The Development of Local Osirian Forms. An Explanatory Model

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This contribution aims to propose an explanatory model for the origin and meaning of the local manifestations of Osiris, based on Whitney Davis’ ideas on the mechanisms governing the development of ancient Egyptian iconographic representations. Four case studies are presented (Wṣjr ḫnty-hty, Wṣjr ḫm긴, Wṣjr jty ḫr-yjḥ T3-s, and Wṣjr N-ṣr=f), highlighting their essential features and local specificities. Davis’ concepts of “core motif”, “additive modification”, and “expressive magnification” are applied here to explain these manifestations and the development of the different local Osirian forms. Finally, the phenomenon of importation and adaptation of prestigious Osirian figures in various localities is explored using Thebes as a case study.

Keywords: Osiris, local traditions, Whitney Davis, creative reinterpretation, mytheme, Osiris Khenty-Khety, Osiris Hemag, Osiris the sovereign who dwells in the Land of the Lake, Osiris Naref.

Palabras clave: Osiris, tradiciones locales, Whitney Davis, reinterpretación creativa, mitema, Osiris Khenty-Khety, Osiris Hemag, Osiris el soberano que reside en la Tierra del Lago, Osiris Naref.

1 Wegner (1996: 11-35) analyses the nature and origins of Osiris, gathering the different interpretations of these issues in two models (that he dubs “standard” and “Griffiths” —referring to the classical study of the latter of 1980, first released in 1966). Mark Smith is currently preparing a monograph on the relationship between Osiris and the deceased in which he re-examines many aspects of the deity and deals with diachronic changes in his figure (a summary of his main lines of research can be found in Smith, 2014).

2 In relation to the different facets of Osiris, Derchain (1969: 167) states: “Il ne s’agirait plus de devenir lequel du dieu funéraire, du dieu lune, du dieu Nil, du dieu agraire, du dieu soleil est à l’origine, et legitimate kingship, succession of generations in society or regeneration of natural and cosmic cycles, the latter manifested through the various phases undergone by plants, the inundation, or the moon². At a mythological level, this deity played many roles as god-