

DIOSKOURIDES, TANAWERUOW, TITUS FLAVIUS DEMETRIUS ET AL.

OR: HOW APPEALING WAS AN EGYPTIAN AFTERLIFE?¹

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Abstract

It is a truism that Egyptians believed in a life after death, that this made their culture very special, and their mortuary religion so appealing even to non-Egyptians. After presenting selected Egyptian textual sources and mortuary equipment dating to the Hellenistic and Roman periods in Egypt, the picture will be less clear: yes, there are non-Egyptians who lived in Egypt and decided to be buried as Egyptians, but, yes, it is also true that some Egyptian texts of roughly the same date convey a distinct scepticism about the afterlife, the netherworld being described as a dark and chilly place or a very dry region where people suffer from thirst. Do those conflicting sources fit together or not? Have we to do with historical changes in Egyptian funerary belief – due to Greek influence – or is it typically Egyptian to be self-contradictory? In this article I try to show that the different, even contradictory, views to be found in Egyptian sources belong to a coherent system, that both are indeed truly Egyptian, and can be attested even for pre-Hellenistic times.

1. Some Case Studies

On 13th February 61 AD a grieving Hartayefnakhtet sat down in Pernebuti, somewhat downstream from Antaeopolis, and wrote out a long and almost unique funerary papyrus in demotic Egyptian on behalf of his deceased daughter Tanaweruow. This papyrus has survived, and is now known as ‘Papyrus Harkness’ (hereafter pHarkness) after its erstwhile owner, and kept in the Metropolitan Museum in New York.² Tanaweruow must have died at an early age because it is her father who took care of her burial and because apparently her husband – although he is mentioned – did not play a major part. There is only one partial parallel to the contents of the funerary papyrus for Tanaweruow, another Demotic papyrus inscribed for a man called Hor, son of Petemin, dating between 100 and 50 BC and now in the British Museum in London.³ Almost two thirds of the surviving pHarkness have no known direct parallel and appear to be an original work, yet one that is deeply rooted in ancient Egyptian traditions.

1 Thanks are due to Richard Gordon and Andrew Monson for checking my English.

2 SMITH 2005; SMITH 2009, 264–301.

3 SMITH 1987; SMITH 2009, 245–263.

The structure of the text preserved in pHarkness allows us to reconstruct a funeral's various phases during the reign of Nero. It must have developed as follows. Immediately after the completion of Tanaweruow's mummification, the text accompanies the actions such as wrapping the mummy in linen and equipping it with amulets as well as two red cloths that symbolize the deceased's divinization. During this first phase her father also prepared the tomb for the impending sepulture. There Hartayefnakhtet laments and addresses the tomb as the deceased's alter ego (phase 2). A third section is entitled "The lamentation which Tanaweruow, the daughter of Hartayefnakhtet, whose mother is Tatita, made" and attests to a fear of the underworld:

Gather to me, all of you, (...)!
Place your hands in my hand,
for I am going far away.
My ship is making sail for the abode of those who thirst.
My vessel is going to the mansion of those who are parched.⁴

As these words are recorded after Hartayefnakhtet's speech and he presumably spoke at the tomb, it can be concluded with some probability, on the assumption that pHarkness is organized chronologically, that this section with Tanaweruow's lament reports the inscription of a stela which was set up in front of her tomb. The aforementioned papyrus of Hor also contains a dirge, but it is worded differently. Nevertheless its position within the papyrus of Hor is almost identical to that in pHarkness: Albeit the second section in the London-papyrus, it immediately precedes what is the fourth section in pHarkness running closely parallel in both manuscripts. This finding indicates a similar series of ritual actions for both Hor and Tanaweruow, and constitutes further (indirect) evidence for a tomb stela bearing an inscription in which the deceased complains about his fate.

Then – it seems – for the fourth phase we are again back in the embalming place. The author shows his command of Egyptian funerary rites in drawing on motives that belong to the so-called *Stundenwachen*, texts to be recited during the hourly vigil in the night before, and on the day of Osiris' burial. This is hardly surprising, as Hartayefnakhtet held several priestly offices, in particular those connected with the cult of Osiris, which surely gave him access to the local temple's archives. The *Stundenwachen* are known in a series of versions inscribed on the walls of Egyptian temples of Ptolemaic-Roman date.⁵ The practice of celebrating an hourly vigil during the mortuary rites is attested since the early 2nd millennium BC, but it is not until the first half of the 1st century BC that more is known about what is recited for private individuals during these watches. In fact the two papyri already mentioned are the only extensive sources for such rites. The *Stundenwachen* are bipartite rituals to be performed during the night before the interment, when the completed mummy was still in the embalming place, and those which were performed on the day of the burial proper. The rites of this day are the fifth

4 SMITH 2009, 283.

5 PRIES 2011.

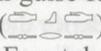
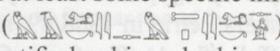
phase of the ceremonies reflected in pHarkness. Thereafter, the voyages of the deceased, her acceptance among the *akh*-spirits and the gods of the underworld are asserted. It may be concluded that the burial rites are now complete, at which point the tomb assumes a different character, not so much a place where an earthly existence terminates, more the starting point of a life in the hereafter. Hence the tomb is now addressed as a mother. A litany accompanying a libation rite indicates the end of the formal burial.

Nothing can be said about Tanaweruow's tomb equipment,⁶ but we may assume that it followed traditional patterns just as her funeral was essentially Egyptian. At least it would not be surprising in her case. That of Titus Flavius Demetrius, my next example, is more surprising. Judging from his *praenomen* and *nomen*, Demetrius is generally assumed to have lived just a few years after Tanaweruow during the Flavian dynasty and to have been a Roman citizen.⁷ When he died, he chose to present himself as Egyptian: his purely Egyptian mummy mask was excavated in the necropolis of Hawara by Flinders Petrie in 1888/89, and is now in the Egyptian Gallery of Ipswich Museum, Suffolk (fig. 1). The faulty Greek inscription ΤΙΤΟΣ ΦΛΑΥΓΙΟΣ ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟΣ around the back of his head indicates that (a) Titus preferred a script he himself could read, and that (b) the craftsman was not particularly familiar with Greek. Some scholars therefore incline to think that Titus was not a Hellenized (or Romanized) Egyptian but rather a non-Egyptian, perhaps a freed slave.⁸ If he were a *libertus*, however, this would weaken the argument in favour of a non-Egyptian descent because he would have taken the *praenomen* and *nomen* of his former master, thus disguising his possible Egyptian ancestry. If we think about it further, it becomes increasingly doubtful that Titus can have been Roman by birth. The spelling Φλαύγιος of Flavius, which went by without correction, might indicate that Titus himself or his progeny could not read Greek. Alternatively I could imagine that he was an Egyptian, the slave of one of the Flavian emperors, who later manumitted him. He may have ordered his name to be written in Greek on his mummy mask because he wanted to commemorate his special relationship and loyalty to the imperial family – Vespasian was after all proclaimed Augustus in Alexandria on 1st July 69. In the end, however, he seems to have placed greater faith in Egyptian eschatology than Greek or Roman since otherwise he adhered to his own indigenous traditions. If I have interpreted the subtle indications of Titus' mummy mask correctly, it would be the perfect symbol for the triangulation between disposal, eschatology and individuation which the conference-organizers described in their call for papers. However, all of this is uncertain because the dating is purely based on the Flavian *nomen gentile*. Titus Flavius Demetrius could have been a descendant of an imperial *libertus* (or a Junian Latin, freed informally by such a person) so that one has to allow up to 40 years after the death of the latest manumitting emperor, in this case, c. 140.

6 SMITH 2005, 16–21. I retract what I said in STADLER 2012, 391.

7 PETRIE 1889, 16; STADLER 2004, 32–34; RIGGS 2005, 21f.; UYTTERHOEVEN 2009, 526f.

8 E.g. RIGGS 2005, 21f.

Not much can be said about what Titus believed in because we have just the iconography of his mask, and no texts similar to pHarkness. However, there are more examples of individuals bearing a non-Egyptian name, but who appear in an Egyptian guise for their afterlife. I have chosen the case of a man whose name is *Dskrds* () on his sarcophagus in the Louvre and who has achieved some fame in Egyptology.⁹ The design of his sarcophagus conceals his individuality behind a purely Egyptian façade rather than revealing it – at first sight. At any rate, we have to do with a high-quality sarcophagus without any personal traits. The hieroglyphic inscriptions that cover it derive chiefly from the Egyptian corpus of funerary texts, in particular the *Book of the Dead* with its long-standing tradition, although the texts are inscribed, as Collombert put it, “aux graphies extrêmement fautives”.¹⁰ Apparently orthography and ortholexis were not an issue for the Egyptians in relation to the equipment for the afterlife. A section of the texts, however, provides us with at least some specific information. The deceased bears the titles of *m-zrkysmtpylks* () and *snty* (), which Collombert has convincingly identified as hieroglyphic renderings of Greek titles. The former is the Egyptian transliteration of ἀρχισωματοφύλαξ, the latter the Egyptian translation of διοικητής. These in turn allow us to identify *Dskrds* as the well-known Ptolemaic finance minister Διοσκουρίδης who served Ptolemy VI Philometor between 163 and 147/146 BC. His mother *T3-di-Wsir-Īi-m-htp* is mentioned on the Louvre sarcophagus, but not his father. This high-ranking Ptolemaic official was therefore at least half-Egyptian, his anonymous father being possibly member of the Greek élite of Alexandria. Is that the reason why only his Egyptian mother is remembered in this context? Specific details of the reliefs that depict Dioskourides performing Egyptian rites, such as the headband, have been interpreted as references to his Hellenic role during life.¹¹ Against that, it may be pointed out that, if the headband sloping down from the front to the back of the head is indeed slightly non-Egyptian, people were often depicted according to current fashion during all stages of Egyptian art. It is more significant that the artist adhered to Egyptian traditions of posture and body display.¹² To use a modern analogy, not everyone who wears jeans nowadays is American! Indeed, American fashion is surprisingly widespread even among young anti-American protesters in Muslim countries today: they may be clad in jeans and t-shirt with an English imprint but they certainly do not feel like Americans, such as Yemenis who flew an Islamic flag above the gate of the American

9 COLLOMBERT 2000; BAINES 2004, 42–44.

10 The explanation which BAINES 2004, 42 put forward does not convince me. Dioskourides may have been able to read Egyptian after all, but it does not seem to have been so important for the Egyptians that a text be correct: even in earlier periods, we can find faulty inscriptions on coffins and sarcophagi of members of the Egyptian élite, e.g. Taaset (Thebes, 720–675/650 BC): STADLER 2005, 153–159. As regards proficiency in Classical (Middle) Egyptian: JANSEN-WINKELN 2011, 2012 and KLOTZ 2011. Both assume a rather high degree of linguistic skill during the Late and Ptolemaic Periods, whereas BAINES downplays it.

11 BAINES 2004, 42.

12 Cf. RIGGS 2002 and RIGGS 2005, esp. 95–98, on that issue for funerary art in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt in general.

embassy during an attack in Sana'a on 13th September 2012. The case of Dioskourides alerts us to the fact that persons with Greek names might be more Egyptian than we expect and that, when it comes to the end of their lives, they might opt for an Egyptian sort of eschatology.¹³ It cannot, of course, be excluded that real addressees are the Egyptian indigenous élite, so that such a burial is more of a political move,¹⁴ but to my mind this is a rather modern way of thinking: the fact that Dioskourides' mother was an Egyptian suggests a strong Egyptian element in his cultural identity.

These three examples illustrate the use of Egyptian funerary customs by three different individuals and thus suggest how diverse personal backgrounds may result in an Egyptian burial: the indigenous Egyptian woman under Nero, in the late 1st–early 2nd century AD the man with Roman *tria nomina*, whose ethnic identity may be more complicated than appears at first sight, and the high-ranking Ptolemaic official who was considered Greek but who turns out to be half-Egyptian. Despite a wide range of different ancestries, then, when it came to the afterlife, each of them wanted to appear Egyptian. All this suggests that the Egyptian hereafter indeed had its attractions.

2. An Egyptological Presupposition

What makes Egyptian eschatology seem more attractive than Greek views of the afterlife? For me as an Egyptologist, it was always clear that nothing could be more appealing for Greeks and Romans than oriental, particularly Egyptian, ideas of the afterlife, since neither traditional Greek nor traditional Roman religion provided anything that could compete with the Egyptian mortuary belief,¹⁵ and I am not the only one who has this possibly distorted perception that might be fuelled by a flourishing scholarly debate on Isis in the Mediterranean.¹⁶ In 1906, Franz Cumont (1868–1947) tried to explain that presumed success in the Roman imperial period of oriental and especially Egyptian cults:

Depuis le II^e siècle avant notre ère, les mystères d'Isis et de Sérapis se répandent en Italie avec la culture alexandrine (...). Ils n'apportaient pas un système théologique très avancé, car l'Égypte ne produisit jamais qu'un agrégat chaotique de doctrines disparates, ni une éthique très élevée car le niveau de sa morale – celle des Grecs d'Alexandrie – ne dépassa que tardivement un étiage médiocre. Mais ils firent connaître d'abord à l'Italie, puis aux provinces latines, un antique rituel d'une incomparable séduction, qui savait surexciter les sentiments les plus opposés dans ses processions éclatantes et dans ses drames liturgiques. Ensuite, ils donnaient à leurs fidèles l'assurance formelle qu'ils jouiraient après la mort d'une immortalité bienheureuse dans laquelle, unis à Sérapis, participant corps et âme à sa divinité, ils vivraient dans la contemplation éternelle des dieux.¹⁷

13 Cf. MOYER 2011 on the Ptolemaic court as a culturally and ethnically less exclusive social space than formerly assumed.

14 BAINES 2004, 43–44.

15 See also LIEVEN 2005.

16 E.g. BRICAULT, VERSLUYS AND MEYBOOM 2007.

17 CUMONT 1929⁴, 182 f. = 2006, 298 f., but cf. ALFÖLDY 1989, who modifies the view of a deeply orientalized religion in the 3rd century.

Such a perception neglects the fact that there were alternative concepts within the Greek world with a somewhat more comforting view of what happened after death, such as Orphism. Orphism provided some ideas for which Egyptian analogies can be quoted.¹⁸ Already in antiquity such analogies were perceived as Diodorus' report suggests telling us that Orpheus had found inspiration in Egypt.¹⁹ So why this perceived Egyptomania and not more Orphism? Venit argues that the Egyptian-Orphic analogies were already present in ancient Alexandria, that this consequently met the needs of major parts of the Alexandrian population and prompted the particular funerary culture of that city.²⁰ However, she refers to Alexandria, and the question remains whether her assumption may be generalized for the *chora*.

Of course there is also the quantitative problem combined with the restricted Egyptological perception which might overemphasize the phenomenon. Within Hellenistic and Roman Egypt the number of Egyptian burials is doubtless significant. Nevertheless, in comparison to the funerary standard in the rest of the Mediterranean and in Europe, ancient tombs with a certain reference to Egyptian belief are marginal, but they do exist.²¹

3. The Egyptian Afterlife: 'Elysian Fields' and Hell in one

The question becomes more complicated even from the Egyptological point of view. Tanaweruow's lamentation quoted at the beginning raises doubts about the widespread assumption which Cumont has so nicely phrased as "immortalité bienheureuse" that Egyptian mortuary belief is thought to have promised. Tanaweruow's description of the underworld as an unpleasant place is by no means an isolated example. A much more elaborate account in which the deceased complains about the miserable life in the hereafter is found on the famous stela of Taimhotep, a woman who died in 42 BC.²² On the stela, which must have been commissioned by Taimhotep's husband, the Memphite high-priest Pasherentpah, the widower makes her speak to posterity as follows:

18 Cf. Jan Bremmer's contribution to this volume.

19 Diodorus of Sicily 4, 25.3.

20 VENIT 2010, 243–257.

21 Cf. LECLANT 1974 who collects Osiris-statuettes. Unfortunately, their archaeological context is not always clear. BRICAULT 1992. See also Valentino Gasparini's chapter in this volume.

22 Stela BM EA 147; PANOV 2010. For further examples see OTTO 1954, 46–50 and MORENZ 1960, 196–200.

O my brother, my husband and friend, Greatest of the Master-Craftsmen²³,
 you should not be weary in drinking.
 Eat, get drunken, have sexual intercourse,
 spend a nice day, follow your heart every day.
 Do not place sorrow in your heart.
 What are these²⁴ years on earth?
 As to the West, the land is in sleep and darkness,
 the place is depressive for them who are there
 sleeping in their bodily forms²⁵.
 There is not their awakening to see their brothers.
 There is not their seeing of their fathers and their mothers.
 Their hearts miss²⁶ their wives and their children and the water of life,
 which is the nourishment²⁷ to everybody there.
 Thirst is with me. It (the water) comes just to him who is on earth.
 I am thirsty, water being besides me.
 I do not know the place where I am, since I have reached this wadi.
 Give me flowing water! (...) ²⁸

A rather ambivalent picture is also painted in the second tale of Setne, which is preserved on a papyrus from the 1st century AD but whose textual history reaches back at least as far as the 5th century BC.²⁹ Setne Khaemwaset's son Siusir, actually a reincarnation of a famous magician, gives his father a guided tour through the netherworld. In the various regions called "halls", Setne can observe the very different fates from which individuals can suffer: in the fourth hall, for example, there are people with food and water above their heads, but they cannot reach them because pits are being dug beneath their feet. The door-bolt of the fifth hall is fixed to the eye of a wretched man. In the seventh hall, Osiris, the ruler of the underworld, is sitting on his throne and judging over the deceased. The poor man whose meagre burial Setne had watched on earth and whom he had pitied now stands as a nobleman next to the god. The fates of the inhabitants of the netherworld are, as Siusir explains, the punishments and rewards for their behaviour during their lifetime.³⁰

In view of the date of the sources I have presented so far to illustrate the ambivalent ancient Egyptian view of what to expect after death, some have assumed Greek influence, implying a fundamental change in Egyptian eschatology. Thus Katja Lembke takes the *carpe diem* motif as the starting-point for her reflections on

23 i. e. the Memphite high-priest.

24 PANOV 2010, 181 emends *itw* to *ir* "as to" and unconvincingly dismisses the possibility of reading it as the plural demonstrative pronoun, cf. note 24.

25 PANOV 2010, 182 takes the word as "mat" on account of the grass determinative (𓆎), despite the mummy determinative (𓆏), and refers to a supposed parallel dated some 1,600 years earlier, whereas in the case of *itw* (see note 24) he rejects alternatives to his preferred interpretation on the grounds that they are chronologically too remote.

26 Not "forget" as PANOV 2010, 182 translated.

27 Reading 𓆏 rather than PANOV's 𓆏 *ty* "earth" (2010, 182 f.). The sentences must therefore be separated differently from his version.

28 Stela BM EA 147 lines 15–18.

29 HOFFMANN AND QUACK 2007, 118–137.

30 II Kh I 23–II 22; HOFFMANN AND QUACK 2007, 121–123.

eating, drinking and dying in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt.³¹ She asks whether classical authors tell us the truth in reporting that mummies were present at banquets – and does not realize that this issue has already been discussed³². Lembke does not answer her question, but studies the depictions of the dead reclining on a *klinê* and assumes a Graeco-Egyptian amalgam, i.e. a Greek form coupled with Egyptian meaning. A strong Greek influence has also been proposed in the case of the second Setne-story, with its close similarities to Tartaros,³³ and the earliest fragments of the Setne-story still allow for such an influence in terms of chronology. Against that, I would stress that the Setne-story is rooted in an Ancient Egyptian tradition, which admittedly does not exclude re-working and adaptations due to new circumstances.³⁴ Taimhotep's lamentation also finds parallels in the harpers' songs which are attested as early as the Amarna Period, some 1,300 years earlier.³⁵ The motif of *carpe diem* occurs here already, as well as the point that nobody knows anything about the afterlife for sure:

(...) None comes from there,
 To tell of their state,
 To tell of their needs,
 To calm our hearts,
 Until we go where they have gone!
 Hence rejoice in your heart!
 Forgetfulness profits you,
 Follow your heart as long as you live!
 (...)
 Follow your heart and your happiness,
 Do your things on earth as your heart commands!
 When there comes to you that day of mourning,
 The Weary-hearted (= Osiris) hears not their mourning,
 Wailing saves no man from the pit! (...)
 Make holiday (*iri hrw nfr*),
 Do not weary of it! (...)³⁶

The phrase *iri hrw nfr* “make holiday” may have a sexual connotation and provides a parallel to the Taimhotep stela. Now, the Harper's songs may be seen as a counter-

31 LEMBKE 2010, 259–267.

32 STADLER 2001, 331–348. Drawing on a personal communication from Sandra Lippert, QUACK 2009, 106 and 2013, 79–80 argues in favor of the idea that there is a genuine Egyptian background to the account of Herodotus 2.78, where the corpse displayed at high-status Egyptian banquets as a *memento mori* and an exhortation to enjoy life is for the first time mentioned. The source (pBerlin P 23757) has however not yet been fully published; it is anyway unnecessary to invoke this demotic text, since the evidence I cite provides adequate support for the *carpe diem* motif in ancient Egypt. Furthermore, I am still not convinced that what Herodotus reports regarding Egyptian banqueting habits is something he encountered regularly rather than a fanciful exaggeration to illustrate how different the Egyptians were. Cf. WILLEMS 2009, 511–520.

33 See QUACK 2009, 41–43 for an overview.

34 VITTMANN 1998; THISSEN 2004 and HOFFMANN 2009.

35 See BURKARD AND THISSEN 2008, 96–98, for an overview and the relevant bibliography, as well as KAPLONY 2011, 233–251.

36 English translation by LICHTHEIM 1973, 196f.

cultural event in the funerary context, but even the corpus of funerary texts, which are more official, contains comparable motifs, such as thirst. In the *Book of the Dead* spell 175, for example, which goes back at least to the Middle Kingdom (first half of the second millennium BC),³⁷ the hereafter, here termed *hr.t-ntr*, lit. “what is under god”, and often inadequately translated as ‘necropolis’, is described as:

the silent land, which has no water and no air
and is very deep and very dark
and (all) is lacking, wherein one lives in quietness of heart
and without any sexual pleasures available.³⁸

Moreover, the – by Ancient Egyptian standards – scientific descriptions of the underworld, which in Egyptology are called the *Underworld Books*, draw a very unattractive picture of the regions where the deceased live.³⁹ Such texts are actually attested for the first time in the early New Kingdom, i.e. c.1500 BC, but they may well date back in some form to the Middle Kingdom or even – as some have suggested – to the Old Kingdom.⁴⁰ In the *Underworld Books* the hereafter is depicted and described in detail. I cannot here deal fully with the 12 regions through which the sun-god passes during the hours of night, but will simply observe that only one of them is relatively pleasant and accords with the modern cliché of the Egyptian netherworld. It is the second hour:

Resting in the Wernes (= name of the region) by the majesty of this great god. Rowing of Iaru (= name of a deity) in the water of Re. 309 iteru (≈ 3,244.5 km) in its length of this field, 120 iteru (≈ 1,250 km) in its width. This great god apportions (fields) for the gods at this region (*nw.t*).⁴¹

The *Book of the Gates* is more explicit regarding the Wernes:

“Re says to them (= those who dwell in the Wernes): ‘You shall belong to your offerings, you shall take possession for yourself of your refreshments! Your *baow* (≈ ‘souls’) were not singled out. Your provisions were not destroyed. (For) you are those who adore me and who dispel Apophis for me.’”⁴²

Thus the sun-god takes care of the righteous ones and equips them properly. In the third hour/region life is more or less enjoyable, but the underworld is still a mainly cold, dark place where the dead exist inertly, coming to life at night only during the hour when the sun-god passes by and illuminates the area with his light. Yet even that light is more like moon-light:

This god travels in this region through the hauling by the underworldly gods, in his manifestation which the encircling serpent conceals. In the vicinity of every cavern of this region this god calls upon the gods who are therein. It is voices what this god hears, after he has called upon

37 STADLER 2009, 371f.

38 An English translation may be found in ALLEN 1974, 183–185.

39 STADLER 2014 for an overview.

40 See briefly VON LIEVEN 2007, 223–250, but note the opposing arguments of JANSEN-WINKELN 2011 and 2012.

41 *Amduat*, HORNING 1987, I 174f.

42 ZEIDLER 1999, 26f.

them. Their corporeal manifestations remain at their corpses which are under the sand. Their gates open on this god's voice every day. They are veiled (again) after he has passed by them."⁴³

In other areas, such as the ninth hour, there are bloodthirsty cobras:

They are those who illuminate the darkness in the room in which Osiris is. It is the flame on their mouth which causes the slaughtering in the underworld. They are those who dispel all snakes who are in the earth and whose forms the Underworldly does not know. They live from the blood of those whom they decapitate every day.⁴⁴

These citations derive from the versions found in the royal tombs of the New Kingdom, but copies of this genre are also attested on sarcophagi dating to the 4th and 3rd centuries BC.⁴⁵ These were not mechanically reproduced from earlier compositions. Rather they bear features of an active and creative work with the ancient texts which were demonstrably still understood.⁴⁶ It may be significant that the *Underworld Books* disappear after the early Ptolemaic period.⁴⁷ They differ in many details, especially in their theology, from the negative image of Egyptian sources from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, such as pHarkness or the stela of Taimhotep, which – unlike the *Underworld Books* – make no reference to gods when describing the unpleasant realm of the dead. Yet the gods do not disappear from Egyptian funerary religion. Otherwise, in the mortuary texts current during the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, for instance the Documents of Breathing in their various forms, the Egyptian gods traditionally associated with the afterlife are still present. It is quite possible that the indigenous Egyptian negative views of the underworld were adapted under the influence of Greek eschatologies (which were themselves far from monolithic), and that the lamentations of Tanaweruw and Taimhotep are examples of such appropriation. The clearest case is probably the second Setne-novel that I quoted above (S. 157).

At all events, pessimism or scepticism in relation to the afterlife was not a novelty in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, unfamiliar though it may be to some colleagues in neighbouring disciplines, and was certainly not confined to an erudite upper class who had enjoyed a Greek education.⁴⁸ Nor can it be counted a symptom of decline due to a loss of faith in the validity of funerary ritual, as some have supposed.⁴⁹ The relevant texts, which are very numerous, are well-known to Egyptologists and have been extensively studied. We can therefore say, without any hesitation, that the once widespread notion that the Egyptians believed in a blessed immortality is a mere shibboleth.

43 Eighth hour of the *Amduat*, HORNUNG 1992, II 606–609.

44 HORNUNG 1994, III 683–685.

45 MASPERO AND GAUTHIER 1939; MANASSA 2007.

46 See the thorough study by MANASSA 2007.

47 Cf. MANASSA 2007, 4.

48 This seems to have been the view of KRAUSE 1983, 86.

49 Such as MORENZ 1960, 200. His position here is actually contradictory, since a little earlier he stresses the continuity of such beliefs in Egypt right into Late Antiquity.

4. Egyptian Eschatology during the Hellenistic and the Roman Periods: Towards a Synthesis

This noteworthy discrepancy which I have pointed out here might confirm Cumont's verdict "l'Égypte ne produisit jamais qu'un agrégat chaotique de doctrines disparates", and anybody who expects clear statements as to where the hereafter is to be located will be disappointed. Throughout the history of Egyptian funerary beliefs, we can find statements expressing the desire for a home among the stars and a continuing existence in heaven juxtaposed with those which describe an unpleasant dwelling in the netherworld. In the royal tombs of the New Kingdom the *Underworld Books* are depicted alongside the *Book of Nut* – an astronomical text that explains the heavens in mythological terms⁵⁰ – or the *Book of the Day*,⁵¹ which complements the *Underworld Books* in that it describes the sun-god's diurnal life in the sky, as opposed to his nocturnal life in the *Underworld Books*, and forms together with the latter the guides for the Beyond. For that reason, even among Egyptologists, there are those who claim, rightly or wrongly, that the guides for the Beyond do not provide a coherent eschatology.

In the Ptolemaic period a further layer comes into play. It is exposed in another type of text, which has been interpreted as showing greater concern with this world even after death. This is the *Book of Traversing Eternity*, surviving copies range in date from the 2nd century BC to the 1st–2nd century AD, and it focuses on participation in cult-feasts that were celebrated in the major sanctuaries of the land.⁵² It has been connected with a change in religious thought in the Amarna period (1351–1333 BC), but I have proposed to consider it as an adaptation of the rituals intended to elevate the king to divine status and to confirm his power.⁵³ Some individuals who possessed a manuscript of the *Book of Traversing Eternity* also owned papyri containing other funerary compositions, so-called Documents of Breathing. Since the latter texts are based on the assumption of an existence in the Beyond, we can dismiss the idea that we have here to do with a somewhat more secular attitude of some individuals towards death, or a shift towards eliminating the gods.

Were the Egyptians schizophrenic? In some liturgical texts throughout Egyptian history all three localisations of otherworldly existence are found together. However, we should bear in mind that these texts are just that, liturgical, i.e. they quote from the entirety of teachings about the Egyptian world view and do not pretend to develop a coherent system. Nevertheless, to my mind Egyptian ideas about the afterlife are not an "agrégat chaotique" but should rather be seen in terms of the cosmology as a whole. In Egyptian anthropology, the individual consists of various elements that disintegrate at death; the objective of the funerary rites is not to reverse this disintegration but to maintain some sort of connection between the ele-

50 VON LIEVEN 2007.

51 MÜLLER-ROTH 2008.

52 HERBIN 1994. SMITH 2009, 395–436.

53 STADLER 2015.

ments despite it.⁵⁴ Like the solar creator-god, the deceased as it were merges with the world. The best brief account of this is to be found in the *Embalming Ritual*, a text that survives in hieratic papyri from the 1st century AD though the tradition may well reach far back into the history of Egyptian religion.⁵⁵ There it is said: “Your *ba* will endure in the sky, your corpse in the underworld, and your effigies in the temples.”⁵⁶ Here we find all three modes of continuity, the stellar existence of the ‘soul’, the abode of the body in the netherworld, and the individual’s earthly presence at the cult feast in the Egyptian sanctuaries, combined in a single sentence.

Such a differentiated representation of one’s fate after death is surely one reason why the Egyptian view of the hereafter might appeal to Egyptians and non-Egyptians alike. Another may have been a certain condensation of beliefs during the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. It might be argued that such a condensed, simple funerary belief existed alongside the more sophisticated one of an educated élite.⁵⁷ This would be difficult to prove, however, since we cannot interview, say, Titus Flavius Demetrius and grade his knowledge of Egyptian funerary belief. In any case Egyptian religion offered the possibility or at least the hope of avoiding the less desirable features of the hereafter by magical means, as evidenced by the large corpus of Egyptian mortuary literature. These sources bear witness to the fear of ending up in the dark and chilly realms rather than the ‘Elysian fields’, but they promise to master of one’s own post-mortem fate through the exercise of knowledge. This may have made the Egyptian afterlife perhaps not exactly appealing, but at any rate less daunting than others.

54 ASSMANN 2001, 116–159.

55 SMITH 2009, 215–244. On the textual tradition of its components see TÖPFFER 2013; TÖPFFER (2015).

56 VII 18 and X 20. Although SMITH 2009, 238 and 244 translates the passages differently, the text is in fact the same in both places because the scribe has simply confused *mn* “endure” and *m3* “see” (cf. SMITH 1984).

57 Cf. the old idea, discussed, e.g., by ASSMANN 1998, that in Egypt the religion of the sages was monotheist, whereas that of the population was polytheist.

Images



Fig. 1. Mummy mask of Titus Flavius Demetrius © Ipswich Borough Council Museums and Galleries

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