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The Egyptian Ouroboros:  
An Iconological and Theological Study

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

by

Dana Michael Reemes

2015

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Egyptian Ouroboros:  
An Iconological and Theological Study

by

Dana Michael Reemes

Doctor of Philosophy in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Jacco Dieleman, Chair

This study examines a well-established idea in normative Egyptological discourse, that there exists in the inventory of Egyptian symbolism a distinct and unique symbol called *sed-em-ra* (‘tail-in-mouth’) in Egyptian, though usually referred to today by the Greek term *ouroboros* (‘tail-devouring’), being the image of a serpent arranged in a circle with the tip of its tail in its mouth, and expressive of specific meanings such as “endless time” and “eternity,” among others. However, a close examination of relevant iconographic and textual sources reveals that this Egyptological ouroboros is largely an illusion, and one that distorts understanding of Egyptian material by importing into it ideas that properly belong to the history of the post-pharaonic reception of the ouroboros icon, such as the idea that the ouroboros was primarily a symbol of the recurrent solar year, which had its origin with Latin authors, or the idea that the ouroboros symbolizes time and eternity, which is a tradition no older than the Italian Renaissance. Yet it is *this* latter ouroboros of the Renaissance iconographers and emblem books, an unquestioned part

of the intellectual environment in which the discipline of Egyptology historically emerged, that induced nineteenth and twentieth century Egyptologists to unhesitatingly single out the ouroboros for special notice as the “serpent of eternity,” an interpretation not supported by Egyptian sources. A fresh hermeneutical approach requires the abandonment of such preconceptions, starting with rejection of the idea that the Egyptian ouroboros is a distinct symbol with specific meanings attached. Once the term ‘ouroboros’ is used only in a limited and purely descriptive sense, it becomes possible to understand what the icon may be intended to express within the larger conceptual and iconographic context in which occurrences are embedded. This approach makes it clear that the icon was never a discrete symbol in Egypt, but rather a possible variant amongst related iconography that might convey similar meanings. A detailed reassessment of relevant primary sources shows that the icon is primarily associated with the idea of protective enclosure, conceived of as a divine force functioning on multiple levels: cosmic, solar, funereal, and individual.

The dissertation of Dana Michael Reemes is approved.

Kathlyn M. Cooney

David L. Blank

Jacco Dieleman, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

*For Eva Marie, light of my life.*

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## Sigla

( ) = In transliterations, indicates supplied elements of a word known to be present, but usually unwritten in the hieroglyphic and hieratic.

< > = In transliterations, indicates supplied elements that should be present but were not written due to error of the ancient scribe. In discourse, indicates a grapheme.

[ ] = In transliterations, indicates a lacuna (or blank space where a name might be filled in). Anything appearing in square brackets has been supplied.

// = In discourse, indicates a phoneme or phonemes of Egyptian.

## List of Abbreviations

Below are common Egyptological abbreviations of journals, series, and institutions, generally following the usage of the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*. For the convenience of the reader, however, some of the more rare and unusual citations are given in full in the footnotes.

ÄAT = Ägypten und Altes Testament, Wiesbaden.

ÄA = Ägyptologische Abhandlungen, Wiesbaden.

AH = Aegyptiaca Helvetica, Basel and Geneva.

AIGN = Arbeiten aus dem Institut für Geschichte der Naturwissenschaft, Heidelberg.

AnAe = Analecta Aegyptiaca, Copenhagen.

ArAs = *Artibus Asiae*, Zurich.

ASAE = *Annales du service des antiquités de l'Égypte*, Cairo.

ASE = Archaeological Survey of Egypt, London.

BAe = Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca, Brussels.

BdÉ = Bibliothèque d'étude, Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Cairo.

BES = Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar, New York.

BIFAO = *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale*, Cairo.

BMMA = *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York.

BMQ = *The British Museum Quarterly*, London.

BSFE = *Bulletin de la Société française d'égyptologie*, Paris.

CCO = Catalogue des cylindres orientaux, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

CdE = *Chronique d'Égypte*, Brussels.

CG = Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire, Cairo.

CNRS = Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris.

DAWW = Denkschrift der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Vienna.

EES = Egypt Exploration Society, London.

EPRO = Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain, Leiden.

ERA = Egyptian Research Account, London.

*ET = Études et Travaux, Travaux du centre d'archéologie méditerranéenne de l'Académie polonaise des sciences, Warsaw.*

*FuF = Forschungen und Fortschritte, Berlin.*

*GM = Göttinger Miszellen, Göttingen.*

GOF = Göttinger Orientforschungen, Wiesbaden.

HAPS = Heidelberger Akten der von-Portheim-Stiftung, Heidelberg.

IFAO = Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Cairo.

*JARCE = Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt, Boston.*

*JEA = Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, London.*

*JEOL = Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap "Ex Oriente Lux," Leiden.*

*JHS = Journal of Hellenic Studies, Athens.*

*JNES = Journal of Near Eastern Studies, Chicago.*

LAPO = Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient. Textes égyptiens, Paris.

*LingAeg = Lingua Aegyptia. Journal of Egyptian Language Studies, Göttingen.*

*MÄS = Münchener Ägyptologische Studien, Berlin and Munich.*

*MDIAK = Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo, Mainz.*

MMAF = Mémoires de la Mission Archéologie française au Caire, Cairo.

MVEOL = Mededeelingen en Verhandelingen van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap "Ex Oriente Lux," Leiden.

NAWG = Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Göttingen.

NISABA = Religious Texts Translation Series, NISSBA, Leiden.

OBO = Orbis biblicus et orientalis, Fribourg/Göttingen.

OIP = Oriental Institute Publications. University of Chicago, Chicago.

OLA = Orientalia Louvaniensia Analecta, Leuven.

OMRO = Oudheidkundige Mededelingen uit het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden, Leiden.

*Or* = *Orientalia*, Rome.

*OrAnt* = *Oriens Antiquus*, Rome.

PL = Patrologiæ, Paris.

*PSBA* = *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, London.

*RdÉ* = *Revue d'égyptologie*, Paris.

*RecTrav* = *Recueil de travaux relatifs à la philologie et à l'archéologie égyptiennes et assyriennes*, Paris.

*SAK* = *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur*, Hamburg.

SAOC = Studies in Oriental Civilization, the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Chicago.

SAT = Studien zum Altägyptischen Totenbuch, Universität Bonn, Bonn.

SDAIK = Sonderschrift des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo, Mainz.

SHAW = Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Heidelberg.

UGAÄ = Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ägyptens, Leipzig and Berlin.

*WdO* = *Die Welt des Orients*, Göttingen.

YES = Yale Egyptological Studies, Yale Egyptological Seminar, New Haven, Conn.

*ZÄS* = *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*, Leipzig and Berlin.

*ZPE* = *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, Bonn.

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## Preface

The explicit purpose of this study is the revision of certain Egyptological conceits that have attached themselves to the ouroboros icon and have deformed our understanding of its history and meaning in Egypt. Most occurrences of the ouroboros in Egypt are in symbolic displays whose concern is broadly eschatological, and because eschatology in Egypt is essentially inseparable from fundamental cosmogonic and cosmological conceptions, a study of the ouroboros also provides a perfect opportunity for closely examining those conceptions and their relationship to afterlife expectations. I have attempted to show how divine creative processes were understood both to create and sustain the cosmos, and how these same processes were understood to function on other levels as well, including the protection of the living individual and the transfiguration of the individual into divine life after death. As Egyptian priestly expression of such matters was often set forth in complex symbolic displays rather than purely written discourse, I have also offered suggestions for a methodological approach to the understanding of such displays involving the application of some basic ideas drawn from semiotics, as well as the concept of inclusive disjunction from basic logic. This should have a more general application for our understanding of Egyptian symbolic expression that goes well beyond merely revising our understanding of the ouroboros in Egypt. The application of this methodological approach can be seen in the following survey of ouroboros-related material from the earliest times to the end of pharaonic civilization, and whether or not it is truly useful in understanding relevant Egyptian sources is a judgment left entirely to the discerning reader.

As this has been the labor of some years, it is only natural that I bear a considerable debt of gratitude to the many persons who have made it all possible. I would like to thank my first

preceptor in the mysteries of Egyptian language, Edmund S. Meltzer, formerly of Claremont Graduate University, as also James M. Robinson, who introduced me to the pleasures of Coptic. I owe special thanks to Jan Assmann for originally suggesting the Egyptian ouroboros as a dissertation topic, and for our many pleasant conversations on related subjects. The title of the dissertation was the suggestion of Antonio Loprieno, to whom I also owe whatever slight competence I might have in Egyptian language, and who also awakened in me a certain sensitivity to linguistic issues.

My dissertation committee is also due very special and heartfelt thanks. This dissertation would most certainly never have seen completion without the sage advice and many useful suggestions of my committee chair Jacco Dieleman, whose admirable command of all stages of Egyptian is equaled only by his fine appreciation for the intellectual culture of the ancient Egyptian priesthood. Kara Cooney has also been steadfast in her encouragement and support of this project, for which I am very grateful. I must also sincerely thank David Blank for his close reading of the draft dissertation and for his many useful annotations.

Others who generously assisted my efforts in various ways include Stephan Johannes Seidlmayer of the *Altägyptisches Wörterbuch* project, Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, who kindly supplied me with a facsimile of an original slip of a citation that never made it into the great Berlin dictionary, Sally-Ann Ashton, Senior Assistant Keeper of Antiquities at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University, who was of great help in supplying a slide of the serpent on the Ramesses III sarcophagus, and Sarah Chapman, Birmingham Egyptology, for permission to make use of her excellent photographs of Bes amulets in the collection of the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Each of them has my sincerest thanks. I also wish to thank Katja Goebis for providing me with a copy of W.R.

Cooper's forgotten work on serpent myths in ancient Egypt, and am likewise grateful to Martin Brunold, historian of early astronomy, for altering me to many points of interest (not least, the role of Johannes de Sacrobusco in the history of the ouroboros), for providing me with copies of rare material from his private collection, and for kindly proofreading an early version of the manuscript.

The staff at the Young Research Library at UCLA is due both gratitude and respect for consistently good service and long toleration of my sometimes unusual needs. The Interlibrary Loan librarians are particularly deserving of recognition for making even the rarest and most exotic resources available to me, often on short notice.

I also owe a great deal to my dear friend Manfred Gebauer, gentleman and private scholar, who acted as my unfailing guide to the occasional intricacies of literary German.

My final expression of gratitude is reserved for my wife, Eva Marie Reemes, whose understanding and support continues to amaze me.

Santa Monica, 2015



## Vita

Dana Michael Reemes was born in Sacramento, California. He holds a baccalaureate in Religious Studies from the University of California, Berkeley, and a master's degree in Film from San Francisco State University. A published film historian, he spent over two decades as an animation artist in motion pictures and television. He returned to graduate work as a research fellow at the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity at Claremont Graduate University where he studied Egyptian language and Coptic, later earning a master's degree in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures (Egyptology) at the University of California, Los Angeles. He has taught Egyptian history and language at Loyola Marymount University, and Egyptian history and Coptic at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is presently adjunct faculty in the Department of History, California State University, Fullerton.

# Chapter 1

## The Ouroboros as Object of Study

L'Égyptologie sera exégèse, ou bien elle manquera son but et restera insignifiante.

--R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz, *Le Miracle Egyptien*.

The subject of the present study is an ancient symbol, the image of a serpent curved around into a circle such that the tip of its tail is at or in its mouth. Often called by the Greek term *ouroboros* (< *οὐροβόρος* 'tail-devouring'), this symbol continues to attract the occasional attention of researchers with a diverse array of interests such as mythography, iconology, analytical psychology, history of science, and history of religion, among others.<sup>1</sup> Modern scholars sometimes make mention, when pertinent to their work, of the historical origin of this symbol; it is generally said to be originally Egyptian, and a pharaonic example may then be adduced.<sup>2</sup> In this view of an Egyptian origin, present opinion is in general agreement with earlier generations of scholars, especially those of the Renaissance, and the classical and late antique authors from which they drew. Modern Egyptology, in particular, was inclined from its very inception to connect the ouroboros of tradition with Egypt. Thus in 1823, less than a year after announcing the principles of the decipherment of hieroglyphic writing to the world in the *Lettre à M. Dacier*, J.-F. Champollion featured an ouroboros as a decorative device in the center of the

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<sup>1</sup> It might also be added that, apart from serious academic research, the symbol of the ouroboros maintains a continued presence in works of modern esotericism such as those of Theosophists, "new age" writers, and occultists, and enjoys as well a certain vogue in popular culture, appearing in written fiction, film, television, graphic arts, and contemporary *tatouage*.

<sup>2</sup> Convenient examples of this are to be found in Arthur John Hopkins, *Alchemy, Child of Greek Philosophy* (New York: Columbia UP, 1934) 106-07, Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, trans. R.F.C. Hill, Bollingen Series 42 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954) 10-11, and in several works of C.G. Jung; see note 102.

title page of his *Panthéon égyptien*,<sup>3</sup> the first post-decipherment work on Egyptian religion, issued in parts between 1823 and 1831 (figure 1). The engraved frontispiece of the *Description de l'Égypte*,<sup>4</sup> published in 1809, provides an even earlier example, if one includes the *Description* as belonging to the beginnings of modern Egyptology. Prominently featured in the center of the bottom border is the initial of Napoleon surmounted by the imperial crown, the whole surrounded by an ouroboros (figure 2). These examples appear without explanation or commentary, as if none is needed; they appear naturally, as it were, as if they somehow belong in the contexts in which they find themselves. Their “Egyptian-ness” was not in doubt, yet it is now obvious that they are not derived from any ancient Egyptian original. Indeed, though both the *Panthéon* and the *Description* contain a wealth of Egyptian iconographic material, there is no ouroboros to be found in either.<sup>5</sup> The ouroboroi of the *Panthéon* and the *Description* represent instead a continuation of the tradition of Renaissance emblematics and in particular the conventions of the printed emblem books. Compare the *Panthéon* and the *Description* examples with one that is typical of the Late Renaissance (figure 3), in this case the first emblem from the *Amorum emblemata* of Otto van Veen, published in Antwerp in 1608. Here one sees a *putto*-like Eros, with bow and arrows, seated upon his quiver and surrounded by a circular ouroboros.

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<sup>3</sup> J.-F. Champollion, *Panthéon égyptien, collection des personnages mythologiques de l'ancienne Égypte, d'après les monuments* (Paris: 1823-31).

<sup>4</sup> [Napoleonic Commission] *Description de l'Égypte, ou recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française, publié par les ordres de sa majesté l'empereur Napoléon le grand. Antiquités, planches*. vol. 1 (Paris: 1809). The frontispiece was designed by mechanical engineer (and later architect) Antoine Cécile.

<sup>5</sup> However, plate 86 of the *Description, Antiquités, planches*, vol. 2 bears an image of the multi-headed serpent protecting the recumbent form of Re-Khepri which is found at the end of hour six in the *Amduat*, copied in this instance from the example in the tomb of Ramesses VI. Though this serpent is relevant to the history of the ouroboros (as explained later in this chapter and more fully in Chapter 3), the creators of the *Description* did not see this serpent as one, identifying it only as one among several “*sujets mystérieux*” found in the tombs of the Valley of the Kings.

Above the emblem, the motto *AMOR AETERNUS* informs us of the meaning of the whole (“Eternal Love”), while the epigram below the emblem says, of the ouroboros, that “the endless serpent ring unending time doth seem.”<sup>6</sup> As a literary genre, the emblem book had emerged full-blown with the appearance of the *Emblematum liber* of Andrea Alciato, first published unauthorized in Augsburg in 1531, followed in 1534 by an expanded authorized edition in Paris, and numerous later editions. There were “Egyptian” and ouroboric associations from the start, as evinced by Alciato’s claim that he was following the example of the hieroglyphs of Chaeremon and Horapollo,<sup>7</sup> and the appearance of an ouroboros in Alciato’s *Emblema CXXXIII* (figure 4), an allegory expressing “*Ex litterarum studiis immortalitatem acquiri*” (“That immortality is attained by literary studies”). Further inquiry into the role of emblem books in the transmission of the ouroboros down to the dawn of Egyptology must for the moment be deferred.

Yet an Egyptian origin for what came to be known as the ouroboros is not in doubt, as will be amply confirmed by much of the present study. One might well ask, however, whether or not what will here be termed the “classic” ouroboros of the emblem books and of early Egyptological interest (the relatively fixed, stable icon of an encircled serpent with its tail in its mouth, expressive of ideas such as renewal, cyclic time, eternity, and immortality) is identical with the ouroboros of pharaonic Egypt. A close, unprejudiced examination of the relevant

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<sup>6</sup> Metrical versions of each epigram are given in three languages, Latin, English, and Italian.

<sup>7</sup> Chaeremon was a native Egyptian priest of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE who achieved fame as an Alexandrian scholar (according to the *Suda*), and was eventually summoned to Rome as tutor to Nero. Among other writings on Egyptian subjects, Chaeremon wrote a treatise on Egyptian hieroglyphs, now lost, but of which a substantial fragment is preserved in a work by the Byzantine scholar Johannes Tzetzes, through which it would have been known to Alciato. See Pieter Willem van der Horst, *Chaeremon, Egyptian Priest and Stoic Philosopher. The fragments collected and translated with explanatory notes*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), cf. Samuel Birch, “On the Lost Book of Chæremon on Hieroglyphics,” *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom* 3, 2nd ser. (1850) 385-390. Chaeremon may have been a source for Horapollo, a Greco-Egyptian antiquary of the 4th century, whose *Hieroglyphica* was well-known to Renaissance intellectuals and artists; the second hieroglyph explained in the *Hieroglyphica* is an ouroboros. See the discussion and references for Horapollo below in this chapter.

Egyptian sources suggests no such absolute identity, though there is nonetheless clear evidence that the classic ouroboros developed out of Egyptian antecedents. It is also clear that an uncritical acceptance of an Egyptian origin for the classic ouroboros of later ages has led some Egyptologists who concern themselves with such things into a degree of error and misunderstanding. There has been a tendency to read back into the Egyptian material ideas that belong more properly to Late Antiquity or the Renaissance, even though the importation of such ideas does not seem particularly warranted by consideration of the Egyptian primary sources in their own contexts. To some extent, an Egyptological fiction has developed that has detached itself from the primary sources and, unquestioned, has taken on a life of its own. Exegesis has become eisegesis, and an *interpretatio græca et romana* (and *interpretatio "renaissance-iana"*) has given birth to a *interpretatio ægyptologiaca*. Any serious attempt to comprehensively reassess materials relative to the history and meaning of the ouroboros in Egypt must, therefore, begin by undoing somewhat the *communis opinio* that unnecessarily deforms and limits the present understanding of the subject.

The problem is twofold, being both linguistic and iconological in nature. On the linguistic side is the claim that the Egyptian expression *sd-m-r3* 'tail-in-mouth' refers to the ouroboros, and the implication that this expression is the likely origin of the Greek term *οὐροβόρος* 'tail-devouring' through a process of *interpretatio græca*. There is then the question of just what ouroboros might mean in relation to the Egyptian sources, and how preconceptions associated with the term affect attempts at objective analysis of the Egyptian iconography. Once such preconceptions are set aside, the scope of relevant iconological material and associated ideas will be seen to be somewhat broader and their internal organization more coherent, as new hermeneutic possibilities present themselves. The remainder of this chapter is therefore devoted

to dealing rather fully with the linguistic and terminological issues, and then to sketching an outline of the iconological issues and hermeneutic perspectives sufficient to lay the groundwork for the chapters that follow.

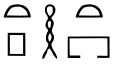
It has been stated often enough that the expression *sd-m-r3* ‘tail-in-mouth’ is the Egyptian equivalent of the term *ouroboros*.<sup>8</sup> The point is made almost casually, as an aside, as if it were a settled truth beyond any need of factual support or documentation. Indeed, this idea has been canonized by inclusion in an “*Uroboros*” entry in the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*,<sup>9</sup> and yet *sd-m-r3*, strictly speaking, *never* occurs anywhere as an Egyptian name or term for the *ouroboros*, as will be seen below in a close examination of all relevant textual sources. How, then, could such a view arise? The problem began with a conjecture by Heinrich Brugsch in his pioneering *Hieroglyphisch-demotisches Wörterbuch*. Under an entry for *sd*<sup>10</sup> (‘tail’, *set* in Brugsch’s pre-Erman transliteration system), a passage from *Spruch I* of the Metternich Stela is quoted and translated as meaning that a serpent has its tail in its maw (“*ihr Schwanz ist an ihrem Rachen*”), an apparent example of a textual or ‘literary’ *ouroboros* image. This is directly followed by a line from the so-called Victory Stela of Piankhi, in which *sd-m-r3* appears as an idiomatic expression (“*als Redensart*”); the besieger of a city makes a *sd-m-r3* (“*er hat sie [sc. die Stadt] zu einem Schwanz am Maule gemacht*”). Brugsch’s wording is terse, but the clear implication is that *sd-m-*

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<sup>8</sup> For a representative but by no means exhaustive sampling see: Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian, The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1997) 202; Erik Hornung, *Die Nachfahrt der Sonne, Eine altägyptische Beschreibung des Jenseits* (Düsseldorf/Zürich: Artemis & Winkler, 1991) 94; László Kákósy, “Ouroboros on Magical Healing Statues,” in *Hermes Aegyptiacus, Egyptological studies for BH Stricker*, Discussions in Egyptology Special Number 2, ed. Terence DuQuesne (Oxford: DE Publications, 1995) 123.

<sup>9</sup> László Kákósy, “*Uroboros*,” *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. 6, ed. Wolfgang Helck and Wolfhart Westendorf (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986) cols. 886-93.


<sup>10</sup> Heinrich Brugsch, *Hieroglyphisch-demotisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 4, (Leipzig: 1868) 1349-50.

*r3* is a metaphor for the besieging army encircling the city, and that this metaphor is related conceptually to the image of a serpent with its tail in its maw as in the previous textual example from the Metternich Stela. As will be seen shortly below, *sd-m-r3* in the Victory Stela of Piankhi and elsewhere is subject to quite another interpretation; moreover, the word that Brugsch had translated as “*Rachen*,” , *tpht*, clearly refers not to the serpent’s maw or jaws, but to the hole or cavern of the serpent. The brief passage is as follows:<sup>11</sup>




*3wj sd=f m-ḥnt tpht=f*

May his tail extend within his burrow.

The presence of the determinative  should have been enough to dissuade Brugsch from his infelicitous choice. The sense of this passage seems obvious enough today, and one might wonder what it was that inclined Brugsch towards his interpretation. Like the editors of *Description de l'Égypte* and Champollion before him, Brugsch had fallen under the spell of the ouroboros. Having seen the ouroboroi and ouroboros-like images in the figurative elements of the Metternich Stela,<sup>12</sup> Brugsch naturally expected to find a reference to the ouroboros in the accompanying text, and thus he did so, mistaken though it was. Some years later, in the compiling the monumental *Wörterbuch der aegyptischen Sprache*, Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow ignored Brugsch’s mistaken Metternich Stela parallel, but adopted and expanded upon his interpretation of *sd-m-r3* as a metaphor derived from the idea of a serpent biting its tail. One

<sup>11</sup> C.E. Sander-Hansen, *Die Texte der Metternichstela*, AnAe 7 (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1956) 16.

<sup>12</sup> The ouroboroi and ouroboros-like images on the Metternich Stela are examined in Chapter 4.

innovation was the inclusion of an apparently similar phrase,  , *sd tp r3* ('tail upon mouth'), a presumed antecedent to *sd-m-r3*, said to be found in the Pyramid Texts (of which see below and in Chapter 2). The following definition of *sd-m-r3* is then given:

- I. Tail in the mouth
  - a) properly of the snake that bites itself in the tail
  - b) figuratively of the unbroken ring of a besieging army around a city
- II. As a verb:
  - to slaughter a great number<sup>13</sup>

The entry further states that the expression *sd-m-r3* is found from the New Kingdom on, and cites examples from the Kushite, Saite, and Ptolemaic periods. This gives the impression that, after a tentative prefiguration in the Pyramid Texts, the expression *sd-m-r3* (derived from the image of a serpent biting his tail) emerges in the New Kingdom and continues into the period of Macedonian rule, at which point it would be only natural to draw the inference that *sd-m-r3* was the inspiration for the Greek term *ὄροβόρος*. That this is merely an attractive illusion, and that another interpretation of the facts is far more likely, will be made clear by an examination of how the editors of the *Wörterbuch* used their citations to support this view, followed by a critical examination of all relevant sources, including those not cited in the *Wörterbuch*.


To begin with, the supposed antecedent of *sd-m-r3* in the Pyramid Texts, *sd tp r3*, does not actually occur there or anywhere else, strictly speaking. The passage in question actually



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<sup>13</sup> I. *Schwanz im Maul*  
 a) *eigtl. von der Schlange die sich in den Schwanz beisst*  
 b) *bildlich vom lückenlosen Ring der Belagerer um eine Stadt*  
 II. *wie ein Verbum:*  
*vom Schlachten einer grossen Menge*

Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, eds., *Wörterbuch der aegyptischen Sprache*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1982) 364.



reads thus:<sup>14</sup>  . Ever since Kurt Sethe's *Übersetzung und Kommentar*,<sup>15</sup>

it has been customary to amend the  to  , reading *sd=k tp r3=k* 'your tail is in your mouth', thus making an apparent connection to *sd-m-r3* and the ouroboros. Though this passage has its place in the history of the ouroboros in Egyptology, it will be shown to have no relation to the origin of the expression *sd-m-r3*. A full discussion of this passage and the Egyptological misconceptions regarding it, together with its textual and conceptual context, will be found in Chapter 2.

In support of the primary definition for *sd-m-r3*, "properly of the snake that bites itself in the tail," the *Wörterbuch* cites the *Book of Amduat*, which is at least as old as the reign of Hatshepsut in the early New Kingdom,<sup>16</sup> and the Apophis compositions from papyrus Bremner-Rhind, the urtext of which dates to the New Kingdom.<sup>17</sup> Neither citation actually contains the expression *sd-m-r3* and, although serpent imagery is involved in each, neither example

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<sup>14</sup> Pyr. 689b = Kurt Sethe, *Die altägyptischen Pyramidentexte*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1908) 374.

<sup>15</sup> Kurt Sethe, *Übersetzung und Kommentar zu den altägyptischen Pyramidentexte*, vol. 3 (Glückstadt: J.J. Augustin, 1962) 260, 262; cf. R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1969) 129, James P. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, Writings from the Ancient World 23 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005) 91.

<sup>16</sup> The exact date of the composition of the *Book of Amduat* is unknown, although the oldest known fragments appear in the reburial of Tuthmosis I undertaken in the reign of Hatshepsut, establishing a *terminus post quem* sometime well before 1500 BCE. Erik Hornung, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999) 27, 173.

<sup>17</sup> A so-called 'colophon' (added by another hand after pBremner-Rhind was copied) gives a *terminus ante quem* of 312 or 311 BCE for the manuscript, a New Kingdom date for the original text has been established by Joris F. Borghouts on the basis of a fragmentary New Kingdom version in Turin; see A. Roccati, "Les papyrus de Turin," *BSFE* 99 (1984) 23. Faulkner had already suggested an earlier date for the original composition based on the presence of features of Late Egyptian; see Raymond O. Faulkner, *The Papyrus Bremner-Rhind (British Museum 10188)*, BAe 3 (Brussels: Édition de la fondation égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1933) viii-x and "The Bremner-Rhind Papyrus-I," *JEA* 22 (1936) 121; E.A. Wallis Budge, *Facsimiles of Egyptian Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1910) ix.

conforms to anything like the classic ouroboros, nor has anything to do with notions of cyclic time, eternity, etc. The *Wörterbuch* then goes on to illustrate the metaphorical use of *sd-m-r3*, “figuratively of the unbroken ring of the besieger of a city,” with a passage from the above-mentioned Victory Stela of Piankhi and with an Edfu text that is entirely out of place in this context, belonging instead with the last remaining *Wörterbuch* citations (from the Saite and Ptolemaic periods), which are offered as alleged examples of “a verb: to slaughter a great number.” What semantic relation this supposed verbal form of *sd-m-r3* might have to the image of a serpent biting its tail—metaphorical or otherwise—is left without comment.

An alternative understanding of the history and meaning of *sd-m-r3* begins with the timely response made by Charles Wycliffe Goodwin to Brugsch’s conjecture regarding the meaning of *sd-m-r3* in the Victory Stela of Piankhi.<sup>18</sup> While diplomatically allowing that the expression *sd-m-r3* “...might be explained to mean that [an] army lay around the city, like a serpent with its tail in its mouth,”<sup>19</sup> Goodwin points to a passage in an Edfu text regarding “...a burnt-offering of fat oxen, whose fumes ascend to heaven, a *set-m-ra* of goats, where roast flesh is in the temple”<sup>20</sup> and then goes on to suggest that the expression *sd-m-r3* derives from

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<sup>18</sup> C.W. Goodwin, “Miscellaneous Notes,” *ZÄS* 12 (1874) 38-39; Goodwin’s article appeared, therefore, within six years of the publication of vol. 4 of Brugsch’s *Hieroglyphisch-demotisches Wörterbuch*, which contained the entry on *sd-m-r3*. Goodwin, though not well-remembered today, was a highly distinguished scholar of Egyptian language and an older contemporary of Brugsch (his senior by ten years). Brugsch founded the *ZÄS* in 1863, and was its editor when Goodwin’s notes on *sd-m-r3* appeared in it. An indication of Goodwin’s stature is that Erman, in his obituary of Brugsch, put Brugsch in the same class “with Champollion, Lepsius, Birch, de Rougé, *Goodwin*, and Chabas ... as one of the great formative figures in the development of Egyptology” (emphasis added). Warren R. Dawson and Eric Uphill, *Who was Who in Egyptology*, rev. M.L. Bierbrier, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: EES, 1995) 67, 171.

<sup>19</sup> Goodwin, “Miscellaneous Notes,” 38.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 39. Goodwin’s cited source for the Edfu text is Johannes Duemichen, *Altägyptische Kalenderinschriften* (Leipzig, 1866) pl. 119, l. 9 = Marquis de Rochemonteix and Émile Chassinat, *Le temple d’Edfou*, vol. 1, fasc. 4, rev. Sylvie Cauville and Didier Devauchelle (Cairo: IFAO, 1987) 536. The passage will be more fully discussed below in this chapter.

...a pen or pen-fold, a small enclosure where the animals are closely packed and stand [with] the tail of one touching the mouth of another. This idea suits well the passage in Pianchi's stele. Nothing could be more descriptive of the close investment of a town, than the phrase of "making it into a cattle-pen."<sup>21</sup>

It should be noted, however, that *sd-m-r3* literally refers (in this view) to the closely confined sacrificial animals themselves, in a compact group, and not actually to the penfold enclosure itself; such an enclosure is known in the Edfu texts as a *s3t n(j) ˁwt*,<sup>22</sup> which indeed might be aptly translated as a "penfold of flock animals."







The oldest known occurrence of *sd-m-r3* is in graffito 25 from the calcite quarries at Hatnub, dating from the First Intermediate Period.<sup>23</sup> Among praises of Neheri, vizier and great nomarch of the Hare Nome, it is said that "the inhabitants of the Residence were satisfied with the regulations he issued," and that he is "one who is reliable for the king," and one



<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Lamentably, the condition of animals awaiting slaughter has not changed for the better since Goodwin's time (or that of the pharaohs); anyone who has witnessed their distressing close confinement would find *sd-m-r3* a remarkably appropriate description, if somewhat callous and inadequate.

<sup>22</sup> Penelope Wilson, *A Ptolemaic Lexikon, A Lexicographical Study of the Texts of Edfu*, OLA 78 (Leuven: Peeters, 1997) 786. A similar term, *s3w n(j)w k3w* (though referring to bulls rather than to smaller flock animals), was in existence at least as early as the Middle Kingdom. See Alan H. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, vol. 1 (Oxford: OUP, 1947) 97\*; pButler in R.B. Parkinson, "The Discourse of the Fowler: Papyrus Butler Verso (P. BM EA 10274)," *JEA* 90 (2004) 92, l. 20. Parkinson renders *s3w n(j)w k3w* as "byres of the bulls," 90.

<sup>23</sup> Rudolf Anthes, *Die Felseninschriften von Hatnub* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1928) pl. 25, l. 4.




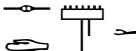





<sup>24</sup> The rare variant orthography  , *sd*, for  , *sd* 'tail', is cited by the *Wörterbuch* (vol. 4, 363) and described as being "vereinzelt" ('isolated', 'occasional'). Though annotated as being from the Middle Kingdom, no source is given, and it is not entirely clear whether or not this example may actually be the same as that in Hatnub Graffito 25. This orthography is probably to be accounted for as an example of scribal "hypercorrection" related to the historical process of phonological change in Egyptian by which voiced palatal /d/ becomes, over time, voiced plosive dental /d/, which in turn becomes voiceless plosive dental /t/ (as, for example, *db.t* 'brick', which becomes Late Egyptian *db.t*, and Coptic **ⲧⲬⲐⲈ**). The same process is seen at work in the sequence  *sd*, the Late Egyptian  *st*, Ptolemaic  *st*, Demotic  *st*, and Coptic **Ⲭⲁⲧ**. As the Old Egyptian attestations show the

*jj.n nꜣf ḥkꜣw šmꜥw sd-m-rꜣ*

...to whom the lords of Upper Egypt came *sd-m-rꜣ*

In this context *sd-m-rꜣ* must mean something like “collectively” or “in a group,”<sup>25</sup> consistent with the metaphorical use of the primary image of a compact group of closely confined animals. In any event, it is clear from this first known occurrence of *sd-m-rꜣ* (as an adverbial clause), that it is an idiomatic expression that has already become thoroughly lexicalized and is being used in a metaphorical sense. It is worth noting that the editors of the *Wörterbuch* prepared a slip for this occurrence of *sd-m-rꜣ*, with the proposed translation “*insgesamt*,”<sup>26</sup> but a decision was made to exclude this example. The reasons for the decision are unknown, but to have included it would have contradicted the contention in the *Wörterbuch* that the expression *sd-m-rꜣ* is only found beginning with the New Kingdom and would have also put a metaphoric use of *sd-m-rꜣ* historically before its alleged primary meaning in reference to a serpent forming a circle and biting its tail.

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orthography  *sd*, it is doubtful, or at least unknown, whether an earlier form  *sd* ever really existed. A possible explanation for the orthography of Hatnub Graffito 25 is that the actual vocalization of  was already showing a shift from /d/ to /t/. The scribe, conscious of this process, “hypercorrected” his writing of the word to conform to an imagined earlier form, perhaps intended to lend an air of impressive archaism to his composition. Compare  , *sd* ‘clothe’, which shows the variants  (with the presence of the determinative  , for  , showing a confusion with  , *sd* ‘tail’) and  (likely scribal “hypercorrection”).

<sup>25</sup> This latter rendering is the suggestion of Antonio Loprieno (personal communication).

<sup>26</sup> Sincere thanks to Stephan Johannes Seidlmayer of the *Altägyptisches Wörterbuch* project, Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, for kindly supplying a facsimile of the original slip of this occurrence.

The next known example of *sd-m-r3* occurs well over a millennium later in the annals of Osorkon, the High Priest of Amun, recorded on the so-called Bubastite Portal in the south wall of the first court of the Temple of Amun at Karnak. The relevant text is as follows:<sup>27</sup>



ḥꜥ .n jr.n=f  
 ʿ3bwt ʿ3wt n nb=f nṯr=f šps(j) wr r nṯrw jmn-rꜥ  
 nb nswt t3-wy psdt jmjw jpt-swt nbw pt t3  
 sd-m-r3 m ʿ3bwt m wnw gḥsw nj3w  
 m3w-ḥd rw šdw m dbꜥw ḥ3w 3pdw š3[w] ////

Then he made  
 great offerings to his lord, his august god, greater than the gods, Amun-Re,  
 lord of the seats of the two lands, (and to members of) the Ennead who are in *Ipet-Sut*, lords of heaven and earth,  
 (and a) *sd-m-r3* of offerings with short-horned cattle, gazelles, ibex, white oryx, geese,  
 thousands and tens of thousands of waterfowl, marsh birds ////

Ricardo A. Caminos, in his translation and commentary of this text, identifies *sd-m-r3* as the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular “old perfective” (= stative) with presumably unwritten inflectional ending (.w)

<sup>27</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Reliefs and inscriptions at Karnak, vol. 3: The Bubastite Portal*. OIP 74; (Chicago: University of Chicago Oriental Institute, 1954) pl. 21, ll. 14-15 and Ricardo A. Caminos, *The Chronicle of Prince Osorkon*, AnOr 37 (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1958) 102. The text here follows the slight restorations of Caminos, which are based with some certainty upon the surviving whole and partial signs, together with the close parallels found in the Nitocris Adoption Stela (see below, this chapter).

of the “rare verb” of the *Wörterbuch* entry, but he does not ascribe to it the same meaning that the *Wörterbuch* gives, “to slaughter a great number.” Instead, Caminos invokes the phantom image of the ouroboros, translating “...he being surrounded by the oblation [consisting of] short-horned cattle,” etc., and commenting that “the literal meaning of the verb is ‘(to be) tail-in-mouth’.”<sup>28</sup> This reading then inspires Caminos to a flight of pure imaginative fancy: “Note that it is Osorkon, not Amūn and the Ennead, who is surrounded by the offerings, for the actual presentation of these has not yet taken place. Presently the offerings will be brought into the temple, and then Amūn will formally ‘appear’ with the Ennead to receive them.”<sup>29</sup> However, as this and the remaining texts show, the “rare verb” *sd-m-r3* is entirely chimerical. In the present instance, *sd-m-r3* is clearly a noun referring to a sacrificial offering of large groups of herd and flock animals, no doubt closely confined (“tail-in-mouth”) until their final moments. The noun phrase *sd-m-r3 m 3bwt...* (“a *sd-m-r3* of offerings...”) is in apposition to the earlier noun phrase *3bwt 3wt n nbzf...* (“great offerings to his lord”), and both are objects of *jr.nzf* (“he made”), as here diagrammed:

<i>jr.nzf</i>	<i>3bwt 3wt n nbzf...</i>
“he made”	“great offerings to his lord...”
<i>(jr.nzf)</i>	<i>sd-m-r3 m 3bwt...</i>
(“and he made”)	“a <i>sd-m-r3</i> of offerings...”

In this context, the idiomatic expression *sd-m-r3* may be hyperbole but, referring as it does to sacrificial herd and flock animals, it is not being used metaphorically.

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<sup>28</sup> Caminos, *Osorkon*, 102.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

The next known occurrence of *sd-m-r3* dates from about a century later and is found in the aforementioned Victory Stela of Piankhi. The relevant passage is as follows:<sup>30</sup>



*mk [sw ḥr] gw3 r nnj-nsu  
 jr.n=f sw m sd-m-r3  
 nj rdj prj prw  
 nj rdj ʿq ʿqw*

Behold, he besieges Heracleopolis.  
 He acted himself by means of a *sd-m-r3*,  
 Goers-forth not allowed to go forth,  
 Enterers not allowed to enter.

Like Hatnub Graffito 25, this text uses *sd-m-r3* as a metaphor. In this case, however, more may be implied than what Goodwin explicitly suggested in his rejoinder to Brugsch, that the citizens of Heracleopolis had been trapped within the crowded confines of their walled city like sacrificial animals in a penfold. As both the Edfu text cited by Goodwin and the preceding text from the annals of Osorkon suggest, there is also the association of potential violence against those so confined like sacrificial animals; as will be seen below, the slaughter of sacrificial animals was often symbolically conflated with the slaughter of enemies in war. In this light, N.-

<sup>30</sup> N.-C. Grimal, *La stèle triomphale de Pi(ʿankh)y au Musée du Caire*, Études sur la propagande royale égyptienne 1 (Cairo: IFAO, 1981) §3 = 1.4-6/6\*; pl. 5, ll. 4-5. Following Grimal’s restoration of *sw ḥr* in the damaged first clause.

C. Grimal’s translation of the *sd-m-r3* passage as “...ils s’est enroulé comme le serpent” is seen to be entirely fatuous, as is his related commentary.<sup>31</sup>

The next example is from the so-called Nitocris Adoption Stela, dating from the mid-seventh century, somewhat less than two centuries after the Piankhi text.<sup>32</sup> Though cited as a mutually supportive parallel to the alleged “ouroboric” image in Piankhi,<sup>33</sup> the Nitocris text employs *sd-m-r3* in an unmetaphorical way much like the Osorkon text; *sd-m-r3* is once again a noun referring to a large offering of herd and flock animals. Having travelled by river, princess Nitocris put to land at Thebes, disembarked, and



*gm.n=s w3st*  
*m d3mw n(j)w t3yw*  
*m wpwt n(j)t hmwt*  
*‘h‘ hr nhm m hs=s*  
*sd-m-r3 m k3w 3pdw ‘3bwt wrw ‘š3wt m tnw*

She found Thebes  
with throngs of men

<sup>31</sup> Grimal, *La stèle triomphale*, 14, 17, 292.

<sup>32</sup> Ricardo A. Caminos, “The Nitocris Adoption Stela,” *JEA* 50 (1964) pl. 9, lines 11-12.

<sup>33</sup> Adolf Erman, “Zu den Legrain’schen Inschriften,” *ZÄS* 35 (1897) 25, n. 5; Grimal, *La stèle triomphale*, 292.



(and) with crowds of women  
 standing and cheering to meet her;  
 (and a) *sd-m-r3* of oxen, fowl,  
 (and) great provisions, a multitude in quantity.

Once again, *sd-m-r3* is a noun that denotes a large number of sacrificial herd and flock animals. Both *d3mw n(j)w t3jw m wpwt n(jw)t hmwt...* “throng of men and crowds of women...” and *sd-m-r3 m k3w 3pdw...* “a *sd-m-r3* of oxen, fowl...” are predicative compliments of *gm.nz.s*, “She found Thebes...” Caminos again asserts that *sd-m-r3* is the “old perfective of the rare verb *sd-m-r3*, lit., ‘to be tail in mouth’, i.e., like a snake biting its tail and thus forming a circle.”<sup>34</sup> He then trots out the ouroboros image from Horapollo, “a symbol of the universe,”<sup>35</sup> and goes on to offer a quote regarding the destruction of Apep from papyrus Bremner-Rhind,<sup>36</sup> neither of which are remotely apposite for the understanding of *sd-m-r3* in the Nitocris text.

The remaining known instances of *sd-m-r3* all occur over three centuries later in the Ptolemaic Period. The following text is from the Temple of Hathor at Dendara and refers to the king in his role as sacrificing priest:<sup>37</sup>

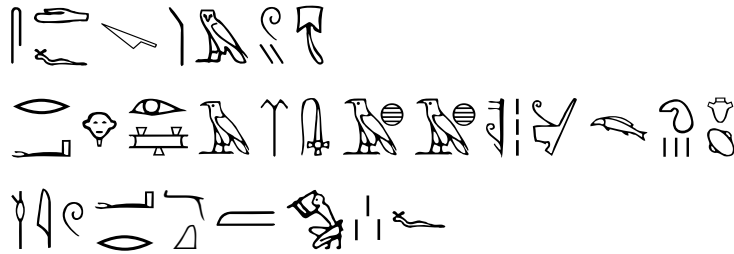


<sup>34</sup> Caminos, “Nitocris,” 84.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 84, n. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 85. The complete irrelevance of Bremner-Rhind in this context is established in this chapter, below.

<sup>37</sup> Émile Chassinat, *Le temple de Dendara*, vol. 3 (Cairo: IFAO, 1935) 185, l. 6; pl. 140 = Auguste Mariette-Bey, *Dendérah, description générale du grand temple de cette ville*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1870) pl. 72a.




*ᶜnh ntr nfr nht ʿʒ phtj*  
*hʒh ʿwj hr st-m-rʒ*<sup>38</sup>  
*sdf ʿwt*  
*rdj hr jrt-hr ʒm ʒhʒhw n(jw) hʒkw-jb*  
*wḏ jw*<sup>39</sup> ʿrq m hftjw=f


Live perfect god, great of strength,  
 whose arms are swift upon the *sd-m-rʒ*,  
 who slaughters the small herd animals,<sup>40</sup>  
 who causes through the Eye of Horus to burn the bones of the rebels,  
 who decrees to terminate his enemies.

In this text, we begin to see a semantic drift in which the term *sd-m-rʒ* has come to be more associated with the idea of the violent, bloody sacrifice of a large number of small herd animals than the mere close confinement, tail in mouth, of such animals awaiting mass sacrifice and immolation.<sup>41</sup> In the accompanying pictorial representation (figure 5), the king is seen facing the

<sup>38</sup> The late writing of *sd* as *st* is well on the way to becoming Coptic **ϢΑΤ**; see note 24, above.

<sup>39</sup> Late writing for preposition  (Coptic **Ϣ**); see note 80.

<sup>40</sup> For this reading of the hieroglyphs see Wilson, *Ptolemaic Lexikon*, 140-41. The ʿwt were small herding animals such as goats, sheep, gazelles, oryx and antelope; sacrifice of these herds symbolized the destruction of the king's enemies.

<sup>41</sup> This meaning is reinforced by the determinative  , denoting an act of violence.

goddess Hathor; between them is a sacrificial altar with a central rising lick of flame. The caption above the altar summarizes the nature of the rite.<sup>42</sup>



*ts-jht hr h3w dd mdw*

Assembling offerings upon the flaming altar and speaking of words.<sup>43</sup>

The repeated hieroglyph  $\text{D}$  (G. F51 = *jwf* ‘meat’), seen on either side of the flame upon the altar, represents the pieces of animal flesh that the king has placed into the fire. The text behind the king then goes on to draw a parallel between the king’s prowess in sacrifice and his power over enemies; the king is one “who causes through the Eye of Horus [=the destructive, fiery eye of Re, represented by the altar flame], to burn the bones of the rebels, who decrees the end of his enemies.” It is noteworthy that the text links the motif of animal sacrifice (as found in the Osorkon and Nitocris texts) with that of the destruction of enemies (as in the Piankhi text). Nothing suggests an image of a serpent biting its tail, or even the notion of “surrounding” that is associated with it.

The following text, also from Dendara, stresses the violent, fearsome nature of a *sd-m-r3* sacrifice:<sup>44</sup>



<sup>42</sup> Mariette-Bey, *Dendérah*, vol. 2, pl. 72a.

<sup>43</sup> That is, ritually placing the pieces of animal flesh into the altar flames while reciting the appropriate liturgical text, of which some indication is given by other texts in the tableau.


<sup>44</sup> Sylvie Cauville, *Dendara, Les chapelles osiriennes*, Dendara 10, vol. 1 (Cairo: IFAO, 1997) 51, lines 11-12.



*mnḥwj q3 ˁ*  
*3ḥ ˁwj ḥr jr(t) k3tɛf*  
*tqr-phḥtj <m> st-m-r3*<sup>45</sup>  
*nrjw sm3w nbw*

The butcher-priest, high of arm,  
 whose two arms are effective in doing his work,  
 mighty of strength in *sd-m-r3*,  
 whom all sacrificial bulls fear.

This text is directly concerned with the *mnḥwj*, the butcher-priest who, in the name of the king, would actually do the practical work of slaughter and dismemberment in the abattoir attached to the temple. His physical prowess in the sacrificial act is so great that the bulls awaiting sacrifice are frightened of him. The image accompanying the text (figure 6) shows the butcher-priest at work with a large knife, removing a forelimb from the beheaded bull. There is no question here of *sd-m-r3* being a “rare verb,” nor of connection with notions of anything encircling, surrounding, or serpentine. The previously noted semantic drift is again evident, with an emphasis on the destruction of the sacrificial victims rather than their confinement. Sylvie Cauville, in her publication of this text, aptly translates *sd-m-r3* as a noun meaning “l’hécatombe.”<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> See above, notes 24 and 38. Note the determinative , again reinforcing the idea of violent sacrifice.

<sup>46</sup> Sylvie Cauville, *Le temple de Dendara, Les chapelles osiriennes 1, transcription et traduction*, BdE 117 (Cairo: IFAO, 1997) 29. A hecatomb was, in the classical world, a great public sacrifice originally of

That *sd-m-r3* came to be understood in some of these later texts as essentially a burnt offering of sacrificial victims is illustrated by a text from the Temple of Horus at Edfu,<sup>47</sup> found in the long band of inscription surmounting reliefs in the western stairway depicting priests carrying portable shrines and sacred standards. In the text, the king leads a religious procession; a recitation of potent words and a display of numinous royal standards symbolically repel the king's "foes" from his way. There is then



*sb-n-ḥt m jw3w dd3*  
*qn=sn pḥ.n=f ḥrt*  
*sd-m-r3 m ʿwt*  
*3šr jm=sn m ḥwt-nṯr*

...burnt offerings of fattened cattle,  
 their fragrance has reached heaven;  
 a *sd-m-r3* of small herd animals,  
 they are roasted in the temple.

Both the semantics of *sd-m-r3* in this context, and the fact of its origin as a lexicalized noun phrase, are highlighted by the structural parallelism in this passage. Like *sd-m-r3*, *sb-n-ḥt* (literally, “pass into flame”) is a lexicalized noun phrase; it survives in Coptic as the noun

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a hundred oxen, but as early as Homer having come to mean a large sacrifice of an indefinite number of animals.

<sup>47</sup> Rochemonteix and Chassinat, *Edfou*, vol. 1, fasc. 4, 536.

CBNCETĖ ‘burnt offerings’.<sup>48</sup> Both *sb-n-ht* and *sd-m-r3* seem nearly synonymous, and are both followed by prepositional phrases commencing with preposition *m*, *m jw3w dd3* (“consisting of fattened cattle”) in the former and *m ʿwt* (“consisting of small herd animals”) in the latter; both terms are semantically linked through the use of *parallelismus membrorum*. Once again, Cauville’s identification of *sd-m-r3* as a substantive translatable as “hecatomb” is perfectly appropriate here.

The three remaining attestations of *sd-m-r3* are also from Edfu, and occur in three of the many offering scenes found in the open corridor formed by the exterior of the naos and the inner surface of its enclosure wall. The first to be considered is found in the lowest register of scenes on the east wall of the naos near the northern end of the building. The editors of the *Wörterbuch* cited this text, along with the passage from the Victory Stela of Piankhi, as a supporting example of *sd-m-r3* supposedly being used “figuratively of the unbroken ring of a besieging army around a city.” The text is of course Ptolemaic, over five hundred years later than the Piankhi example. There is nothing in it about a besieged city, encircled or otherwise, nor is there even a parallel being drawn here between slaughtered sacrificial animals and the enemies of the king, as there is in the first example from Dendara (above). The much mutilated scene accompanying the text shows the king and queen presenting a trussed and beheaded oryx (among other sacrificial victims too vandalized to identify with certainty) to Horus Behdety, who stands facing them to receive their offering. The fragmentary text appears in two vertical lines just above the heap of sacrificial offerings:<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> W.E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939) 318, col. 2.

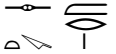

<sup>49</sup> Émile Chassinat, *Le temple d'Edfou*, vol. 4 (Cairo: IFAO, 1929) 29 and vol. 10 (1928), fasc. 1, pl. 83 = Karl F. Piehl, *Inscriptions hiéroglyphiques recueillies en Europe et en Égypte*, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1888) 111.



“dedicating choice meat portions.”<sup>52</sup> As in the previous text, performance of the *sd-m-r3* occasions fear in the sacrificial animals. The offerings are piled up between the god and his royal officiants, and neither encircle nor are encircled by anyone or anything. Admittedly, this somewhat fragmentary text may be subject to slight divergences of interpretation. It is, however, almost exactly the text consulted by the *Wörterbuch* editors in the published transcription of Karl Piehl,<sup>53</sup> and it remains quite bewildering why they or anyone since might imagine that this text further illustrates *sd-m-r3* being used “figuratively of the unbroken ring of the besieger of a city,” as *sd-m-r3* is alleged to be used in the Victory Stela of Piankhi. Perhaps, in the absence of the offering scene (not present in Piehl’s transcription) it was imagined that the suffix pronoun *sn* ‘they’ in *snḏ.nsn m st-m-r3* referred to residents of a city mentioned in the immediately preceding lacuna, and that the entire passage meant something like “they (i.e., the city-dwellers) were frightened by the encircling besiegement.” Considered in total context, however, including the accompanying tableau,<sup>54</sup> and taking into account parallel inscriptions,<sup>55</sup> it is clear that this passage can mean no such thing, that it should never have been cited in support of the “encircling siege” idea in the first place, and that present scholarship should desist in so doing.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Wilson, *Ptolemaic Lexikon*, 624. A perhaps more felicitous rendering of *hw-ꜥ-r-stpw* is that suggested by Aylward M. Blackman: “Presenting pieces of flesh.” A.M. Blackman, “The King of Egypt’s Grace before Meat,” *JEA* 31 (1945) 58.

<sup>53</sup> In point of fact, the only difference between Piehl’s transcription and that of Chassinat is that Piehl transcribes  rather than Chassinat’s , which negligible difference can have no bearing on the translation and understanding of this text.

<sup>54</sup> The tableau depicts Horus Behdety receiving a sacrifice of meat from the king.

<sup>55</sup> For parallels at Edfu see citations in Wilson, *Ptolemaic Lexikon*, 624.

<sup>56</sup> Examples of relatively recent citations that uncritically repeat this error without troubling to examine the primary sources include Grimal, *La stèle triomphale*, 292 and Wilson, *Ptolemaic Lexikon*, 973.

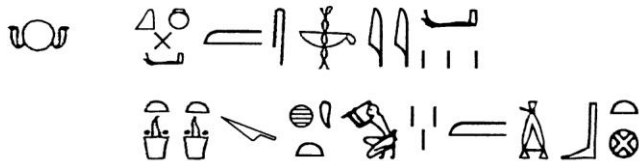




*dj=j n=k sbjw=k sgr m ʿ3(w)*<sup>62</sup>  
*k3j-bdšw=k nn wnn=w*

May you come in peace, O king of the two lands,  
 Great of terror before all foreign countries,  
 I have received your work of slaying foes.  
 I have rejoiced in the *sd-m-r3*;  
 I have given to you your rebels bound to poles;  
 Your conspiring enemies, they do not exist.

Mehit rejoices in the blood sacrifice she receives from the king, but also identifies this symbolic act with the destruction of the king’s enemies in which she is actively complicit. The second text is from an offering tableau in the third register on the western end of the north exterior wall of the naos,<sup>63</sup> in which the king is seen standing before a seated Horus Behdety at whose feet are arrayed four beheaded and dismembered bulls which the king presents to him. The god responds to the king by declaiming himself as companion-in-arms in the king’s following, and then voices the following praises:<sup>64</sup>



<sup>60</sup> For  $\ominus$  as first person feminine pronoun, see H.W. Fairman, “Notes on the Alphabetic Signs Employed in the Hieroglyphic Inscriptions of the Temple of Edfu,” *ASAE* 43 (1943) 247.

<sup>61</sup> The significance of  $\hat{\text{q}}$  is not obvious;  $\text{q}$  would be appropriate as a determinative, while  $\ominus$  is likely intended to indicate that /sd/ has become /st/ (see note 24), it being placed at the end of *sd-m-r3* rather than *sd* because the phrase *sd-m-r3* is here understood as a single bound lexeme.

<sup>62</sup> Substitution of  $\text{f}$  for  $\text{f}$ .

<sup>63</sup> Chassinat, *Edfou*, vol. 10, fasc. 1, pl. 88.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 74.



metaphorical. Subsequent attestations, in which *sd-m-r3* is used as a noun, refer mostly to the sacrifice of confined groups of animals, though the Piankhy text uses the term metaphorically with reference to the closely confined citizens of a besieged city. Over time, there was also a degree of semantic drift that emphasized the aspect of slaughter more than that of confinement; in late offering scenes this notion of slaughter symbolically converges animal sacrifice with the destruction of the king's enemies, both potentially real and preternatural. The coherence of this view of the origin and development of *sd-m-r3* has one advantage over that of Brugsch and the editors of the *Wörterbuch* in that it accounts for *sd-m-r3* being associated with both the idea of confinement and that of slaughter, whereas in the *Wörterbuch* entry the association with the idea of slaughter remains inexplicably mysterious. Moreover, the fact that there is nothing in any of these texts to connect them with the ouroboros, and that most of them are connected with animal sacrifice, strongly suggests that Goodwin's hypothesis has merit. Though animals intended for sacrifice were not closely confined while being raised, when large numbers of them were brought within the limited confines of a temple compound for the purpose of large-scale sacrifices, they were kept in pens, the *s3wt njwt ʿwt*.<sup>66</sup> Such pens would have been sited conveniently near the actual place of slaughter, and would have confined the animals in a density that maximized the efficiency of actually laying hands on them and minimized the space taken up. Under such circumstances, it is at least possible that the term *sd-m-r3* originated in the argot of the *mnḥwjw*, the temple butcher-priests, and it is not difficult to imagine that these rough men, inured to the brutal day-to-day realities of their profession, might have created such a seemingly facetious and callous term as “tail-in-mouth” in reference to the awkwardly cramped conditions of animals awaiting sacrifice. Though such an origin for *sd-m-r3* must remain, in the

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<sup>66</sup> See note 22.

present state of evidence, nothing more than informed speculation, it is surely no greater strain on the imagination, and arguably less of one, than the currently prevailing supposition that the original meaning of *sd-m-r3* was “properly of the snake that bites itself in the tail,” the ostensible evidence for which will now be examined.

The first source cited by the *Wörterbuch* as the earliest known appearance of *sd-m-r3*, and as an example of *sd-m-r3* being used in its supposed original sense “properly of the snake that bites itself in the tail,” is a passage in the earliest of the so-called Underworld Books, the *Book of the Hidden Chamber* (*sš nj ʿt jmnt*), commonly known as the *Book of Amduat* (or just *Amduat*).<sup>67</sup> As previously mentioned, the lexicalized term *sd-m-r3* actually occurs nowhere in this text. Moreover, both the passage always cited in this regard and its accompanying pictorial image are generally considered entirely on their own and out of context when being referenced in support of the conventional wisdom concerning the origin of the term *sd-m-r3* and its supposed connection with the ouroboros. The hesitation to examine this material in context or in any depth is understandable; the *Book of Amduat*, as with the other works in the genre, can be very abstruse to say the least. Indeed, the priestly creators of these works undoubtedly intended them to seem deeply mysterious and enigmatic, as is only appropriate for texts purporting to reveal knowledge of such divine secrets. Nonetheless, to make sense of the cited passage and its accompanying image, beyond the mere act of translation and description, it is necessary to examine both in the larger conceptual context in which they occur. Therefore, though a more


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<sup>67</sup> This title is purely a scholarly convention, a historical survival of an earlier stage of Egyptological understanding; *Amduat* is derived from an older transliteration of the Egyptian *jmj-dw3t*, “that which is in the *Duat*” or “that which is in the Underworld,” from *mḏ3t jmj dw3t*, a designation for the *Book of the Hidden Chamber* not attested before the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty, Erik Hornung, *Das Amduat, die Schrift des verborgenen Raumes*, vol. 1, ÄA 7 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963) x.; Andrzej Niwiński, *Studies on the Illustrated Theban Funerary Papyri of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Centuries B.C.*, OBO 86 (Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989) 174.

complete analysis of the Underworld Books in relation to the history of the ouroboros must be deferred until Chapter 3, a brief sketch of some basic features of the *Book of Amduat* relative to understanding the passage and image under consideration will not be out of place here. The *Amduat* describes the nightly journey of Re, as the sun, his death and descent into the blessed West at sunset, the encounters and events of his progress through the twelve hourly divisions of the mysterious netherworldly region known as the *Duat*, and his rebirth at dawn in the eastern horizon. Water being the pre-eminent means of travel in a culture built around the Nile and its canals, Re very naturally traverses both the celestial waters of the sky by day and the nether waters of the *Duat* by night in special barques dedicated to each purpose. Re is represented in the *Amduat* as standing in his nocturnal barque; his body is that of a kilted royal youth, the generic body of a male divinity, while his identity as the deceased sun is indicated by his having the bewigged head of an extinct species of ram<sup>68</sup> surmounted by a solar disk (the ram being word-play on *bꜣ* ‘ram’ and *bꜣ* ‘soul’). This divine image is labeled the “flesh” (𓂏𓂏𓂏) of Re and, up through the beginning of the sixth hour, appears within the outlines of a shrine. Then, toward the end of Re’s sojourn in the region of the sixth hour, the regeneration of the flesh of Re—foreshadowed in previous hours—is emphasized in a unique image (figure 7). Re’s renewal is represented as Khepri, “the one who becomes,” whose recumbent figure is shown surrounded by an enormous serpent having multiple heads. The reclining body of Khepri stirs to life and

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<sup>68</sup> *Ovis longipes paleoegyptiacus*, distinguished by its characteristic laterally arrayed corkscrew horns, became extinct sometime after the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, being gradually displaced by *O. platyura aegyptiaca*. Dale J. Osborn and Jana Osbornová, *The Mammals of Ancient Egypt* (Warminster, England: Aris and Phillips, 1998) 194. This animal was also associated with Atum, primarily in the sense of the dying or dead sun; see Karol Myśliwiec, *Studien zum Gott Atum*, vol. 1, *Die heiligen Tiere des Atum*, HÄB 5 (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1978) 39 ff. The dying or dead sun could be referred to as Atum because, in death, the sun would regenerate in a post-creational analogue of the primordial creative impulse (Atum) that gave rise to the first appearance of the sun at the moment of creation.

motion, as indicated by the disposition of his legs;<sup>69</sup> his flexed arm recalls a feature of the hieroglyph , (which can be used to write *f3j* ‘to raise’, ‘to lift up’) and gestures toward the large scarab depicted above his head, itself the hieroglyph writing *hpr* ‘to become’, ‘to be reborn’. The main text accompanying this image reads as follows:<sup>70</sup>



*h3t hprj pw m jwf dszf*  
*š3-hrw m s3w*  
*wnnzf m shr pn*

<sup>69</sup> The splaying of the legs recalls  $\Delta$ , the determinative of motion. Compare the iconographically related tableau in the Temple of Opet, in which Osiris is represented as a recumbent divine youth being revived by union with the *ba* of Amun-Re. Constant de Wit, *Les inscriptions du temple d'Opet, à Karnak*, vol. 2, BAe 12, (Brussels: Édition de la fondation égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1962) pl. 4.

<sup>70</sup> Erik Hornung, ed., *Texte zum Amduat*, vol. 2, AH 14 (Geneva: Éditions de Belles-Lettres, 1992) 502-505; Hornung, *Das Amduat*, 110-11 (from the versions of Tuthmosis III and Sethos I).

*sdzf m r3zf*  
*jrtzf pw*  
*dwnzf hr sšmw pn*  
*w3 hrzf jmntt mj qd*  
*jwtj jwzf r st nb(t) n(j)t dw3t*  
*mdw r<sup>c</sup> pw*  
*jw sšmww jmjzf*

It is corpse of Khepri in his own flesh.  
 The serpent Many-of-Faces is guardian.  
 He is in this state:

His tail is in his mouth.






This is what he does:<sup>71</sup>

He is stretched around this form.<sup>72</sup>

The entire West is that which converges upon him (i.e., the serpent).<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> From *jrtzf pw* until the end of the entire passage the text is rubricated, perhaps indicating a special commentary or explanation of the previous lines.

<sup>72</sup> The pronoun *hr* has the primary meaning ‘under’, but has several secondary, idiomatic meanings such as ‘holding’, ‘carrying’, or ‘possessing’ something; the interpretation adopted here is that the expression *dwn hr*, in light of the larger semantic context and accompanying vignette, might best be rendered as ‘stretched around’.

<sup>73</sup> That this line, as others in this text, may have already presented some kind of difficulty for the priestly scribes making use of it seems indicated by the presence of peculiar variants in the surviving copies. The oldest, and presumably most trustworthy version, in the tomb of Tuthmosis III, is followed here; for  in Tuthmosis III, the four other surviving copies in the tombs of Amenophis I, Amenophis III, Sethos I, and Ramesses VI, show , , , and  respectively, none of which make much sense. Assuming the Tuthmosis III version to be the least corrupt, *hrzf* presents a syntactical problem if *jmntt mj qd* is taken as the subject of the verb *w3* (in the *sdmzf* pattern), as its present position could only be occupied by a dative *nzf*, the normative position of a prepositional phrase like *hrzf* being always after the subject to which it refers. However, following the principle of *lectio difficilior*, one might parse *w3 hrzf jmntt mj qd* as a nominal sentence of the AB pattern, in which *w3 hrzf* is a relative form, literally “that which falls near him,” followed by *jmntt mj qd* ‘the entire West’, the whole then being rendered somewhat literally as “the entire West is that which falls near him.” The phrase *jmntt mj qd* ( a slight abbreviation for *jmntt mj qd3s*, literally “the West as its form” = “the entire West”) must be a collective singular referring to the supernatural beings dwelling in the *Duat*, presumably the same as the *sšmww* summoned in the last line of the passage. (Note that the recumbent figure surrounded by the serpent is also described as a *sšmw*.) The exact meaning of the verbal expression *w3 hr*, literally ‘to fall near’, is less certain, *w3* having several idiomatic, figurative meanings when combined with other prepositions, such as *w3 r* ‘to fall into’ a condition, or *w3 hr* ‘to fall upon’, used of fear “falling upon” the bodies of persons; for citations see Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise*



Who does not come to any (other) place in the *Duat*.

It is the word of Re:

The forms which are in it (i.e., the *Duat*) come.

Though the graphic depiction of this serpent is in the line of development that leads eventually to the classic ouroboros (as will be examined in Chapter 3), at present issue is whether or not the accompanying text should be regarded as offering an example of the expression *sd-m-r3* in its alleged primary sense “properly of the snake that bites itself in the tail.” The first lines of this passage describe the body of Khepri as being guarded by an enormous serpent called Many-of-Faces. The serpent is depicted variably as having three, four, or five heads, depending on the source. The text then goes on to describe what the serpent is like and what it does: its tail is in its mouth and it is stretched around (literally ‘under’) “this form”; that is, it is a closed-off barrier around the recumbent form of Khepri. Not unlike the “egg” or “oval” of Sokar in the previous hour, the serpent represents a protective encapsulation of the regenerating god. At this crucial moment in the sixth hour, the magically potent “word of Re” has attracted or compelled all of the many “forms” inhabiting the West to converge around the divine gestation occurring within the protective force or membrane symbolized by the “many-faced” serpent. This serpent has nothing to do with time or eternity, appearing as it does only at the end of the sixth hour; as the accompanying text itself confirms, the serpent “does not come to any (other) place in the *Duat*.” As already noted, the lexical term *sd-m-r3* does not occur in this passage, and is certainly not the name, epithet, or designation of the serpent, which is clearly named Many-of-Faces in the text and, indeed, usually bears a separate label to that effect (as seen, for example, in figure 7). It should not be thought, however, that the relationship between the term *sd-m-r3* (“tail-in-

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*Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1962) 52. The suggested rendering here of the idiomatic expression *w3 hr* as ‘to converge upon’ makes reasonable sense in the total context.

mouth”) and the descriptive comment *sdꜣf m rꜣꜣf* (“his tail is in his mouth”) is purely adventitious. The *Amduat* clause *sdꜣf m rꜣꜣf* is meant to resonate with the term *sd-m-rꜣ* in its earlier metaphoric sense “enclosure” or “confinement.” It is a case of word-play upon the already extant and independent term *sd-m-rꜣ*, the origin of the term itself having nothing to do with serpents.

The last occurrences cited by the *Wörterbuch* as purported examples of *sd-m-rꜣ* “properly of the snake that bites itself in the tail” are two brief passages in the Bremner-Rhind papyrus, likely composed in the New Kingdom like the *Amduat*,<sup>74</sup> but greatly separated from it thematically. The cited Bremner-Rhind passages do, however, share one significant feature with the cited *Amduat* passage; the term *sd-m-rꜣ* does not occur in them either. The passages in question appear in two Bremner-Rhind texts, the *Book of the Overthrowing of Apophis* (*mdꜣt nꜣt shꜣr ꜣpp*) and *The Names of Apophis, Which Shall Not Be* (*nꜣ rnw nꜣw ꜣpp nꜣy nn wnꜣsn*), the latter of which should probably be understood as a kind of supplement to the former, elaborating and expanding upon certain features of that work.<sup>75</sup> Both are liturgical texts, the purpose of which is, in the most general sense, the preservation of the cosmos, specifically bringing about the destruction of Apophis (serpent of chaos and enemy of the solar deity Re), together with associated enemies of pharaoh (considered agents of chaos), both of this world and the next.<sup>76</sup> The texts involve recitations accompanied by ritual acts performed upon inscribed

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<sup>74</sup> See notes 16 and 17.

<sup>75</sup> Faulkner describes *The Names of Apophis, Which Shall Not Be* as “really little more than a magnified rubric added as an appendix to the long text of the ‘Book of Overthrowing ‘Apep’ which precedes it.” R.O. Faulkner, “The Bremner-Rhind Papyrus–IV,” *JEA* 24 (1938) 52.

<sup>76</sup> The Egyptian expression is *m mwt m ꜣnh*, “whether dead or living.”

images modeled in wax and names and images made on papyrus. Among a variety of ritual acts of desecration and destruction (which includes spitting, spearing, trampling underfoot, binding, crushing, among others), cutting up the images and consigning them to the sacrificial flames is most prominent, and is repeated in numerous and varying ways. This is well illustrated by the following excerpts from the convenient translation of Raymond O. Faulkner:<sup>77</sup>

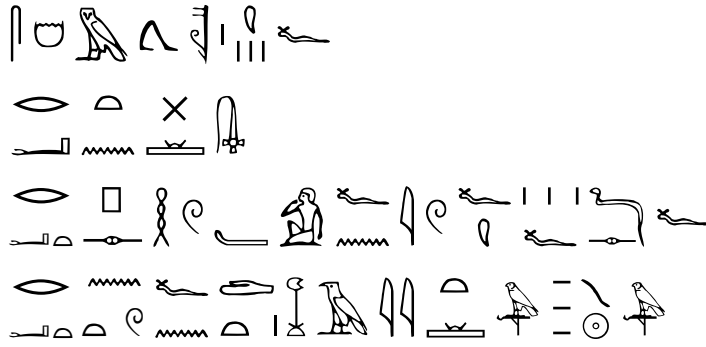
(24.2) Thy execution and the cutting of thee to pieces is achieved... (24.7) thou art allotted to the fiery Eye of Horus... (24.12) Thou art cut up... (24.16-17) thou art condemned to the devouring flame of the Eye of Horus... (25.1) He will destroy you, making a slaughter of you... (25.2) [ ye ] shall fall into the Eye of Horus, for its flame is sharp against you... (25.3) it shall consume you...in this its name of 'Devouring Flame'... (26.14) The sharp-knived butchers cut off thine head, they sever thy neck, they do execution on ... thee again and again. They cast (?) thee to the raging fire... (26.15) and it shall have power over thee, it shall devour thy body... (30.1) ...the executioners of Sekhmet slay thee, they fill their mouths with thy flesh... (30.14) Those who are in their shrines cut thee up...they cut thee to pieces again and again, thou being cast into the furnace of the god at the hall of sacrifice... (30.15) All the gods take their meat-portions ... out of thee, their hearts are satisfied at cutting thee to pieces. (30.22) The Great Ennead which is in Heliopolis cuts thee up... (30.23) ...fire is on thee, it consumes thy flesh... (30.26) those who are in the shrine devour thee, even the Great Ennead which is in the bark, so that thou mayest not exist.

The motifs of cutting up, immolation, and devourment show a clear parallel to the previously discussed passages from Dendara and Edfu, down to the detail of equating the sacrificial flames with the Eye of Horus. The envisioned magical acts of destruction are imagined as being so irresistibly potent that Apophis is himself compelled to be complicit in his own destruction, his very jaws being forced to follow the example of the sacrificial blade by biting into his own flesh (29.22):<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Faulkner, "The Bremner-Rhind Papyrus-III," *JEA* 23 (1937) 169-172 and "Bremner-Rhind-IV," 42-44.

<sup>78</sup> Faulkner, *Papyrus Bremner-Rhind*, 75.



*sh̄m qsw=f*  
*rdjt (=w) n sdt*  
*rdjt psh̄w=f n jwf=f ds=f*  
*rdjt ntf n drt h̄ywt r<sup>c</sup>*

Crushing his bones;  
 Placing them to the fire;  
 Causing that he bites into his flesh himself;  
 Putting him in the hand of the sacrificers of Re.

Apophis is similarly compelled to participate in his own destruction and immolation a few lines later (30.16-17):<sup>79</sup>




<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 79.

*nn jj≠k jw<sup>80</sup> R<sup>c</sup> m ptj≠f*  
*jw r<sup>c</sup> n ptj≠f*  
*s:mʒ<sup>c</sup>-hrw≠f (j)r≠k*  
*wnn sd≠k rdjt m rʒ≠k*  
*wš<sup>c</sup>≠k msq≠k ds≠k*  
*dbdb hr hʒw n(j) ntrw*

You shall never come against Re in his two heavens;  
 Re is in his two heavens  
 (and) he triumphs over you.  
 May your tail be placed in your mouth;  
 May you gnaw your skin yourself,  
 cut up upon the altar of the gods.

It is immediately clear that the lexical term *sd-m-rʒ* ‘tail-in-mouth’ does not occur here; what has been cited by the *Wörterbuch* as such, and quite out of context, is *wnn sd≠k rdjt m rʒ≠k*, “May your tail be placed in your mouth.” Examined in context, there is no hint of a suggestion that this is intended to be the image of the ouroboros. The serpent is being magically compelled to an act of autophagy, biting into the side of his own body (like the actions of the knife), and any suggestion that the rending of the body of Apophis, either by the serpent’s jaws or the sacrificial blade, is somehow to be understood as the image of an ouroboros is purely gratuitous. It makes little sense, when taken in context, to imagine that when the serpent is said to be gnawing through its skin and tail, it is really only biting the tip of its tail, thus forming an ouroboros. How much skin is there for a serpent to gnaw through at the *tip* of its tail? Yet the same line of text makes perfect sense if both the serpent’s jaws and the sacrificial knife are understood as having similar purpose and trajectories through the side of the serpent’s body. Consider also that before the days of Baron Cuvier and modern ideas of comparative anatomy,

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<sup>80</sup> Late writing for preposition  (Coptic **ϵ**) in this text; see Faulkner, *Papyrus Bremner-Rhind*, ix; 1, note a.

all parts of a snake's body posterior to the head might be well regarded as tail, though in point of anatomical fact the actual tail of a snake makes up relatively little of its length. That a snake's body was regarded as its tail in ancient Egypt is confirmed by a passage in this very text, in which Apophis is referred to as:<sup>81</sup>







3w sd prj m-hnw-n tphtzf

...long of tail, who comes forth from his burrow.

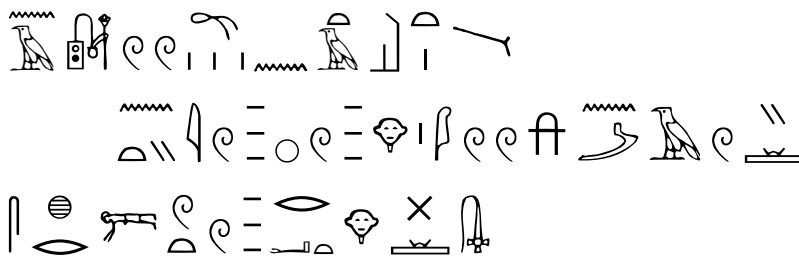
The Egyptians could only think of a serpent as being “long of tail” if they did not know, as we do, that snakes have relatively short tails, considerably shorter proportionately than the tails of many other animals familiar to them. The serpent could only be “long of tail” if most of what is being called tail is actually the serpent’s elongated body. When seen in context, therefore, the clause *wnn sd=k rdjt m r3*, “May your tail be placed in your mouth,” far from being marked or emphasized as in any way connected with the ouroboros, is clearly intended as yet another variation of the repeated motif of magically compelling the serpent to active complicity in its own destruction (like the previous *rdj.tw pshw=f n jwf=f ds=f*, “May it be caused that he bite into his own flesh himself,” and the following *wš=k msq=k ds=k*, “May you gnaw your skin yourself”) with, however, a special additional feature. The clause *wnn sd=k rdjt m r3* contains, imbedded within it, the components of the lexical term *sd-m-r3*, producing a paronomastic resonance with *sd-m-r3* and calling to mind the obvious and only meaning that *sd-m-r3* could have in relation to this text, that of sacrificial cutting to pieces and fiery immolation, that is, of

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<sup>81</sup> Faulkner, *Bremner-Rhind*, 75. Faulkner believes that the sign  is written for  in the original by scribal error; both signs very similar in hieratic, *ibid.*, v, 75 note c. For the signs   , see note 61.

the hecatomb itself. In context, therefore, *wnn sd=k rdjt m r3=k* has no special emphasis other than as a word-play on *sd-m-r3*, in the late sense of “burnt offering,” as it occurs in the Ptolemaic texts. There is nothing here suggesting any connection with the image of an ouroboros.

The other Bremner-Rhind citation alleged to be an example of *sd-m-r3*, “properly of the snake that bites itself in the tail,” is even less convincing than the previous one, upon close examination. The misunderstanding seems natural enough at first glance; the citation given occurs in the section of Bremner-Rhind entitled *The Names of Apophis, Which Shall Not Be*, facilitating the easy inference that *sd-m-r3* must indeed be one of the very names of Apophis and the erroneous conclusion that Apophis and the ouroboros are directly associated in some way, perhaps even one and the same.<sup>82</sup> A look at the text itself, however, reveals that this is not so. Among the twenty-nine names of Apophis listed in the text, *sd-m-r3* does not appear; moreover, as stated before, the lexical term *sd-m-r3* actually occurs nowhere in this text. What does occur, as part of the rubricated instructions to the priestly magician, is as follows: (32, 43-45)<sup>83</sup>



<sup>82</sup> For examples of this view see Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt, the One and the Many*, trans. John Baines (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983) 164; Kákosy, “Uroboros,” 888; B.H. Stricker, *De grote Zeeslang*, MVEOL 10 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1953) 7.

<sup>83</sup> Faulkner, *Papyrus Bremner-Rhind*, 91.






dating from about the time when the text of Bremner-Rhind was originally composed. It will be seen at once that there is nothing “ouroboric” about this image; rather, following conventions like the instructions in Bremner-Rhind, the “face” of the serpent has been drawn bent “downward” so that its jaws and teeth are in contact with the side of its body not far from its head. In other words, the serpent’s “tail” (as understood in ancient Egypt) has been “placed in (his) mouth” so that he may “gnaw into (his) skin (him)self” and “bite into his own flesh himself.” This other Bremner-Rhind citation, therefore, far from providing support for a primary definition of *sd-m-r3* as “properly of the snake that bites itself in the tail” (understood as an ouroboros), instead reveals itself to be only one of a number of thematically related images to be created by a priestly magician for the purpose of being ritually destroyed and cast into the flames. From both textual and iconological perspectives, this text has nothing whatsoever to do with the ouroboros.

The desire to provide an Egyptian origin or antecedent for the Greek term *ὄροβόρος* did not end with *sd-m-r3*. In the 1940s; B.H. Stricker pointed out what appeared to him to be a degree of homophony between the Greek word *ὄροβόρος* and an Egyptian expression *wr-*

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of night, when the mystery of Re’s union with Osiris takes place. It is precisely this moment that is illustrated in the vignette. Osiris stands facing Re, who arrives seated on a throne in the night barque. The barque courses along the inner surface of the night sky, indicated by an elongated sky hieroglyph  ; on the other side of the sky, in the abyssal darkness of the waters of chaos, an overthrown Apophis is shown bending his head downward to bite himself in the “tail.” A vertical line of text to the left of the serpent identifies it as “Apophis number four,” that is, the Apophis of the sixth hour of night in Bremner-Rhind. The red-colored, kneeling, bound, and beheaded captive shown next to the serpent’s body (and forming a “monogram” as superimposed hieroglyphs sometimes do) might be read as *hftj* ‘enemy’ and recalls instructions in Bremner-Rhind for the creation of images of “the children of revolt” which have “their arms bound and fettered behind them,” and are beheaded during the subsequent rite (35. 6-7).

*bjnꜣf*, vocalized as \**oerbonef*.<sup>88</sup> Citing Stricker, J. Jansen, B. van de Walle, and J. Vergote included this idea in their supplemental commentary to a translation of the *Hieroglyphica of Horapollo*.<sup>89</sup> Whereas the *sd-m-ḥ* hypothesis provides an apparent antecedent synonym as the origin of the Greek word (through an *interpretatio græca* along the lines of a “translation” from Egyptian to Greek), the *wr-bjnꜣf* proposal suggests instead an antecedent homonym, perhaps reminiscent of the well-known Egyptian practice of word-play. Stricker understands *wr-bjnꜣf* to be a name of Apophis, whom he explicitly identifies with the ouroboros; he then implicitly supposes that persons of Greek language and culture not only heard the expression *wr-bjnꜣf* spoken, but associated it with the image of an encircled serpent with its tail in its mouth and then chose to call such a serpent *ὄροβόρος*, the word suggested in part by its similarity in sound to *wr-bjnꜣf*. Leaving aside the phonological arguments that could be made against this idea, there are still several points in Stricker’s original publication that should be critically examined. The *wr-bjnꜣf* example that Stricker refers to (out of context and without proper citation) is erroneously said to be from the Serapeum rather than Edfu, where it occurs along the base of the outer wall of the sanctuary in a caption to one of the scenes in which the king presents the personifications of the nomes of Upper and Lower Egypt to Horus Behdety. The texts accompanying these scenes give details of the religious life of each nome, such as the deity or deities worshipped there, the names of unique features like carrying barques and shrines, festival dates, types of sacrificial offerings made, and the names of the preternatural serpents associated

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<sup>88</sup> B.H. Stricker, “Aanteekeningen op Egyptische Litteratuur- en Godsdienstgeschiedenis,” *OMRO* 25, new series (1944) 89.



<sup>89</sup> J. Jansen, B. van de Walle, and J. Vergote, “Compléments au commentaire des Hiéroglyphica d’Horapollon,” *CdÉ* 44 (1947) 253.

with each temple. The bit of text that Stricker refers to comes at the very end of the inscription accompanying the 11<sup>th</sup> Lower Egyptian nome, associated with an important cult center of Seth. After listing various features of the nome's temples and their personnel, characterizing the entire region as evil (*dw drzf*) and as being a place of endless night (*hh grhf*), and giving the date of the yearly occurrence of the nome's great festival (when animals of Seth, the crocodile and hippopotamus, were sacrificed), the inscription ends with the following:<sup>90</sup>



*wr bjnwf nn rnzf*

“(The serpent) ‘his evils are great’, his name does not exist.”

The supposed connection with the ouroboros is that Stricker understands *wr-bjnwf* (actually transliterated by him as *wr-binzf*, and rather loosely translated as “the vicious one”<sup>91</sup>) as a euphemism for Apophis, no doubt correctly, while identifying Apophis with the ouroboros, an arguable point. Stricker further takes *nn rnzf* as an epithet that reinforces this interpretation. He does this first of all by reading  as a writing of *shn* ‘to embrace’, then proceeds to read the supposed epithet in a double sense. His first translation, “whose (fem.) name is: the embracer,”<sup>92</sup> assumes the normative reading of  as the common Ptolemaic writing for *rn* ‘name’, while his second translation, “who keeps enclosed her cartouche,”<sup>93</sup> reads the same hieroglyph in its


<sup>90</sup> Rochemonteix and Chassinat, *Edfou*, vol. 1, fasc. 3, 333.

<sup>91</sup> “*De valsche*,” Stricker, *ibid.*





<sup>92</sup> “Wier naam luidt: de omvattende,” Stricker, *ibid.*


<sup>93</sup> “Die haar cartouche () omsloten houdt,” *ibid.*

origin sense of *šnw* ‘cartouche’, which also carries the meaning ‘circuit’, associated with the circuit of the sun along the edges of the ordered world and the *šn-wr*, the waters surrounding it. Stricker views both renderings as felicitous confirmations of a connection between *wr-bjnꜥf* /\**oerbonef* and *ὄροβόρος*.

A critique of Stricker’s proposal might begin by observing that the hieroglyphs clearly write *wr-bjnwꜥf*, not *wr-bjnꜥf*, and have the plain meaning “[the serpent] his evils are great” (the bracketed portion rendering the semantic force of the determinative *ꜥ*). The first sign of the following “epithet”, , is a quite usual late writing for the negative particle *nn*, known as early as the Victory Stela of Piankhi<sup>94</sup> and common at Edfu.<sup>95</sup> Though *wr bjnwꜥf* does not actually occur among the twenty-nine names listed in *The Names of Apophis, Which Shall Not Be*, the idea expressed by *nn rnꜥf*, “his names do not exist,” has clear parallels both in that work and the *Book of the Overthrowing of Apophis*.<sup>96</sup> It is quite in the spirit of those works, and the Egyptian belief in the actualizing power of names in general, for the occurrence of a name referring to Apophis (or a local analogue) to be followed by words that magically neutralize it, which is exactly what *nn rnꜥf* was intended to do; it was, therefore, not an epithet. It should also be pointed out that both of Stricker’s alternative translations of *nn rnꜥf* rather bizarrely render

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<sup>94</sup> Anthony Spalinger, “The negatives  and  in the Piye (Piankhy) Stela,” *RdÉ* 31 (1979) 66-80. Spalinger persuasively argues for a clear opposition between  *nn* and  *nj* in the Piankhi text.

<sup>95</sup> Wilson, *Lexikon*, 488. At Edfu, however,  is sometimes also used to write *nj*; disambiguation between *nn* and *nj* can then be made, where possible, on syntactical and contextual grounds. Cf., Sylvie Cauville, et al., *Dendara: Les chapelles osiriennes*, vol. 3 *Index*, BdE 119 (Cairo: IFAO, 1997) 237.

<sup>96</sup> Examples include the very title of *The Names of Apophis, Which Shall Not Be*, and those found in Faulkner, *Bremner-Rhind*, col. 29, ll. 11-12, 15, 20 of the *Book of the Overthrowing of Apophis*.

the masculine singular suffix pronoun  $\neq f$  as feminine (with relative pronoun *weir* and possessive pronoun *haar*), possibly a confusion that arose due to the fact that *slang*, ‘serpent’, is feminine in Dutch. None of this inspires particular confidence in Stricker’s proposals, of which he himself makes no mention in his monograph on the ouroboros published within a decade of making them.<sup>97</sup>

As antecedents imagined to give rise to the Greek word *οὐροβόρος*, both *wr bjnzf* and *sd-m-r3* suffer from the problem that their most recent known occurrences are no later than the early first century BCE, whereas the earliest attestation of the Greek term is dated three or four centuries later.<sup>98</sup> Together with the weakness of a case for an Egyptian language antecedent, it would perhaps be best to err on the side of caution and regard the word *οὐροβόρος* as an invention of grecophone circles, coined as a purely descriptive term used to identify a serpent symbol first encountered in native Egyptian contexts, along the line of more familiar Greek neologisms like *ὀβελίσκος* ‘obelisk’ and *πυραμίδς* ‘pyramid’.<sup>99</sup> Complicating matters somewhat, is the fact that *οὐροβόρος* never occurs in Greek as a substantive. What *does* occur is a compound adjective (composed of *οὐρά* ‘tail’ and *βόρος* > *βιβρώσκω* ‘to devour’), which in every known

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<sup>97</sup> Stricker, *Zeeslang*.

<sup>98</sup> PGM VII in Karl Preisendanz, ed. and trans., *Papyri Graecae Magicae, die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, vol. 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart, Teubner, 1974) 1. Preisendanz dates the papyrus 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE, following the editor of the *editio princeps* F.G. Kenyon, *Greek Papyri in the British Museum: Catalogue, with Texts* [vol. 1] (London: British Museum, 1893) xix. Though Betz dates it 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. CE, Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) xxiii, Jacco Dieleman would prefer to date the manuscript to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century on the basis of it being a scroll rather than a codex (personal communication).

<sup>99</sup> For likely etymologies of these words, relative to Egyptian contexts, see H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek Lexicon*, with rev. suppl., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 1196, 1555.

instance modifies the noun *δράκων*.<sup>100</sup> This means that a hypothetical Egyptian substantive referring to the ouroboros, if such there were, would have been received into the Greek target language as an adjective, an unlikely expectation.

Indeed, the use of the lexeme ‘ouroboros’ as a substantive in any language begins with the circle of scholars connected with Karl Preisendanz and the study of the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*,<sup>101</sup> which was then taken up by C.G. Jung and his followers, albeit with an added significance of their own.<sup>102</sup> When Egyptologists like Assmann, Hornung, Kákosy, and Stricker have considered the ouroboros in Ancient Egypt (using the noun “Uroboros” or “ouroboros”), they have done so in the wake of Jungian intellectual fashions.<sup>103</sup>

As will be evident when examining the iconological material in detail, there appears to be no specific name for the ouroboros icon itself in ancient Egyptian sources for the very good reason that it was not understood as a unique icon having a specific meaning; it has no individual

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 1274. There is also the very similar adjectival formation of Lydus, *ὀρηβόρος*, also used to modify the noun *δράκων*, *ibid.* See Chapter 4, “Concluding Remarks.”

<sup>101</sup> Preisendanz innovated the substantive ‘Uroboros’ in his commentary to PGM VII, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, vol. 2, 26. Previous scholarship was careful to present this lexeme as a Greek adjective, using plain descriptive terms (“a serpent with its tail in its own mouth”) where Preisendanz prefers his neologism; Kenyon, *Greek Papyri*, 84, 102. Preisendanz continued to give currency to the term in subsequent articles; Karl Preisendanz, “Ein altes Ewigkeitssymbol als Signet und Druckermarke,” in: A. Ruppel, ed., *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch 1935* (Mainz: Gutenberg-Gesellschaft, 1935), 143-149; Karl Preisendanz, “Aus der Geschichte des Uroboros,” in: Ferdinand Herrmann and Wolfgang Treutlein, eds., *Brauch und Sinnbild* (Karlsruhe: Südwestdeutsche Druck- und Verlagsgesellschaft, 1940) 194-209.

<sup>102</sup> Jung first introduced the noun *Uroboros* in lectures delivered at the Eranos Conference and published in the 1935 and 1936 editions of the Eranos-Jahrbuch, later revised and published together as *Psychologie und Alchemie* (Zurich: Rascher Verlag, 1944).

<sup>103</sup> Stricker must be credited for first introducing the noun “ouroboros” into Egyptological discourse in *De grote Zeeslang*, a monograph reflecting the wide-ranging interests of the Jungian school. The Egyptologist with the most overt Jungian associations may be Erik Hornung, who himself gave a series of papers at Eranos Conferences in the 1980s and 1990s. For a bibliography including these and related works, see Andreas Brodbeck, ed., *Ein ägyptisches Glasperlenspiel, Ägyptologische Beiträge für Erik Hornung aus seinem Schülerkreis* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1998) 317-21.

identity, let alone closely defined meanings like that which it develops amongst Hellenistic and later authors of alchemical, astrological, magical, and iconological texts, the true antecedents of the Renaissance and modern conceptions that have been read back into the Egyptian material. Rather, an impartial survey of the relevant Egyptian iconographic material shows that an image of a serpent with its tail in or near its mouth can occur for more than one reason depending on varying contexts. Alternatively, serpents can occur in very similar contexts with no discernable difference in semantic value, and yet occur with or without tails in their mouths, apparently in free variation. This is illustrated by the case of Mehen (*mḥn*, ‘coiled one’), a name which can denote, at least by the New Kingdom, an entity, force, or process forming a protective barrier around vulnerable beings such as the regenerating nocturnal sun, the infant sun, or the deceased king, and is represented in the form of a serpent (discussed at length in Chapter 3). Are we to regard an example that has its tail in its mouth as somehow being *the* ouroboros (whatever that may mean), while another Mehen-serpent, with apparently similar meaning and purpose but without its tail actually in its mouth, as being something else entirely? And what of the Mehen of the Coffin Texts (examined in Chapter 2), which is represented not as a serpent but as an outer black ring surrounding an “esoteric” image of Re? Should this, then, also be excluded from consideration?

The only approach that makes sense here is to employ the term ‘ouroboros’ in the very restricted and purely descriptive sense of the image of a serpent with its tail in its mouth, one variant amongst other possibilities. To do otherwise, that is, to look for *the* ouroboros (in the modern sense) in the Egyptian material, is methodologically backwards and *a priori*, evincing an unnecessary lack of objectivity toward the material, with unfortunate results. Assmann, for example, describes the serpent that appears around the perimeter of the lids of the nesting

sarcophagi of Merenptah as “the ouroboros...a blessing-symbol (*Heilssymbol*) of resurrection into the eternity of cosmic life,”<sup>104</sup> when protective encapsulation by the Mehen-serpent is a more natural interpretation, consistent with the entire nexus of related iconographic symbolism.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, in a 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty papyrus of Herweben,<sup>106</sup> Assmann interprets the serpent surrounding a sun disk emblazoned with an image of the infant sun as “...the ouroboros, the symbol of endless cyclical time (*kreisförmigunendlichen Zeit*),”<sup>107</sup> when the enclosing protection of Mehen is once again indicated. Piankoff preceded Assmann in this, describing the same vignette as having “...the solar disk surrounded by a serpent biting its tail—the symbol of eternity,”<sup>108</sup> again with nothing to support such an interpretation and much that could be said against it. Kákosy, when describing a serpent that appears around the perimeter of a fragmentary late Saite wooden coffin cover, which is painted such that the head and tail of the serpent meet

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<sup>104</sup> Jan Assmann, *Zeit und Ewigkeit im alten Ägypten: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Ewigkeit*, Abhandlungen der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse 1975/1 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter-Universitätsverlag, 1975) 33.

<sup>105</sup> Edwin C. Brock, an experienced field Egyptologist who has spent many years working in the Valley of the Kings, including the tomb of Merenptah (KV 8), and has closely studied the royal sarcophagi, kindly sent along the following no-nonsense note as a personal communication regarding the serpents appearing on the sarcophagi of Merenptah: “Both the rectangular outer granite lid and the second cartouche-shaped lid with the effigy on its upper surface have a serpent incised around the upper edge that holds its tail in its mouth at the head of each lid. The serpent represents the protective Mehen serpent, sometimes shown in the *Amduat* and *Book of Gates* enclosing the image of the sun god or Osiris.” As will be seen, however, the Mehen serpents shown protecting the night sun in his barque are rarely shown encircling Re, nor do they have their tails in their mouths (with the exception of the first hour in the *Book of Gates*). They are shown rather floating around or draped over the shrine containing Re in his barque or, in the absence of a shrine, floating around or draped over the standing Re himself. Yet their name and function is quite the same as those serpents on the Merenptah sarcophagi lids that entirely surround the sarcophagi and *do* have their tails in their mouths.

<sup>106</sup> A. Piankoff, “Les deux papyrus ‘mythologiques’ de Her-Ouben au Musée du Caire,” *ASAE* 49 (1949) pl. 6. This vignette will be more fully discussed below in Chapter 4.

<sup>107</sup> Assmann, *Zeit und Ewigkeit*, 34.

<sup>108</sup> Alexandre Piankoff, trans., *Mythological Papyri*, texts, Bollingen Series 40/3, vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957) 73.



and overlap near the feet (rather than the tail being actually in the serpent's mouth), second-guesses the Egyptian artisan by declaiming, "Although the tail of the serpent on the coffin fragment is not exactly in the mouth, obviously an ouroboros was intended."<sup>109</sup> But this is circular reasoning or deduction from unquestioned presupposition, for while one might, with Kákosy, suspect the competence of a humble artisan working for a client of more modest means and station, serpents without their tails in their mouths occur in similar iconographic contexts, for example, surrounding the mummy effigies on the granite sarcophagus lids of both Ramesses III and his probable son, Amunherkhepshef (both examined in Chapter 3). As such sarcophagi are obviously products of the royal workshop, they must be—for us—the final arbiters of what should or should not be appropriate in Egyptian funerary symbolism, rather than some unsupported *idée fixe* of our own.

This illustrates the urgent necessity of terminological clarity with regard to this subject, and the tyranny of the term "ouroboros" as commonly used. This usage, and the conceptual baggage accompanying it, is an obstacle to the understanding of the Egyptian material on its own terms. What is proposed here is not, however, the formulation of a complete, systematic, descriptive typology of ouroboros-related imagery. Rather the approach taken here is essentially a pragmatic one, keeping close to the material under discussion, and using whatever terms best convey what is meant with the least ambiguity. On the whole, "ouroboros" will be used *sensu stricto* to refer specifically to the icon or image of a serpent with its tail actually touching or in its mouth, whether in a circle or not, and without any meaning whatsoever attached to it; the term "classic ouroboros" will be used to refer to the iconographically stable icon of a serpent in a circle with its tail in or at its mouth (together with associated concepts of eternity and cyclic

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<sup>109</sup> László Kákosy, "Ouroboros on Magical Healing Statues," 123. The object upon which Kákosy comments will be examined in Chapter 4.

time), that emerged in Late Antiquity and was of interest to scholars of the Renaissance and later;<sup>110</sup> the neologism “ouroboroid” will be used in a purely descriptive sense with reference to ouroboros-like images, such as a serpent in a loop but without its tail in its mouth. The terms “ouroboros-related” and “ouroboric,” whether of ideas or images, will be used somewhat flexibly, but in contexts that leave no doubt as to their meaning. Lastly, with regard to a few less specialized terms as used in this study, the terms “icon” and “image” will be used interchangeably to refer to an iconographic element in and of itself with no meaning attached to it; whereas “symbol” will be used to refer to an icon or image together with the conceptions or ideas associated with it. The term “grapheme” will be used for an icon or image used also or exclusively for writing linear, discursive language (the case for most hieroglyphs).

As an iconological object, then, how is the Egyptian ouroboros, in the strict sense, to be classified? Despite appearing as the second entry in the annotated catalogue known as the *Hieroglyphica* of Horapollo,<sup>111</sup> the ouroboros does not appear as a grapheme anywhere in known Egyptian texts, and is absent from all Egyptological inventories of signs used in the hieroglyphic writing system. From the time of its first appearance in the New Kingdom, the ouroboros is used as a component of what might be variously termed emblematic displays, symbolic groupings,<sup>112</sup> or symbolic tableaux that, while sometimes accompanied by texts, are themselves neither the

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<sup>110</sup> This differs from the sense that Hornung uses the term “*l’Ouroboros* «classique»,” referring to the icon of the serpent with its tail to its mouth that first appears on the second gold shrine of Tutankhamen and subsequently. Erik Hornung, “L’Égypte, la philosophie avant les Grecs,” *Les Études philosophiques* 2/3 (1987) 119.

<sup>111</sup> Heinz-Josef, Thissen, *Des Niloten Horapollon Hieroglyphenbuch*. vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung*, Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete 6 (Munich: K.G. Saur, 2001) 2-3. Horapollo describes the icon, gives its meaning as “the cosmos,” but does not actually use the term “ouroboros” with reference to it.

<sup>112</sup> For a related, if somewhat more restricted used of this term see: Heinrich Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*, ed. Emma Brunner-Traut, trans. John Baines (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

writing of language nor representations of potentially perceptible objects, real or imagined. In order to more clearly define the nature of this uniquely Egyptian mode of expression, a few general remarks about the nature of the Egyptian semiotic system as a whole will first be necessary.

Like the ancient Greek *γράφω*, the Egyptian *sš* has within its semantic range both the meaning of ‘writing’ and of ‘drawing or painting’. Envisioned in its entirety, the graphic aspect of the fully developed Egyptian semiotic system<sup>113</sup> should likewise be seen as forming a continuum instead of as a system emerging from the polar opposites of linguistic signs and non-linguistic figural representations. Rather, the virtually aniconic graphemes employed as purely linguistic signifiers (primarily the demotic script<sup>114</sup>) should be regarded as one natural extreme of this continuum, with entirely textless, figural representations as the other. Moving along the

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<sup>113</sup> The “graphic aspect” under consideration here is essentially the conventions of writing and other two-dimensional representations (though certain such material always retained the capacity for transposition into three-dimensions), and excludes (with a few noted exceptions) most other aspects of the Egyptian semiotic system. The larger system as a whole, however, includes not only writing and other forms of two-dimensional representation, but also such things as sculptures and other three-dimensional objects (e.g., amulets, ritual objects), meaning that is signified by the specific disposition of texts and objects in space (e.g., on a mummy, in tombs and temples), the symbolic meaning of the architectural settings, including the choice and placement of texts and representations upon their surfaces, and the shape, arrangement, and geographical orientation of the structures themselves. This catalogue of semantic expression might ultimately be extended to include the transformation of the perceived natural world by the attribution of toponyms and cosmonyms, including terms for “intelligible” regions beyond normal sense perception (e.g., the *Duat*), the final extent being the limits of the cosmos itself and the surrounding chaos in which it is embedded. Because both hieroglyphs and symbols can visually refer to objects or aspects of the world, both real and imagined (though the Neoplatonist terms “sensible” and “intelligible” might be preferable here), the Egyptian graphic system can also be said to transcend the borders of language (cf., Jan Assmann, “Ancient Egypt and the Materiality of the Sign,” in: Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer, eds., *Materialities of Communication*, trans. William Whobrey (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994) 15-31.

<sup>114</sup> The demotic script and the so-called abnormal hieratic script that preceded it are relatively late developments in the history of Egyptian writing systems; however, earlier examples of aniconic linguistic signifiers occurs in the case of the handful of hieroglyphs derived from hieratic, in which the forms have become purely conventional and the original iconic values entirely lost.

semiotic continuum away from aniconic signifiers in the direction of greater iconicity, one encounters first so-called abnormal hieratic. This is followed by hieratic script, which features more pronounced non-linguistic signifiers (determinatives, cartouches) and is, in theory at least, more or less convertible into fully iconic hieroglyphic script, which demotic script is not. Next, in terms of greater iconicity, comes the hieroglyphic script itself and, further, those instances in which the figural representation is so intimately a part of the whole as to act as determinative to the text. There are then examples of more complex interrelations between the figural representations and the accompanying texts or instances in which texts appear to have only the most oblique connection with the figural representation that accompanies them; yet again, there are examples of figural representations that are virtually or even absolutely textless.<sup>115</sup> One might characterize the antipodes of this continuum as being at one end almost purely linguistic (demotic script), while at the other end being purely semantic (textless figural representations).

As an aside, it may be noted that there is sometimes a tendency to privilege the linguistic end of this continuum, without keeping in mind the whole, that has produced, on occasion, some peculiar results. Some linguistically-oriented scholars, for example, prefer to study the Egyptian language through the exclusive use of texts in the form of modern, romanized Egyptological transliterations that are entirely divorced from any extra-linguistic context and content, even determinatives.<sup>116</sup> This approach might make some sense when working, say, on a group of Middle Kingdom letters, with a view to reconstructing the fine points of an envisioned “pure”

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<sup>115</sup> Examples of the former are the vignettes that began to appear regularly with BD 17 from the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty on, while examples of the latter occur amongst the so-called Mythological Papyri of the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty.

<sup>116</sup> This is, for example, the preferred method of several key scholars associated with *Lingua Aegyptia*, *Journal of Egyptian Language Studies*.

Middle Egyptian language, but what then of monumental inscriptions in which the determinatives may, for example, not only confirm the identity of objects, but have internal details or colors that likely record the materials of which the objects were composed? And what sense does it make to study the texts of compositions like the Underworld Books divorced from their accompanying figural components, when the texts and figures so clearly form an indissoluble whole? If it is thought useful and necessary, as a point of method, to produce synoptic text editions of the Underworld Books, giving every textual variant, should it not be equally as important to include the variant figural elements in such an edition, making available a comparative record of the variations in the figural representations as well?<sup>117</sup> Since the Underworld Books form a textual and figural unity, why privilege variants of the linguistic aspect only? Have the figural elements nothing to say, or less to say? This is a scholarly and methodological bias that unnecessarily disfigures the perception of these works, and encumbers efforts to understand them as they are, on their own terms.

Returning to consideration of the graphic semiotic continuum, the hieroglyphic writing system, in and of itself, has been the object of increasing interest in recent decades, perhaps due

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<sup>117</sup> Such is the case, for example, with Erik Hornung's "standard" editions of the *Book of Amduat*. The text is essentially that of the relatively complete version in the burial chamber of Tuthmosis III, but variants are drawn from seventeen other sources. Admittedly, some of these were originally incomplete or now fragmentary, but several (e.g., Amenophis II, Sethos I, Ramesses VI) have extensive and well-preserved versions with significant variations in the figural elements; despite this, Hornung's 1963 edition gives only the figurative elements from Tuthmosis III. Hornung's later edition, issued in three volumes in 1987-1994, gives all textual sources in parallel columns but reproduces no figural elements whatsoever. Erik Hornung, ed., *Das Amduat; Die Schrift des Verborgenen Raumes*, vol. 1: text, ÄgAbh 7 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963; Erik Hornung, ed., *Texte zum Amduat*, 3 vols., AH 3, 14, 15 (Geneva: Ägyptologisches Seminar der Universität Basel and Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Genève, 1987, 1992, 1994). A concrete example of a figurative element with significant variations that is relevant to the present study is the serpent Many-of-Faces in the sixth hour of the *Amduat* (discussed above), which shows three, four, or five heads in different exemplars of the composition. From this point of view the full corpus of the Underworld Books, as integral textual/iconographic compositions, remains essentially unpublished.

in part to the influence of intellectual fashions reflecting the post-structuralist inversion or rejection of the primacy of spoken language over writing. Studies have included investigation into the origin and nature of the hieroglyphic script,<sup>118</sup> the dual nature of the hieroglyphs as having both linguistic and semantic referents,<sup>119</sup> the organic relationship between hieroglyphic script and figural image, and the potential of hieroglyphic texts to form a semantic unity with two-dimensional representations or three-dimensional objects with which they appear.<sup>120</sup>

At the figurative end of the graphic semiotic continuum, scholarly interest has turned its attention to such issues as the artistic canon and proportion in the human figure,<sup>121</sup> analysis of formal constructional rules, the compositional syntax that allows the figurative images to be “read,” the formal relationship between the text and image, and the relationship between the image and the viewer.<sup>122</sup> As a result of such studies, much that once seemed primitive, irrational,

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<sup>118</sup> Representative examples include: Leo Depuydt, “On the Nature of the Hieroglyphic Script,” *ZÄS* 121 (1994) 17-36; Orly Goldwasser, *From Icon to Metaphor: Studies in the Semiotics of the Hieroglyphs*, OBO 142 (Fribourg, Switzerland: University Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1995); Pascal Vernus, “L’écriture de l’Égypte ancienne,” in: Anne-Marie Christin, ed., *L’espace et la lettre: Écritures, Typographies*, Cahiers Jussieu 3 (Paris: Union Générale, 1977) 61-77.

<sup>119</sup> H. te Velde, “Egyptian Hieroglyphs as Linguistic Signs and Metalinguistic Informants,” in: H.G. Kippenberg, et al., eds., *The Image in Writing*, Visible Religion 6 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988) 169-179. Though intended for a non-specialist audience, mention should be made of a very useful annotated catalogue of hieroglyphs emphasizing semantic rather than linguistic use: Richard H. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art: A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992).

<sup>120</sup> Significant examples are: Pascal Vernus, “Des relations entre textes et représentations dans l’Égypte Pharaonique” in: Anne-Marie Christin, ed., *Écritures II* (Paris: Le Sycomore Presse, 1985) 45-66; Henry George Fischer, *L’écriture et l’art de l’Égypte ancienne: Quatre leçons sur la paléographie et l’épigraphie pharaoniques*, Essais et conférences, Collège de France (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986); Assmann, “Ancient Egypt and the Materiality of the Sign.”

<sup>121</sup> A pioneering work still worth consulting is Erik Iversen, *Canon and Proportions in Egyptian Art*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. rev., (Warminster, Wiltshire: Aris and Phillips, 1975), though superseded to a great extent by Gay Robins, *Proportion and Style in Ancient Egyptian Art* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1994).

<sup>122</sup> Standard older works include Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*; H.A. Groenewegen-Frankfort, *Arrest and Movement: An Essay on Space and Time in the Representational Art of the Ancient Near East*

or semantically opaque to modern eyes, habituated as they are to perspectival representation and a host of other visual conventions, now seems more comprehensible and meaningful. With few exceptions, however, such studies have had the intention of elucidating representations of persons, objects, and events that could be potentially or imaginatively seen by the eye, for example, innumerable scenes from daily life, famous battles, the king destroying enemies or making offerings to the gods, the judgment of the dead, or an epiphany engendering the coming pharaoh.

Conspicuously absent from these theoretical studies is any *sustained* consideration of the distinctively Egyptian tradition of drawing upon the entire spectrum of graphic repertoire to create complex symbolic statements expressive of cosmogonic, cosmological, and eschatological ideas. Extreme examples of this may even be composed almost entirely of iconic elements that can be found as signs in hieroglyphic writing, yet such clusters of signs are *not* writing, but extra-linguistic semantic formulations, sometimes non-linear (as the sense may require), and incapable of being read as pure linguistic statements.<sup>123</sup> Some of these complex emblematic groupings appear to be of polyvalent meaning, designed to be understood simultaneously on two

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(London: Faber & Faber, 1951). For more recent work of relevance see Roland Tefnin, "Image et histoire: Réflexions sur l'usage documentaire de l'image égyptienne," *CdE* 54/108 (1979) 218-244; Roland Tefnin, "Discourse et iconicité dans l'art égyptien," *GM* 79 (1984) 55-69; John Baines, "Theories and Universals of Representation: Heinrich Schäfer and Egyptian Art," *Art History* 8/1 (1985) 1-25; Jan Assmann, "Hierotaxis: Textkonstitution und Bildkomposition in der altägyptischen Kunst und Literatur," in: Jürgen Osing, Günter Dreyer, eds., *Form und Mass: Beiträge zur Literatur, Sprache und Kunst des alten Ägypten*, ÄUAT 12 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1987; Whitney Davis, *The Canonical Tradition in Ancient Egyptian Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>123</sup> In the "syntax" of emblematic groupings or symbolic tableaux (which may represent non-linear realities), one need not expect linearity, which writing has taken over in imitation of speech (necessarily linear because of its occurrence in sequential time). This contrast between the linearity of the syntax of linguistic signifiers and the organization of non-linguistic signifiers is anticipated by Saussure, though he emphasized spoken language over writing; Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique general*, ed. Tullio de Mauro (Paris: Payothèque, 1982) 103.

or more “ontological levels” (cosmic, solar, royal, funerary),<sup>124</sup> of which more will be said below. This potential of the Egyptian semiotic system for the expression of extra-linguistic semantic content, including use of hieroglyphs for purposes other than writing, is documented from the Predynastic Period forward, but achieves the height of sophistication in the Underworld Books of the New Kingdom and the decorated coffins and so-called Mythological Papyri of the following 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty, both of which are rich sources of ouroboros-related imagery.

To return now to the question of how the Egyptian ouroboros (and semantically related ouroboroids) is to be formally classified with regard to its place in the graphic continuum of the Egyptian semiotic system, it is evident that the ouroboros is never intended to represent any natural creature that could actually be seen by the eye, nor does it appear anywhere in the inventory of hieroglyphic signs used for writing. The ouroboros exists primarily as an element of emblematic groupings or symbolic tableaux expressive of cosmogonic, cosmological, and eschatological ideas.<sup>125</sup> The fact that the ouroboros is neither a hieroglyph nor a representation of a potentially perceptible object highlights the character of these emblematic groupings and symbolic tableaux as a distinct genre of extra-linguistic conceptual expression.

It is worth digressing here to note that this potential of the Egyptian semiotic system to express complex ideas non-discursively through the use of symbolic groupings composed of

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<sup>124</sup> A well-known example of this is the symbolic tableaux of the twelfth hour in the *Book of Gates*, which can be understood as an image of the creation of the world, the renewal of the sun at dawn, the reception of the dying, setting sun into the *Duat*, all of which are—by implication as a part of the panoply of funerary preparations for the king—analogs of processes pertinent to royal afterlife expectations to be examined in Chapter 3.

<sup>125</sup> However, it has been argued that in late magical contexts the use of the ouroboros had devolved into a mere formulaic convention with little or no semantic value; see Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950) 250. This view is vigorously opposed by Ritner, who argues that even in these late contexts “...the ouroboros retains its symbolism...as an image of protection and containment.” Robert K. Ritner, “A Uterine Amulet in the Oriental Institute Collection,” *JNES* 43/3 (1984) 220.



icons or signs (some of which also occur in hieroglyphic writing) was a feature of Egyptian priestly culture that was well-known to certain interested outsiders of the Greco-Roman world. Though it has become nearly obligatory in Egyptological accounts of the decipherment of Egyptian to point out that ancient Greek and Latin authors held the erroneous view that the hieroglyphs express ideas symbolically rather than write phonetic and discursive language, a sympathetic and contextual reading of some of the authors in question shows that this was not universally so.<sup>126</sup> Clement of Alexandria, for example, has been understood as properly making a distinction between phonetic elements of the hieroglyphic script and determinatives, and between determinatives that derive their meanings from direct representation of perceptible objects and others that derive their meanings figuratively. He further makes mention of “allegorical” symbolism expressed through certain enigmas (*κατά τινὰς αἰνιγμοῦς*), which may be reasonably understood as a reference to images occurring in symbolic tableaux.<sup>127</sup> A graphic representation attested by Plutarch is clearly an example of iconography expressive of cosmogonic or cosmographic ideas.<sup>128</sup> The most explicit reference to Egyptian symbolic tableaux by a classical author is, however, in a well-known yet frequently misunderstood passage of Plotinus.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Most of the relevant ancient testimonia, expressing a spectrum of views as to the nature of Egyptian hieroglyphs and their relation to symbolism, is collected in: Pierre Marestaing, *Les écritures égyptiennes et l'antiquité classique* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1913).

<sup>127</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromatum V*, 20.3 = Alain Le Boulluec, ed., and Pierre Voulet, trans., *Clément d'Alexandrie, Les Stromates: Stromate V*, vol. 1, Sources chrétiennes 278 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1981) 58-59.

<sup>128</sup> In *De Iside et Osiride* 11 and *De Pythiae oraculis* 12, Plutarch correctly states that the Egyptians represented the rising sun as a newborn male infant seated on a lotus flower. This is the image of Nefertem, also associated with the ontogenesis of the creator. Frank Cole Babbitt, trans., *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 5., Loeb Classical Library 306 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1936) 28-29, 290-91.

<sup>129</sup> Plotinus, *Ennead V*, 8.6 = A.H. Armstrong, trans., *Plotinus*, vol. 5 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1984) 256-57.

Plotinus states that when the Egyptians, in their temples, wanted to represent something “via wisdom” (*διὰ σοφίας δεικνύναι*), they do not use signs that represent sounds of linear, discursive language and the philosophical statements that can be made with such language, but use instead symbols that manifest the non-discursiveness of the “intelligible world.”<sup>130</sup> Plotinus is most correct in this, and a valuable ancient testimony. What struck Plotinus as remarkable was not the ability of the Egyptians to write the sounds of their own language—every civilized people that he knew had that ability—but the unique ability of the Egyptians to create non-discursive, extra-linguistic symbolic groupings or tableaux, for which they had a well-developed, complex, and ancient tradition.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> That is, “intelligible” in the Neoplatonist sense of realities known directly by the mind (e.g., ‘the gods’), as opposed to realities perceived by the senses; see. n. 113.

<sup>131</sup> There continues to be perpetuated, in Egyptological circles, an old view, now being abandoned by some classicists, that this passage refers to hieroglyphic writing. For this Egyptologically normative view, see Erik Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt and Its Hieroglyphs* (Copenhagen: Gec Gad Publishers, 1961) 45-46. It has even been suggested that Plotinus was responsible for delaying the decipherment of hieroglyphic writing because he “...had set out the theory which was to underpin European hieroglyphic studies for one and a half millennia,” Aidan Dodson, *The Hieroglyphs of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2001) 96, as if there indeed *were* any such studies from Late Antiquity until the Renaissance discovery of the *Hieroglyphica* of Horapollo on the Island of Andros in 1422. The manuscript was taken to Florence and became an object of intense interest for Marsilio Ficino, a young scholar of Greek who, under the patronage of Cosimo de’ Medici, was to re-found the Academy of Plato in Florence. Ficino was very much under the spell of Horapollo when he published, in 1492, the *Enneads* of Plotinus, with his Latin translation and commentary. For the nature of Ficino’s Horapollo-inspired misconception and its effect on, amongst other things, the Renaissance reception of the ouroboros, see Chapter 4, “Concluding Remarks.” The entire subject deserves detailed treatment elsewhere, but let it suffice for the present purpose to point out that Ficino’s misunderstanding of this passage not only had a great influence on the development of Renaissance emblematics but, more importantly (for Egyptology), had a strong influence on the subsequent translation tradition of the *Enneads*. Iversen, for example, relied for his views on the translation of Bréhier, who had followed Ficino’s misunderstanding so completely that he felt obliged to emphasize in his commentary that, “*Plotin ignorait complètement, comme tous les Grecs, le caractère alphabétique des signes hiéroglyphiques.*” Emile Bréhier, ed. and trans., *Plotin, Ennéades*, vol. 5, Collection des Universités de France (Paris: Société d’édition «Les belles lettres», 1931) 142. For a correct understanding of this passage, it is important to notice both what Plotinus does and does not say. If what Plotinus says is true, that when the Egyptians want to represent something in their temples “according to wisdom,” they do not use signs that represent sounds of language and discursive statement, then it would seem to follow that when they *do not* wish to write “according to wisdom,” but want to write a poetic account of a battle, about the foundation of a temple, or the praises of a king, etc., they *do*

A thoroughgoing theoretical analysis of both the semantic and syntactic dimensions of Egyptian non-discursive symbolic statements has yet to be fully attempted (if it is even possible), and no attempt will be made to do so here as this would require the examination of much material well beyond that which is germane to the present study. Again, a purely pragmatic approach is taken here, with only such analysis as is necessary for the interpretation of the material at hand. In seeking to understand the articulation and interrelation of signs, one can perhaps do with less than a complete, rigorous syntactical model, but may nonetheless benefit from something a bit more overtly structuralist than the “rules of decorum” that Baines imported into Egyptology from Gombrich’s iconological studies of Renaissance emblematics.<sup>132</sup> While informed by the approach of Baines, along with Schäfer and Gombrich before him, and

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use signs that represent the sounds of linear language and make linguistic, discursive propositions. This is clearly, if negatively, implied by Plotinus’ statement. “Plotinus...is therefore not misunderstanding the semi-alphabetic hieroglyphics...but speaking of the purely ideogrammatic symbols which do appear on temple walls.” Armstrong, *Plotinus*, 256-257; see also Eugénie de Keyser, *La signification de l’art dans les Ennéades de Plotin*, Recueil de travaux d’histoire et de philologie, ser. 4, 7 (Louvain: Publications universitaires de Louvain, 1955) 60-62. Plotinus would certainly have been in a position to know of symbols on temple walls, having grown up in one of the largest towns in Upper Egypt at a time when the temples were still very much active and being himself almost certainly a Hellenized Egyptian; see Dana M. Reemes, “On the Name Plotinus,” *LingAeg* 5 (1997) 161-69.

<sup>132</sup> On the methodology of “rules of decorum,” see John Baines, *Fecundity Figures: Egyptian Personification and the Iconology of a Genre* (Warminster, Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips, 1985) 27ff.; for Baines’ source for the “rules of decorum,” see E.H. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images: Studies in the art of the Renaissance* (London: Phaidon Press, 1972), 7ff. Many of Gombrich’s ideas are clearly as applicable to Egyptian iconological studies as to those of the Renaissance (e.g., a given symbol “...does not have one meaning but a whole range of meaning determined by context” Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 8.) Baines insightfully recognized the applicability of Gombrich’s methods, especially to iconological products of Egyptian high culture: “The phenomena I am concerned with are common to most iconographic sources and some textual ones, so that the potential rewards from defining a set of rules or, more probably, sets of rules for different areas such as temple relief and underworld material is considerable....As is true of the renaissance works for which decorum is significant, the Egyptian products are central to the artistic and intellectual culture, and should display the highest degree of meaningful organization.” Baines, *Fecundity Figures*, 277. There is an unrecognized irony in Baines’ productive appropriation of methodological tools developed for the interpretation of Renaissance iconography, since the whole enterprise of Renaissance emblematics was self-consciously “Egyptianizing,” taking much of its inspiration from the *Hieroglyphica* of Horapollo.

acknowledging the relevance of the more recent contributions of Tefnin<sup>133</sup> and Assmann,<sup>134</sup> the iconographic material that is the object of the present study will be subjected to a more structuralist approach, somewhat analogous to that used in the analysis of texts. So, for example, by proposing that certain syntagmatic structures underlie thematically related emblematic displays, it becomes possible to determine which elements in such displays are paradigmatically interchangeable with one another and may have some equivalency in meaning. As will be seen in the following chapters, this method will be crucial for establishing the meaning of the ouroboros and other closely related icons in the contexts in which they are found.

As previously stated, in order to understand best the origin, history, and meanings expressed through the Egyptian ouroboros (*sensu stricto*, along with organically related images), it has been necessary to abandon the accumulation of preconceived notions attached to the term ouroboros and then to cast a wide net, including a broader range of textual and iconographic material than has been previously considered in Egyptological discourse about the ouroboros. While attempting to reduce this fuller range of material to some degree of manageable order, certain hermeneutical approaches have then suggested themselves. To start with, when attempting to determine what meanings are to be understood from the ouroboroi, ouroboroids, and related icons in the contexts in which they are found, the starting-point should not be the isolated icons themselves, but the underlying syntagmatic structure of each emblematic display in which they are embedded. Though the icons are deployed as signs (that is, each uniting in itself both signifier and signified), much of the meaning they convey has to do not only with their

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<sup>133</sup> Tefnin, “Image et Histoire” and “Discourse et iconicité.”

<sup>134</sup> Assmann, “Hierotaxis.”

individual significations, but with their interplay and articulation amongst themselves, relational meanings determined by the underlying syntagmatic structure.<sup>135</sup>

In further examining the material relevant to this study, the perennial question of the logicity of Egyptian speculative thought arises anew, for example, in the apparent contradiction in detail of multiple, alternate accounts of the sun-god's nightly journey, often occurring side by side in the very same tombs. Its apparently illogical and unsystematic tendency has long been perceived to be a general problem for the rational understanding of Egyptian religious thought. A useful perspective on this problem is offered by Wilson who, giving the example of the sky being alternatively yet simultaneously supported by posts, or held up by a god, or resting on walls, or being a divine cow supported by its legs, or a goddess arched over the earth and supported by her outstretched fingertips and toes, stresses the fluidity of Egyptian conceptualization and the absence of contradiction from an Egyptian point of view, due to the "possibility of complimentary viewpoints."<sup>136</sup> Zandee adopted this idea from Wilson, yet felt obligated to point out that Egyptian speculative thought nonetheless violated the "law of identity" in logic.<sup>137</sup> Hornung subsequently took up the problem and expanded upon the idea, drawing an explicit parallel with the concept of "complimentarity" associated with the so-called

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<sup>135</sup> Distinct, individual signs of identical or closely related meaning can be in an interchangeable, paradigmatic relationship to one another with regard to the underlying syntagmata, which (at a deeper and broader level) can have variants of their own, functioning as interchangeable paradigms in a more basic and inclusive syntagmatic structure. The application of such a model to larger questions of Egyptian theology might bring more clarity to the understanding of the speculative achievement of the priestly intelligentsia by emphasizing the meaning common to the underlying syntagmatic structures, rather than of the more variant surface expressions.

<sup>136</sup> John A. Wilson, "Egypt," in: Henri Frankfort, et. al., *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man, An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East*, An Oriental Institute Essay (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946) 45-46.

<sup>137</sup> Jan Zandee, *Het ongedifferentieerde denken der oude Egyptenaren* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966) 14ff.

“Copenhagen interpretation” of quantum theory advanced by Bohr in 1927.<sup>138</sup> Hornung goes on to contrast the “two-valued logic of yes/no” of classical mechanics with the “many-valued logic” required by quantum theory, which he sees as potentially valuable for understanding Egyptian thought. However, he further states that, as the particulars of “quantum logic” or the “logic of complementarity” remain a matter of controversy in the field of physics, “the intellectual basis of a many-valued logic remains uncertain” and Egyptian thought, therefore, “will continue to be open to the charges of arbitrariness or confusion.”<sup>139</sup>

However, the logical validity of Egyptian speculative thought need not await the outcome of an unresolved controversy of modern physics, provided one is willing to be descriptive rather than prescriptive in one’s approach to the question. One need look no further than the most elementary formal principles of inference and definition in modern logic, those of exclusive versus inclusive disjunction in particular.<sup>140</sup> Exclusive disjunction means that when two terms of a statement are coordinated by the conjunction “or,” one must be true and the other must be false; thus the celestial vault could not be *both* the Heavenly Cow and the goddess Nut. However, in the case of inclusive disjunction, the conjunction “or” has the meaning “and/or”; at least one of the terms must be true, and both can be. The logic of inclusivity is a basic feature of

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<sup>138</sup> Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*, World Perspectives 19 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958) 43ff.

<sup>139</sup> Hornung, *Conceptions of God*, 242. For a summary of the scholarly debate on the question of logic in Egyptian religious thought that followed as a response to Hornung’s publication of these views see: John Baines, “*Interpretation of Religion: Logic, Discourse, Rationality*,” *GM* 76 (1984) 26ff.

<sup>140</sup> See, for example, the typical account of a convenient standard college text, Patrick Suppes, *Introduction to Logic* (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand, 1957) 5, 11.

Egyptian thought and is seen everywhere in Egyptian religion, not least in its most obvious feature, its so-called polytheism.<sup>141</sup>

Pursuant to this logic of inclusivity, the rich and varied expressions of Egyptian speculative thought, its cosmogonies, cosmologies, and eschatologies, should be understood as stating a relatively few things but doing so in many different ways. It may also be averred, with only a little irony, that it is when Egyptian thought appears most illogical and contradictory that it is truly being its most clear and precise.<sup>142</sup> The multiple and various accounts of creation, of the order of the world, and of afterlife expectations, often appearing together in apparent contradiction, suggest a self-conscious awareness that, while all versions are to be understood as in some sense true, no specific expression is to be considered as absolutely and exclusively true. Perhaps the “final” truth was thought to be something to be read between the lines, so to speak, something to a degree transconceptual, but shadowed forth and given apprehensible form, to the extent that such is possible, by means of multiple, specific accounts.<sup>143</sup> At the same time, the realities expressed by the various accounts could not be thought of apart from the specific

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<sup>141</sup> “Polytheism” is hardly a concept that the Egyptians would have used themselves; the term has its origin in Jewish and Christian polemics and was entirely pejorative (see citations, Liddell and Scott, *Greek Lexicon*, 1438). The opposition of exclusive/inclusive neatly summarizes the contrast between monotheist reductivism and the fluid, all-embracing pluralism of the Egyptian pantheon. The former is also an inherently intolerant and “closed system,” whereas the tolerant “open system” of traditional Egyptian religion knew neither orthodoxy nor heresy and easily assimilated foreign deities. The aberrant religion of Akhenaten is a case in point. His was an exclusive “closed system”; among his radical innovations was religious intolerance, as witnessed in his persecution of traditional religion.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001) 230, though Assmann’s point is not quite that which is being made here.

<sup>143</sup> This way of thought is here being speculated with regard to the views of the priestly intelligentsia; by contrast, the likely popular understanding of multiple, contradictory accounts (of afterlife expectations, for example) might perhaps be likened to the familiar example of some contemporary Christians, who are formally taught to believe that there is no resurrection until the final judgment, at which time some will ascend to heaven (while others are sent to hell), yet who will console themselves upon the death of a loved one with the common, shared belief that the deceased is already resurrected and is in heaven with God, Jesus, and other deceased loved ones.

linguistic and/or graphic expressions that give them form. The Egyptian thinker no more thinks that the sky is *literally* the underbelly of the Heavenly Cow or the overarching body of the goddess Nut, any more than a quantum physicist thinks that the calculation of a probability function is *literally* the state of a sub-atomic particle—yet in both cases the realities to be comprehended cannot be thought of apart from the symbols (qualitative in the first case and quantitative in the second) that are used to express them. In a study of the Egyptian ouroboros, therefore, one should not be looking for literal, preternatural serpents floating in space around the perimeter of the cosmos or enveloping the solar disk. Like the entire body of Egyptian religious iconography and symbolism—whether linguistic, graphic, sculptural, or architectural—these are only symbolic representations of realities which could not be explored and comprehended in any other way.<sup>144</sup>

Unlike the intellectual condition of the ancient Egyptians, who sought to express abstract ideas by means of a symbology having outward forms limited to concrete images (linguistic or graphic) drawn from experience of the human and natural worlds, there now exists a rich heritage of long-accumulated abstract concepts and terminology that allow the possibility of a metalanguage in the usual linguistic sense of a form of language used to describe or analyze another language,<sup>145</sup> thus making possible the whole hermeneutical enterprise. With this metalanguage, one can form abstract models of realities understood by the Egyptians, which they conceived and expressed symbolically by means of the ouroboros and related imagery, both linguistic and graphic. What follows immediately below is such a model, a hypothetical

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<sup>144</sup> This is what Hornung is getting at when he says, “If we are to comprehend the world we still need the gods.” *Conceptions of God*, 259.

<sup>145</sup> Hornung idiosyncratically employs the term metalanguage to refer to the Egyptian symbolic system itself, as used to make statements about the gods, *ibid.*, 117, 257.



reconstruction of the conceptual world associated with the ouroboros, and the basis for the hermeneutical examination of the material presented in subsequent chapters. It is a comprehensive view, covering the entire spectrum of the Egyptian cosmos from the summit of divine creativity to the ordinary experience of the human being in sleep. This hypothetical sketch will also conflate material from various periods in order to create the most complete picture possible. Supporting evidence for this sketch will be seen to be stronger in some respects than others, as might be expected from a civilization whose most abundant remains are funerary. As the relevant evidence is more closely examined in the chapters to come, it will be for the reader to judge how well this model serves to resolve paradoxes and confusion in present Egyptological understanding and to what degree it better explains the meaning and function of the ouroboros in ancient Egypt. For the sake of panoramic sweep and expositional clarity, detail and citation will for the moment be kept to a minimum, as all of the relevant texts and images will be fully examined in the following chapters, and provided with a fuller hermeneutical commentary.

Amongst the several complimentary ways that the Egyptians sought to understand and express the process of creation, always conceived as a monist, emanationist cosmogony,<sup>146</sup> there is a very ancient thought that the cosmos began as a singular event in the abyssal waters of chaos, an ontogenetic outflow of the “primeval flood,”<sup>147</sup> in which the latent creative potential of

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<sup>146</sup> This view of creation is the diametric opposite of the conception of a creator-god who creates the world *ex nihilo* and remains fundamentally distinct in substance from the world created. The cosmos is regarded as essentially a single organism, which has developed through differentiation from a supremely numinous singularity. Typically, this primeval monad is understood to have undergone a bifurcation or to have emanated a first duality (the “indefinite dyad” attributed to the Pythagoreans, Ch. 3, n. 31), the interplay of the two poles of which then produce the entire descending hierarchy of the divine and natural worlds.

<sup>147</sup> Pyr. 1146a. = Kurt Sethe, *Die altägyptischen Pyramidentexte*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1910) 140.

the chaos<sup>148</sup> “inverts,” as it were, at a single point, expanding outward as it begins a process of division and differentiation through which it eventually becomes the ordered cosmos. This moment is conceived as an orgasmic burst resulting in an ever-expanding vortex of creative energy that is likened to the spiraling coils of a serpent.<sup>149</sup> At the center of these whirling “coils,” the power of divine thought and utterance (*sj3* and *hw*) causes a sphere of vivific light and air (*šw*) to inflate outwards. Further transformations then take place, and the gods, humanity, and the natural world all assume their stable forms within this sphere,<sup>150</sup> the outer perimeter or limit of which acts as a bulwark against the surrounding waters of chaos, like a protective membrane, and came to be symbolized by a great ouroboros girding the world.<sup>151</sup> Within the orderly and regular post-creational reality, the sun makes its daily circuit along the inner surface of this enclosing membrane, which was also thought permeable to the degree that the abyssal waters could yearly seep through as the Nile’s annual inundation of the land. After the unsettling events of the First Intermediate Period, an anxiety arose that when the sun was most vulnerable at its nadir below the earth in the depths of night, this membrane might somehow fail, and that the abyssal waters might flow in as a kind of destructive embolism (symbolized by the serpent Apophis), breaking like a storm and destroying the sun and the life of the world with it, unless

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<sup>148</sup> This creative potential latent in the pre-creational abyssal deep is formulated in the theology of the so-called Ogdoad. See James P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt, The Philosophy of Egyptian Creation Accounts*, Yale Egyptological Studies 2 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Egyptological Seminar, 1988) 20-21; Susanne Bickel, *La cosmogonie égyptienne avant le nouvel empire*, OBO 134 (Fribourg, Switzerland: Édition Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994) 27-29.


<sup>149</sup> CT Spell 321, d-g. = Adriaan de Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*, vol. 4, Oriental Institute Publications 67 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) 146.

<sup>150</sup> CT Spell 321, h-o. = *ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> This is the image of the *s3-t3* of the Transformation Texts (BD 87), discussed in Chapter 3. An interesting very late survival of this is the second “hieroglyph” of Horapollo, described as a serpent devouring its own tail and said to represent “the cosmos”; see note 111.

prevented from doing so by appropriate divine or human intervention.<sup>152</sup> It was further conceived that, after many millions of years, there would at last be a catastrophic failure of the protective force or barrier that enspheres the world, and the abyssal waters would rush in with roiling, chaotic currents that dissolve the cosmos into “serpents.” All that then survives in the abyssal deep is something of the primeval monad itself, but now in its purely latent “osiride” form, suggesting something like conditions before creation,<sup>153</sup> and perhaps even the possibility of a

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<sup>152</sup> The Coffin Texts offer numerous examples of Apep threatening the course of the sun, often as a great storm; magical utterance by the divinely identified deceased cleaves the sky, disperses the storm, and opens the way for the solar barque. Representative examples include CT 1089, CT 1094, CT 1099, and CT 1179 = Adriaan de Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*, vol. 7, OIP 87 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) 370, 376-77, 386, 517. By the New Kingdom, the role of defending the nocturnal sun from Apep was assigned to Seth; associated with violence and disorder and consigned to the desert periphery of the world, Seth was yet the furthest extension of the divine order at the world’s edge, and was therefore in the natural position to defend the sun and the world from the intrusion of Apep from the outer chaos. See BD 39, 108 = Édouard Naville, *Das ägyptische Totenbuch der XVIII. bis XX. Dynastie*, vol. 1 (Berlin: 1886, repr. Graz: Akademische Druck – u. Verlagsanstalt, 1971) pls. 53, 119. By the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty there is representation of Seth standing on the prow of the solar barque, spear in hand, defending Re against Apep, who is clearly depicted as intruding from the outer chaos, with an elongated  ‘sky’ sign (upon which the solar barque sails) making a clear demarcation between the inner cosmos and outer chaos (cf. fig. 8). See Piankoff, *Mythological Papyri*, 75, fig 54.

<sup>153</sup> An earlier version of Atum’s mention of his survival, with Osiris, after some kind of apocalyptic destruction is in CT 1130 (de Buck, op. cit., 476-68); an elaborated version (followed here) occurs in BD 175 (Naville, op. cit., pls. 198-99). Atum reveals to the deceased that he will destroy all that he has made, that the land will return to the abyssal waters as it had been before, and that only Atum will survive, together with Osiris, after Atum has assumed his forms of “other serpents, which men do not know and the gods cannot see.” Atum, likely in this primeval / “post-eval” aspect, was often represented as a serpent; Myśliwiec, *Tiere des Atum*, 95ff. What may be an early allusion to Atum’s serpentine, post-creational aspect survives in one of the Hatnub graffiti, in which a First Intermediate Period prince of Siut, Nehri, likens his position after success in conquest to being like the divine *qrht*-serpent that remains after the destruction of humankind; Rudolf Anthes, *Die Felseninschriften von Hatnub* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1928) 42. A Roman Period text similar to CT 1130 and BD 175 occurs in the Temple of Opet; Constant de Wit, *Les inscriptions du temple d’Opet, à Karnak*, BAe 11 (Brussels: Édition de la fondation égyptologique reine Élisabeth, 1958) 112-13. A very late possible survival of related Egyptian *apokalupsis eschaton*, is in an account of the destruction of the Serapeum preserved by the late 4<sup>th</sup> c. Christian monk and historian Rufinus, and likely acquired during his residence in Egypt; he recounts that, in order to forestall the temple’s destruction by Christian zealots, the pagans had put forth the rumor that it had been foretold that should any hand act against the cult image of Serapis, the earth would split asunder and dissolve into chaos and the sky would collapse (“...*terra dehiscens illico solveretur in chaos, caelumque repente rueret in praecipit*”). Rufinus, *Historia ecclesiastica. Liber secundus*. PL 21, 529.

cycle in which another cosmos might emerge in a repetition of the cosmogonic process, a cosmic analogue to the daily rising of the sun.<sup>154</sup>

In order to understand the full implications of these ideas, it is useful to describe the Egyptian cosmos in terms of “ontological levels” (for want of a better expression), each level being a holon having features analogous to the others, and arranged in an order of descending noumena, from the divine creative monad down to the individual mortal human.<sup>155</sup> The ontogenesis of the monad and its unfoldment as the world, together with the final apocalyptic destruction and re-emergence of the monad at the beginning of a new cosmos, may be termed the cosmic level. It is at this level that the ouroboros is used to symbolize the protective encapsulation that ensures the integrity of the cosmic/solar sphere while the cosmos endures.

The next levels, those of the stable, post-creational realities within the cosmos, have as their primary characteristic the diurnal cycle of the sun and may be termed the solar and solar/funereal levels. On these levels, the sun is the post-creational analogue of the primeval monad; the sun travels across the sky for its appointed time, just as the unfolded, differentiated monad endures as the cosmos for its aeon, and both the cosmos and sun grow old and die. At its setting in the western horizon, the sun passes into a dark and mysterious underworld, the *Duat*,

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<sup>154</sup> The concept of the rebirth of the cosmos, as an analogue of the rising of the sun, is implied by the tableau of the twelfth hour of the *Book of Gates*. The primary significance of this complex image, given its occurrence at the end of a treatise detailing the nightly journey of the sun, must be the rising of the sun at dawn, and yet the solar barque is shown being raised out of the primeval waters of Nun, a symbolic image clearly resonant with the first moments of creation. A full discussion of this tableau is found below in Chapter 3, Excursus I.

<sup>155</sup> This Egyptian conception of analogues should likely be regarded as the historical antecedent and essential insight that is found elaborated much later in the well-known macrocosm/microcosm teaching (“as above, so below”) ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus in the Hermetic literature, but having earlier Greek antecedents; see Julius Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der hermetischen Literatur*, HAPS 16, AIGN 4 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter’s Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1926) 2-3; George Perrigo Conger, *Theories of Macrocosms and Microcosms in the History of Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922) 1-27.

which may be regarded as the post-creational analogue of the primeval abyss, just as the bright upper world is an analogue of the entire ordered cosmos. As the dead sun travels through the underworld, it undergoes an ineffable mystery of regeneration, and is reborn anew in the eastern horizon. During this nightly journey, the vulnerable solar deity is portrayed as being protected from inimical forces by Mehen, “the coiled one,” symbolized by a serpent,<sup>156</sup> a clear analogue of the image of a serpent safeguarding the entire world against engulfment by the abyssal waters.

The levels that follow may justly, if somewhat awkwardly, be termed the solar/funereal and funereal levels. The death, regeneration, and rebirth of the sun becomes historically an increasingly dominant theme amongst the varied expressions of Egyptian afterlife expectations, with a view that the death and transfiguration of the deceased might follow an analogous course, and that the blessed dead might even be subsumed into the solar/funereal and solar levels, joining the divine sun in the “barque of Re” or “barque of millions (of revolutions).”<sup>157</sup> In the New Kingdom specifically, the deceased king is received into the West, like the setting sun, by placement in a tomb which has become a veritable model of the underworld and, like the nocturnal sun, the royal mummy is conceived of as protected within the coils of Mehen, represented around the edges of sarcophagi as an ouroboros or ouroboroid serpent.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> The completely or partially surrounding image of a serpent protecting the nocturnal sun occurs in the seventh through twelfth hours of the *Book of Amduat*, and throughout the *Book of Gates* and the *Book of Night*, all discussed in detail below in Chapter 3.

<sup>157</sup> A direct or indirect expression of the desire of the deceased to be amongst the divine beings in the “barque of Re” or the “barque of millions” occurs several places in the *Book of the Dead* (e.g., BD 100, 102, 164, 186). As to the reference being to daily solar revolutions rather than years, see Chapter 2, n. 86.

<sup>158</sup> Mehen as an ouroboros or ouroboroid occurs on sarcophagi of Merenptah, Ramesses III, and Amenherkhepshef (probable son of Ramesses III), discussed below in Chapter 3; see also above, note 115.

Descending to the less numinous realm of the living, there is first the royal level, in which the enthronement of the king is conceived of as analogous to the appearance of the sun at dawn, “arising in glory” (*hꜥj*), and at a greater remove, as analogous to the ontogenesis of the primeval monad at the beginning of creation. The enthronement of the king re-establishes, in theory, the ideal conditions and perfect order of the “first time” (*sp-tpj*). It is then the prerogative and obligation of the living king to fulfill the divine commission of insuring justice and order (*mꜣꜥt*) to the uttermost limits of the realm of the living, laterally coterminous with the internal surface of the cosmic sphere itself. After the king’s death, an event analogous to the setting of the sun, all requisite rites and preparations cause him to be received into the more numinous funerary level, sketched above.

Still in the realm of the living, but below the royal level, is the least numinous level, that of the ordinary individual. On this level, the cycle of sleep is yet another analogue of both the solar cycle and the larger cycle of the creation and destruction of the cosmos. As the cosmos is conceived as ultimately dissolving back into the abyssal waters, so the individual consciousness in the depths of sleep is understood to go beyond dream states to dissolution in the abyssal deep. Something mysteriously remains, however, and the individual somehow re-emerges from the deep like the ontogenesis of the cosmos or the rising of the sun.<sup>159</sup> The same force or process that protects the sun from destruction in the depths of night (sometimes represented as an ouroboros, ouroboroids, or related paradigmatic variants) prevents a final, absolute dissolution of the individual in the unfathomable and formless darkness of dreamless sleep, making possible the

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<sup>159</sup> It is explicitly stated in a sun hymn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty that the sleeper enters into Nun in order to live again, be renewed, and be made young. P. BM EA 10682/Chester Beatty IV, recto 11, 8-10 in Alan H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum. Third Series: The Chester Beatty Gift* (London: British Museum, 1935) pl. 17. See also A. de Buck, *De godsdienstige opvatting van den slaap inzonderheid in het Oude Egypte*, MVEOL 4 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1939) 5-13.

regeneration and rebirth of consciousness that leads back through dream states to awakening.<sup>160</sup>

In addition, the integrity of the living individual's body, like the life of the cosmos and the life of the sun, is likewise preserved for a time by some force or process; the many ouroboroi appearing on protective amulets intended for the living are likely connected with this.<sup>161</sup>

Before at last moving on to the examination of the relevant primary sources, a few words regarding the principles by which this material has been arranged might not be out of place. As will be seen, the nature of the material does not lend itself to either a purely historical or purely thematic presentation. In general, however, a historical approach will be taken, following successive periods of Egyptian history, though in order to elucidate certain points it will sometimes be necessary to compare thematically related material from different periods, sometimes centuries or even millennia apart. Such comparison is not unusual in Egyptology, but must always be undertaken with full critical awareness of the potential for both continuity and change.

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<sup>160</sup> That the ouroboros was indeed used to represent the enveloping force protecting sleepers is perhaps confirmed by an apotropaic object from the New Kingdom representing an infant boy with side-lock of youth and his mother lying side-by-side on a bed, surrounded by an ouroboros—not unlike the ouroboroi surrounding the recumbent mummy effigies on the lids of royal sarcophagi of the same period; this object is discussed below in Chapter 3.

<sup>161</sup> See above, note 125. These late amulets are examined below in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 2

### Ouroboric Beginnings: Ideas and Images before the New Kingdom

In the collection of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology at University College London, there is a small object of mottled grey and brown serpentine representing an encircled serpent (figure 9).<sup>1</sup> About four centimeters in diameter, of simple design and competent workmanship, Petrie took it to be an amulet of some sort, and assigned it to the ‘prehistoric’ period, by which he meant the Predynastic.<sup>2</sup> This object could be interpreted as perhaps the earliest known image of that serpent coil first mentioned in the Pyramid and Coffin Texts, and associated with creation, preservation, and renewal.<sup>3</sup> It may be that this is so, but as this artifact is but one of the many purchases that Petrie made during his years of excavation in Egypt, nothing whatsoever is known of its provenance or original context, let alone its actual meaning and purpose.

Another early possible example of a related serpent image is on a fragmentary late Predynastic period ceremonial schist palette in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

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


<sup>1</sup> Accession number UC 38463. W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Amulets* (London: 1914; repr., intro. Geoffrey Martin, Warminster, Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips, 1972) 25; pl. 12, 96d.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, in his introduction to the reprint of Petrie’s publication, offers the following comment on Petrie’s dating of unprovenanced objects, “It may well be asked...how Petrie arrived at his dating criteria. From the point of view of modern scholarship the absence of reasoned argument from the chronological standpoint is perhaps the weakest point in Petrie’s catalogues. Yet Petrie’s vast experience in handling material of every period of Egyptian history in the field enabled him to assign dates, sometimes intuitively, to great numbers of unprovenanced objects in museums and private collections.” Ibid, xi.

<sup>3</sup> See below this chapter and Chapter 1, n. 149.



(figure 10).<sup>4</sup> A mere nine centimeters in height, this fragment represents the central core of an object that was approximately one-third larger when it was whole.<sup>5</sup> Of interest to the present study is the ouroboroid surrounding the circular area intended for grinding eye-paint. The possible relevance of this palette’s iconography to the ideas most often connected with the ouroboros and ouroboroids is suggested by a thesis originally proposed by Wolfhart Westendorf,<sup>6</sup> which is here adapted and elaborated upon for the present purpose.



The hieroglyph , most often used to represent the phoneme /q/, has as its primary signification the lexeme *q33* ‘hill’ and, indeed, can appear in an extra-linguistic context with this meaning or, more specifically, as the hill of the West where the sun sets and the blessed dead are received (figure 11). Two such hills facing one another form the hieroglyph , with the primary signification *dw* ‘mountain’; together with the hieroglyph , having the primary signification *rʿ* ‘sun’, this forms the hieroglyph  *3ht* ‘the *Akhet*’ or ‘Horizon’, meaning the place where the sun both rises and sets.<sup>7</sup> These hills on either side of the sun can also be

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<sup>4</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA 28.9.8. William C. Hayes, *The Scepter of Egypt*, vol. 1, rev. ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990) 29, fig. 22.

<sup>5</sup> The palette had apparently suffered damage in antiquity, losing a significant portion of its periphery along the sides and bottom. The irregular edges of the breaks were later ground down by someone, perhaps an ancient Egyptian priestly antiquary, so that the remaining central fragment resumed the more regular shape of an undamaged palette. Subsequent to this, there was further damage to the right edge of the palette, including the loss of the upper right-hand corner. For a reconstruction of the palette’s original state, see Henry G. Fischer, “A Fragment of Late Predynastic Egyptian Relief from the Eastern Delta,” *ArAs* 21 (1958) 73, fig. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Wolfhart Westendorf, “Zu Frühformen von Osiris und Isis,” *GM* 25 (1977) 104-107.

<sup>7</sup> In linguistic contexts the hieroglyph  writes *3ht* ‘horizon’ in the singular; however, there are examples of  employed extra-linguistically in symbolic tableaux, in which the two “hills” of the hieroglyph can only be understood as representing both the eastern and western horizons, an example of the “and/or” logic of inclusive disjunction basic to Egyptian speculative thought. For the Akhet as both

supplemented or replaced (in paradigmatic substitution) by *rwtj*, ‘Ruty’, the double lion-god attested textually as early as the Pyramid Texts,<sup>8</sup> and who is represented by two back-to-back lions *sejant*, producing an effect like that of heraldic supporters (figures 12a, 12b). Examples from the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty have the two lions supporting the sun disk surrounded by an ouroboros representing the protective power of Mehen.<sup>9</sup> Westendorf points out that the lions of Ruty occur in other thematically related contexts such as the lions which may occur on either side of the royal throne and on the bier upon which a mummy rests.<sup>10</sup> The sun, the king, and the mummy are

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singular and as representing the two horizons, see Siegfried Schott, *Zum Weltbild der Jenseitsführer des neuen Reiches*, NAWG 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965) 187; Piankoff, *Mythological Papyri*, 30ff.

<sup>8</sup> Ruty, the double lion-god, is mentioned only four times in the Pyramid Texts, thirty-nine times in the Coffin Texts, and seventeen times in the Book of the Dead, though most of these occurrences reveal little of Ruty’s nature. The notion that PT 301, *pyr.* 447a-b, identifies the two lions of Ruty with Shu and Tefnut is a strained interpretation of the plain meaning of the text that has unfortunately taken on something of a life of its own in the secondary literature. The text most explicitly revealing of Ruty’s nature, theologically, is a passage in BD 17, sometimes accompanied by an image in which the two lions are labeled *sf* ‘yesterday’ and *dw3w* ‘tomorrow’ (figure 12b); the text reads, *jnk sf, jw3j rh.kwj dw3w*, “I am yesterday and I know tomorrow,” which brief text is the given the following exegetical commentary, *ptr rf sw, jw sf wsjr pw, jw dw3w r<sup>c</sup> pw*, “Who is he? Yesterday is Osiris; tomorrow is Re,” a clear reference to the western horizon associated with death and the realm of Osiris, and the eastern horizon associated with the rebirth of Re, the sun. Naville, *Todtenbuch*, vol. 1, *Text und Vignetten*, pl. 27; vol. 2, *Varianten*, 35-36. The image the lions of Ruty is iconographically and conceptually related to the god *3kr* ‘Aker’, who could be represented as two lions *couchant* facing away from one another but conjoined just below the ribs; see, for example, Jacques Vandier, *Le papyrus Jumilhac* (n.p. [Paris]: CNRS, n.d. [1961]) pl. 3.

<sup>9</sup> The 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty examples of the two lions supporting on their backs a sun disk surrounded by an ouroboros occur in the papyrus of Henuttawy in the British Museum (P. BM EA 10018.2) and the papyrus of Heruben in the Cairo Museum (P. 133), and will be fully examined in Chapter 4. See Piankoff, *Her-Ouben*, pl. 4; Schott, *Weltbild*, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Westendorf, “Zu Frühformen,” 110, 112 fig. 1, offers as an early example of the Ruty lions as supports of a royal throne, the well-known 4<sup>th</sup> Dynasty anorthosite gneiss statue of Chephren in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo (CG 14). See Ludwig Borchardt, *Statuen und Statuetten von Königen und Privatleuten im Museum zu Kairo, Nr. 1-1294*, vol. 1, *Text und Tafeln zu Nr. 1-380*, CG 1-380 (Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 1911) 14-16, pl. 4. As an example of the Ruty lions as supports of a funerary bier, Westendorf offers one of many similar images to be found among the reliefs of the Osirian Chapels of the Temple of Dendera (Westendorf, “Zu Frühformen,” 104, 113 fig. 2), though there are numerous representations of such objects from earlier periods. Perhaps the earliest known example is a calcite/alabaster ritual table of the

paradigmatically interchangeable and are in a syntagmatic relationship with the Ruty that support them. All three, on their respective ontological levels (the sun on the solar level, the king on the royal level, and the deceased on the funerary level) are thus being represented as *hꜥj* ‘arising in glory’ from the horizon. Westendorf then introduces the idea that, since Predynastic iconographic conventions were presumably more fluid and less fixed than those of later periods, the syntactic place of Ruty, as the horizons supporting the sun, might also have been filled by paradigmatic substitution of other animals that could fulfill the same symbolic function, but which had disappeared from the iconographic inventory as the conventions of the Egyptian system of graphic symbolism became formalized.<sup>11</sup> In Westendorf’s view, the so-called “hyena-dog”<sup>12</sup> and the fabulous serpent-necked feline could express an essentially similar semantic

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early 3rd Dynasty, also in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo (CG 1321); see Ludwig Borchardt, *Denkmäler des Alten Reiches (ausser den Statuen) im Museum zu Kairo, Nr. 1295-1808*, vol. 1, *Text und Tafeln zu Nr. 1295-1541, CG 1295-1808* (Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 1937) 9, pl. 3.

<sup>11</sup> A parallel example of this process, in which a symbolic animal that was important in late Predynastic times later disappears from the iconographic inventory, is the royal catfish (genus *Heterobranchus*) which appears in the name of King Narmer, *Nꜥr-mr* ‘Striking catfish’, a name no doubt intended to reflect the awesome supernatural power of the king, probably because of association of *Heterobranchus* with another, similar genus of Nilotic catfish, *Malapterus*, which is electric and has long been associated in the minds of Nile fishermen (and no doubt generations of peasants who had the common experience of wading canals) with thunder and electric shock. See Douglas J. Brewer and Renée F. Friedman, *Fish and Fishing in Ancient Egypt*, *Natural History of Egypt 2* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1989) 63, 70. In historic times, however, the catfish disappeared entirely from Egyptian royal iconography. Something similar is also true of the scorpion, also once associated with the king in the late Predynastic, but later associated exclusively with the goddess Selqet. The catfish and the scorpion thus disappeared from the repertory of symbols associated with the divine king, while equally ancient royal animals such as the falcon and the bull retained their importance in this respect throughout pharaonic history.

<sup>12</sup> This animal is probably not to be identified as any member of the family *Hyaenidae* but rather with a member of the family *Canidae*, specifically *Lycaon pictus* ‘painted wolf’, commonly called the “hyena dog,” a diurnal wild dog that hunts in packs. See Fischer, “Fragment,” 80-84; Dale J. Osborn and Jana Osbornová, *The Mammals of Ancient Egypt*, *Natural History of Egypt 4* (Warminster, Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips, 1998) 79-80.

content and occupy the same syntactic place as Ruty,<sup>13</sup> in what basically amounts to elaborations or variations on the symbol of the Akhet. The central, circular area for preparing eye-paint should then be regarded as representing the sun, an interesting enough suggestion given the long association of the eye and the sun in Egyptian symbolic thought.<sup>14</sup> Other members of the order *Carnivora*, whether of the family *Canidae* or the family *Felidae*, appearing at the bottom edge of the central circular space, are therefore to be understood as analogues of Ruty supporting the solar disk. As examples of this, Westendorf offers images isolated from the obverse of two late Predynastic palettes, one in the Ashmolean museum, Oxford,<sup>15</sup> and the Metropolitan Museum of

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<sup>13</sup> The serpent-necked feline (sometimes referred to as a serpofeline) was originally a late Uruk period Sumerian motif, likely introduced into Egypt during the Naqada II period through cylinder seals and sealings. In particular, Henri Frankfort notes a Sumerian cylinder seal in the Louvre (CCO, A41) bearing a pair of serpent-necked felines that closely resemble those on the obverse of the Narmer palette (below, figure 13); H. Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals, A Documentary Essay on the Art and Religion of the Ancient Near East* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1939) 27, pls. 4 (d, f, h), 5 (h). The appropriation of a foreign motif, however, does not necessarily entail adoption of whatever meaning had been attached to it in its original cultural context. The serpent-necked felines on the Narmer palette differ from their Sumerian predecessors by being adapted to purely Egyptian purposes. While the entwined necks of the Sumerian felines create the decorative effect of an empty circular space between them. In the Egyptian adaptation, this circular area becomes the surface for preparing eye-paint (at least symbolically), and may possibly represent the sun, being in a closely similar syntactic relation with the two serpent-necked felines as the solar disk is with the Ruty lions in later Egyptian iconographic conventions. In the case of the Narmer palette felines, it is also just possible that their bodies and serpentine necks are semantically equivalent to the feline and ouroboroid on the Metropolitan Museum fragment (and to later images of the Ruty lions supporting a sun-disk surrounded by an ouroboros). Assuming the central disk area to be analogous to the sun, the serpentine necks occupy the same syntactic place as the ouroboroid. It might also be noted that the serpent-necked feline did not quite disappear entirely from Egypt after the Predynastic period, but appears in the company of other fabulous beasts and certain deities on so-called apotropaic “wands” of hippopotamus ivory dating from the Middle Kingdom (e.g., a specimen in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA 22.1.154, in Hayes, *Scepter*, vol. 2, fig. 159).



<sup>14</sup> This association is documented in many textual allusions to the Eye of Re, and passages like that in CT Spell 1130 (= de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 4, 465a), in which humanity is brought into being through a transformation of “tears” (i.e., sunlight) from the god’s eye, a word-play on *rmṯw* ‘mankind’ and *rmwt* ‘tears’; Re’s nightly journey illuminating the *Duat* is also described as being by means of his eye in BD 15B (= Naville, *Todtenbuch*, vol. 2, 28).

<sup>15</sup> Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, E 3294, in W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Ceremonial Slate Palettes*, BSEA 66 (London: British School of Egyptian Archaeology, 1953) pl. F 16.

Art fragment under consideration here (figures 14a and 14b).<sup>16</sup> If one accepts Westendorf's thesis, it would then be natural to interpret the ouroboroid of the Metropolitan Museum of Art fragment as an early analogue of later images of the coils of Mehen protectively encircling the solar disk.<sup>17</sup> Though perhaps less than perfectly persuasive, this interpretation makes as much sense as might be expected, given the remote antiquity of the ouroboroid in question and the scarcity of relevant comparative evidence.

A last point may be made regarding the Metropolitan Museum of Art palette fragment. Abutting the upper of the ouroboroid is a *serekh* surmounted by a falcon. In later Egyptian conventions for representing three-dimensional spatial relations in two-dimensions, an object in the position of the *serekh* with relation to the ouroboroid would be understood as standing vertically erect at the center of the horizontal, disk-shaped plane bounded by the ouroboroid. Relevant parallels are offered by the late images of the so-called Bes Pantheos. In two-dimensional representations on papyri, Bes Pantheos is sometimes shown with the soles of the god's feet in contact with the upper edge of a horizontally arranged, lozenge-shaped ouroboros.

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<sup>16</sup> It has already been noted that when foreign motives were appropriated by the Egyptians, such motives were then adapted to purely Egyptian purposes; the serpent-necked feline supporting the ouroboroid on the Metropolitan Museum of Art palette fragment is a case in point in this regard. The configuration of the feline's neck, compressed into a row of thick, close undulations, is like nothing in the known Sumerian material, and must be an Egyptian innovation. The upper edge of the neck, just below the ouroboroid, suggests the upper contour of the hieroglyph , or perhaps , an early version of which occurs on an Amratian (Naqada I) pottery vessel, which appears to show the rising and setting of the sun; see J.J.M. de Morgan, *Recherches sur les origines de l'Égypte: l'Âge de la pierre et les métaux*. (Paris: 1896) pl. 2, fig. 4. This further suggests the possibility, at least, that this peculiarly configured serpent-necked feline carries a semantic value similar to that of the Ruty lions, offering additional support to Westendorf's thesis.

<sup>17</sup> The solar cult of Re very likely predates its great rise to prominence in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasties; the earliest textual evidence is the theophoric name of 2<sup>nd</sup> Dynasty pharaoh Reneb, though surviving iconographic materials suggest much earlier antecedents; see Jochem Kahl, *"Ra is my Lord": Searching for the Rise of the Sun God at the Dawn of Egyptian History*. Menes 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007).

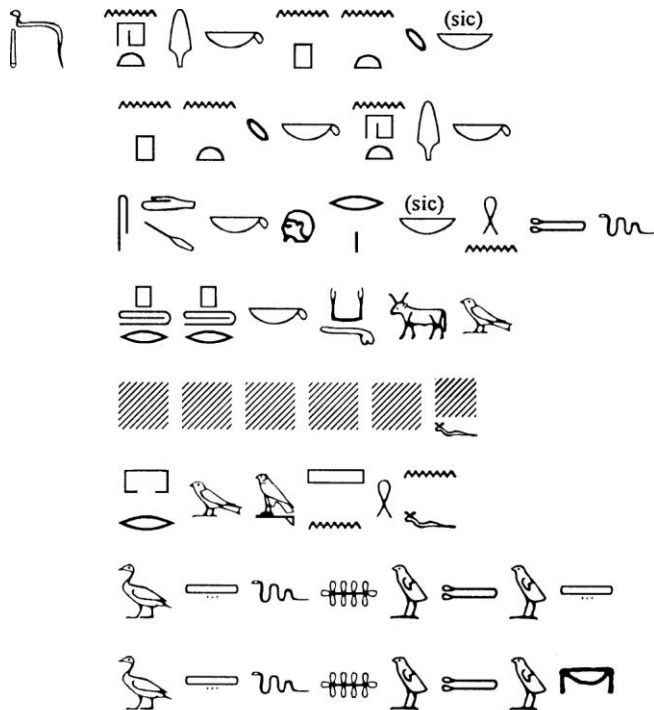
When such representations are translated into three-dimensions, as seen in numerous bronze examples, the deity is seen standing on a flat, horizontal plane circumscribed by an ouroboros. (These images of Bes Pantheos will be discussed in Chapter 4.) If these same conventions of spatial representation governed the disposition of the images on the Metropolitan Museum of Art fragment, created about two and a half millennia earlier, there would be some justification in regarding the king (represented as the *serekh* and falcon) as being identified with the sun (the disk-shaped space within the protective coils of the ouroboroid, or alternatively (on the royal or political level) as the king ruling from the center of the world outwards to the periphery bounded by the ouroboroid, the edge or limit of the world—perhaps both.

Moving forward in time to the Old Kingdom, one returns to an issue raised briefly in Chapter 1 and deferred to the present chapter for full consideration, and that is the repeated claim (based on a suggestion in the *Wörterbuch*), that one of the so-called “snake-spells” of the Pyramid Texts contains a reference to the image of an ouroboros in the phrase *sd tp r3*, “tail upon mouth”; *sd tp r3* then being further alleged to be the precursor of the later expression *sd-m-r3*,<sup>18</sup> “tail in mouth,” which is itself not only averred to refer to the image of an ouroboros, but also to have been the source of the Greek lexeme *οὐροβόρος*, by means of some imagined unknown process of *interpretatio græca*. That these latter allegations are highly unlikely was shown by a close examination in the previous chapter of all relevant sources, leaving only the claim regarding the expression *sd tp r3* in need of a thorough examination. To accomplish this end, it will be necessary to attempt a complete analysis of the spell in which the phrase *sd tp r3* is supposed to occur, in order to establish what is or is not written there and what it may mean in

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<sup>18</sup> Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, vol. 4, 364.

its total context. The spell in question is found in the pyramid of Teti,<sup>19</sup> and is numbered 393 in Sethe's edition. As pointed out in Chapter 1, the phrase *sd tp r3* does not actually occur in this spell; what does occur is as follows:<sup>20</sup>





*dd mdw nht=k npnt=k<sup>21</sup>*  
*npnt=k nht=k*  
*sd=k tp r3=k<sup>22</sup> šnt*  
*p<sub>h</sub>r p<sub>h</sub>r=k k3 wr*  
*//// //// //// ////=f*  
*prj wr šn.n=f*  
*s3-t3 s3w tw t3*  
*s3-t3 s3w tw nbw(?)<sup>23</sup>*

<sup>19</sup> The spell is located just above the doorway leading from the antechamber to the serdab; Kurt Sethe, *Die altägyptischen Pyramidentexte*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1922) 120, 124.

<sup>20</sup> Sethe, *Pyramidentexte*, vol. 1, 373-74.

































<sup>21</sup> The  is here amended to , following Sethe, *Übersetzung*, vol. 3; 260, 262.

<sup>22</sup> Again the  is amended to , *ibid.*

Words said: Your sycamore is your grain-patch;<sup>24</sup>  
 Your grain-patch is your sycamore.  
 Your tail is upon your mouth, attacker (-snake)!  
 Your constrictions are ensorcelled, great bull!  
 //// //// he //// ////;<sup>25</sup>  
 The great one whom he encoiled has come forth.  
 Snake, guard the earth!  
 Snake, guard the “gold”!

Before going forward with an explanation of the proposed translation, a few words should be said about the general purpose of such texts. Following an observation made by Jürgen

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<sup>23</sup> The exact reading of  is problematic, as it occurs nowhere else within the entire corpus of the Pyramid Texts except as a *tris legomenon* in Teti, once in Spell 393 ( *pyr.* 689d) and twice in Spell 395 ( *pyr.* 691 a,b); these appear quite close together on the same wall, the lines of the respective spells in which they occur being separated only by a single line of text consisting of Spell 394. The nature of the similar contexts in which  appears in both spells makes an unambiguous reading as *nbw* ‘gold’ by no means certain. Sethe leaves the sign untranslated, though he suggests *nbw*, ‘Gold’ among other possibilities in his commentary; Faulkner “translates” the sign with an ellipsis accompanied by a demurring footnote, while Allen unhesitatingly translates ‘gold’. Sethe, *Übersetzung*, vol. 3, 261; R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts, Translated into English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) 129; James P. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, ed. Peter Der Manuelian (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005) 268. Elsewhere in Teti, *nbw* ‘gold’ appears unambiguously in                                 



Osing<sup>26</sup> that the snake-spells are generally placed near doors or on the walls of entryways within the tomb, Christian Leitz<sup>27</sup> has proposed that the snake-spells were not only intended to protect the deceased king from the danger presented by the possible presence of fearsome serpents in the tomb,<sup>28</sup> but to channel their aggressive force into the service of the deceased king as protectors of the tomb and its contents. The absence of deliberate mutilation of the snake determinatives in the inscriptions, such as was done to the determinatives of other dangerous creatures in order to magically protect the king from the possibility of otherworldly harm, suggests to Leitz that the naming of the snakes on entryway walls was intended to call them into existence to protect the tomb. This, however, exposes the king to dangers as well, which the spells attempt to forestall by ordering the snakes to retreat, fall down, keep quiet, creep away, and so forth; passages in which the snakes seem to be killed should be interpreted as only a threat or possibility, rather than an action that has been really performed. In general support of Leitz' thesis, it should be noted that snakes in the role of afterworldly door-guardians have a long history in Egypt, both before and after the appearance of the snake-spells in the Pyramid Texts. The earliest known example occurs on a surviving jamb of a doorway from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty funerary complex of Djoser (figure 15);<sup>29</sup> examples are also known from the Coffin Texts (figure 16)<sup>30</sup> and the Underworld Books (figure 17).<sup>31</sup> With these considerations in mind, the text at hand can now be examined.

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<sup>26</sup> Jürgen Osing, "Zur Disposition der Pyramidentexte des Unas," *MDIAK* 42 (1986) 134-36.

<sup>27</sup> Christian Leitz, "Die Schlangensprüche in den Pyramidentexten," *Or* 65.1 (1996) 389-91.

<sup>28</sup> As Leitz notes, this otherworldly anxiety is made explicit in the title of Spell 160 of the Coffin Texts, which promises the deceased *tm mwt n hf3w*, "not to die from snake"; de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 3, 373d.

<sup>29</sup> The surviving door jamb is nearly complete but is broken into two pieces near the middle; figure 15 shows the upper fragment with a snake-guardian figured upon it in raised relief. Two such snakes, arranged vertically, one above the other, appear on both the front and the back, so that the jamb bears a

The spell is composed of four couplets. James P. Allen, reading the *hapax legomenon* *npnt* as ‘grain’, translates the first couplet as “Your sycamore is your grain, your grain is your sycamore,” interpreting this as a “...metaphor for reversal, like a sycamore at grain-level and a grain at sycamore-height,”<sup>32</sup> though no parallels are offered as support for such “reversal” as an operative principle in Egyptian magic, other than to suggest that this is somehow confirmed by the following line. However, by reading *npnt* as ‘grain-patch’, following the conjecture of Sethe, another possible interpretation presents itself. A stand of grain is a natural habitat for a snake, providing both a secure refuge in which to find concealment and a source of sustenance in easy prey such as insects and small rodents attracted to the grain. The equation of the grain-patch

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total of four such creatures. In the reconstruction of Zahi Hawass, there are two such jambs, one on either side of the doorway, such that, whether the doorway was approached from within or without, one would be confronted with four snakes slithering up the jambs; see Zahi Hawass, “A Fragmentary Monument of Djoser from Saqqara,” *JEA* 80 (1994) 45-46, pls. 6-7.

<sup>30</sup> Coffin Text spells 1052 and 1180 mention the *ḥfʒw ʿftt jrjw ʿrrwt*, “the serpents of *afitet*, keepers of the gates” (= de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 4. 587 a-b); otherworldly snakes are depicted guarding doors in vignettes accompanying CT Spells 1136 and 1138 in two Middle Kingdom coffins from Deir el-Bersha, the outer coffin of Sepi (*jmj-rʿ pr Spj*), Louvre E10779 and the inner coffin of Djehutihotep, Cairo J37566 (= de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 7, pls. 14-15).

<sup>31</sup> In the *Book of Gates*, named snake-guardians are found vertically erect against pylon doors marking the twelve divisions of the sun’s nightly journey through the *Duat*; see, for example, the snake-guardians in one of the best preserved of the four surviving complete versions of the *Book of Gates* in Alexandre Piankoff, trans., *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, vol. 2 (plates), ed. N. Rambova, Bollingen Series 40.2 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954) pls. 29, 42, 45, 47, 51, 53, 56, 57, 59, 61.

<sup>32</sup> Allen, *Pyramid Texts*, 91, 96 n. 4. In his introduction, Allen says of the snake-spells, “Their language is often obscure, even impenetrable. Translations are offered for all of these spells...though without a great deal of confidence in their accuracy.” Ibid, 7. This reflects a view of the snake-spells held by other scholars. “This collection of magical spells is poorly understood and often even incomprehensible, which that (*sic*) it has been neglected in Egyptological studies.” See Chris Reintges, “Pyr. 426a Revisited,” *ZÄS* 123 (1996) 138. With regard to the Pyramid Texts as a whole, Dieter Mueller has remarked on “...the extremely difficult and often enigmatic character of these texts.” See Dieter Mueller, “Book Reviews: R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts Translated into English*,” *JNES* 32 (1973) 251. For the most current and comprehensive analysis of the snake-spells, see Georg Meurer, *Die Feinde des Königs in den Pyramidentexten*. OBO 189 (Fribourg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002) 269-305.

with the sycamore is significant, as the sycamore also has associations with refuge and life-sustaining nurture, but in the realm of the dead rather than the living. The very word for sycamore, *nht*, if written with the  $\square$  determinative, means ‘refuge’. Already in the Old Kingdom, a numinous, otherworldly sycamore appears in the eastern horizon and as an enclosure and refuge of gods,<sup>33</sup> and the title *nbt nht rst*, “mistress of the southern sycamore,” is known in the Hathor cult of Memphis.<sup>34</sup> In Chapter 64 of the *Book of the Dead*, occurring as early as the versions inscribed on the sarcophagus of 11<sup>th</sup> Dynasty queen Mentuhotep,<sup>35</sup> the deceased embraces and is sheltered by the divine sycamore.<sup>36</sup> In Chapter 109, the deceased declares knowledge of the verdant eastern paradise in which the grain grows five cubits high, and from which the sun ascends into the heavens from a gate between two miraculous sycamores made of imperishable turquoise stone.<sup>37</sup> Later tradition abounds in numerous examples of the goddess (usually Hathor or Nut, but rarely also Isis) emerging as an epiphany from within the leafy boughs of the divine sycamore, pouring libations of life-giving waters that the *ba* of the deceased drinks in pious gratitude from a pool beneath the tree; trays of offerings may appear to complete provision of sustenance for the dead.<sup>38</sup> We may suppose from all of this that the snake, who is to be summoned away from the security of his grain-patch into the shadowy afterworld, is being

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<sup>33</sup> *Pyr.* 916 a-b and *pyr.* 1485 a = Sethe, *Pyramidentexte*, vol. 3, 7, 313.

<sup>34</sup> Marie-Louise Buhl, “The Goddesses of the Egyptian Tree Cult,” *JNES* 6 (1947) 86.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>36</sup> *BD* 64 = Naville, *Todtenbuch*, vol. 2, 138.

<sup>37</sup> *BD* 109 = *Ibid.*, 247-48.

<sup>38</sup> For numerous images of the goddess of the sycamore, with full discussion, see Nathalie Baum, *Arbres et arbustes de l'Égypte ancienne. La liste de la tombe thébaine ( n° 81)*, OLA 81 (Leuven: Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1988) 67-86.



*pḥr=k*, which has been erroneously translated as an imperative,<sup>41</sup> but which Allen has no doubt correctly analyzed as a verbal noun (with possessive suffix *=k*) serving as the subject of a passive *sḏm=f* of the same verb<sup>42</sup>; he therefore translates this as “your encircling has been encircled”<sup>43</sup> and as “your surrounding has been surrounded.”<sup>44</sup> Such translation is undoubtedly correct from a strictly grammatical point of view, but what can it possibly mean? Part of the difficulty here is the desire to have the translation reflect a feature of the original Egyptian by having both the verbal noun subject and the verbal predicate derived from the same verb; hence the pairs “encircling”/“encircled” and “surrounding”/“surrounded.” However, for a more meaningful translation of *pḥr pḥr=k*, one must consider the full semantic range of *pḥr* and use whatever English words best express the respective meanings of the verbal noun subject and the verbal predicate, whether or not the English words are derived from the same verb. Presuming that the snake at issue is not of the venomous variety but a constrictor, it would seem reasonable to understand *pḥr=k* as “your constrictions,” with reference to the coils with which a constrictor subdues its prey. As for the meaning of *pḥr* as the verbal predicate, in magical texts it appears in the technical sense of “to enchant”<sup>45</sup> or the like, hence the translation offered here: “Your constrictions are ensorcelled.” The constricting coils of the snake are undone by the magic spell,

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<sup>41</sup> Translation as an imperative includes that of Sethe, “Wende dich um dein Umwenden...” (*Übersetzung*, vol. 3, 260-61) and Faulkner, “Turn, turn yourself about...” (*Pyramid Texts*, 129).



<sup>42</sup> James P. Allen, *The Inflection of the Verb in the Pyramid Texts*, Bibliotheca Aegyptia 2 (Malibu, California: Undeena Publications, 1984) 338.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Allen, *Pyramid Texts*, 91.

<sup>45</sup> Ritner, *Mechanics*, 57ff.

with the result being expressed in the third couplet (of which the first line is lost<sup>46</sup>), “The great one whom he encoiled has come forth,” that is, an unnamed god (*wr* ‘great’, followed by the  determinative), as a kind of magical stand-in, has escaped from the snake’s constricting coils, demonstrating that the snake has no power to bring harm to the king.<sup>47</sup>

In the final couplet of the spell, the snake is at last commanded to guard the tomb: *s3-t3 s3w tw t3, s3-t3 s3w tw nbw(?)*, “Snake, guard the earth! Snake, guard the ‘gold’!” In justifying this translation, it should be noted first of all that the rather poetic term *s3-t3*, literally “son of the earth,” should probably be understood—despite the apparent hesitation of lexicographers—as an already fully lexicalized virtual synonym of *hf3w*, just meaning ‘snake’ (compare Demotic  *syt* and Coptic  $\text{CIT}$ <sup>48</sup>), rather than “Son of the Earth” as the name of some specific snake. This can be argued from semantic considerations. In the second couplet, *šnt* ‘Attacker (-snake)’ is given as the name of this particular snake<sup>49</sup>; *k3 wr* ‘great bull’ is not a name but an epithet (and lacks the  determinative). In the last couplet, *s3-t3* could be a name, but then why would the snake of this spell have two names? Moreover, if *s3-t3* is the name of a specific snake, rather than a literary term for ‘snake’ essentially synonymous with *hf3w*,

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
<sup>46</sup> See note 25.

<sup>47</sup> The change of person in the pronoun, from second person in the first and second couplets, to third person in the third couplet, is due to the third couplet no longer being addressed to the snake, but rather describing the effect of the imprecation on the serpent’s powers. The previous line, now missing, would have no doubt clarified the issue.

<sup>48</sup> J. Černý, *Coptic Etymological Dictionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) 164.

<sup>49</sup> Meurer, *Feinde*, 275.

then why are there snakes of radically divergent natures bearing the same name?<sup>50</sup> It makes better sense in each one of these cases to treat *s3-t3* as a fully lexicalized term meaning ‘snake’, especially in the light of its incontrovertible lexicalization in Demotic and Coptic.

The next point to be addressed in the translation of the last couplet is with regard to the meaning of the imperative *s3w tW* (plus object), previously translated as “hüte dich vor...” or “beware (thou) of...” The verb *s3w* can equally mean ‘to guard’, depending on context, and is closely related to nouns for ‘guard’, ‘magician’, and ‘magical protection’, all of which can be written .<sup>51</sup> While there are instances in the snake-spells in which the translation of *s3w* as ‘beware’ seems appropriate or at least possible, good or better sense is as often obtained by preferring the meaning ‘guard’ to that of ‘beware’.<sup>52</sup> The problem of choice here is really more




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<sup>50</sup> Compare, for example, the *s3-t3* of the Pyramid Texts with the *s3-t3* in the so-called Transformation Texts (BD 87, discussed in the following chapter). A greater contrast is scarcely imaginable. The *s3-t3* in PT Spell 393 is something like a natural snake, a dangerous constrictor conceived as being capable guarding a doorway of the king’s tomb as it might its own burrow. By comparison, the *s3-t3* of the Transformation Texts is not anything like a natural snake, but is co-extensive with the perimeter of the world and is at the same time the circuit of the sun and the alternately resting and renewed life of the sun itself. A conclusion that might be drawn from this is that *s3-t3* does not designate a specific snake but was, quite early, already a literary term meaning just ‘snake’, as is well-documented in later stages of the language. Perhaps the distinction between *s3-t3* and *hft3w* was originally something akin to the difference of nuance between ‘serpent’ and ‘snake’ in English.






<sup>51</sup> Faulkner, *Dictionary*, 207-08.

<sup>52</sup> For example, in Spell 398, *s3w tW hftjw* has been translated as a command for the snake to “Beware of the enemies!” (The “enemies” themselves are addressed as *hbs-t3* “hackers of the earth,” that is, “tomb robbers.”) In this context, however, it would make as much sense to translate *s3w tW hftjw* as a command to “guard the enemies, as one would guard against robbers, preventing them from harming the tomb and thereby protecting the tomb. In Spell 396 there is a command similar to that in Spell 393, *t3 s3w tW t3*, which has been translated as “Earth, beware of the earth!” But what possible sense does it make for “earth” to beware of itself? Translating “Earth, guard the earth!” or “Earth, protect the earth!” makes better sense, as a magical exhortation or empowerment of the earth (understood in the next line of this spell as the father of Osiris = Geb) to guard or protect the tomb against tomb-robbers, the “hackers of the earth.” It is likely that there is word-play here, with *t3* to be understood in two senses, in the first place as Geb, the father of Osiris (= the deceased king), and in the second place as the physical earth itself, within which the tomb is located.

apparent than actual; while the two English words ‘beware’ and ‘guard’ appear at first glance to be quite distinct semantically, in Egyptian these two meanings are contained within the normal semantic range of the single word *s3w*. Actually, the relationship of these meanings is not so entirely different in the case of English; consider that “to beware” of something is to be “on one’s guard,” while in order “to guard” something effectively, one certainly needs to “be aware” > “beware.”<sup>53</sup>

The final consideration is how to interpret the objects of the imperatives in the last couplet of the spell. The first of these,  *t3* ‘earth’, presents no immediate difficulty, whereas the reading of the second, , remains problematic. If, for reasons detailed above,<sup>54</sup> the provisional reading of *nbw* ‘gold’, has been adopted here for purposes of translation, it is with the understanding that—whatever the true reading—the referent is the collective contents of the tomb. The translation, “Snake, guard the earth! Snake, guard the gold!” is therefore to be understood as a twofold command: first, to guard the “earth,” that is, the underground tomb-chambers and passageways cut through the very bosom of the earth (not unlike the burrows of snakes) and, second, the guard the “gold” (or however  is actually to be read), that is, the

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<sup>53</sup> That *s3w* is here to be understood in the sense of ‘protect’ or ‘guard’ is further suggested by the existence of another lexeme *s3-t3* (not the serpent), both used as an epithet (e.g., of pharaoh as ‘guardian of the earth’) and as a verbal expression (with *jrj* or *qm3*); usually written with , it can also be written with  or even  (attested in the Middle Kingdom), this last being of particular interest as it suggests an early interchangeability between  and  in this context which graphically supports the possibility of intended word-play between *s3-t3* ‘serpent’ and its apparent homophone *s3-t3* ‘guardian of the earth’ (and by extension *s3w...t3* ‘guard the earth’ in Spell 393). For citations and texts see Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, vol. 3, 416 and *Belegstellen*, vol. 3, 85, 120.

<sup>54</sup> See note 23.



precious contents of those tomb-chambers, including both the funerary equipment and the body of the king.

The logical progression of the entire spell can therefore be summarized as follows. In the first couplet the snake is addressed in an oblique manner that summons him to the afterworld. As the presence of this aggressive and fearsome creature now poses a potential danger to the deceased king, the second couplet remedies this through an imprecation that turns the mouth of the snake back against his body and enchants the constriction of his coils. The result of this enchantment is noted in the third couplet; the snake cannot harm the king because the snake has shown himself incapable of holding a great god in his coils. The safety of the king now assured, the final couplet commands the snake to protect both the underground tomb-chambers and their contents. Though this interpretation of the spell is not likely to be the final word regarding the meaning of this text, it should at least be evident from the foregoing that neither the image of the ouroboros, nor the ideas most commonly associated with the ouroboros in Egyptian usage, have anything to do with it, and that *sd tp r3* as an Old Kingdom ouroboros is entirely chimerical.

Elsewhere among the Pyramid Texts, however, there are nonetheless a few passages that have a direct bearing on conceptions which are closely associated with the image of the ouroboros in later periods. Specifically, there are references to Mehen (*mḥn* ‘the Coiled One’), a name which occurs nearly a millennium later as the label identifying what is usually said to be the first unambiguous graphic image of the ouroboros in Egypt,<sup>55</sup> in a symbolic tableau on the second gold shrine of Tutankhamen (discussed in the next chapter). For the fullest appreciation

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<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Kákosy, “Uroboros,” 887 and Erik Hornung, *Idea into Image, Essays on Ancient Egyptian Thought*, trans. Elizabeth Bredeck (n.p. [New York]: Timken Publishers, 1992) 50-51.

of what might be intended by this labeling, it is first necessary to understand what is meant by the conception of Mehen from its earliest attestation onward.

Apparently coeval with the appearance of Egyptian civilization itself, the concept of Mehen originally bore a double aspect, a theological dimension and an association with a type of game-board; both, however, are closely related. The earliest evidence for Mehen are game-boards from the Predynastic Period, like the iconographically typical but miniature example recovered from a grave in Ballas, and now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (figure 18).<sup>56</sup> The image is that of a serpent arranged as a disk, with its tail along the periphery and its body spiraling inward with the head at the center. The exact method of play is unknown and perhaps beyond recovery, but it involved two opponents whose apparent object was to move their respective playing pieces along the segments of the serpent's back, spiraling inward from the tail to the head.<sup>57</sup> By the time that allusions to the game of Mehen appear in the Pyramid Texts in the early 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, it has become a powerful religious metaphor of the king's regeneration, drawing on the conception of the first appearance in the abyss of the primeval monad, forming the center of a vortex imagined like a spiraling serpentine coil. Indeed, there is perhaps reason to believe that the form of the game was derived from the theological image, or at least that the

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<sup>56</sup> W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Naqada and Ballas* (London, 1896, repr. Warminster, Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips, 1974) 42, pl. 43. Other Predynastic examples include Berlin inv. 13868 (A. Scharff, *Die Altertümer der Vor- und Frühzeit Ägyptens, Zweiter Teil, Mitteilungen aus der Ägyptischen Sammlung* 5. [Berlin: Curtius, 1929] 145-46, pl. 33) and a specimen in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UC 20453 (Petrie, *Amulets*, 25, pl. 47, 96f.). There are also examples from the royal tombs of Den at Abu Rawash and of Peribsen at Abydos (P. Montet, "Tombeaux de la Ire et de la IVe dynasties à Abou-Roach, deuxième partie: inventaire des objets," *Kêmi* 8 [1946] 186-90, and É. Amélineau, *Mission Amélineau: Les nouvelles fouilles d'Abydos. Troisième campagne, 1897-1898*, vol. 2 [Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1905] 494-96, pl. 47).

<sup>57</sup> For an overview of material relevant to the Mehen game-board in general, see H. Ranke, *Das altägyptische Schlangenspiel*, SHAW 11 (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1920); H. Junker, *Gîza IV, Die Mastaba des K3jm'nh (Kai-em-anch)*, DAWW 71.1 (Vienna and Leipzig: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1940) 36-38; P. Montet, "Le Jeu du Serpent," *CdE* 30 (1955) 189-97; A.F. Shore, "A 'Serpent'-Board from Egypt," *BMQ* 26.3-4 (1963) 88-91, pl. 33.

game and the theological concept may have emerged together. There is a unique and beautiful little object in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, a deep blue disk of lapis lazuli some five centimeters in diameter, in the form of a spiraling serpent arranged with its head at the center and its tail at the periphery (figure 19).<sup>58</sup> It has been stylistically dated to the Predynastic Period, and the rarity and preciousness of the material at such an early era (likely imported at some distance from the Badakhshan mines of northern Afghanistan<sup>59</sup>), together with its fine workmanship, suggests that it was from an elite entombment, possibly even of a royal personage, who presumably would have been relatively near, socially, to theologically informed priestly circles. The rounded naturalism of the serpent's body, and the lack of segments needed for play, make it certain that this was not a game-board but an amulet of some sort, interred with the deceased to assist in the regenerative process of the blessed dead by the magical potency of its symbolic image (no doubt actualized by the appropriate rite at the time of placement on the body). None of this is entirely certain, however, as once again the object is unprovenanced, and nothing can be confidently said with regard to its exact origin, period or disposition in the tomb or on the body of the deceased.<sup>60</sup>

Turning now to a few relevant excerpts from the Pyramid Texts themselves, the oldest is in Spell 332, which follows here the edition of Sethe:<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Accession number UC 38655; Petrie, *Amulets*, 25, pl. 12, 96e.

<sup>59</sup> Paul T. Nicholson and Ian Shaw, eds., *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 39.

<sup>60</sup> It has also been suggested that the Mehen game-board itself "...already in the Predynastic Period...had acquired some symbolic analogy in the funerary cult," this judgment being based primarily on the placement in the tomb of the miniature game-board (amulet?) excavated by Petrie in the Predynastic cemetery of Ballas, and illustrated in figure 18; see Shore, "A 'Serpent'-Board," 91.

<sup>61</sup> Sethe, *Pyramidentexte*, vol. 1, 276, *pyr.* 541 a-e.



with the progress of the deceased king, leading to regeneration and transfiguration. In the second line, the process by which the king has come forth from Mehen is described: as the serpentine vortex revolves, the king moves inward along the coil until he reaches the serpent's head from which he emerges in Mehen's "blast of fire," like the first appearance of the primeval monad or its post-creational analogue, the rising of the sun. In the third line this great and numinous event, the king coming forth into the sky and returning to the earth, is heralded both to the horizons of the sky and the *Duat* (the "two heavens") and the lands of Upper and Lower Egypt (the "two lands"). The king's transfiguration and return is then confirmed in the last two lines, in which he is affirmed as treading both the roadways of the sky and the earth (whatever exactly "the green *q3d*-plant under the two feet of Geb" is intended to convey).


The next excerpt, from Spell 758 and following Faulkner's transcription,<sup>63</sup> describes the condition of the royal deceased (in this case Queen Neith, wife of Pepi II) in the moments before her transfigured emergence from Mehen's "blast of fire," mentioned in the second line in Spell 332:



*jwr nt m fnd*  
*ms nt p(w) m ms3dt*  
*sdr nt m q3(b)k*  
*hms nt m mhnbk*

<sup>63</sup> R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts, Supplement of Hieroglyphic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) 87.

Neith is conceived in the nose;  
 This is how Neith is born from the nostril.  
 Neith rests in your coil;  
 Neith dwells in your Mehen-board.

In the first couplet, the “nose” and “nostril” refer to the enormous snout of the Mehen serpent, from within which the regenerated deceased is about to emerge reborn in the fiery blast of Mehen’s exhalation. The second couplet describes the state of the deceased during the pregnant moment just before that emergence, conceived as simultaneously both resting at the center of a spiraling serpent coil and as dwelling at the center of a Mehen game-board; these are, however, actually one and the same, being mere alternate iterations pointing toward a single divine, preternatural referent.<sup>64</sup> The spell as a whole being addressed to  *nb 3ht hntj ntrw*,<sup>65</sup> “Lord of the Horizon, foremost of the gods,” who can only be Re in this context, *q3(b)z*k is therefore the coil of Re and none other than Mehen himself, who is metaphorically also the very game-board of Re.


In order to arise reborn from the serpent’s snout, or to win at the game of Mehen by arriving at the serpent’s head with one’s game-pieces, both the deceased and the player of Mehen were conceived of as first entering the serpent by the tail. This conception is associated iconographically with an unusual feature found on a well-preserved alabaster/calcite Mehen-board of Old Kingdom workmanship, now in the collection of the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago, and shown in figure 20.<sup>66</sup> As can be seen in the figure, the tail of the

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<sup>64</sup> This should be understood not as two opposing possibilities, but as another example of “inclusive disjunction” as explained in Chapter 1.

<sup>65</sup> Faulkner, *Supplement*, 87.

<sup>66</sup> OIM no. 16950; published in Peter A. Piccione, “Mehen, Mysteries, and Resurrection from the Coiled Serpent,” *JARCE* 27 (1990) 46-47, figs. 2-3.

serpent terminates in the head of what appears to be some species of waterfowl, which Peter A. Piccione would identify as perhaps either “a duck or a goose.”<sup>67</sup> A more pertinent choice might be a species of Nile cormorant, of which easy comparison may be made with a fine Old Kingdom representation in bas-relief from the 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty mastaba of Mereruka at Saqqara.<sup>68</sup> The head of the cormorant is here to be read metonymically, *pars pro toto*, as the hieroglyph  ‘q’ ‘enter’, the exact verb used to describe the action of the deceased entering Mehen in the second line of a passage from Spell 760 of the Coffin Texts, discussed further below in this chapter. This idea of entering the serpent’s tail, and passing through the serpent’s body to emerge regenerated from its head, had a long history in Egyptian eschatology, being clearly present in the eleventh and twelfth hours of the *Book of Amduat*, more fully examined in context in the following chapter. For the present it is enough to note that in the eleventh hour of the sun’s nocturnal passage through the *Duat*, a procession of twelve “gods” carry on their heads a long serpent identified as *mḥn-t3*, “Encircler-of-the-Earth,” and position it before the solar barque,<sup>69</sup> in the following and final hour, the serpent has swollen to enormous size, and Re and an

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 47. Ranke recognized that the tail on the Predynastic Berlin game-board (inv. 13868) also appears to terminate with the head of some kind of bird, but the condition of the board apparently made it impossible to be more specific; see Ranke, *Schlangenspiel*, 7, n. 5.



<sup>68</sup> Genus *Phalacrocorax*; Egyptian representations frequently lack sufficient detail for identification at the species level. See Patrick F. Houlihan, *The Birds of Ancient Egypt*, Natural History of Egypt 1 (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1986) 8, fig. 7.

<sup>69</sup> Hornung, *Amduat*, vol. 1 (Text), 185, pl. Elfte Stunde. The particularly felicitous rendering of *mḥn-t3* as “Erdumringler” was first proposed by Kákosy, then subsequently adopted by Hornung; L. Kákosy, “Osiris-Aion,” *OrAnt* 3 (1964) 19, n. 26; Hornung, *Conceptions of God*, 161. *mḥn-t3* is a clear literary image of the ouroboros, closely related conceptually to the *s3-t3* of the Transformation Texts (discussed in the following chapter), described in BD 87 as the serpent which is *ḏrw-t3*, “at the edges of the world.”





written not with the serpent determinative , but with the Mehen game-board determinative .<sup>72</sup>

Even after the total disappearance of the Mehen board-game, the theological concept of Mehen continued to be associated with *snt* (*znt*) ‘Senet’, a board-game of equal antiquity.<sup>73</sup> Like the Mehen board-game, Senet could also be understood as representing a passage from death to renewed life. Instead of spaces arranged in a spiral, the rectangular Senet board has three parallel rows of ten squares each along which players move in a pattern like the hieroglyph , which could be used in the writing of *phr* ‘turn about’, ‘revolve’, and the like, perhaps symbolically encoding the idea of a circular or spiral progress as in the old game of Mehen. In a hieratic text of the late New Kingdom that gives a first-person account of Senet game play as a contest between the deceased and an unnamed inimical opponent, the player describes the way he begins or enters the game by saying,  *tkn=j mhn*, “I approach Mehen.”<sup>74</sup>

There is another example of Mehen in the Coffin Texts, occurring in Spell 1130, a spell essentially added to the long version of the *Book of Two Ways* as something like an epiphany in which the deceased comes face-to-face with the nameless high creator god *nb-r-dr* “Lord of all” ( lit.: “Lord to the limit,” essentially identical with Atum and Re), who conceives in his mind (*jb*, lit.: ‘heart’) all aspects of the creation-to-be, while still abiding at the center of the primeval

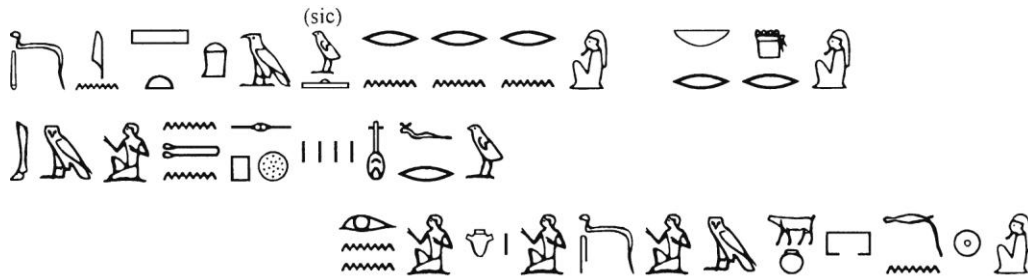
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<sup>72</sup> Certain examples of this are from source coffins B1L, B3L, and B2P in de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 7, 428 c.

<sup>73</sup> Alexandre Piankoff, *The Wandering of the Soul*, Bollingen Series 40.6 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974) 117.

<sup>74</sup> Cairo papyrus JE 58037, col. 1, line 2, in Piankoff, *Wandering*, pl. 43.

vortex (visualized as the personified serpentine coil Mehen, which is both his emanative expression and protective limit up against the surrounding limitless abyssal “waters.”)<sup>75</sup>



*ḏd-mdw jn šṯ3 rnw nb-r-ḏr*

[.....]

*wḥmꜛj nꜛtn spw jfdw nfrw*

*jr.n nꜛj jbꜛj ḏsꜛj m-ḥnw mḥn*

Words said by he whose names are secret,<sup>76</sup> Lord of all:

[.....]

I shall relate to you the four beautiful deeds

my heart made for me myself within Mehen.



Assmann, not inappropriately, translated *mḥn* in this passage as “*Umringerschlange*,”<sup>77</sup> which term might or might not be used to signify an ouroboros, strictly speaking; it could also conceivably refer to an encircling ouroboroid, or to a spiral arrangement like that of the Mehen board-game or the lapis lazuli amulet mentioned above in which the god would be understood as being at the center.<sup>78</sup> It is also worth noting that the name *mḥn* is here followed by both the

<sup>75</sup> Following the transcription of de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 7, 460 c-d, 462 b. The excerpt is an eclectic text drawn from preserved portions of sources B1C, B3C, B4C, B1BO, and B6C.

<sup>76</sup> This line is rubricated in the original.



<sup>77</sup> Jan Assmann, *Ägypten, Theologie und Frömmigkeit einer frühen Hochkultur*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1991) 205.

<sup>78</sup> David Lorton, however, in his English translation of Assmann’s work, transmutes “*Umringerschlange*” into “ouroboros-serpent,” entirely without warrant; see Assmann, *Search for God*, 174.

“god” determinative  and the “sun” determinative .<sup>79</sup> This suggests that Mehen is to be understood both as a deity and as having a close association with the sun (and the creative monad, the pre-creational analogue of the sun). Indeed, as already seen in the excerpt from Spell 758 of the Pyramid Texts, and as confirmed both by material later in this chapter and by New Kingdom material in the following chapter, Mehen is understood as in some sense belonging to Re (which name can signify both the creator and the sun); it is perhaps best to regard Mehen as neither entirely distinct nor fully identical with Re, yet still ontologically subordinate to Re, on which point more will be said later.

There is also a small group of three spells in the Coffin Texts, numbered 758-760 in de Buck’s edition, in which Mehen is prominently featured. These spells, together with a unique accompanying vignette, form a composition as arguably coherent and independent from the total Coffin Text corpus as the *Book of Two Ways* and might, with some justification, be regarded as a *Book of Mehen*. Though deserving a thorough and complete study as such, present purpose will limit examination of this interesting work to basic description and highlights of features pertinent to the history of the ouroboros and ideas associated with it. This *Book of Mehen* (which has no known actual title) is preserved to us in only one known copy on the head-end of the outer coffin of a certain 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty general Sepi (*jmj-r3 mšꜥ spj*), recovered from Shaft 15 in the forecourt of Tomb no. 2 (that of nomarch Djehutihotep) at Deir el-Bersha.<sup>80</sup> Spells 758-760 are

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

<sup>79</sup> The determinative in the excerpted passage follows de Buck’s source B1C; of the two other sources in which determinatives have been preserved, one (B1BO) has only the solar disk  and the other (B3C) has a determinative that looks (at least in de Buck’s transcription) something like a cross between the solar disk and the Mehen game-board, viz. .


<sup>80</sup> Egyptian Museum, Cairo, CG 28083; Pierre Lacau, *Sarcophages antérieures au Nouvel Empire*, vol. 1, CG 28001-28086 (Cairo: IFAO, 1904) pl. 25. A few lines were later incorporated into Spell 131 of the *Book of the Dead*, giving rise to the suggestion that these texts had once been more widely known than
















*dbn w3wt sdt st r<sup>c</sup> psd*  
*s33(j) w3wt n jmw<sup>83</sup> wr n(j)<sup>84</sup> mhn*  
*dbn(j) hh m-s3 hh*

The roads of fire go round the seat of Luminous-Re,<sup>85</sup>  
 Who protects the roads for the great barque of Mehen,  
 Which goes round myriad after myriad (of revolutions).<sup>86</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Following the suggestion of Faulkner,  is read as an abbreviated writing of *jmw*, usually signifying a large transport vessel or even warship; R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, vol. 2 (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1977) 290. For a similar abbreviated writing  , see Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, vol. 1, 78. The idea must be of a supernaturally enormous vessel.

<sup>84</sup> In spite of the uncertainty that de Buck expresses about the transcription of this sign, photographs of the original allow the probable, if not certain, reading as  ; de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 6, 387 n. 4\*.


<sup>85</sup> This is reading  as *r<sup>c</sup>* ‘Re’ and reading  as *psd* ‘bright’, ‘luminous’, written as the number nine, and taking *psd* as adjectivally modifying *r<sup>c</sup>*, although the seated god determinative  occurring after *psd* rather than *R<sup>c</sup>* is then problematic, unless *r<sup>c</sup> psd* is perhaps to be understood as a compound name “Luminous-Re.” Faulkner translates *r<sup>c</sup> psd* as “Shining Sun,” while Carrier translates as “Rê, le Lumineux.” Faulkner, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 2, 290; Claude Carrier, *Textes des Sarcophages du Moyen Empire Égyptien*, vol. 2 (n.p. [Paris]: Éditions du Rocher, 2004) 1699. There may also be a suggestion of word-play here, a resonance between *psd* ‘bright’, ‘luminous’, and *psdt* ‘Ennead.’

<sup>86</sup> This is taking *hh* as meaning ‘a great number’, ‘myriad’, rather than the specific number ‘million’, as the latter meaning of *hh* appears to have fallen into disuse fairly early (Gardiner, *Grammar*, 191); the purport of *hh m-s3 hh* would seem to be a very great, virtually unlimited number. It is by no means certain, however, whether or not this great number refers to a great number of *years*, as it is often translated. Of what particular relevance would the *year* be to the deceased embarked on a virtually perpetual travel around the circuit of Re? Mere duration of time, in and of itself, is not at issue here. It is more likely that what *hh* refers to here are the numberless daily revolutions being made around the solar circuit. This possibility is supported by the fact that related expressions occurring in the *Book of the Dead*, for example, also make no explicit reference to years. For example, in BD Spell 182, the “barque of millions (of years),” as it has been translated, is written only    | III , *wj3 n(jt) hhw* ‘barque of millions’; the millions (or rather “myriads”) referred to could easily be the desired indefinite number of daily revolutions around the solar circuit (Naville, *Todtenbuch*, vol. 2, 447). Similarly, in BD Spell 175, Atum promises great afterlife longevity to the deceased in the following terms:    |   |  |  | *jw3k r hhw n(jw) hhw h<sup>c</sup>w n(j) hhw*, “you are destined for myriads of myriads, a lifetime of myriads” (E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Chapters of Coming Forth by Day or the Theban Recension of the Book of the Dead*, vol. 3 [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1910] 73-74). Though *hhw* is conventionally translated here as “millions (of years),” there nothing in these contexts to privilege the solar year over the daily solar circuit. On the contrary, the focus of interest is the unending return of the ever-renewed sun along its circuit, and the near immortality

One would expect Re, in his barque, to go round endless circuits, illuminating both the upper world of the living and the underworld of the *Duat*, but the description reflects the diagrammatic arrangement of the vignette in which the circuits go round the seated image of Re. This is the first hint that the conceptions presented in the *Book of Mehen* may function simultaneously at more than one level. Re is the sun which revolves around the world, but he is also the supreme numen of the world, of which the circuits of the sun are extensions and ontological dependents. The essential idea here of a great barque encircling the world has much in common with the Underworld Books of the New Kingdom. The great barque of Mehen should be understood as a variant of the solar barque, following the endless circuit of Re by day and by night, but without being formally factored into day and night barques, as seen in the Underworld Books. Calling it the “great barque of Mehen” emphasizes that the circuit upon which the barque travels is upon the inner periphery of the world, the limiting edge protectively encapsulating the ordered reality, and sometimes called Mehen.

It is likely that the abstract, diagrammatic alternation of red and black rings represent days and nights, respectively. The text mentions only four *w3wt sdt* “roads of fire” alternating with four *w3wt kkjt* “roads of darkness,”<sup>87</sup> yet the diagram shows a total of nine rings, the

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attained by the deceased (until the world’s end) through virtually perpetual participation in the sun’s daily renewal. Note also that the lexeme *ḥw* ‘lifetime’ is written with the determinative ☉ of the sun, calling to mind not duration in terms of years, but duration in terms of the daily journey of the sun along its circuit, marking the days of a lifetime, long or short. That *ḥḥ* in CT Spell 758 does not by itself refer to myriads of years seems confirmed by the way *ḥḥ* is used on the throne of the seated deity in the vignette, in which the signs  $\left\{ \left\{ \left\{ \right. \right. \right. rnpwt$  ‘years’ are written separately from  *ḥḥw* ‘myriads’, on their own register; see note 112.

<sup>87</sup> From CT Spell 759 = de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 6, 388 j-m; discussed below.


number nine being, in Egyptian thought, a usual way of indicating an indefinite plurality,<sup>88</sup> in this case the myriad after myriad of revolutions to be made by the deceased around the circuit of Re. Obstacles to be overcome along the way include closed gates or portals guarded by demonic *hftjw* ‘enemies’, a feature shared by other, related compositions such as the *Book of Two Ways* elsewhere in the Coffin Texts<sup>89</sup> and, in the New Kingdom, several of the Underworld Books,<sup>90</sup> and thematically related *Book of the Dead* Chapters 144-150. The deceased must have the required special knowledge (*rh*) of the circuit, its portals, and their guardians in order not to be “turned away” (*stnm*)<sup>91</sup> This is made clear in the following excerpt from Spell 759:<sup>92</sup>

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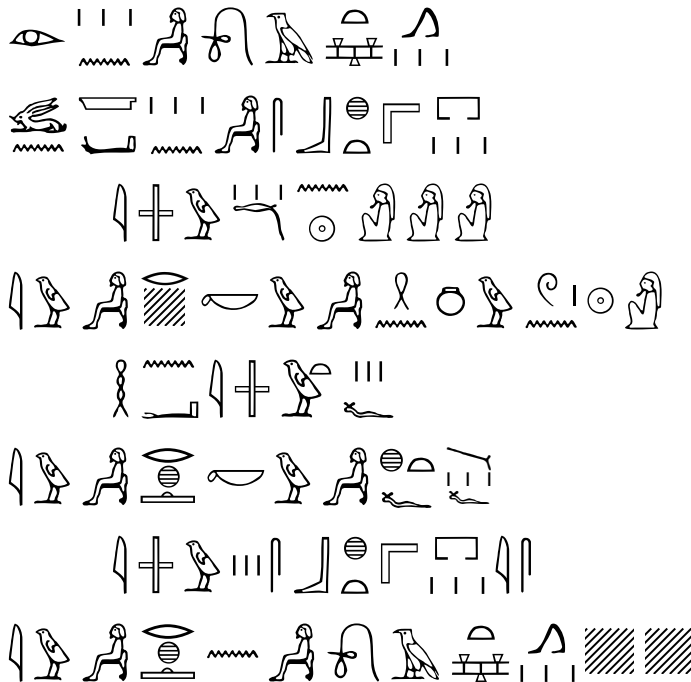
<sup>88</sup> As three strokes III are a common determinative for marking plural number, so three groups of three strokes (equalling nine) signifies an indefinite plurality of something, essentially *all* of whatever it may be. The specific foreign enemies threatening Egypt’s borders may have changed in number and ethnic composition over the centuries, and yet were always traditionally accounted as the *psdt-pdwt* ‘nine bows’; similarly, the so-called Ennead, or nine chief gods of Egypt, could be composed of varying constellations of deities as circumstances might require, or might simply be referred to as the *psdt* ‘Ennead’ without specifying the precise make-up of its members. In such cases, the reference was often not so much to any specific nine deities, but abstractly to all the gods, what might well be termed the divine pleroma itself. See Richard H. Wilkinson, *Symbol & Magic in Egyptian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994) 146.

<sup>89</sup> The complete text of the *Book of Two Ways* is made up of CT Spells 1029-1130; the section describing the seven closed portals and their demonic guardians is confined to Spells 1100-1114; see de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 7, 252-471.

<sup>90</sup> This is especially true of the *Book of Amduat* and the *Book of Gates*, both discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>91</sup> In Spell 758 (de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 6, 387 e, j),  *sb3w stnm(w)* should be understood as something like “the gates that turn away” (i.e., that are closed to one). Faulkner (*Concise Dictionary*, 254) gives *stnm* as ‘lead astray’, ‘confuse’, leading him to the bizarre and contextually meaningless translation, “the gates are confused” (Faulkner, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 2, 290), and this in spite of the fact that he recognizes *stnm* as the *s*-causative of *tnm*, which he elsewhere glosses as ‘turn aside’ (*Concise Dictionary*, 299). Faulkner’s error is then perpetuated by Carrier, in his own way, as “Les portes qui éqarent,” (*Textes des Sarcophages*, vol. 2, 1699). For the correct understanding of *stnm* in this context, see Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, vol. 4, 343, II; Pascal Vernus, *Athribis: Textes et documents relatifs à l’époque pharaonique*. BdE 74 (Cairo: IFAO, 1978; Piccione, “Mehen,” 44, n. 10.

<sup>92</sup> Following the transcription of de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 6, 389 a-d.



*jr n=j w3wt*  
*wn n=j sbḥwt*  
*jmjw mḥn*  
*jw=j r[h]<sup>93</sup>.kwj šnw n(j) r<sup>c</sup>*  
*ḥn<sup>c</sup> jmjtw=f*  
*jw=j rh.kwj ḥftjw=f*  
*jmjw sbḥwt js*  
*jw=j rh.n=j w3wt [mḥn]<sup>94</sup>*

Make for me the roads!  
 Open for me the portals,  
 O, (You)-who-are-in-Mehen!<sup>95</sup>

<sup>93</sup> This restoration of *rh* is made on the basis of the parallel constructions with *rh* occurring immediately below in this same text.

<sup>94</sup> *Mḥn* is here restored by de Buck on the basis of surviving traces (*Coffin Texts*, vol. 6, 389, n. 1\*) followed by Paul Barguet, trans., *Les textes des sarcophages égyptiens du Moyen Empire*, LAPO 12 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1986) 595 and Piccione, “Mehen,” 44.

<sup>95</sup> The clause is at first sight problematic because of the three “seated god” determinatives written at the end, a writing that would allow for the reading *jmjw mḥnw*, “who/which are in the Mehehs.” Faulkner understood this as referring to the immediately preceding word *sbḥwt*, and







entering the serpent Mehen (as seen above in the Pyramid Texts), in order that one might undergo transfiguration to new and everlasting life, on the model of the processes at work during the first emergence of the primeval monad and in the daily renewal of the sun. This process is also explicit in the twelfth hour of the *Book of Amduat*, when the solar barque is towed through an enormous serpent introduced in the previous hour as Mehen, but now labeled “Life of the gods.” The sun-god, Sia, Hu, and a retinue including the blessed dead, all enter the tail of this great serpent, are towed through it, and then exit the snout of the serpent as renewed beings, filled with divine life. The process is a post-creational reconfiguration of the forces at play in the first moment of creation when the “sole one” abiding with “his coils” (that is, as a singularity within the surrounding abyssal chaos), conceives of creation in his “mind” (*jb*, lit. ‘heart’), and then emanates his powers of Sia and Hu through the coils of the expanding primeval vortex to effect the unfolding differentiation of all things in the divine and natural worlds.<sup>98</sup>

It is this luminous transfiguration and renewal of the sun-god (and the deceased who is to some extent identified with him) that is referred to in the third line of this last excerpt, when it is said that the serpents of darkness are “create light for those who are after them and those who are before them,” an oblique reference to the countless cycles of the barque and its retinue entering in darkness and exiting renewed in light and life.

In the last line of this excerpt, the deceased has entered like the sun-god himself, standing between Sia and Hu on the solar bark, and through the power of his special “gnosis,” his secret knowledge of the roads of Mehen, he at last passes through that mysterious road that leads to the very “summit” of Re, an experience of epiphany, an encounter with the highest ontological reality, no doubt represented by the central divine image of the accompanying vignette. It should

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<sup>98</sup> CT spell 321 = de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 4, 147 a-o.

be noted that this excerpt makes more explicit something that the later Underworld Books do not; it is the possibility of the deceased identifying with the sun-god that makes possible the deceased's regeneration and renewal through participation in the processes by which the sun-god is daily renewed. By contrast, the Underworld Books in royal (and later, non-royal) contexts serve primarily as a display of the process of divine solar renewal, while connecting this to the afterlife expectations of the deceased only through a complex array of funerary symbolism designed to include the deceased in this process.

In the following excerpt from Spell 760,<sup>99</sup> the deceased has demonstrated the power of his requisite knowledge, successfully achieves apotheosis, and participates in the very life of highest deity:



*jr <r>h(j)<sup>100</sup> rn n(j) w3wtz f jptn  
 swt pw 'q(j) r mhn  
 jr rh(j) r3 pn n sk.nzf dt  
 'nhzf m 'nht r'*

As for one who knows the name of these roads of his,  
 it is he who enters into Mehen.

<sup>99</sup> Following the transcription of de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 6, 390 k-n.

<sup>100</sup> The writing  $\left[ \text{Q} \right] \left[ \text{O} \right] \left[ \text{Sun Disk with Dot} \right]$  is haplography for  $\left[ \text{Q} \right] \left[ \text{O} \right] \left[ \text{Sun Disk with Dot} \right]$  : cf. the correct writing in the third line of this excerpt. Examination of the original groupings in the vertical columns makes it more evident just how such an inadvertent omission might occur.

As for one who knows this spell, he cannot perish forever;  
he shall live by means of that which Re lives.

The passage through the body of Mehen is here characterized as a roadway, the secret name of which the deceased must know in order to “enter into Mehen.” Moreover, by knowing this entire spell, and by successfully undergoing a regenerative transformation when passing through the “roads of Mehen,” the deceased everlastingly participates in the divine life of Re, living “by means of that which Re lives.” This may also mean that the deceased may expect to benefit from the temple offerings made to Re.

While Mehen is to an extent personified as a deity, he (or it) was never an object of cult, and is more accurately understood as the hypostasis of a theological conception. In the context of Spells 758-760 of the Coffin Texts, Mehen is identical with the circuit of Re, and the barque of Mehen is essentially the solar barque. Mehen is here again neither fully distinct from Re, nor fully identical with him. Re is the highest numen and ontological reality; Mehen exists as an aspect or manifestation of Re at a lower ontological level. The distinct quality of the *Book of Mehen* is its emphasis on the regenerative and transformative power inherent in the process of passing through the same vivific and vivifying pathway that is followed by the sun. A similar emphasis occurs in Chapter 87 of the *Book of the Dead* (discussed in the following chapter), one of the so-called Transformation Texts, in which the life of the sun is converged with the life-renewing solar circuit and expressed through the image of an enormous ouroboros with which the deceased becomes magically identified by reciting the text.


It should be evident from the foregoing that a main contrastive features between the Mehen of the Pyramid Texts and CT Spell 1130, on the one hand, and that of the *Book of Mehen*, on the other, is that the former is modeled more upon the image of the primordial vortex of

spiraling energy at the time of creation and the first emergence of the primeval sun from its center, while the Mehen of the *Book of Mehen* is more reflective of the post-creational order in which the solar circuit and daily renewal of the sun is the predominant feature. One can see this contrast in the preference for determining the name Mehen with a serpent hieroglyph or the serpent game-board hieroglyph in the Pyramid Texts and CT Spell 1130, while the name Mehen in the *Book of Mehen* is exclusively determined with the solar disk and seated god hieroglyphs. Likewise, in the former texts the process of regeneration undergone by the deceased is conceived of as being more analogous to the first appearance of the sun at the center of the creational vortex, while in the latter texts the deceased undergoes a process more closely modeled on the daily renewal of the sun as it travels around the solar circuit.


Something more remains to be said regarding the unique iconography of the vignette accompanying the *Book of Mehen* (figure 21). The entire vignette is composed of two basic parts, a seated deity at the center, and nine concentric rings surrounding him. These rings represent the “circuit of Re” or “roads of Mehen” in a very abstract way that does not reproduce spatial relations or potentially perceptible visual appearances, but conveys or encodes certain specific ideas regarding the “circuit” or “roads.” The alternating red and black rings very likely represent an indefinite number of alternating courses of day and night. The text clearly states that there are four of each; the significance may be astronomical, perhaps an oblique reference to the solstices and equinoxes, though the number four might also suggest associations with notions of totality, universality, or completeness.<sup>101</sup> In drawing the vignette, however, the priestly scribe has

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<sup>101</sup> Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic*, 129-31, 144. As two often means completeness (as in “the two lands” being the complete Egypt), two twos or four could mean a completeness of completeness, analogous to three threes being a plural of plurals (as when the Ennead is intended to suggest essentially all the gods as a whole). It is perhaps also possible that the number four encodes here the idea of three (plurality) plus one more, meaning a great though indeterminate number, as one might title a literary work *A Thousand*


added an additional outer black ring, bringing the number up to nine, the number of indefinite plurality,<sup>102</sup> suggesting a virtually endless succession of solar cycles. Since the vignette as a whole represents the entire cosmos, though reductively emphasizing only its most highly numinous features, this outermost black ring should probably be understood as representing the furthest extent and outer periphery of the cosmos, the outer “membrane” of the sphere of ordered reality, upon inner surface of which the solar barque navigates its numberless cycles of night and day. On this post-creational level, the level of which the primary characteristic is the orderly diurnal cycle of the sun, the outer black ring is identifiable as Mehen,<sup>103</sup> the outermost limit and protective interface against the surrounding abyssal deep; in other words, it has both the syntactic place in the vignette and the semantic reference that would be appropriate for the use of an ouroboros in the place of the black ring. The designer, however, left the outer ring perfectly abstract, yet encoded serpentine imagery into the iconography of the seated deity, to be considered momentarily. There is first a final point to be made regarding the oval rings as a whole; they should not be understood as oval but as perfectly circular. Their oval shape is simply a result of “stretching” them to fit around the elongated space taken up by the seated deity. This is closely analogous to the way in which the *shen*-ring (  *šn*), by nature a perfect circle, is

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*Nights and A Night* or tout a commercial product as having “a hundred and one uses.” Such considerations may be why, for example, that one finds variants of the hieroglyph  (*tš* ‘earth) with four little grains of earth below the horizontal bar instead of three, even in prestige royal inscriptions (e.g., *pyr.* 541c, 691a).

<sup>102</sup> See note 87, above.

<sup>103</sup> This follows Jan Zandee’s understanding of CT Spell 758; J. Zandee, *Death as an Enemy, According to Ancient Egyptian Conceptions*, Studies in the History of Religions 5 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960) 164. Piccione is mistaken in stating that Zandee conjectures the surrounding band of text to be “...specifically a representation of Mehen himself.” (Piccione, “Mehen,” 44.) Zandee, rather, basing his argument on the accompanying texts, correctly understands the outer black ring as representing Mehen.

elongated into the *shenu* (  *šnw*), an oval of any length as required for writing the names of various kings. In both cases the deformation of the circle has been done for the purely pragmatic requirements of the graphic image, and is still to be understood conceptually as a perfect circle.

The unique iconographic features of the seated deity at the center of the vignette are not like those primarily intended to identify a deity for the purposes of cult, but are rather an “esoteric” summary statement of theological abstractions intended to compliment the surrounding texts. Though the image is unequivocally identified as Re in the accompanying texts, its iconography bears little resemblance to that usually seen in representations of Re. One clue to the meaning of this image is the unusual rendering of the head *en face*, facing the viewer. The only relevant parallel<sup>104</sup> to this unusual feature occurs in the eleventh hour of the *Book of Gates*, when the night solar barque (and the deceased identified with its chief occupant) is brought face to face with the *hr jtn*, the “face of the disk” (figure 22).<sup>105</sup> The face to face nature of the encounter is emphasized by the barque bearing the “face of the disk” being towed in the opposite direction *toward* the barque of the night. The accompanying text explains this encounter thus:<sup>106</sup>

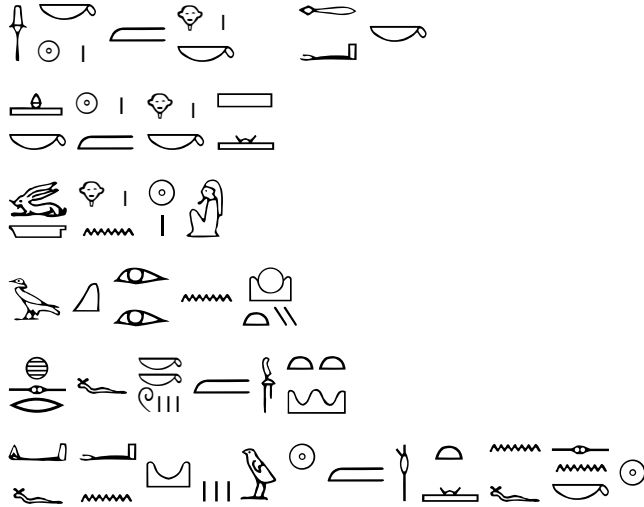
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<sup>104</sup> The only deity commonly represented *en face* is, of course, the domestic god Bes, whose usual associations bear no consideration in the context under discussion, though by the Ptolemaic Period the so-called Bes Pantheos (and similar polymorphic deities) could appear standing in the center of an ouroboros in three-dimensional representations; see Chapter 4.

<sup>105</sup> Erik Hornung, ed., *Das Buch von den Pforten des Jenseits nach den Versionen des Neuen Reiches*, vol. 1 (Text), AH 7 (Geneva: Éditions de Belles-Lettres, 1979) 363, following the versions of the alabaster sarcophagus of Sethos I and the tomb of Queen Tawosret.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 361-62, following the version of the alabaster sarcophagus of Sethos I.











*sh*m≠*k* *r*<sup>c</sup> *m* *h*r≠*k* <sup>c</sup>*z*≠*k*  
*h*t

≠*k* *r*<sup>c</sup> *m* *h*r≠*k* š<*t*>  
*w*n *h*r *n*(*j*) *r*<sup>c</sup>  
<sup>c</sup>*q*(.w) *j*r*t*-*j*r*t*<sup>107</sup> *n* *z*h*t**j*  
*h*s*r*≠*f* *k*k*w* *m* *j*m*n*t*t*  
*d**j*≠*f* <sup>c</sup>*n**d*w *m* *w**d**t*.*n*≠*f* *s*n*k*<*t*>



You have power, O Re, in your face, your great one.  
 You rest, O Re, in your mysterious face.  
 The face of Re is uncovered (lit., “is opened”);

<sup>107</sup> The rare expression  or  occurs twice in the Theban tomb of Neferhotep (TT 50) and once in the *Great Speos Artemidos Inscription*, both edited by Gardiner, who suggested that it means something literally like “entering eye (to) eye” with a god; Alan H. Gardiner, “Davies’s Copy of the Great Speos Artemidos Inscription,” *JEA* 32 (1946) 52. This might be rendered more idiomatically in English as “coming face to face” with a god. The transliteration of  in this case is problematic. Reading this as a dual *jrtj*, though possible by the writing, makes poor sense semantically, as a dual would normally refer to a pair of matched eyes, such as the two eyes on a person’s face, while the sense of the idiomatic expression  suggests eyes that do not belong to a single pair, but eyes opposing one another from two separate pairs, as in the English expression “eye to eye.” If Gardiner’s interpretation of the expression is correct, which it appears to be, then  is more likely to be an unmarked conjunction than a dual, literally “eye (and) eye,” having the idiomatic meaning better rendered “eye to eye” in English. For this reason, the transliteration *jrt-jrt* is adopted here, with  being read as <sup>c</sup>*q* (.w), the third-person masculine stative with unwritten inflectional ending .w; the entire clause would then literally mean something like “he has entered eye (to) eye to Akhty,” which has been rendered here in more idiomatic English as “he has come face to face with Akhty.”

He has come face to face with Akhty.<sup>108</sup>  
 He dispels darkness in the West;  
 He causes dawn when he commands the darkness.


Thus the dead sun, the “osiride” sun (with whom the deceased king is identified) is re-unified with the living face of the sun, which has the power to dispel darkness and bring about the dawn.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, the deceased in the *Book of Mehen* experiences the change from darkness to brightness as he approaches the vertex of “Luminous-Re.” The image of Re faces the deceased as the deceased approaches, as a kind of epiphany. The deceased, already identified with Osiris, is unified with Re, a condition expressed in the iconography of the seated image. Osiris is generally represented with a white, mummiform body; the seated image is white, and is mummiform from the waist down.<sup>110</sup> The image is seated, enthroned, like Osiris in the fifth hour of the *Book of Gates*. Like that image of Osiris, the *Book of Mehen* image does not have the short, symbolic crook and flagellum commonly found in representations of Osiris, but an elongated stave (a shepherd’s crook in the case of the *Book of Gates* Osiris and a *was*-scepter ( $\int w3s$ ) in the *Book of Mehen* image) and a large *ankh*-sign ( $\int \epsilon nh$ ). In the case of the *Book of Mehen* image, the

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


<sup>108</sup> While the earliest preserved writing  of the alabaster sarcophagus of Sethos I is followed here, the presence of the divine determinative  in the versions in the tombs of Ramesses VI and Tjanefer show that the divine name or epithet Akhty (‘Horizon-dweller’) is intended, rather than the dual “the two horizons.”

<sup>109</sup> For Akhty as an epithet of the “osiride” dimension of the unified Re-Osiris, see Darnell’s discussion of a thematic parallel from the fifth division of the *Book of Caverns*, “As the Osiride element reaches up to the sun, so the solar element stretches out to unite with the Osiride king”; John Coleman Darnell, *The Enigmatic Netherworld Books of the Solar-Osirian Unity, Cryptographic Compositions in the Tombs of Tutankhamun, Ramesses VI and Ramesses IX*, OBO 198 (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004) 393.

<sup>110</sup> Though clearly identified as Re in the accompanying text, these features, together with the variation on the *atef*-crown (discussed below), tempted Lacau to identify the seated figure as “un osiris”; Lacau, *Sarcophages*, vol. 1, 175.


arm holding the *ankh*-sign is extended downward so that the sign can be read together with the hieroglyphs appearing on the throne as *‘nh rnpwt hhw*, “living millions of years,” or (taking *‘nh* as a participle, adjectivally modifying the seated figure, which is treated as the noun) “who lives millions of years.”<sup>111</sup> The figure is crowned with a variation of the *atef*-crown (  *ʔtf* ), associated in its earliest attestations with the king,<sup>112</sup> but later frequently with Osiris as an emblem of his kingship. The *Book of Mehen* version of the *atef*, however, shows certain unique peculiarities. One unusual feature, absolutely unique to this particular representation, is that its summit is in the shape of the hieroglyph *jb* ‘heart’ or ‘mind’, with its characteristic internal markings,<sup>113</sup> but shorn of the projecting blood-vessel stumps so that it has an appropriate contour for the top of the crown;<sup>114</sup> recall that it is in the *jb*, the ‘heart’ or ‘mind’ of the creator that the particulars of the cosmos were originally conceived. It is possible that the *jb* at the top of the crown is to be understood as the aforementioned *wpt rʕ*, the ‘summit’ or ‘apex’ of Re, which the


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<sup>111</sup> Note that the three *rnpt*  signs are not attached to the heads of the three *hh*  signs, nor even aligned with them. They are, however, reasonably aligned on the same horizontal row as the *‘nh*  , with the three *hh* signs forming a parallel row just beneath them; hence the reading of the whole as *‘nh rnpwt hhw*. That the *rnpt* signs are represented separately from the *hh* signs may be taken to confirm the phrase *hh m-sʔ hh* “myriad after myriad” (in the outer ring of text surrounding the vignette, discussed above) as not necessarily referring to “myriads” or “millions” of years, but possibly of daily revolutions of the sun (see note 86, above).

<sup>112</sup> The earliest known examples of the *atef*-crown are apparently those that appear on the head of King Sahure in a series of scenes of the king making offerings in his funerary temple at Abusir; Ludwig Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Šaʔhu-Reʕ*, vol. 2 (Text), *Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* 7 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1913) pls. 35, 37, 38.

<sup>113</sup> Compare the closely contemporary example from the tomb of Djehutihotep at Deir el-Bersha in F. Ll. Griffith, *A Collection of Hieroglyphs, A Contribution to the History of Egyptian Writing*, ASE 6 (London, 1898) pl. 9, 166.

<sup>114</sup> It is therefore exactly like the heart in the “heart and windpipe” hieroglyph used to write *nfr* (  ); for contemporaneous example see Griffith, *Hieroglyphs*, pl. 9, 164.

deceased enters by means of the *w3t št3t*, the ‘mysterious road’ within it. Another unusual feature of this *atef*-crown is the treatment of the side-feathers. It is usual to have, attached vertically at each side, a pair of feathers of the form , such as is used to write *šw* and *m3ˁt*,<sup>115</sup> in this instance, however, the feathers have been replaced by a pair of serpents whose bodies have been made to conform to the shapes of the usual feathers. In addition, at the base of the crown, arrayed just above the lateral corkscrew horns, is a short serpent body with heads at each end, just where protective uraei sometimes appear on more elaborate versions of the traditional *atef*-crown.<sup>116</sup> These serpents are not, however, representations of slender, hooded, venomous cobras (like the uraei), but of the fuller-bodied constrictors usually used when representing Mehen; nonetheless, they may be a reference to protection, specifically of Re protecting the roads of Mehen, as he is said to do in CT Spell 758, above. It is very likely, therefore, that the iconography of the seated deity was meant to be understood as having references to Mehen, as well as features of both Re and Osiris.

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<sup>115</sup> The *atef*-crown seems to have originated through combining a tall reed or wicker-work crown, similar to those worn by the *Muu*-priests who sometimes danced at funerals, and the crown of ram and bovine horns surmounted by a tall pair of ostrich plumes which was the characteristic headgear of Andjety, patron god of the 9<sup>th</sup> Lower Egyptian nome; see Abd el Monem Joussef Abubakr, *Untersuchungen über die ägyptischen Kronen*. (Glückstadt, Hamburg, New York: J.J. Augustin, 1937) 7-8. Though the original meaning of these plumes is unknown, it is quite possible, after the *atef*-crown became commonly associated with Osiris, that the two plumes may have been understood as related to the apparent dual form of *m3ˁt* in *Wsh̄t n(j)t M3ˁtj*, the “Hall of Judgment” over which Osiris presided. The serpent-plumes of the crown of the *Book of Mehen* deity may have been meant to associate Mehen with *m3ˁt*, which in this context would be the divine order of the cosmic, solar, funerary levels involving Mehen.

<sup>116</sup> Stephen Quirke’s description of this two-headed serpent is poorly observed; he states that the seated deity is “...crowned with an unfamiliar crown, resembling the *atef*-crown of Osiris, but on which the horns emerge as serpents”; Forman and Quirke, *Hieroglyphs*, 97. The usual, laterally arrayed, corkscrew horns are clearly indicated with a black wavy line, while the serpent heads appear where protective uraei sometimes occur on more elaborate examples of the crown; see Abubakr, *Kronen*, 11, figs. 7-8 and 12, fig. 11.

The unique iconography of the seated deity of the *Book of Mehen* vignette should probably be regarded as the earliest known representation of the theological concept of the unity of Re and Osiris. This idea, latent in certain features of the Pyramid Texts, emerges quite distinctly elsewhere in the Coffin Texts,<sup>117</sup> and then develops significantly in the Underworld Books, achieving perhaps its most refined treatment in the so-called *Book of the Solar-Osirian Unity*.<sup>118</sup> Nowhere is this conception more dramatically displayed than in the version of that work appearing on the exterior left panel of the second golden shrine of Tutankhamen,<sup>119</sup> in which the “giant deity” representing the unified Re-Osiris is seen surrounded by the serpent Mehen, shown not as a single black band as in the *Book of Mehen* vignette, but as a pair of serpents with their tails in their mouths, the earliest known graphic representation of the ouroboros in ancient Egypt.

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<sup>117</sup> For a discussion of the origins and development of the theology of the temporary merging and mutual identity of Re and Osiris in the Coffin Texts, see Harco Willems, *Chests of Life*, MVEOL 25 (Leiden: Ex Oriente Lux, 1988) 151-54.

<sup>118</sup> The fundamental study of this material is Darnell’s aforementioned study in which he confirms the possibility of a Middle Kingdom origin for this theological conception in the following observation: “Based on considerations of grammar, vocabulary, and theology, there is no reason why the enigmatic annotations accompanying the various versions of the Book of the Solar-Osirian Unity should not go back even to a Middle Kingdom original.” Darnell, *Solar-Osirian Unity*, 469.

<sup>119</sup> Alexandre Piankoff, trans., *The Shrines of Tut-ankh-amon*, ed. N. Rambova, Bollingen Series 40.2 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1955) fig. 41 (foldout between pp. 120 and 121), pl. 48.

## Chapter 3

### Emergence of the Icon: The Ouroboros in the New Kingdom

The earliest known graphic representation of an ouroboros proper appears in the New Kingdom, in which we see a proliferation of ouroboros and ouroboroid imagery, most of which is related to the graphic dimension of the Underworld Books. A reconstruction of the intellectual history of these images and the ideas associated with them, including a study of the “intericonicity” of graphic discourse (on the model of intertextuality of written discourse), is at present possible only in a general way, due to uncertainty as to the dates of composition of the works in question, with estimates ranging from the times of first attestation to as early as the Old Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> For present purposes, the general approach will be to leave aside the question of dating and precise reconstruction of historical development in favor of simply examining the relevant material in the approximate order of its appearance, while pointing out pertinent thematic and conceptual interconnections amongst the various examples.

The earliest attested ouroboroid in the New Kingdom material, the image of the serpent Many-of-Faces in the sixth hour of the *Amduat*<sup>2</sup> (Figure 7), was examined in Chapter 1 as part of an inquiry regarding the Egyptian term *sd-m-r3* as the alleged antecedent of Greek lexeme *οὐροβόρος*. At the end of the sixth hour of his nocturnal sojourn, the deceased sun (Flesh-of-Re)

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the dating issue see Alexandra von Lieven, *Grundriss des Laufes der Sterne. Das sogenannte Nutbuch*, CNI Publications 31, The Carlsberg Papyri 8 (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2007) 223-250; see also Colleen Manassa, *The Late Egyptian Underworld: Sarcophagi and Related Texts from the Nectanebid Period*, Part 1: Sarcophagi and Texts, ÄAT 72,1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007) 3, n. 9; see also Darnell, *Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, 467-71.

<sup>2</sup> The oldest surviving example of the *Amduat* is on blocks from the tomb of Tuthmosis I; Hornung, *Das Amduat*, xiii.

has reached the nadir of the Underworld. It is here that the process of Re's regeneration begins, but it is also a critical moment when he is most vulnerable to the destructive force intruding from the outer chaos, represented by the monstrous serpent Apophis. Yet there is a protective force encapsulating the supine body of the regenerating god—now characterized by the scarab above his head as Khepri, “The-One-Who-Becomes”—and protecting him from destruction; this force is graphically represented as a great serpent, Many-of-Faces, having an indefinite number of hydra-like raised heads (from three to five in New Kingdom representations, though as many as seven in the Late Period, discussed below) with which to fend off destructive chaotic forces. The accompanying text (quoted at length in Chapter 1), emphasizes the serpent's womb-like, hermetically sealed encapsulation in the following words, “He is in this state: His tail is in his mouth.”<sup>3</sup> The accompanying image, however, portrays the serpent Many-of-Faces without its tail in any mouth; the heads are all raised in unison as if alert to any danger. The fact of the text stating that the serpent's “tail is in his mouth,” while the accompanying image shows no such thing, should not be seen as an illogical contradiction but as the presence of complimentary features, yet another example of the and/or logic of inclusive disjunction (explained in Chapter 1) that is so characteristic of Egyptian theological and speculative thought.

The serpent Many-of-Faces is not unique to the *Amduat*, but is also attested in several places in the Coffin Texts (which might be another argument for an early dating for composition

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<sup>3</sup> The fact that a two-dimensional image of a serpent arranged as an encircling ring or perimeter could be used to represent a three-dimensional, encapsulating barrier around the regenerating sun highlights an interesting feature of these symbols. All symbolic representation involves a greater or lesser degree of abstraction and reductionism; in this case the originators have, in both text and image, exploited an inherent property of the two-dimensional surface, for it is only on a plane that a circle can be thought of as completely enclosing a point. This abstraction, determined by the two-dimensional surface, is then retained when the ouroboros is used in three-dimensional contexts; see commentary on BD 87 (below, this chapter) and remarks on two- and three-dimensional representations of Bes-headed polymorphic deity (below, Chapter 4).





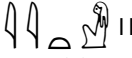

*jr hrw pt*  
*s<sup>c</sup>r n R<sup>c</sup> dr phtj <sup>c</sup>pp*  
*wb3 bj3 hsf nšn(j)*  
*s<sup>c</sup>nh jswt<sup>7</sup> r<sup>c</sup>*


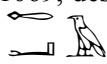





I am Many-of-Faces,  
 who makes the voice of the sky (=“thunder”),  
 who ascends to Re (and) who subdues the strength of Apophis,  
 who opens up the firmament (and) who drives away the tempest,  
 who causes to live the crew of Re.

There is also a very similar, in part identical, CT Spell 1069 which may refer to Many-of-Faces, though the name does not explicitly appear.<sup>8</sup>

A revealing graphic parallel to the *Amduat* image of Many-of-Faces has recently emerged from the excavation of an intact shaft-tomb of a royal official, one Iufaa, in the ancient royal cemetery at Abusir dating from the last years of the 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty or the first years of the

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<sup>7</sup> Faulkner supposed  to be a corruption of  *jswt* ‘crew’ (Faulkner, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 3, 188); the correct writing occurs in an exactly parallel line in the closely similar CT Spell 1069 (de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 7, 331 i).

<sup>8</sup> CT Spell 1069 and CT Spell 1179 share sufficient similarities as to suggest that either one is a variant of the other or that both are variants derived from an otherwise unknown common ancestor. Both share the same rubric:  *r<sup>c</sup> n sw3 hrjz:f nw nt(j) tp-<sup>c</sup>wjz:f* (thus 1069e; 1179j substitutes *hrjz:f*) “A spell for escaping it, that which is in front of him.” The protective being of CT Spell 1069, described as one “who opposed the aggressors and guards them,” is named not Many-of-Faces but  *ʿ3-hr* ‘Great-of-Face’, though later in the spell there is a line that is nearly identical to the opening line of CT Spell 1179, , in which the being names himself merely as  *ʿš3* ‘Many’, rather than Many-of-Faces. The simplest explanation for this would perhaps be the accidental omission of  *hrw* ‘Faces’ in an earlier exemplar from which the surviving copies derive, though it is also conceivable that  *ʿš3* ‘Many’ was intended as an abbreviation for Many-of-Faces. Be that as it may, in light of the fuller parallel of CT Spell 1179, Faulkner’s translation of  in CT Spell 1069 as ‘the lizard’ seems unlikely (Faulkner, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 3, 143). It is perhaps more probable that the variants ‘Great-of-Face’ and ‘Many’ are to be understood on the principle of inclusive disjunction as equally designating the same divine being who is more conventionally named as Many-of-Faces in CT Spell 1179.

following First Persian Period.<sup>9</sup> On the inner surface of the trough of the basalt sarcophagus, just above where the crown of the mummy's head would be, there is an image much like that of Many-of-Faces in the *Amduat*, except that the necks and heads of this preternatural guardian serpent are multiplied to the even more imposing number of seven (figure 23).<sup>10</sup> The tail of the serpent does not, as in the *Amduat* image, curl around back over itself; the tail should rather be understood as extending laterally around the mummy itself in a syntactic relationship analogous to the image of the serpent Many-of-Faces surrounding the recumbent figure of Re (in the phase of Khepri, "The-Becoming-One") at the end of the sixth hour of the *Amduat*. The analogy between the mummy and Khepri is often reinforced by the presence of a large scarab depicted prominently on the crown of the head of a mummy mask or mummy case, so that the scarab is above the actual head of the mummy itself (with examples from at least the late New Kingdom onwards<sup>11</sup>). The recumbent mummy with the scarab above its head is thus a symbolic analogue of the supine Re-Khepri with the large scarab above his head, and the serpentine oval of Many-of-Faces surrounds the god like a sarcophagus, much like the surrounding ovals in the *Book of Caverns* (discussed further below) in which underworldly beings "tend to be enclosed in ovals...(which) are the sarcophagi enclosing the corpses of gods and goddesses."<sup>12</sup> Moreover, as will be seen in this and the following chapter, there are a number of sarcophagi and coffins, royal

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<sup>9</sup> Ladislav Bareš and Květa Smoláriková, *The Shaft Tomb of Iufaa*, vol. 1: *Archaeology*, Abusir 17 (Prague: Czech Institute of Egyptology, 2008) 31-96.

<sup>10</sup> For the possible significance of the number seven in this instance, see the interesting parallel from the Temple of Hibis (also First Persian Period) discussed in Matthias Rochholz, *Schöpfung, Feindvernichtung, Regeneration. Untersuchung zum Symbolgehalt der machtgeladenen Zahl 7 im alten Ägypten*, ÄAT 56 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002) 124 and fig. 3.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Andrzej Niwinski, *21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty Coffins from Thebes: Chronological and Typological Studies*, Theben 5 (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1988) pls. 20-21.


<sup>12</sup> Hornung, *Books of Afterlife*, 85.



and non-royal, that have serpents depicted on them partly or completely around the perimeter of the sarcophagus or coffin, or along the inside perimeter or even the bottom of the trough, effectively surrounding the mummy as a clear analogue of Many-of-Faces and in the same semantic and syntactic relation to the mummy as Many-of-Faces is to the recumbent Re-Khepri appearing at the end of the sixth hour of the *Amduat*.


The tomb of Iufaa offers an additional point of interest with regard to the identity and function of Many-of-Faces. The movement of Re through the *Duat* is from the West, where he is received in death at sunset, toward the East where he will arise in glory with the day. The head of the mummy of Iufaa is likewise oriented to the East;<sup>13</sup> beyond the mummy, a bit further east, rises the eastern wall of the burial chamber, emblazoned with a symbolic tableau portraying the mystery of the rising sun, now regenerated and renewed (figure 24). The tableau has three registers. In the bottom register, the regenerated sun, in the image of a great scarab in the act of taking flight, is assisted aloft from a spit of land or sand-bar<sup>14</sup> marking the eastern terminus of the watery route through the Underworld, a close analogue to the final image in the *Amduat*. In the central register, the disk of the sun is further assisted to the summit of the sky by the arms of Shu,<sup>15</sup> a deity who should be regarded here as the hypostasis of the expanse of vivific light and air made possible by the presence of the sun himself. Four great preternatural baboons, from their respective quarters of the world, raise their arms and voices in prayer to the divine glory of

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<sup>13</sup> Bareš, *Iufaa*, vol. 1, 72 fig. 20.

<sup>14</sup> The launching-point of the rising sun is simply represented by the hieroglyph  (Gardiner N20, *wdb* ‘sand-bank’), arranged vertically, possibly suggestive also of the first rising of the sun upon the "primeval mound" at the dawn of creation.


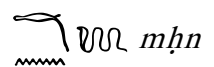
<sup>15</sup> The attitude of the arms of Shu in this tableau also have a marked graphic resonance with both the hieroglyph  *k3* ‘ka’ and  *hh* ‘heh’, literally ‘myriad’ with reference to repeated risings of the sun and consequent revolutions along the solar circuit; see Chapter 2, note 85.

the rising sun. Above the scene, in a separate register, the many-faced serpent is seen again, bearing seven heads raised like those seen inside the head-end of Iufaa's basalt sarcophagus, and so iconographically similar to the serpent identified as Many-of-Faces in the *Amduat*. In this image, however, the length of the serpent surrounds nothing but is arranged instead in a row of undulations following behind the raised heads. Having come through the ordeal of the nocturnal process of death and regeneration, the reborn sun—no longer in a state of critical vulnerability as it had been in the depths of the night—now rises into the sky in full divine power and glory. The many-faced serpent stands by as witness to this resurrection and triumph of Re, who no longer needs protection in his coils. In front of the serpent is a pair of labeling hieroglyphs,  *mḥn* 'Mehen', behind which the serpent follows as determinative, suggesting a strong association between Mehen and the iconography of Many-of-Faces, at least in the minds of the priestly redactors and designers of Iufaa's time. Indeed, as will be seen in this chapter and the next, Mehen is the name most often attached to the ouroboros and other conceptually related serpent imagery.

There are a few additional features of the *Amduat* that are especially pertinent to an understanding of the ouroboros-related ideas and images it contains. During the first six hours of the nocturnal voyage through the Underworld, Re is depicted as a kilted royal youth with the bewigged head of a ram surmounted by a small solar disk. The figure stands amidships in the *msktt*-barque, sealed up within the outline of a closed shrine (the designers once again taking advantage of the two-dimensional surface; see note 3), like a sacred image in a temple might be (figure 25a). After the pivotal moment at the end of hour six, however, when Re undergoes the process of regestation within the womb-like enclosure of Many-of-Faces, the subsequent images of Re beginning with hour seven no longer appear enclosed within a shrine; instead, the shrine

has been replaced by the contours of a serpent that is clearly labeled as Mehen (figure 25b). The designers of this image, while no doubt intending the body of Re to be understood as being sealed within the protective perimeter of the serpent, must have felt no need to have the serpent actually surround the figure of Re completely, with its tail in its mouth or otherwise, apparently being satisfied with allowing the deck of the ship under the figure's feet to complete the enclosing perimeter not fully provided by the body of Mehen. This arrangement also allows for the head of Mehen to be configured in an attitude of raised vigilance toward possible oncoming dangers.

Another related point of interest occurs at the beginning of hour seven, in the upper and middle registers (figure 26). As the barque of Re enters the region of the seventh hour, the accompanying text explains that it passes through the Portal of Osiris into a city named Mysterious Cave, the Cavern of Osiris. In the upper register is an enthroned royal figure crowned with tall double plumes, holding an *ankh* in one hand and a *was*-scepter in the other, and labeled

 *jwḥ-wsjr* 'Flesh-of-Osiris'.<sup>16</sup> An enormous serpent labeled  *mḥn*

'Mehen',<sup>17</sup> encloses the figure on all sides except the bottom, where the register line itself serves to complete the enclosing perimeter. The arrangement is very like that of the Mehen serpent enclosing Re in the *mstt*-barque in the last half of the *Amduat*, including the feature of having the head of the serpent raised in an attitude of defensive vigilance. The enemies of Osiris lie before him; some are trussed and beheaded by a great demon with the ears of a cat,<sup>18</sup> while


<sup>16</sup> Hornung, *Texte zum Amduat*, vol. 2, 536.



<sup>17</sup> Ibid, following the version of Ramesses VI.

<sup>18</sup> This bears a conceptual relation to the "Cat of Re" beheading Apophis in a BD 17 vignette discussed toward the end of this chapter.

others are lassoed. The serpent is said to burn them with his flames, rage against them with his knife, and make them into his (sacrificial) portion, “every day.” Similarly, in the middle register beneath, Re receives divine and magical assistance in the repulsion of his monstrous enemy Apophis,<sup>19</sup> representing the intrusion—in the profoundest depths of night—of chaotic forces from the abyssal depths without, bent on the destruction of Re and, ultimately, all ordered reality. A god and goddess have tethered the head and tail of Apophis, draining his strength with their magic, while other goddesses carrying knives attack and repulse him “every day,” as the text says.<sup>20</sup> This appearance of Re in the mysterious Cavern of Osiris, together with the resonance of imagery and simultaneity of act (the enemies of both Re and Osiris are attacked while they each remain protectively enclosed by Mehen), is conceptually related to the theology of the unity of Re and Osiris, perhaps already present in the iconography of the seated deity of the *Book of Mehen* (examined in the previous chapter) and developed explicitly elsewhere (as will be seen further below and in the following chapter).

At the far right of the upper register of hour seven, three *ba* birds, each wearing the double crown and marked with the *ankh*-hieroglyph near its feet, stand behind another seated royal figure with an *ankh* in one hand and a *was*-scepter in the other (figure 27). The figure is

identified as  *jwḏ-jtm* ‘Flesh-of-Atum’,<sup>21</sup> and is seated on the body of a large serpent marked with an *ankh*-hieroglyph under its chin. The serpent is labeled with two

names or epithets,  *ḥnh-jrww* ‘Life-of-Forms’ and  *ḥnh-bꜣw*

<sup>19</sup> The accompanying text describes Apophis as 443 cubits long and as “filling the *Duat*”; Hornung, *Texte zum Amduat*, vol. 2, 548.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 556.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 543.

‘Life-of-*Bas*’,<sup>22</sup> precisely the additional names or epithets given to the Mehen-serpent enclosing Oriris at the left end of the same register.<sup>23</sup> In the accompanying text, Atum addresses the *bas* as “...living *bas* who live on mysteries, who come into being from what came into being in him (i.e., Atum), who are now in the following of Flesh-of-Atum, who protect his body in the *Duat*.”<sup>24</sup> On the cosmic level, as the starting point of the cosmogonic process (described toward the end of Chapter 1), Atum can represent the divine creative singularity appearing in the abyss at the “first time”; its expansive and emanative outward spiraling, during which its living substance differentiates into the numberless transformations (*hprw*) of the divine and natural worlds, was likened to the spiral form of a serpent. Here, on the solar/funereal level, the presence of Atum suggests an understanding that the creative process was not merely a matter of a cosmogonic unfoldment taking place at the beginning of time. Rather, the creative monad was also thought in some sense to be present now in the emanated reality; so it is that Atum and his serpentine extension are present here in hour seven of the *Duat* as ‘microcosmic’ expressions on the solar/funereal level. The three *bas* are emblematic of all the blessed dead that have passed into the West (three being the usual graphemic marker for plural), and Atum’s projection of himself into the *Duat* (in his special underworldly manifestation as the Flesh-of-Atum—essentially his ‘corpse’) explains the coming into being of the living *bas*, assures their continuing existence, and benefits not least the now regenerating *ba* of Re.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 236.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 541-42.

A fairly explicit reference to the ouroboros (on the cosmic level, as perimeter of the world) occurs in hour eleven. Twelve gods are shown before the barque of Re carrying an enormous serpent on their heads (figure 28); the accompanying text describes this as follows:<sup>25</sup>



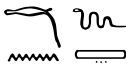
wnnꜥsn m shꜣr pn m-ḥꜣt nꜣr pn ʿ3  
 f3ꜥsn mḥn-t3 tpꜥsn r njwt tn  
 ʿppꜥsn m-ḥt rꜣ r 3ḥt j3btt n(j)t pt

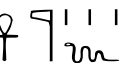
They are like this before this great god:

They carry Mehen-Ta (Encircler-of-the-Earth) above them<sup>26</sup> to this city.

They traverse accompanying Re to the Eastern Horizon of the sky.

In the region (literally “city”) of the following twelfth and final hour, this serpent

 mḥn-t3 ‘Encircler-of-the-Earth’ is laid in the path of the oncoming solar barque

(figure 29). Now referred to as  ʿnh-nꜣrw ‘Life-of-the-Gods’, the serpent

<sup>25</sup> Hornung, *Texte zum Amduat*, vol. 3, 768-69. This is an eclectic text pieced together from the best surviving examples in Hornung’s synoptic text edition. The serpent Mehen-Ta (Encircler-of-the-Earth) first appears in the *Amduat* at the beginning of hour eight in the bottom register; Hornung, *Das Amduat*, 148, pl. “Achte Stunde.”

<sup>26</sup> This is a special underworldly manifestation of the cosmic serpent, enveloper and protector of the cosmos (both at the boundary of the earth and vault of the sky), once again a symbol developed on a two-dimensional surface with a three-dimensional reference. Relevant here is its association with the vault of the sky and hence the solar circuit, the twelve coils representing the hours of the nocturnal portion of that circuit. In a sense, therefore, this serpent is itself an image of the *Duat* as a whole. See the discussion of Spell 87 of the *Book of the Dead* further below.



miraculously inflates or expands to truly prodigious proportions as Re's "gods" tow the barque through the serpent's body:<sup>27</sup>



*sqdd ntr pn m shrw pn m njwt tn  
 m im3h n(j) sšmw pn št3 n(j) ʿnh-ntrw  
 ntrwz f st3(w) sw ʿqz f m sdz f prrz f m rz f  
 ms(w) m hprwz f n(j) hprj ntrw jmjw wj3z f mj*

This god travels in this fashion in this city:  
 Through the spine of this secret image of (the serpent<sup>28</sup>) Life-of-the-Gods,  
 his gods towing him, he enters through its tail  
 (and) he comes forth from its mouth,  
 being born as his form Khepri,  
 (and) the gods who are in his sacred barque likewise.

The text goes on to say that the twelve gods enter the serpent as *jm3hyw*

‘blessed dead’ (making word-play with the *jm3h* ‘spine’ of the serpent), but emerge from


the serpent's mouth as *hwnw rʿ* ‘youths of Re’, every day.<sup>29</sup> At the far

eastern limit of the *Duat*, at the Eastern Horizon of the sky, Re is seen represented as a scarab (Khepri, “The-One-Who-Becomes”) as he is about to emerge as the rising sun. Now disunited from Osiris, he has cast aside his Osiride flesh, represented by the mummy seen collapsed below

<sup>27</sup> Following the text in Hornung, *Das Amduat*, vol. 1, 197.

<sup>28</sup> Expressing the force of the determinative .

<sup>29</sup> Hornung, *Texte zum Amduat*, vol. 3, 823.




him, lying against the sand-bank forming the eastern perimeter of the bottom register. These symbolic conceptions have close affinities to a very old idea, present as early as the Pyramid Texts and probably much earlier, perhaps coeval with pharaonic civilization itself (as discussed in Chapter 2), that the deceased (originally only the king) can become regenerated and transfigured by undergoing a process analogous to the first appearance of the primeval monad and the sun. Behind the conception of the serpent Encircler-of-the-Earth/Life-of-the-Gods in hours eleven and twelve of the *Amduat* is the idea of the spiral vortex that produced the sun at its center and expanded outward to become the cosmos. Just as this expansion of life-giving divine force could be expressed by the image of a coiled serpent, termed Mehen, so when the cosmos had achieved its full unfoldment could the perimeter of the world, its limit against the surrounding abyssal chaos, also be represented as a serpent, termed Mehen-Ta, Encircler-of-the-Earth, the image of the ouroboros. However, it is not the cosmic Mehen-Ta that is present in the *Duat*. The great serpent of hours eleven and twelve of the *Amduat* is, analogous to Flesh-of-Atum in hour seven, a special underworldly manifestation of the cosmic serpent on the solar/funereal level, a  *sšmw šṭṣ* ‘secret image’ specific to this regenerative function in the Underworld; “...it remains in its place and does not go any other place, any day.”<sup>30</sup>

The next of the Underworld Books to be considered, in order of preservation, is the so-called *Book of Gates*,<sup>31</sup> first attested in the tomb of Horemheb. Its basic structure is similar to

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 826-27.

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of the possible original title of the work, written cryptographically, see Jürgen Zeidler, *Pfortenbuchstudien*, GOF: Series 4, Ägypten 36 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999) vol. 2, 10-13. The conventional titles *Book of Gates* and *Pfortenbuch* derive from *Livre des Portes*, originally coined by Gaston Maspero; see Hornung, *Buch von den Pforten*, vol. 2, 7.

that of the *Book of Amduat* in that it follows the progress of the *msktt* solar barque through the twelve hourly divisions of the *Duat*. Each of the hours is divided into three horizontal registers except for the first tableau, a unified image of the western desert near the entrance to the Underworld<sup>32</sup> and the unique final tableau (examined at length in an excursus further below) which both summarizes the solar cycle of the post-creational world and the cosmogonic process that gave rise to it. The oldest surviving version of this tableau is cut onto the outside of the alabaster sarcophagus of Sethos I, under the foot of the trough (figure 30). The night barque is seen approaching the hill of the West, passing boundary posts on either side, and being greeted by two rows of blessed dead, the  *ntrw jmntt* ‘gods of the West’ and the  *ntrw smyt* ‘gods of the Desert Necropolis’.<sup>33</sup> The crew of the barque has been reduced from the eight gods of the *Amduat*<sup>34</sup> to two only, Sia and Hekau (  *hk3w* ‘Magic’), conceptually equivalent here to Sia and Hu, the personified powers of divine thought and utterance present at the creation of the world.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the capacity of the sun-god to recreate himself during his nightly voyage through the *Duat* is anticipated by representing him as

<sup>32</sup> Hornung is really mistaken in describing the first hour as also being divided into three registers; much to be preferred is the approach of Jürgen Zeidler, who recognizes that—for purposes of description only—the upper and lower areas of the tableau should be taken together as a "peripheral register" surrounding a "central register" of the solar barque. Hornung, *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 29-44; Zeidler, *Ibid.*, 14-17.

<sup>33</sup> Hornung, *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 1 and 11. The toponyms *jmntt* and *smyt* are virtually synonymous in this context, and are likely used here as literary variations.

<sup>34</sup> The significance of the number eight here is that, together with the sun, the number of gods in the barque total nine, an “ennead” that really signifies the divine pleroma or totality of all the gods; see the discussion of the Ennead of gods in the solar barque in the final tableau of the *Book of Gates*, further below in this chapter.

<sup>35</sup> Hornung neatly summarizes the close conceptual relationship between Hu and Hekau, “...the ‘magic’ that brings the world into being out of the creative word [Hu]”; Hornung, *Conceptions of God*, 76. See also Chapter 1, note 149 and Chapter 2, note 97.

a solar disk marked with a scarab, signifying his form as Khepri, “The-One-Who-Becomes,” the form of Re seen at the ends of both the *Book of Amduat* and *Book of Gates*. Surrounding Khepri is a serpent, its tail touching its mouth; this ouroboros can only be Mehen, closed protectively around the solar disk.<sup>36</sup> This protective aspect of Mehen is graphically reinforced here by “inflecting” the head and neck of Mehen in the form of the hooded cobra usually associated with the uraeus.<sup>37</sup>

In each of the remaining eleven hours of the sun-god’s journey in the *Book of Gates*, he is represented in the ram-headed form familiar from the *Amduat*; he stands amidships within a shrine with Sia and Hekau standing fore and aft. A serpent with many undulating folds, labeled Mehen, protects the shrine from all sides (figure 31). As in the case of the Mehen-serpent protecting the body of Re in the second half of the *Amduat*, it was thought unnecessary to have the serpent completely surround Re, tail in mouth, in order to establish Mehen’s protective function. In the case of Re standing in the solar barque, it was graphically inconvenient to do so (as the deck of the barque was in the way), while in the case of the Mehen-serpent completely surrounding the circular solar disk in the first hour, it was graphically natural. Either way, the meaning is the same.<sup>38</sup>


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<sup>36</sup> Though not separately labeled, the image of the serpent itself can be understood as a writing for *mḥn*.

<sup>37</sup> See the remarks on the relationship between the uraeus and Mehenet, the feminine of Mehen, in the discussion of the two-headed ouroboroid in the “lost” tableau of Ramesses III, further below in this chapter.

<sup>38</sup> Pressing the point a bit further, it is possible that the serpent protecting the “face of the disk” in hour eleven (figure 22, discussed near the end of Chapter 2) should be understood in a similar way. The “face of the disk” is yet another aspect of the sun-god himself; the barque the “face” is towed in is an analogue of the solar barque, and it would be reasonable to understand the serpent protecting the “face” as Mehen. The raised cobra hood seems to suggest that the serpent should be classified as a uraeus, as Hornung has done in his commentary to his text edition. (Hornung, *Buch von den Pforten*, vol. 2, 255; Piankoff more conservatively referred to this serpent only as “a cobra,” Piankoff, *Ramesses VI, Texts*, 207) However, the specific example that Hornung was commenting on (and the example used to illustrate his edition)

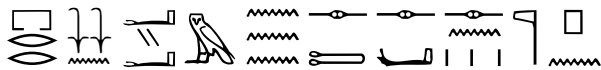
## EXCURSUS I: The Final Tableau of the *Book of Gates*

The *Book of Gates* ends with a solar disk penetrating the desert sands of the eastern perimeter of the *Duat* in order to emerge as the rising sun at dawn; immediately before this, however, appears an elaborate and unique symbolic tableau that elegantly summarizes the workings of the divine creative dynamic that created and sustains the world (figure 33). It is of interest in the present context because it contains features thematically and conceptually related to ideas often associated with the ouroboros and, as will be seen below, contains an ouroboros-like image of Osiris, the proper interpretation of which will be useful in understanding a feature of the now lost ouroboroid tableau formerly in the sarcophagus chamber of Ramesses III, examined below in Excursus II. The surface surrounding the images of the tableau is covered with zigzag hatching representing the waters of the abyssal deep, labeled  *nwn* ‘Nun’, also present as an outsized, personified, anthropomorphic deity emerging from the chaotic depths at chest-level. Reading the image from the bottom upwards, the body of this deity extends to the right and the left as two very elongated arms, above which is the solar barque containing the sun-god Re, represented both as the scarab Khepri and the solar disk. This composite image is of interest as a particularly pertinent illustration of the method of symbolic representation discussed in Chapter 1, especially the point that obscure, apparently competing, or seemingly contradictory representations (in this case relative to cosmogonic ideas) can be made intelligible once it is understood that there is a shared underlying syntagma that is expressed through signs, either

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was a later example from the tomb of Ramesses VI (figure 22); should comparison be made, however, between the barque bearing the “face of the disk” as found in an earlier example from the alabaster sarcophagus of Sethos I and the solar barque bearing the solar disk marked as Khepri appearing in the first hour of that same sarcophagus, the similarities are apparent (figures 32a and 32b). There is therefore reason, on the basis of such comparative analysis, to identify the serpent protecting the “face of the disk,” not as a uraeus, but as Mehen with a “uraeus inflection,” like that of the Mehen-serpent surrounding the solar disk in the first hour.

linguistic, purely graphic, or both, in an interchangeable, paradigmatic relationship to one another.<sup>39</sup> In this case, the familiar formulation of the cosmogonic sequence, as Atum first emerging from Nun and then emanating Shu and Tefnut, who then give rise to the remainder of the Ennead,<sup>40</sup> has been replaced by a more abstract form representing the same underlying idea. The essential idea is that watery chaos Nun, through a latent inherent power,<sup>41</sup> gives rise to a singularity which emanates a first polar division<sup>42</sup> that then makes possible the continued emanative differentiation that produces the divine, human, and natural worlds. The body of the great god emerging from the abyssal waters is paradigmatic substitution for the more familiar Atum and represents the primeval monad that appears at the first moment of the emerging ordered reality. The two diverging arms of the god, emphasized by both their diverging angle and their extreme elongation, are similarly paradigmatic substitution for the more familiar Shu and Tefnut, and represent the first division of the primeval monad that makes all subsequent development possible. The accompanying text reads:<sup>43</sup>



*prr nn n(j) 'wj m mw stszsn ntr pn*

As the two arms come forth from the water, they lift up this god (= Re-Khepri).

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 1, note 135.

<sup>40</sup> For a convenient summary of this “genealogical” cosmogonic Ennead, see Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, 8-9.

<sup>41</sup> This latent power of creation in Nun is articulated as the idea of the Ogdoad, four personified qualities of the abyss and their female doublets, who somehow bring about the first appearance of the primeval creative monad; see Allen, *Ibid*, 20-21.


<sup>42</sup> For a full discussion of this, see note 129, below.

<sup>43</sup> This is an eclectic text assembled from parts of the best surviving examples in Hornung's synoptic text edition. Hornung, *Buch von den Pforten*, vol. 1, 410.

The written image here is of the two arms diverging away from the single point which emerged from the watery chaos; the god they “lift up” is Re-Khepri in the *mꜥndt*, or day-barque, features of which also encode the continuation and unfoldment of the cosmogonic sequence. To make this clear, one must first consider the nature of the central grouping of “this god” in the barque, consisting of the solar disk, the scarab, and the attendant pair of divine sisters, Isis and Nephthys. The scarab represents the renewed sun at the moment of his re-emergence; Isis and Nephthys, arranged on either side somewhat like heraldic supporters, are present in a protective capacity as they often are, like midwives, at key moments of critical transition or “obstetric” vulnerability. The solar disk represents the next phase of the sun after it rises successfully and becomes the day sun. The entire grouping, Isis and Nephthys, the scarab, and the solar disk might be thought of as a unity, a coherent single “holon” in the sense of something made of discrete parts and complete in itself, yet itself capable of being a part of something else.<sup>44</sup> Essentially, this grouping is a kind of expanded or “multi-inflected” image representing aspects of a single deity, Re. Notice that, unlike the crew of the barque, who all uniformly face the prow, Isis and Nephthys are attentively focused on the form of Khepri. Note also that Isis and Nephthys are clearly distinguished from the crew by the way in which the crew and the sisters are respectively labeled. Either the labels of Isis and Nephthys are discretely worked in between the goddesses and the image of the scarab toward which they are facing (as in the Osireion example in figure 34), or else not labeled separately at all, being identified only by hieroglyphic signs serving as their customary headdresses.

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<sup>44</sup> The term ‘holon’ was originally coined by Arthur Koestler over a half century ago with reference to hierarchical structures in nature, including mind, and has since been taken up by Ken Wilber and others and extended to descriptions of social and cultural realities. Its further extension here, as potentially useful in the description of the hierarchical arrangements in the ‘syntax’ of symbolism, is in preference to an overly vague term like ‘group’ and to Assmann’s concept of ‘constellations’ of deities, which has its own distinct meaning and utility.

Turning now from this grouping to the gods making up the crew of the day barque, they are to be “read” from stern to prow in a retrograde fashion like the line of text directly above them of which, indeed, they are a continuation. Standing at the rudders are Sia and Hu, the powers of divine thought and utterance that appear at the first moments of creation. This divine utterance expresses itself as the creative force of “magic,” in the Egyptian sense, here personified as Hekau, the next god in the sequence. The following two gods, Shu and Geb, occur quite naturally as abbreviations for the next two phases of cosmogonic unfoldment (which would be more fully expressed by the pairs Shu/Tefnut and Geb/Nut); these two gods are then followed by the “expanded” image of Re, whose arising and daily cycle belongs to the fully unfolded creative sequence. Beyond Re, in the prow of the barque, are three gods who are each labeled ; these three hieroglyphs, together with the three standing gods as their determinatives, are perhaps to be read collectively as *wnjw* ‘the ones who open’,<sup>45</sup> with reference to the way that must be opened for Re during his circadian journey. The total number of the crew, then, comes to eight; together with Re this makes nine, an Ennead, a reference to the divine pleroma.<sup>46</sup> The passengers in the barque, therefore, also represent the completion of the creative sequence, the beginning of which is represented by the single divine body emerging from the abyssal waters and the two arms then dividing away from it. In other words, from the primeval monad comes the first division which begins the progression of unfoldment and differentiation, the completion of which is signified by an Ennead, a plural of plurals. All of this once again serves to demonstrate

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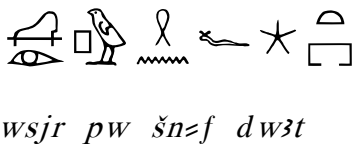
<sup>45</sup> Reading this as the masculine plural imperfective active participle of *wn* ‘to open’, used as a noun.

<sup>46</sup> The flexibility of the specific composition of the Ennead is well known, as is the fact that the Ennead in any form is often really a reference to the totality of the gods; see Hornung, *Conceptions*, 221-23 and above, Chapter 2, note 87.



the characteristic flexibility of the Egyptian symbolic system in its ability to express the same basic idea in alternate ways.

The movement of the tableau now continues upwards, the upside-down orientation of the hieroglyphic captions inviting one to mentally rotate one's visual perception one hundred and eighty degrees. The setting disk of Re is then seen to be received into the arms of the goddess Nut, the starry night sky,<sup>47</sup> then is further received into the arms of an elongated mummiform image of Osiris, bent backwards into a near circle, its feet touching its head. This figure encircles the following caption:<sup>48</sup>



It is Osiris, as he encircles the *Duat*.

This ouroboros-like image of Osiris is here conceptually converged with the *Duat*, the Osiride realm *par excellence*.<sup>49</sup> The curved body of Osiris is coextensive with the nocturnal course of the

<sup>47</sup> Nut's function here, on the level of the solar circuit, is analogous to the reception of the dead by Hathor, as the beautiful lady of the West, on the purely funereal level.

<sup>48</sup> This is another eclectic text assembled from the best complimentary examples in Hornung's synoptic text edition. Hornung, *Buch von den Pforten*, vol. 1, 410.

<sup>49</sup> For the body of Osiris as the *Duat*, compare the opening lines of an approximately cotemporaneous solar litany (first attested in the Osireion from the reign of Sethos I):



That which Re says, when he enters the corpse of the Westerner, foremost of the West:  
 “Oho! I have traversed the *Duat*, that I might cross (through) the one who is in the earth.”

Joshua Roberson, “A Solar Litany from the Tomb of Ramesses IX,” *JARCE* 45 (2009) 228-30.

sun through the *Duat* and recalls the nightly unity of Re and Osiris, the holy mystery of Re's renewal. The arrangement of the figure of Osiris in a circle denotes only that there is a cyclical recurrence of Re's journey through the *Duat* each night and represents only half of the complete solar circuit, which is sometimes symbolically represented by the image of an ouroboros (as in BD 87, below). The head and feet of the encircled figure do not therefore represent the closed loop of a recurrent cycle solely within the *Duat* itself; rather, the head and feet correspond to the horizons, those liminal regions of the *Duat* through which the dying sun enters at sunset and the renewed sun emerges reborn at dawn. It is this understanding of the symbolic convergence of the horizons arranged as a closed circuit that will be useful for interpreting an important feature within the large central ouroboroid of the lost tableau of Ramesses III in Excursus II, below.<sup>50</sup>

\*                    \*                    \*                    \*                    \*                    \*

Though the *Book of Gates* contains what is possibly one of the first graphic representations of an ouroboros, in the form of the “uraeus-inflected” ouroboros surrounding the solar disk as Khepri in the first hour, it is not generally cited as the first appearance of an ouroboros because of the fact that the first hour does not survive in the oldest-known but incomplete copy of the *Book of Gates*, that in the tomb of Horemheb, the more complete copies containing the first hour being Ramesside or later. This is the only reason why the honor of being the first extant example of a graphic representation of the ouroboros has been given to an image occurring in the so-called *Enigmatic Underworld Book* or *Book of the Solar-Osirian Unity*,<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Though not part of a circular arrangement, the convergence of the eastern and western horizons in a single symbolic image has already been noted in Chapter 2 in the case of the two Ruty lions and the *ꜥꜥt* hieroglyph (fig. 12).

<sup>51</sup> Hornung first recognized this as an independent composition on the Tutankhamun shrine and more or less gave it a name in the title of his article about it; Erik Hornung, “Ein aenigmatisches Unterweltbuch,” *JSSEA* 13 (1983) 29-34. Darnell, proposed that the composition on the Tutankhamun shrine is but one of

found on side one of the second golden shrine of Tutankhamun (figure 34).<sup>52</sup> The image is of an enormous mummiform figure, its midsection filled with the solar disk, its head and feet surrounded by ouroboroi. Although the precise meaning of this image (and, indeed, that of the entire work in which it appears) remains to some degree uncertain, the work of Erik Hornung and (especially) John C. Darnell has done much to elucidate the enigmatic writing, unique iconography, and theology of the entire unusual composition in which this image appears. Darnell describes this image as being “Osiride in appearance and labeled as Re...a depiction of the unified Re-Osiris, an image of the gods Re and Osiris at their moment of combining at the eastern horizon.”<sup>53</sup> Drawing on numerous parallels from thematically related material in the tombs of Ramesses VI and Ramesses IX, along with other pertinent texts, Darnell explains this image as representing “the unified Re-Osiris as the highest deity in the cosmos,” who can be understood as having his head in the heights of the day sky and his feet in the depths of the underworld.<sup>54</sup> Support for this interpretation is to be found in a remarkably similar image<sup>55</sup> (figure 35) found near the beginning of the second register of the first section of the *Book of the*

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several variants apparently derived from a lost common template; he coined the name *Book of the Solar-Osirian Unity* for this supposed lost work and its surviving variants (Darnell, *Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, 6), taking his cue from Niwiński, who used the expression “Solar-Osirian Unity” with regard to the theology of the unified Re-Osiris in the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty. (Niwiński's important contributions in this regard, and to the understanding of the symbolism of the ouroboros, are examined in the following chapter.) However, the existence of this hypothetical lost work of which the relevant compositions from the Tutankhamun shrine, the tomb of Ramesses VI, and the tomb of Ramesses IX are supposed to be variants has been seriously questioned; see Joachim Friedrich Quack, “Ein Unterweltsbuch der solar-osirianischen Einheit?,” *WdO* 35, 22-47. In the present study, *Book of the Solar-Osirian Unity* will be used solely as a convenient term for the composition on the Tutankamun shrine alone.

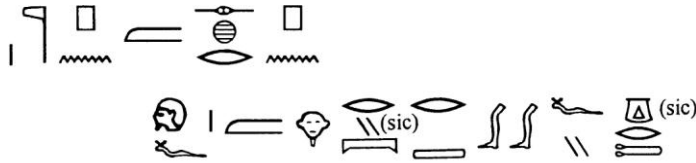
<sup>52</sup> Piankoff, *Shrines*, fig. 41, pl. 48.

<sup>53</sup> Darnell, *Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, 80.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 378.

<sup>55</sup> Piankoff, *Ramesses VI*, pl. 114.

*Creation of the Solar Disk* (a work discussed further below), consisting also of a mummiform figure emblazoned with a solar disk at its midsection. In place of ouroboroi, however, plain circular rings appear at its head and feet within which, inverted in relation to one another, appear a falcon-headed figure corresponding to Re in the upper world and a ram-headed figure corresponding to Re in the *Duat*. An accompanying text reads, in part, as follows.<sup>56</sup>




*ntr pn m shr pn*  
*tp=f m hrj<t> rdwj<sup>57</sup>=f hrjt<sup>58</sup>*


This god is like this:

His head is in the heavens (and) his two feet, below.



It should be observed, however, that this is not a representation of the great deity of the *Book of the Solar-Osirian Unity* himself. Rather, it is part of a tableau of *štjw* ‘secret ones’; like the “secret” images of the Flesh-of-Atum and the Encircler-of-the-Earth found in hours seven and eleven, respectively, in the *Amduat*, this image is also a special underworldly reflection of the cosmic deity it represents, manifesting on the solar/funereal level (as indicated as well by the fact

<sup>56</sup> Alexandre Piankoff, *La création du disque solaire*, BdE 19 (Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1953) 13; Piankoff, *Ramesses VI*, pl. 114.

<sup>57</sup> In place of the hieroglyph  , the text has the bar of the exact shape and color used in this tomb to write *tj* ‘earth’ but without the three grains of earth. This sign appears in Ptolemaic texts with both phonemic values /t/ and (more rarely) /d/; see Fairman, “Alphabetic Signs,” 234. The presence of this sign here likely reflects the fact that, in the spoken Egyptian of the time, /d/ in *rd* ‘foot’ had already gone to /t/; compare Coptic ϣⲁⲩ- ‘foot-’ (in compounds).

<sup>58</sup> The sign  is error for  ;  is a common writing for  in Ramesside tombs.



that the falcon-headed Re within the upper circle and the ram-headed Re in the lower circle both are represented with mummiform bodies).

The ouroboroi around the head and feet of the mummiform figure of the Tutankhamun shrine pose an intriguing hermeneutic problem. While their wavy bodies indicate that they are interfaced with the abyssal waters surrounding them, Darnell understands the upper serpent to be enclosing the heavens and the lower serpent to be enclosing the Underworld, further suggesting that the placement of the two serpents is intended to indicate “that the deity is completely surrounded by the serpents.”<sup>59</sup> He properly associates this idea of complete encirclement with the image of the “roads of Mehen” surrounding the seated image of Re in the vignette accompanying CT Spell 758<sup>60</sup> (figure 20). The question that naturally arises from this is why there are two serpents instead of one. The answer is that there are, in a sense, both one serpent and two, again following the logic of inclusive disjunction, a regular feature of Egyptian speculative thought. The pair of serpents is labeled *once*, at the top as  The pair of serpents is labeled *once*, at the top as  *mḥn*<sup>61</sup> ‘Mehen’. The cryptographic text distributed between the two serpents could be taken as tending to unify them as well:<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Darnell, *Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, 380.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. However, Darnell strangely states that the “roads” in the vignette “appear as a much coiled serpent which surrounds the seated figure of Re” (ibid.), when the vignette itself shows absolutely nothing of the kind, only alternating concentric rings of black and red (though one might argue that these rings appear in paradigmatic substitution for the much coiled serpent of Darnell’s imagination).

<sup>61</sup> The reading is certain; the cryptographic substitution of  for  occurs regularly in cryptographic portions of this composition as an example of “substitution of kind,” ibid., 599. It should also be noted that Hornung is mistaken when he states that the “head and feet of the huge divine figure are each surrounded by an *ouroboros*-serpent, which in each case is called *Mehen*,” their being only one such label on the upper serpent alone; Hornung, *Books of Afterlife*, 78.



*dw3 wnwn r<sup>c</sup>/jtn pw wnwn*


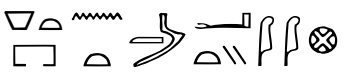
Adoration of the circling one; the circling one is Re / the Disk.

Darnell is also no doubt justified in his view that this “annotation thus equates the encircling uroboroi with the disk of the sun...”<sup>63</sup> As already seen in the *Book of Mehen* (CT Spells 758-760), the “roads of Mehen” are essentially the same as the “circuit of Re”; moreover, throughout the *Book of Mehen*, the name Mehen is determined with both the solar disk and the seated god hieroglyphs, clear evidence of the close relationship of Mehen and Re. In these contexts, Mehen really has no independence from Re. On the solar/funereal level, as the dead sun passes through the *Duat*, Mehen manifests like a protective carapace of the vulnerable nocturnal sun, not something that has come from without, but as something produced at the appropriate moment by an extension of the sun's own power and process, as a larva produces its own chrysalis. Likewise, on the most inclusive cosmic/solar level, the entire solar circuit can scarcely be segregated from the sun that traverses it and defines it. This point will become especially clear in the examination of BD 87, further below, in which the perimeter of the world, the circuit of the sun, and the sun's recurrent daily renewal are all represented by the literary image of an ouroboros. In the case of the uroboroi encircling the head and feet of the great mummiform figure on the second golden shrine of Tutankhamun, each ouroboros is in the image of the complete macrocosmic circuit, somewhat like a fragment of holographic plate that yet shows a reduced image of the whole. By factoring the image of the ouroboros into two, however, and by placing one above representing

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<sup>62</sup> Following the transliteration and translation of Darnell, *Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, 78, with emendations. The forward slash in the transliteration, missing from the published edition, has been restored from a UMI duplication of Darnell's dissertation manuscript.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 79.

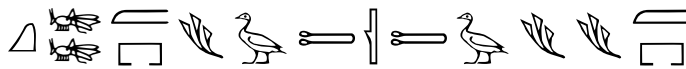
the heights of the day sky and one below representing the depths of the Underworld, greater emphasis is placed on the immensity and importance of the mummiform deity who represents “the highest deity of the cosmos” and who might appear somewhat graphically and conceptually subordinate to an ouroboros that completely surrounded him. The phenomenon of representing only half of the solar circuit with a closed circle has already been encountered in the final tableau of the *Book of Gates*, in which the Underworld half of the solar circuit is represented by a mummiform figure of Osiris bent backwards into a single closed circle. Moreover, the very feature of factoring the solar circuit into two can be understood as a way of signifying the whole, following a common way in which Egyptian thought organizes certain ideas, typified by the well-known expression  *t3 wj* ‘the two lands’, meaning always the *entirety* of Egypt.<sup>64</sup> An even more pertinent example occurs in Spell 125 of the *Book of the Dead*, in which the hall of judgment is referred to as the  *wsh t n(j) t m3 t j* ‘Hall of Two Truths’ or ‘Hall of Double Maat’; accompanying vignettes of the hall of judgment sometimes show the presence of two goddesses Maat,<sup>65</sup> giving a literal graphic expression of the hall’s designation when there can be no question that there would actually ever be more than one such goddess.

<sup>64</sup> This is confirmed by the Greek rendering of *t3 wj*, as ἡ ἰοκουμένη ‘the whole inhabited earth’, Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods. A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1948) 19; see also Wilkinson, *Symbol & Magic*, 129-31, 141.

<sup>65</sup> For examples see BM EA 9900 (18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty), Günther Lapp, *The Papyrus of Nebseni (BM EA 9900)*, Catalogue of the Books of the Dead in the British Museum 3 (London: The British Museum Press, 2004) pl. 91 and BM EA 10470 (19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty), [E.A.W. Budge], *The Book of the Dead. Facsimile of the Papyrus of Ani in the British Museum*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (n.p. [London], 1894) pl. 32. There is also a very interesting example in a judgment scene on the south wall of the southernmost sanctuary of the small Ptolemaic temple at Deir el-Medina, in which a sort of deceased “everyman” is presented to Osiris by two goddesses Maat, one on either side of the deceased, each one taking one of the deceased’s hands; see Pierre du Bourguet, *Le temple de Deir al-Médîna*, MIAFO 121 (Cairo: IFAO, 2002) 56-57, 303 fig. 58.


The intention is that the name of the hall of judgment should be understood as the “Hall of Complete Truth” or the “Hall of the Entire Truth,” or the like. In the same way, the presence of two ouroboroi at the antipodes of the great mummiform deity should be understood as signifying the “complete” or “entire” Mehen, while at the same time graphically emphasizing Mehen’s ontological subordination to the great deity in a way that a single large ouroboros surrounding the deity would not do.<sup>66</sup>

In the last section of side one of the second golden shrine of Tutankhamun, there is a representation of a region of the *Duat* which is identified in the accompanying cryptographic inscription as:<sup>67</sup>



*qrrt jmjt htmyt*

The cavern which is in the Place of Destruction.





The central image of this representation shows a wavy-bodied serpent, with a human head and single outstretched arm, coiled around two recumbent mummiform figures lying in ovals representing their sarcophagi (figure 36). The serpent is labeled , which both Piankoff and Darnell read as *tpj*, rendered by Piankoff as the “One of the Head”<sup>68</sup> and Darnell as

<sup>66</sup> The use of different scales to indicate relative importance of subjects is a well-known feature of Egyptian two-dimensional representation; see Schäfer, *Principles*, 230-34.

<sup>67</sup> The text is from Piankoff, *Shrines*, fig. 41, following the transliteration and translation of Darnell, *Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, 94.

<sup>68</sup> Alexandre Piankoff, “Une représentation rare sur l’une des chapelles de Toutânkhamoun,” *JEA* 35 (1949) pl. 7, 115 and Piankoff, *Shrines*, 125, pl. 49.



“(human-) headed one.”<sup>69</sup> As the upper mummy wearing the white crown  is apparently Osiris, Piankoff read the small oval hieroglyph enclosed with it as *wsjr* ‘Osiris’ on the strength of three partly cryptographic but fuller writings for *wsjr* in the *Book of Caverns*<sup>70</sup> which, however, actually employ  rather than . Darnell, perhaps more convincingly, takes  as a writing of *dbꜣt* ‘sarcophagus’, given that the form of the hieroglyph is exactly that of the reductionist ovals indicating sarcophagi in this instance and occurring also in both the *Book of Caverns* and the *Book of the Creation of the Solar Disk*; he further suggests the possibility that this might be a very abbreviated writing for *dbꜣtj* ‘he of the sarcophagus’, understood as a designation for Osiris. Darnell interprets the entire scene as follows:

The human-headed serpent thus circles around the sarcophagi of the corpse of the great god in the Netherworld, the Solar Osiris, shown as split into his two constituent parts—the corpse of Osiris (wearing the White Crown), and the corpse of the sun.<sup>71</sup>

All of which may be true, but there is perhaps more intended here as well, an additional and complimentary register of meaning. It is apparent that this image is yet another variation of the basic pattern of a protective serpent enveloping some version of the sun-god. The serpent is represented with a human head, and the name *tpj* ‘(Human-) Headed One’ appears to connect it with a guardian serpent of that name appearing in the *Book of Amduat*, the *Book of Gates*, and the *Book of the Creation of the Solar Disk*;<sup>72</sup> one might ask, however, why the serpent is shown having a single human arm, extended horizontally with the palm of the hand downward. It is



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<sup>69</sup> Darnell, *Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, 90 and n. 249, 94.

<sup>70</sup> Piankoff, *Shrines*, 115 n. 2.

<sup>71</sup> Darnell, *Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, 90-91.

<sup>72</sup> For references, see Darnell, *Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, 96 n. 249.

clear that only a single arm is intended; when two arms, legs, wings, etc. are intended, and one limb could completely hide the other from a perfectly perpendicular point of view, Egyptian representational convention regularly teases one limb out from behind the other sufficiently for the viewer to clearly recognize that there are two. This single arm is very like the hieroglyph  *mḥ*; taken together with the wavy body of the serpent trailing after it—itsself suggestive of the hieroglyph  *n*, the reading *mḥn* is possible, a hidden or ‘cryptographic’ meaning certainly appropriate in this context. The name *tpj* might also be understood as a word-play on the nominal use of the nisbe adjective formed from the preposition *tp*, meaning “Foremost One” or “First One”; turning to an English translation derived from Latin rather than Anglo-Saxon, “Primal One” perhaps better conveys the required nuance with reference to a serpent image that resonates with the spiraling Mehen of the Coffin Texts discussed in the previous chapter, of which this image is a “secret” underworldly variant.

A related image, but with a true ouroboros, occurs in the so-called *Book of Caverns*,<sup>73</sup> a work first attested in the Osireion from the reign of Merenptah and having close thematic affinities with the *Book of the Solar-Osirian Unity*. In the fourth tableau of the middle register of the third section, an ouroboros surrounds the “corpse of Osiris,” the “*ba* of Re,” and the “eye of

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<sup>73</sup> No original title of the work has been preserved, the conventional title of the work being an Egyptological invention reflecting the internal structure of the work, being divided into six sections each of which corresponds to a *qrrt* ‘cave’ or ‘cavern’ of the *Duat*; see Hornung, *Books of Afterlife*, 83-85. The only full publication of the hieroglyphic text is still that of Piankoff, serialized in issues of the *BIAFO* between 1942-46: A. Piankoff, “Le livre des Quererts. 1<sup>er</sup> tableau,” *BIAFO* 41 (1942) 1-11, pl. 1-9; “Le livre des Quererts, seconde division, troisième division, quatrième division, cinquième division,” *BIAFO* 42 (1944) 1-62, pls. 10-79; “Le livre des Quererts, sixième division,” *BIAFO* 43 (1945) 1-50, pls. 85-151; “Le livre des Quererts (fin) [Index, Table des matières],” *BIAFO* 45 (1946) 1-12. A more recent study, translation, and critical text edition (entirely in transliteration, however, without the hieroglyphic texts) is that of Daniel A. Werning, *Das Höhlenbuch. Textkritische Edition und Textgrammatik*. 2 vols. GOF: Ägypten 48 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011).

Re,” each contained in an oval representing a sarcophagus (figure 37). The body of the ouroboros is arranged to form a rough rectangle rather than a circle; no particular significance should be read into this, however, as this configuration is due to purely graphic (as opposed to symbolic) considerations, conforming the ouroboros to the shape of the space determined by the columns of vertical text on either side and the register lines occurring above and below it.<sup>74</sup>

Behind the ouroboros, four Underworld gods bow in respect while the solar disk shines above them. The tableau is introduced by the following text:<sup>75</sup>




<sup>74</sup> Similarly, in the case of the previously image of the serpent *tpj*, the spiraling body of the serpent takes on a more or less rectangular configuration due to the shape of the space defined by the objects contained within it. The process is not unlike that in which the normally circular *šn*-ring can be ‘stretched’, so to speak, into a *šnw*-oval of any necessary length in order to accommodate royal names.

<sup>75</sup> This is an eclectic text based mostly on that from the tomb of Ramesses VI, but with emendations from the versions in the Osireion and the tomb of Pedamenope (TT 33). Piankoff, “Le livre des Quererts, seconde division, troisième division, quatrième division, cinquième division,” *BIAFO* 42 (1944) 23, pl. 32, text 8.






Thus in the fourth tableau, separate components of the unified Re-Osiris “gestate” within the womb-like enclosure represented by the serpent called Great One, shown as a sealed, true ouroboros, its tail in its mouth, while in the following fifth tableau, the seal is undone, and a divine figure (formed out of the previously separate components) emerges to stand upon the serpent outside of the space that the serpent previously enclosed. This divine figure, Complete One, is identified by Re as Osiris; the crocodile head is likely intended to reinforce the idea of the god being made complete out of parts, by association with the verb  *s3q* ‘assemble’, (possibly to be construed here as a passive participle, ‘Assembled One’), which could be written in an abbreviated fashion with the crocodile hieroglyph alone.<sup>83</sup> The purpose here, however, is not to offer a full exegesis of these tableaux, but to provide sufficient context for further establishing that one and the same serpent entity, in this case referred to as Great One, can appear both as an ouroboros and not as an ouroboros, as has been seen already in the closely analogous case of Mehen (if, indeed, the serpents Great One and Mehen are not actually to be considered symbolically equivalent or even identical). As pointed out in Chapter 1, to single out only those examples in which serpents appear as actual ouroboroi, and then to attribute some unique significance to them in the light of later tradition that regards the ouroboros as a distinct symbol with its own special meaning, is to distort needlessly our understanding of the original material on its own terms.

The lowest of the three registers of the third section of the *Book of Caverns* represents the Place of Destruction familiar from other Underworld Books; enemies of the sun and the ordered world are seen there, upside-down, some with wrists tied together or beheaded. In the midst of

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<sup>83</sup> Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, vol. 4, 25.

this region, protected by a serpent identified as  *nḥ3-ḥr* ‘Terrible-of-Face’, is the recumbent corpse of Osiris, above which is the disk of Re (figure 39). The tableau is introduced, in part, as follows:<sup>84</sup>



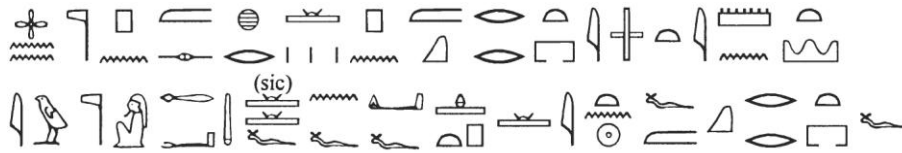
*mk wj ʿp=j wsjr*  
*dj=j ḥtp jtn=j m qrrt=k*  
*jw=j nd=j b3=k šwt=k*  
*jw rwj=j (j)n=k kkt (j)r=k*  
*jw nḥ3-ḥr jmj qrrt*  
*s3q=f ḥ3w(t)=k*

Behold, I traverse Osiris  
 (and) I cause my disk to rest in your cavern.  
 I protect your *ba* and your shadow  
 (and) I drive off your darkness for you.  
 Terrible-of-Face, who is in the cavern,  
 he gathers together your body parts.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>84</sup> This is an eclectic text pieced together from the least problematic parts of the Ramesses VI and Osireion versions; Piankoff, “Quererts, seconde division,” 27, pl. 35, text 4; Frankfort, et al., *Cenotaph*, vol. 2, pl. 31.

<sup>85</sup> Presuming this to be the plural of *ḥ3t* ‘corpse’, it can hardly mean the plural ‘corpses’ in this context and must refer to the component parts of a single body.

The caption over the recumbent body of Osiris reads in part as follows:<sup>86</sup>

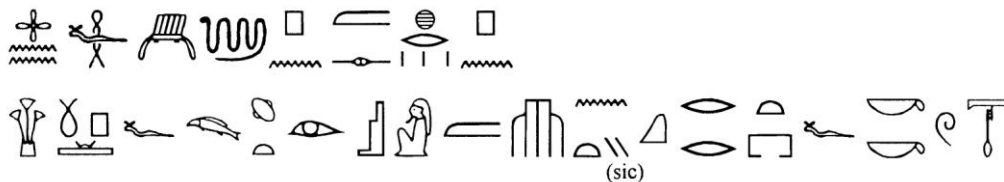


*wnn ntr pn m shrw pn m qrrt jmjt jmnt  
jw ntr 3 mdw=f n=f dj=f htp jtn=f m qrrt=f*

This god is like this in the cavern of the West:

The great god speaks to him as he causes his disk to rest in his cavern.

The text near the head of the serpent reads:<sup>87</sup>





*wnn hf3w pn shrw pn  
h3p=f h3t wsjr m-hnt qrrt=f kkw*

This serpent is like this:

He hides the corpse of Osiris within his cavern of darkness.

The corpse of Osiris speaks as follows:<sup>88</sup>



<sup>86</sup> This is an eclectic text pieced together from the least problematic and best surviving parts of the versions in the tomb of Ramesses IX (first line), M. Félix Guil mant, *Le tombeau de Ramsès IX*, MIAFO 15 (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1907) pl. 52, and the tomb of Ramesses VI (second line), Piankoff, "Quererts, seconde division," pl. 35, text 4. However, Piankoff's transcription is faulty; the sign transcribed as  is clearly  in the photographic documentation of the tomb that he later published, Piankoff, *Ramesses VI*, pl. 20.

<sup>87</sup> Guil mant, *Ramsès IX*, pl. 52.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*



*jw nḥ3-ḥr jmjw qrrt*  
*s3q=f ḥ3t=j jw<sup>89</sup> =j*

Terrible-of-Face, who is in the cavern,  
 he gathers together my corpse for me.

Here again is the basic underlying syntagmatic pattern of an enveloping force or barrier, most often represented as a serpent, acting in a protective capacity for a vulnerable divine being. The being protected is usually some form of the sun but is here a version of Osiris that is closely associated with the sun, a convergence of identities also seen above in the middle register of this same section of the *Book of Caverns*, as well as in the *Book of the Solar-Osirian Unity* and, less explicitly, in the *Book of Amduat* and *Book of Gates*. Just as in the fourth tableau of the middle register, in which both the tableau and its accompanying text make reference to components or parts of the corpse of Osiris being encircled and protected by a serpent arranged as an ouroboros, the corpse of Osiris is here gathered together by a surrounding serpent that also hides the corpse of Osiris, by means of an enveloping darkness, from potential threats of inimical beings in the Place of Destruction. The serpent is named *nḥ3-ḥr* ‘Terrible-of-Face’, presumably because it is conceived as having a visage that is frightening to potential threats, much as the multiple faces of Many-of-Faces, the ouroboroid serpent found in the sixth hour of the *Amduat*, are conceived as being (figure 7). Another parallel is that both the recumbent figure surrounded by Many-of-Faces in the *Amduat* and the recumbent figure here surrounded by Terrible-of-Face are similarly shown as being stirred to new life. As the disk of Re pauses in its passage over the serpent surrounding the corpse of Osiris, the generous gap between the serpent’s mouth and tail allows the bright rays of the disk to enter the space around the corpse, dispelling the darkness within that space, and arousing the corpse of Osiris to life. This awakening to new

<sup>89</sup> This is *jw* as a late writing for *jr*; see Chapter 1, notes 80, 85.

life is indicated by the corpse's ithyphallic state and the splaying of the corpse's legs in the manner of the hieroglyph  $\Delta$ , the determinative of verbs of movement (also a feature of the recumbent figure surrounded by Many-of-Faces in the *Amduat*).<sup>90</sup> Though the function of the ouroboroid serpent in this tableau is closely analogous both to that of the nearly closed-off ouroboroid Many-of-Faces in the *Amduat* and the true ouroboros Great One in the middle register, it was evidently thought necessary in this instance to allow a wide opening between the mouth and tail of the serpent, in order to allow the divine life-giving rays of the disk of Re to reach the corpse of Osiris. All of this serves again to illustrate the necessity of studying Egyptian ouroboros in the full context in which it appears, not as a uniquely important icon with special meaning, but as a mere variant and organic part of an elaborate system of closely associated ideas and images forming an iconological and conceptual continuum.

The sarcophagus chamber in the tomb of Ramesses III (KV 11) once contained a unique tableau of relevance to the present study. The tomb has unfortunately lost much of its former decoration due to water damage from serious recurrent flooding, the worst of which was probably as recent as the nineteenth century.<sup>91</sup> Water has been drawn up into the stone, causing

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<sup>90</sup> An important late parallel can also be found on the north wall of the north chapel of the Temple of Opet in Karnak. There Osiris appears as a nude youth, ithyphallic, with splayed legs, and lying on the lion-bier usually reserved for mummies (and symbolic of the horizon from which the sun rises). Instead of the solar disk stirring Osiris to new life, there appears an image of the winged *ba* of Amun, also ithyphallic, hovering above the recumbent figure. The phallus of the image of Osiris has been destroyed by vandals, and does not appear in the sketch published in Constant de Wit, *Temple d'Opet II*, pl.4. However, a good photograph of this tableau can be found in R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz, et al., *Les temples de Karnak, contribution à l'étude de la pensée pharaonique* Collection «Architecture et symboles sacrés» (Paris: Dervy-Livres, 1982) vol. 2, pl. 289. Other, similar parallel images are found in the third room of the eastern Osiris chapel at Dendera; see Cauville, *Dendara* 10/2, pls. 106-7, 135-6.

<sup>91</sup> It has been argued that most of the damage must have been after Lefébure's visit sometime before 1884; see Marek Marciniak, "Deux campagnes épigraphiques au tombeau de Ramsès III dans la Vallée de Rois (no. 11)," *Études et Travaux* 12 (1983) 300, n. 28.

swelling, cracking, detachment of large flakes of stone, and the ultimate collapse of much of the wall surface, especially the lower portions. Among the tableaux thus lost, there was one with a prominent image of an ouroboroid, preserved only in the hand-copy made by Champollion during his brief expedition of 1828-29 (figure 40).<sup>92</sup> The central image of this tableau attracted the attention of Hornung, who reproduced this image without its text or full context<sup>93</sup> and commented upon it (in part) as having been placed

...on the right-hand wall of the burial chamber, where Merneptah and Tawosret had placed their summary versions of the solar cycle. It showed a double ouroboros encircling the solar disk in the middle of which stood the pharaoh's name... The twelve goddesses worshipping the solar disk, and thus Ramesses as well, symbolize the twelve hours of the nightly voyage, as do the stars and disks in the outer circle.<sup>94</sup>

It is clear that this tableau is a variant of the central tableau found in the upper register of the final section of the *Book of the Creation of the Solar Disk*,<sup>95</sup> a fairly complete version of which is to be found on the left wall of the sarcophagus chamber of Ramesses VI (figure 41).<sup>96</sup> For purposes of comparison it will be best to first examine the less problematic, more elaborate, and contextualized Ramesses VI tableau. The central image is a standing mummiform figure

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<sup>92</sup> [Jean-François] Champollion le jeune, *Monuments de l'Égypte et la Nubie. Notices descriptives* (Paris, 1844) vol. 1, 422-23.

<sup>93</sup> Erik Hornung, *The Valley of the Kings, Horizon of Eternity*, trans. David Warburton (New York: Timken Publishers, Inc., 1990) 94.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 93. However, Hornung's placement of this tableau in the tomb would appear to be mistaken, as Marciniak provides a photograph of the right wall of the Ramesses III burial chamber which clearly shows the still preserved upper portions of the final *Book of Caverns* tableau, much like those on the respective right walls of the burial chambers of both Merneptah and Tawosret; see Marciniak, "Deux campagnes," 299, fig. 2.

<sup>95</sup> For over a half-century the fundamental publication for the study of this work remained Piankoff, *La création*, now superseded by Joshua Aaron Roberson, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Earth*. Wilbour Studies in Egypt and Ancient Western Asia 1 (Atlanta, Ga.: Lockwood Press, 2012). As the original title of this work is not preserved in known sources, several modern titles have been suggested (see Hornung, *Books of Afterlife*, 97; the present study follows Darnell's English adaptation of Piankoff's French title).

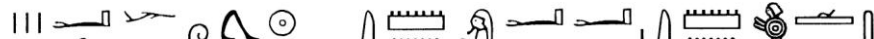

<sup>96</sup> Piankoff, *La création*, pl. D, center of upper register, and Piankoff, *Ramesses VI*, pl. 132.

with large solar disks below its foot and above its head; the disk below its foot is given emphasis by its larger relative size. This image of the mummy with disks bears comparison to both the image of the unified Re-Osiris from the *Book of the Solar-Osirian Unity* as it appears on side one of the second golden shrine of Tutankhamun (figure 34) and with the figure found near the beginning of the second register of the first section of the *Book of the Creation of the Solar Disk* (figure 35). In both instances, the areas near the head and foot of the mummiform figure represent the upper and lower regions; the encircling ouroboroi above and below suggest the upper and lower worlds and the solar circuit in both its day and night aspects in the first case, whereas the plain circles above and below the mummy in the latter case contain images referring to the sun in both its day and night aspects. On the basis of these parallels, and the accompanying texts, the mummiform figure of the central tableau from the last section of the *Book of the Creation of the Solar Disk* in the tomb of Ramesses VI should probably be understood as an image of the unified Re-Osiris, with the solar disks above and below representing the sun in both its day and night aspects, the night sun being appropriately emphasized in this funereal, underworldly context.

The texts appearing to the right and left of the standing mummy, curving away beneath and parallel to the rows of alternating solar disks and stars, are apparently defective to some degree. Both texts are to be read from the center of the tableau outwards. The text on the right (Piankoff's *Texte I*) reads, therefore, from left to right. The inscription is readable, in spite of the fact that it is strangely disordered, with hieroglyphs facing right even though the text is intended to be read right to left, reminiscent of columns of retrograde text. The text on the left (Piankoff's *Texte II*) reads normally from right to left, with much less peculiarity. The transcriptions appearing here do not follow Piankoff's publication of these lines, which is highly inaccurate in

quite unaccountable ways,<sup>97</sup> but follow instead direct photographs of the tableau itself with no real emendations.<sup>98</sup> The texts are quite similar and may be read as follows:

I.  

II.  

*sjsw* ‘*p* *htw* *r*’      *jtnyt* ‘*wjz*s *r* *jmn(y)tz*s’<sup>99</sup>

*sjsw* ‘*p* *htw* *r*’      *jmnt* ‘*wjz*s *r* *jmn(y)tz*s

Six whom the retinue of Re passes. Atenit (goddess of the East),<sup>100</sup>  
her two arms are toward those she hides (= the hours).

Six whom the retinue of Re passes. Amaunet (goddess of the East),  
her two arms are toward those she hides (= the hours).

The texts on either side of the uraei (Piankoff’s *Texte III* and *Texte IV*) are also quite similar to one another, but with slight variations:<sup>101</sup>


<sup>97</sup> Piankoff, *La création*, pl. 35, *Textes autour du disque, I, II*. It is hard to know where to begin cataloging the errors in Piankoff’s transcription of these lines, which manage to be more deranged than the defective originals. To begin with, the lines are copied backwards, beginning with the suffix pronoun *z*s which occurs at the end of each line and ending with the numeral that begins each line. Some of the hieroglyphs have their relative positions transposed, or are capriciously reversed, while others are simply transcribed as the wrong sign altogether (and then incorrectly marked *sic*). The reader is invited to make a close comparison of these transcriptions with the photograph in Piankoff, *Ramesses VI*, pl. 132.

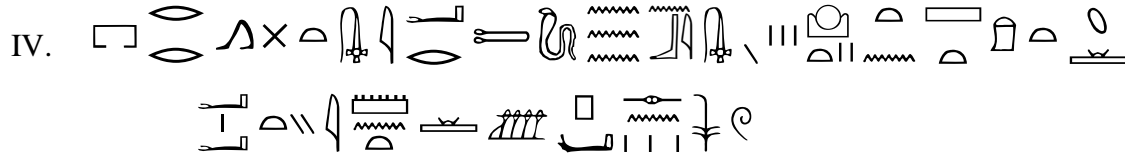
<sup>98</sup> Piankoff, *Ramesses VI*, pl. 132. For present purposes, however, both texts have been transcribed to read left to right; nonetheless, every peculiarity has been preserved relative to the reading direction, with the exception of the last signs in *Texte I* which have been rotated ninety degrees to correct an infelicitous choice made by the ancient scribe as his column of text curved so far as to become nearly vertical. Compare figure 41.

<sup>99</sup> This is read as a relative form agreeing with *wnwwt* ‘hours’, expressed by the arc of stars and disks above the lines of inscription, though it might possibly be read as “her hidden ones.”

<sup>100</sup> For the reading of the names as those of the two goddesses of the East and the West, rather than as being both corrupt versions of the name of the goddess of the West (as Piankoff, *La création*, 42), see Darnell, *Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, 220-21.

<sup>101</sup> Piankoff, *La création*, pl. 35, texts III and IV, collated with Piankoff, *Ramesses VI*, pl. 132.

III. 

IV. 

*prr sḏwt j<sup>c</sup>rt tn m nbjw ʒht tn ʿʒt*  
*ʿwj štʒ(wj) šsp.n=sn sw*


*prr sḏt <j> ʿrt<sup>102</sup> m<sup>103</sup> nbt ʒht tn štʒ<t>*  
*ʿtj<sup>104</sup> jmnt<j> šsp=sn sw<sup>105</sup>*

The fires of this uraeus come forth as the flames of this great horizon,  
 (and) the two mysterious arms, they have received it.

The fire of this uraeus comes forth as the flame of this mysterious horizon,  
 (and) the two hidden limbs, they receive it.

Turning now to a comparison of this Ramesses VI tableau with Champollion's hand-copy of the lost tableau from the damaged sarcophagus chamber of Ramesses III, one sees at once both key similarities and striking differences. In the Ramesses III version, the upper solar disk

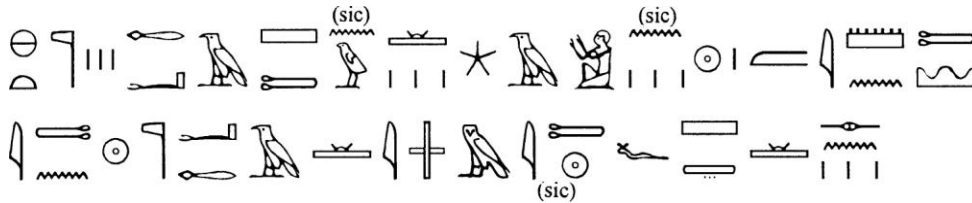
<sup>102</sup> See note 56.

<sup>103</sup> Reading the sign  *mw* for *m*, François Daumas, *Valeurs phonétiques des signes hiéroglyphiques d'époque Gréco-Romaine*, vol. 3 (Montpellier: Publications de la recherche–Université de Montpellier, 1990) 466.



<sup>104</sup> Reading this as the dual of ʿt 'limb'.
















<sup>105</sup> The use here of dependent pronoun *sw*, as in the previous line, appears problematic with regard to gender and number agreement with possible antecedent referents. A solution would be to regard the use of *sw* here as showing the influence of Late Egyptian (in which *sw* can be used for either masculine of feminine third person singular), with *j<sup>c</sup>rt* as the antecedent to which *sw* refers to in both lines (though *sḏwt* / *sḏt* would be semantically preferable).



has been raised well away from the mummiform figure's head, where it is labeled *jtn*<sup>106</sup> ‘Aten’ and is used graphically to punctuate a short text having no obvious relation, in terms of specific content, to the much longer text occupying the analogous position at the top of the Ramesses VI tableau. This text, written in short retrograde columns, presents several difficulties, but may be read as follows:



*psdt ʿ3<t> šṭ3w<t>*<sup>107</sup> *dw3z<s>n*<sup>108</sup> *rʿ m jmnt*

<sup>106</sup> Throughout this tableau,  is commonly substituted for .

<sup>107</sup> The first difficulty presented is the reading of   ; read as *štnw*, this would be an attestation of a very rare lexeme of unknown meaning. (The *Wörterbuch* vol. 4, 560, gives  , attested in the Pyramid Texts, glossing it only as “eine nominale Verbalform.”) The frequency of  for  in this tableau (and elsewhere in the tomb) would certainly make possible the transliteration *štnw*, which led Piankoff to suspect a connection with *šṭ3*; he accordingly rendered the first words as “La grande ennéade mystérieux (?),” which makes sense semantically, but is difficult to justify on the basis of the text as it stands; Piankoff, *La création*, 42 n. 1. Presuming that the text was at one point written in hieratic, the solution may lie in a confusion between the hieratic signs for  and  on the part of the person or persons responsible for transposing the hieratic text into the final hieroglyphic form that was actually laid out on the wall. Examples of the hieratic sign for  written without the small stroke or dot below the horizontal line, and virtually indistinguishable from the hieratic sign for , are attested from all periods; Georg Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. rev., 3 vols. (1927, 1936; reprint, Osnabrück: Otto Zeller, 1965) vol. 1, 30; vol. 2, 20; vol. 3, 30; Ursula Verhoeven, *Untersuchungen zur späthieratischen Buchschrift*, OLA 99 (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2001) 161. Reading both  for  and  for  would then allow a possible reading of *šṭ3w<t>* for the whole, understood as an imperfective active participle meaning “who are mysterious” or, used nominally, the “mysterious ones.”

<sup>108</sup> Another difficulty is the question of how to understand . Taken at face value, as the first person plural suffix pronoun, this yields the unlikely result that the Ennead is speaking in the first person, “we praise Re in the West”; one would, moreover, expect some marker of direct quotation. It seems warranted in this case to amend the text to read , thus giving the much better sense “they praise Re in the





*jtn ntr ʿ3 jmj jt(n)z f štzsn*

The great Ennead, the mysterious ones, they praise Re in the West,<sup>109</sup>  
(and they praise) the Aten, the great god who is in his disk, while they (i.e., the  
Ennead) remain hidden.<sup>110</sup>

The texts occurring in the Ramesses VI tableau under the semi-circle of solar disks and stars on either side of the standing mummy have analogues in the hand-copy of the lost tableau of Ramesses III, but in the latter case the corresponding texts are in enigmatic script. Darnell comments, quite correctly, that “...these versions of the annotations (are) both corrupt and clipped at the end...”<sup>111</sup>; indeed, both end abruptly at the preposition *r* and are lacking the following relative form *jmn(y)tzs*.<sup>112</sup> The contrast is even greater between the texts occurring on either side of the uraei in the Ramesses VI version and the analogous fragments of text on either side of the uraei in the Ramesses III hand-copy. The texts begin in the same way in both versions, with *pr*, but that is the extent of the similarity. Neither the *m* nor the *m ntj* following *pr* in the Ramesses III hand-copy makes any sense syntactically, nor does the out-of-place *hrw*


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West.” This must have been what Piankoff had in mind when he translated this as “Ils (?) adorent Rà à l'Occident”; *La création*, 42 n. 1.

<sup>109</sup> Reading  for . The orthography   for *jmnt* ‘the West’ is attested at Deir el-Bahari; see Faulkner, *Dictionary*, 21.

<sup>110</sup> Piankoff took *štzsn* as a stand-alone noun phrase, apparently like a caption, “Leur mystères” (ibid.). What this caption might refer to not being evident, the rendering suggested here is as a clause of circumstance, literally something like “while they (i.e., the Ennead) are mysterious,” perhaps to be understood with the sense “while they remain secret,” or “while they remain hidden.” There is also the distinct possibility that the text did not end here, as the demands of symmetry would require two additional short columns to the right of *štzsn*.

<sup>111</sup> Darnell, *Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, 121.

<sup>112</sup> Piankoff’s typeset version is even more clipped, his version of the right-hand text missing even its final ; *La création*, 42 n. 1.



*nb* occurring with the left-hand text. The hieroglyphs between the left-hand uraeus and the standing mummy might be read *dw3.n nb(j)* (as flame is mentioned in the Ramesses VI parallels), but this also makes little sense. The reason for this defective and confused state of affairs is fairly obvious; however magisterial one may regard Champollion's contribution to the decipherment of Egyptian, or heroic his efforts collecting materials for study during his brief Egyptian campaign, it is nonetheless true that a close comparison of specific textual and iconographic records of the *Monuments* with other records of the original monuments (or the monuments themselves) often shows that Champollion and his assistants were not always consistent in marking areas of lacunae with hatching, nor sufficiently careful in the placement or proportions of the surviving hieroglyphs to be of much use to the reconstructive philologist.<sup>113</sup>

An explanation for deficiencies in the hand-copy must surely be that when the now lost Ramesses III wall was being copied, it had already suffered significant deterioration of the kind

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<sup>113</sup> One example, out of many, will suffice. In the sarcophagus chamber of Tawosret in KV 14, there is a tableau of the final representation from the *Book of Caverns* that has a large central image of a ram-head falcon with outstretched wings. The wings extend horizontally but are bent at the carpal joints, at which point they taper downward. Two bands of text, once containing royal names and titles (as is known from the intact lines in the version of this scene in the sarcophagus chamber of Merenptah), appeared just above and parallel to the top edges of the wings on either side of the ram's head. The texts are largely missing now, the plaster disturbed, no doubt due to alterations made in antiquity as a result of the well-known change of tomb ownership. The reading direction of these texts is from near the central image outward, to the right and left; all that remains of the texts now are a few signs at the tail end of each line, just beyond the bend in the wings. (These were presumably signs that would have remained even though the royal names in the earlier part of the inscription were changed.) All of this is clear enough on the tableau itself. However, in Champollion's hand-copy of the tableau, there is no hatching to indicate the disturbed plaster where the royal names and titles are now missing, and the surviving hieroglyphs are drawn proportionately too small, too far beyond the bends in the wings to the right and left, and (most significantly) too *low* on the tableau (in the area where the wings begin to taper downward) to allow any thoughts of reconstructing the lines inward. Any attempt to imagine the missing signs inward along a horizontal line now just collides with the wings. The result is that the surviving signs in Champollion's hand-copy remain hopeless, disarticulate orphans, whose true placement and meaning would have been lost if one had to rely solely on Champollion's copy. The reader is invited to discover other examples of this type at one's leisure. [Jean-François] Champollion le jeune, *Monuments de l'Égypte et de la Nubie, d'après les dessins exécutés sur les lieux* (Paris, 1845) vol. 3, pl. 260.

that ultimately led to its catastrophic collapse subsequent to Champollion's visit to the tomb. That the lower portions of the enigmatic inscriptions were already damaged would explain their truncated state in the hand-copy. Similarly, much of the texts on either side of the uraei must have been already lost, leaving only *pr* to be read clearly; the problematic *m*, *m ntj*, *hrw nb*, and *dwꜣ.n nb(j)* were only guesses. The problem is disguised somewhat due to the fact that Champollion certainly knew enough Egyptian to supply credible groups of hieroglyphs as might be suggested to him by such scanty traces as were discernible. That he did indeed, on occasion, attempt to supply something definite for a damaged or fragmentary original is elsewhere evident in this very hand-copy. In the lower right-hand corner are two left-facing, standing mummiform figures labeled *ntrw št(ꜣw)* 'mysterious gods' or 'secret gods'. Both have solar disks surmounted on their heads, but the figure at left has something additional surmounting its solar disk, something peculiar, unidentifiable and rather "un-Egyptian" looking. The mystery is solved at once by comparing these two figures with a close parallel from the *Book of the Creation of the Solar Disk*, preserved in the tomb of Ramesses VI (figure 42).<sup>114</sup> Leaving aside for the moment the interpretation of this interesting image, it is at once evident that what surmounts the analogous solar disk is an oval of concentric circles from which emerges a small scarab head with antenna<sup>115</sup> and a pair of arms raised in a gesture of praise. The analogous traces that Champollion saw on the damaged wall must have been slight indeed for him to have interpreted





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<sup>114</sup> The image appears on the right wall of the sarcophagus chamber as the first tableau in the third register; Piankoff, *La création*, 20, pl. A, and Piankoff, *Ramesses VI*, 341 fig. 97, pl. 114. Both the line sketch in *La création* (pl. A) and the more detailed line drawing in *Ramesses VI* (341 fig. 97) omit the crucial iconographic detail of the scarab head emerging from the oval atop the sun-disk, clearly visible in the photograph (*Ramesses VI*, pl. 114).

<sup>115</sup> This small button-like head with v-shaped antennae, though unlike the usual stylized head seen commonly in scarab hieroglyphs of this and other periods (and even less like the natural animal), is nonetheless exactly how some scarab heads appear elsewhere on this very wall, as in the captions of the third tableau of the second register.

them as he did, inventing an abstract shape that preserves only the vaguest shape of the lost original, with none of the defining details once present. This leads one to consider the question as to the general trustworthiness of other purely iconographic elements in the hand-copy of this tableau and whether or not Champollion may have made other “restorations” which may not be so evident. For example, it is possible—even likely—that the solar disk on the second mummy is such a restoration; since the gesturing arms emerging from the oval above the first mummiform figure in the Ramesses VI version are facing a female figure reciprocating the gesture (instead of a solar disk as on the head of the second mummiform figure in the lost tableau); one would expect such a female figure to be standing on the head of the second mummiform figure in the Ramesses III hand-copy as well, with her arms gesturing toward where there should be a complimentary pair of arms emerging from the oval above the sun-disk on the first mummy but where there is now Champollion’s imaginary shape preserving only their general placement and outline. Under these circumstances, one might well suspect that other damage was present on the mummiform figures themselves, though on the basis of numerous parallels within the tomb itself, such highly conventionalized images would have been easily and credibly restored in ways that would not now be evident. All this needs to be borne in mind when turning one’s critical attention to the central disk and the so-called “double ouroboros” surrounding it.



Despite the hand-copy having no indication of color, the area within the serpentine perimeter must be presumed to be the solar disk itself, though it is unusual for the surface of a solar disk to be quite so filled with other images, including the twelve praising goddesses of the nocturnal hours, and two smaller solar disks. However, the most prominent image on the disk, and its central feature, is a peculiar writing of the king’s name, his *rn* (his nomen, in this instance). The great disk itself is part of this writing, providing the reading *r<sup>c</sup>*, to be followed by

the central  *ms* and its compliment  *ss*, read right to left. The epithet  *hq3 jwnw* ‘ruler of Heliopolis’<sup>116</sup> is then read left to right. The emphasis on the hieroglyph  *msj* ‘give birth’, ‘be born’, together with the goddesses of nocturnal hours praising the sun in its passage of renewal, resonates conceptually with the afterworldly renewal and rebirth of the king. It is the pre-eminence of the *rn* of the king, however, that is the key to understanding the meaning of the unique serpentine enclosure at the perimeter of the disk.

First, however, the exact form of this serpentine perimeter must be closely examined. As it appears in the existing hand-copy, there are three components. The most considerable of these three is a length of serpent body, lacking both head and tail, extending around the upper part and sides of the disk, its dorsal surface facing outward, its ventral surface inward. The other two components are two short serpents, nearly identical (though virtual mirror images of one another); their tails overlap slightly at the bottom of the disk, and they extend to the right and the left almost laterally, the degree of their curvature being minimized by the oval “flattening” of the vertical dimension of the disk. Their ventral surfaces face inward and upward so that, as their heads protrude outward from the perimeter, the undersides of their lower jaws are facing upwards. It would appear that this arrangement is certainly unique amongst all known Egyptian iconography; on the other hand, it may be in certain respects entirely un-Egyptian, the product of Champollion's effort to restore a damaged image that he did not fully understand. Notice that below the central disk, and below the feet of the laterally arrayed pair of horizontal goddesses, there appears the king's nomen in an oval that can only have been intended by its Egyptian creators as a *šnw*, or ‘cartouche’. It is, however, lacking the bar that should appear along its end

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<sup>116</sup> Perhaps to be understood here as *hq3 jwnw šm'w* ‘ruler of the Southern Heliopolis’ (=Thebes).

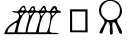



(here this would be a vertical bar on the viewer's right, as the text reads left to right), an essential feature of any *šnw*. The relative proximity of the end with the missing bar to Champollion's fantastical mis-reconstruction of the symbol attached to the top of the solar disk surmounting the mummiform figure, strongly suggests that the right end of the cartouche was sufficiently damaged as to show no trace of the cartouche's end bar to the eye of the copyist. Damaged hieroglyphs within that end of the cartouche would have been credibly restored on the model of the king's nomen appearing directly above in the large central disk and elsewhere in the tomb. It is perhaps not too much for one to further imagine a trajectory of damage extending in a line from the fantastically reconstructed symbol above the solar disk of the mummiform image, diagonally upward through the area of the missing bar on the cartouche, past the feet of the right-hand horizontal goddess (credibly restored on the model of the better preserved left-hand horizontal goddess or other parallels in the tomb), to the place along the lower perimeter of the large central disk where the tails of the two short serpents overlap. The suggestion being made, while only informed speculation, is that no overlapping of tails and no such oddly short serpents existed in the lost original tableau; rather, the component image was more likely a continuous section of serpent with a head on each end. Something quite similar has already been encountered in the vignette accompanying CT Spells 758-760 (figure 21); above the ram's horns on the *atef*-like crown on the seated divine image, there is seen a slightly curved section of serpent body with a head on each end. Double headed serpents are not unknown elsewhere in Egyptian iconography, for example, the serpent  |  | *ts-ḥrw* 'Joined-of-Faces', appearing before the solar barque in the second register of the tenth hour in the *Book of Amduat*.<sup>117</sup> Another example of a single serpent body having a head at each end occurs on an early Roman Period

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<sup>117</sup> Hornung, *Das Amduat*, vol. 1, 173, pl. *Zehnte Stunde*.


coffin (examined in Chapter 4); there the serpent body is formed into a circle such that the two serpent heads meet face-to-face at the top. If one accepts the possibility that the original image in the Ramesses III tableau contained a single section of serpent with a head at each end, then the serpentine perimeter would have been made up not of three components but of two, the main component being the length of headless serpent body forming the better part of a circle and the second component being the more horizontally deployed length of serpent body with a head on each end. Viewed in this way, the serpentine perimeter is the conceptual equivalent of  $\bigcirc$ , the *šn*-sign, which is highly appropriate given that it surrounds the king's name like a cartouche. It is well-known that the cartouche, or *šnw*, is only a *šn*-sign containing a king's name and elongated as necessary to do so.

The *šn*-sign, and by extension the cartouche, protectively ensures the integrity of that which is contained within it (such as the king's name), while simultaneously representing in two dimensions the three-dimensional perimeter or limit of the “bubble” of the ordered cosmos, and therefore also the path of the sun as it passes along the inside surface of that perimeter in its daily circuit. It is also closely connected with the sun itself and the light of the sun. In examples of the *šn*-sign that retain color, whether paint or inlay, the ring is entirely filled with red, indicating the solar disk; the ring in such cases represents a protective containment around the solar disk but also suggests the perimeter of the cosmos itself, filled with the light of the sun. In the case of the cartouche, this last aspect is sometimes made more explicit, as seen in the numerous examples in the mortuary temples and tombs of New Kingdom kings in which the background within the cartouche is most often filled with yellow (= gold), the color of *šhw* ‘sunlight’, or less frequently (as in the tombs of the post-Amarna 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty kings) with white, *hd* or


 *šp*, either of which can be determined with ☉ or . The presence of this light within the cartouche gives life to the king's *rn* 'name'.<sup>118</sup> The serpentine perimeter around the great central solar disk in the lost tableau of Ramesses III, therefore, both protectively encloses the solar disk and represents the limit of the cosmos filled with the divine solar light that gives life to the name of the king. But as perimeter of the cosmos, the encircled serpent body also recalls the path of the solar circuit; this may explain the arrangement of the serpent heads facing opposite directions along the circle. The Egyptians conceived of the diurnal and nocturnal courses of the sun as being in opposing directions to one another; the day sun travels east to west while the night sun travels west to east. The orientation of the serpent heads may, therefore, encode the idea that the complete circuit of the sun includes both day and night phases. Within the perimeter, however, only the nocturnal passage of the sun is represented. The two sets of six goddesses, arms raised in praise, are the goddesses of the twelve hours of the night mentioned in the two incomplete lines of enigmatic text curved around either side of the large central disk (and in the more complete, if still flawed, *Klarschrift* version in the *Book of the Creation of the Solar Disk*). These praising goddesses are a more explicit variant expression of a conception also present in the alternating disk and stars forming a semi-circle above the central disk. Each star can be read as an abbreviated writing for  *wnwt* 'hour', but also suggests  *dw3* 'praise', in a manner of graphic word-play. The solar disk accompanying each star represents the sun as it "rests" in each of the twelve hours of the *Duat*. Midway in this semi-circle stands the

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<sup>118</sup> Another meaning of the *šnw*, in relation to the living king, is the outer perimeter of his rule. For an insightful discussion of the origin of the *šn* and the evolution of the conceptions that attached themselves to it, as well as its relations to the *šnw*, light, sight, and the life of the *rn*, see Andrey O. Bolshakov, *Man and his Double in Egyptian Ideology of the Old Kingdom*, ÄAT 37 (Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997) 175-82.

mummiform figure, six hours being before it and six hours after it; this figure can only be the night sun at that crucial moment in the dead of night when, as the unified Re-Osiris, the process of regeneration leading to rebirth at dawn begins.<sup>119</sup> The same symbolic idea is present amid the twelve praising goddesses within the large disk; this key moment in the sun's nightly journey is represented analogously by a single small disk at the top, having six hour-goddesses before it and six hour-goddesses after it. The larger solar disk below the king's name would come, therefore, both at the beginning and at the end of the sequence of twelve hour-goddesses, and inclusively represents a convergence of both the rising and setting sun, a graphic and conceptual strategy seen, for example, in the hieroglyph <sup>120</sup> and, in a certain respect, very like a feature of the Osiris image in the final tableau of the *Book of Gates*, examined earlier in the chapter (figure 33). Recall that this mummiform image is conceptually coextensive with the nocturnal course of the sun through the *Duat*, and emphasizes the nightly unity of Re and Osiris during that course. The image is bent backward into a circle with the feet touching the back of the head. This apparently closed loop cannot, however, represent the entire, complete day and night solar cycle, but only the nightly sojourn through the *Duat*. The point at which the head and feet come together, therefore, can only represent the convergence of the beginning and the end of the *Duat*, of the horizons of the west and the east through which the sun enters at death and later comes forth renewed, a symbolic meaning closely related to that of the slightly larger solar disk below the

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<sup>119</sup> This figure should be understood as standing *within* the ouroboroid and emerging from the  *ms*-sign, in a “syntactic” relationship like that of the falcon and the ouroboroid on the Predynastic palette discussed in Chapter 2, as well as the arrangement of actual mummies standing above ouroboroi painted on the inner foot-boards of certain 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty coffins, ouroboroids painted around the base of the feet on certain Saite coffins, and the images of the so-called Bes Pantheos and other versions of polymorphic deity standing within ouroboroi, all discussed below in Chapter 4.

<sup>120</sup> See Chapter 2, note 7.



king's name, situated as it is both at the beginning and at the end of the sequence of the twelve hour-goddesses of the *Duat*.<sup>121</sup>

Given both the contents of the tableau as a whole, and the larger context of the symbolic genre to which the lost tableau belongs, it is clear that the serpentine perimeter around the central disk is a unique permutation of a more basic underlying conception, usually given graphic expression as an ouroboros or ouroboroid, most often understood as a version of Mehen, but also named in some variations as Many-of-Faces, the Great One, or simply unnamed (or perhaps “self-named”<sup>122</sup>), as in the present case. One might well question, however, the propriety of contemporary scholars referring to this serpentine perimeter as a “double ouroboros” or “doubled uroboros,” as has been done recently.<sup>123</sup> It is of course unrealistic to expect previous scholarship to have made use of the more rigorous taxonomic nomenclature being introduced for the first time in the present study. Nonetheless, the use of “double ouroboros” or “doubled uroboros” seems unnecessarily lax and imprecise on several grounds. Strictly speaking, there is no ouroboros—single or double—in the lost tableau, for the simple reason that there is no serpent tail in, at, or near any serpent mouth. As for the purported “double” or “doubled” aspect of the image, as the serpentine perimeter is primarily composed of only a single strand of serpent body and is never more than a single body-width wide, this terminology can only be suggested by the



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<sup>121</sup> The hour goddesses and two smaller sun-disks in the lost tableau can also be found, somewhat differently constellated, in the fourth tableau, second register, first section, of the *Book of the Creation of the Solar Disk*, preserved on the right wall of the sarcophagus chamber of Ramesses VI. Mehen is also present in a non-ouroboroid/ouroboros form, but nonetheless fulfills a familiar function, creating an interior space, or “cavern,” in which a partly mummiform figure appears to be stirring to life (indicated by its ithyphallic condition.) Piankoff, *La création*, 16 ff., pl. A, and Piankoff, *Ramesses VI*, 339 fig. 95, pls. 115-16. It appears, therefore, that the lost tableau of Ramesses III combines elements drawn from both the first section (right wall) and the last section (left wall) of the *Book of the Creation of the Solar Disk*.

<sup>122</sup> The suggestion being that, in specific cases, the serpent image itself might be read as “Mehen.”

<sup>123</sup> Hornung, *Valley of the Kings*, 382; Darnell, *Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, 382. Darnell evidently sees this supposed “doubled uroboros” as being made up of “two overlapping uroboroi” (ibid.).

two heads protruding from each side. To make the problem at issue perfectly clear, consider the following comparison with a better known and frequently occurring Egyptian symbol, the solar disk associated with Horus Behdety, a symbol which often appears with great outstretched wings extending laterally on either side. The disk itself is invariably shown with two protective uraei emerging from its sides, one on the right and one on the left. Sometimes the solar disk is shown entirely ringed with a single strand of protective serpent body, ventral surface inward, from which a hooded uraeus emerges from either side, of which a fine early example from the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty appears in figure 43a. This solar disk can also appear without wings, and with or without a ring of serpent body going all the way around the disk. Figure 43b shows, for example, a version of the Horus Behdety disk occurring in the sarcophagus chamber of Sethos I, only about a century and a half earlier than the ouroboroid of the lost tableau of Ramesses III, where it appears above the head of the king, to identify him as both the king and Horus Behdety. The disk has no wings but does have a single ring of serpent body going entirely around the solar disk, as well as having the two customary uraei emerging from either side (both of which here have optional, if auspicious, *ankh*-signs hanging from the loops of snake body below their hoods). Now the question may be asked: if the two-headed serpentine perimeter encircling the solar disk in the lost tableau of Ramesses III is somehow to be appropriately described as a “double ouroboros” (or “doubled uroboros”), then why shouldn't this appellation do just as well for this version of the disk of Horus Behdety? It might be objected that the disk of Horus Behdety has uraei emerging from its sides, while the “double ouroboros” of the Ramesses III tableau has common snake heads without cobra hoods. In that case it should be recalled that in the first hour of the *Book of Gates*, the solar disk is shown surrounded by a serpent having the hood of a cobra but with its tail in its mouth—most definitely an ouroboros by even the narrowest definition

(figure 32a). A characteristically Egyptian flexibility of identity is clearly evident here. The identifying iconographic feature of a uraeus may indeed be the hood of a cobra, but in accordance with the and/or logic of inclusivity typical of Egyptian theological formulations (as described in Chapter 1), it does not necessarily follow that every cobra hood represents a uraeus or at least *only* a uraeus.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, when a protective serpent ring, most often understood as a form of Mehen, was given a “uraeus-inflection” (no doubt to emphasize the protective function), it was evidently felt that there arose as a result a tension of gender identity (Mehen being masculine, while  *j'rt* ‘uraeus’ is feminine), necessitating introduction of the feminine appellative  *mḥnyt* ‘Mehenyt’. Indeed, the boundary of identity between Mehen, Mehenyt, and the uraeus could be quite fluid.<sup>125</sup> All of which returns one to the issue of why the serpent ring in the lost tableau of Ramesses III should somehow be loosely regarded as a species of ouroboros, yet the serpent ring appearing around a Horus Behdety solar disk should not, even though it is now obvious that these images are closely related, both iconographically and conceptually. It may further be pointed out that in the iconography of both Montu and Re-Horakhty, a continuous ring of serpent may also appear around the solar disk, with tails and heads abutted to such rings in a highly formal, conventionalized manner, quite unlike anything imaginable with a natural animal (figures 44a, 44b). What is clear from these considerations is

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<sup>124</sup> For example, goddesses Meretseger and Wadjet can both appear as uraei; for convenient images see R.V. Lanzzone, *Dizionario di mitologia egizia* (Turin, 1881; reprint, Amsterdam: John Benjamins B.V., 1974) vol. 1, pls. 60, 128.

<sup>125</sup> See, for example, the appearance of both Mehen and Mehenyt, the latter in the form of a uraeus, in the vignettes for Spell 168 of the *Book of the Dead*; Piankoff, *Wandering of the Soul*, pls. 15-16, 30-31. Like the uraeus, Mehenyt might represent various goddesses, and can be explicitly equated with the uraeus itself. See Christian Leitz, ed., *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen*, vol. 3, *p-nbw*, OLA 112 (Leuven: Peeters Publishers and Department of Oriental Studies, 2002), 385, where Mehenyt is glossed as “Die Stirmschlange” and described as “Bezeichnung de Kobra (ir'rt).”

that *all* of these serpent bodies surrounding solar disks, including that of the lost tableau, are closely related iconographically and conceptually to one another and to some uses of the ouroboros (as will become increasingly evident throughout the remainder of this chapter and in the following chapter). For the sake of clarity, however, they should not be referred to as ouroboroi, which they are not, but as ouroboroids (“ouroboros-like” serpents), which they surely are. From this perspective, the singling out of the Ramesses III example as some kind of ouroboros, with never a mention of the others as being in any way related or similar, is seen as highly arbitrary and tells us more about intellectual fashions of modern Egyptological thought than it does about the natural interconnections amongst organically related icons and ideas of the ancient Egyptians.

A final consideration regarding the ouroboroid of the lost tableau of Ramesses III concerns its relation to any concept of time. There is certainly no doubt that, taken as a whole, the entire agglutination of symbols in and around the great central disk has a temporal dimension, as is clear from the presence of the twelve hour-stars and their corresponding solar disks, as well as the praising hour-goddesses appearing along the inner perimeter of the serpent ring. In this regard, Darnell has offered the following descriptive interpretation:



...the ruler's nomen and epithet *ḥqꜣ-iwnw* are surrounded by two overlapping uroboroi, this group in turn orbited by 12 disks and 12 stars. There the doubled uroboros encloses the name of the king, as the uroboroi on the second shrine of Tutankhamun enclose the actual image of the Solar-Osirian ruler. The uroboroi are surrounded by the stars and disks of the hours, and do themselves represent the unending round of time.<sup>126</sup>

Before going further, it should be noted that Darnell apparently conceives the ouroboroid of the lost tableau as somehow being two separate ouroboroi, one overlapping the other, although this

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<sup>126</sup> Darnell, *Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, 382.

is emphatically not what is present in Champollion's hand-copy. Evidently, without actually saying so, Darnell also seems to suspect some kind of inaccuracy present in Champollion's drawing of the serpent. It might be argued on the basis of various parallels, however, that Darnell's conception is one of the least likely constructions that might be imposed on Champollion's no doubt imperfect sketch. A more likely possibility is a single continuous ring of serpent body with the protruding heads "branching off" on the right and left (somewhat in the manner of the cobra heads in figure 43a), or perhaps a continuous ring with the protruding heads simply abutted to the dorsal outline (in the manner of the cobra heads in figures 43b, 44a, and 44b). In any event, the question must remain entirely a matter of speculation until such time as a painstaking clearance of the wreckage in the sarcophagus chamber should reveal sufficient miraculously preserved fragments of the lost tableau to permit a definitive reconstruction. In the meantime, the reader is welcome to prefer Professor Darnell's view regarding the exact nature of the ouroboroid at issue. The present concern here is Darnell's claim that this ouroboroid—"doubled" or otherwise—represents "the unending round of time." As previously discussed, the serpentine perimeter signifies first of all a protective ring around the solar disk itself (and the king's name within it) but simultaneously also the perimeter of the cosmos, along the inner surface of which the sun travels in its daily journey. It is this last aspect which associates this serpent ring with the temporal dimension, and (as earlier observed) the orientations of the two serpent heads may indeed represent the apparent opposite directions (east to west and west to east) of the sun's day and night travel. There is no reason to suppose, however, that this ouroboroid perimeter represents "the unending round of time" exclusive of the spatial course along which the sun moves, as the temporal and spatial dimensions are still perfectly integrated here. The parallel that Darnell draws with the ouroboroi on the second shrine

of Tutankhamun is relevant and interesting but does nothing to support the idea that the lost tableau ouroboroid represents “unending time” to the exclusion of the spatial dimension, as Darnell’s own interpretation of the Tutankhamun ouroboroi is that they are purely spatial in meaning, representing encirclement of both the upper heavens and the Underworld, with the implication that the large mummiform deity is to be understood as “completely surrounded by the serpents.”<sup>127</sup> Moreover, when some ouroboroid and ouroboros images finally do become associated primarily or exclusively with time (the first examples, from the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, are discussed in the following chapter), they are *not* identified with “unending time,” that is, with  *nḥḥ* ‘cyclic time’, associated with the ever-repeating daily renewal of Re, but with  *dt* ‘eternal time’, associated with the static abiding perfection of Osiris.<sup>128</sup> In light of present evidence, Darnell’s attribution of the meaning “unending time” to the ouroboroid of the lost tableau of Ramesses III appears to be yet another example of reading much later developments regarding the ouroboros back into the earlier material. It is of interest to note how closely Darnell's choice of words echoes the verse in the eighteenth century emblem book quoted in Chapter 1, “...the endless serpent ring unending time doth seem.” One might regard this as indicative of the degree to which later traditions regarding the ouroboros have permeated the intellectual life of modern scholars, or one might prefer to dismiss this as mere pleasant serendipity; perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between.

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<sup>127</sup> Darnell, *Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, 380.

<sup>128</sup> Much has been written, and no doubt will continue to be written, regarding these complimentary Egyptian concepts of time. The position taken here, however, is that a fundamental understanding of these concepts has been sufficiently well established for the purposes of the present study; see Assmann, *Zeit und Ewigkeit*, 41-48; *Search for God*, 74ff.

## EXCURSUS II: The Bottom Register of the Lost Tableau of Ramesses III







Before entirely leaving Champollion's hand-copy of the lost tableau of the sarcophagus chamber of Ramesses III, it is really worth taking a parting glance at what may very well be its most neglected and yet its most unique and interesting feature, though only indirectly connected with the ouroboros through cosmogonic and cosmological ideas that appear throughout this study. The lowest portion of the hand-copy records a scene composed of a row of five mummiform deities. The two on the right have been briefly touched upon already in the earlier discussion regarding Champollion's apparent attempts at restoring parts of images that were already too damaged for him to fully understand. The orientation of this lowest scene, like the tableau as a whole, is left-facing, so that the viewer should attempt to understand the scene by approaching it left-to-right. The scene is arranged in a basic bi-lateral symmetry, and is dominated by the central, taller mummiform deity. A "reading" of the scene should actually start with this central left-facing deity, as the two smaller right-facing deities to the left of the central deity are clearly subordinate to it. The royal beard on the leftmost of the smaller deities marks it as male, the other being female. The brief texts accompanying the scene are to a degree corrupt or defective, either from errors of the ancient copyist (a common enough occurrence in these tombs) or, as likely, through the efforts of Champollion, with his as yet imperfect knowledge of Egyptian syntax and lexicon, to plausibly restore texts that were already seriously deteriorated. The caption for the larger, central deity was likely intended to read *nnw jtj ntrw šṭṭw* 'Nun, father of the secret gods', while the caption between the two smaller deities is probably a corruption of *twṭj* 'the two forms'. Two undulating rays emanating from the large deity's mouth reach the foreheads of the smaller deities facing Nun; other rays, in turn, issue from the mouths of the smaller deities and flow downward, disappearing into the register line at the bottom of the

tableau. This small triadic grouping, nearly lost forever were it not for Champollion’s prescient decision to preserve it for posterity as best he could, is of unique importance for understanding the development and progressive refinement of Egyptian cosmogonic conceptions and their symbolic expression.<sup>129</sup> The three mummiform deities are yet another formulation of the first moments of creation. The deities are far removed from being objects of cult or subjects of narrative mythology, but are reified hypostases of theological conceptions, their generic mummiform images<sup>130</sup> being indicative of this shift toward greater intellectual abstraction.<sup>131</sup>



<sup>129</sup> It should be noted that the first Egyptologist to appreciate the importance and cosmogonic significance of this image was W. Max Müller, though he was only able to offer a very tentative interpretation due to the lack of adequate comparative material, a situation that has much improved since the time of his research in the early years of the twentieth century; W. Max Müller, *Egyptian Mythology* (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1918) 47.

<sup>130</sup> Such mummiform images are used to similar purpose elsewhere in the Underworld Books, especially in the *Litany of Re*, the *Book of the Solar-Osirian Unity*, and the *Book of the Creation of the Solar Disk*.

<sup>131</sup> This tendency away from the familiar mythological, genealogical cosmogonic sequence of the Heliopolitan Ennead (typically Atum begetting Shu and Tefnut, who in turn beget Geb and Nut, themselves then begetting Osiris, Isis, Seth, and Nephthys), attains its most extreme form in a purely arithmetical sequence of progressive derivation, preserved on the coffin of one Petamen, a Theban priest of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Dynasty. See G. Maspero, “Notes,” *RecTrav* 23 (1901) 196; idem, “La Progression numérique dans l’Énéade heliopolitaine,” *BE* 40 (1916) 165.

		
		
<i>ḏdꜣf</i>	<i>jnk wꜥ ḥpr(j) m snwj</i>	<i>jnk snwj ḥpr(j) m jfdw</i>
	<i>jnk snwj ḥpr(j) m ḥmnw</i>	<i>jnk wꜥ m-sꜣꜣf</i>

He says: I am One who becomes Two; I am Two who becomes Four;  
I am Four who becomes Eight; I am One beyond this.

(Here following Maspero’s understanding, lit.: “in the back of it” = “following after it” = “beyond this,” taking the suffix pronoun ꜣf to be resuming *ḥmnw* ‘eight’ as a singular noun; admittedly, one would prefer the writing  rather than  for Maspero’s reading, though this may be understood as word play suggesting also that the One protects the whole.) The exact interpretation of this arithmetical sequence has been open to conjecture. Maspero takes the first “Two” as Shu and Tefnut (reasonably enough), but then (rather unconvincingly) would have the “Four” as the male members of the so-called Hermopolitan Ogdoad (which he identified as the four gods acting as pillars upholding the firmament) and the “Eight” as the full Ogdoad including their four female doublets. A more natural interpretation



Beneath the surface of these images is the now familiar syntagmatic pattern of a single point emerging from the abyssal chaos and then emanating the first complimentary pair, interaction between which ultimately produces the entire ordered cosmos. The paradigmatic choices that articulate this underlying syntagma not only give it intelligible form but also determine the particular emphasis of this expression of the supreme creative moment.

As in the previously examined final tableau of the *Book of Gates*, the cosmogonic process is here understood to originate with the abyssal deep, Nun, its creative potential being elsewhere expressed in the theology of the so-called Hermopolitan Ogdoad, in which four defining qualities into which the abyss is factored are represented as eight male and female doublets.<sup>132</sup> The symbolic equivalent of Atum, the single point that appears in the abyss and from which the

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might be to understand the first two as Shu and Tefnut, who then beget Geb and Nut, bringing the total up to four. Next engendered are Osiris, Isis, Seth, and Nephthys, bring the total up to eight. Maspero correctly understood, however, that the One—the Monad precipitating the cosmogonic sequence—yet remains (all things, indeed, being mere transformations of the Monad), yielding a total of nine, the numeric symbol of the indefinite plurality of all creation (Maspero, *op. cit.*, 197). However, such interpretive efforts miss the real point of the text, which is the move away from mythological genealogy into the realm of arithmetical abstraction, presenting a cosmogonic progression that doubles at each step (1, 2, 4, 8), clearly indicating expansion from a single point. It is Maspero's view that this text shows "...what a large part was played by numbers in the development of Theban thought toward the end of the eleventh century B.C." (G. Maspero, *Guide to the Cairo Museum* [Cairo: Printing-office of the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology, 1903] 226-27) Moreover, he informs us that this text is not unique, but one of "several texts of the same kind" found on other priestly coffins from the same find at Deir el-Bahari; he further suggests that this group of related texts are likely excerpts "...taken from some book composed to explain the ideas held by the earlier schools...in which the authors had incorporated all the speculations with which the sacred text had inspired the thinkers of their school." (Maspero, *op. cit.*, 227) This is not the place to argue the following point at length, but it is at least possible that some such abstract arithmetical cosmogonic model was the historical antecedent of the thoroughly un-mythological cosmogonic number theories which Aristotle attributed to the Pythagoreans, as well as the later theory of the derivation of solids (point, line, plane, solid) developed by Plato and his successors in the early Academy and also attributed by them to the Pythagoreans. For a discussion of this attribution see Walter Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, trans. Edwin L. Minar, Jr. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972) 22-28, 68-71; but cf. J.A. Philip, "The 'Pythagorean' Theory of the Derivation of Magnitudes," *Phoenix* 20.1 (spring, 1966) 32-50. A tradition preserved by Porphyry has Pythagoras apprenticed for a time to priests of Diospolis (=Thebes) about four centuries after the Petamen text; see Peter Gorman, *Pythagoras, A Life* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979) 56-62.

<sup>132</sup> Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, 20-21.

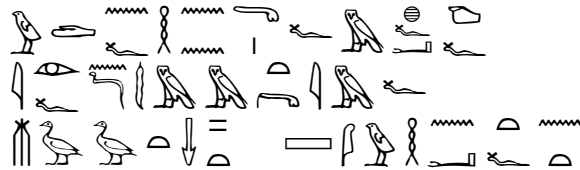
actual creation then emanates and expands outward, is here the mouth of the mummiform image representing Nun, suggesting an association with the concept of *ḥw*, the power of creative utterance, and then by implication *sjḏ*, the power of the divine mind that first conceives of the cosmos before divine utterance gives it manifestation.<sup>133</sup> From this single point, two wavy rays emanate and diverge (analogous to the exaggerated long arms stretching away from the torso of Nun in the final tableau of the *Book of Gates*) to become a new level of ontological reality, the second stage in the ontogenesis of the cosmos, represented by the pair of standing mummiform figures facing the larger one representing Nun. The two mummies are differentiated as male and female (by the presence or absence of a small ceremonial beard) and can only represent Shu, the expanding space of life-giving light and air, and Tefnut, the principle of pattern and order.<sup>134</sup> The

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<sup>133</sup> See Chapter 2, note 97.

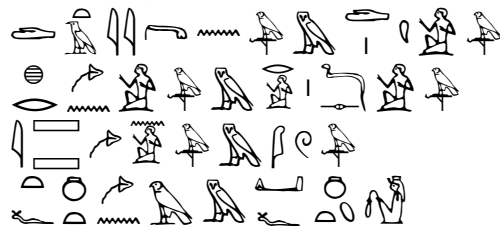
<sup>134</sup> In the secondary literature one still encounters the unfortunate custom of describing Shu and Tefnut as personifications of natural forces, Shu as “air” and Tefnut as “moisture” or the like. As fairly representative examples, Lesko conventionally gives Shu and Tefnut as “air” and “moisture” respectively; Quirke, with more creativity than warrant, gives Shu as “dry air” and Tefnut as “corrosive moist air,” adding gratuitously that “Shu and Tefnut compliment one another as the concept of dryness depends on the complimentary concept of moisture.” Leonard H. Lesko, “Ancient Egyptian Cosmogonies and Cosmology” in Byron E. Schafer, ed., *Religion in Ancient Egypt. Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991) 92; Stephen Quirke, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (London: British Museum Press, 1992) 25-28, 48. Assmann at least shows a degree of hesitation with regard to Tefnut, giving “Luff” (‘air’) for Shu and “Feuchte?” (‘humidity?’) for Tefnut. The German original is quoted here because Lorton’s English version unaccountably translates “Feuchte?” as “fire,” leaving out Assmann’s modest question-mark into the bargain. Assmann, *Theologie und Frömmigkeit*, 145; Assmann, *Search for God*, 119. This is more than an oversimplification of a subtle issue; it is a fundamental misunderstanding that has long taken root in the Egyptological literature and now seems to have a life of its own that is quite independent of a critical examination of the primary source texts upon which it is ostensibly based. The mischief is due in part to an overly selective reading of the primary sources, together with a persistent misunderstanding of the word-play in those few texts. Beginning with the Pyramid Texts (PT 600, pyr. 1652c; Sethe, *Pyramidtexte*, vol. 2, 373) there occurs, addressed to the creator:  *jšš.n=k m šw; tfn=k m tfnt*, “You sneezed out Shu; you spat out Tefnut.” A third-person version of this text, in which the deceased is identified with the creator, next occurs in the Coffin Texts (CT 77 = de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 2, 18, e), and the word-play *jšš-šw* and *tfn-tfnt* continues to be used in a similar way many centuries later (e.g., the *Book of Knowing the Transformations of Re and the Overthrowing of Apophis*; Faulkner, *Bremner-Rhind*, 59-60). The verb *jšš* is apparently onomatopoeia for the act of sneezing, and the same is likely true

with regard to *tfn* and spitting. Connecting the meanings “air” and “moisture” with these words would require an overly nice distinction between the relative moisture content of the efflux of a sneeze and that of spittle and then the imputation of such a distinction to the minds of ancient Egyptian cosmogonists. The question that should be asked regarding this is: what aspects or implications of the meanings of these verbs are really relevant in this cosmological context? It is clear from a close reading of the pertinent texts that it is not the relative moisture content of spit or sneezes that is at issue here but the image of the sudden expulsion of something from a body; in the typical Egyptian manner of a theology based partly on the possibilities of word-play, homely concrete images drawn from a relevant direct human experience were chosen to express this, with the additional requirement that the chosen verbs should have an appropriate phonic resonance with the names of Shu and Tefnut. These verbs were certainly not the etymological origin of the names, being chosen to suit the names, not the other way around, and the relative dryness or wetness of sneezing and spitting has nothing to do with it. That this is so is shown by the context in which PT 600 is found. It occurs on the west wall of the main passageway leading to the antechamber in the pyramid of Merenre; on the east wall there appears an earlier (first appearing in the pyramid of Pepi I) related cosmological text (PT 527 = Sethe, *Pyramidtexte*, vol. 2, 203, n-d; for the relative positions of these texts see op. cit., vol. 3, 139) in which Shu and Tefnut emerge from the creator through an onanistic act (b-d):



*wd.n=f ḥnn=f m ḥf<sup>c</sup>=f*  
*jr=f ndmmyt m=f*  
*ms(w) s3tj snnwt, šw ḥn<sup>c</sup> tfnwt*  
 He placed his phallus in his grasp,  
 that he might make orgasm with it, (and)  
 the two siblings, Shu and Tefnut, were born.

The moisture content of the creator’s ejaculate is clearly irrelevant here; what *is* relevant is, once again, the idea of something emerging suddenly from a body, expressed by means of yet another concrete image drawn from human experience, in this case connected in nature with the creative production of life. With regard to PT 600 and PT 527 appearing opposite one another in the very same passageway, are we to suppose (as is too often repeated) that Egyptian theologians were in the habit of illogically compiling disparate, contradictory versions of the same thing? On the contrary, as yet another example of the inclusive and/or logic typical of Egyptian theological formulations, those who authored and edited these texts are attempting to express and refine an abstract idea by means of a series of complementary concrete images. That the images of PT 600 and PT 527 could be considered together is confirmed by the very same images being presented intimately together centuries later in the aforementioned “book” preserved in pBremner-Rhind (Faulkner, *Bremner-Rhind*, 60, 11-13):



*d3y.n=j m drt=j*  
*ḥr.n=j m r3=j ds=j*

interaction of these two then produce the subsequent stages in the cosmogonic sequence, this continuation of creation being here indicated only by the wavy rays emerging from the mouths of the two smaller mummiform figures and then flowing downward to the horizontal register line at the bottom of the scene. There these rays disappear from view, with the further stages of the cosmogonic unfoldment to be understood by the viewer. It may be observed, in passing, that the closest iconographic parallel to these wavy rays are the numerous rays transmitted between various otherworldly beings in the *Book of the Solar-Osirian Unity* on the exterior right panel of the second golden shrine of Tutankhamun.<sup>135</sup> However, unlike the rays on the Tutankhamun shrine, the rays of the lost tableau scene are represented as undulating, suggesting a “watery” nature appropriate to their ultimate source, Nun, the primeval “waters.”


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*jšš.nꜥj m šw*  
*tfn.nꜥj m tfnwt*  
 I made copulation in my fist (and)  
 I let fall from my mouth myself;  
 I sneezed Shu (and)  
 I spat Tefnut.

What is being expressed here is that, at the moment of creation, there was the sudden expulsion of something of the creator’s very substance. Quite reasonably understanding the human procreative act to be a microcosmic analogue to the primeval macrocosmic process, the priestly author intends the onanistic image to convey that this first burst of creative emanation is accompanied by an experience of divine orgasmic bliss on the part of the creator, whereas the imagery of Shu and Tefnut emerging from the mouth of the creator is undoubtedly intended to suggest a connection with the divine power of creative utterance (*ḥw*). That Shu has an essential meaning of something like “air” has, indeed, a strong linguistic basis from numerous sources, but it should certainly not be thought that Shu is identical with “air” in the modern sense of the breathable planetary atmosphere composed of various gasses, nor even in the pre-scientific sense of the gaseous element of the ancient “four elements” theory. At the time of creation, Shu is the expanding *élan* of life-giving bright air that pushes back the surrounding waters of chaos and within which the ordered world and living beings take form. Tefnut should be understood as the pre-creational, pre-cosmic, cosmogonic form of Maat, the principle of pattern and order that, interacting with the radiating surge of vivific light and air known as Shu, acts as a catalyst for the transformation of that divine energy, thus producing the world, the gods, humanity, and nature. It is only after creation is in place that Tefnut/Maat can be understood as being “order” (on the cosmic level), “justice” (on the human social level), or “truth” (on the individual human level). For the identity of Tefnut and Maat based on a critical analysis of the relevant primary source texts, see Bickel, *La cosmogonie*, 168-176.


<sup>135</sup> Piankoff, *Shrines*, fig. 42.

Standing behind the large mummiform figure representing Nun are the aforementioned pair of smaller mummiform figures that seem to have been already damaged to some extent by the time Champollion set out to copy them, prompting restorations that now appear unlikely. By reconstructing these images instead on the basis of the previously discussed clear parallels in the tomb of Ramesses VI (figure 42), the solar disk on the figure directly behind Nun would not be surmounted by a meaningless, fanciful vessel-like shape, but by a small egg-like oval made up of concentric rings, from which the head of a scarab emerges from the top and a pair of praising arms emerges from the rear, facing back toward the second mummiform image. As previously argued, this second mummiform image must also have been damaged to an extent when Champollion made his hand-copy, and was the subject of attempted restoration most likely based on the closest similar parallel, in this case the mummy to the immediate left. This would account for the second mummy also having a solar disk on its head when, on the basis of the well-preserved parallel in the tomb of Ramesses VI, there should not be a solar disk but a standing goddess on its head, her arms outstretched in a reciprocal gesture of praise toward the pair of arms emerging from the egg-like oval above the solar disk on the head of the first mummy. Accepting this reconstruction, and with reference to both the color and texts of the Ramesses VI parallel, a clear interpretation of these images now suggests itself. The body of the first mummy would have been red in color (following the Ramesses VI parallel), the usual solar color. On its head is a solar disk, also red, above which a scarab begins to emerge from its “egg.” This mummiform image, therefore, represents the process of solar renewal and rebirth at dawn. This is supported by the accompanying inscriptions in the Ramesses VI parallel. A label below the

solar disk reads  *mswtj* ‘The-One-of-Birth’, while the line accompanying the mummy itself explains:<sup>136</sup>

  
*ntr pn m shrw pn wts=f mswtj*

This god is like this: he lifts up The-One-of-Birth

The three smaller disks apparently floating in space between the mummies in the Ramesses III scene would also have been colored solar red, again on the basis of the Ramesses VI parallel. Indeed, they are three small solar disks, a graphic reference to the conventional phases of the daily solar journey through the upper sky, the sun ascendant, at zenith, and descendant. Atop the head of the second mummy, the outstretched arms of Nut (once again restored from the Ramesses VI version) receive the setting sun into the nocturnal realm, in a manner quite like the image in the uppermost part of the final tableau of the *Book of Gates* (figure 33), in which a little figure identified as Nut, standing on the head of a mummiform figure identified as Osiris, receives the setting sun in her outstretched arms in order to guide him into the *Duat* which, it is said, Osiris “encircles.” Judging from the Ramesses VI parallel, this second mummy would have been painted yellow, understood as gold, an alternative solar color associated with the transfigured dead, as witnessed in the use of gold on the features of mummy masks, especially in the later periods. The caption to the Ramesses VI parallel confirms this connection with the Underworld, the mummy being labeled  *nnwtj* ‘The-One-of-the-Lower-Heaven’.

<sup>136</sup> Piankoff, *La création*, 20; Piankoff, *Ramesses VI*, pl. 14.

The entire scene at the bottom of the lost tableau of Ramesses III may now be appreciated as a coherent whole. Both graphically and conceptually, its nearly symmetrical arrangement is dominated by the central and tallest mummiform image representing Nun, the primeval abyss from which creation emerges and, by implication (in priestly minds educated to this tradition), into which it dissolves at the end of time (as in BD 175), though perhaps only to emerge once again through a process analogous to the renewal of the sun, the afterlife expectations of the deceased, and the awakening of the sleeper at dawn. The images to the left of this central figure represent the primary and most numinous event at the start of the cosmogonic process, while the images to the right portray the most salient features of the post-cosmogonic created order. Taken as a whole, the complete scene is a concise and elegant summary of the fundamental realities against the contextual background of which the ouroboroid of the lost tableau finds its meaning.

\*                    \*                    \*                    \*                    \*                    \*

Another protective ouroboroid is found associated with the *msktt*-barque occurring in the nocturnal divisions of the comparatively rare *Book of Night*,<sup>137</sup> (figure 45). The night sun, represented in the ram-headed form familiar from the *Book of Amduat* and *Book of Gates* (and labeled ☉ Q , to be read with honorific transposition as *jwḥ rꜥ* ‘flesh of Re’), appears enshrined amidst accompanied by the goddess Maat and a vertically rising protective serpent. Two gods, no doubt to be understood as Sia and Hu, appear fore and aft of the shrine. An enormous Mehen-serpent completely surrounds the central shrine within its convoluted coils. The priestly

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<sup>137</sup> This work is first attested in the Osireion from the reign of Sethos I, also appearing in the tombs of Merenptah, Ramesses IV, and Ramesses VI, which last provides the most complete version; versions and excerpts continue to appear through the Ptolemaic Period. The standard edition is now Gilles Roulin, *Le Livre de la Nuit. Une composition égyptienne de l’au delà*. 2 vols. OBO 147 (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996); the line drawings of the plates of Roulin’s edition, however, leave much to be desired for the discerning iconologist, who will wish to consult the photographs in Piankoff, *Ramesses VI* and Alexandre Piankoff, *Le livre du jour et de la nuit*. BdE 13 (Cairo: Imprimerie de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1942).

designers have once again exploited the nature of the two-dimensional surface to represent the idea of protective encapsulation from all sides, and evidently felt that this feature was adequately indicated without the necessity of having the serpent's tail actually in contact with its mouth. The presence of Sia and Hu, along with the serpent surrounding Re, suggests that the nightly renewal of the sun is a process having analogies to the first moments of creation, recalling the conceptual image of Atum at the center of his serpent coils, together with his powers of divine ideation and creative utterance.<sup>138</sup>

Very similar images of such a protective and encapsulating Mehen-serpent occur on the ceilings of corridor F in the tomb of Ramesses VI and corridor C of Ramesses IX, in two unusual tableaux containing imagery most closely related to the *Book of Day* and *Book of Night*. Just above the entrance to corridor F, the Ramesses VI ceiling tableau<sup>139</sup> has an apparently unique representation of the *msktt*-barque (figure 46) partly depicted as seen from above, with the places of the gods (presumably Sia and Hu) standing fore and aft of the central shrine being indicated merely by the presence of their feet. The central shrine itself and the divine figure within it are represented *en face*. Completely surrounding the shrine is a protective Mehen-serpent very like that seen in the *Book of Night*. Near the center of the entire tableau, isolated by itself, is another large representation of the serpent (figure 47a).<sup>140</sup> A similar large, isolated image occurs near the center of the Ramesses IX ceiling tableau (figure 47b)<sup>141</sup> but is shown

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<sup>138</sup> As in CT Spell 321, d-o, see Chapter 1, notes 149-50.

<sup>139</sup> Piankoff, *Ramesses VI*, pl. 143; Alexandre Piankoff and Charles Maystre, "Deux plafonds dans les tombes royales," *BIFAO* 38 (1939) pl. 6.; Marcus Müller-Roth, *Das Buch vom Tage*, OBO 236 (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008) 42, fig. 8.

<sup>140</sup> Piankoff, *Ramesses VI*, pl.143; Piankoff and Maystre, "Deux plafonds," pl. 5, 1.

<sup>141</sup> Piankoff and Maystre, "Deux plafonds," pl. 5, 2.



encapsulating the king's name in a manner somewhat reminiscent of the central ouroboroid of the lost tableau of Ramesses III.

Protective Mehen serpents also appear around the perimeters of a cluster of red granite royal sarcophagus lids spanning a period of about fifty years from the time of Merenptah to that of prince Amenherkhepshef, and were no doubt the products of the same royal workshop. Merenptah's outermost sarcophagus<sup>142</sup> was, when intact, an enormous rectangular box over four meters long and two meters high. Its slightly vaulted lid is embellished with horizontal bands of text appearing over a scene of the deceased, mummified king being received by Neith, the ram-headed nocturnal form of Re, and other deities; this vaulted area is entirely enclosed by an ouroboros (figure 48). Merenptah's second sarcophagus,<sup>143</sup> by contrast, is shaped like a *šnw*, a cartouche or elongated *šn*-ring, the somewhat convex interior of which is dominated by a sculpted image of the mummiform king. An ouroboros appears just within the perimeter of the *šnw*, its tail meeting its mouth just behind the crown of the mummiform image's head (figure 49). This is again illustrative of the aforementioned close conceptual association of the *šn*-ring and a ring of serpent-body (as in the lost tableau of Ramesses III), both symbolizing a protective perimeter. This association is also seen on the granite sarcophagus of Ramesses III, now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.<sup>144</sup> In this case, however, the lid does not have the *šnw* cut

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<sup>142</sup> The outer sarcophagus lid remains in chamber H of Merenptah's tomb in the Valley of the Kings (KV 8), whence it had been removed from the sarcophagus chamber in antiquity. Hourig Sourouzian, *Les Monuments du roi Merenptah*, SDAIK 22 (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1989) 180-81, pl. 36, a; Jan Assmann, "Die Inschrift auf dem äußeren Sarkophagdeckel des Merenptah," MDAIK 28 (1972) v. 1, fig. 1.

<sup>143</sup> This lid remains in the sarcophagus chamber of Merenptah's tomb. Sourouzian, *Monuments Merenptah*, pl. 36, b; see also Chapter 1, note 105.

<sup>144</sup> Accession number E.1.1823. Eleni Vassilika, *Egyptian Art*, Fitzwilliam Museum Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 85-86.

along its perimeter, but nonetheless has the silhouette of an enormous cartouche (figure 50). Beyond the edge of this cartouche shape, the sides of the lid drop off perpendicularly and are embellished on either side with bands of text bearing the names and titles of the king. Between these bands and the perimeter of the lid intended to articulate with the trough which the lid once covered, there is seen the undulating body of a Mehen-serpent extending entirely around the sides of the lid, its head and tail meeting—and overlapping—at the head-end of the lid (figure 51).<sup>145</sup> Since it is clear that the serpents and cartouche shapes of both the Merenptah and Ramesses III lids express the same conceptual meaning, the fact that the tail is in the serpent's mouth in the Merenptah example but is overlapping the serpent's head in the Ramesses III example once again underscores the point that there is no reason to single out the ouroboros for special attention in such contexts, and that it must be regarded as one variant in a spectrum of graphic possibilities expressing the same basic meaning, that of a protective enclosure or perimeter.<sup>146</sup> This point is further illustrated by the arrangement of the serpent on the

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<sup>145</sup> Like the lid of the second sarcophagus of Merenptah, this lid remains inadequately published. Neither the notices of Samuel Birch or E.A. Wallis Budge deal adequately with the iconography (S. Birch, *Remarks upon the Cover of the Granite Sarcophagus of Rameses III in the Fitzwilliam Museum* [Cambridge, 1876]; E.A. Wallis Budge, *A Catalogue of the Egyptian Collection in the Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge* [Cambridge, 1893] 1-4) and neither mentions the serpent around the perimeter, even though it had been previously reported in W.R. Cooper, *The Serpent Myths of Ancient Egypt* (London, 1873) 62-63. Assmann is apparently unaware that there is a serpent around the Ramesses III lid, *Sarkophagdeckel des Merenptah*, 49. Figure 51 is based on a rather oblique photograph (unpublished and really not suitable for adequate publication), taken to document the lid's relatively recent conservation and remounting. The lid is now mounted vertically, a choice that no doubt creates an impressive display for museum visitors, but is unfortunate in that it does not reproduce the horizontal orientation of the lid in its original setting and, moreover, now makes study and documentation of the head and tail of the ouroboroid quite impossible as the head-end of the sarcophagus is too near the ceiling for either observation or photography. The Fitzwilliam's most recent publication of the lid only shows a frontal view of this new display mounting, Vassilika, *Egyptian Art*, 87.

<sup>146</sup> Taken in their full conceptual and iconographic context, Assmann's view that the ouroboroi on the sarcophagus lids of Merenptah should be understood as "a blessing-symbol (*Heilssymbol*) of resurrection into the eternity of cosmic life" does not seem supportable; Assmann, *Zeit und Ewigkeit*, 33.

sarcophagus lid of prince Amenherkhepshef, a probable son of Ramesses III (figure 52).<sup>147</sup> Somewhat like the examples in the Underworld Books in which the idea of protective enclosure is symbolized by serpents that do not completely surround that which they protect, the serpent nearly surrounds the mummiform image of the prince, but the head and tail of the serpent do not actually meet. There can be no doubt, however, that the meaning expressed by this serpent is basically the same as the serpents in the Ramesses III and Merenptah examples. The choices that were made in those instances to complete the serpent ring, either by overlapping the head and tail or by actually placing the tail to the mouth, were apparently determined by the cartouche symbolism of those sarcophagi. Overlapping the head and tail evidently seemed to be an adequate indication of closure around the sides of the cartouche-shaped Ramesses III lid, whereas the close proximity of the Merenptah serpent to the more defined *šnw* of that lid apparently made placing the tail directly to the mouth seem more suitable; this was then carried over to the outer sarcophagus of Merenptah for the sake of stylistic consistency. The symbolism of the cartouche being inappropriate for the sarcophagus of a mere prince, there was no need to complete the serpent ring around the perimeter of the Amenherkhepshef lid in order for the partially encircling Mehen-serpent to express adequately the intended symbolism of protective enclosure.

Protective Mehen-serpents also appear as ouroboroids in a composition reckoned by Neville as Spell 168 of the *Book of the Dead*,<sup>148</sup> but which was subsequently recognized by

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<sup>147</sup> Hartwig Altenmüller, "Dritter Vorbericht über die Arbeiten des Archäologischen Instituts der Universität Hamburg am Grab des Bay (KV 13) im Tal der Könige von Theben," *SAK* 21 (1994) 4-7, fig. 1, pl. 1.

<sup>148</sup> Naville, *Todtenbuch, Einleitung*, 185-87; vol. 1, pls. 187-189.

Piankoff as an independent composition.<sup>149</sup> First attested in the reign of Amenophis II, the work is a guide through twelve divisions of the *Duat*, each referred to as a *qrrt* ‘cavern’. This led Piankoff to designate it as the *Quererefs*, though Hornung refers to it as the *Spell of the Twelve Caves*,<sup>150</sup> thus avoiding possible confusion with the *Book of Caverns*. Each division briefly describes and graphically portrays a number of Underworld beings for which the deceased makes offerings. In the twelfth *qrrt*, nine groups of Underworld “gods” are presented; in the third and eighth positions in this sequence, there appear representations of recumbent male figures enveloped by Mehen's coils (figure 53). As with all other vignettes throughout the composition, numerals accompanying the images indicate the number of “gods” intended, in this case fourteen. In the graphically expanded version in the south chamber of the Osireion, however, the numerals are omitted and the images are repeated to the requisite number<sup>151</sup> (figure 54). In the earliest attested version of the *Spell of the Twelve Caves*, the texts accompanying the vignettes are short, with fuller texts found in later versions; the longer texts accompanying the two Mehen vignettes of the twelfth *qrrt* read as follows:<sup>152</sup>

(first vignette)



*nṯr jmjw mḥn*

<sup>149</sup> Piankoff, *Wandering of the Soul*, 40-113, pls. 10-42.

<sup>150</sup> Hornung, *Books of Afterlife*, 54-55.

<sup>151</sup> Margaret A. Murray, *The Osireion at Abydos*, ERA 9 (London, 1904) pl. 2.

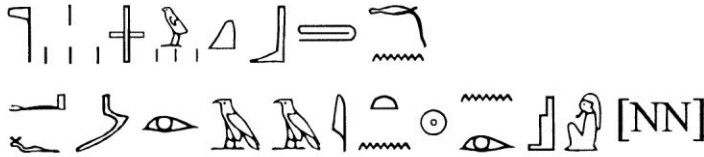
<sup>152</sup> Piankoff, *Wanderings of the Soul*, pls. 31-32.

*dj=sn wn wsjr [NN] m bw nb mrr k3=f wnn=f m sw*<sup>153</sup>

The gods who are in Mehen.

They will grant that Osiris (NN) may be in every place that his *ka* desires him to be in.

(second vignette)



*ntrw jmjw q(3)b mhn*










*dj=f m33 jtn n wsjr [NN]*

The gods who are in the midst of Mehen;

He will grant the sight of the solar disk to Osiris NN.

Though the significance of the number fourteen in this context is not immediately obvious,<sup>154</sup> there can be little doubt that the figures within the enveloping coils of Mehen are intended to be a cohort of blessed dead represented at the crucial moment of their revivification. The recumbent postures and splayed legs<sup>155</sup> are strikingly reminiscent of the regenerating “flesh” of Re within the coils of the great serpent Many-of-Faces at the end of the sixth hour of the *Book of Amduat* (figure 7). It may be supposed, on the basis of the accompanying texts, that the vignette appears twice in this cavern because in the first instance it is the benefit that the “gods” within Mehen

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<sup>153</sup> The hieroglyph  was intended to come below the  in the vertical column, but the scribe had run out of room. He then squeezed in the  sign to the right of the , which might make it seem that the  sign comes before the ; however, the logic behind this scribal choice is that, because the order of the columns is retrograde, the  sign appearing to the right of the  is understood as coming after the , as if it were a new retrograde column.

<sup>154</sup> Multiples of seven are common in Egyptian number symbolism; recall also the late tradition that Osiris was cut into fourteen parts, preserved at Dendera and elsewhere. Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, 358 a, 368 A = Babbit, *Plutarch's Moralia*, 44-45, 102-03; J. Gwyn Griffiths, ed. and trans., *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride* ([Cardiff:] University of Wales Press, 1970) 17-18, 338. See also Rochholz, *Schöpfung*, passim; Wilkinson, *Symbol & Magic*, 135-36.

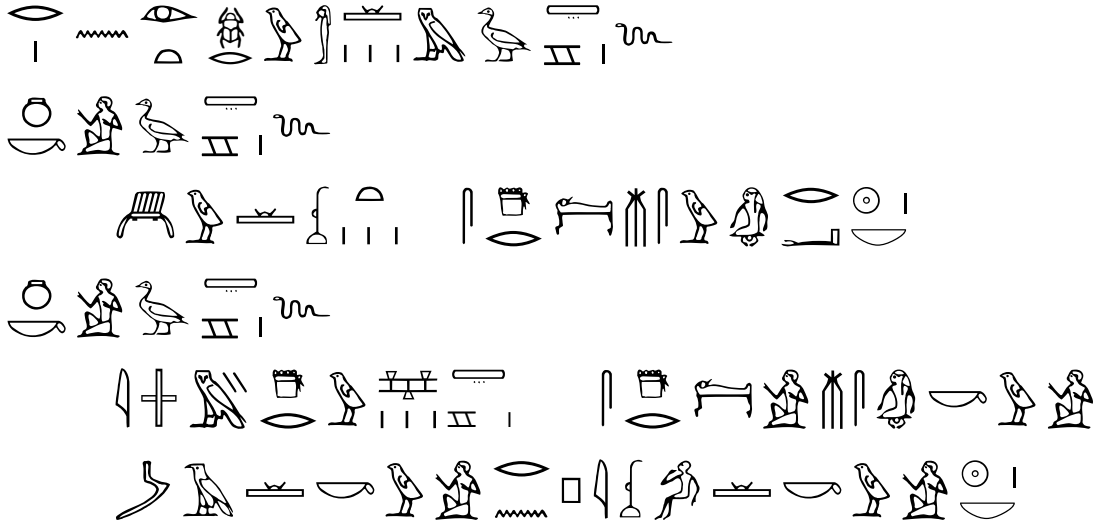
<sup>155</sup> See Chapter 1. n. 69.

will grant the deceased that is being emphasized, whereas in the second instance the emphasis is on the blessing that will be granted the deceased by Mehen himself. Perhaps the high blessing of the deceased seeing the solar disk (quite like the epiphany of the “face of the disk” in the eleventh hour of the *Book of Gates*), brought about by the agency of Mehen, is to be understood in some sense as not merely a response to the offering rites the deceased has made for the “gods” of this cavern, but potentially as a theurgic result in which the deceased himself becomes as one of the “gods” within Mehen, regenerated and reborn into a new divine life within the retinue of Re. It is also interesting that, while the image of Mehen is repeated around each recumbent “god” (explicitly in the fuller Osireion version), Mehen is represented as only singular in the accompanying texts, a single protective force manifested to each of the dead individually. In any event, these images of recumbent “gods” within the coils of Mehen are yet another paradigmatic variant of the basic deep syntagma of a protective force surrounding a regenerating or regenerated being, here functioning on the purely funerary rather than the solar/funereal level.

An important and much overlooked reference to the image of the ouroboros occurs in Spell 87 of the *Book of the Dead*, one of the so-called Transformation Texts. The genre appears already in the corpus of Coffin Texts, but BD 87 is first attested only in the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Like other texts of the genre, BD 87 has something of the character of a spiritual exercise in which the person reciting the text, whether living or dead, is identified with divine powers.<sup>156</sup> The text is as follows:<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> The first scholar to really understand the true character of the Transformation Texts was the enigmatic Walter Federn, “The ‘Transformations’ in the Coffin Texts. A New Approach,” *JNES* 19 (1960), 241-257. On the “performativity” of the Transformation Texts see Frédéric Servajean, *Le formules des transformations du Livre des Morts, à la lumière d’une théorie de la performativité*, BdE 137 (Cairo: IFAO, 2003); for examinations of the more general issue of “funerary” texts being used by the living, and the question of ritual identity with divine powers, see Terence DuQuesne, “‘Effective in Heaven and on Earth’, Interpreting Egyptian religious practice for both worlds,” and Alexandra von Lieven, “Mysterien



*r3 n jrjt hprw m s3-t3*  
*jnk s3-t3*  
*3w rnpwt sdr msw r3 nb*  
*jnk s3-t3*  
*jmj drw t3 sdrzj msj.kw*  
*m3wj.kw rnpj.kw r3 nb*

Spell for making transformation into the serpent:

I am the serpent,

long of years, who rests (and) who is born every day.

I am the serpent,

who is at the boundary of the earth; I rest (and) I am born,

I am renewed, I am made young every day.

This brief spell, made up of only two lines of unequal length (not counting the title), very likely had poetical beauties now in large part lost to us; this is suggested by several features such as both lines beginning and ending with the same words, consonance (*drw/sdrzj*), the phonic resonance (not quite amounting to word-play) of words derived from the same root (*rnpwt/rnpj.kw*), and alternation of forms from the same verb (*msw/msj.kw*). The spell is,

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des Kosmos: Kosmographie und Priesterwissenschaft,” in: *Ägyptische Mysterien?*, Jan Assmann and Martin Bommas, eds., (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2002) 37-46, 47-58.

<sup>157</sup> Günther Lapp, *The Papyrus of Nu*, Catalogue of the Books of the Dead in the British Museum 1 (London: British Museum Press, 1997) pl. 31. The name and titles of the deceased have been left out present purposes.

moreover, a particularly elegant example of theological concision, its ideas folded together with characteristic inclusive disjunction. The *s3-t3* is here the same as Mehen understood on the cosmic/solar level. As in the *Book of Mehen* (CT 758-760) examined at the end of the previous chapter, the serpent is expressive of the solar circuit, an aspect or manifestation of Re that is neither fully distinct from Re nor fully identical with him. It is in this sense that the serpent “rests” every day and is then born every day. It is difficult to find a satisfactory English equivalent for *sdr* that adequately conveys the appropriate nuance and conceptual associations intended here. Unlike “rest” or even “sleep,” *sdr* really means something that occurs only at night; its determinative (which alone can write the entire word) shows a mummy lying on a leonine bier, the lions symbolic of the two horizons and the mummy a symbolic analogue of the sun that both sets in the western horizon and rises, reborn, in the eastern horizon. The word *sdr* is therefore more than rest or sleep and yet it is not merely a euphemism for death. It is the act that, completed at night (as indicated by the perfective *sdrzj*), has the natural result of one being born, being renewed, and being made young again (the statives *msj.kw*, *m3wj.kw*, and *rnpi.kw*, as the results of the completed action *sdrzj*). It is the perpetual repetition of this cycle that makes the serpent *3w rnpwt* ‘long of years’, just as the image in the *Book of Mehen* is said to be *nh rnpwt hhw* ‘living myriads of years’.<sup>158</sup> The serpent is the solar circuit, not fully distinct from the sun itself, and yet is simultaneously also the very ground of that circuit, the protective barrier at the periphery of ordered reality. As seen in previous examples, the symbol of the serpent as protective barrier evolved in the context of writing and drawing on a two-dimensional surface, upon which a two-dimensional ring could be understood as representing a

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<sup>158</sup> See Chapter 2, note 111.



three-dimensional encapsulation. This is why the serpent is also described as one *jmj drw t3* ‘who is at the boundary of the earth’, that is, who surrounds the earth where this encapsulating limit is in contact with the circumference of the terrestrial plane. It is thus that the serpent of BD 87 expresses the parameters of the complete cosmos, in both its temporal and spatial dimensions.<sup>159</sup> As with all the Transformation Texts, the recitation of BD 87 is essentially an act of theurgy, the individual being identified in this instance with an aspect of divine power that both insures the integrity of the cosmos against the threat of the surrounding abyssal chaos and perpetuates the life-giving rhythm of the solar cycle within it.

A rare example of the ouroboros icon being used to represent a force protecting living persons is seen on a nude female figurine formerly in the British Museum but apparently somehow lost in the disorders attendant to the relocation and storage of the collections during the two world wars.<sup>160</sup> The object was seen, along with two similar objects, by W.R. Cooper during or somewhat prior to 1873, when Cooper published a brief description of the object accompanied by a simple ink sketch of its figural side (figure 55).<sup>161</sup> The genre of object to which it belongs is

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<sup>159</sup> BD 87 vignettes, when present, do not appear to express either the spatial or temporal dimensions, however, but only show images of a generic serpent in various conventional configurations, though the Papyrus of Nu lets the long lower body of the snake drop playfully down an empty vertical column between two columns of text; Lapp, *The Papyrus of Nu*, pl. 31. A rare exception is in the Papyrus of Ani, in which the scribal artist has created a monogram with the snake body and the determinative  $\Delta$ , suggestive of motion and perhaps, therefore, the temporal dimension. [Budge], *Papyrus of Ani*, pl. 27.

<sup>160</sup> Repeated inquiries show this object not to be in the current British Museum database, though it is thought that a thorough search through the small object stores might still possibly turn it up; it is apparently not the only object to have been mislaid under similar circumstances. Personal communication, Richard Parkinson, Assistant Keeper, Ancient Egyptian pharaonic culture, Department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan.

<sup>161</sup> Cooper, *Serpent Myths*, 63, fig. 107. Though Cooper's publication of this object is inadequate by present standards, it should be judged by the standards of his day. Cooper was a minor though perfectly respectable figure of mid-nineteenth century Egyptology, having been introduced to the field by Bonomi, later collaborating on projects with Birch, Sayce, Renouf, Chabas, and other leading authorities of the

well-known and has been the subject of typological studies.<sup>162</sup> Dating from the Ramesside Period, these figurines represent a woman lying on a slab-like bed with an infant at her side. They are relatively small (generally varying from 10 cm to 20 cm in length), are typically made of fired Nile silt that had been pressed into an open mold,<sup>163</sup> sometimes having traces of polychromy. Examples are known in which serpents are indicated along the sides of the recumbent woman in red and/or black pigment,<sup>164</sup> bearing comparison to the protective serpents that appear directly along the sides of the royal effigies on the approximately contemporary sarcophagi of Siptah, Sethnakhte, Ramesses III, and Ramesses IV (all similar to those seen in figure 50). It is only on the Cooper example, however, that there is an expression of the same idea of a protective perimeter as that seen on the sarcophagi of Merenptah and Ramesses III, but functioning at the level of the living individual rather than the royal dead. Found primarily in domestic contexts rather than tombs or temples, this and related objects were very likely “connected with the continuity of the family living in the house, through successful conception and birth” and “were concerned not only with protection during or immediately after childbirth, but with all aspects of procreation.”<sup>165</sup> That apotropaic rites were involved in the use of such

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day; Warren R. Dawson and Eric Uphill, *Who was Who in Egyptology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., rev., M.L. Bierbrier (London: The Egypt Exploration Society, 1995) 106.

<sup>162</sup> Geraldine Pinch, *Votive Offerings to Hathor*, (Oxford: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1993) 209; Elizabeth A. Waraksa, *Female Figurines from the Mut Precinct. Context and Ritual Function*. OBO 240 (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009) 25-30.

<sup>163</sup> Cooper will be forgiven for describing what he saw being made of “terra-cotta...very roughly executed” (*Serpent Myths*, 63). A very fine example in painted limestone (and without a serpent or serpents) in the British Museum (BM EA 2371) is somewhat larger than most at about 25 cm; Geraldine Pinch, “Childbirth and Female Figurines at Deir el-Medina and el-‘Amarna,” *Or* 52 (1983) 407-09, pl.6.

<sup>164</sup> There are simple fired silt examples in the British Museum much like those seen by Cooper, for example, BM EA 20982, which has protective serpents painted along the sides of the woman and child; Pinch, *Votive Offerings*, 209, pl. 46 B). See also Pinch, “Female Figurines,” 406.

<sup>165</sup> Pinch, “Female Figurines,” 414.

objects seems probable in the light of certain magico-medical texts that make regular use of clay objects.<sup>166</sup> The use of the ouroboros around the periphery of the Cooper example also foreshadows the regular use of the ouroboros around the periphery of amulets intended for the living, especially common during the Roman Period.<sup>167</sup>

The earliest attested amulet intended for the living that makes use of the image of an ouroboros, known as P. Deir el-Medina 44, has been dated on paleographic grounds to the late 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.<sup>168</sup> It is one of a general type found in great numbers at Deir el-Medina, consisting of a small sheet of inscribed papyrus tightly folded into a small oblong packet, which was then further folded and tied onto knotted cords so that it could be worn around the neck as a pendant. The content of P. Deir el-Medina 44 has been described as a kind of “counter-spell” prepared to protect a specific individual, and begins with a version of the well-known “Book of Protecting the Body,” mentioning the goddess Taweret in connection with good health and protection. The accompanying vignette (figure 56) shows Taweret, in her usual guise as a standing pregnant hippopotamus (here with a small image of Amun appearing in the region of her belly<sup>169</sup>), together with a standing royal figure wearing the white crown, his arms raised in the act of muzzling an upended, vertically oriented crocodile. This group is plausibly identified with the constellations of Taweret and Orion. Above this group appears the signs 𓆎𓆎, likely an



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<sup>166</sup> Waraksa, *Female Figurines*, 165.


<sup>167</sup> Discussed toward the end of Chapter 4.

<sup>168</sup> Publication with translation and commentary: Yvan Koenig, “Le contre-empoisonnement de Ta-i-di-Imen. Pap. Deir el-Medina 44,” *BFAO* 99 (1999) 259-281.

<sup>169</sup> This and other features of the hastily sketched figures of the vignette are made clear by comparison with the close parallel image found in magical papyrus Louvre E 32 308, *ibid.*, 279.

abbreviation for   $h^c w$  ‘body members/body’, while below appears a prominent hieroglyph that may be an abbreviation for   $jmnt$ , that which is ‘secret’ or ‘hidden.’<sup>170</sup> Surrounding the whole is a large ouroboros (more or less, though in actual execution the tail does not quite touch the mouth). It should now be evident from much that has been previously examined that this is yet another example of the ouroboros functioning as an encapsulating and protective perimeter,<sup>171</sup> perhaps on more than one level; with regard to the enclosed divine images as constellations the ouroboros may be understood as the protective limit of the cosmos, while in relation to the inscription  $\vartheta \vartheta \vartheta$  it can be taken as symbolically—or rather magically—surrounding and protecting the ‘body members/body’. Indeed, it is in this latter function that the image was efficacious for the individual for whom the amulet was

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<sup>170</sup> Koenig appears to be mystified by this sign, which he calls by the makeshift “tadpole-fellow” (“*bonhomme-têtard*”) and wishes somehow to connect it iconologically with the *sz*-sign () frequently associated with Taweret, often appearing before her with a forepaw resting on its summit. The reader, however, has already encountered this hieroglyph in the discussion of the “lost tableau” of Ramesses III, where it occurred as the determinative of *jmn(y)t* in Piankoff’s *Texte II* in the central tableau from the last section of the *Book of the Creation of the Solar Disk*. Compare the example from that text with the example from the vignette in P. Deir el-Medina 44 (figures 75a, 57b). This rare sign likewise appears as a determinative of the adjective *jmn* ‘hidden’, ‘secret’ in a unique version of the *Litany of Re* in the tomb of Ramesses IX (figure 57c), where its peculiar form is more fully and carefully rendered. That the sign is not better known or understood is no doubt due in part to the unaccountable carelessness attending some of its publication. Even Guilmant’s careful line drawing of the Ramesses IX example lacks color useful for ascertaining internal detail; far worse are the inexplicable versions of the very same example given in the handcopies of Andreas Brodbeck (in Hornung’s text edition) and Friedrich Abitz (figures 57d, 57e). Equally hideous is Piankoff’s version of this sign in his transcription of the Ramesses VI text (figure 57f); his baffling disarrangement of the entire word in which the sign appears can be seen by comparison with the original text (figure 57g). Semantically, in the P. Deir el-Medina 44 vignette, the sign may refer to the body being “hidden” within the ouroboros as a protection from malevolent forces, perhaps alluding also to the secret nature of magical protection that insures its efficacy. (Full citations appear with Figure 57.)

<sup>171</sup> Koenig, in offering an interpretation of the ouroboros in this vignette, states that “its fundamental sense is clear,” then dutifully quotes Hornung’s mistaken view that the ouroboros “always represents the outer darkness, that is to say, the non-existent...”; he goes on to correctly observe that the ouroboros “defines a field by erecting a border between the ordered universe and the chaos,” but he entirely misses the primary protective function. Koenig, *op. cit.*, 276.

prepared, a function analogous to that of the protective ouroboros around the image of a recumbent female body in the Cooper example described above, as well as the serpents around the perimeters of the sarcophagi of Merenptah and Ramesses III.

There are a very few New Kingdom examples of serpent images arranged in ways that may be typologically described as ouroboroid but have no conceptual connection with the Mehen-serpent as protective perimeter, being related instead to Apophis. There are possibly two such instances as determinatives of the euphemistic designation *ḏw-ḡd* ‘Evil-of-Character’, used as a substitute for the potentially dangerous name of Apophis in two separate hymns to the rising sun in the tomb of Kheruef (TT 192), which dates from the last years of Amenophis III.<sup>172</sup> The well-preserved determinative in figure 58a, like the entire inscription in which it occurs, is executed in elegant raised relief with fine surface detail. The possible second occurrence of this determinative (figure 58b) is in an inscription executed entirely in sunk relief silhouettes without interior detail; the inscription is badly damaged, however, and the determinative in question has been restored by the Epigraphic Survey almost entirely on the basis of the well-preserved example in raised relief. In any case, the serpent is clearly disambiguated from any possible association with the Mehen-serpent by the presence of knives cutting into the serpent’s body in order to magically neutralize it. Moreover, the ouroboroid arrangement of the serpent seems to be of no particular significance, the serpent appearing to have been so coiled in order to fit better into the hieroglyphic group of which it is a part. This is confirmed by the fact that elsewhere in the tomb when an equivalent determinative was needed for *ḥftj* ‘enemy’, again as a euphemistic

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<sup>172</sup> The Epigraphic Survey, *The Tomb of Kheruef. Theban Tomb 192*. OIP 102 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1980) pls. 7, 76.

avoidance of the name Apophis, the serpent with knives determinative is arranged as a wider, open loop better accommodating it to its place in the hieroglyphic group (figure 58c).<sup>173</sup>

Another New Kingdom instance of an ouroboroid related to Apophis occurs in a variant of one of the vignettes accompanying Spell 17 in an anonymous 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty *Book of the Dead* now in Dublin (figure 59a).<sup>174</sup> The relevant lines of BD 17 relate that the divine Cat, a manifestation of Re, destroyed *hftjw* ‘enemies’ who were the *msw bdšt* ‘children of the Feeble One’, understood as an alternative name for Apophis and one that is apotropaically neutralizing.<sup>175</sup> The vignettes accompanying this text all show a cat killing a large serpent, presumably *bdšt*/Apophis. The identity of this serpent seems confirmed by a brief caption attached to a version of this vignette painted as part of the decorative program of TT 335, the tomb of the sculptor Nakht-tu in Deir el-Medina, in which the vignette has been isolated from its usual BD 17 context, but has been provided with brief captions of its own (figure 59b).<sup>176</sup> The captions read:

(above the cat)



*mjw ʿ3 hprw rʿ*

Great-Cat, the form of Re.

<sup>173</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Kheruef*, pl. 7.

<sup>174</sup> This is P. Dublin 4, at Trinity College; the text and vignette appears in Naville, *Todtenbuch*, vol. 1, *Text und Vignetten*, pl. 30, D a.

<sup>175</sup> Mykola Tarasenko, “Mythological Allusions Connected with Cosmogony in Chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead,” in Burkhard Backes, et al., ed., *Todtenbuch-Forschungen*. SAT 11 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006) 344-48.

<sup>176</sup> M. Bernard Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1924-1925)* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1926), 170, 171 fig. 113.

(above the serpent)



ꜥpp ḥftj n(j) rꜥ

Apophis, the enemy of Re.

The wavy body and rather ouroboroid arrangement of the serpent in the Dublin papyrus vignette is likely intended as a reference to the nature of Apophis as an intrusion of the watery chaos surrounding the world. This variant image is unique amongst many other more conventional examples of this vignette in which the serpent bodies are commonly arranged in one, two, or more large undulating loops as in figures 59c and 59d, a tiny sample of a considerable body of similar material. Like the aforementioned determinatives (ouroboroid or not) in the tomb of Kheruef, all of the Apophis-serpents appearing in the various versions of the BD 17 vignette (ouroboroid or not) are clearly distinguished graphically and conceptually from serpent images representing the protective Mehen-serpent by the presence of knives cutting into their bodies. An occasional ouroboros-like arrangement of an Apophis-serpent is not a meaningful iconographic feature for identifying the serpent as Apophis, but the presence of one or more knives cutting into a serpent's body most certainly is such an identifying feature.

By casting a wide net, the foregoing survey of New Kingdom ouroboros-related imagery avoids the methodological error of wresting from their full contexts those few serpent images that might with varying degrees of justification be regarded as ouroboroi. Our understanding is not improved by singling out such examples for special attention without full consideration of other closely related iconographic analogues, as well as the larger web of conceptual associations that give them all meaning. As has been seen, the ouroboros proper is clearly part of a spectrum of graphically and conceptually related images, including certainly an encircling serpent with its

tail actually in or touching its mouth, but also an encircling serpent with its head and tail merely overlapping, a serpentine enclosure made up of an impenetrable labyrinth of coils with the head and tail not even near one another, a serpent incompletely surrounding the perimeter of a sarcophagus, a serpent seemingly “draped” or arched over a god or shrine, and even a plain, un-serpentine ring, among other possibilities, all serving as paradigmatic substitutions in a common underlying syntagma, the basic pattern of which involves indication of a protective barrier or force preserving the life or integrity of a central image of great numen or preciousness. This being the case, it is difficult to understand why, for example, Assmann would choose to single out the serpents appearing around the perimeter of the lids of Merenptah’s sarcophagi and pronounce them “the ouroboros...a blessing-symbol (*Heilssymbol*) of resurrection into the eternity of cosmic life,”<sup>177</sup> when the larger conceptual context makes it clear that the ouroboros in this case is a Mehen-serpent representing a force protecting the perimeter of the sarcophagi and the mummy of the king within them, a function on the royal funerary level that has clear analogues on the solar level (protecting the night sun) and the cosmic level (insuring the integrity of the perimeter of the cosmos against the threat of the surrounding abyssal chaos). Furthermore, any symbolic meaning expressed by the ouroboroi on the sarcophagi of Merenptah should not be thought of as being attached exclusively to serpents that are proper ouroboroi, with tails in mouths, but as also expressed by ouroboroids found in the same “syntactic slot,” like those on the sarcophagus lids of Ramesses III and prince Amenherkhepshef.

There is also nothing in the New Kingdom material to support Kákosy’s view that the ouroboros “often symbolizes evil in general” and that in a “mythological context it stands for

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<sup>177</sup> Assmann, *Zeit und Ewigkeit*, 33.



Apophis.”<sup>178</sup> The possibly two ouroboroid determinatives in the tomb of Kheruef and the single example of an ouroboroid variant in the BD 17 “Cat of Re” vignette are certainly associated with Apophis, but are definitely not actual ouroboroi and appear in free variation with serpents not remotely ouroboroid. Moreover, as with their non-ouroboroid variants, they are in every case distinctly marked as being Apophis-serpents by the presence of knives cutting into the serpents’ bodies, emphatically disambiguating them from the ouroboroi, ouroboroids, non-ouroboroid serpents associated with notions of periphery, encapsulating protection, etc. Even less does anything in the New Kingdom material provide support for Hornung’s contention that the ouroboros can also represent “the nonexistent,” summarized by him as follows: “(t)he complete circle of the snake’s body illustrates—so far as it is possible to depict it—the nonexistent, which encompassed the world continuously on all sides.”<sup>179</sup> Such claims notwithstanding, the serpent at the periphery of the cosmos is clearly the post-cosmogonic transformation of the serpentine spiral vortex that was one early way of representing the cosmogonic expansion of the cosmos itself as it came into being. The serpent at the boundary of the cosmos is perhaps best understood as a residuum of that serpentine vortex, now insuring the integrity of the cosmic periphery, protecting the life within from the threat of nonexistence from without.

Lastly, there is nothing in the New Kingdom material to suggest that the image of the ouroboros is ever exclusively or even only primarily a symbol of recurrent cyclic time (*nḥḥ*) or eternity (*ḏt*). On the cosmic level the ouroboros can have an association with time, but only because it can be used to delimit the cosmos as a whole, and therefore has both spatial and

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<sup>178</sup> Kákosy, “Ouroboros on Magical Healing Statues,” 123.

<sup>179</sup> Hornung, *Conceptions of God*, 178. No doubt this interpretation commends Professor Hornung to the Jungian community, with whom he was very active for many years through his participation in the Eranos lectures.

temporal dimensions, as does the cosmos itself. As seen in BD 87, this limit is not just the spatial bounds of the terrestrial plane but also the sphere of the upper and lower heavens containing it, upon the inner surface of which is the locus of the solar circuit with its perpetual cycles of days (sunrises and sunsets) and years (solstices and equinoxes). This is the only source of any connection with time, such as there is, in the New Kingdom material, and it is always found integrated with the spatial dimension. To give another pertinent example, the great serpent of hours eleven and twelve of the *Book of Amduat* is associated with both encirclement of the earth in hour eleven (the spatial dimension) and with passage through the hours of the *Duat* in hour twelve (the temporal dimension). Being a “secret” underworldly manifestation of the cosmic serpent, it reflects the integrated spatiotemporal nature of the cosmos on the solar/funereal level but has no exclusive or even primary association with recurrent time or eternity.

## Chapter 4

### The Ouroboros to the End of the Pharaonic Period

Conditions attending the collapse of central authority at the end of the New Kingdom led to the rise of a virtually autonomous theocratic state of Amun in Thebes, and saw the continued development of theological speculation along lines seen in the preceding Ramesside era. Important discoveries in the second half of the nineteenth century, primarily at Deir el-Bahari and the Asasif, have provided a rich source for the study of theological conceptions of this period. Among these are Auguste Mariette's discovery in 1858 of seventy-one coffins of the priests of Montu, buried with their owners in subterranean chambers of the Temple of Hatshepsut,<sup>1</sup> followed in 1881 by Émile Brugsch's excavation of TT 320, the Deir el-Bahari "royal cachette" containing 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty re-interments of New Kingdom kings and royal women buried along with high dignitaries of the priesthood of Amun.<sup>2</sup> Then in 1891, Georges Daressy discovered a tomb cut into the cliffs at Deir el-Bahari, now known as the Bab el-Gasus tomb.<sup>3</sup> A shaft over five hundred feet in length was found stacked to the ceiling with fifty-two single coffins and one hundred and one double coffins containing the mummified remains of priests and priestesses of Amun, many of them the children and grandchildren of the great 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty high priest Menkheperre. At one time, only a few generations before, such dignitaries would all have had their own elaborately decorated rock-cut tombs; increasingly insecure social conditions and

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<sup>1</sup> For bibliography see: Bertha Porter and Rosalind Moss, *Topological Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964) 643-49.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 658-67.



<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 630-42.

reduced economic resources had, however, necessitated the expedient of communal interment. One consequence of this was that the texts and figural representations deemed necessary for a felicitous afterlife, which would have customarily appeared on the walls of the tombs, were now transferred to the more limited space of the inner and outer surfaces of the coffins themselves, often covering the surfaces with an almost promiscuous luxuriance, as if motivated in part by a *horror vacui*. Moreover, there is an evident preference for symbolic representations over texts, and while the themes and motives of these representations are familiar, they are often used in very novel ways, exploiting the extra-linguistic semantic potential of Egyptian graphic symbolism while still working generally within the inherent limits of the canon. Something similar can be seen in many of the seventy funerary papyri recovered from these same tombs. While some of these are fairly conventional adaptations of material from the *Book of the Dead* and the Underworld Books, there are others that depart from the traditional models by emphasizing the figural element and having very little in the way of texts; not a few others, yet again, are absolutely textless, graphically communicating their message of solar and individual regeneration and rebirth by means of symbolic elements drawn from the Underworld Books, *Book of the Dead* vignettes, or both. It is in the symbolic representations appearing on these coffins and papyri that one finds a particular abundance of Egyptian ouroboros and ouroboroid imagery.

The ouroboros image perhaps most reproduced from this corpus is found on one of the two papyri prepared for Herweben, chantress of Amun and granddaughter of high priest Menkheperre (figure 60).<sup>4</sup> In a succession of five scenes, the deceased first makes offerings and prayers before Ptah-Sokar-Osiris and Hathor, lady of the West, then undergoes life-giving

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<sup>4</sup> P. Cairo 133/EMC SR 19325. Piankoff, *Mythological Papyri*, pl. 1; idem, "Her-Ouben," pl. 4.



ablutions through the assistance of Thoth and Horus. Thus purified, she praises Re while beholding the divine mystery of the solar cycle and power of renewal that, by analogy, now assure her own perpetual existence. In the scene that follows she prostrates herself before Geb, who is represented by a crocodile, as she drinks from the “pool of Amun” and expresses a desire to receive offerings from the Fields of *Iaru*. The final scene shows her assisting in both sowing and reaping the divine grain of those fields, recalling a major theme of Spell 110 of the *Book of the Dead*. The ouroboros occurs in the pivotal third scene, in which Herweben is brought face to face before the solar disk. Knees flexed and bowing slightly at the waist as if in a state of pious humility, Herweben raises her palms in the standard gesture of prayer while “praising Re, Horus-of-the-Two-Horizons.” Standing in front of her, and joining her in praise, is the baboon form of Thoth; above his cradling hands hovers a large  *wꜥꜥt*, the “uninjured” or “whole” eye of Horus<sup>5</sup>, the apotropaic virtue of which protects the integrity of the divine process of solar renewal. Facing Herweben and the baboon is a complex symbolic image of the solar process. At the bottom, standing on the register line, are the two Ruty (discussed in Chapter 2) representing the horizons of the East and West; together with the solar disk above them, the effect is visually resonant with the hieroglyph  *ꜥꜥt* ‘the *Akhet*’, where the sun both rises and sets.<sup>6</sup> The disk itself is embraced above by a pair of arms, while resting on the horns of what Piankoff describes as “the skull of a bull”<sup>7</sup>; numerous parallels, however, make it clear that this apparent bucranium

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<sup>5</sup> This gesture recalls the myth in which Thoth returns the eye after her rage and wanderings. Patrick Boylan, *Thoth, the Hermes of Egypt. A study of Some Aspects of Theological Thought in Ancient Egypt*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922) 69-79; Eberhard Otto, “Augensagen,” *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. 1, col. 564.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of this semantic convergence, see Chapter 2, note 3.

<sup>7</sup> Piankoff, *Mythological Papyri*, 73.

actually represents Hathor, the lady of the West, who receives the dead into the West and therefore also receives the setting sun.<sup>8</sup> The arms embracing the upper part of the sun disk are a *pars pro toto* representation of Nut, as is made clear by numerous parallels in which the arms have breasts between the shoulders<sup>9</sup> and a further example in which Nut is actually figured completely.<sup>10</sup> Thus, with the supplementative redundancy of inclusive disjunction so often characteristic of Egyptian theological statements, both Nut and Hathor are present as receiving the setting sun, two ways of saying the same thing. The sun disk itself, however, is marked as also being the rising sun by having upon its face the image of the solar child. It is of interest here to note a further redundancy; the infant sun is shown seated upon the hieroglyph , so that taken together there is here again a semantic equivalent of . Surrounding the disk, in intimate contact with its perimeter, is an ouroboros, its tail being neatly in its mouth where they meet, just above the sun-child's head.

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<sup>8</sup> One may also recall the frequent appearance elsewhere of the solar disk cradled in the horns of Hathor, when she is represented with horns or is in her cow form. Note also that, in spite of the seemingly deep set, socket-like eyes, the Herweben bovine head in question has both eyes and is therefore not merely a skull; moreover, analogous examples on 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty coffins show dappled markings like those on cow heads that are unquestionably Hathor, with such heads also having a similar “syntactic” place in relation to symbols for the sun and the horizon; compare, for example, a vignette much like Herweben from coffin Alexandria 32 (Erik Hornung, “Die Tragweite der Bilder: Altägyptischen Bildaussagen,” *Eranos* 48 [1981] 227, fig. 20) with an unquestionable head of Hathor in Pap. Warsaw 199 628 (Tadeusz Andrzejewski, *Le papyrus mythologique de Te-hem-en-mout*. Académie polonaise de sciences, Travaux du Centre d’Archéologie Méditerranéenne 1 [Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukow; Paris: Mouton & Co, La Haye, 1959] 4). Mention might also be made of an example sharing features with that of the Herweben example, in which the cow-head has dappled markings in the form of stars, suggesting rather an association also with the Heavenly Cow and Nut (Gertie Englund, “Propos sur l’iconographie d’un sarcophage de la 21e dynastie,” in: Sture Brunnsåker and Hans-Åke Nordström, eds., *From the Gusatavium Collections in Uppsala, 1974*, Boreas 6 [Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1974] 54, fig. 10).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Hornung, “Tragweite der Bilder,” 226 fig. 17, 227 fig. 20, 230 fig. 23; characteristic bare breasts appear on representations of Nut from at least the New Kingdom.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 236 fig. 39.

The relative popularity of the Herweben ouroboros, so often reproduced by interested Egyptologists as well as scholars in other fields,<sup>11</sup> is likely due in part to its graphic appeal and its superficial resemblance to what is called in this study the “classic ouroboros.” As has been seen in the last chapter, ouroboroi and ouroboroids often appear with undulating bodies (e.g., encircling the giant mummy in the *Book of the Solar-Osirian Unity*, forming the perimeter of various “caverns” in the *Book of Caverns*, and around the perimeter of stone sarcophagi of Merenptah and Ramesses III), a reference to the idea that the perimeter represented by the serpent’s body can be associated with the interface between the sphere of ordered reality within and the “waters” of the Abyss without; such undulations reflect the inchoate “watery” nature of this outer, chaotic reality, and are also seen in the deliberate undulation of mud-brick temenos walls (especially well-preserved, for example, at Dendara, Medinet Habu, and Deir el-Medina), perimeters that symbolically protect the “ordered” reality of the enclosed temple precincts from the “chaotic” reality outside the walls. By contrast, the smooth and nearly circular curve of the Herweben ouroboros follows the outline of the solar disk which it so tightly encircles, giving an appearance more like that of the “classic” ouroboros known millennia later outside of Egypt. Moreover, because the complete complex solar symbol, including all of its components, most certainly represents both the rising and the setting of the sun, there has been a tendency to interpret the ouroboros component as more than a protective perimeter, and as even more than a

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<sup>11</sup> Leaving aside the frequent appearance of this ouroboros in what might be called the “popular” press (occultists and so forth), a sampling of its reproduction by reputable scholars (both within and without Egyptology) might include: Stricker, *Zeeslang*, pl. 3a; Piankoff, “Her-Ouben,” pl. 4 and *Mythological Papyri*, 22, fig. 3 and pl. 1; Hornung, *Conceptions of God*, 164, fig 18 and “Verfall und Regeneration der Schöpfung,” *Eranos* 46 (1977) 435, fig. 5; Jan Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom. Re, Amun and the Crisis of Polytheism*, trans. Anthony Alcock (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1995) dust jacket design, and *Stein und Zeit. Mensch und Gesellschaft im alten Ägypten* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1995) 97, fig. 4; Hopkins, *Alchemy*, unnumbered plate opposite 107.

symbol of the perpetual solar cycle, but as a symbol for eternity itself. Thus (as noted in Chapter 1) Piankoff describes the Herweben ouroboros as “the symbol of eternity,”<sup>12</sup> while Assmann similarly characterizes it as “the symbol of endless cyclical time (*kreisförmigunendlichen Zeit*),”<sup>13</sup> assessments that are not well supported by contemporary Egyptian sources, but are best understood as based on *a priori* presupposition, reading back into the Egyptian material certain exclusive associations belonging to much later periods. To the extent that the Herweben ouroboros may be regarded as something more than a protective Mehen-serpent, protecting the sun itself, it may simultaneously be understood as emblematic of the protective perimeter of the cosmos and therefore the locus of the sun’s circuit—dimensions of both space and time. It can therefore be considered as related to time only as part of space-time, and has no independent or primary meaning of “eternity” or “endless time.”

A quite similar ouroboros appears at the end of the funerary papyrus of Henuttawy, chantress of Amun and yet another granddaughter of the high priest Menkheperre (figure 61).<sup>14</sup> Here the ouroboros appears as a component of an elaborate symbolic tableau intended to illustrate salient features of the processes of creation and of death and rebirth, with primary reference to the sun. The tableau as a whole should be “read” from the normal privileged direction of right to left. The viewer first encounters the image of an enormous preternatural serpent adapted from the winged serpent image found near the beginning of the upper register of the eleventh hour of the *Book of Amduat*;<sup>15</sup> this serpent can be identified on iconographic

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<sup>12</sup> Piankoff, *Mythological Papyri*, 73.

<sup>13</sup> Assmann, *Zeit und Ewigkeit*, 34.

<sup>14</sup> P. BM EA 10018.2. Schott, *Weltbild*, 14.

<sup>15</sup> Hornung, *Das Amduat*, pl. Elfte Stunde.



grounds as a primordial form of Atum,<sup>16</sup> but has other associations as well, as will be seen below. The serpent is portrayed as being in the vastness of starry space and is active, as indicated by its two pairs of legs being represented by the hieroglyph  $\Delta$ , determinative of verbs of motion. Above the serpent is a red sun disk marked with a scarab (Khepri, “The-One-Who-Becomes”), the disk being centered in a space contained within a plain black ring; this can be understood, in the first instance, as a compact image of the primary cosmogonic event, the emergence of the cosmos with the sun at its center, its perimeter marked by the unbroken black ring. However, this image can also be understood, as will be seen, as the rising sun, the repeating post-creational analog of the “first time” appearance of the sun at the moment of creation. Reading further left past the serpent, one finds a complex image representing features of the post-creational world. An ouroboros is seen surrounding a solar disk which rests on the Ruty-lions, a symbolic construction bearing resemblance to that in the papyrus of Herweben.<sup>17</sup> Unlike the Herweben example, however, this image does not represent both the setting and rising sun. The solar disk is marked by an image of the so-called “fetish of Abydos,” thought to represent the head of Osiris, but here intended as an indication of the “osiride” state of the sun. The sun sets and, entering the Underworld, becomes united with Osiris, that is, it undergoes the transformation that leads to renewal and rebirth. The ouroboros, which can be understood as Mehen, surrounds and protects the osiride sun, just as it surrounds and protects the osiride mummy of a king by appearing around the perimeter of the enclosing sarcophagus (as seen in the

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<sup>16</sup> Myśliwiec, *Tiere des Atum*, 102-3.

<sup>17</sup> The exact outline and interior details of the head of the Henuttawy ouroboros are somewhat obscured by some kind of discoloration on the papyrus, perhaps due to pigment used to color in the area of the head having bled somewhat beyond the original outer contour of the head, before later darkening with age. The resulting slight ambiguity led to the drawing given by Piankoff (*Mythological Papyri*, 56, fig. 41) unaccountably omitting the head altogether. The best previously published drawing of this ouroboros is in Stricker, *Zeeslang*, 13, fig. 4c.

previous chapter). The actual process of renewal and rebirth begins by reading back toward the viewer's right, in the manner of underworldly retrograde texts. It will be noted that the tail of the great serpent ends with the head of a jackal which has its muzzle attached to a foreleg of the nearest of the Ruty. The idea here is that the dead, osiride sun is to enter the tail of the serpent, the jackal head being symbolic of Wepwawet, the "Opener-of-Ways," that is, the "ways" of the West that ultimately lead to renewal and rebirth. The small disk just below the serpent's body likely represents the sun moving through the serpent. The sun then emerges, once again, appearing between the serpent's parting wings.<sup>18</sup>

There can be little doubt that this serpent is yet another variant of that primeval serpent associated with creation and the first appearance of the sun on the cosmic level, and with renewal and rebirth on the solar and funereal levels, seen already in the Pyramid Texts as the Mehen-serpent from which the king emerges like a "blast of fire,"<sup>19</sup> appearing in the Coffin Texts as the Mehen which the deceased enters so that "he cannot perish forever" and "shall live by means of that on which Re lives,"<sup>20</sup> and seen elsewhere including the eleventh and twelfth hours of the *Book of Amduat*. As noted in Chapter 3, a version of this primeval serpent is introduced in the eleventh hour under the name of Mehen-Ta, "Encircler-of-the-Earth"; in the following twelfth

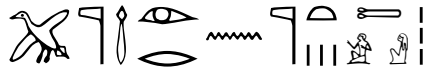
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<sup>18</sup> In the original *Amduat* version, the accompanying text states that "this god (= the serpent) calls to him, and the image (*sšmw*) of Atum comes forth from his back." The "image" of Atum is shown as a divine youth, with a solar disk upon his head, standing behind the serpent in such a way that the solar youth appears between the serpent's outstretched wings, much as the solar disk marked with the scarab does in the Henuttawy variation. It should also be noted that this same winged serpent appears earlier in the fifth hour of the *Amduat* in a latent, inactive form (lacking the legs of the  $\Delta$  determinative), where it abides at the center of the cavern of Sokar, awaiting its role in the renewal of the sun. Hornung, *Das Amduat*, pl. Fünfte Stunde.

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter 2, note 61.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 2, note 99.

hour, however, the serpent is called “Life-of-the-Gods,” as the sun enters its tail and undergoes regeneration as it passes through the serpent’s body. It is interesting to note in this regard that the *Amduat* winged serpent, from which the Henuttawy winged serpent is derived, is not actually identified in the accompanying text, other than to have a large hieroglyph  $\text{𓂏}$  ‘*nh*’ ‘life’ placed just below its head. By contrast, the Henuttawy winged serpent is identified by an inscription below its head that is attached to the serpent’s neck by something resembling a leash. The inscription reads in part:



*p3 ntr 3 jrr n ntrw rmt*

The Great God, who acts for gods and humanity.<sup>21</sup>

The text is laconic, to be sure, but the intention here must surely be that the Great God acts to bring about new life. The text also makes explicit that, while the cycle of the sun’s renewed life may be the archetype for such regeneration, this act extends beyond the sun to include not only lesser gods but also humanity itself.

The foregoing analysis of the meaning and context of the Herweben and Henuttawy ouroboroi serves as yet a further illustration that individual occurrences of the ouroboros should

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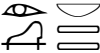

<sup>21</sup> Schott (*Weltbild*, 195) translates this caption, “...the great god, who made gods and men” (“...den großen Gott, der Götter und Menschen gemacht hat”), a grammatical impossibility; *jrr n ntrw rmt* can only be read as an imperfective participle followed by an indirect object formed with  $\text{𓂏}$  *n*. Moreover, being a reduplicated and therefore imperfective stem, *jrr* can hardly refer to a completed past event, but conveys rather an essentially tenseless, ongoing action. The writer of the caption, therefore, was not referencing the original creation of gods and men, but the acts of the Great God that bring about their regeneration and rebirth. Niwiński, likewise, attempts to translate this as a past action of creation: “Atum ‘created gods and men.’” (“*Atum ‘der die Götter und Menschen schuf’.*”) Andrzej Niwiński, “Noch einmal über zwei Ewigkeitsbegriffe. Ein Vorschlag der graphischen Lösung in anlehnung an die Ikonographie der 21. Dynastie,” *GM* 48 (1981) 41-53.

not be considered in isolation or interpreted with some fixed assigned meaning (like “eternity,” etc.), as the meaning of an ouroboros is dependent both on its immediate symbolic environment and on the larger context of Egyptian cosmological and eschatological thought in which it is embedded. Moreover, this analysis yet again bears out the thesis presented in the first chapter, that the ouroboros, while it can be considered a discrete icon in terms of graphic typology, cannot be regarded as an absolutely discrete conceptual entity. Rather it is seen, here as elsewhere, as just one mode of a divine “serpentine” energy, force, or function sometimes known as Mehen, “Coiled One” (though as often unnamed), which is capable of functioning on multiple ontological levels, and which may be symbolized as the coiled, spiral Mehen of the Pyramid Texts or Coffin Texts, or the laterally arrayed Mehen-Ta and “Life-of-the-Gods” in the *Amduat*, among others. It appears in a protective function as the ouroboroi of the Herweben and Henuttawy papyri but also, in a sense, as the winged serpent through which the sun is regenerated in the Henuttawy papyrus.<sup>22</sup>

The ouroboros vignettes of the Herweben and Henuttawy papyri are also especially fine examples of two key symbolic motives recurring throughout the iconography of 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty papyri and coffins, those of the dead, nocturnal sun and the sun reborn at sunrise. The dead “osiride” sun may be symbolically represented by the so-called fetish of Abydos as in the

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<sup>22</sup> Hornung seems to be approaching a similar understanding when he describes the ouroboros as “the regenerating non-existence that encircles the world” (*Conceptions of God*, 164), but he does not view the ouroboros as symbolizing the protective interface or membrane between the created order within and the chaos without, but rather as being somehow the same primeval non-existence that manifests itself as the potentially destructive Apophis. This is in contrast to the interpretation explained in the previous chapter, in which Apophis is understood as symbolizing an embolism-like inflow of the surrounding chaos through a temporary nocturnal breach in the “ouroboric” membrane surrounding and protecting the sphere of ordered creation.

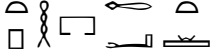
Henuttawy example, or by the distinctive corkscrew horned ram<sup>23</sup> first used to represent the night sun (as the “flesh” of Re) in the *Book of Amduat*. The death, nightly transit, and rebirth of the sun are the uncertain, critical phases of the daily circuit and, as such, are often shown with some kind of serpentine symbol of a divine protective force or barrier, occasionally represented as an ouroboros. Examples of ouroboroi surrounding representations of the dead sun include a vignette from the papyrus of Amenemsaf, now in the Louvre (figure 62),<sup>24</sup> in which the fetish of Abydos is labeled , *wsjr nb nḥḥ*, “Osiris, lord of eternity”; before the fetish stands a gesturing, ibis-headed deity labeled , *ḏḥwtj nb mdw-nṯr*, “Thoth, lord of divine words,” recalling Thoth’s mythological role in restoring the dead Osiris to life with words of magic.<sup>25</sup> An ouroboros surrounds and protects the sacral space. Lest one be tempted, as some have, to interpret an ouroboros automatically in such a context as being somehow an emblem of eternity, recurrent time, etc., compare the following example from a coffin in the British Museum (figure 63).<sup>26</sup> The identity of the fetish with the osiride phase is again confirmed by a label reading , *wsjr nb tḥwy*, “Osiris, lord of the two lands.” In place of Thoth, a jackal-headed deity stands before the fetish, being labeled , *jnpw ḥntj šḥ-nṯr*, “Anubis, foremost of the divine booth” (that is, as god of mummification in the place of the mummy’s preparation or purification). However, unlike the Amenemsaf

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 1, note 68.

<sup>24</sup> Alexandre Piankoff, “The Funerary Papyrus of the Shieldbearer Amon-m-saf in the Louvre Museum,” *Egyptian Religion* 3 (1935) 144, vignette 11.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick Boylan, *Thoth*, 21-22, 93-95.

<sup>26</sup> BM EA 25291. Stricker, *Zeeslang*, pl. 4a.

example, the surrounding ouroboros is also labeled, as  , *tpḥ<t> ʿ3t*, “great cavern.” It is evident, therefore, that the serpent perimeter is meant to signify a mysterious underworld “cavern” or vast contained space, much like the protective serpent perimeters seen previously in the *Book of Caverns* (figures 37, 39). A further example of an ouroboros symbolizing a protective barrier around the dead sun can be found on a coffin now in Vienna (figure 64).<sup>27</sup> As in the Herweben example, the ouroboros attains to a nearly circular shape, determined by the outer edge of the solar disk to which it is intimately attached. The disk is likewise shown resting on the horns of a cow, to be understood as the sun being received into the afterworld by Hathor, lady of the West. The sun disk itself is marked as the night sun by the image of a seated mummiform figure bearing the bewigged head of a corkscrew horned ram who is holding the royal flail. Alternately, the head of the ram by itself can mark the solar disk as being the night sun, as seen in an example from the coffin of the princess Nesikhonsu, now in the Cairo Museum (figure 65).<sup>28</sup> An ouroboros surrounds the disk, which rests on a version of the night barque in which the baboon of Thoth sits on a standard before a large *maat*-feather attached to the prow, while the hieroglyph ⋆ above the stern signifies that the barque is travelling through the *Duat*, complimenting the placement of the barque on the back of (= within) the arched body of Nut, in a variant of an image derived from the *Book of Nut*.<sup>29</sup> The sun reborn at sunrise may be symbolized by the divine solar child, as in the Herweben papyrus, or alternately

<sup>27</sup> Valdemar Schmidt, *Sarkofager, Mumiekister og Mumiehylstre i det Gamle Ægypten. Typologisk Atlas*. (Copenhagen: J. Frimodts Forlag, 1919) pl. 155, fig. 848.

<sup>28</sup> CG 61030. Georges Daressy, *Cercueils des cachettes royales*. CG 61001-61044 (Cairo: IFAO, 1909) pl. 48.

<sup>29</sup> The finest exemplar of this image occurs in the Osireion at Abydos. See Frankfort, *Cenotaph*, v. 2, pl. 81.

by a scarab, Khepri, “The-One-Who-Becomes.” A further example of the former is seen in a papyrus now in Berlin, of which the owner’s name has been lost (figure 66).<sup>30</sup> Like the Herweben example, an ouroboros surrounds the child in the solar disk as part of a complex symbolic image that subsumes both the rising of the sun (indicated by the solar child) and the setting sun (indicated by the sun being received onto the horns of Hathor), this inclusion being reinforced by the presence of the Ruty, which simultaneously represents both the eastern and western horizons. The baboon of Thoth praises the sun as “Horus-of-the-Two-Horizons, who comes forth (from) the *Duat*.” The papyrus of Bakenmut, now in Cairo, has an example of a solar disk marked with a scarab which appears in a morning-barque drawn by fire-spitting uraei with Maat as pilot in the prow (figure 67).<sup>31</sup> The ouroboros in this instance is shown enveloping the disk in dense folds. A unique representation of the solar rebirth, and perhaps of the divine power of renewal and rebirth altogether, occurs as the final symbolic statement of the relatively brief and primarily visual papyrus of Djedameniufankh, also in Cairo, in which much is dispensed with (even the sun disk itself) in reductionist preference for a large scarab hieroglyph surrounded by an ouroboros (figure 68).<sup>32</sup> This image, showing a degree of conceptual abstraction and having the strength of simplicity, impresses with its confident calligraphic execution.

Though these examples of symbols for the dead nocturnal sun and for the renewed reborn sun all feature encircling ouroboroi, a survey of other similar representations elsewhere in the corpus of relevant 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty material shows that a protective serpentine perimeter in the form of an ouroboros is apparently an optional element. Both the night sun and the day sun may

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<sup>30</sup> P. Berlin 3148. Siegfried Schott, “Das blutrünstige Keltergerät,” *ZÄS* 74 (1938) pl. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Piankoff, *Mythological Papyri*, pl. 20.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pl. 27.

appear without an ouroboros, having instead some other non-ouroboric serpentine protection, some other kind of non-serpentine perimeter, or may even have nothing at all. Another way of putting this is that the ouroboros here is in a particular syntagmatic position in relation to the symbols for the night sun and the sunrise sun, but that other protectors, perimeters, or nothing may appear in paradigmatic substitution or as alternatives, of which the ouroboros is only one variant or possibility. Consider, for example, two images of the night sun in figure 69. The first (figure 69a) is a detail from the papyrus of Tehemenmut in Warsaw<sup>33</sup> showing the night sun being received into the mountain of the West; in the second (figure 69b), a detail from the side of a coffin now in Berlin,<sup>34</sup> the image of the night sun (labeled “Lord of the Horizon”) is the object of an offering scene. In both cases the head of a corkscrew horned ram representing the nocturnal sun is surrounded with a closed ring of undulating folds much like those of the ouroboros surrounding the sunrise sun in the papyrus of Bakenmut (figure 67). In neither case, however, is there the slightest indication of a serpent head or the tip of a tail, yet there is no reason to think that the semantic force of these undulating rings is in any way different than the meaning of the Bakenmut ouroboros. Again, in another detail from the papyrus of Henuttawy (figure 70a),<sup>35</sup> the setting sun is shown surrounded by a plain, thick ring with no discernable serpentine features, following occasional precedents going back as far as the *Book of Mehen* (figure 21, discussed in Chapter 2), in which the “serpentine” perimeter is represented by a plain outer ring. The plain ring surrounding the scarab-marked solar disk emerging from the back of the winged serpent in the final tableau of the Henuttawy papyrus (figure 61) should probably also be understood in this

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<sup>33</sup> Andrzejewski, *Te-hem-en-mout*, pl. 7.

<sup>34</sup> Berlin 11978. Schmidt, *Sarkofager*, 143, fig. 727.

<sup>35</sup> Piankoff, *Amen-m-saf*, 155, fig. 2 (detail).





way. In an image of the night sun similar to the Henuttawy example, from the papyrus of Gautseshnu, chantress of Amun, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (figure 70b),<sup>36</sup> the night sun, labeled as “lord of the *Duat*,” is shown setting into that haunches of the Ruty; the protective serpentine power is represented not by an ouroboros but by a serpent bent part way around the sun, having undulating folds like the Bakenmut ouroboros (figure 67), reaching down to the horizon on either side, and inflected with a raised hood typical of the uraeus. Again, there is no reason to think that the meaning of this serpent is in any way significantly different than the ouroboroi occurring in previously discussed parallels. An interesting further example of such paradigmatic substitution occurs in a particularly elegant tableau appearing near the end of the papyrus of Khonsurenep, now in Cairo (figure 71).<sup>37</sup> The underlying syntagma is, of course, the reception of the dead sun into the West, its nocturnal transit, and its rebirth in the East. The central image of the tableau is again derived from the *Book of Nut*. Geb, the earth, reclines below; arching over him is “Great Nut,” held aloft by “Shu, lord of the Sky.” Nut, while in one sense the starry night sky, is often shown as receiving the dead sun (or its analogue, the deceased person) into the West, a function that can alternately be ascribed to Hathor, lady of the West (in yet another illustration of the principle of inclusive disjunction). The sun is described as swallowed by Nut as it sets in the West, and as emerging from her vulva as it rises reborn in the East. Moreover, the sun’s transit through Nut’s body is the same as the sun’s passage through the *Duat*; indeed, as will be seen in examination of the tableau presented in figure 72 (discussed below), Nut can be quite explicitly identified with the *Duat*. At the west end of Nut, three nameless beneficent “genies” face the dead sun, represented here by the fetish of

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<sup>36</sup> P. MMA 25.3.31. Piankoff, *Mythological Papyri*, pl. 24.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pl. 11.

Abydos, below which are offering-jars containing precious oils. At the east end of Nut is the morning-barque in which the winged solar scarab is raised on the  *djed*-pillar, and the sun-disk—waxing in strength—begins its independent course across the day sky. What is of interest here is that, in both the case of the fetish of Abydos and the solar scarab, “syntactic” places in which ouroboroi might appear show instead alternate serpentine symbols of protection. Instead of ouroboric encirclement, there are in both cases pairs of serpents on either side of the symbols of the dead sun and the sun reborn. The fetish of Abydos is flanked by two elongated, slightly undulating serpents guarding its flanks on either side, while in the case of the solar scarab, uraei with deeply undulating tails stand guard in the prow and stern of the morning-barque. One can see from the foregoing that any method of study that singles out only examples of true ouroboroi for special consideration is likely to misunderstand the significance of the ouroboros in these contexts.

There are also a number of unusual ouroboroid images occurring in the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty material. An apparently unique and particularly impressive example is found in the bottom of a coffin trough preserved in Cairo (figure 72).<sup>38</sup> The perimeter is entirely encircled by the body of an enormous winged and human-headed serpent. In the center of the space within the serpent coils, Nut appears with outstretched arms, as she so often does in coffins and sarcophagi beginning with the New Kingdom. These images must be understood in relation to the mummy that was intended to be in the coffin, as part of an integrated whole. The mummy, understood as an analogue of the dead sun, is received by the arms of Nut into the afterworld. Above Nut’s head appears not her name, as is often the case, but the hieroglyph , an abbreviated writing of

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<sup>38</sup> Schmidt, *Sarkofager*, 151, fig. 780.

*dwꜣt*, ‘*Duat*’, signifying that Nut is to be understood as the nocturnal afterworld itself into which the sun (and the deceased) enters in order to undergo the process of regeneration and rebirth. In another clear example of inclusive disjunction so characteristic of Egyptian theological statements, the accompanying image of the great serpent reiterates this same idea with a somewhat shifted emphasis. This winged serpent is yet another variant of the *Amduat* serpent, much like that seen in the Henuttawy papyrus. Expressing a theme developed in the *Amduat*, the regeneration of the sun is effected by a process symbolized by the sun entering the tip of the serpent's tail and passing through its body. An interesting feature of this particular rendering of the serpent is that the tip of the tail is depicted as the head of a waterfowl, the markings and shape of which identify it as a cormorant.<sup>39</sup> This is a *pars pro toto* writing of ‘*q*’ ‘enter’, a feature already seen on the tail of the coiled serpent in figure 20.

More apparently unique serpent imagery occurs on the underside of another anonymous coffin in Cairo (figure 73).<sup>40</sup> In a representation that must be related to the theological and iconographic ideas under discussion, the entire space of the coffin bottom is contained within a perimeter formed by two large serpents, while the space within this perimeter is completely filled with the undulating folds of a third serpent—thus symbolizing both a protective barrier and the primeval power of regeneration within it.

Ouroboroi and ouroboroids also occur in the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty material in connection with mysterious underworld beings. Figure 24 shows two such images from the interior of an

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<sup>39</sup> Houlihan, *Birds*, 8, fig. 9.

<sup>40</sup> CG 6043-6044. Andrzej Niwiński and Émile Chassinat, *Le seconde trouvaille de Deir el-Bahari (Sarcophages)*, vol. 1, fasc. 2 (Cairo: Conseil Suprême des Antiquités, 1996) 14, fig. 3.

anonymous coffin in Cairo (figure 74a)<sup>41</sup> and another in the Vatican Museum, Rome (figure 74b).<sup>42</sup> The images show a twinned, bi-laterally symmetrical, mummiform being with serpent heads surmounted by *maat*-feathers, and holding lizards by the tails. The lizard is an abbreviated writing for ‘šš’ ‘many’, ‘numerous’, ‘multitude’, or the like, conveying that there are actually a great multitude of such beings here, not just one. These must be the same as the beneficent genies sometimes shown meeting the dead sun at the start of the sun’s night journey, as seen for example in the tableau from the papyrus of Khonsurenep (figure 71). In that tableau, the idea that there are a great number of such beings is conveyed in an alternate manner by showing three such beings, three (whether repeated objects, hieroglyphs, or the hieroglyph III ) being a quite usual way of marking indefinite plurality in hieroglyphic writing and in the larger Egyptian semiotic system in general. The surrounding ouroboros must represent the vast underworldly space within which the multitude of these beings abides, much like the serpent labeled as “great cavern” in figure 63. It is also quite common, both on the coffins and in the papyri, to see numbers of mysterious underworld beings caught up in the folds of a great serpent. In some instances the serpents have heads and tails brought into such proximity that these serpents may well be described typologically as ouroboroi or ouroboroids, as seen in two examples from the papyrus of Djedkhonsuiufankh II, now in Cairo (figures 75a and 75b).<sup>43</sup> Once again, these serpents are best understood as representing the Underworld caverns in which these beings abide.

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<sup>41</sup> CG 6086. Ibid., 122, fig. 102.

<sup>42</sup> Stricker, *Zeeslang*, pl. 4b.


<sup>43</sup> P. Cairo 166. Piankoff, *Mythological Papyri*, pl. 22.

Andrzej Niwiński, who has made an extensive study of 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty iconography, has drawn attention to the image of an ouroboros occurring occasionally on interior footboards of 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty coffins and has published an image from such a footboard, of an ouroboros surrounding a hare on a standard (figure 76),<sup>44</sup> as an illustration in support of his views regarding certain features of Theban theology of the period. Niwiński has concluded that 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty theology was a direct extension of Ramesside precedents in which the conception of a high god, Amun-Re as a pantheistic and transcendental deity, was taken to a further degree of abstraction and comprehensiveness as the *ntr-ꜥ3* ‘Great God’, understood as simultaneously transcendental and immanent, existing in any possible shape or form, and therefore corresponding in some sense to the entire Egyptian pantheon. As opposed to Akhenaten’s “monomorphic” monotheism, Niwiński would call this conception “polymorphic” monotheism. One particularly elegant and compact representation of this high god is, according to Niwiński, the synthetic image of a ram-headed scarab wearing a compound *atef* crown, a symbol that unites the polarities of both the abiding, dead, osiride aspect with the dynamic aspect of Khepri, renewal and rebirth.<sup>45</sup> Yet another representation of the Great God is the giant mummiform figure, the unified Re-Osiris, already seen in the *Book of the Solar-Osirian Unity* (figure 34, discussed in Chapter 3) and, by analogy, the mummy of the deceased. Niwiński observes that, while images on the interior bottom and sides of the coffin trough (such as Nut with her arms or wings outstretched in embrace) are to be understood with the mummy and its coffin arranged horizontally, the symbols on the inner footboards are meant to be understood with the mummy in its coffin standing

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<sup>44</sup> Coffin Cairo J. 29628 = 29735. Andrzej Niwiński, “Mummy in the Coffin as the Central Element of Iconographic Reflection of the Theology of the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty,” *GM* 109 (1989) 56, fig. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Andrzej Niwiński, “The Solar-Osirian Unity as Principle of the Theology of the ‘State of Amun’ in Thebes in the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty,” *JEOL* 30 (1987-88) 103-106.

vertically, as during the “opening of the mouth” ceremony.<sup>46</sup> Visualized in this way, the mummy symbolizes the Great God standing as emerging from the primeval mound at the center of the cosmos (symbolized, Niwiński says, by the sign for some major cult center), the perimeter of which is defined by an ouroboros—all of which Niwiński summarizes by means of the diagram shown in figure 77.<sup>47</sup> The conceptual relationship of this symbolism to the giant mummy with ouroboroi in the *Book of the Solar-Osirian Unity* is obvious. Niwiński further wants to connect this symbolism with recurring images of a mummy (or mummiform deity Osiris) shown atop a stepped pyramidal structure representing the primeval mound and invariably accompanied by a great serpent derived from the hieroglyph  (perhaps expressing both *dt* in the sense of ‘body’, ‘form’, as an embodiment of the primeval creative power, and *dt* as the abiding, static time associated with nascent, osiride realities). In the example shown in figure 78,<sup>48</sup> from a coffin in Cairo, the mummy can be understood as the osiride aspect of the Great God, while the mummy’s head, represented as a scarab (somewhat unusually shown in a lateral view), symbolizes the aspect of renewal and rebirth.<sup>49</sup>

Niwiński may well be right in his reading of the symbolism of the mummy standing above the footboard which bears the image of an ouroboros; however, given that the only example that Niwiński ever offers in support of this hypothesis is that of an ouroboros




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<sup>46</sup> Niwiński, “Mummy in the Coffin,” 55-56; idem, “Solar-Osirian Unity,” 103.

<sup>47</sup> Niwiński, “Mummy in the Coffin,” 58, fig 5.

<sup>48</sup> Coffin Cairo J. 29662 = CG 6190. Niwiński, *Deir el-Bahari (Coffins)*, 86, fig. 22.

<sup>49</sup> Niwiński, “Solar-Osirian Unity,” 103.

surrounding a  hare on a standard<sup>50</sup> (which he takes as the sign of the Hare Nome, therefore supposedly meaning Hermopolis), and given the present lamentably inadequate publication of relevant material in which it appears that the only published parallels are variations also featuring the  sign on a standard,<sup>51</sup> one is tempted to ask: why this preference on the part of Theban priests for Hermopolis as a symbol for the primeval mound, if indeed one should understand the Hare Nome sign as meaning this? One possibility is that the priests had in mind Hermopolis as the mythological site of the *iw nsrsr*, the ‘isle of flame’, the primeval high mound that first appeared at creation, and the birthplace of Re.<sup>52</sup> Another possibility, however, is that this is not to be understood as the nome sign at all. There are clear examples elsewhere in the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty material of abstract ideas being represented on standards, such as *rnpt* ‘year’, *nhh*, and *dt*, as in the papyrus of Khonsumes A in Vienna (figure 79),<sup>53</sup> and having no reference whatsoever to nomes. An alternative (or at least complimentary) interpretation is that the  on a standard may represent the abstract idea *wnn* ‘being’, the ontological status associated with *dt* as the static, abiding time of osiride realities (as opposed to *hpr* ‘becoming’, the ontological state

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<sup>50</sup> Niwiński, “Solar-Osirian Unity,” 105, fig. 19; idem, “Mummy in the Coffin,” 56, fig. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Stricker, *Zeeslang*, 13, fig. 4, d and f. Stricker does not state where these presumed parallels actually occur on the coffins, his citations being limited to a catalog entry of the Rijksmuseum in Leiden and a notice in Daressy's list. Neither has illustrations. P.A.A. Boeser, *Catalogus van het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden. Egyptische Afdeeling*. (Leiden, 1907) 85, nos. 3-5; Georges Daressy, “Les cercueils des prêtres d’Ammon (deuxième trouvaille de Deir el-Bahari),” *ASAF* 8 (1907) 20, no. 139 (sic. = 39).

<sup>52</sup> G. Roeder, *Hermopolis, 1929-1939*, Pelizaeus-Museum zu Hildesheim, Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung 4 (Hildesheim: Gebr. Gerstenberg, 1959) 189; Hans Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1952) 194.

<sup>53</sup> Piankoff, *Mythological Papyri*, pl. 16.

associated with *nḥḥ*, the dynamic cyclic time connected with the rising sun),<sup>54</sup> and perhaps suggesting an association with *wnn-nfrw* ‘Perfect Being’, a well-known alternate name or epithet of Osiris. Thus the lower, foot end of the mummy is given osiride associations, while the upper, head end of the mummy has associations with the ideas of renewal and rebirth connected with the symbols of the scarab and the rising sun, either or both of which frequently occur on the crown of a mummy’s head or just above the head on the facing surface within the coffin trough. Thus the mummy would unite these divine polarities in itself and would be understood as a complete image of the Great God as the giant mummy, standing in center of the cosmos, the outer perimeter of which is represented by the ouroboros on the footboard.

EXCURSUS: Niwiński and the Ouroboros as Synthetic Symbol of Macrocosm and Microcosm.

Few scholars have studied the symbolic iconography of the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty as closely as Andrzej Niwiński, who has spent decades in analysis and ongoing publication of primary sources, and whose presentation of Theban theological conceptions of the period is both exemplary and illuminating.<sup>55</sup> His extended meditations led him to publish, in 1981, an essay<sup>56</sup> in which he tackled the much discussed question of the nature of the Egyptian time concepts *nḥḥ* and *ḏt*, relating these to the image of the ouroboros. Niwiński’s conclusions relate to general conceptions that go well beyond those specific to the thought of the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty Theban priesthood, but as he rightly regards this period as a “time when the Egyptian religious

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<sup>54</sup> Assmann, *Search for God*, 78.

<sup>55</sup> See especially Niwiński, “Solar-Osirian Unity.”

<sup>56</sup> Andrzej Niwiński, “Noch einmal über zwei Ewigkeitsbegriffe. Ein Vorschlag der graphischen Lösung in anlehnung an die Ikonographie der 21. Dynastie,” *GM* 48 (1981) 44-53.



iconographic repertoire reached its culmination,<sup>57</sup> illustrating “deep theological thoughts of the Egyptians,”<sup>58</sup> and as study of this material was Niwiński’s point of departure, a summary of the views he presents in his essay on *nḥḥ*, *dt*, and the ouroboros is not out of place here.

It should first be noted that Niwiński is firmly in the camp of those who regard the Egyptian ouroboros as being primarily a symbol of endless time as well as the perimeter of the ordered world.<sup>59</sup> One object of his essay is to reconcile the apparently conflicting views proffered by certain scholars (Assmann, Hornung, Kákosy, Thausing, Žabkar) regarding the meanings of *nḥḥ* and *dt*, and Niwiński believes he can do this, and more besides, by presenting the Egyptian ouroboros as a kind of key to the mysteries. He is prompted in the first place by a view expressed by Westendorf, that the Egyptians seemed to have no collective concept for the system of two polar elements that unify periodically in an eternal cycle of preserving life.<sup>60</sup> Niwiński thinks this would be a very strange state of affairs indeed, as one should rather expect to find such a concept as not, and that—should such a concept exist—we would likely find it amongst the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty iconographic material, most probably as a well-known symbol. He muses that, like the Christian cross, such a symbol would have been immediately understood without explanatory texts to identify it. The Egyptian symbol that meets all these qualifications

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<sup>57</sup> Andrzej Niwiński, “Towards the Religious Iconography of the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty,” *GM* 49 (1981) 47.

<sup>58</sup> That is, “tief theologische Gedanken der Ägypter.” Niwiński, “Ewigkeitsbegriffe,” 41.

<sup>59</sup> For example, Niwiński in one instance glosses the ouroboros as “the serpent biting its own tail, which symbolizes endless time, and also the border between the ordered world ruled by the sun and the exterior space of chaos.” Niwiński, “Mummy in the Coffin,” 55-56. He also extends this connection with time to the non-ouroboric primeval serpent (such as discussed above in the analysis of the tableau in the papyrus of Henuttawy or the serpent appearing against the stepped, pyramidal structure in figure 78), which he describes as “the Great Serpent as the primeval form of Atum and as the symbol of time and eternity.” Niwiński, “Solar-Osirian Unity,” 98.

<sup>60</sup> Wolfhart Westendorf, “Zweiheit, Dreiheit und Einheit in der altägyptische Theologie,” *ZÄS* 100 (1974) 137.

is, Niwiński believes, none other than the ouroboros.<sup>61</sup> Niwiński then proceeds to introduce what he refers to as his macrocosmic model of the ouroboros (figure 80),<sup>62</sup> with which he proposes first of all to reconcile Hornung’s idea that *dt* originally represented the horizon, the unbroken bound of all existence symbolized by the ouroboros,<sup>63</sup> with Assmann’s view that the ouroboros represents the concept of *nhh* as cyclic process measurable in units of time.<sup>64</sup> In Niwiński’s diagram, the juncture of the serpent’s mouth and tail is the locus of the start of all renewed cycles, beginning with the act of creation, which is itself the archetype of all other events of cyclic renewal such as sunrise and sunset, the new year, and the enthronement of the king. That significant moments of renewal were indeed thought to be analogues of the moment of creation in the “first time” is without doubt will be recalled from the discussion of these analogues in Chapter 1. In light of that discussion, however, it is difficult to see how sunset is supposed to fit into the scheme; it is certainly a temporal event, but it cannot very well be considered an analogue of the first creation as sunrise obviously can. It is also difficult to accept Niwiński’s contention that *dt*, on the macrocosmic level, is only the horizon bounding ordered space,<sup>65</sup> and that *nhh* and *dt*, in this context, correspond to the ideas of time and space. Moreover, as basic

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<sup>61</sup> Niwiński, “Ewigkeitsbegriffe,” 42.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 46, fig. 1.

<sup>63</sup> Erik Hornung, “Zum ägyptischen Ewigkeitsbegriff,” *FuF* 39 (1965) 335.

<sup>64</sup> Assmann, *Theologie und Frömmigkeit*, 35.

<sup>65</sup> Hornung’s hypothesis (see note 64), on which Niwiński’s contention is based, regarding the concept of *dt* being originally derived from the idea of the horizon (understood not as the *akhet*, the numinous locus of the rising or setting sun, but as the unbroken limit or boundary of the plane of the earth) is an interesting one, especially in consideration of the otherwise inexplicable use of the  $\overline{\text{t}}$  ‘earth’, ‘land’ sign as an apparent determinative in writing  $\overline{\text{t}} dt$ . However, the use of this determinative must be yet another case of the well-known Egyptian strategy of expressing the abstract by means of the concrete, and refers not to the boundary of the earth itself, but to a key feature of that which lies unseen beyond that boundary, the changeless osiride realm of the lower world.

and necessary as the conceptual pair time and space may seem to us, there is no reason to presuppose such a pairing in the conceptual inventory of Egyptian speculative thought, and the relevant ancient texts and representations can be well explained without recourse to identifying *nḥḥ* and *ḏt* with time and space.

It is far beyond the intended scope of this study to engage in any kind of detailed analysis of the often contentious discourse revolving around the issue of the meaning of *nḥḥ* and *ḏt*. It will suffice here only to restate briefly the view adopted in the present study, which emerges organically from examination of the pertinent original sources, and of which the reader is no doubt already aware from incidental remarks made throughout the previous chapters. Before creation, *nḥḥ* and *ḏt* did not exist. Within the limitless, dark, formless, and watery chaos, creation begins as a single bright, fiery monadic point, which then differentiates and expands outward, forming a spherical bubble of ordered reality. This sphere is bisected laterally by the plane of the earth's surface, thus creating both an upper world, the realm of the living, and a lower world, the realm of the dead. The key feature of the ordered world is the sun (the post-creational analogue of the fiery primeval monad), which partakes of both worlds by travelling in a circular course along the inner surface or perimeter of the cosmic sphere and perpendicular to the plane of the earth. In symbolic representations, the three-dimensional surface of this inner perimeter can be represented by a two-dimensional image such as a plain ring or an ouroboros. In this way, the ouroboros could be associated with space, as the perimeter of the unbroken horizon bounding the lateral plane of the earth, and with time, as being also the locus of the perpendicular course of the sun. Within this sphere of ordered reality, then, *nḥḥ*-time refers to events occurring in the upper world of the living, events involving change, while *ḏt*-time refers to the static, abiding, changeless realities of the lower world. An ouroboros, understood as

representing the complete circuit of the sun, would therefore be associated with both *nḥḥ*-time in relation to the sun's upperworldly rising, zenith, and decline, and with *ḏt*-time in relation to the sun's mysterious union with the changeless osiride powers of the lower world.

Niwiński attempts to illustrate his macrocosmic model with an interpretation of the ouroboros appearing in the previously discussed final tableau of the papyrus of Henuttawy (figure 61). He claims that the ouroboros here is not to be understood as surrounding a solar disk, but as surrounding the world, as the apparent solar disk here should rather be understood as representing the earth's lateral surface.<sup>66</sup> He offers no explanation as to why the fetish of Abydos should appear at its center. Countering this view is the fact that both disks in the tableau, that marked with the fetish of Abydos and that marked with the scarab, are painted red, the usual solar color. There can be little doubt that the ouroboros here is to be understood on the solar level, as a protective force or enclosure preserving the integrity of the sun at the crucial moment of its passing into the lower world, just as the same divine power safeguards the entire world against engulfment by the abyssal waters on the cosmic level. If this latter idea can be said to be at all present in the ouroboros of the Henuttawy papyrus, it is only well in the background as a mere analogic resonance of the cosmic level with the solar level depicted there.

Niwiński presents his understanding of the ouroboros in relation to the evolution of the macrocosm in a fairly self-explanatory diagram (figure 81),<sup>67</sup> based in part on his reading of the well-known apocalyptic passage in Chapter 175 of the *Book of the Dead*.<sup>68</sup> The basic idea, as Niwiński presents it, is quite unobjectionable, with qualifications. The first and last columns

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<sup>66</sup> Niwiński, "Ewigkeitsbegriffe," 44.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 47, fig. 3.

<sup>68</sup> See Chapter 1, note 153.

represent the state of chaos before creation and after the dissolution of the world, in which state the primeval creator can be said to exist only as a kind of latency. It is assumed, no doubt correctly, that the post-apocalyptic condition of the creator as described in Chapter 175 of the *Book of the Dead* can be read back into the analogous pre-creational state. However, Niwiński's characterization of the pre- and post-creational states as “unity” betrays the influence of Jungian psychology, as one finds also in Hornung.<sup>69</sup> Nowhere in the relevant Egyptian texts and symbolic representations is the abyssal chaos described as “unity.” On the contrary, the pre-creational chaos is factored onto the qualities of *ḥḥw* ‘infinite’, *nwj* ‘watery’, *kkw* ‘darkness’, and *tnmw* ‘lostness’<sup>70</sup> (alternately *jmn* ‘hidden’), which are moreover expressed as personified male and female doublets (perhaps to suggest the latent potential for creation), generally referred to by Egyptologists as the Hermopolitan Ogdoad, while the post-creational state is described in Chapter 175 of the *Book of the Dead* as one in which only Atum will survive, together with Osiris, after Atum has destroyed what he has made, returning the land to the abyssal waters as it had been before. Atum will assume the form of “other serpents, which men do not know and gods cannot see.” This would seem to mean that the apocalypse was understood as a catastrophic collapse of the protective force or barrier that enspheres the world, the abyssal waters then rushing in as roiling chaotic currents that dissolve the ordered cosmos into formless “serpents,” with nothing remaining in the abyssal deep but the primeval Atum, now in a purely latent “osiride” form. The description of Atum as being “other serpents” is scarcely an image of unity,

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<sup>69</sup> See Chapter 1, note 103.

<sup>70</sup> Following the suggested translation of James Allen, who had earlier translated *tnmw* as “chaos” (*Genesis*, 18-20), but later had reason to prefer “lostness”; James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian. An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 126.

and Niwiński's choice of the image of a single, free-floating serpent to represent the pre- and post-creational state of the primeval creator-god is not supported by Egyptian sources.

Niwiński believes, no doubt correctly, that the pre-creational and post-creational conditions are essentially identical, and raises the issue of whether or not the Egyptians imagined the evolution of the cosmos as a perpetual cycle in which a new cosmos would again emerge after a period of dissolution. He accepts this as a possibility, though regards it as an open question.<sup>71</sup> The lack of clear evidence is no doubt due to the character of the relevant sources, which were not intended as comprehensive expositions of theoretical cosmology, but are eschatological in nature, and therefore tend to emphasize only those features deemed relevant to afterlife expectations, such as the first creation and the perpetual process of solar rebirth, which were seen as the archetypes of processes in which it was imagined that the deceased could participate by analogy. It also seems reasonable that as solar rebirth was understood as an analogue of creation, the process of analogy likely extended to the understanding of the entire solar cycle as analogous to a cosmic cycle of creation, existence, and dissolution—and therefore of new cycles of creation. Moreover, while Egyptian sources in this regard may not be as explicit as might be desired, sources that tend to confirm such a view are not entirely absent.<sup>72</sup>

Niwiński places an ouroboros in the center column of his diagram of the evolution of the macrocosm as a fitting symbol of the secure perimeter of the ordered cosmos, the divine boundary between the chaos without and the realized multiplicity of the creator within. While it is true that in the Egyptian sources an ouroboros *may* be used to represent this boundary, as may also a plain ring, there are numerous examples of ouroboroi that have no such reference, as has

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<sup>71</sup> Niwiński, "Ewigkeitsbegriffe," 46-48.

<sup>72</sup> See Chapter 1, note 154.

been seen. The meaning of the ouroboros in Egypt is never purely determined by its iconic form alone, but is rather entirely dependent on context.

Niwiński's third diagram (figure 82)<sup>73</sup> represents his ouroboric model of the microcosm, and closely resembles his model of the macrocosm with which it is partly analogous graphically. The ouroboros here is intended to represent the cycle of time solely in relation to the life and afterlife of a human being. Time moves inexorably forward, as indicated by the arrow, with the key events of discontinuities of a person's existence corresponding to the juncture of the serpent's mouth and tail. Thus this juncture corresponds first of all to a person's birth, and later to a person's death. Niwiński explains his understanding of *nḥḥ* and *ḏt* in relation to this microcosmic model in the following way. In terms of the existential aspect, a person's earthly life is to be visualized as one's own space-time moving through the body of the ouroboros. *Nḥḥ* and *ḏt*, for an individual, come into existence at the moment of birth, *ḏt* extending indefinitely before one and *nḥḥ* expanding behind as one moves through time. In other words, *nḥḥ*, which is measurable with units of time, is a person's lifetime from birth up to the present point of time, while *ḏt* is the indefinite, immeasurable length of time extending forward from the present to the point of a person's death, which initiates the eschatological aspect of human experience. After reaching again the juncture of mouth and tail, the blessed dead no longer moves through the ouroboros, at which point, according to Niwiński, *nḥḥ* and *ḏt* are located before one as the future afterlife, and the two concepts become synonymous.<sup>74</sup> This, he goes on to say, refers only to the Osirian eschatology, while from the standpoint of the solar eschatology the microcosmic model

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<sup>73</sup> Niwiński, "Ewigkeitsbegriffe," 49, fig. 4.

<sup>74</sup> This seems designed, in part, to integrate the views of Morenz and Žabkar. "Nach dem Tode befinden sich *nḥḥ* und *ḏt*, die zusammen das Jenseits bilden, vor dem Menschen. In solcher Situation bedeuten die beiden Begriffe die (jenseitige) Zukunft, was Morenz betont hat, und man kann sie auch für Synonyme halten, was Žabkar akzentuierte." Ibid., 48.

is practically identical with the macrocosmic one, as the deceased shares the fate of the sun. Niwiński's understanding of *nḥḥ* and *ḏt* in relation to the life of the individual seems very eccentric, especially the idea that *ḏt* in this context is the indefinite expanse of time extending from the present moment until one's death. The point will not be argued here, as being outside the stated purpose of this study, but this understanding of *nḥḥ* and *ḏt* does not appear to be well-supported by Egyptian sources, and is not in accord with the understanding adopted for the present study, as articulated earlier in this excursus. The reader is invited to make a close reading of Niwiński's essay and to form an independent judgment in the matter.

As can be seen from the diagrams, Niwiński makes much of the point of juncture between the serpent's mouth and tail. All significant temporal discontinuities, such as creation, sunrise and sunset, new year, enthronement of the king, birth and death, are explicitly associated with this juncture of mouth and tail in the diagrams of the macrocosmic and microcosmic models, as well as in the accompanying text. Similarly, in his discussion of the diagram of the evolution of the macrocosm, Niwiński states that the world in its aspects of time and space is represented by the serpent biting its tail, that the end of the world will take place when the serpent has released its tail from its mouth, and that the reappearance of the cosmos would be the serpent again seizing its tail in its mouth. He also states that, because threat manifests itself in every significant change, the permanent locus of this threat is this same juncture between the mouth and tail.<sup>75</sup> There is absolutely nothing in the Egyptian sources to support the idea that there was any such significance attached to this juncture of mouth and tail by the Egyptians themselves. As has been seen, the perimeter ensuring the integrity of the cosmos could also be represented by a plain ring with no such juncture of mouth or tail. In the *Book of Amduat*, the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 46.



most significant moment of threat is not sunrise or sunset, but comes rather at the nadir of the sun's circuit in the depths of night, at which point the forces of the outer chaos, personified as the serpent Apophis, penetrate through a temporary breach of the cosmic perimeter to threaten the sun at its weakest moment, only to be repelled by Seth, yet there is no obvious relevance to the mouth and tail juncture here. Moreover, there are clear examples of an encircling serpent on royal sarcophagi, functioning perfectly on the royal/funereal level to insure the integrity of the king's mummy, in which the tail of the serpent is not in its mouth, but merely overlaps with the mouth and head, as for example the afore seen sarcophagus of Ramesses III (figure 51). One also sees on the sarcophagus lid of Amenherkhepshef (figure 52) that the serpent is shown with a significant space between the serpent's mouth and the tip of its tail, and yet there is nothing to indicate that the serpent protects the mummy any less or that the gap between the serpent's mouth and tail is in any way suggestive of a threat to the mummy or of its possible destruction by inimical forces analogous to those outer chaotic forces that threaten the cosmos.

Perhaps the greatest problem with Niwiński's presentation is his decision to impose the macrocosm/microcosm categories on the material. The notions of a microcosmic level, having only to do with the human being, and of a macrocosmic level, having to do with everything else, are not ideas that are native to (or even latent in) Egyptian speculative thought. Like the later "classic" ouroboros, traditionally believed to be of Egyptian origin and exclusively associated with ideas of eternity and endless cyclic time, the macrocosm/microcosm doctrine also has an association with Egypt due to its traditional ascription to Hermes Trismegistus,<sup>76</sup> but its origins are Greek.<sup>77</sup> Of course, this is not to say that the Greek macrocosm/microcosm doctrine might

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<sup>76</sup> Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina*, 2-3.

<sup>77</sup> Conger, *Macrocosms and Microcosms*, 1-27.

not have been inspired by Egyptian antecedents,<sup>78</sup> in particular those Egyptian conceptions regarding levels of reality (cosmic, solar, funereal, royal, and individual) which were perceived by the Egyptians as having certain analogous features (discussed at the end of Chapter 1). A consideration of those levels, as preferred in the present study, is only descriptive, imposes nothing on the material from outside, and allows the sources to speak for themselves in their own idiom.

Whatever value Niwiński's views about the nature of *nḥḥ* and *ḏt* may have, and whatever heuristic utility his use of the ouroboros may have in explaining them, must all be judged on their own merits. However, Niwiński's hypothesis that the ouroboros was understood by the Egyptians themselves as a symbol that encoded such ideas as Niwiński imagines it to have done, as a kind of symbolic key, is ultimately unconvincing, and tells us only about Niwiński and nothing about the thought of ancient Egypt.

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Ouroboros-like iconography continues to appear on coffins of the Saite period, of which a few examples are known from members the Theban clergy of Montu and their families. The most recently published example is a fragment of an anthropoid coffin (figure 83)<sup>79</sup> of "lady of the house" Takapethakhonsu,<sup>80</sup> now in the oriental manuscript collection of the main library of the University of Kassel. The coffin was of sycamore wood, and the surviving fragment consists

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<sup>78</sup> See Chapter 1, note 155.

<sup>79</sup> Kassel Ms. orient. 26; Mohamed Sherif Ali and Heike Sternberg-El Hatabi, "Ein Sargfragment der T3-k3p(t)-ḥ3-Ḥnsw," *GM* 138 (1994) 11-21.

<sup>80</sup> Takapethakhonsu is identified in one of the inscriptions on the fragment as "daughter of Bes," though it is uncertain if her father is to be identified with a late Saite Montu-priest of that name; *ibid.*, 14. There is no doubt, however, that she was a member of one of the families of the Montu priesthood, based on comparison of the fragment with the more complete examples discussed below.

of the projecting piece that once covered the feet of the mummy. The place it occupied can be seen in figure 84, a reconstruction based on a close parallel (discussed below) now in the Cairo Museum. In the manner of the period, the coffin was pieced together out of wood which was then encased in linen coated with a thin, smooth layer of plaster or gesso as a ground for the polychrome decoration. Below several columns of text are the remnants of a painted serpent with head and tail meeting across the lower part of the fragment corresponding to the front of the toes. As the region beneath the feet on such anthropoid coffins is rendered as a rectangular, box-like shape serving as a plinth upon which the mummy appears to stand, the serpent should be understood as encircling the mummy along the lowest edge of the feet, as if the circle of the serpent rests just above the imaginary plane on which the feet of the mummy stand. This suggests a symbolism related to that of the ouroboroi on the inner footboards of the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty coffins. However, unlike those ouroboroi, the tail is not actually in the mouth, but overlaps in contact with the underside of the serpent's head, much like the head and tail of the serpent on the Ramesses III sarcophagus lid shown in figure 51. Kákosy, commenting upon this fragment, says that “[a]lthough the tail of the serpent on the coffin fragment is not exactly in the mouth, obviously an ouroboros was intended.”<sup>81</sup> There is absolutely no reason whatsoever for Kákosy to second-guess the ancient priestly iconographers in this way, as if the serpent with overlapping head and tail is some kind of inadvertent error, except for the fact that he mistakenly believes that the term for such serpents in Egyptian is *sd-m-r3* ‘tail-in-mouth’, and therefore the serpent on the fragment *should* properly have its tail in its mouth if only the priestly draftsman really knew what he was doing. As seen already from the Ramesses III example, the rendering of the head and tail as overlapped is a perfectly canonical variant, as is confirmed also by completely

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<sup>81</sup> Kákosy, “Ouroboros on Magical Healing Statues,” 123, note 2.

preserved parallel examples from Deir el-Bahari, now in the Cairo Museum (figures 85 and 86),<sup>82</sup> the coffins of Hahaet and Tasheritaset, priest and priestess of Montu. Details of the lower parts of the coffins can be seen in figures 87 and 88. The serpents on both coffins are closely parallel to that of the Takapethakhonsu fragment in having their tails not in their mouths but rather overlapping and in contact with the underside of the heads. In all three cases, the presence of this serpent around the feet of the mummy was likely understood, on one level, as symbolic of a protective encapsulization of the entire mummy, and on another level must represent the perimeter of the cosmos, with the mummy within it understood as an image of the Great God, as seen first in the *Book of the Solar-Osirian Unity* (figure 34) and in the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty mummies which were conceived of as standing within the enclosing ouroboroi painted on their footboards (figures 76 and 77). Once again, whether or not the serpent actually has its tail in its mouth is not relevant to the symbolism of enclosure, and even less does it seem likely that the serpent here has any reference to ideas of eternity, recurrent time, or Apophis.<sup>83</sup>

Another type of ouroboroid image occurs in the bottom of the troughs of some late 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty or Saite coffins, as seen for example in the outer coffin of the Theban priestess Neskhonsupakared, now in the British Museum (figure 89).<sup>84</sup> The troughs of coffins of this

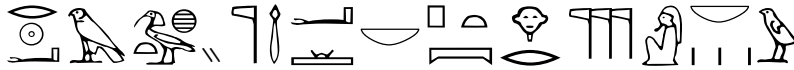
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<sup>82</sup> CG 41064 and CG 41065. Henri Gauthier, *Cercueils anthropoides des prêtres de Montu*, vol. 1, CG 41042-41072 (Cairo: IFAO, 1913) pls. 33, 35. The accompanying textual description of the coffins is found in vol. 2, 408-29 and 430-62.

<sup>83</sup> A view expressed by Kákosy, "Ouroboros on Magical Healing Statues," 123.

<sup>84</sup> BM EA 47975. [British Museum], *A Guide to the First, Second and Third Egyptian Rooms*. 3rd. ed. rev. ([London:] the British Museum, 1924) 67-68. It is worth noting that the author of the guide identifies the serpent as Mehen. Porter and Moss had dated this coffin to the 20<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> Dynasties (Porter and Moss, *Topographical Bibliography*, vol. 1, pt. 2, 824), while a very close parallel in the Hermitage (below) has been dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE (B. Piotrovsky, *Egyptian Antiquities in the Hermitage* [Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1974] captions, pls. 102-103); however, John Taylor has more recently dated this coffin to the late 25<sup>th</sup> or early 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (John H. Taylor, *Egyptian Coffins*, Shire Egyptology 11 [Aylesbury, Bucks.: Shire Publications Ltd, 1989] 57, and other close parallels (though lacking the

general type are dominated by a large figure of Ptah-Sokar-Osiris, associated with death and the Underworld; the inscription, however, identifies the figure as a god associated with the upper world of the living:



*rꜥ ḥr ʒḥtj nṯr ʕ nb pt ḥrj nṯrw nbw*



Re-Horus-of-the-Horizons, great god, lord of heaven, chief of all the gods.

In this rather baroque fusion of word and image, the Saite theologians express the idea of a complete high god, an equivalent of the Great God, the unified Re-Osiris of the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty, with which the mummy of the deceased was no doubt identified. The figure is enclosed by a large serpent having a raised hood in the manner of a uraeus. The priestly draftsman has effected the enclosure by means of having both the tight loop of the serpent just below the hood and the tip of the serpent's tail in contact with the elongated head of the *was*-scepter held in the deity's hands, thus closing the gap between both ends of the serpent and completely enclosing the deity. In a very close parallel found in the coffin of one Petisis, now in the Hermitage (figure 90),<sup>85</sup> the complete enclosure is effected by bringing the tip of the tail into positive contact with the tight loop of the serpent just below the raised hood. In spite of the fact that the tail of the serpent is at or in the serpent's mouth in either of these two coffins, the intent of the serpent symbolism here, that of a protectively enclosed sacral space, can hardly be other than the same as that of the serpent with its tail in its mouth as seen in figure 63, demonstrating once again that the strict occurrence of the serpent's tail in its mouth is not an essential or absolutely necessary feature. It

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ouroboroid feature) had previously been dated as Saite by Valdemar Schmidt (*Sarkofager*, 169, fig. 937; 177, fig. 979).

<sup>85</sup> Piotrovsky, *Egyptian Antiquities*, pl. 103.

is also interesting to note that in coffins of this type, a solar disk with uraei, identified as Behdety by large accompanying hieroglyphs, appears in the trough over the head of the mummy, while a large *shen*-ring (  ) appears under the mummy's feet on the footboard of the trough. This offers a symbolic parallel to previously seen 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty examples which show solar symbolism over the head of the mummy and have an ouroboros appearing under the mummy's feet (figures 76-77), as well as to the ouroboroid surrounding the feet of the mummy in the Saite examples of the priesthood of Montu (figures 83-88). Here the large *shen*-ring, which like a plain ring, an ouroboroid, or an ouroboros can symbolize the perimeter of ordered reality, etc., fulfills the same symbolic function as the ouroboros/ouroboroid in the other examples, so that the mummy may also be understood as an image of the Ptah-Sokar-Osiris/the Great God, suspended at the center of the cosmos. One may also note that, while most of the coffins of this type show a large, plain *shen*-ring on the footboard, like that seen in figure 90,<sup>86</sup> the Neskonsupakared coffin (figure 89), perhaps uniquely, shows the variant , which can be read as *dmd* 'reassemble', 'unite', a probable reference to the well-known myth regarding the reuniting of the limbs of Osiris and the preparation of his mummy as the precondition of his afterworldly resurrection.

An unusual and perhaps unique ouroboros (figure 91),<sup>87</sup> dating from the late 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty or early First Persian Period, has been recently discovered in the intact burial chamber of "administrator of palaces" Iufaa, in the ancient royal cemetery at Abusir.<sup>88</sup> Two images of the

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<sup>86</sup> The plain *shen*-ring is also seen in examples that are very similar in every respect except that they lack the (apparently optional) ouroboroid surrounding the large central image of Ptah-Sokar-Osiris. See Schmidt, *Sarkofager*, 169, fig. 937; 177, fig. 979.

<sup>87</sup> Miroslav Verner, *Abusir, Realm of Osiris* (Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002) 203.

<sup>88</sup> Bareš and Květa, *Tomb of Iufaa*, vol. 1, *Archaeology*, passim.

goddess Taweret stand on either side of the ouroboros, somewhat in the manner of heraldic supporters. The ouroboros itself, remarkably, has the head not of a serpent but of a hippopotamus like the images of the goddess herself. The symbolism of this ouroboros must be considered in the larger decorative program of the tomb chamber. The western wall is crowned with an image of the sun resting on a hill, together with a hymn to the setting sun,<sup>89</sup> while the eastern wall, toward which the head of the deceased is oriented, bears an image of the rising sun (figure 24). These walls summarize the divine process of the sun's death and rebirth, through which, by analogous participation, the deceased hopes to achieve afterworldly apotheosis. Notably, the image of the rising sun on the eastern wall is oriented above the head of the deceased, a clear analogy to the afore seen appearances of scarabs and solar symbolism on the crowns of the heads of mummies or just above the mummies' heads on the interior of the coffin troughs. The western and eastern walls of the tomb chamber are mediated by the connecting southern and northern walls, on which appear texts and images relating to care of the deceased enabling his transfiguration, including scenes of offerings and purifying libations.<sup>90</sup> The ouroboros and images of Taweret are appropriately placed on the northern wall, no doubt with reference to Taweret's association with the northerly, "imperishable" constellation that bears her image. Taweret's primary association, however, is with pregnancy, and it is in this capacity that she appears here on the north wall—between the western and eastern walls' images of solar death and rebirth. The head of the ouroboros being that of a hippopotamus strongly suggests that the space formed by the perimeter of the ouroboros is intended as the womb of Taweret, and its

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., pl. 20a.; Ladislav Bareš, "Some Notes on the Religious Texts and Scenes in the Tomb of Iufaa and Other Late Period Shaft Tombs at Abusir," in: Hedvig Geöry, ed., *Aegyptus et Pannonia III. Acta Symposii anno 2004* (Budapest: MEBT-ÓEB, 2006) 3.

<sup>90</sup> Bareš, *Notes*, 2-3.

smooth, non-undulating contour and the slight vertical compression of the space formed by the ouroboros suggest that the apparently blank space with it is intended as a solar disk, though as the tomb was never completed and the reliefs were left unpainted, it lacks the red coloration one might expect. Symbolism of Taweret in relation to gestation, between reception into the afterworld and “arising in glory” reborn, is also known from the funerary biers occurring as wall paintings and objects in royal tombs of the New Kingdom.<sup>91</sup> In representing a womb-like enclosure, the Taweret ouroboros in the tomb of Iufaa is functioning as a protective perimeter surrounding the gestating sun, with no apparent reference to eternity or endless cycles of time.

Ouroboros and ouroboroid imagery also continues to appear on coffins due to the continued adaptation of material from the Underworld Books. Figure 92 shows two examples from the painted scenes on the vaulted lid of a rectangular outer coffin from the Nubian Period, now in the Cairo Museum, which shows the night barque with the sun tightly enclosed within an ouroboroid typical of those appearing in the *Book of Night* (figure 45).<sup>92</sup> Several examples are found on some of the granite Nectanebid sarcophagi found by Mariette at Saqqara, such as that

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<sup>91</sup> These zoomorphic biers come in a set of three, in cow, hippopotamus, and lion forms. For their appearance in New Kingdom royal tombs, see citations in Horst Beinlich, “Zwischen Tod und Grab: Tutanchamun und das Begräbnisritual,” *SAK* 34 (2006) 29, n. 4. Anwar Shoukry suggested that these biers were probably used somehow during the funeral rites and were likely connected with rebirth (in Christine Desroches-Noblecourt, *Tutankhamen. Life and death of a pharaoh* [New York: New York Graphic Society, 1963] 301). Beinlich develops this idea somewhat, suggesting that the three biers represent three phases of the regenerative process. His interpretation of their symbolism is that the hippopotamus first takes the deceased within her, swallowing the deceased, so to speak. The lion goddess then keeps the deceased within and rejuvenates the deceased, while the cow goddess then gives birth to the deceased into a new, otherworldly life (Beinlich, *ibid.*, 29). This rather bizarre interpretation is pure speculation, entirely out of accord with the relevant Egyptian theological ideas, and is most certainly wrong. The cow, of course, is Hathor, lady of the West, and represents the reception of the deceased into the afterworld. The hippopotamus is Taweret, through which the deceased undergoes gestation and regeneration. The lion bier is Ruty, the double lion-god of the horizon, through which the deceased, like the sun, “arises in glory,” reborn. See Chapter 2, notes 8-10.

<sup>92</sup> Schmidt, *Sarkofager*, 203, figs. 1157, 1158.



of priest and overseer Ankhhepu, now in Cairo, which has a single image of a recumbent male figure within the protective coils of Mehen (figure 93),<sup>93</sup> derived from the vignettes for the twelfth *qrrt* ‘cavern’ in Chapter 168 of the *Book of the Dead* (discussed in the previous chapter; compare figures 53 and 54). The well-known sarcophagus of Pawenhatef, known as Djedher the dwarf, has a finely cut ouroboros surrounding a solar disk (figure 94),<sup>94</sup> in a vignette abbreviating the opening scene of the first hour of the *Book of Gates* (compare figures 30 and 32b). It is instructive to compare this with a very similar vignette from a sarcophagus of the dwarf’s contemporaneous namesake, the high official and priest Djedher, also in Cairo (figure 95),<sup>95</sup> in which the serpent’s tail is only brought around to the tight loop at the base of the raised cobra hood, unlike the serpent on the dwarf Djedher’s sarcophagus, which has the tail brought up to the serpent’s mouth (as with the canonical form seen in figures 30 and 32b). This once again demonstrates that the serpent’s tail being actually at or in the serpent’s mouth was not considered absolutely necessary for the meaning of the symbolism.

As has been previously noted, while an ouroboros may on occasion be used to represent the perimeter of the cosmos, this perimeter may also be symbolized by a plain, heavy ring as well, which is the case in a beautiful relief cut onto the cover of yet another Nectanebid sarcophagus, made of diorite, that of the Theban priest Ureshnefer, also found at Saqqara and now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (figure 96).<sup>96</sup> This same type of perimeter

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<sup>93</sup> CG 29303. Gaston Maspero, *Sarcophages des époques Persane et Ptolémaïque*, vol. 1, pt. 1, CG 29301-29306 (Cairo: IFAO, 1914) 86 ff., pl. 4.

<sup>94</sup> CG 29307. Manassa, *Late Egyptian Underworld*, vol. 1, 17; vol. 2, pl. 4b. Cf. Maspero, *Sarcophages*, vol. 1, pt. 1, pl. 24.

<sup>95</sup> CG 2902. Manassa, *Late Egyptian Underworld*, vol. 1, 16; vol. 2, pl. 4. Cf. Maspero, *Sarcophages*, vol. 1, pt. 1, 73 ff., pl. 7.

<sup>96</sup> C.L. R[ansom], “A Late Egyptian Sarcophagus,” *BMAA* 9 (1914) 117, fig. 3.

ring is seen in a substantial fragment (in three contiguous pieces) of a limestone sarcophagus which, when complete, once bore a very similar (though even more elaborate) representation to that of the lid on the Metropolitan sarcophagus.<sup>97</sup>

A most unique ouroboroid published by Brugsch (figure 97)<sup>98</sup> appears on a painted wooden outer coffin from the Roman Period, dated exactly by means of its astronomical inscriptions to 125 CE.<sup>99</sup> It was found in Thebes in the mid-nineteenth century and by 1857 was in the possession of a sometime assistant to Mariette, M.V. Galli Maunier, French consular agent in Luxor, money lender, and antiquities dealer. Maunier later went into service as agent for the powerful Halim Pasha and emerged from his service a rich man,<sup>100</sup> but the coffin, alas, passed out of his possession at some point, presumably into a private collection on the continent, and its present whereabouts is quite unknown.<sup>101</sup> Brugsch was first of all interested in the astronomical texts and celestial objects surrounding the outstretched image of the goddess Nut, arching over the deceased on the underside of the vaulted lid. He published this image of Nut in 1860,<sup>102</sup> following this two years later with a drawing of the general appearance of the whole coffin together with excerpts of texts and symbolic images on the coffin's exterior, including the

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<sup>97</sup> J.J. Clère, "Fragments d'une Nouvelle Représentation Égyptienne du Monde," *MDIAK* 16 (1958) 31, fig. 1; pl. 5.




<sup>98</sup> Henri Brugsch, *Recueil des monuments égyptiens*, pt. 1 (Leipzig: 1863; reprint, Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1981) 30-35, pls. 17, 34, 35.

<sup>99</sup> Otto Neugebauer and Richard A. Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, vol. 3.1, BES 6 (London: Percy Lund, Humphries and Co. Ltd, 1960) 93.

<sup>100</sup> Dawson, *Who was Who*, 281.

<sup>101</sup> Neugebauer and Parker believed the coffin was already lost when writing in 1960, *Astronomical Texts*, vol. 3.1, 93.

<sup>102</sup> H. Brugsch, "Ueber ein neu entdecktes astronomisches Denkmal aus der thebanischen Nekropolis," *ZÄS* 14 (1960) 15-27, pl. "Astronomische Darstellung."


ouroboroid under consideration. Brugsch is none too exacting about recording the actual placement of these excerpts, however, stating only that the ouroboroid appears on the upper part of the head-end of the coffin,<sup>103</sup> presumably on the end of the chest component of the coffin rather than on the head-end lunette of the vaulted lid, though this is not entirely clear. The accompanying inscription presents only the most conventional wishes for the deceased, that the sun disk may shine on him, that the sun may rise in the morning so that its rays may illuminate his mummy, followed by a brief identifying filiation; nowhere is there any direct reference to the encircling serpent and the symbols within it. Although the serpent-circle has no tail at or in a serpent mouth (indeed, the serpent has two *heads* facing one another), Brugsch shows no hesitation in describing it as the “*serpent symbole de l'éternité.*”<sup>104</sup> As can be seen from the figure, however, the serpent is not actually a true ouroboros in terms of strict graphic typology. The serpent defines a sacral space dominated by a standing figure of the goddess Nut, whose legs are being supported by a pair of Heh-gods, like the legs of the analogous Heavenly Cow. Her arms are outstretched in a horizontal line and support *nw*-jars, as if to suggest a sportive graphic reference to her name, sometimes written thus: ,<sup>105</sup> in which the image of Nut, who is both female and the sky, herself serves as the <sup>106</sup> and . Mummiform figures on either side of Nut perhaps betoken the osiride nature of those in the depths of the underworld where the dead


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<sup>103</sup> Brugsch, *Recueil*, 31.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, vol. 2, 214.

<sup>106</sup> The sportive interchangeability between female figures and , specifically in the writing of pronouns, became an established feature in Ptolemaic hieroglyphic writing; see Fairman, “Alphabetic Signs,” 247.




sun undergoes its regeneration, while the scarab and winged solar disk above Nut show the sun reborn as it leaves the underworld at dawn, accompanied by the praises of the twin sisters Isis and Nephthys, seen seated on either side of the rising sun. It is likely, therefore, that the serpent ring here does not represent the circuit of the sun but rather the “cavern” of the Underworld, with the space between the facing serpent heads representing the egress through which the reborn sun emerges at daybreak. Note also that each serpent head is raised in the manner of the hieroglyph  *dt*, the likely reference being to the mode of *dt*-time, characteristic of unchanging Underworld realities with their power to renew mutable *nḥh*-time realities, such as the sun or the deceased, that pass into and out of the Underworld. Other rare, late examples of the association of *dt*-time with symbolic ouroboroids will be noted further below.

A true ouroboros appears as a regular feature in the iconography of the so-called “pantheistic” deities that emerge in the Late Period and continue into the Roman Period. As the exact theological meaning of these deities remains a matter of controversy,<sup>107</sup> J.F. Quack has proposed the purely descriptive term “polymorphic deities,”<sup>108</sup> which will be preferred here. The iconography of polymorphic deities appears in various media, including papyri, amulets of varying materials, faience plaques, stelae, bronzes, and finally gemstones (in the Roman Period), with examples occurring in all major collections of Egyptian antiquities. The most common type of polymorphic deity has been traditionally called “Bes Pantheos” in Egyptological literature because of having the head of the protective deity Bes. Two-dimensional versions occur as

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<sup>107</sup> For a discussion of composite gods generally and the history of scholarly opinion regarding the “pantheistic” deities, see Olaf E. Kaper, *The Egyptian God Tutu. A Study of the Sphinx-God and Master of Demons with a Corpus of Monuments*, OLA 119 (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2003) 79-104; for a more recent assessment, see Joachim Friedrich Quack, “The So-Called Pantheos. On Polymorphic Deities in Late Egyptian Religion,” in: Hedvig Geöry, ed., *Aegyptus et Pannonia III. Acta Symposii anno 2004* (Budapest: MEBT-ÖEB, 2006) 175-190.

<sup>108</sup> Quack, “Polymorphic Deities,” 176.

drawings on papyri (figures 98<sup>109</sup> and 99<sup>110</sup>), but more commonly as reliefs on small stelae or plaques like an example in green-glazed ceramic from Mendes, now in Cairo (figure 100)<sup>111</sup> or like a particularly fine faience example of the Saite Period, now in the Louvre (figure 101).<sup>112</sup> The image on the Louvre plaque is quite typical for objects of this type, though one stops short of describing the image as “canonical” due to the considerable variations that are known in the full corpus of similar attestations. The head of Bes, along with subsidiary heads of powerful animals, is seen atop the body of a divine youth having four arms and covered all over with open eyes. The lower pair of arms hold an *ankh* (  ) and a *was*-scepter (  ), while the raised pair of arms grasp weapons along with scorpions and snakes. The rear of the human body is merged with that of an enormous preternatural falcon having a single tail but four great wings, while the head of Bes is crowned with a headdress bearing laterally arrayed corkscrew ram-horns below a solar disk and a pair of tall plumes, all protected by a pair of uraei and projecting knife blades. The figure is also ithyphallic, with both the phallus and feet terminating in jackal heads, a likely reference to Wepwawet, “Opener-of-Ways,” suggesting the unstoppable power of this polymorphic god to penetrate and make his way through all obstacles. The entire figure is then surrounded by a great nimbus of flame, indicated by the perimeter of “fire” hieroglyphs (  ).

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<sup>109</sup> P. Brooklyn Museum 47.218.156. Serge Sauneron, *Le papyrus illustré de Brooklyn*, Wilbour Monographs 3 (Brooklyn, New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1970) fig. 2.

<sup>110</sup> P. Deir al-Medîna 46. Yvan Koenig, “Histoires sans paroles (P. Deir al-Medîna 45, 46, 47),” *BIFAO* 111 (2011) 256, fig. 2.

<sup>111</sup> CG 9429. G. Daressy, *Texts et dessins magiques*, CG 9401-9449 (Cairo: IFAO, 1903) pl. 10.

<sup>112</sup> Louvre E 10954. The figure is based on a direct cast of the original object in the possession of the author.

The purpose of these representations is presumed to be apotropaic, in the first instance as protection against actual harmful creatures like snakes, scorpions, etc., and then perhaps against whatever other inimical forces such creatures may have been thought to symbolize. Below the standing figure of the polymorphic deity is a true ouroboros enclosing an array of potentially harmful wild animals such as are often encountered in Egyptian apotropaic magic,<sup>113</sup> in this case the lion, hippopotamus, serpent, crocodile, scorpion, turtle, and jackal. The idea has been put forward that these animals might indeed be the “helpers” of the polymorphic deity,<sup>114</sup> but the three small lines incised above the serpent on the Louvre plaque (representing knives cutting into the serpent’s coils) make it clear that the beings within the ouroboros are to be understood as threatening and potentially dangerous. The ouroboros in this context symbolizes the perimeter of the cosmos surrounding all the dangerous creatures contained within it. The polymorphic deity above the ouroboros is meant to be understood as dominating these creatures and probably as dominating all inimical forces within the cosmic perimeter.

The exact “syntactic” relationship between the standing polymorphic deity and the ouroboros can perhaps be better understood by reference to the many three-dimensional realizations of this iconography. For example, a bronze image now in Berlin (figure 102),<sup>115</sup> unfortunately with its former headdress now broken away, is clearly shown as actually standing upon the lions and crocodiles contained within the ouroboros. Another strategy that is used in the three-dimensional versions to indicate the dangerous animals as being within the perimeter of the

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<sup>113</sup> For examples see J.F. Borghouts, *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts*, NISABA 9 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978) 59 ff.

<sup>114</sup> For citations see Quack, “Polymorphic Deities,” 177, n.18.

<sup>115</sup> Berlin 11625. Bonnet, *Reallexikon*, 107, fig. 37.

ouroboros is to represent them in either raised or sunk relief around the surface of a sort of plinth above which the polymorphic deity stands within the ring of the ouroboros. Animals in raised relief can be seen, for example, on an exceptionally beautiful faience amulet now in the Birmingham Museum (figure 103),<sup>116</sup> which has sadly also lost its headdress and has suffered damage to its upper pair of wings. A smaller, less well executed faience amulet in the British Museum (figure 104)<sup>117</sup> shows a similar use of a plinth but with the dangerous animals rendered as sunk relief in summary fashion almost like bookhand hieroglyphs. The fact that, in all similar three-dimensional examples, the polymorphic deity is clearly standing within the perimeter of the ouroboros<sup>118</sup> makes it certain that the two-dimensional examples should also be understood as representing this as well.<sup>119</sup> The basic idea in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional versions is that the great polymorphic deity is at the center of the cosmos and dominates all of the inimical forces contained within its boundary, which is represented by the ouroboros. However, again confirming an earlier observation that a plain ring can, on occasion, appear in paradigmatic substitution for the ouroboros to symbolize the cosmic perimeter, a little faience amulet also in the collection of the Birmingham Museum (figure 105)<sup>120</sup> shows the polymorphic

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<sup>116</sup> Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery 1969W655. Unpublished; from a photograph by Sarah Chapman, Birmingham Egyptology.

<sup>117</sup> BM E 11821. Carol Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 1994) 38, fig. 34.

<sup>118</sup> However, a somewhat anomalous bronze in the Louvre (E 11554) has the left foot of the polymorphic deity extending so far forward that the toes go beyond the perimeter of the ouroboros. Marc Étienne, *Heka. Magie et envoûtement dans l'Égypte ancienne*, Exposition-dossier du département des Antiquités égyptiennes 57 (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2000) 82, 107 (cat. no. 140a).

<sup>119</sup> This is a syntactic pattern seen already as early as the Predynastic palette shown in figure 10, in which the Horus falcon on the *serekh* should be understood as standing within the ouroboroid.

<sup>120</sup> Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery 1969W2926. Unpublished; from a photograph by Sarah Chapman, Birmingham Egyptology.

deity standing on wavy serpent bodies, but has the cosmic perimeter surrounding the dangerous creatures represented on the underside of the amulet, where it appears as a plain ring rather than a serpent. This interchangeability of plain line and serpent body argues against the thought that the ouroboros might, in this or related contexts, represent Apophis or evil in general.<sup>121</sup>

Not all examples of the polymorphic deity bear the head of Bes. Figure 106 shows a bronze now in the Chicago Oriental Institute<sup>122</sup> in which the jackal head, often seen on the phallus and feet of the Bes-headed images, has taken the place of the Bes head. However, the Bes element is still present in the form of the stocky, bow-legged body characteristic of Bes, which appears instead of the slim, straight legged body of a divine youth that is always seen in the Bes-headed versions. Similarly, figure 107 shows a bronze in Leiden<sup>123</sup> that bears the head of the sacred ram of Amun, yet once again the Bes element is present in the form of the bow-legged body. In both cases the polymorphic deity is clearly seen as standing above inimical beings (crocodiles in both instances) surrounded by an ouroboros.

A thematically related class of apotropaic object is the so-called “cippus” of Horus or “Horus on the crocodiles” which, after a few New Kingdom antecedents, assumes its characteristic form in the Late Period, even exceeding the polymorphic deity in popularity if one is to judge on the basis of the numerous surviving examples.<sup>124</sup> The iconography of these stelae

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<sup>121</sup> A view expressed by Kákosy, “Ouroboros on Magical Healing Statues,” 123, 125.

<sup>122</sup> Chicago Oriental Institute 11.375. Gunther Roeder, *Ägyptische Bronzefiguren*, vol. 2 (plates), MÄS 6 (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 1956) pl. 75, a and b.

<sup>123</sup> Leiden E.XVIII.146. Gunther Roeder, *Ägyptische Bronzefiguren*, vol. 1 (text), MÄS 6 (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 1956) 102, fig. 130.

<sup>124</sup> The most recent and complete study of the history, iconography, and purpose of these objects is that of Heike Sternberg-El Hatabi, *Untersuchungen zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der Horusstelen. Ein Beitrag zur Religionsgeschichte Ägyptens im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, 2 vols., ÄA 62 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999).



is closely related to that of the polymorphic Bes but with differences appropriate to the more specific purpose of the protection of little children and infants. Under the aegis of Bes, whose head invariably occurs at the top of the stela, stands the image of a nude divine male child wearing the braided side-lock of youth. Like many of the polymorphic Bes images, the divine child grasps serpents and scorpions in his hands (along with an oryx and lion) and stands upon crocodiles. A selection of protective magical texts (and occasionally images) appearing on the back and sides of the stela complete the basic elements thought necessary for its efficacy. The iconography can be understood as a variation or transform of the basic pattern of the Bes-headed polymorphic deity; instead of a Bes head attached to a body which is both that of a divine youth and the falcon of Horus, here the syntactic place of the youth/falcon body is taken by the complete child Horus below a head of Bes, while the feature of grasping serpents and scorpions and that of standing above crocodiles remains the same. Notably absent, however, is the ouroboros forming a perimeter around the god and the inimical beings, as is always seen in examples of the polymorphic deity. There is a single interesting exception to this, however, on a very late example, thought to be Ptolemaic, now in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow (figure 108).<sup>125</sup> As can be seen in the figure, an ouroboros is arranged around the entire figurative front of the stela, completely surrounding the image of the child Horus, the inimical creatures he grasps, and the crocodiles upon which he stands. Once again, as with the images of the polymorphic deity, the god and the creatures he dominates are to be understood as being at the center of the cosmos, the perimeter of which is symbolized by the surrounding ouroboros.

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<sup>125</sup> Pushkin State Museum inv. no. I, 1a4474 (ИГ 1895). Svetlana Hodjash, *God Bes's Images in the Ancient Egyptian Art in the Collection of the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts. Catalogue* (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura Publishers, 2004) 46-49; Sternberg-El Hotabi, *Horusstelen*, vol. 2, 143, pl. 22.

By far the largest and finest surviving example in the “Horus on the crocodiles” genre is the so-called Metternich Stela, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>126</sup> Carved of fine dark green greywacke in the mid-fourth century (30<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, reign of Nectanebo II), its design is such that the space taken up by the actual iconography of the Bes head, child Horus, and crocodiles is reduced to perhaps less than a quarter of the stela’s front surface, so that on all sides there is greatly increased space available for accompanying texts and images. The accompanying images repeat the basic notion of divine power overcoming inimical forces with prolific variation and redundancy (in a fine illustration of the principle of inclusive disjunction), exploiting the inherent possibilities of the entire symbolic repertoire of such images in so doing. Among these images are several ouroboroids and ouroboroi, the most prominent of which occurs on the back of the stela. Right at the top, in the lunette formed between the curved upper edge of the stela and the first of the horizontal register lines, there appears the now familiar iconography of the Bes-headed polymorphic deity standing above an ouroboros which surrounds the usual malign animals (figure 109).<sup>127</sup> Another variant of the polymorphic deity is found among the smaller images on the left side of the stela (figure 110a),<sup>128</sup> in this case having features of the falcon of Horus and the erect phallus and flagellum characteristic of the god Min. The deity stands above an encircled serpent that forms an enclosed space but is not a true ouroboros as its head and tail are laced together in a loose knot rather than having the tip of the tail and mouth brought into contact, once again demonstrating that contact between the head and tail of the serpent is not an

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<sup>126</sup> Cat. no. 52 in James P. Allen, *The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005) 49 ff.; Nora E. Scott, “The Metternich Stela,” *BMMA* 9 (1951) 201-217.

<sup>127</sup> Allen, *op. cit.*, 53; Scott, *op. cit.*, 208.

<sup>128</sup> Sixth register from the top, Scott’s register XXI. Allen, *op. cit.*, 52; Scott, *op. cit.*, 210.

absolutely necessary feature for the meaning of the symbolism, the ouroboroid in this case perfectly fulfilling the same purpose as the more usual ouroboros. Yet another unusual variant of the polymorphic deity occurs in the upper right-hand corner of the raised frame surrounding the main sculpture of Horus on the crocodiles on the front of the stela (figure 110e),<sup>129</sup> in this instance combining attributes of the falcon of Horus, Min, and Taweret, with the deity standing above a true ouroboros. Both variants are quite small, and the presence of the usual inimical creatures within the serpent perimeters beneath them is no doubt to be understood, even though the small size of the encircled serpents made the actual carving of such creatures in such tiny spaces entirely impractical. In other registers on the left side of the stela, one encounters standing figures who are shown spearing serpents that in a purely descriptive sense may be regarded as ouroboroi, in that their tails and mouths are brought into contact. In figure 110b, one sees at the left a figure of Onuris brandishing his iconographically characteristic spear against the tail of a crocodile, with one side of the spear head in contact with a convoluted serpent having its tail to its mouth. Two other spears, their divine power indicated by each having shafts topped with falcon heads crowned with solar disks, are shown with their points in contact with the serpent's body. Another register (figure 110c)<sup>130</sup> shows two additional variants of polymorphic deity spearing elaborately convoluted serpents that have their tails brought into proximity with their mouths. The deity on the left is shown combining iconographic features of Onuris, Sobek, and the falcon of Horus, while the deity on the right has only features of Onuris and the falcon of Horus. As in the case of the serpent in figure 110b, both the presence of spears touching the serpents and the convoluted bodies of the serpents indicate that these serpents are to be

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<sup>129</sup> Allen, *op. cit.*, 51; Scott, *op. cit.*, 206.

<sup>130</sup> Eleventh register from the top, Scott's register XXV. Allen, *op. cit.*, 52; Scott, *op. cit.*, 210.

understood as symbols of chaotic forces antithetical to life in the ordered cosmos. Similarly convoluted serpents are to be found on the front of the stela (figure 110d),<sup>131</sup> where they are seen (along with a single scorpion) contained within squares upon which are seated knife-bearing images of divine protective beings like those encountered in the Underworld Books. The serpents are shown with convoluted coils, and the varying dispositions of their bodies further indicate their chaotic, antithetical nature. Four of the serpents have their tails to their mouths, while two do not, in apparent free variation. Two further examples of similar serpents are found on the back of the stela (figure 110f),<sup>132</sup> where a pair of serpents are likewise shown with convoluted bodies; one serpent has its tail to its mouth while the other does not, again with no apparent difference in meaning. In all such contexts, no special significance should be read into the serpents which happen to have their tails to their mouths.


Ouroboroi can also be found on examples of a related genre of object, the so-called “statues guérisseuses” or magical healing statues.<sup>133</sup> These statues are stelaphorous, being typically a sitting, kneeling, or standing image of a priestly donor who is shown holding or displaying a stela of Horus on the crocodiles. The first example to be considered here, however, is scarcely more than a battered fragment, the so-called “Borgia Torso,” now in the Museo

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<sup>131</sup> Third register from the top (counting the lunette as the first register), Scott’s register III. Allen, op. cit., 53; Scott, op. cit., 208.

<sup>132</sup> The serpents are found at the far left end of the fifth register from the top (counting the lunette as the first register), Scott’s register XIII. Allen, op. cit., 53; Scott, op. cit., 208.

<sup>133</sup> For a list of known objects of this genre, together with a discussion of their nature and use, see László Kákósy, “Some Problems of the Magical Healing Statues,” in: Alessandro Roccati and Alberto Siliotti, eds., *La Magia in Egitto al Tempi dei Faraoni* (Milan: Rassegna Internazionale di Cinematographia Archaeologia Arte et Natura Libri, 1987) 171-186. For a descriptive catalogue of examples now in Italy, see: idem, *Egyptian Healing Statues in Three Museums in Italy (Turin, Florence, Naples)* Catalogo del Museo Egizio di Torino, Serie Prima - Monumenti e Testi 9 (Turin: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali - Soprintendenza al Museo della Antichità Egizie, 1999).

Nazionale in Naples. On the right side of the torso's back are five registers (Kákosy's registers VI through X) in which are seen nine seated, knife bearing images of divine protective beings (figure 111)<sup>134</sup> much like those already seen on the front side of the Metternich Stela. Three of these are seated upon rectangles containing scorpions, while six are seated upon rectangles containing serpents. Unlike the serpents of the Metternich Stela examples, however, the serpents here are all regularly arranged into a shape approximating the hieroglyph  *dw* 'evil'. In order to arrange them in this manner, the priestly iconographer connected their tails to their mouths, and they may therefore be described as ouroboroi in a limited descriptive sense. It is also just possible that, as the enclosing perimeter of the entire cosmos was sometimes represented as an ouroboros, the serpents here might have been intended to suggest the idea of "all evil" contained in the world.

A similarly fragmentary statue, now in Turin, preserves only the lower body and hands holding a stela of Horus on the crocodiles. In the second of the surviving registers found on the rear surface of its back pillar (Kákosy's register X+II), there is an image of Montu (figure 112a)<sup>135</sup> who is described in the accompanying text as




*mnt(w) nb w3st ntr 3 nb pt šc sbjw*

Montu, lord of Thebes, great god, who cuts up rebel-serpents.

The serpent being speared is arranged in "chaotic" coils similar to those of the serpent found in the square beneath the first of the seated protective beings on the front of the Metternich Stela

<sup>134</sup> Museo Nazionale di Napoli, no. 1065. Kákosy, *Healing Statues*, 144-148, figs. 28-30, pls. 42, 43.

<sup>135</sup> Museo Egizio di Torino, no. 3031. Kákosy, *Healing Statues*, 99, pl. 33.

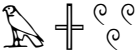
(figure 110d) except that the tail here is shown clearly overlapping the head rather than in near contact with it. As there is no discernable difference in the meaning of these serpents, this is yet another example showing that no special significance should necessarily be attached to the tail being at or in the mouth in such contexts. Two registers below the image of Montu, there is an apparently unique vignette in which “Sekhmet, beloved of Ptah” (as the accompanying caption reads) is seen holding a protective serpent as a scepter and standing guard over an unusual and complex symbolic representation that combines features of the infant sun and Horus on the crocodiles (figure 112b).<sup>136</sup> An ouroboros surrounds what must be understood as a solar disk marked with the so-called Pataikos dwarf, the whole appearing above the horizon in a manner suggestive of the hieroglyph  ; this in turn rests upon two crocodiles perched upon a serekh. The Pataikos dwarf appears primarily in the form of amulets in which he is shown standing on crocodiles in the syntactic place occupied by the child Horus in the Horus on the crocodiles stela.<sup>137</sup> The diminutive stature of Pataikos links him both with the divine child of the stela and with the child marking the solar disk as the rising sun (as in figure 60), while his dwarfish physiognomy also suggests an association with the dwarf body of the protective deity Bes. The crocodiles below him are shown with their heads turned “backwards” as crocodiles are sometimes commanded to do in protective magical texts.<sup>138</sup> Altogether, the entire symbolic image skillfully converges several diverse but thematically related symbols into a single emblem of great numina and apotropaic power. On the right of the back pillar, in the fourth preserved

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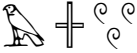


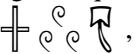

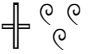
<sup>136</sup> Kákosy, *Healing Statues*, 100-01, fig. 24, pl. 33. Two less well cut but very similar images occur on back pillars of Florence 8708 (*ibid.*, 54, fig. 8; 55, Reg. VIII; pls. 4, 13) and Turin 3030 (*ibid.*, 85, Reg. VII; pl. 26).

<sup>137</sup> Andrews, *Amulets*, 38, figs 34, 35; Étienne, *Heka*, 83, 108 cat. 145.

<sup>138</sup> Borghouts, *Magical Texts*, 85.


register from the top (Kákosy's register X+V), there is also a variant of polymorphic deity, combining features of the Horus falcon, Taweret, Min, Sobek, and Neith (figure 113a).<sup>139</sup> The accompanying inscription reads  *hrw jmj šnw*<sup>140</sup> 'Horus-who-is-in-the-enclosure', further confirming that the deity apparently standing above the ouroboros is actually to be understood as being within the enclosing serpentine perimeter. The text is also of interest in that it explicitly states that the ouroboros in this context could be referred to as a *šnw* 'enclosure'. A similar example (figure 113b),<sup>141</sup> but having what maybe the head of a hippopotamus rather than a crocodile, is found on the aforementioned Borgia Torso just behind the left arm (at the level of the elbow on the statue's back (Kákosy's register V). The head of the ouroboros is quite

<sup>139</sup> Kákosy, *Healing Statues*, 103, pl. 30. Other examples of deities like those seen in figures 113a and 113b can be found on Turin 3030 near the (figure's) right of the back pillar on the long garment (ibid., 87, Reg. V; pl. 25) and on the (figure's) right side of the back pillar on Florence 8070 (ibid., 60, fig. 16, Reg. VII; pl. 9).

<sup>140</sup> The reading of  is uncertain. Because it sometimes appears with  and/or  , it has been read as *hr jmj šnwt* 'Horus-who-is-in-Shenut', with *šnwt* being understood as a place-name. That *šnwt* is a place-name (place unknown, presumed to be in the 9<sup>th</sup> Nome of Upper Egypt) was argued by Hermann Kees ("Kulttopographische und mythologische Beiträge," *ZÄS* 64 [1929] 107-112), a view then reflected in vol. 4 of Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch* (transliterating *šn.t.w*, 498.5) when published the following year, and dutifully repeated recently in Leitz, *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter* (vol. 5, 244). Herman te Velde, however, was more cautious, noting that the town-determinative may not necessarily mean that this term originated as a place-name, though it was certainly understood as a place name sometime in its history ("Horus imi-schenut," *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. 3, col. 47). That this word was certainly *not* always understood as a place-name, however, is clearly indicated in the way it appears in an Edfu text examined in Chapter 1 (see Ch., n. 49). The scene is one of bloody immolation of sacrificial animals, in which the king and queen offer trussed and beheaded creatures to Horus Behdety, who is addressed with the epithet  , written without the  but written *with* the determinative in the form of a piece of animal skin with attached tail that always signifies that the word it follows has something to do with animals. The god is understood as being *jmj šnw* 'in the enclosure' containing the animal sacrifices, the destruction of which was magically understood to be the destruction of the enemies of the god. It makes perfect sense, then, to read  as *jmj šnw* with regard to a form of polymorphic deity, as the deity is understood as destroying inimical forces, symbolized by animals, within the enclosing perimeter of the cosmos, represented by the ouroboros.

<sup>141</sup> Kákosy, *Healing Statues*, 52, pl. 42.

perfunctorily indicated, if at all, the effect being more like a plain *šnw*-ring. Both of these polymorphic deity images are quite small and, as in the case of the similar small examples on the Metternich Stela, the actual carving of the appropriate malign creatures within the tiny ouroboroi was entirely impractical, and their presence was to be understood by the intended viewer who would no doubt be familiar with these iconographic conventions and their meaning. More to the point, such graphic abbreviation was apparently not believed to diminish the magical efficacy of such images.

Also appearing on the magical healing statues is a form of protective deity in which the iconographic element of Taweret is featured alone without the other components found in Horus-who-is-in-the-enclosure representations. The Taweret image is shown with a forepaw on a *s3*-sign (𓄏), signifying ‘protection’, and holding a knife (𓄏), which can also be read *s3*, perhaps intended as word-play. The deity is shown standing on (= within) an ouroboros or ouroboroid. The example in figure 114a<sup>142</sup> appears to be standing on an encircled serpent having its head and tail overlapping, while the examples in figures 114b<sup>143</sup> and 114c<sup>144</sup> appear to have true ouroboroi. Though the example in figure 114c has no accompanying inscription, the other two examples are captioned  *wr hk3w* ‘Great-of-magic’. The encircled serpent in these images can scarcely have any other meaning than the ouroboroi seen in the various representations of polymorphic deities; the deity here is once again the divine protective force

<sup>142</sup> Turin 3130. The image occurs on the (figure’s) right side of the back pillar. Kákosy, *Healing Statues*, 102, Reg. X+IV; pls. 29-30.

<sup>143</sup> Florence 8708. Again, the image occurs on the (figure’s) right side of the back pillar. Kákosy, *Healing Statues*, 60, figure 15; 61, Reg. VI; pl. 9).

<sup>144</sup> Turin 3030. The image occurs on the (figure’s) right side, in the mid-leg area of the long garment. Kákosy, *Healing Statues*, 89, Reg. IV; pl. 23.



dominating and destroying all inimical forces within the cosmos, the outer limit of which is represented by the encircled serpent. The images are all very small, making the representation of dangerous animals within each encircled serpent quite impossible; once again, the presence of inimical beings within the perimeter of the serpent is to be understood, implied by the icon of the encircled serpent itself.





A final example of an ouroboros from the magical healing statues (figure 115)<sup>145</sup> is found also on the Borgia Torso, tucked just behind the statue's left shoulder amongst a series of deities cut onto the side of the back pillar. The image is of a mummy, having a bewigged falcon head crowned with a solar disk, and standing on (= within) an ouroboros. The symbolism is by now familiar, uniting the osiride aspect (the mummy) with the solar aspect (the falcon head with solar disk), a concise synthetic image of the greatest numina and very life of the entire cosmos, the limit of which is represented by the ouroboros.

On an unusual and apparently unique stela recovered by Petrie from his excavations at Coptos, one finds a sculptural image of a perfectly circular ouroboros quite like that often seen in the "classic" ouroboros of the post-pharaonic reception (figure 116).<sup>146</sup> Dated to the Roman Period, the symbolism of which the ouroboros forms a part is traditional, though executed in a manner that betrays its late date. Taken as a whole, the symbolism of the stela represents key phases of the solar cycle, with an emphasis on the all-important nocturnal, osiride phase in which the dead sun is again united with Osiris at the cycle's nadir in the depths of night, and thus begins the process of renewal leading to rebirth at sunrise. As tempting as it might be to regard the ouroboros here as purely emblematic of the cycle itself, it is once again more consistent with

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<sup>145</sup> Naples 1065. Kákosy, *Healing Statues*, 149, Reg. III; pl. 44.


<sup>146</sup> W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Koptos* (London, 1896) 25, pl. 5 fig. 12.

previously seen iconographic and textual evidence to understand this ouroboros as the protective underworldly “cavern” in which the resurrected Osiris stands. The iconography of this Osiris is fairly traditional,<sup>147</sup> though the cape-like rectangle descending from the figure’s arms are a late feature. The spaces on either side of the image of Osiris are each marked with three stars (the number three being a usual indication of plurality), no doubt intended to convey the idea of a nocturnal deep filled with numerous stars. The surrounding circular ouroboros, having the five-pointed stars within it, also has a graphic and thematic resonance with the hieroglyph , an abbreviated writing for *dwꜣt* ‘*Duat*’, and this ouroboros and the Osiris within it must surely bear some relation to the late, graphically sportive writing for *dwꜣt* , and further to the writings  and <sup>148</sup> for *dt*, the form of time associated with the ever-abiding, changeless realities of the *Duat*. At the lower left of the stela, outside the perimeter of the ouroboros, a much smaller image represents the rebirth of the sun at sunrise. The sun appears as a royal child sitting on his haunches, bearing the side-lock of youth and the royal flail-scepter, and touching an index finger to his mouth, the conventional gesture of early childhood. The royal child sits within a solar disk from which emerge stubby projections representing rays of light, an unusual and late iconographic feature. Both the child and disk are supported by a thick horizontal register line, which in turn rests upon a small lotus blossom, the stem of which is intertwined with stems

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<sup>147</sup> Front-facing, high relief images of Osiris are, however, very rare; the only other known examples date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, occurring at the north end of corridor 7 in KV5 and in side-chamber Ja in KV 7. See Kent R. Weeks, *KV 5. A Preliminary Report on the Excavation of the Tomb of the Sons of Ramesses II in the Valley of the Kings*, Publications of the Theban Mapping Project II (Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2000) 36, 37 fig. 29c.


<sup>148</sup> For citations see Daumas, *Valeurs phonétiques*, vol. 2, 369. The connection between the symbolism of the stela and such writings is mentioned by László Kákósy, “Osiris-Aion,” *Or Ant* 3 (1964) 20, pl. 41.

bearing unopened buds on either side; the lotus and buds emerge from a horizontal rectangle like the hieroglyphs for ‘pool’ or ‘canal’, the entire image being no doubt intended to suggest the iconography of the child Nefertem appearing upon a lotus arising from the abyssal waters, a variant representation of the primeval monad appearing in the waters of chaos at the first moments of creation and a cosmogonic analogue to the appearance of the sun at sunrise. Then at the lower right of the stela, one sees a small solar disk marked with the  *wꜣdt*, the “whole eye” representing the day sun in the fullness of its strength at zenith. The peculiar rendering of the *wꜣdt*, departing as it does from well-established convention, is likewise an indication of the stela’s very late date. The setting of the sun is not explicitly represented because that phase of the solar cycle could be understood as subsumed within the emphasized osiride phase.

It has been suggested that an ouroboros occurs in a Demotic tale of the Setne Khamwas cycle.<sup>149</sup> A story within a story relates that there was once a certain priest, Naneferkaptah, an antiquary and seeker of forbidden knowledge, who sought out a secret scroll of magic said to have been written by Thoth himself. When he at last locates the great iron box containing the scroll, it is surrounded by a great expanse of scorpions, venomous serpents, and fearsome

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<sup>149</sup> Assmann, “Sarkophagdeckel des Merenptah,” 49. The Setne Khamwas cycle seems to have enjoyed popularity from the Ptolemaic through the Roman Periods, with manuscripts and fragments known from both. The specific tale of interest here is *Setne I*, preserved on P. Cairo 30646. W. Spiegelberg, *Die demotischen Denkmäler*, vol. 2: *Die demotischen Papyrus*, CG 30601-31270, 50001-50022, (Strausburg, 1908) 88, pls. 44-47; F. Ll. Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis, the Sethon of Herodotus and the Demotic Tales of Khamwas*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1900) 13-40, 82-141; W. Erichsen, *Demotische Lesestücke*, vol. 1: *Literarische Texte mit Glossar und Schrifttafel* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs Verlag, 1937) 1-40; Sara Goldbrunner, *Der verblendete Gelehrte: der erste Setna-Roman (P. Kairo 30646)* (Sommerhausen: Gisela Zauzich Verlag, 2006).

reptiles, which Naneferkaptah subdues with a magic spell. Proceeding to the box itself, he finds it surrounded by a  *hf-n-dt* ‘serpent of eternity’.<sup>150</sup>



*r-jr=f gm w<sup>c</sup> hf-n-dt n p3 qd n t3 tbt n rn=s*

Surrounding that very box, he found a serpent of eternity.<sup>151</sup>


The storyteller then has the serpent come to life and threaten Naneferkaptah, who kills the serpent only to have it come back to life. Again Naneferkaptah kills the preternatural serpent, and again it returns to life. This time, however, Naneferkaptah not only kills the great serpent, but cuts it into pieces and separates the pieces with mounds of sand. The serpent at last stays dead, and Naneferkaptah goes on to obtain the magic scroll he so desires. It is clear that the serpent surrounds the box in order to protect its contents, and Jan Assmann is no doubt correct to point out the similarity of this conception with the serpents found encircling the perimeters of some royal sarcophagi of the late New Kingdom,<sup>152</sup> in particular those of Merenptah, Ramesses III, and prince Amenherkhepshef (figures 48, 49, 51, 52). It is of interest that this apparent ouroboros is here given a definite descriptive name, *hf-n-dt*. As has been seen, there is no evidence from earlier periods of a distinct appellation for the ouroboros; it was certainly not *sd-m-r3*, as has been suggested (and rejected at length in Chapter 1), and though most often

<sup>150</sup> *Setne I*; 3, 31. Erichsen, *Lesestücke*, 9-10.

<sup>151</sup> Literally, “He found a serpent of eternity in the circuit of the box in its name (= the same box),” though the translation offered above is an attempt both to render this in more idiomatic English and to express the force of the past ‘second tense’ *r-jr=f gm* by emphasizing the adverbial element through extraposition.

<sup>152</sup> Assmann, “Sarkophagendeckel des Merenptah,” 49. However, Assmann’s rendering of *hf-n-dt* as “Schlange der Unendlichkeit” seems a somewhat inappropriate translation of *dt*, perhaps intended to reinforce association with the idea of the endless circle of an ouroboros.

identified with Mehen, this latter might also be represented as a plain ring or as non-ouroboric serpents, e.g. an uraeus (as shown in Chapters 2-3).

In the left-hand corner of the north wall in the monumental Gate of Hadrian, a landing station at Philae, there can be seen a relief that has been cited in relation to the ouroboros.<sup>153</sup> The image in question occurs as an element in an elaborate tableau representing, in part, the mythological origin of the fecundating Nile waters from within a mysterious hidden grotto located on the nearby island of Bigeh. The island precinct of the sacred grotto was known to the Greeks and Romans as the Abaton (<τὸ ἄβατον ‘not to be trodden’, a reference to its sanctity<sup>154</sup>), a designation given also to several other sacred sites elsewhere in Egypt, though in this case a naming that was possibly facilitated by a perceived similarity to the sound of the Egyptian name for the place,  *iw w<sup>c</sup>bt* ‘island holy-place’.<sup>155</sup> The relief itself (figure 117)<sup>156</sup> shows a promontory of great granite boulders such as are characteristic of the First Cataract region, on the summit of which perch a falcon and a vulture representing the protective sisters, Isis and

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<sup>153</sup> Kákosy, “Uroboros,” 888.

<sup>154</sup> Diodorus Siculus I, 22 = C.H. Oldfather, trans., *Diodorus Siculus*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1933) 70-72; Strabo XVII.1.23 = Horace Leonard Jones, trans., *The Geography of Strabo* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1932) 74-75; Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, 20 = Babbit, *Plutarch’s Moralia*, vol. 5, 52-53; Servius, *Ad Vergilii Aeneidos*, VI, 154 = George Thilo and Hermann Hagen, eds., *Servii Grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii Carmina Commentari*, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1884) 34.

<sup>155</sup> Lit. ‘island pure-place’, with various similar orthographies; for examples see Hermann Junker, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, DAWW 56.4 (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1913) 8, 11, 24, 26, 33.








<sup>156</sup> Junker, op. cit., 37, fig. 8.

Nephthys.<sup>157</sup> At the base is depicted the mysterious grotto hidden within the granite promontory, referred to in the accompanying terse caption:<sup>158</sup>



ḥꜣp sp sn jmn sp sn ḏw kꜣj m snmt

Doubly secret, doubly hidden, high mountain in Senmut (= Bigeh).

Seen within this hidden grotto is an image of the Nile-god Hapi, pouring forth the Nile waters from a pair of ewers having the shapes  and . The inner periphery of the grotto is defined by the body of a serpent, its tail well overlapping its head, and therefore not a true ouroboros. This imagined grotto was not only regarded as the mythological origin of the Nile, but also as the tomb of Osiris, a fact directly mentioned or alluded to by Greek and Roman authors;<sup>159</sup> indeed, the usual Egyptian name for the Abaton, *jw w<sup>c</sup>bt*, alternates in the Philae texts with the expression     *jꜣt w<sup>c</sup>bt* 'holy (lit. *pure*) tumulus', a term for the tomb of Osiris,<sup>160</sup> and *jw w<sup>c</sup>bt* also occurs with the tumulus hieroglyph (  ) as its determinative.<sup>161</sup> Moreover, Hermann Junker, in his study of the Abaton, examines a number of texts from Philae which clearly establish that Hapi in this instance was regarded as a form of Osiris, the ebb and flow of

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<sup>157</sup> The falcon's silhouette here is not that of the so-called Horus falcon but that of the kestrel (*Falco tinnuclus*), used to represent Isis. The vulture (*Gyps fulvus* or *Aegypius tracheliotus*) always represents goddesses (e.g., Nekhbet, Mut, Nephthys). Houlihan, *Birds*, 40-41, 45.

<sup>158</sup> Junker, op. cit., 137.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 74 ff.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 8, 74.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 50.

the Nile's yearly inundation being understood as a manifestation of osiride death and renewal.<sup>162</sup> Junker further identifies the serpent around the periphery of the grotto as a protective *qrrt*-serpent,<sup>163</sup> analogous to the protective serpentine perimeter already seen in other Osiris-related contexts (e.g., figure 63, in which the serpent-perimeter is referred to as *tpht ʿ3t* 'great cavern'). There is nothing whatsoever to suggest that the encircling serpent should be understood as an "ouroboros" symbolizing unending cycles of yearly inundation.

Also from the Roman Period is an apparently ouroboros-like image on a painted ceiling in the tomb of one Petosiris in the Dakhla Oasis necropolis of Qaret el-Muzawwiqa.<sup>164</sup> The tomb consists of two chambers, each with a painted ceiling representing the sky. The basic design is the same on each ceiling, a more-or-less circular zodiac set within a rectilinear frame, an obvious parallel to the pattern of the famous zodiac from the ceiling of the second room of the eastern Osiris chapel at Dendera, now in the Louvre.<sup>165</sup> The ouroboros-like image occurs in the ceiling decoration of the first chamber (figure 118),<sup>166</sup> where it can be seen encircling the celestial vault. Immediately within its perimeter one finds the ring of the zodiac, which in turn surrounds a central space containing star-like rosettes along with male and female busts that have been plausibly identified as representing the visible planets.<sup>167</sup> Outside the ouroboros-like perimeter,

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 37-39.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 39. Junker transliterates *kr.t* (sic).

<sup>164</sup> Jürgen Osing, et al., *Denkmäler der Oase Dachla, aus dem Nachlass von Ahmed Fakhry*, AV 28 (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1982).

<sup>165</sup> Cauville, *Dendara*, 10/2, pls. 60, 86. Another parallel would be the now lost Akhmim zodiac; see Neugebauer and Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, vol. 3, 86-89 n. 65, pl. 45.

<sup>166</sup> Osing, *Denkmäler*, pls. 38-39.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 96.

the entire celestial vault is supported by four winged, nude goddesses who are standing in the four corners of the rectilinear frame (which is, however, slightly deformed due to the shape of the room). These goddesses, looking rather like disrobed predecessors of later Coptic angels, should be understood as versions of the goddesses of the four cardinal points, seen supporting the sky in the Dendera zodiac.

The ouroboros-like image around the perimeter of the celestial vault is unusual in that it is composed of a serpent *and* a crocodile, their tails connected as one and their mouths touching one another. An unbroken line or ring of red pigment, seen running around through their mouths and bodies, represents the solar circuit. The original publication of the tomb makes no attempt at interpreting this image, beyond mere description. Helen Whitehouse, however, suggested that this serpent-crocodile may symbolize “opposed aspects of eternity,”<sup>168</sup> citing a paper in which Kákosy presents arguments for the crocodile as a symbol of eternity and time.<sup>169</sup> Implicit in her suggestion is the unquestioned assumption that the serpent here must also represent an aspect of eternity. However, the true meaning of this serpent-crocodile ouroboroid is to be found in quite another direction.

The key to the meaning of this unusual ouroboroid is the presence of heads of two bovids, one appearing with the crocodile and one appearing with the serpent. The tomb publication describes these simply as: “Bull’s heads with ears, otherwise similar to Meskhetiu,”

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<sup>168</sup> Helen Whitehouse, “Roman in Life, Egyptian in Death: The Painted Tomb of Petosiris in the Dakhleh Oasis,” in: Olaf E. Kaper, ed., *Life on the Fringe. Living in the Southern Egyptian Deserts during the Roman and early-Byzantine Periods* (Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1998) 264.

<sup>169</sup> László Kákosy, “Das Krokodil als Symbol der Ewigkeit und der Zeit,” *MDAIK* 20 (1956) 116-120.



further commenting that there “are no heads in the opposite corners.”<sup>170</sup> The fact that there are two heads, and only two, and that one is associated with the crocodile and the other with the serpent, is seen to be of special significance in light of the following considerations. The artistic execution of the heads, like the rest of the tomb’s painted decoration, shows a certain lack of skill and an imperfect mastery of traditional Egyptian canonical forms which, at their best, often show such keen observation of animal forms that particular species can often be identified with relative certainty. In this instance, however, the execution of these heads is merely perfunctory, almost cartoonish to the modern eye. No doubt they are intended to represent members of the family Bovidae, but there is no reason to suppose that they are necessarily bulls (*Bos taurus*); rather, they are an imperfect attempt to represent the heads of hartebeests (*Alcelaphus buselaphus*),<sup>171</sup> which occur associated with the serpent and crocodile in the opening tableau of the *Litany of Re* (figure 119).<sup>172</sup> The tableau is divided into three registers, with the sun disk appearing at the center, in the middle register. The disk is marked with the ram-headed deity and scarab, symbolizing the key features of death and rebirth in the solar cycle. In the registers above and below the disk are a serpent and a crocodile respectively, each facing toward the head of a hartebeest emerging into the frame in each of their respective registers. Red-glowing wicks appear on the heads of the hartebeests.<sup>173</sup> In the complete, original versions of the *Litany of Re*,

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<sup>170</sup> Osing, *Denkmäler*, 96. As will be seen, there is no reason whatsoever to connect these heads with the constellation *mshtjw*, the foreleg of an ox/bull identified with *Ursa major*, or with any other constellation.

<sup>171</sup> Osborn, *Mammals*, 171-172.

<sup>172</sup> Alexandre Piankoff, trans. and comm., *The Litany of Re*, Bollingen Series 40/4 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964) pl. 3.

<sup>173</sup> Piankoff described the protuberance emerging from the head of each hartebeest as “a torch between the horns,” Piankoff, *Litany*, 16, n. 1. Hornung more plausibly describes this as a wick, and gives details

no textual information is forthcoming as to the exact meaning of these creatures. Piankoff supposes that the serpent and crocodile are fleeing from the solar disk,<sup>174</sup> and Hornung similarly regards them, along with the hartebeests, as inimical beings expelled from the path of the sun.<sup>175</sup> However, as has been seen already in the case of serpents acting as door guardians (discussed in Chapter 2), potentially dangerous creatures can also serve as effective, beneficent protectors. That such is the case in this instance is shown by texts accompanying a version of the opening tableau of the *Litany of Re* dating from the Late Period (c. reign of Nectanebo II), found on the foot end of the sarcophagus lid of Lady Tadipakem, probable mother of the famous Petosiris who was buried in the large tomb and temple complex in the late necropolis of el-Ashmunein at Tuna el-Gebel. The tableau (figure 120)<sup>176</sup> has as its central image the solar disk, again marked with a ram-headed deity and scarab. The disk appears suspended at the top of the register, with corpuscles of solar light radiating downward from it in a vertical column. The disk is nestled in

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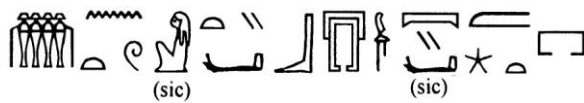
about the red pigment surviving on various examples, Eric Hornung, ed and trans., *Das Buch der Anbetung des Re im Westen (Sonnenlitanei)*, vol. 2 *Übersetzung und Kommentar*, AH 3 (Basel and Geneva: Ägyptologisches Seminar der Universität Basel; Centre d'études orientales de l'Université de Genève) 29. Internal details of the wick are absent due to it glowing with light, as indicated by being painted entirely red.

<sup>174</sup> Piankoff, *Litany*, 16, n. 11.

<sup>175</sup> Hornung, *Sonnenlitanei*, 29-30. Hornung supports this idea by pointing out the inimical nature of such creatures in magical texts, and representations such as those on the so-called cippi of Horus, on which one sees the infant Horus standing on crocodiles while grasping serpents and horned antelope, along with other powerful creatures such as the lion and scorpion. Hornung is aware of the texts accompanying a Late Period version of the opening tableau of the *Litany of Re* (discussed below) that identify the tableau's crocodile, serpent, and hartebeests as beneficent guardians, but concludes from this only that the original inimical nature of these beings had undergone a transformation by the Late Period. Even if he is correct, this does not affect the present argument, as the crocodile, serpent, and hartebeests of the Petosiris ceiling are centuries later, well after Late Period attestation of the tradition that these creatures are beneficent guardians.

<sup>176</sup> CG 29316. Gaston Maspero and Henri Gauthier, *Sarcophages persane et ptolémaïques*, vol. 2, CG 29307-29323 (Cairo: IFAO, 1939) pl. 32; cf. Manassa, *Late Egyptian Underworld*, part 2, pl. 291.

an inverse pocket-like space defined by a continuous curve formed by the tails of the crocodile and serpent, both of whom seem to flow downward to the register line where they each face images of the blessed deceased, who is represented in a posture of kneeling adoration. Below the register line are found lines of text, to the right and left of which are seen the hartebeest heads associated with the crocodile and the serpent respectively. Small curved wicks can be seen emerging near the bases of their horns. The crocodile appears at the right, the side of the solar disk marked with the ram-headed deity symbolizing the dead, nocturnal sun; it is therefore natural that the crocodile is connected with the western gate of the *Duat*, as the accompanying text explains:



*hntw s3wtj sb3 jmntj m dw3t*



The Forechamber (-crocodile),<sup>177</sup> who guards the western gate of the *Duat*.




The text continues by identifying the hartebeest at right:




*šs3(t)<sup>178</sup> b3 jmntt m dw3t*

The Twilight (-hartebeest), *ba* of the West in the *Duat*.

<sup>177</sup> The crocodile's name suggests that it is a guardian in the fore-chamber at the western gate of the *Duat* (Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, v. 3, 302). The determinative  was undoubtedly intended as the "god" determinative ; when executed as mere silhouettes (as here), the two are very similar except for the presence of the royal beard on the latter.


<sup>178</sup> The graphic metathesis of  as  in the writing of this word is not uncommon, as also the unwritten . Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, v. 4, 545.

The serpent at left appears at the side of the solar disk that is marked with the scarab, symbolizing the rebirth of the sun, and it is therefore connected with the eastern gate of the *Duat* from which the living sun emerges:

  
(sic)  
*w3mmw s3wtj sb3 ʿnh m dw3t*

The Roasting (-serpent),<sup>179</sup> who guards the gate of life in the *Duat*.<sup>180</sup>

The text then goes on to identify the eastern hartebeest:



  
*šs3(t) b3 ḥd<sup>181</sup> n ʿnh m dw3t*




The Twilight (-hartebeest), *ba* who shines for the living one in the *Duat*.

The crocodile and serpent, therefore, represent protective powers present at the crucial moments of the sun’s descent into the western gate of the *Duat* and the sun’s re-emergence from the eastern gate at sunrise. They act to protect the sun-god during these times of transition, when it was thought that the sun might be vulnerable to interference by destructive forces. The

<sup>179</sup> The name of the serpent, from *w3m* ‘to dessicate’, ‘to roast’ perhaps suggests something rather like a fire-breathing *δράκων*.

<sup>180</sup> Darnell (*Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, 274.), in the belief that both the crocodile and serpent are guardians of the gate of the West, translates *ʿnh* as “the West,” presumably on the basis of similarity to the lexeme *ʿnh**t*, which does have that meaning (Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, v. 1, 205. 16).

<sup>181</sup> Manassa (*Late Egyptian Underworld*, 454) takes the very spare writing  as an active participle of the comparatively rare lexeme *ḥdj*, one of the meanings of which is ‘to fly’ (Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, v. 3, 205.6), and translates *ḥd n ʿnh* as “who flies to the West,” following Darnell (whom she cites) in translating *ʿnh* as ‘the West’ (see n. 177). However, a better sense is obtained by regarding  as a defective or playful writing of *ḥd*, which as verb, substantive, and adjective has associations with shining, bright white light and the dawn. This purely phonetic writing of *ḥd* as *ḥd* would simply be reflecting the historic phonemic change /*d̥*/ > /*d*/ > /*t*/ (see Chapter. 1, n. 24). By the time the present text was written (4th c. BCE), *ḥd* had already become *ḥd* or *ḥt*, as documented in Demotic; compare Coptic *ϩατ*.

apotropaic activities of these protectors were imagined to be crepuscular, that is, as taking place in the mysterious half-light between sunset and dusk, and between dawn and sunrise. The hartebeests with glowing wicks on their heads are the personifications or hypostases of these periods of twilight. The hartebeest seems to have been put to this symbolic purpose on the basis of word-play between *ššw* ‘hartebeest’ and *ššt*, which is commonly translated as ‘nightfall’, ‘time of sunset’, but which should really be understood as ‘twilight’ so that it can refer not only to the time just after sunset, but also to the time just before sunrise, as the context requires. This meaning is perhaps confirmed here by the writing of *ššw* using the determinative group  (in place of the usual  or ) , which shows a single star beneath the canopy of sky, suggesting the twilight appearance of Venus, experienced as both morning and evening “stars.”





The design of the Petosiris ceiling, into which these elements of the opening tableau of the *Litany of Re* have been integrated, does not attempt to diagrammatically reproduce something representing the actual spatial relations or celestial operation of the subjects shown, which are instead organized along purely thematic and graphic principles. The most obvious example of this is the male and female busts representing planets, which are placed within a disk-shaped space defined by the surrounding circular band of zodiacal constellations. Beings planets, their natural place would be in the zodiacal band itself, which corresponds to the ecliptic through which the planets were known to actually move. Similarly, in the outer ring representing the solar circuit, no attempt has been made to indicate the western and eastern points at which the sun sets or rises, though those features of the sun’s quotidian journey are encoded by the presence of the crocodile, the serpent, and their attendant hartebeests. In integrating their images into the outer ring representing the solar circuit as it does, the design also preserves the

traditional mirror-image decorum present in all previous versions of the arrangement of these symbolic creatures. Moreover, having the crocodile and serpent appear to face one another also creates the effect of their bodies facing in opposite directions along the solar circuit. This recalls a conception of the Underworld Books that the dead sun and the living sun travel in opposite directions, from west to east during the nightly sojourn through the *Duat* and from east to west during the daily course across the sky in the upper world of the living. The crocodile and serpent are also fused at the tail, forming a single entity arranged in a circle representing both the path of the sun's daily circuit and the outer perimeter of ordered reality. The image is quite ouroboros-like, and occurs in the same "syntactic" place where one might expect an ouroboros as symbol of the divine force that both insures the integrity of the sphere of reality against the threat of surrounding chaotic forces and protects the sun in all phases of its daily cycle. The appearance of this fused crocodile-serpent in such a context suggests that the crocodile and serpent of the *Litany of Re*, in their functions as protectors of the western and eastern gates of the *Duat*, were understood to be local expressions of the greater power which protects the entire perimeter of the cosmos, and which can be symbolized by an ouroboros, an ouroboroid (as here), or even a plain ring.<sup>182</sup>

As it happens, the above understanding of the Petosiris crocodile-serpent ouroboroid and attendant hartebeests also sheds unexpected light on a heretofore mysterious and unexplained image found at the end of the middle register of the tenth hour of the *Book of Gates* (figure

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<sup>182</sup> Yet another example of this perimeter being symbolized by a plain ring is furnished by the painted ceiling in the second chamber of this same tomb, where such a ring occurs in exactly the same "syntactic" place as the crocodile serpent ouroboroid in the first chamber. See Osing, *Denkmäler*, pls. 40-41.

121).<sup>183</sup> The lower part of this image shows a conventional representation of the Apophis-serpent, labeled as such (   ꝑꝑ). Above the Apophis-serpent is seen a hybrid creature, composed of a crocodile and serpent fused at the tail, and labeled  |  | šs-šs. The meaning of this creature is now evident: it is made up of the guardians of the western and eastern gates of the *Duat*, but fused at the tail like the ouroboroid on the Petosiris tomb ceiling. Its name, šs-šs, is a likely abbreviation of šsšt-šsšt, a reference to the two twilight regions in which the guardians perform their functions, the western and eastern gates, the two most important features of the solar circuit, suggestive of the whole. The combined image having the šs-šs creature above and the Apophis-serpent below, therefore, utilizes a familiar syntagm, a basic pattern in which the perimeter of the solar circuit (above) excludes the chaotic forces without (below), as seen for example in figure 9. As the entire middle register of the tenth hour of the *Book of Gates* represents the battle against Apophis, it appropriately has the image of šs-šs and Apophis appearing at the end in order to indicate, in a concise symbolic miniature, the restoration of cosmic order.

As a final note regarding the crocodile-serpent ouroboroid and hartebeests of the Petosiris ceiling, it may be observed that the Petosiris hartebeests lack the iconographic detail of the glowing wicks between their horns. The wicks were evidently not essential to the meaning of the hartebeests as symbols of twilight, and the word-play between šsšw ‘hartebeest’ and šsšt ‘twilight’ must have been considered sufficient to convey their significance. An earlier example of symbolic hartebeest heads appearing without wicks occurs at the end of the fifth hour of the *Book of Gates*, in which the judgment hall of Osiris is represented with four such heads

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<sup>183</sup> The figure is after Sharpe, *Alabaster Sarcophagus*, pl. 12. See also Hornung, *Buch von den Pforten*, vol. 2, 237.

protruding from the ceiling.<sup>184</sup> As four is the number suggesting a “total” or “complete” something,<sup>185</sup> it is possible that these heads are intended to express something like *fdw-šs3w* ‘four-fold twilight’, meaning ‘total twilight’ or ‘complete twilight’, perhaps the idea that the judgment hall of Osiris exists in a perpetual state of supernatural twilight glow.

The last survivals of the ouroboros in an Egyptian setting are found in magical contexts, in particular amongst the many engraved gemstone amulets produced in the first centuries of the Common Era, most likely in Alexandria, and now represented in considerable numbers in the collections of various museums and private collections. It was an age of cultural syncretism, and though the main impulse and much of the symbolism of these objects can be traced to Egyptian antecedents, the Egyptian elements are always found combined, to one degree or another, with other elements, predominantly Greek or Hellenistic, but may also include features of Jewish, Babylonian, or even Parthian origin. The very medium and manufacture of these amulets is un-Egyptian, being based on the Greek lapidary technique common throughout the Hellenistic world for the production of non-magical engraved gems, primarily as the ornamental bezels of finger rings or as pendants. In addition to iconography of pharaonic origin, one commonly finds amongst an extensive and varied repertoire, Serapis and Hellenistic versions of traditional Egyptian deities, classical Greek and Roman deities, and certain motives including composite and bizarre deities largely unknown outside their appearance in the corpus of these gems.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Hornung, *Buch von den Pforten*, vol. 2, 143; Piankoff, *Ramesses IV*, vol. 1., 172 fig. 45.

<sup>185</sup> The original association of the number four is certainly the four cardinal directions, which thus make up the ‘complete’ or ‘total’ world; by extension, then, the ‘four’ of something is the ‘complete’ or ‘total’ something. “The number four was primarily related to the concepts of totality or universality through its relation to the four cardinal points...” Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic*, 144.

<sup>186</sup> For fundamental studies and catalogues of Graeco-Egyptian magical gems, see: Simone Michel, *Bunte Stein - Dunkle Bilder: “Magische Gemmen,”* Schriften der Archäologischen Sammlung Freiburg 5



There are numerous examples, however, in which ouroboroi are seen surrounding purely pharaonic imagery in quite traditional ways. Figure 122a,<sup>187</sup> for example, shows the obverse of a jasper gem on which an ouroboros is seen encircling a scarab in a manner quite similar to that found in the afore seen 21st Dynasty papyrus (figure 68). Figure 122b<sup>188</sup> shows the obverse of yet another jasper gem, in this instance with a quite conventional image of the Bes-headed polymorphic deity standing above an ouroboros which surrounds small marks intended to represent the usual inimical animals. Aside from the relative crudity of its execution, the iconography differs in no significant respects from that seen in figures 98-101 and 109. An example made of lapis lazuli (figure 122c)<sup>189</sup> has on the obverse a front-facing image of Osiris standing above a winged scarab, quite reminiscent of the image of Osiris found on the stela that Petrie excavated at Coptos (figure 116). Yet in spite of the relatively traditional pharaonic imagery on these and similar examples, the reverse sides of these gems bear quite un-pharaonic Greek inscriptions. These include quite typical *vocales*, mantra-like manipulations of strings of vowels, and *voces magicae*, often wholly or partly unintelligible magic words, perhaps arranged as palindromes (as on the gem in figure 122c), and sometimes containing names of deities from

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(Munich: Biering und Brinkmann, 2001); A. Delatte and Ph. Derchain, *Les intailles magiques gréco-égyptiennes* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1964); Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press; London: Geoffrey Cumberlege/Oxford University Press, 1950) Michel, *Die Magischen Gemmen. Zu Bildern und Zauberformeln auf geschnittenen Steinen der Antike und Neuzeit*, Studien aus dem Warburg-Haus 7 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004).

<sup>187</sup> Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet de médailles, 21956. Delatte and Derchain, *Les intailles magiques*, 53, no. 48.

<sup>188</sup> University of Michigan, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 26099. Bonner, *Magical Amulets*, 295, pl. 12, no. 254.

<sup>189</sup> University of Michigan, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 1963.04.0002. Bonner, *Magical Amulets*, 254, pl. 1, no. 5.

various sources, including *Iaω*, believed to be the Alexandrian vocalization of the Jewish  $\text{יאו}$ ,<sup>190</sup> (present in the inscriptions of the gems in figures 122b and 122c). Greek *vocales* and the name *Iaω* are even found on the obverse of a gem, also of jasper, bearing otherwise tolerably pharaonic iconography of an ouroboros surrounding an image of the divine child Harpocrates seated on a lotus in the manner of Nefertem (figure 122d). Except for the Greek inscription, the image is quite similar to much earlier iconography of the divine solar child seen in figures 60 and 66.

However, once introduced into the larger repertoire of magical gem iconography, the ouroboros was also used with iconographic elements of non-pharaonic origin. Among such, it is commonly seen surrounding Egyptian deities grouped with a stylized uterus,<sup>191</sup> surrounding the god Serapis,<sup>192</sup> and also surrounding a strange nameless deity known only from these amulets, having a cock's head, serpents for legs, wearing Roman armor, and bearing a shield with one arm and a whip with the other.<sup>193</sup> In yet other examples, an ouroboros can appear as the sole figurative element, and surrounds a field filled with *voces magicae*, *vocales*, or magical *characteres*.<sup>194</sup>

At this point it might be asked exactly what meaning, if any, was attached to the ouroboros in the context of these magical gems. For those instances in which the ouroboros

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<sup>190</sup> Bonner, *op. cit.*, 30.

<sup>191</sup> Bonner, *op. cit.*, pl. 6, nos. 129-140; pl. 7, no. 141-142, 145, 147 and Delatte and Derchain, *Les intailles magiques*, 247-254. See also Ritter, "Uterine Amulet," 211, fig. 1.

<sup>192</sup> Bonner, *op. cit.*, pl. 1, nos. 17-18.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, pl. 8, 172.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, pl. 13, nos. 279-281, 284; pl. 14, 286-287, 290, 292 and Delatte and Derchain, *op. cit.*, 322-324, 329-334

surrounds purely pharaonic subjects in a traditional way, it is reasonable to suppose that the ouroboros retained the same meaning it had in the earlier pharaonic antecedents, that is, a divine protective perimeter of some kind. Though it is likely that such associations remained attached to the ouroboros when used with other subjects as well, Campbell Bonner (in his fundamental study) was skeptical: “Though it is extremely common on magical amulets, there is nothing in the designs and inscriptions that occur with it to suggest a definite meaning for it; it seems to have become little more than a conventional border for such stones.”<sup>195</sup> More recently, Robert K. Ritner has offered an opposing view; after briefly reviewing some of the same evidence closely examined in this study, he concludes that “[f]ar from being a mere conventionalized border, the ouroboros retains its symbolism upon Hellenistic Egyptian gems as an image of protection and containment.”<sup>196</sup> Perhaps, in a sense, both of these views could be true, Ritner’s view in the case of the priestly magicians who must have originated the designs for these amulets, and Bonner’s view in the case of less educated lapidaries who manufactured and traded in the amulets themselves.

The so-called Greek Magical Papyri, composed by Hellenized members of the Egyptian priesthood and dating to the same centuries as the magical gems, contain several texts mentioning the ouroboros as part of explicit directions for the creation of amulets. In one example, directions are given for the engraving of a ring bezel of heliotrope as an amulet effective for success, favor, and victory, though also said to be useful for freeing demoniacs from possession. The obverse of the gem is to be engraved with the image of a scarab with rays,

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<sup>195</sup> Bonner, *op. cit.*, 250.

<sup>196</sup> Ritner, *Uterine Amulet*, 220.

surrounded by an ouroboros.<sup>197</sup> In another example, an elaborate magical working intended to attract to the magician a daimon assistant involves, in part, the creation of an amuletic gem engraved with the image of a “lion-faced Helioros” (= Helios-Horus) having a globe in one hand and a whip in the other. Certain *voces magicae* are to appear in the exergue, with an ouroboros surrounding the whole.<sup>198</sup> Elsewhere, as part of a charm against spells, the magician is instructed to inscribe upon a piece of lead the image of a figure having a torch in one hand and a knife in the other, with a scarab beneath its feet, below which is the image of an ouroboros.<sup>199</sup> Note that, far from being a mere conventionalized border, in this instance the ouroboros does not surround the image at all but is employed more like the ouroboros appearing beneath the feet of the polymorphic deities. Another amulet, a general phylactery for guarding against daimons, phantasms, sickness, and suffering, is to be inscribed on gold, silver, tin, or else written on papyrus.<sup>200</sup> Described as “the name of the great god and his seal,” it consists of divine names,<sup>201</sup> *voces magicae*, *vocales*, and *characteres*, the whole surrounded by an ouroboros. The illustration of this amulet in the papyrus (figure 123)<sup>202</sup> shows what appears to be a leontocephalic

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<sup>197</sup> P. Leiden I 384, verso; PGM XII, 270-350. Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, vol. 2, 76; Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*, 163.

<sup>198</sup> P. Berlin 5025; PGM I, 42-195. Preisendanz, op. cit., vol. 1, 10; Betz, op. cit., 7.

<sup>199</sup> P. Oslo 184; PGM XXXVI, 178-87. Preisendanz, op. cit., vol. 2, 168; Betz, op. cit., 273.

<sup>200</sup> P. London 121; PGM VII, 579-90. Preisendanz, op. cit., vol. 2, 26; Betz, op. cit., 134.

<sup>201</sup> The divine names include *Κμη̄φιδις*, the Hellenistic version of Kematef (*km ʒtʒf* ‘he who completes his moment’ or ‘he whose moment is completed’) a form of Amun at Medinet Habu as primeval serpent at the first moment of creation, sometimes identified with Agathodaimon (see David Klotz, *Caesar in the City of Amun. Egyptian Temple Construction and Theology in Roman Times*, Monographies Reine Élisabeth 15 [Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2012] 133-142), and *Χφυρις*, the Hellenistic Khepri, as well as the Jewish *Ιαω*.

<sup>202</sup> Preisendanz, op. cit., vol. 2, pl. 1; Betz, op. cit., 134.

ouroboros, although nothing is said about such a feature in the text itself. This is not, however, necessarily un-pharaonic in inspiration; lion-headed protective serpents are not unknown in pharaonic Egypt, as seen for example in the friezes showing lion-headed uraei protecting the royal cartouches in the tomb of Ramesses IX.<sup>203</sup> An actual amulet prepared along similar lines to instructions found in the magical papyri is seen in figure 124.<sup>204</sup> Dating from the third or fourth century and believed to be from the Faiyum, it was inscribed on a small piece of papyrus, which was then tightly folded into an oblong and likely tied to a cord so that it might be worn around the neck. It was inscribed for one Touthous, child of a woman named Sara, as a charm to prevent shivering fits and fever. Among the recognizable *voces magicae*, most appear to be Jewish in origin, including the names of angels and *Iaω*, but one finds also  $\Phi\rho\eta$  (= *p3 r<sup>c</sup>* ‘Re’). There are magical *characteres* as well (including the sign for the Greco-Egyptian deity Chnoubis to the right of the ouroboros<sup>205</sup>), and *vocales*, including those surrounded by an indifferently drafted but otherwise conventional ouroboros. It may be reasonably supposed that if the ouroboros is intended to have any meaning here, this meaning must surely be some association with the idea of protection, and certainly nothing whatsoever to do with time, eternity, etc.

The foregoing survey of representative ouroboros-related material from the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty through to the end of pharaonic civilization confirms many of the observations and conclusions found at the end of the previous chapter. As was seen in the New Kingdom material, the

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<sup>203</sup> Guilmant, *Ramsès IX*, pl. 11. Consider also that Mehen, the deity most often associated with the ouroboros, has the feminine form Mehenyt, associated with the uraeus; see Chapter 3, note 125.

<sup>204</sup> P. Berlin 21165 (recto). W.M. Brashear, “Vier Berliner Zaubertexte, 2, Ein Amulett gegen Fieber,” *ZPE* 17 (1975) 27-30, pl. 2a; Robert W. Daniel and Franco Maltomini, *Supplementum Magicum*, vol. 1, *Papyrologica Coloniensia* 17.1 (Opladen, Germany: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990) 26-29; Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*, 310-11.

<sup>205</sup> On the Chnoubis-sign see: Bonner, *Magical Amulets*, 25; Delatte and Derchain, *Les intailles magiques*, 56.

ouroboros icon can be used to represent a divine protective perimeter, symbolically functioning on one or more levels, cosmic, solar, funerary, or individual. Moreover, it was once again seen that a true ouroboros, tail in mouth, is not always necessary for the meaning of the symbolism; one finds paradigmatic substitution of an ouroboroid having overlapping head and tail serving just as well with no evident difference in meaning, as one also finds an enclosing perimeter formed with a wavy line or even a plain ring. It makes no sense, therefore, to give special attention only to examples of the true ouroboros, as some scholars have done, looking for meanings unique to the true ouroboros alone. As before, there is also no indication in any of the contexts examined that the ouroboros was ever intended as a discrete “symbol of eternity” or “symbol of cyclic time.” A connection with time exists only to the extent that a particular ouroboros may be understood as being symbolically connected with the idea of the protective perimeter of the cosmos; as the inner surface of the perimeter is also the locus of the solar circuit, the particular ouroboros would therefore symbolize the temporal dimension of the solar cycle as well as the spatial dimension of the perimeter itself. An apparent exception would seem to be the use of the expression *ḥf-n-dt* ‘serpent of eternity’ for the serpent in the tale of Setne Khamwas and Naneferkaptah, but whatever possible connection between ‘eternity’ and the serpent this term may have been intended to suggest—which is far from clear—it is obvious that the primary feature of the serpent in this tale is that it is coiled around the box as a protection of the numinous contents inside. This is quite in line with the function of the Mehen serpent seen encircling some royal sarcophagi of the New Kingdom, as well as guardian serpents seen in the *Duat* as protective of doors, shrines on solar barques, forms of the sun, etc. Perhaps the name for the serpent was suggested by the aforementioned Ptolemaic sportive writing of a serpent enfolding a mummy, of which very similar forms are attested writing both *dwꜣt* and *dt*. It has

also been seen that when the ouroboros icon is found in Greco-Egyptian magical contexts, there is again no suggestion of any meaning other than that of protection or perimeter of some kind, as may be presumed from earlier usage. Notably, the comparatively rare Greek lexeme *οὐροβόρος* makes its first known appearance at this time in the Greek Magical Papyri,<sup>206</sup> not as a substantive but as an adjective modifying the noun *δράκων*, and there is not the slightest of suggestion of a connection with time, eternity, etc., in any of its occurrences in those texts.

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#### CONCLUDING REMARKS, and Later History of the Ouroboros Pertinent to this Study.

It has been a primary purpose of this study to examine an idea that had established itself in Egyptological discourse, that there exists, in the inventory of Egyptian symbolism, a discrete and unique symbol that the Egyptians called *sd-m-r3* ‘tail in mouth’, known in Greek as *οὐροβόρος*, having the image of a serpent arranged in a circle with its tail in its mouth, and expressive of specific meanings such as “eternity” and “endless cyclic time.” The exact meanings that this Egyptian ouroboros is supposed to express, however, have been a sight matter of controversy amongst interested scholars, and it was also averred that the ouroboros was a “blessing-symbol of resurrection into the eternity of cosmic life,” or even expressive of “nonexistence,” “unity,” or “evil itself.” Scholars not directly involved with formulating such views contented themselves with uncritically repeating them, and this Egyptological fiction regarding the ouroboros took on an unquestioned life of its own, quite detached from the reality of the primary sources. As this study has shown, there is actually nothing true about this Egyptological conception of the ouroboros. The true ouroboros icon, tail in mouth, was never a

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<sup>206</sup> See Chapter 1, note 98, and note 207, below.

discrete symbol, but a possible variant amongst related iconic images that might convey the same intended meanings in paradigmatic substitution with one another or in free variation (examples of the former being protective serpents with and without tails in mouths, as in figures 32, 48, 51 and 52, while examples of the latter include inimical serpents with and without tails at or near their mouths, as in figures 58, 59, 100 d and f, and 114). Moreover, it is evident from this that serpents with tails in mouths can occur with quite unrelated thematic meanings, as both protective and inimical serpents may appear with or without tails in mouths. The fruitless minor controversy regarding what the ouroboros does or does not mean arose in part because of the preconception that the ouroboros in ancient Egypt is a discrete symbol with specific semantic values attached to it, and the consequent attempt based on this preconception to reconcile such unrelated meanings. Moreover, the ouroboros icon was certainly not called *sd-m-r3* in Egyptian, and in fact appears not to have had a specific name for the very good reason that it was never understood by the Egyptians as a unique icon having an individual identity and expressive of meanings specific to it. Even less was the Greek term *οὐροβόρος* derived from *sd-m-r3* or any other known Egyptian antecedent. Lastly, the foregoing meticulous—perhaps even at times tedious—survey of relevant primary sources has shown that the ouroboros icon was not in itself ever a symbol of unity, nonexistence, or evil, and was certainly never exclusively or even primarily a symbol of recurrent cyclic time, eternity, or resurrection into eternal life.

By disabusing Egyptological discourse of this phantom ouroboros, fresh hermeneutical approaches have become possible, and the true place of the ouroboros icon can be seen in a broader and more coherent vision of the larger symbolic system and conceptual framework in which it is embedded. What emerges from this is that the ouroboros icon is primarily associated with the idea of protective enclosure, conceived of as a divine force that functions on multiple



levels. The archetype of this protective enclosure is the membrane-like interface between the finite bubble of ordered reality and the limitless abyssal deep surrounding it. The origin of the cosmos was conceived of as starting with a singularity, a divine creative monad (often called Atum) appearing in the formless abyss as a great burst of light and fire, with the cosmos itself being understood as an expansion and progressive differentiation (*hprw*) of the divine substance itself. As this creative expansion from the center was very early symbolized as the outward spiraling of a great serpent (termed Mehen, ‘coiled one’), it was natural to conceive of the encapsulating limit of the post-creational world as a residuum or final transform of this divine ‘serpentine’ energy, and so it was that the outer membrane of the cosmos could be sometimes symbolized as an encircling serpent, though a plain ring or band was also put to this purpose. The integrity of the cosmos was regarded as secure from the threat of engulfment by the surrounding abyss as long as this encapsulating force remains intact, with the end of the present world-system being understood as a result of its eventual collapse. Because this encapsulating perimeter is the furthest limit of the ordered reality, it is also the natural locus of the solar circuit, the distant sun being understood as travelling along the inner surface of this perimeter. As the sun was regarded as the post-creational analogue of the original creative monad, the process of its daily rebirth was thought to share features of the original creative process. This is why, for example, the dead nocturnal sun is thought of as passing through the body of a great serpent, called both ‘Life-of-the-Gods’ and ‘Encircler-of-the-Earth’ during the process of regeneration and rebirth. The names given to this serpent identify it as a special underworldly manifestation of both the force that produced the world and that which protects its perimeter (both of which are also known as Mehen). This same protective, encapsulating power was understood as manifesting itself more locally on the solar level, protecting the integrity of the sun during its

nightly journey through the Underworld. This is the significance of the serpents (again identified as Mehen) seen in the solar barque, either covering the dead sun-god or surrounding the shrine in which the sun-god stands. On the funereal level, the same power was understood to protect the deceased, and is sometimes represented as a true ouroboros, tail to mouth, though a serpent with overlapping head and tail is perhaps more common. Yet again, this same power was understood as protective of the living individual, so that there is a return to waking consciousness after the dissolution of dreamless sleep. It was perhaps the idea that this power could be invoked as a general protection for the individual that accounts for the appearance of the ouroboros on apotropaic objects such as amulets. The individual might also hope for protection directly by agency of the great divine life at the center of things, conceived of for this purpose in the various forms of the polymorphic deities or Horus on the crocodiles. In these instances the ouroboros icon is used to represent the boundary of the cosmos within which the deity dominates all inimical forces, symbolized by potentially dangerous animals. The foregoing, in very brief, summarizes the conceptual realities that provide the contexts in which the true ouroboros icon commonly occurs. Confusing the issue for those who believe the ouroboros to be a discrete symbol expressive of specific meanings (Kákósy, for example, noting the “strange ambivalence” of the symbol<sup>207</sup>) are those few occurrences of serpents having tails at or near their mouths that are clearly connected with threatening, chaotic forces. In all such examples, however, the serpents having their tails at or near their mouths occur in apparent free variation with those that do not, and all of the serpents are plainly distinguished from those symbolizing protective containment by being marked as inimical by figuration with writhing coils and/or the presence of magically neutralizing knives or spears.

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<sup>207</sup> “...eine merkwürdige Ambivalenz,” Kákósy, “Uroboros,” col. 888.

By way of supplementing what has already been presented in the first chapter, a few additional remarks should perhaps be made regarding the post-pharaonic intellectual history of the ouroboros icon, in particular how the idea came to be that there is a distinct symbol called the ouroboros, originally from Egypt, that is primarily expressive of cyclic time, eternity, even of immortality. As already pointed out in Chapter 1, the noun ‘ouroboros’ itself is the most recent addition to this conceptual agglutination, first appearing alone as a substantive with reference to the icon of a serpent with tail in mouth only in the third decade of the twentieth century.<sup>208</sup> It can be truly said that until the twentieth century, the term ‘ouroboros’ plays an insignificant part in the intellectual history of the icon and the ideas attached to it. The term occurs only as an adjective in a handful of Greek magical and alchemical texts of the third and fourth centuries, but never in relation to time or eternity. After the demise of pagan culture in Egypt, the magical texts were forgotten and unknown until the discovery of the original papyri in the nineteenth century and their publication in the twentieth, when they played their part in the introduction of the noun ‘ouroboros’ into scholarly discourse (discussed below). The Greek alchemical texts fared better in the sense that they continued to be preserved, redacted, and augmented outside of Egypt, with the adjective *οὐροβόρος* appearing in a manuscript produced as recently as the fifteenth

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<sup>208</sup> Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, vol. 2, 26. Preisendanz uses the word “*Uroboros*” by itself as a noun, and is the first to do so. However, he was very nearly preceded in this by the historian of alchemy M. Berthelot, who in his translations from the Greek left the adjective *οὐροβόρος* untranslated and capitalized like a name; he does not, however, use “*Ouroboros*” alone as a noun but always has it following “*serpent*,” which renders *δράκων*. He first uses “*Ouroboros*” this way in his *Origines* of 1885, and then in his text editions and translations in 1885. He was followed in this practice by a later historian of alchemy, F. Sherwood Taylor, in his 1930 survey of Greek alchemy; Taylor likewise never quite uses ‘Ouroboros’ alone as a noun, referring to the ouroboros either as “the serpent Ouroboros” or “the serpent.” Moreover, it was not Berthelot or Taylor but Preisendanz, through Jung, who was ultimately responsible for the term *Uroboros/ouroboros* entering Egyptological discourse (see further below). M. Berthelot, *Les Origines de l’Alchimie* (1885; reprint, Brussels: Culture et Civilization, 1983) 61; idem, *Collection des anciens Alchimistes grecs* (1888; reprint, 3 vols. in 1, London: Holland Press, 1963) vol. 2, 87; F. Sherwood Taylor, “A Survey of Greek Alchemy,” *JHS* 50 (1930), 112, 117.

century,<sup>209</sup> but they played no part in the development of the idea of the ouroboros as a symbol of time, eternity, etc.

On the whole, authors of Greek writings who touch upon the symbol of the tail-biting serpent express views that are tolerably close to actual Egyptian ideas. An alchemical text, pseudepigraphically ascribed to Olympiodorus the Alexandrian philosopher, speaks of the primeval serpent as Agathodaimon, and relates that some refer to it as the vault of heaven (*οὐρανός*) because the serpent is the image of the cosmos. Therefore, when priestly scribes (*ἱερογραμματεῖς*) wish to express the idea of the cosmos on obelisks or in sacred characters, they carve a tail-biting serpent (*δράκοντα ἐγκολάπτουσιν οὐροβόρον*).<sup>210</sup> This is quite similar to the brief fifth century notice of Horapollo which states that when the Egyptians wanted to express the idea of the cosmos, they drew a snake devouring its own tail (*ὄφιν ζωγραφοῦσι τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἐσθίοντα οὐρανόν*).<sup>211</sup> The sixth century Byzantine author Lydus, while not actually using the word *οὐροβόρος*, uses a quite similar adjectival compound in a remarkable passage in which he says that the Egyptians, according to a “sacred discourse” (*ἱερὸς λόγος*), carved a tail-biting serpent (*δράκοντα οὐρηβόρον*) on their pyramids because they conceive an abyss in which there is a serpent from which the perceptible gods (i.e., the sun, moon, and planets) and all the visible universe (*τὸ πᾶν*) came into being.<sup>212</sup> Excusing the fanciful detail of the serpent being carved

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<sup>209</sup> Paris 2327 (2), folios 196r, 279r. According to the colophon, the manuscript was copied by one Theodoros Pelecanos in 1478. Stavros Lazaris, “Inventaire sommaire des manuscrits grecs scientifiques illustrés de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris,” *Buzantiaka* 13 (1993) 224-25.

<sup>210</sup> Berthelot, *Collection*, vol. 3, 80.

<sup>211</sup> Thissen, *Horapollon*, vol. 1, 2-3.

<sup>212</sup> Lydus, *Liber de Mensibus*, III.1.4 = Richard Wuensch, ed., *Ioannis Lydi, Liber de Mensibus* (1908; reprint, Stuttgart: Teubner, 1967) 39.

onto pyramids, this is a surprisingly accurate description of the Egyptian cosmographic ideas summarized above. This same basic understanding is also conveyed by an image from the *Chrysopoeia* ('Gold-making') of the alchemist Cleopatra, preserved in a Byzantine copy of a presumed Alexandrian original, in which an ouroboros surrounds the words ἐν τὸ πᾶν, 'the all is one' (figure 125).<sup>213</sup> Both the Lydus passage and the *Chrysopoeia* image clearly express the inherent monism underlying Egyptian cosmogony and cosmology.

The association of the ouroboros icon with concepts related to time really began only with the Latin authors, the oldest of which is the fourth century Servius, whose commentary on Virgil contains the following passage: "The year...according to the Egyptians was indicated before the discovery of writing by a serpent biting its tail (*dracone caudam suam mordente*), because it (i.e., the year) returns upon itself."<sup>214</sup> A paraphrase of this passage then found its way into the late sixth, early seventh century *Etymologiae* of Isidorus Hispalensis (St. Isidore of Seville),<sup>215</sup> a very popular work throughout the Middle Ages, copied by the Venerable Bede (d. 735) and Rafanus Maurus (d. 856), among others.<sup>216</sup> Also important for establishing a connection between the ouroboros and time was a passage in the late fifth century work of Martianus Capella, *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* ('The Marriage of Philology and Mercury'), a meandering prosimetrical encyclopedia of the seven Liberal Arts that was immensely influential

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<sup>213</sup> Venice Marcianus 299. Tenth or eleventh century. Berthelot, *Collection*, vol. 1, 132, fig. 11.

<sup>214</sup> Servius, *Ad Vergilii Aeneidos*, V.85 = Arthur Frederick Stocker and Albert Hartman Travis, eds., *Servianorum in Vergilii Carmina Commentariorum*, vol. 3, Special Publications of the American Philological Association 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) 499.

<sup>215</sup> Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiae*, V.36.1-2 = W.M. Lindsay, ed., *Isidori hispalensis episcopi etymologiarum sive originum*, vol. 1, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911) unpaginated, V.36.1-2.

<sup>216</sup> William E. Bull and Harry F. Williams, eds., *Semeilança del Mundo, A Medieval Description of the World*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959) 2.

in setting the curriculum in Latin education for centuries to come. The passage in question describes the aged god Saturn (associated with time because his festival was at the transition to the new year) arriving at the wedding party with halting steps, his white hair covered by his gray cloak, and holding in one hand a fire-breathing serpent devouring the end of its tail (*flammiuomum quendam draconem caudae suae ultima deuorantem*), it being said of the serpent that it taught the number of days in the year by the spelling of its name (without further explanation of this).<sup>217</sup> This somewhat enigmatic passage in turn attracted the attention of medieval commentators on Martianus Capella, including Johannes Scotus Erigena<sup>218</sup> (fl. 850) and another Carolingian Scholar, Remigius of Auxerre<sup>219</sup> (fl. 900). The image of a great encircled serpent biting its own tail as a symbol of every-returning cycles of the solar year was also prominently featured in *Computus* (c. 1235), an important medieval work on calendars and the reckoning of time, by Johannes de Sacrobusco, a professor of mathematics at the University of Paris. Numerous manuscript versions circulated before the first print edition in 1531, after which *Computus* became established as a university textbook and had gone through thirty-five editions by 1673.<sup>220</sup> A few decades after Sacrobusco completed *Computus*, Guillaume Durand

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<sup>217</sup> Martianus Capella, *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, I.4.70 = Adolf Dick, ed., *Martianvs Capella*, Stuttgart, B.G. Teubner, 1969) 33.

<sup>218</sup> Johannes Scotus Erigena, *Annotationes in Marcianum*, I.33.8 = Cora E. Lutz, ed., *Ioannis Scotti Annotationes in Marcianum* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Medieval Academy of America, 1939) 43.

<sup>219</sup> Remigius of Auxerre, *Commentum in Marcianum*, I.13.8 = Cora E. Lutz, ed., *Remigii Autissiodorensis Commentum in Martianum Capellam, Libri I-II* (Leiden: Brill, 1962) 127.

<sup>220</sup> In medieval manuscripts of *Computus*, God is shown seated in the center of the space defined by the encircling ouroboros, which is captioned in part "...the serpent of the world in which the sun circles..." (e.g., New York Public Library ms. NYPL MA 069, folio 29). The similarity to Egyptian conceptions (a great central deity bounded by an ouroboros) is striking. In the printed editions the ouroboros has a much less medieval appearance, and God has been replaced by a smallish black dot at the center, presumably representing the terrestrial orb. See, for example, *Libellus Ioannis de Sacro Busto, de anni ratione, seu, ut vocatur uulgo, Computus Ecclesiasticus* (Wittenberg, 1550), unpaginated, the ouroboros appearing on the second page of the section headed "*De anno*

(Durand of Mendes) published his *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, an encyclopedic reference work for liturgists, in which he gave yet again another version of the notice originating with Servius that, before the invention of writing, the Egyptians had represented the returning yearly cycle by means of an image of a serpent biting its own tail (*draconem, caudam suam mordentem*).<sup>221</sup> The *Rationale* was a widely disseminated and enduringly influential work as shown by the numerous surviving manuscript copies (over two hundred), vernacular translations, and the fact that it was among the earliest books printed with movable type at Mainz (in 1459), only four years after the Gutenberg Bible was printed there, being followed by many subsequent editions elsewhere.<sup>222</sup> The result of all this all this was that, at the verge of the Renaissance, educated persons throughout Western Europe well understood the ouroboros icon to be both Egyptian and symbolic of the endless cycle of years.

The decisive turning point in the development of the ouroboros into a symbol of endless time and eternity was Marsilio Ficino's commentary on the *Enneads* of Plotinus, embedded in his Latin translation of that considerable work. In comments upon a famous passage (V.8.6) long misunderstood as referring to Egyptian hieroglyphic writing,<sup>223</sup> Ficino attempts to adduce an illustrative example from the then recently discovered text of the *Hieroglyphica* of Horapollo, no doubt anxious to seem in the vanguard of Humanist studies. He appears, however, not to have actually had a copy of the manuscript before him as he wrote, because he shows only a vague

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*solari*." This edition of *Computus* is also remarkable for having a preface by reformer and pedagogue Phillip Melancthon, who promoted it as a university textbook.

<sup>221</sup> Guillaume Durand, *Rationale divinorum officiorum* (Venice, 1568) unpaginated, VIII.3.

<sup>222</sup> T.M. Thibodeau, trans., *The Rationale divinorum officiorum of William Durand* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) xxii.

<sup>223</sup> See Chapter 1, note 131.

and perhaps second-hand knowledge of its contents. Horapollo clearly states that the Egyptians used the image of a serpent with its tail in its mouth when they wished to represent the cosmos; Ficino, however, unaccountably reports Horapollo as giving the meaning “time” for the ouroboros, and adds the fanciful embellishment of wings to the serpent (because, he says, time is “fleeting”).<sup>224</sup> In so doing, Ficino was only elaborating upon a long-established view still very much current amongst the learned intellectuals of his day. His translation and commentary on the *Enneads* was eagerly received and kneaded into the heady mélange of antiquarian exotica that had recently been attracting so much attention, including tractates from the *Hermetica* that Ficino had translated and published two decades previously, along with the Cabalism of Pico della Mirandola, and much traditional classical mythography. All of this together provided Renaissance intellectuals and artists with rich source material for the self-consciously ‘Egyptianizing’ fashion of creating symbolic allegories and synthetic ‘hieroglyphs’ intended to express ideas directly without recourse to language, in contrast to actual writing. Ficino’s misunderstanding of the aforementioned passage in Plotinus, portraying the Egyptian hieroglyphs as expressing ideas rather than writing language, was an important theoretical foundation for this practice, and his aside about the Egyptian ouroboros meaning ‘time’ passed unquestioned into the body of lore upon which Renaissance creators of symbolic devices drew.

In the following decades, the emergence of the emblem book (discussed in Chapter 1) gave such symbolic devices a wide and enduring popularity. The ouroboros was regularly included by the creators of the emblem books, who effortlessly dilated the meaning ‘time’ to include notions of immortality and the eternal (figures 3 and 4). These meanings for the ouroboros were then further canonized by inclusion in encyclopedic manuals intended both as

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<sup>224</sup> Marsilio Ficino, trans. and comm., *Plotini Enneades* (Paris: 1855) 351; see also Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 159.



guides to the symbols of the emblem books and as sources for creating them. Widely influential works like mythographer Lorenzo Cartari's *Imagini colla sposizione degli dei degli antichi* (Venice, 1556) and Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia, ouero, Descrittione di diuerse imagini cauate dall'antichità, & di propria inuentione* (Venice, 1593) went through numerous editions, expansions, redactions, and translations right through the eighteenth century, and were still regarded as standard scholarly authorities when Egyptology began to emerge as a discipline. The ideas they contained were regarded as the accepted and largely unquestioned intellectual background for antiquarian studies. This is how the ouroboros comes to appear on the frontispiece of the *Description de l'Égypte* and as a device on the title page of Champollion's *Panthéon égyptien* (figures 1 and 2), and why Egyptologists of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries could reflexively and uncritically describe the ouroboros as a symbol of eternity.

The term 'Uroboros',<sup>225</sup> as a substantive, was then introduced into scholarly discourse in 1931 by Karl Preisendanz in his second volume of the *Greek Magical Papyri*.<sup>226</sup> Preisendanz followed this in 1935 with an article<sup>227</sup> in which he recognizes the antiquity of the ouroboros icon, but mistakenly assumes the antiquity of the meaning 'eternity' attached to it, when in fact such meaning for the ouroboros is no older than the emblem books. Then at the Eranos conferences of 1935 and 1936, C.G. Jung delivered his most important papers on the symbolism

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<sup>225</sup> 'Uroboros' continues to be the usual German spelling, with 'ouroboros' preferred in English, French, and Dutch. Jung, however, used 'ouroboros' in the first German edition of *Psychologie und Alchemie*, though one oddly finds 'Uroboros' in the English translations of Jungian works.

<sup>226</sup> Karl Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, vol. 2 (Leipzig and Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1931) 26.

<sup>227</sup> Karl Preisendanz, "Ein altes Ewigkeitssymbol als Signet und Druckermarke," in: A. Ruppel, ed., *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch, 1935* (Mainz: Verlag der Gutenberg-gesellschaft, 1935) 143-49.

of alchemy,<sup>228</sup> in which he gives special attention to the ouroboros as a symbol, and also uses the term ‘ouroboros’ as a substantive. That Jung made use of Preisendanz in his research is clear from the fact that Preisendanz is cited in the notes of the printed editions of these lectures. Preisendanz then makes a more general historical contribution to the discourse on the ouroboros, “Aus der Geschichte des Uroboros,” in 1940.<sup>229</sup> Meanwhile, Jung’s two Eranos papers were revised and published in 1944 as *Psychologie und Alchemie*,<sup>230</sup> followed in 1949 by a major summation of Jungian archetypal psychology by Jung’s colleague Erich Neumann, in which an entire chapter is devoted to the Jungian conception of the ouroboros.<sup>231</sup> Jung’s *Psychologie und Alchemie* was reissued with final revisions in 1952, the same year that the Swiss art historian Waldemar Deonna published “Ouroboros,”<sup>232</sup> an article reflecting Jungian interest in the antiquity and universality of the ouroboros.

This, then, was the intellectual background of B.H. Stricker’s 1953 monograph *De Grote Zeeslang*, which both introduced the noun ‘ouroboros’ into Egyptological discourse and sought

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<sup>228</sup> C.G. Jung, “Traumsymbole des Individuationsprozesses,” in: Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn, ed., *Eranos-Jahrbuch III, 1935* (Zurich: Rhein-Verlag, 1936) 13-133; idem, “Die Erlösungsvorstellungen in der Alchemie,” in: Rudolf Ritsema, ed., *Eranos-Jahrbuch IV, 1936* (Zurich: Rhein-Verlag, 1937) 13-111.

<sup>229</sup> Karl Preisendanz, “Aus der Geschichte des Uroboros,” in: Ferdinand Hermann and Wolfgang Treutlein, eds., *Brauch und Sinnbild: Eugen Fehrle zum 60. Geburtstag gewidmet von seinen Schülern und Freunden* (Karlsruhe: Südwestdeutsche Druck- und Verlagsgesellschaft, 1940) 194-209.

<sup>230</sup> C. G. Jung, *Psychologie und Alchemie* (Zurich: Rascher Verlag, 1944).

<sup>231</sup> Erich Neumann, *Ursprungsgeschichte des Bewusstseins* (Zurich: Rascher Verlag, 1949). The Jungian notion that the ouroboros is a universal symbol, common property of the “collective unconscious,” is undermined by the fact that many examples offered as evidence of a “collective” ouroboros archetype are more properly understood as the result of cultural diffusionism, with those apparently not of diffusionist origin being poorly sourced and documented, often with no evident reason for the meanings assigned to them other than *a priori* presumption. It might be argued that, rather than revealing the deep meaning common to all appearances of the ouroboros, the Jungian approach has only added yet another layer of interpretation to those the ouroboros had already historically accumulated.

<sup>232</sup> Waldemar Deonna, “Ouroboros,” *Artibus Asiae* 15 (1952) 163-70.

to integrate Egyptian evidence for the ouroboros into the broader view of the ouroboros as a universal symbol. The ouroboros icon, still unquestioned heir to the meanings ‘endless time’ and ‘eternity’ bequeathed to it by creators of Renaissance and Baroque emblem books and iconological manuals, and having received the Egyptian designation *sd-m-r3* through the mistaken efforts of the *Wörterbuch* editors (examined at length in Chapter 1), had now become its own distinct topic of Egyptological interest. Stricker, following the *Wörterbuch* editors’ misapprehension of passages in Bremner-Rhind, introduced the idea that the ouroboros is also Apophis,<sup>233</sup> perpetuated by Kákosy and others. Erik Hornung then argued for the additional meaning ‘nonexistence’,<sup>234</sup> while Andrzej Niwiński suggested ‘unity’,<sup>235</sup> both apparently motivated by the desire to understand the Egyptian ouroboros as compatible with and illustrative of the Jungian conceptions of the ouroboros as a universal psychological archetype. The chimerical Egyptological ouroboros, based on error and replete with contradiction, was then made canonical by means of Kákosy’s article in the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, and passed into normative Egyptological discourse as a phantom awaiting only the exorcism of this present study. And with that, this inquiry has—ouroboros-like—come full circle, returning to the point from which it began.

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<sup>233</sup> Stricker, *De grote Zeeslang*, 7, 28.

<sup>234</sup> Hornung, *Conceptions of God*, 164, 178.

<sup>235</sup> See figure 81.

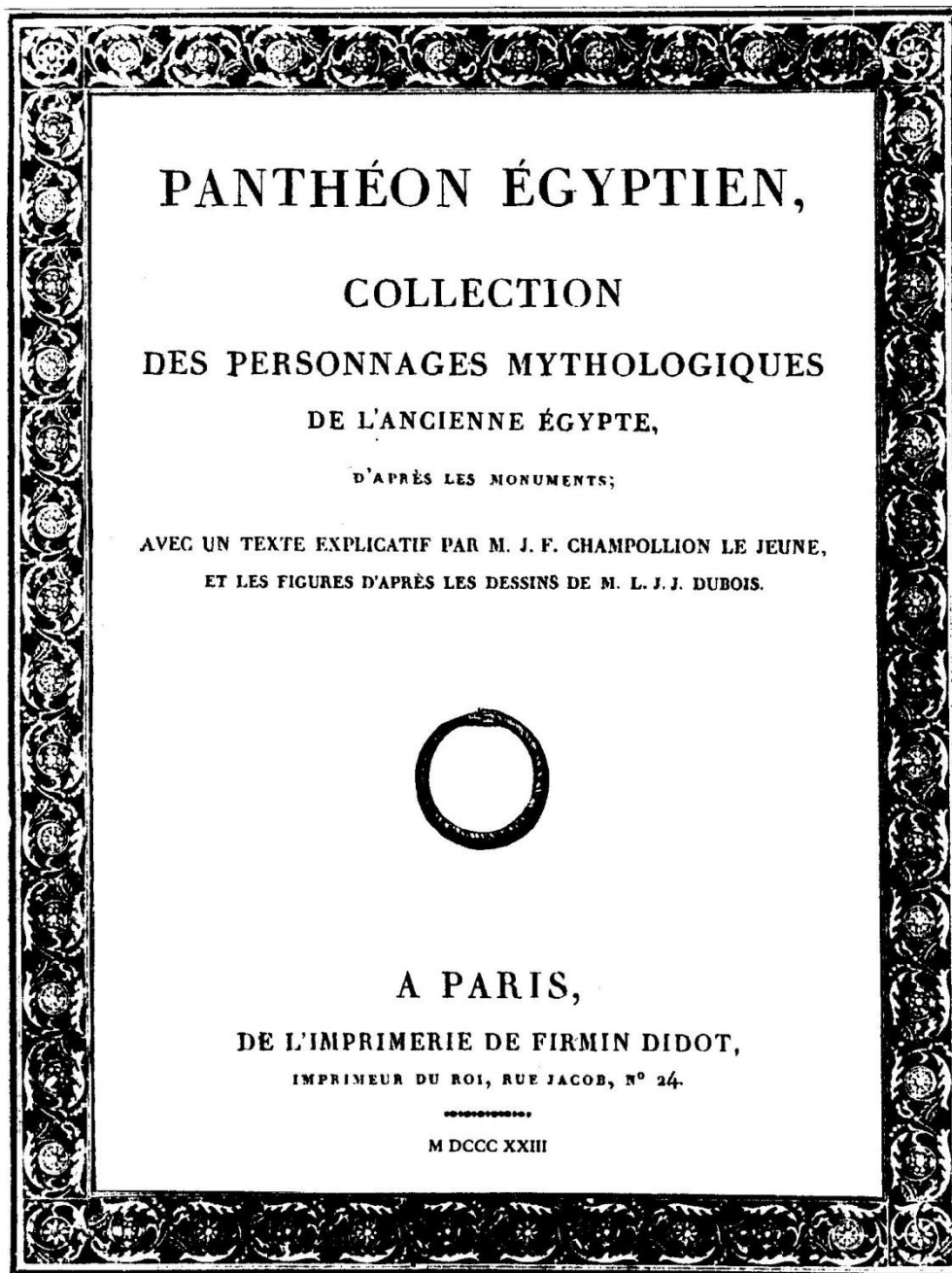


Figure 1.

The ouroboros used as a decorative device on the title page of the first post-decipherment work on Egyptian religion. J.-F. Champollion, *Panthéon égyptien, collection des personages mythologiques de l'ancienne Égypte, d'après les monuments*. (Paris, 1923).

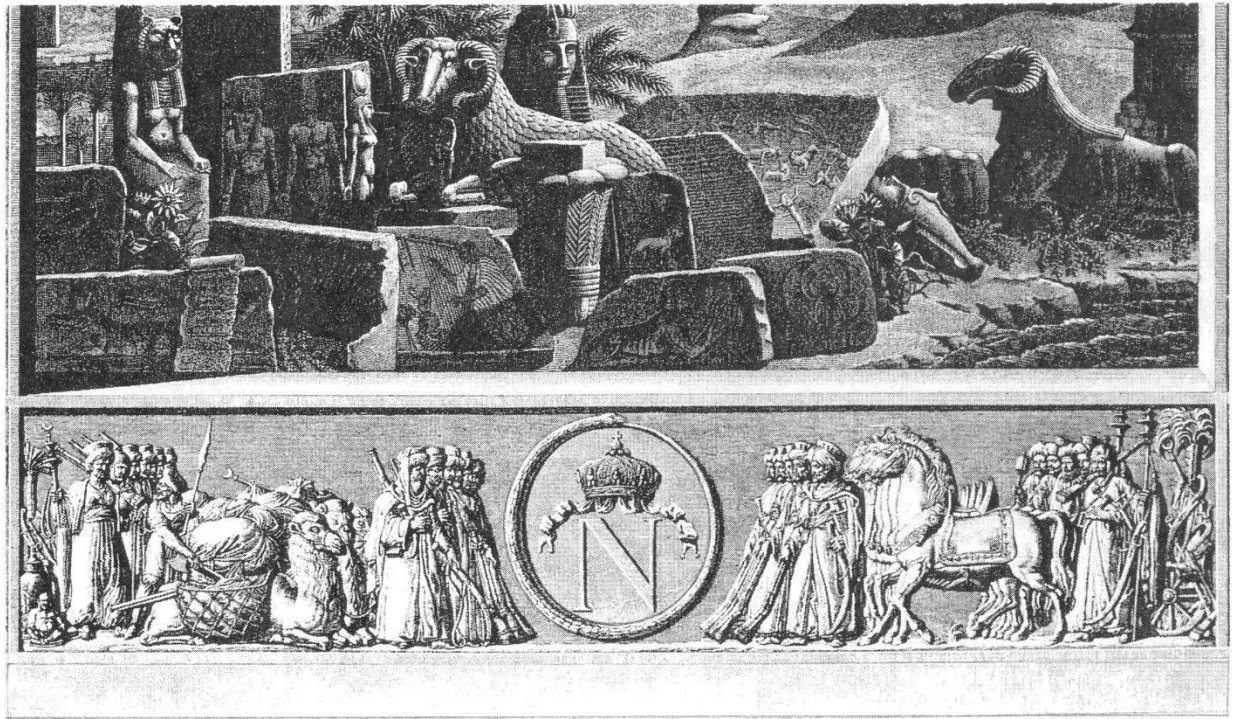


Figure 2.

The ouroboros surrounding the imperial monogram of Napoleon, perhaps intended to signify something like “Emperor Napoleon Forever!” A detail from the lower edge of the engraved frontispiece designed by Antoine Cécile for the *Description de l'Égypte, ou recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française, publié par les ordres de sa majesté l'empereur Napoléon le grand. Antiquités, planches*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1809).



Figure 3.

An ouroboros surrounds an image of Eros, and emblematic realization of "AMOR ÆTERNVS," the motto accompanying this emblem along with a poetic epigram. Otto van Veen, *Amorum emblemata* (Antwerp, 1908), Emblema I.

Ex literarum studiis immortalitatem acquiri.

EMBLEMA CXXXII.



NEPTUNI tubicen (cuius pars ultima cetum  
Aequoreum facies indicat esse deum)  
Serpentis medio Triton comprehenditur orbe,  
Qui caudam inserto mordicus ore tenet.  
Fama viros animo insignes, praclaraq; gesta  
Prosequitur; toto mandat & orbe legi.

Figure 4.

An ouroboros encircles Triton, the trumpeter of Neptune, in an allegorical emblem expressing the immortal fame to be attained through achievement of greatness in literary studies. Andreas Alciato, *Emblematum liber* (Paris, 1583), Emblema CXXXII.

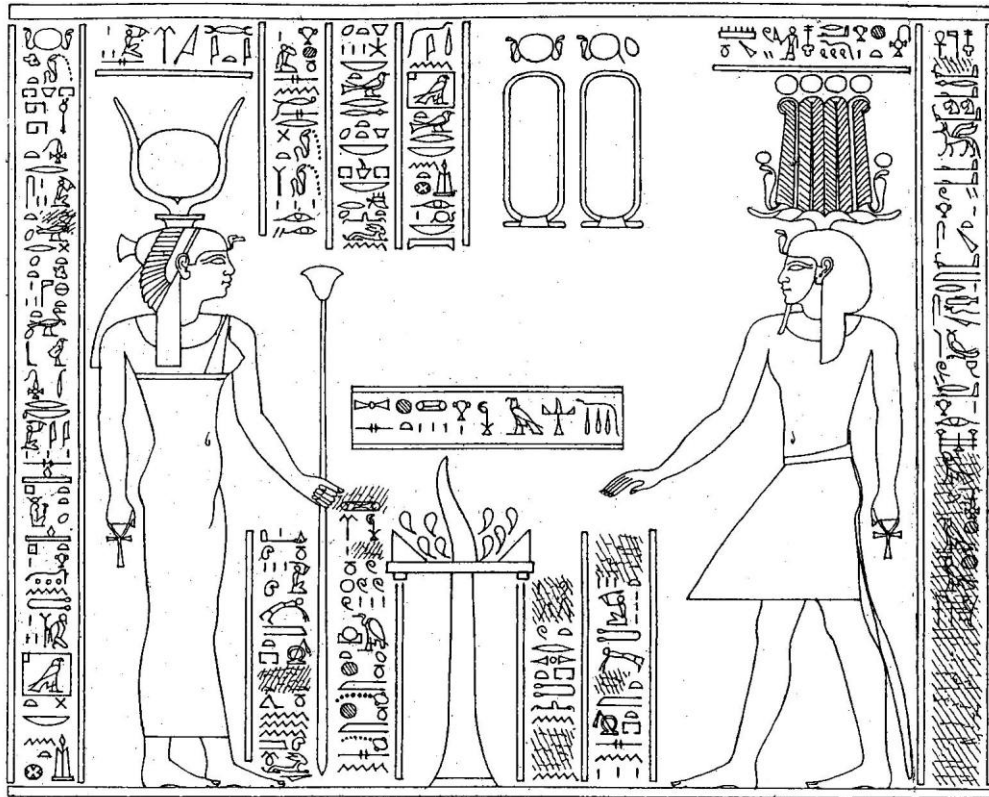


Figure 5.

Mariette's hand copy of an offering scene in the Temple of Hathor at Dendara. While lacking the precision demanded by present epigraphic standards, and drawn at a time when grime still obscured part of the inscriptions, Mariette's attractive drawing is nonetheless meticulous with regard to the hieroglyphs and iconographic details, and has the additional virtue of still being the only published drawing of this scene that integrates both the figural and textual elements into a single image like the original. Auguste Mariette-Bey, *Dendérah, description générale du grand temple de cette ville*, vol. 2. (Paris, 1870) pl. 72a.





Figure 6.

Line restoration after a photograph of a much mutilated sunk relief from an offering scene in the lowest register of the east wall in room one of the eastern Osiris chapel, Temple of Hathor at Dendara; after Sylvie Cauville, *Le temple de Dendara, les chapelles osiriennes*, Dendara 10/2 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1997) pls. X15, X31.

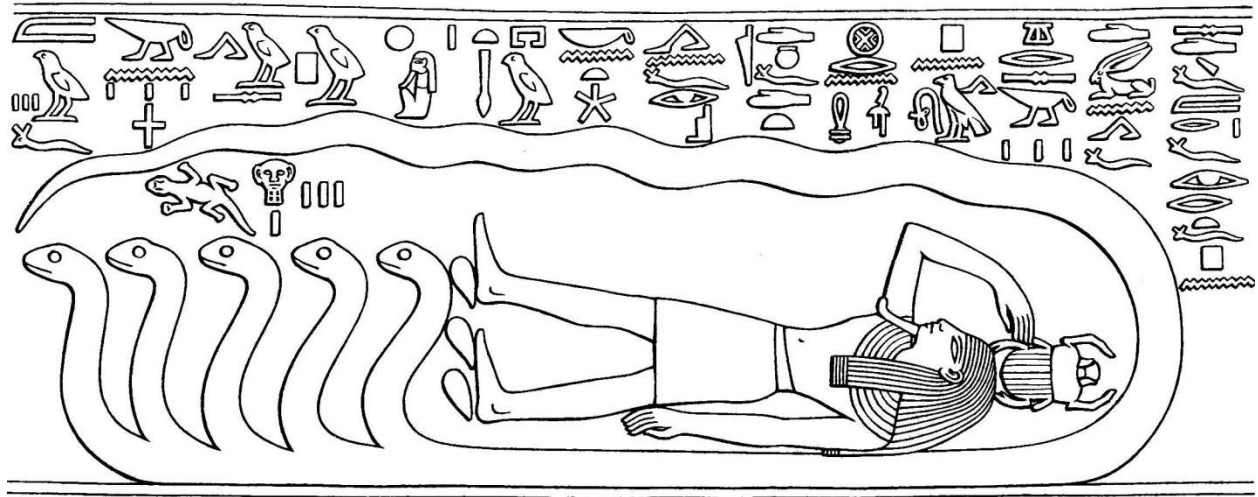


Figure 7.

Vignette from the end of the sixth hour of the *Amduat*, in which the regenerating “flesh of Re” is represented as a recumbent figure of Khepri (“The-One-Who-Becomes”) protected within the folds of a great serpent “Many-of-Faces.” Line drawing of a somewhat disfigured painted relief image on the southwest wall of Hall N in the tomb of Sethos I. Cf., Erik Hornung, *The Tomb of Seti I/ Das Grab Sethos’ I.*, phot. Harry Burton (Zurich and Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1991) 250, pl. 186.

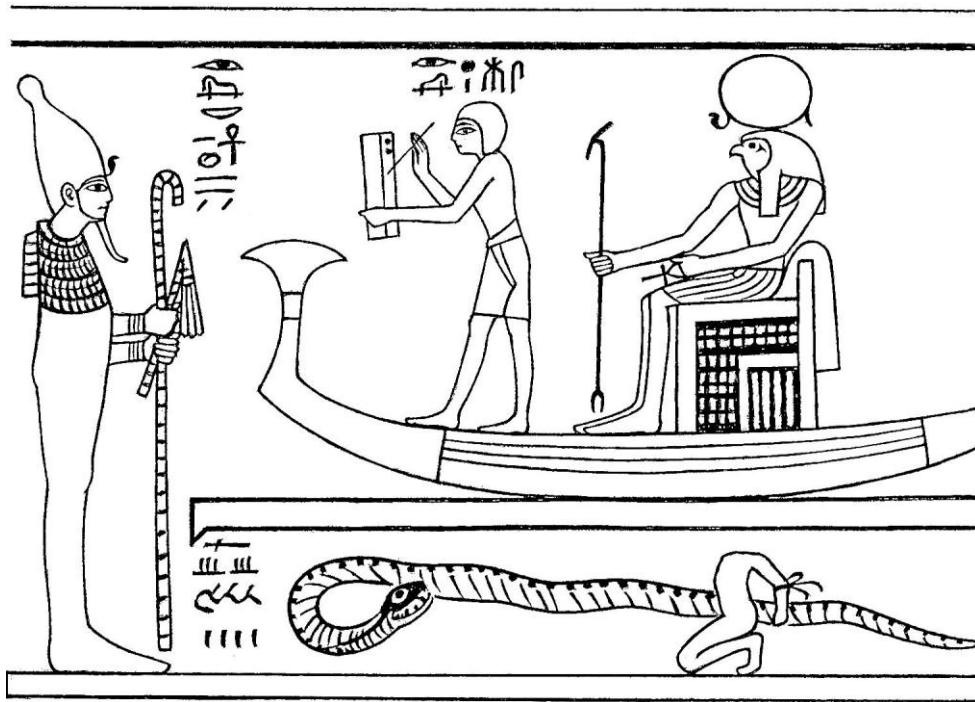


Figure 8.

Vignette from the Papyrus of Khnememhab, showing Apep forced to bite into his own flesh during the sixth hour of the night when the mysterious union of Re and Osiris takes place (see Chapter 1, note 87). Line drawing (with restorations not affecting the text or iconography) after: Allen W. Shorter, "The Papyrus of Khnememhab in the University College London," *JEA* 23 (1937) pl. 10, top. A unique peculiarity of this papyrus is that, while the owner is without doubt Khnememhab, another deceased, one Ramose, also appears (as in this vignette); possible reasons for this are discussed by Shorter, *op. cit.*, 3

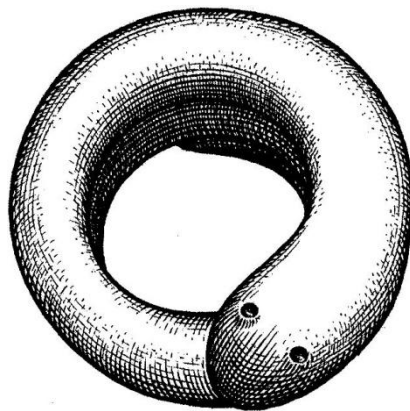


Figure 9.

A small Predynastic Period ouroboroid of mottled gray and brown serpentine, about 4.1 cm in diameter, in the collection of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology at University College London. Line drawing after W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Amulets* (1914, reprint with an introduction by Geoffrey Martin, Warminster, Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips, 1972) pl. 123. 96d.

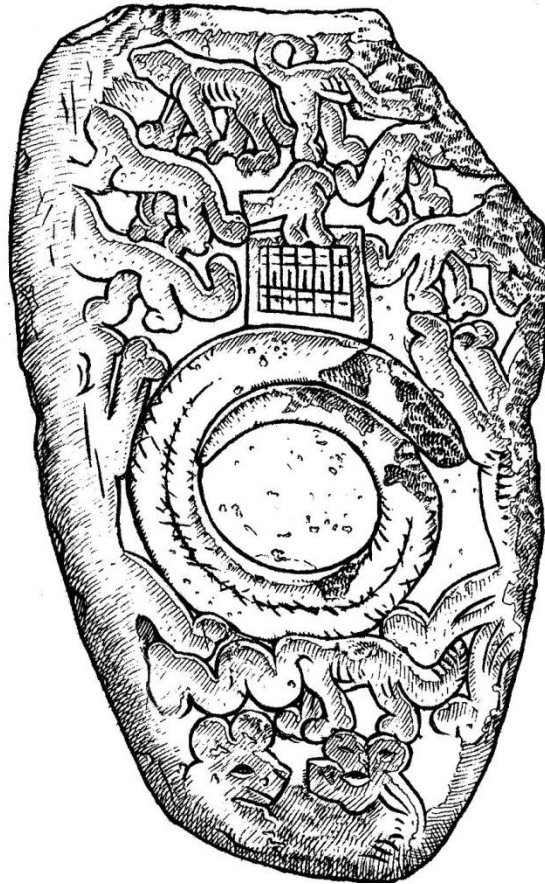


Figure 10.

Surviving fragment (about 9 cm in height) of a small late Predynastic Period ceremonial schist palette, featuring as its central image an ouroboroid apparently supported by a so-called serpent-necked feline. Appearing above the ouroboroid is a *serekh*, surmounted by a royal falcon. Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA 28.9.8; after William C. Hayes, *The Scepter of Egypt*, vol. 1, rev. ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990) 29, fig. 22.

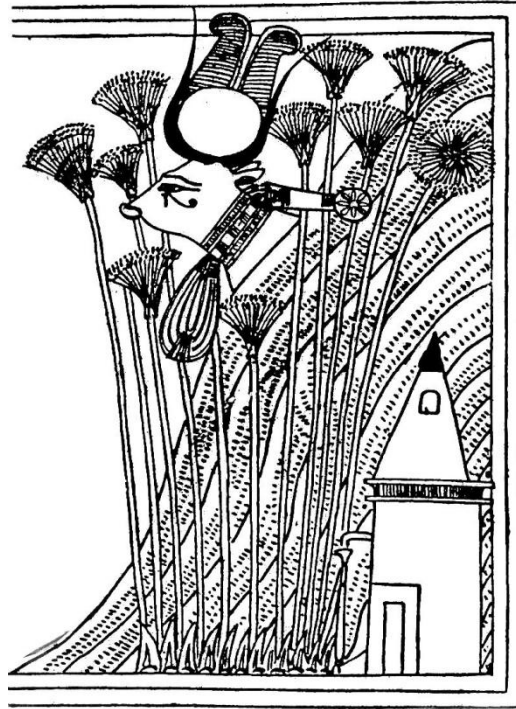


Figure 11.

The hieroglyph  $\triangle$  used to represent the hill of the West, in a detail from a tableau illustrating BD 186 (a clear example of hieroglyph being used as an extra-linguistic signifier) from the papyrus of Ani in the British Museum (P. BM EA 10470). The deceased is to be tenderly received into the West by the goddess Hathor, “lady of the West,” represented by a divine cow emerging from a papyrus thicket. After E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. rev. (London: Kegan Paul, Trubner & Co.; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1923) 634.

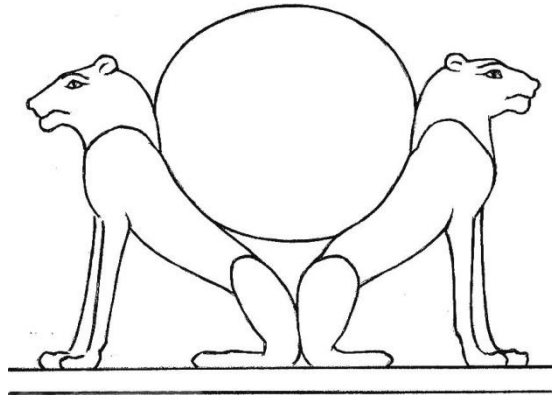


Figure 12a.

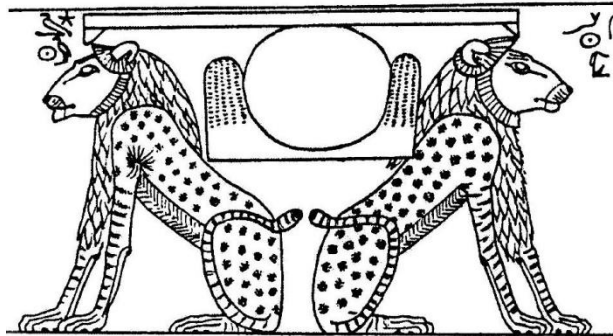




Figure 12b.

Figure 12.

Details from vignettes illustrating BD 17 showing Ruty, the double lion-god representing the two horizons. In 12a, Ruty is shown directly supporting the solar disk; line drawing after Geo. Nagel, “Un papyrus funéraire de la fin du Nouvelle Empire [Louvre 3292(inv.)],” *BIAFO* 29 (1929) pl. 4, k. In 12b, Ruty is shown supporting the hieroglyph  *zht* ‘horizon’, which should probably be interpreted as Ruty supporting the sun-disk, but mediated by  , understood as both the hills of the East and West, essentially a semantic reinforcement and reduplication of Ruty; from the papyrus of Ani in the British Museum (P. BM EA 10470), after E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. rev. (London: Kegan Paul, Trubner & Co.; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1923) 94.

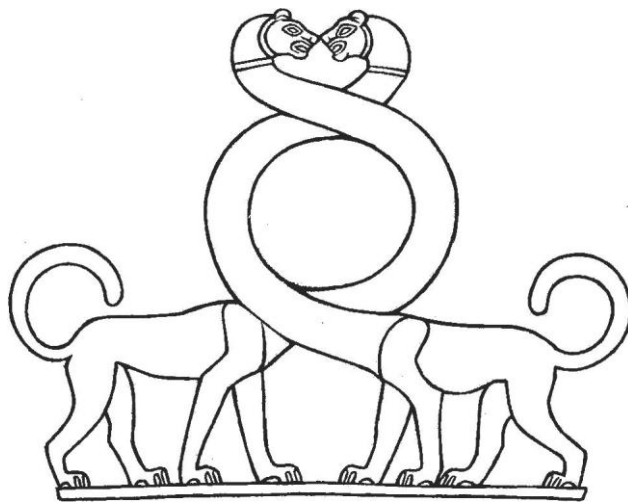


Figure 13.

Serpent-necked felines from the obverse of the Narmer Palette, with necks intertwined to surround the flat, circular surface for preparing eye paint; see Chapter 2, note 13. Line drawing after W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Ceremonial Slate Palettes*, BSEA 66 (London: British School of Archaeology, 1953) pl. K26.



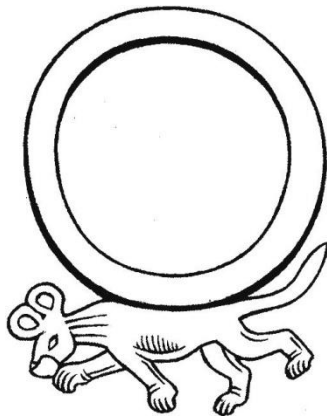


Figure 14a.

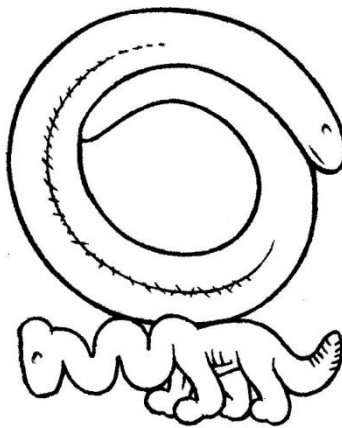


Figure 14b.

Figure 14.

*Lycaon pictus*, the so-called “hyena dog” (14a) and a fabulous serpent-necked feline (14b) interpreted as “Sonnentiere” in images found on ceremonial palettes of the late Predynastic Period; line drawings after Wolfhart Westendorf, “Zu Früformen von Osiris und Isis,” *GM* 25 (1977) 113, figs. 3 and 4.

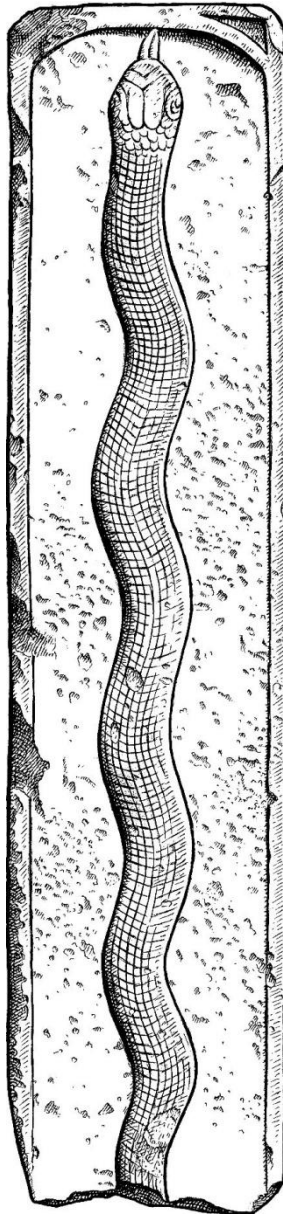


Figure 15.

The upper half of the right jamb of a doorway in the Djoser funerary complex at Saqqara showing a guardian snake, one of a probable eight snakes once depicted on the intact doorway; line drawing after Zahi Hawass, "A Fragmentary Monument of Djoser from Saqqara," *JEA* 80 (1994) pl. 7a.

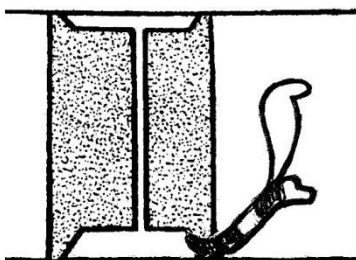


Figure 16a.

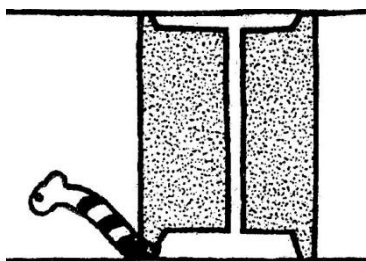


Figure 16b.

Figure 16.

Images of preternatural snakes guarding doorways, from vignettes illustrating CT Spells 1135 (16a) and 1136 (16b), inner coffin of Djehutihotep from Deir el-Bersha, Cairo J37566; after de Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*. vol.7, *Tests of Spells 787-1185*, OIP 87 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) plan 14

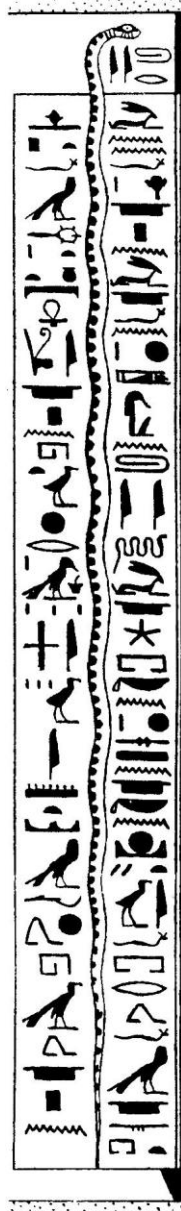


Figure 17.

One of the preternatural snakes guarding doors in the *Book of Gates*, at the end of the twelfth hour, from the alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I; drawing by Joseph Bonimi from Samuel Sharpe, *The Alabaster Sarcophagus of Oimenepthah, King of Egypt* (London: 1864) pl. 15.

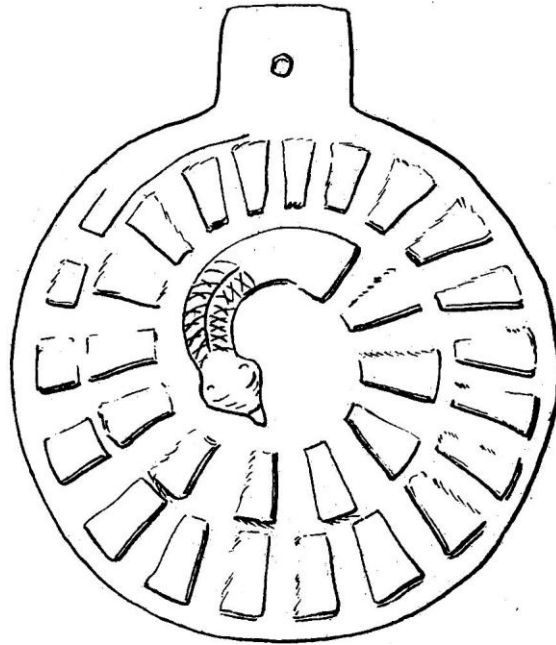


Figure 18.

A miniature limestone Mehen game-board, approximately 10.8 cm in diameter, from a burial in the Predynastic cemetery at Ballas, now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; after W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Naqada and Ballas* (London, 1896; repr. Warminster, Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips, 1974) pl. 43, 2.

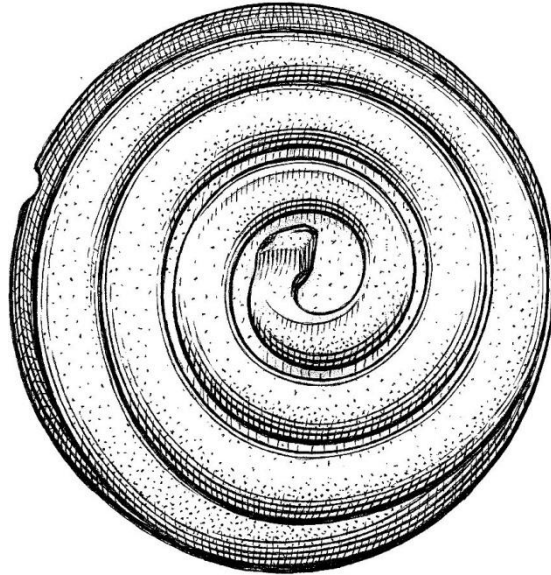


Figure 19.

A Predynastic lapis lazuli amulet, approximately 5.2 cm in diameter, in the form of a coiled serpent, now in the collection of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology at University College London. W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Amulets* (1914, reprint with an introduction by Geoffrey Martin, Warminster, Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips, 1972) pl. 12. 96c.

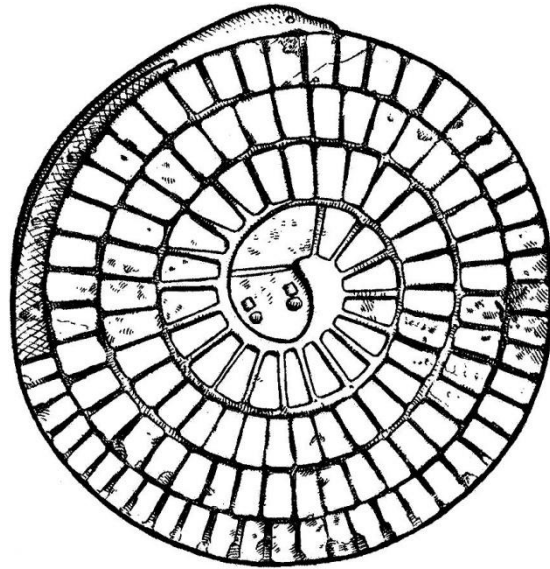


Figure 20.

An alabaster Mehen game-board, approximately 38 cm in diameter, dated to the Old Kingdom, now in the Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago (OIM game-board no. 16950). Line drawing after Peter A. Piccione, "Mehen, Mysteries, and Resurrection," *JARCE* 27 (1990) 46, fig. 3.

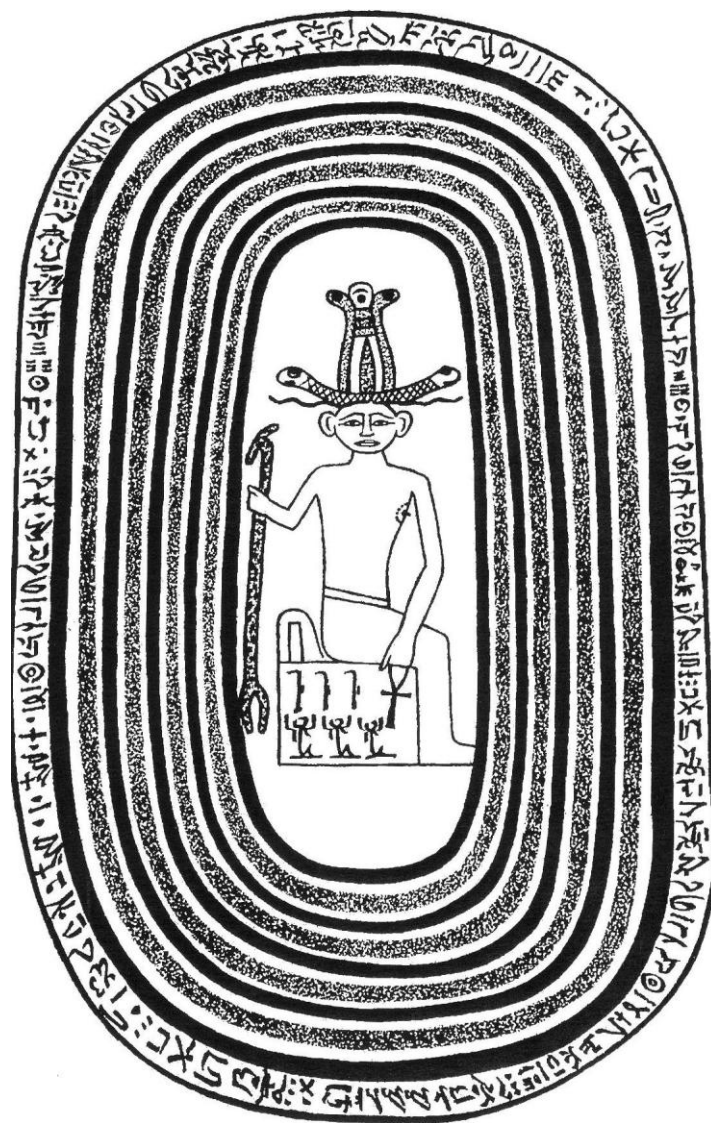


Figure 21.

Line drawing with minor restorations of a unique vignette accompanying CT Spells 768-760 on a Middle Kingdom coffin from Deir el-Bersha, now in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo (CG 28083); Pierre Lacau, *Sarcophages antérieurs au Nouvel Empire*, vol. 1, CG 28001-28086 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1904) pl. 25.



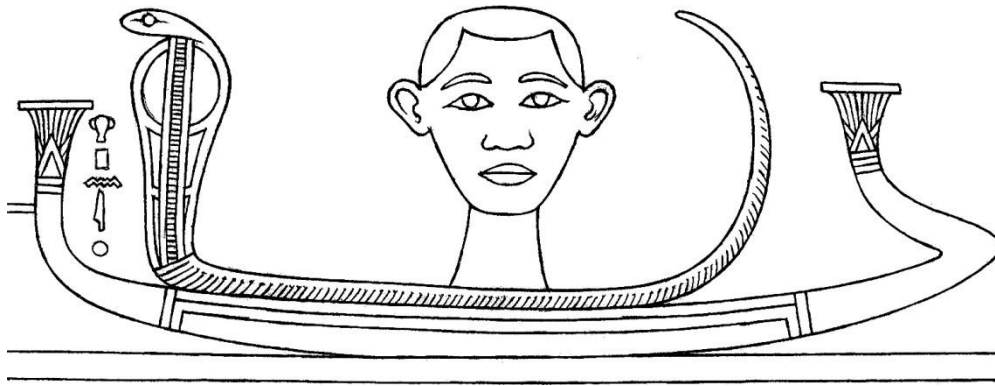


Figure 22.


The hieroglyph  (*hr* 'face') used extra-linguistically to represent the "face of the disk" in the eleventh hour of the *Book of Gates*, from the version in the tomb of Ramesses VI. This version is labeled *hr pn jh(w)*, "This face is made to flourish." Line restoration after Alexandre Piankoff, trans., *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, ed. N. Rambova, Bollingen Series 40.1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954) vol. 2 (plates), pl. 58 (detail).



Figure 23.

A multi-headed serpent much like 'Many-of-Faces' in the sixth hour of the *Amduat* but with seven heads. Relief on the inner surface of the trough of the basalt sarcophagus of Iufaa, just above where the crown of the mummy's head would be. After Ladislav Bareš and Květa Smoláriková, *The Shaft Tomb of Iufaa*, vol. 1: *Archaeology*, Abusir 17 (Prague: Czech Institute of Egyptology, 2008) pl. 26a (detail).

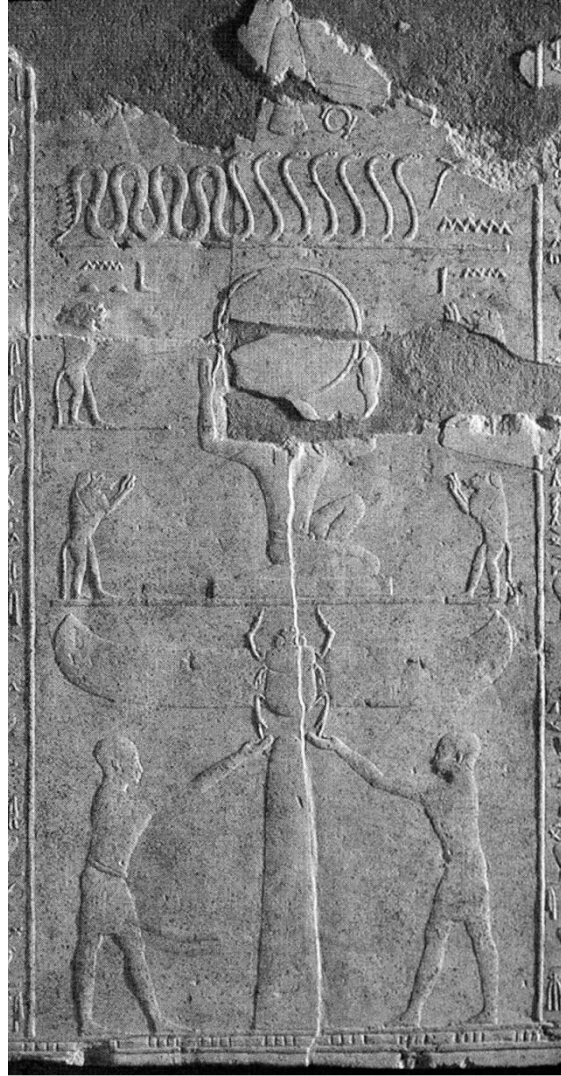


Figure 24.

Symbolic tableau on the eastern wall of the burial chamber of Iufaa, portraying the divine mystery of the rising sun, regenerated and renewed. In the upper register is seen a multi-headed serpent, identified by the partly damaged hieroglyphs as Mehen. After Ladislav Bareš and Květa Smoláriková, *The Shaft Tomb of Iufaa*, vol. 1: *Archaeology*, Abusir 17 (Prague: Czech Institute of Egyptology, 2008) pl. 72 (detail).

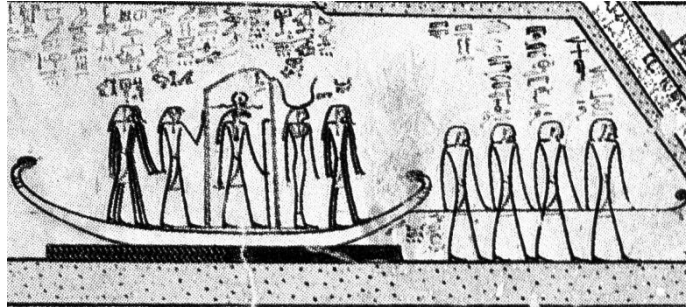


Figure 25a

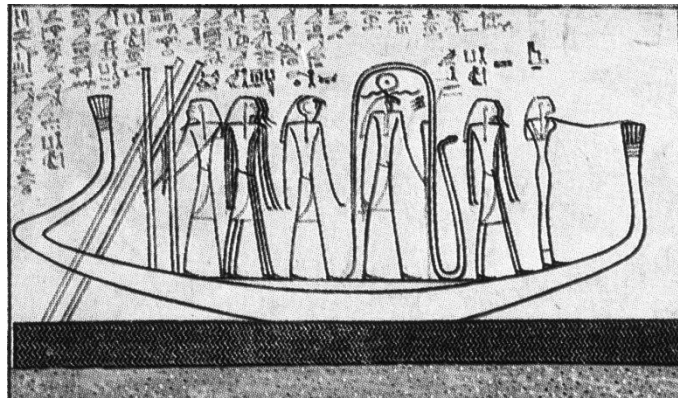


Figure 25b

## Figure 25.

In the first six hours of the Amduat, the nocturnal “Flesh-of-Re” is seen enclosed within the outlines of a shrine (25a). From the end of hour six, however, as Re undergoes the process of regeneration, the figure is no longer within a shrine but is enclosed with a serpent (25b), labeled ‘Mehen’ in the accompanying inscription. From the tomb of Tuthmosis III (KV 34). After Erik Hornung, *The Valley of the Kings. Horizon of Eternity*, trans. David Warburton (New York: Timken Publishers, Inc., 1990) 81, fig. 44 (detail); 111, fig. 76 (detail).

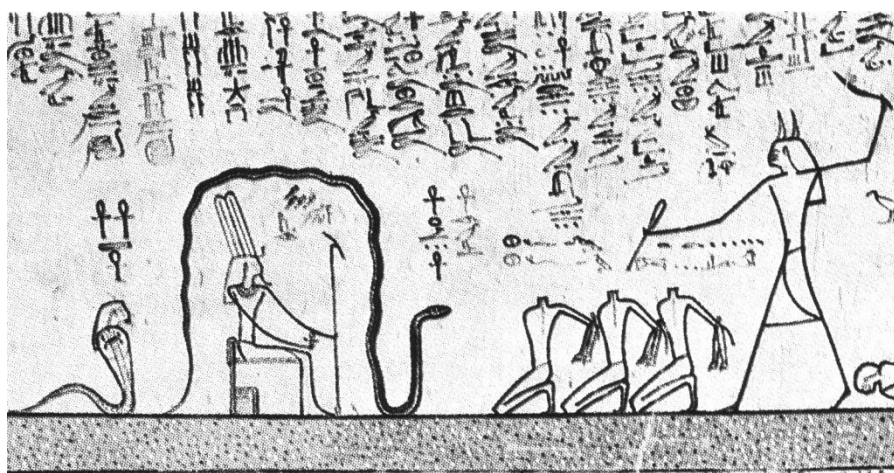


Figure 26.

At the beginning of *Amduat* hour seven, an enthroned figure labeled 'Flesh-of-Osiris' appears enclosed by an enormous serpent named as 'Mehen' in the accompanying text. The enemies of Osiris kneel before him, beheaded by the 'cat of Re'. From the tomb of Tuthmosis III (KV 34). After Erik Hornung, *The Valley of the Kings. Horizon of Eternity*, trans. David Warburton (New York: Timken Publishers, Inc., 1990) 111, fig. 76 (detail).

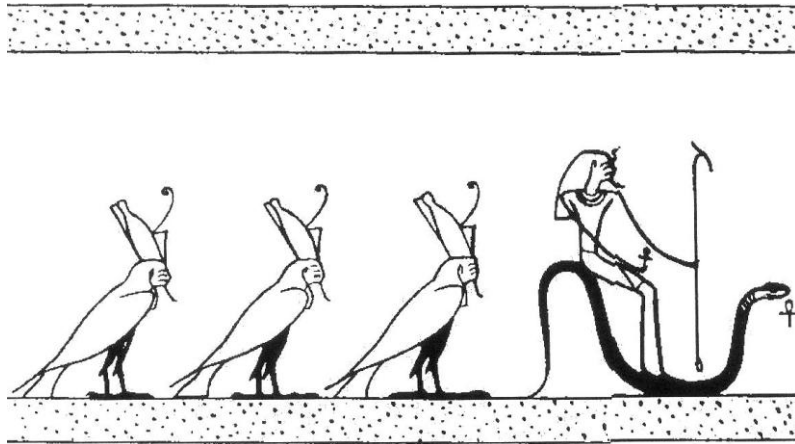


Figure 27.

At the end of the upper register of *Amduat* hour seven, a figure identified as ‘Flesh-of-Atum’ appears seated on a great serpent marked with an *ankh*-hieroglyph under its chin. The serpent is labeled with two epithets, ‘Life-of-Forms’ and ‘Life-of-*Bas*’, names and epithets also used for the Mehen-serpent enclosing Osiris at the beginning of the register. In the accompanying text, Atum addresses the ‘living *bas*, who live on mysteries’, seen behind him. The accompanying texts have been omitted in this drawing. Tomb of Tuthmosis III. After Erik Hornung, ed. *Das Amduat. Die Schrift des Verborgenen Raumes*, vol. 1, *Text*. ÄA 7 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963) pl. Siebente Stunde (detail).

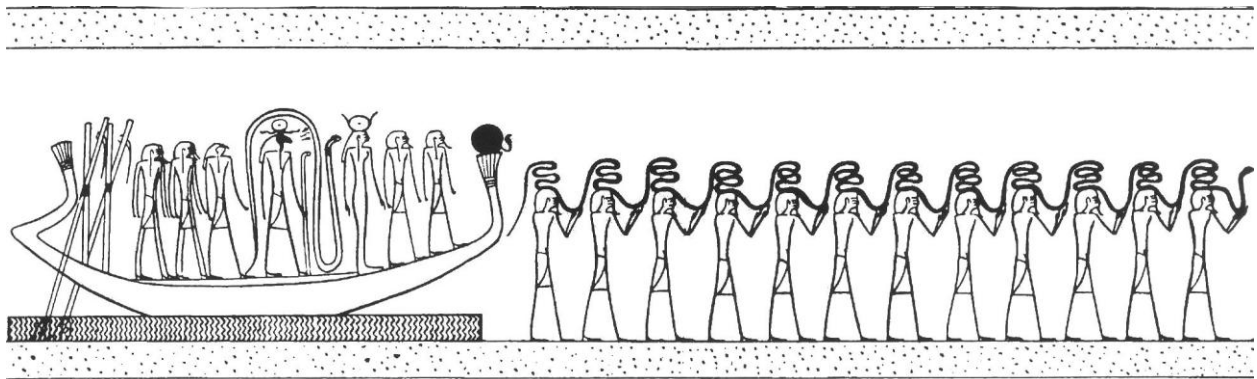


Figure 28.

In hour eleven of the *Amduat*, middle register, twelve gods are shown before the barque of Re carrying an enormous serpent named in the accompanying text as Mehen-Ta, 'Encircler-of-the Earth'. The texts have been omitted in this drawing. Tomb of Tuthmosis III. After Erik Hornung, ed. *Das Amduat. Die Schrift des Verborgenen Raumes*, vol. 1, *Text*. ÄA 7 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963) pl. Elfte Stunde (detail).

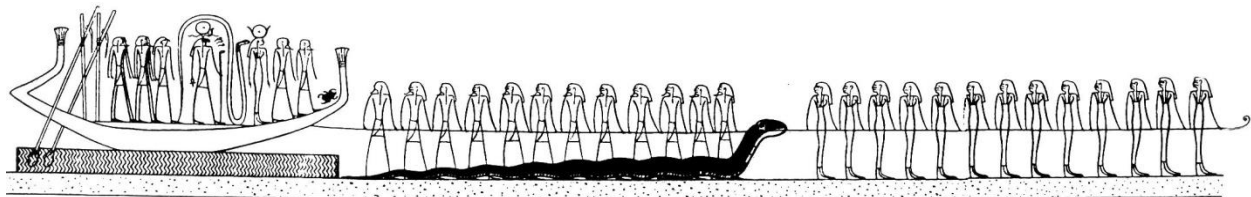


Figure 29.

In the twelfth and final hour of the *Amduat*, the serpent is referred to as 'Life-of-the-Gods' and swells to enormous size as the twelve gods draw the solar barque through its body. The texts have been omitted in this drawing. Tomb of Tuthmosis III. After Erik Hornung, ed. *Das Amduat. Die Schrift des Verborgenen Raumes*, vol. 1, Text. ÄA 7 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963) pl. Zwölfte Stunde (detail).



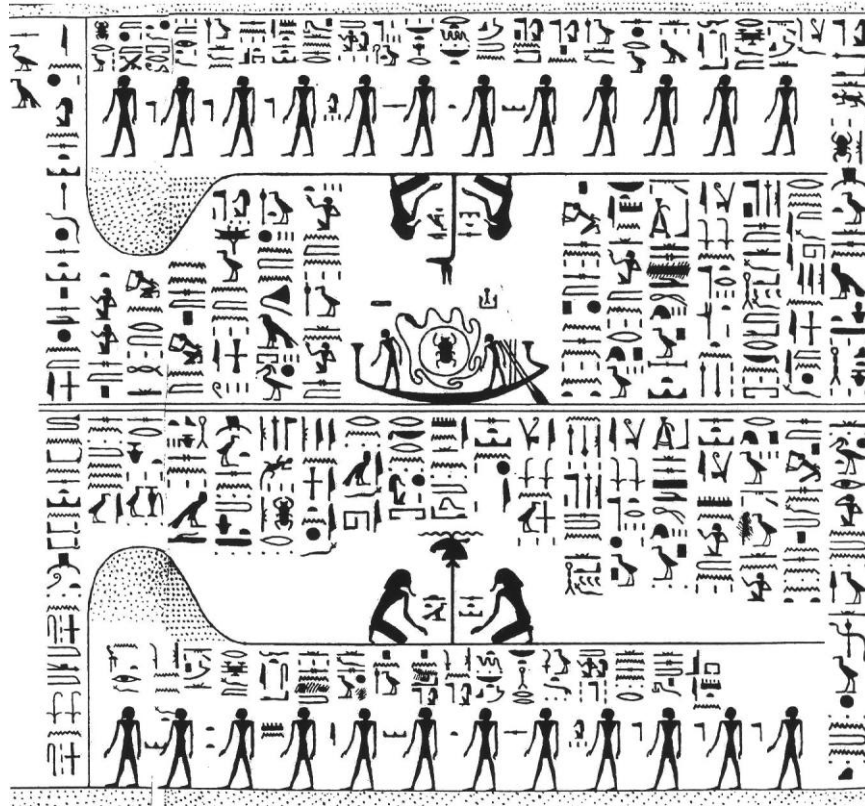


Figure 30.

First hour from the *Book of Gates*, as it appears on the alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I. Drawing by Joseph Bonomi in Samuel Sharpe, *The Alabaster Sarcophagus of Oimeneptah I, King of Egypt* (London, 1864) pl. 5 (detail).

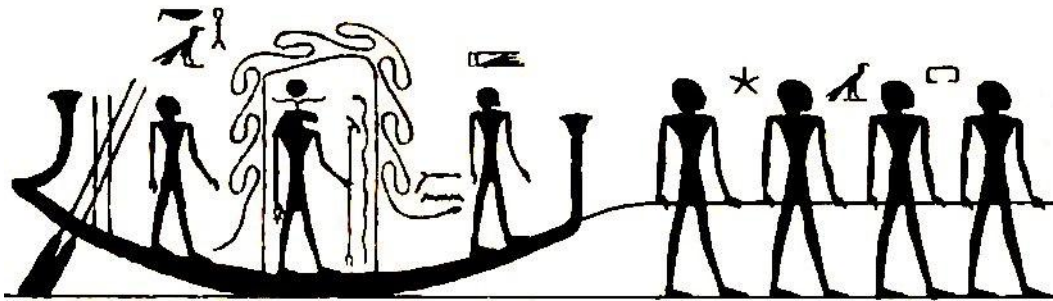


Figure 31.

The solar barque as it appears in hours 11 through twelve in the *Book of Gates*, the nocturnal, ram-headed form of Re stands amidships within a shrine, with Sia and Hekau standing fore and aft. The serpent protectively enveloping the shrine is labeled 'Mehen'. From the alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I; drawing by Joseph Bonomi in Samuel Sharpe, *The Alabaster Sarcophagus of Oimeneptah I, King of Egypt* (London, 1864) pl. 13 (detail).

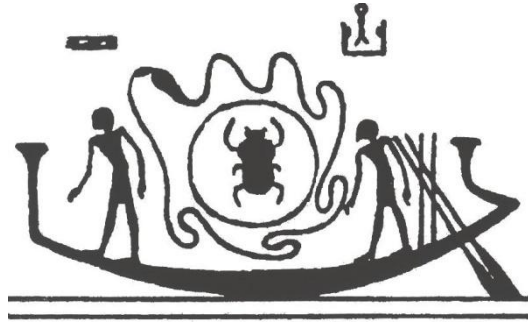


Figure 32a.

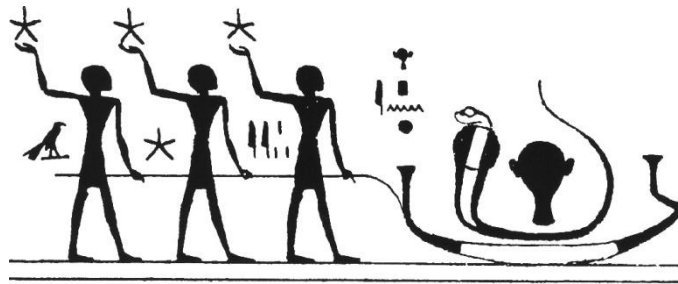


Figure 32b.

Figure 32.

Comparison of protective serpents in the *Book of Gates*, surrounding an image of the reborn sun in the first hour (figure 32a) and enveloping the “face of the disk” in the eleventh hour (figure 32b). From the alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I; drawing by Joseph Bonomi in Samuel Sharpe, *The Alabaster Sarcophagus of Oimeneptah I, King of Egypt* (London, 1864) pls. 5 (detail) and 11 (detail).

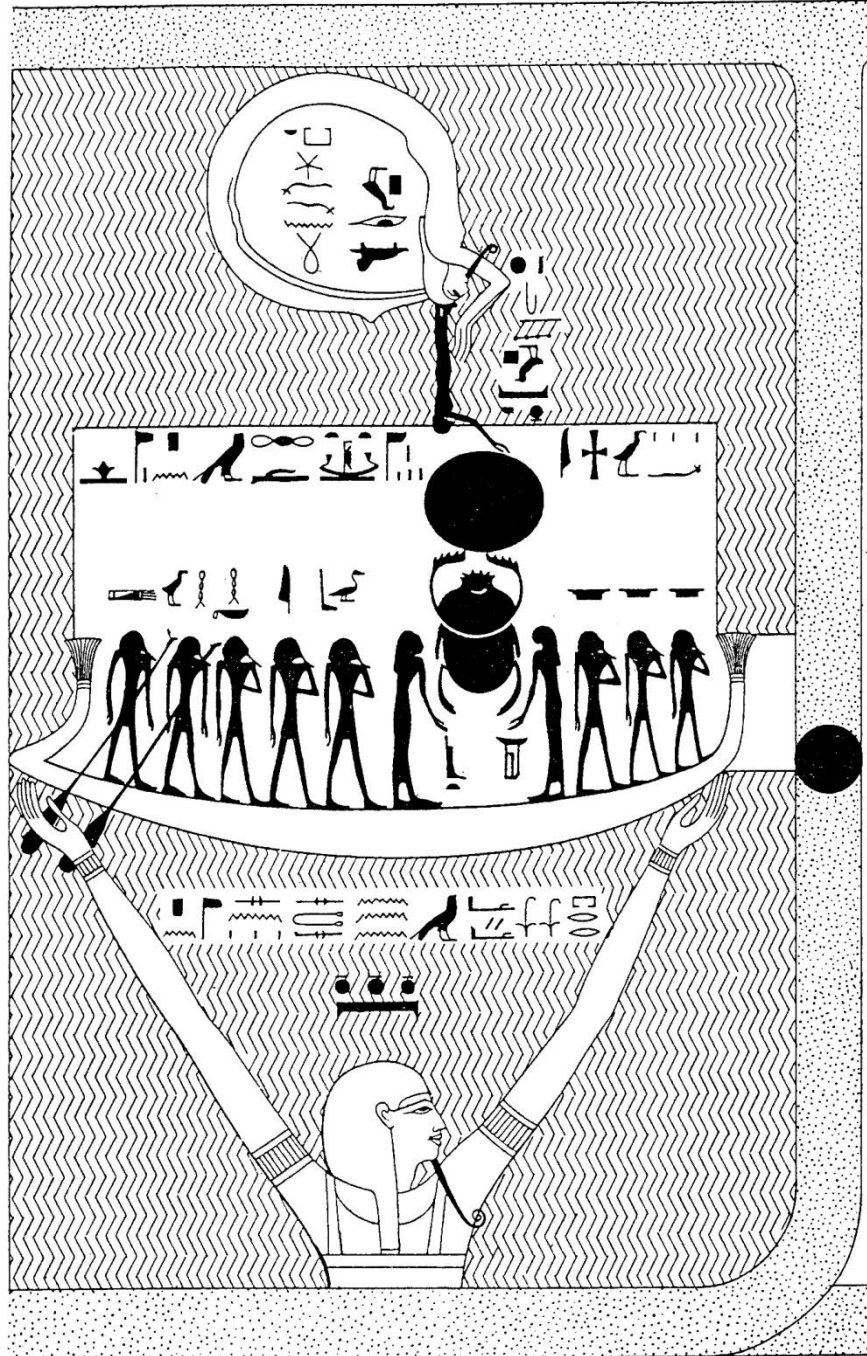


Figure 33.

Final symbolic tableau of the *Book of Gates*, showing simultaneously the rising of the renewed sun, the setting of the sun, and the creation of the world. From the alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I; drawing by Joseph Bonomi in Samuel Sharpe, *The Alabaster Sarcophagus of Oimeneptah I, King of Egypt* (London, 1864) pl. 15 (detail)

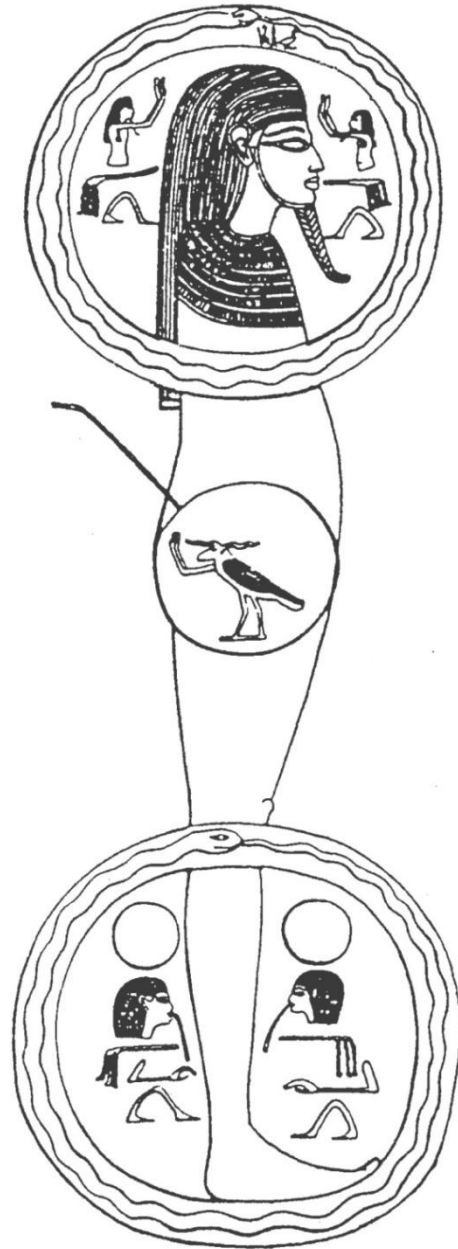


Figure 34.

The earliest known example of the true ouroboros icon occurs on the second gold shrine of Tutankhamun where ouroboroi are seen surrounding a large mummiform figure most likely intended as a representation of the unified Re-Oriris. Alexander Piankoff, "Une representation rare sur l'une des Chapelles de Toutankhamon," *JEA* 35 (1949) 113, fig. 1.

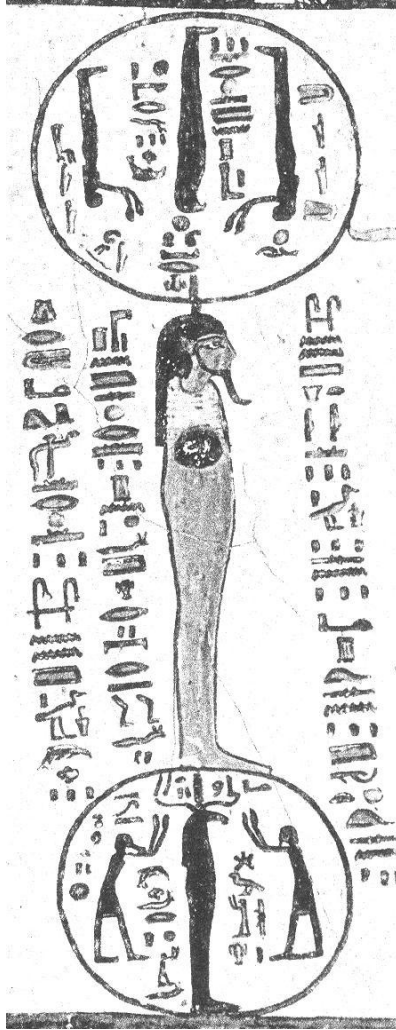


Figure 35.

Mummiform figure seen near the beginning of the second register of the first section of the *Book of the Creation of the Solar Disk*. After Alexandre Piankoff, trans., *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, ed. N. Rambova, vol. 2 (plates), Bollingen Series 40.1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954) pl. 114 (detail).

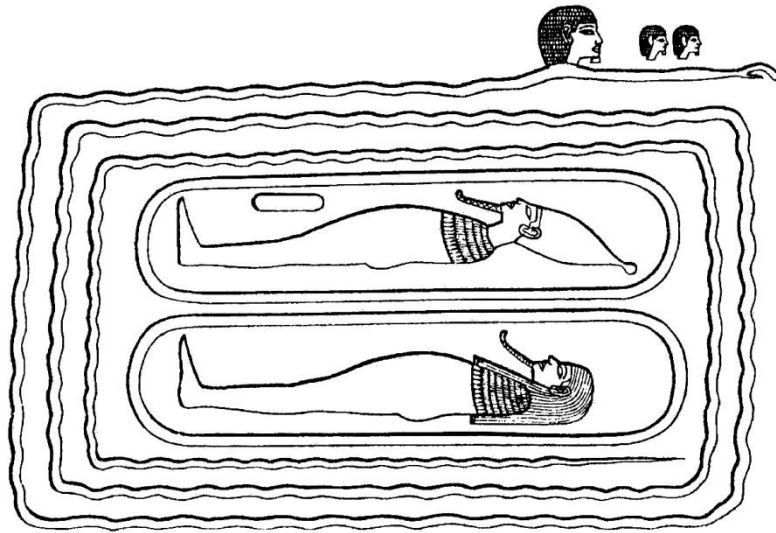


Figure 36.

Mummiform figures in their sarcophagi, protected by a great serpent in “the cavern which is in the Place of Destruction.” Second gold shrine of Tutankhamun. After Alexandre Piankoff, trans., *The Shrines of Tut-ankh-amon*, ed. N. Rambova, Bollingen Series 40.2. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1955) fig. 41 (detail).



Figure 37.

An ouroboros named as “Great One” envelops and protects the “corpse of Osiris,” the “*ba* of Re,” and the “eye of Re” in a vignette from the fourth tableau of the so-called *Book of Caverns*. After Alexandre Piankoff, trans., *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, ed. N. Rambova, vol. 2 (plates), Bollingen Series 40.1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954) pls. 20-21 (detail).





Figure 38.

As the solar disk passes overhead, the serpent “Great One” supports a crocodile-headed divine figure labeled “Complete One,” before whom a figure labeled “Caring One” receives a mysterious exudates from the crocodile snout. Fifth tableau, so-called *Book of Caverns*. After Alexandre Piankoff, trans., *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, ed. N. Rambova, vol. 2 (plates), Bollingen Series 40.1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954) pl. 21 (detail).

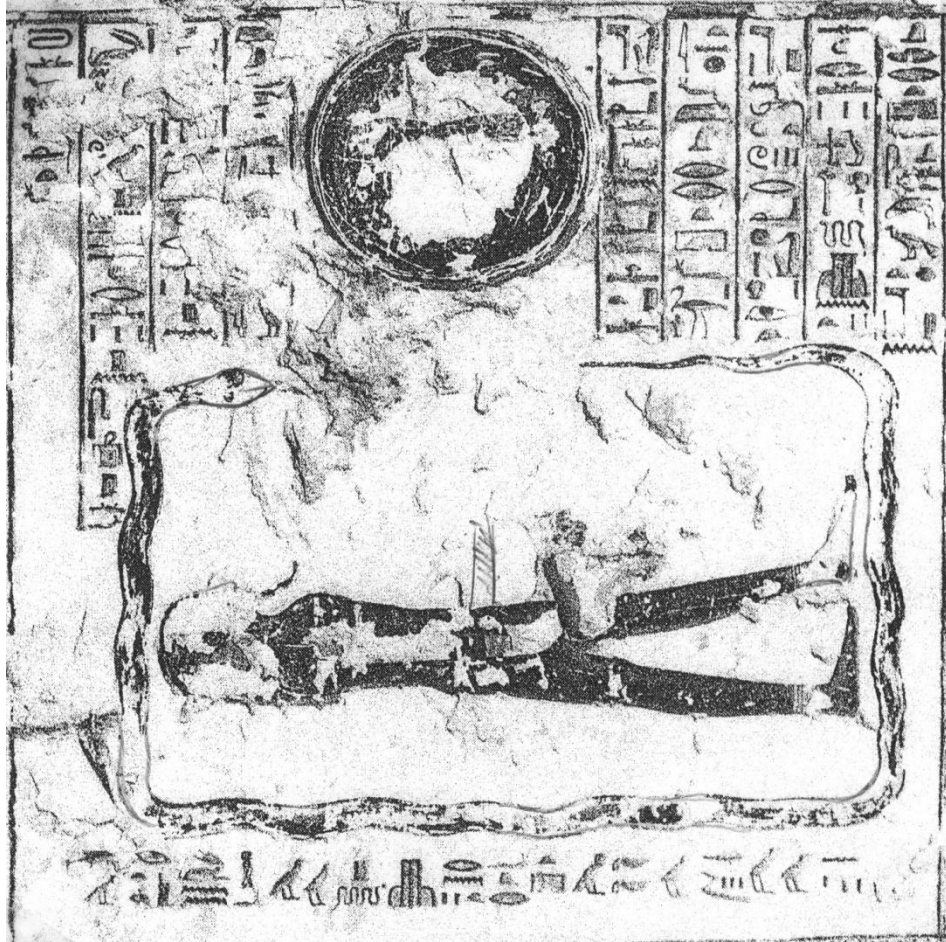


Figure 39.

In the midst of the Place of Destruction, the recumbent, ithyphallic corpse of Osiris is protected by the serpent “Terrible-of-Face.” Lowest of three registers in third section of the *Book of Caverns*. After Alexandre Piankoff, trans., *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, ed. N. Rambova, vol. 2 (plates), Bollingen Series 40.1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954) pl. 20 (detail).

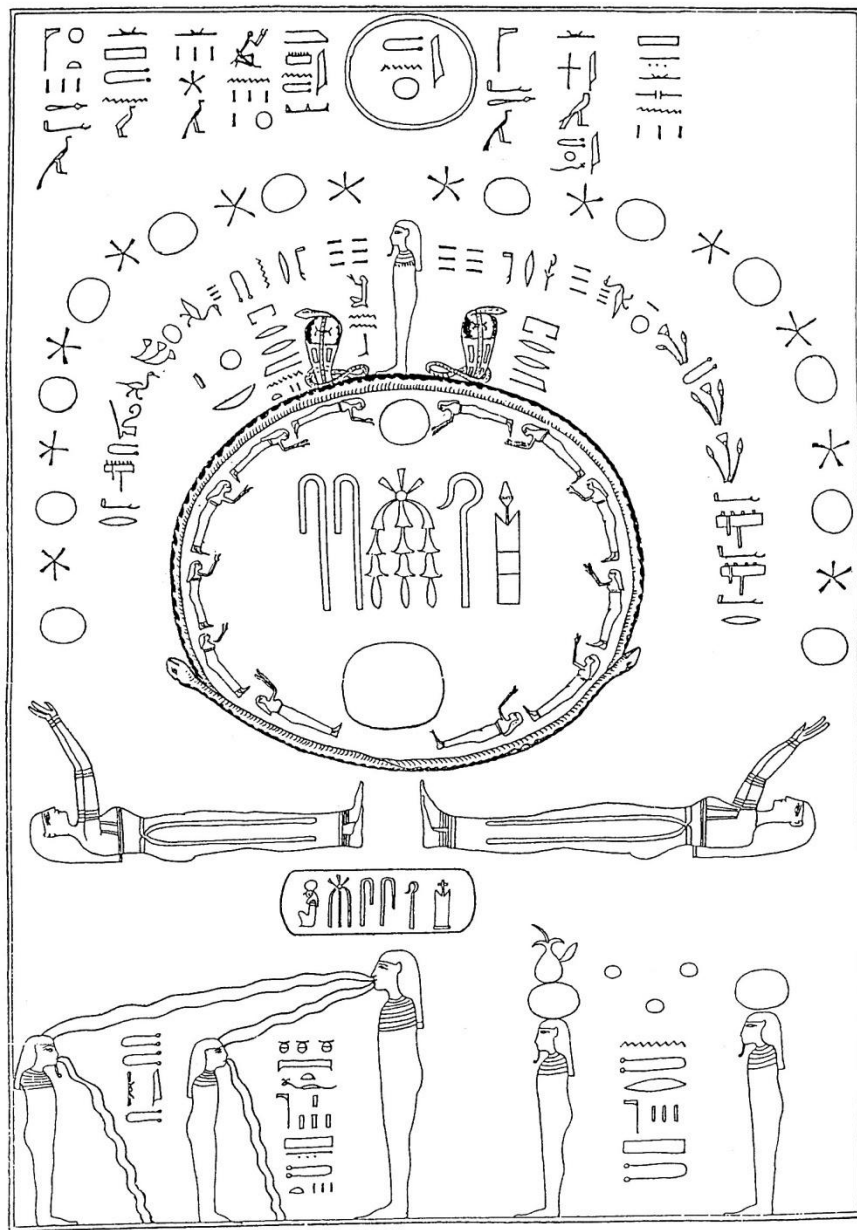


Figure 40.

Champollion's hand-copy of the now lost tableau from the burial chamber of Ramesses III (KV 11). Champollion le jeune, J.-F., *Monuments de l'Égypte et de la Nubie, notices descriptives*. (Paris, 1844) vol 1, 422-23.

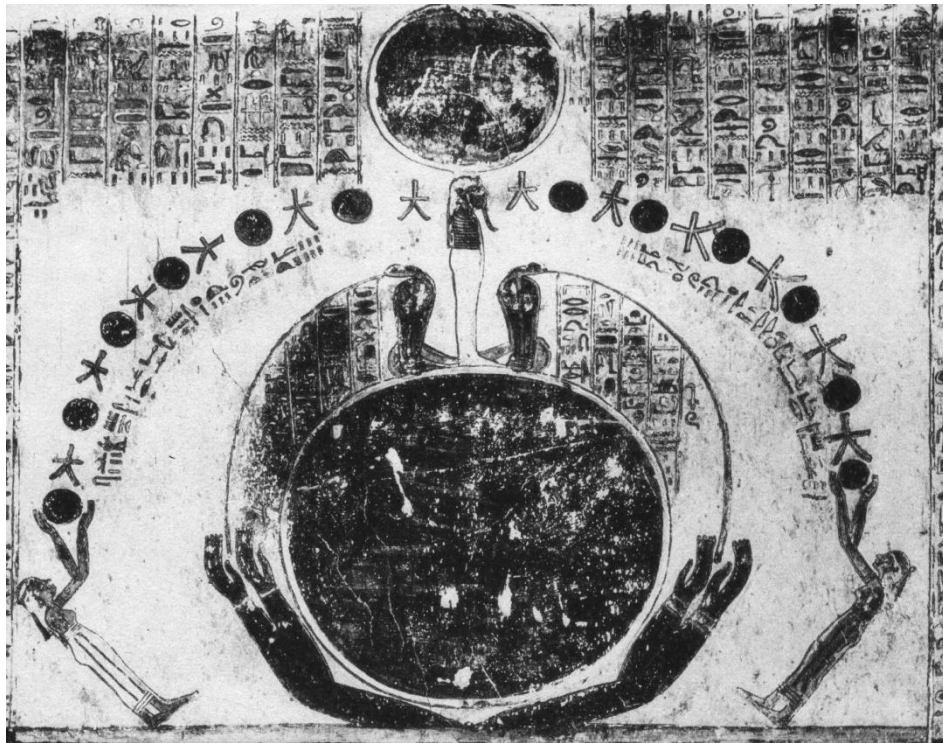


Figure 41.

Detail of tableau in the center of the upper register on the left (western) wall of the sarcophagus chamber of Ramesses VI. After Alexandre Piankoff, trans., *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, ed. N. Rambova, vol. 2 (plates), Bollingen Series 40.1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954) pl. 132 (detail).

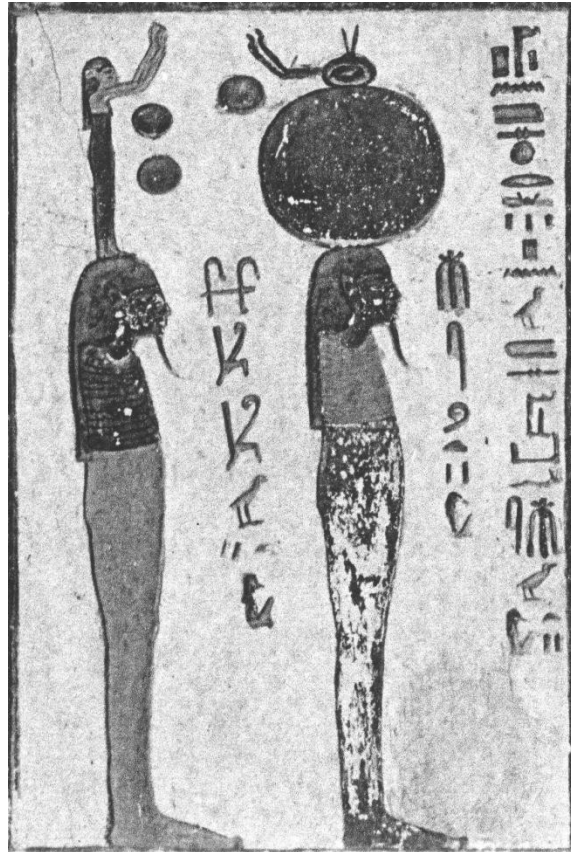


Figure 42.

Mummiform figures in the first tableau of the third register, *Book of the Creation of the Solar Disk*, right (eastern) wall of the sarcophagus chamber of Ramesses VI. After Alexandre Piankoff, trans., *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, ed. N. Rambova, vol. 2 (plates), Bollingen Series 40.1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954) pl. 114 (detail).



Figure 43a.



Figure 43b.

### Figure 43.

Examples of protective serpents surrounding solar disks. Figure 43a is an Middle Kingdom example on a lintel of Senusret III from the temple of Montu at Medamud (Louvre E 13983); sketch after F. Bisson de la Roque and J.J. Clère, *Rapports préliminaires*, vol. 1, pt. 1, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Médamoud* (1929), FIFAO 7.1 (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1930) pl. 4 (detail). Figure 43b is from the sarcophagus chamber of Seti I; drawing from M.E. Lefébure, *Les hypogées royales de Thèbes*, pt. 1, *Le tombeau de Sèti I<sup>er</sup>*, *Annales du Musée Guimet* 9 (Paris, 1886) pl. 24 (detail); cf. Erik Hornung, *The Tomb of Seti I/Das Grab Sethos' I*, phot. Harry Burton (Zurich and Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1991) 226, fig. 162.



Figure 44a.



Figure 44b.

### Figure 44.

Examples of protective serpents surrounding solar disks. Figure 44a is a detail from pillar face Ab in Room F of the tomb of Seti I, from Erik Hornung, *The Tomb of Seti I/Das Grab Sethos' I*, phot. Harry Burton (Zurich and Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1991) 156, fig. 92 (detail). Figure 44b is a Middle Kingdom example from Karnak, after R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz, Georges and Valentine Miré, and Lucy Lamy, *Les temples de Karnak, contribution à de la pensée pharaonique*, vol. 2, Collection «Architecture et symboles sacrés» (Paris: Dervy-Livres, 1982) pl. 325 (detail).



Figure 45.

A protective ouroboroid surrounds the night sun's shrine on the *msktt*-barque in the comparatively rare *Book of Night*. As the surviving individual renderings of the barque are damaged in various ways, this is an eclectic image, with features drawn from several partially damaged representations. Based on images in Gilles Roulin, *Le Livre de la Nuit. Une composition égyptienne de l'au delà*, vol. 2, OBO 147 (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996) plates.



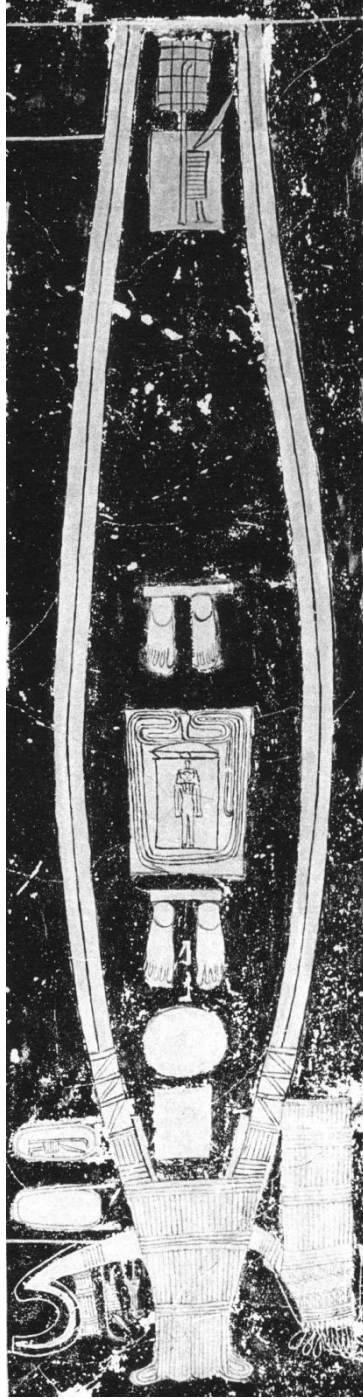


Figure 46.

The *msktt*-barque partly depicted as seen from above. The sun-god and shine are enclosed in an ouroboroid and are represented *en face*, with the places of the gods standing fore and aft are indicated merely by the presence of their feet. Ceiling tableau, corridor F, tomb of Ramesses VI. After Alexandre Piankoff, trans., *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, ed. N. Rambova, vol. 2 (plates), Bollingen Series 40.1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954) pl. 143 (detail).

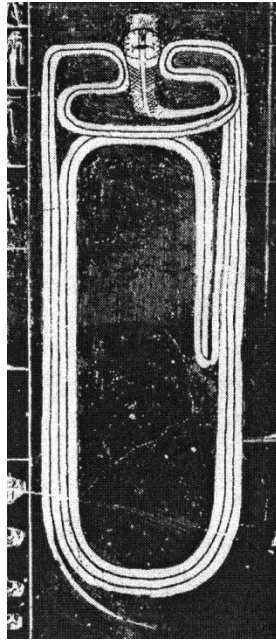


Figure 47a.

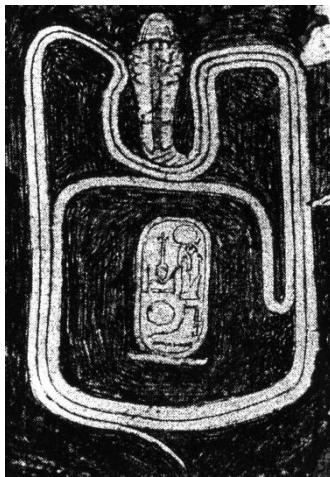


Figure 47b.

### Figure 47.

Ouroboroids at the centers of ceiling tableaux of Ramesses VI (figure 47a) and Ramesses IX (figure 47b). After Alexandre Piankoff, trans., *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, ed. N. Rambova, vol. 2 (plates), Bollingen Series 40.1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954) pl. 174 (detail); idem and Charles Maystre. “Deux plafonds dans les tombes royales.” *BIFAO* 38 (1939) pl. 5, 1 (detail).

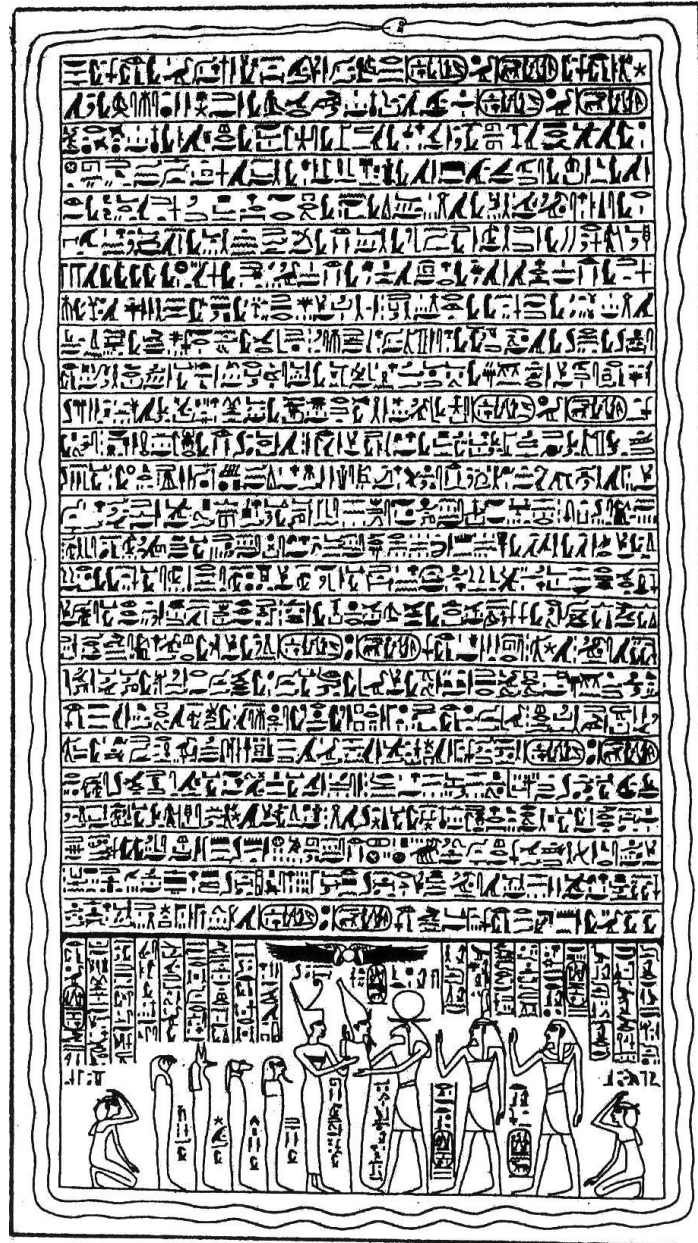


Figure 48.

A true ouroboros protects the perimeter of the slightly vaulted lid of Merenptah's outermost sarcophagus. After Jan Assmann, "Die Inschrift auf dem äußeren Sarkophagdeckel des Merenptah." *MDAIK* 28 (1972) fig. 1.

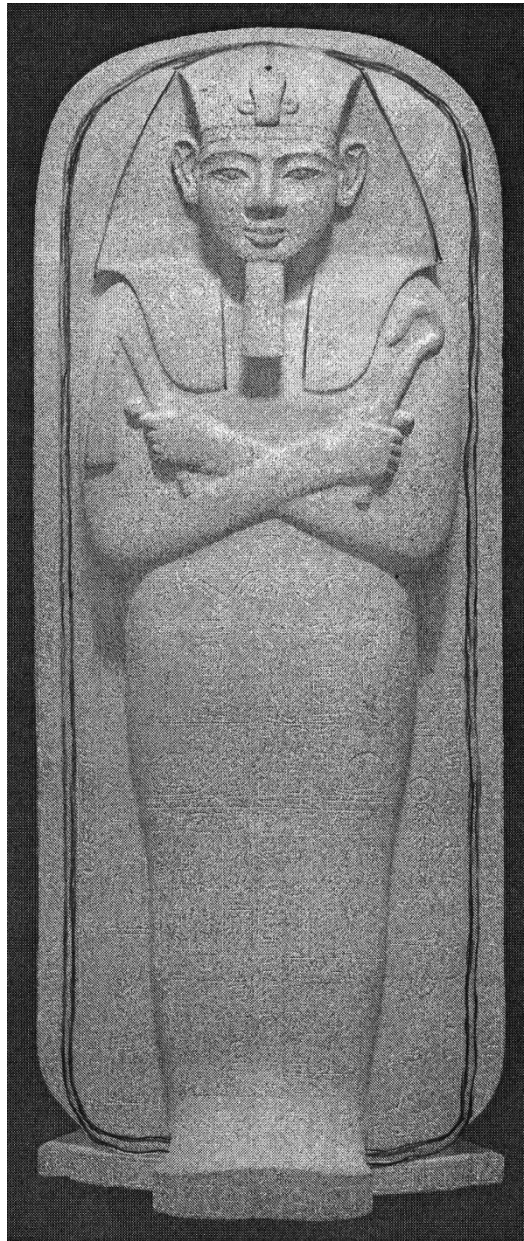


Figure 49.

Merenptah's second sarcophagus is shaped like a *šnw*, or elongated *šn*-ring, often called a cartouche. An ouroboros (like that on the outer sarcophagus seen in figure 48) appears just within the perimeter of the *šnw*, its tail and mouth meeting just behind the crown of the mummiform king's head (and therefore blocked from view in this photograph). After Hourig Sourouzian, *Les Monuments du roi Merenptah*, SDAIK 22 (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1989) pl. 36, b

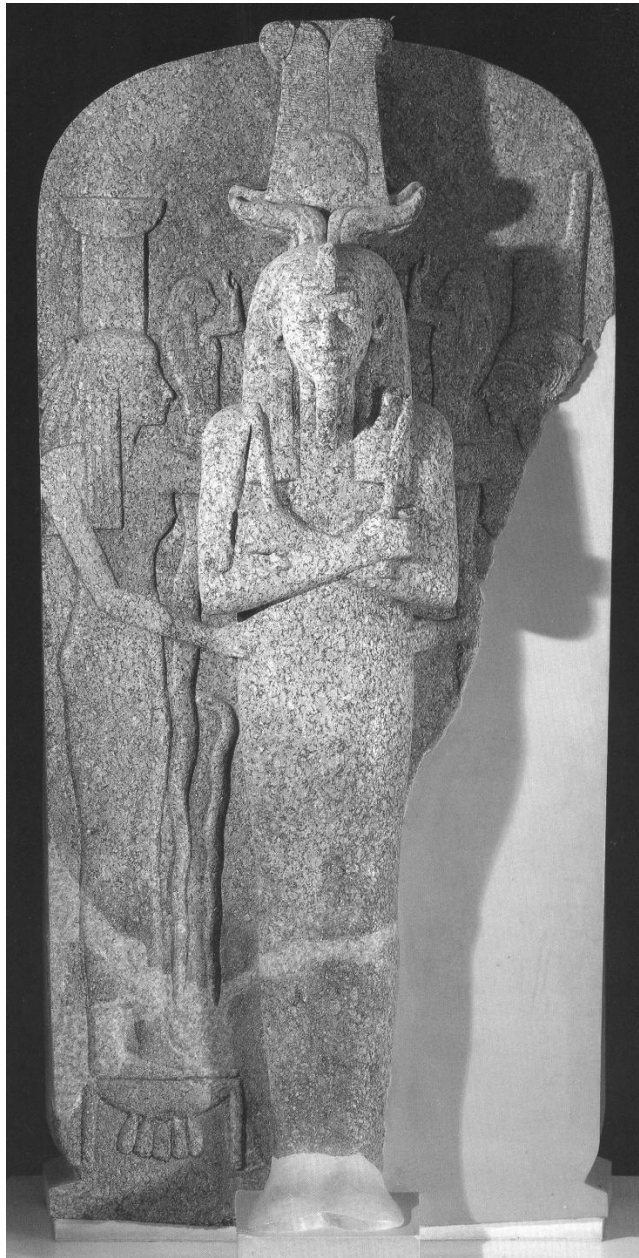


Figure 50.

The granite sarcophagus lid of Ramesses III in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, does not have the *šnw*, or cartouche, cut onto its front surface, but is itself shaped like an enormous *šnw*. A ouroboros-like serpent is carved around the perimeter, but on the perpendicular sides not visible from the front (see figure 51). After Eleni Vassilika, *Egyptian Art*, Fitzwilliam Museum Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 41.

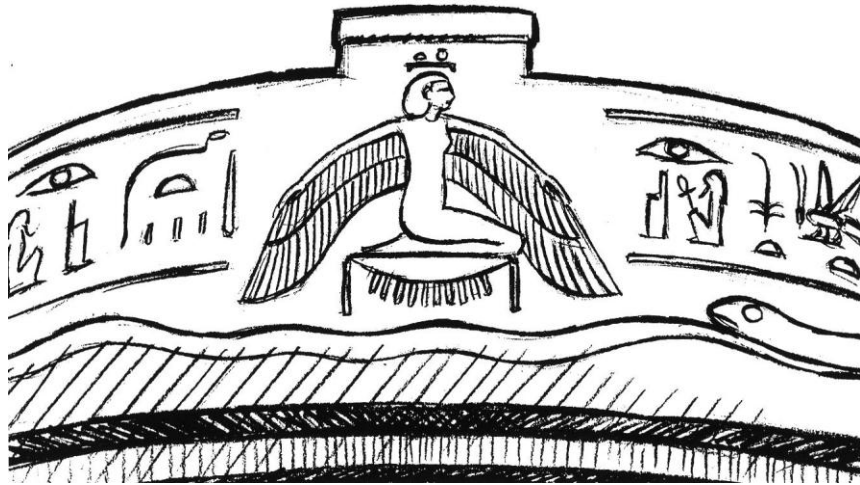


Figure 51.

Head-end of the Ramesses III lid sarcophagus now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, showing how the head and tail of the serpent overlap where they meet. Sketch based on an unpublished photograph taken during recent conservation, and kindly provided by the Fitzwilliam Museum.

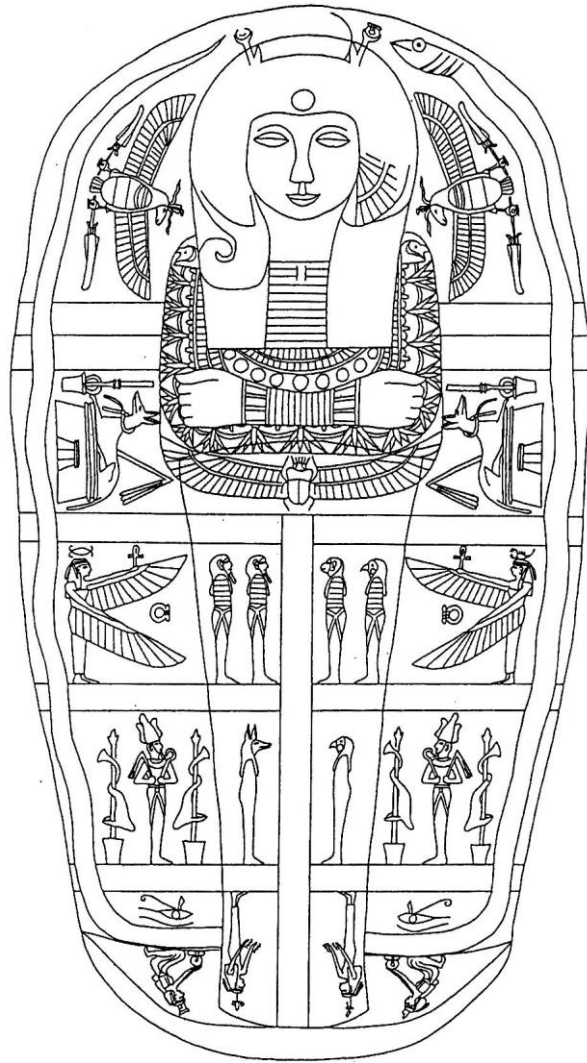


Figure 52.

Diagrammatic representation of the granite sarcophagus lid of prince Amenherkhepshef, with the perpendicular sides splayed outward and flattened so that the entire design program can be seen as an integral whole. A protective serpent appears around the perimeter, but its head and tail do not meet. After Hartwig Altenmüller, “Dritter Vorbericht über die Arbeiten des Archäologischen Instituts der Universität Hamburg am Grab des Bey (KV 13) im Tal der Könige von Theben.” SAK 21 (1994) fig. 1.



Figure 53a.



Figure 53b.

### Figure 53.

Protective Mehen-serpents appearing as ouroboroids surrounding the dead in a composition known alternately as Spell 168 of the *Book of the Dead* (Neville), the *Quererefs* (Piankoff), and the *Spell of the Twelve Caves* (Hornung). After Alexandre Piankoff, trans. and comm., *The Wandering of the Soul*, completed by Helen Jacquet-Gordon, Bollingen Series 40.6. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974) pls. 16 (detail), 31 (detail).



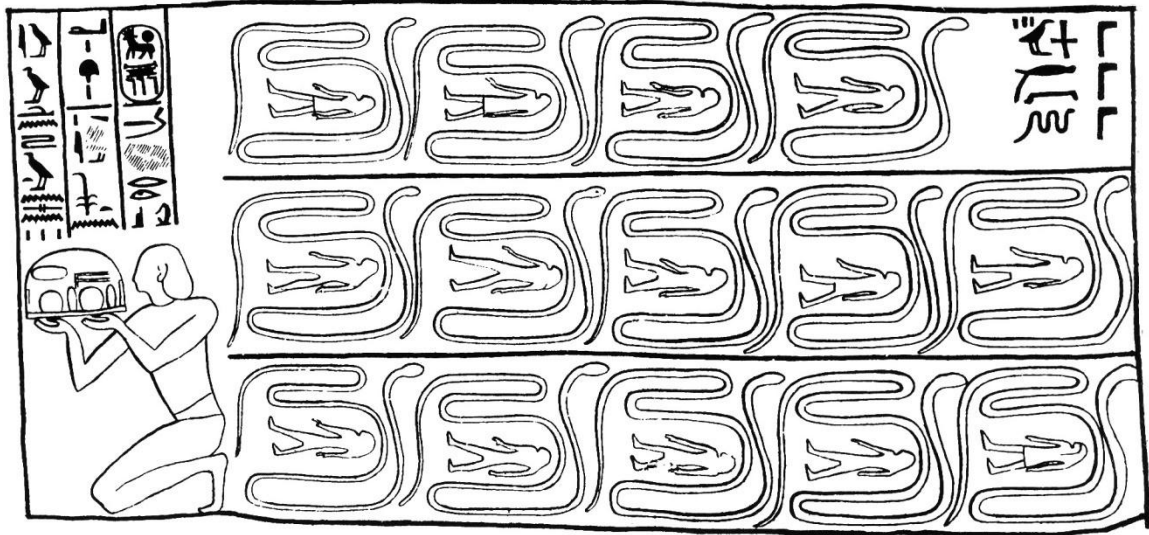


Figure 54.

Protective Mehen-serpents appearing as ouroboroids surrounding the dead in a graphically expanded version of Spell 168 of the *Book of the Dead* /*Quererets*/Spell of the Twelve Caves appearing on the west wall of the first chamber of the Osireion, Abydos. The text in the upper right corner reads “the gods who are in Mehen.” From Margaret A. Murray, *The Osireion at Abydos*, ERA 9 (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1904) pl. 2 (detail).

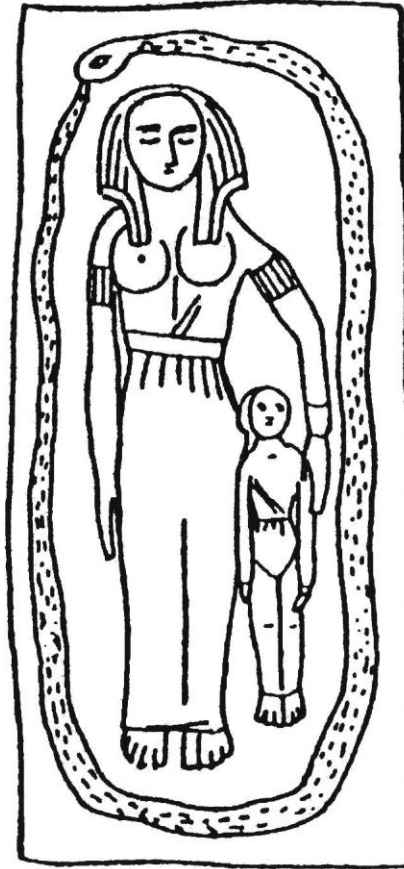


Figure 55.

W.R. Cooper's drawing of a Ramesside apotropaic object of fired Nile mud depicting a woman and male infant lying on a slab-like bed, surrounded by a protective ouroboros. Formerly in the British Museum, though present location unknown. W.R. Cooper, *The Serpent Myths of Ancient Egypt. Being a Comparative History of the Myths Compiled from the "Ritual of the Dead," Egyptian Inscriptions, Papyri, and Monuments from the British and Continental Museums* (London: 1873) 63, fig. 107.



Figure 56.

Vignette from an papyrus amulet for preservation of the body, showing an ouroboros surrounding Taweret (as a pregnant hippopotamus with a small image of Amun in her belly) together with a standing figure wearing the white crown who is in the act of muzzling an upended crocodile, a group plausibly identified with the constellations Taweret and Orion. Above the group are the hieroglyphs  $\text{D D D}$ , abbreviation for  $h^c w$  ‘body members/body’, while below is a rare hieroglyph abbreviating  $jmnt$  ‘secret’. Yvan Koenig, “Le contre-empoûtement de Ta-i.di-Imen. Pap. Deir el-Medina 44.” *BFAIO* 99 (1999) 280



Figure 57a.

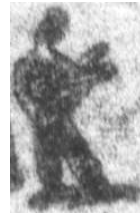


Figure 57b.

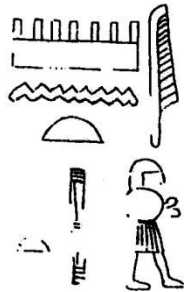


Figure 57c.



Figure 57d.

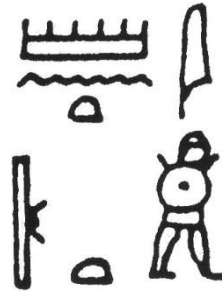


Figure 57e.



Figure 57f.



Figure 57g.

### Figure 57.

Versions of the unusual hieroglyph associated with the lexeme *jmnt* ‘secret’, ‘hidden.’ Figure 57a after Yvan Koenig, “Le contre-empoûtement de Ta-i.di-Imen. Pap. Deir el-Medina 44.” *BFIAO* 99 (1999) 280 (detail); figures 57b and 57f after Alexandre Piankoff, trans., *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, ed. N. Rambova, vol. 2 (plates), Bollingen Series 40.1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954) pl. 132 (detail); figure 57c after M. Félix Guilman, M., *Le tombeau de Ramsès IX*. MIFAO 15 (Cairo: Institute français d’archéologie orientale, 1907) pl. 11, col.8 (detail); figure 57d after Erik Hornung, ed., *Das Buch der Anbetung des Re im Westen (Sonnenlitanei)*. Vol. 2. *Übersetzung und Kommentar*, AH 3 (Basel and Geneva: Ägyptologisches Seminar der Universität Basel; Centre d’études orientales de l’Université de Genève, 1977) 16 (detail); figure 57g after Alexandre Piankoff, ed. and trans., *La création du disque solaire*, BdE 19 (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1953) pl. 35 (detail).

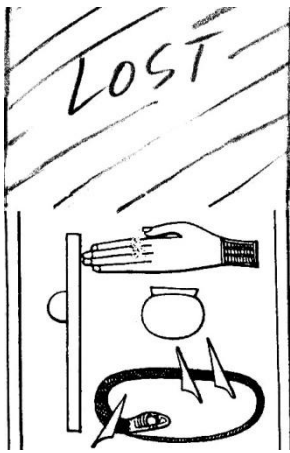


Figure 58a.

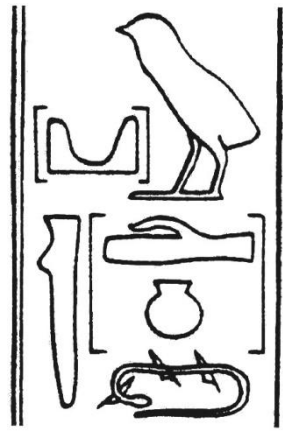


Figure 58b.

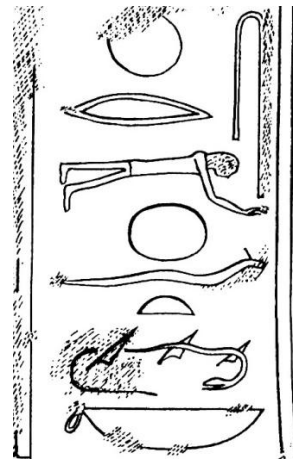


Figure 58c.

### Figure 58.

Examples of serpent images arranged in ways that can typologically be described as ouroboroid, but having associations with Apophis rather than protective Mehen serpents. Note the presence of knives, clearly identifying the serpents as inimical, not protective. After Epigraphic Survey, *The Tomb of Kheruef. Theban Tomb 192, OIP 102* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1980) pls. 7, 76 (details).

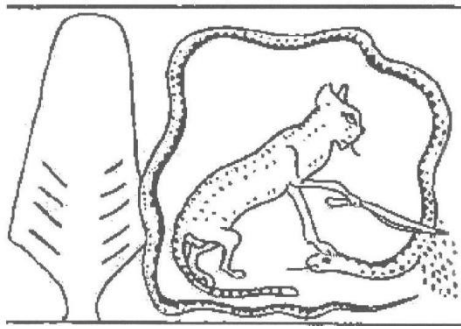


Figure 59a.



Figure 59b.

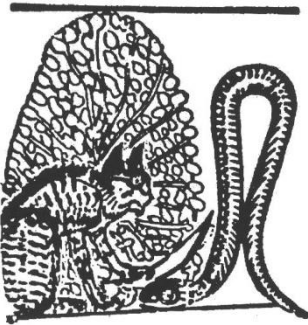


Figure 59c.

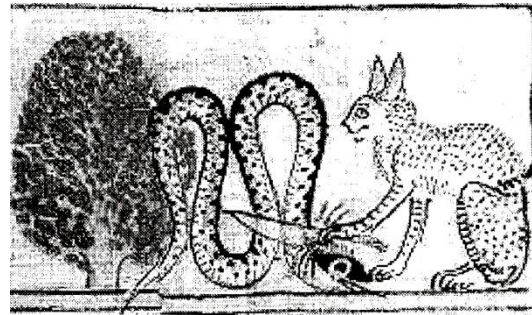


Figure 59d.

## Figure 59.

Variations in the graphic representation of the Great Cat, a form of Re, destroying Apophis. Figure 59a after Édouard Naville, *Das ägyptische Tottenbuch der XVIII bis. XX Dynastie*. Vol. 1. *Text und Vignetten* (1886, reprint, Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1971) pl. 30, D a (detail); figure 59b after M. Bernard Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1924-1925)* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1926) 171 fig. 13; figures 59c and 59d after E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead*, 2nd ed. rev. (London: Kegan Paul, Trubner & Co.; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1923) 103.



Figure 60.

Third scene in a papyrus (P. Cairo 133/EMC SR 19325) prepared for Herweben, chantress of Amun, who raises her hands in prayer, "praising Re," as she beholds the divine mystery of the sun's cyclic renewal. After Alexandre Piankoff, trans., *Mythological Papyri*, ed. N. Rambova, vol. 2 (plates), Bollingen Series 40.3. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957) pl. 1.

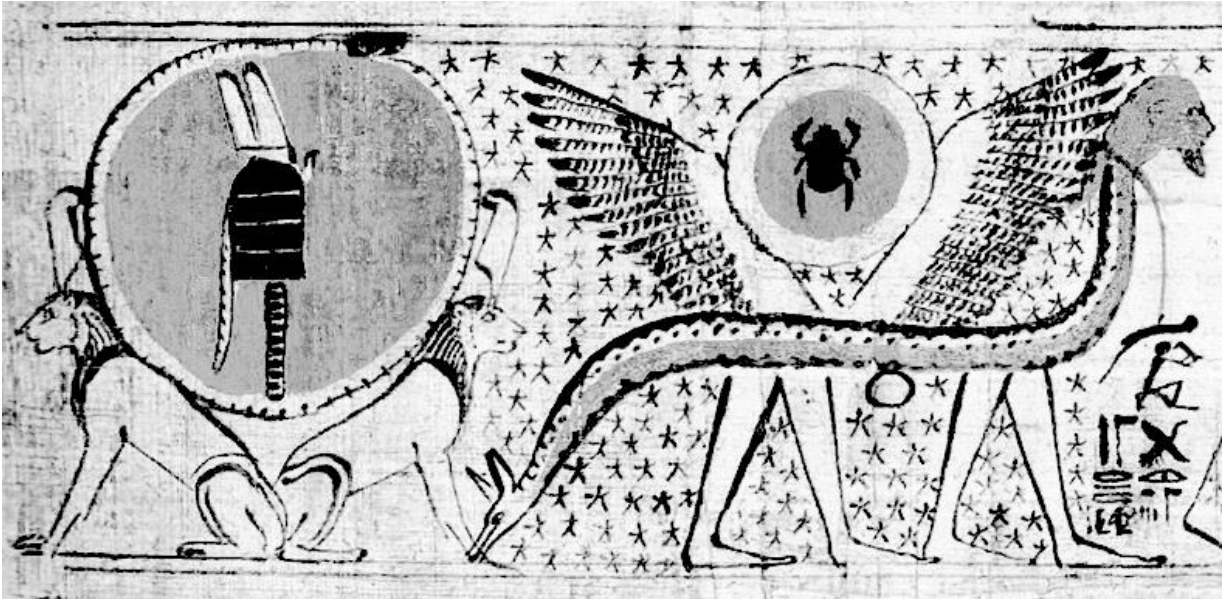


Figure 61.

Symbolic scene representing the divine process of death and renewal of the sun from the funerary papyrus of Henuttawy, chantress of Amun (P. BM EA 10018.2). After Siegfried Schott, *Zum Weltbild der Jenseitsführer des neuen Reiches*, NAWG 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965) pl. 4.





Figure 62.

A protective ouroboros surrounds an image of Thoth, who utters regenerative “divine words” before the so-called ‘fetish of Abydos’, representing the nocturnal, osiride form of the sun. After Alexandre Piankoff, “The Funerary Papyrus of the Shieldbearer Amon-m-saf in the Louvre Museum,” *Egyptian Religion* 3 (1935) 144, vignette XI (detail).



Figure 63.

An scene on the lower part the bottom panel of a damaged coffin trough in the British Museum (BM EA 25291) showing a protective ouroboros labeled “great cavern” surrounding “Anubis, foremost of the divine booth,” who performs a rite before the so-called ‘fetish of Abydos’, labeled as “Osiris, lord of the two lands.” After B.H. Stricker, *De grote zeeslang*, MVEOL 10 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1953) pl. 4a.



Figure 64.

Vignette from a coffin in Vienna showing a protective ouroboros surrounding the nocturnal form of the sun. After Valdemar Schmidt, *Sarkofager, mumiekister, og mumiehylstre i det gamle Aegyptens. Typologisk atlas* (Copenhagen: J. Fimodts Verlag, 1919) 155, fig. 848.

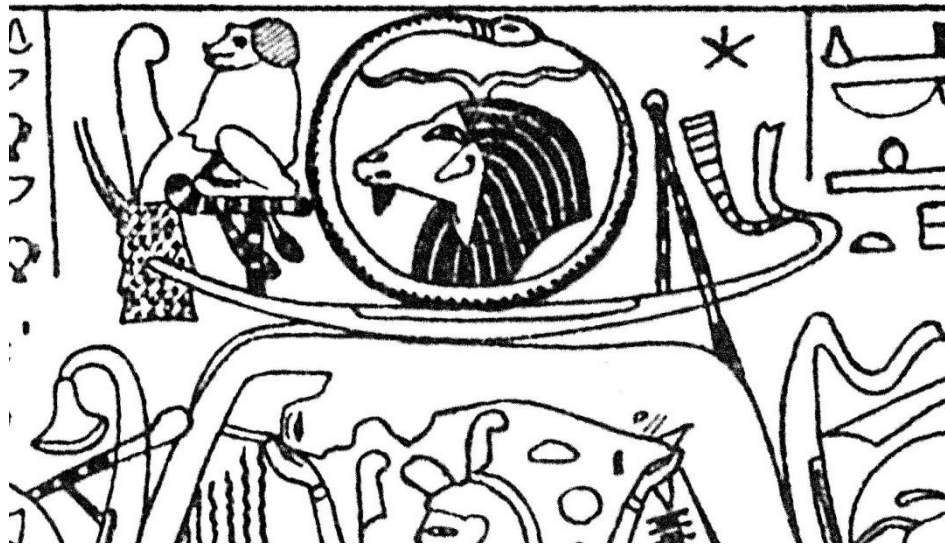


Figure 65.

Detail of a scene on the exterior of the coffin trough of princess Nesikhonsu, now in Cairo (CG 61030), showing the nocturnal sun in the night barque passing over (= through) the body of Nut. Drawing after a photograph in Georges Daressy, *Cercueils des cachettes royales*, CG 61001-61044 (Cairo: Institute français d'archéologie orientale, 1909) pl. 48.



Figure 66.

Scene from an anonymous papyrus now in Berlin (P. Berlin 3148), in which the baboon form of Thoth praises the solar child as “Horus-of-the-Two-Horizons, who comes forth (from) the *Duat*.” The hieroglyphs on the disk identify the solar child as “the god, lord of the horizon.” After Siegfried Scott, “Das blutrünstige Keltergerät.” *ZÄS* 74 (1938) pl. 6 (detail).

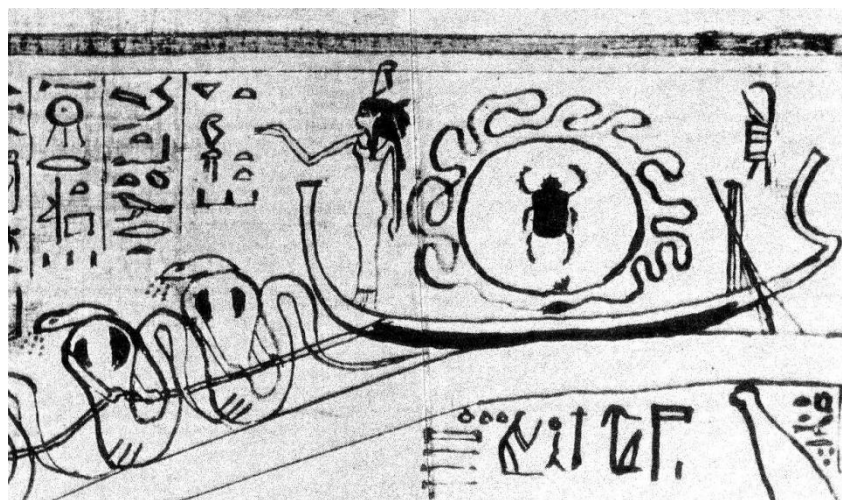


Figure 67.

A detail from a scene on the papyrus of Bakenmut in Cairo, in which the goddess Maat pilots the barque of the rising sun, drawn by a team of fire-spitting uraei. An ouroboros with undulating folds protects the solar disk. After Alexandre Piankoff, trans. *Mythological Papyri*, ed. by N. Rambova, vol. 2 (plates), Bollingen Series 40.3. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957) pl. 20 (detail).

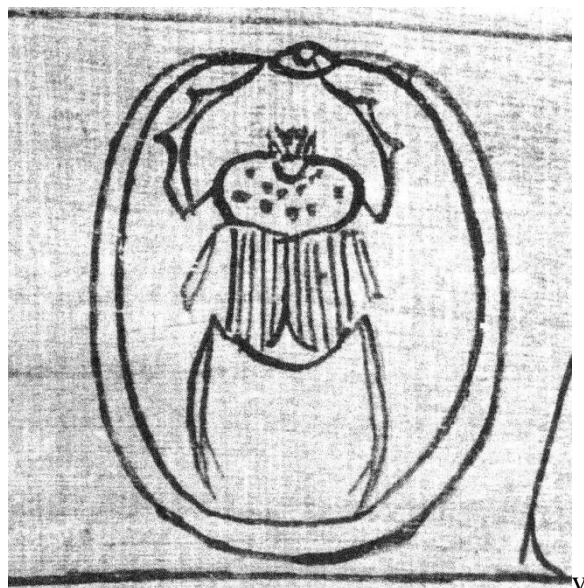


Figure 68.

An elegant calligraphic representation of solar rebirth and the divine power of renewal and rebirth, the final symbolic statement of the relatively brief and primarily visual papyrus of Djedameniufankh, now in Cairo. After Alexandre Piankoff, trans. *Mythological Papyri*, ed. by N. Rambova, vol. 2 (plates), Bollingen Series 40.3. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957) pl. 27 (detail).

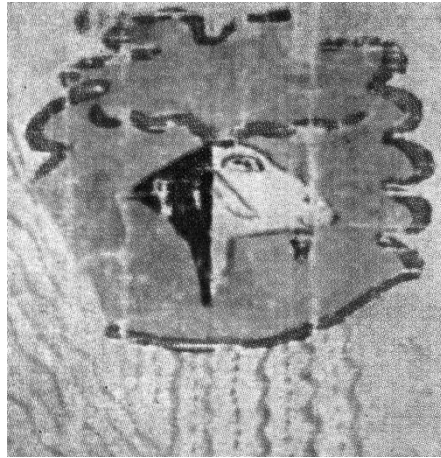


Figure 69a.



Figure 69b.

Figure 69.

Examples of the ram-head symbol of the setting/nocturnal sun, surrounded by an ouroboros-like undulating ring. The hieroglyphs in figure 69b identify the image as “Lord of the Horizon.” Figure 69a is from the papyrus of Tehemenmut in Warsaw, after Tadeusz Andrzejewski, *Le papyrus mythologique de Te-hem-en-mout*, Académie polonaise de Sciences, Travaux du Centre d’Archéologie Méditerranéenne 1 (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe; Paris: Mouton & Co, La Haye, 1959) pl. 7 (detail); figure 69b is from an offering scene on the side of a coffin in Berlin, after Valdemar Schmidt, *Sarkofager, mumiekister, og mumiehylstre i det gamle Aegyptens. Typologisk atlas* (Copenhagen: J. Fimodts Verlag, 1919) 143, fig. 727 (detail).





Figure 70a.



Figure 70b.

### Figure 70.

In figure 70a, the setting/nocturnal sun is shown surrounded by a plain, heavy black ring (detail from the funerary papyrus of Henuttawy, chantress of Amun (P. BM EA 10018.2); after Alexandre Piankoff, "The Funerary Papyrus of the Shieldbearer Amon-m-saf in the Louvre Museum," *Egyptian Religion* 3 (1935) 155, fig. 2 (detail). In figure 70b, The setting/nocturnal sun is protected by a serpent with undulating folds but which does not completely encircle the sun; from papyrus Gautseshnu A, after Alexandre Piankoff, trans. *Mythological Papyri*, ed. by N. Rambova, vol. 2 (plates), Bollingen Series 40.3. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957) pl. 24 (detail).

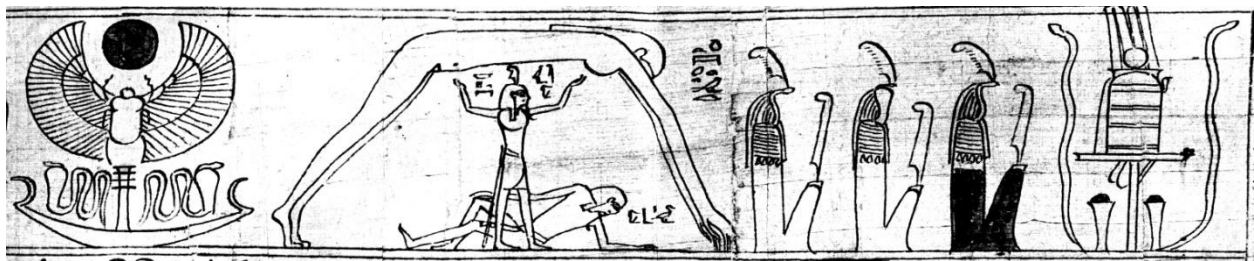


Figure 71.

An elegant tableau near the end of the papyrus of Khonsurenep (Cairo), representing the reception of the sun into the West, its nocturnal transit, and its rebirth in the East. After Alexandre Piankoff, trans. *Mythological Papyri*, ed. by N. Rambova, vol. 2 (plates), Bollingen Series 40.3. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957) pl. 11 (detail).

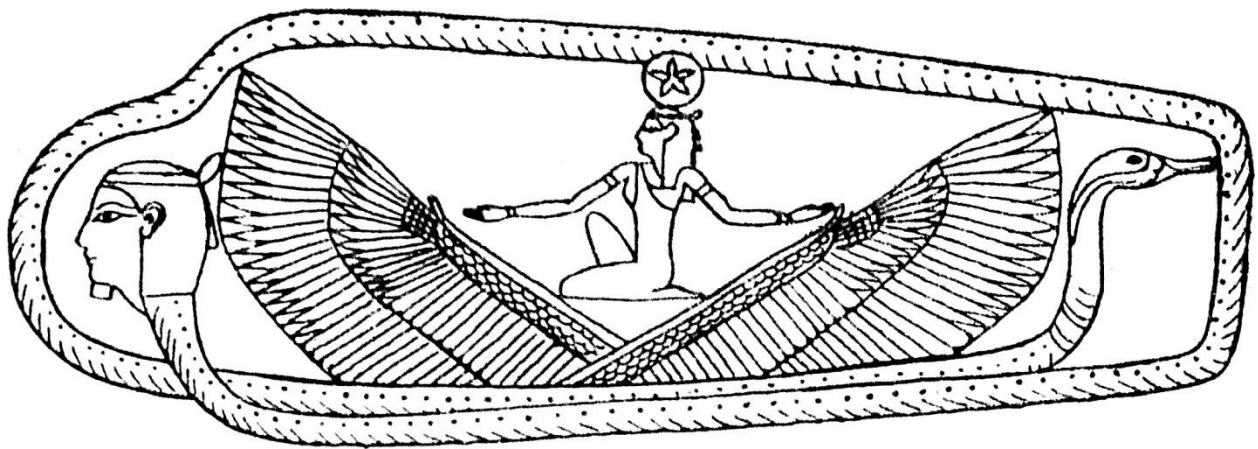


Figure 72.

Image of Nut and the primeval serpent on the bottom of a coffin trough, Cairo. After Valdemar Schmidt, *Sarkofager, mumiekister, og mumiehylstre i det gamle Aegyptens. Typologisk atlas* (Copenhagen: J. Fimodts Verlag, 1919) 151, fig. 780.

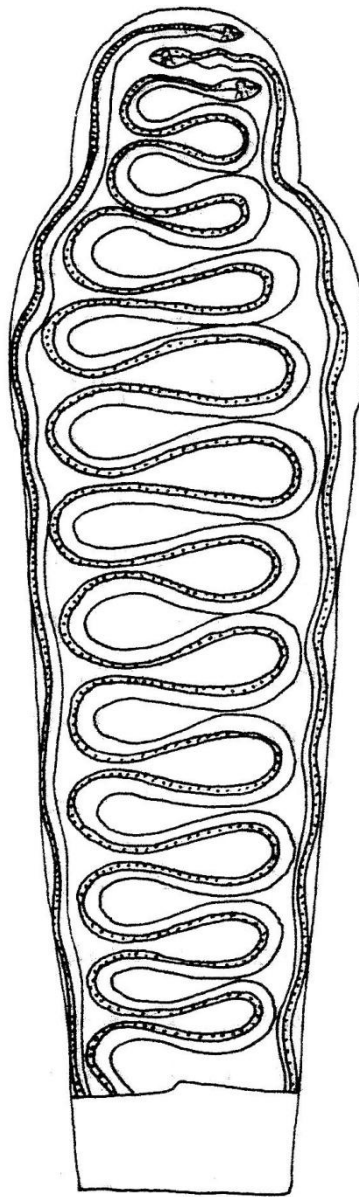


Figure 73.

Serpent imagery on the underside of a coffin trough, now in Cairo (CG 6043-6044). After Andrzej Niwiński and Emile Chassinat, *Le seconde trouvaille de Deir el-Bahri (Sarcophages)*, vol. 1., fasc. 2, CG 6029-6068 (Cairo: Conseil Suprême des Antiquités, 1996) 14, fig. 3.

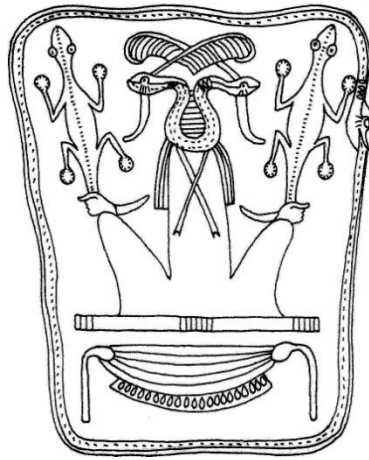


Figure 74a.

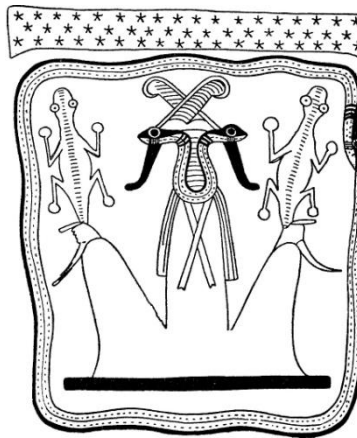


Figure 74b.

Figure 74.

Examples of a type of image symbolically representing the multitude of beneficent Underworld genies that greet the dead sun at the start of the sun's night journey. The surrounding ouroboros represents the vast underworldly space within which this multitude of beings resides. Figure 74a is from an anonymous coffin now in Cairo (CG 6086); after Andrzej Niwiński and Emile Chassinat, *Le seconde trouvaille de Deir el-Bahri (Sarcophages)*, vol. 1., fasc. 2, CG 6029-6068 (Cairo: Conseil Suprême des Antiquités, 1996) 122, fig. 102. Figure 74a is from a coffin in the Vatican Museum, Rome; after B.H. Stricker, *De grote zeeslang*, MVEOL 10 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1953) pl. 4b.

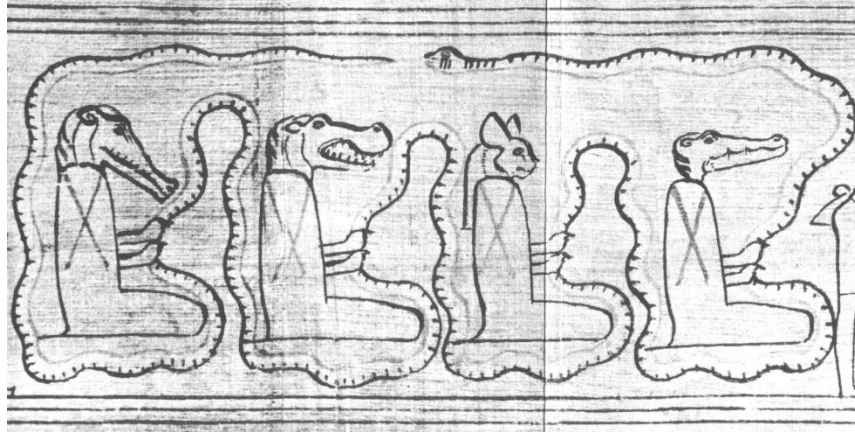


Figure 75a.

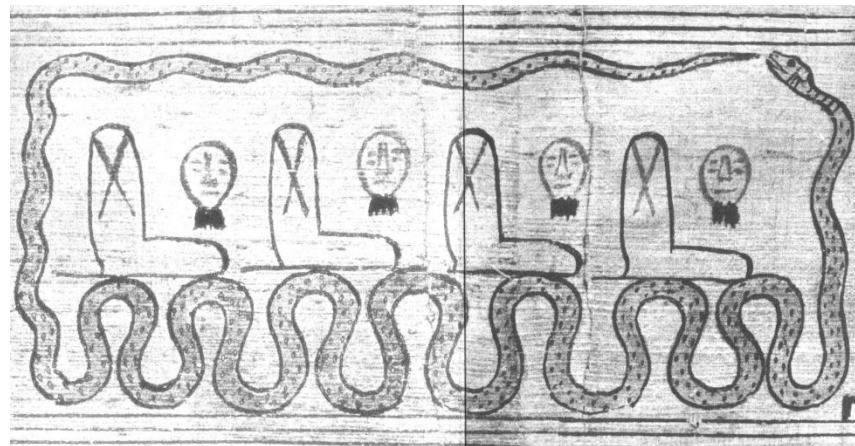


Figure 75b.

Figure 75.

Images of mysterious Underworld beings in their caverns, represented by the surrounding serpents. Details from the papyrus of Djedkhonsuiufankh II (P. Cairo 166). Alexandre Piankoff, trans. *Mythological Papyri*, ed. by N. Rambova, vol. 2 (plates), Bollingen Series 40.3. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957) pl. 22 (details).



Figure 76.

Image on the inner surface of the coffin trough footboard, just beneath the feet of the mummy. Coffin Cairo J. 29628 = 29735. After Andrzej Niwiński, "Mummy in the Coffin as the Central Element of Iconographic Reflection of the Theology of the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty in Thebes," *GM* 109 (1989) 56, fig. 3.

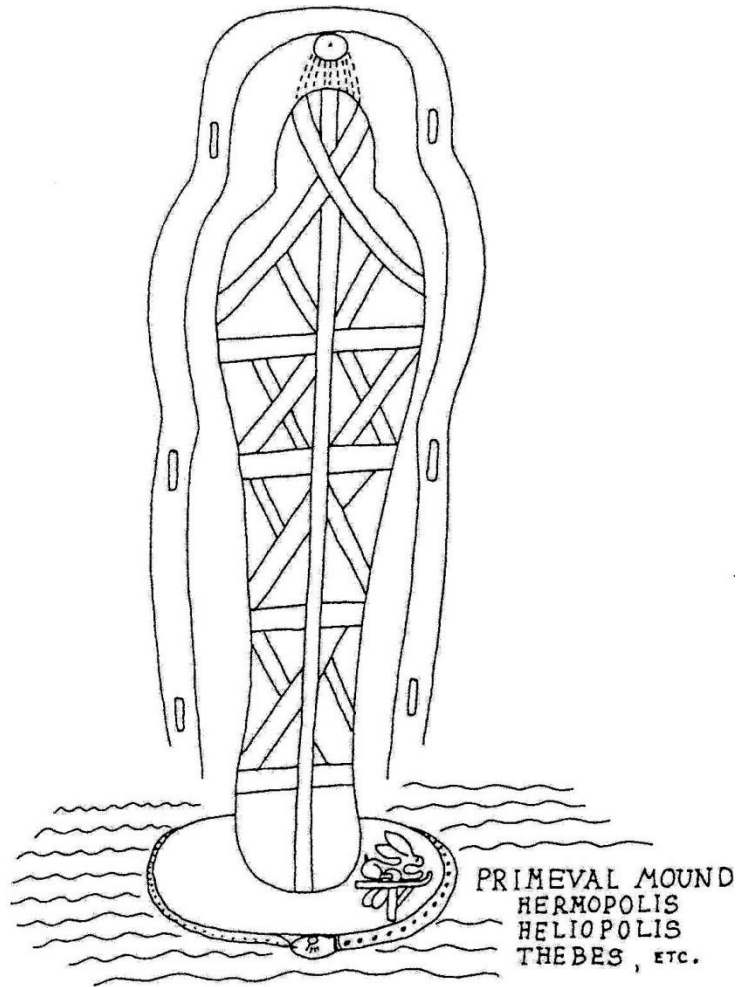


Figure 77.

Niwiński's diagram illustrating the symbolic relationship between the mummy in the coffin and the ouroboros on the inner footboard of the coffin trough. After Andrzej Niwiński, "Mummy in the Coffin as the Central Element of Iconographic Reflection of the Theology of the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty in Thebes," *GM* 109 (1989) 58, fig. 5.



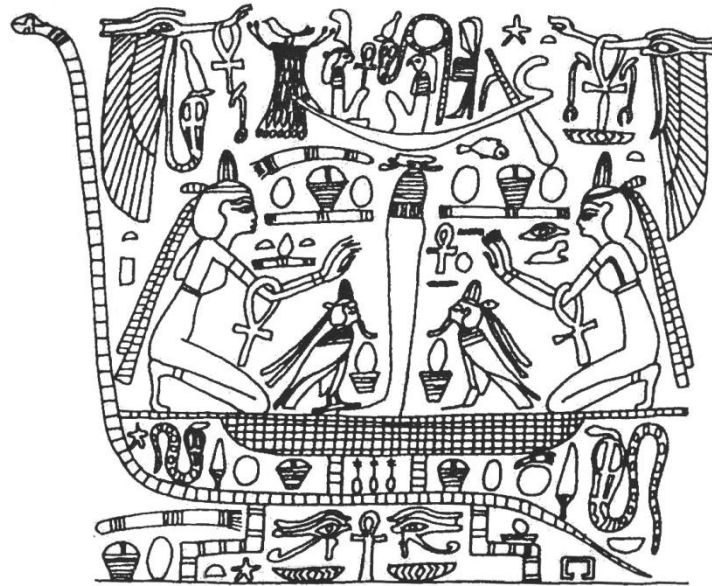


Figure 78.

A complex symbolic image of death and renewal showing a mummy standing above a three-stepped platform representing the primeval mound, before which passes the primeval serpent configured as if to suggest the hieroglyph that writes *dt*, the 'eternity' of the osiride realm. The mummy's head is represented as a scarab (seen unusually from the side), suggesting renewal and rebirth, above which appears the solar barque. From the exterior of Cairo Coffin J. 29662 = CG 6190, after Andrzej Niwiński, *The Second Find of Deir el-Bahari (Coffins)*, vol. 2, fasc. 1, CG 6069-6082 (Cairo: Supreme Council of Antiquities, 1999) 86, fig. 22.

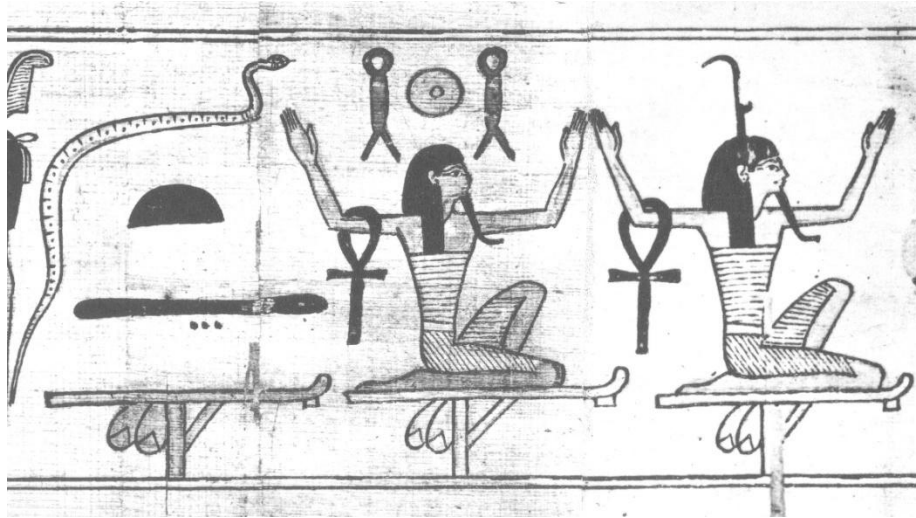


Figure 79.

Abstract ideas *rnpt*, 'year', *dt*, and *nḥḥ* represented on standards. Detail from papyrus Khonsumes A, Vienna. After Alexandre Piankoff, trans. *Mythological Papyri*, ed. by N. Rambova, vol. 2 (plates), Bollingen Series 40.3. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957) pl. 16 (detail).

## MACROCOSM

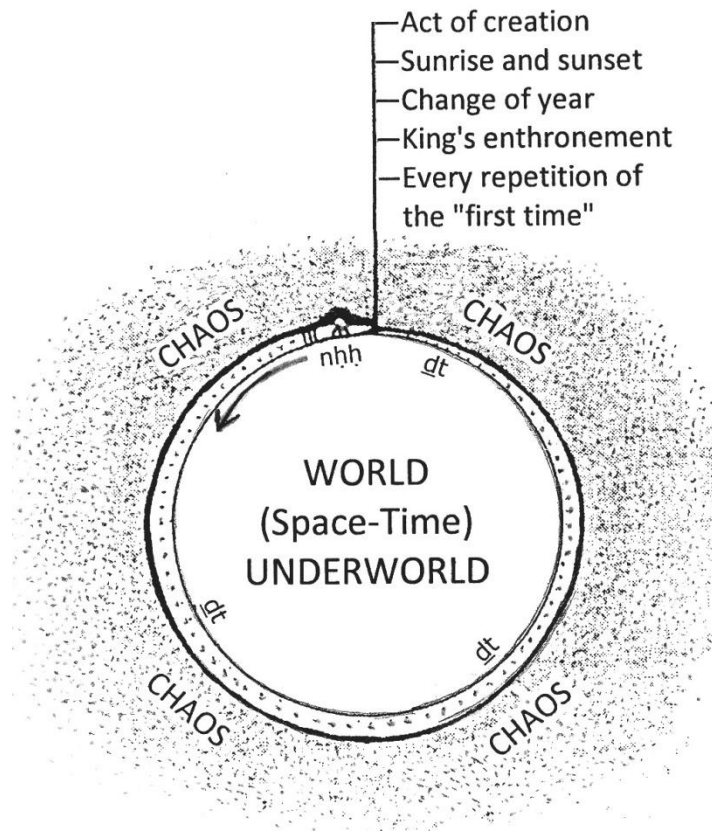


Figure 80.

Niwiński's diagram illustrating his conception of the ouroboros as a model of the macrocosm (translated from the German). After Andrzej Niwiński, "Noch einmal über zwei Ewigkeitsbegriffe. Ein Vorschlag der graphischen Lösung in anlehnung an die Ikonographie der 21. Dynastie," *GM* 48 (1981) 46, fig. 1.

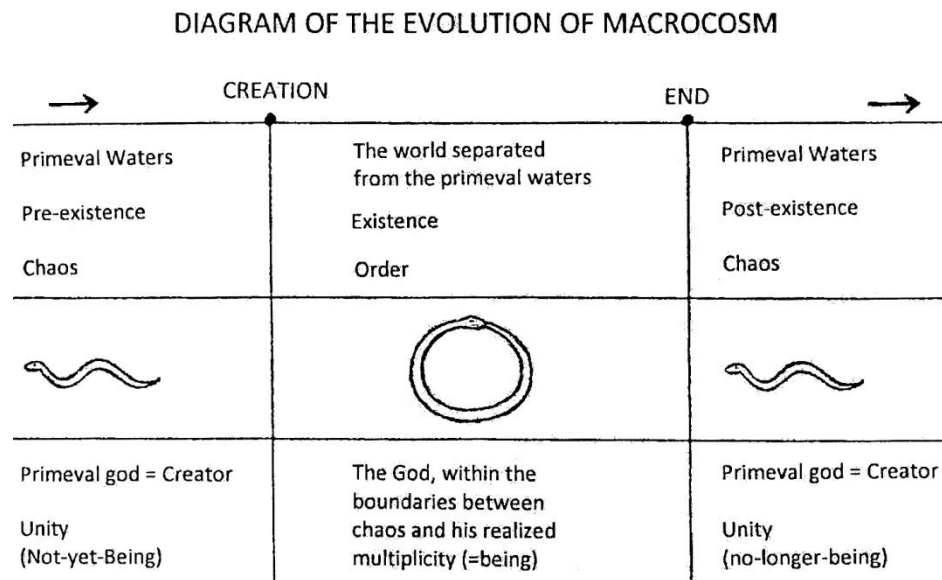


Figure 81.

Niwiński's diagram of the evolution of the macrocosm (translated from the German). After Andrzej Niwiński, "Noch einmal über zwei Ewigkeitsbegriffe. Ein Vorschlag der graphischen Lösung in anlehnung an die Ikonographie der 21. Dynastie," *GM* 48 (1981) 47, fig. 3.

## MICROCOSM

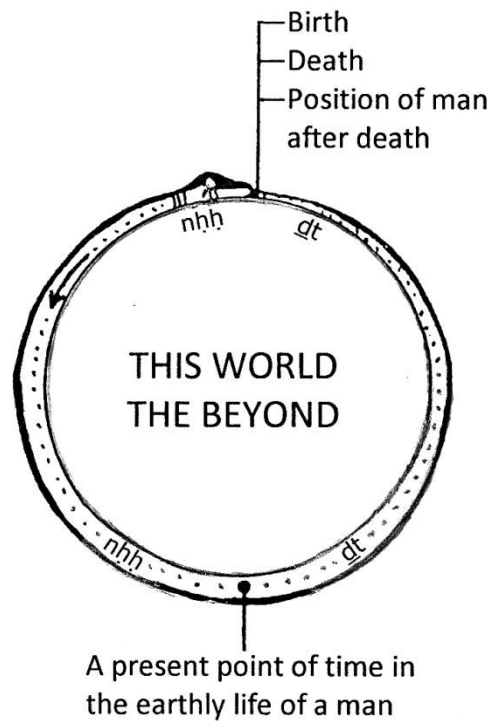


Figure 82.

Niwiński's diagram illustrating his conception of the ouroboros as a model of the microcosm (translated from the German). After Andrzej Niwiński, "Noch einmal über zwei Ewigkeitsbegriffe. Ein Vorschlag der graphischen Lösung in anlehnung an die Ikonographie der 21. Dynastie," *GM* 48 (1981) 49, fig. 4.



Figure 83.

Sketch of a fragment of an anthropoid coffin of “lady of the house” Takapethakhonsu, now in the oriental manuscript collection of the University of Kassel (Kassel Ms. orient. 26); the fragment once covered the feet of the mummy. After Mohamed Sherif Ali and Heike Sternberg-El Hotabi, “Ein Sargfragment der T3-k3p(.t)-ḥ3- Ḥnsw,” *GM* 138 (1994) 21, fig. 3.

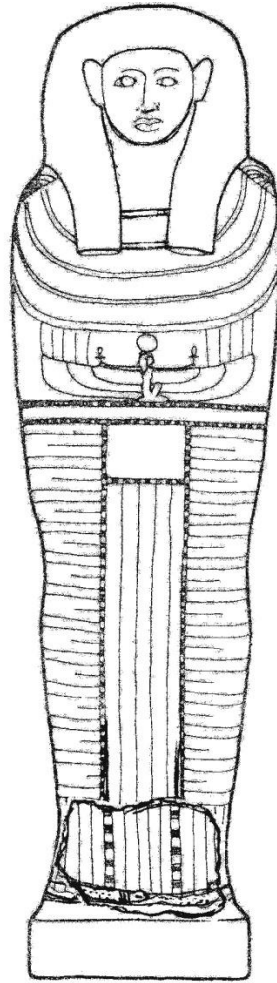


Figure 84.

Sketch showing placement of the Takapethakhonsu coffin fragment based on parallels with complete coffins in the Cairo Museum. After Mohamed Sherif Ali and Heike Sternberg-El Hotabi, "Ein Sargfragment der T3-k3p(.t)-ḥ3-Ḥnsw," *GM* 138 (1994) 20, fig. 2.



Figure 85.

The coffin of Hahaet, priest of Montu, in the Cairo Museum (CG 41064). An ouroboroid serpent appears around the feet, like that seen on the Takapethakhonsu coffin fragment. After Henri Gauthier, *Cercueils anthropoides des prêtres de Montu*, vol. 1, CG 41042-41072 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1913) pl. 33.



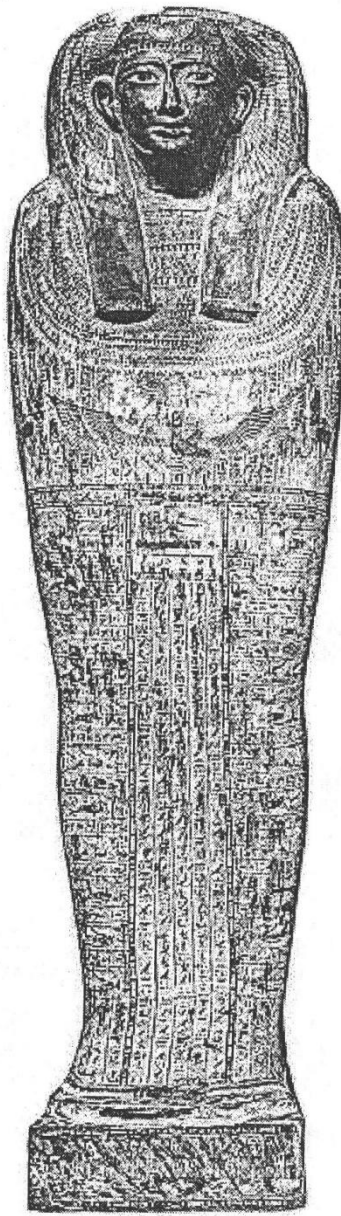


Figure 86.

The coffin of Tasheritaset, priestess of Montu, in the Cairo Museum (CG 41065). An ouroboroid serpent appears around the feet, like that seen on the Takapethakhonsu coffin fragment. After Henri Gauthier, *Cercueils anthropoides des prêtres de Montu*, vol. 1, CG 41042-41072 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1913) pl. 35.

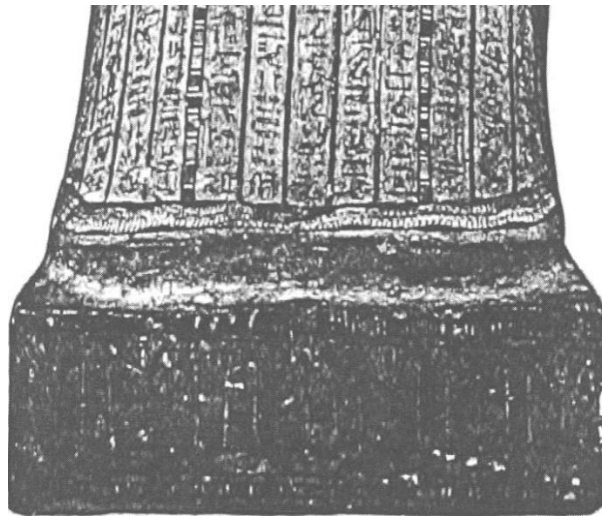


Figure 87.

Detail of lower portion of the coffin of Hahaet, showing the ouroboroid serpent around the edges of the foot area as on the Takapethakhonsu coffin fragment. After Henri Gauthier, *Cercueils anthropoides des prêtres de Montu*, vol. 1, CG 41042-41072 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1913) pl. 33 (detail).

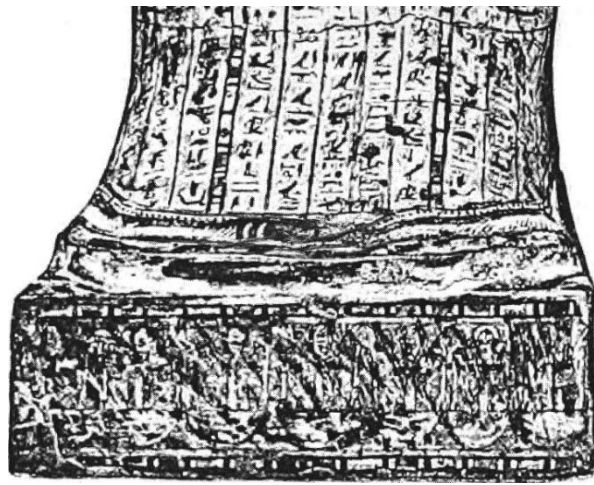


Figure 88.

Detail of lower portion of the coffin of Tasheritaset, showing the ouroboroid serpent around the edges of the foot area as on the Takapethakhonsu coffin fragment. After Henri Gauthier, *Cercueils anthropoides des prêtres de Montu*, vol. 1, CG 41042-41072 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1913) pl. 35 (detail).

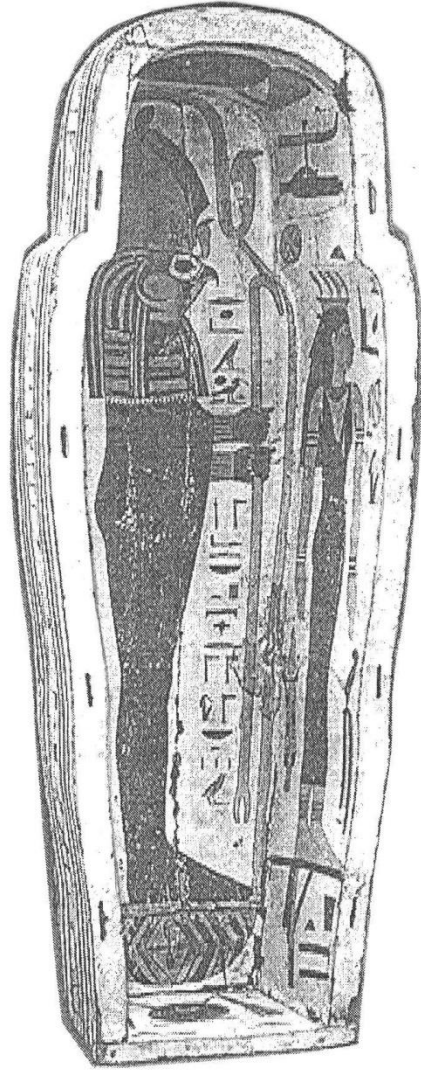


Figure 89.

The outer coffin trough of Theban priestess Neskonsupakared, now in the British Museum (BM EA 47975). After John H. Taylor, *Egyptian Coffins*, Shire Egyptology 11 (Aylesbury, Bucks: Shire Publications Ltd, 1989) 57.



Figure 90.

Outer coffin trough of Petisis, now in the Hermitage. After B. Piotrovsky, *Egyptian Antiquities in the Hermitage* (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1974) pl. 103.

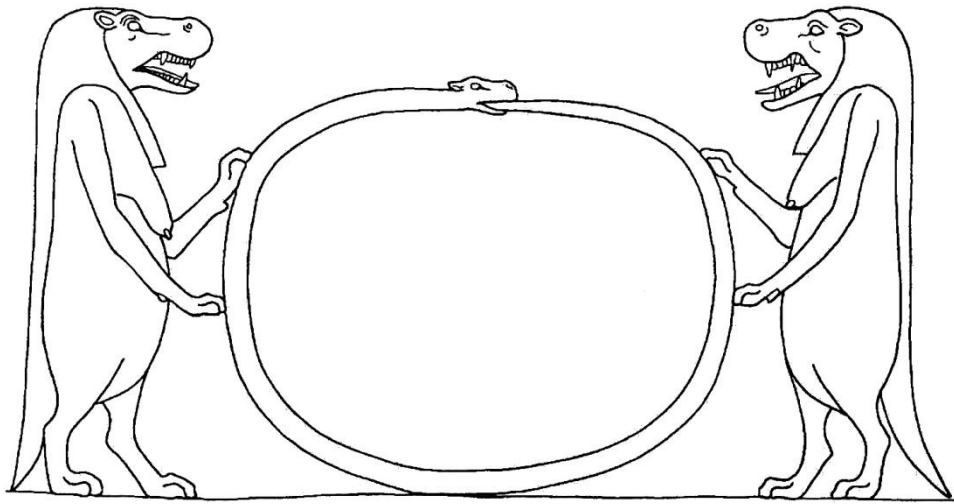


Figure 91.

Unique ouroboros on the north wall of the tomb chamber of “administrator of palaces” Iufaa, at Abusir. Two images of the goddess Taweret stand on either side, and the ouroboros has the head of a hippopotamus. Drawing by Jolana Malátková in Miroslav Verner, *Abusir, Realm of Osiris* (Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002) 203.

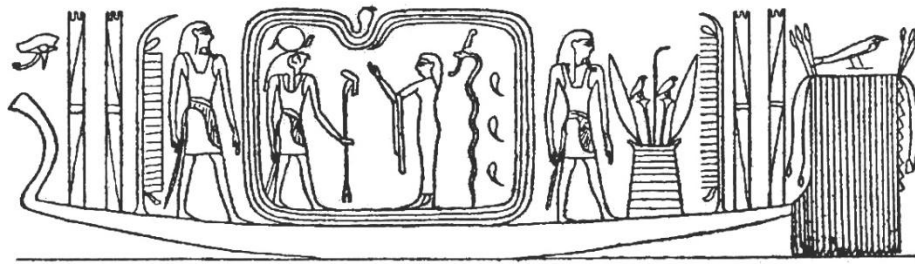


Figure 92a.

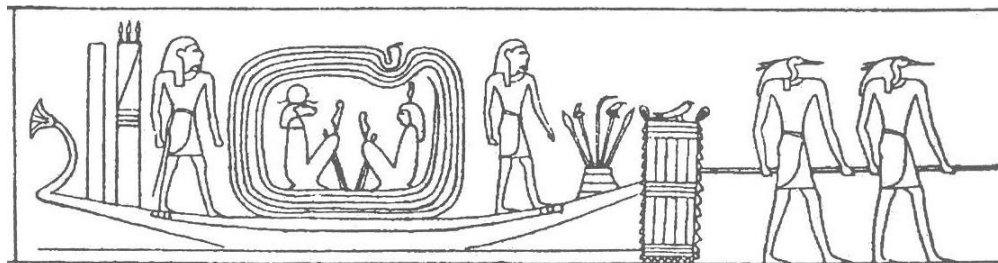


Figure 92b.

## Figure 92.

Images of the night barque typical of the *Book of Night* show the sun tightly enclosed within a protective ouroboroid. From painted scenes on the vaulted lid of a rectangular outer coffin of the Nubian period, now in Cairo. After Valdemar Schmidt, *Sarkofager, mumiekister, og mumiehylstre i det gamle Aegyptens. Typologisk atlas* (Copenhagen: J. Fimodts Verlag, 1919) 203, figs. 1157, 1158.



Figure 93.

Image of the dead reviving within the protective coils of Mehen, derived from vignettes for the twelfth 'cavern' of Chapter 168 of the *Book of the Dead*. From the granite sarcophagus of Ankhhepu, priest and overseer, now in Cairo (CG 20303). After Gaston Maspero, *Sarcophages des époques persane et ptolémaïque*, vol. 1, pt. 1, CG 29301-29306 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1914) pl. 4.



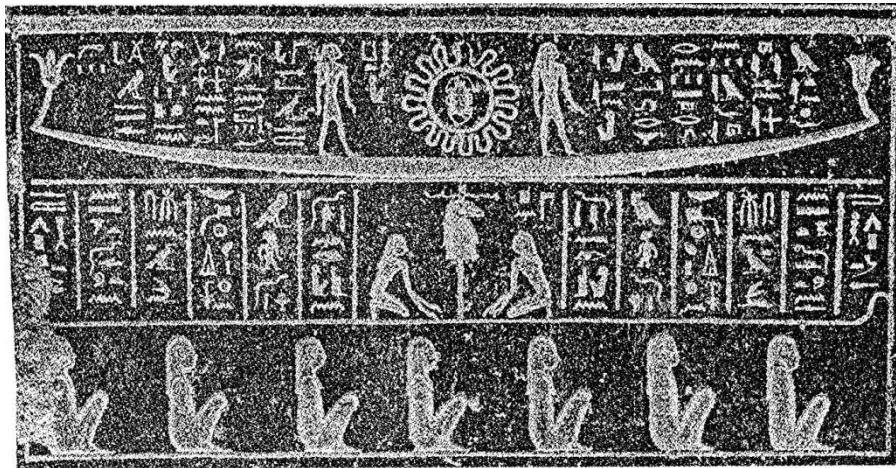


Figure 94.

A finely cut ouroboros surrounds a scarab-marked sun disk in an abbreviated version of the opening, first hour of the *Book of Gates*. Relief on the foot end of the sarcophagus of Pawenhatef, known as Djedher the dwarf, now in Cairo (CG 29307). After Gaston Maspero, *Sarcophages des époques persane et ptolémaïque*, vol. 1, pt. 1, CG 29301-29306 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1914) pl. 24.

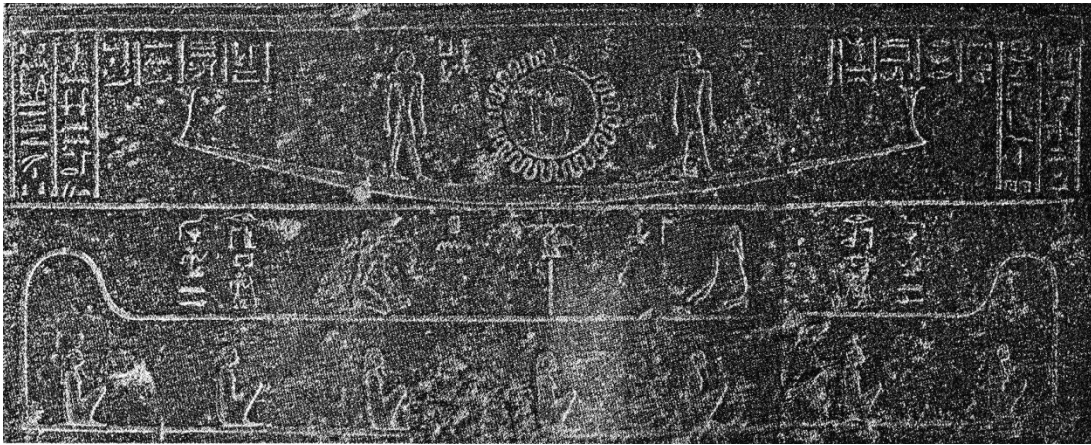


Figure 95.

Another example of an abbreviated version of the first hour of the *Book of Gates*, contemporary with that in figure 95. In this case, however, the tip of the tail is not at the serpent's mouth but at the base of its raised hood--with no apparent difference in symbolism. From the sarcophagus of high official and priest Djedher, now in Cairo (CG 29302). After Gaston Maspero, *Sarcophages des époques persane et ptolémaïque*, vol. 1, pt. 1, CG 29301-29306 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1914) pl. 7.

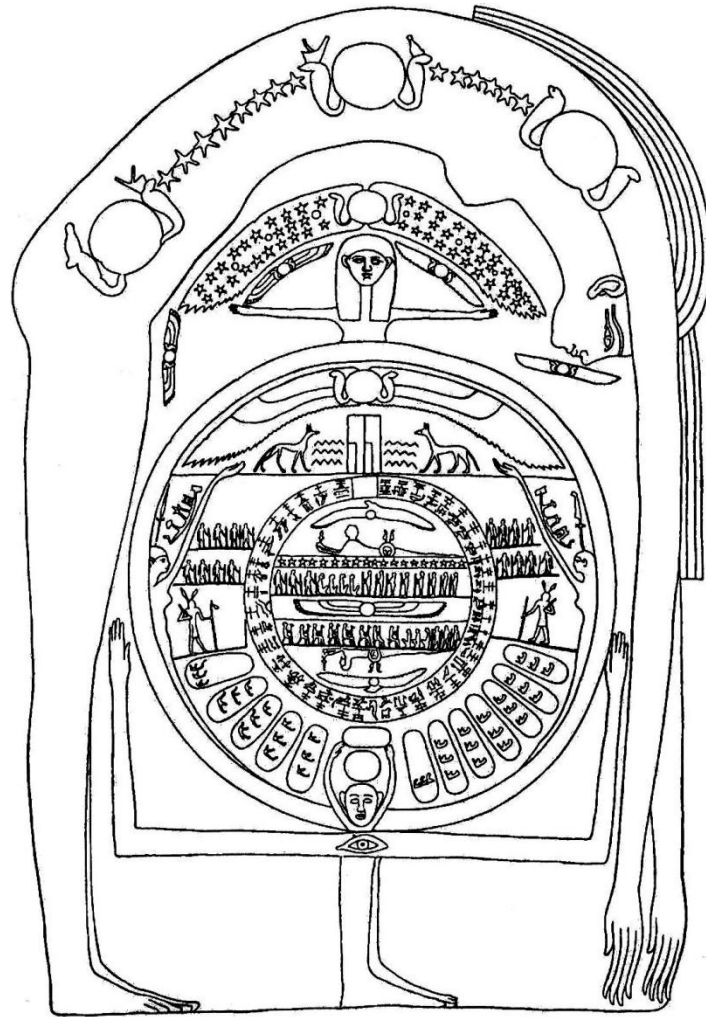


Figure 96.

The perimeter of the cosmos symbolized by a plain, heavy ring in this elegant cosmogram on the cover of the diorite sarcophagus of Theban priest Ureshnefer, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. After C.L. Ransom, "A Late Egyptian Sarcophagus," *BMMA* 9 (1914) 117, fig. 3.

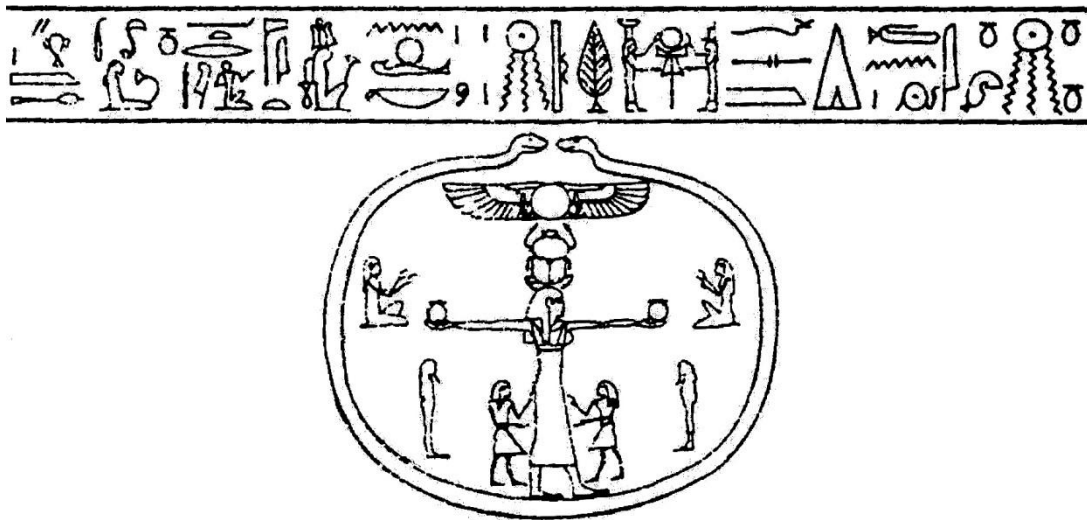


Figure 97.

Drawing published by Brugsch of a scene appearing on a painted wooden coffin of the Roman Period from Thebes, now unfortunately lost. After Henri Brugsch, *Recueil des monuments égyptiens*, pt. 1 (1862. Reprint, Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1981) pl. 34, fig. 2.

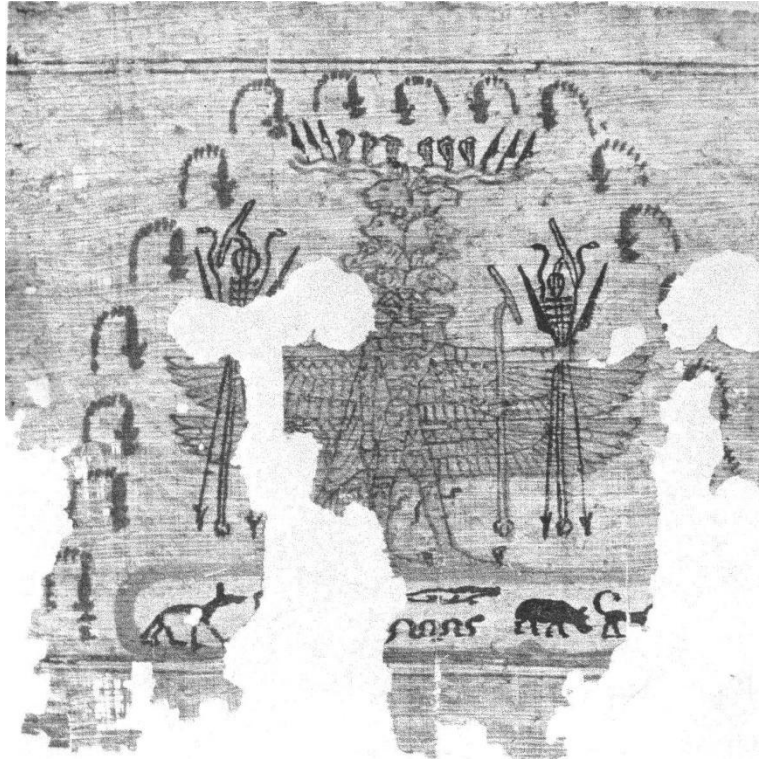


Figure 98.

The so-called Bes Pantheos standing above an ouroboros that surrounds inimical creatures. P. Brooklyn Museum 47.218.156. After Serge Sauneron, *Le papyrus illustré de Brooklyn*, Wilbour Monographs 3 (Brooklyn, New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1970) fig. 2.



Figure 99.

The so-called Bes Pantheos standing above an ouroboros that surrounds inimical creatures. P. Deir al-Medina 46. After Yvan Koenig, “Histoires sans paroles (P. Deir al-Medîna 45, 46, 47).” *BIFAO* 111 (2011) 256, fig. 2.



Figure 100.

Green-glazed ceramic plaque from Mendes showing the so-called Bes Pantheos standing above an ouroboros that surrounds inimical creatures. Cairo Museum (CG 9429). After Georges Daressy, *Texts et dessins magiques*, CG 9401-9499 (Cairo: Institute français d'archéologie orientale, 1903) pl. 10.



Figure 101.

Faience plaque in the Louvre showing the so-called Bes Pantheos standing above an ouroboros that surrounds inimical creatures. Louvre E 10954. The figure is from a photograph of a direct cast of the original in the author's collection.



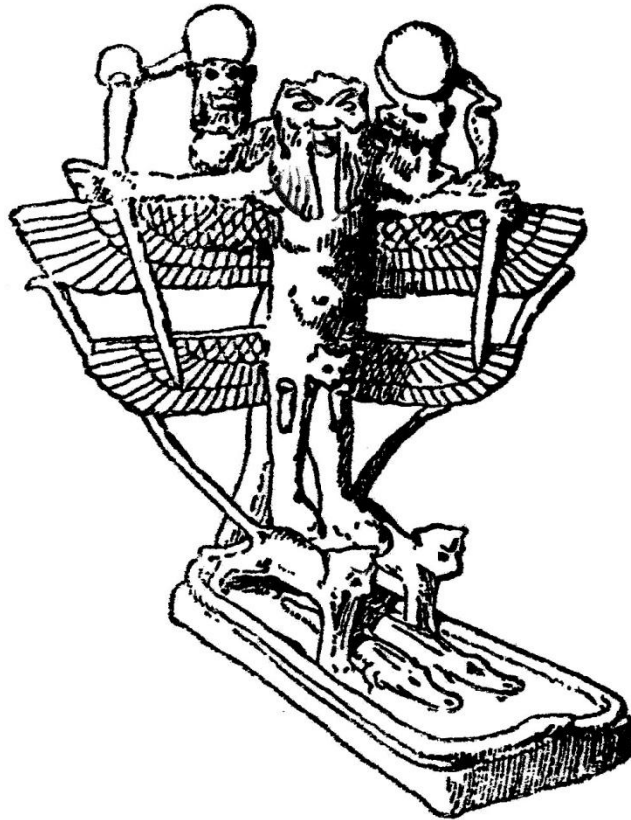


Figure 102.

Bronze image showing the so-called Bes Pantheos standing on inimical creatures contained within an ouroboros. Berlin 11625. After Hans Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter & Co., 1952) 107, fig. 37.



Figure 103.

Faience amulet of the so-called Bes Pantheos, showing the deity standing within the perimeter of an ouroboros, with the contained inimical creatures represented in raised relief below. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery 1969W655. Unpublished. From a photograph kindly provided by Sarah Chapman, Birmingham Egyptology.



Figure 104.

Very small faience amulet of the so-called Bes Pantheos, showing the deity standing within the perimeter of an ouroboros, with the contained inimical creatures represented in sunken relief below. British Museum (BM EA 11821). After Carol Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 1994) 38, fig. 34 (detail).



Figure 105a.



Figure 105b.



Figure 105c.

### Figure 105.

Three views of a tiny amulet of the so-called Bes Pantheos. The deity stands upon serpents, but other inimical creatures are shown on the bottom of the amulet, contained within a plain incised ring. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery 1969W2926. Unpublished. From a photograph kindly provided by Sarah Chapman, Birmingham Egyptology.



Figure 106a.



Figure 106b.

### Figure 106.

Bronze figure showing a polymorphic deity standing on crocodiles which are surrounded by an ouroboros. Chicago. Or. Inst. 11.375. After Günther Roeder, *Ägyptische Bronzefiguren*, vol. 2 (plates), MÄS 6 (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 1956) pl. 75, figs. a and b.

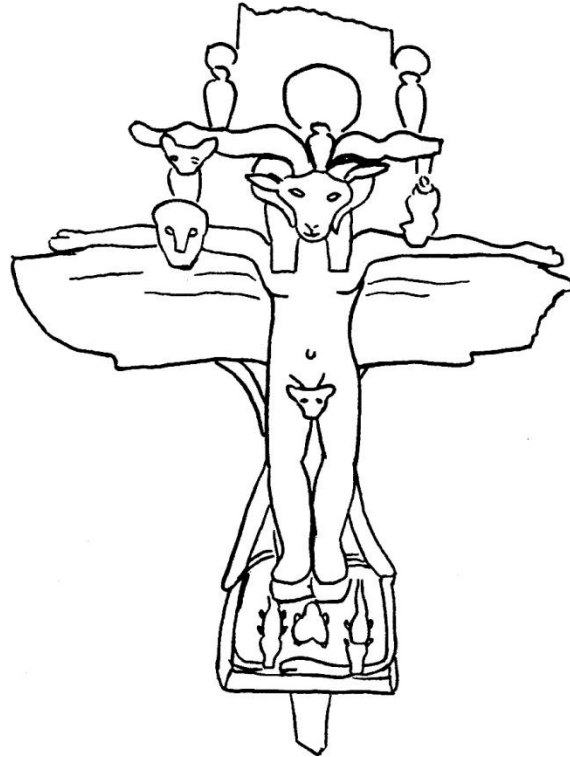


Figure 107.

Bronze figure portraying a polymorphic deity standing on inimical creatures which are contained within a surrounding ouroboros. Leiden E.XVIII.146. After Günther Roeder, *Ägyptische Bronzefiguren*, vol. 1 (text), MÄS 6 (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 1956) 102, fig. 130.



Figure 108.

A unique example of a “Horus on the crocodiles” stela having an ouroboros completely surrounding the image of Horus and the crocodiles. The head and tail of the ouroboros meet just under the nearest crocodile’s right forepaw. Pushkin State Museum inv. no. I, 1a4474 (ИГ 1895). After Svetlana Hodjash, *God Bes’s Images in the Ancient Egyptian Art in the Collection of the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts. Catalogue* (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura Publishers, 2004) 47, fig. 7a.

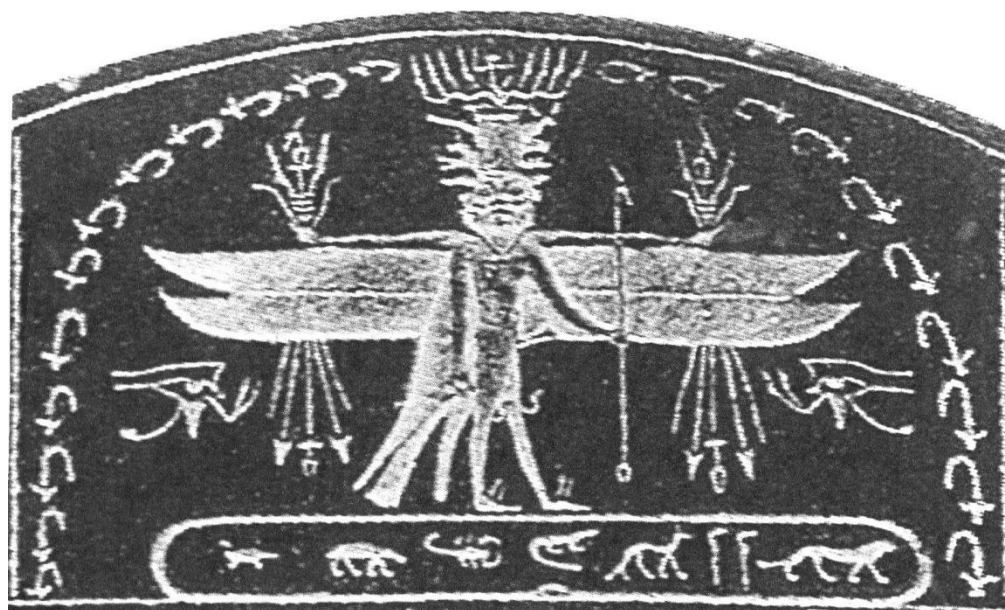


Figure 109.

Vignette from the Metternich Stela showing the so-called Bes Pantheon standing above inimical creatures contained within an ouroboros. After Nora Scott, "The Metternich Stela," *BMAA* 9 (1951) 208 (detail).





Figure 110a.



Figure 110b.

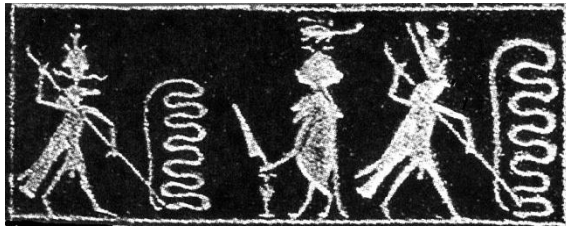


Figure 110c.

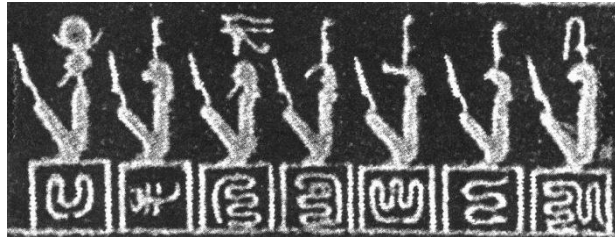


Figure 110d.



Figure 110e.

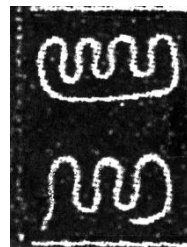


Figure 110f.

## Figure 110.

Vignettes from the Metternich Stela. After Nora Scott, "The Metternich Stela," *BMA* 9 (1951) 206, 208, 210 (details).



Figure 111.

Deities on the (figure's) right side of the back pillar of the "Borgia Torso" (Museo Nazionale di Napoli, inv. no. 1065). After László Kákosy, *Egyptian Healing Statues in Three Museums in Italy (Turin, Florence, Naples)*, Catalogo del Museo Egizio di Torino, Serie Prima–Monumenti e Testi 9 (Turin: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali–Soprintendenza al Museo delle Antichità Egizie, 1999) pl. 42 (detail).



Figure 112a.



Figure 112b.

Figure 112.

Vignettes from the back pillar of a fragmentary healing statue (Turin Cat. 3031). After László Kákosy, *Egyptian Healing Statues in Three Museums in Italy (Turin, Florence, Naples)*, Catalogo del Museo Egizio di Torino, Serie Prima–Monumenti e Testi 9 (Turin: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali–Soprintendenza al Museo delle Antichità Egizie, 1999) pl. 33 (details).



Figure 113a.



Figure 113b.

### Figure 113.

Images of the polymorphic deity Horus-who-is-in-the-enclosure from magical healing statues. Figure 113a is from the Turin fragment (Turin Cat. 3031); figure 113b is from the “Borgia Torso” (Museo Nazionale di Napoli, inv. no. 1065). After László Kákosy, *Egyptian Healing Statues in Three Museums in Italy (Turin, Florence, Naples)*, Catalogo del Museo Egizio di Torino, Serie Prima–Monumenti e Testi 9 (Turin: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali–Soprintendenza al Museo delle Antichità Egizie, 1999) pls. 30 and 42 (details).



Figure 114a.



Figure 114b.



Figure 114c.

Figure 114.

From the magical healing statues: tiny images of a protective deity, ‘Great-of-magic’, with iconographic features of Taweret, seen standing above (= within) an ouroboros. Figure 114a is from Turin 3130, figure 114b from Florence 8708, and 114c from Turin 3030. After László Kákosy, *Egyptian Healing Statues in Three Museums in Italy (Turin, Florence, Naples)*, Catalogo del Museo Egizio di Torino, Serie Prima–Monumenti e Testi 9 (Turin: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali–Soprintendenza el Museo delle Antichità Egizie, 1999) pls. 30, 9, and 23 (details).



Figure 115.

Small image of a mummiform solar deity standing above (= within) an ouroboros. From the “Borgia Torso” (Naples 1065), found just behind the statue’s left shoulder amongst registers of deities cut into the side of the back pillar. After László Kákosy, *Egyptian Healing Statues in Three Museums in Italy (Turin, Florence, Naples)*, Catalogo del Museo Egizio di Torino, Serie Prima–Monumenti e Testi 9 (Turin: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali–Soprintendenza el Museo delle Antichità Egizie, 1999) pl. 44 (detail).



Figure 116.

A unique Roman Period stela featuring an image of Osiris within the 'cavern' of the Underworld, represented by the ouroboros. After W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Koptos* (London, 1896) pl. 5, fig. 12.



Figure 117.

Relief on the north wall of the Gate of Hadrian at Philae showing the hidden grotto of Bigeh (the 'Abaton'), mythological source of the Nile. Within the cavern, symbolized by the encircling serpent, the Nile-god Hapi (understood to be a form of Osiris), pours forth the Nile flood from two ewers. Author's photograph.



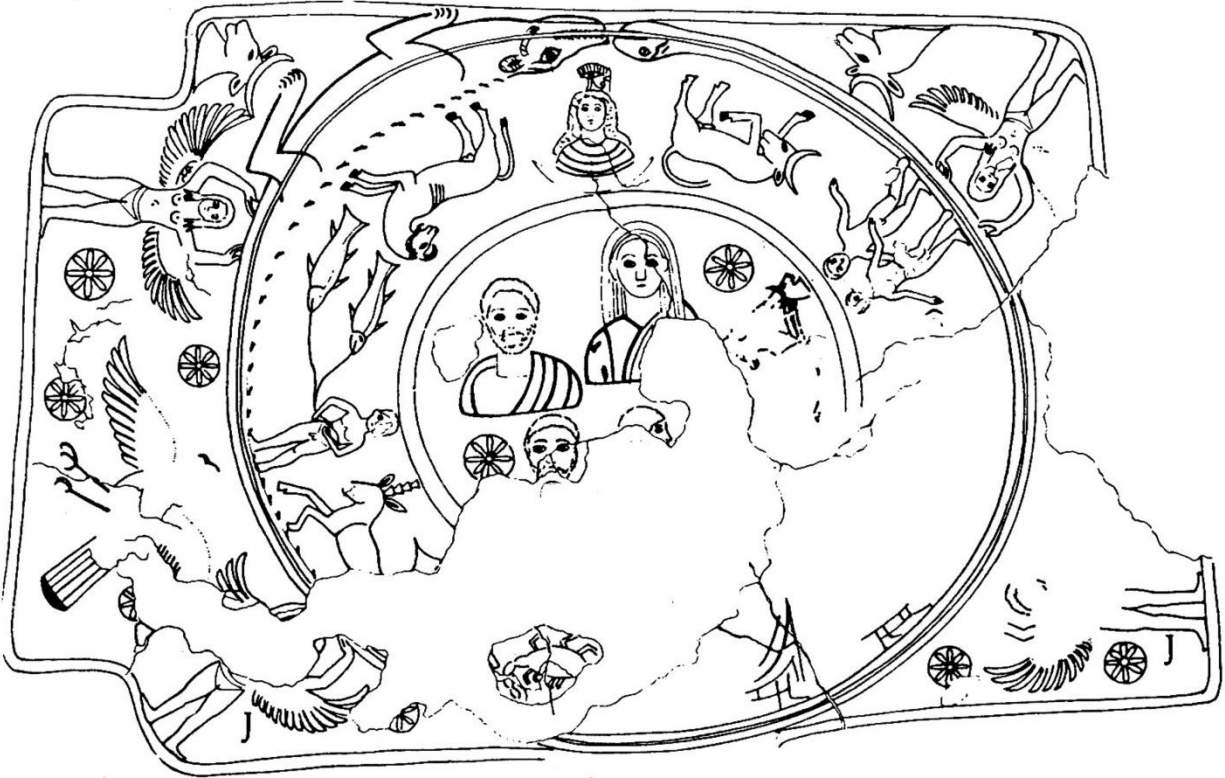


Figure 118.

A unique serpent-crocodile ouroboroid encircling the zodiac as the perimeter of the sky. Painted ceiling in the Roman Period tomb of one Petosiris in the Dakhla Oasis necropolis of Qaret el-Muzawwiqa. After Jürgen Osing, et al., *Denkmäler der Oase Dachla aus dem Nachlass von Ahmed Fakhry*, AV 28 (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1982) pl. 41.

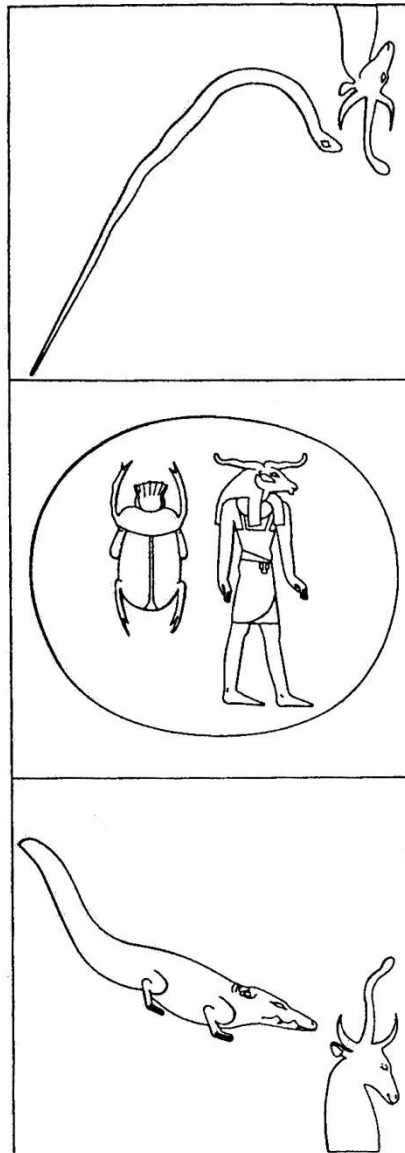


Figure 119.

Symbolic opening tableau of the *Litany of Re*, tomb of Seti II (KV 15). After a drawing by A. Brodbeck in Erik Hornung, *Das Buch der Anbetung des Re im Westen (Sonnenlitanei)*, vol. 2, *Übersetzung und Kommentar*, AH 3 (Basel and Geneva: Ägyptologisches Seminar der Universität Basel; Centre d'études orientales de l'Université de Genève, 1977) 55.



Figure 120.

Annotated version of the opening tableau of the *Litany of Re* on the foot end of the sarcophagus lid of Lady Tadipakem, now in Cairo (CG 29316). After Gaston Maspero and Henri Gauthier, *Sarcophages persane et ptolémaïques*, vol. 2, pt. 2, CG 29307-29323 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1932) pl. 291.

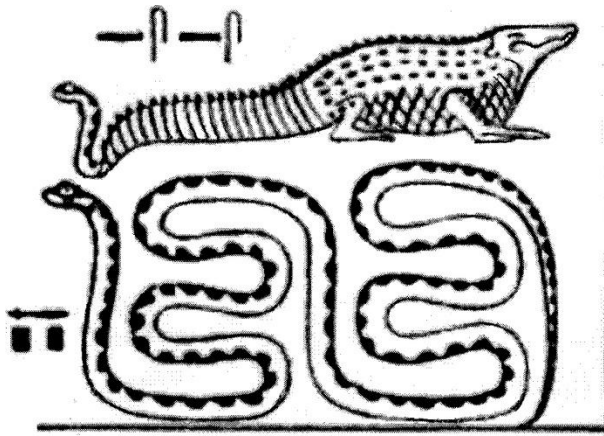


Figure 121.

Final vignette at the end of the middle register of the tenth hour of the *Book of Gates*, from the alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I. Drawing by Joseph Bonomi in Samuel Sharpe, *The Alabaster Sarcophagus of Oimenepthah I, King of Egypt* (London, 1864) pl. 12 (detail).

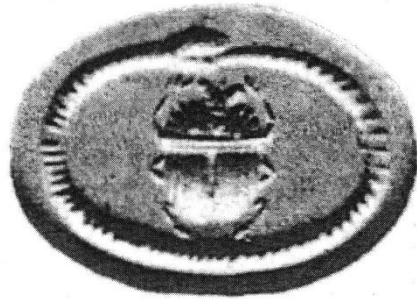


Figure 122a.



Figure 122b.



Figure 122c.



Figure 122d.

## Figure 122.

Examples of magical gems in which the ouroboros occurs in a relatively traditional manner with Egyptian imagery. Figure 122a after Armand Delatte and Philippe Derchain, *Les intailles magiques gréco-égyptiennes* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1964) 53, no. 48; figures 122b, 122c, and 122d after Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press; London, Geoffrey Cumberlege/Oxford University Press, 1950) pl. 12, no. 254; pl. 1, no. 5; pl. 9, no. 191.

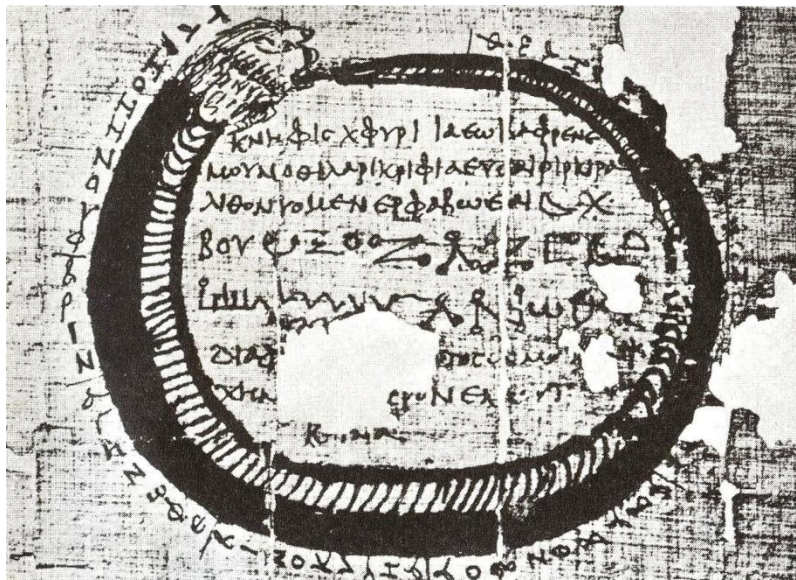


Figure 123.

Illustration accompanying instructions for making an amulet intended as a general phylactery for guarding against daimons, phantasms, sickness, and suffering, to be inscribed on gold, silver, tin, or else written on papyrus. P. London 121; PGM VII, 579-90. After Karl Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. rev., vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1974) pl. 1, fig. 4.

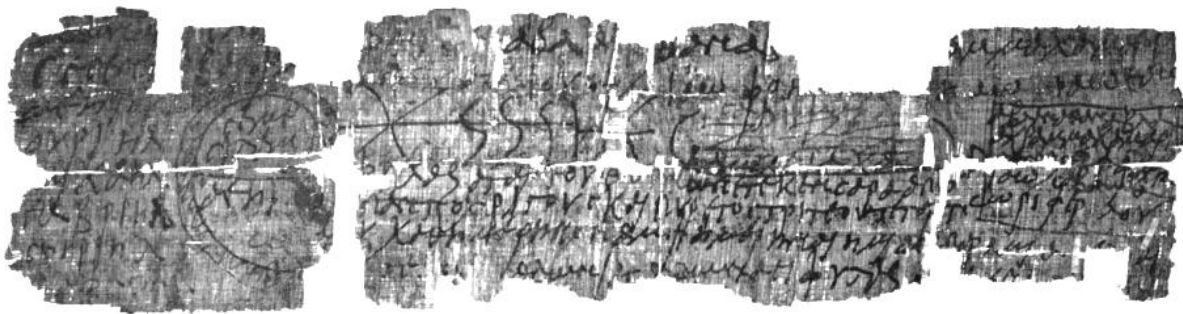


Figure 124.

An ouroboros appearing on an actual papyrus amulet (against fever) prepared along similar lines to instructions found in the Greek Magical Papyri. The papyrus was once tightly folded into a small oblong and tied with a cord so that it could be worn around the neck. P. Berlin 21165 (recto). After W.M. Brashear, "Vier Beliner Zaubertexte, 2, Ein Amulett gegen Fieber," *ZPE* 17 (1975) pl. 11a.



Figure 125.

An ouroboros from the *Chrysopoeia* ('Gold-making') of the alchemist Cleopatra, in a Byzantine copy of a presumed Alexandrian original. Codex Venice Marcianus 299. After Marcellin Berthelot, ed. and trans., *Collection des anciens Alchimistes grecs*, vol. 1, (1888. Reprint [3 vols. in 1], London: Holland Press, 1963) 132, fig 11.



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

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