
Understanding the Conduct During Festivals of Drunkenness

How the Egyptian worldview justified breaking with social conduct norms during religious festivals

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Abstract

When studying the proper conduct dictated by ancient Egyptian instructional texts, specifically the Papyrus Insinger teachings, the conduct that is encouraged is starkly different from what was practiced during festivals to the Solar Eye Goddess. This article seeks to compare depictions of the Festivals of Drunkenness with Wisdom Literature which dictate good etiquette. Special focus will be on the how differently the festivals and the instructional texts endorse alcohol consumption, boisterous behaviour, and promiscuity. Finally, an explanation for the differences will be suggested: The reason the Egyptians were willing to defy cultural moral norms on such occasions were ideological – in order to keep the capricious and powerful Solar Eye Goddess at peace, as many people as possible should partake in her favourite activities during her celebration. If she was somehow not satisfied during her festival, it could lead the world into numerous kinds of disasters. Therefore, by taking part in these, otherwise discouraged, acts, every Egyptian was helping keep the world stable.

فهم السلوك أثناء احتفالات الثمالة

كيف بررت النظرة المصرية للعالم الخروج عن أعراف السلوك الاجتماعي أثناء الاحتفالات الدينية

خلاصة:

عند دراسة السلوك الصحيح الذي تمليه النصوص التعليمية المصرية القديمة ، وعلى وجه الخصوص تعاليم بردية إنسنجر ، فإن السلوك الذي يتم تشجيعه يختلف اختلافاً صارخاً عن ذلك الذي كان يمارس خلال الاحتفالات بالهة عين الشمس. تسعى هذه المقالة إلى مقارنة صور احتفالات الثمالة بأدب الحكمة الذي بدوره يملئ آداب السلوك الجيدة. حيث سيتم التركيز بشكل خاص على مدى اختلاف الاحتفالات عن النصوص التعليمية في تأييد استهلاك الكحول والسلوك الصاخب والاختلاط الجنسي. أخيراً ، سيتم اقتراح تفسير للاختلافات: السبب الذي جعل المصريين على استعداد لتحدي الأعراف الأخلاقية الثقافية في مثل هذه المناسبات كان أيديولوجياً. وذلك من أجل إبقاء إلهة عين الشمس المتقلبة والقوية في سلام ، يجب أن يشارك أكبر عدد ممكن من الناس في أنشطتها المفضلة خلال الاحتفال بها. وإذا لم تكن راضية بطريقة ما خلال احتفاليتها، فقد يؤدي ذلك بالعالم إلى أنواع عديدة من الكوارث. لذلك ، ومن خلال المشاركة في هذه الأعمال المثبطة للعزيمة ، كان كل مصري يساعد في الحفاظ على استقرار العالم.

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Introduction

In Egypt, several Goddesses shared similar characteristics and were often interchangeable with each other; They were motherly or feminine ideals, often with feline attributes, a dualistic personality, and the daughter of the Sun-God. These Goddesses can be viewed as local versions of the same Goddess. This Goddess' popularity caused massive festivals to arise in her honour, most of them evident from the New Kingdom onwards. Depictions of these religious festivals show they involved drinking, singing, dancing and overt sexuality. However, concurrent with these festivals, scribes penned down texts, now called Wisdom Literature, wherein almost identical behaviour were discouraged and frowned upon.

In this article, a brief research history on the development of the festivals will first be established. Then, the article will look at some of the sources that describe the festival conduct and contrast them with Wisdom Literature. Afterwards, I will try to explain the disparities by examining the mythological context of the festivals, and what purpose the festivals had for keeping the universe in peace – and how this made it acceptable to behave differently during the festivals than otherwise encouraged.

Sources and methodology

In this article all the different identities of the Goddess will be referred to as the Solar Eye Goddess, and her specific names will only be used in contexts where they are relevant. The term 'Solar Eye Goddess' will be used for any of the Goddesses celebrated in the festivals or their related myths. This is because their shared themes and roles suggests they were local versions of the same Goddess. This way we can better look at the festival mentality as a phenomenon, though there is much potential for studying why her alter egos show up in different contexts.

For similar reasons, festivals with relevant themes and mythological contexts are grouped together under the umbrella term Festival of Drunkenness. The scope of this article will not allow much deeper discussion about the age, size or timing of each festival than detailed in the brief research history below, though much more could be said about it and its development.

The article will mainly be looking at the following texts:

Herodotus' Histories Book 2, as translated by Godley (1920).

Hymn from Medamud translated by Darnell (1995).

Hymn from Philae translated by Quack (2009, 353).

Hymn to Nehemani/Ait translated by Jasnow and Zauzich (2017).

A love song translated by Simpson (2003, 327).

A Demotic Poem about the Festival of Drunkenness for Bastet, as translated by Quack (in Ryholt and Quack 1996, 21).

The Wisdom Literature text Papyrus Insinger, as translated by Lichtheim (2006, 167 (For another translation of Papyrus Insinger, see also: Lexa (1926)).

The Destruction of Mankind, as translated by Simpson (2003, 290), which is a part of the larger story The Book of The Heavenly Cow found in tombs of post-Amarna kings (For another translation of the Destruction of Mankind, see also: Hornung (1997, 37).

The Distant Goddess from Quack (2009).

For these texts, I rely on the translations of others, and therefore my understanding of the texts can be coloured by their translation choices. How to specifically parse through and translate the sources are another field which could be discussed at length, as varying results have big impact on our understanding of the texts.

The above texts have been chosen, as they are from either the Ptolemaic and Late periods, or the New Kingdom, where we have evidence of the festivals taking place. First or second-hand festival sources will be used to describe the behavior at the festivals, as well as Herodotus' coeval comments about it. However, Herodotus' accounts should not be treated as first hand witness accounts of the festivals. It is disputed whether he travelled to Egypt and saw the Bastet festival he describes himself, or if he relayed its description as a first-hand account. There are several problems with the accuracy of Herodotus; he often included folklore among his historical accounts and made his own opinions on different topics very clear. 'Histories' is written with Herodotus as the observer, but he also often points out how certain information is told to him from other sources. His accounts of the festival to Bastet cannot alone testify to the behaviour at the festivals, but it is included for its similarity to Egyptian depictions.

The analysis will be in three parts: First we will look at the texts that describe behaviour at the festivals, through festival hymns as well as Herodotus' account. In the second part, this behaviour will be compared with the conduct which the Wisdom Literature encourage, modelled after the Egyptian social values and their idea of good etiquette. And lastly, two myths about the Goddess will help explain the need for the events, and why we may see discrepancies in the Egyptian idea of good conduct, and that which was displayed at her festivals. The article will mainly be looking at two myths: The Destruction of Mankind, as well as Return of the Distant Goddess.

The Emergence of the Festivals

Many of the names of the Goddess can be traced all the way back to the Old Kingdom, where Hathor is first seen described as the Sun's Eye in the Pyramid texts (Richter 2010, 157). However, at what time the Festivals of Drunkenness arose has been discussed heavily. Jensen (Jensen 2017, 300) uses the presence of feline and bovine imagery, as well as large-scale beer production, among other indirect signs, to tentatively trace some form of inebriety festival all the way back to predynastic times. However, for the purposes of this article, it might be too tenuous to trace these festivals back over a millennia before direct evidence of them appear.

The first concrete evidence for a festival to the Solar Eye Goddess is attested in the Middle Kingdom. Horváth (2015, 125) examines the fragmented festival calendar from

Lahun temple, which lists a few events in Hathor's name, though no description of the events is provided. Since Lahun is not otherwise known as a cult centre for Hathor, Horváth postulates the celebrations could have been related to a procession where a visiting Goddess' statue arrives from another temple. Little can otherwise be said of how much the celebrations at Lahun resembled later festivals. Similarly, no known versions of the above-mentioned myths are known from the Middle Kingdom, and scholars disagree whether they had appeared yet in any form. However, from this period, references are made to a rebellion against the Sun-God (Horváth 2015, 134), which might indeed suggest that the myths, or at least elements of them, were already in circulation.

In the New Kingdom, evidence for the Festival of Drunkenness is more direct: at Mut's *Isheru* temple at Karnak, a Porch of Drunkenness constructed by Hatshepsut, which might have been where festival parties took place, was excavated by Bryan and her team (Bryan 2005, 181). It is believed the myth of the Destruction of Mankind developed around this same time. Some linguistic studies of the first known example of the myth, found in Tutankhamun's tomb, has placed it pre-Amarna. Lichtheim has argued that it must have its origins in the Middle Kingdom, as the passage containing the myth is written in Middle Egyptian, distinct from surrounding text, which was written in later Egyptian (Lichtheim 2006, 196 – 97). That means the myth might have been copied from lost Middle Kingdom texts into the Book of the Heavenly Cow in the New Kingdom. However, Spalinger disagrees and argues the myth cannot be dated before the 18th dynasty, shortly after the end of the 2nd intermediate period (Spalinger 2000, 260). Both ideas place the composition of the text before or just around the time when Hatshepsut built the Porch of Drunkenness.

On a temple gateway in Medamud, one can find the Hymn to the Returning Goddess, which is possibly the oldest known reference to the myth of the Distant Goddess (Quack 2009, 357). According to Darnell, the hymn and its festival might have evolved from similar celebrations to Monthu, which were described in Papyrus Boulaq 18 (Darnell 1995, 47) from the 13th dynasty, so Darnell also traces the origins of this myth back to the Middle Kingdom. The Return of the Distant Goddess is otherwise only known from full or partial versions in Ptolemaic temples and papyri.

By the Late and Ptolemaic periods, both myths relating to the festivals had appeared, as well as direct evidence for the festivals and the conduct seen in them. As this is the time with most concrete evidence for the festivals, and this article will therefore focus on sources from this period.

Festivals to the Solar Eye Goddess

To understand the ideology of the Festival of Drunkenness, it is necessary to understand the function of the Solar Eye Goddess and her identities, whom the festivals were held in honor of. The Goddesses' who were celebrated had specific functions in the Egyptian world view, which was reflected in their mythology and the stories about

them. Understanding the link between the festivals' purpose and the mythological stories connected to them are essential to understand the behavior at the events.

The Solar Eye Goddess

This article uses 'Solar Eye Goddess' to refer to any Goddess who is identified as the Sun's eye, possess feline attributes and a dual nature of opposing characteristics, like calmness and wrath, and who embodies feminine and motherly ideals. Her two personalities are different faces and names of the same Goddess. These paired Goddesses are often the daughter of the Sun-God, as well as his physical eye, the visible sun-disk. The most famous example of such a Solar Eye Goddess pair is Sekhmet and Hathor, though literature relating to Bastet, Nehemani and Ait as other Solar Eye Goddesses also will be discussed.

Looking at these Goddess pairs, often one or both had feline attributes, some being calm cats, others powerful lionesses. There are many reasons why felines were associated with the Goddess: cats also possess a dualistic nature, as they can be soft and warm one instant, yet effective predators the next. Their loud mating habits, as well as their ability to have huge litters of kittens, made them ideal representations of the Goddesses' sexual and motherly roles. Jackson (2018, 16) also proposed that felines were great representations of the sun's eye due to a peculiar trait: at night, whilst the sun was travelling through the underworld, their eyes glowed when reflecting torch light, almost identical to two sun disks, fig. 1. A passage from the Metternich stela might refer to this feline trait in its praise of cats:

"O Cat, your eyes are the eyes of the Lord of the glorious eye, by whose eye the Two Lands are lighted." (Jackson 2018, 23)

The myths related to this Goddess will be discussed in depth below, but certain themes show up when she appears: she is the Goddess of joy, sexuality, and motherhood so long as she is pleased, but she may set off into a rampage if she, or her father, has been slighted. Only by being appeased, either through dancing and singing for her enjoyment, or by tricking her into a state of inebriety, will she turn back into the calm beloved Goddess again.

Her serene forms, especially as Hathor, are popular figures in love literature. In this New Kingdom love song, the Goddess is referenced:

*"I shall kiss him in the presence of his family
And not be embarrassed by the people.
I shall rejoice because they are aware
That he has been intimate with me.
I shall celebrate festivals for my Goddess"* (Simpson 2003, 327)

Here a woman sings of being in love, and about not being embarrassed to be close with her partner, especially at the festival. In these songs, Hathor is often called the Golden Goddess, and she is the deity a love-struck person could ask for help, as she would intertwine the fate of two lovers.

A Demotic Poem About the Festival of Drunkenness for Bastet

This is a poem written on papyrus where a man sings praises to the Goddess and his audience replies. It showcases some of the behaviour expected from participants of a Festival of Drunkenness. In one part, the singer exclaims:

*“Let us drink,
let us eat of the delicious(?) produce.
Let us exclaim in cheers, even more cheers!
May Bastet come to our party
and may we become intoxicated at her
drunkenness party.”* (Quack 1996, 21)(translated by the author)

Here, the performer and festival goers indulge on food and get drunk in the Goddess’ honour, and they yell out in excitement, in the hopes she might be present at the celebration. The audience respond to the singer:

*“They exclaimed sounds of euphoria, (...)
while they said: “Bastet has arrived
in her calm appearance form.
Vi have reached this (...) in drunkenness.”* (Quack 1996, 21) (translated by the author)

Here, the participants rejoice the arrival of the calm Bastet, whom they have reached through their intoxication. The poem shows the different ways the participants were encouraged to drink, eat, make noise, and celebrate for Bastet’s Festival of Drunkenness. Due to how often a person’s petition to a God is done whilst inebriated in texts, some suggest that alcoholic beverages were consumed to encourage visions of the Gods (Szpakowska 2003, 236).

Hymns of Ait and Nehemani

Several texts in honour of the minor Goddesses Ait and Nehemani also show how these festivals encouraged overindulging in drinking, eating, dancing and sexual exploits (Jasnow 2017, 156). The followers of Ait and Nehemani felt ecstatic in their hymns:

“The ones who drink and the ones who eat (are) the ones who are on the path (of god). (...) (But) the ones who have said: “They have not drunk,” the ones who have said: “They have not eaten,” their fate (and) their fortune (lead) towards anger and death. They will cause silver to come into being. (But) they will destroy the treasury.” (Jasnow 2017, 157)

In this hymn, it becomes apparent that the matter of celebratory indulgence may be done for more than simple enjoyment, for calamities are ensured to anyone who refuses to partake in the celebrations. In this hymn, indulgence is the ‘path of God’, whilst modesty causes calamities.

Hymns from Medamud and Philae

A hymn found at the temple of Medamud was likely performed to welcome home the Goddess from Nubia, in remembrance of the Myth of the Distant Goddess, where the Goddess had stormed off to Nubia after a dispute with her father and was coaxed home by other Gods. On her travels home through Egypt, she is celebrated at every town. This specific hymn is from those celebrations at Medamud. The hymn describes the celebrations as well as some of the animals and people that escort her home:

“Come, oh Golden One, who eats of praise, because the food of her desire is dancing, who shines on the festival at the time of lighting (the lamps), who is content with the dancing at night. ‘Come! The procession is in the place of inebriation, that hall of travelling through the marshes. Its performance is set, its order is in effect, without anything lacking in it. (Darnell 1995, 49)

(...)

There dance ecstatically for you the Mentyew-Libyans in their (peculiar) clothing, and the Nubians with their mace(s); The nomads throw themselves down to you in front of you, and the bearded ones declaim for you.” (Darnell 1995, 64)

The Goddess is celebrated everywhere she appears on her way home. Musicians and dancers make noise and perform for her, and people join the celebrations in ecstasy. The ‘Hall of Travelling Through Marshes’, an expression Bryan has suggested is a euphemism for intercourse, and the ‘Place of Inebriation’ mentioned here, may be akin to the Porch of Drunkenness found by Bryan and her team. Here the rowdy celebrations could take place, the participants could drink, dance, sing, and find intimate partners, all to the enjoyment of the Goddess.

Another hymn from the same time comes from Philae. According to Quack, these two hymns might be the oldest references we have to the myth of the Distant Goddess, though they aren’t exceedingly older than other references (Quack 2009, 357). Excerpts of this version align well with the hymn above:

*“Hathor, Great Lady of the place of appeal!
Your father Re is rejoicing at your rising,
Your brother Shu is giving homage before you.
That, the knowing one of the two lands, is calling to you, oh powerful one.
The great ennead is in rejoicing and festival cries.*

(...)

*Virgins open for you the processions in giving their fate.
You are the lady of favour, the dame of dancing.
Great of love, lady of beautiful women.
You are the lady of drunkenness, numerous of feasts.
Lady of myrrh, lady of knotting wreathes.
Lady of cries, lady of rejoicing.
The sistrum is played for her majesty,*

(...)

You are the lady of dancing, lady of singing and lute-playing.

Radiant of face every day, who does not know wrath.” (Quack 2009, 353)

In this hymn, the returning Goddess as Hathor is celebrated by many types of people and animals, and the male Gods Ra, Shu and Toth, who had succeeded in calming her down and returning her, are in praise of her. Her ‘rising’ here may be quite literal: Quack (2009, 356) suggests that the celebrations of this myth took place around the changing of the year, as the Nile inundation creeps across Egypt, restarting their cycle of harvest, an event that coincides with the sun slowly moving northward, and the rise of the Sirius star, often associated with Hathor, above the horizon. This way the festival also becomes part of keeping the pre-historic cycle of the world going another year.

Herodotus’ Histories Book Two

For a long time, the only known evidence of these festivals came to us through a passage in Herodotus’ writing about Egypt in his Histories books. Here, he describes a festival to Bastet at her cult centre in Bubastis:

“When the people are on their way to Bubastis, they go by river (...) Some of the women make a noise with rattles, others play flutes all the way, while the rest of the women, and the men, sing and clap their hands. As they travel by river to Bubastis, whenever they come near any other town they bring their boat near the bank; then some of the women do as I have said, while some shout mockery of the women of the town; others dance, and others stand up and lift their skirts. (...) But when they have reached Bubastis, they make a festival with great sacrifices, and more wine is drunk at this feast than in the whole year besides.” (Godley 2014, 347)

For the festival, the whole area around Bubastis, and even most of Egypt, is encouraged to sail to the city and partake in Bastet’s celebration. On the way there, at any harbour they come across, they lift their garments and expose themselves to those on land, yelling obnoxiously to each other, to shame those who do not intend to partake. This display seems to have made an impression on Herodotus, whether he saw it himself or had been told about it from someone else.

Behaviour at the Festivals

There are a few common themes in the texts above, most obviously the focus on large consumption of alcoholic beverages, hence the modern name of the festivals.

Other common behaviour is dancing, singing, and noisemaking for the Goddess. Hathor’s favourite instrument, the sistrum, is shaken in Herodotus’ account and is played by festival participants in the hymns. Though the music could be beautifully arranged, it seems the point of the rejoicing and shaking of rattles was to make as much noise as possible. Another part of the Medamud hymn reads:

“The drunken revellers drum for you in the cool of the night.

The awakened ones heap blessings onto you.”

That is, the Goddess' followers drum loudly late at night or early morning to awaken the possibly hung-over populace, so all could join the praise of the Goddess. This loudness was accompanied by dancing, like the foreigners or animals who followed the Goddess home in the Medamud hymn, and possibly of no style or coordination at all, adding to the rowdy festival atmosphere.

Another common theme was promiscuous behaviour, as seen in the poem of the woman, unembarrassed to show her beloved's family that they are intimate, or the women on the boats who expose themselves and yell obscenities in Herodotus' depiction. The inebriated participants were 'roaming the marshes' and finding partners for the festival evening. Some scholars even believe this is to be taken even further; Quack writes "Her homecoming to Egypt is always occasion for indulgent parties, which can border on orgies." (1996, 22)(translated from Danish by the author). That is, the sexual behaviour might have been public displays even akin to orgies, though this is a disputed proposal (For a more in-depth discussion on the problems with understanding sexuality in ancient Egypt, see: DuQuesne 2005).

Other behaviour seems to have been common at the events as well. Indulging on foods is mentioned in several texts above. It has also been suggested inhaling fumes of the blue lotus was used alongside inebriation to connect with the Gods (Szpakowska 2003, 226). Risk-taking might also have been common, as there is festival-associated graffiti at Abusir that suggest the festival participants braved the desert to welcome home the Goddess from her journey (Jackson 2018, 187).

Wisdom Literature of Ptolemaic time

The Wisdom Literature genre of texts dictate proper conduct in ancient Egyptian societies, comparable to modern etiquette books, and they may have been abided by just as liberally as ours are today. Even though they are probably ideals rather than the common practice, they still tell us a lot about the values and morals of those who composed them. They are written as a mentor's hand-me-down knowledge to a younger, more naïve son or student (Snell 2020, 286).

Papyrus Insinger

Papyrus Insinger is a single demotic text which is missing the first eight columns. It's written in a style fitting the 1st century CE, though its composition might date to the latter part of the Ptolemaic period, since variants are known to have been copied elsewhere. This version is rearranged by its author, the teachings put into thematic groupings, and most of the groupings end by pointing out that even if one follows all the instructions, bad times can still fall upon you. For in the end, the Gods control cosmic order and design peoples' fates. The first set of teachings on the papyrus focus on gluttony and overindulging, and explains:

*"There is he who is weary from yesterday yet has a craving for wine.
[There is] he who dislikes intercourse yet spends his surplus on women.
(...)*

[The] evil that befalls the fool, his belly and his phallus bring it.

(...)

He who drinks too much wine lies down in a stupor.

All kinds of ailments are in the limbs because of overeating.

He who is moderate in his manner of life, his flesh is not disturbed.

Illness does not burn him who is moderate in food.”

“The Fool” is the person who does not follow the teachings and suffers the consequences; He cannot control himself, and because of his gluttony, his craving for wine, and lust for women, he will suffer. His urges, literally “his belly and his phallus”, are to blame for this misfortune. This is directly opposite the condemnations seen in the hymn to Ait, where those who drink and eat are “on the path of God”, and those who do not “lead towards anger and death”.

Further condemnation of lust is seen later in the text, especially if it is toward a married person:

“He who is abstemious with his belly and guarded with his phallus is not blamed at all.

(...)

Wrongdoing [occurs] to the heart of the fool through his love of women.

He does not think of the morrow for the sake of wronging the wife of another.

The fool who looks at a woman is like a fly on blood.

His – – – attains the bedroom, unless the hand of another attains him.

the [fool] brings disturbance to – – – because of his phallus.

His love of fornication does harm to his livelihood.”

Here, the author explains how much damage a man can do to his life, as well as those around him, when he starts sleeping around, where “his love of fornication does harm to his livelihood”.

In the teachings, the reader is also warned of the troubles one may suffer if they are loud and obnoxious, shouting, or even dancing:

“Wine, women, and food give gladness to the heart.

He who uses them without loud shouting is not reproached in the street.

(...)

If there is no calm in a feast its master cannot enjoy himself.

If there is no calm in a temple its gods are the ones who abandon it.

(...)

Do not dance in the crowd, do not make in the multitude.”

The author warns the reader not to be obnoxious, and the temples especially are to be kept sombre, or their Gods may abandon them. This is starkly different from the noisy

and joyful celebrations that are supposed to soothe the Solar Eye Goddess.

In this instruction, drinks, food, and lust is allowed in moderation. However, this should happen in quiet settings, for once you are found drunk on the street, have embarrassed yourself by overeating, or have been caught sleeping with many people, you will suffer misfortune.

Ideology of the Solar Eye Goddess

To understand this apparent clash between the ideal behaviour seen in Wisdom Literature and the conduct of festival participants, we will look at the ideological and mythological origins of the Goddess, and how these myths fostered certain ideas connected to the festivals.

Destruction of Mankind

The Destruction of Mankind is the tale of Hathor, who, in her form as Sekhmet, almost destroys humanity, but is stopped by being tricked into inebriety by her father. The tale is set in the mythical time when Ra ruled Egypt. He has grown old and weak, and humans have therefore plotted against him. Finding this out, Ra then summons his allied Gods to have their counselling on how he should proceed. He is angry, and debates whether he should simply kill all humans. However, Nun, the God of the primordial ocean from which Ra came, advises him to send his eye, from whose tears humans had first been born, instead:

Then said Re to Nun, "(...) I am seeking (a solution). I cannot slay them until I have heard what you might have to say about this." The Majesty of Nun replied, "O my son Re, (...) The fear of you is great; your Eye shall proceed against those who conspire against you."

However, Ra discovers that the rebels have fled to the desert. His eye takes the form of Hathor, who descends to smite them. After a short while she returns, and her father welcomes her. However, Hathor, who had started to enjoy the killing, becomes enraged when she is told to stop, and turns into Sekhmet to continue her slaughtering:

This goddess replied, "As you live for me, I have overpowered mankind, and it was agreeable to my heart." The Majesty of Re said, "I shall gain power over them as king. Hold off decimating them!" And so Sakhmet came into being. The nightly beer-mash for wading in their blood starting from Heracleopolis.

Worried she will kill all of humanity, Ra formulates a plan, where ochre and beer are combined by humans into 7000 jars of blood-red beer. This is then poured over the marshes near the resting Goddess, creating a false inundation of blood in wait for her continued rampage the next day. As she awakens, Sekhmet sees the beer:

This goddess set out in the morning, and she found these (fields) inundated. Her face became delighted thereat. So she proceeded to drink, and it was just fine in her estimation. She returned so drunk that she had been unable to recognize mankind.

This part of the Book of the Heavenly Cow ends as Ra establishes a celebration in remembrance of how he prevented mankind from being slaughtered. He dictates beer shall be prepared in the temples during the festivals:

The Majesty of Re then told this goddess that intoxicating draughts shall be prepared for her on the seasonal feasts of the year; maidservants shall be held responsible for this. And so the preparation of intoxicating draughts became the assignment of maidservants on the Feast of Hathor on the part of all people since the first day. The Majesty of Re said to this goddess, "Has the heat of sickness become painful?" And so respect is bound to originate through pain.

Not only is this the mythological reason for the festivals, but it also explains why the festivals are essential: if they were not celebrated, if the Goddess' rage was not distilled, she might rampage against humanity once more. This was not an empty threat for the Egyptians, many of whom had seen natural disasters and diseases, which they thought came directly at her wish. However, if they all soothed her rage by entertaining her and held many feasts for her, sometimes getting the whole nation drunk, she would be both joyful and at peace.

The Return of the Distant Goddess

The Return of the Distant Goddess is another myth of the Solar Eye Goddess. Evidence of this story can be found in many temples from Ptolemaic times, as well as on papyrus and ostraca. Since the story concerns the Goddess visiting several cities as they celebrate her, every temple had a local variation of the myth, and details changed depending on the version.

The story opens with the Goddess taking off to Nubia in anger after a dispute with her father. Egypt and the Sun-God is weak without his daughter's protection, and the land grows stale without the power of the sun-disk. Depending on the version of the myth, Ra sends one or more Gods to fetch her. In this version it is the son of Thoth, in the form of a hybrid of wolf-guenuon. When he finds the Goddess, her form terrifies him:

She took on the form of a raging lioness (...) She stroked with her paw, and the mountain set off dust. She wagged her tail, and the sand formed dust devils. She bared her teeth, and fire blazed out of the mountain. (...) The wolf-guenuon was in very great fear. (Quack 2009, 344)

To persuade the Goddess home, the male Gods tell fables from Egypt, morality stories she might have enjoyed growing up. Once the Goddess has been calmed down and convinced of going home, the Gods all take different forms. Quack notes that these forms could very well be purposeful; when she reaches El-Kab, where the vulture Goddess Nekhbet is revered, the Solar Eye Goddess takes the form of a vulture. When in Thebes, where Mut is revered, she transforms into a gazelle, an animal sometimes associated with Mut (Quack 2009, 343). This might be a way for the different cities to link their different Solar Eye Goddesses together and unite all towns in a national celebration. By the end, she can re-join her father as his eye in Heliopolis.

Festivals of Peace

The myths clearly show how the Goddess' rage, and her subsequent rampage or disappearance, could cause disasters and droughts, leading Egypt to the brink of collapse. To avoid these disasters, the Egyptians must calm and entertain the Goddess by performing her favourite pastimes: Dancing, singing loudly, telling stories, having intercourse, and drinking. The drinking was not only something she enjoyed, but also what stopped her rampage and turned her peaceful as she returned to her father.

As the festivals were developing from smaller events like the ones at Lahun, the myths might have sprung up as reasons for why the festivals were essential; they appeased the Goddess, and stopped her from causing calamities for humanity, both as plagues and disease, natural disaster or loss in battles. Should the goddess not be satisfied at her festival, her rage could be unleashed on the population, much like it was on the rebels against Ra, or the Nubians of the second myth. At the same time, the festivals happened at a time of year where the inundation was coming in, the start of a new year cycle, and to make sure it would be a good one, every town had a duty to welcome home their wandering Goddess. Much was at stake for the cosmos during the festivals, and as the Goddess was not easy to please, it was necessary to act outside of normalcy during her celebrations. During the festival the nation would encourage each other to participate to appease the Goddess, and in the early morning, they would then be awakened by drums, so they could welcome her home. The participants might even go out to the desert where she would return and carve greetings for her. Or they might sail upstream, shaming those on land for not attending, and lifting their garments to cause laughter, just as Hathor is said to have done in the story of the Contending of Horus and Seth, where she makes her depressed father laugh at her silly behaviour as she dances naked (Beatty 1931, 16).

The Literate Population and the Festival Participants

In this article I have worked mainly out of the assumption that the readership of the Wisdom literature, and in particular Papyrus Insinger, also took some part in the boisterous behaviour at the festivals. This is not meant to say that the literate population was the exact same people who were described on the boats in Herodotus' account, or in the Egyptian texts produced for the festivals. In fact, several places the participants are specifically noted as being from other groups; the Medamud hymn stresses the different nationalities that are celebrating the Goddess, and the Philae hymn mentions virgins as the ones to lead processions. However, I would still argue that these groups would normally adhere to social norms, though possibly less restricted than the Wisdom literature dictated. At the same time, these are not the only groups to partake, as seen in the demotic poem to Bastet, where it is the narrator and his fellow party goers that encourage each other to drink and cheer in her honour. In fact, all parts of the Egyptian society took part, as even Hatshepsut had a place built specifically for it to take place.

The different social groups undeniably celebrated the festivals differently and according to their means, but there were certain things a participant was expected to do during the festival. Whether those with more of a reputation to uphold could act just as unseemly as some of the depictions or not, there was still an undeniable shift in what behaviour was acceptable in the duration of the festival: it was encouraged and even expected that a participant did their utmost to appease the Goddess at her party, and it was achieved by drinking, dancing, singing, being noisy and being overtly sexual. The Wisdom literature tells us that this was not normally the case, that the Egyptian image of a composed, high-status and literate individual would normally not involve those activities. In fact, I would argue anyone in Egyptian society would have been raised to have the same attitude towards such behaviour, even without the ability to read: the Wisdom Literature was based on the Egyptian social conscious, where such behaviour was frowned upon. Therefore, I think only by understanding the implications of the festivals, what their purpose was for the cycle of the world, can this difference in attitude be explained.

Conclusion

The Egyptians could at the same time dissuade each other from certain behaviors in most circumstances, whilst also seemingly be fine with indulging in them during the Festival of Drunkenness, because the success of the festival was of huge importance to the wellbeing of the world. The conduct taught by Papyrus Insinger developed from the Egyptian social consciousness; what would and would not cause the literate Egyptian to raise an eyebrow. It taught the reader to be remembered as a composed and pleasant individual, rather than as an incoherent and scandalous person. In contrast, the festivals had a cosmic purpose, to keep the balance of the world, and keep the Goddess appeased, for otherwise, they could risk the collapse of order. The behavior described at these festivals were unusual for any other time, at least if you wanted to uphold a good reputation. But for the duration of the festivals, the whole nation was encouraged to indulge in them, so far as even royalty erected pavilions for the parties to take place in. The purpose of the festivals made the behavior a religious declaration for the wellbeing of Egypt.

The behaviour of these festivals could literally save humanity from the Goddess' wrath, whether that manifested in losing battles, political turmoil, epidemics, or other natural disasters. So long as the Egyptians exercised her favourite activities, they could keep her wrath at bay. At the same time, if they succeeded in appeasing her, she would bring them protection and a good fortune.

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