

EGYPT AND BEYOND



ESSAYS PRESENTED TO
LEONARD H. LESKO



Leonard H. Lesko, in his office at Brown University

Egypt and Beyond

Essays Presented to Leonard H. Lesko
upon his Retirement from the
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at Brown University
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The Nun-basin of Renpetneferet

Ali Radwan

TO PROF. LEONARD H. LESKO WITH MY RESPECT AND BEST WISHES. The following short note aims to shed some light on a recently discovered basin for liquids, found in situ in front of a small mud-brick mastaba (ABC-105) at Giza in January 2004 by the joint-expedition of Cairo and Brown Universities.¹ It is a rectangular, double-ledged receptacle of Tureh limestone (39.7 x 29.2 x 15 cm) with a deep central depression and a flat, inscribed rim.² The owner of this basin is a *mitrt*-lady named Renpetneferet.³ On the short right-hand side she is called: *mitrt imshyt hr ntr ʿ Rnpt-nfrt*, “The *mitrt*-lady, the revered (or honored) one by the great god Renpetneferet;” on the short left-hand side she is referred to as “The ‘*mitrt*’-lady Renpetneferet;” this time with a figure of her standing and holding a lotus flower to her nose. The incised words on the two longer sides of the rim are the standard invocation for funerary offerings which runs as follows:

Bottom line: *hṭp-dī-nswt^a pr(t)-hrw n.s m Wg^b Dhwt^c Wp(t)-rnpt tpy-rnpt hb wr r^c nb*. “An offering which the king gives, that invocation offerings should (belong) to her on the Wag-festival, the Thoth-festival, the festival of New Year’s Day, the festival of the First of the Year, the Great Festival and every day.”

Top line: *in s.s ir n.s^d nw sk qrs(t) m hr(t)-ntr stp(w)^e Pr-hr-nfrt.^f* “It was her son, the one who did for her this by now, the burial in the necropolis, the carpenter(?) Perherneferet.”

COMMENTS

a) For the offering formula in general and its development during the Old Kingdom in particular cf. W. Barta, *Aufbau und Bedeutung der altägyptischen Opferformel*, *ÄF* 24 (Glückstadt, 1968); G. Lapp, *Die Opferformel des Alten Reiches* (Mainz, 1986); W. Barta, in: *LÄ* IV, col. 584ff.; id., “Zur Bedeutung der Opferformel im Alten Reich,” *GM* 96 (1987), p. 7ff.

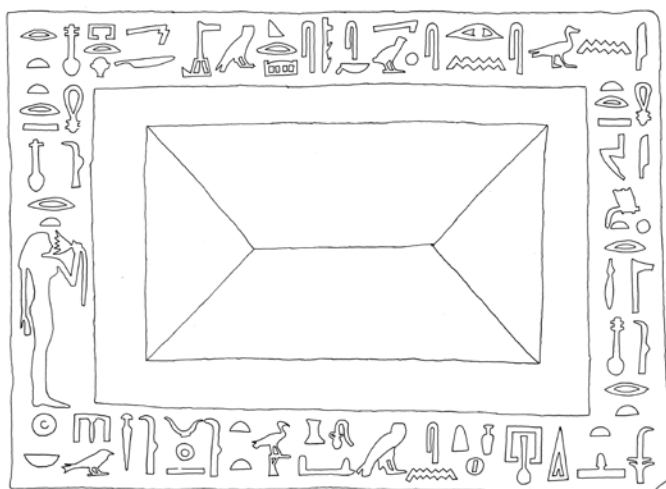
b) For the Wag-festival cf. e.g. P. Posener-Krieger, in: *LÄ* VI, col. 1135ff.; U. Verhoeven, “Totenfeste,” in: *LÄ* VI, col. 645ff. This was the most important festival of the dead in the Old Kingdom; cf. further H. Altenmüller, in: *LÄ* II, col. 174.

c) For the Thoth-festival cf. e.g. W. Helck, in: *LÄ* VI, col. 523. On the family statue-group of Penmeru in Boston (second half of Dynasty V) the Thoth-festival is likewise preceded by the Wag-festival; cf. *PM* III², 1 (1974), p. 82f. (G. 2197) and e.g. M. Seidel and D. Wildung, in C. Vandersleyen (ed.), *Das Alte Ägypten* (Berlin, 1975), p. 227 (140). For mentions of the Wag-festival before that of Thoth, as it is the case on our basin from Giza, cf. e.g. A. Moret and D. Abou-Ghazi, *Denkmäler des Alten Reiches* III, CG (Cairo, 1978), 57007; N. Kanawati, *The Rock Tombs of El-Hawawish: The Cemetery of Akhmim* IV (Warminster, 1983), pp. 40 (fig. 30), 43 (fig. 32, c); Kh. Daoud, in: *SAK* 23 (1996), p. 98. Normally this was not the rule during the Old Kingdom; cf.

1 I would like to express my thanks to Z. Hawass, T. Handoussa and Ed Brovarski for giving me the chance to publish this fine basin (figs. 1–2)

2 For similar limestone basins cf. e.g. the works mentioned by Ed. Brovarski, in: Sue D’Auria et al. eds., *Mummies & Magic: The Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt* (Boston, 1988), 90 (20); T.G.H. James, *Hieroglyphic Texts from Egyptian stelae, etc.* I² (London, 1961), pls. XXXIX, 3, XL, 2, 3, XLI, 1–3; H.G. Fisher, *MDAIK* 47 (1991), p. 127ff., Taf. 7, a, b; J. Vandier, *Manuel d’archéologie égyptienne* II, 1 (Paris, 1954), 524, n. 5 (fig. 307, 1323); K. Martin, in *LÄ* VI, p. 147, 3 (“Opferbecken oder- Tröge”); E. Brovarski, *The Senedjemib Complex* I, (Boston, 2001), 11, 19; *PM* III², 1 (1974), p. 378ff. (under basins); *PM* III², 2, Fasc. 3 (1981), p. 1002ff. (under basins).

3 Renpetneferet is a common name for women during the Old Kingdom and later; cf. e.g. *PM* III², 1 (1974), 53, 203 (a *mitrt*-lady); *PM* III², 2, Fasc. 3 (1981), p. 966 (1496).



Figs. 1–2. Photograph and line drawing of offering basin of Renpetneferet, from Giza mastaba ABC–105, discovered by the joint-expedition of Cairo and Brown Universities.

e.g. D. Dunham and W.K. Simpson, *The Mastaba of Queen Mersyankh III, G7530–7540* (Boston, 1974), p. 15, fig. 7, 18, fig. 10; H.G. Fisher, in: *GM* 107 (1989), p. 71, fig. 2; Z. Hawass, “An Inscribed Lintel in the Tomb of the Vizier Mehu at Saqqara,” *Lingua Aegyptia* 10 (2002), p. 220, n. 11; see further H. Altenmüller, in: *LÄ* II, col. 174.

d) For this expression of filial dedication cf. WB I, p. 111, 6; R. El-Sayed, “Formules de piété filiale,” in: *Mélanges Gamal Eddin Mokhtar I, BE* XCVII, 1 (1985), p. 271ff.; S. Grallert, *Bauen-Stiften-Weißen: Ägyptische Bau- und Restaurierungsschriften von den Anfängen bis zur 30. Dynastie* (Berlin, 2001), p. 93ff.

e) It seems that the son of the owner of this basin was simply a carpenter, as his title is given by the adze (*stp*) and a saw-like sign as a determinative; cf. R. Hannig, *Großes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch (2800–950 v. Chr.): die Sprache der Pharaonen* (Mainz, 1995), p. 780 (*stp*: “zimmern, mit dem Dächsel arbeiten”).

f) The name Perherneferet is attested on a false-door from Giza (Dyn. V–VI) for a woman; cf. PM III², 1 (1974), p. 215. Perherneferet was also a man's name and can be traced during the Old Kingdom; cf. *Aegyptische Inschriften aus den königlichen Museen zu Berlin I* (Leipzig, 1913), p. 70 (= Berlin 10858); H. Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen I* (Glückstadt, 1935), pp. XXIII, 134, 1; H. Junker, *Giza VII* (Wien, 1944), p. 220, fig. 88. According to the statement on this basin, it seems likely that Perherneferet, the son of Renpetneferet, was responsible for her burial in the Giza necropolis.

GENERAL REMARKS

As a *mitrt*-lady the owner of this basin was one of the employees of the palace, as this title can evidently refer to an important position for a middle class woman.⁴ Abneb of the Third Dynasty, who was king's acquaintance and overseer of the palace, was at the same time the controller of such a group of courtiers with up till now unspecified function.⁵ The Memphite necropolis has shown that the *mitrt*-title was widely used for women during Dynasties V and VI.⁶ In many cases⁷ the husbands of those ladies were inspectors or overseers of artisans of different kinds.⁸ The last attempt of W. Helck to see in the *mitrt*-title (= "female mourner")⁹ a variant of the well-known *mitrt*-title with the meaning of "female weaver" is unacceptable.¹⁰ Should the *mitrt*-title be related to the root *m_tr*, as has been stated by Helck, one could suggest that it is a derivative of the verb *mtr* ("be famous or renowned").¹¹ In this case the obscure title "*mitrt*" could be translated "the famous lady."

The appearance of Renpetneferet on the rim of her basin smelling a lotus-flower is likely of some significance.¹² The lotus was one of the manifestations of the sun-god in his newborn

4 For this difficult title which can denote a special group of people or a prominent position; cf. e.g. W. Helck, *Untersuchungen zu den Beamtentiteln des ägyptischen alten Reiches* (Glückstadt, 1954), p. 102; id., in: *LÄ VI*, col. 596, B; Kh. Daoud, in: *SAK 23* (1996), p. 88ff.; D. Jones, *An Index of Ancient Egyptian Titles, Epithets and Phrases of the Old Kingdom I* (Oxford, 2000), p. 424f.; R. Hannig, *Handwörterbuch* (1995), p. 326.

5 *Wb II* (*Belegstellen*), p. 45, 5.

6 Cf. e.g. PM III², 2 Fasc. 3 (1981), p. 923 (366: *mitrt*); Kh. Daoud, in: *SAK 23* (1996), pp. 89ff. and 95 ("One also can conclude that the title witnessed its peak during the Fifth Dynasty, and gradually decreased at the end of that Dynasty and through the Sixth Dynasty"). For the title in the Archaic Period and at the very beginning of the Third Dynasty, cf. e.g. P. Kaplony, *Die Inschriften der ägyptischen Frühzeit II* (Wiesbaden, 1963), p. 421; T.G.H. James, *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Inscriptions in the Brooklyn Museum I* (Brooklyn N.Y., 1974), p. 7 (22); *LEgypte des Millénaires obscures* (Marseille, 1990), p. 88f. (474).

7 Cf. Kh. Daoud, *SAK 23* (1996), p. 95: "At least 80% of the instances known from the Old Kingdom are from Giza Necropolis."

8 Cf. PM III², 2, Fasc. 3 (1981), p. 923 (366: *mitrt*); Kh. Daoud, in: *SAK 23* (1996), pp. 89ff. and 95: "In general, however, the post seems to be held by women of relatively working class." Nevertheless some of those *mitrt*-ladies were kings' acquaintances or priestesses of Hathor and Neith (e.g. *Wb II* [*Belegstellen*], p. 45, 6; PM III², 1 (1974), p. 286; Sue D'Auria et al. eds., *Mummies & Magic: The Funerary Arts of ancient Egypt* (Boston 1988), p. 86, which does not imply that they were of a low social rank. See also Z. Hawass "A Group of Unique Statues Discovered at Giza I; Statues of the Overseers of the Pyramid Builders," in: *SDAIK 20* (1991), p. 93, pl. 30, with note 11.

9 R. Hannig, *Handwörterbuch* (1995), 322 (*mstryt* ("Klagefrau")); D. Jones, *An Index of Ancient Egyptian Titles, Epithets and Phrases of the Old Kingdom I* (Oxford, 2000), p. 424.

10 W. Helck, "Die Datierung der Prinzessin *Wnš.t*," in: C. Berger et al., eds., *Hommages à J. Leclant I* (Cairo, 1994), p. 228.

11 Cf. R. Hannig, *Handwörterbuch*, p. 375 (bekannt sein); R.O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford, 1962), p. 121.

12 Cf. the appearance of Queen Iput, mother of Pepi I, on her offering-table twice with the lotus flower in her hand; M.M.F. Mostafa, *Untersuchungen zu Opfertafeln im Alten Reich*, HÄB 17 (Hildesheim, 1982), p. 122, pl. XXVIII, 2 (= fig. 3 of the present article).

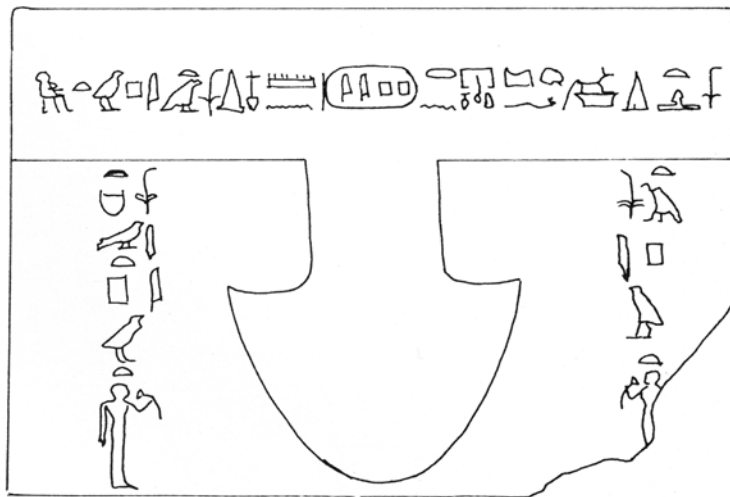


Fig. 3. Queen Iput standing with a lotus flower in her hand on her offering table. After M.M.F. Mostafa, *Untersuchungen zu Opfertafeln im Alten Reich*, HÄB 17 (Hildesheim, 1982), pl. 28, 2.

phase at early morning (Nefertum).¹³ The lotus-flower at the nose of the deceased¹⁴ is to indicate his/her resurrection or rebirth¹⁵ as well as his/her readiness to receive offerings.¹⁶

Such small offering-basins, like this one of Renpetneferet, were found just in front of the false door of the tomb.¹⁷ Its function in the funerary rituals has been widely discussed.¹⁸ Although liquid offerings were mainly water, beer, wine and milk,¹⁹ it seems that single rectangular basins were destined to be containers of water resembling magically a small pool for the benefit of the

- 13 Cf. e.g. E. Brunner-Traut, in: *LÄ III*, col. 1091 ff.; H. Schlögl, in: *LÄ IV*, col. 378 ff.; A. – A. Maravelia, “*ptri.st mi spdt hr̄y m-hst nrbt nfrt*: Astronomical and Cosmological Elements in the Corpus of Ancient Egyptian Love Poems,” *Lingua Aegyptia* 11 (2003), p. 103, nn. 114, 115.
- 14 This is the most popular motif in the funerary scenes of pharaonic Egypt: cf. e.g. D. Wildung and S. Schoske, et al., eds., *Nofret, die Schöne: die Frau im Alten Ägypten* [exhibition catalogue, Haus der Kunst, München, 15.12.1984–10.2.1985] (Mainz, 1984), pp. 28f. (9), 48f. (19), 54f. (21), 156f. (74); J. Vandier, *Manuel d'archéologie égyptienne IV* (Paris, 1964), figs. 18ff.; A. Eggebrecht et al. ed., *Suche nach Unsterblichkeit: Totenkult und Jenseitsglaube im Alten Ägypten* (Hildesheim, 1990), p. 92f., 98f. Cf. also in this respect Pyr. 266: “I (the dead king) appear as Nefertem, as the lotus-bloom which is at the nose of Rea;...” (after: R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* [Oxford, 1969], p. 61).
- 15 Cf. e.g. the panel-scene on the false door of Senenmut (Berlin) who is depicted sitting between his parents, while his mother is facing him with a lotus-flower in her hand directed towards his nose; A. Eggebrecht ed., *Ägyptens Aufstieg zur Weltmacht* (Hildesheim–Mainz, 1987), p. 334f. (286). Cf. further the stela of Nebnacht (Cairo) who is shown in the bottom register sitting beside his mother who holds a lotus-flower to his nose while his son is performing a libation- ceremony with a *nmst*-vase; E. Hornung and B.M. Bryan eds., *The Quest for Immortality—Treasures of Ancient Egypt* (Washington, 2002), p. 92f. (12).
- 16 Cf. e.g. D. Dunham and W.K. Simpson, *The Mastaba of Queen Mersyankh III, G7530-7540* (Boston, 1974), p. 15f., fig. 8 (upper, right); N. Kanawati, *The Rock Tombs of El-Hawawish: The Cemetery of Akhmim VI* (Warminster, 1986), p. 23ff., figs. 9, 27, a, 28, b, 30, b (= fig. 4 of the present article); D. Wildung, *Fünf Jahre Neuerwerbungen der Staatlichen Sammlung Ägyptischer Kunst München, 1976–1980* (Mainz, 1980), p. 10 (ÄS 6288); E. Brunner-Traut et al., *Osiris, Kreuz und Halbmond: die drei Religionen Ägyptens* (Mainz, 1984), p. 103f. (80); A. Eggebrecht ed., *Ägyptens Aufstieg zur Weltmacht* (Hildesheim–Mainz, 1987), p. 352ff. (303, 304).
- 17 Cf. e.g. Ed. Brovarski, in: Sue D’Auria et al. eds., *Mummies and Magic*, p. 90 (20), fig. 51; Z. Hawass, *Secrets From The Sand* (New York, 2003), p. 104.
- 18 Cf. e.g. H. Junker, in: *Archiv Orientalni* 20 (1952), p. 185ff.; M.M.F. Mostafa, *Untersuchungen zu Opfertafeln im Alten Reich*, HÄB 17 (Hildesheim, 1982), pp. 104, 114 f., 116, 124 ff., pls. XIII, XVII, 1, XVIII, 1, XXIII, 2, XXIV, 1, XXX; H.G. Fischer, in: *MDAIK* 47 (1991), p. 127ff., pl. 7a, b.
- 19 Cf. e.g. D. Abou-Ghazi, *Altars and Offering Tables* (Cairo 1980), 57026.

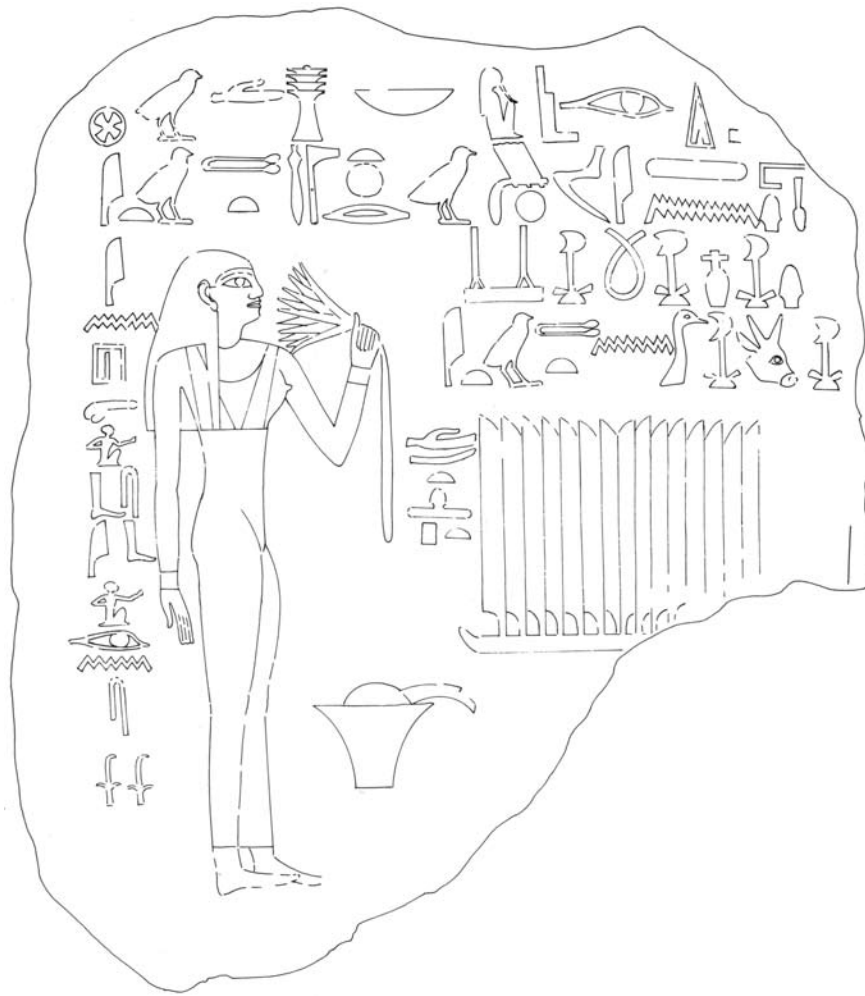


Fig. 4. The deceased standing before an offering table with a lotus flower in her hand. After N. Kanawati, *El-Hawawish VI* (Warminster, 1986), fig. 30b.

deceased in the afterlife.²⁰ Especially in the New Kingdom we can trace the rectangular pool, normally connected with the tree-goddess, where the dead people and their spirits could enjoy

²⁰ Cf. e.g. Ed. Brovarski, in: Sue D'Auria et al. eds., *Mummies and Magic*, p. 90 (20); H.G. Fischer, *MDAIK 47* (1991), p. 131: "In most cases, however, private individuals probably had to content themselves with an offering basin in place of an amenity that would have been difficult to maintain for any length of time, and for which there could have been little space in the crowded Memphite cemeteries;" S. Grallert, *Bauen – Stiften – Weihen*, p. 576: "Zu einem Privatgrab gehört seit ältester Zeit ein § "See;" cf. further G.A. Reisner, *Mycerinus, The Temples of the Third Pyramid at Giza* (Cambridge, 1931), p. 40; Sue D'Auria et al. eds., *Mummies and Magic*, p. 199 (147); B. Geblér-Löhr, *Die heiligen Seen ägyptischer Tempel: ein Beitrag zur Deutung sakraler Baukunst im alten Ägypten*, HÄB 21 (Hildesheim, 1983), pp. 16, n. 55, 59, 71ff., 260, n. 909, 368f., n. 1232, 386, n. 1286, 387, n. 1290. The small basin (about 50 x 40 cm) or tank inside one of the rooms of the Mastaba of Kai (Giza) has a drain which refers to a practical purification function; cf. S. Hassan, *Excavations at Giza. Pub. by the Faculty of Arts of the Egyptian University III* (Cairo, 1941), p. 34, pl. XIII, 1–2.

receiving cool water and food offerings.²¹ As depictions or models of some small rectangular pools could be meant to represent the primeval waters of Nun, the source of all life,²² we could see in limestone basins like that of Renpetneferet a substitute for a sacred lake or simply an eternal source of water resembling the Nun-ocean.²³ Like the morning sun, the dead was to be born out of the lotus-flower emerging from the Nun-waters.²⁴ Therefore such small basins of limestone could give the dead the hope that his birth morning after morning would be realized in the afterlife. In fact, one could fairly call them the Nun-basins.²⁵

It seems that our *mītrt*-lady, Renpetneferet, lived in the second half of the Fifth Dynasty.

- 21 Cf. e.g. H.W. Müller and J. Settgast eds., *Nofretete, Echnaton, Tutanchamun* (Mainz, 1976), No. 89; R. Drenkhahn, *Ägyptische Reliefs im Kestner-Museum, Hannover* (Hannover, 1989), p. 112f. (37); D.P. Silverman ed., *Ancient Egypt* (New York, 1997), p. 72; PM I (1960), p. 402, 15 (TT335); N. Billing, in: *SAK* 32 (2004), p. 43f., fig. 5. Cf. also in this respect, D. Wildung, "Die Kniefigur am Opferbecken," *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* XXXVI (1985), p. 17ff.
- 22 Cf. e.g. Chr. Desroches-Noblecourt, "Un lac de turquoise," in: *Monuments et Mémoires PIOT XLVII* (Paris, 1953), p. 1ff.; id., *Ramses le Grand* (Paris 1976), p. 194ff.; B. Geßler-Löhr, *Die heiligen Seen*, p. 221f., fig. 46; D.P. Silverman, *Ancient Egypt*, p. 131; H. Altenmüller, in A. Eggebrecht ed., *Suche nach Unsterblichkeit Totenkult und Jenseitsglaube im Alten Ägypten* (Hildesheim, 1990), p. 13 (= Abb. 5, here the rectangular basin is depicted under the throne of Osiris); H.W. Müller and J. Settgast, *Nofretete, Echnaton, Tutanchamun*, p. 42 (= Chr. Ziegler ed., *The Pharaohs* [Milano, 2002], pp. 468, 206); A.P. Kozloff, *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 73, 8 (Oct. 1986), p. 336, fig. 30 (= fig. 5); Chr. Desroches-Noblecourt, in: *MDAIK* 47 (1991), p. 79f., pl. 3.
- 23 Cf. e.g. R. Grieshammer, in: *LÄ* IV, col. 534f.; Daniel R. McBride, "Nun" in D.B. Redford ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* 2 (Oxford, 2001), p. 557f.
- 24 Cf. e.g. A. Piankoff and N. Rambova, *The Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon* (New York, 1955), p. 25, n. 65, pl. 13, fig. 19 (on p. 57 = fig. 6 of the present article); H.W. Müller, *Die Schätze der Pharaonen* (Augsburg, 1998), p. 195f. (412); Chr. Ziegler ed., *The Pharaohs*, p. 220f., fig. 8, 404 (46).
- 25 Cf. in this respect E. Chr. Strauß, *Die Nunschale: eine Gefäßgruppe des Neuen Reiches*, MÄS 30 (Berlin, 1974), passim; A. Radwan, *Die Kupfer- und Bronzegefäße Ägyptens von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn der Spätzeit* (München, 1983), p. 116ff.; Renate Germer, "Flora," trans. by E. Schwaiger and M. Goldstein, in D.B. Redford ed., *Ancient Egypt* 1 (2001), pp. 536, 541f.



Fig. 5. Model of a Nun-basin from the New Kingdom, Cleveland Museum of Art 1914.538. After A.P. Kozloff, in *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 73, 8 (Oct. 1986), fig. 30.

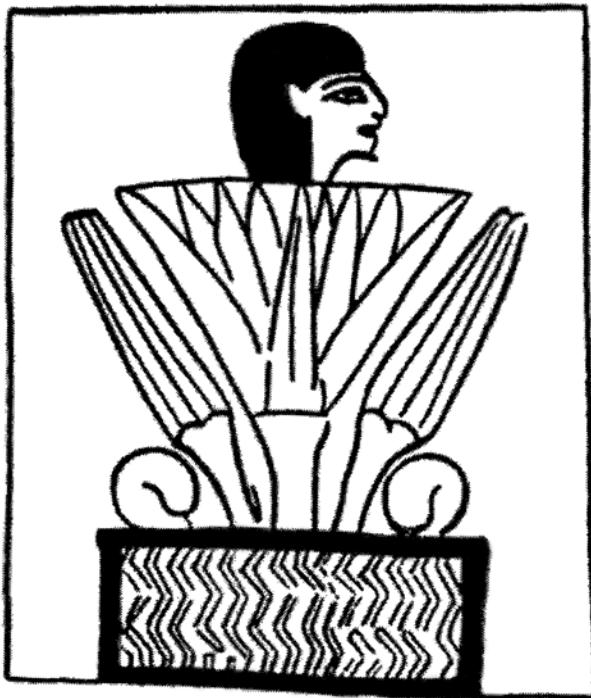


Fig. 6. The Nun ocean and a lotus flower with the head of the dead emerging from it. After A. Piankoff and N. Rambova, *The Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon* (New York, 1955), p. 57, fig. 19.