

On the Heels of the Wandering Goddess: The Myth and the Festival at the Temples of the Wadi el-Hallel and Dendera*

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Introduction

One of the most important festivals celebrated during the Ptolemaic Era was the Return of the Wandering Goddess. This “very, very great festival” (*ḥb ʿ3 wr ʿ3 wr*), as it was called at Dendera,¹ included joyous processions and navigations of divine barques on the sacred lakes, along with singing, dancing, eating, and drinking, in order to commemorate the happy return from the Nubian desert of the daughter of the sun god Ra, his Eye. Evidence of this festival or the myth from which it derives, appears in at least twenty-two Ptolemaic-era temples spanning the length of the Nile from Bubastis in the north to el-Dakka in the south (Fig. 1). The pervasiveness of the Distant Goddess within these monuments led Junker² to collect traces from various temples in an attempt to put together an “ideal” version of the myth.

Since Junker’s first publication, studies have continued to concentrate primarily on the origins and development of the myth as found in the temple texts³ or papyri,⁴ without regard for the placement of scenes within buildings. However, because of the intrinsic relationship

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¹ Edfou V, 351.9–11; M. ALLIOT, *Le Culte d’Horus à Edfou au temps des Ptolémées*, BdE 20/I, 1949, 216.24, cited in: A. GRIMM, *Die altägyptischen Festkalender in den Tempeln der griechisch-römischen Epoche, Ägypten und Altes Testament* 15, Wiesbaden 1994, 271.

² H. JUNKER, *Der Auszug der Hathor-Tefnut aus Nubien*, SPAW 1911, Abh. 3.

³ JUNKER, *Auszug*; ID., *Onurislegende*; K. SETHE, *Zur altägyptischen Sage vom Sonnenauge das in der Fremde war*, UGAÄ V/3, 1912; J.C. DARNELL, *Hathor Returns to Medamud*, in: SAK 22, 1995, 47–94.

⁴ The principal source is pLeiden I 384 (recto) from the second century CE, together with fragments from pTebtunis Tait 8 and an unnumbered papyrus in the collection of the Institut de Papyrologie et d’Égyptologie de Lille. In addition, pBM 274 from the third century CE contains fragments of a Greek translation based on the Demotic. See: W. SPIEGELBERG, *Der ägyptische Mythos vom Sonnenauge: Nach dem Leidener demotischen Papyrus I 384*, Hildesheim 1917; H. REITZENSTEIN/W. CRONERT/W. SPIEGELBERG, *Die griechische Tefnutlegende*: pBM 274, SHAW 1923, Abh. 2; and S. WEST, *The Greek Version of the Legend of Tefnut*, in: JEA 55, 1969, 161–183.

between scenes, texts, and architecture within Egyptian monuments,⁵ I was motivated to study the myth within its architectural setting. My analysis revealed important information about the myth's function and purpose, as well as its integration into the overall theology of the temple. Additionally, by looking at the myth within groups of related structures, I was able to see relationships between buildings that would have served as stage settings for the associated festival, thus suggesting the processional route. I chose two of the best-documented groups for my study: the small desert temples in the Wadi el-Hallel, near El Kab,⁶ and the temple complex of Hathor at Dendera.⁷ However, before examining these two complexes in more detail, we will first take a closer look at the myth itself, tracing its development prior to the Ptolemaic period and examining the scholarly debate surrounding its origins and interpretation.

The Myth

The Legend of the Wandering Goddess⁸ takes place when the sun god Ra still lived on earth and governed Egypt. His Eye, personified as the lioness Tefnut, becomes angry for some reason and wanders south to Nubia (Bugem/Keneset). Missing his daughter and needing her protection against his enemies, Ra enlists the aid of her brother Shu,⁹ a powerful lion, and the wise Thoth, to help bring her back. Thoth promises her entertainment, offerings, and temples, and presents her with *mnw*-jars of wine and the *wensheb*,¹⁰ the symbol of ordered time (Fig. 2). Finally persuaded to return, the goddess arrives in a festival procession at

⁵ A. GUTBUB, Remarques sur quelques règles observées dans l'architecture, la décoration et les inscriptions des temples de Basse Époque, in: F. GEUS/F. THILL (ed), *Mélanges offerts à Jean Vercoutter*, Paris 1985, 123, and E. WINTER, *Ägyptische Tempelreliefs der griechisch-römischen Zeit*, SÖAW 98, 1968, 17, mention the importance of a ritual scene's environment for its deeper understanding.

⁶ J. J. TYLOR, *The Temple of Amenhotep III: Wall Drawings and Monuments of El Kab*, London 1898; P. DERCHAIN, *Elkab I: Les monuments religieux à l'entrée de l'Oudj Hellal*, Bruxelles 1971.

⁷ Publications of Dendera used in this paper include MARIETTE, *Dend.*, DAUMAS, *Mammisis*; CHASSINAT, *Dendera*; W. WAITKUS, *Die Texte in den unteren Krypten des Hathortempels von Dendera: Ihre Aussagen zur Funktion und Bedeutung dieser Räume*, MÄS 47, 1997; S. CAUVILLE, *La Chapelle de la barque à Dendera*, in: BIFAO 93, 1993, 68–172; EAD., *Dendera: Les fêtes d'Hathor*, OLA 105, 2002; EAD., *Dendera I–VI: Traduction*, OLA (81, 88, 95, 101, 105, 131), 1998–2004; EAD., *Le Temple de Dendera XII/1, XIII/1, XIV/1, and XV/1*, 2007–2008, the last three volumes published online at <http://www.dendera.net>, thereby completing the publication of the temple's hieroglyphic texts. Note that translations of volumes VII–XV and the plates for volumes XIII–XV of the Temple of Dendera are not yet published.

⁸ The myth of the Distant Goddess occurs in different versions throughout the Ptolemaic temples; the following summary draws primarily on JUNKER, *Auszug*.

⁹ Assimilated to the god Anhur (Anhur (Ἄνουρις), *in-hrt*, “the one who brings back the distant one,” as noted by C. DE WIT, *Le rôle et le sens du lion dans l'Égypte ancienne*, Leiden 1951, 220, or Arensnuphis, the Greek form of *iri-hms-nfr*, “good companion,” in JUNKER, *Auszug*, 39; q.v. note 42 below.

¹⁰ The *wensheb* (*wnšb*, the Greco-Roman form of the New Kingdom word, *šbt*) consists of a baboon figure, symbolizing Thoth's role in ordering time, the *hnty*-symbol for infinite time and space, and a *hb*-festival basket for support. It symbolizes the annual return of ordered time, the regular cycles of the day and night, and the ordered and protected universe. Recent studies, such as P. WILSON, *A Ptolemaic Lexikon*, OLA 78, 1997, 238 and 660, and E. GRAEFE, in: LÄ V, 547, s.v. Schebet, discount older translations of the *wensheb* as a water clock. Cf. F. DAUMAS, *Les propylées du temple d'Hathor et le culte de la déesse*, in: ZÄS 95, 1968, 14; Wb I, 325.

Philae, where she purifies herself in the sacred waters of the Abaton, transforming into a beautiful woman whom Ra welcomes into his arms. With her pacification, the order of the cosmos is also restored.¹¹ She then enters her divine barque and continues her journey down the Nile, a great festival greeting her at every place she stops. In honor of his daughter's return, Ra decrees the establishment of a festival, so that she might see the inundation and all the marvels of Egypt, with great offerings of meats, fragrant substances, and wine.¹²

Earlier Attestations and Scholarly Interpretations of the Myth

In order to obtain a sense of the development of this myth over time and an appreciation for the richness of its symbolism and interconnectedness with other myths, we will now briefly examine its traces prior to the Ptolemaic Era. The earliest of these references goes back to the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom, attesting the great antiquity of the symbolism eventually integrated into the myth. As we will see, much of this symbolism, sometimes transformed, reappears in the later Ptolemaic temple reliefs. In addition to appearances in funerary texts of the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, connections to elements of the myth occur in festivals, many of which relate to cyclically recurring natural phenomena. These traces are all valuable sources of information that can provide clues about the development and function of the legend. Scholars have offered a wealth of differing opinions about the myth's interpretation, which we will note while examining some of the traces.

One of the earliest of these traces occurs in the identification of the goddess Hathor (equated with Tefnut of the myth) with the Eye of Ra. Pyramid Text 405¹³ states, *N pw irt=k tw tpt wpt hwt-hr, innt innt*¹⁴ *rnpwt hr N, sdr N iwr ms r nb* ("N is that Eye of yours (=Ra's), which is on the horns of Hathor, which turns back the years from N; N spends the night and is conceived and born every day"). Sethe¹⁵ interprets "on the horns of Hathor" as the sun disk (= right Eye of Ra) held between the cow's horns of Hathor's headdress; Anthes¹⁶ further relates this imagery to the stars on the tips of the horns in the predynastic slate palette¹⁷ of the cow head and stars, taking the expression "turn back" as relating to the year. Thus, the Eye of Ra, in its connection with the years, could also be identified with Sirius, the Morning Star that ushers in the New Year and the beginning of the Inundation.¹⁸ The connection of Hathor/Eye of Ra with the Inundation is an important factor in the interpretation of the later myth, as we shall see.

¹¹ D. WILDUNG, in: LÄ II, 166, s.v. Felstempel.

¹² Dendara VI, 158, 3, pl. DLXXIX; CAUVILLE, Chapelle, 164; PM VI, 78, 238–247.

¹³ FAULKNER, Pyr., 132; K. SETHE, Die altägyptischen Pyramidentexte nach den Papierabdrücken und Photographien des Berliner Museums, Leipzig 1908, reprint, Hildesheim 1960, §708.

¹⁴ FAULKNER, Pyr., 132, n. 2 of Utterance 405, suggests that the second *innt* may be a "complementary infinitive."

¹⁵ SETHE, Sage, 8.

¹⁶ R. ANTHERS, Das Sonnenauge in den Pyramidentexten, in: ZÄS 86, 1961, 8.

¹⁷ A.J. ARKELL, An archaic representation of Hathōr, in: JEA 41, 1955, 125–126.

¹⁸ As we will see in our analysis of the reliefs at Dendera, this relationship of Hathor-Isis=Sirius adds to the significance of the *hnm-im* ("Union with the Sun Disk") ritual carried out in the roof kiosk on New Year's Day, in which Hathor returns and is united with her father Ra.

In addition to the connection with the Eye of Ra, the Pyramid Texts show that the Eye is also the Uraeus. Pyramid Text 689¹⁹ states, *gm.n N irt hr rdy n=s tp=s iri.n=s h3t m wpt r^c 3d m sbk* (“N has found the Eye of Horus, to whom her head has been given, and she has acted as a frontal on the brow of Ra, raging like Sobek.” This statement indicates that the Eye of Horus is also the Uraeus on the brow of Ra, thus equating the two. Many scholars have noted that the solar aspect of the Eye goddess has a certain ambiguity, in the sense that she can appear not only as the right Eye (the sun), but also as the left Eye (the moon).²⁰ As a result, the myth of the sun Eye and the moon Eye are “almost inextricably interwoven.”²¹ This fact has significance to our myth, because the high point of the Wandering Goddess festival took place at the full moon;²² the monthly waning and waxing of the moon may allude to the disappearance and reappearance of the Wandering Goddess.²³

By the time of the Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts, we see the connection of the sun’s Eye with Shu and Tefnut—important protagonists in the later Wandering Goddess myth. Spell 76²⁴ states, *ink pw šw it ntrw, p3 n tm h3b w^ct=f m hhw=i hn^c snt=i tfnt* (“I am Shu, father of the gods; the One of Tem (=Atum) once sent his Sole Eye seeking me and my sister Tefnut”). It is noteworthy that in this text, the Eye searches for Shu and Tefnut, whereas in later versions of the myth, Shu searches for Tefnut, the Eye.²⁵ Coffin Text 890²⁶ makes an allusion between the Distant Goddess and the lioness goddess Sekhmet, stating, *ink shn w3yt nw{p}n hb insy m nhpw* (“I am he who sought her who is far away at the time of the festival of red linen in the early morning”). This particular reference might be

¹⁹ FAULKNER, Pyr, 297–298; J.P. ALLEN, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, Writings from the Ancient World 23, Atlanta, 2005, 293, Spell 523 of Pepi II; SETHE, *Pyramidentexte*, §§2089b–2090b)

²⁰ JUNKER, *Auszug*, 22; ID. *Onurislegende*, vii; DE WIT, *Le rôle*, 328; ANTHES, *Sonnenaue*, 1; E. OTTO, in: LÄ I, 565, s.v. *Augensagen*; M.-E. COLIN, *Le saint des saints (ou sanctuaire des barques) du temple de Dendara à travers ses inscriptions dédicatoires*, in: *Hommages à François Daumas*, Tome I, Montpellier, 1986, 116; E.O. FAULKNER, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day*, San Francisco 1994, 159.

²¹ C.J. BLEEKER, *Hathor and Thoth: Two Key Figures of Ancient Egyptian Religion*, *Studies in the History of Religions* 26, Leiden 1973, 120.

²² P. DERCHAIN, in: LÄ III, 857, s.v. *Kultspiel*.

²³ Various other “cosmic” interpretations are as follows: K. GOEBS, *A Functional Approach to Egyptian Myth and Mythemes*, in: *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 2, Leiden 2002, 54–55, who suggests that the return of the goddess could represent the rising of the sun, thus equating it with the daily solar cycle; BLEEKER, *Hathor and Thoth*, 121, who says that the myth recounts the exceptional occurrence of a solar eclipse, in which Thoth (the moon-god) searches for the sun-eye and is successful in bringing it back; P. GERMOND, *Sekhmet et le protection du monde*, AH 9, 1981, 133, who writes that the Eye (=the sun) is obscured when it goes away to fight enemies (=clouds); R.T. RUNDEL CLARK, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, London 1959, 229, who suggests that the journey northward of the wandering goddess mirrors the softening of the sun in higher latitudes, or even the victory of the powers of civilization over the “untamed ferocity of the desert.”

²⁴ CT II, 5, a–b; R.O. FAULKNER, *Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, vol. I, Warminster 1973, 78.

²⁵ By the time of the Book of the Dead, Thoth’s role in bringing back the pacified Eye to Ra is clear: “Thoth has returned the sacred eye, he has pacified it after being sent out by Re to search for it. It was enraged, but it was Thoth who satisfied the Eye after it had given vent to its wrath.” Spell 167 from Papyrus of Nebseni, BM 9900, Sheet 22, as quoted by BLEEKER, *Hathor and Thoth*, 121.

²⁶ CT VII, 102; R.O. FAULKNER, *Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, vol. III, Warminster 1978, 53.

alluding to the Festival of the Wandering Goddess, who as Sekhmet is consistently associated with the color red.²⁷

Another important strand connected with our Wandering Goddess myth, which also figures into the rituals carried out as part of its festival, appears in the 18th Dynasty as part of the Book of the Heavenly Cow inscribed on the outermost gilded shrine from the tomb of Tutankhamen.²⁸ In order to annihilate his enemies, Ra sends out his daughter Hathor, who transforms into the lioness Sekhmet (“the powerful one”). However, she carries out her mission rather over-zealously, mankind being spared only when she is tricked into drinking red-colored beer that she mistakes for blood, thus becoming pacified and transforming back into a beautiful woman. The fearsome power of Sekhmet was regularly associated with epidemics, drought, and death, which her emissaries could send upon rebels.²⁹ However, when appeased, this power could provide protection for the king and maintenance of cosmic order.³⁰ One way to appease a leonine goddess such as Sekhmet was by means of an *isheru*,³¹ the horseshoe-shaped lake where the wild lioness would come to drink and be pacified (Fig. 3). Such a lake existed as early as the Old Kingdom, at Memphis.³² Pacification rites included navigations on the *isheru* or the sacred lake,³³ an appeasement ritual that eventually worked its way into the festival for the Return of the Wandering Goddess. Leitz³⁴ suggests that the Destruction of Mankind myth has a direct relationship to the natural cycle of the inundation of the Nile. He connects the river’s annual recession with Sekhmet’s drinking of the red beer, noting that the color of the Nile takes on a reddish-brown color as the waters recede and the underlying ground appears closer. He also notes that at this time during the year, the rodent population and the dangers of plague increased dramatically. Thus, the appeasement ceremonies for Sekhmet (such as those carried out at New Year’s, just as the Nile reaches its lowest point), and navigation rituals associated the Festival of Drunkenness in the month of Thoth³⁵ (a time when the waters were still low),

²⁷ Hathor is also associated with red linen. Hathoric priestesses from the Old Kingdom wore red scarves, as noted by M. GALVIN, *The Priestesses of Hathor in the Old Kingdom and the 1st Intermediate Period*, Ann Arbor, 1981, 230; a priestly title from Dendera is “She who unites with the Red Cloth,” in J. DÜMICHEN, *Bauurkunde der Tempelanlagen von Dendera*, 1865, pl. VIII, as cited by A.M. BLACKMAN, *On the Position of Women in Ancient Egyptian Hierarchy*, in: JEA 7, 23–24.

²⁸ E. HORNUNG, *Book of the Heavenly Cow*, OBO 46, 1982, 74–87. Other examples of this text appear in the tombs of Seti I, Ramesses II, Ramesses III, and Ramesses IV (fragment of the end). Cf. E. HORNUNG, in: LÄ III, 837, s.v. Kuhbuch.

²⁹ S.-A. NAGUIB, *Le clergé féminine d’Amon thébain à la 21^e dynastie*, OLA 38, 1990, 81.

³⁰ GERMOND, *Sekhmet*, 133.

³¹ B. GESSLER-LÖHR, *Die heiligen Seen ägyptischer Tempel: Ein Beitrag zur Deutung sakraler Baukunst im alten Ägypten*, HÄB 21, 1983, 401, suggests that a naturally curved body of water sought out by lions at the entrance of a wadi may have been the inspiration for the crescent-shaped lakes surrounding on three sides the temples of leonine divinities, who were often syncretized with each other.

³² GESSLER-LÖHR, *Die heiligen Seen*, 412, notes that many *isheru* lakes were built throughout Egypt; they are attested for Mut in South Karnak, Sekhmet in Memphis, Bast in Bubastis, Nekhbet in Elkab, Wadjet in Buto, for Mut in Philae, for Neith-Menhit in Esna, and Hathor-Isis at Dendera. Cf. *ibid.*, 401–423.

³³ *ibid.*, 402

³⁴ C. LEITZ, *Tagewählerei: Das Buch ḥ3t nhḥ phwy dt und verwandte Texte*, vol. I, Textband, Weisbaden 1994, 205–206.

³⁵ Earliest reference to the Festival of Drunkenness, on 20 Thoth, appears in an Illahun papyrus, SCHOTT, *Festdaten*, 82. Cf. NAGUIB, *Le clergé féminine*, 43–44.

may have arisen because of these natural occurrences. Similar navigations for appeasing lioness goddesses also took place in the months of Tybi and Mechir, attested as early as Thutmose III,³⁶ and also during the Ramesside Era.³⁷ This time coincides with later celebrations of the Festival of the Wandering Goddess.³⁸

Besides the need to pacify the angry lioness goddesses, another basis for celebrating the Return of the Distant Goddess is the seasonal shift of the sun. The correspondence with the month of Tybi is quite striking: from summer to winter, the sun appears to shift south (the goddess wanders south to Nubia); from winter to summer the sun's path appears to shift north (the goddess returns north to Egypt). As both Junker³⁹ and Spiegelberg⁴⁰ noted, the festival of her return took place precisely at the summer solstice, when the goddess would have returned and the days were the longest.

In addition to the many cosmic interpretations of the myth, Junker⁴¹ maintains that the original basis lies in the important motive of *in.tw=s*, "bringing it back." Junker sees the origin of this theme going back to the idea of the return of the conquering hero, in which the hunter brings back a wild but now subdued animal, such as the lioness in our myth. Onuris,⁴² a god especially venerated in the southern regions of Egypt and in Nubia, and worshipped as the "essential hunting hero,"⁴³ takes part in myths whose central theme concerns the "bringing back" from the south of the wild lioness Tefnut or one of the divine Eyes,⁴⁴ as well as fighting against the enemies of Ra. As we will see in many of the Ptolemaic temple reliefs, Onuris often syncretizes with Haroeris, Shu, Arensnuphis, or Thoth of Nebes when carrying out this task.⁴⁵ Thus, the offering of wild game upon altars to the pacified goddess in the Distant Goddess myth harkens back to the idea of the chieftain hunter presenting his kill to a deity.⁴⁶

³⁶ SCHOTT, Festdaten, 94–95; ALTENMÜLLER, in: LÄ II, 176–177, s.v. Feste.

³⁷ The workmen's community at Deir el-Medina was allowed work-free days on 29–30 Tybi and 1–4 Mechir, when the Festival of the Navigation of Mut would have taken place, GESSLER-LÖHR, Die heiligen Seen, 416. Cf. W. HELCK, Feiertage und Arbeitstage in der Ramessidenzeit, JESHO 7, 1964, 157–158.

³⁸ A depiction of the boat of Nekhbet and characters from the Distant Goddess myth in the chapel of Thoth in the Wadi el-Hallel from the time of Ramesses II suggests a navigation for the returning goddess (see section on this temple in the present paper). Other early attestations of the myth occur during the reigns of Takelot (Dyn. 22) in the Mut Ritual pBerlin 3053 and Psamtik (Dyn. 26) on reused blocks found in the main temple of El Kab. See: U. VERHOEVEN/P. DERCHAIN, Le voyage de la déesse libyque: ein Text aus dem Mutritual" des Pap. Berlin 3053, Rites Égyptiens 5, Bruxelles 1985, 4. In the festival calendar of Edfu (from the interior wall of the west enclosure wall) from the Ptolemaic Era there is explicit reference to the navigations during Tybi/Mechir as the Return of the Wandering Goddess festival, ALLIOT, Culte, 227.

³⁹ JUNKER, Onurislegende, 166.

⁴⁰ SPIEGELBERG, Mythos, 2.

⁴¹ JUNKER, Onurislegende, iii.

⁴² Onuris is attested since the end of the Old Kingdom as the local god of Thinis, appearing with his consort, the lioness-goddess Mehit, in New Kingdom reliefs at Abydos. He is depicted as a man wearing a long skirt, four-feathered headdress, and feet poised to aim a deadly spear at his adversary. See: W. SCHENKEL, in: LÄ IV, 573, s.v. Onuris.

⁴³ RUNDEL CLARK, Myth and Symbol, 227.

⁴⁴ SCHENKEL, Onuris, 573.

⁴⁵ SCHENKEL, Onuris, 573.

⁴⁶ RUNDEL CLARK, Myth and Symbol, 228.

However, Inconnu-Bocquillon⁴⁷ interprets the myth in relation to the multiple meanings of the Divine Eye, which symbolizes on a theological level the struggle for power. She suggests that the use of the myth in the reliefs reflects the difficulties experienced by the Ptolemaic rulers at the time of the temple decoration. She sees the Eye of Horus themes in the combat between Horus and Seth as representing the initial struggle for power over Egypt, whereas the Eye of Ra myth symbolizes the maintenance of this power, specifically over Nubia and Upper Egypt. Thus, she insists, the theme of the Distant Goddess finds its greatest development in places where the theologies give an important place to the defense of Ra by these lioness-goddesses, and at a time when the Lagide rulers were trying to secure their hold over Upper Egypt.⁴⁸

Therefore, a number of motives were put together to form the Wandering Goddess myth of the Ptolemaic Period. The earliest texts connect the Eye of Ra with Hathor and the year,⁴⁹ which itself is identified with the star Sirius,⁵⁰ ushering in the New Year and the Inundation; Thoth returns the left Eye of Horus to its owner. The two Eyes become equated with each other, and the protagonists of our story (Thoth, Shu, the Eye, and Tefnut) are brought together by the time of the Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead. Navigations to pacify angry lioness goddesses originate in response to the plague at the end of summer; festivals of the return of the Wandering Goddess celebrate the sun's northward shift and the full moon. The theme of the victorious hunter and the Eye of Horus add allusions to the struggle for power and the kingship. Thus, within a deceptively simple framework, the myth combines both cosmic and earthly themes. The cycle of the inundation, the shift of the sun's path, and the moon's phases combine with ideas of the conquering hero and the restoration of order, as the Eye is brought back to her rightful place as the protective Uraeus on her father's brow.

Methodology

Having examined the myth and its origins, we will now look at its appearance in reliefs in the temple complexes of the Wadi el-Hallel and Dendera. In order to determine if certain scenes or texts relate to the myth, I developed the following list of criteria: protagonists (Thoth, Shu/Onuris, Hathor/Tefnut, the Uraeus, and Ra); locales (Keneset/Bugem, Punt, Land of God/Lands of Gods, Nubia); rituals/actions (*shtp*, or pacification/appeasement; *intw.s*, or "she is brought back," "she takes her place on her father's brow," "she turns her back on Nubia," "she turns her face to the North"); and offerings given to the goddess in the myth (*wensheb*, *mnw*-jars of wine, fragrant substances, especially from Punt). If at least two factors were contained within a scene or text, I considered it as referencing the myth. I compiled information on all of the scenes and texts in the temples of this study: the Temple of Amenhotep III (16 scenes), the Chapel of Thoth (11), and the Hemispeos (17) from the Wadi el-Hallel; and the Barque Chapel (31) and the Per-wer Sanctuary (50) of Dendera, for

⁴⁷ D. INCONNU-BOCQUILLON, *Le mythe de la Déesse Lointaine à Philae*, BdE 132, 2001, 335.

⁴⁸ INCONNU-BOCQUILLON, *Mythe*, 335.

⁴⁹ Pyramid Text 405. Cf. FAULKNER, *Pyr.*, 132; SETHE, *Pyramidentexte* §705.

⁵⁰ Pyramid Text 477, in: SETHE, *Pyramidentexte* §965, states that Sothis (Sirius) prepares yearly sustenance for the king "in her name of 'Year.'"

a total of 125 scenes. At the Hemispeos, over 59% of the scenes relate to the myth, at the Barque Chapel, 58%, and at the Per-wer sanctuary, 36%. The Chapel of Thoth had only one scene, but it contains many others too damaged to evaluate. The Temple of Amenhotep III had none, although other factors relate it to the festival proceedings in the area. However, some “non-myth scenes” work together with “myth” scenes.⁵¹ In the temple reliefs, the king, and the local god or goddess, takes on the roles of the characters in the myth. Offering scenes replicate actions that took place in the myth, by showing objects given to the goddess by Thoth and Shu in the legend—the same objects presented to Hathor/Tefnut (or her local manifestation) during the festival. The offering having perhaps the clearest connection with the myth is that of the *wensheb*, the symbol of ordered time that Thoth, the Lord of Time,⁵² presents to the goddess in order to lure her back to Egypt. The offering of the udjat represents the return of the Eye to its owner and to its rightful place on Ra’s brow, connecting it to both the Wandering Goddess myth and the struggle for power in the conflict between Horus and Seth. Wine and beer, and the playing of sistra and music, pacify the wrath of the angry lioness, while mirrors, equated with the Eyes of the sun and moon, allow her to admire her beauty. Finally, the offering of primordial water alludes to the cooling waters of the Abaton, as well as to the pacifying waters of an isheru, where the lioness goddess was purified and appeased, allowing her to transform into a joyous, beautiful woman. Most significantly, the placement in the most sacred part of a temple of the culminating scene of the myth—when the goddess returns to her father—shows how the myth integrated itself into the main function of the temple: the restoration of order and the maintenance of the cosmos.

El Kab

One of the many places that the Distant Goddess stopped on her return from Nubia is the site of El Kab, located about 40 km north of Edfu⁵³ (Fig. 4). Hathor-Tefnut was equated there with the vulture goddess Nekhbet, the principal local divinity and tutelary goddess of Upper Egypt. The site consists of two parts: the primary temple complex at the ancient site of Nekheb (Ἐίλειθυσπόλις during the Græco-Roman Period), and a cluster of small temples located in the eastern desert of the Wadi el-Hallel.⁵⁴ Although there are some

⁵¹ For example, the symmetrical scene to the offering of the *mnw*-jar of wine is often the offering of Ma’at at Dendera. CAUVILLE, Chapelle, 168, suggests that the equilibrium of Ma’at is established by the offering of the beverage to the angry lioness goddess, who is then appeased. These scenes are discussed further in the section on the Per-wer Sanctuary at Dendera.

⁵² Some of Thoth’s epithets include “the time-determiner” (*sk ḥꜣw*), MARIETTE, Dend., 73c; P. BOYLAN, Thoth: The Hermes of Egypt, New York 1922, 197; “reckoner of years” (*ḥsb rnpwt*), Edfou I, 27; *ibid.*, 193; “who distinguishes seasons, months, and years” (*wp trw ibdw rnpwt*), Edfou I, 27; *ibid.*, 183; and “lord of eternity” (*nb nhḥ*), Thebes, Tomb of Pa-shedu, 20th Dynasty; *ibid.*, 188,

⁵³ DERCHAIN, Elkab, vii.

⁵⁴ A small temple, constructed by Thutmose III and located approximately 1 km NW of the northern corner of the enclosure wall of the main temple complex at Nekheb, was probably a barque chapel, according to L. BORCHARDT, Tempel mit Umgang, BeiträgeBF 2, 1938, 92. Its plan and elevation appear in Description de l’Égypte in 1820, but by 1829, it had suffered complete destruction. M.-P. VANLATHEN, Le temple périptère de Thoutmosis III, à Elkab, in: CdE 62/123–124, 34 n. 2. An architrave inscription with the cartouche of

references to the Wandering Goddess in the main complex at Nekheb,⁵⁵ the desert temples offer the clearest evidence for their use in the festival celebrating her return. The group includes a barque chapel of Amenhotep III, a small Ramesside chapel of Thoth,⁵⁶ and a Ptolemaic hemispeos.⁵⁷ Graffiti of animals and boats dating as far back as Predynastic times on the bases of unusual rock formations deeper into the wadi, in the shape of a vulture, a cobra, and a pyramid suggest that the area held a special sanctity.⁵⁸ Rock-cut tombs of many New Kingdom dignitaries line the cliffs north of the main temple complex.⁵⁹

The reason for building these small temples out in the desert may have been to greet the returning Wandering Goddess, as suggested by the geographical situation of the wadi itself. The occasional violent rains from the eastern Arabian mountains become rushing streams, carving out the desert valley over time⁶⁰ and leaving a watering hole that would have curved around the precise area of the cliff where the hemispeos was built.⁶¹ (Fig. 5) This watering hole, whose curved shape recalls the isheru lake at the Temple of Mut at Karnak (Fig. 3), would have provided a place of pacification for our returning lioness goddess.⁶² An inscription from the hemispeos, destroyed today but recorded by Lepsius,⁶³ suggests the existence of an actual isheru lake at this site. Also, surrounded by water, the temples would have appeared to rise up like the mythical primeval mound, mirroring the traditional symbolism of an Egyptian temple.

Thutmose III and the names of Satis and *nbt-int* ("Lady of the Valley") is one of the few remains of the temple, in: PM V, 176. Although this small chapel may have taken part in processions originating in the main temple of Nekheb, due to its distance from the other temples in the Wadi el-Hallel proper, and its state of complete destruction, it is not included in this paper.

⁵⁵ Reused blocks of Psamtek I (Dyn. 26) found in Crypt B under the sanctuary of the main temple, with parallels to the 22nd Dynasty Mut Ritual of pBerlin 3053, referring to the "Journey of the Libyan goddess." See VERHOEVEN/DERCHAIN, Mutritual, 3; J. CAPART, Sur une scène figure de la crypte B', in: J. CAPART/J. STIÉNON/M. WERBROUCK, Fouilles de El Kab: Documents, Bruxelles 1940, pl. 18a. The main temple is dedicated to Nekhbet; the mammisi is dedicated to the goddess in her form as Hathor.

⁵⁶ Built during the reign of Ramesses II by Setau, the viceroy of Nubia and "organizer of festivals for all the gods of Thebes." DERCHAIN, Elkab, 70 and pl. 29.

⁵⁷ Originally a rock-cut sanctuary, also built by Setau under Ramesses II, it was transformed into a more elaborate "hemispeos" during the Ptolemaic period. See: DERCHAIN, Elkab, 5–6.

⁵⁸ "Vulture rock," identified with Nekhbet, is a projecting rock formation favored by the local white vultures. Two kilometers south of the Temple of Amenhotep III is the "Borg of Hammam," which appears to have the shape of a cobra. J. CAPART, El Kab: Impressions et souvenirs, Bruxelles 1946, 154, suggests that its form may not be entirely the product of nature. Cf. pls., *ibid.*, pp. 148–155.

⁵⁹ The tomb of Setau (not the Viceroy of Kush mentioned later in connection with the Chapel of Thoth), who was first prophet of Nekhbet under Ramesses III–IX, has the depiction of a boat towing a barge with the shrine of Nekhbet, in: PM V, 181–182.

⁶⁰ CAPART, El Kab, 148–149.

⁶¹ The water would have thus surrounded the front of the hemispeos as well as the temple of Amenhotep III, situated above the torrent bed. See: TYLOR, Amenhotep III, 16. In the color image from Google Earth (Fig. 5), one can see a faint green area curving around the cliff in front of the hemispeos.

⁶² A torrent in the Wadi el-Hallel, witnessed by Somers Clarke in 1901, was able to dig a channel 3–4 m deep and 20 m wide, with 25 days required for the waters to stop flowing. See: CAPART, El Kab, 148–149.

⁶³ LD IV, 39: *nḥbt mwt wrt nb(t) išrw nḥb s3t r' ḥnwt b3kt m smt...* ("Nekhbet, Mut the Great, Lady of the Isheru of Nekheb, daughter of Ra, Sovereign of Baket [place on the coast of north Punt or Libya] in the desert..."). DERCHAIN, Elkab, 11, suggests that it served as the isheru for El Kab.

Temple of Amenhotep III

Furthest east in the desert is the small barque chapel built by Amenhotep III in honor of his father Thutmose IV, which may have replaced a previous Old Kingdom desert temple⁶⁴ (Fig. 6). Dedicated to Nekhbet and her assimilation to Hathor, it consists of a forecourt (added in the Ptolemaic period) and a small, one-roomed sanctuary. Graffiti from various periods decorating its façade,⁶⁵ as well as inscriptions on rocks further into the desert dating back to the Old Kingdom,⁶⁶ attest boat processions in honor of Nekhbet and mark out the sacred itinerary.⁶⁷ The decoration of the sanctuary emphasizes its function as a barque station, with large scenes of Amenhotep III offering to the barque of Ra along the length of both lateral walls (Fig. 7, nos. 5–6 and 9–10 on plan; Fig. 8).

Although the temple texts state that the chapel was dedicated to Nekhbet,⁶⁸ Hathoric imagery in the temple suggests her assimilation to Hathor. A frieze of Hathor heads alternates with cartouches of Amenhotep III around the top walls of the entire chamber, while Hathor-head capitals atop the four columns carry the architraves supporting the roof (Fig. 8). Never-completed scenes of birds and cattle in a papyrus swamp, and figures of lion guardians, allude to Hathor's manifestation as a cow or lion.⁶⁹ In addition, the use of the epithet, *nbt r-int* ("Lady of the Valley Entrance"), is a title associated with Hathor elsewhere in the region.⁷⁰ Thus, although the chapel contains no specific references to the myth, the long attestation of barque processions for the local goddess and the proximity to other desert chapels that do reference the myth suggest its participation in celebrations that welcomed the Distant Goddess. In order to understand when these local processions and festivals began to be associated with the myth, we will now examine the other two wadi temples.

⁶⁴ As suggested by an inscription on the SE lateral wall, *iri.n=k n(=i) mnw nfr hwt-ntr hrt m m3wt k.d.ti m inr m k3t nhh*, ("you have built for me a beautiful monument, a desert temple, anew, built of stone as an eternal work"), in: TYLOR, Amenhotep III, pl. VI.

⁶⁵ A graffito on the façade of the temple of Amenhotep III, depicting a boat with the image of a cobra, appears in DERCHAIN, Elkab, pl. 25c. See also: LD III, 174d, with restitutions by BRUGSCH, Thes. 1128, VI.

⁶⁶ J.C. DARNELL, Hathor Returns to Medamud, in: SÄK 22, 1995, n. 236, notes that a graffito on "Vulture Rock" east of the small temple of Amenhotep III depicting an archaic shrine suggests the great antiquity of the temple site. Cf. F.W. GREEN, Prehistoric Drawings at El-Kab, in: PSBA 25, 1903, 371. For Old Kingdom graffiti in the area, see: A.H. SAYCE, Some Old Empire Inscriptions from El-Kab, in: PSBA 21, 1899, and G.W. FRASER, El Kab and Gebelein, in: PSBA 15, 1893, fig. 1. There is a graffito of boats with the name of Khufu on a nearby hill, in: PM V, 190(d); F.W. GREEN, Notes on an Inscription at el-Kab, in: PSBA 25, 1903, 215-216.

⁶⁷ Cf. S. AUFRÈRE/J.-C. GOLVIN/J.-C. GOYON, L'Égypte Restituée, Tome 1, Paris 1991, 51.

⁶⁸ Two symmetrical scenes on either side of the niche on the rear inner wall show the king offering to Nekhbet, seated on a throne with the white crown of Upper Egypt. She is called, variously, *mwt=f nhbt*, "his mother Nekhbet," and *hdt nhn*, "the shining one of Nekhen." See: TYLOR, Amenhotep III, pls. III and V.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*; Louvre E. 26023 depicts a cow, uraeus, and two women (one lion-headed, another with a sistrum on her head), embodying in the round the goddess worshipped in El Kab's wadi temples. Cf. DERCHAIN, Elkab, 13 and n. 3; J. VANDIER, Un groupe du Louvre représentant la déesse Hathor sous quatre de ses aspects, in: Mélanges offerts à Maurice Dunand, Beyrouth 1969, 159–183.

⁷⁰ DERCHAIN, Elkab, 42, in the hemispeos; GESSLER-LÖHR, Die heiligen Seen, 408, notes the title, "Mut-Nekhbet-Hathor, Mistress of the Valley Entrance, Tefnut, Daughter of Re, Mistress of Bugem," at El Kab.

Chapel of Thoth

The smaller Ramesside⁷¹ Chapel of Thoth (also called el-Hammam, or “the bath”), located just 70 m from the larger hemispeos carved out of the cliff, was originally fronted by a *h3yt*, or kiosk (Fig. 9). The chapel measures only about 10 m x 5 m, with a height of 4 m. Facing the desert, it would have provided a convenient way station for processions of the returning goddess,⁷² its kiosk serving as a resting place for her sacred barque. The Ptolemaic restoration added a stone roof and entirely enveloped the original structure with an undecorated exterior. As a result, the original facing is only visible on the four interior walls. Setau dedicated the single-roomed chapel to the deified Ramesses II and the local divinities: Thoth Who Resides in the Valley Entrance (*dhwtj hry-ib r-int*), and the two goddesses: Nekhbet Lady of Nekhen (*nhbt nbt nhn*), and the Lady of the Upper District (*nbt p3 w hry*). Inscriptions in the hemispeos equate these two goddesses with each other.

The importance of the myth is evident in a scene at the rear of the chapel (Fig. 10, no. 3 on plan; Fig. 11), which Derchain⁷³ characterizes as, “unique à représenter le retour de la déesse lointaine.” Nekhbet, standing in the center dressed in a long red robe with flared sleeves and covered in a gold lattice, incarnates the distant goddess. She holds out something in her hand to Ra-Horakhty, seated facing her. In exchange, he presents her with the *nh*-symbol of life from the top of his *w3s*-scepter. Derchain⁷⁴ notes that such a gesture of one god to another is rare in this era. The accompanying inscription states, *dd mdw in nhbt...ink s3t=k wrt...r nhh twt.ty <m> nb it=i*, “Recitation by Nekhbet...I am your great daughter...always; united <with> the lord, my father.”⁷⁵ Derchain⁷⁶ suggests that the goddess is offering the Udjat Eye to her father and that this scene may actually represent the crucial moment when the Distant Goddess, as the Eye, reunites with her father’s brow as the uraeus. Other protagonists from the Wandering Goddess myth are also present: the man walking behind the goddess wears the long kilt and four red feathers characteristic of Onuris; his companion, whose remaining titulary only says, *ntr 3*, “Great God,” is probably Thoth. The two remaining men, Hu and Sia, are often present in ritual scenes concerning the Eye.⁷⁷ Finally, two baboons acclaiming, *ii.wy m htp nfr* (“Welcome in beautiful peace!”), greet the returning goddess. The scene’s presence in the chapel thus suggests the celebration of the myth and its ritual as early as the 19th Dynasty; its placement at the focal point of the chapel’s interior shows the great importance of the myth in the decoration of the building.

⁷¹ Both the hemispeos and the so-called Chapel of Thoth were originally built by Setau, the Viceroy of Nubia under Ramesses II, and restored during the Ptolemaic period. Setau also dedicated a rock-carved stela in the name of Ramesses II on the outer side of the speos in the wadi. See: DERCHAIN, Elkab, 66 and pl. 12b.

⁷² DERCHAIN, Elkab, 69.

⁷³ DERCHAIN, Elkab, 71.

⁷⁴ DERCHAIN, Elkab, 71 n. 4. Cf. WINTER, Tempelreliefs, 96, n. 4.

⁷⁵ DERCHAIN, Elkab, 72 n. 1, takes *twt.ty* as a prospective passive participle; I take it as a 3rd fem. sing. stative, agreeing with *s3t* (“daughter”).

⁷⁶ DERCHAIN, Elkab, 72.

⁷⁷ E.g., Dendara III, 137.

Hemispeos

A path from the chapel of Thoth leads to the third temple of the group—an old 19th dynasty speos transformed by the Ptolemies⁷⁸ into a complex reception temple (Fig. 12). A long staircase leads up towards a terrace containing a *h3yt*, or kiosk, placed in front of the entrance to the rock-cut chapel⁷⁹ (Fig. 13). A surviving fragment from the forecourt shows a dancing Bes holding a lotus bud in each hand,⁸⁰ recalling similar themes of music and dance in the reception temple of Hathor at Philae. The architectural plan suggests that a procession of the sacred barque would have gone up the stairs to rest in the kiosk on the terrace, while festivities took place in the forecourt and priests carried out rituals in the rock-cut sanctuary.

The doorframe at the entrance to the forecourt once contained important inscriptions relating to the Wandering Goddess myth, but only a few blocks remain in situ.⁸¹ Our knowledge of the reliefs therefore depends almost entirely on the drawing by Lepsius.⁸² The scenes contain a summary of the roles and titularies of the deities worshipped in the sanctuary, where the local goddess⁸³ plays the cosmic roles of Hathor, Tefnut, and the Eye goddesses. Hathor, Lady of the Valley Entrance (*ht-hr nbt r-int*), also called Tefnut, Daughter of Ra, always appears on the viewer's left, corresponding to the left Eye of Ra, the moon. Nekhbet, the Lady of the Upper District (*nbt p3 w hry*), always appears on the viewer's right, corresponding to the right Eye of Ra, the sun. Derchain⁸⁴ notes that the two Eyes appear constantly in the inscriptions, “tantôt confondus, et tantôt distincts.” This duality is apparent in scenes on the lintel, in which the corner scenes show the king carrying the *hpt* and oar, performing the *hb sd* ritual run towards a goddess. In the left corner the king runs towards Hathor; in the right corner he runs towards the One of the Upper District (*t3 nt p3 w hry*).

Some references to the myth occur in highlighted scenes on the doorframe (Fig. 14). At the left center of the lintel, the king offers incense to two seated goddesses, Nekhbet and Tefnut.⁸⁵ The inscription for Nekhbet says, *di(=i) n=k ʕnh w3s nb rʕ nb dd mdw in nhbt hd nhn irt rʕ nb(.t) pt hnwt t3wy* (“I give you all life and dominion, each day. Recitation by Nekhbet, the White One of Nekhen, Eye of Ra, Lady of the Sky, Sovereign of Egypt”).

⁷⁸ Cartouches throughout the structure attest various rulers who took part in the restoration and construction: Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II and Cleopatra III in the speos, Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II in the subterranean chamber, Ptolemy IX Soter II in the rupestral façade and door of the court, and Ptolemy X Alexander I in the embrasure of the door, after which work on the speos ceased. See DERCHAIN, Elkab, 8–9.

⁷⁹ DERCHAIN, Elkab, 12 and 32.

⁸⁰ DERCHAIN, Elkab, pl. 16.

⁸¹ Several blocks found their way into the mosque of Hallel and others into the house of the village teacher. See: DERCHAIN, Elkab, 36.

⁸² LD IV, 68.

⁸³ The goddess *ssmtt* (Greek, Σμήτις), who appears from the beginning of the Old Kingdom. An inscription mentioning her connection with Mut and an isheru lake appears on an 18th-dynasty statue of Amenhotep Son of Hapu. See: DE WIT, *Le rôle*, 310. The rock-cut speos at El Kab, connecting with the architectural image of Hathor coming forth from her mountain residence, is thus dedicated to the pacified goddess who takes up residence amidst Hathor-headed columns. See: WILDUNG, *Felstempel*, 166.

⁸⁴ DERCHAIN, Elkab, 37.

⁸⁵ DERCHAIN, Elkab, Text I.A.3.c and d.

Tefnut's inscription says, *di(=i) n=k 3w-ib nb snb nb dd mdw in tfnwt s3t r' hnwt bwgm* ("I give you all joy and all health. Recitation by Tefnut, Daughter of Ra, Sovereign in Bugem"). Not only is the connection with our myth made in the reference to Bugem, but also in the stereotypical formula of Late Period texts, the gifts of *ḥw w3s 3wt-ib snb* ("life, dominion, joy, health") are distributed between the speeches of the two goddesses, thus suggesting that Nekhbet and Tefnut are in fact aspects of the same deity.⁸⁶ Whereas Tefnut defines the myth, the local goddess Nekhbet plays the role of the Wandering Goddess.

Another reference to the myth occurs in a scene on the right side of the door frame (Fig. 14) in which the king offers incense and libation to Thoth, "who appeases Her Majesty, the One of Bugem, who gives the king everything that Ra sees." The offering of wine in the third register of the right doorframe forms a pair with the offering of Ma'at in the symmetrical scene of the left doorframe. The offering of wine pacifies the goddess; Ma'at results from her appeasement. We will see the pairing of these two scenes at Dendera as well.

Proceeding towards the rock-cut Hemispeos, one sees Hathor-heads alternate with lotiform capitals on the ten columns of the *h3yt*. On the façade of the sanctuary, Cleopatra III pacifies the goddess with sistra in dual scenes, saluting her as the fiery Lady of Terror who can be appeased,⁸⁷ another reference to the angry lioness of our myth. Despite lacunae on the embrasure of the doorjamb at the entrance (at the rear of the *h3yt*), one can see an allusion to Thoth and the joyous return of the goddess: "having come in joy...gives him...following. Thoth is delighting in it...rejoicing his heart in the place..."⁸⁸

The best-preserved part of the speos is the vaulted ceiling, decorated with flying vultures alternating with the cartouches of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II and Cleopatra III. The only decoration remaining on the walls inside the sanctuary is the frieze of Hathor-heads alternating with cartouches (similar to the frieze in the Temple of Amenhotep III) and a long inscription of eight horizontal lines (Fig. 15). The inscription contains three hymns: to Horus, Temet (the daughter of Atum), and Hathor, showing parallels with Edfu, Philae, and Musawwarat es Sufra, as well as with pChester Beatty VIII.⁸⁹ These parallels are already apparent in the first line, with Horus addressed as the son of "Osiris, Lord of Abaton," an epithet more appropriate for Philae than for El Kab.⁹⁰ In keeping with the parallelism of left and right, the text mentions Hathor (as Temet) on the left wall and Nekhbet on the right. The texts on the left wall note Temet's sovereignty over the four cardinal directions, alluding to Hathor's *quadrifrons* aspect of protection for Ra.⁹¹ The texts on the right wall state that Thoth appeases the goddess called the Udjat (the right Eye of Ra); her reception includes music, dance, and meat offerings. The festival is described on the right wall as well, "the singers shout, the dancers dance for you in your name of Sister that one appeases...he appeases the flame of your Majesty in your name of Nesret."

⁸⁶ DERCHAIN, Elkab, 38 n. 6.

⁸⁷ DERCHAIN, Elkab, 49.

⁸⁸ DERCHAIN, Elkab, 48.5. No hieroglyphic text is given.

⁸⁹ Parallel texts: pChester Beatty VIII, V, 9–10; JUNKER/WINTER, Philae II, 136; Edfou I, 393, lines 14–17; F. HINTZE, Die Inschriften des Löwentempels von Musawwarat es Sufra, ADAW 1962, 40–42.

⁹⁰ DERCHAIN, Elkab, 53.

⁹¹ DERCHAIN, Elkab, 56–57 n. 260.

Thus, the temples of the Wadi el-Hallel, situated in a desert valley with sacred natural rock formations and a naturally occurring isheru, honored the goddess Nekhbet in her form of Hathor-Tefnut, the returning Distant Goddess. In the Temple of Amenhotep III, the oldest of the group, the assimilation of Nekhbet to Hathor is more subtle than in the other temples, with Hathoric imagery suggesting the equivalence of the two goddesses. The depictions of the barque of Ra suggest that it was a way station for processions. A centrally important scene in the small Chapel of Thoth, another way station for the barque, may depict the homecoming to her father Ra of Nekhbet as the Wandering Goddess. The Ptolemaic Hemispeos, another way station as well as a place for celebrating the homecoming, connects the myth with more cosmic symbolism: Hathor-Tefnut is the left (moon) Eye and Nekhbet (the Lady of the Upper District) is the right (sun) Eye. Thus, the festival would probably have consisted of a barque procession, perhaps originating in the main temple of Nekhbet at El Kab, proceeding to the Temple of Amenhotep III, stopping at the Chapel of Thoth, and ending with festivities in the court of the Ptolemaic hemispeos.

The Wandering Goddess at Dendera

The great temple of Hathor at Dendera⁹² is located on the bend of the Nile south of the provincial capital of Qena⁹³ (Fig. 16). The local necropolis dates back to the early dynastic period and a temple has been located there since the Old Kingdom.⁹⁴ The Ptolemaic temple of Hathor replaced one built by Nectanebo I; its construction began at the end of the reign of Ptolemy XII Neos Dionysos (Auletes)⁹⁵ around 54 BCE. Although most of the building took place during the 21-year reign of Cleopatra VII, the relief decoration was just beginning at the time of her death in 30 BCE. Decoration and construction in the complex continued under the Roman emperors, from Augustus (30 BCE–14 CE) through Marcus Aurelius (161–180 CE). There are many references, both direct and indirect, to the myth and its festival throughout the temple complex,⁹⁶ but this paper will concentrate on the two

⁹² Capital letters designating rooms and chapels refer to the labeling system in: Dendera.

⁹³ The temple faces the river (the usual orientation), but because of the east-west Qena bend, this direction is actually north; it was considered symbolically to be east. Thus, “East” = geographic north; “West” = geographic south (Chapels I, H, J, M, N); “South” = geographic east (chapels G, F, E, D); “North” = geographic west (Chapels L, K). CAUVILLE, Dendera II, 2.

⁹⁴ R.S. BAGNALL/D.W. RATHBONE, *Egypt from Alexander to the Early Christians: An Archaeological and Historical Guide*, Los Angeles, 2004, 209. Pepi I is the first king associated with the memory of the temple; his royal titulary includes the epithet, “Beloved of Hathor of Dendera.” A sistrum inscribed with his name was part of Dendera’s treasury. Other rulers associated with building activity at Dendera include Nebhepetre Mentuhotep (11th Dynasty chapel, now in the Cairo Museum), Thutmose III, Shabaka, Nectanebo I, Ptolemy I, Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II, Ptolemy X Alexander I, and Ptolemy XII. See: S. CAUVILLE, *Dendera: Guide archéologique*, Bibliothèque générale 12, Cairo 1995, 3–4.

⁹⁵ BAGNALL/RATHBONE, *Egypt*, 209, state that it was begun from scratch in 125 BCE; CAUVILLE, *Guide*, 4, states that it was begun at the end of the reign of Ptolemy XII (88–51 BCE).

⁹⁶ A preliminary examination of the reliefs in the temple showed that allusions to the myth occur in most of the rooms of the main temple (including the the barque sanctuary, the mysterious corridor, the subsidiary chapels (Per-nu, Per-neser, Chapel of the Sistrum, Chapel of the Menit, and “the Leg Created from the Corpse,” a chapel whose scenes revolve around the appeasement of the Eye of Ra), the inner vestibule, the

sites with the clearest and most important relationships to the myth: the Barque Chapel by the sacred lake and the Per-wer sanctuary of the main temple. However, we will first look briefly at the calendar texts attesting the festival.

The festival for her return, celebrated from the 19th of the month of Tybi until the 4th of Mechir, appears in four calendar texts within the Dendera complex (Fig. 16): the barque chapel next to the sacred lake;⁹⁷ the outer west wall of the main temple;⁹⁸ doorjambs of room C' off the inner hypostyle hall;⁹⁹ and Crypt West 3.¹⁰⁰ Crypt West 3 is an inventory room; the festival calendar shares space with historical and mythological texts, as well as a list of the pantheon of Dendera. The calendar in the crypt is thus historical, in contrast with the "modern" ones on the outer west wall and inner hypostyle hall of the main temple. However, there is no significant difference between the two regarding the carrying out of the festival in Tybi, suggesting that the ritual proceedings remained constant over time.¹⁰¹ From the information contained in these texts, we know that on the first day of the festival Hathor appeared in procession with her divine court. She stopped and entered the chapel on the esplanade, "her beautiful face turned towards the north" (alluding to the Distant Goddess' turning her back on Nubia and returning north to Egypt), after which she entered her barque for a navigation on the sacred lake.¹⁰² Following the navigation, she stopped in the *wsht* hall of the main temple.¹⁰³ Alliot¹⁰⁴ notes that the present *wsht*, or hypostyle hall, built during the reign of Tiberius, did not exist when the text was inscribed. Therefore, the place where the goddess stopped was probably the inner hypostyle hall, which would have functioned as the *wsht* until the construction of the larger hall in front.¹⁰⁵

The celebration of this festival received additional royal patronage under Ptolemy III Euergetes I, whose young daughter Berenike had died coincidentally during the month of

hypostyle hall, the treasury, the Court of the New Year, and the roof kiosk, as well as in the Barque Chapel and the Roman Mammisi.

⁹⁷ West façade, right (south) doorjamb of barque chapel, in CAUVILLE, Chapelle, 133–136, Text III, pl. 17.

⁹⁸ Outer west exterior wall of main temple, in Cauville, Chapelle, 164, D; PM VI, 78 (238)–(247); J.

DÜMICHEN, Bauurkunde der Tempelanlagen von Dendera in einem der geheimen Corridore im Inneren der Tempelmauer aufgefunden und erläuternd mitgeteilt, Leipzig, 1865, iv, pls. cvii–xxx, as cited in Rec.dM, vi.

⁹⁹ Dendara IX, 202.4–9; MARIETTE, Dend., pl. 62j; PM VI, 53 (65), (a)–(d); ALLIOT, Culte, 245–246, Col. 15; CAUVILLE, Chapelle, 163.

¹⁰⁰ Dendara VI, 158.3, pl. DLXXIX (Crypt 9 of MARIETTE, Dend., columns 31–35); ALLIOT, Culte, 239; CAUVILLE, Chapelle, 164. The festival also appears in a calendar text in the forecourt of the Temple of Horus at Edfu. See Edfou V, 351.6–11; ALLIOT, Culte, 227–228; CAUVILLE, Chapelle, 163.

¹⁰¹ However, the north side of the doorjamb of the north interior wall of the Barque Chapel states that the festival was celebrated from 3 Tybi, instead of 19 Tybi, as in the other texts. See: CAUVILLE, Chapelle, 131–132, Text II, pl. 16. CAUVILLE, Chapelle, 165 n. 30, notes that festivals of the civil calendar did not fall on the same day every year; more important was the fact that the festival of the return of the goddess took place during the first days of winter. L.-A. CHRISTOPHE, Les fêtes agraires du calendrier d'Hathor à Edfou, CHE VIII/1, février 1955, 37, gives the "ideal dates" for the festival of 19–21 Tybi as 3–5 December.

¹⁰² CAUVILLE, Chapelle 164; Dendara IX, 202.4–9; Dendara VI, 158.3.

¹⁰³ Dendara IX, 202.4–9.

¹⁰⁴ ALLIOT, Culte, 245 n. 8.

¹⁰⁵ CAUVILLE, Guide, 5, notes that the inner part of the temple (the "naos," consisting of barque sanctuary, chapels, and inner and outer vestibules), where the text on the door jamb of room C' was inscribed, was constructed during the last years of Ptolemy XII Neos Dionysos (Auletes), whereas the present hypostyle hall ("pronaos"), with its columns and screen walls, was built under Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero.

Tybi in 237 B.C.E. The Canopus Decree¹⁰⁶ outlines her posthumous honors, equating her with ἡ Ἡλίου θυγάτηρ (“the daughter of the Sun”) who had departed, ἣ ὁ πατήρ στέρξας ὠνόμασεν ὅτε βασιλείαν (“whom her loving father sometimes called his diadem”). A feast and boat-procession was to take place for her during four days from the 17th of Tybi; gold and jeweled statues of her were also set up in the major temples. Thus, her cult became part of an already existing festival, which undoubtedly benefited from the increased royal support.

Barque Chapel

Almost a century after the festival began incorporating honors to Berenike, Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II constructed the Barque Chapel located about 20 m north of Dendera’s sacred lake (Fig. 17). Referred to as a *h3yt*,¹⁰⁷ like the kiosks in front of the Chapel of Thoth and the Hemispeos at El Kab, it shared themes and a similar structure, also functioning as a way station where the goddess would rest before entering her barque for the navigation on the sacred lake. Its brick chapel has long disappeared, leaving only the sandstone gateway decorated with offering scenes and texts, and the vestiges of a brick platform. When in use, it would have contained altars and lustration basins, as well as a twenty-meter-wide platform covered with flagstones and reached by an access ramp/staircase.¹⁰⁸

The doorway consists of four decorated sides: the east and west façades, and the interior south and north sides (Fig. 18). The east façade, facing the main temple, contains five registers of single scenes on each side of the doorframe, with two scenes decorating the lintel. Vertical lines of text adorn both sides of the west doorframe, as well as the west sides of both interior elevations. Of the four texts, three describe the navigation of Hathor in Tybi, adding details to our knowledge of the festival.¹⁰⁹ A depiction of her barque appears in the lowest registers of the east façade and the interior south and north elevations, the accompanying texts indirectly referring to the myth by mention of its protagonists: Hathor, Thoth, Ra, Shu, and Tefnut. The choice of offering scenes decorating the façades and sides cleverly works to recount aspects of the myth of the returning goddess. The different offerings depicted on the barque chapel gateway (*mnw*-jars, myrrh, mirrors, *wensheb*, sistra, make-up) not only recall presentations to the goddess in the myth, but also relate to the different aspects of Hathor.¹¹⁰ When she receives mirrors or make-up, she is the beautiful woman. When she receives myrrh, she is the Mistress of Punt, coming from Nubia. When she receives milk, she is the nourishing cow. When she receives the *wensheb*, sistrum, or *mnw*-beverage, she is the angry lioness needing to be pacified. In many scenes, the text additionally calls her the Uraeus on the head of her father. Thus, the decoration of the

¹⁰⁶ W. DITTENBERGER (ed.), *Orientis Graeci inscriptiones selectae, Supplementum Sylloges Inscriptionum Graecarum*, vol. 1, Leipzig 1903, 56, A.

¹⁰⁷ ALLIOT, *Culte*, 245.

¹⁰⁸ CAUVILLE, *Chapelle*, 171.

¹⁰⁹ Musicians and singers serenaded, while Hathor sailed on the lake until the 6th hour of the day; at the 9th hour, rituals took place, after which Hathor returned to her house.

¹¹⁰ CAUVILLE, *Chapelle*, 169.

barque chapel serves several functions: it defines the purpose of the chapel as a way-station for Hathor's navigation on the lake at Tybi; it replicates the offerings given to the goddess during the myth as well as during the festival; and it presents Hathor in her four manifestations (lioness, cow, cobra, beautiful woman)—“Hathor Quadrifrons,” who protects her father Ra in each of the cardinal directions.¹¹¹

Even a scene that at first glance does not concern the myth, may actually work together with its myth-related counterpart or have an indirect reference to the myth. The scene on each lintel showing the king offering the *mnw*-beverage (Fig. 18, east and west façades, Scenes 11/12, and 23/24) to Hathor is paired with the offering of Ma'at, having no apparent connection to the myth. However, the presentation of the beverage, with the resultant appeasement of the angry goddess, reestablishes the equilibrium of Ma'at.¹¹² This working-together of scenes appears also in the Per-wer sanctuary, as we will see.

Comparing the doorframe of the Hemispeos (east façade) (Fig. 14) with that of the Barque Chapel of Dendera (Fig. 18), we see that there are many more scenes relating to the myth on the door of the Barque Chapel. The singular purpose of the Barque Chapel—to receive the barque of Hathor before her navigation on the sacred lake—caused almost all of the scenes depicted on the door to relate to the myth and her pacification. However, the Hemispeos, after the remodeling by the Ptolemies, was a more complicated structure, honoring Nekhbet in the form of Shesmetet, who plays the roles of Hathor, Tefnut, and the cosmic Eye goddesses. In addition to creating a setting for the festival, it served as a small rock-cut sanctuary for the local goddess. References to the myth are abundant in the texts on the sanctuary walls, and might have been in the scenes, too (which unfortunately are missing). Thus, the symbolism of the myth shares space on the doorway with the rituals normally carried out for the goddess during the daily temple rite.

Per-wer Sanctuary

Before looking at some scenes from the Per-wer, we will take a brief look at the organization of a relief scene from Dendera¹¹³ (Fig. 19). Beginning at the top, the decoration of the frieze provides information about the principal personages of the room. For example, in chapels consecrated to Hathor, heads of the goddess decorate the frieze. The “bandeau de la frise,” or stringcourse underneath the frieze, usually contains hymns. Below this narrow band of text are scenes occupying several registers, numbering three in the chapels and four in the large halls; one reads these registers from bottom to top. The lowest register (the base) contains ordinary cultic actions done on earth, whereas the upper registers refer to the astral aspects of the deity. The scenes are organized into symmetrical pairs: offerings of purification (incense, water); offerings of the same type for the same

¹¹¹ P. DERCHAIN, *Hathor Quadrifrons: Recherches sur la syntaxe d'un mythe égyptien*, Uitgaven van het Nederlandsch Historisch Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul 28, Istanbul 1972, 11–15.

¹¹² CAUVILLE, *Chapelle*, 168. M-C. POO, *Wine and Wine-Offering in the Religion of Ancient Egypt*, London/New York 1995, 45–46, notes that wine offerings on jambs and thicknesses of doorways are often paired symmetrically with offerings of water, milk, and Ma'at.

¹¹³ CAUVILLE, *Guide*, 21–24.

goddess (menit, sistra); offerings for complementary deities (Hathor, Isis); offerings for deities representing the two great sanctuaries of Egypt, Thebes and Memphis (Amun, Ptah).

The most important focal point in the Temple of Dendera is the Per-wer (*pr-wr*, or “Great Sanctuary”), located on the central axis at the rear (south) of the main temple, directly behind the barque sanctuary¹¹⁴ and in front of the sacred image of Hathor on the outer wall (Fig. 16). Cauville¹¹⁵ notes the exceptionally fine compositional balance and relief carving in this particular chapel, undoubtedly carried out by the best artisans of the time. Within the central niche of the Per-wer stood a statue of Hathor—the focus of a second daily temple rite carried out in addition to the primary one in the barque sanctuary. Many of the emblems and offerings presented during this ritual allude to the Myth of the Wandering Goddess. Evidence of the myth in this room illustrates the integration of its symbolism into the overall theology of the temple, particularly with respect to the characterization of Hathor and Isis.

These allusions begin already in the façade of the Per-wer sanctuary’s entrance from the Mysterious Corridor, where hymns written in the vertical lines of text on both sides of the doorway describe the comings and goings of the goddess in festival procession, to the acclaim of Ra, Thoth, Hu, and Sia. On the right (west) side of the doorframe, Thoth helps to bring the goddess home to her father: *wp n=t dhwtj w3wt, shn <n=> t r^c m^c wy.fy* (“Thoth opens the roads for you, Ra greets <you> in his arms”).¹¹⁶ The goddess enters her sanctuary, *nmt=t m st ib=t* (“you walk into the place of your desire”), taking up her rightful place: *h^c wrt m-hnt 3ht, <wbn>=s hr wpt nt it=s* (“the Uraeus appears in the temple, she <shines> on the brow of her father”). On the left (east) side of the outer doorframe, the vertical lines describe the great jubilation made by the populace and the gathered divinities during *hb pn nfr* (“this beautiful festival”).¹¹⁷ When she goes forth in procession, *ntrw hr irt n=t i3w, ntrwt hr irt n=t hnw* (“the gods are making adorations for you, the goddesses are making acclamations”), *sw3š tw t3 dr=f r r3-^c wbn-htp n itn, wn n=t hhw g3bty=sn, sn n=t hfnw t3* (“the entire country adores you up to the limits of the rising and setting of the sun; the multitude opens its arms for you, the innumerable masses kiss the earth before you”).¹¹⁸ Thus, Thoth opens the way for the Distant Goddess and Ra greets her in his arms, after which she enters her sanctuary and takes her place on his brow, to the acclaim and jubilation of the populace.

As in the Hemispeos, there is a division between right and left for the goddesses. Whereas at El Kab, Hathor was on the viewer’s left (left Eye=moon), and the Lady of the Upper District, equated with Nekhbet, appears on the right (right Eye=sun), at Dendera, Hathor (with Horus) is on the right and Isis (with Harsomtut) is on the left. I believe that the difference is because at the Hemispeos, Nekhbet is the principal goddess (and is therefore

¹¹⁴ The Per-wer sanctuary carries the name of the archaic Upper Egyptian shrine of Nekhbet, the place of the king’s coronation; it is framed on both sides by chapels named for the archaic shrines of Lower Egypt (*pr-nw* and *pr-nsr*). See: CAUVILLE, Guide, 52; EAD., Dendara III, 8.

¹¹⁵ CAUVILLE, Dendara III, 6.

¹¹⁶ Dendara III, 46.2–6; CAUVILLE 2000, 104–107; Dendara II, pl. XCIV, center, sides of doorway.

¹¹⁷ Dendara III, 45.4–46.1; CAUVILLE 2000, 104–05; Dendara II, pl. XCIV, center, lintel above doorway.

¹¹⁸ CAUVILLE, Dendara III, 6–7, notes that Thoth is present in this scene because Hathor here is *hntyt iwnt* (Hathor who presides at Dendera, a form of Hathor-Isis), Thoth being the “father” and mentor of Isis. Cf. Dendara III, 35.9–43.7.

the right Eye of Ra who returns to his brow), whereas at Dendera, Hathor is the principal goddess with this function. At El Kab, Hathor is a secondary manifestation of the main deity, similar to that of Isis at Dendera.

Scenes within the Per-wer sanctuary include offerings of the *wensheb*, sistra, *mnw*-vase, unguents, and udjats—familiar objects from the myth and the festival (Fig. 19). The king takes on the role of Thoth in the second scene of the first register on the east wall, where he is depicted opening the shrine containing Hathor's image (the "Great Eye").¹¹⁹ The text describes the king as *snn n hb, in wd3t n nb=s, rdi 3ht r st wnn=s* ("the image of the Ibis, who carries the udjat-eye to its lord, who places the shining eye in the place where it (should) be"). Hathor responds, acknowledging that she is the *ʿnht wrt hn=tw m hḏ.s* ("the great Living Eye preserved in her shrine"). Thus, the king's action is equivalent to that of Thoth returning the Udjat to its rightful place, to its Lord.

In addition to the offerings and ritual acts relating to the myth, two particularly significant scenes within the Per-wer sanctuary suggest connections with the inundation and navigations on the isheru. A clue to their meaning may be in the historical calendar text in Crypt West 3, which states that after the first navigation of the festival, there were sixteen days of nine more navigations, until the fourth of Mechir.¹²⁰ These nine navigations may allude to the places where the Wandering Goddess stopped as she progressed north from Nubia; the number sixteen may connect with the festival in Tybi and the inundation. In the third register of the north wall of the Per-wer sanctuary, Hathor nurses her son, seated on a throne over 16 vases of inundation water¹²¹ (Fig. 20). The king offers her a jar of primordial water, while Horus-Ihy plays the sistrum and shakes the menit to repel her anger. In another scene, on the west wall, Isis sits on a throne, its base surrounded on three sides by wavy lines of water in a basin (Fig. 20), whose depiction bears a similarity to the U-shaped, "classic" isheru lake. The king makes an offering of fresh bread to the goddess. The caption for Isis lists the material ("beautiful gold") and height (1 cubit) of her statue, as well as the notation, *isrw=s m kd=s nb* ("her isheru lake is all around her").¹²² Behind Isis are seated images of Harsomtut and Mut, who bears the epithet, "Lady of Isheru," but without a similar depiction of an isheru beneath her throne.

René Preys¹²³ describes the ritual of "making an isheru lake," which may have taken place as part of the rites of purification and pacification of the Wandering Goddess. Sixteen vases filled with inundation water would be poured into a basin that surrounded her statue like a crescent-shaped isheru. These sixteen vases denote the ideal level of inundation, with each vase representing one cubit of water height.¹²⁴ Preys suggests that this ritual actually took place within the main temple of Dendera,¹²⁵ but Cauville¹²⁶ disagrees, stating, "le lien

¹¹⁹ Dendara III, 65.4–66.3 and pls. CLXXX and CLXXXVII; CAUVILLE, Dendara III, 132–133.

¹²⁰ Dendara VI, 158.3, pl. DLXXIX (=Crypt 9 of MARIETTE, Dend., columns 31–35); ALLIOT, Culte, 239; CAUVILLE, Chapelle, 164.

¹²¹ Dendara III, 71.11–72.8, pl. CLXXX)

¹²² Dendara III, 84.15; CAUVILLE, Dendara III, 160–161.

¹²³ R. PREYS, Hathor, maîtresse des seize et la fête de la navigation à Dendara, in: RdE 50, 1999, 263.

¹²⁴ Cf. J. YOYOTTE, L'Ishrou de Bouto et le problème des Ishrou, in: RdE 14, 1962, 106.

¹²⁵ PREYS, Hathor, 266–267, suggests that the ritual took place within the Per-Nu, or "Chapel of Purification" (lit. "House of the *nw*-jar"), located directly east of the Per-wer sanctuary. The third register of the south wall of the Per-nu (Dend. II, pl. CLXII) contains two similar scenes: one with Hathor seated over 16 jars, and another with Isis seated over a base surrounded on three sides by water in a basin.

qu'il établit avec la fête est cependant imaginaire," because there is no specific reference to the festival of Tybi in the inscription. I would suggest that the depictions in the Per-wer sanctuary of the isheru lake, along with the sixteen vases under Hathor's throne, do not necessarily depict a ceremony taking place inside the temple, but rather refer to the navigation of Hathor/Isis on the sacred lake, which itself becomes an "isheru" in the ritual. Crypt South 1, Chamber D, depicts a similar statue of Isis, again seated over an isheru-shaped basin, with the accompanying text stating, *3st wrt, . . . sndmt m išrw nty m šnw=s s3b sš hnt wi3=s* ("Isis the Great . . . is seated (or "pacified") in the isheru that is around her, who crosses the lake within her barque").¹²⁷ This description suggests that the depiction of Isis seated over an "isheru" is a symbolic representation of her ritual navigation on the sacred lake. The texts describe this ritual poetically as a meeting with her father Nun, the Primordial Water, who enfolds her in his arms.¹²⁸ Thus, her navigation symbolizes not only the return of the Distant Goddess after her stay in Nubia, but also the arrival of the Inundation that she brings with her. Another interesting observation is that the cardinal directions of the two walls (north and west) are the same directions in which Hathor exits the temple in procession, and where the navigation takes place on the sacred lake.¹²⁹

Two particularly important scenes relating to the myth occur in the second registers of both the east and west side walls of the Per-wer's niche, framing from the inside of the temple the sacred image of Hathor on the rear wall, as well as the statue housed within the niche (Fig. 21). The scene on the left depicts Shu offering the Udjat to Hathor, while Ihy plays the sistrum for his mother. (Fig. 22). Not only is she characterized as *irt-r* ("Eye of Ra") and the *nhnt nt itm* ("Living Eye of Atum"), but also as *ipy t psd hr wpt nt it.s* ("the resplendent Uraeus on the head of her father").¹³⁰ Horus of Edfu (identified with Ra-Horakhty) stands behind her, his arms raised in adoration, saying, *dwn.n=i wy=i h3 hrt-tp m h4=s, mk(=i) k3=s hnt k3w* ("I placed my arms around the Uraeus in her naos, I protect her ka among the divine forces.")¹³¹ On the west wall, in a symmetrical scene in the same register, Ihy offers the Udjat to Hathor while Thoth raises his arms in praise (Fig. 22). Harsomtut (equated with Ra-Horakhty) says, *r ds=f hnt pr-r: di=i wy=i h3 ryt, hnwt t3wy* ("Ra himself is in the Sanctuary of Ra: I place my arms around Raet,¹³² the Sovereign of the Two Lands").¹³³ Thus, the main protagonists from the myth are present: Hathor, Shu, and Thoth. Ra enfolds his daughter in his arms, as the Eye is returned and protected. These scenes recall the main scene of Nekhbet returning to her father Ra on the rear wall of the

¹²⁶ CAUVILLE, Dendara V–VI, 20 n. 23.

¹²⁷ Dendara V, pl. CCCXXXVIII. This scene also designates the material (gold) and size (1 cubit) of the statue, which is similar to the description of the Isis statue in the scene of Isis seated above the isheru-shaped basin that we saw earlier in the Per-wer sanctuary.

¹²⁸ Stringcourse of the base of the exterior west wall of the naos, PM VI, 78 (238–247); CAUVILLE, Dendara XII/1, 184.17. GESSLER-LÖHR, Die heiligen Seen, 323 n. 1103, and 327–328; JUNKER, Auszug, 77–78. Cf. CAUVILLE, Chapelle, 164 and n. 26, who reads, *it=s h^c=f m phr=s* ("son père, il exulte à ses côtés"); I read, *it=s nwn wy=f(y) m phr=s* ("her father Nun, his arms embracing her").

¹²⁹ It may not be a coincidence that the similar scenes noted earlier, in Crypt South 1, Chamber D, with Hathor seated over sixteen vases of water, and Isis seated over an isheru, are also located on the north and west walls, respectively.

¹³⁰ Dendara III, 95.2–3.

¹³¹ Dendara III, 95.6–7; CAUVILLE, Dendara III, 172–175.

¹³² Raet is the female counterpart of the sun.

¹³³ Dendara III, 98.1–2; CAUVILLE, Dendara III, 176–177.

sanctuary of the Chapel of Thoth at the Wadi el-Hallel. Not only is the offering of the Udjat depicted on both sides of the rear image of the niche, but the two scenes above the image are both offerings of Ma'at--the cosmic order restored because the right Eye (the sun) and the left Eye (the moon) have been restored to their proper places. So, by returning the Eye, the proper maintenance of world order is assured. Hathor returns to her place upon her Father's brow, able to protect Ra from his enemies in all directions. In addition to the scenes alluding to the myth, the first registers on the walls on either side of the niche depict statues, giving their dimensions and materials. These statues may have been the ones that went forth in the procession of the Wandering Goddess.

Therefore, I would suggest the following processional route for the Festival of the Return of the Wandering Goddess in the month of Tybi at Dendera (Fig. 15). The sacred image of Hathor was brought from the Per-wer sanctuary, joined with the sacred barque, and went forth through the inner hypostyle hall (note the calendar texts on the east doorjambs there, suggesting that the procession for this festival passed by this location). Before the construction of the hypostyle, the procession would have exited there and gone around to the west towards the Barque Chapel, where Hathor's image would have been turned towards the north and then placed in her barque for a navigation on the lake with the barques of Horus, Ra-Horakhty, and Isis. Afterwards, more rituals would take place until the 9th hour of the day, when the procession would return to the inner hypostyle hall (or, later, the hypostyle), and then Hathor's image and her barque would return to their places of rest in their respective sanctuaries.

Another important aspect of the myth in connection with Dendera is the assimilation of its symbolism into the two great festivals of the temple: the Festival of the Beautiful Reunion, and the Opening of the Year. Texts in the Crypt East 1, Chamber C¹³⁴ make an allusion to the myth in the description of the reunion of Hathor and Horus of Edfu: "Hathor, the Eye of Ra has come from the Lands of the Gods (*t3wy ntrw*) to her city in full life on the day of the navigation to Mesen (=Edfu). She sails to the Temple of Horus annually the third month of the season of Harvest, the day of the New Moon, at the time of the festival (called), "She is brought back." The phrase, "she is brought back," along with the references to Punt and *t3wy ntrw* (where the Distant Goddess sojourned), link the festival of reunion to our myth. In addition, because Horus of Edfu can be equated with Hathor's father Ra, a visit to his temple at Edfu could be seen as a return of the Uraeus to Ra's brow.

An additional festival in which the uraeus could be said to return to Ra is the Opening of the Year, during which the statue of Hathor was carried to the roof kiosk for exposure to the sun's life-giving rays in the course of the *hnm itn* ritual, the Union of the Sun Disk. The joining of her Ba with the divine power of the sun could thus be seen as a reunion with her father Ra, allowing her to return to her rightful place as the uraeus upon his brow.

Summary

Thus, navigations to pacify angry lioness goddesses at the end of summer became incorporated into another festival, which celebrates a myth that is a conflation of several

¹³⁴ Dendara V, 14.

ideas, both cosmic and earthly. The cosmic ideas include the shift of the sun's path north from summer to winter, the waxing and waning of the moon, and the cycle of inundation. The earthly include the return of the conquering hero and the struggle for power and the kingship. The small temples of the Wadi el-Hallel, all of them containing barque stations, work together to celebrate the festival of the Return of the Wandering Goddess, here assimilated to the local goddess Nekhbet. Its barque procession may have originated in the main temple of Nekhbet at El Kab, from where it proceeded first to the Temple of Amenhotep III, stopping at the Chapel of Thoth, and ending with Festivities in the court of the Hemispeos. This festival was probably the main *raison d'être* of these small temples during the Ptolemaic period. The Barque Chapel at Dendera had a similar, singular function, as a rest stop for Hathor before she entered her barque for navigations on the lake, shown by the emphasis of the festival in its decoration. On the other hand, the main temple of Dendera, the central focus of a large complex of buildings, had many more functions and rituals to carry out. Although the myth worked its way into other festivals at Dendera, its great importance in the theology of Hathor is shown by its presence in the holiest part of the temple. It is here that Shu and Thoth return the Eye to her father, so that Hathor can take her place on her father's brow—thus bringing about a restoration of Ma'at to the country and to the cosmos.

Further study of the myth of the Wandering Goddess at Dendera, and at other Ptolemaic Era temples, has the potential to yield more information about its function and purpose within a variety of settings. Such a study would include the examination of its appearance in the other chapels around the main barque sanctuary, as well as in the crypts and other buildings within the Dendera complex, taking into consideration the intrinsic interdependence of texts, reliefs, and architecture. Insight gained from such an investigation would increase our understanding of how decoration not only transmits theological ideas but also serves to transform the temple into a functioning "machine" for guaranteeing the stability of the cosmos and the prosperity of the land.

On the Heels of the Wandering Goddess



Fig. 1: Attestations of the Myth in Cult Centers. Illustration by David Rager.



Fig. 2: Wensheb, symbol of ordered time. Illustration adapted from WinGlyph by David Rager.



Fig. 3: Isheru lake at the Temple of Mut, Karnak. Photo courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum Mut Expedition.

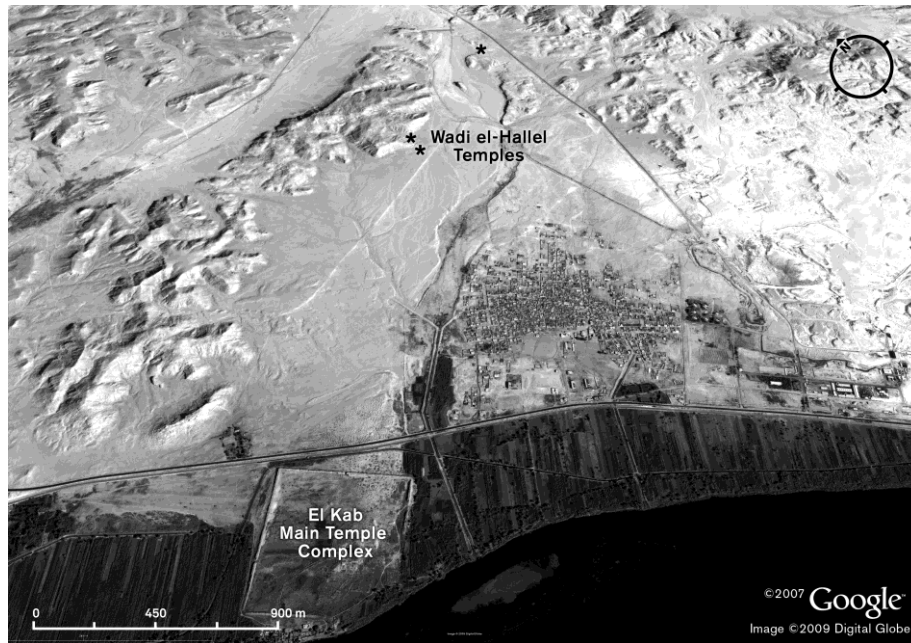


Fig. 4: El Kab and the Wadi el-Hallel. Adapted from photo © Google Earth by David Rager.

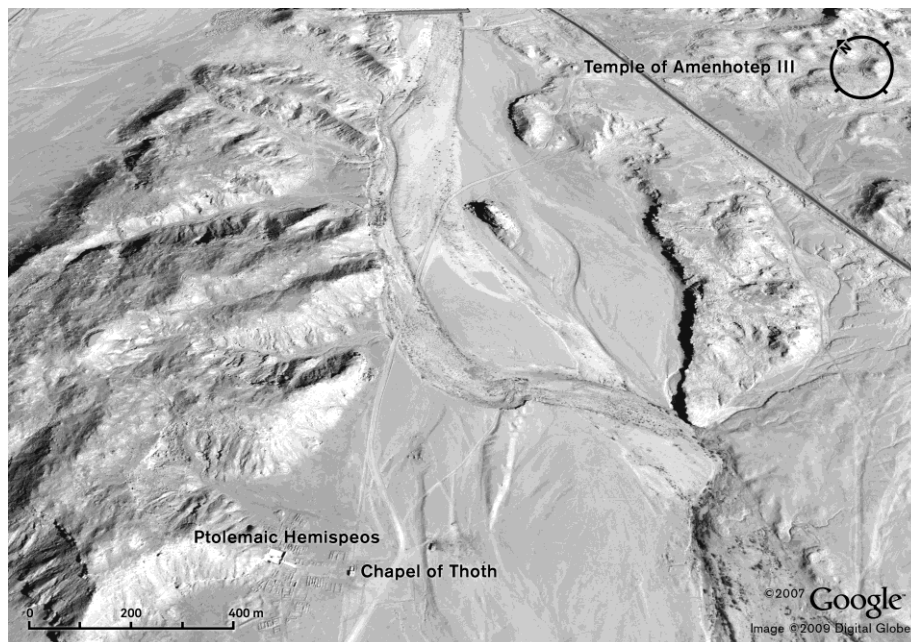


Fig. 5: The Wadi el-Hallel and its temples. Adapted from photo © Google Earth by David Rager.



Fig. 6: Temple of Amenhotep III at the Wadi el-Hallel. Photo by Su Bayfield.

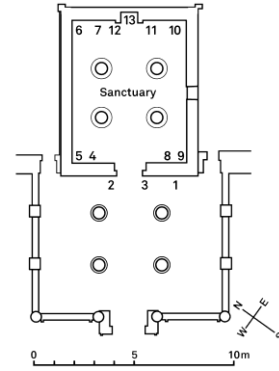


Fig. 7: Plan of the Temple of Amenhotep III at the Wadi el-Hallel. Adapted by David Rager from PM V, 186, Copyright: Griffith Institute, University of Oxford.

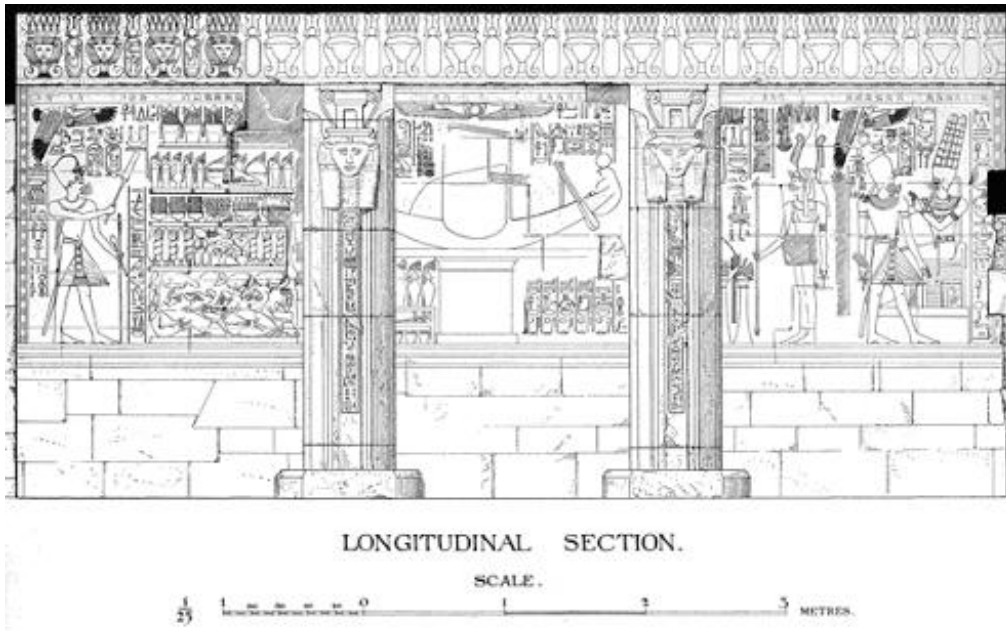


Fig. 8 - Southeast lateral wall inside sanctuary of the Temple of Amenhotep III. J. J. Tylor, The Temple of Amenhotep III: Wall Drawings and Monuments of El Kab, London 1898, pl. 14.



Fig. 9. Chapel of Thoth at the Wadi el-Hallel.
Photo by Bob Skinner.

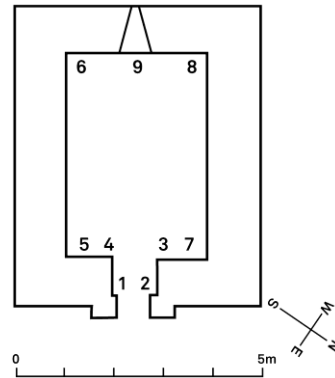


Fig. 10: Plan of Chapel of Thoth at the Wadi el-Hallel. Adapted by David Rager from PM V, 186, Copyright: Griffith Institute, University of Oxford.

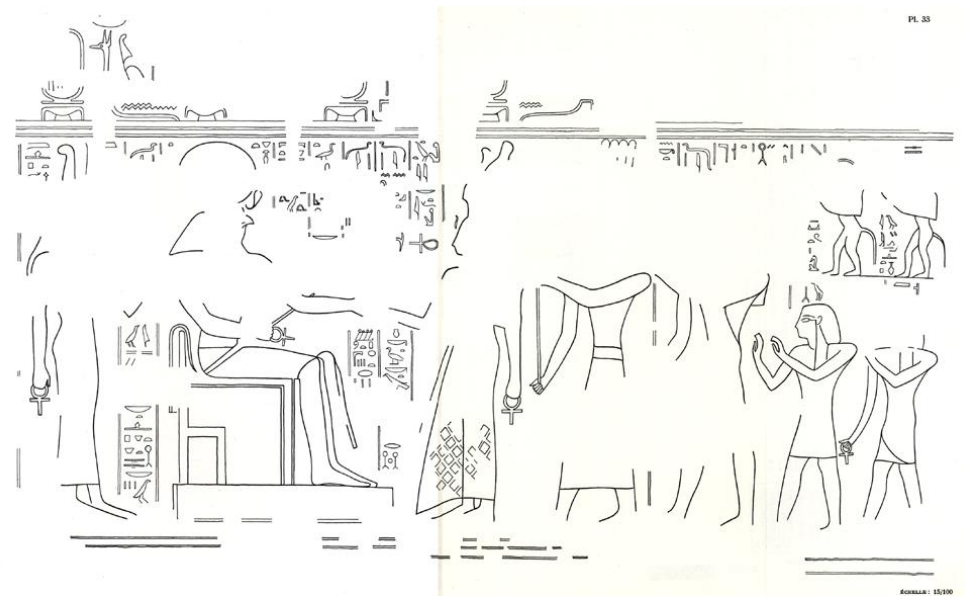


Fig. 11 - Rear wall of the Temple of Thoth at the Wadi el-Hallel.
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Fig. 12: Hemispeos of Ptolemy IX Soter II at the Wadi el-Hallel. Photo © Instituto de Estudios del Antiguo Egipto (Madrid).

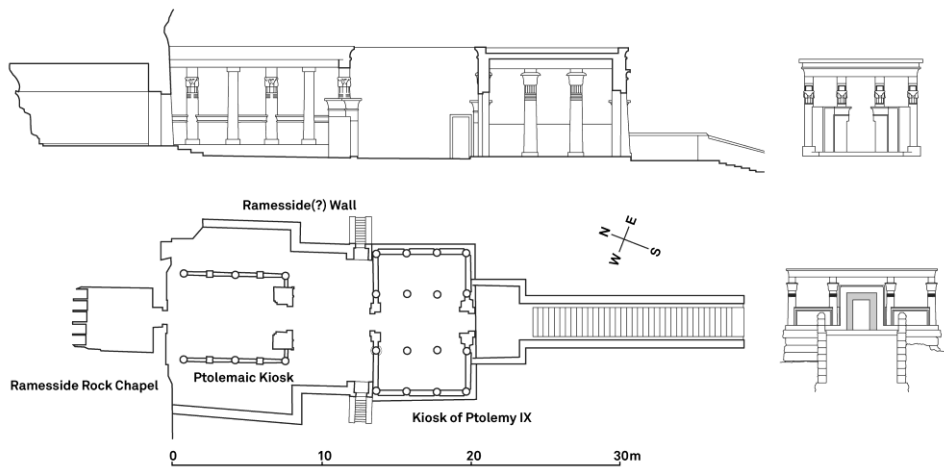


Fig. 13 - On the left, section and plan of the Ptolemaic Hemispeos. Adapted by David Rager from fig. 159 (p. 207) in "The Ptolemaic Period (323-31 B.C.)" in Dieter Arnold's *Temples of the Last Pharaohs* (1999), by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc. On the right, facades of kiosks in front of sanctuary of the hemispeos and in front of entrance to court, adapted by David Rager from images reproduced with permission of the Association Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth.

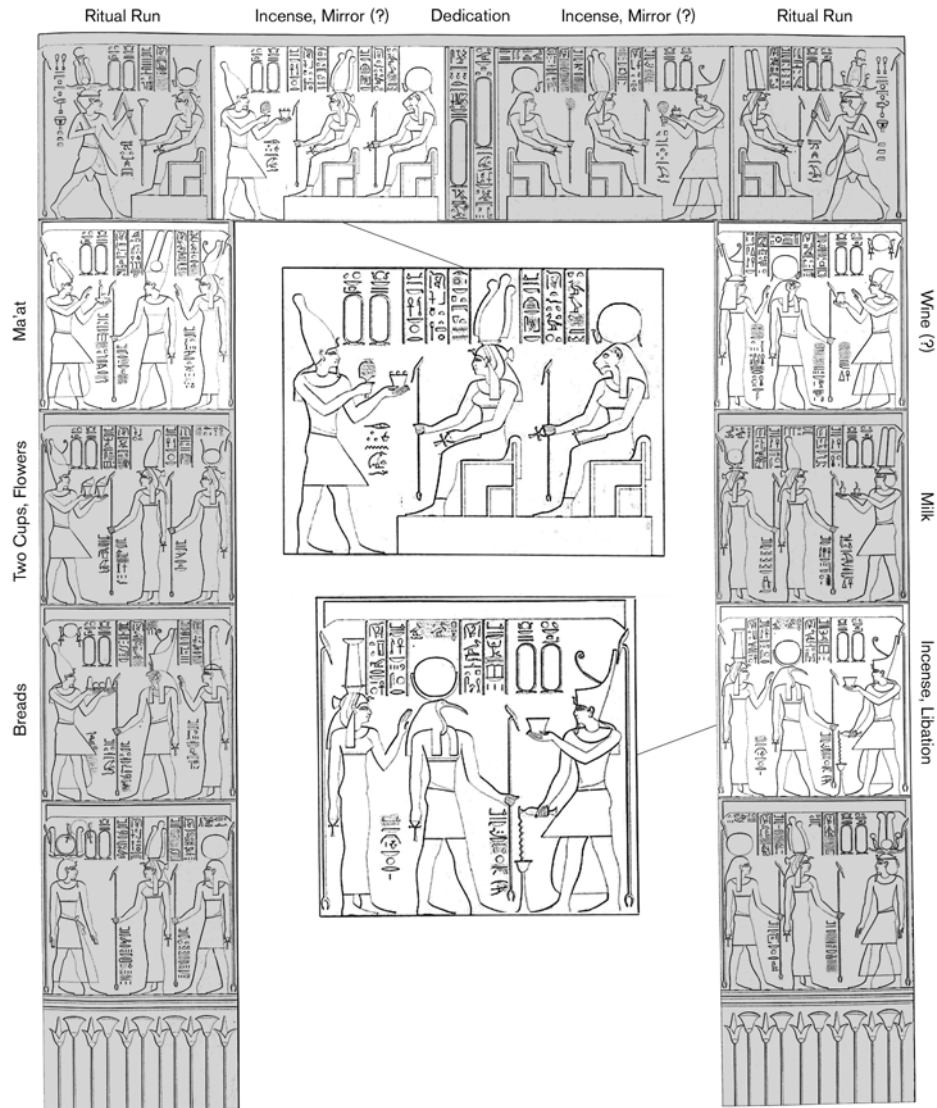


Fig. 14: Gateway at entrance to court of Hemispeos at the Wadi el-Hallel. Reproduced with permission of the Association Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, adapted by Nathan Antolik.

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Fig. 15: Hathor heads and lines of text on barrel-vaulted ceiling of the rock-cut sanctuary of the Ptolemaic Hemispeos. Photo by Carla Lagerwijn.



Fig. 17: Barque Chapel west of main temple at Dendera. Reproduced with permission of the IFAO.

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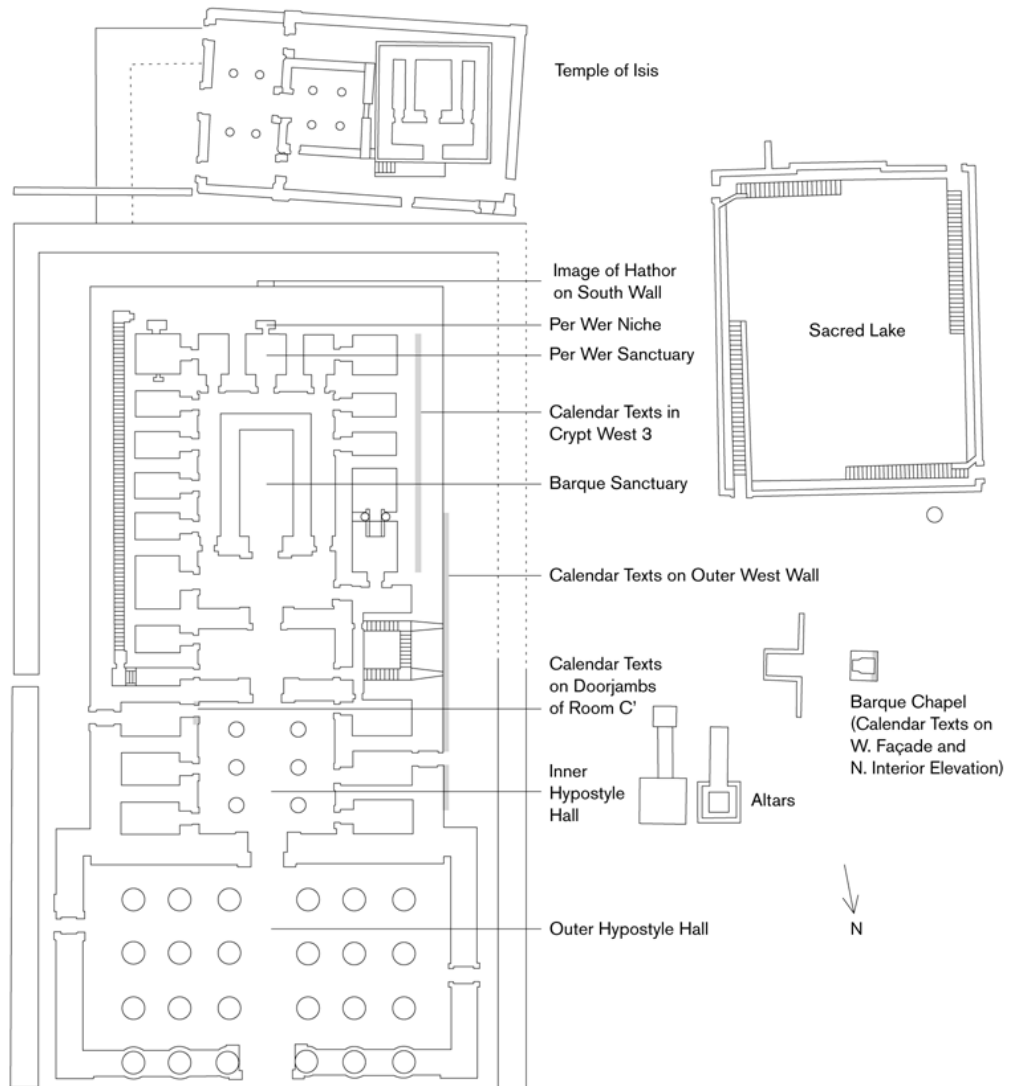


Fig. 16: Plan of Dendera, with selected buildings, rooms, and calendar texts labeled. Reproduced with permission of the IFAO; Copyright: Griffith Institute, University of Oxford, adapted by Nathan Antolik.

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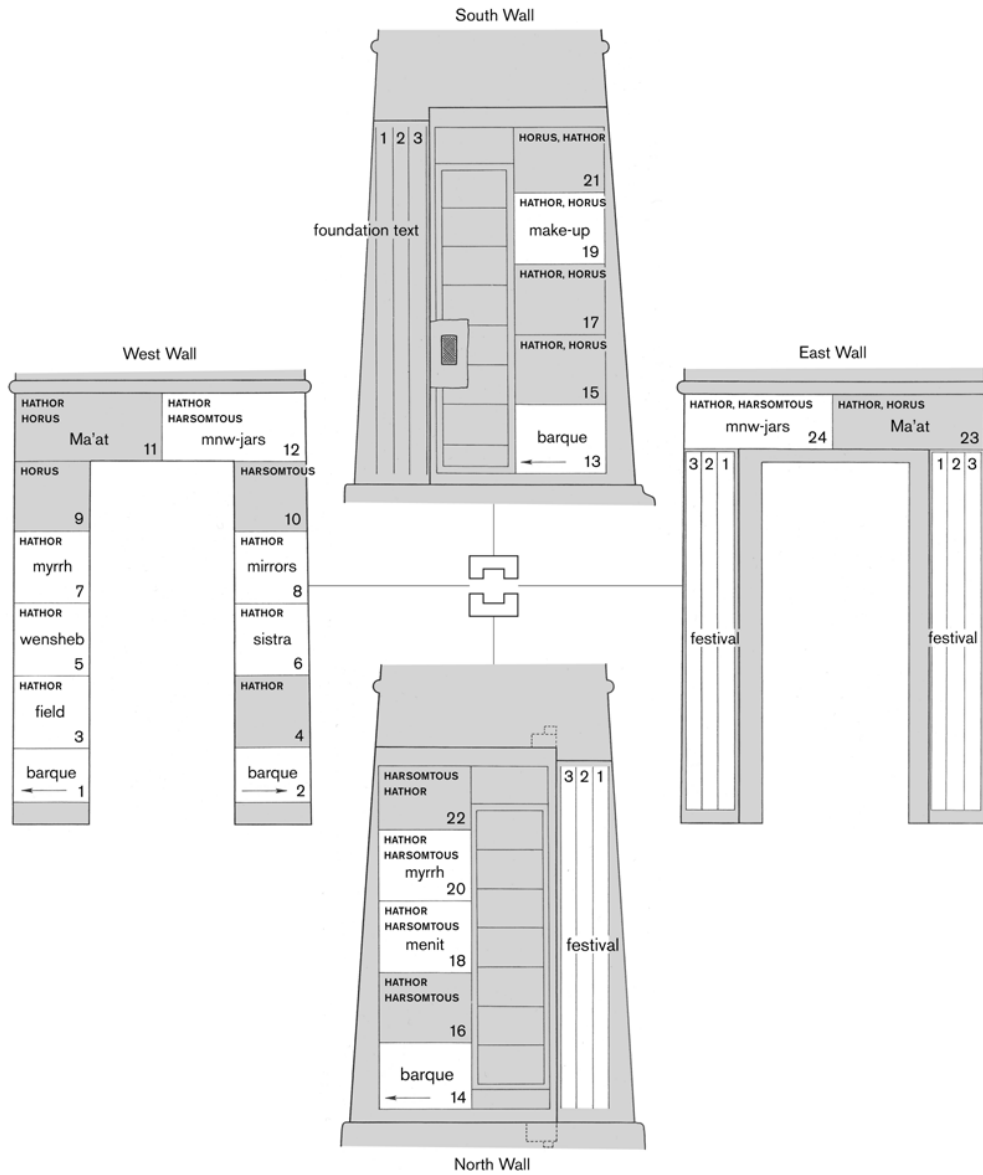


Fig. 18: Composite plan of Barque Chapel at Dendera. Reproduced with permission of the IFAO, adapted by Nathan Antolik.

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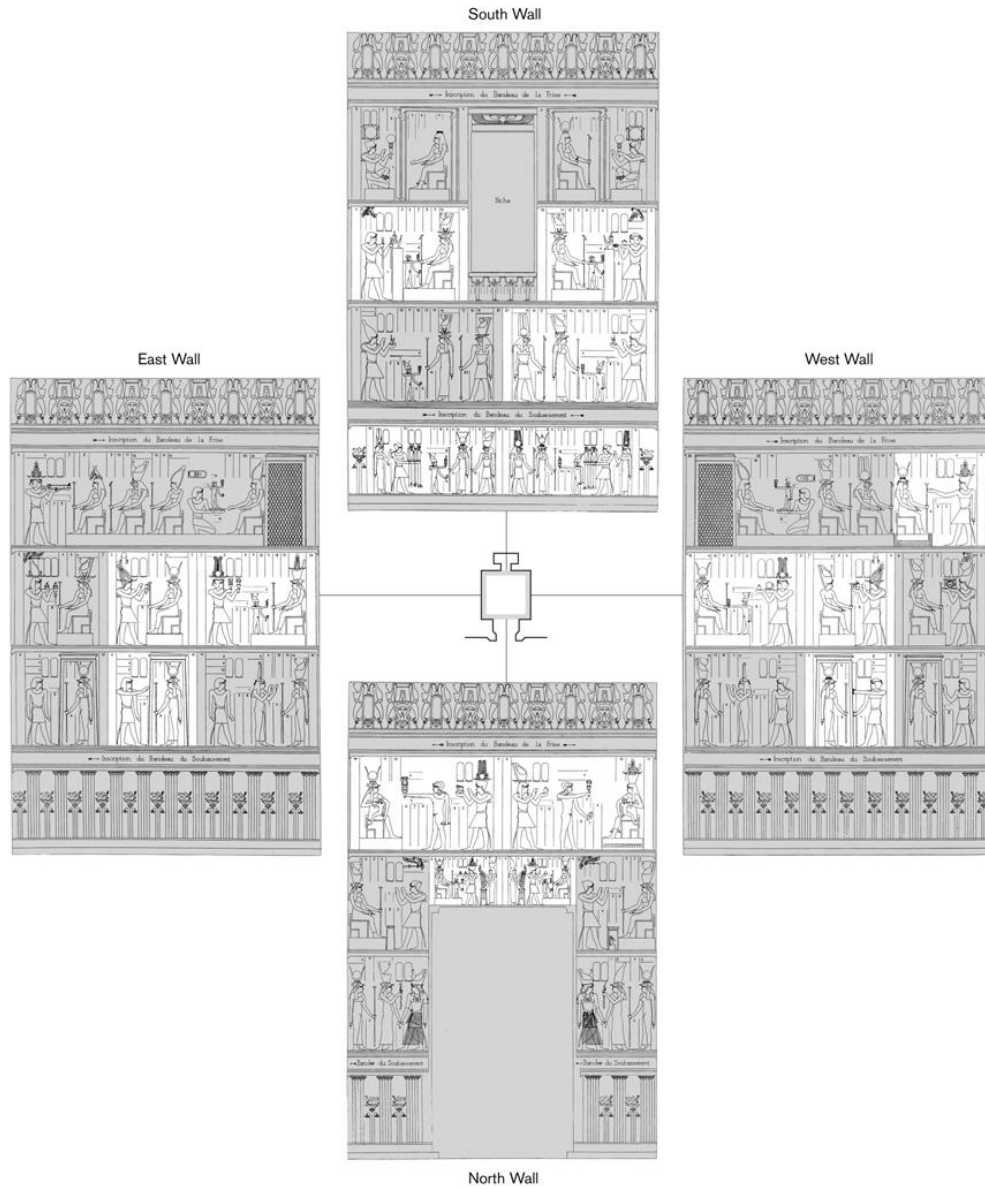


Fig. 19: Composite plan of Per-wer Sanctuary at Dendera. Reproduced with permission of the IFAO, adapted by Nathan Antolik.

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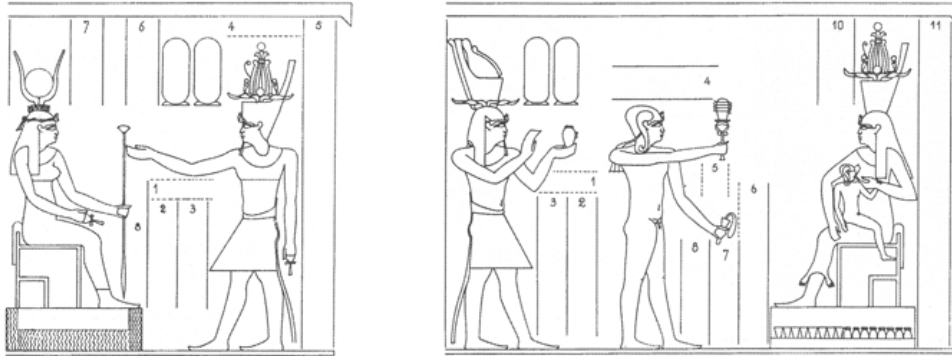


Fig. 20: Scenes from Per-wer Sanctuary. On the left: Isis seated on base atop isheru (third register of west wall); on the right: Hathor seated on base of sixteen jars of primordial water (third register of north wall). Reproduced with permission of the IFAO.

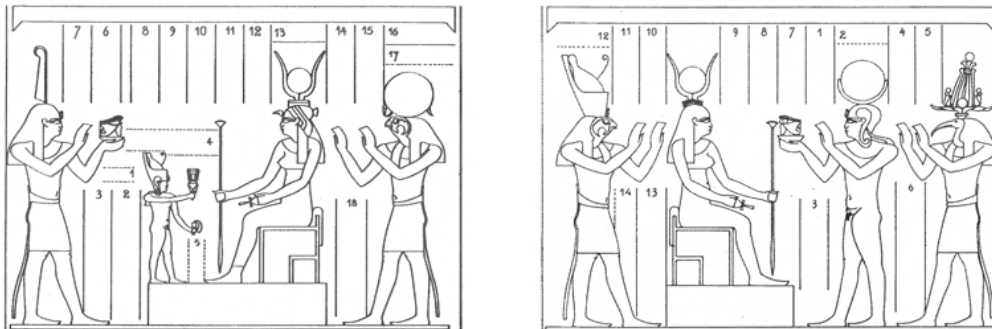


Fig. 22: Scenes from the Per-wer Sanctuary. On the left: Shu with Ihy and Ra-Horakhty, offering Udjat Eye to Hathor (second register of east wall); Ihy with Thoth and Harsomtut, offering Udjat Eye to Hathor (second register of west wall). Reproduced with permission of the IFAO.

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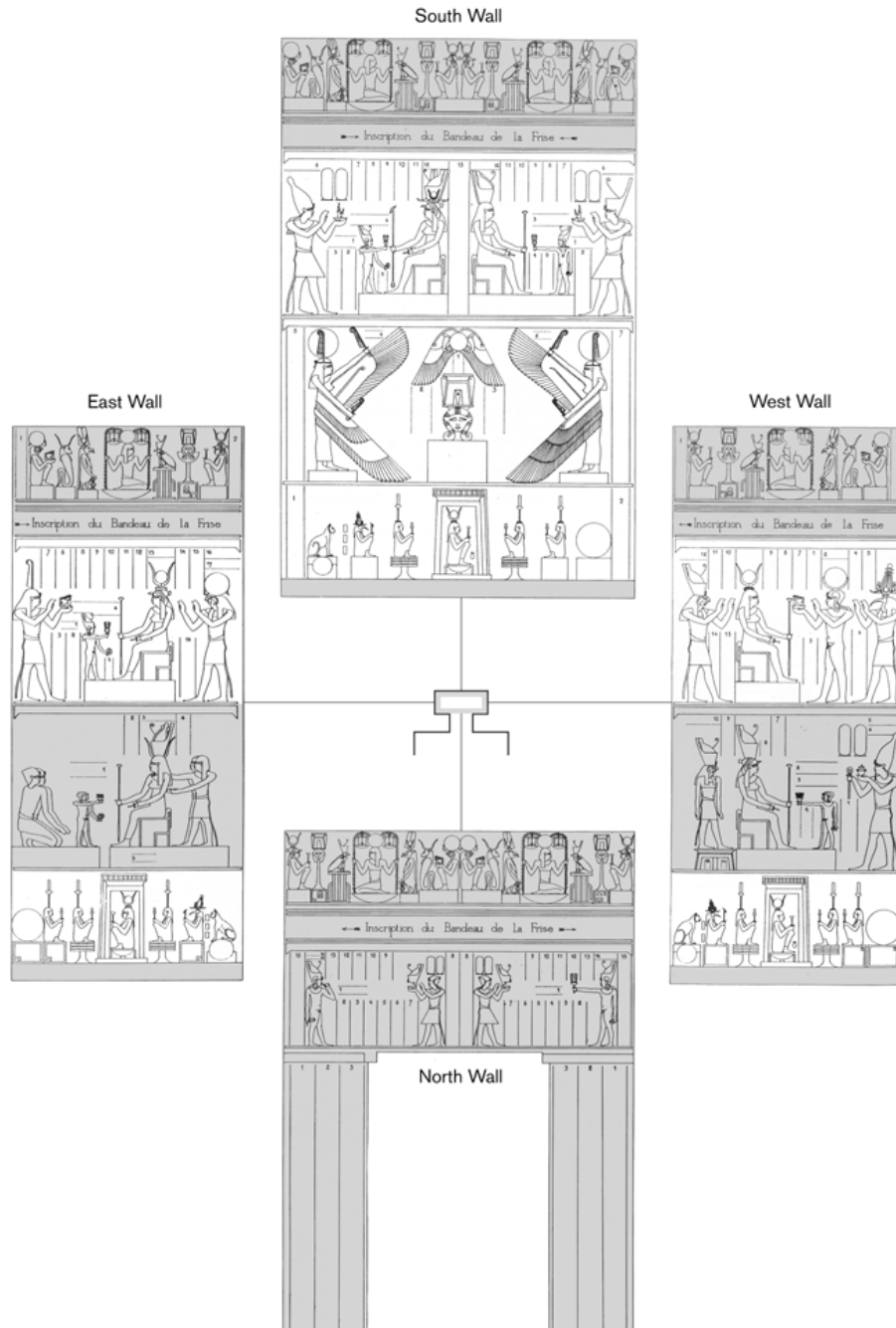


Fig. 21: Composite plan of southern niche in Per-wer Sanctuary at Dendera. Reproduced with permission of the IFAO, adapted by Nathan Antolik.