Egyptian Interest in the Oases in the New Kingdom and a New Stela for Seth from Mut el-Kharab

Colin Hope and Olaf Kaper

The study of ancient interaction between Egypt and the occupants of regions to the west has focused, quite understandably, upon the major confrontations with the groups now regularly referred to as Libyans from the time of Seti I to Ramesses III, and the impact these had upon Egyptian society. The situation in the oases of the Western Desert and the role they might have played during these conflicts has not received, until recently, much attention, largely because of the paucity of information either from the Nile Valley or the oases themselves. Yet, given their strategic location, it is not unrealistic to imagine that their control would have been of importance to Egypt both during the confrontations and in the period thereafter. In this short study we present a summary of recently discovered material that contributes significantly to this question, with a focus upon discoveries made at Mut el-Kharab since excavations commenced there in 2001, and a more detailed discussion of one object, a new stela with a hymn dedicated to Seth, which is the earliest attestation of his veneration at the site. We hope that the comments will be of interest to the scholar to whom this volume is dedicated; they are offered with respect, in light of the major contribution he has made to Ramesside studies, and with thanks for his dedication as a teacher and generosity as a colleague.

I: New Kingdom material from the Western Desert Oases: a brief review and some implications

At the height of the conflict between Kamose and the Hyksos control by the former of Bahariya, which lay in the Hyksos sphere of influence, was crucial to cut off lines of communication between Apophis and Kush, though it is not certain whether these passed through Farafra, Dakhleh and Kharga or skirted around them. Archaeological material, mostly ceramics, documents activity during the Second Intermediate Period at two sites within Bahariya, namely Khataba and Qaret el-Toub, and at the

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2 Manassa, The Great Karnak Inscription of Merneptah, 94–103, is the notable exception.

3 These are conducted by C. A. Hope on behalf of the Dakhleh Oasis Project, and have been funded by Monash University and Australians Studying Abroad.

latter examples of the distinctive type of Tell el-Yahudiyeh ware, Piriform 2, have been found that occur within the Hyksos sphere of influence. From the same time there is now ample evidence for activity within Dakhleh and Kharga and along the routes into Thebes, all of which may have been under Theban control. This clearly highlights the strategic importance of the oases at one period when the unity of the Egyptian state had collapsed and external threat was strong.

It is natural that following this interlude and on the reunification of Egypt at the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty, all of the oases would once again have been annexed by the Nile Valley administration and remained under its control throughout the New Kingdom. Their administration was predominantly the concern of officials of the temple estates of Amun at Thebes by the time of Thutmose III, who oversaw their economic exploitation; viniculture became a major activity until the end of the period, supplemented by exploitation of the mineral reserves. The pictorial and documentary evidence for this activity from the Valley has been supplemented in recent years by discoveries both within the oases themselves and in the Valley. From Qantir to Buhen fragments of amphorae and other types of vessel manufactured in the oases, especially Dakhleh and Kharga, have been identified, sometimes in considerable numbers. Similar forms have been found on the desert routes out of Thebes into Kharga, and at various sites within


7 Whilst information concerning Farafra is scant and exists only from the Nineteenth Dynasty (L. L. Giddy, *Egyptian Oases* (Warminster, 1987) 164), it is inconceivable that it was not under Egyptian control throughout the New Kingdom.


Figure 2: Plan of Mut el-Kharab showing the location of excavation units (drawing by J. Knudstad and updated by B. Rowney with additions by B. Parr).
Figure 3: Plan of excavation units 6, 18, 21 and 25 at Mut el-Kharab (drawing by B. Rowney, F. Hardtke, G. Bowen and C. A. Hope, adapted by B. Pari).
A New Stela for Seth from Mut el-Kharab

Bahariya, Kharga and Dakhleh, along with a variety of other types of material; New Kingdom activity is documented on the Abu Ballas Trail leading south-west from Dakhleh. In addition to the ample ceramic data, various sites with New Kingdom material are now known. In Bahariya near to the famous tomb of Amenhotep Huy at Bawiti, of late Eighteenth or early Nineteenth Dynasty, there is a cemetery at Qaret el-Toub. In Kharga near the Hibis temple is a cemetery that has yielded scarabs of Thutmose I and III, and a likely settlement has been identified at Qasr Ghuweita. In Dakhleh, the Old Kingdom capital at 'Ain Aseel was occupied throughout the period until the Nineteenth or Twentieth Dynasty; Fakhry’s work there uncovered parts of two inscribed doorjambs referring to a cult place of Nerit, who is also mentioned upon a fragmentary stela from the site ascribed to the period of Thutmose III and Hatshepsut. Not far from ‘Ain Aseel is the cemetery of ‘Ain Tirghi where several graves of the New Kingdom have been identified, from one of which comes a scarab of Thutmose III, while Amhida at the western end of the oasis has produced a hieratic ostrakon ascribed to the Ramesside Period.

Mut el-Kharab, in the south centre of Dakhleh, emerged as a major site during the New Kingdom and has yielded the most significant material for the period from the Western Desert. The site (Figure 2) comprises the largest temenos enclosure surviving in Dakhleh, measuring 240 m N/S x 180 m E/W, with walls up to 8 m thick, within which are the scant remains of a stone temple, a wide variety of mud-brick structures and a large well. To its immediate south lies a cemetery of the Late Period, and others of similar date are located to the north, north-east and west, while Ptolemaic and Roman Period cemeteries occur over a wider area. Excavations have been focused within the central part of the site where the temple once stood, and in the north-west and south-east corners. The first phase of activity may be tentatively assigned to the Early Dynastic Period to early Old Kingdom; material thereafter until the New Kingdom is at a premium, while most relates to activity from the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty to the Mamluk Period. New Kingdom data takes the form of ceramics, sculpture, beads, and inscribed/decorated stone.

10 For discussion see the references cited in notes 6 and 9; unpublished material from North Kharga has kindly been made available to me by A. Gascoigne and S. Ikram.
12 C. van Siclen, Wall Scenes from the Tomb of Amenhotep (Hay), Governor of Bahria Oasis (San Antonio, 1981).
15 The ancient name for the site, Per-wesekh, is preserved upon docketts from Malkata; see, most recently, S. Marchand and P. Tallet, ‘Ayn Asil et l’oasis de Dakhla au Nouvel Empire’, BIFAO 99 (1999), 312.
17 Marchand and Tallet, BIFAO 99 (1999), 309. The reference to ‘blocks with cartouche of Ramesses IX’ in PM VII, 295 is incorrect; they carry the cartouche of Pepi II, see J. Oising et al., Denkmäler der Oase Dachla aus dem Nachlass von Ahmed Fakhry (Archäologisches Veröffentlichungen 28; Mainz am Rhein, 1982), 35-6, nos 33-4, and Giddy, Egyptian Oases, 239.
19 It bears part of the school book Kemyt, and it is being prepared for publication by O. E. Kaper.
fragments from religious and domestic structures. The majority of this material need only be reviewed briefly for present purposes. The ceramics attest primarily amphorae, bread moulds and offering jars with perforated bases, and derive almost entirely from considerable deposits of discarded, predominantly Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, pottery that occur below the outer walls of the temple. The amphorae are of types imitating Egyptian forms and others manufactured only within the oases; and all fragments are made in oases fabrics; while their date range cannot be determined with certainty, some are of types that occur in the Ramesside Period on the basis of parallels from Qantir. The bread moulds are typical of the type found on temple sites throughout the Nile Valley in the New Kingdom, and the offering jars have parallels from late Eighteenth Dynasty onwards. The decoration upon a single blue-painted jar is typical of the Ramesside Period. The faience beads parallel types known from Amarna, Qantir and various other sites, and the single piece of sculpture, a head from a private statue of a male, wears a type of wig common in the middle of the Eighteenth Dynasty; these also were found amongst later dumped material.

The inscribed and decorated fragments can be dated with greater precision. From rubble resulting from the destruction of the temple come the lower part of a cartouche preserving the prenomen of Thutmose III, which can be assigned to the second half of his reign on the basis of the inclusion of the epithet stp n r; and another block inscribed in low raised relief with mry nb wh3t, the orthography of which is of the middle of the Eighteenth Dynasty. The other blocks of interest here were found reused in pavements associated with structures immediately to the west of the location of the main temple (Figure 3). Here, excavation unit 6 has been identified as a possible shrine, and a well-preserved relief of Psamtek I worshipping Ra-Horakhty and Atum was found, plus fragments in similar style. In the western room on the north, sandstone blocks were set upon a sub-floor ledge, and one of these possibly derives from a private house of the Ramesside Period. It preserves the left side of a sandstone lintel with a decorated and inscribed area below a horizontal torus moulding and a cavetto cornice. Most of the decoration and text has been obliterated but on the left the figure of a female is preserved. Another, found in the entrance to the same room from the north, preserves part of what may be a portable barque shrine and accompanying text refers to Amun-Ra; the piece may also be of Ramesside date.

The ledge and its surrounding features relate to other structures found immediately to the north of unit 6, and which were substantially modified during the course of architectural additions to the area. The stratigraphy needs clarification, but the remains of a pavement comprising blocks of different sizes and types of sandstone have been revealed in unit 21, the area adjacent to unit 6 and south of unit 18 (Figure 3). This area was accessed from the northern part of the temple through a door in its main east wall, which forms the east wall of unit 6 also, while on its west the pavement overlies a section of a wide red-brick wall that is part of the earlier configuration of the area to which the sub-floor features in unit 6 probably belong. Six blocks from a monument of Horemheb dedicated to Amun-Ra were found amongst

For some see Hope, *The Artefact* 26, Figure 6b–e.

Hope et al. in Friedman (ed.) *Egypt and Nubia: Gifts of the Desert*, 100–1.


Hope, *The Artefact* 24, pl. 7.

Hope, *BACE* 13, pl.12.

The majority of the inscribed/decorated blocks from the rubble date from the Third Intermediate Period to the Late Period, with a couple of fragments of Ptolemaic Period date; Roman material is absent from the area of the temple but has been found elsewhere. The majority awaits detailed study.


Hope, *The Artefact* 26, 57.
the paving blocks; several preserve the cartouches of the king, fragments of his figure and that of Amun-Ra. Within the same pavement was a single block from a monument of Ramesses IV that preserves the lower parts of his cartouches. The paving continued for an uncertain distance to the west and also into a small room west of unit 18 and on the north of unit 25, which lies due west of unit 21. Most of the paving had, like elsewhere, been removed, but fortunately a series of blocks remained in the eastern half of the room. Whilst several bore slight traces of once having been either inscribed or decorated, a single block in the entrance to the room preserved much of its decoration and part of a hymn. This block is discussed in detail below; it depicts Seth and Nephthys before Amun, above a text containing a hymn to Seth, and then a scene containing the figure of the donor and his family (Figure 4; Plates 1-3). This we ascribe to the Ramesside Period on the basis of parallels to other such prayers/hymns to Seth, and as such it is currently the earliest evidence for the cult of Seth at Mut el-Kharab. The date at which the pavement was laid down cannot, as yet, be determined. From basal and sub-wall levels in unit 18, which must have been in existence when this occurred, come substantial quantities of demotic and some Greek ostraka, many of which are datable to the second half of the Ptolemaic Period; however, immediately below the inner walls of the room in unit 25 that contained the prayer to Seth, sherd of Old Kingdom and Early Dynastic Period pottery were recovered within contexts that were devoid of later material, indicating considerable disparity between the nature of the deposits within adjacent areas.

When the material outlined above is related to documentation of conflicts between Egypt and her neighbours, some interesting coincidences emerge. Clearly, the energetic policies of Thutmose III impacted upon the Western Desert, and a small but significant body of material has been identified from his reign. This coincides with documentation from Thebes especially to confirm Egyptian domination of the region. Mut el-Kharab has yielded evidence of construction under Horemheb. Reliefs in his Memphite tomb imply some interaction with Libyans, though the exact nature of this cannot be determined from the surviving material. It is, however, of interest that under Akhenaten conflict between Egypt and some Libyans occurred, as attested by the painted papyrus fragments from the House of the King’s Statue at Amarna. During this reign Libyans are depicted making offering to the king in the celebrations of year 12 and within his army, thus the relationship was not only of hostility. Evidence from the reign of Amenhotep III indicates contact with new peoples from the West, possibly implying a change in the demographic make-up of its inhabitants that could have had significant impact upon Egypt’s relations with the region. The effect of such changes was certainly felt during the reigns of Seti I – Merenptah, Ramesses III and thereafter, when conflict with various Libyan groups was a major element in Egyptian foreign affairs and also internal security. The occurrence of Ramesside material especially in Dakhleh

32 The title stp.n […] is written at the end of the first cartouche with the hieroglyph of the Red Crown. This sign is only attested in the throne name of Ramesses IV, according to the material collected in Gauthier, Le livre des rois d’Égypte III (MIFAO 19; Cairo, 1914) and J. von Beckerath, Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen, (2nd edn Münchner Ägyptologische Studien 49; Mainz am Rhein, 1999).
33 I am grateful to Dr G. Vittmann and Professor K. A. Worp for information on these texts.
37 For the first reference to the Meshwesh, see W. C. Hayes, ‘Inscriptions from the Palace of Amenhotep III’, JNES 10 (1951), 82; the poetical stela of Amenhotep III alludes to capture of the Tjehenu, but whether this indicates actual conflict is questionable, see Manassa, The Great Karnak Inscription of Merenptah, 65.
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Oasis attests a continued interest in the region, which may be related to the Libyan menace. The link between these categories of material seems inescapable, and Egyptian activity in the oases of the Western Desert may reasonably be considered to reflect a concern not only with the economic exploitation of the region but with the security of its western border and its dealings with the Libyans. The necessity for this must have been made clear following the year 5 invasion under Merenptah, when it is suggested that an attempt to organize simultaneous attacks by Libyans and their allies, and from Nubia, was coordinated using routes that passed through the oases, and during which Farafra may have been taken by the Libyans. As control of the coastal routes into Egypt was attempted under Ramesses II by means of a series of large fortifications along the Mediterranean, some means of securing the desert routes would surely have been affected. In this regard Mut el-Kharab might have played a significant role. (CAH)

II: A Hymn to Seth from Mut el-Kharab (Figures 4–7)

Description

The stela is made from local sandstone of a reddish hue. The entire top of the stela and the bottom left corner are missing and there is a large piece missing from the middle of the right hand side. The surviving height is 109 cm, its width tapers slightly towards the top, measuring 37 cm at the base and 34 cm at the top; its thickness is 20 cm. The lower half of the surface of the stone is abraded, suggesting that it was used as a paving stone at some stage, even though when found it was face down. Some remains of colour, notably red, survive. The central figure at the top of the stela had a red skin colour; the left figure had a blue skin. The hieroglyphs were multi-coloured, only sporadic traces of which remain.

The carving of the stela is quite crude, with schematic and irregular renderings of the divine figures carved in sunk relief. The arms and legs of the figures are drawn stick-like, which betrays the hand of an unskilled sculptor. Likewise, there has not been much attention to the carving of individual hieroglyphic signs, which are crudely drawn and placed haphazardly between the dividing lines. The stela tapers towards the top, and the horizontal lines in the stela indicate that the right edge of the stone served as vertical for the sculptor. The top of the stela has a scene with three figures, of which the top is missing, as also its left edge. From the remaining part of the scene, the following conclusions may be drawn. A male divinity is depicted on the left, holding a wAs staff in his hand. Behind this figure, the missing portion of the relief allows for a narrow vertical element in the scene. Facing him are two other divinities, one male and one female, both holding divine staffs. The first divinity holds a wAs staff and he wears the short kilt commonly found in Egyptian divine representations. No rear arm is visible, which indicates that this arm was held up in adoration towards the god on the left. The goddess behind him holds a wAD staff in her hand as well as what appears to be an ostrich feather, symbol of the concept of Maat. The top of the feather is missing, but the lower part that narrows sharply on its left side is distinctive. Her rear arm probably held an ankh sign, but this element is damaged.

Who are these deities? In view of the text of the stela, which addresses Seth, one expects the principal god depicted to be Seth. The secondary male god should then be Amun of Thebes, as there is a wide range of evidence associating the gods Seth and Amun in the context of temple cult or private devotion. This

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38 I have followed here the interpretation offered by Manassa, *The Great Karnak Inscription of Merneptah*, 94–5, that the oasis mentioned is Siwa and that ‘the shadu of the district of Farafra’ alludes to some distinctive topographic feature there. If the former was a reference to Bahariya and the latter an indication that Farafra was inaccessible, as in previous interpretations, this would not significantly alter the importance loss of areas of the region would have had upon Egyptian border security in the west. That the Libyans actually seized control of all of the western desert routes (Spalinger, *War in Ancient Egypt*, 236) is not indicated in the Merenptah inscriptions.

39 Previously the piece was mentioned and illustrated in Hope et al., *BACE* 16 (2005), 43, pl. 8 and Hope, *Egyptian Archaeology* 27, 5.
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Figure 4: Facsimile drawing of the stela with hymn to Seth from Mut el-Kharab (drawing by O. E. Kaper).

Figure 5: The stela with a hymn to Seth from Mut el-Kharab (© C. A. Hope).
fact was first pointed out by Vandier in 1969. Thus, the principal temple of Seth in Ombos (Egyptian Nbw.t, modern Tukh near Naqada) also housed a cult for Amun in the Ramesside period. A private lintel of the priest of Seth Userhat, which was found at the site of the temple, depicts both gods together. A stela from Deir el-Medina of the workman Amenemope described further below (no. 4), addresses both Amun and Seth in the same homage, while only one of these gods, probably Amun, was depicted at the top of the stela. At the temple of Seth from which the present stela derives, that of Mut el-Kharab, the situation appears to have been similar. One inscribed block of the Ramesside temple, which was reused in a later construction, mentions Amun-Re explicitly. The smaller Dakhleh Stela from the same temple, which dates to the reign of Piye, mentions a priest who serviced in the temples of both Amun and Seth. This man, whose name is lost, held the titles of God’s Father of Amun and Second Prophet of Seth (line 5). The donation decree in this stela refers principally to Amun, but Seth is depicted as the principal deity in the scene on top. The tentative conclusion that we may draw from this material is that the cult of Seth at Ombos as well as at Mut was shared with that of Amun, and that priests of both gods served in the same temple enclosure. Whether the two gods physically shared the same temple building within this enclosure remains to be established. Further confirmation has appeared at a recently discovered site with petroglyphs in North Kharga, which has been dubbed Seth Rock by its discoverers. This rock art site has

Figure 6: detail of the upper portion of the stela showing the figures of Amun (left), and Seth and Nephthys (© C. A. Hope).

several images of the Seth animal, but it is the name of Amun that appears in the inscriptions. H. te Velde has explained the close association of Amun and Seth as a contrast between ‘the typically Egyptian god and the divine foreigner’ respectively. Perhaps, however, it indicates a mediating role of Seth in relation to Amun, in which Seth and his animal functioned as a focus for prayers to Amun.

Thus, the gods at the top of the stela are likely to include Amun and Seth. First the possibility should be considered that Seth has been placed as principal god on the stela, since he is mentioned in the hymn below. In that case, Seth would be depicted on the left, with Amun facing him and holding his arm raised in adoration. The goddess following Amun would then probably be Mut. A problem arises in this case, because Amun is not likely to be shown subservient to Seth with his arm raised in adoration. Moreover, there is no parallel for the goddess Mut holding an ostrich feather in her hand. The reverse arrangement of gods is more acceptable. The god on the left may be identified as Amun and the gods facing him as Seth and Nephthys. In this arrangement the primacy of Amun in the oasis’ pantheon is recognized and the feather in the hand of Nephthys may actually be supported by an identical depiction of this goddess elsewhere in the Dakhleh Oasis. She appears with an ostrich feather in her hand in a scene in the mammisi at Ismant el-Kharab, on the southern side of the vaulted shrine, in the first register, in a scene as yet unpublished. Even though this image dates to a much later time than the stela under discussion, viz. the Roman period, the incorporation of local divinities and local iconography in this particular scene is evident and carries weight.

Consequently, we suggest that the principal deity at the top of the stela was Amun rather than Seth. Iconographically, this reconstruction finds further support in the blue skin colour of the left figure, which is well attested for Amun after the Amarna period. The narrow space available behind the figure of Amun would allow space for the pole supporting his crown, as well as the top of the backward leaning feather crown itself.

The bottom of the stela contains a scene of four private individuals in adoration, representing the donor with his family. The figures face right, in the direction of the presumed figure of Seth in the upper register. Their names appear in legends above their heads, which are, unfortunately, badly preserved. The first figure is male, followed by two females and a male child. Their names were contained in the legends above their heads, which are barely legible now. The second figure appears to be designated as sn.t=f, ‘his sister’, but the reading of her name is unclear. Thus, the family appears to be composed of the donor, his wife, probably his mother and his son. About the donor, all we are able to conclude is that he is not depicted as a holder of priestly rank.

The text

1. dwA Sth sNw.t nTr nb p.t my […]
2. wn […] k nty br […] wy n.w p.t […]
3. […] m […] […] […] m […] […] […] m […] […]
4. […] m […] […] m […] […] m […] […]
5. […] n=k m […] nb m […]

43 Interview with S. Ikram on <www.archaeology.org/online/interviews/ikram/>, date 03.13.2006, accessed 01.02.2007; material that was also discussed in a lecture by S. Ikram at the British Museum, London, in July 2006.
44 H. te Velde, Seth, God of Confusion: A Study of his Role in Egyptian Mythology and Religion (Probleme der Ägyptologie 6; Leiden, 1977), 134, n. 2.
45 A photograph of the relevant part of this scene appears in BACE 2 (1991), pl. 11.
Figure 7: Detail of the text and dedicant with family (© C. A. Hope).
A New Stela for Seth from Mut el-Kharab

6   [...] itn [...] =k m št.w
7   [...] [...] br nmw.t snb ‘nh
8   [...] mw [...] [...] wū nb.t [...] 
9   [...] idí m [...] [...] 

‘Adoring Seth the son of Nut, the Great God, Lord of Heaven. Come … open … the one who is at the doors of heaven … …in the prow … evil … … sun … tortoise … on account of the beauty, health and life… … recite … …’

The text consists of nine lines. Unfortunately, the state of the text is such that no sentences can be read from the third line onwards. The traces allow the reading of certain words, but their context is lost or too fragmentary to allow reconstruction. Nevertheless, it seems certain from the few surviving words, such as ‘sun disk’ and ‘tortoise’ in line 6, that the text continues to be of a religious nature.

One of the reasons why the text on this stela can only be read in part is the lack of comparable material. The genre to which the text belongs is clear; it is a hymn to Seth, but hymns to this deity are extremely rare. This is remarkable, considering the importance of the god during the Ramesside period. In the following I have collected the extant verbal homages and prayers to Seth, which are mainly preserved upon private votive stelae like the one under discussion. They comprise only seven texts, ranging in date from the late Eighteenth Dynasty to the reign of Ramesses III. The texts are short and, in general, they provide little or no support in reading the stela from Mut el-Kharab. Hymns were composed anew for every occasion and the genre typically shows much variation.

1. A lintel of the priest of Seth, Userhat, found at Ombos, and dating from the reign of Ramesses III, contains the following homage: ‘Giving praise to your ka, Seth great of strength, so that he may give fulfilment of his making, a heart full of sweet joy in mighty Thebes for the ka of the priest of [Seth …]’. Opposite Userhat are the name and titles of the god: ‘Seth of Ombos, Lord of Upper Egypt, the Great God, (Lord) of Heaven, the Perfect Child of Re’. This lintel was made in honour of both Seth and Amun, with the two gods depicted in symmetrically identical positions. It was found in the north-eastern corner of the temple enclosure of Seth in Ombos.

2. Another lintel of the same priest of Seth, Userhat, and of the same provenance, bears the following text: ‘Homage to your ka, Seth (…)’. Seth is described as ‘Seth of Ombos, Lord of Upper Egypt, the Great God’. This lintel was dedicated to both Seth and the goddess Nut.

3. Upon a stela of the workmen Penamun and Amunshedu from Deir el-Medina, now in the Cairo Museum (JdE 72020), and dating from the reign of Ramesses II, the following two homages to Seth are recorded: ‘Giving praise to Seth Great of Strength, the son of Nut Mistress of the gods, May he give life, well-being and health to the ka of the Servant in the Place of Truth Penamun’; and ‘Giving praise to Seth, Beloved of Re, Great of Strength in the Barque of Millions (of Years) to the ka of his son Amunshedu justified’. The stela depicts Seth as a hippopotamus.

47 Rdi.t št.w n kūk Seth ‘ph.ty [disf] s[w] m br-f lbr šw nm n m.št n sDm m kâ nb-nfr n [Sth…]; KRI V, 429.6; Petrie and Quibell, Naqada and Ballas, 70, pl. 79.
48 Seth nbw.ty nb itomw nfr ‘nh p.t sft nfr n R’. 
49 Rdi.t št.w n kâ nb-itomw nfr ‘nh p.t sft nfr n R’; KRI V, 429.15; Petrie and Quibell, Naqada and Ballas, 70, pl. 79.
50 Rdi.t št.w n Seth ‘ph.ty s Nu.t dl-f sb n kâ n [şdm]-5 m [S.t-Mf]-t Pt-nn-em [mi²-brw]; rdi.t št.w n Seth nbw.ty ‘ph.ty m wb n hh.w n kâ n sDf ‘im-nbrw nfr; KRI III, 733, 10–6; PM 1:2, 731b; B. Bruyère, Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1935–1940), fasc. II (FIFAO 20.2; Cairo, 1952), 101, pl. 16, fig. 173, no. 228; Vandier, MDAIK 25 (1969), 192, no. D1.
4. A fragmentary stela of the workman Amenemope of Deir el-Medina, from the late Eighteenth Dynasty, contains an obeisance to both Amun and Seth together: ‘Giving praise to Amun Lord of Heaven, Ruler of Eternity; Giving praise to Seth the Great God (...) of the Two Lands. (I) give you praise and I appease (...) your beauty. May you give me life (...) praises and love. Made by the esteemed of (his lord), the servant of Amun Amenemope, justified’.\(^{51}\) In the scene at the top, which is largely missing, a single divinity was depicted, seated on a throne in front of a table of offerings. Only the feet of the god remain. Since Amun is the first deity mentioned in the text, the image probably depicted him. Vandier remarked about this: ‘Seth et Ammon sont si étroitement associés qu’on s’adresse à eux exactement comme s’ils ne formaient qu’une seule divinité’.\(^{52}\) Amenemope is depicted below, next to the text, presenting offerings.

5. A private votive stela of another Amenemope, in the Pushkin Museum (no. I.1.a.5618 / 4084) and dating to the Nineteenth Dynasty, bears the homage: ‘Giving praise to Seth, kissing the earth for He from Ombos, giving praise to your beautiful face, so that you may answer my petitions, oh Great One who hears prayers, merciful one. Made by the (servant) Amenemope’.\(^{53}\) Seth is shown seated on a throne in the scene above the text in front of an offering table. His name is given as ‘Seth the Great God, the Lord of Heaven’; Amenemope is shown squatting in adoration, with the homage written in front of him.

6. The ‘Stela of Era of 400 Years’, in the Cairo Museum (JdE 60539), from the later half of the reign of Ramesses II, contains the following prayer: ‘Hail to you, O Seth son of Nut, Great of strength in the Barque of Millions (of years), with his triumphs at the prow of the Barque of Re, great of war-cry in […], May [you grant] [to] me a happy lifetime in following your will (ka), I abiding in […].’\(^{54}\) The stela designates Seth as ‘Seth, Great in strength, Son of Re, He of Ombos, the beloved of Re-Horakhty’, and in the top of the stela is a shorter version of the same prayer: ‘For your spirit, O Seth son of Nut! May you give a happy lifetime in following your will (ka) for the spirit of the Hereditary Noble, […]’.\(^{55}\)

7. The ‘First Hittite Marriage Stela’ of Ramesses II, known from copies at Abu Simbel, Karnak and Amara West contains the following prayer to Seth: ‘The sky is in your hands, the earth is under your feet, and whatever happens is what you have commanded’.\(^{56}\)

In addition to these written prayers, there is a further series of private votive stelae dedicated to Seth, which are instructive because they provide comparable iconographical material and epithets of the god. We list here only those 12 stelae from the Egyptian Nile Valley in which Seth has been depicted. They are probably all New Kingdom in date. The first group consists of four stelae, in which a private donor has himself depicted face to face with Seth:

8. A stela fragment from Qaw/Antaiopolis shows the worshipper adoring Seth depicted as a hippopotamus in a papyrus thicket. The text is much degraded but it was read hesitantly by Gardiner as: ‘An offering that the king gives to Seth the victorious, the hippopotamus(?), the Lord of Antaiopolis in(...) the
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Antaeopolite Nome’.

9. The stela Chicago 10510 of the scribe Hu, from the Eighteenth Dynasty. This stela shows a fusion of two gods, as it depicts the god ‘Nemti, Lord of Antaopolis (tḥw), the Great God the Lord of Heaven’, with the appearance of Seth. In the offering formula below the god is referred to specifically as ‘Seth the mighty, Lord of Antaopolis’ (Sḥḥ nḥt nb ḥḥw).

10. A faience stela in the Cairo Museum (S.7161), said to be from South Saqqara, depicts a certain Pa-ahaty (Ptány) facing Seth. The piece is probably Ramesside, and it designates Seth as ‘Lord of Upper Egypt’.

11. A stela of Aapehty from Deir el-Medina in the British Museum (EA 35630) depicts this workman facing ‘Seth Great of Strength, the Lord of Heaven’. This stela is dated to the time of Siptah-Tawosret by Kitchen.

Three stelae depict Seth without the donor, in one case with the addition of a figure of Amun on the reverse:

12. A double-sided stela to Amun as a ram and Seth in Asiatic guise spearing Apophis, in the Museum in Brussels (KMKG), from the reign of Ramesses II. Bought in Zagazig, it was formerly in the MacGregor collection (no. 42). Capart considered it a possible indication of the identity of Amun and Seth.

13. Stela Leiden Inv. AP 60 depicts Seth spearing Apophis beneath symbols for the sun and moon, and the following text below: ‘Giving praise to Re, kissing the earth to He of Ombos by (…)’. Thus, in this stela the sun god and Seth are seen as equals, and Re is adored in worshipping the image of Seth.

14. There is a close parallel to the latter in a wooden stela found in the first court of chapel no. 1190 at Deir el-Medina, inscribed for ‘Seth of Ombos, Great of Strength, Lord of Heaven’.

Four stelae depict Seth as the final god in a divine group. Two of these also depict the family members of the donor:

15. Stela Turin no. 50057 of the workman Neferrenpet and his family from Deir el-Medina, from the Nineteenth Dynasty. This is a stela for the gods Amun, Taweret and Seth in the form of their sacred animals ram, striding hippo and a double hippopotamus. The surprising second hippopotamus may be a representation of the goddess Nut. The legend with Seth reads: ‘Seth, the Perfect God, the son of Nut’.


59 ḥḥw nb xmlns ṣn p.t; M. Bierbrier, Hieroglyphic Texts from Egyptian stelae etc. Part 10 (London, 1982), pl. 71.2; KRI IV, 448, 14–15; RITA IV, 360; photo in S. Quirke, Ancient Egyptian Religion (London, 1992), 55, fig. 31; colour photo in G. Pinch, Magic in Ancient Egypt (2nd edn: London, 2006), 31 fig. 13.

60 Dating with Vandier, MDAIK 25 (1969), 191 n. 7.


63 [Sḥḥ nb xmlns] hḥw nb xmlns ṣn p.t; B. Bruyère, Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1929) (FIFAO 7; Cairo, 1930), 44, fig. 18; Vandier, MDAIK 25 (1969), 191 no. C3.

64 ḥḥw nb xmlns ṣn p.t; Vandier, MDAIK 25 (1969), 192, no. D2; M. Tosi and A. Roccati, Stela e altre epigrafi di Deir el-Me-
16. A stela, without text, from Matmar, in the Cairo Museum (JdE 55887) associates Seth with the gods Ptah and Taweret.66

17. Stela Berlin 8440, from Thebes. There are multiple gods depicted on this stela; above are Amun, Mut and Amun, and below are Ptah, Sobek, Amun and Seth. Seth is depicted in Asiatic guise, with the title ‘Lord of Strength’.67

18. Stela of the Viceroy of Nubia Sety at Abu Simbel, North Terrace. It depicts the gods Amun, Mut, Re, Seth and Astarte in the upper register being worshipped by king Siptah. Seth is designated as ‘Great of Strength, Beloved of Re’.68

19. Finally, the stela Louvre E 26017, from the reign of Ramesses II, depicts the king offering to Astarte, with Seth appearing as a sphinx in the top of the stela. The legend with the sphinx designates him as: ‘Seth the great god, Lord of heaven, the Beloved of Re’.69

The private votive stelae for Seth show two significant recurring elements. First, the god is often designated as ‘Lord of Heaven’ (nos 1, 5, 9, 11, 14 and 19 in the list above). Secondly, the god is shown closely associated with Amun or Re in several instances. Amun and Seth are shown as equals on stelae 1 and 12, while the text on stela 4 addresses both gods equally. In stelae 13 and 14, the sun god is adored through the image of Seth. In addition, on four stelae (3, 6, 18 and 19), Seth is designated as ‘beloved of Re’, which is a known title of the god also in other contexts.70 Both these characteristics are found again in the new stela from Mut el-Kharab. Seth is called ‘Lord of Heaven’ and he is shown subservient to Amun-Re in the scene at the top of the stela.

In order to give an approximate dating of the stela, we can refer to some further parallels in type. The Mut el-Kharab stela has three deities depicted in the upper register, beneath which is the hymn and the donor and his family are depicted at the bottom. The division into a register of deities on top and the human worshippers below is common on private stelae of the Ramesside period. I cite as examples a stela of Seti-er-neheh from Qantir in the Pelizaeus Museum Hildesheim (no. 375), dating to the Nineteenth Dynasty.71 This stela has three gods in the upper register, who face each other. The god Amun faces both Ptah and a statue of ‘Ramesses II, Montu of the Two Lands’. In the lower register the family of Seti-er-neheh is depicted, consisting of two women and two children. All human figures are shown facing right, towards the images of Ptah and Ramesses. Another example is a stela of Tia, brother-in-law of Ramesses II in the Louvre Museum (E.7717). Its upper register has images of three gods: Amun-Re of Karnak facing left and Re-Harakhty and Ptah facing right. Tia himself appears in the register below facing left, with a legend in front of him that confirms that Tia adores all three gods equally: ‘Giving praise to Amun-Re, Re-Harakhty and Ptah’.72 The typology is not exclusive to the Ramesside period, however, since a highly similar arrangement in three separate sections is found again in a funerary stela of Udjahoremuia in Berlin (Inv. Nr. 97/66). This stela, which probably stems from Abydos, has been dated to the early Third

dina n. 50001–n. 50262 (Turin, 1972), 93–4.

68 ʿḥry nṯ R; KRI IV, 362.15.
70 C. Leitz (ed.), Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen III (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 112; Leuven, 2002), 340b lists three additional occurrences of this title for Seth.
71 A. Eggebrecht (ed.), Pelizaeus Museum Hildesheim, The Egyptian Collection (Mainz am Rhein, 1996), 72, fig. 66.
72 rdḥt ḫḥ n ḫḥ nb n ḫḥ R; G.T. Martin, The Tomb of Tia and Tia: A Royal Monument of the Ramesside Period in the Memphite Necropolis (EES EM 58; London, 1997), 47, pl. 165.
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Intermediate Period (Twenty-First/Twenty-Second Dynasties).\textsuperscript{73} It depicts the funerary gods in the upper register beneath a pyramidal point with an image of Anubis. The central section has six lines of text and the donor and his family are depicted at the bottom, in a similar arrangement as the present stela. It is not possible for this period, however, to find a parallel type among the private stelae of a non-funerary realm.

The date of the stela from Mut el-Kharab is therefore most likely the Ramesside period, on the basis of parallels. Most of the parallels for private votive stelae for Seth, and especially those inscribed with prayers, date to the Nineteenth Dynasty. Hymns to Seth are extremely rare, despite the god’s national significance in Ramesside times. This may be the consequence of the persecution of the names and images of the god that is evident on many Ramesside monuments.\textsuperscript{74} There are several more private stelae dedicated to the god without the addition of a text, but no more than 20 of these survive. When these can be securely dated, they are from the New Kingdom. The layout of the stela is familiar from other examples from the Nineteenth Dynasty, even though it may also be found in later funerary stelae. Finally, a Ramesside date is not contradicted by the garments worn by the donor, which resemble the fashion of the early Ramesside period. Unfortunately, not all relevant details can be made out on the stela.\textsuperscript{75}

The situation at Mut el-Kharab was different from that in other temples, because a cult for Seth continued here uninterrupted into the Roman period. Stelae for Seth continued to be erected at the temple in Mut, while elsewhere in Egypt the cult of Seth declined after the Ramesside period.\textsuperscript{76} When the cult of Seth fell from favour, also in Dakhleh some changes were deemed necessary. At least from the early Kushite period onwards, Seth’s emblematic animal was no longer tolerated in either hieroglyphs or images.\textsuperscript{77} This means that the stela under examination must predate the Kushite period.

The genre of the text, the hymn, is well-attested specifically for the Ramesside period, ‘the heyday of hymnic poetry in Egypt’.\textsuperscript{78} The hymns may occur in tombs, literature and magic, but only rarely in temples.\textsuperscript{79} Their form is that of a series of epithets of the god in question, the ‘nominal style’. A verbal style, with finite verb forms, was used only for the sun god, according to Assmann. The speaker of the texts remains largely absent; he is only named at the end, unless there is a prayer added which may involve him more directly. According to Assmann’s definition, private votive stelae with hymns were not made for temples.\textsuperscript{80} Only prayers and homages (Assmann’s ‘Anbetungen’) were written for this context. An example in the case of Seth is the ‘Stela of Era of 00 Years’, which must have been set up by a high dignitary of Ramesses II in the temple to Seth at Piramesse. The present stela may also have been set up in a temple of Seth, as it was found reused at that location in a later floor. It is unique among the Egyptian material in its use of the term \textit{dwA}, ‘adoration’, at the start of the text. With that term, the text is placed

75 A Ramesside parallel appears on Pushkin stela I.1.a.5619 (4119), from the reign of Ramesses II, in Hodjash and Berlev, \textit{The Egyptian Reliefs and Stelae in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow}, 138, 140, no. 79.
80 J. Assmann, \textit{Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete: übersetzt, kommentiert und eingeleitet} (2nd ed: Orbis biblicus et Orientalis; Freiburg and Göttingen, 1999), 9–10, states that the type of hymn that was composed with the verb \textit{dwA}, ‘Anbetung’, is not found in the temple. Only the hommage (‘Huldigung’), written with \textit{rdit iA.w}, was employed there.
among the group of hymns which are mainly addressed to the sun god in Ramesside times. The relation of Seth to Amun-Re, which is made explicit in the scene on top of the stela, may have given rise to this composition. It is unfortunate that not more has survived of the text itself, because it seems possible that a verbal style was employed in this hymn, just like in hymns to the sun god.

Conclusions

The stela from Mut el-Kharab here published is significant in several respects. As an example of a hymn to Seth, it is a unique religious monument. It is also the earliest certain attestation for the cult of Seth in Mut, about which the current excavations are bringing up an increasing amount of evidence. The date of the piece seems well established by the parallels for private votive stelae to Seth from elsewhere in Egypt. It confirms that there was a devotion to Seth at the site in the Nineteenth or Twentieth Dynasty, which implies the existence of a cult and a temple at that moment. The famous Dakhleh Stela in the Ashmolean Museum provides evidence for this cult and for Egyptian involvement in its operation from the early Twenty-Second Dynasty.\(^1\) It is now clear that Egyptian involvement in Dakhleh was intensive already during the Ramesside period, at a time when frequent conflict with Libyan enemies made the region of prime strategic importance. (OEK)