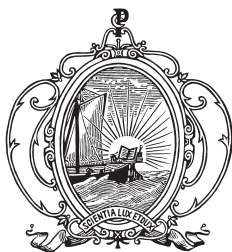


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ANCIENT EGYPTIAN DEMONOLOGY

Studies on the Boundaries between the Demonic
and the Divine in Egyptian Magic

edited by
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- P. KOUSOULIS (University of the Aegean)
The Demonic Lore of Ancient Egypt: Questions on Definition IX
- Y. KOENIG (Catholic Institute of Paris & C.N.R.S.)
Opening Greeting to the Demonology Symposium on Rhodes XXIII

PART I

DEMONS AND PERSONIFICATION

- R.K. RITNER (Oriental Institute, University of Chicago)
An eternal curse upon the reader of these lines (with apologies to M. Puig) 3
- P.J. FRANDBSEN (University of Copenhagen)
Faeces of the creator or the temptations of the dead 25
- K. SZPAKOWSKA (University of Wales, Swansea), *Demons in the dark: nightmares and other nocturnal enemies in ancient Egypt* 63
- P. WILSON (University of Durham)
Masking and multiple personas 77
- A. ROCCATI (University of Turin)
Demons as reflection of human society 89

PART II

MAGIC AND THE COSMICIZATION OF THE WORLD

- A.B. LLOYD (University of Wales, Swansea)
Egyptian magic in Greek literature 99
- Y. KOENIG (Catholic Institute of Paris & C.N.R.S.)
Between order and disorder: a case of sacred philology 121

J.F. QUACK (Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg)	
<i>Remarks on Egyptian rituals of dream-sending</i>	129
H. GYÓRY (Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest)	
<i>Some aspects of magic in ancient Egyptian medicine</i>	151
Bibliography.	167
Index	193

DEMONS IN THE DARK:
NIGHTMARES AND OTHER NOCTURNAL ENEMIES IN
ANCIENT EGYPT

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The dream in ancient Egypt functioned as a liminal zone between the land of the living and the farworld. However, dreams and nightmares were also phenomena over which the dreamer had little control, and their permeable boundaries allowed both the divine and the demonic inhabitants of the beyond access to the visible world. Sometimes the result was a beneficial experience, as is attested in New Kingdom royal texts and elite hymns that relate the awe-inspiring contact a dreamer could have with a god or a goddess. But another more disturbing belief was that dreams could also allow the vulnerable sleeper to be watched or even assaulted by the hostile dead. While today we call these events “anxiety dreams” or “nightmares” and consider them psychological phenomena, the Egyptians blamed them on external monsters or demons crossing over from the other side. These entities included the dead, and here it appears that the line between the justified transfigured dead, and the malevolent unjustified dead might not have been an immutable one. Drawing upon both textual and material evidence primarily from the New Kingdom, this paper will explore the identity and nature of the hostile entities who dared to disturb the sleep of the living and the methods for their repulsion.

Like good dreams, nightmares or anxiety dreams usually occur during REM sleep,¹ but are characterized by feelings of intense fear and paralysis or a terrifying inability to move. These types of dreams are a common occurrence in adulthood, and can usually be easily recalled immediately upon awakening. The phenomenon of nightmares should not be confused with ‘night terrors’ or “*pavor nocturnes*”,² a condition that mod-

¹ The following is a synopsis of discussions in FISHER *et al.*, *JAPA* (1970), 747-82; SPIELMAN and HERRERA, in: S.J. ELLMAN and J.S. ANTROBUS (eds.), *Mind in Sleep*, 25-80; KAHN, FISHER and EDWARDS, in: *Mind in Sleep*, 437-47; VAN DE CASTLE, *Dreaming Mind*.

² This is the technical term used for the phenomenon by psychologists and sleep disorder specialists.

ern psychologists classify as a waking disorder. Night terrors occur during “slow-wave sleep” and are more commonly suffered by children rather than by adults. The characteristics include sudden intense vocalization, sleepwaking, sharp increases in the breathing and heart rate, followed by severe confusion. The content of the dream itself is rarely recalled. While the “*pavor nocturnes*” phenomenon does not seem to appear in Egyptian texts, the typical characteristics of nightmares can be recognized in a number of spells, while other genres of text report the occurrence of dreams, both bad and good.

There were two specific words commonly used for “dream”: *rsw.t*, a substantive that finds its roots in the word *rs*, “to awaken”, and *ḳd.t*, a substantive from the verb *ḳd*, “to slumber”. While *rsw.t* was commonly used from the late Old Kingdom through the Coptic period, the use of *ḳd.t* was restricted by period and genre.³ Dreams could be either explicitly called “good dreams” (*rsw.t nfr.t*), or “bad dreams” (*rsw.t ḳw.t*). Nightmares could be referred to less specifically, often as animated entities who assaulted the vulnerable sleeper. Whether the term *rsw.t* or *ḳd.t* was used, it was always used as a substantive and never a verb, usually in a context associated with verbs of visual perception, such as *m33* “to see”. In Egyptian terms one did not “do dreaming”, it was not an action; one would “see a dream” or “see something in a dream”. It was thus perceived as an uncontrollable phenomenon external to the dreamer, and this is an important distinction to bear in mind.

From its earliest appearance in Egyptian texts, the dream seemed to have functioned as a link between the inhabitants of this world and the farworld, a landscape inhabited by the gods, the justified dead and the unjustified dead.⁴ While literary texts such as the *Teaching of Ptahhotep* use the metaphor of dreams to emphasize that which is ephemeral, untrustworthy, and potentially dangerous, other texts treated the dream as a sort of liminal space between the two worlds—a space the boundaries of which were not opaque but transparent, rendering the entities of one

³ This lexeme is found in non-royal documents from the late New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period: a letter (P. Deir el-Medina 6 v. 1-3; KITCHEN, *Ramesside Inscriptions*, vol. VI, 266-7), the biographies of Jpuy (Stela Wien 8390) and Djehutiemhab (TT194; KITCHEN, *Ramesside Inscriptions*, vol. VII, 153), the early versions of the Opening of the Mouth ritual, and the oracular amuletic decrees (P. British Museum 1025 v. 44-47, P. Turin Museum 1985 r. 18-24, P. Louvre E. 8083 r. 4-7, Bibliotheque Nationale 182 r. 5-8, Cairo Museum 58035 70-77, University of Philadelphia E 16724 A 4-7, and P. Berlin Museum 10462 r. 6-8) as numbered in EDWARDS, *Amuletic Decrees*. See discussion in SZPAKOWSKA, *Behind Closed Eyes*, 16-21.

⁴ The “farworld” or “afterlife” that in Egyptian was called *Duat*.

world visible to the other.⁵ But just as the dead were able to freely come and go to access the land of living, the contact via dreams seems to have been initiated by the inhabitants of the farworld, rather than the living dreamer, who had no control over his visions.⁶

It has been conjectured that the dreamer himself awakened in the confines of the farworld,⁷ but the evidence suggests that this is not quite precise. The texts indicate that while in a dream, the sleeper could see into the farworld, into a world beyond, while he himself remained in his own sphere; what he saw was “over there” or “far away”. In one example, the individual complains to his deceased father that he has seen another dead man over there, *m rsw.t m njw.t w'.t [hn']=k*, “in a dream in one sole city with you”.⁸ Another passage stresses the power to see something that is far away,⁹ as if it were close enough to touch the dreamer *mj.t tw=j hr m33 w3.w mj=j m dmj.t n=j*.¹⁰ Nevertheless, there is no indication that the dreamer was thought to go anywhere, but rather he remained outside the *Duat*, powerless to affect the events playing out before him in the dream. Thus, it was used as an effective simile in the *Tale of Sinuhe* where the author selects the dream to emphasize the uncontrolled and involuntary nature of Sinuhe’s flight. In a sense, the sleeper remained in the periphery of the *Duat*, and awakened (*rsw.t* being a substantive form of the verb *rs* “to awaken”) in a state from which he could see both the inhabitants of the farworld, and perhaps those who were still living, even though they were physically distant from the dreamer. This ability to see across distances may be suggested in one passage of the Ramesside

⁵ SZPAKOWSKA, in: S.B. NOEGEL, J. WALKER and B. WHEELER (eds.), *Prayer, Magic and the Stars*, 21-9.

⁶ JOHN GEE (2002) has suggested that *Coffin Text* 103 (and perhaps 89, 98-101, 104) refers to dreams. If one accepts that the spells refer to events that occur in the land of the living, at best, some of the spells might allude to the possibility of seeing *3hs*, but these spirits or ghosts are not necessarily related to dreams at all. If any of the spells contained a reference to dreams, I would expect it to use one of the words commonly used for dream (in the context of the *Coffin Texts*, I would expect *rsw.t*), or to specifically mention visitations to a sleeping earthly being in the night. The parallel Gee cites is from the Roman period, more than two millennia later than the *Coffin Texts*, and should be used with caution.

⁷ HORNUNG, *Idea into Image*, 95-6; ASSMANN, *Tod und Jenseits*, 182.

⁸ Letter to the Dead Nag ed-Deir 3737, line 3. New translations of all the dream texts discussed in this article can be found in SZPAKOWSKA, in: S.B. NOEGEL, J. WALKER and B. WHEELER (eds.), *Prayer, Magic and the Stars*.

⁹ The ability to see from afar is mentioned in *Book of the Dead* 108, *Coffin Text* 160, as well as in the oracular amuletic decrees and P. Chester Beatty VIII, v. 4, 203 (BORGHOUTS, *JEA* 59 [1973], 114-50).

¹⁰ P. Chester Beatty III, r. 10.11.

Dream Book¹¹ (“If a man sees himself in a dream seeing people far away...”) as well as in a New Kingdom song (“May you see in the dream that which is upon earth”).¹² But neither the dreamer nor his soul seem to have traveled anywhere.

Sometimes the dream could be a positive beneficial experience, as is attested in New Kingdom royal texts and elite hymns that relate the awe-inspiring visions a dreamer could have of a god or a goddess. To emphasize their close personal relationship with the gods, the pharaohs Amenhotep II,¹³ Thutmose IV¹⁴ and Merneptah,¹⁵ publicly claimed to have received visions of, respectively, Amun, Hor-em-Akhet-Khepri-Ra-Atum and Ptah. While surviving records of non-royal dreams remain rare, the stela of Jpwy¹⁶ and the tomb inscription of Djehutiemhab (TT194)¹⁷ attest to the possibility of contact with the divine through dreams, in each of these cases specifically in the form of the goddess Hathor. In both royal and non-royal cases the visions came unbidden and unsought to the dreamer. With the exception of Merneptah, the dreamer was described as sleeping or resting, thus in a passive receptive state, allowing for direct access on the part of the deity. In these positive good dreams, it was not the human who initiated the contact, but rather the deity who chose to allow him or herself to be seen, or even to step through a permeable boundary into the presence of the individual who was in a liminal dream-zone. These divine dreams were of course welcomed, and eventually encouraged,¹⁸ but this was certainly not the case for all types of dreams that one could see.

Nor were gods the only entities one could see in dreams. Going back to the First Intermediate Period, one letter to the dead reveals that the living could also hope to see a deceased loved one in a dream.¹⁹ But another perhaps more common perception was that the dream was an

¹¹ In P. Chester Beatty III, r. 9.4 we find the dreamer able to see those far away *jr m33 sw s m rsw.t hr m33 rmt.t w3j*.

¹² The song written on O. Collin Campbell 4 (O. Glasgow D. 1925.69) suggests that the visions seen in dreams are of events or inhabitants on earth *m33.in m t3 rsw.t nty hr tp-t3* (r. 8-11).

¹³ Memphis Stele 20-2; *Urk.* IV 1306.11-1307.2.

¹⁴ Sphinx Stele 8-13.

¹⁵ Karnak Stele 28-30; KITCHEN, *Rameside Inscriptions*, vol. IV, 5, ll. 10-15; For a recent translation of the text see MANASSA, *Great Karnak Inscription*, 40-1.

¹⁶ SATZINGER, in: P. POSENER-KRIÉGER (ed.), *Mélanges Gamal Eddin Mokhtar*, vol. II, 249-54.

¹⁷ ASSMANN, *RdÉ* 30 (1978), 22-50.

¹⁸ SZPAKOWSKA, *JARCE* 40 (2003), 113-22.

¹⁹ WENTE, *OLP* 6/7 (1975/1976), 595-600.

experience to be avoided, as one could potentially see distressing visions, or the dreamer could become the focus of an evil gaze, or even be assaulted by the malevolent dead in what we would call an anxiety dream or nightmare. This is attested in a letter to the dead,²⁰ while some Middle Kingdom execration texts even include bad dreams (*rsw.t dw.t*) at the end of a long list of hostile individuals, groups, and intangible forces that could potentially harm an individual.

Numerous spells and prescriptions have survived, particularly from the New Kingdom, that incorporate instructions on how to avoid and repulse various malicious entities, including those who were responsible for nightmares. Three of the spells that can most reliably be said to focus specifically on nightmares are Papyrus Leiden I 348, vs. 2,²¹ ostrakon Gardiner 363,²² and the Invocation to Isis on Papyrus Chester Beatty III r. 10.10-10.19²³ (hereafter referred to as the Leiden, Gardiner, and Chester Beatty spells).

The Leiden spell introduces itself as a *md3.t n.t dr snd.wt nty hr jj.t r h3y.t hr s m grh*, “book of driving out terrors which come in order to descend upon a man in the night”. The Egyptian verb *h3j* used for “descend” can mean literally “to fall down”.²⁴ This feeling of being crushed, often by something monstrous or demonic, coming down on top of the sleeper is a feature typically associated with what we call anxiety dreams or nightmares, and indeed is the common semantic concept for expressing ‘nightmare’ in many languages.²⁵ Pharaonic Egypt, however, was a land without any monsters in the realm of the living. Rather, its monsters were often emissaries of beings in the beyond, or the dead themselves, crossing over from the other world.

We find this stated explicitly in the Leiden spell. It begins by exhorting the invading denizens of the land of the dead, the male and the female *3h.w* (that is those that we usually think of as the transfigured and justified dead), the male and female *mwt* (the unjustified dead), the male and the female *d3y* (adversaries), who come from the Heaven (*hrj*) and from

²⁰ Nag’ ed-Deir 3737.

²¹ BORGHOUTS, *P. Leiden I 348*.

²² RITNER, *JARCE* 27 (1990), 25-41.

²³ GARDINER, *Chester Beatty Gift*.

²⁴ *Wb.* II, 473C; DZA 26312750.

²⁵ Arabic, Estonian, Mandarin, and English are just a few examples of languages whose words for “nightmare” incorporate the concept of an external demon or goblin. However, this is by no means a universal phenomenon, and in Greek, for example, the word for nightmare (*ephialtes*) refers to the person who betrayed the Spartans to the Persians. Nightmare here includes the connotation of something that is untrustworthy and potentially dangerous—an association that can also be found in certain Egyptian references to dreams.

the earth (*t3*) to turn backwards, and contemplate the arrival of a host of powerful deities. The Chester Beatty spell, though it does not name these usual suspects, also treats bad dreams as if they were invaders to be driven out and away from the dreamer. In the Gardiner papyrus, a spell designed to protect sleepers, we find a similar though shorter list of entities, in this case male and female adversaries and male and female dead. These are the same hostile dead, adversaries, and generic enemies that were blamed for a host of problems in lists from the *Coffin Texts*, excretion texts, medical texts, and even the oracular amuletic decrees. These entities seemed to be particularly blamed for problems related to possession or invasion of individuals and of spaces and are attested in a number of spells whose purpose was to thwart them. One example, P. Chester Beatty VI, vs. 2.5-9, was designed to prevent any adversaries or dead, who might be within the body of the victim, from killing him,²⁶ while another case, P. Chester Beatty VIII [8] vs. 1.1-2.4, was meant to protect a house from any of these enemies who might attack in the day or the night.²⁷ Other spells were designed to ward off these beings that were also deemed responsible for the ‘plague of the year’,²⁸ fevers or cold,²⁹ eye disorders³⁰ including night blindness,³¹ bleeding (possibly associated with miscarriage),³² or ones whose influence had entered specific parts of the victim’s body such as the belly,³³ the head,³⁴ or the breasts.³⁵

While all of these potential invaders resided in the farworld, their roles and attributes varied. The ones that were labeled as enemies (*hfty.w*), or adversaries (*d3y*), or simply as the host of dead (*mwt*), were those who had threatened or transgressed against the gods, and for whom the proper rituals were not carried out. They were therefore doomed to eternal punishment and unrest —predisposed to intimidate the living in whatever way they could. But these spells also mention the *3h.w*, the “transfigured

²⁶ P. Chester Beatty VI, vs. 2.5-9 (AEMT #8). Throughout this paper AEMT (Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts) refers to spells in BORGHOUTS, *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts*.

²⁷ P. Chester Beatty VIII [8] vs. 1.1-2.4 (AEMT #11).

²⁸ P. Edwin Smith [53] 19.2-14 (AEMT #18).

²⁹ AEMT #55.

³⁰ LEITZ, *Magical and Medical Papyri*, 79 (BM EA 10059 Section XIII Incantation 57 [Wreszinski Incantation 22]).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 64 (BM EA 10059 Section VIII Incantation 22 [Wreszinski Incantation 34]).

³² *Ibid.*, 69 (BM EA 10059 Section IX Incantation 28 [Wreszinski Incantation 40]) and 70 (BM EA 10059 Section IX Incantation 30 [Wreszinski Incantation 42]).

³³ AEMT #27, P. Leiden I 348 [22] rt. 12.7-11 (BORGHOUTS, *P. Leiden I 348*); AEMT #47; AEMT #76.

³⁴ AEMT #39, 40, 41.

³⁵ AEMT #64.

dead". The irony is that a so-called demon could include an Egyptian who had worked very hard to become an *šh*, one of the blessed dead who were not only allowed unrestrained travel throughout the many regions of the farworld, but also free passage into the land of the living. A number of spells in the *Book of the Dead* ensured that this ability would be granted to the *šh*. It seems that these *šh.w* or justified dead, who could appear as benevolent ghosts,³⁶ also had the power and the will to potentially harm the living in the same manner as the generic enemies and unjustified dead. These pugnacious beings, who inhabited the farworld along with the gods, were able to step through the permeable membrane between the worlds and attack as nightmares.

The link between the entities who threatened those on earth and those who were considerable vile enemies in the afterlife is also made clear by reference to their being reversed. The Gardiner ostrakon warns that "he will not go forth face forwards, limbs as sound limbs". Ritner explains that this posture is compatible with other references to both demons and the enemies of the pharaoh who are twisted with their head facing backwards, unable to see forwards.³⁷ This posture is also described in the "spell for a mother and child" (P. Berlin 3027 C1, 9/2-6)³⁸ to protect the vulnerable individual (in this case a child) against demons that attack in the dark. In similar fashion, the enemies of the gods and the unjustified dead could be forced to live a reversed life in the *Duat*. Those who were not instantly relegated to the second death were condemned to a variety of indignities, tortures that might include living a life incompatible with *maat*, eating their own faces and drinking their own urine.³⁹ The Leiden spell orders the fiends to

"Place your head behind, when you raise your face,
together with your *ba*, your shapes, your corpses, your magic, together
with your shapes, your forms.
Oh male *akhs*, ..."

In addition, it forces these beings to look at (the word here used is *dgi*, implying the conscious act of "looking", rather than "passively see-

³⁶ A levitating ghost is described in P. Chassinat II (POSENER, *RdÉ* 12 [1960], 75-82) while the story of Khonsuemhab and the Ghost (for the publication see VON BECKERATH, *ZÄS* 119 (1992), 90-107 and for an English translation SIMPSON, *Literature*, 112-5) tells the tale of a ghost who is unhappy with the state of his tomb.

³⁷ RITNER, *JARCE* 27 (1990), 28-30.

³⁸ ERMAN, *Mutter und Kind*, 11-2.

³⁹ KADISH, *JSSEA* 9 (1979), 203-17.

ing”)⁴⁰ the immense divine force that the speaker of the spell has amassed to oppose them, as the most powerful deities are called upon:

“You shall contemplate and look!
 It is the Lord of All, and it is Those Who Are,
 It is Atum, it is Wadjet: the Lady of dread in the Great Bark, it is
 the child
 It is the Lord of Truth;
 It is the Lord of Truth,
 It is the figure of Atum on the upper road,
 It is the consuming flame by Sia, Lord of Heaven”.

The spell now calls upon the most effective weapon that can be used to destroy the chaotic forces: fire.

“The earth is on fire, the sky is on fire, the people and the gods are
 on fire.
 You say you are hidden against it (but) ‘it is come’ - Is its name in
 truth.
 Beware of the flame which comes forth from the Two Horizons!”

Even the name of the flame, “it is come”, expresses the inevitability of its arrival and the futility of attempting to escape this massive cosmic conflagration.⁴¹ But Egyptian visual iconography is more subtle than our imagery and the idea of a portal or barrier of fire is found decorously represented in the *Book of Gates* by snakes, which spit fire. From the *Coffin Texts* to the *Royal Books of the Afterlife* and the *Book of the Dead* we find the belief expressed that those who had achieved transfiguration and justification in the farworld could pass through barriers of flame and lakes of fire as if through water. Fire, a preferred weapon of the gods, appears in the Chester Beatty spell where Isis threatens to target flames at any entities frightening the dreamer. She commands the dreamer

“Do not allow that which you saw to get out,
 (in order that) your numbness may be terminated,
 your dreams retire,
 and fire go forth against that which frightens you”.

⁴⁰ For the active sense of *dgj* see DEPUYDT, *Or* 75 (1988), 1-13 and WINAND, *SAK* 13 (1986), 293-314.

⁴¹ For fire as a divine weapon against chaotic entities see especially HORNUNG, *Valley of the Kings*, 149-65; HORNUNG, *Idea into Image*, 97-107; ZANDEE, *Death as an Enemy*, 133-42.

For the gods of the afterlife and for the pharaoh on the earth the main method of distributing fire was by means of the *j'r.t* or uraeus — the cobra ready to strike and kill with her piercing gaze, spitting flames with her fiery breath. Cobras are common in Africa today and one of the most dangerous is the spitting or black-necked cobra. This snake can spray its burning venom directly at the eyes of its provoker from a distance of eight feet. This spray was depicted in Egyptian art by a series of dots and described as *h.t* “fire”. Because Egyptian iconography is not directly representational, other forms of snakes were also depicted as spitting fire, such as “Big and Fiery”, a python type snake who perpetually burns the enemies of the sun god in the ninth hour of the *Book of the Gates*. Horus himself commands the serpent:

“Open your mouth, expose your jaws,
That you spit fire on the enemies of my father!
That you burn their corpses
And cook their souls
With the burning breath of your mouth,
With the embers in your body”.⁴²

We are all familiar with the multiplicity of roles played by the uraeus on the brow of the pharaoh.⁴³ She was not only a symbol of Lower Egypt and of power, but was also the physical manifestation of the protective fiery eye of the sun itself who dispels the chaotic darkness with her light. But the use of this fiery weapon was not restricted to the pharaoh and the gods; a non-royal mortal could also call upon the uraeus for aid. In the Leiden spell, the cobra goddess Wadjet is summoned, while in the Gardiner spell she is referred to as “the Striker” and her role is to consume the hearts of the demons. The end of this spell promises the fiends that they “will not escape from the Four Ladies”. The instructions state that this spell is “to be said over the four uraei made of pure clay and fire in their mouths. One is placed on each corner of each room in which there is a man or a woman sleeping”.

Other spells also combine the deadly weapon of fire with the power of the cobras, sometimes referred to as the “Four Noble Ladies” with “fire in their mouth”.⁴⁴ Fire, snakes and various objects including figurines

⁴² HORNING, *Valley of the Kings*, 155-6.

⁴³ For the early manifestations of the cobra goddess see JOHNSON, *Cobra Goddess*.

⁴⁴ See the discussion in RITNER, *JARCE* 27 (1990), 32-3. Other spells include the AEMT #11 (Protection of a House) and AEMT #93 (The Metternich Stela).

made of clay are essential components in many spells. The Leiden spell was supposed to be spoken over an image drawn on a piece of linen that was to be placed on the dreamer's throat. Physical specimens of linen charms have survived,⁴⁵ and it is possible that physical examples of the uraei mentioned in the Gardiner spell to keep away nightmares have survived as well.

Small uraei made of clay (usually Nile silt) have been excavated in New Kingdom sites such as Amarna,⁴⁶ the settlement of Kom Rabia (in Memphis),⁴⁷ Qantir,⁴⁸ Sais,⁴⁹ Kom Firin,⁵⁰ Akoris,⁵¹ in burials in Sakkara,⁵² in the fortress-town of Zawiyet Umm el-Rakham,⁵³ in the way-station of Haruba,⁵⁴ the town of Kamid el-Loz⁵⁵ and the Late Bronze Age garrison at Beth Shan.⁵⁶ Many are often found in association with other objects connected to domestic use such as headrests, figures of Bes, Taweret, male and female figurines, clay balls and amulets. Many of the clay cobras are freestanding with flat bottoms, often decorated in blue, red, yellow and black paint, but wavy-edged bowls with cobra figures rising from the bottom of the bowl have also been found in Amarna⁵⁷ that were likely variations of the freestanding versions. While some of figurines are

⁴⁵ MAARTEN RAVEN (in: J. VAN DIJK (ed.), *Essays Te Velde*, 275-85) has studied a number of surviving linen charms now in the National Museum of Antiquities of Leiden.

⁴⁶ See examples in KEMP, *CAJ* 5 (1995), 31-2; KEMP, *JEA* 67 (1981), 5-20; ROSE, in: B.J. KEMP (ed.), *Amarna Reports I*, 133-53; ROSE, in: B.J. KEMP (ed.), *Amarna Reports V*, 82-114; FRANKFORT and PENDLEBURY, *City of Akhenaten II*, 42, 59 and 62; PENDLEBURY and ČERNÝ, *City of Akhenaten III*, 111; Number 22/140 in PEET and WOOLLEY, *City of Akhenaten I*, 79-80, pl. 23; Number 22/131 in *ibid.*, pl. 23. The latter two objects are, respectively, currently in the Bolton Museums, Art Gallery and Aquarium (museum number 15.22.9) and the British Museum (EA 55594) and are discussed in detail in SZPAKOWSKA, *JARCE* 40 (2003), 113-22. See also the unpublished Ph.D. dissertation by ANNA STEVENS (2003) of Monash University.

⁴⁷ GIDDY, *Survey of Memphis II*, 13-28, pl. 1-7 and pl. 77-79.

⁴⁸ ASTON, *Egyptian Pottery*, 402-3.

⁴⁹ Personal communication Penny Wilson.

⁵⁰ SPENCER, *Egyptian Archaeology* 24 (2004), 38-40.

⁵¹ I would like to thank Kyoko Yamahana for kindly making available the preliminary report and further information. Some of the clay cobras have been published in KAWANISHI and TSUJIMURA, *Akoris 2002*, 9-11, fig. 7 no 18, and 15-7, fig. 12 no 8-9. They have been found in fill, and their dating is therefore still insecure. They have been tentatively assigned to the Late Period, but Ramesside objects have been found in the same context in close proximity.

⁵² SOWADA, CALLAGHAN, and BENTLEY, *Teti Cemetery at Saqqara IV*, 13, pl. 6, 35.

⁵³ Personal communication Steven Snape.

⁵⁴ OREN, *Qadmoniot* 13 (1980), 26-33, 31, pl. 8; OREN, in: E. STERN, A. LEVINZON-GILBOA and J. AVIMAR (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations*, vol. IV, 1386-96, 1390.

⁵⁵ ECHT, in: R. HACHMANN (ed.), *Bericht über die Ergebnisse*, 37-52, pl. 9-12.

⁵⁶ JAMES, MCGOVERN and BONN, *Late Bronze Egyptian Garrison*.

⁵⁷ KEMP, *JEA* 67 (1981), 5-20.

shaped simply as cobras with flared hoods rising up from coiled tails,⁵⁸ others are more complex, and include a shape resembling a small offering stand rising from the base. Others have two protuberances added to the main body which could possibly represent two smaller snakes on either side of the offering stand or bowl. Some of the snakes without offering stands may have been incorporated into the architecture of a temple as a cobra frieze. The figurines with an offering cup, however, were more likely designed to stand upright (either on their own or within a larger bowl), allowing the cup to hold an offering of some kind.

The function of the clay cobras has yet to be determined. They have usually been termed votive objects, and are thought to represent devotions to one of a number of goddesses including Renenutet, Meretseger, Neith, Wadjet, Mut, or Weret Hekau “Great of Magic”, or a combination of these deities.⁵⁹ The nature of Egyptian gods was fluid and adaptable, as was their iconography. Unless specifically named it is often difficult to associate an artifact with a specific deity and syncretizations are common as well. For example, at Deir el-Medina has provided votive figures, stele, sketches and sculptures dedicated to either Meretseger or Renenutet in snake form, but they have also been dedicated to the combined form or Renenutet-Meretseger.

They might also have been used to keep away poisonous snakes in the land of the living, or to protect the vulnerable sleeper from nightmares and other demonic assaults in the night. Kemp noted that a clue to their use might be found in spells such as the Gardiner spell discussed earlier.⁶⁰ These clay cobras could represent surviving examples of ones that were used by the Egyptians to protect themselves from nightmares and other hostile entities, and could represent the physical manifestation of the “Noble Ladies” that are named in certain spells. The noble ladies are also described as having “fire in their mouths”. It is possible that the bowls found on some of the snakes were used to hold incense, or a coal, thus creating a sort of fire. However, the extant examples that I have examined do not show any obvious evidence of burning, or of having held any sort of resin. Ones that were part of bowls may have been at the centre of a pool of oil that was then lit as a lamp. Another possibility is

⁵⁸ Few complete examples remain. Most have been broken at the junction between base and hood, with only one or the other surviving intact—in some instances only the head has been recovered.

⁵⁹ For example, SADEK (*Popular Religion*, 118-25) has noted votive objects dedicated to the combined form of Renenutet-Meretseger found in Deir el-Medina.

⁶⁰ KEMP, *CAJ* 5 (1995), 31-2.

that the fire in their mouths was metaphorical, referring to the burning power of protective cobra, which could have been activated by the very presence of the figurines in a room.

The suggestions that the snakes were created as votive objects dedicated to a deity and were used as apotropaic devices in connection with spells are not incompatible. Few objects can be assigned a single restrictive function or a unique purpose, and it is likely that the use of clay cobras would vary according to the specific needs of the individual. The line between the royal and non-royal use is also more ambiguous than often proposed, and protective creatures such as fire-spiting cobras that can appear on a pharaoh's brow, or in restricted books of the afterlife, would be just as effective for domestic use. The cobra represents the fiery power of the sun, illuminating the night, and effectively destroying enemies, whether the cobra is associated with a particular deity at the time, or is used as a powerful protective icon on its own.

Numerous other spells, including a few that became part of the *Coffin Texts*, prescribe the use of various clay objects shaped as balls, or eggs, or women, or even cobras. A spell has not yet been found in the same context as these figures, but nevertheless it is likely that one method of protecting a sleeper from nightmares and other demonic influences of the night would have been through the use of clay snakes, whose fiery power would have been activated by means of a spell.

These are not the only artifacts that might have been used to keep away demons of the dark. Headrests could also be decorated with protective spells and apotropaic figures including some that wield the striking cobra.⁶¹ These depictions can be found on the top of the base of the headrest, on the supporting pillar, and on the underside of the curved portion that actually supports the individual's head. Carved into one wooden example⁶² is the image of Neith (a goddess who is also associated with the uraeus whose emblem appears on the inside of numerous representations of the rearing cobra) shooting her arrows into a demon who is turning away, his back towards the goddess, hiding his face in his arms. While the spell inscribed on the headrest offers wishes for good sleep, it is likely that the image was in part designed to help ward away nightmares. Other headrests are carved with the form of Bes or one of the many related deities,⁶³ images that we would expect to find on

⁶¹ PETRIE, *Objects of Daily Use*, Gurob #40; SCHOTT, ZÄS 83 (1958), 141-4, Heidelberg #290.

⁶² DARESSY, *ASAE* 10 (1909-1910), 177-9.

⁶³ Examples can be found in PETRIE, *Objects of Daily Use*, Gurob #40; SCHOTT, ZÄS

domestic furniture, and perhaps he appears on these in his capacity as an aid to fertility. But on certain headrests, when the figure is depicted as facing forward and wielding weapons, its identity is perhaps better identified as that of *ḥ3*, “the fighter”, whose image also appears on the so-called magic wands particularly associated with the Middle Kingdom.⁶⁴ These artifacts were used to protect vulnerable individuals, including children and women, and perhaps sleepers as well, from the onslaught of demonic forces by creating a sacred space within which the individual would be protected.

That a protective capacity was part of the function of *ḥ3* and the other figures that can be found on the headrests has been confirmed by Milena Perraud. She noted two Middle Kingdom headrests upon which are inscribed spells for protection whose formulaic expressions are virtually identical to those found on a number of inscribed apotropaic wands also dated to the Middle Kingdom. The formula include: *dd-mdw jn* + name of the protective entity, followed by an expression such as *jj=n* “we come”, and finally the phrase *stp-s3* “protection” often with the preposition *ḥ3* “concerning” + “the object”.⁶⁵ The similarity in formula is not coincidental, and confirms that both the wands and headrests could function in a similar manner.

Like the magic wands, many of the figures appearing on headrests are in the form of griffins, hippopotamus goddesses, or fantastic creatures containing the most recognizable portions of powerful animals, such as the crocodile. Similar figures are described in the *Coffin Texts*, and can be occasionally seen in the composition known as the *Book of Two Ways*. Here, their function was to guard the passageways within the farworld thus restricting access to those who had proved themselves worthy by correctly identifying their names and epithets, or by speaking the correct spell. These composite beings are often termed “demons”, but this is a misnomer, for they were not harmful to those who legitimately belonged, but only towards intruders.

83 (1958), 141-4; PAVLOV and KHODZHASH, *Khudozhestvennoe*, Pushkin Museum #5016; FREED, *Egypt's Golden Age*, 74-5 (Brooklyn Museum number 37.44E); EGGBRECHT, *Ägyptens Ausstieg*, 278-80 (Hannover #2890); SEIPEL (ed.), *Ägypten: Götter, Gräber und die Kunst*, 242-3 (Louvre N3736a and British Museum EA 35807); and PERRAUD, *RdÉ* 49 (1998), 161-6 (Louvre E4321 + E4293).

⁶⁴ To the list of apotropaia mostly published in ALTENMÜLLER, *Die Apotropaia* and SAK 13 (1986), 1-27, pl. 1-4 we should now add the apotropaic wand recently discovered in Dra abu El-Naga' (VOSS, *MDAIK* 55 [1999], 390-9).

⁶⁵ PERRAUD, *BIFAO* 102 (2002), 309-26. Her discussion includes headrests from the National Archaeological Museum in Athens (#128) and the British Museum (EA 35807).

The wands, headrests, and other artifacts upon which these powerful entities appear, acted as apotropaic devices, forming protective barriers around those who were particularly defenseless. These included expectant and new mothers, neonates and children, those who were ill, or, as is suggested by their manifestation on headrests, those who were asleep. Along with their frightening appearance, these deities guarded and defended their vulnerable wards with an assortment of weapons such as spears, daggers, hand-held snakes and rearing striking cobras. In some cases the cobras can be seen in the mouth of the deity, their power in the process of being consumed and absorbed by the deity, while in others the snakes are firmly grasped in their hands. As Ritner has noted, this gesture graphically depicts the ultimate control that the deities have over dangerous and wild animals, a gesture that parallels that of the pharaoh grasping his stereotypical enemies by the hair.⁶⁶ But in some cases, it appears that these snakes are wielded in the same manner as more conventional weapons such as spears and daggers. The rearing snakes here offered a mortal the same kind of protection they afforded the gods.

Reconstructing the private practices in ancient Egypt is not an easy task. Perceptions do change, and the evidence of course offers only brief glimpses onto specific aspects in particular times and places. A dream is an intensely personal experience — contents remain invisible until it is reported, and compared to some other types of documentation the surviving records mentioning dreams in pharaonic Egypt are frustratingly few. Nevertheless, there remains enough evidence to indicate that a dream, good or bad, could be thought of as an external phenomenon — a liminal zone between the world of the living and of the divine. It provided visual access to the inhabitants of the *Duat*. Thus a god could make him or herself visible to a mortal in a dream, but so could the hostile dead who were held responsible for terrifying nightmares. These entities included not only the traditional enemies of the gods, the unjustified dead, but also the transfigured dead. New Kingdom spells, prescriptions, and apotropaic devices attest to the prevalent fear of nightmares and other nocturnal enemies, while the intricate steps one could take to ensure safety in the night emphasize the tangible nature of the demons of the dark.

⁶⁶ RITNER, *Mechanics*, 224, n. 1041.

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