

## The Initial Vignette in the Book of the Dead Papyri in the Late and Ptolemaic Periods<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Some Book of the Dead manuscripts began with an initial vignette during the Late and Ptolemaic Periods. As a result of losing the beginning of many manuscripts, we cannot assert whether this initiative scene was originally included. Still, it is uncertain that it was omitted in some complete manuscripts. This paper tackles the formulas of the initial vignette and its types during the Late and Ptolemaic Periods. Additionally, it delves into the distinctive artistic elements that appeared in some papyri and authenticates the sources they were influenced by.

**Keywords:** Initial Vignette – Book of the Dead –Ptolemaic Period – Papyri – Saqqara–Theban.

### المشهد الافتتاحي في برديات كتاب الموتى من العصر المتأخر والبطلمي

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**المُلخَص:** تبدأ بعض برديات كتاب الموتى في العصر المتأخر والبطلمي بمنظر افتتاحي، ونتيجة لفقدان بداية بعض البرديات؛ لا يمكن الجزم إذا ما كانت تتضمن مشهداً افتتاحياً من عدمه، إلا أن بعض البرديات المكتملة لم تبدأ بهذا المنظر. تستعرض هذه المقالة صيغ المنظر الافتتاحي وطوره المختلفة خلال العصر المتأخر والبطلمي، مع التركيز على العناصر الفنية الفريدة التي ظهرت في بعض البرديات وتأصيل المصادر التي تأثرت بها.

**الكلمات الدالة:** المشهد الافتتاحي – كتاب الموتى – العصر البطلمي – البردي – سفارة – طيبة.

<sup>1</sup> This article is a part of my doctoral dissertation titled The Papyrus of Hor (Cairo JE 32887- SR IV 930), registered at Helwan University in June 2021 under the supervision of Professors Giuseppina Lenzo and Mahmoud El-Bokl. I cannot express my gratitude for their support, reading the draft, and valuable comments.

## Introduction:

Some Book of the Dead manuscripts began with an initial vignette depicting the deceased, either standing or kneeling, adoring a god. As a result of losing the beginning of many manuscripts, we cannot assert whether this initiative scene was included. Nevertheless, it is unquestionably absent in some documents. The quality of these illustrations varied greatly, with some being more elaborate and precise than others, depending on the artist's skill. This comparative study is based on photos of documents available from the Late and Ptolemaic Periods in the Totenbuch project database from Thebes, Saqqara, and Akhmim, while shedding light on the New Kingdom and the Third Intermediate Period, highlighting the vignette development and differences. The decrease in the number of manuscripts in Saqqara and their absence, especially in the Third Intermediate Period, is a gap that represents one of the difficulties of the study. The following paragraphs discuss the initial vignette, its formula, the posture of the deceased, and the artistic elements behind the god Osiris.

In the early papyri, the principal deity in the initial vignette was only Osiris, who was usually standing or seated on a throne inside a shrine holding a crook and flail (Fig. 1). Following the Amarna Period, the sun god Ra supplanted Osiris in many papyri<sup>1</sup>. During the Third Intermediate Period, the adoration scene was for either Osiris or the Sun God in the hieroglyphic and hieratic papyri (Fig. 2). Sometimes, the deceased worshipped other deities, such as Re-Horakhty(-Atum), Re-Horakhty-Atum-Osiris, or again Re-Horakhty (-Atum) associated with Ptah-Sokar-Osiris<sup>2</sup>. From the Late Period to the early Roman Period, manuscript production returns to of the earlier tradition of adoring Osiris.

## The Opening Formula of the Initial Vignette:

Although this motif is considered a general prefatory scene of the Book of the Dead,<sup>3</sup> it has its own distinct opening formula. Only two formulas were popular in the New Kingdom: *dw3* + the god's name<sup>4</sup> or *rdi i3w n* + the god's name.<sup>5</sup> In Third Intermediate Period manuscripts, the traditional formulas<sup>6</sup> were continued alongside new ones such as *i3w n*, *ir i3w n*<sup>7</sup>, *ir mdt*<sup>8</sup>, *htp di nsw* formula<sup>9</sup>, and *ir sntr*<sup>10</sup> or *ir sntr kbh*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Quirke, *Going in Daylight, prt m hrw, The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead, Translation, sources, meanings* (London: Golden House Publications, 2013), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Giuseppina Lenzo, "La Vignette Initiale dans les Papyrus Funéraires de la Troisième Période Intermédiaire", *Bulletin de la Société d'Égyptologie de Genève* 26 (2004): 44, 50.

<sup>3</sup> Malcolm Mosher, *The Book of the Dead, Saite through Ptolemaic Periods: A Study of Traditions Evident in Versions of Texts and Vignettes*. Vol. 1: BD spells 1-15. SPBD Studies 1. (North Charleston, SC: Prescott, AZ, 2016), 157-8.

<sup>4</sup> P. Leiden T 4 (AMS 14), P. Louvre N. 3073, P. BM EA 10471, P. BM EA 10470, P. Berlin P. 3002

<sup>5</sup> P. Vatican 38574, P. Turin 8438, P. CG 51189, P. CG 40003, P. CG 24095, L. BM EA 10473, Sh. Louvre N. 3097, Sh. Hanover 39-64-6623, P. BM EA 9964.

<sup>6</sup> P. S.R. VII 11495, P. JE. 95659, P. Turin 53010, P. Paris BN 33-37, P. BM EA 10014 / P. S.R. VII 10653, P. Paris BN 38-45.

<sup>7</sup> P. New York MMA 30.3.31.

<sup>8</sup> P. JE. 95889, P. Private collection Paris 1.

<sup>9</sup> P. BM EA 9948, P. BM EA 10063, P. BM EA 10096, P. BM EA 10203, P. BM EA 10329, P. Louvre N. 3280, P. Louvre E. 19167, P. Berlin 10466.

<sup>10</sup> P. S.R. VII 10652.

<sup>11</sup> P. Louvre N. 3292, BM EA 10793.

In the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, the text starts with *dd mdw* followed by the deceased's name and titles<sup>1</sup> or the names and titles without any specific formula.<sup>2</sup> Although the scribes were keen to add the deceased's name throughout the texts in the entire papyrus, some papyri did not care to add the names and titles of the deceased and Osiris in the initial scene.<sup>3</sup>



Fig.1. The Initial Vignette from Papyrus Louvre N. 3073

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<sup>1</sup> P. Louvre N. 3081, P. Zagreb 598

<sup>2</sup> M. Louvre N. 3058

<sup>3</sup> omitted names and titles of Osiris and owner P. Berlin P. 3003, P. Turin 1795, P. Hildesheim RPM 2128; omitted the owner's name only SR IV 930



Fig.2. The Initial Vignette from Papyrus Louvre N. 3292

© Musée du Louvre

### The Posture of The Deceased:

The deceased's position is considered one of the most critical elements, characterized by great diversity and development, and can be divided into five types. The typology focuses on papyri and mummy bandages for availability (Table 1) compared to stelae and coffins. (Table 2).

**Type A:** Standing with raised hands was the most common style from NK to GR.<sup>1</sup> This style appeared in papyri<sup>2</sup> and mummy wrapping from Saqqara<sup>3</sup> and Thebes<sup>4</sup> during the Ptolemaic Period (Fig. 3-5).

<sup>1</sup> NK: P. Vatikan 38574, L. Hanover 39-64-6623, L. BM EA 10473, P. BM 10470, P. CG 40003, 51189, P. Louvre N. 3073, P. Turin 8438, TIP: P. Turin 53004; LP: P. BM EA 10558, P. New York Amherst 22; PP: P. Leiden T 24, P. BM EA 10844, P. BM EA 9923, P. Louvre N 3090.

<sup>2</sup> P. Louvre N 3090, P. BM EA 9923, P. Zagreb 598.

<sup>3</sup> M. Louvre N. 3058, M. Uppsala VM MB 92 + 93 + 94, M. Louvre N. 3058, M. Kopenhagen AE. I. N. 887, M. Berlin Ms.or.quart. 411, M. Antwerpen 4943 (2/2).

<sup>4</sup> M. New York MMA OC 3570, P. Leiden T 24, P. BM EA 9923, P. Louvre N. 3206, P. Louvre N. 3284.

**Type B:** The sitting position is rare, and it is known in the early Ptolemaic period from a single example from Thebes P. BM EA 9912 (Fig. 6), and another of unknown provenance is probably from Thebes as well as M. Leiden EG-ZM2650 (Fig. 7).

**Type C:** This position is known from only one example with known provenance: the recently discovered papyrus from Saqqara P. Waziery 1 (Fig. 8). This style is known from three Ptolemaic unknown provenance mummy wrappings<sup>1</sup>(Fig. 9), and they can now be attributed to Saqqara for their resemblance with the Waziri papyrus.

**Type D:** The incensing by bowl-censer was familiar from the Third Intermediate Period at Thebes, and a few manuscripts combined libations with incensing.<sup>2</sup> Bowl-censer continued to be a distinctive feature of Theban manuscripts until the Ptolemaic Period (Fig. 12) while pouring and incense by Arm-censer was a feature at Saqqara only during the Ptolemaic period (Fig. 10, 11). In the only known Ptolemaic example from Akhmim, the initial scene combines the libations and bowl-censer, reflecting the Theban influences that persisted in Akhmim. Although this tradition disappeared from Thebes in the Ptolemaic period, Akhmim followed the Theban traditions that appeared during the Third Intermediate Period. The Papyrus Vatican 48811 also follows this type. However, its provenance and date are unknown, but its similarity of style with P. Privat MacGregor (Fig. 13), in addition to the flower form above the lady's head, makes Akhmim a possible origin. It is also possible that both were produced in the same workshop.

**Type E:** Usually, the deceased was depicted alone in the initial scene, but during the Ptolemaic period, a few manuscripts added a deity in front of the deceased. This addition reflects the local beliefs and their reflection in selecting the accompanying deity for the deceased. Anubis (Fig. 17) was the accompanying deity in Thebes and Thoth in Memphis. The depiction of Thoth as a scribe (Fig. 15) was evoked from the judgment scene,<sup>3</sup> and probably the depiction of the deity holding the hand of the deceased was likely influenced by the initial vignette on stelae or the judgment scene on coffins **Table 2**. A similar depiction of the god Thoth holding the hand of the deceased, like P. SR IV 930 (Fig. 16), is known from the judgment scene in the Third Intermediate Period papyrus Cairo CG 40014 from Thebes.<sup>4</sup> Some manuscripts included a figure of Thoth as a scribe leading the deceased towards Osiris in the initial scene. This evocation also comes from the judgment scene, where Thoth records the outcome.<sup>5</sup>

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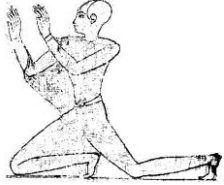









<sup>1</sup> M. Aberdeen ABDUA 23574, 84034, M. Sydney R 373.

<sup>2</sup> P. Louvre N. 3292, P. BM EA 9974, 9903 and P. Warrington WAGMG RA 298.

<sup>3</sup> Quirke, *Going out in Daylight*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ushabtis.com/cairo-81-bd-s-r-vii-10244-je-33997/>

<sup>5</sup> Quirke, *Going out in Daylight*, 3.

Type	Saqqara		Thebes	Akhmim	Unknown provenance
A	 Fig. 3. M. Louvre N. 3058	 Fig. 4. M. Antwerpen 4943 (2/2)	 Fig. 5. M. New York MMA OC 3570		
B			 Fig. 6. P. BM EA 9912		 Fig. 7. M. Leiden EG-ZM2650
C	 Fig. 8. P. Waziery 1 / JE 100403/ SR 4197				 Fig. 9. M. Sydney R 373
D	 Fig. 10. P. Louvre N. 3081	 Fig. 11. M. Uppsala VM MB	 Fig. 12. P. BM EA 9906	 Fig. 13. P. Privat MacGregor	 Fig. 14. P. Hildesheim RPM 2128
E	 Fig. 15. M. BM EA 10265	 Fig. 16. SR IV 930	 Fig. 17. P. Turin 1795		

**Table 1.** The forms of the posture of the deceased in the initial vignette

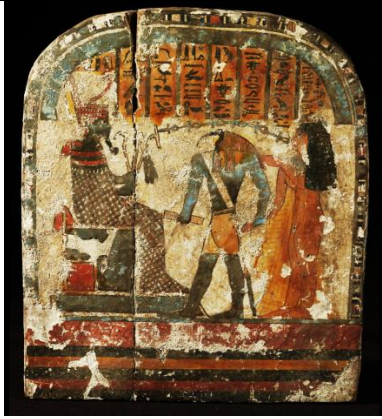


Fig. 18. Stela N 3662  
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Fig. 19. Stela 37.1386E  
© Brooklyn Museum

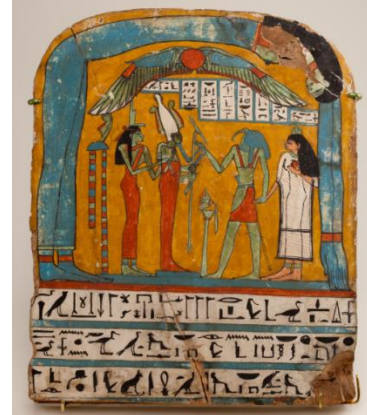


Fig. 20. Stela MMM 96.4.4  
©The Metropolitan Museum of Art

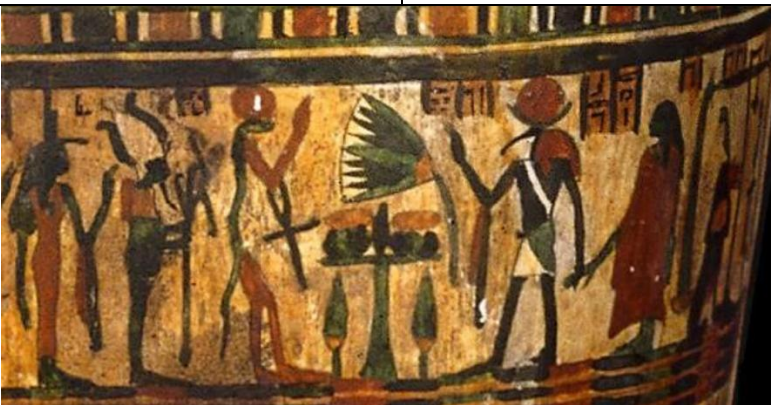


Fig. 21. Coffin EA 22814  
© The Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 22. Stela MMA 22.3.33  
©The Metropolitan Museum of Art

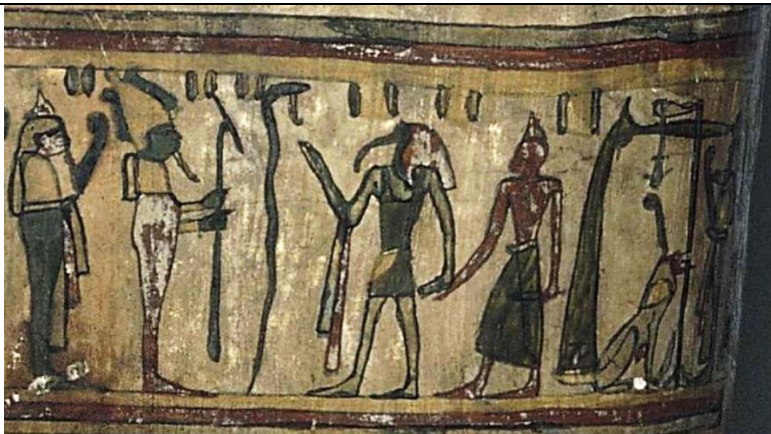


Fig. 23. Coffin BM EA 25245  
© The Trustees of the British Museum

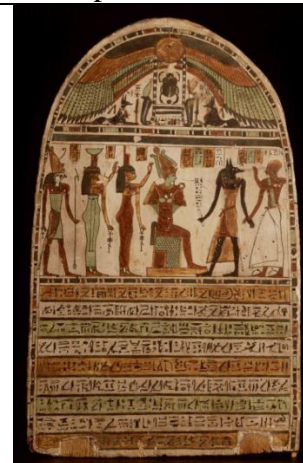


Fig. 24. Steal AH.21  
©Rijksmuseum van Oudheden

**Table 2.** The depiction of the initial vignette on stelae and the judgment scene on coffins.

## Behind the God Osiris:

In most papyri, there is usually nothing behind the seat of Osiris. However, in a few manuscripts, protective goddesses such as Isis<sup>1</sup>, Amentet<sup>2</sup>, or Isis and Nephthys<sup>3</sup> were standing behind him. In the papyrus of Hor SR IV 930 from Saqqara (Fig. 25), a unique depiction of Osiris fetish appears twice behind his seat in the initial vignette (Fig. 26) and vignette of spell 125 (Fig. 27). This depiction is distinctive because it is not commonly found in these vignettes and has a unique style not paralleled in any source of the Book of the Dead. Normally, the Osirian fetish is depicted with a winged lion-mummy form at the base (Fig. 29), but Hor papyrus includes only two lion heads around the base.<sup>4</sup> A realistic diorite model of the Osiris fetish with a lion-mummy form carved at the base is kept at the Louvre (Fig. 30),<sup>5</sup> but no realistic models with lion heads are known.

To date, the only well-known example of what we might call a Memphite fetish is on the outer coffin of Meret-it-es (Fig. 28)<sup>6</sup>. According to the museum, this coffin is believed to have originated from Hermopolis Magna (Al-Ashmūnayn) based on hieroglyphs texts found on the coffin<sup>7</sup>. This coffin is from the collection of Sayed Khashaba Pasha, suggesting that Assiut is a possible provenance for it<sup>8</sup>. Although the connection between the coffin of Meret-it-es and the Hor Papyrus is obscure, it serves as clear evidence of the transmission of the motives.



Fig. 25. The Initial Vignette from P. Hor SR IV 930

<sup>1</sup> P. Turin 1768, P. JE. 95658 and 95659, P. S.R. VII 11503, P. St. Petersburg 1108, M. Turin 1870, P. Leiden T 17 (AMS 19), P. Louvre N. 3081.

<sup>2</sup> L. BM EA 10473, P. BM 10471, M. Aberdeen ABDUA 23545.

<sup>3</sup> P. CG 40018, 40023, P. S.R. VII 11496, P. BM 10329.

<sup>4</sup> Laurent Coulon, "Les Uræi Gardiens du Fétiche Abydénien : un Motif Osirien et sa Diffusion à l'époque saïte". In Devauchelle, Didier (ed.), *La XXVIe dynastie, continuités et ruptures* (actes du Colloque International Organisé les 26 et 27 Novembre 2004 à l'Université Charles-de-Gaulle – Lille 3 ; Promenade Saïte avec Jean Yoyotte, 2011) 93-5.






<sup>5</sup> Louvre E. 11072 ; Paul Barguet, P., "La Base du Reliquaire Abydénien", *Revue d'égyptologie* 9 (1952): 154.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/821344050766187338/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://art.nelson-atkins.org/objects/53671/outer-coffin-of-meretites>

<sup>8</sup> Hend Abdel Rahman, "The Khashaba Museum (1910s-1960s)", *Egyptian & Egyptological Documents, Archives, Libraries* 8 (2019): 101, Pl.3.



				
<p>Fig. 26. Initial Vignette</p>	<p>Fig. 27. Vignette of Spell 125</p>	<p>Fig. 28. The outer coffin of Meret-it-es</p>	<p>Fig. 29. Common Osirian Fetish</p>	<p>Fig. 30. Diorite base E 11072 © Musée du Louvre</p>
<p>P. Hor SR IV 930© author.</p>		<p><a href="https://www.flickr.com/photos/mharrsch/29773620771/in/photostream/">https://www.flickr.com/photos/mharrsch/29773620771/in/photostream/</a></p>	<p>Coulon, Les Uræi Gardiens du Fétiche Abydénien, 95.</p>	<p><a href="https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010007916">https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010007916</a></p>

**Table 3.** The Osirian fetish

## Conclusions:

Although the initial vignette was previously considered a general scene of the Book of the Dead manuscript as a whole, it was separate with a specific formula. Some aspects of the initial vignette in the Book of the Dead manuscripts varied greatly, such as the quality, the posture of the deceased, and the deity accompanying him. While Osiris was the primary god in earlier papyri, after the Amarna period, however, the sun gods supplanted him in some papyri.

The paper proposed that the posture of the deceased divided into five types, and standing was the most common in the New Kingdom until the Ptolemaic Period. Additionally, the new types of posture of the deceased B, C, and E only emerged during the Ptolemaic period alongside the traditional models A and D. The paper also revealed that Saqqara distinguished itself with a group of styles (Types C, D, and E) that were not found in Thebes or Akhmim. On the other hand, Thebes was characterized by the types B, D, and E.

Furthermore, while there were occasionally protective goddesses behind Osiris, a unique depiction of Osiris fetich with lion heads instead of a winged lion-mummy form was found on the papyrus of Hor SR IV 930 from Saqqara. In sum, these variations provide valuable insights into the development and differences of the initial vignette from the Late Period onward.

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