

# DEATH AND INITIATION IN THE FUNERARY RELIGION OF ANCIENT EGYPT\*

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## 1. Introduction

The idea of interpreting the ritual and conceptual structure of the funerary religion of Ancient Egypt in the light of the anthropological topic of initiation is certainly not new. Thirty years ago, in a fine study on the Egyptian background of the Magic Flute,<sup>1</sup> Siegfried Morenz expressed the view that a central aspect of Ancient Egyptian burial ceremonies lay in a sort of priestly initiation to the realm of the dead. Twenty years later, his former student R. Grieshammer was able to substantiate this general hypothesis by capitalizing on one crucial element, the "Negative Confession" in "The Judgement of the Dead,"<sup>2</sup> thereby elevating it to the realm of fact. In 1956, in his article entitled "Zergliedern und Zusammenfügen,"<sup>3</sup> Alfred Hermann had drawn attention to numerous parallels from initiation rituals throughout comparative religious history which could be related to an archaic Egyptian, albeit only sporadically attested, burial custom, as well as to the admittedly much later documented myth-constituent known as "the dismembering of the body of Osiris." Yet again twenty years later, G.R.H. Wright arrived independently at the same conclusion, obviously without any knowledge of Hermann's work, though he was now able to draw extensively on the material which Mircea Eliade<sup>4</sup> had since gathered and interpreted. In his opinion, the shamanistic initiation rites originated from a funerary context and were modeled after the pattern of ancient funerary ceremonies. This

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\* Translated by M. Grauer and R. Meyer. The German version appeared in H. P. Duerr (ed.), *Sehnsucht nach dem Ursprung. Zu Mircea Eliade*, Frankfurt 1983, 338-359.

1 See Morenz 1952.

2 Grieshammer 1974; cf. Merkelbach 1987.

3 Hermann 1956.

4 Wright 1979, cf. Eliade 1975, 470 s.v. "Initiationszerstückelung". For the motif of dismemberment in the Cretan Zagreus Myth see also B. Gollistl 1981, with references to the Egyptian embalming ritual. B. Gladigow 1976 traces the topic of dismemberment back to hunting rituals and places the theme in the broader context of ethics and immortality.



hypothesis combines prior contributions on this subject while following in the same vein. R. Grieshammer's conclusions, however, lead to the inversely formulated premise that the initiation rites, and not vice versa, furnished the prototypes of Egyptian funerary religion: a view which has so far been treated with great reserve.<sup>5</sup>

Our intention here is to examine, under the specific aspect of initiation, a number of ways in which the general idea of "the passage from this world into the next" was expressed in the Egyptian funerary literature. These funerary texts are primarily known as the Egyptian "Book of the Dead,"<sup>6</sup> a late canonized corpus of spells which first appeared on papyrus-scrolls, in varying order and combination, in the tomb equipment of deceased persons at the beginning 16th century B.C. (New Kingdom). Quite a few of these spells can be found centuries earlier, in an older and usually better version, on Middle Kingdom coffins (2150–1750 B.C.). These and many others are known as the "Coffin Texts."<sup>7</sup> Among them, a basic stock can be traced back even as far as the Old Kingdom, where, together with other spells subsequently omitted by funerary tradition, they were used to inscribe the walls of royal burial chambers from the end of the 5th dynasty on (ca. 2450 B.C.).<sup>8</sup> These "Pyramid Texts" represent the oldest substantial corpus of religious texts known to mankind. Apart from this funerary literature, which was placed in the tomb of the deceased so that he might secure his existence in the next world through command of the appropriate knowledge and which should be qualified as "esoteric" in the sense that it was not meant to be seen by the eyes of mortals and therefore did not share in the process of literary communication, there exists yet another category of funerary literature which might be described as "exoteric." Such texts, the importance and extent of which gradually increased in the course of time, took the form of inscriptions, accompanied by representations, in those parts of the tomb accessible to visitors. We shall draw on texts from both these sources for the purpose of our analysis; from which source in particular need not, as a rule, concern us here, since both seem largely to concur in their respective treatment of "the passage from this world into the next."

The general idea of "transition" underlying all concrete formulations of this theme is of ontic nature: it is conceived as a transformation from one state of being to another which the deceased must undergo. The Egyptian language has a specific word for this "other" state of being: *3ḥ* (akh), which is usually rendered as "spirit" and "spirit-state." The phonetic root (*j*)*3ḥ* conveys the basic meanings of "light," "brightness" and "radiance." The feminine form *3ḥt* (akhet) designates that "radiant place" in the heavens where the sun rises and sets, but also the "land of the blessed" to

5 Besides the work of Morenz 1952, which is representative of the general attitude, cf. Bonnet 1952, 494–496; J.G. Griffiths, in: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* IV (1980), 276. Especially careful is C.J. Bleeker 1965, but he ignores or excludes the evidence on which this study is based.

6 The latest translations are due to R.O. Faulkner 1985.

7 de Buck 1935–1961; translations: R.O. Faulkner 1973–1978; P. Barguet 1986.

8 Sethe 1935–1922; latest translation: R.O. Faulkner 1969.



which the deceased journey after death. "Radiant place," in the Old Kingdom, is also the name of the king's pyramid-tomb, an indication that his entombment is the prefiguration or the equivalent of his ascent to the heavens.<sup>9</sup> The AKH-sphere is a world of "mythical"<sup>10</sup> values and realities which, in the course of the Old Kingdom, gradually overlaid an even more ancient world of tangible cultic objects and rituals.<sup>11</sup> The spoken word provides the ideal means of transposing the realities of "yonder" world into this world of symbolic objects and rituals, but also of transferring the deceased to the beyond, while enabling him to retain his earthly capacity. The Egyptian describes this function of the spoken word with the causative derivation of the phonetic root (*j*)*3h*, thus arriving at *s-3h* "to transfigure." It is this basic bipolar structure of Egyptian religious texts in general, but more specifically of the funerary literature, of the relationship between this world of visual realities and yonder world of mythical realities which shall concern us again and again in the following discourse. Within this ontic distance between the "here" and "yonder," between visual and mythical reality, lies the initiatory and mystical character of the Egyptian funerary religion. The world of mythical reality stands for a certain knowledge, to which the deceased is initiated, for a cosmic sphere, to which he is transferred, and for a state of being, which he must attain. Let us distinguish, for the sake of clarity, between two variants found in the formulations and illustrations of the "passage" from this world to the next: firstly, those concerned primarily with the spatial aspect ("transition") and secondly, those presenting a more biomorphic model ("rebirth"). That both variants in no way exclude one another, but actually stand in a complementary relationship and in many ways overlap, needs no explanation. Are we not, after all, dealing with metaphors of an ontic transformation which can neither be depicted nor formulated?

## 2. The "Biomorphic" Models of Transformation

### 2.1 Dismemberment and Rejoining

Dismemberment of the corpse is attested in Egypt both archeologically, i.e. in burial practices, and in funerary literature, where it represents a central aspect of religious thought. Archeological and literary evidence, however, are separated by a long span of time and are, for a number of further reasons, difficult to relate to each other. Evidence of the burial practice spans the time from the Early Dynastic Period to the beginning

9 Cf. the widespread paraphrase for the funerary procession: "to let the god ascend to his horizon" (Lüddeckens 1943, 55ff., #21), probably of royal origin. This text is obviously quoted at the beginning of *Sinuhe* (R 7) as a description of a royal funeral.

10 I am using here the term "mythical" in the sense of "referring to the divine world"; cf. Assmann 1977a, 7–42, where I proposed to distinguish between this broad sense of the term, which is the usual one in Egyptology, and a more strict one restricted to myth as a kind of narrative.

11 Schott 1945; Assmann 1984, 102–117.



of the 4th dynasty, though it always represents an exception to the rule and an exclusive prerogative of high standing individuals.<sup>12</sup> The custom disappears in the wake of the development and general adoption of embalment and mummification,<sup>13</sup> and must rank as its predecessor. As a literary motif, the concept of dismemberment clearly appears in an exclusively negative context:<sup>14</sup> it is either one of the dangers in the netherworld, which must be avoided at all cost,<sup>15</sup> or a metaphorical illustration of the initial state of want, which the manifold resuscitation rites of the funerary cult take up in the sense of a *restitutio ad integrum*.<sup>16</sup> The concept of dismemberment appears here solely as the logical prerequisite of ritual acts, which are conceived as a rejoining of the body.

In the context of the myth of Osiris, the dismemberment of the god's body has dual function and meaning, to which corresponds a dual tradition. Seth has not only killed his brother Osiris, but also, in a second act of violence, cut his corpse to pieces and thrown these into the water. So far, all versions of the myth agree. For the one tradition, however, this dismemberment represents nothing else but a catastrophic state of want, precisely as the funerary texts describe it. This state now becomes the starting point of restorative acts, the goal of which is to cure the condition of death. The rejoining of the limbs of Osiris, found only after a long search, became the prototype for the "overcoming" of death and furnished the mythical precedent<sup>17</sup> for embalment. Embalment and mummification, in the light of the myth of Osiris, are equated with the restoration of life to the body, which had by no means to be ritually dismembered beforehand, since its lifelessness alone was mythically interpreted as dismemberment. Dismemberment is thus a symbol for the disintegration of a living entity and a mythical image for the condition of death itself.<sup>18</sup> In the other tradition, this same mythical episode becomes an etiological myth explaining the spreading of the cult of Osiris throughout Egypt. The water has carried away the pieces of Osiris' body and washed them ashore in 14 different places in the country, where they were preserved as holy relics and formed the nucleus of the Osiris-cult.<sup>19</sup>

Only the first of these traditions shall concern us here. The embalming process, to which it refers, is related to the topic of initiation in manifold ways. It is conceived not so much as a preservation of the corpse, but rather as its transfiguration to a new body:

12 See Hermann 1956 and G.R.H. Wright 1979.

13 For Egyptian mummification techniques, see David 1979. For the purpose of the present study, Sethe 1934 is still valid.

14 In this respect I agree completely with Griffiths 1980, 51ff.

15 Cf. Zandee 1960, esp. p.147ff.

16 Cf. Assmann 1973, 121–125.

17 For this term cf. van der Leeuw 1933, 161–180; Eliade 1954/58, 194–204.

18 Cf. Assmann 1973.

19 See Beinlich 1984.



one “filled with magic,”<sup>20</sup> the perishable substances of which have been replaced by everlasting ones,<sup>21</sup> resting in the mummy-cover as if it were a kind of magic garment. The Egyptian word for mummy, *sCh*, also means “nobility,” “dignity” and denotes the elevated sphere of existence to which the deceased has been transferred and initiated in the course of the process of embalment. The mummy-case itself gradually evolved into increasingly lavishly decorated stucco-cartonnage and wooden anthropoid coffins, whereby the pictorial motifs and decoration patterns merely represent an iconographic formulation of the exact same AKH-sphere which is expressed in funerary literature by means of the spoken and written word.

## 2.2 Rebirth

### 2.2.1 Placement in the coffin as *regressus ad uterum*

In accordance with the principle of “transfiguration,” as the correlation of this world’s symbolic objects and actions with yonder world of values and realities, the coffin becomes the body of the sky- and mother-goddess, thus enabling the “placing of the body in the coffin” to be transfigured into the ascent of the deceased to the heavens and the return to the mother-goddess (*regressus ad uterum*).<sup>22</sup> In Egypt, the sky is conceived as a female entity, which means that we are not dealing with “mother-earth,” but with “mother-sky.” The sky-goddess is the Egyptian manifestation of the Great Mother. A central aspect of this belief is the fact that the Egyptians imagined the deceased as being the children of this Mother-of-all-Beings. This mother-child relationship could be attained in death only, through absorption into the goddess:

“The mother of millions, who receives hundreds of thousands.”<sup>23</sup>

“She loves the entering, she loathes emerging;  
the entire land longs to be there.”<sup>24</sup>

“Their mother is she, who created them all:  
they enter her, all (of them).”<sup>25</sup>

20 For some exx. of this formula see Assmann 1969, p.196, n.22.

21 Cf. similar motifs in the context of the shamanistic initiatory dismemberment, see Eliade 1975.

22 Cf. Rusch 1922; Assmann 1972, 115ff.; id., in: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* IV (1980), 266–271.

23 Davies 1933, pl. 55.

24 Pap. Dublin 4, ed. Pierret 1874, pp. 83 ff.

25 Cairo, Sarcophagus of Haremhab (Late Period) ed. Piehl III, 67ff.



O thou wetnurse, into whom it is good to enter,  
 O thou, into whom each and everyone enters, day after day!  
 O Great Mother, whose children are not delivered!"<sup>26</sup>

The texts underline the indissolubility of this bond, or more precisely of the embrace into which the deceased, when laid in his coffin, enters with the sky- the mother-goddess, the goddess of the dead. The concept of rebirth, however, still plays an important role. "I shall bear thee anew, rejuvenated," exclaims the sky-goddess to the deceased in one of many such texts inscribed on or in nearly every coffin and tomb.<sup>27</sup> "I have spread myself over thee, I have born thee again as a god." Through this rebirth, the deceased becomes a star-god, a member of the AKH-sphere, a new entity. This rebirth, however, does not imply a de-livery, a separation, but takes place inside the mother's womb, inside the coffin and sky.<sup>28</sup> The constellative relationship of the deceased and the mother-goddess, as shown in pictorial representations and texts, is interpreted and activated in the sense of affiliation and rebirth. It does not represent a transitional state, but the eternal, unalterable basis for a new and higher form of existence. By transfiguring the act of "laying the deceased in the coffin" to a *regressus ad uterum*, the path of life is given a cyclic orientation. The deceased thus gains access to a realm of existence inside her body and is allowed to take part in the cyclic eternity of the stars, the rising and setting of which the Egyptians interpreted as an eternally repeated entering and being born in the sky-goddess.<sup>29</sup>

### 2.2.2 Coronation and Rebirth

The deceased, now reborn through the sky-goddess as a god himself, is subsequently breast-fed by divine nurses and elevated to the heavens. This "sacramental interpretation"<sup>30</sup> has its roots in a different set of rites than those surrounding the "laying of the deceased in the coffin," notably in the "burning of incense"<sup>31</sup> (the rising fumes being a symbol of the ascent to the heavens) and in

26 Pap. Louvre 3148, XI. These and other quotes from *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* IV, 268ff.

27 For a very incomplete compilation of these texts see Rusch 1922. About 70 different texts in among 1000 variants are known to me.

28 In one of these texts the mother and sky-goddess asserts: "I shall never give birth to thee", see Schott 1965, 81–87. The Egyptian desired to "rejuvenate in the coffin" (cf. e.g. the tale of the *Shipwrecked Sailor*).

29 For the terminology of time and eternity see Assmann 1975.

30 "Sakramentale Ausdeutung," for this term see Assmann 1977a, 15–28.

31 E.g. Otto 1960, scene 64.



libation<sup>32</sup> (fluids being a symbol of divine milk). It should be noted that sacramental interpretations such as “rebirth through the sky-goddess” or “the rejoining of the limbs,” in their capacity of events taking place in the divine or AKH-sphere, often enough belong to completely different sets of cultic actions than those connected with the “laying of the deceased in the coffin.” A secondary application of one of the aforementioned sacramental interpretations, for example, may be found in the context of the rite of anointment, which might be accompanied by the words: “Thy mother Nut has born thee on this day.”<sup>33</sup> Where the action is concerned with the rearing of the child-god, a conspicuous role is played by the two goddesses personifying the crowns of the Egyptian double Kingdom. On the basis of this function, the Greeks even identified one of them with Eleithyia, the Greek goddess responsible for helping women to give birth.<sup>34</sup> We can therefore hardly go wrong in assuming that the rites explained as the “nursing of the child-god” originated in the royal coronation ritual.<sup>35</sup> Seen under these aspects, the famous cycle of representations known as “the myth of the divine birth,” which, in some New Kingdom temples, depicts the announcement, begetting, birth, nursing and circumcision of the royal child,<sup>36</sup> appears in a different light. Until now, it had always been interpreted as an elevation of the actual birth of the king to a mythical sphere.<sup>37</sup> It seems to me, however, that a reference to the coronation or, better yet, to an initiation to kingship preceding the coronation in the sense of a “naissance mystique”<sup>38</sup> would be much nearer to the mark.<sup>39</sup> It is admittedly not the sky-goddess, but the actual earthly mother of the child-king who appears as protagonist in the cycle of divine begetting and birth. In the nursing scene, however, the action is taken over by the cow-shaped manifestations of the sky-goddess, the exact same ones, in fact, from which the deceased wishes: “Oh, that I may again come into being under her udders.”<sup>40</sup> It is precisely this mythical icon of the child-king suckling under the Hathor-cow which became the primary cult image in the Hathor temple of Hatshepsut in Der el-Bahri.

The concept of an “initiation to kingship” brings us, without any doubt, to the heart of the problem. If such an initiation truly existed and actually took the form of a

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32 See e.g. *ibid.*, scene 63.

33 Otto, *op.cit.*, scene 55A. The following sentence seems to refer to the idea of initiation (the translation is not completely certain): “Thou art made into one who knoweth the unknown”.

34 Heerma van Voss 1980, 366.

35 See Leclant 1951, 123–127.

36 See Brunner 1964.

37 Brunner 1964; for the interpretation as a ritual (of birth), see Barta 1975.

38 Eliade 1958.

39 This interpretation is explained in Assmann 1982.

40 Book of the Dead 148. Cf. es-Sayed 1980.



“naissance mystique” with subsequent nursing and elevation to the heavens,<sup>41</sup> then, and only then, may we consider the initiation ceremony to be the source and the prototype of the corresponding funerary beliefs. In this case, the initiation ceremonies of living human beings could not possibly have originated from the rites surrounding the “passage to the next world.” It would, on the contrary, seem more logical, if the initiation rites of “this” world had been transposed, together with their corresponding sacramental interpretations, into the next world. Unfortunately, this happens to be a very disputed area of research, where evidence is not only sparse, but also extremely difficult to interpret. The aforementioned correlations can in no way be considered to be established fact. They are, however, far less bold than those formulated in another contribution to the topic of “rebirth.” I mention it here — without going into detail — because it has begun to exert considerable influence in the field of Egyptology. It is the eighth chapter of Chr. Desroches-Noblecourt’s book on Tutankhamun, in which the hardly disturbed findings of his tomb are interpreted with remarkable, if somewhat overstrained sensitivity as a complex of funerary equipment meant to insure the rebirth of the deceased king.<sup>42</sup>

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41 The idea of the ascent to heaven is not realized in the birth cycle, but expressed in a coronation text of Thutmosis III, which has obvious initiatory associations:

He opened for me the door-leaves of heaven  
and unfolded the gates of his horizon.  
I rose to heaven as a divine falcon  
and saw his secret image in heaven.  
I worshipped His Majesty (...)  
I beheld the transformations of *Akhti*  
on his secret ways of heaven.  
Re himself established me  
by distinguishing me with the crowns on his head,  
his Uraeus remaining at my forehead.  
I was furnished with his *akh*-power  
and acquainted with the wisdom of the gods like Horus,  
when he counted his body (i.e. became mature)  
in the house of his father Amun-Re (etc.)

Compare for the ascent to heaven also n.43.

42 Cf. Desroches Noblecourt 1963; cf. Westendorf 1967.



### 3. Transition as a “physical passage”

#### 3.1 Knowledge

Those formulations of the transition to the next world where the idea of a “physical passage” predominates speak of a path, along which the deceased must proceed. Such texts describe the aspired higher sphere of existence principally as a “sojourn” in one specific far off place. The Pyramid Texts, our oldest corpus of funerary literature, locate this eternal abode in the northern sky. The path along which the deceased must travel in order to reach this place is almost entirely restricted to the idea of ascending the heavens and to the manifold ways of mastering both the ascent<sup>43</sup> and the crossing of the sky.<sup>44</sup> This relatively simple scheme was subsequently (at the time when the Coffin Texts become our representative source) enormously complicated by the fact that a conception of the netherworld, which had originally been the sole privilege of the king, suddenly becomes accessible to all. We now find an “underworld,” centered around the god Osiris, standing in a complementary relationship to the Old Kingdom’s exclusively cosmic conception of a hereafter ruled by the sun-god Re. As a consequence of this veritable revolution of ideas, theological speculation on the hereafter undergoes a process of differentiation and development of hitherto unknown extent. The mastering of this complex and steadily growing body of knowledge on the next world now becomes the primary concern of the deceased. The main purpose of this new genre of funerary literature is to “equip” the dead with the necessary knowledge. The formulation of this knowledge gives the impression of being a science of its own and, curiously enough, it reflects the typical bureaucratic and systematic style of Egyptian daily life, transposed to the next world.<sup>45</sup> This mediative literary quality has the advantage of making the “eternal” dimension of the hereafter accessible to the earthly sphere of understanding. In other words, it allows for the possibility of describing it as a conceivable plurality of constituents, which may be carefully ordered and named: the 2 ways, the 7 gates, the 21 portals, the 7 heavenly cows and their bull, the 14 hills, the 12 crypts, the field of reeds, the offering-fields, the door-keepers and heralds, the councils and judges, the individual parts of the ferry and of the catching net, etc. etc...<sup>46</sup> The deceased must not only know the names of all these entities and every detail concerning their nature, he must also have full command of the words needed to face each and everyone of them. The topography of

43 See Assmann 1977c; Davis 1977; J.M. Paysas 1979.

44 Cf. Kees 1977, 67–97.

45 The most important study of this codification of knowledge is Kees, 1977. For the “scientific” character of the cosmographic branch of funerary literature see Hornung 1979b, 217–224; D. Mueller 1972, 100, speaks of “scientific systematization”.

46 For early “scientific” codifications in respect to the field of offerings and the field of reeds see D. Mueller 1972; Lesko 1971–72. For BD 153 see Dino Bidoli 1976, pp.81ff.



the hereafter described in these spells is so full of dangers because of the demonic creatures inhabiting it. The netherworld appears therein first and foremost as a social sphere, in which the deceased must move and, eventually, integrate himself by means of the spoken word: by appealing, conjuring, intimidating, beseeching, threatening, answering, etc... The accumulation of such an enormous body of knowledge based on pure speculation and meant to insure individual salvation (i.e. in the sense of overcoming death) reminds one of the Gnosis and must surely represent one of its roots. Purity, in the sense of deliverance from the burdens of earthly existence, may only be attained through knowledge. Purity and knowledge, these two concept are closely interwoven; does not the deceased assert: "I know the names ... I am pure"?

### 3.2 The path to eternal sustenance

In the many spells concerned with the sustenance of the dead, the destination of the deceased's voyage is defined again and again as "yonder shore, upon which the gods stand;"<sup>47</sup> "he who settles there shall not perish"<sup>48</sup> or "shall come forth as a god".<sup>49</sup> His wish is to settle there, "beneath yon sycamore ... in the midst of plenty; he who lands there, he grows not weary, he who tarries beneath her (i.e. the sycamore), he is as the Great God".<sup>50</sup> To reach this place "where Maat is,"<sup>51</sup> this divine abode holding the promise of eternal life and god-like existence, the deceased must undergo a series of examinations: he must rouse the ferryman from his sleep and induce him to make the crossing, he must secure a ferryboat, avoid the catching-net stretched out between heaven and earth and convince the inhabitants of the heavenly world that he is one of them. The only way of successfully withstanding these examinations is through knowledge, for these take place in the form of interrogations. He is first interrogated by the ferryman following a pattern of examination which Dino Bidoli interprets as an "initiation to the secrets of a profession." Its consists of a cross-examination with predetermined questions and answers, a typical craftman's examination attested in the most varied ages and cultures and even found, until recently, in the guilds of modern Egypt.<sup>52</sup> The deceased must not only proclaim his identity, prove his competence and give the destination of his voyage, he must, above all, know the secret names of the individual parts of the ferry and be able to put together a "mystical ship" by the sole means of this "mystical language." This language consists of nothing else but names, roles and events belonging to the divine AKH-sphere, the purpose of which is to transpose the individual parts of the ferry into the AKH-sphere by making use of the

47 CT IV, 38 i-l; similarly III 98 k-l; 145 a-e etc.

48 BD 98 and elsewhere.

49 CT III 145.

50 CT III spell 203.

51 CT III 143.

52 Bidoli 1976 p.30.



same type of sacramental explanation as that found in connection with cultic objects and rites. The deceased avoids the catching-net in precisely the same way: by successfully using the mystical language to apply specific names to the various parts of the net, he transposes the action into the AKH-sphere and projects his own dangerous situation onto a mythical plane, where it may be resolved in the context of an appropriate mythical precedent.<sup>53</sup> There are many more spells of this type which I should like to mention here, despite the fact that they do not strictly belong within the frame of this discussion. Before entering the hall of judgement (see also section 3.3), the deceased must again be able to transpose the individual parts of the gate onto a specific mythical plane;<sup>54</sup> similarly, in the so-called spells for the “deification of the limbs,” his body is sacramentally interpreted by equating each part of his body with a deity.<sup>55</sup> Sacramental explanation is also the principle behind the glossed funerary texts, notably the well-known 17th chapter from the Book of the Dead. It thus seems justified to consider whether a dramatic initiatory interrogation, rather than the mere philological need for commentary, underlies these spells.<sup>56</sup> If we may generalize Bidoli’s informative remarks on this matter, it seems reasonable to assume that these spells originated in the initiation rites of various professions, such as: net-makers, bird-catchers, fishermen, carpenters, embalmers (with respect to the “deification of the limbs”) and priests.

At the term of his voyage through the hereafter, the deceased is subjected to an interrogation at the hands of those whom he wishes to join. Here, as in the Magic Flute, the interrogator remains anonymous.<sup>57</sup> Through his answers, the deceased must prove himself a god: one who sits where they sit, stands where they stand and eats from that which they eat.<sup>58</sup> The gods live in a redistributive community,<sup>59</sup> itself a projection of earthly society. Membership in this community is the only way for the deceased to partake of the sustenance of the gods; it is, on the other hand, the sharing in the divine nourishment which makes him a member of the community of gods. This specific motif appears repeatedly as a sacramental explanation in those spells concerned with the concrete action of eating and drinking, i.e. dealing with the

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53 Bidoli 1976.

54 Book of the Dead 125, end.

55 Book of the Dead 42. For the origin of this topic in the ritual of embalmment see Altenmüller 1976, 624–627.

56 For a different interpretation of BD 17 see Rößler-Köhler 1976. But in Egypt, even commentary may assume a ritual form, cf. Schott 1954, 13ff. see also pp.31 ff. for the form of interrogation.

57 Mozart/Schikaneder borrowed the character of an anonymous “interlocuteur” from Terrasson, *Sethon* (1731).

58 In Coffin Texts Spell 195 the gods address the candidate to the hereafter with the words: “He lives from what we live, he eats from what we eat, he drinks from what we drink”.

59 “Versorgungsgemeinschaft.” See for this term Assmann 1976, 16–20.



reception of funerary offerings.<sup>60</sup> The means and the end are fully interchangeable: eating and drinking (a social act of paradigmatic significance) are the ideal concretizations of the desired social integration, while social integration inversely represents the prerequisite for sustenance in the hereafter. This peculiar relationship between sustenance and community reflects the structure of Egyptian society, in which the officials not only received no (or little) salary, but were actually dependent on the household (the table) of their superior. The supply of earthly needs, especially of food, thus becomes the symbol of social integration: (a) in a group of fellow human beings depending on the same source and (b) in relation to the patron, from whom the nourishment issues. The exact same structure may be found in the funerary texts, where the deceased is described as living, together with the other gods, from the offering table of the sun-god. His meals come from the altar of Re in Heliopolis.<sup>61</sup>

### 3.3 The path to justification

“Justification” is the central concept of Egyptian funerary religion in which all aspects of the “overcoming of death” and of salvation in the next world come together.<sup>62</sup> It is as important, as it is complex. We alone, who look upon the matter from a sufficiently detached point of view, might attempt to describe its complexity by means of a conceptual analysis. In the Egyptian mind, i.e. from the point of view of those living within this conceptual world, any such analytical approach would have been unthinkable. The structure of those funerary texts concerned with justification may be divided into a number of aspects. The deceased must justify himself: (a) with respect to *the* enemy (as the personification of death), (b) with respect to *an* enemy, who might face him in the next world and perhaps bring forth accusations against him in “yonder” court of justice and, finally, (c) with respect to the divine prosecutor and judge, in whose presence the deceased must answer for his conduct on earth and prove himself worthy of eternal salvation. Aspect (a) forms the basis of the myth of Osiris,<sup>63</sup> (b) is especially important in the Coffin Texts<sup>64</sup> and (c) appears in its purest form in

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60 It would lead us too far astray to quote examples of this very common topic. Just to illustrate the point, let me quote the following passage from a funerary liturgy:

Thy bread is the bread of Re,  
thy beer is the beer of Hathor.  
Thou getst up and siteth down for thy meal  
and joinest the gods who follow the god (Re).

61 See especially CT III, *passim*.

62 “justified” (*m3c-hrw*) is the usual epithet for a deceased person since the beginning of the second millenium. See R. Anthes 1954, 21ff.

63 See Griffiths 1970 *id.*, 1980; see also BD (translation Hornung) 166, verses 3-5; 151, 36 ff. 169, 62-64.

64 See Grieshammer 1970.



conjunction with the general acceptance of a “judgement of the dead,” which, though already recognizable towards the end of the 3rd millennium B.C.,<sup>65</sup> only becomes the overall dominant and obligatory trait of Egyptian funerary literature in the New Kingdom. Its canonical form, as found in Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead,<sup>66</sup> has in any case no known predecessors in the older funerary literature. Our discourse shall be restricted to this one aspect of justification.

### 3.3.1 The gates

“May your soul (*b3*) know the paths of yonder world leading to the gate of ‘he, who conceals the weary one’.” Thus runs the particularly polite wish of a wise man to a prince in a late Middle Kingdom tale.<sup>67</sup> The gate is a most pregnant symbol of transition. In the 145th and 146th chapters of the Book of the Dead, this idea finds itself systematically elaborated into a sequence of 21 gates which the deceased must pass in order to reach the “one, whom they conceal,” the “weary one,” i.e. Osiris.<sup>68</sup> The gates are guarded by demons or better, as of late more correctly differentiated,<sup>69</sup> by apotropaic gods. Their iconography, characterized by animal masks and knives, identifies them as dangerous and terrifying beings.<sup>70</sup> The deceased wards off their threat by calling them by name, but also by knowing the names of the gates; he secures unhindered passage by showing proof of his purity. He knows the mythical significance of the water, in which he has bathed, and wears the appropriate clothing. The nature of the doorkeepers (and of the “apotropaic gods” in general) is ambiguous: the terror they embody is meant to ward off evil, the conceptual manifestations of which are ignorance, impurity and violence. The gates and their keepers build a 21-,

65 Instruction for Merikare P 53–57, Fecht 1972, p.147 with postscripts p.222 and p.228f, Jansen-Winkel 1988.

66 For the history of the idea of the Judgment of the Dead, see especially Grieshammer 1970, 46–70, cf. also the excellent study by Brandon 1967 and the contribution by J. Yoyotte 1961. See also the iconographical study by Seeber 1976.

67 pWestcar 7, 25–26, see A.M. Blackman (ed. W.V. Davies) 1988, 8. “The gates (*sbḥwt*) of the underworld and the doors (*sb3w*) of the field of reeds” are mentioned in the Inscription of king Neferhotep as objects of royal knowledge in connection with the theology of Osiris: W. Helck 1975, 26 line 23.

68 Especially impressive depictions of these gates are found in the tombs of queens Nefertari and Tausret. I have published a funerary text dealing with the knowledge and passage of these gates in Assmann 1973, 94–97. This text is frequently written at the entrance of the tomb which thereby becomes “transfigured,” so that by entering the tomb the deceased symbolically effectuates the transition into the underworld.

69 te Velde, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* I, 980–984; Altenmüller 1976, 635–640. See also Meeks 1971, 19–84.

70 For the apotropaic function of terror and the monstrous, see *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* II, 362–367, cf. also the contribution by H.G. Fischer in *Fs.E.Porada*.



14-(15) or 7-fold (the number as such not being all that important) protective enclosure around the "weary one," namely the dead Osiris, who lives on as a deceased god within the concealment of these walls. The wish of the deceased human being is to identify his fate with that of Osiris. Only within the innermost enclosure of this most secluded and therefore holiest<sup>71</sup> of all cosmic spheres will he also live as Osiris. The terrifying creatures at the gates will then be his own guards, protecting him from all evil.<sup>72</sup>

In the Egyptian conception of the hereafter, the underworld is not thought of as a realm of darkness where death, the "great leveller," causes all to sink indiscriminately into oblivion. It is, on the contrary, divided into three parts: a sphere of light, where the justified dead live in a divine community centered around the sun-god and Osiris, a sphere of chaotic darkness, where the damned suffer eternal punishment,<sup>73</sup> and a sphere not of purging — this idea seems to be fully absent from the Egyptian conception of the hereafter — but of "filtering," where the evil are caught in the catching-net or destroyed by the demons guarding the gates. The concept of a zone of transition is substantiated by the many formulations in which the idea of a qualifying passage is expressed in Egyptian funerary texts: in the "Book of the Two Ways,"<sup>74</sup> the spells of the seven gate-paths,<sup>75</sup> the chapter on the 14 "abodes" of the underworld<sup>76</sup> and the spell of the 12 crypts.<sup>77</sup> This idea was even adapted into a board game with the characteristic name "passage." It requires two players. The object of the game is to find oneself a passage through 30 fields of salutary or evil nature until one arrives in the vicinity of the god, who then grants sustenance (bread and water) and

71 For the correlation between the concepts of "seclusion" and "holiness," see Hoffmeier 1985.

72 The double function of the guardians of the doors, to spread terror (averting the evil) and to provide protection ("covering the weary", eg. *hbs b3gj*), may be expressed less in the text itself than by its location in tomb decoration. In a tomb of the Late Period, one version of this text (BD 145) is written on the walls of the staircase leading from the upper to the subterranean part of the tomb, i.e. from the "upperworld" to the "underworld." It enhances the apotropaic aspect of the gates and the meaning of their passage as a sort of qualifying examination. The guards face the people who enter or descend. In another version, located further inside the tomb, they face from outside in towards the owner of the tomb, who begs for their protection. See Assmann 1977b, 32–34, 59–64.

73 See Hornung 1968.

74 Lesko 1972. For a very interesting though rather speculative interpretation of this text as "texte d'initiation" see Barguet 1969.

75 BD 144 with 147, see also CT spell 901 concerning the "7 chambers of the tomb" (equated with the underworld). The seven *crjrt* (porchways) are also understood as the way to the "field of reeds," the Elysian fields of the Egyptians, e.g. in chamber III of the Tanitic tomb of Osorkon.

76 BD 149 with many precursors in the CT. See for individual references Hornung 1979a 506 ff.

77 BD 168, see A. Piankoff and H. Jacquet-Gordon 1974.



justification.<sup>78</sup> It was, without any doubt, also played in lifetime for the sole purpose of “enjoyment” (*shmh jb*, Egyptian for “enjoyment,” lit.: “to cause the heart to forget”), but has almost exclusively come to us from a funerary context. Particularly informative in this matter is the evidence from the tomb of Sennedjem: here, the scene is found above a door, thus already imparting the sense of “passage” through its very location. Furthermore, near the game-board, a table covered with food offerings figuratively conveys the purpose and goal of the “passage:” securing access to and availability of eternal sustenance.<sup>79</sup>

In the demotic tale of Setne, Osiris sits enthroned in the seventh of seven halls which the deceased must cross in order to reach the place of justification. This sequence of seven gates also seems to have been an important principle in temple architecture, especially in the Late Period. It appears in a particularly straightforward manner on a late type of false door (funerary stela), where up to seven interlocked gates, shown in superimposed *en face* relief, represent a corresponding sequence of rooms.<sup>80</sup> According to this conception, the underworld is imagined as a temple, in the innermost and holiest part of which Osiris sits enthroned.<sup>81</sup> The path of the deceased to Osiris corresponds to the path of the priest on his way to the innermost sanctuary of the god. The path of the priest is furthermore sacramentally explained as an ascent to the heavens. He “opens the door-wings of the sky in Karnak”<sup>82</sup> and “sees the mysteries of the horizon.”<sup>83</sup> If I mention these correlations, it is to demonstrate yet once more that Egyptian “funerary mythology” in no way represents an autonomous field of religious speculation, but is actually deeply interwoven with the ideas and concepts of the earthly cult of the gods. It therefore would not seem justified to accept the idea of an initiation for funerary religion (as *communis opinio* presently sees it) on the one hand, while categorically rejecting it for all other forms of Egyptian religion on the other.<sup>84</sup> The following paragraph should, in my opinion, furnish the decisive proof for this theory.

78 Pusch 1979. Timothy Kendall, *Passing Through the Netherworld* (Belmont, Mass.) has produced a modern reconstruction of the game.

79 Theban Tomb TT 1, see Pusch 1979, pl.28. The last part of the game deals with nourishment (“bread in the house of breads, cool water in the house of cool water”) and justification (“thou art justified! he says to me, namely Mehen”).

80 Le Corsu 1968.

81 For the Setne narrative, see the translation of Lichtheim 1980, 125–151, esp. 139f. For the underworld of the temple, see Barguet 1969. According to its title, ch. 145 of the Book of the Dead describes the “gate of the field of reeds of the temple of Osiris” and localizes the field of reeds in the innermost part of the temple (the holy of holiest).

82 For the title *wn c3wj pt*, see Brovarski 1977.

83 For this, see Assmann 1973, 19ff.

84 Cf. e.g. Hornung 1979b; Morenz 1952.



### 3.3.2 The Trial

The goal of the deceased's "passage" is to reach the "hall of twin truths," where the judgement of the dead takes place. Access to this hall is the last of the qualifying examinations he must undergo simply to gain admittance to the tribunal. It again takes the typical form of a cross-examination. He is first questioned on his identity, then on his competence:

"Who art thou?," say they to me,  
 "What is thy name?," say they to me.  
 "I am the lower root of the papyrus-plant,  
 'He in the olive-tree' is my name."  
 "Where hast thou gone past?," say they to me.  
 "I have gone past the place to the north of the thicket."  
 "What hast thou seen there?"  
 "It was a leg and a thigh."  
 "What hast thou said to them?"  
 "I have seen the jubilation in yon lands of the Phoenicians."  
 "What have they given thee?"  
 "It was a flaming fire and a fayence amulet."  
 "What hast thou done therewith?"  
 "I buried them on the shores of the Maati waters during evening sacrifice."  
 Etc, etc...

That the questions put forward here refer to a mystical knowledge, and more precisely yet to knowledge from the Osiris mysteries, is obvious.<sup>85</sup> They are followed by the final summons:

"Come then and step through this gate of the twin truths, for thou knowest us!"

In the following examination, the candidate must name the individual parts of the door using the mystical language, i.e. he must be able to interpret them on the divine mythical plane. This process of sacramental interpretation has already been discussed.<sup>86</sup> The third and shortest examination is carried out by Thot, the psychopompos, who leads the deceased into the hall of justice. He asks only four questions: "Why hast thou come?" — To be announced. "What is thy condition?" — I am free of every sin. "Whom shall I announce thee to?" — To him, whose ceiling is fire, whose walls are living uraei, whose house-floor is the flood. "Who is that?" —

85 Cf. Griffiths 1980, 30 ff., with further references.

86 Cf. n.30.



Osiris. "Then betake thyself thither: behold, thou art announced!" The following verdict anticipates the tribunal's decision. We shall return to it later.

The actual trial, figuratively formulated by the weighing of the heart against a symbol of truth, and the "negative confession" of the candidate, who must enumerate 42 sins in the presence of 42 funerary judges while swearing not to have committed them, truly belong to the fundamentals of Egyptian religion. They have been the subject of extensive research.<sup>87</sup> We shall therefore be brief in our description. The negative form of the "confession" should not surprise us: it is merely the logical consequence of the negative structure of ethics (the "forbidden fruit"<sup>88</sup>), first articulated in sentences such as "thou shalt not ...," whereupon follows the answer: "I have not ...." This type of formulation is inherent to the subject matter and does not necessarily point to its original "Sitz im Leben." R. Grieshammer, who brought up this question, therefore also bases his argumentation on the actual content of the "negative confession."<sup>89</sup> He divides the 42 sins into three approximately equally large categories: offenses of strictly cultic nature, violations within the temple administration, and infringements with regard to ethical principles of more general character. The same tripartite structure is also found in texts inscribed in the temple doorways used by the priests of the Late Egyptian Period.<sup>90</sup> To all appearances, they would seem to reflect 'admittance liturgies' which the priests had to recite upon entering the temple,<sup>91</sup> but probably also had to swear by during priestly initiation ceremonies.<sup>92</sup> "Just as the priest had to vow, during his first initiation and upon entering the temple, not to have committed certain actions, the deceased must, in the same way, give assurance of his purity upon entering the sacred sphere of the hereafter."<sup>93</sup> It would therefore appear that we are dealing here with a priestly initiation ritual, which only subsequently became part of the literary and conceptual vocabulary of funerary religion.

The outcome of the trial, however, has aspects other than simply gaining admittance to the divine sphere of existence. First of all, the survival of the deceased's individual personality depends on it. Personal identity is, for the Egyptian, a function of social integration and approval.<sup>94</sup> A human being is a person only within the limits of the image which the (significant) others hold of him. The justification brought forth in the judgement of the dead is itself a formulation of this social approval and is meant to ensure the eternal survival of his personality among the blessed spirits of the

87 Cf. especially Yoyotte 1961; Brandon 1967; R. Grieshammer 1970 and Seeber 1976.

88 Cf. Bergson 1932/1982, p.1.

89 Ibid. (n.2).

90 Grieshammer, 1974, p.22 ff., add Gutbub 1973, 149ff.

91 The remarkable parallels in Biblical Texts have been pointed out by Koch 1961.

92 Such an oath in Greek is published by Merkelbach 1968, cf. also the recent article by Merkelbach 1987.

93 Grieshammer 1974, p.25 cf. also Griffiths 1988.

94 Cf. *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* IV (1982), 963–978 s.v. "Persönlichkeitsbegriff und -bewußtsein".



underworld. He is henceforth no longer an immaterial shadow, but, for instance, the high steward Amenemope who may now place his earthly offices and names between the new titles "Osiris" and "justified," both acquired in the judgement of the dead. The second aspect of the trial is the acceptance of the deceased into the 'redistributive community,' in which gods and spirits are thought to live in and which is modeled after the pattern of earthly society. Sustenance and social integration exist, in the Egyptian mind, as one indivisible whole: they merely represent two aspects of one and the same thing. The desired verdict of the funerary judge appropriately formulates it:

"A truly righteous one.  
Let him be given the bread and beer,  
which issues forth from Osiris.  
He shall be forever amongst the followers of Horus."<sup>95</sup>

The conception of the judgement of the dead is thus fitted into the more general context of ideas, which, as discussed in the previous section, see in sustenance and social integration the prerequisites of a blessed state of being in afterlife.

#### 4. Death and Initiation in the Isis-Mysteries of Apuleius

Accessi confinium mortis  
et calcato Proserpinae limine  
per omnia vectus elementa remeavi,  
nocte media vidi solem  
candido coruscantem lumine  
deos inferos et deos superos  
accessi coram  
et adoravi de proxumo.<sup>96</sup>

I entered the boundary of death,  
and as I stepped across Proserpina's threshold,  
I was carried by all elements and returned;  
At midnight, I caught sight of the sun,  
dazzling in radiant light,  
I approached the lower and upper gods  
and prayed to them face to face.

95 Pap. BM 10470 (Pap.Ani) col.3-4 cf. Seeber 1976, p.114. For the correlation of "jurisdiction" and "provision" in the Egyptian world, cf. Assmann 1970, 58-65.

96 Apuleius of Madauros, *Metamorphoseon* XL, 285 cap. 23.



The Egyptian associations present in this description have often been emphasized.<sup>97</sup> We are dealing here with a *katabasis*, i.e. a ritual descent into the underworld, which, in this case, is visually and architectonically actualized by a descent into a crypt decorated with cosmographic representations. In the precise same way, the royal tombs of the New Kingdom are decorated with representations of the underworld, thereby equating the entombment of the king to a *descensus ad inferos*.<sup>98</sup> The wall-paintings of these tombs are cosmographies: they describe the path of the sun-god, sailing in his bark through the hourly regions of the underworld and of the sky. The mystical character of these “books,” in the sense of a codification of an esoteric and secret knowledge, is clearly expressed in these representations, as are the clues that the origins of this literature are to be found not in funerary religion, but in the solar cult.<sup>99</sup> Admittedly, we cannot produce the decisive source material in support of our hypothesis. As a result of fortuitous circumstances, the tombs on the edge of the fertile Nile Valley have been preserved, while the temple-libraries in the valley itself have been lost in the wake of expanding agriculture and urbanization. The reservations of Egyptologists, who cannot conceive of “mystery” and “initiation” outside the context of funerary religion, appear, in the light of the manifold evidence brought together in this discourse, as an untenable argument *e silentio*.

In the cosmographic “books” of the royal tombs, both *dei inferi* and *dei superi* are found together. The *dei inferi* are the inhabitants of the underworld, to whom the sun-god, accompanied by his divine retainers, descends nightly in his bark. The deceased king sails along in the solar bark and prays to the gods “*de proxumo*.” The conception that a human being, once dead, meets the gods face to face,<sup>100</sup> after having only worshiped them in their symbolic representations during his earthly existence, is an oft repeated motif in Egyptian funerary liturgies (“*Verklärungen*”):

“All the gods, whom thou hast worshiped since thou existeth,  
thou shalt enter face to face with them.  
They are ready to receive thy ‘Ba’  
and to protect thy mummy.”<sup>101</sup>

Even the “passage” of the deceased through the 21 gates, the 7 halls, the 15 places (BD 149), etc... of the underworld represents a *descensus ad inferos* which brings him at long last in the physical presence of Osiris and of his divine retainers:

97 For details see Griffiths 1975, 296–308. Cf. especially Bergman 1982.

98 Cf. Brunner 1980, 215–228.

99 Pace Barta 1985 and Wente 1982. See Assmann 1970, and, for further substantiation, Assmann 1983, chapter 1.

100 For *adoravi de proxumo* cf. the numerous parallels in Griffiths 1975, 303–308, but also Gardiner, in: *PSBA* 35 (1913), 169ff.

101 Theban Tomb TT 50, harper’s song, see M. Lichtheim, in: *JNES* 4, 1945, 198.



To separate NN from all his sins,  
to see the face of all gods

is the title of the "psychostasia" in the Book of the Dead.<sup>102</sup> But by the same act the deceased enters also into the presence of the sun-god, who travels nightly through the underworld with his own divine retinue. "To look upon the sun, when it sets and is worshiped by the gods" is the professed goal of the funerary spells.<sup>103</sup>

In the initiation of Lucius, the voyage through the underworld stands for a symbolic death, followed on the next morning by his resurrection as the sun-god: adorned with a palm wreath *ad instar solis*, he appears to the cheering crowd,<sup>104</sup> just as the justified deceased at the judgement of the dead. The following quote is taken from one of the oldest texts, in which this conception may be recognized:

"Trembling befalls the eastern horizon,  
announced are the paths of its remoteness  
to Osiris NN, who hath come forth as Re  
and looms high above as Atum,  
after Hathor hath anointed him  
after she hath given him (eternal) life in the West  
like Re, day by day.  
O Osiris NN, there is neither god nor goddess,  
who might bring forth a charge against thee  
on the day of reckoning (=judgement of the dead)  
before the Great One, the Lord of the West.

Thou eatest bread from the offering table of Re  
in the company of the Great Ones at the gates.<sup>105</sup>

No one doubts that the initiation rites of the Isis-mysteries, as Apuleius ventures to describe them, are deeply rooted in the uniquely elaborated rituals and conceptions of Egyptian funerary religion. The same holds true for other initiation rituals. Seen from this aspect, a relationship between death and initiation is not disputed. A number of clues listed in this survey, however, have given us reason to look in the opposite

102 pap.BM 10470 col.3, see n.95.

103 Assmann 1969, 28 ff.; Griffiths 1975, 303–308. Magical spells have the power to make the sun-god and his circle of deities appear, even for one who is in the underworld.

104 Concerning Apuleius, ch.24, Griffiths correctly calls attention to the "wreath of justification", which the vindicated individual receives in the judgment of the dead (BD 19), cf. Derchain 1955, 225–287.

105 CT spell 45.

106 Cf. Hornung 1979c und 1977; Assmann 1983 ch.2.



direction. Let us attempt to formulate our results into a hypothesis: the funerary rites take the form of an "initiation into the mysteries of the underworld" (Hornung), because they reflect the corresponding rites and conceptions of cultic rituals in "this" world, of which, for obvious reasons, we know next to nothing.

The appearance of the deceased, resp. of the initiated as the sun-god, brings together both conceptual spheres which we had labelled — again: merely for demonstrative purposes — "biomorphic" and "transitional" models. The multiplicity of concepts, through which the nature of the sun is expressed in Egyptian mythical thought, combines the mystery of the passage with that of rebirth. The solar cycle, a mythical event of archetypal and fundamental significance, takes place not only in *illo tempore*, but throughout "present" eternity. During his nightly *descensus ad inferos*, the sun-god crosses the 12 gates and hourly regions of the underworld, only to be reborn every morning in his new appearance: having entered the tail of a snake as an old man, he emerges from its mouth as a youth; he is swallowed by the goddess of the heavens in the evening and reborn through her in the morning. Within this world of endless representational and conceptual possibilities for the solar cycle,<sup>106</sup> we find that all Egyptian contemplations of change, renewal, rebirth and eternal life have been paired with a corresponding world of mythical precedents and realities.

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