



THE SEAHORSE (*ḥꜣ.Ḳšš*) FROM THE SHAFT TOMB OF IUFAA: NEW EVIDENCE OF THE ELUSIVE CREATURE

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ABSTRACT: The present study focuses on the text and vignette concerning two hippopotamus-headed serpents reclining on rectangular bases, each of them labeled as *hayshesh* accompanied by a short text stating that he is “a god who makes the *ba* live in the realm of the dead”. The study of the text reveals that the creature is of a triple significance, in the underworld, in the marine environment (as the sea-horse would) and in the sky. Finally, the development line of the *hayshesh*-creatures from the seahorses of the 22nd Dynasty coffins to the horse, crocodile or hippopotamus-headed snakes of the Ptolemaic temples shall be drawn and discussed, with Iufaa’s attestation forming an important “missing link”.

KEY WORDS: Egypt; Saite-Persian Period; Abusir; Iufaa; seahorse; shaft tombs; funerary texts; mythological texts

Introduction




The north wall of the burial chamber of the shaft tomb of Iufaa at Abusir contains the first nine spells of Iufaa’s version of the purification ritual (see Landgráfová –

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A preliminary version of this study has appeared in Czech, in terms of a broader overview of Iufaa’s northern wall, Landgráfová – Míčková 2018:57-61.

Míčková 2019; Landgráfová – Olsen: *in preparation*) accompanied by three mythological texts related to the purification of the sun before the creation of the world and the text and vignette which is the main focus of this study concerning the *ḥ3jšš* creatures.

Iufaa's Seahorse

The vignette (see fig. 1), located on the top of the related text, depicts two hippopotamus-headed serpents reclining on rectangular bases. Each is labeled as  *ḥ3jšš {š}*, hayshesh (see Leitz 2002, V:21), and accompanied by a short text stating that he is  *ntr s'nh b3 m hrjt-ntr* "a god who makes the *ba* live in the realm of the dead". Both also have a short offering formula inscribed next to them,  *ḥtp-dj-nswt n ntr pn mnḥ mḥ w3d-wr* "an offering which the king gives to this splendid god, who swims (in) the sea," followed by a list of offerings in the form of a table which is repeated at the end of the main text, and is presented here only once.

The main text describes the serpents as follows:



⁽¹⁾ *ntr ʿ3 n zp-tp.j wn=f m kḏ pn nt. {t}j* ⁽²⁾ *m sš {gm} <dšr>. tj rn=f tp=f m rr.t m* ⁽³⁾ *ḥsbd jw=f mj djdj* ⁽⁴⁾ *m-ḥnw ʿ.t n.t mḥ 70 ḥr r3=s nb* ⁽⁵⁾ *r r3 n w3d-wr m ḥ3w-nb.wt ky* ⁽⁶⁾ *mjt.j {t}=f r r3 n w3d-wr m šn-rhy.t m kḏ* ⁽⁷⁾ *pn nt. {t}j m sš jw mw ḥr s3=sn* ⁽⁸⁾ *m ḥrr(.t) n.t mḥ.w jw ḥr:w* ⁽⁹⁾ *=sn m pʿ.w n.w ḥt jn r* ⁽¹⁰⁾ *ʿb jm=sn nms.t 4 n.t bj3 wʿb* ⁽¹¹⁾ *=f jm ʿnh b3=f m ḥrj.t-ntr j3w=f* ⁽¹²⁾ *ḥr-tp t3 ḥtp-dj-nswt jt r jn mw jpn m* ⁽¹³⁾ *nms.t 4 m m3t m jbr* ⁽¹⁴⁾ *t ḥnḏ.t p3.t nms.t 4 tmḥ.w mḥ m ḥknw* ⁽¹⁵⁾ *b3s 4 n.w š {n} <s> r mḥ m jbr* ⁽¹⁶⁾ *sntr k3 r3 d3.t rdj ḥr mw*

Great god of the First Occasion, who is in this form which is depicted (here). His name is Red.² His head is (like) the head of a female hippopotamus of lapis lazuli, his body is like hematite (and he is) inside a chamber which measures 70 cubits at each of

² The sign used actually has a different reading (*gm*), but since both the *gm* and the *dšr* signs depict wading, i.e. similar, birds, their confusion is understandable. Various, even dissimilar, bird signs are rather frequently confused in the Late Period (see e.g. Pries 2011). The fact that further in the text, the snake's body is described as being of hematite, i.e. red, and that a deity named Red/Bloody appears also in other texts (see Leitz 2002 VII: 574), makes reading probable.



Fig. 1 The two *hayshesh* serpents on the northern wall of the burial chamber of Iufaa.
Photo Martin Frouz.

its gates at the mouth of the sea in *Hau-nebut*.³ Another one like him is at the mouth of the sea in *Shen-rekhyt*,⁴ in this form which is depicted (here). The water over their backs is full of flax⁵ blossoms and their bottom sides are in the flames of fire. He who brings - in order to purify them (i.e. the serpents) - four *nemset*-vessels of heavenly ore,⁶ he shall be purified therewith, his *ba* will live in the realm of the dead, after he reaches an old age upon earth. An offering which the king gives: take as four four *nemset* vessels of granite together with *iber*-oil, bread, beer and *pat* bread, four *nemset* vessels of red ochre filled with *hekenu* oil, four *bas*-vessels of alabaster filled with *iber* oil, incense, bulls, geese and grey cranes. Placed (it) on water (for this god).⁷

³ The precise meaning of the term *Hau-nebut* is still under discussion in Egyptology, see more below. For the principal studies see Vercoutter 1947:127-158; Vercoutter 1949:107-209; Quack 2007:331-362 and the overview in Kockelmann – Rickert 2015:54-56.

⁴ Neither this term has been understood precisely, although it is mostly seen as a watery region in or next to the Nile Delta, see Rickert 2011:237-238.

⁵ See Landgráfová – Coppens – Janák – Míčková 2017:616 note 12, I owe this reading to F. Coppens.

⁶ The word *hꜳ* refers to meteoric iron or copper. It was connected with deities and kings and heaven was said to be made of it. In religious texts, it often appears for its heavenly associations, with the precise identification of the metal being secondary (Lalouette 1979: 333–353, see also Graefe 1971).

⁷ Following the offering formula in the accompanying table, which ends with *rdj hr mw n ntr pn* “Place (it) on water for this god.”

Similarly to many other serpentine deities in the tomb of Iufaa (see Landgráfová – Janák 2017:111-122), the two *hayshesh* creatures are labeled as “great god(s) of the First Occasion”, i.e. creator deities or at least those that are present at the very beginning of time.⁸ And just like all other snakes depicted on the northern wall of Iufaa’s burial chamber, they represent, besides divinities, also celestial bodies: red is the color of sunrise (Neugebauer – Parker 1960:49), the blue of flax blossoms, mentioned later in the text, could signify the blue sky. The same creatures, also seated on rectangles, but unfortunately with no labels, appear one in the northern and another in the southern part of the astronomical ceiling of the temple of Esna (Sauneron 1969:fig. 1; von Lieven 2000:16.1, 173).

The form of the snake, which is depicted in the vignette, is described in the accompanying text including the colors, with the hippopotamus head being of lapis lazuli, or dark blue, and the serpentine body of hematite, i.e. red. Both *haysheshs* are said to be located at the mouth of the sea, *w3d-wr* (for the term see recently Vandersleyen 2008 and Quack 2002:453-463 with further literature). One is said to be at *Hau-nebut* and the other at *Shen-rekhyt*. As the precise meaning of these terms is still debated in Egyptology (see Quack 2007:331-362), it is difficult to locate these areas with precision. Whatever the precise meaning of the term *Hau-nebut*, most researchers seem to agree that the term signifies a region in the northern sea (Quack 2007: 353-354), and at least since the 26th Dynasty, it referred to the Greeks and the Aegean region (Quack 2007: 354). The toponym *Shen-rekhyt* has not been so extensively treated. It sometimes accompanies the *Hau-nebut*, but most attempts to locate it situate it in the north as well, either as a lake in the Nile Delta (Rickert 2011:237) or as the Egyptian coastline of the Mediterranean sea (Wilson 1997:1016-1017). Both their serpentine form and the two northern locations associated with them connect the *haysheshs* with the Nile inundation (for snakes and inundation, see Kákosy 1981:255-260).

The rest of the text before the offering formula contains a promise for anyone who correctly purifies these serpents (a similar call for purifying sacred snakes appears several times on the western wall of Iufaa’s burial chamber, see Landgráfová – Janák 2017:11-122): he will be purified likewise, he will reach an old age upon earth and then his *ba* will live in the realm of the dead.

Serpentine beings labeled as *hayshesh* (or the variant *yashesh*) appear also on two sarcophagi of the Ptolemaic Period, that of Udjahor (Louvre D11, Buhl 1959:100-104) and Imeniu (Cairo JE 13/1/21/1, Buhl 1959:90-92, see fig. 2). In the former case, they are called southern and northern *yashesh*, which corresponds to their positions in the temple of Esna and explains their appearance in pairs in the tomb of Iufaa and elsewhere (see below).

On Udjahor’s sarcophagus, a snake with four coils standing on its tail is represented in front of both “boxes” with the reclining *yashesh* creatures (Miatello 2016:35 and fig. 24). The snake in front of the northern (right-hand side of the mummy) *yashesh* is accompanied by the following short inscription: *dd-mdw jn jm.j-nsr.t ntr-ꜣ3 m dw3.t [shd] hr njm.jwj{k}<g>r.t* “Recitation by the one who is in the flame, great god in the Netherworld,

⁸ The term *zp-tpj* is not attested in the Pyramid Texts, and even in the Coffin Texts (CT 640; deBuck 1956: 261) it appears only indirectly, in the parallel chapter of the later Book of the Dead (BD 50B; Quirke 2013: 130). It refers to the time when the creator god first appeared from the primeval chaos (Bickel 1994: 56–59). The gods of the *zp-tpj* are primeval being carrying within them the potential of all creation and of the future world(order).



Fig. 2 The northern *hayshesh* and Ibat on the left side of the sarcophagus of Imeniu, Cairo JE 13/1/21/1. Photo Petr Košárek.



[who illuminates] the face(s) of those who are in the Silent Realm”.⁹ A short inscription over the *yashesh* reads *dd-mdw jn j3šš mh.tj*, “Recitation by the northern *yashesh*,” and the text filling the four short columns on his base, *ntr s'nh b3 m hr:jt-ntr dj s'nh b3 n wsjr hm-ntr wd3-hr:w ms.w hr:t-hpš=s* (reading of the name following Thomas 2013:225) *m3(.t)-hrw* “The god who makes the *ba* live in the realm of the dead, who makes live the *ba* of the Osiris of the priest Udjahor, whom Heretkhepeshes, justified, bore.”

The snake in front of the southern *yashesh* (on the left-hand side of the mummy) is accompanied by the following text: *dd-mdw jn jn.j-ε=f ntr-ε3 m hr:jt-ntr rh rn n psd* (𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏) “Recitation by The one who brings his arm (the first or the last of the judges of the afterlife judgment, see Leitz 2002 I: 371-372), great god in the Realm of the Dead, who knows the name of the Shining One”. A short text over the *yashesh* reads *dd-mdw jn j3šš šmε.{t}j*, “Recitation by the southern *yashesh*,” and the four columns on his rectangular base correspond almost exactly to that under the northern snake.

On the sarcophagus of Imeniu, the *hayshesh* snakes are represented in similar scenes, but instead of serpents, the goddesses Ibat (Leitz 2002 I: 212) and Negayt (Leitz 2002 V: 365) are represented in front of them, two rather rarely attested deities connected with mourning the deceased. Between them and the goddesses, the snakes are described as *ntr s'nh šwj.wt šhnw b3 r h3.t m hr:t-ntr*, “the god who makes the shadows live and unites the *ba* with the dead body in the Realm of the Dead” in case of the northern one (on the left-hand side of the mummy) and “the god who makes the *ba* live in the Realm of the

⁹ As such, he resembles the snake called *njs jm.jw nbj=sn* of Iufaa’s western wall and p. Jumilhac XII,9, who is said to make light for those who are in the Netherworld (see Landgráfová – Janák 2017: 114-115 and Vandier [1965]:139, 176 and pl. 8).

Dead, of mysterious forms in the Realm of Silence” in case of the southern (right-hand side) one (Kákósy 1987:7). The northern *hayshesh* is labeled as *ḥꜣyšš mh.tj*, whereas the southern one just *ḥꜣyšš* (Kákósy 1987:7-8; Miatello 2016:37). The texts on their bases are phrased as speeches of the northern and southern *hayshesh* respectively, addressing the deceased. The northern one says *s^cnḥ.n(=j) šw.t=k shn(=j) bꜣ=k m ḥꜣ.t=k m hr:t-ntr*, “I made your shadow live, I united your *ba* with your body in the realm of the dead,” the southern one *s^cnḥ.n(=j) bꜣ=k m hr:t-ntr dsr(.t) s^cḥ=k m spꜣ.t jgr.t*, “I made your *ba* live in the sacred Realm of the Dead, your mummy in the Realm of Silence” (Kákósy 1987:7-9).

There is no adjective specifying the geographical location of the *haysheshs* of Iufaa, but given the probable locations of the watery regions connected with them, the “northern” *hayshesh* creatures of Udjahor and Imeniu appear to correspond to the *hayshesh* at the *Hau-nebu* of Iufaa, and Iufaa’s *hayshesh* of *Shen-rekhyt* corresponds to the “southern” *hayshesh*. These three pairs of sea-serpents share several other features. The most important of these is a connection with the life of the *ba* of the deceased in the Realm of the Dead, identically described with all of them. On the sarcophagus of Udjahor, the northern *yashesh* is called the Shining One (*psd*) with a wading bird classifier. It is unfortunately difficult to determine precisely whether the bird represented is a ( *gm* or  *dšr*), but the connection of the word for “shine” with a classifier representing a color is not unknown and in this case, it would indicate that the shine of the creature is red, thus connecting it with Iufaa’s *hayshesh*, which is labeled as *dšr.tj*, “Red”. Only Iufaa’s text states that the serpents swim in the sea, here and on both sarcophagi they are concurrently located in the Realm of the Dead (*hr:jt-ntr*).

In an article dedicated to a detailed publication of the coffin of Padiamun in the Liverpool museum, Luca Miatello collected thirteen occurrences of the hippocampus or sea-horse in ancient Egyptian iconography, dated between the 22nd Dynasty and the Ptolemaic Period (Miatello 2016:31-32). Iufaa’s example represents the fourteenth known piece of evidence for these creatures, and it also includes by far the longest accompanying text. Moreover, it dates to the 26th to 27th Dynasty, a period which is so under-represented among the cases known so far, that it led John Taylor to believe that the hippocampus was completely absent from the Egyptian repertoire at this time and thus that the older representations of sea-horses with little or no text from the 22nd to 25th Dynasty are completely unrelated to the *hayshesh*/*yashesh* sea-serpents of the Ptolemaic period (Taylor 2007:416). To see whether this can be upheld with the new evidence from Iufaa’s burial chamber, a short overview of the older group of sea-horses is in place.

Of the three oldest examples, dated to the 22nd Dynasty, that of Horkhebi in a private collection in Wales is only available in a description: “a hippocampus, with undulating serpent body, can be seen distinctly on each side below the levels of the shoulders” on the inner side of the coffin case (Taylor 2007:410). In the case of the coffin of Djedkhonsuiufankh (Paris Louvre N 2585), two hippocampi flank the body of the goddess Nut represented on the bottom of the coffin case. They have distinct horse heads and serpentine bodies with a single coil forming a “belly” and thus resembling real hippocampi (Taylor 2007:408, fig. 1). The third 22nd dynasty example is that of the interior of the coffin of Perenbast (Manchester Museum 5053), which is once again a horse-headed creature with an undulating serpentine body, rather similar in style to those of Horkhebi and Djedkhonsuiufankh (Taylor 2007:409-410).

Only slightly later, of the 23rd to 24th Dynasty date, is the coffin of Nakhtkhonsuiru Ameneminet (Louvre E 5534; Kákósy 1987:pl. 1), where the hippocampi are represented

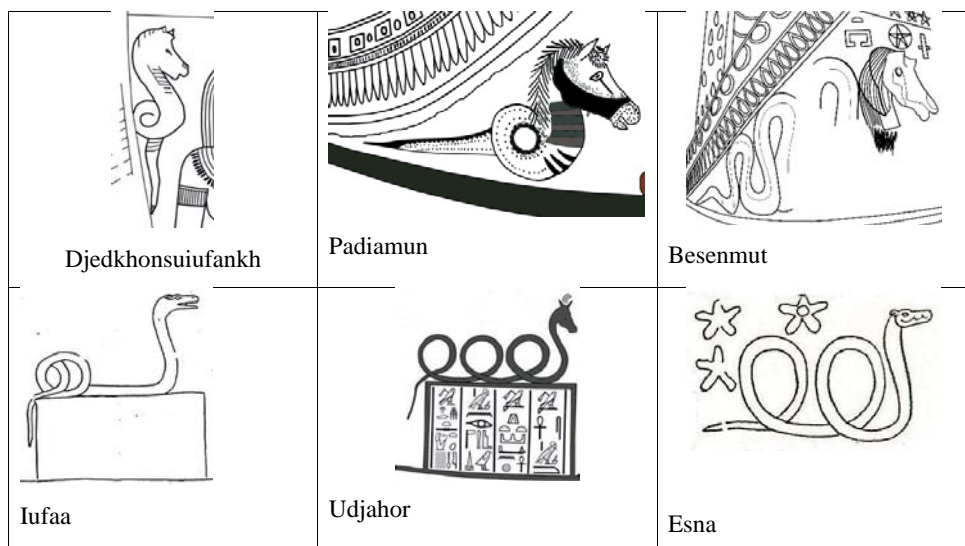


Fig. 3 The development from seahorse to (sea)snake. A selection of 22nd to 23rd Dynasty hippocampi. Drawing Jolana Malátková.

on the exterior of the bottom and on the shoulders flanking the hair. With their horse heads and serpentine bodies in upright position, they strongly resemble the 22nd Dynasty hippocampi, the only difference being the slight movement of the coil of the body backwards, so that they look more like snakes with an erect front than like real hippocampi with a belly-like coil.

The next step is represented by 25th Dynasty coffins. The coffin of Nehemsumontu (Boulogne-sur-Mer 1B; Miatello 2016:34, fig. 21; for the 25th Dynasty dating see Taylor 2007:411-412) contains two hippocampi depicted underneath the collar. They have the same horse's head and serpentine body as in the case of Nakhtkhonsuiri Ameneminet, but due to their position in the triangular space underneath the collar, they are tilted to the front from the originally upright position to better fit the available space (see fig. 3 below). On the coffin of Padiamun (World Museum Liverpool 1953.72; Miatello 2016:17, fig. 5), the two hippocampi are represented in the same area under the collar and in the same forward-tilted form, but a goddess is represented seated in mourning in front of each of them, Isis on the left-hand side of the mummy and Nephthys on the right-hand side. On the last of the 25th Dynasty coffins, that of Besenmut (Paris Louvre E10374; Miatello 2016:34, fig. 22), the hippocampi are again represented underneath the collar, but here their appearance diverges even more from that of a real sea-horse: the horse's heads are attached to snake's bodies with three coils instead of the single one that reflected the shape of the body of a hippocampus. In this way, they completely fill the available triangular space. They also bear a label: over each of them, *jm.j dw3.t* "One who is in the Netherworld" is inscribed. Further above, another epithet is inscribed, *jnj 3*, "The one who closes the door" (Miatello 2016:35-36).

Besides Iufaa, two of the examples collected by Miatello date to the Late Period (with no specific dating, Miatello 2016:32). The coffin Liverpool Garstang Museum SACE E.576 is unpublished, but the cartonnage Liverpool Garstang Museum SACE

E.2002 shows a snake with a horse's head and a single coil, placed horizontally, snake-like, resembling those of Nehemsumontu and Padiamun (Miatello 2016:35, fig. 23).

Conclusion

The two Ptolemaic examples have been discussed in detail above, as they resemble Iufaa's case most closely. The overview of the – admittedly few – representations of horse / hippopotamus / mythological-creature headed serpents shows that not only there is a clear connection between the early and late examples, but the representations themselves show a clear chronological development, with the early examples strongly resembling real hippocampi and the later ones, due to spatial constrictions and probably unfamiliarity of some of the artists with the animal, turning into serpent-like mythological creatures (see fig. 3). With the bodies thus changed into those of snakes, it is no wonder that the head lost its horse-like appearance and took on that of a hippopotamus (Iufaa) or a mythological being (Imeniu and Udjahor).

Besides this development in form, connections between the earlier and later groups can be also seen in the accompanying illustrations and inscriptions. There can be little doubt that the mourning goddesses Ibat and Negayt of Imeniu reflect the same underlying idea as the mourning Isis and Nephthys of Padiamun. It is also highly likely that the label *jnj-^c* that appears close to the hippocampus of Besenmut refers to the same being as the *jnj-^c=f* of Udjahor, even though no snake can be seen in the former case. Another parallel is the location: whereas the sea-serpents of the late group are said to be in the Realm of the Dead (*hr:jt-ntr*) and District of Silence (*sp³.t jgr:t*), Besenmut's hippocampus of the earlier group is labeled as *jm.j dw³.t*, One who is in the Netherworld. Moreover, further evidence can be seen in the text of Iufaa, where the *hayshesh*, while having lost all resemblance to hippocampi, are said to "swim in the sea" and are located in regions of the Mediterranean Sea, as real hippocampi would be (Thomas 2013:218). In the context of the other occurrences of the Egyptian hippocampi, Iufaa's case thus shows that there is a direct link between the creatures of the 22nd Dynasty and those of the Ptolemaic period, and represents an important step in their development.

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