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How to Create a God: The Name and Iconography of the Deified Deceased Piyris at Ayn El-Labakha (Kharga Oasis, Egypt)

Abstract: In ancient Egypt, deceased people who had attained life in the afterlife and acquired the status of “justified” were referred to as “Osiris”, thus becoming a new god. Some of them were granted a more specific status as “efficacious spirits (ꜥḥw) of Ra” or, from the Late Period onwards, “superiors” (ḥrꜥw) or “praised” (ḥsꜥw). They could be honoured as local saints, or even enjoy greater renown on a regional or national scale. This paper focuses on the destiny of a man called Piyris, who probably lived and died at the site of Ayn el-Labakha in the Kharga oasis, in the 1st century AD. His tomb was extended into a semi-rupestral sanctuary, where faithful people and pilgrims gathered to honour the god Piyris in both a human and a falcon form and sought his support and protection. But which form came first? How were these images elaborated, for what purpose and in which ritual context were they used and addressed?

1 Introduction

The creation of a new god poses a series of theological, ritual and iconographic problems and, in this respect, calls for different types of religious bricolage, often drawing on pre-existing material. Thus, the god Sarapis, a creation of the first Ptolemies, was often described and perceived, already in Antiquity, as the Greek iconographic dressing of a deity elaborated from an Egyptian, Memphite theological substratum.¹ In the field of Christian iconography, the work of François Boespflug has also highlighted the long genesis of images of the Christian god, that were heirs to pagan iconographies and Judaic traditions, and full-fledged actors in the incarnation process of the divine: images and art provide theological abstraction with a sensitive materiality and a very particular space of freedom.²

In ancient Egypt, a deceased person who has attained life in the afterlife and acquired the status of “justified” is referred to as an “Osiris”, thus becoming a new god. Within the tomb, they may be represented in different ways, depending on whether

1 Borgeaud/Volokhine 2000.

2 Boespflug 1984; Boespflug 2008.

they are still involved in their activities and status as a living being or whether they have already entered the afterlife, where they have found a specific place among the gods.³ This is also the case, in a more condensed way, in the representation of deceased people on Roman period sarcophagi, cartonnage and funerary portraits, where the two statuses of the new god, that is, the dead person, can be represented in the same image.⁴ Initially a privilege of the king, the integration of deceased people into the gods' sphere is thus achieved through death itself, but some of the deceased attain a more specific status: in the New Kingdom, they are designated "efficacious spirits (*ḏhw*) of Ra". From the Late Period onwards, they are called "superior" (*hry*) or "praised" (*hsy*).⁵ Some of them were honoured as local holy figures, while others, such as Imhotep, minister of King Djoser in the Old Kingdom, Amenhotep, son of Hapu, a high official who was well-connected under Amenhotep III, or Amenhotep I and his mother, Ahmes Nefertari,⁶ enjoyed greater renown on a regional and national scale. These deceased people are distinguished by their individualised status as deities: they are not merely transfigured into Osiris, but become deities in their own right, under their own name, and their theology is fleshed out with a mythological narrative or a more or less important divine pedigree. Here, we will focus on the question of the naming and shaping of the divine image, given that it is quite conducive to religious bricolages, mixing the world of the living with that of the dead and the gods themselves.

A fairly large number of these individuals are known to have had a genuine divine 'career'. Their statues were often installed in transitional spaces on the periphery of temples, in courtyards or near doorways, and could act as privileged intermediaries for oracular consultations and incubation.⁷ These individuals were initially granted an identity – a name – and a biography. The destiny of Amenhotep, son of Hapu, is quite emblematic of this process. Born around 1450 BCE, he spent fifty years of his life at Athribis as "royal scribe and chief of the priests of Horus-Khentikheti", the local god, and was then called by King Amenhotep III to the court of Thebes, where he quickly became chief of the king's architects and the king's "minister of culture", according to Dietrich Wildung.⁸ A mark of his rapid and exceptional rise and distinction is the privilege he was granted to have a funerary temple built for himself, "in recognition of his perfect character",⁹ which seems to have provided the support for his subsequent divinisation. From then on, a codified iconography of Amenhotep spreads: he appears as an old man with a large round wig and a long loincloth. His age expresses wisdom, which is his main personality trait, and the wig is elaborated in such a way that it is specific to him, to identify him. This iconographic

³ Riggs 2005; Smith 2017.

⁴ Rondot 2011; Tallet 2018.

⁵ von Lieven 2010; von Lieven 2004.

⁶ See Hollender 2009 with previous references.

⁷ Sauneron 1959, 40–52; Renberg 2017, 74–111, 329–519, 542–610.

⁸ Wildung 1977a.

⁹ After Varille 1968, 67–75, no. 27.

type, which supports the identification allowed by the name, seems to have originated in two statues of Amenhotep that stood at the entrance of the tenth pylon of the Temple of Amun at Karnak: close to the main entrance of the temple to the south, on an important passageway, they were the object of popular veneration as early as the Ramesside period.¹⁰ They are inscribed with autobiographical texts, in which Amenhotep recounts his career and emphasises his intelligence, moral qualities and piety. The privilege of installing his statue in the vicinity of Amun was granted by the king and this skilful courtier, who also served Amun-Ra, king of the gods at Karnak, knew how to use the position of his statue to place himself as an intermediary. He thus addressed the visitor, transposing his earthly function to that of an intermediary between the people and Amun:

O people of Karnak who desire to see Amun, come to me! I will convey your requests, for I am the herald of this god. Neb-Maat-Ra (Amenhotep III) has ordered me to report to him all that is said in this land.¹¹

On another autobiographical statue, he continues:

You, people of Upper and Lower Egypt, whose eyes gaze upon the sun, who go up and down the Nile to Thebes to implore the lord of the gods, come to me! I pass on your words to Amun of Karnak. Give me an offering and pour a libation for me, for I am appointed by the king to hear the supplicant's requests, to report to him the desires of Egypt.¹²

Proof of the effectiveness of his speech is the fact that the inscriptions on the papyrus scroll he held are completely erased: the faithful touched the hieroglyphs to make contact with the "saint".

Building upon this status of intermediary between the faithful and the god, Amenhotep progressively gained that of a god in his own right and obtained the privilege of having a personal sanctuary built within the funerary temple of Queen Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari.¹³

This is not an isolated case: we also know of the nome governor Heqaib who was worshipped at Elephantine,¹⁴ or Isi, at Edfu,¹⁵ in the Middle Kingdom, and Prince Ahmes Sapair, in the Theban region during the Ramesside period.¹⁶ This is also the case of Peteisis and Pihor, two brothers for whom, undoubtedly, the particular circumstances of their death, and perhaps also their status as members of the high clergy, led to a posthumous divinisation and the erection of a sanctuary at Dendur in

¹⁰ Cairo, Egyptian Museum, JE 44861 and 44862; *ibid.*, pl. 3–4. About ten statues were found in the vicinity of Karnak.

¹¹ After Varille 1968, 25, no. 9.

¹² *Ibid.*, 31, no. 12.

¹³ Wildung 1977a.

¹⁴ Franke 1994 with previous references.

¹⁵ Böwe 2004; Weill 1940.

¹⁶ Barbotin 2005.

Nubia,¹⁷ and finally, Julie Cayzac has recently shown that two divine figures were dedicated a small hemispeos temple within the temenos of the temple of Mandulis at Kalabcha, also in Nubia.¹⁸ As well as in the Theban region and Nubia,¹⁹ multiple cults of local “saints” also seem to have developed elsewhere, the frequency of which is moreover attested in the Hellenistic period by a decree of Ptolemy VIII, specifying that the deified dead would henceforth be buried at the expense of the royal treasury.²⁰

While most of these small local cults are known only by brief mentions in papyri or more rarely in inscriptions, one last figure, that of the deceased Piyris, is known by his sanctuary. This cult developed in the region of the Great Oasis of the Western Desert of Egypt, more precisely, on a site in the north-western Kharga Depression, Ayn el-Labakha (Fig. 1), and constitutes an effective laboratory for studying the process of divinisation of an individual and the fabrication of their divine image.

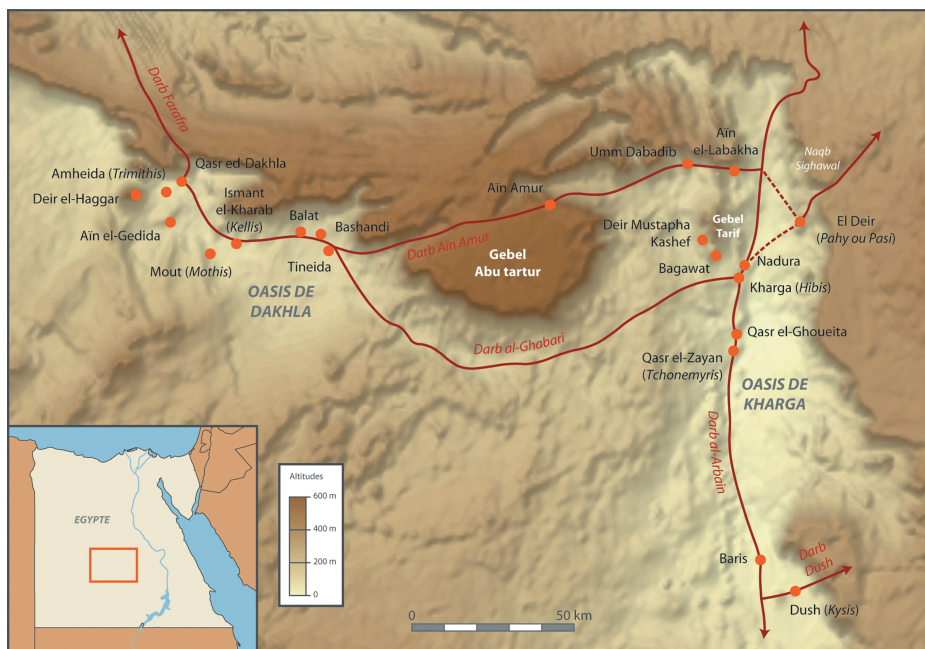


Fig. 1: The Great Oasis, in the Western Desert of Egypt (R. Crouzevialle, ANR OASIS).

¹⁷ Blackman 1911, *passim*.

¹⁸ Cayzac 2019.

¹⁹ On the deified deceased figures in the Theban documentation, see el-Amir 1951; el-Amir 1959; von Lieven 2017, and her habilitation thesis, forthcoming; Birk/Delvaux/Labrique 2022. Von Lieven identifies 70 male and 16 female deities in this documentation, over a period of 150 years; see also Pasher-montou and his son Hor, in the Theban region, at the end of the 2nd century BCE: Thiers 2022.

²⁰ C. Ord. Ptol. 53, l. 77–79.

2 The Cult of a Local “Saint” in the North of the Kharga Oasis

Located at the foot of the northern escarpment of the oasis, about fifty kilometres from Hibis, the metropolis of the nome, the site is positioned on the track that links Kharga to the neighbouring oasis of Dakhla, further west. Its occupation is largely documented for the Imperial period, although there are indications of an earlier occupation, in the Ptolemaic period,²¹ and it has been a place of passage, permeable to different influences – Egyptian and local oasis traditions, but also the Hellenised *koine* of the Roman Empire.

A settlement area has been identified around and to the east of the location of the Late Roman fortress that dominates the site, as well as an off-centre area of Roman-period rock tombs (Fig. 2).²² The site also has two mud-brick cult buildings, located near the two main springs: a temple to the north of the site, built on a kom, has hieroglyphic inscriptions identifying the god Amun, who is also the god of the main sanctuary of the oasis, at Hibis. The building is dated to the 1st-2nd century CE.²³ The second cult building, known as the “southern temple”, yielded about a hundred demotic ostraca, a Greek ostrakon and two bronze statuettes of Osiris which led the excavator, Mohammed A. Nur el-Din, to identify it as an Osirian sanctuary.²⁴ Unfortunately, these elements are still unpublished and the information remains scarce.

In this context, a small semi-rupestral sanctuary was built around a tomb dug into the sandstone, probably at the end of the 1st or beginning of the 2nd century CE (Fig. 3). In this area, a small group of at least six graves was identified: they are shallow vertical shafts leading to a vault closed by a sandstone slab. Halfway up the cliff, which is 11 metres high at this location, the sanctuary appears in the form of a terrace and extends into the hollow of the rock. It was built in three phases and, in its final stage of development, occupies an area of 330 m². A batch of small coins of Maximinus, Constantine I and his sons, issued between 296 and 335 CE, constitutes the last dated element of the sanctuary and leads us to date its abandonment to the mid-4th century.²⁵

Its spatial organisation, arranged in three phases, allows us to sketch out the divinisation process of the deceased Piyris, the emergence of his cult and the development of a real cult complex to welcome a large number of visitors. Let us quickly retrace these developments (Fig. 4).

²¹ Wagner 1987, 82, 168–169, 405–407; Rossi/Ikram 2018, 159–204.

²² Ibrahim *et al.* 2008.

²³ Hussein 2000, 4; Rossi/Ikram 2018, 165–169.

²⁴ Hussein 2000, 5; Rossi/Ikram 2018, 175–176.

²⁵ D. Schaad, in Hussein 2000, 57–58.

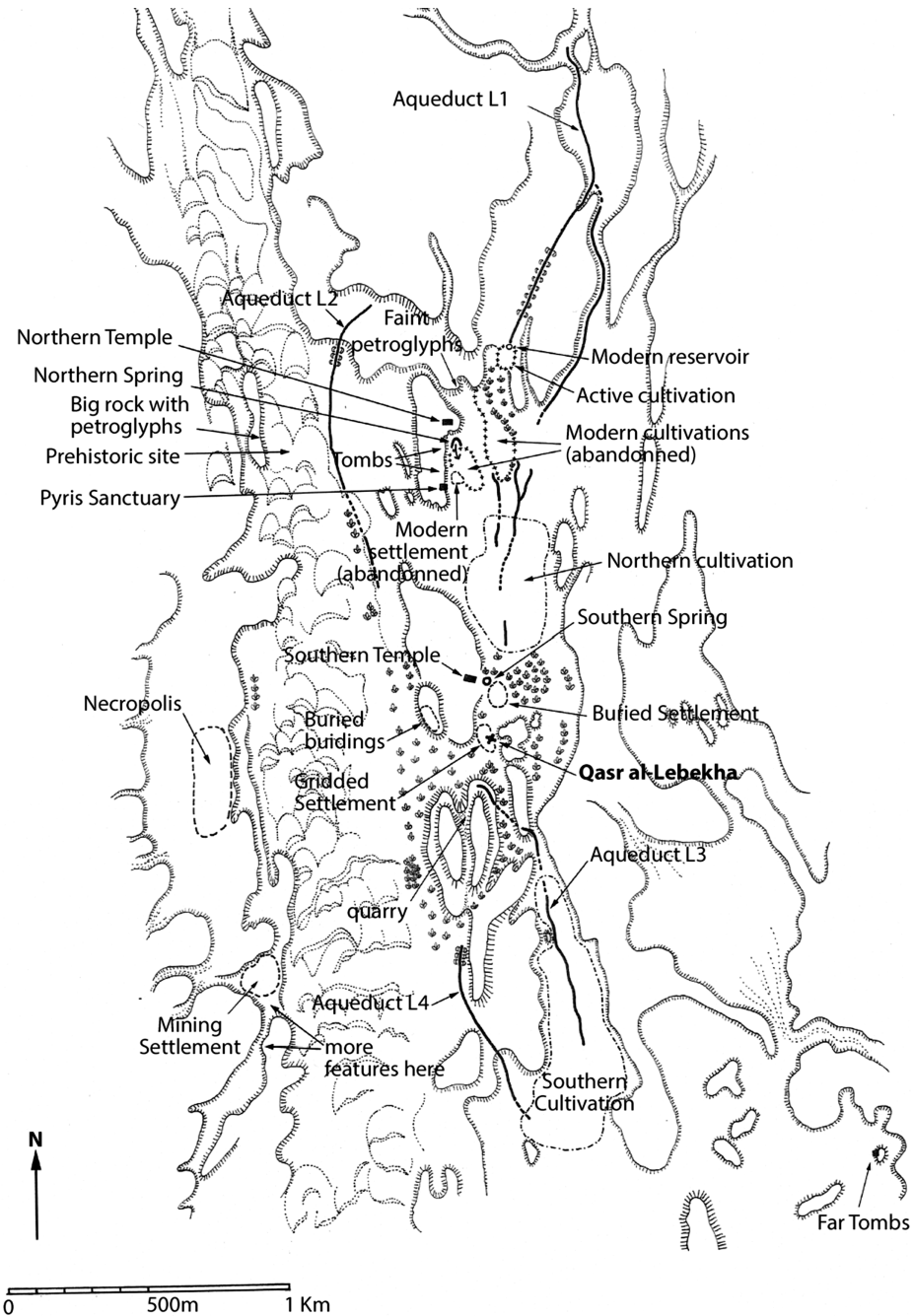


Fig. 2: The site of Ayn el-Labakha, after Rossi and Ikram 2018.



Fig. 3: The sanctuary of Piyris at Ayn el-Labakha (cliché: Gaëlle Tallet).

The first phase, which corresponds to the northernmost part of the complex, is the expansion of a tomb from the group mentioned above. It is a rock tomb, accessed through a vertical shaft leading to a corridor that serves two burial spaces, each consisting of an antechamber and a vaulted chamber. While one of the two gives the impression of an unfinished project, the other has been properly equipped for the matter and has received human remains. This tomb is associated with a complex (called “northern sanctuary” by the editors – we will use this name again) consisting of a hemispeos chapel (6), the door of which is framed by two engaged columns and a classical Egyptian-type cornice. A courtyard (7) and a terrace (8) were added later. At this stage, the complex resembles a classical Egyptian funerary complex, associating an underground structure – the tomb – and a superstructure – the funerary chapel, which can take on, as we have seen for Amenhotep, son of Hapu, important dimensions and look like a real funerary temple.

In a second phase, the complex was developed towards the south in the middle of the 2nd century CE, at the latest. Two rooms were then dug into the rock – a naos (10) and its pronaos (11). The façade of the new building is decorated with an Egyptian grooved cornice. Quickly, new arrangements were made, which respected the alignment of the rooms of the northern sanctuary: a vestibule (12), adjoining the chapel of the northern sanctuary, a courtyard (13) and a terrace (14). To the south of this terrace is a cellar (15). This new phase corresponds to a second sanctuary, designated the cen-

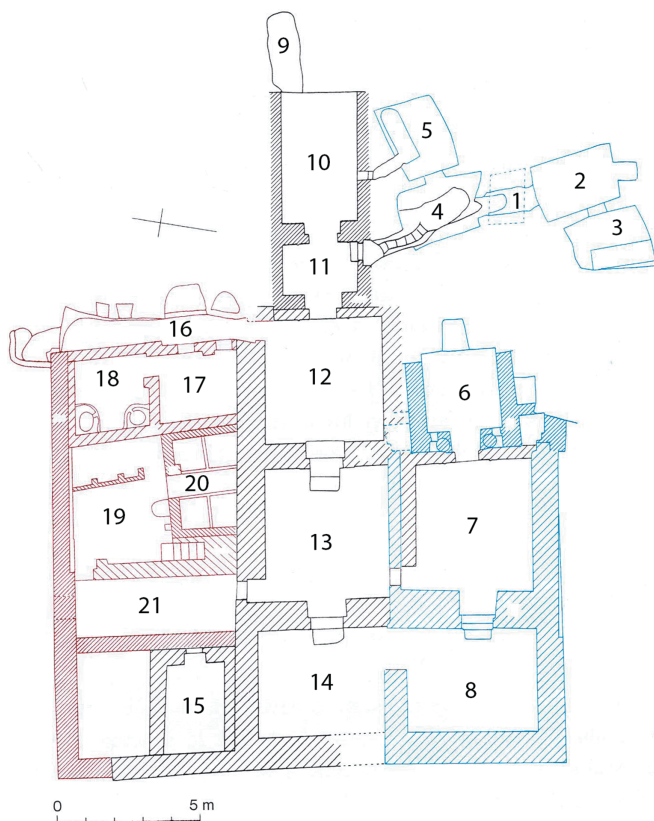


Fig. 4: Phased plan of the Piyris sanctuary at Ayn el-Labakha, after Hussein 2000, 10.

tral sanctuary and identified by a graffito in the courtyard as the “temenos of Piyris”.²⁶ It is assumed that the deceased was called P(a)y-Hor, transcribed in Greek as Piyris. The choice of the term *temenos* reflects the complexity of the building, which was a sort of “temple-mausoleum” for the late Piyris, in the words of the papyrologist Guy Wagner.²⁷ It was equipped with outbuildings and undoubtedly with a consecrated area, and perceived as more than a simple *hieron*.

Finally, in a third phase, a last complex, dedicated to the service and preparation of offerings, was constructed to the south. These rooms were built against the outer wall of the central sanctuary: a vast courtyard (19) was constructed, onto which opened grain storerooms (20), a silo and bakery spaces (17–18), which were probably necessary very early on to allow the large sanctuary to function. Against the rock wall, a redistribution corridor with niches (16) provides access to the vestibule of the

²⁶ Graffito no. 11.

²⁷ G. Wagner, in Hussein 2000, 69.

central sanctuary. All the ceramics found there and studied by Pascale Ballet date from the end of the 3rd-4th century CE. They probably correspond to the last phase of use of the complex.

3 The Divine Career of Piyris

Let us now return to Piyris and his destiny. His burial seems to be contemporary with the functioning of the site's main necropolis and dates essentially to the 1st-2nd century CE. It marks his social differentiation as the rest of the burials are found in a complex much further west, about 1200 metres away, and consist of shaft tombs, opening onto one or two vaults. Piyris, and a small group of other deceased people, was thus not buried with the rest of the population, and the location of his tomb seems to relate to the northern temple, located about 250 metres away on the same ridge. This proximity to the temple evokes the configuration of an isolated tomb at the site of el-Deir, also north of Kharga, identified as a priest's burial and dated to the Persian period (5th century BCE).²⁸ The human remains found in the vaulted room were buried in an excavated coffin-like pit, as is the case with the el-Deir tomb and a group of contemporary tombs found at Hibis.²⁹ The tomb at Ayn el-Labakha contained five vases – *krateriskoi* or *kantharoi*, and a cylindrical beaker.³⁰ Pascale Ballet emphasises the rarity of this type of forms in the oasis.³¹ One of them has irregular vertical depressions on the neck, awkwardly reproducing the gadrooning of metal vessels: the equipment in the tomb is therefore an imitation of luxury ware, similar to what will later be known as the Kharga Red Slip Ware, a top-of-the-range production of the oases.³²

As underlined above, the hemispeos chapel (6), originally framed by two niches, is similar to a classical Egyptian funerary chapel, *i.e.* a superstructure in which funerary offerings were provided to the deceased to ensure their survival in the afterlife. Piyris was probably an important person, perhaps related to the priestly staff of the sanctuary.³³ Unfortunately, we do not know more about him. The addition of a courtyard and a terrace in a second phase evokes several temples in hemispeos dedicated to deified deceased people: at the back of the sanctuary of Mandulis in Kalabcha, a rock chapel is

²⁸ Tallet 2014, 227–229.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Hussein 2000, no. 3045–3048.

³¹ P. Ballet in *ibid.*, 94.

³² *Ibid.*, no. 3045. This production appears only at the beginning of the 4th century CE: Rodziewicz 1987, type 32, pl. XLIV; Ballet, type 141: Reddé *et al.* 2004.

³³ This may have been the case for Pihor and Peteisis in Dendur and for the two deceased people of Kalabcha: Cayzac 2019, 66–67.

dedicated to the two deities identified by Julie Cayzac; at the back of the temple of Peteisis and Pihor at Dendur, a small hollowed room, preceded by a masonry structure, must have corresponded to the tomb and the funerary chapel of the two brothers, or to the primitive temple of these deities, that was abandoned in favour of a large temple under Augustus because of the growing popularity of their cult.³⁴ Finally, a last example is that of the hemispeos arranged for the cult of the two deified mortals at Deir el-Bahari, Imhotep and Amenhotep, son of Hapu. On the second terrace of Hatshepsut's funerary temple, a sanctuary for these cults was built in the Ptolemaic period in two rock chambers that were extended by a third room dug deeper into the mountain.³⁵ And, as in the case of Kalabcha, a kiosk was built in front of the speos.³⁶

Throughout this set of buildings, we can note the link between the hemispeos and deified deceased people. As Julie Cayzac points out, this mixed composition must have seemed “particularly relevant for the sanctuaries of some of these singular gods. In all the previous examples, the choice was made to place the most sacred part of the building in the heart of the rock. Perhaps this was a way of recalling the tomb of the deceased.”³⁷

Ayn el-Labakha, where things took place in two phases, is a good observatory: first, the construction of a tomb and its funerary chapel, arranged as a small temple of the deified deceased (phase I), then the construction of a dedicated sanctuary, the “central sanctuary”, with a hemispeos chapel, connected to the vaults of the main tomb by two lateral galleries. The place highlights a transition phase from the tomb to the temple: while the funerary chapel is not the place of a cult rendered to the deceased, but rather of offerings ensuring their survival in the afterlife, the second phase marks an evolution towards a cult rendered to the god Piyris.

Moreover, there is a clear desire to architecturally assert the link between the central sanctuary and the initial tomb. Openings were made in the northern walls of the naos and its pronaos, which served the southern part of the original tomb: there clearly seems to be a ritual link with this tomb whose vaulted chamber (5) communicates with a niche of the naos (10), while its antechamber (4) communicates with the pronaos (11). The servants ascended to the antechamber of the tomb from the pronaos using a small staircase cut into the floor of the tomb. Here, they performed rituals, as suggested by the presence of two incense burners and a clamp.³⁸

In addition, in the south-western corner of the chapel, slabs cover a passageway leading down to another subterranean chamber (9), 1.10 m wide, 2.85 m deep, closed by a wooden door. It was left empty and its use is difficult to determine, but the funer-

³⁴ Robert S. Bianchi identifies a crypt uncovered in the southern part of the back wall of the temple as a “tomb” of the two deceased brothers: Bianchi 1998.

³⁵ Laskowska-Kusztal 1984, map I–II; Wildung 1977a, 220–235.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, fig. 1–3.

³⁷ Cayzac 2019, 66.

³⁸ No. 3041; 3033; 3056.

ary symbolism of the naos is explicit: one notes the deliberate splattering of black paint on the walls, a colour strongly connoted by Osirian symbolism, that of the black earth of Egypt regenerated by the rituals of the month of Khoiak and that of rebirth in the afterlife.³⁹ As Alexandra von Lieven suggests, the furniture unearthed in the vault of the temple of Piyris seems to offer an archaeological illustration of the “illumination of the lamp” rituals performed before a deity⁴⁰ or before a deceased person transfigured into Osiris: this is the case of the “illumination before the Osiris (of) Nes-pameteri”, known by a calendar from Elephantine.⁴¹ The rituals in honour of the Osiris (of) Piyris performed in the tomb are thus prolonged by Osirian-type rituals in honour of the god Piyris, in his temple.

4 Theology, Onomastics and Iconography

Piyris is therefore a deified deceased person. In a *proscynema* dated to the 2nd-3rd century CE, inscribed in the courtyard of the sanctuary, he is described as *ḥsi* (ḥσι/αῖσι=ἔσι), “praised”, i.e. as a deified deceased/hero, privileged by the gods.⁴² In one graffito (no. 12), the choice of the epithet *εὐτυχέστατος*, “most blessed, most fortunate” is, as Guy Wagner notes, quite exceptional for a god and could refer, according to him, to the divinisation of the hero Piyris, fortunate among all.⁴³ But Piyris is also referred to several times as “great god”, in Greek *theos megistos*⁴⁴ and in demotic *ntr* ‘3,⁴⁵ and as “lord”, *kurios*.⁴⁶ The numerous pieces of furniture found in the vestibule (12) of the central sanctuary highlights the importance of the audience of Piyris. An unfinished bas-relief (stele I), dated to the 2nd-3rd century CE, was inscribed with a six-line dedication, in ink: the object is dedicated “out of piety” (*εὐσεβείας χάριν*) to

³⁹ Chassinat 1966; Coulon 2010; Plu., *De Iside* 39. See the crypt in the back wall of the naos in Dendur, accessible from the outside: Bianchi 1998.

⁴⁰ Collombert 2004.

⁴¹ Hoffmann 2009; Hugues 2005, 6–57, no. 147, pl. 33d; von Lieven 2010; 2017, 240–241. Like the deceased in the funerary texts, Peteisis and Pihor are described in the pronaos and naos of Dendur as “Osiris, great one, praised in the necropolis, justified”: Blackman 1911, 83.

⁴² *Graffito* no. 5. The term is transcribed in Greek elsewhere as *ἐσις/ἑσις*. On this term, see Quaegebeur 1977; Wildung 1977a; Wildung 1977b; Wagner 1998; von Lieven 2017, 242–244; R. Birk in Birk/Delvaux / Labrique 2022, 38–43. *DB MAP* #T20501.

⁴³ Hussein 2000, 81. *DB MAP* #T20506 and 20507.

⁴⁴ Stele IV and *graffiti* no. 5, 9, 16, and 12 (*megistos*). *DB MAP* #T20500, 20501, 20504, 20507, 205010.

⁴⁵ A series of graffiti in demotic was inscribed on the north wall of the naos: see G. Dem. Lebekha 1, l. 2; 2, l. 2; Rossi/Ikram 2018, 169–170.

⁴⁶ *Graffiti* no. 6, 7, 12, 16. *DB MAP* #T20502, 20503, 20505, 20510. The god Mandulis in Talmis/Kalabcha is also referred to as such in some of the *proscynemata* of pilgrims who came to seek his oracle: Ronchi 1974, III, 622–625.

“Piyris, greatest god (θεῷ μεγίστῳ)” by a man named Herakleios, son of Paapis, a carpenter.⁴⁷

In the course of this process, the figure of Piyris acquired a theological depth the full dimensions of which are unmeasurable in the absence of preserved liturgical texts in the temple. But we can nevertheless grasp two fundamental elements: the construction of a divine image and, albeit accompanied by no biographical information on Piyris, the importance given to his name.

As a human who has attained divinity, Piyris must be identifiable in order to play his role as an intercessor between the world of mortals and that of the gods, providing health and salute (*soteria*)⁴⁸ to the faithful who “see”⁴⁹ him in his sanctuary. His image, which at Ayn el-Labakha takes the form of a statue, must preserve the physical features and character marks of the individual and provide him with a body suitable for the funeral service; as a receptacle of the deity, it is the recipient of the appropriate rituals and devotions of the faithful. This image must be an evocative image, easily identifiable, but also manifest and convey all the power and qualities of the god. In the middle of the antechamber (12), there was a fragmentary male statue made from limestone (Fig. 5)⁵⁰ and a bronze statuette representing a figure whose left arm ends in a hawk’s head (Fig. 6).⁵¹ A third statue, made from limestone and 36.5 cm high, was found in the courtyard (13) in the north-western corner: it had a rectangular base and is probably an ex-voto, which is probably also the case for the other statues, which are more fragmentary, but of a larger module. It is a male figure with curly hair holding an object in his left hand, which must have been a broken falcon (Fig. 7).⁵² Also noteworthy is a copy of the same model, of which only the bottom remains, which stood on the terrace (14) in front of the threshold leading to the courtyard.⁵³

This series of statues and figurines was therefore uncovered in the “open” or semi-open rooms of the main sanctuary: the vestibule, the courtyard and the threshold serving the terrace. They are made of limestone or bronze and seem to follow a common model, with different modules: it is always a male figure, standing, leaning slightly on the left leg,⁵⁴ with the right hand raised⁵⁵ and the index finger pointing upwards.⁵⁶ The left arm, preserved for statues no. 2993 (in limestone) and 3010 (in bronze), is folded at waist level and holds an object, now lost for 2993. By invoking the

47 Hussein 2000, no. 3001; limestone; height: 31 cm; width: 17.5 cm. *DB MAP* #T20500.

48 Hussein 2000, stelae no. I and III, graffito no. 17.

49 Hussein 2000, graffiti no. 1, 5 and 12.

50 Hussein 2000, 51–52, no. 3035 (acephalous, arms broken).

51 *Ibid.*, no. 3010.

52 *Ibid.*, no. 2993.

53 *Ibid.*, no. 2939.

54 In the case of bronze statue no. 3010, the male figure is standing, with his feet aligned, facing forward.

55 No. 2993, 3035, 3010.

56 No. 2993, 3010.



Fig. 5: Limestone statue of Piyris, Kharga Museum, New Valley, after Hussein 2000, 51, fig. 68.

parallel of the bronze statuette we can postulate that it was a hawk: the forearm is wrapped in a sleeve that ends in a hawk's head. The hair is short and curly, the eyes sometimes highlighted with black, showing an intensity of presence that enhances its divinity.⁵⁷ The figure is dressed in a fringed toga, tightened at the waist by a twisted fabric belt.⁵⁸

In the three limestone statues, the figure's clothing is carefully represented. The man is dressed in a short-sleeved chiton-like tunic with a 'boat' collar. It stops just above the ankles and has fringes along its lower edge. Over this, he wears a fringed stole (or mantle?), which completely envelops his left arm, folded against his left side, and leaves his right arm free, raised. The end of the stole is rolled up and forms a belt around the figure's waist. This form of garment and drapery is quite unusual and hardly attested in the Egyptian corpus, while decoration with fringes is not present in the Greek corpus and remains the preferred mode of decoration in Egyptian clothing.

⁵⁷ No. 3010 and 2993, with eyes highlighted in black; a small limestone head (2985) is that of a male figure with curly, longer hair.

⁵⁸ No. 2993, 3035, 3010.



Fig. 6: Bronze statue of Piyris, Kharga Museum, New Valley, after Hussein 2000, 52, fig. 72.

We are therefore dealing with a hybrid garment here. A similar drapery appears, without fringes, on another statue preserved in the Kharga Museum which comes from the temple of Amun at Qasr Zayyan.⁵⁹ The presence of horns in the figure's hair indicates that this is a representation of the ram-god Amun (Fig. 8).

A more detailed study of this garment will most certainly be needed, but it seems necessary to highlight a few elements.⁶⁰

The wearing of a tunic with fringes along the lower edge is attested in Egyptian documentation and among the 64 priests represented in two large scenes painted in the *mammisi* (birth temple) of the sphinx god Tutu at Kellis, in the nearby oasis of Dakhla,⁶¹ some wear clothes that may seem similar, although worn differently: thus, priest S22 wears a sack-like tunic with fringes on the lower part, complemented by a

⁵⁹ Kharga Museum, Inv. 2–1036.

⁶⁰ I would like to warmly thank Sylvie Brun, textile conservator at the Musée Galliera, Paris, for the rich discussions we had on this garment.

⁶¹ Kaper 1997, 87–137, esp. 108–113; Hope/Bowen 2021, 215–216.



Fig. 7: Limestone statue of Piyris, Kharga Museum, New Valley. Photo credit: G. Tallet.

tight, fringed scarf at the bust; others wear short-sleeved sack tunics with fringes along the side edges (16 priests in all, S31-S37, N19-N27). This may be a reference to Piyris' priestly status.

The arrangement of the garment, on the other hand, is similar to a Greco-Roman type of drapery, but could be inspired by an Egyptian model. Indeed, a statue with common features in terms of clothing was found on the dromos of the Soknebtynis temple in Tebtynis:⁶² it is a 1.20 m-high statue that Vincent Rondot compares to two fragments of a limestone statuette also found in Tebtynis⁶³ and to a head of a statue of the same origin kept in the Phoebe Hearst Museum.⁶⁴ Private statues of the same type were

⁶² Rondot 2004, §127–129.

⁶³ Cairo, Egyptian Museum, JE 65424.

⁶⁴ Inv. 6–20311.



Fig. 8: Limestone statue of the god Amun from Qasr Zayyan, Kharga Oasis (Kharga Museum). Photo credit: G. Tallet.

found in other temples of the Fayum: in Narmuthis, two statues located on both sides of the axial door, in the pronaos,⁶⁵ and two others in Soknopaiou Nesos.⁶⁶ This is the same garment that Vincent Rondot postulates to be worn by the deified pharaoh Amenemhat III on a wooden painting in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow.⁶⁷ This garment is well known outside Fayum in an abundant series from the Late Period studied by Robert S. Bianchi and referred to by him as “striding draped male figures”.⁶⁸ It is a long tunic with short sleeves over which a fringed shawl is draped, leaving the right shoulder free – unlike the Piyris garment, which covers both shoulders. However, a vari-

⁶⁵ Vogliano 1937, pl. XV and XXX; Arslan 1997, 76, no. II.51.

⁶⁶ *I.Fayoum* I, 77–78; Bingen 1998; Lembke 1998.

⁶⁷ Inv. I, 1a 6860.

⁶⁸ Bianchi 1978.

ation of this garment, this time covering both shoulders, can be seen in a series of statues also published by Robert S. Bianchi and referred to as “enthroned male figures”.⁶⁹ Now, the “striding draped male figures” are, according to Jan Quaegebeur’s hypothesis, *ḥsyw*, glorified dead or “private persons who claim deification, (who) are represented wearing a cloak which originally is connected with the festival-*sed*”, i.e. the royal jubilee during which the power of the king was renewed.⁷⁰ This interpretation is accepted by Bianchi in his complementary study devoted to the “enthroned male figures”. The unusual garment worn by Piyris would thus be an indication of his status as a deceased person and a sign of his divinisation. As for the falcon that rests on his hand, or even that merges with his hand in the case of the bronze statuette 3010, this remains to be explained. Perhaps this is a fairly realistic representation of the ritual elements witnessed by the faithful during the festivals in honour of Piyris: a cult servant would hold a hawk or an effigy of a hawk, or perform a type of ritual involving a hawk form.

5 From Man to Falcon

Alexandra von Lieven has drawn up a typology of the iconography of the deified dead. The first type, according to her, consists of statues or two-dimensional representations of the deceased in human form without any particular distinguishing feature.⁷¹ In the second type, the anthropomorphic iconography is enriched by the wearing of regalia, as is the case with Peteisis and Pihor of Dendur, who wear a beard, the atef crown or a bull’s tail.⁷² In these different cases, the new god remains intimately linked to his status as a deceased person. But it can also occur that certain deified deceased are granted more theological depth with, for example, the attribution of a divine family from the Egyptian pantheon: Imhotep and his sister Renpetneferet were considered the children of Ptah, the deified king Amenhotep I as the son of Amun and Mut,⁷³ the Osiris (of) Nespameteri as that of Khnum and Satet.⁷⁴ A thorough theological construction can also lead to the figure becoming the hypostasis of another deity. This is the case of the Lady Udjarenes, at Hut-sekhem, qualified as “Osiris” after her death and who, in 150 years, evolved from the status of a local “saint” to that of a *paredra* of Neferhotep, a deity assimilated to Isis, and adopted the features of this deity.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Bianchi 1992.

⁷⁰ Bianchi 1978; Quaegebeur 1977.

⁷¹ See the example of Satabous and Tesenuphis in the Fayum: Bernand 1975–1981, I, pl. 58–60; von Lieven 2010.

⁷² Blackman 1911, *passim*.

⁷³ Gitton 1981.

⁷⁴ Hoffmann 2009.

⁷⁵ Collombert 1995.

What about Piyris? The presence of the falcon on his right hand in statuette no. 3010 could link him to the second type, the deceased with regalia. The falcon also appears on the hands of the two deities from Kalabcha-Talmis on two reliefs facing each other on either side of the door that allows access from the courtyard to the hypostyle hall of the temple: they wear the crown of Upper and Lower Egypt,⁷⁶ respectively, while the falcon of Piyris carries the union of the two crowns, the pschent. In the case of Kalabcha, the gesture can be interpreted as one of consecration of the North and the South.⁷⁷ But this is unlikely for Piyris: on the small bronze statuette in the vestibule, his hand does not *hold* a falcon, it is *extended by* a falcon.

Examples of deities borrowing the iconography of a local deity in its animal form are rare: this has been postulated in the case of a figure called Petesobek, assimilated to the crocodile god Sobek in the Fayum.⁷⁸ Another example is that of Pashermentou-Panakht: on a Greco-Roman stela that went up for sale at Christie's in 2018, this deified deceased person is represented in a hieracocephalic form.⁷⁹ Moreover, the parallel with king Amenemhet III, to whom a cult was performed in the Fayum under the name of Pramares (*Pr-ʿ3 M3-ʿRʿ*, “the pharaoh Maa-Ra”), can offer additional elements.⁸⁰ The latter appears on a painted wooden panel in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow (already mentioned) draped in a white shawl and walking towards the crocodile god Sobek-Rê: he wears the costume of the “striding draped male figures”.⁸¹ Another stele preserved in the Cairo Museum (JE 28159) shows the same Pramares in profile, greeting the crocodile-headed god Sobek, and appears to be another version of the painted wooden panel: in this case, the cartouche of Amenemhat in the field leaves no doubt as to the identity of the character wearing the royal *nemes*.⁸² Beyond a simple face-to-face encounter, we witness a real transfer of iconography in that of Pramares: as for Udjarenes and Neferhotep-Isis, Amenemhat III-Pramares sees his iconography transformed in contact with the local god to whom he is related, the crocodile Sobek.

The cult of Pramares developed considerably during the Ptolemaic period. It received significant subsidies from the Ptolemies at the same time that the development policy of the Fayum inaugurated by Amenemhat III was being resumed: they wished to present themselves as continuators of the great kings of the 22nd dynasty. This great benefactor of the Fayum was deified and associated with the cult of Sobek in

⁷⁶ Cayzac 2019, 38–39, fig. 1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Fig. 1 and map I, 1a-1b.

⁷⁸ Von Lieven 2013.

⁷⁹ Thiers 2022.

⁸⁰ Bresciani 1986; Jackson 1999; Widmer 2002; Zauzich 2008.

⁸¹ Vassilieva/Rondot 2012; Rondot 2013, 166–169.

⁸² Guéraud 1941.

several sites⁸³ and he is attested in many towns of the Fayum in the Greco-Roman period: inscriptions and papyri testify to his presence under the name of Pramares, in Theadelphia,⁸⁴ Euhemeria,⁸⁵ Apollonias,⁸⁶ Hawara,⁸⁷ Soknopaiou Nesos,⁸⁸ or, under the name of Poremanres, in Philadelphia.⁸⁹ A set of stelae from Theadelphia is known, representing a royal figure, facing forwards, framed by two crocodiles, undoubtedly an indication of the integration of Pramares in the crocodile regeneration ceremonies in some sanctuaries.⁹⁰

But his association with the local triad is especially well known at Narmuthis, according to the hymns in Greek engraved by Isidoros in the vestibule of the temple. The triad of Narmuthis was formed by the crocodile god Sokonopis, his consort Isis-Hermuthis and their son, the crocodile Anchoes.⁹¹ The fourth hymn of Isidoros elucidates the link between the deified Amenemhat III and the triad:

Who built this holy temple to the greatest (*megistê*) Hermuthis? What god remembered the All-Holy One of the Immortals? He marked out the sacred shrine as a high and inaccessible Olympus. For Deo the highest (*hupsistê*), Isis Thesmophoros, for Anchoes the Son, and the Agathosdaimon, Sokonopis, Immortals (all), he created a most fitting haven. A certain one, they say, was born a divine king of Egypt; he appeared on earth as Lord of all the world, rich, righteous, and omnipotent; he had fame, yes, and virtue that rivalled the gods' for to him the earth and sea were obedient, (and) the streams of all the beautiful-flowing rivers, (and) the breath of the winds, and the sun which shows sweet light, (and) on his rising (is) visible to all. The races of winged creatures with one accord would listen to him, and he instructed all who heard his voice. The fact is clear that the birds obeyed him as those who have read the Sacred Scriptures speak of this king once entrusting a written message to a crow and she returned bearing a verbal message together with a written reply. (It is so) for he was not a mortal man, nor was the son of a mortal man, but as offspring of a god, great and eternal god, (even of) Suchos, all powerful, very great, omnipotent, and the Agathosdaimon, he the son appeared on earth as a king. The maternal grandfather of this god is the Distributor of Life, Ammon, who is Zeus of Hellas and Asia. For this reason all things heard his voice, all things that move on earth and the races of winged heavenly creatures. What was the name of this one? What ruler, what king or who of the immortals, determined it? (Why) the one who nurtured him, Sesoosis, he who has gone to the Western Heaven, gave him a

⁸³ See Erman [1934] 1937, 449–50; *OGIS* 175; *I. Égypte Métriques* 175, IV. On Pramares and the crocodile: Bresciani 1986; Labib Habachi, “A strange monument of the Ptolemaic period”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 41, 1955, p. 106–111.

⁸⁴ *I.Fayoum* 2.111.

⁸⁵ *I.Fayoum* 2.133; Rübsam 1974, 84.

⁸⁶ Rübsam 1974, 58.

⁸⁷ Rübsam 1974, 91.

⁸⁸ Rübsam 1974, 161.

⁸⁹ Rübsam 1974, 144. See also *I.Fayoum* 1.6 (Soknopaiou Nesos), 34–35 (Hawara), 69 (Soknopaiou Nesos).

⁹⁰ *I.Fayoum* 2.116–117, pl. 20–21. See also Bernand 1975–1981, III, 68: in one of the houses located on either side of the dromos of the temple, a small bust of Amenemhat III was found, testifying to his cult in this place.

⁹¹ *I.Fayoum* 3.158–159.

fair name, “Son of the Golden Sun”. When the Egyptians say his name (in their language) they call (him) “Porramanres, the Great, Deathless” (. . .).

Reliably learning these facts from men who study history, I myself have set them all up on inscribed pillars, and translated (into Greek) for the Greeks the power of a prince who was a god, power such as no other mortal has possessed.

Isidoros wrote (it).⁹²

Thus, Pramares, alias Poremanres, is the offspring of crocodile god Suchos-Sobek, and thus part of a divine family, like Imhotep, Amenhotep I or Nespameteri before him. This justifies why he adopts a double iconography, human and animal. It is moreover specified, in the hymn of Isidoros, that Pramares was deified precisely because of his capacity to dialogue with animals, and specifically with birds.⁹³ This image is reminiscent of the figure of Orpheus charming the animals, which was popular in the iconography found in wealthy houses of the Dakhla oasis in the Late Roman Period,⁹⁴ but it may also allude to Piyris’ possible powers as a seer: according to the pseudo-Apollodoros of Athens’ *Library*, dating to the 1st-2nd century CE, Melampus was granted the faculty of understanding the language of not just birds, but all animals, after he took care of a dead snake’s children (1.9.11); this quality has also been outlined for Tiresias by the same author (3.6.7).⁹⁵ Are we dealing here with a similar process to that of the representations of Piyris with a falcon on his hand? Did the reputation of the god-king Pramares and his “aretalogy” circulate beyond the Fayum, to the point of serving as a model for the creation of the image of Piyris? And what about the reference to Melampus, whose powers as a seer derived from the Egyptians, according to Herodotus (2.49)? The falcon statues at Ayn el-Labakha are reminiscent of depictions of Sobek or Amun on wooden boards, terracotta plaques and on a gemstone: in these cases, the animal is considered the zoomorphic hypostasis of the god.⁹⁶ There is unfortunately no evidence of the presence of a living bird in the sanctuary of Piyris, as was the case in Edfu.

And indeed, a second form of Piyris appears in the temple statuary, especially related to the northern sanctuary. Fragments of limestone statues of falcons were found in a pit dug at the back of the chapel, testifying to the fact that the cult that took place in this building was at some point addressed to a falcon deity. A limestone statue (Fig. 9), of which 19 cm is preserved, represents the falcon Horus, whose crown has been broken; he wears a necklace with a pendant representing a naos containing an

⁹² *Hymn IV*; see Vanderlip 1972, 64–65. *DB MAP* #S3200.

⁹³ Bernand 1969, 649; Ael., *NA* 6.7.

⁹⁴ This figure appears in the painted decoration of the wealthy house of Serenos, in Trimithis-Amheida, in the oasis of Dakhla, in the 4th century CE: McFadden 2019.

⁹⁵ I would like to thank Thomas Galoppin for bringing this to my attention.

⁹⁶ Tallet 2020, 656–685; Rondot 2013; Rondot 2012; Tallet 2011. Facilities involving a living crocodile have been discovered in Narmuthis: Bresciani/Pintaudi 1999; Bresciani/Giammarusti, 2001; 2012.

udjat eye. It was originally standing on a pedestal.⁹⁷ The eyes are inlaid with black glass, as the eyes of anthropomorphic figures could be enhanced with black.⁹⁸ The feathers are rendered by scales and striations. It is a beautifully made statue, perhaps older than the rest of the group according to Adel Hussein.⁹⁹ In the case of a second limestone statue (Fig. 10), 45 cm high, the falcon is still standing on a pedestal: the proportions are awkward despite careful work, especially the feathers.¹⁰⁰ The head of the statuette was found in the cellar (15) when the cult furniture was deposited there. A crown is present on this reconstructed statue: it is the *pschent*, allowing us to identify the royal heir god Horus, or one of his forms. The base was inscribed with a dedication, allowing us to assume that it is a votive object: the six lines specify that the object was dedicated by an Aurelius, Ammonios – the dedication of the object is thus posterior to the Edict of Caracalla in 212 CE. Finally, a limestone statuette represents a falcon with a very deteriorated head, the crown of which is missing along with the legs and part of the tail. It wears a necklace with a pendant in relief on its chest, the plumage is well detailed.¹⁰¹ The three statues were probably buried deliberately to protect them from looting during later phases. The fragments of a fourth Horus-falcon statue in stuccoed wood (Fig. 11), 11 cm high, were lying at ground level: the falcon is again wearing the *pschent*. The wood is covered with a film of white stucco and the uraeus of the *pschent* is a metal applique (silver?).¹⁰² Added to this is the furniture from the deposit in cellar 15: a fragmentary statue of a falcon in limestone (Fig. 12) on a rectangular base, the head of which is missing,¹⁰³ and other bronze objects that were probably originally part of the cult furniture of the northern sanctuary – three dishes and a bronze hook.¹⁰⁴ Three bronze columns, uncovered in the northern niche of the façade, could have been part of a mobile naos.

The cult of the falcon god in the northern sanctuary probably functioned in parallel with that of the central sanctuary. The choice of the animal may have been inspired by the very name of the glorified dead, Piyris being the Greek transcription of the Egyptian *pzy Hr*, Pihor, “that of Horus”, which appears in the demotic graffiti.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁷ Hussein 2000, no. 3030.

⁹⁸ It should be noted that in the case of the deified deceased Hor, son of Pashermontou, on the Cairo stele JE 52809, which was probably part of the saint's shrine, the eyes were originally inlaid with precious metal: Rowe 1940, 16–19, pl. II.

⁹⁹ Hussein 2000, 43.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 3028.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, no. 3031.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, no. 3043.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, no. 3032.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 3025 and 3055.

¹⁰⁵ Lüdeckens 1980, 441; *TM* Nam. 915.



Fig. 9: Falcon statue of Piyr in limestone, Kharga Museum, New Valley, after Hussein 2000, 52, fig. 75.



Fig. 10: Falcon statue of Piyr in limestone, Kharga Museum, New Valley, after Hussein 2000, 53, fig. 78.



Fig. 11: Falcon statue of Piyris in limestone, Kharga Museum, New Valley, after Hussein 2000, 53, fig. 82.



Fig. 12: Fragmentary statue of the Piyris falcon in limestone, Kharga Museum, New Valley, after Hussein 2000, 53, fig. 79.

6 The Sensible Materiality of the Divine: Two Visions of the Same God?

Which form came first? It might be tempting to adhere to the hymn of Isidoros in Narmuthis, “translating for the Greeks” the rites of Isis-Hermuthis and the local triad, to postulate that the anthropomorphic image of Piyris is a Hellenised dressing of an Egyptian theological fund and to see the form of the hawk god as the original one. However, the examples of Udjarenes and Amenemhet III-Pramares show us that the opposite evolution is more likely. Piyris was deified and received a cult with strong Osirian connotations in the central sanctuary, with rituals related to the burial and regeneration of the deceased, in connection with his burial chamber. He probably only became a falcon deity in a second phase. At this stage, the play on his name, “That of Horus”, probably played an important role. This should not be surprising: as Dimitri Meeks reminds us, “because it is in adequacy with the bearer, the name contains the identity and, correlatively, the deep nature of an individual, even if he is a god. [. . .] The word ‘name’ (*rn*) is sometimes identified with the *ka*, the vital energy, which connects one’s name to what keeps one alive”.¹⁰⁶ Thus the power of a pun, a homonymy or an assonance can prove to create a new deity and the etymology (albeit fanciful) sometimes reflects the functionality or origin of the god. In the case of Piyris, the fact that his name is linked with Horus seems to have found a ritual and theological development. Indeed, the deceased Piyris, brought closer to Osiris in his central sanctuary, seems to have split into a human and animal form linked to Horus, son and heir of Osiris.

In the middle of the central chapel there is an enormous sandstone pedestal, 2.5 metres long and 1.05 metres wide, rectangular in shape, which is similar to a stretcher support for religious processions.¹⁰⁷ An iron fork, a bronze incense burner and, in a pit, a bronze lamp were found on the floor of the chapel: they are obviously elements linked to the cult.¹⁰⁸

The dimensions of the support suggest a procession involving the statue of the divine falcon Payhor/Piyris. People attended the festival and brought ex-voto offerings. Fragments of bronze furniture found in this space, such as a 12-cm-high bronze handle, recall the animal form of the divinity (Fig. 13): it is decorated with the head of a falcon wearing a pschent.¹⁰⁹ Consistent objects were found in the service corridor (16), such as a statuette of a hawk made of limestone (Fig. 14), crowned with a pschent

¹⁰⁶ Meeks 2016, 119. On the creative power of the name, see also Meeks 1992.

¹⁰⁷ In processions, portable naoi were often equipped with partial doors, making it possible to play on the visible and the hidden. See van der Plas 1989.

¹⁰⁸ Hussein 2000, no. 3040, 3042, 3481.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 3015.

and wearing a necklace with a medal bearing the effigy of an emperor,¹¹⁰ and in the service room (17), where a small pschent with a frontal uraeus was found (Fig. 15), obviously a crown of a hawk statuette.¹¹¹ Other objects were perhaps scattered during the final looting of the sanctuary or hidden there: a falcon head (Fig. 16) quite close to statuette no. 3029 and a copper spouted beaker associated with Late Imperial (late 3rd and early 4th century CE) coins, were uncovered in the courtyard of the southern part of the complex.¹¹²



Fig. 13: Bronze handle decorated with a falcon's head, Kharga Museum, New Valley, after Hussein 2000, 54, fig. 84.

The procession of Piyris may have been accompanied by medieval mystery-type performances as is attested for another deified dead person, Amenhotep I, at Deir el-Medina: a festival centred around celebrating his death, the festival of “Preparing the Bed for Amenhotep”, is known in the New Kingdom.¹¹³ Similarly, a series of celebrations

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 3029; colour remains.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, no. 3034.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, no. 2940, 2983.

¹¹³ Von Lieven 2001.



Fig. 14: Falcon statue of Piyrís in limestone, Kharga Museum, New Valley, after Hussein 2000, 53, fig. 76.



Fig. 15: Headdress of a falcon statue of Piyrís in limestone, Kharga Museum, New Valley, after Hussein 2000, 53, fig. 81.



Fig. 16: Falcon statue of Piyrís in limestone, Kharga Museum, New Valley, after Hussein 2000, 53, fig. 80.

dedicated to episodes in the life and death of Imhotep are attested in the Ptolemaic period.¹¹⁴ It is possible that there were dramatized performances during which priests held a domesticated falcon or an image of a falcon, as anthropomorphic representations might suggest. These rituals probably took place in ceremonies linked to the death of Osiris (of) Piyris, as suggested by the Osirian dimension of the central sanctuary's chapel, splattered with black, and they may have developed the "Horus" theophoric name of Piyris into a celebration of the royal falcon's rebirth, wearing the pschent and assimilated to Horus. As Paul John Frandsen has pointed out, the tomb, like the female womb, can act as an "instrument of rebirth".¹¹⁵ In the courtyard of the central sanctuary, on the west façade, there are two figures of the patron deity of the female womb, Bes,¹¹⁶ framing the doorway and both facing north in a striking break in symmetry.¹¹⁷ Facing the northern sanctuary, the two figures dance with *udjat* eyes hanging from their forearms and raising a tambourine.¹¹⁸ The presence of the figure of Bes, whose apotropaic function is marked here by the *udjat* eyes, is associated with both birth and death and with the protection of Horus the child.¹¹⁹ As Lise Manniche notes, a bench was set up in front of each decorated wall.

The staging of the apparition of Piyris in processions and the rituals celebrating the Osirian rebirth cycle seem to have been very successful, to the point of giving rise to a local pilgrimage and requiring specific arrangements during the third phase of the sanctuary. The decoration of the northern sanctuary underwent an important renovation during the construction phase of the central sanctuary and seems to have focussed more specifically on the falcon aspect of Piyris.

The double door between the vestibule and the courtyard of the central sanctuary appears to be a demarcation line between the sacred space reserved for the priests, in which there are dipinti in Demotic and only one in Greek,¹²⁰ and the public space, accessible for the faithful. The Greek dipinti are concentrated in this courtyard (17 out of 19 listed by Guy Wagner),¹²¹ the oldest of which dates from year 4 of Antoninus Pius, i.e.

¹¹⁴ Vittmann 1984. These stagings are undoubtedly based on literary narratives elaborated in the temples: Ryholt 2010.

¹¹⁵ Frandsen 2007, 100.

¹¹⁶ Meeks 1992.

¹¹⁷ See a parallel representation in a rock tomb in Bahariya (Qarat el-Faragi): Fakhry 1973, II, reed. 1983, 96, fig. 35. Representations of Bes on either side of a doorway can be found in the temple of Mut and in that of Medamud, see Volokhine 2010, no. 56–57; Volokhine 2019.

¹¹⁸ According to Lise Manniche, it is a shield, and the other hand, lost, would have held a sword: Manniche 2015, 231–232. I don't find this altogether compelling.

¹¹⁹ Malaise 2004.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 169–170; Hussein 2000, *graffito* no. 1.

¹²¹ Wagner 1996; Wagner in Hussein 2000, 69.

in 141 CE.¹²² There was a low bench along the northern wall, as found in the vestibules of several Kharga sanctuaries, including the southern temple of Ayn el-Labakha.¹²³ It could have been a meeting or gathering room. A door allows circulation between the courtyard of the central sanctuary and that of the northern sanctuary. Some privileged persons even have their own place, a *topos*, as attested by graffito no. 3 on the north wall of the antechamber (12): unfortunately, we do not know enough about the holder of this *topos*, Olbios, son of Septimia. In any case, all this points to the existence of dedicated spaces linked to the members of a religious association.¹²⁴

In this room with benches along the north and south walls and against the façade, there are heterogeneous pedestals in the form of rectangular pillars with a cornice and a platform. Their tops were about 1.34 metres above the plinth. These plinths are inscribed with short ex-votos in Greek, just as the south wall bears votive inscriptions in Greek, in red or black paint. Several fragments of sculptures were also found in this space¹²⁵ the most remarkable of which is the male statue of Piyris no. 2993, which may have been placed on one of the votive pedestals. Two other plinths were identified on the terrace in the central sanctuary, north and south of the doorway, and on the floor, the fragments of Stele I, an ex-voto of the so-called Ammonios,¹²⁶ and those of a male statue in limestone¹²⁷ similar to 2993.

7 Conclusion

The popularity of local “saints” cults, which played a fundamental role in the religious life of the small towns and villages of the Egyptian *chora*, must have encouraged the development of varied ritual forms, accessible to a multicultural public. In the onomastics, one notices a mixture of oasis epichoric names and common Egyptian, Greek or Latin names. Egyptian priestly strategy cannot be ruled out in this process as we note a desire to be part of a larger trend, attested on the scale of Egypt – at

¹²² Hussein 2000, *graffito* no. 6.

¹²³ Rossi/Ikram 2018, 176.

¹²⁴ We can mention the case of *hry* Djedhor, whose funerary furniture is detailed in P. Louvre N2415, dated 225 BCE: he appears as the patron saint of a professional association (of porters or soldiers). A man named Peteharpre appears as the patron saint of sailors, in *P.Philadelphia* 5/6, dated 302–301 BCE. Von Lieven points out that tombs belonging to craftsmen of the same profession must have been located around the funerary chapel of these saints: von Lieven 2017, 241. A cult association dedicated to Pramares is also attested at Arsinoe in the Fayum by *P.Cairo* CG 31178 (147 BCE): Cenival (de) 1972, 218; another at Medinet Ghoran, by *P.Dem. Lille* 98: Cenival (de) 1977.

¹²⁵ Hussein 2000, no. 2940, 2984, 2985, 2993, 2994.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 2938.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 2939.

Narmuthis, Talmis,¹²⁸ Deir el-Bahari¹²⁹ and elsewhere – which consists in using Greek poetic forms to promote a sanctuary, even a local one, as is the case on Stele I, placed on the terrace of the central sanctuary. As Guy Wagner pointed out, and as Willy Clarysse and Marc Huys demonstrated, the text shows a somewhat clumsy attempt at versification in Ionian, in a Homeric language and style, and is organised into three distichs arranged in 15 lines enamelled with rare and sophisticated words or archaic forms.¹³⁰ It was probably thought necessary to give the local “saint” Piyris the destiny that his name both suggested and called for.

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¹²⁸ Tallet 2012; 2016, with previous references. Note the use of the adjective μάκαρ, a variant of which is also present in one of Kalabcha’s hymns to Mandulis (IM 166, l. 2), and which is incidentally also used as an epithet of Asclepios (Kaibel 1878, 1027.33, 43).

¹²⁹ Lajtar 2006.

¹³⁰ Clarysse/Huys 1996.

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