

PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
FOR YOUNG EGYPTOLOGISTS

Italy, Chianciano Terme  
October 15-18, 2003

*under the Patronage of*

PRESIDENCY OF COUNCIL OF MINISTERS  
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
TOWN OF MONTEPULCIANO



L'ACQUA  
NELL'ANTICO EGITTO

vita, rigenerazione, incantesimo, medicamento



edited by

ALESSIA AMENTA  
MARIA MICHELA LUISELLI  
MARIA NOVELLA SORDI

*ABSTRACT*

«L'ERMA» di BRETSCHNEIDER

04  
S 698 h

N.º 99587  
Data 2007/01/09

FUNDO GERAL

FLUP-BIBLIOTECA (<)



\*903667\*

ROGÉRIO FERREIRA DE SOUSA  
HEART AND WATER IN THE RELIGIOUS  
ANTHROPOLOGY OF ANCIENT EGYPT

THE HEART AND WATER IN THE TALE OF TWO BROTHERS

Dating back to the New Kingdom, the Tale of the Two Brothers presents us a story that uncovers some interesting details which may be interpreted as a metaphoric allusion to the Osirian cycle.

The first part of the tale seems to have been originally an independent account, which later ended up being completed with a second narration. This became the present, well-known tale. This primitive tale presumably began with the unlucky episode between Bata and the wife of his elder brother, Anubis. It probably ended with the departure of the youngest to the Valley of the Pine<sup>1</sup>. The plot thickens with the intervention of Re-Harakhte<sup>2</sup>, the god who “made a great body of water appear between him (Bata) and his older brother”<sup>3</sup> and the episode revolving around Bata and the self mutilation of his penis (an organ believed to be an extension of the heart). The penis is swallowed by a fish, something that immediately remembers the Osirian myth. Here is what Bata says to his brother Anubis:

*“I shall go to the Valley of the Pine. But what you shall do for me is to come and look after me, when you learn that I shall take out my heart and place it on top of the blossom of the pine. If the pine is cut down and falls to the ground, you shall come to search for it. If you spend seven years searching for it, let your heart not be disgusted. And when*

<sup>1</sup> Bear in mind that throughout the first part of the text the names given by the second writer to the main characters, Bata and Anubis, are never mentioned. Their names are solely mentioned on the introduction.

<sup>2</sup> The text uses the form *P3-Rc-hr-3hfy*.

<sup>3</sup> The Tale of the Two Brothers, see LICHTHEIM 1976, 206.

04

S698 h

OFERTA

*you find it and place it in a bowl of cool water, I shall live to take revenge on him who wronged me*"<sup>4</sup>.

As a matter of fact it is the magical procedure that succeeds in bringing Bata back to life after his death:

*"He (Anubis) fetched a bowl of cool water, placed the fruit in it, and sat down according to his daily (custom). When night had come, his heart swallowed the water, and Bata twitched in all his body"*<sup>5</sup>.

The heart of Bata, turned into a seed, became the vehicle for the Osirian rebirth. The reanimation of the heart recalls the Osirian rituals celebrated on the month of Athyr, those in which a bowl full of water is brought in procession as an allusion to the magical power of Isis to renew life in the Afterlife:

*"When night had come, his heart swallowed the water, and Bata twitched in all his body. He began to look at his elder brother while his heart was in the bowl. Then Anubis, his elder brother, took the bowl of cool water in which was the heart of his young brother and let him drink it. Then his heart stood in its place, and he became as he had been"*<sup>6</sup>.

In the second part of the tale the interplay between Anubis and Bata strikes us as being largely metaphorical. It is quite obvious that the elder brother's behaviour mirrors the performance of the homonym embalmer god. Anubis spent four years searching for his sibling's heart, a length of time that in the symbology of numbers may mean that he reached a cycle of completeness. This surely evokes the time of preparation needed for a corpse to be transformed into an Osiris<sup>7</sup>. During the time of Bata's apparent death, Anubis is the one who provides for his safety and guarantees his return to life, a perfect enactment of the psychopompos god's role in the Afterlife. And we must not forget that the resurrection only happens after Bata drank the water and swallowed his own heart, a procedure which is in fact a specific moment of the ritual of the Opening of the Mouth. In some funerary depictions we even see the embalmer god Anubis giving the heart of the deceased away so it can be swallowed by the mummy.

Of special notice is that *"heart stood in its place, and he became as he had been"*, a common feature in Egyptian funerary texts of all-times ever since the Pyramid Texts:

<sup>4</sup> LICHTHEIM 1976, 206.

<sup>5</sup> LICHTHEIM 1976, 208.

<sup>6</sup> LICHTHEIM 1976, 208-209.

<sup>7</sup> WILKINSON 1994, 133.

*"O Osiris the king, knit together your limbs, reassemble your members, set your heart in its place! O Osiris the king, do not be lacking. (...O Osiris) the king, I have brought for your heart into your body, I have set it in its place for you"<sup>8</sup>.*

The Book of the Dead also shows us the concern to keep the heart in its place:

*"Mon Coeur m'appartient dans la maison des coeurs, le viscère de mon coeur m'appartient dans la maison des coeurs. Puisse-je avoir mon coeur, (car) il est heureux avec moi! (Sinon) je ne pourrai pas manger (...) je ne pourrai pas aller dans le bateau dans lequel tu seras"<sup>9</sup>.*

And in that same collection of funerary spells we are taught that being in the possession of the heart is a pre-requisite to restore the unity of human nature:

*"J'ai de nouveau connaissance grâce à mon coeur, j'ai l'usage du viscère de mon coeur, j'ai l'usage de mes bras, j'ai l'usage de mes jambes, et j'ai la possibilité de faire ce que désire mon ka, on ne retiendra pas prisonniers mon âme (ba) et mon corps aux portes de l'Occident"<sup>10</sup>.*

By bringing back the *ka* and the *ba* to the body, the heart can finally start the transformation process that will lead the deceased to his final deification:

*"Il (Anubis/Khentimentiu) fait que tu exécutes toute transformation selon le vœu de ton coeur, car tu fais partie de ses favoris, quotidiennement ; tes bras sont purs, tes jambes sont pures, et ton coeur possède Maât, sans faute"<sup>11</sup>.*

The older brother Anubis portrays the role of the embalmer god and looks after Bata so that his reanimation can reach its term. The metaphorical role of Bata, on the other hand, seems to have an unclear meaning. His name means "bread of the *ba*" and has a determinative of a divine form. Underlining the idea of the transcendent nature of Bata, it is said that "*a god's strength was in him*"<sup>12</sup>. In spite of his self-mutilation, which the second part of the text seems to ignore, the Ennead gave him the pharaonic epithet "Bull of the Ennead". This is a nod to his exceptional sexual poten-

<sup>8</sup> Pyr. 1890-1891; see FAULKNER 1969, 274.

<sup>9</sup> Book of the Dead, Ch. 26; in BARGUET 1967, 72.

<sup>10</sup> Book of the Dead, Ch. 26; in BARGUET 1967, 72.

<sup>11</sup> Le Livre de parcourir l'éternité, see HERBIN 1994, 70.

<sup>12</sup> LICHTHEIM 1976, 204.

cy, an attribute of kings. In the same way, it's his enthusiastic attitude towards life, his exceptional strength and his ability to understand the language of cattle that give him the heroic aura of a man "blessed" by the gods. Unquestionably, the text does show that the gods seems to be especially concerned with him. For instance, Bata summoned Re-Harakhte and the god came in his defense. Also in the Valley of the Pine Ennead's concern with his loneliness leads to the creation of a divine woman.

Such noteworthy traits make me believe that Bata represents the divine nature of a man and that the story may be an allusion to the process of transformation that leads the individual to a complete deification. Supporting this reading, the book later describes a complex process of transformations that will turn Bata into a bull, two persea trees (both solar symbols in funerary iconography)<sup>13</sup> and the royal prince which will finally become the pharaoh of Egypt. Equally interesting is his appointment as Viceroy of Kush, a region that at the time<sup>14</sup> was strongly connected to the cult of Horus and, perhaps even more emphatically, to the royal cult.

In this perspective, Bata is a symbol of the ultimate destination of each man: to become a king and thus a deity. Note that in the beginning of the tale Bata is nothing more than a simple farmer, someone down at the bottom of the Egyptian social hierarchy. The uncanny transformation he undergoes can only be perceived as being allegorical.

Such deification process follows a carefully established sequence throughout the story. Firstly, a "death" is needed: the departure from Egypt (symbolising the death to the organized cosmos), the loss of sex (evoking the loss of vitality) and the loss of the heart (symbolising the loss of personal conscience).

Secondly and lastly, a rebirth takes place: Bata regains his normal appearance and through solar manifestations suffers his final transformation into king of Egypt, the ultimate model of perfection for a deified human life.

#### HEART, WATER AND PRIESTLY INITIATION

The controversial concept of initiation has been related to that of *hpr* "transformation". This word also means "come to existence" or "becoming"

<sup>13</sup> In fact, the rich imaginary of this tale seems to be, in many ways, too familiar with the solar cult of Heliopolis. In first place, many are the heliopolitan gods cited during the text: the Ennead, Re-Harakhte and even Aten, the solar disk.

<sup>14</sup> The author of the manuscript is Ennena, who lived under Merneptah and Siptah reigns.

and is used in the name of Khepri, the god of the rising sun that emerges each morning rejuvenated from the Netherworld. This fact was faced as a great mystery and became the core of Egyptian funerary beliefs. The Books of the Netherworld, depicted in Theban royal tombs, describe the regeneration of the sun as a result of the union of Re and Osiris in the nocturnal journey of the sun. In this light, the royal tomb is a crypt that allows the king to be introduced to the Netherworld therefore participating in the rejuvenation of the sun<sup>15</sup>.

Priestly initiation into divine service performed in the temples might have had a similar meaning and was probably regarded as an anticipated introduction of the neophyte into the world of the dead<sup>16</sup>. In fact, serving a deity alone could guarantee immortality since the cult granted a contact with the deity that would last beyond death. This contact, as close as it gets when it comes to the king, is expanded, on different levels, to every priest that has a function in the worshipping service. According to temple architecture, this introduction to god's presence took place gradually and was an initiation path towered by gates that evoked those of the Underworld and which the priest should cross so that he would be prepared to see the image of the god. In other words, the priest himself became a god. Funerary literature as the Book of the Dead was probably used as a "didactic" literature to accomplish this goal.

During initiation rites water performed an important role and temple precincts were equipped with special structures in order to accommodate all the rites' demands. The sacred lake containing the regenerating waters of the Nun was a stage to purification rituals performed daily by priests connected to the god's service. It was also probably there that the neophyte was purified in a ritual bath that washed him from his own sins and prepared him to the transformations necessary to be ready for the divine cult. This occurred in a crypt near the sacred lake. In fact, in the proximity of the sacred lake of Karnak, we find both the monumental scarab of Amenhotep III<sup>17</sup> and the building erected by Taharqa. This last structure is richly decorated by solar depictions<sup>18</sup> and may have been used as guide to a symbolic journey in the Netherworld.

Depictions of these purification (*ḥbw*) rituals may be found among Theban noble tombs, where the deceased is shown being blessed with

<sup>15</sup> ASSMANN 2003, 310.

<sup>16</sup> ASSMANN 2003, 316.

<sup>17</sup> The scarab is the form of the god Khepri and alludes to the solar metamorphosis and rejuvenation.

<sup>18</sup> The underground rooms of this building are inscribed with texts relating to the sun god's nightly journey and his rebirth each morning as a scarab beetle, see MURNANE 1983, 235.

sacred water poured by lecture-priests. It is certainly not by mere chance that we see the deceased adorned with the amulet of the heart as frequently as we do in these paintings. To understand the meaning of the heart amulet in them we must now return to the Tale of the Two Brothers. According to the metaphorical reading of this text (to achieve immortality), the divine principle of the individual embodied by Bata undergoes a long process of changes that perhaps allude to the priestly initiation process in which the heart performs a crucial role. During the apparent death of Bata, it's the heart that has, just like an Osirian seed, the power of rebirth. Enlivened by water; this seed is given back to Bata and his transformation begins. It is possible that an amulet with the shape of a heart was given to the neophyte during the purification ritual that took place in the temple.

#### CONCLUSION

Being the seat of the conscience of the individual, in close connection to the solar principle, the heart is also "*garant ou générateur de connectivité*"<sup>19</sup> of the entire individual. It keeps the body connected to the *ka* and the *ba*, and, by means of its intelligence, keeps the individual connected to society. Veiling the secret of life of every individual, the heart can also lead him through the path of transformations so he can reach immortality. Again, it's relevant to point out that a metaphorical reading of the Tale of the Two Brothers may help us shed some light on some aspects of priestly initiation. As a seed dried by death, the heart is awoken by the water of Osiris, giver of life and as a spring for rebirth. Note that "*being plunged into the water of the god*" expresses the reanimation of the deceased by the action of the divinity. Once refreshed and enlivened by the sacred fluids of Osiris, the heart can regain all its connective functions and bring forth the transformation that allows its mutation into a solar principle and the reach of immortality.

If this metaphorical reading of the Tale of the Two Brothers is accurate, we can assume that a priestly initiation following the model of funerary literature once existed. As the deceased is submitted to the weighing of the heart to test his purity and to allow his admission into the circle of the divinities, the neophyte experiences a purification process not only to clean his heart and his consciousness, but also to be "filled" with the divine life that the water used in ritual embodies. As in funerary rites, water could perform a crucial role in the initiation ritual by symbolizing the action of the regeneration forces in spiritual birth.

<sup>19</sup> ASSMANN 2003, 55.

