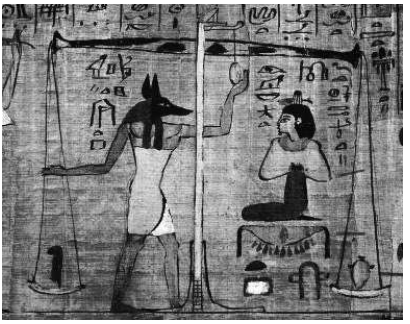
BRITISH MUSEUM.

The Book of the Dead



WITH TWENTY-FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS.

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THE BOOK OF THE DEAD.

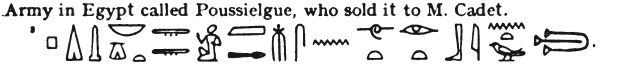
I.

THE TITLE.

"BOOK OF THE DEAD" is the title now commonly given to the great collection of funerary texts which the ancient Egyptian scribes composed for the benefit of the dead. These consist of spells and incantations, hymns and litanies, magical formulae and names, words of power and prayers, and they are found cut or painted on walls of pyramids and tombs, and painted on coffins and sarcophagi and rolls of papyri. The title "Book of the Dead" is somewhat unsatisfactory and misleading, for the texts neither form a connected work nor belong to one period; they are miscellaneous in character, and tell us nothing about the lives and works of the dead with whom they were buried. Moreover, the Egyptians possessed many funerary works that might rightly be called "Books of the Dead," but none of them bore a name that could be translated by the title "Book of the Dead." This title was given to the great collection of funerary texts in the first quarter of the nineteenth century by the pioneer Egyptologists, who possessed no exact knowledge of their contents. They were familiar with the rolls of papyrus inscribed in the hieroglyphic and the hieratic character, for copies of several had been published,[1] but the texts in them were short and fragmentary. The publication of the Facsimile[2] of the Papyrus of Peṭa-Àmen-neb-nest-taui[3] by

[1] See *Journal de Trévoux*, June, 1704; Caylus, *Antiq. Egypt.*, tom. I, plate 21; Denon, *Travels*, plates 136 and 137; and *Description de l'Égypte*, tom. II, plate 64 ff.

[2] *Copie Figurée d'un Rouleau de Papyrus trouvé à Thèbes dans un tombeau des Rois.* Paris, XIII–1805. This papyrus is nearly 30 feet in length and was brought to Strassburg by a paymaster in Napoleon's Army in Egypt called Poussielgue, who sold it to M. Cadet.

[3] .

A

M. Cadet in 1805 made a long hieroglyphic text and numerous coloured vignettes available for study, and the French Egyptologists described it as a copy of the "Rituel Funéraire" of the ancient Egyptians. Among these was Champollion le Jeune, but later, on his return from Egypt, he and others called it "Le Livre des Morts," "The Book of the Dead," "Das Todtenbuch," etc. These titles are merely translations of the name given by the Egyptian tomb-robbers to every roll of inscribed papyrus which they found with mummies, namely, "Kitâb al-Mayyit," "Book of the dead man," or "Kitâb al-Mayyitun," "Book of the dead" (*plur.*). These men knew nothing of the contents of such a roll, and all they meant to say was that it was "a dead man's book," and that it was found in his coffin with him.

II.

The Preservation of the Mummified Body in the Tomb by Thoth.

The objects found in the graves of the predynastic Egyptians, *i.e.*, vessels of food, flint knives and other weapons, etc., prove that these early dwellers in the Nile Valley believed in some kind of a future existence. But as the art of writing was unknown to them their graves contain no inscriptions, and we can only infer from texts of the dynastic period what their ideas about the Other World were. It is clear that they did not consider it of great importance to preserve the dead body in as complete and perfect state as possible, for in many of their graves the heads, hands and feet have been found severed from the trunks and lying at some distance from them. On the other hand, the dynastic Egyptians, either as the result of a difference in religious belief, or under the influence of invaders who had settled in their country, attached supreme importance to the preservation and integrity of the dead body, and they adopted every means known to them to prevent its dismemberment and decay. They cleansed it and embalmed it with drugs, spices and balsams; they anointed it with aromatic oils and preservative fluids; they swathed it in hundreds of yards of linen bandages; and then they sealed it up in a coffin or sarcophagus, which they laid in a chamber hewn in the bowels of the mountain. All

these things were done to protect the physical body against damp, dry rot and decay, and against the attacks of moth, beetles, worms and wild animals. But these were not the only enemies of the dead against which precautions had to be taken, for both the mummified body and the spiritual elements which had inhabited it upon earth had to be protected from a multitude of devils and fiends, and from the powers of darkness generally. These powers of evil had hideous and terrifying shapes and forms, and their haunts were well known, for they infested the region through which the road of the dead lay when passing from this world to the Kingdom of Osiris. The "great gods" were afraid of them, and were obliged to protect themselves by the use of spells and magical names, and words of power, which were composed and written down by Thoth. In fact it was believed in very early times in Egypt that Rā the Sun-god owed his continued existence to the possession of a secret name with which Thoth had provided him. And each morning the rising sun was menaced by a fearful monster called Āapep, , which lay hidden under the place of sunrise waiting to swallow up the solar disk. It was impossible, even for the Sun-god, to destroy this "Great Devil," but by reciting each morning the powerful spell with which Thoth had provided him he was able to paralyse all Āapep's limbs and to rise upon this world. Since then the "great gods," even though benevolently disposed towards them, were not able to deliver the dead from the devils that lived upon the "bodies, souls, spirits, shadows and hearts of the dead," the Egyptians decided to invoke the aid of Thoth on behalf of their dead and to place them under the protection of his almighty spells. Inspired by Thoth the theologians of ancient Egypt composed a large number of funerary texts which were certainly in general use under the IVth dynasty (about 3700 B.C.), and were probably well known under the Ist dynasty, and throughout the whole period of dynastic history Thoth was regarded as the author of the "Book of the Dead."



The Spearing of Āapep.
(*From the Papyrus of Nekhtu-Āmen.*)