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The Lily of the Nile:

A work on the ritualistic use of an ancient flower of
immortality

Uppsala universitet

Teologiska institutionen

Kandidatuppsats, Religionshistoria, 15hp, VT 2021

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Abstract

In pharaonic times, religion, magic and medicine had little distinction between each other due to the commonly held belief that all parts of life were influenced and even controlled by divinity and the supernatural. To navigate life easier, and in true Egyptian fashion, a large corpus of text was composed of magic, medicine and religion. The latter includes the arguably most well-known work, the Egyptian *Book of the dead*, the religious scripture that would help the deceased navigate the netherworld in the hopes for eternal life. The papyri depict numerous plants and remedies as well as spell and healing methods accompanied by magical incorporation such as incantation or invocation of a god or goddess. These can be considered a basis for the fundamental ideas of religion and daily life of ancient Egypt, always consisting of divine involvement.

This essay will deal with a symbol that the ancient Egyptians saw as synonymous with life, and immortality: The narcotic blue water lily, *Nymphaea Caerulea*. The study will be a work on the human religious experience with a plant that I will theorize as having been used for an entheogenic effect in order to connect with the divine by asking some key questions: How and why was the lily used? How is the flowers depiction on art, in texts, and different iconography indicative to a usage in religious experience and through the mythology produced in the civilisation?

Keywords: Ancient Egypt, water lily, entheogen, medicine, content analysis, immortality, lotus.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

“And thou didst symbolize the deathless power.

That under all decaying forms lies hid,

The old world worshipped thee, O Lotus flower,

Then carved its sphinx and reared its pyramid.”

-Arthur Wentworth Eaton

This work is about an ancient Egyptian flower and in particular, about its ritualistic and healing uses in a quest for immortality. Physical and spiritual redemption is more often than not an anxiety for all mortals which we can see in particularly through religions across time. A realization of and a desire to live after death was an idea that the Egyptian religion would centre around both in practice and as we can see, in grave literature and papyri which paid special attention to this issue. This essay will look at the concepts of immortality and symbolism relating to the flower that the Egyptians saw as a transmutational and powerful plant that was often related to a moment in creation, the god Nefertem and the healing flower of the goddess Hathor. The ancient Egyptians had substantially developed and detailed ideas about religion and abstract ways of putting this forth in symbols and text. A topic amongst many that is still researched today is medicine and healing, and how the Egyptians were so well acquainted with this.

The idea that modern medicine stemmed from ancient Greece is being challenged by the study of formulae and medicine found in ancient Egypt that is being conducted by comparing medical texts from the time with modern botanical evidence¹. This, states Rosalie David, is due to an inequality of source materials found through only 12 surviving medical papyri next to the easily translatable survived writings of classical Greece. The difficulty in translating the language has caused a major hindrance in the identification of plant species in relation to understanding the use of materials in treatments and cures as they often cannot be validated by other sources. Further, as the Egyptians used both magical as well as rational methods, it is unclear whether the usage of plant species was understood or added for extrinsic purposes. However, it is

¹ David, Rosalie (2020). “Pharmacology, Egyptian”, *The encyclopaedia of ancient history*, University of Manchester UK, p.1. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah21250.pub2>

estimated that 67% of remedies that we know of had legitimate therapeutic values in their usage. Though it is also unclear if toxicity was understood, the formulation, dosage and preparation of the materials indicate an awareness of potential dangers and benefits in prescribing a certain substance². Healing, medicine, plants and religion seem to have offered an interconnected reality of the ancient Egyptians and which I intend to investigate with this essay by looking at the water lily, so often depicted and utilized throughout the history of pharaonic Egypt.

1.2. Purpose and issue

The purpose of my essay is to investigate and discuss the possibility of an ancient civilisation having built much of their religious pantheon and ideals on the effects of mind-altering substances, the Nymphaea lotus in particular. There is little doubt that the most ichnographically active plant that the Egyptians portrayed, the blue water lily, was present in texts and images at the time of the Egyptians³, but its use is what this essay will focus on. Since the lotus has been shown to be entheogenic through contemporary scientific research,⁴ I seek to give a context for and comprehension regarding its potential consumption as entheogens in ritual and religious purpose, as well as for some other potential plants that existed at the time and place. I will discuss the plants context and religious use and hypothesise their influence on the ancient Egyptian religion.

Issue statements:

1. Are there any sources and evidence to assume the Egyptians used the psychedelic water lily in a religious context?
2. What effect and role did the water lily have on Egyptian religious practice?

² David (2020), p. 1.

³ Poo, Mu-Chou (1995). *“Wine and wine offerings in the religion of ancient Egypt”* Columbia university press, p. 126. Kegan Paul international, cop.

⁴ W. Benson Harer Jr (1985). “Pharmacological and biological properties of the Egyptian lotus” *American research centre in Egypt*: Vol. 22, p. 49. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40000390>

1.3. Demarcation

Due to the extensive nature of the Egyptian religion as well as its pharmacopeia, this essay will focus mainly on one plant and its usage and depiction in religious context. The research will not be limited to a single period due to the large amount of data that is found throughout ancient Egypt's complete history on the subject. I will use this timeframe interconnectedly and without a chronological order, as this is not a research on a time-specific practice/usage, but of a general research on the ancient Egyptian religious practice. I will, however, not focus on the Amarna period between 1346-1336 BCE as the reigning pharaoh Akhenaten strayed off the orthodox Egyptian beliefs and religion and would thus be inconsistent with my research. Further, due to accumulated traditions that the Egyptians assumed, a broad textual and iconographic analysis will be taken on and will be explained for comprehensive purpose in the text.

1.4. Material

This study will utilize some written works dating back to antiquity and will be the essays primary sources. The two primary antique works are The Egyptian *Book of the dead* in English translation by Raymond O. Faulkner in the 1985 edition *The ancient Egyptian Book of the dead*, and some papyri that discusses matters relevant for the study. I will make use of the Ebers papyrus, which dates back to 1500 BCE and the reign of Amenhopis I. It contains more than 800 medical recipes and treatments showing the vast knowledge the Egyptians had of plants and medicine. It was purchased by Edwin Smith at Luxor in 1862 from an unknown source⁵ and later by Georg Ebers. Additionally, John F. Nunn's 1996 work, *Ancient Egyptian medicine* is a valuable secondary source for this study due to his treatment of primary works such as the many medical papyri and through his comprehensive approach that provides an understanding of the ancient medicine, Egyptology and herbology. In addition to these, some medical journals by scientists and multidisciplinary research will be utilized for a broad spectre and perspective.

⁵ Nunn, John F. (1996). "*Ancient Egyptian medicine*", British museum press, London, p. 30.

1.5. Research history

In the study of the medical papyri, the *Grundriss der Medizin der alten Ägypter*, produced in Berlin in 1954-73 by Hermann Grapow, W. Westendorf and Hildegard von Deines et al offers a thorough study of the large corpus of the most important papyri that treat medicine⁶. The work includes full hieroglyphic transcription of the papyri arranged with references and commentary, as well as an extensive list of vocabulary from Egyptian to German⁷. The work has been referenced by important researchers in the field like Faulkner and Gardiner, who both contributed with important studies on grammar and vocabulary of ancient Egyptian language. In addition, John F. Nunn ought to be mentioned for his book *Ancient Egyptian medicine* from 1996. Nunn has comprised a work that through the insights of modern medicine speaks of Egyptology in a comprehensive discussion about amongst many topics such as magic, medicine and mumification. Egyptologist and professor of medicine Paul Ghalioungui has also contributed to the medical and Egyptological field through the books *The healing hand- man and wound in the ancient world* and *Magic and medical science in ancient Egypt*, amongst many other works.

1.6. Theory and method

Through content analysis, this study will examine and identify key aspects of certain textual and iconographic evidence of *Nymphaea Caerulea* for religious ritual purposes and as a medicine. Since the ancient Egyptians have a large amount of written and artistic / visual data for many aspects of life and religion, this study will use the observable evidence available and analyse and interpret this by finding possible systematic patterns of use for a psychedelic substance found in ritual depiction. I will also look over non-ritual depictions as this can show the importance of plants as used, whether it is for religious purposes or for daily application. Content analysis allows me to break down a large quantity of sources and research as it can be applied to several types and large amounts of data that broadens the understanding of the study material⁸. Through the method, I will match the visual context with mythical presentation and history and written evidence in the chosen papyri and the Egyptian *Book of the dead*. Content

⁶ Nunn (1996), p. 25.

⁷ Nunn (1996), p. 25.

⁸ Nelson, Chad & Woods Jr, Robert H. (2011). “*The Routledge handbook of research methods in the study of religion*”, Taylor & Francis group, p. 109, chapter 2.1.

analysis is a valuable method to track the patterns of a particular genre or event while also drawing comparisons between these variables⁹. Content analysis can further measure phenomena against a standard that allows us to classify and suggest a hypothesis for an explanation to a phenomenon, and to relate variables that can further the understanding of the question in hand.

The study will focus on two main variables, pharmacology and religion, and will ask how the two could potentially have been intertwined by using the blue water lily (*Nymphaea*) as the mutual component. I will question how the Lotus as an entheogen was incorporated into the religious life of the ancient Egyptians and hypothesize its importance in contributing to a new understanding of how ancient Egypt used the plant and potentially even influenced cultural development. My method will simply be to analyse the sources from the textual and iconographic evidence found in the papyri and *Book of the dead* as well as remains from archaeological sites like tomb art, artefacts in the coffins and tombs of the dead.

1.7. Disposition

The disposition of this essay will introduce the reader to the topic and create a baseline through its theory and method for comprehension of the way the study has been conducted. In the section where the study is presented, I will begin by introducing the area of research and illustrate some important ideas surrounding the cosmogonies of ancient Egypt in relation to the water lily. Moving on, I will present some libation rituals with chalices and evidence found in the tomb of Tutankhamun who had an affinity for the Lotus flower. Section 2.4 presents the representation and mythology relating to the goddess Hathor and her role in intoxication, as well as the healing centres surrounding her cult. In section 2.5, I will give a deeper representation of medicine and magic in relation to the plants in Egypt and present some papyri data depicting medicinal knowledge and the ways that magic was incorporated. I will then portray mentioning's and symbolism of the water lily as depicted in funerary texts like the *Book of the dead* and how these are relating to the ritual and symbolic use of the lily and some concepts of death and transmutation. Lastly, section 2.7-2.8 summarizes the study and include a personal reflection. Part 2.9 shortly reflects on future research in the field.

⁹ Nelson & Woods Jr (2011), p. 110.

1.8. Definitions

Entheogen: A psychoactive substance often derived from plants, fungi and sometimes excreted from animals such as the bufo alvarious toad. An entheogen causes alteration to the perception, behaviour and cognition of an individual. It is often used by spiritual or religious groups as a mode to feel, meet or see God. Some known examples of entheogens are psilocybin, N-Dimethyltryptamine found in Ayahuasca, LSD from Ergot, and Peyote.

Alkaloid: A naturally occurring class of nitrogen-containing bases that exists in plants, animals, fungi and bacteria. Alkaloids can be psychotropic, toxic, stimulating, and have a broad range of pharmacological capacities like being antibacterial and so forth.

Lotus: This essay will interchangeably use “lotus” and “water lily” despite contemporary assertion that the term lotus refers to the genus *Nelumbo*, which is not the object of this research. The flower used in this study belongs to the *Nymphaea* genus¹⁰. However, as the study references older research and some ancient literature like the Egyptian *Book of the dead*, which has prescribed the word “lotus” for the blue water lily, it will be used here but in reference, if not stated otherwise, to *Nymphaea Caerulea*, the blue coloured water lily native to Egypt.

¹⁰ Harer (1985), p. 49.

2. Study

The following chapter introduce the study and research conducted for the essay and will lastly give a personal reflection and a summary to the work.

2.1. An introduction

The Ancient Egyptians were premier physicians of their time, passing on medical practices and their theories to the Greeks, including plants. This is made evident in formulae from Ebers papyrus and others found in *De Materia Medica* by Dioscórides, who was a Greek physician that served under emperor Nero in Rome¹¹. Harer Jr states that Dioscórides was aware of the Egyptian Lotus from his Egyptian medical influence, which he prescribed “dry and drunk with wine to allay lecherous dreams”¹². The original prescription and use of this indigenous plant were passed down all the way to the physician Avicenna in the 11th century, who adopted Dioscórides as well as Galen’s theories and recognized the therapeutic value of the narcotic Lotus in his text on Cardio therapy. He stated that the blue water lily, when seeped in wine, would moderate “psychic pneuma”, meaning to narcotize or sedate¹³. Our largest and most important source of knowledge for medical practice and of plants is thus found in Egypt’s surviving medical papyri, many of which contain remedies for numerous diseases, some of which we understand and treat today like migraines or jaundice. The surviving papyri unfortunately provide a small fraction of the data that was composed on the topic of medicine and healing. Much of the text was lost to time and through looting as well as having been used in rituals as a component of remedies requiring a magical text as suggested in the Ebers papyrus 262. Due to the loss of some written data, other sources will be used to conduct this study and may provide a wider understanding, some being artistic wall paintings and others being artefacts or remnants discovered in tombs.

For millennia, the Egyptians appeared captivated by the sun-like *Nymphaea Caerulea*, appearing drunk on its scent shown from facial expressions in the art. The flower was held to the nose for a sniffing effect, as well as chalices often depicted in hand suggest libation rituals or other festivities, seen in tomb scenes and in its dominating plant imagery in not only

¹¹ Harer (1985), p. 51.

¹² Harer (1985), p. 51.

¹³ Harer (1985), p. 52.

iconography but also in the well-known Egyptian *Book of the dead*. Lotus symbolism during the second and first millennia BCE was especially prominent and revealed a lot about its usage in Egyptian religious life, information that is still being investigated and discovered as any interpretation without evidence to back it up and to supplement the claim should not be assumed prematurely. The role of the scientist is to consider observable documented evidence that is available, which I seek to do in this essay. In the case of ancient history, evidence is not always efficiently and readily available and thus any such claim requires an account of context of the subject matter to make any logical conclusion. I will therefore make use of the currently existing empirical observations of palaeobotanical papyri and artistic data from ancient Egypt in this study to understand the Blue Lotus.

2.2. Cosmogony

Nefertem, Ra and Atum

The study will begin by looking at some cosmogonies of ancient Egyptian religion to reveal and comprehend why the water lily was a big influence on everyday lives, where religious influence always had a role. The lotus has namely been theorized as a main component and protagonist in one of the older stories of creation that was widely known to the ancient Egyptians. I must first, however, mention that the Egyptian landscape was split into cities as well as a distinction between Lower and Upper Egypt. This is important to acknowledge as stories and gods often differ depending on the area, and each city may have had a main god that they portrayed and showed reverence to above others. For example, Ptah was the main god in Memphis, Amun in Thebes, and Hathor in Dendera. Heliopolis was in particular a religious centre dedicated to the beloved sun god Ra, revered by all.

Many stories and myths existed of the many gods that were more popular in some areas and not in others, but most prominent and widely held was the story of creation from Heliopolis¹⁴. In this story of creation in Egyptian mythology, the primordial water of chaos, Nun, existed before all else, covered in darkness until life emerged. The primordial mound *benben* arose from the dark waters and from it came the first being, a god called Atum that came to be associated with the sun and a version of the sun god Ra. Atum created the first pair of gods Shu

¹⁴ Gilhus, Ingvild & Thomassen, Einar (2010). *Antikens religioner*. Studentlitteratur AB, Lund. P.33.

(air) and Tefnut (moisture) through masturbation. From this godly pair, Geb (earth) and Nut (sky) evolved to finalize the Egyptian creation or cosmogony. This version has been applied to Atum and Ra, often considered aspects of one another in a triad that represents the sun's journey: Khepri is born in the east as the sun rises, he becomes Ra at noon, and lastly becomes Atum in the west when he returns to the underworld to be reborn as Khepri again in the morning¹⁵. Variations to the story have, however, been suggested. The god Nefertem, "the youthful one", represented the primeval lotus blossom, often described in the pyramid texts as being "the lotus in front of the nose of Ra" and in the *Book of the dead* in spells 178 and 174 with gods breathing in its scent. He often is often seen wearing an emblematic headdress of a lotus to represent the narrative personification. Nefertem was a god who had arisen by the same mode as Atum, from the primordial waters of Nun at the creation of the world according to some stories. However, Nefertem came through the primeval lotus flower as opposed to the mound.

A theory by Egyptologist Rudolf Anthes¹⁶ suggests further that there was a greater connection between Ra and Nefertem at the point of creation by discussing the notions of Nefertem in the pyramid texts. "NN shines as Nefertem, who is the lotus flower at the nose of Ra when Ra rises on the horizon every day"¹⁷ and "Nefertem who is at the nose of Ra every day", mentioned in the Theology of Memphis, indicates a primeval being¹⁸. By these two mentions of the god Nefertem, Anthes discusses a being who personifies the mythical lotus that by its fragrance gives life every morning to Ra, which retells the story where the Lotus brings life to the creator God Ra¹⁹. Egyptologist Mykola Tarasenko²⁰ presents a suggestion by H. Altenmuller, in which the creation story in spell 17 in the *Book of the dead* depicts the ancient Hermopolitan cosmology, recalling the emergence of the Lotus and the birth of the sun godchild who created the world²¹. This suggests that the original story of Atum/Ra contained the lotus as the primordial being, which birthed the first God by the fertile waters of Nun, unlike descriptions where he self-generated on a hill from the waters. Ra and Atum, as versions of each other, have

¹⁵ Gilhus & Thomassen (2010), p. 31.

¹⁶ Anthes, Rudolf (1959). "Egyptian theology in the third millennium B.C." *Journal of near eastern studies*: Vol. 18, No. 3, the university of Chicago press, p. 176. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/543421>

¹⁷ Anthes (1959), p.176.

¹⁸ Anthes (1959), p. 176.

¹⁹ Anthes (1959), p. 177.

²⁰ Tarasenko, M.O. (2016). "Studies on vignettes from chapter 17 of the *Book of the dead*: The image of Ms.w Bdst in ancient Egyptian mythology", Archaeopress publishing Ltd, p. 75-76.

²¹ Tarasenko (2016), p. 75-76.

in their roles as creator gods, also been represented as rising out of the lily²² as depicted below in tombs:

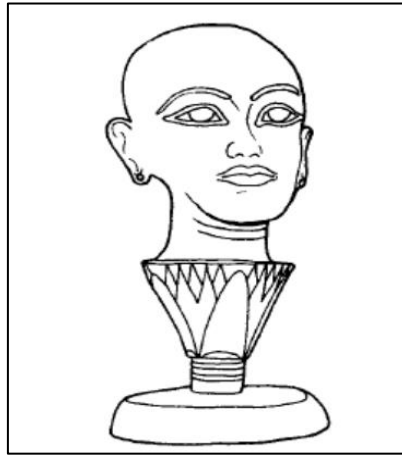


Figure 1. Ra the creator emerging from the primeval water lily, depicted in a statue from the tomb of Tutankhamun in dynasty XVIII, Cairo Museum²³.

Moving on I will discuss what cosmologies can mean for worship. Although a great aspect of ritual devotion in Egypt resided in actions like making offerings of food and drink or by incense and libations, the principle of a rite exists in the interpretation where a concept of a cosmogony is enacted²⁴. This means that physical and ritual actions were always motivated by an idea relating to a myth, which made the ritual action a reality. An example is the offering of a lotus flower during a funerary ritual, symbolizing the story of creation coming through it and transferring this to the deceased for whom rebirth or becoming a lotus is a form of immortality, likened to that of Ra's or Atum's birth.

To further understand this ritual role of the water lily, William Emboden suggests an anthropomorphic and zoomorphic innuendo as to why it was most certainly also consumed or drank in rituals. This can, according to him, be found in the image and story of Osiris and his symbolic representation as a scarab beetle²⁵, which further explains the role of cosmogony in worship rituals. The story of Osiris' death iterates his killing at the hands of his brother Seth. His body was thrown in the fertile waters of the Nile and was by Isis reborn by his dismembered body being put together, making the story of his death one of rebirth. The scarab beetle was a

²² Hart, George (2005). "*The Routledge dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*", Taylor & Francis group, p. 134.

²³ Hart (2005), p. 134.

²⁴ Assmann, Jan (1992). "*Interpretation in religion*", Leiden: E.J Brill, p.87-109.

²⁵ Emboden A. William (1978). "The sacred narcotic lily of the Nile: *Nymphaea Caerulea*". *Economic botany*: Vol 32, No. 4, Springer publishing, p. 397.

symbol of regeneration, used as amulets for its rejuvenating properties and its association with the young sun-God Khepri, who was reborn each morning. Scarab amulets were often placed atop the heart of the deceased's mummy, a representation of the heart's role as a carrier or seat for the actions of your life, determining whether you pass to the next life. The scarab amulets were meant to aid the dead with rebirth. The scarab, in this case, can be likened to Osiris's story from death to regeneration. In a cult in Sudan, Emboden states, scarabs were devoured in a way of "eating magic", to commune with and consume the godly manifestation that it represented²⁶.

Further, a type of idea held in antiquity was that an animal or plant could represent attributes that could be obtained by eating them, an idea very commonly held by the Egyptians of the time²⁷. If the water lily too were an incarnation of Osiris, it would certainly be eaten to gain and find proof in its function through ecstatic separation of body and spirit by altering consciousness, which offered a link to divine communion²⁸. The scarab was an incarnation of Osiris by his story and would thus be eaten to experience and merge with Osiris to gain his qualities, or to the qualities of the reborn Khepri of whom Osiris granted rebirth every morning in the judgment hall. The lotus can be equated to Osiris's and Ra's (Khepri and Atum being versions of Ra) linked stories. Every morning the sun rises and travels across the sky until the sun goes down, and Ra visits the underworld, where Osiris awaits, and Ra becomes reborn by every night so he can rise in the morning and bring righteous souls with him on his boat and to the afterlife. Equally, the lotus opens every morning around 8 as the sun rises and closes at sunset and is then pulled under the surface of the water, existing in Nun until it is reborn and rises again. It is not an uncommon way of comparing the lotus to the sun, its blue-tinted leaves looking like the sky, and its yellow bottom and stem looking like the sun while in bloom. Emboden continues to state that if, and due to Osiris and Ra being equated to the water lily based on both of their stories of resurrection and as a symbol for immortality, the water lily would equally be consumed to gain the qualities of Osiris and Ra representing the sun, or at the very least to be considered its incarnation.

2.3 The water lily in libation rituals

To further discuss the water lily in consumption, what evidence is there for the ritualistic use of the water lily in ancient Egyptian society other than its cosmogenic background? It is, to

²⁶ Emboden (1978), p. 397

²⁷ Emboden (1978), p. 397.

²⁸ Emboden (1978), p. 397.

begin with, highly uncommon for any culture of any time or place to openly reveal and engage in their sacred ritual materials. Two out of many examples are the Eleusis mystery cults where pilgrims would gather to drink a sacred drink we call *kykeon* in a ritual to meet the divine, to die, and meet Dionysus, god of intoxication. Yet, we do not know what this mystery cult drink contained, but speculate it was a mind-altering drug due to the results of the ritual. A second example is the soma of India, repeated many times in the over 10000 verses of the Rig Veda²⁹, where we are only given an abstract indication of the brew that lets us know it was consumed to meet the divine.

We are more often than not, in researching ancient history, only given the pieces to an abstract puzzle in need of lost content. Emboden suggested that to understand the brew, substance, or material used or consumed in these ancient rituals, the chalice of use is a core indication as to what it contains, acting as mediators between the divine and the individual³⁰. In a study by Hepper³¹ one finds an image of chalice alabaster in the form of a water lily, a large blossom in the middle, and two buds as handles. It is carved exquisitely in white tint and was found in the tomb of Tutankhamun, being one amongst many alabasters, chalices, and other lotus-shaped objects in the tomb.

Many of the 18th - 22nd dynasty chalices are shaped like lilies, made of calcite with a blue or white tint or lapis lazuli. Howard Carter discovered Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922. The tomb and his mummified body were decorated in many floral arrangements, with the Nilotic lotus of the Nile embedded in the floral collar on the innermost coffin around the neck of the pharaoh. Palm leaves, papyrus pith, *Withania* nightshade and pomegranate leaves were all found surrounding the corpse³². Garlands with these and many other flowers hanged around the tomb and on the ten deity statues in the crypt. On the ivory casket, a garden scene of him and his wife was shown on its lid. The pair are holding two bouquets composed of papyrus stems with gilded poppies and Lotus flowers, their two children picking poppies and mandrake below them. The two most common floral motifs of ancient Egypt through most of its time were papyrus sedge, representing Lower Egypt, and the blue lotus representing Upper Egypt, the stems of the two plants being intertwined to represent union of the country since the first

²⁹ Emboden (1978), p. 401.

³⁰ Emboden (1978), p.401-402

³¹ Hepper, Nigel F. (1990). "*Pharaoh's flowers: The botanical treasures of Tutankhamun*", London HMSO, p. 12.

³² Hepper (1990), p. 9-10.

dynasty. Hepper³³ states that Tutankhamun had an affinity for the Lotus plant as it was constantly used in his jewellery, his columns and alabaster ornaments and frequently found all around his tomb.

The scene below shows two flowers in a royal context, which appears as a healing ritual and a libation ritual as we can see with the queen holding a small chalice (Figure 2). The two narcotic flowers, water lily and poppy are very often depicted juxtaposed. As are papyrus and the water lily, representing the upper and lower parts of Egypt being unified. In the image, Ankhesenamun wears the crown of Hathor, her and the king's collars are decorated with mandrake and lily flowers. She holds a blue vessel, tending to the pharaoh. This image could be interpreted as anointing of the king with perfume or oil. Yet, due to the young pharaoh's determined fragile health, his frail stature in the image could indicate a medicine that would appear rather more fitting than perfume due to the floral combinations as well as the crown of the Goddess Hathor, representing healing and intoxication.

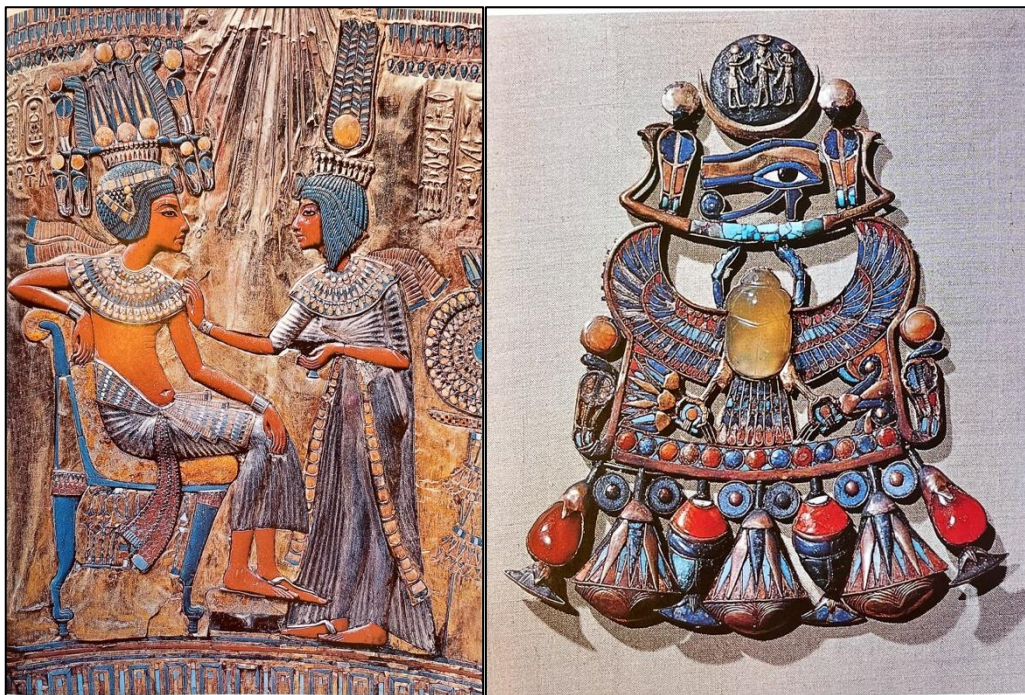


Figure 2. (Left) An image from the back of Tutankhamun's golden throne with queen Ankhesenamun. The pair are wearing floral collars as the ones from the tomb. Bouquets are depicted in the image with papyrus, poppy and lotus flowers.³⁴

Figure 3. (Right) Shows Tutankhamun's pectoral (chest ornament) adorned with semiprecious stones, a scarab holding the boat of Ra and eye of Horus, and adornments of lotus, papyrus and poppy flowers. The disk shows

³³ Hepper (1990), p. 2.

³⁴ Hepper (1990), p. 19.

Gods Thoth and Ra-Harakhty wearing lunar disks, symbolizing the sun god becoming the moon. Found in Tutankhamun's tomb³⁵.

Egyptologist I.E.S Edwards observed that the blue-tinted chalices were used for a ritual purpose and that the white ones were drinking vessels, often shaped like the above-mentioned alabaster with one large blossom and two buds as handles³⁶. Libation scenes are frequently observed in tombs and in papyri texts, suggesting that libation may have been a commonality in everyday life in worship. This can be supported by the known frequent drinking of beer by the Egyptians, as well as in ritual contexts. Libation was equally a central form of ritual in mortuary cults, with testimony in the Nesmin papyrus, consisting of 10 spells presenting mortuary cult offerings³⁷. I will continue to discuss the beverages and sources for libation below.

2.4. Hathor and intoxication

In this section, I will introduce a goddess of the Egyptian religious pantheon that personified by love, rebirth and drunkenness. The importance of this incorporation is to highlight how a divine entity could represent the gateway between intoxication, plants, and a divine linking between man and God. Hathor is often associated with other goddesses, considered one of the most popular out of these and thus acquired several large temples and a large cult following. The name Hathor means “mansion of Horus” due to her often-imagined role as either a consort or a mother of Horus. She was considered the universal cow goddess and the mother of kings. In the Middle kingdom, Mentuhotep Nebhepetre legitimized his rule by depictions where Hathor is offering her sistrum and menit-necklace to the king, suckling him, as well as celebrating a union with him as wife and mother³⁸.

Hathor was considered a link to other worlds by ecstatic experience, as well as to the worlds of rebirth and death. The dead would desire to follow Hathor³⁹. Her cult was popular and linked in particular to Memphis, Dendera and Giza. At Dendera, Hathor was associated with dance and happiness in relation to music and intoxication, where this was considered a form of ecstasy breaking down worldly barriers due to the goddess's role in the godly pantheon. This idea was also linked to her mirror association, to see the other worlds in these so-called trance-like states.

³⁵ Hepper (1990), p. 20.

³⁶ Emboden (1989), p.66.

³⁷ Assmann, Jan & Lorton, David (2011). “*Death and salvation in ancient Egypt*”, Cornell university press, p. 355.

³⁸ Graves-Brown, Carolyn (2010). “*Dancing for Hathor: Women in ancient Egypt*”. Bloomsbury publishing plc, p. 169.

³⁹ Brown (2010), p. 167.

Drunkenness was an approved action in ancient Egypt for women when it was a “holy intoxication”, potentially linking through a different state of mind to the world of the gods⁴⁰. Hathor was the goddess of love, but equally of drunkenness. This is suggested as a divine communion in the Middle Kingdom composition *Dispute between man and his Ba*⁴¹, offering an explanation to scenes in which banquets are held where only imbibing is being done, rather than eating food. This might have expressed a desire of death by mystical communion⁴²:

“Death is before me today
Like the fragrance of a lotus
Like sitting on the shores of drunkenness”⁴³

Excavations in the temple of Mut at Karnak also gives evidence to the festival of drunkenness, celebrated already in the New Kingdom and being linked to Hathor and Mut⁴⁴. The author discusses the findings made by Betsy Bryan, who discovered a “porch of drunkenness”, on which worshipers got drunk and were awoken by drummers to commune with the goddess Mut⁴⁵. The above citation suggests that by intoxication there was a perceived notion that death was in the context of mystical communion that occurs near death, involved with a festival in which Hathor, the lady of drunkenness, was the goddess of invocation.

In art, the lotus appears to be alongside any gender, class and often in ritual and festival scenes. In the Old Kingdom, however, there was a special association with the lotus around women with an erotic suggestiveness⁴⁶. This is also applied to the mandrake fruit, and both are in the New Kingdom seen sniffed by women and included in love poems: “The mouth of my beloved is like a lotus bud. Her breasts like mandrake fruit”⁴⁷. Some reliefs show women holding a lotus with their husbands in association with animals representing sensuality, like the goose or monkey. They are depicted as eternally perfumed and beautiful with sexualizing outfits, like the diaphanous net dresses described in the Westcar papyrus⁴⁸, often in rituals that show the women pouring drinks into glasses at parties with wine and flowers or a garden. Drunkenness increased the possibility of mystical communion and may, with the associated psychedelia

⁴⁰ Brown (2010), p. 168.

⁴¹ Brown (2010), p. 168.

⁴² Brown (2010), p. 168.

⁴³ Brown (2010), p. 168.

⁴⁴ Brown (2010), p. 168.

⁴⁵ Brown (2010), p. 169.

⁴⁶ Brown (2010), p. 112.

⁴⁷ Brown (2010), p. 112.

⁴⁸ Brown (2010), p. 5.

often depicted at these scenes, have also included an erotic euphoria with Hathor's influence and divine representation of these acts. Following up on this idea, I will shortly mention some findings related to Hathor's role in healing and altered mind-states below.

Egyptologist Rosalie David discusses in an article from 2008⁴⁹ healing centres, found in excavations of the temple of Hathor at Dendera, as sites of a sanatorium. This centre would treat patients with water from the sacred lake, which was believed to have curative properties for a patient in which to bathe, or, even more interesting, to have "therapeutic dreams". Hereby, a trance-like state would be induced for the person to commune with the gods for healing and for visionary dreams to be interpreted by priests in hopes of a cure or a message from the gods of healing. Sacred songs were sung at this ritual, as well as burning of perfume wood and lamps would be part of the process. A similar centre was found at Deir el-Bahri, and they have both compared to the temples in Greece that practiced a similar treatment, although the Egyptian sites are dated at least 1000 years earlier⁵⁰.

2.5. The water lily as medicine and magic

In this section, I will present the written evidence for the use of the lotus as medicine and give a context of its healing and magical attributes. The discovery of the water lilies in Egypt occurred with the Napoleonic expedition's arrival on the Nile in 1798. Three water lilies were discovered: *Nymphaea lotus*, *Nelumbo nucifera*, and the subject of this research, *Nymphaea cerulea*⁵¹. Out of these three, *Nelumbo nucifera* was not native to Egypt, but imported from India and Persia. It is important to state that researchers often confused these three when they were discovered, but recent research has managed to distinguish the flowers due to precise and continuous depictions in hieroglyphics⁵². When it was chemically profiled, the water lily of the *Nymphaea* genus was found to contain four narcotic alkaloids concentrated in the rhizome and the flower though not in the seeds nor stem. The effects can be experienced by eating the flower

⁴⁹ David, Rosalie (2008). "The art of healing in ancient Egypt: A scientific reappraisal", The Lancet, Vol.372, Issue. 9652.

⁵⁰ David (2008) vol 372 issue 9652.

⁵¹ Sanchez, Gonzalo M & Harer Jr, W Benson (2014). "History of toxicology and environmental health", *Toxicology in antiquity*: Vol 1, p.2. Elsevier, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-800045-8.00001-0>

⁵² Harer (1985), p. 49.

or drinking it steeped in wine⁵³. Nunn reports that internal medication with the narcotic lotus is stated in the papyri as being with “Khau”, a term identified with the flower part of the lotus, which contains the alkaloids as well as the *Grundriss* (leaves). Ebers 209 contains a remedy for the right side of the belly in which the Khau of the lily with 15 other ingredients including beer had to “spend the night”, meaning to be soaked in it, before ingestion. Ebers 479 also contains Khau of the lotus to treat skin disease from the liver. The Khau would in most cases spend the night with alcohol like beer, wine, or both. This instance provides us with the necessary evidence to conclude that the ancient Egyptians knew how to extract a plant’s effect, like the lotus for our study, through alcohol.

Another mentioning comes from the Chester Beatty papyrus IV13, which further uses lotus Khau as an Enema⁵⁴. The medicine prescribed in ancient Egypt was often and largely selected because of the characteristic that was desired for the patient. The Edwin Smith papyrus, for example, equated an ostrich eggshell to the human skull, and thus an ostrich egg was part of the remedy⁵⁵ causing an irregularity unique to the Egyptians way of using material for medicine. This creates certain difficulties in assessing the nature and efficiency of remedies that were utilized. There is furthermore great difficulty in assessing and identifying species of plants through the remaining papyri and inscriptions. According to Nunn, Germer in 1993 estimated that 20% out of about 160 plant products, mentioned in medical papyri, could be identified in total⁵⁶.

In relation to the existing recipes found, it can be concluded that there was an extraction method for the plants that were identified. Alcohol was an important method for this and was frequently used in recipes with plants. It is by this mode of extraction that our water lily must have been placed. The Ebers papyrus, containing the largest amount of data regarding medicinal knowledge, contains about 106 medicines that require beer⁵⁷. Different types of beers had different uses but were a standard part of the Egyptian diet and were frequently used in medical care and could have produced a euphoric and sedative effect. The beer also produces ethanol during fermentation, which kills many organisms that may have been harmful and existed within the Nile waters, making beer a killer of these bacteria and effective in health care.

⁵³ Nunn (1996), p. 157.

⁵⁴ Nunn (1996), p. 158.

⁵⁵ Nunn (1996), p. 138.

⁵⁶ Nunn (1996), p. 151.

⁵⁷ Metcalfe, Ryan (2016), “*Mummies magic and medicine in ancient Egypt: Multidisciplinary essays for Rosalie David*”, Manchester: Manchester university press, p. 161.

The landscape of ancient Egypt was idyllic for crop cultivation with the Nile providing a fertile environment. The Egyptians based most of their agriculture and economy on emmer wheat and barley suited to beer and bread production and thus for diet. Flooding could have made the crops unreliable, causing either too little or too much water for irrigation and can harm the crops. Bouza is the beer of the old Egyptians, made of lightly baked bread and germinated grain. The mixture would provide yeast. Other methods existed and tomb scenes from both the Old and New Kingdom show the processes⁵⁸.

Beer was, as mentioned, a staple drink for consumption in ancient Egypt, while wine was reserved for the elite but commonly consumed in festivities and medicinal extraction. When soaked in alcohol, alkaloids are soluble, meaning that any plant that does not cause an effect while eaten purely can release its entheogenic or other property in an alcoholic beverage. “Mickey Finn”, as we call it today, or “roofie”, is a recipe found in Leiden papyrus containing mandrake and hyoscyamine that is steeped in wine⁵⁹. It is one of many examples of mixed herbs found causing psychoactive reaction, and although it is unclear what it was used for, a sedative effect seems most logical. This mixture, however, provides a necessary confirmation about the understanding of soaking herbs, psychoactive or not, in alcohol to gain its effect. The blue water lily contains with this knowledge, more than a mythology behind it. What chemistry exists within it is what matters. Extracted through alcohol, the flower's narcotic properties can be contained and metabolized as an entheogen⁶⁰.

Nunn⁶¹ further confirms that active compounds of plants were extracted in water, oil, or in alcohol to extract the active alkaloids, which are a chemical grouping of among others, atropine, nicotine, and morphine. They were, however, mostly extracted with beer and wine as it was most effective in receiving the potent effects, the only alcohols used were beer or wine as it was readily available and consumed daily. An example out of many on the use of this extraction is found in Ebers 202; “You shall then prepare him to drink: figs, 1/8; milk, 1/16; notched sycamore figs, 1/8; which have ‘spent the night’ in sweet beer, 1/10. Strain (atekh) and drink much so that he gets well immediately”⁶². As a vehicle for medicine, it is in the Ebers papyrus often instructed to place items in water before drinking⁶³, but likewise often combined

⁵⁸ Metcalfe (2016), p. 158-160.

⁵⁹ Harer (1985), p. 8.

⁶⁰ Sanchez & Harer jr (2014), p. 73-82.

⁶¹ Nunn (1996), p. 139.

⁶² Nunn (1996), p. 139.

⁶³ Nunn (1996), p. 19-21.

with another extraction method to draw out any other quality. Wine, for example, at a percentage between 10-20% of alcohol, was used for extractions of alkaloids, as stated in Ebers 287. However, whether the plants were necessarily helpful or effectively used has been questioned, and the role of magic has been suggested as the larger component of healing.

As stated above, Nunn does suggest that the pharaonic times witnessed few pharmacologically effective remedies for healing, but rather relied on magic acted as a placebo, enhanced by religious incantation and magical objects. In preparation for any healing or curative remedy, a diurnal variation is seen in collecting and concentrating each plant and its various parts that had therapeutic value to them. The alkaloids had a different value⁶⁴ and the Egyptians understood this craft and the time-specific value of the plants in connection to magic.

Plants used in the ancient Egyptian pharmacopeia have been investigated properly after their identifications have been deemed as correct in translation. Especially when containing potent drugs that were found from the time in Egypt, research has been ongoing on for example morphine in the opium poppy, atropine in deadly nightshade, strychnine in *Strychnos nux-vomica*, cocaine in coca plants, and curare in the vine *Chondrodendron tomentosum*⁶⁵, which have been identified as common plants in remedies. Some other narcotic plants as used in Egypt have been identified by Schultes, Hofmann, and Rätsch: *Hyoscyamus Niger*, a plant recorded in the Ebers papyrus, is very toxic and entheogenic in certain quantities due to its content of atropine, scopolamine, and hyoscyamine (found in the whole plant). *Hyoscyamus muticus* is native to the Egyptian deserts east of Afghanistan and India, where it was smoked as an intoxicant⁶⁶. *Cannabis sativa* is until this day argued over as to whether it was used in Egypt or not. Some sources are confident, and others deny it fully, but the specimen has according to Rätsch⁶⁷ been found in Thebes, potentially used in a drink to cause an opium-like effect. It has been referenced as *Shemshemet* by some sources. One of these was *La Flore pharaonique* (1892) by Victor Loret⁶⁸.

The examples above show a range of drugs found in common plants⁶⁹ at the time and provide a basis for understanding the knowledge that the Egyptians had regarding the effect and potency of narcotic plants. It is important too, in identifying and drawing conclusions of the

⁶⁴ Nunn (1996), p. 97.

⁶⁵ Nunn (1996), p. 151.

⁶⁶ Hofmann, Albert; Rätsch, Christian; Schultes Evans, Richard (2001). "*Plants of the Gods*" (2nd edition), Healing arts press, p. 86-88.

⁶⁷ Hofmann et al (2001), p. 72.

⁶⁸ Nunn (1996), p. 151-152.

⁶⁹ Nunn (1996), p. 151.

plants used, to remember that we cannot translate all written examples found. Therefore, conclusions are fluid and can change with time as research on the very topic is still being conducted by prominent researchers like Egyptologist Rosalie David⁷⁰ and many others.

There was the availability of narcotics, sedatives, and pain relievers, but little evidence is found in the papyri on their obvious use as mind-altering. It is likely that the New Kingdom knew of the effects of for example mandrake, poppy, and cannabis, but there is no evidence for an obvious narcotic usage, meaning mind-altering, for a specifically religious purpose⁷¹. This, however, could be due to the abstraction of this research, as most plants used are named in medical papyri but not often anywhere else. There is no certainty that a lack of information from these sources about ritualistic usage means that they were not utilized as such. However, it could be argued that with the common and almost constant influence of incantations and spells, together with the medicinal treatments and healing, this could be considered a ritualistic endeavour that is not clear-cut in the formulae given in the papyri. I will shortly discuss the role on magic in treatment.

To improve herbal efficiency, magical means would be taken and be accounted for by spells, amulets and the belief that an herb relates to a god, an illness or an organ. Some fundamental gods had magical skills and knowledge concerning medicine and healing, like Isis reassembling Osiris's body after he conflicted with his brother Seth and healing him by the guise of a kite. Isis is as such invoked for protection and curative effect⁷². *Similia similibus* describes the practice of acknowledging a plant or animal remedy that looks like the issue itself to be suitable for healing, often equated to that of a divinity or a quality that appeared as magically connected. An association between illness and a remedy would be accepted on the basis that it looks similar (like an egg likened to the skull) or a similar action has been taken by a mythological story and would thus magically increase the cure.

To further understand how medicine was broadly infused with magic, it is also important to mention that the practitioners of medicine were not specifically doctors. It was common in ancient Egypt for a magician to practice medicine as well as take on the doctoral title or often work together amongst each other. Many roles of magician-doctors existed, a few of these being as follows: *Khery-hebet*, "the one in charge of the festival rolls", was a role associated

⁷⁰ David (2020), p. 1.

⁷¹ Nunn (1996), p. 153.

⁷² Nunn (1996), p. 98.

with religious performance and magic, sometimes translated as “lector-priest”⁷³. They oversaw reading incantations for the ill. *Hekay* is a word for magicians mostly related to the Middle Kingdom and to the god of magic, Heka. *Hekay n kap* was a magician of the king’s private apartments. The depictions of *hekay* are seen in scenes with nurses (*menat*), but with an unclear role in these contexts. The Old kingdom *swnw* were funerary priests of the *hekay*, but it is further unknown as for why⁷⁴. Lastly, priests of Serqet are another type of magicians that practiced medicine. The ancient magicians and *sem* priests (priests of embalmment) were often designated to serve as physicians, health and disease, thus designated to godly interference. Berlant states that it may have been a common practice of these priests to consume the drug that was to heal the patient, a method of communing with the divine on behalf of the patient⁷⁵. Though it can appear an unusual thing for a magician to be incorporated into so much medical practices, there must have existed a favourable component to have these present.

The Egyptian mind was a place where magic and the divine were real and tangible. Thus, having a magician or priest present and treating the patient would provide a placebo effect which in many cases could prove to be more efficient than certain remedies of which its function was rather unclear (as *Similia similibus* above). In the case of the Lotus flower, the important nature of the magician or priest in medical scenarios is that no aspect of life was untouched when incorporating religion and magic. The lotus is as real as any symbol since it represents not only a mythological primordial being related to healing and rebirth but is also a highly potent magical and medicinal tool that changes the mind’s structure in equal ways. The evidence for this idea must exist somewhere between the myth and real-life chemical profile,⁷⁶ since this flower exists within both worlds.

2.6. Funerary rituals

In funerary rituals, a variety of symbols were applied with a critical purpose, among these being the Ankh, *sema-tawy*, and the lotus. The function of these were mostly the same as partial representations of gods and goddesses, immortal life, and the afterlife. The rite of passage to the afterlife, a goal for most Egyptians, began not upon death, but in life as a preparation. To resurrect, the body had to be embalmed and preserved and given sacrifices regularly. The grave

⁷³ Nunn (1996), p. 98-99.

⁷⁴ Nunn (1996), p. 99.

⁷⁵ Berlant, Stephen R. (2005). “Theentheomycological origin of Egyptian crowns and the esoteric underpinnings of Egyptian religion”, *Journal of ethnopharmacology*: vol 102, Issue 2, pp. 275-288

⁷⁶ Emboden (1978), p. 401.

of the deceased was decorated and painted according to the person in question and items were placed in the grave, due to it being the eternal resting place for the physical body⁷⁷. A concept of the dead that was important for the Egyptians was its three existing formats: the mummy that remained in the grave, the Ka and the Ba. The latter two were two aspects of what we would call a “soul”. Ka was the life force energy and represented in the grave by a statue, while Ba was represented by a bird and characterized by its ability to move outside of the grave and to return at will⁷⁸. This concept will be discussed with the spells below.

The *Book of the dead* emerged around 1500 B.C to 1350 B.C. The scripture is a work containing spells, incantations, a guidebook written for the dead for their underworld travels. It was placed in the coffin of the burial chamber with the deceased to instruct of the obstacles in the underworlds many trials. The title “*Book of the dead*” was given by Egyptologist Karl Richard Lepsius. The ancient Egyptians, however, referred to the work as “Spells for going forth by day”⁷⁹. The constituents are to a great extent material from the earlier coffin texts and the pyramid texts with additional components from later periods. It is in this text that we encounter two spells titled “Transformation into a lotus flower”:

Spell 81A

“I am this pure lotus
Which went forth from the sunshine, which is at the nose of Ra;
I have descended that I may seek it for Horus,
For I am the pure one
Who issued from the fen “

Spell 81B

“O Lotus belonging to the semblance of Nefertum,
I am the man. I know your name
I know your names, you gods, you lords of the realm of the dead
For I am one of you.
May you grant that I see the gods who lead the Netherworld,
May there be given to me a seat in the realm of the dead

⁷⁷ Gilhus & Thomassen (2010), p. 47.

⁷⁸ Gilhus & Thomassen (2010), p. 47.

⁷⁹ Billing, Nils (2016). “*De dödas bok: Den fornegyptiska dödsboken I översättning och kommentar*”, Carlssons bokförlag, Stockholm, p. 31.

In the presence of the lords of the West,
 May I take my place in the sacred land, may I receive offerings
 In the presence of the lords of eternity,
 May my soul go forth to every place that it desires,
 Without being held back from the presence of the great Ennead.”

As has been discussed in the part of this essay on cosmogony, creation came through the water lily in some myths from early tomb writings. The lily existed as an image in creation as the object from which the first God came. Like the rising sun, the flower blooms and opens, revealing the sun god, often personified as Nefertem⁸⁰. This spell is found in a group of similar texts, aiming at the transformation of the deceased into a deity and to assume his quality. The lotus would provide rebirth, while identification with the sun and the sun in this case brought immortality due to Ra and his myth of bringing righteous souls with him and eternal life amongst the gods. Both parts of spell 81 (A & B) indicate a clear transformation for the purpose of rebirth, immortality and ascension into heaven as Ra who emerged from Nun and became the sun god traveling across the sky, as well as Nefertem, who rose from and represented the Lotus. Accompanying this spell is an image of a man’s head springing from the blossomed flower, identifying him as the reborn sun⁸¹ as depicted in the image below:

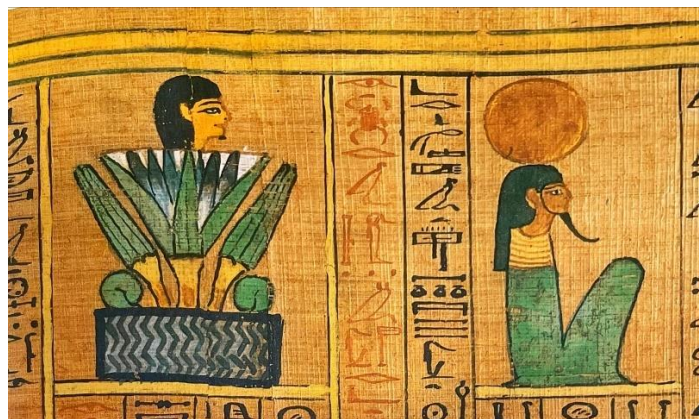


Figure 4: Spell 81A (Left) A man’s head emerging from a blue water lily floating in a pool. Representing the sun god’s daily reappearance and resurrection for Ani⁸². Spell 80 (Right) A squatting god with a sun-disk on his head, the form Ani wishes to assume⁸³

⁸⁰ Billing (2016), p. 403.

⁸¹ Billing (2016), p. 403.

⁸² Faulkner, Raymond O. (1985). “*The ancient Egyptian Book of the dead*”, British museum publications, London, p. 79.

⁸³ Faulkner (1985), p. 79.

In spell 81B, the deceased asks to see the gods of the underworld and to be offered a place in the necropolis by the lords of the West. This makes it appear as an object, acting as a conduit to the next life and immortality. The spells of transformation in the *Book of the dead* can be expressed as the wish to transform into a living Ba⁸⁴. Assmann & Lorton presents tomb inscriptions to explain this reasoning:

“Transforming into a living Ba

So as to alight on this grove

And enjoy the shade of its sycamores

And sit in the rear part of the pyramid,

While his statues endure in his house

And receive offerings,

And while his corpse remains, without being lost

To the lord of life (=coffin).

After he (I.e., the deceased) has taken hi seat... for the future.

Transforming into a living Ba

That has disposal over water, bread and air,

Changing into a phoenix and a swallow

...to receive the offerings set (before God)

And what is proffered to the lord of the sacred district.

...transforming into a living Ba.

May he again see his house of the living.

So as to be a protection to his children daily,

Forever and ever.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Assmann & Lorton (2011), p. 216.

⁸⁵ Assmann & Lorton (2011), p. 216.

The point of this was to be able to receive their mortuary offerings and meals in the form that made them able to return to the mortuary site. A mode where this could take place was in the festivals, where the veil between this world and the next was diminished or eliminated and the dead received offerings⁸⁶. This was a mode of sacralising the living world by gods appearing to men for a specified time frame, an idea dating back to the Middle Kingdom, but highly popularized in the New Kingdom and related to the mysteries of Osiris at Abydos. The mystery was “a worldly enclave in the realm of the living” and would attract even the dead⁸⁷. People would go through pilgrimage to these festivals, in part due to a guaranteed inclusion into lists that held their participation in the festival forever and was considered an initiation into the society of the ones celebrating a deity. This would in turn acquire an advantage in the next life that was made on earth, also being the case with the later Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries. Due to this, a hope would exist for the return to the land of the living after death and showing the reality of the transformational formula capacities after death and why they were so desired.

In the *Book of traversing eternity*, we see a festival calendar, which contained the wishes of the deceased to partake in the festivals rather than the more common guide to the afterlife. This was a guide to the living world. Moments of time where your transformed state can exist back in the physical living world⁸⁸. Building on the transformational spells, the water lily in the above spell 81B states “May I take my place in the sacred land, may I receive offerings in the presence of the lords of eternity, may my soul go forth to every place that it desires, without being held back from the presence of the great Ennead”. Here it speaks of the Lotus, as the living incarnation of the deceased soul, which has transformed, receiving festival offerings and traveling freely with his Ba. In context, this describes this ability during festivals where this worldly veil is diminished and allowing the Ba to be freely attending the living world with the gods and receiving food and other offerings.

The following section will discuss the role of symbols and priests on the above transformational spells due to the inscriptions holding a special power in relation to the divine and its capacities. Inscriptions in tombs and texts, such as those that are a transformational spell, are in many cases as important as the gods are or divine object themselves, as they represent their power. A visible sign that stands as a representation of the entirety of the invisible divine makes the symbols real and living. Like the statues that are made in the image of the gods and goddesses,

⁸⁶ Assmann & Lorton, (2011), p. 225.

⁸⁷ Assmann & Lorton (2011), p. 225.

⁸⁸ Assmann & Lorton (2011), p. 232.

that deity is thought to reside there in a way of linking the divine to the object hence giving it a power worthy of worship and meaning. Assmann gave an important example of the realities of symbols⁸⁹. Tombs were equipped with provisions of food and commodities, replaced by imperishable material models of the same commodities. Lastly, the provisions were listed in a stone inscription and recitation of this text is just as real as actual food or materials, even if it was a representation of the original item. This concept can be applied to cults where gods were embodied in statues or objects that represented them and became an enactment of the divine.

The first instances of the water lily appeared as wall paintings during the 4th dynasty. With the increased continuity in the 18th century, the lily began to be depicted together with the narcotic *Mandragora Officinarum*⁹⁰. They are more often than not interpreted as parts of funerary scenes, i.e., as offerings, a valid interpretation considering that the nature of offerings at the time often was healing plants. Merlin⁹¹ argues that new interpretations have arisen with graphic data, such as papyri and artistic evidence, pointing towards them being used in a kind of shamanic ritual healing.

The Salt magical papyrus, the Beatty papyrus VII and the Harris magical papyrus are occupied predominantly with the magic of the priestly caste and were never available to the common person⁹². A shamanic ritual has been suggested, where the priests were reciting spells and were well revered in the social latter were guiding the souls of the dead and trans mutating their souls into the personification of plants as humans' spirits⁹³. Merlin further argues that it is toward the papyri that the narcotic plants are pointing for evidence in this regard, the mandrake, water lily, and poppy, all which according to Merlin were utilized by the priestly caste that dealt with the ritual magic and healing, which was potentially not ever seen or known by the public. In this statement, Merlin is thus suggesting that like shamans, these priests dealt with the hidden magical aspects by their own direction to heal people and use the plants as vehicles for ecstasy⁹⁴. Priests are often seen as conduits between life and gods. This is not to state that a priest held the position of a pharaoh, who was the literal embodiment of that linkage. Rather the priests were experts of the religion practiced by having full mastering over reciting, spells, medicine, embalming and so forth. The religious practices of ancient Egypt were as we have

⁸⁹ Assmann & Lorton (1992), p. 88.

⁹⁰ Merlin, M.D. (2003). "Archaeological evidence for the tradition of psychoactive plant use in the old world", *Economic botany*: Vol. 57, No. 3, p. 317. Springer. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4256701>

⁹¹ Merlin (2003), p. 317.

⁹² Emboden (1978), p. 396.

⁹³ Merlin (2003), p. 317.

⁹⁴ Merlin (2003), p. 318.

previously made clear affected and influenced greatly by the divine itself. When a priest works in a field that is closer to divinity, directly understanding and using the tools like spells and magic, he may be a form of connector, a different type of link to the divine that allows the common man to for example be ready for the underworld or healed from bodily injury with magic and plants. Assuming that the lily was used narcotically or symbolically, the priest would act in the role of a shaman in guiding the Ba soul with spells for transforming that we encounter in the *Book of the dead*, which provides several spells for transmutation into an animal, a plant, and gods. Some of the transformational spells in the *Book of the dead* include a transformation into a Heron (BD 84), a falcon (BD 77 and 78), or a god (BD 80)⁹⁵. These spells, written down, become living symbols⁹⁶ together with the priest's guidance that provided the souls a transmutation necessary for surviving death in the form of another being⁹⁷. I will further discuss the Egyptian idea for what this would mean to give a context to the hypothesis.

Surviving death was a realized possibility to the Egyptian mind. Immortality was, however, a privilege of the gods and for a mortal human to reach it, he or she would also have to become gods. The deceased's biggest wish was to go forward and join the company of the sun god Ra and transform in the light of the sun⁹⁸. The transformation was written with the hieroglyph of a scarab representing regeneration, along the word *kheper*, "to become/transform". *Wenen* stands with *Kheper* as the centre of the concept of the afterlife in Egyptian thought, where *Wenen* (*Wennefer* used to name Osiris) is connected to Osiris and means "the lasting, completed one" and *Khepri* with Ra⁹⁹. Ra and Osiris became the conduits and representations for achieving survival of death, each god with an important role to maintain the movement of death and life after death. Osiris had the role of representing the elements that allowed the deceased into the underworld as well as the judgement of the dead. Embalming was a hallmark to "becoming" Osiris due to his eternal form of mummification. Osiris was the judge of the deceased's previous life, of what existed in his heart that would be weighed against the feather of Maat. Ra was the second component, who would raise him up into the sky on his boat if he were deemed righteous.

⁹⁵ Billing (2016), p.168, 176, 180.

⁹⁶ Assmann (1992), p. 88.

⁹⁷ Merlin (2003), p. 317.

⁹⁸ Assmann & Lorton (2011), p. 371.

⁹⁹ Assmann & Lorton (2011), p. 372.

Upon death, the divine seed that was the king would ascend to the sky as a falcon and unify with his father the sun¹⁰⁰. In honour of the king's unique existence, pyramids had been built in the Old and Middle Kingdom, manifesting the aspirations of their owners for immortality. These conceptions can also be found in the pyramid texts, a vision for eternal life in the company of the gods. This post-mortal aim would eventually become the goal for the common person.

The Old Kingdom's shift into the New Kingdom changed the mortuary rites of the elite and the royal afterlife started to open to the common man. Tomb decoration and conduction of the rites involved more individuals and the royal model with the lector priest's transfiguration spells chanting remained from the royal tradition for all to take part in. Immortality was an obtainable goal for all and transforming into a lotus was a capable standard. Mythology as a concept constitutes the attempt to understand something relating to the divine world and cannot be explained easily by human standard, stated Egyptologist Rudolf Anthes¹⁰¹. The divine entities can only be grasped by the means of symbols, "every mythological concept is symbolical of the divine world"¹⁰². Egyptian mythology is the manifestation of a commonly accepted use of symbols, dependent on the accepted divine world, which is expressed in a variety of ways. The apparent Egyptian consensus, however, was clearly that no one symbol could portray and encompass the entire meaning of their mythological entity, resulting in a variety of symbols and concepts. Hence, the many symbols and meanings connected with the hieroglyphs.

2.7. Summary

The focus of my essay has intended to answer the question of whether there are sources and evidence to assume that the psychedelic water lily was used in an ancient Egyptian religious context and what its role was. To this question, the essay investigated multiple sources to reveal what the lily was used for and what symbolism is portrayed in the religion. The results show that the Egyptians revered the water lily as a symbol associated with the birth of the sun at a moment in creation, related to the lotus god Nefertem, which has been hypothesized by Rudolf Anthes and H. Altenmuller as being the original creator of the sun god Ra. Ra is held as the creator god by most accounts in ancient Egypt, based on the popular myth at Heliopolis

¹⁰⁰ Assmann & Lorton (2011), p. 389.

¹⁰¹ Anthes (1959), p. 202-203.

¹⁰² Anthes (1959), p. 203.

by rising from Nun and the primordial mound *benben* and then creating the first gods. But by the suggested variation to the story, it was the god Nefertem in his lotus incarnation who with the flower's fragrance “at the nose of Ra” gave the sun every morning as is often depicted.

Ritual devotion existed in several modes, but an aspect that drove ritual forward was its infused cosmogenic meanings, where the action was motivated by ideas relating to one or many myths and made into a reality. In this case, the lotus would be suitable especially for funerary rituals, as it symbolized the deceased's rebirth and immortality. The consumption of the water lily was explained by this concept through an idea where eating magic is a way of becoming the divine or acquiring its qualities.

In libation rituals, the lotus has been shown to exist as décor on chalices and in the shape of vessels made by alabasters in white and blue tints, which represent the two native water lilies that existed in Egypt. Tutankhamun's tomb held flourishing evidence for the use of the lotus in rituals and was especially beloved by this pharaoh. His jewellery and pectoral ornament were embedded with narcotic plants like the lotus, poppies and mandrake, as well as the non-narcotic papyrus sedge. When seeing the many forms of chalices and vessels being either decorated with or in the shape of the lotus flower from the 18th-22nd century BCE, Emboden suggested that the brew that a drinking vessel held was the core indication for what it held inside.

The goddess Hathor represented intoxication and healing by her role in ecstatic experiences like music, dancing, sensual experience and drinking something that caused a euphoric feeling. The sensual context was depicted by beautiful young women in revealing clothing in relation with mandrake fruits and lotuses being sniffed and carried, found in many love poems from the New Kingdom. The goddess was described in the coffin texts as an anchor to whom both the living and the dead can commune and desire to follow as worldly barriers were broken down around her. By holy intoxication, a person could imbibe and meanwhile experience the divine and mystical. Excavations have found drunkenness festivals and porches of drunkenness where the participant would experience near death states by libation where death is considered a state in which one is the closest to the divine and the furthest this can be experienced is by whatever beverage was drunk at this site. Archaeological excavations have revealed sanatoriums at temples of Hathor in which patients would be treated by being placed in trance-like states to commune with gods for healing.

Furthermore, the essay presented evidence from medicinal papyri that constitutes the Egyptian knowledge of plant medicine. This part also presented the magic-medical aspects to the lotus

and healing. The *Nymphaea cerulea* found in ancient Egypt was chemically profiled and found to contain four narcotic alkaloids concentrated in the rhizome and the flower of the water lily, which was stated as the word “Khau” in Ebers papyrus when used for internal medication. Several remedies contained the lotus flower, steeped in alcohol overnight in order to extract its narcotic properties. It was mentioned as an ingredient in remedies to treat the liver as seen in Ebers 479 and stomach issues and as an Enema in the Chester Beatty papyrus.

Alcohol was an often-used vehicle to carry out plant treatments for disease to easier extract its content. Due to the magic-medical aspects of medicine and healing, a reliance existed on the magical aspects due to the efficiency of choosing plants being relied on by means of its physical or mythical properties. A placebo effect due to the use of magical inspirations on medicine would affect the chosen plants. Spells and incantations presented some fundamental ideas of healing in ancient Egypt. Gods were invoked to acquire their healing effects and specific characteristics. It is therefore not surprising that priests and magicians would often take on the role of a doctor or work alongside them and to ingest the drug that was meant to help the patient as a mode to commune on behalf of the ill with the divine. The favourable component of having a magician or priest in these healing practices can be attributed to the real-life tangible aspect of divinity affecting life. The lotus was a prime example of both aspects of medicine and magic, as it was symbolical both a mythological and regenerative rebirth and immortal being while it was also a potent medicinal tool that exists within both these aspects.

Furthermore, the essay goes over the funerary aspects of the water lily, which represents the concept we see in the *Book of the dead* as transforming into animals or plants as a mode of immortality. Spell 81A and 81B in the *Book of the dead* represents the transformation into a lotus as it brings back the concept of a primordial being of immortality and becoming this lotus causes one to acquire its qualities. The lotus is identified with the sun’s birth from the underworld, an image depicted in the cosmology of Ra taking with him righteous souls from the darkness and traveling across the sky. The lotus also represents Ra’s form as the child Khepri seen laying on the lotus blossom or Ra’s head springing forth through its opened petals, and becoming this object constitutes the achievement of having successfully become one with Ra, becoming an immortal and taking a place amongst the lords of the West. The many spells of transformation in the *Book of the dead* expressed a wish to transform into a living Ba, as depicted in tomb inscriptions in order to receive mortuary offerings during everyday rituals as well as festivals, when the veil between the dead and living was diminished. Such festivals

were also a guarantee for the living that after death, returning as a Ba to the living, would be a possibility upon transformation where the deceased soul has the capacity to travel freely.

The power of spells and inscriptions in tombs are in ancient Egypt considered as important as the divine itself to represent its power. The same concept exists for statues, where the god or goddess resides in the object, giving it power worthy of worship. The water lily was first depicted as a symbol in the 4th dynasty in funerary scenes as offerings. Suggestions to the potentially shamanic nature of these flowers have been stated through the evidence pointing toward a priestly caste performing transformational rituals by incantation of symbols and reciting of spells. The priest's recital, like the nature of the symbolism, brings its magic to life and allows the priest to, in a shamanic fashion, guide the soul of the deceased to transform into a lotus flower, or any of the spells relating to transformation. Narcotic plants were suggested to have been used by the priests in such rituals where those plants, like lotus, mandrake and poppy was utilized to heal and transform the deceased and the soul as both transformational conduits, and as ecstasy-inducing mind-altering methods to direct the soul. Thus, the priest acted as a human conduit between the other worlds and the living by using spells and incantation infused with magic and would act in a mode of a shaman guiding the Ba soul with transformational spells that existed as written symbols, allowing the soul immortality.

2.8. Personal reflection

This essay has highlighted the ritualistic use of the blue water lily of Ancient Egypt in the role of cosmogeny, magic and medicine. My second issue statement asks what effect and role the water lily had on religious practice. What my research has concluded is that the role of this flower on religious expression is given a context in the artistic, mythical and scriptural themes provided. I have concluded that there is a theme with the lotus flower being used in rituals that induce mind alteration by for example libation, and specifically in rituals that can be given a shamanic context of transmutation of a soul into an immortal vessel by magicians or priests. This is because a large number of funerary spells and inscriptions that relate to the flower tends to express an experience of a soul which expresses itself in methods that brings a person closer to the divine, to which narcotic plants can be attributed this role and were readily available and used in ancient Egypt.

2.9. Future research

In contemporary research of the usage of the blue water lily as an aphrodisiac and narcotic has been developing further by analytical techniques such as gas chromatography-mass spectrometry and liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry¹⁰³. These techniques would allow examination of hair and scalp samples based on the treatments found in papyri to treat conditions as well as finding resins and unguents of botanical specimen in different areas¹⁰⁴. For future analysis, it would be a worthy endeavour to continue this research and provide a multidisciplinary study that relates developed scientific investigation with mythology and concepts that explain the Egyptian mind-set in relation to drugs like the lotus. Some questions that would be interesting in this investigation could be: What would it mean in the field of Egyptology and religious studies to determine that Egypt was in fact largely practicing a largely psychedelic-based belief system? How did the water lily interact with the formational period of the Egyptian religion? These questions may be especially worthwhile to research in the field.

¹⁰³ David (2008). Vol 372 issue 9652

¹⁰⁴ David (2008). Vol 372 issue 9652

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