



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

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

Schiavo, R.

Citation

Schiavo, R. (2024, July 3). *Only the dead can tell us: on ancestor worship, law, social status, and gender norms in ancient Egypt*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3766117>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3766117>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Only the Dead can Tell Us

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

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van

de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,

op gezag van rector magnificus prof.dr.ir. H. Bijl,

volgens besluit van het college voor promoties

te verdedigen op woensdag 3 juli 2024

klokke 10:00 uur

door

Renata Schiavo

geboren te Siracusa

in 1984

Promotor: Prof. dr. O.E. Kaper

Copromotor: Dr. R.J. Demarée

Promotiecommissie:

Prof. dr. Ab de Jong

Prof. dr. Jacques van der Vliet (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen)

Prof. dr. Harco Willems (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven)

Prof. dr. Ludwig Morenz (Universität Bonn)

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.

Acknowledgments

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has supported me throughout my doctoral thesis journey. First and foremost, my supervisors, Olaf Kaper, and Rob Demarée, for their patience and valuable insights. Their guidance has been instrumental in shaping my academic growth. Above all, I owe special thanks to the Mehen Foundation: the small grant they provided allowed me to focus on the final chapters of my dissertation without the added stress of financial concerns.

During these years of research, I had the opportunity to spend, for two consecutive years, one term at the University of Tübingen. These two study trips proved to be very fruitful and I owe my sincere gratitude to the scientific editorial board of the *EDPC*, particularly Paolo Xella and Valentina Melchiorri, for the wonderful period I spent in Germany.

I am above all deeply grateful to my parents, whose unconditional love has given me the strength to persevere through the toughest times. A special thanks also goes to my former housemates for making the pandemic period I spent in Leiden much more tolerable.

I finally owe special thanks to my beloved "Biblios Cafe crew": your passion for good music, theatre, and tasty food has been a huge source of joy and inspiration.

Truly thank you for all the support and encouragement.

Table of contents

Mission statement, status quaestionis, and structure of the research.....1

1. Discussing methodology and terms	8
1.1 Methodology	8
1.2 Defining terms and concepts	12
1.2.1 What is an ancestor?	12
1.2.2 Ancestor worship and rituals pertaining to the death sphere	21
1.2.3 “Universality”	26
1.3 Limits of the research.....	28
2. On the incorrect use of the label “shamanism” in Egyptology: rethinking Egyptian funerary and mortuary rituals	30
2.1. The status of ancestor worship in Egyptology	30
2.2. Egyptian “shamanism” or “dramatic” and “collective rituals”?	33
2.3 Aims and methodology	39
2.4 Overview of the main Egyptian rituals that have been interpreted as survivals of “archaic shamanic practices”.....	40
2.4.a The Opening of the Mouth Ritual	40
2.4.b The Tekenu ritual	43
2.4.c The Haker feast	51
2.5 Critical approach to the state of the art	54
2.6 Rethinking Ancient Egyptian death rituals	59
<i>First argument: the sem priest and the archaic wearers of the leopard skin</i>	60
<i>Second argument: the absence or minor role of the gods</i>	62
<i>Third argument: the action expressed by the verb sdr</i>	69
2.7 Results.....	72
3. Analysis of the Opening of the Mouth Ritual, the Tekenu ritual, and the Haker feast	74
3.1 The Opening of the Mouth Ritual scenes 9 and 10.....	74
3.1.a PT 364 and OMR scene 10	83
3.1.b The Letters to the Dead and OMR scene 9	88
3.1.c OMR scenes 9 and 10: summary and conclusions.....	92
3.2 The Tekenu ritual	97
3.2.1 Tekenu: a philological analysis	102
3.2.1.a Etymology and meaning.....	102
3.2.1.b Captions concerning the Tekenu scenes.....	106
3.2.1.c Coffin Texts spell 312 and the ritual sleep <i>sdr</i>	129

3.2.2 Why the Tekenu ritual is not attested in royal tombs?	139
3.2.3 Was the Tekenu a human being or an object?	140
3.2.4 The Tekenu ritual: summary and conclusion	141
3.3 The Haker feast	143
3.3.1 Epigraphic sources	143
3.3.2 Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead.....	149
3.3.3 Which kind of judgment of the dead?	155
3.3.4 What did it mean to be a ritualist for the funeral of a god?	159
3.3.5 The Haker feast: summary and conclusions	163
3.4 Results.....	166
4. On the actual juridical function of some Letters to the Dead.....	170
4.1 The so-called Letters to the Dead and their ritual background	170
4.2 Research questions and methodological issues.....	177
4.3 Juridical rules and customs concerning inheritance and succession.....	180
4.4 Analysis of the Letters to the Dead concerning inheritance issues	185
The Letter on Linen, Cairo JdE 2567	185
The Qaw Bowl, UC 16163.....	190
P. Brooklyn 37. 1799 E	195
4.5 Other documents	197
4.6 Results.....	201
5. Ghosts and ancestors in a gender perspective	209
5.1 Research questions and methodological issues.....	209
5.2 Analysis of the Letters to the Dead addressed to women	213
<i>Stele of Nebetitef - Michael C. Carlos Museum, 2014.033.001</i>	213
<i>The Berlin Bowl Inv. 33573</i>	218
<i>Munich Cosmetic Vase ÄS 4313</i>	221
<i>P. Leiden AMS 64/I 371</i>	223
<i>Ostrakon Louvre 698</i>	224
5.3 How to appease an angry dead woman.....	226
6. A comparative approach: ancestors, power and legitimation in the Ancient NearEast ...	234
6.1 Aims	234
6.2 Ancestors, property and social roles	234
6.3 Ancestors, power and public performance	237
6.4 Results.....	240

7. Final remarks and conclusions	241
Bibliography concerning the Tekenu depictions in non-royal tombs	255
Bibliography concerning the epigraphic sources related to the Haker Feast.....	259
Bibliography concerning the Letters to the Dead	260
Bibliography	264

Abbreviations

- PT Pyramid Texts - K. H. Sethe 1960. *Die altägyptischen Pyramidentexte: nach den Papierabdrücken und Photographien des Berliner Museums*, 4 vols. Hildesheim: Georg Olms.
- 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

List of figures

Figure 1 Different typologies of Tekenu. Sources: figure A, No. De Garis Davies, T. E. Peet, H. Burton 1941, Pl. XXV; figure B, No. De Garis Davies 1913, Pl. VII; figure C, No. De Garis Davies 1943, Pl. LXXXIII; figure D, No. De Garis Davies 1913, Pl. VIII.

Figure 2 Remains of a slaughtered bull placed inside a pit. Source: No. de Garis Davies 1913, Pl. IX

Figure 3 TT 20 - The dragging of the Tekenu and the Tekenu standing with the mzkA-skin (first register); the ritualised killing of Nubian prisoners (third register). No de Garis Davies 1913, Pl. VIII

Figure 4 The garment worn by the sem priest in OMR scenes 9 and 10 (TT 100). No. de Garis Davies 1943, Pl. CVI

Figure 5 'The Wearer of the Leopard Skin' in the Narmer Palette (left) and in Narmer Macehead (right). Kelder 2013, 145

Figure 6 Fighter scene from Hierakompolis Tomb 100. B.B. Williams 1997, 489

Figure 7 OMR scene 9, TT 100. No. de Garis Davies 1943, Pl. CVI

Figure 8 OMR scene 9 in KV 17. E. Lefebure 1886, Pl. II

Figure 9 OMR scene 9 in TT 100. No. de Garis Davies 1943, Pl. CVII

Figure 10 OMR scene 10 in KV 17. E. Lefebure 1886, Pl. II

Figure 11 OMR 7 in TT 100. No. de Garis Davies 1943, Pl. CVII

Figure 12 PT 364 in Rekhmire Tomb (TT 100). No. de Garis Davies 1943, Pl. LXXXI

Figure 13 PT 364 (see box A) within the South wall of the passage in Rekhmire tomb (TT 100). J. Settgast 1963, Pl. 14

Figure 14 The Tekenu in the Mastaba of Idu.t/Ihi. N. Kanawati and M. Abder-Raziq 2003, Pl. LVI

Figure 15 The Tekenu in the tomb of ZHtp-ib-ra. J.E. Quibell, 1898, Pl. IX

Figure 16 The Tekenu in TT 60. No. De Garis, A.H. Gardiner and Ni. De Garis Davies 1920, Pl.22

Figure 17 The Tekenu in TT 15. No. de Garis Davies 1925, Pl. V

Figure 18 The Tekenu in EK 7. A. Moret 1922, 48 and fig. 12

Figure 19 The Tekenu in TT 34. H.W. Müller 1975, 27

Figure 20 The Tekenu in TT 389: J. Assmann 1973, fig 40

Figure 21 The Tekenu in TT 82. Ni. De Garis Davies and A. H. Gardiner 1915, Pl. XXII

Figure 22 The Tekenu in TT 17. The image has been reconstructed by the author on the basis of the following source: T. Säve Söderbergh 1957 Pl. XXIV and Pl. XXV

Figure 23 The Tekenu in TT 55. No. De Garis Davies, T. E. Peet, H. Burton 1941, Pl. XXV

Figure 24 The Tekenu in EK 3. E. Naville, J.J. Tylor and F. L. I. Griffith 1894, Pl. V

Figure 25 The Tekenu in TT 20. No. De Garis Davies 1913, Pl. II (detail from the South wall)

Figure 26 The Tekenu in TT 11. J.M.S. Serrano Delgado 2011, Pl. VIII, fig.9

Figure 27 The Tekenu in TT 20. No. De Garis Davies 1913, Pl. VIII

Figure 28 The Tekenu in TT 20. No. De Garis Davies 1913, Pl. VIII

Figure 29 The Tekenu in TT 100. No. De Garis Davies 1943, Pl LXXXIII

Figure 30 The three pools of Khepri, Heqat and Sokar in TT 100. No. De Garis Davies 1943, Pl. LXXXVII

Figure 31 The Tekenu in TT 125. A. Eggebrecht 1987, 314

Figure 32 The sleeping Tekenu in TT 100. No. De Garis Davies 1943, Pl LXXXIII

Figure 33 The sleeping Tekenu in TT 125. J. Settgast 1967, Pl. X.

Figure 34 Possible reconstruction of kinship ties of the individuals mentioned in the Qau Bowl (UC16163)

Figure 35 Hieroglyphs mutilated because of apotropaic reasons. N.S. Picardo 2007, 234.

Figure 35 The Berlin bowl. Gardiner and Sethe 1928, Pl. V.