Restricted Knowledge, Hierarchy, and Decorum: Modern Perceptions and Ancient Institutions

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In terms of the history of Egyptology, the issues addressed in this paper can be summarized in the questions of why a society that exhibited a high degree of inequality and exclusion has often been presented as rather uniform, with free access to knowledge and in theory meritocratic career advancement, and how scholars have reacted to other approaches. If that position is implausible, further questions follow. How much evidence is there for restricted and sanctioned knowledge and what is its significance and position in society and ideology? What frameworks can be suggested for interpreting restricted knowledge within a broader context? Why do meritocratic statements nonetheless occur in nonroyal biographies? I treat these in the order given, placing the lighter modern before the more earnest ancient sources.[1]

I. Initiation and Egyptology

Essential components of the unified vision of Egyptian culture which discounts restricted knowledge have often been assumptions that Egyptian thought exhibited no great complexity, organization, or penetration, and that the preserved record, with its possible intellectual or spiritual flaws, might adequately represent the society and the spread of its ideas. In this view, aspects of which might have appealed to some of the ancient elite, the vast majority who could not have had access to written materials were ignored or were of no account. For want of evidence, it may prove impossible to say anything about them in the context of this paper, except that they were probably excluded from its concerns; but it would be wrong to jump to the related assumption that the preserved record gives an adequate picture of the range of ideas and concepts that existed, either among them or in the elite. Discriminations of knowledge should be expected among the majority, as should complex attitudes, but these are entirely inaccessible for most of the society. It is also impossible to know how far elite and nonelite shared the same ideology.

Instances of the unifying and minimizing approach are Georges Posener's comment in *De la divinité du pharaon*[2] that the Egyptian people

[1] This paper was delivered in a shortened version to the ARCE Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, April 1989, under the title "Religion, Restriction of Knowledge, and Hierarchy." At the meeting, a parallel exhibition of volumes of *Description de l'Égypte* and "Diffusionist Views of the Maya" illustrated ironically the type of attitude to ancient Egypt reviewed in Section I. I am very grateful to Jon Anderson, Marianne Eaton-Krauss, Christopher Eyre, Erhart Graefe, and Peter Machinist for comments on drafts, to Marjorie Fisher for making books available, to Richard Parkinson and Siegfried Richter for bibliographical help; and to others named in the notes. The final version was written during a Humboldt-Stiftung fellowship at the University of Münster.

The issues reviewed are wide-ranging. Limited references are given for much material, but rather fuller ones for more obscure items (to Egyptologists). Citation unfortunately does not imply that works have been studied in depth; partial though they are, the references may nonetheless be useful. Among Egyptological studies, E. Otto, "Aufzeichnungsbedürfnis und -meidung," *LÄ* I, 556–59, is rather loosely organized and addresses few of the issues I cover here. Peter A. Piccione's paper "Mehen, Mysteries, and Resurrection from the Coiled Serpent," given at the Philadelphia meeting and which he has since most kindly made available to me appears in this issue of *JARCE* on pp. 43–52. Whereas Piccione is concerned with texts that relate mainly to the next life (although some practices he describes are also this-worldly), I focus on contexts of knowledge in this life. His wider conclusions about the game of *senet* relate to initiations in this life and are very relevant to this paper.

[2] (Cahiers de la Société Asiatique 15, Paris, 1960), xiv. Posener's final programmatic summary, "Découverte de

"ne pratiquait pas l'espirit du système" or a review of Klaus Baer's *Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom*[3] which states baldly that "The Egyptians were not systematic people."[4] Similar patronizing views are well known in writings on such topics as mathematics.[5] These positions involve a tacit assumption that Egyptian "system," if it existed, would be like Western "system"; since no such system is readily identifiable, no system existed. These attitudes are limiting and tend to be self-confirming, because they discourage the search for system and complexity. The examples are revealing. The first is in a study of kingship, the central institution of Egyptian society and culture, which generated a host of conceptions that are unlikely to have been lacking in organization;[6] systematizing but very alien texts describing the king's role have since become known.[7] The second attacks with an undocumented assumption Baer's work, which fundamentally improved understanding—and has broadly stood the test of further work[8]—by proposing that there was a system in the elite administrative hierarchy. There is something of the *Orientalism* attacked by Edward Said[9] in these approaches, whose premises tend to reinforce the investigator's cultural position.

This is not the only strand in the modern dismissal of special knowledge of hierarchies of knowledge. Less patronizing writers on Egyptian religion often maintain a similar position. In very different ways, Siegfried Morenz[10] and Erik Hornung (n. 6 above) maintain that Egyptian religion was fundamentally open. This could be true in that there might have been little of the mystical initiation known from mystery cults of the Graeco-Roman world (cf. nn. 95–96 ahead)—although this too can be questioned—but in other respects there is much evidence against the assumed openness. Here, two factors may come into play.

One of these factors is the proliferation of works on Egyptian initiation by non-Egyptologists. In a sense, these project threads running back from modern pyramidology, freemasonry, and more various esoterica, through Renaissance attitudes to hieroglyphs and Egyptian antiquity, into ancient Hermetic texts[11] and more general ancient images of Egyptian wisdom and mystery,[12] and thence into pre-Classical Egyptian antiquity. Most of these threads are genuine; what is at stake is the writers' interpretation of their significance, dependent on whether they subscribe to the beliefs in question, and on whether they see such things as having been present in ancient Egypt. Each of the areas mentioned is vast and either the subject of research or deserving of research, perhaps not always by Egyptologists. Many have returned within their purview, but in a rather problematic way, because Egyptology began at the decipherment by breaking away from this tradition. Encapsulating what they rejected are the title and dedication of a book of 1885: *The Storehouses of the King, or the Pyramids of Egypt: What They Are and Who Built Them*, offered to "Egyptologists and Freemasons of all nations."[13]

An example may illustrate problems of legitimacy faced by work on abstruse topics and materials. René Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz used

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l'ancienne Égypte," *BSFE* 112 (1988), 11–22, elevates this point to a principle of the complexity of reality (see pp. 21–22). While this is valid in itself and all-enveloping systems are probably not to be sought, this insight is a problematic starting-point for study.

[3] *Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom: The Structure of the Egyptian Administration in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties* (Chicago, 1960).

[4] T. G. H. James, *JAOS* 83 (1963), 120.

[5] For a more positive assessment, see G. Robins and C. Shute, *The Rhind Mathematical Papyrus: An Ancient Egyptian Text* (London, 1987), 62–63.

[6] Contrast Hornung's comments on system: *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, trans. J. Baines (Ithaca, NY, 1982), 239.

[7] E.g., J. Assmann, *Der König als Sonnenpriester: Ein kosmographischer Begleittext zur kultischen Sonnenhymnik in thebanischen Tempeln und Gräbern* (ADAIK 7, 1970).

[8] See, for example, N. Strudwick, *The Administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom: The Highest Titles and Their Holders* (London etc., 1985), 4–5.

[9] *Orientalism* (London and New York, 1978).

[10] *Ägyptische Religion* (Stuttgart, 1960) = *Egyptian Religion*, trans. A. E. Keep (London and Ithaca, NY, 1973).

[11] See G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Cambridge, 1986).

[12] Compare J. D. Ray, "Ancient Egypt," in *Divination and Oracles*, M. Loewe and C. Blacker, eds. (London, 1981), 175–78. I differ from Ray in seeing the official Egyptian presentation of the cosmos in a less bland light than he does, and thus in assuming more problems at the center.

[13] By Jane van Gelder (née Trill), London: W. H. Allen.

methods that have not gained general acceptance to hypothesize an Egyptian anthropocentric mystic science,[14] and disciples like John Anthony West[15] have disseminated his views. The work of West was reviewed negatively by the classicist Peter Green, and West replied that the reviewer did not know the material.[16] Green responded by saying that nothing in the Egyptian texts he knew fitted with the views of Schwaller de Lubicz; this is true, but does not answer the question. Egyptologists did not enter this fray, but Schwaller de Lubicz knew more about Egyptian temples than either his disciple or his critic. I agree with Green in being suspicious of Schwaller de Lubicz's method, but the only possible *a priori* reason for this suspicion is that Schwaller's strategy of imposing images on ground plans can prove almost anything.

Schwaller de Lubicz comes at the cautious end of such approaches, which range as far afield as Joan Grant,[17] who was the reincarnation of an ancient Egyptian—royal, of course—and Bulbul Abdel Meguid or Umm Sety.[18] The claims of these people to inspired knowledge of their subject bypass academic endeavor and cannot be integrated with it. For different reasons, it is also difficult to incorporate the principles of *The Egyptian Mysteries* by Arthur Versluis, who regrets that the modern world has lost the ability to think analogically[19] and people do not realize that the Vedas are needed to interpret ancient Egypt.[20] Yet unease with such a statement lies

[14] See, for example, René Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz, *Le temple dans l'Homme* (Cairo: Imprimerie Schindler, 1949); Egyptological reviews: B. V. Bothmer, *JNES* 11 (1952), 151–52; A. Mekhitarian, *CdE* 25/50 (1950), 270–72; René Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz, *Du symbole et de la symbolique* (Cairo: Imprimerie Schindler, 1951; reprinted 1978, 1983, Collection "Architecture et Symboles Sacrés," Paris: Dervy-Livres; 1977, Brookline, MA: Autumn Press); *AEB Suppl.* (1960) 228: no reviews; R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz, *Le temple de l'Homme, Apet du Sud à Louxor*, 3 vols. (Paris: Caractères, 1958; reprinted Paris: Dervy-Livres, 1985): [Author's own abstract *AEB* no. 58413]; Egyptological reviews: A. Mekhitarian, "A propos du 'Temple de l'Homme'," *Cahiers du Sud* 48 no. 358 (1960/61), 326–47 (part of a special section "Symbolique du temple égyptien," pp. 321–73); J. P. Mayer-Astruq, "A propos du papyrus mathématique Rhind," *CdE* 35/70 (1960), 120–39 (a critique of part of the mathematical basis of Schwaller's argument); R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz, *Le roi de la théocratie pharaonique* (Homo Sapiens; Paris: Flammarion, 1961). The 1985 reprint of *Le temple de l'Homme* and the 1983 reprint of *Du symbole et de la symbolique* have complete lists of Schwaller's books on the fly-leaf. There are also various works of the author's wife, Isha Schwaller de Lubicz, for example *Her-Bak, Egyptian Initiate*, trans. Ronald Fraser (New York: Inner Traditions International, 1978; abridged version first published 1967). In addition to these books, Schwaller de Lubicz was the author of a posthumous work on Karnak, with Georges and Valentine de Miré and Lucie Lamy: *Les temples de Karnak: Contribution à l'étude de la pensée pharaonique*, 2 vols. (Collection "Architecture et Symboles Sacrés," Paris: Dervy-Livres, 1982). Despite its subtitle, this is a primarily descriptive work, and is one of the most valuable collections of material about Karnak. References to its plates are incorporated in PM II² (see the preface, p. xiv).

For a comment on Schwaller de Lubicz's research in Egypt, see Mayer-Astruq, *CdE* 35/69 (1960), 120. Elevation drawings of the Luxor Temple prepared under him by Lucie Lamy were used in H. Brunner *et al., Die südlichen Räume des Tempels von Luxor* (AV 18, 1977), pls. 1–32. Schwaller de Lubicz also influenced some Egyptologists who worked in Luxor at the same time as him, notably Alexandre Varille and Clément Robichon. In a sense, the approach of Alexander Badawy, *Ancient Egyptian Architectural Design: A Study of the Harmonic System* (University of California Publications, Near Eastern Studies 4, 1965), is comparable to that of Schwaller de Lubicz. So far as I know, no Egyptologist publishing at present uses similar methods.

[15] *Serpent in the Sky: The High Wisdom of Ancient Egypt* (New York, 1978).

[16] "Tut-Tut-Tut," *New York Review of Books* 26 no. 15 (October 11, 1979), 15–32. Correspondence: "The Secrets of the Pyramids," ibid., 26 no. 20 (20 December 1979), 56. Reprinted without the correspondence, as "The Treasures of Egypt," in id., *Classical Bearings: Interpreting Ancient History and Culture* ([London], 1989), 77–90, 290–82.

[17] *Winged Pharaoh* (London, 1937; reprinted several times, e.g., Dennis Wheatley Library of the Occult 22, London, 1974); *Eyes of Horus* (London, 1942); *Lord of the Horizon* (London, 1943); *Many Lifetimes* (London, 1968); I draw also on reminiscences of someone who knew the author. The preface to *Winged Pharaoh* shows that Grant used conventional Egyptological works in constructing the setting for her narrative.

[18] Née Dorothy Eadie. Her posthumous book, Omm Sety and Hanny el Zeini, *Abydos: Holy City of Ancient Egypt* (Los Angeles: L L Co., 1981), mostly represents the less colorful side of her activities around the temple of Sety I at Abydos. In addition, she had significant narrowly Egyptological accomplishments and worked for many years on material from excavations of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization.

[19] (London and New York: Arkana, 1988), 5. Arkana is an imprint of the same house as Kegan Paul International, which publishes the Studies in Egyptology series.

[20] Among Egyptologists A. Varille, "La stèle du mystique Béky (N° 156 du Musée de Turin," *BIFAO* 54 (1954), 135,

not so much in what is said as in its context in the book as a whole;[21] analogy and comparative method are fundamental to intellectual activity.

Some of these works use concepts which subsequently reacquire respectability in Egyptology. The title of the book of S[otirios] Mayassis, *The Book of the Dead is a Book of Initiation,*[22] is similar to that of an article by Jan Assmann, "Death and Initiation in Ancient Egypt,"[23] which is largely concerned with the Book of the Dead and is relevant to this paper, yet the latter does not cite the former. Reviews of Mayassis' work (see n. 22) suggest that Assmann may be correct in ignoring it, but, as remarked by T. George Allen, it might still be a source of useful approaches.

A second factor in scholarly unease with esoterica relates to the composition and habits of the Egyptological community. In order to avoid arguing through their rejection of approaches like that of Schwaller de Lubicz, Egyptologists adopt a similar strategy to that of Green. It is as if they announced, as initiates into a secret science, that the message of that science was that it held no secrets and that antiquity had none. Because it closes off possible approaches, this position is paradoxical, but the motivation for it is comprehensible. Too much pluralism in methods would leave no common discourse within which research could continue.[24] Scholars like Morenz may have had an additional instinctive reason for maintaining such a view, because they could have associated its opposite with abhorrent features of the Nazi Germany of their youth.[25]

In attitudes to ancient restricted knowledge, a Christian/agnostic division has also been discernible, in which Étienne Drioton[26] and Jozef Vergote,[27] for example, maintained that the knowledgeable in Egypt were monotheists but did not publicize their beliefs, while the rest remained polytheists. The group who set up monuments in antiquity was, however, so small that they might have been expected to share such ideas, or at least not to separate them as rigidly as these authors would wish. For similar reasons, the proposed restriction of expressed monotheistic ideas to instruction texts is unlikely, especially since these texts had a wide distribution among the elite. This is not to say that there were not distinctions of knowledge within the elite, but the idea that there were systematically different fundamental religious beliefs is implausible.[28] Here, a possible type of restricted knowledge does not seem to fit its posited context. Views like those of Drioton and Vergote are rare among non-Catholic Egyptologists. In arguing against the quasi-apologetic position of these authors, Hornung adopts the unifying approach.[29] His argument and conclusions are persuasive, but the unifying approach itself is problematic here as elsewhere.[30]

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followed a similar line in comparing *maᶜat* to Chinese *tao*. Here, it may be relevant that he was influenced by Schwaller de Lubicz (n. 14 above).

[21] Its title is paralleled by Moret's *Mystères égyptiens* (n. 96 ahead).

[22] Full title: *Le Livre des Morts est un livre d'initiation: Matériaux pour servir à l'étude de la philosophie égyptienne* (Bibliothèque d'Archéologie Orientale d'Athènes, Athens: B.A.O.A., 1955); reviews, T. G. Allen, *JNES* 17 (1958), 147–48; Ph. Derchain, *CdE* 32/63 (1957), 42–43; see also Mayassis, *Mystères et initiations de l'Égypte ancienne* (Bibliothèque d'Archéologie Orientale d'Athènes 2, Athens: B.A.O.A., 1957). I have not been able to consult this work while writing this paper, and must cite an opinion from Allen's review.

[23] "Tod und Initiation im alten Ägypten," in *Sehnsucht nach dem Urpsrung: Zu Mircea Eliade*, H. P. Duerr, ed. (Frankfurt a. M., 1983), 336–59. Now reprinted in English, trans. M. Grauer and R. Meyer, in James P. Allen *et al.*, *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (Yale Egyptological Studies 3, New Haven, 1989), 135–59.

[24] In another context, this is an essential argument of T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1969).

[25] Erhart Graefe remarks that a similar reaction to absolute rule, this time from the outside, seems to color William F. Edgerton's "The Government and the Governed in the Egyptian Empire," *JNES* 6 (1947), 152–60.

[26] For example, in É. Drioton and J. Vandier, *Les peuples de l'Orient méditerranéen* II: *L'Égypte*, 4th ed. (Paris, 1962), 63–64.

[27] "La notion de Dieu dans les livres de sagesse égyptiens," in *Les sagesses du Proche-Orient ancien* (Bibliothèque des Centres d'Études supérieures spécialisés: Travaux du Centre d'Études supérieures spécialisé d'Histoire des religions de Strasbourg, Paris, 1963), 159–90.

[28] In some respects, Drioton and Vergote were following a strategy I pursue later in this paper. The point here is that there was no mass creation of monuments and works of art.

[29] *Conceptions of God* (n. 6 above), 50–60.

[30] Another phenomenon Egyptologists find difficult to accept is the repeated reprinting of the works of E. A. Wallis Budge. In that case, the difficulty is not that the books contain hidden knowledge. Rather, scholars, who feel that Budge's works are below rather than outside the normal

No writer is independent of an intellectual milieu. In presenting arguments against the unifying view, I do not mean to devalue works that give an over-straightforward and enlightened picture of Egyptian society and its knowledge; rather, different approaches may derive from different modern milieux. However the milieu may change, it has some constant aspects, of which two may be cited.

First, any discipline is nearly closed and tends to seek closure, requiring both that a particular body of material and methods be learned and that formal qualifications or "initiation" be acquired, often with elaborate rituals. In their internal competition, scholars often say (and regrettably print) about work they do not like that the author does not know the material or has not learned the proper methods—for either of which the reviewer is sometimes the principal source—and so forth.[31] Scholarship and arcane initiation are perilously similar. Academic conferences show resemblances to meetings of esoteric initiates. Many major changes in scholarship come when such closure is broken and ideas are imported from outside; but these tend to be best received when proposed by internally accepted practitioners.[32]

Second, the legitimizing side of scholarship, to which I referred in citing Edward Said's *Orientalism*, remains important. People model their object of study to some extent after what they would like a society to be, or they react against that approach and say that the society was brutal and repressive. The latter approach involves some rejection of what originally attracted people to their subject, and in intellectual—as against psychological—terms it is legitimized chiefly by placing Egypt in the wider context of other complex societies. Both views imply moral positions.

Thus, Egyptologists cannot well defend themselves against those who would seek arcane knowledge in the record by saying either that the record has no such features or that Egyptological methods are open and available to all and are the only correct mode of access to the truth. Since the existence of inequality in antiquity is one of the few generalizations in the subject that readily can be termed facts, and inequality is an organizing characteristic of the evidence, it is desirable to investigate the field of socially constructed knowledge, like any other important social institution, for unequal patterning. Apart from their intrinsic worth, which it may not be for an Egyptologist to judge, the approaches of the writers whom Egyptologists wish to exclude from their group are valuable for them in pointing to problems within their discipline. In particular, approaches that will overcome prejudices against finding complexity and system must be welcomed.

In one obvious respect, these writers address a point that is denied by those who would exclude hidden knowledge: by definition, such knowledge could not normally be displayed, so that there will be no more than fragmentary evidence for it, or evidence from special contexts. The response of Green to claims that such things can be identified (n. 16 above), in which he cited

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canons of method, suspect the only explanation of the demand to be that they are bought in the belief that they give insight into hidden matters. It is difficult to say how far this suspicion is justified.

[31] Compare, for example, F. Junge on J.-C. Goyon's review of H. Sternberg, *Mythische Motive und Mythenbildung in den ägyptischen Tempeln und Papyri der griechisch-römischen Zeit*: "Rezensionen. Oder: Über das Blitzeschleudern von Olymp," *GM* 106 (1988), 47-50, referring to *BiOr* 44 (1987), 117-21. This exchange illustrates these techniques well because it is explicit; less explicit ones could be cited. For a review of Goyon with comments comparable to his about Sternberg, see M. Smith, *JEA* 74 (1988), 282-83. Few are exempt from such criticisms.

[32] The study of Egyptology based on the sociology of knowledge by H.-J. Trümpener does not go into these aspects: "Ankündigung einer soziologischen Arbeit über die Ägyptologie," *GM* 9 (1974), 11-12; *Die Existenzbedingungen einer Zwergwissenschaft: Eine Darstellung des Zusammenhangs von wissenschaftlichem Wandel und der Institutionalisierungsform einer Disziplin am Beispiel der Ägyptologie* (Report Wissenschaftsforschung 6, Bielefeld: B. Kleine Verlag, 1981). A revealing feature of this work is its title, terming the subject a "dwarf discipline," which implies that special conditions apply to orthodoxy within it. It is difficult to say whether this is correct beyond the obvious point that personal feelings may surface more than in a larger and more anonymous group.

Practitioners may be concerned that the fieldworker will not understand discussion in their subject, but such a thought is no more relevant than asking if Egyptologists understand the ancient Egyptians, or if any study of a community from outside understands that community. Although criticism of the fieldworker by his data is awkward, it can be said that Trümpener's essay is based on limited fieldwork.

instruction texts, is misleading. Instruction texts were the most widely used literary texts of antiquity, and must be a vehicle for public knowledge and wisdom, not for the esoteric; they also address a relatively wide range of social groups.

II. Ancient Knowledge: Restrictions and Uses

A. *Preliminary*

A good point of departure for placing evidence for restricted knowledge in a rudimentary model of the Egyptian elite is the general one that knowledge is an instrument of power, is integral to socialization, and is a resource subject to controls for which the basic premise is that no one knows everything. Unequal distribution of knowledge is virtually universal, occurring in societies of all types. Small, acephalous societies often have vital rites of initiation, for example at puberty. The knowledge imparted in such contexts may not seem very distinctive or meaningful to the outsider,[33] but this does not detract from its significance, much of which may be in separating social categories and stages of life. Other forms of learning, such as self-knowledge in the construction of an identity, can be important in these initiations, but are hardly accessible to the outsider. In addition to widespread but restricted knowledge of this sort, many societies, again including very small-scale ones, contain secret societies or other specialized groups with their own bodies of knowledge.[34] There may be supplementary modes of access to knowledge, such as mystical enlightenment. Although Egyptologists mostly deny that these existed in antiquity, the evidence for Egyptian religion and religious practice is insufficient to exclude their having done so, while analogies between Egyptian texts and Hermetic material may support the hypothesis of such conceptions in earlier times.[35] In this paper I return to these possibilities only in the case of "mysticism."[36]

In a complex society, knowledge mostly has a complex distribution. There can be formal or substantive restrictions on secular knowledge; I return to these in Section III. A major focus of the complex distribution of knowledge is likely to be religious, because of the prominent and integral position of religion in the institutions of many societies.

Apart from this general consideration, restriction of religious knowledge in Egypt should be expected, because access to religious practice was restricted, at least as regards cult, entry into the temples, and related approaches to the gods: limited physical or organizational access is a first basis for restriction. It would be surprising if there were not some homology between access to religious centers and to religious knowledge. On the level of experience rather than of bodies of knowledge, people who could not enter the temples would know that others could do so and had experiences that were not generally shared. Since in antiquity most temple offices were held by men, there is also an asymmetry between the sexes in religious knowledge, as in most spheres of life. Yet, despite the exclusiveness of religious practice in the regular temples, both the practice and its associated knowledge may have been more widely distributed than some special forms of religious knowledge, to which I return ahead; relatively large numbers of people held temple office of some sort.[37] Decorum (Section III) makes

[33] Numerous examples are cited by J. Goody, *The Interface between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge, etc., 1987); see also, for example, A. Forge, "Style and Meaning in Sepik Art," in *Primitive Art and Society*, A. Forge, ed. (London and New York, 1973), 169–92, esp. 189–91, where what is "seen" or known cannot be specified in other terms. See further M. Douglas, "Dogon Culture—Arcane and Profane," *Africa* 38 (1968), 16–25 (with some ethnocentric assumptions); valuable discussion by F. Barth, *Ritual and Knowledge among the Baktaman of New Guinea* (Oslo and New Haven, 1975), 223–31.

[34] See previous note; also, for example, N. D. Munn, *Walbiri Iconography: Graphic Representation and Cultural Symbolism in a Central Australian Society*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1986).

[35] See Fowden (n. 11 above).

[36] For possible allusions to meditation in the Coffin Texts, see Ph. Derchain, "De la magie à la méditation," in *La magia in Egitto ai tempi dei faraoni*, A. Roccati and A. Siliotti eds. Atti, Convegno internazionale di studi, Milano . . . 1985, Milan (1987), 47–55.

[37] Among exclusive social forms, cult associations, for which most evidence is of Graeco-Roman date, could be cited: F. de Cenival, *Les associations religieuses en Égypte d'après les documents démotiques* (IFAO BE 46, 1972); P. Vernus, "Kultgenossenschaft," *LÄ* III, 848–50. These are professional groups rather than people brought together by

even normal temple reliefs of king offering to god into a restricted category of material, but distinctively secret texts and representations of the sort I discuss in Section II B hardly partook in that system. The general restriction of temple relief should be seen in rather different terms, as a precondition in the background to the most restricted forms of knowledge that were transmitted in written or pictorial form. These then form an inner layer of restriction, presumably the preserve of an inner group of initiates whose identity it is not possible to specify.

A second type of restriction has a different character. Domains of knowledge include the spoken and the written. Neither need be freely available, and Egyptian writing was limited to a tiny proportion of the people.[38] This initial reduction is vital here, because the available evidence is in written, or written and iconographic sources; for accessible periods of history, any relevant restricted oral knowledge will sit within what was written rather than pointing beyond it. Both in the elite and between elite and others, oral forms of restriction were probably also generally important, but might not be related to the material that is available to us. Until writing became widespread, oral communication would have been the prime context for the restriction of knowledge. In the oral context, the means of restriction is partly reduced social contact and selection among social groups and occasions, so that social hierarchies and hierarchies of knowledge are likely to be closely homologous, as are specializations of function, of relevant knowledge, and, in many societies, of social sub-groups.

Between different groups in the literate elite, some restrictions probably reinforced hierarchy or afforded a field for competition and display, while others were protective of apotropaic, relating to the view of a fragile cosmos that needed reaffirmation, within which certain things might be too portentous to state or write publicly (so far as writing was a public medium). These two aspects cannot be separated entirely.

The restricted knowledge to which some people have access can be passive and "utilitarian," with what is known serving only for the performance of duties or being a necessary feature of one's position; or it can be active, so that it brings benefits, notably religious ones, to the knower. Passive knowledge too may bring prestige. Much display of knowledge will not be in written form, although it will often relate to written materials. When it is written, what is shown must not reveal what is known. What has not been identified in Egypt and seems implausible is a formal restriction on who might acquire the basic knowledge of literacy, which would be a prerequisite for access to the more recondite material I discuss; such a restriction is attested from late Babylonian Uruk.[39] In the absence of strong evidence either way, it would be wrong to exclude such a possibility.

B. *Restricted religious access and knowledge*

I have suggested elsewhere[40] that an Old Kingdom example of passive display is in the inscriptions of two Fifth and Sixth Dynasty high priests of Ptah, whose titularies include some unparalleled and probably fabricated items based on a list of Memphite gods which was old by the time when they used it. Earlier instances might be difficult to identify. The example suggests two main points. First, there is an associated hypothesis that the chief early form for recording important cultural matters was the tabular list, which depends on layout and thus is a written genre rather than an oral one, removing the knowledge it contains from general currency. This preference for listing and grouping may have further implications for high-cultural transmission, because it devalues continuous text and

initiation; connections between them and secret knowledge are generally rejected.

[38] See J. Baines and C. J. Eyre, "Four Notes on Literacy," *GM* 61 (1983), 65–74.

[39] P.-A. Beaulieu, "New Evidence for the Existence of Secret Knowledge in First Millennium Babylonia," paper presented to the American Oriental Society meeting, New Orleans, March 1989; to be published in 1990. For a partial parallel, see the Graeco-Roman inscriptions discussed at n. 85 ahead.

[40] "An Abydos List of Gods and an Old Kingdom Use of Texts," in *Pyramid Studies and Other Essays Presented to I. E. S. Edwards*, J. Baines *et al.* eds. (EES Occasional Publication 7, London, 1988), 124–33; one copy of the full list: *KRI* I, 173, 12–176, 9.

narrative. Second, lists like these were preserved and protected in some temples, but not elsewhere, and were probably not available to all within the temple; only high priests displayed their knowledge of this one. The obvious medium for recording them is papyrus, and the preserved copies of the list in the temple of Sety I at Abydos are comparable in layout with Old Kingdom papyri.[41]

It is difficult to assess the list's significance as a piece of knowledge. Because names of gods were so important and potentially powerful, it might grant power. This one does not appear to contain anything very arcane, and seems unlikely to have a special inherent efficacy. My previous view (n. 40 above) that the display of the priests was passive should, however, be revised. Their use of the list probably does more than simply display their access to it. By claiming "priesthoods" of rare separable aspects of Ptah, these men asserted special religious privileges. So far as evidence goes, they were the only people who had those privileges (apart from the king, who would probably have had them as of right). Thus, this case may contain both active and passive elements of display.[42]

Elsewhere, the other, active model of knowledge is the more widespread. People learn things that enable them to do things, are intrinsically beneficial to them, or have both these aspects. Relevant actions include performing the temple cult. Pepy^{c}ankh the Middle of Meir, who stated that he had entered into the presence of Hathor of Cusae as her chief priest, displayed thereby an exclusive action which was probably also beneficial to his ultimate destiny.[43] Here, special opportunities and knowledge come together, forming part of a person's display of religious privilege and moral stature. This moral stature fits with the charitable and upright qualities people claimed in their biographies as enhancing their status and aiding their passage into the hereafter.

I assume that the possibilities displayed in Pepy^{c}ankh's inscription were available from early times. Whereas it used to be claimed that the "democratization" of religion from the king to the nonroyal elite occurred in the First Intermediate Period, this division is probably not neat. The earlier evidence that has been identified[44] may have implications for the spread of people's involvement in official cult and their exploitation of such privileges in display. In certain contexts, yet wider privileges might be available. The clearest instance of these is the use of royal regalia in the object friezes in coffins, most of them post-Old Kingdom in date.[45] This could be compared with access to special texts such as the Amduat (see ahead), and might have analogies in this life.

The difference between royal and nonroyal potential remains clear in the form and dimension of royal mortuary complexes and in the king's claim to perform the cult. But in the latter case, this is partly a fiction and partly a feature of decorum (Section III), and someone like Pepy^{c}ankh advertised that fact. Therefore related nonroyal restricted cult knowledge and practice cannot be precisely dated, but probably originated early. The material which is attested as confined to the king (discussed ahead) could not in reality have been kept for him alone. Increased later evidence for these topics may relate to developments in the use of writing as much as to changes in knowledge itself.

An example of knowledge displayed without revealing much of its nature is in the Eleventh

[41] See, for example, P. Posener-Kriéger, "Old Kingdom Papyrus: External Features," in *Papyrus: Structure and Usage*, M. L. Bierbrier ed. (British Museum Occasional Paper 60, London, 1986), 25–41.

[42] Sir Alan Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford, 1961), 93, seems to have linked the status as high priest of Sabu, the later of the two users of the list, with duties he performed in "exercising protection" (*stp-z3*) on a barque (*Urk.* I, 83, 7–11). Sabu's biography (*Urk.* I, 82–84) gives a very prominent position to royal rituals, and this detail could perhaps be related to the orientation of interests implied by his display of the list.

[43] *Urk.* I, 222–23; A. Roccati, *La littérature historique sous l'Ancien Empire égyptien* (Littératures Anciennes du Proche-Orient, Paris, 1982), 235; for display of the title "overseer of priests," see N. Kanawati, *Governmental Reforms in Old Kingdom Egypt* (Warminster, 1980), 130.

[44] E.g., the find of Old Kingdom "Coffin Texts" at Balat: M. Valloggia, *Balat* I: *Le mastaba de Medou-nefer* 1: *Texte* (FIFAO 31:1, 1986), 72–76.

[45] G. Jéquier, *Les frises des objets sur les sarcophages du Moyen Empire* (MIFAO 47, 1921). Nonroyal mortuary use of other royal decorative motifs can be established for the Old Kingdom.

Dynasty stela of the sculptor Irtisen,[46] whose owner described some of his artistic accomplishments in allusive form. Like the treatise on the king's role in the solar cult (n. 7 above), this text is organized around the idea of knowledge, which here includes the ability to make things. It states first that Irtisen knows the "secret(s) of hieroglyphs (*sšt3 nj mdw-nṯr*)," associating this with festivals and magic and saying that he excelled through his knowledge/ability. It then moves to craftsmanship or artistry, and gives three examples of knowledge, apparently in relief carving, including particular poses (two sections) and in the manufacture of inlays and similar small pieces. The text seems to be obscure and allusive, but the lack of parallels makes this obscurity hard to assess; some of the language might be clearer than appears to us. Nonetheless, the emphasis on knowledge in conjunction with the recondite nature of what is said demonstrates the prestige of special skills, and must also be seen in the general context of biographical inscriptions, hardly any of which contain such display statements. The overt connections made in the text between hieroglyphs, secrecy, magic, and competitive prestige relate Irtisen's achievements and his art to the field of religion.

A less extensive but comparable display is in the titles of the Sixth Dynasty master butcher Khnum. These begin with "keeper of the secrets of darkness (*ḫrj-sšt3 nj kkw*)" and are followed by a group written in cryptography, for which Henry George Fischer proposes the rendering "Who Opens It (the darkness) in Strangling the Bird of the Desert Regions."[47] Here again, the privileged activity of the inscription owner is stated at the beginning to be secret, and its precise nature is given in obscure, allusive form.

A much more widespread display of "secrecy" is in the title *ḫrj-sšt3* (also held by the butcher), which is normally rendered "keeper of secrets." Sabu, one of the users of the list of Memphite gods, was "keeper of the secrets of all works," presumably, as high priest of Ptah, in control of construction or artistic activity. The more general significance of *ḫrj-sšt3* is difficult to assess, because it fits relatively low in the system of ranking titles.[48] When combined with specifying extensions, it might have more meaning than by itself. If its ranking position is taken at face value, it could mean that people of a certain rank had a general access to "secret" matters, which could be either confidential (Section III) or secret in a religious sense; royalty might have some interest in blurring this distinction, because it would place extra sanctions on the confidentiality of less religious information. Common use and display of the title makes explicit the association of knowledge with power and competition. Whereas what was known might be secret, the fact that one knew it was made public.

As an illustration of the later, Middle Kingdom use of *ḫrj-sšt3*, it is worth citing titles of the Twelfth Dynasty nomarch Djehutihotpe of el-Barsha. One title string makes him "*sm*-priest, controller of the lord's *šnḏwt*-kilt, lector priest and chief,[49] keeper of the secrets of god's words (hieroglyphic writing), . . . controller of every (divine) office."[50] In other strings he was "keeper of the secrets of seeing One [ ] in the house of Thoth,"[51] and "keeper of the secrets of rituals (or perhaps 'divine property': *jḫt*)."[52] These must be prestigious titles, because they were borne by the leading citizen of his region, who also went so far as to commission a colossal statue of himself. Scholars have tended not to take the wording of *ḫrj-sšt3* seriously, and this is a reasonable approach, because the interpretation of titles by etymology can be very misleading. Some significance should, however, be attached to the meaning of *ḫrj-sšt3*, because it fits, for example, with attitudes to ancient and

[46] Louvre C 14. W. Barta, *Das Selbstzeugnis eines altägyptischen Künstlers (Stele Louvre C14)* (MÄS 22, 1970); Alexander Badawy, "Stela C 14 of the Louvre reconsidered," *BiOr* 28 (1971), 174–76.

[47] "Five Inscriptions of the Old Kingdom: 4. Enigmatic Epithets of a Master Butcher," *ZÄS* 105 (1978), 56–57.

[48] Baer, *Rank and Title* (n. 3 above), e.g., p. 35.

[49] *ḫrj-ḥ3b ḫrj-tp*. For this rendering, see J. Quaegebeur, "La désignation *(P3-)ḫry-tp* : *Phritob*," in *Form und Mass . . . Festschrift für Gerhard Fecht*, J. Osing and G. Dreyer eds. (ÄAT 12, 1987), 360–94.

[50] *Urk.* VII, 45, 13–16 (correcting the text of Newberry).

[51] *Urk.* VII, 45, 9.

[52] *Urk.* VII, 52, 10; P. E. Newberry, *El Bersheh* I: (*The Tomb of Tehutihetep*) (ASE 3, n.d.), pl. 18, 3rd register down, middle.

obscure writings, as in the Thirteenth Dynasty inscription of Neferhotep, where the king is able to find and read texts in the archives that the officials cannot interpret.[53] Thus, the implications of this title remained remarkably similar for many centuries. They point in two directions, toward the separation of religious rituals, performed in principle by people of high status, and toward the exclusiveness of writing. Those who used these titles aspired to both kinds of prestige. An extra religious overtone to the title may be suggested by the introduction of the writing of *ḥrj-sšt3* with a figure of Anubis, or Anubis on his chest, in the Middle Kingdom.[54]

The title *ḥrj-sšt3* derives from the root *št3/sšt3* "secret" or "difficult,"[55] which should be evaluated for its wider implications. Many usages describe things that are secret or hidden, but these mainly focus on the next world, which the Egyptians stated could not be known directly. This point is encapsulated by the introduction to a hymn for the setting sun, which terms its subject the *št3w d3t*, "secrets of the underworld."[56] Examples of such usages have been collected by Hartwig Altenmüller;[57] the question is how far the notion of "secrets" in this form relates to the affairs of the living. Contexts in which it does relate to them are in the use of magic, and in the notion that the true name of a god is concealed and it would be dangerous to reveal it; but much of this evidence comes from within magical texts, and thus must be suspect as internal to magical discourse. While magic was a focus of prestige and has associations with secrecy and restriction, this usage of *št3/sšt3* brings no decisive insight into the organization of knowledge.

C. *The solar cult and cult initiation*

In the solar cult there are multiple layers of restricted knowledge, of a more narrowly religious kind than the evidence just discussed. This material has been treated repeatedly by Jan Assmann.[58] The hourly hymns to the sun god and the two treatises about the king's role in it were not inscribed in any public place until late Ramessid times. The same applies to the "framing text" for the litany from another liturgical cycle of solar hymns, which is first attested from the Twenty-first Dynasty.[59] Essentially, Assmann interprets this concealment as a safe-keeping of something that was so serious and important that it could not be made public.

Assmann assumes that the hourly hymns, in particular, are ancient, although he does not give a precise date for them. The hymns and treatises are first attested from the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri, where some archaisms in other texts look as if they are based in

[53] W. Helck, *Historisch-biographische Texte der 2. Zwischenzeit und neue Texte der 18. Dynastie* (KÄT, 1975), 21-29, esp. p. 22. R. Anthes, "Die Berichte des Neferhotep und des Ichernofret über das Osirisfest in Abydos," in *Festschrift zum 150jährigen Bestehen des Berliner Ägyptischen Museums* (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Mitteilungen aus der Ägyptischen Sammlung 8, Berlin [East], 1974), 15-49.

[54] *Wb.* IV, 298, 12: "seit m." See also W. A. Ward, *Index of Egyptian Administrative and Religious Titles of the Middle Kingdom, with a Glossary of Words and Phrases Used* (Beirut, 1982), nos. 1004-1040; H. G. Fischer, *Egyptian Titles of the Middle Kingdom: A Supplement to Wm. Ward's INDEX* (New York, 1985), nos. 1004a-1040a. See also next note.

[55] *Wb.* IV, 296, end-300, 6 (*sšt3*); 551, 3-556, 1 (*št3*) (inclusive references for roots of both forms). For further examples, see D. Meeks, *L'année lexicographique* 1-3 (1977-79, Paris, 1980-82), s.v. *sšt3*, *št3*.

[56] J. Assmann, *Liturgische Lieder an den Sonnengott: Untersuchungen zur altägyptischen Hymnik* 1 (MÄS 19, 1969), 29-31. The root is exceptionally common in the Litany of Re; see E. Hornung, *Das Buch der Anbetung des Re (Sonnenlitanei) nach den Versionen des Neuen Reiches*, 2 vols. (AH 2-3, 1975-76); for collections of examples, see Meeks, *AL* 1 (1977; n. 55 above), 348, 380-81.

[57] "Geheimnis," *LÄ* II, 510-13.

[58] See especially, *Der König als Sonnenpriester* (n. 7 above); *Re und Amun: die Krise des polytheistischen Weltbilds im Ägypten der 18.-20. Dynastie* (OBO 51, 1983), 22-53. Some details in Assmann's discussions, such as his later view that the "Treatise" was deliberately garbled in the Luxor temple (*Re und Amun*, 25), are debatable, but his essential position can hardly be questioned.

The second treatise, accompanying the picture of the solar barque in the evening, has not been interpreted (see Assmann, *Re und Amun*, 27, n. 15), but preserved sections do not include the word *rḫ* "know," and it seems to have a different organization from the morning treatise. It also appears to be shorter. See Brunner, *Die südlichen Räume* (n. 14 above), pls. 12, 41, scene 69; R. A. Parker, J. Leclant and J.-C. Goyon, *The Edifice of Taharqa by the Sacred Lake of Karnak* (Brown Egyptological Studies 8, 1979), pl. 20, p. 42.

[59] Assmann, *Liturgische Lieder* (n. 56 above), table on p. 18, text pp. 410-11.

Old Kingdom models; the hymns might go back to such a date. Other evidence suggests that the necessary context of a group of solar initiates should be posited for the Old Kingdom, and so indirectly supports such a hypothesis.

Pyramid Texts Spell 456,[60] whose core consists of three possibly solar invocations (but see n. 60), concludes, very much in the style of the Book of the Dead: "The one who knows it—this spell of Re—/the one who performs them—these magical spells of Harakhte—/he will be an Acquaintance (*rḫj*) of Re, /he will be a Companion (*smr*) of Harakhte" (§855). This is then varied to say that the king is such a person, and so will be helped up to the sky into the retinue of Re (§856). This is the earliest occurrence of such a formula for knowledge and the access which it grants. Since the main body of later special knowledge is solar (see ahead), it is noteworthy that the formula at the end of the spell uses solar names, and seems to be applied only secondarily to the king. As Kurt Sethe remarked in his commentary, the Old Kingdom court provides a model for the circumstances described; the significance of this analogy is uncertain. There are no clear mortuary associations in the three principal invocations. The spell could derive from the solar cult, so that the "knowledge" it describes would be that of one who performed that cult. The spell is unique in the published corpus, perhaps in part because it was not specifically royal.

An example of what could be Old Kingdom restricted material in a solar context is the unique decoration of the chamber of the seasons in the solar temple of Neuserre^{c}.[61] This contains "encyclopaedic" knowledge in a context to which hardly anyone would have access. The knowledge is presumably depicted as exhibiting the solar creator's beneficence toward the entire created world. In the temple context, it may offer a forerunner for the more obviously esoteric knowledge of the underworld collected in the underworld books. Underworld material is inappropriate for temples, and the only related compositions known from temples are the more cosmographic and less "mythological" Books of Day and Night (n. 119 ahead). The mixed pictorial and linguistic form of the Neuserre^{c} decoration offers a partial analogy to the list of Memphite gods, which may suggest that the decoration had an early source or model, before continuous written language became normal; but the later parallel of the underworld books shows that such conventions could be preserved for very long periods.[62]

In another social context, the explicit formula in the Pyramid Texts can be related to nonroyal inscriptions of the Old Kingdom. A common formula centers on the deceased's "knowing" certain things, mostly magical in character.[63] The deceased is often said to be a "lector priest,"

[60] *PT* §§852-56 (P, M and N); K. Sethe, *Übersetzung und Kommentar zu den altägyptischen Pyramidentexten* IV (Glückstadt, Hamburg and New York, n.d.), 110-20 (noting *Book of the Dead* parallels); E. Edel, *Altägyptische Grammatik* II (AnOr 39, 1964), §838; R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts Translated into English* (Oxford, 1969), 151-52; J. P. Allen, *The Inflection of the Verb in the Pyramid Texts* (Bibliotheca Aegyptia 2, 1984), §§15, 29A4, 367B, 370B (discussions of the passage translated here); T. G. Allen, *Occurrences of Pyramid Texts with Cross Indexes of These and Other Egyptian Mortuary Texts* (SAOC 27, 1950), 86-87, lists no later parallels for this spell. Assmann, *Liturgische Lieder* (n. 56 above), 36, points out the analogy between this passage and formulas in the *Book of the Dead.*

I am grateful to Rolf Krauss for discussion of this spell. Krauss relates the text to the planet Mars, identified with Harakhte in the Pyramid Texts (this would fit also with the allusion to the "father" of Harakhte in §854b); the redness alluded to in the main part of the spell would then be that of Mars and not, as Faulkner suggested, of the setting sun. The text may perhaps support stellar and solar interpretations. Since it appears to derive from a non-mortuary and non-royal source, it may have been a solar spell taken over with stellar meaning in the Pyramid Texts. Such an interpretation would not imply that the solar conceptions were older than the stellar. Since solar beliefs are not attested from the beginning of Egyptian history, the opposite is as likely to be the case. What the interpretation would assume is that by the Old Kingdom solar beliefs were well established outside the mortuary context, whereas stellar ones might be appropriate within that context. There could be a variety of reasons for adapting a solar spell from a nonmortuary context to stellar purposes.

[61] PM III^{2}, 319-24; E. Edel and S. Wenig, *Die Jahreszeitenreliefs aus dem Sonnenheiligtum des Königs Ne-user-Re* (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Mitteilungen aus der Ägyptischen Sammlung 7, Berlin, 1974).

[62] For a possible very early date for the *Amduat*, see n. 68 ahead.

[63] E. Edel, *Untersuchungen zur Phraseologie der ägyptischen Inschriften des Alten Reiches* (=*MDAIK* 13:1, 1944), 19-26, §§21-23; formulas quoted p. 23, e); p. 24, f).

who would presumably have access to restricted religious knowledge. One example runs "I have learned every secret magical spell of the court (*ḥkꜣ nb štꜣ nj ḫnw*), every secret formula (*sštꜣ*) through which one becomes a spirit in the necropolis," neatly drawing a parallel between "court" secrecy in this life and other forms that are effective for the hereafter. An inverted form is also known, in which the owner asserts that "no potent magical spell was ever concealed from me (*n zp štꜣ ḥkꜣ nb jr.j jqr*)." Thus, the connections of knowledge, secrecy in the word *štꜣ*, and magic are made here and are associated with the inner elite, with cult activity, and with writing.

This material appears to provide both specific evidence and the requisite social context for restricted solar and related knowledge in the Old Kingdom. It remains unlikely that other relevant compositions, such as the *Amduat*, date to the Old Kingdom (see ahead), but the First Intermediate Period is not an insuperable barrier before which later phenomena could not have occurred. Since there was no fundamental change in the position of central cults in relation to king, elite, priesthoods, and the wider population between the Old and Middle Kingdoms, it is best to assume that the types of restriction which are more clearly attested from later times applied already in the Old Kingdom.

The treatise on the king's role in the solar cult, which Assmann plausibly dates to the Middle Kingdom, gives a fuller insight into the character and purpose of knowledge in the solar cult (only one of two treatises has been deciphered). In its central stanzas, the king is said eight times to "know" particular things. The things he knows form a mythologized description of sunrise. In the small compass of the text, little explicit could be said, but in fact nothing is revealed; it is like having allusive titles of books but no book. When it is stated that the king knows "that secret speech which the Eastern Souls speak," the content of the speech is not indicated, and the souls are not identified—although this is clarified in the accompanying vignette.[64] The king's knowledge is displayed to the very few who might read the text (which they could hardly do where it was set up in the temple), but the outsider is told nothing. In terms of the text's progression, the central stanzas about knowledge lead to the final ones in which the king's general function on earth is described, and it is natural to read the former as a precondition of the latter. This may be valid in terms of the king's legitimation, but in the cult his knowledge probably has further meanings, serving to maintain the sun in its course through his conscious and aware involvement.

Assmann[65] places this text in the same context as the underworld books,[66] whose significance for hidden knowledge is partly similar and partly broader. Like the treatise and the hymns, they were inscribed only in the most inaccessible places, and were not disseminated until after the New Kingdom. The title of the full version of the *Amduat* concerns knowledge, and this motif recurs elsewhere in the composition. Edward F. Wente[67] has collected these passages and has noted that they do not focus on the next world and are not specifically royal, despite the use of these compositions to decorate royal tombs. Both Wente and Assmann date the *Amduat* to the Middle Kingdom.[68] Thus, its inscription in New Kingdom royal tombs is far from what these passages point to as its context and purpose. The knowledge it contains is said to be beneficial on earth to those who know it.[69] The *Amduat* is

[64] For the relief context, see Brunner, *Die südlichen Räume* (n. 14 above), pls. 16, 66. On the conception of the baboons, see H. te Velde, "Some Remarks on the Mysterious Language of the Baboons," in *Funerary Symbols and Religion: Essays Dedicated to Professor M. S. H. G. Heerma van Voss . . .*, J. H. Kamstra *et al.* eds. (Kampen, 1988), 129–37.

[65] *Der König als Sonnenpriester* (n. 7 above), esp. pp. 56–57; *Re und Amun* (n. 58 above), 32–33.

[66] E. Hornung, *Ägyptische Unterweltsbücher*, 2nd ed. (Die Bibliothek der Alten Welt, Der Alte Orient, Zurich and Munich, 1984); id., *Das Buch von den Pforten des Jenseits*, 2 vols. (AH 7–8, 1979–80); id., *Texte zum Amduat* 1 (AH 13, 1987).

[67] "Mysticism in Pharaonic Egypt?" *JNES* 41 (1982), 161–79.

[68] H. Altenmüller, "Jenseitsbücher, Jenseitsführer," in *Ägyptologie* 2: *Literatur*, 2nd ed. (HdO 1, 1, 2, 1970), 72, suggests that the text could go back to the Fourth/Fifth Dynasty. There are, however, no clear linguistic pointers to such an early date, and extensive redaction of texts into later forms of the language was uncommon.

[69] See also further parallels cited by Wente (n. 67 above), 161–62.

the nearest ancient text to an academic book: there is a full version and a short version, whose Egyptian designation *sḫwj*[70] could almost be rendered "abstract"; and in the tomb of Thutmose III there is an "index" in the form of a separate listing of all the divine figures.[71] The "academic" presentation is appropriate for a text to which access is restricted, but which is studied and used in different ways, while the form of copies, in which lacunae in the archetypes were not always restored, suggests a concern with the exact wording.[72] Wente sees the "initiation" vouchsafed to those knowing the text as quasi-mystical, and entitles his article accordingly.[73] Although his term may stretch the evidence of the composition, it is valuable in suggesting how seemingly dry and "academic" knowledge can have an application which places it on an altogether different level.

Problems with the unifying view of ancient knowledge can be illustrated in this case. Hornung[74] accepts some of Assmann's arguments about initiation in the Book of the Dead,[75] but retains his earlier view that what is recorded in the *Amduat* and related compositions is pure knowledge—"Wissenschaft"—even if it is esoteric and fully available only to the king. He notes that Assmann does not pursue the question of who initiated whom; but that is in some respects secondary, because in any case the king alone could not have been the creator and transmitter of such knowledge: some circle of "initiates" must have existed, and it is hard to see their knowledge as disinterested.

The alleged exclusiveness of the king's knowledge has wider implications. There is no evidence that kings exploited it for political ends, and since the contexts in which it is revealed are so recondite, this might have been difficult, except in the sense that it legitimized any king's role. But the idea is powerful. Whereas the circle of initiates knew what the king knew, their knowledge was probably less significant because of their different position. The king acted in maintaining the cosmos on the basis of that knowledge while they did not, or did so only by delegation. Such a distinction, which has a good parallel in priestly practice, would enable the king to retain his unique position while accepting instruction from others, and would allow the necessary safeguards for transmission. Nonetheless, both the Pyramid Text spell cited above and the material in the *Amduat* suggest that there was significance in nonroyal solar knowledge, so that the presentation of the king's position in the treatise on the solar cult should not be accepted in full.

Whereas this royal exclusiveness cannot be affirmed without qualification for traditional religion, and must be seen in the context of a group of initiates, Akhenaten used his unique knowledge in argument[76] and made it explicit in his Great Hymn (it was already implicit in his cartouche epithet "The Unique One of Re^{c}"):[77] "You are in my heart. There is none who knows you /except for your son Neferkheprure^{c} Wa^{c}enre^{c}. /You cause him to comprehend (*šsꜣ m*) your ways and your might." This unique knowledge parallels the exclusivism of Akhenaten's religious and political position. The earlier concealed royal statement is replaced by an open declaration. This alteration can be set beside numerous changes in decorum (Section

[70] E. Hornung, *Das Amduat: Die Kurzfassung; Nachträge* (ÄgAbh 7, 1967), 1, 2; 27; 36; 55.

[71] P. Bucher, *Les textes des tombes de Thoutmosis III et Aménophis II* 1 (MIFAO 60, 1932), pls. 14-22.

[72] See Wente (n. 67 above), 164; see also H. Altenmüller, "Zur Überlieferung des Amduat," *JEOL* 20 (1968), 27-42.

[73] For a negative view on the possibility of Egyptian "mysticism," see J. Assmann, *Ägypten: Theologie und Frömmigkeit einer frühen Hochkultur* (Stuttgart, 1984), 183-87. Because the range of religious practices is poorly known, I would not wish to exclude the possibility of its occurrence.

[74] *Geist der Pharaonenzeit* (Zurich and Munich, 1989), 112-14, 215-16.

[75] "Tod und Initiation" (n. 23 above); see also id., "Die Verborgenheit des Mythos in Ägypten," *GM* 25 (1977), 34-36.

[76] See D. B. Redford, "A Royal Speech from the Blocks of the 10th Pylon," *BES* 3 (1981), 87-102.

[77] M. Sandman, *Texts from the Time of Akhenaten* (BiAe 8, 1938), 95, 11. 16-17. Translations: M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* II: *The New Kingdom* (Berkeley, etc., 1976), 99; J. Assmann, *Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete* (Zurich and Munich, 1975), 220. The form of the verb *dj.k* and the syntax of the passage as a whole are not clear. For general interpretation of the passage, see J. Assmann, "Die 'Häresie' des Echnaton: Aspekte der Amarna-Religion," *Saeculum* 23 (1972), 122-24.

III) attested from the reign.[78] While Akhenaten drew the full conclusions from this royal prerogative and his officials displayed their total secular and religious dependence on him,[79] his statement should not be taken literally. Since his god was politically more than religiously different from that of the existing "new solar religion" known from a number of texts,[80] there was evidently a group of people who developed these conceptions.[81] The special character of his knowledge therefore has analogies with that of the traditional king, but he drew different, seemingly reductive conclusions from it.

The association of initiation and knowledge can be paralleled among the living, paradoxically, by Chapter 125 of the *Book of the Dead*, while similar implications are common in the notations at the ends of spells in the *Coffin Texts* and *Book of the Dead* (as well as occurring in the bodies of spells).[82] Most people did not have access to these texts. The formulas, which start "As for the man who knows this spell . . . ," imply that there are people who will not know them; knowledge of them gives the capacity to do something. What this means for the hereafter is not relevant here, but the format of many spells, in which one gains entrance to places because one knows something, is likely to have earthly analogies, the obvious one being some form of initiation. For *Book of the Dead* 125, the position is clearer. A Greek papyrus and other parallels suggest that the original context of its declarations of innocence is "initiation" into some level of the priesthood.[83] Special knowledge does not seem to be strongly implied, but exclusiveness, as well as special qualification and rituals associated with entry, certainly are.

The text of *Book of the Dead* 125 may have been part of a restricted transmission. This possibility is suggested by the wide temporal spread of relevant sources, including the one in Greek, and by details of the text itself which may place it in the First Intermediate Period or early Middle Kingdom.[84] If this dating is correct, the text, or a forerunner with similar organization, was transmitted for many centuries before it was used in the *Book of the Dead.* The thematic parallels in Graeco-Roman temples[85] make explicit connections between initiation into the temple and priesthood on the one hand, and moral qualities of uprightness and generosity on the other. In addition, they forbid the priests to reveal the mysteries (*sšt3*) they have learned of the gods and goddesses (Kom Ombo) or in the temple (Edfu); but they do not make clear to whom these might be revealed. This complex of ideas brings full circle the type of claim to religious access and social role found in the late Old Kingdom biographies cited in Section II B above. The Graeco-Roman texts have

[78] See J. Baines, *Fecundity Figures: Egyptian Personification and the Iconology of a Genre* (Warminster and Chicago, 1985), 280 with p. vii. See also Section 3 ahead.

[79] J. Assmann, "Die 'loyalistische Lehre' Echnatons," *SAK* 8 (1980), 9–19.

[80] See Assmann, *Re und Amun* (n. 58 above), 96–143, esp. 96–98.

[81] Similarly, to suggest that Akhenaten composed his own Great Hymn (e.g., D. B. Redford, *Akhenaten the Heretic King*, Princeton, NJ, 1984, 177, 234) is a little like assuming that modern politicians write their own speeches.

[82] E.g., *CT* VII, 471*c–g*; translation: M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* I: *The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley, etc., 1973), 131–33; T. G. 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* (SAOC 37, 1974), 6, T 1 (Sp. 1); 41, T 1 (Sp. 31); 58, T 2 (Sp. 64); 65, T 1 (Sp. 72); 113, T (Sp. 136B); these references include precise citations of the original sources. Several of these examples emphasize that the knowledge may be had on earth, although the context may limit its utility to the next world. Very often the context is said to be secret, mysterious, or dangerous. This aspect may be related as much to the magical character of the texts as to any narrowly esoteric qualities.

[83] R. Grieshammer, "Zum 'Sitz im Leben' der negativen Sündenbekenntnis," *ZDMG Supplement* 2 (1974), 19–25; R. Merkelbach, *Die Unschuldserklärungen und Beichten im ägyptischen Totenbuch, in der römischen Elegie, und im antiken Rom* (Kurzberichte aus den Giessener Papyrus-Sammlungen 43, Giessen, 1987).

[84] J. Yoyotte, "Le jugement des morts dans l'Égypte ancienne," in *Le jugement des morts* (Sources Orientales 4, Paris, 1961), 58–65. For further texts that may be relevant here, see the studies of Assmann referred to in n. 75 above; the initiations in question are in the next life, but could again be modeled on ones in this life.

[85] Most fully presented by A. Gutbub, *Textes fondamentaux de la théologie de Kom Ombo* (IFAO BE 47:1, 1973), 144–84, with references; hieroglyphic text: J. de Morgan *et el., Catalogue des monuments de l'Égypte antique* 1:3 *Kom Ombos* 2 (Vienna, 1909), 245 no. 878. See also J.-C. Grenier, *Temples ptolémaïques et romains, répertoire bibliographique: Index des citations 1955–1974* (IFAO BE 75, 1979), 92–93, 400–401.

rather less privileged protagonists, but inhabit the same restricted, initiated world.

D. *Other contexts: cosmic order, magic, rituals*

For the Late and Graeco-Roman periods, evidence for initiation could be extended. Friedrich Junge has suggested that the initiation into the Roman Isis cult fictionalized in the Isis Book of Apuleius goes back to Egyptian practice.[86] Although his arguments are unconvincing in detail, because what he describes is not distinctive for a particular form of initiation, his position may be strengthened by Reinhold Merkelbach's observation that declarations of innocence in Latin poetry are to be associated with the Isis cult (n. 83 above). This would lead back to the living context of *Book of the Dead* 125 and show that typically Egyptian forms had traveled with the cult to the Graeco-Roman world.

Book of the Dead 125 also suggests a cosmic context in which the declarations, and perhaps wider aspects of religious knowledge, can be sited. One declaration states that the deceased does not know that which is not.[87] This has been glossed as meaning that he has not overstepped the order of things.[88] The assertion is thus one of many commitments to the fragile cosmic order against surrounding and encroaching disorder. A similar point has been given a moral dimension by Gerald E. Kadish in his discussion of Coffin Text spells against eating faeces, drinking urine, and walking head down.[89] These imagine a reversal for the next life, but they sit in the context of asserting solidarity with order. In the assumed priestly situation of the *Book of the Dead* spell, commitment to order acquires meaning for the living, who say that they have not overstepped the boundaries of the permissible. Whereas the average person might not have the opportunity to pass these boundaries, those who acquired knowledge like that of the solar cult could run a risk, particularly if the only one with the full right to the knowledge was the king. In such an area, the division between knowing what was necessary to maintain the proper order and knowing things that should not be known might be fine, and could depend more on degrees of access, initiation, or usage than on what was known. The spell's denial might seem paradoxical, since the knowledge would logically be accessible only after entering the priesthood for which one was a candidate, but in such contexts "foresight" may occur, so that this interpretation is compatible with the text's function. The candidate might also have dangerous knowledge from outside the temple, such as that of some magical spells.

The possibility of overstepping the proper order is illustrated in magical spells where the performer threatens to overturn the cosmos if his spell does not succeed.[90] It is unknown whether these spells and use of them, or use of them by the wrong people, constitute such an overstepping, but the effects they evoke must do so. This association evokes the question of whether magic constitutes restricted knowledge. This is unlikely to be true of magic as such, because it was widely disseminated in society, while the ideology that magic was there to "forestall the untoward"[91] should imply that its benefits—as against the ability to enact specific performances—were freely available; but particular categories of magic are very commonly restricted. The appeal of the exotic and obscure is strong here, leading to magical texts in other languages, the citation of elaborate pedigrees or precedents for spells, and so forth. This is a different type of exclusivism from what I have been discussing, because it advertises secrecy for effect rather than creating absolute concealment.

[86] "Isis und die ägyptischen Mysterien," in *Aspekte der spätägyptischen Religion*, W. Westendorf ed. (GOF 4:9, 1979), 93–115.

[87] See C. Maystre, *Les déclarations d'innocence (Livre des Morts, chapitre 125)* (IFAO RAPH 8, 1937), 25–26, phrase 4; translation, for example, Lichtheim, *Literature* II (n. 77 above), 125 with n. 5.

[88] E.g., Hornung, *Conceptions* (n. 6 above), 181.

[89] "The Scatophagous Egyptian," *JSSEA* 9 (1978), 203–17. For the interpretation of *sḫdḫd* as "head down," see P. Barguet, *Le livre des morts des anciens égyptiens* (Littératures Anciennes du Proche-Orient, Paris, 1967), 89, n. 1 to Ch. 51.

[90] See e.g., S. Sauneron, "Le monde du magicien égyptien," in *Le monde du sorcier* (Sources Orientales 7, Paris, 1966), 40–41.

[91] As the Instruction for Merikare^{c} may be freely rendered: W. Helck, *Die Lehre für König Merikare* (KÄT, 1977), 86; see, for example, Lichtheim, *Literature* I (n. 82 above), 106.

The emphasis on knowledge in magic is comparable to what is found in the underworld books and *Book of the Dead*, and further formal restrictions are possible. These are also suggested by the folk image of the magician as "lector priest and chief." Since the spells state that the consequences of extreme knowledge in magic can be so dire, limitations to its use are to be expected; they will also help to legitimize it by minimizing discrepancies between what is claimed and what happens. Nothing like the anti-sorcery edicts of the Roman Empire is known from native Egypt, but there is evidence that the Romans considered Egypt to be a land with dangerous magical knowledge and associated such knowledge with Cheops and the Great Pyramid.[92]

Other types of religious evidence can be cited. I give some examples, but a full listing is impractical. One potential case is the death of Osiris, which is hardly stated explicitly in Egyptian texts. This omission may not relate closely to restricted knowledge, because texts that allude to his death would make little sense if the reader did not know about it. A partial exception to Hornung's blanket statement that the death is never mentioned[93] is revealing. This is the "Memphite Theology," which says that he was "buried(?)" and, a little later, that he was "drowned."[94] This text, whose date is disputed between the later New Kingdom and the Late Period, is presented as being a unique ancient manuscript; its layout mimics early written forms. It is not a conventional hymn or text for performance, but an exposition, partly in dialogue form. As such, it might not be subject to the same constraints as normal inscriptional material, so that it could include otherwise impermissible content. Access to it would surely have been limited, so it may not break the rule that a statement of Osiris' death should not be publicly inscribed. Here, access rather than knowledge would be the crucial point at stake.

The Twelfth Dynasty narrative of Ikhernofret[95] about his refurbishing of the temple of Osiris at Abydos and subsequent performance of the main festival there is a public counterpart to the statement of the Memphite Theology. Much of Ikhernofret's text is allusive rather than explicit. From very much later times, François Daumas[96] pointed to a Ptolemaic biographical inscription whose owner narrated his devotion to his deity and performance of celebratory rituals, but did not name the deity—evidently Hathor—or say anything specific about her. He suggested that membership of a restricted circle of devotees was being displayed. Daumas used similar arguments to interpret an inscription in the tomb of Petosiris at Tuna el-Gebel, where the perverse writing is not characteristic of Late Period hieroglyphic in general so much as intentionally misleading.[97]

A much earlier coded use of knowledge probably occurs in the story of *The Shipwrecked*

[92] See L. Kákosy, "Még egyszer a Cheops-piramis feltöréséről és lezárásáról," [Once more on the violation and resealing of the pyramid of Cheops] *Antik Tanulmányok* 16 (1969), 195–98. Erhart Graefe very kindly made Eva Dombradi's German translation of this article available to me.

[93] *Conceptions* (n. 6 above), 152–53.

[94] The context is very broken: H. Junker, *Die politische Lehre von Memphis* (Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften Berlin, 1941), pl. 1, ll. 17c (the word for burial is a restoration from a trace, see pp. 38–39), 19; convenient translation: Lichtheim, *Literature* I: (n. 82 above), 53; discussion of date and bibliography: H. A. Schlögl, *Der Gott Tatenen nach Texten und Bildern des Neuen Reiches* (OBO 29, 1980), 110–17.

[95] K. Sethe, *Ägyptische Lesestücke zum Gebrauch im akademischen Unterricht*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1928), 70–71, no. 14; W. K. Simpson, *The Terrace of the Great God at Abydos: The Offering Chapels of Dynasties 12 and 13* (Publications of the Pennsylvania-Yale Expedition to Egypt 5, New Haven and Philadelphia, 1974), pl. 1. Translation: Lichtheim, *Literature* I (n. 82 above), 123–25.

[96] "Les propylées du temple d'Hathor à Philae et le culte, de la déesse," *ZÄS* 95 (1968), 16–17. See also id., "Y eut-il des mystères en Égypte?" *Les Conférences de l'Atelier d'Alexandrie* (Alexandria, 1972), 37–52 (abstract by J. F. Borghouts, *AEB* 74143). The entry for this article in [M. Morfin], "Bibliographie de François Daumas," in *Hommages à François Daumas* I (Institut d'Égyptologie, Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier, 1986) xiii, states that it is a résumé of an unpublished work. Mme Morfin very kindly informs me that such incomplete works of Daumas exist as collections of material rather than consecutive manuscripts, and that this work seems not to have proceeded beyond such a collection, although Daumas referred to the topic often in teaching. Hornung, *Geist* (n. 74 above), 215–16, seems to allow for mystery cults in Hellenistic Egypt, but it is not clear from his brief statement whether he considers that these were among the native or the ethnically Greek population.

[97] "La scène de la résurrection au tombeau de Pétosiris," *BIFAO* 59 (1960), 63–80. I have not included here the use of the word "mystery" to describe crucial rites of gods, especially Osiris. See, for example, H. Schäfer, *Die Mysterien*

Sailor.[98] The story seems to evoke two important religious conceptions, the end of the cosmos, and the seventy-four forms of the sun god incorporated in the Litany of Re, but it does not present them directly.[99] The Litany belongs to the same group of texts as the hourly hymns and underworld books, and the non-continuous form of its initial enumeration could point to an ancient origin with other lists. I suggest that some of the reason for the treatment in *The Shipwrecked Sailor*—apart from the narrative potential of things that are mysterious—is in making possible an allusion to matters that could not otherwise appear in a literary text, so that there is a softened tension between the pseudo-folk form of the narrative and its content. The story has been read in varying ways, and might have been understood as variously in antiquity. My argument assumes that not all the literate would have had access to such knowledge as the seventy-four forms of the sun god (or perhaps the identities of those forms). Some might not have comprehended these aspects, but other readings are meaningful, so that the story could have circulated relatively widely.

The inscription in the tomb of Petosiris raises the question of late hieroglyphic writing and its complexity in comparison with that of earlier times.[100] This complexity was almost certainly accompanied by a reduction in the small numbers of those able to read inscriptions. Only rarely, however, does the writing have the character of concealment rather than of elaboration for the sake of enhanced meaning and symbolism.[101] The extreme case here is perhaps the Naukratis stela of Nectanebo I,[102] which is one of the most difficult hieroglyphic texts to read, but has the public topic of taxation; it would be absurd to see this as restricted, although the preserved copy probably has more to do with display in the temple than with practical use. The prerequisite for this development was probably the Late Period separation of cursive from hieroglyphic writing, which meant that those who used cursive would have in any case to be trained additionally to read hieroglyphs. The inner trained group was largely involved in the temples. Thus, this development may relate more to the exclusivism of a group than to special restrictions of knowledge.

III. The Elite Milieu; Hierarchy and Decorum

These suggested cases of restricted religious knowledge need to be set in a social context. A nonreligious example is a good point of departure. The Sixth Dynasty inscription of Weni details how its owner performed various services as he ascended the official hierarchy. Several of his actions were exceptional for his then rank. He heard a confidential or secret (*sšt3*) legal case with a vizier while holding an office whose designation is lost, together with the rank of a *z3b r3(?)-nḫn*.[103] Later, he judged litigation against a queen in secret, saying that this was exceptional for an "overseer of the *ḫntj-šj* of the palace."[104] Only the second of these titles is substantive, while *z3b r3-nḫn* is a ranking title. This fact may give the key to interpretation, as is suggested by the text's most striking example

des Osiris in Abydos unter König Sesostris III (UGAÄ 4:2, 1904); A. Moret, *Mystères égyptiens*, 3rd ed. (Paris, 1927); K. Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altägyptischen Mysterienspielen*, UGAÄ 10 (1928); É. Chassinat, *Le mystère d'Osiris au mois de Khoiak*, 2 vols. (Publications de l'IFAO, Cairo, 1966–68); S. Cauville, "Les mystères d'Osiris à Dendera: Interprétation des chapelles osiriennes," *BSFE* 112 (1988), 23–36. Some related phenomena may be relevant to the present topic, but they cannot be treated here. The studies of Daumas are closer to my theme.

[98] See "Interpreting the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor," *JEA* 76 (1990, in press).

[99] For the text, see Hornung, *Buch der Anbetung* (n. 56 above). For interpretation, see M.-T. Derchain-Urtel, "Die Schlange des Schiffbrüchigen," *SAK* 1 (1974), 83–104.

[100] E.g., S. Sauneron, *L'écriture figurative dans les textes d'Esna* (Esna 8, 1982); D. Kurth, "Die Lautwerte der Hieroglyphen in den Tempelinschriften der griechisch-römischen Zeit—Zur Systematik ihrer Herleitungsprinzipien," *ASAE* 69 (1983), 287–309.

[101] Compare, for example, the comments of Daumas, *BIFAO* 59 (1960), 78.

[102] H. Brunner, *Hieroglyphische Chrestomathie* (Wiesbaden, 1965), pls. 23–24; translation: M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* III: *The Late Period* (Berkeley, etc., 1980), 86–89.

[103] *Urk.* I, 99, 2–8. Translations: Lichtheim, *Literature* I (n. 82 above), 18–23; Roccati, *Littérature* (n. 43 above), 187–97. On the title see D. Franke, "Ursprung und Bedeutung der Titelsequenz *Z3b R3-Nḫn*," *SAK* 11 (1984), 209–17. In Franke's interpretation, the title itself would imply restricted access to a space, in this case the royal palace.

[104] *Urk.* I, 101, 13–102, 7. *ḫntj-šj* was related to the notion of elite by Ann Macy Roth in a paper presented to the International Congress of Egyptology, Munich, 1985.

of restricted material, which was made available to Weni later when he was to lead a military expedition. While he continued to hold the same office, "There was revealed to me (or: I inspected) the number of these troops; /it had never been revealed to/inspected by any 'servant' (*bꜣk*)."[105] This statement might seem almost absurd, because a commander needs to know how many troops he is to lead, but it becomes meaningful if the qualifying *bꜣk* is taken into account. Earlier in the text, classes of officials are listed more than once, apparently according to a formula, as *sr*, *sᶜḥ* and *bꜣk*.[106] The point seems to be that such information would not be available to a *bꜣk*. The other two designations are not necessarily arranged in a vertical hierarchy, but could refer to different kinds of status, such as civil and religious;[107] nonetheless, the vertical reading is the simplest. There could be three broad, hierarchically organized categories of officials.

It is not known how Weni's three categories might relate to the principal public forms of ranking in the sequences of titles established by Baer,[108] but the two are probably connected. Weni's usage may imply access to increasingly restricted knowledge as the title hierarchy was climbed, and there may have been three main levels of restriction; but this will not be the only significance of the hierarchy. As with the other material reviewed here, it does not follow that the knowledge would look very profound to the outsider—in this case it is normally confidential and "classified" information. Yet, because there were parallel phenomena elsewhere in elite culture, there could be extra sanctions and significance attached this confidentiality and secrecy, which occurs in any administrative hierarchy.

The "meritocracy" in Weni's narrative, which is most distinctive where he says that when he took a post he replaced four previous holders,[109] runs superficially counter to its restrictive aspects. There may seem to be a tension between views of a hierarchy as simply exclusive and as something one climbs through ability. The second view is partly that of a bureaucracy that aspires to efficiency, but in the political sphere the king would have an interest in promoting these ideas against more formal ones, if only to give himself room for maneuver. Whereas there might be a contradiction between knowledge hierarchies and claimed meritocracy in the religious sphere, the two may complement each other outside it.

The official acceptance and display of meritocracy may have additional significance here. In the Old Kingdom in particular, religious matter was hardly displayed on nonroyal monuments, especially not in relation to the king. Instead, display focused on individual biographies, which were mostly connected with the king, or on general moral matters, which could relate also to the next world. There was no independent monumental context in which lineage or other centrifugal status markers were exhibited. Thus, meritocratic display is part of the institutionalization of the Fifth–Sixth Dynasty bureaucracy. It reinforces the special position of the king and exploits the exclusions of decorum (see ahead) to best advantage. A counterexample may illustrate this point. One of the few Old Kingdom inscriptions to narrate a ritual is the early Fifth Dynasty one of Reᶜwer, which describes a fateful incident during the "Receiving of the prow-rope of the god's boat."[110] The text is inscribed in the form of a royal document and not as a biography, partly perhaps because of its exceptional content and partly because of the favor shown by the king in presenting the document. The only religious content Reᶜwer's contemporaries had in their inscriptions was the display of priestly titles. The Sixth Dynasty biography of Sabu (n. 40), however, does refer to the performance of rituals.

Meritocracy relates to the conclusions of Wolfgang Helck's *Untersuchungen zu den Beamtentiteln des ägyptischen Alten Reiches*[111] and of Klaus Baer. Baer hardly studied the implications of the ranking system he discovered, except to

[105] *Urk.* I, 103, 2–5; see e.g., G. E. Kadish, "Old Kingdom Activity in Nubia: Some Reconsiderations" *JEA* 52 (1966), 26–28.

[106] *Urk.* I, 99, 7–8; 101, 6–7.

[107] In later periods, *sᶜḥ* mostly referred to the dead.

[108] *Rank and Title* (n. 3 above).

[109] *Urk.* I, 100, 7–8.

[110] *Urk*, I, 232, 5; Roccati, *Littérature* (n. 43 above), 101–2.

[111] ÄgFo 18, 1954; approach reviewed by Baer, *Rank and Title* (n. 3 above), 2–8.

argue that successive kings changed the sequences for their own, essentially political purposes.[112] This argument is incomplete, if only because distinctions of rank in the state existed from much earlier times than Baer's standard sequences—most probably from its beginning. During the Old Kingdom, there was no cultural, as against political, break that would correspond with the introduction of the new system. That system is therefore probably a refinement rather than a radical change. Helck's approach, which is more intuitively based, sees cycles of archaism and development as occurring through much of the Old Kingdom, arguing that there was "magical" value attached to the titles and that administration developed first on the basis of proximity to, and delegation from, the king's person.[113]

I suggest that these approaches can be partly integrated under the broader concept of hierarchy,[114] which I have used informally in discussing Weni. Hierarchy is the more or less formalized stratification of people in larger social groups or within organizations.[115] Use of the term implies that strong values are attached to stratification. In rigorous applications of the theory of hierarchy, hierarchies are organized in formal "levels"—an aspect that may or may not be relevant in Egypt. For Egypt, the presence of central values is crucial in the largest context, where royal ideology creates a hierarchy. The lowest level of this hierarchy consists of humanity in general; and the gods form the highest level. Interlocking and subordinate hierarchies also exist within the level of humanity, between the administrative and title-holding elite and the rest of society, and within the elite, in both secular and religious official hierarchies. Material in the Pyramid Texts, such as Spell 456 (n. 60 above), shows that elite hierarchies formed models for relations in the divine world too.

Hierarchy and ranking are overlapping concepts. The official ranking of titles could have been categorized under headings, as was done in the inscription of Weni. This possibility might supply a context common to both phases of the Old Kingdom. The change from a kinship-oriented hierarchy, symbolized in particular by the title *jrj-pʿt* "member of the *pʿt*," to one based more on administrative office, corresponds with the rise of Baer's system at the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty, but would not involve a significant alteration in hierarchy. Similarly, the post-Old Kingdom disappearance of the system as a system, as against the less formal ranking of titles, favors the assumption that it refines hierarchies rather than defining them or creating them.

In relation to knowledge, the development presented by Helck and Baer can be seen as a gradual broadening of access to the center and to restricted privileges, and perhaps also to knowledge. In the most general terms, this development is normally held to have culminated after the Old Kingdom. For restricted knowledge, it would then be paralleled by the kind of formulation seen in the *Amduat*, where the people who might know things are presented anonymously, apparently without restriction of title or rank (which could hardly have been the case in fact). They would be a group within the literate elite. The Pyramid Text cited earlier suggests, however, that although new forms of text and knowledge may have been introduced in the Middle Kingdom, a theoretically "neutral" group of initiates might have existed in the Old Kingdom also. The central domains of

[112] *Rank and Title* (n. 3 above), esp. 298–302; N. Kanawati, *The Egyptian Administration in the Old Kingdom: Evidence on its Economic Decline* (Warminster, 1977), uses comparable arguments.

[113] Unlike Baer, Helck wished to remove the concept of a ranking title, assuming that all titles corresponded to some function, often ceremonial. Baer's position is more plausible: a complete fit between title and function seems unlikely. More recently Helck, "Titel und Titulaturen," *LÄ* VI, 596–601, has reintroduced the concept of a ranking title.

[114] For a classic work, see L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications*, trans. M. Sainsbury (London, 1970). See also R. H. Barnes and D. de Coppet (eds.), *Contexts and Levels: Anthropological Essays on Hierarchy* (Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford, Occasional Papers 4, Oxford, 1986), with valuable introductory essay by Barnes, pp. 1–7.

[115] General discussion, for example, G. M. Britan and R. Cohen, "Toward an Anthropology of Formal Organizations," in *Hierarchy and Society: Anthropological Perspectives on Bureaucracy*, G. M. Britan and R. Cohen, eds. (Philadelphia, 1980), esp. 23–24; for an Egyptological presentation, see R. H. Pierce, "Land Use, Social Organisation and Temple Economy," *Royal Anthropological Institute News* 15 (1976), 16.

religious knowledge would then have been comparable in the two periods. The group of initiates is unlikely to have been homogeneous or to have had equal access to the same knowledge. More probably there were various levels of access. The display of the Old Kingdom high priests of Ptah would sit well in such a context.

What is imponderable here is specialization of career and occupation, which has so far been set aside. In earlier periods most members of the inner elite seem to have been generalists who held numerous secular and religious titles and offices, but their group was large enough to support specializations in knowledge and competition to attain such positions. This knowledge could be secular, as in the case of what Weni displayed, or religious, as with the high priests. Evidence for religious specialization of knowledge will be sparse, both in the nature of the phenomenon and for reasons of decorum: Weni himself could have had, but not displayed, access to restricted religious knowledge.

It is desirable here to present the religiously-focused system of decorum separately before comparing it with restricted secular and religious knowledge, for which it provides an analogy, as well as a wider context for secular and religious restrictions, and for emphasis on hierarchy.[116] The decorum found on the monuments, which can be traced from late predynastic times, is a set of rules and practices defining what may be represented pictorially with captions, displayed, and possibly written down, in which context and in what form. It can be related to other constraints on action and reports on action, as when a king says that he killed his opponents while his follower says that he kept them alive (see n. 116), and was probably based ultimately on rules or practices of conduct and etiquette, of spatial separation and religious avoidance. The original core of this system is in representations of the gods in full human form, which are almost unknown in early materials.[117] Such figures were depicted within temples and begin to be attested in the later Early Dynastic Period. Detailed rules of decorum in art are narrowly hierarchical, that is, they depend on positions and levels, rather than on the absolute character of the conventions with which they work.

The system of decorum was devised before continuous texts were written, and attributed a positive value to other methods of recording and display. This feature had opposite effects on different categories of material. Brief speeches of gods are the earliest preserved texts in continuous language,[118] and remained central, perhaps because of their prestige, while longer continuous texts hardly occur in temple scenes before Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri and Sety I at Abydos, and always remained the exception; these two temples are unusual in design and contained much other abnormal relief decoration, such as solar texts and the Books of Day and Night (Deir el-Bahri),[119] lists, including the list I discussed earlier, and cult statues (Abydos).[120] A later temple with comparably diverse decoration is that of Hibis in el-Kharga oasis.[121] Another characteristic which is shared by the other two temples and the Luxor Temple, where birth scenes and the treatises about the solar cult were inscribed, is a focus on the king.[122]

[116] See Baines, *Fecundity Figures* (n. 78 above), 277-305; for extensions, see, for example, "The Stela of Emhab: Innovation, Tradition, Hierarchy," *JEA* 72 (1986), 44-49. This system is a construct of mine and has received little comment.

[117] See J. Baines, "Communication and Display: The Integration of Early Egyptian Art and Writing," *Antiquity* 63 (1989), 471-82.

[118] Baines, "Abydos list" (n. 40 above), 131-32.

[119] For references, see Assmann, *Liturgische Lieder* (n. 56 above), 113-64 (to be edited by E. Graefe); id., *König als Sonnenpriester* (n. 7 above), 10-14; J. Karkowski, "Studies on the Decoration of the Eastern Wall of the Vestibule of Re-Horakhty in Hatshepsut's Temple at Deir el-Bahari," *Études et Travaux* 9 (1976), 67-80; id., "Deir el-Bahari 1974-1975 (Travaux égyptologiques)," *Études et Travaux* 11 (1979), 217-20.

[120] A. Mariette, *Abydos* I: *Ville antique—Temple de Séti* (Paris, 1869), e.g., pls. 37a, 38b, 39b, 40c. The central reliefs in the seven main chapels (A. M. Calverley and M. F. Broome, *The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos* I-II, London and Chicago, 1933-35, *passim*) also show cult equipment, but the form of this is much less distinctive, and widely paralleled in other temples.

[121] N. de G. Davies, *The Temple of Hibis in el-Khargeh Oasis* III: *The Decoration* (Publ. Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition 17, New York, 1953); E. Cruz-Uribe, *Hibis Temple Project* I: *Translations, Commentary, Discussions and Sign List* (San Antonio, TX, 1989).

[122] L. Bell, "The Luxor Temple and the Cult of the Royal *Ka*," *JNES* 44 (1985), 251-94; compare also the occurrence of the Litany of Re in the temple of Ramesses II at Abydos: Hornung, *Buch der Anbetung* II (n. 56 above), 13.

Thus, the restriction of religious knowledge is closely integrated with temple decorum, which largely excludes the most sacred and significant texts from being inscribed. When these rules are varied, several of them tend to change together, and the restricted material discussed earlier comes to be inscribed, still in very special contexts. Originally, the exclusion of texts may have given primacy to oral forms and orally transmitted knowledge, but later it seems to have discriminated among written texts, many of which—including the most serious—were not inscribed in stone, even in temples. This position of texts is analogous for a later period with the early absence of figures of gods in the forms central to decorum.

Decorum supplies an analogy for restricted knowledge, a reason for restriction, and examples of the phenomenon. The hypothesis of the system is important here, because it provides an organizing principle which will tend to take on a life of its own. Temple decoration, for example, was transmitted as a complex of conventions, in which variations may be artistic or internal to the system's own development, rather than the result of political or other outside intervention. If decorum acquired these characteristics in its wider sphere of application, it may have reinforced the demarcation of domains that lies at the heart of restrictions of knowledge. There was a gradual weakening of decorum, which can be compared with the gradual inscription of new groups of restricted texts, but this point should not be pressed, because of the special status of the monuments where these texts first occur, and because earlier lost structures could have had similar texts. The main changes in decorum can be seen in transitions between major periods, especially in the early New Kingdom. They affect in particular the representation of gods on nonroyal monuments. Some changes, such as the introduction of figures of the king into nonroyal tombs,[123] are as much political as religious. When religious texts became more widespread in semi-public contexts toward the end of the New Kingdom, they formed part of wider developments in the subject matter of tomb decoration, while changes in the content of papyri buried with priestly personnel[124] relate to a similar extension of the religious prerogatives of the nonroyal in a time of weakened central control. Material that had hitherto been "royal" knowledge was taken over by a small but significant extra group.

IV. Conclusion

This paper started from the position that restricted knowledge is to be expected; only then was it documented and its relation to other phenomena considered. The material cited is intended to suggest a possible spread of domains; a scheme for these follows.

I propose two organizing principles for the Egyptian version of the near-universal restriction of knowledge: hierarchy, which can have religious and secular aspects; and decorum, which is more tightly circumscribed and more closely tied to religion in its contexts on the monuments. The two principles are not fully distinct. Egyptian hierarchy is a variant of near-universal principles of social differentiation and evaluation. Decorum, while also having widespread parallels (and being used as a term to describe similar phenomena in many societies and artistic traditions), is more characteristically Egyptian. In official ideology, decorum demarcates the significant world of the king and the gods from the merely supportive role of humanity.[125] Because of the fragility of the cosmos, the demarcations of decorum acquire extra significance: they uphold the proper order of things. Decorum is a sacralized hierarchy. Thus, although in origin decorum probably related to wider spheres of action, its most typical manifestations are in the royal-divine sphere. In the case of knowledge, although very little of what is contained within decorum was shown publicly, it would have been impossible to keep what was known confined among the actors addressed by the system. If the model of decorum is extended to incorporate restricted knowledge, it becomes possible to see decorum as solidly based on demarcations

[123] Ali Radwan, *Die Darstellungen des regierenden Königs und seiner Familienangehörigen in Privatgräbern der 18. Dynastie* (MÄS 21, 1969).

[124] See, for example, Assmann, *Re und Amun* (n. 58 above), 24 n. 3. See also n. 59 above.

[125] Conveniently summarized by Assmann, *Saeculum* 23 (1972), 111–16.

enacted in society, and not just as an imposed classification. There comes to be a homology between the close hierarchies of decorum, which are elaborated most fully in the crucial context of temple relief, and the wider hierarchies of the society.

Within the human sphere, as against the royal-divine one, the premise that knowledge is power—in diverse spheres—remains valuable, and can be related to the evolution of the sources. Restricted knowledge is socially competitive or divisive, enhancing competition within a social group and accentuating divisions between groups to which knowledge is available and others to which it is not. The character of the knowledge is not as significant as is the question of who knows it. Some restricted knowledge may be instrumentally significant in a narrow sense, giving the technical or informational basis for administrative or artistic activity. Most religious knowledge, however, is not of this type. It does not matter what the "Eastern Souls" sing at sunrise; what is important is that the king knows it (and others do not).

Such knowledge sets the king apart, as a knower and as an actor. Among the wider elite, knowledge is a dimension of the display and seeking for prestige that can be seen in so much Egyptian material. Restricted religious knowledge may be particularly divisive, because it implies that some can approach the meaning and support of life more closely and better than others, either because they shoulder greater responsibility and hence have more merit (especially the king), or because they can do things that are not generally possible for themselves and for others. They can display this inequality, extending the moral role they allot to themselves in providing for others. Piety is a movement that seeks to break down this exclusiveness, and becomes prominent in the later New Kingdom, when the system began to weaken—but did not disappear.[126] It may, therefore, be significant that piety becomes openly visible after a professional priesthood had formed, because priesthoods naturally claim privileged access to religion. Although piety was integrated with the priesthood, it may have retained features that escaped priestly control. This situation contrasts with that of earlier times, when religious and secular prestige and exclusiveness went together.

Finally, it may be useful to summarize evidence for possible stages of development of restricted knowledge.

Old Kingdom evidence suggests that there was restricted religious knowledge held by nonroyal people. This relates to particular texts, but is also attested by a general formula describing knowledge and its benefits. Restricted religious texts include lists and give precedence to noncontinuous language. Speeches of gods may be the central form of continuous text, and they were introduced well before other such texts are attested. If texts like the hourly hymns to the sun god were written down on papyrus (but not inscribed on stone) in the Old Kingdom, it would not be necessary to posit a continuing tradition of exclusive oral knowledge in this area. These writings, together with associated knowledge of their context and purpose, could have replaced the oral tradition. It is impossible to say when this transition occurred, or if it was ever completed, but most later evidence for restrictions falls within the written sphere. Either religious or secular restricted knowledge could be displayed by members of the elite. In religious cases, very little is revealed, except when it has a direct royal sanction. In secular cases the presentation may be more detailed. Hierarchy and rank acquire extra significance when seen in parallel with the restriction of religious knowledge and display, which is governed chiefly by decorum.

Little relevant Middle Kingdom evidence is preserved. This gap is probably due partly to the lack of finds from the capitals of the period, which result in the inner elite's being poorly known. There is reason to suppose that there were major changes in the transmission of restricted knowledge in this period, because several of the texts cited are thought to have been composed then, although they are not available in pre-New Kingdom copies. The introduction of written belles lettres will have opened up new

[126] Cf. "Practical Religion and Piety," *JEA* 73 (1987), 79–98.

possible domains of transmission.[127] Material ascribed to the Middle Kingdom includes the fullest statements of the king's position and exclusive knowledge. These conceptions may have existed in the Old Kingdom and been systematically formulated in writing in the following period.

From the New Kingdom, sources for restricted material are many times more abundant than earlier material, but this volume need not necessarily point to a wider spread of availability. Thus, I would discount the texts from temples and the underworld books as showing a greater spread of restricted knowledge. These derive from contexts that are not preserved for earlier times, so that they cannot establish dissemination. In the case of *Book of the Dead* 125, such a dissemination may have occurred, but that text or comparable ones were not made public in their hypothetical original contexts in temples. Two developments that may be more significant are the weakening of decorum visible from the beginning of the period onward and the non-royal annexation of material relating to the solar cult toward its end. These are part of very broad changes in the record that probably relate to similarly broad, but poorly known, social changes. The annexation of material also exhibits a loss of control by the central power which was the principal source or restriction. Akhenaten's treatment of his exclusive knowledge of his god displays the centrality of access to knowledge at the time of crisis in the solar cult, around which the most significant elements in this knowledge clustered. One implication of this focus may be that others claimed different knowledge—that is, that competing central beliefs began to evolve. If secret knowledge is to be cohesive, there must be agreement about what it is that is known. By the later New Kingdom, there may no longer have been such agreement.

This diversification of power and of displayed knowledge at the end of the New Kingdom suggests that the Late Period, whose heritage of traditions of knowledge was more complex than that of earlier times, should be studied separately. I have done no more than mention a few Late Period examples. Since Egyptian traditions remained unbroken into Roman times and the central role of the king was maintained, at least as an organizing fiction, the demarcation of domains of knowledge may not have changed very much. But the articulation of domains into hierarchies, which has its clearest formal analogy in the system of decorum, is as important as their separate identities, while their content could change in a process distinct from change in the hierarchies. All of these phenomena need separate consideration. An analysis for later periods would probably enrich interpretations of earlier material too.

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[127] For this dating see, for example, J. Assmann, "Schrift, Tod und Identität: Das Grab als Vorschule der Literatur im alten Ägypten," in *Schrift und Gedächtnis: Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation I*, A. Assmann *et al.* eds. (Munich, 1983), 64-93.