

12 Tableau Transformations: The Formal Structure of a Senet Oracle Board.

A Senet Oracle Board must have the standard 30 Houses in a rectangular format with three rows of ten Houses each. It must adhere closely to the structure of the Tableau: Weighing of the Heart. That Tableau was traditional core wisdom of ancient Egypt and became very popular in the art of the New Kingdom. It also must emphasize the importance of the Eye of Ra/Horus, a major theme in the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom and the Egyptian principle of unity in that all the deities emanate from a source that we will call Amen Ra (Aware Will = pure awareness with a cosmic will to create).

It also must include the “Boat of Ra” piloted by Horus as a central organizing feature. The geography of Egypt was structured by the Nile flowing from South to North, a unique geographic condition in the world. Also the Egyptian mythology held that the Sun God Ra would ride a Morning Boat up into the sky from the Eastern Horizon at dawn and then ride an Evening Boat down to the Western Horizon. At night the Solar Evening Boat would pass deep under the Earth with the Sun in a somnolent state, though still standing, but protected by the Mehen snake from mishaps. (See my translation of the **Amduat**.) The Boat became a symbol for meditation [the common word for boat in Egyptian sounds similar to a word for meditation in Egyptian], and the ideal times for meditation are dawn and dusk, when the sun is on the horizon.

Special passengers can be on the Solar Boat, always including Horus. Other key passengers are Hew and Saa, as well as a selection of figures from the Trump Cards. At different times certain figures are invited on board for certain reasons. We now know how important the Solar Boat is for the foundation of Egyptian civilization, because archaeologists found a pair of “full-scale” Solar Boats made of Lebanese cypress buried in two special megalithic pits along the side of the Great Pyramid. One is now reassembled and on display by the Great Pyramid.

In the last article (11) I described the special Ani Papyrus version of the Heart Weighing Tableau (now in the British Museum) and the Solar Boat Tableau that is high over the main entrance to the Grand Hall at the Edfu Horus Temple. From the Senet Game Text we have a pretty good

description of the sequence of Houses on the Game Board. The design is a zigzag course from left to right along the top row, then right to left along the middle row, and left to right along the bottom row. The game is a race, and so the format takes place in “time”. The whole Board is a combination solar and lunar calendar as I mentioned before and will explain in more detail later.

From the Ani Heart Weighing Tableau it is clear that the scene in this case is almost static like a photograph fixing the Tableau for all time. Thus it is structured in space rather than time, although the bottom row particularly introduces a temporal sub-process, and the upper right row describes the opening stages of the universe (and any creative process). The overall structure is thus static and symmetrical. The array of Trump and Court archetypes is timeless, and thus perfectly balanced, just as the Scale of Justice is always perfectly balanced.

Thus it is important to study this formal structure of the Senet Oracle Board, because it enables a person’s mind to “pass beyond” local issues into eternal laws of nature (or at least a version of a set of eternal natural laws.)

Because of the requirement of 10 Houses on each row and the intimate relation of the Taste and Touch Lords to the Solar Boat, I moved these Lords down to the left side of the Middle Row. Their companions, Vision and Hearing (present in the Solar Boat Tableau) went on the far right side of the Middle Row as they are at Edfu. Osiris (represented at Edfu by Neith and in his chamber to the right of the Heart Weighing tableau) governs the stern of the “Boat”, and Baby Horus governs the left side of the Middle Row which is the prow of the boat. The 4 Kings fill the central portion of that row since they stand in front of Osiris in his Chamber, and their order becomes clear once the top and bottom rows are in place. It seemed right to put Vision in front of Osiris, and Hearing behind him as Osiris’ organs of perception. Baby Horus as a fetus and newborn has only Taste and Touch at first. His finger in his mouth confirms these two Lords as his guardians. Mummified Osiris and Baby Horus become the two “eyes” of the middle row.



If you turn the Hanged Man card upside right (head upward), Baby Horus sits on the prow of the Solar Boat as in the Solar Boat Tableau and faces forward [to the left] with Taste to the left and Touch to the right.

The first 6 Trumps on the top row starting from Ra to Newet (from Sun to Star) are a standard story of how the universe gets started. There are other Egyptian versions of creation, but this one nicely fits the theory of modern cosmology. Amen Ra (the Hidden Sun) starts the universe with a Big Bang [Tower]. This releases a cloud of gas that becomes mainly hydrogen and helium as the quark soup condenses, and the universe starts breathing [Emperor]. Gravity takes charge and starts to compress pockets of the gas to form stars. The stars cook heavier elements to form physical Worlds, some of which will become suitable for life. This process iterates over and over to fill the cosmos with countless galaxies of stars rich with life potential. I held off deciding the best sequence for Isis, Nephthys, Hathor, and Horus on the left side of the upper row until the bottom row sequence was clear.

The bottom row from the left side shows the stages of human life in proper sequence (with one exception in the Ani version). At the far left we see Ani and his wife entering the Tableau. They are the Lovers and represent humans living life filled with love and beauty until they become “divine”. Ani enters and meets Meskhent the midwife who delivered him and his nanny, Renenet. (Serqet is a second nanny figure.) The midwife and nanny goddesses are the two cards in from

the left after the Lovers and represent birth of a child (Judgment) and early childhood (the Moon, memory, and childhood lessons).

From my comparisons with other Heart Tableaus, I knew that next should come the Devil (Set) who sends his monstrous female chimera Ammit (Eater of the Dead) to the tableau, so that she is ready to eat a dishonest heart in the left pan of the Scale. However, the artist in Ani's papyrus was concerned about space issues, so he moved Ammit far over to the right behind Thoth. In any case it was clear that the Devil card properly came at the fourth from the left position in the sequence, because that is the transition from childhood to adulthood in which there is a lot of confusion and contradiction. Next we find the heart in the Scale's left pan. The hidden heart is the Hermit, and its common totem is the phoenix (Bennew bird). Under the left arm of the Scale just past the heart comes Shay, the God of Fortune.

After Shay we must include the little baboon that sits on top of the Scale. He is the Fool. Just below and to the right under the right arm of the Scale is Anubis, Jackal Lord of Death, busy adjusting the little Tekhy weight to make the Scale perfectly balanced and accurate. (Of course the Fool Baboon can just jiggle from above and it throws off the "measurements" of Anubis. Behind Anubis is the right pan of the Scale in which the Feather of Maat (Goddess of Balance, Fairness, and Truth) magically stands upright. Her beloved partner Thoth, the High Priest, stands to the right of the Scale and records the results of the weighing into a report for Ra in the top row above (and for Osiris and the rest of the Council of 30).

Going back to the 4 deities on the left side of the top row, we know for sure that Isis goes above Baby Horus, since that is her child that will be born in the Judgment card below on the bottom row. We then know that Nephthys, as the younger sister of Isis, sits behind Isis in the leftmost position. When Isis gives birth, she becomes a mother and identifies with the Cosmic Mother goddess, Mut Hathor. Isis is like a "localized" version of Hathor (the House of Horus). As the epitome of motherhood Hathor sits above the nanny goddesses and behind Young Horus, a warrior with his Chariot who represents the fulfillment of the dream for a leader of society and an heir to the kingdom. He "fights" with the Devil below due to a misunderstanding, but finally realizes his error, and the two then make peace.

Finally we only have to distribute the 4 Kings according to their appropriate positions. The Hawk King of Wind goes under Horus, who is also a hawk. The dog-faced Hepy (Happy) King of Water stands above the heart and below the galaxies of future possibilities. The King of Earth sits between the World and the Wheel of Fortune managing valuable assets. The King of Firesticks stands between Strength above and the Fool below. The Fool plays with fire without fear, and the Lioness of Strength wields the energy of fire like a powerful laser.

With these considerations we now have the Heart Weighing Tableau and the Solar Boat Tableau transformed neatly into a timeless Senet Oracle Board.

12 Study Questions

- * What are some key requirements for a Senet Oracle Board that reflects the true essentials of Egyptian wisdom?
- * How is the fundamental organization of an Oracle Board different from a Game Board?
- * How does study of the Oracle Board structure achieve one of the goals of “Senet”, but in a different way than in a game?
- * What cards form the middle row? Why are the two Trumps in that row very special and what is their relationship in Egyptian classical civilization?
- * Briefly describe how the first six Trumps in the top row start from Amen Ra and unfold the universe we now behold and can explore.
- * Why does the order of the 4 cards on the top row left side depend on the sequence of the bottom row left side?
- * What is the one card in the bottom row sequence that is out of place in the Ani edition of the Tableau? Why? How do we know where it goes in the sequence?

- * Study the bottom row sequence in the Heart Weighing Tableau of Ani until you know where each Trump appears on the Senet Oracle Board.

- * Once the bottom row sequence is clear, the position of one top row card becomes clear right away. Which card is it? That card's position then determines where the other 3 cards must go.

- * Study the order of the 4 Kings and understand why they take their respective positions in the middle of the middle row.

- * How does the formal structure of the Senet Oracle Board relate to the Series Overview?