Relationship between Isis and Hatmehyt
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Abstract
Isis was one of the earliest and most important goddesses in ancient Egypt. In the typical form of
her myth, Isis was the first daughter of Geb, god of the Earth, and Nut, goddess of the Sky. She
was the sister and wife of Osiris and the mother of Horus. She personifies the faithful wife and
the devoted mother. Isis was the Mistress of the Words of Power and the Goddess of Nature. She
was the embodiment of nature and magic. Her major cult centers are Philae and Abydos.
Egyptian goddess, Hatmehyt was a minor fish-deity whose traces have survived throughout
disminishing her balance with Roman times. Her cult was centered in the area around Djedet,
a city in the Delta known to the Greeks as Mendes. She was the consort of the ram god Banebdjedet and together they have the child god Harpocrates of Mendes as the third member of
the Mendesian Triad.
The research highlights not only the relationship that unites Isis and Hatmehyt, but also
understanding the reasons for the presence of such relationship between a native deity of Lower
Egypt namely Hatmehyt and a major goddess of Upper and Lower Egypt namely Isis.
The main epithets of Hatmehyt in her legends in Dendara temple expressly reflect the presence
of an indirect link that unites the goddess Hatmehyt and Isis. The theologians of Dendara temple
considered Hatmehyt as an aspect of the Goddess Isis. She was regarded as the sister of Osiris, a
role specially played by the goddess Isis. To summarize, the relationship that unites Hatmehyt
and Isis returns back to the god Osiris who was often described as his Ba is in the ram of
Mendes.
Keywords: Egyptian pantheon, Isis, Hatmehit, Osiris, Banebdjedet, Djedet, Dendara.

I. Introduction
Isis
Egyptian goddess Isis\(^1\) is one of the most important deities of the ancient Egyptian pantheon,
whose worship spread throughout the Greco-Roman world. In the typical form of her myth, Isis
was the first daughter of Geb and Nut. She was born on the fourth intercalary day. She married
her brother, Osiris, and she conceived Horus with him. Isis was instrumental in the resurrection
of Osiris when he was murdered by Set. Using her magical skills, she restored his body to life
after having gathered the body parts that had been strewn about the earth by Set. She was
worshipped as the ideal mother and wife as well as the patroness of nature and magic. She was
the friend of slaves, sinners, artisans and the downtrodden, but she also listened to the prayers of
the wealthy, maidens, aristocrats and rulers. Isis is also known as protector of the dead and
goddess of children. The Egyptian name was recorded as \(\text{Is.t}\) or \(\text{As.t}\) and meant "She of the
Throne"\(^2\). The modern term Isis reflects the Greek adaptation, with a final-s added to the original
Egyptian form because of the grammatical requirements of the Greek language\(^3\).

\(^1\) About the goddess Isis, see Leitz. 2002, Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen I, OLA 110,
you-pronounce-isis-egyptian-name/
In art, originally Isis was pictured as a woman wearing a long sheath dress and crowned with the hieroglyphic sign for a throne. Sometimes she is depicted as a lotus, or, as a sycamore tree. After she assimilated many of the roles of Hathor, Isis’s headdress is replaced with that of Hathor: the horns of a cow with the solar disk between them. Sometimes she also is represented as a cow or with a cow’s head. She is often depicted with her young child, Horus (the pharaoh), with a crown, and a vulture. Occasionally she is represented as a kite flying above the body of Osiris4.

**Hatmehyt**

Egyptian goddess, Hatmehyt5 was a minor fish-deity whose traces have survived throughout history since the 4th dynasty until Roman times. Her Egyptian name Ḥst-mḥyt, means "She who is in front of the fishes" referring to her pre-eminence in relation to the few rival fish cults6. Hatmehyt was depicted as a woman with a fish emblem over her head or sometimes as a fish7. The worship of Hatmehyt was centered in the area around Djedet, a city in the Delta known to the Greeks as Mendes8. Hatmehyt does not seem to enjoy the same popularity in the different phases of history. In the Old and Middle Kingdoms, Hatmehyt was almost unknown as she was not mentioned in the main funeral corpus of the Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts as well. It is obvious that until the New Kingdom, her role was still very limited. However, from the Late Period onwards, her cult grew and gained popularity that allowed her to appear alongside the great deities of the Egyptian pantheon. From that time, the fame of Hatmehyt continued to increase remarkably in the Greco-Roman era. The research will try not only to highlight the relationship that unites Isis and Hatmehyt, but also to understand the reasons for the presence of such relationship between a major goddess of Upper and lower Egypt namely Isis and a local deity of Lower Egypt namely Hatmehyt.

**II. Documentation**

It will be useful to start this study with a stela coming from the main cult center of the goddess Hatmehyt "Mendes”. This stela is a small round-topped one9 found during the excavations of

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9 Djedet is the ancient Egyptian name of the capital of the XVIth Nome of Lower Egypt, Kha. It is also known as Per-Banebdjedet: "The Domain of Banebdjedet". Then it was known as Mendes (Μένδης) in the Greco-Roman Period. Known today as Tell El-Ruba (Arabic: تل الربيع). During the 29th dynasty, Djedet was also the capital of Ancient Egypt. This city is located in the eastern Nile delta, near the present village of El-Simbellawin, about 35 km from El-Mansoura, see Redford. 2001, "Mendes", In: *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Vol. 2, p. 376–377; Redford. 2005, "Mendes: City of the Ram God", *Egyptian Archaeology* 26, p. 8–12; Gauthier. 1929, *Dictionnaire des noms géographiques contenus dans les textes hiéroglyphiques VI*, p. 136.
10 About this stela which is now kept in the store of Zagazig Inspectorate under the number 228, see Kamal. 1966, p. 27 and pl. I-II.
the Antiquities Departement at Tell Timai-el-Amdid\textsuperscript{11} in April 1963\textsuperscript{12}. Its main scene shows the king Ptolemy II Philadelphus (309–246 BC)\textsuperscript{13} makes an offering in front of a series of four divinities (=fig. 1).

Figure 1: Stela Zagazig no. 228

Ptolemy II Philadelphus is wearing the \textit{Pschent}\textsuperscript{14}-crown and turned to the left where a group of four deities. The king is figured in accordance with Egyptian prototypes: he is depicted in a standing position with his left leg forward. He wears a short kilt-\textit{shendjet} fixed on the waist by means of a belt, and on its back is attached a long ceremonial tail. He offers the \textit{sxt}\textsuperscript{15} to the ram of Mendes, Banebdjedet\textsuperscript{16} who is represented in a full ram with the head surmounted by horizontal horns in which is planted a sun disk. His name is written above his head.

\textsuperscript{11}Tell Timai-el-Amdid was the Capital of the XVI\textsuperscript{th} nome of Lower Egypt, see Porter-Moss IV, p. 35.

\textsuperscript{12}For more information about the excavations at Tell Timai-el-Amdid, see Kamal. \textit{ibidem}, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{13}Ptolemy II philadelphus (309–246 BC) was the king of Ptolemaic Egypt from (283 BC to 246 BC). He was the son of the founder of the Ptolemaic kingdom Ptolemy I Soter and Berenice. He was first married to Arsinoë I, daughter of Lysimachus, who was the mother of his legitimate children; after her repudiation he married his full sister Arsinoë II, the widow of Lysimachus. For more reading about this king, cf. Clayton. 2006, \textit{Chronicles of the Pharaohs: the reign-by-reign record of the rulers and dynasties of ancient Egypt}, p. 208; McKechnie; Guillaume (eds.). 2008, \textit{Ptolemy II Philadelphus and his World}, p. 300; Schneider. 2002, \textit{Lexikon der Pharaonen}, p. 207–210.

\textsuperscript{14}The Pschent was the name of the Double Crown of Ancient Egypt that was referred to it as sekhemti (sxm.tỉ), the Two Powerful Ones, see Griffith. 1898, A \textit{Collection of Hieroglyphs: A Contribution to the History of Egyptian Writing}, p. 56.

\textsuperscript{15}The ritual of offering sxt came to have symbolic meaning: The offering in the temple represents the giving of all the productive areas of Egypt to the god and thus of everything which depends on that land. For this reason the donation stele of the Late Period often show this offering and the donation texts at Edfu begin and end with a Hnk sxt rite, see Wilson. 1997, A \textit{Ptolemaic Lexikon: A Lexicographical Study of the Texts in the Temple of Edfu}, OLA 78, p. 900.

\textsuperscript{16}Banebdjedet was one of the most important local deities of the ancient Egyptian pantheon whose traces have survived throughout history until Roman times. He was the northern equivalent of the god Khnum. He was the principal ram god in the area around Djedet, a city in the Delta known to the Greeks as Mendes. Banebdjedet has a
**B3 nb Djdt**: Banebdjedet which means "Ba, Lord of Djedet".

The second divine figure is a ram headed human god who is represented in a standing position. His head is covered with a long tripartite wig which around the curved twisted horns by a curve. The head is surmounted directly by two horizontal twisted horns in which is planted the atef-crown which consists of a central miter flanked by two ostrich feathers. Above and in front of the head of the god, his name was written in two small columns of hieroglyphs as follows:

**B3 ṣnh n, B3 ṣnh n Wsir (?)**: Ba, life of, Ba life of Wsir (?)

The third representation features a female deity depicted as a woman wearing a long sheath dress and crowned with the horns of a cow on her head, with the solar disk between them. In her right hand, she holds the ṣnh-sign while in the left one, she is holding the papyrus scepter wḏ, symbol for Lower Egypt. Above and in front of the head of the goddess, her name was written in two small columns of hieroglyphs as follows:

**Ist-wrt⁻¹⁸-Hūt-nhyt**: Isis-the Great-Hatmehyt

Figure 2: Isis-the Great-Hatmehyt


¹⁷ The Ancient Egyptians were exceedingly fond of puns, believing that homophony in language was no meaningless coincidence. They crop up frequently in both religious and informal contexts. In our case, the word *Ba* is a double-entendre. The same sound of *Ba* can expound the informal meaning "ram" as well as religious one "spiritual manifestation", see Redford. 2010, p. 134; Pinch. 2004, p. 114-115.

The last figure is Arsinoë II as a deity who is depicted as a lady wearing the double crown over her head. In her right hand, she holds the 'nh-sign while in her left one, she is holding the papyrus scepter ḳḏq, symbol for Lower Egypt.

We have to stop a little before this document. In fact, Ptolemy II Philadelphus makes an offering in front of Banebdjedet in the form of a full ram and a ram headed human god representing the Ba of the god Osiris. Behind these two figures, a depiction of a new divine form called Isis-Wrt-Hatmehyt resulted from the assimilation of the goddess Hatmehyt and the goddess Isis. In the other words, Hatmehyt became fully merged into Isis in the combined form Isis-the Great-Hatmehyt.

The second document invites us to reconsider the reading of an inscription carved on the walls of the mysterious Hall (outside of the sanctuary) of Dendara temple.

(...) ین=t ḫst-mḥyt برا ḫwd=š, ḫwd=š ḫm=t, nṯ ḫt-mḥyt, ḫnwt ṯḏt, ḫṣ sn=s ṯp nwī.

(...) He (the king) brings to you Dolphin’s Nome carrying her provisions, she packed your chapel, you're Hatmehyt, Sovereign in Mendes, She who search (the members of) her brother

19 Arsinoë II was the daughter of Pharaoh Ptolemy I Soter and his second wife Berenice I. She married twice before getting married to Ptolemy II Philadelphus who loved her so much. After her death, Ptolemy II continued to refer to her on official documents, as well as supporting her coinage and cult. He also established her worship as a Goddess. Cf. Dmitriev, "The Last Marriage and the Death of Lysimachus" in: Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies (GRBS) Vol. 47, 2007, p. 135-149; Burstein. 1982, "Arsinoë II Philadelphos: A Revisionist View", in W.L. Adams and E.N. Borza (eds), Philip II, Alexander the Great and the Macedonian Heritage, p. 197-212; Billows. 1995, Kings and colonists: aspects of Macedonian imperialism, p. 110.


22 ḫt-mḥyt is the Ancient Egyptian name for the XVI Nome of Lower Egypt, see Gauthier. 1927, Dictionnaire des noms géographiques IV, p. 15; Brugsch-Bey. 1879, Dictionnaire géographique de l'ancienne Égypte contenant plus de 2000 noms géographiques qui se rencontrent sur les monuments égyptiens, p. 293.

23 About this city, see footnote 8.
upon the flow.

This document demonstrates that Hatmehyt carried an epithet which indicates that she played the role of Isis in the search for members of the body of her husband.

$h\hbar\;sn=s\;tp\;nw\;y$: She who looks for (the members of) her brother over the flow.

The next passage about the goddess Hatmehyt is found in front of the room of Meat, eastern wall, second register in Dendara temple.\(^{24}\)

Hatmehyt, She who resides in Dolphin’s Nome, Noble Lady, Mighty One, She who looks for (the members of) her brother over the flow: « my protection is behind you, the scepter of life is in your hand, all health is in you, (you who are) permanently installed on your throne in the tabernacle of the great mysterious chapel before the divine court ».

This text presents another way for expressing the previous epithet that evidences the role played by the goddess Hatmehyt in the search for members of the body of Osiris.

Moreover a passage in relation with the goddess Hatmehyt is inscribed in the frieze of southern wall (southern crypt n° 1) of Dendara temple\(^{25}\).

Utterance by Hatmehyt, Great One, Divine of Manifestations, She who protects the body of who presides over the sarcophagus”= Osiris”.

In the light of this text, the goddess Hatmehyt exercises the role of protection on the body of the god Osiris, a role that played by his sister and wife the goddess Isis.


\(^{26}\) “2nty-DbAt” was one of the epithets applied to the god Osiris, see Leitz. 2002, \textit{LGG V}, p. 879\(^{(a-b)}\).
swd3 ḏt nt Ḥnty-ḏḥt: She who protects the body of who presides over the sarcophagus "= Osiris"

Finally, another legend related with the goddess Hatmehyt is written in the Room B of Dendara Temple.

qd mdw in Ḥst-mḥyt, wrt, Ḥnty T3-n-Imw, Nbty rḥyt, Ḥnwḥ T3wy, snt mnḥt nt Rs-wdj, ḡkḥt nḥt, Ḥnwḥ Pwnṭ: nmt=ḏ ḏyṯ m Ṭ3-n-Imw ḏsr=ḏ ḫprw n Ḥnwḥ.

Utterance by Hatmehyt, Great One, She who presides over the Land of Atum, Mistress of Mankind, Sovereign of Two Lands "Egypt", Excellent Sister of, Beautiful Regent, Sovereign of Punt: I penetrates into the room in the Land of Atum, I sanctify the manifestation of the sovereign.

This passage evidences that Hatmehyt was described as being the sister of Osiris. In the other words the relationship between Hatmehyt and Isis leads to a level of confusion, in which Hatmehyt was also regarded as the sister of Osiris.

Snt mnḥt nt Rs-wdj: Excellent sister of He who wakes healthy "Osiris"

III. Results and Discussion

The study of the documentation related -directly or indirectly- to the relation that unites the goddess Hatmehyt and Isis and which come from the main cult center of the goddess Hatmehyt at Mendes and from the temple of Dendara shows some certain points, as follows:

In the main cult center of the goddess Hatmehyt "Mendes", she became fully merged into Isis in the combined form Ḥst-wrḥt-Hḥt-mḥyt: Isis-the Great-Hatmehyt. The new combined form "Isis-the Great-Hatmehyt" features as a woman wearing a long sheath dress and crowned with the horns of a cow on her head, with the solar disk between them. This iconography is the same as that of the goddess Isis after her assimilation with the goddess Hathor.

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28 6A-n-Imw was a very frequent nomination for the temple of Dendara, see Gauthier. 1929, Dictionnaire des noms géographiques VI, p. 19.

29 Rs-wDA was particularly connected with Osiris from the NK onwards. See Wilson. 1997, A Ptolemaic Lexikon, p. 591.
The identification of Hatmehyt with Isis in the combined form Isis-the Great-Hatmehyt, and so, Hatmehyt had intermittently been considered the sister of Osiris, since Isis was the sister of Osiris.

Hatmehyt carried the epithet: Snt mnḥt nt Rs-wḏ3: Excellent sister of He who wakes healthy "Osiris".

Consequently, Hatmehyt helped goddess Isis in her search of the dismembered god's body parts of Osiris; Hatmehyt is qualified as: "ḥḥ sn=s tp nwy: She who search (members) her brother on the flow », « ḥḥ sn=s ḫr mtr: She who looks for (the members of) her brother over the flow ». Hatmehyt played the same role that Isis has done before and thus this role allowed Hatmehyt to be associated with the goddess Isis.

Moreover, Hatmehyt also played the role of protection upon her brother Osiris: "swḏ3 ḫt nt Ḥnty-ḏbst: She who protects the body of who presides over the sarcophagus "Osiris" ».

IV. Conclusion

It is worthy to mention that the main epithets of Hatmehyt in her legends in Dendara temple expressly reflect the presence of an indirect link that unites the goddess Hatmehyt and Isis. The theologians of Dendara temple considered Hatmehyt as an aspect of the Goddess Isis. She was regarded as the sister of Osiris, a role specially played by the goddess Isis.

At the main cult center of Hatmehyt "Mendes", she became fully merged into Isis in the combined form ḫḥt-wḏt-Hṣt-ḥḥy: "Isis-the Great-Hatmehyt". This relationship leads to a level of confusion, in which Hatmehyt played the roles principally played by Isis. Consequently, Hatmehyt played a significant role in the myth of Osiris. She helped the goddess Isis in her search for the dismembered god's body parts.

To summarize, the relationship that unites Hatmehyt and Isis returns back to the god Osiris who was often described as his Ba is in the ram of Mendes.

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