

Contexts of Appearance of Water in the *Pyramid Texts* An Introduction

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Abstract: The author collected in her paper introductory remarks concerning the occurrences of water in the *Pyramid Texts*. The article outlines main issues which appear to be assumed by the ancient Egyptians the most vivid while thinking about water and its role in Egyptian religion of the Old Kingdom. In the world oldest religious texts it may be evenly observed that water was a way to travel both on Earth and in the sky as well as to transport goods in both realities. The above-mentioned and the ways of transport confirm watery nature of the hereafter. Water could have both good as well as bad, involving peril, connotations. Furthermore, it appears – that water was perceived as a sacralised sphere, the one of primordial value. However, in the *Pyramid Texts* more emphasis was put on its purifying and rejuvenating qualities.

Keywords: Old Kingdom Egypt, *Pyramid Texts*, water, religion, primordial element, rejuvenation

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In the beliefs of the ancient Egyptians water was undoubtedly the prime, primordial, matter from which life had originated, from which the creator had come and where his will to create turned into existence. Moreover, the first land appeared in it. However, the contexts of its appearance in the *Pyramid Texts* deserve more attention than they have received to date.¹

¹ See: Kaplony 1992: 16–44 and some bibliographical references therein; Bickel 2005; Rotsch 2005; Tatomin 2005 and the other articles in: Amenta, Luiselli, Novella Sordi (Eds) 2005.

MANIFESTATIONS OF WATER IN THE *PYRAMID TEXTS*

Water (*mw*) is mentioned in the *Pyramid Texts* (*PT*) ninety times.² This is quite often in comparison, for instance, to Nu³ – invoked forty-six times. Water, similarly as the Earth,⁴ was a sacralised sphere,⁵ though both could have perilous connotations.

§ 1044a *h33 ppj pn m mw*

§ 1044b *wtz sw wsjr rmn sw psdtj*

§ 1044c *d r^c f jr ppj jr bw (nb) ntjj ntr jm*

§ 1045a *h33 ppj m t3*

§ 1045b *wtz sw gbb rmn sw psdtj*

§ 1045c *d r^c f jr ppj jr bw (nb) ntjj ntr jm*

When this Pepi goes down into water, Osiris will raise him up, the Dual Ennead will support him and Re will give his arm for this Pepi for every place in which the god is. When Pepi goes to the Earth, Geb will hold him up, the Dual Ennead will support him and Re will give his arm for Pepi for every place in which the god is. (PT spell 486 §§ 1044–1045 /P 338, N 548/)

Thus the King who had to immerse himself into the water must have been assisted by the gods. Nevertheless, death in the water was perceived as an infamy and obloquy.⁶

Water was of course treated as a way of transport on the Earth and in the Beyond. As far as the Beyond is concerned, this can be presupposed, judging from various kinds of boats used by the deceased and the gods, as means of transport and the verbs used (see below), which confirm even more the watery nature of the hereafter:

§ 1382a *wb3 nm^ct n jt wsjr ppj j3h mr-n-h3j*

§ 1382b *njs r.f jt wsjr ppj jr hm jr smt*

§ 1382c *d3.snj jt jr gs pf j3bj n pt*

Nemat-canal of father Osiris Pepi has been opened, the Winding Waterway has flooded. Thus, father Osiris Pepi shall call for the steersman and for the-one-who-listens and they will ferry father to that eastern side of the sky. (PT spell 556 § 1382 /P 529/)

² All number references are based on the transliteration and index of the words in the *Pyramid Texts* by J. Popielska-Grzybowska.

³ See: Grieshammer 1982: 534–535; Pépin 1989: 340–343; Popielska-Grzybowska forthcoming a.

⁴ Otto 1975: 1263–1264.

⁵ Water particularly when life and the sources of the Nile are concerned, see: Kaplony 1992: 21; Hoffmeier 1985; Grimal 2012: 15–33; Haikal 1994: 205–212; Borges Pires 2015; forthcoming a and b, and the further literature therein.

⁶ Kaplony 1992: 22–23.

Furthermore, such dangerous creatures as crocodiles came from water and such as serpents should better stay deep down in the Earth. Moreover, the latter were supposed to arrive in Egypt via water on ships with transportations of wood from the East.⁷ Consequently, peril seems to mean the unknown, deep in the water or in the Earth or simply far away.

As far as the *Pyramid Texts* are concerned and what was mentioned above, water is the main feature of the Beyond and of the sky in the *Pyramid Texts*. One of the *passuses* refers directly to ‘the waters ... that are in the sky’ (*PT* spell 685 § 2063a). *The watery nature is implicit in verbs that are used to express the journey across the sky, e.g.: nmj: traverse (with a boat determinative), hnz: travel, hnj: row, d3j: cross.*⁸

As J.P. Allen claims,⁹ particularly two designations make us think that the sky consisted of water, namely ‘cool water’ *kbhw*¹⁰ which on several occasions has the sky sign as a determinative, e.g. spell 452 § 841b (P), spell 463 § 876a (P 313a, N 256a, N 405a), spell 539 § 1327b (P 486), spell 625 § 1765c (N 27). However, R.O. Faulkner thought the determinative of the sky, added after the word under discussion, resulted from mistaking the proper word for the sky with *kbhw*.¹¹ Furthermore, Faulkner sometimes translated the word in question as ‘cold water’, in other cases as a ‘firmament’.¹² However, it appears much more evident that the ‘cool water’ is a synonym of a part of the sky or the sky itself, as it may be assumed when the journey of Osiris was described:

§ 464c *m prt.f jr pt*

§ 465a *d3.f jr kbhw z3.f hrw jr dbw.j.f*

When he ascended to the sky and ferried to the cool water and his son Horus beside him. (PT spell 303 §§ 464c–465a /W 208, T 291, P 428, M 326, N 518/).

or in other words:

§ 1360a *tz tw 3hj p ppj pn mw.k n.k b^ch.k n.k*

§ 1360b *rdw.k n.k pr m hw33t wsjr*

§ 1361a *wn n.k 3wj pt jzn n.k 3wj kbhw*

§ 1361b *wn.t n.k 3wj h3t n^hbb^hb n.k 3wj nwt*

§ 1362a *n.j n.j j.t jn jst sd3 m htp j.t jn nbt-hwt*

§ 1362b *m3.n.s jt.k wsjr hrw pw n h3b m mt*

§ 1362c *k3 ddbwt grgw b3.k*

Raise yourself, akh of this Pepi! You have your water, you have your inundation, you have your effluence that comes from the decomposition of Osiris.

⁷ Steiner 2011: 80–82.

⁸ Popielska-Grzybowska forthcoming b.

⁹ Allen 1989: 8.

¹⁰ Mercer 1952: 53–54.

¹¹ Faulkner 1969: 150, n. 1.

¹² For instance: Faulkner 1969: 92.

The door of the sky has been opened for you, the doors of the cool water have been pulled open to you: the door of the tomb shall be opened for you, and the door of Nut shall be unlocked for you. "To me! To me!" said Isis; "advance in peace!" said Nephthys, when they saw your father Osiris on the day of the reed-festival. Erected are the shrines of the settlement of your ba. (PT spell 553 §§ 1360a–1362c /P 526/)

Moreover, as J.P. Allen noted: ...indications from the Pyramid Texts suggest an early image of the celestial domain as an expanse (*pdwt*) of water (*bj3*, *kbhw*) above the Earth (*hrt*), whose shores (*jdbw pt*) consist of marshland (*sht j3rw*, *sht htp*) with canals (*mrw ptrw (ptrtj)*) and lakes (*šjw*), bordered perhaps by desert (*wʕrt*, *jzkn*).¹³

Then the other term used in the Pyramid Texts, that makes us think of the sky as a space filled with water is *bj3* – ‘basin’. It is written that Unis will acquire the sky and will open the basin of the sky (e.g. PT spell 257 § 305a /W 168, T 192/).¹⁴

Furthermore, there are different forms of water named in the texts scrutinised here. The Egyptians made four references to rain and four to rivers, one to a stream, nineteen to the Nile in all but the Neith’s pyramid and twenty-nine to inundation (*bʕh*)¹⁵ in all of the tombs. There is also an enthralling referral to the sources of the Nile river – hence the pure water originating from Elephantine. The most explicit example appears to be the beginning of the spell 459 (P 296, M 214, N 398), where the pharaoh must receive this pure water of his which originates from Elephantine, and added to the water are natron and incense – as these indispensable for reinforcement of the King’s life and his rule over the living and the dead as well as the gods. Additionally, twenty-four times the word ‘flood’ was mentioned in all of the texts of the pyramids and ‘great flood’ twice, only in Teti’s writings. Concurrently, a lake was evoked thirty-eight times and added to that there are many mentions of the Lake of Duat,¹⁶ Lake of God,¹⁷ Great Lake,¹⁸ Lake of Jackal,¹⁹ Lake of Life,²⁰ Lake of Nurse,²¹ Lake of Osiris,²² Lake of Reeds,²³ Lake of Shu,²⁴ Spread Lake,²⁵ Lake of Stork²⁶ and Lake of Turquoise.²⁷

¹³ Allen 1989: 9.

¹⁴ Allen 1989: 9.

¹⁵ For detailed analysis of the topic see, for instance: Oestigaard 2011 and further literature therein.

¹⁶ PT spells: 268 (W 175); 511 (P 450), 512 (P 452), 504 (P 458), 568 (P 507), 577 (P 519); 671 (N 349), 697 (N 564); 511 (Nt 271), 504 (Nt 280).

¹⁷ PT spell 593 (M 206).

¹⁸ PT spells: 262 (W 172); 262 (T 186); 466 (P 317); 461 (M 284), 619 (M 399); 262 (N 69); 666 (Nt 242).

¹⁹ PT spells: 268 (W 175), 301 (W 206); 512 (P 452), 504 (P 458); 691D (N 529), 697 (N 564); 504 (Nt 280).

²⁰ PT spell 670 (N 348).

²¹ PT spells: 264 (T 187); 265 (P 320).

²² PT spell 324 (T 9).

²³ PT spells: 323 (T 8); 526 (P 474), 564 (P 502); 526 (M 344).

²⁴ PT spell 222 (W 155).

²⁵ PT spells: 300 (W 205); 674 (P 312), 483 (P 334), 521 (P 469), 553 (P 526); 521 (M 351), 610 (M 375); 669 (N 347); 667B (Nt 244).

²⁶ PT spells: 473 (P 324); 473 (M 260).

²⁷ PT spell 627B (N 32).

With some bewilderment one can observe that the Great Green (*w3d wr*), namely the Sea, does not appear in Unis's texts at all and in general appears sixteen times, but the Great Continuousness, the Ocean (*šn wr*), was referred to only once, in the pyramid of Teti (T 198):

- § 628a *j n.k sntj.k jst nbt-ḥwt sd3.sn kw*
 § 628b *km.t wr.t m rn.k n km-wr*
 § 628c *w3d.t wr.t m rn.k n w3d-wr*
 § 629a *m kw wr.t šn.t m šn-wr*
 § 629b *m kw dbn.tj šn.t m dbn pšr ḥ3 nbwt*
 § 629c *m kw šn.tj ʕ3.tj m šn ʕ3 sk*

Your two sisters Isis and Nephthys have come to you, they make you sane, you greatly black in your name of the Great Black Lake,²⁸ greatly green in your name of the Great Green. Look, you have become great and enclosed as the Great Continuousness. Look, you have become encircled and round, as the circuit that surrounds the External Isles.

Look, you have become round and big, as he who surrounds the Big-Waters-that-Perish. (PT spell 366 §§ 628–629 /T 198/)

The puzzling 'Big-Waters-that-Perish' were described once more in spell 593 (M 206, Nt 36*). This intriguing designation may turn to be an implicit reference to annihilation that might afflict living beings, the gods included, at the end of the world (see below).

The Egyptians assigned water one more riveting trait, namely the fact that *the water of Unis was wine like Re (mw m jrp mr rʕ)* (PT spell 210 § 130 c /W 143/).

WATER IN THE PROCESS OF CREATION AND REJUVENATION

CREATIVE ASPECTS OF WATER

Studying the *Pyramid Texts* one can assume the creative aspects of water. The King was born in Nu in Heliopolis before anyone and anything else had come into being:

- § 1039a *j.nḏ ḥr.tn mw jnw šw wtzw mndftj*
 § 1039b *wʕbw.n gbb ʕwt.f jm.sn*
 § 1039c *jbw m ḥt snd ḥ3tw m ḥt sʕt*
 § 1040a *j msjw m nw*
 § 1040b *nj ḥpr.t pt nj ḥpr.t t3*
 § 1040c *nj ḥpr.t smntj nj ḥpr.t ḥnnw*
 § 1040d *nj ḥpr.t snd pw ḥpr hr jrt ḥrw*
 § 1041a *ppj [pw wʕ] n ḥt tw ʕ3t msjtt m b3ḥ m jwnw*

²⁸ The other authors translate: Bitter Lakes. Concerning the translation Great Black Wall, see: Allen 2005: 81, 431.

Hail to you, waters that Shu brought about and two begetters raised, in which Geb cleansed his limbs when minds were permeated with awe and hearts were permeated with viciousness!

I was born in Nu when the sky had not yet come into being, when the Earth had not yet come into being, when the establishment (of the world) had not yet come into being, when disorder had not yet come into being, when the awe had not yet come into being for the eye of Horus had come into being.

Pepi is [the unique one of] that great body that was born formerly in Heliopolis (...). (PT spell 486 §§ 1039a–1041a /P 338, N 548/)

For the present argument this is one of the most important spells regarding water (and Earth) in the *Pyramid Texts*, for it describes creation and the order of the created world emphasising the priority and pre-existence of water.

As a result of the pre-creation of the pharaoh, exactly as it happened with the creator god, the Egyptians seemed to believe that the monarch – as the creator – was the one who completed the ‘land which came out of the lake’, that is the first land that came from the water – *benben*, and then consequently Egypt, as well, uniting its lands and the two banks of its river:

§ 388a *wnjs pj mhj t3 pr m šj wnjs pj zšš w3d*

§ 388b *wnjs pj htp t3wj wnjs pj zm3jj t3wj*

Unis is this-who-made-complete the land that came out of the lake: Unis is a green water-lily. It is Unis, thus be complacent, Two Lands. It is Unis, thus unite, Two Lands. (PT spell 271 § 388 /W 178/)

Creative powers of the water are mentioned rarely and much more often may just be presupposed from the context, as for instance in spell 587 §§ 1590b-c and 1600b-c:

§ 1599a *sdm.t n ppj nfr k3 r^c swt db3 tm*

§ 1599b *jn ppj nfr k3 r^c kd tm swt grg tm*

§ 1600a *jr.t n.f ht nb j.ddt.f n.t m bw nb šm ppj nfr k3 r^c jm*

§ 1600b *f3.t n.f mw jwn jmw.t*

§ 1600c *f3.t n.f mw jwn hp^rt.sn jm.t*

You shall listen to Pepi Neferkare, he is the one who reconstructed you, he is the one who constructed you, he is the one who constituted you. You should do for him everything he says to you wherever Pepi Neferkare goes.

You should lift to him all the waters that are in you, you shall lift to him all the waters that will come into being in you. (PT spell 587 §§ 1599–1600 /N 404/)

Consequently, the water was life and gave life and even some references to giving birth in water, as for example in spell 669 were made, although it was written that ‘the waters

of Nu have been cut' when Isis screamed while giving birth to the King. Thus, water was providing renewal and re-birth, gave life and force, physical and spiritual strength:

- § 2063a *j mw ʿnh̄ jm̄w pt j mw ʿnh̄ jm̄w t̄3*
 § 2063b *nbj n.k pt sd̄3 n.k t̄3 tp ʿwj mswt n̄tr*
 § 2064a *wpj̄j d̄wwj h̄pr n̄tr sh̄m n̄tr m dt.f*
 § 2064b *wpj̄j d̄wwj h̄pr ppj n̄fr k̄3 r̄ʿ pn sh̄m ppj n̄fr k̄3 r̄ʿ pn m dt.f*
 § 2065a *m-k j ppj n̄fr k̄3 r̄ʿ pn j.sn.tj rdwj.f jn mw wʿbw*
 § 2065b *wnnw hr tm jr h̄nn šw sh̄pr k̄3t tfnt*
 § 2066a *jw.n.sn jn.n.sn n.k mw wʿbw hr jt.sn*
 § 2066b *sʿb.sn tw sn̄tr.sn tw*
 § 2067a *f̄3.k pt m d̄rt.k w̄3h̄.k t̄3 m t̄bt.k*
 § 2067b *wdh̄.t kbh̄w jr rwt ppj n̄fr k̄3 r̄ʿ pn j̄ʿ hr n̄tr nb*
 § 2068a *j̄ʿ.k ʿwj.k wsjr j̄ʿ.k ʿwj.k ppj n̄fr k̄3 r̄ʿ pw*
 § 2068b *rnpw.k n̄tr 3 nw.tn w̄d-h̄tp*
 § 2068c *st̄ ht-wtt jr ppj n̄fr k̄3 r̄ʿ pn*
 § 2069a *bnb̄n m h̄wt zkr h̄p̄š m pr jnpw*
 § 2069b *w̄d̄3 ppj n̄fr k̄3 r̄ʿ p ʿh̄ʿ mn̄jw ms 3bd ʿnh̄ sp̄3t*
 § 2070a *jr n st̄3wt sk̄3.k jt̄j sk̄3.k bdt*
 § 2070b *h̄nk.t ppj n̄fr k̄3 r̄ʿ pn jm n dt*

The waters of life in the sky have come, the waters of life in the Earth have come. The sky has been alight for you, the Earth has quivered for you, before the birth of the god.

The two mountains have been separated: the god has come into being, the god has power in his body. The two mountains have been separated: this Pepi Neferkare has come into being, this Pepi Neferkare has power in his body.

Beware, this Pepi Neferkare, his feet shall be kissed by the pure waters that exist by Atum, that the phallus of Shu made and the vulva of Tefnut brought into being.

They have come having for you the pure waters from their father, that they may cleanse you, that they may purify you with natron, Pepi Neferkare. You shall sustain the sky with your hand and set down the Earth with your foot. May the cool water be poured at the gate of this Pepi Neferkare and thus the face of every god will be washed. You shall wash your hands, Osiris; you shall wash your hands, Pepi Neferkare. You will become young god, your third Peace-Commander.²⁹ The fragrance of the Begotten Thing is on this Pepi Neferkare; the benben is in the residence of Sokar, the foreleg is in the house of Anubis.

Become sane, Pepi Neferkare! The shrine shall await the month be born. The countryside will live and arouae will be made for them, that you may cultivate barley and cultivate emmer.

This Pepi Neferkare will be bestowed with them forever. (PT spell 685 /N 519/)

²⁹ Cf. Allen 2005: 292.

WATER IN RITUALS

However, most often water was a means of cleansing in the Daily Rituals, among them mouth-washing with water with natron – an act commencing breakfast. In one of the spells called by J.P. Allen ‘Preparation of the Offering Table’, namely in spell 87 (W 60), the scholar translated the offering as the ‘mouth-washing meal’.³⁰ The King was asked to collect ‘the water that is in it’ and an offering of two bowls of water shall be made (*PT* spell 108 /W 70, T 76, P 127, M 118, N 174, Nt 109/). These activities that ensured physical cleanliness were obviously religious and thus included psychical cleanness and purity as well:

- § 788a *mw.k n.k b^ch.k n.k*
 § 788b *r^dw pr m ntr h^w33t prt m wsjr*
 § 788c *j^cj.j ^cwj.k wb3.<j> msdrwj.k*
 § 789a *s3h.j shm pn n b3.f*
 § 789b *j^c tw j^c sw k3.k hms k3.k*
 § 789c *wnm.f t hn^c.(k) nj nwr n dt dt*

You have your water, you have your inundation, the effluence that comes from the god, the decomposition that comes from Osiris.

*Your arms have been washed and your ears opened: this powerful has been made akh for his ba. Wash yourself and your ka will wash himself, your ka will sit and eat bread with you without termination forever and ever. (*PT* spell 436 §§ 788–789 /P 30/)*

Even if the texts refer, as was shown above, to cleaning and purification, they very often mention inundation and outflow of the waters of the Nile. The decay comes from Osiris, who first of all is a god of vegetation and renewal, that require decay and decomposition, and secondly was one of two gods who were foretold to survive the end of the world. Both of them, Atum and Osiris, in the forms of the serpents, were predicted to stay in the primaeval waters together with the pharaoh (see: *Book of the Dead*, chapter 175).³¹ Notwithstanding the previous phrase, in another fragment, where water implies cleansing and hence purity as well, this purity comes from Osiris. Osiris because all the other gods can enclose in him various – antithetical – characteristics and thus fulfil his divine complex role credited him in Egyptian religious thought:

- § 848a *m^h mrw j3hw jtrw*
 § 848b *m r.f ^cbw pr m wsjr*
 § 848c *sm rp^c wr-m^dw ^ch wr-m^dw jwnw*
 § 849a *psdt wrt hms*

³⁰ Allen 2005: 24. On the rituals based interpretation of the *Pyramid Texts* see, for instance: Piankoff 1968: esp. 1–13; Spiegel 1971; Altenmüller 1972.

³¹ See also: ElSebaie 2013.

The canals have filled, the rivers have been flooded by the purity that comes from Osiris.

You sem-priest, you noble one, you great ten of the palace, you great ten of Heliopolis and you Great Ennead sit. (PT spell 455 §§ 848a–849a /P 50/)

Consequently, cleaned and purified pharaoh undergoes the process of rejuvenation in his name of ‘young’ (nascent) water:

§ 589a *j hr jp.f jt.f jm.k rnp.tj m rn.k n mw rnpw*

§ 589b *wp.n hrw r.k*

Horus has come, recognising his father in you rejuvenated, in your identity of the young water. Horus has opened your mouth. (PT spell 357 § 589 /T 146, P 291/)

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All in all, it may be asserted that water in ancient Egyptian culture had connotations of both life and death.

In conclusion, water according to the *Pyramid Texts* was an essential constituent of every day rituals, washing and rejuvenation by means of its creative power. Water was a creative, principal element, but in the *Pyramid Texts* it is not so much evident. As it could have been perceived from the texts analysed above, in the oldest religious writings water was associated rather with washing in every day rituals and hence purifying in every sense. Added to that the most crucial role of water in the *Pyramid Texts* seems to be re-establishing, re-construction and thus rejuvenation of the deceased. This overview acquaints us in general terms with the contexts in which water recurred in the Old Kingdom religious texts. Notwithstanding the various hindrances and perplexity which analysis of this multi-faceted issue of the Egyptian religious accounts provide, it may be assumed that the creative power of water in the *Pyramid Texts* must have been crucial for the ancient Egyptians and the arguments need to be scrutinised meticulously.

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