

Osiris in Nedit: the floating of a dead body

Osiris en Nedit: el flotamiento de un cuerpo difunto

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ABSTRACT

The god Osiris is a deity who is killed, but who is revived thanks to mummification ritual. The myth of the death of the god was truly relevant in the history of ancient Egypt. In some Egyptian sources the myth of Osiris death occurs in a mythological place called Nedit, where he finally floats over the water. The death by drowning of the god is not accidental since Osiris had a close connection with the Nile. This article will not only analyze the multiple sources that tell us about the drowning of Osiris in Nedit, but it will also examine why we should not talk about him as a swimmer, but as a dead that floats.

KEYWORDS: Osiris, Nedit, Mythology, Egyptian religion.

RESUMEN

El dios Osiris es una divinidad que es asesinada, pero que revive después gracias al ritual de momificación. El mito de la muerte del dios fue muy relevante en la historia del antiguo Egipto. En algunas fuentes egipcias el mito de la muerte de Osiris sucede en un lugar mitológico llamado Nedit, donde se acaba flotando sobre el agua. La muerte por ahogamiento del dios no es casual ya que Osiris poseía una estrecha vinculación con el Nilo. En este artículo no solo se estudiarán las múltiples fuentes que nos hablan del ahogamiento de Osiris, sino que se analizará por qué no debemos hablar de él como un nadador, sino como un difunto que flota.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Osiris, Nedit, Mitología, Religión egipcia.

Osíris em Nedit: a flutuação de um corpo falecido

RESUMO

O deus Osíris é uma divindade que é assassinada, mas que depois revive graças ao ritual de mumificação. O mito da morte do deus foi muito relevante na história do antigo Egito. Em algumas fontes egípcias o mito da morte de Osíris ocorre num lugar mitológico chamado Nedit, onde ele acaba flutuando na água. A morte por afogamento do deus não é acidental, pois Osíris tinha uma ligação estreita com o Nilo. Neste artigo não estudaremos apenas as múltiplas fontes que nos falam sobre o afogamento de Osíris, mas analisaremos por que não devemos falar sobre isso: ele como nadador, mas como um falecido flutuante.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Osíris, Nedit, Mitologia, Religião egípcia.

Osiris dans Nedit: la flottaison d'un corps décédé

RÉSUMÉ

Le dieu Osiris est une divinité qui est assassinée, mais qui ressuscite ensuite grâce au rituel de momification. Le mythe de la mort du dieu était très pertinent dans l'histoire de l'Égypte ancienne. Dans certaines sources égyptiennes, le mythe de la mort d'Osiris se produit dans un lieu mythologique appelé Nedit, où il finit par flotter

sur l'eau. La mort par noyade du dieu n'est pas accidentelle puisqu'Osiris avait un lien étroit avec le Nil. Dans cet article nous étudierons non seulement les multiples sources qui nous parlent de la noyade d'Osiris, mais nous analyserons pourquoi il ne faut pas en parler. Lui comme un nageur, mais comme un défunt flottant.

MOTS-CLÉ: Osiris, Nedit, Mythologie, Religion égyptienne.

Osiride in Nedit: il galleggiamento di un corpo defunto

SOMMARIO

Il dio Osiride è una divinità che viene assassinata, ma che poi rinasce grazie al rito della mummificazione. Il mito della morte del dio era molto rilevante nella storia dell'antico Egitto. In alcune fonti egiziane il mito della morte di Osiride avviene in un luogo mitologico chiamato Nedit, dove finisce per galleggiare sull'acqua. La morte per annegamento del dio non è casuale poiché Osiride aveva uno stretto legame con il Nilo. In questo articolo non studieremo solo le molteplici fonti che ci raccontano dell'annegamento di Osiride, ma analizzeremo il motivo per cui non dovremmo parlarne: lui come un nuotatore, ma come un defunto galleggiante.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Osiride, Nedit, Mitologia, Religione egiziana.

Introduction

According to the Plutarch's myth of Osiris, Seth organizes a conspiracy against his brother Osiris and the plotters murder him by putting him in a coffin perfectly made for his body and throwing him into the Nile¹. This death of Osiris occurs in Nedit in some Egyptian sources, but, also, according to Plutarch, at a banquet. In any case, after Osiris dies, he falls into the Nile, without a coffin – according to the Egyptian sources that we are going to study in this article – or with a coffin as Plutarch describes. Then, his two sisters, Isis and Nephthys, rescue him, in some cases, as we will appreciate, from the water.

In Egyptian mythology it is usual to find geographical spaces like those found in ancient Egypt. Because of that we can observe always references to the water, the hill, the sand, the reeds... and other elements that were in his space, such as the animals. In this context, the body of Osiris is found in a natural space that could be described with two words: water and sandbank. This event took place in a mythological space that was Nedit, and in the texts this space was described as a bank of the Nile, as we will study.

In this moment Osiris unites with the Nile through his floating over the waters. Perhaps we should understand this event as a happy event, since he was related to the flood and the Nile.

Through this investigation we will analyze sources from the Old Kingdom such as the *Pyramid Texts* (ca. 2400-2100 BC) to the Ptolemaic Period (ca. 300-30 BC). Also, Plutarch, a roman writer, gives us some details through his book that are related to the Egyptian sources, but we should be careful with this source since it is not Egyptian.

Nedit and the death of Osiris

Nedit (𓂏𓂏𓂏 Ndit or 𓂏𓂏𓂏 Ndyt) is the place where some Egyptian texts placed the body of Osiris, probably after his murder. As we will appreciate in this investigation, the earlier sources, such as the *Pyramid Texts*, use the word *Ndit* and the later ones *Ndyt*. The word *Ndit* is attested for the first time in the *Pyramid Texts* of Unas (PT 247, 260b-W version). Some researchers considered that this Nedit is in Abidos or the east Delta, probably Busiris². The origin of this toponym is *ndi r t3*, which means “to

throw to the ground”³ or “to extend”⁴. In fact, in the *Pyramid Text* 480 of Pepi I is said: “Isis has come, Nephthys has come (...) and they have found Osiris after his brother Seth threw him down in Nedit, when Osiris Pepi said: ‘You should go away from me’, and his identity of Sokar came into being. They will prevent (you) from decomposing (...)”⁵. So, thanks to this toponym, we could understand Nedit as the site where Osiris is thrown down.

Vernus⁶ states that, in the texts, the place where Osiris is killed is always on earth and not on water since Nedit, and other places where the god is killed, has the determinative N25 (𓂏). From my perspective, in addition to the argument of Vernus, they used the determinative O49 (𓂏), that is for places such as cities or towns, so, it is a fact that Nedit was understood as a place on earth and not on the water. Nevertheless, Vernus states that this place is near the water, perhaps a bank, and that's the reason why they find Osiris floating.

During the Old Kingdom we find for the first time the dead of Osiris and the fight between Horus and Seth⁷. Since the *Pyramid Texts*⁸ the dead of Osiris is placed in Nedit⁹ and this event is understood as the god's falling. Stewart points: “The location of Ghesti therefore seems to be associated to the tradition of Horus or Geb searching for Osiris, while Nedit was associated with Isis and Nephthys. (...) Much like the others in this set so far, this relationship has a low degree of variation showing that Nedit was clearly favoured as the location for the deceased Osiris”¹⁰. Also, in Nedit he is found by his

³ Grieshammer, 1982, 372; Stewart, 2014, 36; Coulon, 2018, 685.

⁴ Mathieu, 2010, 97. “Frappé, abattu, blessé, étendu, transpercé, assommé, jeté à terre, ligoté, tué par Seth, Osiris se retrouva gisant ‘sur son franc’ (*hr gs.f*), à Nédit ou à Géhesti – toponymes qui autorisent des jeux phoniques sur *ndr > ndi*, ‘étendre’, et *gs*, ‘côté, flanc’. Dans cette élaboration narrative, il faut le souligner, la paronomase (omniprésente) doit être considérée non comme la notation secondaire d’une assonance fortuite, mais tout au contraire comme le principe générateur du discours mythique”.

⁵ Allen, 2005, 165.

⁶ Vernus, 1991, 20. “Ces allusions paraissent bel et bien situer le meurtre d’Osiris sur la terre, même si c’est sur une rive. (...) Rien de bien aquatique a priori, même si secondairement on évoque les flots qui coulent près de ces lieux”.

⁷ Assmann, 2000, 61. “Le modèle mythique remonte également à l’Ancien Empire, mais il appartient exclusivement au registre royal. La querelle d’Horus et Seth apparaît rituellement dans de nombreux contextes parce que c’est un mythe central et fondamental ; mais l’un de ces contextes est fourni, dans les *Textes des Pyramides*, par un rituel que j’appelle ‘les rites nocturnes’ et qui combine dès cette période, le traitement du corps et la punition de Seth. (...) J’ai déjà évoqué le modèle mythique du jugement des morts dans mon introduction à propos de l’image de la mort comme ennemi : l’image complexe de la mort est divisée en deux, en acteur et victime, Seth et Osiris”.

⁸ PT 412; PT 701; Faulkner, 1969, 306; Vernus, 1991, 19-20; Stewart, 2014, 117.

⁹ PT 442, 819a; PT 532, 1256a-c; Stewart, 2014, 118.

¹⁰ Stewart, 2014, 118.

¹ Pl. *Is. et Os.*, 365 A-C; Guilhou, 1998, 19; Coulon, 2005, 16-21.

² Grieshammer, 1982, 372; Guilhou, 1998, 22; Colonna, 2018, 227; Coulon, 2018, 684.

two sisters and thanks to the water, he is discovered by them¹¹.

Guilhou points that we find in the *Pyramid Texts* two possibilities related to the dead of Osiris: in the first one, he is defeated and helped by his two sisters¹² and, in the second one, Horus finds the body of his father¹³.

In the Pyramid of Neith we observe the falling of the god:

 (PT 412, 721a-b)

i:hr wr hr gs.f nmm im.i Ndit

“The Great One has fallen on his side, the one who is in Nedit is quivering”

And in the pyramid of Pepi II this is repeated:

 (PT 701A, 2188a)

hr wr m Ndit

“The Great One has fallen in Nedit”

Also, the fall of Osiris is related to Seth’s violence against his brother¹⁴:

Gmi.n.sn(i) Wsr, ndi.n sw sn.f Stš r t3 m Ndit, m dd Wsir: zi.k r.i, m hpr rn.f m Zkr (PT 532, 1256a-c)

“They found Osiris, his brother Seth threw him to the ground in Nedit, Osiris is saying: ‘you set off from me’, becoming his name as Sokar”.

In the *Coffin Texts* Nedit continues as the place where Osiris has fallen¹⁵. Also, in the *Coffin Texts* he is also called “the Bull of Nedit”: “Hail to you, Mourner of Osiris, Companion of the Bull of Nedit who makes

the mummy wrappings to breathe, who veils the limpness, to whom Osiris has turned his back, helper of the embalmer Anubis when treating the body of the Inert One”¹⁶.

Besides, in the *Coffin Spell* 469, it is very interesting how the deceased is identified with Osiris, and he is placed in Nedit: “O you Limp One who are in Nedit before me, I have appeared as the great Primeval One – so says to me He who is limp, (even) he who is in Nedit”¹⁷. In the *Coffin Spell* 470, which is a short version of 469 and a spell for reaching Orion, the deceased says to Osiris: “O You who are in limpness, dwelling aforetime in Nedit (...)”¹⁸.

But the relationship between Osiris and Nedit is attested too during the Ptolemaic period. For example, in the Papyrus Jumilhac¹⁹ or in the Book of the Dead of Iuefankh²⁰ (pTurin 1791, Tb 142). In Iufankh’s Papyrus, Horus is in Nedit, and he protects his father through the punishment of his enemies:



ink Hr nd-hr-it.f. ii.n.i

hsr.n.i dw hr it.i Wsir, bhn.n.i hftiw.f

hr tz pwy Ndyt, pwy n(y) pš ʿ3t

“I am Horus, the one who protects his father. I have come to expel the evil over my father Osiris, I have dismembered his enemies over that sandbank Nedit, that of great dismemberment”

The relationship of Osiris with the Nile River during his death is also in Plutarch, the roman author. In Plutarch’s version of the myth, Osiris is drowned two times by Seth. Firstly, he is thrown on the Nile in a coffin²¹. In his version, Typhon (Seth) is jealous of Osiris, because he is the king, and organizes a plot against him to kill him. He makes a coffin for his brother and with the help of the plotters close it with him inside and drops it on the Nile that goes through the east side of the Delta. Secondly, he is dismembered by his brother and dropped in the river²². In this passage Plutarch’s says that Typhon (Seth) finds the dead body of Osiris in Buto, which was saved there by Isis, during a night

¹¹ Mathieu, 2010, 97. “Après avoir dérivé sur les eaux, le corps d’Osiris est recherché, puis découvert. La quête est effectuée par son père Geb, par ses sœurs Isis et Nephthys, par Horus, ou encore par l’échelle maquet (!), considérée comme la sœur du dieu”.

¹² Guilhou, 1998, 24. “Premièrement, Osiris est abattu par Seth à Nédit. Les deux soeurs y découvrent le corps. Elles le raniment. Isis conçoit alors son fils Horus. Seth, retrouvant le cadavre, le découpe en morceaux qu’il jette dans le Nil. Horus part à leur recherche, les recueille. Confiés à Nout ils sont ensevelis à l’intérieur du sarcophage. Le corps démembré y est reconstitué, recomposé comme celui d’un embryon avant d’être remis au monde (dans l’au-delà). Les Textes des Pyramides développent par ailleurs l’allaitement et l’alimentation d’un nouveau-né”.

¹³ Guilhou, 1998, 24. “Le deuxième scénario et sa variante se heurtent à la tradition faisant d’Horus celui qui recueille les morceaux du cadavre de son père (on le retrouve de même aux côtés d’Isis et Nephthys dans le Papyrus Jumilhac, bas, V). Cependant, on pourrait considérer cette quête comme une sorte de raccourci, une métaphore: Horus ne recueillerait pas au sens propre les parties du corps de son père mais son héritage”.

¹⁴ PT 532, 1256a-c.

¹⁵ CT 398, 128 and 133; Faulkner, 1977, 123.

¹⁶ CT 237, 312; Faulkner, 1973, 186.

¹⁷ CT 469, 388; Faulkner, 1977, 101.

¹⁸ CT 470, 398-399; Faulkner, 1977, 105.

¹⁹ Guilhou, 1998, 20; Coulon, 2018, 693-694.

²⁰ pTurin Museo Egizio 1791, Tb 146, 15-18; Backes, Treptow; Rätzke, 2023.

²¹ Pl. *Is. et Os.*, 356B-356D.

²² Pl. *Is. et Os.*, 357F-358A.

hunt. Then, Typhon dismembered the body of the god in fourteen parts. In this second murder of Osiris described by Plutarch, he is found in Buto²³. Also, this author provides additional mythic information: during the third month of *ꜥḥt* (the inundation season), Seth organizes a banquet where they are going to give a coffin to the person who perfectly fits inside of it. Since the coffin was made for Osiris, they close the lid when he is inside and throw it away in the Nile. After that, the coffin with Osiris arrives to Byblos²⁴. This idea, that the body of Osiris goes adrift after he is killed, starts to be popular from the Late Period onwards and continues under Plutarch²⁵. Nevertheless, the Plutarch's narrative comes from a non-Egyptian person and differs with the other sources that we are analyzing. However, his tale is interesting since the connection of Osiris with the Nile is present.

Osiris and the flood

Osiris is related to the Nile River and its fertility. In ancient Egypt, the river overflowed once a year. Then the river covered the fields every year and when the inundation decreased, it left a natural black sediment that worked as fertilizer. Due to that the flood was perceived as a restoration of the Egyptian cosmos related to this natural cycle.

Osiris was associated with the flooding of the Nile, which enables a good harvest each year, which also agreed on the calendar with the New Year festival²⁶. He was not a god of the land or the earth, but of inundation and rebirth, he was related to the renovation cycles. So, he is not a god of the river itself, as the god Hapy²⁷ is, but a god associated to the fertility's renewal²⁸. Also, there are other divinities associated to this event²⁹. As he is revived through the mummification ritual, the creation is regenerated each year thanks to the flood. In fact, the Osiris's skin is black or green in artistic representations due to his relationship with the fertility of the land. He is not the nature itself, but he is related to the concept of regeneration³⁰. Moreover, for the Egyptians, the origin

of the Nile was near the first cataract: there was the island of Biga, where, according to one tradition, ancient Egyptians believed was buried the body of Osiris at least from the XXVI Dynasty³¹. There were other traditions that situated the tomb of the god in other places, such as Abydos³². In pBoulaq 3 x+7,19 from the Roman period it is said that the inundation emerged from Elephantine.

Moreover, Osiris is dismembered and during the inundation his parts are reunited and so is Egypt³³. This dismemberment has main role since thanks to that the life is possible through the emanations of the god that provide life³⁴.

In his connection with the flood, the constellation of Orion was linked to the god Osiris from the Pyramid Texts. In the sky they placed some myths, as it happened with the revival of Osiris: Isis was Sothis (𓆎𓅓𓏏𓏏 *spdt*) that followed the Orion constellation as Isis went after Osiris when he was dead³⁵.

Also, in the rites related to Osiris there is some connection between the god and the water³⁶.

On the other hand, in sources of Ptolemaic and Roman times the god is connected to the act of giving the deceased cool water. This idea, that appeared in Ptolemaic and Roman Alexandria and its chora through Serapis's cult, perhaps evolves from Egyptian beliefs and thinking, although we do not have a text before that uses this formula, as Lukaszewicz points³⁷. Serapis, that is a Hellenistic version of Osiris

²³ Pl. *Is. et Os.*, 357F-358A.

²⁴ Pl. *Is. et Os.* 356A-C; Guilhou, 2021, 44.

²⁵ Vernus, 1991, 27.

²⁶ Izquierdo Perales, 2024, 109-111.

²⁷ See Bonhême, 1995, 135.

²⁸ Fukaya, 2019, 110-113; Izquierdo Perales, 2024, 75-78.

²⁹ See Gabolde, 1995.

³⁰ Frankfort, 1948, 185-190; Griffiths, 1980, 158 and ss.; Delia, 1992, 182-184 and 187; Mascort, 2018, 105; Izquierdo Perales, 2024, 51-52.

³¹ Pl. *Is. et Os.* 366A; Delia, 1992, 184; Frankfort, 1948, 192.

³² About the tomb of Osiris in magical texts from the New Kingdom see Coulon, 2008, and about the parts and tombs of Osiris see Coulon, 2005.

³³ Guilhou, 1998, 20.

³⁴ Guilhou, 1998, 25. "De même, la végétation naît de la décomposition (les humeurs), tous deux (sperme et humeurs) étant deux liquides générateurs de vie. Le démemberment est nécessaire à la future recombinaison de l'être, qui, cependant, ne va pas renaître sur la terre des vivants mais dans l'au-delà céleste et nocturne, c'est-à-dire non plus à titre individuel, comme lors de sa première naissance, mais comme composante de l'univers, intégré ainsi au cycle éternel du vivant".

³⁵ Frankfort, 1948, 196; Spalinger, 1995, 28; Guilhou, 2021, 41.

³⁶ Bonhême, 1995, 131. "Le grand calendrier des gètes d'Hathor à Dendera mentionne, 'le 24^{ème} jour du mois de Khoiak', une 'sortie en procession d'Osiris, la nuit; faire une halte en face du lac (sacré)'. Hérodote décrit à Saïs, le 'mystère' qu'il a vu jouer de nuit dans l'enceinte du temple de Neith, sur le lac, et qui est une représentation de la passion d'Osiris. Ceci est confirmé par un papyrus dont un passage relate la procession d'Osiris à Karnak, lors de laquelle le pharaon, dans son rôle d'Horus 'a enseveli Osiris et prit soin de sa tombe au haut du lac sacré'. Mêmement, le chapitre 125 du *Livre des Morts* relate 'la mise au cercueil sur bord du bassin-maat (à Hérakléopolis), au moment du repas du soir', d'objets sacrés qui symbolisent le corps d'Osiris. Ainsi, les funérailles symboliques d'Osiris sont mises en scènes au bord des lacs sacrés et Pharaon tient le rôle d'Horus qui a enseveli son père. C'est pourquoi la royauté est aussi prise dans les rites liés à la mort et que les temples qui exaltent le pouvoir royal ont des caractères de temples funéraires".

³⁷ Lukaszewicz, 1989, 195-196.


with other Greek gods, was very popular in this area and was considered the husband of Isis, that traditionally was the wife and sister of Osiris. In Alexandria we could find some depictions of Osiris, not Serapis, and some mentions to the Egyptian god. In fact, there is what we called the “cool water formula”, where they desired for the deceased that Osiris gives him or her cool water in the hereafter. The text that is a funerary inscription, referred to and translated by Lukaszewicz, says “Farewell Isidoros, 28 years old. May Osiris give you cool water”³⁸. Perhaps this is not directly related, but in pBoulaq 3 x+7,19-20 from the Roman period, it is said that the water of the inundation emerges as cool water (*pri m qbbwi*). Nevertheless, the cool water (*qbbi*) is often associated with the nun’s primaevial waters as it is mentioned in Leiden F 1950/8.2 from the Roman period³⁹.


Besides, his relationship with the natural cycles of the river is possible thanks to the nature of the god, since he is associated with different cyclic phenomena such as the moon, cultivation, kingship, or death and life.

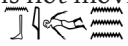

Osiris, the swimmer or the drowned? An analysis of the Egyptian words

The floating of Osiris, that we will analyze in some texts, happens after the crime committed by his brother Seth against him in Nedit, that outcomes in the dead of the god⁴⁰. This event took place before he was found by Isis and Nephthys and, consequently, before he received the mummification ritual. Nevertheless, in some of the sources that we will analyze Osiris is discovered in the waters of Nedit by his two sisters.

Before we examine the texts, it is very important to understand the vocabulary related to the drowning or swimming of Osiris: *mḥi* and *nbi*. This discussion about the translation of these verbs is crucial in this study to understand the true meaning of what Osiris is doing in this water. My proposal is that we should translate these verbs as “to float” and not as “to swim” or “to be adrift”, since nothing indicates that he is moving. To analyze the texts in depth we will proceed to study the verbs used in the sources.

 *mḥi* is a verb which could be translated as “to swim” or “to drown” or “be drowned”⁴¹. This verb

is also related to the overflow of the Nile () , indeed, in Late Egyptian we find *mḥi* as “to flood”⁴², so, this is related to the inundation. Also, *mḥi* involves the movement of inanimate beings, such as objects, the water or Osiris, so in this case it implies that the thing is moving. Moreover, this verb can be related to things that are moving by themselves, such as animated beings. This movement is mainly involuntary, but in some cases, we could notice some kind of voluntarism by the being which is moving⁴³, but, mainly, we should understand this as something that is moving because another force is making him to do it. This verb is used in the Pyramid Texts and in the Shabaka Stone while Osiris is in the water, as we will appreciate after in this article. Vernus⁴⁴ expresses that perhaps the meaning of this verb when is related to the dead body of Osiris should be translated as “be immersed” or “be adrift”. When the text uses this verb while Osiris is in the waters of Nedit he is not moving but being over the water.

 *nbi* is a verb which generally means “to swim”⁴⁵. Nevertheless, it has another meaning: “to fill” and “to melt” metal (): in fact, in early stages, “to fill” was the most common meaning⁴⁶, and in Late Egyptian is more usual to find *nbi* as “to melt”⁴⁷. Also, this verb could be related to the sun’s journey floating in his bark through the sky⁴⁸: for example, in the Book of the Dead pKairo CG 51180 where it is said that Ra “floats on his heavenly waters”⁴⁹. However, Černý⁵⁰ translates *nbi* in pDeM 1 as “le flotant”, which gives an interesting point of view to *nbi* since Osiris is death and, as far as we know through the text, he is not moving. Again, Osiris is just being in the water, without making anything.

During the New Kingdom there are examples where the Egyptians show the enemies of Egypt sinking, due to their inability to swim⁵¹. In this context, this ability seems to be a purely Egyptian skill. Therefore, the Osirian ability of avoiding sinking in water, consequently, to swim, is a proof of Osiris’ divinity and Egyptian character, since if he were not Egyptian, he would drown.

⁴² Erman; Grapow, 1971, Wb, 2, 121-122.

⁴³ Vernus, 1991, 25-26.

⁴⁴ Vernus, 1991, 26.

⁴⁵ Faulkner, 1962, 129.

⁴⁶ Lohwasser, 2008, 54.

⁴⁷ Erman; Grapow, 1971, Wb, 2 236; Lesko and Switalski Lesko, 2002, 233.

⁴⁸ Erman; Grapow, 1971, Wb, 2 236.

⁴⁹ pKairo CG 51189, Tb 017; Backes, Schweitzer and Treptow, 2023.

⁵⁰ Černý, 1978, 9.

⁵¹ Lohwasser, 2008, 60-61 and 66.

³⁸ Lukaszewicz, 1989, 195.

³⁹ Socle Béhague Leiden F 1950/8.2, h.22-27.

⁴⁰ Vernus, 1991, 19.

⁴¹ Faulkner, 1962, 114.

In the Osirian context, as we will examine, Isis and Nephthys, due to the command of Horus, held Osiris to prevent him from sinking. Again, there is not movement made by the god. Because of that, we should imagine Osiris, in these texts, floating, not swimming, not sinking. So, from my perspective, Osiris is “the one who floats”, since he is not doing any movement. It is not accurate to talk about Osiris as “the swimmer” since swimming implies an action, and he is just over the water. Also, in the Shabaka Stone we can read *hr mw.f* “over his waters”⁵², which means that he is not sinking or drowning, but he is in a state over them.

In my opinion, due to the dead of Osiris and the philological discussion, is more accurate to translate these verbs (*mḥi* and *nbi*) in this Osirian context as “to float” when we are talking about Osiris, which is a dead body that is over the water near Nedit. Due to that we will translate them in this article as “to float”, but the reader should know that they could be translated in other ways as mentioned above.

Since the Pyramid Texts the idea of the floating of Osiris is present:

i.ḥm̄.n n.k, Hr, ntrw, n bi3.n.sn ir.k ḏr bw mḥi.n.k im
(PT 364, 615a-d)

“He has seized, Horus, the gods, and they will never be far from you in the place where you floated”

Another example of this aspect of the god is on the stela BM EA 893 (lines 16-17) from the Middle Kingdom. Through this document we found two hymns, one for Osiris and another for Wepwawet. It is at the end of the hymn of Wepwawet we found the reference of Osiris as a swimmer or the one who floats:

Nbi, zp-sn: ink fdwnw n(y) ntr 4 ipw drw sbn

“The one who floats, the one who floats: I am the fourth of these four gods who repels the fishes”

From the New Kingdom, the pDeM 1⁵³, a magical text, exhibits another example. The text refers to the enemies and the protective power of Re related to the destruction of these enemies and then it refers as Osiris as *nbi*:

m[i] nḥm.k mnt msi.n mnt mi
nḥm.k nbi [m] [h]rw n(y) zm3 n(y) t3

“Come, you save someone, borned from someone, as you saved the one who floats during the day of the burial”

In the Shabaka stone (BM EA 498, Dynasty XXV) is attested the Memphite cosmogony and there is a mention of this state of Osiris. In this myth, Ptah, the god of Memphis, creates the world after thinking and naming the creation. Nevertheless, in the text there is a strong presence of the Osirian myth and the relationship of Osiris with Memphis. Griffiths⁵⁴ says that in the Shabaka stone this state of Osiris has a positive meaning. In this text Osiris is rescued by his two sisters and thanks to this event, Osiris lives in the afterlife and Horus became king⁵⁵:

n-wnt Wsir mḥi.f hr mw.f, m3.t(w) 3st, Nbt-Hwt, ptr. sn sw,

mnḥ.sn im.f. Wd Hr n 3st Nbt-Hwt m Dd ndrī.sn m Wsir ḥwī.sn

mḥi.f, phr.sn r dp-tr

“Because Osiris floated over his waters, Isis and Nephthys looked and they saw him, and they make splendid him. Horus commanded to Isis and Nephthys in Busiris that they hold Osiris, and they prevented him from drifting, and they turned everything for the better”

Also, before of this previous text, in the Shabaka Stone there is another mention of the floating of Osiris and this event happens in Busiris⁵⁶:

Nbt-Hwt 3st m Dd n mḥi Wsir hr mw.f

“Nephthys and Isis in Busiris where Osiris was floating over his water”

As in the Plutarch’s version of the myth, Isis and Nephthys recover the body of Osiris from the water of the Nile. We could recognize that this event took place

⁵² Shabaka Stone, lines 62-63 and 18c-19; Werning et al., 2023.

⁵³ pDeM 1, vs. 4,5-4,6; Černý, 1978, 9; Brose et al., 2023.

⁵⁴ Griffiths, 1960, 7; Muhlestein, 2005, 179.

⁵⁵ Shabaka Stone, lines 62-63; Werning et al., 2023.

⁵⁶ Shabaka Stone, lines 18c-19.

before the mummification ritual since he is not moving, by the finding of the two sisters of the body and the presence of Horus. Again, he is not moving and is saved by them.

Conclusions

First, there are sources from the Old Kingdom to Ptolemaic period that places the finding of Osiris body at Nedit, probably after he is murdered by Seth. He seems to die on the ground, then falls and lies in the water. According to the Shabaka Stone, Osiris manages to float over the water like a deceased body. This event took place after being murdered by Seth and before receiving the funerary ritual of mummification.

The fact that Osiris floats over the water perhaps is not coincidental, since he has a close relationship with the Nile and its flood. In the Egyptian worldview it is the arrival of Orion that marks the beginning of the Nile overflowing⁵⁷.

On the other hand, I would like to highlight that we must reconsider the translation of the verbs *mḥi* and *nḥi* in these texts, as I proposed and translated before. The context of the text tells us that Osiris is not moving, so it is perhaps more accurate to speak of him floating over the water and not swimming as some translators have proposed. Furthermore, in the case of the verb *mḥi* we must understand that when this word is used, Osiris is related to his ability to bring the flood of the Nile.

It seems that Osiris in these sources is pictured like a god who, after dying, floats and relates to the water of the Egyptian river. Furthermore, perhaps we must understand this death as a return to the moment of creation since it is in the waters of the Nun where all this creation originates. From an Egyptian perspective, so by returning to the water the god is returning to the origin to later re-emerge as the god of the afterlife thanks to the finding of Isis, Nephthys and Horus, and the mummification performed by them with Anubis.

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⁵⁷ Gabolde, 1995, 237; Colonna, 2018, 232; De Maré, 2016, 2; Izquierdo Perales, 2024, 101-102. Also, in some version, it is the body of Osiris on the island of Biga that creates the Nile. This relationship of the flood with Biga is attested from the I millennium BC.

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