

LIVING WITH THE DEAD

ANCESTOR WORSHIP AND MORTUARY RITUAL IN ANCIENT EGYPT



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CHAPTER 1

The nature of the deceased: constituent parts, character and iconography

*The body of a man is very small compared with the spirit that inhabits it.*¹

In order to discuss ancestors, cults, and the relationship between the living and the dead, it is first necessary to consider what and who the dead were in Egyptian thought, and how they differed from the living in iconography and character. The essential elements of the living and the dead are listed in Table 1. Most aspects of the living were maintained beyond the grave, but acquired new meaning and focus in the transformative process from life to death.

Characteristics of and terminology relating to the dead

Death resulted in the fragmentation of the individual person, forcing apart the physical from the spiritual. According to Assmann,² a newly deceased person emerged in their various aspects or constituent elements, which took on a life of their own. The most important of these elements were the *ba*, *ka*, *ib*-heart,³ name, shadow, and *akh*, along with the image/statue (*twt*), mummy (*sꜥḥ*), and corpse (*ḥ3t*).⁴ A unique text in the 18th Dynasty tomb of Amenemhet⁵ includes five personifications of destiny, namely fate/destiny (*š3it*), lifetime (*ꜥḥꜥw*), birthplace (*msḥnt*),⁶ development/fortune (*rnnt*), and ‘personal creator god’ (*ḥnmw*), as well as physical objects (such as offering stone, stela, tomb), and ‘all his manifestations’ (*ḥprw.fnbw*).⁷ Magic (*ḥk3*) is another constituent part of the dead referred to alongside the *ba*, *akh* and shadow

¹ African oral tradition: Föllmi and Föllmi 2005: 47.

² 2005: 87.

³ For the dead to become an *akh*, his moral character had to be tested, and it was the responsibility of his *ib*-heart to ensure that he was proven free (*šw*) of wrong-doing in the presence of Osiris (Book of the Dead, Spell 125; Faulkner 1985: 29–34).

⁴ Lloyd 1989: 118; Assmann 2005: 87. For an overview of the *ba*, *ka*, and *akh* see Smith 2009: 4–7.

⁵ TT 82: Porter and Moss 1960: 163–7; Gardiner and Davies 1915: pls 19, 23.

⁶ Roth and Roehrig 2002: 136–7.

⁷ Assmann 2005: 88–9.

ATTRIBUTES OF THE LIVING	ADDITIONAL ATTRIBUTES GAINED AFTER DEATH	OBJECTS CREATED FOR THE CONTINUATION OF THE DEAD IN THE WORLD OF THE LIVING	OTHER
Ka (<i>k3</i> ; vitality)	Corpse (<i>h3t</i>)	Tomb (<i>is</i> , <i>mʿhʿt</i> , <i>3ht</i> , <i>mr</i>)	Heka (<i>hk3</i> ; magic)
Ba (<i>b3</i> ; movement)	Mummy (<i>sʿh</i>)	Statues/statuettes (<i>twt</i>)	<i>Akh</i> (<i>3h</i> ; powerful state of entire being)
Name (<i>rn</i> ; individuality)		Stelae (<i>ʿhʿ</i> , <i>wḏ</i>)	
<i>ib</i> -heart (emotion, intellect, morality)		Offering tables (<i>ʿb3</i>)	
<i>h3ty</i> -heart (physical organ)		Anthropoid busts (<i>twt</i>)	
<i>ht</i> -body (physical appearance)		Shabtis (<i>uṣbty</i>)	
Shadow (<i>ṣwt</i> ; movement)			

Table 1: Attributes of the living and the dead.

in the Coffin Texts,⁸ and as something that should not be removed from the deceased in the afterlife in the Book of the Dead.⁹ The many components of the dead person enabled him to pervade the entire cosmos,¹⁰ and it is often not possible to differentiate between humans and deities in the underworld books because of the manner in which they are mixed together.¹¹ Equally, the blessed deceased may be identified as Sia, the personification of perception, who is shown on the right hand of Re.¹²

The only physical attribute acquired in death is the mummified corpse, which replaces the *ht*-body, and through the embalming process regains some of the deceased individual's physical appearance, with facial features being augmented by the mummy mask. Statues and statuettes, along with depictions on stelae, substituted for the visible form of the deceased (see Chapter 2), while emphasis is placed upon the *ka* and *ba* to replace the living essence and the deceased's ability to move and consume food and drink, capacities that were interrupted by the individual's death. Here I discuss in particular the *ba*, *akh*, and shadow, as these are the elements of the individual that could travel, and thus affect the living, and they are most frequently referred to in funerary literature.¹³ John Gee has suggested that the terms *b3*, *3h*, and *ntr* (god) were related

⁸ See Etienne 2000. E.g. Coffin Texts Spell 491: de Buck 1956: 69, a; Faulkner 1977: 133; Žabkar 1968: 106, n. 107.

⁹ E.g. Spells 32, 149, k1; Allen 1974: 42, 145.

¹⁰ Žabkar 1968: 135, n. 61.

¹¹ Hornung 2008.

¹² Pyramid Texts 250, §268b; Goebis 2008: 257. See also Coffin Texts, Spells 958 and 1006: de Buck 1961: 176, 222.

¹³ Coffin Texts, Spell 488: Faulkner 1977: 132; de Buck 1956: 67, a–b. Book of the Dead, Spell 91: Faulkner 1985: 86; Allen 1974: 75. Compare CT 413 (B2B0): Faulkner 1977: 64; 65, n. 5; de Buck 1953: 241 a–e, 242 a–c.

in the Egyptian mind in a hierarchical way.¹⁴ While ‘gods’ in the sense of blessed dead are undoubtedly lower on the scale than major deities, to give individual characteristics ranks in this way may not be particularly meaningful; all parts were integral to the survival of the whole being.¹⁵

Constituent elements of the dead

The ba

The *ba* has been likened by Nadia el-Shohoumi to the modern Egyptian *rūḥ*,¹⁶ and is defined by Žabkar in relation to the deceased (as opposed to the gods or the king) as a representation of an individual, ‘the totality of his physical and psychic abilities’:¹⁷ personified in the Coffin Texts, it becomes a man’s *alter ego*, and by performing physical functions for him, is one of the means by which he continues to live. Žabkar¹⁸ was adamant that ‘*ba*’ could not be translated as ‘soul’, either internal or external, and he considered the Egyptian concept of man to be *monistic*, not an element or form of manifestation of the man, but the man himself. His views have not been universally accepted, and most scholars still interpret *ba* as ‘soul’ or part of the spiritual and physical dimensions of an individual.¹⁹ Žabkar²⁰ also rejected the idea that the *ba* existed during a person’s lifetime, instead proposing that man lives in his *ba* after death, rather than possessing it while alive, which leads to a very different translation of certain texts such as the Instructions of Ptahhotep and the Instruction for King Merikare.²¹ In support of Žabkar’s hypothesis, it seems likely that the Dialogue Between a Man and his *Ba*²² represents an introspective philosophical debate between a man and his conscience and reflects the beliefs and doubts of the period in which it was written.²³

That the *ba* embodied the ability of the deceased to move around during the day is indicated by its avian form, initially represented by a jabiru stork,²⁴ which by the New Kingdom was often replaced by the human-headed falcon (Figure 1). A specific quality of the *ba* was also that it could assume any form it desired²⁵ as stated, for instance, in the Opening of the Mouth ritual.²⁶ The capacity of the *ba* to take flight was essential in enabling the deceased to communicate

¹⁴ 2003: 231. Cf. Smith 2009: 5.

¹⁵ Zandee 1960: 19.

¹⁶ 2004: 232–3. Compare Blackman 1927: 110.

¹⁷ 1968: 3.

¹⁸ 1968: 113, 130, 141, 162.

¹⁹ E.g. Assmann 2005: 89–90; 1989: 147; Lloyd 1989: 120; Baines 1991: 145; Parkinson 1998: 151.

²⁰ 1968: 116–18.

²¹ Lichtheim 1973: 73, 101, 106; Parkinson 1991: 52–4: ‘The wise feeds his *ba* with what endures,/So that it is happy with him on earth’; ‘The *ba* comes to the place it knows/ ... It comes to those who give it water.’

²² Parkinson 1991: 132–3; Lichtheim 1973: 163–9; Allen 2011.

²³ Ouellet 2007: 1441.

²⁴ Janák 2006.

²⁵ E.g. Froot 2007: 147.

²⁶ Otto 1960: II, 194, kk; I, 160.



Figure 1: The tomb owner greets his *ba*. The text behind the latter is a spell for 'being transformed into a living *ba*'. Tomb of Inherkhau (TT 359), Deir el-Medina, 20th Dynasty.

with the gods and the dead,²⁷ and to ensure the preservation of the body through the provision of sustenance.²⁸ In the 19th Dynasty tomb of Paser the *ba* is depicted giving the breath of life to the mummified corpse as part of the embalming ritual.²⁹

Baw – plural of *ba*³⁰ – is interpreted by Borghouts as a form of divine retribution documented by the expression *b3w ntr hprw*, 'a manifestation of a god has come about',³¹ and the *baw* in this sense may be understood as manifest in the *ba*. Whereas the king's divine status made it possible for him to send his *ba* to places where he was not physically present,³² when ordinary citizens are said to send their *baw*³³ one may assume that they are doing so from or within the next world. The mobility of the *ba* could create problems for the living, perhaps in terms of some kind of haunting, or the disruption of daily life as indicated in O. IFAO 857, a question

²⁷ E.g. Stewart 1986: pls. 4–6.

²⁸ Cf. Žabkar 1968: 145–6.

²⁹ TT 106; Porter and Moss 1960: 223 F [c]; Davies 1938: 30, fig. 9.

³⁰ See e.g. Gee 2003: 232.

³¹ 1982: 5–6. See also Žabkar 1968: 98, 161: *ba* as a manifestation of power in the Old Kingdom.

³² P. Anastasi II; Borghouts 1982: 13.

³³ E.g. CT 99; Gee 2003: 230; de Buck 1938: 94 d.

presented to an oracle: ‘is it the manifestation (*b3w*) of Anynakht?’,³⁴ and seems unlikely that a passage on one side of an ostrakon apparently concerned with a form of haunting by the *baw* is unrelated to the image of a *ba*-bird on the other side.³⁵

Coffin Text spells reveal that the deceased was able to send his *ba* to appear before the living. In some cases rituals involving the burial of figurines were required, so presumably the dead relied on the living for this to be realised:³⁶

Go forth, go forth, my ba, (so that) yonder man (may) see you.

Appear opposite him in every place where he is.

Rise up before him in the form of an akh.

Words to be recited over an image of clay...

*Fashioned there, (with) the name of the man on it,
and (placed) in the ground, the ground.*

Middle Kingdom parallels to Book of the Dead Spells 92 and 188³⁷ indicate that the *ba* can appear before someone in human form, and be able to enter his house. Fear that the *ba* may leave the corpse and not return is apparent in Book of the Dead, Spell 89, which specifies that an amulet of gold and precious stones³⁸ should be placed on the mummy’s breast to prevent it from departing. The same concern is shown in the design of several shabtis, which depict the *ba* resting as though partially merged with the deceased.³⁹

The Teaching for King Merikare, dated to the Middle Kingdom, suggests that the *ba*’s behaviour is to some extent governed by familiarity and necessity: ‘The *ba* comes to the place it knows,/ It does not miss its former path,/ No kind of magic holds it back,/ It comes to those who give it water’.⁴⁰ The *ba* is also a means by which the deceased could perpetuate his rebirth. David O’Connor proposed that erotic meaning was encoded in tomb decoration for the purpose of ensuring rebirth:⁴¹

deceased Egyptians achieved ... perpetual regeneration and rebirth ... by impregnating their deceased wives who – following paradigms based on solar and other mythology – would conceive, and then give birth to a renewed form of the deceased himself. The maintaining of sexual potency and the achievement of intercourse and orgasm was therefore of great importance to deceased males, and magically effective means of ensuring these had to be supplied.

The concern of the dead to be able to engage in sexual activity is expressed in mortuary texts, and copulating in the form of one’s *ba* (*nk m b3*) is mentioned in both the Coffin Texts and

³⁴ Borghouts 1982: 22.

³⁵ Cairo CG 25106; Borghouts 1982: 24. See also O. Abd el-Qurna 12202, a text that mentions the *baw* of Amun-Re as a negative force: Borghouts 1982: 9. For the *ba* in relation to Theban Amun-Re theology, see Assmann 1995: 133–55.

³⁶ CT 103; de Buck 1938: 110, i–l. Cf. Gee 2003: 230; Faulkner 1973: 101; the London Medical Papyrus BM EA 10059, lines 3–5 (Leitz 1999: 57). For the cultic aspect of the *ba* and *ba*-summoning in the New Kingdom, see Kessler 2001.

³⁷ Allen 1974: 76, 211; cf. Faulkner 1985: 185.

³⁸ Allen 1974: 75. E.g. BM EA 3361; Ikram and Dodson 1998: pl. xiv.

³⁹ E.g. Stewart 1995: 23, fig. 20.

⁴⁰ Lichtheim 1973: 97, 101.

⁴¹ 1996: 630.

the Book of the Dead.⁴² The deceased in *ba* and shadow form had the ability to have sexual intercourse with the living,⁴³ which seems to have been one of the reasons that they were feared, particularly by pregnant women,⁴⁴ presumably because of the risk of miscarriage. According to the Calendar of Good and Bad Days, death by copulation was a possibility on certain dates, though the reason is not specified.⁴⁵

The *ba* as protector of the corpse is illustrated in funerary papyri vignettes, where it is depicted hovering over the mummy, holding the *shen*-symbol of eternity in its talons.⁴⁶ Through its falcon-like appearance, the *ba* is reminiscent of Horus and thus, like the *akh*, associated with the sun and renewal. This solar connection is emphasised on the 21st Dynasty coffin of Amenemopet, which bears a depiction of a *ba*-bird with the gilded *tp*-face representative of Re and human limbs holding aloft the horizon.⁴⁷ The interior of another 21st Dynasty coffin shows a *ba*-bird with a human head and legs flanked by the inscription ‘going forth as a living *ba*’; its position at the base of the coffin meant that the deceased lay in its embrace.⁴⁸

In several Book of the Dead papyri, the *ba* is shown to be present at the weighing of the heart ceremony, where it functioned as a witness for the deceased.⁴⁹ Obtaining a successful result enabled the dead to separate into the constituent parts that would allow him to progress into the afterlife: ‘Your *ba* to heaven, your corpse to the underworld’.⁵⁰ As Assmann states: ‘The separation of *ba* and corpse was one of the goals of the transfiguration rituals, and was part of the transformation of the deceased into transfigured ancestral spirits’.⁵¹ The unique painting in the tomb of Nakhtamun⁵² may be an illustration of this separation process, the human winged form representing the union of *akh* (in human form) and *ba*. This division also enabled the deceased to be reborn like Re.⁵³ This involvement of the soul in the circuit of the sun is apparent in the Book of the Night, attested from the 19th Dynasty, where the Western *bas* are said to tow the sun god into the sky.⁵⁴

⁴² For texts relating to copulation in *ba*-form, see Gee 2003: 233; Žabkar 1968: 101–3, e.g. CT 193 (de Buck 1947: 109 d), CT 503 (Faulkner 1977: 134, 141), CT 96 (de Buck 1938: 78–81, B1L, B1Ca). Other texts relating to the sexual activity of the deceased include CT 576 (Faulkner 1977: 181; de Buck 1956: 191) and Book of the Dead, Spell 175 (Allen 1974: 184).

⁴³ E.g. CT 71: de Buck 1935: 297, T2C d–e; Žabkar 1968: 98.

⁴⁴ Leitz 1999: 68, pl. 34, lines 4–7.

⁴⁵ Troy 1989: 136.

⁴⁶ E.g. Stewart 1986: pl. 15; cf. Faulkner 1985: 90.

⁴⁷ UC 15703: Stewart 1986: pl. 10. For the face of Re, see for example the eleventh hour of the Book of Gates: Hornung 1999: 76, fig. 40; cf. Ikram and Dodson 1998: 186, fig. 216; Volokhine 2000: 22–3, 75–6. The same motif also occurs on beaded masks covering the faces of mummies (e.g. Liverpool Head no. 19; Gray and Slow 1968: 67, pl. 98).

⁴⁸ Stewart 1986: pl. 7; Volokhine 2000: 90–1. See also Taylor 1989: 44, fig. 34; Schäfer 1986: 208, fig. 213.

⁴⁹ E.g. Ani; Russmann 2001: 198, no. 102; Žabkar 1968: 147.

⁵⁰ Žabkar 1968: 131.

⁵¹ 2005: 91.

⁵² TT 341: Davies and Gardiner 1948: pl. xxvi; Porter and Moss 1960: 408 [2].

⁵³ Assmann 2005: 93; cf. Žabkar 1968: 106–12, 151.

⁵⁴ Hornung 1999: 135; cf. Assmann 2001: 65; Roulin 1998: 1008–9. In the Coffin Texts the close relationship between the sun god and the *ba* is mentioned; the latter is said to be ‘with Re daily’ (Faulkner 1977: 135; cf. *ibid.*: 136–8).

The deceased could play *senet* with his *ba*,⁵⁵ a game that became linked with the passage of Re through the underworld in the 20th Dynasty. This board game was used as a means of communication between the living and the dead at least from the Old Kingdom.⁵⁶ CT 405 states in relation to the deceased:⁵⁷

*Let him sing, let him dance, and let him receive ornaments,
Let him play senet with those on earth.
It is his voice that is heard but he cannot be seen.*

The phrase ‘It is his voice that is heard but he cannot be seen’ also occurs in relation to Osiris in the Book of the Dead Spell 1B, a spell for going forth by day or ‘causing that the mummy descend to the netherworld on the day of joining the earth’ (i.e. on the day of burial).⁵⁸

Although *baw* are often said to be ‘living’, the 19th Dynasty Book of the Dead of Herunefer refers to ‘dead *bas* (*b3w mwt*)’,⁵⁹ presumably meaning the *baw* of the wretched or malevolent dead, which in the Books of the Day and Night, Caverns, and Gates, are described as the souls of the enemies of Re and Osiris, ‘the damned ones, whose tortured and mutilated corpses, Shadows, and *Bas* are turned upside down in the Place of Destruction’.⁶⁰ *Bas* were unable to speak, instead making a bird-like noise or a sound of distress, as indicated on the cosmological ceiling in the temple of Sety I at Abydos: ‘these birds, whose faces are like those of men and whose nature is like that of birds, one of them speaks to the other with words of weeping’.⁶¹ Shadows equally did not have a voice with which they would be able to communicate with the living, producing only a whispering or buzzing sound, or screaming (*sbh*) when in pain.⁶² The only aspect of the deceased able to communicate directly with the living was the *akh*.

The akh

The *akh* was not so much an element of the deceased as the transfigured deceased in his entirety who had attained the status of an ancestor, was able to communicate with the living, and appeared before them in corporeal form.⁶³ The meaning of *3h* seems to stem from two roots: the initial essence of ‘to shine’, and related solar imagery,⁶⁴ and the broader notion of what is ‘beneficial’, ‘effective’.⁶⁵ Both are relevant to the spirits of the dead, who were intrinsically bound to the solar cycle,⁶⁶ and could be efficacious in their communication and arbitration with/for the living.⁶⁷

⁵⁵ E.g. the New Kingdom stela of Wepwawetmose (Vienna no. 55): Piccione 1994: 198.

⁵⁶ Piccione 1994: 197–8.

⁵⁷ De Buck 1954: 209–10; Assmann 2005: 213; Piccione 1994: 197.

⁵⁸ Allen 1974: 6–7.

⁵⁹ Spell 183: Žabkar 1968: 142.

⁶⁰ Žabkar 1968: 143; cf. Hornung 1968: 29–30.

⁶¹ Žabkar 1968: 147.

⁶² Amduat, 8th Hour: Zandee 1960: 63; 11th Hour: Hornung and Abt 2007: 349.

⁶³ Spell 64, Book of the Dead: Demarée 1983: 252, n. 295; Friedman 1994: 114; Allen 1974: 59. For the interaction between the *akh* and the living, see Smith 1989: 124–5.

⁶⁴ Janák 2006.

⁶⁵ Friedman 1982: 145–6.

⁶⁶ The dead shared some of Re’s attributes, as indicated in Coffin Texts Spell 44 (Goebis 2008: 201; de Buck 1935: 181g), ‘for being transfigured into an *akh* with radiance like Re (*s3h m stt mi r*)’.

⁶⁷ Goebis 2008: 201.

Coffin Texts Spell 99 indicates that the dead appeared to the living in *akh* form:⁶⁸

Go my ba, in order that that man may see you, as he passes his life (ḥꜥ ḥmsi); (appear) in front of his sight [literally 'face'] in my form and in my true nature as a living akh

This concept is also found in Book of the Dead Spell 64, which states that the *akh* would appear in the shape of a living person:⁶⁹

*I have come forth as a powerful⁷⁰ akh
(but) I am seen in my human form*

Statues and other representations of the deceased thus depict them in *akh* (transfigured) form, and the act of 'feeding the *akh*' (*snmt 3h*) was performed through the medium of the statue.⁷¹ This implies a complex relationship between the *akh* and the *ka*: while both could be present to receive offerings simultaneously, it was the *akh* that the living saw, the *ka* being the invisible force within the image.

As an inducement to continue to provide frequent offerings, essential to both deities and the dead, the living were promised preferential treatment in the afterlife. Passages in the Book of Gates, for instance, indicate that Re will secure protection and *akh*-status for those who present offerings to him during their lifetime, and that after death they will be able to partake of offerings upon earth.⁷² Without such divine assistance, one needed identification with a god (particularly Re or Osiris), special knowledge, or the recitation of particular formulae (*s3hw*)⁷³ by qualified priests in order to become an *akh*.⁷⁴

One of the most important features of the *akh* was its ability to communicate with the living – a feature seemingly not shared by the *ka*, *ba*, or shadow. Thus, when the deceased states:⁷⁵ 'I will speak to you, who exist upon earth and who will come to be ...',⁷⁶ he is probably referring to himself in his *akh*-form. According to the Amduat:⁷⁷

*The one who knows this mysterious image will be a well-provisioned akh.
He will always leave and enter the netherworld, and speak to the living.*

This spirit in human shape is depicted on *akh iqer en re* stelae (Figure 2), and is probably also represented by anthropoid busts (Chapter 2).⁷⁸ It may be significant that the *akh* shown on

⁶⁸ De Buck 1938: 94, e–f; cf. CT 101, Gee 2002: 85; 2003: 230.

⁶⁹ Donnat 2003: 38; cf. Friedman 1994: 114; Allen 1974: 59.

⁷⁰ A translation of 'powerful' for *iqer* is preferred here to the usual interpretation ('effective'), as this better conveys the sense of the *akh*'s potency (see Demarée 1983: 195–7).

⁷¹ Friedman 1995: 86–90; Demarée 1983: 205.

⁷² Wente 1984: 167, 170, 172.

⁷³ E.g. O. Turin 57003; McDowell 1999: 160. For transfiguration hymns see Assmann 1986: 998–1006; Assmann 2005: 244.

⁷⁴ Demarée 1983: 243–4.

⁷⁵ Frood 2007: 144.

⁷⁶ Tomb of Nefersekheru at Zawyet el-Sultan: Osing 1992: pl. 35.

⁷⁷ Lines 297–299; Wente 1982: 166; Hornung and Abt 2007: 424.

⁷⁸ The role of *akh* as intermediaries between gods and mortals is alluded to in some *akh iqer* stelae where the deceased is depicted in the presence of a deity, but not in a pose indicative of adoration; see for example Schulman 1986: 325–6.



Figure 2: Typical *akh iqr* pose, though the deceased holds an ankh rather than a folded cloth. Stela of Panakht. Deir el-Medina, 19th Dynasty. Louvre E 16367.

stelae⁷⁹ sometimes wear unguent cones.⁸⁰ Although rock-cut tomb statues are not specifically identified in inscriptions as showing the tomb owner and his family in the form of *akhu*, some of them have cones (Figure 3),⁸¹ suggesting there might be an iconographic link between statues and stelae, particularly at Thebes where the stelae are prevalent.⁸²

Despite the power of the *akh*, indicated by their role as the ‘bodyguards of Osiris’ with the authority to detain *bas* and shadows,⁸³ there seems to have been some ambivalence over *akh*-

⁷⁹ E.g. Chicago 14649; Schulman 1986: 230, no. A60; Stewart 1976: pl. 36, 2.

⁸⁰ See Joan Padgham (2012) *A New Interpretation of the Cone on the Head in New Kingdom Egyptian Tomb Scenes*, Archaeopress, Oxford.

⁸¹ E.g. Neferrenpet, TT 178 and Nefersekheru, TT 296; Hofmann 2004: pl. ix.

⁸² Demarée 1983: 279.

⁸³ Žabkar 1968: 137, n. 75.

status, and it is instructive that the word ‘*akh*’ developed into the Coptic term for ‘demon’.⁸⁴ The Calendar of Good and Bad Days relates in several cases specifically to the *akh*.⁸⁵ Their negative aspect is suggested in these texts, which give orders to ‘appease (*sh*)’ and ‘pacify (*sh**tp*)’ the *akh*⁸⁶ – implying that they can be angered. The texts specifically mention that voice offerings (*p**rt*-*h**rw*) should be presented to these spirits. This offering is made at the time when Osiris is rejuvenated and able to accept offerings,⁸⁷ suggesting an association between the risen god and the *akh*.

A description of the *akh* as a disruptive force is found in the Instruction of Ani:⁸⁸

*Satisfy the akh; do what he desires,
And abstain for him from his abominations,
That you may be safe from his many harms.
Every misfortune is his.
The head of cattle is taken from the field?
It was he who did it (lit. has done the like).
Any damage (to) the threshing floor in the fields?
‘It is the akh!’ they say again.
Uproar in the house? Hearts are discouraged?
All these are his doing.*

A less well-known magical text from Deir el-Medina addressed to a malignant spirit describes the indiscriminate nature of the *akh* as a destructive force:⁸⁹

*You enter heaven and then you eat all the stars that are in it.
You sit down on the soil and then you dislodge the seed which people have sown in it.
You stretch your hand toward the desert and you kill all the game that is in it.
You are put on the border of the sea and you make all the fish die that are in it.*

The *akh* collectively acted as a judicial body, particularly in afterlife tribunals,⁹⁰ with their primary role being the evaluation of the newly deceased. Mortuary texts, especially the appeals to the living, indicate that they could also judge and punish those still on earth:⁹¹

*All who enter my [tomb] in their impurity and who have eaten what an eminent spirit (3*h* i*kr*) detests, ... I shall seize his neck like that of a bird, putting fear into him, so that the spirits which are on earth, see it and fear ... an eminent spirit*

In this role, the dead act as moral guides, punishing breaches of rules and reinforcing the social status quo.⁹²

⁸⁴ *i**hy*: Demarée 1983: 194; Koenig 1979: 113–4.

⁸⁵ Leitz 1994: 191 n. 77, 231, 233.

⁸⁶ Troy 1989: 145.

⁸⁷ Leitz 1994: 191.

⁸⁸ P. Bulaq IV, 22, 1–3; Quack 1994: 114–7, 182–3, 324–5 (plates); McDowell 1999: 104; Demarée 1983: 269. Quack (1994: 115) translates *akh* as ‘demon’.

⁸⁹ P. Turin 1995 and 1996, recto 5.8–10; Borghouts 1994: 126; Pleyte and Rossi 1869–75: 124.

⁹⁰ Willems 2001: 341–2.

⁹¹ Sixth Dynasty tomb of Khentika: Zandee 1960: 34, 197; Sethe 1906: 260, 12. The dead as judges of both the living and the dead may be related to their association with the sun god (as 3*h**w* i*krw* n r^c), because Re also acts in a judicial capacity (Zandee 1960: 34; Donnat 2003: 242–50).

⁹² Cf. Smith 2008: 192, re. comparable Aboriginal beliefs.

The shadow

The shadow was an essential part of the living person that took on great importance in death, and shared with the *ba* the responsibility of fetching food for the corpse.⁹³ The *akh* was said to possess a shadow in the Book of Gates: one who offers to them on earth ‘is a powerful excellent *akh*, who possesses a shadow’,⁹⁴ either implying a close association between the two or suggesting that the *akh*, as a transfigured person, was able to retain the shadow he possessed in life.

The shadow has a solar connection, being the image of a person on the ground, the most powerful of divine manifestations.⁹⁵ In Amarna beliefs, the shadow was a visible expression of Re/solar energy.⁹⁶ It is pictured in Book of the Dead, Spell 92 leaving the tomb and ‘going out into the day’ in the company of the *ba* (Figure 4).⁹⁷ The shadow had a close affinity with the *ba*, and they were judged together in the netherworld.⁹⁸ The destruction of the shadow by knives or by being devoured by a demon⁹⁹ suggests that the *šwt* was understood as corporeal rather than ethereal, and the fact that the extermination of the shadow leads to the annihilation of the entire being¹⁰⁰ shows how fundamental it was to the continued existence of the deceased. Shadows were considered to be in some way attached to the deceased (even though they were depicted as independent of one another), because they could be ‘cut off’.¹⁰¹

Book of the Dead Spell 188, a spell for sending forth the soul and going forth by day as a man, states:¹⁰² ‘You have blessed me with a (*ba*)-soul and shadow, so that we may be seen yonder.’ Coffin Texts Spell 413 is a request for the divinisation of the *ba* and the shadow,¹⁰³ again suggesting that these two entities are closely connected in Egyptian thought. The association between the *ba* and the shadow and their relationship with the corpse in turn may partly explain the sexual aspect of the shadow. There are a few texts in which the word *šwt* associated with a god describes the sexual power of that deity.¹⁰⁴ The connection between the shadow and the sexual aspect of the deceased may explain why the shadow is depicted with a penis in some vignettes to the Book of the Dead Spell 92,¹⁰⁵ going forth in the day, when the shadow was free to walk the earth at will before returning to the corpse in the evening.

⁹³ Lloyd 1989: 119; Zandee 1960: 182. See Blackman (1927: 113), El-Shohoumi (2004: 86), and Ogden (2001: 219, 223) for shadow-equivalents and beliefs about shadows in 20th century and modern Egypt and the Greek and Roman worlds.

⁹⁴ *m 3ḥ ikr šm šwt*: Wente 1982: 172.

⁹⁵ Goyon 2000: 15.

⁹⁶ Mantellini 2007: 1239.

⁹⁷ Allen 1974: 76; Herbin 2000: 7. E.g. P. Neferubenef, Louvre N 3092; Herbin 2000: 7.

⁹⁸ Assmann 2005: 112; Žabkar 1960: 182.

⁹⁹ Žabkar 1960: 183.

¹⁰⁰ Žabkar 1960: 20.

¹⁰¹ E.g. BD 191; Allen 1974: 214.

¹⁰² After Allen 1974: 211.

¹⁰³ Faulkner 1977: 64.

¹⁰⁴ Žabkar 1968: 104.

¹⁰⁵ E.g. P. Neferrenpet: Speleers 1917: pl. xxvii.



Figure 3: Rock-cut statues wearing unguent cones. Tomb of Neferrenpet (TT 178), Khokha, 19th Dynasty.



Figure 4: Ba leaving and returning to the tomb, and shadow with phallus. Tomb of Amennakht (TT 218), Deir el-Medina, Ramesside. Altenmüller 1990: 16, fig. 6. Reproduced with the kind permission of Hartwig Altenmüller.

The ka

According to Jan Assmann, the fundamental differences between the *ka* and *ba* are that:¹⁰⁶ ‘the *ba* belonged to the physical sphere of the deceased, restoring his movement and his ability to take on form, while the *ka* belonged to his social sphere and restored his status, honor and dignity... It was soul, protective spirit, and doppelgänger, all rolled into one’. The importance of progeny is expressed through this element of the individual, since the *ka* was passed on through successive generations.¹⁰⁷ Unlike the *akh*, however, the *ka* was shown as an abstract concept – either the symbol itself (two arms joined in the centre with bent elbows and lower arms apparently upraised, palms facing outwards), or as a person wearing the hieroglyph on his head. While the king’s ‘double’ is regularly depicted,¹⁰⁸ however, the *ka* of elite individuals is not explicitly shown (or at least not captioned) and its presence is suggested in more subtle ways, often as the sign on a standard; between the arms food, lilies and bowls of incense may be piled, as though the *ka* is embracing the offerings (Figure 5). In the early 18th Dynasty tomb of Ahmose son of Ibana at Elkab, the tomb owner is captioned as ‘reaching for his *ka*’,¹⁰⁹ combining the imagery of his next-worldly self and the nourishment needed to sustain it.

The arms of the *ka* hieroglyph are outstretched in a gesture of embracing, not upraised as it might appear.¹¹⁰ The gesture is mentioned in the Pyramid Texts:¹¹¹ ‘Atum put your arms around Pepi Neferkare as *ka*-arms, so that the *ka* of Pepi Neferkare might be in it, firm for the course of eternity. Ho, Atum! May you extend protection over this Pepi Neferkare, and prevent anything bad from happening to it for the course of eternity, like you extended protection over Shu and Tefnut.’ According to one myth, Atum created Shu and Tefnut by embracing them and imparting his ‘vital force’ [*ka*].¹¹² Embracing as a means of transferring life and protection to the recipient is suggested in the speech of the *ankh*-holding Goddess of the West in the tomb of Amenemhet:¹¹³ ‘twice welcome to me in peace, that I may embrace you and enfold you in my arms, and command life [for your ...]. Truly I will be a protection for your flesh, and my arms will encircle you for ever and ever.’ This imagery is reminiscent of Nut embracing the mummified corpse in coffins.¹¹⁴ Given that the act of embracing was a way of transmitting *ka* force, it may be significant that during the daily cult ritual, the officiant embraced the statue, entering the shrine and inserting his outstretched arms.¹¹⁵ Naophorus statues may also be part of this tradition, with the statue-owner shown embracing the cult image of a deity in its shrine,¹¹⁶ as might the ceremonial garment worn

¹⁰⁶ 2005: 97. He also describes the *ka* as ‘the vehicle of vindication that restored the individual’s status as a social person’ after death (*ibid.*).

¹⁰⁷ 2005: 44.

¹⁰⁸ Greven 1954.

¹⁰⁹ West wall; Lorton 1999: 180–1; Porter and Moss 1937: 182 with reference.

¹¹⁰ Assmann 2005: 101; Hornung 1992: 175.

¹¹¹ PT 600, a spell for the protection of the pyramid of Pepy II: Allen 2005a: 269. See also Lesko 1991: 92; Heiden 2003: 310.

¹¹² Lorton 1999: 182.

¹¹³ TT 82; Gardiner and Davies 1915: 48, pl. x.

¹¹⁴ E.g. BM EA 24906, 22nd Dynasty: Taylor 2003: fig. 58. Cf. Sugi 2003 on the theme of embracing and giving life.

¹¹⁵ Lorton 1999: 141.

¹¹⁶ Van Dijk 1993: 125.

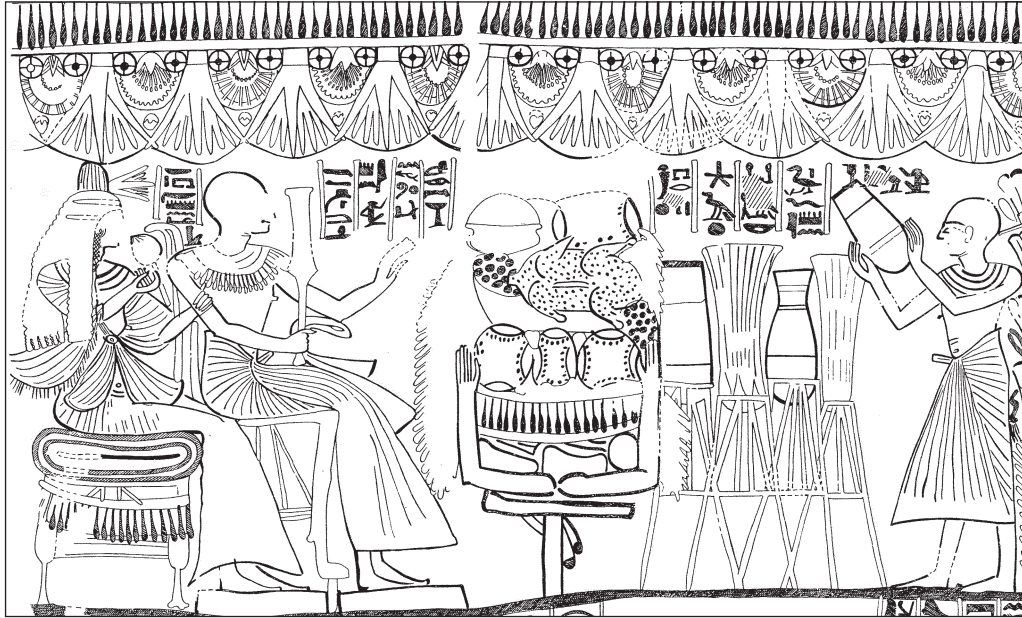


Figure 5: Offerings embraced by the ka-sign. Tomb of Nakhtamun (TT 341), Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, 19th Dynasty. After Davies and Gardiner 1948: pl. xxviii.

by the *sem*-priest during the Opening of the Mouth ritual¹¹⁷ (following his overnight stay in the tomb) known as *kni*, which is a homophone of a root meaning ‘embrace/to embrace’.¹¹⁸

Like the *ba* and *akh*, the *ka* could be a negative force. The *ka* of a god, for example, could punish the living, such as the workman Nakhtamun at Deir el-Medina:¹¹⁹ ‘I made for him praises to [Amun’s] name ... On behalf of the draftsman Nakhtamun, justified, who lay sick unto death, <in> the power of Amun, through his sin. ... May your *ka* be kind (*w3h k3.k*), may you forgive, it shall not happen again.’ The *ka* of the deceased presumably also needed propitiation, hence offerings were made ‘for the *ka* of’ a dead person from the Old Kingdom onwards.¹²⁰

Andrew Gordon describes the *ka* as an ‘animating life force’,¹²¹ an ‘impersonal vital energy that makes the world live and function.’ One source of this force is food.¹²² Living animals, such as the calf whose foreleg is severed and offered to the deceased,¹²³ or freshly killed ones, particularly bulls (themselves *k3w*), would contain a great deal of [*hk3*] energy which could be

¹¹⁷ Scenes 11–19; Assmann 2003a: 56; Fischer-Elfert 1998: 6, 40–3.

¹¹⁸ Faulkner 1962: 279–80.

¹¹⁹ Lichtheim 1976: 106–7, 108.

¹²⁰ Gordon 1996: 34. In reference to BD 105 (spell for appeasing the *ka* in the necropolis), Janák (2003: 195) rejects the translation of ‘appease’ or ‘propitiate’ for *shtp*, because he believes that this incorrectly ‘presumes a negative position of the *ka*’. He prefers to translate ‘to appease by an offering’, but the essential meaning remains the same.

¹²¹ 1996: 35.

¹²² *k3w*; see also Roth 1992: 126.

¹²³ E.g. the Papyrus of Hunefer: Champdor 1963: 148.

transferred to the living or the dead.¹²⁴ If this is the case, it could explain why bulls led for sacrifice in tomb scenes are depicted with a water lily blossom, symbolising life, around their necks;¹²⁵ through their death, the tomb owner could experience rebirth. The foreleg was used during the Opening of the Mouth ceremony to revivify the mummiform deceased; it was part of equipment that included feathers, an adze, a finger, and sacred oils, which were all designed to bring about rebirth.¹²⁶

Iconography: Distinguishing the dead from the living

From the Old Kingdom onward, the tomb owner was distinguished by his greater size in proportion to other figures,¹²⁷ by facing in a different direction to others, such as offering bearers, and often by some form of barrier.¹²⁸ The greater size of the deceased in relation to other people is explicable in terms of the tomb owner's higher rank or importance than those around him,¹²⁹ but also the anticipation of gaining physical stature in the afterlife.¹³⁰ The 'partition' between figures of the living and the dead may be in the form of an offering table, columns of text, or items held by the deceased, particularly staves. Papyrus kiosks are sometimes used to separate the tomb owner (and his wife) from activities going on around him. In the tomb of Rekhmire,¹³¹ the tomb owner's mother, who predeceased him, is distinguished from the other banquet guests by being seated before her own offering table and served separately, as well as by the *mꜣḫrw* (*maa-kheru*) epithet.

The use of *maa-kheru* as a designation of the dead is disputed, not least because it appears alongside images of people still alive when the inscription was written.¹³² In theory, the epithet *maa-kheru*, 'true of voice', indicated that the person had passed through the judgement process successfully and could become a glorified ancestor and join the other blessed dead who themselves judged the dead in the law courts of the netherworld.¹³³ According to Thomas Allen,¹³⁴ the title 'carries an overtone of magic, for it amounts to an advance verdict of innocence at the judgment of the dead described in Spell 125.' Given the element of propaganda and

¹²⁴ Gordon 1996: 35.

¹²⁵ E.g. Davies and Gardiner 1936: pl. lix.

¹²⁶ See Roth 1993.

¹²⁷ Kanawati 1981: 216–21.

¹²⁸ See Seidlmayer 2001 for a discussion of the iconography of the dead in the Old and Middle Kingdoms.

¹²⁹ Kanawati 1981: 222.

¹³⁰ Hornung 2008. This idea may be supported by the presence of oversized shirts in 18th Dynasty burials, see e.g. Hayes 1959: 187.

¹³¹ TT 100: Davies 1943: pl. lxvi.

¹³² For this reason, Schulman (1984: 179, 181) translated the phrase as '[he] who will be justified'.

¹³³ Zandee 1960: 40, 273. It is worth noting that the judgement was not religious in the sense of atoning for sins against gods (as found on votive stelae of the New Kingdom, thought to indicate 'personal piety'), but rather secular: the deceased is tested for his moral goodness, to ensure that he has not committed acts against *maat*, i.e. the social order (Allen 1988: 47).

¹³⁴ 1974: 3.