

Experiences and Challenges in Deciphering the *Book of the Dead* papyrus Havana

تجارب وتحديات في فك رموز بردية هافانا التي تحوي كتاب الموتى

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ملخص

تعد بردية هافانا التي تحوي كتاب الموتى جزءاً من أهم وأروع أجزاء المجموعة المصرية الموجودة في أمريكا اللاتينية، وذلك على حد تعبير دكتور 'روب دماري'، هذا إلى جانب باقي الآثار الموجودة داخل القاعة المصرية في المتحف الوطني للفنون الجميلة في كوبا، التي لا تزال غير معروفة إلى حد كبير لمعظم العلماء في هذا المجال. لقد أنشئ مشروع مستقل لفك رموز تلك البردية ونشره للشعب الكوبي والعالم في وقت سابق من عام ٢٠١٠؛ نتيجة للمناقشات التي أجرتها مجموعة دراسة وتعزيز علم المصريات في كوبا. وقد أجريت الدراسة المذكورة من قِبَل مؤلف هذه الورقة البحثية، وأُرسل تقرير أولي في العام التالي خلال الملتقى القومي الثاني لعلم المصريات، كما عُرض مزيد من التقدم عن السنوات السابقة. لم يكن الأمر خالياً من العوائق وأوجه القصور طوال الوقت، ويرجع ذلك في الغالب إلى القيود المفروضة على الوصول إلى المعلومات المصرية ذات الصلة بالموضوع، وتُقَدَّم النتائج والتجارب والتحديات الأخرى هنا للعلماء وعمامة الناس خارج كوبا لأول مرة.

Introduction

Among the collections currently on display at the Universal Art building, National Museum of Fine Arts of Havana, is the Art of Antiquity, which holds 664 pieces belonging to five ancient Mediterranean cultures: ancient Asia, Egypt, Greece, the Etruscan civilization and Rome. This valuable collection is considered by many experts and specialists to be the best and most comprehensive of its kind in Latin America, not only for the quality of its pieces, but for the great variety of the materials and artistic types that compose it. This part of the Museum's holdings is known as the Earl of Lagunillas Collection, in honor of the collector who gathered the majority of its relics.¹

The Egyptian collection includes 114 valuable pieces of unquestionable artistic value such as an assemblage of alabaster vases, stone and bronze sculptures, extensive funerary equipment, and a magnificent collection of reliefs and stelae from tombs of Egyptian officials. Within the collection on display today, standing out for their significance and quality of manufacture are a head of the god Amun in black basalt of the Late Period, a sculpture of Osiris, an excellent set of canopic jars in Egyptian alabaster, and a papyrus of the *Book of the Dead* dating to the Twenty-first Dynasty.²

History of a deciphering project

At the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, a detailed study of papyrus Havana (to be further referenced as pHavana) has never been conducted, even though some European Egyptologists had knowledge from it, and even one of them worked with it directly. The Polish Jadwiga Lipińska studied the collection in the late seventies and produced the first presentation catalog in 1982,³ with black and white photos of the artifacts, including

the papyrus. The first spell sequence of the papyrus was produced (BD 168B, 148, 99-100, 110, 90, 186), although incomplete, with a misleading note saying that the vignettes and the text did not agree,⁴ assumption lacking of accuracy, at least in a broad scale. A few years later, Andrzej Niwiński went a little further and identified a few additional (BD 168, '195', New, 148, '194', 108/116, 110, 59, 90, 186)⁵ by revising the catalog of Lipińska, introducing also a conjecture based on actual BD 99 (one of the most mingled compositions in the sequence).

When the First National Egyptological Gathering took place in November 2010 at Havana Fine Arts Museum, the knowledge about the content of the papyrus had not changed much; even local researchers did not have access at the time to Niwiński's study on the funerary papyri of the tenth and eleventh centuries BCE. The gathering was organized by the Group for the Study and Promotion of Egyptology in Cuba,⁶ an independent organization ascribed to the Faculty of Arts and Letters of the University of Havana, and had eight lecturers in that occasion. The author presented a study on the funerary stelae at Havana MFA with the offering formula, including their complete transcription, transliteration and translation. Some colleagues approached the author on the need of deciphering the papyrus while visiting the Egyptian Hall at some point during the event. It was a huge task to perform for a beginner, so the author did not give them much expectations that moment, but the challenge caught the author right away. The author started working on the papyrus in December that year, after arriving from Havana.

From the very beginning of the project the author contacted Aymée Chicuri Lastra, the Museum's Curator of Egyptian Art, and notified her about what the author had in mind. She was previously

one of the first people to encourage the author to perform the task, so the author always received all the support and consideration from her side. The author asked her to keep the project low from others attention, for the odds. The greatest problem faced for a start was the lack of high quality images of the papyrus (including the whole Egyptian Collection), and commissioning them was not an option at that time. The best image available was a small (6069 × 599 pixels) and low resolution (96 DPI) picture taken from a multimedia of the Catalog of the Art of Antiquity's Collection,⁷ whose original images were lost in the Museum after publishing. That image was the only source the author used to make the first complete transcription of the papyrus.

The absence of a paleographic study of cursive hieroglyphs, the script in which the papyrus was written, supposed the next limitation while recognizing several symbols, some of them very cursive, even hieratic appear occasionally. Comparing calligraphies with other known sources was the solution for this shortcoming. The small size of some glyphs, particularly in the first part of the papyrus (BD 168B), along with the low resolution of the image, led to a complementary approach. While following the comparison method with a matching source (such as pLondon BM EA 10478), applying color contrast in Adobe Photoshop was the answer to partly elucidate several spellings, particularly those in red. The hieroglyphic transcription obtained was finally reviewed by December 2011 back in the Museum, confronted with the original source. The accuracy was over 98%, and the amendments did not produce changes in the original translation.

A preliminary unwritten report of the study was revealed for the first time on 6 December 2011, during the author's presentation in the Second National Egyptological Gathering, held by the

National Museum of Natural History (MNHNC). The contribution was a total surprise for the Group, for only the curator knew what the author was preparing. On that occasion, the author handed over Aymée Chicuri the first complete hieroglyphic transcription, transliteration and translation of the papyrus. The following years comprised the refinement of the translation, and a thorough analysis of the spell sequence and the vignettes. The project suffered a recess between 2012 and 2016 period in which the author had to reorient the efforts in other research endeavors to conclude the Master's degree in the area of Cuban aboriginal archaeological heritage and prepare a book for publishing.

From the beginning of the project the author had the opportunity to receive invaluable help in accessing specialized Egyptological literature through members of the *Book of the Dead* Project of the University of Bonn, Germany, and also collaborated with them in updating the spell sequence of pHavana from their database. The author's country, with a research infrastructure not fully developed due to an economic embargo imposed by the United States Government for sixty years already, is very limited in the access of specialized scientific information, and particularly through the information technologies for independent researchers. The author owes special gratitude in that respect to Marcus Müller-Roth, Rita Lucarelli, Mikola Tarasenko and Irmtraut Munro. Without their help, this project would not have made further advances.

In 2017, the author compiled again the research notes on pHavana and started setting in writing a comprehensive study. He had not only to resume the previous investigation, but to go further into several more research goals, now with the help of new literature and valuable photographic sources made

available online by the *Book of the Dead* Project and their former members, even though access to Internet still constitutes an unresolved issue.

A brief resume of the findings on pHavana is summarized below.

The Papyrus

This *Book of the Dead* belonged to a man named *b3k-n-wrn(r)* Bakenwerel (Ranke 1976, I: 91), a purification and lector priest at the temple of Amun in Karnak. He was son of *smn-t3wj* – Smentawy (Ranke 1976, I: 307), husband of *mj3-nmt* – Mianemet (not attested in Ranke), singer of Amun, and father to *jmn-htp(.w)* – Amenhotep (Ranke 1976, I: 30). It is in a good state of preservation, but its initial part has disappeared and some of the texts have gaps or lacunae.

The papyrus is 3.4 meters long by 0.32 meters high; written in cursive hieroglyphs in black ink and with the titles of the spells in red. The vignettes occupy most of the surface and have been painted in a wide range of colors, including gilded, some blurred by the damage caused by moisture, particularly the green zones.

The spell sequence is not found in any other known source from the *Book of the Dead* tradition, fact that, united to the seemingly careless textual

arrangement and composition, with original passages and redaction errors, makes it a precious specimen, sign of individuality rather than accident. Most of the available relative dating indicates the Third Intermediate Period: Twenty-first Dynasty;⁸ and mid Twenty-first Dynasty.⁹ Marcus Müller-Roth (personal communication), instead, believes it belongs to the earlier Ramesside Period (Nineteenth–Twentieth Dynasties), based on the style of the vignettes.

The sequence of spells is as follows: BD //168A d V + 168A e V - 195V //23V// - 138V - 185V - 148V //1// - 194V //149V// - 99V //1B b// //100// //76V// - 110V - V59 - 90V// - 58V + 186A.

The introductory fragment to the left of the papyrus (Fig. 1) contains a version of the *Book of Caverns*, formerly numbered BD 168 by Naville,¹⁰ and recognized as an independent composition by Piankoff.¹¹ It consists of 19 vignettes with their accompanying texts, corresponding to 19 divinities of the last two caverns addressed by the deceased in order to gain their favors. If we consider the eleventh cavern was originally complete, it lacks eight vignettes with their descriptions altogether from the missing initial part. The peculiarities of this version consists, first, in the orientation of the divinities, who face right and not to the left



(Fig. 1) Spell 168A.

as elsewhere, also, there are particular changes or variations in the names of some of them, non-coincident in several cases, perhaps transcription errors, and lastly, there is a frequent horizontal shift in the content from the upper and lower registers, with the latter moved two or three positions forward (to the right), attributable, maybe, to an error in the master copy.¹²

The following text comprising three columns is accompanied by its vignette, recognized by *Totenbuch Projekt* simply as *Reinigungsszene* (*purification scene*), and BD 195 after Niwiński.¹³ In other copies, the vignette lacks of text proper, and only a marginal label indicates the association of the deceased with the Ennead. The same is addressed here for the owner and his father in other words, soon after the heir presiding the ceremony, and identified with Horus Iunmutef, utters a versioned fragment from the opening of the mouth ritual (BD 23). Going in and out from the tomb on the day of the festival (of purifications) for the *kau* of the deceased couple is the final aspiration in this section.

The vignette framework from the next two chapters is interwoven with their associated texts (Fig.

2). The first spell, consisting of 13 columns starting over the vignette of the previous chapter, is entitled *Spell for arriving to Abydos*, and it is an abridged version of BD 138 with mingled fragments from BD 83 and 15A. The vignette is divided in two quadrats, one scene of the deceased and his wife standing in adoration, and the other with the fetishes of Abydos and Imyut (symbols of Osiris and Anubis). To become a Bennu bird (BD 83), be named and assigned to the sacred barge of Osiris (version of BD 15A fragment from pLeiden T 2 SR), and granted with offerings are the purposes of this spell.

The second spell is BD 185, formerly dedicated to Osiris, but here it is Anubis the center of attention. The deceased is kneeled in front of an offering table adoring two images of Anubis in the form of jackals with *sekhem* scepters and flails, lying within two pavilions over pylons. The introductory label is over the vignette of the previous spell instead of the former, and indicates the adoration of the *ka* of Osiris in order to receive offerings. In front of the pavilions, the texts worship Anubis who grants everlastingness, not dying again and free movement after vindication.



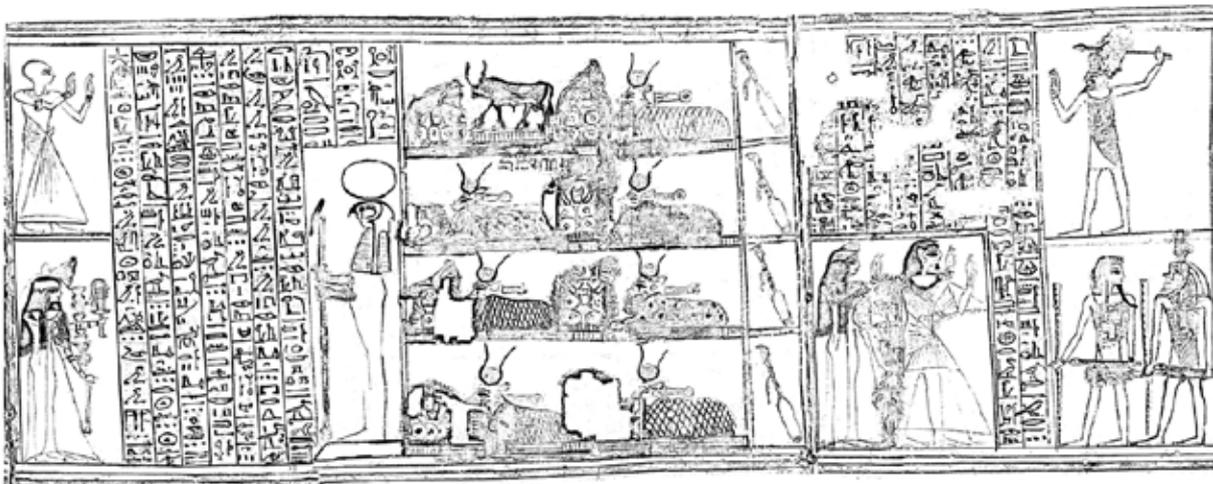
(Fig. 2) Spells 195V - 138V - 185V.

It follows two spells that develop within broad halls (Fig. 3). The first is BD 148; the deceased and his wife stand in adoration in front of Ra-Horakhty (the iconography is of Sokar-Osiris) and the seven cows with their bull, along with four steering oars. In the spell the deceased opts for the knowledge of the speech (instead of the names) of the divine cows from the *Field of Rushes*, who grant offerings of food, water and air to the couple. An excerpt from BD 1 is mixed here asking the favors to listen, sit and see in the house of Osiris, closing with a prayer for free movement.

The second text, with several lacunae but completely readable, seems to be an idiosyncratic version of spell 194, or *Anubis and seven daemons*,¹⁴ as acknowledged earlier by Heerma van Voss and DuQuesne,¹⁵ attending the iconography of the vignette. Under the text, the deceased couple stand in adoration before three divine beings to the right, who occupy the two levels in a double broad hall: one with a white crown, Asiatic beard, left hand raised holding a throwing stick and the right one extended to the front, indicating contentment, stands alone in the upper register; the last two in the lower register are a god with a long divine beard, holding a

throwing stick and a staff and looking backwards to his fellow, a blue-green skinned deity with fearful head and long mane and a feather atop, holding the same implements. They are *akhu*, members of the tribunal of Osiris, who can be observed in detail in at least other four sources dating to the Twenty-first Dynasty: pCairo CG 40023; pLeiden T 3; pLondon BM EA 10554; and pCairo S.R. VII 10228. The first three also contain the purification scene (BD 195, after Niwiński), drawing a link to the current papyrus.

The deceased declares to arrive to the double hall to behold the perfection of the *akhu*, awaiting to be received with beneficial faces (*hr nfr*, as opposed to menacing gestures), provided with magical protection in the necropolis and granted with their company by association. The last passage collates a text from the eleventh mound or division of the house of Osiris in the *Field of Rushes* (BD 149 k), where the deceased, not the heart, is the object of attention: *may he be effective in the sky with Re and powerful on earth with Geb*. This chapter functions as an alternative to the judgement scene of spell 125, as also recognized by DuQuesne and Lucarelli.¹⁶ Iconographically, the three gods in the



(Fig. 3) Spells 148V - 194V.

place of seven mimic the scene of the three fishers and fowlers with the net (BD V153), one of whom, in each case, looks backwards (*m³-h³.f*). Both the net and throwing sticks represent the dangers to be confronted by the dead: be caught as tired fish in the net or be trapped or killed as a migratory bird.

To avoid stagnation as implied otherwise in the previous scene, the next spell is about free movement in the Netherworld (Fig. 4). The couple sail in a night boat loaded with offerings in its prow, in BD 99. To bring a boat in the necropolis is the purpose of this spell, which is an abridged version and a mingle of other related texts. In the composition, the deceased couple relate themselves with the *akhu* who bring the boat. A message to Neberdyer (lit.: *Lord to the Limit*, Atum) follows, as in BD 1B, even though its content is original: traversed the national sanctuary of Heliopolis to raise the sacred image of the creation held in the Benben Shrine. Next, the text reuses another passage of BD 100, here asking the opportunity of ferrying the Benu bird and Osiris to their destinations. As a colophon, a phrase remits to the spells of transformations, emulating BD 76, in perfect harmony with the intention of BD 99 and 194: to guarantee the deceased his liberation from

the terrestrial condition and his transfiguration into another form of being.¹⁷

An abridged version of spell 110 follows, below an image of the couple, kneeling in adoration in front of the gods of the fields. No mention to the *Field of Offerings* throughout the whole text, only the *Field of Rushes*, indicating the Twenty-first Dynasty, according to Gesellensetter.¹⁸ Briefly, the dead man declares the daily activities to be carried out in the region destined for it in the *Field of Rushes*, and identifies himself with Osiris before the Great Ennead of the paradisiac islands, in order not to suffer the lack of offerings in his unearthly abode every day. The main scene, surrounded and divided by water, has four registers: the first two represent the *Field of Offerings*, where offerings are presented to the gods and the bark of offerings bring the deceased all the foodstuff needed for his otherworldly existence; in the last two scenes, the *Field of Rushes* is depicted as a place of labor, to reborn into eternity. The vignette is complemented with enigmatic hieroglyphs, whose interpretation can be consulted in a forthcoming publication.¹⁹

The following scene depicts the goddess of the West, emerging from a sycamore and bringing



(Fig. 4) Spells 99V - 110V - V59 - 90V - 58V - 186A.

offerings and water to the deceased and his wife (BD 59); the former kneeling and drinking water with his two hands, placed in an upper level, and the latter below, also drinking the liquid in the same pose, and between both, in an intermediate register, the *ba* of the deceased in front of a pool doing likewise. In front of the lower register, four lines of text, as a label, comprise an incomplete fragment of BD 90, to be spoken by Mianemet, in order to expel the excess of incoherencies in her speech. The vignette's text proper (not DB 59, but 58 instead) begins above, and continues over the next scene, mingling itself with the description of the latter (BD 186). The deceased speaks to the West requesting for himself several goods comprising two lists of offerings. The scribe must have missed a line of text while copying the lists, but 'emended' the omission by transcribing the whole missing line right afterwards.

Next to the requests to the goddess of the West, an introduction of BD 186 is copied, corresponding with the vignette below. The scene shows the deceased and his wife standing in adoration in front of Opet Taweret (the hippopotamus goddess linked with Mut in Karnak), and Mehet Weret (the cow goddess, named here the *ka* of Hathor, to whom the deceased also requests an invocation offering) emerging from a papyrus ticket over the hill of the West, with a few funerary monuments. The closing text declares that the deceased comes in the following of Osiris, and his name and titles are inverted (oriented to the beginning of the papyrus), perhaps a suggestion that the former was already among the vindicated in the West.

Conclusions

During the presentation of this paper, the author worked on the details to complete the study and prepare it for publishing in his country. What are the

further challenges to be faced in order to conclude the project successfully? First, an Egyptologist is required for supervising the research. There are still a few passages (four, in sum) in the text that need to be confronted with other specialists to clarify their correct meaning, it is nothing less than important to say that pHavana includes numerous misspellings all over, and the lack or change of symbols, particularly determinatives, introduces different probable meanings. The presentation of this project in the Fourth International Congress for Young Egyptologists (Leiden, the Netherlands, 2019) would have been the opportunity to address this issue, if only the author could have had the opportunity to be there in person, and not virtually as it actually happened, because of mobility reasons.

Second, the author plans to produce a few papers on particular aspects related to pHavana to be presented for publishing to international Egyptological journals and other publications. In that respect the author already presented a collaboration to be included in the forthcoming *Festschrift: 'From the Field of Offerings: Studies in Honor of Lanny D. Bell.'* Lastly, with international collaboration, a facsimile edition of the papyrus could be prepared, with the detailed study, including a complete transcription, transliteration and translation of every spell, as well as a commentary of the associated vignettes. With the conclusion at least of the first two tasks mentioned before, the project would be making a modest contribution to academic research. With that goal in mind, the author is open to further suggestions and collaborative projects, and can always be contacted at the mentioned address.

Notes

- * Group for the Study and Promotion of Egyptology. XX Aniversario N° 97, La Valla, Báguanos. C.P.: 82 500. Holguín, Cuba; senerpaitui@nauta.cu.
- 1 A.Ch. Lastra, 'History of the Collection', in M.Á. Sosa, A.Ch. Lastra, and I. Morfini (eds.), *La Colección Egipcia del Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de La Habana / The Egyptian Collection of the National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana* (S.L, 2015), 14.
 - 2 Lastra, in Sosa, Lastra, and I. Morfini (eds.), *La Colección Egipcia del Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de La Habana*, 15.
 - 3 J. Lipińska, *Monuments de l'Égypte Ancienne au Palacio de Bellas Artes à La Havane et du Museo Bacardí à Santiago de Cuba, CAA Cuba I* (Mainz, 1982).
 - 4 Lipińska, *Monuments de l'Égypte Ancienne*, 137.
 - 5 A. Niwiński, *Studies on the Illustrated Theban Funerary Papyri of the 11th and 10th centuries B.C., Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 86* (Gottingen, 1989), Table 12.
 - 6 The group has origins in 1997, after a post degree course imparted by the German Egyptologist Ch.E. Loeben at the Faculty of Arts and Letters, University of Havana. As the name indicates, its main objective is to motivate the study and promotion of the Egyptology in Cuba.
 - 7 M.C. Miranda, A.Ch. Lastra, *Catálogo Colecciones de Arte de la Antigüedad del Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Cuba* (La Habana, 2006).
 - 8 Lipińska, *Monuments de l'Égypte Ancienne*, 137; M. H. van Voss, 'Van ploegen tot aren lezen', in K.A. Deurloo and F.J. Hoogewoud (eds.), *Beginnen bij de letter Beth* (Kampen, 1985), 111-14.
 - 9 Niwiński, *Studies on the Illustrated Theban Funerary Papyri*, 309.
 - 10 E. Naville, *Das ägyptische Totdenbuch der XVIII. bis XX. Dynastie* (Berlin, 1886).
 - 11 A. Piankoff, *The Wandering of the Soul* (Princeton, 1974), 42.
 - 12 The comparative study had as reference pattern p. London BM EA 10478, dating to the Nineteenth Dynasty, and containing version 'A' of the aforementioned spell 168, after Th. G. Allen, *The Book of the Dead or Going Forth by Day* (Chicago, 1974), 177; and every copy from the Nineteenth to Twenty-first dynasties were analyzed in detail.
 - 13 Niwiński, *Studies on the illustrated Theban funerary papyri*, 125.
 - 14 After M.H. van Voss, *Anoebis en de demonen, voordracht gehouden bij het negende lustrum van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch genootschap Ex Oriente lux* op 10 juni 1978 (Leiden, 1978).
 - 15 M.H. van Voss, 'Van ploegen tot aren lezen', in K.A. Deurloo, and F.J. Hoogewoud (eds.), *Beginnen bij de letter Beth*, (Kampen, 1985), 111-114; T. DuQuesne, *At the Court of Osiris. Book of the Dead Spell 194: A Rare Egyptian Judgment Text* (London, 1994).
 - 16 DuQuesne, *At the Court of Osiris*, 14; R. Lucarelli, 'Demons in the Book of the Dead', in B. Backes, I. Munro and S. Stöhr (eds.), *Totenbuch-Forschungen: Gesammelte Beiträge Des 2. Internationalen Totenbuch-Symposiums, Bonn, 25. Bis 29. September 2005* (Wiesbaden, 2005), 205.
 - 17 H.M. Hays, 'The mutability of tradition: The Old Kingdom heritage and Middle Kingdom significance of Coffin Texts spell 343', *Ex Oriente Lux* 40 (2007), 43-59.
 - 18 J.S. Gesellensetter, *Das Sechet-Iaru. Untersuchungen zur Vignette des Kapitels 110 im Ägyptischen Totenbuch* (PhD diss., Julius-Maximilians-Universität, Würzburg, 1997), 145.
 - 19 I.R. López, 'Enigmatic hieroglyphs in a Book of the Dead vignette of the Field of Offerings / Rushes', in S. D'Auria and P. Lacovara (eds.), *From the Field of Offerings: Studies in Honor of Lanny D. Bell*, (Lockwood Press, forthcoming).