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The ba *was often written with the sign of a saddle-billed stork or a human-headed falcon and translated into modern languages as the "soul." It counts among key Egyptian religious terms and concepts, since it described one of the individual components or manifestations in the ancient Egyptian view of both human and divine beings. The notion of the* ba *itself encompassed many different aspects, spanning from the manifestation of divine powers to the impression that one makes on the world. The complexity of this term also reveals important aspects of the nature of and changes within ancient Egyptian religion.*

كانت البا غالبا ما تكتب بعلامة طائر اللقلق أو صقر برأس إنسان وتم ترجمتها إلى اللغات الحديثة على أنها "الروح". وتعد واحد من أهم المصطلحات والمفاهيم الدينية المصرية ، لأنه وصف أحد المكونات أو المظاهر الفردية من وجهة النظر المصرية القديمة لكلا من البشر والكائنات المقدسة على حد سواء. أن مفهوم البا فى حد ذاته شمل العديد من الجوانب المختلفة، والتي تمتد من مظاهر القوى الإلهية إلى انطباع الفرد بالنسبة للعالم. كما ان التعقيد الذى يشمله هذا المصطلح يكشف جوانب هامة من طبيعة الديانة المصرية

Similarly to the *ka*, the body, the shadow, the heart, and the name, the *ba* belongs to the terms and notions that describe individual components or manifestations of the ancient Egyptian concept of a person (see, e.g., Assmann 2001: 116-159; Wendrich 2010). Unlike the other terms, the *ba* has almost solely been interpreted as the Egyptian concept of the "soul." The roots of this partly legitimate but still inaccurate and misleading view date back to Late Antiquity when the Greek expression *psyche* began to be used to describe or translate the Egyptian word *ba* (Sbordone 1940: 15; Žabkar 1968: 48, 112-113). The translation is inaccurate because the *ba* could assume some physical aspects too.

The term *ba* itself (as well as its hieroglyphic renderings) is attested for the entire duration of Egyptian Pharaonic civilization. The word was written variously with signs representing a saddle-billed stork and a human-headed falcon (Janák 2014). A sign in the shape of a ram—which was linked to the *ba* probably for onomatopoeic reasons—was also used. Exceptionally, the *ba* appears also in the form of a leopard's head, as in Pyramid Texts §1027b. The latter connection, however, has not been explained satisfactorily yet.

As far as we can deduce from Egyptian textual sources, the notion of the *ba* encompassed several interdependent aspects spanning from the notion of divinity or the manifestation of gods to super-human manifestations of the dead and the late notion of the *psyche*; but it also covered other meanings like personal reputation, authority, and the

impression that one makes on the world (Wolf-Brinkmann 1968; Žabkar 1968; Borghouts 1982; Ockinga 1995: 82-102; Bonnet 2000: 74-77; Allen 2001, 2011: 6, 137; Assmann 2001: 47, 112, 120-131, 161-163; Loprieno 2003: 200-225; Roeder 2005; Smith 2009: 4-5; Janák 2011). The aforementioned stork-sign represents the earliest attested image related to the religious concept of the *ba*. It stresses the notions of impressiveness, might, and (heavenly) power, originally associated with the saddle-billed stork species in Egypt (Janák 2011, 2014). These notions remained among the most prominent characteristics of the *ba*, even in periods when other hieroglyphs were used to denote it.

Early Sources and the Old Kingdom

In the Archaic Period and the Old Kingdom sources, the *ba* is mentioned almost solely in direct relation to divine beings and the king (fig.1; Wolf-Birkmann 1968; Žabkar 1968; for the only known exception, see below). Nevertheless, the Egyptians used the term in many, varying contexts: the *ba* could be ascribed to deities and kings directly, be part of names of non-royal or royal persons, or even the names of gods, royal ships, monuments, or cult places (incl. pyramids and royal domains). In these cases, it most probably represented the earthly, visible, or ponderable manifestation of the divine, or of the powers that this divine force embodied and represented (Wolf-Brinkmann 1968: 9-32, 85-86; Žabkar 1968: 54-67; Allen 2001: 161).

In the Pyramid Texts, the terms *ba* or *bau* denoted awesome manifestations or impressiveness (Allen 2001: 161) of the gods and of the resurrected king, or was even used to describe the gods and the king as divine powers (Roeder 1996: 291-315, 2005: 191). As the deceased king was believed to be transfigured into a super-human or rather divine entity endowed with great power and might, some Pyramid Texts spells describe him and the gods equally both as a *ba* and as a *sekhem*, i.e., a ruling or dominating power (PT §§1089, 1650-1651, 1373). There are spells that refer to the *ba* in a direct connection to transfiguration or resurrection (PT §§1730, 1921), while other spells put stress on the aspect of might, impressiveness, or awe present in the *ba* concept (PT §§253, 1472).

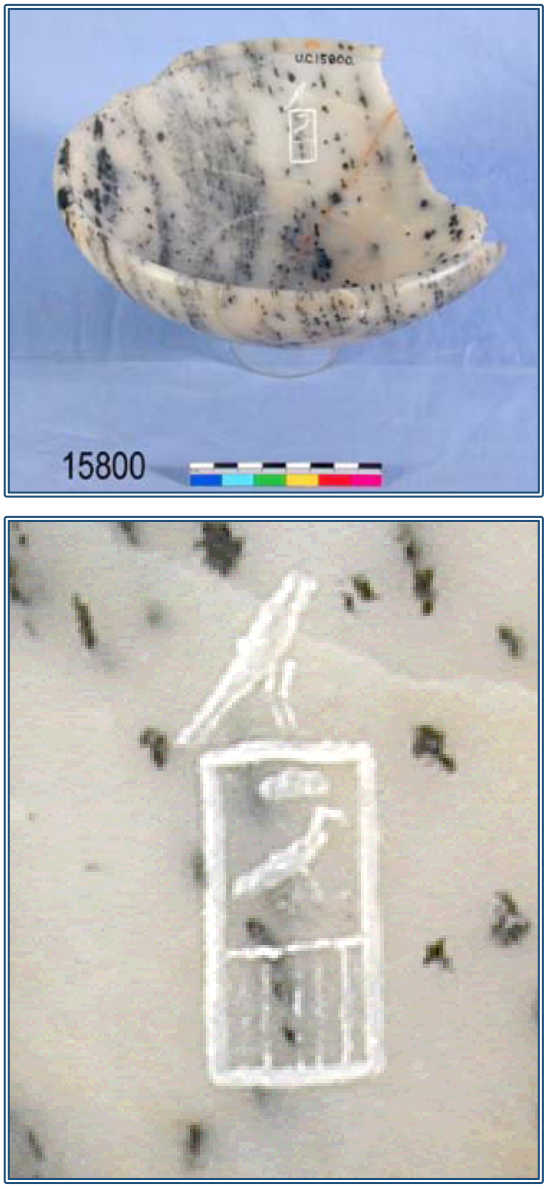

Figure 1. Diorite bowl and detail of the *serekh* of King Khaba with the *ba* hieroglyph.

The (divine or royal) *ba* represented an awesome manifestation of a great power that was supposed to be encountered with awe and venerated by beings of lesser status. Not only did the term refer to the divine being itself, but it was in the *ba* (or as the *ba*) that the hidden, super-natural, or divine beings could manifest

their might, take actions, or make impressions (Allen 2001: 161; Janák 2011: 144). Thus, any god, natural phenomenon, or sacred object could manifest themselves as or through their *ba* or *bau*. However, unlike the term *ba*, which seems to have been ascribed to living beings only, the notion of *bau* was associated with seemingly inanimate objects as well (Allen 2001: 161).

Natural phenomena or heavenly bodies (stars, constellations, the sun, and the moon) might have been viewed as *ba*(*u*) of individual deities (e.g., the wind as the *ba* of Shu, Orion as the *ba* of Osiris) already in the Pyramid Texts and the Coffin Texts. However, the notion of earthly manifestations of divine powers developed over time. Later attestations of the word, dated to a time span from the New Kingdom to the Roman Period, thus include many references to gods and sacred animals that were believed to represent manifestations (of power or will) of other gods: e.g., Thoth as the *ba* of Ra, Sokar as the *ba* of Osiris, Apis as the *ba* of Ptah (Žabkar 1968: 10-15; Leitz 2002: 659-733; Roeder 2005: 193; Fitzenreiter 2013). This concept of divine manifestations and substantial relations between gods was also presented in the last section of the so-called *Book of the Heavenly Cow* (Hornung 1991; Guilhou 2010: 3).

The Ba in the Middle and New Kingdoms

Egyptian sources rarely mention the *ba* of non-royal and non-divine beings during their lifetime, and for the greater part of the Old Kingdom texts do not even associate *ba* with the afterlife existence of private individuals (Allen 2001: 161). The—for the time being—earliest attestation of the *ba* in connection with a deceased of non-royal status comes from the Dynasty 6 mastaba of Hermeru in Saqqara. An offering formula located on the lintel of this tomb expresses the desire that the *ka* of the tomb-owner receives a prominent rank before the king and that the *ba* endures before god (Žabkar 1968: 60-61, 90-91; Altenmüller 1993). At the current stage of Egyptological research it is, however, very difficult to decide whether the absence of attestations for connecting the *ba* with private individuals in earlier phases of the Old Kingdom was caused: a) by not ascribing the *ba* to such persons, b) by a scribal decorum (Baines 2007: 14-29) that prevented the "personal *ba*" from being referred to in official religious sources, or c) simply by a lack of evidence.

Since the time of the Coffin Texts, the *ba* either entered the private mortuary sphere or it began to be explicitly mentioned in such spheres where the non-royal Egyptians expressed their beliefs and hopes about overcoming death and reaching the afterlife. The possible intellectual innovations, and of course also the social changes of the late Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period, might have led to shifts in religious ideas and concepts, including the notion of the *ba*. Thus, the *ba*-concept focused on different aspects that altered its notion towards a manifestation of mysterious powers and abilities that also the mighty dead (the *akhu*) were believed to have and to dispose with (Janák 2013). The main characteristics—for instance, the ability to manifest impressiveness and power, to move freely, or to enter different cosmic realms—were to remain crucial to the notion of the *ba* both on the divine and the human level.

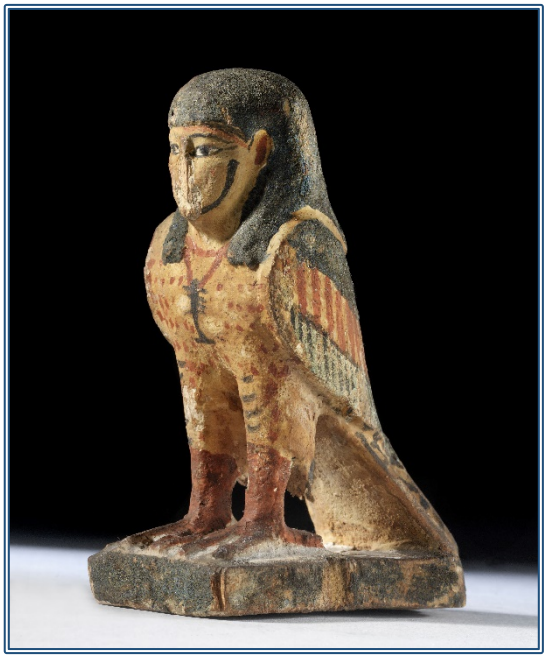

Figure 2. Human headed *ba*-bird.

Unlike the early sources, where the *ba* appears as a saddle-billed stork and thus an earthly manifestation of heavenly powers, later images and texts depict the *ba* as a human-headed falcon (fig. 2). The origin and meaning of the latter image can be explained as resulting from changes in the conception of the *ba*, stressing its mysterious nature and unlimited mobility on the one hand, and the inseparability of *ba* and body on the other. The human head represents the nature of the being it manifests (either human or divine), while the avian body points to the freedom of movement and transformation, and the possibility to enter different cosmic realms.

The nature of the *ba* of a non-royal deceased person can be illustrated well with the New Kingdom *Book of the Dead* spells 61, 85, and 89-92 where the *ba* is described as changing shapes, moving freely, and leaving the corpse during the day while reuniting with it every night. This notion of the *ba* has been interpreted as a personification (or manifestation) of vital powers (Žabkar 1975: 589), as a "free soul" that was part of the physical self (Assmann 2001: 88-89), or as a "movement-soul" or an "activity-soul" (Wolf-Brinkmann 1968: 87-90; Žabkar 1968: 90-114; Koch 1993: 177-178; Assmann 2001: 90). Although the *ba* was believed to be able to leave the corpse freely (to partake in offerings or to seek refreshment), the permanent bond between the *ba* and the (dead) body was one of the key elements in Egyptian notions of afterlife existence (Allen 2001: 161; Assmann 2001: 120-125).

The aforementioned relation between the *ba* and the body was based on the symbolism of the daily solar cycle and found its cosmological reflection in the union of the sun-god's *ba* with his corpse in the underworld. Although the idea of a bond between the *ba* and the corpse/body was present already in the Pyramid Texts (§§752, 1300-1301, 2010-2011) and the Coffin Texts (II, 67-72; VI, 69, 82-83), New Kingdom mortuary texts (e.g., Coffin Texts 335 and *Book of the Dead* chapter 17) explicitly present this event as a union of Ra (as the *Ba*) and Osiris (as the Corpse). This idea reflects the Egyptian concept of universal renewal and resurrection, as well as the notion of a mutual relationship between the *ba* and the (dead) body (Hornung 1993: 168-186; Allen 2001: 161; Assmann 2001: 117-131).

These religious motives found their further exploitation after the Amarna Period as a kind of a "*Ba*-Theology" that interprets the cosmos as the body of a hidden supreme god (i.e., Amun) who animates it and manifests himself in it (Assmann 1984: 277, 2004). The conception of the *ba* thus helped to formulate the idea that different cosmic phenomena or divine beings could manifest themselves in/as the main god, and that this supreme authority could cover many different aspects, duties, roles as documented by his many names, transformations, images, and *bau*.

The Bau and Post-New Kingdom Development

Besides the *ba*, the expression *bau* was also used in ancient Egyptian religious texts and other documents. Although this term has often been translated as "souls," it can be regarded both as the plural form of the *ba* ("*ba*s"), and as an abstract expression referring to the complexity of aspects of the *ba*, i.e., "*ba*-fulness" or "*ba*-hood" (Borghouts 1982; Allen 2001: 161; Roeder 2005). Both meanings are well attested from the Old Kingdom onward. Some sources use the plural form distinguishing several *bau* of a single entity, referring, for instance, to the *Bau* of Buto, Hierakonpolis, and other Egyptian towns and cosmic places. Other texts mention the *bau* of a god or of the king in a context where the term refers to the (abstract) impressiveness or greatness (*ba*-fulness) of the being in question, not to his or her multiple *ba*s (Žabkar 1968; Kessler 2000, 2001; Roeder 2005).

In some cases, however, the idea of the abstract *ba*-fulness (the sum of divine powers) coexisted with the concept of many individual *ba*s of a particular deity, mainly the creator-god (Žabkar 1968: 49). Since the New Kingdom, multiple *bau* of the sun-god (7, 10, or 14 of them) could be individually named in the cult (Kessler 2000: 185-203), but in totality, they represented the sum of the god's supreme creative power. In cultic texts from the Ptolemaic Period this idea was expressed and

strengthened by the use of the term Ra's *bau* (i.e., *bau* of the sun-god) that denoted the ultimate source of mysterious knowledge. These *bau*, or rather this mysterious manifestation of the creative power of the supreme god, was believed to be recorded in secret books, rituals, or spells (Schott 1990: 68-70). The notion of Ra's *bau* as a possible source of ultimate powers might have played a similar role in cult as the concept of the secret name of the (sun-)god in magic.

Similarly, the above mentioned concept of the possible manifestation of a deity in another deity by his or her *ba* (e.g., Sokar as the *ba* of Osiris) and the post-Amarna *Ba*-Theology found their cultic fusion in Late Period and Ptolemaic and Roman Period religious texts. There, a composite, all-encompassing supreme deity comprised the roles, images, names, and manifestations of all other deities and divine beings and who himself represented the *ba* of all gods and living beings (Assmann 1984: 278-282).

The continuous importance of the inseparability of the *ba* and the dead body and its significance for the deceased as expressed already in Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts and the New Kingdom *Book of the Dead* survived into the Roman Period. Then, it was maybe even stressed as witnessed by two attested versions of the so-called *Book of the Ba*, which embraced spells (similar to those of the *Book of the Dead*) dealing with the *ba* of the deceased (Beinlich 2000). The concept of the *ba* and its iconographic image (a human-headed falcon) was also adopted by the Sudanese Meroitic civilisation in cultic imagery, mainly for their statues of the deceased. Egyptian Christians (the Copts), however, preferred to use the Greek expression *psyche* to denote the human soul, since they were most probably well aware of the theological differences between the ancient Egyptian concept of the *ba* (*bai* in Coptic) and the Christian notion of the soul.

A Still Recurring Question: The Ba during One's Life

As has already been stated above, Egyptian texts only rarely reflect on the role of the *ba* of a non-royal person during the person's lifetime. The absence of sources has often been interpreted as evidence proving that private individuals acquired their *ba*s only after death, and that such *ba*s represented afterlife manifestations or posthumous souls of these persons. There are few exceptional attestations that refer to *ba*s of living individuals, for instance, in the *Story of Sinuhe* (Parkinson 1997: 21-53), the wisdom literature (Quack 1992: 35), or autobiographies (Landgráfová 2011: 121), and of course in the famous Middle Kingdom document known as the *Dialogue* (or *Debate*) *of a Man with His Ba* (Parkinson 1997: 151-156, 2003, 2009: 315-321; Allen 2011). However, in all these instances, the *ba* of a man is again referred to in a direct relation to a death-like state (*Sinuhe*), mortuary cult and posthumous reputation (the *Instruction for the King Merikara* and autobiographical inscriptions), and death and afterlife (*Dialogue*).

The problem of the existence of the *ba* of a man before the actual death of the person does not only complicate the interpretation of the concept of the *ba* itself, but it also represents one of the greatest puzzles in our understanding of ancient Egyptian religion. Was the *ba* only an afterlife mode of existence (a manifestation of a deceased person) or was it an entity immanent in the individual person in life, and surviving even after death (Allen 2011: 6)? The so-called *Dialogue of a Man with His Ba* seems to be a key source in this matter. In this extraordinary literary document, the main character argues with his *ba* about life in difficult times and about death with both its uncertainties and apparent blessings. Strangely enough, both parties of the dialogue (or the inner struggle) shift their positions once and begin to defend the opposite side's point of view (Allen 2011: 149, 156-157).

The *Dialogue* sheds light upon the problem of the *ba* in three ways. First, the man (most probably believed to be a wise scribe or a sage) speaks directly with his *ba*, and even argues with it, while still alive. Second, the *ba* is said to be bonded with the man (with his body or belly) by a "rope mash" (Allen 2011: 140) that may suggest the notion of inseparability of the body and "soul" even before death. And third, the *Dialogue* concludes with the following

advice of the *ba*: "Desire my here and reject the West, but also desire that you reach the West when your body is interred and that I alight after your death: then we will make harbour together" (Allen 2011: 157-158).

Unfortunately, the aforementioned evidence is not clear enough and can still be interpreted in several different ways. The main protagonist of this hypothetical inner struggle (a wise sage?) could have been arguing with his present "soul" as well as with his "future" afterlife-self. The meaning of the *Dialogue's* concluding sentence can also be envisaged differently depending on the interpretation of phrases "desire me here" and "I alight after your death." The *Dialogue* itself is a reflective and didactic discourse rather than a fictional narrative or a religious text and should be approached likewise. Didactic literature (e.g., the *Instruction for the King Merikara*; Quack 1992) advises a man to care about his *ba* during his lifetime by making his reputation good among the living and by preparing his funeral and mortuary cult in advance (Žabkar 1968: 115-117). These maxims, however, do not positively lead to the conclusion that a man possesses a *ba* during his lifetime. Thus, we must be very cautious when interpreting the *Dialogue*, which encompasses ideas and tones similar to the wisdom texts or autobiographies (Landgráfová 2011: 121).

In one way or another, the Egyptian cults of deified humans may have influenced subsequent ideas of and practices related to Coptic Christian saints and later Muslim sheiks in Egypt. Even relic veneration seems to have occasionally been part of such cults at least in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods (von Lieven 2007).

Bibliographic Notes

There are only two monographs or comprehensive studies dedicated solely to the concept of the *ba*. Coincidentally, both date to the year 1968. *A Study of the Ba Concept* by Luis V. Žabkar still counts among the most used and quoted publications on the topic of the *ba*, although some of the author's theories and interpretations have become obsolete. Elske Marie Wolf-Brinkmann's unpublished dissertation *Versuch einer Deutung des Begriffes "b3" anhand der Überlieferung der Frühzeit und des Alten Reiches* represents a similarly useful (but difficult to access) research tool for the study of the *ba*-concept, although it covers only a limited time period of Egyptian history. The most important aspects of the *ba* are discussed in the below listed studies by James P. Allen (2001, 2011), Jan Assmann (1984, 2001, 2004), and Hubert Roeder (1996, 2005) who discuss the concept's meaning in its social, physical, and cultic contexts. Hartwig Altenmüller's (1993) article in *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* brings key information on the earliest documented attestation of ascribing the *ba* to persons of non-royal status. As for the connections between the *ba*, its hieroglyphic image, and its natural model (the saddle-billed stork), I refer to my articles published in *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* and *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (Janák 2011, 2013, 2014).

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Figure 1. Diorite bowl and detail of the serekh of King Khaba with the *ba* hieroglyph. UCL 15800. This Work by the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology UCL is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.

Figure 2. Human headed *ba*-bird. From the National Museum of Denmark, provenance unknown, inv. AAb 90. http://samlinger.natmus.dk/AS/6585 Creative Commons license CC-BY-SA.