
DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE AFTERLIFE
ديمقراطية الحياة ما بعد الموت

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DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE AFTERLIFE

ديمقراطية الحياة ما بعد الموت

Mark Smith

Demokratisierung des Jenseits

Démocratisation de l'au-delà

Egyptian religion is characterized by a remarkable degree of continuity, but changes did nevertheless occur in the religious sphere from time to time. One often-cited instance of such a change is the so-called democratization or demotization of the afterlife in the First Intermediate Period. This study examines the evidence for the development in question, concluding that no such change actually took place, albeit not for the reasons advanced by others who have arrived at the same conclusion previously. Based on the results obtained in the examination of this particular problem, a number of general points are then made about the methodology to be employed in the study of religious change in ancient Egypt as a whole.

عرفت الديانة المصرية القديمة بكم من الإستمرارية بالرغم من حدوث بعض التغييرات بالدين من حين إلى آخر. ومن أحد هذه التغييرات التي تُذكر كثيراً هي ديمقراطية الحياة ما بعد الموت التي ظهرت في عصر الإنتقال الأول. والمقصود بالديمقراطية هنا هو جعل الحياة ما بعد الموت في متناول يد الجميع. النقاش هنا يفحص دلائل التطور المذكور أعلاه مستنتجاً أنه لم تقع أي تغييرات من هذا النوع ولكن هذه النتيجة ليست بناءً على الدلائل والأسباب التي توصل إليها السابقون. يتم هنا توضيح عدة نقاط عن الطرق التي تستخدم لدراسة التغييرات الدينية بمصر القديمة وهذا من خلال نتائج البحث عن هذا السؤال تحديداً.

Starting in the reign of Unas (2353 - 2323 BCE), the last ruler of the Fifth Dynasty, the burial chambers and other parts of the interiors of royal pyramids at Saqqara were inscribed with spells intended to bring about the resurrection of the king after his death and allow him to ascend to a new plane of existence in the sky, while at the same time providing his sustenance and other material needs. The collective term given to these spells by Egyptologists is the Pyramid Texts. Not all pyramids have the same number of them, nor do they always occur in the same sequence. Apart from the pyramid of Unas, they have also been discovered in those of kings Teti, Pepi I, Merenra, and Pepi II of the Sixth Dynasty, and Ibi of the Eighth Dynasty, as

well as in those of four queens: Neith, Iput II, Wedjetbetni, and Ankhesenpepi II. The first three of these were wives of Pepi II; the last that of Pepi I (Allen 2005: 1 - 2).

One particularly important category of spells within this corpus is that of *sakhu*, or “glorifications.” These are ritual utterances whose purpose is to transfigure the deceased into an *akh*, or glorified spirit, enabling them to join the company of the gods in the afterlife and share in the privileges that they enjoyed (Assmann 2001: 323). As a result of the recitation of such spells in conjunction with the mummification rituals performed for his benefit, the deceased ruler was believed to acquire an Osirian aspect or form as well. Our

sources refer to this as the “Osiris” of that king (Smith 2006).

At some point after the end of the Old Kingdom, glorifications and other spells intended to benefit the deceased in the afterlife began to be inscribed inside the coffins of non-royal individuals who had sufficient means to pay for them to be decorated in this manner. (For what may be an isolated earlier instance, see below.) Egyptologists refer to these as the Coffin Texts. A number of the spells in question were taken over from the Pyramid Texts, in some instances with considerable editing or alteration, but there is a large amount of new material as well. In many Coffin Text spells, non-royal individuals are referred to as the Osiris of so-and-so, just as royalty had been earlier (see, for example, Willems 1996: 83, 375), and they continue to be so designated in later texts for the afterlife, right up until the end of Egyptian history.

The significance of this development has been much debated. Some believe that the Coffin Texts reflect a change in religious ideas triggered by the decline of royal power and centralized control in the First Intermediate Period, and consequent loss of respect for both the person of the king and the institution of kingship itself at that time. As a result, privileges formerly restricted to royalty—acquisition of an Osirian form or aspect and integration into the hierarchy of the gods in the afterlife—were now usurped by non-royal individuals who had gained access to copies of the spells and rituals that were believed to grant them. Whereas previously, these individuals had experienced, at best, an attenuated form of survival after death in comparison with the king’s, centered around their tombs in the necropolis (thus, for instance, Allen 2006a: 2), now they enjoyed the same benefits as their rulers. Proponents of such a view employ terms like democratization or demotization to denote this putative widening of participation in the society of the hereafter. Willems (2008: 131 - 140) has attempted to trace the origin and spread of this idea in Egyptology, a

development which he sees as a reaction to the upheavals of the First World War and its aftermath, but in fact it is attested much earlier (e.g., Breasted 1912: 256 - 257, 272).

Did such a process of democratization actually occur? There is considerable evidence to indicate that it did not. First of all, it is a well-established fact that non-royal individuals already had access to glorification spells and other texts for the afterlife during the Old Kingdom itself, prior to the First Intermediate Period. Remains of phrases similar to those found in some Coffin Text spells have been discovered on fragments of a shroud belonging to a provincial governor named Medunefert from Balat in the Dakhla Oasis. It has been argued that these were originally inscribed on his coffin, which is now lost, and were imprinted on the shroud as a result of prolonged direct contact between its surface and that of the inner wall of the coffin in damp conditions (Valloggia 1986: 74 - 78, pls. 62 - 63). The texts on Medunefert’s shroud are generally dated to the Sixth Dynasty, although Fischer (1997: 184, n. 43) has argued that they cannot be earlier than the Eighth. There is additional material of this type that has been attributed to the late Old Kingdom—for instance, inscribed fragments from the burial chamber of a man called Meni at Dendara (Petrie 1900: 44 - 45, pl. 3); Berlin 7730, a block from a private tomb of unknown provenience (Königliche Museen zu Berlin 1913: 3, 266); and Gardiner Papyri II - IV (Mathieu 2004: 254, n. 10, with references to earlier literature), but here the dating is less certain, some preferring to assign these to the First Intermediate Period (e.g., Fischer 1968: 85 - 91; 1978: 47, n. 19; Hays 2004: 175 - 176, n. 4; Willems 1988: 246, n. 24). Other possible examples of texts for the afterlife inscribed for non-royal individuals during the Old Kingdom include the so-called *Herdsman’s Song* and *Song of the Palanquin* found in tombs of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties (Altenmüller 1984 - 1985: 15 - 30; Meyer 1990: 235 - 284). With these it is not the date that is uncertain, but rather the nature and function of the texts themselves.

Although the direct evidence provided by actual specimens of works of this nature is rather sparse, we have abundant indirect evidence, both representational and textual, which demonstrates that non-royal individuals already had access to and enjoyed the benefits of glorifications and similar ritual utterances in the Old Kingdom. A scene in the Sixth Dynasty tomb of Kagemni at Saqqara, for instance, depicts a lector priest reading from a papyrus roll for his benefit. The labels in front of and behind this figure inform us that he is “reciting numerous glorifications” (Assmann 2002: 13 - 15; cf. Badawy 1981). Similar representations with labels alluding to the recitation of glorifications for the benefit of the deceased occur in other Old Kingdom tombs as well (Simpson 1976: figs. 22 and 24; Wilson 1944: 208, 213 - 217).

Furthermore, a number of statements in tomb inscriptions of this period attest to the tomb owner’s access to and knowledge of such spells. Thus, in his tomb at Giza, the Sixth Dynasty scribe Ankhudja asserts, “I am an excellent spirit who knows his utterances” (Junker 1929 - 1955, VIII: 134 - 135 and Abb. 62). Other tomb owners claim: “I know everything through which one becomes a spirit in the necropolis” (Edel 1944: 22 - 26). In several texts, the deceased claims to be an excellent spirit who knows or is equipped with magic, the source of which must have been written spells (Edel 1944: 22 - 25; Kloth 2002: 117 - 118). Other inscriptions, while omitting any reference to personal knowledge on the part of the tomb owner, record that glorification rituals have been performed for him or express the hope that they will be (e.g., Edel 1944: 26 - 29; 1953: 328; Goyon 1959: 17 and pl. 3).

The attribution of the status of *akh*, “spirit,” to the non-royal deceased is attested very early in Egyptian history. Since an individual was believed to acquire this status as a direct result of the recitation of glorification spells for his benefit, a practice already attested in the early Fourth Dynasty tomb of Metjen (Lepsius 1849 - 1859, II: pl. 4), this attribution in itself is sufficient proof that access to such texts

was not solely a royal prerogative in the Old Kingdom. Moreover, the designation *akh* explicitly situates the dead person within a group. An important part of being transfigured as a spirit is the perception of that status by others, chiefly the deities into whose company the deceased seeks to be accepted. Only through their reaction is it reified. As Assmann (2001: 453 - 454) aptly puts it, paraphrasing Ralph Waldo Emerson, transfiguration “is in the eye of the beholder.” Thus, just like their kings, non-royal individuals during the Old Kingdom were supposed to enjoy the benefits of integration into the hierarchy of the gods in the afterlife.

The Egyptians believed that one important result of becoming a spirit was that a person’s *ba* was awakened or animated. The word *ba* means, literally, “what is immanent”—that is, visible manifestation. The *ba* is not an element or component of an individual. Rather, it is the whole person, but as seen from a particular aspect: the form in which that person was manifested in the physical world posthumously. As a *ba*, the deceased could leave the realm of the dead and travel anywhere on earth or in the sky. In fact, mobility was one of the most salient characteristics of this aspect of an individual. Having a fully functioning *ba* was viewed as contingent upon being or becoming a spirit. Although references to *bas* of the non-royal deceased are relatively rare in the Old Kingdom, they do nevertheless occur (Altenmüller 1993; 1998: 145, pl. 32; Nordh 1996: 170). The same applies to the Osirian aspect or form to which reference has been made above: the Osiris of a person, acquired through the performance of the mummification rites. The precise dating of the earliest attributions of an Osirian aspect to non-royal individuals has been disputed, but at least some examples can be assigned to the Old Kingdom (Brovarski 2005: esp. 53 - 54, 63; Daoud 2005: 117 - 118; Fischer 1997: 181, 184).

Plainly, such individuals did not acquire afterlife benefits and privileges of this nature as a result of any process of democratization

in the First Intermediate Period. Rather, they were already available to them in the Old Kingdom. On one level, therefore, the nature of the change marked by the Coffin Texts is not so much a change in belief (*viz.* that now a wider section of Egyptian society could share in privileges and benefits in the afterlife that were previously a royal prerogative) as it is a change in practice. Whereas before non-royal individuals did not have texts for the afterlife inscribed in their tombs or on objects of conspicuous display deposited in them, now they did.

The precise motives for this development may be irrecoverable, rather like those that led to the abandonment of the practice of inscribing texts for the afterlife in royal tombs after the end of the Old Kingdom. Nevertheless, it is possible to suggest various factors that may have influenced the change. Previously, religious scruples may have prevented lengthy texts of this nature from being inscribed in the burial chamber for fear that those of their constituent signs that depicted living creatures might harm the occupant, defile his purity, or consume his food offerings. Numerous instances are known from the Old Kingdom in which such hieroglyphs were suppressed or their normal orthography altered to render them powerless (Kammerzell 1986, with references to earlier literature). It is doubtless for this reason that the signs depicting human figures in the inscriptions on three Sixth Dynasty sarcophagus lids from Saqqara were omitted or deliberately left incomplete (Kanawati and Hassan 1996: 48 - 49, pl. 55; Sethe 1933: 204 - 205). Although such practices are attested from later periods as well (Bourriau 1991: 13), perhaps with the passage of time concerns of this sort became less important.

The Egyptians believed that by inscribing or depositing ritual texts in a tomb they could eternalize a rite. The texts constituted not simply a record of it, but a performance as well, ensuring that it would be repeated unceasingly at each appropriate moment for all eternity even without further intervention on the part of any human agency (Smith 2005:

38). In the Old Kingdom, priests came to tombs and recited glorifications and other texts for the occupants on feast days and other important occasions, and in some instances even daily (Abu Bakr 1953: 73 - 74; Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999: 22 - 23, pl. 52; Lloyd et al. 1990: 37, pl. 22; Sethe 1933: 121, 202 - 203). With such visits occurring on a regular basis, perhaps it was not considered essential to perpetuate the rites by any other means. It is not clear whether the political disruptions of the First Intermediate Period had any impact on this sort of activity. Archaeological evidence shows cemetery sites continued in use without interruption throughout the period. If anything, there was an increased expenditure on material provision for the afterlife at this time (Richards 2005: 72 - 73). If the regular recitation of ritual texts at the tomb was curtailed or disrupted, however, this could have led people to change their views and seek another method of ensuring that they would not be deprived of the benefits of such utterances.

Yet another possibility is that texts for the afterlife were already being deposited in private tombs in the Old Kingdom, but these were inscribed on rolls of papyrus that have not survived. Baines (2004: 38) speculates that such spells may have been inscribed inside the coffins of non-royal individuals, but this seems unlikely in view of what we know about the decoration of coffins and sarcophagi at this period. If such texts were placed in tombs, it is more probable that they were inscribed on papyri. In this case, the change would have involved only the substitution of a larger and more durable medium for preserving the spells, *viz.* the wooden coffin, for the smaller and more easily damaged papyrus.

Does the appearance of the Coffin Texts mark any deeper or more significant change than this? Before one can attempt to answer such a question, it is necessary to consider two separate but related ones. First, can the Coffin Texts really be distinguished from the Pyramid Texts or are both parts of a larger

corpus of texts for the afterlife that was already in existence in the Old Kingdom? And second, if such a corpus did exist at that time, was it accessible to non-royalty as well as royalty?

Recent research on the Pyramid and Coffin Texts has tended to highlight their similarities and points of convergence. The standard edition of the latter (de Buck 1935 - 1961) omitted many spells on coffins that were already known from the Pyramid Texts, creating the impression that those without an earlier parallel occurred in isolation and thus constituted an entirely distinct corpus. But the recent publication of spells omitted by de Buck (Allen 2006b) has redressed the balance to some extent, underlining the fact that the two groups of utterances do actually occur in conjunction with each other on coffins and other objects. Moreover, ongoing archaeological and epigraphic work in the pyramids of the kings and queens of the Sixth Dynasty at Saqqara has resulted in the recovery and identification of several new Pyramid Text spells, including a number that were previously only known as Coffin Texts (Mathieu 2004: 250; Pierre-Croisau 2004). Such developments have led some to claim that the two collections of spells are essentially one, both belonging to a single continuously developing corpus whose origins go back to the Old Kingdom.

The most comprehensive argument for the essential identity of the Pyramid and Coffin Texts has been advanced by Mathieu (2004). This is based upon five points: 1) a number of spells are common to both collections; 2) both can be found inscribed on the surfaces of the same types of object; 3) the oldest Coffin Text spells are not much later than the earliest attestations of the Pyramid Texts; 4) both Pyramid and Coffin Texts contain the same range of spell genres and display the influence of Heliopolitan religious thought; and 5) the same groups of people had access to and made use of both. All of this may well be true, but it hardly proves the identity of the Pyramid and the Coffin Texts. The same points can be made in relation to the Coffin

Texts and the Book of the Dead, but one would certainly not argue on this basis that those two collections of spells are identical, despite the fact that there are connections between them and a certain amount of development from one to the other (Grajetzki 2006: 212 - 213; Lapp 1997: 56). One is justified in speaking about the identity of individual spells or sequences of spells when these are transmitted from an earlier collection to a later one, but not about the identity of the collections themselves.

A more nuanced view has been expressed by Willems (2008: 213 - 214). He notes that, although Pyramid Text spells do appear on the coffins of non-royal individuals after the end of the Old Kingdom, the number of these is relatively circumscribed, a point already made by de Buck (1935 - 1961, I: xi), who says that on such coffins they “form a distinct body of texts, a foreign body clearly different from the other spells.” Willems also draws attention to certain features of the Coffin Texts that distinguish them unambiguously from their earlier counterpart—for instance, the marked emphasis on the importance of family links in many Coffin Text spells, in particular those between father and son, and the patterns of social organization in the afterlife that these texts presuppose. Equally, one could add, other spells in this corpus emphasize the rhetorical eloquence of the deceased, their mastery of words, and their knowledge of the arcane and recondite, to a much greater extent than the Pyramid Texts (Coulon 2004; Hays 2004: 190 - 191, both noting the similarity of the Coffin Texts, in this respect, to non-royal tomb inscriptions of the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period). The ability to speak persuasively and justify one’s actions is important not only for aspirants to the afterlife, but for the deity whom they hope to encounter there as well: witness Coffin Text Spell 1130. Moreover, the “god’s domain,” a term denoting the necropolis and, by extension, the underworld, is of central importance in the Coffin Texts as a locus for the deceased’s activities in the hereafter. In telling contrast, according to Hannig (2003: 1020 - 1022) the term occurs

only once in the Pyramid Texts. It would not be difficult to adduce further examples to illustrate the same point: despite the many features they share in common, the “world” of the Coffin Texts and that of the Pyramid Texts are figuratively and literally two very different places.

Even where spells first attested in the royal pyramids of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties reappear on coffins of non-royal individuals after the end of the Old Kingdom, it would be naive to imagine that in every case these were understood in precisely the same way or invested with the same significance as before. One should allow for a certain amount of reinterpretation over time. A good index of this is probably provided by the titles and colophons that were added to such spells in their later versions. Mathieu (2004: 254 - 255) assumes that these features must have been present in the Old Kingdom versions as well, but were omitted when the texts were carved on the walls of pyramid chambers. He argues that they would have been unnecessary, since the nature and function of a particular spell would have been apparent from its position on a particular wall or chamber. However, chamber and wall location normally only provides generic information about a spell or group of spells, e.g., whether they are apotropaic, offering formulas, or resurrection rituals originally recited for the deceased by others, or utterances intended for his personal use in the afterlife—and even this disposition of spells according to category can differ slightly from one pyramid to another (Allen 2005: 5 - 7, 10 - 12). Therefore, titles and colophons would have been no less useful for purposes of identification and providing other information on the walls of these monuments than they were on coffins. Given the lack of any more cogent explanation for their virtually complete absence from the Pyramid Texts, one is probably justified in regarding such features as a later invention.

Untitled spells, by their very nature, are susceptible of interpretation in more than one way and can be invested with multiple levels of meaning. Titles, conversely, foreground

one particular meaning. Pyramid Text Spell 315, in its later incarnation as Coffin Text Spell 421, acquires the title “Proceeding to Heliopolis and receiving offerings there” (de Buck 1935 - 1961, V: 258). The reason for the attribution of a title like this to a spell that mentions neither Heliopolis, nor offerings, nor movement of any sort, may be difficult for us to discern, but it nevertheless represents a conscious decision on the part of the attributor, and as such is a development of some significance in the text’s transmission and reception, which we ignore or discount at the risk of misunderstanding those processes.

Undoubtedly there are similarities, convergences, and a certain amount of overlap with respect to content between the Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts. Neither was ever a closed corpus, and both underwent expansion and change over time. Both clearly belong to the same tradition. But the idea that they are essentially the same, or that the latter, in their entirety, represent a direct, linear development from the former is improbable, for reasons explained above. Moreover, this view assumes an uninterrupted chronological progression from one to the other, and whether there was such a progression is a matter of considerable debate. Some place the origin of the Coffin Texts as a distinctive corpus squarely within the First Intermediate Period (see references cited in Jürgens 1995: 6 - 7; Willems 1988: 244, n. 19), while others believe that this is primarily a development of the Middle Kingdom (so Willems 2008: 140 - 142), proponents of each view arguing that the texts reflect social conditions specific to their time of creation (e.g., Coulon 2004; Willems 2008: 225 - 228). Obviously, the later one dates the Coffin Texts, the more difficult it becomes to sustain a case for direct linear development from the Pyramid Texts.

Did non-royal individuals have access to the same corpus of texts for the afterlife as kings and queens in the Old Kingdom? What evidence we possess suggests that they probably did. There is relatively little in the Pyramid Texts that appears to be of explicitly royal nature (see, however, Sethe 1908 - 1922,

I: 8 - 9 and 138), while on the other hand a number of Pyramid Text utterances, for instance, Spells 456, 467, 486, and 571, show clear evidence of having been composed with non-royal persons in mind. Thus, both rulers and their subjects are likely to have drawn their afterlife texts from a common stock.

As noted above, an important motif in private tomb inscriptions from the Old Kingdom is the tomb owner's access to and knowledge of glorification spells. A few texts characterize the spells in question as *sšꜥ* (var. *šꜥ*), often translated as "secret," the sense of this being that they were accessible or revealed only to a small group of initiates (Edel 1953: 213, pl. 2; Edel 1981: 10, 20, Abb. 1 and 4; James 1953: 36 - 37, pl. 5; Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999: 22, pl. 52; Lloyd et al. 1990: 37, pl. 22; Sethe 1933: 143, 202; Wild 1959: 104). Some individuals actually speak of being inducted or initiated into these secrets (James 1953: 36 - 37, pl. 5; Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 73, pl. 14; Wild 1959: 104), or assert that no part thereof has been hidden or concealed from them (James 1953: 36 - 37, pl. 5; Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 76 - 77, pl. 15). But *sšꜥ* can also mean "incomprehensible"—that is to say, beyond human comprehension or apprehension, which would be an apt description of utterances whose efficacy was deemed to be reliant upon the performative power of the spoken word in a ritual context. Perhaps the word should be understood in both senses when used with reference to glorifications.

A few tomb inscriptions shed light upon the source of the spells that the tomb owner claims to have had at his disposal. A text in the tomb of the priest and metalworker Ankhu at Saqqara, probably dating to the early Sixth Dynasty, implies that someone who was already a glorified spirit could intervene to obtain that status for others (Goyon 1959: 15, pl. 1). In his mastaba at Giza the Fifth Dynasty official Nimaatra states, "The king ordered all the rites of glorification to be carried out for me" (Edel 1944: 75). Similarly Merefnebef, a Sixth Dynasty vizier at Saqqara, attributes his status in the afterlife to the fact

that "His majesty desired more than anything that I should be glorified in the sight of the god" (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 81 - 82, pl. 16).

Statements like these last two might be taken as an indication that it was the king who granted the privilege of being glorified. However, the vast majority of those who claim to have enjoyed the benefits of glorification rites or assert that they know the spells employed in them make no reference to the ruler's involvement. Had there been any such involvement, this would hardly have gone unmentioned. Thus it is more likely that in the cases just noted, the king actually paid for the performance of the rites as a mark of special favor, and this is what the tomb owner is recording. One can compare other Old Kingdom inscriptions in which the occupant of a tomb boasts that the ruler provided him with a false door, sarcophagus, or even an entire tomb, such gifts being cited as evidence of how highly he was esteemed by the monarch whom he served (Sethe 1933: 18 - 21, 38 - 39, 99 - 100). This is not to say that the king had no influence whatsoever over who was glorified and who was not. A decree of the ephemeral ruler Demedjibtawy asserts that he has the power to prohibit malefactors from joining the spirits in the necropolis (Sethe 1933: 305). The above-mentioned Ankhu states that he knows "the royal decree made for a spirit" (Goyon 1959: 17, pl. 3), which may be a reference to an ordinance of a similar nature.

A number of tomb owners explicitly refer to glorification spells as "writings of the house of the god's book" (James 1953: 36, pl. 5; Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999: 22, pl. 52), implying that there was a library or archive where copies of these were kept. This repository can be further described as "the house of the god's book of the *senut*-shrine" (James 1953: 36, pl. 5), which suggests that it was attached or connected to a temple. It is of interest that all of the above references come from tombs at Saqqara, adjacent to the capital Memphis. In his tomb at Deir el-Gabrawi, the nomarch and overseer of Upper Egypt Ibi asserts that he is an excellent and well-

equipped spirit who knows “all the secret magic of the residence, every secret thing through which one is transfigured in the necropolis” (Edel 1944: 23; Sethe 1933: 143), further evidence of the existence of an archive containing glorification spells in the capital.

The view that non-royalty as well as royalty had access to the texts preserved in archives of this type is supported by an inscription in the tomb of a Sixth Dynasty official named Sabni at Qubbet el-Hawa near Aswan in which he asserts, “I am an excellent spirit who knows his spell. I know the spell for ascending to the great god, the lord of heaven” (Habachi 1981: 20 - 21). Ascent to the great god, that is to say, the solar deity, is a prominent motif in a number of Pyramid Text spells, and Sabni may actually be claiming knowledge of one of these (Mathieu 2004: 257 - 258, 262). Likewise, in the aforementioned tomb of Merefnebef at Saqqara, the occupant says he knows “all the rituals by which a spirit who has gone to the necropolis as a revered one of the great god in the sight of the king is glorified” and “all the rituals by which he [namely, the spirit] ascends to the great god” (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 73 - 74, pl. 14). A very similar claim is made in inscriptions from the mastabas of Tiy and Mereruka, also at Saqqara. These assert the tomb owners’ knowledge of “all the rites by which a spirit who has gone to the necropolis is glorified” and “all the rites by which he ascends to the great god” (Wild 1959: 104).

Further corroboration of this view is provided by an offering formula from the tomb of the Sixth Dynasty official Iteti at Saqqara (Murray 1905: pl. 18). The Field of Offerings, a region of the night sky situated to the north of the ecliptic, figures prominently in the Pyramid Texts as a destination that the king is supposed to reach (Hays 2004: 177). Iteti’s formula demonstrates that contemporary non-royalty could aspire to reach the same destination, since it envisages that its beneficiary will “travel on the beautiful roads to the Field of Offerings,” and presumably he was supposed to gain admittance to this celestial region with the aid

of the same sort of spells that allowed royalty to enter it.

Non-royal individuals in the Old Kingdom claiming to know or have access to glorification spells held various offices. Some were clearly of higher rank and status than others. This raises the question of who was entitled to make use of the spells and who was not. Many of those who did employ them held the office of lector priest, among other duties, which would have ensured them access to the texts required (Edel 1944: 21). Some tomb inscriptions even make explicit reference to glorifications recited “in accordance with that secret writing of the lector priest’s art” (Lloyd et al. 1990: 37, pl. 22; Sethe 1933: 186 - 187, 190, 202), which might suggest that those priests held a sort of monopoly over them, but it was by no means obligatory for one to serve in this capacity in order to enjoy the benefits that the spells were thought to confer. If archives containing these existed in only a few places, then perhaps access to them was determined more by where a person lived and worked than by what he actually did. The fact that the Sixth Dynasty (or slightly later) provincial governor Medunefer in far-off Balat in the Dakhla Oasis had texts for the afterlife buried with him (see above) is probably due to the close relations that existed between that place and the capital Memphis (Pantalacci 1997).

In the case of glorification spells then, there is good reason to think that non-royal individuals in the Old Kingdom had access to the same corpus of material as their rulers. The situation was probably very much the same as that with the offering ritual, another important ceremony for ensuring the deceased’s well-being in the afterlife. It is clear that by the early Fifth Dynasty, and possibly before then, a canonical offering list had come into being. This comprised more than ninety items, arranged in a more or less fixed sequence, which were presented to kings and their subjects alike (Barta 1963: 47 - 50 and Abb. 4, there identified as Listentyp A). The list is attested in the royal pyramids of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties at Saqqara, each

item accompanied by an appropriate ritual utterance (cf. Pyramid Text Spells 23, 25, 32, 72 - 92, 94 - 96, and 108 - 171). There are extensive remains of it on the north and south walls of the sanctuary of the mortuary temple of the Sixth Dynasty king Pepi II (Jéquier 1936 - 1940, II: pls. 61, 81). Fragments of it from the mortuary temples of the Fifth Dynasty rulers Sahura, Neferirkara, and Niuserra have been preserved as well (Altenmüller 1972: 76 - 77, 278; Barta 1963: 61; Hassan 1932 - 1960, VI/2: 77). Those from Sahura's temple contain all or part of items 15, 16, 24, 25, 47, 48, and 58 - 60 of the canonical list (Borchardt 1910 - 1913, II: 126, pl. 63), those from Neferirkara's preserve the remains of items 1, 15 - 21, and 47 - 54 (Borchardt 1909: 30), and those from Niuserra's have traces of two illegible items (Borchardt 1907: 83). The list is also found in contemporary private tombs—for example, those of Debehen and Khafkhufu at Giza, the latter of which actually predates the earliest known royal exemplar (Junker 1929 - 1955, II: 85 - 96; Simpson 1978: 14 - 16, pls. 19, 21, figs. 31 - 32).

The only difference between the royal and private versions of the offering ritual is that the former incorporates the presentation of various objects pertaining to the Rite of Opening the Mouth, certain items of the king's regalia, and a short concluding meal (Altenmüller 1972: 79 - 80; Barta 1963: 60 - 61). Initially, these were omitted in the non-royal version, although by the end of the Sixth Dynasty the objects in the first group had been added to it as well (Barta 1963: 78, 182; Brovarski 2005: 53; Lapp 1993: 22). In much the same way, the glorification rites conducted for the king could have been given a distinctively royal stamp by the addition of a few especially composed spells and other small adjustments of this sort, without requiring the creation of a totally separate corpus.

If the Coffin Texts, in the form we have them, are to be distinguished from the Pyramid Texts, as argued above, and there was a single corpus of texts for the afterlife in

the Old Kingdom, including the latter, to which both royalty and non-royalty had access, how then are the Coffin Texts, or more specifically those Coffin Text spells not found in the Pyramid Texts, related to that corpus? There are three possibilities. First, they may comprise material drawn from the corpus that does not appear in any of the royal pyramids because it was used in other ritual contexts. Willems (2008: 221 - 227), for instance, suggests that some of the material in the Coffin Texts may reflect cultic activities that took place in the so-called *ka*-mansions, where non-royal individuals, in particular regional governors, were venerated as local patrons. He points out that the provincial governor Medunefher at Balat, possessor of the earliest extant texts of this type, also had a *ka*-mansion (Soukiassian et al. 2002: 57 - 84). Second, they may comprise material unrelated to the corpus because it was composed after the end of the Old Kingdom. The third, and most likely, possibility is that they are a mixture of these two types of material. If this conclusion is correct, then the Coffin Texts do mark a real religious change in so far as they introduce new spells, including previously unattested types of spell, adapt or reinterpret old spells, and combine the two in a distinctive new corpus.

As we have seen, they do not reflect a process of democratization or demotization, since as far as can be judged, no one gained access to the benefits and privileges that they were believed to confer in the afterlife who did not already enjoy this. Some, for example, Willems (2008: 171), have objected to the use of such terms in connection with the appearance of the Coffin Texts for another reason, viz. that only a tiny minority of individuals could have afforded a coffin decorated and inscribed with lengthy texts for the afterlife. According to him, ownership of such an object would have been the equivalent of owning a Rolls Royce today. This argument rather misses the point. If no new social groups gained access to the benefits conferred by the Coffin Texts, then the overall number of those who had such access is irrelevant. The argument also

assumes that the only means of access to these benefits was through the ownership of a decorated and inscribed coffin, ignoring the possibility that some, perhaps many, may have possessed copies of the spells written on less expensive media, such as rolls of papyrus. The fact that only a few can afford to own a Rolls Royce today does not mean that all others are debarred from having cars, since cheaper alternatives are available as well. Extending Willems's analogy, perhaps the papyrus roll was the equivalent of a Ford Fiesta or Austin Mini. Such rolls need not have been lengthy or elaborate, but could have contained only a selection of spells or else presented them in summary or abbreviated versions, without in any way compromising their efficacy (cf. Smith 1993: 13, 16 - 17).

One should also remember that access and ownership are two different things. Even some who were unable to afford their own scroll may have been able to arrange for a priest or someone with the requisite ritual expertise to recite spells like those in the Coffin Texts for them using an archival manuscript or their own personal copy, which would then be returned to wherever it was kept until the next time it was needed. As one archaeologist has noted, "When considering burial customs we always have to accept that the tangible remains are not the whole story, even in those rare cases where the burial is found intact. The preparation of the body, the procession to the tomb, words spoken, rites carried out at the entrance or inside the burial chamber: all these activities leave little or no trace and yet may have been considered essential in ensuring safe passage through death to the afterlife" (Bourriau 1991: 4). Thus, as is true of the Old Kingdom as well, we can only guess at what proportion of the Egyptian population enjoyed the benefits of texts for the afterlife at the time when the Coffin Texts were in use.

The so-called democratization or demotization of the afterlife in the First Intermediate Period is one of the most frequently cited instances of religious change in ancient Egypt. The preceding examination

of the evidence for this alleged development raises several general points about the methodology to be employed in studying such change that are worth noting. First, it has underlined the importance of assembling all the relevant evidence before one attempts to determine the nature of a particular change in religious belief or practice. If only a part of the evidence (in this instance, only the Pyramid and Coffin Texts themselves) is taken into consideration, one can easily go astray and arrive at the wrong conclusion.

Second, it has highlighted the fact that religious change is not necessarily linked to political change. Some writers (e.g., Assmann 1996) present a schematic view of Egyptian history in which each successive political phase brings with it a new and distinctive religious ethos. This is overly simplistic. As Shaw (2000: v - vi) points out, cultural and social patterns and trends do not always fit neatly within the framework of dynasties, kingdoms, and intermediate periods that Egyptologists are accustomed to use in studying political history. Sometimes they transcend, or even conflict with, that framework. The student of developments in the sphere of Egyptian religion must be prepared to trace them across such artificial boundaries as and when the evidence dictates.

Third, the examination has shown that one should exercise caution in drawing sharp distinctions between royal and non-royal privileges, particularly where beliefs and practices pertaining to the afterlife are concerned. In life, the status of the king was very different from that of his subjects. But in the hereafter, his uniqueness was eroded to some extent, not least because he was now only one of an ever-increasing number of former monarchs. There is no compelling reason to assume that a king's expectations with regard to the next world would have differed greatly from those of an ordinary person, or that the rites performed to ensure his posthumous well-being would have taken a form radically different from theirs. Nor is there any basis for the widespread assumption that any innovations in this area must have

had their origin in the royal sphere prior to being adopted by non-royal individuals (see, for instance, Baines 2004: 35 - 36). With some changes, the reverse may have been true. In this respect, the fact that the earliest attested glorification rites are those performed for the non-royal deceased may be significant.

Fourth, it has demonstrated how essential accurate dating of the relevant evidence is for a proper understanding of religious change. Uncertainties about dating not only prevent us from determining precisely when a given change occurred, but hinder our attempts to establish why and in what circumstances it happened as well. It is evident, for instance, that those who date the Coffin Texts in the form we have them now to the Middle Kingdom will arrive at a very different set of answers to such questions than those who assign their origin to the First Intermediate Period.

Fifth, the examination has shown that religious change can only rarely be studied in isolation or on the basis of a single type of evidence. Attempts to establish the date of the first appearance of the Coffin Texts, for example, are heavily dependent on stylistic and typological analysis of the objects on which they are inscribed, as well as the contents of the spells themselves. Similarly, questions like when non-royal individuals first began to be designated as the Osiris of so-and-so, or when the canonical offering list came into being, cannot be answered without intensive study of the development of private tombs during the Old Kingdom, including analysis of their architecture, decoration, and other features, since in the absence of any more conclusive evidence, we must rely on

these to assign dates to the monuments in which the phenomena under investigation first occur.

Sixth, it has signaled the need for us to be aware of the possibility that a change or development in the religious sphere might be masked by apparent continuity. Egyptian texts, rituals, and religious conceptions could acquire new meanings or layers of meaning over time, without necessarily losing their original ones, and the evidence for this process is sometimes subtle and difficult to detect. At the same time, one should not posit change without firm proof that it actually occurred, or assume differences when the evidence for these is lacking (cf. Smith 2006: 336).

Finally, the examination has revealed the limits of our understanding, what we can and cannot know on the basis of the evidence presently available. One seeks to understand religious change in ancient Egypt by asking and attempting to answer a series of essential questions: what is the nature of a particular change, when and where did it come about, through what agency, for what purpose, which part(s) of Egyptian society did it affect, and how lasting were its consequences. So far as the specific change examined here is concerned, there is scarcely one of these questions for which we can provide a definitive answer. In most cases, the best that we can do is narrow the choice down to two or three plausible alternatives. But by eliminating the rest, showing that they are implausible or even impossible, progress is still achieved. When one is dealing with evidence of such an equivocal nature, this in itself can be a considerable accomplishment.

Bibliographic Notes

The most comprehensive treatment of this subject is Willems (2008), which should be read with the comments made above in mind. Finnestad (1989) and Sørensen (1989) adopt rather different approaches, but both are still based on the traditional assumption that the royal afterlife was invariably the model that non-royal individuals sought to emulate.

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