'Min' Guardian of the Desert

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Abstract
The Egyptian god ‘Min’ had many roles in Egyptian life and religion. He was a god of fertility, and protection. The Eastern desert and the Red sea hills were the original homeland of ‘Min’ as a protector god. This is the reason of depicting Red Sea shells and saw-fish on his three colossal statues excavated at Coptos. Two of these statues are on display in Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, and the third is in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. This study includes hieroglyphic texts and scenes associated with ‘Min’s’ protecting role. The researcher get benefit from Previous studies about ‘Min’ and his role in protecting the desert together with the Nubian (MDAyw ) scouts. This study focuses on the protector role of god ‘Min’ in the desert as place of danger and threat.

Keywords: God ‘Min’, fertility, protection, the emblem (Mnw), Ninth Nome

Emblem and name of god Min
The emblem ( Mnw) of ‘Min’ comprises two horizontal tapering serrated cones emanating from a central disk. (1) This symbol interpreted as a meteorite, a bolt of lightning, an arrow with barbs, a bolt of a door, or two fossilized shells(2) Gardiner describes the symbol as (two fossil belemnites)(3) and so does Montet as (deux fossils bélémites)(4) Lefebvre describes the symbol as (deux mollusques céphalopodes fossiles ).(5) He entitles the symbol ( verrou, se substitute parfois à ).(6)

Moreover, the sign ( Mnw) is the symbol of Upper Egypt’s ninth Nome. ‘Min’ was the principal god and Akhmim – present Sohag – was the capital. (7) The emblem ( Mnw) is itself the name of god ‘Min’ in ancient egypt, sometimes wrote as and is read (Mnw). (8) ‘Min’ is the Greek form of the god’s name. (9) The origin of the name (Mnw) is unknown and gives no clue to the god’s nature. Though the Greek writer Plutarch claimed that it meant ‘that which is seen’, based on a similarity to the verb form ‘to see’.(10) Two important opinions concerning the name (Mnw ); Helck suggested the name might means ‘to endure or to be eternal’, which relates to the verb (mn). While Morenz argued a certain rapprochement between the name of god (Mnw) and king’s ‘Mni’ - the founder of the first Dynasty- name. (11) He suggests the king ‘Mni’ original name was (Mnw), and the god had in a mythical way embodied the king's shape. (12) The ancient reading of the name ( Mnw) of ‘Min’ was ‘Khem’. (Khem Min) meant the ‘shrine of Min’.

The Pyramid Texts mention the reading of the symbol as ( Mnw) occurs in a unique way for one time. In the spell (Pyr. 424 b) of the Pyramid of Teti where the name is written replacing the symbol ( Mnw) in the same place of the pyramid of Unas. Finally, it is difficult to determine the meaning of (Mnw). Probably, it relates to the word ( mn ), which means ‘to endure, to be stable’. (14)

Protecting aspect of God ‘Min’
Ogdon suggests that ‘Min’ repelled the foes by means of his uplifted arm. (15) Moreover, a flail in the god’s hand may represent an arm the god ‘Min’ used against his enemies. (16) The god's emblem resembles a door-bolt. In Egypt, the door and its locking bolt were symbols of defense. Thus, using the door bolt as a protective symbol of ‘Min’ suited the Ancient Egyptians.(17)

‘Min’ lord of the Medjayu, guardian of the desert
Ancient Egyptians used the term ( MDAyw ) to designate the dwellers of the land ( MDAw ) on the Red Sea and the Eastern desert mounds.(18) According to Bietak; what assures the dwell of Medjayu is the presence of monuments in Wadi Al-Allaqi, at 110 km. South of Aswan, and in Sayala. (19) Moreover, great quantity of shells found in their tombs evidenced their presence near the Red Sea.(20)

During the Old kingdom, Medjayu served as scouts and infantry divisions. (22) In the sixth Dynasty, a division of Medjayu soldiers - in the fortress Abu (Abw) - is mentioned in Berlin Papyrus. Müller stated the existence of these soldiers divisions at the frontier areas among the fortresses was important to inspect night tours to prevent any theft
attempt. (23) Bietak comments the Medjayw were following the traces of their own fellow citizens in case of being suspected. (24) Their role in the war against the Hyksos is praised by king Kamose who says: ‘My army being valiant in front of me like a fiery blast; troops of Medjayw on the top (?) of our strongholds (?) to spy out (search out) the Setyw and to destroy their places’. (25)

According to Dido inscription; the chief of Medjayw under the reign of Thuthmos III and Amenophis III, carved on his tomb ceiling in Al Sheikh Abd el Qurna; the Medjayw were trained soldiers:

‘Who fills the heart of the lord of the two lands with trained soldiers’. (26) It is Dido the chief of the Medjayw, true of voice, who is meant by this inscription. The god mentioned in this text is ‘the great god lord of the sacred land’:

Hry mDAyw dydw mAa xrw xr nTr aA nb tA Dsrt

‘Chief of the Medjayw, Dido, true of voice in the presence of the great god, lord of the sacred land’. (27) The text was not precise who is meant by ‘the great god lord of the sacred land’. This maybe ‘Min’ as the text declares about the Medjayw’s chief god.

Among the functions of the Medjayw was to inspect the desert as inscribed in the temple of Mwt in Karnak, where the good great Medjai bearer of the fan is addressed:

Irt.f wD.s mDAi nfr smsw

‘He prepares her division the good great Medjai’.

Ntk nww n tA xASt

‘You are the inspector of the desert (mounds, foreign lands)’. Here the good great Medjai is addressed.

They were also associated to the Eastern desert:

mDAi wr nfr n xAswt iAbtt

‘The great good Medjai of the Eastern desert’. (28)

During the New Kingdom, the Medjayw settled in Egypt and married from. Therefore, it was not easy to distinguish between the Nubian Medjayw and the Egyptian army. Since the 18th Dynasty, the word Medjayw became a professional title refers to police or guardians of the desert. (29)

The god ‘Min’ was associated with the Medjayw. This is evident in a hymn to ‘Min’, carved on stela C.30’s verso in the Louvre Museum in Paris. Erman attributes it to the Middle Kingdom. (30) this stela is read:

Ity nTrw nbw wr idt hAi.f m MDAw SfSfnty m tA-sty

‘The prince of all the gods, the great of perfume, when he comes down from the Medjayw, the powerful in Nubia’. (31) This inscription refers to ‘Min’ as the text begins by an adoration and salutation to him:
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'I adore Min, I exalt Horus raising the arm, salutation to you Min, in his coming - forth(s), who raises the two feathers, the son of Osir, born from Aset the divine'. This inscription associates 'Min' and 'Horus' in the attribution: 'the son of Osir, born from Aset'.

Another inscription associates 'Min' to the Medjayw. This occurs on a statue fragment found at Al Deir el-Bahari, which Hall dates between the XIIth and the XVIIth Dynasties:

'The (Prince) rich in perfume when he descends from the country of Medjayw' .

The inscriptions of Edfu temple, refers to 'Min' as a Medja:

'Min of Coptos, the great god who resides at Behedet, the good Medja of the oriental desert'.

Considering the determinative: accompanying the word Medja in the above inscription and representing a man, probably a traveler, carrying a stick ending with a sack, this relates to 'Min' as a desert dweller. Besides, one of 'Min' titles was 'the man of the sack, the caravaner'. Goyon mentioned this determinative accompanying the word smnt in Hatshepsut inscription at Al Deir el-Bahari:

Nobody has (ever) attained (the encens terraces) except your pioneers

He added, the word ikw replaces the word smnt, and took a meaning of 'prospector', 'pioneer'.

Moreover, the same meaning occurs in the name of Upper Egypt 5th Nome capital of Coptos, where 'Min' was principal god (the one who belongs to Coptos). The name Gbtyw originated from the word gbt (sack). The sack bearers had their name to Coptos from where they moved towards the desert. The symbol represent one of these sack bearers. In the tomb of Menkheperraseneb, the Medjayw superior of Coptos and the chief of Coptos gold mountains drove the bearers. They present the scribes living animals, ostriches feathers, gold rings and sacks, similar to the sign gb. Therefore, these sacks make part of the policemen equipment to guard the desert and mining for gold. Such sacks were entitled gbt, and the people who held them were called gbyw.

Gauthier stated that among 'Min' titles was: Gbtyw (the one of Coptos). Bleeker, translates Gb.tjwj (der Koptische ) too. In WB, gb.tjwj is read (der von Koptos). Gauthier adds; the nisbe form of the word gbt was gbt.i ( the man of the sack, the bearer of the sack, the caravaner 'le caravanier'). Therefore, the plural Gbtyw means: 'The leaders of the caravans, the travelers'. Hassoun calls: which became the name of Coptos.

Another epithet of 'Min' having a close meaning to 'scout' and 'caravaner'; it is sr biA wr n Pwnt 'The great sr biA of Pount'. The word sr means to announce, to make know... biAw means wonders, exotic products... The translation of sr biA would then be: 'reveal the wonders', which designates an exploratory, responsible of recognizing the economic resources of the oriental countries. According to this epithet, the god 'Min' was an 'explorator', a 'seeker' of Pount. This inscription is carved on the Western wall of 'Min's' chapel in the temple of Edfu. It starts as follows:
‘Words spoken by Min, the one who belongs to Coptos, of the two gods, great one in the heart of Edfu’.\(^{(42)}\)

The word (NTrwy) here is an allusion to the name of Upper Egypt’s 5th Nome, symbolized by two birds called (Bikwy or NTrwy). There are many suggestions concerning the identity of these two birds; they could represent the falcon worshipped in (gsA) today Qus, and the Seth worshipped in (nbit), situated between Qift in the North and Qus in the South. Moreover, they represent a falcon and his female, which most likely represent the goddesses ‘Isis’ and ‘Nephtys’.\(^{(43)}\)

Another association between ‘Min’ and the Medjayw is represented in the shells carved on his three colossal statues at Coptos. These shells belong to the Pteroceras species that live in the Red Sea.\(^{(44)}\) The Medjayw used shells as ornament; as a result, great extent of them was in their tombs.\(^{(45)}\)

The researcher uncovers that the god ‘Min’ was considered a Medjai, and was the lord of the Medjayw “guardians”, scouts and the desert caravanners.

‘Min’ was the lord (or First) of the desert lands:

\[
\text{(46)}
\]

\[\text{Mnw} \ 	ext{aHa} \ 	ext{xAswt}\]

Here, Gauthier did not give the complete inscription and did not mention its source either. However, he stated that this title belonged to ‘Min’ of Coptos.

‘Min’ was considered to be standing on the deserts and the mountains:

\[
\text{(47)}
\]

\[\text{Mnw} \ 	ext{aHa} \ 	ext{xAswt}\]

From the Middle Kingdom onwards, Min’s title is ‘He who is upon his xtyw’. Gauthier has referred to as ‘Min upon the cliffs (of the Eastern desert)’. His statue is regularly set upon a base with frontal steps, probably carrying out this idea.\(^{(48)}\) In the procession of ‘Min’ at Medinet Habu, the lector priest reads:

\[
\text{(49)}
\]

\[\text{Mnw} \ 	ext{aHa} \ 	ext{xAswt}\]

‘I am Min who stands on the deserts, who seizes all the lands’\(^{(49)}\)

‘Min’ function of punishing the desert robbers is shown in the following speech addressed to him:

\[
\text{(50)}
\]

\[\text{Mnw} \ 	ext{aHa} \ 	ext{xAswt}\]

‘I grant might to thy sword, for the purpose of smiting the desert folk’\(^{(50)}\)

On a statue fragment found at Al Deir el-Bahari, dated before the New Kingdom (according to M. Hall, between the 13th and 17th Dynasties). A hymn to Min-Amon, where he is said to have inspired fear in the desert lands, reads as follows;

\[
\text{(51)}
\]

\[\text{N} \ 	ext{snd.f} \ 	ext{xAswt}\]

‘Because of the fear he (inspired) in the desert lands’

‘Min’ also inspired fear among the Ennead. In the temple of Edfu, hall of ‘Min’ is a text starts with a salutation to ‘Min’, beautiful of face, and reads;

\[
\text{(52)}
\]

\[\text{Dd} \ 	ext{mdw.i} \ 	ext{inD} \ 	ext{Hr.k} \ 	ext{Mnw} \ 	ext{kA} \ 	ext{sty nhp.k} \ 	ext{aA}\]
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‘Words that I say, salutation to you Min, bull that impregnates, great is your copulation’. Then he adds:

Nsw nxt n nTrw di snty

fAi m PsDt

‘Strong king among the gods, causing fear to be carried among the Ennead’

A mention of Min’s opened eye that allows Egypt to see;

Nb pt.f Sfyt nDm sty.k wn.f irt.f dgi tAwy

‘Lord of his sky, (of) dignity, twice sweet is your perfume, and when he opens his eye, (the two lands) i.e. Egypt sees’

This allusion assures ‘Min’s’ guardian character. Good guardian would have his eyes always open. King Montuhotep IV inscription in Wadi Hammamat appeals ‘Min’ as ‘Ruler of the Yuntiu’, i.e. Nubian bowmen.

**‘Min’ protector of the moon**

The god ‘Min’ was associated with the moon, which assures his guardian role, especially at night. This is due to dimmed vision which causes people anxiety. The following text expresses the association of ‘Min’ with the moon. It remarks the celebration of ‘Min’ while coming-forth to the terrace. The text is carved in the second court of Ramsesses III temple at Medinet Habu.

Abd (1) n Smw xpr Hb Mnw (Mnty) irt.f m tA prt nb nxx (?) xw (?) iaH

‘On the first month of summer, the celebration of Min takes place it is made at the coming-forth of the lord of the flail (?) or the protector (?) of the moon.’

The exact reading and meaning of the sentence “tA prt nb nxx xw iaH” is difficult. Therefore, it has many interpretations; the coming-forth of the lord of the flail, the coming-forth of the protector of the moon, the coming-forth of the moon god Khonsu, the coming-forth of the light of the moon, or other meanings…

To the researcher, both ‘lord of the flail’ and ‘protection (or protector) of the moon’ are meant, for the god ‘Min’ holding up his flail could be protecting the moon. The word 𓊃𓋇𓋈𓊉 (xw) means ‘protection’. Hence, 𓊃𓋇𓋈𓊉 (xw iaH) probably means ‘protection of the moon’ or ‘protector of the moon’. If this interpretation is true, this indicates the awakening of ‘Min’ through night. The expression of ‘protector of the moon’ is a metaphor for nightly guardianship. The text is about Min’s celebration, so the sentence (tA prt nb nxx Xw iaH) probably refers to him.

Due to the difficulty to observe the moon in the lunar month’s first day; ancient Egyptians considered the second day is the month’s real start. Thus, the crescent is clear, so they called the second day (tpy – ibd), ‘head of the month’. They considered this the first day a period of childbirth; where the Ennead is pregnant in the new moon. Simultaneously, god ‘Min’ replaces the moon, which is not visible in the month’s first day. The replacement of the moon by ‘Min’ also indicates the god’s importance in dark nights, due to the disappearance of moon light. As deputy of the moon, ‘Min’ is a source of light, appeasement and guidance. God ‘Min’ was the king of gods in the Palace of the Moon (Hwt-iaH) at Akhmim:
‘His father Min, lord of Ipu (Akhmim), lofty of plume, the king of the gods in Hwt-iaH’.

The tent (sHnt) of god ‘Min’ (Fig. n’5)

Many opinions concern the sanctuary (sHnt) of god ‘Min’, whether it was a conical hut or a tent in shape of a conical hut. This tent was raised up by (nHsw), Nubians from Punt. Oldest representation of the ceremony of raising up the tent poles is carved on the walls of king Pepi II funerary temple in Saqqara. Afterwards, it was represented in Senusert I chapel. This ceremony was entitled;

Moreover, it was written as follows;

Wainwright explains: this means either ‘The setting up of the sHnt (pole) of the bull’, the divine animal was written first out of respect, or ‘The setting up of the bull of the sHnt (pole)’. However, it no doubt means ‘The setting up of the bull, the sHnt (pole)’. Helck translated it as ‘The raising of the poles in order to cover them’. He believes poles were transformed into a tent. From the word and determinative showing faithful Nubians climbing it to dress it, the researcher supposes the sHnt was in fact a tent. It was probably movable as Gauthier says in its description: ‘L’appareil mobile que dressaient ces Nubiens était destiné probablement à rappeler le plus important de ces attributs, la hutte-sanctuaire du dieu’. This movable tent was completing the guardian role of ‘Min’, allowing him to move from one place to another to guard the desert areas.

In Luxor temple, exactly, on the North Eastern wall of the first open court; an inscription includes the tent sHnt attached to ‘Min-Amon’;

Erecting the poles of the tent (?) sHnt for the bull of the tent (?) sHnt Min-Amon who is in front of his harem.

Conclusion

According to this study, the researcher concludes the following:

1- Besides being a fecundity and fertility god, ‘Min’ was a guardian one. He was responsible for guarding the desert with all its dangers. Among his qualifications; ‘Min’ was the pioneer, the prospector, the caravaner, the explorer and the seeker. All are descriptions of a desert dweller.

2- The god ‘Min’ as Lord of the Nubian Medjayw and he himself a Medjai was a trustful guardian with the fear he inspired and his open eye allowed all Egypt to see. The texts said he ‘stands’ on the deserts to indicate his function as reliable guardian.

3- ‘Min’ was closely associated with the moon. His ceremony of coming-forth to the terrace was celebrated in the month of Pa-Khons which indicates his deep connection with the moon god Khonsu. In the texts of Medinet Habu temple, there is a mention of ‘Min’ probably translated as ‘protector of the moon’. In case this translation is true; it is a metaphor of ‘Min’ alertness and awakening during night. He replaces the invisible moon in the lunar month’s first day. Another connection of ‘Min’ with the moon is being ‘The king of the gods in the Moon’s Palace’. All these associations with the moon indicate the god’s awakens at night to protect and secure desert travelers and dwellers.

4- Finally, the sanctuary (sHnt) of god ‘Min’, which was probably a tent raised up by faithful Nubians, was ‘movable’. This is an additional attribute to Min’s character, signifying his protecting role, so he does not settle down in one place, but instead he wanders like the desert real inhabitants.
Figures

Fig. 1: Mace-head of Scorpion King with symbol of god Min
(J. M., Saleh, (1990), in BIFAO 90, p. 264, fig. 2)

Fig. 2: The symbol and name of god Min
(Wilkinson, R., Ancient Near Eastern Raised-Arm Figures, p. 118, pl. 3)

Fig. 3: Belemnite fish
(Google web-site)
Fig. 4: The shells and saw-fish carvings recorded on the colossi of god Min of Coptos (Petrie, W. M. F., (1896), Koptos, Pl. III)

Fig. 5: Amenhotep III officiating to Min during the ceremony of raising up the tent (sHnt) by Nubians (Hypostyle Hall of Luxor temple). Above the tent, is a text of the raising up ceremony but with several gaps. (Gayet, Al., Le Temple de Louxor, Mémoires publiés par les membres de la mission archéologique française au Caire, t.15, 1er Fascicule, Paris, (1894), pl. X, Fig. 49 (59)

End notes

(1) Hart, G., (1986), A Dictionary of Egyptian gods and goddesses, London, 1986, p.121, see Fig. no. 2
(3) Gardiner, A., (1994), Egyptian Grammar being an introduction to the study of hieroglyphs, Oxford, 1994, Sign list 22, 23, p.503, see Fig. no. 3
(5) Lefebvre, G., (1940), Grammaire de l’Egyptien Classique, BdE 12, 1940, p.407
(7) Montet, P., Géographie, t.2, p.108
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Mohamed Ahmad Hassan, (1999), "The Gods and the Pharaohs of the Old Kingdom in History and Religion," at the Faculty of Arts, University of Alexandria.


(16) For more about Sayula, see:

Mohamed Ramzi, (1994), "The Rituals", at the Faculty of Arts, University of Alexandria, from Year 1949, the University of Alexandria, p. 140

(17) ibid., p. 146

(18) ibid., p. 140

(19) ibid., p. 167

(20) Chassion, E., (1892), "Le temple d'Edfou, Mémoires publiés par les membres de la Mission Archéologiques Française Au Caire" 10, Paris, 1892, p. 399-400; Yoyotte, J., (1952), "Une Épithète de Min comme explorateur des régions orientales, Rev. d'égyp. 9, 1952, p. 125


(22) Montet, P., "Géographie," t. 2, p. 77


(24) WB, vol. 5, p. 163


(27) Yoyotte, J., "Une Épithète de Min comme explorateur des Régions Orientales," p. 136


(30) Kemp, B.J., (1989), "Ancient Egypt, anatomy of a civilization," London, 1989, p. 79, Fig. 28:

(31) see Fig. no. 4

For the name (Mn ty), see: Bleeker, C.J., "Die Geburt," p. 41


(33) Petrie, P., (1908), "Atribute, British School of Archaeology in Egypt and Egyptian Research Account," vol. XIV, 1908, p. 21, pl. XXXI


(35) For the name (Mn ty) see WB, vol. 2, p. 72
الآلهة "مين" حارس الصحراء

الآلة المصرية "مين" هي في الديانة المصرية القديمة أكثر من دور هام، فحسباً فيما يتعلق بالخصوبة والإثبات والزراعة، تهدف هذه الدراسة أن إبراز دور إضافي للآلة من دون أهمية من دور عظمى و هو دور في حราะة الصحراء والقوافل التي كانت تسلكها أو تمر بها، وقد كان من بين أقباب الآلهة منهم ذكر "مختصرة" والموافق من فرق شريعة نوبة كانت تعرف بالجبلان، وكان الاسم يرمز إلى الملك suppose أنه في حربه ضد الهكسوس اختار الطرق المعقدة للمجيء وما يليه من الأقدام التي تميزت بها هذه الفرضية أن شكل الآلة "مين" تميز بذروة المفرغ لإلى مدى أو مدى بوتوس، الذي يكون فاعلاً للقوى لدى الأعداء، و من بين أقباب الآلهة "شرف الصحراء أو التلال أو البلاد الإنجليزية " و " المجاب المطابع الشمسي للصحراوية " و " من الوقف على الصحراء أو الجبال "، لاحظ معي الدراسة في هذا اللفظ الأخير، وبالتحديد في وصف ( الوقف ) حيث أنه بيتة في مهمة وأهمية وجاءة الأمان الذي يحيث الآلهة في الصحراء التي تجرسها. لم يتصر دور "مين" يقتصر على الدراسة بل أن كان يعاقب المذربين والخارجين، حيث يوصي بهم: "صاحب يفتي الذي يذهب في صحرى الصحراء، أخبراً نجى نجى سلطة الآلهة " مين " لقد حازنا أن تشير إلى دور هام لهذا الآلهة المصري الذي وفر الحماية في مناطق تعرف بالخطورة، والصعوبة البالغة، وتحتاج في من يتصدى لحمايتها إلى قوة حقيقية. في الآلة مين " في وجدان رحل الصحراء والمئتيين الرائد الأول ومهد السبيل الذي يمكن الرؤية به والإيمان له.