"The Good God in the Form of Montu": Pharaoh as the Warrior God on the Battlefield

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Introduction

Ongoing discussions in anthropology call for the abandoning of the representational approach of cultural constructivism, which opts for one nature or world (reality) and many worldviews or cultures (e.g. Viveiros de Castro 2015). 'Ontological turn'[1] and 'cosmological perspectivism' instead plead for the existence of many different ontologies and many different worlds. Such an approach consists of describing and comparing beings, presences, and existences in their constantly changing and diverse situations (Piette 2015).

Western ontological categories cannot be used to explore those of non-Western settings (Alberti et al. 2011) and novel concepts coming out of the ethnographic encounter are encouraged (Henare et al. 2007). How others think, concepts they deploy, and the worlds they

1 This is a somewhat unfortunate label for diverse studies and approaches. When proponents of the ontological approach in anthropology use the word 'ontology' they mean something very different from what philosophers have traditionally meant by the term. Namely, for these anthropologists ontology is a 'way of being' and in philosophy it is a discourse about the nature of being (Graeber 2015: 14).

describe may be very different to ours (Viveiros de Castro 2015). Ontological pluralism allows us to populate the cosmos in a richer way, to compare worlds, and to "enter into contact with types of entities that no longer had a place in theory and for which a suitable language will have to be found in each case" (Latour 2013: 21). Often the people we study do things which appear to us as wrong, but maybe we have reached the limits of our conceptual repertoire (Carrithers et al. 2010). We should "follow the natives, no matter which metaphysical imbroglios they lead us into" (Latour 2005: 62).[2]

Maybe the most controversial ontological discussion in Egyptology is the one about the divine status or nature of the pharaoh. According to some, the king had a specific divinity, but he was not divine from birth, as he needed to acquire his divinity through rituals of accession to the throne (Barta 1975; Hornung 1982). Other authors do not attribute divinity to the king at all (Goedicke 1960; Grimal 1986; Posener 1960). A more nuanced approach sees the institution but not the individual king as being divine (O'Connor and Silverman 1995). The divinity of the pharaoh, being part of a different ontology than our own, is hard for us to comprehend. Joachim Friedrich Quack (2010) asked if the king is treated in a way so special that he had an ontological status different from human beings, not only as a representing office, but also as a person.

Following the question posed by Quack and the current discussions in anthropology, in this paper I will explore the textual and iconographic attestations of the battlefield emanation of the pharaoh as god Montu and *vice versa*.

Montu's Emanation in the Body of the Pharaoh: Textual Sources

Montu was a god of war in ancient Egyptian religion. He was mostly represented as a human falcon-headed figure and was particularly

2 There have recently already been such attempts in Egyptology (e.g. Matić 2018; 2019; Nyord 2018).

worshiped in Thebes in Upper Egypt. The textual sources allow us to differentiate between those attestations in which the king is compared to Montu by others or himself, being like the god,[3] and those in which the king is described by others or himself as being the form of Montu. Most of the texts mentioning Montu in relation to the king were collected by Edward Karl Werner (1985). Some of the texts describe the king simply as 'beloved of Montu', e.g. Qasr Ibrim Stela of Amenhotep I (1514–1494 BC)-BM 1835, Armant stela, Southern Ellesyia stela and Buhen stela of Thutmose III (1479–1425 BC) (Klug 2002). In this paper, I will concentrate on some not so frequently quoted texts in which the identification of the pharaoh with the god is explicit.

The text of the Memphis stela of Amenhotep II (1425–1400 BC) states that the king conquers with strength and power, like Montu, equipped with his weapons. It adds that "his heart is pleased when he sees blood, after he had cut the heads of the rebels".[4] This bloodthirsty aspect of the war god is also attested in a later text of the Quban stela

3 In the text of the First Libyan war of Ramesses III, inscribed on the north half of the rear wall onto the west end of the north wall of Medinet Habu, we find a speech of the king in which he states that he appeared like Montu enlarging Egypt (KRI V. 15. 4; KRITA V. 14). In the speech of the king seated in his chariot in the second series of Medinet Habu scenes of the First Libyan war of Ramesses III he states that he is like Montu (KRI V. 17. 12; KRITA V, 16). Such attestations use the Egyptian preposition *mj* 'like' to express the indirect relation to Montu.

4 *ḥtp jb=f mꜣꜣ.n=f sn<f> ḥsḳ.n=f tp.w ḫꜣk.w-jb*. The translation based on the transcription without correction would be "his heart is pleased when he sees them, after he had cut the heads of the rebels". Although the sign *f* and determinative D26 'liquid issuing from lips' is missing in the writing of the word *sn*, and the plural strokes are written instead, I am nevertheless tempted to read this as *sn<f>* "blood", Wb 3. 459.2–14. There is a parallel in the text from Karnak temple describing the northern wars of Seti I, more precisely his campaign in Year 1 in Pa-Canaan. There the same is written about the king: *ḥtp jb=f mꜣꜣ snf ḥsḳ tp.w n ḫᶜk-jb.w* "His heart is pleased when he sees the blood after cutting of the heads of the rebels", KRI I, 9. 6–7; KRITA I, 8. Such an understanding also seems logical in relation to the following clause in the text of the Memphis stela, namely "after he had cut the heads of the rebels". Furthermore, if we translate this without correcting the transcription we would have the problem of the missing reference word for the 3rd person plural suffix pronoun *-sn*.

of Ramesses II. The text mentions placing of ochre colour (*ṯr.w*) on the limbs of the king, standing metaphorically for the victories of Montu.[5] The ochre colour on the limbs of the king symbolizes the blood of the enemies and by placing the colour on his skin the pharaoh gained attributes of the god.[6] One is reminded of the Great Sphinx stela of Amenhotep II whose text states that the power of Montu is in the king's limbs (Klug 2002: 226). In fact, already in the text of the Konosso stela of Thutmose IV (1400–1390 BC), we read that the king comes forth like Montu "in all his forms"-*m ḫpr.w=f nb.w* (Klug 2002: 348). Not only is the coming forth of the king compared to that of the god but the many forms of the god are mentioned too. Namely, we know of four forms of Montu: Thebes, Tod, Medamud and Armant (Werner 1985).

The king himself can be addressed as Montu, as in the text written over the fort besieged by Egyptians in the first series of Medinet Habu scenes of the First Libyan war of Ramesses III (KRI V, 14. 2; KRITA V, 13). The king can also appear in the form of Montu, as attested in the text before the king in the second series of Medinet Habu scenes of the First Libyan war of Ramesses III (KRI V, 16. 7; KRITA V, 15). In the Great Inscription of Year 5 of Ramesses III, dealing with the First Libyan war, the king is described as having a form like Montu when he goes forth (KRI V, 26. 8; KRITA V, 23), similar to the Konosso stela of Thutmose IV. In the Great Inscription of Year 11 of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu and Karnak, the king is described as Montu in the form of a man (KRI V. 63. 12; KRITA V, 50). A visual counterpart to these textual expressions is found on the interior side of the chariot of Thutmose IV, whose exterior will be discussed below. The interior depicts the god Montu who, with his outstretched wings, surrounds the depiction of a winged scarab (*ḫpr.w*-form) above the

5 *dj.ntw ṯr.w n ḥ^{c}.w=f m nḫt.w n Mnṯ.w* "on whose limbs the ochre colour is placed as victory of Montu" (KRI II, 354.5 ; KRITA II, 189).

6 The lexeme *ṯr.w* "red" is also attested with the meaning "blood", Wb 5, 386. 13; for similar action see the placing of myrrh on the limbs by Hatshepsut in order to appear as Hathor (Matić 2018: 45).

king trampling enemies in the form of a sphinx (Calvert 2013: 55–56). What we see is the god in the form of the king.

The presence of Montu at the king's side is also attested. In the text of the Karnak temple describing the campaigns of Seti I in Qadesh and Amurru, it is stated that Montu is on his right and Seth on his left (KRI I, 24.10; KRITA I, 19). In the text over the chariot span and the king, and in the scene of the mounting of the chariot in the first series of Medinet Habu scenes of the First Libyan war of Ramesses III, it is stated that the gods Montu and Seth are his protection, on his right and on his left (KRI V, 12.6; KRITA V, 12).

These selected texts indicate that the pharaoh is referred to as not only *being like* the god Montu, but *actually being* the form of the god. Furthermore, the god Montu may be referred to as being in the form of a man.

The Pharaoh and Montu on the Chariot of Thutmose IV

The complex interplay between the identity of the king 'being like the god Montu' or 'being the god Montu himself' is also attested in the iconography of the chariot (Cairo CG 46097) found in the tomb of Thutmose IV—KV 43 in the Valley of the Kings (fig.1). The chariot was partially destroyed by the ancient robbers of the tomb and its exact context in the tomb is not known (Carter and Newberry 1904). The body of the chariot is made of wood covered with gesso and fine linen and decorated with low raised relief which was originally silvered inside and out (Calvert 2013).

On both sides of the chariot there is a depiction of Thutmose IV wearing a blue crown with a sun disc flanked with uraei on top, standing in the chariot pulled by two horses and storming into a mass of defeated enemies. On both sides the image of the king is accompanied with a text. On one side (right) he is depicted pulling an arrow and on the other (left) holding an axe in his left hand and holding two enemies and a bow in his right hand. For the discussion

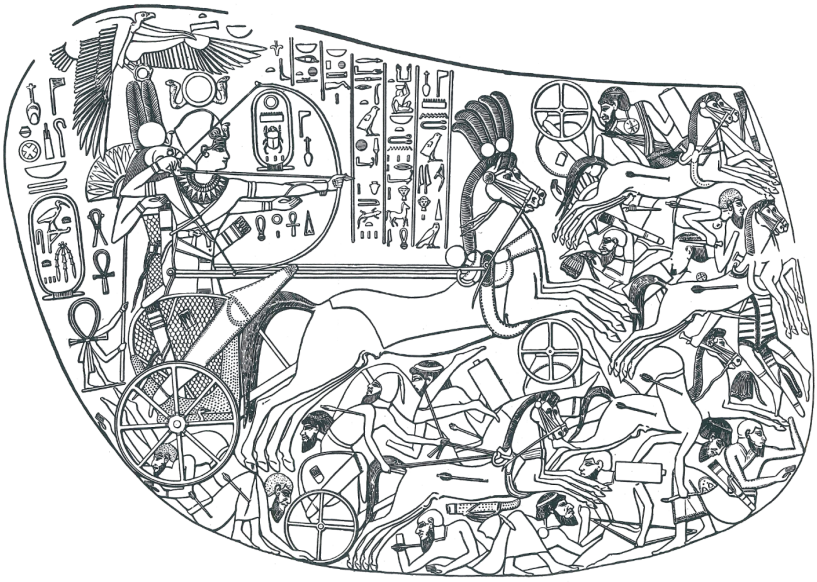

Fig.1. Right exterior side of the chariot of Thutmose IV (Cairo CG 46097) showing the god Montu next to the king in the chariot. Tomb of Thutmose IV, KV 43 in the Valley of the Kings, Egypt, drawing (Carter and Newberry 1904: Pl. X).

in this paper, only the right side of the chariot on which the king is depicted pulling an arrow is important. This is because here he is depicted in the chariot together with the god Montu, who is supporting the arms of the king as he fires his arrow. The left arm of the god is running parallel under the left arm of the king holding the bow. The left hand of the god supports the elbow of the king. The right arm of the god supports the right arm of the king. The right hand of the god is supporting the lower arm of the king spanning the bow-string and holding the arrow. The accompanying text describes the king as the 'beloved of Montu'. We have previously seen that texts from the reigns of Seti I and Ramesses III describe Montu as being on the right side of the king in battle, just as on the chariot of Thutmose IV.

That both the king and the god are depicted in the chariot can be understood as god's presence on the battlefield next to the king. According to Betsy Bryan (1991), the king adopts the role of warrior sun god himself and performs the ritual defeat of enemies.[7] There is also a possibility that what is depicted is actually two-in-one.[8] Indeed, there is no other way to depict the god Montu in the body of the king than placing his body parallel to that of the king. He is not only supporting the king in shooting an arrow, his image is like the image of the king. Amy M. Calvert (2013) noticed that it is as if the body of the king is absorbing the image of the god. Such an interpretation of this scene is in accordance with those texts describing the king as coming forth like Montu, being a form of Montu himself on the battlefield, but also those texts describing the god as being in the form of a man. This is paralleled by the falcon supporting the hand of the king holding an axe on the other side of the chariot which Calvert (2013) read as a visual counterpart to the textual expression 'strong armed Horus'.

In fact, there are no New Kingdom temple depictions of deities on the battlefield confronting the enemies of Egypt (see Heinz 2001). This is the duty and prerogative of the pharaoh. Such a simple fact raises the question of whether the representations of Montu piercing or trampling over enemies on the so-called 'falcon ships' of the 18th dynasty (Werner 1986) are not in fact representations of the king in the form of Montu, and *vice versa*? That these could be representations of the king was previously suggested by Lanny Bell (1985) and refuted by Edward K. Werner (1986) because the representations of Montu on these ships have specific references to cult centres and because other gods are depicted on these ships also defeating enemies. However, the divine emanations of the

7 For the king performing the role of sun god in the aftermath of war see Matić 2017; there is also other evidence for deification of Thutmose IV which due to space constraints cannot be extensively discussed (see Hartwig 2008).

8 For a two-in-one appearance of the god and the king see the divine birth legend texts of Hatshepsut and Amenhotep III which express the two-in-one presence in the palace using a plural form (Matić 2018: 40).

pharaoh on the battlefield are, at least where texts are concerned, not limited to Montu. Therefore, a more appropriate question, whose answer is beyond the reach of this paper, is why are depictions of the divine emanation on the battlefield absent in New Kingdom temple iconography?

Conclusions

Posthumanism can contribute to archaeological interpretations of the past by asking us to consider the possibility that past people lived in 'different worlds' which could have been ordered beyond the human/non-human dichotomy as we know it (Viveiros de Castro 1998). We have to decentre our notion of the human and explore how this decentreing can lead us to novel conceptions. Archaeology can contribute to broader posthumanist concerns not only by enriching the record with case studies, but also by putting focus on materiality.

This paper used the example of the divine presence of the pharaoh on the battlefield, more precisely his appearance as the god Montu, to demonstrate the potential of a posthumanist re-thinking of the sources. The pharaoh is referred to as not only being like the god Montu, but also as being the form of the god Montu. Attributing these expressions to metaphor may be anachronistic, as it presumes that the Egyptians thought like us and considered pharaohs to be human rather than divine. Similarly, the god Montu is referred to as being in the form of a man. Understanding such expressions about god Montu as metaphors would deny him the ability to have many forms. All this indicates that the pharaoh cannot be classified as being as human as other humans. On the battlefield, he was the god Montu in the form of a man. He placed ochre on his body to mimic the body of Montu covered with the blood of the enemies and wore his battle panoply like Montu going forth to battle. The chariot of Thutmose IV, on which he is depicted accompanied by Montu or indeed as being Montu on the battlefield himself, was among all else a ritual and apotropaic vehicle which allowed the king's divine emanation (Calvert

2013). On the battlefield the king is becoming Montu and Montu is becoming the king.[9] A closer look into other New Kingdom texts and representations could further change our idea of the divine presence on the battlefield and the aftermath of war,[10] and urge us to further rethink ancient Egyptian notions of human and divine where the pharaoh is concerned.

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9 Whether or not this simultaneous becoming is related to the concept of becoming in the work of French poststructuralist philosopher Gilles Deleuze (see a detailed discussion by May 2003) which influenced Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2014[2009]) is beyond the scope of this paper. This question should be addressed by studying a larger corpus of sources dealing with various emanations of the pharaoh.

10 See Colleen Manassa's (2013: 114) discussion on the standards preceding Thutmose III on the march and on the standard of god Amun-Re in the chariot before Ramesses III; for the emanation of the king as Amun-Re on the falcon ship see Matić 2017.

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