

## Gone, But Alive! Life in the Beyond

Foy Scalf



*sk3=(i) im=s 3sh=(i) im=s*

*wnm=(i) im=s swr=(i) im=s*

*As I plough in it, so I harvest in it.*

*As I eat in it, so I drink in it.*

— Book of the Dead Spell 110 from the Papyrus of Nebseny (BM EA 9900)<sup>1</sup>

With these words, the papyrus of Nebseny described activities he hoped to enjoy as part of his afterlife experience in a land called both the “field of offerings” (*sh.t htp*) and the “field of reeds” (*sh.t 3r.wt*).<sup>2</sup> Spell 110 of the *Book of the Dead* went on at length describing the “field of reeds” and what took place there, including an elaborate illustration depicting elements of this part of the afterlife world [Figures 1–2].<sup>3</sup> Based on such vignettes and descriptions, the ancient Egyptians have often been portrayed as believing in an afterlife that was an extension of an idyllic life on earth; as someone recently quipped, it “was an afterlife to die for.”<sup>4</sup> However, this concept has been a long-standing and common misinterpretation of what happened in the next world according to ancient Egyptian texts and images. How did such a misunderstanding arise and how was their postmortem existence depicted and described by the ancient Egyptians?<sup>5</sup>

The misleading portrayal of the ancient Egyptian afterlife as an extension of life on earth derived largely from a selective reading and revisionist interpretation of spell 110 from the *Book of the Dead*. Spell 110 describes worldly activities, for example, in the spell’s title rubric:

“Beginning of the spells of the field of offering. A spell of going forth in the day, entering and leaving from the necropolis, joining with the field of reeds, the great (one), lady of winds, having power there, being transfigured there, plowing there, reaping them, eating there, drinking there, having sex there, doing everything that was done on earth there.”<sup>6</sup>

The illustration of spell 110 helps us envision what this means, with images of the deceased planting and reaping the harvest of grain, while also navigating waterways by boat [Figure 1].<sup>7</sup>

The scene in *Book of the Dead* spell 110, however, is quite specific; the individual, having passed from mortal life into the beyond, has arrived in a divine land where the food for the gods is grown. In fact, the deceased is shown in many of the associated illustrations making food offerings to the gods [Figure 2].<sup>8</sup> This is made very clear in the papyrus of Nebseny, where he is shown in an attitude of worship facing the illustration for spell 110 and a caption above his image begins with a description of him praising the gods followed by a hymn:

“Recitation by the draftsman scribe of the temple of Ptah, Nebseny, possessor of perfect veneration, whom the illustrator scribe Tjena, justified, bore, whom the lady of the house Mutresti, justified, bore, as he praises the ennead which is in the field of offerings: ‘Hail to you, lords of the *ka*-spirits! I have come in peace to your fields in order to receive offerings that you give. I will follow the great god throughout the day. I will join the offering that his *ka*-spirit gives consisting of bread, beer, oxen, and fowl.”

At the top of the following illustration showing the waterways of the field of reeds, Nebseny is shown making an offering of incense to the great ennead. In reading the entirety of spell 110—not just the short excerpts about “doing everything that is done on earth” (*ir.t irr.t nb.t tp t?*)—we find that spell 110 presents an image of the deceased in a wondrous divine land, a dream world from which the individual doesn’t want to awake: “I will not awaken from it” (*nn snhs=i im=s*).<sup>9</sup> In this ritual dreamscape, identities can shape-shift and repeated sections of the spell present the departed as a divine personification of the god “Offering” (*hṭp*) himself:

“Being Offering, lord of the field of offering: It is Horus who envelopes<sup>10</sup> himself as a falcon one thousand cubits in length with life and provision in his hands.<sup>11</sup> He will go and he will come according to his heart’s desire<sup>12</sup> from its lakes and from its cities. As he rises from the birthplace of the local god, so he rests in the cavern of the local god. He does everything in it just like what is done in the isle of fire.”

Do becoming a god and traversing the isle of fire sound like activities that are an extension of everyday life? Looking for evidence of an elysian, heavenly paradise as reflective of Western conceptions, commentators have largely disregarded the content of the spell by focusing on more convenient passages such as “doing everything that is done on earth” (*ir.t irr.t nb.t tp t?*), but ignoring the remainder of the spell and references there such as doing “everything in it just like what is done in the isle of fire” (*irr=fh.t nb.t im=s mṯ irr.t m iw nsrsr*). The text itself

describes the duties of the individual to provide offerings to the gods by reaping and plowing in the field of offerings. As part of their imagined state in the field of offerings, a transfiguration takes place for the person, re-envisioning themselves in the retinue of the gods, so that they too receive these offerings. Thus, the field of offerings is not simply a leisurely paradise, but requires the serious work of growing, reaping, and preparing the divine offerings.<sup>13</sup> This is the very agricultural work performed by the *ushabti* statuettes—an individual's avatar—according to *Book of the Dead* spell 6.<sup>14</sup>

The funerary rituals, esoteric knowledge, and magical spells of the *Book of the Dead* enabled the deceased to transform (*hpr*) into a divine *akh*-spirit (*ʿḥ*)<sup>15</sup> themselves, a form that allowed them to partake of the divine provisions in the field of offerings. As with many *Book of the Dead* spells, spell 110 embodies all these aspects. It included the traditional offering ritual<sup>16</sup> and incorporated the esoteric knowledge needed in the hereafter.<sup>17</sup> The magical power of the rejuvenated *akh*-spirit reassures them of an everlasting immortality.<sup>18</sup> Thus, labor in the “field of reeds” (*sh.t iʿr.wt*) supported the divine conglomerate, including themselves as they are referred to in the illustration to spell 110 by “the *ka*-spirits of the *akh*-spirits” (*kʿ.w ʿḥ.w*). After earthly death, it was conceived that the person could embark on a new journey as a divine companion in a divine world. Rather than viewing this as *only* an extension of earthly existence, it is clear the ancient Egyptians described an otherworldly process of rejuvenation and divinization that led to a newfound form of existence. The scene presented by spell 110 was only a single, abstracted feature of this journey. What happened the rest of the time?

Egyptian religious texts are very explicit about their primary purpose. In broad, general terms, after physical death individuals hoped to transition into a divine existence with the gods as an *akh*-spirit, primarily focused on joining the solar cycle of the sun as it rises, sets, and rises each day.<sup>19</sup> The focus on the solar cycle is likely to have been inspired by the seeming eternal nature of the rising and setting sun; what better way to become immortal than by associating yourself with the primary unceasing force in the cosmos, as suggested by passages such as “May Osiris PN live after he has died like Re every day” (*ʿnh Wsir PN m-ḥt mwt=f mi rʿ rʿ nb*).<sup>20</sup> The cosmology reflected in the *Book of the Dead* revolves around a continuum formed by the sun god Re on one end of the spectrum and the chthonic god Osiris on the other. Re was the creator god, the sun that gave light and life to the world, and by extension he ruled over the world of the living [Figure 3]. Osiris was the god of the dead, a personification of the power of rejuvenation<sup>21</sup> as told in the mythology of his epic. Osiris was murdered by his brother Seth, who dismembered Osiris and scattered the remains. Isis, the sister of Osiris, gathered her

husband's body parts and put them back together using linen bandages, a story that provides the mythological rationale for mummification. With the magical power of her ritual utterances, Isis was able to revivify Osiris [Figure 6].

As a personification of the power of rejuvenation, Osiris provided the means by which the sun could be reborn after it set in the evening. The sun rose in the morning as Khepri, a name meaning "he who has come into being" (*Hpri*) [Figure 5]. At the height of its powers at noon, the sun was Re (*Rʿ*). As the waning sun set in the evening, his aged state reflected his identity as Atum, "the finished one." As the sky darkened, Egyptian texts describe the sun descending into the netherworld, called the *duat* (*dwʿ.t*), envisioned as the sky goddess Nut (*Nw.t*) swallowing the sun. The sun traveled the caverns of the netherworld inside the body of Nut on the way to Osiris. Being the son of Nut provided a clear, albeit theological, rationale for why Osiris was located inside her body. In the middle of the night, the sun joined with Osiris and by "passing" through Osiris gained his rejuvenating power to be reborn into the horizon in the morning. Every spell in the *Book of the Dead* was in one way or another focused on the individual's participation in this Solar-Osirian cycle. In fact, the Egyptian descriptive title for the collection of spells we call the *Book of the Dead*, as well as many individual spells, was "Spells of going forth by day," a reference to the ability to leave the tomb at daylight and travel with the sun god in a form symbolized by the *ba*-soul of the dead.

In order to find rejuvenation after death, each individual participated in the identify of Osiris by taking on "Osiris" as part of their name. Throughout Egyptian funerary literature, including the Getty *Book of the Dead* manuscripts, the owner is called "Osiris PN" (PN for "personal name" where the name of the individual was filled in). Just as Osiris was resurrected after death, so too did each individual hope for a similar resurrection. For the individual, it was their corpse (*hʿ.t*) that served as their own Osirian form, mummified in the manner of Osiris. It remained in the tomb, an underground chamber accessed by corridors that served as a metaphorical allusion to the netherworld location of Osiris. Unlike popular movies and legends, ancient Egyptians did not believe that the mummy itself would rouse and walk the earth. Rather, the corpse, as each person's Osirian form, served as their private container for rejuvenation, whereas each person's *ba*-soul was associated with the sun. Like the sun's descent into the netherworld to join with Osiris, each night the *ba*-soul had to return to the tomb to reunite with the corpse. The illustration for spell 89, a "spell for having the *ba*-soul rest on its corpse," often shows the *ba*-soul as a human-headed bird alighting on the mummy [Figure 4].<sup>22</sup> At the beginning of the spell, the departed entreats: "May you cause that this *ba*-

soul of mine come to me from any place where it is.” At the end of the spell, the uniting of the *ba*-soul and corpse is presented as part of the path to immortality: “It (the *ba*-soul) will see its corpse. It will rest upon its mummy. He will not perish. He will not physically deteriorate forever.” Thus, the corpse was not a passive component in this process; rather, it is the regenerator for the dead.

The *ba*-soul and mummified body (*h3.t*) were but two aspectual manifestations by which the Egyptians conceived of an individual’s identity. For the ancient Egyptians, bodily death provided an opportunity to expound on the theology associated with individual existence.<sup>23</sup> Funerary literature such as the *Book of the Dead* often focused on the elements of this theology and the respective roles played by an individual’s symbolic manifestations. The Egyptian conception of the individual has been described as “monistic;”<sup>24</sup> that is, like modern Christian conceptions of the survival of the “personality” of an individual in the form of a soul after death, the Egyptians believed that the individual’s personality could continue to exist after death and post-mortem depictions of individuals took on their likeness from their lifetime. This “monistic” personality, however, had various aspects the ancient Egyptians used to describe how each person interacted with their environment, both the earthly world and the afterlife realm. These aspectual elements have been the subject of many discussions, which generally include the *ba*-soul (*b3*), *ka*-spirit (*k3*), corpse (*h3.t*), name (*rn*), and shadow (*šw.t*). These elements became particularly important after death when they were empowered by the funerary rituals.

Despite the household popularity of the *ka*-spirit in our modern culture, the *ka*-spirit is referenced roughly half as many times as the *ba*-soul in the *Book of the Dead*.<sup>25</sup> The best scholarship on the *ka*-spirit has identified its primary function as a social element that relates the dead to their ancestors and surviving relatives<sup>26</sup> by restoring their “status, honor, and dignity.”<sup>27</sup> It is therefore the *ka*-spirit that receives offerings in the mortuary cult and has statues within the tomb. The importance of the bond between the *ka*-spirit with the individual is emphasized in spell 105, titled “spell for pacifying the *ka*-spirit,” where the illustration shows the individual before a hieroglyph for *ka*-spirit, calling out “Hail to you, my *ka*-spirit, my lifetime. Look, I am here before you.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, these aspects represent various ways by which an individual interacts with the world once they are in the afterlife. The *ba*-soul allows them freedom of movement and joining the solar god in his journey across the sky. The *ba*-soul has a closely associated element, the shadow (*šw.t*), a relationship that reflects its solar association as a darkened shade cast behind an object in the bright sun.<sup>29</sup> The *ka*-spirit offers an

opportunity to be part of the social sphere of both the gods, ancestors, and living relatives on earth. The corpse (*h3.t*) provides a direct connection with Osiris and the aspect by which the soul will be refreshed during the night. The name (*rn*) distinguishes the particular identity of an individual from everyone else, reflecting the Egyptian conception of creation as a process of differentiation (*hpr.w*) out of the undifferentiated mass of the primordial waters (*Nwn*).<sup>30</sup>

We should view ancient Egyptian references to the various aspectual elements—*ba*-soul, shadow, *ka*-spirit, name, and corpse—as metaphorical and symbolic means for elaborating on the various relationships and activities in the next realm, a place of mystery and wonder for the living.<sup>31</sup> In general, it seems that the Egyptians imagined that they would look similar in their afterlife as they did on earth, regardless of the state of their physical remains, and that on the whole, they would become a divine *akh*-spirit after successfully navigating the judgment before Osiris. Parallels are abundant in religions all over the world, as in many Christian believers who imagine their earthly likeness entering the gates of heaven after satisfying the door-keeper Saint Peter. Likewise, the Egyptian *ba*-soul surely also represented each person's human likeness, as symbolized by the human head on the bird's body. The body of the bird was symbolic of the freedom of movement, particularly movement through the sky as part of the solar cycle. It is completely dubious to think that the Egyptians believed they would physically turn into human-headed birds after death, that they would sport wings, or that a bird would emerge from their body. Rather, these are likely figurative images akin to the angel wings and white robes often found in the Christian imagination.

Since the *Book of the Dead* was a collection of spells and not a linear narrative, it is difficult to reconstruct how the *akh*-spirits would traverse the various destinations described in the spells. We should further be cautious in applying linearity to a corpus that was distinctly non-linear. However, as the purpose of the *Book of the Dead* was to ensure that an individual would join the crew of the sun boat and journey through the netherworld, it seems likely the sequence of events would relate to the solar cycle [Figure 7]. Thus, the spirit of the deceased would enter the netherworld. There it would encounter many obstacles, with the most important being the judgment in the hall of Osiris [Figure 8]. A favorable judgment in this hall was a necessity for the spirit of the dead to join the retinue of gods and become a divine spirit, called an *akh*-spirit (*3h*) in Egyptian. As a divine spirit, the dead would continue to navigate their way from the hall of Osiris to their rising in the horizon (*3h.t*) with the sun in the morning.<sup>32</sup> Although it was necessary to navigate gateways and portals on the way to the hall of Osiris, the sacredness of the luminous horizon (*3h.t*) is likely the reason for the placement of

spells dealing with caverns, gates, portals, and mysterious lands near the end of papyrus and linen compilations in the so-called Saite recension (spells 144–150).<sup>33</sup> The guardians at these various passageways demanded esoteric knowledge from the deceased in order to pass. The guardians were not *by necessity* there as a direct threat to the deceased, although there were certainly many demonic forces that could inspire terror.<sup>34</sup> Their job was to keep the uninitiated from passing the gateways to the horizon and into the solar cycle with the sun god. The damned, the enemies of the sun god, were to stay in the netherworld for eternity, being tortured with fire, knives, and disarticulation, without the possibility of passing into the morning sky.<sup>35</sup> The *Book of the Dead* provided the deceased with proof of their initiation into the retinue of gods and offered a handbook of the necessary theological information to satisfy any riddle posed as they passed by. As *akh*-spirits were among the initiated, guardians would let them pass, while the uninitiated faced eternal damnation.<sup>36</sup>

In many ways, the *Book of the Dead* manuscripts, as compiled grimoires of spells, reflected this theological conceptualization in their materiality. The Getty manuscripts of the *Book of the Dead* are from periods when manuscripts were organized according to a relatively stable template known today as the “Saite recension,” a somewhat more standardized order of spells that actually seems to have been implemented prior to the Saite Period (Dynasty 26), at least by Dynasty 25 according to the latest research.<sup>37</sup> *Book of the Dead* papyri following the so-called “Saite recension” bookended the manuscript with the funeral procession up front and the resurrection at the end with a spell for “causing fire under the head.” Such manuscripts often began with spells 1–15 headed by a long illustration showing the ritual episodes of the funeral procession for the papyrus owner. Spell 15, and its illustration known as spell 16 [Figures 3 and 7], expressed solar theology in hymns to the sun, followed by a cosmogonic treatise in spell 17, also with a long and complex illustration, where ritual recitations associate the individual with the Solar-Osirian union:

“I am the one whose two *ba*-souls are amid his two nestlings. What does that mean? It means Osiris when he enters into Mendes. There he found the *ba*-soul of Re. Then one embraced the other. Then they became the two *ba*-souls amid his two nestlings.”<sup>38</sup>

This spell on creation is followed by groupings of spells whose contents can be loosely described as follows:

- justification of the dead against his enemies (spells 18–20)
- reanimation (spells 21–29)

- preventing the heart from revealing misdeeds (spell 30)
- repelling of noxious creatures (spells 31–42)
- preservation, sustenance and access (spells 43–75)
- transformation into divine entities (spells 76–88)
- rejuvenation and divine union (spells 89–106)
- entering the netherworld and traversing its paths (spell 107–124)
- justification, passing the tribunal of Osiris, and transfiguration (spells 125–143)
- passage through the labyrinthine landscape of the netherworld (spells 144–150)
- protection of the corpse, tomb, and divinization (spells 151–152)
- freedom of movement (spells 153–154)
- spells for amulets (155–160)
- spell for opening the sky (spell 161)
- spell for emergence into the light (spell 162)

While we should not impose our conceptions of linear narrative on this material, it is nevertheless rather clear that the prominent themes of the Saite Recension include: death and the funeral; protection, reanimation, divinization, and justification; passage through the landscape of the netherworld, and re-appearance into the sky as part of the solar crew [Figure 7].

Clearly priests took great care to assemble these theological books, meticulously copying and arranging spells on long papyrus scrolls up to 30 meters. It is also clear the individual owners went to great pains to have their names and titles included and to incorporate them into their mortuary assemblage. However, how did the ancient Egyptians envision using the papyri in the afterlife, or did they even expect to? It may be surprising to learn that while the *Book of the Dead* certainly makes mention of texts, and is particularly self-referential in rubrics to individual spells, overall it lacks explicit statements about exactly how a *Book of the Dead* scroll was intended to be used in the afterlife realm. The rubrics to many spells include instructions for inscribing the spell on papyrus, but these rubrics tend to be spell specific. For example, the rubric to spell 100 suggests that the spell be written on a new sheet, not a scroll with other texts:

“Recitation over this image, which is in writing on a clean, blank sheet with pellets of green pigment mixed with myrrh water, placed for the *akh*-spirit upon his chest without allowing that it touch his flesh. As for any *akh*-spirit for whom



this is done, he will board onto the boat of Re every day. Thoth tallies him when going and coming in the course of every day. A matter a million times true.”<sup>39</sup>

Such rubrics suggest that the spells themselves originated in a particular ritual context associated with specific amulets and were only secondarily collected together onto long papyrus scrolls. In grimoire form, the spells lost the connection to their original context and instructions were included detailing their “original” amuletic use.<sup>40</sup> Only secondarily did such rubrics suggest a use in the afterlife.

The phrasing of many rubrics make clear that it is important for the dead to know the spells and in some cases this knowledge has been combined with the appearance of the spell among the funerary materials. For example, in the rubric to spell 72 from the papyrus of Nu, the knowledge of the spell is combined with its potential inscription upon the coffin:

“As for the one who knows this spell, or on whose coffin it is placed in writing, he goes forth in the day in every form that he wants. Bread, beer, and a large cut of beef<sup>41</sup> are given to him upon the altar of the great god. He goes forth to the field of reeds. Barley and emmer are given to him there and then he flourishes like when he was on earth. He does all that he wants like these gods who are in it. A matter that is true a million times.”<sup>42</sup>

In the case of Nu’s papyrus, it seems quite clear that the dead could be content with the effectiveness of the spell whether they themselves knew it or whether they had it inscribed within their tomb confines. Some rubrics stressed that the spells were effective anywhere in the cosmos. For example, the rubric at the end of spell 144 suggests that one purpose of the spell is to expand the dead’s journey in all places:

“You will make this book without allowing any eye to see. It means an expansion of the movement of the *akh*-spirit in the sky, on earth, and in the necropolis because it is more effective (*ꜥh*) for the *akh*-spirit (*ꜥh*) than anything done for him.”<sup>43</sup>

While individual manuscripts of the *Book of the Dead* could be written in hieroglyphs, cursive hieroglyphs, hieratic, or Demotic, spells rarely referred to any specific scripts or which scripts were to be used in writing them out. In spell 68, there is a reference to Hathor carrying “writings of hieroglyphs,” using the traditional Egyptian phrase “words of god” (*md.w ntr*) as a reference to the hieroglyphic script: “I will sit under the branches of the tree of Hathor,

foremost of the broad disk. She is proceeding to Helipoolis carrying the writings of hieroglyphs, the book of Thoth.”<sup>44</sup> The reference here to the “book of Thoth” is quite revealing. In spell 170, Thoth approaches the deceased with books of hieroglyphic writing: “O PN, may Thoth himself come to you with books of hieroglyphic writing.”<sup>45</sup> Spell 90 in the Book of the Dead of Iuefankh includes an illustration of Iuefankh standing before a papyrus-holding Thoth.<sup>46</sup> As the spell prominently references speech and magic, it seems likely that the papyrus held by Thoth is a text filled with words of ritual power, i.e. a *Book of the Dead*.<sup>47</sup> The Egyptian term “book of Thoth” seemed to designate any texts of a magico-religious content, including, but not limited to, the *Book of the Dead*, since Thoth was the author of such compositions according to Egyptian mythology. In later periods, and particularly in the Books of Breathing and Demotic funerary literature that were descendants of the *Book of the Dead*, the “book of Thoth” or “book of breathing of Thoth” became a popular general reference to such compositions.<sup>48</sup>

With these references, the ancient Egyptians conveyed the idea that the *Book of the Dead* provided a compendium of knowledge for the deceased to consult, whether that knowledge was memorized, inscribed somewhere in the burial chamber, or brought along as a papyrus scroll. Direct, explicit references to carrying *Book of the Dead* scrolls with them in the hereafter are rather rare. An oblique reference that appears in spell 69 (and late versions of spell 31) suggests that the doorkeeper of the hall of Osiris was considered as “the collector of writings,”<sup>49</sup> suggesting that such writings had to be presented to him in order to pass.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps supporting this view, in the papyrus of Tjenena, Thoth holds a papyrus while he leads Tjenena through a gateway in spell 144.<sup>51</sup> “The writings of Thoth himself” is even incorporated into one of the guardian’s names of the nineteenth gate in spell 145.<sup>52</sup> Some have cited the famous judgment scene before Osiris which showed Thoth recording the outcome of the judgment on papyrus [Figure 8] as an example of Thoth holding a *Book of the Dead*, but it is unclear if such a papyrus was a *Book of the Dead*, a divine decree, or simply an account of the judgment.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, in a rubric to spell 125, we discover that use of the text on behalf of the departed<sup>54</sup> would ensure his children’s welfare as well as his entrance into the west, the land of Osiris:

“As for one for whom this book was made, he will flourish and his children will flourish. He will be a confidant of the king and his entourage. A cake, jar, bread loaf, and cut of beef is given to him from the altar of the great god. He cannot be

turned back from any gate of the west. He is towed with the kings of Upper and Lower Egypt. He will be in the following of Osiris.”<sup>55</sup>

Use of spells directly in the hereafter appears in the rubric for spell 137: “used in secret in the netherworld (for) the mysteries of the netherworld.”<sup>56</sup> Whether the user had to have the spell memorized or could read from a scroll is left unsaid.

The evidence therefore for the use of the *Book of the Dead* in the afterlife requires some assumptions. Against our expectations, the ancient Egyptian scribes who composed and copied the *Book of the Dead* manuscripts did not write out explicitly how they might be used by the dead in the next world. This is likely because it was completely obvious to them, or perhaps simply part of the unknown mysteries of death, even if their vagueness rendered their intentions opaque to us. With that said, the hints in the texts as discussed above certainly suggest that if you were lucky enough to own a *Book of the Dead*, you would take it with you into life in the beyond.

FIGURES

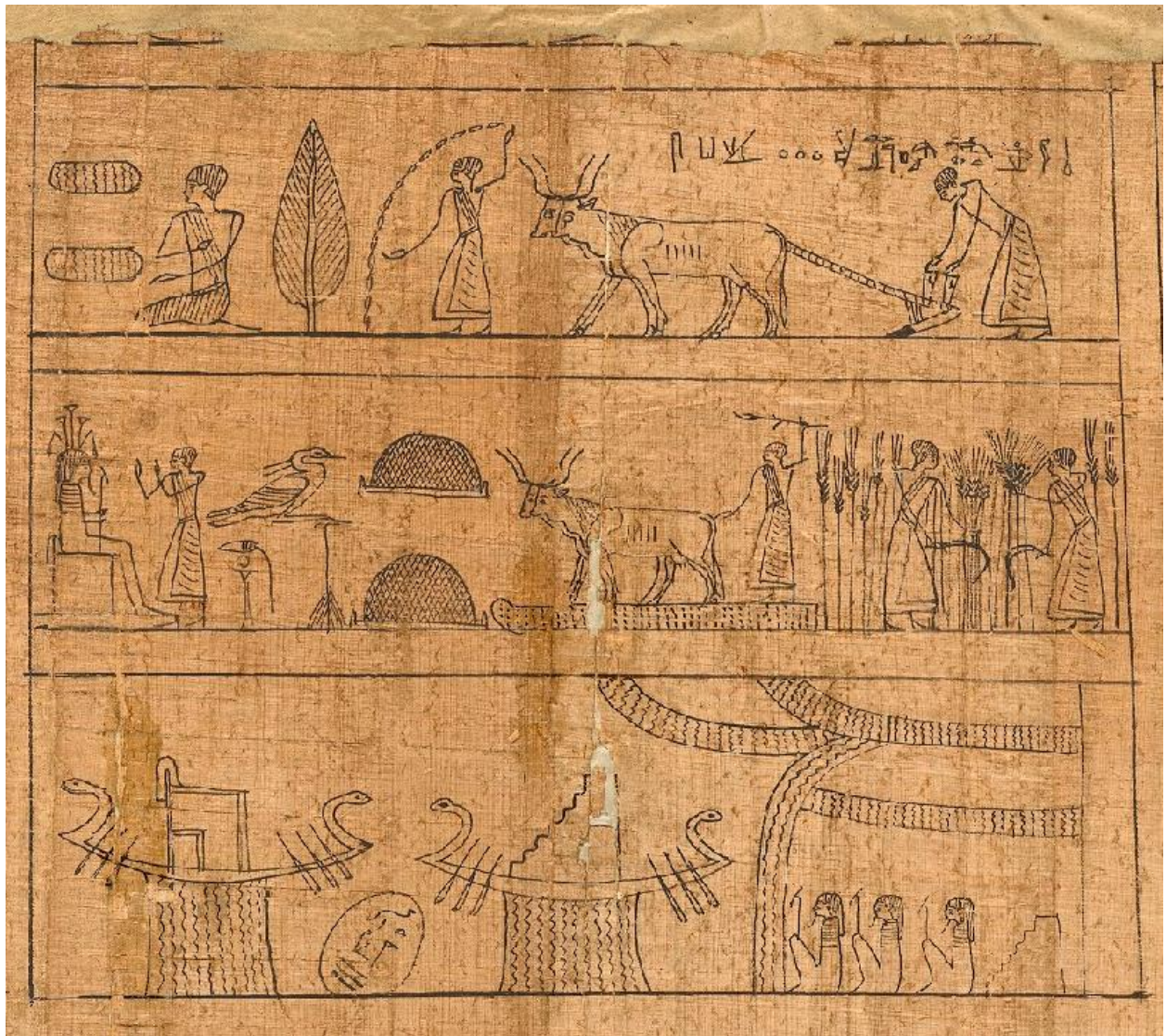


Figure 1. Illustration for Book of the Dead Spell 110 from the Papyrus of Pasherienashakhet (Getty 83.AI.46.1)



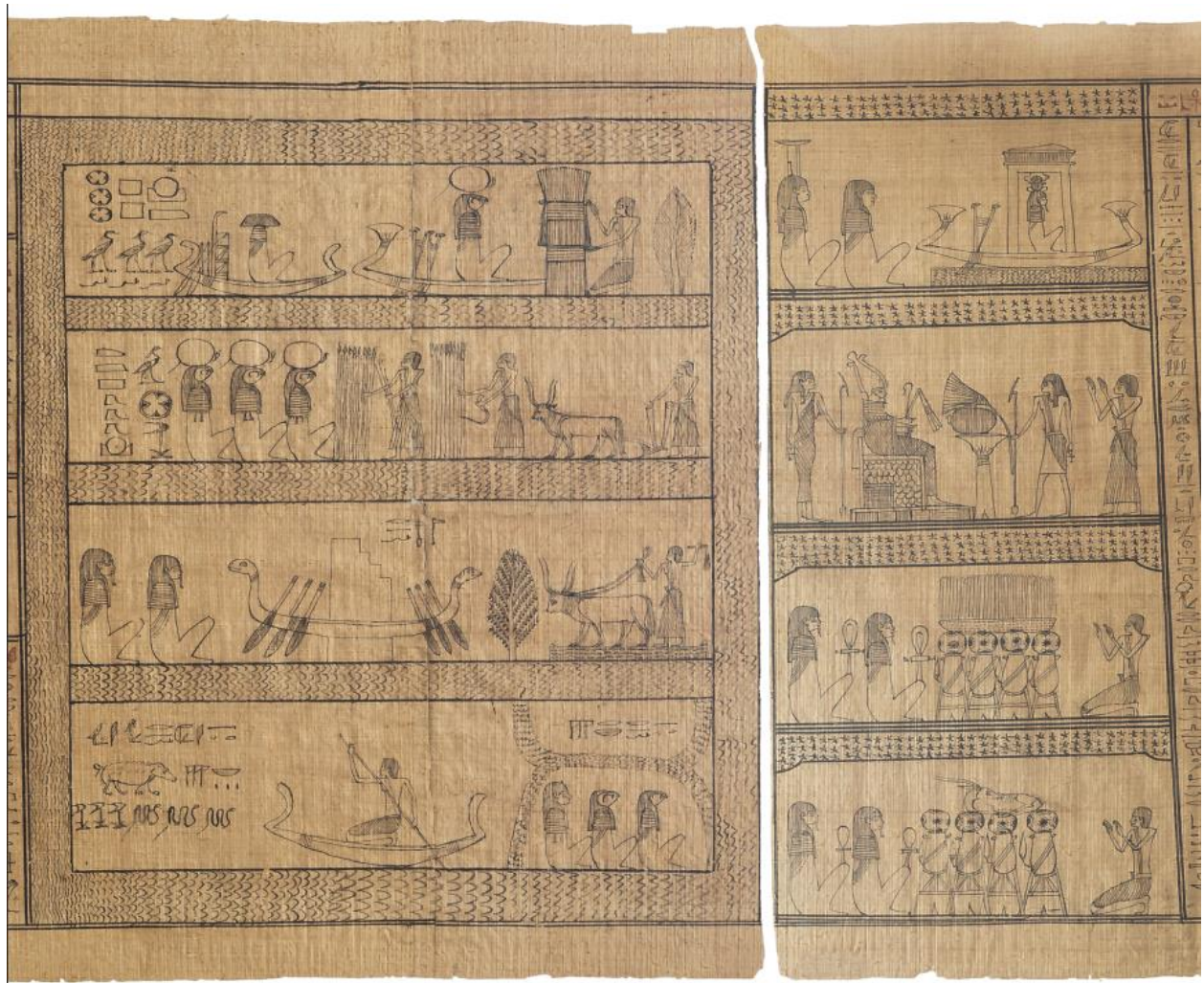


Figure 2. Book of the Dead spell 110 from Papyrus Milbank (OIM E10486G-H)

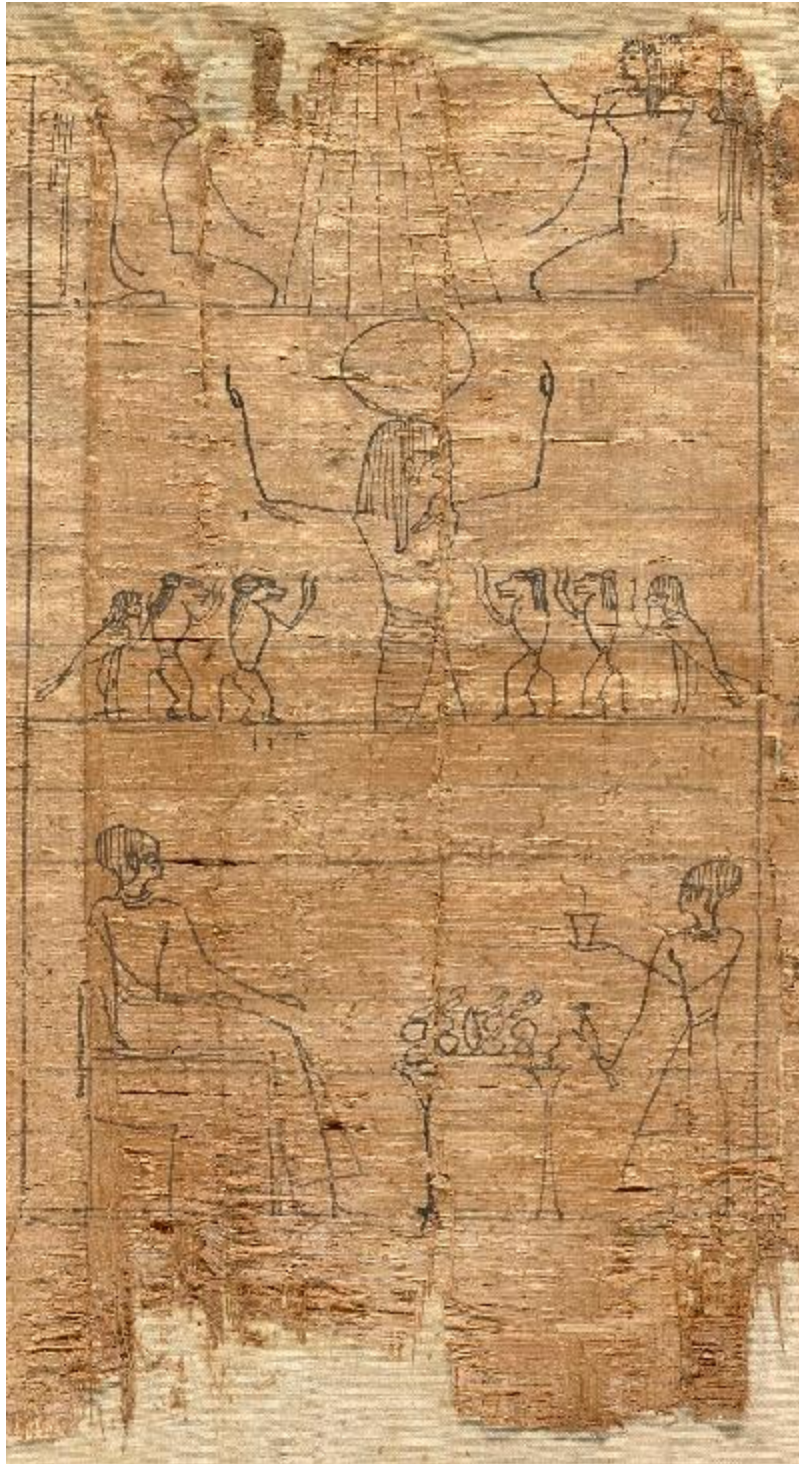


Figure 3. Spell 16, showing the newly risen sun as an illustration for the solar hymns in spell 15





Figure 4. Illustrations showing the ba-soul rejoining the corpse, as well as leaving and returning to the tomb.



Figure 5. The deceased shown worshipping the sun in its form of Khepri.





Figure 6. Isis and Nephthys shown as human-headed birds flanking the funerary bier of the deceased.

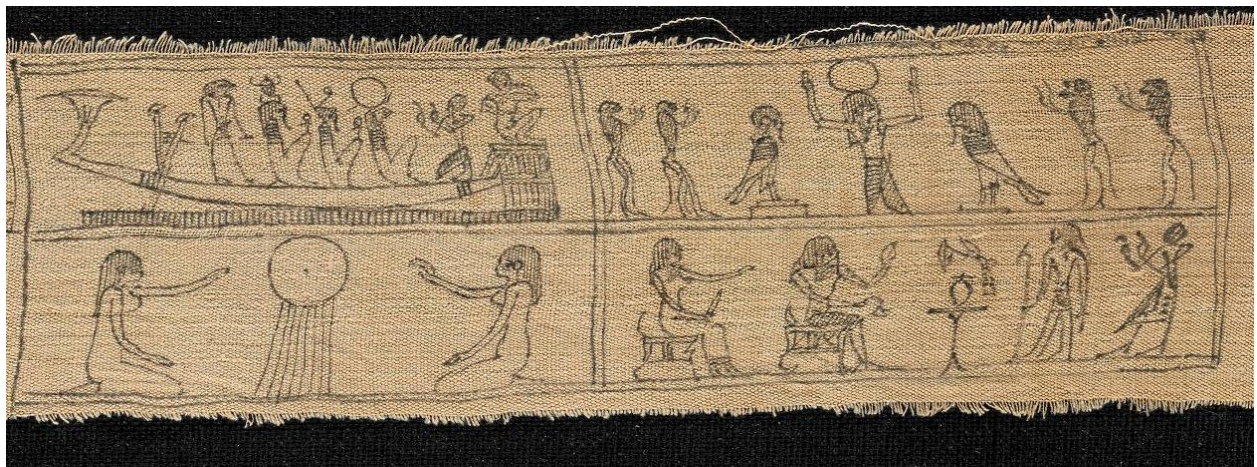


Figure 7. Scenes from spell 16 showing the newly risen sun being welcomed by baboons, worshiped by two female figures, and the deceased aboard the solar boat.



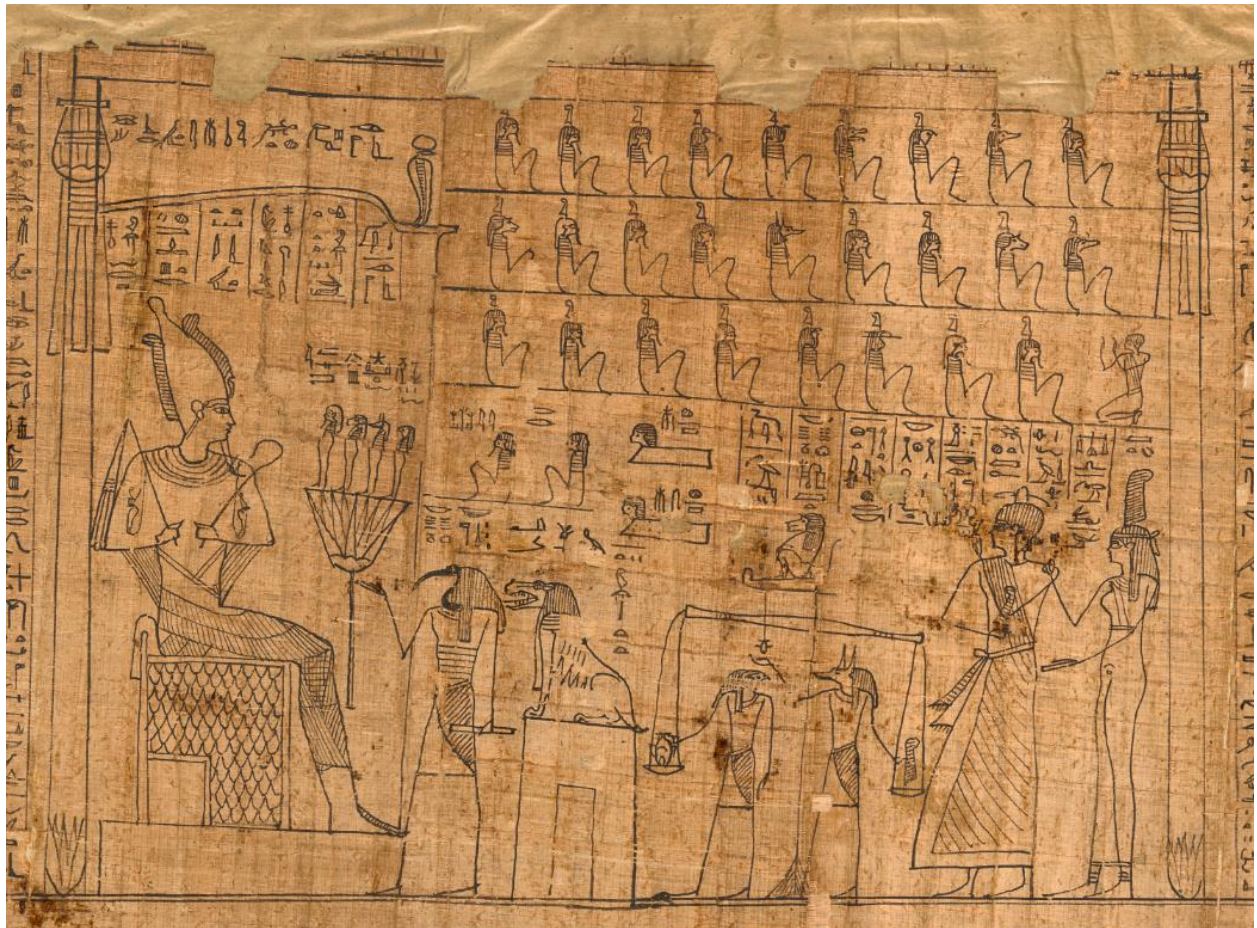


Figure 8. The illustration associated with spell 125 where the deceased is led into the judgment hall of Osiris where the outcome was recorded by Thoth.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Lapp 2004, pl. 49, spell 110, col. 2 (photograph); Naville 1886, pl. CXII (transcription); Naville 1886, vol. 2, p. 249 (transcription); Allen 1974, p. 87 (translation); Quirke 2013, p. 244 (transliteration and translation); Carrier 2009, p. 387 (transliteration and translation).

<sup>2</sup> Taylor 2010b, pp. 241–244.

<sup>3</sup> The contents of spell 110 derived from much earlier spells among the Coffin Texts, for example CT 464–468, see Faulkner 2004, pp. 90–101.

<sup>4</sup> Wilkinson 2010, p. 148. In many places, both scholarly and popular, readers will find descriptions like the following: “There is every reason for believing that the prehistoric Egyptian expected to eat, and to drink and to lead a life of pleasure in the region where he imagined his heaven to be, and there is little doubt that he thought the body in which he would live there would be not unlike the body which he had while he was upon earth” (Budge 1908, pp. 160–161); “Life in the afterworld was thus not appreciably different from a person’s former life on earth, except that it was conducted in a different place” (Muller 2001, p. 32); “Life after death was not significantly different from life itself; existence was simply transferred to another, more remote realm” (Teeter 2011, p. 120); “Alternatively, they appear as living beings dressed in the costume of everyday life. In this guise, they are often represented in the *Book of the Dead* in a specific environment called the Field of Reeds or Field of Offerings. This is a kind of ‘paradise’ reserved for the righteous, which is a reflection of the environment of Egypt, with waterways and cultivated banks” (Taylor 2001, p. 34); “The Field of Reeds was a place of plenitude. The grain grew unbelievably high there, and the deceased received a field that he cultivated himself so as to lead a carefree life, consuming its yield forever. From the point of view of our own concepts, it was quite a fertile and active paradise; there could be no question of meadows filled with flowers or of idleness” (Assmann 2005, p. 233). *Contra*: “It has become a commonplace to say that the Egyptians imagined life after death as a replica of life upon earth. But this is only a partial truth and its inadequacy is generally obscured by the curious nature of our evidence” (Frankfort 1948, p. 89); “The Egyptians believed that the transformed being called an *akh* was capable of a meaningful existence in the afterlife. But existence in the next world was thought to be only somewhat like existence in this life” (O’Rourke 2016 p. 25).

<sup>5</sup> It is important to point out here that spells falling within the designation *Book of the Dead* were attested for a span of roughly two thousand years, from approximately 1750 BC until 50 AD. By including earlier iterations of these spells under the modern categories of Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts, we can add another 600 years to that, going back to the pyramid of Unas (ca. 2350 BC). In this essay, I present how these spells imply certain religious beliefs on the part of the ancient Egyptians and I draw from manuscripts across this attested range of dates. However, I must caution the reader that such a presentation itself may imply that ancient Egyptian beliefs were static across these millennia. This was certainly not the case. Like any culture, ancient Egyptian beliefs were dynamic and demonstrated development across time and space. The synthetic presentation here is meant to give the reader a general sense of the character of the beliefs as suggested by these texts and associated cultural practices, without necessarily implying that such beliefs were present at a particular time or particular location or within every individual. For example, see the comments of Taylor 2010a, pp. 133–134.

<sup>6</sup> In the spell, this is repeated, but with further context of what happens in the field of reeds: “I will supply this field of yours, Offering, which you love and which you make, lord of wind. I will be glorified in it. I will eat in it. I will drink in it. I will plough in it. I will reap in it. I will mill in it. I will have sex in it. My words are powerful in it. I will not awaken from it” (Allen 1974, p. 87; Quirke 2013, p. 244).

<sup>7</sup> The famous scene in the tomb of Sennedjem, often extracted from its context, has been reproduced repeatedly in support of this description.

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<sup>8</sup> Examples are plentiful, but interpretations of the field of reeds as a permanent destination resembling modern concepts of “heaven” have overlooked the other imagery in these scenes. For example, notice the importance of the divine entities and worship in the papyrus of Imouthes (MMA 35.9.20). See Munro 2017, p. 62, fig. 4.21.

<sup>9</sup> The papyrus of Nebseny has what looks like *snhn=i* in place of *snhs=i*, a difference of two small strokes added to the cursive hieroglyphic signs. However, the intention seems clear since the root *snhs* was already attested in CT 464. See Wb. IV, p. 169; van der Molen 2000, p. 511.

<sup>10</sup> For *nwi=f*, see Wb. II, p. 220.

<sup>11</sup> The papyrus of Nebseny here has *h3.wy* “two thousand,” a seeming corruption. A better sense is given by following Carrier 2009, p. 388.

<sup>12</sup> Reading *r mrr s.t-ib=f* “according to what his desire wants.”

<sup>13</sup> Munro 2017, p. 62. Note that the pharaoh appeared in the field of reeds as well. See Barbash 2017, p. 79, fig. 6.5.

<sup>14</sup> For spell 6, see Allen 1974, pp. 8–9; Carrier 2009, pp. 21–22; Quirke 2013, pp. 21–22. For an “Orientalist” reinterpretation of spell 6, see Nyord 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Literally, the word means “an effective one,” and there is also a connection to liminality in the root *i3h* “to shine light, be bright.” See Barbash 2011, pp. 36–39 for discussion, who, however, questions the connection with *i3h*. The connection between being an *akh*-spirit and Osiris is clear in spell 144 where the dead spirit is called *i3h nb i3h.w i3h i3y Wsir* “the *akh*-spirit, lord of the *akh*-spirits, an *akh*-spirit which Osiris made” (Quirke 2013, p. 325).

<sup>16</sup> *htp-di-ny-sw.t* “An offering which the king gives.” See the right column above the image of Nebseni being purified in Naville 1886, pl. CXXIII.

<sup>17</sup> *rh.kwi rn n ntr pn* “I know the name of this god” and *rh.kwi mw niw.wt sp3.wt sw.w hnw sh.t htp nty wi [im]* “I know the waters of the cities, nomes, and marshes inside the field of offerings where I am.” For text, see Naville 1886, pls. CXXI–CXXII; Lapp 2004, pls. 50–51; Carrier 2009, pp. 389 and 392; Quirke 2013, pp. 245–246.

<sup>18</sup> *n sk=i im=s wsr hk3.w=i im=s* “I have not perished in it because my magic is strong in it,” going back to Coffin Texts spell 464 in CT V, p. 345; Faulkner 2004, p. 90. Many variants in spell 110 of the *Book of the Dead* insert *nk=i im=s* “I will copulate in it” as *n sk=i im=s nk=i im=s wsr md.t=i im=s* “I have not perished in it. I will copulate in it. My word is powerful in it.” See Naville 1886, pls. CXXI; Lapp 2004, pls. 49; Quirke 2013, pp. 244.

<sup>19</sup> For example, see the rubric to spell 136: “He will be a holy god ... He will be like a god who is worshipped by the living like Re every day” (Quirke 2013, p. 303).

<sup>20</sup> *Book of the Dead* spell 3, Papyrus of Nu, Lapp 1997, pl. 39; Quirke 2013, p. 18. Note that PN here stands for “personal name” and occurs where an individual’s name would be inserted in the manuscript.

<sup>21</sup> See the related “emergence principle” of Nyord 2020, pp. 6–7, as description of Egyptian ideas of creation as passing from undifferentiated (e.g., *Nwn*) to the differentiation of creation (e.g., *hpr.w*).

<sup>22</sup> Occasionally shown as a darkened, shadow-like figure.

<sup>23</sup> For “death as disassociation,” see Assmann 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Smith 2009, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Based on the index in Backes 2005, pp. 51–52 and 172, which, however, reflects a Ptolemaic Period manuscript. References to the *ka*-spirit decreased throughout the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods when the *ba*-soul was more commonly found.

<sup>26</sup> Assmann 2005, pp. 96–102; Smith 2009, pp. 5–6; Smith 2017, p. 46.

<sup>27</sup> Assmann 2005, pp. 97.

<sup>28</sup> *i.nd-hr=k k3=i h3.w=i mk wi ii.kwi hr=k* from the papyrus of Nu, see Quirke 2013, p. 232.

<sup>29</sup> In many texts, the shadow (*sw.t*) is also closely associated with the term *i3h*, but in its meaning of “effective spirit,” but also in relation to luminosity and *i3h*-spirits’ close connection with the sun.

<sup>30</sup> Allen 1988, pp. 25–30, 56–63.

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<sup>31</sup> The ancient Egyptian theologians addressed the matter of sustenance in the next world in spell 82 of the Book of the Dead. Perhaps responding to questions of what would happen for the deceased if they were to be without sustenance, spell 82 specifically addresses the possibility of eating one's own feces, reassuring the departed that they will have bread and beer: "Spell for becoming Ptah, eating bread, drinking beer, defecating with the buttocks, living in Heliopolis: ... As I have soared as a falcon, so have I cackled as a goose. On that side of the mount of the great festival have I alighted. My abomination! I will not eat it. Excrement is my abomination. I will not eat it, the abomination of my ka-spirit. It will not enter into my body. 'From what will you live,' so said the gods and blessed spirits to me. 'I will live. I will be strengthened through bread.' 'Will you eat it?' so said the gods and the blessed spirits to me. 'I will be strengthened. I will eat it under the branches of the tree of Hathor, my mistress, who makes offerings, who makes bread and beer, the drink of Helipolis." Quirke 2013, p. 194. As noted by Quirke, parallels for this content are found in spells 51, 52, and 189.

<sup>32</sup> For example, in the section on mound two in spell 149: *iw=i rh.kwi sb? hry-ib n sh.t ir.w prrw R' im=f m ib.t p.t* "I know the door in the midst of the field of reeds from which Re goes forth into the east of the sky" (Quirke 2013, p. 359).

<sup>33</sup> A clear indication that our caution in imposing linearity is warranted is the fact that spell 110, the spell concerned with the field of reeds, occurs in the so-called Saite Recension before the judgment hall of Osiris in spell 125, if we are reading the texts on the papyrus in the traditional order. As the state of being for the individual in the field of reeds was that of *akh*-spirit, we have to assume that they had already successfully passed the judgment. Thus, we should attempt, as much as possible, from imposing a linear interpretation on the *Book of the Dead* manuscripts.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. the *rerek*-snake in spell 149: *iw hh=f m ht iw hf?w im=f Rrk rn=f ny-sw mh 7 m ?w n psd=f nh=f m ih.w* "His flame is fire. A serpent is in it. Rerek is his name. He is seven cubits in the length of his back and he lives on the *akh*-spirits." See further Lucarelli 2006; Lucarelli 2010; Lucarelli 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Roberson 2012, pp. 212–219.

<sup>36</sup> For example, mound four in BD 149: *dbn=i p.t tn iw=k m int.t wdd.t pw r=k tp t?* "I will traverse this sky, while you are in fetters. It is what is ordered against you on earth" (Quirke 2013, p. 360).

<sup>37</sup> Munro 2010, p. 58.

<sup>38</sup> Following Carrier 2009, p. 86.

<sup>39</sup> Naville 1886, pl. CXIII; Quirke 2013, p. 225; Stünkel 2015, pp. 414–415.

<sup>40</sup> Scalf 2017, p. 26. The ritual context is at times quite explicit, including the dramatists themselves, e.g., spell 137: "Recitation over four flames of red linen, anointed with Libyan oil, in the hands of four men upon whose arms are written the names of the children of Horus" (Allen 1974, p. 114; Quirke 2013, p. 309).

<sup>41</sup> Bread, beer, and cuts of meat are referenced in Egyptian texts as a generic stereotype for bountiful living. For example, Djedi is introduced in Papyrus Westcar as a man who "eats 500 (loaves of) bread and a shoulder of beef as meat and drinks 100 jars of beer throughout the day" (*iw=f wnm t.w 500 rmn n iw? m iw f hn' swr hnq.t ds 100 r-mn-m hrw*). In another tale in the same papyrus, Pharaoh Khufu commands: "Have an offering made of 1000 bread (loaves), 100 jars of beer, 1 ox, and 2 lumps of incense for the king of Upper and Lower Egypt Nebka, justified, and have 1 cake, one jar of beer, a large cut of beef, and a lump of incense for the chief lector priest Webainer" (*imi di.tw m? t 1000 hnq.t ds 100 iw? 1 sntr p?d 2 n ny-sw.t bity Nb-k? m?-hrw hn' rdi.t di.tw šns 1 hnq.t dwi w iw f wr sntr p?d 1 n hry-h?b.t hry-tp Wb?-inr*).

<sup>42</sup> *ir rh r? pn iri.tw=f m sš hr qrs=f r?-pw iw=f pri=f m hrw m hprw nb mry=f iw di.tw n=f t hnq.t wr n iw f hr h? t n.t ntr ? iw=f pri=f r sh.t ir.w iw di.tw n=f it bty im hr=f w?d.(w) mi wnn=f tp t? iw=f iri=f mrr.t=f nb.t mi nw n ntr.w nty.w im=s šs m? h? n sp* For various treatments, see Quirke 2013, p. 174.

<sup>43</sup> Allen 1974, p. 122; Quirke 2013, p. 328



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<sup>44</sup> Cf. versions in Naville 1886, pl. LXXX; Lapp 1997, pl. 18; Allen 1978, p. 62; Quirke 2013, p. 167.

<sup>45</sup> PN *iwt n=k Dḥwty ds=f ḥr mḏj.wt n.wt md.w-ntr*, Naville 1886, pl. CXCI; Quirke 2013, p. 422.

<sup>46</sup> Quirke 2013, p. 207.

<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that illustrations in the papyrus of Nebseny commonly show him holding a papyrus. However, this appears to be reflective of Nebseny's occupation as an illustrator and copyist (Lapp 2004, p. 27). With that said, spell 94, the spell for water pot and writing palette, portrays the dead as calling out to "the keeper of the book of Thoth" and describes the recording of the "recitations of the great god" and the dead as "equipped with the writings of Thoth." Spell 95 shows the deceased with the water pot and palette of Thoth. Both spells provide a ritual transformation by which the spell-caster takes on the persona of Thoth (Spell 94: *mk wi m sš* "Look, I am the scribe"), thereby allowing them to craft their own *Book of the Dead* spells.

<sup>48</sup> For example, Papyrus BM EA 9995, 22–23: *šy.t n sns n Dḥwty sšw=k* "A document of breathing of Thoth is your protection." For further references, see Scalf 2020, p. 161. As noted there, care should be taken to distinguish references to the "book of Thoth" denoting a funerary composition from the dialogue of scribal initiation called the "Book of Thoth" by its primary editors. There are also references among this literature to texts designated by the same ancient Egyptian description phrase as applied to the *Book of the Dead*, "spells of going forth in the day" (*pr.t m hrw*). For example, Papyrus Louvre E 10607, 9–1155: *iri n=t Dḥwty wpy-r? n sns sh=f n=t pri m hrw tšy=t st r tšy=t ḥw.t n rpy* "May Thoth make for you an opening of the mouth for breathing (document). May he write for you a (book of) going forth by day. May you take them to your tomb of rejuvenation."

<sup>49</sup> Papyrus Turin 1791 (*İw=f-nḥ*): *i wr q=f dd n i'b sš.w iry-? n Wsir r-ntt Wsir PN m?c-ḥrw ip.(w) ntri.(w) wsr.(w)* "O great one, he will enter to speak to the collector of writings, the doorkeeper of Osiris, that Osiris PN, justified, is reckoned, divine, and strong" (Allen 1974, pp. 41 and 63; See also CT 228 in Faulkner 2004, p. 181). Papyrus Louvre III 93: *q=(i) dd=(i) n i'b sš.w iry-? n Wsir [ḥr-ntt w]i 3ḥ.kwi ip.kwi wsr.kwi ntr.kwi* "I will enter so that I may speak to the collector of writings, the doorkeeper of Osiris, [because] I am effective, reckoned, strong, and divine" (Quirke 2013, p. 168).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. spell 130: *ndr Wsir PN sš.w šsp=f ḥtp.t 'pr=f Dḥwty m iri.t n=f* "Osiris PN will grasp the writings. He will receive the offerings. He will equip Thoth with what is done for him" (Quirke 2013, p. 289).

<sup>51</sup> Quirke 2013, p. 323.

<sup>52</sup> Allen 1974, p. 132; Quirke 2013, p. 340. Note also in spell 146 in Allen 1974, p. 135.

<sup>53</sup> The latter is supported by the common "accounting" terminology (*ip*, *ḥsb*, etc.) associated with the day of judgment.

<sup>54</sup> The rubrics very commonly reference the use of the spell on behalf of the deceased, but not necessarily by them. For example, spell 141: "Book which a man made for his father or his son at the festivals of the west." See translation and notes in Allen 1960, p. 226, pl. XXXIX; Allen 1974, p. 117.

<sup>55</sup> Naville 1886, pl. CXXXIX; Allen 1974, p. 101; Quirke 2013, p. 276.

<sup>56</sup> Lapp 1997, p. 78; Allen 1974, p. 115.