

A sheet from Chennena's funerary papyrus (Book of the Dead): The mysterious gates of the dwelling of Osiris

New Kingdom, 18th dynasty, c. 1450 BC

Painted papyrus

H.: 40 cm; W.: 1.06 m

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The Book of the Dead described a series of trials that the deceased had to undergo before reaching Osiris's tribunal where, if the judgment were favorable, he would be admitted to the kingdom of the dead. The obstacles included getting past gates that blocked free circulation in the Beyond, as recounted in chapters 144 to 147. Chapter 147 describes each gate, giving the names of the three gate-keepers who guard it until the deceased utters his speech. This chapter is illustrated in Chennena's papyrus. The deceased comes before several gates that are protected by a guard whose fearsomeness is symbolized by the knife with which he is armed; to pass through the gate, Chennena must utter the name of the gate and the names of its guards. First he asks the gate to let him through, because he knows it and can state its name and those of its guards; the deceased then utters those names out loud. He is allowed to pass through. The same rite recurs in front of each of the twenty-one doors in the dwelling of Osiris. Indeed, chapters 144 to 147 describe seven passages in the god's realm, each of which has three gates. Thus the deceased must get past 21 different gates.



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