

CULT AND BELIEF IN ANCIENT EGYPT

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE FOURTH
INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS FOR YOUNG EGYPTOLOGISTS**
25–27 SEPTEMBER 2012, SOFIA

SOFIA, 2014

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Edited by
TEODOR LEKOV
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PREFACE

The Fourth International Congress for Young Egyptologists (ICYE 2012) organized by Bulgarian Institute of Egyptology and The Department of Mediterranean and Eastern Studies at New Bulgarian University, Sofia was held between September 22th and 25th 2012. The Congress was hosted by New Bulgarian University with the generous support of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

ICYE project was initiated by Dr. Alessia Amenta, Maria Michela Luiselli and Maria Novella Sordi in 2003 is to make possible exchange between young scholars of Egyptology, in order to let them be for the first time lecturers of an international scientific meeting. During the years this idea led to the establishment of a new society of young and promising Egyptologists who are able to share their dreams and optimism, their hunger for knowledge and perspectives for research. ICYE became an opportunity for young people to establish long-term relationships with their colleagues from different countries and continents.

The First International Congress for Young Egyptologists (ICYE 2003) was held at Chinciano Terme (Siena) in October 2003 with topic “Water in Ancient Egypt. The idea of such meeting was continued by the University of Lisbon (ICYE 2006), in particular by Prof. Luis Manuel de Araujo and Aline Gallasch-Hall who organized the Second International Congress for Young Egyptologists at Lisbon in October 2006. The topic of the meeting was “Erotic, Erotism and Sexuality in Ancient Egypt”. Three years later the Third International Congress for Young Egyptologists (ICYE 2009) was held by the Byblos Foundation and Eötvös Loránd University and the Museum of Fine Arts Budapest. In particular the congress was organized by András Hudecz and Máté Petrik with the topic “Commerce and Economy in Ancient Egypt”. The meeting was between 25th and 27th of September in the heart of the beautiful city of Budapest.

The organization of ICYE 2012 was the biggest project of Bulgarian Institute of Egyptology (BIE) and was our great pleasure and honor to receive the opportunity to do it. The topic of our congress was “Cult and Belief in Ancient Egypt”. Among the main purposes of ICYE is also to meet young Egyptologists with prominent scientists. For that reason we invited some of the most important researchers of our time to the Academic Committee, which was thus composed by Prof. Dr. Sergei Ignatov (Head of the Bulgarian Institute of Egyptology, Minister of Education, Youth and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria); Dr. Ian Shaw (Senior Lecturer, University of Liverpool); Dr. Eleni Vassilika (Director of the Egyptian Museum in Turin); Prof. Dr. Joachim-Friedrich Quack (Director of the Institute of Egyptology, Heidelberg University) and Dr. Richard B. Parkinson (Curator, Department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan, The British Museum).

During the three days of the meeting the colleagues had the privilege to listen 40 presentations divided into six sessions. In addition there were also 11 posters presentations, which were presented at the Congress Hall during the time of the Congress. The lectures were MA students, PhD students and postdoc researchers from 18 countries from all over the world. The congress ended with a wonderful trip to the Rila monastery.

The next, Fifth International Congress for Young Egyptologists (ICYE 2015) will be organized by our colleagues from the University of Vienna and the Austrian Academy of Sciences with topic “Tradition and Transformation in Ancient Egypt” and will take place in Vienna in September 2015.

We believe that this volume will contribute to the main vision of ICYE – promoting young scholars in the field of Egyptology in their first steps of academic development, but also we hope that the Proceedings will contribute with fresh ideas and new researches different topics of the study of the Ancient Egyptian Religion.

Teodor Lekov and Emil Buzov
New Bulgarian University
April 2014, Sofia

Θεοί AND ἱεροί: SOME REMARKS ON ANIMAL CULT IN ANCIENT EGYPT ACCORDING TO CLASSICAL AND EGYPTIAN TEXTS¹

– ANGELO COLONNA –

The practice of animal worship in Ancient Egypt continues to arouse questions and stimulate discussions: on the one hand a more accurate and precise formulation of the phenomenon is required and has actually been investigated in recent debates,² on the other, attention must also be focused on the particular objects involved in this cult and on the clarification of their nature; their current characterization as “sacred animals” only provides a partial and imperfect definition while the plurality of alternative expressions often adopted reveals a persistent difficulty in relating with such a multifaceted class of beings.

The chief purpose of this paper is to discuss the possibility to recognize an Egyptian terminology or categorization about these creatures, paying particular attention to the two main classes the texts allow us to identify and trying to ascertain the specific devices and the lexical choices by means of which such a distinction was communicated. In this perspective, the reference to written evidence will stand out as an approach as necessary as fruitful and rich of hints, even more taking into debt account the relative abundance the documentation shows both in terms of quantity and text types (stelae, ostraca and papyri); furthermore, these primary sources can be added to the secondary ones consisting of pieces of classical authors which, if treated with due caution, will give us precious information to complement and explicate the often laconic indications of the Egyptian texts.

THE CLASSICAL SOURCES

The critical examination of the Classical sources represents a moment of absolute preeminence, due not only to the great amount of indications they give on the subject but also to the relevance usually ascribed to them in the specialistic literature; it was on the basis of the analysis of several passages of Greek and Latin writers that Wiedemann and Hopfner distinguished and arranged the sacred animals in three great categories: *Tempeltier* (or *Inkorporationstier*), *heiligen Tiere*, *Fetischetiere*.³

This classification has long maintained its value and still remains a point of reference in field studies.⁴ It evidently implies a distinction of degree and a hierarchical arrangement of the classes identified, particularly of the first two;⁵

¹ The considerations presented in this paper concern some specific issues which are part of my, still in progress, Phd research on animal necropolis in Egypt.

² For a critical and comprehensive dissertation on this topic, see Fitzenreiter 2003 1–32 and 229–263, in particular p. 2: “Unter „Tierkulten“ sollen solche Phänomene der pharaonischen Religion und Religiosität verstanden werden, in denen die Einbeziehung von lebenden oder toten Tieren eine besondere Rolle spielt”.

³ Cf. Hopfner 1913 12; Wiedemann 1912 22–28.

⁴ Cf. Lloyd 1976 Vol. 2 294–295; Kessler 1989 5; Ray 2001 345–346. Dodson 2009 1, plainly distinguishes between “Sacred animals” *stricto sensu*, i.e. “specific specimens of a given species that were held to be an earthly incarnation of a particular deity” and “Votive animals” as “representatives of a species whose embalmed remains could be offered by pilgrims coming to seek the favor of a deity”.

⁵ The third class (fetish-animals) simply represents a subset of the second one.

their relationship has been described as a kind of monarchy, the latter being under the protection of the former, and it is characterized by three main features, closely related, which distinguish the Temple-animal from the Sacred animals: first, the Temple-animal is a single specimen while the Sacred animals are numerous; secondly, it represents the earthly and visible manifestation of a god unlike the others, only held to be sacred; finally, as to the funerary practices, the former is entitled with a high sophisticated treatment and with a monumental single tomb while the latter usually receive more basic cares and a mass burial.¹

Now, the main argument supporting this thesis, relies on the reading of the well known passage of Strabo (*Geographica* XVII 1, 22); in describing the cults of the Momenphite Nome (ancient *Ἰμῶν*, actual Kom el-Hisn in the Western Delta), the historian reads as follow:

“The Momemphitae honour Aphroditē and a sacred cow is kept there, as is Apis in Memphis and Mnevis in Heliopolis. Now these animals are regarded as gods, but those in the other places (for in many either a bull or cow is kept) – those others, I say, are not regarded as gods, though they are held sacred”.

The text shows an antithesis *θεοί-ἱεποί* which seems to fit well to the first two levels of the hierarchy supposed by Hopfner and Wiedemann. However, upon a closer analysis, ambiguous points emerge requiring some remarks: in particular, Strabo is here referring only to cattle (both bulls and cows) and consequently the opposition *θεοί-ἱεποί* should be understood as specifically limited to that species; in addition the *θεοί*-class seems to include just Apis, Menvis and the cow of Momenphis, other specimens like the Buchis bull of Armant and the white cow of Aphroditopolis² (actual Atfih, ancient capital of the XXII *nomos* of Upper Egypt) being excluded even though the author shows to know them;³ finally, it is not entirely clear whether the two terms qualify the relationship between the specimen and the whole species or just between single animals.⁴

Because of these ambiguities, some scholars have questioned the reliability of Strabo’s account: Pestman thinks that the distinction drawn by the Greek author “is suspect” and that “He may have made it with some trivial, external criterion in mind, or it may be simply wrong or carelessly expressed”.⁵ Kessler⁶ has proposed a different explanation of the passage: he argues that Strabo borrowed the two words (and their corresponding meanings) from Greek religious associations working in Egypt during the Ptolemaic Period and being involved in worship and burial of sacred animals; these would never have been defined, in the official documents as ‘gods’ but always as ‘sacred animal’.⁷ Conversely, according to him, these Greeks addressed as ‘god’ not a sacred living animal but the animal-standards carried in procession in occasion of the royal feast;⁸ Strabo therefore, would have adopted this distinction even though “ohne präzise zu formulieren”.⁹

Yet, on this specific point, the text is quite explicit: that a living specimen is intended results clearly from the verb *τρέφεται* (“feed/nourish”), used again in XVII 1, 27 and XVII 1, 31, dedicated respectively to Apis and Mnevis, whose particular status is once more stressed by the noun *θεός*.¹⁰ Therefore it seems that Strabo actually alludes to the existence of a difference in degree separating certain specific animals from all the others while, despite some possible

¹ Cf. Lloyd 1976 Vol. 2 295.

² Strabo does not mention the name of this sacred cow, but it is known to us from a tomb, evidently set up for the animal (Kamal 1908 113–117) and from a stela of Ptolemy I Soter (Urk. II 159–162) which, according to Spiegelberg (1920 260), was associated with the burial: it is *ἡσῶτ*. The evidence on its cult, linked with that of Hathor, is partial, but a brief summary of the available material is provided in Pestman 1980 189–191; cf. also Griffiths 1977, 1170–1171.

³ XVII 1, 35 and XVII 1, 47; in the last passage Strabo does not explicitly mention the name of the bull of Armant but it is reasonable to assume that Buchis is intended (cf. Mond-Myers 1934 Vol. 2 27 and Pestman 1980 190).

⁴ In that case, we should perhaps consider that the Buchis bull and the cow of Atfih simply were *ἱεποί*-animals to Strabo.

⁵ Pestman 1980 190.

⁶ 1989 9–11.

⁷ Kessler 1989 11 where he adds: “Die Griechen der Kultgemeinschaften verehrten persönlich nicht das lokale Bild des Stieres als Apis, sondern den Hochgott Serapis...”.

⁸ Kessler 1989 11.

⁹ Kessler 1989 11.

¹⁰ Notably, in the passage about Apis, the description of the specific marks of the animal immediately follows the statement on its nature, confirming that Strabo applies the term *θεός* to the very living specimen.

inconsistencies in his account and the fact that the term “god” is used – in the entire section about the animal worship – only in relation to the Apis and Mnevis bulls, he proves to be well aware of this separation in other parts of his work: so, in the description of the honours granted to the crocodile in the *nomos* of Arsinoe, it is possible to deduce from his words the idea of some kind of distinction between the species itself and the single (living) specimen which special attentions were reserved for.¹ Furthermore, Herodotus already noticed and described a similar situation in his famous passage on the worship of the sacred ram in Mendes² while other authors, such as Diodorus, adopted the term *θεός* to denote a particular individual specimen (notably Apis and Mnevis)³; finally a very interesting passage of Plutarch shows the same distinction whole species-individual proposed by Strabo yet without adopting his terminological opposition⁴.

Obviously, it is quite vain to expect from our sources a perfectly consistent and systematic exposition concerning the nature of these animals but it is important to record a convergence of opinions on such a key-point; even more noteworthy is the fact that they find correspondence in some interesting, non literary Greek texts. In particular, a missive can be pointed out (110 b.C. ca.) sent to the magistrate in charge of the city of Arsinoe-Crocodilopolis and containing the request to set up all the necessary for the imminent visit of the senator Lucius Memmius;⁵ among the other instructions, it was recommended to prepare “the food for Petesuchos and the crocodiles”, a notation clearly remarking the difference between the selected specimen and the other members of the species kept in the temple area.⁶ In addition, an inscription on the base of a crocodile-god statue records the exact date under Ptolemy XII, when the *epiphaneia* of the single specimen occurred, linking it with “Petesuchos the great god” (Fig. 1).

All these facts should lead to a more critical evaluation of the idea that the official Greek texts would only speak of ‘sacred animals’ and never of ‘gods’; if, indeed, most of the available documentation makes use of the formula *ἐπὶ ζῶα*, nevertheless other evidence reveal the perception of a qualitative difference of some (specific) individuals over their similar; moreover, in all these texts, the animal is always labeled with a name which immediately identifies it with the specific deity manifesting in it (Petesuchos in the quoted examples).

The foregoing considerations, therefore, allow us to contextualize Strabo’s account, specifying its historical value: his antithesis *θεοί-ἱεποί* reveals the same view of the phenomenon that comes out from other Greek sources even though it does not find, in both one and the others, a rigorous theoretical elaboration. This does not mean diminishing the validity of the pass, as Pestman does, but rather to recognize what is its main informative core: the existence of a disparity between the condition of a special individual and that of the other members of the species.

THE EGYPTIAN DOCUMENTS

This point being clarified, it is necessary to verify whether and to what extent, the distinction resulting from the Greek records, is actually reflected in the Egyptian ones. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the Greek pair of terms *θεός-ἱερός*, is equivalent to the Egyptian one *ntr-wt (ntrj)*⁷ even though the correspondence between the two is not exactly accurate; so, in the so called Prinz-Joachim ostraca from Kom Ombo (II century B.C.), inscribed both in Demotic and Greek and concerning the maintenance and the mass burial of ibis and hawks, these are labeled respectively as *ἐπὶ ζῶα* and *n3 ntrw*.⁸ This fact is of great interest, since both variants refer to the same object, and provides the opportunity for a first important consideration: the Egyptian sources often speak of *ntr/ntrw* intending

¹ XVII 1, 38.

² *Historiae* II, 46.

³ *Bibliotheca historica* I 21, 10; I 88, 4. Cf. also I 89, 3 and I 90, 2.

⁴ *Quaestiones convivales* VII 4, 3.

⁵ P. Tebt. I, 33; cf. Smelik-Hemelrijk 1984 1940–1941 and n. 588.

⁶ Here, as in the quoted passage of Strabo (see n. 17), the distinction between the two is suggested by the name (Petesuchos) the single specimen possess and which links/identifies it with the god (Sobek).

⁷ Cf. Kessler 1986 571 and Kessler 1989 8.

⁸ Cf. Preisigke-Spiegelberg 1914, n. 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 13, 15, 16, 17 (Greek); n. 23 e 25 (Demotic).

any animal (or class of animals) which is dead. In fact, through death, or rather through the rituals of mummification and burial affecting it, each animal undergoes a process of apotheosis which makes it a god in the form of Osiris (Osiris-ibis, Osiris-hawk, etc.).¹ So, if Apis, on the Serapeum stelae, is often referred to as *ntr* ʿ3 (“The great god”)², the several ibis and hawks from Kom Ombo³ are *ntrw* as well, i.e. dead and transfigured beings while, a Demotic document from Saqqara, mentions ‘72 gods’ with regard to the internment of as many ibis.⁴

As for the expression ʿwt (*ntry*),⁵ it is mainly in the Late Period that it occurs in several official documents of religious character showing a quite specific meaning: the Canopus Decree informs us about the honours bestowed by Ptolemy III to ‘Apis, Mnevis and all the sacred animals of the temple (ʿwt *hwt-ntr nb hw*) in Egypt’⁶ while in the Decree of Memphis, the benefits granted by Ptolemy V to ‘Apis, Mnevis and all the sacred animals (ʿwt *nb hw*) in Egypt’⁷ are celebrated; finally, the so-called Tanis Geographical Papyrus reports, under the heading ʿwt, a list of animals with the respective places where they are revered. These examples well support the suggestion that the word is adopted to designate the collectivity of the animals⁸ kept in the temple area. This fact should not be surprising nor it must be seen as a sign of “Widerspruch”⁹ between Strabo’s account and the Egyptian sources; the term ʿwt has a neutral meaning as it relates to all the animals in the sacred space of the sanctuary without providing any precise indication of their nature so that, from this point of view, there is no difference between Apis (or Mnevis or any other individual) and the multitude of ibises, falcons, baboons, or specimens of other species kept and buried in mass: in both cases these are all animals belonging to the temple.¹⁰

Thus, it seems one should conclude that the Egyptian documents do not have such an accurate and rigorous terminology that allows us to distinguish between the single specimen and the rest of the species while the opinion of Kessler about that point sounds particularly categorical: “Die ägyptischen Texte zeigen keinen Unterschied zwischen einzelnen ‘heiligen Inkorporationstieren’ und ‘heiligen Artegenossen’”.¹¹ Yet, we must actually recognize that, although this distinction is not made object of a particularly thorough theoretical elaboration, nevertheless it is clearly developed according to other solutions and expressive modes which deserve our interest.

Notably, attention must be drawn to some Demotic documents of Ptolemaic Period, preserved on two papyri (P. dem. Mil. Vogl. Inv. 77 e Inv. 78) coming from the crocodile necropolis of Tebtynis, in the South-West of the Fayyum:¹² these are copies of statutes – internal regulations of a congregation containing dispositions of various kind (mostly economic and bureaucratic) in order to regulate its functioning and duties – belonging to religious associations devoted to the cult of Sobek and the sacred crocodiles.¹³ In these texts we find once more expressed the same division between single specimen and rest of the species, and it is surely remarkable that they are official documents:

¹ Cf. Morenz 1962 46–47 and Kessler 1986 571.

² Malinine *et al.* 1968 *passim*.

³ See the summary table in Preisigke-Spiegelberg 1914 29. The minimum number of burials recorded is of 357 specimens (ostrakon n. 1), the maximum of 4507 individuals (ostrakon n. 13).

⁴ Kessler 1989 116, n. 3.

⁵ *Wb.* I 170, 15–16; *Wb.* II 363, 8–12 and 364, 11.

⁶ *Urk.* II, 128. Cf. also Budge 1904 III 41 (hieroglyphic, transliteration and translation); “sacred” is rendered by the verb *hw* (litt. “to protect” but also “to worship”; cf. *Wb.* III, 244–245.)

⁷ *Urk.* II, 185. Cf. also Budge 1904 II 2 (hieroglyphic and Greek text), 51 (translation of the demotic text), 60 (transliteration of the demotic text) e 112–113 (translation Greek text); for the verb *hw*, *supra* n. 29.

⁸ While having this main meaning, the term ʿwt can also be used, according to Kessler (1989, 8–9) as singular to designate a specific specimen of the livestock within the temple.

⁹ Kessler 1989 8.

¹⁰ It is noteworthy that in the Decree of Canopus the term ʿwt is followed by the sign *hwt ntr* while in the Decree of Memphis by the determinative of a *naiskos*, being translated by Budge (1904 II, 208) as “sacred animal kept in shrine”.

¹¹ Kessler 1989 10.

¹² The two papyri, found by Vogliano in 1934, were part, together with other Ptolemaic scrolls, of the wrapping of a crocodile (Bresciani 1994 50–51). The date of the first document (179–178 b.c.) is given by the text itself while the second one can be assigned to the same period on paleographical ground.

¹³ Texts A-F: Bresciani 1994 57–60 (transliteration) and 60–65 (translation).

one is named *p3 msh* ('the Crocodile', i.e. Sobek) while the others *n3 ntrw sbk* ('the gods <of> Sobek')¹ or simply *n3 ntrw* ('the gods')², probably intended as indistinct group of dead and transfigured beings. The crocodile found by Vogliano with the papyri would have been, according to Bresciani,³ one of the *Mshw*.

Moreover it would be tempting to use these documents to interpret some stelae dating to the New Kingdom, linked with the cult of Sobek (**Fig. 2a-b**): one⁴ shows, on the top, Sobek-Ra 'lord of *smnw*, the great god' in crocodile form, set on a podium and wearing an elaborate divine crown while below several smaller crocodiles are represented, being iconographically poorly characterized; the other⁵, less carefully carved and with no inscriptions, has a similar figurative framework consisting of five pairs of crocodiles surmounted by two opposite specimens, both of them being larger and with divine attributes (podium and crown).

Now, in my opinion, it could be proposed to see in this evidence a reference to a difference in status between the individual specimen and the other members of the species kept in the temple⁶, while the exhibition of this inequality of condition is pursued and conveyed by means of specific devices both in the composition and iconography of the piece. The first aspect to be underlined concerns the size scale of the figures and their position in the scene: one is larger and occupies, almost entirely, the rounded top while the others, of smaller proportions, are regularly arranged on the lower part of the stelae. Furthermore, the single specimen shows a precise and accurate iconographical characterization, rendered through a series of qualifying items (podium, offerings and, above all, the sacred plant and the crown) while the other crocodiles are represented without any attribute or other distinctive feature. The latter, according to Morenz⁷, must be put in connection with the term *sbkw* (plural form of the theonym *sbk*/Sobek), translated by the author as 'crocodiles' or 'crocodiles-Sobek' and designating the numerous sacred specimens kept in proper temple structures, such as those mentioned in Hekanachte VI, 4 as *swnw n sbkw*, 'pools of crocodiles-Sobek'.⁸ If this interpretation was exact, it therefore would offer us a conclusive element for the reading of the hierarchical relationship linking the figures: on the one hand, the single animal in which the god reveals himself and which dimensions and attributes come to qualify as such (in the form of Sobek-Ra); on the other hand, the row of the *sbkw*-crocodiles, subdued to the first and acting as its court. This is just a proposal but it is interesting to remark how the content of this evidence matches with the already quoted passage of Strabo concerning the cult of Suchos and the crocodiles in the Arsinoite *nomos*:⁹ the correspondence is certainly remarkable inasmuch as it not only confirms the report of the Greek historian but also allows us to complete and integrate the information he produced on the basis of direct and original data and sources.

The idea that the qualitative difference between the two class of animals should be read in terms of subordination of the latter to the former, distinctly comes out from a particular epithet attested for Apis and the ram of Mendes during the Ptolemaic period¹⁰: on an inscribed block from Saqqara¹¹ (**Fig. 3**), bearing the cartouche of Nectanebo II, Apis-Osiris is shown while receiving the adoration by the pharaoh and is referred to as 'king of all the sacred animals' (*nsw 'wt nb ntry*). A variant, related to the ram of Mendes, occurs on the famous stele dedicated by Ptolemy II, where the animal is qualified as 'sovereign of the great sacred animals [of Egypt]' (*ity 'wt wr [nt Kmt]*).¹² Now, if the term '*wt* – as it has been previously illustrated – indicate the collectivity of animals belonging to the temple without

¹ Text A ll. 3, 5 (*p3 Msh*) and ll. 3, 5, 9 (*n3 ntrw sbk*).

² Text B ll. 4.

³ Bresciani 1994 52.

⁴ Cf. Fazzini 1972 56–57. Here is also published a second stela (Fig. 22), unfortunately fragmented, which should have a similar iconographic scheme.

⁵ Bakry 1971 137–138 and Plate XXVII b. The stele comes from Mahamid Qibli.

⁶ Cf. Fazzini 1972 57 and note 51.

⁷ Morenz 2003 89–90.

⁸ Cfr. Morenz 2003 85–89 for the discussion about the meaning of the term *swnw*.

⁹ *Supra* n. 16.

¹⁰ Cf. Kessler 1989 8–9 e n. 12–15.

¹¹ The block was part of the temple complex built by the pharaoh and was discovered in a layer of debris from the terrace of the temple (Sector 3); see Martin 1979 92 (n° 363).

¹² Urk. II, 49 (D 24).

any specific suggestion about their condition, the employ of *nsw* and *ity* introduce a characterizing element which, not only put a difference between the one and the many but also gives it a marked hierarchical connotation: the Apis bull and the ram of Mendes differ from all the others animals of the temple on the basis of their individuality but, above all, they are superior to them because they possess a regal status. So, it is plausible that even in the passages of the decrees of Canopus and Memphis discussed above, where Apis and Mnevis are singly mentioned in opposition to all the others sacred animals of Egypt, a similar disparity in degree was understood although not explicitly formulated. The same notion seems to be implied in the quoted section of the Tanis Geographical Papyrus (Fig. 4), containing a list of animals registered under the head *wt ntry* and arranged according to geographical, and maybe, mythological criteria. It shows, quite clearly, a division in two classes: the first one, opening the sequence, includes individual specimens (Apis, Mnevis, Buchis and *B3 nḥ* – “the living ram”), each one associated with its own place of worship (Menphis, Heliopolis, Armant and Mendes); the second one, instead, records several species linked with the names of specific deities.¹ The distinction the papyrus put between the two categories, seems to be substantial, it pertains the very nature of the subjects involved: the first ones are presented as independent superior (divine?) beings, the others as animals consecrated to certain gods, probably being involved, in different ways, in their cult². A further relevance, whereas our suggestion was correct, should be assigned to this document as far as it possibly shows a rare (even though not explicit) hint concerning the attribution to single animal of a supernatural character already during its lifetime. This consideration is of great importance and introduces us to a final question: again, it is Kessler who raised the problem, as he states that “Kein einziges lebendiges heiliges Tier ist in Ägypten außerhalb der Festprozessionen jemals als ‘Gott’ bezeichnet...‘Gott’ war allein das ‘statische’ Kultbild in Tiergestalt”.³ According to the scholar, the textual documentation does not offer any positive evidence that the Egyptian ever regarded as “gods” specific living specimens; these remain for him, just sacred animals, i.e. animals having a ritual function they performed during precise ceremonial occasions while it is just after death that they could gain an authentic divine status, not before.⁴ Besides, the fact that the current data have funerary character or well refer to the *post mortem* treatment of the animal, apparently would confirm this opinion. Yet, three argumentations can be produced against it: first of all, although our main sources come from funerary contexts, that does not necessarily imply they reflect the whole theological aspects of the phenomenon. Secondly, such a perspective produces an indiscriminate leveling, not considering those differences that indeed, apart from terminological accuracy, the texts (both in Egyptian and Greek) seem to record. Finally, we can anyway mention some documents, not strictly pertaining the funerary sphere, from which distinctly emerges the idea of a superior/divine condition as a feature deeply rooted in some particular living specimens: besides the Tanis Papyrus, which was already spoken about but whose interpretation cannot be considered conclusive, an other text, handed down to us by several manuscripts (mainly in hieratic), is of considerable interest for the solution of the problem. This is the so called “Book of the Temple”,⁵ a sort of manual concerning the management and the functioning of an ideal Egyptian temple and containing specific provisions about both the architecture and planimetric articulation of the sanctuary and the internal administration and hierarchical organization of the tasks. Despite the state of partial preservation, it provides us with important information on the maintenance and the treatment of temple animals and, what most concerns us here, does not fail to point out the special status of the living specimen: therefore, a passage reports, among other indications, those relating to the “*m3rw*-area, the residence of this god” (*st nt ḥmsi*)⁶ while in a second paragraph instructions are collected for two high-ranking officials with ceremonial duties:

¹ The species recorded are, as far as it is possible to read, the following: *3by* (leopard), *ḥb* (hippopotamus), *ḡsm*-dog, [*db?*] (hippopotamus), *mnt* (swallow), *ḥpr* (scarab), *bn*-bird, *rd*-bird, *ḳb*(=*gb*, goose), *smn*-goose, [??] (hoopoe?); cf. also the sequences listed respectively in a Onomasticon from Tebtynis (Osing 1998 257) and in a copy of the Tanis Papyrus having the same provenience as the former (Osing-Rosati 1998 50–51).

² Cf. von Lieven 2003 126–127.

³ Kessler 1989 10–11.

⁴ Kessler 1989 11 : “Die einzelnen toten Tiere sind, wenn mumifiziert und difiziert, alle ‘Götter’”.

⁵ Quack 2003 111–123; see n. 1 for a detailed bibliography.

⁶ Quack 2003 113.

“It is they who “open face” to introduce the sacred Apis on the occasion of the festival which takes place in the temples (r-prw). It is they who announce the god when he comes out. It is they who introduce the god on the occasion of the hts-feast...”¹

There is also a final section dealing with the tasks and duties of some lower staff members acting as shepherds of the Apis bull:

“As for the m3rw-area of the sacred animal, there are 4 shepherds in it, in their monthly service, [is] 1 men. It is they who guard this god in his house and in everywhere he goes when he comes out, to cross the fields in...throughout the day [of every day...] bulls and caws with him [...] the mother, his calves and [her] caws with her; to follow the heart [...] happen (to) his children [...] king of [...] not to leave it empty [...] son [...] because she is the mother”²

These passages³ strongly support the following remarks: first, that of the sacred animals appears as a stable presence inside the temple, around which an articulated hierarchy of priests and officials was distributed, being in various way responsible for taking care of the many requirements related with it. Secondly, the term *wt-ntry* is adopted in the text, neutrally and without any particular connotation, thus remarking the general character of the document which was not intended to refer to a specific temple but rather to describe, at least in principle, an ideal situation; the only remarkable exception is the mention, in one case, of the Apis bull, a fact indicating, according to Quack, that the author had in mind the menphite context. Moreover, “sacred animal” occurs in the singular form, evidently referring to the individual animal; this, however, is always surrounded (as stated in the section about the shepherd of the temple) by its own court consisting of cows and calves which act as its family and entourage, even though “Diese werden aber terminologisch deutlich vom einzelnen Tier unterschieden”⁴ Finally, the deep theological nature of this difference is effectively underlined by the fact that, not only in all the quoted passages the single animal is explicitly defined as “god”⁵, but this term is also applied, unequivocally and precisely, to the living specimen:⁶ this is the “god” residing in the *m3rw*-area, the place where he spends its life until death (“the day of its departure”, as it is pointed out below in the same passage⁷) and it is “this god” which the staff has to look after “in its house and everywhere its goes...”

This evidence, therefore, resolutely comes to dispel any outstanding doubt or further uncertainty concerning the relationship between individual and group and about the peculiar condition characterizing the one over the other while it may also contribute to a more careful and balanced interpretation of the information recorded in the classical accounts starting with those provided in Strabo XVII 1, 22.

CONCLUSIONS

Comparing and assembling the information from the various sources collected and analyzed, a quite consistent frame can be outlined, developing around a focal point: the idea, evidently meaningful for the Egyptian thought, of the existence of a discrepancy in rank and condition separating some particular specimens from the rest of their

¹ Quack 2003 115.

² Quack 2003 116.

³ Because the text still lacks a final edition, the sections quoted have simply been translated from the German; I would like to thank prof. Quack for kindly giving me some necessary remarks about the terminology; in particular he has confirmed to me the use of *wt-ntry* for “sacred animal”.

⁴ Quack 2003 116; this contradicts Kessler’s thesis that Egyptian texts make no distinction at all between *Inkorporationstier* ed *heiligen Artgenossen*.

⁵ In the first of the two quoted passage it can be questioned, as also Quack (2003 117) remarks, that ‘god’ refers to the living specimen rather than to a statue, but in the following section the context make this interpretation quite sure.

⁶ *Contra* Kessler 1989 10–11.

⁷ Quack 2003 113.

similar. This concept, obviously implying a hierarchy between these two levels, does not seem to receive in the texts, an adequate theoretical elaboration, at least not in terms of a rigorous conceptual classification: *ꜥwt nꜥry* was regularly employed to designate all the animals held in the circumscribed space of the temple; however a distinction was clearly perceived and it was communicated by the terms *nsw* (block of Nectanebo from Saqqara; Mendes Stelae) and *nꜥr* (Book of the Temple; Tanis papyrus) and/or transposed into appropriate iconographical solutions of comparable eloquence (stelae in honour of Sobek-Ra).

The single chosen animal markedly stands out because of its special nature possessing the attributes of royalty and divinity: it acts, during its earthly existence, as a “king” and as a “god” (or rather as manifestation of the divine presence) while all the other animals, which are subordinate to him and serve as royal court, gain access to such a divine status only after their death when, through burial rituals, they become part of the indistinct community of the *nꜥ nꜥrw*.

This distinction represents such a prominent feature that the classical authors, so much intrigued and fascinated by the phenomenon, do not fail to recognize it: therefore, Strabo’s antithesis *θεοί-ἄνθρωποι*, as well as other analogous formulations, records this fact showing, despite prejudices and misinterpretations, how effective such a dichotomy was and how strongly its perception persisted even in later accounts.

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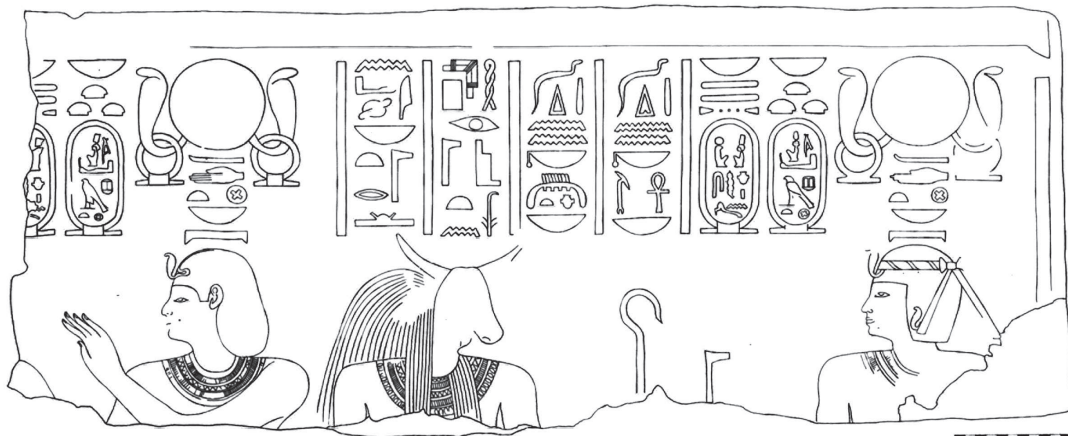
Fig. 1. Statue of Petesuchos from Arsinoe. Granite. Ptolemaic period. Paris, musée du Petit-Palais, inv. Dut. 304 (after Charron 2002 175, n. 74). The inscription on the base reads “Year 23 Pharmouthi 12 (April 16 58 a.C.). For the great king Ptolemy, the god Neo-Dyonisos, Petesuchos the great god which appeared under his reign on Payni 18 year 21 (June 21 60 a.C.), Apollonios, son of Apollonios from Talesis, dedicated”.



Fig. 2a. Stelae dedicated to Sobek-Re of Sumenu. Limestone. Ramesside period. Paris, Private Collection (after Fazzini 1972 56, fig. 23)



Fig. 2b. Stelae dedicated to Sobek-Re. Sandstone. Ramesside period (after Bakry 1971 Plate XXVII b)



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Fig. 3. Block with Nectanebo II and Apis-Osiris from Saqqara. Limestone. XXX din.
 (after Martin 1979 Plate 69, n. 363). Above the god the inscription records the title *nsw n iwꜥ(t)* (> *ꜥwt*) *nb nꜥr*, 'King of all the sacred animals'

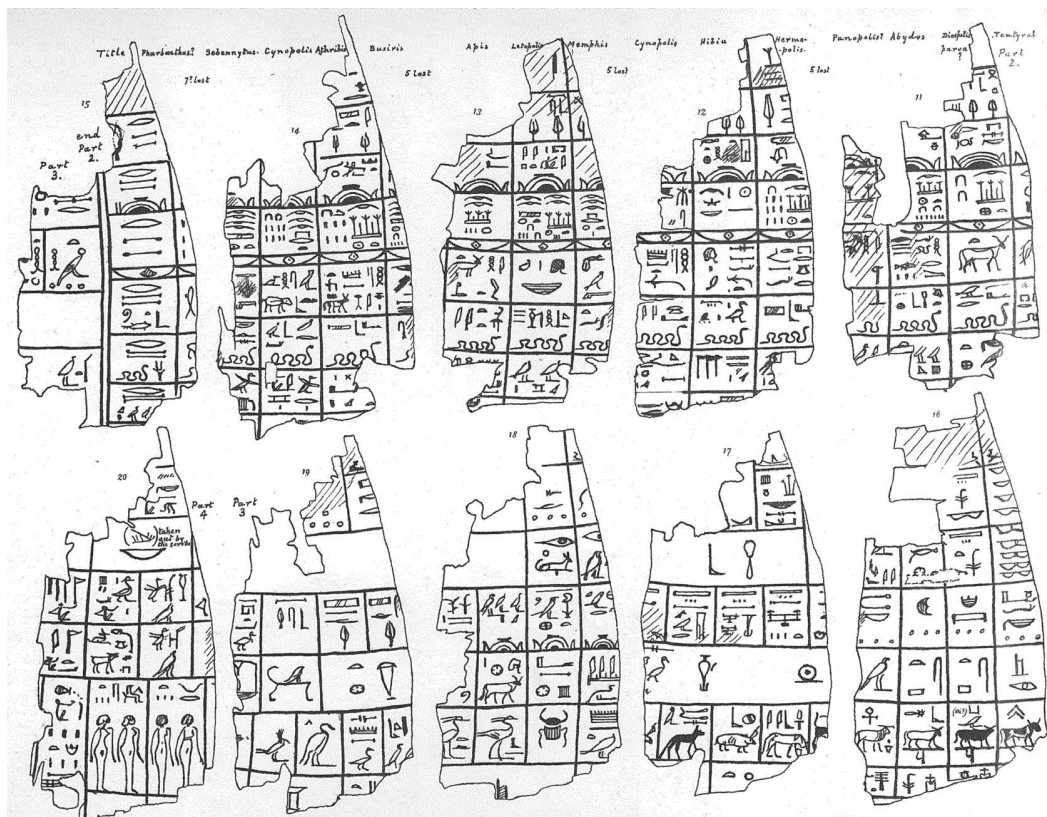


Fig. 4. Tanis Geographical Papyrus. Roman period (after Griffith-Petrie 1889 Plate X). The papyrus shows a sequence of different animals (fr. 16-19, lower register) arranged under the label *ꜥwt [nꜥrꜥ]* (fr. 15 lower register)