

“The Dispute of a man with his Ba”, “A Dispute over suicide”, “Debate between a man tired of life and his soul,” are some of the titles given to a famous work preserved in a single manuscript on a hieratic papyrus (Berlin Papyrus 3024) from the 12th Dynasty.

The first transcription & translation was by Adolf Erman in 1896. Since then numerous translations have been attempted.

Faulkner published his translation as: ***“The Man who was tired of Life”*** in 1956. His work was based on more recent philological insights.

In 1969, Wilfrid Barta studied the work. He took 37 translations into account. He stressed the difficulties posed by the text, understood by him as unparalleled among the texts of Ancient Egypt.

In 1973, Miriam Lichtheim (who described this text as exceedingly difficult and intriguing) proposed a new translation, but she acknowledged that a great variety of interpretations are possible. In 1978, Bika Reed translated the text from the perspective of the initiatic experience. Another translation in French was done by Claire Lalouette in 1984.


The attempt to translate the text from the perspective of the contemporary perception of the mentality of ancient Egyptians has “engendered a great deal of controversy” and has produced “widely diverging translations”, as Lichtheim writes, resulting in no commonly accepted, comprehensible interpretation of the text for the time being.


This translation is based on the perceived mentality of the authors of the funerary texts.


Most of the translations, if not all of them, agree on the point that the Ba is reluctant to help the man whose dream is to attain the West, to go to the West.

According to the funerary texts the West can only be reached by those who manage to go through the test of Judgment successfully.

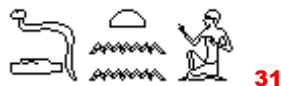
The man wants to be judged! This fact cannot go unnoticed and, as a consequence of this, Wilson writes: *“He then longs for the advocacy of the gods and conceives of himself as pleading his case before a divine tribunal.”*

The man, having not yet been judged, is considered to belong to the subhuman class of the *mt* ().

His Ba, having been judged, enjoys a better position as a member of the rank of the *Wearies* () , who are considered humans, although primitive.

At the top rank of the social ladder, which is described in the funerary texts, resides the aristocracy, the patricians, who are known as the *Living*s ().

The Ba, who acts as a defense witness during the process of the Judgment (which is the reason the man does not want to be abandoned by his Ba), is of the opinion that the man cannot qualify to be recognized as a *Living* -which the man so fervently desires- and that he is but a lower class human, as he himself is. He therefore asks him the following two questions:



ddt.n n=i
said to me

31



b3 =i
Ba mine

What my ba said to me:



n
not



ntk
thou



is
indeed



s
man?

Are you not a (common) man?

The answer "yes" is expected. (Grammar §491.3)



iw
are



=k
you



tr
pray

32



nh.t(i)
a Living?

Here the answer "no" is expected. (Grammar §491.3)



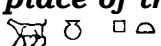
Are you not alive? (Lichtheim)

Indeed you are alive, (Faulkner)

Art thou... whilst thou livest? (Wilson)


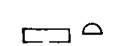
According to the Wörterbuch the term *nhw* is used basically for "the living ones", as contrasted to the deceased, and it is also used for "the men" in general.

However, when used as a noun: "**The Livings**" it refers only to the aristocracy, the patricians, the gods (*nh msw.t*, **born Living** or **Living by birth** was an epithet for gods and Kings). Thus, the expression *rdi nh n nhw*, **provide with life the Livings** refers to a part of the humanity and not to all men alive, as it also happens with the expression *nhw tpw B*, **the Livings upon earth**, which obviously refers

to those gods that are on the earth (there are gods in *kbhw*, , **the place of the cool waters**, in *imntt*, , **the West (bank)** and also in *hnw pt*, , **the residence of the heavens**).

niwt nt nhw, means **the city of the Livings**, and *pr n nhw*, **the house of the Livings**.

Osiris is called *nb nhw*, , **Lord of the Livings**.

3nh.t(i), , means **thou art a living (now)** as *pr.t(i)*, , means **thou art come**. "You were not here before", "You were not a Living before".

There follows an example with the term $w^c b$, *pure, clean* (old perfective $w^c b.t(i)$):

Pyr. 837

$w^c b$ $=k$	$w^c b$ $k3 = k$
pure thou	pure ka thy

Pyr. 839

$w^c b.t(i)$	$w^c b$	$k3 = k$
pure thou art	pure	ka thy

Pyr. 837...
 translated by James Allen: *become clean, let your ka become clean*

Pyr. 839...
 translated by James Allen: *you are clean, your ka is clean*

A person who was not an $3nh$, could be recognized as such by the tribunal, by the judging gods, and be then called an $3nh.ti$ (once known as “pseudo-participle”). The gods belong to the $3nh$ race by birth. A passage in the Coffin texts reads:

Thus said Atum: Tefenet is my living daughter, and she shall be with her brother Shu; “Living One” is his name.

(Faulkner, The Coffin Texts, Spell 80 §32)

The man’s goal is to be recognized as an $3nh$, **a Living**, but he cannot answer “yes” to the second question above and, apparently, that is the reason for the Ba asking him next why is he bothering with the rank of the **Living**s, the patricians, in the way that men of wealth do:

ptr	km $=k$	mhy	$=k$
what is	profit yours	being concerned	you

What do you gain by complaining (Lichtheim)
but what do you profit? yet you yearn (Faulkner)
What is thy goal? Thou art concerned (Wilson)

hr	$3nh$	mi	nb	$h^c w$
about	Living	as	lord	of wealth

about life like a man of wealth? (Lichtheim)
yet you yearn for life like a man of wealth? (Faulkner)
with [living] like a possessor of wealth (Wilson)

Resulting translation of columns 31 to 33

**My Ba said to me:
Aren't you a common man?
Are you, pray, been made into a Living?
What do you gain by being concerned with attaining
the social status of a Living as a rich man does?**

A sentence, in spell 875 of the Coffin Texts, reads: ***I go out into the day in my living shape.*** The phrase ***I go out into the day***, *pṛt m hrw*, was, according to Wallis Budge, the common name for the Book of the Dead in the Theban period, and probably also before this date. He wrote: "These words have been variously translated: "***Manifested in the light.***" "***Coming forth from the day,***" "***Coming forth by day,***" "***La manifestation au jour,***" "***La manifestation à la lumière,***" "***Erzcheinen am Tage,***" etc."

The Book of the Dead consists of prayers which are supposed to have been answered, of dreams and wishes which are thought to have already been realized. Thus, the situation described is the one that the so-called "justified" enjoy after their judgment.

Those awaiting judgment appear to live in a hot, dry and dark place while the West is clearly described as a cool place full of running waters and light. The phrase *pṛt m hrw*, ***going out into the day*** or ***going out into the light***, therefore, meant "***I have been judged. I was found to be pure, and I have passed from the darkness to the light. I reached the West***".

In column 77 of the Dispute text the phrase in question appears as *pṛt m imnt*, ***going out into the West***, so that there is almost no doubt that by "day" and "light" is meant the West.

The verdict depended upon the appearance, the shape, the bodily characteristics of the judged one. The duty of the judges was to decide whether the appearance of the man was that of an *mt*, a *Weary* or a *Living*.

From both the funerary texts and the text of the "Dispute" it is deduced that the ones found to be *mt* were executed on the spot and that the *Living*s were transported by bark to the West. The *Wearies*, although surviving judgment, they were definitely not transported to the West according to the Dispute text, but it is extremely difficult to come to this conclusion by studying the funerary texts. For this reason the opinion of Wallis Budge on the matter should be taken into account.

He wrote in his book "Egyptian Religion": *There seems to have been no idea of a general judgment when all those who had lived in the world should receive their reward for the deeds done in the body; on the contrary, all the evidence available goes to show that each soul was dealt with individually, and was either permitted to pass into the Kingdom of Osiris and of the blessed, or was destroyed straightway. Certain passages in the texts seem to suggest the idea of the existence of a place for*

departed spirits wherein the souls condemned in the judgment might dwell, but it must be remembered that it was the enemies of Ra, the Sun god, that inhabited this region; and it is impossible to imagine that the divine powers who presided over the judgment would permit the souls of the wicked to live after they had been condemned and to become enemies of those who were pure and blessed.

It must be noted that the soul in no passage of the funerary texts appears to be the one being judged. On the scale is always placed the *ib* heart of the person being judged which represents the body of his mother –see below column 77 of the Dispute text.

One more phrase worth mentioning is a formula familiar from letters to the dead which is found in Spell 825 of the Coffin Texts: *iw hrt = k m ʿnh*, **Your condition is that of a Living**. «**Your condition is that of one who lives fully**», translates Faulkner, because to inform the dead that his condition is that of one who lives, was obviously considered an extravagant notion even for the ancient Egyptians. By “**lives fully**” Faulkner means “lives eternally” but that is not what is written in the texts.

Returning to the text of the Dispute we read:

			77		
<i>n</i>	<i>rm</i>	<i>=i</i>		<i>n tf3</i>	<i>mst</i>
not	weep	I		for that	mother

I do not weep for that mother (Lichtheim)

<i>nn n=s</i>	<i>prt</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>imnt</i>
not for her (who)	is going / went out	into	the West



for whom there is no coming from the West (Lichtheim)
there is no coming forth from the West for her (Wilson)
who has no more going forth from the West (Faulkner)

analyzing *nn n=s*,

nn, = the common word for **not**, *n=s*, = **for her**


<i>r</i>	<i>kt</i>	<i>hr</i>	<i>t3</i>
for	another	(who is) on	earth

for another being-on-earth (Lichtheim)
for another (term) upon earth; (Faulkner)
for another (time) on earth. (Wilson)


78  *mhy* = *i*
concerned am I  *hr* = *s*
for children hers

I grieve for her children (Lichtheim)
I sorrow rather for her children (Faulkner)
(But) I am concerned about her (unborn) children, (Wilson)




79  *sd.w* *m* *swht*
break, inflict wound in egg
broken in the egg (Lichtheim, Faulkner, Wilson)

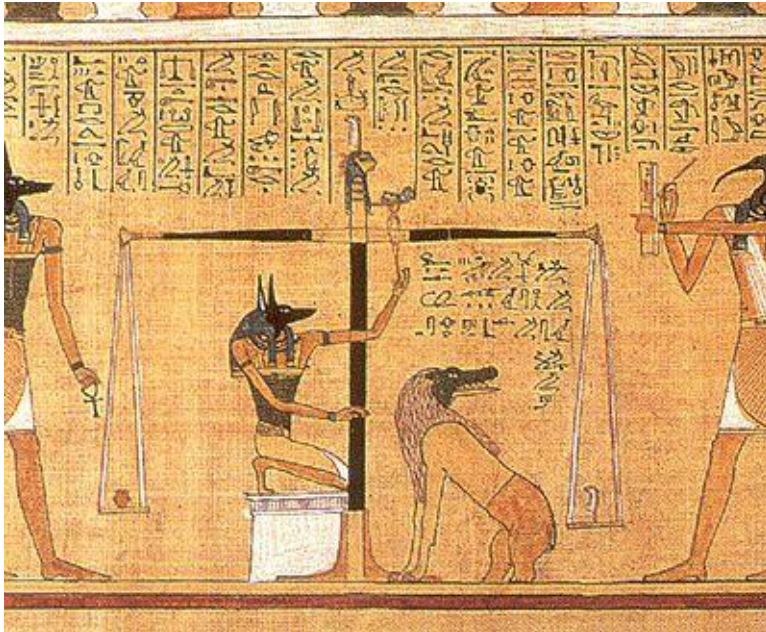
 *m3.w* *hr* *hnty*
seeing face of god Khenty
who have looked in the face of the crocodile god (Faulkner)

who have seen the face of crocodile (Lichtheim)
who saw the face of the crocodile god (Wilson)

80  *n* *nh.t(i)* = *sn*
not are Livings they

before they have lived (Lichtheim)
ere they have lived. (Faulkner)
before they had (even) lived (Wilson)

Khenty, , means **foremost, at the head of**, here it appears as the name of a god because of the determinative sign, , meaning *god*. The crocodile, , represents *Ammit*, the crocodile-headed figure present at the Hall of Judgment, who is the executioner of the condemned *mt*.



His name, ζmmt , means *Devourer of the mt*.



It should be noted that the phrase $n \zeta nh.t(i) = sn$, , “**they were not Livings**” appears to serve the purpose of a justification of the killing of the children: *they were not found to be Livings and as a consequence they were killed as mt*.

The children of the mother who reached the West are safe, as the mother was a *Living* and bore children who were found to be *Livings*. That other mother, who did not qualify as a *Living*, who was a *Weary* or even an *mt*, she bore children who were not *Livings*, children who were condemned in the judgment and killed.






Resulting translation of columns 76 to 80:

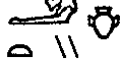




***I am not weeping for that mother
 who went out into the West,
 but for that other one who remained behind.
 I grieve for her children who met an early death
 facing the crocodile,
 as they were not Livings.***








According to the funerary texts the *ib* heart of a person represents the bodily traits inherited from his mother and the *h3ty* heart the resulting bodily identity which is a product of the mixture of maternal and fraternal body traits.

By evaluating the *ib* heart on the scales (in the judgment), the quality of the *h3ty* heart is decided.

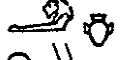






The first two verses of a prayer found in chapter 30B of the Book of the Dead read:

				
<i>ib</i>	= <i>i</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>mwt</i>	= <i>i</i>
ib heart	mine	of	mother	mine

				
<i>h3ty</i>	= <i>i</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>hprw</i>	= <i>i</i>
h3ty heart	mine	of	shape	mine

The sign of the mummy  in the word *hprw*, **shape**,      , is used to denote likeness.

Another description of the *h3ty* heart is the following:

						
<i>h3ty</i>	= <i>i</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>wn</i>	= <i>i</i>	<i>tp</i>	<i>t3</i>
h3ty heart	mine	of	existence	mine	upon	earth

(The Book of the Dead, Chapter 30A, plate 16, line 2)

**O my heart which I had from my mother,
O my heart of my form.
Do not stand up against me in judgment.**

(The Book of the Dead, Ch. 30B, plate III, line 7)

If his mother was the one that remained behind (on earth, according to the text), his *ib* heart, his mother's blood, his mother's flesh, would stand up against him in judgment. So he prays for that not to happen hoping that his mother was the one who **went out into the West**.