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**Title: KING, LION AND FALCON AT DEIR EL-BAHARI: FROM *rw.ty* TO HORUS.  
A STUDY OF THE RAMP NEWEL POSTS IN THE TEMPLE OF HATSHEPSUT**

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# KING, LION AND FALCON AT DEIR EL-BAHARI: FROM *RW.TY* TO HORUS A STUDY OF THE RAMP NEWEL POSTS IN THE TEMPLE OF HATSHEPSUT

Nathalie Beaux

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**Abstract:** The newel posts of the first ramp had lion representations, those of the second one were decorated with composite falcon statues. It is the purpose of this article to study the surviving architectural elements of the ramp newel posts in detail and to explore the function of these elements in Hatshepsut's temple cosmology. *Rw.ty*, the four seated lions of the first ramp, are guarding the passage from land to the intermediate level of the temple, "begetting" Horus the king, allowing him to rise in life like the sun in its daily resurrection trip, and this forever and ever. In turn, the falcon god of the second ramp hovers in protection, as witness and helper in the passage to the third and highest level of the temple, where the king will achieve full resurrection through the Amun sanctuary and fly up to the sky as a falcon in its name of *M3<sup>c</sup>.t-k3-R<sup>c</sup>*. The cartouche raised by the 'nh sign on the first ramp finds an echo in the sn sign held by the falcon on the second ramp: they both tie and establish the king into his solar renewal destiny, helped by the Dual-lions and Horus of Behedet, lion and falcon from earth to heaven.

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Working for the Metropolitan Museum of Art expedition in 1924–1925, Herbert E. Winlock identified a block of limestone as "the newel post at the bottom of the ramp balustrade" (1926: 15–17, Fig. 16). On one side "is carved a magnificent lion in the finest XVIIIth dynasty style", while on the front is "a symbolic design of life upholding Hatshepsut's name". Two other fragments "gave the lion's hind legs and the root of his tail". This exceptional bas-relief of a lion was described by Jean Sainte Fare Garnot (1937–1938: 81–84, Pl. III,

Fig. 3). Its image was reproduced repeatedly (Werbrouck 1949: Fig. 2; Schweitzer 1948: Pl. VI. 4; de Wit 1951: 12), but no detailed study of the block as a whole and its meaning and function has yet been done.

Whereas the newel posts of the first ramp featured lion representations, those of the second ramp were decorated with composite falcon statues. It is the purpose of this article to study the fragments from the newel posts and to explore the function of these architectural elements in Hatshepsut's temple cosmology.

## THE RAMP NEWEL POSTS

There are two ramps in Hatshepsut's temple. The first one leads from the first to the second court, the second one rises to the third level of the monument. The newel posts of the first ramp are decorated with lion bas-reliefs, those of the second one with falcon statues [Fig. 1].

### THE FIRST RAMP

The newel posts of the ramp balustrade were not preserved. Excavating in front of the ramp, Winlock found a large block and fragments belonging to the southern post. They were subsequently put back in

place. Fragments of the northern element were found later and recently restored by Franciszek Pawlicki (1998: 51–52).

### Southern post

The southern and best preserved newel post is decorated on its eastern (front) and northern (inner lateral) faces [Figs 3, 4]. The western face has not been preserved.

The front of the newel post [Fig. 3] is engraved in sunk relief with a tall *ḥh* sign, animated, the arms raised and holding a cartouche of Hatshepsut displayed horizontally. The royal name has been



Fig. 1. The temple viewed from the south with the ramps in place and marked positions of the newel posts of the first (a) and second (b) ramp (Photo N. Beaux)

destroyed, leaving only the *R<sup>c</sup>* sign. Traces of *J*, *mn* and *n* signs are visible, attesting to the carving of *Jmn* over the destroyed surface. Hanging from the right arm of the *nh* sign is a loop attached to a cup-like object with round bottom and projecting element at the side. This object rests on the top of the head of a *hh* sign, a little kneeling man with arms raised (only hands preserved), back turned to the *nh* sign. Although the left side of the block has been destroyed in part, a surviving hand of another *hh* sign visible to the left of the *nh* sign indicates that the decoration was symmetrical. The object hanging from the arm appears to be a pendant of some kind. A similar hanging pendant is depicted twice on a lintel from the Twelfth Dynasty. In one case, it hangs from a single loop around the arm, in the other, there are two loops joining two *rnpt* signs from which the pendant is suspended. In both cases, a series of signs referring to large numbers appears below it and in one instance the series also begins with a *hh* (Schäfer 1932: 427, Fig. 7; Fischer 1972: 12, Fig. 12) [Fig. 2].

On the right side (and most probably on the left side, too) stands a long *rnpt* sign, its upper end curving alongside the edge of the cartouche, as if bending toward and above it. It is notched along its length, referring to numerous years (Quaegebeur 1999: 25).

The whole composition could read as a wish for millions (*hh*) of years of life to the *k3* of the king (if the lifted arms of the *nh* are meant as the sign (D28) *k3*), and/or for the uplifting *k3* of the living king for ever and ever in its exaltation (if the lifted arms are meant as the human sign of a man raising his arms (A28), *q3*, meaning “uplifted” as well as “exalted”):

*nh k3 (ntr nfr) M3<sup>c</sup>.t- k3-R<sup>c</sup> (H3.t-šps.wt  
hnm.t)-Jmn (m) hh.w (n.w) rnpt.wt*  
May the *ka* of the good god Maât-ka-  
Râ Hatshepsut henemet-Amun live  
(for) millions of years!

and/or

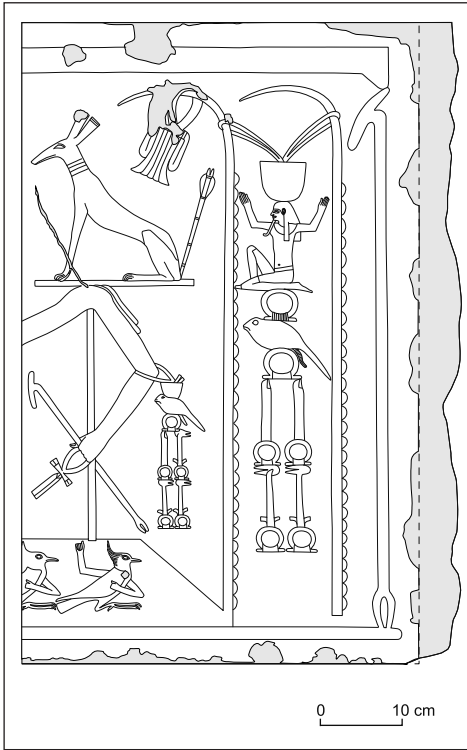
*nh q3 (ntr nfr) M3<sup>c</sup>.t- k3-R<sup>c</sup> (H3.t-šps.wt  
hnm.t)-Jmn (m) hh.w (n.w) rnpt.wt*  
May the good god Maât-ka-Râ  
Hat-shepsut henemet-Amun live and  
be exalted (for) millions of years!

A long *j3b* sign (R15) is carved on the right edge of the block. It refers to the East, which it faces, and the eastern horizon where the sun rises daily.

Thus, the front face of the newel post links the rebirth of the deceased king to the daily rising of the sun disk in the eastern horizon for countless years of eternity.

A seated lion is featured on the inner side of the newel post, its tail raised in a loop behind it [Fig. 4]. The mane is abundant, almost reaching the knee; the rosette of hair carved on its shoulder is an anatomical feature referring to young males (Bate 1950). The carving is remarkable; muscles modelled by shades of raised surface, whiskers delicately outlined, each tuft of hair of the mane being slightly bent. The overall impression is that of a lion in 3D.

A column of text is carved in front of it. At the top there is the usual *pt* sign. The first sign, fitted into a medium-low space (not tall enough for a tall sign but bigger than for a *t* sign), is partly broken. There is clearly the bottom part and the base of a stroke. But since it is not at the edge of the column, there is enough space for another stroke in front. So there would be two strokes followed by a *t*. Writing of vertical and not oblique double strokes is



attested in the temple, with strokes twice as big as a *t* sign (Beaux 2012: Pl. 3-1). The space below the *m* allows at least a tall sign to be restored, probably a low sign as well. The cartouche was chiseled away, but the *R<sup>c</sup>* sign is original and untouched. Below the end of the cartouche there is a lacuna, probably long enough for another set of tall signs.

Since this column is in front of the lion, it is expected to reveal its identity, function or speech. If one reads the animal representation as part of the inscription, it could be the name *Rw.ty*, Dual-lion, read in retrograde, the rest of the column being read in the regular way. The retrograde dual writing might simply refer to the two symmetrical lions carved on each side of

Fig. 2. A *hh* symbol hanging from a pendant, lintel found in the temple of Amenemhat I at Lisht North (Drawing E. Majerus; courtesy P. Jánosi forthcoming: Pl. 31, Cat. No. 40)

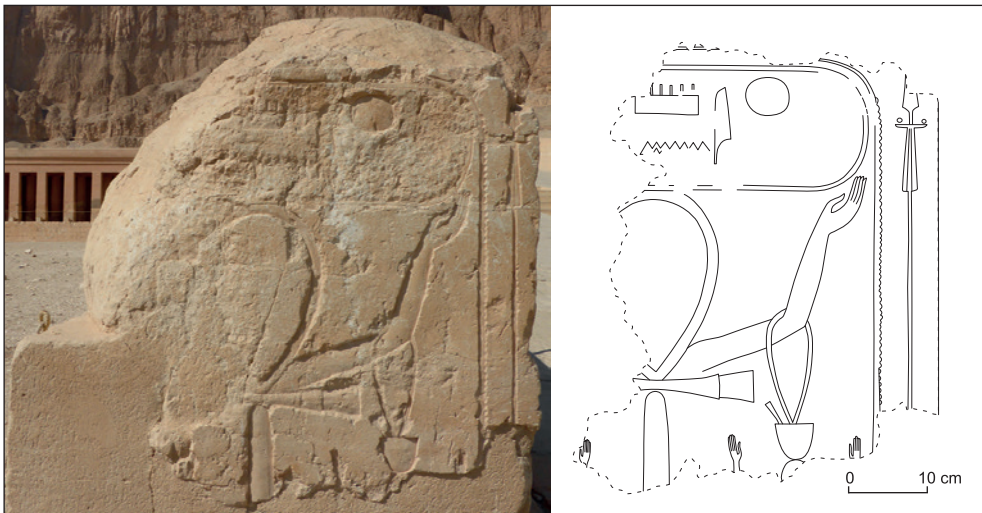


Fig. 3. A *nh* raising the royal cartouche: eastern (front) face of the southern newel post on the first ramp (Photo and drawing N. Beaux; inking E. Majerus)



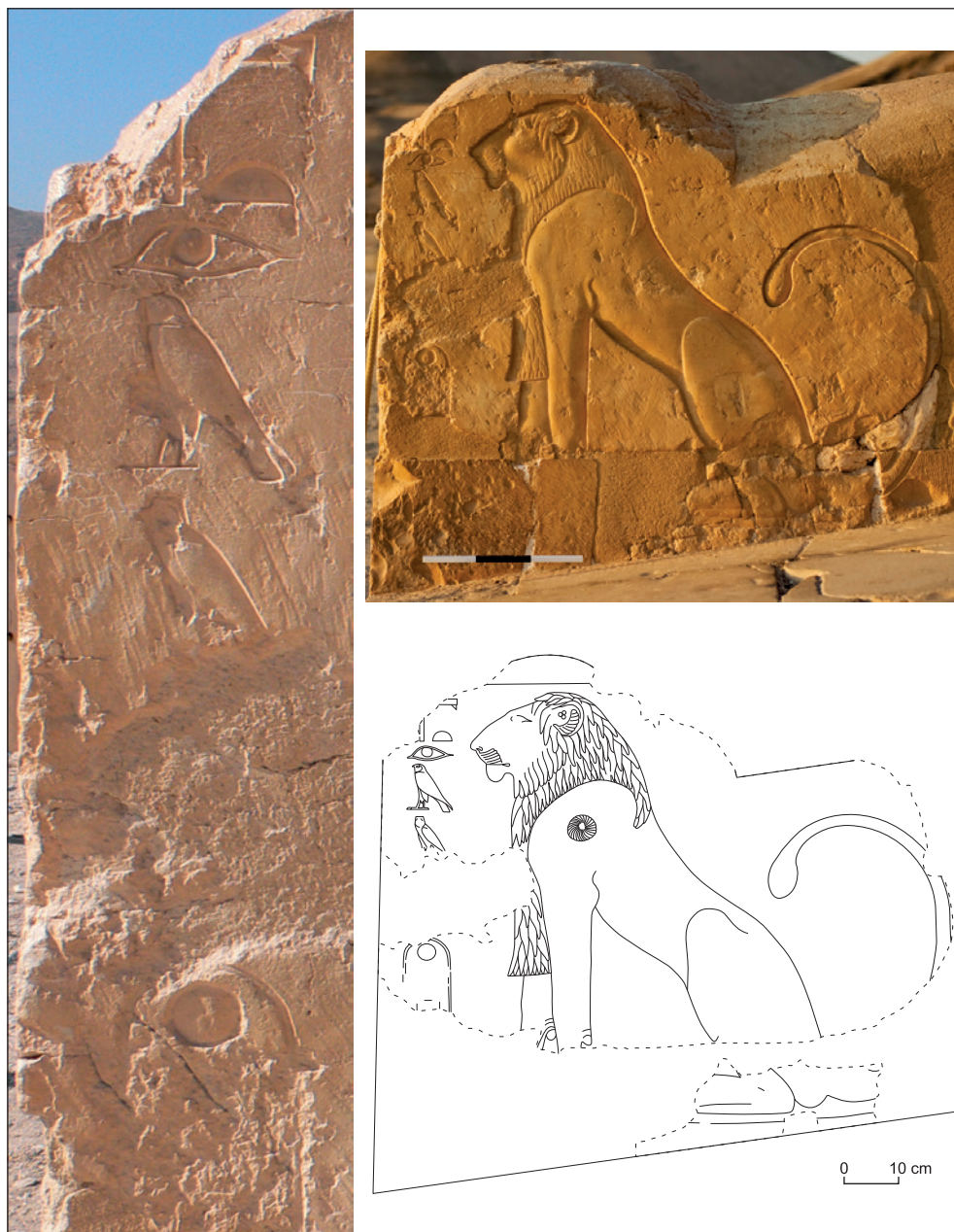


Fig. 4. *Sitting lion: northern (inner) face of the southern newel post of the first ramp; on the left, close-up of the column inscribed in front of the sitting lion (Photo K. Braulińska; drawing N. Beaux, inking E. Majerus)*

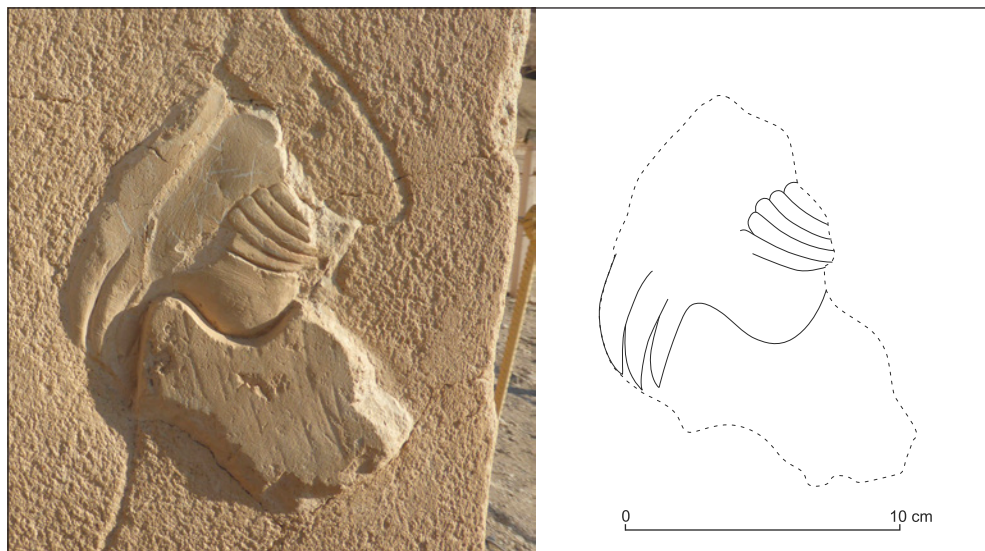


Fig. 5. *Fragment of a lion's head: southern (inner) face of the northern newel post of the first ramp*  
(Photo and drawing N. Beaux; inking E. Majerus)

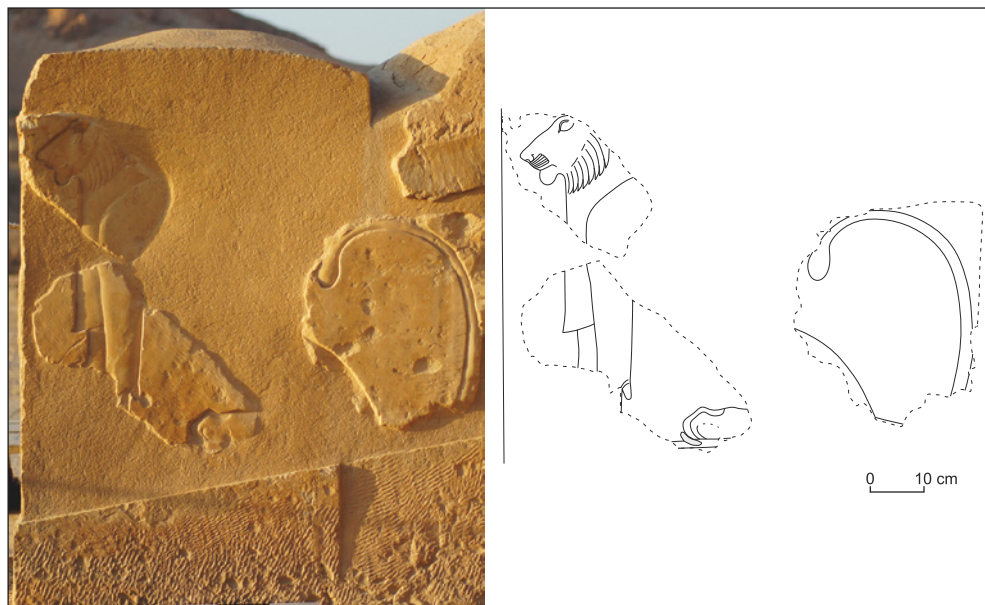


Fig. 6. *Sitting lion: northern (outer) face of the northern newel post of the first ramp*  
(Photo K. Braulińska; drawing N. Beaux, inking E. Majerus)

this block (the southern lion is missing but almost certain), as the two lions attested on the northern newel post (Fischer 1977: §7, 33a). The inscription thus would be:

*Rw.ty jr(w) Hr m...(M3<sup>c</sup>.t- k3)-R<sup>c</sup>...*  
Dual-lion who begets Horus in...,  
(*Maât-ka*)-Râ...

The seated lion is therefore to be considered as a Dual-lion and the image carved on the front of the block refers to the rebirth of the king. Unfolded in two dimensions, we have this seated lion back to back with another similar lion, and in the middle an *ḥ* raising the royal cartouche to the sky.

#### Northern post

The sole preserved decoration on the inner (southern) side of the northern newel post consists of a small fragment of the chin, mouth and whiskers of a lion with a bit of mane [Fig. 5]. The carving is different, less refined, the hair of the mane straight and the whiskers rendered as five thick, parallel strokes.

The outer (northern) side features the same sitting lion [Fig. 6]. Its face, front part of legs, back, tail and rear paws are preserved. As noted with regard to the fragment on the inner side, the carving is distinctly rougher, even if the general composition is the same. The mane in particular is rendered as straight hair in a collar around the face and the whiskers appear as plain large parallel strokes.

Moreover, a close look indicates that the surface of the block is not flat but curved, as if re-carved on a previously damaged (destroyed?) and then lowered and smoothed surface. The lion's head is also very near the edge of the block, which

does not allow for an inscription on the front.

The front (eastern) face of the block does not show any inscription, but is flat and smoothed. In its upper part, it is crowned with a destroyed projecting element, 15 cm high [Fig. 7]. A plaque may have been fixed below this projecting part, enlarging the whole block, adding more or less 12 cm, which would have given enough space for a column of signs on the sides, and a decorated surface on the eastern face. This type of restoration happened



Fig. 7. Front of the northern newel post of the first ramp with a fragment of the projecting upper element (Photo N. Beaux)



when there was a problem with the block: either the block itself was damaged before carving or the carving was deeply changed and required a new element to be fixed onto it to fit the changes of the side.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to know whether the change dates to the times of Hatshepsut or later, but it is certain that the lion heads on the northern post were recarved and not by the same artist working on the southern post as



*Fig. 8. Close-ups of the lion heads on the first ramp: top, southern post; bottom, northern post (Photos N. Beaux)*

the close-up images of the two lion heads demonstrate beyond all doubt [Fig. 8]. Notwithstanding these differences in the execution, the program seems to have been identical on both newel posts with the lions being shown in similar position and the eastern (front) face being probably identical.

### THE SECOND RAMP

The newel posts of the second ramp were composed of a falcon statue [Fig. 9 top and bottom left], fragments of which were discovered by Winlock who proposed a reconstruction (1932: 24, Figs 20–21). They were restored in 1996/1997 by Franciszek Pawlicki from five original fragments to which a new one was added (1998: 52–53). The bird has spreading wings, embracing what was most probably a cryptogram of Hatshepsut. The undulating body of a cobra [Fig. 9 bottom right] is carved all along the top of the balustrade, as if going down from the third to the second court. Its head and hood rose in front of the falcon, the body passing below the bird. A piece of hood attests to this reconstruction [Fig. 9 top right]. The cobra's head was crowned with a sun disk, but whether there was also a sun disk rising between horns, as often represented in the temple cobra friezes (as in the Hathor Shrine), it is difficult to say. There may have been a *k3* sign as well at the base of the statue, but no fragments have (yet) been found. This suggests very much a depiction of the falcon hovering in protection over the royal name of Maat-ka-râ written in a cryptographic manner (Sankiewicz 2008: 200–210). It should be noted that

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to François Larché for his suggestion of this restitution of a thinner front block and to Zbigniew E. Szafrński, who confirmed that this type of restoration is attested in the Deir el-Bahari temple.

the bird is indeed flying, and not resting as shown by the *sn* sign held in its claws, exactly as in the representations of the falcon *Bhd.ty* at the top of scenes, above

the king. Winlock and Werbrouck had suggested this was indeed a representation of the falcon *Bhd.ty* (Winlock 1932: 24; Werbrouck 1949: 48).



Fig. 9. Statues of a falcon hovering over a cobra: top left, southern newel post of the second ramp; top right, front view of the southern statue with part of the hood of a rising cobra in front; bottom left, statue from the northern newel post; bottom right, undulating body of the cobra on the top side of the balustrade (Photos N. Beaux)

## LION REPRESENTATIONS IN THE TEMPLE OF HATSHEPSUT

Lion representations are not rare in the temple of Hatshepsut and they illustrate several aspects of animal symbolism.

There used to be an alley of royal sphinxes in front of the temple. It is significant that two small Hatshepsut sphinxes found at Deir el-Bahari (Winlock 1929: 12–13, Figs 13–14; Schweitzer 1948: 58, Pl. X.7) had an abundant mane carved around the queen's face, in the same way as the sphinxes of Amenemhat III (Schweitzer 1948: 42, Pl. X.2, 4), emphasizing the lion component in the sphinx. Gargoyles in the shape of lion heads were fixed at the edge of the roof of the first portico. One such gargoyle has been preserved and another one is still visible on the roof of the second portico. Already in the Old Kingdom gargoyles were positioned in buildings to spit the destructive rain water away from the finely carved monuments (Schweitzer 1948: 26–27, Pl. V.2–3). The king was also depicted as a sphinx trampling enemies on the northern side of the southern portico and on the southern side of the northern portico, that is on either side of the ramp, a ramp starting with the discussed lion newel posts (Naville 1895–1908/VI: Pl. CLX).

On the first level, corresponding to ground level, the lion was depicted in three poses adopted by the animal: lying with head raised as a sphinx, sitting at the bottom of the ramp as a lion, and trampling enemies on the side of the ramp as a sphinx. Thus he is brought alive and “in motion” all around the temple access. Indeed, the ground level is his domain. He even appears from above, as though growling from the

top of a cliff, looking down with wide open mouth in the shape of a gargoyle.

On the other levels of the temple, there are less references made to the lion. Hints of its powerful presence appear in bas-reliefs: it is depicted no longer as a living animal, but as a symbol on a royal seat (Naville 1895–1908/II: Pl. CXXV; IV: Pl. LXXXVIII, XCI; VI: Pl. CLIV), standard (Naville 1895–1908/IV: Pls LXXXIX, XCI, CIV; V: Pl. CXXVI), kiosk (Naville 1895–1908/V: Pl. CXXIV; VI, Pl. CLIV), podium (Naville 1895–1908/III: Pl. LXXXV), birth bed (Naville 1895–1908/II: Pls LI, LIII). The head alone, or the front part of the standing animal, or the whole body walking is included in representations of pieces of furniture or architecture. Sometimes it is a sphinx rather than a lion that appears.

Two representations of leonine divinities appear in the temple, both from the Hathor Shrine. The first one is a finely recarved image of a lioness-headed Uret-Hekau in the vestibule, enabling Hatshepsut to receive the uraeus and complete her divine transformation (Naville 1895/IV: Pl. CI; Beaux 2012: 33–35, Fig. D-Ouret-hekaou, Pl. 8). The second one, in the Hathor bark shrine, is a seated lion, recarved on a probably original Dual-lion; it is situated on the north wall behind the divine bark (Naville 1895–1908/IV: Pl. CIV; Beaux 2012: 134–135, Fig. D-Iseou, Pl. 32). It is placed there, along with other divine beings, to help the king to achieve his journey after death and be resurrected as the sun every



day. This lion bears the name of *Jzzw.wy*, “the two punishers”, a reference probably to its being a dual divine being, guarding and helping the sun on its trip through the underworld. The position of the lion is identical to that of the balustrade lions, except for the tail which is curling back around its rear leg.

But why is the lion taken as a referent in these contexts? Why does it appear as a royal and/or divine symbol? Because the animal has no predator but man above it, it is wild and powerful and therefore perfect as a royal symbol. In a word, it rules over the untamed world as the king over men. From time immemorial in Egypt kings had tamed lions as much as they could be tamed (de Wit 1951: 10–15). King Aha was buried with lions at Abydos (Dreyer et al. 1990: 67). As Baines clearly stated, for the king, “its most striking choice of lions, which can never be fully domesticated, expressed his own powers and prowess, as well as forging a symbolic link between him and the undomesticated world” (Baines 1993: 65). This mirror image of himself that the king saw in the lion as another self, yet a different one, explains why lion

representations cannot be easily identified as either royal or divine.

The lion sits on its land as the king on his throne, hence both are represented together on the thrones of royal statues. Because the lion has such power, he has no limit to his territory, he is the *h3.t*, the front, the prow, the beginning as well as the *ph.w*, the back, the stern, the outer limits, the end, as it is with the front and back of the lion that the *h3.t* (F4) and *ph* (F22) signs are written. His strength is divine, *phity*. He naturally comes in the best position to be the key symbol for the passage from one world to the other, to enter a sacred area (sphinxes), the underworld (*Rw.ty* lions), and to approach the king (guarding his thrones).

To the Egyptian, the lion is a powerful watching creature at the edge of the world, whether temporal or spatial. It is on the threshold of life, of time, of space, guarding it. It is the key to a proper transition in whichever dimension. This is why it appears on birth-beds, on thrones, on seats, at entrances of temples, virtually at any transition place and moment. It is relevant to note, in this respect, that *Rw.ty* is echoed in *rw.t*, “gate” (Wb II, 404).

## INTERPRETATION OF THE SEATED LIONS

Let us now consider the position of the newel-post lion, and especially its tail. From a zoological angle, the position of the tail indicates that the animal is excited (Schaller 1972: 102–103). It is watching in full alertness, exactly as a lion or lioness hunting or guarding hidden cubs (Schaller 1972: 14, 126, 154, 244, 246, 248).

Moreover, the lion is sitting facing the east, its back to the temple, meaning that all the territory to the west with the temple

belongs to it. It is also positioned on the natural ground level of the temple, where we leave the valley and start climbing the ramp to the other levels of the building, up towards the mountain cliff and the sky. It is there that the newel-post lion appears as a watchful guard. Even more so, if one considers that a lion was also carved on both sides of the northern newel post, and most probably on the outer side of the southern one. There would have been thus



four sitting lions, one for each of the four cardinal directions, and two pairs, meant for the eastern and western horizons.

A lion may appear represented on the sides of thrones in this position, often with its tail raised in a loop, as in Mereruka's tomb (Schweitzer 1948: Pl. VI.1). Although represented only from one angle, a lion is meant to be below each side of the seat, which amounts to a pair of lions for each seat. In a funerary context, the symbol of the two lions sitting back to back holds a rich significance in the resurrection process of the dead, featuring as it does yesterday and tomorrow, the mountain of the East and the mountain of the West, and the horizon through which the sun is setting and later rising at dawn, as described in Chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead (Saleh 1984: 18). In this composition, an *nh* sign may appear, hanging down from the *3h.t* sign (N27) which is set between the backs of the two sitting lions (Cherpion and Corteggiani 2010: 128, 242, Pl. 119). In a variant of this composition, one also finds the *nhh* signs written below the *3h.t* sign (pointing at the eternal, i.e., cyclical rising of the sun) and a falcon, *Hr-3hty*, inscribed inside the disk. In front of the falcon is a rising cobra with the double crown (Vandier 1935: 21, Pl. XVII). In another instance, the *3h.t* sign is shown resting on a sitting lion and a *dd* animated pillar, a cobra wearing the white crown rising in front of the lion's feet, while the mountain's arms are extended to the sun from above, an *nh* sign hanging down from its wrist (Bruyère 1952: Pl. III). These compositions help us to understand

the meaning of the lion newel posts: from a 3D sculpture, reduced to a 2D painting, the two lions on the sides being like the lions back to back. Between them is the rising cartouche, an exact equivalent of the sun disk, life and eternity bringing it to light endlessly, as stated with the *hh* amulet and the *rnp.t* signs just as the *nhh* signs and the *nh* of the mountain. An additional point is the representation of the falcon in the disk which, in Hatshepsut's temple, would correspond to the newel post of the second ramp, where the Horus statue is in 3D above a rising cobra, meant as Hatshepsut's royal names, an equivalent in 2D of the snake with the double crown. Except that on the newel post the falcon is shown flying, hovering above the royal cobra. It is protecting and helping the dead king (embodied in its cryptographic composition with the rising cobra) in its transformation into Horus, the final stage started in the Hathor Shrine and completed (after going up the second ramp and accessing to the third level of the temple) in the Amun sanctuary (Beaux 2012: 175–184).

This is precisely what the funerary texts mentioning *Rw.ty* refer to (de Wit 1951: 123–137; Leitz 2002: 654–656). The Dual-lion is a guardian of the royal *nms*-crown. With its help, the deceased gets wings and achieves his transformation into a divine falcon (Book of the Dead Chapter 78, Coffin Text spell 312). In that sense, *Rw.ty* in the newel post of the first ramp is indeed *jrw*, 'begetting', the king as Horus, with a growling echo (*rw*) between name and function, extending protection to the newborn-to-be pharaoh.

## CONCLUSION

The connection between the lion and the falcon is well known since the beginning of Egyptian history, as stated in the Pyramid Texts (Pyr. §1114a: *jr p.t jr p.t m-ḥ ntr.w pr Rw Hr*). The statue of Khephren in the Cairo Museum (CGC 14), with two lions guarding the seat of his throne and Horus extending wings at the back of his head, could be viewed in the same way as the newel posts of the two ramps, in respect to the destiny of the deceased king. The falcon belongs to the air, and the lion to the earth. The lion at the bottom of the first ramp echoes, as one ascends in the temple, the hovering falcon on the newel post of the second ramp. The flying falcon is combined with the cobra, its body engraved in stone, undulating along the top of the balustrade down from the upper level, its head and hood raised just in front of the bird, most probably in between the two raised arms of the *k3* sign, and topped with a sun disk. This cryptographic combination appears often in the temple and has been read as *M3<sup>c</sup>.t-k3-R<sup>c</sup>*, or *Wsr.t-k3w*, two titles of the king. Horus the god is there watching the rising of Horus the king.

As *Rw.ty*, the four seated lions of the first ramp are guarding the passage

from land to the intermediate level of the temple, “begetting” Horus the king, allowing him to rise in life like the sun in its daily resurrection trip, and this forever and ever. In turn, the falcon god of the second ramp hovers in protection, as the witness and helper in the passage to the third and highest level of the temple, where the king will achieve full resurrection in the Amun sanctuary and fly up to the sky as a falcon in its name as *M3<sup>c</sup>.t-k3-R<sup>c</sup>*. The cartouche raised by the *ḥn* on the first ramp finds an echo in the *šn* held by the falcon on the second ramp. They both tie and establish the king in his solar renewal destiny, helped in this task by the Dual-lions and Horus of Behedet, the lion and falcon from earth to heaven.

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