

# PAPYRUS OF ANI

## PLATE 29: Chapter 175

A theatrical séance  
by  
orlando mezzabotta  
(as an unperfect actor on the stage)

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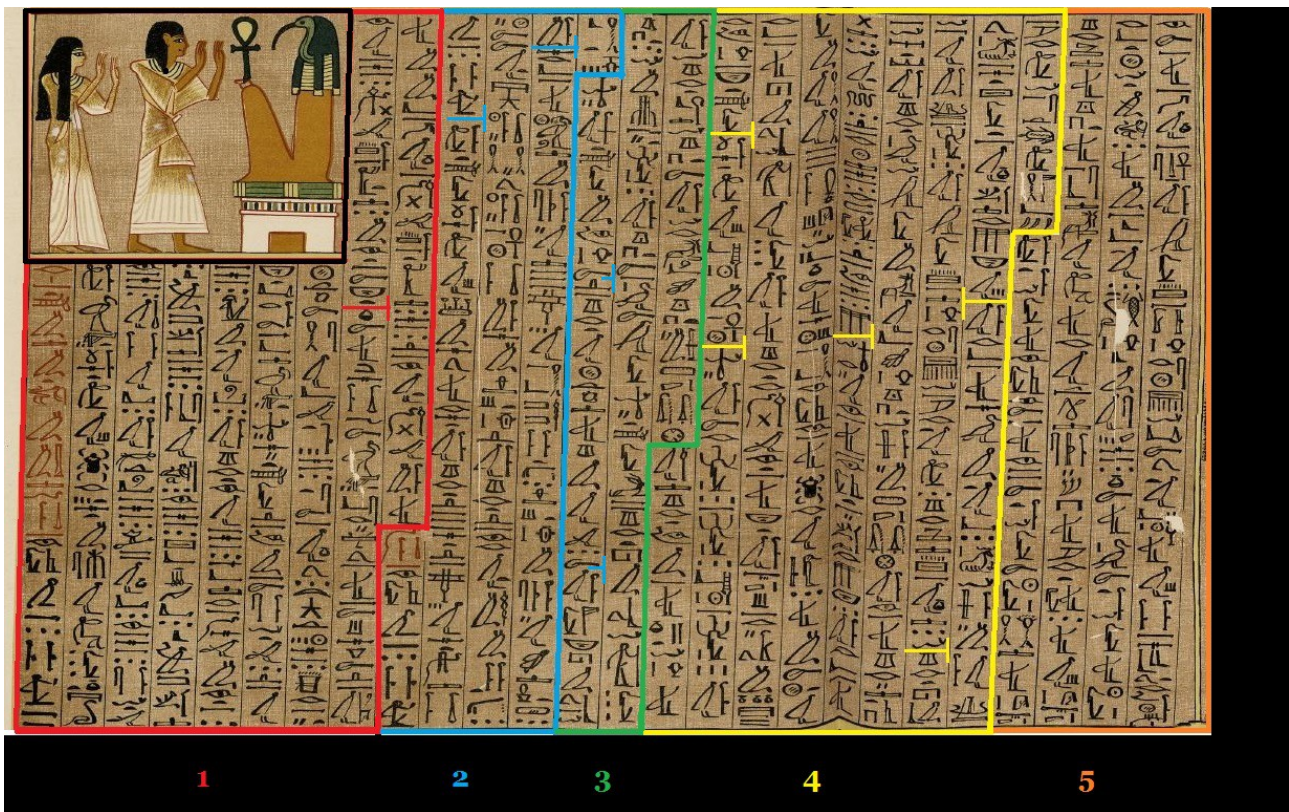


Plate 29 deals specifically with chapter 175 of the *Book of the Dead*, a very interesting and fascinating chapter because of its thematic nucleus (eschatology) and of its theatrical/ritual setting. It is in fact composed of a series of dialogues where Ani and Atum seem to play the major roles, although other characters appear or are present in a more or less visible form and in some points it's not so easy to ascertain who is talking to whom.

Needless to say that, as in my other analyses, this one is also very personal and liable to many objections; probably as many as the ones I raised consulting other interpretations (as usual not commented, or only minimally). At any rate I'll try to sustain my renderings with circumstantial evidences aimed at building a coherent system out of the textual and visual data exposed in this plate.

But, before starting our exploration, we must take note of the positional value of this scene in the course of Ani's journey. It follows, in fact, a very extended series of what are named "*Transformations chapters*", during which the deceased takes the form of various animals and divine beings: in our case 10 of them, running along plates 25-28. In my general introduction I underlined its shamanistic character, aimed at the somatization of psychic structures which could grant the face-to-face vision of the ultimate things, which basically is the central theme of this plate; and, consequently, the vantage point of my interpretation.

Let us begin, then, with an overall look at the plate.



As you see I divided it in five parts which constitute, in a certain sense, the classic five acts of a play; or, perhaps more properly, the five degrees of a “*Ritual of Revelation*”.

The first thing to point out is the “**rubrum**” at the beginning of act [2], with its “***dd-mdw jn***” incipit. Usually that is used at the beginning of each single chapter, after its title; which apparently is not our case. Thus I think that it is legitimate to infer that act [1] work like a sort of “*Prologue*”. In fact it is strictly linked with the unique vignette of the play, displaying *Thoth*, the god of wisdom (and “wisdom” is indeed the basic motif); the text of this act being centred on his figure. He is seated on what seems to be an image of *Rosetau*, holding in his hands a huge **nh**. It's the eternal life that comes from knowledge of the secret things. It's the knowledge that will prevent the “second death”, as asserted by the title of the chapter: “*Spell for not dying again*”.



Ani does address his speech to the god of wisdom:

## ACT 1

1 Spell for not dying again.  
2 Words to be spoken by Osiris Ani, justified.  
3 Oh Thoth, how could it be  
4 that this might happen through the offspring of Nut!  
5 They have started fighting,  
6 they have unleashed turmoil,  
7 they have committed evil,  
8 they have created revolt,  
9 they have done slaughter, they have put (people) under guard.  
10 Moreover, they have turned what is great  
11 into cheapness in all that we have done.  
12 Act then, greatly, Thoth!  
13 This is what Atum said:  
14 *"You shall not see wrongdoings,*  
15 *you shall not bear it!*  
16 *Make short their years,*  
17 *be brief their months,*  
18 *put and end to the ones who did*  
19 *break the Secret (that was) in all that you have done."*  
20 But I am your scribal tool, Thoth;  
21 I have presented to you your ink-pot:  
22 I am not one of those  
23 who break their secret vows.  
24 No breach shall be made through me.

The text may be divided into three separate sections. There are first Ani's bitter and grief-stricken remarks against those (how many!) who acted against laws and civil customs [3 – 11]. The “we” of line 11 is referred to what has been done by “civil people”, of which Ani is/was a member. It can hardly be referred to what Ani and Thoth have done. The man cannot, of course, be equal to the god. Some interpreters resolve the problem assigning the text to Atum, who in fact is mentioned in line 13. But how can lines 20-23 be assigned to him as well? They are definitely Ani's. Could Ani step in while Atum is speaking to Thoth? That would be untenable. Thus I am of the opinion that all the text belongs to Ani. And it is he who reports Atum's commands to Thoth [12-13], inviting him to execute them without delay [14-15] so as to punish those barbarians [16-18] who have defiled Thoth's secret teachings [19].

Then Ani makes clear that he does not belong to that beastly, profane rank that make public, thus abase the “sacred mysteries” [22-24]. I find it “significant” that Ani present himself as Thoth's “scribal tool” (in fact a “palette” ), since he is indeed a scribe. The sentence may be read from two complementary perspectives. Ani states that he has always followed Thoth's directions, complying with the god's tools (reeds and ink); and in the meantime that he is qualified to be “written upon” (taught) by the divine ink of the god.

I am wondering whether this passage had been known by the author of the famous passage of Corpus Hermeticum:

*“Do you weep at this, Asclepius? There is worse to come; Egypt herself will have yet more to suffer; she will fall into a far more piteous plight, and will be infected with yet more, grievous plagues; and this land, which once was holy, a land which loved the gods, and wherein alone, in reward for her devotion, the gods deigned to sojourn upon earth, a land which was the teacher of mankind in holiness and piety, this land will go beyond all in cruel deeds.*

*[...]*

*O Egypt, Egypt, of thy religion nothing will remain but an empty tale, which thine own children in time to come will not believe; nothing will be left but graven words, and only the stones will tell of thy piety.”*

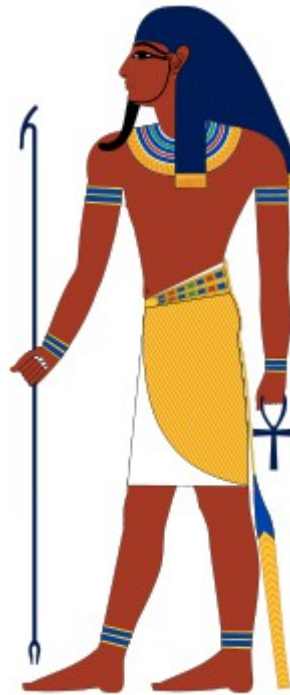
Ani's moving and heart-felt invocation seems to convince the God of Wisdom that his scribe is indeed qualified to be taught the ultimate things, that will come into being through “numinous visions”.

## ACT 2

As noted above, the “*dd-mdw*” glyph marks specifically the beginning of a new section. But there is another interesting hint that should be pointed out, namely Ani's name, twice repeated.



That is commonly considered a scribal oversight. If it were so it was not such a grievous fault, since it allows intriguing interpretations. Let us not forget that Ani has been allowed by Thoth to make his entrance in a sacred space, an abysmal, dark, appalling landscape. It's a psychic quantum leap. Thus it's possible that Ani be paralysed by fear and trembling, unable to utter a word. That is exactly what happens, for example, to Sinuhe when he meets, after his long exile, his sovereign Senwosret. But in our case it's not a king, no matter how mighty, but *Atum* whom Ani does meet, has a vision of. Thus the second “Ani”, this time without the preceding “*wsjr*”, could well be a summons either by Thoth or by Atum himself, inviting him to speak.



- 1 Words to be spoken by Osiris Ani, justified. Ani!
- 2 Oh, Atum, how come
- 3 that I travel to this (place)?
- 4 Indeed, it is not water; it is not air.
- 5 Deep , deep (it is)! Dark (it is), dark!
- 6 abysmal (it is), abysmal!
- 7 Yet one lives therein, in peace of heart,
- 8 although one does not make sex therein.
- [ ATUM ]**
- 9 Glorious power I have given instead
- 10 of water, air and sex pleasures.
- 11 Peace of heart instead of bread and beer.
- 12 And Atum does say,
- 13 looking straight at your face:
- 14 *“I will not, indeed, tolerate that you lack anything .”*

We can observe Ani's uncomfortable and confused condition. Lines 7 and 8 may be read from two different perspectives. As a plain statement: no matter what, one lives in that tenebrous place in quietness of heart. How can that be? Of course Ani can't say that from his own experience, thus he is reporting an accepted theological truth. But I wouldn't exclude, although grammatically questionable, that the sentence be interrogative (Gardiner: E.G. §491 A); which, in this specific moment, would be more suited to Ani's psychological state. And Atum explains [9-11] how quietness of heart and contentment come from a glorious, higher state, not from material things, underlining the substantial diversity of the earthly and the other-world realms.

Lines 12-14 may be somewhat problematical. As for [12] I decided to consider it as a beginning of a new clause, preparing Ani to the new vision that will manifest itself in the next scene.



I picture “**m m33 hr =k**” as Atum looking into Ani's eye and assuring him (look at me!) that he will lack nothing. Then the stare goes deeper in Ani's psyche, raising in him the vision of Osiris, who is the character Atum addresses in the next act. As a theatrical prompt: “*Enter Osiris*”.



As a matter of fact, considering the “psychedelic” setting, we might even hypothesize a psychic dissociation. It's the visual manifestation of the Osiris who is in Ani (*wsjr 3nj*). If we read the formulaic “*wsjr N.*” as a genitive construction, then “*wsjr 3nj*”, grammatically dissociated, becomes “*wsjr & 3nj*”.

### ACT 3

Now the role of Ani is that of a spectator of the ensuing dialogue between Atum and Osiris.



That may be in fact the re-enacting of the mythical encounter of the two gods when the dead Osiris *descended ad inferos*. This works also as a textual justification of what Atum promised Ani, that he would lack nothing. These are the reasons why:

- 1 As each god has taken his seat
- 2 in the *Boat of Millions of Years*,
- 3 so your seat (is given) to your son Horus!



- 4 Thus says Atum.  
5 Moreover it shall be that he dispatch the Great Ones;  
6 and also that he'll rule your throne,  
7 and that he shall inherit the throne  
8 which is in the *Island of Fire*.

In other words, although physically dead, Osiris keeps living, virtually and for millions of years [2], through the figure of his son Horus [3], thus avoiding the second death. And, in our theatrical setting, Ani has the vision of Horus, who takes his mighty stance when Atum speaks about him [3].



“*h3b =f wrw*” is in fact a metaphor for “most powerful”, since he can command the Great Ones; be they the Elders of the earthly palace, the “throne” of [6]; or the gods of the other-world, the “throne” of [7-8]. Thus, by analogy, Ani himself should be assured of his continuity, of a millions-of-years-life through his own son; a concept that will be reaffirmed at the end of the spell (Act 5).

## ACT 4

At this point Osiris and Horus retreat themselves in the background, leaving Ani to resume his dialogue with Atum,



introduced by an intriguing passage.

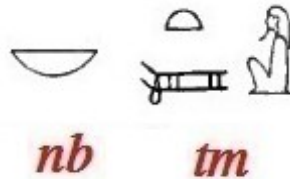


First of all one should find out who “*snnw jt*” is. I exclude “*snnwt =f*”, that would point to a female figure who has no place in this chapter. Of course the “*t*” could be an unnecessary scribal addition, modifying the correct “*snnw =f*”; but I prefer to stick to the text and see whether some sense may come out of it, as it is.

Now, since Atum has been the main interlocutor of Ani, I think it legitimate to suppose that “*father*” does refer to him. Were it not for the fact that Atum is indeed “*a god father*”. We know then that “*snnw*” is “*equal / associate / companion / fellow / counterpart*”. Thus who could ever this “*father's fellow*” be? I would not

exclude to see in him the other part of the symbolic figure that encloses the double aspect of the Creator: *Potency* and *Act*. Atum would thus be the manifestation, the “attantial” component, of the “numinous potentiality” (**Demiurge**) immanent to primeval Chaos.

In conclusion: up to now Ani has had the vision of Atum as the manifest aspect of the father image (Demiurge); but that is not enough. He wishes to have a face-to-face vision (**hr r m33 hr**) of the ultimate *Numen*,



who is not only the *Lord of All*, but the Lord of *Atum* as well: the numinous pattern. He is indeed the *Unique One* who can reveal to Ani the mysteries of the ultimate things in their roots.

Of course the verb “**wd**” (command) might look somewhat strange. “Grant that I see...” would be more appropriate than “Command that ...”, since Ani does not need any order, he wants to see the *Lord of All*. But probably he feels that he has not the necessary energy to face such a numinous vision; his psychological resistances get the better of him. That's why he asks Atum to command him (overcoming his opposing forces) to go forth so as to meet, face-to-face, the Demiurge.

[ANI]

- 1 Command, then, that I see the fellow of the father,
- 2 that my face may come to see the face of the *Lord of All*.

[Enter the Demiurge]

[ANI]

- 3 What shall be the lifetime of life?

[DEMIURGE]

- 4 It is said, that you (are allotted) millions of millions (of years);
- 5 a lifetime of millions (of years).

6 But as I have disposed that he [Horus] dispatch the Great Ones,  
7 I am also going to destroy all that I have made.  
8 This earth is going to return to the Primeval Waters,  
9 in the chaotic flood, as in its primal state.  
10 But I am the cure which goes with Osiris,  
11 once made my transformations  
12 into something else from the serpents  
13 which mankind does not know,  
14 which the gods do not see.

***[ the DEMIURGE morphs once again into ATUM ]***

15 How goodly did I act on behalf of Osiris,  
16 more distinguished than all the gods!  
17 Since I gave him a domain,  
18 and moreover his son Horus  
19 is the heir of his throne  
20 which is in the *Island of Fire*.  
21 I have made what sustains his [Osiris's] seat  
22 in the Boat of Millions of Years,  
23 while Horus stands firm on his palace-façade,  
24 by virtue of his desire to be he who builds his monuments.

***[ ANI ]***

25 Yet it came aboard, as well, the “*ba*” of Seth,  
26 (who reputes himself) more distinguished than all the gods.

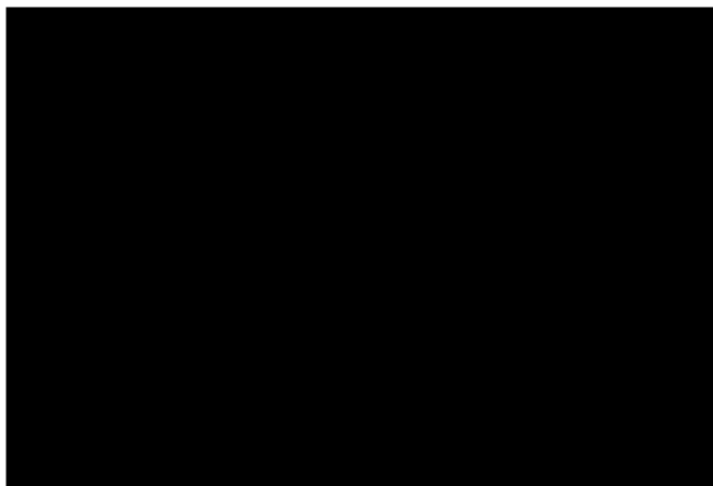
***[ ATUM ]***

27 I have seen to it that it be put under guard -

28 his “*ba*” within the Boat -

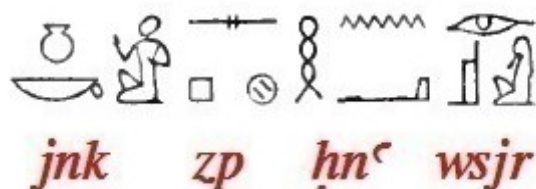
29 because of his desire of frightening the limbs of the god.

So, having chased away his inner resistances through Atum's help [1-2], Ani can experience the ultimate vision. Needless to say that no human or godly eye can contemplate the Demiurge in his essence, but it can only be invested by the deep, dark, unmeasurable, abysmal “numinous”. We should imagine Ani immersed in total darkness,



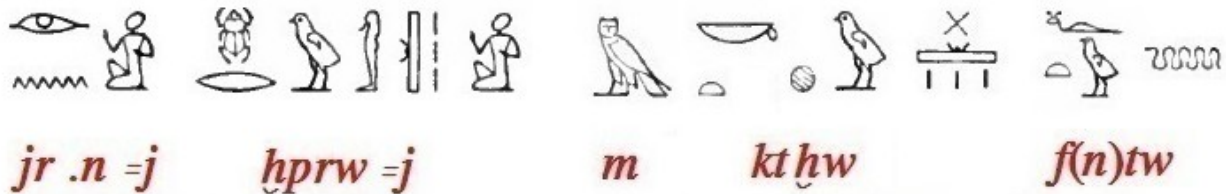
while he asks how long the “creation” will last [3].

We can now hear the unfathomable Voice stating that the universe will last almost forever [4-5], but that at the end, according to His design, it will turn again into chaos [6-9], since He creates [6] and destroys as well [7]. But that it's not the END, since LIFE will begin a new cycle: a “resurrection” symbolized by Osiris [10].

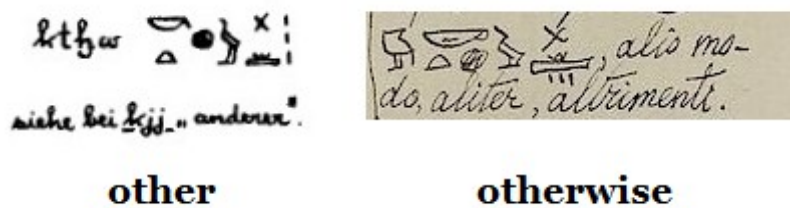


The “*zp*” which goes with Osiris is the immanence of life. It's interesting to note that “*zp*” may be not only “*cure*”, but “*misdeed, fault*” as well (Faulkner, C.D., 221). In other words: as the Demiurge devised the end (Death), in the meantime he conceived the new beginning (Life), in his “Atum aspect”. It's a morphing described

by lines 11-14, showing how the Demiurge, after having become one with the primordial snakes (Chaos) [12-14], transforms Himself once again into his other aspect [11-12],



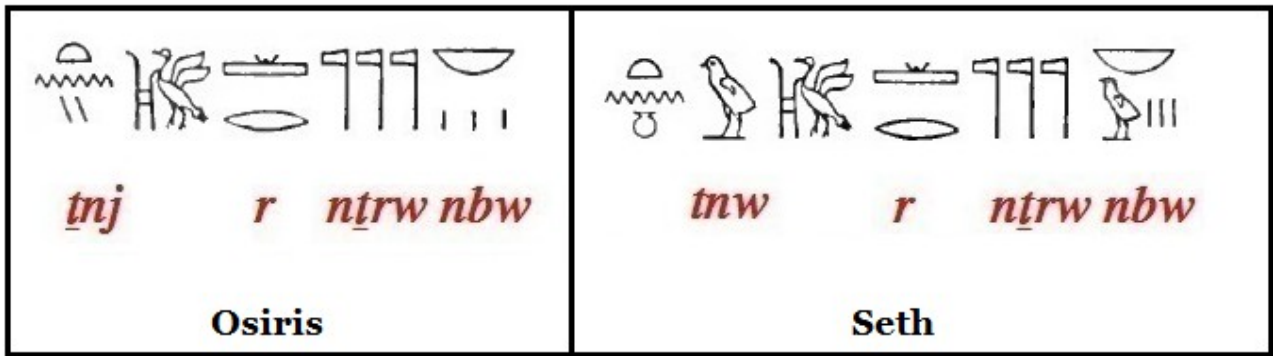
that of Atum, the Creator. One should note how “*m kthw*” may suggest some interesting readings different from the obvious “another” or “otherwise”.



They would be, of course, side resonances. But we could pick up a “*mkt*” (protection); and “*hw*” might be a participle of “*hwj*” (to protect); whereas in the Z9 glyph [X] might point to “*sw3*” (to pass); thus a general image of “*he who protects from the passage/advancement of snakes*”.

In our theatrical setting we can picture the figures of our characters emerging from the darkness. It's Atum now who speaks to Ani, with Osiris and Horus still in the background. Lines 15-24 describe the cycle of Life, from the resurrection of Osiris, who becomes Lord of the Other-world [17]; to the continuity of Horus, who is mighty [23] not only because he is Osiris's son, but thanks to his own capabilities [24].

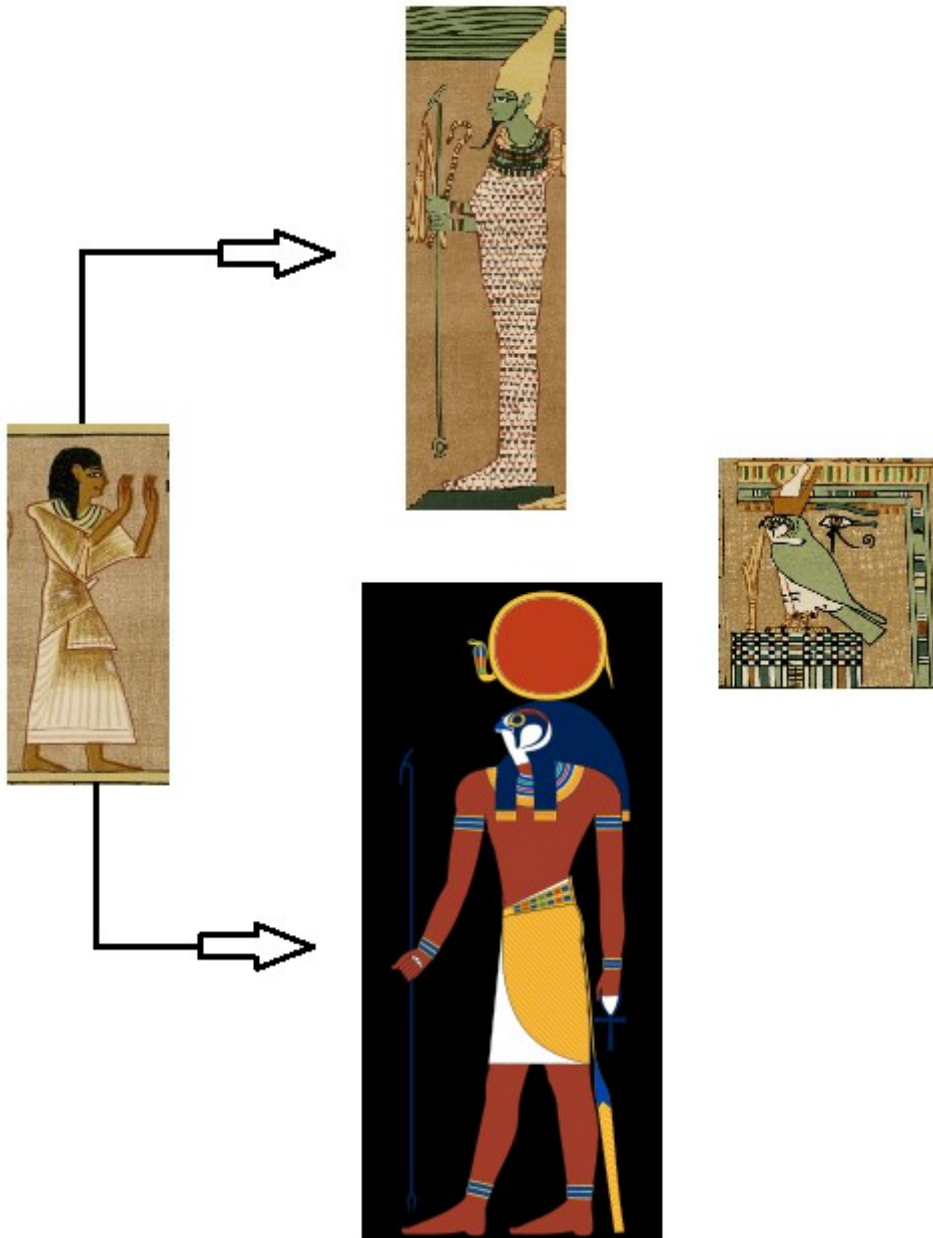
However, although Atum has assured Osiris's everlastingness [21-22], Ani remarks that Seth, the archenemy -- he who reposes himself the most distinguished god [26], using the same words with which Atum described Osiris [16] –



has also a place in the *Boat of millions of years*. Thus Ani points out the “continuity” of evil, as well. Atum's reply [27-29] seems to acknowledge the inconvenient fact; but making clear that if Seth cannot be gotten rid of (since his place has been pre-ordained in the Boat of Life), nonetheless he is being closely guarded because of his built-in dangerousness. Thus Ani should not fear.

## ACT 5

Here the role of speaker passes back to Ani, who is now in front of the three gods who have played their part in the play.



First he addresses Osiris, calling him “*father*”. This could be misleading, since one might think that Ani has assumed the role of Horus, but that is not the case, since the rest of the lines have not Horusian traits.



1 O father of mine, Osiris,  
2 may you do for me what your father Ra made for you.  
3 May I go down (alight) on earth; may I build my throne.  
4 May my heir be healthy; my tomb be well founded,  
5 prosperous my servants on earth.  
6 May my foes be thrown in pains:  
7 Serket over their bounds.  
8 I am your son, O father, O Ra,  
9 may you make this for me,  
10 for life, prosperity, health.  
11 As Horus stands firm on his palace-façade,  
12 may you concede that this lifetime of mine go  
13 to attain the glorious state.

Ani asks Osiris to be treated as Osiris has been by his father Ra/Atum. But the term “father” related to Osiris [1] has a symbolic value. It's the Osirian generating power immanent to Ani, the “*wsjr ʒnj*” that will allow him to become an Osiris; sharing thus the benefits *Ra/Atum* bestowed on the original god [2]. Lines 3-7 are more or less a variation of what has been said in Act 3 and Act 4 [17-24].

Lines 6 and 7 form a very vivid image: the ropes/bounds (*kʒsw*) torturing the “bones” (*ksw*) of the imprisoned enemies like the venomous stings (*nkʿwt*) of the scorpion-goddess Serket/Selqit (*srkt*).

The term “*father*” reappears in line 8, this time referred to *Ra/Atum*. That is in fact the logic conclusion of the transformation process. Having become Osiris, Ani can address Ra as “father”, invoking the “durability” symbolized by Horus [11] and the eternal state [12] of the glorious beings [13]. One might ask: why *Ra* instead of *Atum*? Because Ra is the sun at its highest radiance and that gives to the last act a luminous finale. It's the enlightenment (through knowledge) that prevents the “dying again” the title of the spell talks about.

