

The Daughter Who Became Mother: Temple and Cult of the Egyptian Goddess Mut

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In the south of Egypt, near the present-day sites of Luxor and Karnak, lies one of the largest archaeological monuments in the world, the ancient city of Thebes. Certainly from the New Kingdom on, which started in around 1550 BC, the city of Thebes was the most important religious centre of the country. This is because the ancient Egyptians, both ordinary citizens and the king himself, always had a strong link to their place of birth and with the ‘city god’ who was worshipped there.¹ If possible, they also wanted to be buried in that city. The kings of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom (2135-1785 BC) and those of the 18th Dynasty which started the New Kingdom came from Thebes, and from the time that they ruled over Egypt Thebes changed gradually from an insignificant provincial town into the global city, Homer’s ‘Thebes of the Thousand Gates’, that it eventually became.

Until that time, the god of Thebes was a virtually unknown god called Amun. As the city god of the king, i.e. the god of the ruling dynasty, this Amun now also started to rise to prominence within the Egyptian pantheon, and in the New Kingdom he became linked with the sun god and creator god Re, and as ‘Amun-Re, King of the Gods’ he became the most important god in Egypt. The temple of Amun, or Amun-Re, became the most important temple in Egypt and virtually every king, up to and including the early Roman Emperors, added one or more new parts to this temple until it eventually became the gigantic complex we know today and which is visited and admired each year by millions of tourists from all over the world. The king, who for practical reasons resided elsewhere for most of the year, i.e. in the old capital city Memphis, in the north of Egypt, came at least twice a year to Thebes to participate in some large-scale, important religious festivals, such as the Opet Festival, where the king reinforced his link with Amun, and even his identification with Amun, and whereby he was annually reborn by means of rituals and provided with new powers.² The link with the dynastic god Amun was also demonstrated by the fact that the kings of the New Kingdom had themselves buried in the Theban necropolis, in what we now call the Valley of the Kings, on the West Bank, opposite the huge temple complex of Amun, and also built monumental mortuary temples for themselves there.

But the god Amun is not on his own – together with his female counterpart Mut and their child Khonsu they form what is called a triad, a trinity of gods. This is a very common way of organizing the gods in Egyptian religion; numerous places have a local triad. At first sight these triads seem to be very simple and straightforward – man, woman and child. The reality, however,

¹ Cf. E. Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, transl. J. Baines (London 1983), 73; J. Assmann, *Ägypten – Theologie und Frömmigkeit einer frühen Hochkultur* (Stuttgart 1984), 25–35.

² L. Bell, ‘Luxor Temple and the Cult of the Royal Ka’, *JNES* 44 (1985), 251–294.

is much more complicated. Unlike the gods of the Greeks and the Romans, for example, the ‘family relationships’ of Egyptian gods are usually rather ambivalent. In the best-known creation myth of the Egyptians, that of the Ennead of Heliopolis, the first generation of gods form a primeval triad consisting of the androgynous creator god Atum and his offspring Shu and Tefnut, the first divine couple who represent the male and female principle. In Thebes these three gods are represented by the triad of Amun, Mut and Khonsu. At first sight Amun and Khonsu are father and son, and numerous inscriptions do indeed refer to Khonsu as the son of Amun, but in fact Amun and Khonsu are two names, or two manifestations, of one and the same god, who passes through a continuous cycle of death and rebirth. In this cycle Khonsu is the young, continually reborn Amun and Amun is the aged Khonsu. Amun is periodically reborn as Khonsu. This means that the female element in the triad, in this case Mut, is thus also ambivalent – she can be wife, mother and daughter. These fluctuating, ambivalent family relationships are the result of the fact that such triads are in fact nothing less than a subdivision of the primeval god, the creator god, who is androgynous and unites all the essential elements of creation and life within himself. This creator god started creation by impregnating himself and giving birth to his first descendents himself. In the Theban triad, Mut is in fact nothing less than the realization as a separate divine being of the female aspect of the primeval creator god Amun-Re. An Egyptian triad is thus not simply a family of three persons, but can justifiably be called a divine trinity. Within this trinity or triad Amun can bear the name *Kamutef*, ‘Bull of his Mother’, i.e. he who begat himself on his mother, and conversely Mut can thus also be called ‘the mother of her begetter’ or ‘the daughter-mother who gives birth to her begetter’.³

For a long time Egyptologists paid little or no attention to the goddess Mut, and where they did it was to say that she was a colourless figure about whom there was not much more to say than that she was the consort of Amun. In the early 1980s this changed with the publication of a number of pioneering articles about Mut by my revered teacher and predecessor Herman te Velde, who tried to formulate a ‘minimal definition’ of the nature of this goddess.⁴ A similar minimal definition had previously been formulated for a different, related goddess, Hathor, by the Belgian Egyptologist Philippe Derchain.⁵ Derchain concluded that the nature of this Hathor could be defined as ‘l’excitation sexuelle’, the sexual arousal that formed the driving force that spurred the creator god to the creation and the maintenance of the world. For Derchain, the goddess Isis, the

³ K. Sethe, *Thebanische Tempelinschriften aus griechisch-römischer Zeit* (Urk. VIII; Berlin 1957), 131 (183c) and 6 (7b), resp.; Cf. id., *Amun und die Acht Urgötter von Hermopolis. Eine Untersuchung über Ursprung und Wesen des ägyptischen Götterkönigs* (Berlin 1929), 30.

⁴ H. te Velde, ‘Towards a Minimal Definition of the Goddess Mut’, *JEOL* 26 (1979-1980), 3–9; ‘Mut’, in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* IV/2 (Wiesbaden 1980), 246–248; ‘Mut, the Eye of Re’, in S. Schoske (ed.), *Akten des Vierten Internationalen Ägyptologenkongresses, München 1985*, Band 3 (Hamburg 1988), 395–403; ‘Mut and Other Egyptian Goddesses’, in J. Phillips et al. (ed.), *Ancient Egypt, the Aegean, and the Near East. Studies in Honour of Martha Rhoads Bell*, Vol. I (San Antonio 1998), 455–462.

⁵ P. Derchain, *Hathor Quadrifrons. Recherches sur la syntaxe d’un mythe égyptien* (Istanbul 1972).

ultimate mother goddess in Egyptian religion, was mainly the mother in a social sense, whereas Hathor represented all the biological aspects of womanhood and motherhood. I shall return to this contrast/dichotomy later. So what is the minimal definition of the goddess Mut?

The first point of departure – and here I am still following Te Velde’s argument – is the name of the goddess. Mut is the Egyptian word for ‘mother’. It thus seems likely that she is an ancient Theban mother goddess. However, strangely we have virtually no proof of this; in fact the contrary – although Amun is well-attested from the Middle Kingdom, Mut only appears in our sources in the early New Kingdom. What is remarkable is that she only becomes prominent during the reign of the female pharaoh Hatshepsut (c. 1473-1458 BC). This can hardly be a coincidence, but the fact remains that although the myth of the divine birth of the pharaoh,⁶ which is recorded for the first time on a temple wall by this Hatshepsut, emphasizes that she, Hatshepsut, was begotten by the god Amun (who was of course embodied by her earthly father, King Thutmose I), Mut is not mentioned at all in this myth. Nevertheless, Mut is definitely called ‘mother’ in many texts, and sometimes she is depicted with the divine child on her lap.

Another aspect of Mut is expressed by the way she is depicted. Egyptian gods and goddesses, as we all know, can be depicted in different ways, as humans, as animals, or in the typically Egyptian combination of these two,⁷ and that also applies to Mut. Her most common appearance, however, is that of a woman wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt (Fig. 1). You would expect this crown to typify Mut as Amun’s consort, i.e. as queen, but the remarkable fact is that this crown is never worn by queens, but only and exclusively by the king. So Mut is not the divine queen, but the goddess who personified divine kingship and the coronation of the pharaoh; in other words, as the king’s mother, she guarantees the perpetual continuation of the institution of divine kingship, which she transfers to her divine child, the pharaoh. She is not a ruling queen, but the maternal king-maker. Te Velde thus arrives at the following minimal definition of Mut: she is ‘the royal lady, not the lover’ [like Hathor], she is ‘the divine woman, who gives life as mother and directs it as wearer of the crowns’; if the minimal definition of Hathor is a man’s sexual arousal, then that of Mut is his relationship with ‘his mother, his wife, his daughter, the woman who is his companion’.⁸

⁶ H. Brunner, *Die Geburt des Gottkönigs. Studien zur Überlieferung eines altägyptischen Mythos* (Wiesbaden 1964).

⁷ Cf. R. Merz, *Die numinöse Mischgestalt. Methodenkritische Untersuchungen zu tiermenschlichen Erscheinungen Ägyptens, der Eiszeit und der Aranda in Australien* (Berlin/New York 1978).

⁸ H. te Velde, *JEOL* 26, 8–9.



Fig. 1 – Amun and Mut, Louvre N 3 566. From Thebes, early 13th c. BC.
From A. Gros de Beler, *La mythologie égyptienne* (Paris 1998), 13.

There is, however, yet another aspect of the goddess Mut that must pass the review, and that takes us to her temple and the cult that took place in it. Here we come to the other way the goddess is often depicted. Instead of a woman with the royal crown she can also be shown as a lioness or a cat, or as a woman with the head of a lion or a cat.⁹ This lioness always wears a sun disk on her head. This manifestation is not unique to Mut; it is also seen in a wide range of other goddesses, including Sakhmet, Bastet, Hathor, Tefnut and many others. All of these goddesses were worshipped in temples surrounded on three sides by a sacred lake, known as an Isheru. Nowadays only the Isheru associated with the temple of Mut survives, but we know from other sources that

⁹ H. te Velde, 'The Cat as Sacred Animal of the Goddess Mut', in *Studies in Egyptian Religion dedicated to Professor Jan Zandee* (Leiden 1982), 127–137; J. van Dijk, 'A Cat, a Nurse, and a Standard-Bearer. Notes on Three Late Eighteenth Dynasty Statues', in S.H. D'Auria (ed.), *Offerings to the Discerning Eye. An Egyptological Medley in Honor of Jack A. Josephson* (Leiden/Boston 2010), 321–332 (I. 'A Cat Statue from the Precinct of Mut at Karnak (Mut 4M.141)', pp. 321–326).

such lakes were also to be found at the temples of lioness goddesses elsewhere in Egypt.¹⁰ For example, the Isheru of the goddess Bastet, in Bubastis in the Delta, was described by the Greek journalist or, if you like, historian Herodotus:

[137] (In Bubastis) “there is a temple of Bubastis [Bastet] (the Greek Artemis) which is well worth describing. Other temples may be larger, or have cost more to build, but none is a greater pleasure to look at. [138] The site of the building is almost like an island, for two canals have been led from the Nile and sweep around it, one on each side, as far as the entrance, where they stop short without meeting; each canal is a hundred feet wide and shaded with trees. The gateway is sixty feet high and is decorated with remarkable carved figures some nine feet in height. The temple stands in the centre of the city, and, since the level of the buildings everywhere else has been raised, but the temple itself allowed to remain in its original position, the result is that one can look down and get a fine view of it from all around. It is surrounded by a low wall with carved figures, and within the enclosure stands a grove of very tall trees about the actual shrine, which is large and contains the statue of the goddess. The whole enclosure is a furlong square. The entrance to it is approached by a stone-paved road about four hundred feet wide, running eastward through the market-place and joining the temple of Bubastis (Bastet) to the temple of Hermes (Thoth). The road is lined on both sides with immense trees – so tall that they seem to touch the sky.”¹¹

The two canals that Herodotus mentions are actually the two branches of the lake that surrounded the temple on three sides, the contours of which were still discernible in the 19th century.¹²

The Isheru lake surrounding the temple of Mut in Thebes is thus the only one that still survives (Fig. 2). Since the mid-1970s, this temple has been investigated by an expedition from the Brooklyn Museum in New York, led by Richard Fazzini, later joined by a mission from Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, directed by Betsy Bryan.¹³

¹⁰ J. Yoyotte, ‘Études géographiques II. Les localités méridionales de la région memphite et le “Pehou d’Héracléopolis”’, *RdÉ* 14 (1962), 75–111, espec. 101–110; S. Sauneron, ‘Villes et légendes d’Égypte, VI: À propos du “toponyme” Achérou (*ISrw*)’, *BIFAO* 62 (1964), 50–57; reprinted in *Villes et légendes d’Égypte* (Cairo 1974), 18–25. See now also A. Tillier, ‘Notes sur l’*icherou*’, *ENIM* 3 (2010), 167–176.

¹¹ Herodotos, *The Histories*. Translated with an Introduction by Aubrey de Sélincourt (Harmondsworth 1954), 156–157.

¹² E. Naville, *Bubastis (1887-1889)* (London 1891), 3–4.

¹³ See the bibliography in S.H. D’Auria (ed.), *Servant of Mut. Studies in Honor of Richard A. Fazzini* (Leiden/Boston 2008), xi–xv. Excavation reports for the years since 1996 have been published in *ASAE* and can also be found at <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/features/mut/index.php#reports>; see also R. Fazzini and J. van Dijk, ‘Recent Work in the Mut Precinct at South Karnak’, *Egyptian Archaeology* 31 (2007), 10–13.



Fig. 2 – Aerial view of the Mut precinct showing the *Isheru* surrounding the main temple on three sides.

From A. Bellod et al., *Du ciel de Thèbes* (Paris 1983), 3.

So did this lake with its special shape around the temple have a purpose, and what went on in the temple? To start with the second question first, every Egyptian temple performed a daily liturgy comprising minutely prescribed ritual actions that had the aim of maintaining the world order and the eternal cycle of the sun in a symbolic way. This will no doubt also have been the case in the temple of Mut.¹⁴ We will not be examining this daily temple ritual here. However, alongside this daily routine there was also a religious calendar, a sort of church year, that was determined by festivals and processions. In Thebes, for example, this included the annual Opet festival mentioned above, whereby Amun, Mut and Khonsu travelled together to the more southerly temple of Luxor, 3 km away. There is another major festival, however, that was celebrated in the temple of Mut itself; a festival known in the New Kingdom as the Ipethemtes festival.

In this festival Mut acts as the daughter of the sun god Re, who in Thebes is naturally none other than Amun-Re. This daughter of Re is usually referred to as the Eye of Re, the solar eye, and it is this ‘Eye of Re’ goddess who is depicted as a lioness with a sun disk on her head. This Eye of Re goddess is the central figure in a complex group of myths, in which all kinds of local traditions

¹⁴ Pap. Berlin 3014+3053: *Hieratische Papyri aus den Königlichen Museen zu Berlin, hrsg. von der Generalverwaltung I* (Leipzig 1901), Pl. 43–52.

were mixed together, and which are mainly known from late, demotic papyri¹⁵ and temple inscriptions from the Graeco-Roman period.¹⁶ Time does not allow us to go into this complex of myths in more detail here, but I would like to briefly discuss two aspects in connection with the rituals in the temple of Mut. Both are linked to natural phenomena, i.e. with the summer solstice and with the annual inundation of the Nile, which occurred shortly after each other. During one half of the year (June-December) the apparent course of the sun moves slowly southwards through the sky, and in the second half (December-June) it slowly moves back again. On the longest day, the day of the summer solstice, it reaches the point that it has the greatest power. The Egyptians related the following myth about this:

After Re and his daughter, his Eye, have quarrelled, the Eye disappears to Nubia in the form of an angry lioness. This divine lioness could have many names, including Sakhmet, Bastet, Hathor, Tefnut and also Mut. Re then sends the god Thoth (or a different god, e.g. Shu, Onuris or Ptah) after her to calm her down and persuade her to return to Egypt. He eventually succeeds after many tricks and despite the dangerous moods of the lioness. When he returns with her she is greeted in all the towns that they pass with celebrations and offering festivals; eventually she arrives at her father Re and is reconciled with him.

The return of the goddess was followed a short time later by another key event in the Egyptian year, i.e. the start of the annual inundation of the Nile. At the end of the summer, once the Sun's Eye has returned, the earth has become a hard dry crust in which nothing will grow. People and animals suffer from the heat and die from epidemics and disease. But halfway through the month of June the waters of the Nile slowly start to rise, until the river overflows its banks on or around 19 July, the Egyptian New Year's Day. The first sign that the Inundation is on its way is the changing colour of the water – it turns reddish due to silt with a high iron content washed down from the Ethiopian highlands by the Atbara river, a tributary of the Nile. This red water is reflected in another myth, that of the Destruction of Humankind, the ancient Egyptians' Legend of the Flood.¹⁷ Once upon a time gods and men lived together in harmony in an undivided world, but as the sun god Re began to grow old, people began to take advantage and to rebel against him. Re then sends out his daughter Hathor, his Eye, in the shape of a fierce lioness who starts to slaughter them indiscriminately. When Re realises that soon all of humanity is going to be wiped out, he regrets his decision and decides to save some of them. He thinks up a trick – he orders red ochre to be fetched from Elephantine, on the southern border of Egypt, where the mythical source of the Nile inundation is situated, and be mixed with beer hastily brewed overnight. This red-coloured beer, called a 'sleeping draught' in the Egyptian texts, he orders to be poured over the fields at the

¹⁵ See for a brief survey M.J. Smith, 'Sonnenauge, Demotischer Mythos vom', in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie V* (Wiesbaden 1984), 1082–87; recent edition: F. de Cenival, *Le mythe de l'œil du soleil* (Sommerhausen 1988).

¹⁶ H. Junker, *Der Auszug der Hathor-Tefnut aus Nubien* (Berlin 1911); id., *Der Onurislegende* (Wien 1917); K. Sethe, *Zur altägyptischen Sage vom Sonnenauge das in der Fremde war* (Leipzig 1912); D. Inconnu-Bocquillon, *Le mythe de la Déesse Lointaine à Philae* (Cairo 2001).

¹⁷ E. Hornung, *Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh. Eine ätiologie des Unvollkommenen* (Freiburg/Göttingen 1982).

end of the night. At dawn, when the bloodthirsty goddess wants to continue her destructive work, she sees the red beer on the fields, thinks that it is human blood and starts to drink. By drinking she becomes drunk – and when completely drunk the goddess is no longer able to find people and destroy them and thus the remaining men are saved from annihilation. The text that relates this myth reports that this event is the origin of the making of a sleeping draught for Ipethemtes, the festival of the Solar Eye.

The Ipethemtes festival is the Theban version of a festival celebrated all over Egypt at the beginning of the inundation. As we have seen, the arrival of the inundation was preceded by a period of increasing heat, drought and disease that weakened all of creation and brings it to the brink of destruction. This period culminated in the five epagomenal days that the Egyptians added to their year of 360 days. These were unlucky days during which you'd be better advised not to start anything and when the as yet unpacified angry lioness and her her 'assistants', her 'messengers' or her 'executioners', performed their destructive work and bring illness and death: 'She is the one who sends out her executioners against the evil ones, she is the one who creates heat through her being, she is the one who causes fiery heat in all of Egypt...', but she is also the one who 'gives the breath of life to the nose of the one who loves her'.¹⁸

According to a ritual text on a papyrus in Berlin,¹⁹ the population spent the night at the end of this period in the fields and when morning broke they poured jars of what in religious terminology is called 'heavenly dew' out over the fields. This 'heavenly dew' comes from Hapi, the god of the Inundation, and is in fact nothing other than the red alcoholic sleeping draught from the myth that calms the angry lioness. Another text actually says that Hapi 'calms the Eye of Re with the dew from his body'.²⁰

These two events, the return of the raging Solar Eye and the start of the redeeming Inundation, are what the festival celebrated in these days is all about. The angry lioness drinks the water in the Isheru lake, which, according to the texts, has been dug for her by Re or by the primeval gods and is filled with primeval water, the water from the Inundation that wells up from the primeval ocean. According to the only surviving ancient illustration of the Isheru lake of Mut, a scene in the tomb of Khabekhnet in Deir el-Medinah (TT 2) (Fig. 3),²¹ the lake really was connected to the Nile and was thus fed by the Inundation. We have already seen that according to Herodotus's description, the Isheru at Bubastis was also formed by two canals dug from the Nile and which ran to the left and the right around the temple. By drinking the fresh Inundation waters

¹⁸ S. Sauneron, *La porte ptolémaïque de l'enceinte de Mout à Karnak* (Cairo 1983), Pl. XII: 10–12, resp. 16.

¹⁹ J. van Dijk, 'Hymnen uit het dagelijks tempelritueel voor de egyptische godin Moet', in K.R. Veenhof (ed.), *Schrijvend Verleden. Documenten uit het Oude Nabije Oosten vertaald en toegelicht* (Leiden/Zutphen 1983), 233–246; U. Verhoeven & P. Derchain, *Le voyage de la déesse libyque. Ein Text aus dem "Mutritual" des Pap. Berlin 3053* (Bruxelles 1985).

²⁰ E. Chassinat, *Le temple d'Edfou II* (Cairo 1897), 179: 5.

²¹ Unfortunately this scene is still unpublished, apart from a sketch (often reproduced) in J. Černý, *Répertoire onomastique de Deir el-Médineh* (Cairo 1949), 25.

from the lake, the bloodlust of the lioness is stilled and the goddess is pacified and reconciled with her father Re.

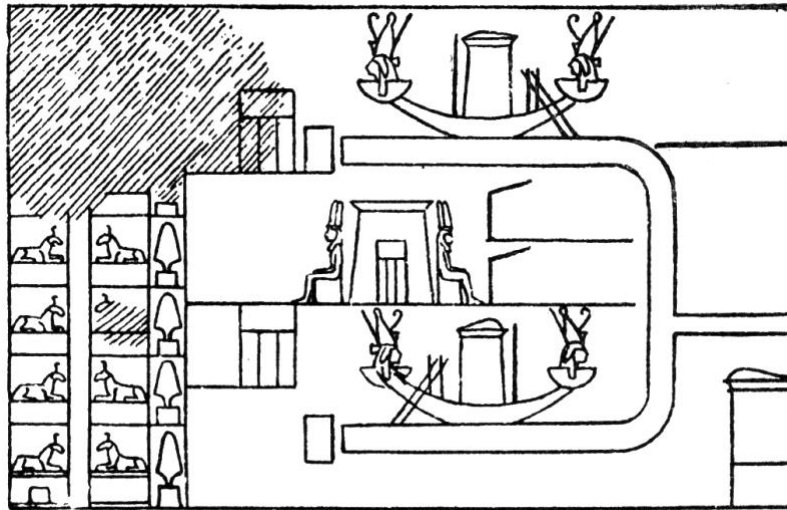


Fig. 3 – The Isheru depicted in the Theban tomb of Khabekhnet. See n. 21.

She then turns from an angry lioness into a cute and dare I say seductive pussycat.²² But not only that – she now also changes from the daughter of Re into his wife, the wife of Amun-Re. As a result the elderly Amun-Re is able to procreate himself through her again, and thus Mut becomes the mother of the god. She is ‘the daughter who becomes the mother and bears the Sunlight’, as one text puts it.²³ As a result Amun-Re is revived; the unification with his Eye causes him to be reborn and charged with new powers. This unification of Amun-Re and Mut is repeatedly described in texts in the temple of Mut: as the goddess approaches Thebes, Nun, the personification of the primeval waters, comes to her and extinguishes her flame by creating a lake for her that surrounds her on all sides. ‘Thus she receives, now she has been calmed, her residence, the great Isheru, which surrounds her, dug by the primeval gods’.²⁴ Then ‘she calls the aged Amun and he comes to the sound of her voice. (...) Then she becomes pregnant with the sun, until the time for childbearing comes. (...) Then she gives birth to the Sunlight in the temple of Mut (...) and the Ritual of the Birth of the Divine Child is instigated for her’.²⁵ In this way the creator god renews and rejuvenates himself, and with him the entire world, and thus the New Year is officially ushered in at the start of the new inundation.

Just how the goddess manages to get the old god to this point is not spelled out in these ritual texts, but a papyrus with a collection of folk tales gives us a bit of an idea.²⁶ There we can read how

²² Te Velde, ‘The Cat as Sacred Animal of the Goddess Mut’, 135.

²³ *Urk.* VIII (cf. above, n. 4), 131 (183c).

²⁴ Unpublished text on a fragment of the Second Pylon of the temple of Mut; quoted by E. Otto, *Topographie des thebanischen Gaues* (Berlin/Leipzig 1952), 39.

²⁵ Sauneron, *Porte ptolémaïque*, Pl. IX, 6: 28–30.

²⁶ Pap. Chester Beatty I, rt 3, 10–4, 3; A.H. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories* (Brussel 1932), 40–41. Cf. E.F. Morris,

the creator god Re at a certain moment in time is so tired of the squabbling among the gods that he throws in the towel and retreats to his pavilion, where he just lies there on his back doing nothing. As a result the cosmic cycle that determines the created world order also grinds to a halt and that is of course something that cannot go on. The text then says: ‘After a long time the goddess Hathor entered and stood in front of her father Re and exposed her vagina right in front of his eyes. Then the great god laughed at her, stood up and resumed his seat in the divine tribunal’. There are a large number of terracotta figurines from the Graeco-Roman period in Egypt showing a goddess lifting up her skirts, and these undoubtedly depict this moment.²⁷



Fig. 4 – Terracotta figurine of a goddess lifting her skirts, Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam, APM Inv. no. 7173. Memphis, 3rd c. BC. From J.M. Hemelrijk et al., *Venus te lijf. Liefde en verleiding in de Oudheid* (Amsterdam 1985), 47 fig. 15.

The events just outlined were celebrated in style. In the temples the mythical events were symbolically represented by means of the rituals. Thus sixteen jars of inundation water were offered to the goddess, symbolizing the sixteen cubits that was the ideal height of the Nile

‘Sacred and Obscene Laughter in *The Contendings of Horus and Seth*, in Egyptian Inversions of Everyday Life, and in the Context of Cultic Competition’, in T. Schneider and K. Szpakowska (ed.), *Egyptian Stories: A British Egyptological Tribute to Alan B. Lloyd on the Occasion of His Retirement* (Münster 2007), 197–224.

²⁷ This type is known as Aphrodite Anasyromene; cf. J. Fischer, *Griechisch-römische Terrakotten aus Ägypten* (Tübingen 1994), 332. A number of years ago the Law Lords, the High Court in England, met to update the law on ‘Indecent Exposure’ to fit modern times with equal rights for men and women. However, these gentlemen came to the conclusion ‘that it must remain a male-only offence, because the female has nothing indecent to expose’, M. Potts & R. Short, *Ever since Adam and Eve. The Evolution of Human Sexuality* (Cambridge 1999), 33. The ancient Egyptians obviously knew better than that.

inundation.²⁸ But the population of Egypt also celebrated in grand style. The return of the goddess and the arrival of the Nile inundation started in the south and spread gradually up to the north. The New Year's festivals were celebrated at various stages along the route, in the lioness temples with an Isheru lake. Herodotus tells us how things went in Bubastis, right in the north of Egypt:

[60] "The procedure at Bubastis is this: they come in barges, men and women together, a great number in each boat; on the way, some of the women keep up a continual clatter with castanets and some of the men play flutes, while the rest, both men and women, sing and clap their hands. Whenever they pass a town on the river-bank, they bring the barge close in-shore, some of the women continuing to act as I have said, while others shout abuse at the women of the place, or start dancing, or stand up and hitch up their skirts. When they reach Bubastis they celebrate the festival with elaborate sacrifices, and more wine is consumed than during all the rest of the year. The numbers that meet there, are, according to native report, as many as seven hundred thousand men and women – excluding children."²⁹

Seven hundred thousand people may seem an exaggeration, but in Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* from 1835 we can read how similar festivals, adapted to Islamic culture, were celebrated well into the 19th century.³⁰ In Tanta, for example, not far from Bubastis, the festival of the Nile inundation took place about a month after the summer solstice, when the Nile had been swelling for a while. The highpoint of the festival came when it was officially announced that the inundation had reached the height of 16 cubits and the irrigation dams were breached. About half a million people from near and far came to the festivities by boat. Unfortunately these festivals no longer exist, or at least not in the same form, since the construction of the Aswan Dam has ended the annual inundation of the Nile. Even in Lane's days the festival was not quite what it used to be anymore: 'In many boats the crews amuse themselves and their passengers by singing, often accompanied by the darabukkeh and the zummárah; and some private parties hire professional musicians to add to their diversion on the river', but 'in former years the festival was always attended by dancing-girls (who are now forbidden to perform)'.³¹

In ancient Egypt, the goddess was welcomed to her temple in fine style accompanied by music and dance and enormous quantities of drink. She was also given a festive boat trip on the Isheru lake. As Herodotus also says, at this time there was more wine, and undoubtedly also more beer, drunk than in the entire rest of the year.³² Parties deep into the night were marked by vigorous

²⁸ E. Chassinat, *Le Temple de Dendara II* (Cairo 1934), Pl. CLXII; cf. R. Preys, *Les complexes de la Demeure du Sistré et du Trône de Rê. Théologie et décoration dans le temple d'Hathor à Dendera* (Leuven 2002), 122–128, 511–512.

²⁹ Translation Aubrey de Sélincourt (cf. n. 12 above), 125–126.

³⁰ E.W. Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, written in Egypt during the years 1833–1835* (edition London 1895), 482–493.

³¹ *Manners and Customs*, 489–490.

³² Cf. L.D. Morenz, "... wobei mehr Wein getrunken wird als im ganzen Jahre": Altägyptische Weingefäße im Licht

dancing, singing and music-making. One ritual text states that ‘the humming of bees and the lowing of bulls in the night’ was imitated for the goddess,³³ noises heard by the sun god at night in the underworld. All the brakes were off, narcotic potions were drunk and the women took matters into their own hands by lifting up their skirts to actively seduce the men. We know of such orgiastic, ecstatic ‘Feasts of Drunkenness’ from various goddess temples. It was a type of religious ecstasy where the women in particular identified with the lion goddess, who, as we have seen, also got drunk and seduced the creator god. Matters were no different in the Mut temple, and not just in the Ptolemaic Period, as is sometimes thought, but right from the start, as proved not so long ago by the discovery by Betsy Bryan’s team from Johns Hopkins University of inscriptions in the oldest part of the temple, built by Hatshepsut, which say that this part of the temple was the ‘Hall of Drunkenness’.³⁴ Here, too, is a link to the myth of the Destruction of Mankind, because, as we have seen, the angry lioness is calmed by drinking red-coloured beer, and a text in the temple of Mut also calls the Isheru lake a ‘vessel of drunkenness’.³⁵

Finally, let us return one final time to the minimal definitions of Mut and Hathor we discussed at the start. The premise that these two goddesses can be strictly separated and defined in opposing terms seems to me to be no longer tenable.³⁶ It is more probable that the various aspects of the female deity, the motherly and the seductive, or, to use a modern cliché the Madonna and the whore, both form part of the essence of every goddess, whose role changes depending on the position she has at a certain moment in the cycle of death and rebirth of her male counterpart. Even though the name Mut means ‘mother’, she is certainly not only a caring maternal figure who crowns the king and protects him against his enemies, but also a seductive young woman without whom the creator god cannot move into action. It comes as no surprise therefore that the goddess Mut actually functions as a protector of young women, who call on her if they cannot find a partner, are unable to have children or have other problems. In Ptolemaic times there was even a separate chapel for this aspect of the goddess within the domain of Mut, close to the end of one of the branches of the Isheru lake (Fig. 5),³⁷ although the main aim of this chapel appears to have been a cult for the deified ancestors of the Ptolemies. In this little temple a special form of Mut was worshipped called Ash-sedjemes, ‘She who listens to the one who calls her’, who bears the epithet

Herodots kontextualisiert’, *CdÉ* 82 (2006), 45–61.

³³ Pap. Berlin 3053, 13: 7–8; Van Dijk, ‘Hymnen’, 236.

³⁴ This name is found on several column drums discovered in the foundations of a later part of the temple by the expedition of Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore directed by Betsy Bryan, to whom I am very grateful for allowing me to mention them here.

³⁵ First Pylon, East side, text 13, line 3. Publication of the Ptolemaic inscriptions in the temple of Mut by J.-C. Goyon, H. te Velde and J. van Dijk is in preparation.

³⁶ Cf. Te Velde, *JEOL* 26, 8 n. 44, quoting J. Leclant, who wrote about Hathor and Mut that ‘toutes deux ne sont que des aspects, des noms du principe divin féminin’, *Recherches sur les monuments thébains de la XXV^e dynastie dite éthiopienne* (Cairo 1965), 301.

³⁷ ‘Chapel D’, built by Ptolemy VI (and extended by Ptolemy VIII) against the North-West interior side of the great enclosure wall (2nd century BC).

‘Mistress of young women’ (Fig. 6). Goddesses and chapels with this function can of course be found all over the world, including Europe and undoubtedly also the United States. In the Dutch village of Molenschot, near Amsterdam, for example, there is a well-known chapel for St Ann, the mother of Mary, who is the patroness of women wanting a partner or a child.³⁸ Just like the Egyptian goddess Mut this ‘Heavenly Matchmaker’ is a venerable mother figure.

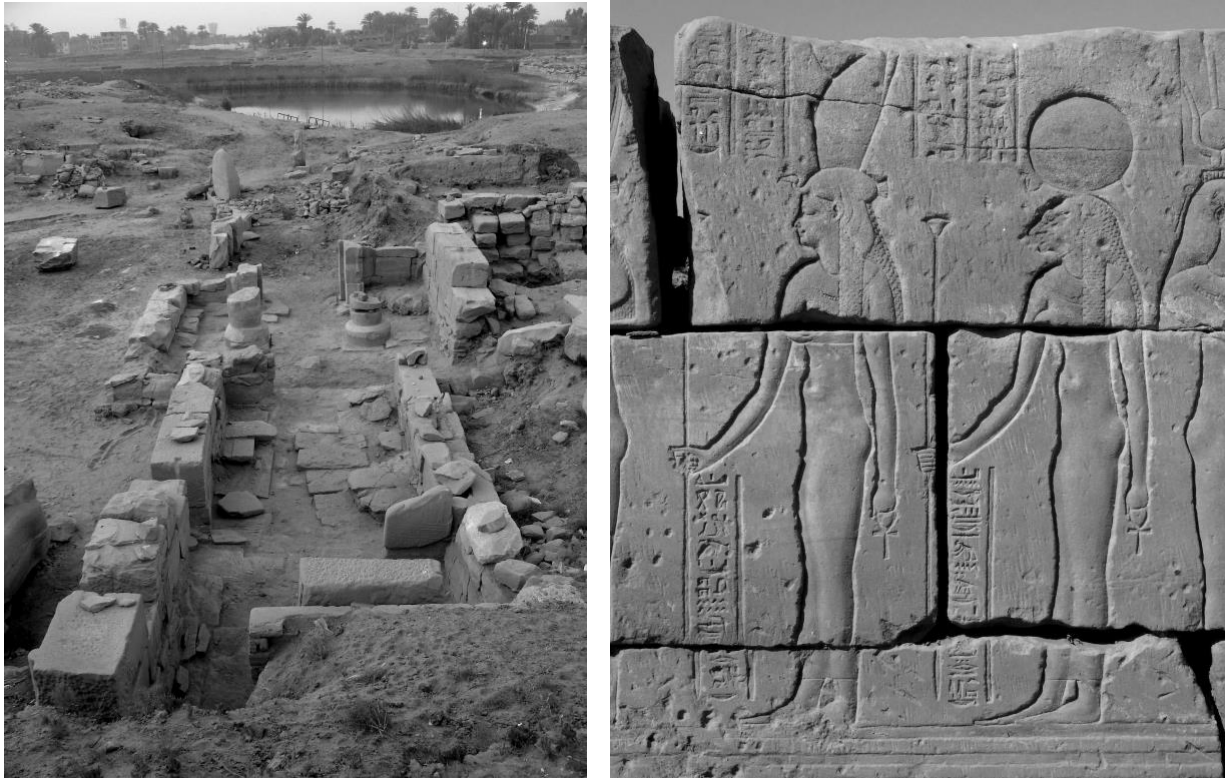


Fig. 5 – Chapel D in the precinct of Mut. The western branch of the Isheru is in the background.

Fig. 6 – Mut and Ash-sedjemes depicted together in a wall relief in Chapel D. Photos: author.

So, as we have seen, at the celebration of the New Year and the advent of the inundation it was all Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll in the temple of Mut. Who would not want to excavate in such a wonderful place?

NOTE: The above is the revised text of a public lecture first held at the opening of the academic year of the Faculty of Religious Studies of Groningen University on 6 September 2006 and subsequently in several places in the Netherlands and abroad. It was published in Dutch in J. van Dijk (ed.), *Onder Orchideeën. Nieuwe Oogst uit de Tuin der Geesteswetenschappen te Groningen* (Groningen 2010), 63–76. English translation by Julia van Dijk-Harvey.

³⁸ ‘Are you single and looking for a partner or longing for a child? Come to St Ann of Molenschot. Better than internet dating!’ (announcement in recent newspapers).