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الازدواجية

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DUALITY

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Frédéric Servajean

Dualität, Zweiheit
Dualité

The term "duality" refers to a way of thinking that creates meaning by conceptually juxtaposing opposite or complementary realities (whether cultural, philosophical, or of the natural world) in a static or dynamic relationship and serves as a mechanism to make sense of, and explain, the functioning of the world.

كلمة ‹الازدواجية› تشير الى طريقة التفكير التى تخلق معاني عن طريق وضع حقائق (بجانب بعضها البعض) سواء معاكسة أو مكملة لبعضها البعض (سواء ثقافياً أو فلسفياً او مرتبطاً بالعالم الطبيعي) وهذا يقع بداخل علاقة ثابتة أو متحركة ويقوم بخلق ميكانيكية تساعد على فهم و تفسير طرق تفاعل العالم.

T he term "duality," unattested in Egyptian, is used in modern scholarship in reference to a way of thinking that creates meaning by conceptually juxtaposing opposite or complementary realities (whether cultural, philosophical, or of the natural world) in a static or dynamic relationship and serves as a mechanism to make sense of, and explain, the functioning of the world. These realities are joined in pairs consisting of two related elements whose combination results in a new, meaningful concept that demonstrates a sense of unity and inclusiveness that the individual elements lack. Dualistic thought was a characteristic of the ancient Egyptian mindset, as is evident from the textual and pictorial record, where we find that the paired elements, or conceptual "poles," could be in a relationship of true opposites, such as *ntt* and *jwtt*, "what is" and "what is not," respectively, whose combination resulted in an idiom denoting the totality of the cosmos. Alternatively, the poles could stand in a relationship of complementarity, such as

Upper and Lower Egypt, and also deficiency, such as day and night, where night could be understood as the "absence of sunlight."

Any discussion of duality must differentiate between the "static" character of certain combinations—for example, the organization of the Egyptian state into two discrete regions (Upper and Lower Egypt)—and the "dynamic" character of other combinations, such as the division of a complete day into a succession of day and night. The two opposing poles constitute what Lévi-Strauss calls *l'écart maximum,* or "the maximum distance" (Lévi-Strauss 1962, 1996), between which intermediate stages are classified. For instance, in the dynamic relationship night/day (defined by the contrast between the absence and presence of sunlight), Egyptians classified the intermediate stages as follows: night without moon; night with waxing or waning moon; night with full moon; day (Servajean 2004).

Static and dynamic approaches were often applied in combination to one and the same

image or concept. For instance, as a human being, the king was subject to time in what is essentially a dynamic relationship. Then again, as a being invested with the powers of kingship, which is a uniquely immutable institution, the king is eternal. This duality allows an understanding of the king's function as mediator between the immutable realm of the divinities (*djet*) and the transitory world of man (*neheh*) (Servajean 2007: 37 - 42).

As a means of explanation and classification, dualism permits the imposition of hierarchical relationships on the natural world. For example, Upper Egypt has primacy over Lower Egypt, just as day has primacy over night, and *djet* over *neheh*. Each of the conceptual poles has meaning of its own, but the presence of the other is always implicit and can add meaning by association. By viewing the night as a period during which certain negative events took place, such as Seth's attempt to violate Horus (Servajean 2007: 126 - 127), the day is implicitly under-stood, through opposition and association, as a time of peace and order (*maat*) (Servajean 2007: 105 - 107).

Duality in Static Relationships

Whenever dualism is employed to explain the immutable character of a phenomenon or concept, the two terms of the dyadic relationship are in a state of equality. For example, in the motif of the "Unification of the Two Lands" (*smꜣ-tꜣwj*) (Baines 1985: 226 - 276; Dohrmann 2006), the domination of the king over a unified state is expressed through combining the two complementary territories of Pharaonic Egypt, i.e., Upper Egypt (or the Nile valley) and Lower Egypt (or the Delta) [fig.1]. The emblem shown in Figure 1 is split into two parts by a vertical hieroglyphic sign, *smꜣ* ("unite"), on which rests the name of the king, written in a cartouche. At the right stands Seth, the deity associated with Upper Egypt, while Horus, associated with Lower Egypt, stands at the left. The two gods are shown tying together the two heraldic plants of Upper and Lower Egypt—the lotus and papyrus, respectively. In doing this the gods

symbolically unite (*smꜣ*) the territories of Upper and Lower Egypt, or "the Two Lands" (*tꜣwj*). With the name of the king atop the *smꜣ* sign, the emblem communicates visually and verbally that it is the king who enables and supervises the union. Unity is thus achieved by transcending the opposition. This should not be understood as a denial of the existence of diversity; rather, it was a way to express the totality of a concept in terms of the unification of its opposing but interdependent components. The same idea was expressed in the motif of the *pschent*, which combines the white and red crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, respectively, into a crown that stands for the unified Pharaonic state.
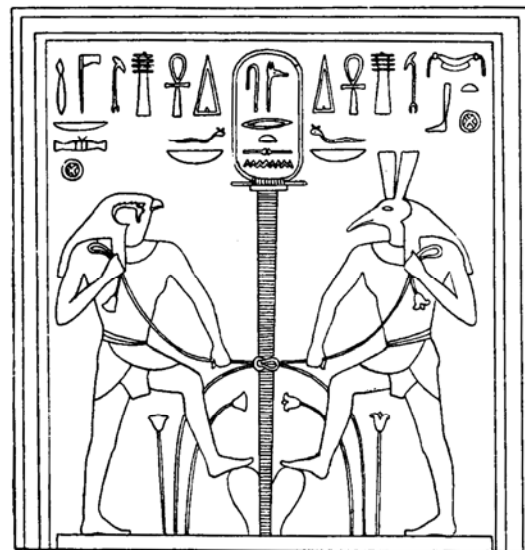

Figure 1. Horus and Seth uniting the Two Lands.

Duality in Dynamic Relationships

In contexts where duality is employed to explain the dynamic character of a phenomenon, the two terms of the dyadic relationship are interdependent, one term relying on the other. For example, the transition of time was expressed in Egyptian thought by combining *neheh*, time as reckoned by man, with *djet*, immutable eternity. The former is inherently a constituent of *djet*, but is extracted from it and returned at regular intervals (Servajean 2007: 57 - 64). A similar interdependency is expressed in the unity of Ra and Osiris, which is understood in

theological terms as Ra (the *neheh* principle) entering into Osiris (the *djet* principle) in the sixth hour of the night and leaving him again at dawn.

Whether the relationship was static or dynamic, unity was made possible only through the "mediation" of an external referent. For example, the "Union of the Two Lands"—a static duality—required the mediation of the royal name to be viable. Dynamic duality, moreover, depended specifically upon the mediation of either the secondary element only, or a product of the primary (dominant) element. Thus, in the case of *djet* and *neheh*, it was the return of *neheh* (the secondary element) to *djet* (the primary element) that made unity possible. Similarly, in the myth of the creation of the gold disc (that is, the moon), as narrated in the Late Egyptian story *The Contendings of Horus and Seth* (Servajean 2004: Papyrus Chester Beatty I r., 11, 1 - 13, 1), it is the moon (*jtn n nbw*)— which grows from the semen of Horus out of the forehead of Seth—that presides over a whole series of binary relationships such as day/night and order/disorder, embodied by the two antagonists Horus and Seth. Hence, the mediation of the moon results in a "unity" composed of the infinite succession of days and nights.

A Mechanism for Comprehending the World

The dualistic identification of Egypt as the combination of two complementary halves (Upper and Lower) was articulated in the cultic topography of the country, which was characterized by a symmetrical distribution of cities and cult centers in Upper and Lower Egypt. For example, the god Thoth was worshipped both in his primary cult center of Hermopolis in Upper Egypt and in a mirror city with the same name in Lower Egypt: there was thus a Hermopolis of the south and a Hermopolis of the north. Similarly, Horus was worshipped in Behdet of the south and Behdet of the north; Osiris, in Abydos in the Nile valley and Busiris in the Delta; the sun god Ra, in Heliopolis in the Delta and Armant in the Nile valley (anciently known as

"Heliopolis of the South"). The same held true for the organization of the central government: offices were subdivided into pairs (whether in title only), one of which pertained to the administration of Upper Egypt and the other, Lower Egypt. The king, for example, was "Lord of the Two Lands" (*nb tꜣwj*) or "He of the Sedge and the Bee" (*nswt-bjtj*). In certain periods, the vizierate was similarly subdivided; likewise, the treasury consisted of two complementary institutions, "the Two Houses of Silver" (*prwj ḥḏ*).

The process of creation was also understood dualistically. The cosmos was believed to have been created by a single deity who implicitly embodied both masculine and feminine qualities. In the case of the creator god Atum of Heliopolis, this dual nature was made explicit at the moment when Atum created the first two divinities, Shu (male) and Tefnut (female), who were manifestations of two complementary aspects of the cosmos—"air" and "humidity," respectively—and again at the moment of the creation of their offspring, Geb (male) and Nut (female)—"earth" and "sky" (Bickel 1994: 168 - 176; Meeks, D., and Christine Favard-Meeks 1995: 148 - 149; Sauneron and Yoyotte 1959: 30). Although in this example the dual gender of the demiurge was implicit, gender-duality could be expressed explicitly as well: the goddess Neith bore the epithet "the father of the fathers and the mother of the mothers" (Sauneron 1961: 242 - 244), and in his description of himself in Coffin Texts spell II, 161a, Atum says, "I am the male and the female."

In ancient Egyptian thought, numerous paired concepts served as instruments to define, and set rules for, the relationship between gods and men. The pair *maat*/*isfet* ("order" and "disorder") codified these relationships in terms of morality. With respect to ritual, these relationships were defined by such pairs as sacred/profane and ritualized/non-ritualized (Meeks, D. 1988: 444), and by a geographic duality, such as north versus south and east versus west (Moret 1902: 102 - 104). Similarly, in relation to temple architecture, the pair

"interior/exterior" imposed a hierarchical structure on cult places and thereby defined the roles and duties of the persons involved (Assmann 1994). The pair *djet/neheh* organized the relationship temporally and spatially (Servajean 2007: 83), the former referring to the immutable nature of the divine world and the latter, to time as experienced by man.

In conclusion, in ancient Egypt duality was by no means simply a contrivance of intellectual thought, or an esoteric doctrine, inaccessible to the majority of the populace. On the contrary, it was a mental structuring device the Egyptians lived by, expressing, implicitly or explicitly, a vision of the world and its functioning. Moreover, it was not exclusively Egyptian (Lévi-Strauss 1974: 154 - 188; 1996: 89 - 101).

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There is regrettably no comprehensive study on the concept of duality in ancient Egypt. Eberhard Otto (1938) approaches the phenomenon from a historical perspective and attempts to establish the general principles. Otto's later work (1975: columns 1148 - 1150) offers a useful bibliography. Wolfhart Westendorf (1974) discusses the significance and function of unity, duality, and trinity as mental categories in Egyptian theology. Short discussions can be found in Frankfort (1948: 19 - 23), Bonhême and Forgeau (1988: 15 - 16), and Desroches Noblecourt (1996).

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Image Credits

Figure 1   Horus and Seth uniting the Two Lands. Adapted from Gauthier and Jéquier 1902: 36, fig. 35.