

# The Senet Game Text of Ancient Egypt

The Complete Works of Douglass A. White, Ph.D.  
Volume 1

古埃及神圖遊戲經文  
白中道博士全集 第一冊



AWAKENED LIFE 覺醒的生命  
SACRED SCARAB INSTITUTE 聖甲蟲學院

# **The Cosmic Game and The Senet Game Text of Ancient Egypt**

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Volume 1

宇宙遊戲與古埃及神圖遊戲經文

白中道博士全集 第一冊

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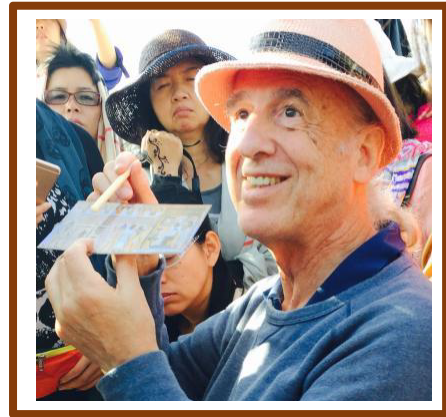
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**Enlightenment** is a viewpoint every person already has available and always has had. It is our essential nature. No technique, practice, or special life style is necessary.

開悟是一個觀點，每一個人都已經可以利用它，而且每一個人都永遠擁有它，它是我們的本性，不需要任何技術、練習、或特殊的生活方式。



## **Douglass A. White, Ph.D. 1941~2021**

He was born in Chicago in 1941, and he graduated from Harvard University in 1964 with Bachelor of Oriental Languages and Literature, after that he entered Taiwan University and began to study the Chinese literature of the former Qin Dynasty in 1965. In 1968, he completed his master's thesis on "Research on Zuo Chuan Quote Poems". Later he returned to Harvard University in the United States to complete his Ph.D. in Oriental Languages and Ancient Civilizations, and wrote the dissertation the Interpretation of the Central Concept of “The Book of Changer” by Scholars in the Han、Song and Ming Dynasties.

The content of all his works: 1) Research on the wisdom of ancient civilizations, including ancient Egypt, China, Buddhism, Judaism, India, etc., 2) Dialyze the authenticity of physical science from the perspective of an observer to connect with the spiritual, 3) Inspiring spirituality Wisdom to continue earth civilization. There are 24 books in total.

白中道博士於 1941 年出生於美國芝加哥，1964 年完成美國哈佛大學的東方語文學士畢業後，1965 年進入台灣大學開始研究前秦中國文學，於 1968 年完成了“左傳引詩研究”的碩士論文；後來又回到美國哈佛大學完成東方語言與古文明博士，論文寫“漢、宋、明代學者對易經中心觀念的解釋”。他畢生所有著作內容型態：1) 古文明智慧研究，包括古埃及、中國、佛學、猶太、印度..... 等等，2) 以觀察者角度來透析物理科學的真實面貌以與心靈接軌，3) 啟發靈性智慧以延續地球文明。總共著作 24 本。

## 【The Complete Works Catalogue of Douglass A. White, Ph.D.】

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# **The Senet Game Text of Ancient Egypt**

Including

**The Hieroglyphic Text,**

Plus a Translation, and Commentary by

Douglass A. White

Based on the three surviving versions transcribed in parallel by  
Professor Peter Piccione

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## The Senet Game Text of Ancient Egypt

A poetic text that describes one of the oldest games known to mankind. The Senet oracle game contains within it the spiritual essence of classical Egyptian culture. The Senet Game Text of Ancient Egypt survives in three copies, one of which is only partial and all of which have lost the last few lines of text.

In this book Dr. White describes the contents of the traditional ancient Egyptian Senet Game Board and allows us to get a feeling for how this game related to the spiritual lives of Egyptians. The Game Board eventually was used as an oracle and became one of the earliest ways of playing with the Tarok divination system (also widely known today as the Tarot) to understand situations in life and the trends of the future.

Dr. White has reconstructed the design of the Senet Game Board based on the badly damaged surviving copies and the work of previous Egyptologists, plus his specialized knowledge of the Tarot system.

This work includes a transcription of the original hieroglyphic text, an English translation, a detailed commentary and interpretation, a proposed reconstruction of the lost portion of the text, a photograph of the text inscribed on a tomb wall, and Dr. White's tentative reconstruction of the entire Senet Game Board along with its correlation to the major cards of the Tarot deck that has survived into our modern world after passing through several transitional stages.

**The Senet Game Text :** This is the second little book in this set of Egyptian Classics. It is a short description of the game board used by Egyptians when they played the game of Senet. The game is a symbolic journey through life. The 30 squares on the board are arranged in 3 rows of 10 and form a month with three 10-day weeks. The pictures on surviving boards are somewhat damaged, but careful study of the text reveals the identity of each “day” in the “month”.

“The “Hero” is Osiris. His mate is Isis. His master is Thoth. Osiris passes through a whole lifetime of experiences, dies, and then is succeeded on the throne by his son Horus.

The squares on the board represent the 22 Tarot Trumps plus 8 royal masters. These masters are the 4 states of matter and the four sensory channels through which we can experience those states of matter: solid, liquid, gas, and plasma. The ion plasma is highly energized and tends to give off light and heat. We call that “fire”. The other states generalize as solids, liquids, and gasses.

# **The Senet Game Text of Ancient Egypt**



**Hieroglyphic Text, Translation,  
Detailed Commentary**

**Douglass A. White**



# Contents

## Cover Art

The cover shows a portrait of Queen Nefertari, wife of Rameses the Great, from the wall of her tomb in the Valley of the Queens, Egypt. Nefertari is divining her future with a Senet Game Board. The work of art depicted in this image and the reproduction thereof are in the **public domain** worldwide. The reproduction is part of a collection of reproductions compiled by The Yorck Project. The compilation copyright is held by Zenodot Verlagsgesellschaft mbH and licensed under the GNU Free Documentation License

## The Great Senet Game Text in Egyptian Hieroglyphs.

This text is based on the transcriptions by Professor Peter A. Piccione (made in his 1990 Doctoral Dissertation at the University of Chicago – “The Historical Development of the Game of Senet and Its Significance for Egyptian Religion”) made from photographs of the original copies and is a draft collation by Douglass A. White of the great essay on the Senet Game Board and the art of playing the game that was written during the New Kingdom of Ancient Egypt. The text survives in three versions: a papyrus in the Turin Museum, a papyrus in the Cairo Museum, and a partial wall inscription of the text in a Theban Tomb. Dr. White also has included a reconstructed ending for the text based on material from the **Book of the Dead** and the **Pyramid Texts**.

## The Great Senet Game Text

Dr. White’s translation with a detailed commentary is based on the research of Professor Piccione and various other Egyptologists, plus Dr. White’s own research on the history of Tarot and the ancient games of Egypt. .

## Proposed Reconstruction of the Senet Game Board.

Dr. White’s diagram shows an example of the simplified ancient Egyptian icons used on their Game Boards based on surviving boards that include such icons.

## Senet Tarot Game Board

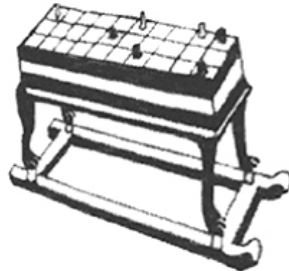
Dr. White uses traditional illustrations of the gods and goddesses from his specially created Oracle Deck *The Senet Tarot of Ancient Egypt* for each of the houses on the Game Board.

### The Great Game Text Inscription

A photograph of the inscription on the wall of Inherkhau's tomb (TT 359) has been kindly provided by Thierry Benderitter, the webmaster of Osirisnet.net. That website is an excellent resource on Egyptian tombs and mastabas. Be sure to see his 3D Tours of several important sites in Egypt.

**Draft Restoration of the TT 359 inscription by Dr. White.**

# The Book of Senet



Sketch by Amy Hsiao based on one of four Senet Game Boards found in the tomb of Tutankhamen. The board is the top of a box with a drawer for holding the pawns and counting sticks. The box forms the glyph “men” that means foundation and is mounted on a platform with lion's legs that stands on a sledge that forms the character used for the name “Tem”. The box is a coffin, the lion is the royal totem for the pharaoh as the sun's emissary, and the sledge of Tem suggests the [re]birth of the universe.

## The Hieroglyphic Text

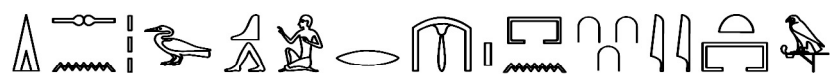




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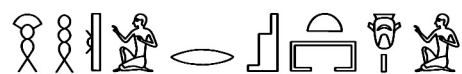
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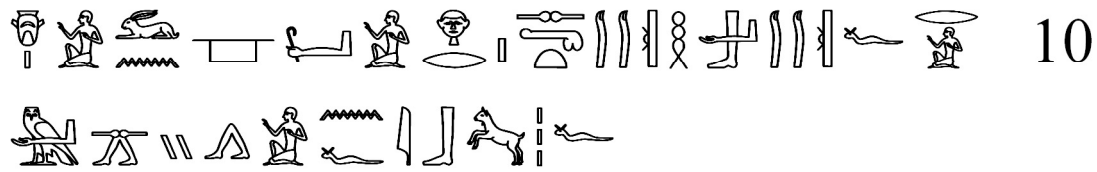
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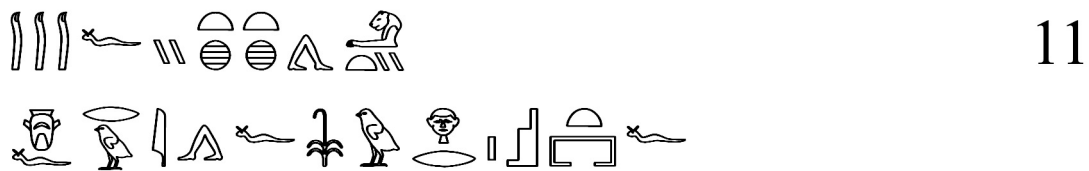
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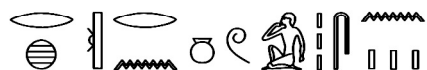


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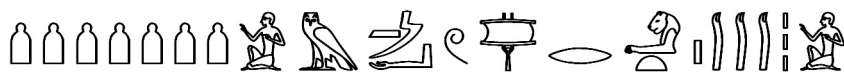
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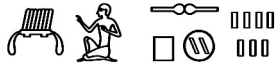


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## Reconstructed Ending



26b



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# The Senet Game Text of Ancient Egypt

Translation and Commentary by Douglass A. White

Based on the three surviving copies  
transcribed and collated by Prof. P. Piccione

Among the surviving documents of ancient Egypt the Illustrated Senet Playing Board and an accompanying poetic text about it that we shall call **The Senet Game Text** was drawn on papyrus [pTurin 1.775]. A second probably earlier papyrus edition of the **Senet Game Text** is in the Cairo Museum [pCairo 58037], and a third partial copy of the **Senet Game Text** is inscribed on the wall of the Theban Tomb of Inherkhau [TT 359].

The iconic illustrations on the 30 squares of the Game Board symbolically represent deities of ancient Egypt. However, they are badly damaged, and many are illegible or destroyed. About 22 out of 30 can be recognized from the two boards drawn on the papyrus. Professor Piccione has recognized 2 more from the Game Text and other sources. Dr. White now has made a tentative restoration of the complete board based on the research done by Piccione and his predecessors, a study of the **Senet Game Text**, the **Book of the Dead** text with its Judgment Scene Tableau, the **Pyramid Texts** and the Tarot Trump and Court Cards. Below is his translation of the **Senet Game Text**. Using Piccione's collation of the three surviving versions, Dr. White has produced a tentative conflated text that includes a transliterated version and commentary with the translation. Since all surviving versions are missing the final few lines, Dr. White has also reconstructed a possible ending for the text based on material from the **Book of the Dead** and the **Pyramid Texts**.

**01. Hetep da su[ten] R@, Temu, Jehuty,  
Wenen-nefer neb ma@-kheru, M@bayu, Heru, Anepu,**

**01.** [I make] a royal offering to Ra, Atum, Jehuty,  
Un-nefer, Lord of Truth Speaking, the Court of 30, Horus, Anubis,

\* I use a modified transliteration system, because the one used by Egyptologists is unreadable for most people. I use the @ symbol to represent the deep laryngeal “grunting A” sound in ancient Egyptian. The default vowel is a short “e” sound. “Kh” and “th” are unvoiced fricative consonants. I sometimes use a hyphen “-” to separate syllables and letters. This distinguishes “ma@-kheru” from being read as “ma@k-heru”. An italicized “a” represents the glottal stop usually written with an eagle glyph in Egyptian.

\* This phrase is the beginning of the text. All three versions are different and variously garbled or damaged at the beginning, but this opening passage was a standard formula used for offering texts on funerary steles, so we understand the basic contents. It connects the text to that tradition and further reminds us that the **Book of**

**the Dead** Judgment Scene Tableau is the “a priori” layout of the Senet Oracle Game Board when used as an oracle. I call the “Book of the Dead” the “Book of Enlightenment” because its true title is “Coming Forth into Daylight [or Enlightenment]” and its purpose is to describe the freedom of consciousness to come and go in the universe, entering and leaving forms at will. The most suitable extant text for studying the “a priori” arrangement of the Game Board is the Theban version known as the Papyrus of Ani (BM #10470.) This document contains in its illustrations all the Tarot Trump cards, Court Cards, and most of the Pip Cards as well. The Witnessing Gods in the Judgment Scene clearly form a Senet Oracle Board layout, even to the extent of showing the proper number of alternating checkerboard squares. In my book **Thoth and the Tarot: the Amazing Secrets** (see also more recent Chinese language edition published as the **Senet Tarot of Ancient Egypt**) I present a layout that is closely based on that Tableau while also drawing on some other sources and making a few simple refinements based on the ancient traditions.

\* From the Pyramid Texts we can already see the expression “A royal offering . . .” used as an opening phrase for dedications. “Su[ten]” usually refers to the pharaoh, but in this formula it comes to mean “Performed in the manner of a pharaoh”. Scholars often read “su[ten]” as “nesu”. The latter refers to the “throne”. However, I believe that this ancient Egyptian word corresponds to our modern word “sultan” and is a traditional title for a royal personage. Medial liquids (l-r) and nasals (m-n) were often not spelled out in written Egyptian texts.

\* The traditional “a posteriori” Senet Oracle Game Board layout used for gaming and described in the Senet Game Text proper usually names the final five squares as follows: The House of Beauty [Heart of Osiris, the Hermit]; Dissolution [An-pu, Death]; The Three Honored Ones [Thoth, Emperor Shu, and Ma@t]; The Two Honored Ones [Tower Temu and Ra Horakhty]; and Horus [the Chariot]. This list is very close to the order in the Book of Enlightenment in reverse sequence with Horus the Younger in the 30 square rising to identify with Amen Ra Horakhty [Horus the Elder] as he leaves the board and transcends from the Lower Self to the Higher Self. The “a posteriori” Senet Game Board layout represents the journey of an aspirant through the Labyrinth of Mehen. The goal of the game is for the aspirant to become a full-fledged “Magician” and identify with the ideal of Osiris. Winning the game symbolized magical assimilation of the entire culture of ancient Egypt and the attainment thereby of immortality.

**02. Shewe, Ma@t, Asyu-t Weryu nu Per-Nefer, Hew Peh-ty Hekaut, Saa,**

**02. Shu, Ma’at, the Crew of Great Ones of the House of Beauty, Hu the Mighty One of Magic Spells, and Saa.**

\* This line continues the list of major gods who appear on the Senet Board. \* Shewe [The Emperor Trump, Shu] is the prototype for India’s Shiva. He represents the primordial material of the universe from which the Breath of Life arises. As such he represents the pathway back to Source. Thus he sits above Dissolution [the Death Trump, Anubis] on the “a priori” ancient Egyptian Oracle Board.

\* Ma’at is the consort of Thoth and represents Truth. She is the Justice Trump in the Tarot. Shu and Ma’at both wear ostrich feathers on their heads as a sign of the mind