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FORM AND SYMBOL IN ANCIENT EGYPT.

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"Death is before me today
As the odour of Myrrh
As when one sitteth under the sail
On a windy day"

(Middle Kingdom)

The Egyptian civilization was regarded by the ancients as the ultimate example of a morally regulated way of life; their judicious political economy was the admiration of the Elians and both Pythagoras and Plato accepted it as ideal, the former in a small select society and the latter on a larger scale.

However a society like this, which is accepted, and acted upon as a completed one, in which everything has been considered, (especially the education of and the habituation to it, to make it second nature), does not take the nature of spirit into consideration, because it is precisely that infinite impulse which acts in contemporary life, and changes its very form.

This impulse expressed itself in Egypt in a peculiar way. One would expect that a society, which appears to have been so complete, so fixed in every way, could have no characteristic of its own. Religion, one would expect would have been introduced in the same calm peaceful way, in accordance with the regular order of things.

Unlike the Chinese civilisation, where every change is excluded, and the fixedness of character recurs perpetually, this calm order in Egypt was threaded with a spirit full of stirring and urgent impulses. We have here the Oriental Massiveness in combination with the African element. It is a spirit which begins to emerge from the merely natural, without freeing itself from nature. It cannot reach free consciousness of being, it only produces this as a problem: the enigma of its being. One half emerges, the other half is hidden. The buildings of the Egyptians are half below the ground while half rises into the air. The whole country is divided into a Kingdom of life and a Kingdom of death. This, however, is in reality no division, but a unity.

The fundamental conception of that which the Egyptians regarded as the essence of being, rested on the fixed character of the natural world - in particular the fixed physical cycle of the Nile and the Sun. These two elements, strictly connected, formed the basis of a very simple and unchanging

mode of life. Unchanging, because there is a definite physical cycle which the Nile, in connection with the sun, pursued. The sun rises, reaches its culmination, and then retrogrades. So does the Nile.

This basis of Egyptian life decided the particular direction of their religious views because of the intimate union between natural and spiritual powers. So vital were the Nile and the Sun to human and vegetable life, that they came to be regarded inevitably as deities. So that the course of nature and religion merged. ("I grant thee that thou mayest rise like the sun . . . (and) repeat life like the flood of the Nile," was a blessing addressed by a god to a King.

In the west, the sun reaches its minimum power, dies, and has to be born anew in the east. (... "they (the dead) are born on earth every day after the great god, the sun, is born in the east of the sky".- The book of that which is in the Douat). Thus also Osiris appears as born but is killed by Set, his brother and enemy, symbol of evil, or from another viewpoint, the destructive, burning mind of the desert. Isis, the Earth, from whom the aid of the sun and the Nile has been withdrawn, yearns after him, gathers his scattered bones, and raises her voice in lamentation in which all Egypt joins.

In a hymn to Osiris, dating from the XVIIIth Dynasty, it was put as follows :

"Thy sister put forth her protecting power for thee, she scattered abroad those who were her enemies, she drove away evil hap, she pronounced mighty words of power, she made cunning her tongue, and her words failed not. The glorious Isis was perfect in command and in speech, and she avenged her brother. She sought him out without ceasing, she wandered round and round the earth, uttering cries of pain, and she rested not until she had found him. She overshadowed him with her feathers, she made air with her wings, and uttered cries at the burial of her brother."

Toth embalms him and "he entered the secret gates in the (splendid) precincts of the lords of eternity..". He is now the judge of the dead, and the lord of the Kingdom of the Nether World of whom is said: "Though thou

departest.....

departest, thou comest (again); though thou sleepest, thou wakest (again); though thou diest, thou livest (again)".

These are the leading ideas in the cult of Osiris, the Sun, and the Nile, a Trinity united in one knot. The Sun is the symbol in which Osiris and the history of this god are united. This is the one outstanding feature of the Osirian myth, namely the assimilation of the life of man with the life of the Sun : Osiris, the sun, sinks and perishes like the human body at death. In chapter XVIII of the Book of the Dead, this identification of Osiris with Ra is said to be as follows: "I am the soul which dwelleth in the two Tchafti (i.e. the souls of Osiris and Ra). What is it then? It is Osiris when he goeth into Tattu and findeth there the soul of Ra, there the one god embraceth the other and souls spring into being within the Tchafti."

The Nile is likewise such a symbol. Osiris is in the beginning the liquid element, the Nile. He is the "fertilising water," "the water of fecundation", which, united with Isis, the vegetative earth, gives Egypt her richness and luxuriant vegetation - in this light then, the earth, which is the masculine element in the couple Geb and Nut, becomes the Mother according to the title "Great Mother", often given to Isis. - The concrete Egyptian imagination also ascribes to Osiris and Isis the invention of agriculture, the plough, hoe, a civil order, law, and religious ritual. Osiris is the seed which is placed in the earth and which grows - as also the course of life. In this duality the spiritual and the natural are woven together into one knot.

Egypt never really broke the cord which connected her with prehistory; she clung to the old concepts and found no difficulty in juxtaposing the old with the new and the new with the old. In accepting this one can understand the nature of their civilization better. This link formed the basis of their civilization and explains the inseparability between the animate and inanimate worlds, the probable and improbable, logic and illogic, science and mysticism, the living and the dead. The inner bond between man, animal, plant, matter and the cosmos was never cut.

That.....

That is why the comparison between Osiris, the Nile, the Sun and human life cannot be regarded as a mere allegory. If one tries to abstract a meaning from this, it would falsify the meaning it expresses. Images are not mere ornaments of ancient thought. The cosmic phenomena of the course of the sun and the Nile or the changeless rhythm of the seasons, reveal not only transcendent power, but also order. In this lies their relevancy to the affairs of man. They enabled man to find intuitively and imaginatively answers to the problems of his own existence, such as the problem of survival after death as the desired order of human life.

When the universe is seen, not as dead matter, but full of life and order, man's own life with its mystery of birth and the crisis of death, becomes significant in relation to the cosmic phenomena, and reaches a new depth. When sunset is death, dawn is a surety of resurrection. In this way the permanence of the gods of nature enabled a correlation between human and natural life which was an inexhaustible source of strength. The life of man as an individual, and as a member of society was integrated with the life of nature, and the experience of this unchanging and harmonic cosmic rhythm was thought to be the ultimate good to which man could aspire.

If the established order was destroyed, life would become meaningless, and, therefore, unbearable: "Men shall fashion arrows of copper that they may beg for bread with blood. Men laugh with laughter of disease, and great and small shall say: ' I wish I were dead' ".

But, as already said, change in the form of a regular recurrence like the succession of seasons, was regarded as part of the unchanging whole, and would therefore be significant and not disastrous. Change, taking the form of a singular event, which skimmed only over the surface, was of no consequence, only a passing disturbance in the fixed order.

A people who holds these views must necessarily be deeply occupied with death, that supreme change, which fits neither of these categories of

change.....

change. Human beings are too individual to appear as part of a series of happenings. In this non-typical feature the Egyptian found himself at a disadvantage in the natural world. The animal world, for example, appears not to be touched by the death of their individual members, because the existence of that particular species is not disturbed. For the human being it makes a change for all those concerned. It is a disruption of the peaceful order. A disorder, out of which, as is man's instinct, an order is created and a hope fashioned. A hope that, as in the eternal renewal of life in nature, death does not signify an end, an annihilation, but only a change in his personality; that it is a translation into this cosmic cycle of eternal renewal of life.

Osiris became the prototype of this hope. They looked upon him as a man who had lived upon earth as they lived, who had suffered a cruel death, and who, with the magic of certain gods, was resurrected and given everlasting life. For thousands of years men and women died in the valley of the Nile, believing that all that had been done for Osiris would be done for them symbolically, and that they, like him, would be resurrected and live eternally. From being the example of a man who had died, risen from the dead and now had everlasting life, he became the cause of the resurrection of the dead; and moreover the power to bestow eternal life upon mortals was his: "Praise be unto thee, O Osiris, lord of eternity, Un-nefer, Heru-Khuti, whose forms are manifold, and whose attributes are great The dead rise up to see thee, they breathe the air and they look upon thy face when the disk riseth on its horizon Homage to thee, O Governor of those who are in Amentat.... (who) giveth birth unto men and women a second time who maketh mortals to be born again."

The Egyptians were the first to express the thought that the soul of man is immortal, that there is something more in the physical nature, something inherently infinite and independent that will not die with the body. This conception is not the same as the ultimate blessedness of the Hindoos, where the soul is absorbed in Brahma; this is an abstract unity, a passing over into a nothingness. With the Egyptian this spirit is an affirmative being, something
immortal

immortal and particular, inhabiting the Realm of the Dead. "Behold thou hast not gone as one dead, but as one living, to sit upon the throne of Osiris."

It has become fairly commonplace to say that the Egyptians regarded life after death as an exact replica of life on earth. This is only partly true for this idea disappeared to a large extent at the end of the IIIrd Dynasty - Zoser's pyramid complex at Saqqara is a smiling optimistic representation of earthly life. The IVth Dynasty saw a change in the programme of the ritualistic needs; a sterner ritual was necessary to transform the king into a god, and Sneferu's pyramid building is basically different from the smiling optimism of Zoser's tomb.

All the tombs, however, have the carefully wrapped bodies, together with personal ornaments, weapons and tools and always a large number of pots containing food and drink. It cannot be correct to conclude from this evidence that the Egyptians regarded life in the beyond as a continued existence of life on earth. It only shows - and the texts confirm this - that they could not imagine any form of life without sustenance, and this not necessarily in the materialistic sense which it inevitably suggests.

Life, that part which is sustained by matter, gave the Egyptians a spiritual view of food, and not a materialistic interpretation of life. The Ka, which can be interpreted as man's "vital force" also means sustenance. In the myth of the creation (Mephite Theology), it stated that before man was created, all the Kas were created, "they that make all sustenance and all food". A man who dies, goes "to his Ka", for although all the vitality has left his body, he must have joined the life force since he has survived. All the offerings in the tomb were therefore made to the Ka. It was necessary to sustain the Ka, but this was a means to an end, namely survival, and not an end in itself.

Here.....

Here, as is the case with the gods, the Egyptians had several avenues of approach to the conditions and possibilities of survival. This is not due to an inability to think clearly but rather to the characteristic of the Egyptian of approaching a problem from as many sides as possible, and through this formulation of thought of offering a number of solutions; solutions which were realistic in the prehistoric sense. They were active operating symbols.

The mummified body, the burial rituals, the spells and magic, the daily offerings and attentions, the tomb, the reliefs and paintings, the food and drink, the ushabtui figurines, and the split of the human spirit into seven species were these solutions with one object in mind, namely to be able to join the cosmic cycle of eternal renewal of life.

The Egyptians could not abstract the survival of man's spirit from the continued existence of his body. Although they admitted physical death they believed nevertheless in subsequent survival, but not without a physical substratum. A man without a body would be incomplete.

As a living person man in the Egyptian concept has a body and an invisible intelligence seated in the Heart. These two together form the Ba after death. The Ba is conceived as a bird with a human face, "with words of men in the language of men," and sometimes with hands. In the reliefs and paintings it is usually depicted hovering over the body or flying down the tomb shaft to rejoin it. The Ba comes near to the Christian conception of the soul, with the difference that the Ba is not part of the living person, but the whole of that person living an animated existence after death. This does not mean, however, that it was conceived that man's corruptible body would rise again. In several places the Book of the Dead states categorically: "Soul to heaven, body to earth". It means that the Ba could not survive without its body ("May his Ba not separate itself from his corpse forever"). The preservation of the body was, therefore, very important.

"I am whole....."

"I am whole," writes Thothmoses III on the linen wrappings of his mummy, "even as my father, Khepers, was whole Grant thou me to endure for ever repulse thou me not, and cast thou me not behind thee, O Temu, to decay Homage to thee, O my father Osiris, thy flesh suffered no decay, there were no worms in thee, thou didst not crumble away, thou didst not wither away, thou didst not become corruption and worms, and I myself am Khepera, I shall possess my flesh for ever and ever, I shall not decay, I shall not crumble away, I shall not become corruption."

Yet it is precisely as Ba that man escapes from the confinement of the tomb: "Thou shall come in and go out ... and thou shall take shape as a heron or swallow, as a falcon or a bittern, whichever thou pleasest." But it must not lose contact with the tomb where the body was preserved.

"The chapter of making the soul to be joined to its body in Khert-Neter" is pronounced "over a model of the Ba-soul made of gold", to prevent it from losing contact with the earthly body: ".... Grant thou that my soul may come to me from any place wherein it may be. Even if it would tarry let my soul be brought unto me from any place it may be May it gaze upon its earthly body, may it take up its abode in its spirit-body, may it neither perish nor be destroyed for ever and for ever."

The thought of survival as Ba and the survival in the tomb are therefore complementary. This is what occurred to man when he saw the imminence of his own death and wished to prepare for it. It was also this which occurred to the living, responsible for the well-being of the dead. The conception of the Ba was the conception of a personal and individual thing, the person himself, a single human being in his tomb. This conception was weighed down by care and anxiety, by a fear of death which could not be repressed, and resulted in endless precautions. But because the tragedy and fates of the individual were of little account in Egypt, the personal and individual Ba-soul was not as important as the Ka which had a far wider cosmic significance. Unlike the Greeks who were concerned with human tragedy, human relations and human fate, the oneness of the world in the form of

form of cosmic symbolism was of primary importance to the Egyptians. It is the eternal flood of the cosmic powers which overwhelms man, not personal tragedy. The age of individualism had not dawned in Egypt. When the idea of tragedy and fate did appear, it was connected with the possibility of survival after death, not as an individual, but as part of the cosmos. That is why the Ka and not the Ba is so vitally important in the cult of the dead, for it was a divine cosmic force.

"The closest approximation to the Egyptian action of the Ka is 'vital force' The Ka, according to this view, should be impersonal and should be present in varying strength in different persons." (Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods, p. 62.) It is a cosmic divine force which comes from the sun-god and, through the Pharaoh, is given to the people. The strength-giving gesture of two upraised arms is universally found in pre-history. The thought that the Ka was a divine power had tremendous impact on the Egyptian, for it has never been found so forcefully and frequently as in Egypt. It was this that illustrated to him the close relationship between man and god.

The Ka was related to the deceased through the mortuary statue. It was not the mummy that received the Ka but the statue. That was why the Egyptian did not regard the statue as a mere portrait of the deceased, for the mortuary statue was existentially connected to the deceased through the Ka. That explains the number of statues often found in the tombs, and the special protection they received in the statue chamber or serdab, for survival after death was assured by the bearer of the Ka.

The statue does not receive the Ka automatically after death. As a preparation for the reception of the Ka, there was the so-called "Opening of the mouth" ceremony; a long ceremony to animate the statue magically performed by the Kher-heb and Sem priests, (the former reciting the prayers and spells, and the latter presenting the prescribed offerings.)

Symbol.....

Symbol and reality are synonymous here, and since the transposition of symbol and rite always finds expression in architectural forms, it gave birth to one of the finest architectural achievements created by man. They desired an eternal continuation existence, and only stone architecture could secure an indestructible basis for the Ka. "Atum, so put thine arms..... about this pyramid, as the arm (s) of a ka, that the Ka of N (the King) may be in it, enduring for ever and ever," reads a spell in the Pyramid Texts.

Of all the tombs, from mastaba to rock-cut tomb, it was the pyramid that comes closest to this intense demand to become part of cosmos. Through its tremendous symbolic impact, this building that man made stands in limitless space and merges with eternity. It was used but once to place the dead king in his chamber and after that it was sealed for ever, inaccessible to human beings, and the King was left to wander eternally from the heart of the pyramid into the sky. ("A ramp to the sky is built for him, that he may go up to the sky thereon.")

No other building has ever shown the impulse to express the longing for eternity in such simplicity. There were no paintings, no reliefs, no ornaments, just the king and eternity.

The pyramid cannot be reduced to the single idea of a tomb, a ramp to the sky or a symbol of the sun-god, but should be seen in a symbolic frame of relationships which bound all these together as cult objects with the primeval hill, the benben, and the obelisks of the New Kingdom. Its all embracing significance lies in the conception of the eternal wandering which first found expression in Zoser's pyramid complex and which received an even more cosmic expression in Pyramids of the Fourth Dynasty and the temples of the New Kingdom. It is the materialization of symbolic ideas, an irrepressible urge to link man's fate with eternity.

Every detail of the pyramid, its shape and space had a symbolic and ritualistic significance. The stages of transforming the King, as an earthly.....

earthly being into a god gave rise to a whole complex of buildings: a valley temple near the Nile, a causeway up to the mortuary temple situated on the east side of the Pyramid, and the Pyramid wherein the King, after the rituals and recitals in these buildings, was buried as a god.

The valley temple, near the fertile vegetation of the Nile, gave expression, in form, to his ties with upper and lower Egypt and an assurance of an everlasting life.

The two entrances of Upper and Lower Egypt lead into their vestibules, which both end in a blank wall. A short central passage leads to the T-shaped hypostyle hall. The main purpose of the Valley Temple was the accomplishment of the purification. ("The followers of Horns purify Pepi. They bathe him, they dry him, they recite for him the Spell of the Right Way!") the mummifying of the body, and the "Opening of the Mouth" ceremony of the Ka statues. It is a stern architecture fully in accord with death and the rites for which it was built, and which shaped its structure.

The "opening of the mouth" ceremony was performed in the great hypostyle hall. Only after this complicated ceremony was performed did the statues receive the Ka. The ceremony is opened with the sacrifice of a "Bull of the South" whose foreleg is cut off, and whose heart is removed. "I have brought unto thee the thigh as the Eye of Horus, I have brought unto thee the heart; let there be no rising up against this god...." An antelope and duck are brought next and their heads are cut off. The antelope and duck typify the destruction of the enemies of the deceased for, when Horus destroyed the enemies of his father Osiris "he cut off their heads (which took) the form of ducks in the sky, making them to fall headlong to the ground in the form of antelopes...." The Kher-heb priest is then able to say to the deceased: "I have seized them for thee, I have brought unto thee thine enemies." Here the sacrifice ends. The next part of the ceremony, i.e. "the opening of the mouth" is then performed by the Kher-heb and Sem priests, and assistants.

Various instruments are employed in this ceremony: the Ur heka (great one of spells), the meskhet, the box for holding unguents, the purification boxes, the nemes bandlet, the libation vases, the ostrich feather and three instruments called Seb-ur, Temanu and Pesh-en-kef. These various instruments all play a highly symbolic part in this ceremony accompanied by liturgy for each separate instrument: "O, Sem priest take the iron instrument of Anubis, Tun-tet, (Three times) Open the mouth and the two eyes (four times) and say, 'I open for thee thy mouth with the iron instrument of Anubis with which he opened the mouths of the gods. Horus openeth the mouth, Horus openeth the mouth, Horus openeth the mouth with the iron which cometh from Set, wherewith he hath opened the mouth of Osiris. With the iron tool (meskhet) wherewith he opened the mouths of the gods doth he open the mouth. He shall go in and he shall speak, and his body shall dwell with the Company of Great Gods in Anu, where he hath received the ureret crown from Horus, lord of men. Hail, Horus opened thy mouth and thy two eyes with the instrument Seb-ur or Teman, with the instrument Tun-tet of the Opener of the Roads (Anubis) wherewith he opened the mouths of all gods of the North, Horus the Great cometh to embrace thee. I, thy son who loveth thee, have opened thy mouth and two eyes. His mother beateth her breast in grief while she embraceth him, and the two sisters (Isis and Nephtys) who are one, strike themselves in grief. All the gods open thy mouth according to the book of service."

The powerful faith in the existence of the Ka was never to be diminished in Egypt, nor was the conviction that the Ka wandered continually to and fro from heaven to earth. The beginning of architecture was inseparably bound up with the concept of the Ka, for, as said above, only stone could provide an indestructible container for the Ka. This "container" for the Ka was to change many times during the course of the centuries. However the basic idea, namely the tomb as basis for the Ka, remained the same. But only once was a whole complex of buildings, as an architectural setting for the use of the Ka, to occur. This is King Zoser's pyramid complex at Saqqara.

It was

It was a city for King Zoser's Ka. It was the Ka who lived in the underground palace chambers, who issued orders from the government buildings, who used the storehouses, who ran the ceremonial race during the Heb-Sed festival, who wandered through the whole complex closing behind him the ever-open carved stone doors leading to the various buildings, and departed on his journey to the sky through one of the many dummy doors in the enclosing wall.

This vast complex was necessary for the eternal existence of the Ka whose vital force needed regeneration from time to time. This was ensured by the Heb-Sed festival: a jubilee of the King's reign. Like nature, the strength of the King needed periodical renewal. The interval between these festivals was probably thirty years. Royal power was supposed to have been granted for only thirty years. After this period the King was deposed and killed, unless he could prove that he was physically still powerful enough to rule the country without letting it decline. To prove his vitality he had to run a race, a distance of approximately two miles. At the beginning of the Dynastic times, a substitute was killed for the King and in the later Dynasties this became a symbolic gesture: "It was not a mere commemoration of the King's accession. It was a true renewal of kingly potency." (Frankfort: Kingship and the Gods, p. 79.) It was not confined to the person of the King alone but was "a renewal to all those beneficial relations between heaven and earth which the throne controls." (Ibid.)

The festival lasted for five days. A high point of the festival was a ceremonial new coronation of the King as ruler of Upper and Lower Egypt. Seated, first upon the throne of Upper and then on the throne of Lower Egypt, the King received gifts and declarations of loyalty from the forty-two nomes. A Bas-relief, on the lintel of the tomb of Sesostris III (Middle Kingdom), depicts the thrones standing back to back on a platform approached from either side by several steps.

The Saqqara pyramid complex includes a Heb-Sed court where the King's Ka was reinvested with royal power to rule over Upper and Lower Egypt. At the south.....

south end of the court stands a platform with the two thrones of Egypt. Two flights of steps lead up to the canopied platform. In a shrine on the opposite side of the court (i.e. the north side) the four statues of Zoser, his wife and two daughters were attached to a wall the feet of which only remain. The east and west sides are lined with chapels representing the forty-two nomes.

During the second part of the festival the King runs his ceremonial race. The distance was marked by two fixed stones. The sprint was regarded as a dance over the "field" symbolizing Upper and Lower Egypt. This was something that grew out of the fertility myths. A first Dynasty King shown on a cylinder seal, running his race, is accompanied by the Bull, Apis, whose traverse of the fields ensured the fertility. This relationship between Apis and the King's ceremonial race was preserved. A relief from the New Kingdom represents Queen Hatshepsut as a Pharaoh, together with Apis.

This ceremonial great court of the complex lies between the step pyramid on the north side and the vaulted tomb on the south side. (As ruler over Lower Egypt, Zoser's mummy was buried in the tomb underneath the step-pyramid on the north side, but the canopic vases containing his entrails were placed in the southern tomb, symbolic of his rule over Upper Egypt). Along the west wall stretches the long facade of dummy storehouses, while the eastern wall backs on to the Heb-Sed court. On the longitudinal axis of the court stand two B-shaped blocks between which King Zoser's Ka would continue to run his ceremonial race on the days of the Heb-Sed festival. There is also a pavilion, separated from the court by a low wall, in which the Ka discarded his Royal raiment before the ritual race.

The Egyptian demand for an embracing oneness in its conceptual image of the world could not be halted when it came to architecture. Structures whose proportions were inseparably bound up with symbolic meaning were made to make immediate contact with the cosmos. There was a striving towards the movement of the stars, the eternal cycle of the day, the constant wondering and movement. In this they followed the urge in nature to upward moulding and growth: "The Receptacle of this generated world" which is "invisible and unshaped all-receptive....."

all-receptive and in some most perplexing and most baffling way partaking of the intelligible". One of them is "being assumed as a Model Form, ever uniformly existent, and the second as the model's Copy, subject to becoming and visible". (Plato.) This merging of the formed and the unformed, without reducing the formed to insignificance expressed itself in Hatshepsut's Mortuary Temple, at Deir el Bahari. Conceived by nature with its cosmic significance and built in nature, the ever present vertical in Egypt architecture echoes the immense verticality of the rock structure of the amphitheatre in which it was built. The horizontal planes, sequences of ramps and terraces, seem as pauses on the upward moving path, drawing the attention to the eternal skyward thrust of the rocks.

Its purpose as a mortuary temple is fully expressed: the essential wish to be absorbed in the great rhythm of the universe as an identification of Osiris in both form and symbol. Just as Osiris is seen in the annual sprouting of the grain, in the flood of the Nile, in the moon, the sun and Orion, this temple is free from the odour of the grave. It is a pleasure garden for eternity; light and airy right up to the top most sanctuary fronted by a palisade of Osiris figures in short a symbol of eternal existence.

It is here that the deceased becomes a god. For the mythopoeic mind, analogy becomes identification. This was one of the rare occasions when myth became actuality. When a Pharaoh died he became Osiris, and his funeral became the responsibility of his son, Horus, the new King. It was Horus who fought Set, and conquered the Darkness, and avenged his father's death. It was Horus who presented Osiris with his eye which animated Osiris. In this dependence on his son in the all-important matter of tomb and equipment, Osiris resembled every Egyptian who could imagine his fate after death through the efforts of his own son, to be like Osiris, a blessed one.

"Arise for me, O King. Arise for me O Osiris king Mernere. I am he, I am thy son Horus. I come to thee, I purify thee, I make thee alive, I gather for thee thy bones ... for I am Horus, thy avenger. I have smitten for thee him who smote thee. I have avenged thee, King Osiris Mernere, on him who did thee evil."

The.....

The manifold complexities in identifying all the dead with Osiris, obscured the fact that this was a means to an end; the surest way of an existence after death. To become Osiris would mean immortality within the eternal movement of nature. Osiris was, as said above, seen in the sprouting of the grain, the flow and floods of the Nile, to be the eternal renewal of life.

The great Liturgy of Funerary Offerings consisted of the ceremonies performed for Osiris. The deceased, because of his identification with Osiris, had the right to the same ceremonies. The Eye of Horus, represented by various substances, plays a prominent part, for it was the Eye of Horus that revived the Heart of Osiris, and it therefore revives the deceased too.

"1. Osiris, everything that is hateful of X (the deceased) hath been carried away for thee; (Here sprinkle water) that evil which was spoken in his name Thoth hath advanced and carried it to Osiris. I have brought the evil which was spoken in the name of X, and I have placed it in the palm of thy hand.

(Recite four times) The fluid of life shall not be destroyed in thee, and thou shalt not be destroyed in it. Let him that advanceth advance with his Ka. Horus advanceth with his Ka. Thoth advanceth with his Ka. Set advanceth with his Ka. (Recite four times and burn incense) Sep advanceth with his Ka. Osiris advanceth with his Ka. Khent-ariti advanceth with his Ka ...

Osiris, I have given unto thee the Eye of Horus, and thy face is filled therewith, and the perfume of the Eye of Horus is unto thee.

This libation is for thee, Osiris, this libation is for thee Osiris X, coming forth (Here pour out from a vessel water in which two grains of incense has been dissolved) before thy son, coming forth before Horus. I have come. I have brought unto thee the Eye of Horus, that thy heart may be refreshed thereby. I have brought it unto thee, (under) thy sandals, and I have presented unto thee the efflux which cometh forth from thee. There shall be no stoppage to thy heart with it, (Recite four times) and there shall be a coming forth to thee through the word which is spoken."

The Egyptian's fear in the face of death contrasts strongly with the serenity in his positive belief in a future life. The identification with Osiris sometimes goes so far that he (Osiris) is made to voice man's fears. In the following passage these two conflicting moods are expressed in a dialogue between Atum, the creator, (who explains the cosmic order of his own creation, in which death has its fixed place), and Osiris, as an ordinary man:

"Osiris said: O Atum, what does this mean that I must go into the desert? It has no water, it has no air, it is very deep, very dark, boundless.

Atum: You will live there without care.

Osiris: But one cannot find there the satisfaction of love.

Atum said: I have put there transfiguration in the place of water, air and satisfaction; carefreeness in the place of bread and beer."

This fear and hope drives the Egyptian even further. In Chapter XLIII of the Book of the Dead, the deceased identifies each member of his body with a different god:

"My hair is the hair of Nu.

My face is the face of the Disk.

My eyes are the eyes of Hathor.

My ears are the ears of Ap-nat.

My nose is the nose of Khenti-khas.

My lips are the lips of Anpu.

My teeth are the teeth of Serqet.

My neck is the neck of the divine goddess Isis.

My hands are the hands of Ba-neb-tattu.

My fore-arms are the fore-arms of Neith, the Lady of Sais.

My backbone is the backbone of Suti.

My phallus is the phallus of Osiris.

My reins are the reins of the Lords of Kher-aba.

My chest is the chest of the Mighty one of Terror.

My belly and back are the belly and back of Sekhet.

My buttocks are the buttocks of the Eye of Horus.

My.....

My hips and legs are the hips and legs of Nut.

My feet are the feet of Ptah.

My fingers and my leg-bones are the fingers and leg-bones of the
Living Gods.

There is no member of my body which is not the member of a god. The
God Thoth shieldeth my body altogether, and I am Ra day by day."

The alleged feud between Osiris and Ra is largely a modern construction. Underneath the endless local uses, traditions and apparent chaos in their religion, there is the essential unity in the wish to be absorbed in the great rhythm, in which all the apparent diverse elements found a common basis. "I grant thee, that thou mayest rise like the sun, rejuvenate thyself like the moon, repeat life like the flood of the Nile." In this wish for eternal life, Ra (the Sun), Thoth (the Moon), Osiris (the Nile) are all bound together as part of the future condition of perennial movement.

This is why the road to the tomb (also called the "roads of the West") cannot be regarded as a mere road from the deceased's house to his tomb. This journey to the tomb merges without break into the "beautiful roads on which walk the venerated dead" with the Sun, the Moon, and the stars. It is his wish to become part of this cycle, and in the funerary ceremony the whole movement of sending the deceased to the "sky" is reflected in this last journey; it is part of the ceremony, as is also the crossing of the Nile.

In the crossing of the Nile another highly symbolic act is performed in support of the deceased's effort to become part of the cosmic circuit. It is an almost world-wide belief that water has to be crossed on the way to the Nether-world. That is why boats, as a symbol of movement, and consequently eternal wandering, are so inseparably bound up in ceremonial rites. In Egypt the symbolism of the boat, as the bark of the Sun-god, had a central position in the ritual. Boats, either as models or painted representations are almost always found in the tombs. Apart from the model of the boat, the deceased himself must also be equipped with the necessary passwords and spells which will ensure that
the.....

the ferryman will take him across. He himself is often appealed to, to "Commend King Teti to 'look-Behind' ferryman of the Lily-lake, that he may bring the ferry-boat of the Lily-lake, for King Teti, in which he ferries the gods to yonder side of the Lily-lake, that he may ferry King Teti to yonder side of the Lily-lake, to the east side of the sky." Occasionally the four guardians of the boat are even threatened: "If ye delay to ferry over the ferry-boat to this King Pepi, this King Pepi will tell this your name to the people, which he knows (to know the name of a god is to be able to control him) ... King Pepi will pluck out these locks that are in the middle of your heads like lotus flowers in the garden."

The deceased dare not be without a boat, for, in failing to have one, he will be unable to ".... ascend unto his horizon, conducting him to the shaft of the Necropolis in peace, in peace beside the great God. (To proceed) in peace to the sky, the horizon, to the (Field of Reeds), to the Underworld, to the Hall" In other words to join the whole cosmic circuit over the earth and under the earth. One often finds the following: "Make a good burial for Amenemhet..... causing him to ascend to the sky in peace..." From this one can conclude that the way to the tomb leads to the great circuit, embracing sky, horizon, the Field of Rushes; in fact the whole cosmic rhythm of eternal renewal of life.

"Uhm ankh" (repeating life), become the keywords to his conception of the future life; a repetitive, regular, recurring movement in which the dead take part. The following beautiful stanza echoes this:

"Thou risest and settest, thou goest down with Ra, sinking in the dusk with Nedy;

Thou risest and settest, thou risest up with Ra, and ascendest with the great reed float;

Thou risest and settest, thou goest down with Nephthys, sinking in the dusk with the evening bark of the sun;

Thou risest and settest; thou risest up with Isis, ascending with the morning bark of the sun."

And yet, despite all the precautionary measures to ensure that man shall

become.....

become part of this movement, one never finds an explicit statement that man will find himself a participant in this state. This is a degree of abstraction which is totally alien to the Egyptian thought. Yet it does form the basis for imaginary concepts which held significance for the Egyptian. But if one takes these concepts or images, of joining the Sun in his boat, or rejuvenation with Osiris, literally, it would be inadequate. It would be the same as imagining the Devil roasting the wicked in Hell. The mood must be grasped, and the expectation which these images signify translated into abstract terms. But in doing so one destroys the directness and emotional complexity, the purpose which originally caused its existence. For example: When sunset is death, dawn is a surety of resurrection. The relevancy of nature to human problems is a direct experience, not an intellectual argument; it is an intuitive insight, not a theory; it gives rise to faith not knowledge. This is why a concrete concept of the Netherworld is ignored. There is neither a Valhalla nor an Island of the Blessed. The texts are to a large extent of a practical nature: they supply the knowledge the dead will require on their journey; they do not express the expectations at the end of the journey.

The few phrases referring to the Hereafter as the Field of Rushes "where corn (grows) four cubits (high), one cubit the ear and three cubits the stem" is secondary and artificial. It really stands for the cosmic, dynamic Hereafter; a place one passes through, as can be seen in the following passage from the Pyramid Texts:

"Heaven was pregnant with thee, together with Orion;
The morning bore thee together with Orion.
(Since he) lives who lives by order of the gods,
Thou shalt live.
Thou risest with Orion in the eastern part of Heaven;
Thou settest with Orion in the western part of Heaven.
The third of you (i.e. your companion) is the Dog star, of the pure
places,
It is she who will guide you on the beautiful roads
Which are in Heaven, in the Field of Rushes".

The Field of Rushes then, does not possess any particular location. It seems to be the place where the dead are in connection with the Solar and Astral circuit.

The main impulse which induces man to depict himself in his future state is fear. The conviction that man survives death does not diminish the fear of death. The Egyptian experienced both conviction and fear, but when he came to depicting survival, fear prevailed. The same is true in almost all religions, and fear of death always finds expression in imaginary obstacles on the way to blessedness. In Egypt this is one of the commonest themes. The conviction of life after death is consistent and cannot be doubted, but it is often obliterated with the ever-present fear of death, which found its outlet in definite and often rather horrible images. These images are not the same as the Christian conception of Hell where they "shall be cast in a furnace of fire (and where) there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth". With the Egyptian this was not a lasting state of wretchedness, but dangers and obstacles which could be overcome, provided the deceased knows the various spells, such as "knowing their names" and is furnished with magic formulae on amulets.

In Chapter XVII of the Book of the Dead, for example, the deceased is confronted by the "Watchers who carry murderous knives, who possess cruel fingers and who would slay those who are in the following of Osiris. May these Watchers never gain mastery over me, and may I never fall under their knives! May their knives never gain mastery over me. May I never fall under the knives wherewith they inflict cruel tortures. For I know their names, and I know the being, Matchet, who is among them in the House of Osiris. He shooteth forth rays of light from his eye, being himself invisible, and he goeth round about Heaven robed in flames which come from his mouth commanding Hapi, but remaining invisible himself.

O Ra-Tem... deliver thou the scribe Nebseni, whose word is truth, from the god whose face is like unto that of a greyhound, whose brows are like those of a man, who feedeth upon the dead, who watcheth at the Bend of the Lake of
fire.....



Fire, who devoureth the bodies of the dead, and swalloweth hearts, and who voideth filth, but who himself remaineth unseen.

Who is this greyhound-faced god?

His name is 'Everlasting Devourer' and liveth in the Doman (of Fire)."

There is no end to spells of this type; fear and precaution combine in a chain reaction in which each newly formed security disintegrates by the apprehension of a new danger. Another of these dangers is the judgment in the Hereafter.

One must distinguish between the ancient texts (which are in keeping with the concept that the gods insist on Maat), and the judgment in the funerary papyri. The conception of Maat - order, justice and truth - expresses the Egyptian belief that the universe is changeless and that all the apparent opposites must, therefore, hold each other in equilibrium. This had a definite influence on the moral philosophy. It rewards whatever exists with a semblance of permanence. It excludes any radical change in the existing conditions. It allows a man "to strive after every excellence until there be no fault in his nature" (Breasted: Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt, p.142), but that implies harmony with the established order. For the Egyptian, therefore, the righteous man was in harmony with the divine order. This view does away with a formal judgment, and has great dignity. The "Instructions for King Merikare" puts it as follows:

"Put not thy faith in the length of years, for the gods regard a lifetime as but an hour. A man remains over after reaching the haven of death. His deeds are laid beside him for all treasure. Eternal is the existence yonder. A fool is he who has made light of it. But he who has reached it without wrongdoing, shall continue yonder like a god, stepping forward boldly like the Lords of Eternity."

The forty-two judges in the Hereafter belong to an entirely different frame of mind. They, like the Watchers with Knives, were another obstacle to overcome, and they are overcome in exactly the same way, namely by magic. The dead were buried with copies of the "Negative Confession" in which they

emphatically

emphatically denied any wrongdoing. They are furthermore furnished with a spell to prevent their own hearts from bearing witness against them. The deceased's fear of the forty-two judges and the Judgment is, therefore, in line with his fear that he might forget his name, or that he might have to walk upside down, or with his head bent, or eat dirt.

From this evidence one may conclude that immortality found in sharing the eternal movements of nature is too vague and too unrelated to the actual problems of human life to qualify as a basic faith. But one must remember that the Egyptian lived extremely close to nature, and found in the recurring phenomena meaning that went far beyond the sphere of usefulness. There was a deep emotional involvement in the course of the Sun and in the floods of the Nile. Besides, the one-sidedness of any belief could find a corrective in other views held simultaneously.

One sees this repeatedly in the multiplicity of approaches to this particular problem. Some are abstract, symbolic approaches, such as the crossing of the Nile; others are concrete, expressions in form, but at the root of all these lay the metaphysical problem of the relation between life and death, in conjunction with nature.

Seen in this light, the various approaches and varying answers are not a disunion, but all imply the same assertion that death is life and that the significance of life is as timeless as death. In the funerary art one sees a joyful awareness of earth's fecundity, of animals and plants. It is a denial that death should be a negation of life. Indeed the Egyptians attempt a harmonious approximation, a mutual interdependence of life and death never equalled by any other people.

True, death claimed ever present awareness and unceasing service on the part of the living; but this was not merely the price by which doubt and terror could be kept at bay, but also the tribute paid to the phenomenon of life, which, pictured in a funerary setting, became unassailable even by death.

The.....

The paradox of the oneness of life and death is balanced on a knife's edge between childish, wish-bound thought and profound resignation and recognition that life is eternal only through death.

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