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HELL. The principal sources for our knowledge of the Egyptian conception of hell are the so-called Books of the Underworld which are found inscribed on the walls of the royal tombs of the New Kingdom (eighteenth to twentieth dynasties) in the Valley of the Kings at Thebes, then later also on papyri and other funerary objects belonging to nonroyal persons. The chief subject of these richly illustrated books—the most important of which are the *Book of That Which Is in the Underworld (Book of the Hidden Room)*, commonly known as the *Amduat*, the *Book of Gates*, and the *Book of Caverns*—is the nightly voyage of the sun god Re through the underworld. During this journey the sun god temporarily unites with the body of Osiris, the god of the dead, which is resting there, and this enables him to regenerate and to be reborn in the morning. Since the underworld also harbors the abode where the damned are punished and annihilated, these books contain vivid descriptions and depictions of this terrifying place.

The nocturnal journey of the sun god through the underworld is not yet a prominent theme in the oldest corpus of royal mortuary literature, the Pyramid Texts, and descriptions of hell are therefore absent from these spells. By contrast, the picture that emerges from the Books of the Underworld is reflected in the nonroyal funerary spells found in the Coffin Texts and the *Book of Going Forth by Day (the Book of the Dead)*, even though these do not contain elaborate descriptions of hell either. This is not surprising, as these spells take it for granted that their owners have successfully passed the judgment of the dead and are therefore numbered among the blessed who follow the sun god Re on his eternal journey along the sky and through the underworld. Spells mentioning the dangers of the world of the damned which the blessed dead pass on this journey are plentiful, but these spells are aimed principally at steering clear of such dangers, and the subject of the fate of the damned is therefore usually avoided as well. The role of the divine pharaoh is different, however. During his life he had been the earthly in-

carnation and representative of the sun god; his principal task had been to maintain the cosmic and social order (*maat*) established by the god at creation and to repel the forces of chaos which constantly threaten the ordered world. This he did either symbolically, by means of the daily temple ritual, or more literally, for example by hunting dangerous animals in the desert or fighting battles against Egypt's enemies, or by administering justice and punishing criminals. After his death the king "unites with the sun disk and his divine body merges with him who made him"; that is, he is identified with the sun god, and in this new existence he continues to perform the task of subduing the powers of chaos. This active role of king and sun god necessitates a detailed description of the punishment of the damned, who represent the forces of evil. Their fate is therefore described in terms similar to those used for earthly adversaries of the king and of Egypt: they are "enemies" who are "reckoned with," "overthrown," "repelled," "felled"; they are "under the feet of" the king or the god. The exact nature of their misdeeds is never spelled out, nor is there a direct relationship between their punishment and the crime they committed. There are no separate areas in hell for different categories of evildoers, nor is there any sort of Purgatory, where sinners can repent so that they can be admitted to the company of the followers of Re at a later stage. The crimes of those who are condemned to hell consist of nothing more and nothing less than having acted against the divine world order (*maat*) established at the beginning of creation; by doing so they have excluded themselves from *maat* and revealed themselves as representatives of chaos. After death they are forever reduced to the state of "non-being"—the chaotic state of the world before creation, for which they have shown themselves to be predestined by their behavior in life. For them there is no renewal of life, but only a second, definitive death. In mythological terms, they are the "gang of Seth," the god who brought death into the world by murdering Osiris, or the "children of Nut" (the mother of Seth), the first generation of mankind, who rebelled against Re.

The fate of the damned is in every respect the opposite of that of the blessed (*ꜥḥw*). When the righteous die and are mummified and buried with the proper rites, they successfully pass the judgment of the dead and start a new life in the company of Re and Osiris. Their limbs are "tied together" again, and the ritual of the Opening of the Mouth ensures that they regain control over their senses. Their bodies rest in their tombs, and at sunrise, when Re is reborn from the underworld in the east, their *ba*-souls leave the tomb unhindered and join the sun god. They spend a happy time in the Fields of Rushes (paradise), where they have plenty of cool air, food, drink, and sexual pleasures. At night, when Re once more enters the underworld in the west and unites with Osiris, they too re-

turn to their mummified bodies. When the damned (*mtw*) end their earthly lives, however, demons tear away their mummy wrappings and uncover their bodies, which are left to decompose. In the place to which they are condemned, the normal order of things is reversed, even to the extent that the damned have to walk upside down, eat their own excrement, and drink their own urine. Their hands are tied behind their backs, often around stakes; their heads and limbs are severed from their bodies and their flesh is cut off their bones; their hearts are taken out; their *ba*-souls are separated from their bodies, forever unable to return to them; and even their shadows are wiped out. They have no air and suffer from hunger and thirst, for they receive no funerary offerings. Worst of all, they are denied the revivifying light of the sun god, who ignores them, even though they cry out loud and wail when he passes them in the underworld at night. Thus, they are excluded from the eternal cosmic cycle of the renewal of life. Instead, they are assigned to the "outer darkness" (*kkw sm3w*), the primeval darkness of the chaotic world before creation, which is situated in the deepest recesses of the underworld, outside the created world. There they are punished by demons, the representatives of chaos, who are often recruited from the ranks of the damned dead (*mtw*) themselves, so that they torture and kill one another. They are subjected to knives and swords and to the fire of hell, often kindled by fire-spitting snakes.

These terrible punishments are carried out in the "slaughtering place" (*nmt*) or "place of destruction" (*h3tmyt*), presided over by the fierce goddess Sakhmet, whose butchers (*nmtyw*) hack their victims to pieces and burn them with inextinguishable fire, sometimes in deep pits (*h3dw*) or in cauldrons (*w/h3wt*) in which they are scorched, cooked, and reduced to ashes; demons feed on their entrails and drink their blood. Another location is the Lake of Fire (*š n sgt*), which is already mentioned in the so-called *Book of Two Ways* in the Coffin Texts (Spell 1054/1166) and illustrated in the *Book of Going Forth by Day* (chapter 126). Like the "outer darkness," it is a place of regeneration for the sun god and his blessed followers, to whom it provides nourishment and cool water, but a place of destruction for the damned. Birds fly away from it when they see its burning, bloody water and smell the stench of putrefaction which rises up from it. In the vignette of chapter 126, its shores are guarded by "the four baboons who sit at the bow of the bark of Re," and who are usually associated with sunrise. Here they figure as the judges of the divine tribunal "who judge the poor as well as the rich" and who decide who is going to be granted access through "the secret portals of the West" and who will be delivered to the hellhound, who, according to another spell (CT 335 BD 17), is in charge of this place, the "Swallower of Millions" who "devours

corpses (or shadows), snatches hearts and inflicts injury without being seen."

At the end of the eighteenth dynasty, a similar monster appears in the well-known vignette of chapter 125 of the *Book of Going Forth by Day* that shows the judgment of the deceased before the divine tribunal. In this scene, the heart of the deceased is weighed in the balance against a feather, the symbol of *maat*. In many cases, the Lake of Fire of chapter 126 is also shown in this vignette. A late (Demotic) text explains that "if his evil deeds outnumber his good deeds he is delivered to the Swallower . . . ; his soul as well as his body are destroyed and never will he breathe again." In the vignette this monster is called "Swallower of the Damned" (*mt mtw*); she is depicted with the head of a crocodile, the forelegs and body of a lion, and the hindquarters of a hippopotamus. Another name for her is *š3yt* ("beast of destiny"). She is usually sitting close to the balance, ready to devour her victim, but since the owner of the *Book of Going Forth by Day* in question is naturally supposed to survive the judgment, the Swallower is almost never shown grabbing her prey. Only a few very late instances dating to Roman times depict this; in one case, the monster is sitting beside a fiery cauldron into which the emaciated bodies of the damned, stripped of their mummy wrappings, are thrown.

In these late times, Egyptian conceptions began to be influenced by images from elsewhere in the Hellenistic world, as is shown by a representation of the Swallower that is very reminiscent of the Greek Sphinx, who was also a demon of fate and death. In their turn, later Egyptian representations of the Christian Hell, from Coptic and other early Christian texts, may well have influenced medieval European descriptions and depictions of the Inferno.

[See also Afterlife; Book of Going Forth by Day; Book of That Which Is in the Underworld; Demons; Ethics and Morality; Judgment of the Dead; and Paradise.]

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