

The Sacred Journey in Dynastic Egypt: Shamanistic Trance in the Context of the Narcotic Water Lily and the Mandrake

WILLIAM EMBODEN*

Contemporary reference to the role of water lilies and mandrakes (*Nymphaea* and *Mandragora*, respectively) in ancient Egyptian healing, and subsequent research on the iconography of the water lily in Mayan shamanistic ritual, suggest the possible importance of these plants as adjuncts to shamanistic healing in dynastic Egypt. Although the usual interpretation of the water lily and the mandrake has been that of a part of ritual mourning, the present article revises this notion. Based on an extensive review of these two powerful narcotic (i.e., hypnotic) plants in iconography and ritual, it is argued that the dynastic Egyptians had developed a form of shamanistic trance induced by these two plants and used it in medicine as well as healing rituals. Analysis of the ritual and sacred iconography of dynastic Egypt, as seen on stelae, in magical papyri, and on vessels, indicates that these people possessed a profound knowledge of plant lore and altered states of consciousness. The abundant data indicate that the shamanistic priest, who was highly placed in the stratified society, guided the souls of the living and dead, provided for the transmutation of souls into other bodies and the personification of plants as possessed by human spirits, as well as performing other shamanistic activities.

The first oblique reference to water lilies and mandrakes serving as adjuncts to shamanistic trance practices in ancient Egypt was made by Gutierrez (1970). Subsequently this theme was followed in an article by Dobkin de Rios (1974) who suggested that the ancient Maya used *Nymphaea ampla* in healing activities. Emboden and Dobkin de Rios (1981) elaborated on the contextual use of the water lily in Maya shamanistic ritual, having derived much information from Rands (1953) who had established mythic associations between the water lily and numerous gods, as well as effects of the plant on the human sensorium.

Emboden (1982, 1981, 1979) considered the water lily of ancient Egypt (*Nymphaea caerulea*) in the context of biochemical analyses and iconography, linking it to shamanistic practices, and revising some interpretations of

ancient stelae and painting. The biochemistry of both *N. caerulea*, the sacred blue water lily, and *Mandragora officinarum* (cf. *M. vernalis* and *M. autumnalis*) reveals chemicals that facilitate shamanistic trance. Harner (1968) pointed out that the impact of ritual hallucinogens has been much greater in non-Western cultures than has been generally supposed. The approach of the botanist has not usually been addressed to such matters of ritual secrecy. Most of the sacred, ritual trance states portrayed by the ancient Egyptians have been seen as funereal scenes of mourning, with the plants portrayed as offerings. When plants were identified in context, a frequent interpretation was made that they were medicines, similar to contemporary healing by chemically curing a diseased state. Healing provided by an induced trance state mediated by a shamanistic healer was never given any consideration.

To approach the ritual and sacred iconography of the ancient Egyptians, one must be aware of their literature and religion as well as their thinking with respect to the super-

*Department of Biology, California State University, 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, California 91330; Research Associate in Botany, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles.



Plate 1. Meriton, consort to Semenhkara, offers him two mandrake fruits and a bud of the narcotic blue water lily (*Nymphaea caerulea*). More of these flowers are held in her left hand. Semenhkara reclines on a crutchlike staff. This is a depiction of ritual healing involving two trance-inducing plants (ca. 1350 B.C.). Staatliche Museen, Berlin-Dahlem.

natural, other realms, and sources of power. Researchers are fortunate to have a diversity of surviving papyri and tomb depictions that provide very clear insights into the thinking of these people. Cultural stratification insured a caste of priest-shaman to guide the souls of the living and the dead. The transmutation of souls into other bodies (animals) and the personification of plants as possessed of human spirits allowed for a wealth of shamanistic ritual that would percolate down to the common classes in simpler forms. Thus the elaborate superstructure necessary for shamanistic systems was well established in the very early dynasties.

The first oblique reference to the role of psychoactive plants in dynastic Egyptian religion is by way of pictorial evidence (see Plate 1) derived from the fresco of Akhenaton (Egypt, fourteenth century B.C.). It presented water lilies and mandrakes in the context of healing (Gutierrez 1970). More specifically, in this depiction Meriton (consort to the ailing Semenkharu) offers him two mandrake fruits (*Mandragora*) and a flower of the narcotic (i.e., hypnotic) water lily (*N. caerulea*). Semenkharu leans on a crutch to indicate his infirmity and Meriton wears the uraeus (a representation of the sacred asp) on her brow. This sacred crown was an emblem of Thoth, guardian of Egyptian medical secrets. The entire presentation is that of healing, but through two plants known to induce trance states; thus healing takes place by way of the sacred journey.

Eliade (1964) noted that the Egyptians preserved the expression *asken pet* in their funerary texts to show that Ra, the sun-god, furnished them with a ladder (*asken*=step) by which they might ascend to be among the gods. This is derived from *The Book of the Dead* that spoke of the ascent of the soul into the sky of the gods. The second kind of experience in which the soul might leave the body for a time took place during trance healing among the living, with narcotic plants facilitating the experience. The very real figures of Semekhara and Meriton were the physical emblems of what the gods gave, and the experiences were those of the deities. It is not surprising that the Cairo collection of objects from the tomb of Tutankhamen includes an unguent jar bearing the face of Hathor, the mediating god of healing, who wears a necklace from which is suspended a water lily flower with two flanking water lily buds and a mandrake fruit emerging from the central flower. These were primary adjuncts to healing and were given to the ancient Egyptians by their deities. In the healing experience, through the shamanistic trance state, the patient could become like a god.

This also leads one to rethink the notion of unguent jars. This characterization of the numerous vessels found in all royal tombs suggests unguents or perfumes. In 1978, Emboden advanced the argument that these were not unguent jars, but vessels to contain those elixirs that allow humans to become gods. The use of the metamorphic tadpoles on these vessels, an ankh (a symbol of life), and emblems of opium poppy capsules, mandrakes, and blue

water lilies suggests plants that can induce trance states and the sacred journey of the spirit.

Gabra (1956) identified opioids in the residue of one such unguent vessel from the tomb of the Eighteenth Dynasty. This alone is enough to suggest the need for a comprehensive investigation that utilizes more sophisticated technologies of gas-liquid chromatography followed by mass spectroscopy to identify the total spectrum of contents. If the jars in question were for perfumes or unguents they would not contain opioids, and they would not have been the source of plundering to the exclusion of precious gold artifacts. To this end, it must be noted that when the tomb of Tutankhamen was looted, an estimated 400 liters of fluid in the sealed vessels had been taken, in preference to the gold, the decorative arts, and the vessels themselves. It was believed by the looters that these vessels contained *didi*, the elixir of life. Certainly the combined narcotic properties of water lilies, mandrakes, and the opium poppy would provide a most potent vehicle (*didi*) to a profound hypnotic state terminating in an extended period of somnolence. The symbolic death so necessary to shamanic tradition (Eliade 1964) would be provided by any one of these plants.

Sleep is the symbolic death that permits miraculous resurrection. Eliade stated that "the role that the celestial supreme being plays in granting the ecstatic trance, or, on the contrary the importance accorded to the spirits of dead shamans or to 'demons' reveals different orientations." The basic premise in shamanistic practices is that there is a trance state in which an elect caste may communicate with deities of other worlds. The narcotic plants become the vehicles for the miraculous adventure. Water lily and mandrake symbolism began in the Fifth Dynasty and continued until the Ptolemaic Period.

Festival days in Egypt brought the populace of common people to the temples for reenactment of the death of Osiris, but not an entrance into the sacred temples of Heliopolis and elsewhere. The complex theologies of the priestly castes were worlds apart from the belief systems of the common people of dynastic Egypt. (See Table I for a chronology of the Egyptian dynasties.) In later periods the mortuary temples became a gathering place for secondary cults in which veneration for real or imagined heros might be invoked. The mundane rituals of these temple priests cannot be translated into the trance ecstasy induced by higher strata of priests who did not communicate with the public and whose mysteries were inaccessible to them. It was they who were responsible for the magical papyri and perpetuation of the most private rituals of Osiris. This cult devolved from the creation of order out of chaos (*Nun*) in which the dark pool of nothingness gave rise to a blue water lily from which the first being arose. In most depictions the persona is that of Osiris (earlier it was Ra). This legend explains the relationship between the order of the entire civilization and the

TABLE I
PERIODS AND DYNASTIES OF ANCIENT EGYPT

First–Second Dynasty (Archaic Period)	circa 3200–2800 B.C.
Third Dynasty (Origin of Old Kingdom)	circa 2800–2720 B.C.
Fourth Dynasty	circa 2720–2560 B.C.
Fifth Dynasty	circa 2560–2420 B.C.
Sixth Dynasty	circa 2420–2270 B.C.
Seventh–Tenth Dynasty (1st Intermediary Period)	circa 2270–2100 B.C.
Eleventh Dynasty (Middle Kingdom)	circa 2100–2000 B.C.
Twelfth Dynasty	circa 2000–1785 B.C.
Thirteenth Dynasty	circa 1785–1700 B.C.
Fourteenth–Sixteenth Dynasty (Hyksos Period)	circa 1700–1680 B.C.
Seventeenth Dynasty	circa 1680–1580 B.C.
Eighteenth Dynasty (New Kingdom)	circa 1580–1315 B.C.
Nineteenth Dynasty	1312–1235 B.C.
Twentieth Dynasty	1200–1085 B.C.
Twenty-first Dynasty (Late Period)	1085–950 B.C.
Twenty-second–Twenty-third Dynasty	950–730 B.C.

Beyond this point, there was the Ethiopian Occupation (715–656 B.C.), the Persian Domination (525–404 B.C.), and the Second Persian Domination (341–333 B.C.). After the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great (332–330 B.C.), there followed the Ptolemaic Period or Lagid Dynasty (330–323 B.C.) and the final Roman Occupation of Egypt from 30 B.C. until 395 A.D.

sacred quality of the narcotic blue water lily.

Egyptologists concur in the belief that Ra predates Osiris in these temple mysteries associated with the blue water lily. It was the worship of Ra that laid the foundations for Osirian mysticism until finally the king became the personification of Horus (the healer) in the worship of Osiris. Thus there was a mysterious trinity in Ra-Horus-Osiris: The priestly castes addressed their petitions to this triumvirate through trance ecstasy, which was facilitated by the blue water lily (symbolic of the water from which it grows), and the mandrake (a symbol of the sun in its golden round fruits). Both were associated with the uraeus as symbols of power.

Nymphaea caerulea blooms for three consecutive days, with its blue flowers lifted 18 inches above the water on peduncles. Each day it opens at about 8:00 a.m. and closes at noon, in the full glory of Ra, the sun. At the end of the third day, the peduncle begins to twist and draw the closed flower beneath the surface of the still water where it will reach fruition. Inside of each flower are numerous insects that have served as pollinators but have died from the lethal fluid that is expressed as the narcotic nectar in the center of each flower. Three days were of extreme symbolic importance to the ancient Egyptians, not only in the trinity of deities previously mentioned, but in the combination of Osiris-Horus-Pharaoh. Legend tells of the murder of Osiris by Seth. His dissected body was cast into the waters of the Nile. It was his wife and sister, Isis, who was able to make him whole

again (with the exception of his penis, which was lost). Osiris then is the descendent of Ra, a flower (the water lily), a deity, and a creator god who can, in allowing his body to be devoured, permit participating priestly castes to experience his death and resurrection.

Worshippers at the oracular site of Delphi held laurel leaves (*Laurus nobilis*) in their mouths, and those at the temple of Osiris approached the temple holding mandrakes and narcotic blue water lilies. Fortunately, Egyptian tomb paintings have mentioned their colors and one can clearly identify *N. caerulea* and the golden mandrake fruits. To the devotee of the popular cult of Osiris they might have been little more than symbols. To an informed priestly caste they were the sacred path to ecstasy. It is interesting to note that Schweinfurth (1883) identified the flowers from the garlands of Ramses II, the Princess Nzi-Khonsu, and the mummy simply marked "Kent," and found that in each instance of analysis the flowers turned out to be those of *N. caerulea* and not any of the several other water lilies of that area.

The narcotic blue water lily first seen in the Fifth Dynasty assumed increasing significance and greater frequency in depiction until the Fourteenth Dynasty at which time it reigned supreme in floral iconography until the Eighteenth Dynasty. Found on vessels destined for tombs in frescos, on altars, as offerings, and in the uraeus around the head of the queen, it is the flower par excellence. It is also worthy of note that it becomes intimately associated with the

mandrake, *M. officinarum* (cf. *M. vernalis* and *M. autumnalis*) in the Eighteenth Dynasty, at which time it is often seen inserted into the water lily flower as a golden globular fruit. The two narcotic plants are united in power and purposeful use. The alkaloids of both plants are known to provide profound states of trance followed by somnolence. For those who argue that *Nymphaea* was, and still is, eaten in Egypt as a famine food, it should be noted that the rhizome is used and only when cooked thoroughly by boiling, which leaches out alkaloids. Food and medicine have never been exclusive concepts, and the mode of use is of the utmost importance. Consider the enormous amount of opium poppy seed consumed as a food every year in the United States. It is from this very capsule that the opioids are produced, in the laticifers of the unripe fruit.

By way of clarification, the question of the lotus of ancient Egypt, which many scholars have confused with the water lily, must be addressed. Both are in the family Nymphaeaceae. The lotus is *Nelumbo nucifera* and was unknown in Egypt until about 700 B.C. when it was brought into the country by the Assyrians. It was prized for the delicacy of its large, porous rhizome that can be made into a flour. The seed is a fine source of nutrition once the bitter plumule is removed. This plumule is still regarded as a medicament because of the copious amounts of nuciferine present. It was almost absent in the Nile Delta region by the end of the nineteenth century. It was a food and an ornamental plant and was the subject of cultivation for food. It should not be confused with *N. caerulea* in that it is historically, botanically, chemically, and iconographically distinct.

In medicine, the mandrake has a long history of association with magical properties and relieving pain. It is one of the oldest known hypnotic narcotics. Thompson (1968) stated that the mandrake was associated in ancient Egypt with Ra and Hathor. The goddess Hathor would become evil and cause great harm unless narcotized by the use of mandrake. Thompson noted that in 1871 Guillaume and Perrot discovered some ancient bas-reliefs depicting mandrakes on the rocks of Boghaz-Keui. The plant has often been found as an ornament on oil lamps in which castor oil and natron salt were burned to give a nonsmoldering light. This smokeless lamp was used in the tombs to permit artisans to see as they executed the elaborate tomb frescos. The mandrake and water lily coexist in these artifacts.

Duke (1985: 292) has indicated that the attributes of the mandrake include "hypnotic, narcotic, and sedative" properties. He reported that among the several alkaloids were "hyoscyamine, mandragorine, norhyoscyamine, scopolamine and atropine," and noted that "scopolamine-containing plants have been used as anaesthetics for centuries in traditional Chinese medicine." These same properties were known to the ancient Egyptians and for that reason the plant is ideally suited for shamanistic trance during which the soul departs from the body. At this time, the soul is in communion

with the world of spirits, and later returns to the body restored and with revelations not possible in the mundane world of the living.

The Papyrus of Ani, better known as *The Book of the Dead*, is perhaps the most important document to emerge from the period 1500 B.C. to 1350 B.C. According to Budge (1975a), some of the spells found in it are predynastic, and it deals with many aspects of shamanism. In it there is a chapter titled "Transformation into a Water Lily Flower." Other translators have substituted the word "lotus," but given the advent of the lotus into Egypt in the year 700 B.C. and its absent narcotic properties, such translation is incorrect and meaningless. The water lily is stated to be an emanation from Ra. Ani wished to transform himself into the blue water lily so that he might become one with Ra, so that his body might be reborn daily and ascend into heaven. A variant version of this text states that the flower allowed Ani to transform himself to Ptah (creator god). The text is attributed to "Osiris Ani" who stated, "I am the holy water lily that comes forth from the light which belongs to the nostrils of Ra, and which belongs to the head of Hathor [again suggesting the quelling of the wrath of Hathor via a hypnotic trance]. I am the pure water lily that comes forth from the field of Ra [the field of Ra being a lake or pond]." Later versions of the same text petition the water lily with requests for visions and soul flight. Could there be a more compelling example of a plant figuring into the soul flight or trance?

In an illustration to the Papyrus of Ani, Horus is seen being petitioned by an offering of two vessels with pouring spouts. Above them are gigantic *N. caerulea* flowers. It must be remembered that size in these images was used to indicate the relative importance of a personage or an object. The water lilies indicate that it is these that are the didi or elixir in the jars under them. The indication is clear that the holy water lily or narcotic water lily belongs to Horus, the distant one, a stellar divinity whose eyes were the sun and the moon. At Heliopolis he was worshiped primarily as the sun-god, but his lunar emblem should not be forgotten. As master of the sky, Horus becomes the perfect emblem of soul flight in shamanistic ecstasy. He is portrayed in his alter ego as half falcon and half man. The magical progress from water to flower, flower to priest, priest to Horus, and all of the equivalencies in the earth-man-god-sky are in evidence. The transformation spoken of in the Papyrus of Ani is that metamorphosis or change is necessary in the ecstatic adventure, whether it be tadpole-toad, man-bird or any other relevant transformation.

Pleyte (1875) independently arrived at the conclusion that the white water lily, encountered by Schweinfurth (1884) in his analyses of funeral garlands about the mummies of Ramses II and Amenhotep I, was not *Nymphaea alba* as indicated, but *N. caerulea* variety *albiflora*. They also agree that the first depiction is found in the fresco executed

at the end of the Fourth Dynasty in which it is part of an offering to Osiris by the dead or spirit beings. The great dilemma has been exactly that encountered by Wasson, Hofmann and Ruck (1978) in their investigation of the mysteries of Eleusis. Holy rites, or mysteries as they are also known, are often given over verbally to a priestly caste. Their reconstruction may present enormous dilemmas, leaving the interpreter to divine glyphs, artwork, poetry, magical books, and similar nonspecific materials.

The Egyptologist Edwards (1976) made the observation that "from the evidence available at present, it appears that cups representing the white lotus (*Nymphaea lotus*) were used as drinking vessels, while those representing the blue water lily (*Nymphaea caerulea*) were used only for ritualistic purposes." Such data from an impartial anthropologist and Egyptologist does much to direct one to the concept of the sacred narcotic water lily having been held apart from other plants and even other water lilies. Edwards went into botanical detail in his analyses and cited a specific vessel found in the tomb of Tutankhamen (Cairo, Number 62125) as exemplary of a nonritual white water lily chalice. The ritual enactment in the sanctuary by the high priest as the personification of Osiris was standardized as early as the Old Kingdom (Emboden 1972). A blue water lily cup was used in such rituals, but its essential function in the ceremonies is still unknown.

Ancient Egypt had two principal castes, one headed by the shaman-priest and the other by cult leaders involved in ritual magic (e.g., the cult of Selket). A dilemma is inherent in the inability of researchers to separate these two cults in toto. In the tomb of King Tutankhamen, Selket images were found as emblematic of a magical guardian. Isis, Nephtys, and Neith were additional possessors of strong magic. They were guardians of the four genii who were the sons of Horus who sprang from the blue water lily in unison. All the genii were possessed of alter egos: a baboon, a jackal, and a falcon. Only Imset had a human head. The baboon was from the land of Punt and was identified with Thoth, keeper of the magical papyri. The jackal was another form assumed by Wepwawet, also known as Upuaut, god of the necropolis and avenger of Osiris. The falcon was the altar ego of Horus, Sobke-Re, Re-Harakhty, and Ra. The three were linked with the sun and universality as well as magical advents. The fourth son, Imset, was the human element who maintained balance (i.e., shamanic equilibrium). Together with his three brethren he represented the four cosmogonies of ancient Egypt. As Wallace (1966) pointed out in his book *Religion: An Anthropological View*, shamanic cult institutions never entirely disappear, but become overlaid with what has been called Olympian religious institutions where nature and spiritual realms become departmentalized and bear symbolic emblems of divinity, after animals, plants, and even creatures of the sea, earth, and sky.

James (1964) separated magic from religion in the early

dynasties. Magical papyri (e.g., Harris Magical Papyrus, Salt Magical Papyrus) were concerned with spells, incantations, and hymns to control disease and misfortune. Such knowledge was in the hands of divinatory oracles who could predict and control events, protect individuals, and narrate unseen activities. Religious texts did not occur before the Fifth Dynasty. Predynastic Egypt was characterized by numerous cult centers, each with its own deities whose popularity and influence increased or diminished with concomitant political fortune and misfortune. The unification of Egypt and the beginning of the dynastic period brought one of the gods from Lower Egypt into prominence as the principal deity. This was Horus, the falcon and the healer, whose four sons mentioned earlier were born from a water lily. Gods, such as Ptah and Ra, maintained lesser positions in local centers of worship.

Throughout most of Egypt, a pantheon of gods was maintained in private religion and fewer in official religion. The high theological doctrines of the priests were expressed in exclusive and complex ceremonies that were kept apart from the public (James 1964). The extravagant and convoluted theologies would have had little appeal to the common person in his/her prayers and festivals. In the Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus (British Museum, Number 10610) there is one of the finest accounts of the ritual drama enacted by the priests who recreated the Osirian psychodrama at the time of enthronement of Sesostri I of the Twelfth Dynasty.

Popular religion concerned itself with magic, ancestor worship, spells, amulets, talismans, and lucky and unlucky days. To this end, magician-oracles were consulted. Among this stratum of the population, shamanistic trance was not induced. The priests, by contrast, reenacted the pageantry of lives and shamanistic transformations of the god. This higher priestly caste had no desire to contact the masses or to reach them with their complex theologies and rituals. Between these two extremes was an intellectual funerary cult characterized by James (1964) as "the most profound religious thinking manifested in ancient Egypt." Thus one may expect in the great dynasties of ancient Egypt elaborate frescos in which such depiction are "hieroglyphics written large" and must be interpreted in an informational sense. Unlike the temples, the tombs were not the place for the priest and religious drama. The priesthood of the temple consisted of a high priest (a king surrogate) and prophets concerned with theology and ritual enactment who took the form of various gods. Below these were ordinary priests of the funerary temple. The simple priests were known as *phyles* (pure ones) and served in a temple only for a month at a time. They were never cognizant of the theologies, but took care of menial duties (e.g., sacristans). This caste of funerary temple priests and their followers became extremely powerful, and by the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty were close to being corporate enterprises.

The importance of the foregoing is to demonstrate that

there were diverse castes and priestly functions that were highly stratified. The commonly held belief that the priestly castes of ancient Egypt were homogeneous is a misconception. Each of these castes possessed distinct strata of information. In some, the important event of shamanistic trance functioned so that hierophants could come to a state of knowing that transcended the mundane. Each caste had its own purpose. It is highly probable that the water lily and the mandrake were common vehicles to ecstasy throughout these castes, but with different, levels of meaning and expectation.

THE COSMOGONIES OF ANCIENT EGYPT

A brief overview of the cosmogonies of ancient Egypt is appropriate in that each reveals the influence of the narcotic water lily in conceptions of the origins of the universe. In the first cosmogony, the world arose when Atum (the sun-god, also Ra) emerged from the narcotic blue water lily that grows in chaos (Nun). He, in turn, engendered Shu (air) and Tefnut (moisture) from which came Geb (earth) and Nut (sky). Osiris and Isis were born of Geb and Seth (Upper Egypt) as well as Nephthys. This company of nine were the Divine Ennead. In Hermopolis (Upper Egypt), the second cosmogony arose as a company of eight, which collectively personified Nun. From Nun there arose a mound bearing an egg that opened to reveal the sun-god. In this cosmogony, the egg replaced the water lily. Memphis fused the mound of Hermopolis with the Ennead of Heliopolis. In this system of belief, the protagonists are Horus and Seth (brother to Osiris). It was Seth who slew Osiris and threw his parts into the Nile. In this version, Osiris was resurrected as the blue water lily. When Thebes became the capital (ca. 1580 B.C.), Amun (the chief state-god) moved in a form of a life-giving wind over Nun, initiating cosmic creation and generating the sacred narcotic blue water lily. In all of these cosmogonies, with the exception of Hermopolis, the water lily figures prominently. In Hermopolis there were no still waters as in Lower Egypt and the blue *N. caerulea* did not grow there.

THE ROLE OF THE WATER LILY AND THE MANDRAKE

In the life cycle of the blue water lily (as in the personification of Osiris), the flower closed in fruition on the third day and the contortion of the peduncle that supports it brings the flower beneath the waters. This is symbolic of the journey of Osiris into the underworld. This theme is restated in almost every Egyptian shamanistic ritual and recitation. The slaying of Osiris and his resurrection are likewise an important ritual element in any shamanistic presentation.

The key would seem to be, however, the vehicles to ecstasy—the narcotic blue water lily and the mandrake. In the consumption of this flower and fruit (or its extracts), the priest was participating in the Osirian mysteries through a divine endocannibalism in which the created devours the creators, and in so doing becomes one with him through shamanistic trance or ecstasy.

To quote La Barre (1972): "All our knowledge of the supernatural derives de facto from the statements made by religious visionaries or ecstasies (i.e., prophets and shamans)—the priests only administrate the ecclesia established on this supernatural basis—and the nature of shamanistic ecstasy may be illuminated by attention to ancient hallucinogens." In the broadest context, *N. caerulea* and *M. officinarum* are just such hallucinogens, in that they are ritual hypnotics that facilitate the psychodrama of shamanistic ecstasy. In the Papyrus of Ani Osiris, Ani stated that he was the holy water lily that came from the sun (mandrake fruit) and belonged to the head of Hathor and the nostrils of Ra. Variant versions of this same text portrayed Ani petitioning the water lily as the alter ego of Osiris for soul flight and visions, suggesting the chemical nature of the flower would be able to provoke such transcendent states. The proof must be found somewhere between these ancient texts and the rigors of modern chemistry.

Goris and Crete (1910) indicated that in *Nymphaea lutea* (*Nuphar luteum*) they had found a new compound that they christened nupharine. Nothing was made of the discovery until the Second World War when in 1941 new sources were sought for opiodlike substances that were nonaddicting. Delphaut and Balansard (1943, 1941) described their experiences using rhizomes of *N. alba* to induce sleep in dogs, mice, and eels. After an initial spasmolytic response, a trancelike state followed. Mordrakowsky (in a letter cited in Raymond-Hamet 1941) stated that the flowers of water lilies were narcotic and provoked a hypnotic state when ingested. All of these researchers had recourse to Descourtilz (1822), who wrote in his *Pictorial and Medical Flora of the Antilles*, that *Nymphaea* flowers of the fresh waters of that region were narcotic and could replace opium. The species in question was most likely *N. alba*. Credulity was adduced when Pobéguin (1912) noted that both *N. stellata* and *N. caerulea* had the same narcotic powers. On page 49, he wrote that "... a decoction of the flowers is narcotic." In 1943, Delphaut and Balansard reported the sedating and antispasmodic effects of rhizomes of *N. alba*. Pizzetti (1908) reported that nupharidine and its analogues were found to be widely distributed in most *Nymphaea* spp. In his manuscript, "On Plants," written in Greece (ca. 350 B.C.), Aristotle, the mentor of Theophrastus (the father of the discipline of botany), wrote of medical "water lilies" (Hett 1963). In the tradition of temple healing in ancient Greece, the ill were placed underground in the temples of Asclepius where they were given hypnotic plants (e.g.,



Plate 2. Lid of an ivory box from Tutankhamen's tomb. The ritual depiction suggests that of Meriton and Semenhkara in which ritual healing is facilitated by the narcotic blue water lilies (*Nymphaea caerulea*) and hypnotic mandrakes (*Mandragora*) (ca. 1350-1338 B.C.). Cairo Museum.



Plate 3. A detail from the ivory box from Tutankhamen's tomb reveals a diminutive votive figure before a very large plant of the hypnotic mandrake (*Mandragora*). Note the flower of the narcotic blue water lily (*Nymphaea caerulea*) above the figure and in front of her.

Hyoscyamus, *Papaver somniferum*, *Mandragora*, *Nymphaea*, and similar hypnotics) to provide a trance state in which they might be healed (Hand 1976).

What of the mandrake that is so often figured with *N. caerulea*? Much has been made of the narcotic root that puts a person into a three-day sleep when the dose is substantial. Some authors have wrongly assumed that the fruit has no hypnotic properties. As early as the first century, Dioscorides (Sprengel 1829) had written that overuse of the fruit made a man speechless. This probably referred to a trance state. During the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius Caesar, *Plinius Secundus* (Pliny 1601) provided a remedy for sleep, giving the essential ingredient as the fruit of mandrakes. Suidas also referred to the sleep-giving fruit. The modern belief that the fruit has no hypnotic qualities is without foundation.

Knowledge of soporific properties of the fruit allows one to interpret ritual depiction in frescoes, such as in a tomb of Nakht at Thebes dating to the Eighteenth Dynasty. In this mural, propitiators offer mandrake fruits in an apparent purification of the nostrils. While the fruit has a pleasant heady and musky quality when ripe, there is no evidence of intoxication through inhalation. However, ritual gesture becomes an aspect of total iconographic interpretation. In a fragment of a relief from a Theban tomb of the Twentieth Dynasty (now in the Museo Egizio in Turin), one can see precisely the same kind of votive offering with inhalation of the scent given off by the narcotic blue water lily. In ancient Egypt, the ritual of purification of the bodily orifices was important just as it was to the ancient Maya. It is such depictions that have led some scholars to dismiss the presentations as a simple rite of cleansing. One should not forget that such funerary rites among the ancient Scythians involved the inhalation of *Cannabis sativa* plants reduced to smoldering fumes that resulted in a profound intoxication. The duality of symbolic purification and intoxication are not mutually exclusive. Nor should one forget the importance of *eating* magic, as practiced by ancient Egyptians. The water lilies and mandrakes were probably consumed after orifice purification. In medical practices, poultices of rotten grain were put on wounds with incantations. This was followed by eating the poultice, an excellent source of antibiotic fungi.

An important artifact from the tomb of Tutankhamen is a chest (see Plate 2) made of ebony, ivory, bronze, and copper (Cairo Museum, Number 61477). On this is depicted a scene in which the ailing king is ministered to by his wife, Ankhesenamun. Just as with the previously mentioned depiction of the ailing King Semenkhara, he rests on a staff or crutch. His consort wears an unguent vessel and two mandrake fruits are upon her head. She offers two bouquets of narcotic blue water lilies and opium poppy fruits. Beneath this scene, two female attendants pick mandrake fruits to take to the royal couple (see Plate 3). In every scene presented in this coffer, opium poppies, mandrakes, and the

narcotic *N. caerulea* are in abundant evidence. Edwards (1976), in cataloging the treasures of this tomb, noted that Ankhesenamun attended to Tutankhamen's needs without offering an explanation. It is known that the king was sickly, and it is quite natural that he would be ministered to by his queen consort, since the same kind of portrayal is seen in the preceding Amara period in a similar scene between Akhnaton and Nefertiti. The only difference is that in the latter scene the two are presented as equal partners.

There is a temptation to state that one is witnessing nothing more than a show of affection between partners. One of the important facts is that ancient Egypt had a wealth of fragrant flowers. Yet the flowers in ritual tomb depiction are only these few same flowers. In addition to this, the water lily bud is often shown and it has no fragrance. Furthermore, the opium poppy fruits are neither fragrant nor particularly attractive. Still another piece of evidence is that the narcotic blue water lily is only open for a few hours in the morning. These are hardly the ideal combination of plant materials appropriate for a bouquet in any usual sense. However, in symbolic interpretation and in a psychopharmacological analysis, the combination is perfect, for all are adjuncts to trance, which was so important to ritual healing and religion in these dynastic periods.

The assertion of priestly castes involved in trance is further reinforced by the gilded wooden shrine that housed the calcite canopic chest of Tutankhamen. Four goddesses are seen as freestanding forms in full dimension around the shrine. They are Isis, Nephthys, Neith, and Selket. All four are the guardians of the four genii of Horus, and are possessed of great power. Among these, the greatest magic belongs to Selket. Although the inscription on the shrine states that all four can drive away intruders by setting magical spells against them, Selket was in control as the most powerful figure. Wearing the emblem of the scorpion, she was believed to be able to bring death, just as the scorpion is the giver of death. A cult developed around Selket, and these "magicians" were identified as followers of the cult of Isis. Selket would speak through the mouth of those followers when they were in trance states. The words spoken were taken to be those of Selket. The Turin Magical Papyrus explains much of the activities and belief system of this cult.

It is important to stress the relationship between Selket and Isis, as Isis was regularly identified with the reigning consort of the king and with Selket as the embodiment of power. She was also Isis of the Divine Mysteries. There were numerous and detailed rites to be performed by those of the Selket-Isis cult. All initiates were sworn to secrecy. The three-stage initiation involved a ritual death, spirit journey, and resurrection, which are so critical to all shamanic activities.

The details of the mysteries have been suggested, but many of the critical elements were undoubtedly passed on by a priestly caste and ultimately lost. The reconstruction of



Plate 4. A scene of ritual mourning in which dust is thrown upon the head of a grieving widow as she squats before a totem of narcotic blue water lilies (*Nymphaea caerulea*) and incised capsules of opium poppies (*Papaver somniferum*). Both facilitate a trance state appropriate to mourning (ca. 1350-1300 B.C.). Tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky, Thebes.



Plate 5. Detail of a lady in the tomb of Menna. The cone on the head will release plant resins over the body. On the brow, the narcotic blue water lily (*Nymphaea caerulea*) has in its center the golden fruit of the hypnotic mandrake (*Mandragora*). The woman's garlands are made of water lily petals and in her hand she holds three water lilies (ca. 1422-1411 B.C.). Theban tomb.

these (Warner 1975) involved the death rite, the journey through the elements, a coffin ritual, and a sacred wedding (possible sexual union) culminating in a return to the world again with the new name. The important missing element, which was not discussed but implied, in almost all ritual depictions is the role of narcotic mandrake and narcotic water lily in the trance state. There is mention of a sacred garden in which the priests of Isis were the catchers of birds (souls). Thus a soul having left the body would be caught by a priest of Isis and would not be lost or relegated to the world of evil. As the mystical cults of Isis spread to Greece in postdynastic times, underground sanctuaries were established. These can be traced to the early Greek healing sanctuaries in which herbs, such as mandrake and henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*), were used to provoke the states of sleep during which the mysteries of healing were practiced (Hand 1976). By this time, the divine mysteries had been corrupted and handed over to secular castes of healers.

If the mysteries of the cult of Selket-Isis seem remote and unclear, one must retrace the ten thousand verses of the *Rg Veda* texts of the ancient people of North India. In these verses, no specific mention is found of the divine intoxicating plant that is soma. Scholars have worked from iconographic and textual clues from many sources without finding any specific reference to the plant and god that is soma. The most thorough research is that of Wasson (1966) who identified the Vedic soma with the mushroom *Amanita muscaria*. Most of the evidence is based on tangential reference; for, as Wasson had frequently pointed out, those ideas and things that are most important to a priestly caste are going to be the most difficult to identify in remaining scripts and legends.

As it was with the Vedic peoples and the mysteries of Eleusis, so too is it with the shamanistic trance of ancient Egypt. The advantage is that the many papyri, books of the dead, books of ritual magic, and related pictorial evidence—which were never meant to be seen by the public—present those same plants that are the vehicles to ecstasy. They do not have to be sorted out from a plethora of plant figures. Apart from the offerings of a few plant foods, they are the plants depicted in the cults of magic. Contrast this to later writings, such as those of Josephus (Allegro 1970), in which the “holy plant” of the early Hebrews is identified as henbane (*Sideritis sensu* Josephus is actually *Hyoscyamus niger*, which is rich in the hypnotic scopolamine). *Sideritis* was also the headgear or turban of the priests of the Old Testament. Josephus indicated that they had attached to this “a plate of gold.” This discoid structure (Exodus 28:36) is little more than the disc of Horus, which became the disc of Isis seated between the cow horn of her headdress. Thus one may see the continuing element of the cult of Isis in the priesthood of the Old Testament in the form of a solar disc, emblem of the sun and of Ra and his power. This *Sideritis*, explained by Josephus so explicitly as the narcotic henbane,

extends this ritual of shamanistic trance to the religion of the Old Testament. Allegro would carry this concept even further to include the mushroom *A. muscaria* (also see Wasson 1966). Those who have an aversion to including narcotic plants in the religion of ancient Egypt will have an even more difficult time with the henbanes and mandrakes (Exodus 30) of the Old Testament, for it suggests that this is a continuation of shamanistic trance into the religious origins of the Judaic-Christian traditions.

Just as in Scythian tradition, *Cannabis indica* (*C. sativa* in broader usage) was used as an inhalation to assuage grief in ritual mourning among the Scythians and to lead to a state of intoxication that would result in howling, narcotic water lilies and mandrakes were similarly used in dynastic Egypt. In the Theban tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky, a widow with bared breasts squatting before the figure of her coffered husband is encountered (see Plate 4). She is pouring dust on the head as a ritual gesture of grief. Springing from the base of the figure is a vegetal column of narcotic blue water lilies and poppy capsules (incised to release their narcotic latex) bound together and crowned with three palm fronds. It is difficult to imagine a simply fortuitous combination of narcotic water lilies and poppies. As for the palm, it was the source of palm wine and could have provided a solvent for the poppy and *Nymphaea* derivatives.

Also at Thebes, the tomb of Amenahet contains a fresco of a sacrificial bull being led to slaughter. It is garlanded with blue water lilies and mandrake fruits about the neck. It would go on the mystical journey taken by human spirits to serve in the otherworld as it has served here. Thebes also contains the tomb of Userhet in which the goddess is seen emerging from a lake and pouring a magical fluid (didi) into golden cups. Mourners wear resinous, scented mourning cones on their heads. From the cones emerge the blue water lilies, extending out over the forehead. The magical fluid is indicated by wavy lines (see Plate 5). This is the elixir that will allow the passage of the spirit. It is not decoration, but representation of a shamanistic order. This is similar to the Theban tomb of Menna that indicates a funerary voyage of the dead on a ship whose stern and rudder are the narcotic blue water lilies. One is reading depictions of the voyage of the soul in the spirit world guided by the spirit of the water lilies. As the trance state of the priest-shaman caste in life allows a spirit voyage in which the soul leaves the body and returns, so in death does the human spirit journey until it is resurrected. The imagery of shamanistic trance in life becomes the Theban soul journey in death.

Romantic imagery of the boy-king Tutankhamen has neglected much of his youthful suffering. While the exact cause of his weakness is unknown, one has reason to believe from portrayals and writings that he was chronically ill. In one of the depictions of this Eighteenth Dynasty king, he is seen on a throne chair with his consort Ankhesenamun ministering to him. In her left hand she holds a blue vessel

in the form of an open *N. caerulea* flower. The royal pectorals of both the king and his consort are of mandrake fruits and blue water lily petals. The queen wears the crown of Hathor. The usual interpretation of this scene is that it is the queen anointing her king with perfume. These often repeated interpretations neglect the power inherent in the didi or sacred ointment made of these narcotic plants. Just as with the Theban bull, it is a message of magic spirit flight. The image of the elixir being poured is depicted. The Egyptologist Mekhitarian (1954) stated that "we must never lose sight of the fact that the choice of motifs in Egyptian pictures, even those which seem to have no connection with religious subjects, is always guided by ritual considerations." This very important statement validates an interpretive as opposed to a merely decorative approach.

A wooden stela depicting the enthroned Ra-Harakhte (Horus of the horizon) shows the falcon alter ego of Horus, with a sun disk and uraeus on his head. Before him is a harpist playing music. Between the two is a pedestal with an ointment jar characterized by its small spout for pouring fluids. Over it is a gigantic narcotic blue water lily. The eyes of Osiris oversee all that takes place. This is one of the most interesting presentations of the narcotic water lily since the deity Horus, who is so often associated with magic and medicine. It is portrayed as his alter ego, the falcon, and with a propitiator who can offer the elements of a trance sleep. The versotherapy of music and recitation help facilitate the narcosis provided by the sacred narcotic blue water lily. Horus (the healer) can be seen in similar context in the limestone stela of Upauaut-mes of the Nineteenth Dynasty. Healing remained the mystical art that took care of the soul. When that was accomplished, the body could repair itself.

The Eighteenth Dynasty under Tutankhamen is extremely important because it was a period of great activity involving the restoration of the old religion at Thebes and to a lesser degree at Memphis. This meant new statues and stelae, embellishment of the temple Luxor, and restoration of ritual as well as the mysteries associated with cults involved in the temple religion. This extraordinary upheaval of a changing tradition that would take it back to its mystical origins and polytheism undoubtedly satisfied many. This upheaval undermined the changes brought by those officials who were determined to change the old order, and had been doing so in a rather progressive fashion. There is reason to believe that it would have been decidedly advantageous for them to be rid of the boy king who initiated this compelling return to orthodoxy in which the divine became an important element. The preceding Amara period was characterized as one during which the gods had withdrawn, and prayers and petitions went unheeded. The boy king's revival put people once more into communication with their gods. The restoration stela of Tutankhamen can probably be assigned to the Vizer Ay, and the general Haremhab, who revised the religion of Atonism and substituted polytheistic thought. This led to the profusion of images that portrayed relation-

ships between humans and their gods. It was this that led to the popularity of the boy king.

King Tutankhamen had mandrakes and narcotic blue water lilies clearly portrayed in his jewelry. Rings, pectorals, collars, fillets, and bracelets all protected the wearer and contain a kind of magic. One typical piece from the collection of the boy king (Cairo Museum, Number 61884) shows solar and lunar emblems on a pectoral as both sun and moon and the infinity of Upper and Lower Egypt. Mandrakes of carnelian are suspended from white water lily flowers. Between these are two complex floral motifs of carnelian, lapis lazuli, and green glass. Blue water lilies are suspended from the buds. The sun-god, represented by the scarab beetle, holds in its lower right tarsi more blue water lilies. It would be hard to concoct a more compelling or potent set of magical elements. These narcotic plants are necessary elements of power and of shamanistic trance.

From what garden might one take such potent plants? They were native to that region and might well be gathered in a wild state. However, they were also known to grace the royal gardens during the reign of Tuthmosis III (Eighteenth Dynasty). Sennofer was the botanist and gardener during the reign, and he and his sister, Merit, were beloved by Tuthmosis III. On Sennofer's death, the Pharaoh ordered that he be buried in regal fashion in Thebes. In his tomb there is a famous fresco of Sennofer and his sister. The gardener is seated, smelling the divine blue water lily. On the table before him are three unguent (ointment) vessels with water lily peduncles and flower buds wrapped around each. Two more buds and an open flower float above them, so that the message cannot be misinterpreted. Most certainly the implication of smelling *N. caerulea* flowers is in part a purification of the nostrils, but it is also more. In death, Sennofer sits on a chair supported by the legs of a lion (Bes). This is supported by the tree of heaven that confers immortality on those resting there. Sennofer's attitude may be compared to that of a Pharaoh. Were he a commoner, his fate would have been to have his body salted in natron. Instead, he is prepared to go to the Garden of Ialu, which is the abode of the blessed dead, as portrayed on the eastern wall of the Deir-el-Medina tombs. This garden was a floating paradise in a lake of the sacred narcotic blue water lily. This is not unlike the emergence of the water lily from Nun and from the first god Ra (later Osiris). Such depictions are a devolution of the more mystical presentation of earlier dynasties and are only fragments of the mysticism encoded in the books of magic.

Caspary (1878, 1877, 1865), writing on the biochemistry of *Nymphaea blanda* and *N. amazonum* cited "their unpleasant, phenolic, xylene- or benzenelike odor remind one of a chemistry laboratory rather than of living biological material." This nymphaeline-nupharine-nuparadine-nuciferine combination rivals the complex constituents of the mandrake.

In the Egyptian dynasties, the essence of the shamanistic trance provided by the hypnotic constituents of the

mandrake and the narcotic blue water lily are clearly in evidence. They continue to be portrayed and appear in magical writings from the Fourth Dynasty until the fourth century B.C. The constituents of these plants are able to provide the requisites for shamanistic trance: a temporary derangement of the priest-shaman's equilibrium that separates the sacred from the profane, and the soul from the body.

The spiritual death, journey, revelation, and resurrection are implicit in both writings and murals. Social stratification is broadly evident and the alter egos of the priest-shamans are frequently portrayed, with birds (soul flight) given primacy. This way of seeing the succession of dynastic portrayals provides a newer and more profound insight into the priest-shaman caste system of ancient Egypt.

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