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Entrevista

Reseñas

In memoriam

"Be welcome in peace, my son!" Beautiful West and Motherhood Practices in CT 30-37

"¡Sé bienvenido en paz, hijo mío!" La Bella de Occidente y las prácticas de maternidad en TdA 30-37

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Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar el papel de la entidad divina la Bella de Occidente en la liturgia TdA 30-37, en la cual aparece como madre del difunto, y examinar las prácticas maternales que dice realizar. Para cumplir con este objetivo, se ha estudiado cada pasaje en el que se la menciona, para así entender su distribución en el programa y su relación con el resto de los actores de la composición. El estudio revela que el papel de la Bella de Occidente era esencial para alcanzar el fin último de la liturgia y, además, servía al mismo tiempo como reflejo y modelo ideal de la maternidad. Sin embargo, hay importantes diferencias ontológicas entre las madres divinas y las humanas que subrayan el estatus inalcanzable de la Bella de Occidente, encarnando un ideal que estaba fuera del alcance de las madres humanas.

Abstract

This paper analyses the role of the divine entity Beautiful West in the liturgy CT 30-37, in which she is referred to as the mother of the deceased and examine the maternal practices she is said to perform. To achieve this, each stanza mentioning her is examined, to elucidate her presence and her relationships with the other actors of the composition. Furthermore, her actions are compared to those attributed to human mothers. The study demonstrates that Beautiful West's maternal role was essential in achieving the ultimate purpose of the liturgy and served as both a reflection and an idealised model of motherhood. However, significant ontological distinctions between divine and human mothers highlight Beautiful West's status as an unattainable symbol, embodying an ideal of motherhood beyond human reach.

1. Introduction

The corpus of the *Coffin Texts* constitutes one of the main mortuary compositions of ancient Egypt, and is the most significant from the Middle Kingdom (ca. 1980-1760 BCE). Generally, these spells ensured the deceased's survival in the afterlife while simultaneously establishing a link between the dead and the individuals performing the appropriate rituals and offerings. Thus, these rituals embodied cultural concepts and realities, and through their performance, they became social phenomena, affecting both the living and the dead.

There is a religious composition that has been the subject of several analyses by Egyptologists due to its encapsulation of multiple religious and social aspects, showing the intertwined relation between both spheres in the ancient Egyptian mindset: CT spells 30-41. These spells form a liturgy in which the ritualist introduces himself as the son of the deceased, who is, in turn, described as the son of the god of the afterlife, Osiris. The relationships established among the participants throughout the liturgy illuminate the understanding of specific social duties and obligations within kinship groups, understood in the religious context of the Middle Kingdom.

Despite the exhaustive analysis to which this liturgy has been exposed, most authors have focused on its ritual aspects and the paternal-filial relationship between the ritualist, the deceased, and Osiris (Gracia Zamacona, 2024, pp. 29-33, 103-104; Jürgens, 1995; Ogdon, 1982; Willems, 2001; 2008; 2014). However, certain elements have received little attention. The role of the female entity "Beautiful West", who appears as mother of the deceased, has been largely overlooked, although her figure is essential for the deceased to successfully complete his journey through the netherworld. This article aims to examine the functions of this goddess within the liturgy. A close analysis of her actions highlights the importance of the mother-child bond in the religious beliefs of the period for ensuring the deceased's successful passage to the afterlife. At the same time, it reveals the fundamental characteristics that the ancient Egyptians associated with the maternal practice, of which Beautiful West served both as a reflection and an idealised model.

2. A paternal-filial liturgy

The emphasis on family ties, particularly the relationship between father and son, is one of the distinctive features of the *Coffin Texts* (Willems, 2014, pp. 195-206). For this reason, Egyptologists have employed its spells to study kinship groups and structures, as these texts reveal attributes that are less evident in other sources (Franke, 1983, pp. 178-301; Olabarria, 2014, pp. 27-67; Willems, 2015). Although the principal theme of CT 30-41 does not concern the family, a thorough analysis has revealed specific obligations and duties within father-son relationships during this period. The following sections do not attempt to provide an exhaustive examination of these spells —already addressed by several scholars (De Jong, 1994; Jürgens, 1995; Ogdon, 1982; Willems, 2001)—, but rather to summarise their content, emphasising the paternal-filial connection they depict.

2.1. The chronological and spatial setting

CT 30-41 spells were inscribed in coffins dating from the late Eleventh to the mid-to-late Twelfth Dynasties (Willems, 1988, pp. 70-79; 2001, pp. 255-256). CT 30-37 were first analysed by Jorge R. Ogdon (1982), who argued that these spells were probably recited as a play during the rites conducted at a person's funeral. This interpretation was later nuanced by Jürgens (1995, pp. 189-190), who claimed that the spells formed a monologue,

in which the ritualist was the only person alive, and whose words had the intention to bring life to the other participants. Harco Willems (2001, pp. 337-355; 2008; 2014) added CT 38-41, correctly recognising that these spells formed part of the same ritual He proposed that the entire composition constituted a liturgy, probably performed after the burial.

The inclusion of the phrase *ỉw m ḥtp* "Be welcome in peace" in reference to the deceased can be interpreted as indicative of a favourable moral and social judgement upon their arrival in the afterlife (Oréal, 2010, pp. 141-142). Moreover, the title of CT 30 (I, 83f [S1C]) mentions *tp(w)-tr nb n ḥrt-nṯr* "all the seasonal festivals of the necropolis" as the time when the liturgy must be performed. CT 35 (I, 130g) further clarifies the setting by stating that the ritual had to be performed in the house of the deceased which is in the Island of Fire. This island is commonly understood as a liminal space between the world of the living and the afterlife (Grieshammer, 1970, pp. 101-103), closely linked to Hermopolis as the site of the primeval mound from which Reemerged (Abbas, 2010, pp. 50-51; Kees, 1942, pp. 41-42; *LÄ*, II, p. 258). Consequently, the Island of Fire was conceptualised as a place of creation, intrinsically connected to notions of rebirth and transition (Eyre, 2002, pp. 81-82; *LÄ*, II, p. 258). This has led some scholars to argue that the liturgy had to take place in a specific part of the necropolis (De Jong, 1994, p. 144, n. 12), or in locations such as tomb chapels or domestic shrines (Gracia Zamacona, 2024, pp. 87-88, n. 141; Willems, 2001, pp. 254, 292, n. 5; *cf*. Abbas, 2010, pp. 53-57) which facilitated contact between the two spheres of existence.

Several passages refer to the sacred city of Abydos as the location for the performance of this liturgy. CT 34 (I, 122a-b) states that the deceased will travel with Osiris to Abydos— a journey likely also referenced in CT 36 (I, 136b-e, 145c). CT 35 (I, 132a-c) allows the deceased to enter in the "Great Shrine" (*ḥm-wr*), a place that has been identified as the abode of the body of Osiris (Willems, 1996, pp. 155-156; 2001, p. 297), which the ancient Egyptians believed was located at Umm el-Qaab (Leahy, 1989, pp. 57-59). Furthermore, similarities between certain sections of CT 37 (I, 147g-148a) and specific passages of stela Copenhagen AEIN 963 (Jørgensen, 1996, pp. 122-123) have enabled Willems to link this liturgy to the Abydene festival "Mysteries of Osiris" (1996, pp. 132-133; 2001, pp. 322-324; for the festival see Smith, 2017, pp. 232-234). Although CT 37 is more elusive in its description, the stela clearly states that the deceased travels to Poqer, the mythical region where the tomb of Osiris was located. Despite this connection, the mention in CT 30 of "all the seasonal festivals" and the recording of these spells in coffins from Deir el-Bersha, suggests that the liturgy could be performed in other times and places. Its effectiveness was likely independent of the specific time and place of recitation. Indeed, Willems has proposed that this ritual could have been performed in small celebrations in provincial tomb chapels all over Egypt (2001, pp. 288, 293, 358).

2.2. Relationships among the participants in the liturgy

The primary purpose of spells CT 30-37 is to ensure a safe journey for the deceased through the netherworld, so they may reach the place where the body of Osiris is prepared for mummification (Willems, 1996, pp. 367-381; 2001, p. 265; 2014, p. 189). To achieve this, the ritualist was required to guide the deceased, announce their arrival, and convince other deities to let them pass through different places. A notable feature of this ritual is the speaker's identification of the deceased as his father (*ỉt=ỉ*) in several passages of CT 30-37 (I, 87a, 93b, 103a, 108a, 114a, 121b, 127b, 135b-c, 145e, 151c-152b). Elsewhere,

however, the speaker describes himself as the representative of *wnḏwt=f ỉm=ỉ ꜥnḫt* ("his living dependants, who I am" *CT* I, 128b, 129e; *cf. CT* I, 153e-154a; see Willems, 2001, pp. 285-286, n. 138), and *bꜣ=f ꜥnḫ(w) tp tꜣ* ("his living *ba* on earth" *CT* I, 128c). This relationship between the ritualist and the deceased becomes the central theme of CT 38-41. In these spells, the son suspects his father is plotting against him, accusing him of attempting to persuade the gods to hasten his death. To avert this fate, the son outlines their mutually beneficial relationship, arguing that if he dies prematurely, his father's the mortuary cult would cease (CT 38 [I, 163a-j, 164d-f] and CT 41 [I, 177e-h]) and the household he had established would be lost (CT 38 [I, 165e], CT 40 [I, 175l-176b], and CT 41 [I, 177a-d]). By the conclusion of the liturgy, although it is not explicitly stated, it appears that the father chooses a course favourable to his son (CT 40 [I, 175e]). Indeed, the god Re states that he will live a long life (CT 40 [I, 173m]).

The paternal-filial relationship established in the liturgy is key element throughout the entire narrative. However, it is noteworthy that—apart from a single passage—this relationship is grounded not in biological ties, but in the fulfilment of various roles and duties. This performative understanding of relatedness in ancient Egypt (see Olabarria, 2018; 2020b) enables a more diverse and nuanced interpretation and application of the liturgy's principles. Indeed, ancient Egyptian kinship terminology is flexible, with the same lexeme often carrying multiple meanings. A man could thus be described as the "son" of another without being his biological offspring (Moreno García, 2005; 2009-2010, p. 43, n. 127; 2013, p. 91; Olabarria, 2014, pp. 25-26, 130-131; 2020b, pp. 85-87). This suggests that, although the ritualist is usually referred to as the son of the deceased, he may have fulfilled this role by being another relative, friend, or colleague. The only instance in the liturgy where the relationship between the speaker and the deceased is explicitly defined in biological terms occurs in CT 39 (I, 169b-c [B16C]):

smsy=ỉ ỉr=ỉ ỉr.n=f wỉ m ḥꜥw n ỉwf=f mtwt pr.t m ḥnn=f.

My begetter, with respect to me, has made me as a body from his flesh and seed coming out from his penis.

In this passage, the son claims that his body was created from two elements provided by his father: his flesh (*ỉwf*) and his semen (*mtwt*) (Nyord, 2009, pp. 335-337, 460-462). This reinforces the connection between the two, now explicitly situated in the biological realm.

The relationship between the living son and the deceased father is mirrored in the afterlife, by the bond between the latter and the god Osiris. Several spells refer explicitly to this kinship connection. For example, in CT 32 (I, 106c [B1L]), the living son addresses Osiris, declaring that the deceased is the child of his flank, *sꜣ=k ỉs pw sḏt(y)=k n ỉm=k*, and that the god has begotten them himself, *ỉr.n=k ḏs=k*. This passage conveys their relationship not only through the kinship lexeme (*sꜣ*), but also through the verb *ỉrỉ* "to create, beget" (*VÉgA, w529*), thereby emphasising a "blood" connection. This bond is further highlighted by the assertion that Osiris has created the deceased from his *ỉm* ("flank" Walker, 1996, p. 226), a term that appears to refer to the lower abdominal region (Willems, 2001, pp. 270-271, n. 65). It may even encompass the genital area, as suggested by a hymn to the god Min that describes the copulation of the god using the phrase: *ỉm=f r ỉm=s* ("his flank being against her flank"; stela Parma 178.9; Müller, 1966, pp. 258-259; Simpson, 1974, pl. 83). Therefore, the bond between the deceased and the god appears to be more rooted in

biological lineage. This filial relationship is significant: it legitimises the deceased's access to Osiris' dwelling, enabling physical proximity to his body and, consequently, facilitating his resurrection. The actions and status of the deceased in the netherworld are therefore intimately bound to this divine kinship.

Willem's interpretation of this liturgy revealed a key aspect: its performance was a "social phenomenon" (2001, p. 368; *cf.* von Lieven, 2019). The social status—whether of a living or deceased individual— depended on the execution of a series of actions on behalf of their father (Willems, 2001, p. 369). Within this framework, one may ask whether the maternal figure plays any role at all, and how she is represented within this religious composition. Although she appears to occupy a secondary position, the deceased's relationship with the entity known as Beautiful West is referred to on multiple occasions throughout the liturgy. This connection has often been assumed to represent a mother-son bond, with little or no bearing on the proper performance of the liturgy, given its primary emphasis on the paternal link. The following sections will explore more closely who this entity is in relation to the deceased, and what role—if any—she plays in the liturgy.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a multidisciplinary approach to the analysis of Beautiful West in CT 30-37, combining textual analysis with theoretical frameworks drawn from kinship, gender, and motherhood studies.

The first step involved defining of the corpus. All passages mentioning Beautiful West within CT 30-37 have been identified, transcribed, and translated directly from witness B12C[b] (CGC 28089; Lacau, 1904, pl. XII, XXIII; 1906, pp. 20-30). This is the inner coffin of a man named *iḥꜣ* about whom little is known. In his outer coffin, B13C (CGC 28090; Lacau, 1906, pp. 30-37), he holds the titles *wꜥb ꜥꜣ* ("great wab-priest") and *ẖri-ḥb ḥri-tp* ("chief lector priest"). However, in B12C[b] he is simply designated by the vague phrase *nt(y) m sr.t* ("the one who belongs to the Magistrature"). Nevertheless, his coffin was selected due to its completeness regarding the first part of the liturgy and even to the presence of some spells from the second part (Willems, 2001, p. 255). CT 38-41 are excluded from detailed analysis due to the absence of references to the goddess therein.

Next, each passage mentioning Beautiful West has been examined with attention to linguistic nuance, its place within the ritual sequence, and, when applicable, textual variance. Rather than a line-by-line philological commentary, the analysis focuses on identifying the narrative roles, actions, and relationships assigned to this figure within the liturgical framework. Special attention is given to kinship terms and verbal constructions involving the goddess. The philological observations are situated within the broader ritual framework of the Coffin Texts, and the role of both Beautiful West and Isis within the ancient Egyptian religious worldview.

The interpretative phase of this study employs conceptual tools from kinship theory, symbolic anthropology, and gender studies. In particular, it draws on a performative understanding of kinship—known as "new kinship studies" (e.g. Carsten, 2000; 2004)— which argues that kinship is not solely based on biological ties but is culturally constructed and sustained through social practices. This approach has been successfully applied to ancient Egyptian sources by Leire Olabarria (2018; 2020b), providing a critical lens though which the relationships depicted in this liturgy may be examined. This framework is especially pertinent

in this case, as the actors of are placed within two ontological realms —human and divine—, highlighting that several of the relationships portrayed are clearly not based on blood ties.

In addition, this study employs insights from symbolic anthropology (e.g. Kohn, 2013; Sered, 1999) to examine how these two spheres —divine and earthly— are constructed and interconnected in the text. This perspective facilitates and exploration of whether the divine relationships portrayed in the liturgy reflect, diverge from, or invert human social structures.

Finally, the analysis considers Adrienne Rich's seminal distinction between motherhood as a social institution and mothering as a personal, lived experience (1986), alongside recent work on religious motherhood (Pasche Guignard, 2021). This theoretical framework enables an analysis of the attribution of maternal behaviours to goddesses, and how these contribute to broader symbolic constructions of motherhood within the society that produced it.

Through this approach, the paper aims to assess whether the roles attributed to Beautiful West align with the social and religious expectations placed on human mothers in ancient Egypt, and how her figure may have functioned within a broader symbolic and ritual system.

4. A divine mother: Beautiful West

Beautiful West (*ỉmnt(t) nfrt*) was an Egyptian goddess attested as early as the Old Kingdom, with her presence continuing into the Greco-Roman period (*LGG*, I, pp. 365-366). Her iconography mirrors that of the goddess of the western region, *ỉmnt(t)*, and like her, she is frequently described as a mere manifestation of other goddesses—such as Isis, Nephthys, Hathor, and Maat (Bruyère, 1925, p. 82; Hornung, 1992, p. 433; *LGG*, I, p. 362; Refai, 1996).

She is mentioned in a passage of the *Pyramid Texts* of Wenis and Teti (PT 254, *Pyr.* §282b-284a), as part of a sequence of spells that allow the deceased to pass through the *akhet* (Allen, 2015, p. 47). In this context, she declares that she has given birth to the king (*ms.n(=ỉ)*). Ogdon (1982, p. 42) interpreted the depiction of the Western goddess on the base of New Kingdom coffins and the sky-goddess Nut on the lid as indicating that both entities were two facets of the same deity: the former as a "devourer", and the latter as a "prolific" celestial mother that welcomes and embraces the deceased in the afterlife. Willems (2001, p. 261), by contrast, argued —based on his analysis of CT 30-41—that Beautiful West was a manifestation of the goddess Isis, wife of Osiris (2001, p. 261; see also Assmann, 2005, p. 154; Münster, 1968, p. 103). Regardless of the precise identity attributed to this goddess, a central point of agreement among scholars is her role as the mother of the individual addressed in these texts.

Beautiful West is mentioned in five different spells of the liturgy: CT 30, 32, 33, 34 and 36. Throughout these recitations, she is portrayed as a powerful entity endowed with the authority to let the deceased access to Osiris' abode, as well as a protective mother responsible for safeguarding his journey. Notably, Beautiful West is never described as *mwt* ("mother" *VÉgA,* w5166), although the deceased is identified as her son—either through a biological relationship or a broader kinship connection.

In the first spell of this liturgy, CT 30, the deity is referred to simply as the West in certain witnesses (e.g. S5C, S12C, B4L, B12C[b], B13C), while in others, her full name is preserved (e.g. B1P, T1L[a], T1L[b], S2C, B3Bo, B2Bo, B1L, B3L). In this spell two groups of divine entities—

one likely composed of deceased human beings residing in the netherworld, and other of gods whose exact identification is uncertain (Willems, 2001, pp. 262-263)— welcome the deceased to the afterlife (*CT* I, 89b-91d):

> *i̓w m ḥtp nṯr rnpw ms.n i̓mnt i̓w mi̓n m tꜣ ꜥnḫ (d)r.n=f ḥm(w)=f r=f mḥ.n=f ḫt=f (m) ḥkꜣ(w) ḫtm.n=f i̓bt=f i̓m=f sdꜣ.n=f wršw=f i̓m=f*

> "Be welcome in peace, youthful god, whom the West has borne, (and) who has come today from the Land of Life, (after) having removed his dust from himself, (after) having filled his body with magic, after having quenched his thirst with it, after having caused his watchmen to tremble with it".

This coffin addresses the deceased using the third person singular—a feature that is not an uncommon feature (e.g. B1P, S1C, S2C, S5C, B3Bo, B2Bo, B1L, B3L, B4L, B13C). However, certain coffins, such as T1Lᵃ and T1Lᵇ, employ the second person singular, indicating that this is a speech directly addressed to the deceased. The passage reveals that, prior to reaching the place where the gods await him, the individual has departed from the "Land of Life" (Willems, 2001, p. 266). This, combined with the fact that he is referred to as a "youthful god" (*nṯr rnpw*), leaves no doubt that the subject is a deceased individual. Indeed, the actions described as having occurred in the "Land of Life" strongly evoke the rituals of embalming and transfiguration (Assmann, 2005, p. 154).

In this passage Beautiful West is not directly addressed. Rather, her name is invoked by the gods to identify the deceased upon his arrival to the hereafter, where he is described as having been born of her. Notably, the deceased's identification is made through her rather than Osiris, despite the centrality of the paternal-filial relationship in this liturgy. The mother-son relationship is established through a perfect relative form of verb *msi̓* "to give birth" (*VÉgA*, w7626), suggesting a bond that transcends beyond the performative aspects of their relationship and point instead to a creative link: the deceased is the son of Beautiful West because she has given birth to him. The absence of the term *sꜣ* ("son" *VÉgA*, w4025) in this passage should not prevent such an interpretation, as the term is used elsewhere in the text.

In CT 32 (*CT* I, 105d-111b) Beautiful West is mentioned twice. In this spell, the speaker claims the attention of Osiris to let him know that his father has arrived at the god's abode and waits outside. He requests Osiris to inform Beautiful West of this arrival, suggesting—as Willems has already noted (2001, pp. 273-274)—that the goddess was inside the dwelling and, therefore, unaware of the presence of the deceased. Osiris conveys the message, after which Beautiful West delivers a speech to the deceased:

> *d(w)=k rḫ i̓mnt nfrt gb⁽ˢⁱᶜˀ⁾ i̓s pw ms.n=s n=k ḫnm.n=s mr.n=s sꜣ=k (s)ḏt(y)=k n i̓m=k i̓r.n=k ḏs=k sḏm nw m msḏrwy=ṯ i̓w i̓n wsi̓r r ḥmt i̓mnt i̓w m ḥtp i̓r(w=k) ḫpw(t) nfrw ḫnm(w)=i̓ ṯw ḫr(w)=s i̓mnt nfrt r i̓t=i̓ pf r ꜥḥꜥw=i̓ pf r ḫꜣy=i̓ pf r hꜣ.n=i̓ n=f pf i̓w=s r=s ḥs=t i̓m=f m škrwt=s n sndw (m) wꜣḥ(w) (n) sndw (n) sḥrtyw(ˀ) [i̓w] ḥtp(wt)=s dꜣ(=w) ḥr ꜥw=s ḏfꜣw(=s) m-ḫt=s ḏd=s (i̓)r=f mi̓ r=k i̓w i̓r(w)=k nṯr m šmsw [kꜣ] i̓mnt sꜥḥt=k ḫft st i̓b=k ṯwt gb⁽ˢⁱᶜˀ⁾ nb pr.*

> "May you inform Beautiful West that he is Geb,⁽ˢⁱᶜˀ⁾ whom she has borne for you, whom she has protected and whom she has loved, your son, your child of your flank, the one you have begotten yourself". "Hear this with your two ears", says Osiris to the Majesty of the West. "Be welcome in peace and may you have

good journeys while I protect you!" so says she, Beautiful West, to that father of mine, to that helper of mine, to that protector of mine, to that one whom I have descend, as she approaches to meet him with her adornments of *sndw*-cloth and a garland of *sndw*-cloth of *sḥrt*-gods. Offerings have been extended on her hands; her provisions are behind her. She says to him: "Come, welcome! May you turn yourself into a god in the following of the [Bull] of the West, your dignity being accordance with your desire. For you are Geb[sic?] of the Lord of the House!".

There are a few philological features on this spell that merit attention. Coffin B12C[b] replaces the expression *sꜣ=k* ("your son"), attested in the other coffins, with the name of the god Geb (see also *CT* I, 112c). Although this may be interpreted as a scribal error—who confused the signs G38 (*gb*) and G39 (*sꜣ*)—the possibility of an intentional identification cannot be entirely excluded, particularly when considered in light of the second part of the liturgy. In later sources, the god Geb is said to have raped his mother Tefnut and rebelled against his father Shu (von Lieven, 2015), which could explain the father's suspicion of his son in CT 38-41. Although the goddesses mentioned in that myth is Tefnut rather than Beautiful West, both entities can be interpreted as emanations of the Eye of Re (*LGG*, I, pp. 426-432; Refai, 1996). However, this hypothesis faces significant challenges. In the second part of the spell, it is the living son who is under suspicion, whereas the name Geb in CT 32 refers to the deceased father. Furthermore, there is no textual evidence indicating any misconduct towards the divine mother. While the merging of distinct mythological narratives cannot be entirely ruled out, the evidence more strongly supports the possibility of a scribal error.

It is worth noting that the exact translation of the sentence *škrwt=s n sndw (m) wꜣḥ(w) (n) sndw (n) sḥrtyw* is problematic. The interpretation proposed by Willems (2001, pp. 271-272, n. 69) has been adopted here, as it provides a more compelling solution (*cf*. Jürgens, 1995, pp. 272-273).

Spell 32 encapsulates all the principal features associated with Beautiful West in this liturgy. The speech is particularly significant, as the speaker seeks to construct a persuasive argument to convince the goddess—who is guarding the abode of Osiris— to grant the deceased access to it. In this context, it is not sufficient to be the identified merely as the son (*sꜣ*) of the god; the speaker must also establish a meaningful a relationship between Beautiful West and the deceased. He is not only the son of Osiris, but also of her. An intriguing variant appears in coffins B1P, S1C, and S2C, where it is the goddess Maat — rather than Beautiful West— who is said to have given birth to, protected, and loved the deceased (*CT* I, 106a-b). This is the only passage where a goddess other than Beautiful West assumes these roles. However, Maat and the goddess of the West are themselves closely connected, and may in this context represent different aspects of the same divine figure (Jankuhn, 1973; Refai, 1996, p. 28, n. 265). This variation may serve to reinforce the deceased's legitimacy to enter the domain of Osiris, by presenting him as the child of Maat —the embodiment of cosmic order— and thereby emphasising his status in the afterlife as "true of voice". Nevertheless, the paternal-filial relationship remains dominant in the narrative, as the ritualist states both that the deceased is the child of Osiris' flank and that the god is his sole begetter.

The speaker then adds that the goddess has protected and loved the deceased at an unspecified moment in his existence. From this point onward, this theme of protection becomes

a recurring motif throughout the liturgy. In most of the subsequent spells, Beautiful West reaffirms her role as the deceased's guardian. Indeed, in the following speech, the goddess herself proclaims herself to be the protector of her offspring (*CT* I, 107c-d).

The spell mentions that, at this point, Beautiful West approaches the deceased in her regalia, having received offerings (*CT*, I 109b-110a). It is unclear whether these offerings were presented by the ritualist or by the deceased—either as a gesture of veneration or as a means of securing her support (*cf.* Hsieh, 2022, p. 77). Regardless, the outcome is that Beautiful West invites the deceased to join those assembled around the body of Osiris (Willems, 2001, p. 274). The paternal-filial relationship is again emphasised when the goddess refers to the deceased as the "son of the Lord of the House"—an epithet that likely alludes to Osiris and his abode (Willems, 2001, p. 274; see also *LGG*, III, p. 630).

The next spell, CT 33, reinforces the scenario outlined in CT 30-32 (Willems, 2001, pp. 365-366), in which the deceased is travelling towards the place where the body of Osiris lies in order to revive him. Along the way, he encounters Beautiful West and other creatures. The speaker addresses these entities to introduce his father; however, on this occasion, he refers to the goddess who has born him as Isis (*CT* I, 112b-d):

mꜣw sw nṯrw ꜣḫ (pw) nṯr(y) ỉr.n wsỉr m sꜣ=f ỉr.n ꜣst m sḏt(y)=f

"See him, gods, the divine spirit, which Osiris has begotten as his son, which Isis has begotten as his child".

This passage leaves no doubt that Beautiful West should be identified in this liturgy with the goddess Isis acting as the mother of the deceased. It is also noteworthy that the verb used here to describe the act of giving birth is *ỉrỉ*, rather than *msỉ* as in the previous spell. Both verbs were used interchangeably during the Midddle Kingdom to refer to the act of begetting or giving birth, without clear semantic distinctions between them (Obsomer, 1993; Postel, 2009). Nevertheless, it is unusual for the same verb to be used to describe the generative act of both the father and the mother. This is particularly significant given that the spell explicitly names Isis, a goddess traditionally said to have "shaped" (*ṯs*) her child within her womb (Feucht, 2004). The use of the masculine suffix pronoun =*f* at the end of the passage introduces a degree of distance between Isis and the deceased as her offspring. However, other coffins (e.g. B1P, B2Bo, B1L, B3L) feature the feminine pronoun =*s*, reinforcing the notion that he is indeed the child of both divine figures.

The spell continues with a challenging passage (Willems, 2001, pp. 275-276, n. 88) in which the goddess appears to approach to the place where the gods and the deceased are assembled, and then give a welcoming speech to the latter (*CT* I, 113e-115c):

sḏꜣ.t(=s) r=s ꜥỉs.t ⁷ (ỉmnt) ḏs=s m ḥs.t m ỉt=ỉ pf m ꜥḥꜥw=ỉ pf m ḫꜣy=ỉ pf m hꜣ.n=ỉ n=f pf ỉm ỉmnt ḏd=sn r=f ỉw m ḥtp sꜣ=ỉ wbn(w) ꜥb ḫp m ḥtp ḫnm(w)=ỉ ṯw ỉw wḏ.n wsỉr

She has travelled, she, the tomb (?) (of the West) herself, (she) has praised that father of mine, that helper of mine, that protector of mine, that one to whom I have descended, (and) who is in the West. They say to him: "Be welcome in peace my son, whose horn is raised! Travel in peace, I will protect you! Osiris has commanded".

The word *iS.t* appears only in coffin B12Cᵇ (*CT* I, 114a). Although its spelling is unclear (Buck, 1935, p. 114, n. 4), most of the coffins (*i.e.* B1P, B3Bo, B2Bo, B1L, B3L, L2Li) read *ḥmt* "Majesty" (*VÉgA*, w9554) as in CT 32, which is likely the correct reading. In this context, however, *iS.t* may be interpreted as an identification between Beautiful West and *iS* ("tomb" *VÉgA*, w9356), from which the feminine ending.*t* derives. This reading is supported by the frequent appearance in the *Coffin Texts* of inanimate entities—particularly the tomb— speaking to the deceased (e.g. *CT* I, 182h). Another distinctive feature of this coffin, along with B13C, is the use of the plural suffix pronoun =*sn* following the verb *ḏd* to introduce the speech (*CT* I, 114b). The use of the plural form indicates that the following statement is delivered collectively by Beautiful West and other entities in the abode of Osiris. However, other coffins employ the singular pronoun =*s*, attributing the speech exclusively to Beautiful West (see also Willems, 2001, p. 276, n. 89). This singular attribution is further supported by the consistent use of singular suffix pronouns throughout the remainder of the speech.

This section opens with a declaration that Beautiful West has praised the deceased (*CT* I, 114a), followed by a speech in which she refers to him as *sꜢ=i* ("my son"), affirming the kinship link between both of them. The epithets *sꜢ=i wbn(w) ꜥb* ("my son whose horn is raised"; *CT* I, 115a), along with *iwn-mwt=f* ("pillar of his mother"; B3Bo and B2Bo), have been analysed by Willems (2001, pp. 281-282), who links them to the fifty-third and fifty-fifth invocations of the *Litany of Re* (Hornung, 1975, pp. 61, 63). These epithets reflect the transference of attributes from the sun god to the deceased (Hornung, 1976, pp. 22-23, 26-27). In these invocations the deceased is also associated with Beautiful West and other entities from the netherworld, with the former assuming the same protective role toward the deceased as described in CT 32 and CT 33. Similar epithets appear in the aforementioned utterance PT 254, in which the deceased is depicted travelling through the netherworld in order to reach the Fields of Offerings. On this basis, Willems (2001, p. 282) proposes that in CT 30-37, the deceased is envisioned in a dual role: both as a solar deity and as a traveller, navigating the netherworld to reach Osiris. The dual image of the deceased aligns closely with Assmann's conception of twofold nature of death (2005, pp. 173-174, 371- 372): the *imitatio solis*, in which the deceased seeks integration into the solar course of Re— a cosmic, cyclical journey that renews him with each cycle—, and the *imitatio Osiridis*, in which he seeks identification with Osiris, overcoming death as a personal adversary. These two images of death carry distinct symbolic meanings. In the *imitatio Osiridis*, the deceased aims to preserve his personal identity, titles, and moral character, achieving immortality as a social and ethical being (Assmann, 2005, p. 173). In contrast, the *imitatio solis* involves his regeneration as a new individual, through the shedding of his former life and a return to an "embryonic preexistence" (Assmann, 2005, p. 173). Assmann further associates these two conceptions with paternal and maternal principles: the paternal representing the linear time, cultural norms, and human agency; the maternal, the cyclical regeneration of nature and the reversible time of the cosmos. He describes their interaction as a complementary duality— *complexio oppositorum* (2005, p. 174). The *imitatio Osiridis* and its connection to the paternal principle, is evident throughout the entire liturgy. This study concurs with Willems' suggestion of the *imitatio solis*, but also expands upon it by emphasising that the deceased's identification with the solar deity necessarily requires a connection to the maternal principle, as outlined by Assman. This maternal aspect is embodied in the deceased's relationship with Beautiful West. Through the use of epithets, the goddess—acting as a mother figure—, enables the deceased to acquire the qualities of the solar deity via an eternal process of birth and regeneration.

In this welcoming speech, Beautiful West reiterates her commitment to safeguarding her son's journey. The passage introduces a noteworthy development: the goddess now states that her protective role has been commanded by Osiris—whereas, in an earlier spell, she undertook this duty voluntarily. However, the fact that Osiris now issues the directive does not undermine the goddess's maternal role. What remains essential is the fulfilment of this responsibility, irrespective of whether it is initiated autonomously or enacted by command (Ruddick, 1995, pp. 14-23).

The spell continues with the speaker greeting Beautiful West and affirming the connection between his father and the goddess, using terms similar to those previously discussed (*CT* I, 115d-117a):

> *ìnḏ ḥr=t ìmnt nfrt mt̠ ìt=ì pf ʿḥʿw= ì pf ḥꜣy= ì pf hꜣ.n=ì n=f pf ì=w ḥr=t ìnḏw=f ḥr=t r ʿ nb sꜣ(=t̠) ìs sḏt(y)=t̠ ìs ʿ=t̠ ¹ ms.n=t̠ n wsìr*

> "Greetings to you, Beautiful West! Look, that father of mine, that helper of mine, that protector of mine, that one to whom I have descended, has come to you, that he might greet you every day. For he is your son, your child, whom you have born for Osiris".

The speaker assures Beautiful West that her father will greet her daily—a gesture likely reflecting the social obligations between mother-son relationship in ancient Egypt (Feucht, 1995, pp. 144-149). The bond between the deceased and the goddess is established both biologically—through the verbal form *ms.n*—which at the same time links them with Osiris—and through kinship, as indicated by the term *sꜣ* and the feminine suffix pronoun *=t̠*. It is significant that Beautiful West acknowledges the deceased as her son, as this recognition confirms their kinship and, in doing so, activates the reciprocal duties associated with familial relationships in ancient Egyptian society (Olabarria, 2018; 2020b, pp. 77-93, 199-202). The fact that the speaker uses both terms consecutively, *sꜣ* and *sḏty*, may imply some semantic differences between them. The speaker's use of both *sḏty* in close succession may suggest a nuanced distinction between the two terms. The word *sḏty* ("child" *TLA* 150150) may, in this context, convey an image of the deceased as a vulnerable and dependent individual—traits typically associated with childhood in ancient Egyptian culture (Arbuckle Macleod, 2023, pp. 144-146; Díaz Vazquez, 2023, pp. 56-60; Marshall, 2013, pp. 66-68). This perceived vulnerability may in turn explain the emphasis on divine protection by the maternal figure.

The ritualist continues speaking, detailing to Beautiful West the journey his father has undertaken thus far. At this point, the father himself addresses the goddess directly to greeting her and explain the purpose of his presence. The spell concludes with Beautiful West reaffirming her commitment to his protection (*CT* I, 119d-121b):

> *ìnḏ ḥr=t ìmnt nfrt m šmsw t̠s-pḥr ì.n=ì ʿꜣ mry.n=ì dr.n=ì nkn n wsìr snwr=ì ḫft(y).w=f ḫp m ḥtp ẖnm(w)=ì t̠w ì(w).t ìn ìmnt nfrt ìt=ì pf ʿḥʿw=ì pf ḥꜣy=ì pf hꜣ.n=ì n=f pf.*

> "Greetings to you, Beautiful West in the following: greetings to you, oh following in Beautiful West! If I have come here is (because) I wished that I might remove the injury of Osiris, and that I might make his enemies tremble". "Travel in peace,

> I will protect you!" said Beautiful West to that father of mine, that helper of mine, that protector of mine, that one to whom I have descended.

Coffin B1P presents a noteworthy variant in which the goddess addresses the deceased directly after her welcoming speech (*CT* I, 121c-h [B1P]):

> *ḥ ꜥ(w)=s r=s m ḫsfw=f ḏd=s ir=f iw m ḥtp sb.n ṯw sꜣ=k tp(y) tꜣ bꜣ […] dr(w)=i iw=k sḏm=i mdw sꜣ=i nṯr(=w) ꜥpr(=w) ir(.w)=i sšm=k ḫft ḏd=f iw wḏ.n wsir […]=f r=k.*

> May she rejoice at his approach (and) say to him: "Be welcome in peace, your son upon earth, […] *ba*, has sent you, that I might expel your impurity, that I might hear the word of my divine, provided son, and that I might carry out your guidance according as he says. Osiris has commanded […] to you".

According to this passage, Beautiful West guides the deceased through the netherworld thanks to the words spoken by the ritualist. Notably, the goddess' actions are not undetaken of her own volition but are again carried out under mandate. A command issued by Osiris is referenced again at the conclusion of the spell; however, due to the damage in this section, the precise nature of the command remains uncertain.

Spell 34 is divided into two distinct parts: the first, and longer section (*CT* I, 122a-126c), features the words of Beautiful West, who enables the deceased to see Osiris and to travel to Abydos. She then invites the deceased to witness a series of ritual activities performed by various deities, all of which are associated with sacred practices (Willems, 2001, pp. 288-291). The phrase she repeats at the beginning of each stanza—*d(w)=i mꜣ.n=k* "May I cause you to see" (*CT* I, 122a)—underscores her status as a powerful figure with both authority and capacity to reveal divine actions to the deceased (Willems, 2001, p. 285, n. 131). This authority is enhanced in the second part, in which the ritualist resumes speaking. He urges the gods to heed Beautiful West, while also declaring himself the heir of his father (Willems, 2001, pp. 291-292) (*CT* I, 127b-128a):

> *mꜣ(w) nw nṯrw n mdw imnt nfrt r it=i pf r ꜥḥꜥw=i pf r ḫꜣy=i pf r hꜣ.n=i n=f pf m-m im3ḫw b□gy*

> Take heed, oh gods, of the words of Beautiful West to that father of mine, to that helper of mine, to that protector of mine, to that one to whom I have descended among the venerated ones!

The following spell contains no reference to Beautiful West. Spell 35 consists of comprised commands originally issued by Osiris, but now spoken by the ritualist (*CT* I, 129a-134c). Ogdon (1982, p. 40) and Jürgens (1995, p. 285, n. 51) proposed that these orders may have been recited by Beautiful West, however, Willems (2001, p. 294) correctly argued that they must have been delivered by the ritualist, who had been speaking at the conclusion of the preceding spell. Moreover, Beautiful West never serves as a narrative voice in this liturgy.

The ritualist continues his speech in spell 36 (*CT* I, 135a-140g), directly addressing Osiris to summarise the journey undertaken by the deceased—his father—and to convey the latter's intentions towards the god. Following this, Osiris instructs Beautiful West to receive the deceased, echoing the ritualist's words (*CT* I, 141a-142b). In response, Beautiful West asks the god how the deceased should be brought before him, to which Osiris replies that he is

to approach as a divine spirit, specifying several rites that must be performed (*CT* I, 142c-144g). Within this section, a reference is made to the conception of the deceased (*CT* I, 141a-143d):

> *šsp sw dỉ ꜥḳ(w)=f ḥr=ỉ ỉ ỉn wsỉr n ỉmnt nfrt rnn sw mꜣṯ sw dỉ n=ṯ sw m-ẖnw ꜥwy=ṯ ḏr-wn.t=f ꜥpr m ỉw nsrsr ỉbs sw ḥr=ỉ kf n=f bꜣgy=ỉ ỉ ỉn wsỉr dỉ mꜣn=f sḳrw=ỉ ỉ ỉn wsỉr ỉỉ(.n)=f r=f mỉ ỉšst ꜣẖt pn mꜣw=tỉ ỉ.t ỉn ỉmnt nfrt ꜥḳ(w)=f m sꜥḥ=f n ꜥẖ nṯr sꜥḥt=k m pr spdt sbnnt=k m ḥwt wr kꜣw šsp(w)=k nṯrwt m ḥwt kꜣ ḥḏ ỉm ẖrt-nṯr.*

> "Receive him, let him enter to(wards) me!" Osiris says to Beautiful West. "Praise him, proclaim him, place him in your two arms, for he has been equipped in the Island of Fire. Introduce him to me, reveal to him my weakness", says Osiris, "(and) allow him to see my wounds", says Osiris. "In what manner will he come, this new spirit?" says Beautiful West. "May he enter in his dignity of divine spirit. Your dignity (comes) from the House of Sothis, your conception from the House of the Great Cattle, may you accept the divine status in the House of the White Bull in the necropolis".

Coffin B12C^b employs the masculine second person suffix pronoun (=*k*) at the end of this section to indicate how the deceased has attained the divine status. Although Osiris previously referred to the deceased in the third person while addressing Beautiful West, the mention of the necropolis, along with the presence of the deceased's name in coffin L2Li, confirms that the god is now addressing the deceased directly. The structure of the passage suggests that both the acquisition of dignity in the House of Sothis and the conception of the deceased in the House of the Great Cattle has already been taken place (Willems, 2001, pp. 302-303, n. 204, 306). Unfortunately, the spell does not specify what or where this place is, nor by whom and how this conception occurred. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the mere conception of the deceased is portrayed as central to the deceased's attainment of divine status—implying that the place and agents involved in this act are themselves already imbued with divine authority.

The spell concludes with Beautiful West complying with Osiris's command, greeting the deceased, and reaffirming her commitment to safeguarding his journey (*CT* I, 145b-145e):

> *ỉ nṯr sꜣ(w) tꜣ ẖp m ḥtp nfr ẖnm(w)=ỉ ṯw ỉ.t ỉn ỉmnt nfrt r ỉt=ỉ pf r mẖy=ỉ pf r ꜥẖꜥw=ỉ (pf r) ẖꜣy=ỉ pf r hꜣ.n=ỉ n=f pf*

> "The god came, the one who guards the earth! Travel in good peace while I protect you" says Beautiful West to that father of mine, that guardian of mine, that helper of mine, that protector of mine, that one to whom I have descended.

Finally, Beautiful West is not mentioned in spell 37. This incantation begins with passages repeated from spell 36 —including the conception of the deceased in the House of the Great Cattle (*CT* I, 146d)—as well as statements from spell 35, outlining a sequence of ritual acts that the deceased must undergo to ultimately enter into the abode of Osiris (*CT* I, 151a).

5. Tracing motherhood practice in earthly and divine realms

The analysis of Beautiful West's role in CT 30-37 allows us to trace specific maternal practices in ancient Egypt, offering insight and additional evidence regarding how these practices were enacted.

Throughout the liturgy, Beautiful West's maternal identification is established through two different channels: the use of the term *s3* in reference to the deceased (*CT* I, 115a, 117a, 121f), and the employment of gestational and birthing verbs like *msỉ* (CT I, 89b, 106a, 117a) and *ỉrỉ* (CT I, 112d). In the context of the Middle Kingdom, this maternal link is corroborated by additional evidence. Numerous stelae from this period employ these verbs in filiation formulae and referred to the women mentioned therein as mothers (*mwt*) elsewhere in the text (Simpson, 1974, *passim*; Stefanović and Satzinger, 2019, *passim*). This feature in the liturgy offers compelling support for the intrinsic—though not necessarily exclusive—connection between the acts of childbirth and the status of motherhood in ancient Egypt (Teeter, 2017, pp. 147-154). It is important to note that such a correlation is not universal. In many other cultural contexts, the link between birthing and motherhood is far more complex and less rigidly defined (Aranzadi Martínez, 2008, pp. 89-93; Carsten, 2004; O'Reilly, 2014; Rebay-Salisbury *et al.*, 2023; Rich, 1986; Ruddick, 1995; Sánchez Romero and Cid López, 2018).

Beautiful West is described performing three main actions towards the deceased: love, praise, and—above all—protection. These tasks have traditionally been associated with the maternal practice in Western societies (Ruddick, 1995, pp. 17-19; Smith, 2003), and evidence suggests they were likewise enacted by mothers in ancient Egypt. With regard to love and praise, it is important to note that most surviving texts were composed by men and for male audiences. Consequently, they are typically more expressive concerning the sentiments of sons towards their mothers (see, for example, *The Satire of Trades*, pBM EA 10182 [4,5], in Brunner, 1944, p. 105). Nevertheless, there are glimpses of maternal affection expressed in the opposite direction. Praise, in particular, was a trait often attributed to mothers. This is evident, for example, in the officials' autobiographies, where a conventional formula frequently states that an individual was loved (*mry*) by their father and praised (*ḥsy*) by their mother (Lichtheim, 1988, *passim*). By contrast, explicit expressions of maternal love in textual sources are more elusive. Nevertheless, some sources do affirm such affection. For instance, the late Fifth dynasty official Khuwiwer inscribed in the antechamber of his tomb at Giza the phrase *mry ỉt=f mry mwt=f* ("I was one beloved by his father and beloved by his mother"; Hassan, 1944, p. 241; for further examples see pLouvre 3092, col. 592 in Carrier, 2014, p. 236 and Feucht, 2016, pp. 209-210).

Protecting the group was one of the primary responsibilities of the male head of the household (Eyre, 2016, p. 164; Franke, 2006, pp. 160-165; Olabarria, 2020b, pp. 71-74, 86). Indeed, the speaker repeatedly affirms throughout the liturgy that his father acted as his protector (*CT* I, 93b, 103a, 108a, 114a, 121b, 127b, 135b, 145e, 152a). However, this protective role is more difficult to identify in relation to mothers within the textual record. Despite this, several divine mothers are renowned for their protective actions towards their children. One prominent example is Nut, who is described as *ḫnmt wrt* ("The great encloser/unifier"; Billing, 2002, pp. 179-180; *LGG*, VI, 21). The term *ḫnm* (*VÉgA*, w8893), used in this liturgy in reference to Beautiful West, is polysemous, encompassing meanings such as "embrace", "join", and "protect". In the case of goddesses like Nut, these meanings

appear intrinsically linked: she protects her son—the deceased—by embracing him (Arnette, 2020, pp. 124-125, 334-336; Morales, 2017, pp. 160-161, n. 367).

Of particular relevance to this discussion is the role of the goddess Isis as protector of her son Horus, since Beautiful West is identified with her in this liturgy. While Isis—along with Hathor—is traditionally regarded as the archetypal wife and protective mother (Teeter, 2017, pp. 155-156), the sources reveal a more nuanced reality. For example, in CT 148, a spell recounting the conception and birth of Horus, Isis pleads for protection from Atum-Re (*CT* II, 213c-215a, 218b-219b) (Münster, 1968, pp. 6-8; O'Connell, 1983, pp. 73-74), suggesting that she alone cannot fully shield Horus from the threat posed by Seth. However, the spell concludes with Horus claiming that his mother protected him when he was in the "egg" (*swḥt*) (*CT* II, 225b), a term that is associated with the womb in other spells (Arnette, 2020, p. 67). Isis's protective role during Horus's childhood is well attested. Chapter 157 of the *Book of Going Forth By Day*, for example, recounts how she hides her newborn and vows to destroy his enemies (Carrier, 2009, pp. 675-676). Numerous episodes highlight her maternal care, including the well-known tale in which Horus is stung by a scorpion (pChester Beatty VII, rt. 6,4; Gardiner, 1935, p. 60, pl. 35). Yet in many cases—this one included—Isis acts not as a preventive protector, but rather as a healer after harm has already occurred (Münster, 1968, p. 12). Despite this ambivalence, Isis was widely venerated as a protective deity for both mothers and children, and she is regularly invoked in protective spells (e.g. pBerlin 3027, rt. 2,6-10 [spell D], vs. 6,1-7 [spell V]; Erman, 1901, pp. 14-15, 50-52; Yamazaki, 2003, pp. 16-17, 52-55).

However, the same protective nature is not as easily discerned in references to earthly mothers. This prompts the question of what we mean by "protection", particularly when the term *ḫnm* is employed. A mother who nourished, bathed, and cared for her child (pAni B 20,18-21,13; Quack, 1994, pp. 108-111, 315) was, in effect, protecting the child from malnutrition, illness, or emotional neglect. The latter concept is particularly significant in relation to the gesture of embracing, given the previously discussed polysemy of *ḫnm* discussed previously. This is highlighted by the frequent depictions of mothers embracing their children (e.g. Malaise, 1977, p. 185; Wen, 2022, pp. 174-179; Whale, 1989, pls. 1, 3), a pose which ancient Egyptians may interpreted not merely as a sign of affection, but also as a protective act. Indeed, even Beautiful West is explicitly commanded to take the deceased into her arms (*CT* I, 141d). However, if one considers more direct actions aimed at protecting children from specific threats—as Beautiful West is portrayed doing in this liturgy—the role of earthly mothers appears less prominent. While some texts portray earthly mothers as taking actions with the ultimately aiming at safeguarding their children, they are not necessarily depicted as those who provide final protection. For example, a letter written by the Eighteenth dynasty Ahmose of Peniati to the treasurer Tai concerns a young servant (*bȝkt*) who was initially in his service but was later taken by Tai and given to an unknown individual (Peet, 1926). Ahmose expresses his regret over the loss of the girl's service and further notes that her mother has lodged a complaint, which he now conveys to Tai. Both Ahmose and the mother refer to the girl as a *šrỉt nḏs* ("child"), with the former emphasising that "she cannot work" (*nn rḫ=s bkȝw*), a statement that may imply that the tasks assigned to her were excessive for someone of her age. The mother's complaint initiates this correspondence, seemingly as an attempt to safeguard her daughter's well-being. A comparable appeal is found in four spells in pBerlin 3027 (vs. 2,7-3,3 [spell Q], vs. 3,3-7 [spell R], vs. 3,8-4,2 [spell S], vs. 4,2-6 [spell T]; Erman, 1901, pp. 40-45; Yamazaki, 2003,

pp. 42-47), in which a mother petitions the god Re for protection against a malevolent entity intent on taking her child. These spells were not intended for the mother to be recited directly, as indicated by the insertion of the phrase "so says NN" after her speech (vs. 3,5; vs. 4,1; vs. 4,4; Yamazaki, 2003, p. 43). Nevertheless, it appears that the mother's plea appears to be the catalyst for the performance of the ritual. Thus, earthly mothers did act to protect their children, even if such protection was not always their primary role and their methods were less direct. It remains essential, however, to acknowledge the male bias inherent in many of the surviving sources, which may have shaped and limited the textual the portrayal of maternal agency in protective contexts.

6. Final Reflection

Spells 30-37 formed part of a mortuary liturgy embedded within a very specific social and religious context. The main figures—the ritualist, the deceased, and Osiris—are envisioned within a triadic relationship, each linked by a successive patrilineal descent as son to father. Their respective roles and actions reflected the social obligations binding fathers and sons during the Middle Kingdom, particularly in the context of death and its aftermath.

Nevertheless, there was another figure—Beautiful West—played an essential role in enabling the deceased to attain his final goal, while simultaneously embodying one of the most central kinship roles in ancient Egyptian society: that of the mother.

Beautiful West's acknowledgment of the maternal-filial relationship enables the deceased to receive the goddess's protection and assistance throughout his journey in the afterlife (*CT* I, 107d, 115b, 121a, 145c). This divine protection ensures his safe passage to Osiris's abode, where he is to play a role in the god's restoration. Moreover, it grants him the privilege of witnessing a series of sacred rites performed by deities in the hereafter (*CT* I, 123a-126c). In return, the deceased pledges to greet her daily (*CT* I, 116b-c), thereby establishing a reciprocal relationship which underscores his reverence for the mother deity.

The role of Beautiful West in this liturgy was essential to fulfil its ultimate purpose, reflecting a *complexio oppositorum* that allowed the deceased to attain the afterlife as a renewed being and as a social individual. Furthermore, it also highlights the duties and roles associated with both, mothers, and sons in ancient Egypt. The figure of Beautiful West was conceived not only as a reflection of motherhood in ancient Egyptian society, but also as an idealized model of it—embodying the key qualities of love, praise, and protection. Religions produce and perpetuate discourses on motherhood that shape their respective contexts (Pasche Guignard, 2021). Particularly, male-dominated religious systems—including, to some extent, ancient Egyptian religion (Borges Pires, 2024; Onstine, 2010, pp. 3-4, 6)—frequently adopt female figurines as sacred symbols and idealised models for secular mothers to emulate, thereby reinforcing prescribed specific social norms (Sered, 1999; see also the example of Virgin Mary in Warner, 2013). This creation of sacred female symbolism—like any deity—stems from human practices (Chakrabarty, 1997, pp. 40-41), imbued with the values upheld by prevailing politico-religious structures. While deities are not necessarily constrained by such human constructs (Kohn, 2013, p. 216; Sered, 1999, pp. 196-197), Beautiful West—especially in this liturgy, where she is identified with Isis—embodies an ideal of motherhood. This ideal finds echoes in secular Egyptian texts and iconography, which reflect comparable representations. However, the distinction between divine and human motherhood must be acknowledge. This study reveals that, although divine mothers are occasionally depicted as active protectors of their offspring, human mother

rarely exhibit the same level of agency. Rather, they tend to assume a secondary role, acting mostly as intermediaries. Thus, divine, and human motherhood operate within distinct ontological frameworks. This difference elevates the symbolic figure of the divine mother as an unattainable ideal, positioning human mothers in a state of inherent subordination by comparison relative.

In the context of ancient Egypt, this reflection-model dynamic has been examined in prior studies, particularly through the lens of material culture—such as stelae—highlighting the reciprocal influence between human subjects and their objects (Olabarria, 2020b, pp. 16-22, 56). Material culture profoundly shapes social actors, whose reality is embedded within a network of object-human relations. These objects are not merely passive symbols; rather they play an active role in forming both individual and collective identities (Olabarria, 2020b, p. 56). In this light, I propose that the liturgical texts—inscribed on coffins and recited in rituals, thereby possessing both material and performative dimensions—functioned not only as a reflection of, but also as active agents in shaping cultural conceptions of kinship and motherhood, transmitting these values across generations. The life of the netherworld was not merely conceptualised as an extension on earthly practices (Willems, 2001, p. 369); it also functioned as a medium through which these practices were communicated and reinforced among the population. Accordingly, this liturgy reaffirms the portrayal of Beautiful West as a loving and protective mother, highlighting the idealised maternal role of a woman whose duty is to safeguard and nurture her child as an integral aspect of their upbringing. In doing so, it contributes to the wider cultural construction of motherhood as institution within ancient Egyptian society (Rich, 1986).

Given the limited direct evidence available to fully understand the motherhood practices in ancient Egypt, an analytical re-examination of religious texts through the lens of gender and motherhood studies may yield new insights into these roles and practices.

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Specific contribution of the authors

The author is the only responsible of this research.

Abbreviations

CGC. *Catalogue géneral des antiquités égyptiennes du Musee du Caire.*

CT. *Coffin Texts.*

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