



THE ICONOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF DISEMBODIED KINGSHIP IN THE EGYPTIAN RITUAL LANDSCAPE OF THE NEW KINGDOM

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In my article ‘The Obelisks of Augustus’ (JAEI 4: 1) I presented the obelisk as symbolizing a principle of ancient Egyptian kingship ideology which held that each mortal ruler was the embodiment of the regenerative force of the demiurge. It was as the earthly manifestation of this force, the notion of kingship itself, that a mortal acquired the universal sanction which legitimized their rule. This vital source of royal power, which had passed from king to king since the beginning of time, was an aspect of the living king known to the Egyptians as the Horus *ka*: the *ka* being an entity perhaps more recognizable to the ancient Greeks as the *daimon*; or to the Romans as the *genius*. My latest research has focused upon the manner in which this concept may have been depicted in the decorative repertoire of the Theban ritual landscape, the monumental architecture forming the platform for the presentation of rituals reifying the mythological basis of state ideology during the New Kingdom Period. Here I believe that I have identified the personification of kingship in its disembodied state which, in the artistic repertoire, is depicted as the figure designated *Iwn-mwt.f*: the ‘Pillar-of-his-Mother.’

While it has long been recognized that the *Iwn-mwt.f* was itself an aspect of Horus the figure, as it occurs in the decorative schemes of monumental architecture, has been variously interpreted by scholars. The *Iwn-mwt.f* has been designated either: a royal son or heir; as one who assisted the king during certain rituals; or, the more general interpretation in recent scholarship, as a member of the priesthood who officiated in the various rituals depicted in temple decoration – particularly those scenes relating to kingship and the king’s *ka*. Exactly where the *Iwn-mwt.f* was placed in the posited priestly hierarchy seems uncertain, although the figure has been described as in some way equivalent to a *sem*-priest – nomenclature which also seems questionable. However, much of the uncertainty in the interpretation of the purpose or nature of participants engaged in the activities depicted in the scenes discussed appears to be a function of scholarship itself; possibly resulting from strongly held personal ontological preconceptions, whether by design or otherwise.

The artistic program in question decorates monuments often described as being dedicated to one or more members of the *ntrw*, the abstract forces of ancient Egyptian mythology, cosmology, and ideology usually identified in Egyptological discourse as ‘gods.’ From this it might seem reasonable to designate buildings apparently dedicated to gods as temples. By the same reasoning, participants involved in the rituals associated with temples become priests of one sort or another. Over the past century or so of Egyptological research the terms applied to the subjects in question have ranged from priest to pontiff, with little apparent regard for the original language used in association with the iconography in which there are no words which can confidently be translated by such appellations. Nor are there words which appear to express either piety or religion. Nevertheless, priests they have become; and some of the garments worn by such figures – by distinctly circular argument – have been deemed to identify them as such. This phenomenon may, at least in some part, be due to the influences of research based, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the schools of biblical archaeology.

It is also apparent that the decorative themes in question have often been interpreted as representative art, depictions of events which have taken place in the corporeal world and perhaps something which may be viewed as akin to a photographic record of lived episodes. However, I believe that the correct view is to accept the artistic program as an ideological template informing activity in the real world: the world of human experience. Within the metaphysical realm of ancient Egyptian ideology there was little need for priests. Many of the figures portrayed were rather visual representations of abstract forces and ideas; and it is from this perspective that my research regarding the roles played by the various agents depicted, and the symbolism of the regalia associated with each character, has been conducted.

From analysis of the texts relating to the *Iwn-mwt.f*, and the title itself, together with a reassessment of the iconography, with particular attention to the placement of the figure in relation to the king, the royal ancestors, and other metaphysical elements, it appears certain that the *Iwn-mwt.f* should be seen as the repre-

sentation of one of the active mythological agents. The appearance of this figure at times of transition and transmission – the transition of the mortal to the embodiment of royal power and the transmission of that power from king to king – allows the conclusion that rather than being a representation of the holder of priestly office the *Iwn-mwt.f* was an anthropomorphization of the abstract concept of kingship; the perpetually youthful and temporarily disembodied Horus *ka*. It was this notion of kingship, the view that legitimate rule existed as one of the abstract forces of nature, which established the

authority of the king in Pharaonic Egypt; and which was given architectural expression in the ritual landscape in the form of the obelisk. The pharaonic tradition was maintained by Alexander and his Ptolemaic successors and, via Augustus, became an aspect of Roman imperial ideology. A summary of my observations regarding the *Iwn-mwt.f* was presented at the *Current Research in Egyptology XIII* conference held at the University of Birmingham, 27th-30th March 2012, and a preliminary report is being prepared for publication.