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# The One She-Cat of Pakhet: Towards a New Type of Animal Cult?

Romain Ferreres

## Abstract

During the 3rd century BC, Padikem of Tuna el-Gebel was 'Priest of the Living She-Cat of the Temple of Pakhet', suggesting that such a cat had her cult around the Speos Artemidos, the cliff-temple of the lion-headed goddess Pakhet. The thousands of cat mummies scavenged next to the temple at the end of the 18th century and turned into powder to make fertiliser for British fields already demonstrated that a cult of cats existed in this area. However, this is only a testimony of the 'cult of the many', the offering of animals mummified for this sole purpose. At the same time, the title of Padikem implies a 'cult to the one', as known for the bulls Apis, Mnevis, or Buchis. However, other indices scattered through Egypt can provide a new hint of a peculiar cult, a hybrid between 'cult of the many' and 'cult of the one'.

## Keywords

Animal cult, Pakhet, Speos Artemidos, Sacred animal, Animal mummies

## Introduction

The cult of animals is a well-known element of the ancient Egyptian religion, even if it suffers from clichés which are a source of jokes and amusement. We can distinguish two main types of animal cults in Ancient Egypt, the 'cult of the one' and the 'cult of the many' (Dunand, Lichtenberg 2005: 227; Ikram 2015: 5-15).

The great bulls of Egypt illustrate best the first type of animal cult: Apis for Ptah in Memphis, Mnevis for Ra in Heliopolis, and Buchis for Montu in Armant. The divine essence of the future sacred bull appears through physical characteristics, such as its coat, and enables its identification. Once found, it comes to the temple, passes through different rites and then lives in a particular paddock, where it will receive care and offerings, and participate in processions and other cult practices. Therefore, we can consider this animal a living statue of the related god. When it dies, the body is treated with care, being mummified and buried in an individual tomb, and continues to be worshipped with the offering of steles. Therefore, only one individual exists per cult, which is why we call them 'one' or 'unique'.

In the second type, every animal presenting proximity with the iconography or the mythology of a god can become a suitable offering, provided it goes through the rite of mummification. However, due to the length of the process, pilgrims could not always come with their own victim to mummify, so the temples prepared mummies in advance to be offered to the pilgrims. Therefore, 'fake' mummies appeared to meet the demand, containing only parts of an animal, the wrong species, or were simply empty, but with an aspect fitting the right animal. Consequently, more than one mummified animal can exist in one particular cult, thus the general denomination as 'many'.

In both types of cult, the critical point is that the chosen animal must become a *ntr*, not in the sense of 'god', but as a 'ritualised being or object' (Meeks 1988: 430, 437). With this status, the living animal or

the dead and mummified one accesses a new state, enters the world of the gods and can therefore serve as a medium between humans and deities (Charron 2014: 277).

### The cult practices for Pakhet

The Wadi Batn el-Baqara - the Belly of the Cow - is a dry tributary on the east bank of the Nile set in Middle Egypt, 15 km north of Hermopolis. This valley is famous for its main monument, the Speos Artemidos, a rock-cut temple dedicated to the lion-headed goddess Pakhet, excavated by Hatshepsut and Thutmose III and later enlarged by Seti I. However, the speos is not the only monument of the wadi, although the most known. Indeed, a small niche from the reign of Hatshepsut called Speos Batn el-Baqara stands far away at the end of the valley, at an uncertain location (Fakhry 1939: 709-723). Then, the cliffs of the wadi opening present numerous tombs dating back to the 5th-6th dynasties for the southern lip (Garstang 1907: 30-35) and from the 20th-30th dynasties in the northern lip (Garstang 1907: 200-209). Finally, another group of rock-cut chambers forms a line east of the Speos Artemidos. Unexplored and undocumented, these hypogea have sculpted door-lintels with cavetto cornices.

Alongside these excavations, Champollion (1868: 69-70) described the existence of countless cat mummies in three different locations (Figure 1):

‘[Le temple] est cerné par divers hypogées de chats sacrés (l’animal de Bubastis); quelques-uns sont creusés dans le roc, un, entre autres, construit sous le règne d’Alexandre, fils d’Alexandre le Grand. Devant le temple, sous le sable, est un grand banc de momies de chats pliés dans les nattes et entremêlés de chiens; plus loin, entre la vallée et le Nil, dans la plaine déserte, sont deux très-grands entrepôts de momies de chats en paquets, et recouverts de deux pieds de sable.’

The first spot refers to the rock-cut chambers east of the Speos Artemidos. Indeed, among these hypogea is a particular room with a more elaborate lintel (Figure 1). Like the others, it has a cavetto cornice carved with a frieze of cartouches of Alexander Aigos (323-309 BC) on both sides of a solar disc,

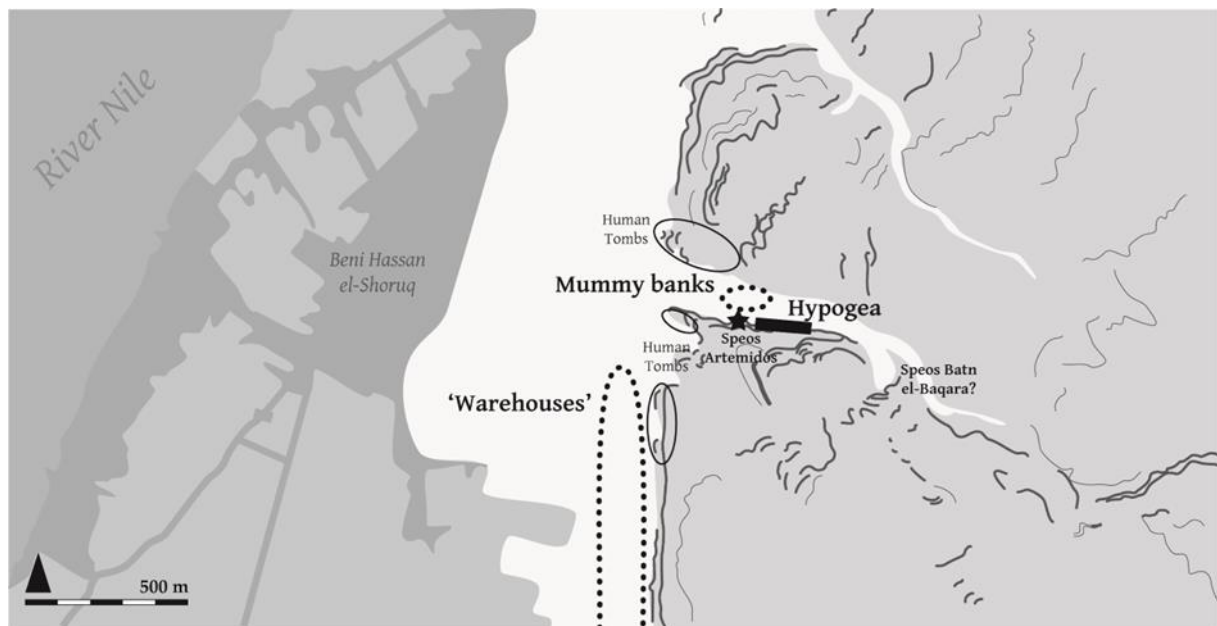


Figure 1. Map of the Wadi Batn el-Baqara region with position of cat necropoleis (© Romain Ferreres).

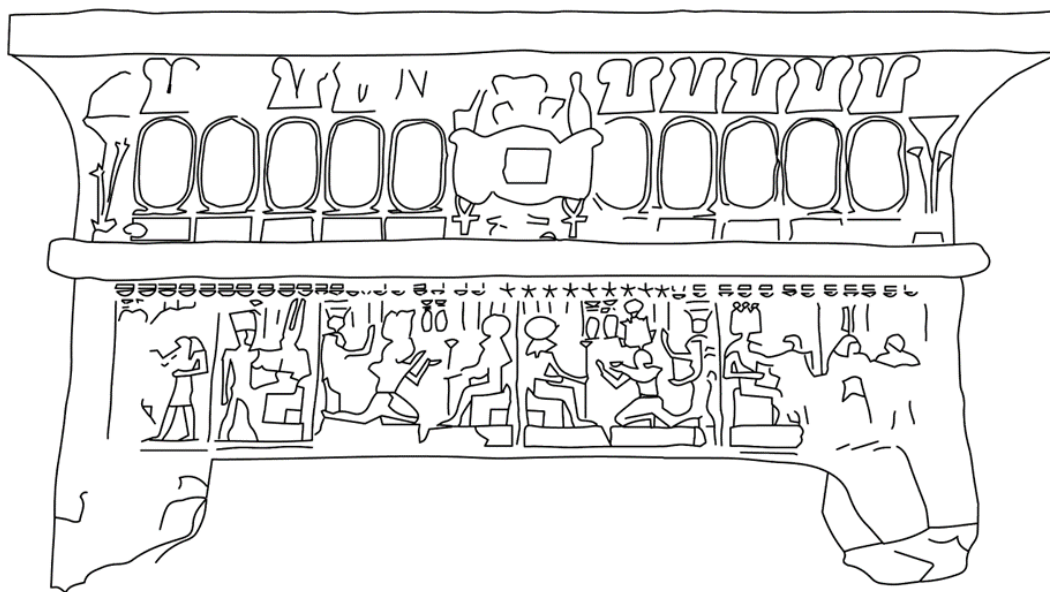


Figure 2. Drawing of the Alexander Aigos speos lintel (© Romain Ferreres).

flanked with two uraei in metal and now lost; all that remains are its imprint and mortise. Under the cornice, a small register of six symmetrical scenes shows the king being brought before a lion-headed goddess, Pakhet, to present her offerings. This decoration leads us to consider this chamber a small temple, a new speos dedicated to the local goddess. However, the general aspect of the lintel, identical to the other hypogea, except for the decoration, implies that it is a tomb consecrated to a more special occupant (Ferreres 2017a: 119-120).

The second and third locations, the banks buried in the ground a few metres below the temple entrance and the two enormous warehouses dug up outside the Wadi Batn el-Baqara, south of its mouth, are irremediably lost. On these last warehouses, a commentary of Maspero (1890: 723) talks about a bank, 2 km long, dating to the Saite-Persian period (Figure 2).

The mummies stored in these places had a sad fate: at the end of the 19th century, two cargo ships delivered 180,000 of them at Liverpool. They were plundered from the Speos region and sold for a fair price to be pulverised and spread as fertiliser on British crops (Cooke 2015: 51). As a result, only a few mummies remain in different museums worldwide for study. We can classify them into two types according to their appearance. In the first, the cat's limbs are distinct from the rest of the body, and the mummy kept the original form of the animal; in the second, the mummy takes the form of a bowling pin with its straight forelegs wrapped along the body and its bent hind legs and tail pulled up under the pelvis.

These cat necropoleis must be the result of the cult of the many, due to the large number of bodies they contained: bred cats were killed and mummified to be 'sold' to pilgrims coming to make offerings to their goddess. The British painter Edwin Longsdon Long (Bills 1998: 153) depicted a romantic vision of this breeding of cats, not knowing that those poor creatures would have their neck broken when they were about four months or one year old (Armitage, Clutton-Brock 1981: 194).

### **The One She-Cat of Pakhet and other living animals**

Not far from the Speos Artemidos, at Tuna el-Gebel, stands the tomb of Padikem, near the famous tomb of Petosiris (Gabra 1941: 11). Padikem's most important titles are related to the temple of Thot

at Hermopolis and his position as a scribe. However, Padikem’s most important title for this present contribution is  $\overline{\text{ḥ}}\overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{t}}\overline{\text{n}}\overline{\text{r}}\overline{\text{n}}(\overline{\text{y}})\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{3}}\overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{j}}\overline{\text{w}}\overline{\text{.t}}\overline{\text{'nḥ.t n(y.t) ḥw.t-nṯr Ph.t}}$  ‘priest of The Living She-Cat<sup>1</sup> of the temple of Pakhet’ (Gabra 1941: 16–17, 23, 25; Ferreres 2017b: 221–222, 282–283). This title is evidence of the existence of a cult of the one in the same temple of Speos Artemidos, for it insists on two points. First, the definite singular feminine article stresses the unique and female aspects of the animal. Second, the adjective ‘living’ focuses on its alive and fully functional state, therefore not being a mummy.

This adjective is quite common for sacred animals’ epithets. For example, the Apis-bull can receive the appellation  $\overline{\text{ḥ}}\overline{\text{p}}\overline{\text{'nḥ}}$  ‘living Apis’ (LGG V, 117a-c), while the dead ones are  $\overline{\text{W}}\overline{\text{s}}\overline{\text{j}}\overline{\text{r}}\overline{\text{-ḥ}}\overline{\text{p}}$  ‘Osiris-Apis’ (LGG II, 554a-555b). In the same way, the Mnevis-bull bears the title of  $\overline{\text{W}}\overline{\text{ḥ}}\overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{-'nḥ n(y) R}}$  ‘living herald of Re’ (LGG II, 520a). However, contrary to Apis, Mnevis or Buchis, the three great bulls of Egypt, this female cat does not seem to have a proper name, for she has the mere definition of ‘living one she-cat’. It implies a cultural tradition related to the great bull cults, although distinct and different.

It becomes exciting when we look around and find that other denominations of sacred animal exist under the form ‘definite singular article + animal name + “living”’ or similar ones that concern animals other than the cat (Figure 3):

- Some steles represent Ptolemaic kings making land donations to a lion. The stele 7772 from the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam names this lion  $\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{3}}\overline{\text{R}}\overline{\text{w}}\overline{\text{'nḥ}}$  ‘The Living Lion’. A single Greek inscription mentions  $\text{ΟΙΚΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΤΑΦΗΣ ΤΩΝ ΛΕΟΝΤΩΝ ΙΕΡΑ}$  ‘the sacred house of the tomb of the lions’ (Meeks 1979: 675-686).
- In the round top of the stele of the lector-priest of Thutmose II, Amenhotep (Cairo CG 34152; Lacau 1909-1957: 198, pl. LXI) stands an ovine figure captioned  $\overline{\text{R}}\overline{\text{ḥ}}\overline{\text{n}}\overline{\text{'nḥ n(y) Jmn}}$  ‘Living Barbary sheep of Amun’, missing the definite article. It otherwise appears on the left side of the ram statue base of Amenhotep II (Cairo CG 42078; Legrain 1906-1925: 45, pl. XLVIII), where the animal has the name  $\overline{\text{Jmn-R}}\overline{\text{'p3 rhny nfr nṯr šps}}$  ‘Amun-Ra the perfect, divine and august Barbary sheep’.
- The Mendes stele (Cairo CG 22181; Kamal 1905: 159-168, pl. LIV-LV; Thiers 2007: 185-195) relates the death and discovery of a new ram for the cult of Banebdjed during the reign of

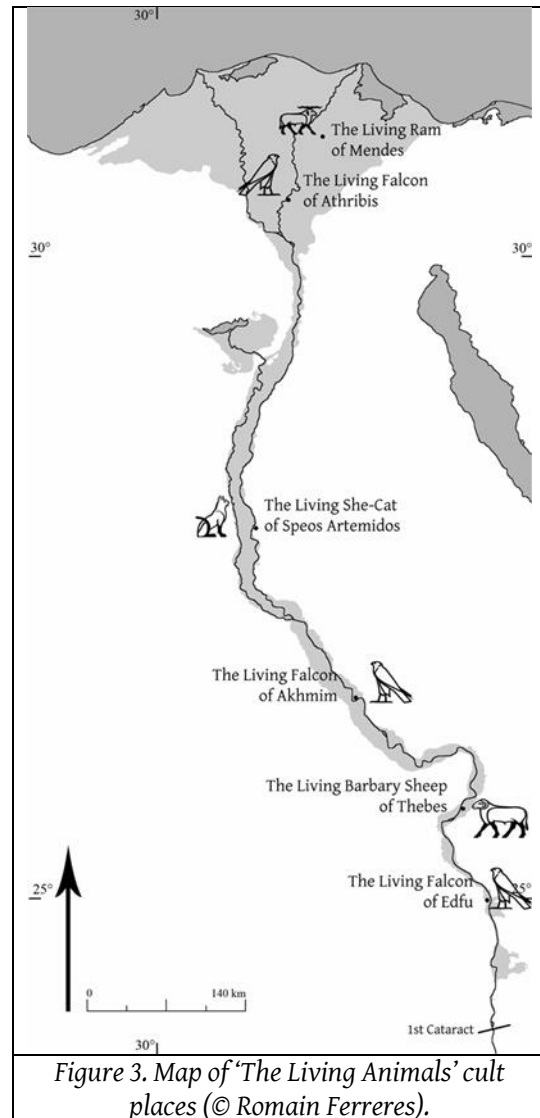


Figure 3. Map of ‘The Living Animals’ cult places (© Romain Ferreres).

<sup>1</sup> The absence of gender in English grammar hardens the translation of the Egyptian feminine word *mjw.t*. The compound name ‘she-cat’ rather than the expression ‘female cat’ allows us to use just one word that better corresponds to the French feminine word ‘chatte’ primarily used (Ferreres 2017a: 273). I thank Islam Alwakeel for pointing out this particular problem during my presentation.

Ptolemy II Philadelphus. According to the text, the king enthroned the animal himself (line 7; Kamal 1905: 162; Sethe 1904: 37, 4): *šhn Ḥm f b3 'nh m sp* 'His Majesty enthroned the living ram at once'. Here again, the definite article is missing, and the text talks about a cult closer to the great bulls' one, with a new ram found on a farm after the death of the current incarnation of Banebdjed.

- Three living falcons are also present in Athribis, Akhmim, and Edfu. The last two cases are called *p3 bjk 'nh* and the first one *n3 bjk.w 'nh.w* in the plural.

These last birds deserve a greater focus. Indeed, the evidence of the cult of unique falcons is the most important because they are not just titles of individuals but are also present through texts which allow us to understand the treatment of such animals and their role in cultural practices. It must be kept in mind that we have here three place cults, quite distant from each other, and that the elements each one gives might come from very different customs. Nevertheless, on the other hand, we have three cults of the same animal taxon, the falcon, which needs specific treatment and, thus, a similarity in its handling.

### **First Case: The Living Falcon of Akhmim**

The offering table of Horashaukhet from Akhmim (Cairo CG 23160) dates to the Ptolemaic period. The owner bore on this object the titles of *mn /mn(jw) n(y) p3 bjk 'nh wnw- '3 n(y) Pr Mnw nb Jpw* 'breeder/guardian of The Living Falcon and doorkeeper of the House of Min, lord of Ipu (Akhmim)'. Some difficulty lies in the first and most important title for us, for its writing only consists of three signs: the draught-board (Gardiner Y5), the ripple of water (Gardiner N35), and the forearm (Gardiner D36). While the first two signs give the reading *mn*, the last one can be the phonogram ' or writing for the forearm with the hand holding a stick (Gardiner D40). In the first case, we read *mn* ', the masculine counterpart of the *mn .t* 'nurse', while in the second, just *mn* with a determinative, maybe with some vowel to replace, *mn(jw)* being a guess. However, the correct writing of the forearm with hand holding stick just two cadrats further on shows that the first reading is to be preferred. This title of 'nurse', or 'breeder' of The Living Falcon, shows that these sacred birds are not wild animals captured to become sacred but domesticated or instead tame animals. Except for falconry, a practice unattested until now in ancient Egypt, and eventually for keeping as pets, which is not very common, there was no use for raptors and so no economic reason to breed them. This title, if read correctly, seems to suggest the existence of aviaries specifically destined to produce birds, at least for the different cults of falcons. It is necessary to note here the association of the functions of sacred falcon breeder and doorkeeper that will appear later on.

### **Second Case: The Living Falcon of Athribis**

Djedhor of Athribis, better known as Djedhor the Saviour, lived from the end of the 30th dynasty to the beginning of the Ptolemaic period, mainly during the Second Egyptian Satrapy. Although his celebrity mostly comes from his famous healing statue from Cairo (JE 46341; Jelínková-Reymond 1968), he also owned a second statue, only known through its socle now in the Oriental Institute of Chicago (OIM 10589; Sherman 1981) and a few years older than the Cairo statue. Both statue socles bear an autobiographical text of Djedhor and recount his functions as a priest of The Living Falcon of Athribis. Both texts are similar in structure and content, but the Cairo socle is more extensive and detailed and contains information absent in the Chicago text. Nevertheless, five points are instructive in both of them.

First, Djedhor bears the titles of *hry jry.w- '3 n(y) Hr Hnty-hty hry s3(w).w n(y) P3 Bjk m h.t f nb.t* 'superior of the doorkeepers of Horus Khenty-Khety and superior of the guardians of The Falcon in all its things' (Jelínková-Reymond 1968: 86-87, 91, l. 7-8; Sherman 1981: 86, 90, F8-9). This sequence is reminiscent

of the titles seen before for Horashaukhet from Akhmim, where the functions of falcon guardian and doorkeeper are associated.

Second, the first statement of the autobiography gives a concise summary of Djedhor's career alongside the sacred falcon (Jelínková-Reymond 1968: 93-94, 91, l. 9-11; Sherman 1981: 86, 90, F10-13):

*J nb ʒ Hnty-hty nb Km-wr hry ntr.w nb m3.t nḥ ʒ jm ʒ r nb šsm(w) jb n(y) ntr.w rmt šsm ʒ jb ʒ jr(t) šhrw n(y) P3 Bjk m-hnw J3.t-M3.t m-ht wn-n ʒ hr sms P3 Bjk m rnp.wt š3.wt*

‘O my lord Khenty-Khety lord of the Great Black Bull province, superior of the gods, lord of *maat* who lives thanks to it daily and leads the heart of gods and men, you lead my heart to realise the design of The Falcon who resides in Iat-Mat after I was at the service of The Falcon for many years’.

Djedhor does not spell out his activities in the sacred falcon temple, here called Iat-Mat, but it is possible to deduce the last part of his career further in the text.

Third, the shorter text on the Chicago statue base reduces the work of Djedhor in provisioning Iat-Mat in food with the sentence *jr-n ʒ hr(y).w N3 Bjk.w nḥ.w jm(y).w t3 pn* ‘I made the provisions of The Living Falcons who are in this country’ (Sherman 1981: 87, 90, L5). Here is the denomination, in the plural, built on the model ‘Definite article + Animal name + “Living”’, as seen for the cat of Pakhet and previous animals.

Fourth, in his new function, Djedhor built a new *wabet*, an embalming structure for the falcons because the previous one was abandoned and squatted by soldiers. Contrary to the Chicago statue base, the Cairo text takes many columns to describe the said building (Jelínková-Reymond 1968: 96-108, l. 15-38; compare with Sherman 1981: 88, 90, B2-8). Without getting too much into detail, Djedhor explains that the *wabet* stands as a separate building from Iat-Mat, the temple itself, which has its enclosure, gardens, and well. We also learn that Iat-Mat stands apart from the actual temple of Horus Khenty-Khety, the god that the sacred falcon of Athribis embodies. Therefore, the enclosure wall of Iat-Mat also contains the *wabet* (see the schematic plan by Jelínková-Reymond 1968: 100, n. 10).

Finally, the text deals with the mummification of the sacred falcon (Jelínková-Reymond 1968: 109-111, l. 38-44; Sherman 1981: 88, 90, B8-11). Djedhor proceeded to the mummification and burial of the sacred falcon of his time. Here, the Cairo statue states:

*Gm-n ʒw bjk.w š3.w m-hnw n(y) .t 70 jwty(w) qrs(t). Rd(~n ʒ) q n ʒsn r t3 w b.t rd(~n ʒ) qrs n ʒsn m mrḥ.t tn ḥbsw nfrw nt(y).t m w b.t rd(~n ʒ) q n ʒsn r pr r(3)-st3w.*

‘Numerous falcons were discovered inside the Chamber of Seventy (left) without burial. I made access for them in the *wabet*; I made embalming for them with this oil, the perfect wrapping and what is in the *wabet*; I made access for them in the house of the necropolis’.

Therefore, the birds Djedhor found were already dead, and he proceeded with the burial rites as he did before for the current sacred falcon. The number ‘70’ is reminiscent of the 70 days of mummification. The presence of those mistreated sacred birds may be due to the period of the Second Egyptian Satrapy when the Persian authorities neglected the local cults.

The case of the Living Falcon of Athribis teaches us that there were priests designated to organise the inhumation of the sacred animals and that they could be the same as those who bred them in the first place. However, this sole text cannot determine whether one person can simultaneously bear the two functions. Then we see that Djedhor, like Horashaukhet from Akhmim, bears a title which links the

care of sacred birds and the gates of the temple of Horus. The temple of the falcon, Iat-Mat and its *wabet*, constitutes a separate enclosure which may stand near the entrance of the main temple. The following case of the sacred falcon will explain this situation. Finally, we can see here the importance of the definite article in the denomination of the sacred animal. Indeed, both texts are void of any article except when it comes to naming the sacred bird: *P3 Bjk* ‘The Falcon’ in the singular and *N3 Bjk.w* ‘*nḥ.w*’ ‘The Living Falcons’ in the plural. This particular use shows that they are not simple determiners but are part of the name-title of the animal. The plural form also induces the simultaneous existence of several sacred living birds, with only one as the unique sacred bird named with the singular form, as we will see now.

### **Third Case: The Living Falcon of Edfu**

The ritual text of *Ḥ(.t) n(y)-sw.t* ‘the Crowning of the king’ (Alliot 1949-1954: 561-676; Van den Hoven 2015: 185-198) from the Edfu temple appears on the first two registers on the inner side of the outer wall’s north part. The eight symmetrical scenes tell the ceremony through which the sacred falcon becomes the new hypostasis, the new living statue of Horus of Edfu.

Once a year on the 1st Tybi - the first month of Emergence (Alliot 1949-1954: 561) - a ceremony brings out the divine statue of Horus with his court in a quest for a new heir, a new incarnation of the god. The procession walks through the pylon to the enclosure main gate, in the south wall, and heads for *Pr Bjk* ‘the House of the Falcon’ (Alliot 1949-1954: 565-566).

This text is the only source concerning this building with its scant details, perhaps along with a remaining archaeological vestige. Indeed, there are two enclosures at Edfu, the main temple one, with a south-north axis, and the mammisi one, with an east-west axis. Both joined the mammisi at the south of the temple and west of its main southern gate. In front of the mammisi, east of the central axis of the temple of Horus, stands a small masonry block, 2 m long, 1 m wide and 1.5 m high (Chassinat 1939: III, 220, pl. LVI, LX). The decoration of this block shows scenes of adoration or offerings to the sacred bird, which allow us to suppose that this altar is part of the House of the Falcon mentioned above. The building itself is still probably under the actual town of Edfu, but the Crowning text states that it has at least a *sb3*-gate, a *wsh.t*-room and a *sšd n(y) ḥ(.t)*, a ‘Window of Appearance’ (Alliot 1949-1954: 566-568). The remaining small altar itself may be merely a sacred bark stand.

Brought to the House of the Falcon, the divine members of Horus’ suite present themselves as the new heirs, but Horus rejects them all. So then, the priest called *ḥm-gmḥsw*, ‘the servant of the raptor’, heads for the *wsh.t*-room of the falcon temple to present the living birds one by one on individual perches (Alliot 1949-1954: 566-568). These birds may even have been bred in the very House of the Falcon.

The next step in the description is: *spr ḥm ḥtp ḥr b3 ḥtp ḥjr ḥr smn jw .t ḥ* ‘he (= Horus) reaches his *ba* in peace and stops towards it, establishing his heritage’ (Alliot 1949-1954: 565, 568). The described ritual is reminiscent of an oracular procedure, where the god ‘chooses’ the answer; here, he elects or recognises the bird. On the practical side, the bird’s election was either a hazardous choice or a selection made beforehand by the priests of the best candidate. The criteria may be due to its physical aspect or healthy state.

In any event, the chosen falcon is placed on a *serekh*-shaped sedan chair, stressing the royal aspect of the said bird, and the priests present it at the Window of Appearance (Alliot 1949-1954: 568-569). This event means this ritual had an audience of unknown composition. Then, the god’s statue and the falcon return to the temple of Horus, where they meet with Hathor, Horus’s *paredra*. During this meeting, the



priests perform different rituals, mainly for protection; the return to the temple and the protection rituals appear on the two outer scenes of the first register (Alliot 1949-1954: 568-632).

The culmination of the 'Crowning of the King' takes place directly in the sanctuary of the temple of Edfu. While Horus and Hathor take their place at the back of the room, the bird and the priests face the divine couple and perform different offerings linked with the sun's course; this appears in the central scenes of the first register. The position of the sacred falcon in front of Horus, among the ritualists, states that the bird is still part of the mortal world. However, when, in the four scenes of the second register, the same falcon stands alongside Horus and Hathor, facing in the same direction as the gods, it means that it has now gained the status of a *ntr* (Chassinat 1960: pl. CXLIX, CLIV). Henceforth, it can receive the last rites, first of protection, then meat offerings (Alliot 1949-1954: 632-664).

The sacred falcon is not supposed to live in the sanctuary. Once the last rituals end, it returns in procession to the House of the Falcon, concluding the ceremony. However, just like some other rituals in Edfu, the 'Crowning of the King' took place for five days in a row (Alliot 1949-1954: 665-668).

To summarise, the 'Crowning of the King' presents two main events: the election of the sacred falcon and its ritualisation, making him a *ntr*. The first part of the ceremony takes place in a separate building near the entrance of the main temple, the 'House of the Falcon', which served as an aviary, procession station and acclamation ritual. The bird's election presents several similarities with a royal crowning, as suggests the rite title. The bird stands on a sedan chair shaped like a palace façade and receives acclamation from a Window of Appearance. Once ritualised, the bird returns to the House of the Falcon, where it will spend the rest of the year.

This case reveals many things concerning a sacred animal's election ritual. However, as a ceremonial text, it contains many questions that still need answers, mainly regarding the frequency of the rite and the changing of the bird. Indeed, the 'Crowning of the King' supposedly takes place yearly, between the 1st and 5th of the month of Tybi. So, either the same bird participates in each repetition for the five days, which implies a previous selection, or a new animal may take its place.

The same problem arises from one year to the other, for nothing indicates that the sacred bird holds this position for life. Therefore, the ceremony could occur with the same bird until its death or with a new falcon elected each time. In this case, what happens to the preceding year's bird? We can only make propositions; for example, the priests could merely release him through an unknown ritual. Nevertheless, they also could kill and mummify it (Alliot 1949-1954: 674-675), and the mummy may receive a special burial as a sacred animal or become a votive mummy, integrated into the circuit of the cult of the many. A final proposition concerns the simple turnover of the birds in the House of the Falcon. Thus, each one had a chance of being chosen later.

However, it is possible that the sacred falcon could keep its status until it died, and a new 'Crowning of the King' ceremony did not occur every year but only when needed, with perhaps a time-lapse of a maximum of one year until the following year's 1st Tybi. Finally, the last and most crucial question concerns this sacred falcon's role in the temple's liturgical calendar outside this election ritual. Living in a separate enclosure, it could, like the Apis, receive visits or offerings from people, but no further indication of this appears in any other text at Edfu.

### **Similarities and differences**

It is necessary to summarise all the gathered information concerning the cult of all these animals: they bear a name-title under the form 'Definite Article + Animal Name + "Living"'. They constitute a stock, bred and kept in a dedicated and separate structure built outside but next to the main god's temple. At

least concerning falcons, we can suggest that this place, called ‘House of the Falcon’ at Edfu and Iat-Mat at Athribis, stands near the main enclosure entrance. This location could explain why the staff in charge of the sacred animal often bear titles related to keeping the temple gates. The priests who constitute these attendants intervene in all the steps of a sacred animal’s life. Breeders maintain and tend the stock, ritualists participate in the election rituals and any other rite requiring the sacred animal, and embalmers take care of the mummification and burial of the dead individuals. These categories may form three different corps of priests; it is also possible that there was only one group of priests in the animal temple and that they were elevated through the different posts in a sort of promotion, as happened to Djedhor of Athribis. Otherwise, Padikem of Tuna, the ‘priest of The Living She-Cat of Pakhet’s temple’, was presumably part of the second category, the ritualists; he may have started as a breeder and only indicated the higher level of priest hierarchy he reached.

As mentioned above, the sacred animal plays a role in a definite ritual in which the god’s statue ‘elects’ or ‘recognises’ its future incarnation, which is then enthroned as The Living Animal in the singular and therefore accesses the required status of *ntr*. However, we know little about the animal’s ritual life outside this enthronement, the frequency of which is unfortunately unknown, and induces many unsolved questions. Finally, the sacred animal is mummified and buried in a dedicated structure next to the breeding place when they die. In the Wadi Batn el-Baqara, the so-called speos of Alexander Aigos may have been only that, a warehouse for sacred cat mummies dedicated expressly to The Living She-Cats of Pakhet, half tomb, half temple.

We can then reconstitute almost the whole life cycle of an ‘elected unique’ and compare it to an ‘authentic unique’ like the Apis bull (Figure 4). Both cycles start differently. Indeed, an ‘authentic unique’ birth is random and can occur everywhere in Egypt, while the ‘elected unique’ breeding implies its birth occurs in the temple. Then comes the recognition of the animal by the priests who went in search of it, or directly by the god during a ritual reminiscent of oracle procedures. Once identified, the animal is not a *ntr*, a sacred animal yet, for it must first pass through a sequence of rites to gain this special status, which presents similarities with a king’s coronation. The sacred animal will henceforth live in

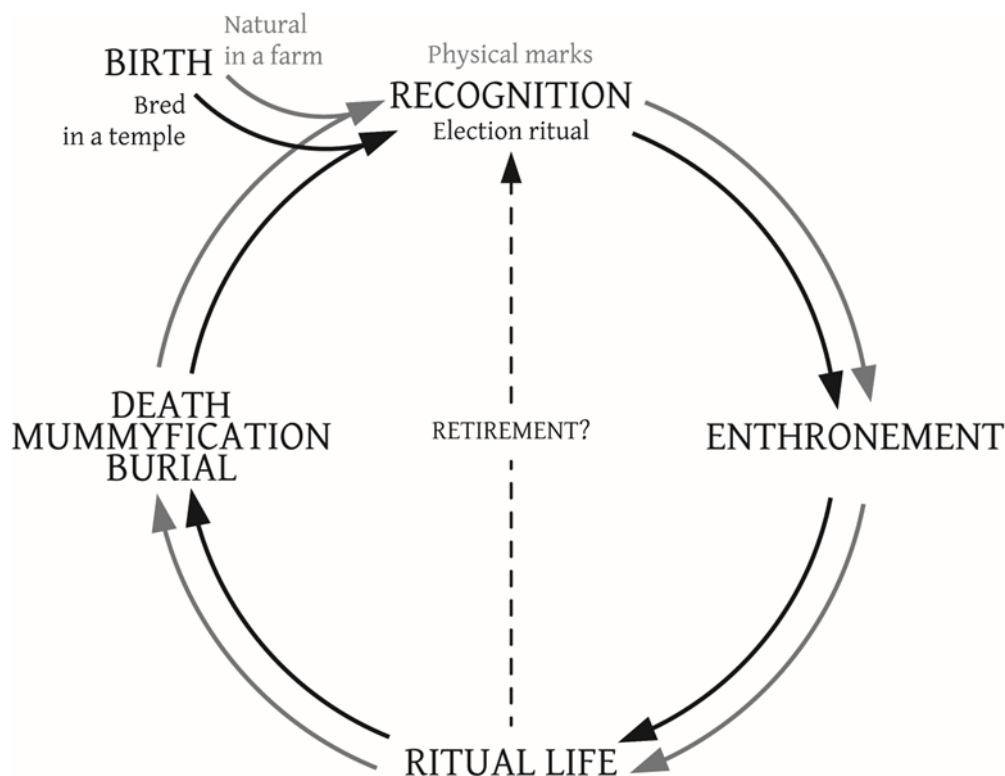


Figure 4. Chart of the compared life-cycles of an ‘authentic unique’ (in grey) and an ‘elected unique’ (in black) (© Romain Ferreres).

its temple and may receive offerings and visits from pilgrims and participate in processions for some time. Indeed, the routes diverge here because of a lack of information concerning the 'elected unique'. For the 'authentic unique', the animal lives its life to its natural end and then is mummified and buried like a king. It might be the same for an 'elected unique'; however, it is also possible that such an animal passes through one or several phases of election-retirement during its life, according to the temple's ritual, before it dies. After that, its treatment is the same as for an 'authentic unique': mummification and burial. A new cycle begins with the death of the sacred animal and the recognition of a new one.

Thus, the cult of 'elected uniques' is close to that of the great bulls, where an animal undergoes a ritual, making it a *ntr* and able to receive proofs of worship. It serves as a medium between men and gods but is closer to people than a cult statue would be, being a living image of the deity. However, a few differences show an adaptation, a sort of improvement and, therefore, posteriority from the cult of an 'authentic unique'. First, the chosen animal taxon is close to the related god's iconography, as with the cult of the many. On the contrary, the unique bulls Apis, Mnevis, or Buchis convey the deity's mighty, combative and fertile characteristics, far from its original image: human for Ptah, falcon for Ra and Montu. Second, there is tighter control over the 'production' of the sacred animal. If we stand by the life-cycle of an 'authentic unique', many years can occur before the birth of a calf with suitable marks. In the case of an election, there is no such constraint, for the breeding of the animals directly in or near the temple obviates the need to quest for it: it lives next door. Finally, the eventual rite renewal every year suggests the retirement and changing of the animal. This treatment constitutes the main difference between the two types or sub-types of cults of the unique. There can be several explanations for the introduction of such a practice. Indeed, compared to a bull, we are dealing here with short-lived animals; replacing the unique before its death maintains the image of an eternal living being. In the same way, it prevents the periods mentioned above of an absence of the sacred animal - between its death and the finding of two successive animals.

## Conclusion

Here we have seen the characteristics of this new type of animal cult induced by Padikem's title of 'priest of The Living She-Cat': the existence of a group of animals in the temple, one of which is chosen to be the living vessel of the deity, at least for a year. Contrary to Apis, Mnevis, or Buchis, they were not destined to live this life until they died, but to face replacement. However, due to their past status, when they died they received the treatment of a *ntr*, being mummified and buried in a special chamber.

Nevertheless, aside from those questions concerning the frequency, replacement and retirement of the animal already mentioned, several others remain. First, what happens to the animals which are never elected if they exist in the case of a hazardous divine election? Second, is it possible that in one temple for the same god, a cult of the one, an 'elected unique', existed simultaneously with a cult of the many? This suggestion relies on the case of the female cat of Pakhet, where the necropoleis show the existence of votive mummies, while Padikem's title testifies to the cult of the one. Third, if both practices could co-occur, do the animals come from the same stock, with an initial human selection for suitable 'eligible ones' and the others doomed to mummification? Fourth, are there differences between the lives of an 'authentic unique' and an 'elected one', other than the election principle and eventual retirement? This question concerns especially the types of rituals in which each type might be involved. Fifth, what are the origins of the cult of the 'elected unique': a development from the cult of the great bulls, with adaptations due to the types of animals? Finally, what about other animal taxa otherwise known through the cult of the many, such as crocodiles, ibises, dogs, ichneumons, fish, shrews, beetles, snakes, or monkeys?

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