

WALID SHAIKH AL ARAB
THE HEDGEHOG GODDESS ABASET

Abstract

The Egyptian goddess Abaset was a minor hedgehog-deity. Her presence was attested only in the 26th Dynasty (656-525 BC). She was solely venerated on the eastern fringe of el-Bawiti, the capital of Bahariyya Oasis, which is situated far from the Nile Valley. This paper aims at presenting a reliable interpretation for the name of the goddess Abaset. It focuses on the history and the development of her cult. The ancient Egyptian depicted Abaset in an anthropomorphic form. The crown of Hedgehog was specific to Abaset; it is a key element in the identification of the goddess, especially if the scene was not labelled with her name. The exact reason for this iconography is unclear. The occurrence of the images of Abaset and the use of her legends was restricted to specific location, i. e. el-Bawiti.

Keywords Abaset, Re-Horakhty, Hedgehog, el-Bawiti, Bahariyya Oasis

I. Introduction¹

Abaset was an Ancient Egyptian minor hedgehog-deity, whose traces have survived only in the 26th Dynasty (656-525 BC). She was merely worshiped on the eastern fringe of (el-Bawiti الباويطي)², the capital of Bahariyya Oasis, which is located far from the Nile Valley. The reading and the meaning of her name have been debated.

Interestingly, Abaset was unknown until the Late Period (656-332 BC) and even no evidence indicates that she was represented permanently among the deities of the Egyptian pantheon. In the 26th Dynasty (656-525 BC), the fame of Abaset increased remarkably and thus she was included in the Egyptian pantheon.

¹ I am thankful to Paola Davoli, Department of Humanities, University of Salento, Lecce (Italy), for her help in publishing this paper.

² (El-Bawiti الباويطي) is the capital and the largest settlement of the Bahariyya Oasis situated in the Egyptian Western desert.

Abaset has received a small attention in religious, historical and prosopographical discussions. A few publications explored her nature. The Egyptian pioneer scholar Ahmed Fakhry was the first to attract the attention of researchers to this goddess in the late years of the first half of twentieth century, when he published his spectacular book about the tomb of *Bꜣ-n-ntyw*³. This book has two scenes of the goddess Abaset⁴. In 2002, Christian Leitz⁵ also addressed the goddess Abaset in his valuable lexikon. Five years later and in his illustrated dictionary, *L'Égypte ancienne et ses dieux*, Jean-Pierre Corteggiani⁶ wrote a short review on Abaset based on the two scenes where the goddess was depicted in the tomb of *Bꜣ-n-ntyw*⁷. Finally in their paper «The Representation of the Hedgehog Goddess Abaset at Bahariya Oasis», Hend Sherbiny and Hussein Bassir⁸ read and analyzed the two scenes of the goddess mentioned in the publication of Ahmed Fakhry. They concluded that «through the textual association of Abaset with Isis by the implications of the name and epithets, Abaset may have shared connections with Osiris as well. Therefore, through her relationships with Re and Osiris, Abaset may have represented the cycle of life and death at Bahariya Oasis».

This paper aims to present a reliable interpretation of the Ancient Egyptian name of the goddess Abaset, to identify and explain the main moments of her iconography evolution, to shed light on her personality throughout her appellations, to define her different aspects, to highlight the relationship that unites Abaset and other deities, to understand the reasons for the presence of such relationship, and finally to point out the history and the development of her cult.

The study is basically divided into two major parts: corpus and synthesis (results and discussion)

³ The reading and the meaning of this name are still uncertain: see H. SHERBINY-H. BASSIR, *The Representation of the Hedgehog Goddess Abaset at Bahariya Oasis*, «JARCE» 50 (2014), pp. 174-176.

⁴ A. FAKHRY, *Bahria Oasis*, Vol.1, *The Egyptian deserts*, Cairo 1942, pp. 78-79, 83-84 and figs. 35, 41.

⁵ CH. LEITZ, *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen* II, OLA, 111, Leuven, Paris-Dudley 2002, p. 88c [1-2].

⁶ J.-P. CORTEGGIANI, *L'Égypte ancienne et ses dieux: dictionnaire illustré*, Paris 2007, p. 8.

⁷ About the tomb of the local notable *Bꜣ-n-ntyw*, see *infra*, p. 92, note 18.

⁸ H. SHERBINY-H. BASSIR, *The Representation* cit., pp. 171-189.

II. Corpus

First document

The first document comes from the tomb no. 1 which is situated at the site of Fama⁹. It is one of six sites at the village of el-Ḥārra (الحرارة)¹⁰, a village currently falls within the administrative division of el-Bawiti (الباويتي), the capital of Bahariyya Oasis¹¹.

The tomb consists of a well-cut vertical shaft (A), which descends vertically through the rocky ground to a depth of 160 cm under the ground level. The western wall of the vertical shaft (A) has an entrance¹² leading to the chamber (B), which is rectangular with four square pillars bearing its ceiling. An accidental collapse may have caused the damage on the roof. Smaller auxiliary rooms, which were cut during the Roman Period (30 BC-642 AD), are attached on the northern, the southern and the eastern walls of chamber (B). An entrance located on the western wall of chamber (B), leads to the main burial chamber (C). It measures 190×190 cm. Its ceiling is lower than that of Columned Hall (B) (fig. 1).

⁹ Fama (فاما) is located at 7 km south-west of the village of El-Ḥārra (الحرارة) and at 3 km north-west of 'Ain el-Maḳṭṭ'a (عين المقطوعة).

¹⁰ The village of El-Ḥārra (الحرارة) is a small village situated on the road leading to the village of El-Bahnasa, Beni Mazar, Minya. It lies about 22 km east of the town of el-Bawiti (الباويتي), the capital of Bahariyya Oasis and about 13 km east of the village Mandisha (منديشة). El-Ḥārra contains several archaeological sites as follow: 'Ain el-Wādi (عين الوادي), 'Ain Gedīd (عين جديد), 'Ain el-Zawia (عين الزاوية), 'Ain el-Maḳṭṭ'a (عين المقطوعة), and Fama (فاما).

¹¹ For more readings on Bahariya Oasis, see F. BLISS, *Die ägyptischen Oasen. Bd 2, Oasenleben: die ägyptischen Oasen Bahriya und Farafra in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart, Beiträge zur Kulturkunde* 23, Bonn 2006, pp. 33-34; F. COLIN, *Qasr Allam. A Twenty-Sixth Dynasty Settlement*, «EA» 24 (2004), pp. 30-33; FARID ATIYA-JENNY JOBBINS, *The silent desert. I, Bahariya & Farafra Oases*, Cairo 2003; J. WILLEITNER, *Die ägyptischen Oasen: Städte, Tempel und Gräber in der lybischen Wüste*, Mainz 2003, pp. 89-91; C. VIVIAN, *The Western Desert of Egypt: An Explorer's Handbook*, New York 2002, pp. 174-212; A.J. MILLS, *Western Desert*, in D.B. REDFORD, *The Oxford encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* III, Oxford-New York-Paris, 2001, pp. 497-501; J. BAINES-J. MALEK, *Cultural Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, New York 2000, p. 187; G. CASTEL-P. TALLET, *Les inscriptions d'El-Harra, oasis de Bahareya*, «BIFAO» 101 (2001), pp. 99-136; L.L. GIDDY, *Egyptian Oases: Bahriya, Dakhla, Farafra and Kharga during pharaonic Times*, Warminster 1987, pp. 15-16; A. FAKHRY, *Bahriya, Oase*, in *LdÄ* I, col. 601-604; A. FAKHRY, *The Oases of Egypt. Vol. II, Bahriyah and Farafra Oases*, Cairo 1974; ID., *Bahriya Oasis, Vol. I and II, The Egyptian Deserts*, Cairo 1942 and 1950.

¹² This entrance is located at the bottom of the burial shaft (A).

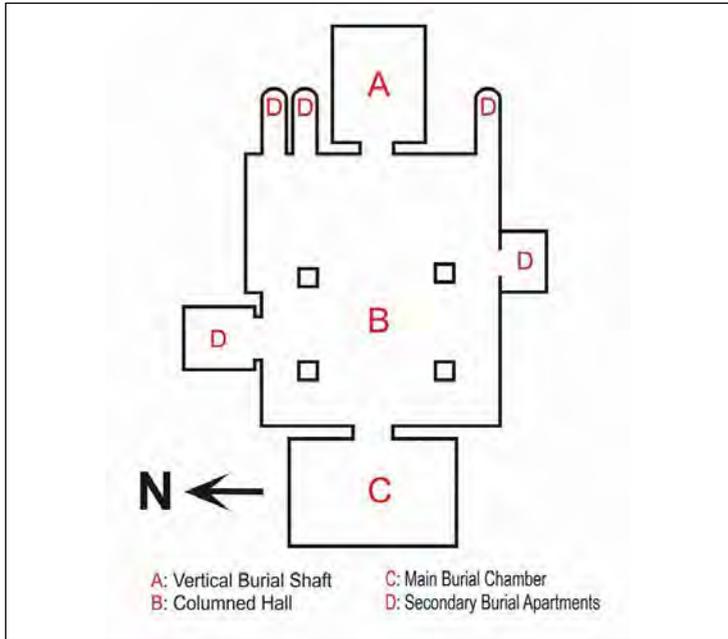


Fig. 1. Plan of Fama tomb no. 1.
(Design by Walid Shaikh al Arab)

It is noteworthy that the burial chamber (C) is the only place containing mural painted scenes and inscriptions in the tomb. The scene of the Eastern wall¹³ shows the tomb's owner raising his hands in a worship attitude, followed by his wife. She raises the right hand behind the shoulder of her husband protecting him, while her left hand is alongside her body (fig. 2).

¹³ To the left of the tomb visitor.



Fig. 2. shows the owner¹⁴ raising his hands in worship, followed by his wife.
(Photograph by Walid Shaikh al Arab)

The scene continues on the southern wall, where an offering table is represented in front of a group of seven deities consisting of two pairs of divinities followed by a triad:

- Re-Horakhty and Abaset (figs. 3, 4 and 5): Re-Horakhty is represented in human form with falcon's head. He is depicted standing with the right leg advanced. He wears a short kilt-*shendjet* with belt. On its back, a long ceremonial tail is attached. He holds a *was*-scepter in the right hand while his left hand grasps an *ankh*-sign. He wears a long tripartite wig, topped by a solar disk. He is followed by the goddess Abaset (figs. 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9).

¹⁴ The names of the tomb's owner and his wife are not known.

- Khepri and Maat (fig. 6): Khepri and Maat are shown behind the goddess Abaset. The image of Khepri is badly damaged, but his head is survived. Three columns of inscriptions are written before him reading from left to right. Behind Khepri, there is the iconography of the goddess Maat, where exclusively remains her head with her distinctive symbol of the ostrich's feather in the solar disk (fig. 6).

- Atum, Isis (?) and Nephthys, they are depicted behind the goddess Maat. Only the double crown subsists from the god Atum's figure, who is identified through the accompanying text. Traces of a figure of a goddess can be seen next to the representation of Atum. The solar disk flanked by two cow horns crowns the goddess' figure. There are no traces for her accompanying text. She could be Isis or Hathor (?). Immediately after the goddess image, there are traces of goddess Nephthys iconography with accompanying text, which mentions her name (fig. 7). Behind Nephthys are the leavings of a text that may have been related to the previous scene.



Fig. 3. The god Re-Horakhty preceded by an offering table and followed by the goddess Abaset.
(Photograph by Walid Shaikh al Arab)



Fig. 4. Facsimile of Re-Horakhty preceded by an offering table and followed by the goddess Abaset. (Drawing by Walid Shaikh al Arab)

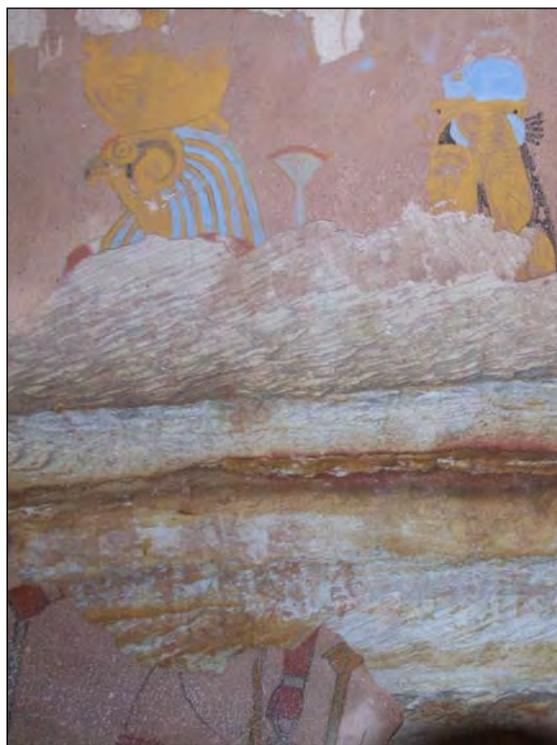


Fig. 5. The god Re-Horakhty followed by the goddess Abaset. (Photograph by Walid Shaikh al Arab)



Fig. 6. The god Khepri followed by the goddess Maat. (Photograph by Walid Shaikh al Arab)



Fig. 7. The god Atum followed by Isis and Nephthys. (Photograph by Walid Shaikh al Arab)

It should be noted that the lower part of the scene on the southern wall doesn't fit perfectly with the upper one. This lower portion was shifted several centimeters from its exact and proper position, moreover it inclines slightly down as one proceed towards the west. This inclination resulted in the movement of the lower part of the god's body from its correct place to the backward and the presence of an illogical space between the upper and lower parts. This can be explained as follows: the artist, who decorated the tomb, was in a hurry to finish it. As a result for this urgency, the artist wrongly placed the draft from which he performed the figures of this lower part¹⁵ and the draft was inclined down as we proceed west. Another opinion may suggest that the paint of this part may have fallen and its restoration wasn't very accurate, which resulted in the imbalance in this scene.

The goddess Abaset (figs. 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9) is depicted in an anthropomorphic form. She wears a tight dress. The details of her dress are almost lost. She is shown striding with her right leg. She wears a tripartite wig which is painted in black, leaving her ears exposed. The uraeus diadem surmounts her headdress; the cobra seems ready to attack anyone who dares to disturb her. The headdress is bound with a vulture cap having a low modius colored in yellow¹⁶, topped by



Fig. 8. The goddess Abaset
(Photograph by Walid Shaikh al Arab)

¹⁵ The sketch was wrongly placed under its suitable position.

¹⁶ There was not basic color term for the yellow in the Ancient Egyptian language although it occurred as a pigment from the prehistoric times. In art, yellow pigment was often used to represent the metal gold *nbw* which was not only associated with the sun, but also was the flesh of the gods, see G. ROBINS, *Color Symbolism*, in D.B. REDFORD, *The Oxford encyclopedia cit.*, I, p. 292; H.G. FISCHER, *Varia Aegyptiaca. 1. Yellow-skinned Representations of Men in the Old Kingdom*, «JARCE» 2 (1963), pp. 17-22.

her remarkable hedgehog headdress in blue¹⁷ suggesting lapis lazuli “*hsbd*”. Her left arm is represented alongside her body, with the hand that may grip the generic *ankh*-sign, while she holds in the right hand a papyrus staff commonly depicted with other goddesses. The text which accompanies the deity was unfortunately lost.

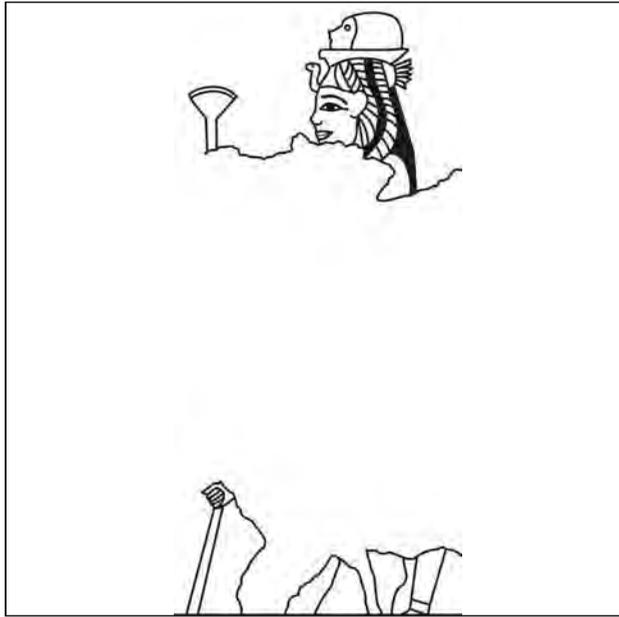


Fig. 9. Facsimile of the image of the goddess Abaset, southern wall, main columned hall (C). (Drawing by Walid Shaikh al Arab)

Second document

The second document presents a scene recorded on the west wall of the tomb of Bannentiu¹⁸, who was one of the local nobles during the 26th Dynasty (664-

¹⁷ The ancient Egyptian did not have a term for «blue» which was not part of the original system of color symbolism found in texts, although it became the most prestigious paint color, see ROBINS, *Color Symbolism* cit., p. 292; H. KEES, *Farbensymbolik in ägyptischen religiösen Texten*, «Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, phil.-hist. Klasse» 11 (1943), pp. 413-479.

¹⁸ The tomb of Bannentiu is one of the Saite monuments at Bahariyya Oasis which includes the tombs of Qarat Qasr Salim: tombs of DjedAmuniwefankh and Bannentiu, the Qasr Allam settlement, the tombs of Qarat al-Subi: tombs of Badiastarte, Thaty, TanefertBastet, Badilsis,

525 BC). As a significant scene in understanding the development of the cult of the hedgehog goddess at Bahariyya Oasis and the only complete inscription referring to the goddess, it deserves closer attention. The entrance of the left side-burial chamber divides the scene on the west wall of pillared hall into two parts. On the left side, there are two representations for the owner of the tomb in different attitudes¹⁹ raising his arms in adoration in front of eight deities²⁰: Re-Horakhty, Abaset, Atum, Isis, Khepri, Heka, Sekhmet, Banebdjedet²¹ (fig. 10).

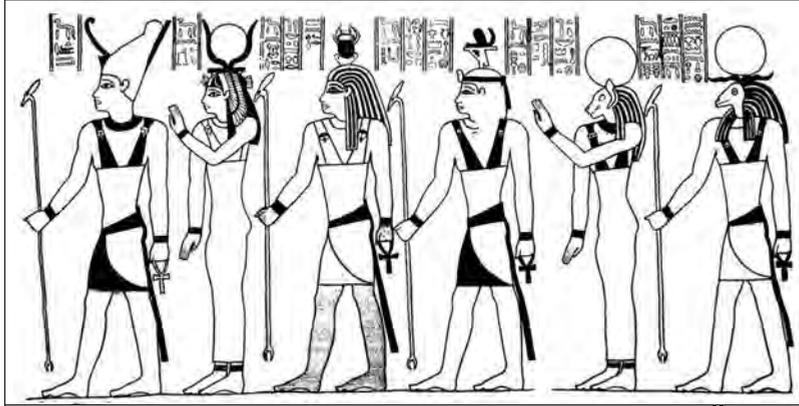


Fig. 10. The representation of Atum, Isis, Khepri, Heka, Sekhmet, Banebdjedet²².
After: AHMED FAKHRY, *Bahria Oasis*, Vol. 1 cit., p. 80 (fig. 36).

Naas, and Djedkhonsuiwefankh, and the four shrines of Ain Al-Muftella. For more readings about the Saite monuments at Bahariya Oasis, see K. Jansen-Winkel, *Inschriften der Spätzeit. Teil IV. Die 26. Dynastie*, Wiesbaden 2014, pp. 1113-1117 (667), 1125-1130 (679-680); F. LABRIQUE, *Le catalogue divin de 'Ayn al-Mouftella. Jeux de miroir autour de "celui qui est dans ce temple"*, «BIFAO» 104 (2004), p. 336; D. ARNOLD, *Temples of the Last Pharaohs*, New York-Oxford 1999, p. 88; W. EL-SADEEK, *Twenty-Sixth Dynasty Necropolis at Gizeh: An Analysis of the Tomb of Thery and its Place in the Development of Saite Funerary art and Architecture*, Beiträge zur Ägyptologie, 5, Wien 1984, pp. 173-174, 190; PM VII, pp. 299-308; FAKHRY, *The Oases of Egypt*. Vol. II cit., p. 64; FAKHRY, *Bahria Oasis*, Vol.1 cit., pp. 49-63, 65-93, 99, 123, 148, 152; G. STEINDORFF, *Durch die Libysche Wüste zur Amonsoase, Land und Leute XIX*, Bielefeld-Leipzig, 1904, p. 135, fig. 101.

¹⁹ The first representation which is executed on the sketch of an offering-table shows a small figure of the tomb owner kneeling and raising his arms, while the second one performed on a grand scale, depicts him in standing position with his arms raised.

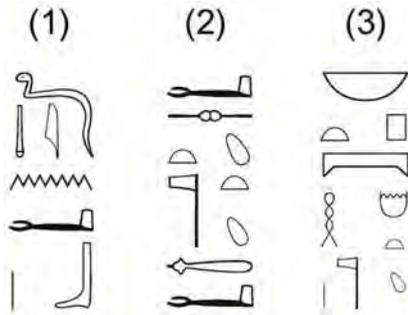
²⁰ Two of the eight deities are to the left of the door while the other six being to the right.

²¹ For more readings about this god, see W. SHAIKH AL ARAB, *The Iconography of the God Banebdjedet*, «IJHTh» 7/2 (2013), pp. 64-87; G. HART, *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*, London 2005, pp. 44-45; R.H. WILKINSON, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, New York 2003, pp. 192-193; CH. LEITZ, *LGG II*, p. 683_b-685_A.

²² This illustration is painted on the west wall of Columned Hall, tomb of B3-n-ntyw.

The image of the goddess Abaset shows her in anthropomorphic form wearing a headdress, which consists of a heavy braided tripartite wig leaving the ears exposed. It is bound with a vulture cap having a low modius, surmounted by her remarkable hedgehog headdress painted in blue. There is an uraeus on the forehead. She wears a tight tunic painted in red²³. Her tunic is held by two shoulder straps that cover her breasts. She also wears a *usekh*-collar, two bracelets, and two anklets. She raises her right hand behind the shoulder of Re-Horakhty in the gesture of protection while her left arm is represented along her side (figs. 11 and 12).

In front of and over the head of Abaset, there are three short columns of hieroglyphic inscriptions (1-3) reading from left to right (←↓).



(1) *ḏd mdw in* ⁽¹⁾*ḃ*⁽²⁾*st nṯrt* ⁽³⁾*nb(t) pt ḥmt-nṯrt*²⁴

(1) Words to be spoken by Aba⁽²⁾set Great goddess, (3) Lady of the sky, God's wife.

²³ The red color-*dšr* was one of the four basic color terms-*km*, *ḥd*, *dšr* and *wšd* which was written with a hieroglyph that represented a flamingo. It was considered a very potent color; hot and dangerous but also life-giving and protective. It is both the color of blood, a substance that relates to life and death, and of fire, which may be beneficial or destructive. It is also a color frequently given to the sun, which may be red at its rising or at its sitting. In Egyptian art men were generally depicted with red skin, indicating their vitality and during celebrations people would paint their bodies with red ocre and wear carnelian, for more reading about the red color and its symbolism in Ancient Egypt, see ROBINS, *Color Symbolism* cit., p. 292; G. PINCH, *Red Things: The Symbolism of Colour in Magic*, in W. VIVIAN DAVIES, *Colour and Paintings in Ancient Egypt*, London 2001, p. 184; J.G. GRIFFITHS, *The Symbolism of Red in Egyptian Religion*, in *Ex Orbe religionum*, Leiden 1972, pp. 81-90.

²⁴ *ḥmt-nṯrt* was a banal epithet carried by many goddesses from the New Kingdom (1550 BC –1077 BC) to the Greco-Roman Period (30 BC-641 AD); *ḥst*, *ḥst-m-Bḥdt*, *ḥst-mḥyt*, *ḥwt-ḥr*, *ḥrskt*, *šdt* and *tfnwt*, see LGG V, p. 136(b-c); P. WILSON, *A Ptolemaic Lexikon: A Lexicographical Study of the Texts in the Temple of Edfu*, OLA, 78, Leuven 1997, p. 646; *Wb* III 78, 14-15.

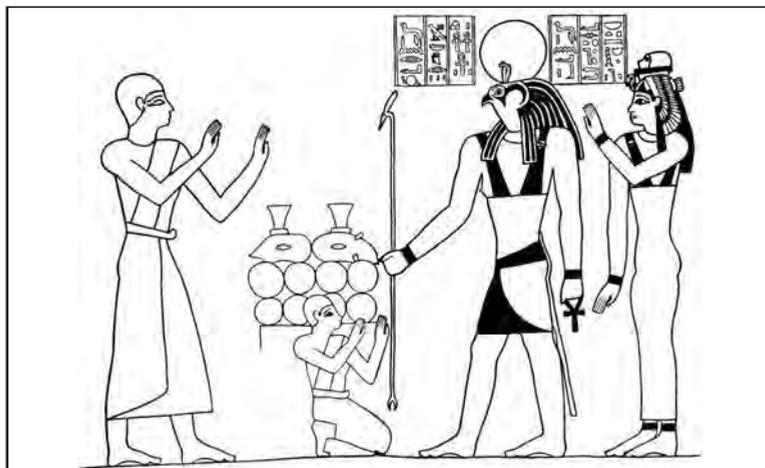


Fig. 11. Drawing of two figures of Bannentiu raising his arms in adoration to Re-Horakhty and Abaset²⁵. After: FAKHRY, *Bahria Oasis, Vol.1* cit., p. 78 (fig. 35).



Fig. 12. Bannentiu raises his arms in adoration to Re-Horakhty and Abaset.
(Photograph by Walid Shailh al Arab)

²⁵ This drawing is mentioned also in the publication of HEND SHERBINY- HUSSEIN BASSIR, *The Representation* cit., p. 183 (fig. 12) and Vera von Droste zu Hülshoff, *Der Igel im alten Ägypten*, HÄB, 11, Hildesheim 1980, p. 94 (fig. 35).

Third document

Finally, the goddess Abaset is shown on the southern west pillar²⁶ of the pillared hall of the tomb of Bannentiu. At the top of the scene, two uraei flanked the winged solar disc. Directly underneath, a decor, otherwise very original, shows the representation of a pair of deities, the god Banebdjedet and the goddess Abaset. They are looking to the south in the direction of the tomb entrance.

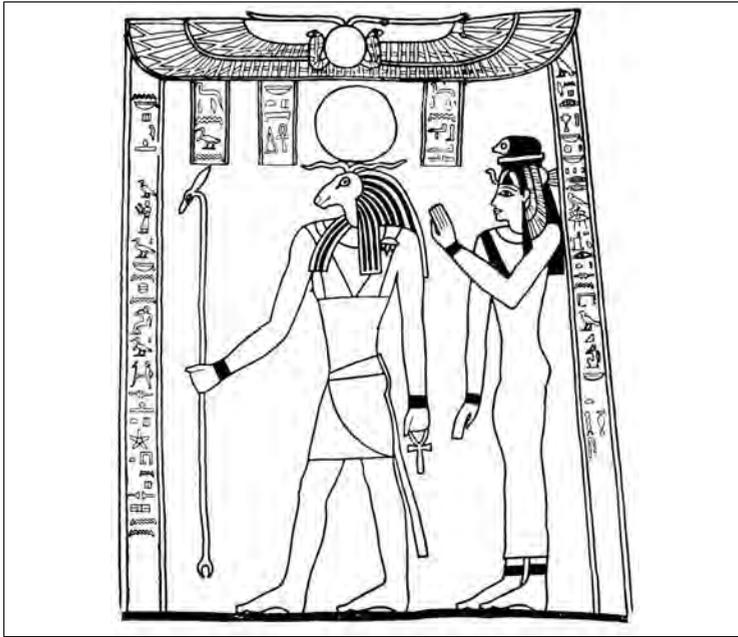


Fig. 13. Drawing for the god Banebdjedet followed by the goddess Abaset
After: FAKHRY, *Bahria Oasis, Vol.1* cit., p. 83 (fig. 41)²⁷

The god Banebdjedet (figs. 13 and 14) is represented in hybrid form, Ram headed human form. He is depicted standing with the right leg striding forward. He wears a short kilt-*shendjet* with belt. On its back is attached a long cere-

²⁶ The first pillar to the left of tomb visitor.

²⁷ This figure is mentioned also in the publication of HEND SHERBINY-HUSSEIN BASSIR, *The Representation* cit., p. 186 (fig. 15) and VERA VON DROSTE ZU HÜLSHOFF, *Der Igel im alten Ägypten*, HÄB 11, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 94 (fig. 36).

monial tail. He holds a *was*-scepter in the right hand and an *ankh*-sign in the left hand. He wears a long tripartite wig topped with two massive twisted horns and a sun-disk.

Mythologically, the god Banebdjedet was supposed to have represented the soul of Osiris. In Late Period, this association was widened to four manifestations – as the soul of Re, Osiris, Shu and Geb – an aspect of his nature which added significantly to his importance²⁸. In this scene, the god Banebdjedet represents the soul of the god Re-Horakhty.

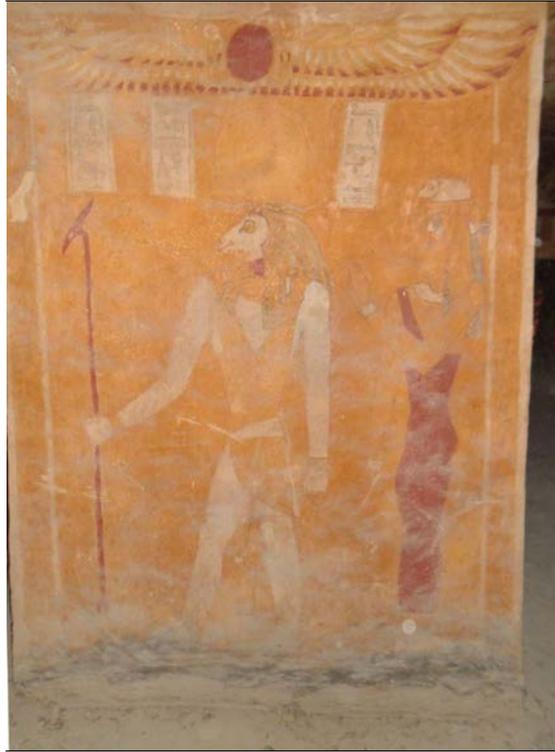


Fig. 14. The god Banebdjedet followed by the goddess Abaset.
(Photograph by Walid Shaikh al Arab)

The goddess Abaset (figs. 13 and 14) is depicted in an anthropomorphic form wearing a tight tunic with two shoulder stars. Accessories that the goddess wears include *usekh*-collar, two bracelets and two anklets. She raises the

²⁸ WILKINSON, *The Complete Gods* cit., p. 192.

right hand behind the shoulder of Banebdjedet in the gesture of protection while the left arm is alongside her body. The youthful face of the goddess is framed by a heavy tripartite wig leaving the ears visible. The wig is surmounted with a vulture cap having a low modius, topped by her significant hedgehog headdress. The uraeus is on the forehead of the goddess.

In front of and over the head of the goddess Abaset, one short column of inscriptions (1) reading from left to right ($\leftarrow\downarrow$)²⁹.



⁽¹⁾*dd mdw in °b°-s[t]*

⁽¹⁾Words to be spoken by Abas[et]

Only one side of each pillar is painted. These sides are the ones to right and left of the person crossing the central corridor. The four scenes represent four gods, who firstly ruled Egypt: Banebdjedet (replaces the god Re-Horakhty), Shu, Geb and Osiris. Every deity was followed by his consort (fig. 14).

²⁹ It is noteworthy that the text, which accompanies the goddess Abaset is not complete. This can be explained as follows: the scribe, who was in charge of writing the text, was in a hurry to accomplish it. Therefore, he made an error by not completing her accompanying text. Another opinion may suggest that the space in front of and over the head of the goddess was not enough to write the supposed full text of the goddess Abaset.

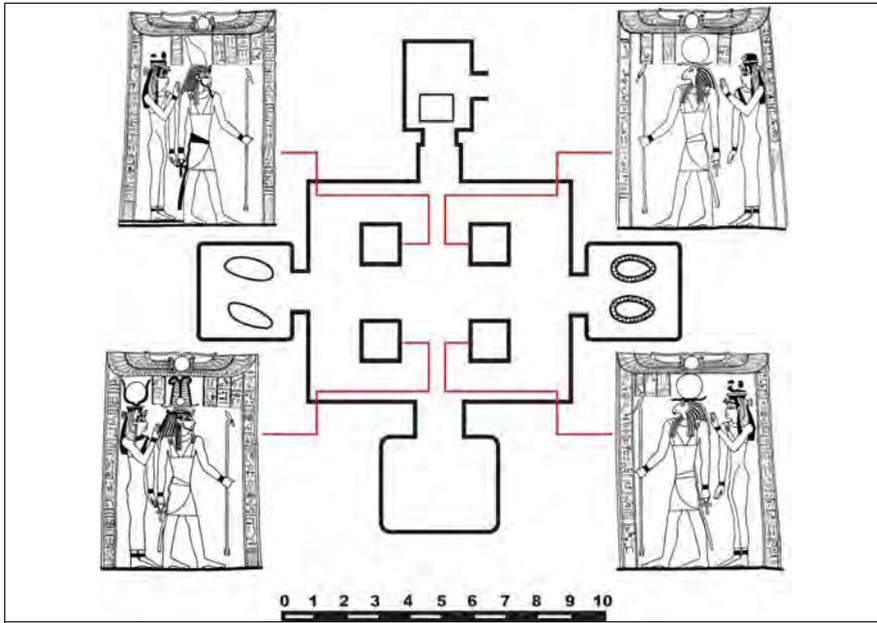
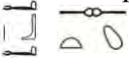


Fig. 15. The painted scenes on the four pillars of columned hall, tomb of Bannentiu.
(Schema by Walid Shaikh al Arab)

III. Results and Discussion

The archaeological work which formerly carried out on the main cult center of the goddess Abaset at el-Bawiti, the capital of the Bahariyya Oasis, has been little or not published. So it will then be necessary to wait for new archaeological work to be undertaken on the proposed site of Abaset's cult center, so that we can know better not only her geographical implantation, but also other facets of this divinity and thus to better define the nature of her personality and her worship. Moreover further excavations and studies of collections with Egyptian and Levantine objects will inevitably turn out the development of her cult proposed here.

The paleography of the name of the goddess Abaset is attested only twice; one of them is incomplete³⁰. In the complete version, the name was written with complete phonetic signs  and the determinative of feminine divinities  [Gardiner H8].

The meaning of the name of the goddess Abaset is still mysterious. No clear explanation has been provided yet. Firstly, Ahmed Fakhry³¹ read her name as «‘Ab‘as» and he referred only to one graphical form of her name: . Then in 1980, von Droste zu Hülshoff³² read her name as ‘b^cs.t.

In 2002, Christian Leitz³³ read the name of the goddess as abast and he did not offer any translation for his suggestion. Then Pascal Vernus in 2005³⁴ read the name of the goddess as ‘b^cs.t. In his illustrated dictionary, Jean-Pierre Corteggiani,³⁵ read her name as Âbâset. Finally in 2014, Hend Sherbiny and Hussein Bassir gave for the first time an interpretation for the goddess’ name. They indicated that her name is probably consisted of two parts: ‘b and sst, and they translated the name as «praising Isis» or «boasting Isis»³⁶.

All the previous studies have not exactly determined the meaning of the name of the goddess Abaset. Therefore, one can propose that its grammatical structure consists of two parts: the word ‘b^c, followed by the substantive st. The paleography of the term ‘b^c can be found in the dictionary of Dimitri Meeks in the form of a verb «se glorifier: “boast”, être fier: “to be proud”»³⁷ and a noun «vantardise: “boastfulness”, exagération: “exaggeration”»³⁸. The graphic forms of ‘b^c also appear in the dictionary of Leonard H. Lesko in three forms; a verb «to boast», an adjective «boastful, arrogant, boasting, haughty», and a noun «boast, boasting, exaggeration»³⁹. The calligraphy of the same term also occurs in the repertoire of Penelope Wilson in the shape of ‘b and ‘b^c⁴⁰.

³⁰ See *supra*, p. 98, n. 29.

³¹ FAKHRY, *Bahria Oasis I* cit., p. 78.

³² VON DROSTE ZU HÜLSHOFF, *Der Igel* cit., p. 93, n. 2.

³³ CH. LEITZ, *LGG*, II, OLA, 111, p. 88c [1-2].

³⁴ P. VERNUS, *Hérisson*, in P. VERNUS-J. YOYOTTE, *Bestiaire des Pharaons*, Paris 2005, pp. 145-146.

³⁵ CORTEGGIANI, *L’Égypte ancienne* cit., p. 8.

³⁶ H. SHERBINY-H. BASSIR, *The Representation* cit., pp. 180-181.

³⁷ D. MEEKS, *Année lexicographique Égypte ancienne*, Tome 3, 1979, p. 45 [79.0451].

³⁸ ID., *Année lexicographique*, Tome 1, 1977, p. 61 [77.0613]; and Tome 3, 1979, p. 45 [79.0452].

³⁹ L.H. LESKO, *A Dictionary of Late Egyptian*, Berkeley 1982, p. 64.

Finally the different graphic forms of *aba* appear in the register of Adolf Erman, Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, in the configuration of a verb «*prahlen*: “to boast”», or a noun «*prahlerei*: “boasting, boastfulness”, *Übertreibung*: “exaggeration”»⁴¹. Therefore, one can translate the name as a “the woman who boasts of (her beauty)”⁴² or “the boastful woman”⁴³.

It is evident that the main epithets of the goddess Abaset don't indicate her different aspects and roles that the deity was able to play in the Ancient Egyptian pantheon. Abaset held the banal epithets of «*ntrt* *ʿst*: great goddess»⁴⁴, «*nb(t) pt*: mistress of heaven»⁴⁵, «*hmt-ntrt*: god's wife»⁴⁶, which she shares with many other goddesses. It is significant that the epithets which were held by Abaset are known only from the 26th Dynasty.

In the 26th Dynasty, the fame of the goddess Abaset remarkably increased and she acquired popularity that allowed her to appear alongside the great deities of the ancient Egyptian pantheon. The historical development of her cult was characterized by her relationship with other deities, particularly the solar deity, Re-Horakhty, with whom she eventually formed a divine couple.

As for the iconography of the goddess Abaset, she was represented in an anthropomorphic form. She wore heavy three-part wig surmounted with a vulture cap, topped by a remarkable hedgehog. The reason for this iconography is unclear. It is significant that the representation of Abaset before the 26th Dynasty was unknown. The Hedgehog crown was specific to Abaset. It is a key element and an identification index for the goddess, especially if the image was not labelled with her name.

The occurrence and use of the images of goddess Abaset seem to be geographically restricted. Her traditional main cult center, el-Bawiti revealed the only known documents where the goddess appears.

Finally, the representations of Abaset precisely with her remarkable hedgehog crown reflect her mythological character. The mores of hedgehog, the little

⁴⁰ Cit., P. WILSON, *A Ptolemaic Lexikon* cit., p. 147.

⁴¹ *Wb.* I, p. 177, 17-22.

⁴² In this case it is a verbal sentence including a *sdm=f* form: *ʿbc*: verb and *st*: substantive used as subject.

⁴³ It's a simple nominal sentence composed of *ʿbc*: logical adjectival predicate and *st*: substantive used as logical subject.

⁴⁴ For more readings about this common epithet, see *LGG* IV, 562_B-563_A.

⁴⁵ About this this popular nomination, see *LGG* IV, 49_A-50_B.

⁴⁶ For further reading about this banal title, see *supra*, p. 94, n. 24.

nocturnal insectivorous, which only goes out for hunt when the sun disappears, its ability to see and move at night, and that to take the appearance of a ball radiant with spikes to defend itself, are probably enough to explain this link with the sun. These particularities of the animal may be interpreted as those of a kind of nocturnal star replacing that of the day. The fact that the goddess Temet, the female counterpart of the Heliopolitan solar demiurge, is represented in the sanctuary of the temple of Hibis in el-Kharga Oasis, under the aspect of what can only be a hedgehog curiously swaddled, seems to confirm this possibility⁴⁷.

IV. Conclusion

In representational works Abaset is usually depicted as a goddess in completely human form. The Hedgehog crown was specific to Abaset; it is a key element and an identification index for the goddess, especially on appearing without inscription. The exact reason for this iconography is unclear. It is significant to note that the representation of Abaset is known only from the 26th Dynasty.

A little-known goddess Abaset seems to have been associated with the solar deities, but her exact nature and roles are uncertain. In the 26th Dynasty the goddess Abaset is attested alongside the great deities of the Egyptian pantheon *e.g.* the solar god Re-Horakhty with whom she eventually formed a divine couple.

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⁴⁷ CORTEGGIANI, *L'Égypte ancienne* cit., p. 8.