

THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN
PYRAMID TEXTS

Second Edition

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The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts

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James P. Allen

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Atlanta, Georgia

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SERIES EDITOR'S FOREWORD

WRITINGS FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD is designed to provide up-to-date, readable English translations of writings recovered from the ancient Near East.

The series is intended to serve the interests of general readers, students, and educators who wish to explore the ancient Near Eastern roots of Western civilization or to compare these earliest written expressions of human thought and activity with writings from other parts of the world. It should also be useful to scholars in the humanities or social sciences who need clear, reliable translations of ancient Near Eastern materials for comparative purposes. Specialists in particular areas of the ancient Near East who need access to texts in the scripts and languages of other areas will also find these translations helpful. Given the wide range of materials translated in the series, different volumes will appeal to different interests. However, these translations make available to all readers of English the world's earliest traditions as well as valuable sources of information on daily life, history, religion, and the like in the preclassical world.

The translators of the various volumes in this series are specialists in the particular languages and have based their work on the original sources and the most recent research. In their translations they attempt to convey as much as possible of the original texts in fluent, current English. In the introductions, notes, glossaries, maps, and chronological tables, they aim to provide the essential information for an appreciation of these ancient documents.

Covering the period from the invention of writing (by 3000 B.C.E.) down to the conquests of Alexander the Great (ca. 330 B.C.E.), the ancient Near East comprised northeast Africa and southwest Asia. The cultures represented within these limits include especially Egyptian, Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Hittite, Ugaritic, Aramean, Phoenician, and Israelite.

It is hoped that Writings from the Ancient World will eventually produce translations of most of the many different genres attested in these cultures: letters (official and private), myths, diplomatic documents, hymns, law collections, monumental inscriptions, tales, and administrative records, to mention but a few.

The Society of Biblical Literature provided significant funding for the Writings from the Ancient World series. In addition, authors have benefited from working in research collections in their respective institutions and beyond. Were it not for such support, the arduous tasks of preparation, translation, editing, and publication could not have been accomplished or even undertaken. It is the hope of all who have worked on these texts or supported this work that Writings from the Ancient World will open up new horizons and deepen the humanity of all who read these volumes.

Theodore J. Lewis
Johns Hopkins University

SBL Press

PREFACE

THIS BOOK introduces three major changes from the first edition, which appeared a decade ago.

The first of these has to do with the numbering of individual spells. As in the first edition, translations of the Pyramid Texts from the major pyramids of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasty kings and their queens are presented here in the order in which they were probably intended to be read, pyramid by pyramid. To reflect that order, the spells in each pyramid were numbered sequentially in the first edition, rather than by the spell (PT) numbers most familiar to Egyptologists, first assigned to them by Kurt Sethe, editor of the first concordance of the texts, and subsequent scholars. In retrospect, that decision has proved ill-advised, introducing yet another layer of complexity in a system already overburdened by complexity (see the Introduction, p. 3). This edition reverts to PT numbers: thus, for example, PT 213 is now numbered as such in each pyramid, rather than as W 146, T 168, P 255, M 184, N 323, and Nt 228.

Secondly, this edition is based on a new concordance of all the available texts from the nine Fifth and Sixth-Dynasty pyramids so far published, which appeared in 2013 (freely available online: see the Bibliography). This concordance unites the disparate numbering systems of Sethe, T. G. Allen, Faulkner, and the Mission Archéologique Française de Saqqâra (MAFS) into a single system that preserves Sethe's PT numbers, supplemented by letters where Sethe's number has proved to belong to more than one spell (e.g., PT 665A–D) and by additional numbers for spells not known to Sethe (PT *704–*806). It has also revealed a few new identifications and spell divisions different from those in the first edition.

Thirdly, our understanding of Old Egyptian grammar has undergone some significant changes in the decade since the first edition appeared. In

place of the somewhat rigid tense-based renderings of some forms and constructions in the first edition, the translations presented here reflect, insofar as possible, both the primarily atemporal nature of the Old Egyptian verbal system and the timeless sentiments that many of the statements conveyed to their original authors and readers.

A number of other changes have been made as well. Spells originally composed in the first person are translated as such rather than from their third or second-person redactions in the pyramids themselves. Spells in a particular pyramid that are not translated are referenced to the pyramid and page in which the translation appears, and textual variants are translated by spell number rather than pyramid by pyramid.

I hope that these changes will make this edition not only easier to use but also more representative of the letter and spirit of the ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts.

Providence, RI, 2014

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INTRODUCTION

AT THE END OF THE OLD KINGDOM, the interior walls of ancient Egyptian pyramids were inscribed with a series of ritual and magic spells, known to modern scholarship as the Pyramid Texts. These inscriptions constitute the oldest body of Egyptian religious writings; usually literary in form and language, they are also the oldest representatives of Egyptian literature. In both respects, the Pyramid Texts are primary sources for the history of ancient Egyptian thought and its relationship to that of the biblical world.

To date, Pyramid Texts have been found in the tombs of eleven kings and queens at Saqqara, the necropolis of the capital city, Memphis:

Unis (Dynasty V, ca. 2353–2323 B.C.)

Teti (Dynasty VI, ca. 2323–2291 B.C.)

Pepi I (Dynasty VI, ca. 2289–2255 B.C.)

Ankhenes-Pepi II, wife of Pepi I

Behenu, wife of Pepi I or II

Merenre (Dynasty VI, ca. 2255–2246 B.C.)

Pepi II (Dynasty VI, ca. 2246–2152 B.C.)

Neith, wife of Pepi II

Iput II, wife of Pepi II

Wedjebetni, wife of Pepi II

Ibi (Dynasty VIII, ca. 2109–2107 B.C.).

After the end of the Old Kingdom, if not earlier, copies of Pyramid Texts were also inscribed on tombs, sarcophagi, coffins, canopic chests, papyri, stelae, and other funerary monuments of nonroyal Egyptians, along with new or revised texts known as the Coffin Texts.¹ In the New Kingdom and later, some Pyramid Texts were incorporated into newer funerary compositions

such as the Mouth-Opening Ritual and the Book of the Dead, and the texts continued to be used until the end of pharaonic civilization.

The Pyramid Texts were first discovered in 1880 and have been the subject of ongoing study and excavation ever since, with new finds as recently as 2010 (the texts of Behenu). Most of the texts of Unis, Teti, Pepi I, Merenre, and Pepi II were first published by their discoverer, Gaston Maspero. A concordance of these five corpora, prepared by Kurt Sethe, appeared in 1908. At that time, only Unis's texts were known in their entirety; the subterranean chambers of the other four kings' pyramids had yet to be completely cleared of debris, and many of their inscribed walls existed largely as fragments in unexcavated rubble. In the first half of the last century, French expeditions led by Gustave Jéquier cleared Pepi II's chambers, excavated four newly discovered pyramids with Pyramid Texts (those of the king's wives Neith, Iput II, and Wedjebetni, and that of the pharaoh Ibi), and eventually published the complete corpus of texts from each of these five pyramids. Since 1958, expeditions under the direction of Jean-Philippe Lauer, Jean Sainte Fare Garnot, and Jean Leclant have worked at clearing and restoring the remaining Old Kingdom pyramids of Teti, Pepi I, and Merenre. The complete publication of Pepi I's Pyramid Texts appeared in 2001; those of Teti, Merenre, and the newly discovered texts of Ankhenes-Pepi II and Behenu are currently in preparation. A new concordance of all texts available in 2013 has also been published and is used as the basis of the translations in this book (Allen 2013).

An English translation of the Pyramid Texts was published by Samuel B. Mercer in 1952, based on Sethe's edition; another of Unis's texts alone by Alexandre Piankoff in 1968; and a third by Raymond O. Faulkner in 1969, incorporating the texts of Pepi II and Neith published by Jéquier. Though useful in many respects, each of these has its disadvantages. Since the appearance of Faulkner's translation, Egyptology has made considerable advances in understanding both the language and the religious background of the texts, in some cases leading to significantly different interpretations, and the recent publication of Pepi I's complete corpus has added substantially to the genre. Though many of the Pyramid Texts are repeated in each pyramid, research has also shown that each corpus was conceived as a unit, with the texts meant to be read from wall to wall in a specific order. Of the three English translations, only Piankoff's reflects this feature, though it has misunderstood the sequence. The other two present the texts in the artificial order of their publication in Sethe's edition, which conceals both the sequentiality of each corpus and the relationship between the texts and the walls on which they were inscribed.

The present work is intended to rectify these shortcomings. It includes translations of the Pyramid Texts found in the pyramids of Unis, Teti, Pepi I, Merenre, Pepi II, and Neith, each corpus in the order in which current research indicates it was most likely meant to be read. Four of these sources have been completely published and are presented here in their entirety; those of Teti and Merenre, still awaiting full publication, are presented here as completely as the current state of publication allows.

The texts of the other queens' pyramids exist mostly as a collection of fragments; a few of the more substantial, not found in other pyramids, are also translated in this book after the texts of Queen Neith. Ibi's texts, although better preserved, are not included, because they stand apart from the main Old Kingdom tradition represented by the Pyramid Texts of his predecessors. To keep the volume to a reasonable size, the texts found in more than one pyramid have usually been limited to a single translation. In such cases the earliest and most completely preserved copy has generally been translated. Subsequent instances of the same text are referenced to this primary translation; major textual variants are recorded in an appendix. In a few instances the number or character of the variants has been deemed substantial enough to warrant a separate translation. These exigencies aside, I hope that this new translation will make it possible for the interested reader to appreciate better not only the content of the texts but also the spatial and sequential relationships intended by their creators.

SPELL NUMBERS

The Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom are inscribed mostly in vertical columns on the interior walls of each pyramid.² They are divided into spells: units of varying length, from a few words to several hundred, each usually preceded by a monogram for the direction *dd-mdw* "Recitation" and marked at the end by a sign taken from the hieroglyph for *hwt* "chapter" or "section" (literally, "enclosure").

The sporadic history of the discovery and publication of the Pyramid Texts has had an unfortunate side-effect in the conventions used to refer to these spells. Sethe numbered the spells known at the time of his publication sequentially, beginning with Unis's texts and appending those of Teti, Pepi I, Merenre, and Pepi II, mostly in chronological order.³ He also subdivided each spell into phrases, numbered sequentially for the entire corpus. The individual spells of Sethe's edition are thus cited by two sets of numbers, referring to spells (PT 1–714) and phrases (Pyr. or §§ 1a to 2217b): for instance, PT 511, subdivided into Pyr. 1149a–1161c. In a few cases these spell numbers reflect

the order in which the spells were meant to be read: for example, PT 108–171, which are sequential in each corpus. In almost no instance, however, do they indicate the true position of the spell in the sequence of an individual pyramid: thus, the first spell in Unis's corpus is Sethe's PT 226.

Jéquier's publication of the texts of Pepi II and Neith added considerably more material to the corpus of Pyramid Texts. In some cases the new texts revealed that a fragmentary sequence from one pyramid to which Sethe had assigned a single spell number actually consisted of several spells. To preserve Sethe's numbering system, the new divisions were assigned supplemental letters (e.g., PT 658A–B)—though not, unfortunately, uniformly by all scholars.⁴ Others of the new texts did not correspond to any of the spells numbered by Sethe; a few of these were discovered to be copies of spells previously known only from the later Coffin Texts.⁵

Subsequent research and the new publication of Pepi I's complete corpus has revealed the need for yet further modification of Sethe's numbering system. These are incorporated in the new concordance (Allen 2013). Sethe's spell numbers have been retained, augmented where necessary by letters (e.g., PT 658A–B) and supplemental numbers (PT *704–*806). Sethe's paragraph numbers have been replaced by a new system in which the lines of each spell are numbered sequentially only within each spell: thus, for example, Pyr. 142a–c is now PT 215.8–10.

As noted in the Preface, the previous edition of this book assigned new sequential numbers to the spells in each pyramid: for example, W 1–18 for PT 226–43. In retrospect, that practice introduced an unnecessary layer of complexity to the numbering system and has therefore been abandoned here: each spell in the translations below is given its PT number.

EDITORIAL HISTORY

Although they are first attested in the pyramid of Unis, most of the Pyramid Texts are undoubtedly older. With few exceptions, their grammar is that of a stage of the language older than that which began to appear in secular inscriptions at least fifty years earlier, and the architecture of the pyramid chambers that they reflect (see below) came into use at the end of the Fourth Dynasty, more than a hundred years before Unis's time. Some of the texts also reflect burial practices that are even older, in earthen graves beneath tombs built of mudbrick. Newer spells that first appear in the later pyramids, however, incorporate features of the contemporary language.

Overall, the Pyramid Texts give the impression of a corpus that had been in use for some time before it was inscribed in Unis's pyramid and one that

was continually revised and amplified during the reigns of his successors. The process went on after the end of the Sixth Dynasty, in the Eighth-Dynasty corpus of Ibi and that prepared for the burial of the Ninth-Dynasty king Wahkare Khety (ca. 2030 B.C.).⁶ The Coffin Texts of the Middle Kingdom incorporate copies and revisions of some Pyramid Texts, and are mostly a continuation of the older tradition rather than a distinct corpus.

Although the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom were inscribed only in royal tombs, the texts themselves give evidence of a less exclusive use. Many of them were originally in the first person, meant to be spoken by the deceased's spirit and thus not restricted to a particular individual. Those addressed to the deceased by name occasionally preserve indications of a generic original, with directions to the celebrant indicating where the deceased's name was to be inserted.⁷ A few spells from the kings' pyramids also seem to make reference to the deceased as someone other than the king himself.⁸

Occasional mistakes in the use of some hieroglyphic signs indicate that the master from which the texts were transcribed to the pyramid walls was a document written in a semi-cursive script—in line with the comments of the preceding paragraph, probably a manuscript that was not specific to any one individual. The inscriptions in the pyramids of Unis and Pepi I, which have been studied in detail, show traces of editorial revision after the texts were first carved—in the case of Pepi I, even amounting to revision of entire sections of a wall.

Most of the editorial revisions have to do with the replacement of an original first-person pronoun by the deceased's name or a third-person referent, thus "personalizing" the texts for each pyramid. In some cases these changes took place after the original version was carved and are visible on the wall; in others, the original first person can be deduced from pronouns overlooked by the editor, from grammatical constructions left unemended, from variant uses of the deceased's name and a third-person pronoun in different copies, or from consistent reference to the deceased in the third person in a single spell or group of spells.⁹ In translating such spells, an argument can be made both for rendering the final third-person version and for reconstructing the original first person. The previous edition of this book adopted the first of these methods; in this edition, the second is used (except where the first-person original has been redacted to the second person for ritual use), because it reflects better the original sense of the texts.

GENRES OF PYRAMID TEXTS

Pyramid Texts are of two kinds, ritual and personal. The spells that address the deceased in the second person are ritual in nature. Originally recited by a lector priest in the role of the deceased's son during rites that probably took place at the funeral, they were carved on the walls of the pyramid's chambers to ensure their ongoing effectiveness. The Pyramid Texts contain two major groups of such spells: the Offering and Insignia Rituals, and the Resurrection Ritual.

The Offering and Insignia Rituals are always associated with the north wall of the burial chamber. Perhaps originally distinct, they are generally combined into a single ritual in the pyramids. The Offering Ritual accompanied preparations for and the presentation of a great meal, beginning with a libation, cleansing with incense and salt-water, and the "Opening of the Mouth," in which the deceased's ability to partake of nourishment was ritually restored. In the Insignia Ritual, items of dress and regalia were offered to a statue of the deceased, which was then presented to the gods in procession. The two rituals generally end with a common formal "Reversion of Offerings" to the deceased and the smashing of the ritual vessels.

Both rituals consist mostly of short spells recited during the presentation of an offering and generally accompanied by a subscript indicating the object presented. The spells often incorporate a word-play with the name of the offering, which cannot always be rendered in translation: for example, "Osiris Unis, accept Horus's eye, which you should embrace" (PT 128), where the qualification *zht.k* "which you should embrace" reflects the presentation of *zhtw* "kidneys." The offering is usually called "Horus's eye," referring to the mythical struggle in which the eye of the god Horus was torn out by his opponent, Seth, and later restored. Originally an explanation of the daily disappearance and reappearance of the sun, "Horus's eye" became a symbol of permanent soundness and was evidently adopted in rituals to signify the eternal viability of the offering.

The Resurrection Ritual occupies the south wall of the burial chamber. It consists of longer spells designed to release the deceased's spirit from its attachment to the body and the earth and to send it on its daily journey to join the gods. The title of this rite in a Middle Kingdom copy indicates that it was performed after the offering rituals.¹⁰

The west end of the burial chamber in the pyramids of Unis's successors (as well as the sarcophagus itself in the pyramid of Teti) is inscribed with a third series of ritual texts designed to commend the deceased's body, identified with the god Osiris, to the sky-goddess Nut, mother of Osiris, who is identified with the sarcophagus. A fourth ritual, addressed to a statue of the

deceased, appears on the south wall of Pepi I's vestibule. Other ritual spells are found throughout the pyramid, often on east walls, and in many cases, walls outside the burial chamber in pyramids after Unis insert ritual sequences between personal ones. Some of these include spells that first appear as personal but have later been ritualized by changing the first person to second.

The other spells of the Pyramid Texts are personal rather than ritual in nature. These allowed the deceased's spirit to find its way safely out of the tomb each morning and exist during the day in the company of the gods. Most, if not all, were originally composed in the first person, to be addressed to the gods by the spirit itself. Ritual spells can also be converted to personal ones, by changing the second person to first (and subsequently, third).

A subset of the personal spells is directed against inimical forces, particularly snakes and worms, that could harm the deceased's body or the contents of the tomb. In all of the pyramids such spells appear on the east wall of the antechamber, above the serdab; in the pyramid of Unis they are also inscribed on the west wall of the burial chamber, above the sarcophagus. Their language is often obscure, even impenetrable. Translations are offered for all of these spells in the present volume, though without a great deal of confidence in their accuracy.

THE FUNCTION OF THE PYRAMID TEXTS

The Pyramid Texts are largely concerned with the deceased's relationship to two gods, Osiris and the Sun.¹¹ Egyptologists once considered these two themes as independent views of the afterlife that had become fused in the Pyramid Texts, but more recent research has shown that both belong to a single concept of the deceased's eternal existence after death—a view of the afterlife that remained remarkably consistent throughout ancient Egyptian history.

The ancient Egyptians believed that each human being consists of three basic parts: the physical body and two nonmaterial elements known as the *ka* and the *ba*. The *ka* is an individual's life force, the element that makes the difference between a living body and a dead one; each person's *ka* ultimately came from the creator and returned to the gods at death. The *ba* is comparable to the Western notion of the soul or personality, the feature that makes each person a unique individual, apart from the physical element of the body.

At death, the *ka* separated from the body. In order for an individual to survive as a spirit in the afterlife, the *ba* had to be reunited with its *ka*, its life force: in the Pyramid Texts and elsewhere, the deceased are called "those who have gone to their *kas*." In its social relationships with the gods, the

other deceased, and the living, the resultant spiritual entity was often known as an *akh*: literally, an “effective” being. No longer subject to the entropy of a physical body or the limitations of physical existence, the reanimated *ba* was capable of living eternally, not merely on earth but also in the larger cosmic plane inhabited by the gods. If the *ba* could not reunite with its *ka*, it continued to exist but was no longer “alive”: in contrast to the *akhs*, such beings were regarded as “the dead.”

The function of the Pyramid Texts, in common with all ancient Egyptian funerary literature, was to enable the deceased’s *ba* to reunite with its *ka* and to become an *akh*; in Egyptian, such texts were known as *s3lur*: literally, “akh-makers” or “akhifiers.” Two forces played a key role in this transition, incorporated by the Egyptians in two gods, the Sun and Osiris. The Sun was the original and daily source of all life: his appearance at the creation and at every sunrise thereafter made life possible in the world. Newly born at dawn, he was often called *lpr* “Beetle” by analogy to the verb *lpr* “come into existence” or “evolve”; from the latter root he was also known as *lprj* “Evolver.” Ruling over the universe by day, the Sun was identified with Horus, the god of kingship; at sunset he was seen as Atum, the oldest of all the gods. The Sun’s daily movement through the sky was viewed as a journey from birth to death, and his rebirth at dawn was made possible through Osiris, the force of new life.

Osiris represents the Egyptians’ explanation of the force through which one generation of living beings produces the next. His life-giving power existed in the floodwaters of the annual inundation, which brought renewed vitality to Egypt’s agricultural land; in the germination of seeds into living plants; in the growth of an egg or fetus into a living being; and in the Sun’s daily rebirth. Though manifest in all these phenomena, Osiris himself was envisioned as a mummy lying in the depths of the netherworld, the region through which the sun was thought to pass at night. In the middle of the night the Sun merged with Osiris’s body; through this union, the Sun received the power of new life while Osiris was reborn in the Sun.

This vision of daily death and rebirth lay behind the ancient Egyptian concept of the afterlife. Like the Sun, each person’s *ba* was seen as passing through the night of death before coming to life again with the sunrise. As with the Sun, this daily rebirth was made possible through union with Osiris: while the Sun merged with the mummy of Osiris in the netherworld, the *ba* merged with its individualized Osiris, its mummified body lying in the tomb, and through that union was reunited with its *ka* and became capable of renewed life.

The concept of the afterlife in the Pyramid Texts is thus one of a daily journey from death to life, and the texts themselves were meant to ensure the success of this journey. The offering spells provided a source for the individual's life force, the *ka*: the sustenance derived from food and drink was recognized as a manifestation of the *ka*; one word for such sustenance, *k3w*, is an abstract formed from the word *k3* "ka." The oils, eyepaint, clothing, and regalia that were presented allowed the spirit to live as a proper member of the society of the afterlife. The Resurrection Ritual served to release the *ba* from its attachment to the mummified body, and the personal spells gave it the means to overcome the hazards of the nightly journey to rebirth and to join the gods in new life.

THE WORLD OF THE PYRAMID TEXTS

Since it was predicated on the Sun's daily cycle of death and rebirth, the deceased's own afterlife was envisioned as a journey in company with the Sun. The Egyptians understood the solar circuit as a circumnavigation of the world by boat. They saw the world itself as a finite space bounded by land and sky; these two elements were personified respectively as the god Geb and the goddess Nut, whose genders reflect the Egyptian words for "land" (masculine *t3*) and "sky" (feminine *pt*). This world was thought to exist within an infinite ocean, called Nu ("Waters"), which was kept from engulfing the earth by the atmosphere, incorporated in the god Shu, whose name means both "void" and "dry." The sky was seen as the surface of the cosmic ocean where it met the atmosphere, and the sun's daily journey through the sky therefore required a boat, known as the Dayboat.

The sun's apparent path across the sky throughout the year follows a 12-degree-wide arc from east to west, known as the ecliptic: the Egyptians saw this as a distinct feature of the sky, which they called the Winding Canal. The region of the sky to its south was known as the Field of Reeds and that to its north as the Field of Rest or Field of Offerings. These names reflect the Egyptians' experience of their own country, where the marshes of the Delta gradually gave way to the Mediterranean Sea. Features within both regions were seen as islands, some inhabited by the "Imperishable Stars," in the north, and the "Unwearying Stars," in the south, and others known as the Mounds of Horus, Seth, and Osiris.

As the sky itself, the goddess Nut was not merely the surface across which the sun traveled by day but also the Sun's mother. The solar god was thought to gestate at night within her womb and to be born at dawn from

between her thighs. At the same time, in a complementary rather than competing view, the Sun was thought to sail by night, in the Nightboat, through a region beneath the earth, called the Duat. The latter half of this region, up to the eastern horizon, was known as the Akhet, meaning “Place of Becoming Effective.” After his union with Osiris at the end of the fifth hour of the night, the Sun proceeded through the Akhet, where he became capable of independent life, and eventually emerged into the world in the eastern horizon. In the latter half of his nightly journey, the Sun was often called Horus of the Duat or Horus of the Akhet.

In line with these two complementary explanations, Osiris was thought to inhabit both the womb of Nut and the Duat. As an element of life, the force embodied in Osiris appeared after the world itself had been created; in mythological terms, Osiris was therefore the son of Geb and Nut. Within Nut’s womb, he embodied the force through which the Sun received the power of new life, to appear at dawn as Osiris reborn in his own son, the god Horus. As the primary force of the Duat, Osiris was also seen as its king, ruler of this region and its inhabitants.

The Pyramid Texts reflect this world-view not only in their vision of the afterlife but also in their relationship to the subterranean chambers on whose walls they were inscribed. These rooms have a uniform plan in each of the kings’ pyramids (Fig. 1).¹² Beneath the apex of the pyramid lies the innermost room, known as the burial chamber, which contained the king’s sarcophagus in its western end. Rectangular in shape, it has a peaked ceiling; on the west and east walls, texts are inscribed in the triangular gable beneath each peak as well as on the walls themselves. The burial chamber is joined by a short passage to a second room to its east, known as the antechamber, more square in shape but with a similar peaked ceiling and distribution of texts. Another

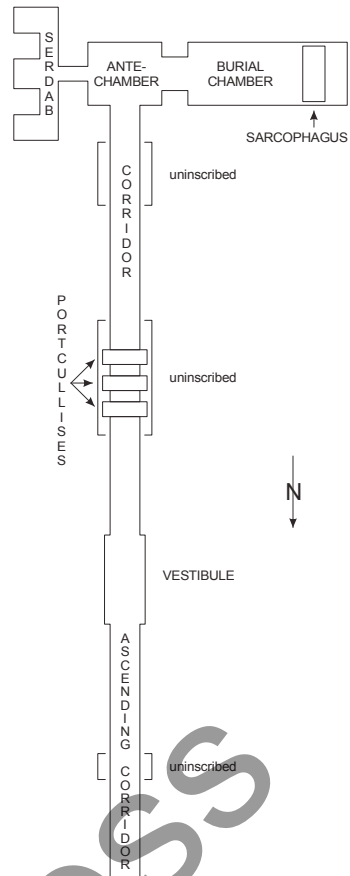


Fig. 1. Plan of the Substructure in the Pyramid of Pepi I

short passage connects the antechamber to a tripartite room to its east, called the serdab. From the north wall of the antechamber a corridor leads to an exit at ground level, originally concealed, on the north side of the pyramid. The corridor is level at its innermost (southern) end, divided in two by a set of portcullises; the level corridor ends in a room known as the vestibule, from which an ascending corridor continues toward the exit.

In its nightly journey from death to rebirth, the spirit of the deceased was thought to pass through these rooms and corridors, beginning with its union with its mummy lying in the sarcophagus and ending with its emergence from the pyramid. The subterranean layout of the pyramid represents an architectural expression of two views of this journey—like the two concepts of the Sun's nightly journey, complementary rather than competing; it represents both a womb and birth canal, and a miniature version of the passage from the Duat through the Akhet and into the sky.

The burial chamber corresponds to the Duat proper. Within it lay the mummy of the deceased, analogous to Osiris lying both as a mummy in the Duat and as the force of rebirth in Nut's womb, which was seen as the sarcophagus itself. In Unis's pyramid the sarcophagus and mummy are guarded by protective spells on the west gable; in the other kings' pyramids the west gable and wall, and the west ends of the north and south walls, are inscribed with spells for enabling the spirit to reenter Nut's womb each night. The other inscriptions in this room are primarily those of the rituals designed to provide the spirit with the means of life and to release it from the body so that it could begin its journey toward rebirth at dawn. In these texts the deceased is addressed not only by name but also as Osiris himself—for example, "Osiris Unis."

The antechamber is the architectural counterpart of the Akhet, the region within which the newly awakened spirit received its "effective" form of existence and became an akh. The texts from here onward are primarily of the "personal" kind, meant to be used by the spirit itself rather than by others on its behalf. Their content indicates that they were read in order from west to north in three groups: (1) west gable, west wall, and south wall; (2) east gable and wall, including in some pyramids the passage to the serdab; and (3) north wall. The texts in the first and third groups are similar in content, concerned with the spirit's passage through the Akhet; those in the second group are somewhat different, consisting of spells for control over provisions and inimical forces.

The spells of the second group are related to the function of the tripartite chamber lying beyond the antechamber's east wall. This room is known as the serdab (Arabic for "cellar"), because it was first thought to have contained

grave goods or statues. More recent research has shown that it probably had cosmic significance, like the burial chamber and antechamber. Lying at the eastern end of the antechamber, it represented the eastern limit of the Akhet, the point at which the Sun, and the deceased's spirit, left the womb of the Duat to proceed into Nut's birth canal. As in life, this was an irreversible process, analogized in the pyramid architecture by the fact that the passage leading to the serdab was originally blocked off from the rest of the substructure.¹³ It was also the most hazardous point in the birth process, where the fetus had to become viable on its own. The texts on the east wall reflect this danger by providing the spirit with spells against forces inimical to its birth and for control over the means of independent life, to accompany its eventual appearance at dawn.

Moving to the north wall of the antechamber, the newborn spirit encountered spells enabling it to leave the Akhet. It then proceeded toward the sky through the corridor, vestibule, and ascending corridor. The walls of this section are inscribed with spells similar to those in the antechamber, concerned mostly with the spirit's crossing from the Akhet toward the sky in company with the Sun and other gods. In the pyramids of Unis and Teti, only the southern end of the corridor is inscribed; in those of Merenre and Pepi II, the entire corridor and vestibule have texts; and in that of Pepi I, the beginning of the ascending corridor is inscribed as well.

From the north wall of the antechamber onward, the direction of the spirit's journey is from south to north rather than eastward with the rising sun. The reasons for this change in orientation are not entirely clear. In part it reflects the legacy of pyramid architecture prior to the end of the Fourth Dynasty, when the specific substructure associated with the Pyramid Texts came into use. The exact nature of the afterlife envisioned by the builders of the first pyramids is not known, but it may have involved the king's eternal existence in company with the "Imperishable Stars" of the northern night sky, so called because they never set below the horizon. Echoes of this stellar destiny appear throughout the Pyramid Texts, though it may have been reinterpreted there as a reference to the spirit's nightly existence before sunrise. Movement from south to north also follows the geographical orientation of Egypt itself, determined by the flow of the Nile, as well as the shift of the sun's path across the sky during the course of the year.

Perhaps most importantly, however, the spirit's northern emergence into the world reflects a phenomenon of nature discussed in later texts. Egypt has always witnessed the annual migration of birds from Europe into Africa along the Nile. In ancient times, before the existence of lands north of the Mediterranean was known, these birds were thought to come from a northern exit

of the Duat. For that reason they were seen as akhs, spirits of the deceased emerging into the world.¹⁴ The northern exit of the pyramids may reflect a similar concept.

A NOTE ON TRANSLATION

The texts in each of the six pyramids translated in this volume are presented in the order in which they were most likely meant to be read.¹⁵ Within each corpus, section titles in **BOLD LETTERS**, as well as page headings, identify the location of the texts in the pyramid; subtitles in **SMALL CAPITAL LETTERS** indicate the general theme of a spell or group of spells. Within each section or subsection, spells are usually separated from one another by a small space, except where evidence shows they were meant to be read as one. Where superscripts, headings, or subscripts occur, they are indicated by **SMALL CAPITAL LETTERS** at the beginning or end of, and occasionally within, the spell.

The spells themselves are divided into stanzas reflecting the text's style and content. Parentheses are used to mark explanatory additions to the translations, and square brackets indicate lost or damaged text that has been restored from parallels in the Pyramid Texts or from later sources; square brackets enclosing an ellipsis are used where no restoration has been possible. Unless noted otherwise, restored text is based on other copies of the same spell within the corpus of the six pyramids translated here or on parallel passages from other spells of the Pyramid Texts.

The translations in this volume differ slightly from those in the first edition in reflecting recent advances in our understanding of the grammar. As in the previous edition, however, they are meant to reflect as closely as possible the language and style of the texts themselves. Egyptian is rich in allegory and metaphor but relatively meager in vocabulary. I have tried to reflect the latter feature by using as much as possible a single English calque for its Egyptian counterpart. I have also avoided the use of words that may connote concepts not present in Egyptian: thus, for example, *pt* is translated throughout as "sky" rather than "heaven." The crucial terms *b3*, *k3*, and *3h* are rendered as "ba," "ka," and "akh," respectively, rather than by a translation, because they each carry a wealth of connotations that is often impossible to capture in a single English word (see the Glossary). In a few cases, our knowledge of the Egyptian language has not (yet) made it possible to know the meaning of a verb or noun; such words are represented in the translations by a transcription of the Egyptian term.

The Pyramid Texts reflect not only an Egyptian vision of the afterlife but also the entire background of Old Kingdom religious and social structures,

and they incorporate an ancient worldview much different from that of more familiar cultures. Two centuries of scholarship have allowed us to understand much of this background and worldview, but many of its aspects still remain obscure. Even in translation, therefore, the meaning of the texts and allusions within them are not always clear. I have tried to ameliorate this difficulty both by notes appended to the translations and by the Glossary at the end of the book; but such clarifications are not always possible in our current state of knowledge, and many passages or spells remain obscure. In such cases, I hope that the translation offered here will allow the reader to appreciate at least the language and flow of the texts, if not their precise import.

NOTES

- 1 The earliest instance of a Pyramid Text outside the pyramid chambers is a copy of PT 32 on the support for a libation table in the mortuary temple of Pepi I's pyramid (Leclant 1990).
- 2 In a few cases the texts were inscribed in horizontal lines. The sarcophagi of Teti and Ankhenes-Pepi II were also inscribed with Pyramid Texts (PT 1–7 in Teti's case), and those of Pepi I, Merenre, and Pepi II with the king's titulary, which is included in the corpus of numbered PT spells (PT 8–9).
- 3 Sethe referred to each individual spell as a "Spruch," after the heading *dd-mdw* "Recitation." The same terminology has been adopted in most English translations, where each spell is called an "Utterance."
- 4 The first effort in this regard was that of T.G. Allen (1950), which has been adopted in most studies of the Pyramid Texts. The primary exception is Faulkner's translation, which differs from Allen's in three respects: it does not recognize some divisions (e.g., PT 658 is treated as a single spell); it begins the supplemental lettering of others with the second spell (e.g., PT 491–491A for Allen's PT 491A–B); and it assigns completely different spell numbers to yet others.
- 5 Faulkner assigned supplemental PT numbers to some of the unnumbered texts of Pepi II and Neith (PT 715–759), and the recent publication of Pepi I's texts uses the supplemental numbers 1001–1081 for unnumbered spells from that corpus.
- 6 The latter's tomb is unknown, but his Pyramid Texts are preserved in part in the Twelfth-Dynasty coffin of an official, the ends of which were inscribed with texts originally prepared for the king: see Allen 1976.
- 7 See Unis PT 215 and n. 37 there.
- 8 E.g., PT 467, stanza 4.
- 9 Later copies of the Pyramid Texts sometimes preserve the original first-person version. The texts of Queen Neith alternate between the masculine pronouns used in the texts of her husband and his predecessors and more appropriate feminine ones.
- 10 See n. 31 to Unis's texts.
- 11 In the Pyramid Texts, as elsewhere, the sun was usually called *r^c*. Though often translated as the proper name "Re" or "Ra," this word means simply "sun"; when the Egyptian

language acquired a definite article (nearly a millennium after the Old Kingdom), the god was often called *p3-r*, meaning “The Sun.” The present volume reflects the Egyptian usage by translating *r* as “Sun” (capitalized) when it refers to the god. The deceased is directly identified with Osiris only in ritual texts, while personal spells are mostly concerned with the spirit’s relationship with the Sun (Hays 2012, 167–74, 247, 257).

- 12 The substructure in the pyramids of Neith and the other queens combines the burial chamber and antechamber into a single room. For the architectural relationship of the texts in these tombs, see the introductory discussion to the Pyramid Texts of Neith.
- 13 See Mathieu 1997. The significance of the serdab itself is uncertain. Its three “bays” may reflect the tripartite tomb shown in the New Kingdom composition known as the Amduat, in which were buried the human head, falcon wings, and feline rear of Horus after his climactic battle with Seth: see Westendorf 2004.
- 14 Both the *ba* and the *akh* were often depicted as birds, reflecting the greater freedom of movement that spirits enjoyed over earth-bound mortals.
- 15 Except for Teti’s sarcophagus, the titularies and names of the five kings and Queen Neith inscribed on their sarcophagi and the surrounding walls are extraneous to the Pyramid Texts proper. These have been translated at the beginning of each corpus.

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