
HOOFDARTIKELEN

**STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE OSIRIAN IDEAS:
AN UP-TO-DATE VIEW ¹⁾**

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Abstract

The book "Following Osiris" by Prof. Mark Smith (2017) should be called a compendious and a rather bold conceptualization of the evidence and the research experience relevant of the major epochs in the evolution of the Osirian concepts of the afterlife in Ancient Egypt, from the Predynastic Period to Late Antiquity. The author's approach is based on a number of postulates: the development of the Ancient Egyptian religion was a continuous process; it was not affected radically by the needs of royal ideology; royal and non-royal concepts of the afterlife must have been basically similar; any reconstruction of religious phenomena, including the "projection" of later concepts on earlier evidence, should be solidly substantiated. In a way, the author tends to avoid as much as possible speculation in interpreting the relevant evidence. It seems, however, that some of these postulates (especially the equivalence of royal and non-royal afterlife in all epochs) became for the author sacred cows in their own right leading him to unlikely conclusions: there is in fact no good argument for the existence of "a common stock of spells for the afterlife from which both kings and their subjects could draw" in the Old Kingdom. It seems that major Egyptological theories of the past, of which the present-day scholarship is somewhat allergic, nevertheless will still define problems to be considered in the forthcoming research.

In 2017 a volume by Prof. Mark Smith (the University of Oxford) saw the light. At the start of this compendious book its author quotes, almost as an epigraph to it, the words of Alexander Scharff that a more or less conclusive judgement on Osiris is not achievable in a scholar's lifetime (p. 1). This is certainly true as few scholars live long enough not just to witness but also to implement the trends of more than one epoch in the research of their field; a standard practice is to adhere to a methodology imbibed at one's initiation into scholarship, which, however, does not make one immune to the bitter feeling, when (and if) any new evidence contradicting this methodology accumulates. As for the author of the reviewed book, he faced an undoubtedly challenging task to conceptualize a vast material on a pack of major Egyptological problems (p. 1: "There are no easy solutions for some of these problems, but this does not mean that we should refrain from discussing them"), at the time when a recurrence of sources tends too often to replace in the research their conceptualization. This makes any reader of this book appreciate the boldness of the task. Another thing to be appreciated is the author's neat approach to his theme: he does not claim to encompass the entire relevant evidence, he confines himself strictly to the ideas of Osirian afterlife treating other aspects of the cult as subordinate (p. 3), and concentrates on five specific epochs in the development of these ideas taken as formative or transitional (p. 2). The

author stresses that these epochs do not coincide with standard boundaries "separating one dynasty or kingdom from another" and that there is a reason to challenge "the traditional Egyptological approach whereby each individual phase of Egypt's political history is deemed to have its own distinctive religious ethos" to be "studied in isolation". The neat formulation of approach is luckily added with the structure of the book that allows following the train of the author's thought most easily.

As for other positions of the author in his Introduction, one should probably pay attention to a "biography of Osiris" made deliberately in a manner almost allowing to implant it in a Wikipedia entry (pp. 5-7). This manner is showy; but the piece leads the author to a highly important point: "The Egyptians considered some deities important because of their impersonal attributes and powers, the roles they were believed to play in the maintenance of the cosmos. But the crucial significance of Osiris for them lay in what he personally had experienced" (p. 7). Thus, the myth of Osiris as a narration backed his importance. Here at least two remarks have to be made. First, a major question is what was the nature and the function of Egyptian myth when the Osirian concepts of afterlife were emerging. Constructing a narrative might have various aims; but in any case it implies eliminating contradictions between its components and relating consistently the effects described to their logical causes. But it is a difficult question when the narrative myth appeared in Egyptian religion: it obviously existed in the New Kingdom (*The Book of the Heavenly Cow* and, in due course, *The Contending of Horus and Seth*); it had already appeared outside religious texts in the cosmological fragment of *The Teaching of Merikare*; but there is a reason to believe that a narrative myth in Egypt and elsewhere was a later form of myth and largely a loss of its initial function. If originally myth described the field of current interaction between supernatural actors (and most probably this was the case of the Third Millennium B.C. in Egypt), then the definition of these actors' nature and resources exploitable through ritual must have prevailed in human perception at that stage over a build-up of a coherent story about them. Rather such a story was likely to be incoherent as the field of that interaction and/or the human knowledge about it expanded and new actors had somehow, not without difficulties, come to be embedded in the myth describing that field²⁾. Second, even in its later form of a developed narrative (and at least half of sources used by the author to build up the "biography" of Osiris are late, though – and the author is wrong not to assess this point as it deserves! – neither of them tells this biography completely) the myth of Osiris allows pointing out his basic nature and function: physical resurrection after death. The story of Osiris' murder had, especially in later epochs, a significant ethic trend; however, Osiris was not the only guiltless sufferer in all times but he alone was able to resurrect. If this was Osiris' distinction from other beings, it has to be explained by his nature rather than by his "biography": hence the implausibility of a rigid distinction between other deities and him based on the alleged "impersonality" or "personality" of their function. It is clear, though, why this

¹⁾ Review article of SMITH, M. – *Following Osiris. Perspectives on the Osirian Afterlife from Four Millennia*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017. (25,5 cm, XXVIII, 635). ISBN 978-0-19-958222-8. £ 125.00.

²⁾ Frankfort, H., et al., *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Chicago 1948), pp. 3-30; Bolshakov, A.O., "On the Professionalism in Egyptology", *VDI 3* (257) (2006), pp. 188-189.

point is important for the author: he is apt to question the equation of deceased to Osiris at various stages of Egyptian religious development; but to recognize the immanence of the ability to resurrect to Osiris even independently of his narrative myth means to recognize as well that the personal resurrection could be thought achievable for humans through such an equation.

An emphasis on the “monistic” nature of the Egyptian concept of a human being (p. 7) also needs a clarification. It is true that the components of a human personality (“Double”-*k3* and “Force”-*b3* the most important of them) might be called “material” for Egyptians as in their idea they functioned according to intelligible laws and their function was observed in real effects. Like other archaic cultures, the Egyptians did not conceive immaterial things, and their vision of not just human beings but of the universe as a whole can be thus defined as “monistic”. But the distinction in the functions of these components, as well as the possibility to distinguish them from, speaking plainly, the human body was repeatedly observed³). In fact, the author spoke in this passage about some different things; but the very definition of the Egyptian concept of human being as “monistic” might efface these important nuances.

The book’s seven chapters (briefly and handily summarized in the conclusion) are rich in negative answers. According to the author, it is inadvisable to read out of the predynastic evidence more than it can give on the development of religion and specifically on the origin of Osiris’ cult or to extrapolate on that times later concepts (Chapter 1). There was no difference between “royal” and “non-royal” afterlife in the Old Kingdom, and the “royal sphere” was not a source of “innovations” in the vision of hereafter (Chapter 2). There is no reason to believe that a king was identified with Osiris in all contexts of the Pyramid Texts (Chapter 3). There was no such thing as the “democratization of the afterlife” in the late Third Millennium B.C. (Chapter 4). Akhenaten did not take on himself the functions of Osiris, and the latter was not forgotten in the Amarna epoch; and there was no idea of a permanent, firm and equal “solar-Osirian unity” in the later New Kingdom (Chapter 5). The Greek (to say correctly, the Macedonian) rule did not have a great impact on Egyptian ideas of the afterlife; the new god Sarapis did not affect the Egyptian image of Osiris; and the cult of Sarapis as well as the concept of Osiris as a savior-god did not emerge under the early Ptolemies but were somewhat elder (Chapter 6). And there was no simultaneous abandon of the cult of Osiris throughout Egypt in the Roman time (Chapter 7). The author’s intention to dispose of a number of unsubstantiated concepts is evident and predictable⁴); but, fortunately, it is not reminiscent of Satan saying to Soviet atheistic writers in Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*: “It seems, no matter what you name here, it doesn’t exist!” The author’s “no” is motivated by a good analysis of sources that allows

considering this sum of negative answers an attempt to reconceptualize the evolution of Osiris’ cult without interpretations that might seem sophisticated. In fact, the author defines rather neatly the “recurrent themes” of his research serving its methodological guidelines (pp. 551-553): in Egypt the “religious change and political change” were by far not always interconnected, and there existed “the limitations on the power of a king or government to influence religious ideas, in particular, ideas relating to the sphere of the afterlife”; “we should refrain from dividing the evidence into arbitrary categories like ‘royal’ and ‘non-royal’ or ‘elite’ and ‘non-elite’, and then looking at each in isolation”; and ritual texts will provide for a handy information only “if we can distinguish between those statements in them that are ritually contingent and those that are not”. One might say that the author wishes to see in the religious evolution basically an uninterrupted process governed with its own rules (a vision questionable due to a mere fact of Akhenaten’s reform in the middle of the New Kingdom!).

Coming down to the contents of specific chapters one notices a vast accumulation of predynastic evidence in Chapter 1 (‘Prelude to Osiris I: Conceptions of the Afterlife in Prehistoric and Predynastic Egypt’). It is hardly advisable to start it with a burial “approximately 55,000 years old” (p. 9); but the major question topical for this chapter is certainly: “Is it legitimate to project later ideas back into earlier periods from which there is no textual evidence?” (p. 39). According to the author, this can be done when “some sort of continuity can be demonstrated between a concept and its hypothetical antecedent” and “the context ... is sufficiently rich to leave no doubt of the connection between the two” (p. 40). An example of how the former point cannot be sufficiently argued is found in a theory that the predynastic depictions of boats or boats’ models were relevant of a belief in a celestial hereafter achievable by boat (pp. 21-24). The author is probably right to doubt the theory, as narrowing all possible interpretations to it alone can be only arbitrary; but one should question his own argument that a parallel between these images and later solar boats is impossible as “there is no unequivocal evidence for belief in a solar deity in Egypt until the third dynasty” (p. 22). What sort of deity is Horus if not solar and what else does the tomb of Djed depict in its upper part if not a travel of this deity, in its falcon image, in the bark across the sky (*cf.* the author’s half-articulated doubt about it, p. 70)? The author is right to state that there is no predynastic evidence “for belief in a separate land of the dead” (p. 23) and “for any hoped-for interaction with the divine world in the afterlife” (p. 25); but he rather excludes from his argumentation a natural appeal to a comparative research of the subject: “how could it be otherwise?” Undoubtedly, he would not say that the notion of “a separate land of the dead” emerged only in the middle of the Old Kingdom from nowhere. Another thing is that not all parallels possible between the predynastic customs and later notions are taken into account: the fixation of the spinal column is comparable to the interpretation of the term *im3hy* proposed by Oleg Berlev (and, it seems, unknown to the author)⁵). In fact, Chapter 1 demonstrates a truth about the research of the ancient Egyptian religion (like of any other deeply archaic world-view): of course, one needs to

³) *E.g.*, in the Russian Egyptological scholarship: Bolshakov, A., *Man and his Double in Egyptian Ideology of the Old Kingdom*, *ÄAT* 37 (Wiesbaden 1997); idem, “Representation and Text: Two Languages of Ancient Egyptian Totenglauben”, *AoF* 30/1, 2003, pp. 127-139; Demidchik, A.E., “Eleventh Dynasty Written Evidence on the Relationship between the *k3* and the Cult Image”, *ZÄS* 142/1 (2015), pp. 25-32.

⁴) One should recall, to say the least, a hammering on the theory of “democratization” more than a decade ago: Willems, H., *Les Textes des Sarcophages et la démocratie : Éléments d’une histoire culturelle du Moyen Empire égyptien* (Paris 2008).

⁵) Berlev, O., Hodjash, S., *Egyptian Reliefs and Stelae in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts* (Moscow 1982), p. 24, note ‘e’.

distinguish established facts from hypotheses; but one can never build any integral picture without forwarding hypotheses and should not be easily scared of their occasional failures.

Chapter 2 ('Prelude to Osiris II: Conceptions of the Afterlife in the Early Dynastic Period and the First Half of the Old Kingdom') accumulates the non-narrative and mostly non-textual evidence on the stage immediately preceding the emergence of Osiris. The author states a number of important points, like the emergence of the bipartite tomb (p. 48) and a degree of variability in burial practices of the Old Kingdom in different parts of Egypt (pp. 93-94; compare with the situation in the early Predynastic Period – pp. 36-37). He also goes on with his mission of *advocatus diaboli* refuting the theories that connected the building of sun-temples under Dynasty V with the royal posthumous cult (p. 71) and the practice of subsidiary burials with the alleged "participation" of buried in the afterlife of their superiors (pp. 82-90). Many of the author's arguments are intended to prove that an interaction with gods in the hereafter was not a royal privilege and that the idea of an afterlife "for everyone" in some "land of dead" existed before the late Old Kingdom; however, the truth of this notion is obvious just on general grounds. It is impossible to assume that the Egyptians were a capital exception of the rule common for all cultures: an idea of the afterlife emerged since immemorial time, earlier than any elite or any ruler were capable of monopolizing it; and it implied some contact of a deceased with supernatural forces. However, a natural and necessary development of this basically true notion for the author is the premise that in "royal and non-royal spheres" the concepts of the afterlife and posthumous practices were more or less the same. A special table serves to prove that the "royal sphere" was not a source of "innovations" in that field for non-royals (pp. 97-99); but its value is undermined with a small remark that it deliberately "omits phenomena that are only attested for one group, e.g. valley temples and pyramids for kings" (!! – p. 99). The author attacks the statement of J.P. Allen that "prior to the fifth dynasty the afterlife of non-royal individuals was restricted to the tomb and its immediate environs" and an "idea of a double world involving the *ka*" that was developed in much more details by A.O. Bolshakov (pp. 54-55)⁶; but the latter theory seems to be misunderstood. This might be partly due to some reticence in Bolshakov's argumentation: however, he has never meant that the Doubleworld was the only Egyptian idea of the afterlife till the crisis of the Old Kingdom. In Bolshakov's idea, it was rather a specific elite concept manifested in highly expensive tombs that emerged by the end of Dynasty III against the background of much less known concept of the afterlife "for everyone" (probably implying an interaction with gods and a posthumous judgement – pp. 74-75; the latter prevailed over the concept of the Doubleworld in due course⁷). Symptomatically, in Chapters 1 and 2 the author starts using lavishly the Ancient Egyptian terms defining different features of divine and human beings: *k3* (pp. 16, 46), *b3* (p. 47), *3h* (pp. 15, 45), *im3h(y)* (pp. 74-75), *m3-hrw* (p. 75); unluckily, he leaves out of his argumentation not only precise definitions of these terms (quite expectedly, due to his intention to avoid conceptualization that

might seem unfounded)⁸) but also a theory of "two worlds" of Egyptian bicameral tomb forwarded by O. Berlev and A. Bolshakov and connecting its upper part with the function of *k3* and the underground burial chamber with that of *b3*⁹).

Despite the title of Chapter 3 ("Unreading the Pyramid Texts. So Who is Osiris?") it deals rather with a variety of sources. The author shows that the name of Osiris is not attested before the mid-Dynasty V and that its appearance in non-royal evidence earlier than in royal does not prove anything about the origin of the cult (pp. 114-122). A treatment of this name's etymology does not bring the author to a positive result: among other things, he deflates a theory of D. Lorton that initially the name must have been read as *st-irt*. The author hardly comments why "the Coptic and Greek forms of the name of Osiris make the reading of its initial element as *s.t* problematic" (p. 125; cf. p. 124); but a key argument to him is that Lorton's etymology presumes a motif of mummification in the meaning of the name, which is not plausible (pp. 125-126). Most unluckily, the author omits again an interpretation proposed by A. Bolshakov: "Word combinations '*jz.t* + a member of the body' convey the function of the respective limb, e.g., *jz.t-r3*, 'place of mouth' = 'speech', *jz.t-jh*, 'place of heart' = 'desire', etc. Accordingly, 'place of eye' means sight and, accordingly, *Jz.t-jr.t* is its personification, 'The Sight'¹⁰). Notably, works by Berlev and Bolshakov built a sort of "network" of this interpretation, the interpretation of the notion *3h* as a definition of a being granted with a posthumous sight¹¹), the meaning of the ushabti formula as granting "enlightening" (*shd*), i.e. a capability of sight, to a deceased¹²), and the importance of the "seeing formulae" in the depictions of the Old Kingdom tombs¹³). One should certainly not overlook these interpretations, as well as the function of light somehow present in the image of Osiris.

As for the Pyramid Texts, it seems that the major point for the author is to prove that quite a number of their utterances position their beneficiary and Osiris as separate beings. Here one should arm oneself once again with an instrument of logic: there can be no need to identify through a specific procedure two beings, which are anyway considered to be the same; so a coexistence of utterances where a deceased king is somehow subordinate to Osiris (pp. 136-137) and where they are identified (pp. 137-138) is not to be treated as a "paradox". The author is perfectly right to approach the Pyramid Texts as "ritual utterances" (pp. 141-147), in which "claims of identity with another being or attribution of such identity to another are a means to an end, not an end themselves" (p. 163). However, the question, what a spell identifying a deceased with Osiris is "supposed to do" (*ibid.*), would probably not arise if the author accepted from the very start the view that Osiris possesses some inherent function apart from his narrative "biography" (see above). If this function was physical resurrection (and the book shows no

⁸) The author remarks that there is no evidence to connect the statues placed in the *serdab* with the notion of *k3* (p. 53); see now not only Bolshakov, *Man and his Double...*, pp. 106-109, 146-148, but also Demidchik, *op. cit.*

⁹) Berlev, Hodjash, *Egyptian Reliefs and Stelae...*, pp. 14-15; Bolshakov, *Man and his Double...*, pp. 283-284ff.

¹⁰) Bolshakov, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

¹¹) Berlev, Hodjash, *op. cit.*, p. 72, note 'h'; Bolshakov, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

¹²) Bolshakov, *op. cit.*, p. 178-179.

¹³) Bolshakov, *op. cit.*, p. 143ff.

⁶) Bolshakov, *Man and his Double...*

⁷) *Idem*, pp. 282-290.

reason to doubt this), then an identification with him would allow an individual to achieve it. Of course, the identity, or identification, of a deceased to Osiris did not mean that he became a mythological figure and the ruler of the netherworld in his own right: he only came to possess a quality inherent to Osiris, namely his ability to resurrect. This means that their relationship could not mean their true equivalence. This point is hardly unclear to the author but he somehow omits it in his argumentation: for him a plausible alternative to the really unlikely total equivalence of the two is that a deceased depended of Osiris, the latter being a giver of benefits for afterlife.

Hence the author's treatment of the locution *Wsir* NN in the Pyramid Texts, which is thought "not unlike the epithet 'imakh before Osiris' or the offering formula in which Osiris is named as a donor" (p. 159). In due course the author tries to show that *Wsir* NN is not an appositive, as usually thought, but a genitive construction (pp. 221, 372-389 – based on the data of the Coffin Texts and of the First Millennium B.C.): such interpretation wipes out from it the motif of equivalence but is in fact quite illogical, as the genitive would denote, if anything, god's dependence on the deceased and not the other way round. Moreover, the author is wrong if he wishes to dispose of the appositive meaning in this construction due to its expressing the equivalence between the two beings: to convey this meaning it would be sufficient to call the deceased just "Osiris", without specifying his name¹⁴), while *Wsir* NN is rather a designation of a being possessing some quality of Osiris and therefore identifiable to him but still distinct from him. The locution *Wsir* NN, the offering formula and the epithet 'imakh before Osiris' must have really had the same or, to say the least, a much similar effect, i.e. a material provision for the afterlife; but this does not mean that this effect was achieved in the same way in all the three cases. Besides, the author is probably not quite right to regard a deity referred to in the Old Kingdom offering formulas as an agent "asked" to act for the benefit of a deceased (p. 69): though such deity is separate from its beneficiary, its act is not so much "asked" for as brought into play regardless of its will by articulating the formula. Thus, the relationship of the formula's beneficiary to its agent-deity is not a dependence in the proper sense of the word.

Chapter 4 ('Democratizing the Afterlife? Aspects of the Osirian Afterlife during the Transition from the Late Old Kingdom to the Middle Kingdom') embracing also a good deal of data from Chapter 3 is really fundamental: here the author's conviction about the common idea of afterlife for royals and non-royals in Egypt is especially given much flesh! It starts with an excursus into the history of research that brings to a right conclusion that the theory of "democratization" "did not arise in the socio-political environment" following World War I (pp. 167-170). Another correct point is distinguishing two approaches within this theory: stating the transmission of certain texts from royal to private ritual ("more people were able to display these texts and items in their tombs than had been the case previously", as Gardiner

and Sethe thought, p. 168) and connecting the phenomenon with "a more profound change, a much far-reaching social development" in the late Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period (the trend started by Breasted; p. 169). The author would not accept both approaches; but while the latter is deflated easily (the author scarcely discusses it, so self-explanatory is the misery of sociology nowadays!), the former can be refuted only by proving there were no such things as a special posthumous destiny of the Egyptian king and the aforesaid transmission from royal to private ritual. The author made a very handy list of private monuments displaying pieces of the Pyramid Texts still in the Old Kingdom (pp. 172-174): however, the (allegedly) earliest of them, the tomb of Menakhpepi/Meni at Dendera, can be dated only to the reign of Pepy I, when the Pyramid Texts already existed. Another thing not discussed by the author is that although some of these monuments were found at Saqqara (and their late dating of Dynasty VIII or even of the First Intermediate Period is if not proved, then at least discussed), many originate from the periphery, like the famous shrouds of Medunfer. Here one more postulate of "democratization theory" has to be discussed: according to its proponents, when the royal ritual "did start to be used by non-royalty in the First Intermediate Period, it was because they had usurped or otherwise appropriated them from their rulers, a development which could only have occurred at a time of weakened government control when the kings were powerless to prevent them from doing so" (p. 171). In fact, the second part of this postulate is not necessary at all: one forgets too often what a small society ancient Egypt was, especially in the Third Millennium B.C., and how meager mechanisms of control in it must have been (though the last point is well illustrated by the preservation of traditional cults throughout the Amarna epoch; see below). If the Pyramid Texts were really created as a record of a highly effective ritual of royal resurrection, this would have been immediately known to the members of elite and probably tempt them to have it copied for themselves. If doing so was prohibited or at least restricted, it would have been problematic in the metropolis but considerably easier in Egyptian provinces, where this process could have started quite soon after the construction of the first pyramids with texts. The display of some initially royal spells under Dynasty VI might have resulted from this process much earlier than the final crisis of the Old Kingdom.

The existence of "a common stock of spells for the afterlife from which both kings and their subjects could draw" (p. 176) is proved by some more points: there are spells of the Pyramid Texts that must have been compiled for non-royals (ibid.); there are the glorification spells in private tombs that employ the same notions as the Pyramid Texts (pp. 177-183); there was in fact a set of common notions for the afterlife of both royals and non-royals revealed both in the Pyramid Texts and in the epigraphy of private tombs (pp. 153-154). Starting with the last point one should say that three of the notions discussed (*im3h*, *3h*, *m3'-hrw*) are basic categories describing the capabilities of a resurrected being: whether the afterlife of royals and non-royals was thought the same or not, its description would employ these categories anyway¹⁵). As for the notion of ascent to the sky, there

¹⁴) See a similar argument of the meaning of the Horus name: "Indeed, Horus is sole and eternal, and if we wanted to define a king is Horus, we could at most call him Horus. This would be merely a title, the same for all of the kings, but in no wise a name" (Bolshakov, A.O., "Royal Portraiture and Horus Name", in Christine Ziegler, ed., *L'art de l'Ancien Empire égyptien. Actes du colloque, Musée du Louvre, les 3 et 4 avril 1998* (Paris 1999), p. 314).

¹⁵) O. Berlev argued convincingly that *im3h(y)* and *3h* should have (at least, initially) applied to the physical qualities of humans to be restored after resurrection (abilities to walk and to see, respectively: Berlev, Hod-

is in fact some doubt that it can be really read out of private offering formulas: they contain a wish that a deceased “ascend to the Great God” (*i'r.f n ntr 3*)¹⁶) rather than to the “heavens” (*hr̄it*) or “sky” (*pt*), as the Pyramid Texts say explicitly¹⁷); and crossing the “firmament” (*d'if bi3*) or the “sky” (*d'if pt*)¹⁸) is rather surmounting a barrier on the way to the afterlife than reaching this goal, as it was in the Pyramid Texts. The glorification spells in private tombs also operate the universal categories that have been discussed above (first of all, deceased becoming *3h*), and there is no reason to find in them parallels specifically to the concept of the Pyramid Texts (saying in some of them that an “excellent *akh*” is equipped with “magic” - *hq3* – p. 178 – does not prove anything, as this word could describe not only the spells of the Pyramid Texts but in fact any ritual spell; cf. pp. 145, 150). As for the spells of the Pyramid Texts allegedly compiled for non-royals, the author singles out those mentioning a “king” other than the beneficiary of the ritual recorded in them: this must prove that this beneficiary was by default a non-royal person liable to the king’s terrestrial authority. What is ignored here is that in the Old Kingdom any living terrestrial king was in the first place the most powerful divine force, with which a deceased king had to interact like with any other such force in order to avoid dangers from and conflicts to it. Thus¹⁹), Spell 467 says that the deceased Pepy “will not revile the king” nor “help Bastet”; in Spell 511 “gods of the undersky ... do not die because of a king; and this Pepi will not die because of the king”; in both cases the king is an actor of the purely divine sphere standing in one line with other gods. King’s administrative and judicial capacity seems to come into play in Spell 338 saying that the deceased is “not arrested for the king or taken to officials ... not accused ... not found guilty...”; however this is guaranteed only because “Pepi was born in Nu when the sky had not yet come into being, when the earth had not yet come into being...” and he “is [the unique one of] that great body, that was born before at Heliopolis”. So even practical acts of a terrestrial king are divine, potentially dangerous for a deceased and can be overcome only by assigning him a much greater divine force. Were these spells really composed just “with non-royal individuals in mind” (p. 176)?

Last but by far not least, existence of the suspected “common stock of spells” would arouse no doubts, if the non-royal monuments displayed ample non-random parallels

jash, *op. cit.*, p. 24, note ‘e’, p. 178, note ‘h’); thus, these qualities had to be stated for any resurrected being, irrelevantly of peculiarities of its further posthumous destiny. The notion of *m3'-hrw* is more complicated: though Berlev suspected that being “true of voice” must have sometimes meant also the physical ability of a resurrected to perceive somebody else’s voice at the invocation of offering inscriptions (*op. cit.*, p. 77, note ‘d’), in due course it became closely connected with the motif of posthumous justification. Again, there is nothing surprising that it could be employed within distinct concepts of afterlife for royals and non-royals: it would be introduced in the Pyramid Texts by kings’ association to Osiris and in private tombs by the motif of impending posthumous judgement for their owners (see the book reviewed, pp. 74-75). There are in fact not many contexts asserting the king’s being *m3'-hrw* in the Pyramid Texts (seven of them in four pyramids: Hays, H. *The Organization of the Pyramid Texts*, PdA 31 (Leiden and Boston 2012), vol. 2, pp. 623-624).

¹⁶) Barta, W, *Aufbau und Bedeutung der altägyptischen Opferformel*, ÄF 24 (Glückstadt, 1968), p. 30 (Bitte 31).

¹⁷) Hays, *op. cit.*, p. 609.

¹⁸) Barta, *op. cit.*, p. 30 (Bitte 30).

¹⁹) See the translation of texts from the pyramid of Pepy I: Allen, J.P., transl., *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts, Writings from the Ancient World* 23 (Atlanta 2005), pp. 123, 133-134, 179-180.

and analogies to the Pyramid Texts at least from the very time of their emergence, if not earlier. Actually there is nothing of the kind, and a rather vast argument (pp. 185-190) results in stating: “It is more likely that the absence of such spells from private tombs reflects an autonomous choice on the part of their owners not to inscribe them there”. The fact that in due course situation changed is explained in the same non-conceptual manner: “the initial appearance of Pyramid Text spells and related texts in private tombs near the end of the Old Kingdom or slightly later does not mark a change in ritual or belief... but rather a change in what was selected for display in the burial context” (p. 265). No motivated explanation is proposed to this change even tentatively. For the Coffin Texts the author feels right to date their emergence to the First Intermediate Period (p. 192) and states that they absorbed no more than 47.2 per cent of the Pyramid Texts (p. 193; such rejection proves, if anything, a considerable distinction between the royal and non-royal concepts of afterlife). Besides, an important point for the First Intermediate Period is the role of Osiris’ cult at Abydos paving the way to the development of the Middle Kingdom (p. 226-235). To sum up, Chapters 3 and 4 of the book definitely showed that the image of Osiris emerged in non-royal monuments even earlier than in the pyramids; however, the ultimate deflation of the “democratization” theory is more a matter of declaration than of a good proof. The evidence collected in the book does not contradict at all to a possibility that at first an amorphous mass of concepts and practices including those connected with Osiris were recorded and systematized in the Pyramid Texts specifically for the royal ritual, and afterwards, almost immediately on the emergence of this record, it started being transmitted into non-royal practice. The start of this process could be independent of any socio-political change; but the downfall of the Old Kingdom must have certainly eliminated most restrictions to it. There is some reason not to describe this process as “democratization”; however, the gist of this scheme seems to explain the matter better than its alternative traced in the book.

It is legitimate that a greater part of the book (Chapters 2-4) deals with Osiris’ rise as the god of the netherworld in the Third Millennium B.C.: the pivotal problems of this time are considered thoroughly, while further developments are traced selectively and more sketchily. For the New Kingdom (Chapter 5 – ‘Re Resting in Osiris, Osiris Resting in Re: Osiris, Sun God, and the Deceased in the New Kingdom’) the author outlines quite fairly the basic features of the Amarna world-view: the ousting of mythology and the concentration on apprehensible things “here and now” (pp. 271-276, 350). It is no wonder that “The term ‘underworld’ denotes a real place in Amarna sources” (pp. 296-297, 352): due to human ability to see deceased in dreams and spontaneous recollections the existence of afterlife was to Egyptians a real, observable phenomenon²⁰). However, the author is doubtful about the theories of Hornung, Gabolde and some others that “dead were buried in their tombs, they slept in them at night, and awakened at dawn. Each day their *bas* would leave the tombs in order to participate in the cult performed at the temples in Akhetaten. The one who provided

²⁰) See, e.g., a letter of a Memphite officer to his defunct wife pleading her to cease tormenting him, as if his painful memory of her was an effect she caused from the netherworld: Guilmot, M., “Lettre à une épouse défunte (Pap. Leiden I. 371)”, ZÄS 99 (1973), pp. 94-103.

the deceased with the means to do this was the king himself, who was the only guarantor of the afterlife” (p. 351; cf. pp. 277, 286-298). The reason for these doubts are the repeated recollections of Osiris in the monuments of Amarna time; however, the author admits that a major problem for their interpretation is “the inability of Egyptologists to date the relevant sources with a sufficient degree of precision” (p. 284). The religious situation of the Amarna time was a complex interaction between the personal belief of Akhenaten, which he was willing to force on his people, the institutionalized traditional religion he put up with till his Year 12 (the theory of the “twelve-years co-regency” is in fact highly impractical), and the clandestine traditional practices that probably continued till the very end of his reign (and were unlikely to be persecuted with any efficiency²¹). Only a very accurate attribution can place evidence in the context of one of these trends, and the latter two of them would aptly incorporate Osirian beliefs even if Akhenaten was repulsive of them. That such must have been the case is highly plausible: the judgement “there was no place for Osiris in Akhenaten’s religion” (p. 350) might be called speculative, but what can be said against it, granted the features of this notorious world-view summed by the author are real? After all, there was no need for Akhenaten to assume the role of Osiris as such for being a “guarantor of the afterlife” to his subjects: provisions for it must have depended on the interaction with the major force of the world, Aten, and here the king was a natural mediator²²). As for the other New Kingdom theme considered by the author, the relationship between Osiris and Re in the “underworld guides” of Dynasties XVIII-XX (pp. 299-350), the conclusions that their concepts did not appear before the New Kingdom and that in this relationship the gods did not merge and were not equal, Re being superior to Osiris (p. 353), seem sound. However, to postulate that the ideas of the “underworld guides” were available both to royals and to non-royals the author only says that they “figure prominently in several spells in Book of the Dead manuscripts that were produced for private individuals in the New Kingdom” (p. 345). This is a rather weak argument against the fact that while the “non-royal use of the Amduat” is attested only twice during the New Kingdom, its adoption by non-royals became more current in the Third Intermediate Period. Probably, the crisis of kingship brought the abolition of restrictions to proliferate the basically royal practice, as it was much earlier with the Pyramid Texts.

Chapter 6 (‘New Rulers, New Beliefs? Osiris and the Dead during the Transition from the Late Period to the Ptolemaic Period’) deals with a selection of important themes of the second half of the First Millennium B.C. For the Ptolemaic and Roman epoch one of the key manipulations with the image of Osiris was the creation of the Sarapis cult: despite the evidence of the two deities’ identification, it seems legitimate to treat their respective cults as rather separa-

rate phenomena (pp. 390-409, 419). One point remains unarticulated properly: from the very beginning the “target audience” of the Sarapis cult was Greeks and Macedonians resided in Egypt (this in fact motivated the support of the cult by the Ptolemies in order to build a sort of “ideological framework” for their authority over them), so its effect on Egyptians was secondary. When considering the origin of the name of Sarapis the author seems to make an unnecessary reservation: on one side he agrees there are no real objections to derive the name from that of the Memphite deity *Wsir-Hp* (as it was, in fact, often thought) but, on the other side, he recapitulates in the same paragraph the possibility of its extra-Egyptian origin (p. 390). One should say that the only evidence suggesting the existence of the cult outside Egypt and much earlier than its alleged introduction under Ptolemy I is the accounts of Alexander’s last days (Plut. *Alex.* 73.4; Arr. *Anab.* VII. 26.2; notably, the author does not discuss them); but the veracity of this evidence is questionable. As for the other extra-Egyptian evidence of the early Hellenistic time (pp. 390-391), it is not incompatible with the creation of the cult inside Egypt. The author’s choice between the options of Egyptian and extra-Egyptian origin of the cult might have been better articulated, especially given that a compromise between them is unlike. The judgement that the aspects of Osiris as an active ruler and saviour were prepared by the development of the cult throughout the First Millennium B.C. rather than by some influence of the Ptolemaic time seems fair (pp. 403-409, 418-419); however, more should be said on the background of these aspects. A transfer of royal functions on a deity was a well-attested step on behalf of those dissatisfied with an actual “terrestrial” ruler both in the late and in the Hellenistic time²³): for instance, the Heracleopolitan priest Somtutefnacht vested in the Stela of Naples (*Urk.* II, 1-6) both Herishef and Osiris with royal regalia obviously to reject them to his contemporary Persian and Macedonian rulers. Another thing is a strong ethical trend in the religions of the First Millennium B.C. (“the Axial Age” of Karl Jaspers): a discussion of its background is highly complicated but nevertheless it is unadvisable to treat the specifics of the Osiris cult in Late and Hellenistic Egypt without touching this issue.

Chapter 7 (“Where is the King of the Two Lands? The End of Belief in the Osirian Afterlife”) is a highly useful collection of little-known evidence on the destiny of Osirian ideas in the first centuries A.D. Case studies of the evidence from Akhmim, Philae, Abydos, and Thebes bring the author to conclude that “we should not assume belief in the Osirian afterlife disappeared at the same time in every part of the country” (p. 527). However, an unexpected comparison tells that the demise of the cult was much like “the end of the Cretaceous Period”, when “the non-avian dinosaurs disappeared, leaving a vacant ecological niche, which other species like mammals were then free to occupy and exploit” (p. 537). How the “niche” of the traditional Egyptian religion emptied is a theme of more than one chapter (rather of a series of books); and the research of the author is sufficient to show the importance and the topicality of the theme.

²¹) See a monument preserving the worship of Osiris at the end of the reign: *Urk.* IV, 2022; Löhr, B. ‘Akhanjāti in Memphis’, *SAK* 2 (1975), pp. 176-178, pl. 8; Perepyolkin, Yu. Ya., *The Revolution of Amen-hotp IV*, part 2 (Moscow 1984), 104 (the author considers this monument unique for this later period of Akhenaten’s reign; cf. in general, on the practice of the traditional cults at the same period: *ibid.*, 104-118); the reviewed book, p. 279.

²²) Notably, in offering formulas the king could mediate a sacrifice to Aten even if the deceased was equated to Osiris (*e.g.*, on the monument mentioned in the previous footnote).

²³ Rössler-Köhler, U., *Individuelle Haltungen zum ägyptischen Königtum der Spätzeit: Private Quellen und ihre Königswertung im Spannungsfeld zwischen Erwartung und Erfahrung*, *Göttinger Orientforschungen. IV. Reihe: Ägypten* 21 (Wiesbaden 1991).

Summing up one should remark that some topics deserving a lengthier presentation in a book on the Osirian afterlife escaped the author's notice (*e.g.*, the reinterpretation of the offering formula in the late Third or in the Second Millennium B.C., or the concepts of afterlife in the Book of the Dead, or the image of Osiris in the writings of Herodotus, Diodorus and Plutarch). Nevertheless the book reviewed is an endeavour to categorize issues of the Osirian afterlife from the viewpoint of the up-to-date scholarship and also an invitation to their further discussion – an invitation that should be accepted by other scholars. It is necessary to stress, however, that the author of the book did not convince the writer of this review article on two major points: that there has never been any difference between royal and non-royal concepts of the afterlife in ancient Egypt; and that the development of its religion should be treated as a continuous process rather than a sequence of epochs marked with their own specifics. Perhaps, the weakness of these points is due to their fighting clear-cut alternatives to themselves: either royal and non-royal concepts are quite the same or they are quite distinct; either the stages in the religious evolution are quite continuous or they are quite separate from one another. There are no such rigorous alternatives in reality. It seems, however, that the problems formulated in the great Egyptological minds of the past century are existent, and the further development of the discipline will still depend on their discussion.

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