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PICTURING THE PHARAOH
THROUGH LANGUAGE – REMARKS
ON THE LINGUISTIC IMAGE OF
THE EGYPTIAN KING IN THE OLD
KINGDOM RELIGIOUS TEXTS

Abstract: *The author of the paper aims at scrutinising the linguistic image of the Egyptian pharaoh in the so-called Pyramid Texts. Was the Egyptian ruler perceived as a human representative of the god on Earth or rather was he a or the god himself? Special emphasis will be put on names and epithets of the King when described or referred to in religious texts of the Old Kingdom. This study is planned as a part of a future research project on picturing the pharaoh through language in religious and royal texts from the beginning of the Old Kingdom till the end of the New Kingdom, and realised in cooperation with Dr. Andrzej Ćwiek and Jadwiga Iwaszczuk.*

Furthermore, the paper is also a presentation of use of ethnolinguistic methods in Egyptology.¹ Using scholarly methods of the 'linguistic worldview' research project in which the present author participates, it is intended to study selected ancient Egyptian concepts. Although language analysis as well as widely understood and studied 'life context' of ancient religious

¹ An interdisciplinary project *Archaeo-Linguistic Worldview* (in Polish: *ArcheoJOS*; outlines have been presented at the international conference *EUROJOS 7* in June 2013) has been started, which combines studies on different archaeological sources, written ones as well as so-called 'material' ones. This project is aimed at a thorough reconstruction of the concept 'home' in old cultures (as for now ancient and Slavonic), using the 'linguistic worldview' methodology, but adjusted to our field of research.

notions let us only a textual and linguistic reconstruction of the world presented, concurrently, helps us understand better the Egyptian religious way of description and thinking.

Keywords: *Pyramid Texts; pharaoh; Egyptian texts; linguistic method in Egyptology; ArcheoJOS*

Scholars have pondered the status of the Egyptian ruler. Was he to be perceived as a human representative of the god on Earth or rather was he a or the god himself? The present author would like to show some significant aspects of the image of the Egyptian pharaoh created through language used in the *Pyramid Texts*. This study is a continuation of the topic earlier studied by this author (see Popielska-Grzybowska 2013a), but still it has a preliminary character.

Concurrently, the paper also shows the use of elements of the linguistic method in Egyptology. Recently, ‘linguistic worldview’ (in Polish *Językowy Obraz Świata*; *JOS* in short) research has been highly developed by Polish linguists and ethnolinguists from the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, namely for example: J. Bartmiński (2009), R. Tokarski (1999) and A. Pajdzińska (Pajdzińska and Tokarski 1996, 143-158).

It has a long history going back to ancient times and the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle and the *topoi*. Later, this method emerged in the French and Italian Enlightenment and then the German linguistic thought of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1999 [1836], the term *Weltansicht*) and L. Weisgerber (1963). It is also derived from the American theory of ‘relativism of language’ by E. Sapir (1949) and B. L. Whorf (1956).

Language analysis as well as the widely understood *Sitz im Leben* (‘life context’) of ancient religious notions give us only a textual and linguistic reconstruction of the world presented, but concurrently bring us closer to the Egyptian religious way of perceiving reality, the way of thinking and describing religious beliefs and religious reality by the ancients.

Linguistic worldview methods are used almost exclusively to study contemporary languages and texts. However, using the same adjusted method while studying ancient written sources one can scrutinise linguistic images of the pharaoh in the analysed texts. Due to the fact that the meaning of the word is a specific interpretation of a designation, there are different perceptions of the same reality described through language/languages. It is of course subjective interpretation, as every interpretation in reality is, but while analysing the language itself, namely its grammar, derivatives,

phraseology (e.g. word plays, onomatopoeic effects etc), categorisation through language (for instance ‘word field’), connotations, one can develop a very thorough study concerning ancient Egyptian perceptions still present in the language used. It is more than obvious that every categorisation, the introductory one included, strongly influences the set of characteristics analysed and the way they are organised within the research.

Hereinafter there will be presented a selection of diagnostic excerpts of the Old Kingdom religious texts to outline the image discussed.

The texts under discussion are abundant in descriptions, designations and varying epithets of the pharaoh. However, the name ‘pharaoh’ *pr ʕ* itself was not used in the *Pyramid Texts*. Rulers are designated with their personal names and with pronouns. The texts are directed to them in the second person sg. telling or in some cases if need be even ordering them what and how to do. Some other passages perhaps were meant to be read by the pharaohs themselves – and in that cases the text was written in the first person sg. or was written in the third person sg. as a part of a narration. Furthermore, the monarch is of course named *nswt* and /or *bjt* (see Allen’s [2005, 87] translation of *PT* spell 412 § 724b).

The King is the one who was born before anything and anyone else (cf. e.g. *PT* 571, 486, 697). This was described for instance as follows:

§ 1040a [*ppj ms*] *m nw*

§ 1040b *nj hpr:t pt nj hpr:t t3*

§ 1040c *nj hpr:t smntj nj hpr:t hnnw*

§ 1040d *nj hpr:t snd pw hpr hr jrt hrw*

‘[Pepi was born] in Nu before the sky came into being, before Earth came into being, before the establishment came into being, before the uproar came into being, before the fear that came into being because of the eye of Horus that had not yet come into being.’

However, the spell 571 § 1466, P 511 mentions the King’s mother being pregnant with him. These seemingly contradictory ideas in reality are complementary one to another, and do not preclude each other (see the translation below).

Furthermore, often the imperative mood, used to create desirable reality (see Popielska-Grzybowska 2012), is employed when the body of the pharaoh is commanded not to decay, not to rot and consequently the King is assured that his body will not decay, will not rot:

§ 721a *j.hr wr hr gs:f*

§ 721b *nmnm jm ndjt*

§ 721c *tz tpj:f jn r^c*

- § 721d *bwt.f kdd msd.f b3gi*
 § 722a *jjf n NN pn*
 § 722a *m hw3 m jmk.(k) m dw st.k*
 § 722c *nj sw33 rd.k nj š3ss nmt.k*
 § 722d *nj hnd.k hr hw3t wsjr*
 § 723a *s3h.k pt mr s3h spd b3.k mr spdt*
 § 723b *j.b3.k b3.tj w3š.k w3š.tj*
 § 723c *h^c b3.k mm ntrw m hrw hr jb jrww*
 § 724a *hpr š3t.k r jb ntrw*
 § 724b *mr nt tpt bjt mr mjzwt tpt nswt*
 § 724c *mr hnzkt tpt mntw*
 § 724d *ndr.k jr h^c j.hmw-sk*
 § 725a *nj htm ksw.k nj znw jf.k NN*
 § 725b *nj hr h^cwt.k jr.k*
 § 725c *n twt js w^c m ntrw*

‘As the Great One fell on his side, as he in Nedit quivered, his head was raised by Ra, for his abomination is sleep, he loathes inertness.

O flesh of the King, do not decay, do not rot, do not smell unpleasant!

Your foot will not be overpassed, your stride will not be crossed, and you shall not tread on decomposition of Osiris.

You shall attain the sky like Orion, your *ba* shall be efficient like Sothis. You shall become *b3* being *b3*, you shall become honoured being honoured. May your *b3* stand amongst the gods as Horus in the middle of *jrww*.

May become your fury against the heart of the gods like the Red Crown atop the King of Lower Egypt and like the Bright Crown atop the King of Upper Egypt, like the plait atop the *mntw*-beduin. You shall grasp the arm of the Imperishable Stars.

Your bones will not parish, your flesh will not be weak, o King, your limbs will not be away from you, for you are one of the gods.’ (*PT* spell 412 § 721a-725c, T 228).

The pharaoh’s destination is the sky, where he ascends and resides governing the gods, the living and the dead (see e.g. *PT* spell 213, 710A), being simultaneously one of the Imperishable Stars, and the oldest and most powerful god – even more powerful than his father, the creator god Atum. His place is among the gods in the sky:

- § 1466a *jwr mwt nt NN jm.f jm nwt*
 § 1466b *ms NN pn jn jt.f tm*
 § 1466c *nj hpr.t pt nj hpr.t t3*
 § 1466d *nj hpr.t rmt nj ms.t ntrw nj hpr.t mt*

(...)

§ 1469a *j.ḥm-sk pw NN z3 pt wrt ḥrt-jb ḥwt-srkt*

§ 1469b *šd.n n.k r^c NN pn r pt ^cnh NN pn*

§ 1469c *mr ^cnh ^ck m jmnt pt pr.f m j3bt pt*

‘The King’s mother was pregnant with him, who is in the Lower Sky, the King was fashioned by his father Atum before the sky came into being, before Earth came into being, before people came into being, before the gods were born, before death came into existence.

(...)

This King is an Imperishable Star, son of the great sky that is in the heart of the enclosure of Selket. Ra has taken this King to himself to the sky and thus this King may live as the one who has entered the west of the sky lives when he emerges in the east of the sky.’ (*PT* spell 571 § 1466, 1468c-1469, P 511).

Moreover, the pharaoh will not perish, neither in a material nor in a spiritual sense, because he is *k3* (e.g. *PT* spell 215) and ‘*k3*-maker’ (*PT* spell 506) and controls the gods and their *k3w* (e.g. *PT* spells 426, 592 and Nt 226).

As a consequence of all assumed characteristics, all assumed identities by means of metamorphoses, the monarch is the one who does not die the death, but who has gone away alive (cf. spell 213: Popielska-Grzybowska 1999; Popielska-Grzybowska 2001):

§ 654a *jhj hjh tz tw NN pw*

§ 654b *šzp n.k tpj.k jnk n.k ksw.k*

§ 654c *s3k n.k ^cwt.k*

§ 654d *wh3 n.k t3 jr jf.k*

§ 655a *šzp n.k t.k j.ḥm ḥsd ḥnkt.k j.ḥmt ^cm3*

§ 655b *^ch^c.k jr ^c3w ḥsf rhwt*

(...)

§ 657e *tz tw NN pw nj mjjt.k²*

‘Oho, oho! Raise yourself, o King, receive your head, collect your bones, gather your (body) members together, throw off Earth from your body, receive your bread which does not grow mouldy and your beer which does not grow sour, and stand at the door which restrains the (common) people.

(...)

Rise yourself, o King, for you have not died!’ (*PT* spell 373 § 654a-655b, § 657e, T 204).

Evidently, the King is distinguished from the others, from the people

² Variant writing: *mt.k*.

as he himself is perceived as rather a or perhaps even the god, for he was after many different metamorphoses finally identified with the creator god Atum (Popielska-Grzybowska, forthcoming):

§ 1468d *tmjw mt n mt nb nj mt NN n mt nb*

§ 1469a *j. hm-sk pw NN z3 pt wrt hrt-jb hwt-srkt*

‘O you who die not because of any dead, the King will not die because of any dead, for the King is an Imperishable Star, son of the great sky that is in the heart of the enclosure of Selket.’ (PT spell 571 § 1468d-1469a, P 511).

The pharaoh is seen as a self-sufficient, holy being who can raise himself up to the stars, becoming one of them:

§ 537a *ttj pw dsr jm hnt tzz h3t*

§ 537b *sb3 kssw n.f ntrw sd3w n.f psdtj*

§ 537c *jn drt ttj wtz.s sw*

‘Teti is a holy one with sweeping forefront, with lifted brow, a star to whom the gods bow, at whom the Two Enneads tremble. It is Teti’s hand which will raise him up.’ (PT spell 328 § 537, T 13).

Moreover, the King was also introduced by *Sia* – the embodiment of wisdom and understanding, as this one who unites hearts:

§ 267a *NN p hr k3w dmd jbw*

‘This is the King who is over the spirits, who unites hearts’ (PT spell 250 § 267a, W 161).

Several times, the ruler is called a bull. Sometimes, more details are given, for instance:

§ 513a *wnjs pj k3 j3hwj hr jb jrt.f*

‘Unis is a bull with effulgence in the middle of his eyes.’ (PT spell 319 § 513a, W 224).

Furthermore for example:

§ 698d *ttj pw jrt tw nt r^c sdrt jwr.t/jj.t mst r^c nb*

‘Teti is that eye of the sun that spends the night conceived and is born every day.’ (PT spell 402 § 698d, T 278), but concurrently he happens to be designated as a serpent (e.g. PT spell 318), a beetle or a bird (PT spell 655, spell 667A § 1944, spell 668) and many other creatures, various types of beings, both divine and deriving from fauna and flora.

To the above-mentioned passages can be added a magnificent piece of writing, the so-called *Cannibal Hymn* that provides us with a lot of valuable information on Egyptian pharaohs, demonstrating vividly the force, power and even omnipotent sovereignty of the King. The text has been studied thoroughly and interpreted in many ways (see for instance:

Goebs 1998, 447-460; Eyre 2002; Goebs 2003, 2950; Goebs 2004, 143-173, and bibliographies therein). It gives a profound image of understanding the foundations of an Egyptian King's position and potency; his rights to rule the world. All of this power, legitimised through identification with his father, the creator god, lord of All, Atum, and the fact that he is the firstborn son makes him more potent than the father himself is:

§ 395a *jw špsw NN m pt jw wsr:f m 3ht*

§ 395b *mr tm jt.f ms sw jw ms.n.f sw wsr sw r:f*

(...)

§ 407a *NN pj šhm wr šhm m šhmw*

(...)

§ 408a *NN pj ntr sms r smsw*

'The glory of the King is in the sky,

His power is in the horizon

Like his father Atum who gave birth to him,

Although he gave birth to the King,

the King is mightier than he.

(...)

The King is the great power

Who has power over the powers

(...)

The King is a god,

Older than the oldest.' (*PT* spell 273-274 § 395, 407a, 408a, W 180).

However, in sharp contrast to the ways of picturing the pharaoh as presented above, there seem to be excerpts in which the King is called weak and feeble:

'It is said about the King: he who perished, he is feeble' (*PT* spell 343 § 558, T 156).

Or he is called little:

§ 392c *NN pj šrr jm*

'Is the King the little one there?' (*PT* spell 272 § 392c, W 179).

Maintaining the first translations of this phrase in the interrogative mood, but keeping in mind recent translations in the indicative mood by J. P. Allen (2005, 50) and R. Bertrand (2004, 107, 214) and considering the whole context it may seem clear that little one is used to designate a child – the son of the creator god (see Popielska-Grzybowska and Józefów-Czerwińska 2011).

Moreover to show a more complete image of the pharaoh it is necessary to point that, *inter alia*, Unis received a name of a flower as well:

§ 264a *j j33w dmdjj n špsj m rn.fpw*

§ 264b *NN pj nw n zšzš wbn m t3 w^cb*

‘O you two fighters! (Sethe 1935, 26; Faulkner 1969, 61 footnote 1) Tell the Noble one, whoever he may be, (Faulkner 1969, 61 footnote 2) the King is this zšzš-flower which sprang up clean from the Earth.’ (PT spell 249 § 264a-b, W 160).

Nonetheless, as it has already been discussed by this author (Popielska-Grzybowska 2011) and as mentioned above, the aim of the passages was not to depreciate the King, but rather to show him as a child of the creator god. Therefore, it was natural to call him little and weak before the final metamorphosis into the creator took place (see also Popielska-Grzybowska, forthcoming).

The King is then the son of the creator god Atum as has already been underlined herein. It is very intriguing that Shu is informed that the King is the firstborn and the oldest son of Atum. Therefore, it appears that Shu is told that the King is Shu himself and identical with him in his identity of the firstborn, the first creation of Atum and in this way, by these specific means, he is son and father – the All – simultaneously (see Popielska-Grzybowska 2013b; Popielska-Grzybowska 2013c).

§ 1870a *šw z3 tm pw wsjr NN pn*

§ 1870b *twt z3 wr n tm wtwt.f*

§ 1871a *jšš.n tw tm m r.f m rn.k n šw*

‘O Shu, this Osiris the King is the son of Atum. You are the eldest son of Atum, his firstborn; Atum has sneezed you out from his mouth in your name of Shu.’ (PT spell 660 § 1870-1871, N 400).

The pharaoh, namely the son being a part of the father, is predestined to abide where the father god resides, consequently controlling and ruling the heritage of his divine parent:

§ 160a *r^c tm j n.k z3.k j n.k NN*

§ 160b *sj^c n.k sw šn n.k sw m hnw ^cwj.k*

§ 160c *z3.k pw n dt.k n dt*

‘Sun, Atum, your son is coming to you, the King is coming to you. Raise him up, enclose him within your embrace, for he is the son of your body forever.’ (PT spell 217 § 160a-c, W 150).

Or similarly:

§ 213a *tm sj^c n.k wnjs pn šn n.k sw m hnw ^cwj.k*

§ 213b *z3.k pw n dt.k n dt*

‘O Atum, raise this Unis up to you, enclose him within your embrace, for he is your son of your body forever.’ (PT spell 222 § 213, W 155).

In such a way every god is an emanation and embodiment of the creator, thus the King is concurrently an emanation and embodiment of them all. He is truly complete as the creator by comprising the most important characteristics and aspects of all the gods in him:

147b *tn kw jn.sn m rn.k n ntr hpr.k j.tm.t (m) ntr nb*

148a *tp.k m hrw d3t j.hm-sk*

148b *mhnt.k m hntj-jrtj j.hm-sk*

148c *msdrwj.k z3tj tm j.hm-sk jrtj.k z3tj tm j.hm-sk*

148d *fnḏ.k m z3b j.hm-sk jbḥw.k spdw j.hm-sk*

149a *ʿwj.k hp dw3-mjwṯ.f dbḥ.k pr.k r pt prr.k*

149b *rdwj.k jmst kbḥ-snw.f dbḥ.k h3.k jr nwt h33.k*

149c *ʿwt.k z3tj tm j.hm-sk*

149d *nj sk.k nj sk k3.k twt k3*

‘Raise yourself – say they, in your name of god, become complete of every god:

Your head is that of Horus of the Duat, O Imperishable!

Your face is that of *chentj-jrtj*, O Imperishable!

Your ears are those of the Twins of Atum, O Imperishable!

Your eyes are those of the Twins of Atum, O Imperishable!

Your nose is that of the Jackal, O Imperishable!

Your teeth are those of Sopdu, O Imperishable!

Your arms are those of Hep and Duamutef,

which you need to ascend to the sky and you shall ascend

Your legs are *Jmsetj* and *Kebehsenuf*,

which you need to descend to the lower sky and you shall descend.

All your members are the Twins of Atum, O Imperishable!

You shall not perish and your *ka* shall not perish – you are *ka*.’ (*PT* spell 215 § 147b-149d, W 148).

The monarch is also the liquids constituting bodies, physical part of the existence (compare Nyord 2009):

§ 1263c *NN pw trw prw m rʿ fdt prt m jst*

‘The King is the blood/the gore which came from Ra and the sweat which came from Isis.’ (*PT* spell 533 § 1263c, P 482).

The final and most significant metamorphosis of the King who passed away is the one into his father – the creator as expressed in many spells, and clearly and verbatim for instance in spell 213 (for a detailed study of this issue see Popielska-Grzybowska 1999; Popielska-Grzybowska 2001) and in spell 690 as follows:

§ 2097c *jw.n.k ppj nfr-k3-rʿ pw m jwnw nd.tj rd n.k jb.k m ht.k*

§ 2098a *hr.k m z3b jf.k m tm*

§ 2098b *b3.k m hn.k shm.k h3.k jst tp ʿwj.k nbt-ḥwt m ht.k*

§ 2099a *dbn.k j3wt hrwt dndn.k j3wt stšt*

§ 2099b *jn šw hnʿ tfnt m3ʿw tw pr.k m jwnw*

‘You have come, Pepi Neferkara, from *Junu*, you are being protected, and your heart having been placed in your body for you. Your face is that of the Jackal, your flesh is that of Atum, your soul is within you, your power is about you, Isis is before you and Nephthys is behind you, you encompass the Horite Mounds and you go around the Sethite Mounds. It is Shu and Tefnut who guide you when you depart from *Junu*.’ (*PT* spell 690 § 2097c-2099b, N 524)

Consequently, the pharaoh is the gist, the essence of every being, of every god as well, namely of everything. From the times when the *Pyramid Texts* were introduced and used only for him as the ruler of the living and those-whose-seats-are-hidden (namely the dead), the ancient Egyptian pharaoh was perceived and pictured as a complete creature, who, after necessary metamorphoses, reached his destination in the sky as the creator god ‘Atum-the-complete-one’ who comprises in him all – positive and negative – aspects of the created world. Therefore, it is said in the *Pyramid Texts* about the pharaoh:

§ 1609a *wsjr nmtjj m z3f mr n rʿ twt k3 n ntrw nb*

‘O Osiris Nemtiemzaf Merenre, you are the essence of all the gods.’ (*PT* spell 589 § 1609a, M 32a) (for a more detailed study of some aspects see also Popielska-Grzybowska, forthcoming). The pharaoh is then the essence of all the gods which came forth at the moment of creation from ‘Atum-the-complete’.

To sum up, it shall be noted that using the linguistic worldview methods enables us to perceive the main ideas of the Egyptian religion embodied in the word-portrait of the pharaoh in the *Pyramid Texts*. These ideas concern *k3* of the creator and the King, the concept of the creator, generations matters and the relations between father and son.

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