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PARADISE. In Western culture the word “paradise” usually refers to a location: first, the Garden of Eden, where the first human beings lived in perfect harmony with their maker and with the rest of his creation, then the abode of the blessed dead where this primeval harmony has been restored and where they live forever in bliss. Comparably well-defined and more or less permanent locations did not exist in ancient Egyptian religion. This does not mean, however, that the concept of an ideal world at the beginning of time did not exist. The opening lines of the *Book of the Heavenly Cow* describe it as follows: “Once upon a time it happened that Re, the god who created himself, arose after he had held the kingship and men and gods were still united. Then mankind began to plan a rebellion against Re, for His Majesty had become old.” Other texts also allude to this primeval world, the “era of Re” (*rk R'*) or the “era of the god” (*rk ntr*), and king lists often begin with a dynasty of gods, headed by either Re or Ptah, which comes before the dynasties of the human pharaohs. During this era gods and humans lived together in an undivided world, and it was humankind’s fault that this harmonious situation came to an end. According to the version of the myth recorded in the *Book of the Heavenly Cow*, Re initially decided to annihilate all human beings, but after a great many of them had been killed, he eventually took pity on them; instead of continuing the massacre, he withdrew to the back of the Heavenly Cow and retired from his duties, leaving the day-to-day running of affairs to his deputy, the god Thoth. One of the earliest references to this myth is found in the Coffin Texts (Spell 1130), where the Lord of All says, “I made everyone equal to his fellow, and I told them not to do evil, but it was their hearts which disobeyed what I had said.” In chapter 175 of the *Book of Going Forth by Day*, the creator god asks Thoth for advice after the Children of Nut—i.e., the first generation of humanity—have rebelled against him, and Thoth replies: “You should not witness evil, you should not suffer it. Let their years be shortened and their months be curtailed, for they have corrupted the hidden things in everything you have created.” Human beings have destroyed the perfect order of creation; as a result, death comes into the world and “paradise” is lost.

A model of the original ideal world is found in the Egyptian temple with its perpetual cycle of rituals, the aim of which was the ████████ maintenance of the perfect

cosmic and social order (*maat*) established at creation. Only the reigning king, who was himself a god among men and a man among the gods and who was therefore able to act as the deputy of the gods on earth, had access to the inner temple; in everyday cultic practice, however, he was replaced by priests who acted on his behalf. Ordinary human beings had no access to the gods in the temple. Only after death were they reunited with the gods, whom they would then be able to worship directly, without a royal intermediary, as is shown by numerous representations on tomb walls and funerary objects, especially after the Amarna period.

The abode of the dead can hardly be described as Paradise, however. The spell from the *Book of Going Forth by Day* (or *Book of the Dead*, BD) quoted above contains a dialogue between Osiris, the god of the dead with whom the deceased himself is identified, and Atum, the creator god: "O my lord Atum, why is it that I have to travel to the district of silence, where there is no water and no air, which is so deep, so dark and so impenetrable?—You will live there in peace of mind.—But one cannot even have sex there!—I have given blessedness instead of water, air and sexual pleasure, and peace of mind instead of bread and beer, so says Atum." Clearly the idea of being trapped forever in the realm of the dead provoked mixed feelings in the Egyptians, and although at death everyone who successfully passed the final judgment became an Osiris, most funerary texts put emphasis on the identification of the deceased with the sun god, who is not restricted in his movements but enters the netherworld at night, only to be reborn and resurrected in the morning. The mummified body of the deceased rests in its tomb in the underworld, but his *ba*, represented as a bird with a human head, is able to move in and out of the tomb. The *ba* joins Re on his eternal journey along the sky and through the realm of the dead: at sunrise, when Re is reborn, the *ba* leaves the tomb, and at night, when Re travels through the underworld, where he temporarily unites with the body of Osiris, the *ba* returns to the mummified body in the tomb.

At first sight, the idea of a perpetual cycle would seem to be difficult to reconcile with the concept of a permanent locality such as Paradise. There is, however, a particular stretch of the daily journey of the sun god, and of the deceased with him, that has sometimes been called the Egyptian equivalent of the Greek Elysian Fields. Egyptian texts use two different names for this abode: the Field of Offerings (*šꜣt ꜥꜥꜣw*), and the Field of Rushes (*šꜣt ꜥꜣꜣw*). They are mentioned together as early as the Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts, and it remains unclear whether these names refer to two different locations or whether they are two names for one and the same place; obviously, they are closely related. Although they are occasionally said to be in the northern sky, most texts agree that they are situated in the east, at the place of sunrise: "the gate . . . from

which Re goes out into the east of the sky" is "in the middle of the Field of Rushes" (BD 149). In chapters 109 and 110 of the *Book of Going Forth by Day*, which describe and even depict these fields, the Field of Rushes is called "the City of the God" (i.e., Re); it is inhabited by the "Eastern Souls" and by Re-Horakhty (the rising sun) and the Morning Star (visible only in the eastern sky). Despite the term "city" used here, the Field of Rushes is really an undated marshland divided by lakes and canals; according to the Pyramid Texts, the sun god purifies himself in the morning in the Lake of the Field of Rushes. In BD 109 and 149 it is described as follows: "Its walls are of iron, its barley stands 5 cubits high, with ears of 2 and stalks of 3 cubits, and its emmer stands 7 cubits high, with ears of 3 and stalks of 4 cubits; it is the blessed, each of them 9 cubits tall, who reap them alongside the Eastern Souls." This idealized farmland stands in stark contrast to the gloomy abode of Osiris, which is airless and without food, drink, and sexual pleasures, totally different from the picture that emerges from the opening lines of chapter 110: "Beginning of the spells of the Field of Offerings and the spells of going out into the day, entering and leaving the necropolis, attaining the Field of Rushes, dwelling in the Field of Offerings, the Great City, the Mistress of Air, being in control there, being a blessed one there, plowing and harvesting there, eating and drinking there, making love there, and doing everything that one was used to do on earth." In the vignette illustrating this chapter, the deceased, often accompanied by his wife, is shown paddling across the waterways of these fields in his boat and plowing, sowing, reaping, and threshing, often dressed in beautiful white linen garments which demonstrate that all of this hard labor should not be taken too literally: in actual fact, it is carried out by the deceased's substitutes, the *ushabti* statuettes which were an essential part of his or her funerary equipment.

The deceased spend only part of their lives after death in this place of abundance, however. When the sun goes down below the horizon and Re enters the underworld, they too return to their tombs. The next morning they will rise from the sleep of death again, bathe in the waters of the Field of Rushes, and provide for their daily sustenance there. The food offerings that they receive every day along with the daily rituals carried out by their relatives or their funerary priests, are the earthly equivalent of the products of the Field of Offerings and the Field of Rushes. One of the most common scenes in Egyptian tombs from all periods is that of the deceased seated at an offering table stacked with tall loaves of bread. From the sixth dynasty onward, these loaves are often replaced by the reed-leaves which in the hieroglyphic script spell the word *šꜣt* ("field"), and in later texts and representations the offering tables are expressly labeled "the Fields of Offerings."

[See also Afterlife; Hell; and Judgment of the Dead.]

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