

The Concept of Fertility in the Dakhleh Oasis, Cult and Symbolism

مفهوم الخصوبة في واحة الداخلة، المعنى والرمز

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Article Info

Article Language: English

Vol. 5 No. 2, (2022) pp. 145-165 | <https://doi.org/10.21608/SIS.2022.174208.1096>

معلومات المقالة

لغة المقالة: الإنجليزية

Abstract

This study examines the opinion of the oasis' dwellers about their environment which differs from the perception of the dwellers outside the oasis. The local cult of fertility in Dakhleh attested by the worship of Seth as a protector and fertility god, Isis- Demeter as a goddess of agriculture, Amun-Re as Min of Akhmim who cultivate the lands and God Tutu as a protector and controller of the waters. The source of the subterranean water (wells) in the Oasis was the Nile and the iconography of the water wells were Gods Khnum Re and Isis-Sothis were the controller of the first cataract of the Nile, God Osiris controller to the source of the water at the Oasis, God Amun Nakht who protect and control water in the Oasis. The iconography of the inundation was the fecundity figure of Hapy, and the iconography of the inundated land was the female fecundity figure of Sekhet.

المستخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في رأي سكان واحة الداخلة في بيئتهم والتي يختلف مفهومها عن السكان خارج الواحة. العبادة المحلية للخصوبة في واحة الداخلة تم تأكيدها عن طريق عبادة الإله ست كإله حامي وإله للخصوبة . وكذلك الإلهة إيزيس- ديميتير كإلهة للزراعة والإله آمون رع والذي عبد في صورة الإله مين (أخميم) والذي يخصب الأراضي، وكذلك الإله توتو كإله حامي للمؤن والمسؤول عن المياه بالواحة. أما فيما يتعلق بالمياه الجوفية (الأبيار) في واحة الداخلة، فمصدرها هو نهر النيل، وقد كانت آبار المياه الجوفية في الواحة من وجهة نظر السكان المحليين على هيئة كلاً من الإله خنوم- رع والألهة إيزيس- سوئيس وهما المسؤولان عن الشلال الأول لنهر النيل، والإله أوزيريس والمتحكم أيضاً والمسؤول عن مصدر المياه بالواحة، أما الإله آمون-نخت فهو إله حامي ومتحكم في المياه بالواحة، فجميعهم يمثل آبار المياه بالواحة. أما عن تمثيل فيضان النيل فقد كان حابي كشكل من أشكال الخصوبة، أما الإله إيزيس- سخت فكانت في هيئة خصوبة أيضاً وتمثل الأرض المغطاة بمياه الفيضان.

Keywords: Oasis; Fecundity; khnum, well; inundation.

الكلمات الدالة: واحة؛ خصوبة؛ خنوم؛ بئر؛ فيضان.

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Introduction

The objectives of the study

- Analyze the opinion of the dwellers of the Dakhleh Oasis about their environment which differs from the perception of the dwellers outside the oasis.
- Describe the reliefs and inscriptions on tombs and temples which influenced with the local perceptions of the local inhabitants.
- To classify the cult of fertility and the iconography of the sources of water in the oasis.
- Conclude the characterized features and properties of fertility in the Oasis.

Dakhleh Oasis is one of the most famous five Oases in Egypt’s Western Desert. It is located about 73 miles (118 km) due west from the northern end of the Kharga Oasis and is orientated west-north-west to east-south-east. The oasis is 49 miles (80 km) in length with a maximum of width of 15 miles (24 km) (Giddy 1987, 16; Kaper et al. 2006, 1). The oasis is connected by desert routes to the Kharga Oasis and the Nile Valley to the east, and the Farafra Oasis to the north-west. Dakhleh Oasis’ most distinctive landmarks are sand dunes, artesian wells, mounts, cultivated fields, and many monuments from every period of Egypt’s history.

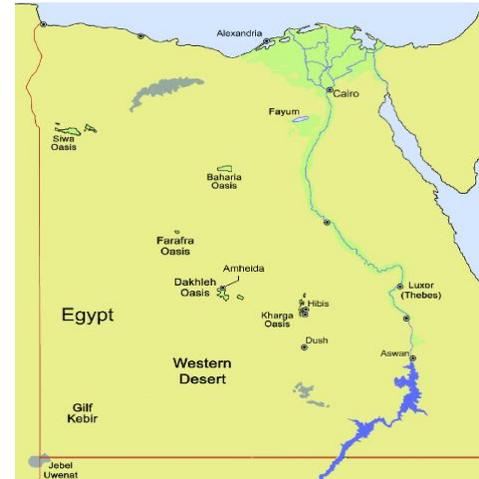


Fig.1

(https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-Egypt-with-the-location-of-Dakhla-and-Kharga-Oasis-in-the-Western-Desert_fig1_346496377)Last accessed 11/11/2022

Ancient Egyptians called Oasis (Wb 1, 347. 18-23) *wh3t* or “wehat”. In Coptic, the name evolved to ouaxe (OuHe). In ancient Greek, it is ὄασις, which is the origin of the English word “oasis”. In addition, the Arabic word for oasis, “oasis”, which is *واحة wh3* and the plural *واحات wh3t* are also derived from the Egyptian *wh3t*. During the New Kingdom the Oases were divided into two parts: The Northern Oasis *wh3t mhyt* and the Southern Oasis *wh3t rsyt* (Dakhleh and Kharga) (Limme 1973, 42; Elkady 2022, 756).

Various suggestions have been made concerning the name which Dakhleh Oasis held in Egyptian. Dümichen proposed the name *dsds* for that purpose (Dümichen 1877,22), followed by both Brugsch (Brugsch 1879, 1001) and Gauthier (Gauthier 1925,50) in their geographical dictionaries. Winlock expressed a preference for the name *kmn.t* the black soil (Wb 5, 133.8; Winlock 1936, 85), recently again propose the by Osing (Osing& Posener 1985, 179). Elsewhere, the name *s3 wh3t* has been applied to Dakhleh as a whole (Kaper 1993, 117).

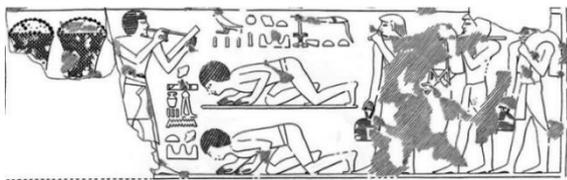


Fig.2 (Davis 1922, Pl. XXXI)



Fig. 3 (Davis 1943, Pls. XLIX and L)

It is generally accepted that Dakhleh and other oases of the Western Desert were populated in prehistoric times. Evidence is found through the rock drawings, which mainly portray cattle and pregnant or dancing women. Yet, the earliest documented mention of *wh3t* the “Oasis” is in Herkhuf’s autobiography in his tomb at Qubbet El-Hawa in Aswan. He was the governor of Upper Egypt served under the kings of the 6th dynasty in the Old Kingdom. He mentions that he reached Yam via

the walls may have been selected for certain reasons. A combination of iconographic and textual study of the reliefs is likely to yield insight into the ideas of the hierogrammateis or decorators/theologians, even in a minor way. The following study is based upon the axiom that the temple decoration in the oasis accurately reflects the local concepts and theology.

The Environmental Conception Model of the Dakhleh Oasis

The study of the Dakhleh temple reliefs is how the ancient inhabitants of the oasis had of their own environment. It is obvious that the ancient oasis dwellers must have had a fundamentally different understanding of their environment. Available knowledge determines the mental image which people have of the geographical space around them, and this image may vary for each region, time, and social group. Other cultural factors, such as religious ideas, may also assist in influencing the perception of the natural surroundings. In its turn, a people's environmental judgmental underlies every decision which is made about the use of the environment, such as about the choice of location for settlements, cemeteries, or temples. This explains why it is important to define a 'perception model' of the inhabitants of Dakhleh for the different periods of its history. This study will be primarily concerned with the Roman period because the epigraphic remains from this period contain the most eloquent evidence concerning the nature of these ideas in the oasis of antiquity.

The archaeological survey carried by the Dakhleh Oasis Project has put at our disposal a large amount of detailed information on the exploitation of the oasis during her different historical periods. One of the conclusions drawn already at an early stage of the survey was that the Roman Period witnessed a much-increased population in Dakhleh and a growth of urban habitation. More than ever before we can distinguish between rural and urban settlements in the oasis, even though a sharp distinction between these categories probably never existed in the ancient world (Mills 1980, 271- 272; Wanger 1987,190-191).

Urban life is most clearly attested in Dakhleh at the large centers of population of Kellis. (Mills 1980, 272; Wanger 1987, 191). The picture which emerges from the study of the temple decoration in the oasis has to be seen against this background. The temple decoration is per definition specifically concerned with the world view of the urbanized upper classes and it is their perception model in particular which we will be outlining below. The environmental perceptions of the farmers in the oasis might not have been much different, but generally, the voice of the actual users of the landscape is not reflected in the textual record (Attema 1992, 5).

Also, it is important to emphasize that the temple decoration reflects the perception of upper classes in an indirect manner through a filter of religious ideas which overlies and obscures the environmental concepts we want to reconstruct. This complicates the study with some theological and iconological considerations; however, these religious aspects merely reinforce an already existing mental image of the environment. The temple inscriptions are not likely to reflect environmental perceptions different from those which existed outside of these inscriptions.

The Cult of Fertility in Dakhleh Oasis

In pursuit of the ancient mental map of the Dakhleh Oasis, the first theme to be explored will be the expressed relation between the gods of the oasis and the land and its produce.

God Seth

Seth was a major God in Dakhleh Oasis, he has been the archetypal god of the Oases, appearing as such both in the Nile Valley inscriptions and in the oases themselves (Taylor, 2016, 205; Davies 1953, pls.42-43, Osing 1985, Jacquet Gordon 1991; Kaper 1995c). Excavations conducted at Mut al-Kharab, the site of Seth's temple, in the Dakhleh Oasis by Monash University since 2000,



Fig.5. (السخاوي، ٢٠٢١، لوحة ١).

Although the Western Desert was a dangerous and inhospitable environment, several settlements existed in the major oases that occurred there. Within these oases, several the sites were associated with Seth and his worship. These sites are detailed in Table 1 and fig.7.

Table 1(Taylor 2016, 192).

Kharga Oasis	Dakhla Oasis	Siwa Oasis
Hebet (Hibis)	Mut el-Kharab	Siwa – Umm Ubaydah
Hill of Seth	Sio'h (Deir el-Haggar)	
	Kellis (Ismant el-Kharab)	
	Ain Birbiyeh	
	Tenida	
	Ankh (el-Qasr)	

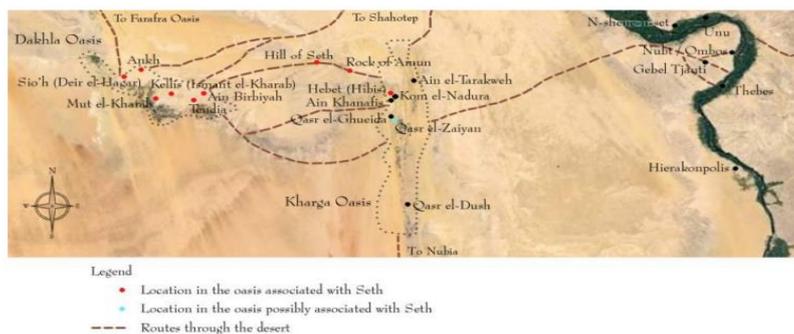


Fig.7 (Taylor 2016, fig.8.8)

One of the god’s aspects which may have sustained his popularity in the oases may have been Seth’s capacity to bring fertility. Our knowledge of the specific nature of Seth in the oases remains limited, but a specific reference to the desert. The papyrus Jumilhac contains an etiologic myth, in which Seth is said to have lost his semens in the desert which then germinated into watermelons ( *bddw.k3*) (Wb 1, S. 488). It was thought that this tale has developed among desert travelers as an explanation for the large silica nodules (cher balls), which are found in large quantities in the desert between Dakhleh and Kharga. These bakks are even now called ‘watermelon’ as appears from the name of a wadi east of Dakhleh which is called “Wadi el Battikh’ after the numerous chert balls fount in it (fig.8) (Turner 2012, 136).



Fig.8

<http://dakhlehoasisproject.com/works/deir-el-hagar-temple/> (Last accessed 25/11/2022)

A fertility aspect for Seth was not current in the Nile Valley, but this may have been different in Dakhleh where several deities controlled the vegetation and the fertility of the land (Te Velde 1977. 55).

Goddess Isis Demeter and Thermuthis

Isis cult began in the Delta, but as the Osirian Mythology developed, she became his wife. Isis is supposed to have civilized Egypt with her husband, teaching agricultural techniques to people, so she was titled by the deity of cultivated lands and fields (Bakier, Nour El-Din, Omran, & Ahmed, 2020, 312). In the classical mythologies of all civilizations, agriculture is fundamentally of divine origin. It arrived in different ways from different deities and under various circumstances, but the underlying theme is recognizable. In the Mediterranean region, the source was a goddess: Isis in Egypt, Demeter in Greece. The appearance of agriculture in mythology was almost always associated with other features of civilization: settled life, household arts, formal religion, and government by laws. We shall also see that agriculture brought death and gods that demanded sacrifice in exchange for rain and abundant harvests.

Goddesses Isis Demeter and Thermuthis; who were both forms of Isis particularly associated with agriculture produce. Of Isis Demeter a large plaster bust stood in the temple of Tutu at Kellis in her fecundity aspects, and locality near Kellis had been named after her. The name was mentioned in a Greek papyrus from Kellis. The name Demeter has been rendered here in its demotic form, under influence of the pronunciation of the toponym. Two plaster busts of Isis at the Kellis temple (fig.9) were life-size depictions of Isis-Demeter crowned with a kalathos decorated with a sun disc One such sculpture may well have belonged to a stone pedestal upon which a Greek dedicatory inscription had been inscribed, which was reconstructed and translated by K.A. Worp as follows: 'To Isis-Demeter, the greatest goddess, has dedicated (this statue), Aurelius Ophellianus ex-magistrate, (cult-)leader, together with his wife and children on account of gratitude, for the best'. This inscription, which presumably dates to the 3rd century AD, attests to the popularity of Isis-Demeter in the village at that time, and that Ophellianus acted as the leader (prostates) of her cult. (Kaper 2011. 169).

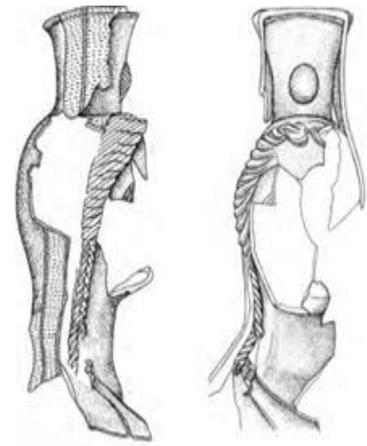


Fig.9 (Kaper, 2011, fig.11)

The syncretistic union Isis-Demeter was based on Isis' association with Renenutet (Thermuthis), a goddess particularly associated with agricultural produce. The name of Demeter appears also in the name of a hamlet near Kellis epioikion Pmountametra, 'the hamlet of the Well of Demeter'. A small stela depicting the serpent goddess Thermuthis, the date of which is uncertain, was found in another temple of Dakhleh that was perhaps dedicated to Osiris (Kaper 2011,169-170).

Her role as Renenutet (Thermuthis) is also confirmed by several titles referring to Isis' control over food provision. The common association of Isis with Thermuthis and Demeter made it possible to invoke the goddess in relation to the fertility of the fields, which must have been important in this agricultural community (Kaper 2011, 179).

God Amun-Re

The agricultural concerns of the population of the Dakhleh Oasis are clearly reflected in the temple decoration at Deir El-Hagar. The gods of Deir El-Hagar were Amon-Re, Mut, and Khonsu, who had been introduced into the region from Thebes. The origin of the gods remained reflected in their titles, which mention Thebes, and in the way the temple has been decorated. The temple's doorways are covered with scenes according to a decoration pattern which was originally developed for the Theban temples (Kaper 1995a). and the astronomical ceiling of the sanctuary reflects Theban theological doctrines The date of the introduction of the Theban gods into Dakhleh remains uncertain. Even though the construction of the temple at Deir El-Hagar dates to the 1st century AD, the influence of the Theban priesthood in the Western Desert was profound and dates back to the New Kingdom. Excavations might well reveal the presence of earlier structures on the site (Kaper, 1995b).

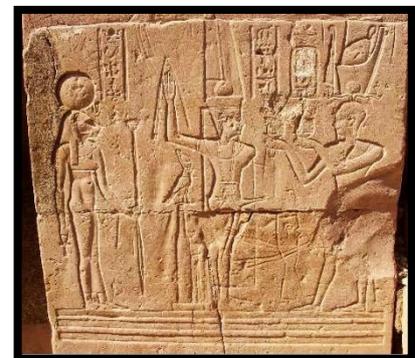


Fig.10 http://promenade-egypte.photosegypte.com/dakhla_deir_el_hagar/dakhla_temple_deir_el_hagar.php Last accessed 10/11/2022

It is interesting to observe in which ways the temple decoration at Deir El-Hagar was made to differ from its Theban models. One of the aspects of Amon-Re in the inscriptions at Deir El Hager, which is not known from Thebes, is the god's concern with the fertility of the land and its produce. In the sanctuary of the temple at Deir El Hagar, one of the bandeau inscriptions addresses Amon-Re with the words: *rd n.k rdw* "The plants grow for you"; *hk3 w3d w3dw* "Ruler of plants" and *nb shwt* "Lord of the field", in a prominent relief scene from the reign of Titus in the pronaos of the temple. Even through these titles are not known for Amon-Re at Thebes, they may be found in the titular of other

the major festival of Tutu on the 14 Thot: ‘offering (*iht*) are to be placed upon the portable altar (Kaper 2003, 278).

There is no doubt that the inhabitants of the desert are concerned with protecting their livelihoods and ways of living in the first place. Therefore, they are more eager than others to preserve their source of livelihood, and perhaps they found this in the god Tutu who brings goodness, growth, and water. It is known that the inhabitants of the Dakhleh Oasis are depends on agriculture in their life, and the god Tutu is in control of the water, and their sanctification and respect for him makes the water abundant without stopping. There are titles that explains the provision of supplies and food by the god Tutu (.٥٥٨-٥٥٧, ٢٠١٦, محجوب & السخاوي) In the words spoken by Tutu in the Kellis temple reliefs, the God promises different kinds of food ((Kaper 2003,31, 285):

di.i n.k htpw df3w di pt km3 bch

(I) give to you food and victuals which the sky gives and which the cultivated land produces”

swr.i iht.k

“I augment your foodstuffs”

di.i s3 df3w mi sc

I cause the provisions to be plentiful as sand”

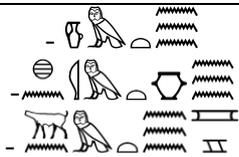
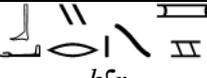
mh.i n t3 pn m iht nbt

“I fill this land with all goods”

The Iconography of Water Wells and its Origin in The Dekhleh Oasis

Before talking about the local perception of the waters in Dakhleh Oasis, I will try to collect the definitions of the wells in the ancient Egyptian Language.

The wells and cisterns in the ancient Egyptian language

Terms	Meaning	Period of use	Reference
 <i>hnm.t</i>	Well, cistern, desert well, well – station.	OK, MK, NK, Late Period	(Wb 3. 282.10-15; 294.11; 383.2; Othman, 2017,81)
 <i>sd.t</i>	Well, Cistern, Waterhole.	OK, NK, Late Period	(Wb 4, 567.1-2; Othman, 2017,81)
 <i>hnw(.t)</i>	Waters, desert well, Well – station	Late OK, 19 th Dynasty	(Kitchen 1975-1989, 66,8; Othman, 2017,81)
 <i>bcr</i>	Well, Bir (in Arabic)	18 th Dynasty, Late Period	(Wb 1, 447.13; Othman, 2017,81)

A quick look already reveals that the translations are quite general and that some translations, especially the basic modern terms are applied to more than one Ancient Egyptian term. This also holds true for the Coptic words **ϠϠTE** , **ϠONBE** which stem from *sd.t* and *hnm.t* respectively (Westendorf 1965, 331, 379; Crum 1939, 595, 691). To modern hydrologists the origin of the waters underneath the western desert still remains uncertain, but for the ancient scholars of the oases this was apparently not the case.

- God Khnum –Re and Goddess Isis Sothis

***Isis- Sothis:** The star Sothis was called $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑}$ 'spd.t' (Sopdet) (Wb IV, 111, no.8). She is personifying the star Sirius (Dog-star), herald of the annual Nile inundation by its bright appearance in the dawn sky in July ('Heliacal rising'). She is visualized as a lady with a star on her head. Perhaps as early as Dynasty I Sothis is called 'bringer of the New Year and the Nile flood' – the agricultural calendar began with the rise of the river Nile. Sothis therefore became associated – like the constellation Orion – with the prosperity resulting from the fertile silt left by the receding waters. Because Sothis and Orion are astral symbols that augur abundant crops, the aspects of fecundity and agriculture that exists in the Osirian cycle of myth made the following equation possible: Sothis- Orion- Sopedu = Isis- Osiris- Horus (Hart 2005, 151-2).



Fig. 11b https://global-geography.org/af/Geography/Africa/Egypt/Pictures/Dakhla/Deir_el-Hagar_3 Last accessed (10/11/2022)

The identification between the two deities appeared as early as the 18th dynasty. In Egyptian mythology the assimilation between them was represented in heaven as Orion star. In later times the identity of Sothis was almost melt in that of Isis. By the Greco Roman times the assimilation between the two deities became almost complete moreover Plutarch confirmed the obvious function of Isis Sothis as a Nile deity (Kitat 2010, 101-2).

Goddess Isis-Sothis was venerated in many temples of Dakhleh Oasis as a water deity. Also, in the temple of Deir El- Hagar, Khnum-Re was venerated as a well God. He became a responsible for the underground water sources in the Oasis. Sothis appeared in Dakhleh temples side by side with God Khnum as controllers over the water sources (Kaper 1997b, 208-210) . The cult of Isis Sothis was usually accompanied by that of Khnum at Dakhleh Oasis. This is because of the assimilation that occurred between Sothis and Satis, wife of God Khnum. By the Roman times Satis was replaced by the figure of Sothis in almost all temple reliefs. Numerous Deir El-Hagar temple inscriptions attest to a local opinion which is perhaps most clearly illustrated by a scene upon the doorway leading into the hypostyle hall. The relief depicts the gods Khnum –Re and Sothis the "Lord (respectively "Mistress of Elephantine" *ꜥbw* being presented with the hieroglyphic sign for the source of the Nile *ꜥrt*. Khnum-Re and Sothis (or Satis) controlled the sources of the Nile at the First Cataract according to an ancient belief, which was maintained alongside several more recent theories surrounding the river's origins. Various other inscriptions in Dakhleh temples confirm that the First Cataract was thought to be the source of the subterranean waters in the Oasis (Kaper 1997b, 208-210).

In the scene of Deir El-Hagar (figs. 11-11b), Khnum- Re and Sothis are represented receiving the sign of the Nile source *ꜥrt* from the Roman emperor Titus. The same scene is depicted upon the western side of the temenos gateway. However, the second depiction is badly damaged.

According to the scenes of Mammisi of Asment El Kharab (Kellis) in Dakhleh Oasis, God Khnum-Re and Goddess Isis Sothis were enjoyed a certain authority over the water sources in the in this Oasis and were venerated in many temples of Dakhleh Oasis as water deities. From the paintings in the Mammisi at Ismant el-Kharab (Kellis), we know that Khnum-Re and Isis-Sothis were venerated in the eastern part of Dakhleh. The inhabitants of the oasis wished to have the means at hand to directly influence the gods upon whose benevolence the coming of the waters depended (Kaper 1997b, 208-210).

- God Osiris

Other gods who presided over the Nile's waters are also found with this capacity in Dakhleh. Apart from Khnum, the principal god who controlled the sources of the river was Osiris. Osiris is called "Lord of the Oasis" which indicates the local veneration of the god (Kaper 1997b, 208).

Osiris was the deity of farming and greenery, and then became the deity of resurrection which related to the Nile flooding. In his aspect as a water-deity, Osiris was the personification of the falling Nile, or the Nile in winter, but he was nevertheless, the cause of the fertility of Egypt, which was

personified by his wife Isis, who helped him to teach his people the art of making agricultural implements and controlling the water of the Nile (Bakier & el. 2020, 112-3). In a relief on the outer gateway at Ein Birybeh (Dakhleh), Osiris is presented with water said to be “from Elephantine” and it is said to be issuing from the god himself. This terminology is identical to that found in inscriptions in the Nile Valley. The temple reliefs in Dakhleh also make clear that Osiris was the beneficiary of the cult in the oasis. The cult of Osiris may be located in a temple near to the modern village of Budkhulu, where the Dakhleh Oasis Project has excavated a mud brick temple in which a statue of the god had been buried. In view of the above, Kaper suspected that the location of this temple next to a large spring mound might not be a mere coincidence (Kaper 1997b, p. 208).



Fig.11c (<https://viajesikertanoa.com/viajes-a-egipto/visitas-en-egipto-oasis-desiertos-y-peninsula-del-sinai/deir-el-hagar/> last accessed 10/11/2022)

The gods who controlled the waters of the Nile were likewise in control of the waters in the oasis. The deliberate choice of scenes upon the doorway into the hypostyle hall at Deir El-Hagar now becomes more apparent (figs. 11a, b, c). Directly above the main god of the temple, who is shown in the eye level scenes in the forms of Min-Re (fig. 11a) and Amon-Re, the second register contains the god Khnum-Re (fig. 11b) and Osiris in parallel positions (fig. 10c), and Goddess Isis is shown following Osiris and she promises to bring the inundation. The inscriptions in the latter two scenes refer to the waters of the Nile. With their temples in eastern Dakhleh (Khnum) and in western Dakhleh (Osiris) these gods together personify the waters of the entire oasis. The lower registers upon this doorway thus contain the religious foundation for a successful harvest in the region, by bringing together the deities who influence the water sources and the vegetation.

The Deir El-Hagar doorways contains images of Osiris and Khnum-Re in parallel positions within the decoration. Both gods are designated in the inscriptions of the Dakhleh temples as being responsible for the provision of water to the Oasis. In fact, the role of these gods in Dakhleh is like their role as expressed in Nile Valley inscriptions regarding the inundation (Kaper 1995b, 175-195). It is obvious that the supply of water to the Oasis must have played an important part in local religious beliefs. The combined data from Deir El-Hagar and Kellis thus suggest that Khnum-Re was venerated in the eastern part of Dakhleh and the Osiris in the western part.

- God Amun Nakht

Amun-Nakht was a unique and local god to the Dakhleh Oasis. The God bears characteristics of both Amun-Ra and Horus son of Osiris, as he was thought to be son of Osiris. The goddess Hathor is perhaps identified with Isis, the mother of the God. The small Ptolemaic temple at Ein Birbiyah in the Dakhleh Oasis was constructed for the god Amun-Nakht, a Ptolemaic Period assimilation of Amun-Ra and Horus, which was created with the intention of supplanting Seth as a god in the Dakhleh Oasis (Kaper 2003, 126). In the local mythology expressed in the inscriptions on Ein Birbiyah temple walls, Amun-Nakht is said (Kaper 1987, 151):

ii 3š pḥrr h3h wni ini drw ḥr ḏw Pn

“To run over the desert in pursuit of the enemies of his father Osiris”.

The iconography of Amun-Nakht upon the gateway of the Ein Berbiyah temple (fig. 12) shows the God accordingly with a falcon's head and wings depicted in a running posture while spearing the figure of the enemy. This same iconography has been copied in the painting at Kellis for God Seth.

In spell 610 of the pyramid text Amun replaced God Min to be the “Lord of the eastern Oases” (Faulkner 1969, 253). This God was thought to be a water deity at Ein Birbiyah. In this place, Amun-



Fig.12 (Kaper 2017c, fig.40)

Nakht was described to bring the Nile water from its cravens *krty* (The First Cataract) adding that “it fertilizes the earth *3ht* so that the two lands will live without shortages In Ein Birbiyeh, Amun- Nakht announced his divine abilities as a water deity by saying (Bonneau 1965, 23):

di.i n.k hꜥpi iw.fr tr.f bꜥh.n.f 3ht

“I cause Hapy to come on time and overflow the land”.

bs.i n.k hꜥpi hnt krty r swsh.f n-3b r nw.f nfr siwr.f 3ht r ꜥnh t3wy n kn rnpt m rk.k

“I bring Hapy on it for you from the double cave, so it will expand without stopping in its time and also will fertilize the land to cause the living in the two lands and there are no lean years in your time”.

The Iconography of the Nile and the Cultivated lands in the Oasis

- The Fecundity Figures (Hapy and Sekhet)

* God Hapy

The concept that the waters in Dakhleh originate from the Nile is shared by some modern scholars. Yet, in contrast to their modern counterparts, the ancient scholars took the analogy of the water wells with the Nile river one step further, by also referring to *hꜥpi*, from the oasis mention the coming of the inundation to Dakhleh, which is ascribes to the influence of either, Osiris, Isis, Khnum-Re, Isis-Sothis, Mut, or Amon-Nakht (Giddy 1987, 29-31). Moreover, the familiar iconography of *hꜥpy*, the so-called ‘fecundity figure’, is encountered in every temple in the oasis.

The inundation of the Nile Valley was a yearly event which brought the waters over the land for a limited period only. In Dakhleh the flooding of the land by the artesian wells continued unabated throughout the year, in our eyes this is a major distinction between the two phenomena, but to the ancient inhabitants of Dakhleh they must have seemed less distinct. They apparently perceived the oasis as being in a state of continuous inundation. One of the *bandeau* inscriptions in the Deir El-Hagar sanctuary expresses this as follows “Hapy comes to your eyes (addressing Amon-Re and referring to the sun and moon) upon every spring mound (*dw*). He overflows all lands for your Ka and the plants grow for you”. The miracle of the waters reaching the desert’s surface is ascribed to the inundation god *hꜥpy* who stand under the beneficial influence of Amon-Re (Mornez 1960, 81-82). The term *hꜥpy* was also employed in connection with rivers in foreign countries, such as the Euphrates or Tigris in one of the inscriptions at Edfu (Kurth 1994, 379). However, it is important to note that the Nile Valley inscriptions record a description of the environment by outsiders, as opposed to the Dakhleh inscriptions which refer to a landscape in the region’s own terminology. Seen in this light, the closest parallels to the Dakhleh inscriptions will be found in Egyptian texts at other peripheral regions. The Quban stela of Ramses II (Brooklyn Museum) (<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3449>), for instance, which describes the digging of a well in the mining region of Wasi Allaky (Nubia). In this stela the water is said to emerge “upon the mountain” from the netherworld by command of the god *hꜥpy* and Ramses himself. The similarity of this description to that found at Deir El-Hagar suggests that the inhabitants of different desert regions within the Egyptian cultural realm had similar explanation for the nature of their water wells. In several texts from Dakhleh, the inundation is said to come “on time” exactly as in the Nile Valley. Amon-Nakht of Ein Birbiyah promises “I cause *hꜥpy* to come on time and overflow the land *3ht*” (Bonneau 1965, 23).

The Deir El Hagar temple depicts “*hꜥpy* who comes rejuvenated in his season...” and Mut and Isis in the same temple are quoted as saying to the king: “I give you *hꜥpy* in his season”. The explanation for these unexpected statements lies in the traditional character of these temple inscriptions which were adopted from the Nile Valley. They yearly inundation was, after all, a potent symbol of cyclical renewal in the Nile Valley and its replacement by a different set of ideas adapted to the different situation of the oases may have been considered undesirable (Mornez 1960, 81-82).

The inundation of the Nile was thought to emerge at the First Cataract from Nun, the primeval water which surrounds the earth and is present below the earth (in the *dbt*) its waters rise only once every year, and this aspect of the phenomenon could not be ignored in other regions outside the Nile Valley, where the origins of local rivers and water wells were linked to the inundation (Mornez 1960, 81-82).. Following this train of thought, it would be vital for the inhabitants of the Dakhleh Oasis that its

gods would ensure a good and regular inundation of the Nile “on time”, because this was directly relevant to their own situation. The offering of the symbol of the First Cataract depicted at Deir El Hagar can thus be understood as referring to the continuation of the water supply in the Dakhleh Oasis itself I agree that this aspect of the hydrologic perception model of the Dakhleh Oasis may seem somewhat farfetched, but I didn’t believe that it portrays the scholars of the oasis as wayward provincial. Without our modern geophysical knowledge of, for instance, the artesian pressure it would indeed be hard to imagine how the water arrives “upon the spring mounds” in the oases. The analogy with the Nile flood is potent because it offers comparison to a similar natural phenomenon of enormous strength. To assume a connection between the two is, to my mind, fully understandable

* Goddess Isis Sekhet

The Goddess *sh̄t*  is a field goddess, known and attested from the Old Kingdom to the Greco-Roman period. She is a personification of the flooded and watered land and is also the patron of fish spearing and bird catching. She was the lady of fields and marshes in ancient Egypt. She held a lot of titles and epithets which show her importance to the deceased and to the king. Her name is mentioned in most of the hunting scenes which were represents on the walls of the tombs throughout the Pharaonic Periods. *sh̄t* appears holding a lot of goods especially in the Nile god processions which were very common on the walls of the Greco-Roman temples. She formed a triad with *h̄ꜥpy* and the king (Abou El Maati 2016, 95-96).

sh̄t appears in a very close relation to the Nile god *h̄ꜥpy* on the walls of the Greco-Roman temples as she appears; behind him, in front of him or between a pair of *h̄ꜥpy* (of the north and south). They are represented in a procession of gods, and they always take the first position, they come directly after the king. *sh̄t* and *h̄ꜥpy* make offering to the king who also makes offerings to the supreme god of the temple either alone or with the queen. (Abou El Maati 2016, 110-112).

As Isis was a mother goddess, goddess *sh̄t* of the cultivated land. Isis took the title *sh̄t* and her name became Isis-Sekhet, who was represented in the form of a female fecundity figure. She appears in this iconography in the temple of Deir El-Hagar in Dakhleh Oasis side by side with *h̄ꜥpy*. It is noticeable that the female figure of Isis is represented at the end of each row this also could be found in the temple of Qasr El-Ghawitta in Kharga Oasis.

h̄ꜥpy represents the water sources in the Oasis, while Isis Sekhet personified the inundated land. She merely represented the flooded land around the temple where she was depicted. Unlike *h̄ꜥpy* the figures of Isis-Sekhet carry vases with bread (Baines1985, 156-157, 161-163).

To continue with the theme of water supply, I wish to look closer at those scenes in the Dakhleh temples which contain fecundity figures of *h̄ꜥpy* and *sh̄t*.” At Deir El-Hagar two rows of nine fecundity figures are depicted upon the *soubassement* in the sanctuary which was decorated under Vaspasian. Elsewhere in this temple they are found depicted in the pronaos and upon the temenos gateway (fig.13). The names of the male figures are given as *h̄ꜥpy* “inundation” and the female as *sh̄t* “field” in accordance with the



Fig.13 (Hope et al. 1989)



Fig.14

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/isawnyu/8157856268/in/photostream/> last accessed (10/11/2022)

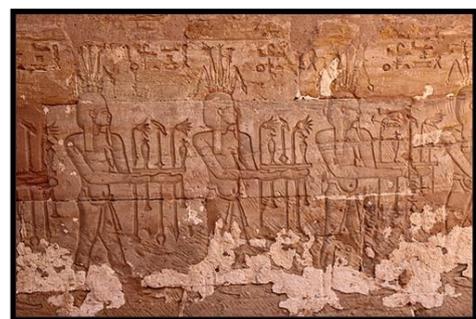


Fig. 15 (Hope et al. 1989)

conventional designations for these types of figures. Some of the *hꜥpy* figures on the side walls of the sanctuary (fig.14) are distinguished in the legends as “Upper Egyptian” and “Lower Egyptian” perhaps in imitation of the geographical processions which are common in other temples of this period. Egypt as a whole is represented here, by a few of the figures in the sanctuary, bringing its tribute to Amon-Re of Deir El Hagar. The remaining figures are not labelled specifically, but we may perhaps assume that they stand for the oasis itself (Hope et al. 1989, 1-26).

Fecundity figures are also present upon the temple gateways at Ein Birbiyeh and Ismant el-Kharab. They are depicted within the reveal of the outer gateway. In the soubassement, and within the first register of the doorway into the naos of the temple. The bottom register of the demolished first doorway into the temple at Ismant el-Kharab preserves only the feet of two pairs of fecundity figures accompanied by sacrificial animals (Hope et al. 1989).

In comparing the Dakhleh procession of fecundity figures with those in the Nile Valley, we find a most remarkable deviation from the conventional distribution of these figures upon the walls. The Nile Valley temples always show them as either exclusively male figures or as male and female alternately (Guglielmi & Brunner 1974, 220-225). In Dakhleh, as is especially clear at Deir El-Hagar, the male type predominates, and the female type is only found represented once at the end of the row. The same configuration is found also once in Kharga, in the hypostyle hall of the temple at Qasr el-Ghuweita which dates from the Ptolemaic Period (fig.15)

In the *bandeau* inscription cited above, the inundation *hꜥpi* is said to come out at the spring mounds *dw*, the inscriptions at Ein Birbiyeh describe the water in this connection as making the earth pregnant, as a masculine principle. The unusual distribution of male and female figures in the oases may be explained by the distinct geographical circumstances of the oasis in which a large number of wells serve only small surfaces of land. This situation is illustrated by the record of a land survey carried on in the 3rd century AD, in Hibis (Kharga). A total number of 86 wells and cisterns were counted dating this survey and it is significant that the report did not waste one word on the agricultural land in this region.

The agricultural produce of an oasis is determined by its water sources rather than by the characteristics of the plots of land which happened to be irrigated at one particular moment. Wanger quotes a relevant local saying: “land is worthless without water; the true value of the oasis lies in the water and not in the land”. The combination of the male and female fecundity figures in the oasis was certainly as fundamental as it was in the Nile Valley, but their proportional differentiation was changed based on the different geographical reality. The single Sekhet figure probably represents the totality of irrigated land around the temple in which she was depicted (Wanger 1987, 165).

In connection with the distinct iconography of the fecundity figures in Dakhleh, we must refer to a relief in the temple at Dakka in Lower Nubia which contains the sole example within the Nile Valley of a row of five male fecundity figures closed by one female. The relief dates from the time of the Meroitic king Ergamenes II. Its exceptional iconography can be explained by references contained in the inscriptions of the same temple, which unusually associate the male fecundity figures with the king and the female figure with the queen. It is possible that the different status of the Meroitic king and his queen has here influenced the proportional differentiation of the fecundity figures. The same explanation can, however, not be applied to the fecundity figures in the Great Oasis, if only because queens are never represented on its temple walls (Guglielmi & Brunner 1974,220-221).

A few other depictions of fecundity figures occur in the Dakhleh Oasis which are distinct from those in the Nile Valley. In the Nile Valley temples, the king is depicted at the head of a procession of fecundity figures as an essential element in the significance of the scene. The king is shown presenting the gifts of the land to the god of the temple in his capacity as figurehead of the entire land. Upon the outer gateway at Ein Birbiyeh, however, the king does not precede the figures, but he is represented standing behind them in the attitude of consecration.

This same iconography is found again in the Kharga Oasis in a later relief scene upon the temple of Dush. Despite its different iconography, this consecration scene is equivalent in meaning to the scenes in the Nile Valley, because the king is shown dedicating the gifts of the land to the god of the temple (Guglielmi & Brunner 1974, 221).

The rear (western) wall inside the Mammisi at Ismant el Kharab contains a row of fecundity figures bringing their gifts to Tutu, the main god of this temple (fig.16). Even though the figures have been defaced, enough of them remain to allow reconstruction of the contents of the scene.

The painting contains the only true example of a geographical procession in the Dakhleh Oasis because the legends of the fecundity figures contain names of certain *hydreumata* (water points) in Dakhleh. The figures are here again predominantly male, with a female closing the row. However, the scene is more complex than elsewhere in Dakhleh because one additional female figure has been inserted in the row in the second position. For this reason, and others to be outlined below, the procession of fecundity figures is effectively split into two sections at this point (Kaper 2003, 271-272).

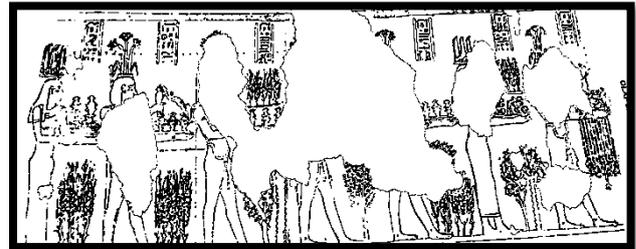


Fig.16a, b (Kaper 2006, 17)

The explanation for this split must be sought in the overall absence of figures of the king in this mammisi. Without going into details here about reasons for this absence, it is sufficient to say that the first *hapy* and *sekhet* figures in the row have been inserted to replace the royal figure by a different kind of symbolic presence. They are the generic types of fecundity figures which symbolize the totality of the wells and fields in the region; and they are designated with blanket terms as: *p3 mw (.n) p3 ntr* “The well of the god” and *sh t wrt n p3 ntr* “the great field of the god”. These names apparently refer to all *hydreumata* and fields which belonged to the temple. The wells in the oasis often carried the names of their owners, in this case the god of the temple, as is demonstrated by the names of the wells around Hibis contained in the next mentioned above (Parsons 1971, 175).

The succeeding five figures in the Kellis painting form a separate group of specifically named *hydreumata* and one field with the following words: *p3 mw (n) wsir* “the well of Osiris”; the second legend is destroyed; *p3 mw 3^c n mskm3*, “the great well of *mskm3* (?)” and *p3hyt* “the(?)”. the list again ends with one female figure (*sekhet*) named *t3h (...)t* “the(?)”. Unfortunately, the translation and some of the readings of the names are problematic. The list of *hydreumata* is not long, but we may assume that any wells which have been omitted were thought to be included within the generic figures on the right. Only four specific *hydreumata* were singled out from what must have been a larger number belonging to the temple. The reasons behind this selection remain unclear. Alternatively, it is conceivable that the four male figures represent four *hydreumata* outside the domain of Tutu which stood in a special relation to the Kellis temple. In that case, the ‘well of Osiris’ may have belonged to the temple of Osiris which was referred to above. It is also unclear which area is referred to by the final *Sekhet* figure. The determinative in the hieroglyphic legend with her name indicates that a building is involved. A comparable name has not been found in other sources from the oasis (Kaper 1995c, 106-8).

The two sections of the geographical procession, the generic and the specific, have been distinguished also in a visual way. The generic fecundity figures carry the kinds of gifts characteristic of their types, consisting of vases and flowers with *hapy* and bread with the *sekhet* figure. All other fecundity figures in the Dakhleh temples carry the same types of gifts. In contrast to them, the non-generic fecundity figures at Kellis (the third to seventh figures) carry specific items of produce of the oasis. A tray with two or three jars is held by each figure, perhaps including also the damaged fourth figure. The jars are of unknown type and may contain the famous wine of the oasis, as is suggested by the last *sekhet* figure whose tray supports three bunches of grapes below the jars. The penultimate figure holds an

additional libation vessel *kbh* type, stressing his function as a bringer of water (Baines 1985, 205-206).

From the second figure onwards, each fecundity figure is depicted surrounded by different plants and trees. In this they resemble the fecundity figures painted in the tomb of Petosiris at Muzzawaka (figs.17 a, b-18). In Kellis, cereals are prominently present. These are depicted in groups of large ears at the feet of the third, sixth and seventh figures, and above the offering carried by the second, possibly the fourth (damaged) and the fifth figures. A date palm is depicted at the feet of the second and fifth figures and two or three other species of trees may be distinguished otherwise. The identification of the latter is prevented by the lack of clearly distinguishable leaves or fruits. The scene in the tomb of Petosiris includes a dompalm, but this tree seems to be missing at Kellis (Baines 1985, 388-389).

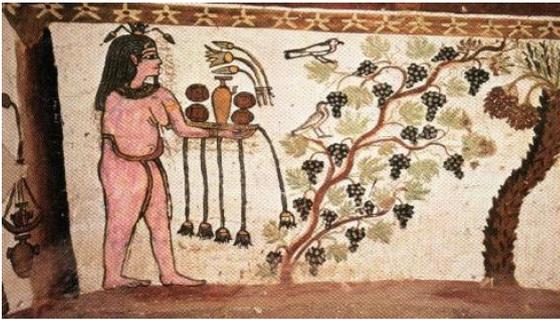


Fig.17a, b (Osing&et.al 1982, pl.34 a,b)



Fig.18 (Osing&et.al 1982, pl.32)

Conclusion

The Local Iconographies of the Fertility in Dakhleh Oasis Temples

Deity	Function	Representation
Seth	- Protector. - Fertility God.	- Winged man with a falcon head. - Jackal.
Isis-Demeter and Thermuthis	- Agriculture Goddess. - Fertilize of the fields.	Fecundity figure.
Amun Re or Amun- Min	- Fertility God (Lord of plants and fields).	Ithyphallic man (form of Min of Akhmim).
God Khnum	- Controller over the water sources of the Oasis (1 st cataract of the Nile). -Water well God.	Ram-headed man.

	- Source of water at the eastern part of the Oasis.	
Isis-Sothis	-Controller over the water sources of the Oasis (1 st cataract of the Nile). - Water well Goddess.	Fecundity figure with star (Sirius) over her head
Osiris	- Controller over the water sources of the Oasis (1 st cataract of the Nile). - Water well God. - Source of water at the western part of the Oasis.	Standing man with Atef crown over his head.
Amun Nakht	- Bringing the Nile water from its cravens <i>krty</i> (The First Cataract) - Water well God.	Falcon's head and wings depicted in a running posture while spearing the figure of the enemy.
Tutu	- Protector god - Desert god - Controller of the water	Lion
Isis-Sekhet	- Water well Goddess. -Iconography of the Cultivated Land.	Fecundity figure with sign of fields over her head
Hapy	- Water well God - Iconography of the Nile and inundation.	Fecundity Figure.

By focusing on the references to fertility and water contained in the temple decoration, a few aspects can be reconstructed of the perception model which the urbanized inhabitants of the oasis had of their surroundings. The texts identify the subterranean water of the oasis to be originating from the Nile, from the Nile's inundation water. It is interesting to observe how the perceived origin of the water coincides with the sources of the dominant culture on Dakhleh. It was already apparent that the upper-class inhabitants identified strongly with the Nile Valley in cultural respects, as is clear from the religious inscriptions and iconography described above. The most important conclusion to be drawn from the present study, is that the cultural dependence of the Dakhleh Oasis upon the Nile Valley even affected the oasis' perception of the environment.

The geography of Dakhleh was mentally linked to the Nile Valley because the oasis formed part of the Egyptian cultural realm, as it was also in an administrative sense. Even though the Greek and later Coptic texts from Dakhleh still distinguish between "Egypt" and the "Great Oasis" or "the Mothite Nome", the upper classes in the oasis felt no essential difference between the two regions because they both drank water from the same source. The Egyptian perception model was adopted in Dakhleh together with many other aspects of the Egyptian culture, but the local geography and existing cultural circumstances brought about several adaptations. The emphasis put on the water sources over the agricultural land has been shown to be characteristic for both Kharga (in the Hibis land survey) and Dakhleh in the Roman Period.

The religious interpretation attached to the perception model of the oasis was adopted likewise in every detail from the Nile Valley. Thus, Khnum-Re and Osiris were said to bring the inundation to Dakhleh from its source at the Nile's First Cataract. By extension, the same capacity was ascribed to the specifically local deity Amun-Nakht.

Hapy represents the water sources in the Oasis, while Isis Sekhet personified the inundated land. In Dakhleh, the male type predominates, and the female type represented once at the end of the row. The single Sekhet figure represents the totality of irrigated.

The perception model of the environment also includes the major produce of the area. A significant selection of plants is contained in the decoration at Ismant el-Kharab and at Muzzawaka which illustrates this aspect. Because of the essentially urban perspective offered by these images, in which nature has perceived in economic terms, the images is interpreted as a record of the major crops grown in Roman Dakhleh. Unfortunately, the identification of the species remains problematic in several cases. In this area, a contribution is needed from the study of the plant remains from the oasis.

The study of the Dakhleh Oasis thus offers a wide range of opportunities to comprehend the mental processes governing life in this extraordinary region.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings and the researcher's awareness of the content of the Dakhleh Oasis area of distinct urban heritage, as well as the importance acquired by the tourism development, the study recommends the following:

- 1) It is necessary to adopt the proposed development plan to achieve sustainable tourism development.
- 2) Recommending acknowledging the Oasis within the world's heritage sites.
- 3) To pay attention to the importance of relaying the heritage character and local materials in the rehabilitation processes and the architectural models and styles due to their direct impact on tourism promotion.
- 4) To activate the role of the Private Sector in tourism development and encourage tourism investment.
- 5) To set up an information database that includes all of the tourism elements in the region, based on the reality of the basic information available in the field of heritage and tourism fortune (e.g. the cultural, tourism and natural resources), as well as the tourism services, to create a model that shall be followed in application and employment within the rest of the cultural heritage sites of Dakhleh Oasis.
- 6) To introduce the Tourist Information System (TIS) and other multi-technical systems to exploit cultural and natural heritage resources and manage tourist facilities in the region to keep up with this field's scientific progress and development.
- 7) To develop policies, plans and mechanisms that promote the development of tourism resources in the region, to create the sustainable development by introducing nonconventional patterns of the economy through investment in the tourism economy and to adopt the concept of tourism as an entry to the development in the heritage sites according to their economic benefits.
- 8) To expand the economic base in the region by establishing other industries related to tourism (e.g. handicrafts and traditional industries), hence achieving the objectives of economic and social development of local society.
- 9) To set up a geographic database at the Geographic Information System (GIS), including the natural and human tourist information in the area of study, based on the reality of the available data originating from maps, satellites, aerial images, GPS data as well as the essential information.
- 10) To maintain the city's heritage character at the execution of the repairs, maintenance, and reuse processes.
- 11) To maintain the buildings through the use of local materials.
- 12) To pay attention to the capacity so that the mass tourism movement does not deteriorate the city's heritage resources.
- 13) To consider the environmental planning through studying and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the tourism projects and addressing the expected negative impacts. To plan the traffic movement by developing a system for traffic and transportation in the city, prevent the entry of cars and vehicles, and ensure the availability of adequate car parking lots.
- 14) To re-plan the vehicles' paths within the city and leave some roads open to be used as touristic tracks only and visually attractive areas to guide the tourists and visitors as they pass by the city's most critical and prominent heritage features.

- 15) To improve the quality and efficiency of the current infrastructure services and expand their capacity.
- 16) To work towards integrating the tourism service projects in the region to constitute an integral system of hotels, restaurants, and recreational and cultural services.
- 17) To provide access points in the city to organize the movement of tourists and provide them with the necessary information and guidance.
- 18) To develop tourist marketing methods and styles for the region within the international, regional, and local tourism markets.
- 19) To prepare urban plans for the tourism development projects within the framework of controls that consider the city's special urban and heritage features.
- 20) To raise the capacity and efficiencies of the residents to work in the tourism sector.
- 21) To improve the quality of current tourism services.
- 22) To reorganize some squares in the city to become centers of tourist activities.

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