

Roeten, Leo: 2018 *Loaves, Beds, Plants and Osiris. Considerations about the emergence of the Cult of Osiris*, Oxford: Archaeopress, 217 pp. [Archaeopress Egyptology 21].

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The emergence of the god Osiris has attracted the attention of many Egyptologists who have specialized in several different areas of research, from religion and language, to archaeology and economy. For decades, scholars have been debating his origin and appearance in Egyptian sources before, in or after the Fifth Dynasty (see, for instance, Griffiths 1966; Bolshakov 1992 and 2002; Shalomi-Hen 2007 and 2015; Dulíková 2016a: 135–160; and mainly Smith 2017: 1–165). Among the deities of the Egyptian pantheon, Osiris was one of the most significant divinities, being endowed with multilayered (or even ambivalent) characteristics and connected to death, the renewal of life, resurrection, regeneration, fertility, the harvest, Nile floods, kingship, *etc.* As far as the studied evidence demonstrates, Osiris is first attested in the elite non-royal sphere (Smith 2017: 123), more specifically in the offering formulae of the mid-Fifth Dynasty (*e.g.* Dulíková 2016a: 136). There seems to be some features in the tomb decoration (mainly the offering table scenes) which could be interpreted as being related to the first appearance of Osiris in the sources. The publication under review, written by Leo Roeten, offers yet another insight into this widely discussed and still puzzling phenomenon, based on the analyses of some relief scenes.

Besides introduction, bibliography and catalogue, the book is divided into 10 chapters, although chapters 3–5 represent rather three different parts of one single chapter than completely separate sections of the book. The argumentation of the study is also supplemented by figures, tables and charts throughout the text. In the Introduction (pp. 1–13), the author deals with the phenomenon of the tomb, which he describes as a “multifunctional monument”. Here, he attempts to answer the question concerning the reasons for the building of such types of structures and their social possible allusions. Thus, different tomb types and their major decorative elements within a chronological framework are presented, but the given information remains very brief and introductory. Chapter 1 of the publication under review (pp. 14–26) is devoted to the offering table scene and provides an insight into its development from the Early Dynastic Period to the Old Kingdom. The author attempts to challenge the dating of the so-called Bankfield stela, which he (according to his research of the bread loaf depictions) dates back to the early Second Dynasty, rather than to the Third or to the beginning of the Fourth, as proposed by others. Chapter 2 (pp. 27–49) turns the attention of the reader

to the loaves of bread and their depiction in ancient Egyptian iconography and archaeology, thus, also to baking scenes, bread moulds and the baking process itself. The excursus which follows this chapter examines the gestures in the Old Kingdom tomb decoration protecting the actors against heat during fire-connected activities. This kind of gesture is identified in scenes of pre-heating bread moulds, metal melting, cooking and also in ship scenes, where it was used as a protection of the face or eyes against strong heat or sunrays. Although this brief excursus is only secondarily linked to the topic of the book, it gives the reader interesting insights and represents a nice piece of supplementary material to the main focus of the author’s research.

Chapter 3 (pp. 50–62) concentrates on the bread loaves depicted on offering tables in tomb decoration and the development of this image in the first three dynasties. The author presents the applied methodology, followed by a study of several stelae where he aims to verify their dating. Subsequently, Chapter 4 (pp. 63–69) continues with the same general topic as the previous one, focusing on the length of the bread loaves and distinguishing the three dating systems of Nadine Cherpion (1989), Joyce Swinton (2014) and Miroslav Bárta (1995); additionally, he attempts to establish a new chronology or dating system. However, as the presentation of the different dating systems and of the examined iconographic material remains very brief and the discussion is abbreviated, the attempt to shed more light onto the problem or even to establish a new system was not very successful. In the following chapter (pp. 70–90), the author concentrates on the topic of the length of the loaves in detail, analysing diverse features in depictions and focusing on chronological development. It is the length of the loaves and the differences in their indentation that demonstrates significant chronological developments in the offering table scenes; however, it must be said that a study by Andrea Kahlbacher (2013) dealing with bread and reed in the funerary repast imagery should be included and taken into consideration.

Other chapters address the aspects of the rise and character of the cult of Osiris (Chapter 6: pp. 91–99), discussing the earliest archaeological and epigraphic evidence of Osiris, and the Fields of Rushes and the Field of Offerings in connection with the reed plumes on the offering table (Chapter 7: pp. 100–108). Chapter 8 (pp. 109–138) deals with the topic of the rebirth of the

deceased, with special attention devoted to the so-called bed, water lily and marsh scenes, which were connected to the rebirth of the deceased non-royal persons, and to the cult of Osiris. Another excursus focuses on the significance of the goddess Hathor, mainly in link with the bed and marsh scenes. Chapter 9 (pp. 139–143) concentrates on the sustenance of the *ka* and presents the author's view on the topic with his observation that there probably was a clear distinction between the amounts of real and ritual food supplies. The last chapter (pp. 144–161) focuses on the discussion and summarizes the conclusions, where Roeten presents his opinion that the cult of Osiris must have existed at the turn of the Fourth to the Fifth Dynasty, before the first attestation of this deity in the sources.

The appendix of the book contains various tables which enlist, for instance, the tombs with bread loaves on the offering table, the chronological development and parallels of the Early Dynastic stelae, the lengths of the bread loaves, the presence of the baking rim or indentation, the frequency of bed-making scenes, *etc.*; thus, providing a useful list of references. However, notes on spatial distribution are, unfortunately, not presented. Similarly, the bibliography is also not fully comprehensive, as many important studies were not included; for example, some major treatises dealing with the beginnings of the Osiris' cult are missing (Griffiths 1966; Shalomi-Hen 2007 and 2015) and some are not properly dealt with and taken into consideration (Smith 2017). The incorporated figures well supplement the texts and support the analyses. On the other hand, the technical quality of these is sometimes quite poor, which makes the understanding of the picture more difficult.

The first part of the book, where the author deals with bread, bread-making and bread-offerings represents a nice case-study on this interesting topic, but, due to the rather too brief discussions, incomplete evidence and missing references, it remains far from being fully comprehensive. It does, although, contain very helpful parts, collections of data and insightful excursi. The latter part, where the author focuses on cultic and religious phenomena linked with tombs, offerings and the afterlife, mainly on the question of the emergence of Osiris in the Egyptian pantheon, the significance of the Fields of Rushes and the concept of sustaining the *ka* of the deceased, is not sufficiently supported by evidence and, thus, also not satisfactorily interpreted. When focusing on the cult of Osiris, for instance, one should not work only with epigraphic or iconographic evidence. It is particularly important to examine the topics connected with the real and social significance of the tomb and of the mortuary cult, as the deity played a significant role in these, as well as in the whole concept of the afterlife beliefs. Although Roeten presents the opinion that the burial equipment signifies conceptions of the afterlife, this statement does not always reflect the reality, as was demonstrated by Mark Smith (2017: 10–11, with further references). Even though a brief summary of various theories on the origins of Osiris occurs on p. 91, note 2, it would be more supportive


had this concise overview been elaborated on in the Introduction and discussed widely in the main text.

The weakest point of the book resides in its unbalanced approach to the primary sources and Egyptian religious concepts. Roeten puts stress almost solely on iconographic evidence, while the textual evidence is (in great part) side-lined, which, of course, stems from the author's focus on tomb decoration. Moreover, in view of the fact that the emergence of the cult of Osiris, the importance of the *ka* for the deceased and the concept of the heavenly field represent the thread that runs through the entire monograph, the relevant written evidence is quite startlingly not included. There are, for instance, several examples to mention relating to the author's statement "Furthermore Osiris is not mentioned in tombs that can be securely dated to Niuserre (V.6) or earlier" (see p. 97). Offering formulae including Osiris are attested, for example, in the following tombs dated to the mid-Fifth Dynasty, Nyuserre's reign: *Ny-ḥnh-R^c* (Saqqara F 1; Harpur 1987: 274 [430] V.6?; probably the same individual as in the mason's marks of Vizier Ptahshepses' mastaba, *cf.* Verner 1992: Inscr. Nos. 39, 89, 91, 93, 116, 299, 305, 404, 408), *Ty* and his wife *Nfr-ḥtp.s* (Saqqara D 22; Verner 1987; Auenmüller 2014, "early reign of Nyuserre"; Strudwick 1985: 158–159 [157], "perhaps late reign of Neweserre"; Harpur 1987: 277 [543] V.8–9), *Ny-k3-ḥnh* (Saqqara D 48; Strudwick 1985: 104–105 [75], "middle fifth dynasty"; Harpur 1987: 274 [433] V.3–6?), *Wsr-ntj* (Saqqara D 1; Strudwick 1985: 114 [91], "later reign of Neweserre or that of Menkauhor"; Harpur 1987: 275 [451] V.6L–7), and others (see Dulíková 2016a: 138–140, with more examples). Concerning the tomb dating, the author, again, relies too much on the dating based only on decoration criteria, which is fine if combined with other findings (for instance, see the case of *Dw3-ḥp* who lived in the mid-Fifth Dynasty, Dulíková 2016b: 43–44; *cf.* Harpur 1987: 277 [557] VI.7? or earlier VI). Another questionable issue is the absence of Osiris in the anthroponyms of the earlier dynasties and also in the records of the so-called Giza writing board, when Osiris was extremely popular. The reliefs analysed by Roeten could surely be linked to the cult of Osiris, but the existence of religious concepts, which were later connected with Osiris, before the first attestation of the deity does not necessarily indicate the early presence/manifestation of the god. Such concepts and notions might have existed (and they most probably did) even before the deity, as well as before other deities. Similarly, also Roeten's discussion on the topic of the *ka* and its sustenance would be more convincing if the author explained how he views the concept of the *ka* and what the current Egyptological approaches in understanding this puzzling religious phenomenon are. By not doing so, the appropriate parts of the book that deal with the *ka*, with the question of magical/actual food supply and with the importance of offering for the afterlife existence of the deceased remain incomplete and unconvincing.

To sum up, albeit Roeten's publication collects valuable data, offers some interesting thoughts and

the appendices can be useful in further research, his approach to the topics of ancient Egyptian religion and mortuary cult, as well as the presented suggestions require more elaborated investigation.

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