

Some Remarks to the Semantics of Image of Deity on the Coffin of Sepi III (Cairo CG 28083)

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Abstract. The problem of the iconography of a unique image of a deity drawn on the Middle Kingdom rectangular coffin of Sepi III (Cairo CG 28083; B1C; Deir el-Bersha; CT VI, 386) is discussed in the article. It is possible that the god is the first known image of the syncretic double god Re-Osiris. The deity (with a head unusually for Egyptian iconography unfolded in full face) is shown sitting on a throne with the inscription “millions (of years)”. The image of this god could be a visual display of the eschatological plot described in Spell 1130 of the *Coffin Texts* (the union of Atum(-Re) and Osiris after destruction of the Universe) at the end in the *Book of Two Ways*, that is represented on the bottom of Sepi’s coffin.

Keywords: Ancient Egypt; Middle Kingdom; Coffin Texts; Spells 758-760; coffin of Sepi III; Cairo CG 28083; Re-Osiris; Mehen; Egyptian eschatological myth; iconography.

[es] Algunas observaciones a la semántica de la imagen de la deidad en el ataúd de Sepi III (Cairo CG 28083)

Resumen. El problema de la iconografía de una imagen única de una deidad dibujada en el ataúd rectangular del Reino Medio de Sepi III (Cairo CG 28083; B1C; Deir el-Bersha; CT VI, 386) se discute en el artículo. Es posible que el dios sea la primera imagen conocida del doble dios sincrético Re-Osiris. La deidad (con una cabeza inusualmente desplegada en la cara completa para la iconografía egipcia) se muestra sentada en un trono con la inscripción “millones (de años)”. La imagen de este dios podría ser una muestra visual de la trama escatológica descrita en el Hechizo 1130 de los Textos del Ataúd (la unión de Atum (-Re) y Osiris después de la destrucción del Universo) al final del Libro de las Dos Vías, que está representado en la parte inferior del ataúd de Sepi.

Palabras clave: Antiguo Egipto; Reino Medio; Textos del ataúd; Hechizos 758-760; ataúd de Sepi III; Cairo CG 28083; Re-Osiris; Mehen. Mito escatológico egipcio; iconografía.

Summary. 1. Introduction. 2. The image of a strange deity on the coffin of Sepi III: the interpretations. 3. The “ways of Mehen” and the Mehen-game. 4. Conclusions. 5. Acknowledgments. 6. Written sources and bibliographical references.

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1. Introduction

The wooden rectangular outer coffin of Sepi (*Spi*) III² (B1C; Cairo CG 28083, J.E. 32969; Middle Kingdom, 12th Dynasty)³ (Fig. 1), originating from the necropolis

of Hermopolis (Deir el-Bersha), is of particular interest for research since it has an unusually valuable and rich pictorial decoration, including a unique image of a deity, the interpretation of which is the subject of this article.

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² For the numbering see: Bert Verrept, “The Identification of the Owners of Some Canopic Chests from Deir al-Barsha”, *Göttinger Miszellen. Beiträge zur ägyptologischen Diskussion* 195 (2003): 5-6.

³ Pierre Lacau, *Catalogue Général des Antiquités Égyptiennes du Musée du Caire. Nos 28001–28026: Sarcophages antérieurs au Nouvel Empire*, vol. 1 (Le Caire: Imprimerie de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1903), 170-199, pl. 11, 24, 25.

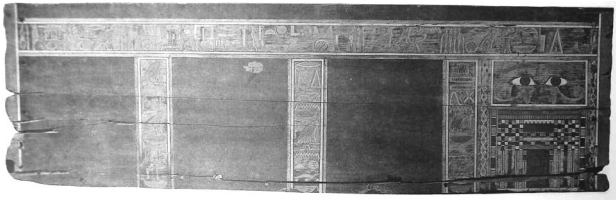


Figure 1. The outer side of the rectangular coffin of Sepi III (Cairo CG 28083; B1C). Source: Lacau, *Catalogue Général*, pl. 11.

This picture of the god⁴ (Figs 2, 3) accompanies the text of Spells 758-760 of the *Coffin Texts*⁵ (Spell 758 represents the text near the image of a deity and inside the ovals)⁶. It is placed on the inside at the head end panel and shows a deity (with a face unusually for Egyptian iconography depicted in full face) wearing an *3tf*-crown⁷, framed by ram horns and snakes, seated on a throne with the signature *hḥw* “millions (of years)”, surrounded by five black and four red concentric ovals associated with the image of the Mehen serpent⁸ (Fig. 4). In the right hand of the deity is a *w3s*-scepter, and in the left is an *ʿnh* - the sign of life⁹. In the New Kingdom the extracts from the *Coffin Texts* Spells 758 and 759¹⁰ became a prototype for the Chapter 131 of the *Book of the Dead*, but this Chapter has no vignette in the Theban Redaction¹¹.



Figure 2. The inside decoration of the head end panel of the coffin of Sepi III with the image of a deity on a throne. Source: Forman and Quirke, *Hieroglyphs...*, 96.

⁴ Adrian de Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts VI* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1956), 386 (here and after: CT, VI); Ulrich Luft, “A Different World - Religious Conception”, in *Egypt. The World of the Pharaohs*, eds. Regine Schulz and Matthias Seidel (Köln: H. F. Ullmann, 1998), 422, fig. 10; Mikhail A. Chegodaev, *Papirusnaya grafika Drevnego Egipta* (Moscow: URSS, 2004), fig. 2; Peter Piccione, “Mehen. Mysteries and Resurrection from the Coiled Serpent”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 27 (1990), 45, fig. 1; Werner Forman and Stephen Quirke, *Hieroglyphs and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1996), 96.

⁵ See the translations: Raymond Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, vol. 3 (Warminster: Aris & Philips, 1978), 167; Claude Carrier, *Textes des des Sarcophages du Moyen Empire Egyptien*, vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions du Rocher, 2004), 1698-1703. For a discussion of the accounts in the *Coffin Texts* Spells 758-760, see: Wael Sherbiny, *Through Hermopolitan Lenses. Studies on the So-called Book of Two Ways* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 389-391.

⁶ CT VI, 387.

⁷ According to Piccione it is “a crown reminiscent of an *3tf*” (Piccione, “Mehen...”, 44). For the iconography of *Atf* see in details: Abd el Monem Joussef Abubakr, *Untersuchungen über die ägyptischen Kronen* (Glückstadt: Augustin, 1937), 7-24.

⁸ CT VI, 387n (*ir wmnt Mhn pwy*). Cf. Faulkner, *The Ancient...*, 290; Burkhard Backes, *Das altägyptische “Zweiwegbuch”. Studien zu den Sargtext-Sprüchen 1029-1130* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), 361; Carrier, *Textes...*, 1701.

⁹ For the decorative program of the coffin see: Peter Robinson, “Ritual Landscapes in the Coffin Texts - A cognitive mapping approach”, *Current Research in Egyptology 2004: Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Symposium which Took Place at the University of Durham, January 2004*, ed. Rachael J. Dann (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2006), 123-128.

¹⁰ CT VI, 387-389.

¹¹ Thomas George Allen, *The Book of the Dead or Going Forth by Day. Ideas of the Ancient Egyptians concerning the Hereafter as expressed in their own Terms* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 107, fn. 222; Stephen Quirke, *Going out in Daylight - prt m hrw: the Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead. Translation, Sources, Meanings* (London: Golden House Publication, 2013), 293.

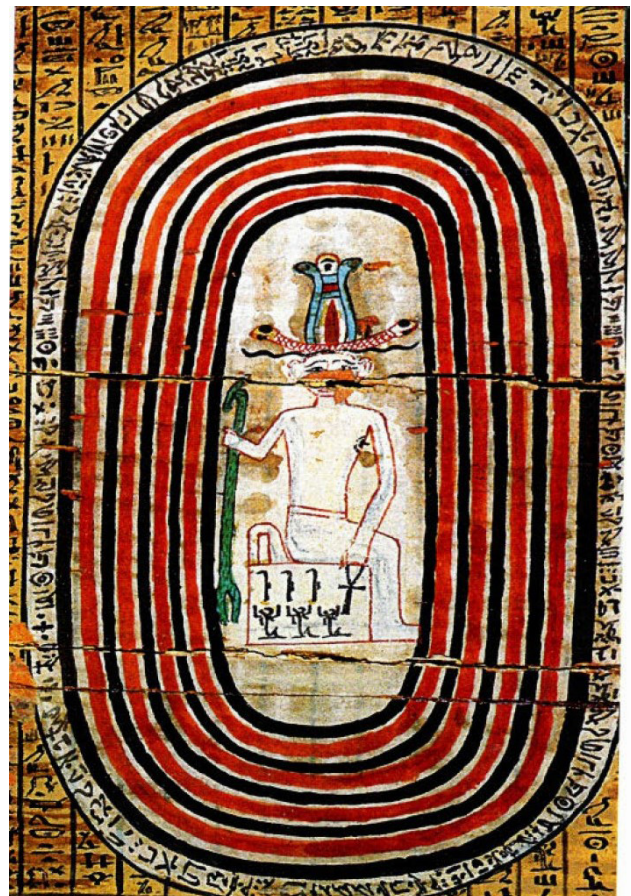


Figure 3. The image of a deity on a throne on the coffin of Sepi III. Source: Étienne, *Les Portes du Ciel*, 36, fig. 12.

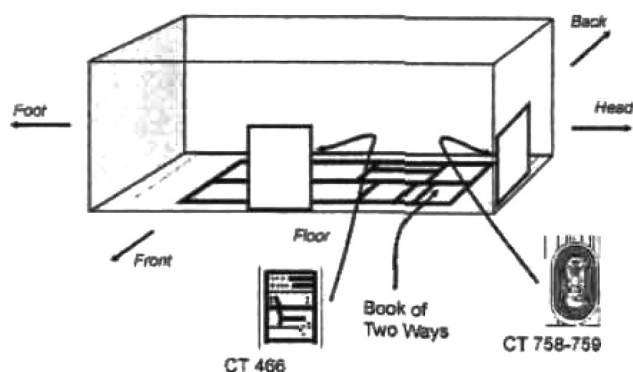


Figure 4. The decorative program of the coffin of Sepi III and the location of the deity's image. Source: Robinson, "Ritual Landscapes...", 127, fig. 7.

2. The image of a strange deity on the coffin of Sepi III: the interpretations

There are several views regarding the identification of the strange deity and the composition surrounding him. The first publisher of the coffin for *Catalog Général*, P. Lacau, and later U. Luft, Yu. Volokhine, and E. P. Uphill identified Osiris in the depiction¹². According to Volokhine "la frontalité suggère ici l'éveil du dieu Osiris - si c'est bien de lui qu'il s'agit-, sa renaissance"¹³. In the red ovals surrounding the deity, Luft saw "Channels of Fire": in the text they are designated as *w3.wt sd.t* "Roads of Fire"¹⁴, washing, according Luft, the Island of Osiris - "Champs Elysees", i.e. "Fields of *Iaru*"¹⁵. They are also referred to below as *w3.wt [Mh]n* "Roads of Me[h(en)]"¹⁶. At the same time it is confidently impossible to conclude that the "map" is presented by "Fields of *Iaru*" since they are not mentioned in Spells 758-760 of the *Coffin Texts* relating to the image, but that the "Roads of Fire/Mehen" that surround a certain area. I will return to this area below.

J. Zandee, P. Piccione, B. Backes, A. Bolshakov, and W. Sherbiny personify the deity of the picture as Re / Sun god¹⁷. Bolshakov also notes that this is the only example of "images of gods besides maps" of the Netherworld on the Middle Kingdom coffins¹⁸. However, the composition is definitely represents a kind of *map* and therefore does not go beyond the general tendency, characteristic of the design of coffins in the Middle Kingdom, to show the de-

ities *only* in maps/guides to the Netherworld¹⁹. The black ovals described by Zandee and Bolshakov are similarly interpreted as a symbolic image of Mehen, which is very plausible due to the direct link to the text of the corresponding spells²⁰. A similar opinion is also expressed by M. Chegodaev, P. Piccione and B. Backes²¹. H. Ranke expressed a special opinion: he saw in the deity of the depiction an anthropomorphic image of the serpent Mehen²².

The interpretation of the Russian Egyptologist M. Chegodaev seems to be the most legitimate and I will pay more attention to this original interpretation²³. Chegodaev personifies the deity on the coffin of Sepi III as Re-Osiris²⁴ and wittily suggests²⁵ that the ovals around him are 'mandala' - a kind of "tunnel leading to the Netherworld, and the deity surrounded by it is seen as if through a tunnel, from its other end"²⁶.

Although the Egyptians did not leave any postscript to the picture that would allow us to identify this creature (the totality of the textual material of the spells associated with the picture, as noted, indicates rather the essence of Re)²⁷, its Solar-Osirian iconographic attributes suggest that this is possibly the earliest visual image of the syncretic deity Re-Osiris. I want to emphasize that the combination of Solar and Osirian elements in the given image of the deity on Sepi's coffin is recognized by all scholars, even by those, who are more inclined to identify Re in him²⁸. In contrast, Chegodaev does not see any iconographic elements of Re here, believing that "this is undoubtedly Re", but only in the text, and in all "external" signs this is Osiris ("Re in the text is Osiris in the image")²⁹. The scholar considers the main argument to

¹² Lacau, *Sarcophages*, 175; Luft, "A Different World...", 422, ill. 10; Youri Volokhine, *La frontalité dans l'iconographie de l'Égypte ancienne*, (Genève: Société d'Égyptologie 2000), 85; Eric P. Uphill, "The Ancient Egyptian View of World History", in *Never Had the Like Occured: Egypt's view of its past*, ed. John Tait (London: UCL Press, Institute of Archaeology, 2003), 20-21.

¹³ Volokhine, *La frontalité...*, 85.

¹⁴ CT VI, 387b (Spell 758).

¹⁵ Luft, "A Different World...", 422, ill.10.

¹⁶ CT VI, 389d (Spell 759: *iw=i rh.n=i w3.wt [Mhn]* "I have identified the Roads of [Mehen]"), fn. 1*.

¹⁷ Zandee Jan, *Death as an Enemy according to Ancient Egyptian Conception* (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 164, fn. 10; Piccione, "Mehen...", 44; Backes, *Das altägyptische "Zweiwegbuch"*, 361; Andrei O. Bolshakov, "Izobrazheniye i tekst: dva yazyka drevneyegipetskoy kul'tury," *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii* 4 (2003): 14; Sherbiny, *Through Hermopolitan Lenses*, 389.

¹⁸ Bolshakov, "Izobrazheniye i tekst", 14.

¹⁹ Cf. Nikolai A. Tarasenko, "K voprosu ob evolyutsii izobrazitel'nykh putevoditeley po zagrobnomu miru v Drevnem Egipte", in *Trudy Tsentra egiptologii im. V. S. Golenishcheva Rossiyskogo gosudarstvennogo gumanitarnogo universiteta* (Moscow: Filozofskaya kniga, 2005), 2: 103-126.

²⁰ Zandee, *Death as an Enemy*, 164-165; Bolshakov, "Izobrazheniye i tekst...", 14.

²¹ Mikhail A. Chegodaev, "Sarkofag Sepi iz Egiptskogo muzeya v Kaire i dva yazyka egipetskoy kul'tury", *Peterburgskiy egiptologicheskoye Chteniya 2005* (Saint Petersburg: Iz-vo Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha, 2006), 195-198; Piccione, "Mehen...", 44-46; Backes, *Das altägyptische "Zweiwegbuch"*, 361-364.

²² Hermann Ranke, *Die altägyptische Schlangenspiel* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1920), 19.

²³ Chegodaev, "Sarkofag Sepi...", 195-198; Chegodaev, *Papirusnaya grafika...*, 17-18; Chegodaev, "Iyerotopiya drevneyegipetskogo sarkofaga", in *Iyerotopiya. Sravnitel'nyye issledovaniya sakral'nykh prostranstv*, ed. Aleksey M. Lidov (Moscow: Indrik, 2009), 13-32.

²⁴ Chegodaev, *Papirusnaya grafika...*, 17; Chegodaev, "Sarkofag Sepi..."

²⁵ As it seems to me his reference to the psychoanalytic studies by Carl Gustav Jung cannot be a strong argument here.

²⁶ Chegodaev, *Papirusnaya grafika...*, 18, fn. 36; Chegodaev, "Sarkofag Sepi...", 194, 201-202.

²⁷ For example, CT VI, 387n-o: *ir wnn.t Mhn pwy pw n(y) R'* "As for this Mehen, he belongs to Re". Chegodaev propose the translation of last phrase as "he surrounds Re" (Chegodaev, "Sarkofag Sepi...", 204, fn. 12).

²⁸ Backes, *Das altägyptische "Zweiwegbuch"*, 361; cf. Piccione, "Mehen...", 44; Anders Bettum, "Nesting: The development and significance of the 'yellow coffin' ensemble", in *Proceedings First Vatican Coffin Conference: 19-22 June 2013*, eds Alessia Amenta and Hélène Guichard (Vatican: Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 2017), 1: 75-76. See also: Emanuele Ciampini, "Among the Middle Kingdom 'unica'. The head side in the coffin of Sepi from Deir el-Bersha", in *Second Vatican Coffin Conference. 6-9 June 2017. Abstracts* (Vatican: Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 2017), 25 (the deity is recognized as 'Demiurge').

²⁹ Chegodaev, "Sarkofag Sepi...", 202; Chegodaev, "Iyerotopiya...", 28.

be the presence of the “Osirian” *3tf*-crown³⁰. But, firstly, as Piccione noted, the crown of the deity here is not necessarily an *3tf*, but perhaps in stylized form; secondly, in the Middle Kingdom the *3tf*-crown was also characteristic for Horus and Re³¹; and, thirdly, what about the *w3s*-scepter and *ḥnh*-sign?

According to Chegodaev, since Re is only described in the text and Osiris is only depicted, the formation of the figure of “Re-Osiris” occurs exclusively through the “crossing” (synthesis) of two “languages of Egyptian culture” - text and image³², what, as we see, is quite controversial. At the same time, one feature of the iconography of the deity on the B1C coffin, noticed by the researcher, suggests the correct way to a general understanding of the essence of this character - this is his full face image. In Egyptian funerary art in a similar depiction are only “the inhabitants of the Netherworld, whose path to our world are closed. They are in the Netherworld... Osiris is the king of Netherworld and it belongs entirely to him”³³. We can mention in this case³⁴ a number of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period images, connected with Osirian or infernal context (Figs 5-12).



Figure 5. The images of Osiris, Isis and Nephthys in the tomb chapel of Abdiel at Saqqara, 18th Dynasty. Source: Zivie, “Pharaoh’s Man...,” 22.

³⁰ Chegodaev, “Sarkofag Sepi...”, 202; Chegodaev, “Iyerotopiya...”, 28-29.

³¹ Abubakr, *Untersuchungen...*, 20.

³² Chegodaev, “Sarkofag Sepi...”, 200, 202.

³³ Chegodaev, *Papirusnaya grafika...*, 17-18; Chegodaev, “Sarkofag Sepi...”, 195.

³⁴ See: Christine Favard-Meeks, “Face et profil dans l’iconographie égyptienne”, in *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 23 (1992): 15-36, pls. 1-2; see also: Kent R. Weeks, *The Anatomical Knowledge of the Ancient Egyptians and the Representation of the Human Figure in Egyptian Art* (New Haven: Yale University, 1970); Heinrich Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*, transl. and ed. John Baines (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 205-218; Karol Myśliwiec, “A propos des signes hiéroglyphiques ‘hr’ et ‘tp’”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 98 (1972): 85-99; Volokhine, *La frontalité...*, 85-86; 161, figs. 102-104.

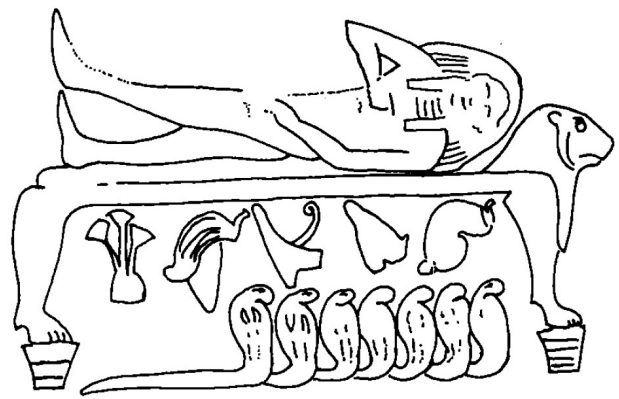


Figure 6. The image of Osiris in the Hibis sanctuary
Source: Volokhine, *La frontalité...*, 161, fig. 103.

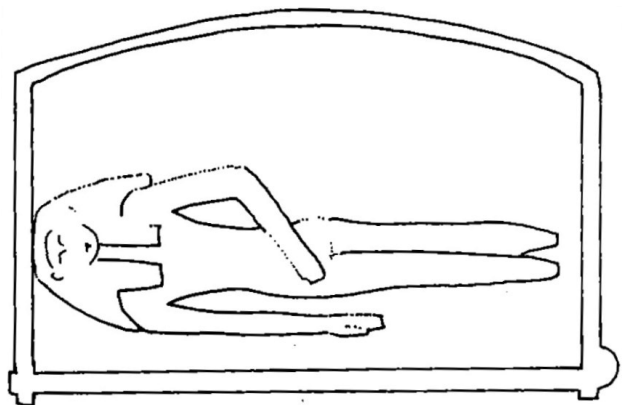


Figure 7. Another image of Osiris in the Hibis sanctuary.
Source: Volokhine, *La frontalité...*, 161, fig. 104.

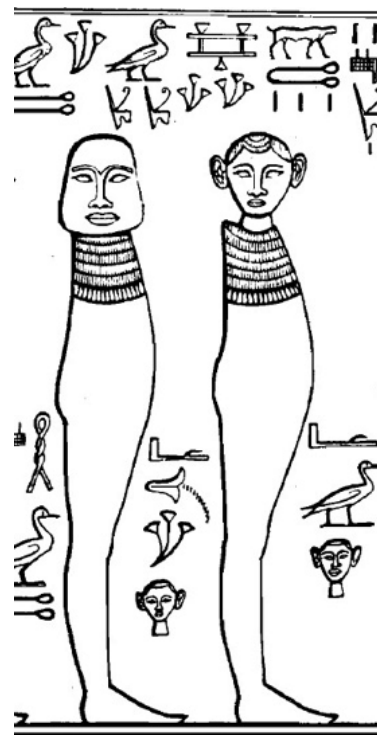


Figure 8. The images of the Netherworld deities on the “Enigmatic Netherworld Book” of Tutankhamun, Section A. Source: Piankoff, *Les Chapelles...*, pl. 4.

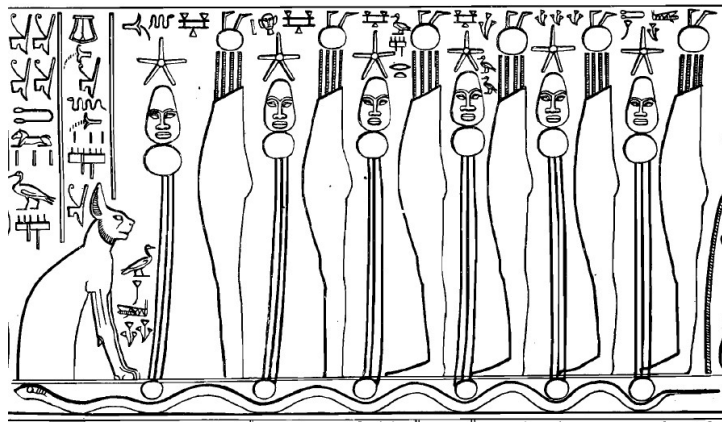


Figure 9. The composition with images of deities on the “Enigmatic Netherworld Book” of Tutankhamun, Section B. Source: Piankoff, *Les Chapelles...*, pl. 4.



Figure 10. The image of a head of a solar deity during his infernal journey, *Book of Gates*, Middle Register, Scene 73, the tomb of Ramses VI (KV 9). Source: Piankoff, *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, pl. 58.



Figure 11. The images of the Netherworld inhabitants in the Mythological papyrus of Djedkhonsuiuefankh, 21st Dynasty, Cairo S.R.VII.10266. Source: Volokhine, *La frontalité...*, 160, fig. 100.

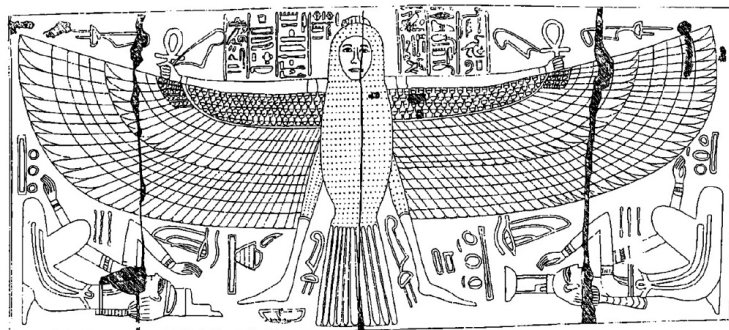


Figure 12. The image of the winged and mummiform *ba-soul*³⁵ on the coffin of Amenhotep, 21st Dynasty, Leiden AMM 16. Source: Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*, 208, fig. 213; Volokhine, *La frontalité...*, 166, fig. 115.

³⁵ The other examples of such images of *ba-soul* see: Volokhine, *La frontalité...*, 167, figs 118, 119; Lara Weiss, ed., *The Coffins of the Priests of Amun, Egyptian coffins from the 21st Dynasty in the collection of the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden* (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2018), 40, fig. 12 (Leiden F 93/10.1a); 41, fig. 13 (Leiden F 93/10.1b); 43, fig. 16 (Leiden F 93/10.2b).

Backes, however, adheres to a directly opposite opinion and regards the “frontal” position of the face as a sign of a solar deity, while the *3tf* is of Osiris³⁶. In the iconography of Re I don’t find any serious confirmation of this and therefore the ideas of Chegodaev in this matter look to be more fair. Considering that many Egyptologists worldwide may not have access to the Russian text of Chegodaev’s researches, I will focus more closely on his hypothesis regarding the image in question.

Thus, I completely agree with Chegodaev in identifying the creature on the B1C coffin as Re-Osiris, but I believe that the formation of his image occurs not only by the text-pictorial synthesis, but also by direct combination of their iconographic attributes in the image.

Chegodaev rightly focuses on the need for an integrated approach to studying the semantics of the pictorial and textual components of the design of the coffin³⁷, taking into account the location of certain spells and images, their interconnections, and the position of the mummy in the coffin³⁸. The scholar emphasizes that the drawing of the deity on the coffin is located on the head end inner panel (northern), i.e. at the head of deceased, and is slightly shifted to the right, thus being in front of the eyes of Sepi lying on his left side with his head to the north³⁹. This is undoubtedly very significant. At the same time, the opinion that the explanation as to why the image of the deity is placed exactly here must be sought “on other boards of the coffin adjacent to the head”⁴⁰ and, first of all, on the bottom, where a special and apparently local (Hermopolitan) “section” of the corpus of the *Coffin Texts*, a so-called *Book of Two Ways*⁴¹ (that traditionally, but not always⁴², identified as the first pictorial guide to the Netherworld) is located.

The text of the *Book of Two Ways* is placed in two registers describing the movement of a soul of deceased in the Netherworld by land and by water (which gave the corresponding name) and is read from right to left, i.e. the initial spells of both registers are located at the headboard, and the final spells at the feet. The exception is the coffin of Ikha (Cairo CG 28089; B12C) where the first register is read from right to left and starts at the head, and the second “returns” in the opposite direction - from the legs to the head, from left to right, in a so-called “reverse” direction of writing (“retrograde writing”) which first appeared in the *Pyramid Texts*⁴³ and was further developed in the *Book of the Dead*⁴⁴. It is very symptomatic that the way “traversed” by the deceased through the

“mapped” world of the *Book of Two Ways* ends with the entrance to the Gates of the Horizon⁴⁵, behind which the Lord of the Universe (*Nb-r-dr*) resides and the text of the famous Spell 1130 is represented.

Pointing to the importance of the *Book of Two Ways* for understanding the image of the deity on the end panel of the coffin, Chegodaev further explains the placement of the image of the throne of Re-Osiris “before the eyes” of the deceased, by the fact that he should have seen it “not from the point of view of an outside observer, namely the dead Sepi, would see the throne of God to where he is going”⁴⁶. The fact that the deceased was included in the microcosm of the coffin decor as a *main character* is absolutely true, but I should make two clarifications in the general interpretation of the pictorial program of the coffin.

Firstly, the movement of the soul of the deceased along the “world” of the *Book of Two Ways* occurs in the direction from the head end panel to the back, and not *vice versa* (see Fig. 4). Thus the image of the deity is placed at the very beginning of the journey and not at its end. In other words, Chegodaev’s assertion that the direction of movement of Sepi was the “throne of God” with the figure of Re-Osiris on the head end panel cannot be recognized - on the contrary, the path of the deceased formally started from him.

Secondly, it should be noted that in order to see the throne, the resurrected Sepi still had to direct his gaze a little higher, but directly in front of his eyes, facing east, on the right side panel of the coffin⁴⁷, where another famous image was placed - the map of the Fields of *Hetep* (*htp*) of Spell 465/466 of the *Coffin Texts*⁴⁸, which became the prototype of Chapter 110 of the *Book of the Dead* (see Fig. 4). The Fields of *Hetep* were the place where the deceased finally arrived to, and therefore his look is directed towards their image as the desired final point of the posthumous journey⁴⁹.

3. The “Roads of Mehen” and the Mehen-game

The dilemma can be explained by Piccione’s hypothesis. This scholar, developing the idea expressed by H. Ranke⁵⁰, connects the oval “Roads of Mehen” (*w3.wt Mhn*) of the picture surrounding the deity on the Sepi’s coffin with the *mhn*-game, known from Pre-dynastic times until the First Intermediate Period when the rules (which, as in the case

³⁶ Backes, *Das altägyptische “Zweiwegbuch”*, 361, but cf. 320-321.

³⁷ The examples of such researches are: Harco Willems, *The Coffin of Heqata (Cairo JdE 36418): a Case Study of Egyptian Funerary Culture of the Early Middle Kingdom* (Leuven: Peeters, 1996); Burkhard Backes, *Sarg und Sarkophag der Aaschyt (Kairo JE 47355 und 47267)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020).

³⁸ Cf. Niwiński Andrzej, “Untersuchungen zur ägyptischen religiösen Ikonographie der 21. Dynastie (3)”, *Göttinger Miszellen. Beiträge zur ägyptologischen Diskussion* 109 (1989): 53-66.

³⁹ Chegodaev, “Sarkofag Sepi...”, 194-195, 202.

⁴⁰ Chegodaev, 200.

⁴¹ The recent researches are Backes, *Das altägyptische “Zweiwegbuch”*; Sherbiny, *Through Hermopolitan Lenses*.

⁴² Sherbiny, 154-155.

⁴³ Erik Hornung, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife*, transl. David Lorton (Ithaca and London: Cornell University, 1999), 5.

⁴⁴ Chegodaev, *Papirusnaya grafika...*, 91-95.

⁴⁵ The Doors/Gates of the Horizon (*sbh.t 3ht*) is the place of the morning burning of the Sun from the Netherworld on the Eastern horizon. In the Late Period, a real “sacred place” with the same title is known to be located in Heliopolis and associated with the burial (“grave”) of Osiris (Susanne Bickel, “Die Jenseitsfahrt des Re nach Zeugen des Sargtexte”, in *Ein ägyptisches Glasperlenspiel. Ägyptologische Beiträge für Erik Hornung aus seinem Schülerkreis*, ed. Andreas Brodbeck (Berlin: Mann, Gebr., 1998), 51).

⁴⁶ Chegodaev, “Sarkofag Sepi...”, 203.

⁴⁷ I.e. the eastern panel, on which on the Middle Kingdom coffins the image of two eyes was placed or a false door, as in the case of Sepi’s coffin (B1C).

⁴⁸ Alexander Piankoff, *The Wondering of the Soul* (New York: Princeton University, 1972), fig. 1; Lacau, *Catalogue Général*, pl. 28.

⁴⁹ Leonard Lesko, “The Field of Hetep in Egyptian Coffin Texts”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 9 (1972): 89-101.

⁵⁰ Ranke, *Die altägyptische Schlangenspiel*.

of *snt* game, are not reliably known today) were forgotten⁵¹. From a later time, objects from the funeral inventory that imitated the *mhn* playing board were preserved. For example, the blue faience “votive object” Chicago, Field Museum of Nat. History No. 31009 (25 cm in diameter and 1-2 cm in thickness) is dated to the New Kingdom⁵². In the Saite Period of a so-called “Saite Renaissance” archaic images of the *mhn* game imitating the Old Kingdom painting reappear on the walls of the tombs of the nobility (at least two cases are known)⁵³, which, however, does not mean that the long-forgotten rules of this game have been restored. Curiously, the imitations of the *mhn*-table seem to have existed even before the Old Kingdom - for example, a small (diameter 52 mm, thickness 14 mm) lapis lazuli “amulet” from the Flinders Petrie collection (London, Petrie Mus. UC 38655)⁵⁴ is “predynastic”, but, unfortunately, contextless (Fig. 13). The limestone *mhn*-table (playing board)⁵⁵ from an Early Dynastic Period can be represented by a figure of a Mehen-serpent coiled into spiral rings⁵⁶ (London, Petrie Mus. UC 20453, diameter 288 mm, thickness 34 mm)⁵⁷ (Fig. 14), and it is really closely resembles the image on the coffin of Sepi.



Figure 13. Serpent amulet, Naqaqa, Predynastic Period, London, Petrie Mus. UC 38655. Source: ©The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL.



Figure 14. Limestone *mehen* playing board, Early Dynastic Period, London, Petrie Mus. UC 20453. Source: ©The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL.

Piccione quite reasonably proves that playing *mhn* (like playing *snt*) reflected a journey through the Afterlife, i.e. during the game, there was moving along the same “Roads of Mehen” (*w3.wt Mhn*) as in the case of the “channels” on the B1C coffin that explains their relationship. But it is possible to give another parallel suggesting the reason for the depiction of the “Roads of Mehen” on the Sepi’s coffin at the “beginning of the journey”. This is another Egyptian board game - *snt*, also known from an early time (from the 1st Dynasty). Just like *mhn*, this game depicts the journey of the soul through the roads of the Netherworld (reliably from the New Kingdom)⁵⁸. With the image of the *snt*-game the illustrative frieze of vignettes of Chapter 17 of the *Book of the Dead* begins⁵⁹. Moreover, there is no second player opposite the deceased on this initial vignette⁶⁰, which apparently indicates the game with the invisible forces of the Netherworld or, as Piccione believes, with another invisible oppo-

⁵¹ Piccione, “Mehen,” 46-47; Timothy Kendall, “Schlangenspiel,” in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, eds Wolfgang Helck and Wolfhart Westendorf (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1984), 5, 653-654. The first written mention of this game is given in the offerings list in the mastaba of Rahotep at Meidum (Kendall, “Schlangenspiel”, 653). For a list of the ancient Egyptian tombs of the 5th - 6th Dynasties in Giza and Saqqara, with the images of the *mhn* game, see: Kendall, 655, fn. 8.

⁵² Piccione, “Mehen...”, 51, fig. 4.

⁵³ Bertha Porter and Rosalind L. B. Moss, eds, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs and Paintings. Volume I: The Theban Necropolis*. (Oxford: Griffith Institute & Ashmolean Museum, 1970) 1, 65; Piccione, “Mehen...”, 47; Kendall, “Schlangenspiel,” 654, 655, fn. 12.

⁵⁴ Flinders Petrie, *Amulets* (London: Constable & Co Ltd., 1914), 25 (no. 96e) (Naqada, Predynastic Period).

⁵⁵ Piccione, “Mehen...”, 51, fig. 4.

⁵⁶ About 13 copies of the *mhn* playing boards are known in various museum collections (Piccione, “Mehen...”, 46).

⁵⁷ Petrie, *Amulets*, 25 (no. 96f: “limestone, prehistoric, large amulet to hang in house”), pl. 48.

⁵⁸ See in details: Peter Piccione, *The Historical Development of the Game of Senet and Its Significance for Egyptian Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), 191-241.

⁵⁹ Henk Milde, “It is All in the Game. The Development of an Ancient Egyptian Illusion”, in *Funerary Symbols and Religion. Essays dedicated to Professor M. S. H. G. Heerma van Voss on the occasion of his retirement from the Chair of the History of Ancient Religions at the University of Amsterdam*, eds Jacques H. Kamstra, Henk Milde, and Kees Wagendonk (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1988), 89-95; Henk Milde, *The Vignettes in the Book of the Dead of Nefertiti* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1991), 32; Mykola Tarasenko, “The vignettes of Chapter 17 from the *Book of the Dead* as found in the papyrus of Nakht (papyrus London BM EA 10471): at the beginning of the Ramesside iconographic tradition”, *Journal of Hellenic Institute of Egyptology* 3 (2020): 135.

⁶⁰ As well as on identical scenes in the New Kingdom tombs. The only two exceptions known to me are the drawings in the tombs of Nebenmaat (TT 219, Deir el-Medina, 19th Dynasty) (Mohammed Saleh, *Das Totenbuch in den thebanischen Beamtengrabern des neuen Reiches: Texte und Vignetten* (Mainz um Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1984), 16, Abb. 15) and Khonsumes (TT 30, Sheikh Abd el-Qurnah, 20th Dynasty) (Saleh, *Das Totenbuch...*, 17, Abb. 19), which depicts a scene of a game between spouses.

ment - the own soul of a man⁶¹. The mention of *snt* is also included in the title rubric of Chapter 17⁶² - the only such case known in the *Book of the Dead*. This can be considered as a marker for the beginning of the journey of deceased through the Netherworld⁶³ that is gradually revealed in subsequent vignettes and text in the 17th Chapter⁶⁴.

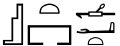
The same reasons could explain the placement of the image of the “Roads of Mehen” to Re-Osiris which are identical to the “Roads of Mehen” in the corresponding game at the beginning of the journey of the deceased on Sepi’s coffin (B1C). It is extremely important that, judging by the surviving descriptions, in the *mhn* game, the path of the playing pieces moved from the tail to the head of the snake, i.e. from the periphery to the center⁶⁵. In the case of the channels of the “way of Mehen” on the coffin, Re-Osiris was placed in the center, i.e. his location is the end point of the travel of the deceased along the “Channels of Fire” / the “Roads of Mehen”. The same journey in the microcosm of the coffin “world” is unfolded under the feet of Sepi III and in the *Book of Two Ways*. So, in this case the meaning and scenes on the picture with Re-Osiris and in the *Book of Two Ways* had to be identical. And here it is interesting to see how the *Book of Two Ways* ends. This is Spell 1130 of the *Coffin Texts*, which begins (as a monologue of the Demiurge) with the mention of Mehen in the cosmogonic context of the planning four “good deeds” of the Creator: *whm=i n=tn sp.wi nfr.wi irj.n n=i ib=i ds=i m-hnw Mhn n mrw.t sgr.t isf.t* “I will relate to you the two good deeds which my own heart did for me within the Coiled One (i.e. Mehen) in order that falsehood be silenced” (CT VII, 462b-c)⁶⁶. Below the plot that became the prototype for Chapter 175 of the *Book of the Dead*⁶⁷ is given: after the passage of “millions of years” (*hh.w m rnp.wt*) separating Atum(-Re) from Osiris (literally: “this Weary of heart, the son of Geb” - *Wrd-ib=f pf s3 Gb*), their meeting will take place, marking the end

of the world⁶⁸. The mysterious place of their meeting is not named, but is designated as *ś.t w^c.t* - “One Place”:

*iw n=i ḥnh ink nb=f n nhmm w3s m dr.t=i iw iri.n=i
hh.w m rnp.wt m im.i-wt=i m^{sic} r Wrd-ib=f pf s3 Gb
hmsj.k3=i hn^c=f m ś.t w^c.t iw niw.wt r i3.wt ts-plr (in)
hwt w3s=s hwt*

“Life belongs to me, I am its lord. My scepter will not be taken away from my hand. I have spent millions of years between myself and that Weary of heart⁶⁹, the son of Geb. I will sit with him in One Place, and towns will be mounds⁷⁰ and mounds will be towns; mansion will desolate mansion” (CT VII, 467b-468b (after B9C))⁷¹.

4. Conclusions

To sum up, it is possible to assume that the image with the throne of Re-Osiris on the coffin of Sepi III that has the inscription *hh.w* “millions (of years)” is a visual display of the eschatological plot described in the *Coffin Texts* Spell 1130, final in his *Book of Two Ways*. It is the visual image of *ś.t w^c.t* “One Place”⁷², where after passing millions of years the meeting of Atum(-Re) and Osiris will take place at the end of the existence of the Universe. Noteworthy in the cited fragment of Spell 1130 all the visual attributes represented in the image of deity on the coffin of Sepi are mentioned: “life” (*ḥnh*), “scepter” (*w3s*), “millions (of years)” (*hh.w*). The *3tf*-crown is an axial attribute of the “son of Geb, i.e. Osiris. The localization of the meeting of gods is also curious:  *ś.t w^c.t* “One Place”, as all scholars translate with rare unanimity⁷³. It can be assumed that for Egyptian theologians it was not an easy task to give a special name for a certain area which will be the meeting of Atum(-Re) and Osiris after the total death and the end of the existing world (i.e., in the boundless waters of the primordial ocean of Nun). Therefore, the abstract lo-

⁶¹ Peter Piccione, “In Search of the Meaning of Senet”, *Archaeology* 33 (1980): 58.

⁶² Günter Lapp, *Totenbuch Spruch 17. Synoptische Textausgabe nach Quellen des Neuen Reiches*, Totenbuchtexte 1 (Basel: Orientverlag, 2006), 6-7 (c-d) (*ḥ^cb snt hmsj.t m sh* “The *snt*-game, sitting in the pavilion”).

⁶³ Curiously, since the 19th Dynasty the Mehen-serpent becomes the patron deity of the *snt*-game (Kendall, “Schlangenspiel”, 654; Piccione, *The Historical Development*, 217-241).

⁶⁴ According to Goedicke, *snt* is not only a game, but also a kind of “pun” or “rebus”, i.e. “as a hieroglyph it has the phonetic value mn with the common meaning ‘to remain’, the sole player sitting at the game-board can thus be rendered, ‘may N remains’” (Hans Goedicke, “Ancient Egyptian Vision of Eschatology”, *Journal of the Society for the Studies of Egyptian Antiquities* 25 (1998): 39).

⁶⁵ Piccione, “Mehen...”, 46.

⁶⁶ Adrian de Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts VII*, Oriental Institute Publications 87 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961) (here and after: CT VII); Backes, *Das altägyptische “Zweiwegbuch”*, 427; Bickel, “Die Jenseitsfahrt des Re”, 53, Anm. 37; Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt. The One and the Many*, transl. John Baines (Ithaca-New York: Cornell University, 1996), 163-164.

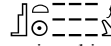
⁶⁷ See Leonard Lesko, “The End is Near”, in *Through a Glass Darkly: Magic, Dreams & Prophecy in Ancient Egypt*, ed. Kasia M. Szpakowska (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2006), 63-79; Nikolai A. Tarasenko, “Glava 175A drevneyegipetskoy Knigi Mertvykh i eye mifologicheskoye paralleli”, *Shidnij svit* 2 (2011): 147.

⁶⁸ For Egyptian Apocalyptic see, for example: Lesko, “The End is Near”, 63-79; Andreas Blasius and Bernd U. Schipper, eds, *Apokalyptik und Ägypten. Eine Kritische Analyse der relevanten Texte aus dem Griechisch-Römischen Ägypten* (Leuven-Paris-Sterling: Peeters, 2002), 286-294. The discussion on a moral aspect in the *Coffin Texts* Spell 1130 see: Alexandra von Lieven, “Ich habe nicht befohlen, dass sie Unrecht tun”: Das Theodizee-Problem im Alten Ägypten”, in *Teaching Morality in Antiquity. Wisdom Texts, Oral Traditions, and Images*, ed. Takayoshi M. Oshima (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 175-181.

⁶⁹ Lit. “One-who-is-weary-of-his-heart”, the common epithet of Osiris.

⁷⁰ That is “ruins”.

⁷¹ See also Lesko Leonard, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of Two Ways* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1972), 130; Faulkner, *The Ancient...*, 167; Carrier, *Textes...*, 2312-2315; Sherbiny, *Through Hermopolitan Lenses*, 565.

⁷² Possibly, it could be identified with  *ś.t R^c Psdw* “Throne of Re, a Shining One” twice mentioned in the *Coffin Texts* Spell 758 (CT VI, 758g, k), i.e. in the text surrounding the discussed image of a deity on the coffin B1C.

⁷³ Cf. Chegodaev, “Sarkofag Sepi...”, 201; Piankoff, *The Wondering of the Soul*, 35; Lesko, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of Two Ways*, 130; Faulkner, *The Ancient...*, 167; Paul Barguet, *Textes des Sarcophages Égyptiens du Moyen Empire* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1986), 663; Backes, *Das altägyptische “Zweiwegbuch”*, 121; Hornung, *Conceptions...*, 163; Sherbiny, *Through Hermopolitan Lenses*, 565, etc.

cus “One Place” was used in the text. Chegodaev offers another reading for *m s.t w^c.t* as “on the one throne”⁷⁴, apparently proceeding from the ideographic meaning of sign 𓄿 (GSL Q1) as “seat”⁷⁵, “Sitz”⁷⁶. But even in this case, “throne” or “seat” of a cosmic dual deity, as we see, is directly represented in the image (besides being noted as “millions (of years)”), only proving the close interconnection of the written and visual descriptions of the given eschatological plot, which, quite obviously, not only complement but “duplicate” each other. Let’s emphasize that the meeting with the dual image of (Atum-)Re and Osiris completes both the wanderings of Sepi III along the “Roads of Mehen” in the image on the head end panel and the journey by “two ways” along the bottom of the coffin at the feet of the mummy.

Obviously, the initial image of Re-Osiris inside the “Roads of Mehen”, the task to reach which is set by the textual and program of the coffin at the beginning of the

postmortem journey, ends with the description of the essence of this image at the end of the path - in Spell 1130 of the *Coffin Texts*. In this case, the image of Re-Osiris on Sepi’s coffin displays the eschatological representations⁷⁷ disclosed in the Spell 1130. They are not related with the cyclical figure of Re-Osiris of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period when the essence and existence of this deity, manifested as a result of the infernal meeting and union of the *ba*-souls of solar Re and chthonic Osiris⁷⁸, were clearly limited by the borders of the Netherworld and the night.

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⁷⁴ Chegodaev, “Sarkofag Sepi...”, 201.

⁷⁵ Alain Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar. Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs* (Oxford: Griffith Institute & Ashmolean Museum, 1957), 500.

⁷⁶ Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, eds. *Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961), 4: 1-2.

⁷⁷ Cf. Bickel, “Die Jenseitsfahrt des Re”, 53.

⁷⁸ For the historical development of Solar-Osirian syncretism in texts and iconography after the Middle Kingdom - see in details: Joachim Spiegel, “Versuche zur Verschmelzung von Re und Osiris”, in *Göttinger Totenbuchstudien (Spruch 335 der Sargtexte und Kapitel 17 des Totenbuches)*, ed. Wolhardt Westendorf (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1973), 129-181; Andrzej Nawiński, “The Solar-Osirian Unity as Principle of the Theology of the ‘State of Amun’ in Thebes in the 21st Dynasty”, *Jaarbericht van het vooraziatisch egyptisch genootschap. “Ex Oriente Lux”* 30 (1989): 89-106; Backes, *Das altägyptische “Zweiwegbuch”*, 320-321; Nikolai A. Tarasenko, “Drevneyegipetskoye sinkreticheskoye bozhestvo Ra-Osiris ikonograficheskij aspekt obraza”, *Shidnij svit* 3 (2006): 66-85.

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