The Relationship between \( nHH \) and \( D.t \) with the Doors of Heaven*  

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Abstract  

The “Doors of Heaven” are the entrances to the celestial realm which only open and close at the passage of the sun god and the blessed dead in his following during their diurnal and nocturnal journeys. Texts and vignettes that came to us from ancient Egypt in the form of funerary books mention and depict the doors of heaven in different ways. The signs of the two aspects of time, \( nHH \) and \( D.t \), along with the deities associated with them are among the motifs portrayed and related to the portals of the sky. The research studies the relationship between \( nHH \) and \( D.t \) with the Doors of Heaven as well as the purpose and the religious significance of the representation of their symbols on the entrances to the eastern and western horizons of the sky and how this depiction contributes to the success of the daily voyage of the solar deity.  

Keywords: Doors of Heaven, \( nHH \), \( D.t \), aspects of time in ancient Egypt, Re, Osiris, \( \text{Rwti} \).  

- Conception of time in ancient Egypt:  

According to the ancient Egyptian beliefs, the two components of the whole conception of time are the \( nHH \) and the \( D.t \).\(^1\) While \( nHH \) represents the cyclic and the ‘imperfective’ side of time, the \( D.t \) is the linear or the completed time and hence its ‘perfective’ facet. This cyclic nature of the \( nHH \) corresponds to the recurring days, months and seasons; and therefore, to the process of death and rebirth. Whereas the \( D.t \), was seen as enduring and everlasting as the earth.\(^2\) At the primordial state of the universe, before the creation of the world, the concept of time did not exist.\(^3\)
According to the Book of the Heavenly Cow, Re had first created the $nHH$ aspect of time when he ascended to the sky and abandoned the earthly realm of humans which marked the first day of the new order. This actually means that before the ascension of Re to heavens the world only knew the linear facet of time, the $D.t$. Consequently, the $nHH$ is more related to the sky and the celestial cyclic time rather than the $D.t$ which refers to the linear eternity and the netherworld.\(^4\) The theory is expressed in other terms, after the creation of the universe, the separation between the sky goddess Nut and the earth god Geb was necessary for the daily cycle of the sun god and at this specific moment the ancient Egyptian world knew the conception of the cyclic time $nHH$.\(^5\) The appearance of the $nHH$ notion had brought with it the idea of death and the end of time,\(^6\) since the $nHH$ is eternal only during the existence of world, while $D.t$ had existed before creation and will continue to exist even after the end of the universe.\(^7\) This actually makes the conception of $nHH$ more related to the act of passing through the Doors of Heaven\(^8\) which is associated with death and the hope of joining the sun god in his cyclical daily journey. These two facets of time are also connected to the two aspects of the solar deity; Re and Osiris. As the $nHH$ and $D.t$ are the two facets of the whole unit of time, Re and Osiris are the two forms of a one great deity.\(^9\) The $nHH$ is believed to be the embodiment of Re as it symbolizes the cyclic process of death that is followed by rebirth, while the $D.t$ refers to the continuous aspect of time that is equated with Osiris and his linear netherworld realm.\(^10\)

- **Door of the tomb as the Door of Heaven:**

As early as the Old Kingdom, the opening of the Doors of Heaven for the deceased king was associated with the opening of the doors of the tomb as attested in PT Spell 553 §1361, “The two door leaves of the sky are open to you; the two door leaves of the Cool Water are open to you! The two door leaves of the tomb are open to you; the two door leaves of Nut are open to you!”. This idea equates between the door of the tomb and the doors of heaven as well as the womb of Nut, where the later personifies the tomb, the burial chamber and the sarcophagus,
for all of them share the same function of providing an exit of the dead from the darkness of the netherworld to his rebirth. This idea was not iconographically proven before the Book of the Dead vignettes as in that of chapter 92 in the papyrus of Neferwebenef (Louvre III 93). The scene shows the deceased’s bA and Swt getting out from the tomb whose façade is depicted with its upper part has two bulging ends between which the sun disk shines and emanates its rays so as to resemble the Axt sign of the horizon. These two protruding sides could be equated with the two mountains of the horizon that provide an entrance and exit to the eastern and western horizons of the sky. According to the annotations of the chapter, the tomb is open for the bA and Swt of the dead so as to go out into the day which is reflected in the vignette. The fact that the bA of the dead returns also through the same door suggests that the door of the tomb plays a dual role being an assimilation of both the eastern and the western gates of heaven.

Fig. 1: Vignette of the BD chapter 92, Papyrus of Neferwebenef, Louvre III 92, mid 18th Dynasty

After: S. Ratie, ‘Le Papyrus de Neferoubenef (Louvre III 93)’, Bibliothèque d’Etude 43, (1968), pl. IX

- The representation of nHH and D.t on the tomb doors in the Book of the Dead Vignettes:

In the tomb of Nebenmaat of Deir el Medina T.T. 219, the vignette of the BD chapter 92 shows the Swt of the deceased along with a large black solar disk representing the Swt of the sun god as they
leave the door of the tomb. In this version of the vignette, only the Swt of the dead and the sun god go out in the day to start their diurnal journey. The door of the tomb is topped with a cavetto cornice under which there is a panel decorated with repetitive patterns of nHH signs. Due to the correlation between the nHH signs and the idea of the assimilation between the door of the tomb and the Door of Heaven, the vignette of the BD chapter 92 from the tomb of Nebenmaat refers to the cyclic movement of the sun god, who is identified with nHH, along with the dead in his following between the eastern and the western doors of the horizon.

Fig. 2: Vignette of the Book of the Dead chapter 92 – Tomb of Nebmaat, T.T. 219, Deir el Medina

After: Ch., Maystre, Tombes de Deir el-Médineh. La tombe de Nebenmât (N° 219), MIFAO 71, (Cairo, 1936), pl. 9

The depiction of the repetitive nHH patterns is also attested in the vignette of the BD chapter 72 from the tomb of Nakhtamun T.T. 335 at Deir el Medina. On the northern wall of the corridor that leads to the burial chamber, the scene shows the wife of the deceased standing while raising her hands in adoration in front of a door which lintel is decorated with Xkrw motives and a small figure of her husband praying for Osiris. The door jambs are ornamented with two vertical lines of
recurring $nHH$ signs set against two D.t signs depicted at the base of each side of the door.\textsuperscript{14} Despite the fact that this scene is not accompanied with the annotations of the BD chapter,\textsuperscript{15} it is believed to be the vignette of chapter 72 whose title is “Formula for opening the $imHt$ and going out into the day”. The $imHt$ is translated as both the tomb chamber or the netherworld,\textsuperscript{16} which denotes that both of them are playing the same role. Thus, this door is considered as both that of the tomb and the netherworld which are in fact equated with the door of the sky.

Fig. 3: The northern wall of the corridor that leads to the burial chamber C – Tomb of Nakhtamun, T.T. 335, Deir el Medina

After: www.osirisnet.net/ accessed November 1, 2019 at 08:19 pm

In the text of the BD chapter 72, the deceased also expresses his wish to join the great god “$Tkm$” whom is identified with the sun god,\textsuperscript{17} for his name is written with the determinative of a falcon on a standard.\textsuperscript{18} In an amuletic papyrus in Leiden, the deity is referred to being the “$Tkm$ of everyday, the great morning god” in a clear identification with the morning form of the solar deity. In CT spell 404 V 197 – 198, the god “$Tkm$” is mentioned to have “opened the western horizon” and the one who “knows the eastern horizon” which
implies the cyclic motion “nHH” of that divinity equated with the sun god between the doors of the eastern and the western horizons. This actually applies on the vignette from the tomb of Nakhtamun, where the repetitive nHH signs on either side of the door signify the cyclic motion of Re against the netherworld indicated by the D.t signs at the bottom of either side.

This scene also implies on one hand the birth of Re from Osiris and the day from the night which happens at the eastern door of heaven every morning. On the other hand, the return of Re to the embrace of Osiris at night and to the netherworld which occurs every evening at the western door of heaven. This is based on the fact these nHH signs, compared with the day and Re, are shown as if emerging from as well as returning to the D.t which is equated with the night, netherworld and Osiris. The notion of the birth of the day from the night and the birth of Re from Osiris is mentioned in the PT Spell 636 a-c, where Osiris is mentioned as the “Horizon from which Re goes forth”. Servajean relates the representation of the two signs of the two aspects of time in a vertical way on either side as to refer to the eternal cycle of the solar disk from the sky towards the earth. This depiction of the deceased and his wife will actually guarantee that they participate in the cyclic rebirth nHH of the sun god eternally D.t.20

According to Bruyère, the door shown in the Book of the Dead vignette 72 from the tomb of Nakhtamun is believed to be that of the netherworld given to the depiction of god Osiris.21 In fact, this representation of Osiris could indicate the dual function of the door as both the eastern and the western gates of the Axt where Osiris is residing. The existence of Osiris at the eastern and the western portals of heaven is referred to in the annotations of the Book of Nut which states that the rear and mouth of the goddess are to be similar to the eastern and the western doors of heaven.22 At the mouth of Nut, which is mentioned to be the western door of heaven, the inscriptions refer to the sun god as “when the incarnation of this god enters is at her first hour of evening, becoming effective again in the embrace of his father Osiris, and becoming purified therein”. While at the rear of the goddess, which is the eastern door of heaven, the text alludes to the
solar deity as “he becomes pure in the embrace of his father Osiris, then his father lives, as he becomes effective again through him, as he opens in his splitting, and swims in his redness”. This motif, besides of assuring that Osiris is present at both the eastern and the western doors of heaven, could also be translated in the terms of nHH and D.t. Meaning Re is nHH and Osiris is D.t, they are present together at the eastern and the western doors of heaven, where they meet at the western gate of heaven and separate at the eastern one.

The depiction of the nHH pattern is shown on a similar door in the papyrus of Neferrenpet which is decorated with XAkrw motifs on the top followed by repetitive nHH signs below in a horizontal way. The deceased is shown striding towards the door while raising his hands in adoration. This portrayal is the vignette of BD chapter 72 where the nHH signs are also referring to the unending solar cycles around the door that represents the eastern and western horizons. Comparing this vignette with that one in the tomb of Nakhtamun as well as that of BD chapter 92 from the tomb of Nebmaat, the D.t sign is not represented. However, it could be understood that the D.t is replaced in here with the netherworld itself revealed in the form of the interior of the tomb door from which nHH emerges and born.

Fig. 4: Papyrus of Neferrenpet, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Bruxelles, E. 5043

After: L. Speleers, Le papyrus de Nefer Renpet: un livre des morts de la XVIIIe dynastie aux Musées royaux du Cinquantenaire à Bruxelles, pl.12, fig. 25
• *Rwti, nHH and D.t:*

The Doors of Heaven are not only shown in the form of actual doors, but their existence is implied by other depictions like that of the *Rwti* scene in the vignette of the BD chapter 17. According to the annotations that accompany this representation, the two lions are either yesterday and tomorrow or Re and Osiris, thus they are equated with the rising and setting sun from the eastern and western doors of heaven. Rwti are also assimilated with the two horizon mountains, *mAnw* and *bAXw* that are regarded as the entrances to the eastern and the western horizons of the sky. The association of Rwti with the gates of the celestial sphere could be a result of a play of words which is attested as early as the Old Kingdom. In PT §1713, the word for a gate “rwt” refers to the portal of Aker, the double lion deity equated with Rwti, who opens for the deceased king so that he could ascend to the sky: “The earth speaks to you, the gate ‘Rwt’ of Aker opens to you, the doors of Geb are opened to you”. An evidence on the association of Rwti, now equated with the doors of heaven, with the two aspects of time; nHH and D.t comes from the tomb of Neferabu T.T. 5 at Deir El Medina. The scene shows the two lions seated back to back while supporting the Axt sign. The sun disk of the Axt sign is enclosing the representation of Re-Horakhty fronted by the cobra wearing the double crown. Under the solar disk and between the two lions, the nHH sign is inscribed which refers to the cyclic motion of the solar deity between the eastern and the western doors of heaven embodied in the form of the two lions. During the Greek and Roman eras, the Axt sign whose disk encloses the figure of Re-Horakhty is read as nHH, which expresses the relation between the nHH cycle of the sun god to the two mountains of the horizon acting as the doors of heaven.
The two facets of time $nHH$ and $D.t$ and their relation with the doors of heaven in the form of $Rwiti$ is also attested in a scene from the 21$^{\text{st}}$ Dynasty papyrus of Herweben. It shows the sun god as a child within the $ouroboros$ snake received from the top by the two arms and lifted from below by a head of an ox. This representation is fitted between the double lions of the eastern and the western mountains.$^{34}$ According to Assmann, the serpent whose tail joins its mouth is itself the embodiment of the cyclic continuity $nHH$, which together with the figure of the young solar deity guarantee the continuous rebirth of time.$^{35}$ While the $ouroboros$ snake is equated with the cyclic $nHH$, the sun god shown seated inside is the generator and causer of that recurring eternity. In this case, he could be an equivalent to the figure of the falcon within the solar disk in the $Rwiti$ attestation from the tomb of Neferabu. Thus, the $nHH$ below the $Axt$ sign in the Neferabu scene could be paralleled with the $ouroboros$ within which the solar child is shown indicating the eternal cycle $nHH$ of the sun god between the eastern and the western doors of heaven.
Fig. 6: The ouroboros snake enclosing the solar child between the two horizon lions – Papyrus of Herweben A – 21st Dynasty – Egyptian Museum in Cairo SR 19325, TR 14/7/35/6

After: A. Piankoff, N. Rambova, *Mythological Papyri, Bollingen Series* 40, (New York, 1957), 22, fig. 3 and pl. 1

The two lions of the eastern and western mountains of the horizon that are now known to be the embodiment of the eastern and the western doors of heaven could themselves be equated with the $nHH$ and $D.t$. These aspects of time were considered as the two supports of the sky vault. This idea is assured in the depiction of the personifications of $nHH$ and $D.t$ in the form of divine male and female figures$^{36}$ on the shrine of Tutankhamun.$^{37}$ This depiction is an excerpt from the Book of the Heavenly Cow where the two effigies are mentioned to be “the two great gods whose name the dead man must know”.$^{38}$ According to the CT spell 80, II 28d, within which Atum narrates the creation of the world, he mentions that Shu is $nHH$ and Tefnut is $D.t$.$^{39}$ Because these two deities are assimilated with $Rwti$, as for example according to the PT spell 301 §447a-b$^{41}$ which actually gives justification to the fact that the two lions acting as the doors of the eastern and the western horizons are regarded as Shu and Tefnut, who also act as the personifications of the $nHH$ and $D.t$.$^{42}$
Fig. 7: Representation of the \( nHH \) and \( D.t \) as divine male and female figures supporting the sky vault – the first shrine of Tutankhamun – left interior side – 18\(^{th}\) Dynasty – the Egyptian Museum – Cairo

After: PIANKOFF, “Les Chapelles de Tout-Ankh-Amon”, Fascicule Deuxième, MIFAO 72 (Cairo, 1951), pl. 1

- Male and female connotations of the \( nHH \) and \( D.t \) and its association with the Doors of Heaven:

Based on the fact that \( nHH \) is personified by a male deity while the \( D.t \) by a female, could imply the idea of the birth of the male \( nHH \) from the female \( D.t \) which is another notion related to the eastern door of heaven where the act of birth happens. This actually indicates that the birth of the sun god from the womb of his mother goddess, either the celestial cow, Hathor or Nut,\(^43\) is the birth of \( nHH \) from \( D.t \). The womb of this mother goddess is regarded as the eastern gate of the sky, from which the birth of the sun god repeatedly “\( nHH \)” occurs every morning. As for her mouth, it is regarded as the western door of the sky through which the solar divinity repetitively “\( nHH \)” enters the netherworld realm. This conception does not actually contradict with the solar-Osirian associations of the \( nHH \) and \( D.t \) in terms of the birth of Re as \( nHH \) from Osiris as \( D.t \). Barta, discussed the solar-Osirian unity in terms of the mother-child relationship between Re and Osiris; where Osiris in his mother role actually receives Re in the west, becomes pregnant with him and then gives birth to him in the morning.\(^44\)
**Conclusion:**

According to the abovementioned discussed examples, the representation of the $nHH$ and $D.t$ signs on the Doors of Heaven not only refers to the two aspects of time in the ancient Egyptian thought; the cyclic and linear, but also embodies all the necessary aspects of the solar cycle that begins with the entry of the sun god into the western gate of the sky and ends with his rebirth from the eastern one. This is based on the fact that, $nHH$ as the embodiment of the day and the solar deity Re, is born from the $D.t$ which is equated with the night, the netherworld as well as Osiris. These acts of association between the day and the night as well as Re with Osiris occurred at the portals of the sky, or at the tomb doors assimilated with them. This union between Re and Osiris in their aspects of $nHH$ and $D.t$, where they support each other so as to cause everlasting recurrence of rebirths of solar divinity and the continuous victory of Osiris over his enemies. The continuity of life in the ancient Egyptian mind had very much depended on the repetition of cyclic rebirths of the sun god “$nHH$” which would lead to the realization of $mAat$ and the destruction of $isft$ that is guaranteed at the birth of the sun god from the eastern door of the sky every morning. The gates of the sky themselves could also be embodied in accordance with the $nHH$ and $D.t$ connotations which appeared in the $Rwti$ scenes and in the role of Shu and Tefnut as personifications of both the two lions as well as the two aspects of time. As attested on the first shrine of Tutankhamun, the male and female implications of the $nHH$ and $D.t$ confirms the notion of the birth of the male $nHH$ from the female $D.t$. Whereas the mouth of the female mother goddess “$D.t$” which swallows the solar deity “$nHH$” in the evening is the western door of heaven, while her womb is the eastern one. Thus, the association of the signs and conceptions of the two aspects of time, $nHH$ and $D.t$, with the Doors of Heaven, whether the eastern or the western one, is now clearly understood.

* A paper with the title “The Relationship between $nHH$ and $D.t$ with the Doors of Heaven” was presented by M. Aly in the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities 2020 Scholars’ Colloquium where the researcher included more evidence than those published in the present article.


6 Fr. Servajean, Djet et Neheh: Une Histoire du Temps Égyptian, Orientalia Monspeliensia 18, (Montpellier, 2007), 105

7 L. H. Roeten, ‘Some Observations on the nHH and D.t « eternity »’, Göttinger Missellen 201, (2004), 77; for the conception of the end of the universe see the Book of the Dead chapter 175.

8 The expression of the Doors of Heaven “aA wy pt” is used to refer to the leaves of the door of the shrine housing the statue of a deity which is incorporated in the title of the priest, the Shrine Opener “wn aA wy pt”, entitled with the opening of the shrine at the beginning of the temple service, J. Černý, “Note on aAwy-pt ‘Shrine’”, JEA 34, (1948), 120. E. Brovarski in his study “The Doors of Heaven”, Orientalia NOVA SERIES Vol. 46, No. 1, (1977), 107-115, traced the older origins of that term which he proposes it refers to the purification tent within which the body of the deceased is purified prior to his mumification and transition into the realm of the dead. He based his hypothesis on the earliest depiction to this construction found in the mastaba of Mereruka shown in the form of a building whose door leaves are open and topped with the pt sign of the sky which could be read as “aA wy pt”. Another recent study that suggests the same interpretation of the purification tent is also made by Sigrid M. van Roode, “De Deuren van de Hemel”, Mehen 2012, 143-157


they are granted the freedom of movement.  The liberation of both the ba and Swt of the deceased is a necessary step for being able to ascend to the horizon and enter through the sky. This notion is denoted to in the CT 491 which refers to several instances where the ba and Swt of the deceased are inseparable when the dead enters into the dominion of Re and enters into the celestial realm, so that the dead addresses the guardians as not to cease them so that they are granted the freedom of movement.

11 S. Quirke, Going out in the Day Light pt m hrw: The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead: Translation, sources, meanings, GHP Egyptology 20, (London, 2013), 210

12 The liberation of both the ba and Swt of the deceased is a necessary step for being able to ascend to the horizon and enter through the sky. This notion is denoted to in the CT 491 which refers to several instances where the ba and Swt of the deceased are inseparable when the dead enters into the dominion of Re and enters into the celestial realm, so that the dead addresses the guardians as not to cease them so that they are granted the freedom of movement.

13 M. Saleh, Das Totenbuch in den Thebanischen Beamtengräbern des Neuen Reiches. Texte und Vignetten, Archäologische Veröffentlichungen 46, (Mainz am Rhein, 1984), 53-54; PM I, Part 1, 322; Ch., Maystre, Tombes de Deir el-Médineh. La tombe de Nebenmât (N° 219), MIFAO 71, (Caire, 1936), pl. 9

14 M. Saleh, Das Totenbuch in den Thebanischen Beamtengräbern des Neuen Reiches. Texte und Vignetten, Archäologische Veröffentlichungen 46, (Mainz am Rhein, 1984), 38: B. Bruyère, Tombes Thébaines de Deir el Médineh a Décoration Monochrome, MIFAO 86, (Cairo, 1952), 92; B. Bruyère, Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1924-1925), FIFAO 3, (Cairo, 1926), 142

15 M. Saleh, Das Totenbuch in den Thebanischen Beamtengräbern des Neuen Reiches. Texte und Vignetten, Archäologische Veröffentlichungen 46, (Mainz am Rhein, 1984), 38


19 J. Assmann, Stein und Zeit: Mensch und Gesellschaft im alten Ägypten, (München, 2003), 41-42

20 Fr. Servajean, Djet et Neheh: Une Histoire du Temps Égyptien, Orientalia Monspeliensia 18, (Montpellier, 2007), 106-107

21 B. Bruyère, Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1924-1925), FIFAO 3, (Cairo, 1926), 142


Rwt as bAXw and mAAnw are also seen totally replacing the two horizon mountains so that they carry the solar disk itself see de C. de Wit, *Le Rôle et le Sens du Lion dans l’Égypte Ancienne*, (Leiden, 1951), 123, 125-126, 128, 148-149; G. Nagel, ‘Un Papyrus Funéraire de la Fin du Nouvel Empire [Louvre 3292 (inv.)]’, *BIFAO* 29, (1929), 53, pl. IV

26 C. de Wit, *Le Rôle et le Sens du Lion dans l’Égypte Ancienne*, (Leiden, 1951), 71-73


28 M. F. B. De La Roque, ‘Notes sur Aker’, *BIFAO* 30, (1930), 57-80


32 Fr. Servajaean, Djet et Neheh: Une Histoire du Temps Égyptian, *Orientalia Monspeliensia* 18, (Montpellier, 2007), 49


41 C. de Wit, Le Rôle et le Sens du Lion dans l’Égypte Ancienne, (Leiden, 1951), 109, 123