The Land of Fertility II

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The Southeast Mediterranean from the Bronze Age to the Muslim Conquest

Edited by

Łukasz Miszk and Maciej Wacławik

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PREFACE

The papers in this volume are based on presentations given at the second international conference entitled "THE LAND OF FERTILITY. South-east Mediterranean since the Bronze Age to the Muslim Conquest. Origin and functioning of ancient cities", held at the Institute of Archaeology, Jagiellonian University in Kraków on June 12–13, 2015. This event was a second part of a number of conferences regarding the area of the so-called "Fertile Crescent". In this region, located in the south-eastern Mediterranean, the modern world began its long development at the very beginning of human civilisation. Our aim was to look more closely at cities, their formation and development in this very special region, as well as addressing the question of where people chose to live. We also focused on, amongst other topics, the urbanisation process, relationships between urban centres and urban ideology. The period covered in the present collection spans from the beginning of the Bronze Age through the ancient era to the Muslim Conquest – 5,000 years of urban development.

Łukasz Miszk and Maciej Wacławik

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CHAPTER ONE

GEBELEIN AND THE CULT OF HATHOR: AN OVERVIEW

DANIEL VIKTOR TAKACS

Gebelein – in Arabic, "Two Rocks/Hills" – is how the modern countryside around the villages of Southern and Northern Gherira is known today. The south Egyptian locality's name has its own history: its first attestation comes down to our times through papyri, which already carried the toponym jnr.ty – meaning "two rocks/hills" – 4,500 years ago, at the time of the fourth dynasty (Posener-Kriéger, 1975, pp. 218–19). Roughly 2,300 years later, the name was still present in the legal and everyday documents of the Ptolemaic era, from a place mostly named as *Pathyris*. Then, in the Coptic Christian era, it disappeared and the same meaning resurfaced only in the present-day Arabic place name (Morenz, 2010, p. 94).

The two names – *jn*(*r*).*ty* and Pathyris – are regarded today as more or less identical as geographic locations, but a deeper analysis shows that both of them were complex entities, and indeed hard to delineate (Ejsmond, 2013). The first part of this work is dedicated to analysing this question. Closely connected to this issue, the second part explains the complicated situation regarding the religious landscape of the area that is discernible in ancient sources – toponym by toponym – as the current results of researches show them.

From the time of the Middle Kingdom onwards, the dominant religious presence in Gebelein was that of Hathor – hence its frequent naming, in the Ptolemaic papyri, as Pathyris, which was the Greek equivalent of the Egyptian name *pr-ḥw.t-ḥr* – "the house of Hathor". The third part of the study explains the importance of the Hathor cult throughout the ages, and is complemented by the newest field and research results from the 2015 survey of Gebelein by the University of Warsaw. By the time we reach the Ptolemaic era, a complex situation regarding the land tenure regime and

ownership of lands emerges from Greco-demotic papyrus archives from Pathyris. Thanks to them, a quite detailed examination can be made of the local topography of Gebelein, where – not surprisingly – agricultural lands connected to multiple deities dominate the landscape. Therefore, the final part of this paper is devoted to a presentation of the Ptolemaic cult topography of the site and the land partitioning very closely connected with this, which shows us how much the everyday life experience of the Egyptian town dwellers of the region was affected by the local power houses of their gods.

What is Gebelein?

Gebelein was part of the third Upper Egyptian *nome* in ancient times. Its true affiliation is still somewhat obscure, and it might even be the case that it changed more than once throughout its history[1] – for example, it became the *nome* capital during Ptolemaic times. Nevertheless, the localisation of the two hill formations – in a narrowing of the Nile Valley, 28 km south of Thebes and opposite Mo'alla, the First Intermediate Period power base of Ankhtifi, a local strongman – gave it an adventurous history. In spite of the amount of research invested in the area, quintessential questions still surrounded the 'phenomenon of the region' at this stage of the study: what is Gebelein? Is it only the two hills, the Western and Eastern Hill as they are called today by the researchers of the University of Warsaw – illustrated on the maps in Fig. 1-1 and Fig. 1-2 – or maybe a town, perhaps the region surrounding them? To answer these questions, we need to take a look at the place names found on the objects and documents in the region: in the following part, the presentation of the toponyms is kept separate from the description of their local gods in order to concentrate solely on the plethora of names emerging from this locality. In Table 1-1, a chronological order is presented for the occurrences of the names, the red arrows showing the continuity of the appropriate name from the time of its emergence.

[1] Browarski (1977) shows this problem well. On the early formation of *nomes*, see: Bussmann, 2014 and Moreno García, 2003.

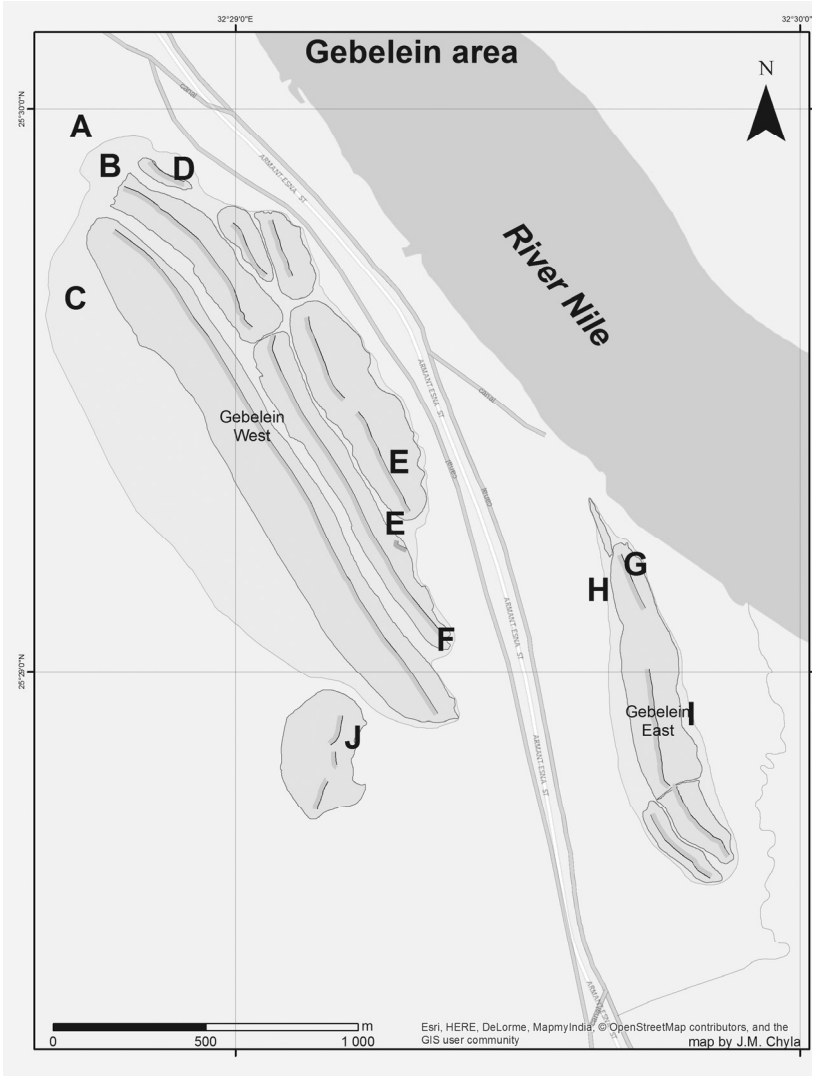

Fig. 1-1 Map of Gebelein and its neighbouring territories. (Image courtesy: Julia Chyla).

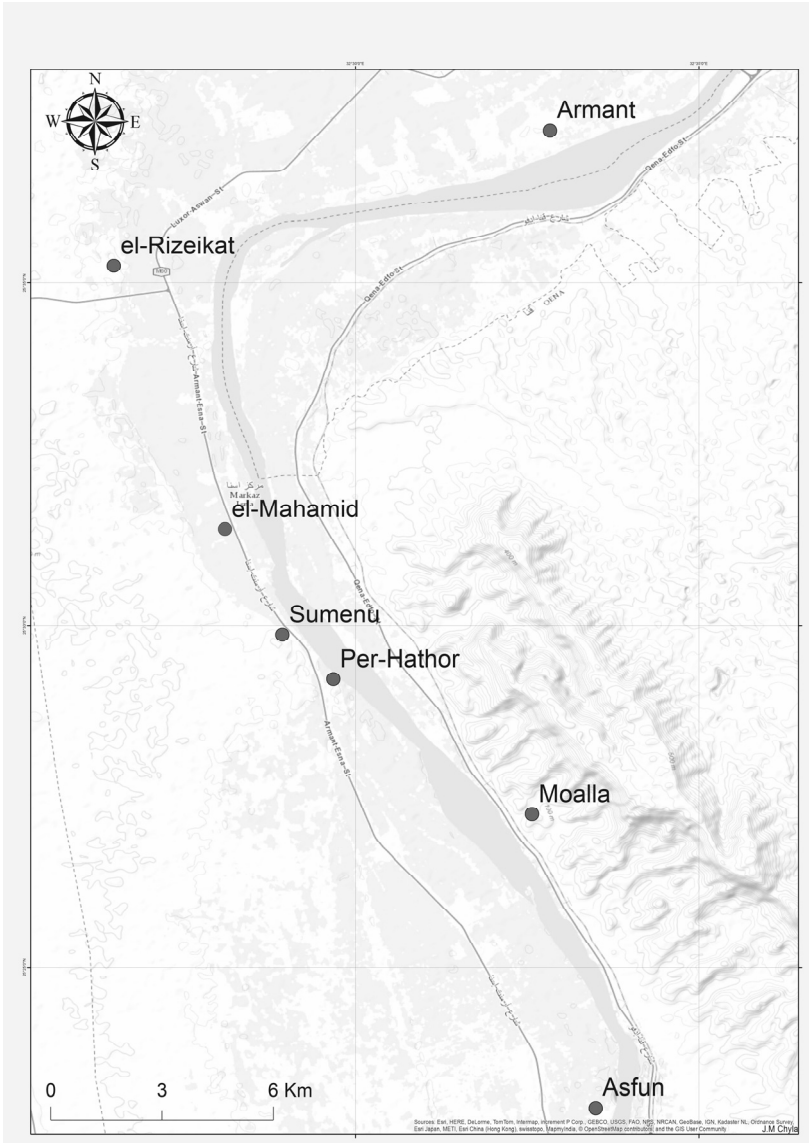

Fig. 1-2 Map of the Gebelein area. (Image courtesy: Julia Chyla).

The site was populated very early on, from the predynastic period (Fiore Marochetti, 2013, p. 3) – as can be seen from the cemeteries present in the area – but no mention of a name for it has yet been found. The toponym *jnr.ty-jnpw*, from a fourth-dynasty papyrus attributing the place to the god Anubis/*jnpw* is the first name to be found, and the one by which the region is designated (Posener-Kriéger, 1975, p. 218). This connection – and the written form of the place name, showing two ovoid eggs instead of the later orthography of two stones – led to some serious investigations into its origin (Morenz, 2010, pp. 94–98). L. Morenz's theory about the local mythology of the two eggs is very convincing, but cannot be given in detail here. For now, the following must suffice: the god Thot, in his ibis form, as a deity of primeval times, came forth from his rock-hard egg as the first being, and the two white hills of Gebelein were regarded as the two halves of this primordial egg. Hence, in the writing of the toponym jnr.ty the determinatives (semantic designators at the end of the words) of the word were changed from two rectangular stones to two ovoid eggs. Indirect evidence originating from local coffins, containing unique parts of the so-called 'Coffin Texts', support this idea when they talk about mythological events in the terms of an egg (Morenz, 2010, pp. 103–4).

From the same era and source, the name jarw is preserved, which was a funerary agricultural estate depending – probably on an administrative basis – together with *jnr.ty-jnpw* on *ḥw.t-nṯr- n.t snfrw*, the modern village of Asfun (preserving the original Egyptian name as well, through Asphynis/*ḥsfnt*), situated approximately 10 km south of Gebelein (Fiore Marochetti, 2010, p. 7). It seems that from the earliest times, the region had an economic feature based on religious institutions.

The name jwnw.t originates from the 11th-dynasty chapel of Mentuhotep II, who named himself *ḥḳꜥ-jwnw.t* / "the ruler of *jwnw.t*" here, thereby probably referring to the site on the top of the Eastern Hill, where a chapel was located. Interestingly enough, this proves itself, in the light of the Egyptian name of Dendera (*jwn.t*) and Heliopolis (*jwnw*), which might have created a religious link between the different locations (Fiore Marochetti, 2010, p. 7).

The name of the necropolis of Gebelein, connected with Anubis and laid out around the Western Hill, was *tȝ-ḥḏ*. It dates from the Middle Kingdom (Morenz, 2010, p. 103).

The toponym *pr-ḥw.t-ḥr* (Area G in Fig. 1-2) is the name that – from its first appearance, in the 12th-dynasty Papyrus Reisner II from the time of

Senusret I, until its last attestation, on a stela from the time of Emperor Trajan – was most frequently used when referring to the central area of the Gebelein region: the temple on top of the Eastern Hill and its immediate vicinity, the Ptolemaic town of Pathyris (Fiore Marochetti, 2013, p. 2). It seems that the names presented above show that the area of Gebelein consisted of numerous smaller sites connected by the fact that they were all in the "shadow of the *Two Hills*" – constituting the Gebelein region proper. Table 1-1 divides the names of places connected with the Gebelein region into three different categories: those considered to be "inside" the area, those referring to the region's name itself and those that are frequently mentioned together with it, thereby indicating a sense of a wider "region of interaction" for the inhabitants or for the administration of Gebelein. The orthography of the name *jnr.ty* has different variants from era to era, giving us clues to the dating of certain documents and objects, and building up a palaeography on their own (Fiore Marochetti, 2010, p. 6; Al-Ayedi, 2012, p. 99). Of these, only their transcriptions are presented here, in the second column of the table.

Table 1-1 Toponyms associated with the Gebelein area.

Chronology	Toponyms inside the Gebelein area (until the Ptolemaic Era)	*Jnr.ty*'s Orthography and transcription (until the Ptolemaic era)	Place names frequently mentioned together with the Gebelein region (From North to South)
Old Kingdom	*ỉ'rw*	*jnr.ty – jnpw/ jntyw-?*	
Middle Kingdom	*Pr – ḥw.t – ḥr*	*jnr.ty*	
	t3-ḥḏ		*jw-mjtrw/ jw –m –jtrw* area of modern Rizeiqat?
	jwnw.t		
New Kingdom		*jnr.ty* – 18th Dyn.	*swmnw* - ?
		jn(r).ty – from 19th Dyn.	*ḥw.t – nṯr n.t śnfrw* – modern Asfun

The third column contains those places that are very frequently present in connection with Gebelein. Asfun, mentioned above, was a possible funerary estate for King Snofru himself and a superordinate of two other estates to the north of it: *jʿrw* and *jnr.ty-Jnpw*.

The names *swmnw* and *jw-mjtrw* prove to be very interesting for several reasons: first of all, their localisation is not without doubts. The only sure fact, arising from ancient Egyptian geographical lists from both the fourth dynasty and the New Kingdom, is that the order of the towns from south to north was: *pr-ḥw.t-ḥr*, *swmnw* and *jw-mjtrw* (Nims, 1952, p. 41). The last two are frequently associated with the Ptolemaic garrison town of Krokodilopolis – possibly the vicinity of modern Rizeiqat (Vandorpe & Waebens, 2009, p. 37) – as the crocodile god Sobek was the main focus of the cult here.

The interaction of these towns with Gebelein can be showed through evidence like the grave of a certain Iny, from the late Old Kingdom/First Intermediate Period buried on the Western Hill of Gebelein, who was a chief priest of Sobek of *swmnw* (Browarski, 1977, pp. 31–34). Later, in the Greek period, the inhabitants of Pathyris often went to this neighbouring town because it had an office for the local clerk and it was the main station for the region's military units, having Pathyris as its subordinate (Vandorpe & Waebens, 2009, p. 36). The persistence of these towns' mutual relationship throughout the ages prompts us to consider the boundaries of regions and the "jurisdictions" attributable to toponyms. Since we have a much more detailed picture of the Ptolemaic situation than of the preceding ones, its place names will be presented later – suffice it to say here that the name *pr-ḥw.t-ḥr* was still used in this period for Pathyris, a small town on the side of the Eastern Hill, the site of the modern Southern Gherira village, which has completely overrun this former place.

Interestingly, it has been suggested that in the Greco-Roman period people from the Gebelein region – therefore, on the western side of the Nile – used the rock quarry of Dibabiya, on the eastern side – although the connection between these two sides was not, as it was in many cases, one of the town being on the eastern and its cemetery on the western side of the Nile (Vandorpe & Waebens, 2009, p. 1). Still, it is worth mentioning that Gebelein might have had closer connections with Mo'alla on the other side of the river. It seems that we could conclude, after Elisa Fiore Marochetti, that the name "*jnr.ty*" might have referred to the site as a geographical localisation, i.e. the region itself – thus, a toponym in a

stricter sense – while the later "*pr-ḥw.t ḥr*" was perhaps its name for religious purposes (Fiore Marochetti, 2010, p. 7).

Gods of the Region

Analysing the local religious entities, it can be seen that their situation is as complicated as the toponym structure of the region, for precisely the same reason: that almost every locality had its own deity from different ages. To start with, it could be said that the so-called "graffito site" (point F in Fig. 1-2), which is regarded as a very early predynastic site of rock carvings, contains depictions of the god Min, and at the same time we know from previous excavations on the Eastern Hill that a chapel to an unknown deity from the second/third dynasty stood where a later chapel of Hathor was built by Mentuhotep II.[2] So, regardless of the dating of the figure of Min – who is otherwise unattested from here – it is possible to show that very early on various religious presences were attributed to the region.

It is worth turning our attention towards the place name *jnr.ty-jnpw* – written with the sign of two eggs – because it brings interesting conclusions. This orthography from a fourth-dynasty papyrus, attributing the region of the "two rocks" to Anubis, and the possible allusion to the same mytheme from the Pyramid Text spell 534/1271C in connection with Thot and a Book of the Dead reference to Thot the "son of the stone who comes out of the two stones/eggs" has powerful implications (Morenz, 2010, pp. 94–108). If the local myth of the primordial egg was strong enough to secure a place in the non-local Pyramid texts, and later in the Book of the Dead and the administrative/everyday life writing of the name, then it must have been an idea of importance to the creators of these texts, which pervaded ordinary life. To what extent this importance was valued and propagated cannot be known for sure, although it is true that references to Thot's primal mythology do not seem to occur very often from this region – just as the god did not have his temple here (unless it is yet to be discovered).[3]

[2] The scholarly consensus differs on the dating: Morenz 1994 and Vandorpe & Waebens, 2009, p. 16. There are also some ideas about a very early cult in the form of a lion goddess, see Fiore Marochetti 2010, p. 8.

[3] Nonetheless, some evidence might exist for the local cult of Thot; see: Morenz 2010, pp. 101–2.

t3 ḥḏ, the Necropolis area of Gebelein from the Middle Kingdom until at least the 20th dynasty, had "Anubis, Lord of *t3-ḥḏ*" as its protector. This is probably one of the necropolises on the Western Hill, although which one cannot be said for sure. The notion of *t3-ḥḏ*, which means "the bright", might refer to the white "eggs" of Gebelein as it is mirrored in the Coffin Text spell CT 334b (Morenz, 2010, p. 103).

With the arrival of Hathor, Lady of Dendera, on the top of the Eastern Hill in the 11th dynasty, the region seems to have gained a new, main deity for itself.[4] The temple site was probably initially called jwnw.t, as is possible to ascertain from the epithet of Mentuhotep II, who named himself "ruler of jwnw.t". Perhaps, as has been proposed above, this was a reference to *jwn.t* – Dendera, the main cult place of Hathor. *pr–ḥw.t–ḥr*/"The house of Hathor", the name for the temple site from the 12th dynasty onwards, served as the focal point for the cult of Hathor, "Lady of Gebelein", and, later, in Ptolemaic times, it was called Pathyris, equated to Aphroditopolis by Strabo (Geographica 17.2). The cult of Hathor easily survived into this period.

The site of *jʿrw*, mentioned earlier – its localisation being unsure apart from the fact that it was close to Gebelein or even within the area – survived until Roman times and served as a cult place for Sobek-Ra (Fiore Marochetti, 2010, p. 7),[5] this god being prominent in the region initially under the name Sobek. The earliest attestations of this god name him as "lord of *swmnw*," and, later, a certain Sobek "Lord of *jw-mjtrw*" can be found in the so-called Medinet Habu geographical list next to a certain Khonsu "*ḫry-jb jw-mjtrw*", who is otherwise unattested (Nims, 1952, p. 41). The twin towns of *swmnw* and *jwmjtrw* lay close to Gebelein, where, in the First Intermediate Period, the priest of Sobek, Iny, was buried on the Western Hill. The deity's presence is well attested in the Ptolemaic period as well. By this time, Hathor was worshipped here as – transcribed from Greek – "νεβενταιγεως", which name came from the Egyptian form of "Lady of *jn.ty*": "*nb.t jn.ty*", *jn.ty* being the demotic form of the old place name *jnr.ty* (Fiore Marochetti, 2013, p. 2).[6]

Alongside her, Sobek, "Lord of the Pillar", an apotropaic deity, filled the local male role of the usual god triads, and Harsemtus was in the role of

[4] If indeed there ever was one before; this question remains largely unanswered.
[5] See also an account of Sobek's temple: Bakry 1971.
[6] For the demotic and Greek versions of the name, see: Verreth 2011, p. 498 and 2013, p. 527.

the son (Vandorpe & Waebens, 2009, pp. 38–39). In Ptolemaic times, Isis, through a process of identification with Hathor, was also the object of a cult established here. It is important to note that the cult of Sobek, "Lord of *swmnw*", had most probably been transferred by Nubian mercenaries stationed here to the fortresses of Buhen and Semna much earlier during the late Middle Kingdom, creating religious interconnections between distant regions (Fischer, 1961). Through the ages, alongside those who had been present for a long time in the region, other deities rose to prominence, while still others vanished and some were reintroduced, making the region's religious landscape diverse and formative at least until the First Intermediate Period.

The Cult of Hathor

This study now focuses on the predominant cult of the region – that of Hathor. It is not known for sure if she was a deity indigenous to the place, but Mentuhotep situated his chapel on top of an older, early dynastic chapel on top of the Eastern Hill of Gebelein, making reference to her as Hathor, Lady of Dendera.[7]

In this chapel, various other gods were present as well, and it seems that it served to support Mentuhotep's campaign to conquer the country, by making a firm statement about his position in the southern part of Egypt and about his intentions towards claiming royal prerogatives.[8] Very soon after this chapel was established, we find a 12th-dynasty reference to Hathor as "Lady of Gebelein", proving that her cult was well established by this time. This must have had strong economic effects on the region, and, as was mentioned above, *jʿrw* and *jnr.ty-jnpw* were probably funerary agricultural estates: state-organised economic units.

This trend of an economic organisational power built upon religious bases is exhibited well in the example, from the late Middle Kingdom/Second Intermediate Period, of the stela of *jw-snb*, who was a *phyle* member of

[7] A fifth-dynasty seal has been discovered that contains the name of Hathor, but this alone cannot be considered a mark of an established local cult since it is without affiliation and the cult of Hathor was very prominent at that time. For this, see: Fiore Marochetti 2010, p. 8.

[8] Other gods present here are Seshat, Khnum, Sematawi, Neith os Satet, Montu or Horus (not possible to ascertain which) – although none of them seems to receive a distinguished local cult: Fiore Marochetti, 2010, pp. 25–26. For Mentuhotep's situation in Egyptian history, see: Habachi, 1962.

Hathor "Lady of Gebelein", just like his father before him.[9] Interestingly, however, his *phyle* was named rather than numbered as would be expected from this era, a fact that might pose fundamental questions as to its dating (it might, for instance, date from the First Intermediate Period or even earlier). Nevertheless, the cult of the goddess and the geographical/ military value of the "Two Hills" proved strong enough for a number of kings from the Second Intermediate Period and New Kingdom to have left their traces here (Polz, 2006). Thotmes III rebuilt the destroyed chapel of the Eastern Hill – or, at least, established a new one next to it (it is difficult to say which at this stage). Later, other rulers of the New Kingdom contributed to this chapel, probably in the form of renovations, and subsequently its holy precinct was turned into a fortress area.[10]

Recently, after works by the 2015 season of the University of Warsaw expedition in the area, many new, interesting details have emerged concerning the cult of Hathor. To sum them up very briefly: it seems that a *speos*, consisting of a lateral vestibule and a sanctuary room, hitherto only called "new kingdom/t-shaped chapel", was created on the Eastern Hill by the 18th-dynasty pharaoh Hatshepsut. It is situated more or less directly below a natural cave, which, in turn, lay below the temple precinct area, probably connecting all three in one cult complex. This might have held more than one deity in its focus: Hathor of Gebelein, surely, but probably also the Theban Amun-Ra and Hatshepsut herself as the recipient of the funerary cult in the presence of the two former deities.[11] The evaluation of the material, considering its relationships with other *topoi* inside and outside the region, is currently ongoing. As a consideration, it might be worth mentioning the fact that the *speos* is at the foot of the Eastern Hill facing the Nile. This makes it a likely candidate for participating – to what extent is not yet known – in the nautical procession of Hathor during the festival of the "Beautiful Meeting" (Wilkinson, 2003, pp. 98 and 139–45). This took place once a year, and involved a journey of the statue of Hathor from Dendera to Edfu – a journey with Gebelein at its midpoint. Similar

[9] For the nature of the Old Kingdom – and, to some extent, the New Kingdom – *phyles*, see: Roth, 1991. For the stela: Catalog number: BM EA1750.

[10] Mud bricks stamped with the name and title Mekheperre, High Priest of Amun from the 21st dynasty are still lying around in abundance, to this the author can testify.

[11] The question of whether the deities or Hatshepsut herself was in the focus of this cult is difficult to answer. For the publication of the *speos*, see the forthcoming work, the MA thesis of the current author written at the University of Warsaw: "Rock-Cut Cult Place from the New Kingdom at Gebelein" 2016.

cultic contemplations might have been present in the creation of other *speoi* by Hatshepsut and her successors from the later New Kingdom, just as the mythology of the "returning eye of the sun"[12] might have ideologically subsidised these building projects.[13] It is indeed hard to dismiss the fact that the entrance of the chapel is approximately 4 metres above present-day ground level and that the Nile, even after the building of the so-called "Low Dam",[14] could still reach the bottom of the hill, where the *speos* is located.[15] This somewhat isolated positioning of the entrance – without any presently visible ramp, quay or stairs – close to the river might allude to periodic use of the chapel. At the present stage, it is difficult to give hard facts about the purpose or building circumstances of the *speos* other than its partly preserved decoration programme and ground plan.

The Ptolemaic cult-topography of the area, which enlightens us more on the facts of the "business side of religion", contributes greatly to the object of our investigation: the economic organisational power of the local cults. The seemingly prominent Hathor cult became paired with that of Sobek, complemented with the cult of Harsomthus as their son in a triad. All three deities possessed lands in the area of Gebelein, although Hathor's holdings were the largest by far. Interestingly, the proportion of the oaths made in contracts – as a customarily required part of these legal documents – were much more in favour of Sobek that the other deities: 85% to 15% (Vandorpe & Waebens, 2009, p. 39). The fact of Sobek "finally" becoming directly visible in the area – not only from outside, e.g. from the neighbouring *swmnw* – and the fact that some of the priests served him and Hathor at the same time, and that he had a guild devoted to him and was invoked in oracles as well, all serve to show his rise to prominence (Vandorpe & Waebens, 2009, p. 39). Alternatively, it could be said that

[12] This mythological element best described in the Demotic tale (but available from the New Kingdom as well) of the "Myth of the Sun's Eye" held that the feminine eye of the sun god in the form of Tefnut (or other similar goddesses) had to be lured back from Nubia to the land of Egypt, in order to re-establish cosmic order. See: Feder 2013.

[13] The assumption originally came from Dr. Andrzej Ćwiek in conversation with the author.

[14] The Low Dam was built at the turn of the twentieth century. Upon completion, the height of the annual inundation decreased since the dam held back a great amount of water. Without this dam, the normal flow of the Nile almost surely reached the level of the entrance.

[15] See the picture from the Schiaparelli mission from 1910, in Fiore Marochetti 2010, p. 2.

this only showed his presence "in documents" while his real existence was already well established, in a chapel yet to be found. Isis was another interesting addition to the cult-topography. She, through identification with Hathor, had a cult in Gebelein and had chapels and priests with relatively high social standing and hereditary titles ready to serve her (Vandorpe & Waebens, 2009, pp. 39–40).

The topography and land partitioning of Gebelein was centred on the Ptolemaic town of Pathyris, on the Eastern Hill and its slopes. Information on these matters originates from the Edfu donation text and the Pathyris archive of papyri, and displays the following situation:[16] the Temple of Hathor possessed the so called "Low-Lands", the best and most fertile areas directly next to the river, flooded and covered by mud-silt every year. They were leased out privately for cultivation. After the great Theban revolt of 205–186 BCE, the government confiscated lands from the temples in order to cut back their budget and, through this, their power. The same happened in Gebelein as well – the so called "High Lands of Hathor" were almost all taken out of the hands of the priests. This was a major reduction, as these holdings reached considerable size and hence yielded a significant income, although the temple received some compensation in the form of small taxes directed to them from these seized lands. Besides this, the temple had pastoral lands and, of course, its sacred precinct, which contained the house of the priests.

On the basis of all this data, suggestions have been made to the effect that the system had been equally self-sufficient before, in the New Kingdom and Late Period, which posits a continuity of cult paralleled to the continuity of its economic organisational power (Vandorpe & Waebens, 2009). In conclusion, it can be said that the temple and the cult of Hathor – as was the case for the other, less visible local cults – was a major organising factor in the landscape, land-tenure regime and land partitioning of the Gebelein region, and, as such, significantly affected the everyday experience of the population of the area.

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[16] For complete and detailed descriptions of the situation, see Vandorpe & Waebens, 2009, pp. 39–40.

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