

The Body as a Toolbox in Ancient Egypt The Human Body and some Aspects of its Functionality

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Abstract

This article is the revised version of a presentation at the International Workshop “The Body as a Toolbox” (Cologne, October 2018). It can discuss only some aspects of body conceptions in Ancient Egypt and will focus on few anthropological issues. An overview of the Ancient Egyptian idea of man will be given, including corporal as well as intellectual and social aspects. These aspects are not only to be considered separately, but intertwined. First, the Ancient Egyptian idea of the origin of human beings and its basic condition (anthropogenesis) will be presented, because it represents the reflection on human nature (anthropology). This nature comprises different aspects (Corporeality/ *Ka/ Ba/ Heart/ Name/ Shadow* und *Ach*), which need a short introduction. Then the human body will be described with regard to its capabilities of perception and interaction. At this point we also talk about single body parts as symbol for special skills. Ancient Egyptian sources also combine body parts with material culture. Finally, the idea of human beings’ ambivalence or its complexity will be illustrated by a primary source (The Struggle between Horus and Seth).

Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel ist die Ausarbeitung eines Vortrages, den ich beim Internationalen Workshop “The Body as a Toolbox” (Köln, Oktober 2018) gehalten habe. Diese Abhandlung kann lediglich einige Aspekte altägyptischer Vorstellungen zum Körper behandeln und wird sich auf einige anthropologische Fragestellungen fokussieren. Es wird ein Überblick über das altägyptische Menschenbild gegeben, wobei sowohl körperliche als auch geistige und soziale Aspekte angesprochen werden. Diese Aspekte sind nicht nur getrennt voneinander zu betrachten, sondern interagieren miteinander. Zunächst wird die altägyptische Vorstellung vom Ursprung des Menschen und dessen Rahmenbedingungen (Anthropogenese) vorgestellt, da diese als Ergebnis der Reflektion über die Beschaffenheit des Menschen (Anthropologie) zu sehen sind. Diese Beschaffenheit umfasst verschiedene Aspekte (Leib/ *Ka/ Ba/ Herz/ Name/ Schatten* und *Ach*), die kurz erläutert werden. Anschließend wird der menschliche Körper v.a. im Hinblick auf seine Wahrnehmungs- und Interaktionsfähigkeiten beschrieben. Hier werden auch einzelne Körperteile als Symbole für bestimmte Kompetenzen angesprochen. In altägyptischen Quellen werden diese auch mit der materiellen Kultur in Verbindung gebracht. Schließlich wird die altägyptische Vorstellung von der Ambivalenz beziehungsweise der Komplexität des Menschen anhand einer Primärquelle (Der Kampf zwischen Horus und Seth) exemplarisch veranschaulicht.

1. Einleitung

- <1> To use parts of the body to act seems obvious. But indeed today the ‘Body as a Toolbox’ is no longer a matter of course. In fact we make use of tools to define our body. To optimize the body is not vitally important anymore but rather prestigious. Corporeality remains an important factor worldwide, although various civilizations in space and time have different perceptions of the human body. Therefore the topic of the Workshop ‘The Body as a Toolbox’ was an interesting subject for interdisciplinary discussions and it was a pleasure to participate in it.
- <2> The human body is the centre of an individual’s cosmos and consequently corporeality plays an important role in every culture. Because of its relevance the ‘Body as a Toolbox’ has long

been an object of research in Egyptology.¹ This paper can discuss only some aspects of body conceptions in Ancient Egypt and will focus on few anthropological issues.

There are good reasons for inventing extra-corporeal tools. They work as extensions of the body or as substitutes for bodily deficiencies of human beings. This leads us to the question of human self-perception a) as creatures within the cosmos and b) as human beings in relation to other people. a) Human beings, compared to other creatures, are extremely lowly specialized; respectively – in a more positive way – they have ‘multi-functional capabilities’. These capabilities originate in the human’s capacity for reflection. b) Human beings as part of a social group, show ambivalent behavior patterns. Because of their incompleteness after birth they depend from the very beginning on other persons. This means that they are social beings (*zoon politikon*). On the other hand, they have a high potential for conflict because of their instincts, namely in driving to fulfill personal wishes immediately and without restriction. This cognition leads to the concept of the ‘imperfect human’.

2. Anthropology in Ancient Egypt

<3> Although most civilizations share the idea of human imperfection, reaction to that for social coexistence, can vary a lot. The Ancient Egyptian anthropogony informs us about the attitude toward the question, why human beings lack the skills to live a good life, without help from the outside; both as creature and as *zoon politikon*! In Coffin Text 1130 the sun god – as primeval god – declares, that it was not his intention to create mankind as imperfect human beings.

Coffin Text 1130²

<i>iw iri.n=i si nb mi sn.nw=f</i>	‘I made every man like his ‘companion’
<i>n wd(=i) iri=sn Isf.t</i>	and I did not order that they do <i>Isfet</i> .
<i>in ib.w=sn hdi dd.t.n=i</i>	Their hearts are what injure, what I had said.’

The creator said that people should behave in a good manner in relation to Maat. Bad social behavior (*Isfet*) results from the genesis of mankind.

Coffin Text 1130³

<i>shpr.n=i ntr.w m fd.t=i</i>	‘From my sweat I created the gods.
<i>iw rmt.w m rm.wt ir.t=i</i>	But the human beings (<i>rmt.w</i>) are from the tears (<i>rm.wt</i>) of my eye.’

The reason for this failure lies in the particular circumstances during their conception.

Coffin Text 714⁴

<i>rm.yt ir.y=i pw m 3d r=i</i>	‘I must weep (<i>rm.yt</i>) because of the rage against me.
<i>rmt.w n šp.w(t)</i>	That’s why human beings (<i>rmt.w</i>) belong to blindness,
<i>hr.iw-s3=i sk<n>.w</i>	being in trouble with each other behind my back.’

It is no accident that the words ‘tears’ and ‘human being’ are homonymous. This indicates that there is a close relationship between both. Tears induce blindness. But while blindness was only a short term condition of the creator, it is the natural state of human beings which they have to overcome actively. In Coffin Text 1130 gods and human beings were created by the

¹ In her article ‘The Body’ for the UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology Riggs gives also an overview of the relevant literature. Nyord has recently published some studies on the conceptions of the body in ancient Egypt (see references).

² CT VII 463f-464b.

³ CT VII 464g-465a.

⁴ CT VI 344f-h. Although this text passage is corrupted, the content seems clear. It is probable to emendate the last line into *sk<n>.w* parallel to *3d*. I translated it as a *pseudoparticiple* (pl.) in attribution to *hr.iw-s3=i* as a *substantive* which relates to the human beings.

sweat and tears of the sun god. Creation, as emanation of the primeval god, is a well-attested phenomenon in Ancient Egyptian texts. In these cosmogonies the creator used his body as a toolbox. The cosmogony of Memphis is a further example of creation by bodily activity. Before discussing this conception, a short explanation about the special kind and effects of human blindness will be presented. The negative connotation of blindness does not apply to physical inability to see. Blindness, in contrast to the ability to see, must be understood in a broader sense. Both represent the dichotomy between ‘Light and Darkness’.⁵

Light	Darkness
eyesight	<i>blindness</i>
knowledge	<i>ignorance</i>
order	<i>chaos</i>
life	<i>death</i>
Maat	Isfet

Blindness is the root of *Ignorance*, which causes ‘wrong-doing’, as it was mentioned in *Coffin Text 1130* above. Bad behavior leads to *Chaos* and destruction and accelerates the *Death* of an individual and of society as a whole. Therefore education is a never-ending task, because knowledge was not the natural state after birth.

Ptahhotep (41)⁶

nn msy s3w

‘Nobody exists, who was born wise.’

Merikare (E 35-36)⁷

sni r it.w=k tp.iw-^c.w=k

‘Emulate your forefathers and your ancestors!

b3k.tw /// m rh ///

Work will be done (successfully?) with (their?) wisdom!’

mk md.wt=sn mn.w m sh3.w

Look, their words endure in writings.

pg3 šdi=k sni=k r rh.w

Open, for you can read and you can emulate the wise man!

hpr hmw.w m s {b }b3.yw

A skilled man becomes an educated man.’

- <4> Ancient Egyptian anthropology postulated that human nature was characterized, not only by ignorance, but also by the ability to learn. *Maat* was the concept of order and served as the basis for overcoming chaos and destruction (*Isfet*). *Maat*-doing (*iri M3^c.t*) was the main duty of the pharaoh as representative of kingship. *Maat* was the guideline for all Egyptian society and therefore constituted its philosophy and purpose of education.

Ptahhotep (507-511)

ir sdm=k nn dd.n=i n=k

‘If you listen to what I have told you,

wnn shr=k nb r h3.t

all your affairs will advance.

ir sp n.i M3^c.t iri

According to the concept *Maat* thereto;

špss=sn pw

it is their (i.e. maxims) wealth and

rwi sh3=sn m r3 n.i rmt.w

the memory of them comes from the mouth of human beings,

m-^c nfr n.i ts.w=sn

because of the perfection of their maxims.’

- <5> Due to the complexity of the world in Ancient Egypt, multiple ideas on cosmogonies⁸ arose. The cosmogony of Heliopolis worked in sexual practice, which appears to be an obvious way

⁵ Only a few references to this issue can be given. To the various aspects of light cf. Assmann, *Lux divina*; to the dichotomy of light and darkness in particular see Hornung, *Chaotische Bereiche*; *Ibid.*, *Licht und Finsternis*.

⁶ Numbering according to Žába, *Les Maximes de Ptahhotep*.

⁷ Numbering according to Papyrus Leningard Eremitage 1116 A *verso* (E after Quack, *Merikare*). The text in line 35 is corrupt.

⁸ An overview is given by Sauneron & Yoyotte, *Ägyptische Schöpfungsmythen*; Schulz, *Die Erschaffung der Welt*. See also Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*.

of bringing something into being. Creation meant ‘differentiation’ in Ancient Egypt: i.e. ‘the One became Many’. One of the main factors in the Ancient Egyptian worldview was the concept of dualism. The world can only exist because complementary contrasting pairs form dynamic units. Even the dimension of space was a result of the interruption of bodily union – and consequently of sexual intercourse – of heaven (body of *Nut*) and earth (body of *Geb*) by the god of the air (body of *Schu*).

In the cosmogony of Memphis, the primeval god *Ptah* brought everything into being by creative thought (*si3*), which was in his heart (*ib*) and creative utterance (*hw*), which came out of his mouth (*r3*). Therefore heart and tongue (*nis*) were metonyms for creative power.

***The Memphite Theology (line 56)*⁹**

ntf dd pri Crq.yt nb ‘It (i.e. the heart) is, what causes all decisions to emerge
nis wħm k33.t h3.ti sw and it is the tongue which realizes¹⁰ what the heart devises.’

We see that parts of the body have specific functions. In Ancient Egypt the human being was considered as complex creature, but also he was more than the sum of his parts.¹¹

3. Ancient Egyptian Aspects of Human Beings

<6> The human body¹² is not restricted in corporeality. It is also the organ which perceives sensual and emotional phenomena. Even non-material realities are related to parts of the body which seem to show a particular reaction. The heart was not only a symbol but the residence of intellect and emotion in Ancient Egypt. As there was no strict separation between ‘body’ and ‘soul’, an overall view is indispensable.¹³

The complexity of human beings was described by means of different aspects. While each aspect was individually significant for the living, their perfect interaction was essential. Dying means to fall apart and the reunification of the dead by rituals was most important.

Only a condensed overview of these aspects can be presented here.¹⁴

Corporeality	Physicality
<i>Ka</i>	Vital Force
<i>Ba</i>	Mental Energy
Heart	Intellect & Emotion
Name	Sense-giving Function
Shadow	(connected with the sun?)

<7> *Corporeality*: Physical integrity remained important even after death (see the necessity of mummification). It functioned as a container, housing non-physical aspects. Physical abnormalities from which a human being might have suffered during his life, will heal by transformation during mummification, while the mummy becomes a ‘dignified body’ (*sCh*).¹⁵

⁹ To this cosmogony in particular see Iversen, *The Cosmogony of the Shabaka Text*.

¹⁰ To the term *wħm* (realize) s. Kootz, *wħm*.

¹¹ On the necessity of completeness concerning to the body of the king and its functionality see Popielska-Grzybowska & Manfredi, *Body as symbol?*

¹² About the conceptualization of the body in Ancient Egypt see Riggs, *The Body, who introduces in her article into the physical, social and metaphorical aspects*.

¹³ Assmann talks about different spheres where a human being exists, which he calls ‘body sphere’ and ‘social sphere’ (Tod und Jenseits, pp. 54-59.; translated by Lorton, *Death and Salvation*). See also Loprieno, *Drei Leben nach dem Tod*.

¹⁴ On these aspects i.a. Assmann, *Tod und Jenseits* (esp. pp. 116-159); Hornung, *Der Mensch*; Meyer-Dietrich, *Senebi und Selbst*; Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife*, pp. 15-24 and 31-32.

¹⁵ It is not possible to discuss the important subject of the so-called ‘Gliedervergottung (deification of the members)’ in Ancient Egyptian religious texts. Neither the functionality of body fluids can be a subject. More information about this and about body parts of the dead, is given by Nyord, *Breathing the flesh* (on ‘Divinization of the body parts’, pp. 510-523; ‘Body fluids’, pp. 321-331).

The body was an essential tool with which one could interact with the whole material world.


- <8> *Ka*¹⁶: The Egyptian term *Ka* (*k3*) concerning ‘to people’, refers to the vital force, which could be powered by food. Interestingly enough one term for food is also *Ka*, which alludes to the correlation between vitality and eating. Funeral offerings were made ‘for the *Ka*’ of the deceased. A word play making use of homonymy of the lexemes was not only intellectually stimulating, but gives explanations about ideas of coherence.¹⁷ It is therefore not surprising that the name for a bull is again *Ka*. This vital force was not limited to physical strength but also to mental strength and it represented the attitude of a person. Attitudes could be transferred from one person to another by embracing. The *Ka*-hieroglyph (𓂏) shows two raised arms, for arms meant interaction, which will be discussed later (see paragraph 22).
- <9> *Ba*¹⁸: Mental energy is translated as *Ba* (*b3*). This important aspect was one of mobility: mental energy could transcend time and space while dreaming or reflecting. It could also get lost because of the lack of refreshment or anxiety so that people faint. *Ba* was written with the hieroglyph of a bird, which represents the mobility of the latter. In tombs the *Ba* of the deceased is often be portrayed by a bird with human head, which needed a libation to maintain the consciousness of the dead. 
- <10> *Heart*¹⁹: Intellect and emotions were located in the heart as mentioned in the ‘Memphite Cosmogony’. The heart was responsible for both reflection and affection. The struggle between *Maat* and *Isfet* took place in the human heart and determined whether someone was a social-being or a wrong-doer. Only people who practiced *Maat* were able to survive and to live in the hereafter. The deceased was justified when his heart was in balance with *Maat*. The ‘Book of the Dead’ shows a vignette of that judgment of the dead, by weighing the heart in one scale and *Maat* in another one.



Fig. 1: The ‘Book of the Dead’ of *Hunefer* (19th Dynasty, about 1300 BC)

- <11> *Name*²⁰: Names not only had a sense-discriminative, but also a sense-giving function. This means, their main function was not to differentiate between persons, but to represent the single individuum. God did not only look after mankind in its entirety, but looked after any individual, by knowing his name.

¹⁶ A recently published article about ‘The concept of *ka*’ by Nyord offers a broader insight into this aspect. He states that “the *ka* advocated here as the potential of which the person is in actualisation” (p. 201).

¹⁷ See Guglielmi, Funktionen des Wortspiels.

¹⁸ The term *Ba* shows different semantics in various contexts. See Janák, Ba. In this paper we cannot talk about the *Ba* of a god, which is his perceivable manifestation.

¹⁹ A number of studies on the ‘heart’ in Ancient Egypt were published. For details see Toro Rueda, Das Herz in der ägyptischen Literatur.

²⁰ On this aspect of the name see Vittmann, Personal Names: Function and Significance.

Merikare (E 138)

iw ntr rh.w rn nb

‘For god knows every name.’

To speak out loud a person’s name, meant animating the name’s owner. The dead will continue to exist through cultural memory. The *damnatio memoriae* represents the converse. If a person’s name was eradicated, he died in social isolation. To erase the name of a deceased on a sepulchre-wall was to kill him (so he would die a second time), because the name represented the tomb owner and his individuality. The name was also affected by its owner’s good or bad reputation and also by misusing a person’s name.

*A Man and his Ba (column 86ff.)*²¹

mk b^{ch} rn=i m-^c=k

r stj 3s.w m hr.w šm.w

p.t t3.ti

mk b^{ch} rn=i m-^c=k ...

‘See, my name reeks because of you (i.e. the *Ba*),
more than the smell of vultures on summer days,
when the sky burns.

See, my name reeks because of you (i.e. the *Ba*) ... ’

In this text a ‘Man tired of Life’ laments about defamation. He is depressed, because he feels deprived of his social integrity.

<12> *Shadow*²²: The value of the shadow for a human being apparently lies in the connection between the sun and the living. As we have seen, light was an important factor for life. Only a standing (i.e. living) person throws his shadow on the ground. Although the shadow’s shape is equal to its ‘owner’, it moves according to the source of light, independently of the body of the person.

<13> *Ach*²³: In contrast to the other aspects *Ach* was not an integral part of a human being by birth. If people perceived an effect without being aware of its source, the unknown power will be named *Ach*.²⁴ This effective force was extremely powerful. Its close relationship to light – hence to knowledge – is evident, and not only because of the *Ach*-hieroglyph (𓂏) which represents ‘the horizon’ (sunrise over two mountains). As we know: “Nobody exists, who was born wise” (*Ptahhotep* 41). Therefore it was a duty of everyone to improve himself by education, to overcome ignorance (i.e. imperfection as a natural state). The *Ach*-status must be acquired by becoming a social being in relation to Maat. The aspect *Ach* was not limited to the dead, but it became much more efficacious after the successful completion of the ‘judgment of the dead’. The so-called ‘Letters to the Dead’ aimed to influence the deceased’s *Ach* in his activities.

4. The Human Body and its Connections to the World

<14> Abstracta, creativity and competences were expressed by bodypart terms. When discussing the human body in Ancient Egypt, we will see that there was no clear cut distinction between physical and mental capabilities; in fact they were mostly intertwined.

The following figure illustrates associations between the cognitive, mental and emotional faculties and the human body. Although these associations apply almost to every human being, we must consider that the royal body (here *Sethi I*) is of particular nature. Due to the *rites de passage* coronation and enthronement the king became a container for divine power.²⁵ Thus his competencies are even more effectively.

²¹ Transcription by Faulkner, *The Man who was Tired of Life*, p. 24. To interpret the second writing of the owl with the arm as *preposition* seems to be more appropriate than as a second particle *mk* in the midst of an *adjectival*-sentence including a *comparative*.

²² On the ideas on shadow in Ancient Egypt see George, *Zu den altägyptischen Vorstellungen zum Schatten als Seele*.

²³ A comprehensive view is given by Janák, *Akh*.

²⁴ See Jansen-Winkeln, “Horizont” und “Verklärtheit”.

²⁵ See also Popielska-Grzybowska & Manfredi, *Body as symbol?*

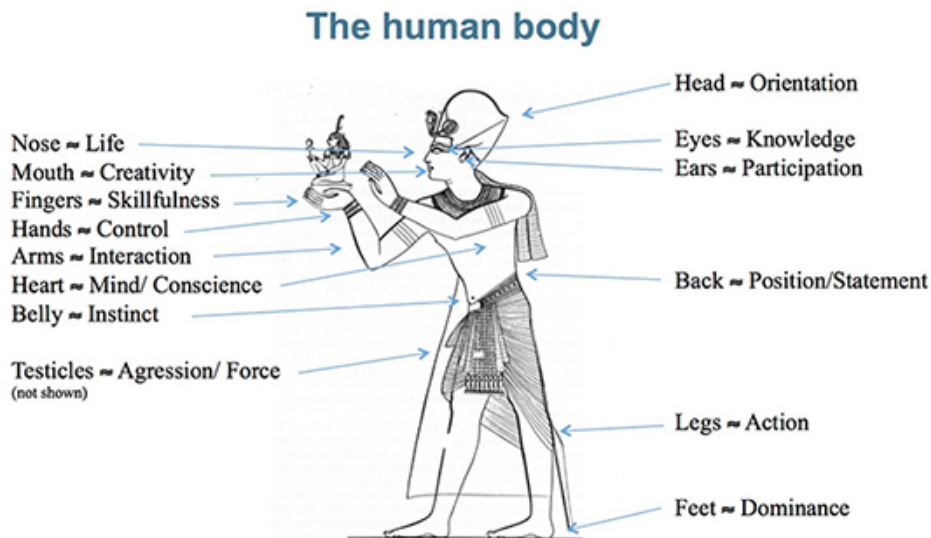


Fig. 2: The Human Body and its Functionality (*Sethi I offers Maat to the creator god*)

4.1.Head ≈ Orientation

<15> The body was perceived as the centre of the owner’s habitat. Thus, as is the case in most civilizations, the Egyptians described spatial location by means of bodypart terms, viz. ‘above’ by the head, ‘below’ by the feet, ‘behind’ by the back, ‘in front’ by the forehead and distance was measured by the lower part of the arm (i.e. an Egyptian ell is the combined length of the forearm and extended hand). This orientation equates to order.²⁶ The realm of the gods was in the sky. A political act was confirmed as legal and permanent by the expression ‘like heaven’ (*mi p.t*). In illustrations of the Egyptian world-view the sacred sphere was always depicted on top. To turn this orientation upside down causes chaos which must be avoided. The Coffin Texts 173 describe the “hell” as an inverted world of ‘walking on the head and eating faeces’.

*Coffin Text 173*²⁷

... <i>hr nt.it</i>	‘... because
<i>nn wnm=i n=tn hs</i>	I will not eat faeces for you;
<i>nn swr=i n=tn wsš.t</i>	I will not drink urine for you;
<i>n h3y=i n=tn m shdhđ ...</i>	I will not go upside down for you ...’

At this point just an example of grammaticalization shall demonstrate how this works in classical Egyptian.²⁸ A *noun* or *preposition* can be transformed by the suffix *-i* (*nisba*) into an *adjective*, an *adjective* can become a *substantive* (again) only by fixing the *singular* or *plural* of the *masculine* and the *feminine* marker at the end of the word. This can for example be seen on the term *hr* which as a *noun* has the meaning ‘face’ which is also used for the *preposition* ‘upon’.

<i>hr</i> ‘face’	⇒ <i>hr</i>	‘upon’
	⇒ <i>hr.i</i>	‘being upon’
	⇒ <i>hr.iw</i>	‘who is on the top = chief’ or <i>hr.it</i> ‘the top = the sky’

hr.iw ‘who is on the top’ is the name of the god Horus, whose *habitat* was the heaven and therefore the normative-sphere.

²⁶ Orientational metaphors in ancient Egyptian kingship, which describe spatial orientations, are the main topic of Hsu’s paper, You up – I down. On the basis of Lakoff & Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (pp. 14-21) he discusses the domination (UP) of ancient Egyptian kingship over its enemies (DOWN). See also the interesting article from David, *Devouring the enemy*.

²⁷ CT III 47k-48b.

²⁸ For Coptic see Nyord, *Conceptualizations of embodied space*.

4.2. Eye/s ≈ Knowledge

<16> Eyesight, as opposed to blindness, was closely related to knowledge (see paragraph 3). The light is the source for the eye to see. The absence of light makes a nuanced perception of the material world impossible. As a consequence darkness was noticed as an element of chaos, while order was a result of light. The eye became a metonym for the sun as ‘eye of the god’ and the crown with which the king must be united, was called ‘eye of Horus’. The Egyptian term for eye (*ir.t*) is homonymous with the expression for ‘acting’ (*ir.t*). Furthermore, in this case ‘eye’ and ‘acting’ were interrelated, insofar as acting must be guided by wisdom, which is represented by eyesight.²⁹

4.3. Ears ≈ Participation

<17> The hieroglyph showing the ear of a cow is also used for the term ‘hearing (*sḏm*)’. The ear is the part of the body with which a person can perceive sounds. Furthermore, the human ear represents in depictions, the phenomenon of ‘hearing’. To hear means to learn and to overcome ignorance. People who are deaf to education are not social beings. Like blindness, deafness, however, does not refer to physical inability to hear. To participate in social knowledge was not only a question of altruism, but a necessity for a successful life. Remember the words of *Ptahhotep* (507f. in paragraph 4): “If you listen to what I have told you, all your affairs will advance.” Once again it was the heart which decided whether a human being will live a life as a social being or as an egoist.

Ptahhotep (550-552)

in ib shpr nb=f

m sḏm m tm sḏm(.w)

ḥḥ wḏḏ snb n.i si ib=f

‘It is the heart which makes its lord

to someone who hears or to someone who does not hear.

Life, prosperity and health of a man is his heart.’

Listening in order to learn was an act of socialization for students who wanted to become members of society. But listening was not only a duty for learners. Even for Egyptians in high positions listening was a social act. They should lend an ear to what petitioners wished to communicate.

Ptahhotep (264-272)

ir wnn=k m sšm.y

hr sḏm=k mdw sprw

m gnf.w sw r sk.t ḥ.t=f

m kḏi.t.n=f ḏḏ.n=f st

mrr ḥr.iw iḥ.t ib=f

r iri.t ii.t.n=f ḥr=s

‘If you are a leader,

be patient while you hear a petitioner’s speech!

Do not refuse him to sweep his body

by what he planned to talk about!

A distressed man loves to purify his heart

more than achieving what he came for.’

This verse from the ‘Instruction of *Ptahhotep*’ shows the interaction between parts of the body as reaction to emotional stress. Talking was an instrument for self-relief. Sweeping the body was purifying the heart.

Statues of *Senwosret* III show him with very big ears. These sculptures communicate to the viewer that he was aware of his responsibility as king and that he would listen to everyone’s problems. Thus such images must not be interpreted as accurate portrayals.

²⁹ More about the ‘Eye of Horus’ in opposition to ‘the Testicles of Seth’ see paragraph 30. A monograph on all aspects of the eye has been written by Grässler, *Konzepte des Auges*.



Fig. 3: *Senwosret III* (12th Dynasty, about 1850 BC)



Fig. 4: *Ramesses III* receives ‘life’ from the god *Amun-Re* (20th Dynasty, about 1150 BC)

4.4. Nose ≈ Life

<18> Breathing through the nose is one of the main factors for survival.

*Osorkon-Inscription*³⁰
tꜥw m ḥ.t rd.wi ḥr šmm.t

‘As long as breath is in the body the legs are walking.’

Because breath is not depictable it was represented by an *Ankh* which is the hieroglyph for ‘life, living’. That ‘breath’ and ‘life’ belong together was indicated by an *Ankh* held in front of a living person’s nose (s. fig.4).

The ‘Tale of the Eloquent Peasant’ informs us about what supports human beings breathing.

*Eloquent Peasant (BI 177)*³¹
mri wꜥḥ mi ḏd
tꜥw pw n.i fnd ir.t Mꜥ.t

‘Wish to endure, as is said (saying!):
 “Doing *Maat* is the breath of the nose”.’

4.5. Mouth³² ≈ Creativity

<19> Like the god *Ptah* in ‘The Memphite Theology’ mentioned above (see paragraph 5) the king must be creative to maintain order and to organize social cohabitation.

³⁰ Text B, column 8. See Caminos, *The Chronicle of Prince Osorkon*, p. 92 (§ 136 h).

³¹ BI (pBerlin 3023) after Parkinson, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*.

³² To a further aspect of the mouth concerning the king see David, *Devouring the enemy*, pp. 91-93. Here the mouth is described as agency for appropriation, since eating is the metaphor for acquiring possessions.

Leather Roll (II 1-2)³³

hw r³=k si³ m-ht=k

‘*Hu* is your mouth and *Sia* is behind you.’

Keep in mind that *Hu* was the creative utterance (*hw*) and *Sia* the creative thought (*si³*). Both were creative forces competencies pertaining only to the gods and the pharaoh as the representative of the institution of sacred kingship, because of their mighty power. Of course, people outside of the sacred sphere may also have had power by command (*wḏ*). At least eloquence was the most appropriate and successful capacity to accomplish goals.

Merikare (E 32)

hpš pw n.i nsw ns=f
qni md.wt r ḥ³ nb

‘The sword of the king is his tongue.
Words are stronger than any weapon.’

Shipwrecked Sailor (15-18)³⁴

mdwi=k n nsw ib=k m-ḥ=k
wšb=k nn niti.t
iw r³ n.i si nḥm=f sw

‘May you speak to the king by your heart is with you.
May you answer without stuttering.
It is the speech of a man which saves him.’

Because of the performative power of speech it was essential to use the own voice carefully. This makes the ‘silent one’ (*grw*) virtuous, because silence did not imply cowardice or a lack of eloquence.

4.6. Fingers ≈ Skillfulness

<20>

Shipwrecked Sailor (188)

... *m sh.w sh³*
iqr n.i ḏbᶜ.w=f
Imny ...

‘... in the scripts of the scribe
excellent regarding to his fingers
Ameni ...’

This expression was a *topos* of skillfulness which promised good results and reliability. So it described not only a manual but also intellectual capacity.

4.7. Hand ≈ Control

<21>

David (Devouring the Enemy) – an important main specialist for categorization in Ancient Egypt – gives a vivid description of visual, textual and scriptural expressions for the domination of the pharaoh. The hand stands for control, which David outlines by the very well known *topos* and *icon* ‘Smiting the Enemy’ (Type 1 in her article). The raised hand illustrates also the UP-DOWN-category.³⁵

Also social interaction was performed by using hands. *Senwosret III* gives a helping hand to whoever needed it.

Hymn to Senwosret III (Papyrus Kahun II 15)³⁶

..*ibw pw tmm ššš.w d.t=f*

‘...he is “an asylum”, his hand do not evade.’

³³ After the transcription of de Buck, The Building Inscription.

³⁴ Transcribed from papyrus Leningrad 1115 by Dessoudeix, *Lettres Égyptiennes III*.

³⁵ Domination of kingship (UP) over the enemy (DOWN) (compare paragraph 15).

³⁶ Line 15 on plate II; see Griffith, *Hieratic Papyri from Kahun*.

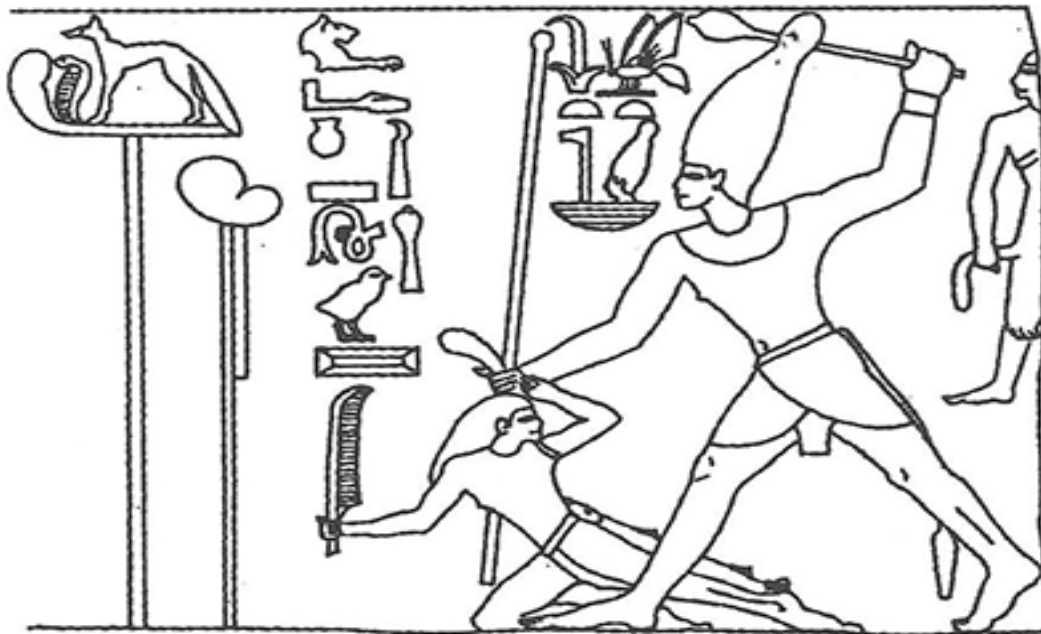


Fig. 5: *Mentuhotep II smites an enemy* (11th Dynasty, about 1990 BC)

4.8. Arm ≈ Interaction

<22> Although the concepts of hands and arms are related, they shall be discussed separately. Using hands and arms means interaction. In embracing one another two persons would not only show their emotions, but it was also a way of transmission of values, spirit and the like. The vital force *Ka* (*k3*) could also be transferred by embracing. It follows that it was not only food, which strengthened people. The king as *Ka* of the god *Horus* received this vital-force when the falcon-god put his wings around him. In figure 4 (see paragraph 17) the god *Amun-Re* embraces the king *Ramesses III* while he revives him. The king thereby shares in god's holiness.

The same held true with regard to mankind. The close bond between two persons was recognizable by their embracing, more than by genealogy.³⁷ Even the natural father had to accept his child as his son by transmitting the *Ka*. As a consequence it was possible that persons became relatives even if there was no genetic relationship. To meet again close relatives includes body contact.

Shipwrecked Sailor (133)

...*mḥ=k qni=k m ḥrd.w=k* '...than you will fulfill your embrace with your children ...'

Gods represented different functions with which they maintained cosmic order. These gods were not human beings but powerful forces. In order to make interaction with these forces possible the Egyptians displayed them as animal, in mixed forms (animal and human features intertwined) and/ or as human beings. Even if they have no anthropomorphic forms in total, their material manifestations used arms to make their activities visible.

4.9. Heart ≈ Mind/ Emotion

<23> In addition to what is said in paragraph 10 some primary sources will be quoted. Let us remember that the 'Instruction of *Ptahhotep*' describes the heart as the central organ of human beings. "It is the heart which makes its lord to someone who hears or to someone who does not hear. Life, prosperity and health of a man is his heart." According to this statement the struggle between *Maat* and *Isfet* took place in the human's heart. A social being owns a pure

³⁷ See Assmann, *Das Bild des Vaters*, p. 96.

heart, which allows an individual to adjust his conduct to *Maat*. Therefore, it is obvious that a defective heart will cause serious problems for its owner.³⁸

Ptahhotep (633-636)

<i>mk s3 nfr n.i dḏ nṯr</i>	‘See; a perfect son, by the gift of a god,
<i>rdi ḥ3.w ḥr ḏd.t n=f ḥr nb=f</i>	who exceeds, what was said to him by his lord,
<i>iri=f M3^c.t</i>	he realizes <i>Maat</i> ,
<i>iri.n ib=f r nmt.t=f</i>	because his heart has acted according to his (correct) procedure.’

On a stela which was erected in Nubia by *Senwosret III*, the king was described once again as a conscientious ruler.

Stela Berlin 1157/7-8³⁹

<i>tm sdr.w md.t m ib=f</i>	‘Who do not sleep as long as a matter is in his heart.
<i>ḥmt tw3.w ḥ^c.w ḥr sf</i>	Who looks after the dependents, who rely on clemency.’

By contrast, a greedy heart may lead to satisfaction for a moment, but in the long run to social isolation.

Ptahhotep (91-97)

<i>sw3.t pw m-ḥr n ḥwn-ib</i>	‘That is, what is missed for the greedy (lit. narrow-hearted).
<i>in nd.yt itt ḥ^c.w</i>	It is baseness (i.e. <i>Isfet</i>) what seizes possession,
<i>n p3 ḏ3.yt mni sp=s</i>	(but) crime never lands its misdeed.
...	...
<i>wn ph.wi M3^c.t w3ḥ ...</i>	In the end (only) <i>Maat</i> is what endures ...’

4.10. Belly ≈ Instinct

<24> Pleasure and deprivation have an impact on the belly. Especially the feeling of hunger can cause an out-of-control reaction, which may pose a threat to public order.

Ptahhotep (481 + 484)

<i>ḥḏ ḥr=k tr n wnn=k</i>	‘Be benevolent (lit. bright-faced) as long as you live!
...	...
<i>srḥ.y pw šw m ḥ.t=f</i>	One whose belly is empty is an accuser.’

Merikare (E 43-44)

<i>n ḏd.n šw3.w m M3^c.t=f</i>	‘A poor man cannot speak according to his <i>Maat</i> .’
--	--

A person who acted impulsively was called ‘the hot one’ in comparison, a person acted rationally was called ‘the cool one’. The former was an egoist and bad reputed in society, which suffer from his greed (*ḥwn-ib*, i.e. *Isfet*). A calm person recognized the benefit of solidarity (*Maat*). He was able to keep quiet and silent (*grw*).

Ptahhotep (350)

<i>imi=k whm.w mski n.i md.wt</i>	‘You should not practise slander by articulation,
<i>n sḏm=k sw</i>	nor listen to it.
<i>pri pw n.t t3.w-ḥ.t</i>	This is what comes out of him whose belly is hot!’

Amenemope (IV 1+6)⁴⁰

<i>ir p3 šmm ...</i>	‘As for the ‘hot one‘ ...
<i>t3 st3 t3.y=f qr(s)y.t=f</i>	the flame is his burial.’

³⁸ In her article ‘Die Defekte des Herzens’, Windus-Staginsky collected those primary sources, which deal with the damage und the threat of the heart.

³⁹ The so-called Boundary-Stela of *Senwosret III*. from Semna; now in the ‘Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung’ (Stela 1157).

⁴⁰ Transcription by Budge, Facsimiles.

4.11. Testicles ≈ Aggression/ Strength

<25> The testicles are a cross-cultural symbol of sexual desire. Lack of control over that basic instinct involves the risk that people satisfy their lust or other needs by aggression. This potency might be destructive and destroy a society. The natural state of god *Seth* was chaotic energy. This was due to the unfortunate circumstances of his genesis, in which destructive forces (*Isfet*) were very active. He shared his origin with that of human beings (see paragraph 3) and for this reason both participated in the chaotic forces which made them imperfect. Consequently *Seth* bore the title ‘lord of darkness and storm’, who caused trouble. Because of his quick-tempered personality the testicles became his attribute, which made him equal with a bull and *Seth* was worshiped as the ‘god of strength (*ph.ti*)’.

Aggression was not only connotated with negative associations, it was also essential for survival.⁴¹

Hymn to Senwosret III (Papyrus Kahun II 9)

<i>ḥi.wi</i>	‘How rejoice
<i>t3.wi m ph.ti=k</i>	the two lands (i.e. Egypt) in your strength,
<i>mki.n=k inb.w=sn</i>	for you protected their walls.’

Strength is the power which helps to avert danger. It must, however, be taken in mind that wisdom has to dominate over strength so that the latter is used in an appropriate manner. We will discuss this issue further below in paragraph 30.

4.12. Back ≈ Position

<26> The upright position indicated not only stability but also steadfastness.⁴² Not all people were able to guarantee stability for their own lives by themselves. Therefore the king had to act as supporter of those persons.

Merikare (E 135-136)

<i>...iri.n=f n=sn ḥq3.w m swḥ.t</i>	‘... he (i.e., the sun god) created 'rulers in the egg'
	(i.e. born ruler) for them (i.e. human beings),
<i>ts.w r tsi.t m psd n.i s3 -c</i>	leaders as a support for the back of the weak.’

The king was not only responsible for all the individuals but for the whole cosmos as well. As already stated he had to maintain order (i.e. *Maat*). Two rituals demonstrate that the pharaoh recognized and realized this role. One ritual is celebrating the *Maat*-offering to the creator god and therewith to the lord of *Maat* himself. A second ritual is very important for stabilizing the institution of kingship, which corresponds to living together peacefully. This ritual was called ‘Raising of the Djed-pillar’. The term *Djed* (*dd*) means ‘duration’ and is written by a hieroglyph, which represents the spinal column of an ox.

⁴¹ Effland offers in her article ‘Aggression und Aggressionskontrolle’ a differentiated insight into both aspects of aggression.

⁴² See also what is mentioned in paragraph 15; for example the stability/ durability of heaven.



Fig. 6: Temple of *Seti I* in Abydos (19th Dynasty, 1290 about BC).

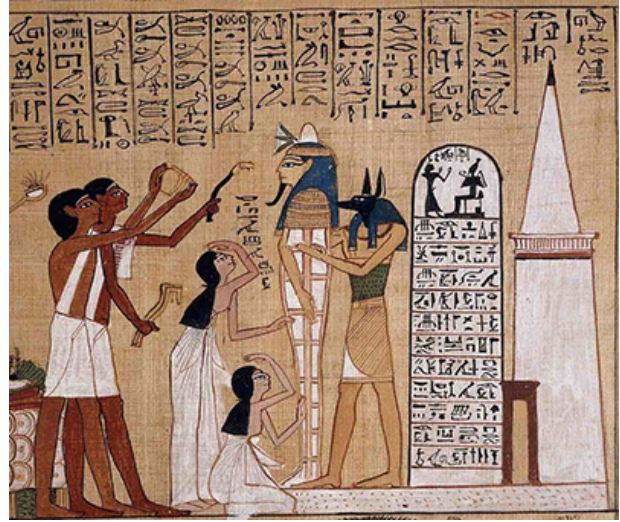


Fig. 7: The 'Book of the Dead' of *Hunefer* (19th Dynasty, 1300 about BC).

In figure 6 the 'Djed-pillar' (spinal column) was combined with the image of *Osiris* in his function as 'Lord of *Kemet* (i.e. Egypt)'. This means *Horus* upholds the killed/ destroyed *Osiris* and in this way the Egyptian state.⁴³ The upright position is connected with life as was already mentioned. A person lying down is powerless because he is tired, ill, unconscious or even dead. That is why the mummy of the deceased was raised during the rite of 'Opening of the Mouth' (s. fig. 7) to re-animate the dead person. The straightening of the mummy was aligned to the sun (i.e. *Ra*).⁴⁴ At this point it is worth remembering, that a person in erect posture can throw a considerably better shadow than one who is lying on the ground.

4.13. Legs ≈ Action

<27> The position of legs in Ancient Egyptian art signified an attitude.⁴⁵ A standing figure with both legs close to each other symbolizes duration and stability. This position was common feature of gods or the king as the representative of the gods. The stride-position demonstrates dynamism and activity, which is indispensable to obtaining stability because of the never-ending cycle of coming into being and decaying.

4.14. Feet ≈ Dominance

<28> Being under someone's feet meant being under his dominance. The king, who had to maintain order, must dominate chaotic forces.



Fig. 8.: The 'Nine Bows' under the feet of a queen (Late Period)

⁴³ On *Osiris* as representative of *Kemet* see Kootz, *State-Territory and Borders*, pp. 34-36.

⁴⁴ See Assmann, *Tod und Jenseits*, pp. 418f.

⁴⁵ A brief overview to the different kind of statues can be found in *Wildung/ Reiter/ Zorn, Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection, Berlin*, pp. 56-79.

In the minds of the Ancient Egyptians it was quite clear that chaos and destruction could not be totally annihilated but only be banished for a while. The ‘Nine-Bows’ and the so-called *Rechyt* represented foreign and inner enemies of the Egyptian state. The king had to defend against attacks from the outside and put down rebellion inside the country. For example the enemies were depicted under Pharaoh’s feet which, standing on them, makes them ineffective. By means of textual and iconographical evidences David (Devouring the Enemy) shows that ‘to be under someone’s feet (*hr rdwy*) is to be in that person’s power’.⁴⁶

Hymn to Senwosret III (Papyrus Kahun III 7)

<i>ii.n=f ...</i>	‘He came, ...
<i>ptpt.n=f h3s.wt</i>	after he trampled the foreign countries
<i>hwi.n=f iwn.tiw</i>	and he smote the <i>Iuntiw</i> (one tribe of the Nine-Bows),
<i>hm.w snd.w</i>	who had no respect.’

5. The Body as a Medium of Communication

<29> An orchestrated body can be purposely used for communication. (Body-) posture, gestures and facial expression can transmit statements and attitudes. Special codes give information about social features, which affect inter-human behaviour. The body itself can function as an information medium when manipulated in appropriate ways (tattoos, scarification, shave). Also dresses, jewellery, make-up and hairstyle – as extensions of the body – encode social positions and attitudes. The ideal person as well as the one excluded from society was not only described by linguistic pictures (words), but also by physical characteristics (images). To behave like a ‘hot one’ or like a ‘cool one’ had an impact on the appearance of a person. A lack of body care or uncontrolled movements (frenzy) indicated an undisciplined personality, while a self-controlled personality kept its composure and gave off an orderly appearance.⁴⁷

6. The Ambivalence of Human Beings

<30> In paragraph 4 it was noted, that the Ancient Egyptians also believed in the ambivalent character of human beings. The struggle between knowledge and physical power for supremacy was explained on the basis of a myth.

The Struggle between Horus and Seth

In the created world something very significant happened: *Seth* killed his brother *Osiris*. After he had cut the corpse into pieces and scattered it throughout Egypt, *Seth* hoped to succeed him as king. *Isis* and *Nephtys*, the sisters of *Osiris* and *Seth*, gathered the parts of the corpse and joined them together again. *Isis* was able to get pregnant from her dead but reconstructed brother and husband *Osiris*. This means that *Osiris* begot *Horus post-mortem* who became a rival of *Seth* for the royal office.

The manner of fighting which took place is very fascinating. *Horus* took away *Seth*’s testicles, while he tore out the eye of *Horus* which injured the latter not only physically, since the eye was associated with knowledge. Because of his aggression *Seth* represents violence and testicles as symbol for physical strength are well-attested. *Horus* tried to take away the strength of *Seth*, and *Seth* wanted to destroy *Horus*’ capacity to act (*ir.t*). Once again homonymy attested an inner correlation between ‘acting’ and ‘eye’ (*ir.t*).

⁴⁶ David, *Devouring the Enemy*, p. 87. Because the act ‘Trampling the enemy’ (Type 2 in her article) was of aggressive nature, the king was mostly represented by an animal (lion, bull, sphinx and the like).

⁴⁷ On the topic of ‘body images of the ethical human’ in Ancient Egypt s. Moers, *Ägyptische Körper-Bilder*. Moers noted that ‘the less a body is marked, the more it represents the ideal’ (p. 20). In this sense, it is not about physical disabilities and handicaps. See also Riggs, *Body* (esp. pp. 4-7). Fischer-Elfert presented a study on the non-ideal character in ‘Abseits von Maat’ (on the ‘hot-one’ see pp. 91-158).

The god *Thot* who represented wisdom terminated the fight and restored the potencies of *Horus* and *Seth*. Finally the ‘judgment of the gods’ led to the decision that *Horus* became successor of *Osiris* and king of Egypt. Because *Seth*’s strength was very important for the kingship to function well, he should also play an important role. Integrated into *Maat* he fought against chaos and thus represents the legitimate form of power.

<p>Horus</p> <p>↓</p> <p>politics (eye)</p> <p>↓</p> <p>ruler of Egypt</p> <p>↓</p> <p>care</p>	<p>Seth</p> <p>↓</p> <p>violence (testicles)</p> <p>↓</p> <p>ruler of the desert</p> <p>↓</p> <p>defence</p>
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<31> This myth clearly shows that the primary goal of the Egyptian society was to bring all different needs into harmony (i.e. *Maat*). Even an individual by himself must balance his divergent wishes by intertwining his body parts.

Ptahhotep (527-533)

<p><i>in sr hr.i sp=f nfr</i></p> <p><i>mnn(?)⁴⁸ ib=f ns=f</i></p> <p><i>ᶚq3 sp.ti=f i w=f hr ḏd</i></p> <p><i>ir.ti=f i hr m33</i></p> <p><i>ᶚnh.wi=f twt hr sdm 3h.t n s3=f</i></p> <p><i>ir(i) M3ᶚ.t šw m grg</i></p>	<p>‘Only the official who is the chief of his good deed twines together his heart and his tongue; his two lips are righteous when he is speaking. His both eyes are seeing, and his two ears in total are hearing what is effective for his son. A doer of <i>Maat</i> is someone who is free of falsehood!’</p>
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In the view of *Ptahhotep* the body must be a toolbox for righteousness.

7. The Body in Comparison with Material Culture

<32> Tools – as we mentioned in paragraph 2 as extension and/ or substitution of the body – remain closely linked with human creativity. The comparison between parts of the body and material objects aims to clarify competencies of the body.

The ‘Eloquent Peasant’ appeals to a high official to carry out his duties properly. In a eulogy he compares parts of the official’s body with a balance, which is the epitome of justice.

Eloquent Peasant (BI 189-200)

<p><i>ᶚq3.yt n.it t3 ir.t M3ᶚ.t</i></p> <p><i>m ḏd.w grg iw=k wr.ti</i></p> <p><i>m is.w iw=k dns.ti</i></p> <p><i>m ḏd.w grg ntk i wsw</i></p> <p><i>m tnbh.w ntk tp-hsb</i></p> <p><i>mk tw m tp wᶚ hnᶚ i wsw</i></p> <p><i>ir gs3=f hr=k gs3=k</i></p> <p>...</p> <p><i>th pw ns=k</i></p> <p><i>dbn pw ib=k</i></p> <p><i>rmnw=f pw sp.ti=ki</i></p> <p><i>ir hbs=k hr=k r nht-hr</i></p> <p><i>nm irf hsf=f bw-hwrrw</i></p>	<p>‘Earth’s righteousness is doing <i>Maat</i>. Speak not falsehood, for you are great! Be not light, for you are weighty! Speak not falsehood; you are the balance! Swerve not; you are the standard! See, you are one (head) with the balance; If it tilts, you may tilt.</p> <p>...</p> <p>Your tongue is the plummet; your heart is the weight measurement; your both lips are its arms. So if you cover your face toward violence, who then shall repel the evil?’</p>
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Different parts of the king’s body functioned likewise like tools as was said in the ‘Teaching

⁴⁸ Possibly *mnn* ‘winding’.

for *Merikare*: “The sword of the king is his tongue. Words are stronger than any weapon.”⁴⁹
And the body of a god can become a landscape or a building.

*TT 32 (line 8)*⁵⁰

iri=f is rw.yt r ḥꜥ.w=t
ḥ.t=t n mꜥḥꜥ.t=f

‘Indeed he built a hall to your body
and your womb is for his tomb.’

In the case of *Osiris* the body can become the whole land: When *Seth* killed *Osiris*, cut his corpse into pieces and scattered them throughout Egypt, the parts of his body became relics, which represent one of each 42 *nomes* of Egypt. The united body of *Osiris* corresponds to the unified kingdom.⁵¹

8. Conclusion

<33> The human body is not only a container, which delimit the physical, mental and emotional individuality towards the outside. In Ancient Egypt the body was a structure, which intertwined, linked and harmonized different aspects of the human nature inside and which served as a tool to come into contact with the outside world. In his materiality it gave orientation in the physical world (cosmos), serves for communication with the ‘Other’ and is a tool for creation. The same is true for its immateriality. Consciousness gave orientation in a complex world and interact as a creative power with practices. Emotions had an ambivalent character. For one thing it is the source of greed (*Isfet*), otherwise it makes empathy possible, which is the basis for responsible social behaviour (*Maat*). The heart was the residence for both reflection and affection. For that reason the Egyptian wisdom literature reminds people of ‘giving *Maat* into their hearts’ to make living together peacefully function well.

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⁴⁹ See paragraph 19.

⁵⁰ Especially on the topic of the rocky landscape as the body of a goddess see Rummel, Der Leib der Göttin. This article includes a figure (1) with the text of TT 32. About body parts as metaphor for architecture and landscapes s. Wattler, Menschliche Körperteile, in the same volume.

⁵¹ See also paragraph 26 and Kootz, State-Territory and Borders, pp. 34-36.

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List of Abbrevations

AAeO	Afrikanistik-Aegyptologie-Online
AE	Archaeopress Egyptology
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
BACE	Bulletin of the Australian Center for Egyptology
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CNI	Carsten Niebuhr Institute (Publications)
CT	Coffin Texts
GOF	Göttinger Orientforschung
IBAES	Internet-Beiträge zur Ägyptologie und Sudanarchäologie
JEA	Journal of Egyptian Archeology
MDAIK	Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Kairo
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
SAK/ B	Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur/ Beihefte
UCLA-EE	University of California, Los Angeles-Encyclopedia of Egyptology
WSA	Wahrnehmungen und Spuren Altägyptens. Kulturgeschichtliche Beiträge zur Ägyptologie
YES	Yale Egyptological Studies
ZÄS	Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde