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Between Identity and Agency in Ancient Egyptian Ritual*

Harold M. Hays

Represented in the hieroglyphs of Berlin stele 1204 is the first person account of the Middle Kingdom official Icherneferet,¹ detailing the thirty² steps he took while participating in rites for the god Osiris Foremost of the Westerners at the *bz.w šṭ3* ‘mysteries’³ at Abydos. As this autobiographical slice-of-life dominates the greater part of the stele, there is no doubt as to the central message he wished to leave to posterity there:⁴ in the construction of ritual equipment and images of deities, in instructing priests in their tasks, in arraying the divine Lord of Abydos in finery, and in carrying out rites for the god as a priest, this singularly capable individual had indeed done his duty.

But Icherneferet places his deeds in context by preceding his account with a letter from his king Senwosret III.⁵ More precisely, it is an *wd-ni-sw.t*, a ‘royal decree’⁶ commanding that his subject go to Abydos ‘to make (*iri*) a monument for my father Osiris Foremost of the Westerners, and to embellish (*smnh*) his mysteries’.⁷ Icherneferet’s first words after the frame⁸ of the royal command demonstrate his full compliance with the king’s instructions, through appropriation of the instrumental terms of the mission, *iri* and *smnh*:

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¹ See Sethe, *Lesestücke*, pp. 70–71; Schäfer, H., *Die Mysterien des Osiris in Abydos unter König Sesostri III* (UGAÄ 4), Leipzig 1904; and Simpson, W.K., *The Terrace of the Great God at Abydos: The Offering Chapels of Dynasties 12 and 13*, New Haven 1974, pl. 1; with translation at Lichtheim, M., *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom* (OBO 84), Freiburg 1988, pp. 98–100.

² About thirty, so long as one includes clauses where a first person pronoun subject is not expressed but may be read, such as at Sethe, *Lesestücke* 71, 5–6: *ms(=i) ntr.w imi-w-ht* ‘me bearing the gods of the following’. Even if one does not, the difference between reading such forms thus or as passives is not substantial, because the account’s intention is to list the events in which his involvement was instrumental. These many deeds may be more broadly grouped into four acts; see Assmann, J., *Tot und Jenseits im Alten Ägypten*, Munich 2001, pp. 310–312.

³ On which see Kucharek, A., ‘Die Prozession des Osiris in Abydos. Zur Signifikanz archäologischer Quellen für die Rekonstruktion eines zentralen Festivals’, in: Mylonopoulos, J. and Roeder, H. (eds.), *Archäologie und Ritual. Auf der Suche nach der rituellen Handlung in den antiken Kulturen Ägyptens und Griechenlands*, Vienna 2006, pp. 53–64; Lavier, M. C., ‘Les mystères d’Osiris à Abydos d’après les stèles du Moyen Empire et du Nouvel empire’, in: Schoske, S. (ed.), *Akten des vierten internationalen Ägyptologen Kongresses München 1985*, Band 3 (BSAK 3), Hamburg 1989, pp. 289–295; and Assmann, *Tot und Jenseits*, pp. 308–312.

⁴ At his presumably *ex voto* chapel. See Simpson, *Terrace*, pp. 22–23, under ANOC 1, with reference to criticism at Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies*, p. 84.

⁵ Which in turn is contextualized by titularies of the king and other elements of the stele, including the separate and prominent display of Icherneferet’s own titles and name; see the schematic representation of Hare, T., *ReMembering Osiris. Number, Gender, and the Word in Ancient Egyptian Representational Systems*, Stanford 1999, pp. 34–43.

⁶ For literature on *wd.w-ni-sw.t* ‘royal commands’, see Kloth, N., *Die (auto-) biographischen Inschriften des ägyptischen Alten Reiches. Untersuchungen zu Phraseologie und Entwicklung* (BSAK 8), Hamburg 2002, p. 168 n. 592.

⁷ Sethe, *Lesestücke*, p. 70, 17: *r ir.t mn.w n it(=i) wsir hnti-imn.tiw r smnh bz.w=f šṭ3*

⁸ For the sense of *frame* as active contextualization, as ‘something we do’, see Culler, J., *Framing the Sign. Criticism and Its Institutions*, Norman 1988, p. xiv.

I acted (*iri*) in accordance with that which His Majesty commanded,
 embellishing (*smnh*) that which my lord had commanded for his father Osiris, Foremost
 of the Westerners, Lord of Abydos, resident in the Thinite nome.
 I performed (*iri*) the office of Son Beloved of Him for Osiris, Foremost of the
 Westerners:
 I embellished (*smnh*) his great bark of eternity and perpetuity.⁹

Though having done much on his own at Abydos for the god—in constructing, instructing, investing, and performing—Icherneferet had after all been ordered there. The stele he set up thus represents the intersection of his interests with those of the king and the god. Especially in this way, it has to do with the relationship between his individual activities and the most dominant structures of the world around him, namely the state and cult; it thus has to do with the notion of *agency*, with how an individual maintains, changes, or ignores the structures of the society within which he is embedded.

An agent within ritual may be said to be a person who performs a ritual action upon a ritual object.¹⁰ Even more essentially, an agent is someone who does something, and the term *agency* refers most simply to the capacity and office of action. But in the humanities the terminology is regularly used in studies relating the individual to the collective in a quasi-technical fashion, albeit with widely varying connotations.¹¹ As invocation of the term *agency* orients a discussion upon how an individual interacts with his society (or with the *doxa* shaping his actions), it participates in the social science tension between ‘holism’ and ‘individualism’.¹²

In Icherneferet’s case, his act of agency involved the maintenance of the structures of his society: in performing cult, he participated in acts of central ancestral authority, doing the same kinds of things done by generations before him¹³ at ‘Abydos, the first ancient place of Neberdjer’.¹⁴ And in acting for the king, he was neither subverting nor ignoring the structuration radiating from the monarch; he was adhering to it.

And yet—as ironic as it may seem given the thirty deeds of service detailed by him as implicit evidence of worthiness—Icherneferet’s compliance with cult and king must have had the necessary consequence of suppressing his own identity during the act.

⁹ Sethe, *Lesestücke*, p. 71, 2 4:

ir.k(w) mi wd.t.n hm=f
m smnh wd.t.n nb=i n it=f
wsir hnti-imn.tiw nb 3bdw shm ʕ3 hr(i)-ib ʔ-wr tw
ir.n=i z3 mr=f n wsir hnti-imn.tiw
smnh.n=i w3=f wr nhh hn^c d.t

¹⁰ Cf. the terminology’s use at Lawson, E.T. and McCauley, R.N., *Rethinking Religion. Connecting Cognition and Culture*, Cambridge 1990, pp. 85 86 and similarly at McCauley, R.N. and Lawson, E.T., *Bringing Ritual to Mind. Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms*, Cambridge 2002, esp. p. 23.

¹¹ See Dornan, J.L., ‘Agency and Archaeology. Past, Present, and Future Directions’, in: *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 9 (2002), pp. 303 329, p. 304. The terminology’s most influential employment is by Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens; see the summaries thereof at Dornan, *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 9, pp. 305 308, and Krüger, O., Nijhawan, M. and Stavrianopoulou, E., “Ritual” und “Agency”. Legitimation und Reflexivität ritueller Handlungsmacht’, *Forum Ritualdynamik* 14 (2005), <http://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/archiv/5785>, pp. 7 13.

¹² On the historical position of the term’s technical usage in the social sciences in respect to these polarities, see Gillespie, S.D., ‘Personhood, Agency, and Mortuary Ritual. A Case Study from the Ancient Maya’, in: *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 20 (2001), pp. 73 112, pp. 73 75.

¹³ According to Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies*, pp. 55 58, 85 88, and 129, the earliest dated stele attesting to the dramatic rituals is from year 9 of Senwosret I (Louvre C3), with the advent of the ‘Abydos Formula’ appearing already in Dynasty 11. On this formula, see further Lavie, M. C., ‘Les mystères d’Osiris’, p. 210, and Wegner, J., *The Mortuary Complex of Senwosret III: A Study of Middle Kingdom State Activity and the Cult of Osiris at Abydos*, Ph.D. dissertation University of Pennsylvania 1996, pp. 62 69. It is conceivable that rites like those performed by Icherneferet had existed in some form since the Old Kingdom; see Griffiths, J.G., *The Origins of Osiris and His Cult*, Leiden 1980, p. 78.

¹⁴ CT 60 I 255e (B10C): *3bdw p3.t tpit n(i)t nb-r-dr*.

The Delegation of Agency

In sending a decree to a specific person, Senwosret III engaged himself in a practice already centuries old, when a letter from the king to one of his subjects could be expressed as an *wd-ni-sw.t* ‘royal decree’,¹⁵ and in framing his stele’s account with the content of that letter, Icherneferet was claiming the same kind of status-by-association already claimed centuries before him by others, who had likewise signaled to posterity their favor by inscribing letters from that most august personage:¹⁶ here are two men, king and subject, both consciously positioning themselves within the traditions of their society. And though one might otherwise have imagined that the specific actions performed by Icherneferet were prompted by personal initiative—by his heart—his citing of the royal command as the first element of his text cedes initiative, planning, and motivation to his ruler. In view of Icherneferet’s blatant embrace of tradition, I aver that he may be seen as an illustrative protagonist, an example of a type: a member of sacerdotal officialdom of a sort evident since the Old Kingdom, whence the simple and time-honored rule of obedience. Unquestionably the Egyptian priest was an agent in the rites he performed—in that he did and said things—but everything done was done under the aegis of the authority of command and command’s authorization. One might more precisely call someone like Icherneferet an instrument of the state.¹⁷

State and religious duty are condensed in the person of the monarch. In Egyptian temples the king is ubiquitously¹⁸ represented in relief making offerings to the gods, and he is portrayed just as ubiquitously in text making them to the dead in the formulaic phrase *hṭp-dī-ni-sw.t* ‘the offering which is given of the king’.¹⁹ His service in temple and tomb is paired in a Middle Egyptian text often discussed by Jan Assmann, ‘The King as Sun-priest’, as it transparently expresses the ideological reach of the monarch’s knowledge, powers, and responsibilities. One of those responsibilities is the performance of cult. As for the king, ‘he gives offerings to the gods and mortuary offerings to the Akhs’, the beatified dead:²⁰ in principle, it was the king who officiated in temple and tomb. Even for the ‘Ritual of Amenophis’,²¹ where the royal name

¹⁵ With ‘the same term also used for more formal royal edicts’, as observed by Wente, E.F., *Letters from Ancient Egypt*, Atlanta 1990, p. 17.

¹⁶ The Old Kingdom letters of this kind have been republished and their connections to autobiographical texts discussed at Eichler, E., ‘Zu den Königsbriefen des Alten Reiches’, *SAK* 18 (1991), pp. 141–171.

¹⁷ Contrast notions of agency where it is construed as revolving around subversion of established order, as with Mitchell, J., ‘Ritual Structure and Ritual Agency. “Rebounding Violence” and Maltese *festà*’, in: *Social Anthropology* 12 (2004), pp. 57–75. For the position that agency and the structures around the individual are inseparable, see Joyce, R.A. and Lopiparo, J., ‘PostScript: Doing Agency in Archaeology’, in: *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 12 (2005), 365–374. For reference to the relationship between ritual and the maintenance or subversion of social structure, see below n. 93.

¹⁸ Scenes of the High Priest of Amun Herihor offering to Theban gods at the temple of Khonsu constitute an obvious exception, but they are understood by Römer, M., *Gottes und Priesterherrschaft in Ägypten am Ende des Neues Reiches* (*Ägypten und Altes Testament* 21), Wiesbaden 1994, p. 25, to be in the tradition of statues of priests emplaced in the temple, ‘wobei der prominente Anbringungsort der Darstellung an der Stelle des räuchernden Königs besonders günstig für die Erlangung göttlicher Gnade war’, and thus the scenes stand ‘in der Tradition der Priester als Stellvertreter des Königs im Kult’.

¹⁹ On the royal and cultic significance of the phrase, see Assmann, J., ‘Totenkult, Totenglauben’, *LÄ* VI, cols. 659–676, col. 663.

²⁰ See Assmann, *LÄ* VI, cols. 662–663. For the text, see Assmann, J., *Der König als Sonnenpriester. Ein kosmographischer Begleittext zur kultischen Sonnenhymnik in thebanischen Tempeln und Gräbern* (*ADAIK* 7), Glückstadt 1970, p. 19, and further exemplars at Karkowski, J., *Deir el Bahri VI. The Temple of Hatshepsut. The Solar Complex*, Warsaw 2003, pp. 31, 180, and 205, with translations of the whole at Assmann, J., *Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete*, 2nd ed., Freiburg 1999, pp. 97–99, and Parkinson, R.B., *Voices from Ancient Egypt*, Norman 1991, pp. 38–40. From the Luxor version B 9 10 + B 4 5: *iw=f dī<=f> hṭp.t n ntr.w pr.t-ḥrw n 3ḥ.w*.

²¹ Or better, ‘das Opferritual des Neuen Reiches’, a term adapted from Arnold, D., *Wandrelief und Raumfunktion in ägyptischen Tempeln des Neuen Reiches* (*MÄS* 2), Berlin 1962, p. 9, by Tacke, N., ‘Das Opferritual des ägyptischen Neuen Reiches’, in: Metzner-Nebelsick, C. (ed.), *Rituale in der Vorgeschichte, Antike und Gegenwart*, Rahden 2003, p. 27–36, p. 31 with n. 28.

severally occurs in the position of ritualist,²² Alan Gardiner draws out an important distinction between king as donor and those who actually performed the rites, because ‘...the real performers were priests, and their ranks are several times indicated’²³ in the paratext accompanying that ritual’s recitations. The king’s name is there on papyrus just as his name is on the temple wall:²⁴ it is an expression of the ideal, of what took place in theory.

In practice, as Gardiner said and as is very well known,²⁵ the role of officiant was performed by his subjects, as in our example case of Icherneferet. But from the Egyptian point of view it is not a question of pretending to be king;²⁶ the king does not command his subject to usurp ‘royal prerogative’. It is a matter of royal delegation to perform particular actions and particular sacerdotal offices. Apropos Abydos, the stele of another Middle Kingdom official recounts that, ‘His Majesty caused that I sacrifice cattle even in the temple of Osiris, Foremost of the Westerners in Abydos, Tawer’.²⁷ But the place might have been wherever any temple was. Already in the Old Kingdom, one finds the king appointing specific persons to priestly service (with attendant grants of land),²⁸ authorizing the establishment of teams of priests for the mortuary cult of his subjects,²⁹ and making provisions for the unhindered performance of cult.³⁰ Reaching forward in time, royal authorization is unequivocally expressed within the script to the daily rites performed for the god Amun-Re at Karnak, as given in the Dynasty Twenty-five Papyrus Berlin 3055:³¹ ‘I indeed am a *hm-ntr*-priest’, announces the priest reciting the liturgical script; ‘it was the king who commanded me to see the god’.³²

Seen from the point of view of delegation, Icherneferet’s framing of his account not only singles him out as one worthy of regard by virtue of his association with the highest member of society, it also declares his very authorization for participating in rites in the first place. The command passes him the skeptron—the staff or scepter of office, the symbol of authorized

²² On the mention by name of royal officiants within the ‘Ritual of Amenophis’, see Gardiner, A., *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum. Third Series. Chester Beatty Gift*, London 1935, pp. 101–105.

²³ Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri*, p. 104.

²⁴ Where the difference in media dramatically affects the representation of ritual. On walls as opposed to papyri, dynamics of self presentation come into play, owing to the public nature of the medium.

²⁵ As noted, for example, at Assmann, J., ‘Das Bild des Vaters im Alten Ägypten’, in: Tellenbach, H. (ed.), *Das Vaterbild in Mythos und Geschichte*, Stuttgart 1976, pp. 12–49, p. 41, and see Assmann, J., ‘Unio liturgica. Die kultische Einstimmung in götterweltlichen Lobpreis als Grundmotiv “esoterischer” Überlieferung im alten Ägypten’, in: Kippenberg, H.G. and Stroumsa, G.G. (eds.), *Secrecy and Concealment. Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions* (Numen Book Series 65), Leiden 1995, pp. 37–60, p. 49.

²⁶ Compare Frood, E., ‘Ritual Function and Priestly Narrative. The Stelae of the High Priest of Osiris, Nebwawy’, *JEA* 89 (2003), pp. 59–81, pp. 73–75 with n. 29, following Hare, *ReMembering*, pp. 39–40.

²⁷ Dyroff, K. and Pörtner, B., *Ägyptische Grabsteine und Denksteine aus süddeutschen Sammlungen*, Leipzig 1904, pp. 2–7 and pl. II (Sethe, *Lesestücke*, p. 74, 19–20): *di.n hm=f zft=i tw3.w m hw.t-ntr n(i)t wsir hnti-imm.tiw m t3-wr 3bdw*.

²⁸ See Urk I 26, 11 (see also 25, 4–6): *in hm n(i) wsr-k3=f wd wcb n hw.t-hr nb.t r3-in.t* ‘It was the Majesty of Userkaf who commanded the performance of priestly service for Hathor, mistress of Ra inet’.

²⁹ See Goedicke, H., *Königliche Dokumente aus dem Alten Reich* (ÄgAbh 14), Wiesbaden 1967, p. 209 fig. 27, 3–4 (see also 7–8) (Urk I 302, 13–14; see also 302, 18–303, 1): *iw wd.n hm(=i) tz.t n=k shd hm-k3 12 r hw.t-k3 n(i)t d.t=k r wcb n=k r šd.t n=k 3bd* ‘My Majesty has commanded the setting up for you of twelve Hem Ka inspectors for your own Ka house in order to perform priestly service for you and to recite for you the monthly service’.

³⁰ As at Goedicke, *Königliche Dokumente*, fig. 5 (Urk I 213, 8–9; see also Urk I 212, 10–13): *ir.n hm(=i) nw n(i) hw.wt niw.ti ptn m-š sšr.w pn n-mr.wt wcb šd.t 3bd ir.t-h.t-ntr m niw.ti ptn* ‘My Majesty has commanded this exemption of these two pyramid cities in this manner precisely in the interest of priestly service, recitation of the monthly ritual, and the performance of divine ritual in these pyramid cities’.

³¹ On authority and authorization in this text, see further Gee, J., ‘Prophets, Initiation and the Egyptian Temple’, *JSSSEA* 31 (2004), pp. 97–107, pp. 99–100.

³² pBerlin 3055 IV, 2 (rite 9 of Moret, A., *Le rituel du culte divin journalier en Égypte d’après les papyrus de Berlin et les textes du temple de Séti I, à Abydos*, Paris 1902): *iw hm ink hm-ntr in ni-sw.t wd wi r m33 ntr*. See also pBerlin 3055 IV, 6 (rite 11): *hr=i z3 tw r ntr tz phr ntr.w iry n=i w3.t zn=i in ni-sw.t wd wi r m33 ntr* ‘Sight of mine, shield yourself from the god (vice versa). Gods, make a way for me that I may pass. It was the king who commanded me to see the god’.

speech—to adopt a metaphor of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu³³. It is a dogmatic or abstract precondition to the performance of the rites. Performed under such a precondition, the actions of the ritual cannot of themselves be efficacious³⁴; the utterances recited for the god and the actions done for him are not of themselves *performative*³⁵; their illocutionary force³⁶ is not inherent; the performance of cult by living priests demands the imprimatur of authority.

But from the moment of authorization on, the bestowed office was at times something like a piece of property, capable of being sold,³⁷ bequeathed in a testament to one's children,³⁸ or otherwise claimed by hereditary right.³⁹ So also could the authorization be transmitted on the spot by the delegate to his subordinates. Thus Icherneferet informs his reader that 'I set the temple personnel at their tasks, causing that they know the daily ritual⁴⁰ and the calendrical rituals':⁴¹ the king's appointee ensured that the other ritualists knew the roles they were to fill in cult. This is not merely to be involved in a single ritual event, the mysteries proper, but to ensure that the officiants were trained in the regular operation of service throughout the course of each day, throughout the entire year. Through such direction, the delegation becomes a chain: from king to subaltern, and from subaltern to lieutenant.

Having authority over temple personnel and the actions they are to perform, it is also significant that our illustrious and illustrative protagonist is an outsider: Icherneferet was raised in the court of the king⁴² and sent to Abydos to execute a royal command; this is control extended over the periphery from the center,⁴³ the imposition of a vision from a remote

³³ For the metaphor of the skeptron, see Bourdieu, P., *Language and Symbolic Power*, Thompson, J.B. (trans.), Cambridge 1991, p. 109.

³⁴ The point is that it is not enough that the ritual be performed, but that it must be performed by persons with certain qualifications. Cf. Tambiah, S.J., 'Form and Meaning of Magical Acts', in: Lambeck, M. (ed.), *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, Oxford 2002, pp. 340–357, p. 352, where ritual and magical acts are asserted to be illocutionary or performative by virtue of being performed 'under the appropriate conditions'. See the second rule identified for performative utterances by Austin, J.L., *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd edition, Cambridge 1962, p. 34 (see also pp. 15 and 53): 'The particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked', and the extensive elaboration of Austin's observation at Bourdieu, *Language*, pp. 107–116.

³⁵ The term *performative sentence* 'indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action' (Austin, *How to Do Things*, p. 6); i.e. such a statement not only says something but also accomplishes something: saying so makes it so. On how the notion of performativity has been applied to ritual in history of religions, see Penner, H.H., 'You Don't Read a Myth for Information', in: Frankenberry, N.K. (ed.), *Radical Interpretation in Religion*, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 153–170, pp. 156–158. The notion of performativity has seeped into Egyptology in respect to religion and ritual as at Assmann, J., *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, Lorton, D. (trans.), Ithaca 2001, p. 51, in respect to magical practice at Eschweiler, P., *Bildzauber im alten Ägypten* (OBO 137), Freiburg 1994, p. 14, and in respect to grammar; see the summary thereof at Servajean, F., *Les formules des transformations du Livre des Morts* (BdE 137), Cairo 2003, pp. 33–38.

³⁶ That is, what the words of a statement accomplish (illocution) as opposed to the true/false meaning they communicate (locution) or the affective consequences they inspire (perlocution); see Austin, *How to Do Things*, pp. 99–100.

³⁷ As occurs in the Ptolemaic pMarseille 299 recto; see Vittmann, G., 'Ein thebanischer Verpfändungsvertrag aus der Zeit Ptolemaios' III. Eurgetes. P. Marseille 298+299', *Enchoria* 10 (1980), pp. 127–139 and pls. 12–15.

³⁸ As at Urk I 26, 14–16 (also cited above): *in igr ms.w(=i) ipn w^cb h^w.t-h^r nb.t r3-in.t mr irr(=i) ds(=i) sk w(i) hp.k(i) r imn.t nfr(i) m nb im3h* 'Furthermore, it is these children of mine who are to perform priestly service for Hathor, mistress of Ra in et as I now do myself, after I am passed to the perfect West as a possessor of veneration'.

³⁹ See for example the filio paternal cliché of pBerlin 3055 X, 2 (rite 25 of Moret, *Le rituel du culte*): *iw hm ink hm-ntr z3 hm-ntr m r3-pr pn* 'and indeed I am a hm-ntr priest, the son of a hm-ntr priest in this temple'.

⁴⁰ Lit. what pertains to the hand of every day, i.e. the daily action.

⁴¹ Sethe, *Lesestücke*, p. 71, 6–7: *di.n=i [imiw]-wnw.t-h^w.t-ntr r ir(i)wt=sn di(=i) rh=sn n(i)t-^c n(i)t r^c nb h3b.w-tp-tr.w*. On *tp-tr.w* as seasonal festivals, see Spalinger, A., 'The Limitations of Formal Ancient Egyptian Religion', *JNES* 57 (1998), pp. 241–260, p. 242 with n. 11.

⁴² Sethe, *Lesestücke* p. 70, 20–21: *dr nt(i)t in=k is pw m sb3.t(i) hm=i iw hpr.n=k is m sd.t(i) hm=i sb3.t(i) w^c n(i) h=i* 'because it is the case that you were brought to be a pupil of My Majesty, and you became a protegee of My Majesty, a singular student of my palace'.

⁴³ For a nuanced theoretical consideration of center versus periphery in respect to king, court, cult places, and cult, see Gundlach, R., 'Hof, Zentrum und Peripherie im Ägypten des 2. Jahrtausends v.Chr.', in: Gundlach, R. and

authority over the local conduct of ritual practice, and, through that, dogma. It is a fresh imposition of a new pattern of action, or it is an existing structure's maintenance and refinement.⁴⁴ Better said, the deeds of the agent, empowered by the monarch, contribute to the formulation or adjustment of the fundamental basis of ritual practice, influencing the practice and beliefs of other officiants there. Indeed, the royal control and protection of the cults has a long history, stretching back to Dynasty Five⁴⁵ and before.⁴⁶ And even in the construction of temples, as at Heliopolis under Senwosret I,⁴⁷ the king directs a member of his court⁴⁸ to go forth and execute the preliminary work for him.⁴⁹ Afterwards the king arrives to personally oversee the demarcation of the temple's foundations:

The appearance of the king in the fillet of two plumes,
with all the masses in his following:
the chief lector priest, scribe of the god's book,
stretching the cord and untying the line,
when the putting into the earth was done in this temple.⁵⁰

Abstractly establishing the ideological grounds for the hierarchical structuring of society,⁵¹ the very space in which ritual is performed has its concrete design imposed from outside and above, along a chain of delegation suspended from the one ritualist whose identity genuinely mattered: the king.

The Place of the Non-royal Agent's Identity

In performing ritual for the god, Icherneferet does not act for himself; he acts for the king. And there are incentives for him to do so. The most obvious is the enhancement of his personal status through having been commanded to a sacred task and through having fulfilled it. That the task and accomplishment were significant to his status is evident in the record of these events commemorated in Berlin stele 1204. Here one sees the Egyptian personality advanced through

Klug, A. (eds.), *Das ägyptische Königtum im Spannungsfeld zwischen Innen und Außenpolitik im 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, Wiesbaden 2004, pp. 21–34.

⁴⁴ Compare the scope of the notion of 'redemptive hegemony' (how the practice of human activity can not only change a structure but also reproduce it) in Bell, C., *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Oxford 1992, pp. 81–88. See also below, n. 92.

⁴⁵ See Goedicke, *Königliche Dokumente*, fig. 2 (Urk I 170, 11–172, 11) for the Dynasty Five decree of Neferirkare for the divine temple at Abydos.

⁴⁶ As with the representation of the foundation rite (presumably of a temple) involving the king and the goddess Seshat, dated to the reign of Kha'sekhemwi, for which see Engelbach, R., 'A Foundation Scene of the Second Dynasty', *JEA* 20 (1934), pp. 183–184, pl. 24.

⁴⁷ As narrated in the Berlin Leather Roll 3029, for the text of which see de Buck, A., 'The Building Inscription of the Berlin Leather Roll', in: *Studia Aegyptiaca* I, pp. 48–57; and on which see Piccato, A., 'The Berlin Leather Roll and the Egyptian Sense of History', *LingAeg* 5 (1997), pp. 137–159, pp. 137–142 with n. 1 for further references.

⁴⁸ In this case, like Icherneferet, the king's instrument is a *htm.ti-bi.ti* and *imi-r3 pr.wi nbw pr.wi hq* (Berlin 3029, II 7–8).

⁴⁹ Instructing him to *wḏ n iry.w r ir.t hft š3(=i) n=k* 'make command to those who are to act according to my assignment to you' (Berlin 3029 II 13).

⁵⁰ Berlin 3029 II 13–15:

h^c.t ni-sw.t m ššd šw.ty
rhy.t nb.t m-h^t=f
hri-h3b.t hry-tp zš-md3.t-ntr
hr pḏ šs wh^c w3w3.yt
di.w m t3 ir.w m h^w.t tn

⁵¹ Cf. cult centers shaping societies at Smith, J.Z., *To Take Place. Toward Theory in Ritual*, Chicago 1987, pp. 51–52.

royal service, just as in the Old Kingdom:⁵² the privilege of the assignment presumably adds to his cultural capital, to the dimension of social status which is built out of non-material qualities. The stele commemorates and even creates that status, freezing it in time as a fixture of self-presentation. In maintaining the structure of his environment through adhering to royal command, the experience distinguishes the ritualist from among his peers.

Not only in the performance of divine cult does the Egyptian have incentives,⁵³ but also in the performance of rites for the dead: he secures their praise and protection in this world. Thus an official may say ‘I am one praised of his father, mother, and lords in the necropolis, through performing mortuary service for them, performing their ceremonies on’⁵⁴ various feast dates. And the dead, for their part, are advised, ‘Watch over your survivors, for they perform your ceremonies!’⁵⁵ As the living ritualist expects forceful protection from his ethereal benefactors, a descendant can make this sort of appeal in a Letter to the Dead from the First Intermediate Period:

Your condition is absolutely like a living one
by the command of the gods who are in the sky and earth.
You will put an end to the enemies, evil of character,
of⁵⁶ your house, of your brother, your mother, /// and her excellent son, Merer,
for as you were *igr*-excellent upon earth,
so are you *mnḥ*-excellent in the necropolis,
with mortuary service performed for you,
the Haker-ceremony⁵⁷ performed for you,
the Wag-ceremony⁵⁸ performed for you,
and bread and beer given to you upon the table of Foremost of the Westerners,
with a going downstream in the night-bark, a going upstream in the day-bark,
and truth of voice given to you beside every god,
as I make the praise of the dead for you!⁵⁹

⁵² See Assmann, J., *Stein und Zeit. Mensch und Gesellschaft im alten Ägypten*, Munich 1991, pp. 187–189. For further references and for the asseveration of individuality in the Old Kingdom, see van Walsem, R., ‘Diversification and Variation in Old Kingdom Funerary Iconography as the Expression of a Need for “Individuality”’ in: S. Seidlmayer (ed.), *Acts of the Symposium Religion in Contexts: Imaginary Concepts and Social Reality in Pharaonic Egypt, Berlin 29–31 October 1998, Berlin (in press)*.

⁵³ On the principle of reciprocal benefit from the gods as a result of loyal devotion to them through human action, see Assmann, J., ‘Weisheit, Loyalismus und Frömmigkeit’, in: Hornung, E. and Keel, O. (eds.), *Studien zu altägyptischen Lebenslehren*, Göttingen 1979, pp. 11–73, esp. pp. 28, 39, and 47.

⁵⁴ Urk I 217, 12–13: *ink ḥzy n it=f mw.t=f nb.w=f m ḥrit-ntr m pr.t-ḥrw n=sn ir.t ḥ3b=sn m* various festivals.

⁵⁵ PT 667 §§1942b c (Nt): *stp z3=k ḥr tpw=k t3 ir=sn ḥ3b.w=k*

⁵⁶ Lit. against.

⁵⁷ On this ceremony, see Helck, W., ‘Die Herkunft des abydenischen Osirisrituals’, *ArOr* 20 (1952), pp. 72–85, pp. 78–79, and Assmann, J., *Altägyptische Totenliturgien. Band 2. Totenliturgien und Totensprüche in Grabinschriften des Neuen Reiches*, Heidelberg 2005, pp. 474–476, with n. 78 for further references.

⁵⁸ On this ceremony, see Assmann *Altägyptische Totenliturgien. Band 2*, pp. 303–304, with further references at p. 416 n. 106.

⁵⁹ Louvre E 6134, ll. 5–20 (see Piankoff, A. and Clère, J.J., ‘A Letter to the Dead on a Bowl in the Louvre’, *JEA* 20 [1934], pp. 157–169):

iw ḥr(i)t=k mr ḥnḥ ḥh n(i) zp
m wd ntr.w nt(i)w m p.t t3
ir=k ḏr n ḥft(i)w ḏw.w qd
r pr=tn r sn=k r mw.t=k /// n z3=s igr mrr
ntk igr tp t3
ntk mnḥ m ḥrit-ntr
pr.t(w)-ḥrw n=k (For the delay of *n=k* after *ḥrw* in this expression, cf. the text cited below n. 103)
ir.t(w) n=k ḥ3kr
ir.t(w) n=k w3g
rdi.t(w) n=k t ḥnq.t ḥr wdhw n(i) ḥnti-imn.tiw
ḥd=k m msk.t(y)t ḥnt=k m mḥnd.wt

The ritually cared-for dead exert themselves on this world for the material benefit of those who make ritual possible: just as the king receives direct benefits from the gods on earth⁶⁰ for his performances as *nb ir.t h.t* ‘lord of ritual’, so do non-royal delegates expect to receive reciprocal reward for their observance of filial duties. ‘But as for any lector priest or any Ka-servant who will act /// and speak for me at this tomb of mine of the necropolis, I will be their protector’,⁶¹ declares the dead. Even a purely spoken service yielded benefit both to its deceased recipient and its doer. As one Middle Kingdom stele substantiates its appeal to the living:

because the breath of the mouth⁶² is beneficial for the titled dead,
and this is not something through which one wearies,
and because it is more beneficial for the one who does it
than for the one for whom it is done:
it is the one who is helped who protects the one who is upon earth.⁶³

Significantly, this same sentiment is repeated as social dogma in the ‘Loyalist Instruction’,⁶⁴ emerging in the Middle Kingdom⁶⁵ and transmitted in multiple copies in the New Kingdom. Further incentives for the maintenance of cult are encoded in other socially prescriptive texts. In the *Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage*, a Dynasty Nineteen papyrus the text of which dates back to as early as the Thirteenth,⁶⁶ the reader is told:

Remember the chewing of natron
and the preparation of white bread by a man on the day of washing the head.
Remember to set up the flagstaffs and to carve the altar,
with the W'ab-priest cleansing the cult places,
with the temple painted like milk,
and to make sweet the scent of the horizon⁶⁷ and to maintain offering-cakes.
Remember to cleave to the ritual instructions and the arrangement of dates,
and to remove one initiated into priestly service for being physically corrupt:
that is to do it wrongly;
that is to remove the heart of [a man] /// on the day before eternity,⁶⁸

r di.t(w) n=k m3^c hrw r-gs ntr nb
ir(=i) n=k hz.w(t) n(i) m(w)t (mwt).t

⁶⁰ Ubiquitous in the various formulaic statements placed in the mouths of gods on temple walls in scenes since the days of Djoser (see Kahl, J., Kloth, N. and Zimmermann, U., *Die Inschriften der 3. Dynastie* (ÄA 56), Wiesbaden 1995, p. 116 [Ne/He/4]) and thereafter throughout pharaonic history.

⁶¹ From the tomb of Khentika; see James, T.G.H., *The Mastaba of Khentika Called Ikhekhi* (ASE 30), London 1953, pl. 5 B13 15: *ir swt hr-i-h3b.t nb hm.w-k3 nb ir.t(i)=s /// dd n(=i) hr iz(=i) pn n(i) hr-it-ntr iw(=i) r wnn m h3y=sn*.

⁶² The formula is identified by Vernus, P., ‘La formule «le souffle de la bouche» au Moyen Empire’, *RdE* 27 (1975), pp. 139 145.

⁶³ Berlin 7311, K 1 2 (Berl. Inschr. I, 180, corrected via collation with the photograph of Simpson, *Terrace*, pl. 32): *dr-nt(i)t Bw n(i) r3 3h (si) n s^ch*

nn nw m wrd.t hr=s

hr-nt(i)t 3h (si) n irr

r irr.w n=f

in sm.w mkk hr(i)-B

⁶⁴ See Posener, G., *L'Enseignement loyaliste: sagesse égyptienne du Moyen Empire* (Centre de recherches d'histoire et de philologie II. Hautes études orientales 5), Geneva 1976, §14.6 12. On this passage therein, see also Loprieno, A., ‘Loyalistic Instructions’, in: Loprieno, A. (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature. History and Forms* (PdÄ 10), Leiden 1996, pp. 403 414, pp. 411 412.

⁶⁵ On the stele of Sehetepibre (Cairo 20538), for which see Sethe, *Lesestücke*, pp. 68 69.

⁶⁶ See Parkinson, *Voices*, p. 60, concerning the date of the papyrus and the disputed date of the text.

⁶⁷ Sc. the shrine, as observed by Parkinson, *Voices*, p. 121 n. 1.

⁶⁸ pLeiden I 344, col. 11, ll. 2 5 (Enmarch, R., *The Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All*, Oxford 2005, pp. 46 47 and 78):

when months are cou[nted] and years are known.

Service is to be performed and performed correctly, lest one incur ultimate consequences. In the *Instructions for Merikare*, composed in the First Intermediate Period⁶⁹ or Dynasty Twelve⁷⁰ and still copied in the New Kingdom, one encounters the exhortations:

A man should do what is beneficial for his Ba:⁷¹
perform priestly service <at> the monthly ritual; receive the white sandals;
go into the cult place;⁷² unveil the mysteries:⁷³
enter the sanctuary; and eat bread in the temple.
Make the <altar> flourish, add to the provisions,
and increase the daily service,
for it is what is beneficial for the one who does it.
Strengthen your monument according to your power:
one day gives to eternity,
an hour improves the future,
and the god knows of the one who acts for him.⁷⁴

The benefits of participation in cult point eventually to eternity; they are accrued after death.

The mortuary literature well attests to this principle. In the Coffin Texts, for example, justification for one's very presence in the afterworld is based upon such observances in life.⁷⁵ Take this striking parallel to the 'King as Sun-priest' mentioned above: 'It has been made that I be in this land because of what I did, as I have set up divine offerings for the gods and mortuary offerings for the Akhs'.⁷⁶ And after death, the Egyptian claims involvement in the sorts of rites

sh3.w wš^c hzmn
sspd t-ḥd in z(i) hrw iwh tp
sh3.w s^ch^c sn.w<t> ht ^cb3
w^cb hr twry.t r3.w-pr
ḥw.t-ntr sqh3.ti mi irt.t
sndm sti 3h.t srwd p3.wt
sh3.w ndr tp-rd šbšb sw.w
šd.t bz m w^cb.t r ḥz.t ḥ.t
ir.t st pw m nf
szwn ib pw n(i) [z(i)] /// hrw hnty nhḥ (The traces do not appear to suit sh3.w.)
3bd.w tn[w] rnp.wt rh<.ti>

⁶⁹ As at Helck, W., *Die Lehre für König Merikare*, 2nd ed., Wiesbaden 1988, p.1.

⁷⁰ As argued at Quack, J.F., *Studien zur Lehre für Merikare* (GOFIV.23), Wiesbaden 1992, pp. 120 136.

⁷¹ Following the segmentation of Helck, *Lehre für König Merikare*, p. 39.

⁷² Lit. 'join the temple'; see Wb iii 378.9.

⁷³ For this phrase, see Wb v 119.8.

⁷⁴ pLeningrad 1116A, 64 67 (Helck, *Lehre für König Merikare*, VI 6 10, pp. 38 39; see Quack, *Studien zur Lehre*, pp. 38 41):

ir z(i) 3h.t n b3=f
w^cb.t(i) <m> 3bd šzp ḥd.ty
ḥnm r3-pr kf3 {hr} sšt3.w
^cq hr ḥm wnm t m ḥw.t-ntr
sw3d <wdh> .w s^c3 ^cq.w
im ḥ3.w hr mny.t
3h.t pw n ir-sy
srwd mnw.w=k ḥft wsr=k
iw hrw w^c di=f n nhḥ
wnw.t smnh=s n m-ht
rh.n ntr m irr.w n=f

⁷⁵ Cf. below at n. 115.

⁷⁶ CT 39 I 171a b (B16C): isk ir wnn=i m t3 pn n(i) ^cnh.w hr ir.t(=i) smn.n(=i) ḥtp(.t)-ntr n ntr.w pr.t-ḥrw n 3h.w

he performed during life: ‘N. has come, even that she may establish offerings in Abydos’.⁷⁷ In the process, he can even maintain the solar cycle:

N. is the one who stops that twisted one,⁷⁸
 the one who comes to burn your bark upon the Great Plateau,
 for N. knows them by their names,
 and they will not reach [your] bark
 while N. is in it,
 that is, N. the maker of offerings.⁷⁹

But given the present line of inquiry, there is something remarkable about these statements from the mortuary literature: like the stele of Icherneferet, they all apply to specific persons. They are tied to a certain individual within the community of the dead. What makes this fact remarkable is that, insofar as cult is concerned, the identity of the non-royal Egyptian matters only so long as it is a question of him reaping benefits—and yet these benefits must accrue *outside* the context of ritual activity proper.

The Displacement of the Agent’s Identity

In talking about what he did at Abydos, it is of paramount importance to Icherneferet that the reader know his name, know his titles, and know that *he* was the one who performed rites for the god Osiris. And in the spells copied for Egyptians to be taken with them to the tomb, they are designated by name as the *otherworldly* performers of rites or as the dead *recipients* of rites. But within collective ritual as performed by living persons, there is only one non-royal individual who genuinely matters, and that is the divine or deceased beneficiary.

By *collective ritual* I refer to temple ritual, mortuary ritual, opening of the mouth,⁸⁰ and other points of group ritual emergence, the evidence for which stretches from the pyramids to Greco-Roman times, as the layered traces of a cultural complex occupying a central place in ancient Egyptian society, reaching into every dimension of it. The rites are collective inasmuch as they were typically performed by more than one ritualist, and because in any event they always involved at least two persons, one of whom was the beneficiary.⁸¹ This beneficiary, the object of sacerdotal action, may be presumed both to be and to indwell the physical image of the god in his sanctuary, in the case of temple cult. Or, in the case of rites for a deceased

⁷⁷ CT 1079 VII 349b (B3C): *i.n N. tn smn=s h.t m 3bdw*. One may presume that the statement is made metaphorically.

⁷⁸ For *nbd* as ‘twisted’, see Borghouts, J.F., *Book of the Dead [39]. From Shouting to Structure* (*Studien zum Altägyptische Totenbuch* 10), Wiesbaden 2007, p. 42 with n. 323.

⁷⁹ CT 1099 VII 414c 415e (B1Bo):

in N. pn hsf nbd pi
iy hr nzt wi3=k hr w^r.t wr.t
iw N. pn rh sn m rn.w=sn
n ph=sn wi3[=k]
sk N. pn im=f
N. pn ir htp.wt

⁸⁰ The close relationship between temple ritual and mortuary ritual in rites, phraseology, and participant role structures is demonstrated at Hays, H.M., ‘The Worshipper and the Worshipped in the Pyramid Texts’, *SAK* 30 (2002), pp. 153–167.

⁸¹ The other being the ritualist, of course. Collective ritual texts in the mortuary literature are distinguishable on the basis of the grammatical person from personal recitations, wherein the beneficiary is also himself the performer; see further Hays, H.M. and Schenck, W., ‘Intersection of Ritual Space and Ritual Representation. Pyramid Texts in Eighteenth Dynasty Theban Tombs’, in: Dorman, P.F. and Bryan, B.M. (eds.), *Sacred Space and Sacred Function in Ancient Thebes* (*SAOC* 61), Chicago 2007, pp. 97–115, p. 97 with n. 3.

person, he (or his Ka) is represented through or manifest in a statue or false door in his cult chapel.⁸²

In Icherneferet's instance, it was a matter of performing service for a god, Osiris. Undoubtedly some of the specific rites he describes were in their details unique to Abydos, the occasion of his personal involvement being a calendrical event or otherwise special. But that these activities shared structural features with other temple rituals—for example, with the Greco-Roman Hour Vigil,⁸³ and with the mortuary liturgies of the Coffin Texts⁸⁴—is not a serious question, at least to me: that the rites were done for a god, an inert image whose breast Icherneferet adorned with lapis lazuli and other precious materials,⁸⁵ is enough to place the events within a well attested framework.

But the case of Icherneferet is merely the touchstone of this essay. The assertion is a general one: one of the characteristics of collective ritual is that there is only one non-royal individual who genuinely matters, and that is the beneficiary. For this reason, many of the rites performed for Ra-Harakhti at the temple of Seti I are virtually identical to those performed for Ptah in the same place,⁸⁶ and they in turn can match rites done for Amun-Re at Karnak⁸⁷—except that in each case the name of the deity being propitiated is changed to make the rite appropriate specifically to him. The identity of the sacred beneficiary was critical in the temple liturgies. So also in texts for the mortuary cult. Whether they were to be recited for the king Wenis or for the official Rekhmire,⁸⁸ the name of the passive⁸⁹ and inert beneficiary is inserted to tailor the rite to apply to him alone. The single meaningful variable among the different exemplars of such texts is the identity of the one for whom ritual is performed.

But as for the rest of the words the ritualists say, as well as their gestures, they remain the same. What, then, of the officiant's relationship to the text? In adhering to a fixed script, he follows the institutionalized furrows of his society.⁹⁰ In reciting, his actions are shaped by the stamp of repetition: the rite's words have been and were being repeated by still other ritualists elsewhere and elsewhere. In repeating gestures, he recognizes and submits to the words of his

⁸² In practices established during the Old Kingdom. See Wiebach Koepke, S., 'False Door', in: Redford, D.B. (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, vol. I, Oxford 2001, pp. 498–501, p. 499, and Fitzenreiter, M., *Statue und Kult. Eine Studie der funerären Praxis an nichtköniglichen Grabanlagen der Residenz im Alten Reich*, vol. I, <http://www2.rz.hu-berlin.de/nilus/net/publications/ibaes3>, pp. 545–549.

⁸³ On the Hour Vigil, see Assmann, J., 'Stundenwachen', *LÄ* VI, cols. 104–106, Willems, H., *The Coffin of Hqata (Cairo JdE 36418)*, Leuven 1996, pp. 382–384, Cauville, S., *Le temple de Dendara. Les chapelles osiriennes. Commentaire* (BdE 118), Cairo 1997, pp. 70–72, and Assmann, *Tod und Jenseits*, pp. 349–371.

⁸⁴ In detail, see Assmann, J., *Altägyptische Totenliturgien. Band 1. Totenliturgien in den Sargtexten des Mittleren Reiches*, Heidelberg 2002, and in summary see Taylor, J., *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt*, London 2001, p. 199.

⁸⁵ Sethe, *Lesestücke* p. 71, 8–10: *iw shkr.n=i šnb.t nb 3bdw m ḥsbd.w ḥn^c mfk3.wt d^cm.w ʿ3.t(i)wt nb.t m ḥkr.w n(i)w ḥ^c.w ntr* 'I adorned the breast of the Lord of Abydos with lapis lazuli, and turquoise, and every kind of precious metal and precious stone, as an adornment of the flesh of the god'.

⁸⁶ It is easiest to see the matches between the rites for the cults of each of the gods there (Isis, Osiris, Amun, Ra-Harakhti, and Ptah) through examination of Mariette *Abydos. Description des fouilles. Tome premier. Ville antique. Temple de Séti*, Paris 1869, pp. 34–76.

⁸⁷ See Moret, *Le rituel du culte*, pp. 2–3.

⁸⁸ Compare, for example, the vocative in PT 25 §18c in the pyramid of Wenis to that of TT 100 (Davies, N. de G., *The Tomb of Rekh mi Ré at Thebes* [PMMA 11], vol. II, New York 1943, pl. 78).

⁸⁹ To be sure, the beneficiary of a rite may be orally exhorted to action by the reciting ritualist, but the physical reality is otherwise: stone, metal, and dead flesh are inert. For the observation that mortuary liturgies of an offering situation characterize the beneficiary as active (in contrast to those of an embalming situation), see Assmann, J., 'Verklärung', *LÄ* VI, cols. 998–1006, col. 1001; as a general rule, mortuary texts characterize the deceased as passive, in contrast to hymns, where the addressed personage is active, as noted by Assmann, J., 'Verkünden und Verklären. Grundformen hymnischer Rede im Alten Ägypten', in: Loprieno, A. (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature. History and Forms*, Leiden 1996, pp. 313–334, p. 324.

⁹⁰ Cf. Kelly, J.D. and Kaplan, M., 'History, Structure, and Ritual', in: *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990), pp. 119–150, p. 140: 'The special power in ritual acts, including their unique ability to encompass contestation, lies in the lack of independence asserted by a ritual participant, even while he or she makes assertions about authority'; see also Rappaport, R.A., *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge 1999, pp. 32–33.

community,⁹¹ and he is involved in perpetuating them.⁹² It is to maintain the ritual structure. It is also to let that structure exert whatever power it has to structure the structure of society.⁹³ Or rather, it is to be instrumental in it.

And yet, as to the officiant's specific identity, within the ritual itself it is of singular irrelevance. As Assmann has observed, the priest does not speak as NN.⁹⁴ We do not hear the names of Icherneferet or Niankhkai; the ritualists are effectively anonymous, inasmuch as they are not designated as specific members of society. Their identities are not part of the script. Better said, the living ritualist's personal identity is displaced in favor of the mantle of sacerdotal title or the role of divine officiant. Naturally, he often refers to himself with the first person pronoun, but when the ritualist happens to apply a name to himself in the scripts, it is never his own human one. An excellent example comes from the forty-fourth rite of the ritual performed at the sanctuary of the god.⁹⁵ The priest announces to the divine beneficiary:

Hail to you, Amun-Re, lord of the thrones of the two lands,
I have come even with a message of my father Atum:
my arms are upon you as Horus,
my hands upon you as Thoth,
and my fingers upon you as Anubis, foremost of the god's booth.
I am a living priest (lit. living servant) of Re,
I am a W'ab-priest,
and I am pure,
my purity being the purity of the gods.⁹⁶

Putting his hands upon the image of the deity,⁹⁷ the officiant speaks of himself in the first person. As for his named identity, two things are important: that he is in the office of priest and that, at once,⁹⁸ he is Horus, Thoth, and Anubis. It is the same when officiants address their fellows or otherwise refer to them, as for example when one priest calls out to another, 'O

⁹¹ See Tambiah, S.J., *A Performative Approach to Ritual* (*Proceedings of the British Academy* 65), Oxford 1981, pp. 140 141, where it is observed that two of the objectives of ritual (when construed as an act of communication) are submission to constraint and subordination to a collective representation.

⁹² Cf. Bourdieu, *Language*, p. 116.

⁹³ For a summary of anthropological perspectives on the relationship between ritual and the maintenance or subversion of social structures, see Kelly and Kaplan, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19, pp. 139 141.

⁹⁴ See Assmann, 'Unio liturgica', pp. 46, 53, and 56.

⁹⁵ In view of the fact that the officiant is within the sanctuary while identifying himself as a w'ab priest, cf. Gee, *JSSA* 31, p. 98, who claims that such priests did not enter the sanctuary. The present passage contradicts this assertion.

⁹⁶ pBerlin 3055 XXVI, 4 6 (rite 44 of Moret, *Le rituel du culte*):

i.nd-ḥr=k imn-r' nb ns(.wt) t3.wy

ii.n=i m wp.t n(it) it(=i) i.tm

ḥ.wy=i hr=k m hr

dr(.ti)=i hr=k m dḥw.ty

db'w=i <ḥ>r=k m inp ḥnti zh-ntr

ink ḥm ḥnh n(i) r'

ink w'ab

iw=i w'ab.kw

ḥb<=i> ḥb ntr.w

⁹⁷ Cf. Heiden, D., 'New Aspects of the Treatment of the Cult Statue in the Daily Temple', in: Hawass, Z. (ed.), *Egyptology at the Dawn of the Twenty first Century*, vol. 2, Cairo 2003, pp. 308 315, p. 312, who claims without support that the non royal priest did not touch the image of the god. The present passage and others contradict this assertion.

⁹⁸ Or it may be that more than a several priests recited these lines, with one saying he is Horus, another saying he is Thoth, and so on.

butcher, give the foreleg to the lector priest and the heart to the companion!⁹⁹ And from a different rite of the sanctuary ritual:

I have ascended to you
with the Great One (sc. Atum) behind me
and <my> purity before me:
I have passed by Tefnut,

even while Tefnut was purifying me,
and indeed I am a priest, the son of a priest in this temple.¹⁰⁰

The officiant is everywhere referred to by generic title and by the names of gods. As the words he recited would be used by other priests, earlier and later, there and elsewhere, so also would his divine roles be played by others. Like the gestures he made, the sacerdotal roles belonged to society beyond the individual. In this manner, for the time being the participant yields his uniqueness and shapes his actions according to prescribed patterns, acknowledging and perpetuating them. His act of agency is to maintain this structure of his society.

Having observed that the officiant's personal identity is displaced, one would like to speculate after some reason for it. The most obvious is that the focus of collective ritual is not on the priests involved, but on the passive beneficiary for whom the rites are performed. Excluding the identities of the sacerdotal officiants has the effect of keeping the object of the activity in central place. Within the context of the ritual itself, it is not about the individualities of the living participants, but strictly about the divine beings whom they serve.

A further impetus for the separation of the officiant from his identity could well be found in the nature of the physical space into which he enters, since it is conditioned by the sacredness of the passive beneficiary: in addition¹⁰¹ to receiving the skeptron, a precondition to entering ritual space is purity.¹⁰² This holds for rites for a god as for a dead man. Thus Mehuakhti promises protection for '[any] of my own Ka-servants who will perform mortuary service for me while in a state of purity, that their heart be strong in respect to it, just as they are pure at the temple of the great god'.¹⁰³ According to the classical, Durkheimian theory, outside of the cultic space the ritualists 'are profane; their condition must be changed'¹⁰⁴ through purifications which prepare

the profane participant for the sacred act, by eliminating from his body the imperfections of his secular nature, cutting him off from the common life, and introducing him step by step into the sacred world of the gods.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Opening of the Mouth rite 24, I b (KV 17) (Otto, E., *Das ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual*, vol. I, Wiesbaden 1960): *i mnḥ dī ḥpš n ḥri-ḥ3b.t [ḥ3].ty n smr*

¹⁰⁰ pBerlin 3055 X, 1 (rite 25 of Moret, *Le rituel du culte*):

pr.n=i ḥr=k

wr m-ḥt=i

ḥb.w<=i> ḥr-tp ḥ.wi=i

zn.n=i ḥr tḥnw.t

swḥ {k} wi tḥnw.t

iw ḥm ink ḥm-ntr z3 ḥm-ntr m r3-pr pn

¹⁰¹ For an assertion that the efficacy of ritual is contingent upon a combination of interdependent conditions, see Bourdieu, *Language*, pp. 111, 113, and 115.

¹⁰² Reflected in the stele of Icherneferet at Sethe, *Lesestücke*, p. 71, 11: *ink wḥb ḥ.wi m shkr ntr sm twr dbḥ.w* 'I was one pure of hands in adorning the god, a Sem priest cleansed of fingers'.

¹⁰³ Edel, E., 'Inschriften des Alten Reichs III. Die Stele des Mḥw-3ḥtj (Reisner G 2375)', *MIO* 1 (1953), pp. 327-336, p. 328: *ḥm-k3 [nb] d.t(=i) pr(.ti)=sn-ḥrw n(=i) wḥb.w r nḥt ib=sn r=s mr wḥb=sn r ḥw.[t]-ntr n(i)t ntr ḥ3*

¹⁰⁴ Hubert, H. and Mauss, M., *Sacrifice. Its Nature and Function*, Chicago 1964 [1899], p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, p. 22.

That notion finds resonance in the priest's asseveration that 'I am pure, and my purity is the purity of the gods'.¹⁰⁶ Explicitly, the priest's condition of purity matches the purity of the divine beings he serves; implicitly, the statement distinguishes his present from his former state. Just as he physically separates himself through purification from the human world outside cultic space, thereby acquiring a divine condition, so also does he leave behind his profane identity and assume the mantles of authorized priest and of god. His separation from his human self facilitates passage between the contraries¹⁰⁷ of the mundane world and the ritual space. The purification signifies 'sheer difference', to use the phraseology of the historian of religions J.Z. Smith.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, because the Egyptian sentient world could be understood as consisting of four parts—the gods, the blessed dead, the king, and humanity¹⁰⁹—the existence of a living Horus Icherneferet, or a Thoth Niankhkai would constitute a transgression across opposing categories.¹¹⁰ But, together with authorization and the solemn marking of the passage by the act of purification, the specifically human agent is absent, and the ritualist steps across the threshold.

The specifically human agent is absent out of necessity, out of the nature of the efficacious action: it is really the gods who act. Thus the deceased is exhorted: 'Do not be distant from the gods, as they perform this utterance for you which they perform for Re-Atum'.¹¹¹ The replacement of human with divine identity could be seen as an *unio liturgica*, the term adopted by Assmann¹¹² to describe what he sees as the principle at work; according to him, in addition to involving the donning of a divine role, this principle has to do with knowledge of sacred words (*s3h.w*, 'transfigurations'¹¹³), their recitation,¹¹⁴ and ritual action, with the point of the union being the facilitation of the human officiant's future transition into the afterlife.¹¹⁵ But that is later.¹¹⁶ Within the rites themselves, the focus remains the beneficiary, and to facilitate *his* transfiguration, a god must speak and act. Thus one may perceive the priest as god reciting the efficacious, Akh-making words to the deceased king: 'hear this word which Horus said to his

¹⁰⁶ pBerlin 3055 I, 7 (rite 2 of Moret, *Le rituel du culte*): *iw=i w^cb.kw ^cb.w=i ^cb.w ntr.w*

¹⁰⁷ For the notion of passages between contraries as a dynamic of ritual, see Bourdieu, P., *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Nice, R., (trans.), Cambridge 1977, pp. 120 and 124 130. See Bourdieu, *Language*, pp. 117 126, on solemn transgressions as marks of consecrated difference. The very act of purification would have the effect of reinforcing the boundaries between the categories of man and god.

¹⁰⁸ See Smith, J.Z., *To Take Place*, p. 108.

¹⁰⁹ See Baines, 'Society', p. 129.

¹¹⁰ And thus even in describing the ritual, Icherneferet does not specify the divine roles he played, although his chief role is implicitly evident in saying *iw nd.n=i wnn-nfr hrw pfn(i) ^ch3 ^c3 s3r.n=i hft(i)w=f nb(.w) hr tz [w] n(i) ndy.t* 'I saved Wenennefer on that day of the great battle; I felled all of his opponents on the bank of the [district] of Nedit' (Sethe, *Lesestücke* p. 71, 17 18), by virtue of the use of the verb *nd* in connection with Osiris and his enemies; see for example CT 17 I 51b 52a (B1P): *iw s3m=f ^cnh n ntr.w pr.t-hrw n r^c m m3^c.t iw hr hnt(i) ^cnh.w nd.n=f it=f wsir snhm.n=f nmt.wt sm3.w it=f wsir* 'He guides life to the gods, and a mortuary offering to Re in truth. Horus Foremost of the Living has saved his father Osiris, having nullified the action of the one who slew his father Osiris'.

¹¹¹ PT 606 §§1693c 1694a (M): *m hr ir ntr.w ir=sn n=k r3 pw ir.n=sn n r^c-tm*

¹¹² See further Assmann, 'Unio liturgica'; Assmann, *Search for God*, pp. 68 and 250 n. 33; and Assmann, *Tod und Jenseits*, pp. 504 517.

¹¹³ The Egyptian term *s3h.w* being equated by Assmann, J., *LÄ* VI, col. 998, with the category of 'Verklärungen', or 'mortuary liturgies'; the association is derived from observations of Goyon, J. C., 'Littérature funéraire tardive', in: *Textes et langages de l'Égypte pharaonique III* (*BdE* 64), Cairo 1974, pp. 73 81, pp. 79 81.

¹¹⁴ To be clear, it should be observed that the activity indicated in the word *s3h* 'to make into an Akh' is not exclusively oral. For instance, when oil is applied to the deity's image, the priest recites, *di.n=i <tw> m h3.t imn-r^c nb ns(.wt) t3.wy sndm=f hr=s s3h=f hr=s* 'I have put <you> even in the brow of Amun Re, lord of the thrones of the two lands, that he be made sweet by it, that he be made an Akh by it' (pBerlin 3055 XXXIII, 2 3, rite 55 of Moret, *Le rituel du culte*; for the reading *tw*, see pBerlin 3053 XXVIII, 3); similarly with the Pyramid Text version of the rite for mortuary cult, PT 77 §52c.

¹¹⁵ See Assmann, *Tod und Jenseits*, pp. 510 511 and 516: 'Ihnen opfert man auf Erden und knüpft dadurch schon zu Lebzeiten eine Beziehung, die dann nach dem Tode durch Aufnahme in den Kreis der Opferempfänger belohnt wird'.

¹¹⁶ See above at n. 76.

father Osiris, that you be an Akh thereby, that you be great thereby'.¹¹⁷ Priest as god, *s3h.w* as recitation, and purity find confluence in the archaic or archaizing¹¹⁸ Hour Vigil:

Recitation by the Two Kites, the Mourners:

Ah, let me purify my mouth; let me chew natron!

I have censed myself with incense and fire,

thus pure, cleansed, censed

with the natron which went forth from Nekheb, with the incense which went forth from Punt,

that which is sweet of scent, that which went forth as the Eye of Horus.

How pure is the *s3h* of Osiris Foremost of the Westerners among the gods, the Followers of Horus!

How beautiful is the *s3h* of Osiris Foremost of the Westerners!

How ceremonial is the *s3h* of Osiris Foremost of the Westerners!¹¹⁹

The recitation by the kites is the recitation of priestesses as Isis and Nephthys.¹²⁰ As the priest's mouth and body are purified, so are his *s3h.w*; in that condition, with him *w^cb twri sntr*, the god's *s3h.w* are *w^cb nfr h3bi*. The quality of purity is necessary not only for the passage between contraries, but for the speech to be efficacious, for it to be 'performative'.

Finally, although the king may delegate his subjects to perform the office of priest, once within that sphere deities such as Anubis, Re,¹²¹ Geb,¹²² and Thoth can be said to direct the action. Thus the deceased is told: 'May you go forth at the voice of Anubis, that he as Thoth

¹¹⁷ PT 734 §§2264a b (N): *sdm mdw pw dd.n hr n it=f wsir 3h=k im 3=k im*. Gods are also specified as those who make one into an Akh at, e.g., PT 431 §§781a b (Nut); PT 437 §795b (Re); PT 483 §1083a (Geb); PT 610 §§1712a c (Horus) and §§1713b c (Thoth and Anubis); PT 690 §2106a (Horus); CT 50 I 231h (Thoth); CT 74 I 312e (Thoth); CT 229 III 295d (Isis); CT 237 III 309c (Isis); CT 345 IV 375a (Thoth); CT 1068 VII 330a (those in the Netherworld).

¹¹⁸ That the Hour Vigil is marked by archaic language is observed by Cauville, *Le temple de Dendara*, p. 70, for the statements made by the lamenters, with global parallels to Pyramid Texts drawn out already by Junker, H., *Die Stundenwachen in den Osirismysterien*, Vienna 1910, p. 23.

¹¹⁹ Hour Vigil XIII (Edfu) 61 71 (Junker, *Stundenwachen*):

dd-mdw in dr(i).ti h3.(t)iw
i^cb=i r3=i wš^c=i zmn.w
k3p.n(=i) wi m sntr hr h.t
w^cb.kw(i) twr.kw sntr.kw
m zmn.w pr m nhb m sntr pr m pwn.t
ndm sty pr m ir(t) hr
w^cb.w(i) s3h n(i) wsir hnti-imn.tiw m-^cb ntr.w šms-hr
nfr.w(i) s3h n(i) wsir hnti-imn.tiw
h3b.w(i) s3h n(i) wsir hnti-imn.tiw

¹²⁰ See Münster, *Untersuchungen zur Göttin Isis*, p. 23, for the identification of the *dri.ty* 'kites' as Isis and Nephthys, an identification the tradition for which reaches back to the Old Kingdom, as at PT 535 §1280b (P): *i h3.t i dr.t 3s.t ti hn^c nb.t-hw.t* 'the wailing bird comes: the mourning kite comes, that is, Isis and Nephthys'. For the vocalization with -i- (-y), see CT 1033 VII 269a: *z3 dry.t n(i)t wsir* 'the son of the kite of Osiris'. For further references on the mourning goddesses, see Cauville, *Le temple de Dendara*, p. 70 n. 117.

¹²¹ As at CT 45 I 199f 200a (B12C): *iw wd.n n=i r^c rdi n=k tp=k smn n=k tz=k shr [n=k] hft(i)w=k ink mstw.ty=k tp(i) t3* 'Re has commanded me (sc. Horus) that your head be given to you, that your spine be made firm for you, and that your enemies be made to fall [for you], for I am your offspring who is upon earth' and CT 590 VI 210h i (S2P): *pr.n hr it=f wsir m nby.t zkr ds=f wd.n r^c irr=f sw* 'Horus has equipped his father Osiris with the Nebyt collar of Zokar himself: Re has commanded that he do it'.

¹²² As at PT 477 §967a c (N): *i.n Ne. hr=k wsir ... iry n=k Ne. nw wd.n gbb iry=f n=k* 'To you has Neferkare come, O Osiris,... that Neferkare do for you this which Geb commanded that he do', and PT 373 §657a d (M): *h(w) n=k it 3h n=k bd.t ir n tp(i)w-3bd.w=k im ir n tp(i)w-smd.wt=k im m wdd.t ir.t n=k in it=k gbb* 'Let barley be threshed for you, emmer harvested for you, being done at your first of the month festivals thereby, being done at your first of the half month festivals thereby, as that which was commanded to be done by your father Geb'. See also PT 357 §§583c and 590b; PT 364 §612a; PT 367 §634a; and PT 369 §640b.

make you an Akh... through this your Sakh which Anubis commanded',¹²³ while 'it is Thoth who got the lectors, those who recite it during the deeds'.¹²⁴ In letting his actions be structured by royal authorization, the human goes to his task, becoming pure and stepping by title and divine name into the formalized ritual space; there, he acts as god, and his mandate stems from the gods.

And yet the ceding of initiative and acceptance of authorization has the effect of empowering the ritualist outside of ritual proper. Prior to it, the authorization imparts authority, granting control over subordinates. Once the ritual is complete, he enjoys the secondary benefits of cultural capital, a claim for superhuman protection in life, and post-mortem advantages. Among such other experiences and results as the agential ritualist might enjoy, in wielding the authorized language of his society he helps perpetuate and support its structures. And so, just as the ritualist stands between the motion of his performance and the stasis of the tradition incarnate in his king, so does a monument like that of Icherneferet emanate a myth of human identity. Irony: it was generated within a society in which that identity was in ritual effaced.

¹²³ PT 437 §§796c 797b (P): *pr=k ḥr ḥrw inp s3ḥ=fṯw m dḥw.ti ... m s3ḥ=k pn wd.n inp*

¹²⁴ CT 590 VI 210f g (S2P): *in dḥw.ti in ḥriw-ḥ3b.t šdd.w sw m šm.wt*