

# Lexikon der Ägyptologie

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Lieferung 49  
( Band VI, Lieferung 9 )

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WIESBADEN 1986

**Zerbrechen der roten Töpfe.** *Sḏ ḏšrw* "breaking the *ḏšrt*-vessels" is the Egyptian term for a \*ritual consisting in the destruction of pottery vases either by crushing them with a pestle,<sup>1</sup> by dashing two of them against each other<sup>2</sup> or by smashing them on the ground.<sup>3</sup> Our understanding of this ritual is hampered by the fact that the archaeological evidence on one side and the textual and iconographical evidence on the other side, though doubtless related, are of a different nature and seem to refer to a different ritual setting in each case. The two categories are therefore best discussed separately.

A. The archaeological evidence is restricted to a number of groups of figurines<sup>4</sup> depicting enemies and fragments of deliberately broken pottery vessels inscribed with the so-called Execration Texts (\*Ächtungstexte). Eight groups have so far been found, varying in date from the 6th to the 18th Dynasty.<sup>5</sup> Of these only two consist of inscribed potsherds, both dated to the middle of

Dyn. 12, i.e. a group allegedly originating "from a tomb" on the Theban west bank<sup>6</sup> and another found in the desert near the MK fortresses of \*Mirgissa.<sup>7</sup> The remaining groups consist of figurines buried loosely in the sand<sup>8</sup> or stored together in a jar. They depict foreign or Egyptian enemies which in most cases have been carefully identified by name and filiation. The connection between sherds and figurines is proven not only by the fact that both are inscribed with the same execration formulae but also by the Mirgissa find which in addition to a large number of sherds contained three limestone figurines. Most finds derive from cemeteries (\*Gîsa, \*Saqqâra, \*Theben), but they do not seem to be related to one particular burial. Four jars each containing a vast quantity of small figurines as well as one larger figure were found buried in four different locations which formed a line running from east to north-west in the northern part of the necropolis of Gîza. According to hieratic dockets on the jars they had been deposited there at short intervals within a period of two months during the reign of an unknown king of Dyn. 6.<sup>9</sup> The Mirgissa find presents a particularly interesting case. Here the execration deposit was not located in a cemetery but in the desert surrounding the MK fortifications. Apart from potsherds and figurines several more objects were found, including figures of animals, a flint knife and human remains, and it has been suggested that an actual human sacrifice (\*Menschenopfer) was part of the execration ritual here,<sup>10</sup> a sacrifice more commonly substituted by the symbolic destruction of figurines or pottery vessels. Nothing is known about the occasion that prompted the enactment of the ritual. Perhaps it took place when an area of the desert had to be "conquered" from and protected against the powers of chaos for the laying out of a cemetery or the building of a fortress.<sup>11</sup> As such the figurines may be comparable to the large limestone statues of bound prisoners found in the precincts of OK pyramid temples<sup>12</sup> or to the reliefs depicting similar prisoners on the exterior walls of NK temples.<sup>13</sup> The "execution" of figurines of enemies is well-known from LP rituals (\*Vernichtungsrituale) such as the "Book of Overthrowing \*Seth and His Gang"<sup>14</sup> or the "Book of Overthrowing Apophis" (\*Apophisbuch)<sup>15</sup> and from representations in Graeco-Roman temples.<sup>16</sup> The lack of actual finds from this period and indeed of more finds from earlier times is probably due to the use of figurines of (red) wax (\*Wachs),<sup>17</sup> wood<sup>18</sup> and other perishable materials or of drawings on \*papyrus<sup>19</sup> which, at least in LP rituals, were "fettered, spat upon four times, trampled with the left foot,

pierced with a spear, cut with a knife, thrown into the fire, spat upon several more times while in the fire”<sup>20</sup> and thus effectively destroyed. No reference is made to the breaking of pottery vessels in these late texts, which may indicate that the practice had by then been abandoned.

B. The earliest textual reference to a ritual called *sd dšrw*t is found in Pyr. Spr. 244, where it accompanies an offering presented to the king “in order that he may be strong and that he (i. e. the enemy<sup>21</sup>) may fear him.”<sup>22</sup> It is also occasionally mentioned at the end of the offering-list (\*Opferliste) in some OK and MK tombs,<sup>23</sup> often together with the rite called *injt rd* (\*Inet-red).<sup>24</sup> The *dšrt*-vessels destroyed at the end of the offering ritual are undoubtedly the same as those occurring in the offering-list itself where they are always said to contain water (*mw dšrt* or *dšrt nt mw*).<sup>25</sup> “Those who carry the *dšrt*-vessels” (*brjw dšrw*t) are also mentioned in the Funerary Liturgy of pRam. E.<sup>26</sup> That the breaking of the red vessels was not restricted to funerals is shown by a unique scene in the temple of \*Luxor. On the wall enclosing the door which gives access to the offering room for the cult-image of \*Amun \*Amenophis III is depicted breaking two *dšrt*-vessels for the god by dashing them against each other.<sup>27</sup> Four *nmst* and four *dšrt*-jars were used in the Ritual of Opening the Mouth (\*Mundöffnungsritual)<sup>28</sup> and these are often represented in the so-called Frises d’Objets (\*Gerätefries) on MK coffins.<sup>29</sup> Strictly speaking the term *dšrt* refers to a wide conical pot with a round base,<sup>30</sup> but already in Pyr. 249b tall-necked vases are shown among the determinatives of *dšrw*t and the term therefore could probably refer to any vessel showing the red colour (*dšr*) of the earthenware from which it was made.<sup>31</sup> This is also evident from the iconographical material which, apart from the Luxor scene already mentioned, consists exclusively of representations in NK tombs, mainly in the Memphite necropolis.<sup>32</sup> These show a number of funerary booths<sup>33</sup> supported by light poles composed of papyrus-stalks; the entrance is flanked by two palm-branches and grapes are hanging down from the ceiling.<sup>34</sup> In the booths are offering-tables heaped with all kinds of offerings and racks containing a number of jars (usually four) of a type commonly used for the temporary storage of water, with a tall neck and a biconical body with a round base. In front of the booths is a shaven-headed priest displaying various gestures of mourning who takes out the jars one by one. Then he either empties them and subsequently throws them on the floor or he smashes them immediately so that the water is streaming out when the jars break on the ground. Sometimes the

burning of incense is also depicted, though it is not clear whether this took place before<sup>35</sup> or after<sup>36</sup> the breaking of the jars. At the end of the ritual the booths were taken down.<sup>37</sup> The latter are also frequently shown in Theban tombs,<sup>38</sup> but the depiction of the breaking of the jars does not seem to have been part of the standard repertory of the tomb decoration here. That the ritual took place at Theban funerals as well, at least in Ramesside times, is suggested by the occasional representation of a priest pouring water from a jar in front of the booth<sup>39</sup> and by a few more explicit scenes;<sup>40</sup> one of these varies from the Memphite examples in that the jars are not broken by a priest but by the last woman of a group of female mourners<sup>41</sup>.

The breaking of objects as a funerary rite is widespread and many different reasons for this custom are given in various cultures.<sup>42</sup> In Egyptological literature it is often assumed that the explanation of the breaking of the *dšrt*-vessels as the destruction of the enemies of the deceased is a later mythological interpretation of a custom originally practical, i. e. to prevent the re-use of the ritual vessels for subsequent “profane” or non-ritual purposes.<sup>43</sup> Other explanations given are that the vessels had to be “killed” in order to “assimilate them to the state of the owner”<sup>44</sup> or to render them harmless for the surviving relatives.<sup>45</sup> It has even been maintained that the vessels were filled with “magical potential” through their contact with the demonic powers of the netherworld and that this magical power was released from the vessels by breaking them.<sup>46</sup> It should be stressed, however, that neither of these explanations is supported by Egyptian evidence. The breaking of the red jars takes place at the end of the offering-ritual which itself forms part of the Funerary Ritual (\*Bestattungsritual).<sup>47</sup> It is followed by the liturgy of carrying the funerary equipment to the tomb and the two liturgies are terminated by the slaughtering of a bull; then follows the dragging of the sarcophagus into the tomb, accompanied by the song “To the West, to the West, o praised one!” In NK tomb scenes the breaking of the jars in front of the funerary booths is in most cases depicted in the immediate vicinity of the scenes showing the bringing of the funerary equipment and the dragging of the sarcophagus; in one case<sup>48</sup> the words “To the West, to the West, o praised one!” are recited by the priest while removing the jars from the booth in order to smash them. In the Pyramid Texts the *sd dšrw*t of Spr. 244 is followed by a libation in Spr. 32;<sup>49</sup> both rites have been explained by Altenmüller<sup>50</sup> as actions carried out simultaneously with the slaughtering of a bull in the slaughterhouse of the pyramid temple,

the breaking of the jars and the libation symbolizing the killing of the bull and the cutting up of its body,<sup>51</sup> respectively. This interpretation would seem to be confirmed by the representation of the ritual in the Memphite tomb of Horemheb (\*Harmheb).<sup>52</sup> Here a long series of booth-scenes is shown and each of these is accompanied by the depiction of a bull which is being slaughtered. The actual killing of the animal is shown to take place at the very moment when the priest takes out the first jar and smashes it. Both the sacrifice of the bull (\*Opfertier, \*Schlachten) and the breaking of the *dšrt*-vessels with their Sethian red colour (\*Farben) symbolize the annihilation of the god's enemy (\*Feindsymbolik) and, although this is never said in so many words in Egyptian texts, it is quite possible that the water streaming from the jars represents the blood (*dšrw*, \*Blut) flowing out of the bull when its throat has been cut.<sup>53</sup> It seems likely that the destruction of figurines or pottery vases inscribed with the names of enemies and the breaking of the red jars at the end of the offering-ritual are variants of one and the same ritual aimed at the destruction of evil forces lurking beyond the borders of the cosmos. Although the ritual may be described in a technical sense as an act of sympathetic magic it is more likely to be interpreted as a rite of reassurance,<sup>54</sup> enacted to reassure and thereby protect<sup>55</sup> the participants of the ritual when they approach the dangerous borderline between the ordered world and the domain of the powers of chaos (\*Gefährdungsbewußtsein).

<sup>1</sup> Pyr. 249b [M]; cf. Kurt Sethe, Die Ächtung feindlicher Fürsten, Völker und Dinge auf altägyptischen Tongefäßscherben des Mittleren Reiches, APAW 1926. 5, 20. – <sup>2</sup> Hellmut Brunner, Die südlichen Räume des Tempels von Luxor, AV 18, Mainz 1977, pl. 71. – <sup>3</sup> Borchardt, in: ZÄS 64, 1929, 12–16. – <sup>4</sup> Usually of sun-dried clay, sometimes of limestone or even alabaster. – <sup>5</sup> See the list given by Posener, in: LÄ I, 67–69. On three of the four finds from Giza (Posener's no. 1) listed there as unpublished see now Abu Bakr and Osing, in: MDAIK 29, 1973, 97–133; Osing, in: MDAIK 32, 1976, 133–185. – <sup>6</sup> Posener's no. 4. Sethe, o.c., 20–21, connecting the find with the ritual mentioned in Pyr. Spr. 244 (see below), surmised that it derived from the tomb or mortuary temple of one of the kings of Dyn. 11, but this possibility is ruled out by the 12th Dyn. date of the find, see Georges Posener, Princes et pays de l'Asie et de la Nubie, Brussels 1940, 35 n. 1; id., in: Kush 6, 1958, 43. – <sup>7</sup> Posener's no. 5. See now also Vila, in: L'homme hier et aujourd'hui. Recueil d'études en hommage à André Leroi-Gourhan, Paris 1973, 625–639. – <sup>8</sup> Cf. the description of an execution in CT Spr. 23: "You shall not be interrogated, you shall not be arrested, you shall not be imprisoned, you shall not be fettered, you shall not be put under guard, you shall not be taken to the place of execution to which one takes rebels, no sand shall be thrown over

your face", CT I, 70b–71a. – <sup>9</sup> Probably \*Pepi II; see Osing, o.c., 154–155. – <sup>10</sup> Vila, o.c. (v. n. 7). – <sup>11</sup> In that case the execration deposit would supplement the foundation deposit whose principal function was "to delimit and purify the sacred area within which the temple or tomb was built" (James M. Weinstein, Foundation Deposits in Ancient Egypt, PhD University of Pennsylvania 1973, 433). Contrary to Mesopotamian foundation deposits, which included prophylactic figurines, their Egyptian counterparts had no apparent protective function (o.c., 434–435). – <sup>12</sup> Lauer and Leclant, in: RdE 21, 1969, 55–62. – <sup>13</sup> E.g. on the façade of the eastern high gate of \*Medinet Habu (Medinet Habu VIII, pl. 600); cf. William J. Murnane, United With Eternity, Chicago–Cairo 1980, 6–7. – <sup>14</sup> Urk. VI, 1–59. – <sup>15</sup> pBremner-Rhind 22, 1–32, 12. See also pBM 10081, 35, 21 (Schott, in: ZÄS 65, 1930, 35–41); cf. Posener, in: Annuaire du Collège de France, 74<sup>e</sup> année, Paris 1973–1974, 397–405; 75<sup>e</sup> année, Paris 1974–1975, 405–412. – <sup>16</sup> Cf. J. Capart, in: Posener, Princes et pays, 6–7. – <sup>17</sup> Urk. VI, 5, 6; 37, 3; pBremner-Rhind 23, 6–7 etc.; see for the use of wax in destructive rituals Raven, in: OMRO 64, 1983, 24–26. – <sup>18</sup> Urk. VI, 5, 11; pJumilhac 18, 9–10. – <sup>19</sup> Urk. VI, 5, 9–10 etc. – <sup>20</sup> Urk. VI, 5, 12–19; 37, 13 ff. – <sup>21</sup> Cf. Pyr. 113a–b; 614c. – <sup>22</sup> Pyr. 249a–b. – <sup>23</sup> Duell, Mereruka I, pl. 67; Meir IV, pl. 18, 1; Deshasheh, pl. 29; unpublished tomb of *Wnjs-hj-jst.f* at Saqqāra, see Barta, Opferliste, 87. Cf. also CT VII, 128f–k. – <sup>24</sup> Cf. for this rite Gardiner, in: Davies–Gardiner, Amenemhêt, 93–94; H. Altenmüller, in: JEA 57, 1971, 146–153. – <sup>25</sup> Barta, Opferliste, index s.v. *dšrt*. In the NK offering-list of the Daily Temple Ritual one *dšrt*-vessel is sometimes said to contain "Lower-Egyptian wine", *ibid.*, 141. 143. – <sup>26</sup> Gardiner, in: JEA 41, 1955, 16, pl. 6 (c). – <sup>27</sup> Moret, in: RdE 3, 1938, 167; Brunner, Südliche Räume (v. n. 2), pls. 16. 71, and see pp. 79 ff. for the function of this room as "Speisetschsaal für das Kultbild". Whether the scene in Naville, Festival-Hall, pl. 24, 9 has anything to do with the ritual (cf. Borchardt, o.c. [v. n. 3], 16) is very uncertain. – <sup>28</sup> Otto, Mundöffnungsritual II, 37–44. – <sup>29</sup> Jéquier, Frises d'Objets, 311–312. – <sup>30</sup> Cf. Gardiner, EG<sup>3</sup>, Sign-list, W 11 and W 13; Wb V, 493. – <sup>31</sup> Jéquier, o.c., 311. Although *dšrt*-vessels of gold or other metals were sometimes made for permanent use in the temple (cf. Kees, Opfertanz, 55–56), there is no evidence to suggest that the ritual originally consisted in the noisy destruction of red copper vessels in order to strike terror into the enemies (thus Dorothea Arnold, in: LÄ II, 487). – <sup>32</sup> The following examples were discussed by Borchardt, o.c.: 1. Berlin 12411 [Ptahemhat Ty], the so-called "Berliner Trauerrelief", PM III<sup>2</sup>. 2, 711–712; 2. Cairo 21. 6. 24. 16 [Apuia], *ibid.*, 555; 3. Cairo JE 43275 [Kyiry], *ibid.*, 668; 4. Cairo JE 8374 [Hormin], *ibid.*, 665; 5. Cairo 12. 6. 24. 20 [Kha'emwaset], PM III<sup>2</sup>. 1, 304. To these may be added: 6. Two walls in the tomb of Horemheb, Geoffrey T. Martin, The Memphite Tomb of Horemheb I (forthcoming); cf. *id.*, in: JEA 63, 1977, pl. 1, 3; H. D. Schneider, in: Phoenix 22, Leiden 1977, 32 fig. 24 (printed in reverse); see also the following incomplete or damaged scenes: 7. Wall in the tomb of Maja, PM III<sup>2</sup>. 2, 662 (5), see Graefe, in: MDAIK 31, 1975, 200 with n. 1 and 202 fig. 6b; 8. Moscow I. 1. a. 6008 + Detroit 24. 98

[NN], PM III<sup>2</sup>. 2, 759. 757; Svetlana Hodjash and Oleg Berlev, *The Egyptian Reliefs and Stelae in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts Moscow, Leningrad 1982*, no. 68; 9. Copenhagen *ÆIN*. 38 [NN], PM III<sup>2</sup>. 2, 756; 10. Cairo 10. 6. 24. 12 [Ptahnefer], *ibid.*, 754; 11. Brussels E 3053–3055 [Neferrenpet], *ibid.*, 752; 12. Block from North-Saqqâra [NN], Geoffrey T. Martin, *The Tomb of Hēteḫka, Texts from Excavations 4*, London 1979, pl. 37 (127). Cf. also Gaballa A. Gaballa, *The Memphite Tomb-Chapel of Mose*, Warminster 1977, pls. 34–35. — <sup>33</sup> Since almost all sources consist of incomplete fragments it is difficult to ascertain the number of booths; the arrangement of some scenes (notably those in the tomb of Horemḫeb, no. 6 in the list above) and comparison with depictions of similar booths in Theban tombs suggest that there were only one or two of them (flanking the funerary procession?) and that the various depictions of booths should be taken as successive scenes showing different stages of the ritual performed in front of one and the same booth. — <sup>34</sup> In this respect the booths resemble the throne-<sup>\*</sup>kiosk of the king and of the god <sup>\*</sup>Osiris (Tb [Naville] I, pl. 196) and it has been argued that the booths represent the “vegetation dwelling” from which the deceased arises from the dead, see William B. Kristensen, *De loofhut en het loofhuttenfeest in den Egyptischen cultus, Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeling Letterkunde*, 56. 6, Amsterdam 1923 and the critical review by Kees, in: *OLZ* 28, 1925, 71–72. — <sup>35</sup> As in no. 4 (s. n. 32). — <sup>36</sup> As in no. 6. — <sup>37</sup> Depicted in no. 1. — <sup>38</sup> See PM I<sup>2</sup>. 1, 472 s. v. “Booths with offerings and servants”. In TT 57 [Khaṣemḫat] they are called “Chapels of the Red Crown” (*ḥwwt nt*) which may point to an ancient Delta origin of the ritual; cf. Lüddeckens, in: *MDAIK* 11, 1943, 13–14; CT VII, 167a–f. — <sup>39</sup> TT 341 [Nakhtamun], see Davies, *Seven Private Tombs*, 36 with n. 4, pl. 25. — <sup>40</sup> TT 13 [Shuroy], Marcelle Werbrouck, *Les pleureuses dans l’Égypte ancienne*, Brussels 1938, pl. 39; TT 178 [Neferrenpet], M. Abdul-Qader Muhammed, *The Development of the Funerary Reliefs and Practices Displayed in the Private Tombs of the New Kingdom at Thebes, Cairo 1966*, pl. 76. — <sup>41</sup> TT 44 [Amenemḫeb], Borchardt, o. c., pl. 1, 1; Werbrouck, o. c., pl. 30. Cf. the female mourners in front of the booth in the Memphite examples Brooklyn 37. 1504E [NN], PM III<sup>2</sup>. 2, 752 and pLeiden T 4 [BD of Pakerer], Werbrouck, o. c., pl. 29. — <sup>42</sup> See the excellent survey given by Grinsell, in: *Folklore* 72, London 1961, 475–491; 84, 1973, 111–114, and in: Barrow, *Pyramid and Tomb*, London 1975, 60–67. — <sup>43</sup> Meir IV, 51; Borchardt, o. c. (v. n. 3), 15–16; Barta, *Opferliste*, 72; Hartwig Altenmüller, *Die Texte zum Begräbnisritual in den Pyramiden des Alten Reiches*, *ÄA* 24, 1972, 99. — <sup>44</sup> Davies, *Two Sculptors*, 48 n. 1. — <sup>45</sup> Borchardt, o. c., 15–16; Hermann Kees, *Farbensymbolik in ägyptischen religiösen Texten*, *NAWG* 1943. 11, 462. — <sup>46</sup> Joachim Spiegel, *Das Auferstehungsritual der Unas-Pyramide*, *ÄA* 23, 1971, 37–38. — <sup>47</sup> The offering-ritual is introduced by Pyr. Spr. 311–312 and the same spells are accompanying the pictorial version of the liturgy in the tomb of Khaṣemḫat (TT 57), see Altenmüller, o. c., 110–111; Lüddeckens, o. c., 14. — <sup>48</sup> No. 4 in the list of n. 32 above. — <sup>49</sup> Altenmüller, o. c., 38. Cf. CT VII, 128j–k. — <sup>50</sup> Altenmüller, o. c., 98–100. — <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 92–93 on Pyr.

Spr. 207. — <sup>52</sup> See n. 32, no. 6. — <sup>53</sup> Cf. Kees, *Farbensymbolik*, 462. — <sup>54</sup> te Velde, in: *JEOL* 21, 1969–1970, 181. — <sup>55</sup> van Dijk, in: *JEOL* 26, 1979–1980, 23–25.

*Lit.*: Borchardt, in: *ZÄS* 64, 1929, 12–16; Posener, in: *Annuaire du Collège de France*, 74<sup>e</sup> année, Paris 1973–1974, 397–405. For a possible echo of the ritual in the biblical Psalm 2, 9 see Kleber, in: *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 5, Washington D.C. 1943, 63–67; Othmar Keel, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament, Köln–Neukirchen–Vluyn* <sup>2</sup>1977, 247. J. v. D.