

Visuality of the Invisible: The Image of Medjed in Sources of the 21st Dynasty

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Abstract

This paper discusses iconographic features of the deity or “demon” Medjed (*Mdd*). The specific and unusual image of this character is only found during the 21st Dynasty and is unknown in the funerary art of the New Kingdom and Late Period. Only one Ye coffin and nine papyri are known in which the image of Medjed is depicted. Eight are in the context of Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead*. In the text of Spell 17, Medjed is described in lines 71–72 of Grapow’s *Urk. V Abschnitt* 24. The “invisibility” of this “demon” is evidently the reason for his unusual iconography: Medjed has a conical shaped body, with human legs. Although he does not have a true head, his eyes are indicated, and he wears a belt. Equally the deity could be depicted as a figure covered entirely in a conical cover except for the eyes and feet, which are visible. This curious treatment can be understood as an attempt by Egyptian artists to depict an invisible being.

Keywords: Medjed; iconography; *Book of the Dead*; vignettes; invisibility; 21st Dynasty



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1. Introduction

The *Book of the Dead* is a compendium of funerary spells that is attested over a millennium, from the 18th Dynasty of the New Kingdom to the Ptolemaic period (see [Lucarelli and Stadler 2023](#)). The evolution of the collection during this time was inextricably linked with social and cultural changes. In my opinion, these changes are best traced in the development of the pictorial tradition of the *Book of the Dead*, since its textual content remained relatively conservative.

For instance, the development of the pictorial tradition depicted in Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead* can be cited, as it is one of the longest and most significant spells in the collection. The origins of this text can be traced back to Spell 335 of the Middle Kingdom *Coffin Texts*, a period during which it was not accompanied by illustrations. The first vignettes of the *Book of the Dead* Spell 17 were produced during the 18th Dynasty. However, these vignettes did not establish a dominant tradition, or “canon” ([Munro 1988](#), pp. 67–68; [Tarasenko 2014](#), pp. 241–56).

A revolutionary change occurred at the beginning of the Ramesside Period, when Spell 17 was suddenly endowed with a long frieze of vignettes, comprising approximately twenty scenes with mythological content. These vignettes served to supplement the mythological and exegetical text of the spell itself. It is hypothesised that this phenomenon may be attributed to significant ideological changes among the Theban elite, particularly the priesthood and master artists responsible for the creation of religious and funerary

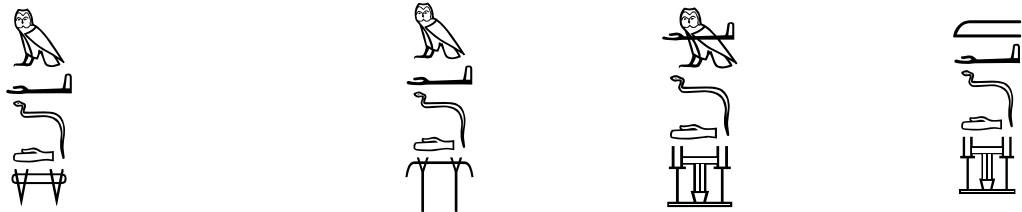
1.2. The Name ‘Medjed’




Let us proceed to the analysis of this character. The name ;  *Mdd* (after [Leitz \(2002, III, p. 476\)](#) and [Table 1](#)) derives from the verb , *mdd*, which according to Rainer Hannig bore up to seven meanings in different grammar constructions in the Middle Kingdom ([Hannig 1995, p. 383](#); [2006, II, pp. 1173–74](#); cf. [Erman and Grapow 1955, II, p. 191](#))⁵. Five of them are:


1. “to press”, “to squeeze a press” (“pressen”, “drücken”);
2. “to get”, “to strike” (“treffen”);
3. “to impose”, “to assign” (collecting a tax, etc.) (“auferlegen”);
4. “to obey”, “to execute” (“gehörchen”, “befolgen”);
5. “to divide” (“teilen”), etc.

Table 1. Writings of the name *Mdd* in the “Theban Edition” of the *Book of the Dead* (after [Lapp 2006, pp. 236–37](#)).

<i>pJwʒ</i> pCairo CG 51189 (18th Dynasty)	<i>pNb.sny</i> pLondon BM EA 9900 (18th Dynasty)	<i>pJh-ms</i> pParis Louvre E. 11085 (18th Dynasty)	<i>pNfr-Mnw</i> pLeiden Shrine of Tutankhamun Cairo T15 (19th Dynasty)
<i>pHʿ</i> pTurin Suppl. 8438 (18th Dynasty)	<i>pNww</i> pLondon BM EA 10477 (18th Dynasty)	<i>pJmn-ḥtp</i> pCairo CG 40002 (18th Dynasty)	J.E. 60666 (18th Dynasty)
<i>pJmn-m-jpt</i> pVatican 38 600/1-2 (18th Dynasty)	Tomb of <i>Jmn-m-ḥt</i> TT 82 (18th Dynasty)		



The meaning “to destroy” is first attested from later ([Lesko 2002, I, p. 221](#)). This diversity of meanings and difference between periods makes it difficult to determine the meaning of the name *Mdd*. According to the *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen*, it designates “der Treffsichere”—“well-aimed”, “exact”, “right” ([Leitz 2002, III, p. 476](#)) (Similarly [Bruyère 1939, pp. 182–92](#); [Rößler-Köhler 1979, p. 227, Anm. 4](#) (“Der Treffsicheren”); [Backes 2005, p. 79](#) (*Mddw/Mdd* “Der Treffsichere”)), while [Peterson \(1963, pp. 83–88\)](#) connects its meaning with “pressing” (grapes to in winemaking, compare the determinatives , , and ). The same understanding is given by [Quirke \(2013, p. 60\)](#): “one who presses”. T. George Allen and Raymond Faulkner translated *Mdd* as “Smiter” ([Allen 1960, p. 90](#); [1974, pp. 30, 292](#); [Faulkner 2001, p. 48](#)). A quite similar understanding “Chastiser” (“Каратель”) was offered by [Mikhail Chegodaev \(2002, p. 100\)](#). [Barguet \(1967, p. 62\)](#) gave the translation “Broyeur” (i.e., “Breaker”/“Cruncher”), while [Carrier \(2010, p. 18 \(77\)\)](#) translates “agitateur”. [Hornung \(1979, p. 71\)](#) left the name of *Mdd* untranslated: “Medjed” (see also [Cariddi 2018, pp. 203–4](#); [Cariddi and Iannarilli 2020, pp. 83–84](#)).

The earliest known mention of the “deity” *Mdd* is from the Middle Kingdom ([Leitz 2002, III, p. 476](#)). On the astronomical “tables” on a number of Theban coffins *Mdd* designates one of the Decans (); that name later changed to *Šsmw* ([Neugebauer and Parker 1960, pl. 27 \(12. “crew” \(?\)\)](#); [Leitz 2002, III, p. 476](#)). It is noteworthy that both

Medjed and Shesemu appear together in the same semantic context of Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead* and are associated with the sky, light, and the inundation (Grapow 1917, (=Urk. V), Abs. 24, pp. 71–72 (61–62)). Bengt Peterson observed that this co-occurrence could confirm their connection (Peterson 1963; cf. Cariddi and Iannarilli 2020, pp. 79–83).

2. Sources with Medjed Images: Catalogue

As noted above, the image of Medjed is depicted in nine papyri of the *Book of the Dead* and on one coffin of the 21st Dynasty. In eight cases, it appears in the vignettes of Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead*. I start this catalogue with a short description of the sources (see also the Appendix A):

1. Papyrus of *ḥnh-s-n-Mwt* pCairo J.E. 95637/S.R. IV. 528 (unpublished)⁶ (Figure 1). This document represents a combination of the *Book of the Dead* and the content *Amduat* papyri (Books of the Netherworld). It contains the text of Spells 125A/125B and pictures originating from the vignettes of Spells 125B, 150, 83, 110, as well as four scenes (from left to right) from the central register of the vignettes in Spell 17: the image of a *bnw*-bird, goose, and falcon on a pedestal, and the three “demons”, the first with the head of a kite and the second with two opposite-facing falcon heads with *m3ʹt*-feathers. These demons hold knives. The last character is Medjed himself.

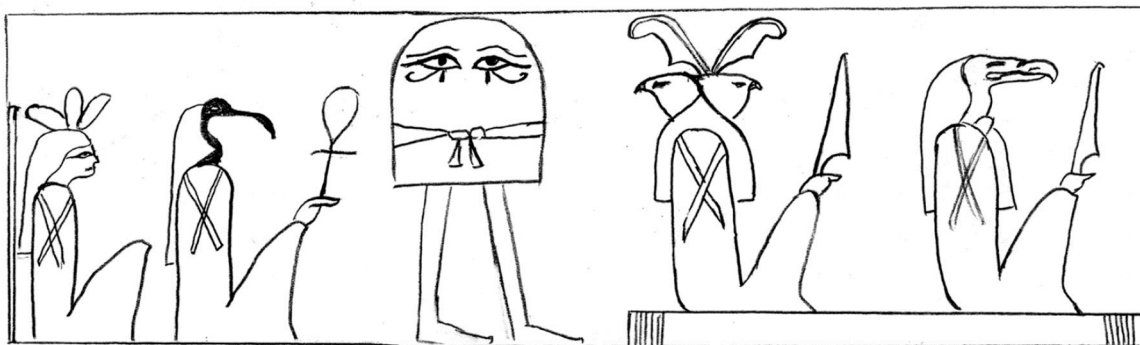


Figure 1. Papyrus of *ḥnh-s-n-Mwt* pCairo J.E. 95637/S.R. IV. 528. (drawing after Cariddi 2018, p. 199, fig. 4b).

2. Papyrus of *ḥnh-f-n-Hnsw* pCairo J.E. 95658; S.R. IV. 556⁷ (Figure 2a,b). Six spells of the *Book of the Dead* are written in this roll: 1, 57, 89, 148, 56, and 9. Three spells (1, 148, and 9) are illustrated with coloured vignettes. Medjed is illustrated in Spell 148. The vignette shows the *b3*-soul of the deceased before an offering table, behind which are six deities. The first three gods (from left to right) appear in the so-called Scene XIII of Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead* (Milde 1991, pp. 36–37), while the last three figures represent “demons”, similar to those in the previous roll (no 1 above). Medjed is the last in this group.
3. Papyrus of *T3-b3k-n-Hnsw* pCairo S.R. VII. 10222 (unpublished)⁸. The papyrus does not include any text of Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead*, only its vignettes. The manuscript begins with a vignette of Spell 110 and is followed by Spells 149, 77, 89, 138, 148, 81A, and 1 with colour pictures. As was noted by Matthieu Heerma van Voss, the two spells in this roll are illustrated by vignettes of Spell 17—77 and 81A (Heerma van Voss 1977, pp. 87, 88). Spell 81A is accompanied by images of Isis and Nephthys in the form of kites near the mummy of Osiris, as well as figures of the god Heh and a falcon. All these images derive from the vignettes in Spell 17. The drawing of three “demons” together with Medjed (again in the final position), is presented as a vignette of Spell 77 of the *Book of the Dead* (Figure 3).

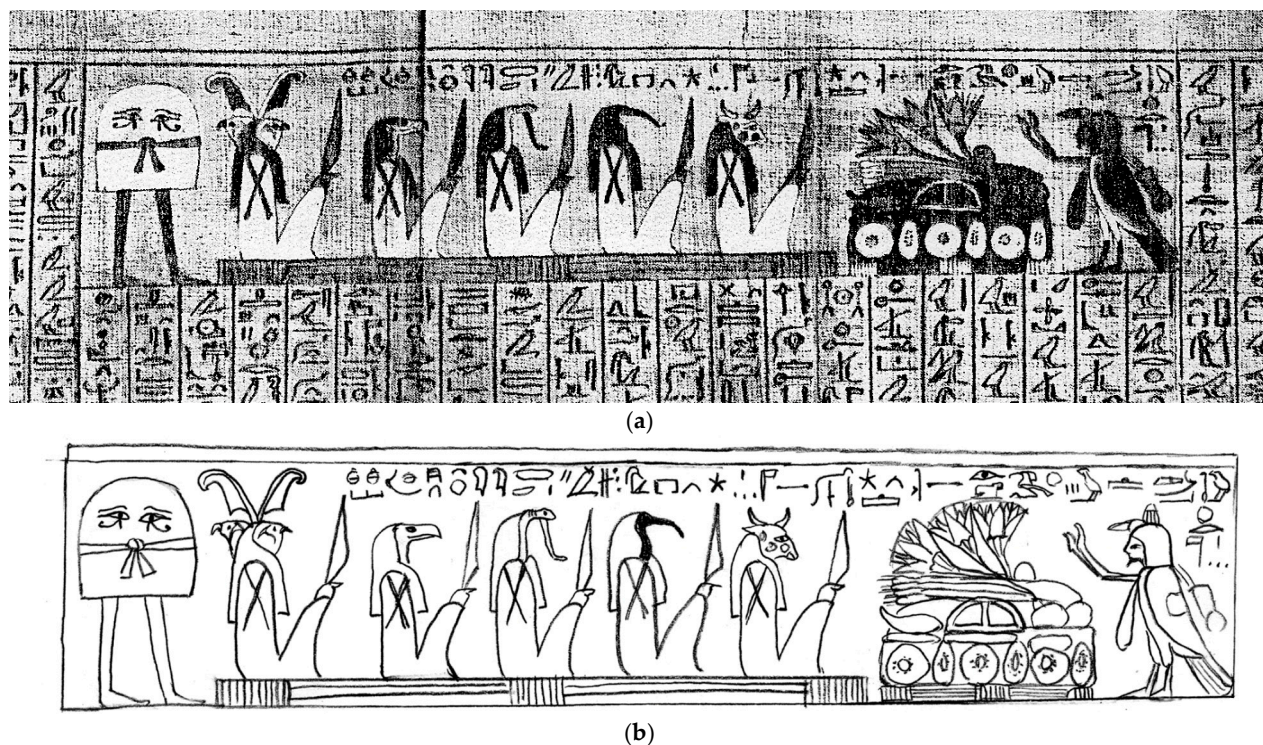


Figure 2. (a,b) The image of Medjed in the papyrus of *nh-f-n-Hnsw* pCairo J.E. 95658; S.R. IV. 556. (after Bruyère 1939, p. 184, fig. 78; drawing after Cariddi 2018, p. 199, fig. 4a).

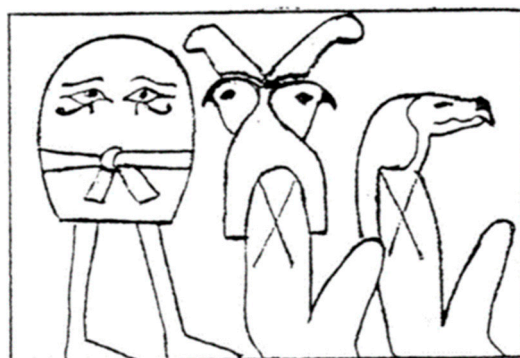


Figure 3. The image of Medjed in the papyrus of *T3-b3k-n-Hnsw* pCairo S.R. VII. 10222 (after Milde 1991, p. 44, fig. 15).

4. Papyrus of *Jnj-ph-f-nht* pCologne-Geneva C (Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, pBodmer 100)⁹ (von Bissing 1928, Taf. I; Sallé 1990, pp. 28–35; Bickel 2001, pp. 117–34, figs. 32, 39; Heerma van Voss 2008, pp. 163–66). In this document, as well as in all subsequent sources, Medjed appears in the context of the Spell 17 vignettes and text. This rather small papyrus (3.78 m) contains ten spells of the *Book of the Dead*, two of which are followed by coloured vignettes—Spells 17 and 125B. The scenes in Spell 17 are divided in five blocks, separated by the text columns. Only two of them (II and III) are published (von Bissing 1928, Taf. I; Bickel 2001, pp. 128–29, fig. 39; Tarasenko 2012, p. 383, fig. 4a–b; Cariddi 2018, p. 199, fig. 2b) (Figure 4a–c). In general, the sequence of scenes in the papyrus of *Jnj-ph-f-nht* has similarities with the Spell 17 vignettes in pBerlin P. 3157.

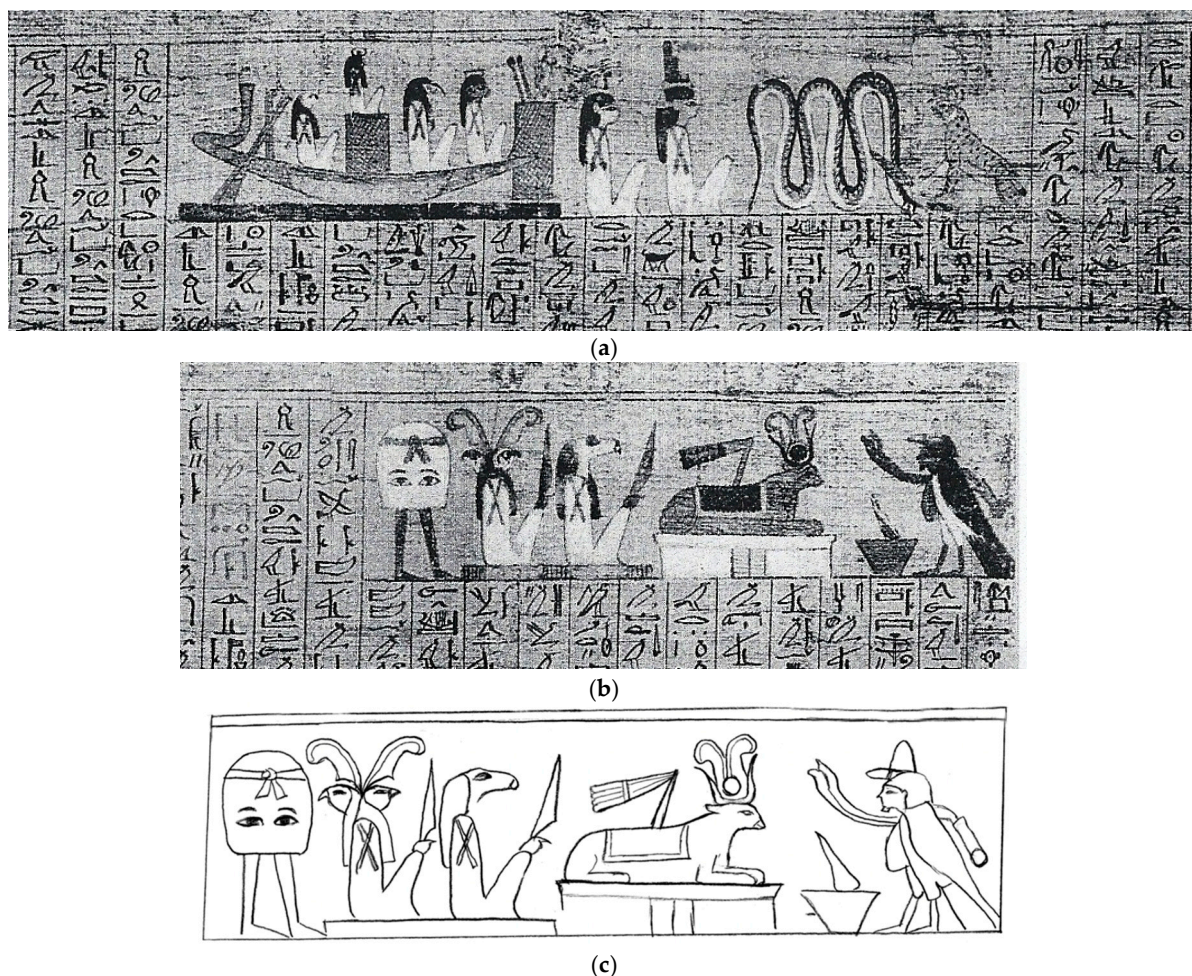


Figure 4. (a–c) Vignettes of Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead* in the papyrus of *Jnj-ph-f-nht*, pCologny-Geneva C (after von Bissing 1928, Taf. I; drawing after Cariddi 2018, p. 199, fig. 2b).

Medjed is shown in block II (Figure 4b,c). Here the *b*²-soul of the deceased adores the Mekhet-Weret cow who is set on a plinth; three “demons” are shown behind her, the last one being Medjed. Matthieu Heerma van Voss already observed the similarity of the iconography of these three “demons” in the papyri of *Jnj-ph-f-nht* and *T3-b3k-n-Hnsw*, noting that in the latter the text of Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead* is absent, and in both rolls the sequence of scenes on vignettes is opposite to the direction in which the text is read (Heerma van Voss 1988, p. 6).

5. Papyrus of *Nsy-t3-nbt-jšrw* pLondon BM EA 10554 (pGreenfield)¹⁰ (Budge 1912; Lenzo 2023). This roll belonged to the notable Theban priestess, the younger daughter of the High Priest of Amun Pinudjem II and his second wife *Nsj-Hnsw* (Niwiński 1988, pp. 226–30). This manuscript is probably the latest copy of the Third Intermediate Period *Book of the Dead* with the illustrations for Spell 17. In terms of chronology, it could therefore be the latest document with an image of Medjed¹¹. This impressive roll of 40.53 metres is written in hieratic, as became common for the *Book of the Dead* during the late 21st Dynasty; the only spell written in hieroglyphs is 125B. The image of Medjed occurs twice in duplicated vignettes of Spell 17 accompanying other spells. In the first case, it illustrates Spells 23–26 (Budge 1912, pl. XV; Lenzo 2023, Sheet 12) (Figure 5a,b); the second example is with the part of the Hymn to Re and Osiris where a list of various “entities” or “forms” of Re is given (Budge 1912, pl. LXXXVIII; Lenzo 2023, Sheet 76) (Figure 5c,d).



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Figure 5. (a–d) The images of Medjed in the papyrus of *Nsy-t3-nbt-j3rw* pLondon BM EA 10554 (pGreenfield) (after [Lenzo 2023](#), Sheet 12, 76; drawings after [Cariddi 2018](#), p. 200, fig. 5). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

In both cases, Medjed appears together with the figures of a goose and a bird with open wings above it¹², and two deities, one of whom is shown with the head of a jackal. Medjed's feet in the first pGreenfield example are splayed in opposite directions; this might fit with his 'face', which is frontal, but it could also indicate that he relates to the other figures on both sides of him¹³; that detail is not present in any of the other examples. However, in the second scene (Figure 5c), Medjed is probably represented as an independent character with his legs turned away the other figures and the image of the deceased kneeling in front of him. Curiously, E. A. Wallis Budge saw in the first drawing of this being the figure of Medjed (Budge 1912, p. 13; pl. XV, fn.1), while he understood the second as "The Devourer of Millions" (*m ḥḥw*), a deity who is also mentioned in Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead* (Budge 1912, p. 70; pl. LXXXVIII, fn. 2).

6. Papyrus of *nḥf-n-Ḥnsw* pCologne-Geneva CI (Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, pBodmer 101, unpublished)¹⁴. This is the first in a series of five almost identically "replicated" rolls that attest to a specific tradition of illustration that was confined to the 21st Dynasty (Tarasenko 2012, pp. 384–87). So far, only one roll of this group (pLondon BM EA 9948) has been partially published; the other four examples are practically unknown to scholars (cf. Niwiński 1989). These documents are of the greatest importance for reconstructing the stages of graphic development in papyri during this period, and they may constitute a special type (similar to the BD.II.1 type in the classification of Niwiński (1989, pp. 118–28)) playing an important role in this evolution (See in detail Tarasenko 2012, pp. 384–87). All these rolls have an identical order of spells and illustrations. They consist of an introductory vignette (individual in each document), the text of Spells 17 and 1 of the *Book of the Dead*, followed by a series of selected vignettes of Spell 17 (the top frieze). In total, a series of twelve scenes, starting with pictures of a cat, a serpent, and an *jšd*-tree,¹⁵ followed by the figures of Isis and Nephthys, and finishing with the adoration scene, are represented on these papyri. The images of three "demons", with Medjed as the last of them, are in the eighth scene ('h') (Tarasenko 2012, p. 385). This scene is preserved in four rolls of this group. In the fifth document, the papyrus of *Dd-Ḥnsw* pSaint-Petersburg Hermitage 18587, it is destroyed¹⁶. Before these characters comes scene 'g', showing the adoration of Mekhet-Weret—similar to the papyrus of *Jnj-ph-f-nḥt* pCologne-Geneva C (Figure 4b)—and it is followed by the image of a deity in front of an offering table (scene 'i') (Tarasenko 2012, pp. 385–86) (Figure 6).



Figure 6. The image of Medjed in the papyrus of *nḥf-n-Ḥnsw* pCologne-Geneva CI (drawing after Cariddi 2018, p. 198, fig. 1a).

7. Papyrus of *Tj-nt-Jmmtt-hrt-jb* pCologne-Geneva CII (Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, pBodmer 102) (unpublished)¹⁷ (Figure 7).
8. Papyrus of *Nsy-Ḥnsw* pTurin 1818 (unpublished)¹⁸ (Figure 8a–c).

9. Papyrus of *Djw-sw-n-Mwt* pLondon BM EA 9948¹⁹ (Figure 9a,b).
10. The decoration of the interior walls of the lid of the inner coffin of *P3-dj-Hnsw* Lyon Musée des Beaux-Arts H 2320–2321 (Jamen 2015, pp. 102–4) (Figure 10a,b).

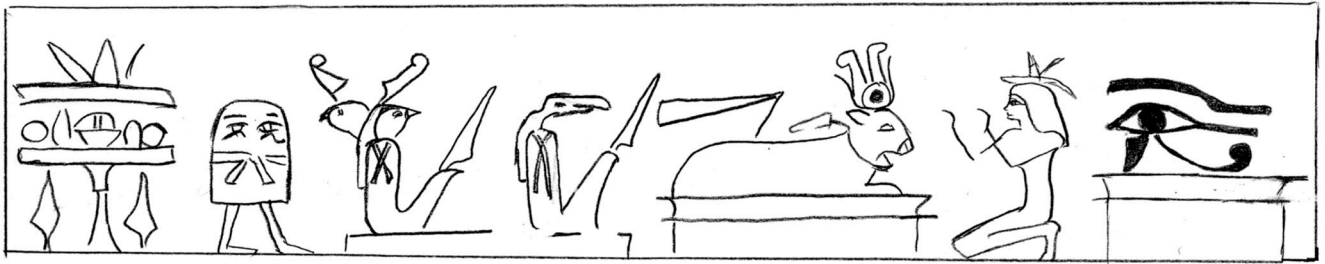


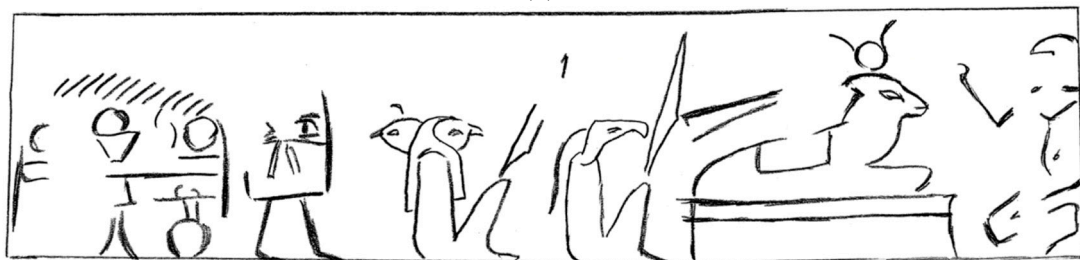
Figure 7. The image of Medjed in the papyrus of *T3-nt-Jmmtt-hrt-jb* pCologny-Geneva CII. (drawing after Cariddi 2018, p. 198, fig. 1b).



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 8. (a–c) Papyrus of *Nsy-Hnsw* pTurin 1818 (a) and its image of Medjed (b,c) (pTurin Cat. 1818: © Photo Museo Egizio Turin Egyptian Museum (<https://papyri.museoegizio.it/d/258> (accessed on 29 June 2025))); drawing after Cariddi 2018, p. 199, fig. 2a).

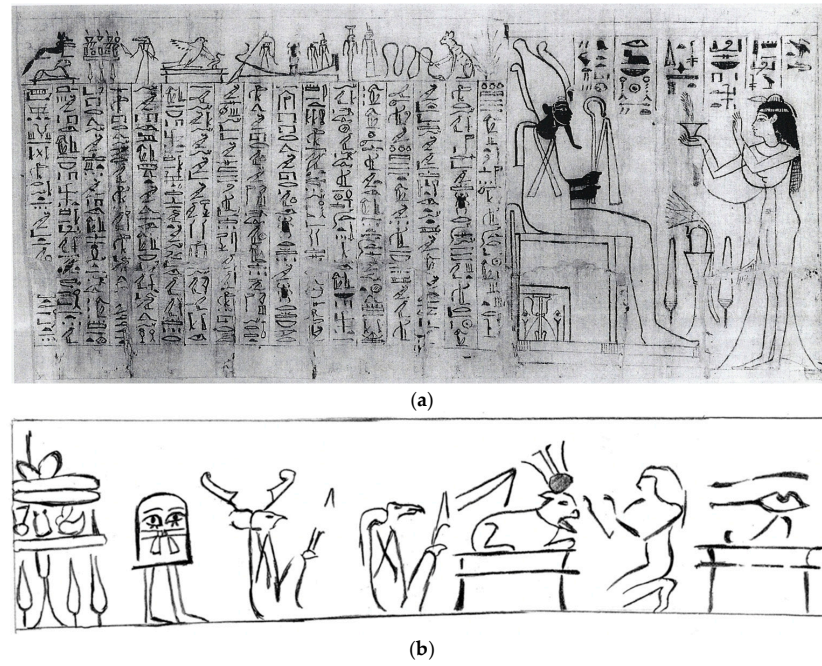


Figure 9. (a,b) First sheet of the papyrus of *Djw-sw-n-Mwt* pLondon BM EA 9948 (a) and its image of Medjed (b) (after Shorter 1938, pl. X = Tarasenko 2012, 385, fig. 5; drawing after Cariddi 2018, p. 199, fig. 3a).

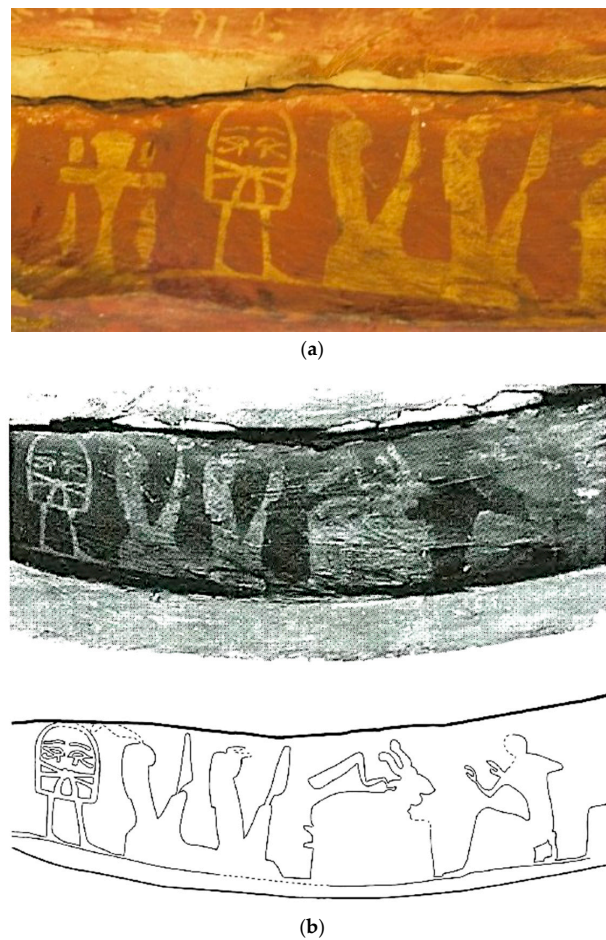


Figure 10. (a,b) The image of Medjed on the coffin of *P3-dj-Hnsw* Lyon Musée des Beaux-Arts H 2320–2321 ((a) © photo by F. Jamen = Tarasenko (2016, p. 19, fig. 27a); (b) after Jamen (2015, p. 102, fig. 39)).

3. Iconography of Medjed

This “deity” or “demon” has a conical body with human legs (pGreenfield), or perhaps with a conical-shaped cover hiding his body (Milde 1991, p. 44). In other sources Medjed looks like rectangle with a round top, close in shape to a round-topped stela (in some cases with *wedjat*-eyes, creating a fitting composition). The two eyes face the viewer. In all cases except the two latest examples in pGreenfield, Medjed’s trunk is surrounded with a characteristic sling that is tied at the front and placed above²⁰ or below the eyes. The fact that on all papyri except pCologne-Geneva C this attribute is shown *below* the eyes suggests that it might be a belt²¹.

The first iconographic typology of the image of Medjed was proposed by Bernard Bruyère (1939, p. 183, fig. 77). He distinguished four types: 1—a god with a sling/headband over the eyes; 2—a god with a sling (belt?) below the eyes; 3—a god without a sling/headband; 4—a god without a headband and with legs splayed apart (Figure 11).

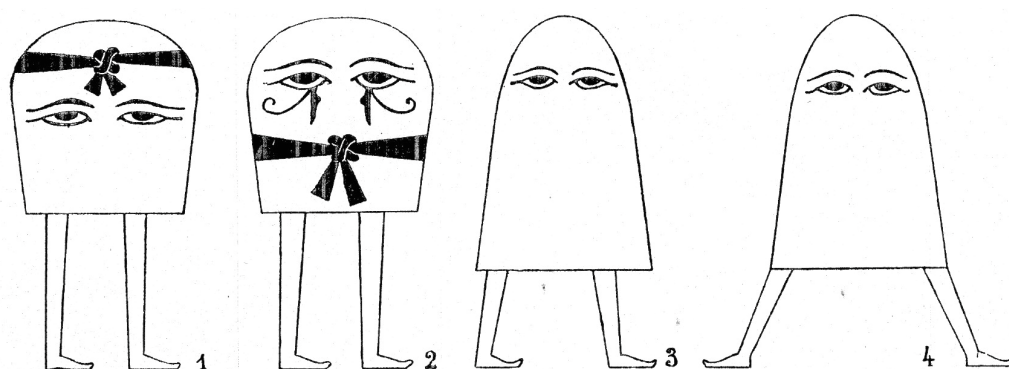




Figure 11. The iconography of Medjed after Bruyère (1939, p. 183, fig. 77): 1—no. 4; 2—nos 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10; 3, 4—no. 5.

Ilaria Cariddi proposes a rather similar typology of Medjed’s iconography (Cariddi 2018, pp. 201–2; Cariddi and Iannarilli 2020, pp. 86–87), which I present here in Table 2.

Table 2. The iconographic typology of the image of Medjed after Cariddi (2018, p. 201).

Type	Description	Sources (Nos.)
M.1	Medjed with a knotted red strip of cloth placed in the upper part of the demon’s body and human eyes painted below. The body has an ovoid shape and is coloured in white; the legs are filled in red.	4
M.2	Medjed with the red ‘belt’ located in the middle of the body, under the eyes (drawn in the form of a wadjet eye); the shape of the body is a rough rectangle with a round top.	2, 6, 7, 8, 9
M.3	Medjed has again wadjet eyes and the ‘belt’ in the lower part of the demon’s body, closer to the legs.	1, 3
M.4	Medjed has human eyes, no ‘belt’, and a more elongated conical shape.	5

While the iconographic typology of the image of the Medjed does not raise significant issues for discussion, its explanation remains problematic. Some scholars confine themselves to pointing out the strangeness of this image (Niwiński 1989, p. 122 (“a strange figure of Medjed”); Lenzo 2023, pp. 68, 69 (“a strange conical figure with two eyes and two legs”)). According to Milde (1991, p. 44), “it has the appearance of a conical cover, tightened by legs in a straddle. Maybe it is not a cover at all but the very body of the demon, for it is provided with two staring eyes”. I briefly proposed that the covered body of Medjed could be explained by his invisibility, which is mentioned in the text of Spell 17 (see above;

Tarasenko 2012, p. 285). Bernard Bruyère and Terence DuQuesne saw in Medjed the image of an upended oil vessel (*nw*-vase, Gardiner's sign W24: ) (Bruyère 1939, pp. 182–85; DuQuesne 2008, p. 19 (“a personification of a vessel for sacred oils”)). At the same time, DuQuesne (2008, p. 20) saw a possible connection between Medjed and the local shrine of Hathor at Asyut (See also DuQuesne 2002, pp. 39–60; Warkentin 2018, pp. 200–9). Cariddi (2018, pp. 203–4) suggests that the iconography may be based on a vessel with a sealed lid. She also cautiously observes a possible connection with the images of a fetish/symbol of the Thinite nome (*T3-wr*, Gardiner's sign R17: ) (Gardiner 1957, p. 503) or a mace-head.

4. Discussion

The group under discussion representing three “demons”, one of whom is Medjed, is characteristic only of the 21st Dynasty, and indeed can serve as a dating criterion. Andrzej Niwiński describes it as “innovative”, noting first of all a specific image of Medjed, who is always shown as the last “demon” of the group of three, and is unknown in the iconography of Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead* of the New Kingdom and Saite-Ptolemaic periods (Niwiński 1989, p. 122). Niwiński has also assembled the group (“family”) of seven rolls, on several of which he has noted that these three demons are shown (Niwiński 1989, p. 122). However, the first scholar to identify this corpus was Bernard Bruyère, who dated all the sources to the 18th Dynasty, on the basis of supposed stylistic similarities in the drawings with earlier examples (Bruyère 1939, pp. 182–84). Henk Milde states that in the papyri of *Mwt-m-wj3* (pBerlin P. 3157) and *ḥḥs-n-Mwt* (pCairo S.R. VII. 10255), mentioned by Niwiński (pBerlin 27 and pCairo 90), there are no images of Medjed, but he confirms their presence in the papyri of *T3-b3k-n-Ḥnsw* (pCairo S.R. VII. 10222 (pCairo 59)) and *ḥḥf-n-Ḥnsw* (pCairo J.E. 95658 (pCairo 19)), where they are included in vignettes to Spells 77 and 148 (Milde 1991, p. 45, fn. 39).

Milde, however, came to the conclusion that the “three demons do not belong together”, on the basis of the scenes in the papyrus of *Nsy-t3-nbt-j3rw* (pGreenfield) (No. 5), and he proposes that in all sources Medjed acts as an independent character (Milde 1991, p. 44, fn. 36). I cannot agree with him, because the hieratic pGreenfield is established as being as the latest copy of the illustrated Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead* from the Third Intermediate Period and could have been unique in its time, so that it cannot offer a basis for reconstructing the primary form of the iconography and its semantics.

In five earlier rolls (Nos. 4, 6, 7, 8, 9), all the three “demons” are represented together in the context of Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead*. One of the other “demons” has the head of a vulture, while the second has two falcon heads with *maat*-feathers. In many sources, they are depicted with knives (Nos. 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). Identifying these “demons” is difficult. The one with two falcon heads may be associated with the following passage in Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead*: *Hr pw wnnf m tpwy wnn w' hr m3't ky hr jsft dd3f jsft n jr zy m3't n jy hrz* “It is Horus with two heads, one bearing what is Truth (*maat*) and the other what is Evil (*isefet*), giving evil to the one who does it, and Truth to the one who comes bearing it” (after pNb.sni pLondon BM EA 9900, col. 64; Lapp 2006, pp. 218, 220; Quirke 2013, p. 60). As Milde (1991, p. 43) noted according to the image of this “demon”, “it may come as a surprise that both heads carry *m3't*-feather. But it seems that Horus's wrong-doing is an act of justice, too. For it is bestowed on those who are themselves guilty of wrong doing”. So the punishment of Evil in this case is a part of Justice. It is more difficult to identify the “demon” with a vulture head (might it be Shesemu as a figure close to Medjed?). There is no doubt that this entire triad relates to Sections 23–24 of Spell 17B of the *Book of the Dead* (Quirke 2013, p. 60), which are connected with ideas of posthumous reward.

5. Conclusions

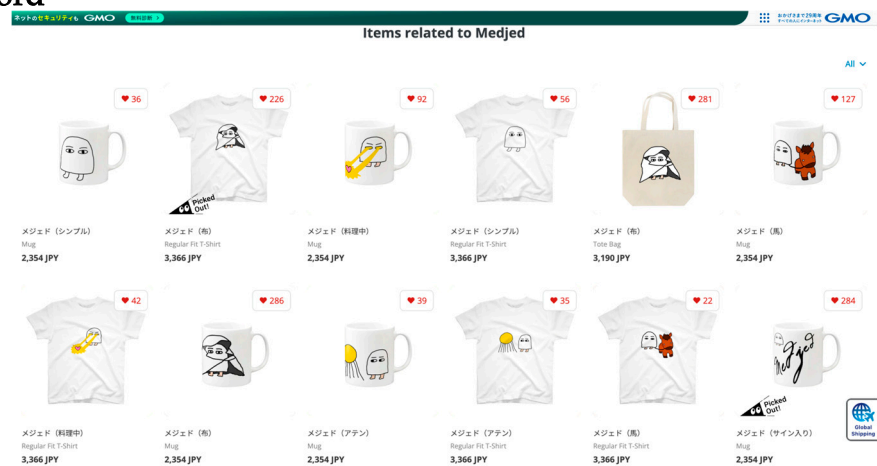
To sum up, it is obvious that a principal value for creators of the visual image of Medjed was his *invisibility* (*mn m33.n.twꜣf*), twice underlined in the text of Spell 17. Evidently, the very *invisibility* of this deity caused his unusual iconography, like Lewis Carroll’s hero *Humpty Dumpty*.²² Medjed has a conical body (as in pGreenfield) or looks like a rectangle with a round top. Medjed is depicted with human legs and without a true head—or with a cover hiding his face—but with eyes indicated and wearing a belt. All these details foreground his peculiar “covered”, “concealed” image. Medjed is the deity who had corporeal form but nevertheless essence, inaccessible to sight, as is emphasized by the characteristic cape that hides his shape. Thus, the iconography of Medjed presents a curious example of an attempt by Egyptian artists to depict an *unimaginable* being. It is an example of the creative endeavours of Egyptian artists during the 21st Dynasty.

It is a matter of some surprise that the ancient image of Medjed has gained considerable popularity in modern popular culture in Japan (anime, computer games, etc.), both visually and in its essential form—invisibility (Cromwell 2022, pp. 23–25) (Figure 12) In ancient Egyptian art this image did not survive beyond the Third Intermediate period and seems to have been forgotten. It is therefore most unexpected that it should receive a “second life” three millennia later; but that is a topic for a different study of modern culture and its ancient antecedents.

Afterword



(a)



(b)

Figure 12. (a,b) The image of Medjed as an element in modern Japanese popular culture ((a) the cute gods of the animation series *Kamigami no Ki* (“Chronicles of the Gods”). Source: MyAnimeList (after Salvador 2017, p. 19, fig. 12); (b) various products with Medjed images on the Suzuri online shop (<https://suzuri.jp/>, accessed on 29 June 2025)).

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Appendix A

Table A1. Sources with an image of Medjed (Third Intermediate Period).

No.	Document	BD 17 Vignette/Type by Cariddi (2018)	Type by Niwiński (1989)
1	<p>ḥḥ-s-n-Mwt pCairo J.E. 95637; S.R. IV. 528 Cursive Hieroglyphic Late 21st Dynasty Thebes Unpublished Bibliography: Niwiński (1989, p. 255 (pCairo 4)); Tarasenko (2012, p. 382 (5)); Cariddi and Iannarilli (2020, p. 85); Cariddi (2018, pp. 198, 200 (8)).</p>	Polychrome Figure 2 M.3	BD.III.1b + A.II.3
2	<p>ḥḥ-f-n-Ḥnsw pCairo J.E. 95658/S.R. IV. 556 Cursive Hieroglyphic Late 21st Dynasty Thebes Unpublished Bibliography: Bruyère (1939, p. 184, fig. 78); Niwiński (1989, p. 260 (pCairo 19)); Tarasenko (2012, p. 382 (6)); Cariddi and Iannarilli (2020, p. 85); Cariddi (2018, p. 198 (7)).</p>	Polychrome Figure 3 M.2	BD.II.1
3	<p>T3-b3k-n-Ḥnsw pCairo S.R. VII. 10222 Cursive Hieroglyphic Middle—late 21st Dynasty Thebes Unpublished Bibliography: Bruyère (1939, p. 183, fig. 77, 2); Niwiński (1989, p. 274 (pCairo 59)); Tarasenko (2012, p. 383 (2)); Cariddi and Iannarilli (2020, p. 85); Cariddi (2018, p. 198 (6)).</p>	Polychrome Figure 4 M.3	BD.II.1
4	<p>Jnj-ph-f-nḥt pCologne-Geneva C (Bibliotheca Bodmeriana) Cursive Hieroglyphic Middle 21st Dynasty Thebes Bibliography: von Bissing (1928), Taf. I; Niwiński (1989, p. 308 (pGeneva)); Sallé (1990, pp. 28–35); Bickel (2001, pp. 117–34, fig. 32, 39); Heerma van Voss (2008, pp. 163–66); Tarasenko (2012, pp. 383–84 (8)); Cariddi and Iannarilli (2020, p. 85); Cariddi (2018, p. 198 (4)).</p>	Polychrome Figure 5b,c M.1	BD.II.1
5	<p>Nsy-t3-nbt-jšrw (Naville: Ec) pLondon BM EA 10554 (pGreenfield) Hieratic and Cursive Hieroglyphic Late 21st Dynasty—early 22nd Dynasty Thebes Bibliography: Budge (1912); Lenzo (2023); Niwiński (1989, p. 338 (pLondon 61)); Quirke (1993, pp. 50 (Nr. 145), 79 (fn. 145)); Rößler-Köhler (1999, pp. 95–98); Tarasenko (2012, pp. 381–82 (2)); Cariddi and Iannarilli (2020, p. 85); Cariddi (2018, p. 200 (9)).</p>	Monochrome Figure 6 M.4	BD.III.2
6	<p>ḥḥ-f-n-Ḥnsw pCologne-Geneva CI (Bibliotheca Bodmeriana) Cursive Hieroglyphic 21st Dynasty Thebes Unpublished Bibliography: Valloggia (2001, p. 141); Tarasenko (2012, p. 384 (9)); Cariddi and Iannarilli (2020, p. 84); Cariddi (2018, p. 198 (1)).</p>	Monochrome Figure 7 M.2	—

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Document	BD 17 Vignette/Type by Cariddi (2018)	Type by Niwinski (1989)
7	<i>T3-nt-Jmntt-hrt-jb</i> pCologne-Geneva CII (Bibliotheca Bodmeriana) Cursive Hieroglyphic 21st Dynasty Thebes Unpublished <i>Bibliography:</i> Valloggia (2001, p. 142); Tarasenko (2012, p. 384 (10)); Cariddi and Iannarilli (2020, p. 85); Cariddi (2018, p. 198 (2)).	Monochrome Figure 8 M.2	—
8	<i>Nsy-Hnsw</i> pTurin 1818 Cursive Hieroglyphic 21st Dynasty Unpublished Thebes <i>Bibliography:</i> Rößler-Köhler (1999, pp. 124–25); Tarasenko (2012, p. 384 (11)); Cariddi and Iannarilli (2020, p. 85); Cariddi (2018, p. 198 (3)).	Monochrome Figure 9b,c M.2	—
9	<i>Djw-sw-n-Mwt</i> (var. <i>Dmy-n-Mwt</i>) pLondon BM EA 9948 Cursive Hieroglyphic Middle—late 21st Dynasty Thebes <i>Bibliography:</i> Shorter (1938); Niwinski (1989, p. 322 (pLondon 8)); Quirke (1993, pp. 35 (Nr. 45), 73 (fn. 45)); Rößler-Köhler (1999, pp. 123–24); Tarasenko (2012, pp. 384 (13); 385, fig. 5); Cariddi and Iannarilli (2020, p. 85); Cariddi (2018, p. 198 (5)).	Monochrome Figure 10b M.2	BD.II.1
10	<i>P3-dj-Hnsw</i> Coffin Lyon Musée des Beaux-Arts H 2320–2321 (interior wall of the lid of the inner coffin) Cursive Hieroglyphic 21st Dynasty Thebes <i>Bibliography:</i> Jamen (2015); Tarasenko (2016, pp. 18–19, fig. 27a).	Monochrome Figure 11 M.2	—

Notes

- 1 “Since the God is in everything and everything is in the God ‘who made millions of himself,’ there are practically no limits of the ways, in which He can be imagined, named or represented” (Niwinski 2000, p. 28).
- 2 “Only one imaginable or imaginary shape of God officially accepted by theologians” (Niwinski 2000, p. 28).
- 3 The database of Egyptian “demons” from the Middle and New Kingdoms was created by the *Ancient Egyptian Demonology Project* (<https://voices.uchicago.edu/demonthings/demonbase/>) (accessed on 29 June 2025), founded by Kasia Szpakowska (<https://www.swansea.ac.uk/arts-and-humanities/arts-and-humanities-research/our-recent-research-projects/ancient-egyptian-demonology/>) (accessed on 29 June 2025).
- 4 Chegodaev translates “who throws with his eyes” (“мечет глазами”) (Mikhail Chegodaev 2002, p. 100), but in all New Kingdom examples of the spell the form “his eye” (*jrtj*) is given in the singular (Lapp 2006, pp. 236–237). See Grapow (1917 (*Urk. V*) (Überschrift), pp. 26–27); Allen (1960, p. 90); Allen (1974, p. 30); Barguet (1967, p. 62); Hornung (1979, p. 71); Faulkner (2001, p. 48; *LGG III*, p. 476) (“der mit seinem Auge strahlt”); Quirke (2013, p. 60).
- 5 For etymology of the root *md* see Takács (2008, p. 869–83).
- 6 Totenbuchprojekt Bonn, TM 134467, <totenbuch.awk.nrw.de/objekt/tm134467>.
- 7 Totenbuchprojekt Bonn, TM 134446, <totenbuch.awk.nrw.de/objekt/tm134446>.
- 8 Totenbuchprojekt Bonn, TM 134491, <totenbuch.awk.nrw.de/objekt/tm134491>.
- 9 Totenbuchprojekt Bonn, TM 134423, <totenbuch.awk.nrw.de/objekt/tm134423>.
- 10 Totenbuchprojekt Bonn, TM 134519, <totenbuch.awk.nrw.de/objekt/tm134519>.
- 11 Most likely, *Nsy-t3-nbt-jšrw* died before the beginning of the Twenty-second Dynasty.

- ¹² The image returns to a scene XVIII in Spell 17 of the Ramesside *Book of the Dead* (Milde 1991, p. 39), which shows a goose and a falcon flying above it.
- ¹³ I am thankful to John Baines for this observation.
- ¹⁴ Totenbuchprojekt Bonn, TM 134678, <totenbuch.awk.nrw.de/objekt/tm134678>.
- ¹⁵ For this scene see in detail Tarasenko (2016).
- ¹⁶ Nine fragments (one without a text) representing two parts of a introductory monochrome vignette were preserved (deceased in an adoration pose in front of the offering table, the figure of a deity did not remains); one fragment of a scene with a cat, a serpent, and *jšd*-tree, and Isis with Nephthys; one fragment of a scene with Khepry's boat (only the vessel's prow and one column of the text), and four fragments of the worshipping scenes. Besides, in the reconstruction of the roll in which the fragments were placed under glass, the introductory vignette was incorrectly located at the end of the roll, not at its beginning (on the right).
- ¹⁷ Totenbuchprojekt Bonn, TM 134677, <totenbuch.awk.nrw.de/objekt/tm134677>.
- ¹⁸ Totenbuchprojekt Bonn, TM 134600, <totenbuch.awk.nrw.de/objekt/tm134600>.
- ¹⁹ Totenbuchprojekt Bonn, TM 134536, <totenbuch.awk.nrw.de/objekt/tm134536>.
- ²⁰ As Glenn Janes (Manchester) kindly noted to me, the sling above the eyes recalls *seshed*-headbands found on the Third Intermediate Period *shabtis*.
- ²¹ For symbolic and magical value of a belt see e.g., Baines (1975, pp. 1–24).
- ²² I am grateful to Dr Henk Milde (Leiden) for this comparison.

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