

Interpretation of the Scenes of Amun in the Tombs of Gebel El-Mawta at Siwa

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Abstract

Two scenes appeared in the tombs of Gebel El-Matwa (one in the tomb of Si-Amun and the other in the tomb of the crocodile) representing a ram-headed figure holding a knife in his hand. This figure was interpreted by all the scholars who dealt with Siwa tombs as god Amun. This could be related to the fact that god Amun was the main deity in the Oasis. However, it is unusual to see god Amun holding knife in his hand. As long as no inscription survived that could decipher the figure, the researcher aims at pointing out that this figure could be a demonic gatekeeper of the netherworld. Those gatekeepers facilitate the deceased's passage through the gates of the Netherworld to reach the goal of joining Osiris. They were mentioned in the Book of the Dead and used to be represented on the walls of tombs. They were depicted as animal-headed figures, either sitting or standing and holding weapons in their hands, especially knives.

Keywords: Gebel El-Mawta, demons, gatekeepers, Amun.

1. Introduction:

Siwa Oasis is located between the Qattara Depression and the Mediterranean Sea in the

Western desert. It became very famous in the Greco-Roman period because of the temple of the oracle that is dedicated to the main deity in the Oasis, god Amun. The Mountain of the dead (Gebel al-Mawta) is a hillside full of tombs, lies only one and a half km away from the center of the Siwa Oasis. There are about 600 tombs cut in the rock of the mountain. The tombs dated back to the 26th Dynasty and the Graeco-Roman era. They were later reused in the Roman era; as the mummies that were found inside the tombs dated back to this period. (Fakhry, 1990)

Among these tombs, only four were cleared and published: Tomb of Si-Amun, the crocodile tomb, Tomb of Mesu-Isis, and the tomb of Neperbathoth (Fakhry, 1990). The researcher focused on two scenes of a ram-headed figure holding a knife in his hand appeared in both the tomb of Si-Amun and the tomb of the crocodile. This figure was interpreted by the researchers who dealt with the tombs of Gebel el-Mawta; Fakhry (1990) and Venit (2015); as the representation of Amun; while Lembke (2015) referred to it as a ram-headed god. Although Amun was the main deity in the Siwa Oasis; it is unusual to see him holding a knife. Moreover, there is no

inscription survived accompanying both scenes that could help in deciphering the figure.

2. Description:

2.1 The first scene:

It is located on the northern side of the eastern wall in the tomb of Si-Amun. The tomb dates back to the 4th – 3rd century BC. In this scene we can see Si-Amun stands in front of a ram-headed figure holding two knives (interpreted as Amun), colored blue and wears the tailed kilt. He is followed by a female goddess holding in one hand that ankh sign and a scepter in the other hand. Her name and crown are damaged; however, it was interpreted as Amun's consort Mut. Behind Mut stands Hathor, looking to the right and holding the god Duamutef in her hands (Fakhry, 1990). (Pl.1) The female figure that stands behind Mut was interpreted by Venit (2015) as Imentet embracing a mummiform falcon-headed god that is Osiris-Sokar. The interpretation of Imentet is more convenient here as the remains of the crown on the head of the goddess resembles that of Imentet that represents the "hieroglyph of the west"  .

2.2 The second scene:

It is located in the crocodile tomb, that probably dates to the late Ptolemaic or early Roman Period. At the two thicknesses of the entrance, the headless bodies of three figures of deities are represented holding knives in their hands. Originally there were four figures. To the right of the niche the tomb owner is seated on a chair and behind him stands the ram-headed figure (interpreted as god Amun), holding a knife in each hand (Pl. 2). The body of the god is colored blue; while that of the tomb owner is a light red. Beneath them is a mad adorned with stepped pyramidal designs painted blue or red, bordered with two yellow

lines, and below this, a crocodile appears painted in yellow (Fakhry, 1990).

3. Interpretation:

In the two previous scenes the ram-headed figure was interpreted by the scholars as Amun, however, god Amun did not use to be presented holding knives. The reasons that made the researchers interpreted it as Amun, probably related to the fact that Amun was the main deity in Siwa Oasis, and the blue color of the body that was usually related to the deities. As long as there is no inscription accompanied the scene, we can't be affirmative that it is Amun.

As for the other deities that appeared in ancient Egypt with a ram head; they are: Khnum (main deity of Elphentine), Banebdjedet (deity of Mendes), Heryshaf (god worshiped in Hermopolis Magna), and Kherty (a netherworld god) (Hart, 2005). However, non of those deities were represented with a knife in their hands.

While looking in Leitz (2002) dictionary about the ancient Egyptian deities, the researcher didn't find any ram-headed god represented with a knife. Thus, the researcher prefers to identify this figure as a demon.

In ancient Egypt, the demons are subordinate to the gods, and in certain cases they act under the command of a deity (Lucarelli, 1994). there were two types of demons: the malevolent demons (the wanderers), who were wandering creatures that provoke misfortune on earth and menace the deceased during his journey in the netherworld. They were connected to diseases, misfortune to humans, nightmares, and demonic possessions (Lucarelli, 2008). Magical spells are mentioned in the Pyramid texts, Coffin texts and Book of the Dead to confront the power of

these malevolent demons (Lucarelli, 2006; Borghouts, 1978).

On the other hand, there are the benevolent demons (the guardians), who were called



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"Guardian-

demons" (Lucarelli, 2017; Szpakowska, 2009). They guard certain regions of the netherworld and can turn malevolent towards those who don't know the magical spells needed to face and greet them. They are named with epithets that usually refer to some fear-inspiring detail of their faces or characters. They were depicted as animal-headed figures, either sitting or standing and holding weapons in their hands, especially knives (Lucarelli, 2011). The function of these weapons was to repulse the evil which faced the deceased in his journey in the underworld before reaching the field of Iaru or the eternal paradise (Omran, 2015). The Guardians dealt with the gates and portals of the netherworld, facilitating the deceased's passage through them to reach the goal of joining Osiris (Von Lieven, 2002).

Those demonic gatekeepers were also in charge of the 12 gates through which the solar barque had to pass at night, as mentioned in the Book of Gates. Before each gate, Re had to stop and recite the name of the gatekeeper in a spell which included the name of the gate. Then he could pass on to the next gate. Later, it became the pharaoh who had to deliver the recitations in order to pass beyond the netherworld safely to be united with his father Re (Wells, 1993). The representations of the 12-night star goddesses appeared on the ceiling of the Hypostyle hall at the temple of Dendara, each goddess was accompanied by a gatekeeper (Neugebauer O. and Parker R., 1960). One of those gatekeepers was represented as a ram-headed figure holding a knife (Pl. 3).

Those gatekeepers were represented in detail in the spells 144 to 147 of the Book of the Dead (Book of the Dead, 2017) (Pl. 4) and on the walls of the Pharaonic tombs (Pl. 5) either standing or seating holding the knives in front of the portals. Among these gatekeepers there is a demon in a ram-headed shape holding a knife. During the Graeco-Roman period, those demons were also represented on the walls of the tombs. At Dakhla Oasis, inside the tomb of Petubasis, there are representations of ape-headed daemon with a bow, Jackal-headed daemon with knife, and Bes-daemon with a knife (Venit, 2015) (Pl. 6). The representation of the demons appeared in other tombs in the Dakhla Oasis such as the tomb of Psenosiris (Venit, 2015).

The reasons that make the researcher assume that the ram-headed figure represented in the tombs of Gebel el-Mawta is a gatekeeper demon and not god Amun are:

- God Amun was never represented holding a knife.
- In the scene from the crocodile tomb, the ram-headed figure was represented behind the seated deceased. If this figure was Amun, the deceased will never be represented giving his back to the almighty god Amun. Moreover, Amun was never one of the protective gods that used to be represented behind the kings such as Isis and Horus.
- It was common to see the gatekeepers represented on the walls of the tombs starting from the Pharaonic period till the Graeco-Roman era.
- On the same wall that carries the representation of the ram-headed figure in the Crocodile tomb, there are representations of other four falcon-headed figures holding knives. All

these animal-headed figures with knives could be gatekeepers.

- Lembke (2015) described the scene on the east wall of the tomb of Si-Amun as depicting the journey described in chapter 145 of the book of the dead "Beginning of spells for entering through the secret portals".
- If we accepted the interpretation of Venit (2015) to the female goddess in the scene of Si-Amun tomb to be Imentet, the goddess who welcomed the deceased to his new dwelling place in the netherworld. It seems that the role of Amentet as a goddess who receive and embrace the deceased started at the very end of the 5th dynasty (Willockx, 2007). Thus, the whole scene may represent the journey to the netherworld, in which the presence of a gatekeeper is more convenient to be found.
- On the same wall in the tomb of Si-Amun there is a representation of two deities looking to the right. The first is the lion-headed god (interpreted by Fakhry as god Mahes) holds a knife in one of his hands, the other is a female holding in her right hand the sistrum (Fakhry, 1990) (Pl. 6). The lion-headed figure was interpreted by Venit as a demon (Venit, 2015). Thus, it will be more convenient that the whole scene represents the entering through the portals as Lembke suggested.

4. Conclusion:

The two scenes of the ram-headed figure that appeared in the tomb of Si-Amun and the crocodile tomb, were previously misinterpreted by Fakhry, Venit, and lembke as being the representation of a deity that could be god Amun. They based his theory

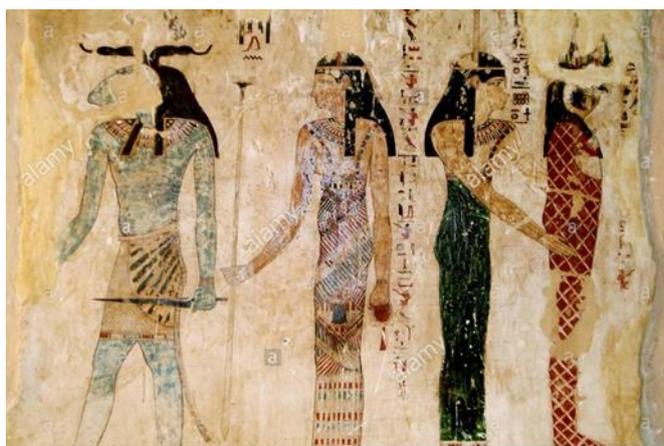
upon the fact that Amun was the main deity of the island and the blue color of the body that is usually related to deities. As long as there is no survived inscription accompanied the scene, we can't affirm that it is Amun. the researcher proved through many points that it is a representation of a demonic gatekeeper that is used to be represented in the tombs:

- Amun was never represented with a knife and also never appeared behind the deceased (scene of the crocodile tomb).
- The representation of the demonic guardians was common in the tombs starting from the Pharaonic period till the Graeco-Roman era.
- On the same wall where we see the ram-headed demonic figure there is other representations of hybrid creatures with knives (also demonic guardians) that affirm the concept that the whole scene reveals the journey of the deceased to the Neitherworld, while entering through the portals that were guarded by those demons.

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Pl. 1

Ram-headed figure, eastern wall

Tomb of Si-Amun, Siwa

After: Fakhry, 1990, Fig. 76



Pl. 2

Ram-headed figure, to the right of the niche

Crocodile tomb, Siwa

After: Fakhry, 1990.



Pl. 3

Night star goddess accompanied by a demonic gatekeeper

Northern end of the 2nd strip west from the centre

Ceiling of the hypostyle hall, temple of Dendara

After: <https://paulsmit.smugmug.com/Features/Africa/Egypt-Dendera-temple/> (last accessed 9/8/2020)





Pl. 4

Demonic guardians with knives

After: Book of the Dead, Spells 145 – 146



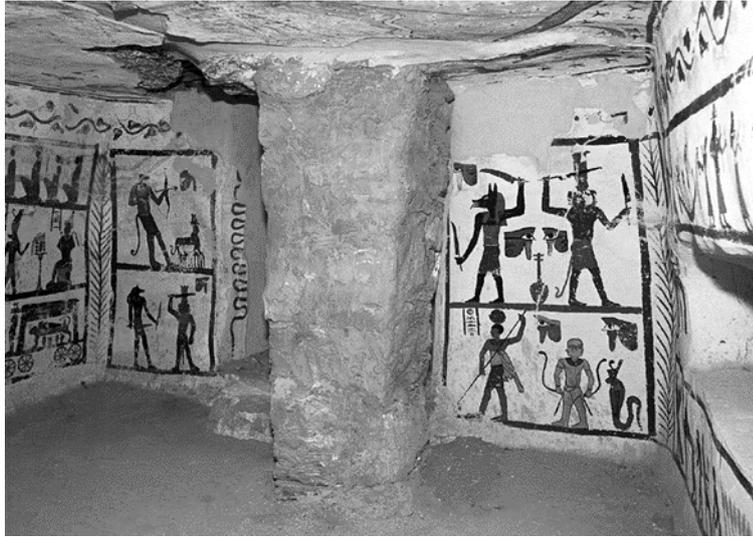
Pl. 5

Tomb of Queen Nefertari QV66, Valley of The Queens, 19th dynasty

Burial Chamber – Western Wall, Nefertari's passage through the gates - Chapter 144 from the

Book of the Dead

After: http://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/pharaons/nefertari/e_nefertari_06.htm (last Accessed 9/8/2020)



Pl. 6

Different daemons holding weapons, tomb of Petubasis

Al-Muzawaqa, Dakhla Oasis, Roman era

After: Venit, 2015, Fig. 5.1



Pl. 7

Lion-headed demon holds a knife, eastern wall

Tomb of Si-Amun, Siwa

After: Fakhry, 1990.