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Only the dead can tell us: on ancestor worship, law, social status, and gender norms in ancient Egypt

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Only the Dead can Tell Us

On Ancestor Worship, Law, Social Status, and Gender Norms in Ancient Egypt

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Dr. Miriam Müller

This thesis is presented as a scientific treatise delving into the role of ancestor worship in influencing the administration of law, and the hierarchies and expectations surrounding social status and gender roles in Ancient Egypt.

Some chapters are reworkings of articles that I have previously published. Specifically:

- Chapter 2 – On the incorrect use of the label “shamanism” in Egyptology – is an extended version of R. Schiavo 2018. On the Improper Use of the Label "Shamanism" in Egyptology: Rethinking the Role of the Opening of the Mouth Ritual and the Tekenu Ceremony in Light of Ancestor Worship, *Религиоведение/History of Religions*: 5-15.

Chapter 4 – On the actual juridical function of some Letters to the Dead – is an extended version of two papers of mine: 1. R. Schiavo 2013. Sulla possibile funzione giuridica di alcune lettere ai morti. *Aegyptus* 93: 125-145; ○ 2. R. Schiavo 2023. Ancestors as a source of legal authority. In: A. Loktionov (ed.), Compulsion and control in Ancient Egypt: Proceedings of the Third Lady Wallis Budge Egyptology Symposium, 54-74. Oxford: Archeopress.

- Chapter 5 – Ghosts and ancestors in a gender perspective – is an extended version of: R. Schiavo 2020. Ghosts and ancestors in a gender perspective, *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 25: 201-212.

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CT Coffin Texts – A. de Buck 1935-1961. *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 7 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

FCD R.O. Faulkner 1981. *A concise dictionary of Middle Egyptian.* Oxford: Griffith Institute

RPN H. Ranke 1977. *Die ägyptischen Personennamen,* 3 vols. Glückstadt: Augustin.

Wb A. Erman and H. Grapow 1926-1961. *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache,* 7 vols. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

TLA *Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae*

Symbols used on transliteration and translation

[…] Text damaged or broken off

<…> Omission by the scribe

{…} superfluous sign due to scribal error

(…) Translator's remark

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Mission statement, *status quaestionis*, and structure of the research

Funerals and other kinds of commemorations in honour of the dead often involve aims far more complex than merely benefiting the deceased and, in cultural contexts characterised by significant social inequalities, these rituals could become a powerful tool serving elite self-presentation.[1] Especially in societies where social roles, or even offices, are traditionally handed down within the same family through generations, the rituals inherent in the sphere of death can be fashioned as special occasions to publicly ratify the transmission of power from a deceased person to the legitimate successor.[2] From this perspective, as noted by the anthropologist J.R. Perodie, funerals can be considered one of the foremost "formal condition for political advancement".[3] Scholars have also pointed out how actions aimed at periodically praising deceased family members – in other words, the so-called "ancestor worship" – usually play a crucial role in establishing and justifying social behaviours, including the rules governing inheritance and succession.[4]

Several elements suggest that these kinds of phenomena characterised Pharaonic culture as well. The importance of feasts as a tool to cement social relations has been for example highlighted by H. Jauhiainen,[5] and the customary rule according to which "the property is given to the one who buries" is probably the most striking evidence of the connection between funerary and mortuary rites, inheritance and succession within this ancient culture.[6]

In the light of these premises, the main aim of the present thesis is to investigate the authoritative role of the ancestors in matters of social cohesion, succession, inheritance and property ownership. In particular the purpose is to ascertain whether religious sources concerning the cult of the ancestors can provide concrete evidence on how justice was actually administrated in Ancient Egypt.

[1] B. Hayden 2010, 29-30.
[2] B. Hayden 2010, 29-30.
[3] J. R. Perodie 2010, 205-206.
[4] J. Goody 2004, 412; C. J. Calhoun 1980, 304-319.
[5] H. Jauhiainen 2008.
[6] J. J. Janssen and P. W. Pestman 1968, 137-170; P. W. Pestman 1969, 58-77.

The title of the present research – *Only the dead can tell us* – derived indeed from the idea that this core of religious beliefs, which also included necromantic practices, can be invaluable for better understanding Ancient Egyptian society and justice.

Specifically, the study will focus on three main research questions:

- What are the factors intrinsic to the history of Egyptology that led to an underestimation of the role played by ancestor worship in both the juridical and the economic sphere?
- Is it possible to identify specific ceremonies focused on the passage of power from the deceased head of the family to the legitimate heir, which were strictly intertwined with both funerary and mortuary rituals? If yes, how and where were they performed? Furthermore, what role did women play in this kind of religious beliefs and practices?
- Is it possible to recognise an actual involvement of the ancestors in the legal practices pertaining to inheritance and succession and the ownership of certain kinds of properties? If yes, how have these kinds of beliefs and practices evolved through time?

Since these research questions aim to explore a very specific intersection between law, economy, and religion, they can hardly be framed within a sole line of research already consolidated and formally recognised in Egyptology. Therefore, with regard to the current *status quaestionis*, it is possible to identify, in a purely heuristic way, three different research areas – partly overlapping with each other – from which the present work stemmed.

Studies focused on ancient Egyptian law have already identified a strong connection between the act of taking care of both the funerary and the mortuary rituals of the deceased and the right of claiming the inheritance of the latter.[7] The importance of the "kinship logic" as an element characterising both ancient Egyptian society and law was highlighted by M. Campagno.[8] Particularly significant is also a category of documents – known in the scientific literature as "Letters to Dead" – which were often addressed to a deceased ancestor to solve legal disputes concerning inheritance issues. In this regard, there is a still

[7] J. J. Janssen and P. W. Pestman 1968, 137-170; P. W. Pestman 1969, 58-77.
[8] M. Campagno 2006.

ongoing debate. While most Egyptologists showed a certain tendency to identify them as a form of "legal fiction" and therefore as a magical/performative action to ward off an opponent,[9] or, at least, as the "final attempt of an individual to seek justice, the legal system proper having failed",[10] others posited how these written sources may have had a certain degree of legal value. The latter hypothesis was first put forward by S. Morenz in 1949, who interpreted some excerpts from the Letters to the Dead as the evidence of a necromantic practice aimed at bringing back to life the mummy of the deceased and letting the latter testify in front of a tribunal.[11] Although Morenz's interpretation was based on extremely weak arguments, some of which are no longer acceptable in the light of the knowledge currently attained on the subject,[12] starting from the 2000s, the necromantic hypothesis gained new supporters. The first re-evaluation of the label "necromancy" to better understand certain Egyptian religious practices, such as the Letters to the Dead or the oracular consultations, was proposed by R.K. Ritner in 2002.[13] Two years later, in 2004, D. Farout interpreted some passages from a Letter to the Dead as the evidence of a necromantic action aimed at summoning a dead through a human medium in order to settle a legal dispute.[14] A similar interpretation has been subsequently supported by S. Donnat Beauquier.[15] J. Hsieh also addressed this concept in her recent monograph, even though she did not explore the potential legal function of these documents.[16] On the other hand, especially J. C. Moreno García and S. Donnat Beauquier have considered the Letters to the Dead in some ways comparable to the oracular consultations which were often involved in the settlement of legal issues,[17] a hypothesis that has been further developed in the present thesis. It is also important to stress that H. Willems highlighted how a group of Coffin Text spells (especially CT spells 30-41), designated by him as "spells without mythology" – since the traditional gods seem to play a rather minor role while the main focus centres on

[9] See, in particular, G. Miniaci 2014 and 2016, 88-105.
[10] R. Jasnow 2003, 132-133.
[11] S. Morenz 1945, 298-300.
[12] Specifically, as regards the translation of the verb *ṯsi*, literally "rise". According to Morenz, it would indicate the action of bringing a deceased back to life in order to testify in a court (see S. Morenz 1949, 298-299). However, a subsequent analysis by Grieshammer showed that the verb, especially in legalistic context, was used to indicate the action of being in sharp conflict with someone or to face an enemy during a trial. See also: R. Grieshammer 1975, 867; R. Grieshammer 1970, 17-18.
[13] R.K. Ritner 2002 A, and 2002 B. On the other hand, it is important to stress that Ritner is more prone to consider the Letters to the Dead more as a magical action to seek vindication against an enemy, comparable to execration rites. See: R.K. Ritner 1994, 180-183.
[14] D. Farout 2004, 51.
[15] S. Donnat Beauquier 2009, 84.
[16] J. Hsieh 2022, 313-314 and 4-9.
[17] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 144-145; J.C. Moreno García 2010.

the interactions between the living and the dead – not only shows significant stylistic similarities with the Letters to the Dead, but can be understood as the specific liturgy enacted during the ritual deposition of these documents inside or in the vicinity of the tombs.[18] This element allows us to easily understand how the public performances carried out during both the funerary and the mortuary rituals involved a rather complex core of meanings and values, and, as H. Willems himself underlined, it is possible to assume that such an "interconnection between inheritance and performance of the rituals for the deceased" was probably "the model from which conceptions about life after death were derived".[19]

Recent interpretations that emphasised the potential legal purpose of the Letters to the Dead must be understood within the broader context of the recent developments in studies concerning Ancient Egyptian ancestor worship. Although earlier Egyptological thoughts exhibited a certain reluctance in accepting the existence of such beliefs in pharaonic Egypt,[20] the veneration of deceased forebears has been shown to have played a major role not only in the context of domestic cults but also in the establishment and maintenance of power relations in both elite and royal spheres.[21] For example, Y.M. el Shazly has demonstrated the importance of the posthumous veneration directed towards certain members of the royal family in the specific context of the "worker's village" of Deir el-Medina. Although the existence of this religious phenomenon had already been highlighted by various prior studies, Y.M. el Shazly's monograph distinguished itself by introducing the concept of "superior ancestor worship" into Egyptology, a notion previously elaborated by the anthropologist D. Sheils.[22] This concept refers to the dynamic according to which the ancestors of the hegemonic group occupy a paramount role not only within the confines of the most powerful family but also as supernatural beings capable of influencing (either protecting or punishing) all members of the community, regardless of their social background.[23] A recent monograph published by J. Troche has highlighted how the

[18] H. Willems 2001, 253-256.
[19] H. Willems 2001, 369. See also: H. Willems 2014, 184-192.
[20] This is an aspect that will be thoroughly explored in Chapter 2.
[21] A turning point, in this regard, can be identified in aforementioned monograph by R. J. Demarée (1983), which inaugurated the study of ancient Egyptian ancestor worship in a sociological perspective and opened the path to several subsequent works: J. Lustig 1993; H. Willems 2001; Moreno García 2010; N. Harrington 2013; R. Schiavo 2014, 153-162; J. Troche 2018, 465-475; Y.M. el Shazly 2015; J. C. Moreno García 2016; L. Weiss 2015, 50-63; L. Weiss, 2021, 219-235; J. Troche 2021.
[22] Y.M. el Shazly 2015, 4 and note 17.
[23] D. Sheils 1980, 254.

apotheosis of some deceased nomarchs played a significant political function in legitimising the power of the local rulers during the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom, and how these types of religious facts were absorbed and reformulated by the royal power after the reunification of Egypt.[24]

From this perspective, it can be argued that studies focused on ancient Egyptian ancestor worship have proven to be one of the most fertile research areas for better understanding various aspects of ancient Egyptian culture through a sociological point of view. M. Fitzenreiter, in particular, has emphasised the social functions of Egyptian ancestor worship in regulating both power relations and succession.[25] Additionally, subsequent articles by the same author highlighted how the mortuary rituals dedicated to elite members – and the estates funding these posthumous cults –involved a broad network of people who was not limited to blood relatives but also included individuals connected to the extended family through various patronage relationships;[26] in sum, in Ancient Egypt, kinship ties were, at least in part, a cultural construction, that could be dismantled and reconstructed to meet the specific needs related to the self-presentation of the elites or the royal family.[27]

Recent studies have also focused on the role of necropolises as special liminal places, which were not only designed for seeking contact with the dead, but also to serve as ideal settings for showcasing social status, fostering social bonds, and shaping both individual and collective identities.[28] In this regard, it is worth mentioning a recent monograph by L. Olabarria aimed at approaching the complex issue of ancient Egyptian kinship from a fresh perspective that draws inspiration from modern social anthropology.[29] Although this study highlights the role of the deceased as active members of the family group,[30] Olabarria's methodology has been criticised for an inherent tendency to produce oversimplified interpretations, which neglected some mechanics characterising the complex interactions between the living and the dead documented in the sources she considered.[31] For example, as stated by R. Nyord, some of the stelae analysed by Olabarria clearly show more than an individual as cult recipients; it follows that the ritualists mentioned in those documents

[24] J. Troche 2021, 90.
[25] M. Fitzenreiter 1994, 55.
[26] M. Fitzenreiter 2005 A, 91-92.
[27] M. Fitzenreiter 2005 B, 10.
[28] L. Weiss 2019; J. Baines 2022.
[29] L. Olabarria 2020, 3-15 and 96-114.
[30] L. Olabarria 2020, 70-71; 92-93.
[31] J. Budka 2021, 199.

should be related not to the owner of the stela but to the deceased ancestors for whom the mortuary ritual was performed.[32] Furthermore, her observation that "several letters to the dead are addressed to women, who are meant to intercede in favour of the deceased in the hereafter and assure the wellbeing of living members of their family, but they do so in their role of efficient and effective dead rather than on the basis of their gender", can be easily questioned, especially in light of what is stated in chapter 5 of the present thesis.

Last but not least, the topics addressed herein are closely tied to a wider problem concerning the methods used in Egyptology to approach religious facts, and the dialogue of the latter discipline with other academic fields, above all, history of religions, Cultural Anthropology, and Sociology. This is not an absolute new area of interest and indeed it is beyond the scope of the present thesis to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of the art related to this issue. On the other hand, it is of the utmost importance to highlight certain problematic recurrent tendencies that have characterised scholarly approaches to ancient Egyptian religion. M. Fitzenreiter, for example, has pointed out how traditional Egyptological studies mostly approached religion from a theological point of view, while "social aspects of religious practice were not at the center of earlier research".[33] Both J. Baines and L. Weiss have stressed that Egyptology has shown a tendency to emphasise the unique role of Pharaonic Egypt as the place of origin for the most salient traits typical of the great monotheistic traditions – above all, those of the so-called personal piety or a positive attitude towards the afterlife – to the detriment of other aspects, such as those involving the interactions between the living and the dead.[34] These problematic approaches also involved another issue: the ways in which certain interpretative schemes, typical of earlier anthropological thoughts, have been passively assimilated by modern and even contemporary scholars.[35] As posited by H. Willems, these, often unconscious, tendencies have resulted in the misinterpretation of several ancient Egyptian written sources in which the kind of supernatural entities we are accustomed to label as 'gods' are absent or play a minor role.[36] This is especially true for a group of documents that constitute the main object of analysis of the present thesis – the Opening of the Mouth ritual scenes 9 and 10, the Tekenu ritual, the Haker feast, and the so-called "Letters to the Dead" – which

[32] R. Nyord 2021 B, 208-209.
[33] M. Fitzenreiter 2018, 53.
[34] J. Baines 1983, 80; J. Baines 2011, 42; L. Weiss 2015, 179-180.
[35] H. Willems 2013; R. Nyord 2018.
[36] H. Willems 2013, 412-413.

have often been understood in the light of an interpretative bias strictly linked to an evolutionistic unilinear vision of human history and, therefore, considered as a mere survival of 'archaic' religious facts.

The starting point of the present thesis has thus been that of analysing these sources – which only at a superficial level show a lack of mythological references– in order to better understand their actual meaning as dramatic and/or collective rituals and their involvement in the administration of justice and the legitimation of social status.

To fulfil this aim, the thesis has been structured as follows. Chapter 1 is dedicated to the methodology, with special attention to the role of comparativism in the history of religions; in addition, the relevant terms and concepts are discussed and defined. Chapter 2 consists of a critical approach to previous studies; rather than focusing exclusively on the topic of ancestor worship and its role in Egyptology, as mentioned above, a wider problem has been identified and deepened: that of certain dramatic rituals – the Opening of the Mouth Ritual, the Tekenu Ritual, and the Haker feast – which have been incorrectly considered as survivals of archaic shamanic practices rather than as contemporary expressions of ancestor worship. This approach has turned out to be particularly useful to the first research question and thus to understand the factors that led to an underestimation of the role played by the Egyptian ancestor worship in both the juridical and the economic sphere. Chapter 3, 4 and 5 are dedicated to the analysis of the sources. In chapter 3 all the main data currently available concerning the Opening of the Mouth Ritual scene 9 and 10, the Tekenu ritual and the Haker feast have been translated and analysed in order to fully understand their actual meaning and function. Chapter 4 and 5 focus on the so-called Letters to the Dead; specifically, chapter 4 analyses the Letters to the Dead written to settle inheritance, or economic-related issues, while chapter 5 focuses on the Letters to the Dead addressed to deceased women in order to analyse these kinds of beliefs from a gender perspective. Chapter 6 is dedicated to a comparative study between pharaonic Egypt and other societies of the Ancient Near East, with a special focus on the authoritative role of the dead in legitimising power relations, inheritance issues, and real estate ownership. Finally, in chapter 7, the results of the research are outlined.

1.Discussing methodology and terms

1.1 Methodology

The present thesis aims to analyse the role of ancestor worship in Ancient Egyptian society and the ways in which this core of beliefs affected social behaviours and the juridical sphere through time. Before delving into the topic, it is therefore necessary to provide an exact definition for specific concepts and terms and, above all, specific methodological observations.

The main goal of the research is the analysis of diverse written sources, but the texts have not been simply translated and commented upon. Rather, one of the main aims has been that of understanding and reconstructing the actual ritual practices behind them and how the latter changed and were adapted over time. To fulfil this objective a comparative method has played a crucial role but, in this regard, it is important to specify what is meant by comparative method within the context of the present thesis.

Comparativism has had a complex history within the academic study of religions. Several criticisms have been brought forward against it, which mainly pertained to the typology of phenomena taken into consideration and how they have been conceptualised.[37] Specifically, it has been pointed out how most of the categories adopted by scholars can be essentially considered as too ethnocentric; it means that they entail the risk of suppressing the insider perspective about religious facts and the on-the-ground strategies and disposition of the believers towards their beliefs and practices (the so-called *emic* perspective), in favour of the point of view of modern scholars (*etic* perspective).[38] Furthermore, the cross-cultural categories used within comparative studies have been often considered as universal rather than heuristic, an attitude that involved an excessive attention for vague similarities occurring in religions belonging to quite different historical and social contexts, often with the aim of reconstructing "pure", "original" or "archetypical" forms of religion or even "divine revelation", rather than analysing the value and the meaning that religious facts had within their specific historical and social contexts.[39]

[37] W.E. Paden 2004, 78.
[38] W.E. Paden 2004, 78.
[39] W.E. Paden 2004, 78.

Especially C. Geertz has stressed the importance of considering the terminology used by the insiders to describe their religious phenomena. [40] On the other hand, Geertz' approach involved the risk of closing the door to any kind of cross-cultural study in favour of "microscopic thick descriptions" pertaining to very specific social contexts.[41] This can indeed be problematic when a scholar has to deal with cultural practices and beliefs belonging to ancient cultures or has to attempt a diachronic study. As a matter of fact, it is impossible to interview the people involved about the analysed cultural facts, nor it is possible to practice so-called *participant observation*. Especially as regards the Ancient Near East it is important to stress that the sources at our disposal – both archaeological data and written texts – have to be considered as the tip of an iceberg which can give us only a partial vision of realities that were certainly much more complex.[42] Even our current knowledge of the ancient languages is certainly limited, and it is not uncommon to come across *hapax legomena*, or terms whose exact meaning is quite hard to understand.

The recent developments of the so-called ontological turn can suggest that a rethinking of the comparative method is possible as long as the categories adopted for the comparison are critically approached.[43] Particularly interesting in this regard is the inaugural lecture at the *Collège de France* of Ph. Descola, where it is highlighted that:

> *the construction of a category of comparable facts proceeds from a back-and-forth movement between a comprehensive approach – the appeal to context – and an extensive one – the identification of apparently multiple expressions of the same property of social life. Understood in this way, the comparative method is not an end in itself, but a form of controlled experimentation that allows us to verify or to invalidate hypotheses on what underpins and explains the diverse use systems of the world.*[44]

[40] C. Geertz 1973, 122-123.
[41] W.E. Paden 2004, 78.
[42] In this regard see: J. Baines 1987, 87.
[43] Ph. Descola 2013,
[44] Ph. Descola 2014, 21.

Therefore, in order to avoid biased approaches, in the present work the comparative method has been structured in the following way:

- The categories taken into consideration – "ancestor", "ancestor worship", "funerary and mortuary ritual", "necromancy" – are essentially considered here as heuristic tools. Also, aware of Geertz' lesson, the operative definition of these terms has been modelled and structured taking into account the *emic* perspective and language of the ancient Egyptians, and the specific terminology they used to describe certain religious phenomena.

- The comparison has been limited to a restricted range of cultural contexts. Above all, it focuses on the Ancient Egyptian culture itself and its different historical phases. Indeed, given that we are dealing with a culture that has been exceptionally long-lived, to identify specific categories and to analyse their occurrence over time turned out to be an optimal starting point to understanding how certain religious facts have evolved within Ancient Egyptian society. Yet, as mentioned above, the attempt to reconstruct the actual religious practices of human beings who disappeared millennia ago certainly poses some difficulties, since the individuals involved in these beliefs and practices cannot be directly interviewed or observed. In this regard, cross-cultural comparison proved to be a useful tool to better understand certain religious facts. However, following the path already opened by other scholars,[45] this cross-cultural analysis has been conducted by taking into consideration contexts which show significant common traits with Ancient Egyptian society, such as similar political organizations, or a framework in which the institution of the extended family plays a foremost role.

Finally, a further consideration is necessary. Especially with regard to the study of ancient cultures, comparativism has been often strictly intertwined with the concept of "survival" elaborated during the 19th century. Early anthropologists believed that traces of ancient practices may have somehow survived over time, often in a degraded form whose original meaning was not fully understood or even totally unknown to the subjects involved.[46] This kind of approach has been widely dismissed for several reasons. First, it is nowadays considered as biased by a strict ethnocentric vision, according to which human history can

[45] E. Montanari 2001, 49-55; W.E. Paden 2004, 88-90; M.G. Lancellotti 2006, 147-170; N. Cusumano 2013, 634-638; W.E. Paden 2016.
[46] E. Montanari 2001, 54 and ff.

be understood as a unique line which starts from a primitive stage and leads to civilised societies according to a precise evolutionary pattern.[47] Second, the "survival theory" decreases the value or even cancels not only the insider perspective on the analysed facts, but it also presupposes a perspective in which the subjects involved in the analysed cultural practices are paradoxically considered as passive, since they are not even able to recognise the "original" or the most "authentic function" of the cultural facts they are enacting.[48]

On the other hand, it is undeniable that certain cultural phenomena and practices can last over time. Especially for the specific case of the Ancient Egyptian culture, mythical or iconographic themes certainly persisted for millennia. Yet, at the same time, this does not mean that major transformations and shifts in functions and meanings related to certain symbols or rituals have not occurred. It is therefore useful to introduce the concept of "coherent reshaping". Unlike the survival theory, this concept shifts the focus onto the insider perspective. The starting point is that if a cultural or religious practice is enacted by a group of people, it is because it has (or had) a specific meaning for the individuals involved, even in those specific cases in which the phenomena under analysis might appear as "archaic living fossils" according to the *etic* perspective of the scholars.[49] The attention, thus, has to be shifted to the creative solutions and choices of the insiders through which certain beliefs, practices, figurative or mythical themes have been maintained, but also reformulated through times, by acquiring new meanings or functions.[50] Under this point of view, the heuristic categories identified for the aims of the present work will be useful not only for the identification of recurrent patterns, but also to appreciate those significant differences indispensable to outline the historical evolution of the religious beliefs and practices examined here.[51]

Finally, some of the sources taken into consideration for the present thesis – such as the so-called Letters to the Dead or the Coffin Text spells – involve specific methodological issues which will be discussed separately in later chapters.

[47] E. Montanari 2001, 54 and ff.
[48] E. Montanari 2001, 54 and ff.
[49] N. Cusumano 2013, 365.
[50] N. Cusumano 2013, 365.
[51] In this regard, see also W. E. Paden 2016, 133 and ff. (e-book version).

1.2 Defining terms and concepts

The identification of "operative categories" in order to circumscribe the object of a research concerning religious facts must be based on an *inductive method*, by observing and comparing diverse religious practices and beliefs, and, above all, in a way which is respectful of the categories and ideas attested in the language of the insiders. In other words, the definitions proposed here must be meant as a heuristic tool aimed at delimiting the object of a research.[52] To start, operative definitions of "ancestor" and "ancestor worship" have been provided; in this context, it was also necessary to develop a heuristic schematization of the main rituals pertaining to the death sphere – "funerary rituals", "mortuary rituals", "ancestralisation", "necromancy" – and provide an operational definition for each of these categories. The notion of "universality" has also been explored, since scholars, with regard to the kinds of religious phenomena examined here, have often used it in an inappropriate way. Finally, noteworthy is that most of the textual sources analysed in the present thesis - in particular the Opening of the Mouth Ritual scenes 9 and 10, the Tekenu ritual, and the Haker feast - have often been interpreted as survivals of archaic shamanic practices. Although, in the present work, such an interpretation has been rejected, the need to discuss the role played by the category "shamanism" in the context of the history of religions and how this concept filtered down into Egyptology has emerged. This issue has been addressed in chapter 2, where the previous studies relating to these religious facts were critically examined.

1.2.1 What is an ancestor?

In religions, the objects of beliefs and cults are countless and not limited to those we usually call "divinities".[53] Different kinds of supernatural entities, such as demons,[54] tricksters,[55] or impersonal powers can be invoked for help or be the object of various cultic actions.[56]

[52] W.E. Paden 2016, 133 and ff. (e-book version). See also: K. Teinz 2012, 242; W.E. Paden 2004, 87; A. Brelich 2006, 3.

[53] A. Brelich 2006, 23-25. See also the following consideration made by J. Baines "Here, I explore for earlier periods other forms of actions that are considered religious in the study of most societies but are not so centripetally organised and are minimised in the study of Egyptology". Remarkably, these forms of religious actions identified by J. Baines mainly concerns the beliefs and practices pertaining to the dead. J. Baines 1987, 80.

[54] K. Szpakowska 2009, 799-805; R. Lucarelli 2010.

[55] As J.F. Borghouts argued, in ancient Egyptian religion it is impossible to find deities with all the main traits of the widely accepted trickster-typology in comparative religion and anthropology (J.F. Borghouts 2008, 47-48; for related criticism, cf. H. Goedicke 1979.

[56] A. H. Gordon 1996.

Among these, deceased people played – and still play – a foremost role in a large number of cultural contexts.[57]

The ancient Egyptian society was no exception. The deification of the dead was a common phenomenon and numerous studies have shown how the deceased were perceived as supernatural beings which can be invoked to solve diverse kinds of problems.[58]

If the numinous status of the dead within ancient Egypt can no longer be questioned, there are other aspects to be taken into consideration, above all the perceived difference between a god and a supernatural dead. In this regard, some scholars have argued that the original meaning of the word *nṯr* – traditionally translated as "god" – might refer to the deceased or, more precisely, to the dead kings.[59] One of the main arguments focused on one of the signs used to write the word *nṯr*, the sign (R8). The hieroglyph probably depicts a flag or a staff wrapped with a cloth – and in this regard a parallel has been identified with certain traditions attested in Sudan and in North Africa, where the flags placed at the entrance to certain tombs are considered not just markers of holy ground, but concrete manifestations of the supernatural entity residing in that place.[60] Some early scholars have therefore seen in these conceptions the proof of a tradition going back several millennia, whose origins would date to the very dawn of the pharaonic civilization.[61]

On the other hand, it must be said that this kind of interpretation was biased by an approach typical of the 19th century, according to which beliefs concerning the spirits of the dead and their survival after death could be considered as the first manifestation of any form of religion. In this regard E. Hornung has pointed out that early dynastic sources "do not support the hypothesis of a general equivalence of *nṯr* with the deceased or with the dead king".[62]

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[57] Especially for the Ancient Near East, several data confirm this. The Hebrew Bible, on occasion, uses the term *ʾelōhīm,* literally 'gods' in order to denote the supernatural character of the dead (cf. 1 Sam 28:13) Ugaritic refers to the dead with the terms *mt* and *rpu*, but, occasionally, the terms *il* and *ilnym* are attested too. Similarly, Akkadian could use also *ilu*. K. Spronk 1995, 421-422.

[58] D. Wildung, 1977 B; A. von Lieven 2010.

[59] E. Hornung 1983, 42.

[60] E. Hornung 1983, 37.

[61] A.J. Arkell 1933.

[62] "The early dynastic sources, which consist of personal names and titles, do not support the hypothesis of a general equivalence of *nṯr* with the deceased or with the dead king". E. Hornung 1982, 45. See also H. Goedicke 1986 A, 57-62. With regard to the sign R8, compare: J. Baines 1991, 29-46.

A more grounded approach has been adopted by D. Meeks who has investigated the exact meaning of the word *nṯr* by analysing the main contexts in which this term occurs. The result of this investigation showed that the term *nṯr* has been used by the Egyptian to designate all the entities which undergo rituals, such as the kind of supernatural beings we are used to call "gods", but also the sovereigns, and above all the dead, both human and animal.[63]

This statement could be the right key to outline an operative definition of ancestor. Indeed, as several ethnographical parallels suggest, an ancestor is a deceased person who has achieved a special status[64] and the differences between this kind of supernatural being and a "simple" dead are often stressed by specific rites of passage, like the so-called *double burial*, studied by Hertz.[65]

In the Ancient Egyptian language, in addition to the term *mwt*, used to indicate the "dead" in the broadest sense, a specific terminology to remark the superhuman position of certain deceased is well attested. In this regard, the word *ꜣḫ*, traditionally translated as "blessed" or "effective" spirit, is one of the most recurrent terms in the written sources, often associated to adjectives like *ỉḳr* "excellent", *mnḫ* "equipped" or *ḫpr* "capable".[66] This term was not only used to highlight the special status of a deceased[67] but also as a divine epithet aimed at connoting the particular power possessed by a deity,[68] an element which confirms once again how the differences between a god and an ancestor, although existing, were rather nuanced. It is also possible to recognise different local traditions or relevant transformations through times. In the Midlle Kingdom, at Edfu, the sources related to the posthumous cult of the nomarch Izi show that he was called *nṯr ꜥnḫ* (living god);[69] Heqaib,

[63] "Le mot "nétjer" « dieu » appartient à une famille de mots dont le dénominateur commun est le rite. Est «dieu » tout ce qui a été introduit et/ou maintenu dans cet état par le rite". D. Meeks 1988, 429.
[64] A. Brelich 2006, 23-24.
[65] R. Hertz 1905-1906.
[66] R. Demarée 1983, 195-198.
[67] Although not strictly relevant to the research questions investigated in this study, it is interesting to note how the *ꜣḫ.w* are often mentioned in religious texts to identify what we might call a collective group of anonymous ancestors. According to N. Harrington, this could testify to a type of religious belief concerning a general community of ancestors whose post-mortem existence was based on a state of 'collective immortality'. Indeed, the distinction between the ancestors as an "anonymous collective", and specific recent 'ancestors' of a specific kin-group which usually are the main object of a special care is attested in several other cultures. N. Harrington 2013, pp. 29-30.
[68] R. Demarée 1983, 198-199.
[69] C. Böwe 2004.

instead, was worshipped at Qubbet el-Hawa as *ṯnỉ* "the elevated one".[70] During the Late Period terms such as *ḥrỉ* ("the high one") or *ḥsỉ* ("the praised one") are attested to define specific categories of supernatural dead,[71] and the expression *nṯr ꜥ3* (great god) became rather common among non-royal individuals.[72]

Moreover, the existence of a typology of rites denominated *s3ḫ.w* – a causative of the aforementioned term *3ḫ*, which literally means "to transform into an *3ḫ*" – clearly implies that a deceased was able to become a dead endowed with special power thanks to specific ritual actions.[73]

In light of these data, for the specific aim of the present study, the following definition of ancestors has been drawn up:

> *An ancestor is a dead person, who has reached a supernatural status thanks to specific rituals. The ancestor is believed to have special powers and is able to affect the everyday life of the living with both benevolent and malignant actions.*

Given that this definition of "ancestor" is essentially based on a contraposition between a generic class of dead and a special class of deceased, here called "ancestors", the main question is to understand which dead could became an ancestor and why. If one looks up the definition of "ancestor" in a modern English dictionary – for example, the *Oxford Dictionary of English* – the following definition is provided: "one from whom a person is descended and who is usually more remote in the line of descent than a grandparent".[74] Thus, in modern English, an ancestor cannot be a recently dead individual. This kind of definition is certainly valid for the modern term ancestor, but it cannot be useful when studying religious practices belonging to cultures rather distant in time and space.

[70] D. Raue 2014.
[71] M. el-Amir 1951, 81-85; J. Quaegebeur 1977, 129-143
[72] A. von Lieven 2010.
[73] R.J. Demarée 1983, 193; S. Donnat Beauquier 2009, 90 and note n. 160.
[74] *Oxford Dictionary of English*, (2010) Oxford, 57.

Starting from the 80s of the last century several Egyptologists have shown the limits of this kind of definition,[75] by taking into consideration the studies by I. Kopytoff and other ethnologists.[76] This kind of approach has highlighted how the beliefs and practices labelled as "ancestor worship" within diverse anthropological and ethnographic works can include the recently dead as well. Indeed, although the concept of ancestor is undeniably linked with the models of "lineage" and "parentage", it must also be taken into account that within diverse cultural contexts, these concepts can be quite varied.[77] For example, a matrilineal or patrilineal system strongly influences which one among the deceased relatives can become the ancestor of a specific person.[78] In this regard, M. Fortes underlined that the selection of the dead who can become ancestors can be considered as "a representation or extension of the authority component in the jural relations of successive generations".[79] It means that the dead venerated as ancestors are the ones whose social positions in life justify the current position of the living descendants within the society.[80] A subsequent study by I. Kopytoff interprets this type of mechanism as a post-mortem continuation of the "eldership complex" characterising the Sukhu of South-Western Congo.[81] The study highlighted the absence of a clear separation between the world of the living and that of the dead: the deceased are indeed considered as active members of the same social system of the living and, above all, the dead are able to show a kind of power and authority which reflect the ones they had during their lifetime.[82] If these thoughts surely point in the right direction, we have to emphasise that, in Ancient Egypt, the status of old men was quite ambivalent. As R. Janssen argues, there is "no trace of a gerontocracy as in some African societies, nor are the wisdom and experience of the older people particularly expressed".[83] Thus, we have to assume that the substantial elements connected with the conception of authority were related to the typical mechanisms of power in a politically centralised society of the Ancient Near East.[84] A comparison with data from other cultures can be useful in this regard. Indeed, religious practices and beliefs focused on "ancestors" played a foremost role within

[75] R.J. Demarée 1983, 288 and note 40; J. Baines, 1987, 81 and note n. 9.
[76] I. Kopytoff 1971.
[77] T. Tatje and F.L K. Hsu 1969.
[78] T. Tatje and F. L.K. Hsu 1969, 153-172.
[79] "It is not the whole man, but only his jural status as the parent (or parental personage in matrilineal system) vested with authority and responsibility that is transmuted into ancestorhood". M. Fortes 1965, 133.
[80] M. Fortes 1965, 133.
[81] I. Kopytoff 1971, 140.
[82] I. Kopytoff 1971, 140.
[83] R. Janssen 2012, 4883.
[84] J. Baines 1987, 80.

classical Chou China,[85] and similar observations can be made for several ancient Mediterranean cultures.[86] A. Brelich claimed that in social contexts where a chief has a central function, his ancestors may have a "public" cult,[87] and D. Sheils theorised the concept of "superior ancestral religion", defining it as a politically oriented phenomenon that "strengthens the rule of a central state based on kinship over other kin groups by legitimising the superordinate position of the ruling kin group and thus provides a supportive mechanism that aids in the creation of political solidarity".[88] So, for the aim of the present work it can be theorised that:

> *Not all dead can become ancestors: the factors which determine which deceased person can be considered an ancestor depends on the social organisation of a specific cultural context. The supernatural authority attributed to the ancestor is a consequence, and a post-mortem continuation, of the social role the latter had in life.*

In light of this heuristic definition, one may wonder which were the factors specifically intrinsic to the Ancient Egyptian culture that determined the post-mortem status and the supernatural powers of a deceased. Textual sources clearly indicate that the concept of "knowledge" – *rḫ* – played a key role in Egyptian religious thought. In the sphere of royal ideology, for example, the so-called *Cult-Theological Treatise* clearly elucidates the kind of special knowledge required by the king in order to officiate as sun priest and guarantee the continuation of cosmic order.[89] Noteworthy is also that the concept of "knowledge" as a means to elevate human beings both in life and after death is a crucial, everlasting element within the history of Egyptian religion and it is possible to find a reformulation of this conception even in the context of Gnostic and Hermetic currents during the early centuries of the Common Era.[90]

[85] A.J. Chun 1990.
[86] H.I. Flower 2017.
[87] A. Brelich 2006, 24.
[88] D. Sheils 1980, 254. In this regard, see also, Y.M. el Shazly 2015, 4 and note 17.
[89] J. Assmann 1995, 17 and ff.
[90] J.P. Sørensen 2002, 137 and ff.

As for the specific topic and time frame of the present thesis, both archaeological and textual data unequivocally show how "knowledge" was a fundamental requirement for the transmutation of the deceased into an *ꜣḫ*, especially in the context of the elite self-presentation.[91] The connection between being an *ꜣḫ* and possessing a special "knowledge" is indeed a recurrent theme already in the Old Kingdom mastabas inscriptions.[92] Moreover, in several Coffin Texts spells, it is clearly stated that a special knowledge is a crucial requisite for becoming an *ꜣḫ*.[93]

This makes some considerations about the relationship between religions and societies necessary, considerations that become even more relevant if we remember that one of the main morphological elements that allows us to categorise a religious fact as an "ancestor cult" is the post-mortem survival of the social role of an individual. As mentioned above, in several African traditions until very recent times, one of the foremost sources of social authority was the "eldership complex", in other words the special social status held by the elderly official recognised as a source of legal and moral power.[94] On the other hand, it is obvious that the concept of "social authority" is something that varies according to the diverse social contexts; for example, the hero cult in Greece met the specific needs of a certain type of society where the sacrifice of young men in war was essential.[95]

In the specific case of Ancient Egypt, the main ideological model that acted as a cultural reference point was deeply rooted in the value of "knowledge". In the vast Egyptian documentation that has come down to us, there are celebrations of the virtue of the warrior, but it is indisputable that the model for life and the ideals were of another kind. Some extracts from scholastic miscellanies – such as the famous *Satire on the Trades* – are eloquent,[96] especially if we remember that these were the texts that formed the future elites of the country. The ancient Egyptian term *rḫ* – here translated as "knowledge" – covered thus a wide range of meanings. Above all, this concept was inextricably linked to the condition of being highly literate, in a context where the access to literacy was an almost exclusive prerogative of the elite,[97] and the main factor determining the social position of a

[91] R. Demarée 1983, pp. 193-194.
[92] R. Demarée 1983, pp. 207-208; D. Czerwik 2009, 37 and ff.
[93] G. Englund 1978, 108-109.
[94] I. Kopytoff 1971, 140.
[95] Y. Garlan 1997.
[96] W.K. Simpson 2003, 429-438.
[97] One has to keep in mind that, in Ancient Egypt, the access to literacy varied on the basis of the different historical and social contexts (such as urban or rural areas). The number of fully literate people was about the

person.[98] The ability of writing and reading was an essential requirement not only for the proper performance of rites[99] but also for the execution of the law.[100] One can therefore posit that the term *rḫ* indicated the essential source of the most relevant kinds of "social authority" within the ancient Egyptian society, which involved not only the possibility of being politically influential, but also the ability of executing the law and play a remarkable role within the religious sphere.

If ancestor worship is defined as "the post-mortem survival of the social role held by a person", one has also to assume that certain ancestors were somehow considered more powerful than others. We already mentioned that the ancestors of a chief or a king can be venerated by large sections of the community, and as for the specific case of Ancient Egypt, these kinds of religious phenomena are well attested and took diverse kind of specific forms based on diverse historical or regional contexts. [101] Most scholars agree in making a distinction between the special rites which were performed in order to eternalise the social status of the dead sovereign and his *kꜣ*, and the widespread popular devotion devoted to certain kings and deceased members of the royal family such as Amenhotep I and Ahmose Nefertari.[102]

As for the elite sphere, instead, it is certainly significant that a recent study dedicated to the apotheosis of non-royal individuals in Ancient Egypt during the Old and Middle Kingdom has shown that most of the deceased who became the object of a post-mortem cult that went beyond the family sphere – such as Ptahhotep, Hordjedef, Kagemni – were also considered "wise men" and authors of prestigious didactic texts.[103]

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one per cent, even lower during the First and the Second Intermediate Period. Later historical periods probably saw an increase, but access to literacy has always been the preserve of a small circle of people. (See: J. Baines, and C. Eyre 2007, 65-75. In some special environments, such as the village of Deir el-Medina, the level of literacy was certainly higher (See: L. H. Lesko 1994, 131-44).

[98] See, for example: M. Lichtheim 2006 B, Vol. II, 139-140.

[99] D. Czerwik 2003, 42-43.

[100] J. Baines and C. Eyre 2007, 75-78.

[101] J. Troche 2021, 76.

[102] "The special deification of individual kings and queens like Amenhotep I and Ahmose Nefertari is not to be confused with the general idea of a semi-divine status of the king or his ka as part of the royal ideology". A. Von Lieven 2010, 3. On the other hand, especially for the Old Kingdom data, the differences between mortuary cults and popular cults relating to the deceased kings is more complicated. Cf. A. Morales 2006; H. Vymazalová 2010. For general remarks about Ancient Egyptian divine kingship see also the recent publication by J. Troche: "In essence, the king's divinity was no different than that of the gods or deified dead and rather a manifestation expressed to a greater extreme along a shared spectrum of divine efficacy". J. Troche 2021, 53-54.

[103] J. Troche 2021, p. 80 and 100.

In sum, for the specific aims of the present thesis it can be stated that not all the dead can become ancestors, and the factors determining such a difference vary from context to context. As for the ancient Egyptian society and the specific time frame here taken into consideration, the cultural reference model officially proposed by the 'high' culture discourse is clear: the capable and competent scribe, the high official, the elite member at the head of the extended family *ꜣb.t* who – especially during the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom – constituted the basic cell of Egyptian society.[104] These individuals didn't just represent the realization of a cultural model; their importance was substantial and effective: it was the chief of the powerful extended family to whom the lower social groups turned for help in the everyday life and, consequently, also in the post-mortem sphere.

Egyptian textual sources are quite explicit about the pact of mutual aid between the head of the extended family and the other household members, which did not include only actual relatives, but also servants and diverse kinds of dependants.[105] The most striking example can be identified in a passage from the so-called *Loyalistic Instruction* where it is stated that the mutual alliance and aid between the chief of the extended family and his dependants could be perpetuated even beyond death.[106] Specifically, the deceased head of the extended family is referred to as a deceased endowed with supernatural powers able to protect (*mkỉ*) the living and fight (*ḥꜣ*) on behalf of his people.[107]

It is also important to focus on the role played by women within ancient Egyptian ancestor worship. As will be detailed in chapter 5, their status within these religious practices and beliefs was ambivalent. On one side, the data show that both royal and non-royal women could become the object of a more or less widespread veneration, as for the case of Ahmose Nefertari.[108] Furthermore, a restricted number of *ꜣḫ ỉḳr n-Rˁ* stelae clearly show that women could be "ancestralised".[109] Yet, it is undeniable that the women venerated as ancestors were far fewer in number than men and, if one considers the specific features of the ancient Egyptian society this is not surprising element. First of all, women's status within the institution of the extended family was rather peculiar, since the *ꜣb.t***,** as a legal and economic

[104] M. Garcìa 2012; H. Willems 2015.
[105] H. Willems 2015.
[106] G. Posener 1976. Particular interesting the translation made by E. Bresciani. See: E. Bresciani 1999, 36.
[107] H.-W. Fischer-Elfert 1996, 105-108; R. Schiavo 2014, 156-157.
[108] G. Hollender 2009.
[109] R.J. Demarée1983, stelae: A6, A39, A40, A41, A44, A45, A51, A52.

institution, did not officially include the wife of the family chief.[110] Furthermore, even though women's social position was more emancipated than those of other ancient cultures, their access to literacy was certainly lower than men, and if we consider the importance of knowledge/*rḫ* in order to became a venerable ancestor this is not a secondary element.[111]

1.2.2 Ancestor worship and rituals pertaining to the death sphere

Once given a heuristic definition of ancestor, it is important to identify the conditions which permit the recognition of elaborate cult activities devoted to these types of supernatural beings, in other words, which kind of religious practices can be considered as "ancestor worship".

Even though there is no agreement among scholars about what ancestor worship is, and it is possible to distinguish several definitions based on rather diverse approaches,[112] a mandatory starting point can be identified in the concept of "rite of passage", first introduced by A. Van Gennep. This category highlights how the life of each individual is subject to significant transitions over time, which often concern a remarkable change in his social status within the community. In several societies, including the most secularised ones, these transitional phases can be ritualised and their performance not only ratifies the change in the social role of the person involved but also entails an "adjustment" of the community itself, since the validation of the passage implies a change in the composition of the social body.[113]

Because of their very nature, the rites of passage are often linked with the most critical phases of the life cycle, death included.[114] The demise of an individual can indeed entail a combination of different cultural actions – such as mourning, the preparation of the corpse, the burial, etc. – which aims to ratify the new status of that person as a "deceased" and the consequent transformations that this episode causes within the community.[115]

The concept of "rites of passage" is certainly useful for the purposes of the present work, since it is based on the connections between religious beliefs and society. On the other

[110] H. Willems 2015, 454–461.
[111] J. Baines and C. Eyre 2007, 83-89.
[112] K. Teinz 2012, 235-242.
[113] A. van Gennep 1960, 26-40.
[114] A. van Gennep 1960, 26-40.
[115] A. van Gennep 1960, 26-40.

hand, it is crucial to underline that just the presence of rites concerning the separation of a deceased from the community of the living and his inclusion among the ranks of the dead does not entail the belief in ancestor worship. Even though every ancestor is a deceased, not all the deceased persons can be considered ancestors. As stressed by the definition given above, an "ancestor" is a deceased able to affect the living (and their status within society) because of the post-mortem survival of his social role. To make this possible, it is necessary to bring the deceased back into the community of the living by re-establishing their role within it.

Several scholars have pointed out that in diverse cultural contexts it is possible to recognise some specific rites of passage – that can occur during the funerals or afterwards – which are performed with the specific aim of transforming a deceased into an ancestor.[116] It is therefore possible to affirm that the demise of an individual can involve different kinds of ritual actions, generically labelled here as "death rituals", which can be divided in different categories.

First of all, it is possible to identify the "funerary rituals", rites of passage strictly linked with the specific occasion of the death of an individual and aimed at ratifying the change in status from living member of a community to deceased. Within certain social contexts, however, the dead can be re-integrated within the realm of the living. The ritual actions pertaining to this passage have been here called "ancestralisation". The main aim of the "ancestralisation rituals" is that of transforming a deceased into an ancestor, turning him again into an active member of his community, albeit on another plane of existence.

Since the ancestors are perceived as an authoritative entity able to affect several aspects of everyday life, they are the object of diverse actions, which can be labelled as religious practices. In this regard, both historical and ethnographic studies have underlined that the interactions of a community with their ancestors have to be maintained according to specific rules of conduct, often structured as a pact of mutual aid: the living have to take care of their dead (for example, by perpetuating offerings for them), while the ancestors must guarantee supernatural protection and legitimation to their descendants.[117] It follows that it is within this wider framework of beliefs that ancestors are worshipped, invoked, manipulated or even menaced, so that they could act in a certain way. In the light of these

[116] R. Hertz 1905-1906; W. H. Newell 1976, 18-20; K. Teinz 2012, 239-242; M. Fitzenreiter 2018, 54.

[117] A. Roccati 1967; R.J. Demarée 1983, 283; A. Tsukimoto 1985, 229-233; N. Harrington 2013, 29-30.

observations, it is necessary to introduce another concept, that of "mortuary rituals", which can be defined as rituals aimed at celebrating periodically the ancestors and mainly focused on perpetuating the right interactions between the living and the dead. These rituals could be performed at the tombs, in specific cultic places, as well as in the context of the domestic cults.[118]

Given these premises, ancestor worship can be defined as:

> *The set of religious practices focusing on a special category of dead, the ancestors. Within this set of religious practices, it is possible to recognise specific ritual actions aimed at transforming the deceased into an ancestor (ancestralisation) and other religious practices aimed at periodically commemorating and appeasing the latter (mortuary rituals).*

Yet, it is important to stress that this distinction among different classes of rituals ("funerary", "ancestralisation", "mortuary") is eminently *etic*, since it reflects the point of view of a modern scholar. Therefore, they must be understood as a heuristic tool to identify and describe the functions of texts and ceremonies. The classification proposed here does not necessarily reflect the way in which the ancient inhabitants of the Near East used to categorise their rituals. For example, the same liturgy could be involved in both funerary and mortuary contexts; and, in several cases, the funerary rituals and the rites of ancestralisation occurred at the same time and were perceived as indistinguishable. Especially for the specific case of the ancient Egyptian culture, one of the main pieces of evidence to be taken into consideration is that of specific festivals celebrated to periodically commemorate the dead,[119] such as the Wag feast, [120] The Sokar-festival at Elephantine,[121] the Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos,[122] or the Beautiful Festival of the Valley at Thebes.[123] Based on the aforementioned definitions, these festivals have to be labelled as "mortuary

[118] R.J. Demarée 1983, 279-290; H. Willems 2001, 254; L. Weiss 2015, 179-186.
[119] M. Fitzenreiter 2018, 57.
[120] H. Goedicke 1986 B, 1135-1140.
[121] D. Raue 2014, 12.
[122] M. Smith 2017, 232-234.
[123] N. Harrington 2013, 116.

rituals". On the other hand, it should be highlighted that these celebrations were often structured as a special kind of funerary ritual performed for a god – such as Osiris at Abydos, or a deified deceased identified with a god as in the case of Heqaib/Sokar at Elephantine. These festivals, therefore, could re-enact or reshape all the main phases of an elite funerary ritual[124] and it is therefore not surprising that the same liturgies adopted during the funerals were also used or re-adapted for the specific aims of these celebrations.

Another important term for the aim of the present study is that of necromancy. Also in this case, it is important to stress that there is no unanimous position among scholars.[125] Here, I propose the following heuristic definition:

> *A practice through which a living person can communicate with a deceased in order to obtain a response on a specific matter.*

This definition is not so dissimilar from that proposed by Bourgignon[126] and subsequently by R.K. Ritner,[127] Tropper, Schmidt and Hsieh.[128] However, contrary to Schmidt,[129] I do not consider the prediction of the future as a determining element, since any kind of divination can be focused also on gaining insights about the past and, above all, on obtaining a solution about problems perceived as critical in the immediate present.[130] Indeed, although the term "necromancy" has been barely used within Egyptology, it appears to be grounded within the ancient Egyptian *emic* perspective but, of course, this depends on what one means by "communication between the living and the dead".[131]

In the light of the available data, phenomena like that concerning the witch of En-dor (1 Sam 28), where a woman endowed with special skills is able to summon a spirit and make the latter speak to obtain significant information, is not attested.[132] On the other hand, both the Letters to the Dead and the oracular consultations of certain deceased kings undeniably

[124] M. Smith 2017, p. 232-233; D. Raue 2014, 12.
[125] E. Bourgignon 1987.
[126] E. Bourgignon 1987.
[127] R.K. Ritner 2002 A; R. K. Ritner 2002 B.
[128] J. Tropper 1989, 13-23; B. B. Schmidt 1996 A, 11-12; J. Hsieh 2022, 313-314.
[129] B.B. Schmidt 1996 A, 153 and note 100.
[130] E. Bourgignon 1987, 345; J. Černý 1941, 13-24; R. Parker 2016, 69-90.
[131] R.K. Ritner 2002 A and 2002 B; J. Hsieh 2022, 313-314.
[132] See also I. Finkel 2021, 199-200.

prove that a communication with the deceased could somehow be established, for example though oneiric experience, written messages, or by interpreting the movements of a sacred image during a procession.[133]

It is also important to stress that within cultures where the religion is characterised by the post-mortem survival of the social role, this kind of beliefs can certainly affect necromantic practices. It means that a dead can be consulted on a specific topic because of the social position he had during his life implied a special knowledge in that specific ambit. For example, in 1 Sam 28, Saul does not ask the witch of En-dor to generically consult the dead. The woman, rather, is asked to summon Samuel, a deceased prophet, so that his spirit can figure out the outcome of an imminent battle, advising the king as he used to do during his life.

Finally, some further considerations are needed. In several studies a difference between "ancestor worship", "ancestor veneration", "ancestor cults", "cult of the dead" and "veneration of the dead" has been stated. For example, B.B. Schmidt has posited a difference between "care of the dead", "veneration of the dead/ancestors", and "worship of the dead/ancestors".[134] Within Egyptology, instead, M. Fitzenreiter has distinguished between "cult of the dead", "ancestor cult", and "ancestor veneration".[135] Although these distinctions make perfect sense and are heuristically operative with the aims of the specific works for which they were meant, these definitions have not proved useful or practical

[133] J. Černý 1941, 13-24; yet, see: D. Farout 2004, 51.

[134] "The ancestor cult comprises beliefs and practices directed towards dead predecessors. The cult of the dead is directed toward the dead in general while the ancestor cult is a lineage cult. […] The veneration of the dead assumes the persistence of man after death. Moreover, it presupposes the belief that the dead can influence the high god(s) to act on behalf of the living. The dead obtained this power through their heroic acts or qualities exhibited while living, or thought to be living in the case of the mythic heroes. Not only do the living offer the dead their expressions of gratitude, but the dead receive various forms of inducements from the living. The dead do not appear to have the same degree or quality of divinity as the high god(s), nor can they act independently of the god(s). Therefore, they are not worthy of, and unlike the gods, they do not receive, worship. The same set of criteria applies in the case of the veneration of the ancestors. […] our use of ancestor worship will be restricted to those acts which reflect the belief that the power possessed by the ancestor is equivalent to that of a deity. […] Care for or feeding of the dead typically carries with it the implicit notion that the dead are weak; they have no power to affect the living in a beneficial way. In the case of the ancestors, the care for or feeding of the ancestors is motivated by the obligation to continue one's filial duties for immediate lineal predecessors after their death." B.B. Schmidt 1996 A, 8-13.

[135] "My approach uses the term 'Cult of the Dead' in order to summarize all ritual activities directed to an individual dead person, e.g. the preparation of the body, his interment, equipping with magical implements and all the further offerings in order to maintain his spiritual existence. In contrast, ritual activities directed to the enduring relationship between the living and the dead will be termed "Ancestor Cult". Furthermore, I prefer to speak of *ancestor veneration* in the more general sense of practices directed to the enduring relationship of the dead and the living, but of *ancestor cult* only in cases where a certain degree of formalization and structure into a perpetual and stable sign system has been established". Cf. M. Fitzenreiter 2018, 54.

within the purposes of the present thesis. Therefore, "cult", "veneration", "worship" and "care" have been used interchangeably.

1.2.3 "Universality"

If certain religious phenomena, such as the three main monotheistic religions, are clearly genetically connected to each other, conceptions about the spirits of the dead are found so frequently, and in such varied and distant contexts (both in time and space), that an explanation in terms of common origin and cultural diffusion is highly unsatisfactory. Starting with this fact, a study by L.B. Steadman, C.T. Palmer and C.F. Tilley has pointed out how ancestor worship – understood as a form of communication between the living and the deceased – may represent the real "heart" of every religion, and a useful tool with which to understand the "universality of religious belief".[136] However, this theory implies a series of problems that are rather difficult to solve. First, not all human beings currently believe in supernatural entities, or in certain kinds of existence after death.[137] Second, more or less sceptical views towards the dominant religious traditions – especially about ideas of post-mortem survival – are well-known and documented also in the past. This is the case of the position of a small number of philosophers, both from Eastern and Western traditions.[138] For example, the followers of Epicurus held that after death both the body and the soul ceased to exist; in particular, Lucretius claimed that the visions of ghosts seen during dreams or illness are caused by floating atoms (*simulacra*), which are emanated by the bodies of human beings and continued to wander in the air even after their death.[139]

Lucretius' interpretation – referring to universal experiences like dreams or possibly altered states – may suggest a possible explanation for these surprising cases of polygenesis. Even E.B. Tylor, father of cultural anthropology, hypothesised that seeing the dead in a dream may have suggested to "primitive" peoples the idea that "spirits" survived after death, attributing the origin of every religious experience to this phenomenon.[140] Although such a rigidly evolutionist interpretation is now considered unacceptable, several scholars argued that some of these intuitions may be in part valid.

[136] L.B. Steadman, C.T. Palmer and C.F. Tilley 1996, 65.
[137] J.M Smith 2013, 80-99.
[138] M. Poo 2009, 1.
[139] Book IV, vv. 757-761
[140] E.B. Tylor 1871, Vol. I, 377-453.

The cognitivist anthropologist S. Atran has stated that a certain number of factors (such as the tragic experience of mourning, but also the dream experiences that allow us to "see" the dead family members once more) could lie at the basis of the common presence of beliefs about the spirits of the dead, ghosts and ancestors in every cultural context.[141] Based on the theories of cognitive anthropology, the notable frequency of these phenomena could be explained by certain characteristics of the human mind, "programmed" to develop and remember certain types of supernatural representations more easily than others, both because of their conceptual structure, and for their "relevance" in many important social and environmental situations.[142] Therefore, because of this kind of mechanism, certain systems of belief were favoured by the processes of "cognitive selection" which play a role in cultural transmission and favoured supernatural conceptions with similar characteristics that developed autonomously in cultures distant both in time and in space.[143]

Although it is possible to recognise an innate factor to the biological and cognitive structures of human beings that may favour the development of these types of belief - without actually determining it in an obligatory way – the role of the diverse social, economic and cultural contexts has constituted, and constitutes, an important factor in determining the characteristics of particular representations of the spirits of the dead. M. Poo makes some fundamental observations in this respect:

> *How people imagine and deal with the ghosts is conditioned by the social and cultural context in which the conceptions of death and afterlife are nurtured. Thus the conceptions of ghosts can be examined as a social imaginary. Moreover the results of this social imaginary cannot be anything fixed. As Peter Berger and others have explained, culture, being man-made, and lacking the biological structure of the animal world, is inherently unstable. It follows that the idea of a ghost, being part of those cultural structures concerned with life and death, is necessarily highly variable. On the other hand, one also needs to take note of the*

[141] S. Atran 2002, 52-57.
[142] P. Boyer 1994, 263-314; P. Boyer 2020.
[143] P. Boyer 2020, 472.

> *influence of the idea of death and the afterlife on social behavior, religious beliefs and the collective imagination. There is therefore a reciprocal interaction between ideas and society, As Clifford Geertz points out, death and the rituals associated with it not only reflect social values but are an important force in shaping them.*[144]

Starting from this premise, the need for a systematic study of ancestor cults in the context of single cultures emerges forcefully, in order to gather the specific characteristics as well as the many shared ones. This sort of study, in the specific case of Ancient Egypt, could help to unravel various unclear aspects of the historic evolution of religious phenomena, bringing a better understanding of its phases and distinguishing more clearly the elements of continuity and the true innovations.

1.3 Limits of the research

The present thesis concerns the role played by a specific category of dead, the ancestors, in codifying and structuring the social behaviours, the power relations, the execution of law in ancient Egyptian society, with a special focus on the transfer of power and social role from father to son within the context of the elite extended family. Consequently, the topics addressed here are strongly centred on elites and their self-presentation and, above all, on adult men belonging to the upper social groups.

This however should not lead to the assumption that women did not play any role within this core of religious beliefs. Some observations concerning this aspect have been indeed deepened in chapter 5. Yet, it is important to underline that the research questions addressed in the present thesis and the kind of sources taken into consideration did not allow to fully deepen other aspects which probably existed but are quite difficult to identify through the currently available sources.

The documents examined here will hardly tell us the authentic experiences of the individuals for whom they were produced. Rather, they belong to an official discourse used by the elites to legitimise their social role. The object of the present investigation therefore

[144] M. Poo 2009, 4-5.

focuses on what Bourdieu called *habitus*, "a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class".[145]

Finally, the present study is eminently focused on the historical evolution of certain ancient Egyptian beliefs and practices. The time window mainly analysed is that included between the Old Kingdom and the Ramesside Age (from the second half of third millennium to the first millennium BCE). However, some considerations are also made for the subsequent historical phases, especially for the specific case of the Tekenu ceremony and the Letters to the Dead.

[145] P. Bourdieu 1977, p. 86.

2. On the incorrect use of the label "shamanism" in Egyptology: rethinking Egyptian funerary and mortuary rituals[146]

2.1. The status of ancestor worship in Egyptology

The attention paid to the preservation of the corpses and the importance given to burials are just two of several elements that would seem to suggest a prominent role of the dead within ancient Egyptian religious beliefs. Yet, one of the most eminent Egyptologists of the twentieth century, A.H. Gardiner, stated that the Egyptian never practiced ancestor worship:

> *Sir James Frazer has produced testimony from all quarters of the globe to show how prevalent is the fear of the dead, and how great an influence that fear has exerted upon early customs and behavior. To his question whether the same fear was much in evidence in Ancient Egypt I replied with an unequivocal negative. […]. At the outset it must be realized that to fear death and to fear the dead are two very different things, though of course they are by no means incompatible, and when combined may very well lead to ancestor-worship, as has happened in China. But of a cult of the ancestor in the Chinese sense there is very little trace in Egypt.*[147]

This was not an isolated case. Even in the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, under the heading "Ahnenkult", D. Wildung assumed a rather similar position:

> *Einen ausgeprägten Ahnenkult hat es im Rahmen des äg. Totenkults nie gegeben. Die Familiengemeinschaft bleibt zwar über den Tod hinaus erhalten, wird jedoch primär aus Pietät, nicht aus dem*

[146] This chapter is an is an extended version of R. Schiavo 2018.
[147] A. H. Gardiner 1935, 7-8.

Gefühl einer Verpflichtung heraus aufrechterhalten und reicht selten weiter als eine oder zwei Generationen zurück. [148]

According to the aforementioned entry of the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* there would be only a few sources pertinent to the interactions between the living and the dead, such as the data related to the domestic cult at Deir el-Medina, the custom of keeping the mummies of the deceased relatives within the houses attested in Greco-Roman Egypt, or certain festivals to celebrate the dead. Moreover, the latter have been often considered as evidence of a marginal phenomenon of the ancient Egyptian religion,[149] or the results of external cultural contaminations.[150]

The denial of the Egyptian ancestor worship has to be explained in the light of multiple factors related with each other. According to J. Lustig, this "resistance stems from an apprehension that Egyptian beliefs will be incorrectly reduced to a 'lower form' of religion, or that the culture will be interpreted as too closely related to Black Africa".[151] One has also to take into consideration that a markedly ethnocentric definition of "ancestor" led to a strict distinction between the labels "cult of the dead" (Totenkult) and "ancestor worship" (Ahnenkult). Indeed, within Egyptology the term "ancestor" has been for a long time intended in a very narrow sense to exclusively indicate "forebears dead for more than two generations".[152] Consequently, several Egyptian sources were not considered as an expression of this kind of belief, only because they mainly pertain to the bond between the deceased father and his living eldest son. In this regard, traditional Egyptological studies have identified a recurrent theme in a number of religious texts, the so-called "Konstellation von Vater und Sohn" concerning a core of beliefs according to which the bond between

[148] "There has never been a distinctive ancestral cult in the context of the Egyptian death cult. The family community survives beyond death, but is maintained primarily out of piety, not out of a sense of obligation, and rarely goes back beyond a generation or two". D. Wildung 1975, 111-112.

[149] In this regard see the aforementiond entry of the Lexikon der Ägyptologie: *Ansatzpunkte zu einem Ahnenkult liegen in den Briefen an Tote, im Gespensterglauben, in der Aufstellung von Mumien in Wohnhäusern - und den evtl. als Vorläufer anzusehenden Büsten aus Deir el-Medineh - sowie in den Totenfesten vor, ohne daß sich spezielle Rituale des Ahnenkult herausgebildet hätten.* [Incipient traits of a cult of the ancestors are found within the Letters to the Dead, the beliefs concerning the ghosts and the custom of keeping the mummies inside residential houses – and the busts from Deir el-Medina, which may be considered as precursors of such a custom – and also certain festivals for the dead, without this implying that fully developed ancestral rituals occurred."]. D. Wildung 1975, 111-112.

[150] J. Assmann 2005, 15-16.

[151] J. Lustig 1993, 32.

[152] D. Wildung 1975, 111-112; see also: A. R. Schulman 1986, 312 and note 43.

father and son transcended death.[153] J. Assmann, in this regard, distinguishes two different archetypal models, the so-called "Horus-Konstellation", which pertains to the role of the son as a successor and revenger of his father, and the "Kamutef-Konstellation", which concerns the continuation of the lineage – to be identified with the vital force, the Ka – transmitted from father to son through generations.[154] These latter studies, eminently based on a phenomenological approach, had indeed the merit of identifying a connection between the rites pertaining to the death sphere and the ways in which the social order was maintained and regulated on an ideal level. On the other hand, they were more focused on reconstructing the "archetype of the father" within the ancient Egyptian culture,[155] or exploring the concepts of death as "social isolation" and post-mortem survival as "reintegration into the social sphere" rather than exploring the sociological aspects of ancient Egyptian ancestor worship.[156]

It can be stated that the rise of studies on Egyptian ancestor worship is greatly connected to a fresh definition of "ancestor", indebted to some extent to ethnographic works.[157] To this regard especially an article by I. Kopytoff provided a fresh perspective. In his article. "Ancestors as Elders in Africa", ancestor worship is regarded as a post-mortem continuation of the prominent social structures characterising a society, such as the eldership system among the Sukhu in the specific case he studied.[158] This approach, as a matter of a fact, implied a rethinking of the concept of "ancestor" which allowed Egyptologists to include also the recent dead within the category.[159]

Another factor to be taken into consideration is that Egyptologists used to attach more importance to certain religious phenomena still crucial in the monotheistic traditions – above all the positive hereafter characterising and the rise of personal piety – at the expense of other phenomena, like the ones involving the interactions between the living and the dead.[160] It follows that most works concerning Egyptian ancestor worship were mainly focused on house-cults, while little attention has been given to funerary and mortuary

[153] J. Assmann 1976, 12-49; J. Holaubek 1986), 913-915.
[154] J. Assmann 1976, 32-33.
[155] J. Assmann 1976, 32-33.
[156] J. Assmann 1986, 659-664; J. Assmann 1976, 12-49 and 155-162; . Assmann 2005, 39-63.
[157] Above all: I. Kopytoff 1971, 129-142; M. Fortes 1966, 122-144. J.C. Calhoun 1980, 304-319.
[158] I. Kopytoff 1971.
[159]Notably, the aforementioned paper by Kopytoff, has been cited in all the first Egyptological works focused on Egyptian ancestor worship. Cf. R.J. Demarée 1983, 288 and note 40; J. Baines 1987, 81 and note 8; Lustig 1993, 30-44.
[160] Similar considerations have been made by Nyord 2018, 73-87.

liturgies, probably because there was a certain tendency in highlighting their function within the post-mortem rebirth into a new existence in the celestial hereafter, rather than considering them as a rite of passage aimed at transforming a dead into an ancestor.[161].

2.2. Egyptian "shamanism" or "dramatic" and "collective rituals"?

While the label "ancestor worship" has been viewed as problematic, especially with regard to certain funerary and mortuary liturgies, there was – and still is – some debate about the existence of an "ancient Egyptian shamanism". As stressed by H. Willems, these "shamanic" interpretations are mostly rooted in the fact that Egyptology has been characterised by a certain tendency to understand religious texts which do not explicitly mention divine names as being more archaic than other similar sources containing explicit mythological references, a kind of approach stemming from a passive absorption of earlier anthropological views.[162]

Indeed, a number of scholars have used the label "shamanism" to describe certain Egyptian religious practices, above all the Opening of the Mouth Ritual scenes 9 and 10, the Tekenu ritual, and the Haker feast. Within these studies, the use of the label shamanism appears inextricably linked to an historical reconstruction aimed at explaining the aforementioned rituals in terms of "living fossils" of archaic practices, which have been often identified with some hypothetical aspects of the predynastic and protodynastic religion.

Such an interpretative framework is debatable from several points of view. First, it is clearly an expression of the so-called "survival theory", typical of the 19th century unilineal evolutionistic approach, which is currently considered obsolete and dismissed as ethnocentric.[163] Furthermore, the use of the word "shamanism" *per se* is still the object of heated and controversial debates within both Anthropology and history of religions. It is necessary, thus, to spent a few words on the term "shamanism" and the different meanings it has assumed within academic religious studies.

The criticisms pertaining to the use of the label "shamanism" involves several intricate issues – such as the legacy of Mircea Eliade's works[164] and the scientific status of the

[161] Remarkable exceptions: R. J. Demarée 1983, 190-276; H. Willems 2001, 369; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 90; J. Lustig 1993, 33-44; N. Harrington 2013, 28-33. R. Nyord 2018, 78; C. Riggs 2014, 89.
[162] H. Willems 2013.
[163] H. Willems 2013; W. Paden 2004, 72-92.
[164]For a wider overview on this topic see: L. Ambasciano 2014.

comparative method,[165] the rise of new religious movements[166] and the question of cultural appropriation[167] – some of which go well beyond the focus of the present dissertation.[168] Yet, some essential explanations are needed in order to define the object and the aims of the present chapter.

Simplifying the current state of the art, the label "shamanism" has been used in the scientific literature with a wide range of meanings, among which it is possible to recognise two main uses.[169] The first one is a "broad definition", which, heavily in debt to Mircea Eliade's works, considers "shamanism" as the "archaic technique of ecstasy".[170] The terms "ecstasy", or "trance", indicates a *modus operandi* adopted by certain ritualists – the "shamans" – which are able to achieve an altered state of consciousness, often (but not necessarily) through the use of music, dancing or psychoactive substances; achieving this special condition would allow the shaman to interact with the superhuman sphere and manipulate the spirits to perform several kinds of ceremonies, included healing rituals.[171] Within the broad definition, the technique of ecstasy is usually considered "archaic" because it would coincide with one of the most ancient stages of any form of religion. According to Eliade, shamanism would have characterised the whole humanity during the Paleolithic and, consequently, vestiges of it, or spurious forms of it, could be identified in any cultural context, without admitting geographic or historical limits.[172] A second

[165] W. Paden 2004; P. Xella 2003.
[166] H. Rydving 2011.
[167] Especially on this issue, see: A.B. Kehoe 2000.
[168] For an overview on this topic, see: H.-P. Francfort, R. Hamayon and P. G. Bahn 1997.
[169] H. Rydving 2011.
[170] "Une première définition de ce phénomène complexe, et peut-être la moins hasardeuse, sera : chamanisme = technique de l'extase." [A first definition of this complex phenomenon, and perhaps the least hazardous, will be: shamanism = technique of ecstasy]. M. Eliade 1968, 22.
[171] M. Eliade 1968, 154-156.
[172] To be precise, the idea of ecstasy as the original form of religion is not fully expressed in the first edition of *Chamanisme* (although clearly latent), but this is strengthened more and more in Elidian thought through time. It is indeed fully formulated within the subsequent editions of the volume. See for example M. Eliade 1968, p. 391: « Ce qui semble certain, c'est l'ancienneté de rituels et de symboles « chamaniques ». Il faudra encore déterminer si les documents mis à jour par les découvertes préhistoriques représentent les premières expressions d'un chamanisme *in statu nascendi* ou s'ils sont uniquement les premiers documents dont nous disposions aujourd'hui et concernant un complexe religieux plus ancien qui n'a, cependant, pas trouvé de manifestations « plastiques » (dessins, objets rituels, etc.) avant la période de Lascaux. ». [What is certain is that the rituals and the symbols of "shamanism" are quite ancient. It will still be necessary to determine whether the documents brought to light by prehistoric discoveries represent the first expressions of a shamanism in *statu nascendi* or if they are only the first documents that we have today concerning an older religious complex which, however, did not find any "plastic" manifestations (drawings, ritual objects, etc.) before the Lascaux period."]. Also, in the same edition, Eliade underlines that it is impossible to identify pure, authentic forms of shamanism in historical times. (Ibid. pp. 27-28). According to him, the "less degraded" attestation would be recognizable within the North and Central Asia, while other kinds of shamanism recognizable in other geographical context would represent "more deteriorated form" of this original archaic religion. It is clear, at this point, that Eliade postulates the existence of an archaic form of religion to be

definition, instead, employs the term in a more restricted sense, by considering shamans and their techniques as a regional phenomenon typical of Siberia and North Eurasia[173] and, according to some scholars, to be historically linked with some traditional practices attested in both North and South America.[174]

As a matter of a fact, both the broad and the narrow use of the term have been object of criticisms. Especially the historical paradigm strictly intertwined with the broad definition has been considered misleading, since it risks reducing complex religious phenomena attested within diverse cultural contexts just as mere "survivals" of a presumed archaic religion rather than as specific expressions of the societies in which they occur. The restricted use of the term has been considered misleading too, since several specialists have pointed out how even within restricted geographical contexts the diverse religious facts labelled as "shamanism" could be rather different to each other, thus adopting the term "shamanism" could entail the risk of oversimplifications. As stressed by Rydving:

> *Les concepts de « chamane » et de « chamanisme » ont créé une illusion d'homogénéité (régionale ou mondiale). Ils nous laissent croire que nous comprenons les phénomènes que nous prétendons étudier, alors qu'en réalité le risque est qu'ils nous empêchent de bien les comprendre. Concluons que le temps est venu d'abandonner ces termes comme concepts comparatifs ».*[175]

In this regard, it has been proposed (but it is not a solution unanimously accepted) to limit the use of the term to those contexts in which the words "shamanism" or "shaman" are consciously used by practitioners to define themselves, thus the Evenks of North West Asia (from whose language the term "shaman" derives), but also modern religious phaenomena typical of the contemporary globalised world, such as New Age and Neo-pagan

identified with an unattested form of shamanism. For a detailed analysis of the evolution of Elidian thought concerning this aspect, see: L. Ambasciano 2014, 69-73.

[173] H. Rydving 2011.

[174] See, for example, Ph. Descola 2013, 22-24.

[175] "The concepts of "shaman" and "shamanism" have created an illusion of homogeneity (regional or global). They let us believe that we understand the phenomena that we pretend to study, when in reality the risk is that they prevent us from understanding them well. Let us conclude that the time has come to abandon these terms as comparative concepts". H. Rydving 2011, p. 28.

movements, or syncretic religious phenomena, which, paradoxically, have been somewhat developed from the popularity gained by the works of M. Eliade and other scholars in pop culture.[176]

Finally, it is necessary to briefly consider a vibrant debate within the cognitive science of religions. A recent work by M. Singh has reshaped the broad definition of shamanism in light of evolutionary psychology. Here the shamans are described as specialists able of providing services to their community – such as healing practices, or divination – by controlling superhuman agents and the ways they affect human life through a special knowledge (initiation) and techniques (such as the trance) which finds their foundation in what Singh defines as "the drama of strangeness".[177] The latter is explained in the following way:

> *I propose that many features of shamanism, including trance, peculiarity, initiation practices, and self-denial, are selectively retained because they serve to transform the practitioner. By violating folk intuitions for how a human should behave, practitioners convince onlookers of their heightened supernatural powers or experiences. This hypothesis does not necessitate that trance states have the same neurological and physiological correlates across societies, although similar triggers (e.g., hallucinogens and music) likely produce analogous experiences. The theatrical nature of trance does not mean that an individual engaged in it is faking. In fact, cultural selection should favor interventions that convince both the client and the shaman of the shaman's ability, as long as the client's perception of successful treatment is influenced by the shaman's faith.*[178]

According to Singh, shamanic practices and beliefs are rather "resilient" and religious facts characterised by the so-called "drama of strangeness" can be identified in diverse cultural

[176] H. Rydving 2011, 28-29.
[177] M. Singh 2018.
[178] M. Singh 2018, 7.

and historical contexts because these are a kind of belief able to "hack" some universal cognitive dispositions characterising the human mind, especially in social contexts where information and control of unpredictable events are needed.[179]

Singh's work elicited a number of reactions but also in this case there was no lack of criticism. P. Boyer, for example, stressed that, although Singh's model "needs to be supplemented at several crucial points, in terms of anthropological evidence, psychological processes, and cultural transmission", it is however possible to recognise a recurrent pattern of beliefs which occurs within several human cultures, and which, roughly speaking, coincides with what M. Singh has labelled as "shamanism". Yet, even though Boyer is partially inclined to recognise the existence of a group of religious phenomena, which show a certain familiarity with each other, and he also states that it would be possible to adopt the label "shamanism" as a heuristic operative term to study them,[180] at the same time, he is very clear in underlining that this pattern of beliefs is so common that such a wide cross-cultural diffusion cannot be explained exclusively in term of historical transmission from an original, archaic form. Rather, he underlines that "this combination of assumptions was reinvented probably many times in human cultures" because it is something "easy" to think and believe.[181]

Another criticism of foremost importance for the topic treated in this thesis has been provided by R. Kapitány and C. Kavanagh. According to these two scholars, it is hard to distinguish between the pattern of beliefs identified by Singh as "shamanism" and other kinds of ritualistic or performative actions. Especially the element chosen by Singh as a distinctive trait of shamanic practices, "the drama of strangeness" is not enough well determined to demarcate a difference between the latter and any other kind of "dramatic ritual". This term indicates any kind of ritual aimed at causing a certain effect on an individual or on an entire community, which is enacted in the form of a dramatic performance and could involve a more or less large audience:

> *Rituals, in general, do much of the other work of the shaman: they can manage uncertain outcomes effectively, alleviate anxiety*

[179] M. Singh 2018, 17.
[180] P. Boyer 2018, 22.
[181] P. Boyer 2018, 22; see also: P. Boyer 2020.

> *associated with a lack of control, and imbue objects with special significance, all while serving as markers of identity and commitment. Singh acknowledges that the possession of physical oddities and the performance of initiations and ascetic practices also serve as potent indicators of transformation. This leaves us with the question, though: what then separates such actions from the trance category in Singh's model? Is it just another name for dramatic rituals?*[182]

It could be stated, thus, that although the label shamanism is still used in certain scientific contexts to indicate a common pattern of beliefs – whose distinctive features are anyway hardly distinguishable from other phenomena – the interpretative scheme that identifies shamanism as the primordial religion, whose spurious traces can be identified in all human contexts, has been dismissed in the scientific literature, since it entails misleading historical interpretations. On the other hand, the category of "dramatic rituals" highlighted by R. Kapitánya and C. Kavanagh can turn out to be a useful heuristic tool to better understand the ancient Egyptian rituals here taken into consideration. Dramatic rituals are indeed characterised by the presence and the participation of an audience which can be more or less large. The heuristic label of "dramatic rituals" can therefore overlap that of "collective ritual" when the latter involves the participation of a larger audience, such as whole kin-groups, if not the whole community.

To investigate the ancient Egyptian rituals erroneously labelled as "shamanic" in the light of the categories herein identified as "dramatic" and "collective ritual" is certainly useful to answering the research questions of the present thesis. Indeed, law scholars have strongly emphasised how these kinds of religious performances could play a foremost role in the administration of justice. The presence of a large audience, and thus of a large number of people which can testify to what the ritual aims to sanction, but also the authority provided by shared religious beliefs, can indeed create the perfect occasion to control the behaviours of the community "by assigning social roles and influencing the ritual subject, as well as

[182] R. Kapitánya and C. Kavanagh, 2018, 29.

others in the society, to accept the roles so assigned as a natural and appropriate part of the subject's identity".[183]

2.3 Aims and methodology

The present chapter has two main purposes. On one hand, it aims to prove – as already stated by H. Willems[184] – whether the previous studies concerning the so-called "Egyptian shamanism" can constitute an example of an over-simplified comparative method, which involves a misleading interpretation of certain Egyptian rituals – the scenes 9 and 10 of the Opening of the Mouth ritual, the Tekenu ritual, the Haker feast – and their historical formation and evolution. The main aim is that of reconsidering the aforementioned rituals within the specific framework of ancient Egyptian culture, by interpreting them as "dramatic rituals" related to the cult of the ancestors.

In order to pursue these objectives, the chapter has been articulated in three main parts:

- An overview of the previous studies concerning the main Egyptian rituals that have been interpreted as survivals of "archaic shamanic practices": the Opening of the Mouth Ritual (OMR), the Tekenu ritual, and the Haker festival.

- A critical review of the studies concerning the so-called Egyptian shamanism in order to evaluate the manner in which this concept influenced the field of Egyptology, often in implicit or uncritical ways.

- An analysis of the actual textual and iconographic data in order to verify whether it is possible to refute the main arguments used to sustain the existence of an archaic shamanic substratum surviving in the funerary and mortuary rituals here considered.

[183] G. P. Miller 2005, 1226.
[184] H. Willems 2013.

2.4 Overview of the main Egyptian rituals that have been interpreted as survivals of "archaic shamanic practices"

2.4.a The Opening of the Mouth Ritual

The modern label "Opening of the Mouth" derives from the literal translation of the names that the Egyptians themselves gave to an articulated series of ritual actions: *wp.t-rˁ* (more common), or *wn-rˁ*. Both expressions can be translated as "opening of the mouth", but the verbs *wpi̯* (Wb 1, 298.7301.12) and *wn* (Wb 1, 311.2-312.11) are not exactly synonyms: the first one indicates the idea of "opening by separating or dividing"; the second, instead, entails the meaning of "opening up to make something accessible".[185]

Such terminological issues make it clear how complex the topic is. The OMR – or it would be better to say, the collection of ritual liturgies and vignettes currently known under this label – was performed on a wide range of "objects": cultic statues portraying deceased or gods, corpses of both human beings and sacred animals, amulets and even buildings.

To identify the occasions during which the OMR was enacted is another intricate subject. Indeed, the OMR was performed on corpses of both human beings and sacred animals, but it is necessary to make a distinction. A ritualised forced opening of the oral cavity certainly occurred during the embalming process;[186] according to ancient Egyptian written sources, it was practised after the evisceration and dehydration of the corpse, but before the wrapping of the mummy.[187] At the same time, it is well attested that the OMR was performed also after the completion of the mummification, during the funerary rituals on both mummified corpses or coffins. Another important context of the OMR concerns the cultic statues portraying kings, deceased persons or gods. It is proven that part of the ritual – notably the one frequently interpreted as "shamanic" – was specifically meant for the creation of cultic statues.[188] Moreover, the OMR was certainly performed on the statues of the deceased during the mortuary rituals. Likewise, it was also enacted within the daily temple ritual on cultic statues of deified dead and gods. Finally, certain sources testify that the OMR could be performed even for the consecration of whole cultic buildings.[189]

[185] A.M. Roth 2001.
[186] R. Seiler and F. Rühli 2015.
[187] Although we do not have information about the embalming procedures performed on human bodies, P. Vindob 3873 provides a detailed description of this procedure for the embalming rituals of the sacred Apis Bulls. Cf. R.L. Vos 1993, 62-63 and 92-93. According to several scholars it is highly likely that the procedure performed on human remains was rather similar. Cf. A. Dodson 2009.
[188] The scientific literature concerning this topic is treated in the following paragraphs.
[189] A.M. Blackman and H. W. Fairman 1942, 75-91; J.F. Quack 2015.

The OMR was indeed one of the most prominent Egyptian religious ceremonies and it is attested throughout the whole Egyptian history from the Old Kingdom to late antiquity.[190] The first attestation of the term *wp.t-rˁ* occurs within the tomb of an elite member, Metjen, a high official who lived between the 3rd and the 4th dynasties. Specifically, the term appears here twice, and it is associated with both the *sꜣḫ.w*-rituals and the censing (*snṯr*) ceremony. Moreover, it is also said that the ceremony is performed by an embalmer (*wtỉ*), so it has been hypothesised that the OMR, here, is to be connected to the funerary rites.[191] Among the oldest attestations concerning the rite there is also a passage from the so-called Palermo Stone, which instead refers to temple cultic activities concerning a statue of the god Ihy; here, it is said that the artifact was "fashioned" (the verb used is "*mst*", so, literally "born") and, once the OMR was performed on it, the sculpture was carried in procession to the temple of Hathor.[192]

Even though the attestations related to this ceremony can be found already during the most ancient phases of Egyptian history, the first most detailed information dates back to the New Kingdom, when vignettes accompanied by captions concerning this rite began to be reproduced with a certain frequency in tombs, monuments, stelae or other artifacts. There is not a single tomb, monument or object, in which the OMR is entirely represented. All the scenes currently known were collected, numbered and analysed for the first time by E. Otto in 1960,[193] and much of our knowledge about the OMR for the historical phases preceding the New Kingdom strongly depends on his work.

In the light of all these data, it is no wonder that the exact function of the rite is still not fully understood. The ceremony was certainly reformulated more than once and the context in which the OMR originated (embalming procedure, funerary rituals, mortuary rituals, or temple cultic practices) is still debated. One has also to take into consideration that what the Egyptian labelled as *wp.t-rˁ* or *wn-rˁ* in historical times, appears to be an amalgamation of different ceremonies likely originally meant for diverse purposes and reshaped within a large number of contexts already in Old Kingdom sources. According to E. Otto, in a

[190] I.S. Moyer and J. Dieleman 2003; M. Smith 1993.
[191] O. Zorn and D. Bisping-Isermann 2011, 59-60.
[192] T.A.H. Wilkinson 2000, 172-175.
[193] E. Otto 1960.

completely theoretical perspective, it would be possible to identify six main typologies of ceremonies that, at some point in Egyptian history, merged into what we call OMR[194]:

- Statue ritual
- Sacrificial ritual
- Embalming ritual
- Funeral ritual
- Battle ritual

Yet, it is practically impossible to reconstruct the whole historical evolution of the OMR, although several antecedents of the New Kingdom scenes collected by Otto can be identified already in the Pyramid Texts.[195]

The origin of the diverse parts of the ceremony is still debated. For example, A. M. Roth has sustained that the parts of the OMR involving specific tools, such as the *psš-kf* blade or the "little finger" would have originated in certain funerary rituals which mimicked the birth and maturation of the infant to grant new life for the deceased.[196] According to R. van Walsem, instead, the OMR scenes involving the *psš-kf* blade would have developed from archaic embalming procedures, and the Pyramid Texts spells, in which this tool occurs would testify that the original function of this part of the ritual was already reshaped during the Old Kingdom and reintegrated within an offering ceremony.[197]

As regards the main topic of the present section, it must be highlighted that some scenes of the OMR often lack explicit mention of divine names. Being the ritual actions described in such scenes also known from other sources which provides a "mythologised version" of the same ritual actions, several scholars interpreted these passages from the OMR as more ancient than the other ritual texts.[198] This is particular true for the scenes 9 and 10, which concerns the preliminary phases of the statue ritual, with a special focus on the first stages of its construction. These scenes were described by E. Otto as "archaic" and by several other scholars as a survival of ancient shamanic practices. In particular the presumed

[194] E. Otto 1960, Vol. II, p. 2.
[195] E. Otto 1960, Vol. II, 4-7; R. van Walsem 1978-1979; H. Altenmüller 2009, 10.
[196] A. M. Roth 1992; A. M. Roth 1993.
[197] R. van Walsem 1978-1979.
[198] E. Otto 1950, Vol. I, 168-170.

shamanic traits of OMR scenes 9 and 10 have been recognised in the description of a peculiar a ritual sleep (*sḏr*) with involve a kind of oneiric vision performed by the *sem* priest.[199]

2.4.b The Tekenu ritual

The Tekenu ritual is known only thanks to wall depictions in elite tombs and the related captions[200] Unlike the OMR, previous studies have not been able to identify references to this ceremony within Egyptian religious literature, such as Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts etc, with the consequence that the available information is few and difficult to interpret.[201]

Some scholars have claimed to have identified depictions of the Tekenu in some predynastic and proto-dynastic artifacts. However, the lack of explicit captions and the very elusive nature of the sources make this hypothesis inconsistent.[202] The first undoubted depiction currently known is a relief representation in a late 5th dynasty tomb, while the last occurrences date to the Saite Period. However, it must be underlined that only a few sources belong to the Old and the Middle Kingdoms and most of attestations date to the 18th and, partially, to the 19th dynasty.[203]

As the name indicates, the ceremony revolves around the Tekenu, but what the latter might be is still debated. Its iconographic representations are quite varied, as well as the ritual actions in which the Tekenu is involved. Based on the shape, four main typologies can be distinguished (Fig. 1):[204]

1) a shapeless sack dragged on a sledge;

2) an anthropomorphic figure, wrapped in a piece of leather (denominated *msḳꜣ* in some captions), crouching or lying on a sledge;

3) an anthropomorphic figure crouched on a bed and wrapped in the *msḳꜣ*-skin;

4) a standing anthropomorphic figure portrayed while holding the *msḳꜣ*-skin.

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[199] See chapter 2, section 2.5.
[200] Only a depiction of the Tekenu is attested on a Sarcophagus, see section 3.2 table 2 document 39. For the analysis of all the captions concerning the Tekenu, see chapter 3, section 3.2.1.b.
[201] C. Theis 2011, 138; G. West 2019, 6.
[202] G. West 2019, 239 -246.
[203] See chapter 3, section 3.2, tables 1, 2 and 3.
[204] For the iconographic classification, I slightly followed the categorization established by G. West 2019, 25-26.

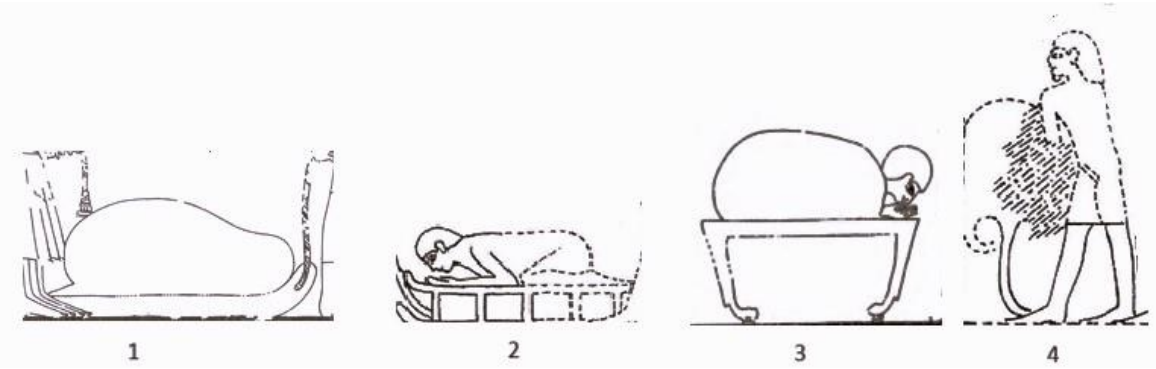

Figure 1 Different typologies of Tekenu

Even the etymology of the Egyptian word *tkn*/*tknw*/*tiknw* is obscure.[205] Given the lack of a determinative, E. Lefébure has hypothesised that it could be a non-Egyptian term, perhaps la loan word to indicate a foreign ethnic group.[206] Others, instead, connected the word with the verb *tkn* (Wb 5, 333.10-335), usually flanked by the D54 sign (two legs), which literally means "to be near", "to draw near", "to approach". Following this interpretation, a translation "neighbour" or "the one who approaches" has been suggested.[207] Especially Gerard van der Leeuw proposed as a possible meaning "the one who is near" and, thus "familiar", "close".[208]

The scenes representing the Tekenu and the captions related to them provide some information, but not enough to fully understand the ceremony. As a consequence, the scientific literature on the topic provides a number of interpretations often conflicting with each other. Since the representations of the Tekenu on tomb walls are accompanied by the depictions of other rituals, the function and the nature of the Tekenu has been frequently investigated in the light of a broader framework which considered the latter as connected with these other ceremonies.[209] The main hypotheses can be summarised as follows:

[205] This aspect has been elaborated further in chapter 3, section 3.2.1a.
[206] E. Lefébure 1900.
[207] J. G. Griffiths 1958, 120; A. El-Shahawy 2005, 54.
[208] G. van der Leeuw, 1938, 164.
[209] K. Paraskeva 2013, 40, 42, 65 and 43; G. West 2019, 195-207.

1) The Tekenu and the funerary procession

The most frequent representation of the Tekenu depicts it within the funerary processions leading the corpse to the tomb.[210] Given that, within this iconographic pattern the Tekenu is usually depicted together with the body of the deceased and his canopic chest, several scholars have claimed that the Tekenu can be identified with an object made of the "waste" of the mummification process and, currently, this is one of the most accredited theories among Egyptologists.[211]

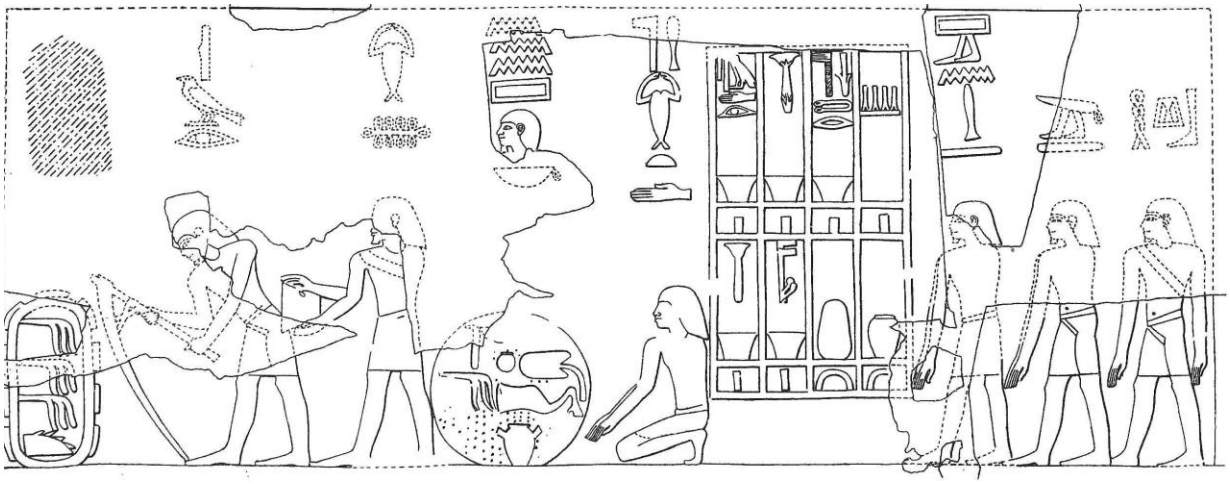

Figure 2 Remains of a slaughtered bull placed inside a pit

Although the captions never refer to the Tekenu as a part of the deceased's body, a depiction in TT20 seems to suggest that the *msḫ*-skin covering the Tekenu was buried in a pit located in the vicinity of the tomb (Fig 2) and, remarkably, archaeological excavations have revealed the existence of pits located within the necropolises actually used as "intentional deposits of waste created during the mummification process".[212] However, as stressed by C. Theis, none of these remains seem to resemble the peculiar shape of the Tekenu.[213]

2) The Tekenu and the human sacrifices

The identification of the Tekenu with a human sacrifice – real or in a fictitious ritualised form to be meant as the survival of an archaic practice – is mainly based on a wall scene depicted in TT 20, a tomb belonging to a high official who lived during the 18th dynasty.[214]

[210] See chapter 3, section 3.2.1b.
[211] E. Hornung 1992, 69; S. Ikram and A. Dodson 1998, 108-109; J. Assmann 2005, 301.
[212] C. Knoblauch 2016, 329.
[213] C. Theis 2011, 35-36 and 138.
[214] E. Lefébure 1900, 161; G. Maspero 1909, 31; A. Moret 1922, 45; contra: J. G. Griffiths 1958, 114-120.

In this scene,[215] two representations related to the Tekenu ceremony – one concerning the Tekenu lying on a sledge (type 1) and the other portraying the Tekenu as a standing man (type 4) – are accompanied by the depiction of a ritualised strangling of Nubian prisoners, which are flanked by two other prisoners represented in a pose rather similar to that of the Tekenu type 1 (Fig. 3).[216] Ritualised killings of enemies are attested in Egypt during both proto-historical and historical times;[217] and, as stressed by U. Matić, it is possible to establish a connection between these presumed human sacrifices and the execration rituals certainly attested in pharaonic Egypt.[218] Yet, the identification of the Tekenu itself with the real or symbolic victim of these sacrifices is problematic. As a matter of a fact – even though this theory has been revived again in a recent monograph[219] – the only argument in support of this theory is given by the depiction of the Nubian prisoners in TT 20 and, remarkably, the latter are never expressly indicated in the inscriptions as a Tekenu, while in the other representations of the Tekenu occurring in the same tombs, the captions are very explicit in this regard (cf. Fig.3, first register).

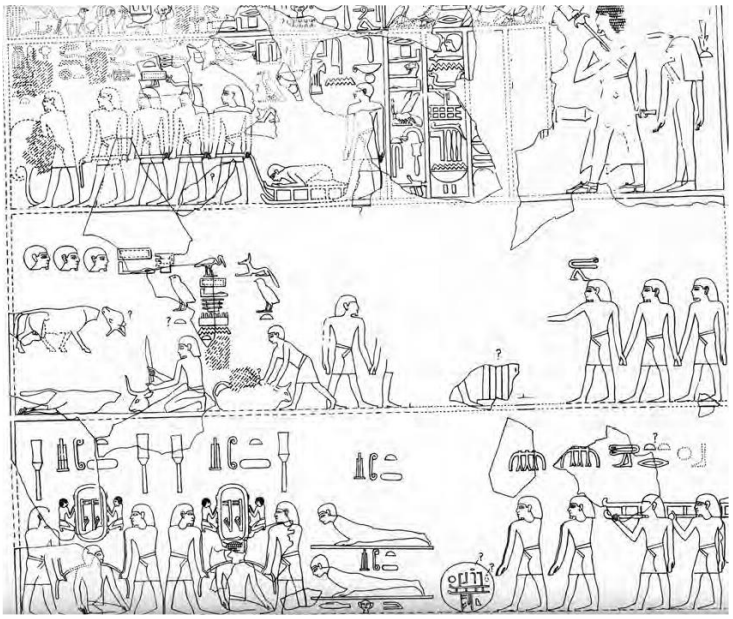

Figure 3 TT 20 - The dragging of the Tekenu and the Tekenu standing with the msḳ³-skin (first register); the ritualised killing of Nubian prisoners (third register)

By analysing the whole figurative repertoire of this tomb,[220] it seems that the articulated funerary ritual, which involved the Tekenu, entailed also an execration ritual. The depiction of the human sacrifices – regardless of whether they were real or fictitious – has thus to be linked to this phase of the ceremony rather than be identified with the Tekenu itself.

[215] TT 20 is the tomb in which the Tekenu has the greatest number of representations. It occurs three times: it is depicted twice while being dragged on a sledge; and once as a standing man holding the *msḳ³*-skin. See: G. West 2019, 213-214. See also chapter 3, section 3.2.1.b, documents 19 and 21.
[216] G. West 2019, 208-223.
[217] U. Matić 2020.
[218] U. Matić 2020, 25-28.
[219] K. Muhlestein 2011, 34-37.
[220] G. West 2019, 208-223.

3) The Tekenu and the so-called Butic Burial /Holy District/Sacred Temenos

The Tekenu appears to be inextricably linked with another figurative theme typical of New Kingdom elite tombs: the so-called Butic Burial.[221] The latter, also known as "Sacred istrict/Heiliges Bezirk", "Rites in the Garden", "Holy district", or "Sacred Temenos", is a modern label used by scholars to indicate a recurrent pattern of scenes depicted in early 18th dynasty tombs and subsequently re-proposed within the iconographic repertoire of Late Period tombs.[222] The representation was readapted and modified in each tomb, but it is possible to identify some fixed distinctive traits, such as the erection of two obelisks, the Hall of the *Mww*-dancers, a landscape characterised by a pool surrounded by trees, an area dedicated to the slaughter of bovids, an area with three pools dedicated to the gods Sokar, Khepri and Heqet.[223] Also, the Butic Burial seems to be somewhat connected to the representations of pilgrimages to the main Egyptian holy cities, such as Buto (*Ḏbꜣ*)/ Pe and Dep (*P, Dp*), Sais (*Šꜣw*), Busiris (*Ḏdw*), Heliopolis (*Ỉwnw*) and Abydos (*ꜣbḏw*).[224] However, it must also be mentioned that these pilgrimages had probably a symbolic meaning, indicating the specific moments during which certain rituals were enacted or a specific point on the funerary procession route, rather than depicting actual journeys to diverse sacred places.[225]

Although the Butic Burial is often considered as a typical element of elite New Kingdom tombs, some of its characterising features are certainly much older, and it has been posited that this pattern of iconographic themes could be understood as a reformulation of previous, more ancient rituals. The scenes depicting the dragging of the Tekenu and the *Mww*-dancers are already attested in Old Kingdom tombs.[226] As for the three pools dedicated to Sokar, Khepri and Heqet, H. Willems has identified a quite similar ritual in CT 234, where the four basins of Khepri and Heqet are mentioned.[227] Likewise the ritualised erection of the

[221] J. Settgast 1963, 58-61; H. Altenmüller 1975 A, 1-9; J. G. Griffiths 1958; G. West 2019, 204-207.
[222] A. Wilkinson 1994, 391; K.-A. Diamond 2012, 98-99; C. Theis 2011, 126.
[223] J. Settgast 1963, 49-50; A. Wilkinson 1994, 391-392; C. Theis 2011, 126 and ff.
[224] K. -A. Diamond 2010, 16, 26-27, 58; J. Assmann 2011, 305-308; C. Theis 2011, 126 and ff.
[225] H. Willems 1988, 157 and ff.
[226] H. Altenmüller 1975 A, 9.
[227] H. Willems 1996, 110-113.

two obelisks could be interpreted as the reformulation of a similar depiction attested within the *object frieze* of a Middle Kingdom coffin.[228]

Other scholars have even hypothesised that the Butic Burial could be considered the "survival" of an archaic funerary ceremony originally celebrated for the prehistoric chiefs of Buto (also known as the double city of Pe and Dep), hence the name. According to this interpretation, the aforementioned *Mww*-dancers would be the souls of the ancient rulers of this locality, the Bas of Pe (*bꜣ.w P*), and, indeed, some passages of the Pyramid Texts – Pyr. 1004/5 and 1974/5 – refer to the dancing souls of Pe, which welcome the deceased to the netherworld.[229] It must be said, however, that the existence of the prehistoric reign of Buto is not well documented and, therefore, the aforementioned souls of Pe would be more mythological than historical.[230] H. Altenmüller, in this regard, identifies the *Mww*-dancers with the ferrymen who had to lead the deceased into the netherworld, and also acted as guardians of the liminal space between the realm of the living and that of the dead.[231] Yet, as Altenmüller himself points out, given the multiple associations between diverse mythological entities typical of ancient Egyptian religion, an assimilation of those mythological ferrymen with the Souls of Pe is not to be excluded.[232]

The whole scene of the Butic Burial appears to be focused on the concept of liminality. In this regard, the symbolism of the three aforementioned pools dedicated to Sokar, Khepri, and Heqet is particularly indicative, since they were respectively associated with death, transformation, and post-mortem rebirth.[233] Moreover, as stressed by H. Willems, these basins were certainly involved in purification rituals which played an important role in the OMR enacted on the mummy of the deceased at the end of the funerary procession, and in the ritual of the sleeping Tekenu.[234] Indeed, it is quite likely that the Butic Burial was something more than a mere mythological or symbolic representation. These scenes probably portrayed a phase of the funerary rituals, and several scholars have identified the representations of the Butic Burial with an actual ritual area, located between the embalming hall and the tomb, that functioned as a theatrical setting for a ceremony concerning the passage from the realm of the living to that of the dead. This dramatic ritual

[228] H. Willems 1996, 113-114.
[229] H. Junker 1940, 24-28.
[230] T. von der Way 2001, 219.
[231] H. Altenmüller 1975 A, 36-37.
[232] H. Altenmüller 1975 A, 36-37.
[233] H. Willems 1996, 114-115; A. Wilkinson 1994, 391.
[234] H. Willems 1996, 110-112.

had to be performed after the embalming procedure, but before the inhumation of the mummified body into the tomb.[235]

4) The Tekenu and the Opening of the Mouth

As stressed above, the Tekenu can be represented as an anthropomorphic figure lying on a bed (type 3) and, according to the captions, when the Tekenu is portrayed in this pose it is involved in a ritual sleep indicated by the Egyptian term *sḏr*.[236] This is the same verb used for the ritualised sleeping of the *sem* priest described in the scenes 9 and 10 of the OMR; moreover, some of the Tekenu-related captions say that, at some point of the funerary rituals, the *msḳ3*-skin covering the Tekenu had to be removed[237] and, notably, the verb used is *sfḫ*, the same word used in the OMR scene 19 to describe the change of garment of the *sem* priest before wearing the leopard-skin.[238]

Also, in a restricted number of tombs, both the depictions of the sleeping Tekenu and the sleeping *sem* priest appear to be somewhat linked with each other: TT 100, where the two rituals are depicted in two opposite walls of the same room; TT 295, where, within the representation of the OMR scenes 9 and 10, the verb *sḏr* used to describe the ritual sleep of the *sem* priest is written with an unusual determinative, which strongly resemble the Tekenu sleeping on a bed (type 3).[239]

Given the presence of a the ritual sleep within the Tekenu ceremony, it has been pointed out that the Tekenu may be identified with a living human being, specifically with a ritualist who is performing something similar to the ceremony described in OMR scenes 9 and 10. According to some scholars both the *sem* priest and the Tekenu-ritualist could even be identified with the same individual involved in two different ceremonies strictly related to each other.[240] Especially H. Willems has highlighted that, at least according to the New Kingdom sources, both the OMR scenes describing the sleeping *sem* priest and the scenes portraying the sleeping Tekenu might be considered two "iconographically different renderings of the same ceremony".[241] Other scholars, instead, has posited that, although the

[235] J. Assmann 2011, 305-308; K.- A. Diamond 2012, 109; H. Willems 1996, 110-112; C. Theis 2011, 126 and ff.
[236] See chapter 3, section 3.2.1.b, documents 20 and 21.
[237] See chapter 3, section 3.2.1.b, documents 18 and 19.
[238] J. M. Serrano Delgado 2011, 161; E. Otto 1960, Vol. II, 41.
[239] J. M. Serrano Delgado 2011, 158.
[240] A. Moret 1922, 46-55; J. G. Griffiths 1958, 115-118; G. Reeder 1994, 59; H. Willems 1996, 111-114. Contra: G. West 2019, 256-262.
[241] H. Willems 1996, 112.

Tekenu might be identified with a living human being acting as a ritualist, there is not enough evidence to identify the latter with the *sem* priest. For example, according to Serrano Delgado, they were probably two distinct ritualists involved in a similar ritual action,[242] while M. Barta identified the Tekenu with the priest of Heqet, who is often mentioned in the captions related to this ritual.[243]

5) The Tekenu ritual as a dynamic sequence of actions

As already underlined, the iconography of the Tekenu is varied and it appears to be involved in different actions: on a sledge, on a bed, standing (Fig. 1). Furthermore, in a restricted number of cases, more than one depiction of the Tekenu occur in the same tomb.[244] Starting from these assumptions, it has been hypothesised that the diverse representations of Tekenu can be interpreted as different stages of a unique articulated ritual. This hypothesis, proposed for the first time by A. Moret,[245] has recently been supported by both J.M. Serrano Delgado and G. West, but from different points of view. J.M. Serrano Delgado identifies the Tekenu with a ritualist, probably different from the *sem* priest, but involved in a rather similar ceremony, which included the same kind of ritual sleep.[246] West, instead, considers the Tekenu as a symbolic representation of the deceased's Ka and the different actions in which the latter is involved would thus represent its mythical/magical journey to the netherworld.[247]

6) The Tekenu and the msḫ-skin

One of the distinctive elements of the Tekenu ceremony is the central role played by the ***msḫ***-skin.[248] It is not surprising, thus, that several scholars focused on its possible symbolic meaning. Although the term ***msḫ*** may indicate diverse kinds of animal skins, it is quite probable that, in the specific context of the Tekenu ritual, it refers to a bovine piece of leather.[249] The involvement of this item in the representations of the Tekenu has been explained as the survival of an archaic burial custom according to which the corpses of the rulers were wrapped in the skin of a bull,[250] or with the symbolic connection between bovid

[242] J. M. Serrano Delgado 2011, 156.
[243] M. Barta 1999, 116.
[244] See chapter 3, section 3.2, table 2, docs. 9 (TT 125), 10 (TT 11), 19 (TT 20), 23 (TT 100).
[245] A. Moret 1922, 41-100.
[246] J. M. Serrano Delgado 2011, 159-162.
[247] G. West 2019, 232-233.
[248] See chapter 3, section 3.2.1.b, documents 18 and 19.
[249] J. M. Delgado 2011, 151.
[250] A. Moret 1922, 59.

skins and the human placenta, an aspect that should confer to the ***msḫ***-skin a symbolic regenerative power.[251] Remarkably, the colour of the ***msḫ***-skin changes according to the type of action in which the Tekenu is involved. As for the depictions of the Tekenu dragged on a sledge, colours may vary (black, red, yellow, sometimes with the typical spots characterising bovids 'coat); instead, white colour – linked to purity and often used for the garments of ritualists – was predominantly associated with the sleeping Tekenu crouched on a bed.[252]

2.4.c The Haker feast

The Haker feast occurred within the annual celebrations of the Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos and most of the information to understand its main features has been gleaned from the so-called "Abydos formula" typical of the 12th dynasty. This is composed of a group of "Osirian wishes", a list of requests concerning a desirable post-mortem existence as a follower of Osiris.[253] Although in the Egyptological literature it is often underlined that such wishes would describe the idealised concept of Egyptian afterlife, as a matter of a fact, they mainly concern the association of the mortuary cult of a deceased person with the cult of Osiris, the dead wishing to participate in the processions celebrated at Abydos and to enjoying the offerings given to this god.[254]

It has been hypothesised that the name of the feast, *ḥ3kr*, could derive by the first words of a liturgy chanted during this celebration – *ḥ3i=k r=i* – whose meaning, "come down to me", was interpreted as an appeal of the son/Horus searching for the soul of his deceased father in the netherworld, or a more generical invocation directed to Osiris or Ra.[255] However it must be stressed that there is no concrete evidence to support this hypothesis.[256]

One of the first attestations of the Abydos formula referring to the Haker feast can be identified in a Letter to the Dead – the Louvre bowl – belonging to the second half of the 11th dynasty.[257] Subsequently, the Haker feast occurs in a number of Middle Kingdom stelae from Abydos, all belonging to high functionaries, in a restricted number of Coffin Text spells and in some chapters of the Book of the Dead. Given that the Haker feast is not

[251] A. Moret 1922, 50-51; C. Spieser 2006, 232.
[252] G. West 2019, 191-192.
[253] G. Griffith 1977, 929-930; see: M. Lichtheim 1988, 55-58 and 129-134; Z. Végh 2021, 322-333.
[254] M. Smith 2017, 232-235.
[255] W. Helck 1952, 78; G. Griffith 1977, 929-930.
[256] G. Griffith 1977, 930.
[257] A. Piankoff and J. J. Clère 1934, 157-158; Z. Végh 2021, 326.

mentioned in the Pyramid Texts or in other Old Kingdom sources, it is thought to have arisen with the advent of the Middle Kingdom.[258]

The Haker feast was strictly linked to the Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos, but to establish the exact moment in which it was enacted within this articulated celebration is still subject of debate, also because, considering the current data, to reconstruct the diverse phases of the Middle Kingdom Mysteries is a difficult undertaking, and unanimous consensus was not still reached among scholars.[259]

One firm point is that the Mysteries were structured as mimicking the funerary rituals for Osiris and involved a theatrical performance – perhaps in the form of a simple chanted recitation – concerning the highlights of the Osiris myth.[260] From the currently available sources, the Middle Kingdom Mysteries appear to have been characterised by a series of processions, during which the sculpture or the emblem of Osiris was carried out of his temple at Abydos and transported to his presumed tomb at Poqer, (modern Umm el-Qa'ab), which was the actual sepulchre of a 1st dynasty king, probably Djer, subsequently identified as the very burial of the god Osiris himself.[261] The sources refer of a "First Procession" (*pr.t tp.t*) strictly linked to another procession dedicated to the god the Upuat (*pr.t Wp-w3.wt*).[262] During this first stage the emblem of Osiris was transported from his temple in Abydos to a location with a lake. Subsequently, during "The Great Procession" (*pr.t ꜥ3.t*) and the "God's Sailing to Poqer" (*ḏ3.t nṯr r Pḳr*), the statue of Osiris reached his tomb.[263]

The celebration of the Abydienne Middle Kingdom Mysteries also included one or more nocturnal phases, which in the textual sources are strictly linked to the Haker feast. The main Egyptian terms indicating this part of the celebrations were *sḏr.t Pḳr*, or *grḥ n sḏr.t;* another expression, *sḏrỉ.t n Ḥr-Šn*/*Šn-Ḥr,* is instead more problematic, since some scholars interprets it as a divine name indicating a specific manifestation of the god Horus,[264] while Z. Végh considers it a toponym.[265]

[258] G. Griffith 1977, 929.
[259] Z. Végh 2011; Z. Végh 2021, 322.
[260] R.A. Gillam 2005, 55-59.
[261] M. Smith 2017, 233; Z. Végh 2021, 140.
[262] Z. Végh 2021, 317-318. 322-323 and 330.
[263] Z. Végh 2011, 145; Z. Végh 2021, 360.
[264] W. Helck 1952, 74; W. Barta 1968, 64; C. Leitz 2002, 292b; D. Franke 2013, 70; H. Altenmüller 2009, 11; H. Altenmüller 2013.
[265] Z. Végh 2021, 316 and 336-337. This aspect has been elaborated further in chapter 3, section 3.3.1.

Some scholars have hypothesised that the Haker feast was performed during the night spent in Poqer. Especially Moret, Helck and Altenmüller highlighted how this ritual seems to show significant common traits with the aforementioned ritual sleep (*sḏr*) performed by the *sem* priest in the OMR scenes 9 and 10.[266] J. Assmann, instead, recognises a strong resemblance between this phase of the Mysteries and the so-called *Stundenwachen*: a phase of the funerary rituals attested since the Middle Kingdom, which was enacted at the embalming hall during the night preceding the inhumation and immediately before the procession leading the mummy to the tomb.[267] Assmann's hypothesis partially overlaps with that proposed by other scholars, who highlighted that the Haker seems to have had an "initial function", taking place at the beginning of the Mysteries and being probably enacted shortly before the of the First Procession.[268]

However, the data are not enough clear in this regard. J. Quack, for example, highlighted that the Haker could be performed more than once,[269] and a similar hypothesis has also been proposed by Z. Végh, which posited that it would be possible to distinguish between a proper "Haker feast", probably enacted at the beginning of the First Procession, and an "Haker ritual", which was performed on different occasions and in different places.[270]

Given the possibility that the Haker could be performed more than once, the only undisputable element of this ritual being its strong connection with death, regeneration and a moment of social display for the royal power,[271] all hypotheses listed herein may not be mutually exclusive. Especially the "initial function" and the identification with the *Stundenwachen* are particularly interesting. Since the *Stundenwachen* took place immediately before the funerary procession leading to the deceased's tomb, it could be hypothesised that the Haker was a reformulation of this phase characterising the funerary rituals specifically meant for the funerals of the god Osiris.

According to the textual sources, the Haker was characterised by a ceremony designated the "counting of the dead". Given that all the Egyptian terms used to express the concept of counting or numbering (*ḥsb, ỉp, sỉp, ṯnw*) also had a specific juridical meaning,[272] it has

[266] A. Moret 1909, 6 and note 6; W. Helck 1952, 78-79; H. Altenmüller 2009, 11; H. Altenmüller 2013.
[267] J. Assmann 2011, 260-279 (especially p. 267).
[268] J. Spiegel 1973, 151; Z. Végh 2021, 360.
[269] J. Quack 2012, 202.
[270] Z. Végh 2021, 337-338.
[271] Z. Végh 2021, 339.
[272] R. Grieshammer 1970, 48-51; Z. Végh 2011, 151.

been hypothesised that during this feast a certain kind of judgment of the dead occurred, but the exact nature of the latter is still to be fully understood.[273] Furthermore, the Haker feast probably involved also a ritual action involving some *msḫ.w*-skins which shows a certain similarity with some phases of the Tekenu ritual.[274]

2.5 Critical approach to the state of the art

Even though Otto never explicitly uses the term "shamanism" with regards to the OMR scenes 9 and 10, he remarkably describes the latter as showing a certain «vorklassischen Schicht».[275] This statement is justified by the fact that Egyptian religious texts are usually characterised by an astonishing number of mythological references, while in scenes 9 and 10, not only the gods are almost never mentioned, but the captions related to the vignettes clearly describe a practice focused on the interactions with the spirits of the dead through a ritual sleep performed by the *sem* priest (*sḏr, ḳdd*). In addition, an important role is played by certain animals – such as falcons, bees, a praying mantis and a spider – or other kinds of supernatural beings, such as the shadow (*šw.t*), all elements that according to Otto would denote an archaic substratum.[276]

The first explicit use of the label "shamanism" to describe the OMR scenes 9 and 10 appears, instead, in a 1970 monograph by B. George devoted to the concept of "shadow" (*šw.t*). George, strongly influenced by Carl Gustav Jung and Mircea Eliade, considers the "shadow" as a kind of vivifying force related to the sexual energy. As for OMR scene 10, she argues that the *sem* priest is acting here as a shaman, whose actual purpose is to heal the deceased from death through a state of *trance* (*sḏr, ḳdd*). Moreover, in her opinion, the *sem* priest would be also able to catch the vivifying force of the deceased (*šw.t*) and use it to re-animate the sculpture of the latter thanks to the help of special animal guides (the spider, the bees and the mantis), as attested in several shamanic practices described by Eliade.[277]

The "shamanic interpretation" was subsequently adopted in different works by W. Helck.[278] The latter not only sustains that the OMR scenes 9 and 10 testify to the survival of a

[273] Z. Végh 2021, 332-333. This aspect has been elaborated further in chapter 3, section 3.3.3.
[274] M. Lichtheim 1988, 77-80; R. Landgráfová 2011, 162-166. See also chapter 3, section 3.3.4.
[275] E. Otto 1960, Vol II, 55-59.
[276] E. Otto 1960, Vol II, 55-59.
[277] B. George 1970, 87-90.
[278] W. Helck 1984 A; W. Helck 1987, 21-29 and 48-51.

shamanic practice – he indeed translates the term *ḳdd* as "trance"[279] – but given this starting point, he outlines some insights regarding the historical evolution of ancient Egyptian religion. Helck's main argumentation is based on the typical dress worn by the *sem* priest, a leopard skin. Individuals wearing this kind of garment are portrayed on several pre- and protodynastic artifacts, sometimes accompanied by a caption *ṯt*, which likely refers to a title. Given that this latter word shows a certain affinity with the term *ṯ3ty*, attested in historical times to indicate the role of "vizier", Helck hypothesises that during the archaic period there was a shaman-like ritualist who played a crucial role by assisting the chief/ruler in his main activities. Only through time, this shamanic figure evolved in two different roles: the vizier and the *sem* priest, who maintained certain shamanic traits in the form of a "living fossil" still recognizable in OMR 9 and 10.[280] Furthermore, according to Helck, some aspects of the Mysteries of Osiris appear to share significant common elements with the OMR scenes 9 and 10, especially with regard to the nocturnal phases of the celebrations and the Haker feast. Both the Mysteries celebrated at Abydos and the OMR would therefore show a common substrate stemmed in archaic shamanic practices concerning the inhumation of the deceased ruler.[281]

Remarkably, although Helck does not make explicit reference to it, the influence of Mircea Eliade on his interpretation is undeniable. Especially in „Schamane und Zauberer", Helck sustains that his interpretation would finally show the proof of an African shamanism,[282] and it is well known that in *Shamanism* by Eliade, even though shamanism is considered as a universal phenomenon, the data from Africa are practically omitted, probably because considered "more spurious" than the beliefs and practices identified in other geographical areas, such as North and Central Asia.[283] Furthermore, even more undeniable is the identification of a shamanic substratum within ancient Egyptian religion which is to be identified with the original religion of prehistoric Egypt, a feature that will recur in numerous subsequent studies.

One of Helck's main arguments is that the leopard skin worn by the *sem* priest can somewhat resemble the garments of certain individuals depicted in pre-and proto-dynastic

[279] W. Helck 1984 A, 104. See also chapter 3, section 3.1.
[280] W. Helck 1984 A, 103-108.
[281] W. Helck 1952, 78-80.
[282] W. Helck 1984 A, 104.
[283] L. Ambasciano 2014, 69-73.

objects. It must be said, however, that the vignettes of OMR scenes 9 and 10 always depict this ritualist with another type of dress: a tight garment characterised by horizontal stripes.

Figure 4 The garment worn by the sem priest in scenes 9 and 10 (TT 100)

This inconsistency is the object of an article by G. Reeder published in 1994. Reeder, re-elaborating a previous theory by A. Moret,[284] suggests a possible explanation by connecting the scenes 9 and 10 of the OMR with the Tekenu ritual. Given that in some depictions the Tekenu is represented with anthropomorphic traits, and it is subjected to a ritual sleep rather similar to that of the *sem* priest, Reeder identifies the Tekenu itself with a ritualist.[285] Also, because of various elements, including the fact that in the Rekhmire tomb (TT 100) both the sleeping Tekenu and the sleeping *sem* priest are portrayed in the same room, Reeder argues that both these ritualists could be identified as the same person. The Tekenu ritual, therefore, could be understood as a kind of preliminary ceremony performed by the *sem* priest in order to prepare himself for the shamanic trance described in scenes 9 and 10.[286]

The first work that openly rejects the shamanic interpretation of the OMR is a study by H.-W. Fischer-Elfert published in 1998. Given that the main focus of scenes 9 and 10 is the construction of a statue depicting the deceased, Fischer-Elfert interprets scene 9 as "the search for inspiration" experienced by the *sem* priest; the terms *sḏr* and *ḳd* would thus not refer to a shamanic *trance* but to a "deep meditation" aimed at the making of the sculpture. Scene 10, instead, would concern the instruction given by the *sem* priest to the artisans and both the animals and the shadows would be nothing more that metaphors used to describe the different phases of the construction.[287]

The theme of shamanism is also somewhat connected with the debate concerning the rise of "personal piety" and, in particular, with the historical evolution of the Egyptian religion

[284] A. Moret 1922, 31 ff.
[285] G. Reeder 1994.
[286] G. Reeder 1994.
[287] H.-W. Fischer-Elfert 1998, 8-52.

outlined by J. Assmann.[288] According to the latter, non-royal people could not have direct contact with the divine sphere. Only after important transformations which occurred with the advent of the New Kingdom – and strictly connected with the "Amarna revolution" – a special feeling of intimacy with the gods started to spread among diverse social groups.[289] This historical reconstruction must be understood in the light of a wider theoretical framework. In 1984 Assmann published *Ägypten: Theologie und Frömmigkeit einer frühen Hochkultur* and, it is interesting to note that the category "shamanism" plays a certain role in this work. Assmann's starting point is that *Gottesnähe* ("the nearness to God") can be manifested in several ways (*Dimensionen der Gottesnähe*): the "local/cultic dimension", the "cosmos", the "verbal or mythic dimension", "ecstasy/shamanism", "mysticism/meditation", "history/ personal destiny"; and each religion is characterised by a specific combination of such dimensions.[290] Specifically, as for the ancient Egyptian religion the first three ones – the "myth", the "cosmos" and the "cult" – played a major role. The "dimension of history", instead, gained a certain importance only after the advent of the New Kingdom, causing the rise of "personal piety", while only sparse samples of mysticism or shamanism can be identified.[291]

This concept was further developed in 2001 in *Tod und Jenseits*. Here, Assmann clearly states that, for the Egyptians, the borders between the realm of humans and the realm of supernatural beings (including both gods and spirits of the dead) were not only rigorously separated, but also subject to a strict cultural control.[292] This means that every contact with the supernatural world had to be regulated and mediated by special rules. Thus, phenomena like "ecstatic trances" – that denote a direct and intimate connection with the supernatural sphere – had a rather minor role in the way in which Egyptian culture perceived the divine sphere:

> *The Egyptians believed that no one (with the possible exception of the king) was capable, during his life, of looking at the gods, of having visions, or of entering in the realm of the gods. Prior to the*

[288] This is certainly not the place to summarise all the criticisms aimed at Assmann's theoretical approach and the current status of the so-called "personal piety" in Egyptology. For further information on this issue, see the following studies: M. M. Luiselli 2008; M. M. Luiselli 2011; L. Weiss 2015, 1-11 and 179-180.
[289] J. Assmann 2004.
[290] J. Assmann 2001 B, 153. First Edition, in German: J. Assmann 1984.
[291] J. Assmann 2001 B, 153 ff.
[292] J. Assmann 2005, 15. First Edition, in German: J. Assmann 2001 A.

> *Greco-Roman period, there are no traces of shamanism, prophecy, or mysticism in Egypt.*[293]

It is interesting how this sentence was strongly criticised in all the main reviews of *Tod und Jenseits*. Several scholars questioned this assumption, underlining the role of ecstasy and intoxication in certain Egyptian festivals, the existence of a certain mysticism recognizable in some passages from funerary literature and the possibility to have a direct contact with the spirits of the dead as testified by the so-called Letters to the Dead.[294]

However, paradoxically, in *Tod und Jenseits*, Assmann himself is inclined to admit the peculiar traits of OMR scenes 9 and 10:

> *They are unique in the history of the Egyptian religion; they are an instance of trance or meditation, for which there are no parallels whatsoever in Egypt*.[295]

It could be posited therefore that the combination of these two factors – the criticisms to Assmann's assumption that in Ancient Egypt there was no trace of shamanism and the fact that he himself admits that OMR scenes 9 and 10 could be interpreted as a peculiar sample of "trance" – has led to a renewed interest in the presumed Egyptian "shamanism" within a wider interpretative framework based on a kind of "survival theory". In these works, "shamanism" is considered a crucial trait of the archaic Egyptian religion (pre and proto-dynastic); and, a number of religious aspects of the historical times, like the OMR, as well as other rituals and myths, could be interpreted as "living fossils" of these archaic practices.

In a 2002 paper, S. Hodel-Hoenes argued that OMR scenes 9 and 10, not only show shamanic traits, but it would also be possible to recognise in these texts an ancient "African substrate", since the presence of the mantis and the spider finds numerous parallels within African traditional tales.[296]

[293] J. Assmann 2005, 78.
[294] Cf. A. J. Morales 2007, 74; L. H. Lesko 2007, 962; F. Scalf 2011, 124.
[295] J. Assmann 2005, 313.
[296] S. Hodel-Hoenes 2002, 185- 196.

An article by L. Morenz, published in 2003 tries to demonstrate that during the Thinite Age several religious practices interpretable as forms of "shamanism" played a crucial role. The main arguments are deducted through an analysis of recurrent iconographic patterns: such as the depictions of certain animals, and the presence of individuals wearing masks or animal skins. Yet, for Morenz, Assmann's statement that shamanism had a secondary role in pharaonic Egypt is substantially correct: it was only with the advent of the centralised state that shamanic practices were marginalised, surviving only in certain traits of Egyptian religion. In his opinion, although the shamanic elements of the OMR could be questioned, certain descriptions of the netherworld attested in the Coffin Texts and several elements of the Osirian myth seem to testify an undeniable shamanic substratum. [297]

S. Neureiter, instead, supports shamanic interpretation of the OMR scenes 9 and 10. In her opinion, not only was shamanism a predominant trait during the pre and proto-dynastic age, but it widely survived as a "Teil des kollektiven Gedächtnisses" (part of the collective memory) in historical times. It follows that several Egyptian religious phenomena could be interpreted as a form of "shamanism", especially specific kinds of medical practices, but also the cult of deceased kings, the ancestor veneration and certain forms of communication with the deceased testified by the Letters to the Dead. Neureiter also draws special attention to the OMR scenes 9 and 10 and other similar religious practices – such as the Tekenu Ritual and the Mysteries of Osiris celebrated in Abydos – all characterised by a "special form of sleeping" (*sḏr*) that should be interpreted as a shamanic trance.[298]

Finally, M. Nuzzolo assumes a position somewhat similar to that of Morenz. In his opinion, certain aspects of the protohistoric Egyptian religion would seem to show some shamanic features. Although he denies the existence of an "Egyptian Shamanism", this label could be an interesting heuristic tool to better understand certain aspects of the historical Egyptian Religion, such as the OMR scenes 9 and 10, the Sed-festival, but also the special role of the pharaoh as privileged intermediary between the divine and human spheres.[299]

2.6 Rethinking ancient Egyptian death rituals

The previous section has highlighted how the main argumentations adopted by the supporters of the shamanic theory could be summarised in the three following points:

[297] L. D. Morenz 2003.
[298] S. Neureiter 2005.
[299] M. Nuzzolo 2017.

1) The iconographic resemblance of the main ritualist performing the OMR, the *sem* priest, with certain individuals depicted on pre and proto-dynastic artefacts and monuments

2) The absence of mythology and references to the traditional gods of the Egyptian pantheon in OMR scenes 9 and 10

3) The assimilation of certain actions, indicated by the Egyptian word *sḏr* and *ḳdd*, performed by the *sem* priest with a form of *trance*. The shamanic interpretation concerning both the Tekenu ceremony and the Haker Fest are mainly based on the fact that also these ceremonies had a phase characterised by an action indicated in the textual sources with the word *sḏr*.

These three salient points will be therefore analysed and deconstructed with the aim of throwing new light on the Egyptian death rituals here taken into account by trying to recontextualise them as dramatic rituals linked to the ancient Egyptian ancestor worship.

First argument: the sem priest and the archaic wearers of the leopard skin

As noted in the previous sections, the ritual actions of the *sem* priest have been interpreted as a survival of archaic shamanic practices also because of his typical garment, a leopard skin. Indeed, depictions of individuals wearing a similar clothing are attested in several sources of the predynastic and protodynastic times, such as the Hierakonpolis tomb n. 100, two Naqada I white-painted vessels, the so-called "lion palette", the king Scorpion Macehead, king Narmer Macehead, the Narmer Palette and a stela of king Khasekhemwy.[300]

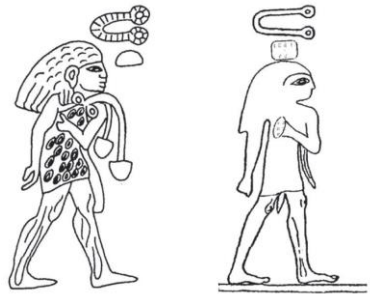

Figure 5 'The Wearer of the Leopard Skin' in the Narmer Palette (left) and in Narmer Macehead

However, do we have enough evidence to consider these individuals as shamans and are they directly linked with the *sem* priest of the subsequent historical phases?

The depictions of the 'wearer of the leopard skin' are never associated to actions that could be interpreted as ecstatic or healing practices. Rather, these individuals are mostly involved in scenes of violence, often related to the executions of prisoners. It has been posited, thus,

[300] B.B. Williams 1997.

that the leopard skin should be considered as a symbol to point out the martial prowess of certain individuals.[301] Another interpretation, instead, has identified this figure with a woman – probably the daughter of the ruler – involved in diverse ritual actions, including a ritualised killing of the enemies.[302] One has also to consider that there are no valid reasons to posit the same function for all the 'wearers of the leopard skin' attested during the predynastic and proto-dynastic times. Actually, we are dealing with a long span of time – about a thousand years – and the same clothing item may have taken on different meanings depending on regional areas, or changed its function over time.[303] Yet, it is noteworthy that the leopard skin always appears in contexts strictly related to the affirmation of social differences. The only element that brings together all these diverse depictions is the will to underline a special social position: the institutional role played by certain individuals related to the central power. Significant is in this regard that, in some stone sarcophagi datable to the 4th dynasty, the lid is decorated with a bas-relief of a leopard skin.[304] Especially for the Cairo Museum sarcophagus JdE 48078, the inscriptions on the coffin allow us to identify its owner, a man called *ỉry-n-wr*, who held several important titles, among which those of "hereditary prince" or "noble man" (*ỉr.ỉ-pˁ.t*) and "Sealer of the King of Lower Egypt" (*ḥtm.w-bỉ.tỉ*).[305] It follows that the only element of continuity that it is possible to identify between the pre- and protodynastic wearers of the leopard skin and the ones attested during the historical phases is the will of highlighting an important social status held by certain individuals.

It is also necessary to underline that, although the leopard skin is one of the typical garments of the *sem* priest in scenes 9 and 10 – considered by most of the supporters of the Egyptian shamanism as a survival of an archaic ecstatic practice – the latter is usually portrayed with another kind of clothing: white, tight, with some stripes, which might resemble the bandages of a mummy. This is another element that could refute the shamanistic interpretation: the *sem*

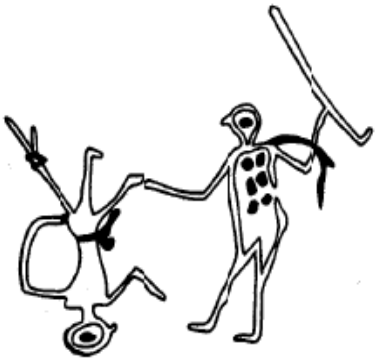

Figure 6 Fighter scene from Hierakompolis Tomb 100

[301] B.B. Williams 1997.
[302] J. Kelder 2013, 144-145.
[303] J. Kelder 2013.
[304] M.H. Gauthier 1930, 178-180; A.M. Roveri Donadoni 1969, 122-123.
[305] M.H. Gauthier 1930, 178-180.

priest is associated with a shaman because he wears a leopard skin that resembles that of certain presumed shamans during the "archaic" phases of Egyptian history; but, when he performs the only historical ritual that may resemble a shamanic practice, he wears a different kind of garment.

The review of the previous studies concerning "Egyptian shamanism" has highlighted how these works were strongly inspired by the Elidian assumption, according to which "shamanism" should be considered not only as a universally valid category, but also the "primordial stage" of any religious experience. Indeed, this premise is far from being proven, and a great number of scholars have rejected it. Notably, one of their main arguments concerns a methodological aspect. The interpretation that identifies any image of animals – or individuals wearing animal skins or animal-like masks – as proofs of shamanic practices has to be considered misleading, because essentially based on too weak similarities between iconographic data belonging to very diverse geographical, cultural and historical environments.[306]

The same criticism can be applied to the supporters of the Egyptian shamanism. One of their argumentations is that the dress of the *sem* priest resembles the dress of some individuals of Egyptian archaic times, which could appear similar to the clothing items used by shamans within other cultural contexts. Actually, we have not enough data to identify the actions and the gestures of the proto-dynastic and pre-dynastic 'wearers of the leopard skin' as shamanic. Rather, their depictions are undeniably intertwined with the appearance and consolidation of social differences, an element that testifies to the special position achieved by certain individuals. The presence of the leopard skin on pre and proto-dynastic artifacts cannot thus be considered as the proof of the existence of an archaic Egyptian shaman; rather, it is a "symptom", of the rise of the state and the consequent social inequality. In other words, it is a proof of the end of prehistory.

Second argument: the absence or minor role of the gods

Several scholars have argued that the OMR scenes 9 and 10 would show a "pre-classic", "archaic" or "shamanic" substrate because of the absence of explicit mythological references, but this statement is problematic from several points of view.

[306] L. Ambasciano 2014, 164-165.

Although the first textual sources concerning the OMR date back to the Old Kingdom, scenes 9 and 10 are not attested prior to the 18th dynasty.[307] Even the lexicon used in their captions – especially the use of the word *ḳdd* to indicate "dream" – is typical of the New Kingdom.[308] The paucity of explicit references to the traditional pantheon is certainly an undeniable fact.[309] On the other hand, one has to note that OMR scenes 9 and 10 are not the only Egyptian documents showing this peculiar trait. The captions relating to the Tekenu, for example, do not show explicit references to mythology,[310] nor are the individuals involved in this rite explicitly assimilated to Egyptian deities.

This point could be pushed even further, by arguing that the absence, or better the paucity, of explicit mythological references constitutes a distinctive characteristic of most textual sources concerning Egyptian ancestor worship.

For example, with regard to the so-called Letters to the Dead, Michael O'Donoghue stressed that: "References to the gods in the letters are remarkably sparse. When the gods are mentioned, they are rather secondary actors in the drama".[311] The same characteristic also occurs in a restricted collection of Coffin Texts spells focused on the interaction between the living and the dead. They include: CT spells 131–146, aimed at rejoining the family of the deceased; CT 149, in which the deceased turns into a falcon to eliminate the enemies of his living relatives in the context of a legal dispute, and CT 30-41, centered on the relationship between the dead father and his living son. Remarkably, H. Willems describes these texts as "a small collection of spells 'without mythology' or "where mythological themes seem to be of only secondary importance".[312]

It is therefore possible to identify a group of textual sources focused on the interplays between the living and the dead, where the gods and explicit mythological references play a rather secondary role. How could it be explained? As mentioned above, in a paper published in 2013, H. Willems has clearly highlighted that the absence of mythology in a

[307] R.A. Gillam 2005, 69-70.
[308] K. Szpakowska 2003, 28.
[309] Yet, the analysis of the texts provided in chapter 3, section 3.1 has highlighted how the name of Horus appears once in scene 10.
[310] The only exceptions are two inscriptions in which the god Ruti is mentioned. See chapter 3.2.1.b, documents 12 and 13.
[311] M.M. O'Donoghue 1999, 87.
[312] H. Willems 2014, 183.

religious text cannot demonstrate its "archaism", and how such a type of interpretations must be considered the result of an ethnocentric bias.[313]

Indeed, if the rise of polytheism is an element strictly linked to the emergence of state organization,[314] this does not entail that those religious ideas concerning the dead and the possible interactions with them must be considered as an exclusive feature of pre-state societies**.** To believe in the supernatural role of the dead is actually one of the most common kinds of beliefs – probably because strongly intertwined with certain dynamics typical of the human mind – and it is an element recognizable in an impressive number of cultural contexts, stratified and verticalised societies included.[315] It cannot be excluded that the interactions between the living and the dead had a foremost role within the prehistoric Egyptian religion. However, this does not mean that the presence of beliefs and practices related to ancestor worship attested within historical Egypt should be considered as a mere "survival" of archaic religious facts. A wide number of studies have shown how ancestor worship played a foremost role in Pharaonic religion. And, if these beliefs were so widespread, it means that they had a specific meaning within the ancient Egyptian society.

In addition, the lack of explicit references to the gods does not mean that these texts cannot be understood in the light of a mythological framework that, although not explicitly mentioned, had to be immediately understandable to the ancient Egyptians.

As stressed by H. Willems, the relationship between the deceased father and his living son in spells 30-41 clearly follows the mythical model of the relationship between Horus and Osiris.[316] The mythical paradigm of the practices linked to the Letters to the Dead can be identified with an episode of the Osirian myth narrated in P. Chester Beatty I (recto 14,6-15,8).[317] Finally, rather similar considerations can be made for OMR 9-10; as stressed by H. Altenmüller, despite the lack of mythology, the ritual actions described within this liturgy must be considered as a "sakramentale Ausdeutung aus dem Osirismythos".[318] Therefore, the interactions between the *sem* priest and the image of the deceased must be interpreted in the light of the fact that the OMR scenes 9 and 10 were meant as a quasi-theatrical performance, where a ritualist played the role of Horus, while the sculpture of the

[313] H. Willems 2013.
[314] M. Liverani 2012, 87-95.
[315] D. Sheils 1980; M. Poo 2009, 1-10.
[316] H. Willems 2001, 363-368.
[317] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 208-219; U. Verhoeven 2003, 38.
[318] "sacramental interpretation from the Osiris myth". H. Altenmüller 2009, 1.

deceased was identified with Osiris, but this role-play was, as a matter of a fact, kept implicit by eliminating most of the direct allusions to it within the liturgical text.[319]

Remarkably, something similar is recognizable in the second book of the *Histories*, where Herodotus shows a certain reticence in reporting the name of Osiris. According to an analysis by P. Sandin, the avoidance of Herodotus would not concern the names of this god *per se*. In several passages, the Greek historian shows no hesitation in transcribing the name of Osiris. Rather, this reticence was about the occurrence of the name of this god within the context of certain Egyptian death rituals.[320] According to Sandin, this behaviour is to be explained in the light of a taboo typical of the ancient Greek culture.[321] Yet, this does not preclude other kinds of interpretations. For example, it has been posited that certain omissions concerning the names of certain Egyptian gods made by Herodotus may reflect an actual Egyptian custom and could be explained with a typical attitude of Herodotus in being respectful towards foreign traditions. Indeed, it is well attested within Egyptian sources that certain aspects of their religion were not meant to be divulgated. [322] According to Laurent Coulon, for example, it is possible to recognise how in four occurrences of Book II, the name of Osiris is subjected to a very specific linguistic taboo:[323]

- The feast of Isis at Busiris - 2.61.1[324]

I have already described how they keep the feast of Isis at Busiris. There, after the sacrifice, all the men and women lament, in countless numbers; but it is not pious for me to say who it is for whom they lament.

- The embalming of the dead and the choice of the sarcophagus -2.86.12

There are men whose sole business this is and who have this special craft. When a dead body is brought to them, they show those who brought it wooden models of corpses, painted

[319] H. Altenmüller 2009, 1.
[320] P. Sandin 2008.
[321] "the educated Athenian gentry who paid to listen to him reciting his histories would not appreciate Egyptian blasphemies. The paying audience will appreciate an attitude in the lecturer which concurs with their own attitude or even better, one which articulates matters which they themselves have only conceived of vaguely, on an emotional plane". P. Sandin 2008, 14.
[322] L. Coulon 2013, 173.
[323] L. Coulon 2013, 173-177.
[324] The translation of the following passages is taken from P. Sandin 2008, 3-5.

likenesses; the most perfect way of embalming belongs, they say, to One whose name it would be impious for me to mention in treating such a matter; the second way, which they show, is less perfect than the first, and cheaper; and the third is the least costly of all.

- A golden cow used as a coffin for a princess and involved in a sacred procession performed once a year during a celebration for the god Osiris - 2.132.2

It does not stand, but kneels; it is as big as a live cow of great size. This image is carried out of the chamber once every year, whenever the Egyptians mourn the god whose name I omit in speaking of such a matter.

- The tomb of Osiris at Sais and the dramatization of the Osiris myth here performed -2.170.1- 2.171.2.3

There is also at Sais the burial-place of one whose name I think it impious to mention in speaking of such a matter; it is in the temple of Athena, behind and close to the length of the wall of the shrine. Moreover, great stone obelisks stand in the precinct; and there is a lake nearby. On this lake they enact by night the story of the god's sufferings, a rite which the Egyptians call mysteries. I could say more about this, for I know the truth, but let me preserve a discrete silence.

It is clear that this taboo is linked to the same kinds of religious facts here taken into account. One of them (2.86.12) concerns the embalming procedure and the coffin of the deceased, like the OMR, which could be performed on mummies, statues, and also coffins, or the Tekenu ceremony, which was involved in the funerary rituals and it is often depicted together with the coffin and the canopic chest. The other passages, instead, describe specific mortuary rituals which took place within the festivals in honour of Osiris; this is a context that shows undeniable affinities with that of the Haker feast celebrated during the Mysteries of Abydos. Moreover, the description of the dramatised ritual performed at Sais shows strong resemblances with the-so called Butic Burial, such as the presence of the lake and

the obelisks.[325] Particularly noteworthy is also the episode of the golden cow. Herodotus says that the latter was used as a coffin for a princess who died at a young age and that it was involved in a ritual procession; indeed, the deification of an individual who died at young age is a well attested phenomenon, especially during the Late Period,[326] and Herodotus here seems to refer to a deified human celebrated together with Osiris during an annual festival.

One could therefore argue that a taboo typical of Greek culture overlapped with a rather similar custom belonging to the ancient Egyptians. Evidence of a certain reticence in transcribing or speaking about the most violent episodes of the death of Osiris are indeed known from Egyptian sources.[327] It is therefore plausible to assume that the explicit reference of divine names, and the explicit assimilation of both the deceased and the ritualist with Horus and Osiris during certain specific moments of both funerary and mortuary rituals, was perceived as something that went against decorum. But the question is, which kind of moments?

Of course, such a restriction did not concern all the rituals related to the sphere of death. The explicit assimilation of the deceased or the officiant with Osiris – as well other deities – and the presence of conspicuous references to the mythological sphere are among the most characteristic features of Egyptian religious texts concerning the death sphere.[328] After all, the documents taken here into account have been noticed by scholars because of their absence of mythology.

A significant element shared by the OMR scenes 9 and 10, the Letters to the Dead, and the so-called Coffin Texts without mythology is that they concern forms of interaction or even communication between the living and the dead, and therefore a kind of necromantic action.[329] Another element, not so obvious at first glance, is the fact that these documents are written textual sources which testify to the existence of dramatic rituals which have to be performed in a quasi-theatrical form, likely in front of an audience.

[325] The obelisk often associated to the Tekenu ritual sleep have been linked to Sais by H. Willems (see: H. Willems 1996, 113-114, and note 342). This aspect will be further explored in section 3.2.1.b.
[326] M. el Amir 1951.
[327] J. Quack 2008.
[328] M. Smith 2017, 141-144.
[329] As we will see later, the same element also characterised the Tekenu ritual. See chapter 3, section 3.2.4.

In several cultures, funerals can be interpreted as a dramatic performance, including the rites performed within several modern cultural contexts.[330] It was also pointed out how both royal and elite funerals can also be interpreted in the light of an ideological function aimed at ratifying the legitimation of the successors and, therefore, as a moment of social display.[331] The same ideas can indeed be applied to both ancient Egyptian funerary and mortuary rites, especially with regard to the documents examined here.[332]

The taboo concerning the explicit references to the mythological backgrounds of these rites was thus active within the context of ceremonies which had the following characteristics:

- They were related to specific liminal ritual actions concerning the interplays and the communication – necromancy, according to the definition used here – between the living and the dead

- They took the form of dramatic performances in the form of collective rituals linked to the Osiris myth and meant for an audience which was perceived – according to the ancient Egyptian emic point of view – as larger than usual: for example, by involving people from diverse social strata or even the dead.

The final phase of the funerary rituals, the one concerning the transportation of the deceased and the grave goods to the tomb, certainly included the participation of both the family members and the friends of the deceased.[333] As regards the festivals for Osiris at Abydos, the question is more complex. Middle Kingdom data show that most of the monuments and

[330] R.E. Turner and C. Edgley 1976.
[331] Cf. for example: C. Given-Wilson 2009.
[332] For the topic concerning Egyptian funerary rites as a dramatic performance Cf. R.A. Gillam 2005, 36-43; 63-65; 73. Especially the OMR and the Butic Burial were likely conceived as dramatic performances. Cf. R.A. Gillam 2009.
The celebrations for Osiris at Abydos have been interpreted as a "dramatic performance" or a "theatrical play" by several scholars. See, for example: R.A. Gillam 2005, 55-59; for the rather similar Khoiak-fest celebrated in the subsequent historical phases see R.A. Gillam 2005, 100-108; see also: R. Gundlach 1987.
As for the Coffin Texts "without mythology", J.R. Ogdon interpreted spells 30-37 as a ritualised drama performed during the funerals. Cf. R.J. Ogdon 1982. This theory has been subsequently rejected by H. Willems 2001, 253-254. Yet, his main argument consists of the fact that the spells have been intended as a monologue, rather than as a dialogue. This indeed does not preclude that the recitation of the spells might have been performed in a "quasi-theatrical" way, and meant for an audience.
As regards the so-called Letters to the Dead the question is more complex. Yet, it must be said that these documents have to be intended as physical witnesses of diverse kinds of articulated ritual actions performed near the tomb of the deceased recipient. It has also been hypothesised that the ritualised deposition of the documents took place during the funerals or within the mortuary rituals linked with the recurrent festivals for the dead, such as those performed at Abydos. Moreover, according to H. Willems the "Coffin Texts without Mythology" could be interpreted as the very liturgy performed for the deposition of the letters (H. Willems 2001, 357-358). With regard to the Letters to the Dead and their ritual of deposition see also chapter 4, section 4.1.
[333] R.A. Gillam 2015, 37; 64-65; 76-77.

stelae found in the terrace of the Great God belonged to prominent members of the elite; yet, stelae attributable to lower social groups, such as craftspeople, have been identified too.[334] In this regard, some textual sources seem to suggest that, while most individuals were just allowed to hear the litanies recited by the ritualists from designated areas outside of the sacred spaces, only few persons could actually attend the ceremonies.[335] It has also been hypothesised that the deceased themselves were perceived as a possible audience for the performance, since the stelae and the monuments located in the terrace likely functioned as a medium so that the dead could observe the ritual,[336] and remarkably some monuments were conceived with special holes which – according to some scholars – functioned like a window specifically meant for this purpose.[337]

Third argument: the action expressed by the verb sḏr

The Egyptian term *sḏr* is used to indicate both a ritual action performed by the *sem* priest within OMR scenes 9-10, and a specific moment of the Tekenu ceremony. Moreover, the Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos included the same kind of ritual action, known in the sources as *sḏr.t* or, *sḏry.t*. So, what did the verb *sḏr* and the nouns derived from it mean? Could they really indicate a shamanic *trance*?

Modern dictionaries of the Egyptian language propose diverse translations for the verb *sḏr*, such as "die Nacht zubringen", "schlafen", "liegen"[338] ("to spend the night"; "to sleep"; "to lie"). The term is also attested as a semi-auxiliary verb in certain kinds of sentences.[339] As for the nouns *sḏr.t*/*sḏry.t*, derived from it, scholars are rather divided. These terms are often translated as "sleeping" or "repose";[340] yet, some Egyptologists prefer to render them with "vigil".[341] Above all, J. Assmann, adopted the latter translation based on the strong analogies he identifies between the *sḏr.t*/*sḏry.t* occurred within the Osiris Mysteries and the

[334] R.A. Gillam 2015, 59.
[335] Z. Végh 2015, 268.
[336] R. Gundlach 1987, 54-60.
[337] K.A. Kitchen 1961.
[338] Cf. Wb IV, 390.9-392.6; Hannig 2005, 2411-2412.
[339] C. Gracia Zamacona 2019, 55-56.
[340] A. Moret 1909, 6 and note 6; W. Helck 1957, 78; H. Altenmüller 2013.
[341] J. Spiegel 1973, 74; M. Lichtheim 1988, 88; Z. Végh 2021, 329-330.

"Stundenwachen" performed in the embalming hall during the night preceding the inhumation of the corpse.[342]

These discrepancies could be explained by the fact that the verb *sḏr* referred to a semantic area that has not an exact match in other modern languages, such as English, or German. According to C. Gracia Zamacona, it might be understood as a causative of a verb (currently not attested) derived from the lexeme *ḏr*, which means "side".[343] The actual meaning, thus, would be "to lie on one side". This would also explain the semi-auxiliary function of the verb, which often occurs in parallel with another semi-auxiliary verb, *ʿḥʿ* ("to stand up"), to be intended as its antonym. In addition, in some passages from the Coffin Texts, *sḏr* is also used as a synonym of *ḥtp* which can denote the setting of the sun.[344]

One has also to take into account that *sḏr* is usually determined with the sign of a man lying on a bed (A 55),[345] and in some cases the same hieroglyph is used as an ideogram to write the whole word.[346] It is therefore clear that this verb had to express a specific meaning concerning an action, which in English can be translated as "to lie down on the side", which was perceived as strongly linked not only to "sleeping", but also to the final stage of the solar cycle and, consequently, to death.

In the OMR scenes 9 and 10, the term *sḏr* is associated to the lexeme *ḳdd,* which usually indicates the act of sleeping but, as stressed by K. Szpakowska, from the Late New Kingdom onwards it assumed the meaning of "dream":

> *It is not until the late New Kingdom that we find firm evidence that ḳd can denote specifically the noun 'dream', as well as 'slumber'. The meaning of ḳd as dream is further confirmed in the oracular amuletic decrees of the Third Intermediate Period, where we find no less than ten separate instances of ḳd referred to as having been seen. The primary meaning of ḳd as 'sleep' or 'slumber' is*

[342] J. Assmann 2001 A, 260-279.
[343] C. Gracia Zamacona 2019, 43.
[344] C. Gracia Zamacona 2019, 43-45.
[345] C. Gracia Zamacona 2019, 43-45.
[346] C. Gracia Zamacona 2019, 43-44.

> *inappropriate in these cases. This is corroborated by the substitution of rsw.t for ḳd in otherwise identical phrases in two others oracular amuletic decrees of the same period.*[347]

Before the New Kingdom, instead, the most common term used to denote what we refer to as "dream" was the word *rsw.t*, a noun derived from the verb *rs*, which literally means "to wake", and idiomatic expressions, such as *m33 m rsw.t* ("to see in a dream"), would imply that the Egyptians perceived the dreams as something that a human being can experience by "wakening" while experiencing the condition described by the verb *sḏr*.[348]

Textual sources clearly indicate that the Egyptians considered the dream as a kind of liminal space, where the sleepers could interact with supernatural entities, such as the gods or the dead.[349] In this regard, it is remarkable that in two Letters to the Dead the senders explicitly ask the deceased recipient of the missive to appear them in a dream.[350]

In the light of these data, it can be posited that the diverse, often contrasting, renderings of *sḏr.t*/*sḏry.t* can be understood as a mere superficial problem concerning the difficult rendering of the semantic area expressed by the verb *sḏr* into modern languages. Within the ritual contexts considered here, this verb and its derivates were used by the Egyptians to describe a specific performative action: to lie down in a sacred space, such as a necropolis, a tomb, or the cenotaph of Osiris, in order to seek an interaction or a form of communication (necromancy) with a dead. This interaction could assume various forms, such as watching over the mummified body during the night preceding the funeral, or experiencing a visual form of communication with a dead, perceived as a dream. It is not important to understand whether this kind of ritual action corresponded to our *etic*, physiological concept of sleeping or involved a state of vigil, since this problem is strictly linked to our *etic* vision of the world, having little to do with the ancient Egyptian meaning of the verb *sḏr*. Therefore, *sḏr* and both the nouns *sḏr.t* and *sḏry.t* will be conventionally translated here as "to perform a ritual sleep", and "ritual sleep".

[347] K. Szpakowska 2003, 28.
[348] K. Szpakowska 2003, 28.
[349] K. Szpakowska 2003, 28.
[350] These documents will be further discussed in chapter 3, section 3.1.b and in chapter 5.

The perception of the dreams as a tool to communicate with the deceased may indeed recall other phenomena attested within diverse cultural contexts, which have been often labelled as "shamanism" in some ethnographic and anthropological works. However, the terms "trance" would be rather misleading here, suggesting a pattern of beliefs and interpretations that cannot fit the ancient Egyptian culture. Above all, Egyptian textual sources make clear that the visions experienced by the sleepers during the dreams did not entail a detachment of the soul from the body, rather it was a condition which allowed a mainly visual interaction with certain supernatural beings; furthermore, the state experienced by the "dreamers" was eminently passive: they cannot control the supernatural beings they meet in the dream-zone, as certain other specialists from other cultural contexts are able to do.[351]

This kind of behaviour is rather widespread among the most diverse human cultures. Yet, this fact does not prove the existence of an archaic "shamanic religion" of which it would be possible to detect "spurious forms" through time and space. Rather, as stressed by Boyer, this kind of beliefs are quasi-universal because they are able to hack some structures typical of the human mind and can be thus "recreated" and re-formulated" several times in diverse contexts without any cultural transmission.[352] In addition, although certain kinds of beliefs – such as the possibility to communicate with the dead through the dreams – are certainly widespread, it does not mean that they have the same meaning and function in all the diverse social and historical contexts in which they are attested.[353]

2.7 Results

The critical approach to the previous studies has identified a tendency of the Egyptological literature in interpreting a group of rituals related to the death sphere – the OMR scenes 9 and 10, the Tekenu ritual, and the Haker feast – as "survivals" of archaic shamanic practices. A critical analysis of the data have rather shown how these rituals could be better understood as an expression of a core of beliefs strictly focused on the interactions between the living and the dead.

[351] K. Szpakowska 2003, 38.
[352] P. Boyer 2007, 13-15; P. Boyer 2020, 465-466.
[353] P. Boyer 2007, 13-15; "More generally, the extraordinary and persistent success of wild traditions as described here, compared to the coercive and often unsuccessful imposition of religious organizations' doctrines, would suggest that these wild traditions are the place to start, if we want to understand those features of the human evolved cognitive architecture that produce varieties of religious ideas". P. Boyer 2020, 472.

Specifically, the three main arguments in favour of the shamanic interpretation proved to be unfounded. The typical leopard skin of the *sem* priest can indeed show a certain similarity with other garments worn by certain figures recurring in pre- and proto-dynastic artifacts but no substantiated elements have allowed the identification of these archaic wearers of the leopard skin with actual shamans. Rather, the presence of this kind of garment in the pre- and proto-dynastic iconographic repertoire testifies to the remarkable status reached by certain individuals associated to the main chief and, consequently, the advent of social inequalities and the rise of an "elite". As for the absence of explicit references to the Egyptian mythology, it proved to be just a mere superficial aspect. Several textual sources other than the OMR scenes 9 and 10 – such as the Letters to the Dead, or the Coffin Texts spells without mythology identified by H. Willems – show this same feature. The analysis of the data also allowed to understand how all these textual sources actually referred – in a deliberately implicit way – to certain episodes of the myth of Osiris. This made it possible to assume the existence of a certain reticence in explicitly narrating some passages of the myth of Osiris within the specific context of "dramatic rituals". The avoidance of explicitly mentioning the name of certain gods was probably triggered by the fact that these quasi-theatrical performances were enacted in the form of collective rituals, which involved the presence of a large audience, or forms of interactions, contacts or even communication between the living and the dead. This was indeed the case of some phases of the funerary ritual and that of the recurrent festivals aimed at celebrating the dead. Finally, the identification of the action indicated by the verb *sḏr* as a "shamanic trance" turned out to be not grounded. The possibility to interact with the dead through oneiric visions is indeed one of the most widely held beliefs among human beings and it does not necessarily imply the enactment or the "survival" of an actual shamanic practice. Furthermore, the verb *sḏr* and the nouns *rsw.t* and *ḳdd* had a very specific meaning that testifies to a core of conceptions and belief typical of the ancient Egyptian culture, such as that of the "dream-zone", a liminal space where it was possible to experience the vision of supernatural beings but in which the dreaming human being was essentially passive.

Taking these results as a starting point, it is therefore possible to conduct a detailed analysis of all the relevant sources concerning the OMR scenes 9 and 10, the Tekenu ritual, and the Haker feast in order to further investigate the exact function of these religious practice and their evolution through Egyptian history.

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3. Analysis of the Opening of the Mouth Ritual, the Tekenu ritual, and the Haker feast

The following chapter is structured into three sections, each dedicated to diverse textual sources concerning specific ancient Egyptian death rituals. The first section is focused on the OMR scenes 9 and 10, the second one pertains to the Tekenu ritual, while the third section discusses the Haker feast in the context of the Mysteries of Osiris celebrated at Abydos.

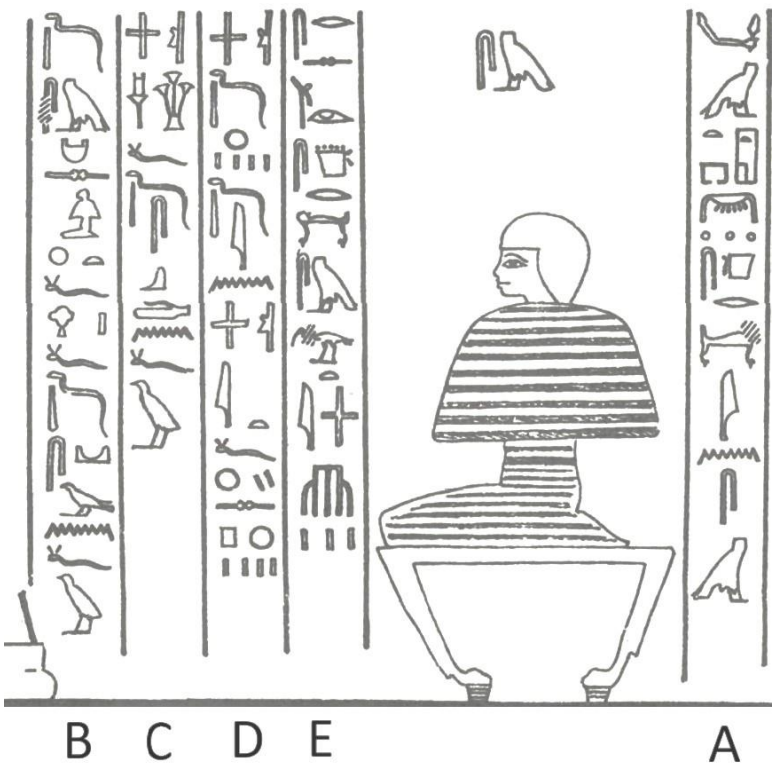
3.1 The Opening of the Mouth Ritual scenes 9 and 10

In the present section the captions concerning the OMR scenes 9 and 10 will be examined and commented. The two scenes are known from several sources, none of which date before the New Kingdom.[354] Their content was subjected to a restricted number of variations over time, the most remarkable being the presence, within some textual witnesses, of special words, which functioned as ritual remarks, placed at the end of some sentences. The analysis proposed here mainly focuses on two sources: the tomb of Rekhmire (TT100), governor of Thebes and vizier who lived during the 18th dynasty (from the reign of Thutmose III to that of Amenhotep II), which is also one of the most ancient attestations currently known; and the tomb of Seti I (KV 17), the second king of the 19th dynasty.[355]

[354] E. Otto 1960, Vol I, 21-30.

[355] Both inscriptions are transcribed in the work by E. Otto 1960, 21-30; For the copies here utilised of scenes 9 and 10 in TT100 see: No. de Garis Davies 1943, Plates CVI and CVII; For KV 17 see: E. Lefebure 1886, Plate II.

Scene 9, according to TT 100 (Rekhmire)



|A| *ḏsr m ḥw.t-nb sḏr ỉn sm*

|B| *ḏd-mdw sm ḥmsỉ ḫf.t-ḥr=f ḏd-mdw sḏwỉ-n=f wỉ*

|C| *ỉmy-ỉs ʿḥʿ ḥ3=f ḏd-mdw sḳd-n=f wỉ*

|D| *ỉmy-ỉs ḏd-mdw sp-4 ḏd-mdw ỉn ỉmy-ỉs ỉt<=ỉ> sp-2 sp-4*

|E| *srs sḏr sm gmỉ.t ỉmy.w-ḫnt 3*

Figure 7: OMR scene 9, TT 100

|A| The seclusion in the House of Gold (1) and the ritual sleep (2) by the *sem* priest

|B| Recitation by the *sem* priest who sits in front of him (3); recitation: "he hurt me! (4)"

|C| The *imy-is* (5) who stands behind him; recitation: "he hit me!" (6)

|D| The *imy-is* who recites four times; recitation by the *ỉmy-ỉs,* four times: "My father! My father!"

|E| Waking up by the one who sleeps, the *sem* priest; the finding of the three *ỉmy-khent* (7).

Scene 9, according to KV 17 (Seti 1st)

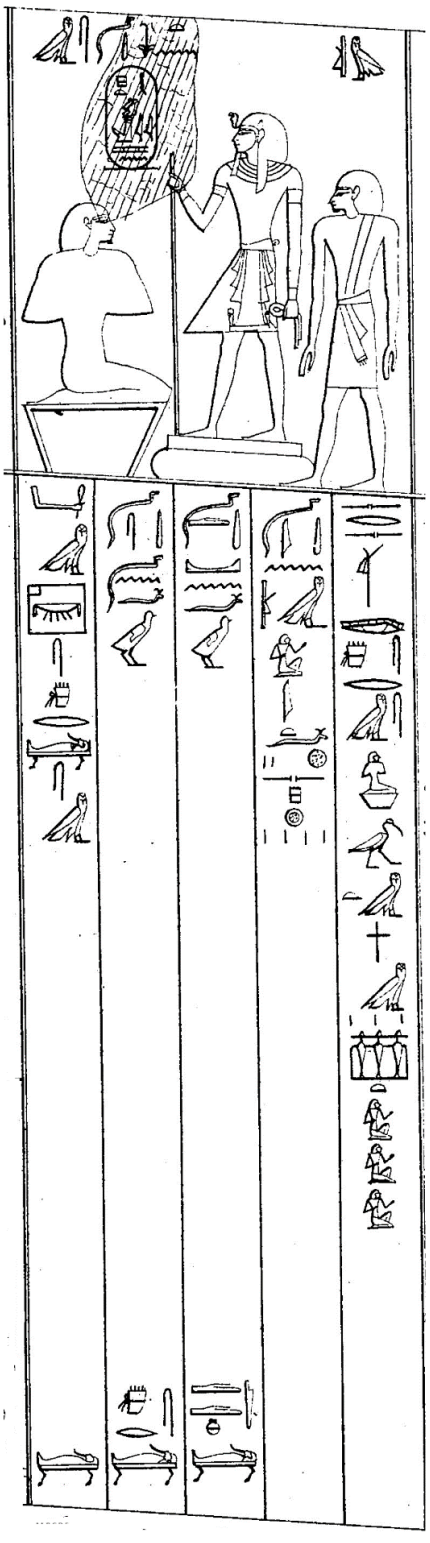


Figure 8: OMR scene 9 in KV 17

Above the figures: *ḏd(mdw) sm; (nswt Mry-n-Ptḥ); ỉmy-ỉs*

|A| *ḏsr m hw.t-nbw sḏr sm* |*sḏr*

|B| *ḏd-mdw sḏwỉ-n=f wỉ* |*sḏr*

|C| *ḏd-mdw dḏw-n=f wỉ* |*ḳdd*

|D| *ḏd-mdw ỉn ỉmy-ỉs ỉt<=ỉ> sp-2 sp-4*

|E| *srs sḏr sm gmỉ.t ỉmy.w-ḫnt 3*

Above the figures: Recitation by the *sem* priest; the King Mery-en-Ptah (Sety I); the *imy-is* (5)

|A| The seclusion in the House of Gold (1) and the the *sem* priest's ritual sleep (2) |To sleep (8)

|B| Recitation: he hurt me! | To sleep (9)

|C| Recitation: he hit me! (10) |The dream (11)

|D| Recitation by the *imy-is* four times: "My father! My father!"

|E| The waking up of the one who sleeps, the *sem* priest; the finding of the three *ỉmy-khent* (7)

Notes

1. The term House of Gold, *ḥw.t nbw*, indicates a special place where the main officiant of the ritual, the *sem* priest, is secluded (Otto 1960, Vol. II, 54). According to H.-W. Fischer-Elfert this place is to be identified with the quarry from which the material to make the statue of the deceased was extracted (H.-W. Fischer-Elfert 1998, 9). This latter interpretation does not preclude that this place could have functioned as a set for dramatic rituals since the very beginning of the Egyptian history. See: Fritschy 2019, 161-176. Altenmüller, instead, hypothesises that during the New Kingdom this term indicated a ritual setting located near the tomb of the deceased. (Altenmüller 2009, 14).

2. For the term *sḏr* as "ritual sleep" see section 2.6, third argumentation.

3. The third-person masculine singular pronouns refer to the deceased or, more likely, to a sculpture portraying the latter.

4. The verb *sḏwi* (Wb 4, 380.7-10), creates an alliteration with the verb *sḏr*. The verb *sḏwi* literally means "to break" or "to penetrate". It likely refers to an action performed on the statue by the sculptors. (Otto 1960, Vol. II, 54). The same verb is also used to describe the "ritual of breaking the red pots", and it clearly shows "an aggressive" meaning. (Szpakowska 2003, 149).

5. The term literally means "the one inside the tomb" and indicates a ritualist.

6. Among the testimonies collected by Otto, the sentence *sḳd-n=f wi* recurs only in TT 100. The other sources show *dḏw-n=f wi* (Otto 1960 Vol. I, 22-23). As for the verb *sḳd* with the meaning of 'push', 'poke', 'shove', 'shake', or 'jolt' see: Szpakowska, 2003, 149, and Hannig 1995, 990.

7. The term literally means "the ones who are inside"; it indicates a group of ritualists.

8 and 9. KV 17 shows the presence of certain words – *sḏr* and *ḳd* – placed at the end of some sentences which are to be intended as ritual remarks. These words recur also in other sources. (Otto 1960, Vol. II, 54-55).

10. The sentence *dḏw-n=f wi* is not attested in TT 100 (see note 6). The verb *dḏw* is quite rare and it is not attested in the Wb. Given the existence of a word etymologically linked to this verb, meaning "flour" (Wb 5, 502.8-10) a possible meaning would be "to crush", "to hammer", or "to grind". In addition, the verb *dḏw* creates an alliteration with the term *ḳd*. (Otto 1960, Vol. II, 54-55).

11. The term *ḳdd* has been translated as "sleeping" by Otto (1960, Vol. II, 54); Helck considered it as a shamanic trance experienced by the *sem* priest (Helck 1984 A, 104). H.-W- Fischer-Elfert suggested "meditation" (Fischer-Elfert 1998, pp. 64-72). Finally, according to Szpakowska (2003, 17), from the 19th dynasty onwards this term assumed the meaning of "dream".

Scene 10 according to TT 100 (Rekhmire)

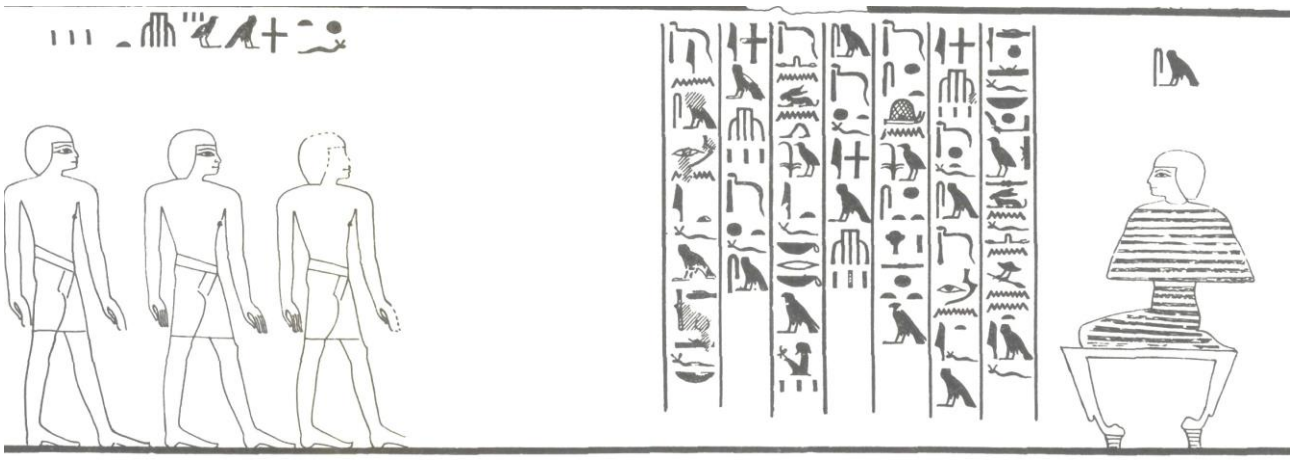


Figure 9: OMR scene 9 in TT 100

|A| Above the figure of the sleeping *sem* priest: *sm;* above the three man standing: *ḫft ỉmy.w-ḫnt 3*

1.|B| *ḏd-mdw ỉn sm mꜣꜣ-n <=ỉ> ỉt<=ỉ> m ḳd=f nb*

2.|C| *ỉmy.w-ḫnt 3 ḏd-mdw ḫft sm*

3.|D| *ḏd-mdw nn wnỉ sw ỉt=k r=k* |*wnw-Ḥr*

4.|E| *sm ḏd-mdw ḫft ỉmy.w-ḫnt 3*

5.|F| *ḏd-mdw sḫt-n sw sḫt.t-ḥr* |*sḫt.t Ḥr*

6.|G| *ỉmy.w-ḫnt 3 ḏd-mdw ḫft sm* |H| *ḏd-mdw mꜣꜣ-n<=ỉ> ỉt<=ỉ> m*

7. ḳd=f nb |I-1| *ḫwỉ<=ỉ> swn=f* |I-2| *nn ḫnn.t ỉm=f*

|A| The *sem* priest is in front the three *ỉmy-khent.*

|B| Recitation by the sem priest: “I have seen my father in all his forms”.

|C| The three *ỉmy-khent*; recitation in front of the *sem* priest;

|D| recitation: “your father will not turn himself away from you” |The messenger of Horus (1)

|E| The *sem* priest; recitation in front of the three *ỉmy-khent*;

|F| recitation: “the spider-*ḥr* (2) has captured him”. | The spider is Horus (3)

|G| The three *ỉmy-khent*; recitation in front of the *sem* priest;

|H| recitation: “I have seen my father in all his forms”.

|I-1| “I prevented him from suffering,”

|I-2| with no trace of putrefaction in him”.

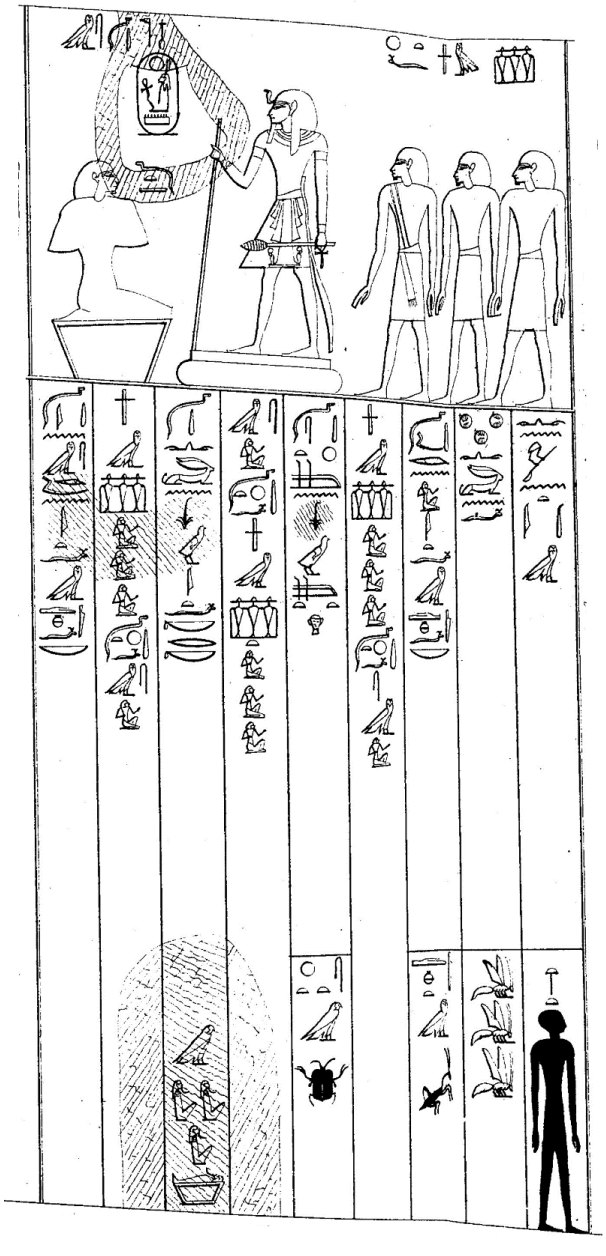


Figure 10: OMR scene 10 in KV 17

Scene 10 According to the tomb of Seti 1st (KV 17)

|A| (Above the figures) *ḏd-mdw sm; nfr-nṯr Mn-Mꜥ3.t-Rꜥ; ḫft ỉmy.w-ḫnt 3*

|B| *ḏd-mdw ỉn sm m333-n <=ỉ> ỉt<=ỉ> m ḳd=f nb*

|C| *ỉmy.w-ḫnt 3 ḏd-mdw ḫft sm*

|D| *ḏd-mdw nn wn sw ỉt=k r=k*
|wnw-Ḥr sḏr

|E| *sm ḏd-mdw ḫft ỉmy.w-ḫnt 3*

|F| *ḏd-mdw sḫt-n sw sḫt.t-ḥr*
|sḫt.t Ḥr

|G| *ỉmy.w-ḫnt 3 ḏd-mdw ḫft sm*

|H| *ḏd-mdw m333-n<=ỉ> ỉt<=ỉ> m ḳd=f nb*
|ḳd m 3bỉ.t

|I-1| *ḫwỉ<=ỉ> <s>wn=f*
|bỉ.wt

|I-2| *nn ḫnn.tỉ ỉm<=f>* *|šw.t*

|A| Recitation by the *sem* priest – the Perfect God, Men-Maat-Ra (Sety I) – in front of the three *ỉmy-khent*.

|B| Recitation by the *sem* priest:"I have seen my father in all his forms".

|C| The three *ỉmy-khent*; recitation in front of the *sem* priest;

|D| recitation: "your father will not turn himself away from you"	|the sleeping messenger of Horus (1)
|E| The *sem* priest; recitation in front of the three *Imy-khent*;	
|F| recitation: "the spider-*ḥr* (2) has captured him"	|the spider is Horus (3)
|G| The three *ỉmy-khent*; recitation in front of the *sem* priest;	
|H| recitation: "I have seen my father in all his forms"	|image of a mantis (4)
|I-1| "I prevented him from suffering"	|bees (5)
|I-2| with no trace of putrefaction in him	|shadow (6)

Notes

1. Both the groups of signs (TT100) and (KV 17) pose some difficulties. This ritual remark is attested with different spellings (E. Otto, op cit. 1960, Vol I, p. 26), the most interesting being that occurring in Butehamun's coffin, currently in Turin (Egyptian Museum C 2237/3), which reveals the phonetic value of the group of signs: , *Ḥr-wnw sḏr*. The signs (A55) and (D40) could be both read as *sḏr* (for this verb written with the sign D40, see Wb IV, 390.5). It is important to stress that the verb *sḏr* does not recur in all the testimonies (E. Otto, op. cit. 1960, Vol. I, p. 26), for example, it does not recur in TT 100. According to H.-W. Fischer-Elfert, the term *wnw* should be translated as "Offenbarung", "vision" (H.-W. Fischer-Elfert, op. cit. 1998, pp. 28-36). Another possible meaning is that of "messenger" (*ỉnw*/*wnw*, Wb 1, 91.19-92.1), which has been suggested by E. Otto because of a parallel with PT 327 (Otto 1960, Vol. II, 56; see also Altenmüller 2009, 8). This latter rendering is particularly interesting, since it can be interpreted as a reference to a mythical episode narrated in CT spell 312 – which plays a foremost role to fully understand the mythological background of the religious practices considered here (this topic is elaborated further in section 3.2.1c) – and in PT 364, which shows numerous affinities with OMR scene 10 (this topic is further elaborated in section 3.1.a).

2 and 3. The term *sḫ.t-ḥr* probably indicates a type of spider: so, it has been translated as "the spider-*ḥr*". The term is etymologically linked to the verb *sḫt* (Wb 4, 263.6-1), whose meaning is "to trap", also creating an alliteration with the aforementioned noun and the ritual remark at the end of the sentence. As for the latter, in

some textual sources (such as KV 17), the ritual remark is determined with the sign (L1), which clearly confirms that the word *sḫt.t* actually indicated an invertebrate animal, such as an insect or an arachnid. The sign G5 placed at the end of the ritual remark should be intended, according to Otto, as a determinative for "divine being", rather than as the name of the god Horus since, in this latter case, the sign would be placed at the beginning of the group hieroglyphs. (Otto 1960, Vol. II, 56). One could however interpret *sḫt.t Ḥr* as a nominal sentence: "the spider is Horus". In fact, it is clear the intent of creating a word play between the subject of the sentence F and the related ritual remark. According to Fischer-Elfert this ritual remark is to be intended as a code-word for a technical term, the "grid", an instrument used by painters and sculptors to catch the feature of three-dimensional figures (Fischer-Elfert 1998, 85). For Altenmüller, instead, it has to be interpreted as a supernatural being dwelling in the netherworld, or as a term referring to a ritualist linked to Horus. (Altenmüller 2009, 8).

4. *ḳd m ỉꜣbỉ.t,* literally "image of a mantis". This ritual remark is not attested in TT 100. (Otto 1960, Vol. II, 56-57). According to Fischer-Elfert, it is a code-word to indicate the outlining of the sculpture (H.-W. Fischer-Elfert 1998, p. 83). For Altenmüller, instead, it has to be interpreted as a supernatural being dwelling in the netherworld. (Altenmüller 2009, 14).

5 *bỉ.wt,* literally "bees". This group of signs is not attested in TT 100. (Otto 1960, Vol. II, 56-57). According to Fischer-Elfert, this term is another code-word used to indicate the grid used by the artists. (Fischer-Elfert 1998, 83). For Altenmüller, it is a kind of supernatural being. (Altenmüller 2009, 14-15).

6 The term *šw.t* literally means "shadow", it usually indicated a component of human beings often associated to the *bꜣ*. (Allen 2001). This ritual remark does not occur in TT 100. According to Fischer-Elfert, within this specific context the term is used as a code-word to indicate the outlining of the sculpture. (Fischer-Elfert 1998, 85). For Altenmüller, instead, it must be interpreted as a supernatural being. (Altenmüller 2009, 14-15).

3.1.a PT 364 and OMR scene 10

OMR scenes 9 and 10 have been considered as the survival of an archaic religious practice because of two main reasons: the lack of explicit references to the Egyptian pantheon, and the main role played by some phenomena – such as the interactions between the living and the dead through dreams – that a certain tradition of studies considered as typical of "primitive religions". As regards the first argument – the absence of mythology – a study by H. Altenmüller has shown how several scenes of the OMR, traditionally considered "without mythology", must be rather understood as a "sacred representation" pertaining to an episode of the Osirian myth narrated in PT 364,[356] a passage from the Pyramid Texts which narrates how Horus was able to heal the wounded corpse of Osiris, and open the eye and mouth of the latter by donating his own eye:

PT 364 (Teti Pyramid) – Pyr. 609 a- 621 c

|609a| *ḏd-mdw hꜣ Wsỉr N pw ʿḥʿ r=k* **|609b|** *ỉy Ḥr ỉp=f ṯw m-ʿ nṯr.w ỉ-mrỉ-n ṯw Ḥr* **|609c|** *ḥtm-n=f ṯw sdmỉ-n n=k Ḥr ỉr.t=f ỉr=k* **|610a|** *wpỉ-n n=k Ḥr ỉr.t=k mꜣꜣ=k ỉm=s* **|610b|** *ṯ(ꜣ)s-n n=k nṯr.w ḥr=k ỉ-mrỉ-n=sn ṯw* **|610c|** *sḏꜣ-n ṯw (ꜣ)s.t ḥnʿ Nb.t-ḥw.t* **|610d|** *n ḥrỉ Ḥr ỉr=k ṯwt kꜣ=f* **|611a|** *ḥtp ḥr=k n=f ỉ-wn k(w) šsp-n=k md(w).t Ḥr ḥtp=k ḥr=s* **|611b|** *sḏm n Ḥr n sww n=k rḏỉ-n=f šms kw nṯr.w* **|612a|** *Wsỉr N rs r=k ỉnỉ-n n=k Gb Ḥr ỉp=f ṯw* **|612b|** *gmỉ-n ṯw Ḥr ꜣḫ-n=f ỉm=k*

|609 a| Recitation: Oh Osiris-N, arise! |609b| Horus comes to judge[357] you among the gods! Horus has loved you, and |609c| he equipped you: Horus has placed on you his eye for your advantage; |610a| Horus has opened your eye so that you can see through it! |610b| The gods have tied for you your face, (because) they loved you! |610c| Isis and Nephthys made you safe! |610d| Horus is not far from you since you are his Ka! |611a| May your face be happy because of him. Hurry up, receive the words of Horus, and be happy about it! |611b| Listen to Horus! You will not suffer, since he caused the gods to follow you. |612a| Oh Osiris-N, awake! Geb brought Horus to you! And he will judge you![358] **|612b|** Horus has found you and he appeared to you in the form of an *ꜣḫ*-spirit.

[356] H. Altenmüller 2009, 10.
[357] The verb *ỉp* (Wb 1, 66.1-13), as other verb belonging to the same semantic category, can assume a more specific meaning of "judging", see: Grieshammer 1970, 30-51.
[358] Grieshammer 1970, 30-51

|613a| *sḏʿ-n n=k Ḥr nṯr.w rdỉ-n=f n=k sn sḫḏ=sn ḥr=k* **|613b|** *dỉ-n ṯw Ḥr m-ḫ3.t nṯr.w rdỉ-n=f ỉṯỉ=k ṯw.t / wrr.t (?) nb.t* **|613c|** *mr-n sw Ḥr.w ỉr=k n wpỉ-n=f ỉr=k* **|614 a|** *sʿnḫ-n ṯw Ḥr m rn=k pw n ʿnḏ.tỉ* **|614 b|** *rdỉ-n n=k Ḥr ỉr.t=f rwḏ.t* **|614 c|** *dỉ-n n=k s ỉmỉm=k nrỉ n=k ḫft.ỉ=k nb* **|614 d|** *mḥ-n kw Ḥr tm.tỉ m ỉr.t=f m rn=s pw n w3ḥ.wt nṯr* **|615 a|** *ỉ-ḫmʿ-n n=k Ḥr nṯr.w* **|615 b|** *n bỉ3ỉ-n=sn r=k ḏr bw šmỉ-n =k ỉm* **|615 c|** *ỉp-n n=k Ḥr nṯr.w* **|615 d|** *n bỉ3ỉ-n=sn r=k ḏr bw mḥỉ=k ỉm* **|616 a|** *ỉnḳ-n n=k Nb.t-ḥw.t ʿ.wt=k nb.t* **|616 b|** *m rn=s pw n Sš3.t nb.t ỉḳd.w.* **|616 c|** *sḏ3-n<=s> n=k sn* **|616 d|** *rdỉ.t n mw.t =k Nw.t m rn=s n ḳrs.wt* **|616e|** *ỉnḳ-n=s ṯw m rn=s n ḳrs.w* **|616f|** *ỉ-sḏʿ.tỉ n=s m rn=s n ỉʿ*

|613a| Horus has caused the gods to ascend to you; he has given them to you so that they may brighten your face. **|613b|** Horus has placed you at the head of the gods and he has caused you to take every *ṯw.t* /*wrr.t*-crown.[359] **|613c|** Horus has joined you; he will not part with you! **|614 a|** Horus has caused you to live in this your name (form) of *ʿnḏ.tỉ*.[360] **|614b|** Horus has given you his strong eye. **|614 c|** He gave it to you so that you might become strong and make all your enemies afraid of you. **|614d|** Horus has filled you completely with his eye in its (the eye's) name "God's donation". **|615a|** Horus caught the gods for you **|615b|** so that they cannot get away from you, from the place where you went to. **|615c|** Horus has judged[361] the gods for you, **|615d|** so that they cannot get away from you, from the place where you drowned.[362] **|616a|** Nephthys has assembled for you all your limbs, **|616b|** in her name (form) of "Seshat, lady of builders", **|616c|** and she preserved them (the limbs) for you. **|616d|** You were given to your mother Nut, who took the name (form) of "sarcophagus", **|616e|** and she embraced you in her name (form) of "sarcophagus". **|616f|** You have ascended to her (Nut, the goddess of the sky), who took the name (form) of "tomb".

[359] The transliteration and the translation of this group of signs is not clear. In this regard, see: K. Goebs 2008, 73 and note 378.

[360] *ʿnḏ.tỉ* (Wb 1, 207.12) is a god of Busiris, associated with the sphere of fertility and often identified with Osiris himself.

[361] For this verb with the of meaning of "judging", see: Grieshammer 1970, 30-51.

[362] A clear reference to Osiris' death by drowning.

|617a| *ỉʿb-n n=k Ḥr ʿ.t=k n rḏỉ-n=f swn=k* **|617b|** *dmḏ-n=f kw n ḫnn.t ỉm=k* **|617c|** *sʿḥʿ-n ṯw Ḥr m nwtwt.w* **|618 a|** *ḥ3 Wsỉr N pw wṯs ỉb=k ỉr=f ʿ3ỉ ỉb=k wn rʿ=k* **|618 b|** *nḏ-n ṯw Ḥr n ḏdỉ-n nḏ=f ṯw* **|619 a|** *ḥ3 Wsỉr N pw ṯwt nṯr sḫm n nṯr mỉw.tỉ=k* **|619b|** *rdỉ-n n=k Ḥr msw=f wṯs=sn ṯw* **|620a|** *rdỉ-n=f n=k nṯr.w nb šms=sn ṯw sḫm=k ỉm=sn* **|620b|** *f3ỉ-n ṯw Ḥr m rn=f n ḥnw* **|620c|** *wṯs=f kw m rn=k n skr* **|621 a|** *ʿnḫ.t(ỉ) nmnm=k rʿ nb* **|621b|** *3ḫ.tỉ m rn=k n 3ḫ.t prr.t rʿw ỉm=s* **|621c|** *w3s.tỉ spḏ=tỉ b3.tỉ sḫm.tỉ n ḏ.t ḏ.t*

|617a| Horus has brought your limbs together (and) he did not cause you to suffer **|617b|** He has reassembled you with no trace of putrefaction in you. **|617c|** Horus made you stand up, don't falter! **|618a|** Oh Osiris-N, may your heart rejoice for him! You are glad, your mouth is open! **|618b|** Horus has protected you, and it didn't take long for him to protect you! **|619a|** O Osiris-N, you are the mightiest god and there is no other god like you. **|619b|** Horus gave you his children to lift you up. **|620a|** He has brought to you all the gods so that they will follow you and you will have power over them. **|620b|** Horus will lift you up in his name (form) of *ḥnw*-bark; **|620c|** he will lift you up in his name (form) of *skr*-bark. **|621a|** May you live and move every day! **|621b|** You are one who appears as an *3ḫ* whose name is "Horizon-from-where-Ra-goes-forth". **|621c|** You are powerful, you are equipped, you are endowed with a *B3*, you are a mighty one for ever and ever.

PT 364 contains numerous explicit references to certain actions, probably of a ritual nature, which perfectly match with the two OMR scenes previously analysed. In Pyr. 610a it is stated that Horus opened Osiris 'eyes to grant him the sense of sight (*wpỉ-n n=k Ḥr ỉr.t=k mɜ =k ỉm=s*), while in Pyr. 618a it is said that Osiris's mouth has been opened (*wn rˁ=k*). Especially noteworthy are a restricted number of passages which show an undeniable affinity with some sentences occurring in OMR scene 10. Pyr. 617a – "he did not cause you to suffer" (*n rḏỉ-n=f swn =k*) – clearly recalls "I prevented him from suffering" (*ḫwỉ<=ỉ> swn=f*) attested in OMR scene 10 I-1. Pyr. 617b, "with no trace of putrefaction in you" (*n ḫnn.t ỉm=k*) is practically identical to OMR scene 10 I-2, "with no trace of putrefaction in him" (*nn ḫnn.t ỉm=f).* Finally, Pyr. 610d, "Horus is not far from you" (*n ḥrỉ Ḥr ỉr=k*) shows a certain similarity with OMR 10 D, "your father will not turn himself away from you" (*nn wnỉ sw ỉt=k r=k*).

Several scholars have suggested that the OMR scenes must be understood as a *scenario* for a dramatic ritual: a piece of writing providing the outline of a story and the details concerning its mise-en-scene, such as the entrances and the exits of the actors (the ritualists, in this specific cases).[1]

For the specific case of OMR 10, its text can be considered as the "stage direction" for the dramatic performance of a mythical episode already known in a much more ancient source, PT 364, which was about the revivification of Osiris through the performance of the funerary rituals and the establishment of his mortuary cult (Pyr. 610c and 616a-c). Moreover, if we adopt the emic point of view of an ancient Egyptian, the facts narrated in PT 364 were likely perceived as the founding model from which the actual funerary and mortuary rituals were created. The strong connections between PT 364 and OMR scene 10 are therefore not surprising since the first was the founding myth of both funerary and mortuary rituals, and the latter concerned the vivification of a cult statue to be used in the mortuary cult.

Another important theme of PT 364 pertains to the Eye of Horus since in several passages it is stated that Horus was able to appear in front of his father in the form of an *ɜḫ* in order to donate his eye to him (Pyr. 609c; 612b; 614b).

It is therefore necessary to dwell on the complex symbolism attributed to Eye of Horus. In the textual sources, it is known by two different names: *ỉr.t-Ḥr*,[2] which is the most ancient term, and *wḏɜ.t*,[3]

[1] E. Otto 1960, Vol. II, 3; J. C. Goyon 1972, 92; K. Szpakowska 2003, 147-148; R. A. Gillam 2015, 69 ; H. Altenmüller 2009, 9.
[2] Wb 1, 107.12-19.
[3] Wb 1, 401.12-402.2.

attested for the first time in the Coffin Texts. Above all, the Eye of Horus was associated to protection and healing; nonetheless, it also symbolised the offerings for the deceased, and in a broader sense it represented the "gift par excellence", encompassing all the kinds of offerings.[4] Both these symbolisms can be found in PT 364, as clearly shown in Pyr. 614b-d, where the Eye of Horus is described as "the god's donation" par excellence and, at the same time, it is a gift able to protect Osiris and make him strong.

Indeed, within the Pyramid Texts the Eye of Horus is often associated with the ritual action of opening the mouth of the deceased/Osiris.[5] And, in this regard, it is certainly suggestive that OMR scene 7 – which concerns a censing ceremony and, in several testimonies, immediately precedes OMR 9 and 10 in the ritual sequence, as attested in Rekhmire's tomb (see the figure below) – is mainly focused on the donation of the Eye of Horus to the statue of the deceased:

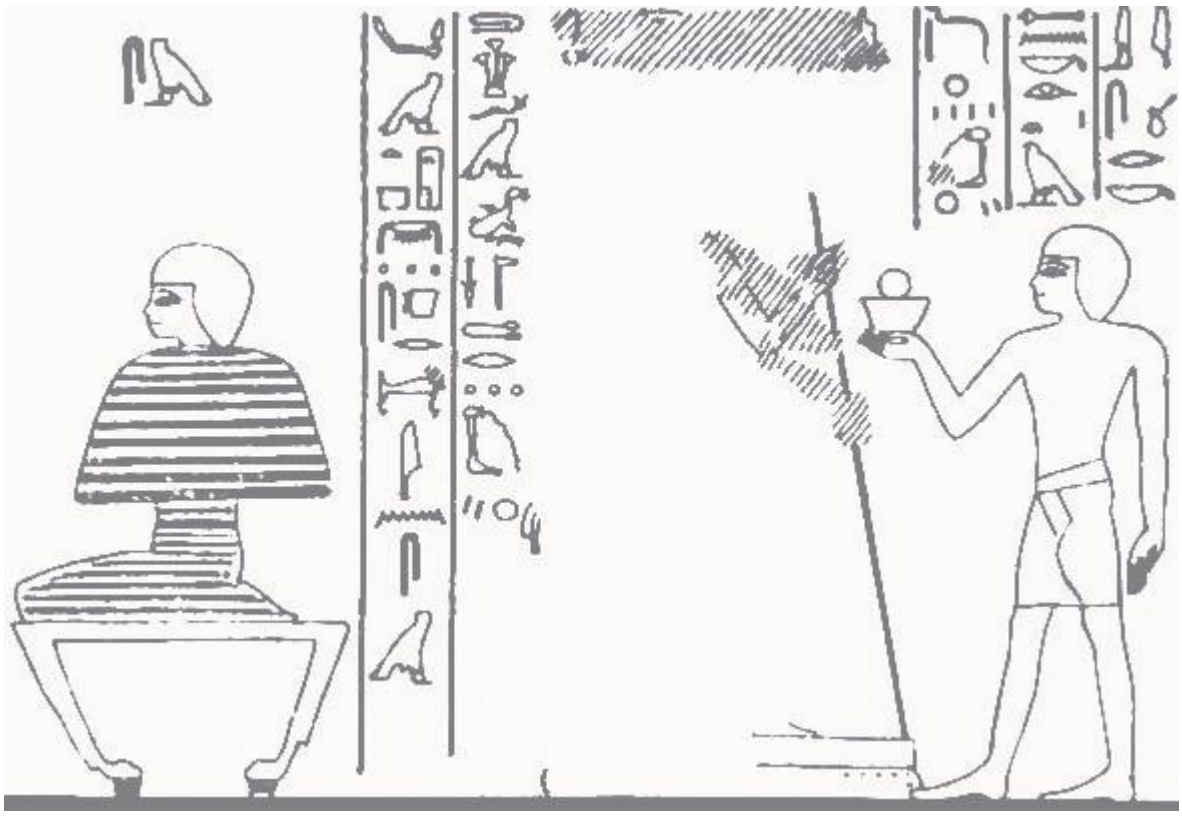


Figure 1: OMR 7 in TT 100

[4] J.-P. Corteggiani 2007, 381-385. The symbolisms related to Eye of Horus will be further analysed in chapter 3, section 3.2.1.c

[5] H.M. Hays 2012, Vol. II, 579-580.

OMR 7, According to TT 100 (Rekhmire's tomb) [6]

1. *pḫr ḥ3=f m t3 snṯr wʿb sp 2*
2. *ḏd-mdw sp 4 wʿb sp 2*
3. *mỉn=k ỉr.t Ḥr sty r=k*

1. Going around him (the statue of the deceased) with a pellet of incense doubly pure.
2. Recitation four times: pure! pure!
3. Receive the Eye of Horus! May the scent reach you!

In sum, OMR scene 10 clearly refers to a mythical episode of the Osiris myth. Thanks to the intervention of Horus and the donation of his eye, the enactment of the funerary rituals and the establishment of his mortuary cult, Osiris is transfigured into a powerful *3ḫ* (Pyr. 612b), and he is finally crowned king of the netherworld. The achieving of this special status is symbolised by the *ṯw.t / wrr.t* crown (Pyr. 613b), which stand for the leadership acquired over the celestial gods.[7] Finally, even though this is not quite explicit in the text, it can be assumed that the celebration of both the funerary and mortuary rituals for Osiris was considered as the fundamental prerequisite for legitimising the succession of Horus as the new ruler of Egypt.

3.1.b The Letters to the Dead and OMR scene 9

Several elements of the OMR scene 9 appear to be typical of the New Kingdom. Even the noun *ḳdd* used in this text to indicate the "dream" experienced by the *sem* priest seems to reflect a regional scribal tradition which originated in the Theban area around the 19th dynasty.[8] Moreover, the whole composition perfectly matches with the cultural climate of this historical phase, which was characterised by an increasing interest in dreams as a means of contact with the divine sphere.[9]

On the other hand, sporadic textual sources describing oneiric experiences as a means to communicate with the deceased can be already found in two Letters to the Dead dating to the First Intermediate

[6] E. Otto 1960, Vol. I, 18-19; Vol. II, 51-52.
[7] K. Goebs 2008, 73-74.
[8] K. Szpakowska 2003, 16-18.
[9] K. Szpakowska 2003, pp. 146-147.

Period (third millennium BCE): P. Naga ed-Deir 3737 MFA 38.2121 [10] and a stela, likely from the same site, currently at Michael C. Carlos Museum 2014.033.001.[11]

P. Naga ed-Deir 3737 is a letter written by a man called Heni to his deceased father, Meru. Specifically, Heni is invoking the supernatural help of his ancestor to ward off another man – probably a deceased person as well, but scholars are not unanimous in this regard[12] – called Seni, who was a funerary servant involved in Meru's mortuary cult. Based on the words of the sender, the spirit of Seni is persecuting him by appearing in his dreams:

> **|Recto 2|** *ỉˁnw n sp ꜣḫ ỉˁnw nmˁw n=k ḥr nn ỉrw ḏ.t=k snỉ n rdỉ.t mꜣ sw* **|3|** *bꜣk=ỉm m rsw.t m nỉw.t (wˁ.t) [ḥnˁ]=k*
>
> *Help a million of times! May your help be useful [13] with regard to the things your funerary servant, Seni, does: for causing me – your servant (Heni) [14] – to see him in a dream in the (Sole) City [with] you.*

Of particular interest is the terminology used here to describe the interactions between the living and the dead. Above all, the expression *mꜣꜣ m rsw.t,* which literally means "to see in a dream", can provide interesting hints about the emic conception of the oneiric visions. In the ancient Egyptian language, a verb indicating the action of "dreaming" is not attested, while nouns for "dream", such as *rsw.t* and, starting from the New Kingdom, *ḳd(d*), are well documented. Such a linguistic peculiarity highlights how for the Egyptians, the dreams were not perceived as an intimate, individual experience, or an action that someone can experience, but as an actual liminal space – referred to by Szpakowska as "the dream zone" – in which the sleeper could be awake.[15]

Also noteworthy is the expression *nỉw.t (wˁ.t),* which can be translated as the Sole City, or the Unique City. The term *nỉw.t* per se is often used to indicate the necropolis, an element that suggest a religious idea of post-mortem survival meant as the prosecution of the earthly social position held by deceased and the social network related to such social status.[16] As for the expression "Sole City", besides the text analysed here, this term recurs in a very restricted number of documents: another letter to the

[10] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 48-50; K. Szpakowska 2003, 24-27; A. Roccati 1967, 324-326.
[11] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 53-55; R. Nyord 2021 A, 3-19. This document is analysed in detail in chapter 5.
[12] J. Hsieh 2022, 172 and note m.
[13] The sentence is problematic. I followed here the interpretation given by Roccati. See: A. Roccati 1967, p. 325.
[14] The writer denotes himself as the servant of his deceased father (*bꜣk-ỉm*) as a form of respect.
[15] K. Szpakowska 2003, 33 and. ff.
[16] J. P. Allen 2006, 11 and 17. See also the section dedicated to the captions concerning the Tekenu ritual (chapter 3, section 3.2.1.b), where the word *nỉw.t* is often used to indicate the necropolis.

dead – the Qaw Bowl[17] – and an inscription from the Roman Period in the temple of Opet at Karnak.[18] It is also possible to find similar idiomatic expressions – *nỉw.t tn, nỉw.t wr.t, s.t wˁ.t* – within the Coffin Texts, where they are used to indicate proximity to certain supernatural beings.[19] In the light of these parallels, the Sole City would seem to indicate a netherworld region, where the living and the dead could come into contact with each other (literally being all together in the same place) and, therefore, somewhat similar to what Szpakowska referred to as the "dream zone".

The Sole City seems also to show certain affinity with other sacred places attested in diverse Letters to the Dead, such as the City of Eternity (*nỉw.t nḥḥ*), which recurs in the Berlin bowl, [20] or the Place of Justification (*s.t mꜣˁ-ḫrw*) attested in the Louvre bowl.[21] According to Donnat Beauquier, all these expressions were probably used to indicate actual earthly places located within the necropolis, where special rituals concerning the interaction between the living and the dead – which could take the form of a ritualised judgment[22] – were enacted.[23]

These two different interpretations – a liminal zone of the netherworld where the living and the dead were allowed to interact with each other, and a specific zone of the necropolis meant as a sacred space to perform specific rituals to interact with the dead – are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Another similar place is known in the textual sources, the "Island of Fire" (*ỉw-nsrsr*), which is often mentioned in the Coffin Texts spells and also recurs in P. Berlin 10482, an early Middle Kingdom document that certainly belonged to the same religious milieu of the so-called Letters to the Dead.[24] The "Island of Fire" was indeed a region of the netherworld, which is to be identified with the eastern horizon where the sun god rises each day to cyclically defeat his enemies and, consequently, it was also considered as one of the settings in which the judgment of the dead occurred.[25] Nonetheless, diverse textual sources suggest that this celestial region was also assimilated with a concrete sacred area located near the tomb, or with the tomb itself, which was the actual setting for the celebration of special rituals focused on the revenge of the deceased over their enemies and a ritualised version of the judgment of the dead.[26]

[17] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 38-39 and note f. See also chapter 3, section 4.4.
[18] C. De Wit 1958, 209.
[19] K. Szpakowska 2003, 38 and note 93.
[20] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 62.
[21] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 60 and note e.
[22] For further information on this kind of ritual, see chapter 3, section 3.3.3.
[23] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 39.
[24] I. Regulski 2020, 285; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 64 and note a.
[25] K. Goebs 2008, 10-11.
[26] I. Regulski 2020, 285. See also: J. F. Borghouts 1971, 104.

It can therefore be said that, according to the Egyptian mindset, there was an overlap between certain ritual areas located in the necropolis, some regions of the netherworld, and a special dimension that the sleepers could experience through their oneiric visions, and that this belief was already attested during the 3rd millennium BCE.

As for the letter on a stela from Nag ed-Deir, in one of the two missives written on this document, a sick lady invokes the help of a deceased woman.[27] The sender asks the spirit to heal her illness by appearing in a dream and fight on her behalf:

> Columns 3–4:
>
> *ỉḫ ꜣḫ =t n<=ỉ> [ḫft]-ḥr=ỉ mꜣ=ỉ ʿḥꜣ=t ḥr=ỉ m rsw.t*
>
> *May you manifest to me in the form of an ꜣḫ in front of me! May I see you fight for me in a dream!*

The terminology used is worthy of attention. Besides the expression *mꜣꜣ m rsw.t* already encountered in P. Naga ed-Deir 3737, particularly interesting is the sentence *ỉḫ ꜣḫ =t n<=ỉ> […]-ḥr=ỉ*, where the lexeme *ꜣḫ* is used as a verb,[28] which can be rendered as "to appear in the form of an *ꜣḫ*-spirit". As mentioned in the first chapter, the word *ꜣḫ* was often used as an epithet referring to a category of deceased who have been subjected to special rites (the *sꜣḫ.w* rites) thanks to which they acquired special powers and could affect the vicissitudes of the living people.

The letter on the stele from Naga ed-Deir seems also to suggest that dreams could somehow be sought and directly asked from a supernatural being, a practice that could be interpreted as a kind of incubation ritual.[29]

The term "incubation" indicates a religious practice consisting in a ritual dormition performed within a sacred place, usually a sanctuary, but also a tomb, in order to receive a dream inspired by a supernatural being, such as a god, a hero, or a deceased person endowed with superhuman powers.[30] Yet, the existence of this practice within pharaonic Egypt is a problematic issue: incubation rituals are certainly attested from the Late Period onwards and, above all, during the Greco-Roman

[27] For the kind of relationship between the sender and the recipient see chapter 5, section 5.2.
[28] Wb I, 15.3.
[29] G. Renberg 2016, 714-716.
[30] G. Renberg 2016, 3-5 and 32.

dominations, but there are not enough relevant sources dating to previous historical phases.[31] Several scholars pointed out how this type of rituals appears to be more the result of foreign stimuli, rather than a custom rooted in an ancient autochthonous tradition[32] and, as a matter of a fact, sanctuaries specifically aimed at the performance of incubation practices are not known for most ancient Egyptian historical phases.[33] On the other hand, although it is not possible to establish whether the sick lady who wrote the letter on the Naga ed-Deir stele spent the night within the tomb of the deceased invoked, this option cannot be ruled out a priori.[34] It is certainly significant that the letter was written on the back of a funerary stela, likely placed inside the tomb of the deceased to whom the missive was addressed, an element that could confirm the enactment of a ritual sleep within the necropolis to seek a dream.[35] Likewise, the reference to the "Sole City" in P. Naga ed-Deir 3737 might indicate that the nightmare experienced by the writer could be identified as a sort of solicited dream too, and that the latter perhaps occurred during a ritual sleep performed in the necropolis.

Egyptian sources testify to the existence of nocturnal ceremonies enacted during the night preceding the burial of the deceased, some of which date back to the Middle Kingdom.[36]

Also remarkable is that some nouns etymologically derived from the verb *sḏr* recur in several documents describing the Middle Kingdom Mysteries of Osiris celebrated at Abydos.[37] It cannot be excluded, therefore, that these rituals performed during the night hours might include special actions aimed at establishing a form of interaction between the living and the dead. This kind of communication, that according to the definition provided in the present thesis can be considered as a necromantic action, was likely established by means of a special kind of ritual sleep (*sḏr*), which was enacted during specific occasions and performed in specific sacred areas – such as the "Sole City" or the "Island of Fire" – whose nature, according to the Egyptian emic perspective, shared the same kind of liminality characterising both certain regions of the netherworld and the dimension experienced by the sleepers through dreams.

3.1.c OMR scenes 9 and 10: summary and conclusions

Several scholars have interpreted the OMR scenes 9 and 10 as somewhat of anomalous and unusual in the context of the Egyptian religion and, consequently, as "the living fossil" of an "archaic" or even "shamanic" practice. The two main arguments behind this interpretative scheme were the

[31] K. Szpakowska 2003, 42-146.
[32] J.D. Ray 1976, 130.
[33] K. Szpakowska 2003, pp. 142-146.
[34] G. Renberg 2016, 714-716.
[35] G. Renberg 2016, 714-716.
[36] H. Willems 1988, 145 and ff.
[37] See chapter 3, section 3.3.1.

absence of explicit references to mythological episodes and the foremost role played by dreams as a means to communicate with the dead.

The first argument is certainly false: the mythological background of OMR scenes 9 and 10 can be identified with specific episodes of the Osiris myth, above all the one narrated in PT 364, which shows significant parallels with scene 10. As for OMR 9, instead, the action expressed by the verb *sḏr* and the vision of the deceased father could find significant parallels in two Letters to the Dead of the First Intermediate Period and in certain rituals performed during the Middle Kingdom Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos.[38]

The apparent absence of mythology can be explained through the fact that the OMR scenes did not intend to narrate a myth but provide the directions on how to enact a series of ritual actions, which were meant to be executed in the form of a dramatic ritual aimed at vivifying an effigy of the deceased.[39] It is also important to stress that in the ancient Egyptian culture there was a certain reticence in explicitly describing some episodes of the Osiris myth, especially those concerning the death and the violence suffered by the god. Moreover, this reticence had to be stronger in the contexts of rituals which involved a large audience and/or certain forms of interactions between the living and the dead.[40]

As regards the second argument – the role played by the dream – it must be said that this element cannot be interpreted as an unusual feature, alien to the pharaonic religion. As shown by two Letters to the Dead dating to the 3rd millennium BCE, practices involving the dreams as a means of communication between the living and the dead were not uncommon, and OMR 9 therefore does not constitute a unique and isolated case in the history of ancient Egyptian religion.

Furthermore, the important role played by the oneiric visions in some religious practices cannot be mechanically framed as the survival of an "archaic shamanic practice". As stressed by cognitive anthropologists, the human mind is structured in a way that makes certain beliefs "more believable" than others, and beliefs concerning the vision of ghosts or spirits through dreams are practically attested all over the world and in a huge number of historical contexts.[41] The diffusion of this type of belief can be therefore easily explained in the light of a cognitive faculty – that all human beings

[38] See chapter 3, section 3.2.1.c and chapter 3.3.1, table 4.
[39] R. A. Gillam 2005, 69-73; J. C. Goyon 1972, 92.
[40] See chapter 2, section 2.6, second argumentation.
[41] S. Atran 2002, 52-56; P. Boyer 2020.

share – which can encourage the rise of similar cultural phenomena within diverse contexts, also distant from each other in space and time.[42]

It follows that what needs to be analysed here is not the fact that the Egyptians were able to see deceased people in their dream. This is a banal fact that virtually every human being can experience and reveals nothing on the salient characteristics of this ancient society. The object to be researched, instead, is the historical-cultural conditioning to which a physiological phenomenon was subjected. It is also important to consider that, probably, the actions described in these textual sources by the terms *sḏr, ḳd*/*ḳdd,* or *m*ꜣꜣ *m rsw.t* may not always correspond to what we – according to our etic perspective – intend for "sleeping" and "dream".[43] Given that the Egyptians perceived the dreams as a liminal experience, it is reasonable to posit that they created specific ritual actions shaped on the model of these physiological phenomena. In other words, it can be posited that certain ritual actions symbolically mimicked the condition of sleeping or the oneiric experiences with the specific aim of solving certain kinds of existential crisis.[44]

If we put ourselves into the point of view of an ancient Egyptian, the death of an elite member at the head of a prestigious extended family involved a whole series of rather concrete problems, which went far beyond the grief felt for the loss of a beloved person. That was certainly a delicate moment of transition during which unpleasant situations could occur, if not actual threats. For example, disputes could arise concerning inheritance and succession, or other rival families could take advantage of this moment of weakness for embezzling goods and properties.[45]

[42] S. Atran 2002, 52-56; P. Boyer 2020, 470-472.
[43] Nonetheless, it is beyond of doubts that this kind of ritual action was perceived by the Egyptians as a something actually identical to a physiological dream.
[44] With regards to the cultural mechanic involving the appropriation of physiological experiences as a model to create ritual actions see: E. De Martino 2013, 69.
[45] This kind of situations - which must have been much more common than one might think at first glance - are a recurring element in the Letters to the Dead, in which the deceased family member is often invoked to solve and vindicate this typology of abuses. See chapter 4.

The passage of power from the deceased father to his legitimate heir needed therefore to be officially formalised and the dangers inherent in it had to be warded off through special ritual actions, which often took the form of dramatic rituals. Indeed, it is easy to figure out that social display played a fundamental role in this kind of situations, since they pertained to the reconfirmation of the prestige of the family in front of society.

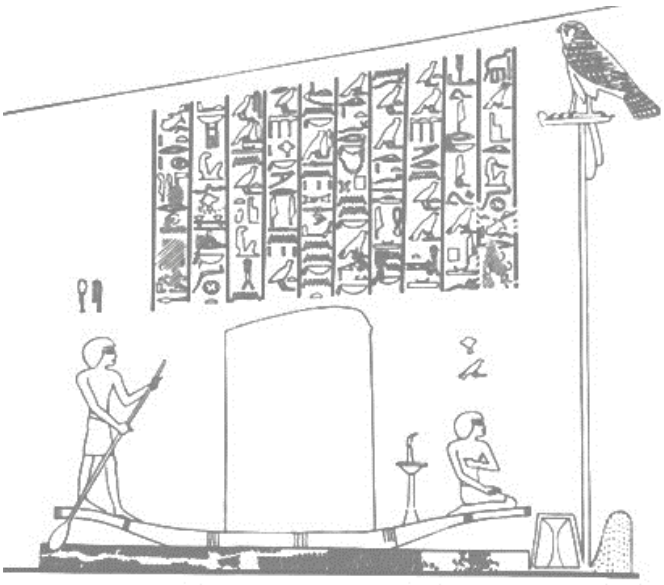


Figure 2 PT 364 in TT 100

The dramatic ritual described in OMR scenes 9 and 10 is strictly focused on the relationship between the deceased father and his living heir, structured on the basis of the mythical model of the bond that united Horus to his deceased father, Osiris. Moreover, as stressed by Altenmüller, it seems that this dramatic ritual also entailed specific phases which could perfectly match with an action of social display, such as a public procession and a fictitious battle during which the enemies of the deceased were defeated.[46]

Noteworthy is that PT 364 was frequently copied on diverse New Kingdom elite tombs in connection with scenes concerning collective rituals.[47] In TT 100, for example, it is possible to identify a copy of PT 364 transcribed above the depiction of a bark landing on the netherworld, carrying two persons identified by the captions as the *smr*[48] and *ḥr* (Fig. 12). The scene is located on the South wall of the passage, which portrays the procession of the deceased to the tomb, and several funerary rituals, including the Tekenu (which will be covered later). This is indeed a significative element. In the light of what has been said so far, one would have expected to find a copy of PT 364 on the North wall of the same passage, where several scenes of the OMR (9 and 10 included) are reproduced. This allows to hypothesise that the episode treated in PT 364 refers to a mythical episode from which diverse

[46] H. Altenmüller 2009, 17.
[47] Often grouped together with PT 593, 356-357 and 677. See: H. M. Hays and W. Schenck 2007, 103-104.
[48] The term *smr* usually indicates a title (see Wb 4, 138.5-139.5). Within the context of the OMR, it can indicate an officiant who took part in the rite as a substitute of the *sem* priest. E. Otto 1960, Vol. I, 11-12.

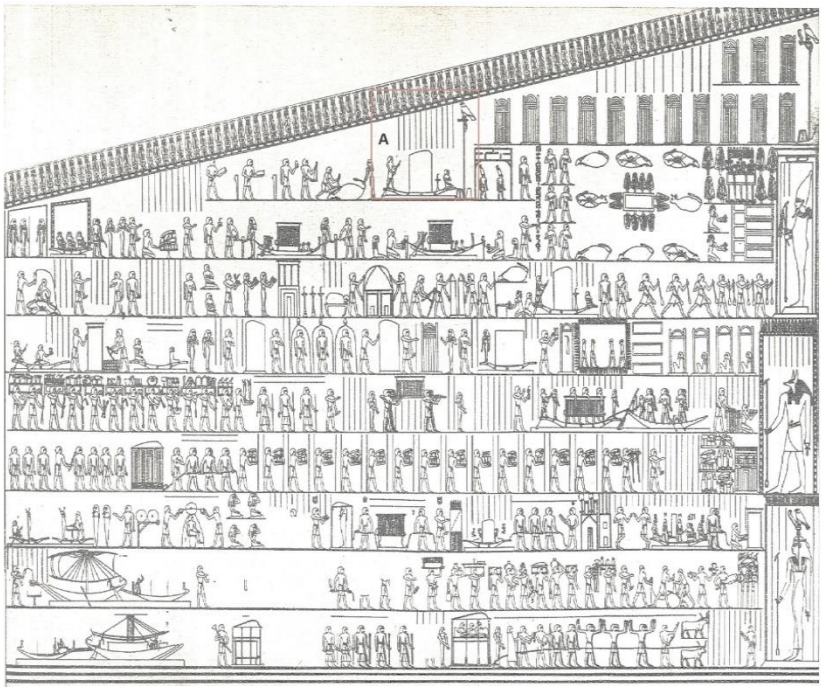


Figure 3 PT 364 (see box A) within the South wall of the passage in Rekhmire tomb (TT 100)

types of dramatic rituals concerning the interactions between the living and the dead stemmed. Finally, one has to consider that the role of main officiant – that of *sem* priest – was traditionally held by the eldest son of the deceased[49] and several elements suggest that performing this ceremony affected not only the status of the dead, but also that of the ritualist/ legitimate heir. That is particularly evident in Tutankhamun's tomb. Here, Ay, who was not a kinsman of the deceased monarch, is depicted with the typical leopard-skin of the *sem* priest, while performing the Opening of the Mouth on Tutankhamun, and indeed it has been hypothesised that the main aim of this wall decoration was that of legitimising the succession of Ay during an historical phase characterised by a profound political crisis.[50]

[49] J. Assmann 2005, 313
[50] M. Eaton-Krauss 2016, 119; J. Baines 2021, 82.

3.2 The Tekenu ritual

The following tables summarise all the currently known sources about the Tekenu ritual. The documents are listed in chronological order: table number 1 shows Old and Middle Kingdom data; table number 2 concerns the New Kingdom; finally, table number 3 shows Late Period data. [51]

Table 1: Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom

.	Tomb	Date	Place	Type of Tekenu	Other related rituals
1	Mastaba of *ʾIḥy* (*ʾIdw.t*) **(1)** (Kanawati & Abder-Raziq, 2003, 34)	5th dyn.	Saqqara, Unis cemetery	One a sledge, perhaps anthropomorphic	Funerary procession; *Mww*-dancers (Butic Burial?)
2	TT 60 [2] – *Sn.t* and *ʾIni-it=f-iḳr*) **(2)**	12th Sesostris I	Sheikh ʻAbd el-Qurna	On a sledge, shapeless	Funerary procession
3	Tomb of *Sḥtp-ib-rˁ*	12th dyn.	Ramesseum	On a sledge, anthropomorphic	Funerary procession; Mww-dancers (Butic Burial)

Notes

1.The mastaba was originally built for *ʾIḥy*, vizier under the king Unis, 5th dynasty. Subsequently reused for a princess, *ʾIdw.t*, daughter of king Teti (6th dynasty). The Tekenu scene was depicted for the first owner of the tomb. See: N. Strudwick 1985, 63.

2. Glennise West mistakenly dates TT 60 to the 18th dynasty (West 2020, 123). The tomb, instead, belonged to a high rank woman called *Sn.t*, who was the wife, or the sister, of *ʾIntf-iḳr*, vizier of Sesostris I, who lived during of the 12th dynasty. See: No. de Garis Davies, A. H. Gardiner, Ni. De Garis Davies 1920.

[51] A section of the bibliography is specifically dedicated to the sources from which the data were obtained.

Table 2 - New Kingdom

	Tomb	Date	Place	Tekenu typology	Other related rituals
4	TT 12 – *Ḥrỉ*	17th / 18th	Dra ‘Abu el-Naga	On a sledge, anthropomorphic	Funerary procession
5	TT 15 – *Ttỉkỉ*	18th.	Dra ‘Abu el-Naga	On a sledge, anthropomorphic	Funerary procession
6	EK 7 – *Rnnỉ*	18th	El-Kab	On a sledge, anthropomorphic	Funerary procession
7	TT 81 – *ỉnn.ỉ*	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	On a sledge, anthropomorphic	Funerary procession
8	TT 24 – *Nb-ỉmn*	18th	Dra’ Abu el-Naga	On a sledge, anthropomorphic	Funerary procession
9	TT 125 – *Dwᶜ.wỉ-r-nḥḥ*	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	1)On a sledge, perhaps shapeless; 2)Recumbent on a bed, anthropomorphic	1) Funerary procession; 2) Butic Burial, erection of two obelisks
10	TT 11 – *Ḏḥwtỉ*	18th	Dra’ Abu el-Naga	1)Standing man with the *msḳ*ꜣ-skin in his hand; 2)On a sledge (damaged)	Funerary procession, perhaps involving a funerary ritual concerning the *msḳ*ꜣ-skin
11	TT 39 – *Pwỉ-m-rᶜ*	18th	El-Assasif	On a Sledge, anthropomorphic	Funerary procession
12	TT 53 – *ỉmn-m-ḥ*ꜣ*.t*	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	On a sledge, shapeless	Funerary procession
13	TT 82 – *ỉmn-m-ḥ*ꜣ*.t*	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	On a sledge, shapeless	Funerary procession; pilgrimage to Abydos
14	TT 104 – *Ḏḥwtỉ-nfr*	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	On a sledge, shapeless	Funerary procession
15	TT 127 – *Sn-m-ỉᶜḥ*	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	On a sledge, shapeless	Funerary procession
16	TT 123 -*ỉmn-m-ḥ*ꜣ*.t*	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	On a sledge, shapeless	Funerary procession; pilgrimage to Abydos
17	TT 260 – *Wsr*	18th	Dra’ Abu el-Naga	On a sledge, damaged	Funerary procession; *Mww*-dancers
18	TT 17 – *Nb-ỉmn*	18th	Dra’ Abu el-Naga	On a sledge, damaged	Funerary procession
19	TT 20 – *Mnṯw-ḥr-ḫpš=f*	18th	Dra’ Abu el-Naga	1)On a sledge, anthropomorphic 2) On a sledge, anthropomorphic 3)As a standing man holding the *msḳ*ꜣ-skin NB. There are other two figures rather similar to a Tekenu on a sledge, but they are two Nubian captives about to be killed (cf. fig 1)	The Tekenu n. 1 funerary procession; Tekenu n. 2 and 3: funerary ritual involving the *msḳ*ꜣ-skin.
20	TT 42 – *ỉmn-ms*	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	On a sledge, likely anthropomorphic (damaged)	Funerary procession; *Mww* dancers (Butic Burial?)
21	TT 92 – *Sw-m-nw.t*	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	On a sledge, shapeless	Funerary procession
22	TT 96 – *Sn-nfr*	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	Recumbent on a bed	Butic Burial, erection of two obelisks

23	TT 100 – *Rḫ-mỉ-rᶜ*	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	1)Recumbent on a bed 2)On a sledge (?), damaged	1) Butic Burial, erection of two obelisks 2) Funerary procession
24	TT 172 - *Mnṯ.w-iỉ.w*	18th	El-Khokha	On a sledge, anthropomorphic (?)	Funerary procession (damaged)
25	TT 276 – *ỉmn-m-ỉn.t*	18th	Qurnet Murai	Recumbent on a bed	Funerary procession; Butic Burial
26	TT 178 – *Nfr-rnp.t*	19th	El-Khoka	On a sledge, anthropomorphic	Funerary procession
27	TT 224 - *Iᶜḫ-ms* **[1]**	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	On a sledge (?)	Likely, funerary procession
28	TT 112 - *Mn-ḫpr-Rᶜ-snb* **[2]**	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	On a sledge (?)	Likely, funerary procession
29	TT 78 -*Ḥr-m-ḥb*	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	On a sledge, shapeless	Funerary procession
30	TT 66 – *Ḥpw*	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	Recumbent on a bed, damaged	Butic Burial? (Damaged)
31	TT 55 – *Rᶜ-ms*	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	On a sledge, shapeless	Funerary procession
32	TT 49 – *Nfr-ḥtp*	18th	El-Khokha	On a sledge, shapeless	Funerary procession
33	TT A4 – *Sȝ-wsr/wn-sw*	18th	Dra’ Abu el-Naga.	On a sledge, shapeless;	Funerary procession; dancers (Butic burial?)
34	TT C4 – *Mrỉ-mȝᶜ.t*	18th	Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna	On a sledge, anthropomorphic	Funerary procession
35	EK 3 – *Pȝḥrỉ*	18th	El-Kab	On a sledge, shapeless	Funerary procession; Butic burial, pilgrimage to Abydo
36	TT 41 – *ỉmn-m-ỉpȝ.t*	19th	Al’ Asasif.	Recumbent on a bed (?)	Butic Burial,
37	TT 284 – *Pȝ-ḥm-nṯr*	20th	Dra’ Abu el-Naga	On a sledge, anthropomorphic	Funerary procession
38	TT A 26 – name unknown **[3]**	Ramesside Age	Dra’ Abu el-Naga	On a sledge (?)	Funerary procession (?)
39	Sarcophagus of *Ḏt-Mw.t* Vatican Museum, MV25008.2.1–2.	20th	Deir el-Bahri	Recumbent near the coffin, (probably dragged together with the coffin)	Funerary procession

Notes

1. Doc. 28. There is little information about the Tekenu scene in TT 112. A transcription of the captions has been made by Ni. De Garis Davies and A. H. Gardiner in the monograph dedicated to TT 82; see: Ni. De Garis Davies and A. H. Gardiner 1915, 51 and note 2. The inscription attracted the attention of the scholars because it is quite similar to that in TT 82. Since the latter concerns the dragging of the Tekenu within the funerary procession it can be hypothesised that the caption in TT 112 concerned a similar scene. The inscription is translated and detailed in section 3.2.1.b, document 9.

2. Doc. 27. There is little information about the Tekenu scene in TT 224. A transcription of the captions has been made by Ni. M. De Garis Davies and A. H. Gardiner in the monograph dedicated to TT 82 (see: Ni. M. de Garis Davies and A. H. Gardiner 1915, 51 and note 2). Since the inscription is quite similar to that in TT 82 and the latter concerns the dragging

of the Tekenu within the funerary procession, it can be hypothesised that the scene depicted in TT 224 was similar. The inscription is translated and detailed in section 3.2.1.b, document 10.

3. Doc. 38. Very little is known about TT A 26; the wall painting with the Tekenu scene is not currently available cf. G. West 2020, 153-154.

Table 3: 25th and 26th dynasty

	Tomb	Date	Place	Tekenu typology	Other related rituals
40	TT 34 – *Mntw-m-ḥ3.t*	25th	El-Asasif	On a sledge, anthropomorphic	Funerary procession(?)
41	TT 36 – *Ỉbi*	26th	El-Asasif	1)On a sledge, shapeless 2)On a sledge, anthropomorphic	1)Funerary procession 2) Funerary procession
42	TT 279 – *P3-n-bsi*	26th	El-Asasif	On a sledge, shapeless	Funerary procession
43	TT 389 -*B's3*	Saite	El-Asasif	On a sledge, shapeless	Funerary procession

Discussion

The Tekenu ritual appears to be an iconographic theme typical of the elite sphere and, as common practice for the scenes pertaining to the funerary procession or the inhumation of the corpse, there are no Tekenu depictions in royal tombs.[52] The oldest attestation currently known dates back to the final part of the 5th dynasty and shows the Tekenu within the funerary procession. We have relatively few attestations prior to the New Kingdom, but this may depend on the fact that more recent historical phases are usually better documented.

Most of the scenes collected here – 36 out of 43 – date back to the New Kingdom, and most of the latter – 32 out of 36 – belong to the 18th dynasty. [53] All New Kingdom data currently known come from the Theban area and are also characterised by more innovative traits: the Tekenu continues indeed to be depicted within the context of the funerary procession, but it also appears to be involved in other ritual actions, such as those of the sleeping Tekenu (docs.: 9, 22, 23, 25, 30,36), or the removal of the *msk3*-skin (docs.10 and 19). Noteworthy also is that all these innovative scenes come for a very small geographical area.[54] The strong interest for the Tekenu among the New Kingdom Theban elites and the irruption into their tombs of innovative figurative themes concerning this ritual cannot solely depend on the best preservation of the Theban necropolises compared to other archaeological sites. As stressed by H. Willems, it might be explained by the notable importance gained by the posthumous cult of Amenhotep I in this geographical area.[55] This king, such as other members of the Ahmosid

[52] Indeed, within the figurative themes characterising the royal tombs, one can recognise a certain reticence in depicting the funerary procession to the necropolis, or the mummy of the deceased. The only exception can be identified in Tutankhamun's tomb (KV 62), where both the transportation of the king's remains in his bier and the performing of the OMR ritual on his mummy are depicted. Yet, as highlighted by D. Laboury, this kind of scenes are quite unusual for royal tombs and, under this point of view, it can be considered as an exception. D. Laboury 2020, 44-45. Also, see chapter 3, section 3.2.2.

[53] Only four sources belong to the Ramesside Age, seed docs: 36, 37, 38, 39.

[54] Sheik 'Abd el-Qurna, Qurnet Murai, Al'Asasif, Dra 'Abu el-Naga, see table 2, docs.: 9, 22, 23, 25, 30, 36, 10, 19.

[55] H. Willems 1996, 114.

line, become the patron god of the Theban West Bank, and several festivals – which also involved special moments dedicated to the commemoration of the dead – were periodically enacted in his honour.[56] The emergence of these new festivals led to a reformulation of both the funerary and the mortuary rituals and, consequently, significant changes in their iconographic depictions into elite tombs.[57] It was also be hypothesised that Hatshepsut was the one who gave particular prominence to these celebrations, reshaping previous traditions in the perspective of a grandiose propagandistic aim.[58] Her challenging position of woman ruling as a king required special legitimising measures and, remarkably, her majestic funerary temple at Deir el-Bahri – built close to the aforementioned temple of Mentuhotep – seems to be clearly designed to play a key role in the processions that characterised the Theban festivals.[59]

Then, after a gap of more than four centuries, the Tekenu reappears in Late Period tombs. This phenomenon is to be explained in the light of an artistic trend, which was particularly strong among the elite circles during the Late Period. Especially during the so-called "Ethiopian and Saite Renaissance", Old Kingdom monuments, were considered ideal models to draw inspiration from, and the iconographic repertoires of ancient tombs were copied in new sepulchres.[60] It is, therefore, no coincidence that the Tekenu depictions belonging to the 25th and 26th dynasties strongly resemble in their style the only Old Kingdom source currently known; yet, we have reasonably to assume, that the artists of that time knew more Old Kingdom tombs to use as a model, than the only example available to us.

3.2.1 Tekenu: a philological analysis

The only sources that explicitly describe the Tekenu ceremony are wall paintings in elite tombs,[61] sometimes accompanied by captions. Unlike the OMR, previous studies on the Tekenu have not investigated the existence of references to this ritual in other literary sources, nor has its mythological background been identified. This can be explained in various ways. Firstly, most works concerning the Tekenu were conducted from a predominantly archaeological and iconographical perspective, for example, by investigating the possible connection between the Tekenu-figure and other similar symbols.[62] Secondly, scholars have not yet reached unanimous consensus about the meaning and the etymology of the word "Tekenu", and this may have discouraged a philological investigation concerning the occurrence of this term in other sources. It should also be considered that the captions

[56] Y.M. el Shazly 2015, 193-195.
[57] H. Willems 1996, 114.
[58] Y.M. el Shazly 2015, 229-236.
[59] Y.M. el Shazly 2015, 229.
[60]. J. Kahl 2010.
[61] The only known exception is a 20th dynasty coffin, see table 2 doc. 39.
[62] See, for example: M. R. Valdesogo Martìn, 2005, 311; R. Metawi 2008, 196.

concerning the Tekenu scenes are quite obscure, and undoubtedly this constitutes an obstacle to fully understanding the function of the ritual or its mythological background.

In the light of these premises, the present section aims at:

- investigating the meaning of the word "Tekenu" and its etymology;
- translating and analysing all the tomb inscriptions currently known concerning the Tekenu;
- identifying the potential mythological background of the Tekenu ritual

3.2.1.a Etymology and meaning

The term *tknw* (Wb 335.14-15) is attested with diverse spellings, the most common being ; ; ; other less frequent variants are , in which the sign X1 is replaced with U33 and attested only twice: in TT 20,[63] datable to the 18th dynasty, where this spelling alternates with the variant , and the tomb of Basa, TT 389, which dates back to the Saite Period.[64] Moreover, the latter together with tomb TT 17 are the only cases in which this word is written with a determinative; it is the sign (A40), usually associated to supernatural beings. Otherwise, the word is always attested without determinatives.[65]

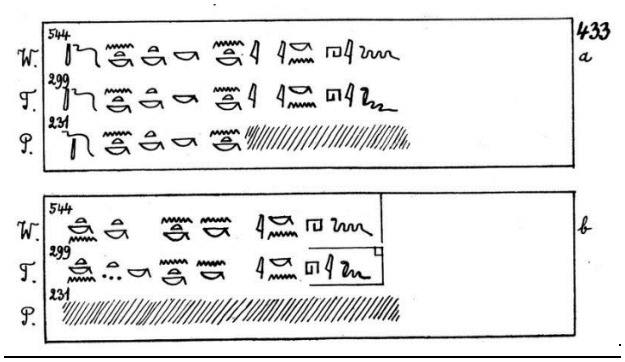
As mentioned in chapter 2, the etymology of *tknw* is still considered obscure. Even in the recent monograph by G. West, it is stated that "what scholars have suggested to this point is of little aid to identifying the nature or function of the Tekenu".[66] Within the current state of the art it is possible to identify two main theories. According to Gerard van der Leeuw,[67] Sigrid Hodel-Hoenes,[68] and Abeer El-Shahawi [69] the word should be from the verb *tkn* (Wb 5, 333.10-335), which means "to be near; to draw near", "to approach". Instead, according to another interpretation, the term *tknw* would be a loan words originally used to indicate a foreign ethnic group.[70]

Especially Eugène Lefébure stated that the term *tknw* derived from a word indicating a foreign tribe and, in this regard, he established a parallel with the accounts of Greek historians, who reported that the Egyptians used to sacrifice red haired (and therefore foreign) people.[71] In his opinion, if the word

[63] See chapter 3, section 3.2.1.a, document 18.
[64] See chapter 3, section 3.2.1.a, document 6. One has to consider that during this historical phase the phonemes *ḏ* and *ṯ* were no longer palatal. B. Gunn and I. E. S. Edwards 1955, 84 and note 4.
[65] This data were collected thanks to the analysis of all textual sources concerning the Tekenu conducted in chapter 3, section 3.2.1.b.
[66] G. West 2019, 21.
[67] G. van der Leeuw 1938, 164.
[68] S. Hodel-Hoenes 1991, 53.
[69] A. El-Shahawi 2005, 54.
[70] E. Lefébure 1900,140-145; No. de Garis Davies 1913, p. 10 and note 3.
[71] E. Lefébure 1900,140-145.

was etymologically connected with the verb *tkn*, the absence of the determinative would have no explanation, since this kind of omission is usually motivated by apotropaic reasons, and the meaning of the verb *tkn*, "to approach", does not justify such a precaution.[72] Indeed, the depictions in TT 20 seem to suggest that the Tekenu ceremony was linked to an execration ritual, which also entailed a ritualised killing of foreign enemies (actual or fictitious). On the other hand, as mentioned above, there is not enough evidence to identify the Tekenu itself with the victim of this sacrifice.[73] Moreover, the hypothesis that sees *tknw* as a term used to indicate a foreign ethnic group is based on too fleeting arguments, such as the fact that the word is written without determinatives, or the existence of certain toponyms that appear similar to the word Tekenu.[74] Even though toponyms or terms referring to ethnic groups showing certain assonance with the word *tknw* exist,[75] it does not necessarily entail that these words have to be etymologically linked with the latter.

The interpretation which links the word "Tekenu" to the verb *tkn* seems thus the most grounded one. Moreover, it is possible to identify written sources of a religious nature in which this verb is used without determinative. See for example, the following excerpt from the Pyramid of Unas, PT 292 (Pyr.433a-b)[76]:



ḏd mdw ntk tkk ntk ỉ'Ikn-ḥỉ

tkn tkn(w).t=k n=k'Ikn-ḥỉ

Recitation: you are the one who attacks, you are, oh Iken-Hi snake,

the one who approaches. Your approached things are for you, oh Iken-Hi snake!

[72] E. Lefébure 1900, 151.
[73] See chapter 2, section 2.4.b.
[74] E. Lefébure 1900, 151-152.
[75] Wb 5, 410.15; Wb 5, 411.3; M.Th. Derchain-Urtel 1986, 609.
[76] This is one of the snake-spells belonging to the Pyramid Texts and subsequently reshaped within CT V 282. See: C. Leitz 1996, 421.

Even though this text is certainly unrelated to the Tekenu ritual – this is one of the "snake spells" which are included in the Pyramid Texts – the source clearly shows that in specific religious contexts the verb *tkn* can be used without the determinative. Eugène Lefebvre's statement, according to which the absence of the determinative cannot fit with the meaning of the verb *tkn* cannot therefore be considered a determining indicator when it comes to establish the etymology of the word. After all, the very meaning of the verb *tkn* is not so neutral if one takes into account that the term can be used to indicate the ability to approach supernatural beings, such as gods, both royal and non-royal deceased, or demonic entities. As already mentioned in chapter 2, Gerard van der Leeuw proposed as a possible meaning "the one who is near" and, thus "familiar", "close".[77] This interpretation of the verb *tkn* is particularly significant since it perfectly matches the type of religious facts herein taken into consideration, which is eminently based on the post mortem survival of the family ties.

[77] G. van der Leeuw, 1938, 164.

3.2.1.b Captions concerning the Tekenu scenes

As mentioned above, the only sources that explicitly describe the Tekenu ceremony are wall paintings in elite tombs, sometimes accompanied by captions. The latter, however often obscure, are an indispensable source of information to understanding the function of this ritual.

Currently, forty-four sources (forty-three tombs and one coffin) containing a depiction of the Tekenu are known. Among these, only nineteen show inscriptions.[78] In some cases, these are very short captions, such as "*tknw*" (Tekenu), "*sṯ3w tknw*" (the dragging of the Tekenu), or *sṯ3w tknw r ḫr.t-nṯr* (the dragging of the Tekenu to the necropolis); other texts, instead are more complex, providing useful hints about the ritual.

The inscriptions can be ideally categorised in four main thematic groups, which partially overlap with each other:

1. captions concerning the dragging of the Tekenu – documents 1-17
2. captions concerning "the speech with the god Ruti" – documents 12-13
3. captions concerning the removal of the *msk3*-skin – documents 18-19
4. captions describing the ritual sleep of the Tekenu– documents 20-21

The present section is devoted to an analysis of these inscriptions in order to identify the main characteristics concerning the ritual and its evolution through times.

[78] Table 1, 2 and 3 docs: 1 (mastaba of *ỉdw.t/ỉhi*), 2 (TT 60), 3 (tomb of *Sḥtp-ib-rˁ*), 5 (TT 15), 7 (EK 7), 8 (TT 24), 9 (TT 125), 10 (TT 11), 12 (TT 53), 13 (TT 82), 18 (TT 17), 19 (TT 20), 23 (TT 100), 27 (TT 224), 28 (TT 112), 31 (TT 55), 35 (EK 3), 40 (TT 34), 43 (TT 389).

Document 1: The mastaba of *ʾIdw.t* / *ʾIḫi* (Table 1, doc. 1)

Date: 5th dynasty - Place: Saqqara, Unis Cemetery.

Bibliography: N. Kanawati, and M. Abder-Raziq 2003, 48 and Pl. LVI; G. West 2019, 57-59.

Figure 4

sṯ3 tkn

The dragging of the Tekenu

Document 2: Tomb of *Sḥtp-ib-rˁ* (Table 1, doc. 3)

Date: 12th dynasty – Place: Ramesseum

Bibliography: J. E. Quibell, 1898, 25-26, and Pl. IX

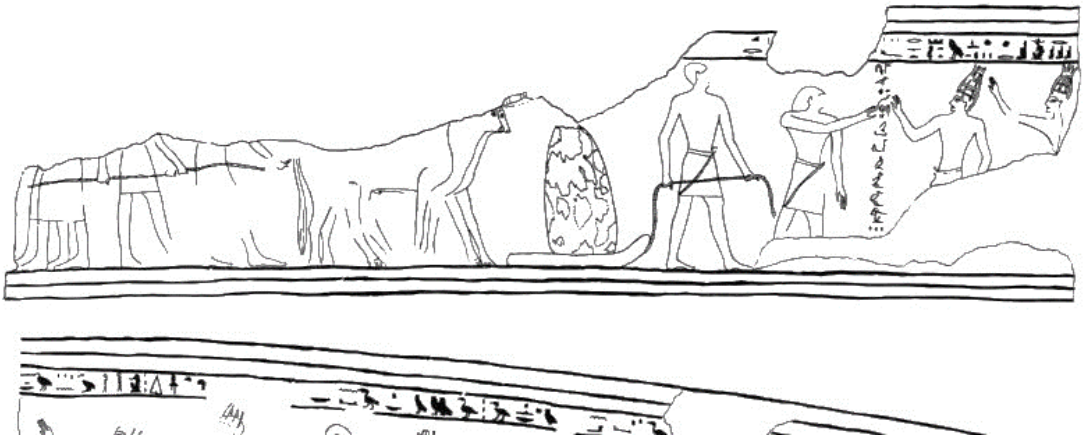


Figure 5

|1| *[…] r s.t ʾImn.t m ḥtp sp 2 ḫr Wsir r s.wt* |2| *n.t nb.w n nḥḥ*

To the place of the West, in peace! In peace! To Osiris! To the places of the Lords of Eternity.

Discussion

The text analysed here shows some resemblances with the one occurring in the tomb of *P3ḥri* (document 16). The caption probably refers to the arrival of the Tekenu into the netherworld, as suggested by the presence of the *Mww*-dancers. As already stressed in section 2.1.4.b point 3, the latter had the duty of welcoming the deceased and, according to H. Altenmüller (1975 A, 36-37) they can be identified with the ferrymen which had to lead the deceased into the realm of the dead. One has also to consider that reaching the West, the necropolis, or the netherworld is one of the most recurrent themes in the captions concerning the Tekenu ritual. For further discussion see document 16.

Document 3: TT 60 - Tomb of *ỉnỉ.t=f-ỉḳr* / *Sn.t* (Table 1, doc. 2)

Date: 12th dynasty, Sesostris I - Place: Sheikh ‘Abd el- Qurna

Bibliography: No. de Garis Davies, A. H. Gardiner, Ni. De Garis Davies 1920, 21-21, Pl. XXII A and B; G. West 2019, 123-124.

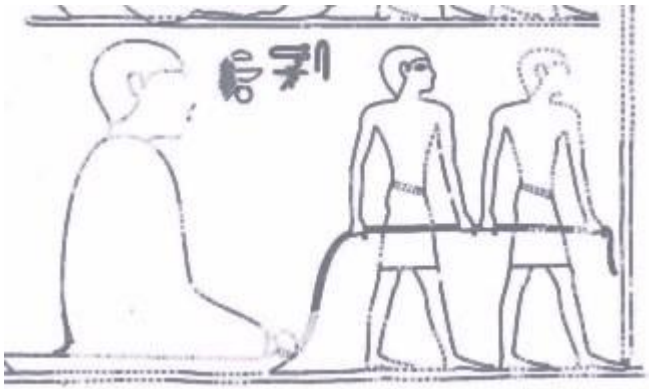


Figure 6

sṯꜣ tknw

The dragging of the Tekenu

Document 4: TT 15 - Tomb of *Ttiḳỉ* (Table 2, doc. 5)

Date: 18th dynasty, Ahmose I - Place: Dra ‘Abu e-Naga

Bibliography: No. de Garis Davies 1925, 10-18, and Pl. V; G. West 2019, 112-115.

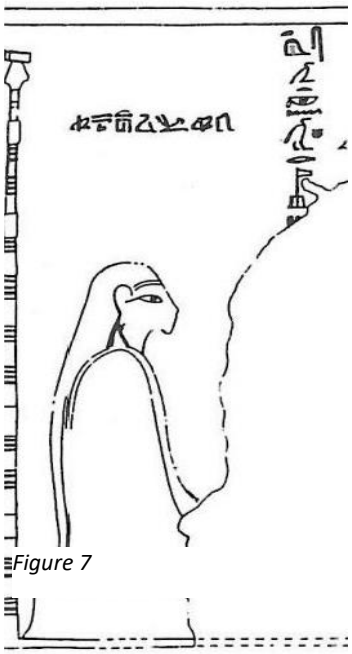


Figure 7

sṯꜣ tknw r ḫr.t-nṯr […]

The dragging of the Tekenu to the Necropolis […]

Notes

In the blank space above the depiction of the Tekenu, a hieratic inscription is recognizable:

sš Pꜣ-rhnny - The scribe Parehenny

According to No. de Garis Davies, this individual is to be identified with the artist who drew the scene (1925, 17). Other scholars, instead, identified this individual with a ritualist who plays the role of the Tekenu. cf. H. Altenmüller 1972, 132; J. M. Serrano Delgado 2011, 153.

Document 5: EK 7 - Tomb of *Rnnỉ* (Table 2, doc. 7)

Date: 18th dynasty, Thusmosis III - Place: El-Kab

Bibliography: G. Reeder 1994, 57; A. Moret 1922, 48 and fig. 12; G. West 2019, 130-132.

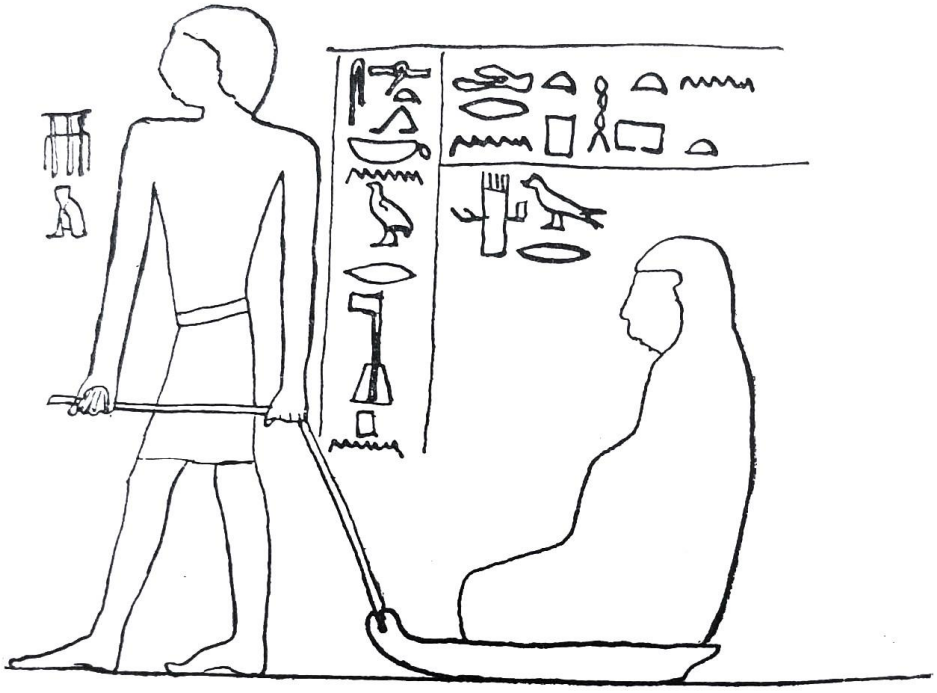


Figure 8

Above the Tekenu
|1| dr n tpḥ.t n.t |2| ʿḥ.t wr

In front of the Tekenu
|3|sṯ3 <.t>knw r ḫr.t nṯr pn

In front of the dragger
|4| m ḫnt (?)

|1| Leaving the chapel of |2|the Great Palace[1]|3| (while) dragging the Tekenu to this necropolis
|4| The imy-khent (?)[2]

Notes

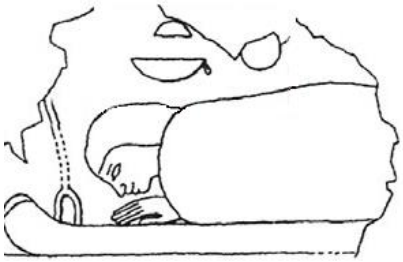
1. The word *tpḥ.t* (Wb 5, 364.11-366.5) can indicate a cave, a hole, or the chapel of a temple. It is certainly suggestive that in TT 20, the sledge and the *msk3* skin related to the Tekenu are depicted as buried inside a pit located in the necropolis (see section 2.4.b and fig. 2). Yet, since the Tekenu here is depicted on a sledge whilw still wrapped in the *msk3* skin, and the text emphasises that he has not yet reached the necropolis, it does not seem plausible to interpret the caption as a reference to this ritual deposition. As for *ʿḥ.t wr,* another plausible translation might be the "Embalming Place" see the word *wry.t* (Wb 1, 332.13) The verb *dr* (Wb 5, 473.1-474.12) literally means "to expel", "to remove", or "to drive out".

2. The reading is uncertain: if correct, the person dragging the Tekenu could be identified with one of the same ritualists involved in OMR scenes 9 and 10. (see section 3.1).

Document 6: TT 34 - Tomb of *Mntw-m-hꜣ.t* (Table 3, doc. 40)

Date: 25th dynasty, Taharqa /Psamtik - Place: Asasif

Bibliography: H.-W. Müller 1975, 18-33; G. West 2019, 62-64.



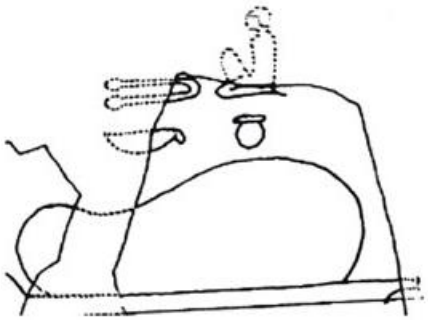
[…] tknw
[…] Tekenu

Figure 9

Document 7: TT 389 - Tomb of *Bʿsꜣ* (Table 3, doc. 43)

Date: Saite - Place: El-Asasif

Bibliography: J. Assmann 1973, Pl. XXIX and fig. 40; G. West 2019, 51-52



ṯknw

Tekenu

Figure 10

Document 8: TT 82 - Tomb of *ỉmn-m-hꜣ.t* (Table 2, doc. 13)

Date: 18th dynasty, Thutmosis III - Place: Sheikh ‘Abd el- Qurna

Bibliography: Ni. De Garis Davies and A. H. Gardiner 1915, 51 and Pl. XII; J. G. Griffiths 1958, 118; R. Metawi 2008, 185; G. West 2019, 165-167.

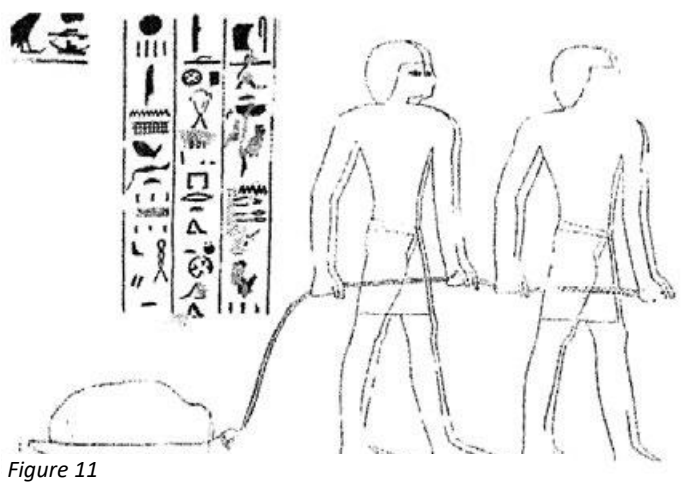


Figure 11

|1| *sṯꜣ tknw ỉn rmṯ* |2| *Ḳd<m> sꜣ-Srḳ.t pr.t nỉw.t ʿḳ prỉ* |3| *sp-4 ỉn spꜣ.t sḏm mḥ.tỉw š Ḥḳ.t*

|1| The dragging of the Tekenu by the people of Qedem[1] and the priest of Serqet. The procession of the city (necropolis): entering and exiting the district |3| four times[2]. The northerners of the pools of Heqet listen[3].

Notes

1 The city of Qedem was located in the 6th nome of Lower Egypt (*ḫꜣsw*). The city was sacred to Serqet and housed a temple of this goddess (H. de Meulenaere 1960, 127-128). The sign □ (Q3) is probably a mistake for the sign ⍥ (W24), see doc. 9/ TT 224. Notably, the same toponym also occurs in CT spell 38 (CT I 160e).

2 Repeating the same action four times is typical of several Egyptian rituals, including the OMR (see section 3.1, scene 9). Rasha Metawi also suggested to read the following group of signs as “*sdm*”, a corrupted form for “*stm*”, “*sem* priest” (R. Metawi, 2008, 29). This translation, however suggestive, is not supported by the grammatical structure of the sentence. As for the term *nỉw.t* used with the meaning of “necropolis” see: Allen 2006 A, 11.

3 *mḥ.tỉw* is a noun, “the people of the North” (Wb II, 126.2); this word is the subject of the verb *sḏm* (Wb 4, 384.4-387.14). The term likely indicates the ritualists depicted within the Tekenu ceremony, which, remarkably, are all connected to sacred cities located in the Delta region (the people of Pe, Dep, Qedem, the priest of Serqet). Both the pools of Heqet and Khepri played a major role in Egyptian funerary rituals, see also the inscriptions in TT 100 and TT 125 (documents 20 and 21), where the pool of Khepri occurs, and document 11 (TT 125) where the expression “Tekenu’s pools” occurs and document 15 (TT 55).

Document 9: TT 112 - Tomb of *Mn-ḫpr-Rᶜ-snb* (Table 2, doc. 28)

Date: 18th dynasty, Thutmosis III (usurped during the 19th dynasty) - Place: Sheikh ‘Abd el- Qurna

Bibliography: Ni. de Garis Davies and A. H. Gardiner 1915, 51 and note 2; J. G. Griffiths, 1958, 118; R. Metawi 2008, 185; G. West, 2019, 164-168.

|1| *[sṯ3] tknw ỉn rmṯ ḳ[d]<m> s3-Srḳ.t* |2| *prỉ.t nỉw.t ᶜḳ prỉ.t sp-4 ỉn sp3.t {n} sḏm mḥ.tỉw š Ḥḳ.t*

|1|The dragging of the Tekenu by the people of Qedem and the priest of Serqet. |2| The procession of the city (necropolis): entering and exiting the district four times. The northerners of the pools of Heqet listen.

Notes

This text is known only thanks to a transcription made by Ni. De Garis Davies and A. H. Gardiner in the monograph dedicated to TT 82 (1915, 51 and note 2). The inscription caught their attention because it is rather similar to that occurring in this tomb. For further notes on the translation cf. TT 82 (Document 8).

Document 10: TT 224 – Tomb of *Ỉᶜḥ-ms* (Table 2, doc. 27)

Date 18th dynasty -Place: Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna, Thutmosis I

Bibliography: Ni. de Garis Davies and A. H. Gardiner 1915, 51 and note 2; J. G. Griffiths 1958, 118; R. Metawi 2008, 185; G. West 2019, 165-167.

sṯ3 tknw.t ỉn rmṯ ḳd n s3-Srḳ.t

The dragging of the Tekenu by the people of Qedem and the priest of Serqet

Notes

This text is known only thanks to a transcription made by No. Davies and A. H. Gardiner in the monograph dedicated to TT 82 (1915, 51 and note 2). The inscription caught their attention because rather similar to that occurring in this tomb. For further notes concerning the translation cf. TT 82 (Document 8).

Document 11: TT 125 – Tomb of *Dwꜣ.wi-r-nḥḥ* (Table 2, doc. 9)

Date: 18th dynasty – Location: Sheik ʻAbd el-Qurna

Bibliography: J. Settgast 1963, 59 and Tafel. IV; G. West 2019, 231.

pr.t niw.t ʿḳ sp 4 in spꜣ.t n mḥ.tiw š tknw

Exiting the city (necropolis) [1] and entering the district four times by the northerners of the three Tekenu's pools.[2]

Notes

This text is known only thanks to a transcription made by Settgast. It was probably the caption related to a scene (currently lost) concerning the dragging of the Tekenu within the funerary procession. See Settgast 1963, Tafel IV. In TT 125 it is also attested a scene of the sleeping Tekenu, cf. Document 21.

1 For the term *niw.t* used with the meaning of "necropolis" see: Allen 2006 A, 11.

2 Noteworthy is the reference to the "three pools of the Tekenu" to be identified with the three pools of Heqet, Khepri and Sokar, which are depicted in TT 100 (cf. Documents 20). The pool of Heqet also occurs in TT 82 and TT 112 (cf. Documents 8 and 9), while the pool of Khepri occurs in the captions of TT 100 and 125 (CF. documents 19 and 20). The Northerners likely refers to the ritualists involved in the ceremony, which are usually linked to sacred cities in the Delta region (see Documents 8, 9 and 10).

Document 12: TT 17 - Tomb of *Nb-ỉmn* (Table 2, doc. 18)

Date: 18th dynasty, Amenhotep II - Place: Dra ʻAbu el-Naga

Bibliography: T. Säve Söderbergh 1957, 31, Plates XXIV and XXV; J. G. Griffiths 1958, 118; R. Metawi 2008, 181; G. West 2019, 115-117 and 169-170.

Figure 12

|1| *rmṯ p* |2| *sṯ*^{3}*(w) tknw* |2| *r ḫr.t-nṯr Ḥr ỉi m Rwtỉ* |3| *n.t mỉn.t*

|1| The people of Pe. |2| The dragging of the Tekenu to the necropolis. The speech[1] of Horus with Ruti of the stagnant water region.

Notes

1. I rendered the word *ỉi* (Wb 1, 36.14) as "speech". A similar translation has been already proposed by Rasha Metawi (2008, 186), who, however, considers this term as an archaic form of the verb *ḏd*; in this regard, it must be said that this verb is only attested as a parenthetic (J. P. Allen 2014, 303). In several religious texts, Ruti is often considered as the gate-keeper of a liminal area placed between the world of the living and that of the dead. This god often obstructs anyone who wishes to reach and see Osiris in the nrtherworld by posing him questions. Such a verbal encounter between Ruti and another god or the deceased is described in several Coffin Texts spells, in particular CT 383, CT 242 and CT 312 (H. Willems 1996, 263-270). The latter will be covered in detain in section 3.2.1.c.

2. The same scene, or at least a quite similar scene, perhaps occurred in TT 53, the tomb of *Ỉmn-m-ḥ*^{3}*.t*. (Document 13)

Document 13: TT 53 – Tomb of *ỉmn-m-ḥ3.t* (Table 2, doc. 12)

Date: 18th dynasty, Thutmose III - Place: Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna

Bibliography: The only source regarding the existence of this caption is the transcription made by No. de Garis Davies (*Notebooks MSS*, 11.40, 19). The text has been taken into consideration by various scholars, who provided quite divergent translations: J. G. Griffiths 1958, 118; R. Metawi 2008, 186, and note 40; G. West 2019, 66-69 and 169. The original copy of the sketch is available in the recent monograph by G. West, (2019, 68).

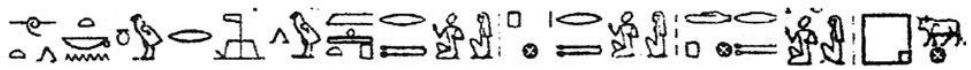
Discussion

This document is highly problematic. Nonetheless, it is certainly significant that J. G. Griffiths (1958), R. Metawi (2008, 186 and note 40) and G. West (2019, 66-69) agreed on the fact that the short text sketched by No. de Garis Davies, besides alluding to the dragging of the Tekenu (*sṯ3w t3 tknw*) also mentions a speech with the god Ruti (*ỉỉ Rwti*). It is therefore possible to hypothesise that the inscription was quite similar to the one attested in TT 17 previously analysed (see document 12, note 1).

Document 14: TT 24 – Tomb of *Nb-ỉmn* (Table 2, doc. 8)

Date: 18th dynasty, Thutmosis III - Place: Dra ‘Abu el-Naga

Bibliography: U. Bouriant 1887, 97–98; J. G. Griffiths 1958, 118; J. Settgast, 1963, 41 and note a; R. Metawi 2008, 185; G. West 2019, 117-118 and 172.



sṯ3 tknw r ḫr.t-nṯr ỉw m ḥtp rmṯ P rmṯ Dp rmṯ Ḥw.t-ỉḥw.t

The dragging of the Tekenu to the necropolis coming in peace; the people of Pe, the people of Dep, the people of Hutwerihut[1].

Notes

1 Pe and Dep were two ancient localities; to be precise it was the double city of Buto, also known as *Ḏb‘.wt*. See: H. Altenmüller 1975 B, 1098-1099. See also: I. Shaw 2020, 600; *Ḥw.t-ỉḥw.t* is a graphical variant of *Ḥw.t-wr-ỉḥw.t*. See: A.A. VV. 1992, 295. It is associated with Pe, Dep and other holy cities in CT spell 132 (CT II 155 c-d).

Document 15: TT 55 – Tomb of *Rˁ-msw* (Table 2, doc. 31)

Date: 18th dynasty, Amenhotep III – Amenhotep IV /Akhenaten

Place: Sheikh ʻAbd el-Qurna

Bibliography: No. de Garis Davies, T. E. Peet, H. Burton 1941, 22-23, Pl. XXV; J. G. Griffiths 1958, 118; R. Metawi 2008, 185; G. West 2019, 41-42.

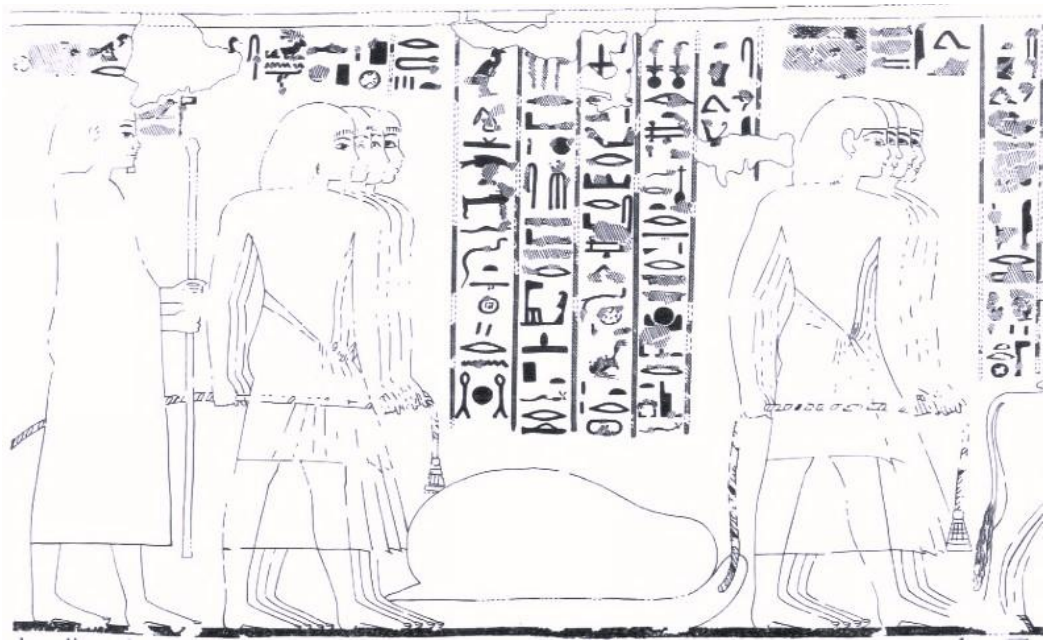


Figure 13

|1| *sṯ3w t(knw) ỉn r(mṯ) Nṯr.w* **|2|** *ˁḳ (prỉ.t) ỉ(n) [sp3.t]* […] |3| *sṯ3w ỉ(n)* |4| *ỉrỉ.ỉw-ỉḫ.t-nswt ỉr.t w3.t nfr.t r t3 r ˁ3.wy 3ḫ.t r s.t=f* |5| *ỉm (t3) ḏsr sˁr(w) ỉmỉ-rˁ nỉw.t ṯ3ty ỉry-Nḫn* |6| *ḥm-nṯr-tp.ỉ Rˁ-msw m3ˁ-ḫrw r ḫr.t-nṯr ḥtp(w)=f* |7| *rwd(w) ḫ3.t=f ḏ.t sp 2 r nḥḥ* |8| *rmṯ.t P Dp Wn.t s* […]

|1|The dragging of the Tekenu by the people of Behbet el-Hagar[1]. **|2|** Entering and exiting by the district […][2] **|3|** The dragging by **|4|** the custodians of the king's property, walking down the beautiful road, towards the earth, towards the two doors of the horizon, towards his place, **|5|** which is in the holy land. May the governor of the town, vizier, warden of Nekhen **|6|** and high priest, Ramose, justified, ascend to the necropolis! May he be at peace! **|7|** May his corpse endure for ever and ever for the eternity! |8| the people of Pe, Dep, the Hare Nome […].

Notes

1 *Nṯr.w* / Behbet el-Hagar is a city in the Delta region; cf. Wb 2, 365.12.

2 Through comparison with other similar texts, such as that of TT 82 (document 8), the lacuna could be filled with "district of the three pools"; see No. de Garis Davies, T.E. Peet, H. Burton 1941, 22-23. Unfortunately, modern pictures of the tomb show that most of the text has practically disappeared. See: G. West 2019, 39, fig. 4.2.10. For the involvement of pools in the Tekenu ritual see also document 8 (TT 82), 9 (TT 112), 11 (TT 125) 20 (TT 100), 21 (TT 125).

Document 16: EK 3 – Tomb of *Pꜣḥrỉ* (Table 2, doc. 35)

Date: 18th dynasty

Location: El-Kab

Bibliography: A. Moret 1922, 47 and fig 10; E. Naville, J.J. Tylor and F. LI. Griffith 1894, 19-21 and Pl. V; R. Metawi 2008, 185; G. West, 2019, 55-57 and 268.

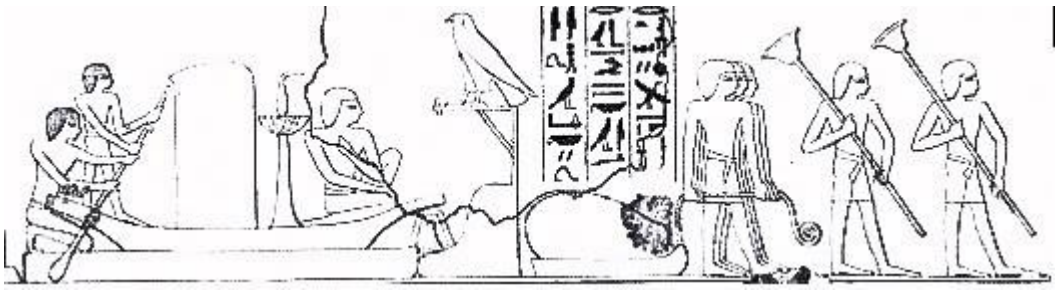


Figure 14

|1| *r ỉmn.t sp 2 pꜣ tꜣ nḏm ꜥnḫ* |2| *r bw n(.tỉ) wnn=k ỉm=f* |3| *yḥ mỉ{=k}*

|1| To the West! to the West! The land of the sweet life! |2| To the place where you will be! |3| Hey! Come[1]!

Note and discussion

1 *mi* is an anomalous imperative (Wb 2, 35.8-14). It is hard to explain the presence of the suffix pronouns. As stressed by G. West, it could be a scribal error (2019, p. 168).

The text does not make explicit references to the Tekenu but since it is written just above a scene depicting the typical dragging scene, several scholars have linked this inscription to the ritual under analysis here (A. Moret 1922, 47; E. Naville, J.J. Tylor and F. LI. Griffith 1894, 19-21; R. Metawi 2008, 185; G. West, 2019 268). In order to better understand the meaning of this inscription, it can be useful to analyse it within a broader framework, by taking into consideration the scene depicted on the left of the Tekenu: a bark landing to the netherworld, as clearly shown by the prow of the boat touching a symbol similar to the Egyptian hieroglyph indicating the West, , to be intended here as both the Westbank of the Nile (where the tombs were usually located) and the realm of the dead. This kind of scene usually described as "the arrival of the dead at the necropolis" (No. de Garis Davies 1943, 72), or as "the landing on the Westbank" (J. Settgast 1963, 83) is quite common in ancient Egyptian private tombs. Indeed, we have already seen it in the tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100), where it is associated with PT 364 (see section 3.1.c). Remarkably, a quite similar inscription is attested in the tomb of *Sḥtp-ỉb-rꜥ* (document 2).

Document 17: TT 20 – Tomb of *Mnṯ.w-ḥr-ḫpš=f* (Table 2, doc. 19)

Date: 18th dynasty, Thutmosis III

Location: Dra ʻAbu el-Naga

Bibliography: No. De Garis Davies 1913, 9-10 and Pl. II: G. West 2019, 77.

Figure 15

Caption in the upper part of the register

|1| *wḏꜣ r mꜣꜣ sṯꜣ tknw šms mrḥ.t r tp [ḏw] […] [mnṯ.w-] ḥr-ḫpš=f*

Captions related to the three men on the left dragging the Tekenu

|2| *sꜣ srḳ.t* |3| *sꜣ* |4| *wṯi*

Caption between the men and the Tekenu

|5| *m-rk sṯꜣ [tknw] šm=f n nỉw.t=f*

|1| To go in procession to see the dragging of the Tekenu. Offering the unguents to the top of the mountain of *M[mnṯ.w-]ḥr-ḫpš=f,* justified. |2| The priest of Serqet |3| the guardian,[1] |4| the embalmer |5| in proximity of the dragging of the [Tekenu], (while) it goes to his city (necropolis).[2]

Notes

TT 20 is the tomb that provides more information about the Tekenu ritual. Another scene depicting the dragging in connection with the *mskꜣ*-skin ritual is depicted on the same wall (see document 19). Moreover, in TT 20 also appears the famous scene of the ritual killing of the Nubian prisoners and pits inside which are buried some tools related to the Tekenu, such as the sledge, or the *mskꜣ*-skin. (See figures 2 and 3).

1 See: Wb 3, 418.1-4; since the term seems to refer to an individual, it probably indicates a ritualist similar to the *sꜣ Srḳ.t*. One could also posit that a scribal error occurred and the term *sꜣ* of *sꜣ Srḳ.t* was written twice.

2 For the term *nỉw.t* used with the meaning of "necropolis" see: Allen 2006 A, 11.

Document 18: TT 11 – Tomb of *Ḏḥwtỉ* (Table 2, doc. 10)

Date: 18th dynasty, Hatshepsut

Location: Dra ‘Abu el-Naga

Bibliography: J. M. Serrano Delgado 2011, 161, Pl. VIII fig. 9; G. West 2019, 98-100 and 176-178.

Figure 16.

|1| *msḳ3 n-* |2| *ḥr=f sfḫ* |4| *šm=f n ḏ.t=f* |1| *tknw m-rk n nỉw.t*

|1| The *msḳ3*-skin[1] |2| above him is removed[2] |3| and he (the Tekenu) goes towards his (of the deceased) body.[3] |4| The Tekenu approaches[3] the city (the necropolis)[4].

Notes

1. The term *msḳ3* is followed by a strange determinative which was identified by G. West as the sign I36, “piece of a crocodile skin”. G. West 2019, 178. It seems more likely an identification with the sign F32, “belly of an animal with tail”, or a strange, upside-down form of the sign F26, “skin of a goat”.
2. The verb *sfḫ* is used to indicate the removing of a piece of cloth. Remarkably, it is also the same verb used to describe the change of dress performed by the *sem* priest in OMR 19.
3. According to Serrano Delgado (2011, 61), *ḏ.t=f* should be translated as “he leaves for his eternity” (Wb 5, 507.4-508.13). G. West, instead, interpreted *ḏ.t* as “body” (2019, 178) and therefore translates: “when he (the deceased) goes to his body”. Indeed, the expression “his eternity” is not common and I was not able to find any parallel for the word *ḏ.t*/eternity followed by a suffix pronoun, while “his body” is instead a common expression. One has to consider that this part of the text is damaged, yet, despite the lacuna, it seems possible to recognise a hieroglyph, perhaps the same one which in the previous sentence followed the term *msḳ3* (F32 or F23), these could perfectly match with the meaning of “body” or “corpse”. On the other hand, one has also to keep in mind that, according to G. West, the Tekenu was not a ritual but a symbolic representation of a journey enacted by the Ka of the deceased. Rather, given that the *msḳ3*-skin occurs in a letter to the dead as an object, which entails rights over an inheritance (see section 4.5) and it also played a role within the Haker feast (see section 3.3.4), it is more reasonable to posit that the Tekenu was a real ritual. The general meaning of the sentence is that the Tekenu is approaching the corpse of the deceased. Not by chance, the next sentence states that the Tekenu is near the necropolis
4. Literally “the Tekenu is near the necropolis”. For this specific meaning of *m-rk* see Wb II, 458.3.
5. For the term *nỉw.t* used with the meaning of “necropolis” see: Allen 2006 A, 11.

Document 19: TT 20 -Tomb of *Mnṯ.w-ḥr-ḫpš=f* (Table 2, doc. 19)

Date: 18th dynasty, Thutmosis III

Location: Dra ‘Abu el-Naga

Bibliography: No. De Garis Davies 1913, 9-10 and Pl. VIII W. Helck 1987, 34; R. Metawi 2008, 183; G. West 2019, 173-177.

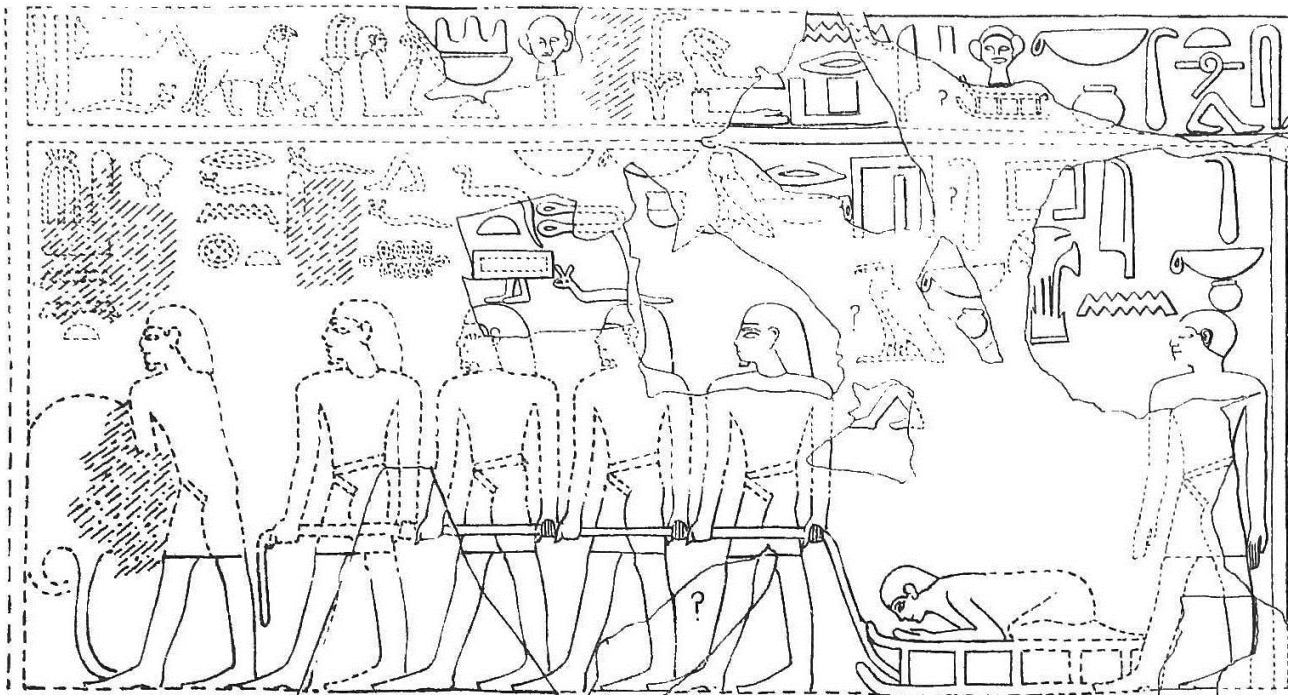


Figure 17

Inscription over the register

ỉw.t m ḥtp r mȝȝ sṯȝ tknw ḥr tm.t ỉn ỉr.y-pˁt (ḥȝtỉ-ˁ) nswt […]ḥr ḫȝw.t nb.t [ỉr.y ḫw Mnṯ.w-ḥr-ḫpš=f mȝˁ-ḫrw]

Coming in peace to see the dragging of the Tekenu on the sledge by the patrician, the nomarch, the […] of the king, the one who is upon every desert region, the fan-bearer *Mnṯ.w-ḥr-ḫpš=f*, justified.

Legends

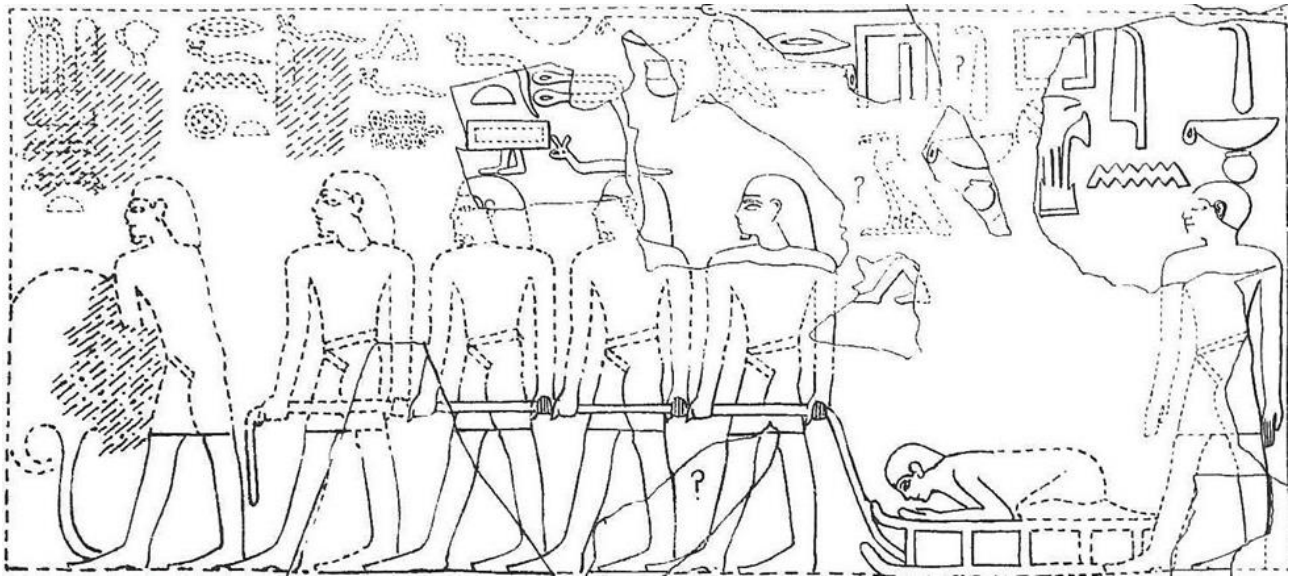


Figure 18

|1| *Ms[kꜣ] (n.tỉ)* |2| *ḥr*|3|*=f n nỉw.t*|4|*=f s[fḫ (?)]* |5| *ỉw=f sꜣ* |6| *nb-ḏ.t ṯknw m-rk šm=f* |7| *hꜣ* |8|*tknw* |9| *pr ḥꜣ* |10| *ỉn tknw*

|1| The *mskꜣ*-skin[1] which is |2| above |3| him |4| in his city (the necropolis)[2] |4| is [removed (?)][3]. |5| He comes; |6| The Lord of Eternity protects the Tekenu[4] as he proceeds. |7| The Tekenu descends, |8-9| the Tekenu walks out.

Notes

1 This scene shows undeniable similarities with the one attested in TT 11 (document 18). In this regard, Serrano Delgado posited that "the style and technique used are manifestly similar in both tombs, which suggests the possibility of them originating from the same artistic tradition or, probably, from the same group of artisans or workshop" (2011, 160). Given this premise, the lacuna occurring after the group of signs can be restored through comparison with the inscription in TT 11. In the light of these data, the translation proposed by G. West – "producing water over/on him for his city, when he [? passes away]" – is unfounded (2019, 175).

2 For the term *nỉw.t* used with the meament of "necropolis" see: Allen 2006 A, 11.

3 Based on comparison with TT 11, and given the presence of both signs S 29 and I 9, the lacuna can be restored with the word *sfḫ*. cf. TT 11 (doc. 17) for further considerations.

4 The spelling used to indicate the Tekenu in this sentence, , is different from that used in other occurrences in the legends analysed here and in other inscriptions within the same tomb. Also, the disposition of the hieroglyphs signs is strange. One could therefore argue that this part of the text was copied from a different source. *Nb-ḏ.t*, "The Lord of Eternity" is usually an epithet of Osiris. It is difficult to grasp the actual meaning of the sentence, one can cautiously speculate that Osiris is protecting the Tekenu along his path.

Document 20: TT 100 – tomb of *Rḫ-mỉ-rˁ* (Table 2 doc. 23)

Date: 18th dynasty, Thutmosis III / Amenhotep II – Place: Sheikh ‘Abd el- Qurna

Bibliography: No. De Garis Davies 1943, Pl. LXXXXIII; J. G. Griffiths 1958, 117; R. Metawi 2008, 186; J. M. Serrano Delgado 2011, 155; G. West 2019, 230-233 and 179.

Figure 19

|1|rdỉ.t ỉỉ n nỉw.t msḳ3

|2| m tknw sḏr ḫr=f

|3| m š ḫpr

|1| Causing the coming to the city (necropolis)[1]. The *msḳ3*-skin |2| (is) together with the Tekenu sleeping[2] under it |3| in the pool of Khepri[3].

Notes

This text shows a strong resemblance with the Tekenu caption attested in TT 125 (Document 21).

Settgast hypothesised the presence of a second depiction of the Tekenu in this tomb, located in a damaged area (Settgast 1963, Tavel IV). It would have been represented within the funerary procession, while dragged by a group of men. (G. West 2019, 224-225).

1 For the term *niw.t* used with the meaning of “necropolis” see: Allen 2006 A, 11.

2 The verb *sḏr* is the same term used to describe the ritual sleep performed by the *sem* priest in OMR 9-10. See also chapter 3.1.

3 The pool of Khepri, together with other sacred pools, played a foremost role in ancient Egyptian funerary rituals. See also Document 9 (TT 82) for further information. Remarkably, in TT 100 we also have a depiction of the three sacred pools of Khepri, Heqat and Sokar.

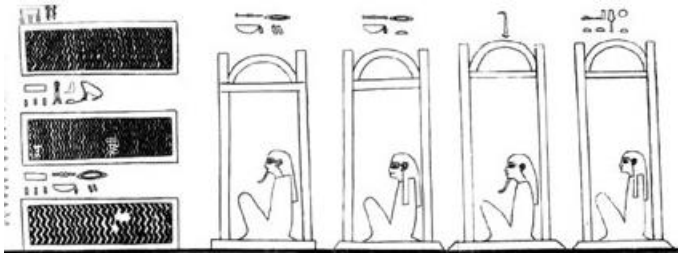


Figure 21 The three pools of Khepri, Heqat and Sokar in TT 100

Document 21: TT 125 - Tomb of *Dwꜣ-wi-r-nḥḥ* (Table 2, doc. 9)

Date: 18th dynasty, Hatshepsut – Original location: Sheikh ‘Abd el- Qurna; present location: Hildesheim, Roemer und Pelizaeus Museum, inventory number 1887.

Bibliography: A. Eggebrecht 1987, 314–315; S. Wohlfarth 2005, 139.

Figure 22

|*1*| *rdi.t ỉi n niw.t mskꜣ*

|*2*| *m tknw sḏr*

|*3*| *rdi.t sgr m š Ḫpr*

|1| Causing the coming to the city (necropolis)[1]. The *mskꜣ*-skin is |2| together with the Tekenu; sleeping[2] and causing silence in the pool of Khepri[3].

Notes

The text is rather similar to the one in TT 100 (document 20). Furthermore, as for TT 100, also in TT 125 there was another depiction of the Tekenu already treated within this section (see Documents 11)

1 For the term *niw.t* used with the meaning of “necropolis” see: Allen 2006 A, 11.

2 the verb *sḏr* is the same used for the ritual sleep of the *sem* priest in OMR 9 and 10. cf. also Document 20 (TT 100).

3 The expression “causing silence in the pool of Khepri” can be connected with the sentence attested in both TT 82 and TT 112 (documents 8 and 9): “The northerners of the pool of Heqet listen”. The northerners, here, are likely the ritualists linked to the sacred cities of the Delta region, often depicted in the scenes concerning the dragging of the Tekenu, such as the People of Pe, Dep, Qedem and the priest of Serqet. It can be argued that, once the Tekenu arrived at the sacred pools, the ritualists and the other individuals involved in the ceremony had to keep silence; then some liturgy was recited.

Discussion

The most ancient captions regarding the Tekenu date back to the end of the late 5th dynasty (document 1) and describe the Tekenu as dragged by a group of men in the context of the funerary procession, which is the most common representation of the Tekenu also in the subsequent historical phases. One can thus infer that this was perceived as one of the most characteristic moments of the ritual.

According to the inscriptions analysed here, the captions concerning the dragging of the Tekenu always contain verbs of motion, such as *sṯȝ, ʿḳ, prỉ, šm, ỉw, sʿr, hȝi*. The texts also provide information about the destination of the Tekenu: the necropolis (*ḫr.t-nṯr, nỉw.t*), the West (*Ỉmn.t*), the body of the deceased (*ḏ.t=f*), or the place where Osiris dwells. It can therefore be said that the ceremony was mainly focused on the passage from the world of the living to the realm of the dead, to be understood either as the necropolis or as a region of the netherworld. A further proof of the liminal function of the ritual is also given by the presence of the *Mww*-dancers, whose role was that to introduce the deceased into the netherworld,[79] and the verbal encounter between the Tekenu and the god Ruti, the gate-keeper of the realm of the dead.[80] Furthermore, remarkable is that the Tekenu is often depicted within an iconographic theme typical of the New Kingdom elite tombs, the so-called "Butic Burial" or "Sacred Temenos", which was a special site for rituals located on the way from the Embalming Hall to the tomb,[81] specifically meant as a transitional place between the earth and the netherworld.[82]

Only a restricted number of sources describes other actions involving the Tekenu, such as the ritual sleep performed near the pool of Khepri (*sḏr)* or the removal of the *mskȝ*-skin.

Given these data, the hypothesis that sees the Tekenu as a dynamic ritual, comprising multiple phases, appears well-founded, especially if one considers that in several tombs the Tekenu is depicted more than once while involved in different ritual actions. Yet it must be underlined that all the scenes portraying the sleeping Tekenu and the removal of the *mskȝ*-skin date back to the New Kingdom, the majority belonging to the 18th dynasty.[83]

As for the two textual sources concerning the removal of the *mskȝ*-skin and the two texts referring to the sleeping Tekenu (documents 18, 19, 20, 21), they belong to a very narrow period of time between

[79] H. Altenmüller 1975 A, 35-38.
[80] H. Willems 1996, 263-270.
[81] A. Wilkinson 1994, 391.
[82] A.-K. Diamond 2012, 109.
[83] See table 2, docs.: 10 and 19 (removal of the *mskȝ*-skin); 9, 22, 23, 25, 30, 36 (sleeping Tekenu). All documents are dated to the 18th dynasty, the only exception being doc.36, datable at the beginning of the 19th dynasty.

the reigns of Hatshepsut and Thutmosis III and occur only within a small geographical area, which includes Dra Abu el-Naga and Sheikh ‘Abd el- Qurna.[84]

We are dealing with just four textual sources, yet some considerations can be made. J.M. Serrano Delgado, for example, highlighted that, since the two textual sources concerning the removal of the *msḫ*-skin (documents 18 and 19) are not only quite similar, but also situated in the same, small, geographical area, it may be reasonable to attribute them to the same workshop.[85] The same reasoning can be also made for the textual sources concerning the sleeping Tekenu in TT 100 and TT 125 (documents. 20 and 21).

On the other hand, one may wonder whether the innovative themes concerning the Tekenu were new elements added to the ritual during the New Kingdom or, more likely, a reformulation of more ancient religious practices.[86]

As regards the ritual function of the *msḫ*-skin, it is to be mentioned that in a Middle Kingdom stela from Abydos (München Gl. WAF 35), reference is made to a ceremony involving some leather hides, that occurred during the Mysteries of Osiris. This latter document seems also to imply that obtaining the *msḫ*-skins bestows a certain social status and some privileges granted by the king.[87] See also a passage from the Middle Kingdom pRamesseum E, line 85, where it is attested a reference to the “one who is under the *msḫ.w*-skins”.[88] In addition, a *msḫ*-skin is also mentioned in a Letter to the Dead datable to the 6th dynasty, the so-called Cairo Linen (JdE 25675), and the possession of this object seems to entail rights over an inheritance.[89] It can be thus theorised that the *msḫ*-skin played a role in both funerary and mortuary rituals already starting by the late Old Kingdom.

As for the sleeping Tekenu the issue is more complex. The verb *sḏr* recurring in the captions is the same one used in the New Kingdom OMR scenes 9 and 10 to describe the sleeping *sem* priest. Yet, it is important to stress that, starting from the early Middle Kingdom, nouns derived from this verb attested in several documents describing the nocturnal rituals enacted during the Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos (*sḏr.t Pḳr, grḥ n sḏr.t, sḏry.t n Ḥr Šn/Šn-Ḥr*).[90] Given that the Mysteries celebrated at Abydos were structured as a funerary ritual enacted for the god Osiris,[91] these nocturnal ceremonies

[84] See section 3.2, table 2: docs.: 9 and 23 for the sleeping Tekenu, and docs.10 and 19 for the removal of the *msḫ*-skin.
[85] J.M. Serrano Delgado 2011, 160.
[86] H. Willems 1995, 110-116.
[87] See chapter 3, section 3.3.4.
[88] C. Theis 2011, 83.
[89] See chapter 4, section 4.5
[90] Z. Végh 2011,153-154.
[91] See chapter 3, section 3.5.

were probably meant as a reformulation of a ritual already characterising the elite funerals. So, it would be plausible to posit that something similar to the ritual sleeping of the Tekenu was already performed during the Middle Kingdom or even before. Indeed, the existence of articulated ceremonies performed between the embalming place and the tombs during the night preceding the inhumation are well attested,[92] and the fact that the sleeping Tekenu is sometimes flanked by torches might suggest that this ritual was performed at night.[93].

In this regard, particularly remarkable is that all the scenes pertaining to the sleeping Tekenu collected in Table 2 are always depicted within a figurative pattern attested in a restricted number of New Kingdom tombs.[94] This articulated iconographic theme was interpreted by J. Settgast as the setting of a consecrated area, whose main characteristics were the presence of incense burners, the ritual erection of two obelisks, and the purification of two shrines.[95].

TT 100, datable between the reign of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II, shows the more detailed depiction of this sacred area. Starting from the left, two women, identified by the captions as the mourners, are enacting a censing ceremony in front of a building. The subsequent scene portrays the ritual dormition of the Tekenu which, according to the caption previously analysed, is performed "in the pool of Khepri".[96] To the right of the Tekenu, both the *sem* priest and the *smr* are depicted while enacting a purification ritual on two shrines. The caption relating to these buildings is an obscure reference to "the red crown (*dšr.t*) of the South" and the "red crown (*dšr.t*) of the North", where one would have expected to find the white crown in connection with the South.[97] In this regard, C. Theis reasonably posited that the red crown sign indicates here the preposition "n", to be grammatically intended as a dative; therefore, the scene should be interpreted as the purification of both the North and the South shrine.[98]

[92] J. Assmann 2005, 260-278
[93] M.E. Strong 2021, 112-125.
[94] See Table 2, docs: 9 (TT 125), 22 (TT 96), 23 (TT 100), 25 (TT 276), 30 (TT 66); 36 (TT 41).
[95] J. Settgast 1963, 90-93.
[96] See chapter 3, section 3.2.1.b, document 20.
[97] J. Settgast 1963, 91.
[98] C. Theis 2011, 83-84.

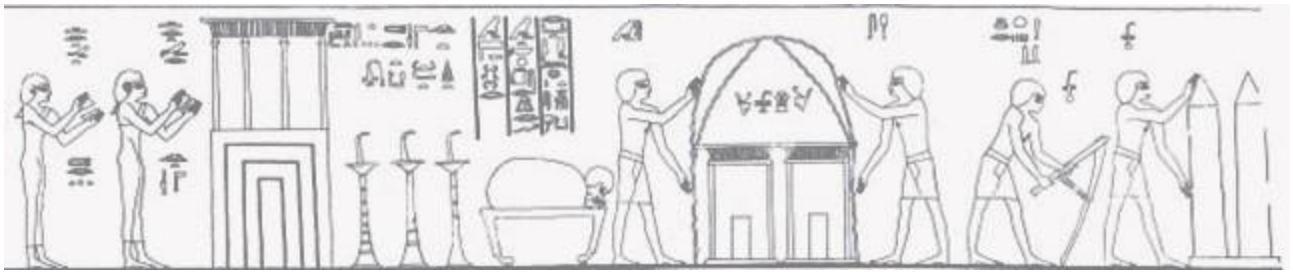


Figure 23 The sleeping Tekenu in TT 100

According to J. Settgast, a quite similar figurative pattern also recurs in TT 125, where he recognises the presence of a ceremony performed by a group of ritualists (the *smr*, the *ḫry-ḥb*, and two women, probably the two mourners) followed by another, damaged scene and, finally, the ritual erection of the obelisks, flanked by the sleeping Tekenu in the pool of Khepri. [99] It must also been noted that the captions of the sleeping Tekenu strongly resembles those in TT 100.[100]

Figure 24 The sleeping Tekenu in TT 125

Settgast confirms the presence of the two obelisks scene also in TT 276 (whose owner probably lived under the reign of Thuthmose IV) and TT 96 (datable to the reign of Amenhotep II).[101] As for TT 41 (belonging to the early 19th dynasty), the sleeping Tekenu is shown as flanked by two *Mww*-dancers, the scene of the two obelisks being depicted in another register on the same wall immediately above the Tekenu.[102] Even though severely damaged, the same pattern may be theorised for TT 66 (Thutmose IV), where the scene pertaining to the purification of the two shrines is recognizable.[103]

It is unclear whether this sacred area should be considered as being part of the Butic Burial or depicting a different ritual setting.[104] Nevertheless, its close connection with the sleeping Tekenu is undeniable.

[99] J. Settgast 1963, 90-93, Pl. X.
[100] See chapter 3, section 3.2.1.b, documents 20 and 21.
[101] J. Settgast 1963, Pl. X.
[102] J. Assmann 1992, Pl. 40.
[103] No. De Garis Davies and Ni. De Garis Davies 1963, Pl. XIII; G. West 2019, 136-137.
[104] J. Settgast 1963, 93.

According to Junker, this sacred area should be interpreted as belonging to the Butic Burial. Since the latter often involves pilgrimages to diverse ancient Egyptian Holy Cities, such as Buto, or Sais, the presence of the obelisks would testify to a pilgrimage to Heliopolis.[105] Yet, as stressed by H. Willems, another valid hypothesis could be Sais, which already in Middle Kingdom sources is associated with the two obelisks and symbolised the Embalming Hall within the context of the funerary rituals.[106]

The only thing that can be said with certainty is that all the symbols recurring in this sacred area seems to insist on the aspect of liminality, by depicting a sort of border between the realm of the dead and that of the living.[107] We have already highlighted that, according to the Egyptian mindset, there was an overlap between certain ritual areas located in the necropolis, some regions of the netherworld and a special dimension that the sleepers could experience through their oneiric visions.[108] Especially the presence of the two obelisks could be interpreted as a liminal symbol indicating the passage from earth to the celestial regions.[109] Indeed, besides the well-known monumental ones linked to temple architecture, obelisks were also placed at the entrance of private tombs.[110] Moreover, as previously mentioned, H. Willems underlined that the presence of the two obelisks could be associated with the symbolic pilgrimage to Sais and therefore with the rituals performed at the entrance of the Embalming Hall.[111] One could thus theorise that the iconographic pattern herein analysed describes a phase of the funerary rituals, which also included the sleeping Tekenu, and took place at night, before the inhumation, at the entrance of the Embalming Hall, or in another ritual setting positioned on the funerary procession route.[112]

The real question to ask is whether the ritual of the sleeping Tekenu existed in earlier historical phases or added to the ritual during the 18th dynasty. Although all the tomb showing the sleeping Tekenu date back to a narrow timeframe between the reigns of Hatshepsut and the early 19th dynasty,[113] they could actually testify to the reformulation of more ancient rituals to be linked to the emergence of the festivals for the posthumous cult of Amenhotep I in the Theban region.[114]

[105] H. Junker 1940, 22.
[106] H. Willems 1996, 113-114, and note 342.
[107] J. G. Tassie 2000, 41.
[108] See chapter 2, section 2.1.b.
[109] G. West 2019, 205-206.
[110] T. Bács 1983, 1-16; J. M. Galán 2017, 187.
[111] H. Willems 1996, 113-114 and note 342; H. Willems 1988, 147.
[112] H. Willems 1996, 112-113.
[113] See section 3.2, table 2: docs. 9 and 23.
[114] H. Willems 1996, 114; see also section 3.2.

Indeed, several elements characterising the sacred area in which the sleeping of the Tekenu took place are well documented since before the advent of the New Kingdom. For example, the depictions of the *Mww*-dancers are known from the Old Kingdom onwards,[115] while the theme of the basins of Heqet and Khepri finds a significant precedent in a Middle Kingdom Coffins Texts spell, CT 234.[116] Also, the scene concerning the erection of the two obelisks, as mentioned above, finds a significant parallel with two obelisks depicted within the *object frieze* of a Middle Kingdom coffin, where they are associated with the symbol of the goddess Neith and the flagpoles of the city of Sais.[117] As mentioned above, this Holy City, within the context of the elite funerary rituals, symbolised the Embalming Hall and the Middle Kingdom data testifies to a number of nocturnal ceremonies herein enacted, such as those described in CT spells 60-61, which strongly resemble the Ptolemaic *Studenwachen*,[118] and the *hsb.t ꜥ3.w*, a ritualised judgment of the dead enacted at the entrance of the Embalming Hall which shows strong affinities with other rituals occurred during the Middle Kingdom Mysteries of Osiris celebrated at Abydos.[119] These rituals were performed shortly before the starting of the funerary procession, and it cannot ruled out a priori that might have included a ritual sleep, which was not too different from that *sḏr.t*/*sḏr.yt* occurred during the Middle Kingdom Mysteries of Osiris.[120]

3.2.1.c Coffin Text spell 312 and the ritual sleep/*sḏr*

Although scarce, the little evidence concerning the existence of a ritual sleep prior to the New Kingdom could be understood as the tip of an iceberg testifying to a ritual practice already attested, at least, since the end of the Old Kingdom. After all, we have already seen that some Letters to the Dead datable to the First Intermediate Period could testify to a ritual sleep performed near the tomb of the deceased to seek a dream.[121]

Both S. Donnat Beauquier and U. Verhoeven sustained that the mythological background behind the practice of addressing deceased relatives through missives probably stemmed from the facts narrated in P. Chester Beatty I, recto, 14,6-15,8.[122] This textual source is particular interesting to analyse the

[115] H. Alntemüller 1975 A, 9.
[116] H. Willems 1996, 110.
[117] H. Willems 1996, 113-114, and note 342.
[118] H. Willems 1988, 145.
[119] H. Willems 1988, 146-150. See also section 3.3.3.
[120] See section 3.3.1.
[121] See section 3.1.b.
[122] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 218-219; U. Verhoeven 2003, 38.

intersection between, law, religion and society taken into consideration here,[123] by narrating how the legal issue between Horus and Seth for the the throne of Egypt was settled by summoning Osiris himself from the realm of the dead thanks to a letter written by the god Toth.[124]

It is however important to stress that P. Chester Beatty I, recto, 14,6-15,8 dates back to the Ramesside Age, probably to the Reign of Ramesses V. However, other, more ancient religious texts might be identified, which could validate the existence the ritual sleep during the Middle Kingdom and explain the mythological background of the most ancient Letters to the Dead and the nocturnal rituals enacted during the Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos.[125]

Coffin Texts spell 312 [CT IV68a – 86w] is particularly interesting in this regard. This spell is currently known thanks to six testimonies, all belonging to elite exponents, and datable to a period of time between the end of the First Intermediate Period and the 12th dynasty:

1. D1C – Coffin of *Bb* (Cairo, CG 28117); Dendera; First Intermediate Period.[126]
2. T1C – Burial chamber of *Ḥr-ḥtp* (Cairo, CG 28023); TT 314 (Thebes West, Deir el-Bahri); Early Middle Kingdom.[127]
3. B4C – Outer coffin of *S3.t-ḥḏ-ḥtp* (CG 28086); Deir el Bersha; Middle Kingdom.[128]
4. B2BO – Inner Coffin of *Ḏḥwty-n3ḫt* (Boston 21. 962-62); Middle Kingdom.[129]
5. B6BO – Fragmentary outer coffin of *S3.t-mk.t* (Boston 21.810-11 and 21.968); Deir el Bersha; Middle Kingdom.[130]
6. B6C - Inner coffin of *ʿḥ3-nḫ.t*, the reused by lady Djehutinakht (Cairo, CG 28094); Deir el-Bersha; end of the 11th dynasty - reigns of Senusret II/III, 12th dynasty.[131]

Of these six sources, only one, B6C, contains the complete spell. The other documents, instead, show significant lacunas or contain an abbreviated version of the text: D1C ends at 81j; T1C and B6BO ends at 71f; B2BO at 80g; finally, B4C contains only the very initial part of the spell, ending at 68e.[132]

[123] M. Campagno 2006.
[124] U. Verhoeven 2003, 38.
[125] See section 3.2.1.c.
[126] H. Willems 2014, 159 and note 117.
[127] H. Willems 2014, 173.
[128] H. Willems 2014, 148-149.
[129] H. Willems 2014, 151-153.
[130] H. Willems 2014, 151-153.
[131] G. Long, M. De Meyer, H. Willems 2015, 225, and p. 236.
[132] A. de Buck 1949, 87.

The text seems to have enjoyed a certain popularity also in the subsequent historical phases, and a later version of it is attested in the Book of the Dead (BD chapter 78).[133]

Although the general plot of the mythical episode narrated in spell 312 is clear, the best-preserved version, B6C shows several anomalies, its translation posing a number of problematic issues. The archetypical text from which the spell derived was likely structured as a dramatic text, in which several characters – Osiris, a chorus of gods, Horus, the Image of Horus, and Ruti – talk to each other, and their speeches are reported in the first person; some of the CT 312 testimonies which has come to us indeed reflect the original structure and, as pointed out by A. de Buck, the version copied on D1C is likely the most faithful to the original.[134] In B6C, instead, some of the main dramatis personae of the text – specifically Osiris, Horus, and the Image of Horus – are identified with the deceased. The result is that the replacement of the first-person pronouns referring to these supernatural entities with the personal name of the deceased involved the formation of sentences which do not follow the usual rules of ancient Egyptian grammar.[135] If one considers that B6C is the only testimony which reports the text in its entirety, this aspect creates quite a few problems for the understanding of the final part of the spell, since sometimes it is hard even to understand which of the dramatis personae the deceased's name is replacing (CT IV 82a-86w).

Despite these problems, the plot of spell 312 can be reconstructed without difficulties. In the present section, some excerpts of this spelled will be analysed in the light of the interpretation provided by H. Willems in 2001.[136] For the translation I mainly based myself on the one provided by A. de Buck.[137] It begins with Osiris asking Horus to reach Djedu (Busiris) and perform for him the funerary rituals:

> *|68b| Oh Horus, come to Djedu, |68c| clear my ways for me[138] |68e| and parade (dbn)[139] around my tomb, |68f| that you may see my form (irw) |69a|*

[133] A. de Buck 1949, 87.
[134] A. de Buck 1949, 87.
[135] A. de Buck 1949, 88-89.
[136] H. Willems 2001, 370 and ff.
[137] A. de Buck 1949.
[138] B6bo, B4c and the Book of the Dead version show here the idiomatic expression Dsr wat, "clear the road". Other sources, instead, show only the verb zDr: B6c *ḏsr=k*; T1c *ḏsr=k ḥr=i*; D1c *ḏsr=k n=i*. Remarkably *ḏsr* is the same verb used to describe the seclusion of the sem priest in OMR scene 9 (see section 3.1).
[139] The circumambulation (*dbn, pḥr*) of cities walls, monuments, or tombs was a characterising trait of several Egyptians rituals, especially those performed in front of a larger public, such as the Heb-Sed, or some ceremonies linked to royal coronation. See: R. Ritner 1992, 55-58; R. A. Gillam, 2005, 150-153. See also section 3.3.1.

and exalt my Ba! |69b| May you spread fear of me |69c| and may you command awe of me.

As already pointed out, in order to inherit and succeed a deceased's son had to perform the role of main ritualist during the funerals and, although the text is not explicit in this regard, from some passages it is clear that Horus's rights to the throne are questioned by Seth (CT IV 69g-70b). One has also to keep in mind that, according to the myth, Osiris would have died even before conceiving Horus, and it is therefore easy to understand why the legitimacy of the latter could be contested.

The only solution is to reach the netherworld so that Osiris can talk to Horus proclaiming him the legitimate heir. However, embarking on such a journey is too dangerous. Horus must stay among the living – being a manifestation of Osiris himself – so that he will generate a new heir to perpetuate the dynastic line and the mortuary cult associated to it (CT IV 71c-72f):

|**Horus says to Osiris**: *|71e| See your own form (ỉrw), |f| let your Ba free to move*[140] *|72a| and cause him to go forth and to have power over his legs, |b| that he may stride and copulate among men; and |c| you shall be there as the Lord of All. |d| The gods of the Duat fear you, |e| and the gates beware of you. |f| You move along with those who move along, |g| (while) I remain on your mound like the Lord of Life.*

Horus however devises a plan, a supernatural being, denominated *ỉr.w-Ḥr* in the text, will act as a messenger and will reach the realm of the dead to meet Osiris. The actual nature of this divine messenger is hard to understand. It is probably to be interpreted as a manifestation of Horus himself. What we can deduct from the text is that this divine being shows the same physical appearance of Horus and is endowed with his very Ba:

[140] For the verb *sḳdỉ* determined with the sign of a boat see Wb 4, 308.7-309.8. It literally means "to travel by boat". A similar interpretation of this verb was already suggested by A. de Buck 1949, 93 and note 3. The sentence should be explained in the fact that Horus is the living Ba of Osiris. See. H. Willems 2001, 370 and ff.

> *|74 a| [Horus says:] I have made his form as my form, his gait as my gait, |74 b| that he may go and come to Djedu, being ennobled (sˁḥ) with my Ba, |74c| so that he will tell you my affairs.*

On the other hand, once the messenger enters the scene, he delivers a monologue, claiming to be an ancestral being, created before Horus himself was born. The *ʾIr.w-Ḥr* thus describe himself as an *ꜣḫ* spirit who dwell in the sun:

> ***|74g|*** *[ʾIr.w-Ḥr says:] I am one who dwell in the light of the sun.* ***|74h|*** *I am an Akh (ꜣḫ) spirit who came into being and was created from the flesh of a god.* ***|75a|*** *I am one of the gods and one of the Akh-spirits who dwell in the light of the sun,* ***|75b|*** *whom Atum created from his own flesh,* ***|75c|*** *whom came into existence from the root of his eye;* ***|75d|*** *whom Atum created and transfigured into an Akh-spirit (sꜣḫ).*

Subsequently,[141] the divine messenger begins his journey but, along the way, he runs into an obstacle, the god Ruti stops him:

> ***|78d-e-f-g|*** *"Repeat[142] to me what Horus has told you, in the form of the things his father said in the place where one lies on the days of the burial – said Ruti to me – and I will give you the Nemes crown.* ***|78h|*** *so that you may go and come through the ways of the sky.*

The messenger is able to answer the question and, once received the Nemes crown, proceeds on his journey. After various vicissitudes – such as his transformation into a falcon to destroy the enemies of Horus[143] – the messenger accomplishes his missions, and coveys the message to Osiris. Horus is

[141] D1C, CT IV 77b-79h; B6C 77d-79h.
[142] As stressed by A. de Buck (1943 p. 93 and note 1), *dì(w)=k wḏb (pr.t) m rˁ=k / d wḏb pr(w).t m rꜣ=k*, is a difficult phrase: *dì(w)=k* is the main sentence ("may you grant that /grant); *pr.t m rˁ=k* ("what came out of your mouth") is the subject of the subordinate sentence; the verb *wḏb* (Wb 1, 408.3-15) literally means "to turn back". So: "may you (Osiris) grant that what came out of your mouth can turn back". From the context it is clear that "turn back" here means "to be repeated".
[143] See CT IV, 76h; 82b-82-n.

finally proclaimed as the legitimate ruler of Egypt, while his deceased father will rule over the netherworld.

Comment

Although at first glance the facts narrated in CT 312 may appear somewhat unusual, the spell shows several themes typical of the ancient Egyptian religious texts.

The topic of the son who refute to physically join his deceased father in the netherworld and is identified with the living *Ba* of the latter on earth is attested also in CT I 162f [38].[144] Moreover, CT 312 finds several similarities with CT 149, one of the spells classified by H. Willems as "without mythology".[145] The rubrics of both texts, in the witnesses where they are attested,[146] state that they served for the transformation of the deceased into a divine falcon. In CT 149, this transformation occurs in the context of a ritualised judgment of the dead, performed at the entrance of a tomb. Here the deceased father is summoned to help his living relatives settle a legal dispute against a rival family, which includes both living and dead individuals.[147] This is a theme often encountered in several Letters to the Dead, and, significantly, CT 149 was certainly involved in the ritual deposition of these documents.[148]

One of the main characters of CT 312, the divine messenger of Horus (*ꜥIr.w-Ḥr*), is said to have been subjected to the *sꜣḫ.w*-rites (CT IV 74g-76h). These were the same rituals used to transmute the deceased into an *ꜣḫ*, a spirit endowed with special powers and therefore able to affect both the realms of the living and that of the dead. Indeed, the messenger of Horus is able to reach the netherworld also because of the special status acquired thanks to these rituals, an element that can be considered as a parallel between CT 312 and PT 364, since in the latter utterance it is stated that Horus has manifested himself to Osiris in the form of an *ꜣḫ*.[149]

More generally, as mentioned above, the possibility of communicating with the dead through a special medium shows strong affinities with *The Contendings of Horus and Seth* narrated in P. Chester Beatty I. This document tells how Horus, in order to be proclaimed legitimate heir to the throne, had to find

passages like 76h; 8
passages like 76h; 8
[144] *Mr-n=k bꜣ=k im=i tp tꜣ* (Love your Ba on earth which I am!); the sentence is to be intended a speech by the living son /Horus to his deceased father/Osiris. See also: H. Willems, 2001, 370-372.
[145] H. Willems 2014, 149-150.
[146]Coffin Text spell 312: CT IV 80h.
[147] H. Willems 2014, 149-150; E.F. Wente 2017.
[148] See section 4.1.
[149] See chapter 3, section 3.2.a.

a way to communicate with his deceased father, Osiris. But, in this case the communication is made possible thanks to an exchange of letters.[150]

Finally, the Egyptian denomination of the supernatural messenger created by Horus, *ꜣrw Ḥr*, is worthy of analysis. The term *ỉrw*, literally "form", is to be intended as "manifestation", thus the text imply that the divine messenger is none other than a manifestation of Horus himself. Also, it has been underlined how in religious texts the word *ỉrw* appears to be something similar to the Ba and remarkably, in several sources both the Ba and the *ỉrw* appears to be strictly connected.[151] Finally one could interpret the term *ꜣrw-Ḥr* as a wordplay referring to the Eye of Horus, in Egyptian *ỉr.t Ḥr*.

This interpretation is confirmed by several passages in the longer version of CT 312 copied on B6C. In CT IV 79a, for example, it is said that Horus has lost his eye, and in CT IV 83c, Horus is called "The Eyeless". The main role played in this spell by The Eye of Horus has been already highlighted by Helmut Brunner. However, according to his interpretation, the central theme of the text would be Horus' refusal of taking care of the post-mortem destiny of Osiris in order to heal his wounded eye; the Eye of Horus would thus symbolise the royal power menaced by social disorders, a theme reflecting the climate of uncertainty typical of the First Intermediate Period and the consequent crisis of traditional values.[152] Even though the central role played by the Eye of Horus in this text is undeniable H. Brunner's view of the First Intermediate Period is no longer acceptable.[153] Rather, in the light of the aforementioned assonance between the name of the divine messenger of Horus (*ꜣrw Ḥr*) and one of the Egyptian terms used to indicate the Eye of Horus (*ỉr.t Ḥr*), the divine messenger must be identified with a manifestation of Horus which substantially coincides with his Ba and, at the same time, with his eye. This interpretation appears particularly well founded if one considers other religious texts where it is possible to find a certain connection between the Eye of Horus and the Ba of Osiris and/or Horus. For example, in Pyr. 578c-579a it is possible to read that Horus has rescued his own eye from his enemy and gives it to Osiris, so that the latter can become a Ba. Furthermore, the mythical theme of a deity sending his own eye as a messenger is quite recurrent in the Egyptian mythology. This is the case of the Eye of Ra sent to destroy humanity,[154] or the eye of Atum sent to find Shu and Tefnut.[155] It is also noteworthy that the mythical narrations concerning the Eye of Horus testify how the latter has gone through a series of vicissitudes quite similar to those experienced by

[150] It was also suggested that this episode may have been the mythical paradigm behind the practice of the so-called Letters to the Dead. See: S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 208-219.
[151] A. Landborg 2014, 215-219.
[152] H. Brunner 1961, 443-445.
[153] H.M. Hays 2011, 115 - 130.; M. Smith 2009; M. Smith 2017, 167 and ff.
[154] J.-P. Corteggiani 2007, 381-382.
[155] J. Assmann 2009, 168.

Osiris himself: it was "killed" and dismembered by Seth in several parts and subsequently recomposed and healed by a god, Thoth or Hathor.[156] This element actually makes the Eye of Horus the most suitable supernatural being when it comes to interacting with Osiris, since both went through an analogous experience which assimilates them.[157]

The idea of an eye able to travel and reach the netherworld perfectly matches with the Egyptian conception of dreams as a medium to interact with the dead. The action of sleeping was strictly associated to death, and the dreams were perceived as a liminal space – the dream zone – which overlapped certain regions of the netherworld where the sleepers could see the dead.[158] Under this point of view, the journey of the *ỉr.w-Ḥr* to reach Osiris can be intended as a metaphor of a ritual sleep and an oneiric vision experienced by Horus. In other words, something not that different from the ritual sleep enacted by the *sem* priest in OMR scenes 9 and 10 to seek the "vision of his deceased father in all his forms". In this regard, it is remarkable that one of the words used as a ritual remark in OMR scene 10 explicitly mention "the messenger of Horus" (*wnw-Ḥr*) or "the sleeping messenger of Horus" (*wnw-Ḥr sḏr*), and that OMR scene 7 – which is to be understood as strictly connected to OMR scenes 9 and 10, as evidenced by the sequence of the ritual attested in TT 100 – concerns the offering of the Eye of Horus as a gift for the deceased.[159] In another excerpt from the Pyramid Texts, Pyr. 535a, is also mentioned a messenger of Horus (*ỉnw*/*wnw*) which has bought his eye to the deceased king/Osiris.

It can therefore be stated that the OMR scenes 9 and 10, the ritual of the sleeping Tekenu, the Middle Kingdom ritual sleep celebrated within the Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos, and the dreams asked to seek contact with a deceased relative described in the Letters to the Dead all stemmed from this mythical episode: a communication established between the deceased father/Osiris and his living son Horus through an oneiric experience. This mythical theme was reformulated several times throughout Egyptian history and used as a background in diverse dramatic rituals specifically meant to solve certain kinds of existential crisis linked to the death of a family chief and his succession.

[156] J.-P. Corteggiani 2007, 384-385.
[157] This could be interpreted in the light of the heuristic concept of "sympathetic magic". See: P. Rozin and C. Nemeroff 2002, 201-216.
[158] K. Szpakowska 2003, 33 and ff.
[159] See chapter 3, section 3.1.a.

Indeed, three important keywords of CT spell 312 are *ḥw*,[160] *sʿḥ*,[161] and *nms*.[162] The first term is usually translated with "word", "utterance",[163] but its meaning is much more complex; *ḥw* indeed indicated the creative power of the word,[164] and in the specific context of CT spell 312 it refers to the words of Osiris, which have the power of legitimising the succession of Horus.[165] The word *sʿḥ* referred instead to the legitimate acquisition of a new status acquired by the Image of Horus, while the *nemes* crown, symbolised the legitimation of the social status acquired by Horus,[166] and under this point of view it can be considered parallel to the *ṯw.t* / *wrr.t* crown PT 364 (Pyr. 613b), which symbolised the leadership acquired by Osiris over the realm of the dead.[167]

The original function of Coffin Texts spell 312 was probably that of a dramatic ritual pertaining to the founding myth for the coronation ritual, in a context where the succession of the hereditary prince was ideologically intertwined with the establishment of the mortuary cult for the deceased king. Yet, in the tradition of the Coffin Texts spells the text was reworked to assume new meanings. The version of the spell in which the dramatis personae are not explicitly identified with the deceased, such as D1C, the original function linked to inheritance, succession and establishment of the mortuary cult was simply reshaped in the context of the elite sphere.[168] Instead, the version of the spell where the deceased is assimilated to Osiris, Horus and the Image of Horus – such as B6C – testifies a further shifting in the function of the text. The journey into the afterlife performed by the Image of Horus and his initiation into the *sꜣḫ.w* rites, was probably perceived as paradigmatic for the deceased who had to reach the realm of the dead.[169] Likewise, the new status gained by both Horus as the new king of Egypt and Osiris as the ruler of the netherworld were considered an ideal model for the transfiguration of the deceased into a supernatural being. Yet, if one considers that the supernatural status reached by deceased and the establishment of his mortuary cult was an essential prerequisite to legitimise the social status of his living descendants, it cannot be excluded that also this version of the text was somewhat aimed at ratifying the social position of the legitimate heir.

Finally, several elements of CT 312 strongly recall the captions concerning the Tekenu ritual. CT 312 concerns the voyage of the messenger of Horus to reach a celestial version of a Lower Egypt holy

[160] CT IV 85j.
[161] CT IV 74b, 76i, 81k, 82k, 85i.
[162] CT IV 74g-76i.
[163] Wb 3, 44.8-10.
[164] J. Zandee 1964, 65-66.
[165] Cf. CT 312, 84 I and 86 s-t.
[166] K. Goebs 1995.
[167] See chapter 3, section 3.1.a.
[168] Under this point of view, the observations made by H. Willems that CT spell 312 belongs to the same religious milieu of CT spell 30-41 is quite reasonable.
[169] H. Willems 2014, 191.

city, Djedu (Busiris), while the Tekenu ritual describes the procession of the Tekenu from the Embalming Place to the tomb of the deceased. Furthermore, several Tekenu depictions allude to the sacred landscape of the Delta. See, for example, the people of Pe and Dep and the *s3-Srḳ.t*, a ritualist associated to religious centre of Qedem; moreover, the depictions of the Tekenu are often flanked by scenes of pilgrimages to holy cities connected to the Osiris myth, especially the cities located in the North, such as Sais, or Djedu itself.[170] Finally, both the Tekenu and the divine messenger of Horus have a verbal encounter with the god Ruti. One may wonder if the Tekenu itself might be identified with the divine messenger of Horus that has to reach the tomb of Osiris in Djedu. Yet, however suggestive this hypothesis may appear, it certainly needs further studies and analysis to be definitively validated.[171]

[170] See table 1.
[171] See also section 3.2.3.

3.2.2 Why the Tekenu ritual is not attested in royal tombs? Muovere questa parte nelle conclusion del tekenu

As demonstrated by the analysis of the documents, the Tekenu ritual is not attested in the context of the royal funerary rituals. This, probably because, within royal tombs, there was a certain reticence in showing the body of the deceased or other kinds of scenes depicting the transportation of the mummy or other phases of the funerary procession.[172] Not by chance, the OMR scenes attested in royal tombs always pertains to the statue of the deceased (and not the mummified body) or, as in the case of queen Tausret – a woman who ruled Egypt as a king – on her royal cartouche.[173] The only exception can be identified in Tutankhamun's tomb but, as stressed by D. Laboury, it constitutes an unique, atypical case.[174]

We have also to keep in mind that, when it comes to themes like inheritance and succession, the procedures were much more complex within the royal sphere since the succession of the new king substantially came to coincide with his coronation.[175] One could thus prudently posit that the same kind of ritual actions characterising the Tekenu ceremony in the elite funerary rituals played a certain role in some phases of the coronation ritual.[176] It is suggestive that C. Campbell refers to the presence of a figure recumbent on a sledge – in his opinion quite similar to the Tekenu – within the Birth Chamber of the Luxor Temple,[177] which was strictly linked to another chamber of the same temple dedicated to the coronation of Amenhotep III.[178] However, as suggestive as it is, Campbell's theory does not seem supported by concrete evidence. For example, a sketch made by A. Gayet portrays the same figure as a trussed bovine on a sledge[179] and, as stressed by G. West, the current poor state of preservation of the scene does not allow a more detailed analysis.[180]

Another hypothesis to explain the absence of the Tekenu within royal tombs might be identified in the fact that this kind of ritual was aimed at sanctioning the special status reached by a restricted number of elite families because of royal concession. In other words, a privilege – that could be

[172] D. Laboury 2020, 44-45.
[173] S. Bjerke 1965, 204.
[174] D. Laboury 2020, 44.
[175] For general remarks on coronation ritual see: W. Barta 1980, 33-35.
[176] Suggestive is that in a passage of CT 213 – CT IV 80 j – the coronation of Horus is described as "the birth of a great god". See J. Assmann 1989, 144-145.
[177] C. Campbell 1912, 73-74.
[178] B. E. Shafer, D. Arnold 1998, 156.
[179] A. Gayet 1894, Pl. LXXII, fig. 208.
[180] G. West 2019, 159-160.

passed from father to son – granted only to the highest elite to reinforce their alliance with the royal power.[181]

3.2.3 Was the Tekenu a human being or an object?

Given the strong similarity between the sleeping Tekenu and the OMR scenes 9 and 10, it has been hypothesised that the Tekenu could be identified as a human being performing a ritual.[182] Indeed, the anthropomorphic representations of the Tekenu – especially the ones of the standing Tekenu in connection with the removal of the *msḳ3*-skin – seem to point towards this interpretation and the action described by the verb *sḏr* is more suited to a ritual operator, than to an object.

On the other hand, a depiction in TT20 seems to suggest that the *msḳ3*-skin covering the Tekenu was buried in a pit located in the vicinity of the tomb[183] and, as already mentioned, archaeological excavations have revealed the existence of pits located within the necropolises and used as deposits for the waste of the mummification process,[184] an element that could be understood as an argument in favour of the theory that sees the Tekenu as an object made of embalming residues.

Indeed, one has to keep in mind that the Tekenu ritual was quite articulated and – as the analysis of the captions has shown – it included several diverse actions enacted within diverse phases of the funerary rituals. One has also to consider that, over the centuries, the ritual was certainly subjected to changes, even if these are difficult to discern in the light of the available data. In this regard, significant is that the New Kingdom scenes concerning the ritual sleep of the Tekenu always show the latter in a white cover, a colour usually applied for the garments of the ritualists, while in the scenes concerning the dragging of the Tekenu, other colours are used, such as black or dark brown.[185] This particularity shouldn't be underestimated, since it could imply that some phases of the ritual involved an object, likely made of the waste from the mummification process, while the ritual sleep was performed by a ritualist who identified himself with the Tekenu.

It is important to underline that in several Egyptian rituals, especially those to whom CT spells without mythology 30-41 and in CT 312 referred, show a peculiar change of roles. While the ritualist/son is performing the role of Horus on earth in order to enact the funerary or the mortuary ritual for the deceased father/Osiris, the latter, telescoped in the supernatural sphere, is identified with

[181] This aspect is further developed in section 3.3.4.
[182] A. Moret 1922, 46-55; J. G. Griffiths 1958, 115-118; G. Reeder 1994, 59; H. Willems 1996, 111-114. See also section 2.4.b.
[183] Cf. Fig. 2.
[184] C. Knoblauch, 2016, 329.
[185] G. West 2019, 191-192.

Horus as well, and has to revive Osiris in the netherworld.[186] It can be posited that something similar happened during the enactment of Tekenu ritual: the ritualist/son performed the sleeping Tekenu role, while a manifestation of him, which was the very embalming residues of the deceased, had to reach his tomb and, therefore, Osiris who dwell the netherworld.

3.2.4 The Tekenu ritual: summary and conclusion

The word *tknw* derives etymologically from the verb *tkn*, "to approach". Other theories that link this term to the name of foreign toponyms or ethnic groups are not based on solid elements. One of the main arguments against the etymological derivation of the term *tknw* from the verb *tkn* – the absence of the determinative – turned out to be unfounded, since the semantic area covered by the verb *tkn* involves a meaning that can take on a specific religious value, such as "to approach" a god or a supernatural deceased.

The scenes depicting the Tekenu describe an articulated pre-burial ritual which had a clear liminal function: the passage from the real of the living to that of the dead. This is also shown by the fact the Tekenu is often depicted in the context of an articulated iconographic theme denominated "Butic Burial" or "Sacred Temenos" which represented a sacred area set up between the embalming place and the tomb of the deceased, which also functioned as a liminal space between the realm of the living and that of the dead where the nocturnal rituals preceding the burial were enacted.

The analysis of the captions pertaining to the Tekenu made it possible to identify three main phases of the ritual, whose exact order it is hard to establish: the ritual sleep performed by a ritualist identified with the Tekenu, the dragging of the Tekenu from the embalming place to the tomb, the removal of the *msḫ*-skin. One has also to consider that ritual was certainly subject to changes over time. All the scenes depicting the removal of the *msḫ*-skin and the sleeping Tekenu date back to the beginning of the New Kingdom, yet it is reasonable to assume that they testify to a reformulation of more ancient rituals.

Also, through an analysis of the analogies between the representation of the Tekenu scenes depicted in elite tombs and some Coffin Texts spells used as liturgies during both the mortuary and the funerary rituals (CT spells 30-41 and CT 312), it was possible to hypothesise that the dragging of the Tekenu probably concerned a ritual object made of waste from the mummification process, while the scenes

[186] H. Willems 2001, 368-372.

of the sleeping Tekenu referred to a ritual sleep enacted by a ritualist, perhaps the eldest son of the deceased, as attested for the OMR scenes 9 and 10.

A depiction in tomb TT 20 seems to imply that the Tekenu ceremony also entailed a ritualised killing of enemies (actual of fictitious), which can be considered as an execration ritual. However, the theory which has identified the Tekenu with the very victim of the sacrifice is not based on adequate arguments.

The captions preserved in elite tombs do not explicitly identify the Tekenu as a divine being. The only exceptions are the inscription found in TT 389 and TT 17, where the word *tknw* is determined with the sign (A40) which is used to indicate supernatural entities. On the other hand, the analysis of CT 312 has suggested that, perhaps, the Tekenu could cautiously be identified with a supernatural being called *ỉrw-Ḥr,* who was a manifestation of Horus'Ba. In addition, the *ỉrw-Ḥr* can be identified with the very Eye of Horus (*ỉr.t-Ḥr*) and, at the same time, with the messenger of this latter god (*ỉnw*/*wnw Ḥr*) mentioned in a ritual remark occurring in some versions of OMR scene 10.[187]

Finally, it has been posited that the journey of this divine messenger/eye might be understood as the mythological background of the ritual sleep mentioned in several religious texts, such as that of the *sem* priest in OMR scenes 9 and 10, the sleeping Tekenu, the dreams described in two First Intermediate Letters to the Dead, and the *sḏr.t*/*sḏry.t* performed during the Middle Kingdom Mysteries of Osiris celebrated at Abydos. Indeed, a journey to the realm of the dead to meet Osiris, which is undertaken by an eye, might be interpreted as a metaphor referring to the ritual sleep and that special oneiric vision which allows a form of interaction between the living and the dead.

[187] See chapter 3, section 3.1.a.

3.3 The Haker feast

In the following section the main textual sources currently known concerning the Haker feast have been collected and analysed. The data were collected through the *Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae*, the *Coffin Texts Word Index*,[188] and the recent monograph published by Z. Végh.[189] Two main types of documents have been identified:

1. Epigraphic sources;
2. Coffin Text spells and Book of the Dead chapters.

3.3.1 Epigraphic sources

The table below lists all the epigraphic sources currently known in which the term *ḥ3kr* appears.[190]

Table 4

	Object	Dating and provenence	Titles	References to the Haker feast
1	Letter to the dead, "Louvre bowl" (Louvre E 6134)	11th/12th dyn.; Abydos (?)	-	*ỉr-tw ḥ3kr ỉr-tw n=k w3g* The Haker feast is celebrated; the Wag feast is celebrated for you
2	Stele of Abkau (Louvre C 15)	Second half 11th dynasty; Abydos	overseer of horned animals	*[ỉw ỉrỉ-n=i] [mꜥḫ]ꜥ.t tn r rw.t n.t šsp 3w.t ỉrỉ-t-n=(i) m T3-wr 3bḏw t3-ḏsr (m) 3ḫ.t ỉmn.ty Wꜥr.t-ꜥ3.t-ḥmḥm.t sḫtp.t ib.w 3ḫ.w r rꜥ n sb3 [n] [ḥ3kr]* I have built this cenotaph at the gate of receiving offerings, which I made in the sacred land of Abydos, in the Thinite nome, (in) the Western horizon of the Waret-aat-hemhemet, which makes the hearts of the Akhw- spirits content at the entrance of the gate during the Haker feast.
3	Stele of Antef (Cairo CG 20024)	Amenemhet I. - Sesostris I; Abydos.	overseer of priests, the great chief of the Panopolite Nome	*sḏm(w)=f hnw m rꜥ n T3-wr ḥ3<k>rt{k} grḥ sḏr.t* May he hear jubilation at the gate of the Thinite nome during the Haker feast, the night of the ritual sleep
4	Stele of Shensetji (Los Angeles 50.33.31)	Sesostris I Abydos	overseer of sculptors	*ḥ3kr.w sḏr.t Pḳr ṯnw.t* During the Haker feast, the ritual sleep in Poqer, (during) the festivals of numbering.
5	Stele of Mery (Louvre C 3 = AE 3)	Sesostris I Abydos	assistant seal-bearer	*sḏm(w) =f hnw m rꜥ n T3-wr ḥ3kr n grḥ n sḏr.t <m> sḏr.t n.t-Ḥr-Šn* May he hear jubilation at the gate of the Thinite nome on the Haker feast, during the night of the ritual sleep, the ritual sleep of Horus-Shen.
6	Stele of Montuhotep (Cairo CG 20539)	Sesostris I Abydos	the hereditary noble and local prince, sealer of the king of Lower Egypt, sole friend, overseer of the treasury, one who is really close (*tknw*), who knows (one's) desire, overseer of the double house of silver and double house of gold, overseer of sealed things.	*ỉw ỉrỉ-n=ỉ s3-mr(.y)=f m [sšm] [n] [ḫw.t-nbw] m sš[t3] n nb 3bḏw ỉw ḫrp-n=ỉ k3.t m nšm.t msỉ-n=(i) ỉnỉ=s ỉrỉ-n=ỉ ḥ3kr n nb=f pr.t Wpỉ-w3.wt* I performed the function of "his beloved son" (*s3-mrỉ = f*-priest) in the management of the golden house (and) in the mystery of the Lord of Abydos, I supervised the work on the Neschemet bark, (and) I made their ropes, I have celebrated the Haker feast and the procession of Wepwawet for his lord.
7	Stele of Sebeki (München Gl. WAF 31)	Sesostris I – Amenemhet II; Abydos	overseer of the army	*sḏm(w)=f hb nw m rꜥ n T3-wr ḥ3kr grḥ n sḏr.t* May he hear the jubilation at the gate of the Thinite nome, (during) the Haker feast, on the night of the ritual sleep.
8	Stele of Wepwawetaa (München Gl. WAF 35)	Amenemhet II; Abydos	count and overseer of priests; great chamberlain in Abydos; foremost of offices in the temple; overseer of priests	Reference 1 *m w3g Ḏḥwty ḥ3kr pr.t-tp.ỉt pr.t-ꜥ3.t wp.t-rnp.t ḏ3.t-nṯr rkḥ tp.ỉ-rnp.t 3bd smd.t ḥ(3)b-Skr s3ḏ pr.t-mnw sḏr.t Pḳr ṯnw.t* During the Wag festival, the Thot festival, the Haker feast, the first procession, the great procession, the opening of the year,

[188] D. van der Plas and J. F. Borghouts 1998.
[189] Z. Végh 2021, 312-336.
[190] For the bibliographic references concerning the documents collected in Table n. 4 see the special section of the bibliography.

				the boat journey of the god, the burning festival, the first day of the year festival, the monthly festival and the half-monthly festival, the festival of Sokar and the Sadj festival, the procession of Min, on the ritual sleep festival of Poqer, the numbering festival. Reference 2 *sḏm(w)=f ḥnw m rᶜ n Tȝ-wr hȝkr grḥ n sḏr.t m sḏr.yt-n.t-Ḥr-Šn* May he hear jubilation at the gate of the Thinite nome, during the Haker feast, during the night of the ritual sleep, the ritual sleep of Horus Shen
9	Stele of Ameny (Louvre C 35)	Amenemhet II; Abydos	sealer of the king of Lower Egypt, the highest-ranking of all generals,	*rdi.t iȝ.w n Wsir ḫnti-imn.tiw nb-ȝbḏw m pr.t-ᶜȝ.t mȝȝ nfr=f m wȝg ḥr Wᶜr.t-rḏd.t-ḥtp.t r rᶜ n sbȝ ᶜȝ n hȝkr prr =f ḥr =f r ḥȝb =f n ḏ.t* Giving praise to Osiris Khentiamenti, Lord of Abydos, during the Great Procession; seeing his perfection during the Wag-feast in Waret-redjet-hetepet, at the entrance of the Great Gate during the Haker feast, from which he comes out to his festivals, for the eternity
10	Stele of Amenemhet (Cairo CG 20040)	Amenemhet II; Abydos	overseer of the *šnᶜ*	*sḏm=i ḥnw snik sbi m pri.t sm* *ȝḫ.t(w)=i m-m ȝḫ.w grḥ n hȝkr mȝȝ.w Ḥrw-mḥ.t* *šms=i sw m Ḥr-rs.i dwȝ(.w) Nw.t wr.t ir.t-Rᶜ mȝȝ.w m wr.t iḥ* May I hear their jubilation as the rebel is punished at the procession of the *sem* priest. May I become an Akh among the Akhu-spirits during the night of the Haker feast, when Northern Horus is seen. May I follow him as Southern Horus, when Nut, the Great, is adored, seen as the Greatest of Cows
11	Stele of Amenemhet (BM EA 567)	Amenemhet II; Abydos	overseer of the *šnᶜ*	*sḏm(w)=f ḥnw m rᶜ n tȝ-wr hȝkr grḥ n sḏr,t m sḏr.yt-n.t-Ḥr-Šn* May he hear the jubilation at the gate of the Thinite nome, (during) the Haker feast: the night of the ritual sleep (during) the festival of the ritual sleep performed by Horus-Shen
12	Stele of Sobeknakht (London UC 14385)	12th dyn; Abydos	the item is damaged and the title is lost	*Ỉrỉ-n=i gr.t mᶜḥᶜ.t tn m Tȝ-wr ȝbḏ.w tȝ-ḏsr ȝḫ.t ỉmn.tt [Wᶜr.t-ᶜȝ.t-hm]hm.t sḫtp(.t) ỉb.w ȝḫ.w r rᶜ n sbȝ n hȝkr* I have built this cenotaph in Abydos in the Thinite nome, the sacred land, the western horizon, in Waret-aat-hemhemet, which satisfies the hearts of the blessed spirits at the entrance of the gate during the Haker feast
13	Stele of Djaa (BM EA 573)	Sesostris II; Abydos	hall keeper	*Sḏm(w)=i hn.w m rᶜ n Tȝ-wr hȝkr grḥ n sḏr.t sḏr.yt-n.t{šn} Ḥrw-<šn>* May I hear the jubilation at the gate of the Thinite nome, during the Haker feast, (during) the night of the ritual sleep, the ritual sleep performed by Horus Shen
14	Stele of Inhernacht (BM EA 575)	Sesostris III; Abydos	steward of reckoning barley	*sḏm(w)=i hnw m rᶜ n tȝ-wr grḥ nfr (n) hȝkr* May I hear the jubilation at the gate of the Thinite nome during the beautiful night of the Haker feast
15	Stele of Sehetibra (CG 20538)	Sesostris III; Abydos	hereditary prince; nomarch; deputy of the overseer of sealers	*ỉw ỉrỉ.n =i sȝ-mrỉ=f m sšm n ḫw.t-nbw m sštȝ n nb-ȝbḏw ỉw ḫrp.n=i kȝ.t m nšm.t msỉ-n =i ỉn.w=s ỉrỉ-n=i hȝkr n nb =f pr.t Wpỉ-wȝ.t* I performed the function of "his beloved son" (*sȝ-mrỉ = f*-priest) in the management of the golden house (and) in the mystery of the Lord of Abydos, I supervised the work on the Neschemet bark, (and) I made their ropes. I have celebrated the Haker feast and the procession of Wepwawet for his lord.
16	Stele of Djab (Chicago OIM 6897)	13th dynasty, second half; Abydos	hereditary prince; nomarch; privy to the secrets of the two goddesses	*[i] ṯp.ỉw-tȝ ḫm-nṯr nb shȝ.w nb ḫr-ḫb nb wᶜb nb swȝỉ.ti=sn hȝk{t}<r> m ḥȝb nb n ḫr.t-nṯr* Oh, living people who are on earth! every priest, every scribe, every lector priest, (and) every wab-priest who will enter the Haker feast and every other Festival of the necropolis

Remarkably, all the documents collected in table 4 come from Abydos and date back to a narrow window of time between the 11th and the 13th dynasty. Among these sixteen epigraphic sources, only one is a Letter to the Dead written on a bowl (doc.1); the other fifteen documents, instead, are stelae dedicated to adult men belonging to the elite.

The analysis of the inscriptions highlights that the Haker feast is mainly associated with the following ritual actions:

- *sdr.t*/*sḏr.yt*/ *sḏr.yt n.t-Ḥrw-Šn*/*Šn-Ḥr* (cf. docs. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13), "the ritual sleep" and "the ritual sleep by *Ḥrw-Šn* /in *Šn-Ḥr*

  As mentioned in section 2.6 both the nouns *sḏr.t* and *sḏr.yt* derived from the verb *sḏr* that within the context of the religious beliefs taken into consideration in the present thesis – such as OMR scenes 9 and 10 and the sleeping Tekenu – indicates a special ritual action through which the living could interact with the dead. The epigraphic sources highlight that, during the Haker feast, this kind of ritual action, conventionally translated here as "ritual sleep" , was enacted during the night, as clearly shown by the expressions *grḥ nfr n hꜣkr*, *grḥ sḏr.t* (cf. docs. 5,7,8,10,13,14). Moreover, this ritual sleep appears to be connected to an expression, *Ḥr-Šn*/ *Šn-Ḥr* (cf. docs. 5, 8, 11, 13), whose exact meaning is currently the subject of debate. Most scholars consider *Ḥr-Šn* as a special form of Horus – Horus Shen – even though there is no agreement about what the epithet would actually indicate. According to W. Helck, it could be translated as "Horus the Fighter",[191] other proposed "Horus who is able to conjure with magic",[192] "Horus who encloses"[193], or, as recently posited by H. Altenmüller, "Horus who is wrapped (in the bandages)", which should be intended as a reference to the peculiar garment worn by the *sem* priest in OMR scenes 9 and 10.[194] On the other hand, Z. Végh has recently sustained that this expression would refer to a toponym rather than a theonym and it should thus be transliterated as *Šn-Ḥr*. In support of her position, she cites a restricted number of textual sources in which the god Wepwawet is mentioned as "The lord of *Šn-Ḥr*" (*Wp-wꜣ.wt nb Šn-Ḥr*),[195] and the fact that in Louvre C3 (doc. 5) this expression shows a determinative, more appropriate for a toponym than for a divine name.[196] Specifically, according to Végh, *Šn-Ḥr* was probably indicated the sacred areas surrounding tomb/cenotaph (*mʿḥʿ.t*) of Osiris, in other words, the same location that, starting from the XII dynasty, was denominated *Pḳr*/Poqer.[197]

[191] W. Helck 1952, 74.
[192] C. Leitz 2002, 292b.
[193] W. Barta 1968, 64.
[194] H. Altenmüller 2013, 21-22.
[195] This expression is indeed attested in two VI dynasty stelae from Abydos (Cairo CG 1575, CG 1615), and recurs three times in two el-Hagarsa tombs. Z. Végh 2021, 135.
[196] Z. Végh 2021, 137.
[197] Z. Végh 2021, 138.

Even accepting such a hypothesis, one may wonder if the very etymology of *Šn-Ḥr* as an archaic term denoting the area surrounding Osiris' cenotaph should be linked to a specific mythical episode, and therefore, the term must still be connected to a particular form of Horus. As mentioned above, noteworthy is that some scholars who identified *Ḥr-Šn* as a theonym have rendered the epithet *Šn* as "the one who encloses" or "surrounds", linking it to the verb *šnỉ* (Wb 4, 491.6-493.7; FCD 268). This verb encompasses a broad range of meanings, referring to the action of surrounding something or someone – almost like an embrace or an enclosure around an object or a person – from which, a more specific meaning of "protection" derived.[198] Not by chance, in several passages from both Pyramid and Coffin Texts, this verb is often used to describe certain actions carried out by Horus to defend Osiris.[199] *Šnỉ* also bears some semantic affinity to other verbs, such as *dbn* or *pḫr*, which were used to denote the circumambulation of city walls, monuments, and tombs, typical of several ancient Egyptian rituals, such as the Heb-Sed, or certain phases of the coronation ceremony.[200] See also the incipit of CT 312, where Horus is explicitly asked to enact the ritual circumambulation (*dbn*) around Osiris' tomb,[201] or the circumambulation of the tomb described the Ramesseum Papyrus E.[202]

In the light of these data, even if Vegh's interpretation of *Šn-Ḥr* as a toponym was correct, it still would not preclude a mythological paradigm behind this expression, and one could hypothesise that the term denoted the sacred area around the tomb of Osiris because of a mythical episode in which Horus had to circumambulate his deceased father's tomb. It seems therefore reasonable to posit that the ritual sleep performed within the Haker feast – exactly like the ritual sleep of the *sem* priest in OMR scenes 9 and 10, or the sleeping Tekenu – referred to mythical episode where Horus was able to establish a form of communication with his deceased father, such as *The Contending of Horus and Seth* narrated in P. Chester Beatty I, recto, 14,6-15,8, or the more ancient narration of the divine messenger of Horus described in CT 312. Moreover, as highlighted in section 3.2.1.c, since the divine messenger (*Ỉr.w-Ḥr*) sent by Horus to convey his message to Osiris could be identified with the very Eye of Horus (*ỉr.t-Ḥr*), his journey to the realm of the dead might be interpreted as a kind of oneiric vision

[198] R. Anthes 1961.
[199] See: PT 221; PT 593; PT 560; CT I, 191c.
[200] R. Ritner 1992, 55-58; R. A. Gillam, 2005, 150-153.
[201] See section 3.2.1.c
[202] R.A. Gillam 2005, 52-53.

which allowed a special form of interaction between the living and the dead.[203] Also, the reference to Horus the Northern in Cairo CG 20040 (doc. 10) in connection with the nocturnal rituals enacted during the Haker feast might be cautiously interpreted as another reference to the mythical episode narrated in CT 312, whose events are set in Djedu/Busiris. The Lower Egypt setting would also recall the iconographic theme of the Butic Burial which was closely connected to the scenes depicting the sleeping Tekenu.

- *ꜣḫ* /*ꜣḫ.t* (Cf. docs. 2 and 10)

  The celebration of the Haker feast appears to be somewhat linked to the *ꜣḫ*-spirits and the *sꜣḫ.w* rituals which involved the transformation of the deceased into an *ꜣḫ*.[204] Especially the stele Cairo CG 20040 states the wish by the owner of the monument of becoming an Akh among the Akh-spirits during the night of the Haker feast, when Horus the Northerner is seen (*ꜣḫ.t(w)=i m-m ꜣḫ.w grḥ n hꜣkr mꜣꜣ.w Ḥrw-mḥ.t*). One may cautiously interpret this text as a reference to the mythological episode described in PT 364, where Horus manifest in front of Osiris in the form of an *ꜣḫ*,[205] and CT 312 where it is narrated how the divine messenger of Horus was transmuted into an *ꜣḫ* to convey his message to Osiris.[206]

- *R rˁ n sbꜣ n hꜣkr* (docs. 3, 9, 12); *sḏm hnw m rˁ n tꜣ-wr* (docs. 3, 5, 8, 11, 13, 14)

  The expression *r rˁ n sbꜣ n hꜣkr* – and its slightly different variation occurring in Louvre C 35, *r rˁ n sbꜣ ꜥꜣ n hꜣkr* – have been here translated as "at the entrance of the (great) gate during the Haker feast". For the meaning of *rˁ* as "door", "entrance", see: Wb 2, 390.10-391.13. The preposition "n" has temporal value (Wb 2, 194.7). This translation is not too dissimilar from those already proposed by other scholars,[207] the sentence suggesting that the Haker feast was performed at the entrance of a sacred building.

  The other sentence may be translated as follows: "to hear the jubilation (*hnw*) at the gate (*rˁ*) of the Thinite nome". We have already underlined how the term *rˁ* can be translated as "door". Yet, in this very specific case, scholars have shown divergent opinions. Another possible

[203] See section 3.2.1.c.
[204] J.M. Iskander 2011.
[205] See section 3.1.a.
[206] See section 3.2.1.c.
[207] Spiegel 1973, 145–150; Z. Végh 2021, 189.

translation could be the following: "to hear the jubilation (*hnw*) from the mouth (*rˁ*) of the Thinite nome", suggesting that the dead wishes to hear the jubilations from the mouth of the inhabitants of the Thinite nome, *Ta-wer*, the 8th Upper Egyptian nome where Abydos was located.[208] As for the word *hnw*, here translated as "jubilation", it actually had a more complex meaning, implying not only a gesture or a type of dance, but also a specific recitation technique practiced by ritualists.[209] It is also important to underline that the *hnw*-jubilation often occurs within the Pyramid Texts as an act strictly linked to the status of *mꜣˁ-ḫrw* reached by the deceased king.[210] As stressed by Anthes, since the original meaning of *mꜣˁ-ḫrw* was that of being declared victorious in a legal judgment, with a reference to the mythological episode in which Horus wins the legal dispute against Seth for his paternal legacy, one may wonder if the *hnw*-jubilitation,[211] within this context, must be understood in the light of a certain judgment of the dead that certainly occurred within the Haker-feast (the *ṯnw.t* mentioned in docs. 4 and 8).[212] This interpretation would be an element in favour of the rendering of the term *rˁ* as "gate", since it is well attested that one of the main places in which ancient Egyptian justice was administrated was at the entrance of the sacred building or in the courtyard in front of the temples.[213]

The emphasis on "hearing" (*sḏm*) could indicate that this part of the ceremony had an esoteric connotation: the most of the participants could not directly attend the performance of the ritual, but they were allowed to hear the words spoken by the ritualists in a special public, accessible space outside the temple.[214]

- *ṯnw.t* (cf. docs. 4, 8)

  The term *ṯnw.t*, and other similar words belonging to the semantic sphere of "numbering" or "counting" – such as *ḥsb* or *ỉp* – had a specific juridical meaning, and was used in religious texts to indicate a judgment involving the dead.[215]

[208] For an overview of the possible translations of this sentence see: Z. Végh 2021, 327-328.
[209] O.E. Kaper 2008, 7; G. Zaki 2016, 129.
[210] R. Anthes 1954, 31; Z. Végh 2021, 327.
[211] R. Anthes 1954, 51.
[212] See section 3.3.3.
[213] A. Loktionov 2019, 57 and 78-80.
[214] This hypothesis proposed by in a paper of her (Z. Végh 2015, 268) was subsequently partially rejected by the author (V. Zégh 2021, 327-3289. Yet, in the light of the other data analysed in the present thesis the idea of a ritual with a certain legalistic function officially recognised and performed in front of the gates of sacred buildings, which were the most accessible areas of an ancient Egyptian temple seems quite plausible.
[215] R. Grieshammer 1970, 30-51; see also section 3.3.3.

3.3.2 Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead

The term *hꜣkr* is not attested within the Pyramid Texts and it occurs only in a restricted number of Coffin Texts spells and Book of the Dead chapters.[216] The following section is aimed at analysing these textual sources.

Currently, only two Coffin Texts spells in which the term *hꜣkr* occurs are known: CT spell 338 (CT IV 336 e) and 339 (CT IV 338 g). Both these the texts concern the justification of the deceased in front of a divine trial through the help of the god Thot, who is invoked as *smꜣ.w ḫrw*, "the one who makes (the deceased, or Osiris) justified".[217] Another significant element that unites the two spells is that both basically consist of a list of holy places – such as Busiris, Heliopolis, Abydos – where a judgment of the dead is enacted. CT spells 338 and 339 are not the only religious texts showing these features, CT spell 337 is characterised by a similar structure too, and it has been posited that all three spells would derive from a ritual text, probably a hymn, which had to be chanted by the ritualists during the celebration of the Mysteries at Abydos.[218] Also, CT spell 338 enjoyed a certain favour over centuries, and diverse variants of it have been re-edited in the chapters 18-20 of the Book of the Dead.[219]

According to A. de Buck, spell 338 is known from four sources:

- M8C (Cairo CG 28038), coffin of *Wsr=s-nfr*– Meir, reign of Senusret II/Senusret III.[220]
- M7C (Cairo CG 28037), coffin of *Wsr=s-nfr* – Meir, reign of Senusret II/Senusret III.[221]
- T1BE (Berlin 9) outer coffin of *Mnṯw-ḥtp* – Thebes, late 12th dynasty.[222]
- T2BE (Berlin 10) inner coffin of *Mnṯw-ḥtp* – Thebes, late 12th dynasty.[223]

However, the Haker feast is attested only in the version of the spell copied on T2BE (CT IV 336 e).[224]

[216] Z. Végh 2021, 334-336.
[217] R. Anthes 1954, 25.
[218] Z. Végh 2017, 520-521.
[219] Z. Végh 2017, 520-521; Z. Végh 2021, 334-336.
[220] Both coffin M8C and M7C probably belonged to the same individual. Cf. L. Díaz-Iglesias 2017, 38 and note 126; H. Willems 1988, 25, and 100; H. Willems 2014, 266–267.
[221] See previous note.
[222] Both coffin T1BE and T2BE belonged to the same individual. Cf. L. Díaz-Iglesias 2017, 84 and note 276; H. Willems 2014, p. 172 and note 159.
[223] See previous note.
[224] T1BE, which belonged to the same owner of owner of T2BE, probably mentioned the Haker feast as well, but due a lacuna it is impossible to verify this.

Spell 338 according to T2Be

|335 a| *ỉ Ḏḥwty sm3ʿ.w {f} ḫrw Wsỉr r ḫfty.w […]=f ỉ Wsỉr N {s}* **|b|** *sm3ʿw=f ḫrw=f r ḫfty.w=f* **|d|** *m ḏ3ḏ3.t ʿ3.t ỉmy.wt Ḏdw* **|e|** *grḥ pf n n sʿḥʿ ḏd.wy m 3bḏw* **|f|** *m ḏ3ḏ3.t ʿ3.t ỉmy.wt ỉwnw grḥ pf n ʿḥ3 n sḫr.t sbyw [=f]* **|336 a|** *m ḏ3ḏ3.t ʿ3.t ỉmy.wt Ḫm grḥ pf n ỉḥ.t ḫ3wỉ* **|b|** *m ḏ3ḏ3.t ʿ3.t ỉmy.wt Dp grḥ pf n smn.t ỉwʿ.t n Ḥr m ḥ.t ỉt=f* **|e|** *m ḏ3ḏ3.t ʿ3.t ỉmy.wt 3bḏw grḥ pf n ỉr.t h3kr m ỉwnw ḥsb mwt 3ḫ* **|337 a|** *w3.wt mwt.w grḥ pf n ỉr.t sỉp.t m ỉwty sw* **|b|** *ḫbs t3 ʿ3* **|c|** *N3-ỉr=f*

|335 a| Oh Thot, The one who has made **(1)** Osiris true of voice[1] against his enemies […] Oh Osiris N **|b|** May he declare true his voice against his enemies: **|d|** in the great court which is in Busiris (Djedu); **|e|** on that night of erecting the two Djed-pillars at Abydos;**|f|** in the great tribunal which is in On (Heliopolis), on that night of fighting and felling the rebels; **|336 a|** in the great tribunal which is in Khem (Letopolis) on that night of the evening meal **(2)**; **|b|** in the great tribunal which is in Dep, on that night of confirming the inheritance of Horus for the possession of his father **(3)**; **|e|** in the great tribunal which is in Abydos, on that night of enacting the Haker feast at On (Heliopolis), the festival of numbering the dead and the Akhu-spirits; **(4)** **|337 a|** the paths of the dead, on that night of making the counting of those who have nothing **(5)**; **|b|** the great hacking of the land **(6)** **|c|** of Naref.

Notes

1. The verb *sm3ʿ ḫrw* is a causative from *m3ʿ ḫrw*; the whole sentence should be understood as the fact that Toth causes that Osiris (and therefore the deceased) is justified in front of his enemies. Originally, the meaning of the term *m3ʿ ḫrw,* was that of being declared right in front a legal court. See: R. Anthes 1954, 22, 25, and 50.

2. The designation *ỉḥ.t-ḫ3wỉ* (Wb 1, 125.5) literally means "night offering". First attestations occur during the 5th dynasty in elite Old Kingdom mastabas and subsequently in the Pyramid Texts. It probably designed a temple ritual performed every evening. This celebration did not occur just in Letopolis, other sources testify that it was also enacted in Abydos (Z. Végh 2017, 531-532).

3. The other testimonies mention both Pe and Dep. Probably, a scribal error occurred.

4. The presence of Heliopolis in this passage could be due to a scribal error. Currently there are no other sources testifying the celebration of the Haker feast at Heliopolis (Z. Végh 2017, 539).

5. The other testimonies contain a different version: *ḏ𓂝ḏ𓂝.t ỉmy.t w𓅱.wt mwt.w grḥ pf n ỉr.t sỉpty m ỉwty.w sw*, "The tribunal which is in the paths of the dead on that night of making the counting of those who have nothing.

6. T2b2 differs significantly from the other testimonies and contains the following sentences: |337a| *ḏ𓂝ḏ𓂝.t ỉmy.t ḫbs t𓏏 ꜥ𓏏*, "The tribunal which is in the great hacking of the land"; |337 b| *ḏ𓂝ḏ𓂝.t ỉmy.t N𓏏-ỉr=f*, "the tribunal which is in Naref". With regard to *ḫbs t𓏏*, "hacking up the earth", this expression is already attested within the Pyramid Texts (cf. PT 398). It has been stated that this term referred to an agricultural ritual linked to the god Osiris and his burial. However, the expression *ḫbs-t𓏏* is often associated also to the offerings of slaughtered animals, which were identified with the enemies of Osiris defeated by Horus; it is probably for this reason that the ritual is also associated to the judgment of the dead, as in the text analysed here. The *ḫbs t𓏏* -ritual was probably celebrated in different holy cities, such as Heliopolis or Herakleopolis. It was also linked to the Sokar-festival (J. Assmann 2005, 281-284;). With regard to Naref, this was a sacred place, perhaps located in Herakleopolis, where certain relics of Osiris were kept. According to Díaz-Iglesias Llamos, Naref must be eminently understood as a mythical toponym linked to different episodes of the Osiris myth, such as the god's burial, the safeguarding of his corpse or relics, his justification, and the restoration of his royal power (Z. Végh 2017, 543-545; Díaz-Iglesias Llamos 2017, 181).

Spell 339 according to B5c

According to A. de Buck Coffin Texts edition, spell 339 is known only from one source, B5c (Cairo CG 28083/ JE 37566). This is an inner coffin from Deir el-Bersha belonging to a man called *Ḏḥwty-ḥtp*, who lived between the reigns of Senusret II and Senusret III.[225]

|338 a| *ỉ Ḏḥwty smꜣꜥ(.w) ḫrw Wsỉr ḫft(y).w=f m ḏꜣḏꜣ.t n.t* **|b|** *ỉwnw hrw pw n ỉwꜥ ns.wt ỉdb.wy n Gb nb ỉrỉ* **|c|** *Ḏdw hrw pw n rd.t wḏꜣ.t n nb=s* **|d|** *P Dpw hrw pw ny ḥꜥḳ ỉꜣkb.wt* **|e|** *Ḫm hrw pw n ỉḥ.t ḫꜣwỉ m Ḫm* **|f|** *Rꜥ-stꜣ.w hrw pw n ỉp ꜥšꜣ.wt sꜥḥꜥ sn.wy* **|g|** *ꜣbḏw hrw pw n hꜣkr m šr ṯnw.t mwt.w m ỉp ỉwty.w sw* **|h|** *Nn-n-sw.t hrw pw n ḫbs tꜣ n sštꜣ tꜣ Nꜣ{r}-r=f* **|i|** *ỉsṯ ḫrw Ḥr mꜣꜥ=f ỉtr.ty ḥtp.ty ḥr=s* **|j|** *Wsỉr ỉb=f nḏm(.w)* **|k|** *ỉn ḥm Ḏḥwty smꜣw=f ḫrw=ỉ r ḫfty.w=ỉ m-m ḏꜣḏꜣ.t n.t Wsỉr* **|l|** *ỉr rḫw nn ỉw=f ỉr=f ḫpr.w m bỉk sꜣ Rꜥ* **|m|** *[ỉr] [r]ḫw nb nn tpy […]=f n ḥtm-n=f bꜣ=f r nḥḥ* **|339 a|** *ḥtmw ḫfty ỉpw ỉw=f wnmw t m pr Wsỉr* **|*b*|** *ỉw=f ꜥḳ=f r ḥw.t nṯr n.t […] mnḫ* **|c|** *ỉw […] ꜣw.t […]* **|d|** *n wnm-n=f ḥs.t […]*

|338 a| O Thot, the one who has made **(1)** Osiris true of voice against his enemies in the court **(2)** of: **|b|** On (Heliopolis), on the day of inheriting the thrones of the two banks from Geb, (who is) the lord over it **(3)**; **|c|** Djedu (Busiris), on the day of "presenting the Wedjat-eye to its lord" **(4)**; |d| Pe and Dep, on the day of "the shaving of the female mourners" **(5)**; **|e|** Khem (Letopolis), on the day of the evening meal in Khem **(6); |f|** Rosetau, on the day of counting the multitudes and erecting the two poles **(7)**; **|g|** Abydos, on the day of "the Haker feast at the pool" and "the numbering of the dead and the reckoning those who have nothing **(8)**" **|h|** Ninsu (Herakleopolis Magna), on the day of hacking the earth and making secret the earth in Naref **(9) |i|** Behold the voice of Horus! it is true (and) the two conclaves are satisfied about it. **|j|** (As for) Osiris, his hearth is glad! **|k|** Thoth is indeed the one who will vindicate me against my enemies in front of the tribunal of Osiris **|l|** As for the one who knows this, he will be able to transform (himself) into a falcon, the son of Ra. **|m|** As for whoever knows this […], neither him or his Ba will ever be destroyed. **|339 a|** His enemies will disappear, while he will eat bread in the house of Osiris. |b| He will enter the temple of […] capable **|c|** […] offerings […] **|d|** He does not eat faeces.

[225] L. Díaz-Iglesias 2017, 56; H. Willems 1988, 20, and 77–78; H. Willems 2014, 246–247.

Notes

1. cf. note n. 1 CT spell 338.

2. Horus inheriting the throne of Geb is a recurrent theme in the Egyptian mythology and it is strongly connected with the topic of Horus who vindicates his father against Seth. See: H. Frankfort 1984, 181-183.

3. This can be a reference to the mythical episode narrated in PT 364, which shows significant common traits with OMR scene 10. Here it is said that Horus gave his eye to Osiris in order to make latter powerful against his enemies. As mentioned above, this mythical theme also plays a role within CT spell 312, since the messenger sent by Horus to reach Osiris in the netherworld could be considered as a manifestation of the Eye of Horus. See section 3.2.1.c.

4. The female mourners could be identified with Isis and Nephthys. The action of cutting the hair to donate some locks to the deceased was a ritual action enacted by the two professional female mourners who played the role of Isis and Nephthys within the funerary rites. See: G. Robins 1999, 67-68.

5. For the "evening meal in Letopolis" cf. note n. 2, CT spell 338.

6. The Rosetau is to be identified with the Saqqara's necropolis or with a specific area of the latter. cf. A. el-Kholy 1999, 45-50. Remarkably, it seems that the action of "counting the dead" characterising the Haker festival was enacted also within this site.

7. As already observed, the action of counting/numbering/reckoning the dead is a characteristic feature of Haker feast and other similar ceremonies (cf. previous note). The action of "counting" within this context is to be understood as a synonym for "judging". See: R. Grieshammer 1970, 30-51.

8. The expression *sšt3 t3* may refer to the embalming ritual performing for the god Osiris. (cf. L. Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2017, 57-59). Regarding Naref and the *ḫbs-t3* ritual see note n. 6 under CT spell 338.

Book of the Dead Chapters 18-20 and 145

As mentioned above, CT spell 338 was reshaped and re-edited in the Book of the Dead chapters 18-20.[226] For the purpose of the present work, this group of spells does not add further information concerning the Haker feast. A partial exception is constituted by BD chapter 18, which is characterised by a series of glosses aimed at explaining the mythological background of the rituals mentioned, and the identity of the gods who were part of the various *ḏ𓂝ḏ𓂝.t* mentioned in the text. Therefore, only the passage in which the term *h𓂝kr* occurs within chapter 18, gloss included, will be analysed. Specifically, the source considered here is BD chapter 18 according to P. London BM EA 10477 [227] (Papyrus Nu):

|17| *ỉ Ḏḥwtỉ sm𓂝ꜥ(.w) ḫrw Wsỉr r ḫftỉ.w=f sm𓂝ꜥ ḫrw NN m𓂝ꜥ ḫrw* **|18|** *r ḫftỉ.w=f m ḏ𓂝ḏ𓂝.t ꜥ𓂝.t ỉm.t 𓂝bḏ.w grḥ pw [n] [h]𓂝kr m ṯnỉ.t [mt].w* **|19|** *m ỉp 𓂝ḥ.w m ḫpr ỉb(𓂝)w m ṯnỉ ỉr ḏ𓂝ḏ𓂝.t ꜥ𓂝.t ỉmỉ.t (𓂝bḏw) Wsỉr* **[20]** *pw 𓂝s.t pw Wpỉ-w𓂝.wt pw*

|17| Oh Thot! The one who makes Osiris true of voice against his enemies, make this deceased true of voice **|18|** against his enemies in the great court which is in Abydos, in that night of the Haker feast, during the numbering of the dead **|19|** and the counting of the Akhu-spirits, while the ibau-dance occurs at Thinis. As for (the members of) **(1**) the great court in Abydos, they are Osiris, **|20|** Isis and Wepwawet.

Notes

1. The term *ḏ𓂝ḏ𓂝.t* is usually translated as "court" or "tribunal". Yet, recent studies have shown that the term indicated the group of persons belonging to the council, rather than the physical place where the court met. See A. Philippe-Stephan 2008, pp. 9-11.

[226] Z. Végh 2017, 521.
[227] G. Lapp 1997, Pl. 9-11.

As mentioned above, the Haker feast is also attested within BD 145 and a shorter variation of the latter, BD 146. These two chapters consist of a list of demons' secret names, which the deceased is required to know in order to cross the twenty-one portals of the netherworld. Specifically, the Haker feast appears in the long name of a female demonic entity, as attested in BD 145 according to P. London BM EA 10477[228] (Papyrus Nu):

> **|58|** *nb.t dndn ḫbi.t ḥr dšr.w irr.w<t> n=s hꜣ{i}kr hrw n sḏm* **|59|** *iw rn=ṯ*
>
> **|58|** "The Mistress of Wrath, the one who dances on the blood, and for whom the Haker feast is held on the day of the hearing the complaints" is your name.

3.3.3 Which kind of judgment of the dead?

The analysis of the sources has shown that the Haker feast was characterised by a ritual action denominated "the counting (*ip, sip, ḥsb, ṯn*) of the dead". As highlighted by previous studies, the terms belonging to the semantic sphere of "counting", or "numbering" had a specific juridical meaning in the ancient Egyptian language and can be synonymous with "judging".[229] Although the ritual of "counting the dead" was certainly a foremost event of the Haker feast, it must be underlined that the same ritual action also occurred in other similar ceremonies. In one of the texts analysed above, CT IV 338f [spell 339] it is said that a ritual focused on "the counting of the multitude" (*ip ꜥšꜣ.wt s*) was performed at the necropolis of Saqqara (Rosetau), while in CT IV 337 e [spell 338] a similar ritual is said to be held in Naref. Moreover, the verb *ip* is often used within the Pyramid Texts with a rather similar meaning; [230] especially in PT 535 (Pyr. 1287) it is said that Anubis is "the one who count the hearts", in a context where the term clearly indicates a judgment (and a punishment) of the followers of Seth who hindered the ascension to the throne of Horus.

When one speaks about the judgment of the dead in Ancient Egypt, the first image that comes to mind is the so-called *psychostasia* described in chapter 125 of Book of the Dead, where the heart of the deceased is weighted on a scale to verify if he had a correct conduct in life. Yet, it must be said that ancient Egyptian sources also testify to another kind of judgment involving the dead, probably of

[228] G. Lapp 1997, Pl. 73.
[229] R. Grieshammer 1970, 30-51
[230] PT 218, Pyr. 161b; PT 217, Pyr.157 b-v; PT 215, Pyr. 155 b-c.

much older origin.[231] The latter was structured as a ritual action during which both the deceased and the living could communicate with each other. According to the Appeals to the Living, for example, the dead can threaten their descendants if they did not behave correctly, and drag them into a court to be judged in front of the Great God.[232] For example, an inscription from the chapel of Ankhmahor at Saqqara[233] (dating to the reigns of Teti and Pepi I) reads:

> **|4|***[ỉr rmṯ] nb ꜥḳ.tỉ=sn r ỉs pn m ꜥbw=sn wnm=sn bww.t* **|5|***bwỉ.t n ꜣḫ ỉḳr n wꜥb =sn n<=ỉ> mỉ wꜥb=sn n ꜣḫ ỉḳr ỉrr ḥss.t nb=f* |5|*ỉw=ỉ r ỉṯỉ.t ṯs=f mỉ ꜣpd <w>dy <=ỉ> snḏ=sn n ꜣḫ ỉḳr ỉrr ḥss.t nb=f* **|6|***[ỉw(=ỉ) r ỉṯỉ.t ṯꜣs]=f mỉ ꜣpd wdỉ<=ỉ> snḏ<=ỉ> ỉm=f r mꜣꜣ ꜣḫ.w tpỉw-tꜣ snḏ=sn n ꜣḫ ỉḳr* **|7|** *ỉw(=ỉ) r wḏꜥ ḥnꜥ=f m ḏꜣḏꜣ.t tf šps.t n.t nṯr ꜥ ỉr swt s nb ꜥḳ.tỉ=fỉ* **|8|** *r ỉs pn wꜥb.w ḥtp(=ỉ) ḥr=f ỉw<=ỉ> r wnn m ḥꜥỉ=f m ḫr.t-nṯr m ḏꜣḏꜣ.t n.t nṯr ꜥ.*

> **|4|**Concerning all the people who shall enter into this tomb with their impurity, and who have eaten the abominations **|5|** [that] an Akh Iqer abominates and who have not purified themselves for me as they have to purify themselves for an Akh Iqer who habitually do what his lord praises, **|6|** [I will grab] his[neck] like a bird, striking fear of me into him in order that the Akhu and those who are upon earth might see and might fear an Akh Iqer. **|7|** [I will be] judged with him in that noble court of the great god. However, concerning the man who shall enter **|8|** [into this tomb] purified and I will be satisfied because of him, I will be his defender in the necropolis in the court of the great god.

Similar beliefs are also attested in the Coffin Texts.[234] Especially H. Willems highlighted how one of the spells denominated by him "without mythology, CT 149 (which show several similarities with the aforementioned CT 312), describes the resolution of a legal dispute between two rival kin-groups, in which the deceased family members plays a foremost role.[235] CT 149 not only resembles certain excerpts from the so-called Letters to the Dead – where the deceased recipient is asked to settle a legal dispute – but it can also be posited that this spell was actually meant to be part of the liturgy used during the ritual deposition of these documents.[236] In this regard, E.F. Wente has pointed out that the original function of CT spell 149 was probably that of being used by a living person to ask

[231] H. Willems 1988, 148; J. Assmann 2005, 73 and ff.
[232] S.B. Shubert 2007, documents: OK 2; OK 5a; OK 9; OK 18; OK 19; OK 31; MK 12.
[233] A.H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, Pl. X.
[234] H. Willems 2014, 186-187.
[235] H. Willems 2001, 353-354; H. Willems 2014, 186.
[236] H. Willems 2001, 353-354; I. Regulski 2020, 330-331. See also chapter 4, section 4.1.

for the supernatural help of his deceased father in the context of an actual legal procedure.[237] Even more interesting is that a passage from CT 149 explicitly mention a ritual sleep (*sḏr-n=i*) performed within the necropolis in connection with this legal settlement involving both the living and the dead.[238]

Several sources seem to suggest that a judgment was actually enacted during the funerals. In a 12th dynasty tomb, TT 60, the captions related to a scene depicting a pilgrimage to an Holy City, perhaps Sais, refer to a ritual called *hsb.t ꜣḫ.w,* "the counting of the surplus" , enacted at the entrance of a sacred place called *wr.yt*, probably to be identified with the embalming place.[239] In this regard, an analysis conducted by Harco Willems on the occurrence of the expression *hsb.t ꜣḫ.w* within the Coffin Texts has shown that this ritual was indeed performed immediately after the conclusion of the embalming process, during the night preceding the procession of the deceased to his tomb.[240] The actual enactment of this ritualised judgment of the dead within the funerals is also attested during later historical phases. According to Elsa Oréal, the ceremony was certainly performed during the New Kingdom, while Joachim Quack has found explicit reference to it in P. Insinger, datable to the 2nd century CE.[241] A ritualised judgment of the dead is also described by Diodorus of Sicily, who records that – after the embalming rites, but before the burial – the mummy was subjected to a public judgment in front of forty-nine judges, and that during this trial, the participants were allowed to come forward and accuse the deceased.[242]

In BD 145, the Haker feast is associated with another ritual action, *hrw n sḏm ỉw*. The rendering of the word *ỉw* within this sentence poses some problems. Several scholars, based on an interpretation given by J.J. Clère, translated the term as "sin", "fault".[243] The phrase would thus testify to a practice similar to the remission of sins typical of some Christian traditions, "the day of hearing the sins". On the other hand, in a recent analysis made by Z. Végh, [244] it has been highlighted how the word *ỉw* may be intended in a different way. The term appears to be linked to a verb (Wb I, 48) whose meaning is

[237] E.F. Wente 2017.
[238] CT II, 233c–234a [149]. See also: Z. Végh 2021, 336.
[239] No. de Garis Davies, A. H. Gardiner, Ni. De Garis Davies 1920, Pl. XVIII ; H. Willems 1988, 147-148.
[240] H. Willems 1998, 148-149.
[241] J.F. Quack 1999, 27-38.
[242] Diodorus of Sicily, *The Library of History* I, 92. For the English translation see: E. Murphy 1990, 313-317.
[243] J.J. Clère 1930, 447 and ff.
[244] Z. Végh 2015, 270-271; Z. Végh 2021, 333.

"to complain". The noun *ỉw*, therefore, would not indicate a moral evil, but an effective problem, a complaint or an outcry about something that ails someone.

This phrase occurs also in other documents, remarkably always in connection with the Mysteries of Abydos. In a stele belonging to a general called Antef, [245] dated to the reign of Montuhotep II, the sentence is associated with a celebration of a *ḥsb.t ꜥ.w* occurring during the Mysteries, which can therefore be identified as a different name to indicate the "counting of the dead" or a rather similar ritual:

> **Lines 6-7** *ḫrw=f mꜣꜥ m ḥsb.t ꜥ.w ḏd=k ỉw=k dr-tw=f n=k m ḏd.t nb.t*
>
> May his voice be found true at the reckoning of the surplus. Tell what is ailing you (*ḏd=k ỉw=k*) and it will be removed from you, with all you will say.

H. Willems identified a very similar sentence within Coffin Text spell 37,[246] yet the translation he proposed might be revisited in the light of the different meaning of the word *ỉw* posited by both me and Z. Végh:

CT I, 147g-148a [37]:

> *ḏd=k ỉw=k ỉ-dr.tw=f ỉrỉ.tw ḫ.t ḫtf ḏd.t=k nb.t*
>
> May you tell what is ailing you (*ḏd=k ỉw=k*) and it will be removed from you. This will be done in accordance with all you will say.

From the textual sources analysed here one can infer that the deceased were able to voice certain problems that plagued them in the context of a ritualised judgment, which was denominated "the counting of the dead", or "the counting of the surplus". This ritualised judgment was also enacted within elite funerary rites, being performed the night preceding the inhumation of the deceased. The mythical paradigm behind this ceremony is to be identified in the dispute between Horus and Seth

[245] Kopenhagen AEIN 963; J. J. Clère 1930, 447; L. Manniche 2004, 77-80, and fig. 29; H. Willems 2001, 323.
[246] H. Willems 2001, 323.

for the throne of Egypt, which according to the myth was solved by a divine court decision in favour of Horus.[247]

In the context of elite funerals this ritualised judgment had the specific function of restoring the social role of the deceased in the post-mortem sphere [248] and, consequently, to validate the current social position of his legitimate heir according to the mythical model of the vindication of Horus against Seth. On the other hand, the reshaping of this ritual in the context of the Mysteries, a festival patronised by the crown, reasonably entailed a more complex purpose, which has to be understood in the light of royal ideology.

3.3.4 What did it mean to be a ritualist for the funeral of a god?

Given that the celebration of the Mysteries was conceived as a funeral for the god Osiris, it is not surprising to find a number of affinities between this festival and the elite funerary rituals. In this regard, it is interesting that in one of the Middle Kingdom stelae mentioning the Haker feast twice, München Gl. WAF 35 (doc. 8), dedicated to a man called Wepwawet-aa, another ritual action – not necessarily linked to the Haker feast but certainly part of the Mysteries of Osiris in Abydos – concerning some *msḳ3.w*-skins is described:

> *sḫntỉ(.w) ḥms.t =ỉ nb.t* **|19|** *r ỉt.w =ỉ ḫpr(.w) ḫr-ḥ3.t dỉ.n ḥm =f sft =ỉ ỉw3.w m ḥw.t-nṯr n.t* **|20|** *Wsỉr-ḫntỉ-ỉmn.tỉw m t3-wr 3bḏ.w* **|21|** *pr-n n-ḥr<=ỉ> msḳ3.w ỉr m ḥ3.t n* **|22|** *ḥss wỉ ḥm =f r ḥ3.tỉ-ḥ nb ḫpr ỉm***|23|***=s ḏr p3w.t=s*
>
> All my ranks have been advanced |19| over (those of) my ancestors who had been before. His majesty granted me to slaughter oxen in the temple of |20| Osiris Khentiamenti at Abydos, in the Thinite nome |21| and (their) skins (placed) over me come forth (in procession), because |22| so greatly his majesty favoured me over every count who had been there |23| since its beginning.

In the sentence of line 21, *pr-n n-ḥr<=ỉ> msḳ3.w*, the verb *pr-n* has been considered by K. Sethe as a "unpersönliche *sḏm=f*" and the meaning he attributed to the sentence would be that Wepwawet-aa

[247] H. Willems 1988, 148.
[248] J. Assmann 2005, 282-283.

has benefited economically from the *msḳ3*-skins.[249] Hence the translations proposed by M. Lichtheim – "There accrued to me (income) from their hides" – and R. Landgráfová – "and (income) came to me from their skins".[250] On the other hand, since this sentence shows a certain resemblance to some of the Tekenu captions previously analysed,[251] another rendering would be possible: to consider *pr-n* as a *sḏm-n=f,* the subject being *msḳ3.w*. In this case the translation would be "and the *msḳ3*-skins over me come forth". Indeed, if one analyses the whole passage, the text seems more focused on the validation of the social status (see lines 18-19: *sḫntỉ(.w) ḥms.t=ỉ nb.t r ỉt.w=ỉ),* rather than on economic issues. Noteworthy is, in this regard, that a term certainly derived from the verb *tkn* is sometimes attested as a title to indicate the privilege possessed by certain elite members of being "near the king".[252]

As has been detailed in the previous sections, acting as a ritualist within the context of certain funerary or mortuary rituals – such as the OMR or the Tekenu ceremony – was something that entailed the possibility to succeed the deceased in his social role. In other words, it was a way to officially validate the new legitimate social role reached by the heir. The question to ask therefore is: what was involved in taking on the role of ritualist during a funerary rite enacted for the god Osiris? In two of the stelae listed in table 4, the persons to whom the monuments are dedicated report to have performed the role of *s3-mr=f* during the Mysteries:

Montuhotep stele CG 20539 (II, b, 6 -II, b, 7):[253]

ỉr-n=ỉ gr.t mᶜḥᶜ.t tn s3ḥ.tỉ smnḫ(.w) s.t=s rdỉ-n=ỉ ḥtm.wt ḏb3.w n ḥm.w-nṯr n 3bḏw ḫrp-n=ỉ k3.t m ḥw.t-nṯr tn ḫws.t m ỉn(r) n ᶜnw ỉw ỉrỉ-n ỉ s3-mr(.y)=f m [sšm] [n] [ḥw.t-nbw] m sš[t3] n nb-3bḏw ỉw ḫrp-n=ỉ k3.t m nšm.t msỉ-n=(ỉ) ỉnỉ.w=s ỉrỉ-n=ỉ h3kr n nb=f pr.t Wp-w3.wt

I fully consecrated this cenotaph and its site has been embellished. Then, I have made contracts for the compensations of the priests in Abydos. I directed

[249] K. H. Sethe 1927, 113.
[250] M. Lichtheim 1988, 79-80; R. Landgráfová 2011, 165-166.
[251] See in particular the caption in TT 11: mzkA n-Hr=f zfx (chapter 3, section 3.2.1.b, document 18).
[252] See for example: Stele of Antef (MMA 57.95) lines 6-7 (R. Landgráfová 2011, 28-31); Stele of Nes-montu (Louvre C1), line A5 (R. Landgráfová 2011, 107-111).
[253] R. Landgráfová 2011, 167-179.

the work in this temple, (which was) built of the stone of Turah. I acted as "his beloved son" (*sꜣ-mrỉ=f*-priest) in the management of the House of Gold (and) in the Mysteries for the Lord of Abydos, I supervised the work on the Neshemet-bark, (and) I made its ropes, I have celebrated the Haker feast and the procession of Wepwawet for his lord.

A rather similar text also occurs in the stele of Sehetepibra CG 20538 (lines II, C, 2 - II C, 5):[254]

ỉr-n=ỉ gr.t mᶜḥᶜ.t ṯn sꜣḫ.tỉ smnḫ(.w) s.t=s rdỉ-n=ỉ ḫtm.t ḏbꜣ.w n ḥm.w-nṯr n ꜣbḏw ỉw ỉrỉ.n =ỉ sꜣ-mrỉ=f m sšm n ḥw.t-nbw m sštꜣ n nb-ꜣbḏw ỉw ḫrp-n=ỉ kꜣ.t m nšm.t msỉ-n=ỉ ỉnỉ.w=s ỉrỉ-n=ỉ hꜣkr n nb=f pr.wt Wpỉ-wꜣ.wt ỉr-n=f ḥ(ꜣ)b.yt nb.t šdỉ(.t) n ḥm.w-nṯr

I fully consecrated this cenotaph and its site has been embellished. Then, I made contracts for the compensation of the priests in Abydos. I acted as "his beloved son" in the management of the House of Gold and in the Mysteries for the Lord of Abydos. I supervised the work for the Neshemet-bark, and I made its ropes. I celebrated the Haker feast for his Lord and the procession of Wepwawet: every offering ritual has been celebrated for him and recited by the priests.

The same sentence is also attested in another Middle Kingdom monument from Abydos, The stele of Ikhernofret, Berlin 1204 (11-14):[255]

ỉw ỉr-n=ỉ sꜣ-mrỉ=f n Wsỉr-ḫnt.ỉ-ỉmn.tỉw smnḫ-n =ỉ wỉᶜ=f(?) wr n nḥḥ ḥnᶜ ḏ.t ỉr-n=ỉ n=f ḳnỉ.w wṯs-nfr.w-ḫntỉ-ỉmn.tỉw m nbw ḥḏ ḫsbd ḥsmn ssnḏm mrw ms(.w) nṯr.w ỉm.ỉw-ḫt=f ỉr(.w) kꜣr.w=sn m-mꜣw.t

[254] R. Landgráfová 2011, 219-225.
[255] M. Lichtheim 1988, 98-100; R. - R. Landgráfová 2011, 204-207.

> I acted as his beloved son (*s3-mr=f*) for Osiris Khentiamenti. I provided his great image[256] with eternity and everlastingness. I made for him the "palanquin which carries the beauty of Khentiamenti" in gold, silver, lapis lazuli, bronze, amethyst, tamarisk and Lebanese cedar wood. The gods who follow him were fashioned and their shrines were made anew.

Before analysing the three documents, it is necessary to dwell on the exact function held by the *s3-mr=f* ritualist. Based on New Kingdom and later sources pertaining to the OMR, the *s3-mr=f* seems to have had a function similar to that of the *sem* priest, and it is quite plausible that both the roles were held by the same person.[257] The expression *s3-mr=f* can be literally translated with "his beloved son" and – as can be easily deduced from some excerpts of the Pyramid Texts[258] – it is a reference to the role played by Horus in the Osiris myth.

The most ancient sources in which this expression is clearly used as a title to indicate a kind of ritualist are the three documents analysed here.[259] Given that all the individuals to whom the three stelae are dedicated declare that they were involved in work constructions to embellish Abydos, it has also been hypothesised that, during the Middle Kingdom, the title *s3-mr=f* indicated a specific office pertaining to both the direction of the works for the construction of the sacred buildings, and the direction of the sacred ceremonies enacted in the House of Gold located in certain holy cities, like Abydos.[260] In the scientific literature it is generally accepted that the pharaoh was virtually considered as the only human being capable of mediating between the human and divine spheres[261] but it has also been pointed out how this commonly accepted axiom can be challenged and it is more articulated than it might seem at first sight.[262] Nonetheless, it is well attested that prominent members of the elite could assume religious offices[263] and, indeed, the texts analysed here clearly show how a prominent individual could be endowed by the king with special powers which enabled him to act as one of the main ritualists within the context of the Mysteries of Abydos. Yet, in view of the religious facts taken into account in the present work, this custom can be interpreted within a broader framework.

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[256] "Sethe's restoration *wi3.f wr,* "his great bark", was rightly questioned by Anthes, […] The illegible noun must have been a word for the cult statue of Osiris". See. M. Lichtheim 1988, 100 and note 3.
[257] E. Otto 1960, Vol. II, 13; M. Smith 1993, 15.
[258] PT 510 and PT 540.
[259] E. Schott 1984, 269 and ff.
[260] E. Schott 1984, 269 and ff.
[261] H. M. Hays 2009, 15-30.
[262] J. Baines 2021, 73-97; J. Troche 2021, 47 and ff.
[263] T. Hare 1999, 39-40; J. Baines 2021, 73-97.

As mentioned above, taking care of the burial and the mortuary cult of the deceased was an essential perquisite not only to claim the inheritance, but also to succeed in the social role of the late person. Within the context of elite funerary and mortuary rites this meant that the designed heir effectively became the new chief of the extended family, whose duty was also that of managing the family assets. In this regard, it is certainly remarkable that Montuhotep, Sehetibra, and Ikhernofret held the same office, that of *ỉmy-rꜣ-ḫtm.t*, literally "overseer of the sealed things", but usually translated as "overseer of the treasury"; furthermore, both Montuhotep and Ikhernofret were also "overseers of the double house of silver and gold (*ỉmy-rꜣ pr.wy nbw, ỉm.ỉ-rˁ-pr.wy ḥḏ*). Since these kinds of offices pertained to the administration of state assets,[264] it could be posited a parallel between the funerary rituals and the celebration of the Mysteries. While acting as a main ritualist during the funerals of an elite member was a way to be officially recognised as the legitimate heir of the deceased, being the main ritualist during the enactment of the Mysteries of Osiris was a way through which the royal crown formally recognised the social role of certain elite members as state officials.[265]

Several Middle Kingdom documents from Abydos highlight how this peculiar mechanic not only was used to formalise the relationship between the king and his high dignitaries, but also the relationship between the high dignitaries and their subordinates. Indeed, on a number of stelae the subordinates of the overseers of treasures are often depicted while acting as the *sem* priest of the latter.[266] It can therefore be stated that the typical mechanics of the Egyptian ancestor worship, based on the divine paradigm of the relationship between Horus and Osiris, were used as a model to reinforce and justify the most significant social relationships within the Egyptian state.

3.3.5 The Haker feast: summary and conclusions

The Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos were an annual celebration during which the death, the burial and the restoration to life of the god Osiris were performed, by re-enacting the main phases of an elite funerary ritual.

Based on the sources analysed here, the Haker feast was a nocturnal ceremony, characterised by:

- A ritual sleep, *sḏr.yt*/*sḏr.t*, a ceremony that shows strong resemblances to both OMR scenes 9 and 10 and the ritual of the sleeping Tekenu;

[264] S. Desplancques 2003, 27; S. Desplancques 2001, 128.
[265] D. Franke 2003, 70-73; E. Frood 2003, 73-75.
[266] D. Franke 2003, 73-75.

- A judgment of the dead – called "the counting of the dead" – during which the deceased were able to voice certain problems that plagued them. This ceremony finds a parallel in a similar ritual performed during elite funerals denominated *ḥsb.t ꜣꜥ.w*;

Also, interesting is that during the Mysteries of Osiris another ceremony involving some *mskꜣ*-skins, which shows some affinities with the removal of the hide from the Tekenu, was probably enacted. The oldest attestation pertaining to the Haker feast dates back to the final part of the 11th dynasty. If we take into account that the Haker occurred within the Mysteries of Osiris celebrated at Abydos, this fact is not surprising. Even though this site played a foremost religious role from the Archaic Period onwards, the first reliable sources regarding the celebrations of the Mysteries date back to the end of the First Intermediate Period, when, during the 11th dynasty, the site was restored and a predynastic tomb of king, probably Djer, was identified as the tomb of Osiris himself.[267]

The rise of Abydos as a foremost cultic centre during the Middle Kingdom has to be interpreted within a wider framework. Ancestor worship played a foremost role in legitimating the nomarchal families at the head of the various local potentates.[268] It is not surprising therefore that during the violent battles characterising the final part of the First Intermediate Period certain necropoles or religious centres – especially those located in the Middle Egyptian area, such as Thinis/Naga ed-Deir– suffered from the excesses of soldiers.[269] On the other hand, after the restoration of the monarchy, certain sanctuaries devoted to the mortuary cults of local rulers, such as the one of Heqaib at Elephantine, experienced a renewed prosperity.[270] The crown not only used to promote these pre-existent cultic places, but even founded new similar shrines, such as the one of Djefai-Hapy in Asiut.[271]

If framed in this light, the rise of the celebration of the Mysteries at Abydos can be interpreted as a means to reinforce royal ideology and strengthen the alliance between the crown and the elite members. In other words, its main aim was that of reshaping specific features of the elite mortuary rituals in order to legitimate the social role of foremost elite members as state officials patronised by the crown. On the other hand, as highlighted for the OMR scenes 9 and 10, it is hard to distinguish what actually belonged to an old tradition and what was an innovative element. It is highly likely that this kind of mechanic to reinforce the connection between the royal power and the elites, strictly

[267] M. Smith 2017, 233.
[268] M. Fitzenreiter 2018, 60-61; H. Willems 2014, 207-208; A. Dorn 2015, 121-122; D. Raue 2014, 1-3; J. Troche 2021, 144.
[269] R.A. Gillam 2005, 56; E. Brovarski 1985, 310.
[270] D. Raue 2014, 3-4.
[271] M. El-Khadragy 2007, 41-55.

rooted on the beliefs and practices concerning ancestor worship, already existed during the early Old Kingdom if not even before.[272] Yet, that does not preclude that this ancient practice was reformulated once again at the beginning of the Middle Kingdom to meet new specific needs concerning the restoration of the royal power.

One has finally to consider that Abydos was not the only place where these types of ceremonies were performed. The Coffin Texts spells and the Book of the Dead chapters analysed in the present section highlight how similar festivals were enacted in diverse religious centres. Especially Djedu (Busiris), located in the Delta, was another holy city linked to the cult of Osiris.[273] The smaller number of archaeological and epigraphic sources concerning this ancient holy city probably depends on the fact that certain conditions characterising Lower Egypt did not present the optimal environment for the conservation of archaeological sites.

[272] M.H. Gauthier 1930, 178-180; A.M. Roveri Donadoni 1969, 122-123; see also: chapter 2, section 2.6, First argumentation.
[273] M. Smith 2017, 234-235; J. Troche 2021, 140.

3.4 Results

Death is certainly the most radical transformation a human being can experience, and this change is so powerful that it affects not only the deceased, but also the community to which the late person belonged.[274] This fact, that in some way we can consider as a "universal", acquires a more concrete and even tragic value within certain kinds of societies, like the ancient Egyptian one, which were strictly rooted in the institution of the extended family.[275] The death of a family chief, especially the death of the head of a powerful elite family, entailed the instauration of a new *pater familias*. This delicate moment of transition was certainly perceived as highly critical, since the whole existence of the extended family as a social group could be questioned and menaced by both internal disagreements and external enemies.

Funerary rites, therefore, were not just a means to ratify the passage of the deceased from life to death, but also a moment during which a new order had to be established. A younger family member, traditionally the eldest son, had to succeed the deceased person by assuming the social role of his father, within both the extended family and the whole society.

The textual and epigraphic sources that have been analysed here concern this delicate moment of transition, which could be considered as a "double rite of passage": the deceased father had to reach the realm of the dead and become a benevolent ancestor, while the eldest son who acted as a main ritualist during the funerary rituals had to become the new chief of the extended family.

As the analysis of the documents has shown, OMR scenes 9 and 10 and, probably also the sleeping Tekenu, were dramatic rituals which re-enacted salient passages of the Osiris myth. In particular, OMR scene 10 has shown strong affinities with PT 364.[276] Another important religious text to understand the religious facts taken herein into consideration is CT 312, whose oldest attestation dates back to the First Intermediate Period and can be considered as the mythological background of the rituals involving a form of communication between the living and the dead.[277] It is even possible to posit that both these texts refer to the same episode of the Osiris myth.

[274] A. van Gennep 1960, 146-165.
[275] J. C. Moreno García 2012.
[276] See chapter 3, section 3.1.a.
[277] See chapter 3, section 3.2.1.c.

Indeed, PT 364 tells how Osiris was installed as a ruler of the netherworld thanks to the intervention of Horus. The main elements allowing this process are: the re-composition of Osiris' body;[278] Horus giving his eye (*Ỉr.t-ḥr)* to Osiris;[279] Horus crowning Osiris with the *wrr.t* crown. [280]

Table 5: parallels between PT 364 and CT 312

	PT 364	CT 312
Mythical episode	Osiris is installed as a ruler of the netherworld	Horus is crowned as the legitimate ruler of Egypt
Aim	Installation of the mortuary cult for the deceased	Legitimation of the heir of the deceased
Symbolisms involved	**The Eye of Horus** as a gift given to Osiris by Horus in order to protect and awake him (by opening his eye and his mouth), so that the god can listen to Horus **The *ṯw.t* /*wrr.t* crown** as a symbol of rulership in the netherworld and acquisition of eternal life	**The Eye of Horus** as a messenger sent by Horus to establish a form of communication with his deceased father **The *nemes* crown** as a symbol of legitimation of the social status (*sʿḥ*) earned by the heir.

The fact that this mythological episode has been reshaped within OMR 10, a text aimed at the vivification of the cultic image portraying the deceased, clearly indicates that this theme played a foremost role as a founding myth for the installation of the mortuary cults.

CT 312, instead, concerns the installation of Horus as the new ruler of Egypt thanks to the intervention of Osiris. Since the latter is dead and resides in the netherworld, Horus has to find a way to

[278] PT 364, 610c: "Isis and Nephthys have healed you.
[279] PT 364, 609c-610a: "Horus has loved you; he has equipped you. Horus has placed on you his eye for your advantage. Horus has opened your eye so that you can see through it!" Also, see chapter 3, section 3.1.a.
[280] PT 364, 613b: "Horus has placed you at the head of the gods; he has caused thee to take the *wrr.t*-crown. Within the occurrence of the *wrr.t* crown within the Pyramid Texts, it can be inferred that the symbolism pertaining this crown was strongly linked to the mortuary cults celebrated for the pharaoh. Cf. H. M. Hays 2012, Vol. I, 298 and note 1046.

communicate with him, thanks to a divine messenger, *ʾIrw-Ḥr*, which can be identified with the very eye of this god (*ʾIr.t-Ḥr*).[281] This divine messenger has to reach the netherworld in order to transmit the message of Horus to Osiris. To accomplish this feat, he has to obtain the *nemes* crown, which symbolises the social status of Horus as a legitimate heir. Once the *ʾIrw-Ḥr* is able to establish a communication between the deceased Osiris and his living heir Horus, the latter is crowned as the new ruler.

The meaning and the function associated with this mythical episode must have been of fundamental importance for the ancient Egyptians, since these themes were reshaped several times over millennia, and formed the ideological basis for diverse kinds of rituals. The most striking example in this regard is given by the Middle Kingdom Mysteries of Osiris celebrated at Abydos. This festival was meant as a great funerary ritual periodically celebrated for the god Osiris. The analysis of the data pertaining to the Haker feast has shown that the same mechanics used to ratify the father-son succession during the celebration of elite funerals, were also used by the crown to assign state offices, in particular that of Royal Treasurer.[282]

The analysis of the sources has also highlighted diverse possible means of communication between the living and the dead enacted in the form of dramatic (or quasi dramatic) performances in the course of collective rituals, such as the ritual sleep *sḏr*/*sḏry.t* and the dreams experienced during this special state.[283] It was also possible to identify the specific moments and sacred areas in which these necromantic practices were allowed. The pre-burial rituals enacted in the night preceding the inhumation at the embalming place and the rituals performed on the journey that led from the embalming place to the grave – which partially coincides with the figurative theme of the Butic Burial identified within several elite tombs – were indeed considered the ideal occasion to interact with the dead. The documents have also highlighted the existence of a ceremony, the *ḥsb.t ꜥ3w*, "the counting of the surplus", which was celebrated immediately after the conclusion of the embalming process, during the night preceding the procession leading the mummy to the tomb. This ceremony – which strongly recalls the counting of the dead celebrated within the Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos – took the form of a ritualised judgment of the dead. Yet, this has not to be confused with the judgment concerning the moral conduct of the deceased described in the Book of the Dead, but with a ritual

[281] See chapter 3, section 3.2.1.c.
[282] See chapter 3, section 3.3.4.
[283] See chapter 3, section 3.1.b; 3.2.1.b (documents 20 and 21); and, section 3.3.1.

action during which the living and the dead could interact with each other and settle a legal dispute concerning the legacy of the deceased.[284]

[284] See chapter 3, section 3.3.3.

4.On the actual juridical function of some Letters to the Dead[285]

4.1 The so-called Letters to the Dead and their ritual background

The so-called Letters to the Dead[286] are an invaluable tool for investigating ancient Egyptian religion. Indeed, within these textual sources lies a core of beliefs cantered on the interplay between the living and the dead, which provides important insights into the complexity of the ancient Egyptian ancestor worship.[287]

Before delving into the issues related to these documents, it is important to stress that the label "Letters to the Dead" is a conventional name, a modern category used by Egyptologists to indicate a corpus of documents which is rather inhomogeneous. The only feature that unites all these written sources is that of being requests addressed to a recently deceased in order to solve a problem. Currently, there is no consensus on what can be considered a "Letter to the Dead" and what not and, despite the use of the term "letters", many of these documents do not show the typical traits of the epistolary genre.[288]

These texts were written on a wide variety of media: above all bowls and papyri, but also statues; moreover, one letter is written on a stela, one on an ostracon, and another one on a piece of linen. Another document which somewhat linked to the same religious milieu, the Oracular decree for Neskhons – CG 58032 and CG 46891, was written both on a wooden tablet and a papyrus sheet.[289] Also, at first sight, the so-called Letters to the Dead would seem to be attested from the 6th dynasty until the Late Period. However, a more accurate analysis shows how most of the documents belong to a limited time span between the end of the Old Kingdom and the first half of the Middle Kingdom (end of the 3rd millennium BCE), and only few sources date to the subsequent historical phases.[290]

As for the type of aid the dead were asked for, one has to consider that a restricted number of documents can be understood as "reminder letters" referring to previous requests, and, as a consequence, their content is often obscure to modern readers because they allude to the problem rather than describe it; in a few cases, the documents are too damaged to understand the nature of the issue.[291] Nevertheless, if one analyses the texts in which the request is clearly described or where

[285] This chapter is an is an extended version of two different papers of mine: R. Schiavo 2013 A, and R. Schiavo 2023.
[286] For the bibliographic references concerning the Letters to the Dead, see the special section of the bibliography.
[287] N. Harrington 2013, 34-37.
[288] S. Donnat Beauquier 2019, 52-56.
[289] See Tables 6, 7 and 8.
[290] Ibid.
[291] See Tables 6, 7 and 8 docs: 3, 8, 14, 21, 22.

there are enough hints to understand its nature, despite the great heterogeneity characterising the so-called "Letters to the Dead", the range of problems the ancestors were called on to solve is surprisingly narrow. Indeed, it always concerns an existential crisis related to a moment of passage: a living person who has to replace another deceased individual, by assuming the social role of the latter. Specifically, it is possible to distinguish three main themes:

1. Letters to appease an angry spirit who died a premature death. Remarkably, most of these documents were addressed to deceased women, angry with their living relatives because they died during childbirth, or because another woman was about to take over their social role within the family.[292]
2. Requests concerning the birth of an heir. Indeed, one has to keep in mind that in a society strongly based on the institution of the extended family,[293] the lack of offspring, especially of a male son, meant the lack of a successor who could take over from the head of the family, once the latter died;
3. Letters concerning disputes over inheritance issues. This type of problem is to be understood within a broader context, which also entails the choice of the heir who should have succeeded the deceased in his social role of family chief.

In the present chapter we will primarily deal with this latter group.

[292] R. Schiavo 2020, 201-212. See also chapter 5. Yet not all the documents written to appease an angry spirit were addressed to deceased women. See, for example the so-called Louvre bowl, Louvre E61634 (see doc. 12); or the statue of Ahmose Sapair, Louvre E 15682 (doc. 23).
[293] J. C. Moreno García 2012.

Table 6 - Letters to the Dead: end of the 3rd millennium BCE [294]

	Document	Medium	Date	Provenance	Topic
1	Cairo Linen JdE 25975	Linen	End 6th dynasty	Saqqara	Inheritance
2	Qaw Bowl -UC1663	Bowl	End 6th dynasty	Naga ed-Deir	Inheritance
3	P. Naga ed-Deir 3500	Papyrus	End 6th dynasty	Naga ed-Deir	General aid or protection – Reminder letter?
4	Chicago Vessel - Chicago Oriental Institute Museum E 13945	Jar stand	6th / 11th dynasty	Girga (?)	Fertility
5	Bowl associated to the Chicago Vessel	Bowl (?)	6/11th dynasty (?)	Girga (?)	Appease an angry spirit (?)
6	P. Naga ed-Deir 3737 - MFA 38.2121	Papyrus	6th /11th dynasty	Naga ed-Deir	Aid protection – issues concerning real estate?
7	Stele of Nebetitef - Michael C. Carlos Museum, 2014.033.001	Stele	11th dynasty	Naga ed-Deir	Appease an angry spirit
8	British Museum (EA10901)	Papyrus	FIP	Unknown	Not clear due to lacunae; general aid or protection (?)
9	Hu Bowl - UC 16244	Bowl	End FIP	Hu	Reminder letter – Inheritance?
10	Berlin Bowl -Berlin 22573	Bowl	12th dynasty	Naga ed-Deir	Appease an angry spirit
11	Berlin Jar Stand – Berlin22574	Jar stand	12th dynasty	Naga ed-Deir (?)	Fertility
12	Louvre Bowl - Louvre E61634	Bowl	11th /12th dynasty	Abydos? – Middle Egyptian area	Appease an angry spirit
13	P. Berlin 10482 + P. Berlin 10481 a-b	Papyrus	12th dynasty, first half.	Asyut	Fertility
14	Cairo Bowl - CG 25375	Bowl	12th dynasty	Saqqara	Aid/protection - letter of reminder?
15	Louvre Figurine - Louvre E 8000	Statuette	13th dynasty	-	Fertility
16	Berlin Figurine – 14517	Statuette	MK, second half	-	Fertility

Table 7 - Letters to the Dead: 2nd/1st millennium BCE [295]

	Document	Medium	Date	Provenance	Topic
17	P. Leiden AMS 64/ I 371	Papyrus	19th dynasty	Memphite area	Appease an angry spirit
18	O. Louvre 698	Ostracon	20th dynasty	Deir el-Medina	Appease an angry spirit
19	P. Brooklyn 37.1799 E	Papyrus	7th century BCE	Theban area	Inheritance

[294] For the bibliographic references concerning the documents collected in this table, see the special section of the bibliography.
[295] For the bibliographic references concerning the documents collected in this table, see the special section of the bibliography.

Table 8 -Documents showing affinities with the so-called Letters to the Dead[296]

	Document	Medium	Date	Provenance	Topic
20	MFA 13.3791	Jar stand	6th-10th dynasty	Naga ed-Deir	Not clear due to lacunae
21	Qubbet el Hawa bowl - JdE 91740	Bowl	Middle Kingdom	Qubbet el-Hawa	Issues concerning real estate
22	Horhotep Ostracon – JdE 49911	Ostracon	12th dynasty	Theban area	Not clear
23	Ahmose Sapair sculpture -E 15682	Statue	17th dynasty	Abydos or Theban area	To appease an angry spirit
24	Oxford Bowl - 1887.27.1	Bowl	17th/ 18th dynasty	-	Inheritance
25	Moscow Bowl -3917b	Bowl	18th dynasty/19th dynasty	-	Inheritance
26	Munich Cosmetic Vase ÄS 4313	Cosmetic Vase	18th dynasty	-	To appease an angry spirit
27	Oracular decree for Neskhons – CG 58032 and CG 46891	Papyrus sheet (CG 58032); wooden tablet (CG 46891)	21st dynasty (995 BCE)	Theban area	To appease an angry spirit

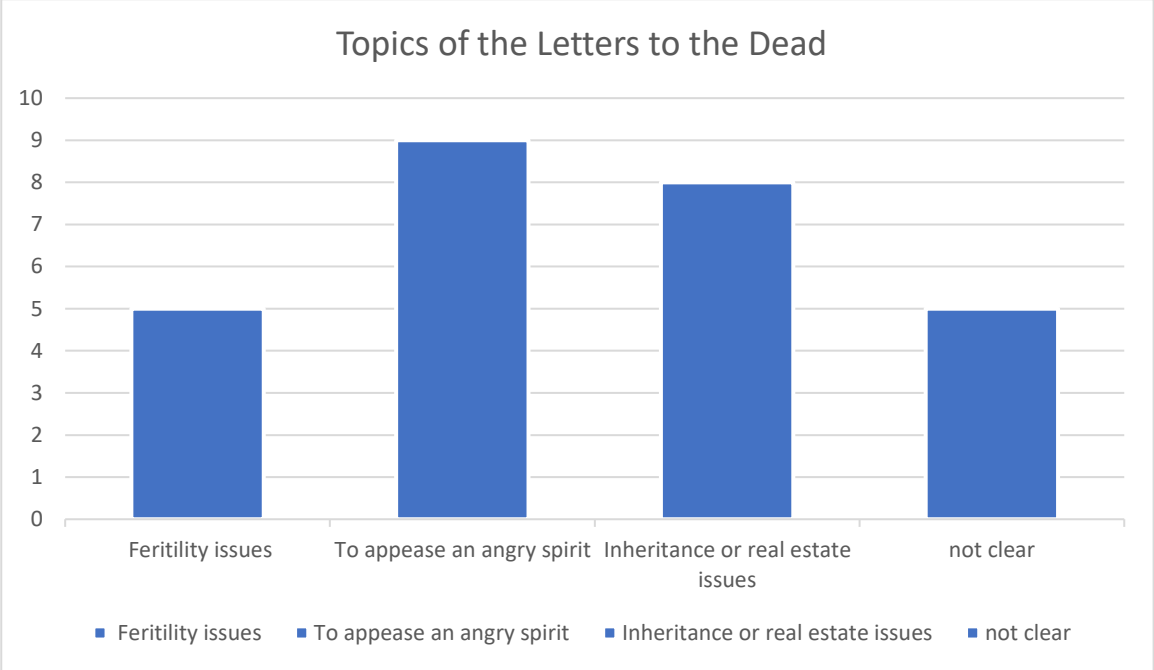
Archaeological evidence indicates that the letters were placed inside tombs, or in their vicinity.[297] Moreover, some references in the texts suggest that their ritual deposition should happen during a ceremony performed in the necropolis.[298]

Funerals were likely one of the main occasions during which the ritual deposition could take place. Yet, even in the few cases in which the find-spot of the documents is known, it is not clear whether the deposition occurred in connection with the funerary rituals or at a later stage.[299] According to S. Donnat Beauquier, since the letters often deal with very contingent problems, it cannot be excluded that the ritual deposition could also have been organised upon request.[300] H. Willems, instead, stated that the ceremony was performed in connection with specific festivals linked to the cult of the dead, such as the Wag-feast, or the Mysteries of Osiris;[301] also, given the strong affinity between the letter

[296] For the bibliographic references concerning the documents collected in this table, see the special section of the bibliography.
[297] J. Troche 2018, 6-7.
[298] In the Cairo Linen it is clearly stated (columns 8-9) that the sender is in the same place as the deceased, (Cf. S. Donnat Beauquier, op. cit. 2014, pp. 29-31); in the Qaw bowl, there is a reference (inside, columns 9-10) to some scribes who are in the same city (the necropolis?) as the deceased (S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 35-37); in P. Brooklyn 37.1799 E, it is stated (Verso, line 1) that the letter has to be recited in front of the tomb of the deceased (R. Jasnow and G. Vittmanm 1992-1993, 27).
[299] J. Troche 2018, 6-7.
[300] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 138-142.
[301] H. Willems 2001, 354-358.

to the dead and Coffin Texts spells – 30-41, 149 and 312 – he hypothesised that the latter group of spells could have been the liturgy used during the ritualised deposition of the documents.[302]

The three thematic groups previously identified may provide interesting hints in this regard. As mentioned above, the "Letters to the Dead" do not constitute a literary genre invented and recognised by the ancient Egyptians themselves. Rather, these documents are to be interpreted as material evidence of diverse ritual practices focusing on the interactions between the living and the dead, which reasonably took place on diverse occasions.



The letters written to appease an angry spirit, for example, show a strong affinity with the mythical theme concerning the wrath of the Solar Eye, and her pacification through inebriation, music and dance.[303]

On the other hand, both the requests concerning inheritance and fertility issues (especially the request for a healthy offspring in doc. 13) can be understood in the light of a wider theme concerning legitimation and succession, which was strictly linked to the Osiris myth. As suggested by both S. Donnat Beauquier and U. Verhoeven, the mythical paradigm of these documents can be identified in an episode narrated in Chester Beatty I, recto, 14,6-15,8, where it is said that the dispute between Horus and Seth for the throne of Egypt was solved thanks to a letter addressed to Osiris, a deceased god dwelling in the netherworld.[304]

[302] H. Willems 2001, 345 and ff.
[303] See chapter 5, section 5.3.
[304] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 218-219; U. Verhoeven 2003, 38.

P. Chester Beatty I is datable to the 20th dynasty, but, as shown in the previous chapter, the mythical theme of a message addressed to Osiris and sent to the netherworld can be already identified in Middle Kingdom sources, Coffin Text spell 312, which tells how Horus sent a messenger (*ỉrw-Ḥr*), able to reach the realm of the dead and convey a message to Osiris.[305] It can thus be said that for the specific cases of the letters concerning inheritance and (in part) fertility issues the hypothesis proposed by H. Willems, who identified the ritual context of these documents within the several festivals linked to the Osirian Myth (or other similar deities, such as Sokar), is quite reasonable. Moreover, these festivals were also connected with the cyclical renewal of nature and, therefore, with the theme of fertility in its broader meaning, including not only the productivity of the earth, but also human reproduction.[306]

In this regard further considerations are necessary. The rise of the Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos coincided with the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. However, as mentioned above, the spread of the so-called Letters to the Dead through Egyptian history is not homogeneous. Most of the letters belong to a restricted window of time between the late Old Kingdom and the early Middle Kingdom; this means that most of these documents can be considered as an expression of the patronage network linked to the nomarchal families, which held the actual power during the First Intermediate Period and, in some cases, continue to have political impact also during the Middle Kingdom.[307] Ancestor worship certainly played a foremost role in the self-presentation of these powerful families, the most significant evidence, being the posthumous cults devoted to certain local governors who lived during the end of the 6th dynasty, such as Izi at Edfu[308] or Heqaib at Elephantine/Qubbet el-Hawa.[309] This religious phenomenon should be understood as an evolution of the pre-existent mortuary cults celebrated for the elites and focused on their mortuary temples, called *ḥw.t-kꜣ*, "temple of the *Ka*".[310] Indeed, during the historical period examined here, these mortuary cults were reshaped as public events, probably in imitation of the celebration performed within royal mortuary complexes during the Old Kingdom. It means that the participation was not restricted to just the extended family of the deceased, rather it involved large sections of the population on a regional scale. As for the case of Heqaib, it has been pointed out that his shrine was certainly restored during the First Intermediate Period in order to host a larger number of participants,[311] and that his mortuary cult was structured in the form of a periodical celebration during which public processions starting from his shrine were

[305] See chapter 3, section 3.2.1.c.
[306] M. Smith 2017, 127 and 368.
[307] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 174-179.
[308] D. Farout 2009), 3-10.
[309] D. Raue 2014.
[310] H. Willems 2014, 207-208; D. Raue 2014; A. Dorn 2015, 121.
[311] A. Dorn 2015, 121-122.

performed.[312] Also, a recent publication by Ilona Regulski has highlighted how the deceased invoked in both P. Berlin 10482 and P. 10481 a-b might have been a local ruler of Asyut.[313] According to her palaeographic analysis, the group of Coffin Text spells copied on the recto of P. 10482 seems to have been used more than once: as a liturgy for the funerary rituals of the deceased invoked in the letter, but also during subsequent celebrations in his honour– the mortuary cult, according to the terminology used here– during which the ritual deposition of the Letters to the Dead was performed.[314] A similar interpretative scheme could also be applied to the aforementioned Chicago Vessel from Dendera. The text of this letter begins with a quotation from a certain Idu,[315] whose post-mortem bond with his son was considered as inspirational for the senders of the missive:

> *ỉw=k rḫ.tỉ nt.t ḏd-n ỉdw r s³=f ỉr wnn.t wn.t ỉm nn dỉ<=ỉ> nḳm=f nḳm.t nb.t ỉr mỉ n mỉt.t ỉry.t*
>
> *You know that Idu said in reference to his son: "Whatever exists or has existed there, I will not allow him to suffer any suffering. So, do the same for me!*

Indeed, it would be plausible to identify this Idu, with an influential ancestor perceived as an authoritative voice.[316] It would be even possible to identify him with one of the governors of Dendera, Idu I, who was probably the object of a local posthumous cult.[317]

In the light of what has been said so far, the exact occasion during which the ritual deposition of the Letters to the Dead concerning inheritance issue occurred could be identified with a certain accuracy. The existence of a number of ceremonies enacted during the funerals and specifically focused on the interactions between the living and the dead have been identified in the previous chapter.[318] Above all, the rituals performed at the embalming place the night preceding the inhumation, and the subsequent funerary procession which led the mummified body from the embalming place to the tomb have proven to be particularly relevant.[319] These ceremonies did not characterise only the funerals, but they were also re-enacted during the mortuary rituals. The best documented example is

[312] D. Raue 2014.
[313] I. Regulski 2020, 330-331.
[314] I. Regulski 2020, 364-367.
[315] H.G. Fischer 1900, 4-12.
[316] See J. Hsieh 2022, 163: "This Letter is informative for Egyptian beliefs about the realm of the dead. The beginning shows that the sender believes that the recipient has knowledge of what Idu said to his son. As it is not stated who Idu is, one may presume that Idu is known to all parties involved; perhaps he is a deceased senior member of the family and the sender is utilising the collective power of their ancestors".
[317] H. G. Fischer 1968, 93-100; F. W. M. Petrie 1900, 4-12.
[318] See chapter 3, section 3.4.
[319] See chapter 3, section 3.4.

provided by the Middle Kingdom Mysteries of Osiris celebrated at Abydos,[320] but similar festivals are attested from the Old Kingdom onwards, such as the Wag feast.[321] These celebrations played a foremost role for the self-presentation of the local governors – such as the festivals for Heqaib at Qubbet el-Hawa, which celebrated the latter as a manifestation of the god to Sokar[322] – and given that the most ancient group of the Letters to the Dead appears to be strictly connected with the patronage networks of the nomarchal families, it is reasonable to posit that their deposition might have occurred in concomitance with this kind of celebrations.

We can go into even more detail. Among these pre-burial rituals there was also a ceremony denominated the "counting of the dead" or the "counting of the surplus",[323] a ritualised judgment involving both the living and the dead, which shows a number of analogies with the judgment described in some Appeals to the Living,[324] in CT spell 149,[325] and that probably also characterised some phases of the Haker feast which occurred during the Mysteries celebrated at Abydos, as well as other similar festivals.[326]

Several elements seem to suggest that the ritualised deposition of the some of the documents we use to call Letters to the Dead could have occurred during this ceremony. First of all, within some "letters", the senders often invoke the deceased recipient so that the latter could set up a judgment against their enemies.[327] It can therefore be reasonable to state that this supernatural judgment pertaining to the relationship between the living and the dead could coincide with the ritualised judgment that occurred during the funerals (and was re-enacted during the mortuary rituals). This hypothesis can be further supported by the fact that Coffin Text spell 149, which clearly describes the kind of judgment of the dead, and was certainly used as a liturgy for the ritualised deposition of P. 10482+10481a-b, as clearly shown by the recent study by I. Regulski.[328]

4.2 Research questions and methodological issues

The fact that some of the so-called Letters to the Dead were written to solve inheritance issues is certainly significant. Indeed, a rich body of scientific literature has highlighted a certain connection between ancestor worship and the rules regulating the passage of privileges and possessions through

[320] See chapter 3, section 3.3.
[321] H. Goedicke 1986 B, 1135-1140.
[322] H. Willems 2014, 207-208; A. Dorn 2015, 121.
[323] H. Willems 1988, 148; J. Assmann 2005, 282-283.
[324] S. B. Shubert 2007, documents: OK 2; OK 5a; OK 9; OK 18; OK 19; OK 31; MK 12.
[325] H. Willems 2014, 186-187.
[326] See chapter 3, section 3.3.3.
[327] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 108-113.
[328] The reuse of P. 10482 highlighted by I. Regulski on the basis of palaeographic evidence could be interpreted in this sense. I. Regulski 2020, 330-331.

generations, especially within societies strictly based on the institution of the extended family and in which the patronage network plays a foremost role.[329] In addition, the involvement of supernatural entities in settling juridical cases is not alien to Egyptian traditions. The most striking cases are certainly the oracular consultations of certain deceased kings aimed at settling legal disputes,[330] a practice documented with certainty from the New Kingdom onwards.[331] Moreover, from the Late Period onwards, another category of documents, rather similar to the Letters to the Dead, is attested, the so-called "Letters to the Gods", which often deal with legal issues too – especially theft or embezzlement[332] – and for which an actual legal function has been suggested by some scholars.[333]

Given these premises, the main aim of the present chapter is to investigate whether the Letters to the Dead concerning inheritance problems could have had an actual juridical function comparable to those of these later practices, above all the oracular consultations.

A possible connection between the Letters to the Dead and the oracular practices is not totally new.[334] Yet, the actual legal function of the Letters to the Dead concerning legal issues has not been adequately taken seriously.[335] In the present research, therefore, the aim is to focus on social history, embracing a wider general vision in which religious phenomena are analysed as significant data to investigate specific aspects of ancient Egyptian society, above all the role played by both mortuary and funerary cults within the juridical system.

In order to pursue this objective, an analysis of the relevant documents will be conducted in order to answer the following questions:

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[329] The list of works dedicated to the topic is quite extensive and I will cite here just some of the main titles. Earlier works date back to the first half of the twentieth century. Cf. for example: N. Hozumi 1912; K Yang 1934. One has to take into consideration, that the influence of cultural evolutionism was, during this period, certainly strong and, thus, also the axiom according to which ancestor worship was not only the "primitive form of religion", but also the driving force behind the rise of the foremost social institutions. Cf. E.B. Tylor 1871, 21; H. Spencer 1876, 411. On the other hand, the connection between ancestor worship and rules regulating inheritance is undeniably attested within several cultures and, clearly, it cannot be considered as a mere abstract assumption biased by earlier anthropological thoughts. This theme has been indeed the object of several studies over times and, in this regard the work by the social anthropologist and Africanist J. Goody 1962 – certainly constitutes a point of reference. As regards Egyptology, the connection between funerary rituals and inheritance has been widely treated by Pestman – See: J.J. Janssen and P.W. Pestman 1968, 137-170; P. W. Pestman 1969, 58-77. See also, H. Willems 2001, 369.

[330] A.G. MacDowell 1990, 114 – 118.

[331] According to Baines and Parkinson, it would be possible to identify the evidence for an oracular consultation occurred during the 5th dynasty, but their hypothesis has not been unanimously accepted. Moreover, it is not a legal consultation. Cf. J. Baines and R. B. Parkinson 1997, 9-27.

[332] K. Endreffy 2019, 249 and note 8.

[333] E. Seidl 1966.

[334] J.D. Ray 1981; J. Baines 1987; J. Baines and R. B. Parkinson 1997; R.K. Ritner 2002 A; R.K. Ritner 2002 B; J. C. Moreno García 2010.

[335] For example, in his analysis of this documents, G. Miniaci denominates them as "legal fiction". G. Miniaci 2014.

1. Is the formal textual structure of the Letters to the Dead concerning inheritance issues comparable with that typical of an ancient Egyptian legal text?
2. Did the action of depositing a written plea inside a tomb or in its vicinity have an officially recognised legal value?
3. Do the Letters to the Dead concerning inheritance problems and the oracular practices show significant common traits, such as the kinds of supernatural entities involved, or the kinds of legal problems called upon to solve?

In order to find answers to these questions, the present chapter will be dedicated to the analysis of all the Letters to the Dead concerning inheritance issues. However, some methodological issues need to be addressed. At first sight, the criteria to select the relevant documents should be rather self-evident: to choose all the letters in which a deceased is asked to settle an inheritance dispute. On the other hand, a wider issue must be taken into consideration. As mentioned above, the category "Letters to the Dead" is not a literary genre recognised by the ancient Egyptians themselves, but a label codified by modern scholars[336] and, actually, there is no unanimous definition of "Letter to the Dead". Rather, as recently stated by S. Donnat Beauquier,[337] it is possible to recognise "two main existing approaches":

1. to consider the Letters to the Dead as a subcategory of the "letter" textual genre;
2. to consider the Letters to the Dead as a non-formalised genre, including, thus, also more generic pleas addressed to the deceased.

As a consequence, even the number of documents to be included in the corpus is quite variable. [338] Given this premise, the present chapter will be first focused on documents which show the following characteristics: typical traits of the epistolary genre; the recipients are undeniably deceased; the main problem to solve is an inheritance litigation. Thus:

- The Cairo Linen (JdE 25975)
- The Qaw Bowl (UC 1616)
- Papyrus Brooklyn 37.1799 E

[336] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 148-149 and 167-172; S. Donnat Beauquier 2019, 52-56.
[337] S. Donnat Beauquier 2019, 53.
[338] For a complete list of the documents labelled as "Letters to the Dead" see: J. Troche 2018, 4-5; see also Tables 1 and 2; Donnat Beauquier 2019, 52 and note 28.

Then, other documents will be considered. Indeed, the Oxford Bowl does not show an epistolary form, although it clearly testifies to a ritual action involving a deceased and an inheritance issue. [339] Similar observations can also be made for a bowl found in a tomb at Qubbet el-Hawa.[340] As regards the so-called Moscow bowl, although it is undeniably a letter concerning legal aspects, it is questionable whether the recipient may actually be a deceased person.[341] These documents will be discussed in a separate section together with other two documents – the so-called Hu bowl and P. Naga ed-Deir 3737 – which show a possible involvement of the deceased in economic issues.

4.3 Juridical rules and customs concerning inheritance and succession

The present chapter aims to demonstrate the actual legal function of some Letters to the Dead concerning inheritance issues. In order to pursue this goal, the pertinent documents will be analysed according to the following methodological criteria:

- To verify if the content of the letters shows explicit references to Egyptian laws and customs concerning succession and hereditary transmission of property;
- To verify if the content of the letters shows a common structure or recurrent stylistic patterns, which could fit within ancient Egyptian legal procedures;

It is thus necessary to provide an excursus on the most relevant aspects of ancient Egyptian administration of justice.

The actual existence of written testaments is the subject of discussion and a topic connected with a wider debate concerning the role of written laws in the ancient Egyptian society. Scholars have indeed identified a specific terminology – above all the word *hp* – that seems to indicate the involvement of written documents to present judicial processes,[342] if not properly "law".[343] It must be stated, in this regard, that several transformations must have occurred over time and no attestations of the term *hp* are known during the Old Kingdom.[344] Moreover, a number of evidences clearly indicates the importance of customary rules.[345] Even the so-called *Legal Code of Hermopolis*, often deemed "the first Egyptian written code of laws", should rather constitute a transposition of customary rules, in

[339] Doc. 24. See also: J. Hsieh 2022, 296-303; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 69-70 and 151-152; A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe,1928, 26-27.
[340] Doc. 21. See also: J. Hsieh 2022, 270-276; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 67-69.
[341] Doc. 25. See also: J. Hsieh 2022, 303-309; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 25-26; U. Verhoeven 2003, 31 and note 1; A.H. Gardiner and K.H. Sethe1928, 27-28.
[342] A.A. Loktionov 2019, 121 and ff.
[343] C F. Nims 1948, 243-260; A. Bats 2014, 95-113.
[344] A. Bats 2014, 95-100.
[345] A.A. Loktionov 2019, 161-162.

other words a kind of handbook which collected a series of judicial decisions considered as paradigmatic.[346]

As regards inheritance and succession, it is possible to identify a well-established custom – which seems to have remained stable over time – according to which the main heir was the first-born male (*s3-smsw*, in the later texts, *šr ꜥ3*).[347] This rule must be contextualised within a social system essentially built around the extended family and the patronage network: the death of the family chief did not entail, thus, just a mere passage of goods and properties to the living descendants, but a mechanism of succession for which the heir/eldest son acquired the social role and the duties of the deceased. It follows that although the firstborn was the sole heir, he had certain moral obligations towards the other members of the family, such as having to take care of them; but, in actual fact, the sources show that this responsibility could sometimes be eluded.[348]

Another essential requirement to claim an inheritance was the obligation to deal with the burial of the departed.[349] Funerals were certainly expensive events. The complete ritual, owning a tomb equipped with all the necessary objects and, above all, maintaining the posthumous cult of the deceased were indeed an elite prerogative and an action of social display.[350] As underlined in the previous sections such grandiose and expensive ceremonies were not a mere religious ritual to praise the dead, but a powerful ideological tool for the self-presentation of the living in order to ratify their social position.[351]

A strong connection thus emerges between the funerary/mortuary cults and the juridical system, an aspect that matches perfectly with the beliefs and the practices examined in the previous chapter. In this regard, several literary sources describe the importance of family solidarity, outlining an ideological and inspirational framework where the main duty of the *pater familias* was to take care of his relatives and servants, which, in turn, had to fulfil their duties to make the family prosper. [352]

[346] P.W. Pestman1983, 14-21. K. Donker van Heel 1990; T. Logan 2017, 81-110.
[347] S. Lippert 2013, 2-3.
[348] S. Lippert 2013, 2-3.
[349] S. Lippert 2013, 4.
[350] In this regard, very useful is the notion of "functional materialism" introduced into the Egyptological discourse by K. Cooney: "I suggest the term functional materialism as a comprehensive model to describe a cultural mechanism at work in a hierarchical society. This model explains the powerful drive to expend economic surplus on socioeconomically and religiously charged material objects – objects which simultaneously embodied multiple interacting ritual and prestige purposes". K.M. Cooney 2007, 260.
[351] See chapter 3, section 3.4. See also: K.M. Cooney 2007, 260 and ff.
[352] This is indeed a theme of crucial importance in the so-called *Loyalist Instruction*, where the solidarity between the different components of the society (king, vizier, elite member, servants, etc.), likewise the cooperation between the diverse members of the extended family, is considered as an essential pillar to achieve and maintain the prosperity of Egypt. On the *Loyalist Instruction*, see: G. Posener 1976; H-W. Fischer-Elfert 1999.

This pact of mutual aid – that the Egyptian perceived as an expression of Maat [353] – was also one of the pillars on which ancestor worship was based, since the interactions between the living and the dead were regulated by the same patronage framework, so that the descendants must take care of their dead in exchange for supernatural protection.[354]

Especially during the Old Kingdom there must have been a greater predominance of orality over the written word. Legalistic inscriptions incorporated in the decorative program of elite tombs are well attested;[355] but, notably, in order to describe the inheritance a father left to his son they often employ terms that clearly refer to the orality sphere, such as *wḏʿ-mdw* ("divider of words").[356] The use of such a terminology seems to suggest that the last wishes of the family chief were expressed orally and in front of witnesses [357] and, in the light of the customary rule mentioned above, it is not surprising: why would it be necessary to write a legal document if the eldest son had automatically right to succeed his father? In addition, the monumental context of these inscriptions perfectly matches with the customary rule "the property is given to the one who buries", well known from several sources.[358] It can be argued, thus, that this typology of texts was not perceived as a mere contract aimed at regulating the passage of goods, but also as an ideological tool to officially ratify the customary succession from father to son.

Although the order of inheritance was regulated by the customary rules that privileged the eldest son, there were indeed methods to sanction the passage of properties for non-normative testators or non-normative heirs. The *ỉmy.t-pr*, well attested since the Old Kingdom, was a contract in which goods and property, but also succession of the social status and the rights related to it, could be transmitted from one individual to another.[359] Some scholars have proposed an identification of such documents with the testaments of the modern Western law, but this parallel is not entirely legitimate.[360] An analysis by Logan of the *ỉmy.t-pr* written between the Old Kingdom and the New Kingdom has indeed revealed how these were prevalently stipulated in cases where the usual rules of the first-born were not applied.[361] Likewise, the aforementioned legalistic inscriptions, also the *ỉmy.t-pr* were usually

[353] In this regard, J. Assmann introduces the definition of "vertical solidarity" that has to be understood as an expression of the Egyptian concept of Maat. Cf. J. Assmann 1990, 248 and ff.
[354] In this regard, it is indeed noteworthy that the Letters to the Dead often show sentences and expressions that undeniably refer to the same ideological substratum of the Loyalist Instructions. See: H-W. Fischer-Elfert 1994, 41-47.
[355] N. Strudwick 2005, 187-208.
[356] D. Czerwik 2009, 38; A.A. Loktionov 2019, 100.
[357] D. Czerwik 2009, 38.
[358] J. J. Janssen and P. W. Pestman 1968, 137-170; P. W. Pestman 1969, 58-77.
[359] S. Lippert 2013, 5-6.
[360] T. Logan 2000, 49-73.
[361] "In Metjen the property goes from his mother to his children, thus skipping a generation. Nikacankh, the Tomb in the Khaefra Necropolis, Sennuankh, etc., are not legal texts but proscriptions warning descendants not to sell the endowment

monumentalised and written within sacred spaces, such as tombs, funerary chapels or, starting from the New Kingdom, the accessible courtyards of temples.[362] It could be stated, thus, that the public display of the testator's instructions played a foremost role in ratifying the passage of property or succession.

Some consideration must also be made concerning the role played by the wife of the *pater familias*. During the third millennium BCE (from the Old to the Middle Kingdom) one of the most important Egyptian social units was the *ꜣb.t*: something rather similar to the extended family without totally overlapping it. It included kin and dependants sharing rights over an inheritance but, notably, wives were never formally considered as members of their husbands' *ꜣb.t*.[363] Rather, a woman belonged, as a daughter, to the *ꜣb.t* of her father; and as a mother, to the *ꜣb.t* of her son. It appears, thus, clear that wives were not perceived as normative heir when the testator was the husband. Even in the later historical phases, when the *ꜣb.t* as institution lost its importance, the data available to us clearly highlight how wives did not inherit from their husbands, but it was assumed that the eldest son, as a legitimate successor, would take care of his mother.[364] In this regard, from the New Kingdom onward, it is possible to recognise particular dispositions, above all fictitious adoptions, that allowed a husband to literally adopt his wife, to bequeath her part of the patrimony. This modus operandi is attested in very specific situations. For example, when a man remarried with a rather younger woman and the couple did not have children, or when there was a male heir, born from a former spouse, who was, therefore considered the legitimate successor of the *pater familias*, without having the duty of taking care of the new wife of his father.[365]

One must mention also another practice attested since the Old Kingdom: a householder on the verge of death, whose heirs were too young to manage the inheritance, might indicate a guarantor to deal with the patrimony; the guarantor in turn would have transmitted the paternal inheritance to the legitimate heirs when they came of age.[366]

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or to transfer it by *jmyt-pr* 'to anyone, except he must give it to his eldest son.' These then are prohibiting the transfer to someone other than the eldest son". T. Logan 2000, 66.

[362] T. Logan, 2000, pp. 66 and ff.

[363] H. Willems 2015, 448 and 454- 461. This aspect is further discussed in chapter 5, section 5.1.

[364] S. Lippert 2013, 2-7.

[365] K. Donker van Heel 2016-2017, 75-86; B. Muhs 2017.

[366] Such a practice would have been in effect since the 6th Dynasty, as shown by Fr. Berlin P 9010. The papyrus, in fact, describes a dispute over inheritance that contrasts the firstborn of the deceased to an individual who claims to possess a document (*sḫ*) that gives him the role of guarantor of properties, a function defined as: *wnm n sbỉ-n = f*, literally "one who benefits (of goods) without being able to damage them". See: K. H. Sethe 1926, 72.

In certain circumstances such a framework must have favoured episodes of corruption and abuse of power that damaged the weaker elements of society. A wealthy widow with one or more young children must have represented an easy target for unscrupulous individuals, even amongst relatives.

It is certainly significant that in the main texts concerning both royal and elite self-presentation – not only from Egypt, but from the whole Ancient Near East – it is emphasised with a certain frequency how, in order to restore and maintain the social order, it is necessary to take care of "the orphans and the widows".[367]

A quote from the '*Teachings for Merikare',* dating to the Heracleopolitan 10th dynasty, gives a clear picture of these kinds of situations:

> |47| *ỉrỉ mꜣꜥ.t wꜣḥ=k tp tꜣ s=gr rmṯ.w m ꜣr.(w) ḫꜣr.t m nš(.w) s ḥr ỉḫ.t ỉt=f m ḥḏỉ* |48| *srỉ.ww ḥr ns.wt=śn*
>
> "Act according to Maat, so you will endure upon the earth. Console those who weep! Oppress not the widow and do not drive away a man from the goods of his father: do not deprive the greats of their positions!" [368]

In the light of the aforementioned Egyptian customs concerning inheritance and succession, the three prohibitions listed in this passage should indeed be understood as actions strongly interrelated with each other: condemned is the practice of depriving of their goods and social role the young orphans belonging to the most prominent families by oppressing the widows of the elite members. As is often emphasised in the study of ancient and modern law, such a clear prohibition can indicate how such behaviour must actually have been a relatively common malpractice. The problem must have been especially relevant – a social scourge, one should say – if it is taken into consideration that even the myth of Isis and Osiris was basically about a widow with a young son who was deprived of his position.[369]

[367] C. Fensham 1962.
[368] For the translation I based myself on the hieroglyphic text provided in: J. F. Quack 1992, 172-173 (lines 47-48).
[369] U. Verhoeven 2003, 37.

4.4 Analysis of the Letters to the Dead concerning Inheritance issues

The Letter on Linen, Cairo JdE 2567 [370]

The support of the letter is a rectangular linen cloth (25 cm x 39 cm). The hieratic text is laid out in 12 columns, but a thirteenth column has been added between the tenth and the eleventh, probably because of lack of space. The document dates to the 6th dynasty and is one of a few cases where the exact place of finding is known: a tomb at Saqqara, belonging to the recipient of the letter, a man of high rank called Sankhenptah.[371]

The sender is the widow of the recipient, a woman called Irti; however, the additional column between the tenth and eleventh can be considered as a second short letter in the name of the son of the couple, Iy. Both ask for revenge for a series of abuses and confiscations carried out against them by a group of people that include a woman named Wabet, two men called Isesi and Ananekhi (probably mother, father and son) and someone called Beheseti, who, according to some interpretations[372] could be identified himself with the spirit of a dead man against whom Sankhenptah is incited to fight in order to overcome the antagonists.

It is surely worth noting that the means with which Sankenptah must have his revenge is by means of a supernatural trial (*wḏꜥ-mdw*), through which the living and the deceased could interact with each other (columns 10-11):

> **|10|** *i(w)=k rḫ-t(i) ỉỉ(=ỉ) n=k ꜥy ḥr wḏꜣ-mdw ḥna Bḥsti ȝȝy sȝ ꜥn-ꜥnḫỉ ṯs ṯw r=sn* **|11|** *ḥna ỉt.w=k sn.w=k ḫnms.w=k skr=k Bḥsti ḥnꜥ ȝȝy sȝ ꜥn-ꜥnxỉ*
>
> **|10|** You know I have come to you in this place for the judgement of Beheseti and Ananekhi, the son of Aay. Rise up against them **|11|** together with your father and brothers, and your friends! May you bring down Beheseti and Ananekhi son of Aay.

[370] The document is currently in Cairo Museum (JdE 25675). For the main bibliography, the photo and the transcription of the text, see: A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 1-3 e 13-17, table I and table Ia; B. Gunn 1930, 148-151; E. Bresciani 1990, 32-35; E. F. Wente and E. S. Meltzer 1990, 21; H. Willems 1991; S. Donnat Beauquier 2009, 75-80; R. Schiavo 2013 B, 29-34; G. Miniaci 2014; J. Hsieh 2022, 111-127.
[371] A.H. Gardiner e K.H. Sethe 1928, p. 1.
[372] S. Donnat Beauquier 2009, 65 e nota 25; H. Willems 1991, 189.

As mentioned above, this supernatural judgment involving the dead seems to have little in common with the traditional *psicostasia*: it is not a judgment on the moral attitude the deceased had during his life in order to establish his post-mortem fate. Rather, it can be identified with the ritualised judgment of the dead performed during the elite funerals, and re-enacted within the mortuary rituals, which probably coincided with the ritual deposition of the letter.[373]

The situation described in the missive is actually quite confusing. It is difficult to decide with any certainty what sort of relationship existed between the people involved. However, one might reasonably think that the antagonists are related in some way to the writer and his family,[374] or that they can justify the exploitation because of a debt contracted by the deceased.[375] Moreover, apart from some cases of homonymy (there are several individuals with the same name involved), there could also be cases where a person is given various names.[376] Apart from the numerous interpretative discordances, scholars nonetheless agree that the son of the couple must have been very young at the time of the facts, practically a child.[377] Such a factor would explain the reason why, overturning the traditional hierarchies of the Egyptian family, it is predominantly the widow who speaks, leaving the son a very marginal role, especially if we remember that it was the latter who was most affected by the situation, as the legitimate heir of Sankhenptah.

After a short *incipit* characteristic of the epistle form, the text begins with the description of a series of events (col. 2 – 9):

> **|2|** *ṯnw-rˁ pw nw ỉỉ-n wp(w).t(y) n Bḥstỉ r msk𓂝 m wn<=ỉ> ḥms-k(wỉ) ḫr tp=k m rdỉ-t(w) nỉs-t(w) ʾIrỉ.t s𓂝 ʾIỉỉ* **|3|** *r sb𓂝ḳḳ n wp(w).t(y) n Bḥstỉ m ḏd=k sdḫ sw n snḏ ʾIỉ wr rp ḫ.t* **|4|** *n 𓂝ṯw.t tw ḫr.t <=ỉ> ḫsf s𓂝 n s r nḏr.wt=f mk ḥm wˁbw.t ỉỉ.tỉ* **|5|** *ḥnˁ ʾIssy ỉw b𓂝-n<=sn> pr=k ỉṯ-n=s ḫ.t nb(.t) wn.t ỉm=f r snḫt ʾIssy* **|6|***mr=sn sm𓂝r s𓂝=k m snḫt s𓂝 ʾIssy ỉw ỉṯ-n=s ʾI𓂝s.t ʾItỉ ˁn-ˁnḫỉ* **|7|** *m-ˁ=k ỉ(w)=s ḥr ỉṯ.t ḫt rmṯ nb n ḥm=k r s𓂝 ỉṯ.t wn.t nb(.t) m pr=k*

[373] See chapter 3, section 3.3.3. See also the observations made by Willems with regards to CT spell 149. H. Willems 2014, 186-187; H. Willems 2001, 370-372.
[374] H. Willems 1991, 189-190.
[375] This is the hypothesis by H. Willems (1991, 190-191).
[376] Iy is the name of both the son of Irti and Sankhenptah (column 2) and of the father of the latter (column 3 and 9). Moreover, the name Ini is to be intended as a nickname for Iy the elder as is clear from column 13. In the text there are also mentions of three different people named Ananekhi: a servant stolen from Irti (column 6), another one called "the son of Ai" (column 10-11); Ananekhi, son of Uabet (column 13). The latter two could be the same person if the name Ay is considered as a nickname for Isesy.
[377] S. Donnat Beauquier 2009, 65; H. Willems 1991, 190.

> **|2|** This is a summary of when the messenger of Beheseti came for the skin (*msḳ*ꜣ). I was sitting at your bedside and the son of Irti, Iy, **|3|** was called to carry out the juridical procedures (*sbꜣḳḳ*) with the messenger of Beheseti. You said then: "Hide it! On the honour (*snḏ*) of Iy the elder: [378] may the wood of bed under me rot **|4|** if the son of a man is deprived of his property!". And then Wabet came together **|5|** with Isesy: they plundered your house! She took away all the things that there were to make Isesy rich; **|6|** they, indeed, wanted to make your son poor and make the son of Isesy rich. She took away Iaset, Iti and Ananekhi from your hand; **|7|** She is taking away all the dependents of your majesty, after taking everything that was in your house.

This text can be interpreted in diverse ways. According to most scholars, this was a series of events that took place shortly before the death of the recipient of the letter and continued after his death. [379] Donnat Beauquier is of a different opinion and claims that this passage – like every other description of events found in the Letters to the Dead – actually refers to a ritual context, in this specific case, the funeral of Sankhenptah himself.[380] These different interpretations are strongly connected with different readings of various terms which play a vital role in the general understanding of the text.

As regards the term *msḳ*ꜣ (column 2), Gardiner and Sethe proposed that it might be a synecdoche that indicates the mattress or divan on which the dying Sankhenptah lay;[381] Gunn, however was the first to translate this literally: "skin", or "leather".[382] However, even using this reading of the term leads to various contrasting interpretations. Willems, for example, underlines the important economic value given to leather, suggesting that at the origins of the confiscations that Irti and her young son had to endure was a problem linked to unpaid debts.[383] In a previous publication I hypothesised that the term referred to a legal document written on a sheet of leather.[384] Yet, in the light of what has been observed

[378] For the term *snḏ* with the meaning of "respect", see: *FCD,* 234.19. The term is indeed used to indicate that feeling of reverential respect mixed with awe and fear that is typically addressed to the head of the family, or to the elders, in several traditional societies. In this regard, see the expression *snḏ-n = i ỉt=i ỉmꜣ-n=ỉ n mw.t=i*: "I feared my father (that is, more correctly" I respected my father ") and I was benevolent with my mother"; an expression that often occurs in a number of Old Kingdom elite tombs. See, for example, W.K. Simpson 1976, 20, Pl. 15-17 and fig. 33; N. Kanawati, M. Abder-Raziq 1998, 31-36, Pl. 18 and Pl. 58.
[379] A.H. Gardiner and K. Sethe 1928, .1-3; H. Willems 1991, 183.
[380] S. Donnat Beauquier 2009, 79-80.
[381] A.H. Gardiner and K. Sethe 1928, 1.
[382] B. Gunn. 1930, 148-150.
[383] H. Willems 1991, 190.
[384] R. Schiavo 2013 A, 133; The interpretation given by G. Miniaci ("the verb *ms* "bear, give birth", Faulkner, Dictionary, 116, "gebären"; "erzeugen"; "schaffen", Wb II, 137, 4-138, 17, which relates to the world of "procreation",

in the previous chapters, the hypothesis – made by S. Donnat Beauquier – of a possible symbolic role of the *msḳ3*-skin thanks to which it was possible to claim privileges over the inheritance of the deceased,[385] seems indeed the more reliable.

As shown in the previous chapters, a piece of leather, called *msḳ3*, played a foremost role within a ceremony characterising elite funerals, the Tekenu ritual.[386] Also, *msḳ3.w*-skins were involved in a ritual action enacted during the Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos, thanks to which a special status and certain economical privileges could be reached.[387]

Reference to the legal sphere could be supported also by other clues. Firstly, the use of the term *sb3ḳḳ* (column 2), derived from the verb *b3ḳ*, "to explain", "to justify". The unusual causative form of the lemma, characterised by the doubling of the third radical, is quite rare: as Donnat Beauquier notes,[388] it is attested in only one other document, the P. Berlin 8869, a private letter dating to the 6th dynasty.[389] Notably, this message describes a series of crimes committed by a count named Sabni, and it is significant to note that, once again, the context is that of a legal dispute over the possession of some goods. It is also important to stress, that the person asking for this skin is an individual called *wpw.tỉ* (column 2). As demonstrated by Valloggia, this is a term that didn't simply indicate a messenger, but a high-ranking delegated official of the patronal authority:[390] an element that could reinforce the idea that the *msḳ3*-skin had an actual symbolic value officially recognised not too different from an actual legal value.

Accepting these interpretations, the subsequent situation could be outlined as follows: on the one hand the antagonists try to justify their actions by the possession of the *msḳ3*-skin and the rights related to it; or – according to the version told by Irti – by the fact that they extorted the piece of leather using force. On the other hand, the widow and the young son present a legitimate request, as it was the custom that the first-born son would be the only and legitimate heir.

"infancy", and the noun *k3*, "Lebenskraft" Wb V, 86, 10-89, 11 or "Nahrung", "Speise", Wb V, 91, 3-13, which might be connected to the sustenance necessary to support life. Hence, *msḳ3* could signify something that contributes to the offspring's survival, a sort of inheritance, or better still, a child's inheritance") does not seem enough grounded. Even the interpretation of the 2nd century BCE document from which he took inspiration seems forced (G. Miniaci 2014, 39), especially in light of the role played by the *msḳ3*-skin within the funerary rituals highlighted in the previous chapter (See Chapater 3, section 3.2.4.

[385] S. Donnat Beauquier 2009, 68-71.

[386] See chapter 3, section 3.2.1.b.

[387] See chapter 3, section 3.3.4.

[388] S. Donnat Beauquier 2009, 72.

[389] C. Manasse 2006, 153.

[390] M. Valloggia 1976, 64.

The senders of the letter mention the deceased's wishes twice. The first time, in the text we just analysed above, in columns 2-5; the second, even more specifically, at the end of the letter (column 12):

> **|12|** *sḫꜣ nw ḏd-n =k n Ỉrỉ.t sꜣ Ỉỉỉ pr.w ỉt.w twꜣ.w m ḏd =k pr sꜣ sp-2 grg sꜣ=k pr=k mỉ grg=k pr ỉt=k*
>
> |12| Remember the things you told Irti's son, Iy: "The houses of the fathers must be respected - and you also said - the house of the son is of the son!". May your son found your house, as you founded your father's house.

Most of the scholars who have analysed the so-called Cairo Linen agree on the fact that these sentences refer to something that happened shortly before Sankhenptah's death.[391] The only dissenting interpretation comes from Donnat Beauquier who suggests that it could be an effective phrase expressed by the deceased head of the household during a necromantic consultation:

> *Il convient toutefois là encore d'envisager la possibilité que ces paroles fassent référence à une prise de position post-mortem du défunt Sânkhenptah. Le verbe « dire » n'est en effet pas seulement utilisé au sens propre pour décrire le processus de communication entre vivants. Il est aussi utilisé pour évoquer la communication avec la sphère divine, en particulier dans le compte rendu de procédure oraculaires.*[392]

The parallel noted by Donnat Beauquier with the oracular practices is certainly well founded. Indeed, other scholars interpreted this document as a proof of ancient Egyptian necromantic practices.[393] On the other hand, though it is correct to contextualise the Letters to the Dead within an articulated public ceremony, and though their function could be comparable with that of the subsequent oracular practices, it seems more likely that this sentence was pronounced by Sankhenptah while he was still alive – indeed, as stressed in the previous section, the last wills could be orally expressed in front of

[391] A.H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 1-3; H. Willems 1991, 183.
[392] S. Donnat Beauquier 2009, 73.
[393] S. Morenz 1949.

witnesses – and reported in this letter with a specific aim. If we consider the facts narrated by Irti as a detailed description of past events, the document could be considered as a "defence plea". It means, that the letter could be interpreted as the transcription of the arguments used by the wife of the deceased to defend her rights over the inheritance. The fact that the letter was deposited inside the tomb of the recipient highlights a certain affinity with the legalistic inscriptions that, during the same historical phase, were usually transcribed on the tombs walls to officially ratify the right of succession of the legitimate heirs.[394] This aspect could suggest that the letter here taken into consideration may have had a certain kind of official value and could perhaps testify a juridical procedure solved through a ritualistic action performed in the necropolis.

The Qaw Bowl, UC 16163[395]

The medium on which the text is written is one of the most frequently used for the Letters to the Dead: the same type of bowl used in mortuary rituals and in some performative practices.[396] In this case it is a terracotta bowl with a diameter of 19cm and a depth of 6cm. It presents inscriptions in hieratic on both sides; these are placed in six columns on the inside and ten on the outside. [397] They actually form two separate letters, sent by the same sender, a man called Shepsi, and addressed to his father (on the inside) and his mother (on the outside).

The document can be dated to the beginning of the First Intermediate Period. As for the Cairo Linen, the archaeological context is known. The artefact was discovered during Petrie's excavations at Qaw el-Kebir in 1924. Inside tomb n.7695 the archaeologist found the remains of a man, some objects and the bowl in question placed under the head of the deceased. [398] The small size of the tomb meant it could only hold one body and there is no information about the identity of the deceased.[399] It has been suggested that the letter might have been given to a mediator – a friend or a family member who had recently died – who would have brought the letter to the intended addressees.[400] However, it is not possible to exclude that the body might have belonged to one of the men cited in the document, such

[394] S. Allam 1990, 31-33; N. Strudwick 2005, 49.
[395] The document is currently held in the Petrie Museum in London (UCL 16163). For the copy of the hieratic text: A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 3-5 and 17-20, table II and table II a; B. Gunn 1930, 148-159; E. Bresciani 1990, 66-68; E.F, Wente and E. S. Meltzer 1990, 211-212; D. Farout 2004; S. Donnat Beauquier 2009, 80-86; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 35-40; R. Schiavo 2013 A, 135-140; G. Miniaci 2016, 88- 105; J. Hsieh 2022, 128-155.
[396] On the function and meaning of bowls in relation to the ritual of the Letters to the Dead, see: S. Donnat Beauquier 2002, 209–236.
[397] A.H. Gardiner and K.H. Sethe 1928, 3.
[398] A.H. Gardiner and K.H. Sethe 1928, 3.
[399] A.H. Gardiner and K.H. Sethe 1928, 3.
[400] On this issue, M. O'Donoghue 1999, 87-90.

as the father of the sender (presuming thus that the parents might have been buried separately), or the brother of the sender, Sobekhotep, who actually plays a crucial role in the facts narrated.[401]
The situation described in this letter is similar to the one of the Cairo Linen. Shepsi asks his parents for supernatural help in order to solve a quarrel about some property. It is interesting to note that the harmful influence of Shepsi's deceased brother, Sobekhotep, seems to have favoured the confiscation Shepsi fell victim to. This document also presents a request submitted by Shepsi to his parents so that they could perform a supernatural judgment against the brother:

On the outside – letter to the mother (column 4):

> **|4|** *ḥA wp(i)=t wi ḥnʿ Sbk-ḥtp*
> **|4|** May you offer a judgment between Sobekhotep and I!

On the inside – letter to the father (column 9)

> **|9|** *ir n=k ir.t wḏʿ-mdw <wi> ḥnʿ=f sḫ.w=k ḥnʿ<=k> m niw.t wʿ.t*
> **|9|** Make a judgment between him and me, as your scribes are there with you in the Only City.

An analysis of the letter written to the father shows a number of elements common to the Cairo Linen. In the same way, after a typical *incipit* of the epistolary genre, the writer narrates a series of events that occurred in the past (on the inside, column 2-4):

> **|2|** *tnw-rʿ nw S=k r itḥ r bw n.t(y) sn<=i> Sbk-ḥtp im in=k* **|3|** *ḫpS n k m iw s=k im ḥnʿ n-wʿ=f m ḏd=k iw n <=i> sn.w (?) ḥms wnm=k* **|4|** *iwf*
> **|2|** This is the memorandum of when you reached the enclosure, the place where my brother Sobekhotep was; when you brought **|3|** a bull's leg and your son arrived with Enuaf and you said: "May (you) be welcome! Sit and eat **|4|** the meat."

[401] G. Miniaci 2016, 88-105. On the other hand, Miniaci's hypothesis, according to which the aim of the document is to obtain the help of the deceased brother through the intercession of their parents does not seem valid. Rather, the fact that the writer of the missive emphasises that he was the one who took care of his brother's funeral clearly shows that the main focus of the document is an issue concerning the inheritance of Sobekhotep.

The full understanding of the text is hindered by some palaeographic and philological problems. Firstly, the word *iṯḥ* (column 2) has been translated by Gardiner and Sethe as 'prison', a meaning that would make the text more obscure. [402] However, based on a parallel with a document dated only slightly after this one, (P. London UC 32157 = P. Kahun LV.1), Donnat Beauquier has hypothesised that this lemma may actually have a more generic meaning, probably indicating a funerary structure.[403]

A further problem of interpretation is given, moreover, by the name of one of the characters found in the second column; the group of hieratic signs lends itself to different readings. Gardiner and Sethe hypothesised as a possible reading *sn* <=*i*> *Sbk-ḥtpw*, thus identifying the individual with the same deceased brother of the writer mentioned in the fourth column of the outside. Nonetheless, the two Egyptologists, based on palaeographic observations, preferred a different interpretation: they interpreted *sn* as a proper name and transliterated the sign as (*sꜣ*), rather than as (*sbk*), thus translating *sꜣ sn Ḥtpw*, "Hetepu, the son of Sen". [404] Such a choice was probably the result of their excessive caution and, as Donnat Beauquier pointed out, the first interpretation seems the most likely.[405]

Several studies so far examining the Qaw Bowl agree in identifying the episode narrated in the initial part of the text with the funeral for the recipient of the missive (the father of the sender), or with another commemoration in his honour. In particular, Donnat Beauquier [406] and Farout [407] claim that it may be a ritual through which Shepsi invokes the help of his father, who, once revived, speaks – in first person or through a medium [408] – inviting the sender to sit down and feast. However, a different interpretation could be considered, namely that the fact narrated does indeed refer to a funeral, but rather than the funeral of the father, it could be Sobekhotep's. [409] This hypothesis is supported by what was later said in the same document:

[402] A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 3.
[403] S. Donnat Beauquier 2009, 82-83.
[404] A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 4 and 15.
[405] S. Donnat Beauquier 2009, 82-83.
[406] S. Donnat Beauquier 2009, 84.
[407] D. Farout 2004, 51.
[408] According to Farout, the man named Enuaf mentioned in the second column would have had this role. See: D. Farout 2004, 51.
[409] A similar hypothesis was proposed by Gardiner and Sethe, but later dismissed because of the name found in the column 2: "We were, therefore, for a moment tempted to read 'my brother Sebekḥotpu instead of Son's son Ḥotpui, and to imagine that the allusion was to that brother's funeral obsequies". See. A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 4.

*|**4**| ỉn ỉ<r>r-t r=ỉ r-gs=k nỉ ỉr.t-n ḏd.t-n sꜣ=k ỉr<r>-t n sꜣ=k ỉm ỉn sn<=ỉ> ḳrs-n(=ỉ) sw ỉ<n>-n(=ỉ) sw m […] |**5**| rdỉ-n=ỉ sw m-m smy.tỉw=f sk ỉt-Smʿ r=f m ṯꜣb.t d(ꜣ)ỉ.w mnw 1 ỉt-Smʿ 6 |**6**| mḥʿ.w šns mḥ.t sk ỉr<=ỉ> n=f tm.t ỉry ỉr-n=f nn r sꜣ=k ỉm nfy sp 2*

|**4**| Why did someone act against me in your presence, on the instigation of my brother and without this son of yours ever having done or said anything? I took care of his burial; I brought him back from [the city of ...] |**5**| and I placed him among his (loved) ones who are in the desert.[410] Because of him I have contracted a debt of thirty measures of southern wheat: a dress, a tool-*mnw*, six measures of wheat from the south, |**6**| linen, sweets, a cup-*mḥt*. Although I have done for him what has never been done (for a brother), he has done these things very badly towards your son.

The writer clearly states that he was wronged by his brother's spirit despite of the pious and commendable behaviour he had in his regard: not only did he recover the body of Sobekhotep from another city, but he paid the huge expenses for his funeral. This is a detail that is particularly interesting, especially if we take into account what follows in the text. Exactly as was found in the Cairo Linen, some words pronounced by the deceased man are written down:

*|**7**| sk ḏd-n=k n sꜣ=k ỉm mn ỉš.wt nb(.wt) m sꜣ=ỉ Špsỉ m<=k> ꜣḥ.wt <=ỉ> ỉṯỉ.t ỉn |**8**| Šrỉ sꜣ Ḥnw*

You said to your son: “all of my possessions will remain with my son Shepsi”. Instead, look! My lands have been taken |**8**| by Henu, son of Shear [alternative interpretation: Henu, son of the son].

It is important to remember that one of the most important rules that regulated the passing down of inheritance stated that this inheritance was to go to whoever dealt with the funeral of the deceased. With this in mind, it is clear why Shepsi emphasised this point, almost pedantically listing the details of the goods he had used to give his brother a fitting burial. This begs the question as to who Henu son of Sheri (*Šrỉ sꜣ Ḥnw*) is and on what basis of pretext or rights he was able to take possession of

[410] The term *smy.tỉw* literally means “the ones who belong to the desert”, therefore the dead; the use of the suffix pronoun *f* might indicate that the corpse has been buried among his relatives. For a similar use of the term see: J. J. Clére 1985, 85-86.

the lands belonging to Shepsi. As the writer mentions a debt, a reasonable hypothesis is that this is the person with whom it was contracted. However, such a theory wouldn't explain the reason why Shepsi asked his parents to "make a judgement" against his dead brother Sobekhotep. So, it would be reasonable to identify Henu as an heir to Sobekhotep, and thus to propose an alternative reading: to consider *šr* not as a proper name,[411] but as a noun, "young boy, son" and therefore translate the phrase as "Henu, son of the son", or rather the grandson of the father of Shepsi, the son of Sobekhotep, the nephew of Shepsi.[412]

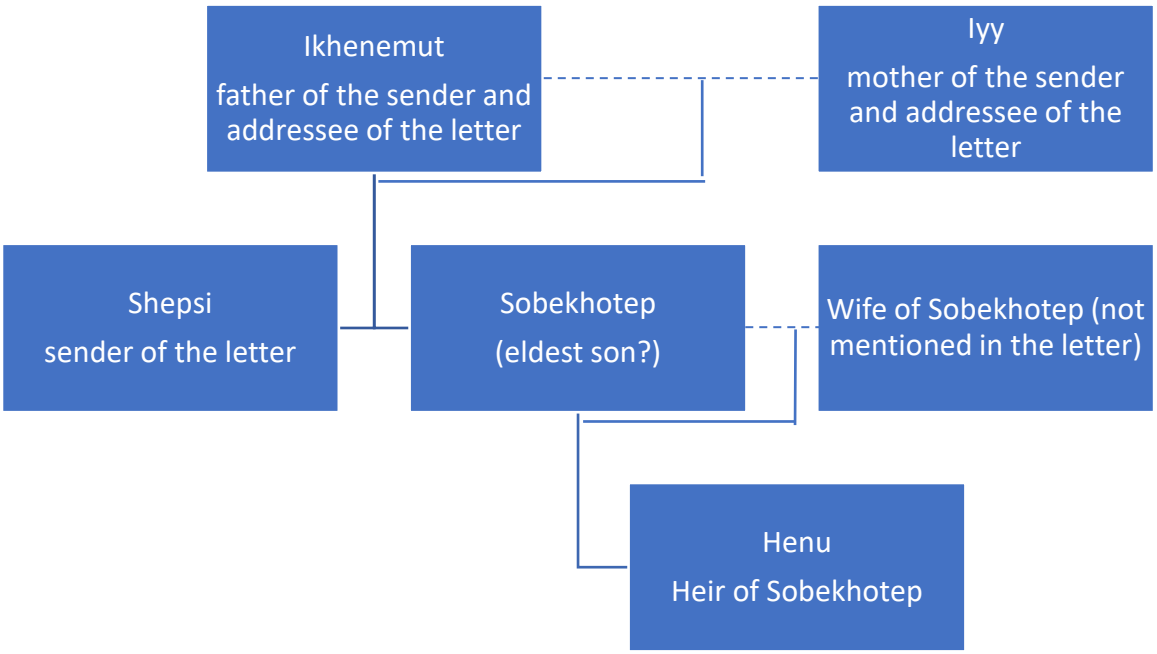

Figure 25 Reconstruction of kinship ties of the individuals mentioned in the letter

One could posit that Sobekhotep was the older brother of Shepsi and thus the legitimate main heir of Ikhenenmut, but he died prematurely, probably before his father, and thus before receiving the family inheritance. Shepsi, in this case, would have been the only heir of the *pater familias*, but also, since he arranged the funeral of his older brother, would be in a position to push aside his brother's legitimate heirs, who would then have made an attempt to reclaim their father's inheritance. [413] One shouldn't forget however that we have the version written by Shepsi and that the possibility exists that some awkward details might have been omitted deliberately.

[411] *RPN* I 329.9.
[412] I was not able to find other attestations for the expression *šr sꜣ*; however, there are examples of similar expressions that are usually translated with "nephew". See, for example, *pꜣ-šri n pꜣ-šri*. See: R. Hannig 1995, 899.
[413] In Metjen's tomb there is an example of an *ỉmy.t-pr* done by a woman for her nephews. See: T. Logan 2000, 66.

The facts narrated in this document, thus, could be interpreted in the light of the same dynamic recognizable in the Cairo Linen: a man is depriving the son of his deceased brother of his property and social position, by oppressing the widow of the deceased.

It is no doubt significant that a recurrent pattern can be found in both the Cairo Linen and the Qaw Bowl: in both cases, indeed, alongside the detailed narration of a recent event in which the writer gives his version, a phrase spoken by the deceased is found recorded in direct speech in which the writer is explicitly recognised as the only legitimate heir. In addition, notably, both the documents were certainly found inside a tomb, an element that allows a parallel with the legalistic inscriptions usually written on walls of tombs in order to ratify the rights of the legitimate heirs over the inheritance of the deceased.

P. Brooklyn 37. 1799 E[414]

The letter is written on a papyrus sheet 23 cm high and 17.8 cm wide; the text, in abnormal hieratic, laid out in 19 lines on the *recto* and one of the *verso*. The state of preservation of the document can be considered excellent, except for a few small scattered losses and a larger one which compromises the reading of the 19th line on the *recto* and the only one on the *verso*. Based on internal evidence, a provenance from the area of Thebes has been proposed. [415]

The P. Brooklyn 37.1799 E is certainly a rather peculiar document. It belongs to a historical period quite anomalous for the Letters to the Dead – the second half of the 7th century BCE [416]– during which the religious practice of the Letters to the Dead seems to have been abandoned. One has indeed to take into consideration that apart from the document in question, the most recent Letters to the Dead, the missive sent by Butehamun to his deceased wife, is dated between the end of the 20th dynasty and the beginning of the 21st, so ca. 1070 BCE. [417]

However, the contents are surprisingly similar to the documents previously analysed and also in this case, it is possible to reconstruct a controversial dispute about issues regarding inheritance.

The writer, a woman called Iretiru, addresses a man, Tenehem [418] – probably her deceased husband – to get revenge for some unjust confiscations. Despite the difficulty in reconstructing the complex

[414] This papyrus is part of a collection of the Brooklyn Museum. (P. Brooklyn 37. 1799 E). R. Jasnow and G. Vittmann 1992-1993, Tafel 2-3. K. Donker van Heel 2013, 25-28; S. Donnat Beuquier 2014, 80-86.
[415] R. Jasnow and G. Vittmann 1992-1993.
[416] R. Jasnow and G. Vittmann 1992-1993.
[417] S. Donnat Beuquier 2014, 80-86.
[418] For a different rendering of the name see K. Donker van Heel 2013, 25.

relationships between the people mentioned in the text, it cannot be excluded that some of the people indicated as antagonists are in fact close relatives of the writer herself. Specifically, Jasnow and Vittmann claim that the person most involved in the actions carried out against Iretiru, a certain Hersaiset, may be not only the brother of Tenehem, but also the second husband of the writer herself.[419]

After the appeal to the deceased, the woman describes a crescendo of abuses. First, her clothes, precious objects and servants are removed:

> Recto, 2 – 4:
>
> **|2|** *n(ỉ)-ʿšỉ nỉ ḫrw nty* **|3|** *tỉ<=ỉ> n-ỉm=w m-šs m-ḏr.t Ns-Ḥr (sỉ) Ḥr-sỉ-Ỉs.t mw.t=f Ỉr.t=w-r=w ḫr=f (wy)* **|4|** *ṯỉy=f nỉy=k ḥbs (n) gns ỉw=ỉ ršy n-ỉm=k ḫr=f*
>
> |**2**| There are numerous thefts of which **|3|** I am the victim at the hand of Nesher, son of Hersaiset, his mother is Iretiru. He has stolen from me. **|4|** He has taken your clothes with force. "I will rejoice over you", he said.
>
> Recto, 11 – 12:
>
> **|11|** *ṯỉy=f nỉy=k ḥmt.w ḥnʿỉ ḥbs tỉ=f tỉ<=ỉ>* sw **|12|** *bnr m-sỉ šp<=ỉ> n(ỉ) ḥḏ nty […] tỉ=f tỉ<=ỉ> 3 ḥm*
>
> **|11|** He has taken your copper and three textiles from me; he has made me **|12|** give away, after receiving it, the money with which […] he has made me give away three servants.

Lastly, from some internal evidence, one can assume that the woman has been evicted from the house of the deceased husband; something that can be deduced from the words of the deceased, recorded here too in the first person:

> **|8|***ỉ-ỉr=w ʿn md.t ỉ-ḏd=k n=ỉ dy* **|9|** *m-ỉr ḫỉʿ.t(=ỉ) pỉy (?) pr Ỉr.t=w-rw ḥms {sw} n-ỉm=f ʿnḫ*

[419] R. Jasnow and G. Vittmann 1992-1993, 24.

|**8**| They have gone against the words you said to me in this place |**9**| "Do not abandon me! This is the house, oh Iretiru, in which you must continue to live!".

Noteworthily, also in this document it is possible to recognise the same recurrent pattern identified in the other two documents previously analysed. In the incipit the writer describes in detail events that have happened in the past that coincide with a list of the injustices suffered. Then, it follows a sentence that the deceased recipient of the missive said when he was still alive. In addition, thanks to some internal evidence (the line written on the verso), it is possible to posit that the letter was placed inside the tomb of the recipient or in its vicinity:

|**Verso 1**| *ḥr-sꜣ-ỉs.t sꜣ Thhm (sꜣ) Nḫt-tꜣ-mw.t […] ꜥš sw (Ḥr)-rꜣ=f (n) tꜣ ḥ.t ṯnhm*

|**Verso 1**| Hersaiset, son of Tenehem son of Nekhettamut […], recite it before him (at) the tomb of Tenehem

4.5 Other documents

The following analysis is devoted to two particular categories of documents somehow connected to the Letters to the Dead concerning inheritance issues:

- Other Letters to the Dead which seem to allude to economic issues: the so-called Hu Bowl and P. Naga ed-Der 3737.
- Other documents belonging to the same religious milieu of the Letters to the Dead, but that from a formal point of view cannot be considered as written pleas addressed to the deceased: the so-called Qubbet el-Hawa Bowl, Oxford Bowl and Moscow Bowl.

Hu Bowl, UC 16244 – First Intermediate Period [420]

The artifact comes from tomb Y84 at Hu (Diospolis Parva), hence the name attributed to it, [421] and it is a plea written by a woman to a deceased man, likely her husband. [422] The nature of the request is

[420] A.H. Gardiner and K.H. Sethe 1928, 5 and 20-21, pl. IV and IV a; A. Roccati 1967, 323-328; S. Donnat 2014, 44-48; J. Hsieh 2022, 198-210.
[421] S. Donnat 2014, 44.
[422] S. Donnat 2014, 44.

quite obscure. Something bad is happening to the daughter of the sender because of some malignant dead.[423] Yet, at columns 3 and 4 it is possible to read:

> |3| *n ỉrỉ.t n<=ỉ> r=f n wnm<=ỉ> ỉšw.t=f n rdỉ=f ḏ.t n sꜣ.t<=ỉ> ỉrr.t pr.t-ḫrw n(ỉ)* |4| *n ꜣḫ ḥr sbỉ.t ḥr tp(yw) tꜣ*
>
> |3| There is nothing I have done against him. I did not use (literally "eat") his goods, nor did he give anything to my daughter |4| with which to perform the funerary offerings for an Akh-spirit who protects those who are on earth (in the realm of the living).[424]

The sentence implies that both the sender and her daughter were not able to enact the proper rites for a certain deceased, probably because of a litigation concerning an inheritance which prevented them from benefiting from certain goods. Indeed, the word *wnm,* at column 3, is to be intended as a juridical term, "being the usufructuary of something".[425] The sentence, thus, could be interpreted as a veiled threat aimed at convincing the deceased to help the two women in a legal dispute similar to those described in the documents examined in the previous section.

P. Naga ed-Deir 3737, MFA 38.2121 – 6th /11th dynasty[426]

The document was found in a pit located in the courtyard of tomb N 3737 at Naga ed-Deir, which belonged to a prominent man called Meru. [427] Remarkably, a wall decoration preserved in this tomb depicts all the individuals cited in the letter: the owner of the tomb, Meru, his son, Heni, and a *ḏ.t*-servant called Henu. [428] The sender of the letter is Heni, who invokes the help of his deceased father to seek protection from Seni; the latter was probably already dead when the missive was written, since Heni claims to be haunted by the oneiric apparitions of this individual. [429]

As already mentioned, Seni was a *ḏ.t*-servant of Meru, thus a person who has to take care of the estates linked to mortuary cult of the deceased. [430] In this regard, it is important to stress that mortuary

[423] S. Donnat 2014, 44-46.
[424] For the translation I have mainly based myself on the interpretation of the text given by Roccati: *ỉrr.t* is a passive imperfective participle referring to *ḫ.t* (A. Roccati 1967, 327).
[425] A. Roccati 1967, 326.
[426] W.K. Simpson 1966, 39-52; A. Roccati 1967, 324-326; K. Szpakowska 2003, 20-26 and p. 185; S. Donnat 2014, 48-51; J. Hsieh 2022, 169-185.
[427] S. Donnat 2014, 48.
[428] M. O'Donoghue 1999, 90 and fig. 1.
[429] This aspect of P. Naga ed-Der 3737 has been elaborated in chapter 3, section 3.1.b.
[430] Wb 5, 511.1; D. Jones 2000, no. 3747; J. C. Moreno García, 2013, 1045-1046.

cults played an important role within the whole Egyptian economic system. The tombs of the pharaohs, as well as those of the elites, were endowed with agricultural estates and workers were in charge of the production of food offerings. Furthermore, one or more persons were appointed for the performance of the offering rituals.[431] As regards the royal sphere, this provisioning system was certainly majestic. The crown used revenues from rather extensive agricultural estates, involving a considerable number of individuals in the production of food offerings as well for the performance of the rites.[432] For the elite, instead, the existence of private institutions is well attested since the 3rd millennium BCE (Old Kingdom).[433] In these cases, the personnel in charge of the mortuary cult was employed through specific contracts and the supplies came from private properties belonging to the family of the deceased; on the other hand, it was not uncommon for high officials to obtain a perpetual mortuary endowment subsidised by the crown and sometimes this last system coexisted with a private one.[434]

The economic interests related to mortuary endowments had to be conspicuous and, remarkably, legalistic texts inscribed on elite tomb walls firmly forbade the conversion of the lands destined to these institutions to other purposes.[435] Such a peremptory prohibition suggests that individual egoism was always around the corner and could entail problematic situations, certainly related to economic issues between the various parties involved. If we interpret the P. Naga ed-Deir 3737 in the light of this perspective, the request of the sender has to be understood within a more complex framework in which the economic interests linked to elite mortuary cults played a crucial role.

Qubbet el-Hawa Bowl, Cairo JdE 91740 – Middle Kingdom **[436]**

The artifact was found at tomb 30b at Qubbet el-Hawa, datable to the 6th dynasty. Yet a palaeographic analysis of the inscription indicates the 12th dynasty. [437] The text inscribed on the bowl cannot be considered as a proper Letter to the Dead, since it is not a plea addressed to a deceased. Rather, the document concerns an economic transaction for the reuse of a tomb, likely the same one in which the artifact was found. [438] Therefore, under this point of view the Qubbet el-Hawa bowl is very interesting

[431] S. Allam 1974, 131-146.
[432] H. Vymazalovà 2009, 337.
[433] S. Allam 2007, 15.
[434] J.C. Moreno García 2013, 1045-1046.
[435] N. Strudwick 2005, 49-50.
[436] E. Edel 1987 93- 105; H. Goedicke 1988; S. Donnat Beauquier 2019, 66-69; J. Hsieh 2022, 270-276.
[437] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 68.
[438] H. Goedicke 1988, 195.

for the purpose of the present chapter, since it seems to imply that a document concerning an economical transaction and buried inside a tomb could have had a certain kind of legal value.

Oxford Bowl, Pitt-Rivers 1887.27.1 – Second Intermediate Period [439]

The provenance of the document is unknown and its dating is problematic. The palaeography and some grammatical features indicate that the text was written during the late Second Intermediate Period; on the other hand, the morphology of the bowl is typical of the 12th /13th dynasty. [440] The document cannot be considered as a proper Letter to the Dead: the text is not written in epistolary form, nor is it a plea addressed to a deceased person. Nevertheless, the Oxford Bowl undeniably belong to the same religious milieu of the three letters written to solve inheritance issues analysed here. The text is a statement concerning the transmission of an inheritance from a fugitive called Meniupu to a family who took care of his burial:

> *ḏd ỉn Ttỉ-ꜥꜣ sꜣ Nnỉ Mnỉ.w-pw ỉỉ wꜥrw sꜥnḫ sw ỉt=ỉ mw.t<=ỉ> (ỉdn.w ?) […]*
> *ḥm.t=f Ttỉ mwt=f ḳrs sw tꜣy=ỉ mw.t ỉn hꜣỉ =s Nnỉ ḏd n=s ḳrs sw ỉwꜥ sw*
>
> Words said by Teti-a, son of Neni: Meniupu came as a fugitive, my father and my mother took care of his nourishment. The substitutes (?) […][441] his wife, Teti. Then, he died and my mother buried him. It was her husband who said to her: "bury him and inherit from him".

Although this brief text cannot be considered as a plea addressed to a dead, it shows all the main stylistic features identified for the Letters to the Dead concerning inheritance issues previously analysed. There is the narration of an event that occurred in the past, and a clear reference to the Egyptian customary rule "the property is given to the one who buries". Moreover, this reference occurs in a speech attributed to the father of the writer, Neni, whose words were *verbatim* reported on the document.

[439] A.H. Gardiner 1928, 26-27, Pl. IX; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 69- 71; J. Hsieh 2022, 296-303.
[440] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 69.
[441] This part of the inscription is not clear. I mainly followed S. Donnat Beauquier here (2014, 69-70). For a different interpretation of this sentence see J. Hsieh 2022, 296-298.

One has also to take into consideration that the situation narrated in the Oxford Bowl is somewhat atypical. The document does not concern a litigation between siblings over the inheritance of an ancestor. Rather, it is a statement through which Teti-a can claim the inheritance of the fugitive Meniupu, inheritance that already belonged to the mother of Teti-a, Teti, (probably already dead when the document was written), since she was the one who took care of Meniupu's burial.[442]

Moscow Bowl, Moscow 3917b – 18th dynasty **[443]**

The letter is written by a man, Neb, to a *wʿb*-priest called Khnem-em-wasekhet and it is about some issues concerning the inheritance of a woman who recently died, Tita, who was the former wife of the sender. At first sight the document may seem an ordinary letter exchanged between two living persons, since it is never explicitly stated that the *wʿb*-priest Khnem-em-wasekhet is a deceased man. On the other hand, as already stressed by A. H. Gardiner and K. Sethe, the fact that, in the last line of the letter, the recipient is threatened with a formulaic expression quite similar to that used to ward off malignant spirits, or to convince the ancestors to act in favour of their descendants, such a possibility cannot be excluded a priori.[444] Finally, the fact that the text is written on a bowl and not on an ostracon, would be another good argument for identifying this document with a proper Letter to the Dead, since ordinary letters are rarely written on this kind of medium.[445] Unfortunately, the archaeological context in which the object was found is not known. If it were from a tomb, the Moscow Bowl could certainly be linked to the same religious milieu of the other documents analysed here.

4.6 Results

The analysis of the Letters to the Dead regarding inheritance issues has highlighted the presence of a recurrent common scheme, partially recognizable also in the Oxford Bowl. Indeed, in these documents, it is possible to identify a detailed description of past events and the transcription of a speech delivered by the deceased recipient of the missive, in which the sender is proclaimed as the rightful heir.[446] If we keep in mind that the most ancient document, the Cairo Linen JdE 25675,

[442] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 69-70.
[443] A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 27-28 and Pl. XI; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 25-26; U. Verhoeven 2003, 31 and note 1; J. Hsieh 2022, 303-309;
[444] A.H. Gardiner and K.H. Sethe 1928, 27-28.
[445] Ibid. Contra: U. Verhoeven, who considers the Moscow bowl as a common letter exchanged between living persons (U. Verhoeven 2003, 31 and note 1).
[446] For the specific case of the Oxford Bowl, we can identify both a narration pertaining to past events and a speech of an authoritative ancestor verbatim reported. However, the situation is more complex. The writer is claiming the

belongs to the 3rd millennium BCE, while the more recent one, P. Brooklyn 37.17 99 E, is datable to the 7th century BCE, the existence of a formal structure that has remained consistent through centuries is certainly impressive.

This feature is even more striking if one considers that the category "Letters to the Dead" is to be meant as a label invented by modern scholars and not as an actual literary genre recognised by the Egyptians themselves.[447] The documents currently labelled as "Letters to the Dead" can be quite different from each other and, as mentioned above, the category did not necessarily include documents written in epistolary style. If one also takes into consideration that these documents were written to appease a potential malevolent dead, as well as to ask the intercession of an ancestor, it is possible to affirm that the documents currently labelled as "Letters to the Dead" have to be understood as the written evidence of diverse kinds of rituals which had to be enacted for different purposes, and likely also in different occasions. Given this starting point, the observation made by S. Donnat Beauquier that the practice of sending a written plea to a deceased was probably recreated more than once through Egyptian history, and that it is impossible to recognise a unique scribal model from which all the documents currently known are derived is certainly valid. [448] Yet, for the specific case of the letters concerning inheritance issues, the presence of a recurrent stylistic scheme is undeniable, and its existence allows us to hypothesise that these letters were written according to a specific prototype. The point is that, probably, such a prototype did not belong to a literary textual genre, but to legal practice. Indeed, a standardised form appears to be a distinctive trait of Egyptian legal texts and the fact that the Egyptians used to consult legal casebooks and form books to write their legal documents since the earliest stages of their history has been proven.[449] As pointed out by T. Logan, "each different legal document probably had its own restricted legal meaning and distinct formulary";[450] the main problem in this regard is that for the most ancient phases of Egyptian history the existence of legal form book can only be demonstrated indirectly, by identifying recurring patterns in texts which show a legal aim.[451] So, the recurrent stylistic pattern highlighted here can be

inheritance of a fugitive, which was previously claimed by his deceased mother (who was probably already dead when the document was written). The mother was indeed the one who enacted the funerary rituals for the fugitive, according to the will of her husband (who is also the father of the sender). In this case, the speech reported is that of the deceased father (or father in law? See: J. Hsieh 2022, 299 and note f) of the sender, who allowed his wife of to take care of the posthumous destiny of the fugitive and, thus, to obtain his inheritance.

[447] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 208-219.

[448] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 218-219. It has been hypothesised that a possible model for the Letters to the Dead could be identified with a text reported within the first sections (I-XVII) of the Kemyt – a compendium used for the training of the scribes. Cf. D. Klotz 2009, 136-140. Yet, the subsequent work by S. Donnat has shown how this hypothesis was not grounded. S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 167 and ff.

[449] T. Logan 2017, 104-105.

[450] T. Logan 2017, 81.

[451] T. Logan 2017, 81.

considered as an argument in favour of the actual legal value of the Letters to the Dead concerning inheritance issues.

In this regard, it is also noteworthy that the documents analysed here were certainly written keeping closely in mind the Egyptian customary rules concerning inheritance and succession. The long, detailed descriptions of past events strongly resemble a defensive plea through which the writer profiles himself on the side of reason. This is particularly clear for the two letters written by widows, the Cairo Linen JdE 25675 and P. Brooklyn 37.17 99 E. The incipit of these documents consists in a long list of abuses suffered by the two women: both the kinds of goods that have been taken and the abusive conduct adopted by the antagonists are indeed reported in great detail. The letter addressed to the father written on the inside of the Qaw Bowl (UC 1663) could be interpreted in the same way too, but, in this specific case, we can observe the other side of the coin: given that the sender is claiming the inheritance of his deceased brother, it follows – although it is not explicitly said – that his aim is to override the rights of the widow and the son of the latter. Also, the narration of past events described in the Qau Bowl is perfectly functional to the claim of the sender: the reference to the ritual banquet – likely occurred during the funerals of the brothers – and the long, detailed list of the expenses the writer faced to bear the funerary rituals must be indeed interpreted in the light of the Egyptian customary rule according to which "the property is given to the one who buries". Therefore, also in this case, it can be argued that the function of the text was rather similar to that of a defensive plea aimed at profiling the writer as legitimate heir.

The speeches of the deceased recipients, transcribed *verbatim* in all the documents analysed here, have to be interpreted in the same way. As stated above, in Ancient Egypt it was custom that the last wishes of the family chief were expressed orally and in front of witnesses.

It is therefore clear that the letters analysed here were written according to formulaic standards that has some legal value and that their content not only shows clear references to the customary rules pertaining to inheritance and succession, but can even be compared to an elaborated defensive plea. One has also to take into account that private letters could be used as legal documents from the Old Kingdom onwards. [452] A letter was indeed perceived as physical evidence of a communication, which can testify what happened and what was said in specific circumstances, especially if sealed and kept in an archive or in another place – such as a tomb – which according to the emic perspective of the Egyptians, had a rather similar function.[453]

[452] K. Baer 1966, 1-9.
[453] C. Eyre 2013, 94-100.

As already mentioned, the Letters to the Dead concerning inheritance issues were placed inside the tomb of the deceased recipient, or in its vicinity.[454] Moreover, the ritual deposition of these documents was enacted during the funerals, or during specific festivals celebrated to praise the dead.[455] Thus, in order to demonstrate whether these letters had an actual or fictitious legal function, one has to clarify what an elite tomb really symbolised for an ancient Egyptian, and if the ritualised deposition of a written document inside it during a public performance could have had an officially recognised legal function.

Monumental tombs were considered as a means of social display since the Old Kingdom. A tomb not only testified the high rank reached by the deceased buried in it, but it was also a medium aimed at displaying the social status of the living descendants of the latter.[456] This is particularly clear in Old Kingdom elite tombs, whose decorative programs often incorporated private legal texts. As stressed by N. Strudwick, these texts could be transcribed inside the tomb or in the funerary chapel, while in other cases the inscription could take the form of slabs or stelae placed in the area of the tomb of the person concerned.[457] This monumentalisation of private legal texts within elite tombs has to be intended as a procedure for keeping a document safe in a place, the tomb, which also had a sacred function, and was also aimed at officially formalising legal documents in order to guarantee and perpetuate their validity.[458]

In the light of these elements, it is reasonable to assume that the act of placing a written document inside a tomb or in its vicinity should have had a rather similar function: if it was common practice to ratify the status of the chosen heir through legalistic inscriptions written on the tomb wall of the donor,[459] it follows that the action of transcribing a speech delivered by the *pater familias* – in which a specific person is named as rightful heir – and to put this written document inside his tomb or in its surroundings – should have had a clear recognizable meaning, aimed at ratifying the status of the heritor.

One has also to consider what has been highlighted in the previous chapters: the performance of the funerary rituals was indeed meant as a "double rite of passage". On the one hand, these ceremonies were meant for the burial of the deceased and his integration into the realm of the dead; on the other

[454] See chapter 3, sections: 3.2.1; 3.2.2; 3.2.3.
[455] See chapter 3, section 3.1.1.b.
[456] S. Allam 1990, 31-33.
[457] N. Strudwick 2005, 49.
[458] S. Allam 1990, 31-33; C. Eyre 2013, 94-100.
[459] S. Allam 1990, 31-33. D. Czerwik 2009, 38 and ff.

hand, the rituals also aimed at validating the new status reached by the heir of the deceased as the legitimate successor.[460]

It can therefore be stated that the action of placing a written document inside a tomb during a public performance could have had an officially recognised legal function. If we take into account that to perform the burial and the mortuary cult for a deceased was a legal prerequisite to claim his inheritance, it cannot be excluded that these rituals also entailed a moment during which the relatives of the deceased could object to the choice of the heir, thanks to the letters analysed here and the ritualised actions related to them. This moment could be identified with the ritualised judgment of the dead, [461] during which the deceased had the possibility to punish his enemies and anyone who threatened his family.[462]

The connection between legal and religious ambit is recognizable even within modern legal systems,[463] and as regards Ancient Egypt it is beyond doubt that the boundaries between these two spheres were even more blurred. Moreover, the involvement of supernatural entities within juridical cases is well attested in Ancient Egypt, as testified by the oracular consultations, particularly widespread starting from the New Kingdom. [464]

Without going into detail about the various theories concerning the role of the so-called personal piety within Egyptian religion and the access to the divine sphere by non-royal people,[465] it is undeniable that the processions of divine statues on festival days were one of the privileged moments for a direct contact with divine entities.[466] It is also well known that oracular practices were strictly limited to moments of cult statues processions, since one of the most common consultation procedures was based on the movements made by a sacred image during a parade.[467]

Oracles were consulted for several reasons, including the assignment of important offices, such as those of viziers or high priests and, in some cases, they played a major role also in legitimising the accession to the throne of sovereigns.[468] It should be also underlined that Egyptian oracles did not

[460] See chapter 3, section 3.4.
[461] See chapter 3, section 3.3.3.
[462] This is particularly clear in CT 149. See: H. Willems 2014, 186-190. Furthermore, as mentioned above, this spell was certainly involved in the ritual deposition of P. Berlin 10482+10481a-b. See: I. Regulski 2020, 330-331.
[463]Known from different parts of the world. Just to take two examples. B. I. Bittker et. Al. 2015; R. M. Scott 2021.
[464] S. Allam 1973, 17-30.
[465] M. Luiselli 2008; L. Weiss 2015, 1-11 and 179-180.
[466] M. Stadler 2008.
[467] J.-M. Kruchten 2001.
[468] M. Fukaya 2012, 202-203.

only involve gods, but also deceased kings that gained a special post-mortem deification, such as Ahmose I at Abydos or Amenhotep I at Deir el-Medina.[469]

Especially the data from Deir el-Medina testify how the oracle of Amenhotep I played a foremost role within the local juridical system. Even though other juridical bodies characterised the jurisdiction of the village, above all the *Ḳnb.t*/local court, it is noteworthy that the lawsuits concerning inheritance litigations and disputes about real estates were mainly solved by means of the oracle, or through the cooperation of this institution with the local court.[470] Moreover, a stela from Abydos – which is one of the most ancient sources concerning the rise of the oracular practices – shows that Ahmose I was consulted for the purpose of a litigation concerning real estate property.[471]

It is therefore possible to identify significant common traits between the Letters to the Dead concerning inheritance issues and the oracular practices:

- Both were linked to processions: the parade of the sacred image for the oracles; the funerary procession from the embalming place to the tomb – or a similar ritual action performed within the mortuary rituals – for the Letters to the Dead;
- Both may regard disputes concerning the possession of real estates;
- Both may concern the conferring of a social status: to legitimise the heir of a deceased, to assign a state office, or to ratify the ownership of real estate.

As for the last point, at first glance it might seem that the kind of supernatural beings involved were rather different: the spirit of a deceased relative for the letters to the dead concerning inheritance issues; a deified king or a god for the oracular practices. However, as has been already highlighted, the differences between a "god", and an "ancestor" must have been somewhat nuanced for the ancient Egyptians: the word traditionally translated as "god", *nṯr*, could refer to both royal and non-royal dead. [472] Likewise, the word *ꜣḫ*, usually translated as "effective spirit" or "ancestor", actually indicated a special status which could be attributed not only to a distinguished category of dead, but also to certain gods.[473] Also, as stressed by Julia Troche, the distinction between an *ꜣḫ* and a *nṯr* was not clear-cut.[474] Especially during the First Intermediate Period – when local rulers maintained independent power over regional states – the apotheosis of the ancestors of the nomarchal family in

[469] A. MacDowell 1990, 121.
[470] A. MacDowell 1990, 114-135.
[471] S. Harvey 1998, 121.
[472] chapter 1, section 1.2.1.
[473] R.J. Demarée 1983, 213-218.
[474] J. Troche 2021, 4.

charge and the festivals related to the latter played an important role in exercising power,[475] and therefore also in the execution of law. Furthermore, some of the public ceremonies during which the oracular petitions were enacted, such as the Beautiful Feast of the Valley, could be considered as articulated celebrations which also involved a commemoration of the dead.[476] In this regard, the procession from the Karnak Temple to the necropolis located in the Theban Westbank shows significant similarities with the elite funerary processions which led the deceased from the embalming place to the tomb.[477] As for the oracles consulted during the Opet Festival, it must be underlined that the latter celebration was aimed mainly at establishing the divine status of the ruling king by confirming his divine ancestry as the son of the god Amun, and therefore as an earthly manifestation of this god. Last but not least, as already stressed by Sylvie Donnat Beauquier, the "letters to the dead" weren't just addressed to the spirits of the dead; rather, some excerpts seem to suggest that these documents were also addressed to the gods and that the dead were probably invoked as mediators between the divine sphere and the world of men.[478] This interpretation could be also confirmed by some Old Kingdom sources. For example, in some Appeals to the Living, the deceased tomb owner declares that he will drag his enemies in front of a *ḏ3ḏ3.t* court presided by the Great God, a deity which is probably to be understood as a personification of royal power, sometimes assimilated to both Ra and Osiris.[479]

The picture that emerges from the data taken into consideration seems therefore to suggest a phenomenon of progressive centralization of a certain type of legal procedures involving the authoritative role of the dead and the public ceremonies related to them. These practices found their first written attestations after the collapse of the royal power (end of the 6th dynasty) but we can reasonably suppose that they were older and more common than the written sources suggest. The spread of the so-called letters to the dead during the First Intermediate Period has to be linked to the rise of the local potentates and as an attempt to reformulate effective legal procedures in line with nomarchal ideological self-presentation. Subsequently, once the reunification of Egypt had taken place, these practices were reshaped and re-adapted to be included into the royal ideology (see, for example, the rise of the Haker feast within the Mysteries of Osiris, where the same dynamics used to confirm the succession of the heir within elite funerary rituals were re-enacted for the god Osiris and used for the assignment of state offices). The rise of oracular practices during the New Kingdom can

[475] J. Troche 2021, 114.
[476] A. von Lieven 2015, 298-299; N. Harrington 2013, 115-122.
[477] A significant parallel in this regard could also be established with the aforementioned processions characterising the Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos, which led the cultic image of the god from the temple to his presumed tomb at Poqer. See chapter 3, section 3.3.5.
[478] S. Donnat 2010, 89.
[479] See chapter 3, section 3.3.3.

thus be seen as a further step in this general process, which substantially saw the progressive absorption of previous local traditions linked to the self-presentation of the elite into the sphere of royal ideology. The most concrete religious fact that reflect this phenomenon is the instauration of the posthumous cult of Amenhotep I and the numerous festivals celebrated in his honour in the Theban area.[480]

Remarkably this is a kind of impetus that also characterised the historical evolution of the ancient Egyptian administration of justice. Indeed, while the Old Kingdom was characterised by the coexistence of a centralised legal system with several local realities, the political crisis that accompanied the rise of the First Intermediate Period saw the increasing importance acquired by local justice systems, as a symptom of the seizure of power by the regional elites. With the advent of the Middle Kingdom, the restoration of a centralised royal power required a more centralised legal system, with the crown aiming at absorbing and reshaping local traditions for its own advantage. This was a process that reach its acme during the New Kingdom, when the concept of *hp*-law arises in a more concrete form.[481]

Yet, it would be a mistake to consider the oracular consultations as a direct derivation of the letters to the dead.[482] Rather, both practices testify to the importance of public celebrations in honour of the dead and the authoritative role played by certain categories of supernatural dead in the settlement of legal matters – especially in relation to landed property and the legitimation of social roles – and how these beliefs gave rise to new types of legal procedures over time.

[480] H. Willems 1996, 114; Y.M. el Shazly 2015, 193-195.
[481] M. Campagno 2006; A.A. Loktionov 2019, 152-161.
[482] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 80-86.

5. Ghosts and ancestors in a gender perspective[483]

5.1 Research questions and methodological issues

It is certainly significant that the rituals analysed in the previous chapters, such as the OMR and the Tekenu ritual were specifically meant to preserve the bond between the dead father and his living son, likewise, most of the Letters to the Dead concerning inheritance or economic issues were addressed to deceased men.[484] Indeed, based on the data collected in Tables 1 2 and 3, especially the Tekenu ritual clearly appears as strictly related to men.[485] As for the OMR scenes 9 and 10, it is instead possible to recognise how this ritual could be performed also for deceased elite women. In order to provide just a few significant examples, a depiction of these scenes is indeed attested in the tomb of Tausret located in the Kings 'Valley (KV 14), a queen who became the actual ruler of Egypt at the end of 19th dynasty.[486] Another striking instance is the funerary chapel of Amenirdis I, located to the southeast of the funerary temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu. The latter case is the most intriguing, and must be understood in the light of the specific context of legitimacy and succession within the religious office of the God's Wives of Amun during the 25th dynasty, whose ideological discourse used to appropriate stylistic elements typical of the royal ideology concerning the king.[487] See, in this regard the considerations made by M. F. Ayad:

> *On none of the monuments of Shepenwepet I and Amenirdis I is the adoption phraseology found in conjunction with these two God's Wives of Amun, it is only on the monuments of Shepenwepet II, Amenirdis's niece and successor, that we first find a God's Wife referring to her predecessor as "her mother" (e.g. on the lintel and jambs of the chapel of Osiris, Lord of Life). There, as elsewhere, Shepenwepet II opts for including the name and cartouche of her deceased predecessor rather than using her own double cartouche. Shepenwepet II likewise solidified her status as Amenirdis' legitimate heir and successor by erecting a "monument for eternity," a funerary chapel, constructed of stone, for Amenirdis and performing funerary rites for her, and on her behalf. A tactic later utilized*

[483] This chapter is an extended version of R. Schiavo 2020.
[484] A remarkable exception is the external side of the Qaw Bowl – UC 1663, which is addressed to the mother of the deceased to solve an inheritance issue. See chapter 4, section 4.4.
[485] See chapter 3, section 3.2. Among the 39 sources here collected, the only representation which could be linked to a woman is perhaps the ones in TT 60, an elite tomb built for a lady named Senet, who also held the title of Priestess of Hathor. Yet, it seems the scenes depicting the Tekenu within the funerary procession concerned her husband or brother Antefoker. See chapter 3, section 3.3.3, doc. 2.
[486] H. Altenmüller 2012, 83-84.
[487] M.F. Ayad 2016, 90-91.

by Ankhnesneferibre, who devotes a substantial portion of her so-called "Adoption Stela" to a description of the "proper" funerary rites she performed for her deceased mother.[488]

Yet, it is undeniable that the documents analysed in the previous chapters mainly concern the male sphere. Such a major focus on adult men belonging to the elite can be explained through the fact that these documents were expressions of a specific ideology aimed at the maintenance of both the family social status and legacy over generations. Women's secondary role is therefore understandable since they were not officially involved in this kind of transmission of powers within the context of the extended family. Of course, instances of women who were able of independently managing their own business are known.[489] Yet, their lives and choices and, above all, their role as a guide and mentor for their descendants were rarely recognised by the official elite discourse.

Through a comparison with the wisdom literature, this aspect appears increasingly clear. These texts focused on advices to better manage the relationships with both superiors and subordinates in order to maintain the wealth of the households, and, remarkably, they always took the form of teachings given by a father to his son. As stressed by A. Depla, "there is not a single extant example of an *Instruction* written by a father for his daughter, nor by a mother for her son, or a mother for her daughter."[490]

Starting from these premises, the present chapter will focus on the so-called "Letters to the Dead" addressed to women. The main aims can be summarised as follows:

- To highlight some specific features concerning the position of women in the ancient Egyptian ancestor worship, with particular attention to the modes through which gender roles were normed by the power relationships in the economical and the juridical spheres linked to the extended family/*ꜣb.t,* and under influence of religious beliefs;
- To figure out the possible ritual background behind these documents.

Further clarifications about the limits of the present investigation are needed. Even though the present chapter is mainly focused on the "female sphere" of the ancient Egyptian ancestor worship, the term "women" is not used here to indicate a uniform category; rather, the main aim is to investigate gender

[488] M.F. Ayad 2016, 93.
[489] K. Donker van Heel 2014.
[490] A. Depla 1994, 29.

roles and norms in relation to a particular ancient Egyptian social group.[491] The data taken into consideration – above all the Letters to the Dead, but also some Coffin Texts spells, Old Kingdom Appeals to the Living, and the documentation from Deir el-Medina – must be understood as expressions of elite culture and the official discourses related to it.[492] A second restriction concerns the effective nature of the investigated phenomena. The Letters to the Dead have for a long time been considered as intimate personal prayers towards divine beings.[493] However, in the light of more recent studies, it is nowadays clear that we have to interpret the diverse document labelled under this *etic* category as evidence of complex rituals that involved whole social groups, rather than individuals.[494] As has been previously stated, these documents do not show us personal intimate feelings but stereotyped norms concerning how social relationships were created and should be maintained on an ideal level.[495] The restricted number of textual sources analysed in the present chapter must therefore be understood as an expression of the social expectations[496] internalised by the elite: how relationships based on gender roles should be realised and – if something went wrong – how to restore the normative interactions between family members, as well between the living and the dead.

Even though the position of Egyptian women, especially when compared with other ancient Mediterranean cultures,[497] was relatively emancipated, their role in ancestor worship is surprising ambivalent. From a purely quantitative approach, the main documents would seem to outline a cult predominantly focused on men. Most Appeals to the Living are requests made by deceased men to other living men and only a restricted number of documents were written for women or addressed to them.[498] As for the Letters to the Dead, these written sources were mainly addressed to the male heads of the household,[499] and, as for the data from Deir el-Medina, among the fifty-five *ꜣḫ ỉḳr n rˁ* stelae collected by R. J. Demarée, in only eight a woman is designated as an "excellent spirit".[500]

The explanation of such an inequality can be understood in the light of the specific social role played by the Egyptian women within the context of the *ꜣb.t*. Although it is quite common to translate the latter term as "family", "extended family" or "household," the actual meaning of this word was more

[491] Regarding the use of Third Wave feminist approach in archaeology and Egyptology, see H. Saleh 2007, 10–11.
[492] See chapter 4, section 4.1.
[493] M. Guilmot 1966, 27.
[494] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 173 ff.
[495] See chapter 1, section 1.3.
[496] "Social expectations" could be defined as "an internalised social norm for society, which guides individuals and organizations to what they should do." See: K. Hasegawa, C. Shinohara and J. P. Broadbent 2007, 180– 181 and 195. Furthermore, the concept of "social expectation" is strictly connected with the concept of "habitus" elaborated by Bourdieu. See: P. Bourdieau 1980, 88.
[497] A.M. Roth 2010, 200; K. Szpakowska 2008, 102–112; Toivari-Viitala 2001, 135–138 and 187–192.
[498] S.B. Shubert 2007, 16–61.
[499] U. Verhoeven 2003. S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 173 ff.
[500] R.J. Demarée 1983, stelae A6, A39, A40, A41, A44, A45, A51, A52.

nuanced, referring to "a property-owning group of which the members were primarily kin who share rights in an inheritance"[501] and, remarkably, several sources indicates that wives did not belong to the same *ꜣb.t* of their husbands. A group of Coffin Texts spells specifically aimed at bringing the *ꜣb.t* members together do not show any reference to the deceased's wife, an element also confirmed by other data, such as a legal statement occurring in an Old Kingdom private tomb, or a royal decree dating to the Eighth Dynasty.[502] Indeed, according to the ancient Egyptian customary norms, even after her marriage a woman continued to belong to the same *ꜣb.t* of her father, and, once the latter died, as "mother" she was juridically considered as belonging to the same *ꜣb.t* of her eldest son.[503]

Paradoxically, this kind of social organization may have contributed to a certain economic independence and emancipation. Given that a woman belonged to a different *ꜣb.t* from her husband, she could inherit from her own family and was relatively free to manage her goods.[504] Moreover both men and women could own their own possessions—even though, with regard to the management of the household and its legacy, there was a strong preference for the "father to son" transmission—and both were able to pass them on to their children.[505]

Another interesting feature is that, although drastically fewer in number, most of the known documents related to ancestralised women do not show significant qualitative differences from the ones concerning men. Only few examples of Appeals to the Living belonging to women are known but these texts show the same formulaic repertoires attested for men, describing the deceased woman as a supernatural being, capable of punishing the transgressor of her tomb or of protecting the living ones who praise her.[506] Likewise, there are no significant stylistic differences between the *ꜣḫ ỉḳr n Rˁ* stelae dedicated to women and men.[507]

The only exception under this point of view is given by two categories of documents, the so-called anthropoid busts and the Letters to the Dead. As for the busts from Deir el-Medina it has been argued that the majority of them might portray women, representing thus the female anepigraphic counterpart of the *ꜣḫ ỉḳr n Rˁ* stelae in ancestor cults.[508] This theory is intriguing, and a similar function, at least for some of the currently known busts, is certainly grounded. On the other hand, when it comes to

[501] H. Willems 2015, 448.
[502] H. Willems 2015, 454–461.
[503] H. Willems 2015, 463.
[504] H. Willems 2015, 463.
[505] S. Lippert 2013, 3; Toivari-Viitala 2001, 96–138.
[506] S.B. Shubert 2007, 51 –52 (O.K. 25).
[507] The inscriptions attested on the stelae are quite stereotyped. Moreover, no significant differences based on gender were noted. See: Demarée 1983, 178–179.
[508] N. Harrington 2005.

anepigraphic documents a certain caution in the interpretation of their meaning and function is always required and it was argued that the Anthropoid Busts should not necessarily represent ancestors, but also gods and even living individuals.[509] Moreover, the elements to identify the gender of an individual portrayed in a bust are often unclear, and it is often difficult to actually understand if these peculiar kind of sculptures portrayed women or men.[510] The Letters to the Dead, instead, could provide more solid data: even though most of these documents were sent to adult men, the requests addressed exclusively to women undoubtedly show some peculiar features that deserve to be investigated.

5.2 Analysis of the Letters to the Dead addressed to women

Stele of Nebetitef - Michael C. Carlos Museum, 2014.033.001[511]

In 1958, a curious stela attracted the attention of E. F. Wente when this was presented at the Cairo Museum to be approved for export. Wente was just able to copy the hieratic text written on its back[512] and, for a long time, the document has been known in the scientific community as "The Misplaced Stela", and the only data available were the sketch of the hieratic inscription and a brief description of the scene on the front of the stele made by Wente himself:

> *[…] a limestone stela, or tablet about a foot high, as I recollect, on the front of which was a painted scene of a man making an offering.*[513]

The object was later re-identified by E. Meltzer in the USA, and it is currently preserved at the Michael C. Carlos Museum of Emory University.[514] The rediscovery of the stele has finally made it possible to check the translation and the interpretations presented by Wente. Although his transcription of the hieratic text was substantially correct, most scholars now agree that Wente

[509] J.L. Keith, S. Donnat and N. Harrington 2011, 91-100.
[510] J.L. Keith, S. Donnat and N. Harrington 2011, 91-100.
[511] Probably from Naga ed-Deir. It can be dated to the First Intermediate Period; epigraphic evidence and strong similarities with the "Anomalous Group" of stele from Naga ed-Deir lead to a more specific date between the 10th and the 11th dynasty. E. F. Wente 1975 –1976; R. J. Demarée 1983, 216 –217; E. F. Wente and E. S. Meltzer 1990, 215 n. 349; K. Szpakowska 2003, 23, 143, 185; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 53 –57; E. S. Meltzer 2008; J. Hsieh 2022, 220-222; R. Nyord, 2021 A, 3-19.
[512] E.F. Wente 1975–1976, 595.
[513] E.F. Wente 1975–1976, 595.
[514] E.S. Meltzer 2008, 1.

misunderstood the scene on the front face: the person portrayed is without any doubt a woman, to be precise a deceased woman, called Nebetitef.[515]

Nebetitef is also the deceased addressee of the two letters written with black ink on the back of the stele, which constitute the only currently known examples of Letters to the Dead written on this kind of medium.[516]

The first message (columns 1-5) is sent by a person called Merirtyfy. At first, E. Wente identified the latter with the person portrayed on the front (in his opinion a man) and consequently with the husband of the deceased woman invoked in the two letters:

> *Although the two other examples of this name known to me [Merirtyfy] are feminine […] the representation on the face of the stela is that of man offering, and I am inclined to believe that the writer of the letter was a widower.*[517]

On the contrary, we have no reasons to doubt that the writer is a woman:[518] the name Merirtyfy is indeed attested only as feminine, and the gender of the sender is also confirmed by a restricted number of grammatical elements internal to the text;[519] furthermore, this latter assumption can provide useful hints to better understand the meaning of the two missives.

In her letter, Merirtyfy claims to be sick and invokes the help of the deceased Nebetitef to be healed. Moreover, as mentioned in chapter 3, this document also constitutes one of the oldest sources regarding the interactions between the living and the dead through an oneiric experience[520]:

> *|1| r ḏd ỉn Mr-Hrty=fy n Nb.t-ỉt=f ỉw=t mỉ <ỉ>ḥ <ỉ>n nḏ ỉs ỉmn.t ḫr.t<=t>|2| [n] ỉb=t m=ṯ ỉnk mr.t=t tp tȝ ʿḥȝ ḥr=ỉ sb ḥr rn(=ỉ) n šb(=ỉ) |3| [ṯs ḫ]ft-ḥr=t sʿnḫ(=ỉ) rn=t tp tȝ ḏr mr.t n.t ḥʿw=ỉ ỉḫ ȝḫ=t n<=ỉ> |4| [ḫtf]-ḥr=ỉ mȝ=ỉ ʿḥȝ=t ḥr=ỉ m rsw.t wȝḥ=ỉ n=n.t ḫ.t |5| [šw] wbnw grg <=ỉ> n=t ḥtp.t*

[515] E.S. Meltzer 2008, 3.
[516] E.S. Meltzer 2008, 3 –4.
[517] E.F. Wente 1975–1976, 597 and note b.
[518] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, p. 55 and note b ; R. Nyord 2021 A, 16-18.; J. Hsieh 2022,
[519] R. Nyord 2021 A, 16-18
[520] See chapter 3, section 3.1.b.

|1| *A message from Merirtyfy to Nebetitef.*

How are you? Has the West been taking care of you **|2|** *according to your desire?*

Look! I am your beloved on earth: fight on my behalf! Intercede for my name! I did not confuse **|3|** *[a spell] in front of you while I was perpetuating your name upon earth.*

Expel the illness from my limbs: May you manifest to me in the form of an ꜣḫ **|4|** *[…] May I see you fight for me in a dream!*

Then I will present offerings to you **|5|** *when the [sun] rises, I will set up offerings for you.*[521]

In the second letter (columns 5-7), a man called Khuau asks the deceased lady Nebetitef to fight for him, for his woman, and for his offspring (column 7). In addition, in the incipit of the missive, Khuau addresses Nebetitef as his ***sn.t***, a term that can be literally translated as "sister" but could also assume the meaning of "wife":

|5| *r-ḏd ỉn ḫw-ꜣw n sn.t=f* **|6|** *[…] n šb(=ỉ) ṯs ḫft-ḥr=t n nḥm(=ỉ) ḥ.t r=t ỉw grt wḫꜣ-n(=ỉ)*

|7| *[…] ꜥḥꜣ ḥr=ỉ ꜥḥꜣ ḥr ḥm.t<=ỉ> ḥr ḫrd.w<=ỉ>*

|1| A message by Khuau to his sister.

|6| […] I did not confuse a spell in front of you, nor I took away the offerings from you. Rather I have provided |7| […]

|8| Fight on my behalf, fight on behalf of my woman, fight on behalf of my children.[522]

According to S. Donnat Beauquier, the identification of the first sender – Merirtyfy – with a woman allows one to argue that she would be no other than Khuau's wife and, therefore, the ***ḥm.t=ỉ*** cited at

[521] For the translation of this text, I mainly based myself on R. Nyord 2021 A, 10-13.
[522] For the translation of this text, I mainly based myself on R. Nyord 2021 A, 10-13.

column 7.[523] In effect, assuming this perspective, the second missive appears as a brief recapitulation of the first one made by a second writer, an element attested also in other letters to the dead.[524] Moreover, given the ambiguity of the expression ***sn.t=f***, the addressee, Nebetitef, could be identified as Khuau's former dead wife.

Although the term ***sn.t*** is used as synonymous of *ḥm.t* with the meaning of "spouse" mainly from the New Kingdom,[525] the use of the word *sn.t* as "wife" is attested in another letter to the dead datable to the end of the Old Kingdom.[526] Such an element could place the document in a different perspective. The role of Nebetitef appears indeed rather ambiguous: at first sight, she would seem a positive figure, since she is invoked in order to fight on Merirtyfy's behalf against an external enemy. On the other hand, such a heartfelt appeal could hide the attempt to appease a potential malevolent spirit. It would be possible to hypothesise that Nebetitef herself was causing the illness of Merirtyfy because she was upset by her living husband's remarriage.[527]

This latter interpretation sustained by both me and Donnat Beauquier, has been recently rejected by R. Nyord, whose main arguments can be summarised as following:

1. Merirtyfy seems to play a major role in the mortuary cult of Nebetitef as a "perpetuator of her name" (column 3, *sʿnḫ(=i) rn=t tp t3*), an element that would rather suggest that Merirtyfy was the daughter or a sister of Nebetitef;[528]
2. Merirtyfy defines herself as "beloved" (column 2, *mr.t*) by Nebetitef, and the term *mr* usually indicates "a downward direction in the social hierarchy, i.e. from parent to offspring, from master to servant".[529]

Given that we do not have detailed prosopographic information about the individuals involved in the missives, Nyord is right in sustaining that any interpretation must be made with caution. The major involvement of Merirtyfy in the ritual action addressed to Nebetitef, is not a common feature and, as we will see in most of the other Letters to the Dead addressed to women, the sender is always a man, probably to be identified with the living husband of the recipient. On the other hand, one has also to consider that the so-called Letters to the Dead do not constitute an actual genre recognised by the

[523] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 57.
[524] See, for example, the aforementioned Cairo Linen JdE 25675, column 13; for further references see: S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 30–31, Hsieh, 2022, 111-114. See also: chapter 4, section 4.4.
[525] Wb 4, 151.9.
[526] This is attested in the so-called Cairo Linen JdE 25675, column 1, for further references see: S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 30–31, J. Hsieh, 2021, 111-114. See also: chapter 4, section 4.4.
[527] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 57.
[528] R. Nyord 2021 A, 18-19.
[529] R. Nyord 2021 A, 18.

ancient Egyptians themselves. The presence of an original feature, therefore should not surprise: not by chance the two letters analysed here are the only case of "Letters to the Dead" written on a stela.

As for the ritual action of "perpetuating the name upon earth", we have to consider that texts such as those analysed here were probably written by using handbooks from which formulaic phrases were copied.[530] Therefore, this sentence can hardly be considered as a valid clue to determine the relationship between the sender and the recipient. Within this specific context, this formulaic expression can rather be intended as a reference to the pact of mutual aid between the living and the dead whose actual meaning should be understood as something like "I take care of your mortuary rituals, so you have to act as a benevolent ancestor towards me". Also, if, as suggested by Nyord, Merirtyfy was the daughter or the sister of Nebetitef, it is indeed odd that such a degree of kinship is never mentioned in the document. If we consider that, on the front face of the stele, Nebetitef mention the name of her mother,[531] and in the missive written on the back, Khuau does not show any reticence in mentioning his grade of kinship with the recipient by using the word ***sn.t*****,** there was no reasonable ground for omitting the type of relationship between Merirtyfy and Nebetitef, especially if it was so close.

In addition, if one adopts the perspective according to which Nebetitef might have been considered as the "cause" of Merirtyfy 's illness, the use of the expression ***mr.t=t*** can be easily explained with the fact that the two letters constitute the written testimony of a complex ritual action – probably enacted at the tomb of the deceased – aimed at appeasing the wrath of an angry dead woman, by transmuting her into a benevolent ancestor. Within this context, the emphasis of being "beloved" by a supernatural dead can be understood as a way to urge the latter to respect the pact of mutual aid between the living and the dead, which perfectly matches with the "downward direction in the social hierarchy", which, as highlighted by Nyord, characterises the verb "***mr***".

Finally, there is another aspect that can confirm this kind of interpretation and that Nyord did not take into account. The theme of vengeful ghosts – envious and therefore potentially dangerous towards the living human beings who are replacing their social position on earth – is a well-attested theme in

[530] The existence of such handbooks or compendia – see for example the Book of Kemit – used for training scribes are well known (see. Eyre 2013, 95). Moreover, as highlighted by Fischer- Elfert, several Letters to the Dead, the Cairo Bowl in particular, show undeniable affinity with the so-called Loyalist Instruction: the occurrence of similar themes and sentences in both these documents allows us to hypothesise the existence of *compendia* from which scribes could take inspiration to write these kinds of texts (H.-W. Fischer-Elfert 1994, 41-44). Also, Donnat Beauquier has highlighted the presence of similar formulaic expressions in both the Cairo Bowl and the Heqanakht letters, another element that allows to posit the existence of handbooks (see S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 38). See also chapter 4, section 4.6.

[531] R. Nyord 2021 A, 7.

ancient Egyptian textual sources,[532] and as we will be see, this is a recurrent feature characterising all the Letters to the Dead addressed to women.

The Berlin Bowl Inv. 33573[533]

Figure 26

The Berlin Bowl is one of the very few cases of a Letter to the Dead showing an image alongside the text:[534] between the two concentric circles of hieratic inscriptions, one observes the upper part of a human figure, probably intended as a portrait of the receiver (Fig. 36). While some scholars have seen in this image a two-dimensional representation of an ancestral bust,[535] in actual fact it seems more likely to be a variant of the hieroglyph B1 (Fig. 35) mutilated for apotropaic reasons.[536]

[532] Se for example CT I 158 a–159 b [38].
[533] Probably from Naga ed-Deir due to internal reference. Datable between the end of the 11th dynasty according to Gardiner and Sethe, to the 12th dynasty according to other scholars (see, in particular: D. Czerwik 1999, 64; J. Hsieh 2022, 245). Main bibliographical references: A. H. Gardiner and K. Sethe 1928, 5–7 and 21–22, plates V and Va; Fecht 1969, 114–115; E. F. Wente and E. S. Meltzer 1990, 214 number 346; Schiavo 2013 A; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 61-63; J. Hsieh 2022, 245-257.
[534] Another exception is the Oxford bowl. See S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 71: *Griffith, l'éditeur premier du texte, signale que le dessin au trait d'un sarcophage était discernable sur le fond du bol. Il n'est tout à fait clair si le signe était à l'intérieur ou, plus probablement, a l'extérieur, mais l'encerclement potentiel par le discours de ce signe n'est pas sans rappeler celui de la figure féminine du Bol de Berlin ».*
[535] D. Lines 2001.
[536] R. Schiavo 2013 A, 36.

Figure 27

The brief content of the hieratic inscription is rather ambiguous. In the incipit the sender stresses that, before her departure, the woman had never shown any resentment towards him (first circle: *ỉn=ṯ ꜥ r niw.t n.t nḥḥ nn špt=ṯ nb r=ỉ*). Subsequently, the man asks what kind of problem could have caused her conduct, claiming that if the deceased has some recriminations against her relatives, she should forget them, for the good of her offspring (second circle: *ỉr wn srḫ m ḫ.t=ṯ; smḫ sw n ỉb n ḫrd.w=ṯ*).

It seems clear that the dead woman is not invoked to solve an external problem; rather, she seems to be perceived as a potentially malevolent spirit who is causing troubles in the family.[537] Although the degree of kinship is not mentioned in the text, the woman is explicitly asked to be benevolent for the sake of her offspring (*n ỉb ḫrd.w=ṯ*), so it could be argued that both the sender and the recipient belonged to the same family. In this regard, it has been suggested that the anger of the dead woman was triggered by the remarriage of her husband, who is probably to be identified with the writer of the missive, and that the recipient might be concerned about the social status of her children potentially threatened by the new wife.[538]

[537] R. Schiavo 2013 A, 36.
[538] A. H. Gardiner and K. Sethe 1928, 7; G. Fecht 1969, 115 and note 1.

The exact provenance of the Berlin bowl is unknown. Gardiner and Sethe indicate that it "was purchased from a Cairo dealer" in 1926.[539] Yet, internal evidence seem to suggest Naga ed-Deir, or another site of the Thinite nome.[540]

Gardiner and Sethe reported that a jar-stand of burnt clay (Berlin 22574) was "purchased at the same time and said to come from the same tomb of the letter here analysed".[541] Notably, the object presents another inscription that concerns the request for a child.[542]

According to Gardiner and Sethe, although the bowl fits on the jar-stand, they cannot belong to each other, due to the fact that they are made in different materials and seem to belong to different historical phases: 11th dynasty for the bowl, 12th for the jar-stand;[543] however, by their own admission, the palaeographic dating of the bowl is based on quite a restricted number of elements[544] and more recent analyses conducted by both Czerwik and Hsieh dated the bowl to the 12th dynasty.[545]

It is therefore possible to hypothesise that the female recipient of the Berlin bowl was suspected of hindering the fertility of other women belonging to her marital household and, as consequence, the letter was associated with another message written on the jar-stand and addressed to a male ancestor in order to solve the problem. A similar case can also be hypothesised for the so-called Chicago Vessel (Oriental Institute Museum E 13945), a Letter to the Dead concerning fertility issues addressed to a deceased man.[546] According to Janák, some internal evidence allows to hypothesise the existence of another letter:

> *The text was inscribed upon a vessel (probably a bowl) that was placed on the top of a stand and was written by a man to a woman who was probably his grandmother. The reason for composing it was to convince the recipient to litigate on behalf of the sender at the afterworld trial.*[547]

[539] A.H. Gardiner and K. Sethe 1928, 5.
[540] E. Brovarski 1985, 310.
[541] A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe, 1928, 5.
[542] See: A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 7 ; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 61 and note 123; J. Hsieh 2022, 253.
[543] A.H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe, 1928, 7.
[544] A.H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe, 1928, 7.
[545] D. Czerwik 1999, 64.
[546] A.H. Gardiner 1930, 19-22; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 41-44 ; J. Hsieh 2022, 156-168.
[547] J. Janák 2003, 276-277.

One can thus hypothesise that this "undiscovered" letter was not too dissimilar from the Berlin bowl, and that, perhaps, also the woman addressed in this document was somehow perceived as a threatening entity which needed to be appeased and transmuted into a benevolent spirit.

Munich Cosmetic Vase ÄS 4313[548]

The letter is written on an unusual medium. it is not a globular bowl, as for the most Letters to the Dead currently known, but a little vase (16 cm height, with a max diameter of 14,8 cm), with a cylindrical neck and a thick, flat rim. The morphology is that of a typical container for cosmetic products and due to both morphological and palaeographical elements it is datable to the final part of the 18th dynasty; the provenance is unknown.[549]

The vase shows several decorations: there are six lines of black ink around the neck and, near the bottom, another four horizontal black lines. The body is divided into four sections by vertical decorative elements. The hieratic inscription is placed inside two of the trapezoidal spaces formed by the decorations on the body of the vase (lines 1-6); part of the incipit occupies the upper part of another trapezoidal space (line 1b), while the last line of text is written near the bottom, under the aforementioned four horizontal lines (line 7).[550]

|1| *ḥtp ḥr-ḏd n ỉpw-rs-tỉ* **|1b|** *ḫr ḳd[=t] sp-2 ỉnn-ỉw[=t] mỉ-ỉšs.t* **|2|** *tỉ[=tn] m ꜥnḫ wḏꜣ snb m hsw ỉmn-Rꜥ* **|3|** *{m} Nswt nṯr.(w) m ḥsw Mn nb ỉpw* **|4|** *dỉ=f n=ṯ ḥs<w.t> mr.wt m sḏm n md.wt n tꜣ ḥm.t* **|5|** *sn=nw.t m=t ỉs ḏd-n=ỉ n=t r-ḏd nn ḥm.t snsn.kw(ỉ)* **|6|** *m dỉ=t ỉw(=ỉ) n=t r bꜣk rdỉ-n=ỉ ỉnỉ.tw nms.t n<.t> ỉꜣrr.wt* **|7|** *šꜥ.t sdf ḥḏ.w*

|1| Hotep to Ipw-res-ti

|1b| How are you? How are you? Are you all alright?

|2| May you be in a state of Life, Health and Prosperity, (may you be) in the grace of Amon-Ra |3| kings of the gods, (and) in the grace of Min lord of Akhmim! |4| May he (Min) give you praises and love.

[548] H. Buchberger 1991, 49-87; Verhoeven, 2003, 31 and note 1; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 25-26.
[549] H. Buchberger 1991, 50.
[550] H. Buchberger 1991, 52-53.

Do not listen to the rumours about the second woman![551] |5| Consider what I told you: "there is no woman since I joined [552] |6|you".

Since I want (to continue) to serve you, I make sure to bring you a jug of raisins, |7| a measure of shaset-grains and onions, 50 pieces.

It has been widely discussed whether this text can be considered a message addressed to a deceased woman or a normal letter exchanged between two living individuals.[553] In fact, there is no internal evidence that can prove that the addressee is actually a dead person. Nevertheless, the hieratic inscription shows certain elements which are somehow similar to the other documents analysed here.

The main aim of the message is that of appeasing a lady who is jealous of another woman, and the sentence occurring in lines 5-6 (*m sḏm n md.wt n tȝ ḥm.t sn=nw.t m=t ỉs ḏd-n=ỉ n=t r-ḏd nn ḥm.t snsn.kw(ỉ) m dỉ=t* / do not listen to the rumours about the second woman! Consider what I told you: "there is no woman since I joined you) strongly recalls what we can see in another Letter to the Dead addressed to a deceased woman, P. Leiden AMS 64/ I 371 (*ḫr ptr nȝ sn.w(t) m pȝ pr bw-pw=ỉ ḫḳ n wʿ ỉm=sn* /"And behold, as for the sisters in the house: I have not gone in to (any) one of them!").[554] In light of this parallel, the final sentence might be interpreted as an offering to placate the potential wrath of a deceased woman.

One has also to consider that the medium – a cosmetic vase – is unusual for a normal correspondence between living persons, and it can match with a ritual purpose whose religious milieu was not too dissimilar to that of the other "Letters to the Dead".[555] One has also to consider that vases meant for containing unguent were a symbol of the goddess Bastet often associated to ritual actions aimed at appeasing her wrath as a hypostasis of the Solar Eye.[556]

Therefore, if, on one hand, there are not enough data to identify the Munich Cosmetic Vase ÄS 4313 as a message addressed to a deceased woman, the latter hypothesis cannot be ruled out a priori, especially in the light of the comparison with the other documents analysed in the present chapter.

[551] If we interpret the present document as a message addressed to a dead, the reference to this "second woman" could be interpreted as the second wife of the sender, or another woman living within his household.
[552] The meaning of the verb *snsn* is usually that of "to associate with; to fraternise" (Wb 4, 172.12-173.31). Yet, as stressed by Buchberger, within the present passage it is possible to recognise also a sexual implication. H. Buchberger 1991, 67-68.
[553] U. Verhoeven, 2003, 31 and note 1; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 25-26.
[554] See next document.
[555] Yet, see: S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 25.
[556] A. Joseph 2018, 36.

P. Leiden AMS 64/ I 371[557]

A letter undoubtedly written by a man to placate the spirit of his dead wife is P. Leiden AMS 64 / I 371. Here the writer begs his wife to stop persecuting him, since – in his opinion – the malevolent attitude showed by the deceased is totally unjustified (lines 1–2 recto):

> *ỉrỉ=t ỉḫ r=ỉ m bt3 |2| p3=ỉ ḫpr m p3y sḫr.w bỉn n.ty tw<=ỉ> ỉm=f*
>
> What evil thing have you done against me, |2| for which I come in this miserable state in which I am?[558]

The man stresses how he always looked after her, respecting her both alive and dead. However, the brief reference to the "sisters in the house" sheds an intriguing light on the causes of the anger of the deceased (line 21 verso):

> |21|*…ḫr ptr n3 sn.w(t) m p3 pr bw-pw=ỉ ʿḳ n wʿ ỉm=sn*
>
> |21|… And behold, as for the sisters in the house: I have not gone in to (any) one of them![559]

We will hardly know if the sender is sincere. However, the fact that the man needs to emphasise that he has not had relations with other women is itself a significant element. It undeniably testifies that, for the Egyptians, it was common to believe that the spirit of a deceased wife could have a malevolent influence, especially if the living husband gave a certain kind of attention to other women.

Ostracon Louvre 698[560]

O. Louvre 698 is the only letter to the dead written on a piece of limestone and the only case in which red ink is used for the inscription. The ostracon comes from the new Kingdom settlement of Deir el-

[557] A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 23-25 and plates VIII a and VIII b; M. Guilmot 1973; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 74-76; L. Troy 2015; J. Hsieh 2022, 317-328.
[558] Here I mainly follow the interpretation by L. Troy. See: Troy 2015, 405.
[559] I follow the interpretation by Troy. See: L. Troy 2015, 413.
[560] J. Černý and A. H. Gardiner 1975, 82 and plates 80–80a; J. Černý 1973, 360–370; P. J. Frandsen 1992, 31–50;

Medina, and the sender is a man called Butehamun. Interestingly, rather than writing directly to the spirit, he addresses a long message to the *ꜥfd.t* of his dead wife, Ikhtay. The word *ꜥfd.t* is a variation of the term *ꜥfḏ.t*. It literally means "box",[561] but it is sometimes used to indicate containers utilised to store letters;[562] furthermore, in specific contexts it can also have the meaning of "coffin".[563] This ambiguity is maybe used on purpose by Butehamun to poeticise the text making a sophisticated link between an object used in everyday life for private correspondence and the will to communicate with his deceased wife. In effect, the document in question is far more artistically skilful than the other letters to the dead: it is written in meter, there are "verse points", and it shows not only various figures of speech, but also a number of educated quotes from the main ancient Egyptian literary genres.[564] On the basis of these features, S. Donnat Beauquier has argued that O. Louvre 698 cannot be considered a letter to the dead, showing, rather, more analogies with funerary lamentations.[565] She points out that an ostracon would not be the most appropriate object for a ritualistic purpose. And although red was traditionally associated with malevolent beings, here the use of red ink could indicate that the ostracon was used to outline a preliminary sketch of the text. In her opinion, either the final version had to be copied onto the coffin of Ikhtay or it had been written to be recited. Donnat Beauquier, moreover, stressed that in this text the deceased is not invoked to solve a specific crisis, but for a generic intercession. In addition, Ikhtay is not called *ꜣḫ*, as attested in several letters to the dead, but "Osiris," as in funerary texts.[566]

However, the term *ꜣḫ* occurs once in O. Louvre 698, not as a noun to indicate a blessed spirit, but as a verb. In this regard, according to the interpretation given by P. J. Frandsen,[567] the deceased is not invoked for a generic mediation to the gods, but for a more specific request:

> *|6| nn ky.t m-ḳd=st […] bw gmi<=i> ꜥp bw.t […] gmi st n=t […] |7| ꜥš=i m iꜣd.t nb ḥꜥ=t […] wšb.t ꜣḫ |8| n=i mw.t<=i> it=i sn=i ḥnꜥ sn.t<=i> st iwi ṯꜣy.tw*

O. Goldwasser 1995, 191–205; E. F. Wente and E. S. Meltzer 1990, 217 –218; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 77–83 and 158–163; J. Hsieh 2022, 329-340.

[561] Wb I, 183.15–18.

[562] The use of *ꜥfd.t* with the meaning of "letter-box" is well attested at Deir el-Medina. Remarkably the same sender of O. Louvre 698, Butehamun, uses the word *ꜥfd.t* with this specific meaning in some private letters. Cf. R. J. Demarée, 2006, 11 Recto 3.

[563] K.M. Cooney 2007, 276.

[564] O. Goldwasser 1995, 191–205.

[565] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 160–161.

[566] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 158 –163

[567] P.J. Frandsen 1992, 37–38.

> |6|no instance of wrong has been found […]. |7| I have appealed to you directly all the time that you might respond […]. My mother and my father, my brother and my sister |8|are beneficial (*ꜣḫ*) for me: they come; you are taken away.[568]

In Frandsen's opinion, the relatives here mentioned could be understood as other deceased persons. Thus, this sentence could reveal the existence of some troubles between the sender and the recipient. The suggestion could be that the writer is complaining that his dead wife is no longer supporting him from the netherworld, since Ikhtay is the only one among his dead relatives to ignore him.[569] However this interpretation is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, the text is seriously damaged due to several lacunas. Moreover, as stressed by Sweeney, because of standard Ramesside malpractice, it is rather difficult to understand whether the verbs have a first-person suffix (Butehamun as subject), or a second person suffix (Ikhtay as subject). Also, with regards to the participles, it is hard to recognise if they are active or passive: the first option renders Ikhtay as a potentially malevolent entity, the second interpretation could depict her more as a victim.[570]

Finally, the prosopography relating to the inhabitants of Deir el-Medina is well known. Butehamun was a "scribe of the necropolis" and maintained a regular correspondence with his father, Thutmose. The letters by Butehamun clearly show the same calligraphy as O. Louvre 698.[571] Moreover, from several documents a relationship with a woman called Shedemdua emerges, but the elder sons of Butehamun are often cited as Ikhtay's offspring. In light of such evidence, Davies hypothesised that Butehamun remarried Shedemdua after the death of Ikhtay.[572] Given this last assumption, at first sight, one could posit that the aim of the present text does not differ much from the other letters here analysed: to placate a dead woman angry for the remarriage of her husband. However, the aforementioned correspondence between Butehamun and his father clearly shows that Tuthmose survived Ikhtay, since, unlike Shedemdua, she is never mentioned in this corpus of letters, and it is an element that could partially invalidate Frandsen's rendering of the passage reported here.[573] Furthermore, we do not have any firm evidence regarding the remarriage of Butehamun with

[568] I basically follow Frandsen's translation with the exception of *ṯꜣy.tw*, here considered as a stative. Cf. P. J. Frandsen 1992, 37-38.
[569] P.J. Frandsen 1992, 37–38.
[570] D. Sweeney 1994.
[571] P.J. Frandsen 1992, 38 and note 31.
[572] B.G. Davies 1997, 56.
[573] B.G. Davies 1997, 56–57.

Shedemdua, and it was also argued that the woman might have been a sister or female relative of Butehamun who was hosted in his house since she was a widow with dependent children.[574]

Given all these elements further evaluations are needed. First, O. Louvre 698 undeniably implies the same religious milieu of the so-called "Letters to the Dead", since it clearly shows a core belief in which a living person is searching for contact with a departed relative. In addition, although we do not have other examples of letters to the dead from the village, ancestor worship is surely well attested at Deir el-Medina.[575] Secondly, the connection with the genre of funerary lamentations stressed by Donnat Beauquier is indeed a valid hypothesis, especially taking into consideration the elaborated style of the text and the fact that the missive is addressed to the coffin of the deceased woman.[576] Nevertheless, the connection between funerary or mortuary texts and letters to the dead is not a surprising fact. The aforementioned CT spells 38–41 (but also 30–37, following Willems' interpretation) show an undeniable affinity with the letters to the dead,[577] and it was also suggested that these spells could constitute the liturgy utilised for the deposition of the letters into the tombs on the occasion of the festivals to commemorate the deceased.[578] So, nothing precludes that, in very extraordinary cases – such as a death occurred at young age, probably caused by childbirth or other violent causes – a rather similar liturgy connected to an apotropaic action could have been performed during the funerals. In this regard, it is suggestive that in a letter sent to Butehamun by his father Thutmose (BM EA 75021) both a "great black *ʿfd.t*" and an evil eye caused by a malevolent dead are mentioned. Unfortunately, due the lacunas the connection between these two elements is not clear[579] but it could be argued that this passage refers to the troubles with the spirit of Ikhtay and the ritual to placate her.

5.3 How to appease an angry dead woman

In the light of these observations, it seems that the "letters" sent exclusively to a female deceased were written in order to solve certain kinds of troubles caused by the very dead addressee. Why were these women so angry?

The average life expectancy for women was lower than for men.[580] Moreover, one of the main causes of death was childbirth, a moment that contains a strong symbolic and liminal character itself. Thus,

[574] B.G. Davies 1997, 56–57.
[575] R.J. Demarée 1983.
[576] S. Donnat Beaunquier 2014, 158–163.
[577] H. Willems 2011, 344–355.
[578] H. Willems 2011, 357–358.
[579] R.J. Demarée 2006, 21–24. I am sincerely grateful to Dr. R.J. Demarée for having brought this document to my attention.
[580] N. Harrington 2013, 138–141.

we are not very far from the idea that an abrupt ending to life would be capable of transforming a dead person into a malevolent entity.[581]

The theme of a spirit that becomes irate because of a premature and brutal death is attested in several cultural contexts. In the Akkadian tradition, for example, the *etemmu ahu*, literally the "foreign spirits", are described as ghosts whose malevolent behaviour is prevalently due to the absence of a proper burial, either because they died in isolated places far from their loved ones (as must often have happened to soldiers), or because they drowned, or died in a fire.[582] From this point of view, an interesting case is found in P. Edwin-Smith surgical papyrus, where, in an apotropaic formula, next to the *ꜣḫ.w* and the *mwt.w*, other kinds of malevolent dead are classified on the basis of the type of death as, for example, "the one which the crocodile has taken"; "the one which the serpent has stung", "the one which has perished by the knife".[583]

Notably, we have two examples of spells against female ghosts from magical and medical texts.[584] A rubric from a spell in the Brooklyn magical papyrus is directed against several kinds of supernatural beings listed in male/female couples, including the group *mwt*/*mwt.t*; but remarkably a dead female (*mwt.t-ḥm.t*) is cited separately, without any male counterpart.[585] A quite similar case is attested in the Leiden Magical Papyrus I 348/AMS 26a, where a spell to heal headaches (spell 12; rt.6,4) is meant to work against "a dead female who robs as a wailing woman".[586]

It is certainly interesting that most of the documents analysed here were in different ways associated with an effigy of the deceased. The letter addressed to Nebetitef is the only example attested on the back of a stele, and, notably, on the front face the female receiver of the missive is portrayed. A stylised image of the deceased possibly mutilated for apotropaic reason is depicted exactly in the centre of the Berlin bowl. P. Leiden AMS 64 / I 371was attached to a statuette of the dead addressee.[587] Clearly, sculptures and images of the deceased played an important role in Egyptian ancestor worship.[588] Such an element is to be connected with an apotropaic practice (well attested to in several magical texts), with the specific aim of dominating a potentially dangerous entity by controlling a (two-dimensional or three-dimensional) representation of her.[589] Furthermore, also the fact that O.

[581] N. Harrington 2012, 22-27.
[582] T. Abusch 1995, 588-594.
[583] J. H. Breasted 1930, 480-481.
[584] R. Lucarelli 2010, 6–7.
[585] S. Sauneron 1970, 7 and 23.
[586] J.F. Borghouts 1971, 97 and note 168.
[587] A.H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 9.
[588] S.B. Schulman 1986.
[589] R.K. Ritner 1993, 112.

Louvre 698 was addressed to the coffin (*ʿfd.t*) of the deceased could be understood by interpreting the coffin as a mediator, through which the sender could exercise a certain control over his dead wife.[590]

A closer parallel can be found in a sculpture preserved at Louvre Museum (E 10582), which portrays prince Ahmose Sapair, a son of Seqenenra Tao, who died at an early age.[591] The sculpture is inscribed with a text showing significant similarities with the Letters to the Dead, where the young prince is invoked to protect his living family members.[592] Remarkably, the artifact also shows several mutilations (in the arms and in the legs, moreover the head was cut off, and subsequently reattached) in which some traces of red colour have been detected.[593] This element has allowed Barbotin to establish with some certainty that such damages have been deliberately carried out in ancient time to be subsequently restored: a procedure that, according to Barbotin, could be identified with a ritual action aimed at neutralising the negative influence of the prince (who likely turned into an evil spirit due to his premature death) and, therefore, transmuting him into a benevolent ancestor.[594]

On the other hand, other factors must also be considered: in all these letters we may infer that the anger of the deceased was triggered by the second marriage of the husband, or by a certain kind of envy towards women that can potentially replace her social role inside the family. This recurrent feature cannot be interpreted exclusively by the projection of typically worldly sentiments onto the afterlife.

A comparison with the CT spells 30-41 may be illuminating in this regard. As mentioned earlier, these texts ratify the firstborn as new head of the family and successor of the deceased father,[595] but it is important to stress that this transition was not perceived as peaceful. In several passages the deceased father shows contradictory feelings, especially towards his eldest son who is about to replace him.[596] In CT I 158 a–159 b [38], for example, it is clearly stated that the deceased father has an ambivalent attitude towards his son and that he wants to bring the latter into the netherworld causing his premature death.

Given this premise, one could posit that for the Egyptians also the dead wife could develop hostile feelings about the second marriage of the living husband. Consequently, when another woman replaced her as wife, such a transmission was perceived as potentially dangerous. In this regard, also accepting Donnat Beauquier's hypothesis, which interprets O. Louvre 698 as a funerary lamentation

[590] For the use of coffins as "communicative tools," see: K.M. Cooney 2007 B.
[591] Barbotin 2005, 19-28.
[592] Ch. Barbotin 2005, 26-28; S. Donnat Beaunquie 2014, 71-73.
[593] Ch. Barbotin 2005, 26.
[594] Ch. Barbotin 2005, 27-28.
[595] H. Willems 2001, 368–369.
[596] H. Willems 2001, 342–344.

rather than as Letter to the Dead, this kind of interpretation is still plausible. Since – in our reconstruction – the writer is not facing a crisis caused by a specific external problem (for example, an illness caused by a malevolent entity), but an existential crisis connected with a change of social roles (the premature death of a young beloved spouse and, thus, the fear that she could become a vengeful spirit, especially if another woman was about to replace her), it is thus reasonable to posit that some kind of apotropaic ritual could be performed already on the occasion of the funeral.

This kind of religious idea seems actually well rooted in Egyptian beliefs. A number of archaeological data testify to the existence of special apotropaic actions connected to the inhumation of pregnant women. A so-called votive bed found in TT 14 seems to have been deposited in connection with the body of a young woman who surely died during her pregnancy, probably with the intention to facilitate "the rebirth of mother and child after a happy completion of delivery in their second, eternal life".[597] Furthermore, a restricted amount of evidence concerning the special attention paid by the Egyptians to the embalming procedure of pregnant women are known.[598]

Significantly, something similar is attested in connection with an oracular decree of Amonrasonther for Neskhons, the wife of Pinedjem II.[599] This document shows strong links with the religious milieu of the letters to the dead: the utterance was written on a wooden board and deposited inside the tomb of Neskhons,[600] as was done with the letters; moreover, from the text it is evident that the female spirit is perceived as a potentially angry entity, capable of persecuting her husband. In addition, according to Smith, the analysis of Neskhons' mummy shows that the woman was young and pregnant at the time of her death.[601] Thus, it could be argued that some complications occurred during the childbirth causing her demise. On the other hand, it is interesting that in in order to protect Pinedjem and his family, the main aim of the texts is to deify Neskhons and to placate her potential negative attitude towards the husband.

From others sources it is well known that the Egyptians had few scruples when faced with neutralising an evil dead person. In a Saitic apotropaic spell, for exorcising a woman possessed by a ghost the threat to burn down the tomb of the malevolent spirit is clearly expressed.[602] Yet, nothing like this is attested in the decree for Neskhons or in the Letters to the Dead analysed here. In these documents the deceased women are clearly treated with a certain respect: the senders stress quite often their

[597] M.C. Betrò 2017, 70.
[598] M.C. Betrò 2017, 68–70.
[599] B. Gunn and I. E. S. Edwards 1955.
[600] A. Dodson and D. Hilton 2004, 200–210.
[601] "The skin of the abdomen is loose and pendulous; and the mammillae are large and prominent. These two signs make it certain that Nsikhonsu was parous." Cf. G. Elliot Smith 1912, 107–109.
[602] Y. Koenig 1979.

correct behaviour toward the women and always highlight how the angry attitude of the spirits appears unjustified. Moreover, with the only exception of P. Leiden AMS 64 / I 371 and the Munich Cosmetic Vase ÄS 4313, the writers always invoke the female spirits to intercede for the writer with the gods or another ancestor, or even to act as a benevolent being against other enemies.[603]

If the CT spells 30–41 were focused on the crucial moment of passage in which the main heir replaces his dead father as householder, in the specific context of the Middle Kingdom elite's extended family,[604] the core of beliefs here highlighted focused on something quite similar, concerning not only the vengeful ghost of a woman angry because of her untimely death, but also, a passage of social status between the living and the dead: a deceased wife and a living woman who took over (or could potentially take over, as in P. Leiden AMS 64 / I 371) her social role. Thus, given these elements, it is possible to posit that the documents here analysed not just show a ritual to ward off an angry spirit, but the will to restore the positive role of an ancestress, healing the pact of mutual aid between the living and the dead for the prosperity of the household.

In light of the elements described above, in addition to funerals, it is also possible to hypothesise other occasions during which these ritual actions might be performed. The appeasing of a wrathful supernatural entity shows indeed a certain affinity with the mythical theme of the wrath of the Distant or Wandering Goddess and her pacification through inebriation, music, and dance. This female divine entity, usually identified with the Solar Eye, embodied the most dangerous manifestation of the sun and was believed able of causing severe diseases. She is often described as the daughter or the wife of the sun god (Ra, Atum, or Amun) and was identified with diverse goddesses, such as Hathor, Sekhmet, Tefnut, Mut, Bastet, Mehit.[605]

The wrathful attitude of the Solar eye against humanity or even against the sun god himself is a recurrent theme in the Egyptian written sources. The first allusion to this myth is found in a Coffin Text spell (CT II 76 4a-b), where it said that the Eye of Atum was sent in search of Tefnut. The New Kingdom *Book of the Heavenly Cow* narrates how the Solar Eye was sent by Ra to exterminate the human beings who rebelled against him. The violence of the goddess was so uncontainable that, when Ra regretted his decision, the only way to placate the goddess was by intoxicating her with a special type of beer dyed red to resemble blood.[606] In P. Leiden I 384 (second century CE), and other Greek

[603] See Berlin Bowl, second circle: *ỉr-wn ỉrr-t(w) m msḏḏ.t=ṯ ꜣ ỉt=ṯ <m> ḫr.t-nṯr* "If it happened against your will: your father is powerful in the necropolis." Here, the sender is asking the female dead to invoke the help of her deceased father to protect the family from malevolent influences. Cf. R. Schiavo 2013 A, 34 –35 and note b. In O. Louvre 698 an intercession to the Lords of the Eternity is explicitly asked between vs 16 and vs 18. Cf. P.J. Frandsen 1992, 33-34.
[604] H. Willems 2001, 268–270.
[605] J.-P. Corteggiani 2007, 381-382.
[606] M. Lichtheim 2006 B, 197-199.

and Demotic sources, the Solar Eye, angry and offended because of an unspecified reason, takes refuge in a foreign country and the choice to abandon her land causes misery for the Egyptians. The goddess is then persuaded to return to Egypt thanks to the intervention of a divine messenger who is able to placate her by narrating a series of fables.[607] It has been posited that the return of the goddess from a distant land could be intended as a metaphor for a natural phenomenon, such as the heliacal rising of Sirius and the advent of the new year, or the annual flood of the Nile and thus the fertility of the land.[608] Other scholars have also identified a further metaphorical meaning strictly linked to female fertility – which does not exclude other interpretations related to the astral sphere – such as pregnancy,[609] the occurrence of the menarche and, therefore, the passage of young girls into adulthood, [610] but also the restoration of women's fertility in connection with the menstrual cycle.[611] See in particular J. B. Jørgensen:

> *In the association of the myth to the coming of age of adolescent girls, it can be viewed as the female analogy to the coming of age myths of Horus, who grew up in the seclusion of the Delta marshes to return as new king of Egypt and the triumphant avenger of his father Osiris. Both myths are applicable to astral phenomena, but to fully appreciate these myths as something more than natural allegories, we need to remember both the distinction between myth and application and the inherent multivalent meanings and levels of myth – including a possible bodily basis. I am not arguing that we should interpret all episodes in every version of the Return of the Goddess as menstrual mythology. However, for some time now, Egyptian astronomy has been reclaimed from the clutches of new age Egyptology, and hopefully the time is ripe for doing the same for such an important source for mythology as female physiology.*[612]

This mythical theme, therefore, relates to the most crucial aspects of female fertility and, at the same time, it has also to be linked to the most significant transitional moments in women's life, such as the reaching of adulthood and pregnancy. In other words, it likely functioned as the main paradigm for the rites of passage concerning the life cycle of women. As for the Letters to the Dead addressed to deceased women, it is certainly suggestive that the Bremner Rhind papyrus (Ptolemaic Period), taking

[607] J.M. Smith 1984, 1082-1087.
[608] J.F. Quack 2002, 286.
[609] D. Meeks 2006, 239.
[610] J.B. Jørgensen, 2015, 133-135.
[611] J.B. Jørgensen, 2015, 147.
[612] J.B. Jørgensen, 2015, 163-164.

up the same version of the myth attested in CT II 76 4a-b, records that the wrath of the Solar Eye was triggered by the fact that the god Atum created a new eye during her absence in order to replace her,[613] an element that shows a certain affinity with the documents analysed here.

The anger of the Solar Eye cannot be simply neutralised, but she can be transmuted into a protective force able to destroy dangerous evil entities, or being pacified through wise words, music, dance, or feasting.[614] In the aforementioned P. Bremner Rhind it is also recorded that Atum, in order to appease her anger caused by the creation of the new eye, decided to place the goddess on his forehead, transmuting her into the prototype of the uraeus: a symbol associated to protection and power linked to royal dignity.[615]

The Solar Eye was therefore considered as an ambivalent entity, whose double nature was often personified by two different goddesses (Hathor/Sekhmet; Mut/Sekhmet) which embodied the two opposite sides – one wrathful and dangerous, the other one protective and benevolent – of the same feminine divine being.[616]

A number of attestations are known concerning celebrations specifically meant to pacify the wrath of the Solar Eye in her various forms. The Egyptian name handed down to us by the textual sources is ***ḥb-tḫy***, probably to be translated as "Festival of the Drunkeness" or "Festival of the Intoxication", in reference to the version of the myth in which the anger of the goddess is appeased thanks to an alcoholic beverage.[617]

This celebration is well attested in the Greco-Roman sources, which also provide the most detailed description of the cultic activities related to it, such as dancing, intoxication through beverage or food, and even orgiastic practices.[618] Some scholars have speculated that the origin of the festival might go back to Naqada II.[619] On the other hand, it is important to stress that the *ḥb-tḫy* is poorly documented for the historical phases prior to the New Kingdom.[620]

[613] J.P. Allen 1997, 14-15 and note 12.
[614] R. Jasnow and M. Smith 2010/2011, 36.
[615] J.P. Allen 1997, 14-15 and note 12.
[616] J.-P. Corteggiani 2007, 381-382; Jasnow and Smith 2010/2011, 36.
[617] F. Masashi 2019, 88. For a different translation as "plummet of the balance" see: U. Luft (1992, 188–9). The association of the term *tḫy* with drunkenness or intoxication is currently the most commonly accepted. See: Z. Horváth: "Luft's reading is plausible and reasonable from a palaeographic point of view. On the other hand, a feast 'Before the Plummet' would be a *hapax* among the Egyptian festival names as opposed to the Feast of Drunkenness which is known to have been celebrated on the same date in the Graeco-Roman period". Z. Horváth 2015, 131.
[618] R. Jasnow and M. Smith 2010/2011, 9-53.
[619] Jensen 2017, 296-302.
[620] F. Masashi 2019, 88.

As for the Old Kingdom, the festival is perhaps mentioned in a calendar from the Sun Temple of Niuserra (5th dynasty), but the text is too fragmentary and its interpretation remains uncertain.[621] Subsequent sources testify that a *tp ˁ tḫ* – (festival) before the brewing) – or *tpˁ tḫ* – (festival) of the the first brewing – certainly linked to the goddess Hathor and probably aimed at taming her wrathful side, was celebrated during the late Middle Kingdom at Lahun.[622] Yet, it is only from the New Kingdom onwards that the data become more numerous and consistent. B. M. Bryan, in particular, has highlighted that during the reign of Hatshepsut, a "porch of drunkenness" was built within the temple of the goddess Mut at Karnak and that this structure was probably meant for celebrations aimed at appeasing the wrathful side of this deity.[623] Textual sources from Deir el-Medina, finally, record that the celebration of the *ḥb-tḫy* was linked to Hathor and the consumptions of alcoholic beverage, especially beer.[624]

According to the religious calendars, the *ḥb-tḫy* was celebrated the twentieth day of the month of Thoth (otherwise known as I Akhet, 20), but other data suggest that it could also occur during other days.[625] One has also to consider that several regional versions of this festival likely related to diverse local goddesses could have existed.[626] Also, according to J.J. Janssen, data from Deir el-Medina seem to suggest that festivals in honour of the goddess Hathor characterised by the use of alcoholic beverages could also be celebrated privately.[627] It might be noteworthy that a document from this latter site datable to the reign of Ramesses III, O. Gardiner 61, records that a man celebrated a "personal festival for Hathor" (*pꜣy=f ḥb n Ḥw.t-ḥr*) in concomitance with the death of his spouse.[628] This kind of private ceremony, even though we are dealing with a too restricted number of evidence to be conclusive, could indeed perfectly match with a possible ritual background of the Letters to the Dead addressed to deceased women.

[621] A.J. Spalinger 1993, 297; W. Helck 1977, 57 and Pl. II
[622] Z. Horváth 2015, 131-135.
[623] B.M. Bryan 2005, 182; B.M. Bryan 2014, 103–106.
[624] F. Masashi 2019, 88.
[625] R. Jasnow and M. Smith 2010/2011, 44.
[626] F. Masashi 2019, 88; R. Jasnow and M. Smith 2010/2011, 44.
[627] J.J. Janssen 1980, 45.
[628] K A. Kitchen 1982, 596: 15–16.

6. A comparative approach: ancestors, legitimation and power in the Ancient Near East

6.1 Aims

The present chapter is devoted to the analysis of religious beliefs and practices focused on the cult of the dead attested in various Ancient Near Eastern societies, within a specific framework where the care for the dead had a special function in legitimising the social role of living individuals. Specifically, the data have been investigated within two different research horizons: a first section has been devoted to the role of ancestor worship in legitimating property ownership and social roles; the second section, instead, focused on the actual practices pertaining to the cult of the dead, in other words, public performances specifically meant to praise the dead and the ways in which this ideological framework was used in the self-presentation of both elite and royal families.

The main aim is to show how ancestor worship was an intrinsic feature of the Ancient Near Eastern polytheisms and that the religious practices linked to these kinds of beliefs were of foremost importance in legitimising power and rights over the property of the real estate and in validating succession.

6.2 Ancestors, property and social roles

According to the seminal study of J. Goody, *Death, Property and Ancestors*, the cult of the deceased forebears is strongly intertwined with the rules concerning the transmission of property. Ancestor cult provides indeed a supernatural framework through which the power relations characterising the social order can be maintained and reinforced. As a consequence, the cultic actions addressed to the dead should not be understood as simple acts of piety but respond to a specific frame according to which the deceased worshipped as ancestors are those from whom one has inherited.[629] Although the work of Goody is focused on the LoDagaa of the Northern Ghana, strong connections between ancestor cult, legitimation of property and inheritance systems is attested in several different cultural contexts,[630] and it could be stated that within certain social frameworks the deceased are venerated because of their authoritative role in validating the social position of the living.

Several elements seem to suggest the existence of rather similar beliefs within the diverse Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Of course, different strategies occurred in different cultural areas, as well as transformations over time. Nonetheless, it is possible to outline a general framework. The extended

[629] J. Goody 1962, 412.
[630] T. Chee-Kiong 1993, 145.

family played a crucial role in the whole area. [631] The chief of the family, who normally was the father, was also considered the main owner of the estates connected to a household and the role of "householder" was traditionally transmitted from father to son.[632] The firstborn was usually considered the privileged heir, but several exceptions are known.[633]

The available sources are not homogeneous. Especially as regards the Levant, between the third and the first half of the Second millennium BCE we have rather scanty information, sometimes limited to very specific social frameworks. For example, most textual sources from Mari were found within the royal archive and, consequently, the tablets mainly deal with kingly aspects.[634] Nevertheless, several documents highlight the foremost role played by the *kispum*-ritual, periodically celebrated to commemorate and feed the deceased.[635] The *kispum* was a custom well attested also in Mesopotamian tradition, and it was indeed recognised as a cultural homogeneity characterising the whole Mid-Euphrates valley, the Dyiala basin and Babylonia.[636] Although the sources from Mari mainly focus on the role played by the *kispum* in legitimating the ruling family[637] it would be reasonable to posit a similar function also for non-royal contexts. In this regard, it is certainly interesting to mention a Paleo-Babylonian document found at Susa, where a woman claims her right to inheritance in connection with her duty of celebrating the *kispum* for her deceased father.[638]

Conversely, the tablets from Emar, do not stem from a royal archive and most of the documents concern private transactions often legal in nature, such as fictitious adoptions to stipulate the sale of real estate, or marriages. Among these, a restricted number of texts – testaments stipulated for extraordinary circumstances in which the heir was not the eldest son, but, for example, the daughter – are interesting for the present purpose.[639] They show a clause that link the legal possession of a propriety with the duty of taking care of both the "gods" (*ilanu*) and the "dead" (*metu*) of the testator. Moreover, even in this case it is possible to figure out a certain cultural continuity since this clause is attested also in a restricted number of documents from the settlement of Nuzi, in Iraq. [640] The strict correlation between the words "gods" and "dead" occurring within these documents has allowed some scholars to hypothesise that both terms were used here as a *hendiadys*, referring thus to the same

[631] R. Westbrook 2003, 36-39; J. C. Moreno García 2012.
[632] R. Westbrook 2003, 36-39.
[633] R. Westbrook 2003; P. W. Pestman 1969, 58-77.
[634] W. Heimpel 2004, 4-6.
[635] A. Jacquet 2012, 123-136.
[636] A. Tsukimoto 1985; A. Tsukimoto 2010, 101-109.
[637] A. Jacquet 2012; B. B. Schmidt 1996 A, 44-45.
[638] D. Charpin 2012, 31.
[639] B. B: Schmidt 1996 B, 141-153. W. T. Pitard 1996.
[640] K. van der Toorn 1994; W. T. Pitard 1996; B.B. Schmidt 1996 B, 141-153.

category of supernatural beings, the "divine ancestral spirits",[641] but such an interpretation has been criticised by other scholars.[642] On the other hand, it is undeniable that the dead, here, are considered as a special category of supernatural entities: they can survive after death, they deserve food-offerings like the gods and, above all, to venerate them appears to be a crucial prerequisite to legitimise the possession of property.

In this regard, it has been hypothesised that both the terms *ilanu* and *metu* would indicate the sculptures involved in house-cults, which were perceived as an integral part of the real estate.[643] J. M. Durand, instead, posited that the strong connection between the ancestral spirits and the ownership rights over a real estate could be explained by the fact that in the Levantine area it was a widespread custom to bury the deceased family members underneath the houses.[644] However, this argument is not totally convincing, since at Emar the presence of tombs located under the houses is not attested.[645]

Without completely foreclosing the validity of these interpretations, the most remarkable aspect is that the care of the ancestral spirits – and, above all, the care addressed to the deceased father – had to be an unavoidable duty of each householder. The last wills under analysis were indeed stipulated for non-traditional heirs, within a cultural context in which to be a householder was a significant social role transmitted from father to son. It follows that to inherit a house meant to become the new *pater familias* and entailed the duty of taking care of all the family members, both living and dead.[646] It is thus remarkable that in most of these documents the chosen heir was a woman and she was not just appointed as legitimate main heir, since the document specifies that she was also in charge to act "as both male and female", which, in other words, means that the female heir was formally allowed to assume the social role traditionally belonging to the eldest son, especially with regards to the perpetuation of the ancestral cult.[647]

This aspect finds a meaningful connection with some Ugaritic literary texts. The famous passage of the ideal son from the poem of Aqhat underlines the foremost social role played by the eldest son. The firstborn had certainly to take care of his elderly parents and, even after their death, his duties would not have ceased, since the eldest son had to maintain the posthumous cult of the father.[648]

[641] K. van der Toorn 1994, 47.
[642] W.T. Pitard 1996; B.B. Schmidt 1996 B, 141-153.
[643] W.T. Pitard 1996, 126; contra: B.B. Schmidt 1996 B, 147-148.
[644] J.M. Durand 1989, 15-18; B.B. Schmidt 1996 B, 149
[645] W.T. Pitard 1996, 139.
[646] K. van der Toorn, op. cit. 2014, pp. 83-84; I. Finkel 2021, 45.
[647] B.B. Schmidt 1996 B, 149 and ff.; W. T. Pitard 1996, 125-126.
[648] P. Xella 1983, 183-216.

6.3 Ancestors, power and public performance

The previous analysis has shown that ancestors exercised a wide authority in validating inheritance and succession in the context of elite extended family. Likewise, the veneration of the forebears had certainly a crucial role not only in legitimising the power of the ruling dynasty, but also in ensuring social cohesion between the king, the elite and, sometimes, even between the royal power and the whole population. Such an ideological function of ancestor cults finds its most striking expression in specific festivals. In order to analyse this kind of phenomena, the concept of "festival" will be here approached as "cultural performances" designed for a specific "audience".[649] The present section will therefore be focused on the main festivals relating to the cult of the ancestors and attested between the third and the second millennium BCE. A special attention will be given to the social groups involved in the ceremonies, since it appears a to a be a crucial element with which to understand the specific function to which a festival was aimed.[650]

In this regard, further clarifications are necessary. As stressed in several studies, the traditional distinction between "official" and "personal" religion risks to be misleading if applied to the Ancient Near East. Indeed, "personal religion" in the modern sense of the term did not exist, or more likely had not a prominent role within the sources examined here. Rather, in these ancient cultures, the individual identity coincided with a collective identity built around the sense of belonging to diverse kinds of social groups,[651] such as the extended family or other kinds of groups, like those of people involved in the same work activities. This consideration also entails that an individual could perform a specific religious action within different framework (family, local, trans-local etc.).[652] Consequently, most religious practices described in the previous sections – such as those concerning the *kispum*, but also the Letters to the Dead, or the oracular consultation of certain deceased pharaohs within ancient Egyptian culture– used to be performed within some of the public celebrations here taken into consideration.

At Ebla, textual sources not only confirm the existence of cultic activity aimed at the veneration of the dead members of the royal family but also the existence of a royal mausoleum outside the city wall. Three texts – ARET XI 1, 2, 3 – found in the L.2769 archive, show an articulated ritual mainly focused on the royal couple.[653] Scholars have not reached a unanimous position regarding the function of the ceremony and different interpretations have been proposed: a mortuary liturgy connected to

[649] E. DeMarrais 2014, 161.
[650] E. DeMarrais 2014, 157-158 and 161.
[651] K. van der Toorn 1996, 94-95.
[652] L. Weiss 2015, 17-19.
[653] M.G. Biga and A.M.G. Capomacchia 2012, 19-20.

the ancestor cult, a coronation ceremony, or a ritual to renew the power of the rulers similar to the Egyptian *Sed-festival*,[654] or more likely a liturgy to be enacted during the marriage, somehow connected to the enthronement of the king.[655] The only sure element, however, is the role played by the ancestors, especially in connection with a "pilgrimage" or, more correctly, a processional journey led by the royal couple to a site called Nenash.[656] Here was located the *é ma-tim*, the "house of the dead", that must be identified with a mausoleum of the deceased rulers, where both the queen and the king had to sit on the "thrones of their fathers".[657] The main aspect of the ceremony is surely the "pilgrimage" – during which the procession had to stop in several different places of worship dedicated to the gods or to the royal ancestors. This kind of ritual journey was a characteristic element of the Eblaite religion and, according to Ristvet, textual sources suggest that not only the elite was surely involved, but also common people were allowed to assist.[658] In light of this aspect, it was suggested that the ritual was meant as an encomiastic demonstration of power of the ruling dynasty aimed at establishing their dominion at both the centre and the periphery of the reign.[659]

In the Amorite kingdom of Mari, the annual festival of Ishtar was certainly one of the most important events of the calendar. It included a procession of the statue of Ishtar from the site of Der – where probably the deceased kings were buried[660] – to Mari.[661] Textual sources mention that the celebration was also associated with a festival in honour of the royal ancestors, mainly focused on the performance of *kispum*-rituals for the deceased kings. Such a celebration was meant as a ritualised act of obedience to the ruling dynasty, since local governors, high officials and political allies were allowed to participate. This kind of audience has also to be understood in the light of the strategic marriage policy of the Amorite rulers. Both local elite members and political allies were often married to royal princesses and, as consequence, the ceremony aimed also at strengthening political alliances.[662]

The sources from Ugarit do not provide numerous information to reconstruct in detail public performances related to the religious sphere, nor to figure out the social extension of the people involved in the ceremonies. However, one ritual text, KTU 1.161=RS 34126, is certainly useful for the purpose of the present study. The document concerns an articulated ceremony performed in

[654] F. Pinnock 2016, 396-397.
[655] A. Archi 2012.
[656] M. G. Biga and A. M. G. Capomacchia 2012, 402; F. Pinnock 2016, 398; A. Archi, 2016, 33-34; P. Xella 1996.
[657] A. Archi 2016, 33-34.
[658] L. Ristvet 2015, 67-68.
[659] L. Ristvet 2015, 71.
[660] A. Jacquet 2012, 133-134.
[661] L. Ristvet 2015, 101.
[662] L. Ristvet 2015, 101.

honour of the deceased king Niqmaddu III, who died in the last decade of the thirteenth century BCE.[663] The actual function of the text is still object of debate. While Pardee claims that the rite had a narrowly funerary aim,[664] other scholars posit that the text might be connected with the enthronement of the new king. In effect, the final part of KTU 1.161 is strongly focused on the successor of Niqmaddu III, Ammurapi, and the text ends with specific benedictions for the new king, the royal family and the whole kingdom of Ugarit.[665] Given these premises, the ceremony could be intended as a double rite of passage. Both the dead king and his successor share a rather similar liminal condition: the first has not yet become an ancestor and the second has not yet become the legitimate sovereign. It is therefore reasonable to posit that such a transitional phase was perceived as potentially dangerous, since the dead king could act as a vengeful spirit, claiming his social position at the expense of the living heir.[666] In addition, the lack of an official ruler was certainly a situation of potential social chaos as well. The rite, thus, enabled Niqmaddu in joining the ranks of the divinised royal forebears and, at the same time, it conferred the role of king on Ammurapi, with the specific aim to legitimise the passage of the royal power from father to son.[667] As mentioned above, the text does not give enough information to reconstruct how and where the rite was performed. The fact that the throne plays a crucial role could suggest that the ceremony was celebrated within the royal palace. And it is suggestive that archaeological data confirm the presence of graves under this building.[668] Consequently, it could be posited that the ritual audience was restricted to the royal family and other prominent individuals. Some scholars stressed that KTU 1.161 could be compared to the royal *kispum* celebrated at Mari.[669] However, another, maybe stronger, resemblance can be recognised in certain Egyptian ceremonies, such as the OMR[670] and the Middle Kingdom mortuary liturgy composed of Coffin Texts spells 30-41.[671] As outlined in the previous sections, the officiant of these rites was the main heir of the deceased and the performance of the ritual not only aimed at transforming the dead into an ancestor, but also affected the heir/ritualist himself, who, after the celebration, achieved a new

[663] D. Pardee 2002, 85-89.
[664] D. Pardee 2002, 85-89.
[665] P. Xella 1983, 279-80.
[666] P. Xella 1983, 279-80.
[667] P. Xella 1983, 279-287; J. M. Suriano 2009.
[668] In this regard Pardee hypothesised that KTU 1.161 was characterised by a ritual lowering of the deceased king into a pit-installation beside the royal tombs in the royal palace, a hypothesis that may be confirmed by the fact the presence of a pit between the royal graves and the palace is archaeologically attested. (D. Pardee 1996, 273-275). According to Suriano, this reconstruction is not reasonable since "it is unparalleled in any other ancient Near Eastern source" and "archaeologists have yet to properly study the phenomenon of pit-installations inside royal tombs". Cf. M. J. Suriano 2009, 113-114. However, these observations do not invalidate the possibility that the ritual could be performed inside the royal palace.
[669] P. Xella 1983, 281-287; J.M. Suriano 2009, 119-123.
[670] See chapter 2, section 2.4a and chapter 3, section 3.1.
[671] H. Willems 2001, 253-372.

status, assuming the social role that belonged to the deceased.[672] A similar mechanism could also be applied to KTU 1.161, since some observations made by Suriano seem to suggest that the successor of Niqmaddu, Ammurapi, was also the main officiant of the rite.[673] Furthermore, according to the translation provided by P. Xella, the ritual described in KTU 1.161 was focused on a sculpture of the deceased king rather than on his corpse.[674]

6.4 Results

The analysis of the data has highlighted how practices and beliefs pertaining to ancestor worship were an intrinsic trait of the polytheistic religions of the Ancient Near East. Cultic actions devoted to the dead had a specific function in legitimising the social role of the living and could take the form of public performances meant as a moment to display the self-presentation of both royal and elite families. Also, ancestor worship turned out to be strictly intertwined with the rules regulating inheritance and succession.

In the light of these data, the Egyptian beliefs and practices analysed in the previous chapters, such as the OMR scenes 9 and 10 and the Tekenu ceremony, but also the Haker feast celebrated within the Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos can be understood in the context of this wider framework where ancestor worship was an ideological tool to legitimise power and succession. From this, it also follows that an actual juridical function of the Letters to the Dead concerning inheritance issues is quite grounded since it perfectly matches with the religious mindset typical of Ancient Near Eastern cultures.

[672] See chapter 2, section 2.3.
[673] J.M. Suriano 2009, 115.
[674] P. Xella 1983, 281-287.

7. Final remarks and conclusions

The sources analysed in the present thesis have highlighted a core of religious beliefs and practices which played a foremost role in the ancient Egyptian religion. Indeed, for the Egyptians the ancestors were not only supernatural beings able to affect the realm of the living, but also a source of legal authority, especially regarding specific socio-economic matters, such as inheritance, succession, the legitimation of certain social roles and the ownership of real estate.

In the introductory chapter, three main research questions have been formulated. Therefore, the results of the present investigation will be summarised below in order to verify whether or not the analysis and the discussion of the data have provided an answer to these questions.

1. *What are the factors intrinsic to the history of Egyptology that led to an underestimation of the role played by ancestor worship in both the juridical and the economic sphere?*

J. Assmann and other scholars are not wrong in underlining that a certain idea of immortality and positive afterlife in the modern world is somehow indebted to pharaonic beliefs. [675] Yet, we have to be aware that the path joining Egyptian thoughts to the conceptions typical of some of current Monotheistic eschatologies has not been linear in its development; several reformulations and new adaptations certainly occurred over time.[676] It is thus possible to identify a (partially) biased narrative of the ancient Egyptian religion. While aspects which have been reformulated in the current religious traditions are overestimated – above all Monotheistic conceptions of a positive hereafter and the concept of "personal piety" typical of the protestant tradition – other beliefs concerning the post-mortem survival have been diminished or ignored.[677]

The incorrect use of the label "shamanism" in reference to the OMR scenes 9 and 10, the Tekenu ceremony and the Haker feast clearly testify to this biased attitude characterising the modern understanding of the ancient Egyptian religion. The use of the label "shamanism" is indeed to be interpreted in the light of the same narrative for which Egyptian ancestor worship has been neglected for a long time. On one side it is possible to identify the so-called *ex oriente lux* bias according to which the Ancient Near East (Egypt included) should be considered as the place of origin of most of the cultural and, above all, religious expressions still existing today. Even though, on the one hand, there is something true in this interpretative scheme, it has been however noted how this kind of

[675] J. Assmann 2005, 11.
[676] G. Scandone Matthiae 1987, 45-47.
[677] J. Baines 1983, 80; J. Baines 2011, 42; L. Weiss 2015, 179-180.

discourse often entails oversimplified interpretations with the risk of neglecting certain cultural facts and the historical processes related to them.[678] One has also to consider that the first academic studies on Egyptian religion were inevitably affected by the cultural climate of the Victorian Age, above all its interest in spiritism and the so-called "quest for immortality", a factor that could have emphasised certain features of the ancient Egyptian religion, above all the search of eternal life after death.[679]

A major consequence of this kind of discourse is that other kinds of religious beliefs concerning the post-mortem existence – such as the ones here defined as "ancestor worship" – were considered as having a minor role within Egyptian religion or have been often interpreted as mere survival of archaic phenomena belonging to an unspecified 'remote time', or the result of foreign stimuli. In this regard it is also possible to recognise that for a long time Egyptology has been characterised by a lack of engagement with contemporary anthropological discourses. This aspect was already highlighted by J. Baines, who, in "Practical Religion and Piety" underlined how several phenomena which are usually considered "religious" in the study of most societies have been minimised within Egyptology, above all, the practices concerning the interactions between the living and the dead.[680] While Baines mainly focused on "non-funerary" practices, it may be posited that neglecting the role of ancestor worship within ancient Egyptian religion may have also involved a partial misconception of certain rituals concerning both the funerary and mortuary sphere, such as the OMR scenes 9 and 10, the Tekenu ritual, and the Haker feast.

The observations made by J. Assmann in *Death and Salvation* are in part emblematic of this state of the art. Assmann denies the existence of beliefs concerning vengeful ghosts in ancient Egypt, and the textual sources pertaining to the malevolent influence of the dead into the realm of the living should be understood as the result of a Mesopotamian influence.[681] Yet, he considers OMR scenes 9 and 10 as "unique in the history of Egyptian religion; they are an instance of trance or meditation, for which there are no parallels whatsoever in Egypt". [682] Finally, his reflections on the theme of "death as social isolation" as one of the "images of death" characterising the ancient Egyptian culture could be

[678] M. Liverani 2011, 8-9.
[679] R. Nyord 2018, 76-78.
[680] J. Baines 1987, 80.
[681] "In Mesopotamia, fear of revenants played an important role: the ghost of the dead (*etemmu*) would haunt this world if he had not been properly buried or had died a terrible death. Such fears are widespread; there are societies for which the "border traffic" between the world of the living and the world of the dead can never be entirely managed, and for which there are broad areas of "wilderness" that are closed to culture. In Egypt, such fears played a rather small role. In the Instruction of Any, one maxim is devoted to the akh, a word that we otherwise translate as "transfigured spirit," but which in this context unequivocally has the meaning "ghost," in the sense of the Mesopotamian *etemmu*. A Late Egyptian story that is unfortunately preserved to us only fragmentarily tells of the appearance of such a ghost. But these are exceptions that only confirm the rule, late texts that point to Babylonian influence." J. Assman 2005, 15. However, one has to keep in mind, that textual sources concerning the angry and potentially harmful spirits can already be identified in the letters to the dead of the 3rd millennium BCE, see chapter 4.1 and table 6.
[682] J. Assmann 2005, 313.

regarded as one of the most accurate descriptions of the mechanics characterising the ancient Egyptian "ancestor worship", [683] except that the author never explicitly uses this category in his study.[684]

Rather, all these diverse phenomena taken into consideration by J. Assmann can be better understood as diverse expressions of a single core of beliefs essentially based on the interaction between the living and the dead. The duty of the living descendants was that of taking care of their deceased relatives, by perpetuating their mortuary cult and the periodical food offerings, a cultic action that can be considered as a reflection into the post-mortem sphere of the traditional respect that sons and daughters owed to their elder parents. The neglect of this duty could trigger the wrath of the deceased which could therefore persecute their living descendants in the form of something similar to a "malevolent ghost". The OMR scenes 9 and 10, testify to the importance played by the bond between the deceased father and his living son, and how this bond could be periodically renewed also thanks to a specific ritual involving the "vision" of the deceased father through a special kind of ritual sleep and oneiric visions, a kind of belief which is far from being unique in the history of Egyptian religion since numerous parallels can be identified, such as some of the Letters to the Dead from the 3rd millennium BCE, and the Middle Kingdom Mysteries of Abydos.

It can be said that this core of beliefs, here labelled as "ancestor worship", not only was a fundamental trait of the Egyptian religion, but it also played a foremost role in shaping social behaviours, and the ways through which customary rules were conceived and executed.

To reassess the role played by ancestor worship in the ancient Egyptian society – not only in the context of the house-cult, or as an expression of the lived religion, but also as one of the basic components of both elite funerary and mortuary rituals – is therefore of great importance in order to place the current academic understanding of this ancient culture into a wider perspective. It allows to contextualise the ancient Egyptian religious practices in the light of the typical mechanics characterising the other polytheistic religions of the Ancient Near East and, indeed, in the present thesis it has been possible to establish several parallels between the phenomena here taken into consideration and quite similar religious facts attested in both Mesopotamia and the Levantine area.[685] This kind of perspective also involves the possibility to establish a historical link between the ancient

[683] J. Assmann 2005, 39-62, 313.
[684] In this regard, it is remarkable that J. Assmann, although he never uses the category "ancestor worship", is clearly inclined in considering the *ꜣḫ.w* as "ancestral spirits" which reached this status thanks to special rituals (J. Assmann 2005, 33-34); he also established a parallel between the Egyptian practices to which the body was subjected after death in Ancient Egypt and the second burial aimed at transforming the deceased into an ancestor as attested in several cultural contexts (J. Assmann 2005, 31).
[685] See chapter 6.

Egyptian religion and some practices and beliefs characterising modern Egyptian lived religion. From this point of view, it is certainly no coincidence that the re-evaluation of the concept of "ancestor worship" within Egyptology has opened the path to comparative studies aimed at highlighting the connections between modern and pharaonic Egypt. H. el-Leithy, for example, has identified significant parallels between the so-called Letters to the Dead and the practice, attested in modern Egypt, of addressing written requests to the Imam Esh-Shafe'ee, theologian, jurist, and saint.[686] N. el-Shohoumi,[687] E. Wickett,[688] and C. Adams[689] have instead conducted comparative studies aimed at underlined elements of continuity between pharaonic and more recent and even modern Egypt, with a special focus on the religious practices concerning the interactions between the living and the dead in both Islamic and Coptic tradition.

In other words, it could be said that re-evaluating the eminent role played by ancestor worship in pharaonic Egypt has turned out to be an invaluable tool to finally place ancient Egyptian religion in history, rather than consider it as a mere "remote archetype" from which religious conceptions of foremost importance for modern European cultures came.

1) *Is it possible to identify specific ceremonies focused on the passage of power from the deceased head of the family to the legitimate heir, which were strictly intertwined with both funerary and mortuary rituals? If yes, how and where were they performed? Furthermore, what role did women play in this kind of religious beliefs and practices?*

Ancient Egyptian conceptions about the hereafter were rather complex and, as attested since the Pyramid Texts copied in the royal tombs of the 5th dynasty, different modalities of post-mortem survivals overlapped with each other without being mutually exclusive. Besides a celestial hereafter in which the destiny of the deceased was associated to the imperishable stars or the cyclical renaissance of the sun, a further kind of post-mortem existence was structured on the model of the cyclical renewal of earth and nature, a theme strictly linked with the special destiny experienced by the god Osiris:[690] a mythical king of Egypt, killed by his brother Seth and vindicated by his posthumously conceived child, Horus, who was finally able to succeed his deceased father to the throne of Egypt.[691]

[686] H. el- Leithy 2003.
[687] N. el-Shohoumi 2006; N. el-Shohoumi 2004; N. el-Shohoumi 2002.
[688] E. Wickett 2010; E. Wickett 2009.
[689] C. Adams 2007.
[690] K. Goebs 2003.
[691] M. Smith 2008.

The analysis of the textual sources concerning the OMR scenes 9 and 10 and the Tekenu ritual has highlighted how the latter can be interpreted as dramatic rituals strongly rooted in the Osiris myth.[692] Specifically, OMR scene 10 is to be understood as the outline of a dramatic performance which was based on the same mythical episode described in PT 364. The mythological background of the OMR 9 and the sleeping Tekenu ceremony can be identified in both PT 364 and CT 312. These two texts are to be interpreted as two sides of the same coin. While PT 364 focuses on the installation of Osiris as the ruler of the netherworld, and therefore on the establishment of the posthumous cult dedicated to the deceased, CT 312 concerns the installation of Horus as the legitimate heir of Osiris and the rightful king of Egypt, which metaphorically represented the installation of the eldest son as the new head of the extended family.

The bond between Horus and his deceased father was certainly perceived as a paradigmatic model with regards to matters concerning the legitimation of succession, and both the OMR scenes 9 and 10 and the Tekenu ritual can be interpreted as a "double rite of passage". Their purpose was not limited to the mere transformation of the deceased into a benevolent ancestor. Rather, they also had a specific function in transforming the legitimate heir into the newly recognised chief of the extended family.

It is therefore clear that the "lack of mythology" – considered by several scholars as the proof of the archaic shamanic nature of these rituals – was only apparent. If one keeps in mind that both the OMR scenes 9 and 10 and, probably even the Tekenu ritual, were dramatic rituals concerning a specific episode related to the Osiris myth, the paucity of explicit references to gods and mythology can be better explained in the light of a certain reticence in pronouncing some divine names in specific circumstances, which can be identified with the presence of a wide audience involving different social strata (public performances and/or collective rituals), or the fact that such performances entailed a form of interaction, or even communication in the form of a necromantic action between the living and the dead.

This kind of "double rite of passage" structured on the model of the Osiris myth was not only used to legitimise the passage of power from father to son. The analysis of the Middle Kingdom data concerning the Haker feast, enacted during the celebrations of the Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos, have shown how the same kind of ritual was also used in contexts other than succession within elite families. To act as a main ritualist during the Mysteries, for example by performing the role of *s3*-

[692] Of course, this does not mean that beliefs and practices concerning the cult of the ancestors cannot be involved also into the celestial/solar post-mortem existence. It is indeed important to mention the case of the *3ḫ-iḳr-n-Rˁ* stelae, where the ancestral spirits (*3ḫ.w*) are associated to the sun god. (See: R. J. Demarée 1983, 275-278; L. Weiss 2015, 124 and 181). Yet, as a matter of a fact this feature did not clearly emerge from the textual sources here taken into account.

mr=f, was a way through which the royal power was able to legitimise the social status of his high officials. Specifically, a significant connection has been identified between the privilege of acting as *sꜣ-mr=f* ritualist (a role rather similar to that of the *sem* priest and modelled on the mythical role of Horus as son and protector of Osiris) during the Mysteries, and the possibility of holding the office of Royal Treasurer. Also, the same scheme appears to have been used to formalise the relationship between high officials and their subordinates, since in a number of Middle Kingdom stelae from Abydos, minor officials are often depicted as *sem* priests while performing rituals for their chiefs.[693] It can therefore be argued that ancestor worship strongly affected the social behaviours of the ancient Egyptians and the ways in which they shaped the power relations within their society.

The sources collected and analysed in the present thesis also allowed us to identify the places and times in which this double rite of passage took place. The window of time between the embalming procedure and the inhumation of the corpse – and especially the night preceding the burial –were considered as one of the most favourable moments to interact and communicate with the dead. Remarkably, this aspect finds also suggestive parallels with practices attested in other cultural contexts; for example, in Senegal and Benin important judgments were enacted at night, since this was considered as the moment in which was easier to communicate with the spirits of the dead.[694] One has also to keep in mind that these kinds of rituals could also be re-enacted on the occasion of the periodical commemorations for the deceased, recreating thus the right moment for what we could actually define as a necromantic action. As regard the places, the sacred landscape known in the scientific literature as the "Butic Burial" – which corresponded to an actual space set up between the embalming place and the tomb – and other areas located within the necropolises cited in the Letters to the Dead – such as the *nỉw.t wꜥ.t,* the *nỉw.t nḫḫ,* the *s.t mꜣꜥ-ḫrw* or the *ỉw nsrsr*– were likely perceived as liminal sacred areas, specifically meant for the interactions between the living and the dead.

It was also possible to identify specific ritual actions which were performed within these liminal areas and whose main aim was that of establishing a form of communication with the dead. A ritual sleep, called *sḏr*/*sḏr.yt,* which could also entail an oneiric vision of the deceased – as those described in OMR scenes 9 and 10, in a restricted group of "Letters to the Dead" – which is also to be linked to the ritual sleep performed by the Tekenu and the *sḏr.yt* ritual enacted during the Middle Kingdom Mysteries at Abydos. A ritualised judgment of the dead, known in the sources with different names – counting of the surplus (*ḥsb.t ꜥ.w*), "counting (*ỉp, sỉp, ḥsb, ṯnỉ*) of the dead (*mwt*) and the blessed

[693] D. Franke 2003.
[694] É. Le Roy 2004, 59-60; A.A. Loktionov 2019, 57.

spirits (*ꜣḫ.w*)", "judgment in the court of the great god" (*wḏꜥ m ḏꜣḏꜣ.t n.t nṯr ꜥꜣ*) or, more simply, "judgment" (*wḏꜥ mdw, wpi*), as attested within the Letters to the Dead.

The existence of a ritual sleep which allowed a form of interaction between the living and the dead can be, once again, explained in the light of CT spell 312. This text narrates of a supernatural communication established thanks to a divine messenger (*irw-Ḥr*), which was sent by Horus to reach the netherworld and can be identified with the very eye of the god himself (*ir.t-Ḥr*). Indeed, in the light of the specific ancient Egyptian conceptions concerning dreams, the idea of an eye/messenger able to see the inhabitants of the netherworld can be interpreted as a metaphor to describe the same kind of oneiric vision experienced by the *sem* priest in OMR scene 9. Not by chance, the same mythical episode could also explain the presence of an obscure ritual remark recurring in some versions of OMR 9, *wnw-Ḥr/wnw-Ḥr sḏr* (the messenger of Horus/ the sleeping messenger of Horus).

Remarkably, in another version of the same mythical episode – narrated in Papyrus Chester Beatty I, recto, 14,6-15,8– it is narrated how a supernatural communication between Horus and Osiris was established through an exchange of letters. As stressed by both S. Donnat Beauquier and U. Verhoeven, the latter can be identified as the mythological background of the so-called Letters to the Dead (especially for the documents pertaining to inheritance and succession).[695] Moreover, it is quite grounded to sustain that the ritual deposition of the Letters to the Dead occurred in the course of a dramatic rituals – such as the ritual sleep or the ritualised judgment of the dead highlighted above – which were performed during the funerals or within one of the numerous festivals to celebrate the dead.[696]

The analysis of the sources here conducted did not highlight special ritual actions concerning the relationship between the deceased mother and her living daughter. This result can be explained in the light of specific features characterising ancient Egyptian society: the extended family (*ꜣb.t*), was a legal-economic institution that did not officially include the wife of the family chief. Rather, a woman continued to belong to the *ꜣb.t* of her father even after her marriage, and once her father died, she was included in the *ꜣb.t* of her eldest son. This element can clearly explain why we do not have – at least in the sources belonging to the official discourse concerning the most powerful extended families – a set of complex rituals concerning the passage of a social role from mother to daughter.

[695] S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 218-219; see also: U. Verhoeven 2003, 38.
[696] See Chapter 4, section 4.1.

In this regard, interesting information has been gleaned from the so-called Letters to the Dead. The analysis of the missives addressed to women conducted in chapter 5 has highlighted the existence of a ritual aimed at appeasing a potentially dangerous dead. In this regard, one has to keep in mind that most women addressed in these letters had probably died at a young age, perhaps due to childbirth. Moreover, the analysis of the documents has suggested that the trigger of their vengeful attitude can be identified with the possible remarriage of their husband. This particular ritual therefore shows certain common traits with what we have seen for the rituals concerning the post-mortem relationship between the deceased father and his living son: it was indeed aimed at sanctioning the passage of a social role from a deceased wife to the new spouse of a family chief. It is also important to stress that a potentially vengeful attitude of the deceased father towards his living son is clearly described in CT spell 38. It was also highlighted that this kind of ritual action aimed at appeasing the irate deceased woman shows a certain affinity with the mythical theme of the Solar Eye 's divine wrath, and a possible ritual background for these ritual practices could be identified in the festival aimed at appeasing the terrible side of certain goddesses.[697]

On the other hand, it is important to keep in mind the limitations of the present thesis and that the typology of sources here taken into account are by their very nature focused on the male sphere. It would be indeed possible to hypothesise that dead women had a larger role and veneration in contexts other than those of the extended family/*ꜣb.t*. An intriguing research horizon that deserves to be better investigated is certainly that of groups of women involved in specific religious offices, such as the priestesses of Hathor during the Old and the Middle Kingdom,[698] or within the royal sphere, the role of God's Wife of Amun.[699]

2) *Is it possible to recognise an actual involvement of the ancestors in the legal practices pertaining to inheritance, succession and the ownership of certain kinds of properties? If yes, how have these practices evolved over time?*

J. C. Moreno García has highlighted how in Egyptology spiritual matters, like the study of religion, art and literature have been more investigated at the expense of other aspects such as economy, law or sociology. [700] This statement is certainly true. On the other hand, Egyptian religion cannot be

[697] See Chapter 5, section 5.3.
[698] R.A. Gillam 1995.
[699] M.F. Ayad 2016, 89-106.
[700] J.C. Moreno García 2014.

considered solely as a “spiritual matter”; rather, it was a pervasive fact that invested several aspects of the ancient Egyptian society, including the ways in which the law was organised and executed.

The analysis and discussion of the sources here conducted has highlighted how the ancestors were considered as a source of legal authority, not only with regards to inheritance and succession issues, but also to officially formalise the social status reached by an individual. The customary rule “the property is given to the one who buries” testifies to the strong links between ancestor worship and the possibility of claiming rights over certain assets, an aspect that is even more evident if we take into consideration the Letters to the Dead concerning inheritance issues.

To posit an actual legal value for these letters is indeed quite reasonable. These documents were written according to a standardised pattern which perfectly matches with that of ancient Egyptian legal documents. The texts show explicit references to the Egyptian customary rules concerning inheritance and succession. Furthermore, private letters exchanged between living persons could have a legal value, and the same function cannot be excluded a priori for the missives addressed to a deceased person.

The fact these letters were deposited inside or in the vicinity of the tomb of the deceased recipient is certainly another argument in favour of the actual legal function of these documents. Elite tombs were certainly meant as a tool for social display thanks to which the living descendants of the deceased could officially validate their social position, and exactly for this reason, it is not unusual to find private legal texts written in a monumentalised form within elite tombs. It is therefore reasonable to posit that a written document placed and sealed within a tomb could have had an officially recognised value too. Also, the fact that the ritual deposition of the letters inside the tombs probably took place in the form of a dramatic performance, likely enacted in front of an audience during a somewhat public occasion, such as certain phases of the funerary and the mortuary rituals, perfectly matches with what an ancient Egyptian meant by legal procedure: if taking care of both the funerals and the posthumous cult for the deceased was the standard procedure towards claiming the inheritance and succeeding the late person, it is reasonable to state that this procedure also involved a legal action during which the relatives of the deceased could object to the choice of the heir. Finally, the presence of an audience responds to the need to officially validate a legal statement in front of witnesses.

Indeed, this kind of procedure finds significant parallels in several other cultures where the institution of the extended family played, or plays, a major role. One can even state that the authoritative role of the ancestors in legal matters such as inheritance, succession and real estate ownership was a typical

trait of the polytheistic systems of the Ancient Near East. [701] In addition, this strong connection between funerary rituals, ancestor worship and rules regulating inheritance and succession is also found in the context of African legal pluralism. Within this context, rites of burial and mourning are not only meant for the deceased and his post-mortem existence, but they are above all an official occasion for regulating succession and the division of inheritance. The most striking example in this regard is certainly the famous Kenyan "burial case" of Silvano Melea Otieno, which saw the widow litigating against the brother of the deceased in order to establish where Otieno should be buried. [702] At the time – the second half of the eighties – this lawsuit gained great media attention since it reflected a clash between tradition and modernity occurring in Kenya and involved local movements for women's rights.[703] However, this does not detract from the fact that one of the issues at stake was the effective right of a widower to have access to the marital inheritance since according to the local customary rules "the body of the deceased is perceived like a title deed whose possession bestows legitimacy when there is a disagreement over inheritance".[704] A further confirmation of the strong connection between the care for the dead and certain economic issues was also noted by ancient Greek historians such as Herodotus and Diodorus of Sicily, who reported that for the Egyptians the corpse of the deceased had a valuable economic and juridical value, and mummified bodies could be used to guarantee debts.[705]

Finally, religious and legal practices were strongly intertwined in the ancient Egyptian culture, and the intervention of supernatural beings in legal issues is widely attested. In particular, through a comparison with the oracular practices, it has been possible to establish how certain categories of dead were considered as supernatural authoritative entities, especially with regard to the legitimation of a social status – such as the validation of an heir, or the assignment of a state office – and, notably, starting from the New Kingdom, the consultation of oracles was usually involved in settling legal cases concerning inheritance and real estate ownership.

Most of the Letters to the Dead[706] can be understood as an expression of the patronage network typical of the regional potentates and the actual power gained by the nomarchs during the First Intermediate Period and part of the Middle Kingdom.[707] It was also possible to posit that the ritual context to which these documents belong could be identified with the annual commemorations celebrated in honour of

[701] See Chapter 6, section 6.2.
[702] M.N. Wangila 2010, 326-343.
[703] M.N. Wangila 2010, 326-343.
[704] P. Stamp 1991, 833.
[705] Herodotus 2, 136; Diodorus of Sicily 1, 92 – 93. See also: G. Purpura 2009, 41-60.
[706] See chapter 4, section 4.1, and table 6.
[707] A. Dorn 2015, 121-122.

the ancestors of the ruling normachal families. Both archaeological and textual sources highlight how the deification of some nomarchs who lived during the end of the Old Kingdom – such as Izi or Heqaib – functioned as a tool of legitimation for the local rulers who descended from them. Indeed, the mortuary cults of these deified nomarchs, essentially focused on their *ḥw.t kꜣ*, gradually assumed the form of public celebrations.[708] As for the case of Heqaib, for example, it has been hypothesised that already during the First Intermediate Period the celebration of his mortuary cult was reshaped in the form a public celebration which involved an audience not exclusively limited to the descendants of the deceased and during which a procession to his shrine at Elephantine was enacted.[709] The rise of these kinds of festivals, seems to have characterised the whole religious landscapes of the First Intermediate Period and probably occurred in each regional state. At Dayr al-Barshā, for example, H. Willems has highlighted the existence of a processional road which led to the tomb of the local nomarch, an element that perfectly matches with the performance of a public celebration.[710] These periodical commemorations for the deified ancestors of the ruling family could take on diverse functions. Indeed, as mentioned above, it was a moment of social display for the living nomarch, whose power acquired legitimation thanks to the authoritative status of his divine ancestor. Nonetheless, these festivals were also somewhat connected to the renewal of nature and it cannot be excluded that the deified nomarchs were believed able to affect the fertility of both earth and human beings.[711] It also follows that these celebrations also functioned as a means for the social cohesion for the local communities, during which the pact between the local rulers and the elite members could be reinforced. As stressed in chapter 4, some of the Letters to the Dead written to ask for the birth of a child – such as P. Berlin 10482 + P. Berlin 10481 a-b – could be contextualised within this religious framework. Moreover, it cannot be excluded that these festivals were also a moment during which the local authorities managed to solve legal litigations concerning inheritance and successions, or other economic issues, such as those described in some Letters to the Dead.[712]

The foremost role played by ancestor worship as a tool to legitimise the power of the nomarchs is also shown by the fact that, during the final part of the First Intermediate Period, the necropolises and the monuments built to commemorate the deified local rulers become the target of some violent actions committed by soldiers. During the battles between the potentates of Hierakonpolis and Thebes some necropolises and religious centres were indeed allegedly destroyed. [713] An echo of these events

[708] See chapter 4, section 4.1.
[709] W. Grajetzki 2006, 7-35 and 94-102.
[710] H. Willems 2014, 109-123.
[711] See chapter 4, section 4.1.
[712] See chapter 4, section 4.5.
[713] R.A. Gillam 2005, 56; E. Brovarski 1985, 310.

is found in the *Teaching for Merikare* where the sacking of Thinis/Naga ed-Deir and the destruction of its monuments and tombs is openly condemned by the same Theban rulers who perpetrated them.[714]

Nonetheless, ancestor worship continued to be a key factor. The innovative trait is that, once Egypt was reunified and kingship restored, the celebrations to praise the ancestor were reshaped in a more complex ideological framework aimed at reinforcing the social cohesion between elite members and the crown. As mentioned above, the Middle Kingdom celebration of the Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos likely functioned as a special moment during which the king ratified the conferment of state offices to prominent individuals. Remarkably, the legitimation mechanic was structured as the same double rite of passage characterising elite funerary rituals: to act as a main ritualist during the procession for the god Osiris entailed the acquisition of a new social position officially recognised by the crown. A restricted number of evidence also suggests that similar festivals were also performed in other foremost Egyptian holy cities.[715]

In the final part of the Second Intermediate Period, the Ahmosid family largely used ancestor worship for their own self presentation. The most striking example, in this regard, is the statue portraying the young prince Ahmose Sapair, son of Seqenra Tao, currently preserved in the Louvre Museum. The inscription carved on this monument has been considered by C. Barbotin as a "three-dimensional letter to the dead", whose aim was that of transforming the prince who died at an early age into a benevolent ancestor.[716] With the advent of the New Kingdom, several members of the Ahmosid family were deified, becoming the object of a popular posthumous cult, and their sacred statues were used as oracles, such as Amenhotep I at Deir el-Medina.[717]

In this regard it is important to explain the mechanics of the Egyptian oracles. Indeed, the supernatural entity involved did not manifest his or her will through a human "medium", endowed with special skills and specialised, as in the case of the "witch" of En-dor, in passing the divine messages.[718] Rather, the mantic action was essentially based on the movements made by a divine statue during a religious procession. [719] The statue, placed on a litter, was carried on the shoulders of a group of priests and specific movements that occurred during the procession were interpreted as the answers to yes/no questions. A possible variant was to write two alternative responses concerning the same

[714] Merikare 68-74; for an English translation see: M. Lichtheim 2006, 102-103.
[715] See chapter 3, section 3.3.5.
[716] Ch. Barbotin 2005.
[717] J.C. Moreno García 2010, 14 ff.

[718] See also I. Finkel 2021, 199-200.
[719] J. Černý 1962.

question and place them on the processional way. In this case, the movements of the statue were interpreted as the divine preference for one of the two options. [720]

Several sources testify that the statues of Amenhotep I used to be consulted during both the Opet feast and the Beautiful Festival of the Valley.[721] These kinds of practices and the religious celebrations related to them occurred also on a local level. [722] At the so-called "workmen's village" of Deir el-Medina, located in the Theban West Bank, Amenhotep I was the object of special devotion. A number of sources show that his statues were used to give oracles, which –starting from the Ramesside Age – played a crucial role in solving everyday life problems as well in the jurisdiction of the village.[723] It is not clear during which occasions the royal statues were consulted by the inhabitants of Deir el-Medina. The data highlight that, in the village, several local festivals were celebrated in honour of Amenhotep I.[724] And, it is quite probable that the deified king used to give oracles during these occasions.[725] O. Cairo CG 25234 provides interesting details about one of these celebrations. The document specifies that the feast involved all the inhabitants of the village: men, women and children.[726] Furthermore, although this is a highly debated issue, it could be argued that the audience was not restricted to the elite, including, rather, the participation of different social strata.[727] However, as stressed by MacDowell, given the importance of these oracles within the juridical system of the village, it cannot be excluded that a procession to consult the deified king, could be arranged on request to solve a specific legal issue.[728]

The oracles of Amenhotep I were consulted for various kinds of questions, such as obtaining information about the health of a distant relative or establishing the price of a certain item. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, this practice played an important role also in the execution of law. Other relevant juridical bodies are well attested in the jurisdiction of the village, above all the *ḳnb.t*, the local court. Therefore, it is noteworthy that especially the causes concerning inheritance litigations and disputes about the possession of real estate were solved by oracular consultation or by the cooperation of this institution with the local court.[729] According to MacDowell this could be explained by the fact that Amenhotep I was perceived as an authoritative voice on matters of legal transmission of property ownership. This deified king was one of the most prominent ancestors of the living ruler

[720] J. Černý 1962. See also: J.-M. Kruchten 2001.
[721] Y.M. el Shazly 2015, 193.
[722] A.G. MacDowell 1990, 108.
[723] Y.M. el-Shazly 2015, 66, 162-165, and 232; A. MacDowell 1990, 107-114.
[724] H. Jauhiainen 2009, 133.
[725] H. Jauhiainen 2009, 133-136.
[726] H. Jauhiainen 2009, 134-136.
[727] H. Jauhiainen 2009, 136.
[728] A. MacDowell 2009, 114.
[729] A. MacDowell 2009, 114.

in a socio-economic context where the royal power was the most important institution on matters concerning the possession of real estate.[730] Amenhotep I was not the only deified dead king involved in the oracle consultations. A restricted number of sources testify that an oracle of Ahmose was consulted at Abydos during the 19th dynasty, notably for legal disputes concerning real estate.[731]

This involvement of deceased rulers in solving private legal disputes is apparently an innovative New Kingdom trait. Yet, several aspects of the consultation, such as the procession of the sacred statue – usually from a temple to the necropolis and back – clearly demonstrate how this practice arose from a well-established tradition rooted in those processions from the embalming place to the tomb of the deceased which were perceived as the perfect liminal occasion to interact or even communicate with the dead.

Indeed, a certain kind of connection with the ritual deposition of the Letters to the Dead have been identified, especially as regards the mechanics concerning the involvement of the dead in the consultation: a ritual procession in front of a large audience during the occurrence of funerary rituals or a festivals. This element could indeed testify to the importance played by the ancestors in the legal practices pertaining to inheritance, succession and the ownership of certain kinds of properties, an element that characterised ancient Egyptian religion in all its historical phases and was reformulated more than once through history to adapt to social changes.

[730] A. MacDowell 1990, 114-135
[731] S. Ph. Harvey 1991, 21.

Bibliography concerning the Tekenu depictions in non-royal tombs

Table 1: Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom

1. Mastaba of *ỉḥy* (*ỉdw.t*)

G. West 2019, 57-59; K. Paraskeva 2013, 20, n. 1; Kanawati & Abder-Raziq 2003, 34. See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, document 1.

2. TT 60 – *Sn.t* (*ỉnỉ-ỉt=f-iḳr*)

G. West 2019, 123-124; K. Paraskeva, 20, n. 2; No. de Garis Davies, A.H. Gardiner, and Ni. de Garis Davies, 1920, 21-22. See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, document 3.

3. Tomb of *Sḥtp-ỉb-rˁ*

G. West 2019, 108-109; K. Paraskeva 2012, 20, n. 3; J. E. Quibell 1898, 25-26 and Pl. IX. See also chapter 3.2.1.b, document 2.

Table 2 -New Kingdom

4. TT 12 – *Ḥrỉ*

G. West 2019, 110-112; K. Paraskeva 2012, 21, n. 4; G. Menéndez Gómez 2005, 29-65.

5. TT 15 – *Ttỉkỉ*

G. West 2019, 112-115; K. Paraskeva, 21, n 5; No. de Garis Davies 1925, 10-18, and Pl. V. See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, document 4.

6. EK 7 – Rnni

G. West 2019, 131-132; K. Paraskeva 2012, 22, n. 6; J.J. Tylor 1900, Pl. XIII. See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, document 5.

7. TT 81 – *ỉnn.ỉ*

G. West 2019, 125-127; K. Paraskeva 2012, 22, n. 7; E. Dziobek 1992, 80-81.

8. TT 24 – *Nb-ỉmn*

G. West 2019, 117-118; K. Paraskeva 2012, 23, n. 9; A. El-Shahawi 2005, 54-55; J. Settgast 1963, 41 and note a. See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, document 14.

9. TT 125 – *Dwˁ.wỉ-r-nḥḥ*

G. West 2019, 146-147; K. Paraskeva 2012, 23, n. 10; J. Settgast 1963, Tafel 10. See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, documents 11 and 21.

10. TT 11 – *Ḏḥwtỉ*

G. West 2019, 98-100; K. Paraskeva 2012, 24, n. 12; J. M. Serrano Delgado 2011, 161. See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, document 18.

11. TT 39 – *Pwỉ-m-rˁ*

G. West 2019, 119-120; K. Paraskeva 2012, 24, n.13; No. De Garis Davies 1922-1923, 4-5

12. TT 53 – *ỉmn-m-ḥ3.t*

G. West 2019, 66-69; K. Paraskeva 2012, 25, n. 14; J. G. Griffiths 1958, 118. See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, document 13.

13. TT 82 – *ỉmn-m-hꜣ.t*

G. West 2019, 165; K. Paraskeva, 2012, 25, n. 15; Ni. De Garis Davies and A. H. Gardiner 1915, 51. See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, document 8.

14. TT 104 – *Ḏḥwtỉ-nfr*

G. West 2019, 47-48; K. Paraskeva 2012, 25, n. 16; ʿA. al-Ġaffā Šadīd 1988, 131.

15. TT 127 – *Sn-m-ỉʿḥ*

G. West 2019, 49; K. Paraskeva 2012, 25, n. 17; J. M. Serrano Delgado 2011, Tavel V, fig. 4.

16. TT 123 -*ỉmn-m-hꜣ.t*

G. West 2019, 48-49; K. Paraskeva 2012, 26. n. 21; J. Settgast 1963, Tafel 4.

17. TT 260 – *Wsr*

G. West 2019, 127-128; K. Paraskeva 2012, 27, n. 22.; J. Settgast 1963, Tafel 4.

18. TT 17 – *Nb-ỉmn*

G. West 2019, 115-117; K. Paraskeva 2012, 27 n. 23; T. Säve Söderbergh 1957, 31 See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, document 18.

19. TT 20 – *Mnṯw-ḥr-ḫpš=f*

G. West 2019, 153-154; K. Paraskeva 2012, 24 n. 12 and 36-28; No. de Garis Davies 1913, 9-15. See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, documents 17 and 19.

20. TT 42 – *ỉmn-ms*

G. West 2019, 121-123; K. Paraskeva 2012, 28, n. 25 and pp. 52-53; Ni. De Garis Davies and No. De Garis Davies 1933, 32-42.

21. TT 92 – *Sw-m-nw*.t

G. West 2019, 44-48; K. Paraskeva 2012, 28, n. 36.

22. TT 96 – *Sn-nfr*

G. West 2019, 137-138; K. Paraskeva 2012, 28 n. 27, and 70-72; S. Hodel-Hoenes 2000, 122.

23. TT 100 – *Rḫ-mỉ-rʿ*

G. West 2019, 139-145; K. Paraskeva 2012, 29, n. 28, and 52-53¸ No. De Garis Davies 1943, 73-77. See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, document 20.

24. TT 172 -*Mnṯ.w-ỉỉ.w*

G. West 2019, 134-135; K. Paraskeva 2012, 29, n. 30; J. Settgast 1963, Tafel 4.

25. TT 276 – *ỉmn-m-ỉn.t*

G. West 2019, 140-141; K Paraskeva 2012, p. 30, n. 31; A. El-Shahawy 2005, 54-55.

26. TT 178 – *Nfr-rnp.t*

K. Paraskeva 2012, 34, n. 45; P. Barthelmess 1922, 57.

27. TT 224 - *ỉʿḥ-mś*

G. West 2019, 155; K. Paraskeva 2012, 26, n 18; Ni. de Garis Davies and A.H. Gardiner 1915, 51 and note 2. See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, document 10.

28. TT 112 - *Mn-ḫpr-Rᶜ-śnb*

G. West 2019, 155; K. Paraskeva 2012, 29, n. 29; Ni. de Garis Davies and A. H. Gardiner 1915, 51 and note 2. See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, document 9.

29. TT 78 -*Ḥr-m-ḥb*

G. West 2019, 133-134; K. Paraskeva 2012, 30, n. 32, and 37-39; A. Brack and A. Brack 1980, 43-47.

30. TT 66 – *Ḥpw*

G. West 2019, 136-138; K. Paraskeva 2012, 30 n. 33; Ni. de Garis Davies and No. Davies de Garies 1963, 12.

31. TT 55 – *Rᶜ-ms*

G. West 2019, 39-42; K. Paraskeva 2012, 32 n. 37; No. de Garis Davies, T.E. Peet, H. Burton 1941, 22-23. See also: chapter 3.2.1b, document 15.

32. TT 49 – *Nfr-http*

G. West 2019, 37-39; K. Paraskeva 2012, 32, n. 38; No. de Garis Davies 1939, 39.

33. TT A4 – *Sȝ-wsr/wn-sw*

G. West 2019, 52-55; L. Manniche 2011, 74-76.

34. TT C4 – *Mrỉ-mȝᶜ.t*

G. West 2019, 129; K. Paraskeva 2012, 33. n. 40; L. Manniche 2011, 112-115.

35. EK 3 – *Pȝḥrỉ*

G. West 2019, 55-57; K. Paraskeva 2012, 33, n. 41; E. Naville, J. J. Tylor, and F. Ll. Griffith 1894, 20-21 and Pl. V. See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, document 16.

36. TT 41 – *ỉmn-m-ỉpȝ.t*

G. West 2019, 149- 151; K. Paraskeva 2012, 32, n. 42; J. Assmann 1992, 93.

37. TT 284 – *Pȝ-ḫm-nṯr*

G. West 2019, 71; K. Paraskeva 2012 34, n. 43; P. Barthelmess 1992, 56-57.

38. TT A 26 – name unknown

G. West 2019, 153-154; K. Paraskeva 2012, 34, n. 46; L. Manniche 2011, 62-63.

39. Sarcophagus of *Ḏt-Mw.t* -Vatican Museum, MV25008.2.1–2

G. West 2019, pp. 73-74.

Table 3: 25th and 26th dynasty

40. TT 34 – *Mntw-m-hȝ.t*

G. West 2019, 61-64; H.-W. Müller 1975, 18-33. See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, document 6.

41. TT 36 – *ỉbỉ*

G. West 2019, 64-65; K. Paraskeva 2012, 35, n. 37;

42. TT 279 - *Pȝ-n-bsỉ*

G. West 2019, 49-51; K. Paraskeva 2012, 35, n. 48.

43. TT 389 -*Bȝsȝ*

G. West 2019, 51-52; J. Assmann 197, Pl. XXIX and fig. 40. See also: chapter 3.2.1.b, document 7.

Bibliography concerning the epigraphic sources related to the Haker Feast

1. *Letter to the dead, "Louvre bowl" (Louvre E 6134)*

   See "bibliography concerning the Letters to the Dead", doc. 12.

2. *Stele of Abkau (Louvre C 15)*

   R. Landgráfová 2011, 88-91 (Nr. 29); J. Spiegel 1973, 145-150.

   N.B. The part of the text in which the Haker-feast is mentioned has been lost. The sentence can be reconstructed with certainty thanks to the parallels provided by Louvre C 35 (here, document 9) and Stele London UC 14385 (here document 12).

3. *Stele of Antef (Cairo CG 20024)*

   R. Landgráfová 2011, 104-106 (Nr. 35)

4. *Stele of Shensetji (Los Angeles 50.33.31)*

   R. Landgráfová 2011, 24-126 (Nr. 40); M. Lichtheim 1988, 90-92 (Nr. 38)

5. *Stele of Mery (Louvre C 3 = AE 3)*

   R. Landgráfová 2011, 134-137 (Nr. 43); M. Lichtheim 1988, 85-88, (Nr. 36)

6. *Stele of Montuhotep (Cairo CG 20539)*

   R. Landgráfová, 2011, 167-179 (Nr. 51); R. J. Leprohon 2009, 277-292

7. *Stele of Sebeki (München Gl. WAF 31)*

   R. Landgráfová 2011, 252-253 (Nr. 79)

8. *Stele of Wepwawetaa (München Gl. WAF 35)*

   R. Landgráfová 2011, 162-166 (Nr. 50); M. Lichtheim 1988, 77-80, (Nr. 32).

9. *Stele of Ameny (Louvre C 35)*

   M. Lichtheim 1988, 118-119 (Nr. 51).

10. *Stele des Amenemhet (Cairo CG 20040)*

    M. Lichtheim 1988, 116-118 (Nr. 50)

11. *Stele of Amenemhet (BM EA 567)*

    M. Lichtheim 1988, 114-116 (Nr. 49)

12. *Stele des Sobeknakht (London UC 14385)*

    R. Landgráfová 2011, 230-231 (Nr. 68)

13. *Stele of Djaa (BM EA 573)*

    M. Lichtheim 1988, 94-95 (Nr. 40)

14. *Stele of Inhernacht (BM EA 575)*

    R. Landgráfová 2011, 208-209 (Nr. 62); M. Lichtheim 1988, 121-122 (Nr. 54)

15. Stele of Sehetibra (CG 20538)

    R. Landgráfová 2011, 219-225 (Nr. 66); R. J. Leprohon 2009, 277-292;

16. *Stele of Djab (Chicago OIM 6897)*

    D. Franke 2004, 98-99.

Bibliography concerning the Letters to the Dead

There are several monographies dedicated to these documents, the main ones being: the *editio by princeps* by A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe (1928), the monograph by S. Donnat Beauquier (2014) J. Hsieh (2022). Moreover, most Letters to the Dead have been translated by E. F. Wente in his monograph dedicated to ancient Egyptian letters (E. F. Wente and E. S. Meltzer 1990).

For specific analysis concerning the dating of the Letters to the Dead, see the study by M. Bommas which analyses all the Letters to the dead written on bowls to establish a datation on the basis of the ceramic typology (M. Bommas 1999, 53-60). Another study by D. Czerwik has approached the dating of the documents based on epigraphic remarks (D. Czerwik 1999, 61-68).

For the bibliographical information concerning the documents shown in tables 6, 7, and 8:

1. *Cairo Linen – JdE 25975*

> J. Hsieh 2022, 111-127; G. Miniaci 2014, 27-45; R. Schiavo 2013 A, 125-145; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 29-30; S. Donnat Beauquier 2009, 61-93; H. Willems 1991, 183-184. E. F. Wente and E. S. Meltzer 1990, 211 [209]; A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1938,1-3 and 6-13.

The document contains two missives: a long letter written by a widow to her deceased husband and a short postscript written by the young son of the couple.

2. *Qaw Bowl – UC 1663*

> J. Hsieh 2022, 128-155; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 35-36 ; G. Miniaci 2016, 88- 105; R. Schiavo 2013 A, 125-145; S. Donnat Beauquier 2009, 61-93; D. Farout 2004, 45-52 ; E. F. Wente and E. S. Meltzer 1990, 212-213 [341]; A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1938, 3-3 and 19-21.

The document contains two letters, respectively addressed to the mother and the father of the sender

3. P. *Naga ed-Deir 3500*

> J. Hsieh 2022, 160-185; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 41; W. K. Simpson 1970, 58-64; H. Goedicke 1972, 95-98.

4. *Chicago Vessel – Chicago Oriental Museum E 13945*

> J. Hsieh 2022, 156-168; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 41-44; S. Donnat Beauquier 2009, 61-93; E. F. Wente and E. S. Meltzer, 1990, 213 [345]; A. H. Gardiner 1930, 19-22.

The document contains two letters, one addressed to a deceased man so that the latter can intercede for the birth of a male son, the other one is a brief message addressed to the same deceased, who is asked to grant a second healthy son to his daughter.

5. *Bowl associated to the Chicago Vessel (?)*

> J. Janák 2003, 275-277.

The document is currently not attested, but its existence is deduced from some passages within the text inscribed on the Chicago Vessel.

6. *P. Naga ed-Deir 3737 – MFA 38.2121*

> J. Hsieh 2022, 169-185; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 48-51; K. Szpakowska 2003, 163-166; E. F. Wente and E. S. Meltzer 1990, 212-213 [343]; A. Roccati 1967, 323-324; W. K. Simpson 1970, 62; W. K. Simpson, 39-52.

7. *Stele Nebetitef – M. C. Carlos Museum 2014.33.1*

> J. Hsieh 2022, 220-232; R. Nyord 2021, 1-17. R. Schiavo 2020, 201-212; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 53-56; K. Szpakowska 2003, 23-24; E. F. Wente and E. S. Meltzer 1990, 215 [349]; E. F. Wente 1975-1976, 595-600.

On the back of this funerary stele there are two letters, written in hieratic and addressed to a deceased woman, Nebetitef, the sender are a man and his spouse.

8. *P. British Museum EA10901*

the document is currently unpublished. For references see:
<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA10901>

9. *Hu Bowl – UC 16244*

J. Hsieh 2022, 198-210; S. Donnat Beauquie 2014, 44-48; A. Roccati 1967, 323.328; A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 5 and 5-21.

10. *Berlin Bowl – Berlin 22573*

J. Hsieh 2022, 245-252; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 61-63; R. Schiavo 2020, 201-212; R. Schiavo 2013 B 29-38; E. F. Wente and E. S. Meltzer 1990, 214 [346]; A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 5-6 and 21-22.

11. *Berlin Jar Stand – Berlin 22574*

J. Hsieh 2022, 252-257; A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 5-7.

The jar was probably associated to the Berlin Bowl (see doc. 10).

12. *Louvre Bowl – Louvre E 61634*

J. Hsieh 2022, 233-244; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 58-61; E. F. Wente and E. S. Meltzer 1990, 214 [347]; A. Piankoff and J. J.Clère 1934, 157-169.

13 *Berlin Papyrus (P. 10482 + P. 10481a-b)*

J. Hsieh 2022, 277-290; I. Regulski 2020; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 63-65; P. Jürgens 1990, 51-63; H. Grapow 1915, 376-384.

P. Berlin 10482 is considered a letter to the dead by Jürgens (1990, pp. 51-62); I. Regulski, instead, considers P. 10482 as a "dedication text" addressed to a man called Sedekh, while P. 10481 a-b would be an actual letter to the dead, likely addressed to the same person (cf. I. Regulski 2020, 228 and, 297-333); in the present study I considered both the documents as a unique ritual action (perpetuated over time) aimed at communicating with the same deceased person.

14 *Cairo Bowl – CG 25375*

J. Hsieh 2022, 258-269; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 56-58 ; R. Schiavo 2014, 153-162; H.-W. Fischer-Elfert 1994, 41-44; F. Wente and E. S. Meltzer 1990, 215-216 [350]; A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 7-8 and p. 22.

15 *Louvre Figurine – Louvre E 8000*

S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 65-66 ; Chr. Desroches Noblecourt 1953, 37-40.

16 *Berlin figurine – 14517*

S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 66-77 ; Chr. Desroches Noblecourt 1953, 34-36; A. H. Gardiner 1939, 21.

17 *Leiden Papyrus AMS 64 / I 371*

J. Hsieh 2022, 317-328 ; R. Schiavo 2020, 201-212; L. Troy 2015, 403-418; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 73-77 ; E. F. Wente and E. S. Meltzer 1990, 216-217 [352]; A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 23-25.

18 *O. Louvre 698*

J. Hsieh 2022, 329-340; R. Schiavo 2020, 201-212; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 73-77; O. Goldwasser 1995, 191–215; E. F. Wente and E. S. Meltzer 1990, 217-218 [353]; P. J Frandsen 1992, 31-49.

O. Louvre 689 is not considered as an actual Letters to the Dead by S. Donnat Beauquier (2014, 73-77).

19 *P. Brooklyn 37.1799 E*

J. Hsieh 2022, 341-344; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 80-83; R. Schiavo 2013 A, 125-145; K. Donker van Heel 2013, 25-28; R. Jasnow and G. Vittmann 1992-93, 23-43.

20 *Naga ed-Deir Jar Stand – Boston, MFA 13.3791*

J. Hsieh 2022, 212-219; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 26; W. K. Simpson 1981, 173-178.

Due to lacunas, it is not clear if the document is to be intended as a scribal exercise or an actual missive addressed to a deceased person.

21 *Qubbet el-Hawa Bowl – JdE 91740*

J. Hsieh 2022, 270-276; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 67-69; H. Goedicke 1988, 195-199; E. Edel 1987, 93-105.

The document is not a letter addressed to a deceased, but a legal document sealed inside a tomb. Yet, it is undeniable that the bowl shows strong connections with the religious beliefs and the ritual backgrounds characterising the practice of the so-called Letters to the Dead.

22 *Horhotep Ostracon – JdE 49911*

J. Hsieh 2022, 391-295; A. J. Morales 2020.

Due to lacunas, it is not clear if the document is to be intended as a scribal exercise or an actual document aimed at the communication between the living and the dead. Even accepting the latter hypothesis, the document would be more similar to an Appeal to the Living rather than to a Letter to the Dead.

23 *Ahmose Sapair Statue – E 15682*

S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 71-71; Ch. Barbotin, 2005, 19–28.

The inscription written on the statue of Ahmose Sapair does not show the typical trait of the epistolary genre. Nevertheless, several features and certain terminology characterising the text allow to consider this document as strictly connected with the same religious milieu of the so-called Letters to the Dead.

24 *Oxford Bowl – 1887.27.1*

J. Hsieh 2022, 296-303 ; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 69-71 ; E. F. Wente and E. S. Meltzer 1990, 216 [351]; A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 26-27.

The Oxford bowl is not a letter, nor a plea addressed to a deceased, but a statement in which the writer claims his rights over the inheritance of a fugitive due to the fact that his family has taking care for the funeral of the latter. Yet, the connection with the religious milieu of the Letters to the Dead is undeniable.

25 *Moscow Bowl – 3917b*

J. Hsieh 2022, 303-309; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 25-26 ; U. Verhoeven 2003, 31 and note 1;. A. H. Gardiner and K. H. Sethe 1928, 27-28.

It is not clear if this document is a “common” letter addressed to a living person or a letter to the dead. The fact that it is written on a bowl suggests the second hypothesis

26 *Munich Cosmetic Vase – ÄS 4313*

S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 25-26; U. Verhoeven 2003, 31 and note 1; H. Buchberger 1991, 49-87.

It is not clear if this document is a “common” letter addressed to a living person or a letter to the dead. The fact that the text is written on a vase and that the text shows some similarities with other Letters to the Dead written to appease an angry woman (see: R. Schiavo, 2020) suggests the second hypothesis.

27 *Oracular Decree for Neskhons – CG 58032 and CG 46891*

R. Schiavo 2020, 210-212; S. Donnat Beauquier 2014, 53-55; B. Gunn and I. E. S. Edwards 1955, 83-105.

This document is not traditionally included among the group of the “Letters to the Dead”; yet, it shows significant common traits with these documents, especially with the pleas addressed to a deceased woman.

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Curriculum Vitae

Renata Schiavo was born in Siracusa, Italy. In 2010 she graduated with top marks in Classical Letters (BA) at the University of Pisa.
In 2013, she graduated with honours from the same university, obtaining a Master's degree in Afroasiatic Philology, with special focus on ancient Egyptian language and Ugaritic.
During her university years, she was employed as a special educator for teenagers and young adults with psychological issues, and as an editor at a small publishing house in Tuscany.
In 2015, she obtained a further Master's degree in Archaeology and history of religions at the University of Pisa, graduating with honours.
She has taken part in several archaeological missions in Italy, Egypt, and Syria and she has a demonstrated history of working in the editorial sector (Felici Editore, Springer-Nature).

Thesis Summary

English

The present thesis focused on the authoritative role of the ancestors in matters of social cohesion, succession, inheritance, and property ownership in Ancient Egypt. The main goal has been to investigate whether religious sources concerning ancestor cult can provide concrete information about ancient Egyptian law administration. In order to pursue this objective a group of written sources that testify to the involvement of the ancestors in matters of inheritance and succession have been identified and thoroughly analysed. Rather than focusing exclusively on philological aspects, the research has mainly been aimed at reconstructing the ritual scenarios in which these textual sources were used in terms of space (by identifying the possible "theatrical settings" of the rituals), time (to be meant as the specific moments in which the ritual actions were enacted) and the type of audience involved.

In chapter 1, the importance of comparativism within History of Religions has been discussed and the relevant terms and concepts have been defined. In chapter 2 a critical approach to previous studies has been conducted; rather than focusing exclusively on the topic of ancestor worship and its role in Egyptology, a wider problem has been identified and deepened: that of certain dramatic rituals – the Opening of the Mouth Ritual, the Tekenu Ritual, and the Haker feast – which have been incorrectly considered as survivals of archaic shamanic practices rather than as contemporary expressions of ancestor cult.

Chapter 3, 4 and 5 have been dedicated to the analysis of the sources. In chapter 3 all the main data currently available concerning the Opening of the Mouth Ritual scenes 9 and 10, the Tekenu ritual and the Haker feast have been translated and analysed. Chapter 4 and 5 focused on the so-called Letters to the Dead. Specifically, chapter 4 analysed the Letters to the Dead written to solve inheritance, or economic-related issues, while chapter 5 focused on the Letters to the Dead addressed to deceased women. Chapter 6 is dedicated to a comparative study between pharaonic Egypt and other societies of the Ancient Near East, with a special focus on the authoritative role of the dead in validating power relations, inheritance issues, and real estate ownership.

Finally, in chapter 7, the results of the research have been outlined: ultimately the analysis of the data has shown that ancient Egyptian religious practices pertaining to ancestor cult played a foremost role within the legal sphere, especially with regard to inheritance issues, real estate ownership, and the public validations of social roles.

Dutch

Dit doctoraat richtte zich op de gezaghebbende rol van de voorouders in kwesties van sociale cohesie, erfopvolging, erfenis en eigendom in het Oude Egypte. In het bijzonder is het hoofddoel geweest om te onderzoeken of religieuze bronnen met betrekking tot vooroudercultus concrete informatie kunnen verschaffen over hoe rechtspraak daadwerkelijk werd uitgevoerd. Om dit doel te bereiken is een groep geschreven bronnen geïdentificeerd en grondig geanalyseerd die getuigen van de betrokkenheid van de voorouders in kwesties van erfenis en erfopvolging. In plaats van zich uitsluitend te richten op filologische aspecten, is het onderzoek vooral gericht op het reconstrueren van de rituele scenario's waarin deze tekstuele bronnen werden gebruikt in termen van ruimte (door het identificeren van de mogelijke "theatrale settings" van de rituelen), tijd (te bedoelen als de specifieke momenten waarop de rituele handelingen werden uitgevoerd) en het type publiek dat erbij betrokken was.

Hoofdstuk 1 bespreekt methodologie en termen: het belang van comparativisme binnen Religiegeschiedenis is besproken en de relevante termen en concepten zijn gedefinieerd. In hoofdstuk 2 is een kritische benadering van eerdere studies uitgevoerd; in plaats van uitsluitend te focussen op het onderwerp van voorouderverering en de rol daarvan in de Egyptologie, is een breder probleem geïdentificeerd en uitgediept: dat van bepaalde dramatische rituelen - het Openen van de Mond Ritueel, het Tekenu Ritueel, en het Haker feest - die ten onrechte zijn beschouwd als overblijfselen van archaïsche sjamanistische praktijken in plaats van als hedendaagse uitingen van vooroudervereering.

Hoofdstuk 3, 4 en 5 zijn gewijd aan de analyse van de bronnen. In hoofdstuk 3 zijn alle belangrijke gegevens die momenteel beschikbaar zijn over de scènes 9 en 10 van het Openen van de Mond ritueel, het Tekenu ritueel en het Haker feest vertaald en geanalyseerd. Hoofdstuk 4 en 5 richtten zich op de zogenaamde Brieven aan de Doden. Meer specifiek analyseerde hoofdstuk 4 de Brieven aan de Doden die geschreven werden om erfeniskwesties of economische kwesties op te lossen, terwijl hoofdstuk 5 zich richtte op de Brieven aan de Doden die gericht waren aan overleden vrouwen. Hoofdstuk 6 is gewijd aan een vergelijkende studie tussen faraonisch Egypte en andere culturen in het Oude Nabije Oosten, met speciale aandacht voor de gezaghebbende rol van de doden bij het bekrachtigen van machtsverhoudingen, erfeniskwesties en eigendom van onroerend goed.

Tot slot worden in hoofdstuk 7 de resultaten van het onderzoek uiteengezet: uiteindelijk heeft de analyse van de gegevens aangetoond dat de religieuze praktijken in het Oude Egypte met betrekking tot de vooroudercultus een belangrijke rol speelden binnen de juridische sfeer, vooral met betrekking tot erfeniskwesties, onroerend goedbezit en de publieke validatie van sociale rollen.