

The God Nehebkau in Heliopolis

Nageh Omar Ali

ملخص:

Snakes played an important role in Ancient Egyptian thought and legendary belief. They have appeared since Naqqada III age through graphics on the body of pottery jars, some combs, some palettes and knife handles, and perhaps the motivation behind that is avoiding its evil and poison.¹

Among the snakes whose names carry their functions is *Nḥb-K3w* snake. In Berlin dictionary it means (spirits repaired),² and in the pyramid texts it means providing food for the deceased;³ it was mentioned by Egyptologists with a variety of meanings. Piankoff, for instance, states that *Nḥb-K3w* means ‘Collector of souls’ or ‘provider of goods and food’.⁴ But according to Barta, it means that ‘which gives Ka’,⁵ while Spelers says that ‘it is that which overwhelms Ka’.⁶ Shorter explains that it means

‘giving souls majesty’,⁷ and Daressy mentions that it was represented in the late period as ‘giver of food and that who offers food-jars by human hands’.⁸ Pyramid Texts No. 229-c:⁹



- *dd.w-mdw.w n.t tw nn n(i).t tm hr(j).t tz kbsw h3b(j)*

k3.w sz3.t(j) hnw m Wnw j.hr zbn

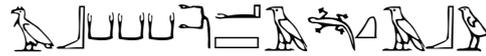
- *Words-spoken: This is fingernail of Atum on the vertebra of Nehebkau’s spine which stilled the disturbance in Hermopolis. Fall down! Crawl away!*

The text shows the religious and moral significance of the fingernail of Atum and his role in calming chaos by putting it on a nerve *Nḥb-K3w*.

Clarke mentions that the intended disorder in Hermopolis is the era of the old chaos – time priemvel water- where Atum tried to end the snake age and begin a new era, but **Wnw** here is only the first world

state, not the actual city in middle Egypt; Clark adds that some inscriptions of twenty-first dynasty coffins represent *Nḥb-K3w* snake wrapped around **Wnw**-area.¹⁰

He appeared in many forms. In pyr. Text. No 1146 b¹¹ it is mentioned that he has multi-windings with reference to his great length.

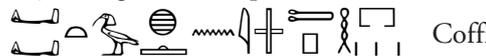


Nḥb-K3.w s3 k3b.w

- *Nehebkau, many of twists(multi-windings).*

Coffin texts II, 54b mention that he is a snake with two heads,¹²

In Imduat book, four o’clock, it is represented at a view top scene as a snake body unfolded with two heads.¹³ In the Caverns Book, three o’clock, it is represented as a snake with a long body and multi-folds and every fold contains a form of the god Osiris.¹⁴ Mysliwik mentions that at the end of the twentieth dynasty or the beginning of the twenty-first dynasty, it began to be represented with feet.¹⁵



Coffin texts mention that he lived in caves and gives the spirit to those in them:¹⁶

ddjt 3h n imy(w) tphw (Neheb-Kau), which gives the Spirit to those in the caves.

He has been linked with Heliopolis, He was one of the forty-two judges at the Dead Court in the great temple of Heliopolis ‘*ḥt-3t*’, where he was held the Gods Court for ruling between Osiris and Seth, and also between Horus and Seth,¹⁷ and thus he has an important role in Heliopolis. Therefore, some believe that he has a funerary chapel at the great temple of Heliopolis. The Supreme Council of Antiquities mission had discovered a statue of *Neheb-K3u* in Heliopolis dated to king Ramses II, which confirms an offering for the god *Neheb-K3u* in the great temple of Heliopolis according to some inscriptions on the statue, as follows:¹⁸



- *nḥb-k3.w ḥry-ib ḥt-ʿ3t*
- *Neheb-Kau who dwells the great temple.*

This a clear indication that he has a funerary chapel in Heliopolis and confirms what was mentioned by Frankfort



- *nḥb-k3.w pr(.w) m ḥ.t-ʿ3t*
- *Neheb-Kau go out from the great temple.*
- According to Nagel to text of a funerary papyrus dated to New Kingdom as follows:²⁰



- *ii nḥb-k3.w pri m Iwnw*
- *Neheb-Kau go out from Heliopolis.*

This means that he was one of the visitor gods in Heliopolis. He was known as an eight heads in a snake form in Heliopolis, possibly a reference to children of the Heliopolis Enaad and is similar to what happened during the twenty-second dynasty where he was god Ptah-Tatenn with the nine-mummies as children to the Heliopolis Enaad.²¹



- *wtt k3 Iwnw*
- *Begetter of Iunu –Bull.*

Thus, Kees thinks that he was a primeval god in conformity with god Atum.²³

In coffin text:²⁴



- *k3 nwt (N) pn ʿ3 pw n tm ʿ3m Iʿrt 7 nḥm 3ḥw di di 3ḥ n imy tḫw*

- *Bull of Heaven, this is the great (deceased) one who belongs to Atum, who swallowed the seven-snakes, spirits negative, which gives the Spirit to those in the caves. That underscores the benefit role of Neheb-Kau with the deceased in the afterlife.*

He was linked with the sun morning boat. God Re was similar to Neheb-Kau in order to be able to transit with his morning boat to east horizon, and has made most of the boats to be pushed by wind to help the boats to escape from the Neheb-Kau snake vertebrae:²⁵



- *iw n f3(t) t3w m psd n nḥb-k3.w.*
- *The robes from the Neheb-Kau backbones.*

This refers to his role in helping to Re-boat for walking and sailing in the sky during the day- trip.

According to the book of the dead, Re will live and his enemies will die and he crosses the sky in his morning boat as Neheb-Kau and the text describes his exit cases:²⁶



- *nḥb-k3.w m mʿndt ršy wi3.k ib.k ndm m3ʿ.ty ḥʿ.ty m ḥ3t.k*
- *Neheb-Kau is in the morning boat, your boat was happy and your heart feels joy and justice appeared on your overhead.*

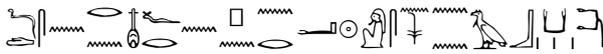
The deceased has taken him as a god defending him in the afterlife and absolving him from sin, and most of the deceased that he wished to say hisname or the beautiful good qualities to both Re and Neheb Kau, which indicates that Neheb Kau took god Re' position in the afterlife.²⁷



- *dd.sn rn nfr n (N) pn n R^c dd.tn sw* 
rn nfr n (N) pn n nhb-k3.w.

- *They can say the beautiful name of this (King) to Re, and they can say // the beautiful name of this (King) to Neheb-Kau.*

The same meaning in the coffin texts:²⁸



- *dd.sn rn nfr n (N) pn n R^c sr sny sw.n nhb-k3.w*

- *They say the beautiful name of this deceased to Re and they offer him to Neheb-Kau.*

In the Book of the Dead to repeat the same meaning:²⁹



- *dd (.sn) rnw nfrw n R^c sw3d rnw.i nhb-k3.w*

- *They Say the beautiful names to Re and report my names to Neheb-Kau.*

We note here the close link between both of them.

On the eighth day of the deceased's rise to the sky, he was called by Re and Neheb-Kau provides food to him:³⁰



- *njs.t ir (tjtj) jn R^c rdj.t(j) n=f jh.t jn Nh.b.j k3.w*

- *Teti is summoned by Re and has offer a meal to him by Neheb-Kau.*

In his benevolent role, not as a snake-demon, toward the deceased king, NHb.j kA.w is one of the king's meals providers in heaven. He is mentioned twice as a servant or as a partner of the Sun-god. After the good name of the king has been announced to them together during the king's waiting in the eastern side of the sky (340a-b), the king shall be summoned by Rea and shall be given a meal by Nehebkaui.³¹

Also, Neheb-Kau played the mediator role between the deceased and two Universal Heliopolis Gods:³²



- *wtsy n nhb-k3.w i3w.k pn nfr n psdty*

- *Neheb-Kau raise your this beautiful prayer to two Heliopolis Enaad.*

He was not just the mediator between the deceased and deity integrators, but more than that, He enabled the deceased to sit on the throne and ruled two Universal Gods:³³

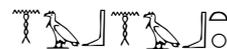


- *hms.k r.k hr hndw.k pw bi3 wd^c.k mdw hn^c psdty*

- *Sitting on your throne (of) bronze and is in control by speaking with two Heliopolis Enaad.*

He is mentioned in the Book of the Dead as a judge in the hall of Osiris, where the trial of the dead took place, and according to Barta, his role is to admit to the purity of the deceased and his being without sins:³⁴

In addition to his role in the protection of a specific part of the deceased body, namely the neck or throat, and also the heart, and perhaps clarify that the role through his association with the process of the soul rob and awarding it, and we note the verbal heterogeneity between as name of the god and as neck:³⁵



As well as spell no. 647 in the coffin texts, talking about the protection by the god Ptah, who described himself in several recipes and comparing himself to Neheb-Kau as spell provided description to Neheb-Kau as the king of heaven (imitation like Re), and ruler of the two lands, and granting the spirits for the gods and human, and crowns for the kings and ka efficiency for human and gods, and the beginnings may mean the beginning of thinking to do anything, or so-called intention, and

refers (They are living on my hands) to have things that humans and gods desire.³⁶

Some of these qualities matched with what is contained in the doctrine of Memphis to the existence or emergence, and the god Ptah is placed on top of this doctrine and built the idea of the doctrine on the heart and tongue, those who show out everything to the presence, the heart is thinking about everything and tongue creates all living things by the word that created all the life forces, also, it drove out the laws which governal created things.³⁷

According to Kitchen, the celebration of *Neheb-Kꜣu* in the New-kingdom was on the birth of Re- HoAkhty,³⁷ and Schott indicates that Neheb-Kau celebration was on the coronation of King during the Ramesses age.³⁸

Conclusion

- 1 It is clear from the study that god Neheb-Kau played the role of funerary god. He gives good, food and the spirit to the deceased in the afterlife and he defends the deceased and absolves him from sin. He has taken god Re's place in the other world.
- 2 God Atum played his role in calming the negative role of Neheb-Kau through putting his nail on Neheb-Kau's nerve.
- 3 He was one of the forty-two judges in the dead court of Heliopolis Enaad.
- 4 The study confirmed that he has a funerary chapel in the great Heliopolis temple.
- 5 He was one of the visiting gods in Heliopolis.
- 6 God Neheb-Kau was born 'Mr-Wr' Bull of Heliopolis.
- 7 He helps God Re in his crossing with his morning boat to the eastern horizon, and assisted him in sailing during the flight day in the sky.
- 8 He was a mediator between the deceased and the

two Heliopolis Enaad.

- 9 He was a judge in the hall of Osiris for the dead's prosecution.
- 10 He was playing a role in protecting the neck and heart of the deceased.
- 11 He had a bull of sky title, and is a king of sky like God Re, as well as the governor of the two lands title.
- 12 His festival during the New Kingdom was the birthday of Re-Hour-Akhty, and in Ramesside period was the coronation day of the king on Egypt throne.
- 13 Although god Nehebkau is among the visitor gods in Heliopolis, he occupied an advanced position in Heliopolis Enaad and became like Atum as an eternal god who emerged from the ground.

Notes

- 1 Saied, A.M., *Gotterglaube Und Gottheiten in der Vorgeschichte Und Fruhzeit Agyptens*, Kairo (1997), 25, 35-38.
- 2 Wb. II, 291, 12-13.
- 3 Sethe, K., *Pyr. Text*, 346a.
- 4 Piankoff, Al., *Ramses VI, Vol. I, (Text)*, P. 68, note.I.
- 5 Barta, W., *LA, IV, (1982)*, 388-390; about nHb-kAw cf.: Hornung, Z.B., *Amduat, Vierte Stunde Nr.287*; *Cenotaph of Seti I, Vol. II, Tf.40,12*; Naville II, 414,66; *Urk,V, 63,13*; Mariette, A., *Abydos I, 44*; Kees, H., *Gotterglaube, 55, Anm.4*; *Metternich-Stele, 21(wortspiel zwischen nHbw-kAw und nHbt)*; vgl. Auch Winfried Barta, *Untersuchungen zum Gotter keris der Neunheit, MAS 28, Munchen 1973, 36 und 150*; Francis Ll. Griffith, *Hieratic papyri from kahun and Gourab, London 1898, Tf. 25,2*; *Urk. IV, 107.7, 109.11, 388.15*; Sethe, K., in: *UGAA 3, 1905, 136 und 138*; Schott, S., *festdaten 93f. Nr163 (Liste 52, z. 1191)*.
- 6 Spelers, E. G., *Les Textes des Pyramides egyptiennes, 27*.
- 7 Shorter, A. W., *The God Nehebkau, JEA, 21, (1935), 41. 48*.
- 8 Daressy, G., *Statues Des Divinites, CG., egyptien Musee au Caire, Le Caire, (1905-6), No. 38837, 38842*; about Neheb-Kau cf.: Budge, E. A. W., *The Egyptian Heaven and Hell, I, 79*; de Buck, A., *The Egyptian Coffin Texts,*

- 7 vols (Chicago 1935-1961), II,51, 53 b-c; III, 318 c-d; IV, 311b, V, 36 f-g; Urk. V, 63,13, Mariette, A., Abydos, Tf. 30,Z25.
- 9 Sethe, K., Pyr. Text. 229 a-c.
- 10 رندل كلارك، الرمز والأسطورة، مترجم، ص ٤٩-٥٠، شكل ٨
- 11 Sethe, K., Pyr. Text. 1146 b.
- 12 De Buck, A., CT. II, 54b.
- 13 Hornung, E., Amduat, Nr. 287.
- 14 Piankoff, Al., Ramses VI, 68, fig. 12.
- 15 Mysliwik, K., Studien Zum Gott Atum, HAB, Hildesheim (1978), 95, fig. 60.
- 16 De Buck, A., CT. II, 54.
- 17 Sethe, K., Pyr. Text., 14c, 215c, 957c.
- 18 Ramadan, W., Was There a Chapel of NHb-KAw in Heliopolis?, GM 110, (1989), 55f
- 19 Frankfort, H., The Cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos, London, (1933), Pl. 67.
- 20 Nagel, M.G., Un Papyrus Funeraire de la Fin du Nouvel Empire, Louvre 3292, BIFAO 29, (1930), 97-98
- 21 El-Banna, E., Le Serpent bien Connu a Helopolis, BIFAO 84, (1984), 119 N. I.
- 22 De Buck, A., CT. VII, 347.
- 23 Kees, H., Der Gotterglaube in Alten Aegypten, Leipzig, (1941), 55, Anme4
- 24 De Buck, A., CT. II, 51-54.
- 25 De Buck, A., CT. V, 143 a.
- 26 Allen, Th. G., The Book of the Dead or Going Forth By Day, Ideas of the Ancient Egyptian Concerning The Hereafter As Expressed in their own Terms, Chicago, (1974), 17 (15A IC).
- 27 Sethe, K., Pyr. Text., 340, 356, 361.
- 28 De Buck, A., CT. VI, 402 e-f.
- 29 Naville, E., TB, 30 a (5-6 nach ca).
- 30 Sethe, K., Pyr., Text., 346 a-c.
- 31 Abd El-Sattar Ibrahim, I., The Role of the deceased King's Assistants in the Pyramid Texts, Ph. D., Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo University, (2009), 237.
- 32 Sethe, K., Pyr. Text., 1708, c-f.
- 33 Sethe, K., Pyr. Text., 1934, b-c.
- 34 Barta, W., LA, IV, (1982), 388.
- 35 De Buck, A., CT. VI, 647.
- 36 De Buck, A., CT., VII, 22u, 159x.
- 37 Kitchen, K. A., Festkalender, LA II, Wiesbaden, (1977), 191-192.
- 38 Schott, S., Altagyptische Festendaten, (AMAW, 10, 1950), 93 Nr. 87.