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Towards a Better Understanding of the Opening of the Mouth Ritual

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represented in the tomb of Seti I (KV 17), where each is depicted as a “guardian uraeus serpent.” As such, they guard the entrance to the vestibule (I). There, Nekhbet is represented along with her emblematic lily on the left (= South), while Wedjat, together with a papyrus plant, is found on the right (= North)⁸.

OPENING OF THE MOUTH IN THE TOMB OF SETI I AND NEW KINGDOM STELA

The parallel reading suggested for the texts of Amenirdis is further supported by the layout of OM scenes in the tomb of Seti I. There, scenes nos. 26 and 27, which deal most explicitly with the opening of the deceased’s mouth, appear opposite each other at the end of corridor H⁹. Located innermost in the sequence of OM episodes inscribed for Seti, the two scenes mark one “end” of the ritual in Seti I’s tomb.

Represented at the other end of the ritual, the grand offering list is inscribed on the right wall of corridor G. The offering list has traditionally been considered the conclusion of the ritual. In the tomb of Seti I, it is inscribed opposite scene no. 1 which depicts Seti I seated before his offering table. Considered together, the two scenes seem to complement one another. The offering list explicitly details the offerings symbolically represented on Seti I’s offering table. Thus, in the tomb of Seti I, the first and last scenes of the Opening of the Mouth ritual seem to be complementary in both meaning and function.

In the same way, OM scenes inscribed on Amenirdis’s South wall are complementary in function. The western half of the South wall contains the scene that most specifically deals with Amenirdis’s Opening of the Mouth: scene no. 26. To the east of the central representation, scenes nos. 2-5 deal with Amenirdis’s ritual purification. Schulman has shown that on New Kingdom stelae depicting Opening of the Mouth ritual, either scene no. 26 or scene no. 27 occurs in various combinations with select purification scenes¹⁰. Typically, a scene from either group A (scenes 2-7) or group B (scenes 57-75) represented the libation/censing process. Because of the limited space available on the stelae, only one scene of each category would be included. Most often, the content of these scenes was complementary and only rarely redundant. A similar combination of scenes occurs on Amenirdis’s South wall, where this innermost wall summed up the most emblematic elements of the Opening of the Mouth ceremony. Being innermost in her chapel, the South wall carried the same symbolic function as

⁸ Erik Hornung, *The Tomb of Seti I / Das Grab Sethos’ I* (Zurich and Munich: Artemis, 1991), 21. In the tomb of Seti I, Scenes of OM are found in corridors G and H, left and right with respect to the onlooker as one proceeds *into* the tomb, heading towards the West. When facing West: Left = South, and Right = North.

⁹ Cf. Hornung, *Tomb of Seti I*, pls. 118 and 119.

¹⁰ See Alan R. Schulman, “The Iconographic Theme: ‘Opening of the Mouth’ on Stela,” *JARCE* 21 (1984), 177-96, especially 173-75.

the West wall. At the center of the South wall, the scene depicting Amenirdis's funerary repast replaced the more traditional false door as her gateway to the netherworld.

PROGRESSION OF THE RITUAL IN THE CHAPEL OF AMENIRDIS I

Based on this analysis of Amenirdis's OM scenes, the ceremony seems to have proceeded from the North wall southward/ inward such that a simultaneous reading of the texts on the eastern and western walls of her chapel yields the following sequence of events:

- 1) The ritual slaughter of an ox and the presentation of the foreleg occur first.
- 2) Various instruments, including the severed foreleg, are then used to open Amenirdis's mouth and eyes, thus reviving her.
- 3) Amenirdis is purified by water and natrun and several gods aid Amenirdis in her ascent to the sky.
- 4) Finally, Amenirdis is able to sit at her funerary table to partake of her funerary repast.

That this particular order of texts is also in line with the Egyptians' own understanding of the ceremony is evident by the numerous depictions of funerary processions, where the ritual slaughtering of an ox is typically shown taking place in front of the entrance to the tomb¹¹. This interpretation also allows the ritual slaughter scenes to precede the scenes depicting the presentation of the foreleg and the Opening of Amenirdis's Mouth. A North-to-South progression of the scenes successfully avoids Otto's problematic assumption that for certain Opening of the Mouth scenes, the slaughter was "presupposed."¹²

Moreover, the sequence proposed for Amenirdis's Opening of the Mouth episodes is essentially the same as the sequence found in the demotic manuscripts of *Opening the Mouth for Breathing*. In both, the "[r]econstitution of the individual... and reanimation of his limbs"¹³ occur before the presentation of offerings.

"Participation in the offering meal is itself a social act and, in sacramental terms, the presentation of such a repast is a symbol of the process of social reintegration which the deceased is supposed to undergo."¹⁴

¹¹ H. Altenmüller refers to a passage from the story of Sinuhe that describes the funeral in R. Germer, *Mummies: Life and Death in Ancient Egypt* (Munich: Prestel, 1997), 36. The relevant line reads: "There will be a slaughter at the entrance of your tomb" (emphasis mine). Old Kingdom representations of the Egyptian funeral often show the slaughter taking place in front of the tomb. See J.A. Wilson, "Funeral Service of the Egyptian Old Kingdom," *JNES* 3 (1944), 213 for the scenes occurring in the fourth dynasty tomb of Debehi at Giza.

¹² Cf. E. Otto, *Das ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual* II. ÄA 3 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1960), 8.

¹³ M. Smith, *The Liturgy of Opening the Mouth for Breathing* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1993), 7-8. While p. Berlin 8351 and p. Louvre E 10607 both share these two elementary themes, the former also includes passages on the "reintegration of the individual into the cosmos" (*idem*, *Opening the Mouth for Breathing*, 10).

¹⁴ Smith, *Opening the Mouth for Breathing*, 8.

TABLE 1: OM SCENES IN THE CHAPEL OF AMENIRDIS I AT MEDINET HABU

Coll. #	New Scene #	Scene #	Coll.
A/Nw 1 (45)	A/Nw 1-4	A/Ne 1 (23 III)	A/Ne 1-5
A/Nw 2 (43)	A/Nw 5-8	A/Ne 2 (24 I)	A/Ne 6-8
A/Nw 3 (44)	A/Nw 9-17	A/Ne 3 (24 II)	A/Ne 9-12
		A/Ne 4 (21)	A/ Ne 13-16

A/W 1 (41)	A/W 1-2	A/E 1 (19)	A/E 1
A/W 2 (42)	A/W 2-3	A/E 2 (20)	A/E 2-5
A/W 3 (Hymn)	A/W 4	A/E 3 (18)	A/E 6-9
A/W 4 (39)	A/W 5-7	A/E 4 (17)	A/E 10-13
A/W 5 (37)	A/W 8-9	A/E 5 (16)	A/E 14-17
A/W 6 (38)	A/W 9-10	A/E 6 (15)	A/E 18-21
A/W 7 (36)	A/W 11-13	A/E 7 (14)	A/E 22-25
A/W 8 (34)	A/W 14-16	A/E 8 (13)	A/E 26-30
A/W 9 (33)	A/W 17-19	A/E 9 (11)	A/E 31
A/W 10 (32)	A/W 20-26	A/E 10 (12)	A/E 32-36
A/W 11 (31)	A/W 27-32	A/E 11 (10)	A/E 37-45
A/W 12 (30)	A/W 33-36	A/E 12 (9)	A/E 46-50
A/W 13 (29)	A/W 37-40	A/E 13 (8)	A/E 51-53
A/W 14 (28)	A/W 41-44	A/E 14 (7)	A/E 54-56
A/W 15 (27)	A/W 45-54	A/E 15 (6)	A/E 57-61

A/Sw 1 (26)	A/Sw 1-12	A/Se 1 (5)	A/Se 1-4
A/Sw 2 (25)	A/Sw 13-17	A/Se 2 (4)	A/Se 5-8
		A/Se 3 (3)	A/Se 9-12
		A/Se 4 (2)	A/Se 13-16
		A/Se 5 (7)	A/Se 17-19
		A/Se 6 (1)	A/Se 20-22

It is at her offering table that Amenirdis is first depicted, not as a statue or a mummy, but in the more dynamic posture of extending an arm towards the food. It is here that the process of her reanimation is finally complete. After all the purifications, incantations and rituals, she is finally able to eat the food offered her.

Amenirdis's selections from the Opening of the Mouth were thus meant to be read, or recited, concurrently, rather than sequentially. After walking across the chapel's

TABLE 2: OM SCENES IN THE TOMB OF SETI I (KV 17)

Scene #	Coll.	Scene #	Coll.
*Offering List	S/G/N 1-52	S/G/S 1 (1)	S/G/S 1-4
S/G/N 1 (59 B)	S/G/N 53-58	S/G/S 2 (2)	S/G/S 5-8
S/G/N 2 (59 A)	S/G/N 59-60	S/G/S 3 (3)	S/G/S 9-12
S/G/N 3 (65 A, B)	S/G/N 61-62	S/G/S 4 (4)	S/G/S 13-17
S/G/N 4 (57 B)	S/G/N 63-65	S/G/S 5 (5)	S/G/S 18-21
S/G/N 5 (57 A)	S/G/N 66-68	S/G/S 6 (6)	S/G/S 22-29
S/G/N 6 (50)	S/G/N 69-55	S/G/S 7 (7)	S/G/S 30-32
S/G/N 7 (55 III)	S/G/N 56-57	S/G/S 8 (8)	S/G/S 33-35
S/G/N 8 (48)	S/G/N 58-61	S/G/S 9 (9)	S/G/S 36-40
S/G/N 9 (47)	S/G/N 62-66	S/G/S 10 (10)	S/G/S 41-49
*Solar Hymn	S/G/N 67-72	S/G/S 11 (11)	S/G/S 50
S/G/N 10 (46)	S/G/N 73-79	S/G/S 12 (12)	S/G/S 51-55
S/G/N 11 (45)	S/G/N 80-84	S/G/S 13 (13)	S/G/S 56-59
		S/G/S 14 (14)	S/G/S 60-62

courtyard, a contingent of priests would split into two groups, possibly just in front of the *cella*. Each group would then proceed in one direction, right or left, reading the texts in the order in which they occur on its walls. The two groups would finally meet in front of the South wall where the ritual culminates.

NEW NUMBERS FOR THE OPENING OF THE MOUTH SCENES

This particular interpretation of the layout of OM scenes has led the current author to consider various possibilities to (re-)number the OM scenes, such that the new numbers would include specific reference to the scenes' physical location and reflect their physical placement relative to each other.

The new system includes both numbers and a series of letters. Much like the system developed by the French for the Pyramid texts¹⁵, the first letter refers to the monument in question: in this case: A for the chapel of Amenirdis; S for Seti I etc. The second letter refers to the architectural element, or chamber, in which the scenes occur: C for the corridor surrounding the *cella* of Amenirdis; G and H for the corridors G

¹⁵ Mission archéologique française de Saqqâra, *Les textes de la Pyramide de Pépy I^{er}*. 1. *Description et analyse*. MIFAO 118/1 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2001).

and H in the tomb of Seti I. The final letter refers to the cardinal orientation of the specific wall on which the scenes occur: **N** (north), **S** (south), **E** (east), and **W** (west). Lower case letters indicate divisions within the same wall, e.g., **Ne** for Northeast and **Sw** for Southwest etc. (See tables 1 and 2).

Because each monument has its own unique selection of scenes, and because each of the monuments has its own architectural style, it is almost impossible to generate a universal numbering system that would completely account for where each scene is located on each monument. Thus, instead of replacing the old, more conventional system, the two systems may have to be utilized in conjunction with one another, the old system being retained for convenience and cross-reference purposes.

Relating a scene's textual content to its physical location on a particular monument will facilitate the comparative analysis of the various extant OM copies. It will thus greatly enhance our understanding of the arrangement of OM texts and the ancient Egyptians' interpretation of their own religious traditions.