

THE BOOK OF THE DEAD IS PRINTED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE WORLD

After more than 3 years of work, a publisher in Salamanca prints for the first time worldwide a facsimile of this text

In 1888, the British Museum commissioned the English Egyptologist and philologist Ernest Wallis Budge to buy a 3,000-year-old papyrus that had rested in the Tomb of Ani (royal scribe) in Thebes, Egypt, and moved it to London. Unrolling the nearly 24 meters, the experts found themselves in front of a copy of *The Book of the Dead* and named it the *Papyrus of Ani*. This treatise was a fundamental work in ancient Egypt, since it contained a compendium of guidelines, spells, prayers, magic formulas and recitations that the Egyptians, once deceased, had to follow until they presented themselves in the trial of Osiris, the Egyptian god of resurrection, vegetation and agriculture. Surrounded by 42 judges, the purity of their soul was decided, which would guarantee them or not, the passage to eternal life. Beyond its economic value, because a roll of papyrus could suppose half the annual pay of a peasant, *The Book of the Dead* was crucial to ensure the future resurrection of the deceased.

Initially, during Dynasties V and VII, hieroglyphs were formed on the pyramids, known as the "Texts of the Pyramids". Later, the engravings were inscribed on the sarcophagi where the mummified bodies rested in response to the Egyptians' fear of decomposition. It was in this period when the practice of immortalising the engraved texts was extended to nobles and high officials. This practice, over the years, was democratised

and the texts were copied on papyri lying in the tomb next to the corpse and the rest of his mortuary trousseau. That was the origin of what is now known as *The Book of the Dead*, a work that influenced Jews, Greeks, Romans and finally Christian Europe. And now the **Spanish publishing house CM** has succeeded in creating the first facsimile.

The Book of the Dead could cost, 3,000 years ago, a farmer's annual salary.

These treaties used to belong to members of the social elite, as they cost a fortune, and were initially reserved only for members of the royal family. With this in mind, Ani's Papyrus gives us an idea of the social position and wealth of the scribe.

While it is an artistic testimony of enormous value, relating the transit of Ani and his wife Tutu (a high-ranking priestess), this version is distinguished by something else. "There is no *Book of the Dead* that is the same as another - Daniel Díez, editorial director of CM, the publisher responsible for the reproduction of this text that is printed for the first time worldwide, confirms this in a telephone conversation. The quality of his images shows



that this roll was made in a special way: normally the images were adapted to the text, but in this case the text was adapted to the images because of their beauty. This makes this version of *The Book of the Dead* the most outstanding of all those which have survived".

This is not the first attempt to reproduce *Ani's Papyrus*. But until now the technology had not advanced so much as to recreate the colours and textures of the original support. "*Ani's Papyrus* is made of a material that it is impossible to print on it - Díez confirms - and there was no substitute that would allow it. But a few years ago we discovered a possibility to do it. We brought papyrus from Egypt, did tests and started asking the British Museum for permission to reproduce the work".

The whole process took almost three years, including permits, tests, trips, etc. To this must be added the difficulty of being faithful to the tones with which they illustrated the original text. "After the first images —Díez says— we have reinforced the white, for example,

For printing, papyrus was brought from Egypt in order to be faithful to the original.





«The Heavy of the Soul». Passage of «The Book of the Dead. The Papyrus of Ani».

since the Egyptians used a very strong white. Basically they used natural pigments, white was obtained from lime, for example. In nature there are two sources for blue: lapis lazuli, and cobalt, while red is obtained from clays and green from natural pigments. As for the texture and density of this type of pigment, the aim was to recreate that living aspect, which is why we were so insistently looking for a technique that would allow us to reproduce this 3D appearance, so to say. With papyrus, which is a living organism, we have to be careful, it wrinkled and we had to develop a completely flat box to prevent moisture from entering. We even designed a box, like a sarcophagus to house the book and a lectern for the reader to turn the pages”.

The reproduction consists of a total of 37 sections into which Budge divided the roll. A very controversial decision, even today.

I always thought they were a civilization obsessed with death but it was just the opposite.

In total it is made up of 37 fragments,” says Díez. Originally it was a roll, but to unfold 24 meters, only to study a part was dangerous and Budge took the decision to cut it in 37 sections in order for it to be studied. In the museum of Turin, for example, there is a book of the dead that was not cut and has 27 meters: it occupies an entire corridor and it is impossible to study it that way. Budge’s was a very controversial decision.

A total of 999 copies of this first facsimile edition have been produced, with a Spanish translation and a detailed explanation of each detail of the images. It also includes the participation of Zahi Hawass, former Minister of Antiquities of Egypt.

Undoubtedly, the technical part was one of the most complex. Not only the papyrus, the colours and the texture had to be analysed in detail, the images also had to reproduce the History. From the clearness to the threads of the papyrus.

“The process of dealing with the breaks in each section could take days —Díez tells us—. Each photograph has a resolution ranging from 150 MP to 200 MP. Ten years ago it was unthinkable to achieve this. The cameras we use for this are giant, like scanners, up to 5 meters, which allow us to obtain this quality of images. Mounting the scanner can take a day”.

And what have you learned after living so long with *The Book of the Dead*, we asked Díez. “I always thought that they were a civilization obsessed with death —confesses the editor— but not at all, the Egyptians cared a lot about life. They were no older than 30 years old and were worried about going on living. That’s why they worked so hard to get a new opportunity”.

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