

CHAPTER II

SIGNIFICANCE OF KHEPRI IN EGYPTIAN ART

INTRODUCTION

Several Egyptian art objects, paintings and sculptures were examined during the course of this study to establish the appearance of Khepri in art. It was found that he was often depicted in art. The previous chapter established his main religious functions. This chapter will try to determine Khepri's significance in art.

Artistically there is a direct correlation between his religious roles and the way he is depicted. His religious significance in art will therefore be discussed according to these roles:- As creator and sun-god, as protector, as god of resurrection and as symbol of the united Egypt.

KHEPRI AS CREATOR

Khepri became the symbol of creation because of the way the Egyptians interpreted the natural habits of the beetle.

As creator-god Khepri created himself (Brunner-Traut, 1965:572) as he rose from the Netherworld as the early morning

sun. He is associated with Ra and in art he is often depicted in combination with Ra (Bonnet, 1952:720), or representing Ra. When in combination with Ra, a beetle with the head of a ram, pushing a sun-disc in front of him, is depicted. This relation with the sun led to his importance as the god of recreation (the creator of new life). This way of depicting illustrated Khepri as god of creation and resurrection. It can be found in examples such as coffin decorations, jewelry and vignettes illustrating religious literature.

KHEPRI AS PROTECTOR

Being a god of resurrection, it was important for Khepri to protect the heart (Hamlyn, 1965:119). According to the the Egyptians an amulet was a sure protector of the heart if it was made of a green stone to symbolize new life (Budge, 1988:80 ff.). The heart amulet had to be in the shape of a scarab which bore the significance of resurrection. The green scarab amulet had to be inscribed with Spell 30B of the Book of The Dead (Faulkner, 1989:27). These three aspects together namely: Khepri, the colour green and Spell 30B had a strong protective value. The scarab heart amulet became the most important amulet among the mummy wrappings (Brunner-Traut, 1965:570f.).

In mummy coverings, whether covering only the face (masks) or the whole body, Khepri also had a protective quality. Here he is depicted in either green, blue or black. Khepri was accompanied by the four sons of Horus, who also played protective

roles, protecting the different organs of the human body (Petrie, 1978:3).

Ram-headed scarabs with falcon wings, together with other deities, often decorated coffins. Together they protected the Ba, or psychic force of the deceased (Saleh, 1987:237). These images and symbols decorating the lids of coffins may be seen as an abridged form of the wall representations in tombs. These coffin scenes also replaced the repertoire of funerary equipment which was also included in earlier burials (Saleh, 1987:237).

The protective functions of Khepri is also apparent in jewelry. Jewelry incorporating Khepri had a protective quality for the living and for the dead. It can be seen in the number of bracelets found while unwrapping the mummy of Tutankhamen. These bracelets show traces of use during life.

In sculpture Khepri is also seen protecting the living and the dead. He even protected architectural structures. Examples can vary from miniature temple deposits to colossal scarabs placed on plinths on the temple premises.

KHEPRI AS GOD OF RESURRECTION

Khepri ensured new life in the Netherworld. Therefore he is seen as a creator of new life. (Brunner-Traut, 1965:572).

As creator of new life he is included in jewelry as well as painting and relief. He is often depicted seated in the celestial barque, as explained and illustrated in Spell 17 of the

Book of the Dead:-

" O Khepri in the midst of your Sacred Bark, primeval one whose body is eternity, save me from those who are in charge of those who are to be examined, to whom the Lord of All has given power to guard against his enemies.." (Faulkner, 1989: 49). Khepri in the midst of his barque is Ra himself (Faulkner, 1989:49).

Khepri is placed in the presence of other deities connected with the life hereafter, e.g. Osiris, and Anubis, gods of the dead and mummification (Casson,1982:148f.). The inclusion of the figure of Khepri, as god of resurrection, together with these gods, ensured a safe entrance into the Netherworld.

KHEPRI AS SYMBOL OF UPPER AND LOWER EGYPT

The adding of falcon wings to the scarab beetle, e.g. the Steatite Scarab from Balyana [Fig. 58 c], syncretizes Khepri and the falcon-god Horus. The sun-disc with wings was a popular symbol. In Egypt it had been in use since the Vth. Dynasty. The two wings became the symbol of the uniting of Upper and Lower Egypt into one country. The falcon-god, Horus, was depicted as sun-disc with two wings, representing Upper and Lower Egypt. This was combined with the symbol of the scarab. With the result that a new symbol was used - that of a scarab with the wings of Horus " pj" (Breasted, 1944:69f.), representing the unity of Upper and Lower Egypt (Brunner-Traut, 1965:570).

CONCLUSION

The religious significance of Khepri is clearly portrayed in

Egyptian art. Firstly he is identified and depicted as creator who created himself. Secondly, as heart scarab, he is a protector of the heart. When depicted together with other gods, e.g. Ra and the sons of Horus, he also protects the Ba and the intestines of the deceased. For the living he bears the significance of goodwill, e.g. in jewelry and sculpture. Thirdly he is the god of resurrection depicted as scarab pushing the sun-disc. Fourthly, when portrayed with the falcon wings, he became the symbol of the unity of Upper and Lower Egypt.