

On some Egyptian Word Plays with „b3“ „Soul“

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In this contribution, word plays with the Egyptian word „b3“ „soul“ are taken into account. The phenomenon is well known in previous research, but has hitherto not been dealt with on a larger scale. The basis of the following study consists of nine examples.

Keywords: *Egyptian Philology – Egyptian Word Plays – Egyptian Word Plays with „b3“ „soul“*

Introduction

The present contribution examines Egyptian word plays with the word „b3“ „soul“. Previous research has not yet dealt with this topic on a larger scale. In this study they are being treated on a broader basis for the first time. The details will become clearer as we progress. The orientation towards phonetic criteria is – this can already be said – of particular importance. The Ba-concept plays a significant role in ancient Egyptian thinking. The trail of this religious-philosophical speculation can be traced through almost all historical epochs of pharaonic culture. The „b3“–soul, along with other components such as the „šw.t“–shadow, „ḥ.t“–body, „k3“–Ka and „ḥ3.t“–corpse, forms part of the bodily structure of the contemporary human image. The still-relevant standard work on the Ba is the book of Žabkar (1968, 1-163) from the year 1968, who took a position on the most important intellectual-historical backgrounds. However, certain individual aspects related to the Ba soul have also been highlighted in the secondary literature. The Ba soul thus emerges as a frequent object of study. The following overview may give an impression of what has been achieved so far.

Literary Review

To start with, Ember (1917, 85) linked the word „b3“ to its corresponding Arabic etymon. The most important characteristics of the Ba-soul were summarized by Bonnet (2000, 74-77) and Brunner (1983, 138-143). The lexical roots of the word base were discussed in more detail by Ward (1978, 148ff). The word was tackled by Diakonoff et al. (1994, 21) from a pan-Hamitosemitic (Afro-Asiatic)

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perspective. The aforementioned anthropocentric conception was transferred by Fischer–Elfert (2015, 235) to demons. The close connection between Ba and Ka was briefly commented on by Backes (2016, 432). The significance of the Ba, specifically in texts from the Amarna period, was illuminated by Luiselli (2011, 157-158). The connection between „b3“ „soul“ and „b3“ „ram“ was made transparent by Kaplony (1969, 36) in all due brevity. The basis of this connection is the homonymy of the two roots, hinted at by Roberson (2012, 190), Backes (2016, 272/756), Hornung (1982, 47) and Lapp (2014, 26). The role of the Ba in purification rites is also valued high, pointed out by Töpfer (2015, 22). The quality of the goat of Mendes as the b3-soul of Osiris and the resulting identification of the latter with Pan was specifically mentioned by von Lieven (2016, 70). The importance of the „b3“-soul in the sun god's night journey was paradigmatically emphasized by Hornung (1999, 27; for a possible Hermetic parallel cf. Petersen 2015, 297; for possible parallels in the Greek texts from Mandulistemple in Kalabscha cf. Tallet 2016, 298). The Ba was elevated to the rank of a literary subject by the Middle Kingdom composition „Man who was tired of his life“ (Barta 1969, 9-151). The Ba also received the privilege of its own small religious text (Beinlich 2000, *passim*; cf. the review by Quack 2001, 209-211). The appearance of the Ba in funerary contexts was addressed by Zandee (1977, 176-179)¹. The metaphorical use of „b3“ in the sense of „deceased“ was introduced into the debate by Sander-Hansen (1937, 98). The difficulties ancient authors encountered in translating the Egyptian word „b3“ have been documented by Quaegebeur (1978, 253-254). The frequent occurrence of the Ba in the Thot Book has been explicatily mentioned by Jasnow (2016, 334-340). The word plays with „b3“ have apparently not yet been the subject of a separate investigation. The exeption mentioned below only confirms the rule. What has been ommited so far will be addressed here.

The work aims at the collection and first review of the material that has been discovered. A total of nine word plays are presented here, the number of which should be representative for the purposes of this study. The unrealistic claim to completeness should not even be made.

Research Questions

Word plays as such have traditionally enjoyed great popularity in Egyptian, which roughly corresponds to the experience in neighboring oriental languages. Egyptian word plays have been discussed several time in specialized studies. The names of Derchain-Urtel (1984, 55-61), Lippert (2001, 88-100) and Breyer (2003, 13-22) can serve as an example. The question of word plays has recently been discussed more frequently in Egyptology. The essay therefore follows a

¹For the Ba im Book of the Death cf. Schneider 1994, 357; for the Ba-spell cf. also Guernieur 2004, 256-257; Leitz 2011, 192-94; Wüthrich/Stöhr 2013, *passim*.

current trend. However, the study of word plays formed with a specific word was not carried out very often. This chapter opens a new page, at least in part. Hopefully the results will make this innovative approach worthwhile. As for the idea of word plays with „b3“ „soul“, it can be supported by at least one precedent. The case of Jasnow (2016, 335) is worth recalling here, who draw attention to the word play between „b3“ „soul“ and „b3k“. The example shows that the idea itself is not far-fetched. The relevant evidence for this question is found at the passage „mr-rḥ ḏ=f my ḏ=w n=y t3 wp.t t3 imy t3 tr.t n.t ir b3k n n3 b3.w [-Rʿ]“ for which the editors propose the translation „The one who loves knowledge, he says: „Let one say to me the work of the fist//the hand which labors on the divine writings“. Jasnow seriously considers this a play on words, whose authority further supports the approach chosen here. The phonetic basis of this word play was not analyzed there. However, the well-known weakness of „k“ offers an ample explanation, which led to its assimilation to the equally weak consonant „3“. The defective spelling „b3“ (Klotz 2014, 175) for „b3k“ „to overthrow“ perhaps provides a further clue. The loss of „k“ can be observed in many other cases. The possibility of word plays with „b3“ is therefore clearly established. The material base is here expanded a little. The arrangement follows an alphabetical scheme. This should make it easier to find the examples.

The interpretation of the following word plays leans on the line of Leitz (2014, 310 n. 44), according to whose results, it is often sufficient if mere similarity is met as the main condition. In contrast, Loprieno (2000, 7) assumes that most Egyptian word plays elude the modern reader due to their obscure pronunciation. The notorious lack of vowels in Egyptian script has a detrimental effect here. The source of the word plays consists predominantly of literary/semi-literary texts, where their occurrence is most frequently observed. The traditional distinction between literary and documentary texts forms the prerequisite for this. In what follows, the opportunity will be used as often as possible to point out the phonetic origins of the word plays. In anticipation of later discussions, it should be noted that metathesis plays a prominent role here. The frequency with which metathesis occurs in Egyptian needs no special emphasis.

The Egyptian Material

The first interest arises from the play on words between „b3“ „Ba“ and „iʿb“ „to unite“, for which one evidence can be provided. The corresponding passage is found in: „wnn b3.w nt.w p3w.tiw ʿb śm=śn m wr.ti“ (Sethe/Firchow 1957, VIII/6g; translation: Sternberg-Hotabi 1993, 41), for which the translation „It is the Ba's of the primordial gods united with their image in Werti“ is the most plausible. The example can be dated to the Graeco-Roman period. According to Sternberg-El

Hotabi, the expression „wr.ti“ is probably related to Month. The play on words relies on a metathesis and the sound change between „3“ and „i“, which is encountered with a certain frequency. The loss of „i“ at the beginning of the word is another component, which should be compared with the information shared by Westendorf (1962, 13). Incidentally, the spelling „b“ for „i“² is not uncommon. The apparently intended play on words between „i“³ „présenter“ und „b.t“ „vase“ in „i‘b.n=i n=k ‘b.t“ (Cauville 1997, 95) „(je) te présente le vase“ offers a complement. The almost identical pronunciation of „i“⁴ „versehen sein“ and „3b.t“ „Speiseopfer“ in recent Egyptian linguistic history should also be mentioned for the record. (Kockelmann/Winter 2016, 58 n. 1).

The second play on words was introduced between „b3“ „Ba“ and „ib“ „heart“, for which two references can be identified. The first location is found in the passage: „šḥtp=i ib n b3 imn m iḥ.wt=k m-‘b ḥmnw nti r gś=f“ (Sethe/Firchow 1957, VIII, 31; Aufrere 2000, 354; translation: Sternberg-El Hotabi 1993, 120), whose closest translation is: „I will satisfy the heart of the hidden Ba with your things beside the Ogdoad which is on his side“. The dating again points to the Graeco-Roman period. The words are spoken by the god Amun. Sternberg-El Hotabi equates the hidden Ba with Amun-Re-Osiris. The second example appears in: „ii b3=f n ḡ.t=f n ib=f“ (Leitz 2011, 192), to which the rendering „his Ba comes to his corpse and his heart“ is recommended. The quoted words refer to the deceased, for whose postmortal existence union with the Ba is of fundamental importance. The example can be dated to the Graeco-Roman period as well. The foundation of the word play is primarily the sound change between „3“ and „i“, which is one of the most common phenomena of its kind in the Egyptian language³. The word play is also positively influenced by a metathesis. The alternate reading of the „heart“-hieroglyph in Ptolemaic times as „ib“ or „3b“ (Fairman 1943, 111; Daumas 1988, 276; Kurth 2007, 226) may also be of some importance for the explanation.

The word play between „b3“ „soul“ and „w‘b“⁴ „to purify“ requires the same detailed discussion, which is clearly intended in „š m inr n ‘in ḥr gś... n ḥw.t-nṯr r w‘b im=f n b3.w lwn“ (Heise 2007, 251). The translation „basin of limestone from Tura, at the side... of the temple, to purify there the souls of Heliopolis“ best meets the criteria. The souls of Heliopolis already appear as an independent entity in the Pyramid Texts, where their primary task is to build a stairway to heaven for the king. Heliopolis is considered one of the oldest religious

²For the writing „b“ for „i“ cf. Vuilleumier 2016, 405; Junge 2003, 228; Pries 2011, 381.

³For this sound change cf. Edel 1955/1964, 59f; Westendorf 1962, 10f; Jasnow/Zauzich 2005, 89.

⁴For the verb „w‘b“ „to purify“ cf. Roccati 1998, 91.

cities of ancient Egypt, not having been systematically and fully excavated. The limestone quarries of Tura were already exploited in the Old Kingdom. In terms of dating, this time we must go back to the Late Period. The putative word play is based on the following three pillars: The sound change between „3“ and „w“ must be mentioned first, which should be familiar from the above. The loss of „w“ at the beginning of the word is the second cause, which has already been discussed several times (Westendorf 1962, 20; Kurth 2007, 493). The process can be explained by the weak character of the „w“. In addition, a metathesis can again be applied. The decision for or against this word play depends, moreover, on one's personal willingness to include the plural ending of „b3.w“ in the argument. The facts clearly indicate that this possibility should be kept open. The last detail represents the culmination of the word play, so to speak. The proximity to the wordplay between „b3“ and „i'b“ discussed above is unmistakable. The probability of the word plays is further increased by the parallel.

For the sake of completeness, the word play between „b3“ „Ba“ and „b3k“ „to shine“ must also be mentioned, which can be seen in „b3 b3k n wsir“ (Leitz 2002, 679) „the shining Ba of Osiris“. The syncretistic connection is clearly to be interpreted as a designation of Month-Re-Harachte. The background of the word play is certainly the loss of „k“ which Westendorf (1962, 42) has already commented positively on. The reason for this is evident in its obvious weakness. The similarity to the aforementioned word play between „b3“ and „b3k“ can not be overlooked.

The wordplay between „b3“ „Ba“ and „bi3“ „firmament, heaven“ must be highlighted next, for which at least two examples are available. The first example can be detected in „lp.t-šw.wt n lmn.t t3-wr [n] km3.n wsir 3ś.t 3h.t n.t 3ś.t iṭi=ś t3.wi im=ś t3 wr n nb.t-ḥw.wt bi3 n b3.w nw nṯr.wt r-3w=śn ś.t šhn n.t [ḥm.w]“ (Sethe/Firchow 1957, VIII, 111; von Recklinghausen 2007, 155). The translation „(Thebes is) Karnak for Amaunet, Dendera [for] the daughter [of Re...] for him, whom Osiris and Isis have begotten, the horizon of Isis, she rules the two lands within it, the east of Nephthys, the firmament of the Bas of all goddesses, the place where the [idols] of the gods are set down“ probably best corresponds to reality. The dating again extends to the Graeco-Roman period. The expression „[n] km3.n wsir 3ś.t“ „for him, whom Osiris and Isis have begotten“ could refer to Horus as the common son of the two gods. The second example appears in „b3=ś m bi3“ (Leitz 2002, 679), for which the translation „whose Ba is in heaven“ seems obvious. The epithet is given to the goddess Hathor. The reason for the play on word lies in the loss of „i“ in the middle of the word, which has already been discussed by Edel and Westendorf (Edel 1955, 61; Westendorf

1962, 13). The „i“ is also known to be a weak consonant. The same factor was already used as a basis above.

The word play between „b3“ „Ba“ and „b‘h“ „abundance“ is to be evaluated at the end, which is formulated in „iri n=k hn.k.t=k nfr.w hr mwt=k Nw.t b‘h=k im m b3 n mnd.wi=ś“ (Kucharek 2010, 449). The rendering „Your perfect things were prepared for you by your mother Nut, so that you have abundance of it as Ba from here breasts“ is probably the most practical. In dating, one must again descend quite far back on the time axis. The passage belongs to the context of Lamentations about Osiris, whose provision is described. The regeneration of the god is probably the main focus. The play on word ultimately stems from the loss of „h“, whose most recent treatment comes from Cannuyer (1985, 117), Peust (1999, 158) and Kurth (2007, 526). The spelling „b“ (Bouvier 1999, Pl. 9) for „b‘h“ represents a kind of precursor to this word play, since the loss of „h“ has already fully occurred. The external cause of the process is certainly the assimilation of „h“ to „“ based on the sound change between this two consonants. The last phenomenon can be considered quite sure (Osing 1976a, 236; Osing 1976b, 509; Westendorf 1962, 36; Westendorf 2002, 134; Edel 1955/1964, 54).

Conclusion

The analysis leads to the following conclusion: Egyptian word plays formed with „b3“ cover a fairly broad spectrum. The relatively large number reflects the popularity of the Ba-concept in the ancient Egyptian worldview. The overall finding can thus be conclusively explained. However, this is only a preliminary survey, and we will always be limited by the chance of preservation. The possibility is not excluded that more examples will be added in the future. But the amount is already enough to get an idea of this phenomenon. The relatively young age of the examples is striking, but this may be due to coincidence in their transmission. The significance of the Ba, mentioned at the beginning, is thus also reflected on a linguistic level. This possibility represents a nice addition. The fact that there are multiple examples of some word plays strengthens the argument in an unexpected way. Needless to say, that the above proposals should only be understood as working hypotheses.

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