

## The Protective Role of Bes- image for Women and Children in Ancient Egypt

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### Abstract

Bes- image played several protective roles in ancient Egypt. He was a protector of women and children during and after childbirth as well as during sleep. He was also a god of warfare and death. In addition he was closely associated with sexuality, music, dance, and alcoholic beverages. Bes-images are found on many items: Bedroom furniture, toiletry items, amulets, jewelry, musical instruments, stelae, weapons, equipment, game pieces, as well as on reliefs, frescoes, ostraca and papyrus.

This study aims to highlight the role of Bes as a protector deity in general and explore the aspects of Bes-image protection role in particular for women and children. Historical and analytical methodology is used to achieve the aims of this paper.

The findings of this study reveal that the most significant aspects of the protection role of Bes image for women and children are mostly represented in the magic knives, Bes vessels, Bes figurines and Tattoos of Bes. They were mostly applied during critical periods of women and children particularly during childbirth.

### Introduction

Bes was an ancient Egyptian dwarf deity. He was a compound deity and demonic fighter. He was a god of war as well as a patron of childbirth. Bes was associated with sexuality, humour, music and dancing. He appeared in the Middle Kingdom and became very popular from the New Kingdom on, mainly as a protector of the household ( Hill, 2010).

Bes is characterized by his ghastly appearance: A mixture of animal and human features in a dwarfish proportion. In his most distinctive form he has short bent limbs, a lion mane and tail and a headdress of feathers. These elements may refer to his fusion nature. His magical, votive and ritual roles can be detected from different periods. (Dasen, 2013). The term Bes-image was used By J. Romano to emphasize that the Bes subject was a virtual form applied to a number of deities (Romano, 1989).

This study aims to highlight the role of Bes as a protector deity in general and explore in particular different aspects of his role as a protector for women and children. The aim of this study will be achieved by displaying Bes image depiction and function in general and focusing on his role as a protector of women and children. Then aspects of his protection for women and children will be specified and discussed. This study covers his role during the Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom and Late Periods. Historical and analytical methodology is used to achieve the aims of the study.

#### His name

The identity of Bes is complex; Bes seems to have been used as a common name for different dwarf deities with the same physical appearance (Dasen, 2016)

The earliest name is *Aha* ('the fighter',  'h3) which accompanies the Bes-image on two of the magic wands from the Middle Kingdom. The name

Bes (*bs*)  appears for the first time with the names Segeb (  *sgb*, Segeb), and Soped (  *spd*, Sopdu) during the New Kingdom. During the late Period, the names Hit or Heyet and Tettenu were associated with the Bes- image (Romano, 1989). The meaning of many of these names remains obscure, but the name *Aha*, "the fighter," appears to be related to the protective aspects of the Bes-image in its role as a fighter against wicked creatures and hostile power. The name Bes could possibly be related to two hieroglyphs: *bs* ("flame"), referring to Bes as a hypostasis of Re or *bz* ("to introduce, to be initiated") may refer to the masks apparently used in the cult of the god (Bruyère, 1939). Furthermore, his name may be derived from the Nubian word for cat ("besa"). It is equally likely that he was always seen as a dwarf with the strength and power of a cat ( Hill, 2010).

#### Depiction

Bes-image was commonly depicted as a leonine full faced bearded dwarf with his tongue sticking out, standing on bowed legs with his genitals prominent and often with a lion's tail. He had a plumed crown and a lion or panther skin. (Seawright, 2001).

The earliest representation of Bes- image dates back to the Middle Kingdom. He was represented on the magic wands (fig. 1) and on various other objects classified under the term of minor arts. He appeared as a lion-man with round ears and a tail hanging between his legs. He is usually standing full faced, holding a snake in either hand. Rarely the figure is female (Dasen, 2013). Bes-image in the New Kingdom is depicted with protruding tongue, jewellery, ostrich feather crown headdress, kilt and rarely wings. In addition to the snakes in

the hands of Middle Kingdom Bes-image, examples in the New Kingdom depict the image holding knives, weapons, scepters, lotus or papyrus stems and amulets. It is also during the New Kingdom that the image appears for the first time in the context of dancing and playing musical instruments such as the tambourine and double-flute (**Kaiser, 2003**).

In the Middle Kingdom Bes-image was often represented on magic knives, kohl jars, amulets, statuettes, scarabs, boxes, ostrakon, infant feeding cups (fig.2), archers' braces and masks. In the New Kingdom and Late Period Bes- images were mainly represented on amulets, vessels, jewellery, decoration on bedroom furniture (e.g., bed legs, head rests (fig.3), sleeping platforms and headboards), toiletry items (e.g., mirror handles, small boxes, kohl and perfume containers), scenes of bed chambers with Bes- images on furniture legs, painting of Bes-images in tombs, papyrus, decorated devices on vessels and containers (cosmetics and ointment pots, pottery vessels, spoons, faience bowl), game pieces, masks and chariots. Statuettes and figurines were put in the bedroom as apotropaic element and even painted on the walls of the house. He was also depicted on various weapons, such as daggers (**Romano, 1989**).

Beset, a female counterpart of Bes, appears in the late Middle Kingdom, but remains rare until the Greco-Roman Period. In the Middle Kingdom, she has the same leonine features of Bes, but with a little different poses and attributes. Beset usually appears with pointed not rounded breasts, the legs held tightly together or slightly separated. Wristlets and anklets are only worn by the female image of Bes (**Dasen, 2016**).

### Functions

Bes appearance was meant to scare off evil spirits with swords and knives he had. He also had musical instruments he used to make noises which would frighten the evil spirits off. Bes was originally the protective deity of the royal house of Egypt and came to be a popular household deity accepted by all classes of Egyptians as a powerful and apotropaic deity (**Capel and Markoe, 1996**). Ancient Egyptians firmly believed in the protective magic powers of Bes- image. Thus, many of them would keep a statue of Bes near the door to guard it and to frighten away evil creatures and spirits (**Mark, 2016**).

The most common function of the Bes-image was a protector of the Egyptian household. His presence on headrests, toiletry items and other objects may reflect the ancient Egyptian's desire to prevent evil spirits from harming the owner of these objects. Moreover, his function was to get rid of negative emotions such as vanity and the jealousy of others. Bes- image played a protective role in different aspects of daily life. He was a protector of women and children during and after childbirth as

well as during time of sleep and dreams. He was also god of warfare and death. In addition, he was closely associated with sexuality, music, dance, and alcoholic beverages (**Kaiser, 2003**).

### Bes-image as a protector of Mother and children

Bes was particularly protective of women and children. As a result, he also became a god of childbirth. It was thought that he could scare off any evil spirits lurking around the birthing chamber by dancing, shouting and shaking his rattle. If the mother was experiencing a difficult birth, a statue of Bes was placed near her head while prayers were recited asking for his help. He was even depicted at royal birth scenes, especially in later times. He was linked with Taweret and Hathor goddesses of childbirth (**Hill, 2010**). Bes and Taweret were also the guardians of the divine infants worshipped in the Birth Houses of ancient Egyptian temples. These birth houses were a common feature of temples all over Egypt. They were characterized by statuary or inscriptions of Bes outside and wall painting of Bes and Taweret inside (**Pinch, 1994**).

The role of Bes as a guardian of women continues to at least the third century A.D., as evidenced by a limestone stela from Memphis upon which the Bes-image appears compound with Ptah-Pataikoi and is shown standing on a pair of crocodiles holding a snake and a sword. He is identified by a Greek inscription as "The great Lord of women's wombs, protector, guardian, healer, feeder, and awakener" (**Dasen, 2013**).

The Egyptians also saw Bes not only a protector of children but an entertainer for them as well. When a baby laughed or smiled for no apparent reason, it was believed that Bes was somewhere in the room making funny faces. Over time he came to be seen as the champion of everything good and the enemy of everything evil (**Seawright, 2001**).

Women, men and children were thought to be defenseless to disease, nightmares and other evil forces during periods of sleep (**Hornung, 1983**). From the Middle Kingdom on, the Bes-image is regularly found on headrests sometimes paired with Taweret and Hathor (**Fischer, 1980**). The presentation of the Bes-image on head and foot-boards of beds has often been linked to its role as a protector of women during childbirth. Mothers would draw an image of Bes on their child's left hand and wrap the hand in a cloth blessed by the

temple so that the child would have pleasant dreams. The image of Bes on the hand associated with the dream world would drive away any spiritual elements which might give the child nightmares (Mark, 2016).

The role of the Bes-image as a musician and dancer appeared from the New Kingdom. As a musician, the Bes-image is found playing a variety of instruments, including the lute, double-flute or oboe, the harp or lyre, and the tambourine (Manniche, 1991). Particularly Bes- image as a tambourine player is closely associated with his role as a childbirth protector. It may have had more to do with frightened away harmful creatures during childbirth than with truly playing music (Dasen, 2013).

His role in connection with fertility may also be significant. Bes' connection to music and sexuality is more confirmed by his depiction in the form of tattoos (fig.7) on the bodies of female dancers and musicians. This may indicate that Bes served as some kind of patron god of musicians (Manniche, 1991).

## Discussion

Bes-image was connected to childbirth as the ancient Egyptians regarded adult dwarf as a rare human being who managed to overcome all the dangers and critical times that surrounded his delivery and after (Romano, 1989). Studies prove that 50% of the newly born dwarves died during delivery or during the first few months of the infancy due to the extremely narrow birth canal of the mother female dwarf (Weeks, 1977). Hence, the ancient Egyptian believed that dwarf god Bes who managed to survive and defeat the evil forces and spirits will be able by his magic power to guarantee a secure childbirth through which mothers and children are protected.

Dwarves, in ancient Egypt, were deeply involved in entertainment particularly music and dance. Therefore, Bes as a dwarf god is closely associated to music, dance and alcoholic beverages. Accordingly, Bes-image was connected to sexuality and fertility as all these aspects improve sexual performance.

As birth was a dangerous event, it was surrounded by many procedures that guarantee a safe delivery. Magic protection of protective gods was one of those important procedures. Bes, Taweret, Hathor, Isis and Horus were the chief protector gods of childbirth and most magical protection aspects were related to them. In one spell Bes is summoned, who is sent by the sun-god Re. the recitation runs:

*Come down placenta, come down, come down. I am Horus who conjures in order that she who is giving birth becomes better than she was, as if she was already delivered....Look, Hathor will lay her hand on her with an amulet of health . I am Horus who saves her.*

This spell must be recited four times over a clay amulet of Bes-image. It was placed on the brow of a woman who is suffering during childbirth. (Janssen, 2005)

There are many aspects for the representation of Bes-image as a protector of woman and children. Among the most significant aspects of his protection are the magic wands, Bes-vessels, amulets, reliefs and tattoo.

### 1- Magic Knives (Wands)

Bes- image was represented on more than 60 magic wands scattered all over the museums of the world such as the Egyptian museum, the British Museum, Berlin Museum and Florence Museum (Romano, 1989). Although the exact function of "magic knives" remains a mystery, Altenmüller proposed three uses for the magic knives: As magical objects to protect mothers and children, as an instrument to help the deceased achieve rebirth and as a ritual object in the celebration of a rite before the cult statue. (Altenmüller, 1986). The purpose of these magic wands may also be explained by a carved inscription. It reads as '*Recitation by the many protectors: We have come that we may extend our protection around the healthy child Minhotep, alive, sound and healthy, born of a noblewoman Sitsobek, alive, sound and healthy.* (Allen, 2005, p.29).

To use magic knives as objects for the protection of mothers and children, they may put either on the mother's belly or over the baby's body. The magic knives appeared during the Middle Kingdom and First Intermediate Period. They were probably used when spells were recited (Janssen 2005; Robins 1997). Their ends are often moved as they were used to mark magically safe places such as the birth seat. They also may be put under the bed of the patient to repel snakes and other poisonous animals or placed over the mother or the child's body. Magic Knives were devices with a curved shape and were regarded as magic weapons. They may be derived from the throwing stick of birds hunting or from real knives. They were commonly made of ivory. Some examples of faience, wood and calcite are found as well (Dasen, 2013).

Magic wands were intended to drive away evil spirits. It was suggested that the owner of the magic knives mothers and their children were identified with the young sun-god Ra and his divine mother. With the help of the protective deities, Ra defeated the forces of chaos. As Ra achieved victory over his enemies, so through magic power of these knives, would a child be magically protected against the demons of childhood (Steindorff, 1946).

The magic wands were decorated with a group of protective demons often with fantastic animal forms such as serpopeline creatures, griffins and monstrous hippopotamus-goddess Taweret- the special female protector of women and children. Moreover, they include Beset as a counterpart of Bes known as fighter or Aha. Wands may

include a naked bandy legged dwarf with a mane and ears of a lion and holding two snakes (**Pinch, 1994**). They also include various creatures like crocodiles, baboons, lions, bulls, beetles, turtles and panthers. Protective deities, include Bes, carrying knives to ward off evil spirits and some are shown dispatching the wicked dead. These deities display their protective power by grasping, biting snakes, brandishing knives, or attacking enemies. (**Dassen, 2013**).

Some of these magic wands bear inscriptions read as *protection by day or night* which is an indication of the time of usage and clear references to their function. One of those inscriptions read as “*Cut off the head of the enemy ...who enters the chamber of the children born to the lady ....., or to the mistress of the house or to the daughter of the king*” (**Steindorff, 1946, p.41**) which indicated that they were used by people of all classes.

## 2-Bes vessels

There are more than 380 Bes vessels scattered at many museums around the world among them the unpublished Bes vessel in Malawi museum in Minia governorate in Egypt (fig.5). Bes-vessels first appeared during the New Kingdom. There are many types of Bes vessels: Large funnel-necked jars with modeled and/or painted decoration (fig. 4), vessels attested only in the form of sherds, fancy-form vessels and vessels with pictorial representations. During the Late Period, the production of Bes-vessels increased to an unprecedented level. The reason is unknown but could somehow be related to the growing association of Bes with the infant Horus. Bes-vessels are best viewed as serving numerous functions dependent on the type of Bes-vessel and the context in which it was found. Milk, beer, wine, water, and medicinal and cosmetic preparations, have all been suggested as possible contents for the Bes-vessels (**Kaiser, 2003**).

Bes-vessels found in the bed chambers at Deir el-Medina are an indication that the vessels served to hold liquids (water or medicine) to cleanse women after birth (**Bruyère, 1939; Strudwick, 1999; Patch, 1998**). The close relation of Bes with Hathor and Taweret as protectors of pregnant and birthing women has supported this point of view. During other periods, Bes' role may have had more to do with fertility. In this context, it is possible that the vessels contained lubricants which may have facilitated marital relations (**Manniche, 1997**). Other Bes-vessel forms are vaguer as to their function, such as the jugs of the Late Period. Some of the smaller vessels which could not have held any significant volume of liquid, must have served as containers for balms, ointments, medicines, kohl, perfumes, precious oils, and other medicinal and cosmetic substances (**Kaiser, 2013**).

Several pieces of evidence support the suggestion that Bes vessels were mainly milk containers. The Middle Kingdom “infant’s feeding cup”, from Lisht, suggests that the vessel was used to feed young children, based on a comparison of the vessel’s spout to the nipple on a nursing bottle<sup>1</sup>

(**Fischer, 1968; Hayes, 1953**).

Another piece of evidence is the iconographic sources such as plaques and statuettes dated to the Late Period which depict Bes suckling the infant Horus (**Hornblower, 1930**). Bes' close relationship to the goddess Hathor offers the best explanation as to how Bes-vessels took on the role of milk containers, a role once served by the *femino-form* vessels and Hathor-vessels dated to the New Kingdom. Since Bes often accompanied Hathor in her role as a protector of women and children during childbirth, the New Kingdom Bes-vessels possibly were used in a similar context as milk containers (**Kaiser, 2003**). Bes-vessels could also serve as water containers to offer protection to women and children during birth or for cleansing a woman after birth during her period of purification. When the Hathor-vessels stopped being produced at the end of the New Kingdom, Bes-vessels continued to be produced, reaching their peak during the Late Period (**Guidotti, 1983**).

Bes vessels could also serve as containers for medicine as it reflected the vessel’s contents. Therefore, such pots may have contained liquids or salves used during pregnancy<sup>ii</sup> (**Romano, 1989**). Even if Bes-vessels did not contain medicinal substances, it is important to remember that many medicines may have been mixed with beer, water, wine or milk to make the medicine more palatable or to enhance its effectiveness. For example, milk was combined with other ingredients to form ointments to heal ulcers of the mouth, eyes, ears and skin. Medicated wines were used to ease childbirth and to heal scorpion stings and beer was used in many areas, one of which was to drive away bad dreams (**Darby, et. al., 1977**).

## 3- Amulets and reliefs

Protective deities were represented during the Middle Kingdom in the form of statuettes and figurines as amulets. They were made of different materials like bronze, faience (fig.6) and wood (**Bourriau, 1988**). One of the Bes-image amulets is a Theban wooden statuette from the Middle Kingdom representing a young lady with a lioness face catching metal snake rods with her hands. She played the same function of the counterpart of the dwarf lion Bes (**Pinch, 1994**). Those figurines were used as amulets to protect its owner. Thus Bes-images were also represented on jewelry as necklaces, rings, beads and bracelets. Moreover Bes-image was carved on the furniture legs of the chamber bed.<sup>iii</sup> Bes seems to be connected with bedroom furniture in general as his image was carved on the beds, chairs and headrests (**Bruyère, 1939**). This may be due to his role as a women protector during sleep and sexual relations by using his magic power to drive away malevolent and hostile spirits or to

improve the sexual performance. From the Third Intermediate Period on, the relation between the Bes- image and childbirth is confirmed with bronze and faience statuettes where the image is depicted seated on the shoulders of either women attended by their children, pregnant women, or musicians probably celebrating a safe delivery. In some cases, Bes-image figurines are shown holding and/or nursing the god Horus or, small, youthful versions of the Bes-image itself (**Dasen, 2013**). There are more than hundred small faience figurines known which clearly acted as an amulet for protection at birth and during nursing. They are blue or green, many with dark painted dots. They were represented as Bes-image nursing a baby. They have been generally found in the eastern Delta, and date from the Libyan Period. (**Janssen, 2005**)

During the New Kingdom many representation of Bes-image relief was found specially in Theban tombs and ostraca from Deir el-Medina, Amarna, Malqata and Saqqara. There are more than twenty depictions of Bes-image in the bedroom scenes. Eleven ostraca were found from Deir el Madiena show scenes of the bed rooms with furniture legs in the form of Bes- images (**Romano, 1989**). At Saqqara, Bes- image is found depicted in a high relief with nude woman, holding snakes. The discovery of erotic votive figurines in some of the nearby rooms suggests that couples may have tried to conceive in some of the rooms. (**Pinch, 1993**) Scenes of successful childbirth that decorated the birth room may be intended to give protection to the mothers and children. A Fragment of painted plaster from the workmen village of Deir El Madiena and from the similar village from El Amarna show that birth rooms were decorated with the figures of Bes and Taweret. Bes was also represented on the scenes of the birth room furniture. (**Robins 1997; Patch, 1998**).

#### 4- Tattoo

A tattoo is the pricking of skin with needles or sharp objects bearing various pigments. This implantation of pigment under the skin causes a permanent mark or design to remain (**Poon and Quickenden, 2006**). Tattooing in ancient Egypt was an exclusively female practice. The earliest tattoos came from small female figurines dating to the 11<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. These figurines are made of blue faience and decorated with dots, dashes and lozenge patterns. They are often represented randomly. They actually hold protective and fertility-promoting significance (**Gilbert, 2001**).

As another form of women protection, Bes- image was tattooed on some females in the form of girls swimming, dancers, musicians, acrobats and prostitutes. This was probably because of his association with music, entertainment, women and sexuality (**Kamal, 2009**). Bes-image tattoos

appeared during the New Kingdom period as Bes

was the protector of women sexuality and during childbirth. The most important masterpieces that display the tattoo of Bes- image are: A faience bowl (fig.7) dated back to the New kingdom depicting a female flute player tattooed with the figure of god Bes on her thigh (**Keimer, 1943**). A wall scene in a house at a workmen's village at Deir El-Medina from the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty depicts a female musician tattooed with the Bes-image on her thigh dancing as she plays her instrument. Another wall scene, from the same site and same period but partly damaged, depicts another standing female musician with her flute, she is almost naked and had the Bes- image on her left thigh (**Poon and Quickenden, 2006**). Bes tattooing on the thighs, over the pelvic and pubic region of female dancers, musicians, acrobats and even prostitutes has often been interpreted as a good luck symbol, a charm to ward off sexually transmitted diseases. It also might have been expected to protect them against venereal diseases, or perhaps it was just considered visually erotic and seductive (**Illes, 2000**).

#### Conclusion

The term Bes-images was used By J. Romano to emphasize that the Bes subject was a virtual form applied to a number of deities as Bes was used as a common name for different dwarf deities with the same physical appearance.

The most distinctive role of Bes-images was as a protective deity of woman and children particularly during childbirth and after. As ancient Egyptians regarded adult dwarfs as rare human beings who managed to overcome all dangers and critical times that surrounded his delivery and continued afterwards. Hence, the ancient Egyptian believed that dwarf god Bes who managed to survive and to defeat the evil forces and spirits, will be able by his magic power to guarantee a secure childbirth and a magical protection for mothers and children even after birth.

As for women, the protection role of Bes –image was mostly represented during childbirth. This protection was mainly the magic power of Bes-image that succeeded in driving away malevolent spirits. This magic power may be functioned through magic Knives which may put over the belly of the pregnant woman during delivery to save her life and to ease the delivery pain. Moreover, during birth, spells were recited over Bes amulets and magic wands also to protect women and her baby from evil spirits. Bes vessels were also functioned as a water containers for the cleansing of women after delivery for her quick and safe return to her normal life with her family. Bes-vessels were also used as medicine containers for the fast healing of women. Furthermore, Bes-vessels were used as a medicated wine container to ease childbirth. Bes-image was

also found on the reliefs and scenes of the birth room for more protection for women to prevent any unwanted sequences during delivery. Bes-image on the bed legs and headrest was related to the women protection during sleep from bad dreams and nightmares. Bes-image was also represented on jewelry as a kind of protection and charm for women.

The protection role of Bes-image for women in connection with sexuality and fertility may also be significant. Dwarves in ancient Egypt were involved deeply in entertainment particularly music and dance. Therefore, Bes as a dwarf god is closely associated with music, dance and alcoholic beverage. Accordingly, Bes-image was connected to sexuality and fertility as all these aspects improve sexual performance. This may be evident by depicting Bes-image in the cosmetic containers and bed legs as well as some reliefs of Bes-image on some bed chamber. Bes' connection to music and sexuality is more confirmed by his depiction in the form of tattoos on the bodies of female dancers, musicians and prostitutes. The tattoo of Bes-image was used as a charm of protection from bad spirits and some venereal diseases.

Concerning children, as it was previously motioned above, all the aspects of Bes Image protection for women that were used during childbirth also were considered as protection aspects for children such as magic knives, amulets and reliefs of Bes-image. There are more than hundred small faience figurines known which clearly acted as amulet for the protection of children at birth and during nursing. Bes vessels were used as milk containers for babies and children to frighten away any malevolent and harmful creature. By his tambourine as a musician, Bes made a din to protect the newly born baby from evil spirits. Mothers would draw an image of Bes on their child's left hand and wrap the hand in a cloth blessed by the temple so that the child would have pleasant dreams.

Magic wands, infant feeding cup, kohl jars and amulets of Bes- images (the so called minor arts) were the most common representation of Bes-image during the Middle Kingdom as a women and children protector. The magic wands, in particular, were found in large numbers and they only appeared during the Middle Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period.

In the New Kingdom and Late Periods, Bes-images were mainly represented on amulets, jewellery, Bes vessels, decoration on furniture (beds, headrests and chairs), vessels, scenes of bed chambers with Bes- images on furniture legs, painting of Bes-images on tombs, papyrus, decorated devices on containers (boxes, cosmetics vessels, pottery vessels, spoons, faience bowl) mirror handle, game pieces, masks, tattoos and chariots. Statuettes were put in the bed room as apotropaic element.

There are many aspects of the protecting role of Bes-images for women and children in ancient Egypt. Among the most important of them are magic wands, Bes vessels, Bes figurines, Bes reliefs and Bes tattoos.

More than sixty magic wands represent Bes-images among other protective deities which functioned as a magic protection for the newly born baby during birth. They were put on the body of the baby or mother while reciting special spells to ease the delivery pain, to protect the baby from evil forces and spirits and to bring good fortune to the newly born baby.

Bes vessels appeared from the beginning of the New Kingdom and on. Bes-vessels serve numerous functions dependent on the type of Bes-vessel and the context in which it was found. Milk, beer, wine, water, and medicinal and cosmetic preparations, have all been suggested as possible contents for the Bes-vessels. Using of Bes vessels as milk containers was supported by much evidence especially to feed children. It may also be used as water containers to cleanse women after delivery. It also could be used as a kohl containers. All these functions of Bes vessels are related directly or indirectly to woman and children as the presence of Bes-images around women and children in many details of their life guarantee safety, protection and good luck.

Figurines of Bes-images were regarded as amulets to protect women and children. These amulets could be clay figures used during birth, statuettes to be put in the bed chamber or carved on the furniture legs to drive away malevolent spirits or to enhance sexual performance among couples. Moreover, Bes-images were represented on headrests to guard the sleeping man, woman and children from nightmares. Also figurines and statues of Bes- images were put at the gates of the house to guard it from any evil creatures.

Reliefs of Bes-images were found on the scenes of successful childbirths that decorated the birth room. They may be intended to give protection to the mothers and children. During the New Kingdom many representations of Bes-image reliefs were found especially in Theban tombs and ostraca from Deir el-Medina, Amarna, Malqata and Saqqara. There are more than twenty depictions of Bes-image in the bedroom scenes with furniture legs in the form of Bes-image.

Bes- image tattoos appeared during the New Kingdom period as Bes was a protector of women sexuality and childbirth. Bes tattooing on the thighs, over the pelvic and pubic region of female dancers, musicians and prostitutes has often been interpreted as a good luck symbol and a charm to ward off sexually transmitted diseases or perhaps it was just considered visually erotic and seductive.

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Fig. 1. A Magic Knife (wand), Middle Kingdom, Thebes, Hippopotamus ivory, BM. after <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/333407178636144881/> accessed, 11-7-2017.

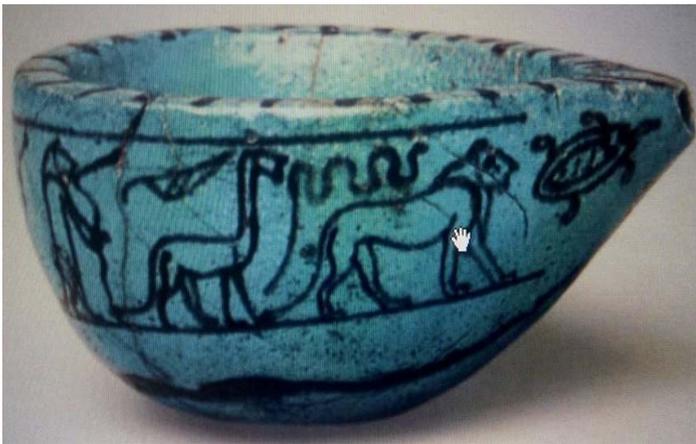


Fig. 2. A Baby's feeding cup, Bleu faience, Middle Kingdom, El-Lisht, MMA. after, Allen, 2005, cat.23.



Fig. 3. A Headrest of Bes-image, New Kingdom, Thebes, after <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20130619>, accessed, 1.6.2017.



Fig. 4. A Bes-Vessel, N.K, Amarna, After Kaiser, 2003, cat. 2.



Fig. 5. A Bes-Vessel, L.P, Tuna Egabal, Malawy Museum, By the researcher, 28.9.2012



Fig. 6. A Faience amulet figurine of Bes, Third Intermediat Period, MMA, after, [http:// www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/26.7.87](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/26.7.87).

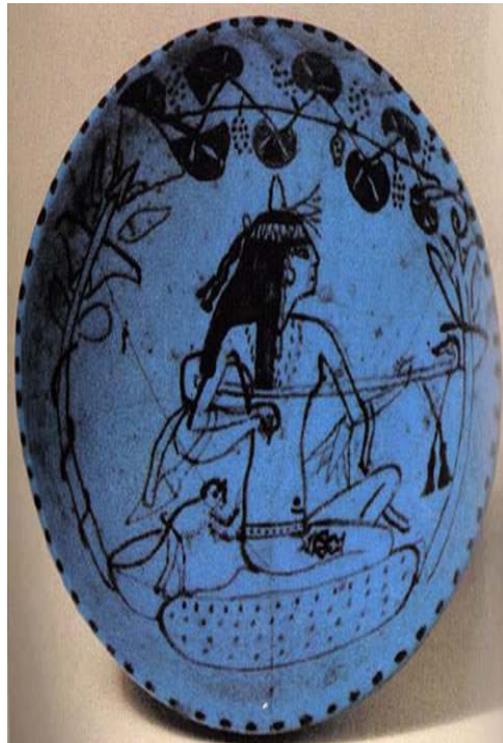


Fig. 7. A Faience bowl depicting female musicians with tattoo of Bes Image on her thy, N.K, Thebes, after Manniche, 1997.

## ملخص البحث

### دور هيئات المعبود بس في حماية المرأة والطفل في مصر القديمة

يعتبر المعبود بس من أهم المعبودات في مصر القديمة، حيث ظهر في الدولة الوسطى و زادت شعبيته كثيرا في عصر الدولة الحديثة وحتى أواخر العصر اليوناني-الروماني. وتعددت أدوار بس ووظائفه وأشكاله. ذلك أن اسم بس يطلق على العديد من المعبودات التي تحمل نفس السمات الجسدية لبس خاصة شكل القزم. ولذلك تم استخدام مصطلح هيئات المعبود بس بدلا من بس. وعادة ما كان يمثل المعبود بس على شكل قزم برأس أسد مقوس القدمين وقد يحمل في يديه ثعبانا، سيفاً، درعا وأولة موسيقية مثل الدف والعود والمزمار.

وللمعبود بس الكثير من الأدوار خاصة في حماية المنزل ومتعلقاته بصفة عامة، كل ما يخص المرأة عموما والولادة والحياة الجنسية بصفة خاصة، الأطفال أثناء وبعد الولادة، حماية الأشخاص أثناء فترات النوم وفي استدعاء الأحلام. هذا بالإضافة إلى دوره في مجال الموسيقى والرقص والمشروبات الكحولية التي بدورها تؤثر في وظيفته المتعلقة بالخصوبة والتزواج في مصر القديمة.

يهدف هذا البحث إلى التركيز على دور بس في حماية المرأة والطفل وتحديد أهم مظاهر وممارسات هذه الحماية وذلك من خلال تحديد بعض المظاهر التي كانت تتم لتفعيل هذا الدور. ولقد اتبع البحث المنهج الوصفي التحليلي.

من أهم أدوار بس كما سبق هو دوره في حماية المرأة والطفل حيث أن صور المعبود بس وجدت على العديد من الأشياء التي يطلق عليها الفنون الصغرى مثل التماثيل والمجوهرات والتمائيل وحاويات أدوات الزينة والأوعية سواء المصنوعة من الفخار أو السيراميك وأثاث غرفة النوم خاصة أقدام الأسرة والكراسي ووسائد الرأس. هذا بالإضافة إلى التماثيل والنقوش والبرديات وتيجان بعض الأعمدة وأخيرا الوشم الخاص بالموسيقى والراقصات.

وقد خلص البحث إلى أن أهم أشكال هذه الحماية تتمثل في السكاكين السحرية، وأواني المعبود بس، والتمائم والتمائيل الصغيرة، النقوش والوشم. وجميع هذه المظاهر مرتبطة بالمرأة والطفل سواء بطريق مباشر أو غير مباشر حيث أن المصريين القدماء كان لديهم اعتقاد كبير جدا في قدرات المعبود بس على الحماية من الأرواح الشريرة والمخلوقات المؤذية وهزيمة أي قوى تريد الإضرار بهم. وذلك لأن وجود قزم بالغ حي أمامهم هو دليل على مدى قوة هذا القزم لأنه نجح في تخطي العديد من المصاعب والتهديدات التي تواجه الأقزام بشكل عام خاصة لحظة الولادة وما بعد ذلك إذ أثبتت الدراسات الحديثة أن 50% من الأقزام حديثي الولادة تحدث لهم الوفاة أثناء الولادة أو بعد ذلك بقليل وذلك لوجود عيوب خلقية معينة في أنثى الأقزام لا توفر ولادة آمنة للأطفال. لذلك تمثلت أهمية المعبود بس الكبرى في دوره أثناء الولادة وما بعدها للأم والطفل، هذا بالإضافة إلى دوره في الخصوبة والحياة الخاصة للمرأة.

الكلمات الدالة: هيئات بس - المرأة والطفل - مصر القديمة.

<sup>i</sup>Both Hayes and Fischer compare the creatures on the cup with those depicted on the so-called "magic knives" from the same period which, based on the inscriptions found on several of the "knives," are designated to protect children

<sup>ii</sup> In describing one of the New Kingdom vessels, Romano writes, "The god's great swollen abdomen and the positioning of the hands on the stomach rather than, as was far more common in the New Kingdom, on the hips, suggests that this vessel once held a substance related to childbirth and pregnancy"

<sup>iii</sup> For the name and locations of Bes-image amulets, jewellery and furniture see, Romano, 1989, p.34 & p.58-59.