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## DIVINE COPULATION IN THE *PYRAMID TEXTS*. A LEXICAL AND CULTURAL APPROACH

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Sexuality is one of the aspects of Egyptian culture more neglected by Egyptology. Through its analysis, we can not only know the concept that the Egyptians had of erotism and sexual practices, but we can also extract information on the evolution of the sacred as well as the profane thought in ancient Egyptian civilization.

An important fact that should be taken into account in the study of sexuality of societies of «mythical thought», as they are called by Henri Frankfort,<sup>1</sup> or «cold societies», in the terms of Claude Lévi-Strauss,<sup>2</sup> is the fact that we should break our own concept of erotism and sexuality. In order to do this, we have to question our categories of beauty, erotism and sexuality, trying to reinterpret them in accordance with the cosmovision of those societies. As ethnographic comparatism shows us, in «cold societies» actions that can be interpreted as erotic or sexual from the western point of view may not have this meaning. Thus, among the Sawos of Papua New Guinea, for example, a sculpture of a naked woman with open legs does not have any kind of sexual connotation, but it is simply a gesture of welcoming the newcomers to the community. Nudity is also a clear example of this difference of thought. While in the western world it is a sexual or erotic incitement, in many societies, as the Egyptian, it was a usual state and therefore it loses all erotic and sensual connotations. Egyptians looked for erotism and sexual stimuli from dresses with transparencies<sup>3</sup> or else with tools as wigs,<sup>4</sup> persuasive methods that we find well reflected in the love poems of the New Kingdom.

So, we should develop a reading of Egyptian sexuality from the perspective of its own sociocultural context. We should not forget that most of sexual documentation coming from Egyptian texts and iconography is symbolic in nature. In fact, as it was highlighted by Eliade, we can not consider sexuality in societies like ancient Egypt as a profane activity: sexuality, as the rest of the vital functions, is imbued with a

<sup>1</sup> Frankfort, H. et al., *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946, chap. I; and Cervelló, J., *Egipto y África. Origen de la civilización y la monarquía faraónica en su contexto africano* (AuOr-S 13), Sabadell (Barcelona), AUSA, 1996, p. 14-24.

<sup>2</sup> Lévi-Strauss, C., *La pensée sauvage*, Paris, Plon, 1962, p. 309.

<sup>3</sup> See an example in the poem of Deir el-Medina vase: Vernus, P., *Chants d'amour de l'Égypte antique*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1992, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> pOrbiney (BM 10183), 5.2.

sacred character.<sup>5</sup> It is a hierophany. The sexual actions are integral actions and therefore, a way of knowledge about society.<sup>6</sup>

In Egyptian textual sources, we find two well-differentiated ways of expressing sexuality, the one is explicit and the other is implicit. The most documented sexual practice, both in sacred and in profane texts, is copulation. In sacred texts we find it expressed mostly in an explicit way, with verbs that directly refer to this action, being *nk*<sup>7</sup> the most common of them throughout all the Egyptian history.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, we find an implicit way of expressing copulation, when no specific verb is used, but the narrative context or the consequence of the action clearly denote that this practice is evoked. Although this manner is also documented in sacred texts, it is most commonly found in profane texts, specially in literature. Here, the sexual action of vaginal penetration is always metaphorically expressed.<sup>9</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to offer a first approach to sexuality in the *Pyramid Texts*, making special emphasis in the practice of copulation. In fact, a detailed study of sexuality in Egyptian funerary texts has never been done, although sexual images are frequent in them. We will analyse the different ways the Egyptians had of expressing copulation, examining on the one hand the determinatives, and on the other hand the use of the different words meaning «to copulate».

In the *Pyramid Texts*, copulation is considered a basic action in the life of the dead king. In Utterance 317, once the king is dead and solarized, we are told: «I eat with my mouth, I urinate and copulate with my phallus»,<sup>10</sup> considering the three actions basic to live.<sup>11</sup>

Having a general vision at the number of utterances where we find copulation, implicitly or explicitly, we can observe that: 1) it does not seem that there is any important quantitative difference among the texts of kings and queens; 2) there are no direct references to copulation — or they have not been found — in the *Pyramid Texts* of Aputi and Aba; 3) in the pyramid of Unas we just find explicit copulations;

<sup>5</sup> Eliade, M., *Le mythe de l'éternel retour. Archétypes et répétition*, Paris, Gallimard, 1949, p. 53-62; and Eliade, M., *Birth and Rebirth*, New York, Harper, 1958, chap. II.

<sup>6</sup> Eliade, M., *Images et symboles. Essais sur le symbolisme magico-religieux*, Paris, Gallimard, 1952, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Wb. II, 345, 3-10; and Hannig, R., *Großes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch (2800-950 v. Chr.)*, p. 437.

<sup>8</sup> Toivari-Viitala, J., *Women at Deir el-Medina. A Study of the Status and Roles of the Female Inhabitants in the Workmen's Community during the Ramesside Period (Egyptologische Uitgaven XV)*, Leiden, Nederlands Instituut voor Het Nabije Oosten, 2001, p. 153.

<sup>9</sup> Some usual expression are «Let us spend an hour lying together» (pOrbiney, 5,1), «They made a happy day with the commoner» (pWestcar, 3,10), etc.

<sup>10</sup> PT 317 Pyr. 510a; Faulkner, R.O., *The Ancient Pyramid Texts*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998, p. 99.

<sup>11</sup> Barguet, P., *Aspects de la pensée religieuse de l'Égypte ancienne*, Paris, La Maison de Vie, 2001, p. 223.

4) in the pyramid of Teti we only find implicit copulations; and 5) it is not until Pepi I. that we find a combination of explicit and implicit copulations.

As for the situation of the utterances, it does not seem that a very strict norm is followed, although the east and west walls of the burial chamber are the most usual locations. We find 6 utterances in the burial chamber,<sup>12</sup> 2 in the antechamber,<sup>13</sup> one in the vestibule,<sup>14</sup> and another one in the corridor.<sup>15</sup> The fact that we find Utterance 593 of the pyramid of Neith repeated twice, in the opposed walls of the burial chamber, is outstanding.

As we have said, in explicit copulation, the most commonly used verb is *nk*. We find it basically determined in two different ways: 1) in four cases, with the signs N42 and D52 combined (𓂏<sup>16</sup>), thus representing the act of copulation itself, joining an erect phallus and a vagina; 2) in one case, with the sign D52 (𓂏<sup>17</sup>), representing an erect phallus. Also in one case, the verb is not determined.<sup>18</sup> We find therefore a clear predominance of the use of the determinative combination N42+D52 (𓂏). We should also highlight that the sign D53 (𓂏), that represents a phallus in erect position ejaculating, which is frequent in ulterior texts as determinative of *nk*,<sup>19</sup> is not used for this verb in the *Pyramid Texts*. However, it is indeed frequently used for substantives as 𓂏𓂏𓂏 *mtwt*, «semen»,<sup>20</sup> or verbs as 𓂏𓂏𓂏 *wsš*, «urinate».<sup>21</sup>

It does not seem that the different determinatives used for the word *nk* modify the semantic value of the verb. So, the determinative N42+D52 (𓂏) can be found when a copulation between two subjects is told, as it is the case of Utterance 205: «The King has copulated with Mowet and the King has copulated with the Beauteous One»;<sup>22</sup> as well as when a generic copulation is expressed, as in Utterance 317: «I urinate and copulate with my phallus»;<sup>23</sup> or in Utterance 539: «Nut: She can neither copulate nor use her arms».<sup>24</sup>

The analysis of the determinatives of *nk* suggests that ancient Egyptians had a masculine perception of copulation. We confirm this when observing what determinative is used when the subject of the action is a woman instead of a man. Unfortunately

<sup>12</sup> East wall: PT 205 *Pyr.* 123a-123c<sup>w</sup> and PT 593 *Pyr.* 1635b-1636a<sup>MMN</sup>; west wall: PT 235 *Pyr.* 239a-b<sup>w</sup>, PT 366 *Pyr.* 632a-632c<sup>pN</sup> and PT 593 *Pyr.* 1635b-1636a<sup>N</sup>; north wall: PT 629 *Pyr.* 1787a<sup>N</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> West wall: PT 366 *Pyr.* 632a-632c<sup>T</sup> and PT 479 *Pyr.* 990a<sup>PMN</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> South wall: PT 539 *Pyr.* 1321a<sup>P</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> West wall: PT 317 *Pyr.* 510b-510d<sup>w</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> PT 205 *Pyr.* 123a<sup>w</sup>, 123c<sup>w</sup>, PT 317 *Pyr.* 510b<sup>w</sup> and PT 539 *Pyr.* 1321a<sup>P</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> PT 235 *Pyr.* 239b<sup>w</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> PT 479 *Pyr.* 990a<sup>PMN</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> See an example in CT 576 VI 1911 or in BD 125.

<sup>20</sup> See an example in PT 325 *Pyr.* 532b<sup>P</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> See an example in PT 317 *Pyr.* 510b<sup>w</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> PT 205 *Pyr.* 123a<sup>w</sup> and 123c<sup>w</sup>. Faulkner, *Pyramid Texts*, p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> PT 317 *Pyr.* 510b<sup>w</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> PT 539 *Pyr.* 1321a<sup>P</sup>.

we do not find any explicit copulation of queens in the *Pyramid Texts*, an evidence which perhaps support our suggestion. However we have an utterance where the goddess Nut is the subject of the action. This utterance says: «Nut: she can neither copulate nor use her arms».<sup>25</sup> Here we find the verb *nk*, «to copulate», determined by the combination of determinatives N42+D52 (𓂏𓂐). Although both, in the *Pyramid Texts* and in other texts, we can find the verb *nk* determined only with the phallus,<sup>26</sup> as in Utterance 235, where the subject of the action is a masculine entity, the vagina alone is never used.

On the other hand, we can also observe that in the *Pyramid Texts* of the queens they are considered as men. We find a clear example in Utterance 493,<sup>27</sup> when in the text of Neith we are told about her phallus. Although Faulkner considers it an error in transcription,<sup>28</sup> I think that the fact of associating a masculine sexual member with Neith is completely conscious, since the queen in these texts is considered as Osiris, following the royal masculine archetype. Once more, we find a masculinization of the feminine sexuality.

Another interesting passage is *Pyr.* 990a, where the verb *nkiki* is used. Faulkner translates: «O Re, make the womb of Nut pregnant with the seed of the spirit which is in her».<sup>29</sup> We find important divergences in the interpretation of this passage. Edel<sup>30</sup> and Sethe<sup>31</sup> consider *nkiki* as an imperative form of the verb *nk* and, through the context, translate it as «schwängern». On the other hand, Erman-Grapow<sup>32</sup> and Hannig<sup>33</sup> consider it as an autonomous word with the specific meaning of «befruchten» or «schwängern». Faulkner, in his turn, translates this verb as «to make pregnant»,<sup>34</sup> without doing any lexical comment. Therefore, there would be two possibilities when translating. On the one hand, we can translate as «to make (the womb) pregnant», as most part of scholars do. On the other hand, if we consider *nkiki* as an imperative form of *nk* and we take into account the nuance of this verbal form, we can translate «to penetrate (the body) repeatedly» or «to copulate repeatedly», indicating that Re would copulate with Nut *ad infinitum*.

In explicit copulation, we also have to draw special attention on Utterance 205. This, according to Faulkner, says: «The King has copulated with Mowet, the King has kissed Shuset, the king has joined with Nekhebut, the King has copulated with the

<sup>25</sup> PT 539 *Pyr.* 1321aP; Faulkner, *Pyramid Texts*, p. 208.

<sup>26</sup> In the *Pyramid Texts* we find one case in PT 235 *Pyr.* 239bW.

<sup>27</sup> *Pyr.* 1061cN.

<sup>28</sup> Faulkner, *Pyramid Texts*, p. 175, note 8.

<sup>29</sup> PT 479 *Pyr.* 990a<sup>PMN</sup>; Faulkner, *Pyramid Texts*, p. 167.

<sup>30</sup> Edel, §435, p. 192.

<sup>31</sup> *Komm.* IV, 271.

<sup>32</sup> *Wb.* II, 346, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Hannig, *Großes Handwörterbuch*, p. 437-438.

<sup>34</sup> Faulkner, *Pyramid Texts*, p. 167.

Beauteous One, for his dread is the lack of food and drink».<sup>35</sup> In this utterance, the king Unas maintains a series of sexual relations with different slightly known feminine deities, that might be the symbolic names of deified natural elements.<sup>36</sup> In *Pyr.* 123a and 123c, we clearly find an act of copulation described with the verb *nk*, whereas in *Pyr.* 123a the king kisses the deity Shuset, which means that we are still dealing with a scene of sexual character. We find the problem in *Pyr.* 123b, where the verb *dmḏ* is used, translated by Faulkner as «to join». Neither Faulkner nor the *Wb*<sup>37</sup> take into account the general sense of the utterance, which shows very clear sexual connotations. So, I suggest that a possible meaning of *dmḏ* in this passage might be «to unite sexually»: although the verb is not followed by any determinative that connotes that, it appears in a clear sexual context, and so, by *parallelismus membrorum*, we might give it this sexual nuance. If this is correct, *dmḏ* would be a synonymous of *nk*.

As we have seen beforehand, another way we find in the *Pyramid Texts* of referring to copulation is through an implicit form, when the action is clear thanks to the narrative context but it does not appear any specific verb that refers to the act itself. We find this form documented in three different utterances: 366,<sup>38</sup> 593<sup>39</sup> — passages already interpreted as allusions to copulation by Hornung<sup>40</sup> — and 629.<sup>41</sup>

The three utterances are parallel, the largest (Utterance 366) translated by Faulkner in the following way: «Your sister Isis comes to you rejoicing for love of you. You have placed her on your phallus and your seed issues into her».<sup>42</sup>

In Utterances 366 and 593 the participants of the action are the same: Isis and Osiris, archetypal icon that we find represented in different temples such as that of Sethos I. in Abydos<sup>43</sup>, the temple of millions of years of the same king in Gurna<sup>44</sup> or in the temple of Philae<sup>45</sup>.

Utterance 629 is the less explicit since we do not find any reference to sexual organs. Even so, I believe that copulation is also evoked, because of the phraseological similarity between all these utterances, using the verb *h'ṯ* and the expression *n mr.wt*. According to Faulkner,<sup>46</sup> in this utterance the subject of the action would be Nephthys, while the object would be the dead king, therefore Osiris.

<sup>35</sup> PT 205 *Pyr.* 120a-123e<sup>w</sup>, Faulkner, *Pyramid Texts*, p. 38.

<sup>36</sup> See in Faulkner, *Pyramid Texts*, p. 38, notes 4, 5 and 6; and Lucarelli, R., «Some Remarks about Ch. 178 of the Book of the Dead», *Serie Egittologica* 2, 2002, p. 45.

<sup>37</sup> *Wb.* V, 457-459.

<sup>38</sup> *Pyr.* 632a-c<sup>TPMN</sup> and Oudjebten 293-294.

<sup>39</sup> *Pyr.* 1635b-c<sup>MN</sup> and Neith 433 and 675.

<sup>40</sup> Hornung, E., *Les dieux de l'Égypte. L'un et le multiple*, Flammarion, Paris, 1992, p. 130, note 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Pyr.* 1787<sup>N</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> Faulkner, *Pyramid Texts*, p. 120.

<sup>43</sup> PM VI, 24.

<sup>44</sup> PM II<sup>3</sup>, 415-416.

<sup>45</sup> PM VI, 206-250.

<sup>46</sup> Faulkner, *Pyramid Texts*, p. 262.



In relation to these passages, it is also interesting to analyse the meaning of the word *mr.wt*. Faulkner translates it as «love»,<sup>47</sup> in the widest sense of the word. This translation implies the assumption that the Egyptians associated the action of copulating to that of loving, but this is perhaps a too western idea. On the other hand, Ogdon translates *mr.wt* as «passion»,<sup>48</sup> but with its negative connotations. Making use of the Ogdon's suggestion, we think we might still go further on and render *mr.wt* as «sexual passion». Clearly we are in front of an utterance that has a strong sexual connotation; therefore, it seems more convenient to translate *mr.wt* with connotations of sexual passion and unrelated to love.

To sum up, as it is shown in the *Pyramid Texts*, the Egyptians did not have any scruple in alluding to sexual practices such as copulation or masturbation<sup>49</sup> in the sacred texts. To the Egyptians, sexuality was another element of the cosmos, so they insert it in the sacred texts, together with other worldly acts like urinating, sleeping, eating or drinking.

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<sup>47</sup> Faulkner, *Pyramid Texts*, p. 120, 244 and 262.

<sup>48</sup> Ogdon, J.R., «Studies in Ancient Egyptian Magical Thought, VII. Pyramid Texts – Pepi I, Passage A-S, South Wall, Line 9. A note to J. Leclant's Translation», *DE* 50, 2001, p. 55-61.

<sup>49</sup> PT 527 Pyr. 1248a-c<sup>PMN</sup>.