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Original article

GOD NEPRI IN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN RELIGION

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Abstract

One of seasonal deities in ancient Egypt was god Nepri, god of grains and germination. This paper aims at highlighting this deity which there was no monograph about him as yet. This will be through some religious texts and representations which are related to this deity. God Nepri played an important role in Egyptian religion, this fact is confirmed by coffin texts, book of the dead and the Tmy-dw3t. Npri's role in the, book of the dead in terms of providing the dead with food and it is a limited role comparing to his roles in the coffin texts which were linked to resurrection and life that he grants for the dead.

Keywords: God Nepri, Religious texts, Coffin texts, Book of the dead, imy-w3dt

1. Introduction

Many of ancient Egyptian deities were associated with the environment around them. The characteristics of those deities were varied according to the multiplicity of the manifestations of the ancient Egyptian environment starting from the Nile and its annual flood on which all aspects of life depend, fertile soil which is the source of growth and life and the corps and their production. If there were some deities that had their effective role on the ancient Egyptian's

life all over the year, there were some other deities whose role associated with seasonal [1], periods of the year like flood, germination and harvest. One of those seasonal deities was god Nepri; god of grains and germination. This paper aims at highlighting that deity whereas there has been no monograph about him yet. This will be through some religious texts and representations which are related to that deity.

2. God Nepri

As to the form of god Nepri the oldest scene of him was in the temple of king Sahu-Ra from 5th dynasty [2]. He is represented in the form of the Nile god with the shape of a fat and flabby bellies man, which is the same appearance of some other gods that personifies different natural or geographical manifestations as a symbol of welfare and growth [2]; may be the full breast refers to that he carries

the double traits of masculinity and femininity, i.e. fertility and vegetation growth. On this view, Nepri's body was covered with wheat, fig. (1) [2]. Human form was the traditional appearance of god Nepri throughout the different periods He was represented as a man in the rock temple of King Amenhotep II in Wadi-Elsebu' and holding two bands of wheat, with the goddess Sekhet and the

god Hapy, fig. (2) [3]. In Graeco-Roman period he is represented in the same shape as well, fig. (3) [4]. Coffin texts present, through some spells, indications

that may clarify the nature and the role of god Nepri and his relations to other deities, such as:

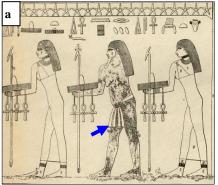




Figure (1) a Nepri in the temple of Sahu-Ra, b details of the figure (After Borchardt, 1913, pl. 30)



Figure (2) Nepri in front of Sekht and Hapy in wadi-Elsebu' (After Guglielmi, Die feldgöttin Sxt, in die welt des orient, Band VII, 1973-1974, p.222, Abb.2)





Figure (3) <u>a</u> Nepri in front of Sokar-Osiris holding wheat bunches in Dendara, <u>b</u> details of the figure (After Chassinat, 1934, Le temple de dendara, II, Institut Français d'Archèologie Orientale, Le Caire, PL. CXV)

2.1. Spell 80

It narrates that the dead merges with Nepri: "...(even I) whom Atum made into the grain-God when he caused

2.2. Spell 102

In spell (102) we read: "It is the hundreds of the grain-god who rescue you in the portal of the sunshine; they go up, go down and return by means of

me to go down into this land, to The Island of Fire, when I became Osiris the Son of Geb." [5] [6].

it. It is the grain-god who takes possession of you, and you go by means of the efflux of my flesh and the sweat of my head. [5].

2.3. Other Spells

"Neper is mentioned as well among other gods of spell (114) which is entitled not entering into the god's place of execution: "I have not been made to enter the god's place of execution, for I have seen Shu and Tefenet behind me, behind me. I am not encircled, encircled, I am not enclosed,

3. Discussion

With these indications we find the most important and remarkable spell (330) which is entitled "Becoming Neper we read" I live and I die, I am Osiris, I have gone in and out by means of you, I have grown fat through you, I flourished through you, I have fallen through you. I have fallen on my side, the gods live on me. I live and grow as Neper whom the honored ones, cherish one whom Geb hides, I live and I die, for I am emmer, and I will not perish^(a)...[6] [7]. Throughout the above spells, it is clear that the most important role of Nepri is to protect the dead and also his relation to Geb, as seeds don't grow without land as everyone of them completes the other (spell 80), he is the symbol of abundance and growth from one side, and saving and protecting the dead from another side (spell 102,114). He also represents the beginning of the

hwj n.k it 3sh n.k bdt

"Gather to you grain and reap to you whea "...[8].

Also, the dead lives on what grow from Osiris body [9]. In Osiris temple in Abydos, Osiris has the title Osiris-Nepri, As Nepri the god of seeds is united with Osiris the god of

enclosed, I am Neper of the knife, my hinder parts are on my back, my buttocks are on my arms, I am a great one, baboon-shaped, I have not entered into the god's place of execution, the knife has no power over me"[5]. In spell (299) "I am the Lord of the first of the year, (even) Nepri" [6] [7].

year (spell 299) may be with reaping the wheat. However, the most important of those spells is the spell (330) which lists Nepri's characteristics. First, he is the god of resurrection as he lives and dies and it is a quality that he acquired from Osiris The dead will go along the stages which seeds go along as they enter the soil when they are planted and they go out, grow forth from it, filled, flourish, then be gathered such as Nepri on which all gods live. And like wheat, cereals are sow and disappear in the soil (= Geb), also the dead is buried in the soil and he will be resurrected such as the wheat, which does not perish, but grow up. Osiris was he merged with Nepri since the Old Kingdom. In the pyramid texts, Osiris who makes Pepi II to gather wheat and reap wheat:

germination. This title for Osiris appeared since the Middle Kingdom [10]. Amenembat I is described in his teachings as following [11].

Ink ir.w it mrj^(b) [12] Npri tr.n.wi ḥ^cp ḥr pg³ nb

It was I who cultivated barley, Beloved of Neperi, Hapy honored me on every field.

The texts not only referred to the dead king's relation to Nepri, but they also sometimes exceeded to individuals, that we find the general Mentohetep governor of Thebes in 11th dynasty held

the title "Son of Nepri, husband of Tayt" [14] [15]. The text reports that Nepri is the husband of Tayt, Goddess of linen and textile. So, those two deities share supplying the most needs to human

beings, that are food and clothes^(c) [16]. From 30th dynasty king Nektenebo I is

described on his stela in Loxur temple as following:



[....]sn wr '3 bt 's't hbw mry Npr s3 T'yt

"[...] great of offerings, (and) numerous of festivals for the beloved Npr son of Tyt [17]"

On the stela of Amenmes from 18th dynasty which is conserved in Louvre museum, Nepry is related to Horus in a text of the myth of Osiris, the text mentions the characteristics of Horus as heir of his father:"..., Aton is under his laws, the north wind, the river, the flood, the tree of life and every plant. Nepry, god of grain gives him all his plants and food which come out from the land, as he gives what fills and gives it for all the countries" [18] [19]. This paragraph clearly and directly determines some roles of Nepri which are more comprehensive from what is thought as only god of grains, as the text refers that he is the god of germination as he grows up all plants, food and all what harvested the soil. In the book of the dead; Nepri played an important role in the papyrus of Ani and papyrus of Nu, in chapter 77 whereas the dead transforms into a falcon" The grain-god (Npri) gave me food to my throat and I'm the lord of myself and my head's allocations [20] [21]. In the papyrus of Nu in chapter 149 of the

book of the dead we read: "Npri will feed me and make me satisfied with food [21]". From those two sentences, it is clear that Npri's role in the book of the dead in terms of his providing the dead with food, it is a limited role comparing to his roles in the coffin texts which were linked to resurrection and life that he grants to for the dead. In the netherworld (Imydwat), Npri accompanied the sun god Ra in his night journey as it is depicted in the second register of the second hour, fig. (4), the boat of Ra, in front of him another boat which its prow and stern are decorated with the heads of cobra. On this boat there are three creatures; the central is a sitting woman and there is one creature in front of her and another one behind her as well, all of the three are armless. To the right and the left behind each one grow two big wheat bunches. This boat is for the god Nepri who represent the god Osiris as god of seeds and germination [22]. Between the prow of the boat and the wheat bunch we read:

wi^c <u>h</u>ni.f Npr

"The bark which convey(or traverse water) Npr"

Also, another text in the same context could be read; this text is

between the stern and the wheat bunch, it is:



"Collector (?) of herbs and plants"

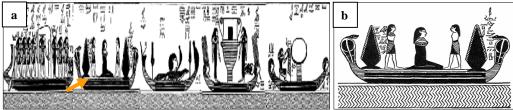


Figure (4) <u>a</u> the boat of Ra proceeded by the boat of Nepri in the second hour, <u>b</u> details of the figure (After Budge, 2007, The Egyptian heaven and hell, Vol. 1, London 1905, pp. 26-27; Rbinovich, Y., Isle of Fire, the book of what's in the hell, P. 66.)

It is remarkable here that all creatures on the boat of Nepri are armless, It may mean that lost the role of protection, and so it may represent the characteristics of germination and growth and resurrection to guarantee for the boat of Ra a new birth [23]. In the

second register of the same hour (*i.e.* the second hour), there are three creatures, fig. (5), each one has two bunches of wheat on its head and they are represented between the harvest gods. Their names are from left to right [22].

tpw pin (These heads?).

npr npi (The Wheat).

bs bs3 (who flow forth).



Figure (5) <u>a</u> lower register of second hour, <u>b</u> details of the figure (After Budge, 1905, The Egyptian heaven and hell, Vol. 1, London, P.31.)

In the temple of Edfu there are many texts which describe the characteristics of Nepri who sows seeds in the land, grows cereals, gives out yields and makes bread [24]. But in Dendara there is more detailed text about the roles and characteristics of Nepri [25]:



dd mdw.in Npr ir t km3 w3hyt b^ch t3 m prt 3ht mn n.k ^cnh.t ^cnh ntr nb ^cnh whm rnpi tp rnpt rnpi k3.k m nn km3 n.k skr wsir hrj-ib hwt ntrt.

"Recitation by Npr who makes bread, produces seeds, overflows lands with seeds, he brings to you barley, living god, lord of life, who renews youth in the beginning of every year, and renews your soul (with this?), you throw Skr-Osiris in the temple".

Nepri was personifying the annual growth of grains, and the celebration of harvest was celebrating the birth of Nepri in first day of Pakhons (the first day of harvest month)

[26]. The celebration of the birth of Nepri is related to the festival of Rennut, goddess of harvest, this fact is mentioned by the text of Kha-em-Hat from 18th dynasty [27]:



When iht nb.t nfr w^c b.t n Rnnwt nbt snwt m 3bd 1 smw sw 1 hrw pn mst Npri "Consecrating all good and pure things for Renenutet, Lady of the Granary on 1 Shomu(=1Pachons), on this birthday of Nepri"

It is known that this Day is the harvest feast and it is the same day on which, in Mammisi of Greco-Roman period, birth of child gods was celebrated, as gods birth comes with

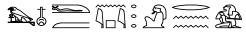
harvest and the birth of new corps It also is the same day on which Rennut, goddess of harvest, gives birth to her new born Nepri who represent the new cereal corp [28]. In addition to that, Nepri shared with Amun in germinating grains as Amun was the one who brings flood [29], which overwhelms the soil

and germinate seeds as we read in the temple of Hebis:



h^c n ^cnh qm³ h.t-n-^cnh Np(r)i b^ch t³.wy wty ^cnh m hm.f m šn t³.wy m rn.f n Nwn-wr [30]. Body of life who creates the "wood-of-life," Nepri who floods the two lands, nobody in the circuit of the two lands living without his knowledge, in his name of Nun the Elder [31]

It seems that the relationship between Amun and Nepri continued till the Greco-Roman period as Amun is depicted with the most remarkable characteristic that distinguish Nepri, that is the bunch of wheat which he holds. This shape of Amun is depicted on many coins of Roman emperors. Studies proved that this shape appeared in the years on which floods were high, and therefore it is directly reflected on grain production [32]. In Greco-Roman period, new relationship between the king and Nepri was founded, as texts refer to that Nepri as he who gives birth to the kings and they are his successors and he who grants them resurrection and life. In Edfu temple Ptolemy IV is described as [24]:



^cnḥ nṭr nfr pri m Npj Rnnt

Living the good God who come out from Npr and Rnnwt

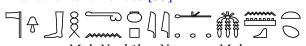
Ptolemy VI is described as Heir of Geb and son of Npr [24]:



Tw' Gb s3 Npj htj ir 'nh n t3 nb

Heir of Geb and son of Npr hty who create life of every land

In another text we read [33]:



Mnh Ntr b3h n Npr ms n Mnk.t

The excellent god, the phallus of Nepr and born by Mnk.t ^(e) [34].

Ptolemy XIII had the title "heir of Nepri" as well [35]. It could be concluded that Nepri is related to many

other deities such as Osiris, Amun, Tayt, Mnqt and Rnnut.

Conclusions

Thought that he had the title of "husband of Tayet" it is difficult to trace a clear Triad for Nepri. Besides, the rarity of stone and bronze statues of god Nepri is remarkable comparing to many other scenes which depict him on the walls of temples, there were no single temple was dedicated to god Nepri's cult where ceremonies could have been presented to him. Accordingly, it is clear from all the above indications that Nepri had an important role in ancient Egyptian religion much more than a simple god of grains.

Endnotes

- (a) Faulkner, 1973 comments on this Spell" This is a most obscure and difficult Spell, but it appears that the deceased is identified with grain that lives and dies", p.255.
- (b) This phrase is translated by Lichtheim as (I was grain-maker), but the verb *iri* bears the meaning "to cultivate" "tend" in more than one other instance, p.137.

- (c) TAyt was the Goddess of weaving and has the main role of supplying of linen.
- (d) Allen translated this phrase as following: "The Grain-god has granted to me that I gain control of him who is at my head: cf.: Allen, T.G., The Egyptian book of the dead documents in the oriental institute museum at the

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- university of Chicago, OIP 82, 1960, p. 150; Idem, The book of the dead or coming Forth by day, SAOC 37, Chicago 1974, p. 66.
- (e) *Mnkt* was the goddess of beer, about that goddess who appeared since the new kingdom
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