Re-examination of the Egyptian Oracle

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Introduction

Egyptian oracles have long been a popular topic explored by many scholars since the end of the Nineteenth Century.[1] The mechanics and the setting of oracle-givings are well known to us. This chiefly owes to a relatively large corpus of extant materials relevant to oracular sessions, particularly from New Kingdom Thebes (c. 1539-1077 BC). However, it is often difficult to distinguish oracles from other forms of divination. Kákosy (1982, 604), for example, defined oracles in comparison with prophecies, as follows: "the border of (the Egyptian) oracle and prophecy is always gray, and many oracles are related to the future. (Also) Oracle often serves to settle situations in the past, and many are in the form of divine decree and convey juridical constraint, whereas prophecy does not have such character". Aune (1987, 81) in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* notes that one of major differences between oracles and prophecies in the Greek-Roman context is that oracles are given in response to inquiries, whereas prophecies are unsolicited revelations that instigate social change. Kruchten (2001, 609) proposes a better definition that the Egyptian oracle was "requesting a deity to answer some practical question through the agency of its public image". In the same line, Shirun-Grumach (1989) is inclined to stress the 'revelation' of gods, a connotation of visibility. All these definitions, however, seem not to fit evidence available from the New Kingdom onwards perfectly.

This article aims at re-examining oracular texts with renewed references, and is divided in three parts. Firstly, it is attempted to present the historical evidence of oracles. It is possible that oracular practice started much earlier than surviving evidence. Scarce evidence of oracles from earlier times might be resulted from the different format of oracles, which is not yet known to us. Secondly, specific phraseology and terminology relating to oracular sessions dating to the Eighteenth Dynasty (c. 1539-1292 BC) are examined. Finally, the author

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1) Among the earliest scholars were Maspero 1893, 77-91 and 1907, 167-73 (both studied speaking statues), and Gayet 1908 (the earliest study of oracles in general).

proposes a brief tentative definition of the Egyptian oracle in the New Kingdom when its standard format is likely to have been established.

Oracular sessions were regularly held on different occasions within temples as well as in public. As will be presented shortly, the earliest examples are in connection with royal and state affairs. This suggests that divine decrees were only available to the royal court at the first stage of the development of oracular practice. Later in the Ramesside Period, more secular contexts are attested. Černý (1927) presented that the workmen in Deir el-Medina had more than a few opportunities to consult the deified king Amenhotep I (c. 1514-1494 BC) on their minor domestic matters.[2] In this state-owned village, he gained great popularity among them as a patron deity and his oracular sessions took place throughout the year. The significance of Černý's article lies in that oracles could have been given in secular settings, in combination with the qenbet session, and at the frequent interval of roughly ten days, a week system used in New Kingdom Thebes.[3] To date, the first textual evidence of the oracular ritual of Amenhotep I with an explicit date is from the reign of Siptah in the Nineteenth Dynasty (c. 1292-1191 BC).[4] Pictorial evidence is also attested in the Theban private tombs belonging to that dynasty with one exception from the tomb of Huy (TT 54) under Tuthmose IV and Amenhotep III of the Eighteenth Dynasty.[5] However, the depiction of Amenhotep I in that tomb is highly likely to be a later addition made during the Nineteenth Dynasty. Thus, we cannot prove his festival to have existed in the Eighteenth Dynasty, even if the cult of this king may have started in that dynasty.[6] Insofar as the deified king Amenhotep I is concerned, oracular consultation as a popular practice in Thebes appears as a later phenomenon.

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2) For more recent research on this subject, see von Lieven 2001.

3) Vleeming (1982) collected all dated records relating to the qenbet sessions at Deir el-Medina. Out of forty-two examples, sixteen took place at weekends. For work-free days every ten days, see Helck 1964.
   For the association of the qenbet sessions with the deified king Amenhotep I, see P Cairo 58092 (P Boulaq X) which records that Amenhotep I gave judgment to a man 'in the qenbet (*m ß knb.t*)' (Janssen and Pestman 1968, 144; McDowell 1990, 128), O Geneva 12550 (McDowell 1990, 113, 256-9), and P DeM 26 (*KRI* V, 462: 11, 463: 2, 11; Allam 1973, 297-300).

4) O DeM 10051 verso (Grandet 2006, 55-6, 241).

5) PM I-1², 105 (5 I); Polz 1997, 71-3, pl. 24.

6) The first attested titles of *w*ᶜ*b ʾImn-ḥtp* 'wab-priest of Amenhotep I' (TT 261) and *imy-r pr n Dsr-k3-rᶜ* 'overseer of the temple of Amenhotep I' (TT A. 8), from the Eighteenth Dynasty and the late Eighteenth (or early Nineteenth) Dynasty respectively.

1. Overview of the historical evidence of oracles

There are only four textual records directly referring to oracular sessions from the Eighteenth Dynasty, dating to Hatshepsut, Thutmose III, and Thumose IV (Section 2). Despite scarce, disputable evidence for oracles from before the New Kingdom and some scholars' idea that oracular practice was imported from abroad, Černý (1962, 35) noted that "(oracular practice) is the natural result of man's reasoning", thus assuming that it had existed before the New Kingdom.

Baines and Parkinson (1998) presented a new interpretation of an Old King-dom text from Sinai as providing a record of an oracle, later opposed by Kam-merzell (2001). Baines (1987, 88-93) also presents three texts of the intervening period from the tomb of Ankhtifi (Tenth Dynasty), the Story of Sinuhe (Twelfth Dynasty), and a stela of Horemkauef (Thirteenth Dynasty), that record divine orders descended to men.[7] He suggests that these texts could be best under-stood in an oracular context. To add to these texts, there are two texts from the Middle Kingdom: a Wadi Hammamat inscription from the time of Mentuhotep IV (Eleventh Dynasty), recording that the god Min appeared in the form of rain on II Akhet 23 to help expedition members in the middle of dessert[8], and a graffito from Hatnub, dated to year 6 of the local sovereign Nehery during the Twelfth Dynasty, recording a decree issued according to a god.[9] Any of these examples, however, does not possess characters parallel to those of later times. One may ask whether oracles before the New Kingdom took a completely dif-ferent form or expressed in terminology unknown to us. Otherwise, the paucity of evidence from earlier times may be explained by the fact that the major im-portant sites other than New Kingdom Thebes have not been fully excavated.

Other forms of divine-human communication are known. For example, the Dream Stela of Thutmose IV tells that the great sphinx at Giza appeared in a dream, when the king fell asleep nearby, and asked the king to save him from the desert sand covering him.[10] Merenptah received a message from Ptah again

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7) For Ankhtifi, see Vandier 1950, 162-71; Fecht 1968, 54; Lichtheim 1973, vol. 1, 85-6. For Horemkauef, see Hayes 1947; Lichtheim 1973, vol. 1, 129-30.

8) *LD* II, pl. 149 f; Shirun-Grumach 1989, 380-1.

9) *wḏ=f r=f iw hrw n nḏw.t-rꜣ* 'he decreed according to him, when the day of *nḏw.t-rꜣ* came' (Anthes and Möller 1928, 43: 1-2, pl. 18; Blumenthal 1976).

10) Great Sphinx Stela at Gaza (*Urk.* IV, 1540; Zivie 1976, 127).

in a dream during the fight against the Libyan-Mediterranean invasion in year 5.[11] The most striking example is that of Tanutamen (Twenty-Fifth Dynasty), who received in year 1 in a dream the prognostication that he would ascend to the throne.[12] Incubation rituals, in which individuals saw a divine image and message in a dream, is also attested from the Ramesside Period (Szpakowska 2003).

Magicians are widely attested in various texts, but scholarly opinions are divided about the existence of prophets or seers because of the lack of direct evidence.[13] Egyptians did not have a distinct term for prophecy or for foretelling.

Pictorial and archaeological evidence is found from the New Kingdom onwards. The divine bark of Amun, for example, is first represented on the alabaster shrine of Amenhotep I at Karnak.[14] Amun's river barge, called Userhat, was probably first constructed under Ahmes.[15] The earliest example of oracular session of Amun in a non-royal context is evidenced by a stela representing the Opet Festival in the time of Ramses VI. Its vignette depicts a priest holding a naos presented to the barks of the Theban Triad (Vernus 1975). A naos similar to this appears in the scene of the same feast of a later time (Kruchten 1986, 230). It may be that the naos is a container of a god's statue or a document associated with a divine decree. Ostraca and papyri on which an oracular inquiry is recorded are attested, some of which must have been actually presented to gods.[16] Indeed, we know a set of two papyrus sheets from Nag' el-Deir that record affirmative and negative questions on the same matter respectively.[17] These ostraca and papyri are all dating from the Ramesside Period or later. Oracular amuletic decrees, issued as talismans by gods, are known from the Twenty-Second Dynasty onwards.[18]

Small shrines attached to the back of major temples, repository chapels in

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11) Inscriptions at Karnak (PM II², 131 (486); KRI IV, 5: 10).
12) Stela Cairo 48863 from Amun's temple at Gebel Barkal (Eide, Hägg, and Pierce 1994, vol. 1, 193-209, Grimal 1981, pls. 1-4).
13) For Egyptian magical practices in general, see Pinch 1994. Shamans are studied by Helck 1984 and most recently by Neureiter 2005.
14) PM II², 63-4; Karlshausen 1995, 120.
15) Stela of Ahmes discovered in Court III at Karnak (Cairo 34001; PM II², 179; Urk. IV, 23: 10-11).
16) For ostraca from Deir el-Medina, see Černý 1942. For those written in Greek in later times, see Schubart 1931 and Henrichs 1973.
17) Ryholt 1993; Fischer-Elfert 1996; Kruchten 2000.
18) Edwards 1960; Bohleke 1997.

temple courts, and the statues of deified kings in front of temples, commonly known as 'hearing-prayer', are first attested in the time of Thutmose III (Jaggi 2002).[19] These shrines seem to have been open to the general public and people were able to address to gods to express their piety and possibly to request oracular consultation. The ear stelae, which attest prayers to gods with a depiction of ears, are also known from the Eighteenth Dynasty onwards (Morgan 2004, 6). More direct material evidence, such as speaking statues and related architectural structures, are known from much later periods, except for a doubted predynastic example of a nodding statue of seated Horus from Hierakonpolis.[20]

With all the evidence presented here, it is possible to assume that the standard format of oracular practice was established in the New Kingdom.

2. Evidence from the Eighteenth Dynasty and the usage of oracular language

Apart from the possibilities from the Old and Middle Kingdoms presented earlier, evidence before the Ramesside Period is strikingly little. They are only four in number, originating from different sites, but all appear to pertain to religious ceremonies performed at the Karnak Temple.[21]

no.	reign	year	date	event
1	Hatshepsut	—	—	The queen visited Amun to make a decision on a campaign to Punt.
2	Thutmose III	—	—	Oracular appointment of the young prince Thutmose as a future king at a divine procession of Amun at Karnak.
3	Thutmose III	24	II Peret 30	Extension-of-the-cord ritual at Karnak at an Amun feast.
4	Thutmose IV	8	III Peret 2	The king consulted Amun on the Nubian campaign.

19) Nims (1971, 111) noted that the first eastern shrine of Karnak can be dated to the time of Thutmose I.
20) Loukianoff 1936 (a divine statue, provenance unknown); Habachi 1947 and Brunton 1947 (a subterranean structure connected to a statue at Kom el-Wist); Fakhry 1971 (the temple at the Siwa Oasis). For the Hierakonpolis statue, see Simpson 1971, 161, fig. 10.
21) There are only two dated records of oracles from other cities: oracle of Ahmose at Abydos on II Akhet 25, year 14 of Ramses II (Stela Cairo 43649; KRI III, 464-5; Frood 2007, 102); oracle of Seth in the Dakhla Oasis on IV Peret 25, year 5 of Sheshonq I (Stela Ashmolean 1894.107a; Gardiner 1933, 22; Krauss 1985, 165-6; Jansen-Winkeln 2007, vol. 2, 24).

The word *biȝy.t* is variously translated, such as 'wonder', 'miracle', and 'marvel'. The translation of this word as 'oralce' fits evidence from the New Kingdom onwards. Some assume that it was so used already in the late Middle Kingdom.[22] In the Poetic Stela of Thutmose III, recovered at Karnak along with Text 2, *biȝy* appears as a verb in relation to an occasion located within a temple, as follows: 'I (Amun) place you in my hall so that I may *biȝy* to you (*biȝy=i n=k*), and I may give you power and victory over all lands.' [23] In this text, *biȝy* clearly expresses the presence of the god before the king, and more specifically, denotes an action of communication. *biȝy.t* here indicates the action that something beneficial is present to a witness as a divine sign. Thus, Shirun-Grumach (1993, 21-2) translated the passage as "Ich befestige dich in meinem Heiligtum, indem ich dir ein Zeichen gebe." The best English translation of *biȝy* in this context is probably 'to reveal', or its nominal equivalent 'revelation'. In the Wadi Hammamat inscriptions cited in Section 1, the word is used, as follows: *whm biȝy.t ir.t hw mȝȝ hpr.w n ntr pn di.t bȝ.w=f n rhy.t* 'biȝy.t repeated. Rain was made. The forms of this god were seen and his bas were shown to the people.' Again, *biȝy.t* has visual connotation with more explicit terms, such as *mȝȝ* 'to see' and *hpr.w* 'form, appearance'. In this sense, the word *shꜥ* (lit. 'to cause to appear') is a nice collocation where divine emergence is always referred to during festivals and rituals (Parker 1962, 7). Thus, Text 3 mentions the Amun Feast and his appearance, as follows:

Text 3 [24]

> My person decreed (*wḏ*) to prepare for the stretching of the cord while waiting the day of the new moon to stretch the cord on this monument in

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22) Posener 1963, 99; Kruchten 2001, 609.
23) Stela Cairo 34010 (PM II², 94; *Urk.* IV, 612: 5-7). Lichtheim (1973, vol. 2, 369) translates 'I placed you in my temple and did signs for you.'
24) *wḏ hm=i sspd pd šs hr sȝw.t hrw n psḏntyw r pd šs hr mnw pn m hȝt-sp 24 ȝbd 2 pr.t ꜥrky hrw hb mh 10 n ꞽmn m ip.t s.wt ꜥhꜥ n rdi [   ] hr hw.t ntr tn iw htp ntr s.t=f wr.t m-ht nn wḏȝ nb=i r shꜥ[.t] ꞽmn wḏȝ ptr r nmt.t=f r ir.t hb=f pn nfr wn in hm ntr pn hr biȝy.t ꜥȝȝy.t hr nb ti hm=f ir=f n [   ] n ntr pn ꜥhꜥw pd šs wn in hm ntr pn hꜥ m mnw pn*
Stela Cairo 34012, discovered in the area in front of the sanctuary of Karnak (PM II², 94; *Urk.* IV, 835-6; Wente 1975, 266). Based on the new moon on I Shemu 21 in year 23, recorded elsewhere (PM II², 97 (280); *Urk.* IV, 657: 2), this day also fell on a new moon day. A royal decree to coordinate the ritual was issued before that day (Read 1996, 104). The link between the foundation ceremony and the new moon is also evidenced by the ritual of the 'loosening of the cord (*whꜥ wȝwȝ.t*)' of Ramses II at Luxor (Redford 1971, 114). For the stretching of the cord, see Park 1998.

year 24, II Peret 30, the day of the tenth festival of Amun at Karnak. Then
[   ] on this temple, when the god rested (on) his great seat.
After this, my lord proceeded to cause the father Amun to appear ($s\underline{h}^c.[t]$).
The god proceeded at his procession to perform this his beautiful festival.
Then, the majesty of this god made many revelations ($bi\underline{3}y.t$) on the lord.
His person made [   ] of this god, the station for the stretching
of the cord. The majesty of this god rejoiced with this monument.

Following this passage, it is recorded that Amun desired to extend the cord
himself. When $bi\underline{3}y.t$ is attested in texts, it always pertains to a particular affair
rather than a matter of society as a whole and appears in the form of divine de-
cree. Thus, Text 2 reads:

Text 2 25)
[   ] my person is he (Amun). I am his son. He commanded ($w\underline{d}$) to me
that I should be upon his throne while I was one who was in his nest. He
begot me with full heart. [   ] there is no lie in it since my person was
a child when I was a youth in his temple before I became a priest [   ] my
person. I was in the form of the Pillar-of-His-Mother like young Horus in
Chemmis. He stationed me in the northern hypostyle hall [   ] splendors
of his horizon. He made heaven and land festive with his beauty. He took
great revelation ($bi\underline{3}y.t$), his rays being in the eyes of all the members of the
pat like the coming-forth of Horakhety.

As is the case with Text 2, $w\underline{d}$ often appears in texts in oracular contexts. It
is a general term used since the Old Kingdom, meaning 'command' or 'decree',
and its usage is not limited only to divine-beings but can be attributed to kings
and high officials. $w\underline{d}$ and the similar word $n\underline{d}w.t$-$r\underline{3}$ are found in the Punt Decree

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25) [   ] *ḥm=i pw ntf ink s3=f wḏ.n=f n(=i) wnn(=i) ḥr ns.t=f is kwi m imy sš=f wtṯ n=f wi m mt.t*
n.t ib [   ] *nn iwms m ḏr wn ḥm=i m inpw ti wi m wḏḥ im r-pr=f n ḥpr bsi=i r ḥm-nṯr* [   ]
ḥm=i iw=i m km3 tit iwn-mw.t=f mi nḥn Ḥr m 3ḥ-bi.t s^c ḥ^c=f wi m w3ḏy.t mḥt.t [   ]*dsr.w n 3ḥ.t=f*
shb.n=f pt t3 m nfr.w=f šsp.n=f bi3y.t ^c3.t stwt=f m ir.wy p^c.t nb.t mi pr.t Ḥr-3ḥ.ty
South exterior wall of Rooms XVI-XXIII at Karnak (PM II², 106-7 (328-30); *Urk.* IV, 158;
Breasted 1902, 6-23). Appointments of the ruler through Amun's oracle are known in the
cases of Ramses IV (P Turin 1882; Gardiner 1955; *Idem.* 1956, 10; Peden 1994, 104-9; Jan-
sen-Winkeln 1999, 54) and of Aspelta (Stela Cairo 48866; Eide, Hägg, Pierce, and Török
1994-2000, vol. 1, 234; Grimal 1981, 23).

of the queen Hatshepsut (Text 1). Both words occur in apposition, as follows:

Text 1 [26)]
> The person of the palace, l.p.h., approached to the steps of the lord of the gods, and a command (*wḏ*) from the great throne – *nḏw.t-rꜣ* of the god himself – was heard: 'Seek ways to Punt, open roads to the terrace of myrrh, and lead the army on the water and the land to bring marvels from the land of the god to this god, [fas]hioner of her beauty.' It was done according to every command (*wḏ*) of the majesty of this august god and according to the wi[sh of] her person, so that she [will be] given life, stabilized of dominion like Re, forever.

Note that Hatshepsut is to be rewarded firm rulership in return. Thutmose IV also asked Amun a decree, concerning a royal campaign, as follows:

Text 4 [27)]
> The king proceeded in peace to the temple in the time of the morning to make great oblations to his father, creator of his beauty, king, his person. He himself approached in front of the ruler of the gods (Amun) and consulted (*nḏ*) him on the matter of his campaign, [so that] he will be informed what is happening to him. 'He will lead in a good way to do what his ka desires according to the words of his father to his son, whom he [made] his seed from him.' He came out with him with his heart contended.

nḏw.t-rꜣ is attested from the Twelfth Dynasty onwards and seems to have fallen out of use by the end of the New Kingdom.[28)] Since *nḏw.t-rꜣ* literally means

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26) *spr ḥm n stp-sꜣ ꜥ.w.s. r rd.w n nb nṯr.w sḏm wḏ m s.t wr.t nḏw.t-rꜣ n.t nṯr ḏs=f ḏꜥr wꜣ.wt r pwnt wbꜣ mtn.w r ḫty.w ꜥntyw sšm [n] mšꜥ ḥr mw ḥr tꜣ r ini.t biꜣ.w m tꜣ-nṯr n nṯr pn [k]mꜣ nfr.w=s ir in tw mi wḏ.t n nb.t ḥm n nṯr pn šps mi s.t-[ib n.t] ḥm.t=s r=s [ir]=s di.t ꜥnḫ ḏd.t wꜣs mi Rꜥ ḏ.t*
   Deir el-Bahari Temple (PM II², 347 (14); *Urk.* IV, 342-3; Shirun-Grumach 1993, 69, 72).

27) *wḏꜣ m ḥtp r ḥw.t nṯr in nsw.t ḥr tri n dwꜣ.t rdi.t mꜣꜥ ꜥꜣb.t ꜥꜣ.t n ity kmꜣ nfr.w=f nsw.t ḥm=f spr=f ḏs=f m-bꜣḥ ꜥ ḥkꜣ nṯr.w nḏ=f sw ḥr ḥr.t nmt.t=f [iw]=f srḫ=f ḫpr.w ḥr=f sšm.n=f ḥr wꜣ.t nfr.t r ir[.t] mrr. wt kꜣ=f mi mḏ.w ity ḥr sꜣ=f [ir].n=f mtw.t=f im=f pr.n=f ḥr=f ib=f ꜣw*
   Rock inscription at Konosso (*Urk.* IV, 1545-8; Bryan 1991, 333; Shirun-Grumach 1993, 80-1; Johnson 1998, 64-6).

28) *Wb* II, 372; de Buck 1938. For an example of *nḏw.t-rꜣ* from the Twelfth Dynasty, see note 10. For others from the New Kingdom, see *Urk.* IV, 649, 807, and 1577; Borchardt 1911, vol. 2, 134; *KRI* IV, 129-131. It is difficult, however, to determine its oracular context from these examples. Many of these can be understood in more secular contexts.

'asking a word', it implies that words are revealed in mutual communication, not one way, requiring a response. When the agency is a deity, it can be understood as 'oracle' or 'divine decree', as *wḏ* can be.

Significantly, the divine decree in Text 1 was issued to promise Hatshepsut her dominion as a reward. In Text 2, Amun's oracle was descended to future Thutmose III to secure the throne for him. It was undoubtedly this divine-royal reciprocal relation that provided secular reward ceremonies of a model. Representations in temple reliefs and tomb decorations represent the king as giving rewards to officials and priests. Rewards were variously expressed, such as *ḥs*, *mk*, *mtn*, and *fḳ3*.[29] In particular, *ḥs* most commonly appears in formal texts.[30] It, however, looks appropriate to leave the translation of this word with wider spectrum, such as a 'praise' and a 'blessing' because it is also employed in funerary contexts, where the deceased is described as receiving it from gods at their tombs. Thus, it is best to understand it as a more conceptual term rather than a practical one. The divine decrees in ceremonial formulae like this are reciprocal in the first instance because they often appear as a return for the monuments (*mnw*) that the king made for gods.

The colloquial expression 'this great god (*nṯr ʿ3 pn*)' and one of Amun's epithets 'lord of the gods (*nb nṯr.w*)' are also relevant because these may have been uttered during festive processions when gods were approached (Kruchten 2001, 609). *nb nṯr.w* is attested from the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty onwards.[31] The element comprising the names of some kings, 'chosen by (*stp-n-*)', may indicate that they were selected through divine decrees (Jansen-Winkeln 1999, 52-3).

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29) McDowell 1999, 223-5. The word 'reward (*mk*)' has both verbal and nominal forms as is clearly attested in O Cairo 25504 recto, col. II, l. 2, where the overseer of the treasury is described: *iw=f ḥr mk 3 is.wt rdi.t n=sn mk* 'he rewarded the workmen, giving rewards to them' (*KRI* IV, 155: 9). Refer to Jansen-Winkeln (1989) for *mtn/mty* for 'reward'. *mtn* appears in a verbal from in the reliefs of Luxor, depicting the Opet Feast (*Opet*, 35, pls. 20, l. 4, 91), where its usage seems to occur interchangeably with *wḏ*. *ḥs* and *fḳ3* are attested together in the dedication text of Ramses II, where the king is described as being bestowed with them by Amun at the Opet Festival (*KRI* II, 325: 6-7), and in the scene of reward ceremony of the high-priest of Amun, Amenhotep (*KRI* VI, 455: 10; Frood 2007, 68-72).

30) It appears, for instance, in the reliefs of Luxor where Amun is said to confer it on the king for the monuments that he made for the god (*Opet*, pls. 8, ll. 11, 56, 110, l. 8, 112, l. 55).

31) A graffito on a cliff in West Thebes, written by the wab-priest of Amun *Nfr-3bd*, dated to Amenemhat I (Winlock 1947, 84, pl. 40 (1)); the stela of a Mentuhotep (Stela Louvre C 200; Vernus 1987, 164).

3. Concluding remark: a tentative definition of the Egyptian oracle

The earliest texts examined above testify that oracles were not suddenly de-
scended to petitioners but they required a formal setting within temples where
kings were rewarded by Amun for what they achieved for him. The circum-
stance of oracular sessions was, therefore, more ideological than theological.
Oracular sessions were perhaps prepared well in advance of (or rather before)
royal achievements. This hints at close association between oracles and reward
ceremonies, many of which also took place within temples and palaces, perhaps
in relation to feasts. In fact, *ḥs* appears both in temple and palace contexts. *ḥs*
originated from gods in the first instance to be given to the king. Then, it was
further descended to his subordinates, using the same model. Furthermore,
reward ceremonies entailed appointments of priests and officials, which again
modeled on the bestowal of the crown from the god to the king (Fukaya 2012).
It was the king who acted as a petitioner in his capacity of the highest priest. The
direct communication between Amun and the king is also echoed in their ideo-
logical intimacy as a father and a son. The divine consultancy was, therefore,
possible only when a reciprocal relationship was admitted, not when the attitude
of moral and piety was accepted. Thus, kings speak of monuments and offerings
dedicated to Amun and a promised fruit from campaigns. Oracles were in return
issued as divine benefaction to petitioners.

The early sources of the Eighteenth Dynasty, however, does not indicate
elements of juridical nature, as evidenced by later records from the Ramesside
Period when personal piety came to be expressed more explicitly and ideologi-
cal reformation is thought to have taken place. Whether the limited texts of the
Eighteenth Dynasty reflect a transitional phase of the development of oracular
practices or simply a matter of surviving records is in the realm of conjecture.

Because the term 'oracle' subjects to difficult, variant definitions, it is not
easy to draw a line between command, decree, and oracle. One of the critical
points one may ask is whether the agent who gives it is a supernatural being.
This eventually leads to a further question of how such a being can display itself
and deliver its message. The question appears not to be philosophical but rather
technical to explore the system, medium, and language of telling. After all, it is
not the usage of certain words but contexts that determine whether or not a text
entails an oracle. The analysis of the etymology and phraseology presented so

far, however, shows that divine images always accompanied oracle-givings in a ritualistic setting from the New Kingdom onwards. Therefore, the following brief and tentative definition of the standardized Egyptian oracle is proposed: Oracles were delivered as divine benefaction by revealing the images of gods in response to inquiries presented through a specific type of ritual.

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