Goddess Hatmehyt in Dendara Temple

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Abstract

Egyptian goddess, Hatmehyt was a minor fish-deity. Her cult was centered in the area around Djedet, a city in the Delta known to the Greeks as Mendes. In the Greco-Roman period, the cult of Hatmehyt grew and she gained popularity that allows her to appear alongside the great deities of the Egyptian pantheon.

Different legends and several offerings scenes dedicated to Hatmehyt are realized in different locations in Dendera Temple complex, precisely in the parts dedicated principally to the god Osiris. Moreover a number of Hatmehyt’s epithets which define different aspects and roles that the goddess plays in the Ancient Egyptian pantheon are connected to the city of Dendara and its temple. The numerous presences of the goddess in this place of cult and the different epithets of the goddess relating to Dendara prove that a special cult was devoted to the goddess Hatmehyt in this place.

This research concludes that the main reason for the presence of a special cult devoted to the goddess Hatmehyt (a native deity of Lower Egypt) in Dendara temple (a great place of cult in Upper Egypt) returns back to her relationship with god Osiris and his wife and sister goddess Isis. In mythology, Hatmehyt played a small but significant role in the myth of Osiris; she helped goddess Isis in her search for the dismembered god's body parts and became thus associated with her.

Moreover, Hatmehyt assumed several epithets which show that she has played the same role of Isis. Hatmehyt also played the role of the protector of Osiris; she was the one who helped him to get rid of his enemies. This confirms clearly that Hatmehyt in the temple of Dendara was regarded as the sister of Osiris, which means that she was manifested there as an aspect of Isis.

Keywords: Hatmehit, fish-goddess, Egyptian pantheon, religion, Dendara, Osiris, Isis, Djedet.
I. Introduction

Egyptian goddess, Hatmehyt\(^1\) was a minor fish-deity whose traces have survived throughout history since the 4\(^{th}\) dynasty until Roman times. 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. 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. Her Egyptian name *Hst-mḥyt*, means "She who is in front of the fishes"\(^2\).

The worship of Hatmehyt was centered in the area around *Djedet*, a city in the Delta. It was the capital of the sixteenth *Nome* of Lower Egypt, known to the Greeks as Mendes\(^3\). Hatmehyt was associated to the ram god Banebdjedet\(^4\), whom she formed a divine couple.

Hatmehyt was depicted as a woman with a fish emblem over her head or sometimes as a fish\(^5\). The specific fish with which Hatmehyt identified is either the Nile carp "the tilapia", or the dolphin. The Greeks called the dolphin "king of the fish and ruler of the sea"\(^6\). An Egyptian calendar refers to the 28\(^{th}\) day of the fourth month of *Akhet*.

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3 *Djedet* is the ancient Egyptian name of the capital of the XVI\(^{th}\) *Nome* of Lower Egypt, *Khu*. It is also known as Per-Banebdjedet:"The Domain of Banebdjedet". Then it was known as Mendes (Mēwān) in the Greco-Roman Period. Known today as Tell El-Ruba (Arabic: تل الروبة). During the 29\(^{th}\) 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. Cf. 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.


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season as the day on which "not to eat the eaters-of-fish in Mendes". This text reflects how ancient Egyptians think about the dolphin.

Dendera Temple complex is located about 2.5 km south-east of Dendera, a small town in Egypt situated on the west bank of the Nile, about 5 kilometers south of Qena, on the opposite side of the river. It is located approximately 60 kilometers north of Luxor. The temple is one of the best-preserved temple complexes in Egypt. The area was used as the sixth Nome of Upper Egypt, south of Abydos. This temple, in its present form, was built during the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, with relief work on the rear external wall depicting Cleopatra VII and her son Caesarion.

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II. Texts

The research aims to clarify the reasons for the presence of a special cult devoted to a native deity of Lower Egypt (Hatmehyt) in a temple located in Upper Egypt (Dendara temple complex).

A number of texts relating directly to the goddess Hatmehyt are inscribed in different places in Dendera Temple complex, precisely in the parts dedicated to the god Osiris. They are not very explicit, but the examination of these documents will allow revealing the different aspect of the goddess.

Text 1

It will be useful to start this enquiry with a document written on the walls of the mysterious Hall (outside of the sanctuary)\(^9\).

(…) In=f n=t Hst-mhty\(^{10}\) hr hwdw=s, hwd=s hm=t, ntt Hst-mhty, Hnwt m Dd\(^{11}\), hh sn=s tp nwy

(…) 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 upon the flow.

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\(^{10}\) Hst-mhty is the Ancient Egyptian name for the XVI\(^{th}\) Nome of Lower Egypt. Cf. 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.

\(^{11}\) About this city, see footnote 4.
**Text 2**

The second document invites us to reconsider the reading of an inscription carved in the thickness of the doorjambs (jamb of the right side).\(^{12}\)

(...) \(\text{Hst-mhyt, ir s3 ms, Mnst, nw ʾs3w dmt, wnn=sn ʾḥ3wt r-ṃn ḥrw ʾḥ3}\)

(...) Hatmehyt, She who protects ames-scepter, and Menset, she who watches over who armed with knives (?), They are the fighters (?) On the day of the battle (...).

**Text 3**

Then Hatmehyt was identified in a document written in the eastern wall of the passage E-F\(^{13}\).

\(\text{dd mdw in Hst-mhyt, s3t, Hnwt Pwnt, Nbt ʾntyw, ir s3i-hb, idt}=s (hr) pfr m t3wy r ////// (?}\)

Utterance by Hatmehyt, Primordial goddess, Sovereign of Punt\(^{14}\), Lady of myrrh, She who makes perfume of festivals, her scent pervades in the Two Lands (Egypt) ////// (?).

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\(^{14}\) About this city which played a role of primary importance in the production of incense trees, cf. Gauthier. 1926, *Dictionnaire des noms géographiques* II, p. 45-46.
Text 4

Another legend of the goddess Hatmehyt was inscribed in the southern crypt n° 2.\(^{15}\)

\[\text{Hst-mhyt pw, Hnwt Hst-mhyt, 'nt r ntrwt, <Nbt> Iwnt, ityt m šn n itn, Nbt šhm mnit ssšt, šhr.tw wnšt n ħnt=š, st kmt šny dšrt inm, ħnmt-nh mr insy, mfkt inm ħbsdšt tp, thn hr-nb n dgt=š, Nbt sšd, Hnwt šwry, wšt m tp (?) n [...]}\]

This is Hatmehyt, Sovereign of Dolphin’s Nome, Beautiful One among the goddesses, \(<\text{Lady}>\) of Ioune\(^{16}\), Sovereign in the globe of the sun, Lady of šhm-sistrum, mnit-necklace and ssšt (naos)-sistrum, ouncheb\(^ {17}\) is erected for her majesty, Woman of black hair and pink skin, She who is full of life and who loves bright red (cloth),Whose skin in turquoise and head in lapis-lazuli, everyone is illuminated to see her, Lady of head band, Sovereign of Two Feather Crown, Unique uraeus on the head (?) of [...].


\(^{16}\) \textit{Iwnt} was the ancient Egyptian name of the capital of VIth Nome of Upper Egypt, its modern name is Dendara (دندارة). Cf. Gauthier. 1925, \textit{Dictionnaire des noms géographiques} I, p. 56.

\(^{17}\) “\textit{wnšt}” seems to be a symbol of the annual return of ordered time, that is the cycle of day and night, the lunar and solar cycles, and of regular time and cosmic order. Cf. Handoussa. 1979, \textit{SAK} 7, p. 65-74.
Text 5

The next passage in relation with the goddess Hatmehyt is inscribed in the frieze of southern wall (southern crypt n° 1)\textsuperscript{18}.

\textit{dd mdw in Hst-mhyt, wrt, ntryt hprw, swd3 qt nt Hnty-dbst}\textsuperscript{19}

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

Text 6

Another text relating to the goddess Hatmehyt is inscribed in the eastern osirion chapel n° 1\textsuperscript{20}.

\textit{Hst-mhyt, Hryt-ib Tt-dt: shr.n=i sbyw r pr ntr}\textsuperscript{21}

Hatmehyt, She who resides in Iatdi\textsuperscript{21}: "I drive away the enemies from the sanctuary of the Great God (= Osiris)".

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\textsuperscript{19} "Hnty-dbst" was one of the epithets applied to the god Osiris. Cf. Leitz. 2002, LGG V, p. 879\textsubscript{(a-b)}.

\textsuperscript{20} Cf. Leitz. 2002, LGG V, p. 18\textsubscript{(a)}, [28] and p. 413\textsubscript{(a)} [3]; Cauville. 1997, Le Temple de Dendara. Les chapelles osirien\(\text{nees} (\text{transcription et traduction}), Bi\textit{Etud} 117-119, p. 3; Cauville. 1997, Dendara X/1, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{21} Tit-dt was the name of Dendara temple sanctuary and with extension this name was given to the city of Dendara itself. Cf. Gauthier. 1925, Dictionnaire des noms géographiques I, P. 35.
Text 7

Another legend in relation with the goddess Hatmehyt is written in the Room B of Dendara Temple.  

$qd\;mdw\;in\;Hst\;mhyt,\;wrt,\;Hntl\;T3\;n\;Itmw,\;Nbty\;rhyt,\;Hnwtr\;Tiwy,\;snt\;mnh\;nt\;Rs-wd\;^{24},\;hk\;nt\;nfrt,\;Hnwtr\;Pwntr:\;nmt=i\;m\;dryt\;m\;T3\;n\;Itmw\;\delta sr=i\;hprw\;n\;Hnwtr$

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

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23 T3-n-Itmw was a very frequent nomination for the temple of Dendara. Cf. Gauthier. 1929, Dictionnaire des noms géographiques VI, p. 19.
24 Rs-wd\(^{\beta}\) was particularly connected with Osiris from the NK onwards. Cf. Wilson. 1997, A Ptolemaic Lexikon, p. 591.
**Text 8**

The next passage about the goddess Hatmehyt is found in front of the room of Meat, eastern wall, second register\(^{25}\):

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".

**Text 9**

Another passage is found in the northern table of the Column VII of the Hathor kiosk of the roof W', Dendara Temple\(^{26}\):

Hatmehyt, She who resides in Iount: "Mighty are your arms against who rebels against you, Mighty One of the Mighty One by means of your arm".

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Text 10

Hatmehyt was identified in another legend which carved in the Bedrock of the southern wall "procession of Hathor playing the tambourine" in the Sanctuary of the mammisi of Dendara complex.²⁷

\[dd\ \text{mdw in}\ \text{Hst-mhyt, Hry(t)-ib}\ \text{Ddt: ti\, n\, dp\, dpt\, k3w\ r\ h}t=k\]

Utterance by Hatmehyt, She who resides in Djedet: "I rejoice for tasting the taste of the provisions for your body".

Text 11

The last document is inscribed in the southern wall of the niche, western osirian chapel n° 2.²⁸

\[dd\ \text{mdw in}\ \text{Hst-mhyt, Hry(t)-ib Hst-mhyt, spst, wsrt, hntyty T3t-dl: h}w.n=i\ \text{Hy}\ \text{sdm.n=i}\ \text{Nhs}\ \text{htm.n=i\ sbi\ m\ hprw=f\ nbw}\]

Utterance by Hatmehyt, She who resides in Dolphin’s Nome, Noble Lady, Mighty One, She who presides over iadit: "I strike Hy (=Seth), I kill the bad (= Seth), I exterminate the rebel in all its forms".

²⁷ Daumas. 1959, Les mammisis de Dendara, 103.
III. Results and Discussion

The study of the texts of goddess Hatmehyt legends in the temple of Dendara shows certain points, as follows:

Hatmehyt assumed several epithets that show her close relationship with the capital of VIth Nome of Upper Egypt, Dendara and its temple. Hatmehyt is ascribed in many texts as: « hryt-ib Twnt: She who resides in Iount », « <nbt> Twnt: <Lady> of Ioune»t», « hryt-ib Ib-di: She who resides in Iatdi », « Ήτη Τ3-η-Ιτμω: She who presides over the Land of Atoum ». These nominations indicate that a special cult was devoted to the goddess Hatmehyt in the city of Dendara especially in its main cult center.

Hatmehyt helped goddess Isis in her search of the dismembered god's body parts of Osiris; Hatmehyt is qualified as: « hh sn=s tp nwy : She who search (members) her brother on the flow », « hh sn=s hr 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 assumed several epithets which show her relationship with the god Osiris as: « snt mnht nt Rs-wdq: Excellent Sister of He who wakes healthy (=Osiris)» and « swdq dt nt Ήnty-dbh: She who protects the body of who presides over the sarcophagus (= Osiris) ». These two epithets confirm clearly that Hatmehyt in the temple of Dendara was regarded as the sister of Osiris which means that Hatmehyt was manifested there as an aspect of Isis.

Hatmehyt also played the role of the protector of her brother Osiris; she said to him: « s3=i hr s3=k ṛnh m ḫw=k snb nb hr=k ḏd.tw hr nst=k (m)-hnty ħnwštyt wrt lnty psdt: 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 », « wsr cwrwy=k r sbi r=k wsr n wsr r gbt=k: Mighty are your arms against who rebels against you, Mighty one of the Mighty One by means of your arm ».

Hatmehyt helped her brother to get rid of his enemies; she said to him that «hw.n=i Hy sdm.n=i Nhs ήtm.n=i sbi m ḫprw=f nbw: I exterminate the rebel in all its forms », « shr.n=i sbyw r pr ntr ṛ?: I drive away the enemies from the sanctuary of the Great God (= Osiris) », « nmt=i m ḏryt m T3-η-Ιτμω dṣr=i ḫprw n Ήwtt: I penetrates into the room in the Land of Atum, I sanctify the manifestation of the sovereign ».  

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A number of Hatmehyt’s epithets refer to her main cult center, XVI\textsuperscript{th} Nome of Lower Egypt (Dolphin’s Nome) and its capital, Djedet: « Hnw\textsuperscript{t} Hst-mh\textsuperscript{y}t: Sovereign of Dolphin’s Nome », « Hry-ib Hst-mh\textsuperscript{y}t: She who resides in Dolphin’s Nome », « Hnw\textsuperscript{t} m D\textsuperscript{d}t: Sovereign in Mendes », « Hryt-ib D\textsuperscript{d}t She who resides in Djedet ».

Hatmehyt was qualified with various honorary nominations that referred to her different aspects and roles in the Egyptian pantheon: she is qualified as « S\textsuperscript{t} S\textsuperscript{t} S\textsuperscript{t}: She who protects »; « S\textsuperscript{t} T\textsuperscript{t}: Primordial goddess », « I\textsuperscript{t} T\textsuperscript{t} M\textsuperscript{n} N\textsuperscript{T} W\textsuperscript{T}: her scent pervades in the Two Lands "Egypt" », « H\textsuperscript{t} T\textsuperscript{t} R\textsuperscript{T} W\textsuperscript{T}: Beautiful One among the goddesses », « H\textsuperscript{t} W\textsuperscript{T} M\textsuperscript{N} S\textsuperscript{M} I\textsuperscript{T} N\textsuperscript{T} T\textsuperscript{N}: She who protects »; « H\textsuperscript{t} T\textsuperscript{t} W\textsuperscript{T} S\textsuperscript{S} T\textsuperscript{N}: Lady of »; « H\textsuperscript{t} T\textsuperscript{t} W\textsuperscript{T} S\textsuperscript{S} S\textsuperscript{T}: Lady of抢劫-sistrum, m\textsuperscript{T} I\textsuperscript{N} S\textsuperscript{M} I\textsuperscript{T} N\textsuperscript{T} T\textsuperscript{N}: She who protects »; « H\textsuperscript{t} T\textsuperscript{t} W\textsuperscript{T} S\textsuperscript{S} S\textsuperscript{T}: Lady of head band »; « H\textsuperscript{t} W\textsuperscript{T} S\textsuperscript{S} W\textsuperscript{T}: Sovereign of Two Feather Crown », « H\textsuperscript{t} T\textsuperscript{t} W\textsuperscript{T} S\textsuperscript{S} W\textsuperscript{T} N\textsuperscript{T} E\textsuperscript{S} S\textsuperscript{T}: She who makes perfume of festivals », « H\textsuperscript{t} W\textsuperscript{T} M\textsuperscript{N} S\textsuperscript{M} I\textsuperscript{T} N\textsuperscript{T} W\textsuperscript{T}: Woman of black hair and pink skin », « H\textsuperscript{t} N\textsuperscript{T} T\textsuperscript{N} Y\textsuperscript{W}: Mistress of Mankind », « H\textsuperscript{t} W\textsuperscript{T} T\textsuperscript{W} Y\textsuperscript{W}: Sovereign of Two Lands "Egypt" », « H\textsuperscript{t} W\textsuperscript{T} H\textsuperscript{R} T\textsuperscript{R} T\textsuperscript{N} E\textsuperscript{N} S\textsuperscript{R}: Divine of Manifestations », « S\textsuperscript{P} S\textsuperscript{T}: Noble Lady », « W\textsuperscript{S} W\textsuperscript{T}: Mighty One ».

\textbf{IV. Conclusion}

The main epithets of Hatmehyt in her legends in Dendara temple expressly reflect the presence of a special cult devoted to her. They also indicate the different aspects and roles that the deity played in this cult center.

It is worthy to mention that the main reason for the presence of a special cult devoted to Hatmehyt in Dendara temple where the head of Osiris had been buried, returns back to her relationship with god Osiris and his wife and sister goddess Isis.

Hatmehyt played a small but significant role in the myth of Osiris. She helped Isis in her search for the dismembered god's body parts and thus she became associated with Isis and then she was equated with her. Hatmehyt assumed several epithets which show that she has played the same role of Isis. Hatmehyt played the role of the protector of Osiris; she was the one who helped him to get rid of his enemies. The theologians of Dendara temple considered Hatmehyt as an aspect of goddess Isis. She was regarded as the sister of Osiris, a role specially played by Isis.
V. Plates

Pl. I, Plan of Dendara complex.

VI. Bibliography

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Illustrations: http://www.religionswissenschaft.uzh.ch/idd/prepublications/e_idd_illustrations_hatmehit.pdf