

Original article

GOD NEPRI IN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN RELIGION

Abu-El-Nadar, W.

Lecturer, Guidance dept., High Institute of Tourism and Hotels-Abu-Keer, Alexandria, Egypt.

e-mail: drwafdy@yahoo.com

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Abstract

*One of seasonal deities in ancient Egypt was god Nepri, god of grains and germination. This paper aims at highlighting this deity which there was no monograph about him as yet. This will be through some religious texts and representations which are related to this deity. God Nepri played an important role in Egyptian religion, this fact is confirmed by coffin texts, book of the dead and the *Imy-dw3t*. Nepri's role in the, book of the dead in terms of providing the dead with food and it is a limited role comparing to his roles in the coffin texts which were linked to resurrection and life that he grants for the dead.*

Keywords: *God Nepri, Religious texts, Coffin texts, Book of the dead, imy-w3dt*

1. Introduction

Many of ancient Egyptian deities were associated with the environment around them. The characteristics of those deities were varied according to the multiplicity of the manifestations of the ancient Egyptian environment starting from the Nile and its annual flood on which all aspects of life depend, fertile soil which is the source of growth and life and the corps and their production. If there were some deities that had their effective role on the ancient Egyptian's

life all over the year, there were some other deities whose role associated with seasonal [1], periods of the year like flood, germination and harvest. One of those seasonal deities was god Nepri; god of grains and germination. This paper aims at highlighting that deity whereas there has been no monograph about him yet. This will be through some religious texts and representations which are related to that deity.

2. God Nepri

As to the form of god Nepri the oldest scene of him was in the temple of king Sahu-Ra from 5th dynasty [2]. He is represented in the form of the Nile god with the shape of a fat and flabby bellies man, which is the same appearance of some other gods that personifies different natural or geographical manifestations as a symbol of welfare and growth [2]; may be the full breast refers to that he carries

the double traits of masculinity and femininity, i.e. fertility and vegetation growth. On this view, Nepri's body was covered with wheat, fig. (1) [2]. Human form was the traditional appearance of god Nepri throughout the different periods He was represented as a man in the rock temple of King Amenhotep II in Wadi-Elsebu' and holding two bands of wheat, with the goddess Sekhet and the

god Hapy, fig. (2) [3]. In Graeco-Roman period he is represented in the same shape as well, fig. (3) [4]. Coffin texts present, through some spells, indications

that may clarify the nature and the role of god Nepri and his relations to other deities, such as:

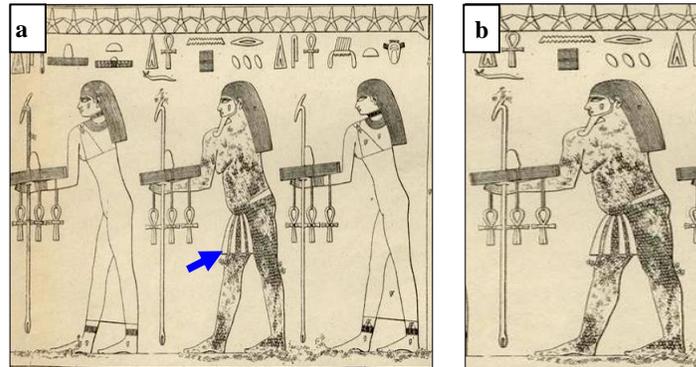


Figure (1) **a** Nepri in the temple of Sahu-Ra, **b** details of the figure (After Borchardt, 1913, pl. 30)



Figure (2) Nepri in front of Sekht and Hapy in wadi-Elsebu' (After Guglielmi, *Die feldgöttin Sxt, in die welt des orient, Band VII, 1973-1974, p.222, Abb.2*)

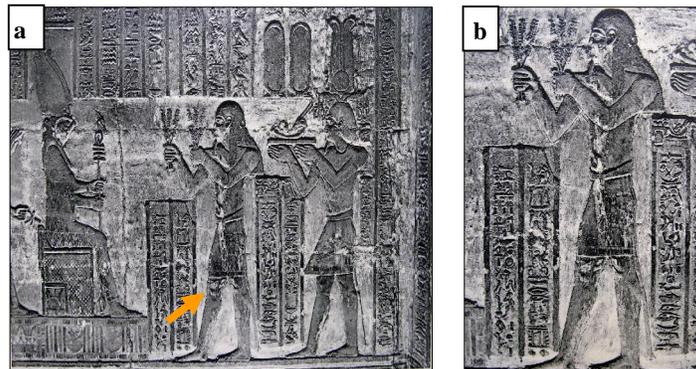


Figure (3) **a** Nepri in front of Sokar-Osiris holding wheat bunches in Dendara, **b** details of the figure (After Chassinat, 1934, *Le temple de dendara, II, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Le Caire, PL. CXV*)

2.1. Spell 80

It narrates that the dead merges with Nepri: "... (even I) whom Atum made into the grain-God when he caused

2.2. Spell 102

In spell (102) we read: "It is the hundreds of the grain-god who rescue you in the portal of the sunshine; they go up, go down and return by means of

me to go down into this land, to The Island of Fire, when I became Osiris the Son of Geb." [5] [6].

it. It is the grain-god who takes possession of you, and you go by means of the efflux of my flesh and the sweat of my head. [5].

beings, that are food and clothes^(c) [16].
From 30th dynasty king Nektenebo I is



[...]sn wr ʿ3 bt ʿsʿt ḥbw mry Npr s3 Tʿyt

"[...] great of offerings, (and) numerous of festivals for the beloved Npr son of Tʿyt [17]"

On the stela of Amenmes from 18th dynasty which is conserved in Louvre museum, Nepri is related to Horus in a text of the myth of Osiris, the text mentions the characteristics of Horus as heir of his father: "..., Aton is under his laws, the north wind, the river, the flood, the tree of life and every plant. Nepri, god of grain gives him all his plants and food which come out from the land, as he gives what fills and gives it for all the countries" [18] [19]. This paragraph clearly and directly determines some roles of Nepri which are more comprehensive from what is thought as only god of grains, as the text refers that he is the god of germination as he grows up all plants, food and all what harvested the soil. In the book of the dead; Nepri played an important role in the papyrus of Ani and papyrus of Nu, in chapter 77 whereas the dead transforms into a falcon "The grain-god (Npri) gave me food to my throat and I'm the lord of myself and my head's allocations^(d) [20] [21]. In the papyrus of Nu in chapter 149 of the



wiʿ ḥni.f Npr

"The bark which convey(or traverse water) Npr"

Also, another text in the same context could be read; this text is



iʿt kʿmwtt

"Collector (?) of herbs and plants"

described on his stela in Loxur temple as following:

book of the dead we read: "Npri will feed me and make me satisfied with food [21]". From those two sentences, it is clear that Npri's role in the book of the dead in terms of his providing the dead with food, it is a limited role comparing to his roles in the coffin texts which were linked to resurrection and life that he grants to for the dead. In the netherworld (Imydwat), Npri accompanied the sun god Ra in his night journey as it is depicted in the second register of the second hour, fig. (4), the boat of Ra, in front of him another boat which its prow and stern are decorated with the heads of cobra. On this boat there are three creatures; the central is a sitting woman and there is one creature in front of her and another one behind her as well, all of the three are armless. To the right and the left behind each one grow two big wheat bunches. This boat is for the god Nepri who represent the god Osiris as god of seeds and germination [22]. Between the prow of the boat and the wheat bunch we read:

between the stern and the wheat bunch, it is:

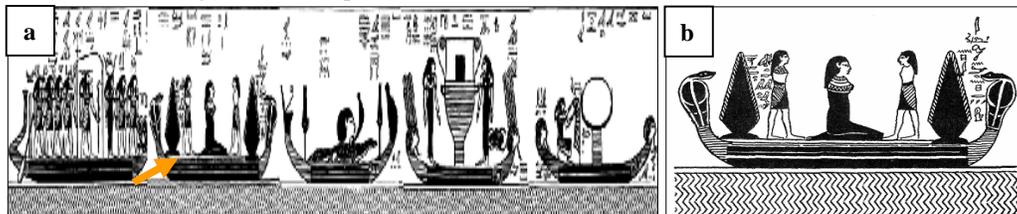
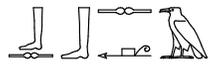


Figure (4) **a** the boat of Ra preceded by the boat of Nepri in the second hour, **b** details of the figure (After Budge, 2007, *The Egyptian heaven and hell*, Vol. 1, London 1905, pp. 26-27; Rbinovich, Y., *Isle of Fire, the book of what's in the hell*, P. 66.)

It is remarkable here that all creatures on the boat of Nepri are armless, It may mean that lost the role of protection, and so it may represent the characteristics of germination and growth and resurrection to guarantee for the boat of Ra a new birth [23]. In the

 *tpw pin (These heads?).*
 *npr npi (The Wheat).*
 *bs bs3 (who flow forth).*

second register of the same hour (*i.e.* the second hour), there are three creatures, fig. (5), each one has two bunches of wheat on its head and they are represented between the harvest gods. Their names are from left to right [22].

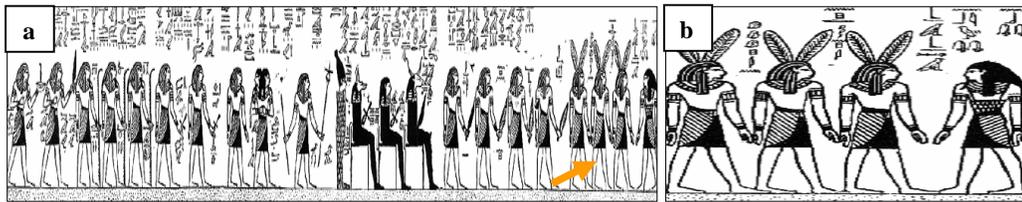


Figure (5) **a** lower register of second hour, **b** details of the figure (After Budge, 1905, *The Egyptian heaven and hell*, Vol. 1, London, P.31.)

In the temple of Edfu there are many texts which describe the characteristics of Nepri who sows seeds in the land, grows cereals, gives out

yields and makes bread [24]. But in Dendara there is more detailed text about the roles and characteristics of Nepri [25]:



dd mdw.in Npr ir t km3 w3hyt b'ḥ t3 m prt 3ht mn.n.k ḥnh.t ḥnh ntr nb ḥnh whm rnpi tp rnpt rnpi k3.k m nn km3 n.k skr wsir ḥrj-ib ḥwt ntrt.

"Recitation by Npr who makes bread, produces seeds, overflows lands with seeds, he brings to you barley, living god, lord of life, who renews youth in the beginning of every year, and renews your soul (with this?), you throw Skr-Osiris in the temple".

Nepri was personifying the annual growth of grains, and the celebration of harvest was celebrating the birth of Nepri in first day of Pa-khons (the first day of harvest month)

[26]. The celebration of the birth of Nepri is related to the festival of Rennut, goddess of harvest, this fact is mentioned by the text of Kha-em-Hat from 18th dynasty [27]:



Wdn iḥt nb.t nfr w'ḥ.t n Rnnwt nbt šnwt m 3bd 1 šmw sw 1 hrw pn mst Npri
"Consecrating all good and pure things for Renenutet, Lady of the Granary on 1 Shomu(=1Pachons), on this birthday of Nepri"

It is known that this Day is the harvest feast and it is the same day on which, in Mammisi of Greco-Roman period, birth of child gods was celebrated, as gods birth comes with

harvest and the birth of new corps It also is the same day on which Rennut, goddess of harvest, gives birth to her new born Nepri who represent the new cereal corp [28]. In addition to that,

- (c) TAYt was the Goddess of weaving and has the main role of supplying of linen.
- (d) Allen translated this phrase as following: "The Grain-god has granted to me that I gain control of him who is at my head: cf.: Allen, T.G., The Egyptian book of the dead documents in the oriental institute museum at the university of Chicago, OIP 82, 1960, p. 150; Idem, The book of the dead or coming Forth by day, SAOC 37, Chicago 1974, p. 66.
- (e) *Mnkt* was the goddess of beer, about that goddess who appeared since the new kingdom

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