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Ancient Egypt

Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys

(Osirian books)

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Egyptian priests and scribes

E. A. Wallis Budge (1914)

Credits

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About:

In the Late and Graeco-Roman periods of Egypt, the great Book of the Dead gave way to short books centred on the cult of Osiris, the god who died and rose again.

This selection gathers passages from those books and from the songs of the cult of Osiris. The Book of Breathings, said to have been written by Thoth himself, assures the dead that they will breathe for ever and live as Osiris; the Book of Traversing Eternity promises the soul that it will travel throughout Egypt and share in the festivals of the gods.

The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys were sung at the festival of Osiris by two women playing the goddesses, calling to their dead brother: "Come to thy house... I am the sister who loveth thee".

They are followed by passages from the Festival Songs of the two goddesses and from the Book of Making Splendid the Spirit of Osiris, in which Isis recalls how she bore Horus to avenge her husband.

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THE BOOK OF BREATHINGS

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1 "Hail, Osiris Kersher, son of Tashenatit! Thou art pure, thy heart is pure. Thy fore parts are pure, thy hind parts are cleansed; thy interior is cleansed with incense and natron, and no member of thine hath any defect in it whatsoever. Kersher is washed in the waters of the Field of Offerings, that lieth to the north of the Field of the Grasshoppers.

1.2 The goddesses Uatchet and Nekhebet purify thee at the eighth hour of the night and at the eighth hour of the day. Come then, enter the Hall of Truth, for thou art free from all offence and from every defect, and 'Stone of Truth' is thy name. Thou enterest the Tuat (Other World) as one exceedingly pure. Thou art purified by the Goddesses of Truth in the Great Hall.

1.3 Holy water hath been poured over thee in the Hall of Keb (i.e. the earth), and thy body hath been made pure in the Hall of Shu (heaven). Thou lookest upon Rā when he setteth in the form of Tem at eventide. Amen is nigh unto thee and giveth thee air, and Ptah likewise, who fashioned thy members for thee; thou enterest the horizon with Rā.

1.4 Thy soul is received in the Neshem Boat of Osiris, thy soul is made divine in the House of Keb, and thou art made to be triumphant for ever and ever."

2 "Hail, Osiris Kersher! Thy name flourisheth, thy earthly body is established, thy spirit body germinateth, and thou art not repulsed either in heaven or on earth. Thy face shineth before Rā, thy soul liveth before

Amen, and thy earthly body is renewed before Osiris. Thou breathest the breath of life for ever and ever.

2.2 Thy soul maketh offerings unto thee in the course of each day.... Thy flesh is collected on thy bones, and thy form is even as it was upon earth. Thou takest drink into thy body, thou eatest with thy mouth, and thou receivest thy rations in company with the souls of the gods. Anubis protecteth thee; he is thy protector, and thou art not turned away from the Gates of the Tuat.

2.3 Thoth, the most mighty god, the Lord of Khemenu (Hermopolis), cometh to thee, and he writeth the 'Book of Breathings' with his own fingers. Then doth thy soul breathe for ever and ever, and thy form is renewed with life upon earth; thou art made divine with the souls of the gods, thy heart is the heart of Rā, and thy limbs are the limbs of the great god.

2.4 Amen is nigh unto thee to make thee to live again. Upuat openeth a prosperous road for thee. Thou seest with thine eyes, thou hearest with thine ears, thou speakest with thy mouth, thou walkest with thy legs. Thy soul hath been made divine in the Tuat, so that it may change itself into any form it pleaseth. Thou canst snuff at will the odours of the holy Acacia of Anu (An, or Heliopolis).

3 Thou wakest each day and seest the light of Rā; thou appearest upon the earth each day, and the 'Book of Breathings' of Thoth is thy protection, for through it dost thou draw thy breath each day, and through it do thine eyes behold the beams of the Sun-god Aten. The Goddess of Truth vindicateth thee before Osiris, and her writings are upon thy tongue.

3.2 Rā vivifieth thy soul, the Soul of Shu is in thy nostrils. Thou art even as Osiris, and 'Osiris Khenti Amenti' is thy name. Thy body liveth in Tatu (Busiris), and thy soul liveth in heaven.... Thy odour is that of the holy gods in Amentet, and thy name is magnified like the names of the Spirits of heaven.

3.3 Thy soul liveth through the 'Book of Breathings,' and it is rejoined to thy body by the 'Book of Breathings.'"

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THE BOOK OF TRAVERSING ETERNITY

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1 "Thy soul liveth in heaven in the presence of Rā. Thy Ka hath acquired the divine nature of the gods. Thy body remaineth in the deep house (i.e. tomb) in the presence of Osiris. Thy spirit-body becometh glorious among the living. Thy descendants flourish upon the earth, in the presence of Keb, upon thy seat among the living, and thy name is stablished by the utterance of those who have their being through the 'Book of Traversing Eternity.' Thou comest forth by day, thou art joined to the Sun-god Aten."

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THE LAMENTATIONS OF ISIS AND NEPHTHYS

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1 Isis saith: "Come to thy house, come to thy house, O An, come to thy house. Thine enemy [Set] hath perished. O beautiful youth, come to thy house. Look thou upon me. I am the sister who loveth thee, go not far from me. O Beautiful Boy, come to thy house, straightway, straightway. I cannot see thee, and my heart weepeth for thee; my eyes follow thee about.

1.2 I am following thee about so that I may see thee. Lo, I wait to see thee, I wait to see thee; behold, Prince, I wait to see thee. It is good to see thee, it is good to see thee; O An, it is good to see thee. Come to thy beloved one, come to thy beloved one, O Un-Nefer, whose word is truth. Come to thy wife, O thou whose heart is still.

1.3 Come to the lady of thy house; I am thy sister from thy mother's [womb]. Go not thou far from me. The faces of gods and men are turned towards thee, they all weep for thee together. As soon as I saw thee I cried out to thee, weeping with a loud voice which pierced the heavens, and thou didst not hear my voice.

1.4 I am thy sister who loved thee upon earth; none other loved thee more than [thy] sister, thy sister."

2 Nephthys saith: "O Beautiful Prince, come to thy house. Let thy heart rejoice and be glad, for thine enemies have ceased to be. Thy two Sisters are nigh unto thee; they guard thy bier, they address thee with words [full of] tears as thou liest prone on thy bier. Look thou at the young women; speak to us, O our Sovereign Lord.

2.2 Destroy thou all the misery that is in our hearts; the chiefs among gods and men look upon thee. Turn thou towards us thy face, O our Sovereign Lord. At the sight of thy face life cometh to our faces; turn not thou thy face from us. The joy of our heart is in the sight of thee. O Beautiful Sovereign, our hearts would see thee. I am thy sister Nephthys who loveth thee.

2.3 The fiend Seba hath fallen, he hath not being. I am with thee, and I act as the protectress of thy members for ever and ever."

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THE FESTIVAL SONGS OF ISIS AND NEPHTHYS

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1 "Come, come, run to me, O strong heart! Let me see thy divine face, for I do not see thee, and make thou clear the path that we may see thee as we see Rā in heaven, when the heavens unite with the earth, and cause darkness to fall upon the earth each day.

1.2 My heart burneth as with fire at thy escape from the Fiend, even as my heart burneth with fire when thou turnest thy side to me; O that thou wouldst never remove it from me! O thou who unitest the Two Domains (i.e. Egypt, North and South), and who turnest back those who are on the roads, I seek to see thee because of my love for thee....

1.3 Thou fliest like a living being, O Everlasting King; thou hast destroyed the fiend Anrekh. Thou art the King of the South and of the North, and thou goest forth from Tatchesert. May there never be a moment in thy life when I do not fill thy heart, O my divine brother, my lord who goest forth from Aqert.... My arms are raised to protect thee, O thou whom I love.

1.4 I love thee, O Husband, Brother, lord of love; come thou in peace into thy house.... Thy hair is like turquoise as thou comest forth from the Fields of Turquoise, thy hair is like unto the finest lapis-lazuli, and thou

thyself art more blue than thy hair. Thy skin and body are like southern alabaster, and thy bones are of silver. The perfume of thy hair is like unto new myrrh, and thy skull is of lapis-lazuli."

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THE BOOK OF MAKING SPLENDID THE SPIRIT OF OSIRIS

✦

1 "Come to thy house, come to thy house, O An. Come to thy house, O Beautiful Bull, lord of men and women, the beloved one, the lord of women. O Beautiful Face, Chief of Akert, Prince, Khenti Amentiu, are not all hearts drunk through the love of thee, O Un-Nefer, whose word is truth?

1.2 The hands of men and gods are lifted up and seek thee, even as the hands of a babe are stretched out to his mother. Come thou to them, for their hearts are sad, and make them to rejoice. The lands of Horus exult, the domains of Set are overthrown because of their fear of thee. Hail, Osiris Khenti Amentiu! I am thy sister Isis.

1.3 No god and no goddess have done for thee what I have done. I, a woman, made a man child for thee, because of my desire to make thy name to live upon the earth. Thy divine essence was in my body, I brought him forth on the ground. He pleaded thy case, he healed thy suffering, he decreed the destruction of him that caused it.

1.4 Set fell under his knife, and the Smamiu fiends of Set followed him. The throne of the Earth-god is thine, O thou who art his beloved son.... There is health in thy members, thy wounds are healed, thy sufferings are relieved, thou shalt never groan again in pain. Come to us thy sisters, come to us; our hearts will live when thou comest.

2 Men shall cry out to thee, and women shall weep glad tears, at thy coming to them.... The Nile appeareth at the command of thy mouth; thou makest men to live on the effluxes that proceed from thy members, and thou makest every field to flourish. When thou comest that which is dead springeth into life, and the plants in the marshes put forth blossoms.

2.2 Thou art the Lord of millions of years, the sustainer of wild creatures, and the lord of cattle; every created thing hath its existence from thee. What is in the earth is thine. What is in the heavens is thine. What is in the waters is thine. Thou art the Lord of Truth, the hater of sinners, whom thou overthrowest in their sins.

2.3 The Goddesses of Truth are with thee; they never leave thee. No sinful man can approach thee in the place where thou art. Whatsoever appertaineth to life and to death belongeth to thee, and to thee belongeth everything that concerneth man."

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