

Individualism and Cultural Identity In The Ancient Egyptian Literature*



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ABSTRACT

The ancient Egyptians accustomed to use the travel and individualism as a metaphor for the journey of one's life, as an expression of his individual aspirations to his pursuit of goal, whether was this representation on land or sea. And the person, who exhibits unusual ways and deviates from the cultural path of Egyptian society, would face obstacles and serious difficulties; drowning, drifting, and fiasco, at the same time he will be tested by the gods, which unify and integrate him within the society and the Egyptian culture again, or leave him in the depths of darkness. Therefore, this paper aims to shed light the importance of individualism and how it used as an expression for the deviation. It also examines the relationship of the individualism with the culture, social identity, and the Egyptian self-representation. This paper also deals with the individualism which used as term for human ambitions, and its implications. Additionally, it sheds light on the issue of determinism, divine fates and impacts on the human orientations by one's traveling during his life, as opposed to the human will.

Keywords:

Individualism, travel, deviation, identity, culture, ancient Egypt, Egyptian literature

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Introduction

The ancient Egyptian considered his land and its environment is unique from other environment, and he considered it also as an effective factor in his daily life. The ancient Egyptian was well aware of the characteristics of nature, and also was aware of the uniqueness of each element such as seas, rivers, trees, fruits, and flowers. On the banks of the eternal river, surrounded by deserts, this rich-charming nature, where the ancient Egyptian lived, has increased and deep-rooted the idea that the individual is a part of the universe. The nature and the animals formed an independent entity hugged by vast deserts in a long strip included in these natural boundaries. So, this world was effective and has a role in the lives of the Egyptian author, or any other Egyptian, whether worldly or religiously.

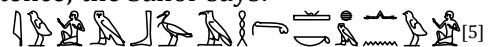
Although some religious anthems in the New Kingdom period, e.g. Aton's Anthem, and Amon's Anthems, have acknowledged its universality, and that it is who gifted life to foreigners and their lands, the ancient Egyptian has considered also the foreign environments outside this exquisite and independent world. Apart from this, the Ancient Egyptian has considered these environments fearful, strange, life looting and a source of continuous worry on his boundaries and on his personal world. On mentioning it in literature, the feeling of risk adventure was aroused.

Moving from his world to external ones was governed by limitations and great cultural obstacles. For some, moving to an external world was considered risky and moving to the unknown. So, his ideas and perceptions about these worlds depended greatly on fiction. Because of this, the travelogues were a mean to get into other world-external adventures and an imaginary world that allows this, where the excitement, pleasure and being under the effect of mixed feelings, loving the idea of adventuring, fear, worry, bewilderment and the ardor to get back. At these moments, his feelings mingle generally with piety, devoutness, and resorting to gods with supplications to rescue him from his misstep, hence helping him to be back to his socio-cultural environment, (Egypt). As a result of this thought, that rely on the privacy of the world and the environment, and what surrounds the person in his daily life, unlike the perception of the external world as the land of

adventures, excitement and suspense, the Ancient Egyptian has mingled his private world and environment in a wonderful and imaginary environment in which the elements interact and melt in one entity, each has a role to play. To facilitate this mix and this interaction all were communicating through the word.

2. Determinism and Human will.

The man is always driven by his ambitions to pursuit knowledge and to discover the unknown the matter which always made the individual trying to get released from the cultural and social restrictions that urge him to abide by the plans of his ancestors. Thus, the individuality deviates person from the natural path which was set before by the god according to the concept of Maat in ancient Egypt accordingly, he becomes susceptible to horrors, and he lives the experiment of adventures and tests which the supreme god subjects him to them until he becomes on the verge of death^[1] ^[2]. Finally, he either coalesces again in his world and in the culture of his society, or thrown away in the depths of darkness or otherwise in a mighty sea the end of which is annihilation. In the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor for example, we find the sailor talks about his experiment beyond the limits of the human experiments and experiences and outside the known, remote and the unsafe areas over which the man has no control^[3]. The protagonist gets out in an individual experiment to meet the god, where the person becomes directly communicated with him^[4]. So, the snake god has appeared as a mediator between the supreme god and the man (the sailor), who searches for the mystery of his existence; the Sailor says:

[5]

iw=i m-bAH =k xm.n (=i) wi

"I am before you without knowing myself"^[6].

The snake here represents the mirror which reflects the mystery of the human existence on earth and shows the nature of his end and his destiny. This meaning lies behind the hero's non acknowledgment of the basic reason of his existence on the island ascribing this to pure human reasons^[7] ^[8]. However, in the end the snake has shown to him that the reason behind his existence and survival is the supreme god^[9] and it is who has brought him to this delusional island^[10]^[11] which basically represents a middle stage between the existence and the

nothingness^[12], or the limit between life and death^[13], thus the snake says:

[14] mk
nTr rdi.n=f anx=k ini=ftw riw pn n kA

"It is god who has let you live and brought you to this island of the ka"^[15].

The story as whole and the journey of the hero reflects the questions around the beginning of the person's life, and the objective of his existence on earth^[16], or it describes a case of an individual who lived a life of hardships and obstacles, followed by success in the tests then finally, his life ended up normally the matter which allows him to get a place in his new world, or to be born again in the underworld ^[17]. The same matter which appeared clearly in the story of Sinuhe; it is one of the important fanciful texts which express the individualism and the man's continuous seeking of knowledge. His name means "son of Sycamore" and although the name they may be expressed an implicit about the close relationship which linked Sinuhe with Queen ^[18]. or refers implicit to the region which the hero came from, where there is the existence of the goddess called The Lady of Sycamore in South Memphis ^[19] , However, the reference name to the goddess Hathor, in fact, does not only mean the son of knowledge ^[20] , And all this emotional attitudes of human directly linked to public knowledge of the hero, where the hero across the country's borders with this knowledge and thereby created a penetrate for another, where Egyptian culture penetrate the walls of foreigners cultures^[21].

Due to unclear reason, the protagonist suffers from the feeling of guilt then, he travels voluntarily to the exile in the south west of Asia for several years. These years were as a reading to his self and they reflect the how the foreigners view the Egyptian identity^[22]. At the end, he returns back to Egypt, after being exposed to many international experiences which enable him competently to get back to his homeland. In order to reach this conclusion, he has to get rid of the restrictions of the Egyptian culture and cross to the other side, of the foreign countries, which means the deviation from the culture of his society therefore, the exposure to the horrors as he was considered a character which refused to follow the ideal form of the Egyptian individual, and the specific typical rules of the concept of Maat which were previously set. So, he has to

take an individual road to escape which is considered the first error of individuality.

Actually, Sinuhe should not have to escape or to make this journey, as his escaping was a kind of the author's self-sufficiency in order to spin his yarn ^[23]. Because the end of the story shows that the hero's escapism was unnecessary; Not only that, but his feeling of guilt because of the killing of the king the matter which makes him a sinner.

The crossing of Sinuhe to the Nile River was considered as a crossing to the opposite field, or to the negative field if compared to the positive one inside the Egyptian identity ^[24]. Sinuhe describes this crossing saying

[25]

xpr.n tr n msy.t sAH.n=i r dmi ngAw
DA.n=i m wsxt nn Hmw=s [m s]wt n imnty
"At dinner time I reached "Cattle-Quay." I crossed over in a boat without a rudder, by the force of the westwind"^[26].

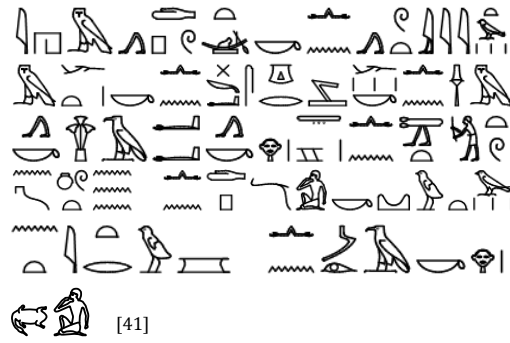
The reference to the dinner time and the time of sunset enhance the feeling of loneliness and isolation, besides escaping in a rudderless boat is a metaphor of drifting away aimlessly in the wrong direction ^[27]. On entering the negative field, Sinuhe starts describing the whole journey as if it was a dream^[28]. But it was, completely, unrealistic matter because he has already been plunged into the Asian society and has become an Asian man in his habits and conducts, as he has surrendered his life to another new tribal one^[29], in addition to that the queen and the royal family did not recognize him on his return^{[30][31]}. However, and during his existence in the negative field (being abroad), and after being like an Asian and was about to lose the Egyptian identity, he was always connected to Egypt^{[32][33]}. He was dominated by a state of division either loving the experience or willing to return, but the whole matter has shifted dramatically towards an overwhelming desire of getting back after his duel with the Retenu man^{[34][35]}. Sinuhe's return to the positive field was like the rebirth and the coalescence again in the Egyptian community ^{[36][37]}.

3. Individualism and Identity

The individuality and searching for knowledge and integration in a foreign society were the goals of Sinuhe and they stand behind his quest to travel abroad. So, there is no doubt that Sinuhe is still Egyptian, [38][39] but this new nature was of a completely different quality from what it was on before. The ideal Egyptian personality has been offered on him but Sinuhe refused it, as he wanted to know what can be got. It was that new individual experience which made him finally decide to return again after realizing the real value of his identity.

Considering the motive behind Sinuhe's attempt to travel abroad it was individualism besides, that the form of the text as it took the shape of the circle ABA. In addition to the hero's seceding and his re-coalescence again inside the Egyptian cultural model shows that the Egyptian model was against the penetration of the foreign culture; it was the reality of life that based on the concept of Maat which protects that the person from the troubles of life that face him^[40].

the individuality was not only refers to drift and move away from the Egyptian homeland and its culture or accession to another exotic foreign culture, but it also addresses the behaviors and ways in which the individual has followed it contravenes for his culture and Egyptian identity that have been developed according to the concept of Maat, therefore the individualism was the problem from which the elders of the first intermediate and the subsequent periods had suffered in their attempt to keep the person away from these paths as he might be faced by harm and damage either in his worldly life or his afterlife; accordingly, in case of committing any deviation from the specified path by the concept of Maat and Egyptian identity, the person would face horrors consequently, he will face the animal (the crocodile) which was always the end of these deviations and these moral crimes in the worlds of literary fiction. It was the matter which the Eloquent Peasant has clarified about the nature of the person's journey, in case of being moderate, and it implicitly shows its expression of the opposite side in case of deviating from the his path, thus the Peasant says:



ir hA=k r S n mAat sqd=k im =f m
 mAaw nn kf ndbyt HtA=k m dpwt=k nn iwt
 iyt m xt =k nn swA srgw=k nn sxm=k
 HAaa=k hr tA nn iT tw nwt nn sp=k Dwt nt
 itrw nn mA=k Hr snD

"If you descend to the Lake of Maat, you will sail thereon in the breeze. The fabric of your sail will not be torn, nor will your boat be driven ashore. There will be no damage to your mast, nor will your yards be broken. You will not founder when you come to land, nor will the waves bear you away. You will not taste the perils of the river, Nor will you gaze upon the face of fear (the crocodile)" ^[42].

4. The relationship between individualism and deviation.

The consequences of the individualism and the deviation are disastrous, as they endanger the person to severe horrors inside the fanciful world; the crocodile for example, was playing an integral role as a punisher, the matter which Khety has referred to in his teachings for his son Merikare as he says:



aAmw pw [msH] Hr mryt =f xnp=f Dt wat
 n iT .n =f r dmit aSAw mH

"For the Asiatic is only a crocodile on its riverbank Which attacks who on a lonely road But does not invade[who] in the area of a crowded town" ^[44].

The crocodiles lurk in secluded paths on the river banks in narrow areas which were considered areas from which the water turns. The crocodiles represented strong actual threat for whom deciding to move lonely and deviate from the ordinary roads beaten by the group as a figurative expression of deviation from the culture. The Asiatic enemy has been metaphorically described as a crocodile because he often represented the danger or the

stereotypical enemy in the Egyptian culture [45]. Therefore, the text refers to the individualism, the deviation and the preference of walking on the beaten tracks or dying between the jaws of the crocodile the matter which Ipuwer has clarified when the disaster struck the country and when the split in the structure of the Egyptian state occurred and finally the ship drifted away from its path to be errant in the open water, Ipuwer says:



iw ms swHA(.w) dpt rsyw xBA (.w) niwwt Smaw xpr(.w) [m qA]yt Swy

"Verily, the ship of the Southerners is shattered, The cities are ravaged, and Upper Egypt has become wasteland" [47].

The deviation of the ship was due to the absence of the guide and the ship master:



n(n) iaS n Hat m wnwT =sn

"There is no pilot in their hour. Where is he today" [49].

Also it was the situation which led the elders to advise the people attempting to find their path in life not to deviate:



Smw Hr wAt rx.n =tn

"Go on the road you know" [51].

In another situation, he also warns from individuality and deviation, he says:

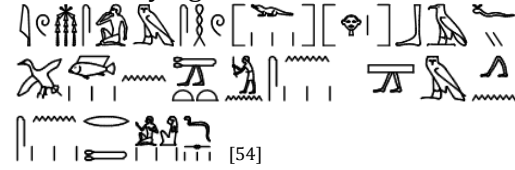


iw ms tw Dd =tw m dgs(w) aA mk <m> Snw mk xnd =tw sxt mi rmw n tnw sw snDw m-a Hrjtt jb

"One says, "Don't walk here, Look it's a net, But behold, men fall into the trap like fish, the fearful man could not distinguish it because of heart's terror"[53].

Despite these many advices, they walk aimlessly due to the severity of fear, deviating away from the right path to abyss and the destruction, as a result they became a prey for

the crocodile, the matter which Ipuwer has clarified saying:



iw ms msHw Hr bFA n iTt.n =sn Sm.n =sn rmT Ds

"O, yet the crocodiles gorge, but do not seize, people go to them of their own will" [55].

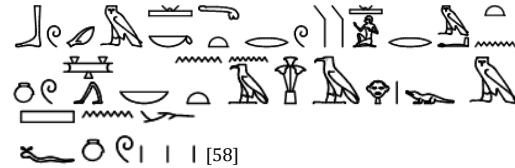
One of the texts which express the ambition and the deviation due to the human will is the advices directed to the prodigal son, as his deviation from the right path was not because of laziness, misunderstanding or other things with which his peers have gained but it was shedding light on more forms of the misconduct which the prodigal son has pursued and it has deviated by him away from his cultural environment. It was the same matter which the wise man pA iri persisted on describing it. So he says about the prodigal son's condition:



Sm =k iw nn n=k tiwt Tbw tm syrt nbt in .tw=k

"You went barefooted in another direction, but no spindle could get you back" [57].

He warns him from the crocodile, the moral penalty executor and the punisher for the individual deviations, to be cautious saying:



bw sDm =k mtrw r mTn nb nt nHA -Hr [59] m Sfnw

"You did not listen and you did not know exactly in which path the crocodiles lurk amidst the bushes"[60]

He says in a different paragraph:



wHm =i Dd n=k an i rwi=k inbt nHA-Hr.. mi nA m Tsymdwt m rA

"Stay away from the crocodile's ambush (Inbt nHA - Hr) as it has been said(literally):that in the mouth"[62].

5. Conclusions.

Individualism was one of the unpleasant and the undesirable things to the ancient Egyptian, as the individual's deviation from his socio-cultural environment voluntarily and due to an obvious reason was socially unaccepted. The texts of wisdom have viewed this matter, because they considered the individual's deviation as a deviation from the hub of his culture, and from the culture of his society which was seen as a type of ethical misconduct^[63].

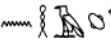

The nature of the man's life has two facets during his pursuit of his goal; who lives alone, secluded, and travels along unbeaten tracks by deviating from the cultural path of the Egyptian community is destined to be drifting away in his boat, fail and never achieve his goals. Besides, being punished by disastrous negative consequences, which include a various group of consequences such as sinking, drifting away, not achieving the goals and being a prey of the crocodile. The crocodile, in the first place, was considered one of the complete destruction tools or the second death ^[64], so it was the creature which lurks at the edges of secluded roads among the jungle trees, and figuratively it represents one of the boundaries of morals, it also appeared in the story of the two brothers as a penalty for the fratricide crime^[65].

Falling in the traps of the crocodiles and the second death have been used as figurative metaphor to indicate the failure and the misconduct which resulted in sailing freely and clinging to the pleasures of worldly life and the individualism. The pleasures which penetrate the limits of morals and lead in the end to drifting to the hell, thus the person becomes not only missing, but also living alone as "the living dead" ^[66].

NOTES

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- [58] O.Oriental Institute 12074, rt., 2-3; Guglielmi,W.,(1983), *Eine Lehre für einen reiselustigen Sohn*, p: 148 (2-3).
- [59] The term  nHA-Hr is often used of Apopis and other evil spirits (Wb. II, 290, 15-18). The Typhonic nature of these beings in whom, suggests that the meaning of nHA here lies in the same area as that identified above and that we should render 'Wild' or 'Fierce of Face'. The name would then be conceptually similar to that of the demon *irty.fy-m-sDt* , "He whose Eyes are Flame", see below: Lloyd , A.B.,(1975), "Once More Hammamat Inscription 191," in: JEA. Vol.61, p: 64.
- [60] Guglielmi,W., (1983), "Eine Lehre für einen reiselustigen Sohn," p: 151(I).
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- [63]Ibid.,p:221.
- [64] Zandee,Jan,(1960), *Death as an Enemy, According to Ancient Egyptian Conception, in Studies in History of Religions (Supplements to Numen)*, Lieden, pp: 14-20 .
- [65] Pap.Orbieny, 6,5- 6,6; Gardiner.,A., (1932), *Late Egyptian Stories*, (Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca I), Bruxelles, p: 15 (13-15).
- [66]  anx=f m mtt see: Pap. Prisse, 17,7; Žábá, Z.,(1956), *Les Maximes de Ptahhotep*, Prague, p.61 (581).

الفردية والهوية الثقافية في الأدب المصري القديم

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ملخص

استخدم المصري القديم السفر كاستعارة للتعبير عن حياة المرء، وتطلعاته الفردية في سعيه نحو هدفه، حيث كانت قضية السفر من القضايا المهمة التي استخدمها المصري القديم للتعبير عن رحلة حياة المرء، سواء بتمثيل تلك الرحلة على النمط البري أو البحري، فمن يسلك طرق غير معهودة وينحرف عن المسار الثقافي للمجتمع المصري، ويعيش منفردًا ومنعزلًا، يواجه عراقيل وصعوبات جمة؛ كالغرق أو الانجراف أو عدم الوصول إلى الهدف، أو أن يقع تحت طائلة الاختبارات الإلهية التي قد تدمجه من جديد داخل مجتمعه وثقافته المصرية أو تلقي به في غياهب الظلمات. ويهدف هذه الدراسة إلى توضيح أهمية الفردية ومدى تعبيرها عن الانحراف، وعلاقتها بثقافة وهوية المجتمع، وكيف يُعتبر تمثيل هذه القضية عرضًا للذات المصرية، من خلال تناول قضية السفر وتعبيره عن طموحات البشر وتطلعاتهم سواء كان سفرًا في الاتجاه الإيجابي أو السلبي، والآثار المترتبة عليه. وتهدف الدراسة أيضًا إلى إلقاء الضوء على قضية الحتمية والأقدار الإلهية ومدى تأثيرها على توجهات المرء وسفره أثناء حياته، في مقابل الإرادة البشرية.