

The Land of the Dead

The one visit to the Duat of which a record remains was paid by Se-Osiris, the wonderful child magician who read the sealed letter, and his father Setna, the son of Pharaoh Rameses the Great.

They stood one day in the window of the palace at Thebes watching two funerals on their way to the West. The first was that of a rich man: his mummy was enclosed in a wooden case inlaid with gold; troops of servants and mourners carried him to burial and bore gifts for the tomb, while many priests walked in front and behind chanting hymns to the gods and reciting the great names and words of power which he would need on his journey through the Duat. - The second funeral was that of a poor laborer. His two sons carried the simple wooden case: his widow and daughters-in-law were the only mourners.

'Well,' said Setna, watching the two funerals going down to where the boats were waiting to carry them across the Nile, 'I hope that my fate will be that of the rich noble and not of the poor laborer.'

'On the contrary,' said Se-Osiris, 'I pray that the poor man's fate may be yours and not that of the rich man!'

'I pray that the poor man's fate may be yours...'

Setna was much hurt by his son's words, but Se-Osiris tried to explain them, saying, 'Whatever you may have seen here matters little compared with what will chance to these two in the Judgement Hall of Osiris. I will prove it to you, if you will trust yourself to me. I know the words of power that open all gates: I can release your Ba and mine - our souls, that can then fly into the Duat, the world of the dead, and see all that is happening there. Then you will discover

how different are the fates of this rich man who has worked evil during his life, and this poor man who has done nothing but good.'

Setna had learnt to believe anything the wonderful child said without surprise, and now he agreed to accompany his son into the Duat, even though he knew that such an expedition would be dangerous: for once there they might not be able to return.

So the prince and the small boy made their way into the sanctuary of the Temple of Osiris where, as members of the royal family, they had power to go.

When Setna had barred the doors, Se-Osiris drew a magic circle round them and round the statue of Osiris and round the altar on which a small fire of cedar wood was burning. Then he threw a certain powder into the flame upon the altar. Thrice he threw the powder, and as he threw it a ball of fire rose from the altar and floated away. Then he spoke a spell and ended with a great name of power, a word at which the whole temple rocked and the flame on the altar leapt high, and then sank into darkness.

'[He] would have cried out in horror if the silence had not pressed upon him like a weight that held him paralyzed.'

But the Temple of Osiris was not dark. Setna turned to see whence the light came - and would have cried out in horror if the silence had not pressed upon him like a weight that held him paralyzed.

For standing on either side of the altar he saw himself and his son Se-Osiris only suddenly he knew that it was not his own body and the boy's for the two bodies lay in the shadows cast by these two forms - the forms of their Kas or doubles, and above each Ka hovered a tongue of flame which was its Khou or spirit - and the clear, light of the Khou served to show its Ka and the dim form of the body from which Ka and Khou were drawn.

Then the silence was broken by a whisper soft as a feather falling, yet which seemed to fill the whole Temple with sound: 'Follow me now, my father,' said the voice of Se-Osiris, 'for the time is short and we must be back before the morning if we would live to see the Sun of Re rise again over Egypt.'

Setna turned, and saw beside him the Ba or soul of Se-Osiris - a great bird with golden feathers but with the head of his son.

'I follow,' he forced his lips to answer; then, as the whisper filled the Temple, he rose on the golden wings of his own Ba and followed the Ba of Se-Osiris.

The temple roof seemed to open to let them through, and a moment later they were speeding into the West swifter than an arrow from an Ethiopian's bow.

Darkness lay over Egypt, but one red gash of sunset shone through the great pass in the mountains of the Western Desert, the Gap of Abydos. Through this they sped into the First Region of the Night and saw beneath them the Mesektet Boat in which Re began his journey into the Duat with the ending of each day. Splendid was the Boat, glorious its trappings, and its colors were of amethyst and emerald, jasper and turquoise, lazuli and the deep glow of gold. A company of the gods drew the Boat along the ghostly River of Death with golden towing-ropes; the portals of the Duat were flung wide, and they entered the First Region between the six serpents who were curled on either side. And in the great Boat of Re journeyed the Kas of all those who had died that day and were on their way to the judgement Hall of Osiris.

So the Boat moved on its way through regions of night and thick darkness and came to the portal of the Second Region. Tall were the walls on either side, and upon their tops were the points of spears so that none might climb over; the great wooden doors turned on pivots, and once again snakes breathing fire and poison guarded them. But all who passed through on the Boat of Re spoke the words of power decreed for that portal, and the doors swung open.

The Second Region was the Kingdom of Re, and the gods and heroes of old who had lived on earth when he was King dwelt there in peace and happiness, guarded by the Spirits of the Corn who make the wheat and barley flourish and cause the fruits of the earth to increase.

Yet not one of the dead who voyaged in the Boat of Re might pause there or set foot on the land: for they must pass into Amenti, the Third Region of the Duat where the judgement Hall of Osiris stood waiting to receive them.

So the Boat came to the next portals, and at the word of power the great wooden doors screamed open on their pivots - yet not so loudly did they scream as the man who lay with one of the pivots turning in his eye as punishment for the evil he had done upon earth.

Into the Third Region sailed the Boat of Re, and here the dead disembarked in the outer court of the judgement Hall of Osiris. But the Boat itself continued on its way through the nine other Regions of the Night until the re-birth of Re from out of the mouth of the Dragon of the East brought dawn once more upon earth and the rising of the sun. Yet the sun would not rise unless each night Re fought and defeated the Dragon Apep, who seeks ever to devour him in the Tenth Region of the Night.

The Ba of Setna and Se-Osiris did not follow the Boat of Re further, but flew over the Kas of the newly dead who came one by one to the portal of the Hall of Osiris and one by one were challenged by the Door-Keeper.

'Stay!' cried the Door-Keeper. 'I will not announce thee unless thou knowest my name!'

'Understander of Hearts is thy name,' answered each instructed Ka. 'Searcher of Bodies is thy name!'

'Then to whom should I announce thee?' asked the Door-Keeper.

'Thou shouldst tell of my coming to the Interpreter of the Two Lands.'

'Who then is the Interpreter of the Two Lands?'

'It is Thoth the Wise God.'

So each Ka passed through the doorway and in the Hall Thoth was waiting to receive him, saying: 'Come with me. Yet why hast thou come?'

'I have come here to be announced,' answered the Ka.

'What is thy condition?'

'I am pure of sin.'

'Then to whom shall I announce thee? Shall I announce thee to him whose ceiling is of fire, whose walls are living serpents, whose pavement is water?'

'Yes,' answered the Ka, 'announce me to him, for he is Osiris.'

So ibis-headed Thoth led the Ka to where Osiris sat upon his throne, wrapped in the mummy-clothes of the dead, wearing the uraeus crown upon his forehead and holding the scourge and the crook crossed upon his breast. Before him stood a huge balance with two scales, and jackal-headed Anubis, god of death, stepped forward to lead the Ka to the judgement.

'I am pure!

I am pure!

I am pure!

I am pure!

But before the Weighing of the Heart, each dead man's Ka spoke in his own defense, saying: 'I am pure! I am pure! I am pure! I am pure! My purity is as that of the Bennu bird, the bright Phoenix whose nest is upon the stone perse-tree, the obelisk at Heliopolis. Behold me, I have come to you without sin, without guilt, without evil, without a witness against me, without one against whom I have taken action. I live on truth and I eat of truth. I have done that which men said and that with which gods are content. I have satisfied each god with that which he desires. I have given bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked and a boat to him who could not cross the River. I have provided offerings to the gods and offerings to the dead. So preserve me from Apep, the 'Eater-up of Souls', so protect me - Lord of the Atef-Crown, Lord of Breath, great god Osiris.'

Then came the moment which the evil-doer feared but the good man welcomed with joy.

Anubis took the heart out of the Ka that was the double of his earthly body and placed it in the Scale; and in the other Scale was set the Feather of Truth. Heavy was the heart of the evil-doer and it dragged down the Scale: lower and lower it sank, while Thoth marked the angle of the beam until the Scale sank so low that Ammit the Devourer of Hearts could catch the sinner's heart in his jaws and bear it away. Then the evil-doer was driven forth into the thick darkness of the Duat to dwell with Apep the Terrible in the Pits of Fire.

But with the good man the Feather of Truth sank down and his heart rose up, and Thoth cried aloud to Osiris and the gods, 'True and accurate are the words this man has spoken. He has not sinned; he has not done evil towards us. Let not the Eater-up of Souls have power over him. Grant that the eternal bread of Osiris be given to him, and a place in the Fields of Peace with the followers of Horus!'

Then Horus took the dead man by the hand and led him before Osiris, saying, 'I have come to thee, oh Unnefer Osiris, bringing with me this new Osiris. His heart was true at the coming forth from the Balance. He has not sinned against any god or any goddess. Thoth has weighed his heart and found it true and righteous. Grant that there may be given to him the bread and beer of Osiris; may he be like the followers of Horus!'

Then Osiris inclined his head, and the dead man passed rejoicing into the Fields of Peace there to dwell, taking joy in all the things he had loved best in life, in a rich land of plenty, until Osiris returned to earth, taking with him all those who had proved worthy to live for ever as his subjects.

All these things and more the Ba of Se-Osiris showed to the Ba of his father Setna; and at length he said, 'Now you know why I wished your fate to be that of the poor man and not of the rich man. For the rich man was he in whose eye the pivot of the Third Door was turning - but the poor man dwells for ever in the Fields of Peace, clad in fine robes and owning all the offerings which accompanied the evil rich man to his tomb.'

Then the two Ba spread their golden wings and flew back through the night to Thebes. There they re-entered their bodies which their Kas had been guarding in the Temple of Osiris, and were able to return to their place as ordinary, living father and child, in time to see the sun rise beyond the eastern desert and turn the cliffs of Western Thebes to pink and purple and gold as a new day dawned over Egypt.