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Another Perspective on the Set of Gilded Couches of Tutankhamun

Seham Mohammed Hussein Ahmed

THREE SETS of gilded wooden couches were found well-preserved in the tomb of Tutankhamun (KV 62) when discovered by Howard Carter. They are now exhibited in the Grand Egyptian Museum.¹ Stored initially along the west wall of the antechamber, they were organised in growing order, from the smallest to the largest, facing north towards the burial chamber.² Resting on rectangular bases, they have the shape of sacred animals; the first couch represents a lioness goddess,³ the second couch a cow,⁴ and the third a hybrid goddess⁵ consisting of a hippopotamus head with lion paws. The slabs of the footboards were decorated with the djed pillar, tyet knot signs and representations of apotropaic gods.

So diverging views exist concerning the function of these couches. Some scholars suggested that they had a funerary function during the king's mummification assumed to be part of the equipment intended for Tutankhamun's rebirth after death;⁶ others thought that these couches related to the sun god;⁷ others suggested that the lioness couch has mistakenly been identified due to its inscription "beloved of Mehet-weret." Some thought that the cow couch was meant to convey Tutankhamun to the solar heaven according to legend the sun god ascending to the sky [fig. 1] on the back of the cow goddess Mehet-weret. Other scholars believe that the third couch represented Ammit with a leopard body, a conflicting perspective as Ammit remains a creature with malevolent attributes.⁸ As yet, the answer is not definite, warranting a new study.

¹ Carter No. 035, 073, 137. They were first dismantled to be brought to Cairo Museum at the time of their discovery. Contemporary signs for their assembling can be seen on the neck of the animals.

² Mohammed Saleh thought that they are ranking from smallest to largest along the western wall of the antechamber, facing north towards the burial chamber. For more see: M. SALEH, H. SOUROUZIAN, *The Egyptian Museum Cairo: Official Catalogue*, Cairo, 1987, 183.

³ Height: 156 cm, length: 180 cm, width: 91 cm.

⁴ Height: 188 cm, length: 208 cm, width: 128 cm.

⁵ Height: 134 cm, length: 236 cm, width: 126 cm.

⁶ I. RÉGEN, "*Šfdy.t* et le transport du mort. Enquête lexicographique et archéologique," *BIFAO* 109, 2009, 468.

⁷ "The sun is the being, which does not die in the evening but only sleeps and at dawn is resurrected or reborn, and these beds represent protection during this period, their role was very important in the afterlife; the dead king was laid on one or other of these in order to be reanimated according to the three phases of resurrection, the beds would carry him to his eternal residence; at the top of each an inscription of Osiris-Nebkheperure confirms the role they played for the late king (...)," M. ZAKI, *The Legacy of Tutankhamun Art and History*, Giza, 2008, 152.

⁸ I.E.S. EDWARDS, *Tutankhamun, his tomb and its Treasures*, New York, 1976.



Fig. 1. The sun, as a child, is lifted up by the cow Mehet-weret. Vignette of BD 71 (I. Munro, *Die Totenbuch-Papyri des Ehepaars Ta-scheret-en-Aset und Djed-Chi aus der Bes-en-Mut-Familie*, HAT 12, 2011, Photo-Tafel 17).

For the context, these pieces of furniture, the couches' set, were represented in the Kings' Valley tombs.⁹ Some fragments were found in the tomb of Horemheb [fig. 2-3].¹⁰

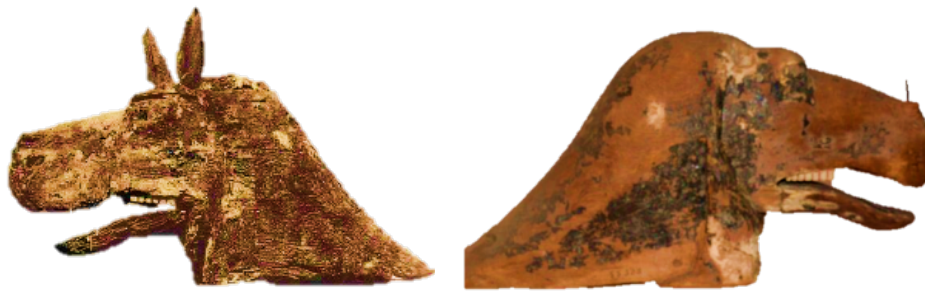


Fig. 2. Hippopotamus head from a large ritual couch, Horemheb tomb, 18th Dynasty, KV57, GEM No 13887, 13936, (© Grand Egyptian Museum).

⁹ Like the tomb of Ramesses III, Mohamed Saleh thought that: "A representation of three similar beds in the tombs of Ramses III indicates that they formed part of typical repertoire of royal funerary equipment in the New Kingdom" (M. SALEH, H. SOUROUZIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 183).

¹⁰ GEM No. 13887, 13936, 13927, 13913.



Fig. 3. Lioness head from a large ritual couch, Horemheb tomb, 18th Dynasty, KV57, GEM No 13927, 13913 (© Grand Egyptian Museum).

The papyrus of the Fayum¹¹ [fig. 4] may contain the closest analogy to this set of couches, which is considered the evolution to the content of the Celestial Cow Book. They appear concerned with the carrying and protection of the sun god during his nocturnal journey, despite following different ranking from the couches in question.¹²



Fig. 4. The papyrus of the Fayum (© Walter Art Museum in Baltimore).

By comparing the second shrine's inscriptions, the hieroglyphic signs and cartouches on the couches, and the incarnations of the couches themselves, is it possible to determine the function of these couches? Furthermore, their arrangement within the tomb and the funerary material is examined accordingly.

Context

It has been suggested that Tutankhamun's burial was a rushed undertaking and elements of the funerary equipment were taken from his relatives. It would have led to unusual architecture or decoration, and the placement of tomb equipment. This article emphasizes that these couches were placed in proper order.

¹¹ Dating to the Greco-Roman period, preserved in Walter Art Museum in Baltimore, USA.

¹² For more about the book of the Fayum: H. BEINLICH, *Das Buch vom Fayum: zum religiösen Eigenverständnis einer ägyptischen Landschaft*, *ÄgAbh* 51, Wiesbaden, 1991; *id.*, "The book of the Faiyum," in A. Wiczorek, *Egypt's mysterious Book of the Faiyum*, Dettelbach, 2013, 27:77.

The Lioness Couch

The Lioness Couch [fig. 5] is considered one of the couches of the ancient Egyptian religion as it is related to the mummy of Osiris and its mummification.¹³



Fig. 5. The Lioness couch (© The Griffith Institute, University of Oxford).

Indeed, the lioness, as represented in this couch, helped Osiris resurrect in Chapter 26 of the Book of the Dead.¹⁴ This spell recalls the heart of the deceased in the Netherworld, where the deceased begs Anubis and Geb to help him recall his heart, mouth, legs, and eyes. He states:

“May the door-leaves of the sky open for me; Geb opens my eyes which were closed up, he extends my legs which were contracted; Anubis strengthens my thighs which were joined together, the Goddess Sekhmet stretches me out, I will be in the sky, a command shall be made for my benefit in Memphis, I shall be aware in my heart, I shall have power in my heart, I shall have a powerful arms, I shall have power to do whatever I desire; my soul and my corpse shall not be restrained at the portals of the West when I go in or out in peace.”

The title of the king “beloved of *Mhyt-wr.t*,” namely “beloved of Mehet the Great one,” was described on the Lioness Couch. This goddess called “Mehet,” the distant goddess who returns appeased to bring the Nile floods from which the country lives.¹⁵ Mehet is represented in a

¹³ See chapter 151, Book of the Dead.

¹⁴ According to the papyrus of Ani, this chapter does not exist in Coffin Text. He was mentioned in the Second shrine of Tutankhamun, on the left of the third register. Chapter 146 of the Book of the Dead, which is about the beginning of the spells to enter the secret entrances to the dwelling of Osiris, the goddess of this entrance was a lioness “who is at the fore, lady of the Power, who raises the Divine and celestial form, who cloaks her lord (Osiris) after his weakness” and the doorkeeper called “who created himself.”

¹⁵ LGG III, 372b.

lioness shape, considered as an incarnation of Hathor, Sekhmet and Isis.¹⁶

Four torches in the shape of ankh signs [fig. 6] were found on this couch, evoking the name of the Second Chapter of the Book of El-Fayum, “the House of flame.” In this Netherworld place, the torches are set ablaze when Osiris comes, his coming referring to the Nile flood’s start.¹⁷ The ancient Egyptian religion considered that the flood flowed from the body of Osiris in the first creation, the sources of the Nile originating from the netherworld (*Dw3t*), which was ruled by Osiris.¹⁸



Fig. 6. The four torches in the shape of ankh signs under the lioness couch (© The Griffith Institute, University of Oxford).

In the religious literature, after his death, Osiris was elevated to the sky in the form of the star *s3h* (Orion).¹⁹ From thereon, the texts described this star as “*B3 3 n Osiris*,” namely the great soul of Osiris, who ruled the stars. Ancient Egyptians had discovered that this star disappears under the horizon for 70 days every year and made it the symbol of Osiris’s death entering the *Dw3t*. The reappearance of this star, and thus Osiris, foretold the flood.²⁰

¹⁶ F. ATTIA, *Valley of the Kings*, Giza, 2006, 31; M. SALEH, H. SOUROUZIAN, *op. cit.*; 183; R. WILKINSON, *The complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, London, 2003, 179; G. PINCH, *Egyptian mythology: A guide to the gods, Goddesses, and traditions of Ancient Egypt*, New York, 2002, 163.

¹⁷ H. BEINLICH, *op. cit.*, 42.

¹⁸ Chapter 185 of the Book of the Dead praises Osiris in his place, and four gods around him carrying a candle or torch (W. BUDGE, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Papyrus of Ani in the British Museum*, Londres, 1895, Chap. 185).

¹⁹ Pyramid Texts Spell 819c, 820d-e: “behold he has come back as *s3h*, Osiris has come as *s3h*, The sky shall conceive you with *s3h*, the *Dw3t* shall give you birth with *s3h*, life is life by the command of lords, may you live may you shine or ascend with *s3h* from the eastern side of the sky,” A.P. KOZLOFF, “Star-Gazing in Ancient Egypt,” *BiEtud* 106/4, Cairo, 1993, 170-171; G. WAINWRIGHT, « Orion and the great star », *JEA* 22, 1936, 45. It was mentioned in the Pyramid Texts that Mehet-weret was attributed to her the Judgment on the deceased in the court of Maat, and it was believed until the Late Period that this trial was taking place at the house of Mehet-weret. W. BUDGE, *The Book of Coming out by the Day* (P. Atia, Trans.), Cairo, 1988, 205.

²⁰ H. BRUGSCH, *Thesaurus Inscriptionum Aegyptiacarum* I, Leipzig, 1883, 9; Fr. DAUMAS, *Les mammisis de temples égyptiens*, Paris, 1958, 311-312; L.V. ŽABKAR, *A Study of the Ba Concept in Ancient Egyptian Texts*, *SAOC* 34, 1968, 14.

This may explain this title “beloved of Mehet-weret” inscribed on this couch, establishing the relationship between Osiris, the flood, the star *s3h*, and the goddess Mehet/Sekhmet. It may suggest that the Osirian couch in the form of the Lioness Couch represents the star *s3h* (Orion).²¹ This hypothesis is confirmed by Chapter 23 of the Book of the Dead:

“I am Sekhmet, who sits on the great west side of the sky; I am the great female Orion²², who is in the middle of the Heliopolis’s souls.”

In the Spell 26 of the Book of the Dead, the deceased begs Anubis and Geb to regain control of his organs, to possess his consciousness, and to control his own *k3*, so that his body is not trapped in the West. As outlined above in this recitation, the ancient Egyptian did not consider the body as a separate entity from the soul; the human being is a body and a soul, and each organ inherited specific human spiritual and psychological traits tailored to the physiological nature of this organ.²³ For instance, the four limbs are linked to volition, cooperation and the ability to achieve one’s wishes and desires.²⁴

This theory is illustrated in the myth “The death and the awakening of Osiris,” which links the rupture of the physical body, and that of the soul whose traits were distributed among the human organs. Reuniting them led to reviving again, known as the spiritual birth/ new birth.

A scene from the Second shrine of King Tutankhamun²⁵ [fig. 7] shows two snakes; one of them

²¹ Pyramid Texts Spell 882b-c, which explains that the king crosses the sky with the star *s3h*: “O king, you are this great star, the companion of the star *s3h*, who crosses the sky with *s3h*, who sails in *Dw3t* with Osiris,” G. WAINWRIGHT, *op. cit.*, 45.

²² The Papyrus of Nu (BM EA 10477) noted another title of this god: “*s3hyt*” namely “who approached” which refers to the god *s3h*, see LGG VI, 151; Wb IV, 22, 7; G. LAPP, *The Papyrus of Nu (BM EA 10477), Catalog of Books of the Dead in the British Museum I*, London, 1997, pl. 12.

²³ Pyramid Texts 18 (Pepy I’s spell 41 & Merenre’s spell 29) emphasises our theory, where the king was stimulated to look for the limbs of his *k3* which were in front and behind him, sound like the limbs of another body separated from his body: “Gathering your bones for you, join together your limbs for you, and get your heart for you in your body.”

²⁴ Chapter 92 from the Book of the Dead emphasis this theory; “gain the power of the feet” was about the soul gaining the power of the volition, which Egyptians saw as coming from the feet.

²⁵ In the immediate Post-Amarna period, ancient Egyptians innovated the shape of the serpent which wrapped around itself, called “its tail in his mouth,” later called “Ouroboros.” The oldest example of this scene appeared on the Second shrine of the king Tutankhamun: E. HORNUNG, *Conceptions of Gods in Ancient Egypt: the one and the many*, (Trans. by J. Baines), London, 1982, 178-179, fig. 18. This author adds that the full circle forged by the body of the serpent is portrayed surrounded by the world to separate between the existence and non-existence, as well as for protection. Clark suggests that the snake symbolizes the momentum the cosmic ocean which was created by Atum when he created Shu in order to create the necessary space into the primeval water to create the good. Clark interpreted the scene on the Second shrine of king Tutankhamun as representing all the energy of the universe and being bound by the two Snakes of earth and sky: R. CLARK, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, London, 1959, 77-80. Shu represented as the consciousness itself, he is hidden out-of-sight and manifests with the creator and thus represents the active thinking as a distinct form of the inert material of the world, and with the creation of the light shapes can be seen, it belongs to appearing, in fact, he is a vision tool, while Atum is the main Deity inherent in all images: *ibid.*, 88. Piankoff mentioned that the human organs which were embodied inside the serpent *Tpy* may refer to cryptographic texts and read it as: “Who hides Horus.” A. PIANKOFF, *The shrines of Tutankh-Amon*, New York, 1951, 48. However, Darnell mentioned that the human organs were to be read as: “adoration to circle one, the circle

is wrapped around the legs, and the other around the head, neck region and upper body. Inside these two reptiles, the different organs of the human body are represented. In the mummy's middle region, a circle with a bird representing the *b3* of the deceased king is bound by a rope held by seven gods.



Fig. 7. Scene from 2nd shrine of Tutankhamun (© A. Piankoff, *The Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, New York, 1955, pl. 6, 726).

This representation may evoke the royal *k3* (*k3*-energy²⁶), where the coiled serpent attracts the energy of existence and life (the *k3*-energy), which was in life distributed in the body's organs. At the same time, it provides the organs with a safe setting, protecting it from dispersion, and helping its resurrection in a spiritual form. The Star *s3h* representing the *b3* of Osiris, is simultaneously considered as a stature or rank which collects *k3*-energy and evokes it. This illustration shows that the *b3* has not been separated from the physical body, illustrating how the *b3* and the *k3* are together.

This is illustrated by the Osirian statue²⁷ [fig. 8] that belonged to King Tutankhamun, which was found in the treasury chamber of his tomb. The king is represented lying on a funerary couch resembling the Lioness couch, with two birds on his sides. The one with a hawk's body and human head likely represented the royal *b3*, while the other, in hawk form, was the royal *k3*, as the embodiment of Horus. Both birds are embracing the king with one of their wings.

on is Ra:" J.C. DARNELL, *The enigmatic netherworld books of the Solar-Osirian unity: cryptographic compositions in the tomb of Tutankhamun, Ramesses VI, and Ramesses IX*, OBO 198, Fribourg, Göttingen, 2004. 78.

²⁶ The *k3* is the spiritual and psychological traits which are borne by the body parts during the life.

²⁷ Carter No. 331a, JE 60720.



Fig. 8. Osiride recumbent figure of Tutankhamun, lying on a funeral bier (© The Griffith Institute, University of Oxford).

The energy of *k3* is the energy of life, necessary for the physical body during the life of the king and also for his intangible body that will be blessed with immortality. This process – evoking the royal *k3* – is carried out under the care of the god Horus. The more a king dominates his own *k3*, the more he is the embodiment of Horus, and then he sees his being as a consort to him or separate body.

This is evidenced by two life-size statues²⁸ of the king [fig. 9], standing at the entrance of the burial chamber in front of the lioness couch; one of them carries the earthly titles of the king Tutankhamun, while the other statue bears the title “the Royal *k3*.”²⁹ And in a scene from the north wall of Tutankhamun’s burial chamber, both the king and behind him his *k3* depicted as his consort, were received by Osiris.



Fig. 9. Large two life-size statues of Tutankhamun (© The Griffith Institute, University of Oxford).

²⁸ Carter No 29; 22, JE 60707.

²⁹ The inscribed text: “The good god of whom one can be proud, the sovereign of whom one boasts, the royal *k3* of Harakhte, Osiris, the king lord of the lands, Nebkheperure, justified.”

The Cow Couch

To contextualise the Cow Couch, in the antechamber, a large quantity of reeds was found beside and below the Lioness Couch,³⁰ with many offerings under the Cow Couch [fig. 10-11]. The antechamber may simulate the environment through which the king crosses after he arrived at the Gate of the Eastern Horizon of the Sky.³¹ Indeed, the books of the Netherworld describe the features of this environment:

- The primeval flood that the king crosses to reach the heavens.
- The fields of the Reeds and offerings,³² where the god Ra purifies himself in its lakes. These fields contain the islands of the earth located between the thighs of Nut.
- The Horizon (*zht*) is a paradise surrounded by the flood water on each side.



Fig. 10. The offerings under the Cow Couch (© The Griffith Institute, University of Oxford).

³⁰ Some scholars suggested that Howard Carter himself placed some of the reeds in front of the wall to the burial chamber just to hide that he had already opened the wall, but this hypothesis has no corroborating evidence.

³¹ L. LESKO, "Ancient Egyptian Cosmogony and Cosmology," in B. Shafer, *Religion in Ancient Egypt*, 1991, 120.

³² R. WEILL, *Le Champ des Roseaux et le Champ des Offrandes dans la religion funéraire et la religion générale*, *Études d'égyptologie* 3, Paris, 1936, 90-91.



Fig. 11. The large quantity of reeds was found beside and below the Lioness Couch (© The Griffith Institute, University of Oxford).

Following the king's arrival on the eastern horizon of the sky, he must equip himself with enough food and drink to obtain the necessary energy to continue his journey. This is confirmed by a spell from the Pyramid Text:³³

“O Horus and Thot, he praying for you, and seeks to invite him to accompany you, you both who cross the sky, these are Horus and Thoth. Take him with you, that he may eat of what you eat, that he may drink of what you drink, that he may live on what you live, that he may sit on what you sit, that he may be strong in what you are strong, that he may sail in what you sail, his booth is a harbour among the reeds in the fields of Reeds and the plenty of him is in the Field of offerings. His offering is among you, you gods! The water of him is wine, like that of Re, he goes around the sky like Re, he traverses the sky like Thoth.”

The role of Sopdt³⁴ is evident at this stage, as she is considered the guide of the king in the heavenly reed fields.³⁵ This is confirmed by the Pyramid Texts 442, § 822a-c:

“Your third is Sothis (Sopdt) of the pure places, who will lead you by the beautiful ways in heaven in the reed fields.”

In the Pyramid Texts 509, § 1123 a-c:

“Here I'm, go up to the sky to live amongst the imperishable stars, my sister is Sothis, and my guide

³³ Pyramid Texts, 210, § 128:130.

³⁴ The goddess Sopdet represented the star Sirius in ancient Egypt. Known to the Greeks as Sothis, she was conflated with Isis.

³⁵ Pyramid Texts 1561 a-b: “*szh* shall give him his arm, Sothis shall take his hand.”

is *Ntr-Dw3w* (the morning star), and they hold my hand in the fields of offerings.”

Sothis supplied the deceased with offerings, as illustrated in the Pyramid Texts 477, § 965a-c:

“It is Sothis, thy daughter, who loves thee, who makes thy yearly offerings in her name.”³⁶

Sothis was considered the cosmic mother who created life on earth. This theory is emphasised through an excerpt of the invocation to Isis from the temple of Philae:³⁷

“I am the one who manifests in the Sothis star, I am the cosmic mother to whom humans invoke, I am the one who separated the sky from the earth, I am the one who guides the stars in its orbit, and I am the one who set the paths of the sun and the moon.”

This invocation explains the cartouche found on the Cow Couch, which refers to the king as: “beloved of Isis-Mehet”, beloved of Isis the inundation.

Isis was also associated with the flood combined with the star Sothis, and called the great donor,³⁸ and Sopdt was called *B3-n-3st*, namely “the soul of Isis”.³⁹ The star Sothis played a role in the resurrection of Osiris, when the star *s3h*, representing Osiris, disappears for 70 days every year, as a symbol of the death of Osiris then enters the *Dw3t*, the star Sothis disappears under the line of sight and descends to the world of *Dw3t* in search of her partner to help him in his resurrection. After 70 days of Sothis being in *Dw3t*, Sothis returns behind Osiris-*s3h* in the Eastern horizon. Whereas the appearance of Osiris foretells the flood, the appearance of Sothis itself is the beginning of the flood.⁴⁰

Due to the relationship between the star *s3h* and the star Sothis, Isis and Osiris, the flood and rebirth, the Cow Couch may have represented the star Sothis.

Thanks to the role of Sothis in the resurrection of Osiris and the coming of the Nile flood, it is considered the link between the corporeal and the non-corporeal world. Consequently, it qualified Sothis to be a likely stature or rank for the *b3*, being the soul after its separation from the physical body and bearing the good and bad traits. For this reason, it - the *b3*- remained attached to its physical body, inhabiting both the spiritual and the physical world (the *Dw3t*), that is ruled by Osiris. The Pyramid Texts 412, § 723 a-c show the association between *s3h* and Sothis:

“You shall reach the sky as Orion, your soul shall be as effective as Sothis.”⁴¹

³⁶ For more about the relationship between Sothis and *s3h*: R. KRAUSS, *Astronomische konzepte und jenseitsvorstellungen in den Pyramidentexten*, *ÄgAbh* 59, Wiesbaden. 1997.

³⁷ A. ERMAN, *A Handbook of Egyptian Religion* (translated by A.S. Griffith), London, 1907, 244.

³⁸ A litany to Hathor dating to Ptolemaic period said: “To speak words of Hathor, the Mistress-of-Dendera, the Eye-of-the-Re, who dwells in Edfu, Isis, the Mother of God who protects her son, Sothis, the great one, who lets the Nile flow out of his cave Keep gods and people alive;” D. KURTH, *Edfu*, Wiesbaden, 2004, 166.

³⁹ Chr. DESROCHES-NOBLECOURT, « Isis-Sothis-le chien, la vigne et la tradition millénaire », in *Livre du centenaire*, Cairo, 1980, 17.

⁴⁰ R. CLARK, *op. cit.*, 85.

⁴¹ R. WILKINSON, *op. cit.*, 127.

Sothis was associated with some goddesses, the most famous of whom was Isis, who wore her crown.⁴² She was also related to the goddess Hathor,⁴³ or the goddess Seshat.⁴⁴ Sothis was also closely related to the goddesses of the first waterfall Satis (Neith)⁴⁵ and Anuket, as a result of their association with the Nile, its sources and floods. The merging of the goddess Neith with the star Sothis is due to the flood, according to the myth of the Night of the Teardrop, in which Isis sheds a tear that the goddess Neith picks up and pours into the Nile, causing the annual flood.

Chapter 66 of the Book of the Dead clarifies why the two Lioness and Cow couches were ranked or placed in this way:

“I know that I was conceived by Sekhmet and borne by Neith. I am Horus who came forth from the eye of Horus (...), I am Horus who flew up, I have lighted on the forehead of Ra in the prow of his Bark which is in Nun.”

The Female Hippopotamus Couch

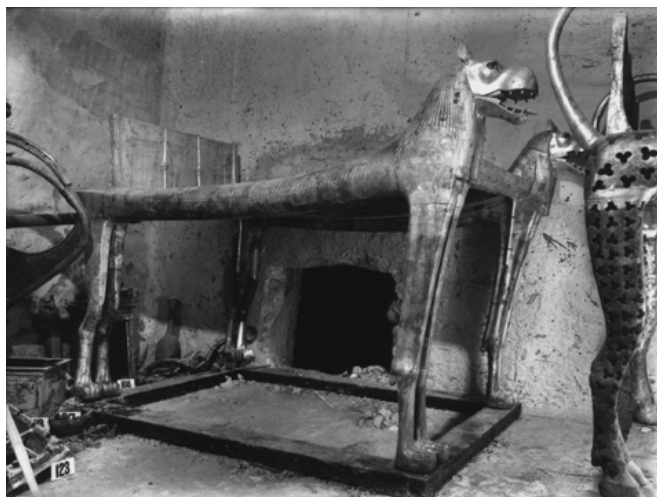


Fig. 12. The female Hippopotamus Couch (© The Griffith Institute, University of Oxford).

On the female Hippopotamus Couch [fig. 12], a cartouche of the king states “beloved of Amit”. However, when comparing the shape of the couch and the form of the female hippopotamus goddess, the shape of the couch is entirely different from the shape of A(a)mit, but closer to other hippopotamus goddesses: *T3-wrt*, *Rrt*, or *Ipi*. All of these goddesses are associated with astronomy and hold the title “Lady of the Horizon.” Hence, the shape represented on this couch

⁴² Chr. DESROCHES-NOBLECOURT, *op. cit.*, 17.

⁴³ L. KÁKOSY, “Sothis”, *LÄ V*, 1948, col. 1112.

⁴⁴ J.A. BELMONTE et al., “Unveiling Seshat: new insights into the stretching of the cord ceremony”, in J.A. Belmonte, M. Shaltout (eds.), *In search of cosmic order, selected essays on Egyptian archaeoastronomy*, Cairo, 204.

⁴⁵ The goddess Neith took several titles, including: The Lady of the stars, the Lady of the eastern horizon of the sky, and the Lady of the beginning of the year. In her temple at Elephantine she had an important role in the festival of *Prt-Spdt* (Chr. DESROCHES-NOBLECOURT, *op. cit.*, 17; L. KÁKOSY, *op. cit.*, 1111).

resembles the constellation depicted on the ceiling of the tomb of Seti I [fig. 13], which the ancient Egyptian called the female hippopotamus constellation. This constellation was considered a huge northern constellation that extends around the northern celestial pole, creating a hybrid goddess composed of a hippopotamus head, lion paws and a corpus resembles to the stellar snake, that is carried on the back of the constellation female hippopotamus.

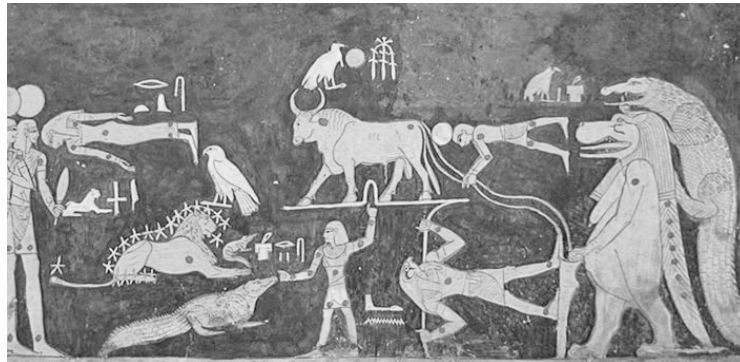


Fig. 13. The constellation depicted on the ceiling of the tomb of Seti I (R.H. Wilkinson, “New Kingdom Astronomical Paintings and Methods of Finding and Extending Direction,” *JARCE* 28, 1991, p. 151, fig. 2).

In the Pyramid Texts, *Ipi* / *Rrt* / *T3-wrt* were considered a cosmic mother who suckled the king with her divine milk during his ascent into Heaven to give his soul the power needed during his celestial journey.⁴⁶

“My Mother, Ipy, give to me your breast, may it pass over my mouth, that I may suck your white, clear, sweet milk, that land into which I go, I will not thirst in it, I will not hunger in it, eternally.”

The female hippopotamus constellation was believed to be a guardian of the northern sky, to keep it devoid of the evil. It stopped all who were unworthy to pass. This is supported by the Pyramid Texts 272, §392:

“O height which has not (yet) been reached, Gate of Nun, I come to you! Let this (gate) be opened for me! Am I the Little One there? I am at the head of the servants of Ra, I am not at the head of the gods who create trouble!”

This may explain the title “beloved of A(a)mit” on the hybrid couch, as the female hippopotamus constellation in the northern sky has the same role as A(a)mit in the realm of the Dead⁴⁷. This

⁴⁶ Pyramid Texts 269, § 381; 382. The Pyramid Texts assert that what is meant by sacred milk is the spiritual nourishment “the wisdom *s3i* and the insight *sj3* that the heavenly mother gives to the deceased king,” and they are only accessible beyond the corporeal world.

⁴⁷ Amit, fighting evil, is Devourer of the souls of those deemed unworthy in the Hall of Two Truths, and stopping all who were unworthy to pass to the fields of the Reeds and offering; J.H. WEGNER, “Ammit”, in D. Redford, *The Ancient Egyptian speaks: a guide to Egyptian religion*, Oxford, 2002, 351-352.

suggests that the hybrid couch represents the female hippopotamus stellar group surrounding the polar star. Ancient Egyptians believed that the stars are the spirits of the dead and that the polar star is the end of every deceased king.

This is supported by Chapter 174 of the Book of the Dead,⁴⁸ and by the Pyramid Texts of Pepi I 503, §1080 a-b:

“I accompany the deities of the northern sky, I accompany the polar star, so I will not annihilate.”

And here the BA of the deceased king turns into the spirit “*ꜥḥ*,” who then acquires an alternative spiritual body called *sꜥḥ*,⁴⁹ before ascending to the sky and uniting with the stars. This is confirmed by Chapter 15 of the Book of the Dead, which mentions that the *ꜥḥ* shines and glows thanks to it being saturated with the creator’s light. The deceased thus reached the level of eternity and immortality, and that is what Ra wants to him, and he shines among the stars which is not annihilated in the northern sky.

This is supported by a scene from the Second shrine of king Tutankhamun [fig. 14], which represents the birth of the *sꜥḥ* (the spiritual body), which Ra recalled to breathe the divine breaths,⁵⁰ and to transfer the divine energy (psychic energy) from the physical body which in the form Osiris’s body laying with the white crown and his name here (*ḏbꜣ.t*) inscribed above.

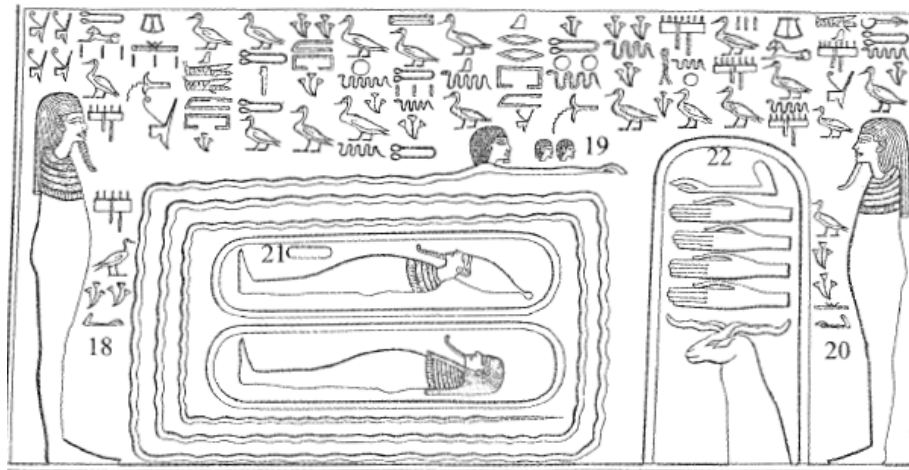


Fig. 14. Scenes from 2nd shrine of Tutankhamun (A. Piankoff, *The Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, New York, 1955, pl. 8, 730).

Underneath the corpus of Osiris, another laying body (perhaps representing Ra in the spiritual body) was surrounded, along with Osiris’s body, by a giant serpent called (*Tpy*) with a human

⁴⁸ Spell to help the “*ꜥḥ*” to cross the big gate of the Northern sky. Pleyte translated it as spell to go out in the form of a star; A. ERMAN, “Die Entstehung eines ‘Totenbuchttextes’”, *ZÄS* 32, 1894, 2-22.

⁴⁹ According to the papyrus of Ani, Book of the Dead, 9, 10.

⁵⁰ R.O. FAULKNER, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, London, 1996, 48.

head and arms. The role of the snake is that of protection, resurrection and renewal of life.⁵¹ This snake looks towards a mound in which four hands, one arm, and the forepart of a ram are depicted. These limbs inside the hill symbolise perhaps the psychological and spiritual traits that were distributed by the members of the physical body as these traits and abilities move from the physical existence to the spiritual one (*szh*, *szh*). Through this depiction, these limbs become divine members attaining eternity,⁵² with the patronage and protection of the sacred ram (Mendes Ram). This may be an accurate interpretation for the human parts with the forepart of a ram inside a hill, perhaps referring to the *primaeval* hill.⁵³

Chapter 17 from the Book of Coming Forth by the Day confirms the identity of the two laying bodies, Osiris and Ra, at the moment of the birth of the *szh* (*szh*):

“I am his twin souls which are within the two fledglings, who is he then? It is Osiris, when he enters into Mendes, he found the soul of Ra there, and they embraced each other, then the twin souls came into being...”

Thereby, the *zh* reached the source from which the creation began and was repeated, from which the spirit renews itself indefinitely. It also grants it access to the portal “Nun” which the deceased king asked to be opened for him,⁵⁴ because the gate of Nun is at the origin of existence and the source from which the divine world emerges.⁵⁵

Hence, this couch represents the stature of the spirit *zh*, with the *bz* stripped of its corporeal desires, which has now reached a degree of maturity that qualifies the *zh* to move to a higher level of existence cohabiting with divine brightness and the king becomes the embodiment of Ra.⁵⁶

⁵¹ For more about snakes and their symbolism in ancient Egyptian: W. BARTA, *Komparative untersuchungen zu vier unterweltsbüchern*, MÄU 1, 1990, 25.

⁵² In the Pyramid Texts 25, §18 a-D, the King Unas was urged to search for the limbs of his *k3* in front of and behind him as if they were limbs of another body separated from his body; S.A.B. MERCER, *The pyramid texts, in translation and commentary*, New York, 1952, 36.

⁵³ Perhaps this is an implicit reference to the process of creation, life and sanctification that is inherent to the shape of the Ram: R.O. FAULKNER, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, London, 1996, 85; M. LURKER, *The Gods and symbols of Ancient Egypt*, London, 1995, 29. The texts of the *zh-mnw* which are dedicated to the commemoration of the divine marriage of the mother of Ramesses II who wed the Ram of Mendes, resulting in the birth of the King. This ram in question was probably a Ram of Mendes; H. BRUGSCH, “Der Altägyptische Name des Stadt grofs – Herakleopolis,” *ZÄS* 75, 1929, 980-982; I. SHAW, *British museum Dictionary*, London, 1998, 181.

⁵⁴ From Pyramid Texts 272, § 392; The spell does not specify the position of the Nun Gate, but it is likely that it is located at the opening of the sky, determined by the polar star.

⁵⁵ For more about Nun: J.B. ALLEN, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts. In Studies in Honor of Wiliam Kelly Simpson*, YES 2, New Haven, 1988.

⁵⁶ According to the papyrus of Ani, Book of the Dead, 91, 92.

Conclusions

Against the common conception, the disposition of the couches in Tutankhamun's tomb demonstrates that they were placed in proper order. This has been identified through the purpose of these couches.

These couches are a stellar group referring to the statures or ranks of the spirit's development in its journey through the heavenly ascension toward brightness. The Lioness Couch represented the star *s3h* (Orion), as a stature of the *k3*-energy and the soul *b3*. The Cow Couch represented the star *Spdt* (Sothis), as a stature of the soul *b3*. The Hybrid Couch represented the female hippopotamus stellar group, as a stature of the spirit *3h*.

The scene of the Second shrine of Tutankhamun illustrates how the soul is freed and developed until reached the stature of the spirit *3h*. The couches participate in this narrative by representing this journey in the heavenly ascension. It is to be noted that the couches were placed in the order of their journey in the celestial ascent in the actual room. The presence of a large quantity of reeds and offerings beside and below the couches of Lioness and the Cow may suggest the king accessing the gate of the eastern horizon of the sky.

These couches were found along the western wall of the antechamber facing north, illustrating the overall objective of this journey, which is the shining among the stars which are not annihilated in the northern sky. The scene on the northern wall of the burial chamber, where the goddess Nut welcomes the king, may refer to the king's arrival in the Northern sky.

Signs around the neck of the Hybrid Female Hippopotamus Couch and Lioness Couch may have been carpenters' marks⁵⁷ but may have had another purpose:

- The sign \mathfrak{f} or \mathfrak{T} found on the neck of the Lioness Couch is challenging to identify precisely because of the bad condition. Nevertheless, we suggest reading *ht* or *sm3*, namely the “body” or the “union”. This corresponds to the stature posed by this couch.
- The sign \mathfrak{f} “*m3 t*” found on the neck of the Hybrid Female Hippopotamus Couch, means “air” or “justice”, the food of the divine entities in the northern sky.

⁵⁷ But I exclude the idea that it belongs to the carpentry marks, because it is not inscribed on all the couches in question.

Résumé :

L'ensemble des lits dorés découverts dans la tombe de Toutânkhamon est examiné afin de réinterpréter leur rôle et leur identification. Cette étude combine l'iconographie de la seconde chapelle dorée de Toutânkhamon et de sa chambre funéraire, les scènes des livres du monde souterrain et l'observation détaillée des lits eux-mêmes dans les laboratoires de restauration du Grand Musée égyptien. Cela a permis d'identifier la signification et la relation entre toutes ces scènes et les lits, ainsi que leur emplacement respectif dans la tombe elle-même. Les lits participent au voyage de l'âme du défunt dans l'ascension céleste.

L'ensemble comprend trois lits représentant chacun une lionne identifiée comme une représentation de l'étoile Orion (*szh*), une vache comme l'étoile Sothis (*Spdt*), et un hippopotame femelle hybride identifié comme une constellation du ciel boréal. Ils sont associés respectivement à la renaissance d'Osiris et de Rê dans les mythes égyptiens, à partir du stade de l'union du *k3* et du *b3*, du *b3* séparé, et du *3h*.

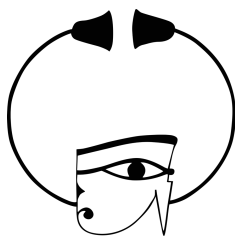
Abstract:

The set of gilded couches discovered in the tomb of Tutankhamun is examined to interpret their role and identification anew. This study combines the iconography of the Second gilded shrine of Tutankhamun and his burial chamber, scenes from the books of the netherworld dating throughout Egyptian history, and detailed observation of the couches themselves in the restoration laboratories of the Grand Egyptian Museum. This resulted in identifying the meaning and relationship among all these scenes and the couches, as well as their respective placement in the tomb itself. The couches participate in this narrative by representing the journey of the deceased's soul in the heavenly ascension.

The set comprises three couches representing a lioness identified as a representation of the star Orion (*szh*), a cow as the star Sothis (*Spdt*), and a hybrid female hippopotamus identified as a constellation in the northern sky. They are associated with the rebirth of Osiris and Ra in the Egyptian myths, from the stage of the union of the *k3* and the *b3*, the *b3* separated, and the *3h*, respectively.

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