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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sergei Ignatov</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Serpent who loves Egyptians in Middle Egyptian Literature</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teodor Lekov</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Death of the Egyptian King</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emil Buzov</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Relation between Wisdom texts and Biographical inscriptions in Ancient Egypt</strong></td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yordan Chobanov</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Some notes on Peas. B1, 95–102</strong></td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vessela Atanassova</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Le culte divin au sein des institutions économiques à l'Ancien Empire</strong></td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silviya Kremenska</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Some notes on the decoration and location of images from private tombs in Theban necropolis in the time of XVIII Egyptian dynasty</strong></td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konstantin Ivanov</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pr-Dw3t – The House of Morning Adoration</strong></td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia Maravelia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Éléments Astronomiques et Cosmographiques dans les Aventures de Sinuhe: La Quête Éternelle de la Déesse Céleste et la Féminisation du Firmament</strong></td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svetla Ilieva</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Some Parallels between the Opening of the Mouth Ritual and the Indian Prana Pratistha</strong></td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pr-Dw3t – The House of Morning Adoration

Konstantin Ivanov

I dedicate my first publication to my mother Iglika Ivanova (A.W.S.) – True Manifestation of Hathor and Isis

1. Background

Term pr-dw3t has been discussed by Blackman in his article “House of Morning” 1. As the title would suggest, the author builds up a case that favors the translation of the term “dw3t” as “morning” instead of “adoration” (or “praise”) 2. In the very beginning Blackman starts by mentioning the preserved examples of the shrine at Edfu and Philae 3, but then continues to discuss the history of the term and its relation to secular purification 4 and mortuary purification 5. Blackman’s work is useful for understanding the historical background of the term pr-dw3t, and its links to the different aspects of purification – the article presents a cornerstone in Egyptology 6 and a basis for the discussion that I am about to pre-

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2 Blackman – The House of Morning – JEA 5 (1918) – pp.152–153; The predating work of H. Kees shows examples of scholars translating pr-dw3t as “chambre d’adoration” and “Haus der Verehrung” – Kees – Pr-dw3t und pr-db3t in Recueil de travaux relatifs a la philology et l’archeologie Egyptienes et Assyriens 36(1914) – p.2,3.
6 “The House of Morning” is almost a century old publication from the time that I am writing this article. Yet, Blackmans conclusions still resonate in the way that Egyptology scholars refer to the pr-dw3t. M. Alliot refers to the shrine as “la maison du matin” – M. Alliot – Le Culte d’Horus a Edfou (Cairo, 1950) – p.132. Francois Labrique has done the same when translating the inscriptions that accompany the purification scene on the exterior of Edfu’s surrounding wall – Labrique – Stylistique et Theologie a Edfou – OLA
sent. Nevertheless, it becomes evident that throughout the known history of Ancient Egypt the name *pr-dw3t* has evolved as to signify compartments of different edifices with slightly different function, ultimately related to purity but not always directly related to the specific ritual proceedings in the temple complex. If one is to discuss the significance of the term and mentions the most prominent preserved examples, it is only fair and scientifically demanded that more focus is redirected towards these examples.

I suggest that contemporary and predating examples of the pharaonic purification scenes should be taken into account. The typical “baptism” scenes (Fig.1) found on temple walls are slightly different from those found in the *pr-dw3t* shrines of Edfu(Fig.2) and Philae(Fig.3). The wall scenes typically display two actors, rarely a sole purifying deity. In contrast to that, both *pr-dw3t* shrines in question only display one deity at a time interacting with the pharaoh. In the case of Edfu the monarch is seated. Nevertheless the shrine scenes and those found throughout the rest of the temples are unmistakably related. Both *pr-dw3t* and temple scenes address the pharaonic purification – a god is acting and the phara-

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51 (1992) – p.172–173,pl.12; Penelope Wilson translates *pr-dw3t* as “House of Morning” and even directly references Blackman’s article in question – P. Wilson – A Ptolemaic Lexicon, OLA 78(1997) – p.355; Prof. J. Quack refers to the *pr-dw3t* as “house of morning” when reporting information related to the Book of the Temple and the procedures of purity related to temple access – Quack – Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion in “Purity and Forming the Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean world and Ancient Judaism” (Leiden-Boston,2013) – p. 119; Dieter Arnold has circumvented this by simply referring to the shrine as *pr-dw3t* – Arnold – Wandrelief und Raumfunktion in ägyptischen Tempeln des Neuen Reiches, MÄS 2 – p. 71–72.


8 For the purpose of this study I am focusing on purification scenes found in the wall registers – labelled (BAP 1) by Eleni Vassilika in her study of the Ptolemaic structures on the island of Philae. In general, doorway scenes (Vassilika’s label (BAP 2)) do not display significant variations from the posture and gesture of Thoth and Horus in the (BAP 1) scenes; the vessel in doorway scenes is always a hes. Exceptional cases of (BAP 2) scenes from the Greco-Roman period will be mentioned in the discussion below – the scenes from the Ptolemaic temple of Deir el Medina and the scenes from Deir el Hagar in Dakhla Oasis. For the labeling – Vassilika – Ptolemaic Philae p.4, p.24,p.353; Examples doorway scenes – Chassinat – Edfou IX pl. LVII; Blackman – The Temple of Bigeh, pl. XIX, XXXVI, XXXVII,XXXIX; Roeder – Debod bis Kalabsche vol.2 taf.12,taf.13.

9 Chassinat – Edfou 3.2 – pl.LXXI.

10 Kockelman, H. and Winter, E. – Philae III, Die zweite Ostkolonade des Tempels der Isis in Philae (CO II und CO II K) (Wien, 2016), vol. 2 – pl.52a,52b.

11 One such example – Khnum, holding a double-spouted hes – Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak. – Chicago OIP 106 – pl.51,pl.259.
aoh-figure is on the receiving end of the rite. The pr-dw3t in both preserved cases is symmetrically juxtaposed with wall “baptism” scenes. In certain cases the “Baptism of the Pharaoh” in wall registers is depicted as taking place within the confines of a shrine and at least one scene holds inscriptions which specify the purification as being carried out in the pr-dw3t.

2. Discussion

I am inclined to agree with some of Blackman’s points, one of which is that the rites of purification (and the pr-dw3t by extension) were related to the entrance of the pharaoh in the temple at the start of the day, which ideally would occur simultaneously with- and reenacting the rising of the sun-god. In fact, I would like to point out something that might be complimentary to his idea. In most cases it

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12 The presence of a recipient figure is also what sets apart the scenes from the pr-dw3t at Philae from other doorway scenes.


16 Labrique – Stylistique et Theologie a Edfou – OLA 51 – p.172; The relations between pr-dw3t and the wall register purification scenes have been pointed out as early as the works of Auguste Mariette – Mariette – Denderah vol.1, p.125.


18 Gardiner has argued against Blackman that purification scenes are related to coronation, not the act of entering the temple – Baptism of the Pharaoh – JEA 36 p.6; Considering Greco-Roman register examples there are no grounds for conflict – purification and coronation are often depicted together; in many cases purification and coronation scenes are located near entrances – evident at Edfu (PM VI – p.125-notes 35–38; p.126- notes 43–46), at Kom Ombo(PM VI – p.182- notes 25,27; p.184 – notes 45,46), at Dendera (PM VI – p.46 – notes 17–19; p.47 –notes 23–25), at Esna (PM VI – p.111 – notes 1–4 and 5–8);Considering the pr-dw3t in particular, according to the Book of the Temple “The ‘house of morning’ in order to perform the purification of the pharaoh in [it] when he enters in the temple” is located in one of the courtyards preceding the hypostyle hall. – Quack – Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion in “Purity and Forming the Religious Traditions” (Leiden-Boston,2013) – p. 119.

is Thoth and Horus purifying the pharaoh \(^{20}\). In all but one \(^{21}\) of the Ptolemaic cases and in most of the earlier examples, Thoth (lunar, therefore nightly god in character) stands “behind” the pharaoh; Horus (solar, daily deity) is in front of the ruler, according to the orientation and flow of motion of the pharaonic figure. The avian nature of both deities is obvious therefore it is easy to associate them with the night sky and day sky. François Labrique has pointed to an example of pharaonic purification from Edfu, in which the texts associate Thoth and Horus with Geb and Ra respectively \(^{22}\). The pharaoh’s orientation and motion, would therefore suggest the transition from night to day, and a symbolic upward motion from the terrestrial towards the celestial. This puts an accent on the “morning” aspects of the ritual. Having said this, it should be clear that I am not setting out to reject Blackman’s “morning” reading but I would, on the other hand, like to propose that his understanding should not be exclusive. The following paragraphs will bring attention to some facts that favor the idea of “adoration” as a completely valid and even vital connotation within the term \(pr\-dw3t\).

Blackman discusses the spelling and grammar of the known examples of the term \(^{23}\). What he has pointed out is that in most cases the translation “morning” is favorable, one of the reasons being that the term, with the determinative for “praise” \(^{24}\), is not part of the usual spelling. The fact of the matter is that in the temple of Edfu the term \(pr\-dw3t\) occurs several times but none of them feature the determinative in question \(^{25}\). However that does not explain the case where the hieroglyph for “praise” does occur as part of the \(pr\-dw3t\) configuration – that is something that Blackman has left that unaddressed \(^{26}\). Furthermore, Blackman himself has stated that there is an interrelation and wordplay based on the similarities between the term “dw3” meaning morning and the term “dw3” meaning praise \(^{27}\).

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\(^{20}\) Blackman – Some Notes on the Ancient Egyptian Practice of Washing the Dead – JEA 5 (1918) – p.117; Nevertheless the temple of Amun at Hibis presents a scene in which involves Wepwawet as one of the actors. – Cruz-Uribe – The Hibis Temple Project vol.1 (1988) – p.54, pl.10A.

\(^{21}\) The exception is at the temple of Dakka where the inversion is most likely related to Thoth being a principal deity of the shrine. Roeder, Ruppel – Tempel von Dakke, vol.II-III – pl.80.


\(^{23}\) Blackman – House of Morning JEA 5(1918) – p.152.

\(^{24}\) Gardiner – Grammar – signlist A30, p. 445 Note that the same sign is a determinative to the words which sir Gardiner translates as “praise” (i3w) and “adore” (dw3).


\(^{27}\) Blackman – House of Morning JEA 5(1918) – p.154.
**Free hand gesture**

In the Greco-Roman period, examples of wall scenes outside the *pr-dw3t*, regardless of chronological, geographical or religious differences, depict the acting deities with one hand holding the vessel from which water is issued. The other hand is empty. The empty hand raised is near (usually behind) the vessel\(^{28}\). In this way, aside from the occupied hand, the entire body posture of the deities mimics the hieroglyph for adoration\(^{29,30}\).

There seem to be very few exceptions to this. The Ptolemaic temple at Deir el Medina displays Horus and Thoth on each doorjamb\(^{31}\) – their hands are extended underneath the vessel in a gesture of offering\(^{32}\). The case is similar at the temple of Hathor in Dendera. Inside the hypostyle\(^{33}\) and on the exterior of the naos\(^{34}\), it is possible to observe pharaonic purification scenes in which the deities are gesturing in offering with their empty hand. Nevertheless one of these scenes presents an important detail (Fig. 4). In the very beginning of the each stream issued forth from the vessels a small depiction of a hand is fitted. Each of these small hands matches perfectly with the way that hands are positioned in the “dw3” gesture in hieroglyphic writing and larger images\(^{35}\). The notion of “praise” in relation to pu-

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29 See above, note 24.

30 My observations on the matter for predating periods of the empty hand: the case is similar. The usual manner of depiction has the gods with a hand raised in adoration. That is true for examples from a wide geographical and chronological range – at least as early as the reign of Hatshepsut – Une Chapelle d’Hashepsout a Karnak (IFAO 1979) – pl. 14; In the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak – Chicago OIP 106 – pl. 105, 148, 198; At Medinet Habu – Chichago OIP 83 – pl. 296, 309; The gesture is expressed in scenes as remote as the temples of Amada and Derr in Nubia – Gauthier- Amada – pl. XXIII, XXIV; Blackman – The Temple of Derr pl. XLIII; Late Period examples feature Karnak-Nord – pl. LXI, LXVI, LXXVIII, LXXVII, examples from the temple of Amun at Habis – The Temple of Hibis in El Khârgeh oasis : Part III – pl. 12; also the kiosk of Nectanebo at Philae – Elgawady – Schranken (2016) – p. 514, pl. 39.


32 Compare Fig. 4 with SMN 1–4 and HED 1 from Vassiliki – Ptolemaic Philae, OLA 34 – p. 370; VESF 1 and VESF 2 from Vassiliki – The Pronaos Decoration of the Temple of Horus at Edfu in OLA 85 – p. 956.


34 Cauville – Dendera XII, vol. II – pl. 27, 58 and pl. 105, 130.

rification seems to have been an important aspect for the Denderan designers and thus was not completely omitted.

**Occupied hand gesture**

Further observations concern the occupied hands with which the deities are holding the vessels to spill water. Despite the apparent simplicity of the (BAP) scene there is room for variations available – which hand the gods employ and which hand is idle; variations of the grip on the vessel; variations in which way the wrist is turning (although invariably the arm is bent at the elbow and pointing upwards). It is a common observation that in some cases the hand that holds the vase is not anatomically correct and there are variations to that as well. Cases of variation and seemingly unnatural depictions of the divine appendages are chronologically concentrated in the periods predating the Ptolemaic dynasty.

Examples from Medinet Habu\(^36\) and the Khonsu temple\(^37\) at Karnak depict the hands with correct anatomy but twisted in a rather unnatural and uncomfortable way, fingers facing away from the viewer, and in fact, away from the recipient of the rite. The thumbs of the gods are depicted closer to the top of the *hes*\(^38\). The temple of Derr presents an extreme example of this hand position – Horus’ limb seems as if it is broken at the wrist\(^39\).

In one of the examples from Abydos (Fig.5) the hand of Horus (in this case behind the pharaoh), raised as usual, is depicted with fingers on the inside – visible to the viewer\(^40\). His thumb however is placed towards the top of the jar, which suggests that the hand is twisted at the wrist and the fingers should be facing away and thus should not be visible to the viewer. The result is an obstruction to the anatomy of the hand of the divinity\(^41\).

These examples portray attempts at a combined illustration of the grip on the vessel, as it would be held in actuality during performance, and the “dw3” gesture. The former dictates that the thumb should be closer to the top, hand pointing slightly away when raised in order to spill the liquid. The latter involves the palm

\(^{36}\) OIP 83 – Medinet Habu V pl. 296,309; Note that the hand of Horus in plate 309 is not anatomically correct.

\(^{37}\) OIP 103 – Temple of Khonsu – vol.1, pl.33; vol.2, pl.176.

\(^{38}\) Such is also the case in Late Period examples from the structures of Taharqa at Karnak – Karnak-Nord IV – pl.LXVI,LXVIII.

\(^{39}\) Blackman – The Temple of Derr pl. XLIV,XLIII.


\(^{41}\) The case is similar with the hand of Thoth in the example of Philip Arrhideus at Karnak – Gardiner – “Baptism” JEA 36 – pl.II.
of the hands facing towards the recipient and is better pronounced when the hand is not twisted and pointing away.

There is yet another manner of depicting the vessel in the hands of the gods—the designers eliminated the anatomical irregularities and the unnatural twist of the wrist, while simultaneously accommodating the “dw3” gesture. This was achieved in a somewhat simple way – by reversing the position of the vessel within the grip. In some Greco-Roman examples the hand is correct, the fingers are pointing inwards, the thumb is near the bottom of the vase. This, however, suggests that the vase was initially picked up and held in a really awkward manner by the actor. Ultimately this is a detachment from the practical enactment for the sake of proper divine anatomy, and for the purpose of asserting the oneness of praise and purification.

Apart from all of this stand out the examples found in the hypostyle hall of the temple at Philae, the example from the pronaos of the temple Dendera, and the examples of the libation episodes from the pr-dw3t shrines of Edfu and Philae. To this list we can add a doorway example from Deir el Hagar. In the first example the deities are gesturing with the inner hand (as opposed to the more common gesture with the outer hand); the vase is spouted and is held somewhat upright. This bears striking resemblance with a scene from the exterior of the same temple. The scene in question has the pharaoh spilling water from two hes-vessels with spouts which are held upright. The water streams fall upon an offering table with no objects placed on it – the vases and the libation itself are the offering. Therefore it is tempting and quite logical to suggest that the variation of the vessel and posture in the hypostyle hall BAP image can be explained away with the desire of the decorators to additionally express offering. The second case is the hypostyle hall image from Dendera, mentioned above, Thoth and Horus’ fingers are facing the viewer, but Thoth has his thumb placed anatomically incorrect. It is possible to observe that distortions of the Ptolemaic grip occur in attempts to incorporate the idea of “offering” into the representation of the rites.

The roman dated temple of Deir el Hagar yields yet another development, which might indicate that, although widely employed, the designers were not completely

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43 Benedite – Le Temple de Philae 1893 – pl. II.
46 First scene lower register in Benedite – Philae pl.XXVIII.
settled with Ptolemaic grip solution. On either side of the doorway are the images of Thoth and Horus in the act of purification. The gods are supporting the hes from underneath with one finger extended forward, along the length (or height) of the vase, instead of a tight grip as depicted in earlier examples. This might be an echo of the gestures evident at Dendera. Ultimately the example from Deir el Hagar presents a solution to the incorporation of both offering and adoration within the act of purification, while avoiding anatomical irregularities and maintaining a level of realism.

**Vessel**

The most commonly employed hes-vessel (hs or hs.t\(^{47}\)) is related to the verb hsj, meaning “praise”\(^{48}\). This suggests that regardless of the variations in the grip on the vessel, regardless of the nuances that the grip portrays, the aspect of “praise” is always represented and quite easily recognizable through the image of the vessel. That is with the exception of the images originating from the two preserved pr-dw3t structures.

**Images from the pr-dw3t shrines**

As I have mentioned above, the images in the shrine in Edfu do not demonstrate the typical grip and depict the employment of another type of vessel\(^{49}\) (Fig.2). At Philae the typical vessel is also alternated – on doorway of the pr-dw3t the deities are employing a stout pot(Fig.3)\(^{50}\). In both cases the deities are not actually touching the liquid containers. The arms of Thoth and Horus are pointing forwards, bent at the elbows and pointing upwards. The hands are free and open towards the pharaoh\(^{51}\). In that way the gesture that conveys adoration and praise

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\(^{49}\) The texts specify a nmst vessel for Horus and a dšrt for Thoth but if Chassinat’s plate is a correct reflection both deities employ the same vessel, one that bears close resemblance to the dšrt. Chassinat – Edfou – vol.3 p.336,338, pl. LXXXI; H.Kees – Pr-dw3t und pr-dbh3t – p.7; Wilson – Ptolemaic Lexicon, OLA 78 – p.519 for nsmt, p. 1210 for dšrt.

\(^{50}\) Berlin Photo #855, #856; Kockerman, Winter – Philae III,vol.2, pl.52A,B, Texts relating to Thoth specify a snbt vessel.

\(^{51}\) This particular posture (with only implied contact with the vessel) and the employment of a stout vessel can be observed in a scene which depicts Ramesses II purifying an image of Seti
is heavily accented. There is only one obstruction to the perfect mimicry – one hand is slightly turned in order to express possession and control over the vessel. In this way the designers have expressed and underlined the divine source of the benevolent purifying streams – this connection is only necessary if the purification of the pharaoh is to be effective.

Additionally there is another important detail featured in the coronation scene found on the east wall of Edfu’s *pr-dw3t* interior. A personification of Heka is seen performing the adoration with absolutely no obstructions or alterations to the gesture. Witnesses in Ptolemaic coronation scenes are not anomalous, but they, unlike Heka in this case, they are passive.

**Summary**

In short, it is possible to observe that the *dw3* gesture was always expressed by the empty hand with minor exceptions; in at least one these few exceptional cases the “adoration” gesture is still accommodated within the scene – it represents an inseparable part of purification. The occupied hand has a lot of variations and even alterations to anatomy in attempts to express the *dw3* gesture and simultaneously conform to the practical enactment of the libation episode. In both hands the gestures give way to positions that suggest the notion of offering, but only in few exceptional cases, sporadically appearing throughout history – the incorporation of offering is not the norm and can hardly be called a trend. The commonly employed *hes*-vessel also relates purification and adoration. At the two examples of the *pr-dw3t* shrine preserved at Edfu and Philae, the *dw3* gesture is even further accented by the complete detachment of the hand from the vessel – the notion of

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Chassinat, Edfou vol.III.2, pl.LXXXI.

52 Chassinat, Edfou vol.III.2, pl.LXXXI.

53 Benedite – Le Temple de Philae 1893 – pl.XXXIV,pl.XXVI; De Morgan – Kom Ombo – pl.463, pl.208. In some cases the additional witness is “semi-passive” – one hand is raised in salutation; nevertheless the *dw3* posture such as that of Heka seems to be unique to the *pr-dw3t* at Edfu. – De Morgan – Kom Ombo – pl.214 ; Sauneron – Esna – p.184.
adoration is given priority over attempts at reflecting actuality. In the *pr-dw3t* of Edfu that is even further accented by the posture of Heka.

**Pr-dw3t Conclusions**

Based on the evidence discussed above, I propose that the understanding of *pr-dw3t* as “House of Morning” should not be favoured *instead* of the reading “House of Adoration”. The two terms should not be understood as mutually exclusive. Rather, they should be considered side by side, as homogenous, complimentary aspects of the term *pr-dw3t*, in reference to the shrines at Edfu and Philae. The case of Blackman is built up on the relation of the shrine to the purification rituals; on the other hand the idea of “praise” and “adoration” are represented as an integral, omnipresent part of the performance of the cleansing rites. Therefore an amendment must be introduced to Blackman’s suggestion. The name of the *pr-dw3t* shrine should be translated as “House of Morning Adoration”.

01.08.2017 Copenhagen

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54 Special thanks to dr. Rachael J. Dann, Martin Thygesen Jensen, Dora Petrova, as well as dr. Emil Buzov for the opportunity and the patience.
LIST OF PLATES

Fig. 1 after Gardiner – Baptism of the Pharaoh, JEA vol.36 pl.1
Fig. 2 after Chassinat – Edfou, vol.III.2 pl.LXXXI
Fig. 3 after Kockelman, H. and Winter, E. – Philae III, Die zweite Ostkolonade des Tempels der Isis in Philae, vol.2 pl.52a-b
Fig. 4 after Cauville – Dendera XII (IFAO 2007) vol.2 – pl. 130
Fig. 5 after Jequier – Les Temples Ramessides et Saïtes (1922) – pl.24
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Lacau, P., Chevrier, H. – Une Chapelle d’Hatshepsout a Karnak (IFAO, 1979)

OIP 83 – Medinet Habu volume V, part I- The portico, the treasury, and the chapels adjoining the first hypostyle hall with marginal material from the forecourts(1957)

OIP 100 – Temple of Khonsu, The Temple of Khonsu, Volume 1: Scenes of King Herihor in the Court (1979)

OIP 103 – The Temple of Khonsu, Volume 2: Scenes and Inscriptions in the Court and the First Hypostyle Hall. (1981)


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