

INSCRIPTIONS

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Egypt Centre, Swansea

Issue 7

June 2001

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British Museum trip

Standing in Fulton House waiting (and hoping it would arrive) for a coach on a wet April morning at 7 a.m. was not the best start to a day out but from then on in things got steadily better.

When the coaches arrived (on time) we had a choice of a noisy ie music playing coach or a quiet coach and chose the noisy which in fact was pretty quiet except when Rebecca got her hands on the microphone! To help the travelling time a raffle had been organised with the cost of the raffle ticket included. There were many excellent prizes including a bottle of cava, chocolates and a cake. After a half hour stop we arrived at the British Museum (BM) at approx 12.45, with no sign of any stray marathon runners!

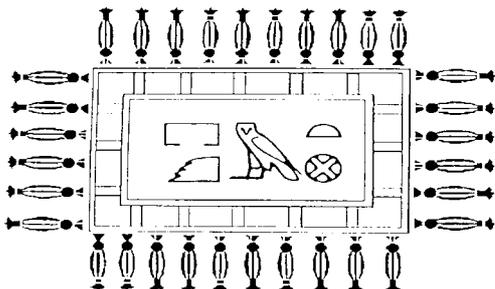
We were met at the museum by Viscount St Davids who opened the Egypt Centre and is one of our patrons. He was very helpful and interested in our activities and has promised to visit us with his wife in the near future.



Wendy, Sheila and Stuart with Viscount St Davids

The BM itself is beyond description and its collection unparalleled. We paid extra to see the new exhibition devoted to Cleopatra which is currently on show before departing to Chicago and found it fascinating, especially the contemporary statues of Cleopatra compared with the Hollywood ideals. Others browsed around the nearby streets which contained many bookshops.

Continued ...





The new Great Court with its impressive glass ceiling was worth the visit alone (see picture opposite) and gave the impression of eating outside.

The coaches left at 5 p.m. and on the way home we had a general knowledge quiz (interspersed with bad jokes from Rebecca) with separate prizes for children - who had higher scores than the adults anyway - which again shortened the journey.

So if you enjoy a well organised trip to an interesting location with good company and bad jokes come with us next year to Liverpool!

Sheila Nowell



Black granite statues of King Sesostris III, 12th Dynasty, from Deir el-Bahri

These statues illustrate the fine portrait quality of Egyptian sculptures during the late Twelfth Dynasty. The faces are excellently worked, although the ears are over-large in common with many statues of the period. (Gift of the Egypt Exploration Fund, 1905)

Ostraca

FLAKES OF LIMESTONE TALK

S C E D

C E

ATTER

ON A DESERT FLOOR
IN GLARING SUNLIGHT

(170897)

Sandy Veltien

A trip to Egypt?

We are taking soundings for a Friends holiday in Egypt in the winter/spring 2002/2003 and would like to hear from those who might be interested. Please contact Sheila Nowell at the Egypt Centre.





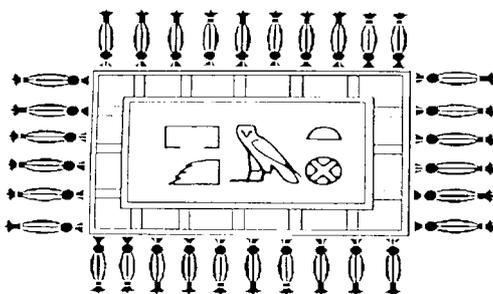
Editorial

Welcome to the seventh issue of our Newsletter. We wish success to all those who are in the throes of examinations at this time, and hope they get the results they want. We also wish happy holidays to those on vacation.

Grateful thanks to all who contributed to, and assisted with, our efforts to raise money for the Sunshine Project in Egypt, which supports the Home in Luxor. Stuart and Wendy will be travelling to Birmingham to present a cheque for £2200 to the project on Saturday 23rd June. This fantastic sum of money was raised by our two "Fun Days" at the Egypt Centre and associated activities. The money will bring much-needed assistance to the Home. Stuart and a group of Friends will be visiting the Home during the summer to bring much-needed supplies.

Contributions to the next issue of *Inscriptions* will be gratefully received and should be sent to the Egypt Centre, marked for the attention of Mike MacDonagh.

Mike MacDonagh



Recipes from Egypt: *Chick-Peas With Noodles*

Ingredients

(serves 4)

- 225g/8oz dried chick-peas or a 400g can
- 900ml/1½ pints vegetable stock
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tbsp tomato puree
- 100g/4oz fresh spinach
- A handful of parsley
- 4 or 5 spring onions
- 1 clove garlic
- 75g/3oz thin egg noodles
- Fresh mint
- Pinch saffron threads or powder
- Salt and black pepper

Method

- 1) If using dried chick-peas, soak them in cold water for 12 hours. Drain and place in a large saucepan of water. Bring to the boil, reduce the heat and simmer for 1½ hours, or until almost cooked. Drain and return to the pan.
- 2) Pour vegetable stock over chick-peas and add the bay leaf and tomato puree. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 45 minutes, adding more stock as required, until very tender.
- 3) Meanwhile, wash and drain the spinach and parsley and coarsely chop the leaves. Trim and thinly slice the spring onion.
- 4) Peel and chop the garlic. Stir into chick-peas and simmer for 5 minutes. Break the egg noodles into short pieces. Add to the chick-peas, along with the spinach and parsley. Simmer for 5 minutes, or until the noodles are nearly soft.
- 5) Chop 2 tablespoons of mint. Put the saffron threads or powder into a small bowl and cover with 90ml/3fl oz boiling water. Stir gently. Add to the stew and simmer for 5 minutes. Gently stir together and serve immediately.

Serving Tips

Soak up the flavours with flat Egyptian bread, and finish with a platter of grapes and fresh green fig. Serve with a Chilean Chardonnay.

Sandra Hawkins





What's on at the Egypt Centre

2001

- 26th September
Esso Theatre
7.30
AGM and Lecture: Egypt III Pharaoh's Revenge
Stuart Williams, Wendy Goodridge
- 17th October
Esso Theatre
7.30
The Art of Dying in Roman Egypt
Christina Riggs
- 14th November
Esso Theatre
7.30
Ancient Egyptian Tomb Models
Martin Davies
- 5th December
Esso Theatre
7.30
Art in the Ramesside Period
Peter Reason

2002

- 9th January
Esso Theatre
7.30
Sir Gardiner Wilkinson, First Egyptologist
Ian Shaw
- 27th February
Esso Theatre
7.30
An (Un)natural History: the Seth Animal in Ancient Egypt
Angela MacDonald
- 17th March
Trip to Liverpool Museum
- 20th March
Esso Theatre
7.30
Horus Behedeti and His Holy Spears
Susanne Woodhouse
- 17th April
Callaghan
Theatre
7.30
The God's Wives of Amun
Robert Morkot
- 15th May
Esso Theatre
7.30
Howard Carter and the Tomb of Tutankhamun
Harry James
- 12th June
Callaghan
Theatre
Dreams and Nightmares
Kasia Szapakowska
Social evening

And the Sky Full of Stars

(Achmenu)

At night the temple cat
Hides in the shadows of
The giant pillared hall
At Karnak
Silently rushing from one
To another
Passing pools of moonlight
With her dusty feet
Ignoring the infinite
height
Of the lotus stalks cast in
stone
Crossing the empty court
Finally reaching the
friendly pillars
Under a starlit sky
painted on stone
Where she stops at a
pillar's foot
And decides to rest
Motionless sits with eyes
of gold
In silver moonlight
At night the temple cat.

(170897)

Sandy Velten

Numerology readings!

Sandra Hawkins has kindly offered to help us raise money by drawing up Numerology charts for any of you who would like one done. The cost will be £5 per reading, and the money will go towards the Egypt Centre's case fund. What Sandra needs from you is your full name, including any middle names you may have, spelt correctly with no nicknames, plus your date of birth. What she also needs is a contact number so that you can be notified when your chart is done. You can send the information to Sandra care of the Egypt Centre, or you can give us a ring, or you can pop into the centre and see us. The charts are very revealing and very accurate!

Please support us in our quest for new cases. Thank you.





Eyes and Teeth in Ancient Egypt

Did you know, the Egyptians had eye specialists and dentists!

In the fifth century BC, when Egyptian civilization was already very old, the Greek writer Herodotus traveled through the country, observing the people and their customs with a keen eye. One thing he noted with admiration was the extent of specialization among physicians. "The practice of medicine is so divided," he wrote, "that each physician is a healer of one disease and no more. The country swarms with medical practitioners, some for the eyes, others for the head, for teeth, or for the intestines or for some obscure diseases." Nor was this a recent development. Doctors (by no means all, but many) had been specializing in Egypt for 2,000 or more years before the time of Herodotus.

For example, take Iry, a medical man whose tombstone was discovered near the pyramids at Giza in 1926. Iry lived sometime between 2270 and 2100 BC, and he is commemorated on a limestone slab (known as a stele) resplendent with hieroglyphs that identify him as Royal Ophthalmologist (eye-doctor to the court). Interestingly enough, the description also credits him with having been a magician.

The Ebers Papyrus, a medical treatise compiled about 700 years after Iry's death, is our chief source of information about eye diseases in ancient Egypt. They were much the same as those we suffer from today: poor sight, crossed eyes, cataracts, and conjunctivitis. Prescriptions for healing, though, were somewhat different. One recommended cure for weak eyes was a mixture of honey, red lead, and water from the eyes of a hog, to be injected in the patient's ear. Another, for Strabismus (crossed eyes) was a salve composed chiefly of turtle brains. Such cures, we are told, work best when the patient completes the cure by twice repeating a magic formula! "I have carried out the instructions and applied the medicine: the crocodile is weak and powerless" (the crocodile being one of the animals, according to ancient myths, that caused eclipses by stealing the eye of the sun).

There are no extant records of the practice of eye surgery, such as the removal of cataracts, in ancient Egypt. But it would be wrong to assume that the eye-doctor's medicine was entirely a matter of turtle brains and mumbo-jumbo. Much that they prescribed makes better sense than it seems at first glance. What, for example, about their recommendation of liver in one form or another as a treatment for night blindness? Until quite recently, all that modern medicine could

offer for combating certain kinds of night blindness was cod-liver oil and liver extracts.

There's nothing new about toothache. Archaeological research into the mouths of mummies has shown that more than 4,000 years ago the ancient Egyptians suffered from just about every dental problem now known, although, since sugar was not a part of their diet, caries (the decay that results in cavities) was not nearly as common as it is today. What seems to have plagued the Egyptians most was dental attrition, surface wear so bad that the teeth were gradually worn down to mere stumps level with the gums. Such attrition, often noted in mummy finds, was probably due to the high content of grit in Egyptian bread. It must have given rise to excruciatingly painful abscesses, either in the roots of teeth or in surrounding soft tissues.

Egyptologists had realized for many years that some form of dentistry was practiced as long ago as the 16th century BC. Egyptian medicine was the most advanced in the ancient world, and physicians often specialized, as do modern doctors, in the ailments of a single organ or area of the body. In the Ebers Papyrus we find many "tooth specialist" prescriptions. A loose tooth, for instance, was treated by the application of a paste composed of a mixture of ochre, crushed seeds, and honey; inflamed gums were eased by chewing and then spitting out a combination of dew saturated beans and dates mixed with milk, a treatment that was continued for nine days. But until quite recently it was generally believed that Egyptians dentistry was hardly more sophisticated than the Eber Papyrus prescriptions suggest. Before 1952 the closest approach to dental craftsmanship that had been found in the mouth of a mummy was a gold wire binding a couple of teeth together, probably because they were loose and in danger of falling out unless attached to a more secure neighbour.

But was the skill of Egyptian dentists even more sophisticated? Did they in fact use some of the techniques that lie at the heart of modern dentistry, in particular the craft of prosthetics (the artificial replacement of missing teeth)? For many years, a few Egyptologists and dentists in the field have contended that the ancient Egyptians did indeed know how to make the kind of partial dentures we call "bridges", and that, in fact, the practice of reconstructive dentistry originated in Egypt. But whenever somebody claimed to have found an apparent example of restorative work such as artificial teeth or bridgework in the mouth of a mummy, the finding was hotly disputed. No incontrovertible evidence turned up until 1952, when, in a burial ground about 30 miles (48 kilometers) northwest of Cairo, a professor in the Department of Antiquities at Cairo's American





Obelisks

Out of the thirteen obelisks in Rome, seven have been transported there from Egypt. After the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium, Octavian; soon to be known as Augustus; decided that obelisks from the defeated Egypt would make very appropriate spoils of war, and consequently had some transported to Rome. To tour around these in their current positions, as well as the other six, would equate to a fair trek around the Eternal City since many have been moved from their original locations. Pope Sixtus V, for example, used them as landmarks for pilgrims and so he moved them to the vicinity of the main basilicas so they could be seen from all over. Of course, they were pagan symbols, but Sixtus 'christianised' them by placing crosses on top of them.

Whilst this is probably just a reflection of my holiday, due to a few nagging suggestions from our Chairman mentioning obelisks, it seemed to become a working visit, so here are some points covering the main Egyptian obelisks in Rome.

The highest of the seven is found inside the Piazza San Giovanni in Laterano (Saint John in the Lateran) outside the Basilica San Giovanni, which is the Cathedral of Rome. It is the largest standing obelisk in the world at 105.6 feet high and weighing in at some 455 tons. According to its inscriptions, it was begun during the reign of Tuthmosis III. (He had another, more famous obelisk, but I'll give the answer to that at the end, just to keep you guessing). It was finally erected 35 years later by his grandson Tuthmosis IV, and placed outside the temple at Karnak. It has great rarity value in that it was the only known obelisk to have been erected without a twin; obelisks, as far as we can see, are normally erected in pairs. It was removed by the emperor Constantine, who intended it to be placed in Constantinople. His death ensured

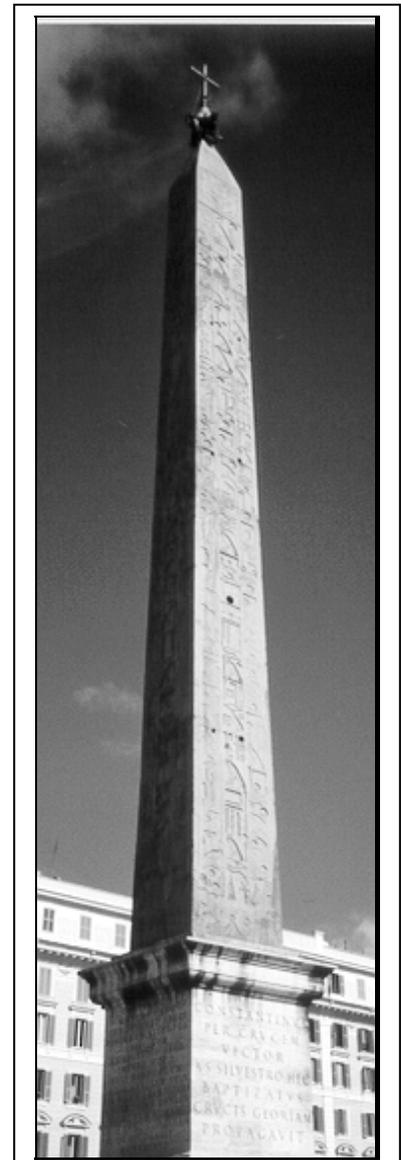
that it was taken over by his son, Constantius (AD 317-361), who erected it in the Circus Maximus. As for its current location, it seems fitting that the largest obelisk was placed outside the Cathedral Church in Rome, rather than Saint Peter's.

The obelisk now in the Piazza del Popolo was commissioned by Seti I (1318-1304 BC) and was erected at the sun temple at Heliopolis. Three of the sides were carved by Seti I, and the fourth by his son Ramesis II. Seti wrote that he was "the one who fills Heliopolis with obelisks that their rays may illuminate the Temple of Re". Rameses seemed to reply by saying that he himself made "monuments as innumerable as the stars of heaven. His works join the sky. When Re shines, he rejoices because of [the obelisks] in his temple of millions of years."

It was one of the first obelisks to be moved to Rome by Augustus and was re-erected in the Circus Maximus in 10 BC until it fell down. It was re-erected in the Piazza in the 16th century, unsurprisingly by Sixtus V. The obelisk is 75 feet high and weighs 263 tons.

Incidentally, the obelisk at the top of the Spanish Steps, which was erected in 1789 and is definitely not Egyptian, seems to have been modelled on Seti's obelisk because of the similarity of the hieroglyphs; yet some of the inscriptions are upside down, probably because the original obelisk may have been on its side when they copied it.

The obelisk of Montecitorio is one of the 'youngest' obelisks, commissioned in the 26th dynasty by Psammetikos II (666-524BC) and erected at Heliopolis. Many of the hieroglyphs have been weathered away, but we are lucky enough to have been left with the pharaoh's full titulary; "the Golden Horus, 'beautifying the Two Lands', beloved of Amun, lord of Heliopolis; the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Neferibre, beloved of Re Harakhti; the son of



The obelisk outside St John in the Lateran

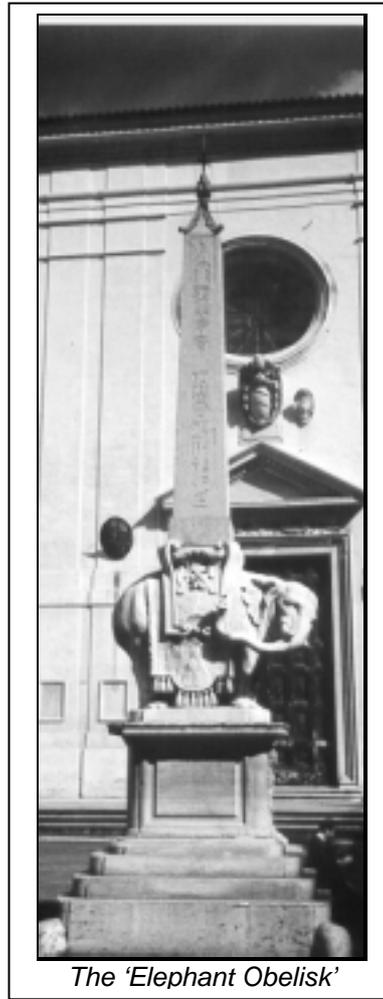
his own body, who seizes the White Crown and who unites the Double Crown, Psammetikos, beloved of the Sails of Heliopolis."

This obelisk was also brought to Rome in 10BC by Augustus, this time placed in the Campus Martius until it fell around a millennium later. It was later re-erected in its current place in the 18th century. The obelisk was used in the Campus Martius as the needle of a large sundial set out on the floor as mentioned in Pliny's 'Natural History'. The Piazza Montecitorio has a layout, which ensures that once again it will be a sundial needle.





Outside one of the most famous monuments of Rome, the Pantheon stands one of the smallest obelisks. It originally stood outside the Sun Temple at Heliopolis and it was brought to Rome to stand outside the Temple of Isis, along with the obelisk now in the Piazza della Minerva. This one is also known as the 'Elephant Obelisk'. Yet the two are not a natural pair. The latter is made from red granite and came from the Egyptian town of Sais and was relocated from outside the Temple of Isis to the Piazza outside the church of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, which is where the remains of Saint Catherine of Sienna, Italy's patron saint, are situated. It stands on the back of an elephant, surprisingly enough, which was designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, who had been commissioned by Pope Alexander VII.



The 'Elephant Obelisk'

This pope dictated the elephant's inscription which reads, "He who sees the carved symbols on the obelisk of wise Egypt borne by the elephant, the strongest of animals, will understand that it is indeed a robust mind which sustains a solid wisdom". Highly philosophical indeed.

There are more obelisks with less known about them than these, but the ones mentioned are the main ones. Whilst they are not in their native country, they have been removed to such beautiful places that they are definitely worth going to see if you have not already. If you were still wondering about Tuthmosis III's other famous obelisk, then it is 'Cleopatra's Needle'. Not a lot of people know that!

Rebecca Shields

Pictured below — One of the obelisks still in place in Egypt, in front of the Luxor Temple - Ed





Flights of Imagination – the Shaman in Dynastic Egypt?

In 1984 Helk produced an article suggesting that the Sem priest may have been the shaman of prehistoric-early Dynastic Egypt. Generally, it seems, Egyptologists also accept that shamanism/mysticism was a feature of Hellenistic Egypt. Between the two periods, there seems to be a general reluctance to believe that the Egyptians embraced such experiences. True there is no incontrovertible evidence but it seems the idea cannot be dismissed altogether.

There are various definitions of shamanism. Shamanistic experiences are usually associated with so called ‘primitive’ societies such as gatherer-hunter groups. Perhaps this explains why Helk suggests that Egyptian shamanism went out of favour as religion ‘codified’. However, religions are always undergoing redefinition and I would guess that only a small part of the Egyptian religious experience was actually institutionalized, ancestor cults for example seem outside institutionalization.

Mysticism too is often seen as something practiced by ‘simple’ societies, perhaps as it is seen more as a factor of emotion than of intellect. There are various definitions of both. As I see it, shamanism differs little from the mystic experience incorporated within the popular religions such as Christianity and Islam. Simply and quickly put, I see the essence of shamanism and mysticism as the ‘altered states’ of mind which may take the form of ecstatic visions, distortions of colour or sound, trance states, heightened senses or other sensations which our language is inadequate to fully describe and yet which seem just as real as the ‘normal’ world to the participant. Often such states involve a feeling of ‘oneness’ and involve communication with ‘the other’. Such altered states may be brought about by extreme tiredness, fasting, religious fervor, drugs, etc.

Given that most religions and even atheists accept experiences of altered states as normal (though not always acceptable), surely it is almost impossible to deny the Egyptians did not at times do the same. But was this recognized by the Egyptians themselves as part of their religious experience?

Brief review of the ideas of Egyptologists

As stated above Helk suggested that shamanism may have been practiced at least in early Dynastic times. He uses evidence of the Sem priest, whose leopard skin cloak shows parallels with the shaman

chiefs of some recent African societies. He also sees the opening of the mouth ceremony as further proof.

Federn suggests that coffin texts were used by the living as well as the dead as a form of initiation. A similar view was put forward by Gertrud Thausing Wenté, more recently used textual evidence to support the idea that initiation was as much a factor of the living as the dead.

Most Egyptologists, however, seem to reject mysticism as a factor of pharaonic Egypt. Siegfried Morenz was against the idea prior to the Hellenistic Period (“Ägyptischer Totenglaube” in *Religion und Geschichte des alten Ägypten: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Cologne and Vienna, 1975 pp 200-2). E. Hornung also states his disagreement in *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and The Many*, translated by John Baines, Cornell University Press 1996 p182:

Several writers have stressed quite correctly that no trace of mysticism can be found in ancient Egypt. The Egyptians never succumbed to the temptation to find in the transcendence of the existent release from all imperfection, dissolution of the self, or immersion in and union with the universe. They remained active and often, to us, startlingly matter-of-fact; any sort of ecstasy appears quite alien to their attitudes. For them the nonexistent is the inexhaustible, unrealized primal matter, the ‘pleroma’ from which they take strength and which challenges them to create something that exists without qualification or hindrance.

Prior conditions

Egyptian religious thought seems to have incorporated certain prior conditions for acceptance of ecstatic experience. Belief in communication with the other, whether through dreams or other means was acknowledged. Moreover, Hornung writes: ‘The fact that for the Egyptians there were dreams “by night and by day” probably indicates that the concept of a “dream” (*rswt*) also includes “visions,” *epiphaneia*, especially since the word strictly means “awakening”’ (Hornung: 130).

As Wenté states (p161), it could be argued that since the Egyptians did not believe in an ‘absolute transcendent god’ they did not attempt to enter a state where they would unite with that god. However, mystic unions were described, for example, that between the king and Hathor and/or Isis.

As Wenté and others have pointed out, the Egyptian belief in cyclical rather than linear time means life and death are one. Therefore, there is a framework for the living person participating in the transformation from death to life.





Animal connections

In shamanism, animal totems are common and humans may be possessed by spirits with animal forms. Animals also act as links between worlds. This could perhaps be seen as a factor of the transformation of Egyptian deities into animals. It might also explain why leopard skins were worn by Sem priests and by the High Priest of Ra at Heliopolis (whose title was 'The Seer'). [*but not 'seer' as in English. The title meant that he could open the shrine and see the god – Ed.*]

In certain Graeco-Egyptian magic texts, the magician chooses to address a god in "bird glyphic" in order to be better understood and uses such dialects as "falconian". Baboon language was also important (Meeks and Favard-Meeks 1993: 102-3). While speaking in animal languages as such does not seem to be a feature of earlier Egyptian history the communication of animals with the gods is surely implied by depictions and descriptions of animals worshipping the gods.

Hathor and Scrying

One might wonder if at times the goddess Hathor was a means by which it was possible to see into 'other worlds'. The mirrors associated with the goddess, as well as being linked to her solar and beauty aspects, may be linked with scrying (a means of seeing into other worlds through reflective surfaces) and music (hand clappers and sistra) are also associated with inducing trance like states. Mirrors were used in religious rituals and not simply for personal grooming (Wilkinson: 18-19). Hathor is frequently depicted as a 'guide'. Could she be a guide for the living?

Bowls of liquid are also used in scrying to provide a reflective surface by means of which the practitioner communicates with the other world. These are well known in Graeco-Roman Egypt. Is there evidence of this in earlier times? Bowls are also mentioned in spells 133 and 134 of the Book of the Dead, but whether or not scrying is implied is not clear. It has also been suggested that Middle Kingdom statues of individuals over bowls are to do with bowl magic but conceivably they might equally well be associated with brewing! (Capart 1944).

Signalling liminal states

The wearing of a cloak does indeed seem to suggest a liminal state and therefore one in which protection is required — altered states would be a dangerous area — and cloaks seem to be worn in Egyptian iconography by the transfigured dead, by kings in a state of initiation e.g. in the Sed festival and by kings in the realms of the gods in the Pyramid texts.

Until the Middle Kingdom coffins were sometimes shown draped in a leopard skin.

Other characters too may wear cloaks, usually of feathers or leopard skins, but sometimes their liminal states and/or protective needs are not so obvious. Bes perhaps wears a cloak as protection, being an apotropaic figure. Seshet too wears a leopard cloak. Certainly writing was considered a particularly powerful and dangerous form of creative process so it might require that protection be worn.

Of course there are many apotropaic figures and many in stages of transition and they do not all wear panther or leopard cloaks.

The Opening Of The Mouth ceremony

The opening of the mouth ceremony can be interpreted as a means to communicate with either the dead or with deities. In shamanistic rites auditory hallucinations are common. Could this be an explanation of the rite? Wine was said to open the mouth of the spirit of the deceased and in other societies alcohol is often a means to communication with the dead and deities (Poo: 78).

The Ba and the Ka

Julian Jaynes suggests that until recently the minds of humans were more susceptible to hallucinations so that people might hear the spirits of their dead, particularly of kings. He suggests that this idea might be portrayed in Egypt by the notion of the ka and suggests that the epithet 'true of voice' and the opening of the mouth ceremony for the dead might be linked to this. At times the ka is portrayed pointing to its mouth implying auditory significance. The power of the spoken word in ancient Egyptian religion is a subject which has been extensively described. Originally the ka may have been associated with the king, as the primary shaman. The particular association of the king with the ka shown in names like Kaininesut "my ka belongs to the king" or Kainesut "the king is my ka". Finally the ka's adoring arms may suggest communication with other deities. While not agreeing with all that Jaynes states, he may have a point.

Agents

The part played by music, dance and drugs such as alcohol etc. is well attested in enhancing altered states. The lotus and mandrake may have been more than symbols of rebirth and objects of beauty and perfume. Their narcotic qualities are well known. Dance is associated with religious ecstasy in many societies. However, how can we distinguish exuberance from ecstasy?





Dances for Hathor were particularly characterized by springing or acrobatic movements, accompanied by the sound of finger clicking, clappers or sistra. Daumas (1968: 15) noted a text at Dendera which describes the movements performed by Hathorian musicians in night-time dances for the goddess: ‘Singers, vital and beautiful, are intoxicated by speedily moving their legs out before them.’ Daumas suggested that this was a kind of *zikh* designed to bring on an altered state of consciousness during the ritual. However, the Dendera temple dates from Greco-Roman times when most Egyptologists suggest that mysticism was a part of Egyptian religious experience. The king seems to have performed dances in rituals, which would be expected by the chief shaman.

Alcohol is often consumed in religious activities to induce a sense of other worldliness to facilitate communication with the gods. In ancient Egypt wine was important in religious activities (Poo: 1995). Very often the offering of wine, like that of water and milk, may have been no more than a symbolic gift for the gods. However, that wine was considered a means of communication with the deities might be suggested in its particular consumption in festivals designed to link living and dead such as the Festival of the Valley. This idea has been suggested by various Egyptologists e.g. Schott (1953: 842). Wine offering scenes frequently occur on temple walls and also on the liminal area of the doorway (Poo).

Poetry

Poetry too may belong in either the realm of the mystic or of one firmly in this world and how can one distinguish one from the other? ...all good poets, epic as well as lyric, composed their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed ... there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses and the mind no longer in him.

Plato, *Io*, 534.

Jaynes (1976: 371) believes early poets actually experienced the *Muses*. But, how can we tell the difference between imagination and actual experience? William Blake seems to have had visions and auditory hallucinations as have other poets and artists, although admittedly most poets are more ‘mundane’.

Within the realm of what we might consider specifically religious poetry, the *sha'ir* or ‘knower’ of the Arabs writes in poetry, likewise the poetic Koran is ‘The Word Of God’. Poetry and divinity are closely associated. Glossolia today tends to fall into meter, as does some ‘demonic possession’.

The pyramid texts have a visionary and ecstatic quality giving the impression that they are records of journeys into a spirit world. Striking visual images are

invoked such as the sky goddess strewing green stones to create the stars. Of a later date, the story of the *Dialogue of a man with his Ba*, borders on the mystic. Here is a man who longs to lose himself in the arms of death, in a mystic abandonment.

Death is before me today
Like a sick man’s recovery,
Like going outdoors after confinement.
Death is before me today
Like the fragrance of lotus,
Like sitting on the shores of drunkenness.

(Lichtheim 168)

The story is almost a typical mystic ‘dark night of the soul’ revelation. Perhaps the original writer was having an auditory hallucination. Of course it can be explained in other ways.

And what of Egyptian love poems? Love poetry is a common mystic tool. The *Song of Solomon* has frequently been used in this way. Christians and Muslims have frequently used quite explicit love poetry to explain communion with god. Egyptian love poems are usually said to be secular. True, they don’t appear on tomb walls but their earthy content does not preclude them from the religious realm and surely not all aspects of religion appear on tomb walls?

The characters

Certain characters seem to be especially associated with mystic states. Hathor and the Sem priest have already been mentioned.

The muu-dancers proclaim the will of the gods to the dead at the entrance to tombs e.g. ‘The dance of the muu-dancers is done at the door of your tomb.’ (From the story of Sinuhe quoted from Lichtheim p229). Most writers have seen these as representations of demi-gods rather than actual people e.g. Brunner-Traut (1938) and others. The fact that these dancers appear in liminal places, particularly tomb entrances, suggests they may be beings of two worlds? Similarly, what of the tekenu who appears under a cow hide (a form of cloak?). Using evidence from the tomb of Rekhmire and others, Reeder (1994) shows the tekenu to be a Sem priest who is awakened from a trance in which he visits the deceased at his tomb.

Most of the characters associated with rebirth in the afterlife, e.g. Osiris, may have once originally been associated with a ‘living rebirth’. Perhaps the processions at Abydos during the mysterious Osirian rituals were designed to allow the living renewal. A less known goddess is Mafdet. Malek suggests that the goddess who sometimes appears as an ‘usherette’ known from vignettes in the Book of the Dead and is usually nameless may be Mafdet, the female ‘panther’ deity. In the mythological papyrus of the chantress





Dirpu dated c1000 B.C. such a goddess brings the deceased lady to the god Osiris. Mafdet as ‘Mistress of the House of Life’ is concerned with the well being and protection of the king (Petrie *Royal Tombs* I pl. 7, 4). The role of ‘The House of Life’ is variously described but by the Graeco-Roman period the priests there had various roles including as seers. The role of the jackal as an ‘opener of the ways’ to Ro-Setawe, a mystical and actual place, was briefly mentioned in the last newsletter. T. DuQuesne describes this in detail. However, the fact that among the living, there are few named after necropolis gods such as Anubis, might suggest that in later times at least such gods were not considered part of the land of the living.

One would expect the primary character in shamanism to be the king himself. That the king is a link between his people and the gods is not disputed. His transformation in temple rituals and in the Sed festival are well documented. The king also initiates the building of the temple along with Seshet of the leopard cloak. The shaman king is a feature of a number of societies. The king’s role in transformations is all encompassing, even as governor of metallurgy and agriculture and possibly other transformation/creation practices carried out within and outside the temple. It is tempting to see Osiris as originally the altered state of the king. He may not have simply been a dead king as the Osiris-king. ‘Symbiosis’ would be expected in gods linked with shamanism. However, the role of a king as shaman would not necessarily preclude others from achieving mystic states.

Books of the Dead for the living?

The idea of death as sleep is common in many cultures and is included in the Pyramid texts. But should it sometimes be taken more as a description of a trance like state?

O King, thou has not gone away dead, thou hast gone away alive. Sit on the throne of Osiris. (Pyramid 134a-b quoted in Griffiths 1980 page 67) Also *My father, Osiris-King has not indeed died the death, what has happened is that my father has become a glorious spirit.* (Pyramid 1385b-c).

But while it maybe suggested that these suggest trance not death the dead are often given the name ‘glorious spirits’ or *akhu*.

Initiation of dead or living

Coronation text of Thutmose III:

He opened for me the door-leaves of heaven
And unfolded the gates of his horizon.
I rose to heaven as a divine falcon
And saw his secret image in heaven.
I worshipped His Majesty (...)
I beheld the transformations of *Akhti*
On his secret ways of heaven.

Quoted from Assman 1989 p142

This could be seen as an ecstatic experience by the living or as an imagination of death. Much ink seems to have been spilt by scholars trying argue whether initiation ceremonies described in such ecstatic tones derive from rituals of death or the other way round. Initiation ceremonies in which the living go through a process of rebirth are a common feature of mystic religions.

It is likely that the means by which the Egyptians described transformations whether of raw materials into tools, of kings into gods, of the living into rebirth, or mystical symbiosis of the living would all bear certain resemblances. It is a very western, 20th century notion to divide up life and death into separate boxes.

Schott states that the Pyramid texts derive from ritual partly because since the time of Teti most of them start ‘to be recited’. Schott believed they were to be recited in the mortuary temple and were related to rites in the temples. Might the texts relate to shamanistic life rituals? Griffiths thinks it is not correct to associate spells with initiation intended for the living (1980: 218-219). Assman (1989) also reviews some of the literature on this subject for and against.

It would be strange if there were not similarities within any one culture between rituals for the living and for the dead. Use of the same metaphors to be expected. The opening of the mouth ceremony was used in temples (to open the mouth of the temple (Blackman and Fairman *JEA* 32 1946 84-90) and on statues as well as the dead. Blackman (*JEA* 5, 1918, 148-165) shows funerary aspects taken from life e.g. in connection with ‘The house of the morning’ purification aspects of the opening of the mouth were taken from the king’s life rituals. Various Egyptologists have suggested the use of funerary spells by the living. Wentz argues that the phrase ‘offered to upon earth’ phrase used in funerary texts shows the use of the text by the living. These include sections of the ‘Book of Amduat’. He also argues that parts of the Book of Gates have been mistranslated and a correct translation suggests its initial use in this world (see also Federn). But it is probably impossible





to say which came first the chicken or the egg, life or death ritual.

Literary evidence for mystic communion can be dismissed as use of allegories or of imaginative descriptions but what if the Egyptians really experienced parallel worlds and incorporated experiences of them into their religious texts? Can we ever know? Ecstatic poetry, the use of mind-altering drugs such as alcohol, etc. be categorized as mere exuberance. Certain Egyptian texts seem to suggest that anything approaching ‘over enthusiasm’ might have been frowned upon, at least within the realms of the secular, but very often what is accepted in secular and religious behavior is very different. However, it would seem unlikely that over three millennia of religious practice by people with various social groups that the ecstatic quality of religious practice was not at times encouraged. That ecstatic religion was widely practiced in Egypt can perhaps never be proven but it does seem to explain a number of otherwise difficult ideas.

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