TOWARDS A MINIMAL DEFINITION OF THE GODDESS MUT*)

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One of the many goddesses worshipped in Ancient Egypt was the goddess Mut. Apart from some scattered notices in Egyptological studies, mainly by Sethe, Rusch, Bonnet, Yoyotte and Sauneron[1]), little particular attention has been paid to Mut, nor has she ever been the subject of an exhaustive monograph, which might have let us formulate a minimal definition of her. Mut does not play a striking part in Egyptian mythology, her name is found rarely if at all in Pyramid texts, Coffin texts or Book of the Dead, and her vagueness[2]) has been complained of, while she is so frequently depicted in temples in Thebes and elsewhere as companion of Amon. Until recently, the temple of Mut in South Karnak was one of the least investigated spots in Thebes[3]). Fortunately, R. Fazzini of the Brooklyn Museum began digging there in 1976[4]). The data collected by him and his staff will, besides other results, undoubtedly lead to a more clearly defined and livelier image of Mut.

As the editors of the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* have invited me to write an article on Mut, I have been going into the material, and would like to draw attention to some aspects and problems connected with this goddess.

Mut makes a late appearance in Egyptian religion, as far as we know from our present philological and archaeological sources. In the first half of Egyptian history she hardly appears, that is until the fifteenth century B.C. The sparse data anterior to the 18th dynasty are uncertain and controversial. The name of the

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[1]) K. Sethe, *Amon und die acht Urgotter von Hermopolis* (APAW, Jhrg. 1929, Philos-Hist. Kl. nr. 4, Berlin 1929), 28-30; A. Rusch, in : Pauly-Wissowa, *Real Encyclopädie* XVI/1, 928-935; H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (henceforth *RÄRG*) 491-494; J. Yoyotte, *RdEg* 14 (1962), 101-110; S. Sauneron, *BIFAO* 62 (1964), 50-57 and *BIE* 45 (1968), 45-52.

[2]) "Sie war eben im Kern eine farblose Ortsgöttin" (Bonnet, *RÄRG*, 494), "a rather pallid figure who only achieved eminence as wife of the powerful Amon" (C.J. Bleeker, *Hathor and Thoth* [Leiden 1973], 58) ... "die keinen fest umrissenen Charakter hat" (G. Roeder, *Die ägyptische Götterwelt* [Zürich-Stuttgart 1959], 255).

[3]) *PM* II², 255-279; M. Benson and J. Gourlay, *The Temple of Mut in Asher* (London 1899).

[4]) R. Fazzini and J. Manning, 'Work in the Temple Precinct of the Goddess Mut at Southern Karnak', *Newsletter American Research Centre in Egypt* 101-102 (1977), 12-24, and 108 (1979), 19-20.

goddess Mut is written with the vulture with flagellum[5]), sometimes with the addition of the bread sign -t. Mut is generally supposed to be a vulture goddess like Nekhbet. Yet since the N.K. we see her depicted in human form, sometimes lion-headed, but not as a vulture like Nekhbet. The oldest representation of Mut seems to be a lion-headed figure with inscription *mwt* on a so-called 'magic wand' of c. 1730 B.C.[6]).

Mut usually wears the vulture cap like Nekhbet, but other goddesses wore this earlier than Mut, e.g. Iunyt and Tenenet in the M.K.[7]). In the N.K. and after it is worn by various goddesses, queens and others. Mut's name is written with a vulture, not because she is a so-called vulture goddess, but because the word *mwt* meaning mother is already written the vulture hieroglyph in the Pyramid texts. Apparently the word mother (*mwt*) was written with the vulture ideogram because this represented a concept of joyous motherhood[8]). Rusch[9]) and others have contested this connection, maintaining that Coptic showed name and word were not homophonous. Beside *maau* however, Coptic has the Upper Egyptian dialectical forms *moo* and *mou*[10]), so that the name Mut can very well mean mother, as is confirmed by puns in Egyptian texts[11]).

Starting with the idea that Mut's name means mother, one might conjecture that Mut was an archaic mother-goddess worshipped in Thebes of old. Lack of evidence, however, leaves this an unproven theory at present. Let us hope that the new excavations will make it clear whether Mut was worshipped in a temple at Karnak before the N.K.[12]).

So far we have no indication that Mut played a part in the religion of the O.K. and before. In *Pyr.* 123 a goddess Mowet is named, written with the owl, quail chick, three ripples and the bread sign -t. She can hardly have anything to do with Mut, but might be a personification of semen[13]).

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[5]) Gardiner, Signlist, G 15.

[6]) H. Altenmüller, *Die Apotropaia und die Götter Mittelägyptens* (Diss. München 1965), 45 (nr. 50).

[7]) M. Th. Derchain-Urtel, *Synkretismus in Ägyptischer Ikonographie. Die Göttin Tjenenet* (Wiesbaden 1979), 37ff.

[8]) Th. Hopfner, *Der Tierkult der alten Ägypter* (Wien 1913), 104ff. and E. Brunner-Traut in *LÄ* II, 514 s.v. 'Geier'.

[9]) Rusch, *op. cit.*, 928f.

[10]) W. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary*, 197a. In the pronunciation of the word for mother the old t was dropped but was carefully retained in the name of the goddess as we know from the Greek rendering. One might compare this phenomenon with the difference that some calvinistic protestants in the Netherlands make when pronouncing the word for lord. *Heer* is a human lord, but *Here* (sometimes written *Heere*) is the lord Jesus Christ or God.

[11]) Mother (*ỉm3t*) of the creator-god in this her name of Mut (Sauneron, *Esna V*, 108).

[12]) Statues of the M.K. have been found in the precinct of Mut (Benson and Gourlay, *op. cit.*) and W. C. Hayes, *The Scepter of Egypt*, I (New York 1953), 179, remarked that the temple of Mut was perhaps founded in the reign of Amenemhet I.

[13]) R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford 1969), 38.

In *CT* V 295f we read: The knife of Mut has been placed in my hand, but others translate instead of Mut, 'mother' or 'Nekhbet'[14]). In Hammamat texts it is certain we should read 'Isis, the goddess and mother of Min'[15]) and not 'the divine Isis, Min and Mut'[16]).

For Mut the earliest references are found in proper names of the M.K.[17]), yet there again one must take account of a possible reading of the vulture as mother or Nekhbet. One of the names of the 29 snake goddesses in the Hymns to the Diadem of the Pharaohs, written with the vulture ideogram, should probably be read as Mut[18]). In the Coffin text mentioned above, Mut is also determined with the snake.

This sparse material before the N.K. would hardly justify the conclusion that Mut was a mother goddess and a goddess of crowns if this were not confirmed by later material. From the 15th century onward Mut is constantly named and depicted upon temple walls, stelae and elsewhere. Very telling is the word 'passim' s.v. Mut in the indexes of some volumes of Porter-Moss. Since the 18th dynasty she is the companion of Amon, forming the Theban triad with him and Khonsu-the Child. One of the earliest representations of this triad is on the north side of the 8th pylon in Karnak and dates from the time of Hatshepsut[19]). Mut is then already wearing the vulture cap and the pschent.

In the time of Hatshepsut, Senmut[20]) had building done for the temple of Mut in South Karnak, and the scarce data concerning the cult of Mut and the personnel of her temple before the time of Hatshepsut become far more numerous in her reign and after it[21]).

Mut does not yet appear in the myth of the birth of the divine king at Deir el Bahri, though she does in the version in the temple at Luxor from the time of Amenhotep III[22]). Amenhotep III and pharaohs after him are called son of Amon and Mut. Yet Hatshepsut is the first pharaoh said to be 'born of Mut and Amun'[23]).

I have indicated the rise of Mut in the time of Hatshepsut, but I am unable to give a satisfactory explanation how it was that just while Egypt was ruled by a

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[14]) J. Yoyotte, *RdEg* 14 (1962), 102: Mut; J. Zandee, *JEOL* 24 (1975-1976), 45: mother; W. Guglielmi in her still unpublished study on the goddess Meret: Nekhbet.

[15]) W. Schenkel, *Memphis-Herakleopolis-Theben* (Wiesbaden 1965), 265.

[16]) Ch. Breasted, ARE, I, § 441.

[17]) See note 47.

[18]) A. Erman, *Hymnen an das Diadem der Pharaonen* (APAW, Jhrg. 1911, Philos-Hist. Kl. nr. 1, Berlin 1911) 15 and 50f.

[19]) *PM* II², 174.

[20]) *Urk* IV, 409.

[21]) W. Helck, *Materialien zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte des Neuen Reiches I* (Abh. Mainz, Wiesbaden 1961), 60-62.

[22]) H. Brunner, *Die Geburt des Gottkönigs* (Wiesbaden 1964), 183, 114ff. and Pl. 11.

[23]) W. C. Hayes, *The Scepter of Egypt*, II (Cambridge Mass. 1959), 105.

woman, the cult developed of a goddess wearing the pschent, the double crown of the pharaohs.

Mut may be represented as a goddess with a child on her lap[24]), and she is accounted the mother of Khonsu[25]). Often she is called the mother of the pharaoh, and the delivery of the goddess and birth of the divine child was celebrated in her temple[26]). It is she who gives strength to the pregnant woman and delivers her in due time[27]). Yet Mut is not merely the divine mother. Even with a child on her lap she often, though not always, wears the double crown. Several gods, such as Atum and Horus may wear the double crown, but Mut is the only goddess to wear the pschent over the vulture cap. Should another goddess, exceptionally, wear this pschent, then one can say she is wearing the crown of Mut[28]). This cannot mean that she is a queen in the sense of spouse of Amon-the-King-of-the-Gods, precisely because the pschent is *not* the queen's crown.

Mut's special gifts to the pharao she has borne (*msi*) and sometimes brought up (*rnn*)[29]) are the age-span of Atum, jubilee festivals (*sd*) and also the double crown[30]). Mut is one of the goddesses of royalty and coronation who personify and bear kingship, as Nekhbet wears the white crown of Upper Egypt, or Uto, Neith or Amaunet wear the red crown. Mut wears both crowns. The Mut-headdress is not the vulture cap, as is sometimes still said, prompted perhaps by the idea that Mut is a vulture goddess. Over the vulture cap Mut wears the pschent. In the so-called Crossword-hymn to Mut it is said that the white and the red crown are fastened upon her head and furthermore that the headdress of Atum has been given her with which she rules the two lands. 'Her temple is the sky, her house is this land, and her shrine is every city'[31]).

Some epithets are regularly added to Mut's name when she is mentioned or depicted. The great one (*wrt*) would seem, mythologically speaking, to characterize Mut as an ancient goddess and not a recent arrival. Neither as a young girl, but as a person of consequence, a matron. Many goddesses have this epithet, which has even been hypostatized as a goddess Thoeris, but Mut-Weret is such a standing term that it can be said "It is ... strange to find Mut without this epithet"[32]).

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[24]) *Cairo C.G.* 39369-39375; G. Daressy, *Statues de Divinités* (Le Caire 1906), II, Pl. LXIII.

[25]) H. Junker, *Der grosse Pylon des Tempels der Isis in Philä* (Wien 1958), 187.

[26]) *Pap. Leiden* T 32, III 22-24 and *B. H. Stricker*, OMRO 34 (1953), 267.

[27]) G. Roeder, *Von Debod bis Kalabscha* (Le Caire 1911), 61f., § 160, Taf. 19.

[28]) M. Th. Derchain-Urtel, *op. cit.*, 54ff.

[29]) *Urk.* IV 1655f.

[30]) Opet 143, 167, see C. de Wit, *Les inscriptions du temple d'Opet à Karnak*, III (Bruxelles 1968), 79, 96. G. Roeder, *op. cit.* (note 27), § 177, Taf. 23.

[31]) H. M. Stewart, *JEA* 57 (1971), 104.

[32]) So I. E. S. Edwards, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum, Fourth Series* (London 1960), text vol., 77, in his commentary on the oracular amuletic decrees of the Late New Kingdom.

Mut is mistress of Asheru (*nbt išrw*). Yoyotte and Sauneron[33]) have shown that originally Asheru is not only the place where Mut was worshipped in South Karnak, but that it was a crescent-shaped lake. Mythologically it is a place where lion-goddesses were appeased. There was an asheru of Uto near Memphis, one of Bastet in Bubastis, of Sakhmet in Memphis. Since the 18th dynasty, the asheru of Mut in South Karnak where her temple was became by far the most renowned. This temple of Mut is first mentioned in the tomb of Ineni[34]), who lived from the time of Amenhotep I till into the time of Thutmosis III, making him a contemporary of Hatshepsut.

Epithets such as 'mistress of the sky' (*nbt pt*) and 'eye of the sun' (*irt Rʿ*) common to many other goddesses, characterize Mut as mother and daughter of the sun or Amon-Re. Mistress of Karnak (*nbt ỉpt ỉswt*) typifies her as spouse of Amon and local goddess. Her most common epithet as a Theban goddess is still 'mistress of Asheru'. In Amon's train she was naturally worshipped in many places in Egypt and Nubia. By herself she was worshipped near Antaeopolis as mistress of Megeb[35]), in Memphis as Mut in the house of Ptah, in Gizeh as Mut-Khenty-Abu-Neteru, and at Heliopolis as Mut *ḫr-snwt·s*[36]).

To enumerate here all the epithets Mut shares with other goddesses would lead us too far.

As spouse of Amon, Mut can be called Mistress of the house of Amon (*ḥnwt pr Imn*)[37]). As already indicated, her relationship to Amon-Re can be expressed not only as man and wife, but also as mother and son and daughter and father[38]). She is "the mother who became a daughter" and "the daughter-mother who made her begetter" or again : "The mother of her sire, the daughter who became mother, who brought forth the light (the moon god Khonsu) anew". With Sethe and Frankfort, one may think here of a female counterpart of the kamutef theology. Here incest is a metaphor to denote the renewal of divine life as expressed in the shape of a goddess. This is the typically paradoxical form which all theology is obliged to give to intuitive religious insights[39]). This divine life continually renewing

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[33]) S. Sauneron, *BIFAO* 62 (1964), 50; J. Yoyotte, *RdEg* 14 (1962), 101; E. Otto, *LÄ* I, 460-462 s.v. 'Ascheru'.

[34]) Theban tomb 81; *Urk* IV 71.

[35]) M. Heerma van Voss, *Phœnix* 11 (1965), 261-263.

[36]) J. Yoyotte, *RdEg* 14 (1962), 103.

[37]) B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Medineh (1935-1940)*, fasc. II (Le Caire 1952), 79 and fig. 158. The relationship between Amon and Mut in the Theban triad and elsewhere is formal. The sexual nature of their relation is not stressed. In the hypostyle hall of the temple of Karnak Amon is often represented together with Mut, but when he appears as the ithyphallic Amon-Min his consort is not Mut, but Isis. See M. Münster, *Untersuchungen zur Göttin Isis von Alten bis zum Ende des Neuen Reiches* (Berlin 1968), 135.

[38]) For this paragraph see K. Sethe, *Amun*, 29f.

[39]) H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the gods* (Chicago 1948), 177.

itself in the form of Mut is, more precisely, kingship, which brings forth the bearer of kingship, accompanies him, and is again brought forth by him.

In a late Egyptian wisdom text preserved in Leiden (*Pap. Insinger* 8, 18-19) we read: The work of Mut and Hathor is that which takes place among women, for there are good and bad women among those upon earth[40]). According to the author of *Pap. Insinger* then, Mut is the goddess of the good women and Hathor the goddess of the bad women. We may wonder what is a good or a bad woman in the eyes of this Egyptian wisdom teacher. Perhaps we may conclude from the context that he means: Mut is the goddess of well-behaved women and Hathor the goddess of licentious women. The former conformed to the cultural pattern expected of an Egyptian woman, while the latter did not. Now it would be precipitate to define Mut with a line from an Egyptian wisdom text as "une fille bien rangée". She is not without dissipated[41]) and malevolent[42]) traits, but in the general context of Egyptian religion and culture she is the stately lady of the crowns standing behind Amon and raising a protective hand by his shoulder. Hathor of course is not just a kind of divine prostitute, but we must not forget that Derchain has convincingly shown the minimal definition of Hathor to be «l'excitation sexuelle"[43]).

Such is not the minimal definition of Mut. She is the royal lady, not the lover, even if the Egyptians could sometimes combine Mut and Hathor in a single figure[44]). Mut is the divine woman, who gives life as mother and directs it as wearer of the crowns. The latter activity was men's work in Egypt. And indeed, in the vignette accompanying the later versions of *Book of the Dead* 164 Mut is

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[40]) A. Volten, *Das demotische Weisheitsbuch* (Analecta Aegyptiaca II, Kopenhagen 1941), 31. See also the remark of C. D. G. Müller in the *Gedenkschrift Otto, Fragen an die ägyptische Literatur* (Wiesbaden 1977), 352.

[41] I. Gamert-Wallert, *Ägyptische und ägyptisierende Funde von der Iberischen Halbinsel* (Wiesbaden 1978), 317.

[42]) See Ph. Derchain, *Le Papyrus Salt 825* (Bruxelles 1965), 144 s.: 'Mout, dame d'Icherou, une flamme est sur son visage, la dame de l'ombre, qui vit de sang, dame du gémissement dont elle vit'. More references on the malevolent Mut are to be found in: P. Vernus, *Athribis* (Le Caire 1978), 242. R. A. Caminos, *The Chronicle of Prince Osorkon* (Roma 1958) 72, comments: 'It is well known that Mut and Sakhmis were often identified with one another'.

[43]) Ph. Derchain, *Hathor quadrifons* (Istanbul, 1972), 45.

[44]) As men of all ages the Egyptians could find these two aspects of the mother and the lover in one feminine figure. J. Leclant, *Recherches sur les Monuments thébains de la XXV^e dynastie dite éthiopienne* (Le Caire 1965), 301, concludes from the material of that period: 'Hathor se trouve naturellement assimilée à Mout: toutes deux ne sont que des aspects, des noms du principe divin féminin', cf. 246-248. Sometimes the two goddesses are venerated together. A good example in J. Černý, *Egyptian Stelae in the Bankes collection* (Oxford 1958), no. 9.

provided with a phallus[45]). Mut is not l'excitation sexuelle of a man but his mother, his wife, his daughter, the woman who is his companion[46]).

Very many Egyptian names are formed with Mut[47]), more than with the names of any other goddess, especially names of woman, but also of men. The Egyptian Kiki changed his name to Samut (son of Mut). In his tomb he praises his goddess[48]):

"As for him whom Mut makes a protégé no god knows how to assail him, the favorite of the king of his time, being one who passes away into honor.
As for him whom Mut makes a protégé, no evil will attack him, and he will be sheltered every day until he joins the necropolis.
As for him whom Mut makes a protégé, how happy is his life!
The favors of the king which endue his body belong to the one who sets her in his heart.
As for him whom Mut makes a protégé when he issues from the womb, favor and fate are his, and beauty upon the brick. He is destined for honor.
As for him whom Mut makes a protégé how happy is he whom she loves.
No god will cast him down, being one who does not know death."

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[45]) Lepsius, *Todtenbuch*, spell 164. The vignet of *BD* 164 is described in the text: 'To be said over ⟨an image of⟩ Mut having 3 faces—one like the face of [the liongoddess] *Pḫ3t* wearing twin plumes, another like a human face wearing the white crown and the red crown, another like a vulture's face wearing twin plumes—and a phallus and wings, with a lion's claws' (transl. T. G. Allen, *The Book of the Dead* (SAOC 37, Chicago 1974), 160f.)

[46]) Exactly because Mut represents the feminity a man meets in his mother and also finds in the companionship of his sister, daughter, and wife, rather than 'l'excitation sexuelle' of the strange woman from outside the family, therefore Mut can all the more be represented as the woman with the phallus. In that case Mut appears as the so-called 'bad mother', see F. Sierksma, *Religie, Sexualiteit en Agressie* (Groningen 1979). In the context of the Book of the Dead Mut as the 'bad mother' can scare away the enemies of the mummy.

[47]) H. Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen*, III (Glückstadt 1977), 58-59. Here names are enumerated composed with *mwt* that are to be found in vol. I and II where particulars int. al. concerning dates are given.

[48]) Translation: J. A. Wilson, *JNES* 29 (1970) 191. Text of Theban tomb 409: Abdul-Qader Muhammed, *ASAE* 59 (1966), pl. 48-54. See also P. Vernus, *RdEg* 30 (1978), 115-146.