

# PAPYRUS OF ANI

## PLATE 35

( CHAPTER 148 )

### The Archetypal Womb



by

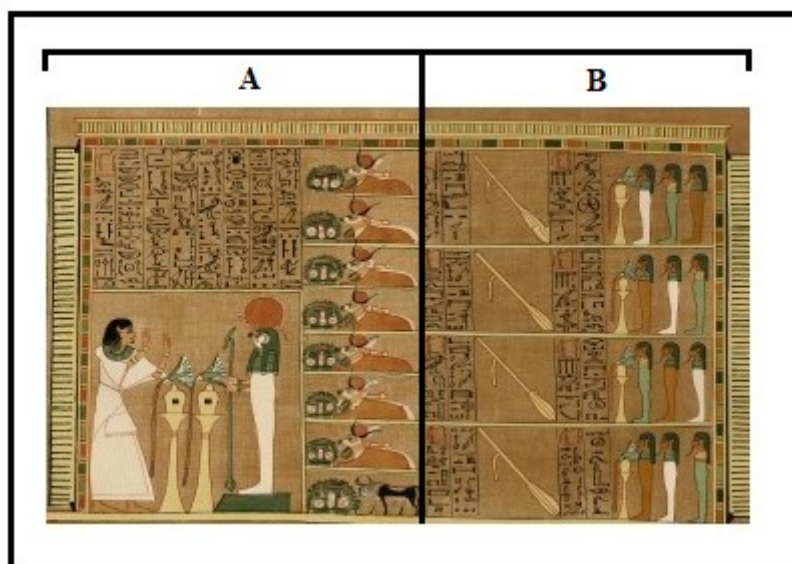
orlando mezzabotta

[www.ormezza.it](http://www.ormezza.it)

I think one can hardly deny the iconic specificity of this plate, so different from the one that directly precedes it:

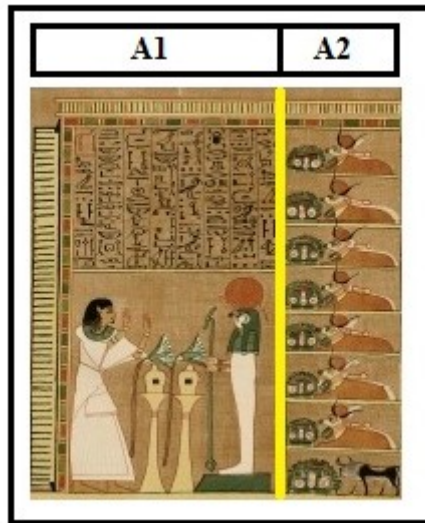


Although symmetrically balanced the vignettes of the Field of Offerings are marked by a dynamic character totally alien to the static composure of our plate, starting from the very frames that engulf the figures. On the left the vibrating waving lines of the waters (hinting at those of the Nun); on the right the calm and ordered contours of a shrine with its doors, for the moment wide open, so as to let the curious viewer take note of its inner structure. We should begin focusing our attention on its geometrical architecture, noticing first of all the symmetrical juxtaposition of two basic components,

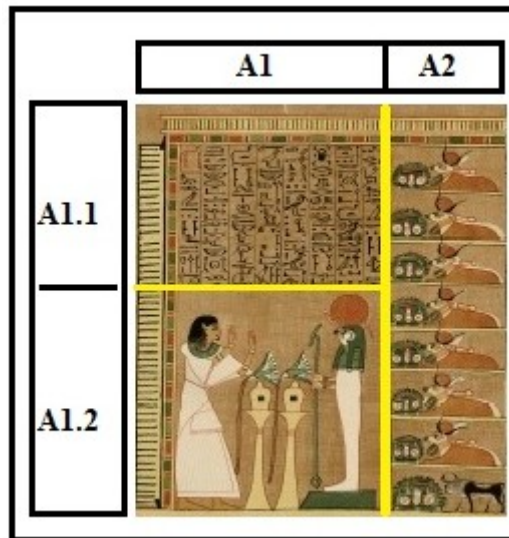


corresponding, as it were, to the two wings of the door; each one occupying, more or less, half the space of the shrine. This binary juxtaposition is repeated, although in different modulations, both

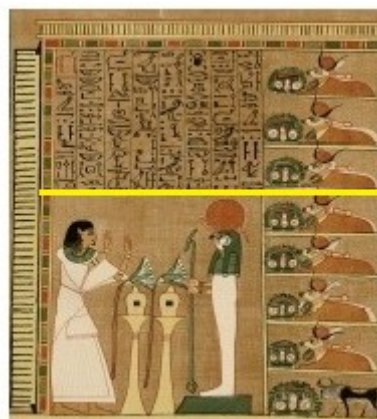
in A and B. As regards A we see in fact a clear division between the group on the left and the animal herd on the right (seven cows and their bull).



We may also note how A2 has half the width of A1, counterbalanced by its height which is twice the size of the figures on the lower section of A1, itself divided into two separate parts (A1.1 and A1.2):

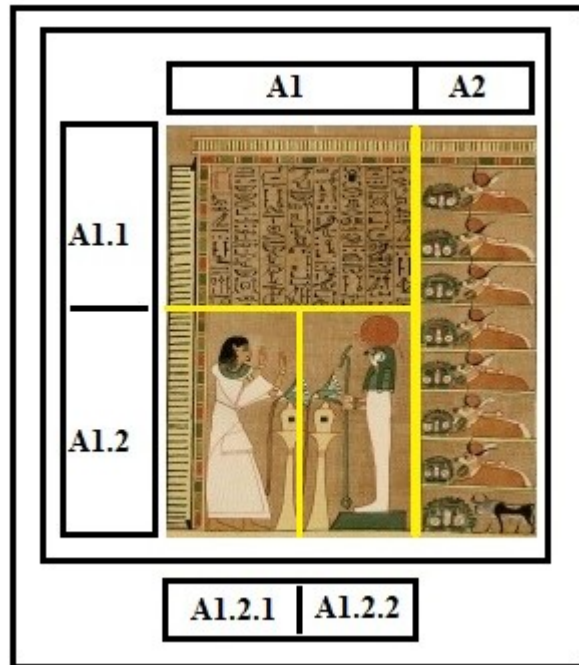


True that the text (A1.1) is a little bit shorter with reference to A1.2, nonetheless its base is on the same level of that of the first three cows,



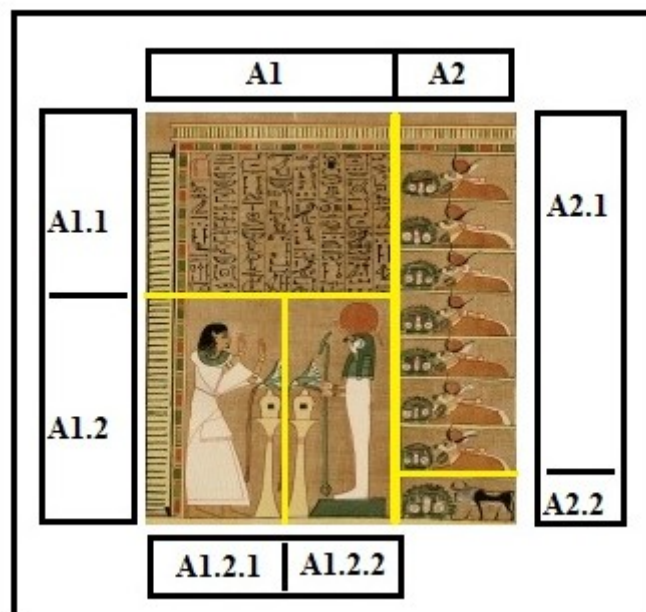
giving the upper part of the A block a poised visual wholeness.

As regards A1.2 we may also note a further division between the human and the divine figure



made more manifest by the twin lotus plants.

For what concerns A2 things are a little bit more complicated, at least apparently, since there is a marked disparity between the group of the cows (A2.1) and the single bull (A2.2):

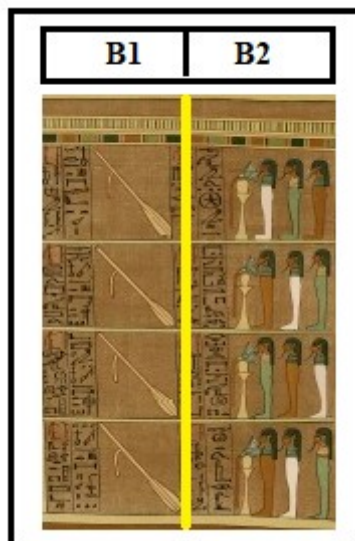


But that might be balanced by the proximity of the bull to the “*m3t*” pedestal on which *Ra* stands (A1.2.2),

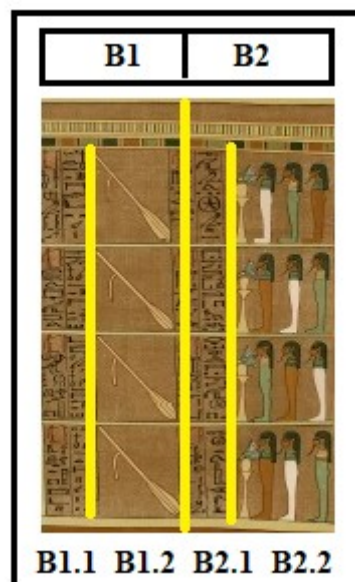


with more or less similar dimensions and a marked symbolic analogy. As *Ra*'s power is founded on the ordering principle of truth and righteousness, so Hathor's (seven cows) fertile power is rooted in the fecund force of her bull.

The same kind of juxtapositions are found in B as well,



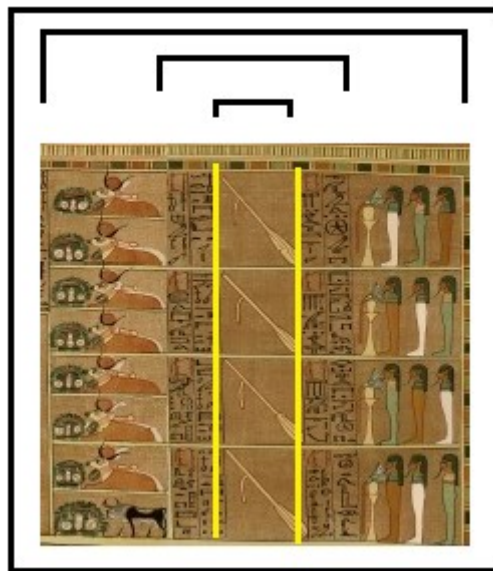
showing similar further divisions: B1.1 / B1.2 and B2.1 / B2.2,



the texts (two columns) on the left in relation with the vignettes at their right. Now if in the one to one correspondence the texts seem to play a minor visual role (more or less half the size of the drawings) they may become more significant if looked at as brackets framing the steering oars,



working as a sort of magic protection for that primary sailing device, in fact a symbol of the right course, namely of *m3't*. Virtual brackets that may be expanded so as to include both cows and gods:



Although not specifically connected these separate blocks form a visual scene of ordered and calm composure, the central oars being the pivots around which turn the groups of godly figures, female cows and human-shaped males.

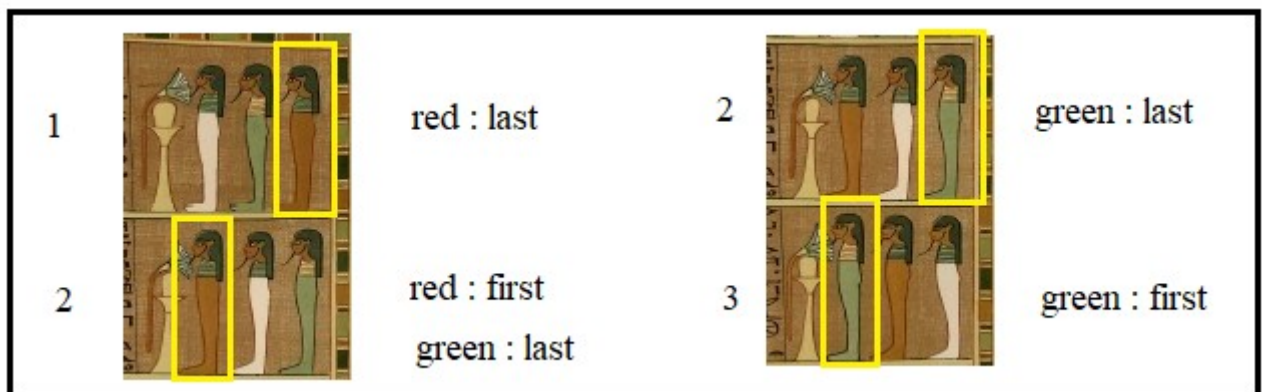
As regards these last ones they deserve a closer look:



First of all we should notice the lotus plant which can be seen as the representative of Ani, since it is almost the same as the one of the A1.2 vignette:

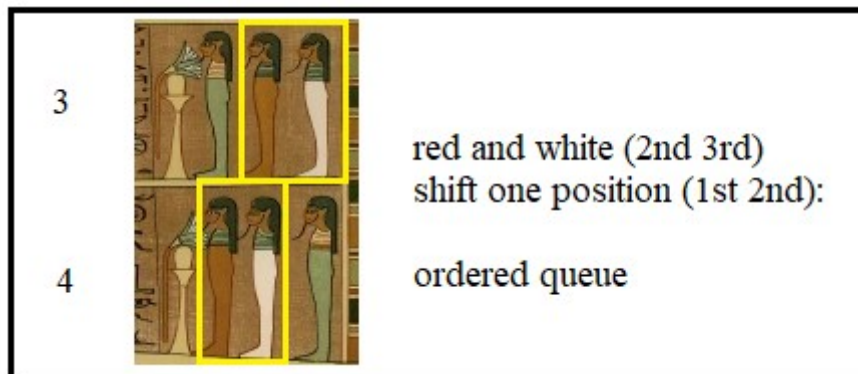


thus Ani's meeting with specific deities. Then the moving strategy of these godly figures:



We can see how in the first three rows the last figure jumps to the first place. Leaving aside the improbable anticipation of Matthew 20.16 (the last shall be the first) I would not exclude a hint at the course through the *Duat* (as expressed by the corresponding texts) marking the passage from the lowest stratum (the entrance in the netherworld) to the highest one (the coming forth towards the breath of life → lotus plant).

This is not what happens in the passage from the third to the fourth row, where the movement follows the directive of an ordered queue:



This may have sense considering that the corresponding text refers to the followers of Ra in the wake of Osiris: “*šmsw r jmy(w)-ht wsjr*”.

At this point it’s time that we look at the texts, starting from the eight columns over the vignette of Ani meeting Ra face to face, all by himself.

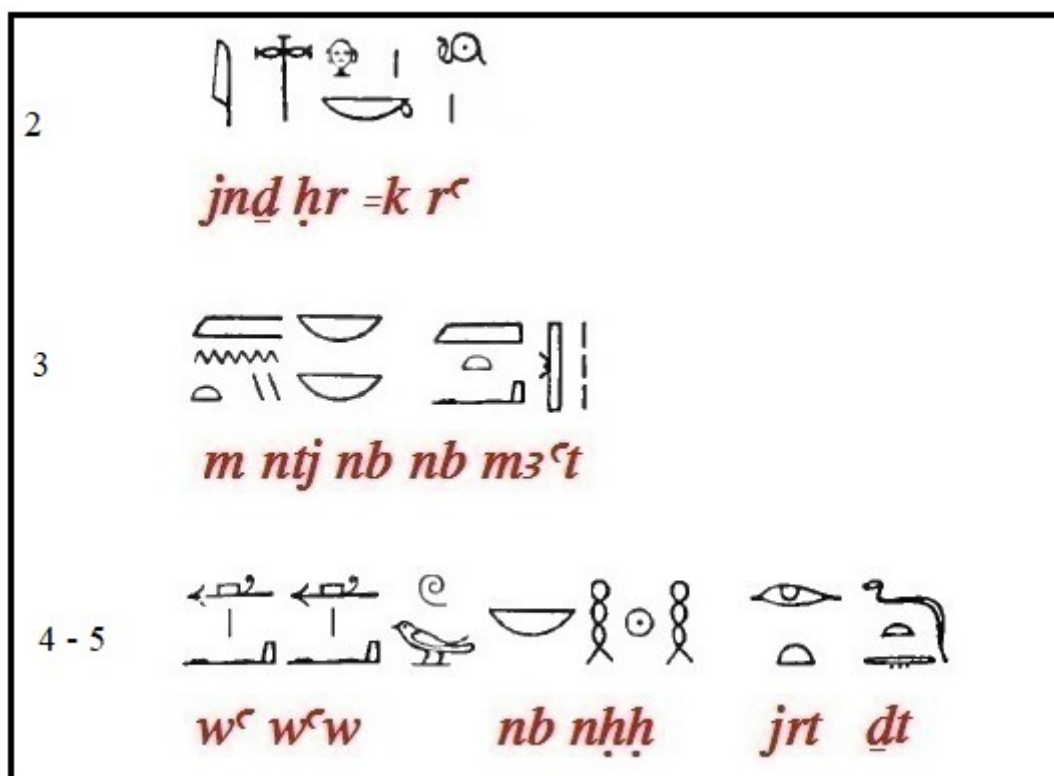


- 1 Words to be spoken by Osiris Ani justified.
- 2 Hail to you, Ra, as Lord;
- 3 Lord of Truth and Righteousness.
- 4 Unique One, Lord of Eternity,
- 5 the maker of Everlastingness.
- 6 I have come at your presence,
- 7 O Lord, Ra:
- 8 having made myself to blossom
- 9 as lord of the seven cows

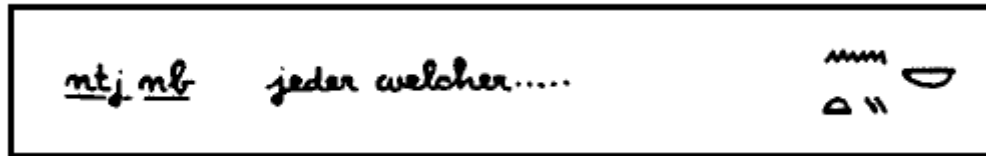
- 10 (that are) with me, their bull.
- 11 You who bring bread and beer
- 12 to the blessed spirits,
- 13 grant to the *b3* amongst you,
- 14 that he come into being under your buttocks,
- 15 that he be like the one who is amongst you, [= the bull]
- 16 eternally and everlastingly;
- 17 that he be a blessed spirit
- 18 in the Beautiful West!
- 19 So says Osiris Ani, justified!

❖❖❖

Within its apparent clarity this invocation hides a few subtle theological references. The basic theme is in fact the image of self-generation, namely that of the first coming forth. We may pick it up from lines 2-5:



“*ntj nb*” of line 3 is tricky, since its most obvious reading would be

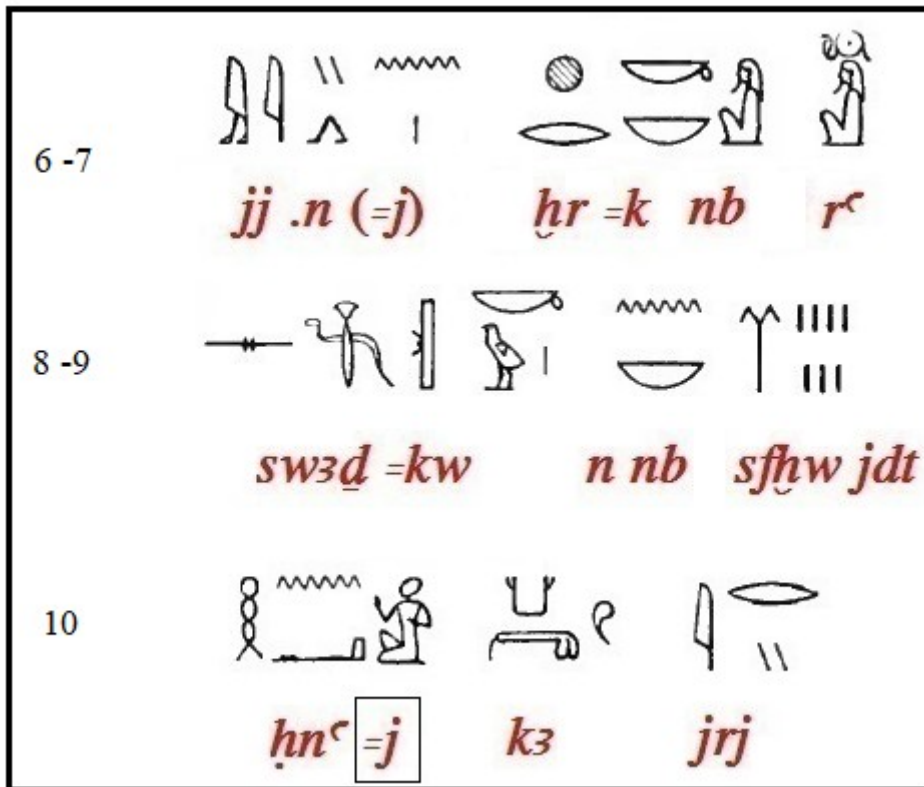


“anyone who...” considering “*nb*” as adjective. But that would not make much sense. One might suppose “*r m ntj nb*” be the sun (*r*) inside (*m*) everyone (*ntj nb*), but that would be kind of hazardous. Thus “*nb*” is most probably “lord”. The question is: why that ambiguous rendering? Why “*m ntj nb*”? A simple “*jnd hr =k r nb m3t*” wouldn’t it be enough? It is evident that the scribe wanted to highlight the “*nb*” placing two of them one after the other and adding a third one in the next line (*nb nhh*). So we may interpret the three instances as variations of a same theme, or better, “mytheme”. “*m ntj nb*” (in the aspect of lord, of he who is lord) does stress the potential *lordship* of Ra, which becomes manifest the moment he rises up from the abysmal waters of chaos putting *order* in it, that is becoming the lord of *m3t*. And in fact we see him standing upon the *m3t* pedestal.



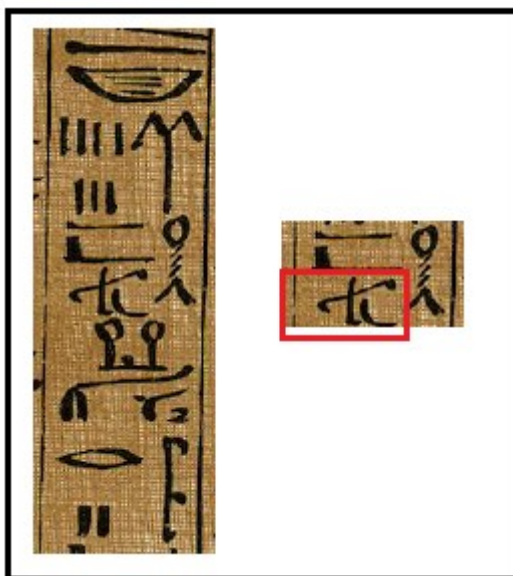
But in his primitive form he is the Unique One (*wrw*) whose specific traits are eternity and everlastingness that have come into being through his original creative act. Thus the whole sentence outlines the archetypal image of the self-generating potentiality.

What comes next (6-10) shows Ani’s integration of that archetype.

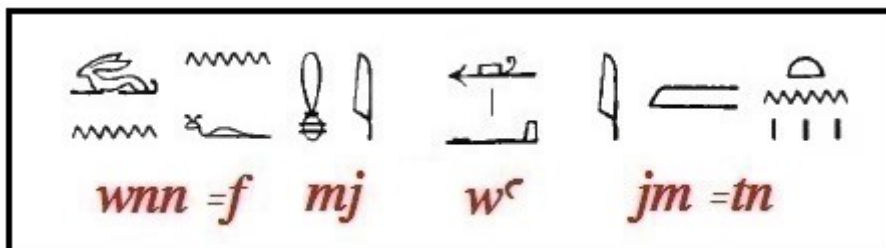


Once again the graphic rendering is very ambiguous, with apparent incongruities that hide in fact subtle allusions as, for example, the “*nb*” of line 7 followed by the A40 determinative (seated god). Were it A1 (seated man) it would have been a suffix pronoun (=j), thus “*nb =j*”, perfectly correct. Thus the question: is A40, no matter what, a suffix? That would imply that Ani present himself as one who has already become a god. Which might make sense especially because the rest of the sentence, as we shall see, seems to underline this meaning. However that might contradict the apparent absence of a suffix pronoun at the beginning (*jn .n = ∅*). Unless of course we consider the vertical stroke as a suffix. In that case it would be indeed a minimal “=j” juxtaposed to the godly one following “*nb*”. And that could make sense as well. It would hint at the transformation of a “little human I” into a “big divine one”. However at this point such an attitude might be considered too presumptuous. So all that could be just Ani’s unconscious desire. By consequence “*nb*” could be referred to Ra in his pristine form of “*ntj nb*”, whereas the proper “*r*” would point out his manifest creative aspect. Once again a subtle allusion to self-generation. A mytheme that can be detected in the lines that follow next. The stative “*sw3d =kw*” describes an already attained “blossoming” condition, visually sustained by the two lotus plants of the vignette. In other words Ani asserts of having reached the goal towards which he directed his efforts, that of becoming lord (*n nb*) of the generating power

symbolized by the seven cows, a collective image of *Hathor*, herself an image of the archetypal *Great Mother*. But the real tricky part comes from what looks like a scribal error, a faulty “*hn<sup>c</sup> =j*”

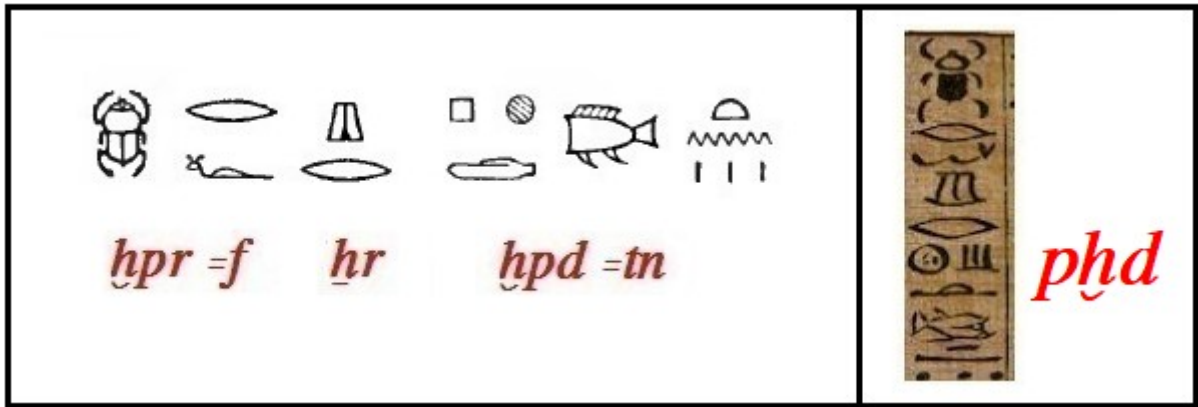


with a patent improper “*=j*” intruding in what should be “*n nb sfhw jdt hn<sup>c</sup> k3 jry*” (lord of the seven cows and of the bull serving them). We should also note the smaller size of the impertinent suffix as if placed there on second thought. But let us suppose that the scribe knew exactly what he wanted to do. Thus “*hn<sup>c</sup> =j*” could be linked to the cows that are with Ani who is their bull (*k3 jry*). A further proof of this may be given by line 15



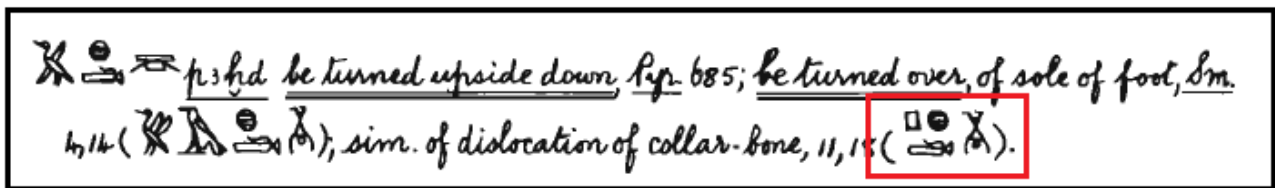
where “*w<sup>c</sup> jm =tn*” is not just “one among you → one of your group), but the “number one” and the “unique”, namely he who is different from all the rest (one bull vs seven cows).

Now, as said above, the cows are a collective image of Hathor (their motherly aspect clearly expressed in lines 11-12), so the goddess is the mother of whom Ani is the bull (*k3 mwt =f*), in other terms he is one who, fecundating his mother, self-generates himself, as picturesquely shown in line 14,



alluding to the birth of the divine calf from the buttocks (*hpd*) of the heavenly cow.


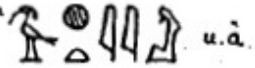
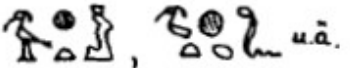
One may wonder whether the metathesis *hpd/phd* be not just an oversight, but an intended pun with “*p3hd/phd*” (be turned over / upside down),




so as to show the peculiarity of self-generation. There is in fact a possible further evidence considering its position, exactly parallel to a dubious “*3ht*” (line 12) of the previous column




The most logic and plausible reading, judging from the god determinative, should be “*3hw*” (blessed spirits). But we find an ambiguous “*t*”. If it is not a redundant sign (possible in Late Egyptian) that might hint at the androgynous aspect of the luminous being who would then be both male (A40) and female (*3ht*):


 die Verklärte o.ä.  
 I. von der Verstorbenen 15. N.R. <sup>xm</sup>  u.ä.  
 II. als Bezeichnung verschiedener Göttinnen 16 (dabei von den Worten für „Auge“, „Hathor“ u.ä. nicht immer zu scheiden). Sp. u. Sn.  u.ä.


A similar graphic ambiguity may be found in line 17,


  
**3ht = f m jmntt nfrt**

with “*3ht = f*” which should most likely be “*3h = f*” (so that he be a blessed spirit):


*3h* (1) vb. be, become a spirit, Urk. IV, 518, 7; V, 4, 7; JEA 2, pl. 3, c3.

But the possible redundant “*t*” might invite to read “*3ht*” as a noun,


*3ht* what is good, profitable, useful, Pt. 5, 7; 14, 5; Urk. IV, 57, 6.8; 3ht n  
 'do good to', Urk. IV, 194, 7 (3ht III); 750, 8 (3ht).

namely the power of the just born “bull” (*w<sup>c</sup> jm = tn*) in the beautiful West (*m jmntt nfrt*). In this case the “*jn*” of the final line,

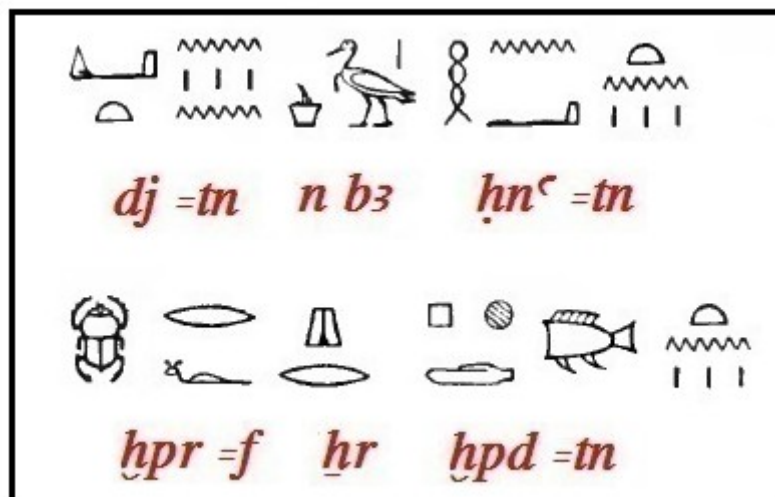

  
**jn wsjr 3ny m3<sup>c</sup> hrw**

read as a preposition, would imply that the bull's power (**ʒht =f**) has been worked out by (**jn**) Ani himself, by his own efforts that made effective his potential "creative energy". Once again an image of self-generation.

On the contrary, if "**ʒh(t) =f**" is a verb the sentence would be seen as an independent one with "**jn**" as a probable "so says",

*ʒm in (1) prep. by, of agent: (2) non-encl. part.: (3) interrog part.: (4) emphatic form of prep. n, cf. lpr. p. 553: (5) so says... JEA 21, 179. Var. ʒ Urkh. IV, 6, 2.*

mirroring, as a twin closing bracket, the "**dd mdw jn wsjr ʒnj**" of the beginning. And I am of the opinion that this image of transformation into a blessed spirit (**ʒh[t] =f**) be in fact the dominant one. It would be in consonance with the **bʒ** of line 13



that would become an "**ʒh**", thus agreeing with the working hypothesis of the two levels of the rite of passage, from the individual one (**bʒ**) to the "social" collective (**ʒh**): the power that acts for the benefit of the people of the beloved land.

Now, both the general image of self-generation and the complementary aspect "individual/collective" are present as well in the right half of the plate, but expressed in more nuanced textual and visual constructions. There are in fact many apparent scribal oversights as regards gender of nouns (defective writing of masculine and feminine words) and number (defective writing of singular and plural notations). As usual I am of the

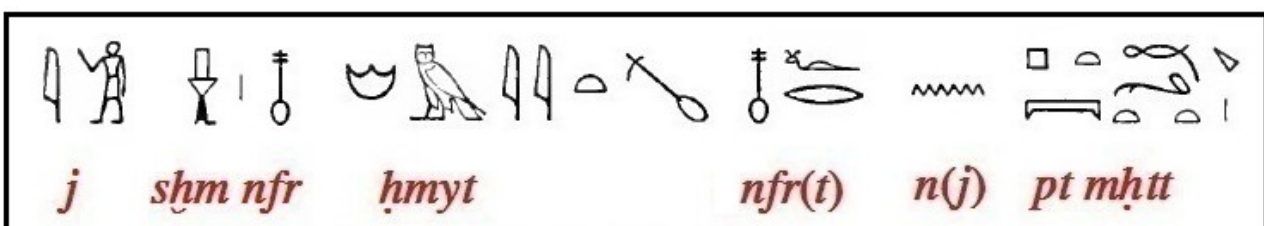
opinion that they be scribal strategies in order to point out complementary reading of terms. Let us start with the texts at the left side related to the four steering oars:




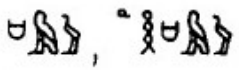
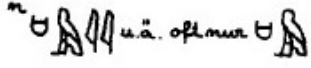



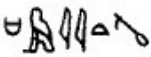
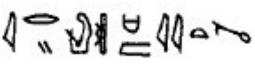
At a cursory look they could be seen as descriptions of specific qualities of a luminous being in the four cardinal points, thus the solar traits of Ani just turned into a blessed spirit (*sh = f*). The rudder is a plausible symbol of the right course and most of all of a phallic male power, made evident by the basic similarity with the glyph of the *shm*-sceptre (S42)



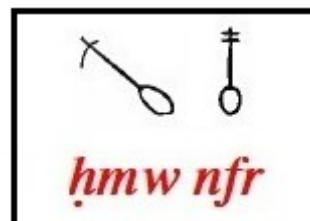
shown in the corresponding text,



where we meet, though, the first problem, namely a missing “*t*” of the adjective “*nfr*” that should modify the feminine “*hmyt*”. This is the only instance of the four sections where the rudder is written through glyphs, whereas the other texts show only the ideogram (P10). However P10 may also be the ideogram of the masculine “*hmw*”, itself meaning “rudder”

<p><i>hmcw</i> </p>	<p>belegt seit <i>Pyr.</i> das Steuerruder. I. Eigentlich als Schiffsteil 16.</p>	<p> ,  u.ä. <i>oflmw</i>  Det.  auch </p>
<p><i>hmjt</i> </p>	<p>belegt <i>N.R.</i>; <i>Sr.</i> das Steuerruder 11. auch in der Verbindung: Steuermann (Var. hat <i>inj</i> <i>hmcw</i>) 12. <i>Toll.</i> auch bildlich gebraucht 13</p>	<p></p>

so that the other renderings might indeed be correct “*hmw nfr*”







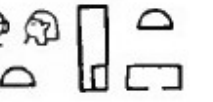
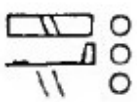


Thus the question: why “*hmyt*” instead of the plainer “*hmw*”? I would not exclude that the apparent masculine/feminine confusion be in fact a hint at the androgynous character of the self-generating divine being. Furthermore the double reed ( $j+j = y$ ) might allude to the two steering oars at the stern of boats, which might themselves be allusions to the double “*m3t*”:



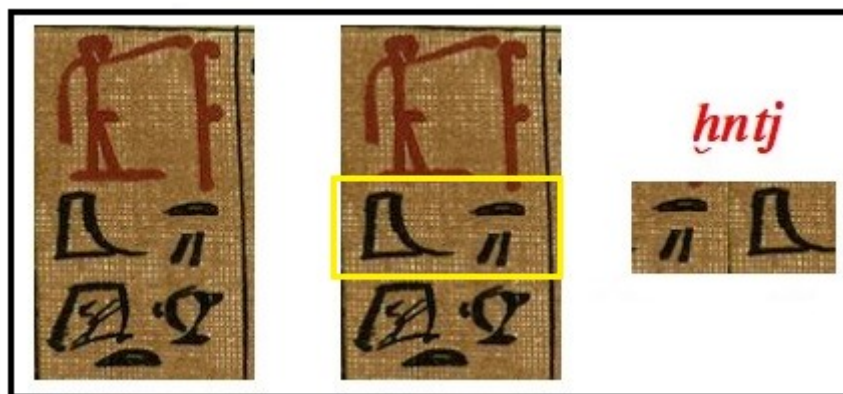
the ostrich feathers being plausible visual substitutes of steering oars. All this in consonance with the “*nb m3ʿt*” (Lord of Truth and Righteousness) of line 3 of the previous text. But the possible pairing “*m3ʿt/rudder*” may also trigger a subtle pun. The rudder (P10) might in fact mirror the oar (P8) that has “*hrw*” as phonogram; hinting thus at a justified “*m3ʿ(t)-hrw*”.

Further ambiguities due to dubious “*t*” are found in the last two sections:

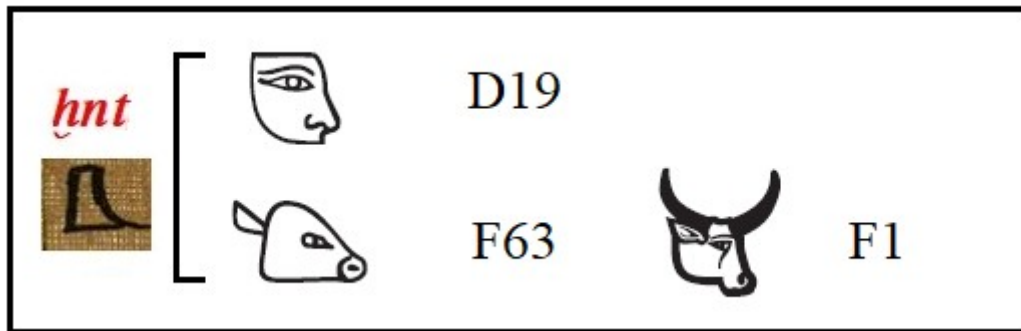
3				
	<i>j</i>	<i>3hw</i>	<i>hrt-tp hwt</i>	<i>šmw</i>
4				
	<i>j</i>	<i>hntj</i>	<i>hrt-tp hwt</i>	<i>šj</i>

Since “*3hw*” and “*hntj*” are masculine we should expect “*hrj-tp*”. Unless of course we consider “*hrt-tp*” as a different subject (chieftainess). Thus we would have two genitival constructions. In any case strictly connected male/female images.

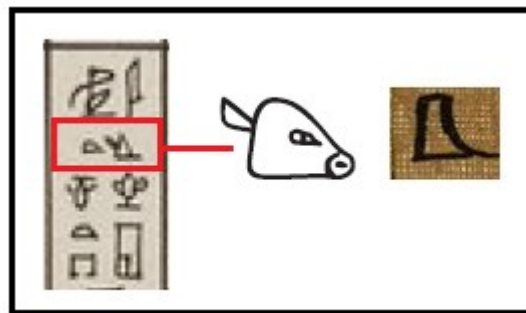
As regards the graphic rendering of “*hntj*” there is another scribal trick we should take note of. Let us have a look at the original glyphs:



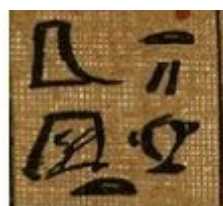
We note a metathesis concerning “*hntj*”, with “*tj*” preceding “*hnt*”. The cursive rendering of “*hnt*” points either to D19 or F63, sometimes used instead of F1:



A parallel rendering in *pTurin* shows an unmistakable F63

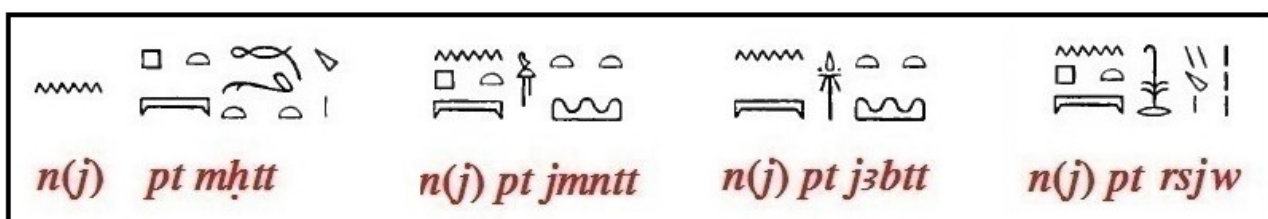


but I would not exclude that the metathesis be a way to point out the bull's horns and the shift from F63 to F1, whose head is upon the “*hrt-tp*” cow

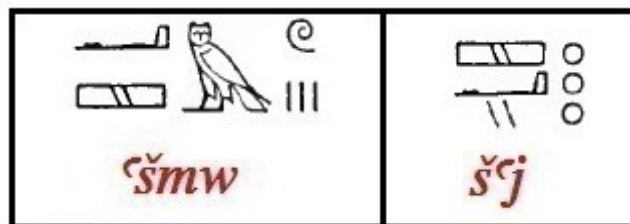


so as to show his male power over the female chieftain.

A final remark regards an apparent missing “*t*” in the last cardinal point:



Instead of the expected “*rsjt*” we find “*rsjw*”, namely the “southerners”. However I think that is not a mistake or a defective writing, but a subtle scribal strategy so as to connect the “rudders” section on the left with the one at the right side, the “southerners” being the three depicted gods closely related with the Duat. In fact the cardinal points should not only be viewed on a flat surface, but also from an ascensional perspective, north and south being the sky and the sandy domain of the “underworld”, as clearly expressed in the parallelism of the above shown last two blocks, where we also note a wordplay between “*šmw*” and “*šj*”:



The first one is related to the sunlight (*šhw*) of the eastern region (*j3bt*) and “*šm / hm*” is a term related to sacred images



with a falcon determinative hinting at the sky. Contrary to that (*š ↔ š*) the sandy realm recalls the underworld domain.

At this point we may try a tentative translation of the four blocks:



- 1 Hail to you, good and perfect Power,  
good and perfect steering oar of the northern sky!
- 2 Hail to you, who go round the sky, guide of the Two-Lands,  
good and perfect steering oar of the western sky!
- 3 Hail to you, Sunshine of the chieftainess of the temple of the sacred images,

good and perfect steering oar of the eastern sky!

- 4 Hail to you, Foremost of the chieftainess of the temple of sands,  
good and perfect steering oar of the sky of the South dwellers.

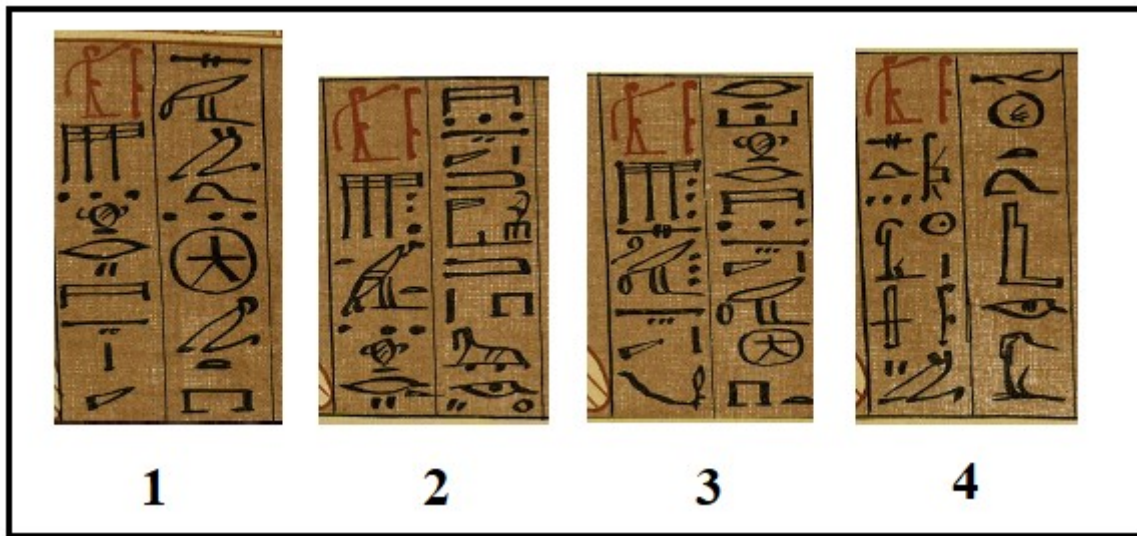


This holistic view may indeed point out the male/female interaction we have been talking about. We see the solar power [1] circling the sky and shining over the country until its setting in the west [2], namely in the womb (heavenly cow) from which he will come forth in the eastern horizon [3], after having victoriously traversed the sandy Realm of the Dead [4], under the supervision of the gods of the rightmost section, those who inhabits the southern sky.

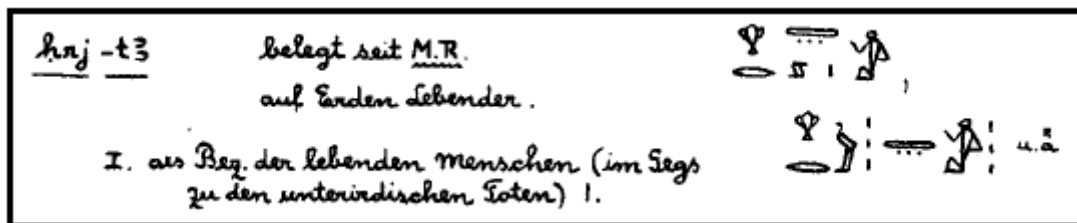


Under its apparent simplicity this section may hide subtler meanings. So let us begin with the easier reading which looks like a general greeting to the gods who have power on the sacred land of the dead. In the form of a lotus plant Ani addresses them acknowledging their status of divine beings who are guides of the Duat and followers of Ra and Osiris. It is legitimate to suppose that the greeting be Ani's way to assert that he belongs to their rank, having the capabilities of going in and out of the Duat. Now the

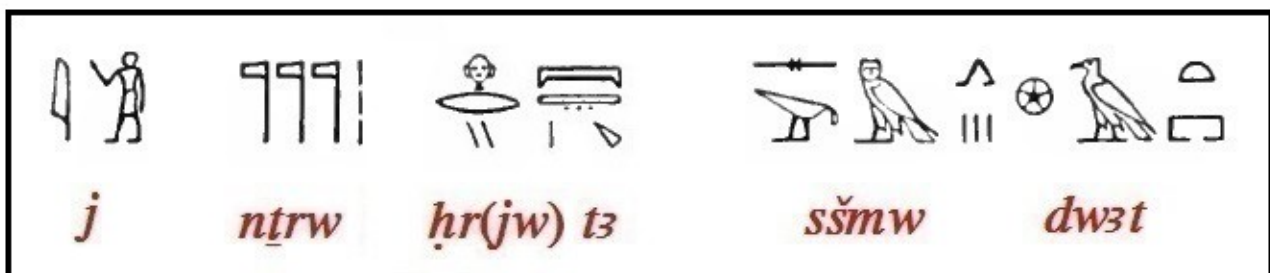
problem is that the texts of the four sections present a lot of graphic irregularities regarding plural and singular aspects. Let us give them a closer look:



In #1 we have gods (*ntrw* : plural) who are guides (*sšmw* : plural) of the Duat, but a singular “*hrj-t3*”. As regards this word we find here a dubious rendering, since, at face value, it should mean “living being”, in contrast with the deceased of the Realm of the Dead:

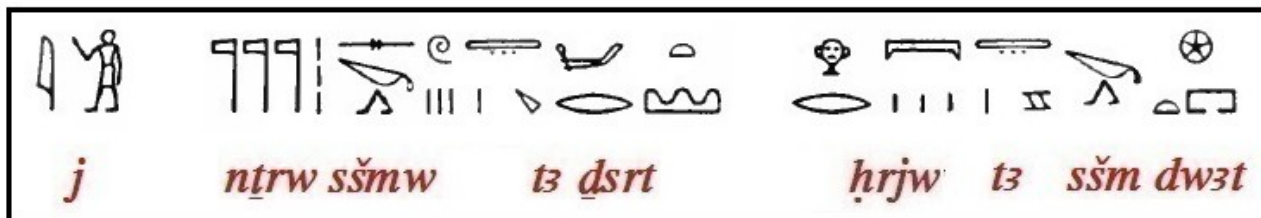


This would not make much sense. True that the gods are living beings, but not human as the word implies. So I think that “*hrj t3*” should be read as “who is over the earth”. In our specific case it might be an allusion to the gods’ capability of going out of the Duat of which they are guides:

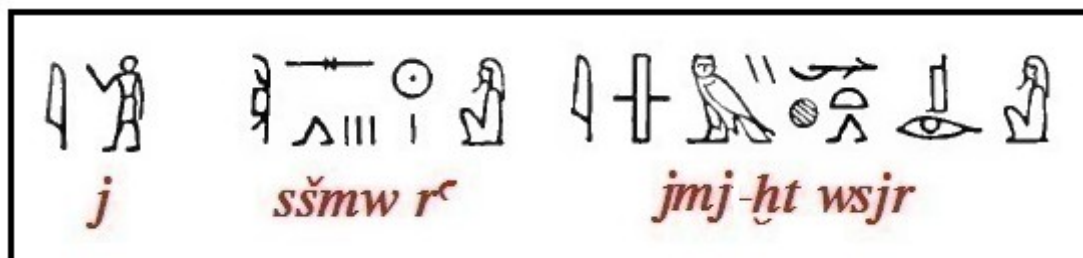


Thus dwellers both of earth (*t3*) and of the Netherworld (*dw3t*).

Getting back to our defective writings in #3 we have instead gods who are guides of the sacred land (plural *sšmw t3 dsr[t]*), then a plural “*hrjw t3*”, and finally a singular guide (*sšm*) of the Duat:



In #4 there are plural followers (*sšmw*) of Ra, but a singular subject in Osiris’s retinue (*jmj-ht wsjr*).

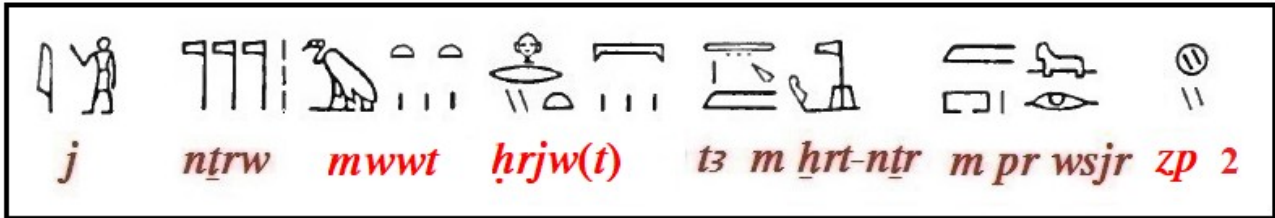


Now, considering the context, one might choose not to be so fussy since it seems evident that even the defective writings are plural forms. Thus a possible translation could be:

- 1 Hail to you, O Gods who are over the earth and guides of the Duat.
  
- 2 Hail to you, Gods of the mothers, who are over the earth
- 2b and in the Realm of the Dead, in the house of Osiris [twice].
  
- 3 Hail to you, O Gods, guides of the sacred land,
- 3a who are over the earth and guides of the Duat.
  
- 4 Hail to you, Followers of Ra, in the suite of Osiris.



My translation of line 2 might be judged somewhat puzzling.



First of all we must decide about the reading of “*hrjw / hrjw(t)*”, since the original rendering is sort of ambiguous:

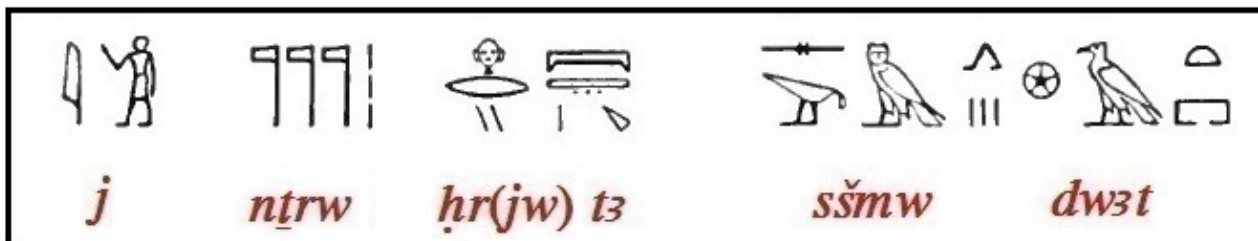


Let us leave it aside for the moment and decide beforehand whether the gods and the mothers (*ntrw / mwwt*) be distinct nouns or a genitival construction (gods and mothers *vs* gods of the mothers). I am for the second hypothesis for two reasons: (1) the vignette shows only male gods; (2) the gods of the mothers would recall the bull of the cows, thus the image of self-generation that is indispensable for any deceased turned into a god. “*hrjw t3*” would then be a plural masculine referred, as suggested above, to their capability of visiting the earth, coupled with the one of dwelling in the necropolis (*m hrt-ntr*) that becomes in fact the Duat, namely the house of Osiris (*m pr wsjr*). So that “*zp 2*” may refer to the double movement (entrance and coming forth) in the Realm of the Dead, Osiris’s house.

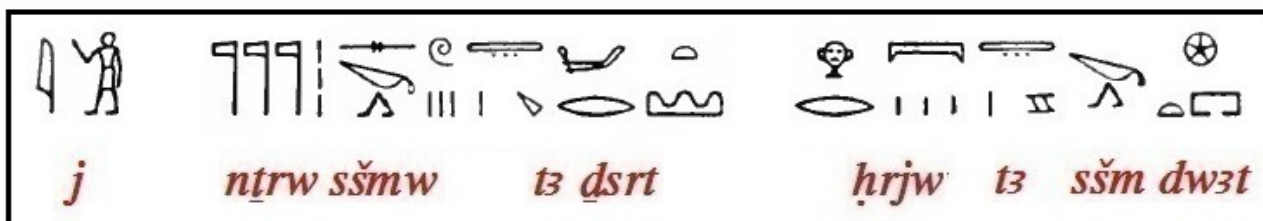
If we read instead “*hrjw(t) t3*”, that would refer to the mothers (of whom the gods are bulls) who share both the earthly domain (*t3*) and the one of the necropolis (*hrt-ntr*), namely the womb, of which they are more than a plausible symbol, corresponding to Osiris’s house (*pr wsjr*) inside which each “*wsjr N.*” enters in view of his coming forth (*zp 2*). A passage more neatly described in #3 where the land of the necropolis becomes the sacred

one (*t3 dsr[t]*) of which the gods (*hrjw t3*) are guides, giving the right directions (steering oars) to the deceased during his rite of passage.

In conclusion all this may correspond to a possible reading of the emended texts. But let us suppose for a moment that the apparent erroneous writings be in fact intended in order to suggest deeper insights. Let us first compare the almost similar #1:

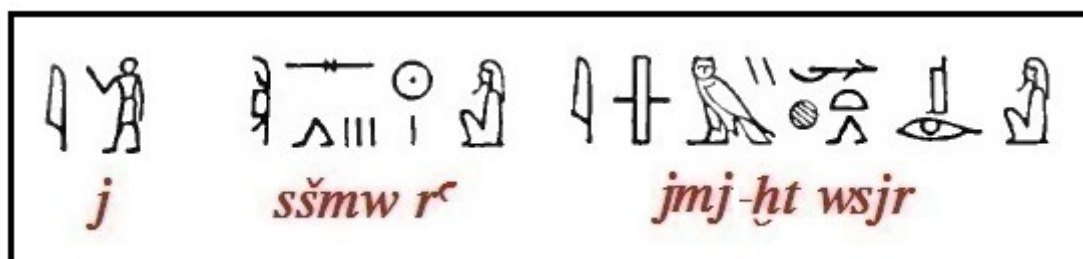


and #3:



Now the singular “*hrj t3*” of #1 may be a reference to Ani who, although deceased, is still living, but needs the gods’ directions in order to traverse the Duat. So they are the gods of the earthly being in view of divinization. In #3 we see these gods of the netherworld (*t3 dsrt*) and of the earthly land (*hrjw t3*), sharing the same “*t3*”, juxtaposed to a single “guide of the Duat”, who could be Ani after his guided passage through “*t3 dsrt*”. Being a “*sšm dw3t*” he has become like the “*sšmw dw3t*” of #1.

The same in #4



where a singular “*jmj-ht*” in the retinue of Osiris is “picked up” from the expected “emended” plurality (*jmjw-ht*). That’s a very important point, since, although still part of a group (plural), a member of a collectivity, Ani is maintaining his personality. From a psychological perspective that is a fundamental passage, stating the acquired ability to avoid psychic inflation that would otherwise disrupt the ego. In visual terms that is the meaning of the lotus plant, which distinguishes the single subject from the archetypal numinosity symbolized by the three (plural) gods.

I am aware that this “depth psychology” reading is less reliable than the emended one, but I would not exclude a scribal wink before closing the two wings of our mysterious shrine.



As regards the door-leaves there is only another scene where they appear, namely in the negative confession of Plate 31:



I'd say that they are two variations of a *sancta sanctorum* space. But the first one is characterized by the exterior acquisition of the traits of specific divinities, of their material form; whereas in our case we contemplate the "knowledge" of the archetypal womb.

