The Benevolent Demon $s3k-hw$

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**ARTICLE INFO**

<table>
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<th>Keywords: $s3k-hw$; demon, serpent; Edfu.</th>
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$s3k-hw$ was one of the benevolent demons of ancient Egypt. He appeared during the Late and Graeco-Roman periods at the temples of Edfu, Dendera and Deir al-Madina. It was difficult to classify those creatures as humans, animals or deities. The appearance of them was associated with their characteristics and roles. $s3k-hw$ had a protective role which can be noticed within the various texts that mentioned his name. His iconography was either a serpent-headed or a falcon-headed demon holding knives with his hands. As the ancient Egyptians -from the beginning of the history- considered the serpent as a zoological symbol to protect them from evil and oriented it against their enemies. It was also considered a sacred power. Serpents were associated with the good, as it represented life and creation. He was a male demon as most of the demons in ancient Egypt. As female demons were rarely depicted. The research aims to be a descriptive study of benevolent demon $s3k-hw$; his iconography, his role and the different figures of his name according to the texts.

**ABSTRACT**

*Introduction*

The Book of the Dead gave a strong proof that the kingdom of the Dead in ancient Egypt was inhabited by metaphysical creatures. Neither they were exactly related to the class of gods, nor they were humans. They were regarded to be in a rank between humans and deities. The Book of the Dead did not show only individual demons that appeared in separated spells but also a type of demons that had collective names. This type on the contrary of individual demons, works on earth along with the Netherworld. There is no definition of the term demons in ancient Egypt. The were referred to as “Minor Divinties”. Demons were not identified as a group. Instead of this, the ancient Egyptians gave particular names and physical features to its members. The names and iconographies given to them, gave definition about their roles more than about who they are. Those demons could be benevolent or malevolent. There were two main species of demons; guardians and wanderers. The first type is related to a particular site on earth or beyond it. They guard their site from any harm. On the other hand, the second type of demons travel amidst the world and beyond. They acted as messengers for the gods or of their own free will. Many of the “wanderers” were directed by main deities like $R^e$ and $wstir$. On the other side, the wanderers sometimes caused diseases. The demon $s3K$, for example, was the cause of headache. Nightmares $rs wt$ $dwt$ were caused by wandering demons. The guardian demons have

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an offensive nature because of their desire to protect their home. This terrifying nature made it possible for them to protect the sacred places. Their role, were the temples’ demons during the Late and Graeco-Roman periods. Demons were not regarded as gods in ancient Egypt until the Late and Greaco-Roman periods. They were considered as deities in their prerogative and cults. Although many demons were not related to temples and priests, but they had a great respect and frightening force.

Demons could appear as a single individual but they also appeared as pairs, triple or as a group. Most of the major gods, had groups of demons at their command. They used them against both humans and other deities. Because of the existence of the demons in groups, the term which was often used for demons was plural such as: htmjw (ruiners), wpwtjw (messengers), hstjw (ghosts of night) who were sent as death by irate deities such as shmt and bsstt, shw (souls), wjw (thieves), wrjt (monsters), mw (the damned), hjw (enemies), nhw (the strong), shrjw (the exiled), sśrw (the defeated) and šmsjw (the wandering souls). The roaming dead mwt and the disembodied souls shh souls different from demons as they were the deceased’s appearance in the netherworld. They gained their miraculous nature after conversion created by ritual and death. Mwt were always malevolent, while shh could be malevolent or benevolent. Demons were often depicted as a mumified body with an animal head and holding weapons like knives with their hands. They also could be depicted in totally zoomorphically form. The animals that were involved in the combine bodies of demons were reptiles such as crocodiles, snakes. Other animals were also included such as jackals, dogs, hares, bulls, rams, baboons and hippopotamus. Scorpions, insects and birds such as falcons and vultures were also among the iconography of demons.

The figures of sšk-h⁻w’s name

The name of sšk-h⁻w means the one with the jointed body, the one who gathers the body of Osiris and the one who gathers the members (in the myth of Osiris). The determinative of his name differs in each figure as they are an upright mummy, an upright serpent, a serpent with four body folds relating to the four cardinal points of the world and a seated god.

Doc.1. The Mnevis Tomb of Ramesses VII

In the Mnevis chapel of king Ramesses VII on south wall, at the bottom, there is a figure of a lion-headed god standing and holding a knife. Above him, there is a vertical inscription. The line mentioning sšk-h⁻w reads:

hsp.t₁³ hst²₀ m hₜ sšk-h⁻w n Ṝt

Hiding the corpse in the body of sšk-h⁻w for eternity.

Comment: the corpse here in this inscription referred to the corpse of god Osiris.
Doc.2. Sarcophagus of $p3-nh\text{"m}-3st$ from Saqqara
This sarcophagus (Fig.1) is an excellent piece of work of the anthropoid sarcophagi dating to the Late period. Now, it is at a museum in Vienna. It is distinctive with its large face and abundance of inscriptions that cover all over its surface. It is made of basalt, however, the inscriptions and figures are engraved with great precision. It measures 47.5 cm high and 66.05 cm wide. $p3-nh\text{"m}-3st$ wears a wig and broad collar. The backside of the wig is joint with the dorsal pillar. Down the broad collar, there is a pectoral which has a winged scarab surrounded by the goddesses Isis and Nephthys holding the $w3d$ scepter$^{21}$. Below, there is a cartouch having the name of Osiris as $\text{wnn-nfrw}^{22}$. The cartouch is surrounded by two seated figures of Osiris. The plentiful of texts on the sarcophagus’s body are from the Books of the Netherland. A few texts are from the Book of the Dead.

There is a deficient funerary text at the back of the lower part of the sarcophagus. The text addresses the deities that protect the sarcophagus$^{23}$. The line of $s3k-h^r\text{"w}$ reads:

$s3k-h^r\text{"w}$ (Wsr) $h^r \text{ snt.j-nfr}^{25} m \text{ dw3.s nfrw.k}$

$s3k-h^r\text{"w}$ (Osiris) who assists the two divine sisters (Isis and Nephthys) by praising your beauty.

Doc.3. Edfu Temple, chamber of Soker, south wall
This scene (Fig.2) represents $s3k-h^r\text{"w}$ standing in a long procession of demons. He is depicted as a falcon-headed human standing and holding two knives in his both hands. He wears the nemes and a short loincloth with a bull’s tail. There is an inscription of his name $\text{A}^\wedge \text{26}$.

Doc.4. Edfu Temple, mysterious corridor, the base of the right-side of the doorway
This slightly mutilated scene (Fig.3) of adoration represents the king, whose cartouches are empty, standing wearing the White Crown and making offering before four serpent-headed genies, who protect the mysterious corridor and its chambers. $s3k-h^r\text{"w}$ is depicted as a serpent-headed human, whose face is destroyed, standing and wearing the Double-Feather Crown and a short loincloth. He holds a knife with his left hand while his right hand is destroyed$^{27}$.

The text of $s3k-h^r\text{"w}$ reads:

$s3k-h^r\text{"w} ntr ^\circ \text{ hrt-iib} bhd.t^{28}$

$s3k-h^r\text{"w}$, the Great God who presides over Edfu.

Doc.5. Edfu Temple , the offering hall, the frame of the door, north wall
The base is surmounted by a band which has a representation of four crawling snakes. On the left side of the band, the name of the deity is depicted (Fig.4) $\text{29}$. 

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Doc.6. Edfu Temple, second Hypostyle hall, the gate, south wall

The name of sšk-hꜣꜰw appeared in this text on the gate of the second hypostyle hall of Edfu temple. The text reads sšk-hꜣꜰw n hꜣꜰw n ntr ḫꜣꜰw which means Sak-hcfw of the body of the serpent god.

Doc.7. Edfu Temple, exterior of the Naos, the area of the north wall, west section

This scene (Fig.5) depicts the king standing, wearing the Red Crown and making a food offering of ḫps before the two good genie of Edfu sšk-hꜣꜰw and ḫry-dndn, whose name means ‘the one who belongs to anger’. Both of them are shown sitting on a low-backed throne. sšk-hꜣꜰw is the deity sitting at the front. He is depicted as a human with a serpent head. He wears a nemes and a fitting loincloth and holds the ḫ symbol with his right hand and the ḫs scepter with his left hand.

The text of sšk-hꜣꜰw reads:

\[ dd \ mdw \ in \ sšk-hꜣꜰw \ n \ ntr \ ḫ \ ᴡ \ ḫꜣꜰw \ τ \ s \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \
them. $ssk-h^5w$ is the third one from the right. He is sitting on a low-backed throne and holding the $wss$ scepter with his left hand and the $\mathcal{c}nh$ symbol with his right hand. He wears the nemes and a broad collar. Beside his head, there is an inscription of his name $43$.

**Doc.10. Edfu Temple, enclosure wall, outer face**

This scene (Fig.8) depicts $ssk-h^5w$ and $\mathcal{h}w-hr^{44}$ sitting on the thrones before the king and the queen. They are standing and offering a tray of food to the serpent deities. There are two representations of the vulture $N\mathcal{h}bt$ hovering over the king and the queen’s heads. The throne of $\mathcal{h}w-hr$ has a crocodile skin on its base. $ssk-h^5w$ is the demon at the front. He is represented as serpent-headed human, sitting on a low-backed throne and holding the $\mathcal{c}nh$ symbol with his right hand and the $wss$ scepter with his left hand. He wears the *nemes* and a broad collar$^{45}$.

**The text of $ssk-h^5w$ reads:**

$d\bar{d} m\bar{d} w i n \, ssk-h^5w \, ntr \, \mathcal{c}3 \, \mathfrak{hnt \, \mathfrak{bd}t} \, w\ddot{d}d^{46} \, nfr \, m \, s \, wnp^{47}$

Recitation by $ssk-h^5w$, the Great god, in Edfu, the good serpent in the place where Seth was stabbed=Edfu$^{48}$.

**Doc.11. Dendera Temple, eastern osiride chapels, no.2, 2\textsuperscript{nd} register, north-east side**

This scene depicts (Fig.9) depicts $ssk-h^5w$ among other demons. He is the second one from the right. He is shown standing as a falcon-headed human. He wears the *nemes*, a broad collar and a short loincloth. He holds a knife with his right hand and the $\mathcal{c}nh$ symbol with his left hand$^{49}$.

**The text of $ssk-h^5w$ reads**$^{50}$:

$dmd \, ssk \, h^5.f, \, dsr \, m \, t\mathfrak{3}-\mathfrak{c}nh; \, \mathfrak{slhn},.n.i \, Pr-M\mathfrak{c}g\mathfrak{3}, \, sk.n.i \, hnw.f \, nbw \, m \, rmt \, snb.n.i \, \mathfrak{t}\mathfrak{w} \, nw \, pfy-\mathfrak{wh}\mathfrak{-sp}$

$ir.n.i \, gs \, dpt \, n \, \mathfrak{w}\mathfrak{-m}-\mathfrak{snq}\mathfrak{t} \, m \, \mathfrak{\ch.f} \, d(\mathfrak{t}) \, \mathfrak{\ch}^5w \, n \, [\ldots.\ldots.] \, h\mathfrak{fytw.f} \, hsb.(i) \, [\ldots.] \, n \, st\mathfrak{s} \, r \, [\ldots.]^{51}$

The one who unites, $ssk-h^5w$, the sacred in the land of life: I devastate the shrine of crocodile Mcga, I destroy all his followers among people. I bring down the band of the one who misses his shot. I make the protection of the unique in the acacia=Osiris to give a duration of life to [\ldots.] his enemies, I kill [\ldots.] of Seth by [\ldots].
Doc.12. Dendera Temple, eastern osiride chapels, no.2, 3rd register, east side
This scene (Fig.10) depicts ss{k-h}w in a procession of demons. He is the second one from the left. In front of each demon, there is a chapel. ss{k-h}w is represented as a falcon-headed human standing and holding a knife in each hand. He wears the nemes, a broad collar and a short fitting loincloth.52

The text of ss{k-h}w reads53:

\[
\text{dd mdw in ss{k-h}-ntr, ntr } \dd \text{ hnt wts-t-hr, irj st.f m st-rdi.(w)-stś-m-tst, rs r' nb ḥr shr(y) sby: Pr.n.i m st-[w]n[p], } \dd \text{ k.n.i st-rdi.(w)-stś-m-tst, wn[p.n.i sby n iwny, llnb.tw ḥṣb, sm3.s hrw ḥb.}
\]

Recitation by ss{k-h}w (the one who collects the divine relics), the Great god in Apollonopolis Magna, who is on his throne in the place-where-Seth-is-put-to-death=Dendera, who watches everyday to repel the enemies, I leave the place of the piercing, I enter the place-where-Seth-is-put-to-death=Dendera, I pierce the enemy of the Heliopolitan, the hippopotamus is massacred to kill, it is a day of festival.

Doc.13. Deir al-Medina Temple, the north chapel, the gate, exterior façade (east), south side, 3rd register
This scene (Fig.11) is surrounded by a wḥs scepter on each side, acting as a frame for the scenes. It represents ss{k-h}w and the demon sbk 𓊷, or skb 𓊶- whose name means the Wise- squatting on the ground. sbk is the first demon and behind him sitting ss{k-h}w. He is shown as a falcon-headed demon who grasps a knife with his two hands and raising it in front of his face. He wears the nemes and bracelets around his wrists. His body is wrapped in a fitting gown. The other demon is depicted as a ram-headed human with two horns upon his nemes. The strange thing about ss{k-h}w’s name, that it is written as 𓊷 sbk for the first time54.

Conclusion
- ss{k-h}w was one of the benevolent demons that was mentioned in the texts and representations of the temples of Edfu, Dendera and Deir al-Madina during the Late and Graeco-Roman periods (LGG VI). However, there is a document in the research (doc.1) attested that ss{k-h}w appeared during the New kingdom in the Mnevis tomb of Ramesses VII (Daressy, ASAE 18).
- The determinitives of ss{k-h}w name were which means ss{k} (collect or gather together), 𓊶 upright mummy, 𓊷 upright serpent, a serpent with four body folds relating to the four cardinal points of the world and 𓊸 a seated falcon-headed demon holding a knife.
- Although there is no term in the ancient Egyptian language that marks apparent distinction between gods and demons, but it is attested that the demons’ names did
not have the determinitive of the god. At Edfu temple sṣk-ḥ̀w’s name appeared with the determinitive of a god ⲡⲟ ⲥⲧ Ⲣⲧ (Edfu I, 200).

- The name of sṣk-ḥ̀w is written in completely different figure in the temple of Deir al-Madina (doc.13). It is written as 𓋲𓋴𓋵𓋲 𓋯 ⲙ纪检监察, just like the name of the demon beside him in the scene who called 𓋲𓋴𓋵𓋲 𓋯 Ⲝ纪检监察.

- sṣk-ḥ̀w was depicted as a serpent-headed (doc.4, 7, 8, 9, 10) or a falcon-headed demon (doc.3, 11, 12, 13). He appeared in one scene as a crawling snake (doc.5). He holds knives in most of his scenes, while holding the wsḥ scepter in other scenes. He wears the nemes headdress in almost all of his representation except one scene (doc.4) as he appeared wearing the Double-Feather Crown. In nearly all the scenes, he is depicted wearing a short loincloth.

- His titles were: sṣk-ḥ̀w nṯr ⲡ ⲧ ⲩ ⲫ, ḫrj-in bḥd.t, ḫt wtst-hr, ḫḏ pḥṭj m ḫḥbw.f, wḏḏ nṯr m st wnp, ḏnd sṣk ḫ.f, ḗṣr m t3-snh$j, rs r̀ nb ḫr sḥr(y) sby and wnp.n.i sby n ḫwny.

- The roles of sṣk-ḥ̀w as mentioned in the texts of Edfu, Dendera were gathering together the body of Osiris, hiding the corpse of Osiris in his body (doc.1), assisting the two sister goddesses Isis and Nephthys (doc.2), and protecting the unique in the acacia=Osiris (doc.11).

- From the New kingdom onwards, demons were regarded as deities in their excellence and cult. This is attested in many scenes of sṣk-ḥ̀w, as he was shown sitting on a low-backed throne and receiving offerings from the kings (doc.7, 8, 9, 10) at Edfu temple.

**Fig.1.** Sarcophagus of priest ḫ3-nhm-īst from Saqqara

Ernest, Bergmann, “Der Sarkophag des Panehemisis” in *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, vol 1, Wien (1883), Taf.I
Fig. 2. *ssek-hr*w at a procession of demons at Edfu

Fig. 3. *ssek-hr*w standing as serpent-headed demon at Edfu temple

Fig. 4. *ssek-hr*w as a crawling serpent at the offering hall at Edfu temple

Fig. 5. *ssek-hr*w and *Irty-dndn* at Edfu Temple
Fig. 6. ssk-hꜣw and ḫty-dnḏn at Edfu Temple

Fig. 7 ssk-hꜣw and the four demons at Edfu Temple

Fig. 8 ssk-hꜣw and ḫwꜥ-hr at Edfu Temple

Fig. 9 ssk-hꜣw as a falcon-headed demon at Dendera Temple
Fig. 10. $s\kappa h\check{r}w$ as a falcon-headed demon

Fig. 11. $s\kappa h\check{r}w$ as a falcon-headed demon at Deir al-Medina Temple

2. LÄ I, 980.
5. LGG VI, 444, 445.
7. LÄ I, 981, 982.
9. LÄ I, 980.
11. LGG VI, 159.
13. LGG VI,159.

- Mnevis is the Greek name that given to the divine bull of īwnw. The ancient Egyptian called it mr-wr. His name appeared in the Coffin Text as wn-wr. He was a distinct deity related to the cult of the sun god. He was mentioned in the Pyramid Texts as ‘the bull of Heliopolis’. He was considered a manifestation of the composite god Re-Atum. He was depicted with a complete black coat and wearing a sun disk and an uraeus between his horns; Richard H. Wilkinson, The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt, London (2003),p.174, 175; LGG III, 328; WB II, 106.


- WB III, 31.

- WB III, 359.


- LGG II, 375; WB I, 311.


- WB IV, 151; LGG VI, 159.


- WB III, 268.

- LGG I, 413.

- Chassinat, E, Le Temple d’Edfu, X, Le Caire (1928) re-editition (2009), pl.LXXXVIII


- WPL, p.LII.

- WB I, 319.

- WB I, 384.

- Chassinat, E, Le Temple d’Edfu, X, Le Caire (1928) re-editition (2009), pl. LXXXIX


- WB I, 539.

- WB III, 350.


- LGG VI, 159.
46 - *wdd* is one of the four *ss-t3* creator serpents at Edfu; WPL, p.383; WB I, 270.
47 - LGG II, 268.
48 - WB I, 319.
56 - LGG VI, 256.
العفريت الخير ساك-حعو

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الملخص

العفريت الخير ساك-حعو يُعتبر واحد من العفاريت الخيرة في مصر القديمة. وقد ظهر خلال العصر المتأخر والعصران اليوناني والروماني في معابد ادفو، دندرة ودير المدينة. وقد كان من الصعب تصنيف تلك الكائنات على أنها بشر أو حيوانات أو آلهة. وكانت الهيئة التي تبدو عليها هذه الكائنات مميزة عن خصائصهم وأدوارهم. قد ظهر دور ساك-حعو في الحماية من خلال النصوص المختلفة التي ذكرت اسمه. وكان يصور أما في هيئة إدميه برأس ثعبان أو برأس صقر ماسكا السكاكين في يده. حيث كان المصري القديم منذ بداية التاريخ - يعتبر الثعبان كرمز حيواني لحمايتهم من الشر، وتوجيهه ضد أعدائهم. كما كان الثعبان يعتبر قوة مقدسة. لم تكن الثعابين مرتبطة فقط بالشر، بل أيضًا ارتبطت بالخير حيث كانت تمثل الحياة والخلق. كان ساك-حعو عفريت مذكر كغيره من العفاريت في مصر القديمة، حيث كانت العفاريت المؤنثة نادرة الظهور. ويهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة وصفية للعفريت الخير ساك-حعو: هيئة، دوره والأشكال المختلفة التي ظهر بها اسمه طبقاً للنصوص الخاصة به.

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