The process of endowing a symbolic meaning to the most prominent marks in the landscape can be illustrated by a distinctive feature of Heracleopolis Magna: the sacred lake of the temple of Heryshef. Its dominant position in the city, its relationship with the local temple and its importance in the royal sphere led to its projection from this world to the Beyond. The analysis of funerary texts and vignettes from the First Intermediate Period onwards show that the lakes were considered as a significant place for the purification and rebirth of the deceased.

El proceso de dotación de un significado simbólico a los rasgos más prominentes del paisaje puede ser ilustrado por medio de una característica distintiva de Heracleópolis Magna: el lago sagrado del templo de Heryshef. Su posición dominante en la ciudad, su relación con el templo local y su importancia en la esfera regia condujo a su proyección desde este mundo al Más Allá. El análisis de textos y viñetas de naturaleza funeraria fechados desde el Primer Periodo Intermedio en adelante muestra que los lagos fueron considerados como un lugar significativo para la purificación y renacimiento del difunto.

KEY WORDS: Heracleopolitan Lakes; CT 335; chapter 17 of the BD; vignette; fecundity figures; feathered eye; mytheme; purification; rebirth.

The Egyptians conceived a symbolic dimension of the landscape, as a space which was experienced, thought about, rendered meaningful, and shaped both by beliefs and language. This conception is part of an intellectual process and effort aimed at ordering and recreating the immediate surroundings, as well as at recognizing the significant elements on a cosmic, mythological, funerary level, in the most significant landscape features.

In order to illustrate this process we will focus on the natural and culturally– distinctive feature of the city of Heracleopolis Magna: the sacred lake of the temple of the god Heryshef. Based on sources from the First Intermediate Period (FIP)/ Middle Kingdom (MK) onward found in funerary contexts, i.e. devised to ensure the access of the deceased to the Hereafter¹, we will show how the symbol of the lake is projected to the realm of the gods and the dead and thus inserted in a “mythical topography”. These texts have preserved the names given to the Heracleopolitan pools, their pictorial representation and mythological role in the other world. In this article attention will be

¹ Many texts (magical compositions against the bite of poisonous animals, expressed wishes to live 110 years …) had some purpose during life before being used as funerary spells. Regardless of their origin, our interest is centred on the meaning that the spells in the corpus of Coffin Texts (from now on CT) acquire in their new context.

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