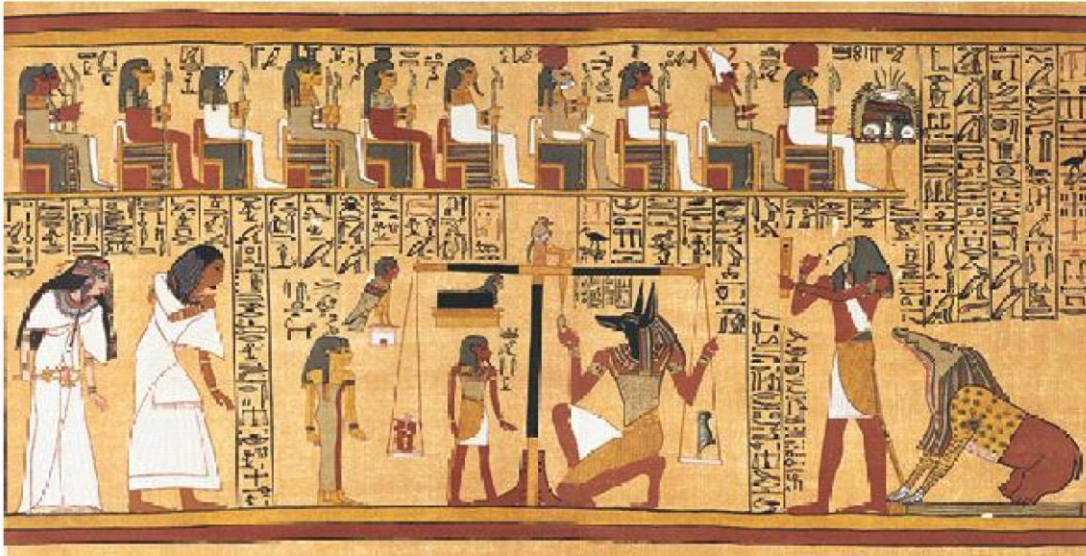


## 11 The Senet Board and the Mehen Board

The breakthrough in identifying a design for a Senet Oracle Board came when I was studying the Papyrus of Ani, a fantastically beautiful copy of the Book of the Dead that is preserved in the British Museum. In this papyrus is a wide tableau of deities gathered to witness a ritual the Egyptians called “The Weighing of the Heart”.



The purpose of this rite is to see if a person has lived honestly during his life. We will describe the details later, but what caught my eye was that, at the top of the tableau, is a row of august deities headed by Ra. They each sit on a square throne that also looks like the glyph for a temple or “house”, suggesting that the throne was indeed the House of the particular deity. There are ten thrones, and they alternate between a dark color and a lighter color so that the row of Temples looked just like a row of colored squares on a checkerboard or a chess board. Could this be the Senet Oracle Board? Would the tableau hold deities for all 30 squares of a Senet Board?

I started counting. The top row turned out to actually have 12 deities, although it still looked like there were only ten thrones:

Ra, Tem, Shewe, Tefnut, Geb, Newet, Isis, Nephthys, Horus, Hathor, Hew, and Saa.

Isis and Nephthys share a throne, and Hew and Saa (Lords of Taste and Touch) also share a throne at the end. (They are actually side by side, but compressed due to the viewpoint angle.)

Starting from the left in the lower half of the tableau we find Ani (the Lover), Meskhent (the midwife who delivered him into the world), Renenet (his nanny), Ani's Heart in the Scale's left pan, Shay (Fortune), "Foolish" Baboon Baba sitting on the tongue of the Scale, Anubis adjusting the little lead Tekhy counterbalance, the Feather of Maat in the Scale's right pan, and Thoth, with Ammit (a chimera waiting to eat a dishonest heart) crouching behind Thoth.

That came to ten more deities (with Ani assuming the role of a deity, since he will become a form of Osiris.)

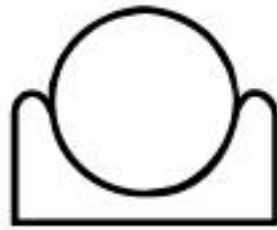


In the next panel of the tableau Horus brings Ani to meet Osiris, who also sits on a throne (with Isis and Nephthys behind him providing support.) In front of Osiris on a small lotus table stand the Four Sons of Horus (the Four Kings of the Senet Deck). Only baby Horus and the two other Lords of the Senses (Maa and Sejem) were missing from a Council of Thirty.

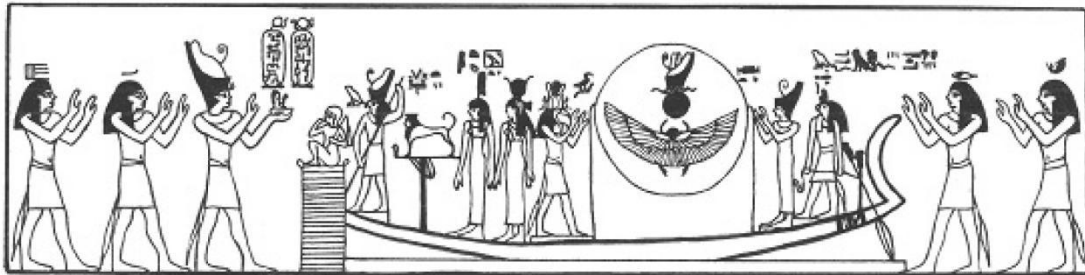
According to Egyptian tradition, Ani while alive plays the dynamic role of Horus, and, when he dies, he becomes the passive witnessing role of Osiris, the Eye on the Throne. Right over the Lord of Fortune, Shay, is a brick with a human head on it. The brick is where his mother squatted to give birth to him. The head is the baby Ani's head emerging from his mother's womb and represents his role as the Son of the Sun (Baby Horus) ready to take on his mission in life. The head glyph is read "tep" and means "topmost", "primary". I had found all 22 Trumps plus 4 Kings and 2 of the 4 Lords of the Senses in this large tableau. I figured

that Maa and Sejem were assumed, because they put Hew and Saa in such a conspicuous position.

There was no middle row on the tableau, but the Chamber of Osiris with Ani and the 4 Kings seems to represent that row. Later I found that Budge in his **Gods of the Egyptians** did a fine drawing of a tableau that is over the main entrance of the Great Hall at the Edfu Temple of Horus. The current state of the carved tableau has deteriorated, but is still visible.



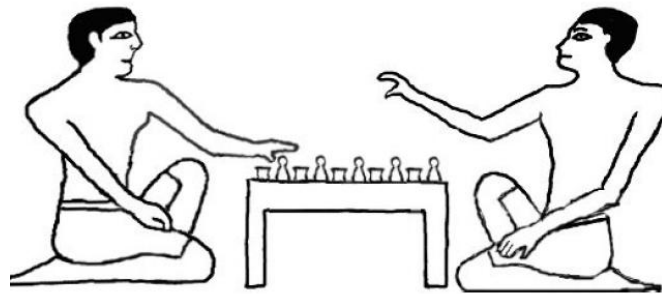
The Sun on the Horizon  
Egyptian symbol of Samadhi (Deep Meditation)



The scene depicts the Morning Solar Boat. Ra gets in a boat at dawn and rides into the sky. Then he switches to an Evening Boat and rides that down below the horizon into the night. In the middle of the boat is a large solar disk with a flying scarab (the sun's creative energy) on it. The disk is the Sun on the Horizon (in meditation, the word for "boat" being an Egyptian pun on "meditation"). Thoth, Maat, Hathor, and Neith (a form of Newet and a stand-in for Osiris) ride on the boat protecting the Sun. Horus pilots the boat and Wepwawet guides the way, while Baby Horus sits on the prow of the boat sucking his thumb. Pharaoh faces the boat offering a little statue of Maat, while the 4 Lords of the Senses embrace the tableau, Hew and Saa (Taste and Touch) are in front of the boat. Maa and Sejem (Vision and Hearing) are behind the boat. The basic symmetry of the design suggested the layout for the Middle Row of the Oracle Board. Neith acts as a stand-in for Osiris,

so we can bring in the 4 Sons of Horus to complete a layout of 8 Court cards and 2 Trumps: Baby Horus and Mummified Osiris.

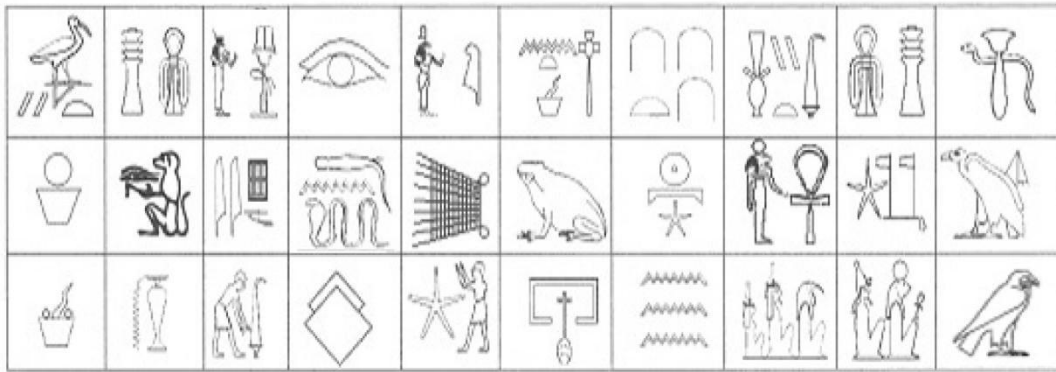
The Weighing of the Heart Tableau is widely depicted in ancient Egyptian art of the New Kingdom, and was something every Egyptian knew by “heart”. It not only depicts one’s state after death, it is valid every moment of a person’s life. There are many variations in the arrangement of the tableau, but there must be a row of witnessing gods, the centerpiece Scale of Justice with the heart and the feather of Maat. There could be variations in certain of the less critical participants, but the key figures were always there, and the Ani papyrus is the best rendition and the only one that clearly suggests the presence of an Oracle Board in the Weighing of the Heart Tableau. But what better place to consider the essential issues in a person’s life than in such a tableau? It is easy to see that any drawing of the Tableau can be used as an Oracle Board in various ways, so I simply tidied up the top row, inserted the middle row, and there was a perfect Senet Oracle Board.



Two Men Play the Game of Senet.

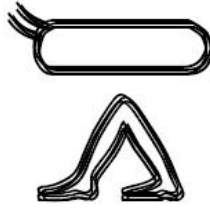


Hunefer sits alone in a Seh booth and consults the Senet Oracle.



Reconstruction of what a Senet Game Board with glyphs on it would look like. Thoth starts the month in the upper left corner of the drawing. His beak is the New Moon. The top row shows the early stages in the Quest of Life. Master Thoth (1) sends Osiris (2) out to experience life. His mother Neith/Newet (3) honors his shrine as he departs. Maa (4) opens his eye to see reality. Maat (5) tells him to go for truth. Sejem (6) the advocate advises him on how to meet the Council of 30 at the 7<sup>th</sup> square. Square 8 seems to be a coded homage to Earth. At the 9<sup>th</sup> square he joins his beloved Isis. Square 10 is Isis in the Delta swamps pregnant with her first child. Square 11 is Mut (Hathor) who represents Isis becoming a mother. Square 12 seems to be Osiris in adulthood heading for the stars to become Sah (Orion). Square 13 is his strength growing to its maximum. Square 14 is the Sun. The Toad in the middle represents the Wheel of Fortune and time in general. So we see the Sun to its East (right) and the Full Moon (fish net) to its West (left). This is the peak of Osiris' career. From there the life force fades. Square 17 is Mehen, a long winding serpent who will protect the life force during the dark hours. Square 18 is finding the "beloved place" dedicated to love. Square 19 is the Fool (Osiris as a farmer), and Square 20 is the World (the bread the "foolish" farmer produces). Osiris has completed his life-season and begins the transition. Square 21 is Temperance. Seduced by the fragrant Nephthys he loses his life force and begins to die, losing breath (22), body heat (23), body fluids (24), and finally crumbling to dust (25). These are the Kings of the 4 Matter States. Then he enters the House of Beauty (Square 26) where his mummy is prepared. After that comes the complete oblivion phase of Death, a lake of pure energy potential where Anubis and his jackal friends tow him across to the ethereal realm. The last three squares are the Emperor (a new pharaoh), The Tower (Coronation of Pharaoh as Ruler of All), and finally Horus the Hero arrives as the Heir to Osiris.

Pawns then exit the board “Passing Beyond” the limitations of the worldly realm.



Senet: Passing Beyond

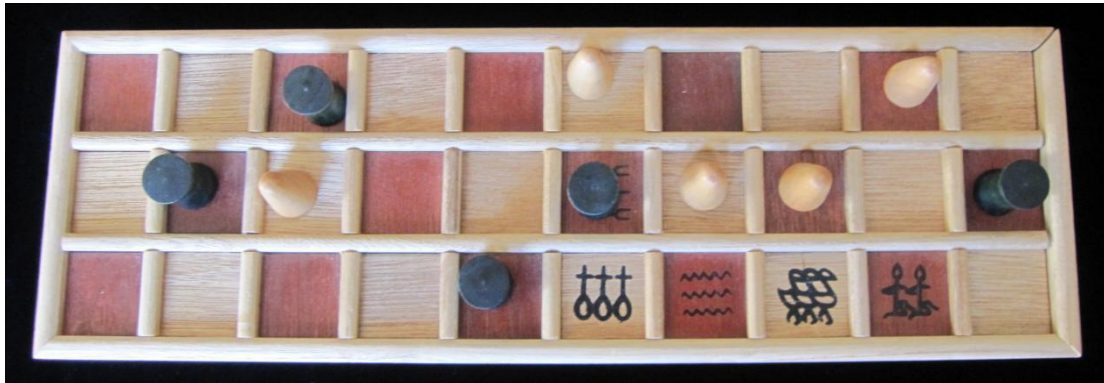



Photo of my Game Board with pawns and a few key symbols (Note House of Beauty and Lake of Oblivion. The Lake is just the particles of matter returning to their primeval state of photon energy potential. All the frequencies and phases cancel out leaving no experience.

Here are some other examples of ancient Egyptian board games. The first is a round board with indentations made to look like the scales on a giant coiled snake protecting the Eye of Ra in the center. Scholars say



the snake's name is “Mehen” (  the same snake we saw on the Senet Game Board, Square 17), but I think that may not be the proper reading of the glyph compound. The top part is read “meh” and is the name of a cubit, the ancient Egyptian ruler. The word also has the idea of fullness, perhaps being a bladder of animal skin that could be filled with water. The lower part is the letter “n” and also can have the sense of “to” or “for” someone or something. Because of calligraphic considerations I suspect they may have actually read the word “Ne-Meh” (To Fullness). In Sanskrit this is a traditional greeting (*Namah*). After the Full Moon, what remains is still the fading of the Moon's Light, an illusion cause by its angle with the Sun relative to observers on Earth.



We do not know the exact rules of the Mehen game, but it seems to have been a spiraling race to the center, and perhaps back out again to the tail. The Egyptians used little clay balls as pawns, and throwing sticks to determine moves. They also had little clay lions for some unknown purpose. The Senet Game outlasted the Mehen Game, and the Senet Board is a mathematically precise Board, whereas the Mehen Board had no precise calibrations as far as I have noticed.

Another Egyptian Board Game is known today as “Hounds and Jackals”. Below is a photo of a museum piece ([Wikipedia](#)), and a hand crafted replica by Worthpoint. The game seems to resemble the childhood board game I played called “Chutes and Ladders”. The Board design has a palm tree in the center, which seems odd for “hounds”, who are unable to climb. In ancient Egypt the baboon was always described as being “dog-faced”. Since the sticks used in the game show no more than an animal face, it might as well be a baboon who would like to climb the tree.



<https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/incredible-handmade-hounds-jackals-1857497840>

I believe this may be a game between Baba the Baboon and Anubis the Jackal. They were half brothers and would very likely play a lot



together. They also had companion baboons and jackals and often formed packs hunting and playing together.

On the Senet Oracle Board we find Baba and Anubis facing each other. Baba plays with the phases of his Lunar Eye (the Egyptian Book of Changes), and Anubis plays with the little lead counter balance on the Scale used when they weigh the heart. Baba was also known to be a counter of hearts.



So we will leave these secondary Game Boards. We know that the Senet Board is the only Board that is mathematically precise, and this is a very important point we will explore later.

## 11 Study Questions

- \* What was the Tableau that led to the discovery of a special Senet Oracle Board?
- \* Why is it important that this Tableau was a focus point for an Oracle?
- \* What other Tableau helped to fill in the structure of the middle row of the emerging Senet Oracle Board?
- \* Why is it important that this other Tableau was a focal point for the middle of the Oracle Board?

- \* From what you know now, how is the design of the Senet Oracle Board fundamentally different from that of the Senet Game Board, and why do you think that is important? (even though the “card content” of both versions is the same?)
- \* What similarities do you see between the Mehen Board and the Senet Board? What major differences?
- \* Why is it possible that the “Hounds and Jackals” game may be misnamed? How and why might the name be changed?
- \* What relationship does that change bring to light in the Senet Oracle Board?
- \* How does the material in this article relate to the Series Overview?