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# Dissertation

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*The Way of Horus:*

*Kingship and Transition in the Contendings of Horus and Seth*

*Horova Cesta: Panství a přechodová symbolika ve Sporu Hora a Sutecha*

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2023

I hereby declare that I have written this dissertation independently, using only the mentioned and duly cited sources and literature, and that the work has not been used in another university study programme or to obtain the same or another academic title.

In Prague on September 23, 2023

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## Abstract

The present study explores the Ancient Egyptian tale *Contendings of Horus and Seth*, attested from the New Kingdom *Papyrus Chester Beatty I*, with focus on its complex symbolism and relationship to contemporary Egyptian religious thought and royal ideology. Intertextual ties between the tale and multiple Egyptian textual corpora are outlined, including ritual texts, funerary inscriptions, royal inscriptions of various types and literature proper. The symbolic analysis is followed by an interpretation of the story as a literary *rite of passage*, centred on the drama of royal succession, represented in the tale by the maturation of the god Horus. Elements of individual stages of this process are identified, with particular attention being given to the liminal aspect of succession, in which the various symbolic layers merge into a single narrative focused on the transformation of a prince into a king. The study shows how the tale presents a complex theology of kingship as an earthly image of the creator god, who subsumes in the drama of his ascension to the throne the totality of vital processes in the universe, including the revival of the dead in the afterlife and a cyclic renewal of the whole cosmos. The figure of the god Seth serves as another major focus of the thesis, which describes his indispensable function in the life cycle of kingship. Seth is shown as a complementary cosmic principle to Horus, which ensures continued vitality of kingship by regularly confronting it with the element of disorder which underlies the structured universe. The symbolic sacrifice of Seth is presented as a source of a special type of power, which allows the king to perform his cosmic duty as the guarantor of cosmic boundaries. Based on these considerations, the thesis reevaluates accepted theories about the function of the tale in Egyptian cultic activity and readdress its status as a mythological literary work.

Keywords: Ancient Egyptian Cosmology; Ancient Egyptian Kingship; Ancient Egyptian Literature; Ancient Egyptian Mythology; Ancient Egyptian Religion; Arnold van Gennep; *Contendings of Horus and Seth*; Deir el-Medina; Horus; Late Egyptian Literature, Liminality; Maurice Bloch; *Myth and Ritual*; *Papyrus Chester Beatty I*; Ring Composition; Rites of Passage; Rites of Passage (Ancient Egypt); Seth; Victor Turner.

## Abstrakt

Tato studie zkoumá staroegyptský příběh *Spor Hora a Sutecha*, doložený na papyru *Chester Beatty I* z Nové říše se zaměřením na jeho složitou symboliku a vztah k soudobému egyptskému náboženskému myšlení a královské ideologii. Věnuje se intertextuálním vazbám mezi příběhem a četnými egyptskými textovými korpusy včetně rituálních textů, pohřebních nápisů, královských inskripcí a literatury. Po této symbolické analýze následuje výklad příběhu jako literárního přechodového rituálu, jehož středobod představuje drama královského nástupnictví, které je v příběhu reprezentováno dospíváním boha Hora. Práce identifikuje prvky jednotlivých fází tohoto procesu, přičemž zvláštní pozornost je věnována liminálnímu aspektu nástupnictví, v němž se různé symbolické vrstvy spojují v jediné vyprávění zaměřené na proměnu prince v krále. Studie v příběhu odhaluje komplexní teologii královského úřadu jako pozemského obrazu boha stvořitele, který v dramatu svého nástupu na trůn subsumuje souhrn vitálních procesů ve vesmíru včetně oživení mrtvých v posmrtném životě a cyklické obnovy celého kosmu. Zkoumání postavy boha Sutecha představuje druhý ústřední prvek práce, která popisuje jeho nezastupitelnou funkci v životním cyklu kralování. Sutech je ukázán jako komplementární kosmický princip k Horovi, a zajišťuje trvalou životaschopnost královské moci tím, že ji pravidelně konfrontuje s prvkem chaosu, který je základem strukturovaného vesmíru. Symbolická oběť Sutecha je popsána jako zdroj zvláštního typu moci, která králi umožňuje plnit jeho kosmickou povinnost jako garanta hranic kosmu. Na základě těchto úvah práce přehodnocuje přijaté teorie o funkci příběhu v egyptské kultovní činnosti a jeho statutu mytologického literárního díla.

Klíčová slova: Arnold van Gennep; Dér el-Medína; Hor; Kruhová kompozice; Liminalita; Maurice Bloch; Mýtus a rituál; Papyrus Chester Beatty I; Pozdně egyptská literatura; Přechodové rituály; Přechodové rituály (Starý Egypt); Spor Hora a Sutecha; Staroegyptská kosmologie; Staroegyptská literatura; Staroegyptská mytologie; Staroegyptské náboženství; Staroegyptský královský úřad; Sutech; Victor Turner.

## List of Abbreviations

CT	Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts
GDG	Gauthier, Henri, Dictionnaire des noms géographiques contenus dans les textes hiéroglyphiques, Cairo: La Société de géographie d'Égypte, 1925-1931, 7 vols.
KRI	Kitchen, Kenneth, <i>Ramesside Inscriptions, Historical and Biographical</i> , Oxford: Blackwell, 1968-1990, 8 vols.
LÄ	Helck, Wolfgang, Eberhard Otto (eds.), <i>Lexikon der Ägyptologie</i> , Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1975-1992, 7 vols.
LGG	Leitz, Christian, <i>Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen</i> , Leuven: Peeters, 2002, 8 vols.
PT	Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts
Urk.	Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums
Wb	Erman, Adolf, Hermann Grapow (eds.): <i>Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache</i> , Akademie-Verlag, Berlin, 1926-1971, 7 vols.



### Note on Translation

The translations of Egyptian texts in this thesis adhere to certain conventions employed in translations of ancient texts. Parentheses, (), in the text surround words inserted by the translator for clarity; square brackets, [], show restorations; and angle brackets, <>, enclose words omitted by the Egyptian scribe.

Some special conventions are applied to the translation of the *Contendings*. The small capitals represent words that the Egyptian scribe wrote in red ink, so-called rubrics. Text in all-caps represents the title parts of royal titulary. Upper-index numbers in parentheses show the page and line number of the original text.

With regards to other primary sources cited in this thesis, (...) represents a section of surviving text which was intentionally not cited, while [...] represents a section of text which has not survived. “NN” represents the name of a text’s beneficiary when the text is attested for multiple beneficiaries.

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## Preface

The subject of the present thesis is the Ancient Egyptian tale *Contendings of Horus and Seth*, attested from the New Kingdom *Papyrus Chester Beatty I*. The aim of the thesis is to explore the complex symbolism of this mythical story and relate it to contemporary Egyptian religious thought and royal ideology. To achieve this, connections and similarities between the story and other Egyptian sources are discussed, uncovering a dense web of intertextual ties between the tale and multiple corpora, including ritual texts, funerary sources, royal inscriptions of various types and literature proper. This symbolic analysis will be followed by an interpretation of the story as a literary *rite of passage*, whose central motif is royal succession, represented in the tale by the maturation of Horus. Elements of individual stages of this process are identified in the tale, with particular attention being given to the liminal aspect of succession, in which the various symbolic layers merge into a single narrative centred on the transformation of the prince into a king. The result is a complex theology of king as an earthly image of the divine creator, who subsumes in the drama of his ascension to the throne the totality of vital processes in the universe, including the revival of the dead in the afterlife and the cyclic renewal of the whole cosmos. The figure of Seth will serve as another major focus of the thesis, highlighting his indispensable function in the life cycle of the royal office. Seth will be shown as a complementary cosmic principle to Horus, which ensures continued vitality of kingship by regularly confronting it with the element of disorder which underlies the structured universe. Finally, the symbolic sacrifice of Seth will be described as a source of a specific type of power, which allows the king to perform his cosmic duty as the guarantor of cosmic boundaries. Based on these considerations, this thesis will reevaluate accepted theories about the function of the tale in Egyptian cultic activity and readdress its status as mythical literary work.

The thesis consists of six main sections:

1. An introduction including an overview of previous works relating to the study of the *Contendings* and of the material context of *Papyrus Chester Beatty I*. This includes a brief discussion of the locality of Deir el-Medina, where the papyrus was likely found and of the ancient private archive to which it belonged.
2. An analysis of the text's structure. The thesis uses the methodology formulated by Mary Douglas to identify the *Contendings* as a ring-composition. Douglas' analytical tool of 'parallel pairing' is employed to divide the tale into 14 sections based on patterns of motif repetition. The significance of variant writings of the names of Horus and Seth is also discussed.
3. A translation of the *Contendings* with commentary focusing on the symbolic associations and intertextual comparison. Each of the 14 sections of the tale is discussed in detail, highlighting not only their religious symbolism, but also the ways in which these symbols interact within the ring structure of the narrative. The

result of this section is comprehensive understanding of Egyptian religion and culture and of the text's internal dynamics that allows the more interpretative approach of sections 4–6. Significant topics discussed in this section include the constellational character of Egyptian mythology, positional succession, the prominence of solar theology and funerary beliefs.

4. An overview of Egyptian kingship, its cosmic function, the impact of the king's death on the universe and the way in which the crisis of succession reflects in the *Contendings*. Particular attention is devoted to critical images of kingship and the way in which individual examples relate to either the individual or the institutional aspect of the king. This chapter includes a preliminary outline of Arnold van Gennep's model of *rite of passage* and its relevance for the constitutive elements of the succession crisis.
5. An interpretation of the *Contendings* through the notion of liminality, showing how the idea of royal succession is rendered in the tale as a cosmic drama which reassembles the world impacted by royal death. The argument is based on the theory of van Gennep as interpreted by Victor Turner and Nicole Hochner. Chapters 5.2–5.6 present three distinct images of liminality, each centred on Horus. First, the idea of Horus as an initiate in coming-of-age rites is discussed, including a discussion of possible evidence for such rites in Ancient Egypt, with particular attention given to the connection between royal accession and the transformation of the prince. Second, the transition of Horus is explored as a funerary drama by describing structural similarities between the movement of Horus through fictional space in the tale and the renditions of funerary practices in funerary literature, particularly the Coffin Texts. Third, the liminal stage of the narrative is interpreted as an expression of Egyptian cosmogonic tradition. The specifics of this expression include a vision of Horus and Seth as two opposing cosmic forces, whose power dynamics are the driving force behind the life cycle of kingship. Finally, the religious imagery and structures are compared with Theban cultic tradition, showing that the mythical events described correlate with contemporary practices in this region. Chapter 5.7 describes the transformation of Seth and the significance of the god in contemporary royal ideology. Maurice Bloch's theory of sacrifice is discussed to analyse the ways in which the tale renders the transmission of his power.
6. An exploration of the tale's social context, including an evaluation of Ursula Verhoeven's proposed festive use of the *Contendings*. The literary and mythical qualities of the tale are discussed together with major theories of Egyptian literature and myth. Possible functions of the narrative beyond Verhoeven's idea are also considered.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 The Contendings of Papyrus Chester Beatty I

The single attested version of the *Contendings* is preserved on what is conventionally understood to be the front side (“recto”) of a papyrus roll, known today as *Papyrus Chester Beatty I*.<sup>1</sup> The modern history of the papyrus begins with Alfred Chester Beatty, an American copper magnate and an avid collector of Orientalia.<sup>2</sup> As it is the case with so many ancient artifacts, the papyrus was not discovered from beneath the soil and sand of Egypt by archaeologists. Instead, it is very likely that it was obtained through a dealer of antiquities who had the pleasure of selling the papyrus roll to Mr. Chester Beatty, whose name it came to bear. Consequently, the precise location and context of the find could not be pinpointed, which is common to artefacts gained through other means than archaeological work.

Luckily, the papyrus itself contains some indices as to its origin, which allowed Alan Gardiner to argue for a Theban provenance.<sup>3</sup> The main piece of evidence is the colophon<sup>4</sup> of the papyrus: “It has come to a happy ending in Thebes, the place of truth.”<sup>5</sup> The phrase

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published in Alan Gardiner, *The Library of A. Chester Beatty: Description of a Hieratic Papyrus with a Mythological Story, Love-songs, and Other Miscellaneous Texts; the Chester Beatty Papyri, no. 1 (=Chester Beatty Papyrus No. 1)*, London: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931, 46 p.

<sup>2</sup> See Charles Horton, *Alfred Chester Beatty: From Miner to Bibliophile*, Dublin: Town House, 2003, 48 p.

<sup>3</sup> A. Gardiner, *Chester Beatty Papyrus No. 1*, p. 1. Theban provenance would include not only the city proper, but also the surrounding areas, including necropolis of Western Thebes where Deir el-Medina was located.

<sup>4</sup> Lit. “summit”. The term is used to denote a brief statement containing information about the publication of a book. For this textual element in Ancient Egypt, see e.g., Richard Parkinson, “Teachings, Discourses and Tales from the Middle Kingdom”, in Stephen Quirke, (ed.), *Middle Kingdom Studies*, New Malden: Sia Publishing, 1991, p. 94 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Con.* 16,8. The translation “Truth” is based on a tentative reconstruction of a hieratic group found at the end of the colophon. Originally reading it as *tb.w* (?), which he considers “completely unintelligible as it stands”, Gardiner suggested that the group is a corruption of *mꜣꜥ.t*, although he himself states that the emendation is “very precarious” (A. Gardiner, *Chester Beatty Papyrus No. 1*, p. 26, n. 4; Alan Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories*, Bruxelles: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1932, p. 60a). Chappaz followed Gardiner’s original reading, translating the phrase *s.t tb.w* as “Place of transfer”, by which he meant the transfer of the text from one papyrus to another. At the same time, he suspected an “unconscious identification of the writer with the ferryman Nemty from the nome of *tbw*.” See Jean-Luc Chappaz, “Que diable allaient-ils faire dans cette galère? Recherche sur le thème de la navigation dans quelques contes égyptiens”, *Bulletin de la Société d’Égyptologie de Genève* 3 (1980), p. 6–7; Ursula Verhoeven, “Ein historischer ‘Sitz im Leben’ für die Erzählung von Horus und Seth des Papyrus Chester Beatty I”, in Mechthild Schade-Busch (ed.), *Wege öffnen: Festschrift für Rolf Gundlach zum 65. Geburtstag*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996, p. 351. While this reading is not the preferred one in the present thesis, the translation of “Place of transfer” is surprisingly fitting given the findings of chapter 4 below.

“place of truth” was originally thought to refer to the Theban Necropolis as a whole,<sup>6</sup> and some scholars argued that on this particular papyrus it refers to the ancient village of Deir el-Medina, which was home to the artisans who worked on the tombs in the Valley of the Kings between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> dynasty, during the New Kingdom.<sup>7</sup> More recent research indicates that this manuscript was a part of a larger find from this village from what was identified as the private library of the family of Naunakhte, who were draughtsmen and scribes in Ramesside Deir el-Medina.<sup>8</sup> As far as we know, this archive included not only the *Chester Beatty Papyri* (I-XIX), but also *Papyri Deir el-Medina* I-XVII and *Papyri Naunakhte* II-III.<sup>9</sup>

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The reading *s.t mꜣꜥ.t* is relatively prevalent, and apart from Gardiner’s cited works, it is preferred in Michèle Broze, *Mythe et roman en Égypte ancienne: Les aventures d’Horus et Seth dans le Papyrus Chester Beatty I*, Leuven: Peeters, 1996, p. 116; Friedrich Junge, “Die Erzählung vom Streit der Götter Horus und Seth um die Herrschaft”, Anonymous (ed.), *Weisheitstexte, Mythen und Epen: Mythen und Epen III*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, p. 950. Verhoeven is not convinced by either reading, noting that the scribe would probably not misspell the phrase in this manner, especially if it denoted his hometown, as she assumes. See U. Verhoeven, “Ein historischer ‘Sitz im Leben’ für die Erzählung von Horus und Seth des Papyrus Chester Beatty I”, p. 351.

<sup>6</sup> Jaroslav Černý, “L’identité des “Serveurs de la place de vérité” et des ouvriers de la nécropole royale de Thèbes”, *Revue de l’Égypte Ancienne* 2 (1929): 200–209. Ursula Verhoeven also subscribes to the idea that the papyrus originated in Deir el-Medina. See U. Verhoeven, “Ein historischer ‘Sitz im Leben’ für die Erzählung von Horus und Seth des Papyrus Chester Beatty I”, p. 351, n. 21.

<sup>7</sup> See Charles Boreux, “On Two Statuettes in the Louvre Museum”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 7 (1921), p. 113 ff.; Henri Gauthier, “La nécropole de Thèbes et son personnel”, *Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale* 13 (1917), p. 153 ff.; See also Leonard Lesko, “Introduction”, in Leonard Lesko (ed.), *Pharaoh’s Workers: The Villagers of Deir El Medina*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994, p. 7.

Cf. the argument in chapter 5.6.5 where the phrase *s.t mꜣꜥ.t* is understood to simply denote a sacred place of significance.

<sup>8</sup> Pieter Pestman, “Who Were the Owners in the ‘Community of Workmen’ of the Chester Beatty Papyri?”, in Robert Demarée, Jac Janssen, *Gleanings from Deir el-Medina*, Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1982, p. 155–172.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 155. Cf. Jaroslav Černý, Georges Posener, *Papyrus hiératiques de Deir el-Médineh I: Nos I-XVII*, Le Caire: Institut français d’archéologie, 1978, p. vii + viii.

For the contents of the Chester Beatty papyri and their relation to other Deir el-Medina papyri, see Fredrik Hagen, *An Ancient Egyptian Literary Text in Context: The Instruction of Ptahhotep*, Leuven: Peeters, 2012 p. 104–111. Cf. the discussion and sources cited in Niv Allon, Hana Navrátilová, *Ancient Egyptian Scribes: A Cultural Exploration*, London: Bloomsbury, 2018, p. 114. See also the work in progress outlined in Stéphane Polis et al., “Crossing Boundaries: Understanding Complex Scribal Practices in Ancient Egypt (with a 2019 Progress Report)”, *Rivista del Museo Egizio* 4 (2020): 1–15.

The earliest known additions to this collection were made by the scribe Kenherkhepeshef, the first husband of Naunakhte and an avid bibliophile.<sup>10</sup> *Papyrus Chester Beatty I* was likely added to the library by Amennakhte, a son of Naunakhte from her second marriage, who seems to have inherited the collection after her death.<sup>11</sup> Amunakhte has most likely acquired the roll from Nakhtsobek, a lifelong friend,<sup>12</sup> who also took the liberty of replacing the name in the colophon of the papyrus with his own.<sup>13</sup> It is not clear whether Nakhtsobek lived in the village himself,<sup>14</sup> but the original scribe is assumed to have been from Thebes.<sup>15</sup> Due to the usurpation of Nakhtsobek, however, his name remains unknown.<sup>16</sup>

Gardiner was also of the opinion that the text may have been written by more than one hand, possibly over an extended period of time.<sup>17</sup> This might account for the variety of texts present on the papyrus, which contains several other literary compositions. All of them are written in typical Late Egyptian language and using hieratic script.<sup>18</sup> Apart from the mythological story itself, there is a collection of love-songs, *The Encomium of Ramesses V* (a short panegyric of the king), a fragment of a religious hymn and miscellaneous

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<sup>10</sup> Leonard Lesko, "Literature, Literacy and Literati", in Leonard Lesko (ed.), *Pharaoh's Workers: The Villagers of Deir el Medina*, Ithaca - London: Cornell University, 1994, p. 136-137. For the family, see Koenraad Donker van Heel, *Mrs. Naunakhte and Family: The Women of Ramesside Deir el-Medina*, Cairo - New York: The American University in Cairo Press, p. 21 ff.

<sup>11</sup> L. Lesko, "Literature, Literacy and Literati", p. 137.

<sup>12</sup> *Papyrus DeM 4*. See translation in Edward Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990, p. 150-151. For authorship and commentary of the text, see Deborah Sweeney, "Friendship and Frustration: A Study in Papyri Deir el-Medina IV-VI", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 84 (1998): 101-122.

<sup>13</sup> The colophon refers to the person whose hand wrote the text on the papyrus. Whether the hand belonged to an *author*, who composed the text, or a copyist, cannot be inferred from the sources. Both these functions, however, were held in a degree of esteem. Cf. N. Allon, H. Navrátilová, *Ancient Egyptian Scribes* p. 119; Chloe Ragazzoli, *Les Artisans du Texte: Le culture des Scribes en Egypte Ancienne d'après le sources du Nouvel Empire*, Dissertation: Université Paris-Sorbonne, p. 571-572.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Anne-Claire Salmas, "Space and Society at Deir el-Medina: Delineating the Territory of a Specific 'Social Group'", in Andreas Dorn, Stephane Polis (eds), *Outside the Box: Selected papers from the conference "Deir el-Medina and the Theban Necropolis in Contact" Liège, 27-29 October 2014*, Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2018, p. 433. See also the discussion in chapter 6.4 below.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g., L. Lesko, "Literature, Literacy and Literati", p. 137. See also the discussion above.

<sup>16</sup> Alan H. Gardiner, *The Chester Beatty Papyri No. 1*, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Renata Landgráfová, Hana Navrátilová (eds.), *Sex and the Golden Goddess II: World of the Love Songs*, Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 2015, p. xxiii.

<sup>18</sup> Alan H. Gardiner, *The Chester Beatty Papyri No. 1*, p. 12.

notes.<sup>19</sup> The *Encomium* is usually taken to be a sign that the papyrus was written during the short reign of Ramesses V (ca. 1149–1145) in the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.<sup>20</sup>

The roll itself is a particularly fine specimen and was in very good condition upon its find. The ancient archive where it was located was sadly not kept to the highest standard and many of the papyri have been deliberately damaged during antiquity.<sup>21</sup> Amennakhte's brother Maanakhtef, for example, habitually tore off sheets to use for personal notes and letters.<sup>22</sup> Now, despite the extensive use of ostraca in the village, papyrus seems to have been far from scarce, as evidenced by the numerous archaeological finds of the material on site.<sup>23</sup> Textual sources indicate that during Ramesside times it was priced at about 2 deben per roll, which in this period typically measured 40–48 cm by up to 4 meters.<sup>24</sup> While earlier works generally believed that papyrus was expensive,<sup>25</sup> this price would put it less than a litre of sesame oil<sup>26</sup> or ca. 10 kilograms of flour.<sup>27</sup> Compared to the ostraca, which were essentially free of charge, papyrus may have appeared costly, but it would hardly have been out of reach for even ordinary workmen, whose wages tended to be lower than those of educated specialists.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Pestman finds it “quite probable,” that the business notes were written by Maaninakhtef, the son of Naunakhte and her second husband Khaemnun, all residents of Deir el-Medina during the 20th dynasty. See P. Pestman, “Who Were the Owners in the ‘Community of Workmen’ of the Chester Beatty Papyri?”, p. 164.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. the discussion in chapter 6.1 below.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g., L. Lesko, “Literature, Literacy and Literati”, p. 137

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>23</sup> Jac Janssen, *Commodity Prices From the Ramessid Period: An Economic Study of the Village of Necropolis Workmen at Thebes*, Leiden: Brill, 1975, p. 447.

<sup>24</sup> Such a roll was composed of 20 sheets, each ca. 16 to 20 centimeters in length. Cf. Jaroslav Černý, *Paper and Books in Ancient Egypt*, Edinburgh: T. & A. Constable, 1952, p. 8 ff. See also Ludwig Borchardt, “Bemerkungen zu den ägyptischen Handschriften des Berliner Museums”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 27 (1889), p. 120; Manfred Weber, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis des Schrift- und Buchwesens der alten Ägypter*. Dissertation: University of Cologne, 1969, p. 95.

<sup>25</sup> See e.g., ‘Abd Bakir, *Egyptian Epistolography from the Eighteenth to the Twenty-first Dynasty*, Cairo: Institut français d'Archéologie orientale, 1970, p. 23. J. Černý, *Papyrus and Books*, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> The oil was a staple distributed by the administration of the village. Cf. Willem Pleyte, Francesco Rossi, *Papyrus de Turin*, vol 2., Leiden: Brill, 1869, pl. 7, 34. For the identification as sesame oil, see Ludwig Keimer, *Die Gartenpflanzen im alten Ägypten: Ägyptologische Studien*. Hamburg – Berlin: Hoffmann und Campe, 1924, p. 18 ff., 134–135. For the pricing, see J. Jansen, *Commodity Prices From the Ramessid Period*, p. 330–333.

<sup>27</sup> Price from the time of Ramesses VII at 4 deben for 2 oipe in *Papyrus Turin 1907/8*, II, 11 (Jac Janssen. “A Twentieth-Dynasty Account Papyrus (Pap. Turin No. Cat. 1907/8)”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 52 (1966), p. 83. Cf. J. Jansen, *Commodity Prices From the Ramessid Period*, p. 343–344.

<sup>28</sup> See J. Jansen, *Commodity Prices From the Ramessid Period*, esp. 533 ff. For the surplus available from the wages in the village, see Anthony Spalinger, “Costs and Wages of Egypt with Nuzi Equivalents,”



The papyrus was first published in 1931 by Gardiner in *The Chester Beatty Papyri No. 1*, a remarkably luxurious folio which provides a complex description of the papyrus along with photographs, hieroglyphic transcription and English translation of the texts with commentary. Published in a very limited edition, possibly due to the papyrus' contents being considered unsuitable for a wider audience at the time,<sup>29</sup> *The Chester Beatty Papyri No. 1* is a rare publication even by academic standards. It is likely because of this – and probably also due to the almost grotesque unwieldiness of the book – that Egyptologists usually cite the edition of the *Contendings* published a year later in Gardiner's compilation *Late-Egyptian Stories* which provides only the hieroglyphic transcription but includes some new notes by the author.<sup>30</sup> Even though Gardiner's edition includes some controversial reconstructions of the few lacunae present in the papyrus, a vast majority of Gardiner's transcription is considered to be an accurate representation of the hieratic original and it is only in particular cases that the validity of *Late-Egyptian Stories* is challenged by scholars.

## 1.2 Research and Reception

The initial reaction to the story itself was a mix of excitement and embarrassment: where the novelty of the 'mythological story for story's sake'<sup>31</sup> opened new avenues of research, the form and content of the tale were viewed with a degree of concern. Given the time of its publication, the profane nature of the *Contendings* was accepted relatively calmly, although the more graphic and sexually explicit passages were attributed to a kind of humour "too barbaric to give offence."<sup>32</sup> Gardiner's idea that the tale was consequently intended for popular consumption formed its reception significantly, affecting also the appreciation of its form.<sup>33</sup> Although the developments of discourse in the humanities lead to a significant re-evaluation of the profanity of the *Contendings* as less biased attitudes towards human sexuality found their way into academia, the text's format remains strongly underappreciated. Ever since its original publication, the tale was criticized for

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*Orientalia* 75 (2006), esp. p. 28–29. See also Jaroslav Černý, "Prices and Wages in Egypt in the Ramesside period", *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale* 1 (1954): 903–921.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Horton, *Alfred Chester Beatty*, p. 35. See also Richard Parkinson, "Boasting about Hardness: Constructions of Middle Kingdom Masculinity", in Carolyn Graves-Brown (ed.), *Sex and Gender in Ancient Egypt: 'Don your Wig for a Joyful Hour'*, Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, p. 118.

<sup>30</sup> A. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories*, xv + 101 p.

<sup>31</sup> Alan H. Gardiner, *The Chester Beatty Papyri No. 1*, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> It is remarkable where Gardiner drew the line was the word *kꜣ.t* "vulva, vagina", a "wholly impossible word" rendered in his translation as "nakedness." (Alan Gardiner, *The Chester Beatty Papyri No. 1*, p. 10) The fact that the manuscript represents the word with the humorously fitting hair-determinative probably didn't ease Gardiner's embarrassment.

<sup>33</sup> See the discussion in chapter 6.

being repetitive, monotonous, clumsy even – sentiments still shared by many modern commentators. The introduction to Wente’s translation describes the text as “an episodically constructed tale, whose narrative style is especially monotonous”, going on to say: “this, the longest of the New Kingdom stories, is perhaps the one with the least literary merit, for there is very little in the way of suspense to maintain the reader’s interest throughout the narrative.”<sup>34</sup>

To a lay reader of the text this evaluation may seem harsh, but quite fair, The *Contendings* have a way of repeating themselves more than seems necessary and are sometimes concise where explanation is due, often suffocating the plot with conversation that has no apparent function in advancing the strangely fluctuating narrative. The result, for many, is disappointment, especially when compared to the marvels of Egyptian literature of the likes of *The Story of Sinuhe* whose refined language and clear structure contrast starkly with the apparent clumsiness and incoherence of the narrative version of Egypt’s most famous myth.<sup>35</sup> This critical language aimed at the *Contendings* will be shown as a marker of a subtler literary form later.<sup>36</sup>

Owing in no small part to the controversy surrounding it, the *Contendings* have been the subject of numerous academic works. Despite this prominence in the Egyptological discourse, however, only two major monographs focusing on the tale have been published since its original publication more than eighty years ago, each reflecting a fundamentally different epoch of Egyptology.

The first work is Joachim Spiegel’s *Die Erzählung vom Streite des Horus und Seth*, a classic of inter-war Egyptology.<sup>37</sup> A book whose influence can still be seen decades after its publication in 1937, the *Erzählung* is a well-rounded commentary to a German translation that includes a study of the literary form, style, composition as well as of the narrative aspect and the interplay between history and religion in the *Contendings*. According to Spiegel, the main motif of the text is not the conflict between Horus and Seth but the conflict between Re and Osiris. In his view, the relationship of the latter two gods reflects a historical situation at the beginning of the Middle Kingdom when the regional rulers,

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<sup>34</sup> William Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies, and Poetry*, London – New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 91.

<sup>35</sup> Alan Gardiner, *The Chester Beatty Papyri No. 1*, p. 1. See also Georges Posener, “Literature”, in John K. Harris (ed.), *The Legacy of Egypt*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 240.

<sup>36</sup> Employing lexicostatistics, Lepper has shown that while the *Contendings* definitely isn’t the richest of Egyptian tales in terms of vocabulary, it still surpasses *The Tale of the Two Brothers* and *The Journey of Wenamun*, texts with significantly better reputations amongst modern commentators. See Verena Lepper, “Ancient Egyptian Literature: Genre and Style”, in Roland Enmarch, Verena Lepper (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature: Theory and Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 213.

<sup>37</sup> Joachim Spiegel, *Die Erzählung vom Streite des Horus und Seth in Pap. Beatty I als Literaturwerk*, Glückstadt – Hamburg – New York: Verlag J. J. Augustin, 1937, 141 p.

the nomarchs, challenged the central authority of the Egyptian king.<sup>38</sup> This interpretation reflects the historicizing approach to Egyptian myth which was prevalent among contemporary authors and is still present in some modern works.<sup>39</sup> The Osiris-myth is consequently considered to be the “Haupterzählung” of the *Contendings* by Spiegel, while various other mythemes are found to represent mythical foundations of the central tale, specifying it and interconnecting it with other, distinct myths.

*Die Erzählung* was treated as the go-to work on the subject until the 1996 publication of *Les aventures d'Horus et Seth dans le Papyrus Chester Beatty I* by Michèle Broze.<sup>40</sup> The book is arguably the most significant academic work on the *Contendings* since the original publication of the *Chester Beatty Papyrus*. Aside from presenting an annotated French translation of the tale, it is composed of three distinct interpretative sections. The work first explores the meaning of variant writing in the text which was originally assumed to be random. However, Broze shows that the variations in spelling of certain words serve to provide an additional layer of meaning to the tale. This is particularly significant with regard to Horus and Seth, the changes of whose names' writing serve to mark shifts in their character development.<sup>41</sup> Narrative forms and their relation to the rubrication of the original text are the second major topic. Each of the forms is shown to have a distinct

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<sup>38</sup> J. Spiegel, *Die Erzählung vom Streite des Horus und Seth*, p. 68–83.

<sup>39</sup> Concerning this phenomenon and the mythology of Horus and Seth see particularly Kurt Sethe, *Urgeschichte und älteste Religion der Ägypter*, Leipzig: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, 1930, p. 70–78. Unlike Spiegel, Sethe argues that the conflict of Horus and Seth reflects a (pre)historical battle between two kingdoms vying for supremacy in Egypt. It should be noted that Sethe's work predates the publication of the *Contendings* which are consequently not treated in *Urgeschichte*. The most relevant later work sharing Sethe's view is John Griffiths, *The Conflict of Horus and Seth from Egyptian and Classical Sources*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1960, p. 119–123. Griffiths is more careful in his phrasing than Sethe but nevertheless states “that the legend of the conflict and reconciliation stands in organic relationship to an important fact in Egyptian history, namely the formation of an (sic) united nation and kingdom.” (J. Griffiths, *The Conflict of Horus and Seth*, p. 121) Similar sentiments can be traced even to quite recent publications, e.g., Jan Assmann, *Ägypten: Eine Sinngeschichte*, München – Wien: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1996, p. 57 (translation by Andrew Jenkins in Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002, p. 43): “The text mythically represents the supersession of a historical period of two rival partial realms (...) Horus stands for the Horus kingdom of Hierakonpolis, and Seth for the kingdom of Naqada.”

For a discussion of historicizing interpretation in Egyptology see Martin Pehal, *Interpreting Ancient Egyptian Narratives*, Bruxelles: EME, 2014, p. 25–27. See also Harco Willems, “War Gott ein ‚Spätling in der Religionsgeschichte‘? Wissenschafts-historische und kognitiv-archäologische Überlegungen zum Ursprung und zur Brauchbarkeit einiger theoretischer Betrachtungsweisen in der ägyptologischen Religionsforschung”, in Susanne Bickel et al. (eds.), *Ägyptologen und Ägyptologien zwischen Kaiserreich und Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten: Reflexionen zur Geschichte und Episteme eines altertumswissenschaftlichen Fachs im 150. Jahr der Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2013, p. 407–8.

<sup>40</sup> Michèle Broze, *Mythe et roman en Égypte ancienne: Les aventures d'Horus et Seth dans le Papyrus Chester Beatty I*, Leuven: Peeters, 1996, 304 p.

<sup>41</sup> M. Broze, *Les aventures d'Horus et Seth*, p. 129–156.

meaning in the text, their modal function emphasized by the fact that rubrication is almost entirely reserved to these narrative forms in the *Contendings*. The section is essentially a philological commentary on the specifics of verb usage in the *Contendings*, which allows a better appreciation of the nuances of narrative forms in the text.<sup>42</sup> The final chapter of *Les Aventures* deals with the tale as a religious composition, providing an extensive list of mythological associations with other Egyptian texts. The *Contendings* are found to be deeply immersed in solar theology, investing Horus, and through him the King, with solar characteristics, ultimately reflecting Ramesside royal ideology.<sup>43</sup>

The list of works dealing with the *Contendings*, either as their primary focus or an issue of secondary nature, is virtually inexhaustible. The mythology of Horus and Seth is so profoundly ingrained in all aspects of extant pharaonic culture that it is almost impossible to discuss the latter without introducing the former. The two monographs discussed in this section are noteworthy not only because they are extensive publications focused solely on the *Contendings*, but also because they form the very discourse on the *Contendings*. Their influence can be discerned in the scholarly works of the respective historical epochs and determines the very way in which the study of the tale was progressed. The impact of Spiegel's work is more unambiguously negative, introducing a historicising interpretation of the text as well as an idea of a mythical line that is somehow central to the narrative and can be clearly separated from the rest. Broze's *Les Aventures* suffer from no such apparent flaws but have nevertheless had some less desirable effect in the field, notably on general attitude towards structuralist interpretation of the myth of the *Contendings*, something which has been characteristic of Egyptology since its tentative introduction into Egyptology. In 1979, Robert Oden published the article *The Contendings of Horus and Seth' (Chester Beatty Papyrus No.1): A Structural Interpretation*, in which he presented a Levi-Straussian semantic square as the logical structure underlying the *Contendings* and establishing its meaning.<sup>44</sup> This arguably unsuccessful attempt has elicited a massively negative response which evicted structuralism from the study of Egyptian myth for

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<sup>42</sup> M. Broze, *Les aventures d'Horus et Seth*, p. 157–220.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221–275.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Oden, "The Contendings of Horus and Seth' (Chester Beatty Papyrus No. 1): A Structural Interpretation', *History of Religions* 18 (1979): 352–369.

decades.<sup>45</sup> It was only with the turn of the millennium that structuralist works devoted to Egyptian religion started to appear as accepted part of the discourse.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Most notably Edward Wente, “Response to Robert A. Oden's ‘The Contendings of Horus and Seth’ (Chester Beatty Papyrus No.1): A Structural Interpretation”, *History of Religions* 18 (1979): 370–372. Wente criticises not so much Oden’s application of the method, although he calls it “rigid” (p. 371), but structuralist reading of myth itself, considering it suitable only for less developed societies: “As far as methodology is concerned, how valid is it to apply the structuralism of Levi-Strauss, derived from studies of primitive religions to the religion of a highly civilized culture? If anything, in the sophistication of its ritualism and symbolism Egyptian religion is perhaps more akin to Eastern Orthodox Christianity, which I doubt can be easily reduced to the algebraic equations of structuralism.” Wente concludes his critique with an overall discouragement regarding the use of the method in Egyptology, an exhort that has not fallen on deaf ears. It should be remarked that the earlier article, Edmund Leach, “The Mother's Brother in Ancient Egypt”, *Royal Anthropological Institute Newsletter* 15 (1976), p. 19–21, which is arguably even more controversial than Oden’s, has gone virtually unnoticed by contemporary Egyptologists – a shame given its significantly more stimulating conclusions compared to Oden’s work.

<sup>46</sup> Especially Katja Goebis, “A Functional Approach to Egyptian Myth and Mythemes”, *Journal of Near Eastern Religions* 2 (2002): 27–59, Frédéric Sarvajeau, “Lune ou soleil d’or? Un épisode des Aventures d’Horus et de Seth (P. Chester Beatty I R<sup>o</sup>, 11, 1 – 13, 1)”, *Revue d’Égyptologie* 54 (2008): 125–148, and M. Pehal, *Interpreting Ancient Egyptian Narratives*.

## 2 Structure

One of the most frequent appellations given to the *Contendings* by its commentators is 'episodic'. A trait for which the composition is usually criticized, the episodicity of the *Contendings* is the main hermeneutic tool used for the sectioning of the text apart from Gardiner's pagination. Following Spiegel's original assessment, the narrative is generally considered to be composed of a sequence of more or less definable sections of text which are to a degree self-contained. It would consequently be possible to sensibly study the individual 'episodes' in relative isolation as each forms a discrete logical unit. In fact, it is the assumption of some authors that the *Contendings* are an aggregate work, a collection of individual stories about Horus and Seth that were secondarily put in a narrative succession to form a continuous plot.<sup>47</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to show the exact opposite: the tale is structured as a coherent whole, whose constituent parts are deliberately ordered to produce a complex narrative work. To achieve this, the concept of 'ring composition' will be applied, specifically its rendition in the work of the esteemed Mary Douglas.

### 2.1 The Problem of the 'Episode'

The disparaging view of the episodic character of the *Contendings* has a direct effect on the way the tale is studied. The individual episodes are sometimes treated as almost separate texts and excised from the whole of the narrative, while the possible relevance of other sections of the composition to the understanding of a given episode is mostly disregarded. The so-called *homosexual episode* is the perfect example of this phenomenon. Located in the middle of the *Contendings*' action-packed second half, it is preceded by a passage recounting Horus' mutilation by Seth and his subsequent healing by Hathor. The two central motifs of the respective sections – the mutilation-healing and the sexual encounter – have been shown to be closely interrelated,<sup>48</sup> but despite this, most scholarly works concentrate on establishing relationships of the *homosexual episode* with passages outside the *Contendings* rather than those within. Thus a significant number of articles sets the section side by side with other instances of sexual relations between Horus and Seth across Egyptian history and even ancient homosexuality in general, exposing the nuance of male-to-male sex within Egyptian worldview.<sup>49</sup> Instead of a mytheme constituting a part of a

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<sup>47</sup> Griffiths, for example, assumes that the incidents as recounted in the *Contendings* reflect the existence of "stories" that appear in various versions. In this way he uses the term "homosexual episode" to refer to a common source of the various iterations of the motif. See J. Griffiths, *Conflict of Horus and Seth*, p. 41–42.

<sup>48</sup> See e.g., Henk Te Velde, *Seth: God of Confusion*, Leiden: Brill, 1967, p. 32–53, esp. 49–52.

<sup>49</sup> See especially Alessia Amenta, "Some Reflections on the 'Homosexual' Intercourse between Horus and Seth", *Göttinger Miszellen* 199 (2004): 7–21; Winfried Barta, "Zur Reziprozität der

greater meaningful whole – the tale – a *homosexual episode* is created, a text in and of itself neatly occupying lines 11,1 to 13,1 of the recto of *Papyrus Chester Beatty I*.<sup>50</sup> The common denominator of homosexuality, an idea foreign to Egyptian thought, is seemingly more significant than the associations implied in the text itself.

Even more problematic is the idea of ‘episode’ itself. The previous discussion begs a question: “What exactly is an episode?” Modern scholarship is generally content with the idea of the *Contendings*’ episodic character, only seldom, however, there is proposed a definition or even a basic outline of what this constitutes. Behind the concrete word there is only a very vague idea whose meaning largely depends on the matter to which it is applied. We have seen that in the case of the *homosexual episode* there is an implied characteristic of definition and separability. This reflects the use of the word “episode” in general where it typically denotes a coherent narrative unit, especially within a larger dramatic work. Episodes of this sort are often discrete, like episodes of a TV show. This is in itself interesting in that the classification implicitly treats the *Contendings* as a work of performative art, i.e., drama rather than prose, an idea which seems to be prevalent in current scholarship.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, however, the word ‘episode’ may take on the general meaning of ‘event, occurrence’, which is apparent, for example, in Griffiths’ work. He considers the relevant passage of the *Contendings* as just one of the instances of the ‘homosexual episode’, apparently a mythical event underlying these mythical occurrences.<sup>52</sup> This twofold meaning of the word likely contributes to the peculiarities of its use with regard to the *Contendings*.

One could, of course, try to bypass the issue by speaking instead of the text’s internal division. This is, after all, the primary aspect of the text’s episodicity: the fact that it is composed of discrete parts. However, reading the narrative, it becomes apparent that

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homosexuellen Beziehung zwischen Horus und Seth”, *Göttinger Miszellen* 129 (1992), p. 33–38; Beate Schukraft, “Homosexualität im Alten Ägypten”, *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 36, (2007): 297–331. Cf. the more theoretically guided approach in David Halperin, John Winkler, Froma Zeitlin, *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, xix + 526 p.

<sup>50</sup> The tendency to see the episodes as inherent to the text rather than as analytical tools imposed on the text by the interpreter can be perceived by the manner in which the episodes’ extent becomes conventionalized, again most notably with regard to the ‘homosexual episode’, understood as *Con.* 11,1–13,5. Thus defined it can be found in all the sources mentioned in the previous note, as well as M. Broze, *Les aventures d’Horus et Seth*, p. 90, where it is titled ‘La grossese de Seth’, and elsewhere. The case of Schukraft’s work is especially interesting as although she uses the same pagination, she includes the introductory passage of *Con.* 10,11–11,1 in her translation of the episode, reflecting the fact that this introduction is key for the understanding of the ‘homosexual episode’ even though it is traditionally not included in it.

<sup>51</sup> See the discussion in chapter 6.1.

<sup>52</sup> Griffiths’s implicit approach can be related to Assmann’s later idea of genotext, a form of myth transcending its individual attestations, the phenotexts. (Jan Assmann, “Die Verborgenheit des Mythos in Ägypten”, *Göttinger Miszellen*, 25 (1977): 7–43)

distinguishing these parts is a harder proposition than it might seem from some commentators' descriptions. There are no clear markers of sectioning in the text which could be compared to the typical case of the *Pyramid Texts* where the beginning of each individual spell is indicated by the phrase *ḏd-mdw* ("recitation").<sup>53</sup> We could also cite the *Book of the Dead* where the title of the chapter serves a similar purpose.<sup>54</sup> It could be argued that such unambiguous partition of text is characteristic of the funerary tradition, rather than Egyptian tales and the comparison is not completely valid. It should, nevertheless, be kept in mind that Egyptian textual tradition included such separation markers.

That is not to say that Egyptian proper literary works do not show relatively clear indicators of textual division. In the tale of *Papyrus Westcar*, known as *King Cheops and the Magicians*, each of the three stories recounted to the king is introduced with the same phrase "then X arose to speak, and he said."<sup>55</sup> Each of the individual tales is clearly marked and this gives the whole composition a clear structure. A different approach was chosen by the author of the *Tale of Two Brothers* which is divided into twenty-four "chapters", indicated by the use of *ḥr jr(=f ḥr sdm)* phrases written in red ink (*rubra*).<sup>56</sup>

If any of these methods was employed by the author of the *Contendings*, it is yet to be discovered. There are no apparent headings or specific phrases that might be taken as partition markers. The *rubra*, while abundantly present, seem to have been used somewhat haphazardly. They mainly seem to underline the modal function of narrative forms and even this is done inconsistently.<sup>57</sup> Two phrases describing passage of time are also rendered in red ink – both are found in the 'homosexual episode' at *Con.* 11,2 and *Con.*

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<sup>53</sup> James Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015, p. 3. In most cases, the end of a spell was marked with the sign for *hw.t* "chapter, section."

<sup>54</sup> Stephen Quirke, *Going Out in Daylight – prt m hrw: The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead – Translation, Sources, Meanings*: Golden House Publications: London, 2013, p. viii.

<sup>55</sup> *Papyrus Westcar* 1,18–19; 4,17–18; 6,22–23. See also Domenica Bagnato, *The Westcar Papyrus: A Transliteration, Translation and Language Analysis*, Wien: Edition Atelier, 2006, p. 120.

<sup>56</sup> Jan Assmann, "Das Altägyptische Zweibrudermärchen (Papyrus d'Orbiney)", *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache* 104 (1977), p. 3–4; Jan Assmann, "Textanalyse auf verschiedenen Ebenen: Zum Problem der Einheit des Papyrus d'Orbiney", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 1 (1997), p. 2. The idea was criticised in Joachim Quack, "Review of *Die Erzählung von den beiden Brüdern*", *Die Welt des Orient: Wissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Kunde des Morgenlandes* 35 (2005), p. 198–202. For the relationship of the *rubra* and the internal dynamics of the tale, see M. Pehal, *Interpreting Ancient Egyptian Narratives*, p. 163–176.

For Egyptian *rubra* in general, see LÄ V, 313–14. See also Jan Assmann, "Die Rubren in der Überlieferung der Sinuhe-Erzählung", in Manfred Görg (ed.), *Fontes atque pontes: eine Festgabe für Hellmut Brunner*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983, esp. p. 18, n. 1.; Georges Posener, "Les signes noirs dans les rubriques", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 35 (1949): 77–81; Georges Posener, "Sur l'em ploi de l'encre rouge dans les manuscrits égyptiens", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 37 (1951): 75–80.

<sup>57</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures d'Horus et Seth*, p. 211–212.



11,3 respectively – close to the purported beginning of the episode, but probably not enough to serve as its markers. In several instances, portions of the text seem to have been rubricated almost randomly while some sections of the text are written in black even though they would be written in red in the rest of the tale.<sup>58</sup>

In the end, however, it should be noted that even if there were some clear indications of how the author of the tale perceived its internal structure, this partition would still have to bear the scrutiny of the modern interpreter. Behind any ancient idea of structure that is directly perceptible, there is a number of imperceptible ones underlying it, ideas whose appreciation is necessary to reach a desirable level of understanding. Even if it was possible to discover the principles that led to the establishment of such partition, these would still constitute only one element of the text's narrative dynamics and would have to be matched and compared to the others to properly evaluate the *Contendings* as a coherent whole. Criticizing the overemphasis of the importance of the great literary works' constituent parts ("books"), Peterson states:

"The value of counting books, in Homer especially, but even in the *Aeneid* or *Paradise Lost*, is open to objection on the ground, that "books" may be arbitrary units with little relation to content. The criterion to be observed in counting books (or anything else) is this: the element to be counted should be in fruitful relationship (harmony, contrast, conflict, etc.) with obvious narrative, thematic, or symbolic concerns in the work. Once this is recognized, patterns can be discovered on any level of interpretation."<sup>59</sup>

All the aspects of a tale's narrative structure need to be considered and only then can any sensible textual patterns begin to appear to the reader.

## 2.2 Partitioning the *Contendings*

The apparent conclusion is that any division of episodes in the text is inevitably a modern construct, and the interpreter has to make a creative effort in partitioning the tale, which reflects their own understanding of the text. In the words of Pehal:

"There is no clear rule to distinguish an Episode. It is more a question of one's own feeling and an ability to perceive shifts and the focus of the narrative, repetition of motifs, and other important markers."<sup>60</sup>

The latter two indicators have seen little use in the study of the *Contendings*' structure so far, the former two, however, have been more prominent. The idea of a discernible shift

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<sup>58</sup> Especially *Con* 7,9 (*dj.t* "given"); 11,6 (*hmt* "copper"); 13,8 (the number 138).

<sup>59</sup> Richard Peterson, "Critical Calculations: Measure and Symmetry in Literature", *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 91 (1976), p. 370.

<sup>60</sup> M. Pehal, *Interpreting Ancient Egyptian Narratives*, p. 164.

in the tale (coupled with a fair share of intuition) was notably articulated by M. Patanè, who, applying the principles of Algirdas Greimas, produced the following schema:<sup>61</sup>

Mythical narrative						
Contents	Inverted contents			Posed contents		Correlate Contents
	Correlate Contents	Topical Contents		Topical Contents		
Narrative sequences	Initial (1,1-5,6)	Isle-in-the-Midst (5,6-8,2)	Underwater combat and double punishment (8,2-11,1)	Sexual episode and Isis' vengeance (11,1-13,2)	The boat episode (13,2-13,11)	The intervention of Osiris and the triumph of Horus (13,11-16,8)

According to Patanè, the tale is divided into two main parts: *inverted contents* and *posed contents*, the two being inversions of one another in accordance with Greimas' theory of the structure of mythical narratives.<sup>62</sup> Two pairs of *topical* and *correlate contents* are also distinguished – the two correlate contents are contrasted with the topical contents by their absence of action as according to Patanè, significant events are condensed in the central portion of the tale.

This partition has not received much support amongst Egyptologists, likely due to the fact that Patanè was unable to show in what way the two halves of the narrative are inverse to one another, a flaw the article openly admits, and which seriously undermines its utility.<sup>63</sup> Broze has consequently opted for a less theoretically based partition of the tale, dividing it into 30 sections.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Massimo Patanè, "Essai d'interprétation d'un récit mythique: Le conte d'Horus et de Seth", *Bulletin de la Société d'Égyptologie, Genève* 7 (1982), p. 83.

<sup>62</sup> Algirdas Greimas, "Éléments pour une théorie de l'interprétation du récit mythique", *Communications* 8 (1966): 28-59.

<sup>63</sup> M. Patanè, 'Essai d'interprétation d'un récit mythique', p. 84.

<sup>64</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures d'Horus et Seth*, p. 13-127. The partition seems intuitive in principle, much like that of a novel divided into chapters, each headed by a phrase summarizing its contents. Cf.

Patanè's choice of the narrative's "turning point", which constitutes the transition between *inverted contents* and *posed contents*, is based somewhat more firmly in the text. While the episodes prior to Con 11,1 are characterized by the dominance of Seth, the *Sexual episode and Isis' vengeance* and *The boat episode* depict his defeats as the tale turns in the favour of Horus after *Underwater combat and double punishment*. The apparent problem with this proposition is that the defeats of Seth are not located solely in the second part of the narrative. The *Isle-in-the-Midst* also ends with a defeat of Seth as his unwilling confession leads to the coronation of Horus at Con 8,6. It should also be noted that according to Patanè partition, the first part would be almost twice the size of the second. This is not necessarily an issue, but it may nevertheless indicate that the two sections are not to be considered as mirror images of one another.

While the individual findings of Patanè may be questionable, the emphasis that Greimas's method places on the element of action seems fitting for the *Contendings*. Passages of relative inactivity form the beginning and the end of the tale – albeit in a much less extensive manner than proposed by Patanè – while the core of the text describes more dynamic events.



More important to the issue at hand, however, is the notion that the tale can be divided into two parts based on the principal *mode of action*. About in the middle of the story the dominant type of action abruptly changes, specifically around Con. 8,6, between *Isis' Ruse* (*Isle-in-the-Midst Episode*) and the *Diving Episode*. In the first half of the text, the primary type of action is speech: the characters interact mostly by speaking and the resolutions of narrative stalemates, which constitute the primary dynamic element of the first half of the text, are attempted by introducing new types of speech: first by letters, i.e., mediated speech, and then by the use of metaphor. On the other hand, the second half is much more varied in types of action: the characters engage in sexual activity, manual labour and, most importantly, violence. Indeed, it seems that violent action is the characteristic element of the latter part of the narrative.


The difference between the two parts also manifests in the change of primary characters: where the first part is dominated by Atum and Isis, the second revolves mainly around Horus and Seth. Atum's agency is relegated to the connective passages among the violent interactions that form the heart of the episodes of the second part and Isis' action is dependent on Horus', although there the difference is harder to establish.

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an earlier French treatment of the issue in Gustave Lefebvre, *Romans et contes égyptiens de l'époque pharaonique*, Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1949, p. 178–203. For Broze's critical evaluation of Patanè's work see M. Broze, *Les Aventures d'Horus et Seth*, p. 227–229.

	Mode of Action	Primary Actors
Part 1 (1,1-ca. 8,6)	Speech	Atum (Seth), Isis
Part 2 (ca. 8,6-16,8)	Violence	Seth, Horus

As the narrative transforms from a court drama to a tale of adventure, so do the primary characters. Both Horus and Seth assume significantly more assertive attitudes. Seth directly engages his opponent instead of the members of the court and Horus endeavours to match Seth's forceful virility, the lack of which was the main argument of those opposing Horus' claim.<sup>65</sup> This transformation of the principal actors is also represented on the level of the script. The standard variant of Horus' name, rendered with the image of the falcon (  ), is replaced with another using the sign for a road as the phonetic element (  ):

“THEN Horus (  ), son of ISIS, became angry with (9,8) his mother Isis, coming out his face fierce like that of a leopard with his 16 *deben* knife in his hand (9,9) and he removed the head of his mother Isis, put it in his embrace and went up to the mountain.”<sup>66</sup>

The fact that the passage recounts first violent act of Horus – arguably the most violent one – is certainly significant. This is emphasized by also being the first instance of Horus as the grammatical subject of a *wn.in=f hr sdm* form, used in the narrative to introduce a new active character.<sup>67</sup> Broze argues that this is, in fact, the turning point of the narrative:

“Until then Horus intervenes very little, which will change. We are clearly at a turning point, and the use of this script can be a first signal. When he actually acts, Horus is no longer a child with the uraeus,<sup>68</sup> he becomes the Distant One, the celestial Horus. It is he, in the end, who will win this graphic battle.”<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Con. 3,7-8.



<sup>66</sup> Con. 9,7-9.



<sup>67</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures d'Horus et Seth*, p. 146, n. 62.

<sup>68</sup> Broze stresses the importance of the word *hms* 'child' at 1,2 being written with the determinative of a child with an uraeus as an indicator of not only Horus' initial status but also a foreshadowing of his final solar ascendance. (Esp. M. Broze, *Les Aventures d'Horus et Seth*, p. 231-3.)

<sup>69</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures d'Horus et Seth*, p. 146.

As Broze goes on to show, this new variant, used seven times in total in the tale,<sup>70</sup> is employed to emphasize Horus' forceful side which manifests during the latter part of the narrative.<sup>71</sup>

The name of Seth is altered in a similar manner, although the use of the two variants is more widely dispersed across the tale. Beginning with *Con.* 2,1, the sign-form of a sitting man with the head of the Seth-animal () may be replaced with that of the lying Seth-animal (), which is the case nine times in total in the narrative.<sup>72</sup> Seven of these are present in the latter part of the narrative, their use overlapping with that of Horus' variant name. Broze argues that this writing is employed to indicate that Seth's virility is emphasized in the passages in question, the larger size of the animal-sign in the hieratic original reinforcing the idea of its relative importance.<sup>73</sup> This view was challenged by Angela McDonald, who counters Broze's argument by pointing out that this reading accounts for only some of the instances of the variant writing, something reflected by the inconsistency of Broze's attitude towards the issue:

“Broze classified the animal orthography in this passage as an indication of Seth's strength, because the animal is much more impressive visually than the deity form of the sign. However, Seth's strength is not pertinent to the other eight contexts in which the animal variant is used. (. . .) Thus, while  does seem to throw more visual emphasis on Seth than , the significance of the alteration need not be as complex as Broze suggested, particularly since other signs are treated similarly. Rather than highlighting a particular characteristic of the god, the animal orthography may simply mark the importance of the passage in which he occurs.”<sup>74</sup>

What this importance may be, McDonald does not specify. She remarks, however, that the semi-anthropomorphic orthography of Seth's name is, in fact, the less frequent variant in contemporary texts and its dominance in the *Contendings* is unique in Late Egyptian literature.<sup>75</sup>

For the time being, the issue can remain relatively open with the present argumentation favouring a middle ground. While it is apparent that Broze's approach is too unsystematic

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<sup>70</sup> *Con.* 9,7; 11,7; 12,3; 12,4 (twice); 14,4.

<sup>71</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures d'Horus et Seth*, p. 146–156.

<sup>72</sup> *Con.* 2,1; 9,4; 10,3; 10,12; 11,4; 11,9 (twice); 13,2.

<sup>73</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures d'Horus et Seth*, p. 134–136. Broze argues that the size of a sign can be taken as an indicator of its relatively larger importance in general, pointing out the enlarged writing of the white-crown sign at *Con.* 1,8 and the *wedjat*-eye sign at *Con.* 10,4.

<sup>74</sup> Angela McDonald, *Animal Metaphor in the Egyptian Determinative System: Three Case Studies*, Dissertation: Oxford University, 2002, p. 203.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203–204.

to yield solid results, it would seem too careful to adapt McDonald's very vague idea that the variant use marks "importance". If anything, the two orthographies indicate that both Seth and Horus appear in two distinctive forms of being, the iconic nature of Egyptian script reducing the distinction between the signifier and the signified. If Seth or Horus appear in altered script-forms in some passages, it is reasonable to assume that the characters themselves are likewise altered. This phenomenon can consequently be provisionally understood as a marker of a different, altered state or mode of being of the two gods in the sections in question.

It could also be remarked that apart from the instance of Seth's variant name at *Con.* 2,1, the alternate orthographies of Seth's name are all attested in the second part of the narrative and are concentrated in the sections recounting his violent interaction with Horus, particularly the homosexual episode (seven out of thirteen alternate writings). Even if the precise function of the variants cannot be determined yet, they can be taken as a marker of a shift in the nature of the two characters, which is associated with the escalation of their quarrel. It could be argued that it articulates a transition of the two gods to a violent mode of interaction, each of them adopting a *nom de guerre*.

Even if this were the case, however, it would not necessarily constitute a marker of the transition of the narrative itself. Even if we assumed that these changes of the titular characters relate to a more general shift in the narrative as described above, this still does not indicate whether a partition is to be perceived within the text. It simply shows that developments take place within the narrative. These could be sudden, in which case a partition could be argued for, but they could also be gradual. The "shift and focus" of the narrative does, in fact, change, but is this enough to establish a definite structure? More specific markers must be discovered for this issue to be overcome in a satisfying manner.

### 2.3 Mary Douglas and the Ring Composition

The apparent frustration at trying to find sensible indicators of the tale's partition might seem to support the opinion of its critics: The text is unorganized, poor in literary quality and any effort at introducing a kind of order into it is hampered by the inept craftsmanship of its author. Such negative opinion of the *Contendings*, however, reflects not so much a lack of literary quality of the text as of exegetic skill on the part of modern interpreters.

Discussing the task of working with ancient works of literature, Mary Douglas describes how claims of a given text's supposed repetitiveness, clumsiness and incoherence often mark a literary work whose formal structure is so unfamiliar to the modern author that it is perceived as an inadequacy of the ancient writer.<sup>76</sup> Dealing with the *Contendings* and the tale's modern reception, it is fascinating to see how closely Douglas' description of this critical language of misinterpretation reflects actual opinions of the tale. What she proposes and convincingly shows is that many such ill-reputed texts are, in fact, ring compositions.

A ring composition is a text employing the literary technique of a ring structure as its main means of organization.<sup>77</sup> Circularity is its basic principle: the composition is a narrative whose line progresses through a sequence of elements only to turn back and go through the same or slightly varied elements in the inverse order: A-B-C-D-D'-C'-B'-A'. As more elements are included into the structure, a concentric symmetrical pattern emerges, which is the distinctive trait of a ring composition. The parallelism of the beginning and the end is then construed as completing the circle<sup>78</sup> while the narrative line itself is also "imagined intersecting a group of concentric circles, a visual metaphor for the repetition in the reverse order of particular elements."<sup>79</sup> A central element is often present around which the composition pivots and which may be emphasized to stress the circular nature of the text.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007, p. 139 ff.

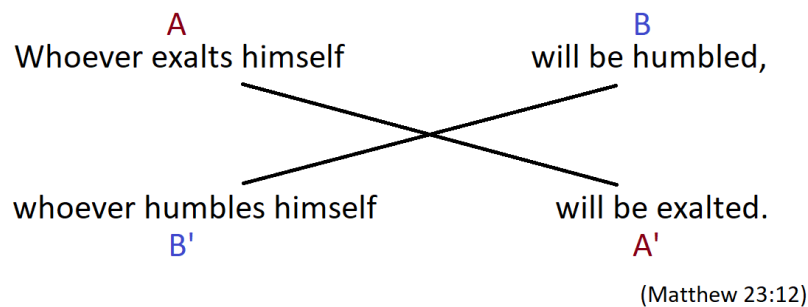
<sup>77</sup> "Other systems of organization are, of course, possible – alternating-parallel (AB, AB, AB, . . . or ABCD, ABCD, ...) or triadic (ABA, ABA, ... or ABA, CDC, ...) – but what is rare is the direct ABCDEFGH ..., one thing after another, the history of an unstructured life." Peterson argues that the tendency to think and fashion works of art according to principles of symmetry and mathematical harmony is a fundamentally human trait. (R. Peterson, "Critical Calculations", p. 367–368, 374)

<sup>78</sup> M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, p. xiii ff.

<sup>79</sup> R. Peterson, "Critical Calculations", p. 367.

<sup>80</sup> This element may be marked simply by another letter in a schematic, but it has been proposed that the letter X be used for the sake of clarity. (Mary Schertz, Perry Yoder, *Seeing the Text: Exegesis for Students of Greek and Hebrew*, Nashville: Abingdon, 2001, p. 54) For the significance of the *pivot*, see chapter 2.4 below.

The term *chiasmus* is often used for the ring structure due to its common representation as an x-structure, the text being read from top left to bottom right:<sup>81</sup>



The smallest rings can be a single verse or even a mere sequence of words, used alone as a poetic device – “All this the world *well knows*, yet none *knows well*”<sup>82</sup> / “Fair is foul, and foul is fair.”<sup>83</sup> – while the largest encompass entire books.<sup>84</sup>

It was the latter that attracted serious attention of academia. While the literary device itself was widely used since antiquity, known to the Greeks as the *chaismos*, and remained

<sup>81</sup> The term *chiasmus* is derived from the Greek *χαισμός* (“diagonal arrangement), which ultimately derived from the verb *χιάζω* (“mark with two lines crossing like a X”). While the literary device was widely used in both Greek and Latin literature, the corresponding term in Classical Latin is unknown, while the only Greek attestation is from the work of 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE rhetorician Hermogenes (*Inv.* 4.3). According to a second-hand, source the term was used in this manner by Isocrates, but I have not been able to verify this since a specific passage from the ancient source was not provided. (Wayne Brouwer, *The Literary Development of John 13–17: A Chiastic Reading*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000, p. 23, cites Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik*, Munich: Universität Drukerpresse, 1960, p. 893, on this point.). It is nevertheless clear that Isocrates used this literary device. A clear example of the use of chiasm by Isocrates is found in *Panegyricus* 4.67–68. For a discussion of the use of rhetorical devices such as chiasm in ancient Greco-Roman thought, John Harvey (*Listening to the Text*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 171) displays the Greek text of this pericope and underlines the three terms that Isocrates arranged in chiasmic order.

The phrase *ring composition*, on the other hand, is modern. The earliest source of the term that I was able to locate, in the form *Ringkomposition*, is in Willem van Otterlo, ‘Untersuchungen über Begriff, Anwendung und Entstehung der griechischen Ringkomposition,’ *Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandsche Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeling Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks* 7 (1944): 133.

Other terms used for the phenomenon include, envelope construction, epandosis, concentricism, symmetrical alignment, extended introversion, the chiform, palistrophe, recursion, and introverted parallelism. It should be emphasized that there is no scholarly consensus on the use of the terms and their meaning is consequently quite author specific.

<sup>82</sup> William Shakespeare, *Sonnet 129*, 13.

<sup>83</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.1.

<sup>84</sup> There have been attempts to distinguish between these two degrees of use terminologically. James Bailey, Lyle Vander Broek (*Literary Forms in the New Testament*, Louisville – Westminster: John Knox, 1992, p. 181–82) argue that on at the micro-level the chiasmus should be referred to as a *literary device* while at the macro-level, when the chiasmus forms the structure of a larger composition, the phrase *literary form* is to be used.



popular well into the Renaissance, knowledge of it gradually disappeared as it ceased to function as a consciously employed literary form.<sup>85</sup> The term *chiasmus* has (re)surfaced in 1742 when Johann Albrecht Bengel, a biblical scholar and a classicist, who applied it to the parallelistic constructions of the New Testament and the way in which they reflected earlier Hebrew tradition.<sup>86</sup> The idea has since become firmly embedded in biblical scholarship<sup>87</sup> and has consequently established itself as an analytical tool for literary works in general, and especially for those of Greek and Latin provenance. The *Iliad*,<sup>88</sup> Herodotus' *Histories*<sup>89</sup> and the *Aeneid* of Virgil<sup>90</sup> have all been identified as ring compositions and the use of the literary form in classical antiquity has become an accepted fact alongside the form's established place in the study of Hebrew scripture. The idea has also penetrated some of the more conservative historical disciplines with the *chiasmus* being discovered in some Ugaritic and Sumero-Akkadian texts.<sup>91</sup> In recent years, even the idea that the ring structure is a solely premodern literary phenomenon was challenged by numerous studies that describe recent narrative works as ring compositions.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, p. 131 ff.

<sup>86</sup> John Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament by John Albert Bengel: Now First Translated into English with Original Notes Explanatory and Illustrative*, translated by Andrew Robert, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1858, vol 1., p. 64; vol. 5, p. 343; vol. 5, p. 409. The English translation by Fausset is used here for ease of reference as Bengel's original is in Latin. Bengel defines *chiasmus* quite broadly as a mode of speaking where the elements are arrayed as *two pairs of words or propositions* where the pairs are either in *direct* or *indirect* relationship (Ibid., 5: 411). His *direct chiasmus*, i.e., the A-B-A'-B' structure is called parallelism in modern literature and is not usually considered a *chiasmus*, the narrower use of the term referring to the A-B-B'-A' form being prevalent in recent sources. Some emphasize the importance of the mid-turn by contrasting *inverted parallelism* (A-B-B'-A') and *chiasmus* proper (A-B-C-B'-A'). Cf. J. Bailey, L. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament*, p. 49.

<sup>87</sup> For more recent treatments see especially Nils Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in the Form and Function of Chiastic Structures*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942, xxx + 428 p.; Ian Thompson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, 253 p., David Dorsey, *Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999, 330 p. A convenient bibliography on the subject of *chiasmus* in literary critique can be found in Daniel McKinley, John Welch (eds.), *Chiasmus Bibliography*, Provo: Research Press, 1999, vii + 193 p.

<sup>88</sup> Cedric Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition*, New York: Norton, 1965, p. 253-257.

<sup>89</sup> John Myres, *Herodotus: Father of History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953, vi + 315 p.

<sup>90</sup> George Duckworth, *Structural Patterns and Proportions in Vergil's Aeneid: A Study in Mathematical Composition*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962, x + 268 p.

<sup>91</sup> John Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language*, Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994, p. 21.

<sup>92</sup> Perhaps most notably the Harry Potter series, arguably the most popular publication of our time – has been shown to be a ring composition with both the whole of the series and the individual books employing the chiastic structure as their main mode of organization. See John Granger, *Harry Potter as Ring Composition and Ring Cycle*, London: Unlocking Press, 2010, 164 p.

Although it has been an established part of the scholarly discourse on ancient literature for some time, it was only recently that patterns of this kind started to be discovered in Ancient Egyptian literature. The first notable example is José-Ramón Pérez-Accino's *Text as Territory: Mapping Sinuhe's Shifting Loyalties*.<sup>93</sup> Following an earlier work by Baines,<sup>94</sup> the article argues that the *Story of Sinuhe* is structurally defined by Sinuhe's movement away from and back to the vicinity of the King of Egypt, both literally in a spatial environment, and metaphorically by the means of Sinuhe's changing allegiance. The tale is theoretically grasped as a dual myth of passage as both the journey to the Levant and back to Egypt conform to the tripartite schema of van Gennep: separation – liminality – incorporation.<sup>95</sup> Textual 'landmarks' in the two passages are matched to reflect both the twin A-B-C-A'-B'-C' structure and the A-B-C-C'-B'-A' characteristic of a ring composition. Pérez-Accino visualizes the *Story of Sinuhe* as a ring composition, but doesn't classify the tale as such even though he presents more than enough evidence to do so, instead referring to a 'circular model'.<sup>96</sup> More recently, Pehal has shown that the *Tale of Two Brothers* and *The Doomed Prince* are both ring compositions and describe the literary form as a means of establishing conceptual space wherein paradoxes inherent in Egyptian worldview can be resolved.<sup>97</sup>

Discovering whether a ring structure is present in a given text is not as simple as it might appear from the outline at the beginning of this chapter. A ubiquitous literary form in antiquity, the *chiasmus* is not easily recognisable by the modern reader. It was therefore necessary for literary critics to define what exactly constitutes a ring composition and how it can be identified. Douglas' description seems most fitting:

“The minimum criterion for a ring composition is for the ending to join up with the beginning. (...) A ring is a framing device. The linking up of starting point and end creates an envelope that contains everything between the

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<sup>93</sup> José-Ramón Pérez-Accino, “Text as Territory: Mapping Sinuhe's Shifting Loyalties”, in Fredrik Hagen et al. (eds.), *Narratives of Egypt and the Ancient Near East: Literary and Linguistic Approaches*, Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Department Oosterse Studies, 2011, p. 177-194.

<sup>94</sup> John Baines, “Interpreting Sinuhe”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 68 (1982): 31-44.

<sup>95</sup> Pérez-Accino does not explicitly mention van Gennep's framework as an influence but it is nevertheless apparent in the text. The work is reliant solely on Egyptological material and the theoretical tools are therefore mostly the author's own apart from the distinction of *topos* and *mimesis*, which he adapted from A. Loprieno, another Egyptologist. This attitude of terminological self-reliance is characteristic of Egyptology in general. See the discussion in chapter 4 below.

See also Eltayeb Abbas, “The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor and the Rite of Passage”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 49 (2017): 9-18.

<sup>96</sup> See especially the table at p. 191.

<sup>97</sup> Martin Pehal, “Culturally Reflexive Aspects of Time and Space in New Kingdom Mythological Narratives”, in Gaëlle Chantrain, Jean Winand (eds.), *Time and Space at Issue in Ancient Egypt*, Hamburg: Widmaier, 2018, p. 162 ff. The present argument has been made independently of Pehal's in the article cited.

opening phrases and the conclusion. The rule for closing the ring endows the work with unity; it also causes all the problems that another set of rules has been designed to solve. It takes skill to compose a polished specimen. There has to be a well-marked point at which the ring turns, reparatory to working back to the beginning, and the whole series of stanzas from the beginning to the middle should be in parallel with the other series going from the middle back to the start.”<sup>98</sup>

From this description it is hardly apparent how the *Contendings* could even be considered a ring composition, Douglas’ neat picture of a structured whole having little to do with the amorphous reality of the tale. Of course, this could be expected. Since the structure of the *Contendings* is yet undetermined, there is no way of telling whether it has a ring-structure. To deal with this inevitable conundrum, Douglas outlines a set of rules – characteristic traits of a ring composition – to help the perplexed interpreter establish whether a given text is or is not a ring composition:

“1. *Exposition or Prologue* (my italics): There is generally an introductory section that states the theme and introduces the main characters. (...)

2. *Split into two halves*: If the end is going to join the beginning, the composition will at some point need to make a turn toward the start. (...)

3. *Parallel sections*: After the mid-turn the next challenge for the composer of a ring is to arrange the two sides in parallel (...). When the reader finds two pages set in parallel that seem quite disparate, the challenge is to ask what they may have in common, not to surmise that the editor got muddled.

4. *Indicators to mark individual sections*: A method for marking the consecutive units of structure is technically necessary. (...)

5. *Central loading*: The turning point of the ring is equivalent to the middle term, C, in the middle term of a chiasmus, AB / C/ BA. Consequently, much of the rest of the structure depends on a well-marked turning point that should be unmistakable. (...)

6. *Rings within rings*: As Otterbo pointed out, the major ring may be internally structured by little rings. (...)

7. *Closure at two levels*: By joining up with the beginning, the ending unequivocally signals completion. It is recognizably a fulfilment of the initial promise (...). The final section signals its arrival at the end by using some conspicuous key words from the exposition. (...) Most importantly, there also has to be thematic correspondence.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, p. 1.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36-37.

To gauge whether Douglas' general assumption about modern literary critique being an indicator of a ring is pertinent to the *Contendings*, these rules will now have to be applied to the Egyptian tale.

The first 'rule' of Douglas' system presupposes the existence of an introductory section, a *prologue*:

"There is generally an introductory section that states the theme and introduces the main characters. You can call it a prologue. It sets the stage, sometimes the time and the place. Usually, its tone is bland and somewhat enigmatic. It tells of a dilemma that has to be faced, a command to be obeyed, or a doubt to be allayed. Above all, it is laid out so as to anticipate the mid-turn and the ending that will eventually respond to it."<sup>100</sup>

This poignant description aptly fits the otherwise perplexing initial section of the tale:

"[THERE CAME TO PASS] THE JUDGEMENT of Horus and Seth, they of mysterious forms, greatest of existing princes and lords. A [divine] child sat before the Lord of All, seeking the office of (his) father Osiris, him of beautiful appearances, the son of Ptah, who illuminates the West with his gifts, while Thoth brought the Eye [to] the great prince in Heliopolis."<sup>101</sup>

The main characters are presented, as is the initial situation of the narrative. The quarrel between the two gods is outlined only partly, but the reader's general awareness of the mythology would have supplied him with the appropriate presumptions. The precise function of this section of the text will be discussed in the following chapters, but at this moment it should suffice to say that it fits the definition of Douglas' first rule – almost. The passage cited above, and termed *Prologue* matches the whole of Douglas' definition bar the last sentence: "Above all, it is laid out so as to anticipate the mid-turn and the ending that will eventually respond to it."<sup>102</sup>

The mid-turn, referred to earlier as the *pivot*, is the "well-marked point at which the ring turns"<sup>103</sup> and serves as the centrepiece of a ring structure.<sup>104</sup> It is the point where the text starts to trace its way back to its beginning, the new sections now mirroring their parallels in the first half of the text. A ring composition inevitably has to be divided into two parts. Without this, there would be no ring to speak of, which is reflected by Douglas' 2<sup>nd</sup> rule, *Split into two halves*:

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<sup>100</sup> M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, p. 36.

<sup>101</sup> *Con.* 1,1-4.

<sup>102</sup> M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, p. 36.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. the discussion of van Gennep's *point mort* in chapter 5.6.3.

“2. *Split into two halves*: If the end is going to join the beginning the composition will at some point need to make a turn toward the start. The convention draws an imaginary line between the middle and the beginning, which divides the work into two halves, the first, outgoing, the second, returning. In a long text it is important to accentuate the turn lest the hasty reader miss it, in which case the rest of the carefully balanced correspondences will also be missed.”<sup>105</sup>

Because of its crucial importance to the very structure of the narrative, this point where the two halves meet is emphasized in a ring composition to clearly show the reader that the text is bipartite. This highlight is the defining characteristic of a mid-turn, reflected by Douglas’ rule number five, *Central loading*, according to which the structure of parallels, which constitutes the ring composition, is most densely present and consequently most apparent at the mid-turn of the text. This is both due to its function as a marker but also because here the parallel sections are closest to one another in the linear succession of the narrative, which makes their similarity easy to notice.<sup>106</sup>

The mid-turn should also contain textual indicators that connect it to both the beginning and the ending, thereby establishing the basic structure of the ring-composition – A-B-A’ – each of the three main elements of the text pointing to one another by means of shared phraseology. In practice, this means that one should search for motifs concentrated in the initial, final and the suspected central section of the text. As it turns out, the author of the *Contendings* has chosen a surprisingly fitting symbol for this role, a symbol which effectively sums up the tale as a whole: the coronation of Horus.

#### 2.4 Pivoting the *Contendings*: The Three Coronations of Horus

The coronation of Horus is obviously one of the central motifs of the tale. This is hardly surprising given that the plot revolves around the issue of Horus’s ascendance to the throne as Horus and Isis strive to secure it while Seth seeks to unravel Horus’ aspirations. While the definitive coronation happens at the very end of the story after Seth’s final defeat, it is not the only instance of a coronation in the tale.<sup>107</sup> It can be noted that two attempted coronations take place prior to the victory of Horus, the first of these at *Con.* 1,8:

“THEN spoke [Onuris]: „[May] he (the Lord-of-All) [bring] the cartouche to Horus and let the White crown [be placed] upon his (Horus’) head.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, p. 36.

<sup>106</sup> R. G. Peterson, “Critical Calculations”, p. 367.

<sup>107</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures d’Horus et Seth*, p. 260–262.

<sup>108</sup> *Con.* 1,8.

The proposal of Onuris remains unheeded as the only reactions to it are the angry silence of Atum and Seth's threat of violence. The coronation is proposed, but not realized. Another one happens later, towards the middle of the tale at *Con.* 8,6:

When my (Atum's) message reaches your ears, you shall place the White crown on the head of Horus, son of Isis and prostrate yourselves before the throne of his father Osiris.

THEN Seth became really furious.

THEN the Ennead said to Seth: „Why are you angry? Should one not do that which says<sup>1</sup> Atum, the lord of the Two Lands, and Re Horus-of-the-Horizon?”

THEN the White Crown was made firm on the head of Horus, son of Isis.

THEN Seth raised his voice in the face of the Ennead, angrily saying: „Will the office be given to my junior, while I, his older brother, stand here? Then he made a vow, saying: „The White crown shall be driven from the head of Horus, son of Isis and he shall be thrown into the waters! I shall contend with him for the office of the Ruler, l.p.h.<sup>109</sup>

The coronation is mentioned three times in the passage, the second of these marking an actual crowning of Horus. As in the previous case, however, this does not yield the desired result. Since Seth refuses to acknowledge Horus' ascendancy, the act of coronation is ineffective, and the conflict continues. Using the terminology of John Austin, the performance *misfires*: the implicit precondition of all relevant parties' agreeing to it is not present and the performance is thus void.<sup>110</sup> It is only when Seth conforms to Horus' claim that the coronation succeeds, and Horus effectively becomes king:

THEN Seth said to him: „On the contrary, my good lord! Have Horus, son of Isis, summoned and may the office of father Osiris be given to him!”

THEN Horus, son of Isis, WAS brought and the White crown was placed on his head, he was placed on the throne of his father Osiris and it was said to him: “You are a good king of the Beloved Land, you are the beautiful Lord, l.p.h., of the whole world for ever and ever.”

THEN Isis raised her voice to her son Horus, saying: “You are a good king! My heart rejoices, for you shall brighten the world with your gifts!”<sup>111</sup>

The coronation with the White crown is a motif present only in these three passages of the tale. Its dispersion matches that described by Douglas, but this in itself gives little

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<sup>109</sup> *Con.* 8,4-8.

<sup>110</sup> See John Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 17-18.

<sup>111</sup> *Con.* 15,12-16,3.

reason to believe that it implies any kind of internal structure in the *Contendings*. Looking more closely at the section of the text recounting the failed coronation, however, passages and phrases that are remarkably similar to one another appear, bracketing the coronation itself and producing parallel pairs. It is this pairing, coupled with the phraseological interconnection of the beginning, the centre and the end which allows a basic structure of the tale to be established around of the White crown motif, whose individual mentions serve as the basic landmarks of the *Contendings*' narrative space. The second coronation thus constitutes the mid-turn of the tale, the parallel sections providing the necessary highlighting described by Douglas as *Central loading*:

<u>Mid-turn</u>	
“Then the <b>White Crown</b> was made firm on the <b>head of Horus</b> ( <i>hr tp n hr</i> ).” (8,6)	
(A <sub>1</sub> ) “Then the <b>Ennead</b> said to <b>Seth</b> : “Why are you <b>angry</b> ? Should one not do ( <i>i.ir.tw</i> )...” (8,5)	(A <sub>2</sub> ) “Then <b>Seth</b> raised his voice to the <b>Ennead</b> , <b>angrily</b> saying: “Will ( <i>i.ir.tw</i> ) the office be...” (8,7)
(B <sub>1</sub> ) “...you shall place the <b>White Crown</b> on the <b>head of Horus</b> ( <i>Hr tp n Hr</i> )...” (8,4)	(B <sub>2</sub> ) “...the <b>White Crown</b> shall be driven from the <b>head of Horus</b> ( <i>hr tp n hr</i> )...” (8,8)
(C <sub>1</sub> ) “...you will make them waste their life away in court.” (8,4)	(C <sub>2</sub> ) “I shall contend with him for the office of the Ruler, l.p.h.” (8,9)”
<u>Beginning</u> (D <sub>1</sub> ) “Then spoke [Onuris]: „[May] he [bring] the cartouche to Horus and let the <b>White Crown</b> [be placed] <b>upon his head</b> ( <i>hr tp=f</i> ).” (1,8)	<u>Ending</u> (D <sub>2</sub> ) “Then Horus, son of Isis, was brought, the <b>White crown</b> was placed <b>on his head</b> ( <i>hr tp=f</i> ) and he was placed on the throne of his father Osiris...” (16,1)

The first pair of passages (A) serves as a phraseological highlighting of the mid-turn. The common element of the two is the complex Ennead – Seth – anger – speech, followed by the emphatic *i.ir.tw sdm* form.<sup>112</sup> Such a sequence is present only in these two passages and even though each is assembled in a slightly different way, they are too similar in their choice of words for it to be random. Such similarities of phrase are the characteristic element of parallel pairs, something repeatedly stated by Douglas.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>112</sup> See Friedrich Junge, *Late Egyptian Grammar: An Introduction*, Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2005, p. 129 ff.

<sup>113</sup> See the pages indicated under “Parallelism” in M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, p. 166.

The second parallel pair (B) is even more transparent. The mention of the White crown and its placement on the head of Horus refers to the mid-turn in both content and phrase. The head of Horus appears nowhere in the text except these two passages and the mid-turn. It is notable that three out of five attestations of the White crown motif mark the mid-turn, indicating the significance of this section for the narrative. Furthermore, a connection is established through the motif's appearance in the mid-turn and the beginning and the ending of the tale (D) – there, however, instead of the phrase ‘on the head of Horus’ (*hr tp n hr*) we only find the phrase “on his head” (*hr tp=f*), the suffix pronoun =*f* referring again to Horus. This contrast identifies the passages of *Con.* 1,8 and *Con.* 16,1 as a pair and posits them against the trio of *Con.* 8,4; 8,6 and *Con.* 8,8 that emphasize the mid-turn of the tale.<sup>114</sup> The reference back to the beginning and forwards towards the end is crucial since it reminds the reader of what is central in the tale: the coronation. Narratives often recount a plethora of various incidents but may nevertheless have a central message which binds them together and gives a unified meaning to the text. In such cases, the mid-turn may serve to ensure that the reader recognizes it:

“I start by saying once more that a ring composition condenses the whole burden of its message into the mid-turn. What has been seen through straight linear reading has to be read again with a fresh eye for the message that is in the mid-turn.”<sup>115</sup>

The content of the mid-turn and the secondary ring is crucial for the tale in that it forces the reader to re-evaluate the previous section of the narrative, to not only take it as a sequence of incidents but also to try to understand their relation to the circular structure of the work as a whole. To understand the *Contendings*, it is necessary to take into account not only the sequential arrangement of events recounted in the tale but also acknowledge how they are organized around the pivot of the narrative. That is the function of the *Central loading* and that is why the White crown symbol is employed in this manner. It will be shown later in the present thesis how the symbolic value of the motif supports and further specifies its structural position within the tale.

As for the third pair (C) mentioned in the table above, more explanation is needed. Instead of emphasizing the Mid-turn, it might function as a summary of the two parts of the text that the mid-turn separates. The first element of the pair (C<sub>1</sub>) marks the end of the first part as Atum tries to end the trial by (prematurely) crowning Horus, the second (C<sub>2</sub>) marks the beginning of the second part as Seth disregards the decision, giving rise to another round of disputes. Lacking titles or another form of proper introduction, the two parts instead contain these ‘connective sentences’ that relate them to the narrative axis of

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<sup>114</sup> There is further phraseological association of the beginning and the Mid-turn by the verb *xAa* (“throw”). In the aftermath of both the first and the second coronations does Seth swear to throw Horus out.

<sup>115</sup> M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, p. 58.



the mid-turn, the former both ending and summarizing the first part of the text, while the latter gives a hint of the second part's contents.

To summarize, the White Crown emerges as the primary structural element of the narrative. The symbol serves to connect the Mid-turn with both the beginning and the ending of the tale. Each of the three passages is supplemented by a pair of passages, which include a reference to the White Crown. This in turn highlights the Mid-turn, the focal point of a ring-composition. A crown is actually a fitting choice as it is also the focus of the story which the narrative communicates. In this manner, the *Contendings* revolve around the issue of Horus' coronation in more than one sense. Coming back to Douglas' rules, it is possible to conclude that both the 2<sup>nd</sup> rule (*Split into two halves*) and the 5<sup>th</sup> rule (*Central loading*) apply to the *Contendings*, showing that there are concrete indicators of a ring structure within the tale.

### 2.5 Parallel Pairs

The tale has a Prologue, it has a Mid-turn and the Mid-turn is emphasized. The characteristic trait of a ring composition, however, is yet to be identified in the *Contendings*: the set of parallel pairs that links the two parts together as mirror images of one another. This kind of symmetry is encapsulated by the 3<sup>rd</sup> rule of Douglas:

“3. Parallel sections: After the mid-turn the next challenge for the composer of a ring is to arrange the two sides in parallel. This is done by making separate sections that are placed in parallel across the central dividing line. Each section on one side has to be matched by its corresponding pair on the other side. In practice the matching of sections often contains surprises; items are put into concordance that had not previously been seen to be similar. Parallelism gives the artist opportunities of taking the text to deeper levels of analogy. When the reader finds two pages set in parallel that seem quite disparate, the challenge is to ask what they may have in common, not to surmise that the editor got muddled.”<sup>116</sup>

If the 2<sup>nd</sup> coronation in fact marks the centre of the story, now it should simply be a matter of finding the links between the corresponding episodes. Here the initial problem presents itself again: since the division into Episodes is tentative at best, how can one establish whether there are pairs of corresponding episodes in the two halves of the text? The feasible option at this point seems to be to intuitively estimate the division of the episodes. This is in line with the work of previously mentioned scholars, and the present thesis can attempt this task with the crucial knowledge of the tale's Mid-turn and the theoretically

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<sup>116</sup> M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, p. 36.

grounded expectation that phraseological and/or narrative similarities between the sections on either side of the tale’s pivot could be identified.

The analysis will progress from the beginning of the narrative towards the Mid-turn, first rephrasing the interconnection of the *Prologue* and the *Epilogue* of the story, which has already been outlined in the preceding chapter when we focused on the mirroring of phrases mentioning the placement of the White Crown on the head of Horus. This relationship between the two sections of the tale is directly reflected on the narrative level as well, since the *Prologue* sets the story in motion by proposing the situation achieved in the *Epilogue*.<sup>117</sup> The formal and symbolic elements connecting these two sections will be discussed in more detail later.

The *Prologue* is immediately followed by a section of the text dealing with a quandary of the divine court and an attempt to remedy it by resorting to the authority of the goddess Neith. This section appears to be quite reminiscent of that adjacent to the *Epilogue* where Atum exchanges messages with Osiris. Both start with an aporic situation which can only be solved by outside intervention. A distant authority is contacted by letter and addressed as a royal person but then a quarrel develops since the council refuses to acknowledge the other party’s authority. The parallelism is represented not only in the overall structure, but also by individual phrases:

<u>Correspondence with Neith</u>	<u>Correspondence with Osiris</u>
(A <sub>1.1</sub> ) “Let us not make plans without knowing!” (2,5)	(A <sub>2</sub> ) “Please write to us that which we should do with it for Horus and Seth so that we won’t make plans while being ignorant!” (14,9)
(A <sub>1.2</sub> ) “There is none who knows how to judge these two men. Write us what we should do!” (3,1)	
(B <sub>1.2</sub> ) “Send a letter to Neith the great, the divine mother. That which she says we will do.” (2,5-6)	(B <sub>2</sub> ) “Then the Lord-of-All said to Thoth: “Sit down and write a letter to Osiris and we shall receive that which he says!” Then Thoth sat down to fill in the letter to Osiris, saying...” (14,6-7)
(B <sub>1.2</sub> ) “Then the Ennead spoke to Thoth before the Lord-of-All: ‘Would you write a letter to Neith the great, the divine mother, in the name of the Lord of All, the bull in midst of Heliopolis (...) Then he sat to write the letter, saying...” (2,7-2,9)	

<sup>117</sup> Cf. chapter 3.1.1 and 3.1.12 below.

The way the process of the letters' commission and execution is described is too unified for the similarities to be random. The motivation for the sending of the letters is identical, emphasizing both the ignorance of the court and the identity of the plaintiffs (A). The phrasing of the commission is likewise similar: The letter is requested from Thoth with the assumption that the advice given by the reply will be accepted by the court (B). Even though the first letter is requested by the Ennead, it is in the name of Atum that it is written, which is the case of the second letter also. The positioning in the tale, the internal structure and the language used connect clearly these two sets of passages which apparently form a parallel pair.

Moving on towards the mid-turn, the correspondence with Neith only leads to another quandary as Atum's refusal to accept Neith's arbitration results in him being rebuked by Baba and secluding himself away from the rest of the pantheon. Only an intervention of Hathor encourages Atum to return and allows the court to resume its proceedings. This section is short and there are no apparent phrasal parallels to other portions of the tale. Structurally, however, there are several remarkable similarities to the section where Horus is healed by Hathor after his eyes are torn out by Seth, something remarked on by earlier commentators of the tale and quite apparent from the following summary:<sup>118</sup>

<u>Hathor &amp; Atum-Re</u>	<u>Hathor &amp; Horus</u>
(C <sub>1</sub> ) Atum stricken by Baba (3,9-10)	(C <sub>2</sub> ) Horus stricken by Seth (10,3-10,4)
(D <sub>1</sub> ) "Then the Great God spent a day taken away lying on his back in his booth, his heart being very sore, and he was alone." (4,1-2)	(D <sub>2</sub> ) "...found Horus lying and crying in the foreign land." (10,6-10,7)
(E <sub>1</sub> ) "spent a day (...) Then after a long time Hathor..." (4,1-2)	(E <sub>2</sub> ) "Towards the morning (...) Then came Hathor" (10,4-10,6)
(F <sub>1</sub> ) Atum looks at Hathor and is healed (4,2)	(F <sub>2</sub> ) Hathor looks at Horus and he is healed (10,9)
(G <sub>1</sub> ) Atum returns to the Ennead (4,2)	(G <sub>2</sub> ) Horus returns to the Ennead (10,10-11)

The basic structure of the two episodes is essentially identical: the god is incapacitated (C), separated from the rest of the deities, spends some time in a state isolation and poor

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<sup>118</sup> See the discussion in chapter 3.8.3 and 5.6 below.

humour (D) and is afterwards restored by Hathor (E). The emphasis on *seeing* of Atum is especially important as it points not only to Hathor inspecting the healed Eyes of Horus (F), but also to the focal importance of the eye, the vehicle of sight, in these passages. Just as the intervention of Hathor amounts to the return of Horus' eye, so does it constitute a return of the Eye for Atum.<sup>119</sup> Hathor's action eventually leads to the afflicted party's return to the Ennead (G). From a symbolic point of view, the association between the episodes has been convincingly demonstrated by other scholars and will be discussed extensively later. Derchain has repeatedly shown the connection between Baba and Seth,<sup>120</sup> and the solar emphasis on Horus which puts him close to Atum in this episode is discussed by Broze.<sup>121</sup> There is ample evidence to argue that the two incidents can be perceived as analogous even though the majority of the actors are different, which is characteristic of Egyptian religious thought.<sup>122</sup>

There are slight variations between the two passages: Atum is first stricken, then separated from the collective while Horus first separates himself and is attacked by Seth afterwards. Similarly, in the passage where Atum is recovered by looking at Hathor, it is Hathor who *sees* that the Eyes of Horus are healed. These inversions do not necessarily constitute a challenge to the current line of inquiry.

More importantly, however, it must be noted that there do not seem to be parallels of phrase which are a typical common indicator of a ring, albeit not an essential one. Here it should be reemphasized that Douglas' rules serve rather as guidelines or tools which the author can employ to establish the presence of a ring composition. Typical rings, like those of the Old Testament, are of course significantly neater to the ideal and more apparent, and that is why they only constitute a typical example. Indeed, Douglas' work is based on her life of biblical studies. The study of Egyptian rings, on the other hand, is in the earnest and more research is necessary to begin to appreciate their specifics compared to the more recognizable rings of later antiquity. It should also be noted that there are different degrees of ring structure: in some works, the structure is more pronounced than in other, and it is consequently possible for some ring compositions to diverge from the standard as described by Douglas, simply based on intensity or effort put into emphasizing the narrative's cyclical character.

The return of Atum sets off a new round of debate as the two contenders give voice to their claims for the first time. Until now, only the opinions of others were voiced in the

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<sup>119</sup> See the discussion in chapter 3.8.3 below.

<sup>120</sup> Philippe Derchain, "Bebon, le dieu et les mythes", *Revue d'Égyptologie* 9 (1952): 23-47; Philippe Derchain, "Nouveaux documents relatifs à Bebon (B3b3wy)", *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 90 (1963): 22-25.

<sup>121</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures d'Horus et Seth*, esp. p. 231-233.

<sup>122</sup> The principle was systematically described by K. Goebis, "A Functional Approach to Egyptian Myth and Mythemes", p. 42-58.

court, Seth’s remark at Con. 1,10–1,11 being a dismissal of Horus’ claim in general, rather than the surprisingly well articulated argument of Con. 4,3–4,5. The following discussion revolves mainly around the idea of kinship, with all interested parties emphasizing their lineage to further their cause. Here the tale does something quite interesting. Studying the phraseology and the structure of argumentation, several parallels can be found between this section of the text, provisionally called the *Kinship Episode*, and the *Diving Episode*. It is solely in these two sections that the phrases “maternal brother” and “older brother” are mentioned:

<u>Kinship Episode</u>	<u>Diving Episode</u>
(H <sub>1</sub> ) “Then Onuris and Thoth spoke with a loud voice: “Shall the office be given to the <b>maternal brother</b> , while the bodily son stands?”” (4,6–7)	(H <sub>2.1</sub> ) “Then Seth raised his voice, saying: “What are you doing to me, sister Isis? Cry to your copper to let me go! I am your <b>maternal brother</b> , mother Isis!”” (9,4–5)
	(H <sub>2.2</sub> ) “Then Seth (9,6) cried to her, saying: “Will you love a strange man rather than the <b>maternal brother</b> Seth?”” (9,5–6)
	(H <sub>2.3</sub> ) “Then she cried to her copper, saying: “Let go of him! Look, the one you're biting into is a <b>maternal brother</b> of Isis.”” (9,6–7)
(I <sub>1</sub> ) “Then Banebjede, the great living god, said: “But <b>will the office be given to this child, while his older brother Seth stands?</b> ”” ( <i>i.ṛ.tw dī.t t3 i3w.t n p3 ʿdd iw stš p3y=f sn ʿ3 (hr) ʿhʿ</i> ) (4,7–8)	(I <sub>2</sub> ) “Then Seth raised his voice in the face of the Ennead, angrily saying: “ <b>Will the office be given to my junior, while I, his older brother, stand here?</b> ”” ( <i>i.ṛ.tw dī.t t3 i3w.t n p3y=i šr.i iw=i ʿhʿ.k(wi) m p3y=f sn ʿ3</i> ) (8,6–7)

The passages are permeated with references to kinship, and this will be dealt with extensively in the part of this thesis devoted to religious symbolism. Of particular note is the common ending of the two episodes: the removal of Isis. The means employed to achieve the separation of the goddess reflect the division of the tale into a dialectic and a polemic part: where Seth formally objects to Isis’ presence at court which leads to her being left behind – a rather passive-aggressive way of dealing with the issue – Horus simply lops his mother’s head off.

Now the association of the *Kinship Episode* and *Diving Episode* may seem convincing. The same, however, can be said of the next section of the text, the *Isle-in-the-Midst* episode, also known as *Isis' Ruse*. There are some notable parallels between the two episodes which include phrases unique only to them, setting them together apart from the rest of the text:

<u>Isis' Ruse (Isle-in-the-Midst)</u>	<u>Diving Episode</u>
(J <sub>1.1</sub> ) "Then Seth said to her: 'Will the office be given to the <b>strange man</b> ( <i>p3 rmt drdr</i> ), while the son of the man stands?" (6,13-14)	(J <sub>2</sub> ) "Then Seth cried to her, saying: 'Will you love a <b>strange man</b> ( <i>wc rmt drdr</i> ) rather than the maternal brother Seth?" (9,5-6)
(J <sub>1.2</sub> ) "I am a wife of a herdsman, who is dead and whom I bore a son, a man, who tended to the herd (=office) of his father, when a <b>strange man</b> ( <i>wc rmt drdr</i> ) came with my boy to my stable and I gave him bread." (7,4-7)	
(K <sub>1</sub> ) "Then Seth said to him: "Have Nemty the ferryman brought, so that a <b>great lesson is given to him...</b> " ( <i>mtw.tw ir.t n=f sb3.yt 3.t</i> )" (7,12)	(K <sub>2</sub> ) "Then Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon raised his voice, saying to the Ennead: "Let us go and <b>give him a great lesson</b> " ( <i>hn=n ir=n n=f sb3.yt 3.t!</i> )" (9,12-10,1)

Parallelism can consequently be found not only between the *Kinship Episode* and the *Diving Episode*, but also between the latter and *Isis' Ruse*. What the tale seems to do is acknowledge the separation of the *Kinship Episode* and *Isis' Ruse* while at the same time placing them under a common heading and pairing them with the *Diving Episode* in the overall structure of the narrative. The symbolic consequences of this will be discussed in chapter 3. This structural element is also apparent in the endings of the three episodes: the removal of Isis and the passage to the mountains dispersed among the two episodes of the *Contendings'* first half are bundled together in the *Diving Episode* where the first motif is immediately followed by the other:

<p>“Then Seth made an oath to the Lord-of-All, saying: “I will not contend before this council while Isis is in it.” (...) And they said to the Nemty the ferryman: „Do not ferry any woman that looks like Isis.” Then the Ennead crossed to the Island-in-the-Midst ...” (5,3-5)</p>	<p>“...and he removed the head of his mother Isis, put it in his embrace and went up to the mountain.” (9,9)</p>
<p>“Then the Ennead crossed to the western shore and sat on a mountain.” (8,1-2)</p>	

One last remark on the motif of the mountain should be made. At the end of *Isis’ Ruse*, we find the mention of the mountain in association with a passage to the west and the coming of night. In the *Diving episode*, if we omit the segue that is the discussion of Isis’ headless state at *Con.* 9,9-12, Horus’ voyage to the mountain is followed by sleep and subsequently violence by Seth that leaves Horus almost dead. We can refer to the central role of sleep in other Egyptian narratives, notably the mid-turn of the *Tale of Sinuhe* (the fight with the champion of Retenu), which is likewise framed by night.<sup>123</sup> In the *Tale of the Two Brothers*, the relationship between sleep and death is clear, and likewise in *Doomed Prince* sleep is a key motif. Given the close association of the west, night-time, sleep and death, it is possible that these motifs are parallel as well.<sup>124</sup> This will be discussed more extensively later.

The tripartite “pair” of episodes grouping together *Isis’ Ruse*, the *Kinship Episode* and the *Diving Episode* may seem unconvincing, but a similarly anomalous constellation will be shown to connect the *Horus & Hathor Episode*, the *Homosexual Episode* and the *Boat Race*. The phraseology clearly points to the association of these two sections of the text bracketing the Mid-turn and the overall focus of these on the inherent paradoxes of kinship with regard to royal succession supports this claim. With this the ring should be complete, the two parts of the text constituting two sets of interconnected episodes pivoting around the Mid-turn of the second coronation of the White Crown. However, the following table easily shows the obvious problem with the structure presented so far – the number of episodes in both of the text’s parts simply does not correspond:

<sup>123</sup> *Sinuhe* B 127.

<sup>124</sup> Most notably in the texts of Amarna, for example *The Great Hymn of Aten*: “When you set in western light land, Earth is in darkness as if in death; One sleeps in chambers, heads covered, One eye does not see another.” (Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, p. 104-5)

Mid-turn (2 <sup>nd</sup> coronation)	
Isis' Ruse	Diving Episode
Kinship Episode	
Re & Hathor	Horus & Hathor
X	Homosexual Episode
X	The Boat Race
Correspondence with Neith	Correspondence with Osiris
Prologue (1 <sup>st</sup> coronation)	Epilogue (3 <sup>rd</sup> coronation)

Apart from the lack of other parallels – which one might still hope to find in the text once it is more carefully studied – there are no large sections of the text in the first half left unpaired to match those in the second half. This poses an apparent difficulty for the argument presented here.

Two considerations should be made here. Firstly, this structure is provisional. It is an initial attempt at structuring the tale based on indicators inherent in the text itself rather than mere intuition. For now, this attempt has been based almost solely on structural and phraseological markers while the richness of symbolism has been left largely unexplored. It will be shown later in the present thesis that not only does the evaluation of symbolic meaning in the *Contendings* establish intertextual links that support the structure proposed here, but expands it significantly, creating a distinct and profoundly more complex image.

The second point directly follows the first. The clarity of the structure here is proportional to the degree to which the tale was organized as a ring. A ring composition can be structured as a ring to certain degrees, some texts exhibiting more signs in a more pronounced way than other. Tools to compare the intensity of ring structure have been proposed, partially in response to modern works of art in which the ring is but one of many elements contributing to the overall makeup of the composition.<sup>125</sup>

Simply put, the tale is formed by factors other than its chiastic structure. As the study of the *Contendings* presented in this thesis progresses, so will the understanding of the contributions these factors make to the current form of the tale. For now, however, an

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<sup>125</sup> John Welch, “Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus”, *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4 (1995): 1-14.



idea of the narrative's structure has to be formulated so that the necessary analysis of the narrative's contents may take place in an organized manner.

## 2.6 A Provisional Structure

The tale has been shown to consist of two parts connected by an emphasized central element. The individual sections of these two parts are furnished with textual references so that pairs are formed, creating a symmetry of 'circles' with the Mid-turn at their centre. The basis on which a structure of the *Contendings* can be proposed is almost ready. However, while the pairs may be determined in a satisfying manner, these still have to be transformed into proper episodes, sections which are defined and can be distinguished from each another. This is necessary not only to overcome the difficulties inherent to the established intuitive models of the tale's episodicity, but also because it is a characteristic trait of a ring composition:

“4. Indicators to mark individual sections: Some method for marking the consecutive units of structure is technically necessary. The primary problem is to make clear to the reader or listener where one section stops and the next begins. Otherwise, the pattern fades out. There are various methods. Key words always carry a lot of the weight of marking the sections. In a long composition the author will also have resort to specific signals to indicate beginnings or endings of the sections. Only when these have been found can the meanings that have been packed together be sorted out. One method is to close off each section by repeating a refrain, like the chorus line of a folk song.”<sup>126</sup>

Since the *Contendings* are a relatively short text (Douglas' reference works here are Homer's *Iliad* and the *Book of Numbers*), these indicators may be quite subdued, especially if the text has only three parallel pairs, not counting the prologue and epilogue. Nevertheless, some markers should be present, else the two parts would be just continuous lines of text interspersed with isolated references to the other side of the Mid-turn. To discount this possibility, it is necessary to return to the discussion of the tale's bipartite character and the way in which this is reflected in the two distinct types of action:

	Mode of Action	Primary Actors
Part 1 (1,1-ca. 8,6)	Speech	Atum (Seth), Isis
Part 2 (ca. 8,6-16,8)	Violence	Seth, Horus

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<sup>126</sup> M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, p. 36.

Having firmly established this division with a specific boundary marker of the second coronation, the idea of the fundamental difference between the two parts is likewise reinforced. Each of the halves is defined by its dominant mode of action, its dynamics constituted by the surges and drops in speech, and violence, respectively. Examining the tale in this manner, it becomes apparent that the dips in activity coincide with changes of pace and context in the course of the narrative as the polemic, action packed sections of the story give way to calmer intervals in between.

The first part of the text is interspersed by periods of silence and quandary while the second mixes the clashes of Horus and Seth with peaceful sojourns with the Ennead. In fact, if the calmer parts are compared to the episodic schema proposed above, and it can be observed that these narrative breaks correspond with the structure of the pairs. The angry silence of Atum at *Con. 2,1* coupled with the overt embarrassment of Onuris mark the ending of the *Prologue* and open the way for the *Correspondence with Neith*. This section is in turn ended with another silence of Atum caused by the infraction of Baba. The revival of Atum by Hathor constitutes a break in Part 1 as a spatial element is introduced into the tale's narrative dynamic: the resumption of talks is also marked by Atum's movement. The quandary at the end of the *Kinship Episode* is also mirrored by a shift of the plot's focus towards Isis and away from the Ennead whose departure from the former marks the beginning of *Isis' Ruse*. It is with Ennead's traverse to the western shore at *Con. 8,1-2* that Part 1 ends as the tale reaches the mid-turn. A comparable principle is perceivable in Part 2, where moments of relative calm mark the end of the *Diving Episode*, the *Homosexual Episode*, *Horus & Hathor* and the *Boat Race*. The *Correspondence of Osiris* ends with the ultimate pacification of Horus and Seth as they are judged, and Seth finally accepts the court's ruling. In the following section, the *Epilogue*, Horus is once again crowned, and Seth is likewise elevated to a position of power.

In this way the 14 identified episodes of the *Contendings* are defined and roughly delineated. It will for now serve as the basic structure for the symbolic analysis of the narrative that occupies the following part of the thesis.

### 3 Symbolism and Mythical Comparisons

In this chapter, we will focus on the religious symbolism in the *Contendings* and discuss connections to elements of Egyptian mythology, ritual and literature. The findings of this chapter will serve as the foundation for the interpretative work of chapters 4 and 5 which depends on a thorough understanding of Egyptian religious thought and the polyvalent character and interconnection of Egyptian symbols and mythemes.

Reflecting the division of the *Contendings* proposed in chapter 2, this chapter is divided into fourteen subchapters, each focusing on a single Episode and significant motifs that appear in it. In these subchapters, we will break down specific sub-topics, ensuring a detailed exploration of the narrative's symbolic elements. Each of the chapters will be prefaced by the translation of the Episode or an appropriate part in case of sub-chapters. The translation of the whole text is available in Appendix 2.

#### 3.1 Prologue (1,1-1,12)

##### 3.1.1 Incipit (1,1-1,3)

<sup>(1,1)</sup> [THERE CAME TO PASS] THE JUDGEMENT of Horus and Seth, they of mysterious forms, greatest of existing princes and lords. <sup>(1,2)</sup> A [divine] child sat before the Lord of All, seeking the office of (his) father Osiris, him of beautiful appearances, the son <sup>(1,3)</sup> of Ptah, who illuminates the West with his gifts, while Thoth brought the Eye [to] the great prince in Heliopolis.

The distinctive trait of the *Contendings*' first lines is their condensed character. The tale's beginning is abrupt, rushed even, and allows no time for a gradual immersion into the story.<sup>127</sup> This suddenness likely reflects the fact that there was no need to extensively introduce the reader to the plot, merely to indicate the specific situation in which this particular story begins. The general mythology of Horus and Seth was obviously well known to the Egyptian audience although the peculiarities of the *Contendings* may have come as a novelty, not only in genre but possibly also in content.<sup>128</sup> The function of these opening words is to inform the reader of the specific place in the mythology of Horus, Seth and Osiris at which the story starts. Many known parts of the mythos, such as the


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<sup>127</sup> Compare this to the opening lines of *The Two Brothers* where a significantly more gradual opening is present which allows to reader to come to terms with the tale and prepare oneself for the plot. An introductory passage three times as long as that of the *Contendings* is used for a narrative two-thirds its size. Cf. *Two Brothers* 1,1-1,4.

<sup>128</sup> See the discussion in chapter 6.2.

murder and search for Osiris are completely absent from the narrative which begins about halfway through Plutarch's version, making an introduction of this sort appropriate.<sup>129</sup>

This function the Prologue would account not only for its abruptness but also its symbolic richness. Compared to the somewhat clumsy and at times overstretched conversations of the following episodes which often make little reference to religious matters proper, the Prologue has almost the quality of a temple inscription and is particularly reminiscent of an offering scene in both form and content. Given the very secular nature of the conversations that form the bulk of the following episodes, it is remarkable that the *Prologue* in its few sentences invokes several symbolic motifs that only gradually reveal themselves in the story. In this it is very much like the *Contendings'* closing hymn whose literary quality and religious depth starkly contrast with the bulk of the text. Together, these two passages seem to frame the episodic main section with contrasting elements, bracketing the narrative with non-narrative passages, almost as if pointing out the relationship of the genre anomaly that is the *Contendings* with its source material.

The formal characteristics of the Prologue described above are mirrored by its content. The focal points of the narrative are introduced here, topics to which the whole of the story relates and in whose full realization it concludes. The Prologue presents the primary actors – Horus and Seth – and the nature of their relationship which defines the *Contendings* – judgement. Secondly, it identifies the protagonist, Horus, as a child, and defines his original state as that of insufficiency, since he lacks not just his patrimony, but also the *wedjat* (, *wḏꜥ.t*), the Eye of Horus.<sup>130</sup>

The term chosen by the author of the tale, *wedjat*, has been used at least since the beginning of the New Kingdom as a synonym for the Eye of Horus,<sup>131</sup> which was usually referred to in earlier texts simply as *jr.t hrw*, “the Eye of Horus.” The symbol occupies a central position in Egyptian religious thought. Literally, the word *wedjat* means “the whole/intact (female one).”<sup>132</sup> The question whether the term represents the assaulted

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<sup>129</sup> For the relationship between Plutarch's version and Egyptian sources, see esp. J. Griffiths, *The Conflict of Horus and Seth*, xii + 182 p.

<sup>130</sup> Significant literature dealing with this topic includes LÄ III, p. 48–51; John Darnell, “The Apotropaic Goddess in the Eye”, *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 24 (1997): 35–48; Günter Rudnitsky, “Die Aussage über “das Auge des Horus”: Eine altägyptische Art geistiger Äusserung nach dem Zeugnis des Alten Reiches”, Kopenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1956, esp. p. 16–25. See also, more recently, Hourig Sourouzian, “The Sound Eye of Horus”, in Miroslav Bárta et al. (eds.), *Guardian of Ancient Egypt: Studies in Honor of Zahi Hawass*, vol. 3, Prague: Charles University, Faculty of Arts, 2020, p. 1501–1509. For the *wedjat* as the vehicle of the transmission of royal power, see Paul Barguet, “Le Livre des Portes et la transmission du pouvoir royal”, *Revue d'égyptologie* 27 (1975), p. 32.

<sup>131</sup> Olaf Kaper, “Myths: Lunar Myths”, in Donald Redford, (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, vol. 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 481.

<sup>132</sup> *Wb* 1, 401.12–402.2; Wilson, *Ptol. Lexikon*, 286 f.

and restored Eye or the other, unharmed one, is still open according to some authors.<sup>133</sup> This, however, seems to stem from an overly literal reading of the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic inclinations of Egyptian thought.<sup>134</sup> Our understanding of this symbol does not depend on which of the eyes is the wounded one. Egyptian gods are concepts that are explored using natural language, but it is not productive to attempt to grasp their visible appearance as represented by the texts or physical art as if the intent of the Egyptians were to accurately describe what the gods actually look like. Indeed, the Prologue of the story calls the two gods “they of mysterious forms.”

Instead of reading the references to the Eye of Horus or the *wedjat* Eye in a literal manner to create a “unified mythology” of the Eye from the seemingly endless variability of Egyptian mythemes, Katja Goebis argues to look for the *structural relationships among their actors and objects*. Focusing on the mythical relationship of Horus, Thoth and the Eye of Horus, she finds that they correspond to a structural relationship:

Mythical relationship	Structural relationship
a) Horus—NEEDS/IS AIDED BY—Thoth	God in need—NEEDS/IS AIDED BY—Helper
b) Horus—LOST/NEEDS/IS GIVEN—Eye of Horus	God—LOST/NEEDS/IS GIVEN—Object
c) Thoth—RESTORES—Eye of Horus	Helper—SEIZES/BRINGS/RESTORES—Object

Figure 1: Constellation HORUS – MISSING / RETRIEVED EYE OF HORUS – THOTH. After K. Goebis, “A Functional Approach to Egyptian Myth and Mythemes”, p. 47.

It is this constellation that allows ritual performers and objects to take on divine qualities and identities:<sup>135</sup>

“When this structural relationship is applied to a ritual context, the cultic performer may take on the role of Thoth, who is the archetypical restorer of the Eye of Horus, and the offering is accordingly equated with the Eye.”<sup>136</sup>

This means that the choice of a specific mytheme in each text is determined by structural relationship between the respective actors and/or objects. Goebis argues that this is typical of ritual and funerary context, but not necessarily of other genres:

<sup>133</sup> See e.g., Carol Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994, p. 43.


<sup>134</sup> Cf. the discussion and sources cited in Richard Wilkinson, “Anthropomorphic Deities”, in Jacco Dieleman, Willeke Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2008. Accessed at <https://escholarship.org/content/qt5s54w4tc/qt5s54w4tc.pdf>.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Harold Hays, “Between Identity and Agency in Ancient Egyptian Ritual”, in Annette Kjølbj, Rune Nyord (eds.), *Being in Ancient Egypt: Thoughts on Agency, Materiality and Cognition: Proceedings of the Seminar Held in Copenhagen, September 29–30*, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2006, esp. p. 24 ff.

<sup>136</sup> K. Goebis, “A Functional Approach to Egyptian Myth and Mythemes”, p. 47.

“By contrast, one might hypothesize here that a written mythical (or other) narrative would place more emphasis on the character of Actors A and B as fixtures, and treat the relationships of action between them more variably. Thus, the mythical account of P. Chester-Beatty I makes play at least as much with the typical characteristics of its actors as with the events that happen to and between them. Examples are Horus’ naïveté, Seth’s rampant aggression and hunger for power, or Isis’ cunning.”<sup>137</sup>

While this may be the case with the parts of the *Contendings* that follow, we might come back to the remark that the prologue has almost the quality of a temple inscription. Thoth bringing the *wedjat* Eye to the sun-god is a frequent motif of the sources cited by Goebis as examples of ritual context.<sup>138</sup> At the same time, however, it has a cosmic aspect, related to the idea of the Sun as the central and defining element of the universe.

The figure below is the third scene of the funerary papyrus of Herweben (*Papyrus Cairo 133/EMC SR 19325*), a chantress of Amun during the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty.<sup>139</sup> Scene 3 of the manuscript (Figure 2 below) shows the lady Herweben witnessing the mystery of solar renewal expressed in a theologically condensed image of a solar child sitting inside the sun-disc enclosed by an ouroboros snake, “the symbol of endless cyclical time”<sup>140</sup> safeguarding the infant.<sup>141</sup> Herweben stands in reverent anticipation before its radiance. Her knees are gently bent, and she inclines her body slightly forward in a gesture of devout humility. Her upturned palms form the customary prayerful pose as she “extols Re, Horus of the Two Horizons.” Beside her, sharing in the act of worship, is a baboon, a manifestation of Thoth.<sup>142</sup> Above his cradling hands hovers the substantial  *wedjat*

<sup>137</sup> K. Goebis, “A Functional Approach to Egyptian Myth and Mythemes”, p. 44.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 231–233.

<sup>139</sup> For the papyrus, see Alexandre Piankoff, “Les deux papyrus ‘mythologiques’ de Her-Ouben au Musée du Caire”, *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l’Égypte (SAE) (Cairo)* 49 (1949), pl. 6; Alexander Piankoff, *Mythological Papyri*, vol. 2, New York: Pantheon Books for the Bollingen Foundation, 1957, p. 1. A similar rendition is represented on the papyrus of Henuttawy in the British Museum (P. BM EA 10018.2). For Herweben herself, see Aidan Dodson, Dyan Hilton, *The Complete Royal Families of Ancient Egypt*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2004, p. 205.

<sup>140</sup> Jan Assmann, *Zeit und Ewigkeit im alten Ägypten: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Ewigkeit*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter – Universitätsverlag, 1975, p. 33. Cf. A. Piankoff, *Mythological Papyri*, p. 73.

<sup>141</sup> For the motif of ouroboros in Egypt, see Jan Assmann, “Ouroboros: The Ancient Egyptian Myth of the Journey of the Sun”, *Aegyptiaca* 4 (2019): 19–32; Dana Reemes, *The Egyptian Ouroboros: An Iconological and Theological Study*, Dissertation: University of California, Los Angeles, 2015, xxiii + 438.

For enveloping snakes as emblems of protection, see Peter Piccione, “Mehen, Mysteries, and Resurrection from the Coiled Serpent”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 27 (1990): 43–52.

<sup>142</sup> See Martin Stadler, “Thoth”, in Jacco Dieleman, Willeke Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2012, p. 2 ff. Accessed at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2xj8c3qg>.


eye, whose apotropaic qualities safeguard the sanctity of the celestial process of solar rejuvenation. In front of Herweben and the baboon unfolds a complex symbolic representation of the solar cycle. At the lowermost part, precisely aligned with the register line, sit the dual Ruty lions, emblematic of the Eastern and Western horizons.<sup>143</sup> Together with the radiant solar disk positioned above them, this composition visually resonates with the hieroglyph  which represents the horizon, a transformative space whose significance will be discussed later in chapter 5.5.3. Below the disc and between the lions there appears the *en face* cow head representing Hathor, the lady of the West, who receives the dead into the afterworld and with them, the setting sun as well.<sup>144</sup> At the same time, the sun disc is embraced by a pair of hands, a *pars pro toto* of Nut, the sky goddess which receives the solar-god in the evening and births him anew in the morning.<sup>145</sup>



Figure 2: Horus the Child depicted within the sun disc resting upon the Ruty lions, surrounded by an ouroboros, from the funerary papyrus of Herweben (*Papyrus Cairo 133/EMC SR 19325*). Accessed at [egypt-museum.com](http://egypt-museum.com).

<sup>143</sup> Cf. chapter 5.5.3 below.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. the discussion in See also chapter 5.5.3 and 5.5.4 below.

For Hathor and frontality, see Yuri Volokhine, *La frontalité dans l'iconographie de l'Égypte ancienne*, Genève: Société d'Égyptologie, 2000, p. 60–65. See also Dominique Farout, “La frontalité contrariée dans l'iconographie égyptienne”, *Pallas – Revue d'études antiques* 105 (2017): 41–66.

<sup>145</sup> This interpretation is possible due to the numerous parallels in which the arms are equipped with breasts. One example actually shows the body of Nut in its entirety. See Erik Hornung, “Die Tragweite der Bilder: Altägyptischen Bildaussagen,” *Eranos* 48 (1981), p. 226 fig. 17, p. 227 fig. 20, p. 230 fig. 23.

How closely the complex theological image of Herweben's papyrus corresponds to the symbolism of the *Contendings* will become apparent by the end of this thesis. For the time being, the notion that the tale presents a comparably complex cosmic statement should be entertained, albeit not in a condensed, pictorial form, but through an extended textual narrative.

The opening words of the *Contendings* are reminiscent of an offering ritual, but with a twist. The usual actors are invoked, the Horus of the *Prologue*, however, is not the Horus of the offering ritual, the Helper that AID the God in need by BRINGING him what he lacks and NEEDS, but a child, dependent on the will of others. Here, it is Horus who is presented as the God in need. At the same time, the author's choice of religious motif brings out that in fact it should be him who helps others. The initial situation is a reversal of the ideal state. This is further emphasized by the choice of words when referring to the Horus and Seth which puts them on equal footing as divine magnates, which is manifestly not the case at the story's beginning. Instead, it seems that the narrative's first sentence already anticipates its final state where Horus and Seth are reconciled, and Horus has achieved his maturity.<sup>146</sup> It is the transformation from the child Horus of healing rituals to the mature, royal Horus of the Daily Ritual that is the central focus of the story.<sup>147</sup> In the end, he is exalted as a shining being bringing what's needed to all.

Coming back to Goeb's table, we might remark that not only does it apply mainly to ritual and funerary sphere, but also that it does so because both these areas of religious action are very sensitive to expression of unfavourable states of affairs. In ritual a lot is at stake. Indeed, the temple ritual is a matter of state and of cosmic importance. The funerary sphere is similarly crucial as the beneficiary's eternal existence and bliss depend on the quality of the funerary institutions and magical devices guaranteeing it. A mythical story, on the other hand, can afford to take some risks: crises are, in fact, one of the typical elements of Egyptian literature.<sup>148</sup> Not only might it not be as crucial for everything to be presented in an optimal state, but more interestingly, the linear and temporal nature of the narrative allows the optimal state to be achieved in the course of the story. That naturally means that at least some stage of the narrative needs to present a suboptimal state of affairs. A story where everything is great from the start makes for poor reading.

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<sup>146</sup> Broze argues that the epithet *jhpr.yw*, a perfective participle, indicates that the whole sentence refers to an action in the past and contrast it with the final hymn. The former would be placed a "privileged time of mythical narratives", whereas the latter is "an event out of time" that seems immutable and relates as well to the present of the reader to whom the text is intended than to his future or his past." (M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 16)

<sup>147</sup> See, for example, the temple offering of milk to the child Horus in Hermann Junker, *Der grosse Pylon des Tempels der Isis in Philä*, Wien: Rohrer, 1958, p. 180, 185; Hermann Junker, Erich Winter (eds.), *Das Geburtshaus des Tempels der Isis in Philä*, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften: Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Wien: Herman Böhlau, 1965, p. 319, 385, 389.

<sup>148</sup> See chapter 6.3 below.



The line of reasoning allows us to present the initial situation of the *Contendings* using Goeb's terminology:

Mythical Relationship	Structural Relationship
Horus seeks office of Osiris, but is not given anything	God in need–NEEDS, but is <u>NOT</u> AIDED BY–Helper
	God–IS <u>NOT</u> GIVEN–Object
Thoth brought the Eye to the great prince in Heliopolis.	God– <u>DOES NOT</u> NEED–Object
	Helper–BRINGS–Object

At this point it would seem eager to simply conflate the *wadjet* Eye with the object of Horus's need, which is identified instead as *t3 i3w.t n iti wsir*, the office of (his) father Osiris. The assumption that these two are interchangeable, while based on the established symbolism, is not grounded in the *Prologue* itself. Instead, it will be in the narrative as a whole that the pattern of symbols around the Eye and the royal office is weaved in detail.

### 3.1.2 Opening Statements: An Overview (1,3–1,12)

THEN spoke <sup>(1,4)</sup> Shu, son of Ra, before Atum, the great prince in Heliopolis: “Justice lords over power. Do it by saying: “Give the office to [Horus]!” <sup>(1,5)</sup>

[THEN] Thoth said to the [Ennead: “It is true] a million times.”

THEN Isis uttered a great cry and was overjoyed. <sup>(1,6)</sup> She [went before the Lord of] All, saying: “Northwind, go west! Please Onuphris, l.p.h.”

[THEN] <sup>(1,7)</sup> spoke Shu, son [of Ra]: “Giving the Eye is right by the Ennead.”

The Lord of All [said] this: “What is this planning of yours on [your] <sup>(1,8)</sup> own?”

THEN spoke [Onuris]: “[May] he [bring] the cartouche to Horus and let the White crown [be placed] upon his head.” Then Lord of All fell silent for <sup>(1,9)</sup> a long time as he was angry with the Ennead.

THEN spoke Seth, son of Nut: “Throw him outside <sup>(1,10)</sup> with me and I will have you [see] my hand as he is seized of his hand before the Ennead, since no one knows [any other] way <sup>(1,11)</sup> of getting rid of him.”

THEN Thoth said to him: “Will we not know this falsehood? Will the office of <sup>(1,12)</sup> Osiris be given to Seth while [his] son stands?”

The defining trait of Episode 1 is its locutionary form. Looking back to chapter I.A of the present work we are reminded that focus on speech as the primary type of action is the common trait of all the episodes of the story's first half, but this episode stands out in this

regard. Speaking is the only proper action performed by the characters throughout the episode, the other verbs merely describing states: joy at *Con.* 1,6, silence at *Con.* 1,8, anger and desire at *Con.* 2,1.<sup>149</sup> This homogeneity of action results in a simple dynamic of speech and silence or, more specifically, angry silence.<sup>150</sup> The two periods of angry silence of the Lord of All (in the second case silence is not explicitly mentioned but nevertheless present as he doesn't actually say anything) serve as contrasting elements which serve to separate this Episode from Episode 2 and also divide the Episode itself in two parts. The internal structure of the episode is thus determined by dynamics of speech and silence.

The importance of speech to the tale cannot be understated. It has already been noted by Broze that the *Prologue* (her “tableau descriptive”) concludes with the first narrative form as the non-narrative gives way to a narrative.<sup>151</sup> Speech starts the tale's narrative flow and it also stands at its end: the final part of the *Contendings* is Isis' hymn in reverence of Horus. Even the defeat of Seth is only made effective when he verbally concedes the throne. Speech acts frame the story as a whole, which is more significant recalling the circular form of the story. That both the beginning and ending of the plot are marked with a *sdm.in* form with the verb *dd* “to speak” reinforces the point.<sup>152</sup> This is a form that is typical of narratives and is relatively scarce elsewhere.<sup>153</sup> It could also be remarked that the vast majority of the text's rubrics are used for *sdm.in* forms, which should be taken as another form of emphasis of the tale's narrativity.<sup>154</sup> That speech and a narrative tale are aligned in such a way is understandable, since as media, they are both typically linear in character.<sup>155</sup> This topic will be explored further in the present work. For the purposes of the chapter it should suffice that the central importance of speech and narrativity are established at the very beginning of the tale and do so within the frame of its ring composition.

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<sup>149</sup> It should be noted that members of the Egyptian elite were expected to express themselves in a calm, reserved manner. See the discussion and sources cited in Shih-Wei Hsu, Jaume Llop Raduà, “The Expression of Emotions in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia: An Introduction”, in Shih-Wei Hsu, Jaume Llop Raduà (eds.), *The Expression of Emotions in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia*, Leiden: Brill, 2021, p. 1–22.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 197. For silence and conversational tactics, see Deborah Sweeney, “Gender and Conversational Tactics in The Contendings of Horus and Seth”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 88 (2002), p. 148, n. 70.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. M. Broze, *Les Aventures d'Horus et Seth*, p. 20.

<sup>152</sup> At *Con.* 1,3 a typical *sdm.jn=f* form is used. At *Con.* 16,6 the pseudoverbal *wn.jn=fHr* is used, which is the same form with is combined with a preposition and infinitive. For *wn.jn* as a *sdm.jn=f* form see John Gee, “The Origin of the Imperfect Converter”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 43 (2007), p. 253–259, especially note 4.

<sup>153</sup> See e.g., Friedrich Junge, *Late Egyptian Grammar*, p. 276.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. M. Broze, *Les Aventures d'Horus et Seth*, p. 162–164.

<sup>155</sup> See chapter 5.5.1 below, esp. n. 900.

Given the import of speech to this episode it is remarkable to see that it is at the same time the least interested in actual dialogue. Only three of the eight remarks constituting the episode can be construed as replies to a prior speech: that of the Lord of All at *Con.* 1,7-1,8 and Thoth's at *Con.* 1,11-1,12. Neither of these merits any further reaction in the eyes of the speakers.

Compared to the later episodes, the focus here is not on interaction but on presentation of ideas. Seeing as the first part of the story conforms most to the notion of a court drama, it might perhaps be fitting to treat this initial part as opening statements of each of the plaintiffs.<sup>156</sup> The dividing element of silence at *Con.* 1,8-1,9 creates two separate spaces each of whom is devoted to the opinions of either party and consequently serves to outline their respective position and arguments. It has been remarked by Broze that this part of story is concerned with the definition of *maat*, justice, with each deity contributing its own view and by contrast also defining its opposite.<sup>157</sup> Each of the two sections of this episode contain the keyword that highlights this: *mꜣꜥ.t* at *Con.* 1,4 and *grg* at *Con.* 1,11. An argument is made for both truth and falsehood, even though no party actually admits to be on the side of falsehood.

This is important particularly with regard to the first part of the episode which is given to Horus' supporters, which are the same time the explicit supporters of *maat*. It should be noted that at no point does the other side try to claim justice for their own point of view – strength seems to have its own merits.<sup>158</sup>

Each of the speeches in support of Horus' claim expresses the same idea in a different way. This in turn creates a mosaic of symbols around the central issue of what constitutes justice in this court case. In order to properly understand the function of this episode it

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<sup>156</sup> For the legal aspect of the tale and relation to historical judicial practice, see Schafik Allam, "Legal Aspects in the 'Contendings of Horus and Seth'", in Alan Lloyd, (ed.), *Studies in Pharaonic Religion and Society in Honour of J. Gwyn Griffiths*, London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1992, p. 137-145; Marcelo Campagno, "Fighting in the Water: On 'Ordeals', Kinship and State in the Contendings of Horus and Seth (Papyrus Chester Beatty I)", in Alessia Amenta, Maria Luiselli, Maria Sordi (eds.), *L'acqua nell'antico Egitto: Vita, rigenerazione, incantesimo, medicamento; Proceedings of the First International Conference for Young Egyptologists, Italy, Chianciano Terme, October 15-18*, Roma: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 2003, p. 117-124; Marcelo Campagno, "Judicial Practices, Kinship and the State in 'The Contendings of Horus and Seth'", *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 133 (2006), p. 20-33; Marcello Campagno, "Crime and Punishment in 'The Contendings of Horus and Seth'", in Christine Cardin, Jean-Claude Goyon, (eds.), *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Egyptologists: Grenoble, 6-12 septembre 2004*, vol 1., Leuven: Peeters, 2007, p. 263-270; Bernard Mathieu, "Les 'procès': Un genre littéraire de l'Égypte ancienne", in Eszter Bechtold, András Gulyás, Andrea Hasznos (eds.), *From Illahun to Djeme: Papers Presented in Honour of Ulrich Luft*, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2011, p. 161-166

<sup>157</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures d'Horus et Seth*, p. 25. Cf. the discussion in Nikolaos Lazaridis, "Ethics", in: Elizabeth Frood, Willeke Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2008, esp. p. 2. <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz000s3mhn>.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. chapter 5.7 below.

is necessary to realize how exactly each of the individual statements refers to the issue at hand by examining them in turn.

THEN spoke <sup>(1,4)</sup> Shu, son of Ra, before Atum, the great prince in Heliopolis:  
“Justice lords over power. Do it by saying: “Give the office to [Horus]!”” <sup>(1,5)</sup>

Shu takes the role of Horus’ counsel in this initial stage. It has been remarked by Campagno that the court has in fact the character of a “family tribunal”, with the solar god, the patriarch of the divine clan, serving as the judge.<sup>159</sup> This leaves Shu, a member of the 2<sup>nd</sup> divine generation according to the Heliopolitan tradition, as the most senior intercessor available and therefore most suitable to take up Horus’ case. It could also be argued that in his function as a separator of Earth and Sky he could best mediate between the heavenly sovereign and the earthly sovereign to be, Horus.<sup>160</sup>

Shu’s message is clear. Judging in Horus’ favour is the right thing to do, the opposite would constitute an inversion of the proper order of things, a threat which Neith reiterates later in the tale. What is remarkable is that here *maat* is not opposed by *grg* (“lie”) or *jsf.t* (“chaos”), but instead by *wsr* (“power”). The word *wsr* does not denote a negative quality. Therefore, the question is not which of the two – *maat* or *wsr* – is better,<sup>161</sup> but what their proper relationship might be, which is something that the story explores gradually. The present episode makes it clear that Horus is not a holder of *wsr*, something that was described above, while Seth is presented as the exact opposite, as evidenced by the frequently used title Great-of-Strength (*ꜥꜣ-ph.tj*).<sup>162</sup> Confident of his strength, he proposes to resolve the issue with violence. Re, considering the merit of giving the office of Osiris to Seth, does so with Seth Great-of-Power in mind. It is worth noting that Seth’s idea of trial by combat out is precisely what happens in the second part of the tale. Violence will be shown to have a place in politics, but not in such an indiscriminate.

[THEN] Thoht said to the [Ennead: “It is true] a million times.”

The translation requires a reminder that the term *mꜥꜣ.tw* means both “it is true” and “it is just”. According to Thoht, it is *both* correct and just that justice lords over power and it would be just to judge in Horus’ favour. *Maat* is both a description of how things are and

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<sup>159</sup> M. Campagno, “Judicial Practices, Kinship and the State in ‘The Contendings of Horus and Seth’”, p. 23.

<sup>160</sup> See e.g., Hans Bonnet, *Lexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin: Nikol, 2000, p. 685–689. See also the discussion in chapter 5.6.4 below.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. M. Campagno, “Judicial Practices, Kinship and the State in ‘The Contendings of Horus and Seth’”, p. 23.

<sup>162</sup> Cf. H. te Velde, *Seth*, p. 38, 132, 137; Eugene Cruz-Uribe, “*šth ꜥꜣ phty*: “Seth, God of Power and Might.””, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 45 (2009), p. 202.

an exhortation of how they should be. Thoth's role as an enforcer and/or guarantor is well established.<sup>163</sup> The epithet "Lord of *Maat*" was quite frequently attributed to him.<sup>164</sup>

The term Ennead (*psd.t*), Greek for a "group of nine", can refer not only to the Heliopolitan Ennead, the Sun god and the three successive divine generations, but also to the divine collective as a whole.<sup>165</sup> The *Contendings* seem to imply a council of some size which can express itself as a whole and whose individual members can state their own opinions which, however, can be taken as opinions of the whole collective (e.g., *Con.* 1,7-1,8 or *Con.* 1,8-1,9).

### 3.1.3 The Significance of Northwind (1,5-1,6)

THEN Isis uttered a great cry and was overjoyed.<sup>(1,6)</sup> She [went before the Lord of] All, saying: "Northwind, go west! Please Onuphris, l.p.h."

Isis' remark is a bit more challenging. Onuphris is a well-known epithet of Osiris, although it is not always written in a cartouche and with the royal honorific "l.p.h." following, as is the case here. Osiris' royal status is evidently emphasized.<sup>166</sup>

The word *mḥ.yt* "northwind" appears only once in the *Contendings* but is well attested from Egyptian sources. It is consequently not surprising that the term carries significant connotations which should be taken into account.

In the context of the passage, it would seem intuitive to associate it with Shu, a god of wind, which is actually the case in Ptolemaic inscriptions from Karnak and Edfu:

"Shu is there as the northwind, to unite with his (Osiris') nostrils, as is his task in the Horizon-of-Eternity (a tomb), together with Tefnut as flame, to burn up her adversaries as she does in Areq-heh, being Menet, the eye-of-Re with terrible pupil, Sekhmet the great, mistress of all Sekhmet goddesses..."<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Cf. e.g., Frédéric Servajean, "Lune ou soleil d'or?", p. 142-144; Martin Stadler, *Weiser und Wesir: Studien zu Vorkommen, Rolle und Wesen des Gottes Thot im ägyptischen Totenbuch*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009, p. 328-333.

<sup>164</sup> LÄ III, 1110-1119; Erik Hornung, "Ma'at: Gerechtigkeit für alle? Zur altägyptischen Ethik", *Eranos* 56 (1987): 385-427. See also the discussion in chapter 4.1 below.

<sup>165</sup> Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, London - Melbourne, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971, p. 221-223.

<sup>166</sup> See the discussion of royal emblems in chapter 3.1.4 below and of the kingship of Osiris in chapter 5.6.4.

<sup>167</sup> *Edfou VII*, 14,6-15,1. (Dieter Kurth, *Edfou VII: Die Inschriften des Tempels von Edfu*, vol. 2, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004, 861 p.)

“Words spoken by Shu, the son of Ra, the father of the gods, he who roams the sanctuary of the Weary-hearted One as a gentle northwind, filling his nose with its fragrance for him, at all times, every day.”<sup>168</sup>

Shu as the nourishing northwind is juxtaposed with Tefnut as the returning solar Eye, which in a way represents the South-wind, which is also the case in the Karnak inscription cited above.

There is more, however, beyond this relatively clear association. Northwind stands in the centre of a semantic complex bringing together diverse concepts of sweetness, nourishment and breathing. The positive nature of northwind relates to the natural environment of Egypt, where the cool and humid northern wind contrasts with the hot and dry winds coming from the south.<sup>169</sup> It can also be paired with the flow of the Nile as complementary elements representing north and south, also likely in reference to both serving as a source of marine propulsion:<sup>170</sup>

“The water (of the Nile) will flow for him to the north (and) the northwind will move for him to the south!”<sup>171</sup>

“(As) the water of the Nile flows downstream, and the northwind goes upstream: So every man (goes) in his (appointed) hour.”<sup>172</sup>



The word is present in several passages of the *Book of the Dead*, probably the most extensive source of religious beliefs contemporary to the *Contendings* and therefore also the source to be considered first. Most often it rendered as a means of transferring vital force closely associated with breathing, rebirth and also the quality of beauty:

“I am Thoth, who testifies Maat, who testifies Maat for the gods, (...) I have given beautiful breath of the north wind just as he (Osiris) came out of the body of the one who gave birth to him. I will cause Re to settle in Osiris, since Osiris is settled in Re. I will cause him to enter the secret cave to invigorate the heart of the Miserable One, the shielded *ba* in the west . . .”<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Constant de Wit, *Les inscriptions du temple d'Opet à Karnak*, vol. 1, Bruxelles: Édition de la Fondation égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1958, p. 106.

<sup>169</sup> Negative views of northwind are usually associated with bad weather, as the northwind often accompanied storms. See, for example, in *Lebensmüde* 72.

<sup>170</sup> Consequently, words denoting southwards upstream sailing are classified with Gardiner's sign P2, depicting a boat with a billowing sail: . Words denoting downstream sailing, on the other hand, typically use the classifier of a boat without a sail: , Gardiner's sign P3.

<sup>171</sup> *Papyrus Salt* 825, x+3,3. For the papyrus, see Philippe Derchain, *Le papyrus Salt 825 (B.M. 10051): Rituel pour la conservation de la vie en Égypte*, 2 vols., Bruxelles: Palais des Académies, 1965.

<sup>172</sup> *Harper Song of Inherchau* 7. For the text and this translation, see Miriam Lichtheim, “The Songs of the Harpers”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 4 (1945), p. 201.

<sup>173</sup> *Book of the Dead* chapter 182, 201–202, 203–205.

“I am Thoth, lord of Maat who justifies the deprived and who watches over the oppressed, those impoverished that are in his possession. (...) I have given breath to Onuphris, the beautiful true breath of the north wind when it/he comes out of his mother's womb. I have let it enter the hidden cave, so that lives the heart of the weary one, Onuphris, son of Nut, justified.”<sup>174</sup>

In these examples, it is Thoth that presents Osiris with the vitalising power of northwind, restoring him to life. However, he is not the originator of this substance. Instead, it is Atum, while Thoth serves as the mediator between Osiris and the solar god:

“Adoration of Osiris . . . by the Osiris NN, justified (the deceased), he says: I come to you, son of Nut, Osiris, ruler of infinity. I belong to the entourage of Thoth and am pleased with everything he has done. He brings you pleasant breath to your nose, life and well-being to your beautiful face, the north wind that has come from Atum to your nostrils, lord of the Necropolis.”

““Name my name,” says the wind, “because you want to sail with me! ‘Northwind that came from Atum to the nose of Chontamenti (Osiris)’ is your name.”<sup>175</sup>

Northwind seems to be most frequently attested in offering texts known as *ḥtp-dj-nswt* formulae, due to their common incipit: “An offering which the king gives.”<sup>176</sup>

“An offering which the king gives (*ḥtp dj nswt*) of the living Aten who illuminates every land with his beauty: may he give the fragrant breezes of the northwind, (along with) consumption of offerings and endowing with provisions...”<sup>177</sup>

“I am sated by following Him (Akhenaten), the breath I live by, my Northwind, my millions of Nile floods in the daily flow. Nefer-cheperu-re-wa-en-re (throne name of Akhenaten), may you grant me a long lifetime in your favour.”<sup>178</sup>

The notable difference between these two sources and the those mentioned before is the connection with food.<sup>179</sup> This likely reflects is the earlier usage of northwind as an article

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<sup>174</sup> *Book of the Dead* 183, 42–45.

<sup>175</sup> *Book of the Dead* chapter 99, 28–29.

<sup>176</sup> For a concise study including bibliography of relevant works, see Alexander Ilin-Tomich, “Changes in the *ḥtp-dj-nswt* Formula in the Late Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 138 (2011): 20–34. For a more detailed and recent study, see Günther Lapp, *Opfer und Opferformel*, Basel: Orientverlag, 2023, 448 p.

<sup>177</sup> *Text of the Scarab of Apy*. Translation of William Murnane, *Texts from the Amarna Period in Egypt*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995, p. 128, with modifications.

<sup>178</sup> From the tomb of Eje, entrance hall, eastern wall. Norman Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El Amarna*, vol. 6, London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1908, p. 28–29, pl. 25.

<sup>179</sup> The verb *ssꜣi* ‘to sate’ used in Eje’s inscription may take on the meaning “to satisfy” beyond the context of ingestion, but is itself firmly associated with food, the derived substantive *ssꜣ* meaning

of the normalized sequences of offerings on earlier funerary stelas, characterized by the familiar *hṯp-di-nswt* opening formula. Compared to the Amarna sources earlier formulae mentioning the northwind devote significantly more energy into the physical needs of the deceased, enumerating the various goods the beneficiary may live off:

“[A sacrifice given by the king ... May he give a sacrifice of the dead (consisting of) ... ..] that gives the heaven that creates the earth that the Nile brings [as his beautiful sacrifice and the sweet breath of the North wind for the ka of the first <lector> priest of Horus of Behdet, Juf, called Jeb (?).”<sup>180</sup>

“A sacrifice given by the king, Ptah, Sokar and Osiris, the lord of Busiris, the great god, the lord of Abydos. May they give a sacrifice (consisting of) bread, beer, cattle, poultry, frankincense, anointing oil, linen, going out and descending into the necropolis, the sweet breath of the north wind.”<sup>181</sup>

On the inscription of the *Obelisk of Amenemhat* the material boons give way to more abstract goods. The focal idea remains, however. It is the King that provides northwind and other means of restoring life, it is on him that the dead and buried may depend, as was the case during their life on earth:

“May he give the sweet air of the northwind, transfiguration, power and justification for the ka of the great of the Ten of Upper Egypt, Henu, the justified, the Lord of the Providence, whom bore the Lady of the House of Renefanch, the Great of the Ten of Upper Egypt, Bembu, the Justified, the Lord of Serenity.”<sup>182</sup>

Summarizing the sources cited in this subchapter, we can argue that by the beginning of the Amarna period, northwind was an established motif of the language of offering formulae, a situation apparently not interrupted by the events of Akhenaten’s reign, and has become interwoven with as solar symbolism as an element of funerary beliefs.<sup>183</sup> The resulting complex of the older notions of vitalisation through the beauty and sweetness of food and air taken together with the idea of rebirth through the power of the eternally

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“provisions” (*Wb* 4, 275.7) and *ssꜣi* itself often using the determinative for activities of the mouth. This particular writing is without a determinative but in several other passages in the same inscription the determinative is used.

<sup>180</sup> From the *Stele of Juf* (Kairo TR 9/6/18/26), x+1-4. Sabine Kubisch, *Lebensbilder der 2. Zwischenzeit: Biographische Inschriften der 13.-17. Dynastie*, Berlin - New York: de Gruyter, 2008, p. 244-247.

<sup>181</sup> From the *Stele of Djab* (Louvre C 41), 1-3. S. Kubisch, *Lebensbilder der 2. Zwischenzeit*, p. 298-301.

<sup>182</sup> Detlef Franke, “Middle Kingdom Hymns and Other Sundry Religious Texts: An Inventory”, Sibylle Meyer (ed.), *Egypt - Temple of the Whole World / Ägypten - Tempel der gesamten Welt: Studies in Honour of Jan Assmann*, Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 106-107.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. the discussion in Jan Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom: Re, Amun and the Crisis of Polytheism*, London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1995, p. 128 ff.



renewing life source of the sun that forms the theological environment in which the cited chapters of *Book of the Dead* and the *Contendings* emerged.<sup>184</sup>

By the time *Book of the Dead* began to appear in larger numbers, northwind was an established symbol of royal guarantee of vitality to the deceased as part of the *hṯp-dī-nswt* formula which articulates that in the end all funerary provisions, and by extension afterlife itself, is a boon that the King graciously provides.<sup>185</sup> In practice, this was done through appointed agents and the King consequently functioned as a more distant original source of a substance whose proximal source was the mediating priest.<sup>186</sup>

These considerations show that the use of Northwind in the earlier *hṯp-dī-nswt* formulae mirrors that in the discussed passages of the *Book of the Dead*, provided the shift in register is considered. Whereas the offering texts situate the described processes mostly into the human realm with the primary actor being the deceased and the king, with the possible addition of a funerary deity such as Osiris or Anubis, in the *Book of the Dead* the related events unfold in a divine environment inhabited by a multitude of gods and goddesses as even the human deceased takes on a divine identity as Osiris (of) NN.<sup>187</sup> Through this symbolic shift, the idea of northwind as an offering provided by the King via a mediator transformed into a more abstract vitalising force generated by Atum, a royal figure in the pantheon, and transferred by Thoth, the archetypal mediator. The association with breath and sweetness translated into the language of the *Book of the Dead* without visible change, the two concepts apparently suitable for both symbolic environments.

This interconnection allows the idea presented at the beginning of this subchapter to fully unfold. The *Book of the Dead* testifies that Isis' speech is not random and indeed that it finds a number of parallels where northwind is associated with sweetness and pointed to Osiris. It also indicates that Atum is the intended recipient of her speech as it is from him that the northwind often issues in other texts. What the other sources also show is that northwind is a boon that is the king's to give. Here it should be noted that since almost all

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<sup>184</sup> For a description of North-wind as negative phenomenon, see Benoît Lurson, "Du chaos à la métaphore: Le régime des vents dans Néfertiti VIe-VIg", *Lingua Aegyptia* 30 (2022): 201–222.

<sup>185</sup> See the detailed exploration of this notion using the example of Ramesses II in Jan-Michael Dahms, Martin Pehal, Harco Willems, "Ramses II Helps the Dead: An Interpretation of Book of the Dead Supplementary Chapter 166", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 100 (2014): 395–420.

<sup>186</sup> H. Hays, "Between Identity and Agency in Ancient Egyptian Ritual", p. 17.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. László Kákosy, "Osiris of NN", in Mamdouh Eldamaty, May Trad (eds.), *Egyptian Museum Collections around the World*, vol. 1, Cairo: Supreme Council of Antiquities, 2002, p. 629–636; Mark Smith, "Osiris NN or Osiris of NN?", in Burkhard Backes, Irmtraut Munro, Simone Stöhr (eds.), *Totenbuch-Forschungen: Gesammelte Beiträge des 2. Internationalen Totenbuch-Symposiums, Bonn, 25. bis 29. September 2005*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006, p. 325–337. For a more detailed study, see Mark Smith, *Following Osiris: Perspectives on the Osirian Afterlife from Four Millennia*, Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, xxviii + 635 p. See also the discussion of the *akh* in chapter 5.5.2 below.

the Middle Kingdom attestations and a significant part of New Kingdom ones are offering formulae, the idea of royal donation must have been firmly ingrained in the concept of northwind and forms a significant part of its semantic field.

Coming back to the *Contendings*, we see that from the perspective granted by this improved understanding of Isis' remark does Shu's next utterance make sense not so much as a separate statement but rather as a reply:

[THEN] (1,7) spoke Shu, son [of Ra]: "Giving the Eye is right by the Ennead."

Recalling the discussion of the structural character of Egyptian symbols of the previous chapter one could argue that both Isis' and Shu's remark employ the loaded language of ritual offerings to argue their case. The specific matter of justice, namely Horus' right to his inheritance, which is superficially rendered as a village squabble for inheritance, is marked as an event of greater significance.<sup>188</sup> The interlocutors present the restitution of Horus as akin to universally accepted expressions of cosmic order: the superiority of rule of divinely ordained law (*maat*) over a disorderly strength-based society and the central importance of Egyptian funerary rites. It also presents Horus in a position of need comparable to that of the beneficiary of the ritual offering, both having the same position in the same structural relationship: God – NEEDS – object. The story binds the fate of the inheriting son and the deceased father around the unifying symbol of the Eye of Horus: one's justification in life is paralleled by the other's justification in death. Only an empowered son can perform the filial tasks needed to maintain a favourable afterlife for his father and only a father empowered in such manner can support his son's earthly rights. In short, the self-sustaining cycle of royal legitimacy is invoked.

### 3.1.4 Emblems of Kingship (1,7-1,8)

The Lord of All [said] this: "What is this planning of yours on [your] <sup>(1,8)</sup> own?"

THEN spoke [Onuris]: "[May] he [bring] the cartouche to Horus and let the White crown [be placed] upon his head."

The final opening remark in favour of Horus is difficult to appreciate due to the lacuna that is obscuring the speaker's identity. Gardiner reconstructed the name of Onuris solely based on the size of the lacuna, finding that the name as rendered later in the text fits best

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<sup>188</sup> Campagno stresses the difference between the official state trials and the rendition of the *Contendings*, which reflect a rather rustic idea of justice as attested from Deir el-Medina sources. See works by the author cited above and Marcelo Campagno, "Two Observations on the Tales of The *Contendings* of Horus and Seth and Truth and Falsehood", *Trabajos de Egiptología - Papers on Ancient Egypt* 4 (2005), p. 19-30. For trials at Deir el-Medina, see also Christopher Eyre, "Crime and Adultery in Ancient Egypt", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 70 (1984), p. 102; Andrea McDowell, *Village Life in Ancient Egypt: Laundry Lists and Love Songs*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 171.

into the damaged part of the manuscript.<sup>189</sup> Sadly, this means that the reconstruction will remain relatively tentative.

The presence of Onuris in this passage would be curious, although not ill-fitting. Known as Onuris to the Greeks, the Egyptian name of the god was *in.i-hr.t*, “he who brings back the distant (female) one”,<sup>190</sup> which is usually rendered as Anhur or Inheret when the Greek version is not used. Various texts allude to a myth in which he tracks down the lion goddess Mehit in Nubia and brings her to Egypt as his wife.<sup>191</sup> This event is the basis for the name of Onuris name, and some sources identify the story with the myth of the Distant Goddess. In it the Eye of Ra – a solar deity taking the form of several goddesses in various renderings – runs away from her father Ra, who sends one of the gods to bring her back. In some versions it may be Thoth or Shu.<sup>192</sup> In the version with Anhur and Mehit, Anhur can be syncretized with Shu,<sup>193</sup> while Mehit is equated with Hathor-Tefnut.<sup>194</sup> Vandier briefly considers the idea of Onuris being an epithet of either Thoth or Shu but decides instead that the name belongs to a god “who is never named.”<sup>195</sup>

Rather than treat gods as discrete entities with fixed names to whom epithets can be attributed, we can approach Onuris in a way that is consistent with Goebis’ model described above, which focuses on structural properties of divine names in each separate source and evaluates how these names could be used interchangeably in expression of a single structural relationship. Since Shu and Tefnut occasionally symbolized the sun and moon, Mehit could similarly embody the full moon. Consequently, her restoration to her

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<sup>189</sup> A. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories*, p. 37a.

<sup>190</sup> LGG I, p. 378. See also Walid Shaikh Al Arab, “Le dieu Onouris”, *Cahiers de Recherches de l’Institut de Papyrologie et d’Égyptologie de Lille* 30 (2013–2015): 249–262.

Since the name of Onuris can be written in an abbreviated way as  $\text{𓂏}^{\text{hr}}$ , we could actually read it in the context of this tale as the “Bringer of Horus (alternate writing)”. The significance of the alternate writing will be discussed in detail later, but it is very interesting to see Horus possibly paralleled with the returning Eye goddess, especially given the way in which both the actions of the Eye goddess and the establishment of earthly kingship have a common origin in the *Book of the Heavenly Cow*. It will be shown how the punitive and repressive character of kingship is accentuated in the passages where Horus is denoted with alternate writing. See chapter 5.2 below.

<sup>191</sup> Hermann Junker, *Die Onurislegende*, Wien: Alfred Hölder, 1917, p. 5–7.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. the discussion in chapter 3.3 below.

<sup>193</sup> LGG I, p. 380–381.

<sup>194</sup> Geraldine Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Goddesses, and Traditions of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press. p. 71–73, 177.

<sup>195</sup> Jacques Vandier, “Le Dieu Shu dans le Papyrus Jumilhac”, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo* 15 (1957), p. 269. Cf. H. Junker, *Onuris-legende*, p. 271–272.

rightful position could symbolize the reinstatement of the Eye of Horus, which serves as both a lunar symbol and a representation of divine harmony within the universe.<sup>196</sup>

It is not clear whether a connection between the Eye of Horus and the myth of Onuris and Mehit can be assumed.<sup>197</sup> Onuris' name alone seems to localize the god alongside Thoth in the same category defined by the structural relationship of Helper—BRINGS—Object.<sup>198</sup> It is hard to imagine that the appearance of Onuris, who is almost literally the bringer of the Eye, just a few sentences after Thoth is introduced as the bringer of the Eye, would be unnoticed by the ancient reader.

Both the items that Onuris proposes to be given to Horus are emblems of royalty, and the statement is clearly in support of Horus' claim. This is actually the first time the matter of kingship is brought up, and it is also a good reminder that most of the story takes place in a pastoral environment upon which the grandeur of royal life only rarely intrudes. This can be ascribed to the mimetic aspect of the tale, which renders the royal topoi in a satirical manner, but also to the fact that the royal function was considered eminently pastoral, hence the rendition of Osiris as a herdsman later in the tale.<sup>199</sup>

First comes the cartouche.<sup>200</sup> By the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty, an official royal titulary composed of five royal names was developed.<sup>201</sup> Two of the five names forming Egyptian royal titulary were

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<sup>196</sup> Cf. the discussion and sources cited in Barbara Richter, "On the Heels of the Wandering Goddess", in Horst Beinlich, Monica Dolinska (eds.), *8th Egyptological Tempeltagung: Interconnections between Temples*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012, p. 159.

<sup>197</sup> Cf. LÄ IV, 573.

<sup>198</sup> For Thoth as a protagonist of the myth of the returning Eye-goddess see Martin Stadler, *Weiser und Wesir*, p. 235 ff.

<sup>199</sup> Topos refers to a recurring literary theme or motif, often employed as a rhetorical convention or formula. In contrast, mimesis involves the portrayal of elements from the actual world, particularly human actions, within the realms of literature and art. This device has been popularized in Egyptology in Antonio Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis: Zum Ausländer in der ägyptischen Literatur*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988, 125 p. Cf. chapter 6.3 and chapter 6.3 below.

<sup>200</sup> For an overview of the topic and relevant literature, see Cathie Spieser, "Cartouche", in Elizabeth Froid, Willeke Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2010, Accessed at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3g726122>.

<sup>201</sup> Alan Lloyd, *Ancient Egypt: State and Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 65. For a recent treatment of topic of royal titulary, see Ronald Leprohon, *The Great Name: Ancient Egyptian Royal Titulary*. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013, 292 p. See also Jürgen von Beckerath, *Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen*, München - Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1984, 334 p.; Rolf Gundlach, *Die Königsideologie Sesostris' I. anhand seiner Titulatur*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008, esp. p. 3–15; Rolf Gundlach, "'Schöpfung' und 'Königtum' als Zentralbegriffe der ägyptischen Königstitulaturen im 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.", in Nicole Kloth, Karl Martin, Eva Pardey (eds.), *Es werde niedergelegt als Schriftstück: Festschrift für Hartwig Altenmüller zum 65. Geburtstag*, Hamburg: Buske, 2003, p. 179–192; Siegfried Schott, *Zur Krönungstitulatur der Pyramidenzeit*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Rupprecht, 1956, 83 p.; Richard Wilkinson, "The Horus Name and the Form and Significance of the Serekh in the Royal Egyptian Titulary", *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 15 (1985): 98–104.

written using the cartouche,<sup>202</sup> which in the form of a *šn*-ring (Ω) served as an emblem and amulet of enveloping and protection.<sup>203</sup> At the same time, it symbolized “all that the sun encircles” and as such it represented the totality of the world and the king’s central position in it.<sup>204</sup>

The two names using the cartouche are today referred to as Nomen or Birth name and Pronomen or Throne Name. The former is understood to be the name given to the crown prince at birth.<sup>205</sup> It would be prefaced with the title “son of Re” and circumscribed with a cartouche during his accession to the throne.<sup>206</sup> This is also the name that we use today to refer to Egyptian kings and to which Roman numerals are added to distinguish between the various holders of the same name.<sup>207</sup> The Throne name, on the other hand, was the last to be presented to the king during coronation and is assumed to have been the most important of the five since from the Middle Kingdom, often being used if the king was referred to using only one of his names.<sup>208</sup>

Presentation of the full titulary, cartouches included, was part of the coronation ritual, which is also the context of the present passage.<sup>209</sup> Two New Kingdom sources provide some hints as to the process itself, first of which refers to the coronation of Thutmose III:

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<sup>202</sup> C. Spieser, “Cartouche”, p. 3–4.

<sup>203</sup> For cartouche as a *šn*-ring, see Winfried Barta, “Der Königsring als Symbol zyklischer Wiederkehr”, *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 98 (1970): 5–16. See also C. Spieser, “Cartouche”, p. 1. Cf. the discussion of the *šn* and the ouroboros motif in chapter 3.1.1 above.

We may also cite the practice of using the *šn* ring to encircle the inkwells on scribal palettes, which emerged during 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty. See Jenny Cashman, “The Scribal Palette as an Elite Gift in New Kingdom Egypt”, in Panagiotis Kousoulis, Nikolaos Lazaridis (eds.), *Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Egyptologists: University of the Aegean, Rhodes. 22–29 May 2008*, vol. 1, Leuven: Peeters, 2015, p. 617.

<sup>204</sup> Nicolas Grimal, *Les termes de la propagande royale égyptienne: de la XIXe dynastie à la conquête d’Alexandre*, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1986, p. 57–60.

<sup>205</sup> C. Spieser, “Cartouche”, p. 2.

<sup>206</sup> Cf. Jürgen von Beckerath, *Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen*, p. 38.

<sup>207</sup> R. Leprohon, *The Great Name*, p. 18–19.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.


<sup>209</sup> Notably, the individual part of a royal titulary could be changed during religious events such as the Sed festival, whose function was to restore and aging king’s vitality and hence the capacity to exercise this office. The introduction of new names can be understood as the revival of the old king into a new young one, creating a fiction of a fresh start comparable to actual succession by a new sovereign. Cf. R. Leprohon, *The Great Name*, p. 12, 109. See also Bengt Birkstam, “Given Life Like Re Eternally – A Royal Epitheton”, in Sture Brunnsaker, Hans-Åke Nordström (eds.), *From the Gustavianum Collections in Uppsala*, Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis 1974, p. 20; Georges Daressy, “L’obélisque de Qaha”, *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l’Égypte* 19 (1920): 131–135.

“[He (Amun-Re) established] my appearances and set a titulary (*nhb.t*) for me himself.”<sup>210</sup>

The second source, the *Coronation Inscription of Hatshepsut*, shows some of the practical side of this ceremony. Where the previous text presents *divine revelation*, the following speaks of *divine inspiration*:<sup>211</sup>

“His Majesty (Thutmose I) commanded that lector-priests be brought in to inscribe her (Hatshepsut’s) Great Names, (at the time) of receiving her titulary of Dual King<sup>212</sup> . . . They then proclaimed her names of Dual King, since, indeed the god had brought about (his) manifestations in their minds, exactly as he had done previously.”<sup>213</sup>

The proposal to give the cartouche to Horus can consequently be related of the earthly coronation. The presentation of the royal name, while involving some human actors in the form of the lector-priests, is in the end an act of divine investiture, wherein the solar god assigns a new identity to the new king as ruler of all and his son. Perhaps one could now empathise a bit more with the sun-god’s angered reaction, seeing as the god would have surely appreciated some say in the question of his own paternity.

The other item intended for Horus is the *hd.t* , the White crown. Its importance for the story as a framing element has already been established in the previous chapters, although its symbolic overtones have not yet been discussed.

Crowns are a prolific group of insignia. Nine types of crowns or headdresses are attested throughout the span of Egyptian history and this number continued to rise until Greco-Roman times when it reached staggering highs.<sup>214</sup> The word used for crowns, *h<sup>c</sup>.w*<sup>215</sup> is derived from the verbal stem *h<sup>c</sup>i*, meaning “to appear, to shine”<sup>216</sup> and is used for royal presentation both during royal investiture and ritual appearance during festivals.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> *Urk.* IV, 160: 10–11. See also Bertha Porter, Rosalind Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings II: Theban Temples*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929, p. 106 (room 24, no. 328, plan 12).

<sup>211</sup> Marie-Ange Bonheme, “Les designations de la ‘titulature’ royal au Nouvel Empire.”, *Bibliothèque d’Étude* 98 (1978), p. 12. Cf. the discussion in Ronald Leprohon, “The Royal Titulary in the 18th Dynasty: Change and Continuity”, *Journal of Egyptian History* 3 (2010): 7–45.

<sup>212</sup> *Urk.* IV, 261: 2–4.

<sup>213</sup> *Urk.* IV, 261: 11–13.

<sup>214</sup> See Katja Goebis, “Crowns”, in Donald Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 321–326.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. *Con.* 13,1.

<sup>216</sup> *Wb* 3, 239.4–241.2.

<sup>217</sup> Donald Redford, *History and Chronology of the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt: Seven Studies*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967, p. 4–27.

Incidentally, the same word is used for the rising of celestial bodies and correspondingly associated with a number of deities, which in turn emphasizes the cosmic aspect of kingship when the earthly ruler receives these crowns.<sup>218</sup> Consequently, Horus is intended by Onuris to be crowned the same way as a human king would with the crown being bestowed by the gods, as is the case in the elaborate presentation of Hatshepsut's coronation in the Red Chapel of Karnak.<sup>219</sup>

Each of the crowns carries a different set of symbolic connotations that can be inferred from the way they appear in earlier sources. The White crown is well attested from both textual and pictorial evidence throughout Egyptian history. It is obvious that the crown is a symbol of (royal) authority, so it requires no explanation why exactly a crown is used here in this function. Therefore, the main question is why the White crown in particular was employed by the author of the story.

The White Crown is often called the Crown of Upper Egypt and is associated with the titular goddess of Upper Egypt, Nekhbet, with whom it may be directly identified. As such, the White Crown can be a symbol of rulership, but also a maternal figure of nurturing and protection.<sup>220</sup> In funerary contexts, it is often encountered as an article that is desirable for the deceased and is quite prominent as such in the Pyramid Texts and the Coffin Texts. Goebis, who has published an extensive study of crowns in funerary literature, has found that the functions of the White Crown largely mirror those of the Red crown. The only significant symbolic facets of that are specific for each of the crowns relate to their differing colours. Where the Red crown carries connotations of violence, the White crown is a significant lunar symbol.<sup>221</sup> This connection that will be expanded upon in chapter 3.9, where the birth of the “disc of gold” will be discussed.

### 3.1.5 Seth's Proposition (1,9-1,11)

Then Lord of All fell silent for <sup>(1,9)</sup> a long time as he was angry with the Ennead.

THEN spoke Seth, son of Nut: “Throw him outside <sup>(1,10)</sup> with me and I will have you [see] my hand as he is seized of his hand before the Ennead, since no one knows [any other] way <sup>(1,11)</sup> of getting rid of him.”

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<sup>218</sup> K. Goebis, “Crowns”, p. 24–25.

<sup>219</sup> Henri Chevrier, Pierre Lacau, *Une Chapelle d'Hatshepsout à Karnak*, vol. 1, Cairo: Service des antiquités de l'Égypte, 1977, p. 237–244.

<sup>220</sup> R. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, p. 213–214. C. Leitz, LGG IV, p. 301–303. See also Jean Capart, *Quelques observations sur la déesse d'El-Kab*, Bruxelles: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1946, p. 1–15.

<sup>221</sup> Katja Goebis, *Crowns in Egyptian Funerary Literature: Royalty, Rebirth, and Destruction*, Oxford: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 2008, p. 140 ff.

THEN Thoth said to him: “Will we not know this falsehood? Will the office of<sup>(1,12)</sup> Osiris be given to Seth while [his] son stands?”

The first spoken line of Seth is as brash as it is direct, and he immediately proposes a violent solution to the issue at hand. This overt display of aggression reflects his boastful character and confidence in his own physical strength.<sup>222</sup> It is clear that very little respect is shown to either the other litigant, Horus, or, indeed for due legal process.<sup>223</sup> While many of the Sethian qualities like strength, virility and confidence were acceptable and sought after in some contexts, the representation of Seth here shows how disruptive to the normal order of things are in the extreme.<sup>224</sup> The vitality of the god, which was a key element of royal power, is present in isolation, un-tempered and raw. It will remain a threat to the protagonists of the narrative so long as it remains so.

Here, it should be emphasized that violence seems to have been an accepted part of Egyptian culture and one of the cornerstones of royal power:

“Subjugation of the forces of evil and chaos (often as personified by enemy soldiers) was integral to the ideology of the kingship in ancient Egypt. Anyone who threatened *ma’at* had to be punished or eliminated to restore balance. In such cases, violence would be viewed as not only the legitimate and right thing to do, but the absolute duty of the king to pre-serve the world and Egyptian society.”<sup>225</sup>

The cosmic order was naturally manifested not only on the level of ancient nations but also pertained to relationships that constituted Egyptian society. Violence, including physical punishment, was therefore very common.<sup>226</sup> Lower ranking individuals could be

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<sup>222</sup> See H. te Velde, *Seth*, p. 23–24. For Seth as the paragon of boasting and aggression, see esp. Niv Allon, “Seth is Baal – Evidence from the Egyptian Script”, *Ägypten und Levante* 17 (2007), p. 16–19.

<sup>223</sup> Campagno relates Seth’s lack of humility before the court directly to its rustic character, arguing that such proceedings lacked the coercive capacity of state courts. We could also observe that Seth immediately submits himself to the court’s judgement once state authority is established with the ascension of Horus. For the time being, however, Seth’s innate strength allows him to establish a coercive capacity of his own. See M. Campagno, “Judicial Practices, Kinship and the State in ‘The Contendings of Horus and Seth’”, p. 25.

<sup>224</sup> Cf. the discussion in chapter 5.7.1 below.

<sup>225</sup> Roselyn Campbell, “Smiting Pharaohs: The Poetics of Violence and Power in Ancient Egypt”, in Anna Osterholtz (ed.), *The Poetics of Processing: Memory Formation, Identity, and the Handling of the Dead*, Denver: University Press of Colorado, 2020, p. 125.

<sup>226</sup> For an overview, see Kerry Muhlestein, “Violence”, in Elizabeth Froom, Willeke Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2015. Accessed at <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/21198/21198/zz002k6dfb>. See also the discussion of kingship and violence in chapter 5.7 below.



subjected to arbitrary beatings by their superiors with little hope of legal recourse<sup>227</sup> and physical punishments for seemingly minor infractions were the standard.<sup>228</sup> The threat of physical violence is therefore less out of the ordinary than it might be in today's court of law, but it also shows that Seth considers Horus to be his inferior. Later in the story Seth is called Horus' senior and it indeed was the prerogative of the older generation to inflict violence on the younger.<sup>229</sup> The proposition of Seth is therefore not necessarily just an expression of his aggressive nature, but also of his perceived social superiority over Horus, who is not deserving of the level of respect that would be appropriate to a social peer, but is instead seen as a child whom Seth can beat at his leisure.

This section of the text also highlights that the beginning of the story takes place in an interior, although it is not clear of what. The story is not very informative regarding the physical environs in which the plot takes place. When the letter of Neith reaches the Ennead, they are feasting in a "broadhall" (*wsh.t*), a structure often described as the place where royal offerings were given, such as in *Pyramid Texts* Spell 468:

"Ho, NN! I am Thoth. A king-given offering: your bread, your beer, and these your two loaves of bread that have come from Horus in the broad-hall have been given to you. He will content your heart with them, Pepi, for the course of eternity."<sup>230</sup>

Such reference is symbolically aligned with the motif of northwind, but the word also recalls the name of the court where the so-called negative confession was heard in the Book of the Dead chapter 125:<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Andrea McDowell, *Jurisdiction in the Workmen's Community of Deir el-Medina*, Leiden: Nederlands Instituut Voor Het Nabije Oosten, 1990, p. 226–227. For an example, see Jaroslav Černý, "Papyrus Salt 124 (Brit. Mus. 10055)", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 15 (1929): 243–258.

<sup>228</sup> See the discussion in K. Muhlestein, "Violence", p. 2.

<sup>229</sup> For the role of violence in education, which describes how schoolboys could also be beaten for faulty scribal work see *Papyrus Anastasi V* in Ricardo Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, London: Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 254–58.

<sup>230</sup> See also PT 437 § 807a–c; PT 534 § 1266b; PT 667A § 1949e; and various private inscriptions.

<sup>231</sup> For negative confession, see Martin Stadler, "Judgment after Death (Negative Confession)", in Jacco Dieleman, Willeke Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles, 2008. Accessed at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/07s1t6kj>. For a more recent study, see Jiří Janák, "Interrogation before Osiris: Judgment of the Dead or Immigration Interview?", in Victoria Almansa-Villatoro, Mark Lehner, Silvia Štubňová Nigrelli (eds.), *In the House of Heqanakht: Text and Context in Ancient Egypt; Studies in Honor of James P. Allen*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, p. 450–462. See also Miguel Molinero Polo, "The Broad Hall of the Two Maats: Spell BD 125 in Karakhamun's Main Burial Chamber", in Julia Budka, Kenneth Griffin Elena Pischikova (eds.), *Thebes in the First Millennium BC*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, p. 269–293.

“Greetings, (you) in this Hall of the Two Maats (*wsh.t tn n.t m3̣.tj*). There is no lie in your bodies, (you) who live on *maat*, who feed on *maat* in the presence of Horus in his solar disk!”<sup>232</sup>

Later, at *Con.* 2,7, the broad-hall Truth is One (*ẉ-m3̣.t*) is mentioned as one of the courts where Horus has already been justified against Seth. Even though *wsx.t* is a frequent enough term in New Kingdom and was used to denote a variety of rather profane institutions and structures, we could still consider whether a connection between the significant broadhall of chapter 125 and those of the *Contendings* would have been perceived by ancient audiences.

### 3.2 Correspondence with Neith (1,12 – 3,13)

#### 3.2.1 An Aporia (1,12-2,2)

THEN Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon <sup>(2,1)</sup> became very angry, since the heart of Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon would grant the office to Seth Great-of-Power, son of Nut. Then Onuris uttered a great cry towards the Ennead, <sup>(2,2)</sup> saying: “What is it that we do?”

What seems like a clear reference to the sun-god’s emotional state, is in fact a relatively complicated issue. The Egyptian phrase is somewhat ambiguous, and we are not certain as to which literary tools the author may have had in store for his tale. Broze proposed a possible reading of “Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon became really angry. Could it be that he would rather grant the office to Seth . . .?”<sup>233</sup> Such a reading, while interesting, would however stand out in the story. The narrator of the *Contendings* is in general an omniscient one. The story is related from a position of certainty and Broze’s reading, while elegant, would imply that the narrator intentionally obscures or doubts the motivation of its character, something that he does nowhere else in the text. We can be quite confident that Re is openly on Seth’s side. When characters are described as having emotions in the *Contendings*, they almost always express them. We can assume the same in this passage. Onuris’ reply makes sense only if Re’s anger is visible and its cause transparent. Generally speaking, characters in this tale are almost always aware of all that the narrator is aware of, unless it is specifically pointed out that they are ignorant or deceived.

Onuris’ frustration tells us that the dissenting opinion of Re is a clear obstacle to the proceedings. Obviously, Re is not the only decision-maker here. If that were the case, Seth would have had the victory.<sup>234</sup> What the court seems to aspire to is a universal assent,

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<sup>232</sup> *Book of the Dead* chapter 125, 66.

<sup>233</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 25.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

which, as the failed coronation at *Con.* 8,6, shows needs to include Seth as well. The foundation of monarchy is surprisingly democratic.

### 3.2.2 Appeal to Banebjede (2,2-2,7)

THEN Atum, the great prince in Helipolis, said: “Have one call to Banebjede, the great living <sup>(2,3)</sup> god, for he shall judge the two youths!”

THEN was brought Banebjede, the great god in midst of Setit, before Atum and Ptah <sup>(2,4)</sup> Tatenen. He said to them: “Judge the two youths, get rid of them now, so that the everyday quarrels cease!”

THEN <sup>(2,5)</sup> Banebjede, the great living god, answered, saying to him: “Let us not make plans without knowing! Send a letter <sup>(2,6)</sup> to Neith the great, divine mother. That, which she says, we will do.”

THEN the Ennead said to Banebjede, <sup>(2,7)</sup> the great living god: “They were judged once in the broad-hall Truth-is-One.”

Having reached a deadlock in its deliberations, the divine tribunal looks to outside help. The choice of Banebjede may seem curious, but it becomes more transparent when the circular nature of the narrative is recalled. In the first half of the story, the intercession of Banebjede is followed by an appeal to Neith. In the latter half, the second appeal to Neith, this time performed by Horus in person, is followed by the communication with Osiris, whose advice helps to bring the tale to its conclusion.



This connection of Banebjede and Osiris is supported by theological considerations, since Banebjede was considered to be a *ba* of Osiris.<sup>235</sup> The *ba* is a very complex religious concept, but in relation to a deceased entity, like Osiris, the *ba* is the aspect of being that is capable of leaving the body to interact with the world of the living.<sup>236</sup> Egyptians not only had a deep affection for puns, but were firmly convinced that the similarity in sounds within language held profound significance, which lead to puns being common

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<sup>235</sup> Dimitri Meeks, *Mythes et légendes du Delta d'après le papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.84*, Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 2006, p. 263.

For a recent study of the god Banebjede, see Walid Shaikh Al Arab, “The Iconography of the God Banebdjedet”, *International Journal of Heritage, Tourism and Hospitality* 7 (2013): 64–89.

<sup>236</sup> See Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005, esp. p. 87 ff.; Salima Ikram, *Death and Burial in Ancient Egypt*, Harlow: Longman, 2003, p. 23 ff. Some recent studies on the topic include Emanuele Casini, “The *bA* over Time: Continuity of Concept, Discontinuity in the Figurative Art”, in Andrea Kahlbacher, Elisa Priglinger (eds.), *Tradition and Transformation in Ancient Egypt: Proceedings of the Fifth International Congress for Young Egyptologists, 15–19 September, 2015, Vienna*, Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2018, p. 215–224; Hiroshi Suita, “Ba, ka, and akh Concepts in the Old Kingdom, Ancient Egypt”, in Hiroshi Suita (ed.), *Study of Egyptian Monuments*, vol. 1, Osaka: Egyptian-Japanese Mission for the Mastaba Idout, Kansai University, 2022, p. 25–82.

occurrence in religious texts.<sup>237</sup> In this case, the word *ba* serves as a prime example of this linguistic ambivalence. It carries a dual meaning, denoting both the common “ram” () and the religiously significant notion of a “spiritual manifestation” ().<sup>238</sup> That nature of Egyptian imagination then ensured that the god would be depicted as a ram or with ovine characteristics.<sup>239</sup> If we approach Banebjede as a visible form of Osiris, it would account for the fact that while Banebjede can be interacted with directly, even though he is obviously not a part of the proceedings prior to this point, Osiris can only be communicated through the textual medium as observed later in the tale.<sup>240</sup>

Banebjede’s involvement solves nothing, of course. As we will see, the narrative needs to enact a fundamental transformation of its principal actors before it can be brought to a satisfactory conclusion. By involving Banebjede here, at its very beginning, the *Contendings* let the reader know in advance what the solution will be and that at this point it cannot take place. The glaring absence of Osiris himself, whose transformation is implied in the text, is likewise illuminating, highlighting that the world is not in its optimal state.

The name Banebjede is actually a composite of common names, meaning “*ba* (of) the lord of Djedet”.<sup>241</sup> Djedet, often known simply as Per-Banebjedet, “the house of Banebjede”, was the capital of the 16<sup>th</sup> Lower Egyptian nome.<sup>242</sup> It is possible that the need to have one send for Banebjede indicates that he is not in the proximity of the proceedings. The same would be the case with Neith, who too is a deity strongly associated with Lower Egypt, specifically with Sais, where she is said to reside later in the story at *Con.* 13,12. One could argue that this would reinforce an Upper Egyptian context for the tale, as the ending of the story and other indices seem to suggest.

As with Onuris in the preceding section of the tale, the scribe chose to omit the suffix *.t* in the name of Banebjede, which marks the feminine gender of the toponym Djedet. The suffix could be omitted without the word itself losing its original meaning but in case of Banebjede, this omission leads to ambiguity. The version of *Contendings* can be read as “*ba*

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<sup>237</sup> Cf. Antonio Loprieno, “Puns and Word Play in Ancient Egyptian”, in Scott Noegel (ed.), *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature*, Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2000, p. 3–20.

<sup>238</sup> Dimitri Meeks, *Mythes et légendes du Delta*, p. 243.

<sup>239</sup> See W. Shaikh Al Arab, “The Iconography of the God Banebdjedet”, p. 65 ff. See also Christiane Zivie-Coche, “Banebdjed dans tous ses états du Delta à Edfou”, *Études et Travaux* 26 (2013): 761–771.

<sup>240</sup> For letters as a standard means of communicating with the dead, see Julia Troche, “Letters to the Dead”, in Jacco Dieleman, Willeke Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2018. Accessed at: <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz002kdds6>.

<sup>241</sup> *Wb* 1, 414.9; *LGG* II, p. 683–684.

<sup>242</sup> See Donald Redford, “Mendes: City of the Ram-god”, *Egyptian Archaeology* 26 (2005): 8–12.

of the lord of Djedu.” Djedu is another Lower Egyptian centre whose local patron was Osiris, who, who was worshipper as “Lord of Djedu”,<sup>243</sup> could also himself be identified with the *djed* pillar, an emblem of stability.<sup>244</sup> Osiris himself could be depicted as the *djed* pillar with eyes and arms.<sup>245</sup> The specific variant of the name Banebjede present in the tale consequently serves to reinforce the Osirian associations of the god and emphasizes that the two passages – the conversation with Banebjede and the correspondence with Osiris – form a parallel pair.

### 3.2.3 Letter to Neith (2,8–3,1)

THEN the Ennead spoke to <sup>(2,8)</sup> Thoth before the Lord-of-All: “Would you write a letter to Neith the great, divine mother, in the name of Lord of All, the bull in midst of Heliopolis.”

THEN <sup>(2,9)</sup> Thoth said: “I will, I will indeed.”

THEN HE sat to write the letter, saying: “Lord of Upper and Lower Egypt, <sup>(2,10)</sup> Re-Atum, beloved of Thoth, Lord of the Two Lands, the Heliopolitan, the sun-disc that brightens the Two Lands with his gifts, the Hapy great in <sup>(2,11)</sup> flowing, Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon, as Neith the Great, the divine mother, who shone upon the first face, is living, healthy and vigorous. The living *ba* <sup>(2,12)</sup> of the Lord of All, bull of Heliopolis, beautiful king of the Beloved Land, (speaks) thus: “This loyal servant sleeps on behalf of Osiris, taking counsel <sup>(2,13)</sup> of the Two Lands every day, while Sobk endures eternally. What is it that we will do for these two men that were at the tribunal for eighty years NOW? <sup>(3,1)</sup> There is none who knows how to judge these two men. Write us what we should do!”

Reaching out to Neith obviously constitutes an escalation to a divine personage of higher authority. The council does not simply summon her to the court, but instead writes a formal letter to the deity. The title “great divine mother” (*mw.t mtr* 𓄀) could be taken a sign of respect, but Isis, who suffers various indignities by the hands of her peers in the story, has the same title at *Con.* 5,1. It could also be related to the epithet “god's mother” (*mw.t-ntr*), which denoted not only goddesses with mythical children, but also royal mothers and queens.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> LGG III, p. 799.

<sup>244</sup> Cf. Jean-Luc Fissolo, “Un pour tous! Le pilier-djed et la stabilité du monde”, in Guillemette Andreu-Lanoë, Thierry-Louis Bergerot (eds.), *Une aventure égyptologique: mélanges offerts à Christine Gallois*, Montségur: Centre d'égyptologie, 2022, p. 201–208.

<sup>245</sup> Edna Russmann, *Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Museum*, London: The British Museum Press, 2001, p. 126.

<sup>246</sup> *Wb* 2, 54.11–17; LGG III, p. 261–262. See also the discussion in Silke Roth, “Zwei frühe Belege für den Titel “Gottesmutter””, *Göttinger Miszellen* 177 (2000): 57–62.

As for the Ennead's choice of scribe, it seems almost natural, both due to Thoth's role as a divine scribe, and his propensity for mediation, which are ultimately two facets of the same idea.<sup>247</sup>

The letter makes it clear that the names Atum, Re-Atum, Lord-of-All and Chepri refer to a single character in the tale, who changes his forms "like a chameleon."<sup>248</sup> The function of the term *ba* can be understood as a straightforward identification: Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon is one of the faces of the Lord-of-All, as is Re-Atum. The titles themselves make it clear that the sun-god is represented in his full glory as the source of life in the universe, being not only the sun-disc, but also Hapi, the boon of the Nile's flood.<sup>249</sup> At the same time, however, Neith too is invoked here as the "mother, who shone upon the first face". This likely refers to the fact that Neith was worshipped as a mother of Re and creator goddess in the temple at Esna.<sup>250</sup> When Neith is called a "great divine mother," we could actually read Re's, or the world's.

This is not the only solar connection in this passage. In the letter, Atum-Re is called the "sun-disc that brightens the Two Lands (=Egypt) with his gifts". This makes perfect sense for a solar deity, but it is remarkable that Horus is referred to in an essentially identical manner at the end of the story.<sup>251</sup> Specifically, at *Con.* 16,2-3 Isis says to him "you (will) brighten the world with your gifts." (*shd-k t3 m iwn-k*). The significance of Horus as a solar king will be explored throughout the rest of this thesis.

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<sup>247</sup> For Thoth as a divine scribe, see, Georges Posener, "Un dieu écrivain: Le Thot égyptien", *Annuaire du Collège de France* 62 (1962): 287-290; M. Stadler, *Weiser und Wesir*, p. 337-340; Youri Volokhine, "Le Dieu Thot et La Parole," *Revue de l'histoire des Religions* 221 (2004): 131-56.

<sup>248</sup> F. Junge, "Die Erzählung vom Streit der Götter Horus und Seth um die Herrschaft", p. 932. Junge notes that the forms are not all the same, with sympathy for Seth, for example, being reserved to the form named Re.

<sup>249</sup> This is likely in line with Hapi being called "Father of Gods" See R. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, p. 106. The sun-god apparently attempts to rhetorically monopolize generative power in the universe.

<sup>250</sup> See the sources cited in M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 245 ff; Serge Sauneron, *Esna III: Le temple d'Esna*, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1968, p. 7 ff. Cf. Barbara Lesko, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1999, p. 60-63; LÄ I, p. 634-635.

<sup>251</sup> See the sources cited in chapter 3.12.

### 3.2.4 Response of Neith (3,2–3,5)

Then Neith the great, divine mother, <sup>(3,2)</sup> sent a letter to the Ennead, saying: “Give the office of Osiris to his son, Horus! Do not do the great <sup>(3,3)</sup> evil things that are not in place, or else I shall be angry, and the sky shall strike the ground. And may it <sup>(3,4)</sup> be said to the Lord of All in Heliopolis: “Double the possessions of Seth, give him Anat and Astarte, your two daughters! And may <sup>(3,5)</sup> Horus be given the place of (his) father Osiris!”

Neith’s response largely mirrors the arguments of Horus’ supporters. His right to Osiris’ inheritance is justified and not to respect it amounts to a violation of *maat*. From this perspective the threat of cosmic destruction can be seen both as a coercive measure from Neith and as a warning of what can happen once disorder starts to infringe on basic laws of the universe.

The proposal to reward Seth anticipates the ending of the tale, when he is elevated to heaven as a son of Re at *Con.* 16,4. What could here be understood as a reward or compensation for accepting Horus’ claim, is an idea of how Seth could be integrated into a unified pantheon, by becoming Re’s son(in-law) through marriage.<sup>252</sup>

The choice of Anat and Astarte reflects that by the 20<sup>th</sup> dynasty these Syrian deities were well integrated into Egyptian cultic life.<sup>253</sup> Their association with Seth can be taken connected to his syncretism as Seth-Baal, Baal himself being a close ally of Anat and Astarte in the Baal Cycle of Ugarit.<sup>254</sup> Apart from the Baal connection we may also see the two goddesses as appropriate partners for Seth because of their foreign character, as well as their savage natures, something they share with Seth, even though in his case his foreign nature is not supported by historical sources.<sup>255</sup> Finally, in the tale *Anat Myth*, Seth

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<sup>252</sup> See the discussion in chapter 5.7.3.

<sup>253</sup> Christiane Zivie-Coche, “Foreign Deities in Egypt”, in Jacco Dieleman, Willeke Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2011, p. 3. Accessed at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7tr1814c>.

<sup>254</sup> See esp. N. Allon, “Seth is Baal – Evidence from the Egyptian Script”, p.16 ff.; Alexandra Diez de Oliveira, “The Many Faces of God Ba’al in Ancient Egypt: Metaphors and Syncretisms”, in Alicia Maravelia, Nadine Guilhou (eds.), *Environment and Religion in Ancient and Coptic Egypt: Sensing the Cosmos Through the Eyes of the Divine. Proceedings of the 1st Egyptological Conference of the Hellenic Institute of Egyptology, Co-organized With the Writing & Scripts Centre of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and the Institute of Coptic Studies (University of Alexandria), at the People’s University of Athens, Under the High Auspices of His Eminence Mgr Damianos, Archbishop of Sinai, Athens: Wednesday 1st, Thursday 2nd Friday 3rd February 2017*, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2020, p. 107–114; Susana Soler, “Los orígenes del sincretismo Seth-Baal: Seth y la tormenta según los clasificadores de los Textos de los Sarcófagos del Reino Medio”, in Lluís Feliu, Adelina Millet, Jordi Vidal (eds.), “*Sentido de un empeño*”: *Homenatge a Gregorio del Olmo Lete*, Barcelona: Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona, 2021, p. 461–475.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. the discussion in chapter 5.7.3.

has a painful sexual encounter with the goddess, which may throw a rather humorous light on Neith's proposition.<sup>256</sup>

### 3.3 Re and Hathor (3,5-5,3)

#### 3.3.1 The Insults (3,5-3,13)

Then the letter of Neith the great, divine mother, reached the Ennead, while they sat<sup>(3,6)</sup> in the broad-hall Horus-Foremost-of-Horns and the letter was placed in the hand of Thoth.

Then Thoth read it before the Lord of All<sup>(3,7)</sup> and the whole Ennead and they said with a single voice: "The goddess is right!" Then the Lord of All became angry with Horus, saying to him: "Your<sup>(3,8)</sup> limbs are weak, and the office is big for you, a child the taste of whose mouth is wretched!"

Then Onuris became really mad<sup>(3,9)</sup>, as did the whole Ennead that comprised the court of Thirty.<sup>257</sup> Baba the god stood up and<sup>(3,10)</sup> said to Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon: "Your chapel is empty!" Then Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon suffered for the answer that was said to him<sup>(3,11)</sup> and lay on his back, his heart being very sore.

Then the Ennead went outside and<sup>(3,12)</sup> shouted a lot in the face of Baba the god, saying to him: "Go away, the crime<sup>(3,13)</sup> that you committed is great indeed!" as they went to their tent.

The acceptance of Neith, which was supposed to overcome the division in the pantheon, instead served to push it past its breaking point. The intervention of an outside authority sparks open hostility in court, rage spilling out and leading to personal attacks. The sun-

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<sup>256</sup> See Jacobus van Dijk, "Anat, Seth and the seed of Prē", in Herman Vanstiphout et al. (eds.), *Scripta Signa Vocis: Studies About Scripts, Scriptures, Scribes, and Languages in the Near East, Presented to J. H. Hospers by His Pupils, Colleagues, and Friends*, Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1986, p. 31-51; M. Pehal, *Intepreting Ancient Egyptian Narratives*, p. 210 ff.

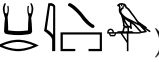
<sup>257</sup> The "court of the thirty" (*m<sup>c</sup>bꜣj.t*) was a historical judicial institution attested since the Middle Kingdom. Lichtheim, commenting on the *Contendings*, call the Court of Thirty the supreme tribunal of Egypt. (M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature II*, p. 223) The power of the court was apparently so great that it extended to the afterlife, as evidenced by the need to plead innocence before it in the negative confession, where the "gut eater who hails from the Court of the Thirty" appears. (*Book of the Dead* Chapter 125, 37). The reference to such a significant state institution serves to remind the reader how much the parodic version of the legal process in the tale deviates from the rather decorous norm of Ramesside courts. See Deborah Sweeney, *Correspondence and Dialogue: Pragmatic Factors in Late Ramesside Letter-Writing*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001, p. 19-20. See also Deborah Sweeney, "Gender and Conversational Tactics in The Contendings of Horus and Seth", p. 148, n. 71.

For the *m<sup>c</sup>bꜣj.t*, see also the discussion and sources in Pahor Labib, "Die Stellung des Wesirs in der Verwaltung des Ramessiden-Reiches", *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo* 25 (1969), p. 69.



god, true to his preference for the stronger candidate, humiliates Horus for being a weakling, making it clear that for him, physical strength is an essential trait of a ruler.<sup>258</sup>

Baba's insult seems to hit Re where it hurts, although how precisely is a matter of debate.<sup>259</sup> It might seem obvious how it is a bad thing for a god's home to be empty, especially in a religion where a temple is literally the house of a god, where a physical manifestation of the deity resides.<sup>260</sup> The vision of an empty chapel recalls the lamentation of the Restoration stela of Tutankhamun, where the ruination of the country's temples mirrors its spiritual abandonment by the gods.<sup>261</sup> Spiegel has argued for an alternative reading "Your chapel does not exist",<sup>262</sup> while Lichtheim saw Baba's remark as an urging for the sun-god to go home.<sup>263</sup> Caminos sees a parallel in *Papyrus Anastasi IV*,<sup>264</sup> where a reproached scribe is likened to "an empty chapel of his god, a house without bread."<sup>265</sup> Broze argues that the resemblance may be accidental. Following up on Derchain's work on Baba, she compares the present passage to *Papyrus Jumilhac*, where Baba falsely accuses Thoth of having stolen from Re. As in the case of the *Contendings*, the Ennead responds by rebuking Baba.<sup>266</sup>

Instead of following Derchain's line of reasoning, she points out a particular motif present in solar hymns: an assurance that the cabin of the solar bark is safe and sound. The cabin of the solar bark and the chapel of the *Contendings* are denoted with the same word *k3r* ()<sup>267</sup>. The hymns make it clear that in its optimal state the cabin is not only inhabited by the sun-god, but also by the goddess of the solar eye, who protects him.<sup>268</sup> In

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<sup>258</sup> See the discussion in chapter 5.7.

<sup>259</sup> For the minor deity Baba, see Christian Leitz, "Auseinandersetzung zwischen Baba und Thoth", in Heike Behlmer (ed.), ... *Quaerentes scientiam: Festgabe für Wolfhart Westendorf zu seinem 70. Geburtstag überreicht von seinen Schülern*, Göttingen: Seminar für Ägyptologie und Koptologie, p. 103-117.

<sup>260</sup> See e.g., Richard Wilkinson, *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2000, p. 40 ff.

<sup>261</sup> *Restoration Stela of Tutankhamun* 6-9. Cf. John Bennett, "The Restoration Inscription of Tut'ankhamun", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 25 (1939), p. 9.

<sup>262</sup> J. Spiegel, "Die Erzählung vom Streit der Götter Horus und Seth um die Herrschaft", p. 91, n. 4.

<sup>263</sup> M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature II*, p. 223, n. 7.

<sup>264</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 238.

<sup>265</sup> *Papyrus Anastasi IV* 11,11. (Ricardo Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, London: Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 9-10)

<sup>266</sup> *Papyrus Jumilhac*, XII, 25-28; XIV, 10.

<sup>267</sup> *Wb* 5, 107.12-108.12

<sup>268</sup> E.g., *Papyrus Berlin* 3050, II 7-13.

the rendition of *Papyrus Berlin 3050* the goddess in the bark is simultaneously on the forehead of Re, emphasizing that it is the uraeus, an eye of fire, that protects him:<sup>269</sup>

“(…) heaven is cheering, the earth is rejoicing, the gods and goddesses are celebrating and giving adoration to Re-Harakhty, when they see that he has appeared in his boat after having shot down his enemies in his time. The cabin is saved because Mehenet is in her place. The uraeus has driven the enemies away.”<sup>270</sup>

These considerations provide the necessary context for this episode of the *Contendings*, but one last point needs to be made. It could be argued that a transgression was the inevitable outcome of the escalated state of affairs that has arisen in the narrative. It is clear why Baba in particular was chosen as the transgressor. Seth and Baba exhibit significant similarities in the source material, which would qualify the latter to play the role of the transgressor when the former is otherwise occupied by the narrative.<sup>271</sup> As for the insult itself seems to serve no function other than to frame and introduce Hathor’s intervention at this point. By pointing out the motif of the empty chapel, Baba has already announced its resolution: the return of the solar goddess. The almost infantile reaction of the insulted party would also allow reader to make an educated guess as to the benevolent face that the goddess would take on and the bawdiness she would enact on behalf of the stricken god.

### 3.3.2 Coming of Hathor (3,13–4,3)

Then the great god spent a day <sup>(4,1)</sup> taken away lying on his back in his booth, his heart being very sore, and he was alone.

THEN AFTER A LONG TIME <sup>(4,2)</sup> Hathor, the lady of the southern sycamore, came before her father the Lord of All and showed him her vulva.

THEN the great god <sup>(4,3)</sup> laughed about it. Then he got up, sat with the great Ennead and said to Horus and Seth: “Speak for yourselves!”

The insult of Baba introduces the first element of true, cosmic crisis into the tale. The withdrawal of the solar god is a significant and symbolically rich development, and the

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<sup>269</sup> For a discussion of the text, see Philippe Derchain, Ursula Verhoeven, *Le voyage de la deesse libyque: Ein Text aus dem "Mutritual" des Pap. Berlin 3053*, Fondation égyptologique Reine Elisabeth: Bruxelles, 1985, viii + 85 p.

<sup>270</sup> *Papyrus Berlin 3050*, II,7–III,3. Cf. Serge Sauneron, “L’hymne au soleil levant des papyrus de Berlin 3050, 3056 et 3048”, *Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale* 53 (1954): 65–90.

<sup>271</sup> See A. Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, p. 73 ff. See also the discussion in chapter 5.7 below.

rest of the story will keep circling back to this rather concise recount of the seclusion and recovery of Re.

The sentence describing Re's seclusion relates to both the *Homosexual Episode* and *Hathor & Horus*. All three describe the protagonist lying in an apparently passive state and while this is not as apparent in the current passage, they are nocturnal. As in *Hathor & Horus*, night-time is not mentioned here, but it is implied: the combination of the passage of a whole day and the gods retiring in their tent would point this way, as would the unusually long rubricated passage. Only three such other are in the *Contendings*, one in Seth's recounting of Isis' trickery to Re and then twice in the *Homosexual Episode*, where they serve to emphasize the nocturnal setting.

The nocturnal reading, together with the passive state of the sun-god, fit well with the fact that the god is twice is said to lay on his back, which is symbolically indicative of both sleep and death. The same determinative A55 , depicting a person lying on his back on a bed, is used both for to denote sleep and death, with the verb  *nm3* that is used here having both the meaning of "to sleep" and "be dead."<sup>272</sup> Consequently, we could translate the phrase *Con.* 3,10–3,11 in a much different manner, in the sense of "the words of Baba hurt the great god so badly, he died."

It is curious to see the heart of Re playing such a prominent role here, since at *Con.* 2,1 it is also his heart that has him lean towards the side of Seth. One could compare this to the prominence of the creator's god's heart in the already cited *Bremner-Rhind Papyrus*. In such creation accounts such as this one, or that of the *Memphite Theology*, the heart serves as the ultimate origin of creation from which the desire to create emanates.<sup>273</sup> Here, however, the efficient cause is heartache at the unsatisfactory state of affairs in the chapel of the god. It is irrelevant to ask if in fact the goddess of the eye was missing from the chapel when Baba made his hurtful remark. The mention alone is enough to reset the narrative into a primordial state defined by her absence, thereby reducing the creator into his original mode of a passive potentiality of being existing in a state indistinguishable from death.

Hathor enters the story in a manner appropriate to the goddess of love and drunken revelry.<sup>274</sup> In fact, Morris argues that her behaviour reflects acts of exposure taking place

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<sup>272</sup> *Wb* 2, 266.7–8.

<sup>273</sup> See the discussion in chapter 5.6.2.

<sup>274</sup> See Cornelius Bleeker, *Hathor and Thoth: Two Key Figures of the Ancient Egyptian Religion*, Leiden: Brill, 1973, p. 39–40, 83.

in the context of temple festivities.<sup>275</sup> Her title “lady of southern sycamore” refers to the sycamore fig, a fruit bearing tree cultivated in Egypt since predynastic times and played a dominant role in horticulture and the tree, its fruit and even its timber or twigs being richly represented in funerary art.<sup>276</sup> The tree, praised for the sweetness of its produce and the shade it provided was a form of Hathor, who in this capacity often served as a source of nourishment in the netherworld.<sup>277</sup> The goddesses’ title is frequent enough to have no deeper significance in this tale but may have been chosen here to emphasize Re’s incapacitated, isolated state, which is reminiscent of death.<sup>278</sup> The same can be argued for sleep, which is implied in the tale.<sup>279</sup> Furthermore, the parallel passage in the second part of the tale has Hathor revive Horus by giving him milk, mirroring her role in funerary texts and depictions.<sup>280</sup>

The passive loneliness of the sun-god finds a very close parallel to the story of the *Bremner-Rhind Papyrus*. There the solar god is described as drifting alone in the primeval waters of Nun. At this point the universe exists only as a monad, a potentiality of being ready to unfold into the fullness of reality. This self-expanding unravel is poetically rendered as a desire of the creator god to be reunited with his children, Shu and Tefnut, lost in the darkness of Nun. To achieve that, he sends out his Eye, a female goddess, whose return marks the creation of mankind and world as the Egyptians knew it. The original text, while lengthy, deserves a full citation:

“THE BOOK OF KNOWING THE CREATIONS OF RE AND OF FELLING APEP. RECITE: Thus spake the Lord of All after he had come into being: It was I who came into being as Khopri. When I came into being, 'Being' 1 came into being, and all beings came into being after I came into being; manifold were the beings which came forth from my mouth ere the sky had come into being, ere the earth had come into being, ere the ground and reptiles had been created in this place. I created (some) of them in Nun I as Inert Ones when I could as yet find no place where I could stand. I considered (?) in mine

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<sup>275</sup> Ellen Morris, “Sacred and Obscene Laughter in the Contendings of Horus and Seth, in Egyptian Inversions of Everyday Life, and in the Context of Cultic Competition”, in Thomas Schneider, Kasia Szpakowska (eds.), *Egyptian Stories: A British Egyptological Tribute to Alan B. Lloyd on the Occasion of His Retirement*, Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2007, p. 219–220.

<sup>276</sup> Maria Hopf, Daniel Zohary, *Domestication of Plants in the Old World*, Oxford: University Press, 2000, p. 165.

<sup>277</sup> Renata Landgráfová, Hana Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess I: Ancient Egyptian Love Songs in Context*, Prague: Czech Institute of Egyptology, 2009, p. 203. See also Richard Parkinson, *The Painted Tomb-Chapel of Nebamun: Masterpieces of Ancient Egyptian Art in the British Museum*, London: British Museum, 2008, p. 132–145.

<sup>278</sup> Cf. J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, p. 104. For Hathor as the tree goddess of the dead, see *Ibid.*, p. 170–172.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>280</sup> See the discussion of milk in chapter 3.8.3.

heart, I surveyed with my sight, and I alone made every shape ere I had spat out Shu, ere I had expectorated Tefenet, ere there had come into being any other I who could act with me. I planned with mine own heart and there came into being a multitude of forms of living creatures, namely the forms of children and the forms of their children. I indeed made excitation with my fist, I copulated I with mine hand, I spat with mine own mouth; I spat out Shu, I expectorated Tefenet, and my father Nun brought them up, mine Eye following after them since the aeons when they were far from me. After I had come into being as sole god, 1 there were three gods in addition to myself. I came into being in this land and Shu and Tefenet rejoiced in the Nun, in which they were. They brought back to me mine Eye with them after I had united my members; I wept over them, and that is how men came into being I from the tears which came forth from mine Eye, for it was wroth with me when it returned and found that I had made another in its place, having replaced it with the Glorious (Eye). So I promoted it in my face, and when it exercised governance over I this entire land, its wrath died away, for I had replaced what had been taken from it. I came forth from the roots, I created all reptiles and all that exists among them. Shu and Tefenet begat Geb and Nut, and Geb and Nut begat Osiris, Horus Mekhantenirti, Seth, Isis, and Nephthys from the womb, one after the other, and they begat their multitudes in this land.”<sup>281</sup>

The Eye is a role that can be played by many goddesses and in different stories. A notably different account is that of the *Book of the Heavenly Cow* where the Eye is sent in the form of the vicious Sekhmet to destroy a rebellious mankind.<sup>282</sup> The arrival of Hathor likewise allows Re to assume his duties as the king of heaven, although the nature of her intervention is more reminiscent of the motif which attributes creation to Atum’s cooperation with his hand, which, as in the case of the solar Eye, represents the female principle inherent in his divinity.<sup>283</sup> However, it should be emphasized that Atum’s arousal might not necessarily be sexual in nature. Female nudity, while erotic, was not *exclusively* erotic,<sup>284</sup> and Hathor’s gesture could be taken to be humorous rather than

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<sup>281</sup> *Papyrus Bremner-Rhind* 26,21–27,5. Translation of Raymond Faulkner, “The Bremner-Rhind Papyrus III”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 23 (1937), p. 172.

<sup>282</sup> For an overview of the text and its study, see Nadine Guilhou, “Myth of the Heavenly Cow”, in Jacco Dieleman, Wendrich, Willeke (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2010. Accessed at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2vh551hn>. For its relation to other Egyptian sources see Erik Hornung, *Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh: Eine Ätiologie des Unvollkommenen*, Freiburg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991, p. 88–101.

<sup>283</sup> See the discussion of Egyptian cosmogony in chapter 5.6. For Hathor as the libidinous desire to create of the sun-god, see Jacobus van Dijk, “Anat, Seth and the seed of Prē”, p. 41 ff.

<sup>284</sup> See esp. E. Morris, “Sacred and Obscene Laughter”, p. 202 ff. For nudity, see Ogden Goelet, “Nudity in Ancient Egypt”, *Source Notes in the History of Art* 12 (1993): 20–31; Gay Robins, “Dress, Undress, and the Representation of Fertility and Potency in New Kingdom Egyptian Art”, in

erotic, all while retaining its cosmic significance.<sup>285</sup> Not only is the lady of the sycamore not behaving like a lady, but she is also behaving like that towards her own father, someone who would expect her to be on her best behaviour.<sup>286</sup>

### 3.4 Kinship Episode (4,3-5,3)

#### 3.4.1 Claim of Seth (4,3-4,6)

Then he got up, sat with the great Ennead and said to Horus and Seth: “Speak for yourselves!”

Then <sup>(4,4)</sup> Seth Great-of-Strength, son of Nut, said: “As for me, I am Seth, Great-of-Strength within the Ennead, and I slay the enemy of Re <sup>(4,5)</sup> every day, while I am on the prow of the bark of Millions and there is none that can do it! I will take possession of the office of Osiris!” Then <sup>(4,6)</sup> they said: “True is Seth, the son of Nut.”

The intervention of Hathor allows the proceedings to resume. This is only temporary, however, and the court faces another deadlock only a few paragraphs later, signifying that her action alone does not have the potential to resolve the issue at hand. Still, it serves as a model of overcoming more particular challenges, foreshadowing the role she plays later in the tale.

Immediately, the tale shifts its focus on Seth who is able to make his case for the first time. He starts with the familiar phrase, “great-of-strength”, already used by his supporters. More interestingly, he presents himself as an insider, “within the Ennead”, which anticipates the significance of familial relations in the impending argument. The centrepiece of Seth’s claim is his role as the solar god’s protector against “the Enemy”, which invokes the well documented tradition wherein the daily journey of the solar bark faces the threat posed by a monstrous snake embodying the destructive force of chaos whose defeat is necessary in order for the sun-god to continue his vitalising journey through the universe.<sup>287</sup>

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Natalie Kampen et al. (eds.) *Sexuality in Ancient Art: Near East, Egypt, Greece, and Italy*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 27-40.

<sup>285</sup> The ritual exposure of women in front of the Apis bull presents an interesting comparison, seeing as both the bull and the sun-god here were impaired by age. See E. Morris, “Sacred and Obscene Laughter”, p. 201, n. 13.

<sup>286</sup> See Alain Fortier, “Le voyage de Rê et sa lutte contre Apophis”, in Arnaud Quertinmont (ed.), *Dieux, génies et démons en Égypte ancienne: à la rencontre d’Osiris, Anubis, Isis, Hathor, Rê et les autres*, Paris: Somogy éditions d’art, 2016, p. 279 ff.

<sup>287</sup> Notably, arguments have been made that Hathor was not only the daughter of the sun-god, but also his consort. See e.g., C. Bleeker, *Hathor and Thoth*, p. 65; M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 44, 238.

Of all the aspects Seth takes on throughout the length of Egyptian history, this is probably the most consistently positive.<sup>288</sup> Ample textual and pictorial evidence of Seth playing the role of the protector of the solar bark by fighting the giant snake is evidence that this belief was widespread, and the divine court reacts accordingly.<sup>289</sup> The response of the Ennead makes it clear that he struck the right chord. The phrase “true is Seth” carries connotations of justice, of positive contribution to the maintenance of the cosmic order, something that is a key quality of a ruler, as is physical prowess. Seth’s speech actually emphasizes that the two are intertwined, indicating the close association of order and force.

True to his boastful nature, Seth does not fail to mention that his ability to defeat the snake is unique. The divine assembly assents to this, even though other sources describe different deities fighting Apep as well.<sup>290</sup>

### 3.4.2 Kinship Confusion (4,6-4,10)

Then Onuris and Thoth spoke with a loud voice: “Shall the <sup>(4,7)</sup> office be given to the maternal brother, while the bodily son stands?”

Then Banebjede, the great living god, said: “But should the office be given <sup>(4,8)</sup> to this child, while his older brother Seth stands?”

Then the Ennead cried loudly in the face of the Lord of All, saying to him: “What <sup>(4,9)</sup> is the meaning of these words that are not even worthy of being listened to?”

THEN SPOKE Horus, the son of Isis: “It is not good at all to defraud before <sup>(4,10)</sup> the Ennead. Shall the office of (my) father Osiris be taken away from me?”

The supporters of Horus respond by rephrasing his previously made claim, that heredity is the key factor determining the proper successor. Furthermore, they argue that the claim of the son is stronger than that of the brother. Their argument is however, immediately rebuked, when Banebjede argues the exact opposite. We may relate this pro-Seth

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<sup>288</sup> Cf. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 101.

<sup>289</sup> See Charly De Maré, “Le combat mythique entre Seth and Apophis: les raisons de la valorisation d'un mythe”, in Christian Cannuyer, Daniel De Smet, Marie-Anne Persoons, (eds.), *Les combats dans les mythes et les littératures de l'Orient & miscellanea orientalia et iranica belgo-polonica: Wojciech Skalmowski in memoriam*, Bruxelles: Société Royale Belge d'Études Orientales / Koninklijk Belgisch Genootschap voor Oosterse Studiën, 2018, p. 145-164. For a useful summary of the relevant primary sources, see Magda Gad, “Seth Against Apophis: Originating The Scene Depicting Seth Spearheading Apophis”, *Journal of Faculty of Archaeology (Qena)* 16 (2021): 43-82.

<sup>290</sup> The role could be also taken by the Eye of Re or by Re in the form of a cat. See Joris Borghouts, “The Evil Eye of Apophis”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 59 (1973), p. 116; Geraldine Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Goddesses, and Traditions of Ancient Egypt*, New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 107-108.

argument with the case of the *Two Brothers*, where the younger brother of Anup, Bata, says that he considers his older brother as his father, thereby accepting his authority.<sup>291</sup>

It is remarkable that we see Banebjede delivering this controversial line, a deity that is a sort of stand-in for Osiris in the tale. Banebjede was called to court to help untangle this difficult case, but instead he seems to introduce even more confusion. Despite the Ennead's reaction, however, this is no more nonsense, intended to provoke. Much like Osiris later in the tale, Banebjede intervenes in a manner that is upsetting to the narrative but manages to advance it.

The remark points to the rather sensitive truth that Egyptian familial relationships are significantly more fluid than one might expect. A man can call his wife his daughter. Children can be adopted without any significant legal action. This becomes even more difficult in the context of the royal family. There we encounter a somewhat paradoxical arrangement, articulated by the epithet *kamutef*, "bull of this mother", which encapsulates the idea that a king or god is his own father by the virtue of impregnating his own mother. This curious concept had obvious advantages:

"...to be "Kamutef" is also a way of denying linear time and inverting the succession of generations by uniting the past and the present in one personage. This personage, being both father and son of itself, possesses a legitimacy that is not questionable."<sup>292</sup>

A title seemingly first associated with Amun during the Middle Kingdom, the *kamutef* articulated an idea of unbroken continuity and regeneration that related both to gods and royal dynasties,<sup>293</sup> thereby safeguarding the latter by introducing an idea of "legitimate descent without ancestry."<sup>294</sup>

The symbolic mechanism is analogous to the Horus-Osiris dyad, which in the royal context identified any living king with Horus and any (and every) deceased king with Osiris, imagining the whole history of Egyptian rulers as a line of individuals subsumed into the person of Osiris ending in the present ruler, Horus.<sup>295</sup> The transformation of the ascending king into Horus was inseparable from the funerary rites that transformed the recently deceased ruler into Osiris and was performed by overt expression of filial loyalty

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<sup>291</sup> *Two Brothers* 3,10.

<sup>292</sup> Claude Traunecker, "Kamutef", in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, vol. 2, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 221. See also LÄ III, 308-309; Susan Hollis, *The Ancient Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers": A Mythological, Religious, Literary, and Historico-Political Study*, Oakville: Bannerstone Press, p. 175-179; Jan Assmann, *Stein und Zeit: Mensch und Gesellschaft im Alten Ägypten*, München: Fink, 1991, p. 134-137; M. Pehal, *Intepreting Ancient Egyptian Narratives*, p. 154-155.

<sup>293</sup> LÄ III, 308-309.

<sup>294</sup> C. Traunecker, "Kamutef", p. 222.

<sup>295</sup> See the more detailed discussion of kingship in chapter 4. For the Osirian side of kingship, see also M. Smith, "Osiris NN or Osiris of NN?", p. 325-337.



on the part of the new king.<sup>296</sup> Together, the Horus-Osiris dyad and *kamutef* meant that, in the words of Edmund Leach, the “reigning king was both the living ‘son’ of his dead predecessor and also the immediate reincarnation of his dead predecessor.” He goes on to remark that “the Queen Mother, i.e., the principal widow of the former king, was simultaneously both the ‘mother’ of the reigning king and his ‘wife’.”<sup>297</sup> The aforementioned advantages the two legitimizing strategies had also the consequence that the otherwise clearly defined familial relations become somewhat blurred: “The reigning King was Horus, the deceased King was Osiris, the Queen Mother was Isis. But since Osiris and Horus are two persons but one god, (in that living Horus in due course becomes dead Osiris) the half-sister principal Queen of the living King was also, like the Queen Mother, potential Isis.”<sup>298</sup>

The resulting ambivalence of royal women, who can be a mother, wife/sister and daughter to the same royal person, will be highlighted later, but the somewhat confused character of familial relations is already present here. If from a certain perspective the son is his father, what difference is there between a brother and a son with regards to the royal office?

Sadly, we cannot definitively tell if the Ennead’s indignant response is to the whole line of argument based on kinship or simply with Banebjede’s contribution. We can argue, however, that the ambivalence of these relations within this context is invoked and we can also conclude that for the time being this line of argument has reached its limit. Clearly, the fact alone that someone can claim descent from the deceased king is not only sufficient to guarantee succession, but it also brings up the ambivalent nature of descent itself. This ambivalence will be renegotiated in the *Isis and Seth* when the topic of succession is removed from the royal context which is what Isis does when she reimagines the present issue into a pastoral setting in Isis’ ruse. In the context of common people, the matter is unambiguous enough that even Seth can only conclude that the herdsman’s son is the one true heir. Even that, however, does not remove the ambiguity of the female role in the succession drama, and violence emerges as the only solution.<sup>299</sup>

The indirect manner in which Horus phrases his complaint emphasizes that he argues from a passive and inferior position. This is further reinforced by the fact that no one cares enough to give him a proper reply. Looking at the whole exchange as a dialogue regarding the importance and nature of the hereditary principle we can see Horus’ remark

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<sup>296</sup> See the discussion of filial loyalty in chapter 5.5.2.

<sup>297</sup> Edmund Leach, “The Mother’s Brother in Ancient Egypt”, p. 20.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> See the discussion in chapter 3.7 and 5.7.

as its wistful epilogue. The topic has been exhausted and can be taken no further on its own.

### 3.4.3 Oaths of Isis and Seth (4,10-5,3)

THEN Isis became angry with the Ennead and made a divine oath <sup>(4,11)</sup> before the Ennead, saying: “As (my) mother, the goddess Neith, lives, as lives Ptah-Tatenen, he whose plumes are tall, he who bends the horns of <sup>(4,12)</sup> the gods, this matter will be placed before Atum, the great prince in Heliopolis, and Khepri in his bark also!”

THEN the Ennead said <sup>(4,13)</sup> to her: “Do not be angry! Justice shall be given to him who is in the right. All that you say will be done!”

Then Seth said to them: “I <sup>(5,2)</sup> will seize my sceptre of 4500 ingots and shall kill one of you every day!” Then Seth made <sup>(5,3)</sup> an oath to the Lord-of-All, saying: “I will not contend before this council while Isis is in it.”

The institution of a divine oath is a well attested element of Egyptian life and served an important function in the legal process.<sup>300</sup> Wilson classifies Egyptian oaths into two main categories, juridical and non-juridical, understanding the former as “having to do with law or with the administration of law and justice.”<sup>301</sup> A typical characteristic of the juridical oath is that it is assertory in nature, i.e., confirming the truth of a statement or a declaration, in which it conforms to the use of oath in contemporary Western law. Non-juridical oaths are more varied in form and can take on a form of an oath of fealty or an emotional expression but are all promissory in nature.<sup>302</sup>

Curiously enough, Wilson classifies the present case (his number 82) as an example of a non-juridical oath, which is seemingly at odds with the legal setting of this passage. He understands Isis’ oath as either a demand or an appeal, suggesting that she strives for an appeal to a different, possibly higher authority, or alternatively for a change of venue.<sup>303</sup> This is in line with the reading of Broze, who sees Isis as demanding a new judgement whose validity will not be disputed.<sup>304</sup> The phraseology points chosen is reminiscent of that used in relation to oracles, further reinforcing that a consultation with a greater

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<sup>300</sup> For and overview, see Ben Haring, “From Oral Practice to Written Record in Ramesside Deir El-Medina”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 46 (2003): 249–72.

<sup>301</sup> John A. Wilson, “The Oath in Ancient Egypt”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 7 (1948): 130.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>304</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 50.

authority is sought.<sup>305</sup> Donker van Heel argues that women were far more likely to resort to oaths of this kind based on attested examples from Deir el-Medina, inferring that this reflects the disadvantaged position of women in courts of law.<sup>306</sup> It is no coincidence that Isis resorts to this tactic at a time when the case of Horus seems the most desperate, the vulnerability of their claim mirroring the real-world vulnerability of female litigants, who too were often at mercy of stronger men who could bend the truth for their own ends, often with complicity of local authorities.<sup>307</sup>

Isis's choice of divinities to invoke in her oath matches Wilson's assumption that she has an appeal in mind. Neith serves as a distant authority in this tale, while Ptah seems to be a deity that is at least on par with Re, if not higher, indicated by the fact that Re is called "Son of Ptah" later in the tale. Moreover, it is clear that they are not directly involved in the proceedings, meaning an appeal to them would be possible. Indeed, an appeal to Neith and deliberations with Ptah brings the matter of succession to its satisfactory conclusion at the end of the tale.

Isis' oath, however, is perhaps too impactful. The response of the Ennead mirrors the arguments of Thoth earlier and appears to put his case right back on track in apparent contrast with previous developments of the proceedings and our assumptions about the impact of female litigation in Egyptian courts.<sup>308</sup> Coming back to the remark that the subjectivity of characters is quite limited in this tale, we can argue that when Seth "became angry, since they spoke the words of Isis", this represents not an opinion of Seth's, but rather a statement of fact within the narrative. Therefore, the compliance of the Ennead constitutes yet another 180 degrees turn of opinion, one they repeat right away as soon as Seth opposes it: a full 360 within just a few sentences. The divine council is now transparently seen as a collection of weathervanes whose direction is fully determined by the force of each litigant's argument.<sup>309</sup>

It is less clear as to how exactly the efficacy of Isis' argument can be understood, i.e., what specifically was it that compelled the Ennead to agree with her. The phrasing of Seth's reply could indicate that there was in fact magic at work, Isis using her remarkable skill in this art to break the conundrum, as she perhaps does later with Seth on the Isle-in-the-

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<sup>305</sup> Cf. Jean-Marie Kruchten, *Le grand texte oraculaire de Djéhoutymose: Intendant du domaine d'Amon sous le pontificat de Pinedjem II.*, Bruxelles: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1986, p. 89, 378. See also Ben Haring, "From Oral Practice to Written Record", p. 263.

<sup>306</sup> See the discussion K. van Heel, *Mrs. Naumakhte & Family*, p. 49 ff.

<sup>307</sup> Cf. note 1110. See also D. Sweeney, "Gender and Conversational Tactics in The Contendings of Horus and Seth", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 88 (2002), p. 142.

<sup>308</sup> See D. Sweeney, "Gender and Conversational Tactics in The Contendings of Horus and Seth", p. 148.

<sup>309</sup> Cf. M. Campagno, "Judicial Practices, Kinship and the State", p. 25.

Midst.<sup>310</sup> The wrath of goddesses was also feared for its destructive potential in some contexts, when the lion goddesses and the goddess of Eye were invoked.<sup>311</sup> It is just as possible that the Ennead is only depicted as completely lacking in spine and relevance at this point in the narrative when the possibilities of collective deliberation have been completely exhausted.

Seth's response, on the other hand, contains no such ambivalence. Invoking once again his physical superiority and propensity for violence, he also highlights the now too apparent disadvantages of choosing a candidate for office solely based on his strength. Faced with a legal challenge, Seth immediately resorts to threats of murder, once again proving that unless he is restrained, he represents an uncontrollable force that can undo the order of the universe. Just as the principle of kinship invoked by Horus is shown to be an ambivalent factor in the succession drama, so is the prowess of Seth both necessary for the maintenance of the cosmic order and erosive with regards to it. As each of the opposing principles of royal legitimacy clash against one another, each is shown to be more problematic than they were originally assumed to be. While it may appear that no progress has been made in the narrative as far as the legal battle goes, the clash of ideas underlying the royal institution has, in fact, advanced significantly. We are now faced with a far more nuanced concept of politics, one that becomes even more complex as the tale unfolds, ultimately showing that in the context of the royal office, the matter of succession is not only a legal matter, but a thing of cosmic importance.<sup>312</sup>

### 3.5 Isis' Ruse (5,3-8,1)

#### 3.5.1 The Function of Nemty (5,3-5,7)

Then Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon said to them<sup>(5,4)</sup>: "You shall cross to the Island-in-the-Midst and there you shall be judged." And they said to the Nemty the ferryman: "Do not ferry<sup>(5,5)</sup> any woman that looks like Isis." Then the Ennead crossed to the Island-in-the-Midst, and they<sup>(5,6)</sup> sat down to eat bread.

Re's remark is clearly intended for Horus and Seth. Its content is, surprisingly enough, a sort of synthesis of both Isis' and Seth's demands from the council – Isis requested a change of venue, while Seth demanded her removal from the proceedings. The

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<sup>310</sup> For Isis as a sorceress, see Geraldine Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, London: British Museum Press, 1994, p. 29–30; Robert Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993, p. 18 ff.

<sup>311</sup> See E. Hornung, *Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh*, p. 38–40, 93–94; Christian Leitz, *Tagewählerei: Das Buch ḥ3t nḥḥ ph.wy dt und verwandte Texte*, Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994, p. 134.

<sup>312</sup> For non-royal succession, see the discussion and sources cited in Sandra Lippert, "Inheritance", in Elizabeth Froom, Willeke Wendrich (eds.) *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2013. Accessed at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/30h78901>.

importance of the change of venue is obvious. The main mode of action in this part of the story is still speech, but whereas until now the speech was direct and transparent, now elements of metaphor and deception appear, adding another layer to the narrative.<sup>313</sup> This is visible both in terms of the story and the literary devices used: it is no coincidence that it is here that the device of the story within a story appears.<sup>314</sup> The story and the characters are getting more complicated, and so is the storytelling.

Nemty is a well-attested deity in Egyptian history and his worship is quite ancient. Its beginning can be traced to at least the 2<sup>nd</sup> dynasty, at which point he seems to have had priests dedicated to his cult. During this early dynastic period, it seems that Nemty was the patron deity of the area around Badari.<sup>315</sup> Nemty, Dunanwi and Horus were all falcon gods of this earliest stratum of Egyptian mythology, who have gradually assimilated into one another, eventually leading to Horus achieving the position of prominence in the pantheon.<sup>316</sup> Unlike Dunanwi, Nemty seems to have remained relevant at least till the Ptolemaic Period, when his appears in *Papyrus Jumilhac*.<sup>317</sup> Throughout Egyptian history, he remained very closely tied with the more dominant Horus, taking on the latter's mythical qualities.<sup>318</sup> The extent of the mythical overlap between Nemty and Horus will become apparent in this chapter.

The god's name is usually written using an ideogram ( or )<sup>319</sup> depicting a falcon perched on a stylized boat reminiscent of the lunar crescent.<sup>320</sup> This logographic writing

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<sup>313</sup> Cf. D. Sweeney, "Gender and Conversational Tactics in The Contendings of Horus and Seth", p. 162.

<sup>314</sup> See the discussion in M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 262–265.

<sup>315</sup> Toby Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt*, London – New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 242. See also Guy Brunton, *Qau and Badari*, vol. 1., London: British School of Archaeology in Egypt – Bernard Quaritch, 1927, pl. xviii.

<sup>316</sup> R. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, p. 200.

<sup>317</sup> See Gábor Nemes, "The Mythological Importance of the Constellation Msxtjw in Mortuary Representations Until the End of the New Kingdom", *Égypte Nilotique et Méditerranéenne* 13 (2020), p. 33 ff.

<sup>318</sup> *Book of Fayum* identifies Nemty as the "great Horus" (Horst Beinlich, *Das Buch vom Fayum: Zum religiösen Eigenverständnis einer ägyptischen Landschaft*, vol. 2, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, p. 162). See also R. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, p. 25.

<sup>319</sup> The arguments for each of the readings are quite complex and have been quite conveniently summarized in Erhart Graefe, *Studien zu den Göttern und Kulturen im 12. und 10. oberägypten Gau*, Fribourg, 1980, 64 p.

<sup>320</sup> LÄ I, 318; R. Wilkinson, *Complete Gods and Goddesses*, p. 204. Wilkinson also sees some similarity between the boat and a throw-stick, as does Stan Hendrickx, René Friedman, Merel Eyckerman, "Early Falcons," in Ludwig Morenz, Robert Kuhn (eds.), *Vorspann oder formative Phase? Ägypten und der Vordere Orient 3500–2700 v. Chr.*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011, p. 144–146, fig. 17.

convention results in there being two possible readings of the name: Anty and Nemty.<sup>321</sup> The former was preferred by earlier research, while the latter reading is currently preferred by scholarly consensus.<sup>322</sup> Interestingly, each of these readings comes with a distinct set of etymologies and resulting symbolic associations.

The preferred reading, Nemty, relates the name to the verb *nmt* “to go; to stride through”,<sup>323</sup> allowing for the translation “Wanderer”.<sup>324</sup> This reading underlines both the lunar aspect of Nemty’s divinity and his function in funerary literature, both of which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. The traditional reading, Anty, assumes the name is related to *ʿn.t* “claw”, the god being “the clawed one”. Following this reading, Spiegel argued that the passage where Anty’s toes are removed is a mythical explanation for Anty’s clawed feet, claws replacing his lost digits.<sup>325</sup> This, however, has no basis in the tale itself, although there is a possible connection with the clawed deity of the 12<sup>th</sup> Upper Egyptian nome mentioned in Pyramid Texts spell 302: “The seat of NN is with you, Re, and he will not give it to anyone else. He will ascend to the sky to you, Re, for his face is that of falcons, my wings are those of ducks, his talons are the fangs of Him-of-Atefet (a locality in the 12<sup>th</sup> nome).”<sup>326</sup> The text of New Kingdom stela of the herald Mem (Bruxelles E.2161) confirms that this epithet refers to the god with the passage “from the offering table of Nemti, lord of the Atefet-district”.<sup>327</sup>

The phrase “his talons are the fangs” (*ʿn.wt=f m whʿ.w*) of the Pyramid Texts spell is especially interesting. The word *ʿn.t* actually has a wider range of “most distal part of a limb”, including not only “claw”, “fang” and “talon”, but also “finger” and “toe”. In fact,

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<sup>321</sup> See Alan Gardiner, Kurt Sethe, “Zur Vokalisation des Dualis in Ägyptischen: Der Name von Gebelên und der Name des Gottes Antaios,” *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 47 (1910), p. 51. Cf. Jaroslav Černý, Alan Gardiner, Eric Peet, *The Inscriptions of Sinai*, vol. 1, London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1952, pl. 42, no. 119.

<sup>322</sup> The arguments for each of the readings are quite complex and have been quite conveniently summarized in Erhart Graefe, *Studien zu den Göttern und Kulturen im 12. und 10. oberägypten Gau*, Fribourg, 1980, 64 p.

<sup>323</sup> *Wb* 2, 270.4-21.

<sup>324</sup> R. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses*, p. 204.

<sup>325</sup> J. Spiegel, “Die Erzählung vom Streit der Götter Horus und Seth um die Herrschaft”, p. 44-45.

<sup>326</sup> PT 302 § 461b-d.

<sup>327</sup> Luc Limme, *Égyptische stèles*, Brussel: Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis, 1979, p. 20-21; Louis Speleers, *Recueil des inscriptions égyptiennes des Musées Royaux du Cinquantenaire à Bruxelles*, Bruxelles: Vanderpoorten, 1923, p. 17, n. 75. 2

“fingernails of him of Him-of-Atefet” is a frequent reading the passage of Pyramid Texts spell 302.<sup>328</sup> It is quite likely that this deity is, in fact, Nemty of Atefet.<sup>329</sup>

Give the considerations above, a question arises whether the sharpness of Nemty is not the same lunar sharpness as that of Thoth. The Pyramid Texts call Thoth “the knife that issued from Seth,”<sup>330</sup> relating both his fierce character, and the perceived similarity between knives and the lunar crescent.<sup>331</sup> Apart from the lunar appearance of Anty’s bark, which might be only superficially reminiscent of the heavenly crescent, there is an interesting passage in Coffin Text spell 473. In this spell the deceased is described as escaping a net while traversing the Winding Waterway on the way to the Field of Offerings and states the following: “I have glittered as Nemty on its middle, I have glittered as Nemty on its top.”<sup>332</sup> “Its” refer to the Winding Waterway, a locale on the east side of the sky.<sup>333</sup> Without specifying which glittering celestial body Nemty is supposed to represent in the passage, we can invoke the tradition of Pyramid Texts, where the assistance of Thoth is used by the deceased to cross the Winding Waterway: “He (The King) will cross with you (Horus) on Thoth’s wing to the other side of the Winding Canal, to the eastern side of the sky.”<sup>334</sup> While the Wing of Thoth inspires an idea of flight, the word “cross” (*dʒi*) has a classifier in the form of a boat.<sup>335</sup> Consequently, the Wing of Thoth is often interpreted as a figure for the moon sickle, much like the boat of Nemty.<sup>336</sup>

The sources cited shows that Nemty and Thoth both fill the role of an assistant deity with ferryman qualities in funerary transition spells.<sup>337</sup> That Nemty is invoked in the same

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<sup>328</sup> Cf. Timofey Shmakov, *New Readings in the Pyramid Texts*, p. 313. Accessed at [https://www.academia.edu/1319063/New\\_readings\\_in\\_the\\_Ancient\\_Egyptian\\_Pyramid\\_Texts](https://www.academia.edu/1319063/New_readings_in_the_Ancient_Egyptian_Pyramid_Texts).

<sup>329</sup> For a discussion of the talons or nails of a raptor associated with Atefet and likely linked to Nemty in a falcon form, see Horst Beinlich, *Studien zu den „Geographischen Inschriften“ (10.–14. o. äg. Gau)*, Bonn: Habelt, 1976, p. 130 ff.

<sup>330</sup> PT 665A § 1906b, PT 665D § 1927c, PT 674 § 1999c.

<sup>331</sup> Cf. the discussion of Thoth flinty character in chapter 3.9.3 below.

<sup>332</sup> CT 473 VI, 16g–h.

<sup>333</sup> Yasser Abdel-Hadi, Maha Yehia, “Astronomical Interpretation of the Winding Canal in the Pyramid Texts”, *NRIAG Journal of Astronomy and Astrophysics* (2009): 303–316. See also Rolf Krauss, *Astronomische Konzepte und Jenseitsvorstellungen in den Pyramidentexten*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997, xvi + 297 p.

<sup>334</sup> PT 359 § 596a–b.

<sup>335</sup> See the appropriate page in James Allen, *A New Concordance of the Pyramid Texts*, vol. 3, Providence: Brown University, 2013. Cf. *Wb* 5, 511–513.14.

<sup>336</sup> For the Wing of Thoth as a moon sickle, see Abbas Bayoumi, *Autour du Champ des Souchets et du Champs des Offrandes*, Cairo: Service des Antiquités de l’Égypte, 1940, p. 5; Winfried Barta, *Die Bedeutung der Pyramidentexte für den verstorbenen König*, Berlin – Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1981, p. 88–89; Kurt Sethe, *Übersetzung und Kommentar zu den Pyramidentexten*, vol. 2, Glückstadt – Hamburg: Augustin, 1932, p. 44.

<sup>337</sup> See M. Stadler, *Weiser und Wesir*, p. 235 ff.

capacity in this tale, which is understood to be outside of this category of spells, can indicate that the tale doesn't just cross a geographical boundary in its representation of physical universe. It also crosses boundaries between spheres of religion that are usually not so readily crossed: that between the funerary and the here-and-now.<sup>338</sup>

To close out the relationship between Anti and religious geography a passage from Coffin Text spell 607 can be cited which calls the Goddess Sekhet, "the flesh of the East-land, the assistant of Nemty."<sup>339</sup> Furthermore, Nemty is "Lord of the East," in a stela from Serabit el-Khadim in the Sinai.<sup>340</sup> While the stela is most readily understood as relating the oriental nature of Nemty with the real-world location of Sinai, it can also reflect a wider, mythical understanding of the East which encompasses both land east of Egypt, such as Sinai, and ideal locations that include the Winding Waterway.

The Sinai stela is interesting in another regard: it depicts Nemty as a man with the head of a Seth-animal, the same way as Seth is usually depicted.<sup>341</sup> Te Velde remarks that while Nemty is Horus-like in that he can be depicted as a falcon, he also reveals a Sethian aspect abroad, calling him a "double god".<sup>342</sup> This would allow us to reconcile Nemty's significant overlaps with Horus with the fact that he does lean more towards Seth in the *Contendings*, where his significant qualities are the fact that he is punished, his propensity to dereliction of duty and bribery, and bad judgement. All this can easily be related to Seth of *Contendings*. His defeat at the hands of Isis is a warm-up round for her overcoming of Seth, who too falls to the ambivalence of her speech. That Anti of this tale leans rather towards the Sethian, indicates that he acts in a capacity of lord of foreign lands, although in this case in might be better phrased as their gatekeeper. Indeed, in a New Kingdom context Sinai was not only a foreign land itself, but also a gateway to them. Finally, we may also remark that this Sinai connection might be relevant when Hathor, herself the mistress of Sinai, comes into play later in the tale.

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<sup>338</sup> See the discussion of Ferryman spells in chapter 5.5.1.

<sup>339</sup> CT 607 VI, 220d-e.

<sup>340</sup> J. Černý, *The Inscriptions of Sinai*, vol. 1, pl. xlii. Cf. J. Vandier, *Le Papyrus Jumilhac*, p. 27.

<sup>341</sup> For the Seth animal, see the discussion in Angela McDonald, "Tall Tails: The Seth Animal Reconsidered", in Angela McDonald, Christina Riggs (eds), *Current Research in Egyptology 2000*, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2000, p. 75-81.

<sup>342</sup> H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 114.



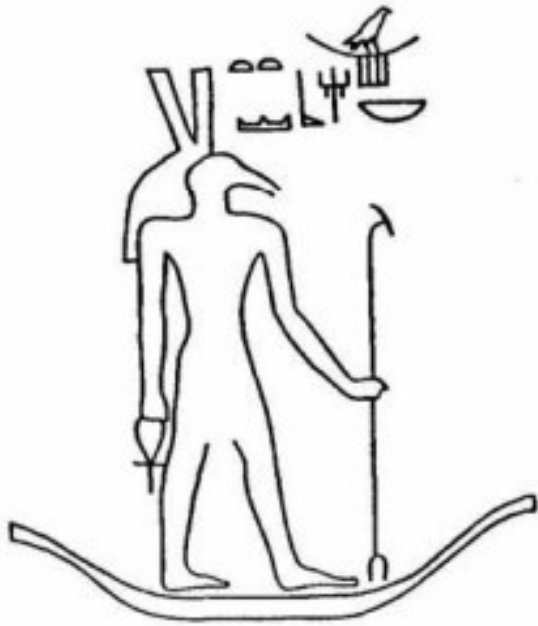


Fig. 3. “Nenty, lord of the Sinai.” After J. Černý, *The Inscriptions of Sinai*, vol. 1, pl. xlii.

To conclude, the ferryman Anti exhibits many common traits with Thoth. He serves as an assistant deity in funerary transition contexts. His “sharpness” is one of his distinctive qualities, much like with Thoth of older tradition, he exhibits lunar characteristics and is both Seth-like and Horus-like, albeit in different contexts, which is a distinctive trait of Thoth’s in the Pyramid Texts and can be applied to Thoth of the *Contendings* as well.<sup>343</sup> Not only will this realisation allow to match this episode to one related to Thoth later in the tale, but it also reinforces the argument that ideas of funerary religion are brought into the foreground here. Emphasizing the traits that Anty shares with Thoth not only highlights that they are similar in nature, but also places the similarities themselves in the

spotlight, pointing the reader to what the focus of the following text is going to be. Leaving the familiar structures of the world of legal disputes, the ferryman brings the tale over to the other bank of the waterway, to the otherworld where different rules apply.<sup>344</sup>

As for the Island-in-the-Midst itself, it is a purely literary device and matches no historical locale mentioned in Egyptian sources.<sup>345</sup> Derchain related this episode of the *Contendings* with a text of Hellanicos of Lesbos, who has visited Egypt in 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>346</sup> This fragment, quoted by Athenaeus, mentions “A city on the river, Tindion by name. Here is an assembly of the Gods, and a great and holy temple of stone in the midst of the city, and gates of stone. Inside the temple grow white and black thorn-bushes. On the top of them are placed the garlands twined of the flower of the thorn and the flower of the pomegranate and of the vine. And they are always in bloom. The Gods placed the garlands in Egypt when they heard that Babys was king, who is Typhon.”<sup>347</sup>

<sup>343</sup> For Thoth as a cohort of Seth in the Pyramid Texts, see PT 218 § 163d; PT 219 § 173a-b; PT 534 §1271a-1271c.

<sup>344</sup> Cf. the discussion of liminal spaces in chapter 5.5.1 below.

<sup>345</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 51.

<sup>346</sup> Philippe Derchain, “Un conte égyptien chez Hellanicos de Lesbos”, *L’Antiquité Classique* 25 (1956): 408-411. Derchain translates the Greek phrase as “city in the middle of the river.” He argues in favour of this reading with the notion that the terse account Hellanicos would likely not bother mentioning the fact that the city is located by the river, something that is the norm in Egypt.

<sup>347</sup> Hellanicus, *Fr. 150*, quoted by Athenaeus, xv. 25, p. 679.

The description indicates that it relates an Egyptian myth rather than a visit to a physical place. Derchain considers the city of Hellanicus' account fictional, although he sees in the name Tindion a corruption of Egyptian *t3-nty*, "place of Anty", connecting it Antaeum described by Diodorus of Sicily.<sup>348</sup>

### 3.5.2 Isis and the Ferryman (5,6–6,2)

Then Isis went, reached Nemty the ferryman, while he sat by his<sup>(5,7)</sup> boat, and turned herself into an old woman that walked all bent<sup>(5,8)</sup> with a small golden signet ring on her hand. She said to him: "I have come to you to ask you to ferry to<sup>(5,9)</sup> the Island-in-the-Midst, because I have come with a bowl of flour for a small boy,<sup>(5,10)</sup> who tends to the herds (after he lost? the office) on the Isle-in-the-Midst, five days has it been, and he is hungry."

And he said to her:<sup>(5,11)</sup> "I was told not to ferry any woman across."

She said to him: "That which you say was said to you<sup>(5,12)</sup> because of Isis."

And he said to her: "What will you give me if you get ferried to the Island-in-the-Midst?"

THEN Isis said to him:<sup>(5,13)</sup> "I will give you this cake."

THEN he said to her: "What will this cake of yours be to me? Do I ferry you to the Island-in-the-Midst, having been told: "Do not to ferry any woman!", in exchange for your cake?"

THEN SHE<sup>(6,1)</sup> told him: "I will give you the golden signet ring that is in my hand."

He said to her: "You hand over the golden signet ring!", and she<sup>(6,2)</sup> gave it to him.

THEN HE ferried her across to the Island-in-the-Midst.

Approaching the ferryman, Isis finds herself facing a predicament not dissimilar to that of the deceased in the funerary texts referred to in the previous section and many others.<sup>349</sup> The expanse of water presents itself as an obstacle and like in the Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts, the ferryman must be brought into compliance to resolve the issue.<sup>350</sup> Many elements of Isis' encounter with the ferryman can be connected to spells in these corpora of texts. In Coffin Text spell 398, we see the deceased in a similar manner as Isis in the

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<sup>348</sup> P. Derchain, "Un conte égyptien", p. 111.

<sup>349</sup> E.g., CT 404 V, 183. See also Dieter Mueller, "An Early Egyptian Guide to the Hereafter", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 58 (1972), p. 113.

<sup>350</sup> Cf. e.g., PT 270 § 384a–b, § 385, §387a–c.

*Contendings*, as he approaches the ferryman and is, in turn, asked to provide his credentials before the service is provided to him:

“– Oh, you Ferryman, who brings the Horus to his Eye who brings Seth to his testicles and who brings the Bark to Horus when it flees and falls down into his garden, it having been saved from the hand of Seth. Oh, you Ferryman, bring (it) to me!

– Who are you?

– I am the one whom his father loves.

– Your father loves you because of which things you do for him?

– Because I have tied together his bones and gathered together his members, and because I have given him bread at my will so that the magic ability of his survivors might be effective <for> him. Now make ready, it being at the wharf (?)”<sup>351</sup>

If one considers how the difference of literary registers affects the way in which symbols and their constellations appear, the similarities become more visible. The passenger of the Coffin Text is the deceased, who, from parallels with other spells, can be identified with Horus.<sup>352</sup> The ferryman is described as the facilitator of the transfer of the commodities or qualities necessary – the structural function of the Eye of Horus has already been discussed in preceding sections.<sup>353</sup> Typically in spells such as this one, the passenger wishes to follow Osiris, whose funerary rituals have not yet been completed.<sup>354</sup> However, as the speaker assures the ferryman, this has already taken place, leading us to a seemingly paradoxical conclusion: he needs to cross in order to perform rituals, while at the same time basing his right to cross on the fact that the rituals have been duly performed. This may seem challenging to accept, but the cyclical nature of the funerary rituals enacted in the netherworld provides a conceptual framework within which such statements are consistent.<sup>355</sup> In the end, the purpose of the spell (and the corpus) is not to explain the

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<sup>351</sup> CT 398 V, 120a–124a. Translation by H. Willems, *Coffin of Heqata*, p. 415–416.

<sup>352</sup> Cf. PT 310 § 493a. See also the discussion in chapter 5.5 below.

<sup>353</sup> The testicles of Seth sometimes appear in parallelism with the Eye of Horus. Te Velde argues that these body-parts represent opposing, but complementary elements of the universe. (H. Te Velde, *Seth*, 50–58) As for the bark, earlier versions instead read “Eye of Horus”, which Willems sees as the original reading. (H. Willems, *Coffin of Heqata*, p. 162)

<sup>354</sup> For a concise description of funerary rites, incl. naval rituals often connected to the Ferryman spells, see Harold Hays, “Funerary Rituals (Pharaonic Period)”. Cf. Martin Stadler, *Weiser und Wesir*, p. 357.

<sup>355</sup> H. Willems, *Coffin of Heqata*, p. 163–164.

mythology of Osiris, but the continuous life of the deceased beyond death, something that we know from later texts is tied to regular cosmic cycles of rebirth.<sup>356</sup>

The similarities between the *Contendings* and the Ferryman spell can now be outlined.<sup>357</sup> When Isis presents her false identity and justification for travel on Nemty's boat, she paints herself in a very similar light as the deceased does. First, she invokes her love for her relation, in this case, a son. Then, she points out that the relation lacks something needed, in this case bread. Her story emphasizes the privation of the son, clearly establishing a link between her possession of the bread and the person in need, bringing up the mythical constellation of the Eye of Horus. Behind the thin façade of Isis' charade hides the underlying principle of the ferryman spells, and the choice of bread as the physical manifestation of the Eye points to popular spells such as CT 398. The parallel can be pushed further, if we recall that despite Isis' emotional claim that the boy is hungry, we know from two separate mentions in the story that the divine court is eating bread while Isis interacts with the ferryman, each of the mentions positioned in such a way in the tale as to neatly frame this episode.<sup>358</sup> While the *Contendings* do not explicitly mention that Horus is eating together with the rest of the divine collective, it is tempting to see in the story a parallel with the apparent paradox of Osiris at the same time requiring assistance and already benefiting from its being given. Perhaps, instead of treating Isis' vision of a hungry child as an outright lie, or a metaphor for the office the child is lacking, it can point to the paradoxical image that the ferryman spells often present.

At the same time, we may see the bread as shorthand for a more general idea of an offering. As we have seen, the Eye of Horus can denote various offerings, including the typical offering of bread, as in Pyramid Text spell 46: "A king-given offering to the *ka* of NN. Osiris NN, accept the Eye of Horus, your bread-loaf, and eat."<sup>359</sup> Just as the Eye of Horus is the archetypal needed object, so may the bread serve as shorthand for the thing Horus lacks: the royal office. Feasting with the Ennead, he may be sated by bread, but the same is not the case for his desire to follow his father as king.

Now, unlike bread, the office is at first glance not for Isis to give, but by the time she reaches Horus, she has already secured the office for him, and the ferryman (just as Seth does later) plays unwittingly the part of a funerary assistant deity, a fitting role, given his symbolic connection with Thoth, the archetypal helper of mortuary texts.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> See e.g., Winfried Barta, *Die Bedeutung der Jenseitstexte für den verstorbenen König*, p. 1 ff.

<sup>357</sup> See also the argument in chapter 5.5.1 below.

<sup>358</sup> *Con.* 5,6; 6,3.

<sup>359</sup> PT 46 § 35b.

<sup>360</sup> See e.g., Hubert Röder, "Auf den Flügeln des Thot: Der Kamm des Königs Wadj und seine Motive, Themen und Interpretation in den Pyramidentexten", in Mechthild Schade-Busch, (ed.), *Wege öffnen: Festschrift für Rolf Gundlach zum 65. Geburtstag*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997, p. 232–252.

One open topic remains: the role of Isis within this funerary framework. Superficially, she is a helper of Horus. Structurally, however, she is the object that Horus needs. We may recall how Seth causes the estrangement Isis from Horus, which can be compared to texts like Pyramid Texts spell 359, where it is said that “Horus’s eye jumped and he made landfall on the other side of the Winding Canal so that it might save itself from Seth, having seen Thoth on the other side of the Winding Canal.”<sup>361</sup> The threat of violence that caused the separation of Isis and Horus can be compared to the many instances where Seth insults the Eye of Horus.<sup>362</sup> Unlike the ferryman spells, however, the Eye returns of its own volition, much like the Solar Eye in the myth of the returning goddess. Like Re after the insult of Baba, a profoundly Sethian character,<sup>363</sup> Horus is reduced into a passive state and must await the return of the goddess. Compared to the aforementioned destructive goddess, the anger of Isis is more subdued, but the penalties to the rebels Nemty and Seth are still severe.<sup>364</sup> As will be shown later, the returned goddess must be transformed to lose its dangerous character and be reintegrated into the pantheon.<sup>365</sup>

Combining elements from the mythology of the returning goddess and of the Eye of Horus into one symbolic constellation, Isis is at the same the missing piece that Horus needs, which is only effective after potentially destructive contact with chaos, but at the same time she is the independent and powerful agent that exacts vengeance upon the instigators of chaos, restoring the clarity of royal rule upon her return.<sup>366</sup> Consequently, in the context of this passage, Isis is structurally identified with the royal office, both partaking of the symbol of the divine Eye. More specifically, Isis represents a female principle by which a contender for the throne legitimizes his or her claim, a principle that is presented in this tale as an alternative to the model of patrilineal descent that has dominated the story advanced so far. The interrelation of these two principles of legitimacy will be explored later.

Coming back to the specific situation in the tale, we can remark that the ferryman of the *Contendings* is obviously less cooperative than his colleague of the funerary texts. Nor is

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<sup>361</sup> PT 359 § 594a, cf. PT 475 § 946a ff.

<sup>362</sup> See H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 46 ff.

<sup>363</sup> Philippe Derchain, “Bebon, le dieu et les mythes”, p. 23–47; Philippe Derchain, “Nouveaux documents relatifs à Bebon (B3b3wy)”, p. 22–25.

<sup>364</sup> Sweeney notes that given her great magical power, Isis chose an indirect strategy by design. See D. Sweeney, “Gender and Conversational Tactics in The Contendings of Horus and Seth”, p. 154.

<sup>365</sup> Cf. C. Bleeker, *Hathor and Thoth*, p. 57.

<sup>366</sup> Compare to *Con.* 15,11–12, where upon Horus’ victory Seth is treated as a rebel and his release is conditioned by his submission to the new king.

It should also be noted that the interactions of Isis and Seth leave the goddess profoundly ambivalent, necessitating her brutal transformation later in the tale. Cf. the discussion of cultural motherhood in chapter 3.7.3.

Isis equipped with the ostentatious force, confidence, and powerful allies, like the deceased of the same corpora. This reflects the different purpose of the text, which, unlike the funerary spells, which have an interest in the success of their beneficiaries, does not need to make things easy for the protagonists.

Isis must consequently resort to an indirect approach to achieve her goal. We can easily compare her trouble with the ideal situation represented in Pyramid Texts spell 359, which conveniently parallels the Coffin Texts spell cited above:

“Horus wailed for his eye; Seth wailed for his testicles. Horus’s eye jumped and he made landfall on the other side of the Winding Canal so that it might save itself from Seth, having seen Thoth on the other side of the Winding Canal. Horus’s eye jumped up on the other side of the Winding Canal and he made landfall on Thoth’s wing on the other side of the Winding Canal.

You gods who cross on Thoth’s wing to the other side of the Winding Canal, to the eastern side of the sky, in order to contend against Seth over that eye of Horus, Teti will cross with you on Thoth’s wing to the other side of the Winding Canal, to the eastern side of the sky, for Teti will be contending against Seth over that eye of Horus.

May you wake in peace, Sees Behind Him, in peace. May you wake in peace, Nut’s oarsman, ferryman of the Winding Canal. Tell the name of Teti to the Sun, announce Teti to the Sun, for Teti is off to that far palace of the lords of kas in which the Sun dawns from the Horus Mounds and the Seth Mounds, the god of those who go to their kas. Sun, commend Teti to Sees Behind Him, the ferryman of the Winding Canal, so that he might get for Teti that ferryboat of the Winding Canal in which the gods cross to the other side of the Winding Canal, to the eastern side of the sky, and he might ferry Teti to the other side of the Winding Canal, to the eastern side of the sky, for Teti is in search of Horus’s endangered eye, Teti is off to the numbering of fingers<sup>367 368</sup>.

An important difference between ferryman spells and the *Contendings* has not yet been discussed. When we compare the episode to the Pyramid Text spell cited, we see that not only does Re not instruct the ferryman to aid Isis, but he also expressly forbids him from

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<sup>367</sup> For a detailed study of this curious phrase, see Luca Miatello, “Finger-numbering in the Coffin Texts: A Ritual with Rhymes, Puns, Parallels, and a Final Rebus, *Göttinger Miszellen* 260 (2020): 91–108. See also Harco Willems, *The Coffin of Heqata (Cairo JdE 36418): A Case Study of Egyptian Funerary Culture of the Early Middle Kingdom*, Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1996, p. 170 ff.

The reference to the “numbering of fingers” as potentially amusing, considering that when Nemty is brought to account for failing to ensure that only the right individuals are ferried, his toes are numbered.

<sup>368</sup> PT 359 § 594a–601a. Cf. PT 475 § 946a–950b.

doing so.<sup>369</sup> Unlike the royal funerary texts, the present narrative can afford a bit of uncertainty and drama, which would be unacceptable when the continued vitality of the king is at stake, as in the Pyramid Texts.<sup>370</sup>

### 3.5.3 Bribes and Puns

One element of Isis' travails with Nemty has not yet been discussed: puns. The emergence of word play fits well with the more general remark made earlier regarding the shift in the type of action in the narrative. Simple, unambiguous speech of earlier sections gives way to a greater variety, introducing metaphors, puns and deception, all employing a rather polyvalent understanding of language signs. The tale has affirmed that the ideas of heredity and legitimate descent are more complicated than assumed and now it translates this cognitive uncertainty into an element of the narrative and a tool that the protagonists can employ. Both for the characters and for the reader, things are no longer just what they seem at first glance.

The vehicle of this ambiguity is Isis, exemplified by the fact that she changes her appearance twice: first into that of an old woman, then to a beautiful girl. She hides her true intentions with metaphors, straddling the fine line between truth and lie and exploiting the inability of her opposition to accommodate this ambiguity. The description of Isis' approach to the ferryman is also somewhat tricky, as at first it seems to show Isis in danger of being exposed. The initial sentence "Then Isis went, reached Nemty the ferryman, while he sat by his boat, and turned herself into an old woman that walked all bent with a small golden signet ring on her hand" first informs the reader that she has arrived at the ferryman, only to change the way we visualize her saying that she has changed her appearance beforehand. The result of this chronological reverse is surprise, the reader thus mirroring how well Nemty and Seth afterwards will fare.<sup>371</sup>

As for the whole speech of Isis, it seems almost crafted to make a complete fool of the ferryman. Her image of herself as a poor old woman bringing food for her little boy is hard to reconcile with the fact that she apparently wears golden jewellery, which was not typically the case for the lower strata of Egyptian society.<sup>372</sup> Here already, appears the ambiguity of the word *iꜣw.t*, which can denote both "office" and "herd" and highlights both the short-sightedness of Nemty and his similarity to Seth, who too fails to recognize the deception hidden in the word.

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<sup>369</sup> Cf. PT 359 § 594b–596c.

<sup>370</sup> Cf. the discussion of the mimetic elements in the tale in chapter 6.3.

<sup>371</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 57.

<sup>372</sup> Cf. the discussion of age and vulnerability in D. Sweeney, "Gender and Conversational Tactics in The Contendings of Horus and Seth", p. 154, n. 110.

The trickery of Isis finds a parallel in the Calendar of Lucky and Unlucky Days, a collection of literary works that assign predictions to each day of the Egyptian year, denoting whether the day, or a part of the day, is to be considered “good” (*nfr*) or “bad” (*ḥz*).<sup>373</sup> The best preserved of the calendars is that of *Papyrus Cairo 86637* and is referred to in the present work.<sup>374</sup>

In the *Cairo Calendar* entry for day 13 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of the flood season (3 Akhet 13), Seth is described in essentially the same situation as Isis in the present episode.<sup>375</sup> He takes on the appearance of an old man and bribes the ferryman with gold to facilitate his and his companions’ crossing. They threaten the body of Osiris, but after changing into little cattle they are discovered by wrathful gods and are torn apart. Nemty’s tongue is cut out and gold is proscribed to him. The comparison indicates that Isis’ behaviour should be understood as Sethian in nature – unethical and reprehensible – and also warns the reader of the impending danger to the goddess.<sup>376</sup> If her mischief is discovered, there is no telling how she could be punished for defying the order of the sun-god.

The tale, curiously enough, gives some pointers. In the following pages, the overlap between these passages and love songs is discussed and the comparison of Isis’ predicament is made with that of the literary Egyptian women whose transgressions led them into the jaws of crocodiles. Perhaps a connection can be made between these women, Isis and the dismemberment suffered by Seth in the Calendar. Anyone familiar with the eating habits of the Nile crocodile knows that the same likely happened to the wife of Webainer, who was “snatched” by crocodile.

Coming back to the Isis and Nemty itself, one may remark that Nemty makes a show of denying Isis his service, but it takes very little for him to open to the idea of a bribe.<sup>377</sup> The joke, of course, is on the ferryman. When Isis replies that the prohibition against

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<sup>373</sup> Tamás Bács, “Two Calendars of Lucky and Unlucky Days”, *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 17 (1990): 41–45; C. Leitz, *Tagewählerei*, p. 1–2; Lana Troy, “Have a Nice day”, *Boreas: Uppsala Studies in Ancient Mediterranean and near Eastern Civilizations* 20 (1989): 127–147. Nine such calendars have been identified (L. Troy, *Have a Nice Day*, p. 140–143; C. Leitz, *Tagewählerei*, p. 2; Lauri Jetsu et al., “Evidence of Periodicity in Ancient Egyptian Calendars of Lucky and Unlucky Days”, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 18 (2008): 327–339.

For the original text, see ‘Abd el-Mohsen Bakir, *The Cairo Calendar No. 86637*, Cairo: General Organization for Government Printing Offices, 1966, x + 142 p.

<sup>374</sup> L. Jetsu, “Evidence of Periodicity in Ancient Egyptian Calendars of Lucky and Unlucky Days”, p. 330.

<sup>375</sup> C. Leitz, *Tagewählerei*, p. 127–128.

<sup>376</sup> We may compare the trickery of Isis with the lie of Seth at *Con.* 10,5–6.

<sup>377</sup> For bribery, see Hassan El-Saady, “Considerations on Bribery in Ancient Egypt.” *Studien Zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 25 (1998): 295–304, esp. p. 303. See also Pascal Vernus, *Affaires et scandales sous les Ramsès: La crise des valeurs dans l’Égypte du Nouvel Empire*, Bibliothèque de l’Égypte ancienne. Paris: Pygmalion/Gérard Watelet, 1993, xi + 211 p.



women crossing the river was issued because of one woman only and should therefore be restricted to that one woman, she almost spells out the religious reality that any woman can be Isis. This is, in fact, very much the point of this phase in the whole narrative, when the ambiguity of the female, especially in the context of royal succession, is shown to blur the boundaries between individual roles a woman can occupy, collapsing all of them into a singular idea of femininity.

The cake with which Isis first tries to bribe Nemty, also seems to be a pun. According to Leitz, the bread (*wh3(r)*) could be a wordplay with the talons (*wh3.w*) of Nemty from Pyramid Texts spell 461 cited above.<sup>378</sup> Broze tentatively accepts this reading, arguing that the fact that the bread is repeated three times in the Episode indicates that it is not just an unimportant detail. Instead, we can see the ferryman rejecting not only the bread, but his own toes in a tragicomic foreshadowing of his own imminent fate.<sup>379</sup>

The other item that Isis attempts to bribe the ferryman elicits a more favourable response but that doesn't reduce its comedic potential. First, the ring itself. The word used, *htm*, means not only ring, but also seal, the possible reading being "signet-ring".<sup>380</sup> Already we may see a hint of comedy, as the seal-ring was in some respects the equivalent of an identification card and was regularly used to authenticate documents by the wearer. It often bore the name and title of the owner, so it is ironic that the ferryman asks for it while the goddess' true identity eludes him. In fact, we might argue that the expensive golden ring is the one thing that could let him recognize the story of poor old woman as utter nonsense. The ferryman's lack of insight becomes even more pronounced as Isis flaunts the clues to her identity and the consequences of his failure to recognize it.

The word *htm* ultimately derives from the verb "to seal", having connotations of something closed, locked, restricted.<sup>381</sup> One of the uses of a seal in ancient times was to prevent authorized individuals from accessing certain places or items, such as chests, houses or tombs. Consequently, the word *htm* could also denote a fortress, either due to this also being a restricted place, or being an institution, whose purpose is to restrict others from moving freely.

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<sup>378</sup> C. Leitz, *Tagewählerei*, p. 129.

<sup>379</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 53.

<sup>380</sup> *Wb 3*, 352.13–16. For signet rings and seals, see Johannes Auenmüller, "Siegel und Siegeln in der Ikonographie des pharaonischen Ägypten: Soziale Kontexte und Akteure", in Johannes Auenmüller, Nikola Moustakis (eds.), *Gesiegelt - Versiegelt - Entsiegelt: Studien zum Siegel(n) als Kulturtechnik von der Antike bis zum frühen Mittelalter*, Münster: Zaphon, 2022, p. 33–100; Maria Guerr et al., "Finger-rings", in Maria Guerra, Marcos Martín-Torres, Stephen Quirke (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Gold: Archaeology and Science in Jewellery (3500–1000 BC)*, Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2023, p. 387–410.

<sup>381</sup> *Wb 3*, 350–352.3.

Military installations of this kind dotted the boundaries of Egypt and were perhaps most prominent in the regions where Egyptian military was most active: the border with Kush in the south, and the eastern Asiatic border with Sinai. As we have seen before, there are some indications that Nemty's association with Sinai could be invoked in the tale. As lord of the East and a divine assistant in transition spells, it makes only sense he would be the protector of travellers through this dangerous region on the way to the mining centres there or the lands of the Levant that lay beyond. While toeing the line between hypothesis and pure conjecture, we may entertain the notion that the choice of *htm* signet ring is supposed to evoke the *htm* fortresses covering the eastern boundary of Egypt and protecting the Way of Horus, the military road that connected Egypt proper with its Asian holdings.<sup>382</sup> The *htm* of Tjaru was frequently cited as the point of egress from Egypt in the New Kingdom royal inscriptions describing campaigns in the Levant, marking the fortress transition point between homeland and foreign country.<sup>383</sup> The military and economical function of the fortress was paramount and it is described in inscriptions of Seti showing his return from his campaign against the Cannanites, including a bridge over an otherwise impassable canal filled with crocodiles and lined with reeds.<sup>384</sup> The army of Ramesses II likewise passed the fortress on its way to Kadesh.<sup>385</sup>



Not only does it make sense that Isis would be following the Way of Horus metaphorically by staying true to his side in the quarrel with Seth, but also literally by following in his footsteps that lead to Island-in-the-Midst. Most interestingly, however, we can see in the standard writing of the phrase Way of Horus ()<sup>386</sup> the two signs that the author of the *Contendings* chose to represent the character of Horus in his two distinct modes () , as outlined in the chapter 2.2 above. If it could be argued that Nemty's Sinai association is referred to in the tale, we could brave the extra step and propose the connection between him, the Way of Horus and the two writing variants. In that case, Nemty would not only be the facilitator of Isis' movement from one mythical locale to

<sup>382</sup> See Ola El Aguizy, "The Khetem of Tjaru: New Evidence", *NeHeT* 6 (2018–2022): 1–7. See also Alan Gardiner, "The Ancient Military Road between Egypt and Palestine", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 6 (1920): 99–116; Dominique Valbelle, "One More Time, "The Way(s)-of-Horus"", in Miroslav Bárta et al. (eds.), *Guardian of Ancient Egypt: Studies in Honor of Zahi Hawass*, vol. 3, Prague: Charles University, Faculty of Arts, 2020, p. 1607–1613.

<sup>383</sup> Abdul Rahman Al-Ayedi, *The Inscriptions of the Ways of Horus*, Paris: Obelisk Publications, 2006, p. 2.

<sup>384</sup> The Epigraphic Survey, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak IV: The Battle Reliefs of King Sety I*, Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1986, p. 16–22, pl. 6–7. See also Benedict Davies, *Egyptian Historical Inscriptions of the Nineteenth Dynasty*, Göteborg: Paul Åströms Förlag, 1997, p. 1–7.

<sup>385</sup> *KRI* II, 12, 16.

<sup>386</sup> The meaning of the phrase would be the same even if the signs  and  were omitted. For variants of the phrase, see *Wb* 1, 248.3–4.

another, but also of Horus' movement from one state to the next. To imagine how these two transitions may be connected, we need only to consider what indispensable role Isis plays in this transformation of Horus. Also, much like Seth later in the story, Nemty becomes ambiguous character whose transgression and subsequent sacrifice are necessary for Horus to move to his new state of being.<sup>387</sup>

An alternative, although not necessarily exclusive, reading of *htm*, would refer to the specifics living in the area Deir el-Medina. Due to the sensitive nature of the work on royal tombs and the relative exposure of the village to raids by desert nations, the authorities maintained a system of checkpoints in the vicinity of Deir el-Medina, called the Five Walls.<sup>388</sup> We know relatively little about the precise nature of this security arrangement, but there are reasons to believe that instead of literal walls there would have been manned guard posts at strategic places.<sup>389</sup> Any person travelling from the valley to the village would have been subject to interference from security personnel.<sup>390</sup> It seems that a guardhouse referred to as *htm* was part of this security arrangement and could have been located on the bank of the Nile.<sup>391</sup> Anyone attempting to pass through could be subjected to official scrutiny, and the officers in charge could easily exploit their position to harass travellers or demand bribes. The signet-ring would in this interpretation serve as a mimetic element in the tale, connecting the travails of Isis with historical difficulties inherent in travel to the guarded community.

The most discussed element of the bribe, of course, is that the ring is made of gold. This topic will be discussed along with the topic of Nemty's punishment, something the tale itself relates to the special relationship the god has with gold.

#### 3.5.4 The Desire of Seth (6,2–6,8)

THEN HE ferried her across to the Island-in-the-Midst.

Now she was walking under the trees WHEN she looked and saw<sup>(6,3)</sup> the Ennead sitting and eating bread before the Lord-of-All in his booth.

THEN Seth looked<sup>(6,4)</sup> and saw her there, coming from afar.

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<sup>387</sup> See chapter 5.7.2 below.

<sup>388</sup> K. Donker van Heel, *Mrs. Naunakhte and Family*, p. 14.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15 and 17 ff.

<sup>390</sup> Cf. Patricia Berg, "Textual References to Mobility in Necropolis Journals and Notes from Deir El-Medina", in Andreas Dorn, Stéphane Polis (eds.), *Outside the Box: Selected Papers From the Conference "Deir El-Medina and the Theban Necropolis in Contact" Liège, 27–29 October 2014*, Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2018 p. 49–70.

<sup>391</sup> K. Donker van Heel, *Mrs. Naunakhte and Family*, p. 14.

THEN she cast her spell and made her appearance <sup>(6,5)</sup> that of a young woman with a beautiful body, the like of which did not exist in the whole world.

THEN he desired her very badly <sup>(6,6)</sup> indeed.

THEN Seth stood up, having been sitting and eating bread with the Great Ennead and he went to meet her, <sup>(6,7)</sup> whom no-one saw there apart from him.

This passage mentions twice that the divine assembly is eating bread, something that they were described in the previous passage doing as soon as they passed over to the island. This gives the reader a clear idea of the temporal frame of these passages as the principal actors separated for the first time in the story. Namely, we know that nothing of consequence has happened while Isis was acting independently of the rest of the gods. This means that even though the tale presents a three-dimensional space inhabited by characters, which would suggest a possibility for parallel action, i.e., multiple interactions happening at once, the narrative makes it clear that all activity is ordered serially. Regardless of the superficial scattering of the principal actors across mythical space, the tale makes it clear that it retains its clear linear structure. The significance of this emphasis on the tale as a two-dimensional entity will be discussed later in chapters 5.1 and 5.5.1.

The act of seeing is obviously the main mode of action in this passage. The sentences describing Isis seeing the Ennead and Seth seeing Ennead are constructed in a very similar way, producing an elegant parallelism of mutual beholding.<sup>392</sup> This situation, however, is far from equal. The verbal forms used – *ḥꜥ.n=f ḥr sdm* for Seth and *wn.in ḥr sdm* for Isis – indicate that Isis saw him first, and that Seth saw her as a consequence of this, reacting to the feeling of being watched.<sup>393</sup> The goddess has the initiative, even though later Seth addresses her by referring to the fact that he sees her (first). The text indicates that he did notice her coming but did not pay enough attention or could not recognize her from the distance, at least not until she transformed into a beauty. It is only then that she really catches his eye and with it, his heart.<sup>394</sup>

When Seth leaves the Ennead to meet Isis, we read about the eating of bread for the third time, which indicates significance of the phrase.<sup>395</sup> The meal is treated as a communal affair, something that Isis was excluded from when the Ennead left her on the other bank and is actually the only thing that the Ennead does while she goes about her business, first with Nemty and then with Seth. When the latter threatened the gods with violence, the consequence was that Isis was excluded from this collective eating. Reading the third

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<sup>392</sup> Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 61.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>394</sup> The different Egyptian terms used to describe seeing in this passage underline this point. On this, see Jean Winand, “Champ sémantique et structure en égyptien ancien, les verbes exprimant la vision”, *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 13 (1986), p. 312.

<sup>395</sup> Cf. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 61.

mention of bread eating in relation to the first case, we may see the ruse of Isis as a related action, a means of separating Seth as she herself was ostracised. Lured away by her beauty, he voluntarily leaves the very company which he strived to deny her. Removed from the rest of the tale's characters, Seth becomes surprisingly vulnerable. The importance of his separation is confirmed at Con. 6,7, where it is made clear that he leaves the sight of the Ennead as he pursues his passion.

### 3.5.5 Isis and Seth (6,8-7,1)

THEN he stood behind a sycamore and shouted at her, saying to her: "I am <sup>(6,8)</sup> here with you, beautiful girl."

Then she said to him: "Let me, my great lord: Me, I am just a wife of a herdsman, whom I <sup>(6,9)</sup> bore a son, a man. But my husband is dead, and the youth came to tend the herd of his father. <sup>(6,10)</sup> Then a man came, a stranger, and he sat in my stable, speaking like this to my boy: <sup>(6,11)</sup> "I shall beat you up, take your father's herd (office) and I shall throw you out!"

Then she said to him: "Now I would like to have <sup>(6,12)</sup> you defend him."

THEN Seth said to her: "Will the herd (office) be given to the strange man, while the son <sup>(6,13)</sup> of the man stands?"

THEN Isis turned herself into a kite, took off, and sat on the top <sup>(6,14)</sup> of a tree, crying at Seth, saying to him: "Weep for yourself! It is your mouth that said it! It is your cleverness <sup>(7,1)</sup> that has judged you! What do you want?"

Seth's opening remark would make little sense if he assumed that Isis is aware of his presence. The fact that he thinks he saw her first underscores that he feels to be the dominant party in an interaction when it is the other way around. This lack of insight is the defining characteristic of Seth in this episode.

We should note here that members of Egyptian elite had a repository of practical knowledge in the form of numerous wisdom texts that formed a keystone of male education.<sup>396</sup> The function of this corpus, amongst other things, was to provide the young men with a set of practical maxims that would allow them to navigate complicated situations, avoid unnecessary risks or, as in this case, foolish mistakes with women.<sup>397</sup> In

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<sup>396</sup> For an overview, see Richard Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt: A Dark Side to Perfection*, London: Continuum, 2002, p. 110, 235, 313-319. See also the discussion in R. Landráfová, H. Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess I*, p. 64-66.

<sup>397</sup> See Annette Depla, "Women in Ancient Egyptian Wisdom Literature", in Leonie Archer, Susan Fischler, Maria Wyke (eds.), *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night*, Basingstoke - London: Macmillan, 1994, p. 28-30.

fact, the *Instruction of Ani*, a text likely composed during the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty, an almost identical situation is described:

“Beware of a woman who is a stranger,  
One not known in her town;  
Don't stare at her when she goes by,  
Do not know her carnally.  
A deep water whose course is unknown,  
Such is a woman away from her husband.  
“I am pretty,” she tells you daily,  
When she has no witnesses;  
She is ready to ensnare you,  
A great deadly crime when it is heard.”<sup>398</sup>

The actions of Seth oppose this wisdom text in several respects: he allows his eyes to feast on a woman unknown to him, approaches her instead of avoiding her and he does this while being alone with her, without any witnesses, thereby exposing himself to even greater danger. Furthermore, he approaches the beauty with clear romantic intent, which is emphasized by the symbol of the sycamore behind which he hides, which is a frequent motif of love poetry<sup>399</sup> and a well-known attribute of Hathor.<sup>400</sup> The tale confirms the relevance of this reading by referring to the goddess with her title “Lady of the Southern Sycamore” at *Con.* 4,2. It is quite clear that Seth’s feelings are more than platonic which means that he goes against several maxims of Ani pertaining to a situation like this.

While Seth excels in the masculine quality of strength, he fails to live up to other ideals of manhood, namely temperance and at least a certain measure of erudition, at least as far as the classics are concerned. Wisdom literature was, of course, primarily aimed at the scribal elite, and it is hard to understand the degree to which the values communicated by these texts disseminated outside this narrow group of specialists. At this point it might be too cumbersome to discuss how exactly these values might be applicable to a person with social standing comparable to Seth, i.e., a prince and a claimant to the throne, but it can be argued that presentation of scribal ability of virtue was part of royal ideology, regardless of whether or how literate the royal person was.<sup>401</sup> Furthermore, the evidence of the very popular *Satirical Letter of Papyrus Anastasi I* indicates that even amongst the

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<sup>398</sup> Version of *Papyrus Boulaq* 4, recto, 16:13–16. Translation of M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, p. 137.

<sup>399</sup> See Jesús López, “Le verger d'amour (P. Turin 1966, recto)”, *Revue d'égyptologie* 43 (1992): 133–143. For examples, see H. Landgráfová, Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess I*, p. 200–202.

<sup>400</sup> See Alison Roberts, *My Heart My Mother: Death and Rebirth in Ancient Egypt*, Totnes: NorthGate Publishers, 2000, p. 26–27; Barbara Richter, *The Theology of Hathor of Dendera: Aural and Visual Scribal Techniques in the Per-wer Sanctuary*, Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2016, p. 179–182.

<sup>401</sup> Cf. the discussion in N. Allon, H. Navrátilová, *Ancient Egyptian Scribes*, p. 67 ff.

martial elite to which Sethian virtues may have appealed, there would have been an expectation of a solid education of the scribal variety.<sup>402</sup> Finally, the reader of the *Contendings* would inevitably be a literate and therefore most likely someone with scribal education.<sup>403</sup>

### 3.5.6 Isis, Seth and Love Songs

One of the curious aspects of the episodes recounting the exclusion of Isis and her travails with Nemty and Seth is that they share many interesting traits with New Kingdom love songs. We have already seen that the setting of the episode is erotically charged, expressed by the image of Seth regarding<sup>404</sup> his beauty from beneath a sycamore, a tree with strong erotic connotations. It is also hard to imagine the strong desire that motivated Seth to engage with the strange beauty as anything else than a sensual one. There are, however, more specific similarities, that deserve more detailed attention.

First, we may note the similarity in setting.<sup>405</sup> It has already been noted that despite the royal status of the principal actors, the story takes place in a pastoral setting, far from the luxuries of palace life that was associated with the royal way of life during the New Kingdom.<sup>406</sup> The gods do their business outside and reside in temporary shelters.<sup>407</sup> Whenever there is a mention of a specific urban location, the narrative treats it as a very distant place, far from the proceedings, requiring lengthy travel or messengers to facilitate

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<sup>402</sup> See the text of the letter in E. Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt*, p. 98 ff. For the original text, see Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert, *Die satirische Streitschrift des Papyrus Anastasi I*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983, 159 p. Cf. the letter's rendition of a love affair with a foreigner in chapter 3.5.6 below.

<sup>403</sup> For the letter as element of scribal education, see E. Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt*, p. 98–99.

<sup>404</sup> For the importance of sight in Egyptian love poetry, see Bernard Mathieu, *La poésie amoureuse de l'Égypte ancienne: recherches sur un genre littéraire au Nouvel Empire*, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale 1996, p. 163–164; Shih-Wei Hsu, "The Images of Love: The Use of Figurative Expressions in Ancient Egyptian Love Songs", *Orientalia* 83 (2014), p. 409–10.

<sup>405</sup> For the spatial aspect of Egyptian love poems, see the discussion in Bernard Mathieu, *La poésie amoureuse*, p. 151–159.

<sup>406</sup> For an overview of the topic, see Manfred Bietak, "Introduction To Palaces In Egypt: What They Tell Us About The Ruler, Administration And Culture," in: Manfred Bietak, Silvia Prell (eds.), *Palaces in Ancient Egypt and the Ancient Near East*, vol. 1, Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2018, p. 23–38.

<sup>407</sup> *Con* 3,13 refers to *j3m.w* "tents". The matter is more complicated with the *zḥ* "booth" of Re at *Con* 4,1 and 6,3 as the term can refer to both a tent and more permanent structure, such as a hall or a small chapel. (*Wb* 3, 464.3–21) However, since it seems that the same *zḥ* is referred to in both passages and the plot has meanwhile moved to another location, we can infer that the *zḥ* is a mobile or temporary structure. The presence of temporary shelters is characteristic of love songs. See John Darnell, "The Rituals of Love in Ancient Egypt: Festival Songs of the Eighteenth Dynasty and the Ramesside Love Poetry", *Die Welt des Orients* 46 (2016), p. 23.

communication between the locations.<sup>408</sup> While some love songs take place in a domestic setting, a larger proportion is set in the same pastoral-aquatic setting environment as Isis' encounter with Seth.<sup>409</sup> A significant exception is the house of Seth which serves as the setting of the *Homosexual Episode* and which anticipates the royal imagery of the story's finale.<sup>410</sup>

The presence of the sycamore tree in the passage points in the same direction. A meeting of lovers under a tree is described in the first song of *Turin Papyrus 1996*, and the sycamore is mentioned in two other songs of the same papyrus.<sup>411</sup> It is the setting of the episode by a body of water, notably one that has previously served as an obstacle,<sup>412</sup> however, that evokes the images of one of the *Cairo love songs*, specifically the famous piece of poetry which describes lovers separated:<sup>413</sup>

“The love of my beloved is on the yonder bank;  
The river has devoured my limbs.  
Nun is strong at the time of the [flood]  
And a voracious crocodile is waiting on the sandbank.  
I went down to the water to wade through the floodwaters,  
My heart was confident on the bank.  
I found the crocodile like a (mere) mouse,  
And the floodwaters like land to my feet.  
It is her love that makes me strong,  
She will cast a water-spell for me.  
I see the one whom my heart loves  
Standing right before me!”<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Cf. *Con.* 13,12, when Horus travels to Sais to meet Neith. Possibly also with Banebjede at *Con.* 2,2-3, who can be understood as being present in Setit when presence is requested at the proceedings. Even though a Theban context is assumed for the body of the narrative, there are no hints of an urban environment. Cf. chapter 5.6.5 below.

<sup>409</sup> John Darnell, “The Rituals of Love in Ancient Egypt”, p. 22-23. Darnell remarks that there are usually festive elements present as well, but it would probably be too ambitious to see such associations in the fact that the Ennead was sitting and eating bread.

<sup>410</sup> See the discussion of *ir hrw nfr* in chapter 3.9 below.

<sup>411</sup> *Papyrus Turin 1996*, 2 and 3. Cf. R. Landgráfová, H. Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess I*, p. 200-202.

<sup>412</sup> For references to water and navigation as typical elements of Egyptian love songs, see J. Darnell, “The Rituals of Love in Ancient Egypt”, p. 24.

<sup>413</sup> For commentary, see R. Landgráfová, H. Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess I*, p. 150. Cf. Michael Fox, “The Cairo Love Songs”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 100 (1980): 101-109; Virginia Davis, “Remarks on Michael V. Fox’s ‘The Cairo Love Songs’”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 10 (1980): 111-114.

<sup>414</sup> oDM 1266 and oCGC 25218, 8-14, A/4. Translation of R. Landgráfová, H. Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess I*, p. 149-150.



The obvious similarity is that there is a need to cross a waterway that is not easily traversed.<sup>415</sup> This on its own recalls the ferryman spells discussed previously, but such a situation would not have been unusual in real life, especially during the yearly inundation. The poetic description of the flooded land as the primeval waters Nun, however, fits well with the image of Re on an island in its midst of the *Contendings*, which produces cosmogonic connotations.<sup>416</sup>

I propose that Isis might in fact, be acting the role of the lover of this poem, seeking her beloved son despite risks and obstacles. The crocodile on the sandbank, while enigmatic at first, would then be an elegant parallel to Seth. The dangerous reptile was justly dreaded for the strength, speed and suddenness of its attack which threatened both people and livestock.<sup>417</sup> Unpredictable and aggressive, the animal was consequently a target of many magical texts seeking to ward off its assaults.<sup>418</sup> Crocodiles were also said to be exceptionally sexually aggressive, one Pyramid text describing the animal as “seizing wives from their husbands whenever he wishes, according to his desire”.<sup>419</sup> The power of the animal was compared to lightning,<sup>420</sup> which too falls within the symbolic category of Seth as lord of thunder.<sup>421</sup> Describing the whole category of words determined by the sign for crocodile, Goldwasser remarks that “Almost all words determined by the crocodile

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<sup>415</sup> An interesting comparison can also be made with the *Two Brothers*, where a somewhat inverted situation is described. Having been unjustly pursued by his older brother Anup under suspicion of adultery, Bata crosses a waterway infested with crocodiles and each of the brothers remains on a different bank: “He could not cross over to where his younger brother was because of the crocodiles. Then his younger brother called to him, saying, “If you have recalled a grievance, can’t you recall a kindness or something that I have done for you? Now go to your home and take care of your cattle, for I shall not stay in a place where you are.” (*Two Brothers* 8,1-8,3, tr. of E. Wente in *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*)

<sup>416</sup> Cf. the discussion chapter in 5.6.2 below.

<sup>417</sup> For a brief, historical overview of sources describing the crocodile in negative context, see: Penelope Wilson, “Slaughtering the Crocodile at Edfu and Dendera”, in Stephen Quirke (ed.), *The Temple in Ancient Egypt: New Discoveries and Recent Research*, London: British Museum Press, 1997, p. 181-183. For a detailed analysis, see Angela McDonald, “Animal Metaphor in the Egyptian Determinative System: Three Case Studies.” Dissertation: Oxford University, 2002, p. 339-495.

<sup>418</sup> Angela McDonald, “Animal Metaphor in the Egyptian Determinative System, p. 415.

<sup>419</sup> PT 317 § 510a-d: “NN has appeared as Sobek, Neith’s son. NN will eat with his mouth; NN will urinate and NN will copulate with his penis. NN is lord of semen, who takes women from their husbands to the place NN likes according to his heart’s fancy.” Translation of J. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, p. 60. Cf. Marco Zecchi, “Sobek, The Crocodile and Women,” *Studi di Egittologia e di Antichità Puniche* 1 (2004): 149-153.

<sup>420</sup> Cf. the crocodile hieroglyph as classifier after the word *sšd* “lightning” (*Wb* 4, 300, 8). See also Anna Chilcott, *The Crocodile in Ancient Egypt: Fate, Kingship, and Dichotomy*, BA thesis: The University of Auckland, 2013, p. 13.

<sup>421</sup> Angela McDonald, “A Metaphor for Troubled Times The Evolution of the Seth Deity Determinative in the First Intermediate Period.”, *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 134 (2006): 36, N. Allon, “Seth is Baal – Evidence from the Egyptian Script, p. 16 ff.

(except perhaps *sšd*) have strong negative connotations. They belong to the categories of greed, wild eating habits, wild power, and aggressiveness.”<sup>422</sup> Although the crocodile, like most symbolically interesting animals in Egypt, ultimately carries both positive and negative connotations, the term used in the love song, *dpy*, describes the animal in its dangerous and voracious aspect.<sup>423</sup>

The mix of physical and sexual aggressiveness attributed to the crocodile reflects in the role the animal takes on in stories recounting acts of lust and adultery, such as in *Papyrus Westcar*, where the crocodile devours the treacherous wife of Webainer,<sup>424</sup> and in the New Kingdom tale *Truth and Falsehood*, where the adulterous wife of Truth is supposed to meet the same fate.<sup>425</sup> The extent of the parallels of the latter tale with the *Contendings* has been noted by many, and the connection with the crocodile is consequently quite pertinent.<sup>426</sup> It may actually be argued that the crocodile in the poem serves as a metaphor for the threat of adultery, something that could lead the lover astray on the road to his or hers partner.<sup>427</sup> This would be in line with the issue of Isis’ split loyalties in the *Diving Episode*, which are discussed later.

The combination of traits associated with crocodiles meant that there was a very significant symbolic overlap between them and Seth, who was likewise known for his wild and excessive nature.<sup>428</sup> The Sethian character of the animal was expressed in a number of mythological sources, notably on objects called *cippi* or “Horus on the Crocodiles stelae” which represent Horus as a child standing on Seth in the form of a crocodile and

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<sup>422</sup> Orly Goldwasser, *From Icon to Metaphor: Studies in the Semiotics of the Hieroglyphs*, Freiburg - Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg & Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995, p. 103.

<sup>423</sup> *Wb* 5, 47, 13-16.

<sup>424</sup> *Papyrus Westcar* 12, 18-19.

<sup>425</sup> *Papyrus Chester Beatty II*, 6,2.

<sup>426</sup> On the topic of similarities between *Truth and Falsehood* and the *Contendings of Horus and Seth*, see Alan Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum. Third Series: Chester Beatty Gift*, London: British Museum, 1935, p. 2-6); Gustav Lefebvre, *Romans et contes égyptiens*, p. 159-161; John Griffiths, “Allegory in Greece and Egypt”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 53 (1967), p. 90; Leonard Lesko, “Three Late Egyptian Stories Reconsidered”, in Leonard Lesko (ed.), *Egyptological Studies in Honour of Richard A. Parker*, Hannover, 1986, p. 100; Jesús López, *Cuentos y fábulas del Antiguo Egipto*, Barcelona - Madrid: Publicacions i Edicions de la Universitat, 2005, p. 153-155; M. Campagno, “Two Observations on the Tales of ‘The Contendings of Horus and Seth’ and ‘Truth and Falsehood.’”, p. 19-30.

<sup>427</sup> *Wb* 5, 47, 13-16.

<sup>428</sup> As regards the shared sexual characteristics of the crocodile and Seth, it is interesting to compare the contraceptive of Papyrus Kahun, which utilizes crocodile dung (*Papyrus Kahun* 3,6), with the belief that Seth causes miscarriages (see H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 28-29, 55). Both Seth and crocodiles are potent to such an extreme that it prevents conception.

which were attributed magical healing properties.<sup>429</sup> The incantations on them describe Seth transforming himself into the animal to threaten the vulnerable child, Horus, in the marshes of the Nile delta.<sup>430</sup> In fact, many of Seth's epithets that were related to his negative traits included a crocodile sign as a classifier.<sup>431</sup> One such manifestation of Seth was a crocodile called the Glutton, both the animal and the god being known for their extreme and destructive appetites.<sup>432</sup> In later periods, the cult centres of Horus depicted Seth a hostile crocodile that was slaughtered by Horus and the king.<sup>433</sup> Another such form of Seth was called Seizer.<sup>434</sup> The crocodile was amongst the many messengers of Seth,<sup>435</sup> while the crocodile named Mega could be called the “son of Seth” when acting as the enemy of Osiris in mortuary literature.<sup>436</sup> The same crocodile was also the subject of several spells of the *Harris Magical Papyrus* intended to ward off crocodiles.<sup>437</sup>

The crocodile plays a significant role in another Late Egyptian story, the *Tale of the Doomed Prince*.<sup>438</sup> Its protagonist is a son of the Egyptian king, but a terrible fate is foretold to him by the gods. He is to be killed by one of three animals: crocodile, snake or dog. Sadly, the papyrus containing the single attested version of the story is damaged to such an extent that the latter part of the story is present only in fragments while the ending is missing altogether, although a good ending is usually assumed by scholars.<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> See Robert Ritner, “Horus on the Crocodiles: A Juncture of Religion and Magic in Late Dynastic Egypt”, in William K. Simpson (ed.), *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, New Haven: Yale Egyptological Seminar, 1989, p. 103–116. See also Annie Gasse, *Les stèles d’Horus sur les crocodiles*, Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2004, 184 p.

<sup>430</sup> R. Ritner, “Horus on the Crocodiles”, p. 105.

<sup>431</sup> For example: *jh*y (Wb 1, 122, 11), *jt* (Wb 1, 150: 9), *hwr* (Wb 3, 56: 14), *ʿwzj* (Wb I, 171: 15). See also A. Chilcott, “The Crocodile in Ancient Egypt”, p. 8.

<sup>432</sup> Wb 3, 121.14; LGG V, 228a-b

<sup>433</sup> See L. Kákosy, “Krokodilskulte,” in W. Helck, E. Otto (eds.), *LÄ*, vol. 2, p. 801; P. Wilson, “Slaughtering the Crocodile”, p. 183; H. W. Fairman, “The Myth of Horus at Edfu: I,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 21 (1935), p. 29. See also Anna Chilcot, *The Crocodile in Ancient Egypt: Fate, Kingship, and Dichotomy*, BA Thesis: The University of Auckland, 2013, p. 30–31.

<sup>434</sup> Wb 1, 150.9; LGG I, 627.

<sup>435</sup> See Hans Bonnet, *Reallexicon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971, p. 393. See also A. Chilcott, “The Crocodile in Ancient Egypt”, p. 8.

<sup>436</sup> Mareike Wagner, “Konzeption von Gespräch und Rede auf dem Sarkophag der Gottesgemahlin Anchnesneferibre”, in Amr El Hawary (ed.), *Wenn Götter und Propheten reden - Erzählen für die Ewigkeit*, EB-Verlag: Berlin, 2012, p. 107–10.

<sup>437</sup> Christian Leitz, *Magical and Medical Papyri of the New Kingdom*, London: British Museum Press, 1999, p. 38, VI, 5.

<sup>438</sup> For the text, see the discussion and sources cited in Camilla Di Biase-Dyson, *Foreigners and Egyptians in the Late Egyptian Stories: Linguistic, Literary and Historical Perspectives*, Leiden: Brill, 2013, p. 121 ff.

<sup>439</sup> M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, p. 200.

Towards the apparent conclusion of the tale, the prince encounters the crocodile who is locked in combat with an enigmatic character called the "Power" (*nht*).<sup>440</sup> He tries to enlist the prince's assistance against his nemesis in exchange for releasing the prince from his fate:

"Now on the day on which the youth had left Egypt in hit wandering, the crocodile, [his fate had followed him] ~. It came to be opposite him in the village in which the youth was, [and it dwelled in'] the lake. But there was a demon in it. The demon did not let the crocodile come out; nor did the crocodile let the demon out to stroll about. As soon as the sun rose (they) stood and each other every day for three months now. (...)

Now when many days had passed, the youth went out for a stroll on his estate. [His wife] did not go out [with him]. but his dog was following him. Then his dog began to speak [saying: "I am your fate]." Thereupon he ran before it. He reached the lake. He descended into [the water in flight from the] dog. Then the crocodile [seized] him and carried him off to where the demon was. [But he was gone. The] crocodile said to the youth: "I am your fate that has come after you. But [for three months] now I have been fighting the demon. Now look, I shall release you. If my [enemy returns] to fight [you shall] help me to kill the demon. For if you see the ~~~~ the crocodile." Now when it dawned and the next day had come, (the demon) returned ~~~~."<sup>441</sup>

This is where the papyrus cuts off. Studying the enigmatic character of the "Power" (*nht*) in the *Doomed Prince*, Christopher Eyre related it to the interaction of Isis and Seth in the *Contendings*:

"Some light may perhaps be thrown on the term *nht* by comparison with a passage in the story of 'Horus and Seth'. Isis appeals to Seth, telling him that a stranger (*drdr*) is threatening her son, and declares: "And my desire is to cause you to act for him (as a *nht*." The 'him' is presumably her son, although it is perhaps just possible that it might refer to the stranger. Seth then promises that he will protect the son. Apparently, the sense of *nht* is here 'champion, protector.' It is curious to note that the *nht* and the crocodile of the 'Doomed Prince' fight together for three months, the same length of time as that set on the duel between Horus and Seth."<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> *Doomed Prince*, 7,11-12; 8,10; 8,11; possibly also 8,14.

<sup>441</sup> *Doomed Prince* 7,9-13; 8,6-14. Translation of M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, p. 202-3.

<sup>442</sup> Christopher Eyre, "Fate, Crocodiles and the Judgement of the Dead: Some Mythological Allusions in Egyptian Literature", *Studien Zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 4 (1976), p. 107. Cf. M. Campagno, "Two observations on the tales of The Contendings of Horus and Seth and Truth and Falsehood", p. 23.

It has been observed by Pehal that the three fateful animals of the *Doomed Prince* are all symbols of Seth, each representing a distinct mix of positive and negative characteristics of the god.<sup>443</sup> Much like in the *Contendings*, there is a seemingly interminable enmity between two deadlocked rivals and a third, partially interested party enters the equation, tipping the balance to the advantage of one of them. Whereas in the *Doomed Prince*, an honest exchange of favours can be inferred, in the *Contendings*, the third party is tricked into acting against its own interest, not seeing that it is the enemy that it is enlisted against. As for the Power described in the story, we can see that it is an entity clearly opposed to the crocodile, and although the fragmentary nature of the tales' ending prevents a comprehensive understanding of the Power, its structural relationship with the Sethian crocodile is relatively clear.

Consequently, the *Doomed Prince* presents many interesting parallels with the *Contendings*, namely the underwater combat of two rivals lasting three months,<sup>444</sup> and the request to a third individual to intervene in a duel between a Sethian character and his rival. Both of these similarities are very specific and indicate a significant likelihood of either a common textual precedent, or direct influence of one text on the other. Apart from the interesting intertextual ties that this indicates (and which will be discussed later), it also means that crocodilian undertones should be expected within the parts of the *Contendings* that share parallels with the *Doomed Prince*. In the *Diving Episode*, where Horus and Seth fight for the aforementioned three months, Seth appears as a hippo, another fierce aquatic beast renowned for its man-eating habits and voracity.<sup>445</sup> In the episode of Isis and Seth, this crocodilian connection is articulated in a more subdued way and its exposition demands more sources to be added to the discussion.

Returning to *Truth and Falsehood* and the *Cairo love song*, we see that a woman threatened by a crocodile appears in both. In the former, the creature is a physical threat, in the latter an obstacle to love. In this episode, Seth is both: alone with Isis on the riverbank, he is vulnerable to her trickery and can be overcome, but at the same time he represents a significant danger to her.<sup>446</sup> He has already expressed willingness to kill his peers if

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<sup>443</sup> An unpublished article shared by email.

<sup>444</sup> Cf. *Con.* 8,10.

<sup>445</sup> Compare the discussion of Ammit, a beast that is part-lion, part-hippopotamus, part-crocodile mythical beast in Manon Schutz, "Auf allen Vieren: Taweret, Ammit und der missing link?", in Kathrin Gabler et al. (eds.), *Formen kultureller Dynamik: Impuls – Progression – Transformation. Beiträge des zehnten Basler und Berliner Arbeitskreises Junge Ägyptologie (BAJA 10) 29.11.–1.12.2019*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2021, p. 141–158.

<sup>446</sup> The idea of Seth as a crocodile threatening just punishment on Isis can be related to the fact that in Deir el-Medina, severe punishments were not typically inflicted in the village. Criminals were instead sent out to the riverbank where they were processed. See K. van Heel, *Mrs. Naunakhte & Family*, p. 58–59.

opposed and as Horus learns all too well later in the tale, a close encounter with Seth in private can have very serious consequences.

The comparison with *Truth and Falsehood* can be pursued further. The crocodile that awaits the wife of Truth is a result of her transgression against her husband, as is the case with the wife of Webainer in the *Westcar Papyrus*.<sup>447</sup> In the *Contendings*, Isis is exposed to Seth because she does not obey the ruling of the sun-god that barred her from the proceedings. Travelling to the Isle-in-the-Midst under false pretence, she acts in defiance of royal and in this case possibly also paternal authority. While there is a difference between marital and filial disloyalty, there are significant similarities, particularly that both are punishable by death, and Isis indisputably falls short of the social norm with her behaviour. ymuch like the women of the aforementioned stories, she finds herself deserving a fate in the jaws of the rapacious beast.<sup>448</sup> Despite the appearances, however, Isis is not a mortal woman and instead of falling to the danger, she prevails like the lover of the *Cairo love song*, employing magic or, at least, supernatural abilities. She defeats and humiliates Seth, “finding the crocodile as a mere mouse”, and returns to the object of her love, Horus.

The travails of Isis therefore mirror the situation of the lover of the *Cairo love song* not only in broad contours, but also in some significant details. There is, however, another side of the story, when we approach the episode as a love song from the perspective of Seth. Where for Isis there are mostly similarities with the *Cairo love song*, for Seth there are just differences. What is a victory for her is a defeat for him and the love song quickly turns into a horror as he falls into her trap.

Seth’s initial position in the episode matches that of the protagonists of numerous love songs, observing his romantic interest in an erotically charged environment.<sup>449</sup> Unlike,

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<sup>447</sup> In literary works in general, death serves as the standard punishment for infidelity. See C. Eyre, “Crime and Adultery in Ancient Egypt”, p. 96–97. In real life, the punishment for adultery would have been significantly less severe and may have entailed no punishment whatsoever, save for the possible condemnation by one’s peers. See *Ibid.*, p. 98 ff.

<sup>448</sup> Cf. the conclusions of Gustave Lefebvre, “Un conte égyptien: vérité et mensonge”, *Revue d'égyptologie* 4 (1940), p. 23; M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, p. 212, n. 4. William Simson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, p. 132, n. 7.

<sup>449</sup> There are several attested love songs with the incipit “I have found my beloved”, e.g. oLeipzig 1896 (Jaroslav Černý, Alan Gardiner, *Hieratic Ostraca*, vol. 1, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957, pl. VII, 4) and oDM 1650/I,II,III (Georges Posener, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques littéraires de Deir el Médineh*, vol. 3, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1980, p. 93, pl. 72–73). See also the table in R. Landgráfová, H. Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess I*, p. 233.

An interesting comparison could be made with the song of oDM 1266 / OGC 25218, A, 5:

“(My beloved has come, my heart rejoices,  
My arms are open to embrace her.  
My heart is happy in its place

them, however, the object of his desire not only does not share his feelings, but approaches him with hostile intent.

Much like Isis, Seth enters the episode in a way that defies societal expectation, as outlined in the discussion of the *Instruction of Ani* above. One of the ideas behind the maxim in question is the avoidance of adultery, both with regards to one's wife and the husband of the strange woman, the assumption being that an adult woman would likely have a husband. To know her carnally would therefore constitute a risk of being charged with adultery by her husband if the matter became known.<sup>450</sup>

To emphasize the risk of engaging with a woman outside of one's community, it is possible to mention two more sources. *Papyrus Lansing* advises an Egyptian scribe against becoming involved with a Cassite woman, because nothing good can come of it,<sup>451</sup> while *Papyrus Anastasi I* describes another man who was made an object of ridicule for having fallen to the victim to a foreign maiden's charms in Joppa.<sup>452</sup> Quite clearly, strange women constituted a potential danger, unless encountered in the orderly confines of Egyptian marriage.<sup>453</sup> Here we may recall another case of Seth's travails with foreign women attested in the story of *Anat, Seth and the Seed of Pre*, where the wild intercourse he has with the goddess causes him to become ill.<sup>454</sup> Given his direct association with the foreign lands and their women,<sup>455</sup> one would expect the god to be more wary when approaching the attractive stranger. With regards to this, his inability to temper his appetites in the episode with Isis may appear even more comical.

Coming back to the topic of Seth's improper behaviour, we can see that his romantic interest in Isis is inherently dangerous. Seth's recklessness in failing to account for this danger betrays the fact that he and Isis are actually playing out two different literary

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Like a Nile bass in its pond."

(translation of R. Landgráfová and H. Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess I*, p. 136)

<sup>450</sup> C. Eyre, "Crime and Adultery in Ancient Egypt", p. 95.

<sup>451</sup> *Papyrus Lansing*, 8,7. See Alan Gardiner, *Late Egyptian Miscellanies*, Bruxelles: Édition de la Fondation égyptologique reine Élisabeth, 1937, p. 107. For translation and commentary, see Aylward Blackman, Eric Peet, "Papyrus Lansing: A Translation with Notes", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 11 (1925), p. 284-298.

<sup>452</sup> *Papyrus Anastasi I*, 25, 2.

<sup>453</sup> See e.g., H. Te Velde, *Seth: God of Confusion*, p. 112-113.

<sup>454</sup> J, van Dijk, "Anat, Seth, and the Seed of Pre", p. 33. See also the discussion in M. Pehal, *Interpreting Ancient Egyptian Narratives*, p. 210 ff. The scene is reminiscent of the *Contendings* and the love song in that Seth encounters the goddess on the waterfront and is ensnared by her beauty.

<sup>455</sup> Cf. also *Con.* 3,4.

scenarios. Whereas Isis plays out the role of the lover of the *Cairo love song*, Seth becomes a discouraging example of instruction texts or the fool of *Papyrus Anastasi*.<sup>456</sup>

We can observe an interplay of genre and genre tropes that match the interplay of content of the tale. On both levels, there is intentional confusion on Seth's dialogue as to what role he is playing and in what kind of a story he is playing it. The result is an inversion of established tropes of love poetry. The story seems to support this reading by omitting Hathor from this superficially erotic encounter and only introduces the goddess in a funerary context. Whereas in the romantic genre the Hathoric element point to the sensual, in the *Contendings* her presence always signifies that the protagonist is on the threshold of death. The sycamore, an otherwise benign symbol, likewise becomes an omen of ill fate for Seth, reminding us that in its most basic form, love is a pure force which is both generative and destructive.

By transposing the wisdom of Ani on the romantic fiction of this genre, the story avoids its idealized scenarios and plays out in a much different way than a similar interaction would in a love song. The result of this genre subversion is that Seth and Isis effectively change their roles. As Seth is shown not to be the lover, but the fool, so is Isis transformed from an object of love to an object of terror. Now she, abusing his foolishness, becomes the crocodile, punishing his and Nemty's trespasses. The ferryman undergoes a literal dismemberment, losing precious body parts, while in the case of Seth it is more metaphorical, losing the case and, more pertinently, his face in front of the court, as his ostentatious declarations of virility give way to pathetic and tearful expressions of self-pity. This social emasculation which reflects a more gruesome mythical tradition of Seth losing his testicles<sup>457</sup> or being fully dismembered, also finds a parallel later in the story when Seth loses his semen.<sup>458</sup> The significance of this symbolic slaughter of Seth will be discussed in the following section.

It is important to note the situational identification of Seth and Isis as metaphorical crocodiles enacted in this episode. Its purpose in the overall framework of the tale is to outline the key aspects of dealing with Seth. Firstly, it shows that in order to defeat Seth, one must become Seth-like, adopting the strength of the foe to defeat him. Secondly, it highlights that for Seth to be defeated effectively, the event needs to be framed as a self-sacrifice. These two elements are interdependent in this episode, articulated both by Seth's ill-advised verbal self-condemnation, and the shared symbolic identification of Isis and Seth with the crocodile through clever intertextual references and genre subversion.

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<sup>456</sup> Love songs actually describe lovers doing foolish things out of love, their tone is, however, usually not reproachful of the lover's foolishness and the outcome for him or her is not remotely as tragic as in the case of Seth. See e.g., *Papyrus Chester Beatty* I/1/2, I/1/3, I/1/4.

<sup>457</sup> See the discussion in H. Te Velde, *Seth: God of Confusion*, p. 53 ff, esp. 58.

<sup>458</sup> *Con.* 11,7.



Later in the tale, Horus will utilize both elements to defeat Seth once and for all but will approach them in a different manner. The contrast between his approach and that of Isis is one of the factors behind Isis' decapitation by Horus that occurs in the second part of the *Contendings*.

To provide one more example of the described genre subversion, we may bring up another characteristic of love songs, when the beloved is described as divine, their appearance akin to an epiphany.<sup>459</sup> This divinization is strictly situational, although it serves to emphasize that New Kingdom hymns are one of the precursors of Egyptian love poetry.<sup>460</sup> The situation in the *Contendings* is an interesting inversion of this motif in the poems as instead of a woman appearing to her admirer as a goddess, we see a goddess disguising herself as a woman. The creative reinterpretation of this motif neatly reflects the way the episode treats love poetry and contributes the overall comedic effect.

Lastly, it is possible to bring up one last potential literary reference to a love song in this episode of the *Contendings*. Coming back to the choice of a signet-ring as the vehicle of bribery, one may recall another poem from the same material source as the *Cairo love song* cited above – the *Deir el-Medina ostracon 1266 / Cairo ostracon 25218*:

I wish I were her little signet ring,

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<sup>459</sup> Most remarkably, the poem *Papyrus Chester Beatty I/I/1*:

“Unique is (my) beloved, with no second,  
More beautiful than anyone.  
Look, she is like the Star  
Rising at the beginning of the good year,  
Dazzling, excellent, fair of complexion.  
Beautiful when eyes behold.  
Her lips are sweet when speaking,  
She has no excessive words.  
Long of neck, fair of breast,  
Her hair is (of) true lapis lazuli,  
Her arms surpass gold,  
Her fingers are like lotus flowers.  
Wide of hips, slim of waist,  
Her thighs stress her beauty.  
Balanced of <stride> when she walks the earth,  
She seized my heart in her embrace.  
She makes the necks of all men  
Turn in order to look at her.  
Happy is everyone who embraces her,  
Being like the first of lovers.  
Coming forth, she appears  
Like the Yonder, the Unique One.  
(translation of R. Landgráfová and H. Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess I*, p. 92–97.)

The songs wherein the beloved is described as god-given are also quite pertinent, esp. *Papyrus Chester Beatty I/1/5, I/II,3*.

<sup>460</sup> J. Darnell, “Rituals of Love in Ancient Egypt”, p. 22 and 25 ff.

A companion of her finger!  
I would see her love  
Every day  
[...]  
While it would be I who would seize her heart.<sup>461</sup>

The phrasing is exactly same as in the tale, *htm.w šrj* “little signet ring.” Unlike the beloved of the song, however, it is Isis, lacking the ring she left with the ferryman, who would see Seth first and seize his heart.

To conclude, the literary parallels identified seem sufficient to establish a meaningful connection between the literary tropes of the love songs with the episode of Isis and Seth. Most of the symbols constituting these parallels are so pervasive in Egyptian literature that the author and reader of the tale would be closely acquainted with them. This likely indicates a conscious effort to relate the events described in these episodes with the literary devices and values represented by love poetry and the instruction genre. Here, we may recall that all the songs cited are of Deir el-Medina provenance, meaning that they likely shared the same physical context with *Papyrus Chester Beatty I* for an extended period.<sup>462</sup> As for the instruction texts, an abundance of them has been found during the excavation of the village, with text of the cited Instruction of Ani being present on four ostraca found there.<sup>463</sup>

The result of the analysis in this chapter is that the characters and the relationships between them and other elements appear richer and more complicated. This contributes to the understanding of the text and opens a new way in which its individual parts are integrated into a structured whole. This will become fully apparent as the interpretation of the plot develops further.

In addition, the fact that the characters in this story interweave with literary tropes outside the mythological genre suggests a more complex authorial process that uses intertextual connections to create a multi-layered work whose meaning goes beyond the mythological schemata with which the story explicitly works. These findings have the potential to contribute to scholarship on the topic of authorial agency in Egypt, genre categories, and

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<sup>461</sup> oDM 1266 and oCGC 25218 B/3. Translation of R. Landgráfová and H. Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess I*, p. 121–122.

<sup>462</sup> For love poems, see the discussion of source provenance in R. Landgráfová and H. Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess I*, p. 222 ff. For the *Instruction of Ani*, see especially *Papyrus Chester Beatty V*, verso 2,6–11, which contains several maxims from the wisdom text (A. Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri*, vol. 1, p. 50 and vol. 2, p. 27). The papyrus is generally assumed to have been a part of the same family archive as *Papyrus Chester Beatty I*. This topic is discussed elsewhere in this work, but see e.g., P. Pestman, “Who were the Owners, in the ‘Community of Workmen’, of the Chester Beatty Papyri” p. 155–172. It is an amusing coincidence that the selected maxims of Ani on the papyrus extol the benefits of marrying while young.

<sup>463</sup> M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, p. 135 ff.

also provide an example of a satirical or parodic work, something that is usually very difficult to identify in ancient literature.<sup>464</sup>

The contribution of this interpretation therefore goes and beyond the analysis of this one mythical work. The text not only takes motifs from different genres, but in doing so mediates a dialogue between them as well. This not only artistically and symbolically enriches the resulting work but can also serve as a commentary of the individual texts or genres it takes inspiration from. Specifically, this manifests in the way in which the relevant motifs that are taken from these sources are treated. By mixing themes and ideas from both instruction literature and love poems in one narrative, mythical framework, a unique constellation emerges that approaches the values articulated in both textual corpora from a new angle, allowing us to appreciate them in a new context. Whereas the poems and instructions express their ideas as self-evident, the *Contendings* do not necessarily treat the same ideas in the same way, as the focus of the tale lies elsewhere, in the exposition of the intricacies of royal succession. Instead, they are employed in a manner consistent with this focus, which uncovers otherwise hidden or subdued aspects or attitudes. For example, we may perceive the tale as holding up a mirror to love poetry, showing how the ideal world they depict leaves out some of the difficulties that actual love life might have entailed,<sup>465</sup> notably interaction with individuals acting in bad faith.<sup>466</sup> It is also likely, however, that the tale rather emphasizes the manner in which the interaction between Isis and Seth it depicts deviates from the societal norms described in the two groups of sources. In doing so, it highlights the problematic nature of the characters, but also the rather limiting nature of orderly conduct. Consequently, not only can we read the passage as problematizing established wisdom, but also the other way around, that the divine royals are not subject to it. If the matter of succession and the person of the king himself requires the ability to act in the manner of Seth, then it necessarily follows that at a certain point the morality Egyptian life need to be suspended.

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<sup>464</sup> See e.g., the discussion and references in Scott Noegel, “Wordplay” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021, p. 70.

<sup>465</sup> Compare Antonio Loprieno, “Defining Egyptian Literature: Ancient Texts and Modern Literary Theory”, in Jerrold S. Cooper, Glenn M. Schwartz, (eds.), *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the 21st Century*, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996, p. 217.

<sup>466</sup> Unrequited love is described in *Papyrus Chester Beatty I/III/6* and *Papyrus Harris 500 I,1*, while *Papyrus Harris 500 500 II,7* likely shows a post-breakup scenario. This is, however, quite far from the sophisticated, calculated trickery of Isis in the *Contendings*. Cf. R. Landgráfová and H. Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess I*, p. 157–158. The First story of Setne is also an interesting case in this regard. For a recent study of the story including up-to-date bibliography, see Steve Vinson, *The Craft of a Good Scribe: History, Narrative and Meaning in the First Tale of Setne Khaemwas*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017, xii + 354 p.

### 3.5.7 Isis and Seth II

Returning to the story Isis recounts to Seth, we may observe that it combines established elements of the Osirian mythos, shrouded, of course, in metaphor, with previous passages of the *Contendings*, as the threat placed in the mouth of the “stranger” strongly reflects the remarks of Seth at *Con.* 1,9-1,11. This results in the reader being able to relate this particular rendition of the mythology to those parts of it that are not included in the narration. It should be emphasized that only in the two “stories within a story” – Isis’ narration and its retelling by Seth – is the death of Osiris mentioned. This topic was carefully avoided in many contexts and genres due to reasons that might include not only decorum, but also concern with ritual efficacy, which is especially the case of funerary sources, in which the story of Osiris is usually framed as a matter of rebirth rather than death. By placing the issue of Osiris’ death outside the symbolic framework of the Osirian cycle, the story allows it to be presented from a less “religiously correct” and more naturalistic angle. At the same time, the inclusion of the motif of death within this inserted narration ensures that this element can remain omitted from the main story.<sup>467</sup> This indicates that the main narration shares some reservations of decorum with the sources mentioned above. Given the density of references to funerary material in the *Contendings*, the dislocation of the death of Osiris into another symbolic register both supports a funerary reading of the *Contendings* and highlights the deliberate manner in which these symbolic registers were navigated by the author of the tale.

Much like the previous section of the narrative, the story of Isis is replete with ambivalence. The most obvious example is, of course, the word *iszw.t*, meaning both “herd” and “office”.<sup>468</sup> While the purpose of this word’s presence in this passage is to obfuscate the reality behind the story of Isis, one might remark that there is also something eminently pastoral about the royal institution, and indeed mankind itself has been referred to as a “noble herd” in the Westcar papyrus.<sup>469</sup> The royal insignia of crook and flail have been both identified as tools of the shepherd.<sup>470</sup> The choice of word to cover up

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<sup>467</sup> It is unlikely that the New Kingdom audience would be unaware of the tradition of Seth as Osiris’ killer. At the same time, necessities of decorum likely discouraged any direct discussion of this sacred yet controversial incident. See John Baines, “Myth and Literature”, in Antonio Loprieno (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, Cologne – Leiden – New York: Brill, 1996, p. 369; Neal Walls, *Desire, Discord, and Death: Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Myth*, Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2001, p. 96.

<sup>468</sup> *Wb* 1, 29.7-16.

<sup>469</sup> *Papyrus Westcar* 8,17.

<sup>470</sup> Percy Newberry, “The Shepherd’s Crook and the So-Called “Flail” or “Scourge” of Osiris”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 15 (1929): 84-94; T. Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt*, p. 190. For Osirian iconography in general, see Uta Siffert, “Osiris – the Mummy Par Excellence? Investigating the Iconography, Development and Function of the Mummy Shape during the Middle Kingdom”, in Massimiliano Franci, Irene Morfini, Salima Ikram (eds.), *Rethinking Osiris: Proceedings of the*

the reality behind the story of the herdsman is therefore not arbitrary, but refers to an established facet of royal representation, matching the humorous word-play with state sanctioned symbolism.

Furthermore, we can at this point address the observation of Eyre discussed in the previous section, specifically that the word “him” in Isis’ “Now I would like to have you defend him,” is ambiguous: it is not clear whether it refers to the son or to the stranger. The usual reading is that “him” in refers to the son and *nht* means a “champion”, this being a positive role with regards to the son. On the other hand, if we interpreted the word of “him” as referring to the stranger, and related this passage to the *Doomed Prince* as Eyre suggests, the resulting translation could be “so that you would act as a Power to (against) him (the stranger).” That would mean that the trick of Isis to convince Seth to sabotage his own efforts would work on multiple levels. Not only would he agree to act against himself, but he would take on the role of his own enemy, the one who likely overcame his symbolic double in the *Doomed Prince*.

The same ambiguity appears on the level of the whole narration of Isis. As Broze remarks, the clause structure of her story is such that the chronological order of events in it is not entirely clear, specifically whether the child was born before or after the death of its father. Remarkably enough, when Seth recounts his version of Isis’ story, he fails to translate this ambivalence and renders it in a way that is coherent with the Osirian cycle: the child is born after the death of the father.<sup>471</sup> This reinforces the idea that Seth is just incapable of the same level of ambivalence as Isis, which can be both understood as a nod in the direction of his stupidity, but also as a sign that the two deities occupy distinct structural positions in the pantheon. Whereas Seth in each source is either an ally or a foe,<sup>472</sup> the relationships of Isis with the other deities are significantly less unambiguous.<sup>473</sup> The *Contendings* are not exception to this, as the second half of the story shows.

As with the ferryman, Isis straddles the fine line between truth and lie, making sure that she remains on the side of the former. This is in line with traditional Egyptian morality, which emphasizes truthfulness in both private and public contexts.<sup>474</sup> In a judicial context, however, the stakes are much higher, as the punishment for perjury could be very

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*International Conference*, Florence, Italy 26–27 March 2019, Rome: Arbor Sapientiae, 2021, p. 175–188.

<sup>471</sup> Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 164.

<sup>472</sup> For a convenient summary of these two main attitudes towards Seth, see H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 27 ff.

<sup>473</sup> See especially, Edmund Leach, “The Mother’s Brother in Ancient Egypt”, p. 19–21.

<sup>474</sup> See e.g., Richard Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940–1640 BC*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 13

severe.<sup>475</sup> This can be related to the great oath made by Isis in the previous episode, which was the institution by which tried criminals often subjected themselves to indictment of perjury. Following these considerations, we may compare this passage with the wisdom of the *Instruction of Ptahhotep*, which present us once again with a surprisingly fitting likeness of the tale's antagonist:

“[The fool]<sup>476</sup> who does not hear,  
He can do nothing at all;  
He sees knowledge in ignorance,  
Useful in its harmfulness.  
He does all that one detests  
And is blamed for it each day;  
He lives on that by which one dies,  
His food is distortion of speech.  
His sort is known to the officials,  
Who say “A living death each day.”  
One passes over his doings,  
Because of his many daily<sup>477</sup> troubles.”<sup>478</sup>

The actions of Isis might be remarkable for their careful avoidance of downright lies, but she deserves no less respect for her audacity. This is nowhere as apparent as when she asks Seth to intercede on the boys' behalf, which is technically true, even though she omits the crucial fact he will end up defending Horus from himself and to his own disadvantage. Bringing up a compelling image of an intruding “stranger”, she utilizes the xenophobic attitudes of the Egyptian value system to ensure Seth's cooperation.<sup>479</sup> He doesn't realize,

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<sup>475</sup> It is possible, albeit unlikely, that perjurers could be executed for their crime. A large amount of attested perjury cases relates to trials of tomb robbers active in the area of Deir el-Medina, who were forced to take an oath against perjury and who were, if found guilty by the royal court in Thebes, inevitably punished for both tomb robbery and perjury. While it is more likely that the death penalty was related to the robbery charge, as in other cases perjury would often result in milder forms of punishment, such as deportation, mutilation or lashing, the two crimes might have been seen as closely intertwined, especially by the inhabitants of Deir el-Medina where such criminal proceedings would have the potential to directly impact the community. See David Lorton, “The Treatment of Criminals in Ancient Egypt: Through the New Kingdom”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 20 (1977), p. 32–34.

<sup>476</sup> It is interesting to note that the opposite of the fool of the *Instruction of Ptahhotep* is a good son that is “a follower of Horus”. M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 1, p. 75.

<sup>477</sup> Compare *Con.* 2,4: “Judge the two youths, get rid of them now, so that the everyday quarrels cease!”

<sup>478</sup> M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 1, p. 74–75.

<sup>479</sup> A hatred of strangers and foreigners was true on the level of Egyptian cultural stereotypes, but not so much in more personal daily life situations, where interaction was inevitably more pragmatic and when foreigners enjoyed varying levels of tolerance and hospitality. See Poo Mu-chou, *Enemies of Civilization: Attitudes toward Foreigners in Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, p. 58–59. A fictional character, such as Seth, would of course rather fall within the scope of these ideologically charged stereotypes, reflecting Loprieno's *topos*.

of course, that since it is he who is the essential foreigner of Egyptian pantheon, he agrees to take up arms against himself.<sup>480</sup> Nor does he realize that there is no actual fight to be had on behalf of the damsel in distress. Instead of intervening against the boy's opposer physically and presumably somewhere else, he does the defending by unwittingly denouncing himself in front of the tribunal and scuttling his own case against Horus.

It is apparent that Isis' arguments are very carefully crafted to lead her opponents into a trap, but at the same time she refrains from saying anything that is false in the strictest sense of the word. Apart from safeguarding the goddess from moral or legal rebuke, this also serves to frame the whole affair in a comedic light. The affected characters can be seen digging their own graves even as they think themselves the advantaged party, the ferryman gaining a hefty bribe and Seth getting the opportunity to flex his muscles in front of a beauty.<sup>481</sup> The gleeful final remark of Isis, "Weep for yourself! It is your mouth that said it! It is your cleverness that has judged you! What do you want?", however, points to yet another direction. The phrasing clearly adapts the text of the ritual of the *Opening of the Mouth*, specifically the passages related to the slaughter of a bull:

"Words spoken at his (the bull's) ear by the great kite: [it is your lip that makes for you, it is the knowledge] of your mouth." (Episode 23)

"SETTING HANDS ON A MALE SHESER-ANIMAL OF UPPER EGYPT

GRAPPLING IT - CUTTING ITS FORELEG - REMOVING ITS HEART

Words spoken at his ear by the great kite: it is your lip that makes for you, it is the knowledge of your mouth."<sup>482</sup>

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Cf. A. Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, p. 73 ff. For a compact summary of the discussion, see Sakkie Cornelius, "Ancient Egypt and the Other", *Scriptura* 104 (2010), p. 334.

<sup>480</sup> H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 109 ff.

<sup>481</sup> Cf. D. Sweeney, "Gender and Conversational Tactics in The Contendings of Horus and Seth", p. 154.

<sup>482</sup> Eberhard Otto, "An Ancient Egyptian Hunting Ritual", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 9 (1950): 170, n. 21; Eberhard Otto, *Das ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual*, vol. 2, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1960, p. 76.

The sacrificial ritual, wherein animals were bound, killed and dismembered, was an established part of Egyptian funerary rites, which included as were texts in which Seth suffered the same fate.<sup>483</sup> Pyramid Texts Spell 580 is a prime example:<sup>484</sup>

Father-striker!<sup>485</sup> Killer of one greater than you! You have struck my father; you have killed one greater than you.<sup>486</sup>

Father Osiris NN, I have struck for you as an ox the one who struck you, I have killed for you as a wild bull the one who killed you, I have broken down for you as a long-horned bull the one who broke you down. The one on whose back you were is a bull on his back, the one who stretched you is a bull on the rack, the one who milked you is a milked bull, the one who deafened you is a herd-bull.<sup>487</sup>

The Spell goes on to describe how the bull is butchered and its parts are distributed among the gods. A remarkable element of the Spell is the way the bull is subject to the same injuries, which the bull is said to inflict on Osiris. Discussing the relationship between Seth as a murderer and Seth as a sacrificial animal, Te Velde somewhat cryptically remarks that his activity in the Osiris myth is suicidal rather than fratricidal. For him, the two gods

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<sup>483</sup> Cf. H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 94 ff. For an overview of the respective ritual, see Harold Hays, “Funerary Rituals (Pharaonic Period)”, p. 4.

We may also compare the treatment of Seth in the *Contendings* with the later practice of symbolically sacrificing red figures of men exhibiting Sethian traits. See Uroš Matić, “On Typhon, Red Men and the Tomb of Osiris: Ancient Interpretations and Human Sacrifice in Egypt”, in Vladimir Mihajlovic, Marko Jankovic (eds.), *Pervading Empire*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, p. 15–28.

<sup>484</sup> See also, for example, PT 581 § 1556a; CT 312 IV, 85q; CT 315 IV 97 i–l, 105 e–f; CT 594 VI, 213i.

<sup>485</sup> There is no doubt that this refers to Seth. The following Spell in the version of Pepi says: “Seth has been prepared for slaughter; how correct is Osiris!” is in the gods’ mouth at that final day of going atop the mountain.” (PT 581 § 1556a–b) This passage can easily be related to the events that follow in the *Contendings*.

<sup>486</sup> *smꜣ.n-k wr jr-k* Compare Ramesseum Dramatical Papyrus, VI.1.3, scene 3 (col. 6): *dhꜣwty stš [dd mdw] n dd [...]wr ir.k [...]* “Thoth [speaks words] to Seth: [...] cannot last [...] one who is older/greater (*wr*) than you”. For the translation and commentary, see Christina Geisen, *The Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus: A New Edition, Translation, and Interpretation*, Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2012, p. 46. The numbering of the papyrus used here is that of Geisen’s work.

<sup>487</sup> PT 580 § 1544a–1545b. Translation of J. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, p. 206.

Commentary of Allen’s translation can be of some assistance in understanding the passage: “These sentences incorporate a series of puns: between “strike” (*h*) and “ox” (*jh*), “kill” and “wild bull” (both *smꜣ*), “break down” and “longhorn bull” (both *ngꜣ*), “stretch” (*pd*) and “bull on the rack” (*pd.tj*), and “deafen” and “herd bull” (both *jd*). A “bull on his back” refers to one trussed for slaughter; “milking” is a metaphor for bloodletting.”



represent two opposing, yet complementary principles that make up the duality of life and death:<sup>488</sup>

“If Osiris is the god of absolute life, whose essence includes death, then the duality of Osiris and Seth is that of death and life. Osiris is death from which life arises, and Seth is life which produces death. Owing to the duality of Osiris and Seth which now came into being, death, which before had formed a unity with life, became visible separately in the strange brother. Seth attempts to get rid of death, i.e., Osiris who must die, by murdering his brother. This is the behaviour of the self-murderer, in whose life death does not remain hidden until he is completed or overtaken by it, but to whom death appears as his double or alter ego and who feels the need to murder death, so taking his own life.”<sup>489</sup>

This in turn allows for the incursion of death into life that disturbs the orderly course of the world to be overcome as the two principles of life and death become one again:

“By killing Osiris, Seth has slain himself and given himself as a sacrifice. The sacrifice of Seth and his following in the ritual is the dramatization of the murder of Osiris in its true perspective. It symbolises the end of Seth the demon of death, who as a suicide could find no rest. It unites him with his brother, Osiris the god of the dead. It confirms the cosmic order and does away with duality of opposites that should be united. Since the murder is not only the culmination, but also the end of chaos, it can be celebrated as a sacrifice.”<sup>490</sup>

Funerary texts often employ the symbolic image of Seth carrying Osiris as another way to express the function the punishment of Seth has in the resurrection of Osiris.<sup>491</sup> This can be articulated with Seth taking on the form of a bull to carry or drag the body<sup>492</sup> or a ship that is used to ferry Osiris to his final resting place, where he will achieve new life.<sup>493</sup>

This brings the matter back to Nemty and his Sethian character. Nemty brought Isis over, and it is for that reason that he is sacrificed. Now that the funerary overtones of this passage have become more apparent, it is appropriate to consider how the interaction with the ferryman can be integrated into this symbolic framework. Firstly, we may not

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<sup>488</sup> H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 95.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>491</sup> Cf. E. Cruz-Urbe, “Seth, God of Power and Might.”, p. 202 ff.

<sup>492</sup> See Jacques Vandier, *Le Papyrus Jumilhac*, Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1962, p. 250. See also Eberhard Otto, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Stierkulte in Ägypten*, Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1938, p. 13.

<sup>493</sup> *Ramesseum Dramatical Papyrus VI.7.2*, scene 13 (cols. 38). See also C. Gneisen, *The Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus*, p. 45–46.

that Nemty takes the physical aspect of the punishment while Seth's is less invasive: he only loses the case but keeps all his body parts. Both, however, are vehicles with which an obstacle to the beneficiary's progress to a desired state is overcome. In Nemty's case, the obstacle is articulated as a physical and an institutional barrier, whereas in the case of Seth, he is the obstacle himself. In this manner, the tale places together two crucial elements of the mortuary ritual, which are presented as crises to be overcome, as is typical of funerary literature. The first of these funerary images in the *Contendings* is transfer of the body on a boat across the Nile from the land of the living in the east, to the land of the dead in west, which frames death as a physical transition, the second is the Opening of the Mouth ceremony, which is a part of a greater set of rituals transforming the statue of the deceased into a functioning cultic body.<sup>494</sup>

Whereas the apparent beneficiary of the self-sabotage of Nemty and Seth is Isis, who wishes to reach the Isle in the Midst, the ultimate benefit comes to Horus, as the whole incident results in his coronation. Whereas in the ritual of the Opening of the Mouth and the *Dramatic Ramesseum Papyrus* the main concern is with the deceased and his achievement of superhuman state after death,<sup>495</sup> the *Contendings* are focused on the other transformation that results in a superhuman being, the king.<sup>496</sup> These two approaches are, of course, complementary, which the tale underlines with frequent references to funerary material. The justification of Osiris is always in the background as the matter of Horus' kingship progresses. The literary connection between this episode and the ferryman spells is present in the *Contendings* to emphasize how the explicit story of Horus and the implicit story of Osiris correlate. Furthermore, the structural framework of this episode puts Horus in a profoundly Osirian position. Passive, beset by enemies and lacking the article he needs to achieve his desired state, Horus very much reflects the position of Osiris before the justification that restores his ability to function effectively. This emphasizes that the fates of the son and father are close intertwined in the context of the funerary ritual, each of them "betwixt and between", until the necessary rituals can transition both of them to new stable roles within ordered universe. This topic will be discussed in greater detail in chapters 4 and 5 below.

As before, the author of the *Contendings* plays with the subject material in a creative manner. Isis, who in both *Dramatic Ramesseum Papyrus* and the Opening of the Mouth takes on the role of the slaughterer and blames the victim, incites both Seth and Nemty

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<sup>494</sup> Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad, "The Meaning and Purpose of Opening the Mouth in Mortuary Contexts", *Numen* 25 (1978), p. 121. See also the discussion in chapter 5.5 below.

<sup>495</sup> C. Gnieisen convincingly argues that the ceremony described is "concerned with the dead king" and the rites are performed on a royal statue, rebuking the idea that the papyrus might describe rituals related to accession or coronation. See C. Gnieisen, *The Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus*, p. 222-227, 238 ff. See also the discussion of the transformed deceased in chapter 5.5.2 below.

<sup>496</sup> See the discussion of royal divinity in chapter 4.

to acts that justify their consequent punishment, which needs to take place before the matter of succession can be advanced further. By providing both Seth and the ferryman with a carefully crafted version of the truth rather than a lie, she gives them with an opportunity to see through the trickery. In the world of the narrative, they become responsible for their fates, their own actions and their own inability to see what was in front of them that ultimately dooming them. In this manner does the sacrifice effectively become a suicide, and the tale connects itself with this aspect of the Osirian myth. The forces opposing Horus' accession are now transformed from dangerous opponents into sacrificial animals and it is thanks to this sacrifice that Horus can himself be elevated from his passive, impotent state. We will see that the same duality that is overcome at this point in the funerary context begins its process of integration in this passage. From now on Horus is no longer a completely passive element and begins to interact with the world on his own. When his transformation is completed, both he and Seth will no longer be opposing principles neither of which is capable of contributing to the maintenance of the cosmic order, but instead complementary elements of one harmonious duality, each a mirror image of the other.

### 3.5.8 Story of Seth (7,1-8,1)

THEN he started crying and went in tears to the place where Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon <sup>(7,2)</sup> was. He said to him: "What do you want again?"

THEN Seth said to him: "That evil woman came <sup>(7,3)</sup> to me again. She made me weak again. She made her appearance that of a young beauty before me and she <sup>(7,4)</sup> said to me: "I am a wife of a herdsman, who is dead and whom I bore a son, a man, who <sup>(7,5)</sup> tended to the herd (office) of his father, when a strange man came with my <sup>(7,6)</sup> boy to my stable and I gave him bread. NOW MANY DAYS AFTER THIS the one who came <sup>(7,7)</sup> said to my boy: "I will beat you, I will take the herd (office) of your father, it will be mine!" This he <sup>(7,8)</sup> said to my boy," she said to me.

THEN Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon said to him: "And what did you tell her?"

THEN Seth said to him: <sup>(7,9)</sup> "I have told her this: "Now, will the cattle be GIVEN to the stranger while the man's son stands?" That is what I told <sup>(7,10)</sup> her. "The one who came should be beaten in the face with a stick, thrown outside, and your boy should be put <sup>(7,11)</sup> in the place of his father." That is what I told her."

THEN Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon said to him: "So, you have judged <sup>(7,12)</sup> yourself, indeed! What do you want?"

THEN Seth said to him: "Have Nemty the ferryman brought, so that a great lesson is given to him, saying: "What did you <sup>(7,13)</sup> ferry her for?" This will be said to him."

THEN Nemty the ferryman was brought before the Ennead and his toes were removed.

THEN <sup>(8,1)</sup> Nemty forsook gold until this day before the Great Ennead, saying “Gold shall be an abomination to me and my city.”

As the main line of argument relating to this part of the tale has been discussed in the previous sections, the paragraphs below will mainly deal with supporting considerations relevant to this particular passage.

It has been remarked in the previous section that the specific phrasing of Seth’s retelling of Isis’ story removes the ambivalence of her rendition, thereby making sure that it matches the event succession of the Osirian myth. Being told that he is the stranger of the story, he amends it based on his own knowledge and engagement with the reality behind the story. This narrowing down of the ambivalence, which he willingly shares with the court, that is the essence of his self-judgement. Isis may have tricked him into condemning himself in from her, but it is only when Seth shares his own, more damning version of the story, that he ultimately loses the case against Horus.

However, the repetition itself can be taken to refer to the Mundöffnungsritual, which could be and was repeated on special occasions to reconfirm its efficacy.<sup>497</sup> When Seth repeats the story to Re and is once again denounced, not only is his shame repeated, but Isis’ plan actually comes to fruition. Whereas before his self-condemnation the story of their interaction was only between him and Isis, now the head of the court is aware as well, which leads to the ultimate dismissal of Seth’s claim to the crown in this part of the *Contendings*. The non-ambivalent phrasing that Seth uses does worsen the position, but probably not as much as the fact itself that he chose to recount his misfortune to Re. Once again, it is his mouth that has doomed him.

The tradition of Nemty’s punishment is attested from other sources, namely the *Cairo Calendar* and *Papyrus Jumilhac*, which support the aetiological claim of the narrator. According to Broze, the function of this foray from the fiction of myth into the historical reality of ritual practice serves to add veracity to the story: “If the reader knows that gold is prohibited in the nome of Anti, then the whole story has to be true.”<sup>498</sup> Bypassing the question whether the credibility of the narration could be expected to hinge on this rather amusing detail, we can remark that this reference to historical reality may be interpreted as a culmination of the *Contendings* literary complexity. Leaving the confines of fictional mythical time, the tale can be almost said to break the fourth wall and engage the audience as it relates the events described to the here and now of the reader.

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<sup>497</sup> R. Bjerre Finnestad, “The Meaning and Purpose of Opening the Mouth in Mortuary Contexts”, p. 126.

<sup>498</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 69.

Leaving aside the question of the relationship between cult and fiction, we can approach the nature of the punishment itself. The removal of toes is a remarkably specific punishment for this Sethian character and should be linked to the more frequently encountered motif of the loss of Seth's testicles. Much like them, the toes of Nemty are closely related to the very essence of this deity. Coming back to the discussion of the etymology of Nemty/Anty, we may recall that the latter reading relates the name to an.t which is not only "claw, talon", but also "finger, toe". The god is literally called the "toed one", meaning that his punishment goes directly against the nature of his being. These toes/talons of Nemty were, as we have seen, considered to be profoundly sharp, and were the obvious symbol of this god's dangerous character, much like the testicles of the Seth.<sup>499</sup> The removal of toes reduces the capacity of the god to do evil without destroying him, so that he can remain the part of the divine world. Instead of eliminating disorder, it is transformed so that it can become part of Maat.<sup>500</sup>

The tale articulates this idea further on another level, by denying Nemty gold. Approaching Nemty as a Sethian character, we may recall the very common epithet of Seth, *nbw.tj* ("The Ombite").<sup>501</sup> The primary meaning of the epithet is, of course, He-of-Ombos, the Upper Egyptian city, but can also be translated "The golden one." Relating the proscription of gold described in the tale to Seth and to Nemty's Sethian function in the tale, we can interpret this proscription as the removal of the problematic Sethian aspect that Nemty contains. Instead of acting against the orderly working of the universe, in this case the transfer of the royal office, he becomes an established part of Maat as a recipient of a divinely ordained cult, benefitting the people of his nome and the country as a whole.

Remembering Nemty's dual etymology, we may even remark that even when the toes are removed from Anty, the Wanderer still remains. If the gold were removed from the Ombite, there would be nothing left. Nemty bereft of his toes and gold represents a deity cultivated by violence and integrated by the loss of the means by which he committed his infraction. Just as Nemty violated his duties by taking a bribe of gold, so will Seth have to undergo a similar fate before peaceful relations are restored in the pantheon. From the treatment of Nemty we can already anticipate that Seth can only be reintegrated into the order of the universe when he is punished by losing the very thing with which he violated

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<sup>499</sup> Cf. H. Te Velde, *Seth: God of Confusion*, p. 112–113.

<sup>500</sup> Cf. E. Cruz-Urbe, "Seth, God of Power and Might.", p. 22: "Rather, the actions of Seth in murdering his brother Osiris are not to be seen as evil in the earliest periods, if at all, but as necessary actions to explain the experience of death, as well as the notion of utilization of power. Seth is judged by the rest of the gods and is not destroyed. Instead, he is reconciled with Horus and their "contendings" provide both instructions into the nature of divine events, as well as potential models for human events. The storm that Seth evokes is not one of confusion and disorder, but of power and might over the enemies of Egypt and the sun god."

<sup>501</sup> *Wb* 2, 242.6–7; *LGG* IV, p. 191.

this order. First losing his masculine vitality in the form of semen and then losing the crown-like disc of gold that appears on his head, he is maneuvered into a position when defeat is the only option, and he has no other option that to give up his claim to the throne and accept his new place in the world.<sup>502</sup>

To conclude, the treatment of the divine ferryman is set up as an example which Seth will follow later. This is crucial considering the destructive manner in which other, later sources deal with the disorders of Seth. By invoking an established tradition of divine infraction and subsequent reintegration of the culprit in the example of Nemty, an idea of productive leniency is introduced into the tale. If the cult of Nemty can flourish and benefit Egypt despite the god's troublesome mythology, then the same can be said for Seth, who is not only the god of murder, but also of victory and strength. Nemty can be redeemed in spite his crime and so can Seth.

### 3.6 First Coronation (8,1-8,6)

THEN the Ennead crossed <sup>(8,2)</sup> to the western shore and sat on a mountain. Now after the evening came Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon and <sup>(8,3)</sup> Atum, lord of the Two Lands and Heliopolis, sent to the Ennead, saying: "You sit here to do what, again? These two men, you will make them waste <sup>(8,4)</sup> their lives away in court."

When my message reaches your ears, you shall place the White crown on the head of Horus, son of Isis and prostrate yourselves before the throne of his father <sup>(8,5)</sup> Osiris.

THEN Seth became really furious.

THEN the Ennead said to Seth: "Why are you angry? Should one not do that which says Atum, <sup>(8,6)</sup> the lord of the Two Lands, and Re Horus-of-the-Horizon?"

THEN the White Crown was made firm on the head of Horus, son of Isis.

The transition of the divine court to the West and the coming of the night constitutes a breaking point in the narrative. The most conspicuous element is the absence of the solar god, as is the mention of his two names Atum and Re, representing both the primordial/nightly and the day aspects of the god. At the same time, the oath of Isis is recalled, wherein the solar god was mentioned in all three forms: Atum, Khepri and Re, framing the Isle in the Midst episode with solar references and further highlighting the

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<sup>502</sup> Cf. chapter 5.5.4 below.

absence of the sun-god as the protagonist enter the western realm, traditionally associated with death.<sup>503</sup>

For the story, this represents an entry into a period of transition for its primary actors. The “graphical game” described in the sections devoted to the topic of the story’s structure comes into play here. It is at this point that the alternative classifiers in the names of Horus and Seth start to appear, highlighting that the both the gods are now passed into an altered state of being, one from which they will return once their transformation is complete. In terms of religious geography, the story enters the *akhet*, the mythical horizon, a liminal area on the margins of the main parts of the ordered universe – the earth, the sky and the underworld.<sup>504</sup> The reference to the mountain on which the Ennead moves as it reaches the western shore, combined with the aforementioned solar symbolism, brings up the hieroglyphic image of the *akhet*, represented by the solar disk in a mountain valley.<sup>505</sup> It is here, in the western horizon, that Sun enters the land of the dead, beginning its nightly journey to its rebirth. Chapter 15g of the *Book of the Dead* directly associates this solar transition with the motif of the mountain:

“Re sets in the western mountain and lights the netherworld with his rays.

This means: Re rests in Osiris, Osiris rests in Re, this means.”<sup>506</sup>

This passage is relevant as it helps to identify this mountain of the *Contendings* with the place where the worlds of the living and the dead meet, but its reference to the union of Re and Osiris that takes place during the sun’s journey through the netherworld is very interesting, as it allows us to relate another nightly union that takes places later in the tale, the sexual intercourse of Horus and Seth.

Returning to the motif western mountain, we should remark that its liminal nature, transformative potential and association with death, makes it a suitable metaphor for the tomb.<sup>507</sup> In fact, both the elements of the physical setting of this passage of the *Contendings* reflect ideas of Egyptian funerary symbolism, and can be nicely compared with this text describing the mortuary rites of Tepemankh, from his tomb in Saqqara:

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<sup>503</sup> Cf. e.g., J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, p. 304 ff.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid.

<sup>505</sup> The Egyptian sign for a mountain (𓂏) depicts a valley flanked by two mountains.

<sup>506</sup> The version of the mortuary papyrus of Gatseshni. See Jan Assmann, *Liturgische Lieder an den Sonnengott*, Berlin: Bruno Hessling, 1969, p. 93, 101–105. Translation of Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, p. 188.

<sup>507</sup> See the example of the Memphite tomb of Paser. (Jan Assmann, *Altägyptische Totenliturgien*, vol. 2, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2005, no. 8.2.13 = Geoffrey Martin, *The Tomb-Chapels of Paser and Ra-ia at Saqqara*, London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1985, pl. 10. Cf. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, p. 220.

Setting out to the western mountain, after crossing the lake while he was transfigured by the lector priest and the rites were carried out for him by the embalmer in the presence of Anubis.<sup>508</sup>

As the tale reaches its pivot, we are presented with a symbolically rich environment, which outlines in broad strokes of the developments that will take place in the second half. Entering the *akhet*, the main characters undergo a transformation paralleled by the nightly rebirth of the sun-god, a rejuvenation through the contact with death. The main beneficiary of this solar process is of course Horus, now the one chosen candidate for the throne. His transformation begins with the 1<sup>st</sup> coronation with the White Crown, whose lunar overtones discussed in one of the previous sections now become significant. The Moon acts in parallelism with the Sun as its nightly counterpart, both the celestial bodies being two distinct forms of one cosmic cycle.<sup>509</sup> The transition of Horus from a prince to kingship consequently happens in parallel to implicit journey of the sun-god through the netherworld. Horus, like Re, undergoes a symbolic death in which the royal office is reborn in the person of the now former prince. The danger to Horus, previously only theoretical, now becomes imminent and as in the case of the sun-god in the netherworld, he has to navigate between the threats that are inherent to the liminal state in which he now finds himself. The transformative power that turns a boy into a god-king is in its very essence indiscriminate, and its potential for transformation is also a potential for destruction. This ultimate source of change is, of course, death itself, into which all life is subsumed to be made new. Mirroring the mystical union of Re and Osiris in which the sun-god is reborn, Horus taps into an energy source in the person of Seth, who, unusually, embodies both the destructive and generative aspects of death, which are usually divided between Seth and Osiris.<sup>510</sup> It is for this reason that Seth is ultimately not fought to be destroyed, but only to be put in its rightful place so that his vitality can be put to good use.<sup>511</sup>

This role of Seth in the second half of the story is anticipated by failure of the first coronation at his hands, which also outlines the main dynamic of this part of the *Contendings*: the power of Seth is too dangerous and needs to be cultivated in order to become a productive element of the cosmic cycle of renewal. Consequently, the transformation of Horus through Seth depends on a concurrent transformation of Seth, something that was showcased in the punishment and subsequent reintegration of Nemty. The role of Horus as a solar actor is likewise anticipated during the initial presentation of the White crown at the beginning of the story, where the child sitting before the divine

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<sup>508</sup> *Urk.* I, p. 189.8-10.,190.12-13.

<sup>509</sup> See e.g., *Book of the Dead* chapter 2, 17,6. (Irmtraut Munro, *Der Totenbuch-Papyrus des Hohenpriesters Pa-nedjem II.* (pLondon BM 10793/pCampbell), Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996, pl. 18)

<sup>510</sup> Cf. *Con.* 15,5, where Osiris is shown as a destructive force.

<sup>511</sup> See chapter 5.7 below.



council is determined with the sign of a child with uraeus on his head, highlighting the identification of the king with the solar child.<sup>512</sup> Now the tale has reached the phase where Horus starts taking on the mantle of kingship and with it, the role of a solar being, one which culminates with the second, successful coronation with the White Crown and the subsequent presentation of Horus as a vision of sun in the sky.<sup>513</sup>

### 3.7 Diving Episode (8,6-10,1)

Then Seth raised his voice<sup>(8,7)</sup> in the face of the Ennead, angrily saying: “Will the office be given to my junior, while I, his older brother, stand here?”

THEN he made a wow, saying:<sup>(8,8)</sup> “The White crown shall be driven from the head of Horus, son of Isis and he shall be thrown into the waters! I shall contend with him for the office of the Ruler, l.p.h.!”<sup>(8,9)</sup>

THEN Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon acted likewise. Then Seth said to Horus: “Come, let us change ourselves into hippos and sink into<sup>(8,10)</sup> the flood of the sea. As for him that surfaces in the time of three months to a day,<sup>(8,11)</sup> the office will not be given to him.” Then they sank as two men. Then Isis sat down and wept, saying: “Seth will kill Horus, my<sup>(8,12)</sup> boy.”

THEN SHE brought a reel of yarn, and she made a rope, she also brought a deben of copper and cast it into a harpoon.<sup>(8,13)</sup> She tied the yarn to it and threw it into the water towards the place where Horus and Seth sank.<sup>(9,1)</sup>

THEN the copper bit into the Majesty<sup>514</sup> of Horus, her son.

THEN Horus raised his voice, saying: “Come to me, my mother, Isis, mother of mine.<sup>(9,2)</sup> Cry to your copper to let go of me! I am Horus, your son!”

THEN Isis raised her voice, saying to her copper: “Let go of him,<sup>(9,3)</sup> it is (my) son Horus, my boy.”

THEN her copper let go of him.

THEN she threw it<sup>(9,4)</sup> again in the water and it bit into the Majesty of Seth.

THEN Seth raised his voice, saying: “What are you doing to me, sister Isis? Cry<sup>(9,5)</sup> to your copper to let me go! I am your maternal brother, mother Isis!”

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<sup>512</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 232.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>514</sup> The Egyptian word *hm*, translated as “Majesty” refers to the body of the two gods, but emphasizes its powerful, divine appearance which activates the world. As such, it is typically used to denote the king of Egypt. See Tobias Hofmann, “Majestät und Diener: zur Dialektik des Begriffes Hm”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 128, (2001): 116-132, esp. 116-117.

THEN SHE felt a great sorrow for him in her heart.

THEN Seth <sup>(9,6)</sup> cried to her, saying: “Will you love a strange man rather than the maternal brother Seth?” Then she cried to her copper, saying: <sup>(9,7)</sup> “Let go of him! Look, the one you're biting into is a maternal brother of Isis.”

THEN the copper let go of him.

THEN Horus, son of ISIS became angry with <sup>(9,8)</sup> his mother Isis, coming out, his face fierce like a leopard's with his 16 deben knife in his hand <sup>(9,9)</sup> and he cut off the head of his mother Isis, put it in his embrace and went up to the mountain.

THEN Isis <sup>(9,10)</sup> changed herself into a statue of flint that had no head.

THEN <sup>(9,11)</sup> Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon said to Thoth: “What is that coming that has no head?”

THEN Thoth said to Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon: <sup>(9,12)</sup> “My good lord, that is Isis, the great divine mother, whose head her son Horus has cut off.”

THEN <sup>(10,1)</sup> Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon raised his voice, saying to the Ennead: “Let us go and give him a great lesson!”

### 3.7.1 Hippopotami and the Sea

The coronation of Horus is immediately shown to premature. The necessary precondition to a successful coronation – the subjugation of Seth – has not yet taken place, and consequently elements opposed to the accession of the chosen prince are still active in the world. The acquiescence of Re and the form of Seth's challenge, disputing Horus' accession from the position of the “older brother”, recalls the argument of Seth earlier in the tale at *Con.* 4,4–4,8, which emphasized his seniority and physical superiority to enforce his claim.

As indicated by the initial remark of Seth, the main topic of this Episode is once again kinship and especially its complicated relationship with the royal office. In the encounter of Isis and Seth, the principle of patrilineal succession was introduced and mistakenly accepted by Seth as the determining source of legitimacy for a royal candidate, something he previously opposed by emphasizing his seniority and his filial relation to the deceased king. While this line of inquiry was closed thanks to the clever trickery of Isis and the issue of succession could advance to another stage, the topic has now arisen again. Seth once more argues that he is Horus older brother, something that seems to be at odds with the known family structure of the pantheon.

Disputing the priority of Horus in the matter of succession, he challenges Horus for the first time as an equal. Furthermore, the tale refers to them as “two men”, highlighting their comparable status, which it does again in the Homosexual Episode. Sharing the same

awesome form, the physical change of the two contenders is mirrored by the emergence of the alternate writing of their names.

The symbolic connotations of the hippopotamus, the form that the two gods adopt, are also quite important. The hippopotamus is a profoundly Sethian animal, sharing many of the negative characteristics of the crocodile from previous sections.<sup>515</sup> Wild, voracious, and eminently dangerous to humans, they also raid crops, and the management of their population was a permanent issue for ancient Egyptians. Depiction of hippopotamus hunts was a key element of the king's image as a suppressor of disorder.<sup>516</sup>

The comparison with the aforementioned tale of the *Doomed Prince*, which likewise includes a three month long underwater combat, is compelling, but sadly the fragmentary nature of that texts hinders our effort. We can remark, however, that both contain a fight between two rivals, and in each of them one of the contenders is associated with the cosmic disorder. The character of the crocodile has already been discussed and has been declared a clear case of a Sethian actor, but the enigmatic Power bears many traits of Yam, the ruler of the sea from the *Astarte Papyrus*. The very fragmentary tale describes a dispute between the Egyptian pantheon, headed by Baal (a royal and positive Sethian figure)<sup>517</sup> and the sea god who is demanding tribute from them.<sup>518</sup> Pehal has convincingly shown that in the *Astarte Papyrus*, Yam represents a substitute of Osiris in his destructive form,

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<sup>515</sup> H. Te Velde, *Seth: God of Confusion*, p. 26. See the discussion of primary sources in John Griffiths, "The Interpretation of the Horus-Myth of Edfu", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 44 (1958), p. 75–85. See also Torgny Säve-Söderbergh, *On Egyptian Representations of Hippopotamus Hunting as a Religious Motive*, Uppsala: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1953, esp. p. 43 ff.

<sup>516</sup> See Vera Müller, "Nilpferdjagd und geköpfte Feinde: Zu zwei Ikonen des Feindvernichtungsrituals", in Eva-Maria Engel, Ulrich Hartung, Vera Müller (eds.), *Zeichen aus dem Sand: Streiflichter aus Ägyptens Geschichte zu Ehren von Günter Dreyer*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008, p. 477–493. For a more recent work with up-to date references, see Vera Müller, "The Hippopotamus Hunt and its Relationship to Other Rituals in the 1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty as Represented on Seals" in Wouter Claes et al. (eds.), *Remove that Pyramid! Studies on the Archaeology and History of Predynastic and Pharaonic Egypt in Honour of Stan Hendrickx*, Leuven – Paris: Peeters, 853–870.

Recently, it has been shown that the hippopotamus did not exclusively represent Seth in his negative aspect, because the hippopotamus-form was depicted on New Kingdom private stelae dedicated to Seth in the context of personal piety. See Milena Kooyman, "Always on the Periphery? Seth and Personal Piety in New Kingdom Egypt", in Camilla Di Biase-Dyson, Leonie Donovan (eds.), *The Cultural Manifestation of Religious Experience: Studies in Honour of Boyo G. Ockinga*, Münster: Ugarit, 2017, p. 365–370.

<sup>517</sup> See the discussion in M. Pehal, *Interpreting Ancient Egyptian Narratives*, p. 244 ff.

<sup>518</sup> Original publication in Percy Newberry, *The Amherst Papyri, Being an Account of the Egyptian Papyri in the Collection of the Right Hon. Lord Amherst of Hackney, F.S.A., at Didlington Hall, Norfolk: With an Appendix on a Coptic Papyrus*, London: Bernard Quaritch, 1899, p. 47, pl. xix–xxi.

First hieroglyphic transcription published in Wilhelm Spiegelberg, The Fragments of the "Astarte" Papyrus of the Amherst Collection, *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 24 (1902): 41–50.

reflecting the less prominent Egyptian tradition of the aggressive, demonic side of Osiris.<sup>519</sup> Without disputing this interpretation of the *Astarte Papyrus*, we can argue that since the relationship of Yam and Seth-Baal is that of structural opposites, then the figure of the aquatic force can stand in for *any* enemy of Seth's, which may take on varying forms in different contexts. In the *Astarte Papyrus*, Seth is represented as a positive character, which results in the chaotic side of Osiris being emphasized in the figure of Yam.<sup>520</sup> The precise nature of the Force of the *Doomed Prince* eludes us, but the clear connection between the *Doomed Prince* and the *Contendings* allows us to transpose the structural relationship of the Sethian crocodile and the aquatic Force onto the two contenders of the Diving Episode. Much like Osiris/Yam of the *Astarte Papyrus*, Horus of the *Diving Episode* is a noticeably ambivalent character, which becomes apparent in its matricidal aftermath. Conversely, it is Seth, who, in a dramatic switching of roles, takes it upon himself to chastise Horus for his crime, repeating his role of the pantheon's champion from the *Astarte Papyrus*.

### 3.7.2 Positional Succession

Despite the similarities with the two sources mentioned above, the contest of the *Diving Episode*, however, does not have a martial character, nor do the contenders get the opportunity to finish their contest. Isis' concern disrupts the competition and once again she enters the equation as a disruptive element. Her motivations are explicitly maternal, and the obvious impact of her meddling is the inability of Horus to deal with Seth on his own, questioning his maturity. The actual function of Isis in this episode, however, is significantly more subtle.

In the section devoted to the structure of the tale, the Diving Episode was found to form a parallel pair with the two episodes, coined the Kinship Episode and Isis & Seth, which deal with the issue of kinship in the first part of the *Contendings*. Key words and phrases, like "stranger/strange man" and "older brother" communicate that the central motif is kinship and its function with regards to the royal office, specifically the matter of succession. Here we may cite again the curious exchange at *Con.* 4,6-4,9:

Then Onuris and Thoth spoke with a loud voice: "Shall the <sup>(4,7)</sup> office be given to the maternal brother, while the bodily son stands?"

Then Banebjede, the great living god, said: "But should the office be given <sup>(4,8)</sup> to this child, while his older brother Seth stands?"

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<sup>519</sup> M. Pehal, *Ancient Egyptian Narratives*, p. 245-6.

<sup>520</sup> See also the cosmological reading of this episode in chapter 5.6.2 below.

Then the Ennead cried loudly in the face of the Lord of All, saying to him: “What <sup>(4,9)</sup> is the meaning of these words that are not even worthy of being listened to?”

The response of the Ennead to this exchange could be taken as a rejection of Banebjede’s line of reasoning, but the text allows a different interpretation. Instead, the whole passage should be understood as trying to contain two distinct models of kinship and succession, each of which operates based on different assumptions about the nature of relation, which are represented as conflicting realities throughout the narrative. The cornerstone of this is the term “brother” (*sn*). Compared with its English translation, the Egyptian word covered a broader range of kinship relations, including “uncle”, “cousin” and “nephew”.<sup>521</sup> Furthermore, “brother” could be used in a metaphorical manner, denoting any individuals in a state of parity and equivalence, regardless of the whether the relationship is amical or inimical.<sup>522</sup> The metaphorical sense of *sn* includes the meaning of “colleague”, “friend” or “husband”, but at the same time also “rival”. Numerous descriptions of court cases describe the two opposing litigants as “brothers”, using the term interchangeably with “disputants”, and, pertinently to this tale “two men”.<sup>523</sup> The root of this inimical reading of brotherhood can be seen as transcultural, stemming from the numerous shared rights, duties and functions that are typical for brothers, which lead them to compete for limited resources that cannot be shared, such as sexual partners, or as in the case of the present story, patriarchal authority.<sup>524</sup> Consequently, the claimed brotherhood of Horus and Seth reflects attested metaphorical use of the term *sn* to denote opponents of equal status. Approaching the issue of inheritance with this metaphorical use in mind, Seth attempts to put Horus and himself on equal footing as brothers, thereby bypassing the issue whether uncle or son should take precedence. In this manner, Seth can frame himself as the older of brothers, making him the prime candidate for inheritance.

The royal succession, however, is not a typical inheritance case. Compared to New Kingdom situation of non-royal individuals, the royal succession system placed a significant emphasis on line of descent, with the office ideally passing from father to son in an unbroken line that can be traced to the creation of the world.<sup>525</sup> The importance of this patrilineality is visible in the popular customs of assembling king-lists, connecting

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<sup>521</sup> See the summary of relevant literature in Jean Revez, “The Metaphorical Use of the Kinship Term *sn* “Brother””, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 40 (2003), p. 123, esp. n. 4 and 5.

<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128–130.

<sup>524</sup> Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, London – New York: Continuum, 2005, p. 66.

<sup>525</sup> Cf. the discussion of kingship in chapter 5.1.

present rulers with divine predecessors.<sup>526</sup> This principle of succession was grounded in the fundamental uniqueness of the royal person, which, however, clashed with the biological reality of the king having male siblings, who often shared the same legitimizing line of descent. Based on this logic of succession, the brothers would be seen just as legitimate as the king. To reduce the destabilizing ramifications of this fact, Egyptian succession system included an institution which could address the inherent ambivalence of biological brotherhood in the form of positional succession.

This cultural institution is in its essence inheritance of personal identity. The phrase was originally used in relation to the practices of several Bantu-speaking ethnic groups but has since become a staple of cultural theory and has been identified in numerous historical contexts.<sup>527</sup> It term was first employed by Audrey Richards who conducted field research in the 1930s among the Bemba of northern Zambia. and introduced the phrase 'positional succession' as a translation for the Bemba term *ukupyanika*, which refers to a type of succession in which a person inherits from the deceased not only property but also his social identity. The successor consequently takes over the deceased's offices, kinship ties, name,<sup>528</sup> and spirit, which constitutes a complete transfer of all cultural goods from the deceased to the heir, who thus becomes structurally a perfect imitation and substitute.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>526</sup> On the topic, see Tamás Bács, "The Pride of the Ramessides: A Note on a Late Ramesside King-List, in Tamás Bács, Horst Beinlich (eds.), *Constructing Authority: Prestige, Reputation and the Perception of Power in Egyptian Kingship, Budapest, May 12-14, 2016. 8. Symposium zur ägyptischen Königsideologie / 8th symposium on Egyptian royal ideology*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017, p. 5–18.

<sup>527</sup> Audrey Richards, "Some Types of Family Structure amongst the Central Bantu", in Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, Cyril Ford, *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, London - New York: KPI, 1987, p. 207–251.

For examples of studies identifying positional succession outside the African context, see for the Inca, Gary Urton, *The History of a Myth: Pacariqtambo and the Origin of the Inkas*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990, p. 7–8. For ancient Rome, see Laura Nader, *Law in Culture and Society*, Berkeley - London: University of California Press, 1997, p. 359. For the Sumerians, see Klaus Wilcke, "Genealogical and Geographical Thought in the Sumerian King List", in Hermann Behrens et al. (eds.) *DUMU-É-DUB-BAA. Fs. Å. W. Sjöberg*, Philadelphia: The University Museum, p. 568. Cf. Charles Maisels, *Early Civilizations of the Old World: The Formative Histories of Egypt, the Levant, Mesopotamia, India and China*, London: Routledge, 1999, p. 351. For modern Japan, see Takie Lebra, *Above the Clouds: Status Culture of the Modern Japanese Nobility*, Berkeley - Oxford: University of California Press, 1992, p. 112 ff.

<sup>528</sup> The transmission of the name is an essential element of the institution of positional succession, which is directly called "name eating" and can be directly related to Egyptian royal titulary, which partly modifies, and partly supplants the name of the prince. See A. Richards, "Some Types of Family Structure amongst the Central Bantu", p. 224.

<sup>529</sup> "Succession to the chieftainship is only a special case of the characteristic 'positional succession' (*ukupanyika*) of the Bemba by which the social status and kinship position of each dead person, man or woman, is passed to a select heir or heiress. A successor must be found to acquire the guardian spirit of a person recently dead, and the bow of the man or the girdle of the woman, and to be addressed by the name of the dead and by the same kinship terms." (A. Richards, "Some Types of Family Structure amongst the Central Bantu", p. 224) Cf. Audrey Richards, "Mother-

The successor completely accepts his new identity, thereby losing his old one. The social image of this new reality is that he is treated as if he were his predecessor, his old identity subsuming into that of all the previous holders of the office.<sup>530</sup>

Positional kingship allowed the royal office of Egypt to avoid a number of succession issues stemming that plagued European monarchies<sup>531</sup> by providing a framework which could suspend, and ultimately rewrite, biological reality to confirm with the needs of actual political reality.<sup>532</sup> This applied first and foremost to the ascending king, who regardless of his biological descent and gender would be (re-)classified as the son of the previous monarch. At the same time, the theological institute of Kamutef, which encapsulates the idea that a king or god is his own father by the virtue of impregnating his own mother, provides for the direct identification of the former and current ruler.<sup>533</sup>

This cultural fiction which elevated the (cultural) son into the social position of his father had a cascading effect on the system of kinship relations. The same process which replaced the former identity of the prince with his new kingly identity affected the rest of the royal family, notably the royal brothers, a category which by the Ramesside period included a wide range of often remotely related males with varying levels of association with the throne.<sup>534</sup> As the prince is elevated to kingship, so are the royal brothers transformed into cultural sons, a system described by Pehal as cultural fratricide:

“Instead, the system found a symbolical solution in the form of “cultural fratricide”: potential contenders to the ruling pharaoh belonging to the rather

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right among the Central Bantu”, in Edward Evans-Pritchard et al., *Essays Presented to C. G. Seligman*, London: Kegan Paul, 1933, p. 269.

<sup>530</sup> Audrey Richards, *Chisungu: A Girl's Initiation Ceremony Among the Bemba of Zambia*, London: Faber and Faber, 1956, s. 38.

<sup>531</sup> The example of the Salic law provides an interesting comparison with the Egyptian model. This legal code from ca 500 CE applied to successor states of the Frankish Empire, which included the Habsburg monarchy. Salic law barred women from the throne but lacked any sensible provisions to deal with absence of suitable male heirs, which culminated in numerous succession crises, notably in the case of Maria Theresa and her rule over the Habsburg monarchy and the Holy Roman Empire. (Martin Anderson, *The War of the Austrian Succession 1740–1748*, Milton Park: Routledge, 1995, p. 2 ff.) The Egyptian succession system was in comparison significantly more flexible in accommodating monarchs that did not necessarily conform to the cultural idea of a proper son, which included foreigners and women.

<sup>532</sup> Cf. Martin Pehal, “New Kingdom Royal Succession Strategies and Their Possible Old Kingdom Antecedents”, in Massimiliano Nuzzollo and Jaromír Krejčí (eds.), *The Rise and Development of the Solar Cult and Architecture in Ancient Egypt: Latest Researches and Recent Discoveries*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2020, p. 220

<sup>533</sup> E. Leach, “The Mother's Brother in Ancient Egypt”, p. 265. See also Edmund Leach, “Why did Moses have a sister?”, in Alan Aycock, Edmund Leach (eds.), *Structuralist Interpretations of Biblical Myth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 33–66. Cf. the discussion of *kamutef* above.

<sup>534</sup> See M. Pehal, “New Kingdom Royal Succession Strategies”, p. 205, n. 23.

widely conceived *sn*-group had their bio-genealogical fraternal ties to the ruling pharaoh culturally severed by being transformed into a large group of “cultural sons”. This cultural mechanism solved two issues: it eliminated a potentially very dangerous group of individuals (royal brothers), but it also complied with the preferred bio-genealogical paternal succession idiom. In theory, this group of “cultural sons” would then conflate several family tiers and generations (brothers, uncles, cousins, half-brothers, nephews) into one, leaving the pharaoh completely peer-less and “without his equal”.<sup>535</sup>

The term “fratricide” is chosen very aptly by Pehal, since from a symbolic standpoint the constitutes the change into a cultural son the destruction of the royal brother’s identity, which is then replaced by a new, royally imposed cultural reality. This an essentially violent act, something the tale reflects in the martial imagery that accompanies the transformation of Seth at the hand of Horus and which is even more explicit in other sources, where the body of Seth is thoroughly chastised.<sup>536</sup>

The result is a two-tier family, wherein the king is the senior of all other males, regardless of their age, status or biological relation to the royal person.<sup>537</sup> By giving up their brotherhood with the new king, these transformed individuals leave behind their former ambivalence and replace it with unequivocal loyalty of the filial position.<sup>538</sup>

When Seth frames himself not as a cultural son, but as a brother, he not only rejects Horus’ rule which demands that Seth takes on a filial position, but he also openly challenges his claim and presents himself as rival and enemy: at best an ambivalent being

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<sup>535</sup> M. Pehal, “New Kingdom Royal Succession Strategies”, p. 205–206. Pehal compares *cultural fratricide* with *performative fratricide*, citing the example of the Ottoman monarchy, where custom allowed the heir-presumptive to kill his male relatives.

<sup>536</sup> H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 53 ff.

<sup>537</sup> We may compare this to the republican idea of fraternity, which, instead of emphasizing the value of the biological family, treats the whole citizen body as a single cultural family united not by descent, but by shared values and nationality. In Egypt, the foundation of this universal brotherhood, however, is not the commonality of man enshrined in a constitution, but the all-encompassing rule of the king, who is father to all. See e.g., the discussion in Gerald Johnston, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Democratic Ideals and Educational Effects”, *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 12 (1991), p. 491 ff.

<sup>538</sup> Jacques Clère makes a compelling case for a link between the word *jjj* “father” and *jty* “ruler,” arguing that the latter is probably an adjective derived (“nisbe”) from the former, which be translated “the one who is (like) a father”. (Jacques Clère, “Les noms de parenté en ancien égyptien”, *Comptes rendus du Groupe Linguistique d’Études Chamito-Sémitiques* 6 (1951–1954), p. 35.) This indicates that the king is the archetypal/universal father, meaning that the father-son and king-subject relationships are direct parallels. Theologically, this is in line with the close association of the royal person with the solar creator. See also; Christian Cannuyer, “Paternité et filiation spirituelles en Égypte pharaonique et copte”, in Christian Cannuyer, Jean-Marie Kruchten (eds.), *Individu, société et spiritualité dans l’Égypte pharaonique et copte: Mélanges égyptologiques offerts au Professeur Aristide Théodoridès*, Athens - Bruxelles - Mons: Association Montoise d’Égyptologie, 1993, p. 83; J. Revez, “The Metaphorical Use of the Kinship Term *sn* ‘Brother’”, p. 123–124; Werner Vycichl, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue copte*, Leuven: Peeters, 1983, p. 68.



that has to be transformed before the accession of Horus can be finalized. This also serves to emphasize the significance of the topic of kinship for the developments in the story's second half, ensuring that the reader is attentive not only to the funerary, but also the kinship ramifications of the narration. Ultimately, the cosmic ambivalence of Seth that needs to be tackled, is the same as the kinship ambivalence discussed here. As the story concludes, we will see that the reintegration of Seth into the cosmic order and his filial submission to Horus are two sides of one coin.

Returning to the *Diving Episode*, we see the issue of kinship arising in a similar way to the parallel episodes of the first part of the tale, but with a different outcome. The key to the understanding of the reason for this difference lies in the term “stranger” (*ḏrḏr*) that connects the otherwise separate episodes.<sup>539</sup> Exploring this motif, Pehal concludes that even though the system of positional succession has the benefit of flexibility by providing legitimizing strategies, which allows not only biological descendants of the former king but also outsiders to ascend to the throne, it also introduces problems of its own:

“As we have seen, the application of the positional succession mechanism created a culturally homogenous group out of individuals who were in very much differing levels of bio-genealogical relationship to the pharaoh. Furthermore, the group of potential successors was composed not only of uncles and (half-)brothers of the one specific pharaoh who ascended the throne, but also of individuals related to the given king's predecessors with whom the reigning pharaoh shared an aspect of his identity through the dual body principle. The group of potential successors could thus include also the current pharaoh's (great-grand)father's uncles, giving all of these individuals some level of legitimacy to the throne. However, from the bio-genealogical point of view (the axial legitimisation strategy in ancient Egypt), these individuals could be very distant in the genealogical line; so distant that they could be viewed as “strangers”. Yet, the cultural idiom put them on the same level, or very close to, a biological son of the pharaoh. The problematic effects of this cultural mechanism are then illustrated in the *Contendings* on Seth, the prototypical “stranger” of Egyptian mythology unlawfully claiming the throne.”<sup>540</sup>

The parallel episodes consequently address two distinct paradoxes that are inherent in the positional succession system and which stem from the different ideal frameworks that individual legitimization strategies employ. When in the first half the two sides debate the seemingly unclear relationship of Horus and Seth at *Con.* 4,6–4,9, each does it with from a different understanding of kinship and its relevance to the matter of succession:

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<sup>539</sup> Cf. esp. A. Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, esp. p. 81. See also C. Di Biase-Dyson, *Foreigners and Egyptians in the Late Egyptian Stories*, p. 345 ff.

<sup>540</sup> See M. Pehal, “New Kingdom Royal Succession Strategies”, p. 210.

“Onuris and Thoth are referring to the bio-genealogical idiom in which Seth is indeed an “uncle” and Horus is the “bodily son”. On the other hand, Banebdjede is referring to the cultural idiom which defines the contenders’ relationship in fraternal terms making Horus the less experienced and thus less legitimate, younger brother of Seth.”<sup>541</sup>

The important take-away is that both these strategies are simultaneously valid, which results in an impasse. Neither of the side is wrong, and this is why the first half of the tale could not be resolved through discussion. The divine debate has reached the foundations of royal legitimacy and any further inquiry would be futile. It is only when Isis tricks Seth into accepting the axioms of the biological descent strategy, which applies to herdsmen, but not necessarily to kings, that the court can move away from the question which legitimization strategy should it accept in this specific succession case. Faced with an aporia, the tale resorts to trickery and humour, bypassing the logical impossibility of progress. At the same time, however, this reinforces the morally ambivalent reading of Isis’ action towards Seth as he is essentially robbed of his claim to kingship.

The motif of the stranger this time arises due to the inclusion of a new element in the arrangement, a female mediator, Isis, who acts through a curiously independent implement, a magical seeking harpoon. The weapon acts, strangely enough, as the arbiter of the contest of Horus and Seth, which despite its being framed as an exercise in holding one's breath revolves solely around the issue of kinship. Its first target is Seth, but he quickly deflects the attack by stressing his close relationship with Isis, namely being her maternal brother (*sn n mw.t*), and calls Horus a “strange man” (*zj drdr*) in comparison. Adopting the biological idiom previously used against him, Seth bypasses the maternal bond between Isis and Horus by shifting the discourse “one generation higher stressing the common bio-genealogical link of both Seth and Isis to their maternal mother, thus completely avoiding Osiris and his kin.”<sup>542</sup> In this manner, the biological closeness of Isis and Seth can be stressed to such a degree that Horus seems as distant a relation as to be indistinguishable from a stranger.<sup>543</sup>

The reality behind the word “foreigner” in this story is that foreignness constitutes alienation of biological kinship. Positional succession has the beneficial capacity to allow individuals with no biological relationship with the former king into the office, but in order to do that, it ultimately had to treat all candidates as strangers on some basic level. This is articulated with the inclusive category of the royal son, to which all (politically relevant) males are subsumed when a king ascends. This means that deep within the structural essence of positional kingship is a paradox: as the existence of the king overrides

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<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid.

biological kinship, everyone becomes a stranger. That is ultimately why both Horus and Seth are accused of being foreign, because they have a potential foreignness in them, which in different contexts can be constructed in such a way that only one of them comes out as foreign. Realizing this potential for strangeness is every male candidate, Seth opts for a version of the biological descent strategy that emphasizes the role of the mother and frames Horus as the stranger.

Much like the royal brother, the mother therefore represents an ambiguous element within the context of succession. The mother is naturally a key element of any heir's legitimacy.<sup>544</sup> As the physical vehicle of biological descent, the royal mother is a living embodiment of the biological son's connection with the deceased king, especially in cases of direct biological descent. At the same time however, her person provides the same connection with her brothers, who share the same parents, which is arguably a closer kind of kinship. While the individual relations the mother has with other males in her family are on their own mostly unambiguous, she has an ability to introduce ambiguity into the relations around her, in this case by prioritizing the uncle, her brother over the nephew, her son. This structural characteristic of is matched by a practical consideration of human reproduction. Compared to other legitimacy strategies, the claim of "bodily sons" seems more firmly grounded, being rooted in the biological reality of human procreation, but this physical essence of sonship is a benefit to the claimant as much as it is a vulnerability. The question of whether one's biological closeness to the deceased king is greater than that of other claimants is a matter that is open to debate and can easily be thrown into question with reference to the possible infidelity of one's mother. Also, in cases where multiple royal sons from the same mother contend for the throne, she can undermine the claims of some of them by falsely accusing them of being bastards. Conversely, any other contender can at the same time be "exposed" as an until then secret son of the late ruler, thereby achieving the same level of legitimacy.

But why is Isis in such a position? As we have seen, the choice of the biological model over the cultural model was purely through trickery, meaning that while the Ennead has mostly accepted it, it has no effect. Seth still denies its primacy, holding on to the cultural model which would work in his favour. Knowing that in such conditions the contest is a free-for-all, where Horus does not have a clear moral advantage, she intervenes in *Isis' Ruse*, involving the person of the royal mother to the issue of kinship and succession. In this manner, the element of the mother enters the legitimacy debate, but its biological essence makes it an indiscriminate weapon. The mother can support her son's claim just as she can undermine it. Once the maternal principle is invoked as a source of legitimacy, it lives its own life, which is aptly described by the image of the autonomous harpoon which

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<sup>544</sup> Silke Roth, "Queen", in Elizabeth Froom, Willeke Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles, 2009, p. 5. Accessed at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3416c82m>.

strikes both friend and foe. Through this image the double-edged nature of this legitimization strategy is exposed and with it the problematic nature of the royal mother.<sup>545</sup>

### 3.7.3 Transformation of Isis

The episode *Isis' Ruse* dealt with problematic aspects of biological succession through the father. Its parallel pair, the *Diving Episode*, also deals with the topic of descent, but through the mother. Sadly, this approach turns out to be similarly ambivalent. Just as biological descent through the father necessitated the cultural elimination of competing brothers by turning them into “cultural sons”, so does the model of biological descent through the mother require a transformation of the biological mother into a “cultural mother” which does not share the ambiguity of the biological one and can be construed according to the needs of the royal office and its holder.

The tale opts for the performative model for its matricide, treating Isis in a symbolically potent manner.<sup>546</sup> Isis is eliminated as a source of ambivalence, but instead of leaving Horus stripped of her feminine support, she is transformed into a new motherly body. The decapitated statue is an elegant symbol of this transfiguration as Isis becomes an artifact reflecting the ideal rather than the real,<sup>547</sup> deprived of the very basis of independent agency – her own head. Following the example of Nemty, she is deprived of the aspect of her being responsible for the infraction.<sup>548</sup> Betraying Horus with her speech, her mouth is removed, along with her head, the vehicle of her troublesome identity.<sup>549</sup>

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<sup>545</sup> For decapitation as the fate of the enemies of Horus, see e.g., PT 535 § 1286a-d; *Urk.* V, 143.

<sup>546</sup> It should be noted that decapitation represented a threat to an Egyptians continued existence after death. See Nicholas Picardo, ““Semantic Homicide” and the So-Called Reserve Heads: the Theme of Decapitation in Egyptian Funerary Religion and some Implications for the Old Kingdom”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 43 (2007), p. 221–222.

<sup>547</sup> See the discussion of Egyptian portraiture and naturalism in Jan Assmann, “Preservation and Presentation of Self in Ancient Egyptian Portraiture”, in Peter Der Manuelian (ed.), *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson*, vol. 1, Boston: Dept. of Ancient Egyptian, Nubian and Near Eastern Art, Museum of Fine Arts, 1996, p. 55–81; Edna Russmann, “Portraiture”, in Edna Russmann, *Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Museum*, London: The British Museum Press, 2001, p. 32–39.

<sup>548</sup> For decapitation as punishment, see Harco Willems, “Crime, Cult and Capital Punishment (Mo’alla Inscription 8)”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 76 (1990): 27–54, esp. 33–43; Angela McDowell, “Crime and Punishment”, in Donald Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, vol. 1, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 315–320; D. Lorton, “The Treatment of Criminals in Ancient Egypt through the New Kingdom”, p. 50–53.

<sup>549</sup> For the head as the seat of identity, see Jan Assmann, “Preservation and Presentation of Self in Ancient Egyptian Portraiture”, p. 58–61; Roland Tefnin, *Art et magie au temps des pyramides: L’énigme des têtes dites “de remplacement”*, Bruxelles: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1991, p. 55–56, 69–72, 94. See also Karol Mysliwiec, “A propos des signes hiéroglyphiques “*hr*” et “*tp*””, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 98 (1972): 85–99.

The significance of the transfiguration of Isis is communicated by the specific choice of stone. Egyptians were masters of flint-working, and utilized it for a variety of purposes, notably for knives, arrowheads and as tool for producing fire. This practical aspect of flint was mirrored by a symbolic ambivalence of the material, which was “at once both creational and destructive.”<sup>550</sup> As such, it was connected with the goddesses of the Eye of Re,<sup>551</sup> amongst which Isis could also be counted.<sup>552</sup>

The decapitation of Isis, however, finds an intriguing parallel in *Papyrus Sallier IV*, where the head of Isis is replaced with that of a cow.<sup>553</sup> This motif of replacement of the head of Isis is alluded to in several other sources, some of which may describe the action in a profoundly Hathoric context, which included dance with menat necklaces and sistra.<sup>554</sup> Because of this possible connection, Berlandini and Broze argued that the case of *Papyrus Sallier* was connected by with Hathor in her cow-headed form.<sup>555</sup> Broze further commented that the tale intentionally confuses the two goddesses from this point on, citing the example of this episode and of Isis’s sexual liaison with Horus later in the tale.<sup>556</sup>

This underlying idea is a duality of Isis and Hathor as two complementary and mutually dependant principles of motherhood: the social reality of motherhood, represented by Isis and the biological precondition of motherhood, which is eroticism, embodied by Hathor. In the human sphere, these two aspects are inherent in a single person, each woman alternating between the two. According to Derchain, the story employs this bifurcation to communicate that eroticism is a necessary precondition to social motherhood by having Isis act in an emphatically Hathoric manner.<sup>557</sup> The significance of the overlap of Isis and Hathor, however, has a deeper significance. We see that the

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<sup>550</sup> Carolyn Anne Graves-Brown, *The Ideological Significance of Flint in Dynastic Egypt*, Dissertation: University College London, 2010, p. 120.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, e.g., p. 225

<sup>552</sup> J. Darnell, “The Apotropaic Goddess in the Eye”, p. 35-48.

<sup>553</sup> *Papyrus Sallier IV*, 3,5. Compare the version of Plutarch, according to whom Isis is not decapitated, but her head ornament is replaced with a hairstyle in the shape of a cow’s head. (*De Iside et Osiride*, 19)

<sup>554</sup> *Papyrus Jumilhac XII.22-XIII,2, XX 1-9; CT 80 II 37c, 38g, 41h; CT 334 IV, 1811-o*. Another possible attestation is KRI VI 24, 3-6.

<sup>555</sup> Jocelyne Berlandini, “La déesse bucéphale: une iconographie particulière de l’Hathor Memphite”, *Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale* 83 (1983): 33-50. Cf. M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 234-237.

<sup>556</sup> See M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 236.

<sup>557</sup> Philippe Derchain, “Review of Maria Münster, Untersuchungen zur Göttin Isis vom Alten Reich bis zum Ende des Neuen Reiches” *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 27 (1970): 21-23. See also Françoise Labrique, “La chevelure des servantes de la reine de Byblos: Un rite égyptien en filigrane? (Plutarque, De Iside et Osiride)”, in Erhart Graefe, Ursula Verhoeven (eds.), *Religion und Philosophie im alten Ägypten: Festgabe für Philippe Derchain zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Juli 1991*, Leuven: Departement Oriëntalistiek; Peeters, p. 203-207.

arrival of Hathor coincides with the neutralization of Isis as an ambivalent actor, which sets the two aspects of femininity side by side: the sexual Hathor<sup>558</sup> and Isis as the now non-ambivalent mother. In the following episode, the two combine, resulting in Isis representing both the supportive maternal aspect and the sexual aspect.<sup>559</sup> It is through this unification that she becomes like Hathor, who appeared as *both* the consort and mother of Horus.<sup>560</sup> The case of Isis is the same in the *Contendings*, highlighting the difference between deities and human individuals as regards the representation of cultural values. Whereas a human woman is sexual with regards to one man in order to be maternal to another one, a divine woman can be sexual and maternal to the same person. The dual role that Isis assumes upon her decapitation is directly linked with the nature of positional succession, specifically the concept of *kamutef*.<sup>561</sup> Since the reigning king and his predecessor are mythologically one and the same, the mother of the king was simultaneously his mother and wife.<sup>562</sup> Much like the king himself, who possessed both a human and a divine nature, the queen was depicted with ornaments otherwise reserved for goddesses, such as the vulture headdress and the uraeus, thereby associating herself with female divinities.<sup>563</sup>

This arrangement is of course, at odds with biological reality of human birth which precludes conception from being induced by the conceived. The mother is battleground of this paradox, which requires her to assume two roles which, as we already stated, are mutually exclusive, being both the mother and the consort of the same man. This denial of the separateness of biological motherhood and wifeness results in the creation of a cultural mother/wife, a feminine counterpart of the cultural son which, as we have seen before, replaces the plurality of various male relatives by subsuming them into a single, homogeneous category.

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<sup>558</sup> There is nothing explicitly sexual about the encounter of Hathor and Horus in this tale, but the parallel event involving Re implies erotic undertones in this passage.

<sup>559</sup> When Horus confronts Isis with his stained hand at *Con.* 11,5, he calls out to her as his mother: “Come to me, Isis, my mother! Come and see that which Seth did to me!” Her cure, on the other hand, is manifestly not maternal.

<sup>560</sup> R. Wilkinson, *Complete Gods and Goddesses*, p. 140.

<sup>561</sup> See Hellmut Brunner, *Die Geburt des Gottkönigs: Studien zur Überlieferung eines altägyptischen Mythos*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1984, 242 p.

<sup>562</sup> E. Leach, “Mother’s Brother in Ancient Egypt”, p. 20.

<sup>563</sup> S. Roth, “Queen”, p. 1 ff. See also Gay Robins, “Ideal Beauty and Divine Attributes”, in Christiane Ziegler (ed.), *Queens of Egypt: From Hetepheres to Cleopatra*, Monaco – Paris: Grimaldi Forum – Somogy, 2008, p. 118–130; Lisa Sabbahy, “The King’s Mother in the Old and Middle Kingdom”, in Elizabeth Carney, Sabine Müller (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Women and Monarchy in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, Abingdon – New York: Routledge, 2021, p. 11–21. For Egyptian queenship in general, see Lana Troy, *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1986, xiv + 236 p.



go and give him a great lesson!”, can directly be related to the justified chastisement of Nemty to whom a “great lesson” was given.<sup>569</sup> In this manner, Horus is presented as deserving punishment, anticipating the violence of Seth against him, which is itself unpunished. One of the most symbolically potent acts of Egyptian mythology, the wounding of the Eyes of Horus, is consequently framed as just retribution against by an aggrieved brother of Isis. This recalls the subdued but very interesting tradition of Osiris being killed by Seth in justified reprisal for a grievance.<sup>570</sup> In Pyramid Texts spell 477, Seth defends himself by saying he took revenge for a kick that Osiris gave him.<sup>571</sup> More interestingly, in a Late Period text, Seth assaulted Osiris because the latter had intercourse with Nephthys, Seth's consort,<sup>572</sup> which, as discussed before, could justly end in death at the hands of the aggrieved party.<sup>573</sup>

Closing this rather lengthy discussion of the *Diving Episode*, we can sum up the conclusions and relate it to its parallel pair in the ring composition of the *Contendings*. Each of the two members of the parallel pair deal with the same issue, but different aspects. The first, the *Kinship Episode* and *Isis and Seth*, deal with the problematic nature of the patrilineal descent legitimacy, while the second with legitimacy traced through the female side of the family. The issue of the patrilineal descent strategy is resolved by elevating biological principle above the cultural. Since both are valid, trickery is needed for the tale to advance. In

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*Interpretations of Sinuhe: Inspired by Two Passages (Proceedings of a Workshop Held at Leiden University, 27–29 November 2009)*, Leiden – Leuven: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten – Peeters, 2014, p. 23–41. However, whereas in the case of Sinuhe the significance of transgression is to reinforce the cultural importance of the ideas Sinuhe betrayed by reaffirming these ideas in the end, Horus of the *Contendings* retains the transgressive capacity necessary for the execution of the royal office, highlighting the essential difference between the role of the official and that of the king. See chapter 5.7.2 below.

<sup>569</sup> Cf. M. Campagno, “Judicial Practices, Kinship and the State in ‘The Contendings of Horus and Seth’”, p. 26–29.

<sup>570</sup> See esp. Alexandra von Lieven, “Seth ist im Recht, Osiris ist im Unrecht!”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 133 (2006): 141–150. Cf. Mark Smith, “The Reign of Seth: Egyptian Perspectives from the First Millennium BCE”, in Ladislav Bareš, Filip Coppens, and Květa Smoláriková (eds.), *Egypt in Transition: Social and Religious Development of Egypt in the First Millennium Bce. Proceedings of an International Conference, Prague, September 1–4, 2009*, Prague: Czech Institute of Egyptology, Charles University in Prague, 2010, p. 404.

<sup>571</sup> PT 477 § 959c–d. Cf. Bernard Mathieu, “Un épisode du procès de Seth au tribunal d'Héliopolis”, *Göttinger Miszellen* 164 (1998): 71–78.

<sup>572</sup> Wilhelm Spiegelberg, *Demotische Papyrus aus den königlichen Museen zu Berlin*, Leipzig and Berlin: Giesecke & Devrient, 1902, p. 21 and pl. xcv. See also Amr Gaber, “A Case of Divine Adultery Investigated”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 51 (2015): 303–328.

For Anubis as the offspring of their union, see Mark Smith, *Papyrus Harkness (MMA 31.9.7)*. Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2005, p. 203.

<sup>573</sup> In addition to sources cited above, see also Hans Goedicke, “Was Magic Used in the Harem Conspiracy against Ramesses III? (P. Rollin and P. Lee),” *Journal for Egyptian Archaeology* 49 (1963), p. 89.



historical reality, neither was superior and both could be manipulated/utilized to best serve political needs. In the end, tale implicitly accepts the legitimacy of both strategies by elevating Horus and Seth to royal positions.

### 3.8 Horus and Hathor (10,1 – 10,10)

THEN the Ennead <sup>(10,2)</sup> went into the mountains to seek out Horus, son of Isis. As for Horus, he was sleeping under a shenusha tree<sup>574 (10,3)</sup> in the Oasis land.

THEN Seth found him, seized him there, struck him down onto his back on the mountain and tore out <sup>(10,4)</sup> his eyes from their places. Then he buried them on the mountain.

Towards the morning those two of his eyes outside turned into bulbs <sup>(10,5)</sup> and grew into two lotuses.

THEN Seth went to Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon, saying to him falsely: <sup>(10,6)</sup> “I did not find Horus,” although he did find him.

THEN came Hathor, lady of the southern sycamore and she found <sup>(10,7)</sup> Horus lying and crying in the foreign land.

THEN SHE caught a gazelle, milked it and said to Horus: <sup>(10,8)</sup> “Open your eyes, so that I may put milk therein!” And she put it in the right one and she <sup>(10,9)</sup> put it in the left one. Then she said to him: “Open your eyes!” and he did open his eyes. She looked at him and found him complete.

THEN SHE <sup>(10,10)</sup> went and spoke to Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon: “I found Horus, Seth having deprived him of his eyes, but I made him stand <sup>(10,11)</sup> again. Look, he comes!”

#### 3.8.1 Desert Symbolism


Horus takes refuge in a location doubly marked as wild and dangerous. Mountains were the structural opposite of the civilized land of Egypt, the word *ḥꜣs.t* meaning not only “foreign land”, but also “mountain(s)” and “desert”,<sup>575</sup> the latter two being very closely associated in Egyptian imagery.<sup>576</sup> The essentially mountainous nature of the desert was

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<sup>574</sup> Sadly, we have very little evidence regarding this plant, which prevents any symbolic reading of this motif. In the Ebers Papyrus there appears a *šn n wšꜥ*, which is used against swelling and pus. (*Papyrus Ebers* 519: 70, 7–9; 577: 74, 16–17) See also the discussion in M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 85. For possible identification of the plant as blackberry, see Gérard Charpentier, *Recueil de matériaux épigraphiques relatifs à la botanique de l'Égypte antique*, Paris: Trismégiste, 1981, § 353, 1122.

<sup>575</sup> *Wb* 3, 234.7-235.21

<sup>576</sup> The desert surrounding the Nile valley is hilly and rocky, quite unlike the stereotypical image of a desert as a relatively flat expanse of sand, which is the case in central Arabia or the Gobi. Cf. Michel Defossez, “L’inscription d’Amenhotep II à Giza: Notes de lecture”, *Göttinger Miszellen* 85 (1985), p. 26.

articulated through the use of the sign , which represents a mountain range, as the classifier for the words denoting desert, like the aforementioned xAs.t or the very frequent dSr.t “desert, foreign land”.<sup>577</sup>

Acting contrary to his filial duties, Horus is driven into an eminently hostile environment, which is incidentally also Seth’s home turf. Since early dynastic time, Seth was associated with foreign lands and its denizens, who, like him, were often considered unruly bunch of cowardly, murderous thieves, giving in to drink and sexual excess, always grumbling and dissatisfied.<sup>578</sup> The lands surrounding Egypt were considered Seth’s domain, and he was accordingly called the “lord of foreign countries.”<sup>579</sup> The western desert, the land of the Oases, was no exception. Even though the Oases<sup>580</sup> were Egyptian territory, symbolically they belonged to the desert of Seth, who ruled over them.<sup>581</sup> Finally, the Egyptians also believed that the desert was inhabited by demons,<sup>582</sup> completing an image of a place inimical to civilized life.<sup>583</sup>

At the same time, the desert was the locale of many significant cultic activities, especially in relation to Hathor.<sup>584</sup> Inscriptions from Wadi el-Hol describe “spending the day

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<sup>577</sup> Wb 5, 494.5–13.

<sup>578</sup> H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 111–112

<sup>579</sup> Hermann Kees, “Ein alter Götterhymnus als Begleittext zur Opfertafel”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 57 (1922), p. 97; Siegfried Morenz, *Ägyptische Religion*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960, p. 252. See also CT 335 VI, 220a–b.

<sup>580</sup> The tale uses the term Oasis-land (*t3-wḥ3.t*), which usually denotes the region of the Oases Dakhla and Kharga, due west of Thebes. (GDG I, 203).

<sup>581</sup> See especially Georges Soukiassian, “Une etape de la proscription de Seth,” *Göttinger Miszellen* 44 (1981): 59–68; Olaf Kaper, “The God Seth in Dakhleh Oasis before the New Kingdom”, in James Gill et al. (eds.), *Dust, demons and pots: studies in honour of Colin A. Hope*, Leuven – Paris – Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2020, p. 369–384.

*Papyrus Salt 825* conveniently lists locations with a cult of Seth, including the oases:

“The land of Oxyrhynchus, the land of Ombos, the land of Shu, the land of Dakhle, the land of Kharga, towards them fell the blood of Seth, these are his places.”

(*Papyrus Salt 825*, V, 1,2; Philippe Derchain, *Le papyrus Salt 825 (B.M. 10051): Rituel pour la conservation de la vie en Égypte*, Bruxelles: Palais des Académies, 1965, p. 138 (vol. 1), p. 41 (vol. 2). Translation of H. Te Velde, *Seth*)

<sup>582</sup> Ludwig Keimer, “L’horreur des Égyptiens pour les démons du desert”, *Bulletin de l’Institut d’Égypte* 26 (1943–1944): 135–147.

<sup>583</sup> Donald Redford, “Egypt and Western Asia in the Old Kingdom”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 23 (1986), p. 125.

<sup>584</sup> See John Darnell, “The Deserts”, in Toby Wilkinson (ed.), *The Egyptian World*, London; New York: Routledge, 2007, p. 46–48.

beneath this mountain on holiday,”<sup>585</sup> and there is evidence of worship both at natural sites, like grottos or rock clusters, or even permanent structures deep in the desert.<sup>586</sup> The safer and more accessible desert on the periphery of the Nile valley, the location of the ancient cemeteries, was regularly visited by worshippers. The case of the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty temple of Sahure is interesting. This Old Kingdom mortuary edifice was repurposed as a temple of Sakhmet in the New Kingdom and the goddess was worshipped here with feasts of drunken revelry.<sup>587</sup> In such contexts, the desert served as a place as a liminal space, suited well for intoxication and romantic endeavours.<sup>588</sup>

These considerations bring up an image of deserts as an essentially ambivalent place, whose potential deadliness is just one aspect of its character. Seth’s explicit role in the episode relates to the mortal danger of deserts, but his function in the tale as a whole reflects their polyvalence and creative potential. It is on this mountain that Horus begins his symbolic rebirth at the hands of Hathor, his mythical encounter with her recalling the festive journeys of Egyptian worshippers to the goddess’ sacred places in the desert. We could also remark that this entry into Hathoric space anticipates the eroticism of the *Homosexual Episode*, which follows the return of Horus from the mountain.

### 3.8.2 The Mutilation

With the arrival of Seth, the destructive aspect of the desert makes itself manifest to Horus. Abusing Horus’s weakened state and his own innate ferocity, Seth mutilates his rival and leaves him for dead. This development finds a parallel in the *Tebtunis Mythological Manual*, where Horus flees from Atefet, the seat of Nemty, where he was threatened by Seth. He goes to a mountain belonging to the god Dedun, the lord of Nubia.<sup>589</sup> Thinking himself safe there from the violence of Seth, he meets his fate at the hands of Dedun.<sup>590</sup> The god is a fitting stand-in for Seth, since he was likewise considered a deity living on

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<sup>585</sup> John Darnell et al., *The Theban Desert Road Survey I: The Rock Inscriptions of Gebel Tjauti in the Theban Western Desert, Part 1, and the Rock Inscriptions of the Wadi el Hól, Part 1*, Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2002, p. 129–138.

<sup>586</sup> J. Darnell, “The Deserts”, p. 47.

<sup>587</sup> Sigrid-Eike Hoernes, *Untersuchungen zu Wesen und Kult der Göttin Sachmet*, Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1976, p. 113–115. For the disorderly character of such festivities, see Richard Jasnow, Mark Smith, “As for Those Who Have Called Me Evil, Mut Will Call Them Evil”: Orgiastic Cultic Behavior and Its Critics in Ancient Egypt (PSI Inv. [prov.] D 114a + PSI Inv. 3056 verso)”, *Enchoria* 32 (2010–2011): 9–53.

<sup>588</sup> See R. Landgráfová, H. Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess II*, p. xiii ff. For liminal spaces in the desert, see also the work cited in note 760 below.

<sup>589</sup> For Dedun as lord of Nubia, see e.g., PT 480 § 994d and PT 572 § 1476b.

<sup>590</sup> *Papyrus Florenz* PSI inv. I 72, x+2, 7–11. This interpretation of this fragmentary text follows that of Dimitri Meeks, *Mythes et légendes du Delta d'après le papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.84*, Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 2006, p. 260–262.

the margins of the world, where he exercised domain over non-Egyptians.<sup>591</sup> According to the text, the reason for the flight of Horus lies ultimately with Isis, who injured him in some way.<sup>592</sup> The text is quite fragmentary and too cryptic for direct citation, but a very similar rendition is present in the Brooklyn Delta Manual:

“Then her son Horus of Medenu defended his mother and protected his father bringing an end to his enemies. Some time after this they were fighting again and again. Then a possibility for victory arose for Horus of Medenu. He tied up Seth as a fettered prisoner. He was released by this goddess. Then Horus committed a crime because of this and this evil deed befell her head. Then Dedun made him ascend, and the same was done to him.”<sup>593</sup>

Consequently, Jorgensen considers all three sources as examples of the same plot.<sup>594</sup> A number of parallels can be also found in the Ptolemaic *Papyrus Jumilhac*, specifically in the previously discussed story of Nemty:

“Knowing the secrets of the Mehet-Imiut in this place according to another version. Someone committed this crime in Aphroditopolis, which happened in the temple of Hathor the lady of Mefkat. Then Re and the ennead heard about it and they raged and became very appalled because of it. Then Re contemplated (the matter) with the Ennead: ‘Concerning his flesh and his skin, which his mother created with her milk and concerning his bones from the fluid of his father: Let his skin and his flesh be removed but his bones remain with him.’ Then it was done accordingly in Atfet (...) Then he travelled to the nome of Dunawi with the gods who are in his following. Thoth was in front carrying his (Nemty’s) skin. Then Hesat became concerned because of it. She created her milk for him anew in renewing his birth, and she milked the milk from the tip of her breasts to give it for his skin in this place, letting it (the milk) flow thereby, and she created an ointment in her jar treating his skin and his flesh with it (...) Then he became well in this place and his flesh grew back for him in renewing (his) birth and renewing his form (...) Then his

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<sup>591</sup> See esp. Valeria Turriziani, “Delimiting, Fighting and Embracing the Other: Liminality in the Egyptian Divine World”, *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 84 (2018), p. 107. See also Marguerite Erroux-Morfin, “Dédoun: Prince du désert devenu dieu”, *Égypte, Afrique & Orient* 65 (2012): 25–32; Heinz-Josef Thissen. “Von Nubien nach Oxyrhynchos: Dedun, ein kleiner Gott”, in Mélanie Floßmann-Schütze et al. (eds.), *Kleine Götter – große Götter: Festschrift für Dieter Kessler zum 65. Geburtstag*, Vaterstetten: Patrick Brose, 2013, p. 495–501.

<sup>592</sup> Jens Jorgensen, *Egyptian Mythological Manuals: Mythological Structures and Interpretative Techniques in the Tebtunis Mythological Manual, the Manual of the Delta and Related Texts*, Dissertation: University of Copenhagen, 2013, p. 50.

<sup>593</sup> *Papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.84*, 11, 618. Translation of Jens Jorgensen, *Egyptian Mythological Manuals*, p. 51.

<sup>594</sup> J. Jorgensen, *Egyptian Mythological Manuals*, p. 51.

mother Isis regarded him as a young infant since she gave birth to him again in this nome.”<sup>595</sup>

Jorgensen convincingly argues that the two mythical manuals, the *Contendings* and *Papyrus Jumilhac*, reflect a single mythical tradition. In his view, the distinctions between them are only result of the fact that “the different episodes of the myth; the crime committed against the mother and following punishment, the restoration and rebirth are parcelled out to different gods, who can be said to fill the slots in different phases of the same icon or constellation of mother and son.”<sup>596</sup>

The parallels for the wounding of Horus itself, are too many to be mentioned. The poetic images chosen to describe the negative impact of Seth on the eye are many: the Eye can be stolen, irritated, caused to cry, injured, torn out, or even caused to flee in fear. The exact action is incidental, while the essence of the act is key: Horus is made bereft of the Eye and needs to regain its ownership and its efficacy. The Eye or Eyes are ultimately the vital energy of the god himself and without it, Horus is incapable of fulfilling his function within the ordered universe. Helck argues that the eye (*jr.t*) is the bodily seat of doing (*jr*).<sup>597</sup> Without it, Horus does not have the capacity to act, which is the very essence of the office of king, who could himself be called *jr.j h.t* (“the lord of rituals”)<sup>598</sup>

### 3.8.3 Healing and the Significance of Milk

The fate of Horus reflects that of Re in the first part of the tale, who too was left alone and incapacitated due to an insult by a Sethian character. As Hathor arrives to assist Horus in his hour of need, the parallel between Horus and Re is made complete. Horus, who was in the prologue of the story depicted as a solar child, is now transitioning into the solar king illuminating the world of the closing hymn of the story.<sup>599</sup>

The two lotuses that emerge from the torn-out Eyes are themselves potent solar symbols.<sup>600</sup> As they emerge in the morning, they recall the cosmogonic tradition according to which

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<sup>595</sup> *Papyrus Jumilhac* 12, 22–13, 9. Translation of J. Jorgensen, *Egyptian Mythological Manuals*, p. 52.

<sup>596</sup> J. Jorgensen, *Egyptian Mythological Manuals*, p. 52.

<sup>597</sup> Wolfgang Helck, “Bemerkung zu den Bezeichnungen für einige Körperteile”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 80 (1955), p. 144–145.

<sup>598</sup> For a detailed examination of the epithet, see Carolyn Routledge, *Ancient Egyptian Ritual Practice: ir-x.t and nt-a*, Dissertation: University of Toronto, 2001, p. 162–305.

<sup>599</sup> Cf. M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 254.

<sup>600</sup> See the discussion of the cosmic aspect of the lotus in Pierre Koemoth, “Le dieu-enfant sur la fleur du lotus égyptien: une icône luni-solaire?”, *Res Antiquae* 17 (2020): 189–225.

the sun-god is born from a lotus that rose from the waters of the primordial ocean, thereby initiating creation.<sup>601</sup>

It is interesting to note that the sentence structure of the passage relating the flight of Horus, his mutilation and the emergence of the two lotuses through its the sentence structure presents the creation of the lotus flowers as a direct consequence of the violence of Seth.<sup>602</sup> Also, this event is situated before the coming of Hathor, who arrives in the morning, highlighting that it is Seth, not Hathor that is the ultimate cause of the appearance of the lotuses.

The healing, however, depends on the goddess, who mirrors the function of Isis in *Papyrus Jumilhac* cited above. The image of Horus receiving milk from Hathor recalls the ancient image of the king being breastfed, which served as potent expression of royal legitimacy and divine status:

“Since the Old Kingdom, the king has been raised to kingship in three contexts by nursing a divine wet nurse, by means of the birth, the coronation or the Sed feast and similar rites as a repetition of the coronation and the repetition of the coronation and the rebirth after death, the latter two occasions as birth into a new life, that is, as the rejuvenation. Breastfeeding is an essential part of these rituals. The divine milk is, on one hand, a prerequisite or means of this rite de passage, on the other hand it marks the transformation that has taken place and subsequently guarantees the prosperity of a new life.”<sup>603</sup>

The comparison with these depictions shows another way in which the wounding of Horus leads to his assumption of kingship. The symbolism of milk links Horus’ mythical revival with rites which facilitate the transformation of the royal person into a new life, be it new life as terrestrial king in the context of coronation, or as Osiris in the afterlife.<sup>604</sup>

Aside from its use in symbolic expressions of royal divinity, milk was employed in ritual practice as a purifying substance, specifically to cleanse the path on which religious processions passed. In a scene from the temple of Luxor depicting the Opet Festival, a priest is depicted holding what resembles a milk jar and sprinkling a liquid behind him

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<sup>601</sup> E.g., CT 80 II, 33a ff.

<sup>602</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 84. See also J. Spiegel, “Die Erzählung vom Streit der Götter Horus und Seth um die Herrschaft”, p. 135.

<sup>603</sup> Silke Cassor-Pfeiffer, “Milch und Windeln für das Horuskind: Bemerkungen zur Szene Opet I 133–134 (= KIU 2011) und ihrem rituellen Kontext”, *Cahiers de Karnak* 16 (2017), p. 83.

<sup>604</sup> Cf. the discussion in chapter 5 below.


with a stick.<sup>605</sup> The liquid was identified by Wolf as milk,<sup>606</sup> while the inscription above the priest reads “Purifying the road in front of the god. Be pure! Be pure!”<sup>607</sup>

A similar depiction of a priest sparkling a milk on the ground before a coffin was found in the tomb of Apy at Amarna.<sup>608</sup> Another instance of this motif is attested from an 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty tomb of Dhouty at Thebes (TT 110) where an inscription describes a burial rite:

“A good burial comes in peace; the whole 70 days have ended in your embalming house. You are placed on a bier and perfect bulls are pulling you. Milk is sprinkled on the way (*wꜣ.t*) for your arrival to the door of your tomb.”<sup>609</sup>

A text cited by Barta expresses the same wish to purify the road to the tomb with milk:

“They have allowed that the roads (*wꜣ.wt*) are opened with milk so that you can reach the entrance to your tomb.”<sup>610</sup>

While the curative aspect of milk is sufficient to understand its presence in the *Contendings*, it is compelling to note that purifying function is milk is so often relegated to the cleansing of pathways. The word *wꜣ.t* is usually written with the same sign as the alternate writing of the name of Horus, the hieroglyph . It is certainly compelling to consider the poetic imagery of Horus “the Way” being cleansed in the same manner as the path which bears the deceased or a god to his eternal abode. The funerary reference is particularly interesting in that the reborn Horus is, in fact, the means through which Osiris is reborn. It has already been described how the bull pulling the corpse of Osiris was mythically equated with Seth. It is plausible that the *Contendings* would frame Horus’ transition in a similar way, as the pure road on which the god’s body travels its resurrection. In this manner, the symbol of milk could serve to unite the twin transitions of Horus and Osiris in the tale, the latter being only present in various clues and allusions. Furthermore, it would appropriately affect Horus and Osiris inversely, meaning that while in the case of Osiris, it would enable to reach the realm of death, it would allow Horus to

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<sup>605</sup> The Epigraphic Survey, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Luxor Temple, Volume 1: The Festival Procession of Opet in the Colonnade Hall: With Translations of Texts, Commentary, and Glossary*, Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1994, p. 5, 37.

<sup>606</sup> Walther Wolf, *Das schöne Fest von Opet: Die Festzugsdarstellung im grossen Säulengange des Tempels von Luksor*, Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1931, p. 28.

<sup>607</sup> The Epigraphic Survey, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Luxor Temple*, vol. 1, p. 5, 37.

<sup>608</sup> Norman Davies, *Two Ramesside tombs at Thebes*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1927, p. 49, pl. xxviii.

<sup>609</sup> Nina Davies, Alan Gardiner, *The Tomb of Amenemhêt (no. 82): Copied in Line and Colour by Nina de Garis Davies and with Explanatory Text by Alan H. Gardiner*, London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1915, p. 56.

<sup>610</sup> Winfried Barta, *Aufbau und Bedeutung der altägyptischen Opferformel*, Glückstadt: J. J. Augustin, 1968, p. 92.

escape this. The common denominator, of course, is that both gods can reach their appropriate place, Osiris leaving this world so that Horus can take his place in it.<sup>611</sup>

Returning to Hathor, we can observe that the *Contendings* alter the traditional image of the king's breastfeeding by having Hathor milk a gazelle instead of offering Horus her own breast. Broze points out that the gazelle is an animal with strong Hathoric connotations, and could be even identified with the goddess in her capacity of the returning Eye of Re, citing an inscription from the temple at Philae, where she is called "a gazelle of the desert."<sup>612</sup> Furthermore, she argues that the gazelle shares the erotic character of the goddess, likely citing the depictions of priestesses of Hathor with a headdress that includes the head of a gazelle as an ornament.<sup>613</sup> Such depictions often include the women holding sistra and *menat* necklaces, reinforcing the Hathoric reading of such images.<sup>614</sup>

Aside from these considerations, the choice of a gazelle, as opposed to the more typical Hathoric animal, the cow,<sup>615</sup> makes sense in the logic of the story, since the gazelle is a desert animal, but this has symbolic ramifications as well. Although gazelles may seem to be rather innocuous animals, in ancient Egypt the attitudes towards them were more ambivalent,<sup>616</sup> as Simpson argues:

"The antelope and gazelle were frequently treated as noxious, pestilential, and harmful, and the scene which immediately comes to mind is that of the cippi of Horus, where the young god is shown triumphantly standing over the crocodiles, and clenching in his fists scorpions, serpents, a lion, and an antelope or gazelle. The gazelles are said to uproot crops when they pass from the desert into the cultivation."<sup>617</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> Cf. chapter 5.5 below.

<sup>612</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 250. The source cited by Broze is François Daumas, "Les propylées du temple d'Hathor à Philae et le culte de la déesse", *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 95 (1968), p. 10.

<sup>613</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 250–251. Cf. Åsa Strandberg, *The Gazelle in Ancient Egyptian Art: Image and Meaning*, Dissertation: Uppsala University, 2009, p. 140. Compare L. Troy, who argues that the headdress was typical of lower-ranking women of the harem. (Lana Troy, *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History*, p. 130)

<sup>614</sup> Rosemarie Drenkhahn, "Bemerkungen zu dem Titel *hkr.t nswt.*", *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 4 (1976), p. 64.

<sup>615</sup> Cf. e.g., François Daumas, "Les objets sacrés de la déesse Hathor à Dendara", *Revue d'égyptologie* 22 (1970): 63–78.

<sup>616</sup> Cf. *Wb* 5, 191, 5.

<sup>617</sup> William K. Simpson, "New Light on the God Reshef", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 73 (1953), p. 88.



The same ornaments interpreted above as Hathoric elements are seen by Simpson as parallels to the uraei and vultures<sup>618</sup> that also formed part of elite female adornment, their common denominator being the capacity to inflict harm.<sup>619</sup>

Here it can be remarked that gazelle heads and horns were part of the iconography of the foreign gods Reshep and Baal, the latter of whom was often identified with Seth.<sup>620</sup> Due to their unruly character and association with the wilderness, they were also associated with Seth directly and were sacrificed to him in the later periods of Egyptian history.<sup>621</sup> This Sethian connection was reflected in mythological sources where the gazelle took on the role of Seth, notably in the *Tebtunis Mythological Manual*, where it is blamed with the theft of the Eyes of Horus:

“The one who acts as that evil one, the rebel against the Udjat-eye’, so they say about the gazelle when he had injured its face.”<sup>622</sup>

“It is called Hebenu according to the beating of the evil one, the gazelle, when the Udjat-eye was taken from him.”<sup>623</sup>

Other passages of the same text describe Horus placed on the back of the animal, all within a triumphant context:

“The son of Osiris is on the back of the Dark one, the splendid falcon on the gazelle.”<sup>624</sup>

“Concerning the falcon on the back of the gazelle. It is in this form because of what that he said.”<sup>625</sup>

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<sup>618</sup> S. Roth, “Queens”, p. 2–3.

<sup>619</sup> W. Simpson, “New Light on the God Reshep”, p. 88. For an opposing view, see e. g. Raphael Giveon, “Review of Reshep in Egypt (W. J. Fulco, 1976)”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 66 (1980), p. 144.

<sup>620</sup> C. Zivie-Coche, “Foreign Deities in Egypt”, p. 2 ff. The association between Seth and Reshep was looser, but nevertheless significant. (R. Wilkinson, *Complete God and Goddesses*, p. 126.) For the iconography of Reshep, see Izak Cornelius, *The Iconography of the Canaanite Gods Reshep and Ba'al: Late Bronze and Iron Age I Periods (c 1500 – 1000 BCE)*, Fribourg – Göttingen: University Press – Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, 1994, 293 p.

<sup>621</sup> R. Giveon, “Review of Reshep in Egypt”, p. 145.

<sup>622</sup> *Tebtunis Mythological Manual*, x+7,17. Cf. x+7,14. Translation of J. Jorgensen, *Egyptian Mythological Manuals*, p. 240.

<sup>623</sup> *Tebtunis Mythological Manual*, x+7,9. Translation of J. Jorgensen, *Egyptian Mythological Manuals*, p. 239.

<sup>624</sup> *Tebtunis Mythological Manual*, x+7,12. Translation of J. Jorgensen, *Egyptian Mythological Manuals*, p. 239.

<sup>625</sup> *Tebtunis Mythological Manual*, x+7,23. Translation of J. Jorgensen, *Egyptian Mythological Manuals*, p. 240.

These excerpts recall the well attested motif of defeated Seth being used as a draft animal for the body of Osiris on its way to the necropolis, thereby assisting with his rebirth in the afterlife. The phraseology of the last passage of the *Tebtunis Mythological Manual* seems to support this reading by blaming the fate of gazelle on the animal itself, much like the case of the sacrificial bull or indeed Seth in the *Contendings*, who too is doomed by his own words.

With the help of Hathor, the gazelle, which in contexts similar to this Episode occupies the role of Seth, is used as a source of energy for the revival of Horus, who, like Osiris, was struck down by Seth. As is the case with his father, Horus is renewed with the very same force of disorder that wounded him.<sup>626</sup> The interaction leaves Horus empowered and the world enriched, as evidenced by the two solar flowers. From now on, his role in the story becomes gradually more assertive even though his fate will still parallel that of Osiris, as it did since the beginning of the second part of this story. Pursued, killed and revived as his father was, Horus will go on to take part in a divine conception, the resulting offspring finally helping him to overcome the evil that beset him in the first place. As the story of kingship moves towards its happy conclusion, so does in the background the story of triumph over death. In support of this Osirian reading of Horus' travails, we may remark that the death of Osiris himself was associated with gazelles: the name given to the place where he was stuck down is in some sources rendered as Gesehty, "the place of the (two) gazelles."<sup>627</sup>

In conclusion, this episode produces within the person of Horus a compelling mix of variously charged influences, which due to a complex interplay of symbolic meanings result in an overwhelmingly positive result for the young god. Consequently, the emergence of the two solar lotuses is framed as a positive occurrence despite its violent origin. Since the blooming of the flowers serves as an anticipatory symbol of Horus' solar ascendancy at the end of the tale, we can understand why this symbolic foreplay is attributed with this unusual mix of qualities, being both savage and ultimately benign. We will see later in chapter 5.7 that this seemingly paradoxical combination of beneficence and savagery represents the foundation of kingship.

In emphasizing the lie of Seth, the tale makes sure that despite his action being framed as cosmically benign, the character himself is at this point in the tale still a negative one. While the narrative requires the savagery of Seth in order to facilitate the symbolic death

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<sup>626</sup> We could remark that Hathor fills in the wounds of Horus with a white Sethian substance, while the two solar flowers grow. From a certain perspective this can be related to the following episode, where Seth tries to fill Horus with another white substance but does himself give birth to a solar emblem.

<sup>627</sup> See PT 478 § 972c; PT 485 § 1033b; PT 574 § 1487d; PT 637 § 1799b. See also Alan Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, vol. 2, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947, p. 9; Kurt Sethe, *Übersetzung und Kommentar zu den altägyptischen Pyramidentexten*, vol. 4, Glückstadt - Hamburg: Augustin, 1939, p. 263. GDG V, 220.

and subsequent rebirth of Horus as king, he is still a representative of disorder, and his moral failings reflect his nature, which might otherwise be confounded by the retributive context in which Horus was pursued into the mountains. Even though Seth's cause may be justified, his methods are not.<sup>628</sup>

### 3.9 The Homosexual Episode (10,11-13,2)

THEN the Ennead said: "Have Horus and Seth summoned, and they shall be judged!"

THEN they were brought before the <sup>(10,12)</sup> Ennead and then the Lord of All spoke to Horus and Seth before the Great Ennead: "Come and take that which I say to you! Please, eat, <sup>(11,1)</sup> drink, and let us rest! Go away with your quarreling every day again and again!"

THEN Seth said to Horus: "Come, let's spend a feast day in my <sup>(11,2)</sup> house!"

THEN Horus said to him: "I will, look, I really will."

NOW THE TIME OF EVENING HAS PASSED, when <sup>(11,3)</sup> beds were prepared for them, and they slept as two men.

NOW IT WAS DARK, and Seth made his member hard, and he placed it between the thighs <sup>(11,4)</sup> of Horus.

THEN Horus put both his hands between his thighs and took the seed of Seth.

THEN Horus <sup>(11,5)</sup> went and said to his mother Isis: "Come to me, Isis, my mother! Come and see that which Seth did to me!" Then he opened his hands and <sup>(11,6)</sup> let her see the semen of Seth. She raised a loud cry, grasped her COPPER (blade), and cut off his hand. <sup>(11,7)</sup> Then she threw it in the water and drew forth for him a new hand.

THEN SHE took a little sweet ointment and put it on the horn of Horus. <sup>(11,8)</sup>

THEN she went with the semen <sup>(11,9)</sup> of Horus to the garden of Seth in the morning and said to the gardener of Seth: "Which are the plants <sup>(11,10)</sup> that Seth eats here with you?"

THEN the gardener said to her: "Nothing does he eat here with me <sup>(11,11)</sup> except lettuce." And she placed the semen on it.

THEN Seth came in his daily custom and ate the lettuce that he always ate after getting up. Then he became pregnant with the semen of Horus.

THEN Seth went and said to <sup>(12,1)</sup> Horus: "Come, let us hurry, that I may contend with you before the council!"

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<sup>628</sup> Cf. M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 84-85.

THEN Horus said to him: “I will, look, I really will.”

THEN THEY <sup>(12,2)</sup> went to the council as two men and they stood before the Great Ennead, and it was said to them: “Speak for yourselves!”

THEN Seth said: “Have the office of Ruler, l.p.h., given to me <sup>(12,3)</sup>, as far as Horus here is concerned, I have done a male deed to him.”

THEN the Ennead uttered <sup>(12,4)</sup> a great cry and they spat in the face of Horus.

THEN Horus laughed at them.

THEN Horus made <sup>(12,5)</sup> a divine oath, saying: “Every word of Seth is falsehood! Have anyone call out the semen of Seth and you shall see where it answers <sup>(12,6)</sup> from. Then let mine be called and you shall see where it answers from.”

THEN Thoth, master of the sacred speech, true scribe <sup>(12,7)</sup> of the Ennead, placed his hand on the arm of Horus, saying: “Come out, seed of Seth!” And it answered <sup>(12,8)</sup> him from the waters in the middle of a cucumber field.

THEN Thoth placed his hand on the arm of Seth, saying: “Come <sup>(12,9)</sup> out, seed of Horus!”

THEN it said to him: “Where am I to come out?” Then Thoth said to it: “Come <sup>(12,10)</sup> out from his ear!” THEN it said to him: “Should I come out of his ear? Me, the divine <sup>(12,11)</sup> seed?”

THEN Thoth said to it: “Come out from his brow!”

THEN it came out as a disc of gold on the head of <sup>(12,12)</sup> Seth.

THEN Seth became very angry and stretched out his hand to seize the disc of gold.

THEN Thoth took it <sup>(13,1)</sup> from him and put it as a crown on his head. Then the Ennead said: “True is Horus, false is Seth!”

THEN Seth became very angry, <sup>(13,2)</sup> raising his voice while they said: “True is Horus, false is Seth!”

### 3.9.1 “Spend a Feast Day”

Much like in the previous episode, there is no obvious hint of danger in the proposal of Seth. The phrase “spend a feast day” (*ir hrw nfr*) is in line with the Re’s proposal of enjoying a shared meal, but its meaning goes beyond eating. The phrase had significance in both funerary and non-funerary contexts, and while in literary sources it typically represented an occasion for pleasure, it should be noted that in funerary sources such

banquets often included both the living and the dead as its participants.<sup>629</sup> The use of this phrase could consequently be interpreted as another element of funerary symbolism in this part of the tale.

Comparing the function of the phrase in other Late Egyptian stories, Castro notes that the motif appears in anticipation of the protagonist's emergence as king and marks a temporary lull of action inserted into the texts as a transition point in the plot.<sup>630</sup> The harmonious image of the feast represents a clear de-escalation in terms of violence between the two gods, which nevertheless returns to the story as soon as the gods go to sleep with Seth approaching Horus the same night and with open hostility returning in the *Boat Race*, right after the conclusion of the *Homosexual Episode*. The phrase *ir hrw nfr* embodies a literary eye of the storm, during which the action is briefly suspended as the development of the story starts to turn in favour of the king-to-be. It will be shown in chapter 5.6.3 below how such momentary halt of activity highlights a pivoting element in the succession drama of kingship, which now begins its journey to recovery.<sup>631</sup>

The sexual encounter of Horus and Seth is far from eventful, of course, and danger still awaits the young god after the feast, the advances of Seth mirroring the case of the *Doomed Prince*. In the story, a snake attempts to bite the titular prince, who was fast asleep after enjoying *hrw nfr*.<sup>632</sup> An intervention of a female character averts the danger, much like Isis helps neutralize the effects of Seth's semen.

### 3.9.2 Sexual Aspects of the Rivalry of Horus and Seth

The physical act of love itself is one of the most discussed elements of the whole tale.<sup>633</sup> It is remarkable in that it is one of the few attestations of male-on-male sex that is not shrouded to some degree in ambiguity, as the tale uses very clear language to describe the event as sexual.<sup>634</sup> It is consequently often cited in discussions devoted to the topic of

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<sup>629</sup> See the discussion in Hana Navrátilová, "Hail Thee, Festival Day": Interaction of Primary and Secondary Epigraphy in the Pyramid Temple of Senwosret III", in Simone Gerhards et al. (eds.), *Schöne Denkmäler sind entstanden: Studien zu Ehren von Ursula Verhoeven*, Heidelberg: Propylaeum, 2023, p. 457–485.

<sup>630</sup> María Castro, "El hrw nfr en la literatura ramésida: Algunas notas para su interpretación", *Trabajos de Egiptología – Papers on Ancient Egypt* 11 (2020), p. 86–87.

<sup>631</sup> Cf. especially the discussion of *point mort* in chapter 5.6.3 below.

<sup>632</sup> *Doomed Prince* 7,14–15. Cf. M. Castro, "El hrw nfr en la literatura ramésida", p. 86.

<sup>633</sup> Aside from the sources cited below, see also Alessia Amenta, "Some Reflections on the 'Homosexual' Intercourse between Horus and Seth", *Göttinger Miszellen* 199 (2004): 7–21.

<sup>634</sup> Cf. Uroš Matić, "Gender in Ancient Egypt: Norms, Ambiguities, and Sensualities", *Near Eastern Archaeology* 79 (2016), p. 178 ff.

Egyptian homosexuality and the notion of “sexuality” itself.<sup>635</sup> This affluence of secondary literature at same time emphasizes how tenuous our findings can be as our analytic tools try to come to terms with historical sources.<sup>636</sup> Indeed, the outline of the topic itself is often perceived as problematic, as described by Landgráfová & Navrátilová:

“The seemingly self-evident truths about the phenomena defined as heterosexuality or homosexuality are modern definitions and besides the danger of projecting boundaries of sexual categorization into antiquity, there is also the danger of implying the absence of any categorisation.”<sup>637</sup>

Rather than devote itself to the studies of culture-specific attitudes to sex and the numerous interpretative pitfalls that this entails, the present thesis focuses on the interplay of symbols, treating it first and foremost as a religious text rather than a representation of real-life practices or attitudes.

As a mythological motif, the intercourse between Horus and Seth is described in a number of sources, two of which are most pertinent for the present discussion of the *Contendings*. The first is a spell of the Pyramid Texts in the pyramid of Pepi I recently discovered by the archaeological team of Jean Leclant:

“Horus cried because of his of his body’s eye [...] Seth cries because of his own testicles.

Horus introduces his semen in Seth’s backside, Seth introduces his semen in Horus’s backside.”<sup>638</sup>

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<sup>635</sup> For studies of Egyptian same sex intercourse and associated topics, see especially Richard Parkinson, “‘Homosexual’ Desire and Middle Kingdom Literature”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 81 (1995): 57–76; Richard Parkinson, “‘Boasting about Hardness’: Constructions of Middle Kingdom Masculinity, in Carolyn Graves-Brown (ed.), *Sex and Gender in Ancient Egypt: ‘Don your Wig for a Joyful Hour’*, Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2008, p. 115–142. Greg Reeder, “Same-Sex Desire, Conjugal Constructs, and the Tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep”, *World Archaeology* 32 (2000): 193–208; Greg Reeder, “Queer Egyptologies of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep”, in Carolyn Graves-Brown (ed.), *Sex and Gender in Ancient Egypt: ‘Don your Wig for a Joyful Hour’*, Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2008, p. 143–155; Beate Schukraft, “Homosexualität im Alten Ägypten”, *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 36 (2007): 297–331.

<sup>636</sup> Cf. R. Parkinson, “‘Homosexual’ Desire and Middle Kingdom Literature”, p. 57–60; Thomas Dowson, “Queering Sex and Gender in Ancient Egypt”, in *Sex and Gender in Ancient Egypt: ‘Don your Wig for a Joyful Hour’*, Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2008, p. 27–46.

<sup>637</sup> R. Landgráfová, H. Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess I*, p. 23.

<sup>638</sup> Antechamber, wall E, columns P 233+234, bottom. Translation of A. Amenta, p. 8. Publication in Jean Leclant et al., *Les textes de la pyramide de Pépi Ier*, 2 vols., Cairo, Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 2010.

The remarkable element of this spell is the reciprocity of the sexual action,<sup>639</sup> something related by Amenta to the use of onomatopoeic verbs that can be ascribed to a magical or liturgical function of this passage.<sup>640</sup> Used comparatively with the *Contendings*, it likely shows the scenario that Seth was supposed to follow, thereby depositing his semen in the body of Horus. In this manner, it would have responded from inside of the younger god, thereby testifying to Seth's claim. At the same time, it is also the scenario that would have been incorrectly envisioned by the divine audience when the semen of Horus answers from the body of Seth: instead of eating the semen by accident, Seth appeared as if he alone was forced to be the receptacle of the other's sperm.

The other major comparative source is present on the recto of a 12<sup>th</sup> dynasty *Papyrus Lahun* VI.12:

“Then the majesty of Seth said to the majesty of Horus: “How beautiful are your buttocks!<sup>641</sup> Broad (?) are your thighs [...]”<sup>642</sup> Stretch out (?) your feet (?) ...

And the majesty of Horus said: “Go away! I will tell [it to my mother Isis.” When they arrived] to their palace, the majesty (*hm*) of Horus said to his mother Isis [what shall I do? Comes] Seth to know me sexually.”

And she said to him: “Beware! Do not approach him about it!”

When he mentions it to you another time, then you shall say to him:

“It is too painful for me entirely, as you are heavier than me.

My strength shall not match/support your strength”, so you say to him.”<sup>643</sup>

This text supports the idea that not only was there an implication of sex in Seth's invitation, but unlike the *Contendings*, Horus did not fail to understand that there was also an element of danger that Horus failed to recognize. In the present episode, however, Seth once again managed to meet Horus alone at night, this time under a ruse of a party, hoping to take advantage of him as he did on the mountain in the previous episode,

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<sup>639</sup> Most of the attested cases of homosexual intercourse between Horus and Seth seem to involve a certain degree of reciprocity. See Winfried Barta, “Zur Reziprozität der homosexuellen Beziehung zwischen Horus und Seth”, *Göttinger Miszellen* 129 (1992), p. 33–38.

<sup>640</sup> A. Amenta, “Some Reflections on the ‘Homosexual’ Intercourse Between Horus and Seth”, p. 8.

<sup>641</sup> Parkinson interprets this phrase as a parody of the ritual greeting *nfr.wy hr-k*, see R. Parkinson, “‘Homosexual’ Desire and Middle Kingdom Literature”, p. 70, n. 101. Cf. PT 220, § 195; *Papyrus Cheste rBeatty* IV 9,12–13; 10,1; 11,8, 10, 12, 13, 15; 12.4, 6.

<sup>642</sup> This section is very damaged. Amenta reads “Stretch out (?) your feet (?) (...)”

<sup>643</sup> *Papyrus Lahun* VI.12 x+1,8-x+2,6. Francis Griffith, *The Petrie Papyri: Hieratic Papyri from Kahun and Gurob (Principally of the Middle Kingdom)*, vol. 1, London: Bernard Quaritch, 1898, pl. 3. Translation after the cited works of A. Amenta and R. Parkinson.

thereby tipping the contest in his favour.<sup>644</sup> What this version and the *Contendings*, however, have in common is the admission of Seth's physical and sexual superiority, which is explicit in *Papyrus Lahun*, but only implied in *Papyrus Chester Beatty I*. If it was the case that Horus could overpower Seth sexually, then the whole arrangement with lettuce could be avoided. That Isis and Horus resort to a stratagem is an indication that a direct approach would not result in success.

The issue of Horus' hands and their replacement finds some parallels as well. A mention of "seed in his (Horus') hands" is found on a fragmentary demotic papyrus from Saqqara,<sup>645</sup> while the aforementioned *Papyrus Lahun* has Horus take the semen of Seth off his thighs with his hands. Furthermore, Coffin Texts spell 158 describes Horus' hands being cut off and thrown into a river by Isis, comparing the two lost hands to the "secrets of the town of Nekhen."<sup>646</sup> The choice of hand as the body part for replacement is therefore in line with other sources, but the symbolic value of this act is no more transparent thanks to this. It could be argued that there is a common denominator between the eyes, which are symbolically related to action, and the hands which are the primary organ of human activity. In receiving new eyes and hands, Horus is effectively reborn as an effective actor. It could even be stated that his previous eyes and hands were essentially dysfunctional, as evidenced by his lack of effective speech and action. Lastly, we could also remark that the choice of hands reflects the role of Isis as the hand of the creator, as discussed below in this chapter in later in chapter 5.6.2.

### 3.9.3 Isis, Lettuce and the Birth of the Moon

The agency of Isis is a crucial element in this episode as it was in the previous one. Unlike the diving episode, however, she does not act independently, and the initiative is with Horus, who actively seeks out her help, highlighting the transformation of Isis into an unambiguously supportive character, as outlined in the discussion of her petrification. Her change is also marked by an emergence of her sexual side, since the form of assistance she provides to Horus can hardly be subscribed to her role as a mother. The specific form of intercourse chosen evokes the cosmogonic images of the creator god and the hand

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<sup>644</sup> Parkinson argues that in the rendition of the Lahun papyrus, the primary motivation of Seth seems to be lust rather than political gain. See Parkinson, "'Homosexual' Desire and Middle Kingdom Literature", p. 70.

<sup>645</sup> See Karl-Theodor Zauzich, "Der Streit zwischen Horus und Seth in einer demotischen Fassung (Pap. Berlin P 15549 + 15551 + 23727)", in Heinz-Josef Thissen, Karl-Theodor Zauzich (eds.), *Grammata demotika: Festschrift für Erich Lüddeckens zum 15. Juni 1983*, Würzburg: Gisela Zauzich, 1984, p. 275-281.

<sup>646</sup> CT 158 II, 349a ff. (= *Book of the Dead* chapter 113).



goddess.<sup>647</sup> The tale has already broached in the episode *Re and Hathor*, which, in line of the interpretation of the last episode, points to the emerging solarization of Horus in the second half of the story.

The production of a new pair of hands is, of course, not the whole outcome of this Episode. Unlike the previous episode, where the neutralization of the violence of Seth on the protagonist, the side of Horus makes a significant progress. The savage strength of Seth is not yet sapped, which is indicated by the fact that his name is still described with the altered classifier in this episode.<sup>648</sup> It is only when this episode ends, the episode in which he misplaces his seed, his male essence, and loses his masculinity by undergoing pregnancy, a profoundly feminine state, that the name reverts to the ‘standard’ classifier after the *Homosexual Episode*. His anguished cry at its end at *Con.* 13,2 serves as a farewell to his unbridled power.

The vehicle of the excessive potency of Seth is articulated through the symbol of the lettuce plant. Lettuce was strongly associated with the ithyphallic fertility god Min, being frequently depicted as an offering to the deity.<sup>649</sup> The plant itself was considered to be aphrodisiac, the erect and narrow variety that seems to have been prevalent in Egypt<sup>650</sup> easily giving credence to this idea, not to mention that when broken or injured, it exudes milky latex juice that is quite reminiscent of semen.<sup>651</sup> Seth’s diet consisting solely of lettuce therefore amounts to a rather extreme and likely intentionally humorous expression of hypersexuality and masculine potency.

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<sup>647</sup> On various solar methods of creation see Susanne Bickel, *La cosmogonie égyptienne avant le Nouvel Empire*, Freiburg - Göttingen: Universitätsverlag - Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994, p. 71-111.

<sup>648</sup> *Con.* 10,12; 11,4; 11,9 (twice); 13,2.

<sup>649</sup> Pauline Norris, “Lettuce as an Offering to Mnw (Min)”, in Maravelia, Alicia and Nadine Guillou (eds.), *Environment and Religion in Ancient and Coptic Egypt: Sensing the Cosmos Through the Eyes of the Divine. Proceedings of the 1st Egyptological Conference of the Hellenic Institute of Egyptology, Co-organized With the Writing & Scripts Centre of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and the Institute of Coptic Studies (University of Alexandria), at the People’s University of Athens, Under the High Auspices of His Eminence Mgr Damianos, Archbishop of Sinai; Athens: Wednesday 1st, Thursday 2nd Friday 3rd February 2017*, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2020, p. 317-329.

<sup>650</sup> For the identification of the *ḥw*-plant as the common lettuce, see Ludwig Keimer, “Die Pflanze des Gottes Min”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 59 (1924): 140-143. See also the discussion in Jack Harlan, “Lettuce and the Sycomore: Sex and Romance in Ancient Egypt”, *Economic Botany* 40 (1986), p. 6.

<sup>651</sup> Jack Harlan, “Lettuce and the Sycomore”, p. 4-10. See also Barbara Adams, “A Lettuce for Min”, *Göttinger Miszellen* 37 (1980): 9-16; Adriana Belluccio, “La pianta del dio Min e la sua funzione sul piano mitico-rituale”, *Discussions in Egyptology* 31 (1995): 15-34; Nabil El-Hadidi, “Notes on Egyptian Weeds of Antiquity, 1: Min's Lettuce and the Naqada Plant”, in Barbara Adams, Renée Friedman (eds.), *The Followers of Horus: Studies Dedicated to Michael Allen Hoffman*, Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1992, p. 323-326; Renate Germer, “Die Bedeutung des Lattichs als Pflanze des Min”, *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 8 (1980): 85-87; Klaus Kuhlmann, “Bemerkungen zum Lattichfeld und den Wedelinsignien des Min”, *Die Welt des Orients* 14 (1983): 196-206.

Remarkably, this Min connection with the case of the *Contendings* is attested in two offering scenes from Edfu, which also describe the subsequent birth of Thoth:

“Offering of the lettuce. Repeat aloud: The beautiful vegetable, grown in the garden, may your heart rejoice by contemplating it. Let your (Horus-Min's) semen penetrate the body of the enemy (Seth), so that he becomes pregnant and your son (Thoth) comes out from his head.”<sup>652</sup>

“Receive the beautiful green plant and what is in it (semen?), so that you (Horus-Min) may expel the sacred seed that is in it, and the craven one (Hmty = Seth) eats (it) and generates for you a son (Thoth), who will come out of his forehead as a judge; thus you will be justified in front of the Court.”<sup>653</sup>

These two texts make a clear connection between all the main elements of the homosexual episode: the intentional contamination of the lettuce, its consumption by Seth and finally the birth of Thoth that leads to final justification.

The ingestion of semen deserves some attention. This superficially grotesque motif finds a surprising parallel in some renditions of Egyptian cosmogony that, as Orriols-Llonch succinctly puts it, present the solar creational act as a sequence of phallus-hand-orgasm-mouth-spit.<sup>654</sup> Three relatively unambiguous sources are attested for this idea, Coffin Texts spells 77 and 80 and the *Papyrus Bremner-Rhind*:<sup>655</sup>

“I am this *ba* of Shu ... which Atum ejected with his hand. He made an orgasm falling the sperm in his mouth. (Then) he spat me as Shu together with Tefnut, who came forth after me.”<sup>656</sup>

“I am this *ba* of Shu which Atum ejected. I am bound for my place of eternity. I am the eternal who gives birth millions of times. (I am) the repetition of Atum's spit, which came out of his mouth (after) he used his hand.”<sup>657</sup>

“I copulated with my fist, and I copulated with my hand. I spat with my own mouth. I spat Shu and expectorated Tefnut. [...] After I copulated with my fist

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<sup>652</sup> *Edfou* I 82,5-6. Translation of A. Amenta, “Some Reflections on the ‘Homosexual’ Intercourse Between Horus and Seth”, p. 11.

<sup>653</sup> *Edfou* II 44,12-13. Translation of A. Amenta, “Some Reflections on the ‘Homosexual’ Intercourse Between Horus and Seth”, p. 11.

<sup>654</sup> Marc Orriols-Llonch, “Semen Ingestion and Oral Sex in Ancient Egyptian Texts”, in Panagiotis Kousoulis, Nikolaos Lazaridis (eds.), *Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Egyptologists: University of the Aegean, Rhodes, 22-29 May 2008*, Leuven: Peeters, 2015, p. 480.

<sup>655</sup> See the discussion of the sources in Marc Orriols-Llonch, “Semen Ingestion and Oral sex in Ancient Egyptian Texts”, p. 840-842.

<sup>656</sup> CT 77 II 18a-e. Translation of M. Orriols-Llonch, “Semen Ingestion and Oral sex in Ancient Egyptian Texts”, p. 840.

<sup>657</sup> CT 80 II 31b-f. Translation of M. Orriols-Llonch, “Semen Ingestion and Oral sex in Ancient Egyptian Texts”, p. 841.

and my orgasm came to me in my hand, falling the semen in my mouth. (Then) I spat Shu (and) expectorated Tefnut.”<sup>658</sup>

In this manner, we may actually see the conception and birth of the moon disc as a parallel of the cosmogonic act of the creator god, whose person is split in two: the ejaculating Horus and the swallowing Seth. If we followed this analogy, we could argue that just as the splitting of the creator into the person of Atum and goddess Hand represents the presence of both the creative male and the assisting female principles in the primordial god, so represent Horus and Seth the creative and assisting aspects of creation.<sup>659</sup> Several authors have stated that the mouth is a simile for the uterus, which would reinforce the reading of Seth’s final role in this episode as eminently feminine.<sup>660</sup> Even though he lacks female reproductive organs, he is still fully capable of achieving the same result with his head, perhaps also reflecting the tradition of Memphite theology creating the world with his mouth and thoughts.

These cosmogonic connotations emphasize the significance of the result of Seth’s pregnancy. Whereas the fact alone that Thoth receives a disc of gold to wear as a crown may seem relatively insignificant, the graphic game of the classifiers of Horus and Seth makes it clear that this is the breaking point of the narrative. In the following episode, Horus defeats Seth on his own, something he was not heretofore able to do, and it is the birth of the golden disc that marks this transition in the person of Horus. As seen in the texts from Edfu cited above, the pregnancy of Seth results in the birth of Thoth, something articulated in the *Contendings* only through the motif of the god’s crown but attested directly in other sources. Thoth is frequently attributed such titles as “the son of the two rivals”, “the son of the two lords”, or “the son of the two lords, who came forth from the forehead.”<sup>661</sup> The last one recalls the tradition of the Pyramid Texts, where he is described as “the knife/knife-bearer (*mds*) which went forth from Seth.”<sup>662</sup> The word *mds*,

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<sup>658</sup> *Papyrus Bremner-Rhind* 28,27; 29,2. Translation of M. Orriols-Llonch, “Semen Ingestion and Oral sex in Ancient Egyptian Texts”, p. 841.

<sup>659</sup> Cf. Marc Orriols-Llonch, “Sex and Cosmogony: The Onanism of the Solar Demiurge”, *Göttinger Miszellen* 233 (2012): 31–42. Orriols-Llonch recognizes the motif of semen ingestion in the *Contendings* but draws no parallels with the cosmogonic sources. See M. Orriols-Llonch, “Semen ingestion and oral sex in ancient Egyptian texts”, p. 842–843.

<sup>660</sup> See esp. Susanne Bickel, *La cosmogonie égyptienne avant le Nouvel Empire*, p. 74; Jan Zandee, “Sargtexte, Spruch 76 (Coffin Texts II 1-17)”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 100 (1973), p. 72.

<sup>661</sup> Lucas Baqué-Manzano, “Thoth in PT [218] 163d and PT [219] 175a: From the Shadows of Power”, *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 46 (2017), p. 17. See also Hermann Kees, “Zu den ägyptischen Mondsagen”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 60 (1925): 1–15; H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 44.

<sup>662</sup> PT 665A § 1906d; PT665D § 1927d; PT 674 § 1999c. There reportedly exists an unnumbered wooden tablet in Turin describing Thoth as “the one who went forth from the forehead”, see *Wb* 1 (Belegstellen), 41, *Wb* 2 (Belegstellen), 231.6.

which relates Thoth to the discussion of Nemty's lunar sharpness earlier can be translated as the "the sharp one" or the "violent one", which is usually taken to emphasize the aggressive aspect of the god which appears in the Pyramid Texts.<sup>663</sup> This sharpness, which lends itself to use in many protective spells, but at the same time entails a certain level of violent ambivalence, has been identified by Derchain as a clear lunar attribute.<sup>664</sup> Remarkably, the Pyramid maintain some ambiguity as to whether Thoth is just a holder of the lunar knife, or is to be identified with him:

"In the quoted sentences of the PT the reference to the knife-medes close to its possessor, i.e., Thoth, is puzzling as it does not seem clear whether it was the knife or the god himself (personifying the knife) what came forth from Seth. Nevertheless, it is perhaps not by accident but intentional such a close – one might say coalescent interrelationship between possessor (=Thoth) and possessed object (= knife-medes), i.e., between the god and an essential part of him (knife = moon), under which ancient Egyptians could have conceived the instrumental nature of Thoth as an avenging-knife entity at the service of men and gods."<sup>665</sup>

Here it should be remarked that according to Graves-Brown, the etymology of *mds* is possibly "from flint",<sup>666</sup> something shown as pertinent to the present discussion by Pyramid Texts spell 674:<sup>667</sup> "The *mꜣs*<sup>668</sup> upon the arms of Thoth are of flint which came forth from Seth."<sup>669</sup> This spell indicates that Seth is the origin of the flintiness of Thoth. Seth himself had significant flinty associations, both through his relation to storms, which are transculturally connected with flint,<sup>670</sup> but also its function in knives, which could

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<sup>663</sup> See the discussion and sources cited below in chapter 3.5.1.

<sup>664</sup> Philippe Derchain, "Mythes et dieux lunaires en Égypte", in Anonymous (ed.), *La lune, mythes et rites: Égypte, Sumer, Babylone, Hittites, Canaan, Israël, Islam, Iran, Inde, Cambodge, Japon, Chine, Sibérie*, 1962, Éditions du Seuil: Paris, p. 41.

<sup>665</sup> Lucas Baqué-Manzano, "Thoth in PT [218] 163d and PT [219] 175a", p. 18–19.

<sup>666</sup> C. Graves-Brown, *The Ideological Significance of Flint in Dynastic Egypt*, p. 46, 122.

<sup>667</sup> For the flinty character of Thoth, see C. Graves-Brown, *The Ideological Significance of Flint in Dynastic Egypt*, p. 256 ff.

<sup>668</sup> See the discussion in C. Graves-Brown, p. 259. Meurer equates the spines with the claws of the ibis, Thoth's emblem animal. The claw of the ibis is elsewhere associated with a knife. See Georg Meurer, *Die Feinde des Königs in den Pyramidentexten*, Freiburg – Göttingen: Universitätsverlag – Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002, p. 178–179 Interestingly, Goebis suggests *mꜣsw* may relate to, or be a miswriting of, *mꜣsw.t* (the white crown which comes forth from Seth and which may be the moon itself, and/or the uraeus and the Eye of Horus, all linked by their luminous potential). See K. Goebis, *Crowns in Egyptian Funerary Literature*, p. 144–145, n. 361.

<sup>669</sup> PT 674 § 1999c.

<sup>670</sup> C. Graves-Brown, *The Ideological Significance of Flint in Dynastic Egypt*, p. 255.

both be used by Seth against Apep, and by the enemies of Seth against him.<sup>671</sup> As in the case of Nemty, the flinty sharpness of Thoth can be connected to Seth and is also shown to be the tool of his defeat. The pregnancy of Seth is consequently a means of extracting the dangerous strength of Seth (sometimes articulated as flinty character) and depositing it into a separate entity (Thoth, the Moon,<sup>672</sup> a flint-knife or a golden disc), which in turn can be used against him. Having lost control of his male essence, and with his sharpness now in the possession of the enemy, Seth faces certain defeat.

There are more interesting points to be made about flint, though. The material is characteristic not only by its sharpness, but also by its luminosity, which reflected in its frequent association with the solar Eye in its supportive, vengeful aspect.<sup>673</sup> Since the solar Eye and eye of Horus could be treated as interchangeable in some contexts, it is pertinent to ask how we could relate the lunar knife of Seth to the case of Horus.<sup>674</sup> Here, this otherwise too encompassing association between the two mythical eyes can be seen as justified thanks to some sources a connection between flint, the Eye of Horus and the Eye of Re can be made.<sup>675</sup> Specifically, the Ptolemaic Papyrus *Turin Museo Egizio* 1791 (=BD 149), reads “I am the Eye of Horus, Great of Magic of flint, which came forth from Seth.”<sup>676</sup> This can be related to another Book of the Dead chapter 149, where it is stated

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<sup>671</sup> See the discussion of sources in C. Graves-Brown, *The Ideological Significance of Flint in Dynastic Egypt*, p. 258.

It should be noted that the Egyptians did not differentiate between a “good Seth” and “bad Seth.” In the course of the present analysis, we may distinguish between positive and negative aspect, but also keeping in mind that “there was no contradiction in the fact that Seth acted in good and bad ways, and was treated positively and negatively, at the same time”, which embodies the profound ambivalence of the deity. See Janne Arp-Neumann, “Negating Seth: Destruction as Vitality”, *Numen* 68 (2021), p. 165. In words of Mark Smith, “how Seth is portrayed in a given source is determined by the nature of that source.” (M. Smith, “The Reign of Seth”, p. 415)

<sup>672</sup> For Thoth as the moon, see esp. M. Stadler, *Weiser und Wesir*, p. 200 – 219.

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>674</sup> J. Darnell, “The Apotropaic Goddess in the Eye”, p. 35–48.

<sup>675</sup> Graves Brown argues that flint does not appear in the Contendings in connection with the night sky or solar symbolism, these associations being characteristic for the material. (C. Graves-Brown, *The Ideological Significance of Flint in Dynastic Egypt*, p. 266). In response, we can point out that the petrification of Isis happens right before and is in fact the necessary precondition for the symbolic rebirth of the Eyes of Horus, which represent both the solar and lunar disc, the former being directly alluded to in the same episode through the image of the two lotuses, while the latter is the result of the sexual union of Horus and Seth.

<sup>676</sup> *Papyrus Turin Museo Egizio* 1791, col. 45. Translation of C. Graves-Brown. See Richard Lepsius, *Das Todtenbuch der Ägypter nach dem hieroglyphischen Papyrus in Turin: Mit einem Vorworte zum ersten Male herausgegeben*, Leipzig: Georg Wigand, 1842, p. 72; Boris de Rachewiltz, *Il Libro dei Morti Degli Antichi Egiziani*, Milano: All'Insegna del Pesce d'Oro, 1958, p. 84, 86.

“Great of Magic, the sharp one (*mds*) that came forth from Seth.”<sup>677</sup> The title “Great of Magic” frequently refers to the uraeus<sup>678</sup> or a knife.<sup>679</sup> The flint *mds*-knife, as the “crescentic lunar avenging knife” can therefore be identified with the Eye of Horus, the uraeus snake and its flame, and is firmly associated with Thoth.<sup>680</sup> With this, the chain of associations comes full circle.

We can conclude that the golden disc which emerges from Seth and which Thoth acquires undoubtedly represents the lunar Eye, which Broze also identifies with the *wedjat* at the tales’ incipit.<sup>681</sup> In this manner, the connection of the lunar with the royal office is established, relating the homosexual episode to the main challenge for Horus as it is framed at its beginning of the tale: the lack of the *wedjat*. From this perspective, the most crucial issue of the party of Horus is resolved, which is in line with our understanding of this episode.

The motif of Thoth (identified with the king) taking a crown from the head of Seth here finds a fascinating parallel in Pyramid Texts spell 524:

NN has become clean in the cleaning that Horus made for his eye. NN is Thoth, who tended you, (eye); Pepi is not Seth, who took it. Become happy, gods! Become aroused, Dual Ennead! Horus, meet this NN, for this NN is wearing the White Crown, Horus’s eye, through which one becomes powerful. Become aroused, gods above; emerge! The face of this NN is that of a jackal, this Pepi’s arms are those of a falcon, the wingtips of NN are those of Thoth. Geb shall fly NN to the sky, so that this NN may take Horus’s eye to him.

(...) Hear it, bull of the Ennead, and part this Pepi’s path and widen the place of NN at the fore of the gods, that this NN may take Horus’s eye to him, that NN may tie on for him what came from his head, that this NN may let him see with his two eyes complete and punish his opponents with it. Horus has acquired his eye and given it to this NN. (...) NN is the one who prevents the gods from turning away from embracing Horus’s eye. This NN sought it in Pe

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<sup>677</sup> Édouard Naville, *Das ägyptische Tottenbuch der XVIII. bis XX. Dynastie / aus verschiedenen Urkunden zusammengestellt und hrsg. von Édouard Naville*, vol. 2, Berlin: Asher, 1886, 416.70. Translation after C. Graves-Brown, *The ideological significance of flint in dynastic Egypt*, p. 259.

<sup>678</sup> John Griffiths, *The Origins of Osiris and His Cult*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980, p. 38; Sally Johnson, *The Cobra Goddess of Ancient Egypt: Predynastic, Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom Periods*, New York: Kegan Paul International, 1990, p. 77.

<sup>679</sup> Sydney Aufrère, “Caractères principaux et origine divine des minéraux”, *Revue d’égyptologie* 34 (1982–1983), p. 15, n. 124.

<sup>680</sup> In addition to sources cited above, see Hermann Kees, “Der angebliche Gauname ‘Schlangenberg’”, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo* 20 (1965): 102–109.

<sup>681</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 253. For a more detailed study, see Frédéric Sarva jean, “Lune ou soleil d’or?”, p. 126–148. See also M. Stadler, *Weiser und Wesir*, p. 147–151.

and found it in Heliopolis, and this NN took it from Seth's head in the place where he and Seth fought. Horus, give your arm to this NN. Horus, accept your eye emerging for you, that it may emerge for you. When this NN comes to you, for life, Horus's eye comes to you with this NN, atop Pepi forever.<sup>682</sup>

This spell invokes most of the key elements of the mythology outlined above, but also emphasizes the connection of the motif of the birth of the golden disc from the head of Seth. It is thanks to this emergence that the Eye can not only return to Horus, but also benefit him. The taking of the Eye from the head of Seth marks a culmination of the resurrection of Osiris, who is now, in terms of funerary ritual, able to receive his offerings, thereby achieving a reciprocal relationship with the living and through it overcoming death.<sup>683</sup> As the Eye passes from Thoth to Horus, it is "filled" and brought back by Thoth in the form of the *wedjat*.<sup>684</sup> With this, Horus finally crosses the threshold as he becomes whole and yet stronger than he was before, the filled in Eye being imbued with the very power that caused it to be estranged from its owner. Ultimately, this power is Sethian,<sup>685</sup> and it passes through the intermediary body of Thoth, who as the child of the two gods is both Horus-like and Seth-like.

The way the Eye serves as the emblem of kingship in this episode should be discussed at this point. Recalling the discussion of royal crown in the present work, we can remark that the word *hꜥ.w*, which is usually used to denote a crown, appears in this passage as well, which is reflected in the translation "Thoth took it from him and put it as a crown on his head." An interesting comparison can be made with Coffin Texts spell 656:

"O Re! Those enemies of Osiris N have said that they will take away the great White Crown on your head, and the *ꜣtꜥw*-crown(s) on your brow.

They have said that they will smash heads and disturb [...] in the (divine) presence.

They have said that they will disturb *maat* and es[tabli]sh evil on the throne/in (its) place.

O Re, cause that Osiris N be justified!"<sup>686</sup>

The comparison with this spell makes it clear, how high the stakes were in the homosexual episode. According to this spell, the presence of *hd.t* on Re's head amounts to maintenance of order, whereas its removal represents an attempt to establish the rule of disorder in the world. If Seth managed to snatch the disc of gold, all the work done by

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<sup>682</sup> PT 524 § 1233a-1243c. Translation of J. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, p. 162-163.

<sup>683</sup> Cf. the discussion in chapter 5.5 below.

<sup>684</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 253.



<sup>685</sup> Cf. Eberhard Otto, "Thot als Stellvertreter des Seth", *Orientalia* 7 (1938): 69-79.

<sup>686</sup> CT 656 VI 277q-278f.

the party of Horus would be undone and with it the cosmic order of things. The birth of the solar disk represents the last truly critical moment in the narrative, marking a point where the power of kingship exists briefly as if it were a separate entity. This possibly reflects the parallel fate of the deceased, who too is reduced to his constitutive parts and must be reassembled before the crisis of death is overcome. Alternatively, and perhaps complementarily, we may understand this is a capture of the exact point in time where the essence kingship passes from the former king to the new one, momentarily being in a condition between states, a liminal area where the forces of chaos are an ever-present danger.<sup>687</sup>

The Coffin Texts spell relates the crown-like character of the golden disc to the White Crown, the main emblem of kingship in the *Contendings*. It has been remarked in the present work that the distinguishing element of the White Crown is its lunar character. Applying the motifs of Coffin Text spell 656 to the *Contendings*, we can easily identify the golden, lunar disc, already identified with the Eye of Horus, with the White Crown, the basic structural symbol of the tale. Relating the climax of the homosexual episode to the coronations of Horus, especially the 1<sup>st</sup> coronation at *Con.* 8,6, we can see this emblem of kingship undergoes the same development as the Eye of Horus. First, the emblem is shown, but is not given to Horus. Then it is given to Horus but is not effective – Horus lacks agency (*jr* (“to do”) – *jr.t* (“eye”)), and he lacks others’ submission, meaning the crown doesn’t work either. Lastly, the emblem is reborn through contact with Seth, which in the case of the eyes is violent, whereas in the case of the crown it is sexual.

This structural similarity allows us to draw a parallel between the episodes Hathor & Horus and the Homosexual episode, each dealing with the central issue of rebirth and kingship using different symbols. The emergence of Horus is therefore presented as a multistep process, which is finalized in the Boat episode, where his period of transformation ends, highlighted by the last use of the altered classifier for Horus at 14,4. The way of Horus to maturity has reached its end, and the sign of a perched falcon, an icon of stability can return in place of the sign of the path, an apparent metaphor for a state of transition.

As the homosexual episode unravels, the tale reverts to its original form of a court drama. The two litigants are called before the jury as before, and testimonies are called for. Here again we are presented with a rather amusing pun, as it is the semen (*mtw.t* )<sup>688</sup> of the two gods that plays the role of the witness (*mtr.w* )<sup>689</sup>. As regards the position of the judge, Re is conspicuously absent here, leaving this role to Thoth,

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<sup>687</sup> Cf. the discussion of van Gennep’s *point mort* in chapter 5.6.3.

<sup>688</sup> Wb 2, 169.1-4.

<sup>689</sup> Wb 2, 172.5-10.



although he is not a judge in the sense that he would utter any judgement. Instead, his very existence as the lunar issue of the union of Horus and Seth is the judgement which separates the two contenders and justifies one against the other.

There is one thing, however, that is omitted by the *Contendings*, and which is actually parallel by another omission in Pyramid Texts spell 524: How does the Eye pass from Thoth to Horus? The tale leaves this question without an answer, which has to be sought elsewhere. Following up on the understanding of the golden disc as a lunar symbol, we can also note that the whole of the homosexual episode takes place at night. The importance of this nocturnal setting is emphasized by the two rubra within the episode that serve no other function than to state it is night-time: NOW THE TIME OF EVENING HAS PASSED at Con. 11,2 and NOW IT WAS DARK at Con. 11,3.

In the *Myth of the Heavenly Cow*, Thoth assumes the position of vizier of the sun-god, and as such rule the sky as moon in his absence.<sup>690</sup> This absence, together with lunar appearance of Thoth, makes it clear that a nocturnal context should be assumed, with Re residing in the netherworld. As night turns into day, the reign, and with its emblem, the Eye, is returned to the solar god, who by this time in the *Contendings* is becoming as Horus.<sup>691</sup> The victory of Horus over Seth in the *Boat Episode* consequently serves as visible proof of the Horus' rebirth as solar king, which explains the conspicuous absence of the description of daybreak. The image of the king's triumph is solar enough to frame the events as engulfed in morning light. The birth of the moon introduces light into the darkness and with it, the crisis of succession is all but overcome.

Given significance the events of the Homosexual Episode in the advancement of the succession of Horus, we may ask why this particular tradition of the interaction of Horus and Seth was chosen for the tale's climax and not another, perhaps more martial setting. A number of answers to this rather speculative question come to mind. In line with the comical aspect of the tale as a whole, we can easily see the benefits of framing the breaking point of the narrative as a convoluted love affair. Furthermore, since the tale does not end with the destruction of Seth, a more aggressive showdown would limit the author's ability to have the all the primary characters reach the conclusion in good condition, but the case of Isis' beheading shows how reversible fictional violence is. A deeper meaning can perhaps be discerned if we recall the frequent funerary allusions present in the tale. The nocturnal union of Horus and Seth, while seemingly profane, could be compared to the

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<sup>690</sup> Version of Seti I, cols. 71-73. See Charles Maystre, "Le Livre de la Vache du Ciel dans les tombeaux de la Vallée des Rois", *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 40 (1941), 94-96; Pierre Lévêque, "La vache celeste", *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 16 (1990), p. 387. See also Nadine Guilhou, *La vieillesse des dieux*, Montpellier: Université de Montpellier, 1989, 154 p.

For Thoth as the deputy of the sun-god, see M. Stadler, *Weiser und Wesir*, p. 211-214.

<sup>691</sup> K. Goebis, *Crowns in Egyptian funerary literature*, p. 140 ff., esp. n. 358.

other significant case attested in Egyptian religion, which is the union of Re and Osiris.<sup>692</sup> In both events the merging leads to both sides being imbued with the force of other, which ensures their continuing existence. In the case of Seth, the benefit might at first be hard to discern, but we should emphasize that it is only with his defeat that he can finally reach his proper place in the universe. This idea of such cosmic significance behind the fruitful union of Horus and Seth will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.6.2 below.

### 3.10 Boat Race (13,2-14,5)

THEN Seth became very angry, <sup>(13,2)</sup> raising his voice while they said: “True is Horus, false is Seth!”

THEN Seth made a great divine oath, saying: <sup>(13,3)</sup> “The office will not be given to him, until he is thrown outside with me, and we shall build some <sup>(13,4)</sup> stone ships and we shall race as two men. Now as for him who seizes his opponent, <sup>(13,5)</sup> to him will be given the office of Ruler, l.p.h.”

THEN Horus built for himself a boat of pine, coated it in plaster <sup>(13,6)</sup> and threw it in the river in the time of the evening, while no man on the entire earth saw it.

THEN <sup>(13,7)</sup> Seth saw the boat of Horus, said “Stone!” to himself. Then he went to the mountain, <sup>(13,8)</sup> cut off its summit and fashioned it into a stone-barge ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-EIGHT cubits long.

THEN THEY went down to their <sup>(13,9)</sup> ships before the Ennead. Then the ship of Seth sank into the water.

THEN Seth changed his form into a hippopotamus <sup>(13,10)</sup> and he caused the ship of Horus to sink.

THEN Horus took his copper and struck the Majesty of Seth. Then <sup>(13,11)</sup> the Ennead said to him: “Do not strike him!”

THEN HE carried his equipment to the water, placed it in his ship and sailed downstream <sup>(13,12)</sup> to Sais to say to Neith the great, the divine mother: “Judge me and Seth for it is 80 years to this (day) that we have been in court and <sup>(14,1)</sup> no one knows how to judge us. And while he has not yet been justified against me, I was justified against him a thousand times every day and he did not come to see with regard to anything <sup>(14,2)</sup> that the Ennead has said.” I have contended with him in the broad-hall Way-of-Truth and I have been justified against him. I have contended with him in the broad-hall Horus- <sup>(14,3)</sup> Foremost-of-Horns and I have been justified against him. I have contended with him in the broad-

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<sup>692</sup> See e.g., Anthony Spalinger, “The Rise of the Solar-Osirian Theology in the Ramesside Age: New Points d’appui”, in Alexander Manisali, Benedikt Rothöhler (eds.), *Mythos & Ritual: Festschrift für Jan Assmann zum 70. Geburtstag*, Berlin: LIT-Verlag, 2008, p. 257-275.

hall Field of Reeds, and I have been justified against him. I have contended with him <sup>(14.4)</sup> in the broad-hall Pool-of Fields and I have been justified against him as the Ennead said to Shu, son of Re: “Truth is in that which Horus, son of Isis, said.” <sup>(14.5)</sup>

The significance of the boat race has already been outlined in previous chapters. The interaction with Seth has resulted in an empowerment of Horus, which has at the same time left Seth weakened. Having lost his potency, Seth now faces Horus that is more than capable of dealing with on his own. The phrase “as two men” appears once again, but it does not reflect the same reality as the previous episodes. Although Seth still acts in the spirit of brotherly rivalry, the parity between the two contenders is gone. Horus has become superior both in terms of cunning and martial prowess.<sup>693</sup>

Once again, the contest begins based on the suggestion of Seth. Retaining his propensity for rash action, he challenges his opponent for the third and last time in manner which once again reflects the incapability of Seth to properly consider his own ideas. Even though the plan outlined by “we shall build some stone ships and we shall race as two men”<sup>694</sup> seems unambiguous, the opposite is the case. The phrase “stone ships” (*ḥꜥ.wy n jnr*) can mean both “ships for (transporting) stone” and “ships (made) of stone”, the former, of course, being the more sensible interpretation. Much like Isis in the episode on the Isle in the Midst, however, Horus uses this ambiguity to confound Seth with yet another pun.<sup>695</sup> The essence of the trickery is once more that things are more complicated than they appear, the superficial stoniness of the boat of Horus being something that Seth’s limited power of insight cannot penetrate. Rather than interpret Seth as stupid, which would entail the same erroneously superficial attitude that Seth would be accused of, we should approach him as simple in the strictest sense of the word. Horus is an intricate character which goes through a complicated process of change in the tale, ultimately achieving the seemingly paradoxical unity of father and son that constitutes the royal office, which itself is a comparably paradoxical unity of man and god. This is the centrepiece of a theological tradition stretching back millennia and it is nothing if not complex. Seth in comparison represents an idea of unstructured force, an ambivalence

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<sup>693</sup> The lunar crown that Horus received itself is a tool of victory, as in the hymn to Senusret III from *Papyrus UC 32157*, cols. 2-3:

“Hail Khakaura!  
Our Horus, divine of forms  
Protector of the land, extender of its boundaries  
He who defeats foreign lands by his Great Crown  
He who embraces the two lands with his action.”

(John Foster, *Hymns, Prayers, and Songs: An Anthology of Ancient Egyptian Lyric Poetry*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995, p. 135)

<sup>694</sup> *Con* 13,3-4.

<sup>695</sup> Hans Goedicke, “Seth as a Fool”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 47 (1961): 154.

that is in its present state only destructive. Only when Seth is reintegrated into *maat* can he appreciate the complexity of the world.

The strength of Seth is immense, but in this episode, it is manifestly impotent. As impressive as the feat of cutting of a mountain top may be, it ultimately yields no fruit, which can be compared with the similarly fruitless sexual life of the god, who can boast of no issue.<sup>696</sup> The productive, industrious attitude that would lend itself to complex thought is beyond his means, hence the brawn and bravado with which he meets this challenge.<sup>697</sup>

Ultimately, Seth falls to Horus' trick and attempts to race in a boat clearly unsuitable for the task. Answering with violence, he reverts to a form that is well suited to the task of sinking the boat of Horus. In doing so, however, he inadvertently exposes himself to mortal danger. Failing to realize that the Horus he faces is not Horus the child, but the mature, royal Horus, he takes on the role of the victim of the ubiquitous depictions of hippo hunts, with Horus ready to strike at the vulnerable beast.<sup>698</sup> Unlike the various depictions and rituals, the intent of this tale, however, is not to dramatize the extermination of the unruly being, but rather to cultivate it and restore it to the divine community. The Ennead stops Horus from striking the final blow, who leaves in frustration as the execution of the royal office is denied to him. His kingship now left to the deliberations of others, he secludes himself from the workings of the Ennead, who work out a way of dealing with Seth, who, in the end, accepts the filial role that is required

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<sup>696</sup> H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 29 ff. The consort of Seth is Nephthys (lit. *nb.t-hw.t* "mistress of the house"). Following up on the idea of Te Velde, we can remark that since Seth is the essential foreigner, remaining beyond the borders of Egypt, while Nephthys is the essential housewife, she is like Isis irreversibly bereft of a husband, thereby having no choice than to be a wailing woman.

<sup>697</sup> The brutish short-sightedness of Seth can probably be related to a tradition pertaining to the tomb of Osiris. At Abydos, the tomb was in the necropolis "She Who Harbors Her Lord" in the mountains called "Mysterious Mountain." A decree of Nectanebo II forbade, under the penalty of mutilation, the quarrying of stone in this sacred place. See Dimitri Meeks, "Oiseaux des carrières et des caverns", in Erhart Graefe, Ursula Verhoeven (eds.), *Religion und Philosophie im alten Ägypten: Festgabe für Philippe Derchain zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Juli 1991*, Leuven: Peeters, 1991, 233–241. See also J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, p. 190.

If we follow this interpretation, Horus could then be seen as tricking Seth into an act of violence against Osiris, thereby actualising this otherwise missing mythological element in this tale and possibly also provoking the judgement of Osiris against him later in the tale.

<sup>698</sup> See especially T. Säve-Söderbergh, *On Egyptian Representations of Hippopotamus Hunting as a Religious Motive*, 56 p. See also Aurélie Roche, "Et le roi tua l'hippopotame: enquête sur les origines d'un rite égyptien", *Archimède* 1 (2014), p. 71–87; Vera Müller, "The Hippopotamus Hunt and Its Relationship to Other Rituals in the 1st Dynasty as Represented on Seals", in Merel Eyckerman, et al. (eds.), *Remove that pyramid! Studies on the archaeology and history of predynastic and pharaonic Egypt in honour of Stan Hendrickx*, Leuven – Paris – Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2021, p. 853–870; Penelope Wilson, "Slaughtering the Crocodile at Edfu and Dendera", in Stephen Quirke (ed.), *The Temple in Ancient Egypt: New Discoveries and Recent Research*, London: British Museum Press, 1997, p. 179–203.

of him. The issue of the *Contendings* is hence not framed as who succeeds to the throne, but how Seth can be reintegrated in a manner that would comply with the accession of Horus.

The choice of place for seclusion, Sais, the seat of the goddess Neith, once again mirrors the first part of the narrative. As there, the issue that the Ennead faces is compensated for by reaching out beyond its limits, to an alternative source of authority. This is the second time that Neith is approach as the Ennead reaches an impasse, and once again it seems that she is not able to assist in any way. Indeed, this time, she doesn't even speak, serving instead as a compassionate ear for the frustrations of Horus. Beyond this superficial level, however, there is hidden another compelling complex of symbols.

Broze penetrates this matter by relating this episode to the theology of Esna, where Neith was worshipped as a creator god who gave birth to the sun-god.<sup>699</sup> In the same cosmogonic text, the creation of mankind is caused by the tears that Re sheds when Neith, his mother, leaves, giving in to laughter once she comes again as the returning goddess.<sup>700</sup> The rest of the gods then emerge from the spittle that falls from his mouth as he laughs with joy. Establishing a connection between the present episode and *Hathor and Re*, Broze argues that for the solar god to assume his creative role in the universe, he must contact the returning goddess.<sup>701</sup> In this manner, the role of Hathor parallels that of Neith in the latter part of the tale, but here the present interpretation deviates from that of Broze. She is correct to associate the role of Neith with that of Hathor in *Hathor and Re*, but not as a direct structural identification, which would serve to emphasize the similarity between Horus and Re. Instead, the roles of the goddesses are inverted, which in turn emphasizes the *difference* between the two solar deities of the tale. The first difference is in the dynamics of the episodes: whereas in *Hathor and Re*, the solar god is passive, and the goddess is active, here is the other way around. Secondly, Hathor is the daughter of the solar god, whereas Neith is his mother. Finally, the context of the first episode is nocturnal, while the present is most likely diurnal, even though the tale is ambiguous here. All of these contrasts serve to highlight that while Horus ascends as a solar god, he is nothing like his predecessor: instead of being feeble and old, he is young and virile. Comparing the two episodes, the opposition of the evening sun and the morning sun emerges, where Horus takes over of Re as a young and vital ruler.

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<sup>699</sup> *Esna* II 16–17. See Serge Sauneron, *Les fêtes religieuses d'Esna aux derniers siècles du paganisme*, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1962, p. 288–299.

<sup>700</sup> Broze follows the reading of Sauneron, but unfortunately does not consistently cite his work throughout the passage, making reference to his original writings difficult. See M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 247. Cf. Michèle Broze, “La création du monde et l'opposition *sdm.f* - *sdm.n.f* dans le temple d'Esna”, *Revue d'égyptologie* 44 (1993): 3–10.

<sup>701</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 246–248.

As for the strangely specific period of 80 years, which Horus states is the extent of his conflict with Seth, Broze relates it another element of the Esna tradition, according to which all acts of creation were completed within 8 hours of emergence of the sun.<sup>702</sup> The significance of the number eight in the Esna cosmogony can further be connected with the “Ennead of thirty Great ones” at *Con.* 3,9. The Esna texts state that thirty gods were created by Neith and when she announces the creation of the sun, they express their ignorance (*hmn*) of it, and for this reason are henceforth known as the Eight (*hmn.w*).<sup>703</sup> The fact that the “eighty years” come up in both the episodes involving Neith supports the notion that the cosmogonic tradition attested in the Esna text is invoked in the *Contendings*. As for the ignorance of the Ennead, it is a recurring theme in the *Contendings*, and is the explicit reason for referring the case to Neith at *Con.* 2,5. Accordingly, we may read the foray of Horus into the city of Neith as highlighting another case of ignorance on the part of the Ennead.

However, it is also possible to relate this case to another element of the Esna cosmogony: the unawareness of the emergence of the solar god. Until the assembly and Seth realize that Horus is reborn as a solar king, the *Contendings* cannot arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. While Neith remains silent, the father of Horus now enters the stage, and his intervention finally resolves the dispute.

### 3.11 The Letters of Osiris and Re (14,5–15,10)

Said Thoth to the Lord of All: “Have a letter sent to Osiris, he shall judge the two youths!”

THEN Shu, son of Re, said: “The words of Thoth to the Ennead<sup>(14,6)</sup> are true a million times.”

THEN the Lord-of-All said to Thoth: “Sit down and write a letter to Osiris and we shall receive that which he says!”

THEN Thoth sat down<sup>(14,7)</sup> to write the letter to Osiris, saying: THE BULL For-whom-the-Lion-Hunts, TWO LADIES Protector-of-Gods, He-who-bends-the-Two-Lands, HORUS OF GOLD, He-who-found Mankind-in-the-Beginning<sup>(14,8)</sup>, DUAL KING, Bull-in-midst-of Heliopolis, l. p. h., SON OF PTAH, Benefactor-of-the-Two-Shores, He who appears-as-the-Father-of-his-Ennead, He-who-eats-Gold-from-All-Sacred-Glass,<sup>(14,9)</sup> l.p.h. “Please write to us that

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<sup>702</sup> *Esna* II 206,5. In Egyptian numeral system, the number eight is represented as eight times ten, indicating a closer symbolic relationship between 8 and 80 than there might be in Western numerology. In the same way, the 30 gods created by Neith can be read as 3 gods, which symbolically simply means “plurality of gods.”

<sup>703</sup> *Esna* II 206,7.

which we should with it for Horus and Seth, so that we won't make plans while being ignorant!"

Now many days have passed and THEN the <sup>(14,10)</sup> letter reached the king, SON OF RE Great-of-Overflowing, Lord-of-Provisions. Then he raised his voice while the letter was read before him.

THEN HE <sup>(14,11)</sup> replied with great haste to where the Lord-of-All was with the Ennead, saying: "Why do you harm (my) son Horus so much, when it is I who made you powerful? Is it not me, <sup>(14,12)</sup> who creates emmer and barley, to gives life to the gods and likewise to the herds (i.e., mankind) that come after the gods, when no god or goddess was able to do it."

THEN the <sup>(15,1)</sup> letter of Osiris arrived to where Re Horus-of-the-Horizon was, as he was sitting with the Ennead in the White Field of Xoïs.

Then it was read before him <sup>(15,2)</sup> and the Ennead and Re Horus-of-the-Horizon said: "Please answer this letter for me with great haste to Osiris, you shall say to him about this letter: "If you did not come to be, if you were not born, <sup>(15,3)</sup> emmer and barley would still exist."

Then the letter of the Lord-of-All reached Osiris and it was read before him.

Then he wrote to Re Horus-of-the-Horizon again, saying: "Beautiful in great <sup>(15,4)</sup> measure is everything that you have done and what the Ennead has found in doing. Justice has been caused to sink inside the netherworld! Would you see this matter that is yours also. <sup>(15,5)</sup> The land I am in is filled with messengers with fierce faces that fear neither god nor goddess, whom I will cause to emerge, and they shall bring me the heart of every evildoer, <sup>(15,6)</sup> who shall then come to be here with me. Surely, why would my form be here resting in the west, when each and every one of you is outside? Who among them is stronger than me? But look, <sup>(15,7)</sup> they have found evil in deed! When Ptah the Great, South-of-his-Wall, Lord of Memphis, created the sky, did he not say to the stars on it: "Make rest every night <sup>(15,8)</sup> in the West, where the king Osiris is! And after the gods both lords and serfs will rest where you are as well." (This) he said to me."

Now many days after <sup>(15,9)</sup> this the letter of Osiris arrived to where the Lord-of-All was with the Ennead.

THEN Thoth received the letter and read it aloud before Re Horus-of-the-Horizon <sup>(15,10)</sup> and the Ennead. Then they said: "Doubly right is right all that says he, Greatly-Overflowing, Lord-of-Provisions!"

A common denominator of Neith and Osiris is that they are both rulers that are relatively independent of the solar gods. As a female creator, she is one of the very few creator deities that are not in some historical contexts subsumed in the person of the solar god, who in the *Contendings* too is blessed with a bounty of names and titles. In the tradition

of Esna, Neith is invoked instead as the mother of Re and it is possible that Horus does indeed approach her in this capacity. Much like Osiris, Neith represents a sovereign force on the margins of the solar domain, a power from which the solar king ultimately derives his legitimacy. Whereas Osiris often fulfils this function on his own on behalf of the ruling king, the *Contendings* have opted to split this function between a female and male actor, introducing the gendered dualism that is characteristic of Egyptian thought. In this manner, we could perhaps see Neith in this latter part of the tale as a parallel to the transformed Isis, whose purpose is in the end to introduce the glory of the solar king Horus to the world. Much like her, Neith introduces the revived Osiris, who shows himself for the first time in the narrative.

The initial phrase of the episode, “Said Thoth to the Lord of All” (*dd.n dhwt.y n nb-r-dr*) at Con. 14,4 is unusual in the narrative in that it uses the *dd jn=f* verb form.<sup>704</sup> It appears here and in the beginning of the narrative to introduce speeches by Thoth on the topic of *maat*. Unlike the previous case, however, where it is classified with sign of the papyrus scroll, here the word *maat* is written with the sign of the uraeus. This graphic difference is reflected on the level of the story. Whereas in the first case the proposal of Thoth (and Shu) is met with disagreement of Re, who remarks that they are acting too independently, here he gives his assent. The form of the letter itself then recalls the first letter of Neith, which did manage to resolve the succession issue. This time, the conditions seem more auspicious, indicating that an agreement is in sight.<sup>705</sup> Despite this, the author still manages to keep the readers on their toes. Recalling the fruitless exchange with Neith of the first part of the tale, the curt, defensive reply of Re to Osiris’ letter threatens with yet another round of obstructions. The exchange of letters between Osiris and Re is a curious ending to the tale, which ramps down from its more dynamic episodes to the back and forth of speech that dominated the beginning of the story.

The topic of the two gods’ long-distance quarrel is clearly power and, more specifically, where it originates, which once again reflects the initial episodes of the tale, where the merits of Horus’ birth were weighted against the qualities of Seth. Firstly, the letters of Re and Osiris indicate the interdependence of the solar and Osirian spheres of existence. Each requires the other to survive and maintain his generative capacity. On a mythical level, the sun-god needs to pass through the netherworld, often described as the womb, where he revitalizes himself by uniting with Osiris and is born anew in the morning. Just as the passage through the realm of Osiris gives new life to the solar god, so are its denizens, Osiris included revived as the light of the sun falls on them. Ultimately, this idea boils down to the theological concepts of *djet* and *neheh*, which stand for the static and dynamic elements inherent in the universe and the generative cycles that constitute

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<sup>704</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 259.

<sup>705</sup> *Ibid.*



it. Re, the dynamic element, passing through the daily and the nightly sky (=netherworld), and Osiris, the static element, forever residing in the realm beyond, represent the totality of being as a duality of two male principles, each complementing the other.<sup>706</sup> The purpose of the question of whether Osiris has the primacy or Re is consequently not to establish one's dominance, but to show that they are peers, which is emphasized by the fact that both of them are presented as royal individuals, confirming their equal status of kings of their respective spheres of influence.<sup>707</sup>

This brotherly relationship, which could be compared to that of the king of Egypt with the rulers of foreign empires. By the late New Kingdom, the rule of these foreign kings was accepted as legitimate, and a sophisticated language of diplomacy developed to describe their relationship in a manner consistent with the intricacies of Egyptian royal self-presentation. Part of this was a concept of brotherhood (*snsn*).<sup>708</sup> While this could be used to describe amical relations with one's fellow man, as is the case in the *Instructions of Ani*,<sup>709</sup> it is more often used to describe relations between the Pharaoh and other powerful rulers.<sup>710</sup> The treaty of peace between Egypt and Hatti repeatedly mentions the term in this context and provides a good example of its function:

“The regulations<sup>4</sup> which the Great Prince of Hatti, Hattusilis, the powerful, the son of Mursilis, the Great Prince of Hatti, the powerful, the son of the son of Suppiluliumas, the Great Prince of Hatti, the powerful, made upon a tablet of silver for User-maat-Re, the great ruler of Egypt, the powerful, the son of Men-maat-Re, the great ruler of Egypt, the powerful, the son of Men-pehti-Re,<sup>5</sup> the great ruler of Egypt, the powerful; the good regulations of peace and of brotherhood, giving peace . . . forever.

Now from the beginning of the limits of eternity, as for the situation of the great ruler of Egypt with the Great Prince of Hatti, the god did not permit

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<sup>706</sup> See the literature cited in n. 758 below.

<sup>707</sup> Cf. the discussion in chapter 5.6 below. Cf also the language of the Great Hymn to Osiris in M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, p. 81. For the topic of fatherhood and authority within the pantheon, see David Tasker, “Divine Fatherhood: Re-examining the Paradigm”, *Theology Papers and Journal Articles* 81 (2008): 109–127.

<sup>708</sup> See Raymond Cohen, “All in the Family: Ancient Near Eastern Diplomacy”, *International Negotiation* 1 (1996), p. 14; William Moran, *The Amarna Letters*, Baltimore – London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, p. xxiv. See also Amanda Podany, *Brotherhood of Kings: How International Relations Shaped the Ancient Near East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 163 ff. For an overview of the topic of brotherhood, see Grigorios Kontopoulos, *The Egyptian Diplomatic System in the Late Bronze Age Beyond The Terms of “Brotherhood” & “Equality”: The Egyptian “Abandonment” Of Power and Aspects of Pharaonic Identity & Kingship*, Dissertation: University of the Aegean, 2019, esp. p. 215 ff.

<sup>709</sup> *The Instruction of Ani* (ver. B) 18,7–18,9: “Make friends with one who is truly sincere and just when you have seen what he has done and when your sincerity can match his, so that their brotherhood (*snsn*) is balanced.

<sup>710</sup> *Wb* 4, 174.1.

hostility to occur between them, through a regulation.<sup>6</sup> But in the time of Muwatallis, the Great Prince of Hatti, my brother,<sup>7</sup> he fought with Ramses Meri-Amon, the great ruler of Egypt. But hereafter, from this day, behold Hattusilis, the Great Prince of Hatti, is under a regulation for making permanent the situation which the Re and Seth<sup>8</sup> made for the land of Egypt with the land of Hatti, in order not to permit hostility to occur between them forever. (...) The land of Egypt, with the land of Hatti, shall be at peace and in brotherhood like unto us forever. Hostilities shall not occur between them forever.”<sup>711</sup>

The treaty reflects the paradox of brotherhood described in relation to positional succession. Since brothers usually share the same value system and often compete for limited resources, conflict is bound to happen, something which the peace treaty admits and strives to avoid. Friendship may be desired and declared, but the implication of possible enmity is ever-present, meaning even amongst kings, brotherhood remains eminently ambivalent.

This potential for hostility explains the aggravated response to both the letter of Osiris and the proposal of writing to Neith earlier in the tale. Re is a sovereign, the master of creation and yet he is asked to deal with distant rulers as if they were his peers. As the tale describes the brotherhood of Osiris and Re in this manner, it very carefully broaches the subject of the uniqueness of the king and how this relates to the apparent parity of the Pharaoh with foreign rulers. Recalling the discussion of positional succession, this brotherhood is in direct conflict with the very essence of kingship, which is why brothers need to be culturally transformed, thereby removing the ambivalence of the individuals concerned. With brother-kings, however, no such thing is possible, and this encapsulates the other paradox of kingship: how it is cosmically unique in an intranational perspective, but not in an international one.

As Re and the gods delay and talk, so too do they delay the accession of Horus as the new solar king, prolonging the tenure of his predecessor. On one level, Horus is of course the successor of Osiris, but in another mythological expression, he is the successor of Re as he matures and assumes the mantle of the solar god. One could remark that since Re represents the old sun, while the Horus the yet unrecognized young successor to the old sun, the whole interaction can be seen as the god of death convincing the royal predecessor to give up his rule in favour of the successor. This may be why we see here Osiris in his otherwise subdued dangerous aspect, threatening to kill the gods of Egypt much as Seth did in the first part of the tale. As Seth's violent power diminishes and he prepares to assume his role in his new, civilized form, so emerges the dark side of Osiris, who takes

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<sup>711</sup> *Year 21 Stele of Ramses II*, 7–12. See *KRI II*, 225–232.

over the vacated position of death – the enemy.<sup>712</sup> Confronted with this new reality, the old god of sun finally gives in to the words of Osiris and assigns the rulership to Horus. As the tale draws to its end, it is Re who hands over the rulership to Horus, his final word as king being an exhort to the divine assembly to recognize Horus as king. The solar hymn follows in praise of Horus as he appears as the sun god.

### 3.12 The Finale and Epilogue (15,10–16,9)

THEN Seth said: “Let us go to the Isle-in-the-Midst,<sup>(15,11)</sup> so that I may contend with him!”

THEN HE went to the Isle-in-the-Midst and justification was given to Horus against him.

THEN Atum, Lord of the Two Lands, the Heliopolitan, sent to Isis, saying: “Bring Seth<sup>(15,12)</sup> in chains!”

THEN Isis brought Seth in chains as a prisoner.

THEN Atum said to him: “Why would you NOT let us judge you<sup>(15,13)</sup>, why have you taken for yourself the office of Horus?”

THEN Seth said to him: “On the contrary, my good lord! Have Horus, son of Isis, summoned and may the office of<sup>(16,1)</sup> father Osiris be given to him!”

THEN Horus, son of Isis, WAS brought and the White crown was placed on his head, he was placed on the throne of his father Osiris and it was said to him: “You are a good king of the Beloved Land, you<sup>(16,2)</sup> are the beautiful Lord, l.p.h., of the whole world for ever and ever.”

THEN Isis raised her voice to her son Horus, saying: “You are a good king! My heart rejoices, for you shall brighten the world<sup>(16,3)</sup> with your gifts!”

THEN Ptah the Great, South-of-his-Wall, Lord of Memphis, said: “What is to be done with Seth, now that Horus has been placed on the throne of father Osiris?”

THEN Re<sup>(16,4)</sup> Horus-of-the-Horizon said: “Have Seth, son of Nut, be given to me and he shall sit with me as my son, his voice shall be in the heaven and there shall be fear of him.”

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<sup>712</sup> Cf. M. Pehal, *Interpreting Ancient Egyptian Narratives*, p. 245–246. For the executioners of Osiris, see Erik Hornung, *Das Amduat: Die Schrift des verborgenen Raumes*, Vol 1, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963, p. 191. See also R. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, p. 168 ff. See also the discussion in chapter 5.7.1 below.

THEN <sup>(16,5)</sup> he was brought and said to Re Horus-of-the-Horizon: “Horus, son of Isis, stands a ruler, l.p.h.”

THEN Re, Horus of the Horizon, rejoiced greatly and said to the Ennead: <sup>(16,6)</sup> “You shall exalt Horus, son of Isis, throughout the entire land!”

Then Isis said: “Horus stands a ruler, l.p.h., the Ennead is feasting, the heaven rejoices, for they shall <sup>(16,7)</sup> don garlands when they see Horus, son of Isis, as he stands a great ruler, l.p.h., of Egypt. The Ennead, their hearts are content, and the entire land is joyful <sup>(16,8)</sup> when it sees Horus, son of Isis, illuminated by the office of his father Osiris, the lord of Busiris.”

And so it went well in Thebes, the place of truth.

To finish their quarrel once and for all, Seth and Horus contend for the last time. Horus, of course, holds all the cards, and the narrator sees no need to delay the matter any further. Their final contest is brief and anticlimactic, as Horus immediately wins by universal assent. As he does, the restructuring effect of the positional kingship starts sending ripples through the fabric of divine society, fundamentally changing existing relationship. The impact is the most pronounced with Seth. The former challenger is immediately reclassified, no longer a prince, but a criminal, attempting to subvert the authority of the one true heir, and needs to await his judgement.



Fig. 4. Seth bound and stabbed before Osiris (after Auguste Mariette, *Dendérah: Description générale du grand temple de cette ville*, vol. 5, Paris: A. Franck, 1873, pl. 56a.

The choice of Isis reflects her new role as the Eye of Re, one of whose functions was to deal with the god’s enemies. Magical texts used to combat inimical beings often use the substances associated with them. Since Seth is generally associated with common metals so, the binding with chains is symbolically appropriate. <sup>713</sup>

This use of the motif here can be related to scene 71 of the ritual of the Opening of the Mouth, in which the goddess Maat is brought back by Thoth to the sun-god so that

<sup>713</sup> Cf. R. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, p. 166. See also Herbert Fairman, *The Triumph of Horus: An Ancient Egyptian Sacred Drama*, London: B. T. Batsford, 1974, p. 89.

he can attach it to his forehead as the uraeus, the badge of royalty, which drives away and punishes his enemies:

“It is to bring you Maat that I have come to you, that you may live from her, that you rejoice in her, that you feed on her, that you are powerful by her, that you are stable by her, that you succeed by her, that you adorn yourself with her, that you rise by her, that you shine by her, let you be satisfied with her, let her join your forehead, let her join you to take down your enemies. Your heart is joyful when you see her, and those who are in you are in joy when they see Maat behind you, for the famine has perished and the rebellion has been repulsed, all the gods are celebrating, since I gave his eye to Horus, that (I) saved the *wedjat* for his master, that I gave his testicles to Seth, so that the two gods are at peace thanks to what my two arms have done.”<sup>714</sup>

Justice returns as Horus nears the assumption of the throne and Seth awaits his fate. Board and facing the judgment of his peers, Seth finally recognizes the reality of Horus’ solar ascension and swears fealty to him, which finally unifies the whole of the world behind the new ruler. As his rebellion comes to an end, the Eye, which at this point in the tale represents the totality of symbols related to Horus as the solar king of Egypt, is finally and effectively awarded to the new king as the White crown. This uncontested act both proclaims and ensures that the order of the world has been restored.

The tale consequently devotes the last few lines to the description of the roles which the protagonists occupy in the cosmos. First, there Isis, who proclaims the glory of the new ruler to the world, thereby confirming herself as the female complement of the king, the archetypal queen, whose function in supporting the ruler is both essential and unique.

Seth, far from being relegated to the margins of the universe to live among its wretched tribes, find his proper place on the bark of the sun, where he will daily combat the forces of disorder as they descend against the solar god, a thing that only he can do. His voice, the thunder of storms and tempests is a potent metaphor of the violence that too is part of the cosmic order, so long as it is directed against its foes.<sup>715</sup>

And, finally, there is Horus, who appears before the world as the reborn sun. Framed as a joyful, festive occasion, the introduction of the solar king can be compared to numerous hymns from the New Kingdom:<sup>716</sup>

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<sup>714</sup> E. Otto, *Das Ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual*, 71n-v.

<sup>715</sup> Cf. chapter 5.7 below.

<sup>716</sup> The passages at *Con* 16,6, “The Ennead is feasting, the heaven rejoices” (*t3 psd(.t) m hb p.t m rš.wt*) and *Con* 16,7, “The whole land is rejoicing” (*t3 r-ḏr=f m ḥꜣ.wt*) can be related to the phrases used to denote major festivals of the Ramesside period: *hb.w n p.t n t3 rmp.t* “annual festivals of the sky and the land” and *hb m t3 ḏr=f* “festival in its entire land”). See Masashi Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year: Their Socio-Religious Functions*, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2019, p. 5. The significance of this connection will become apparent later.

“The heaven is cheering, the earth is rejoicing,<sup>717</sup> the gods and goddesses are celebrating, adoring Re Horus-of-the-Horizon as he appears in his boat, having shot down his enemies in his time.”<sup>718</sup>

“Awake in peace! Awake, O Horus, lord (?) of... in peace! You go forth from your horizon being complete, Amun-Re, the mighty one at their head, twice beautiful great elder of heaven and earth, who came into existence [by himself], appearing from the abyss. You seized all through awe of you. You appear as king, (when) you appear in [the horizon (?)]”<sup>719</sup>

We may find similar language in texts exhorting the living king of Egypt, as in the case this hymn addressed to Merenptah.

“Attend to me, O Shining Light who the Two Lands with his loveliness! Sundisk of the Sunfolk who drives darkness from the Black Land! You are like the of your who shines down from the heavens: Your rays even the underworld and no lacks your The affairs of each country are told to you while you are at rest in your And you hear the of all nations for you have millions of ears. Brighter your eye than the stars of heaven. for you can see more than the sundisk itself.”<sup>720</sup>

The examples with which the hymn which ends to *Contendings* are numerous, too many to be cited here, but they all share the key common element. The appearance of the king is likened to the emergence of the sun in the horizon, his presence bringing life force to all around him.

Two more comparisons can be made and will become significant in chapters below. First is the entry the *Cairo Calendar* for day 28 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of the flood season (3 Akhet 28):<sup>721</sup>

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<sup>717</sup> Cf. e.g., *Stela BM 826*, 14: “Rising in heaven formed as Re, (...) Every land rejoices at his rising, Every day gives praise to him.” Translation of M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, p. 88.

<sup>718</sup> *Papyrus Berlin 3050*, II,7–III,3. Cf. Serge Sauneron, “L’hymne au soleil levant des papyrus de Berlin 3050, 3056 et 3048,” *Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale* 53 (1954): 65–90; Jan Zandee, *De hymnen aan Amon van papyrus Leiden I 350*, Leiden: Brill, 1947, p. 22–23, pl. II.

<sup>719</sup> *Hymn from the Theban tomb of Khaemhet*, cols. 4–7. Translation after Harry Stewart, “Some Pre-’Amānah Sun-Hymns,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 46 (1960): 83–90.

<sup>720</sup> Translation of J. Foster, *Hymns, Prayers, and Songs*, p. 141. Cf. Anthony Spalinger, “Encomia and P. Anastasi II”, in: Stephen Quirke (ed.), *Discovering Egypt from the Neva: The Egyptological Legacy of Oleg D Berlev*, Achet Verlag: Berlin, 2003, p. 123–144.

<sup>721</sup> “Ancient Egyptians divided their year in three seasons: *ꜥḥ.t* ‘Inundation’ (mid-July to mid-November), *pr.t* ‘Growing’ (literally, “Emergence,” mid-November to mid-March), and *šm.w* ‘Harvest’ (mid-March to mid-July). Each season was divided into four months of thirty days each.” (James Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 107.

“The gods are cheering and rejoicing at the sight of the *jmyt-pr*-document in favour of Horus of Osiris, to satisfy Onuphris in the land of the dead. The whole land is in celebration and the gods’ hearts are satisfied because of it.”<sup>722</sup>

The *jmyt-pr* was a legal certificate, originally rendered as “last testament”,<sup>723</sup> it is best translated as “transfer-document”.<sup>724</sup> It was used to formalize transfer of property, both in context of inheritance and outside of it and one of its functions was to serve as marriage endowment with reversion to children.<sup>725</sup> Consequently, it was not standard legal practice to write and *jmyt-pr* for the eldest son, because he was the designated beneficiary of the property if no *jmyt-pr* has been written.<sup>726</sup> This could imply that in the case of Horus, his inheritance was not guaranteed in the same way as it would in case of a non-royal son and successor, giving further credence to the arguments made above in relation to the complicated relationship between biological and cultural sonhood.

The appearance of the *jmyt-pr* in such festive, mythical context is not unique and finds a parallel in one of the hymns of *Papyrus Leiden I 350*. The hymn, titled Chapter 700 is fragmentary, but the nevertheless presents a familiar image:

“The split-horned goddess (Seshat) is scribe to the entire Great Ennead <to establish> an *jmyt-pr* <in favour> of the Eye of Re: the sky, Thebes and those who inhabit it.

The gods [...]

[...] Atum speaks with his mouth and a heart full of love. The gods [...] their hearts are full; they exult a million times and rejoice.”<sup>727</sup>

Returning to the entry for 3 Akhet 28, we may notice how the reference to Onuphris is reminiscent of the Isis’ exhortation to northwind at the beginning of the *Contendings*,

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<sup>722</sup> C. Leitz, *Tagewählerei*, p. 143–144.

<sup>723</sup> See e.g., Aristide Théodoridès, “Le testament dans l’Égypte ancienne (essentiellement d’après le Papyrus Kahoun VII, 1, la Stèle de Sénimose et le Papyrus Turin 2021)”, *Revue Internationale des Droits de l’Antiquité* 17 (1970), p. 117 ff.; Aristide Théodoridès, “L’acte de disposition de la statue stéléphore Caire CG 42.208 et son exécution”, *Chronique d’Égypte* 60 (1985): 322–346.

<sup>724</sup> Tom Logan, “The Jmyt-Pr Document: Form, Function, and Significance”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 37 (2000), p. 71.

<sup>725</sup> Pieter Pestman, *Marriage and Matrimonial Property in Ancient Egypt: A Contribution to Establishing the Legal Position of the Woman*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1961, p. 121–122, 136–139; Aristide Théodoridès, “Du rapport entre un contrat et un acte de disposition appelé “imyt-per” en égyptien”, *Revue Internationale des Droits de l’Antiquité* 40 (1993), p. 81–84. See also Christopher Eyre, “The Evil Stepmother and the Rights of a Second Wife”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 93 (2007): 223–243, esp. p. 232.

<sup>726</sup> C. Leitz, *Tagewählerei*, p. 143–144.

<sup>727</sup> *Papyrus Leiden I 350*, VI, 2–3.

seemingly linking the uplift of Osiris' spirits with the endowment of Horus with his inheritance. This line of argument will be explored in more detail later.

Finally, the last source to be cited in comparison with the closing hymn comes from the same source, *Papyrus Chester Beatty I*. Saved for last, this text is significant not only because of the similarity of tone and content between these two laudations, but also given its close overlap with the subject matter of the *Contendings*. As the present thesis moves to its interpretative part where the significance of this tale within Ramesside ideology of kingship is discussed, it will be shown how many of the implicit statements of the *Contendings* are paralleled by the explicit words of the *Encomium*, which praises Ramesses V:

Beautiful-faced with the White Crown like Atum,  
highly respected and with beautiful desire like Amun,  
with a strong arm that drives away opponents like the son of Nut,  
the one whose strength is like that of Montu.  
Scepter (alternatively, "divine force") of Plenty,  
he seizes the White Crown, the Atef Crown, which he has donned once more.  
Egypt is happy at your being (haw, lit. "time"),  
because you are sitting on the throne.  
They rejoice over your noble name,  
like (the do at) Horus, Lord of the Two Lands.  
They are happy, as all are united in cheer  
for the youthful ruler, Life, Prosperity, Health.  
A good Nile is coming in your time,  
because you have united with *maat*.  
You are like an image of Horus, son of Isis,  
when he appears on the stairs.  
His mother Isis calls with the trumpet,  
(Onuphris) is in jubilation,  
when the see you,  
appearing on the throne of Horus.  
It is Thoth who delights the heart by the side of the All-Lord,  
when he proclaims the kingship for you."<sup>728</sup>

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<sup>728</sup> *Papyrus Chester Beatty I*, verso, B19-31.



## 4 Kingship and Crisis

The tale's initial situation clearly describes the pantheon and the world at large in a state of *crisis*. There is a lack of a defined and effective authority, and the fabric of the divine society consequently suffers. By the time the tale concludes, the crisis has passed and is overcome. It is replaced by a state of peace and unity as lawful authority returns. This is the essence of the plot: disorder is replaced by order.

So far, this thesis has endeavoured to show that the *Contendings* have extensive symbolic associations with various types of Egyptian religious sources and that the structure of the tale is circular in nature. Now is the time to see how the findings related to both the form and the content of the tale can be integrated into a single, holistic image.

The argument presented in this chapter will proceed as follows. First, the relationship between the critical state described in the tale and its literary structure will be shown to frame the events not as an abnormal occurrence, but rather as a reflection of eternally recurrent cosmic realities. Following that, the significance of the royal office in Egyptian worldview and the impact of the king's death will be discussed, with attention also given to the contexts in which the sacred person of sovereign could be depicted in a critical manner. Finally, the critical images will be explained as markers of a liminal phase in the life cycle of cosmic kingship, whose passage from one ruler to the next is the central focus of the *Contendings*.

### 4.1 Cosmic Order and Cyclic Crises

The word “crisis” will play a central role in the argument put forward in this part of the present thesis. Wishing to avoid a lengthy discussion, a relatively palatable definition can be introduced: a crisis “is either any event or period that will (or might) lead to an unstable and dangerous situation affecting an individual, group, or all of society.”<sup>729</sup>

A significant element of such a definition is that it relates the notion to both the individual and the collective, which will be explored later with regards to the *Contendings*. Perhaps more interesting for this introduction is the etymology of the word “crisis”, ultimately stemming from the Greek κρίνειν, meaning “to separate, to choose, to judge”. Here, we may recall the opening line of the story, describing the “judgement of Horus and Seth” (*wꜥ.wt ḥꜣꜣw ḥꜣꜣ stḥ*), since the primary meaning of the verb *wꜥi* is likewise “to separate, to judge.”<sup>730</sup> Consequently, the Ancient Greek rendition of the title could easily be ἡ κρίσις του Ὠρου καί του Σήθου.

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<sup>729</sup> “Crisis”, *Wikipedia* (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis>), accessed on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023.

<sup>730</sup> *Wb* 1, 298.7–301.12.

We may begin with a simple question: Why is the tale a circle? What purpose is there in this particular choice of literary structure? The most obvious answer is one that stems from the very definition of the circle.<sup>731</sup> The tale has a ring composition so that its beginning and ending are connected and related in such a way that a linear tale would not allow. In the *Contendings*, this is articulated in several ways, but most notable is the already discussed atemporal character of the tales incipit and its closing hymn. A curious element of literary rings is that while they symbolically express a circularity by identifying common elements at the beginning and ending of a story, in our case this being the White Crown, they often do not frame the initial and final situations as simply identical. The same is the case in the *Contendings*, where despite the stylistic and symbolic similarities, the initial position of the narrative is quite different from the ending. Whereas the beginning presents a crisis that only deepens as the tale progresses, the conclusion of the tale shows it resolved and describes a world at peace and in line with Egyptian values. It is therefore curious as to why the tale is a circle: What benefit is there in connecting the glorious ascension of Horus with the emasculated state in which he enters the story? It is apparent that the tale describes a genuine crisis of the royal institution, and one would expect that it would rather be beneficial to frame its resolution as definitive. The circularity of the tale's form seems to run counter to the tale's content, which is singularly concerned with the overcoming of the succession crisis.

This seemingly paradoxical arrangement stems from a holistic understanding of the royal institution.<sup>732</sup> During the New Kingdom, royal authority was considered divine because it was delegated by the creator god, originally Atum or Re, who gradually merged with the Theban patron Amun to form the syncretistic Amun-Re.<sup>733</sup> The king's cosmic efficacy was consequently a mirror of this solar generative power, with which he was imbued and made

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<sup>731</sup> Cf. the discussion in M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, p. 72 ff. See also the connection made between ring compositions and the notion of cold and hot societies of Claude Lévi-Strauss in M. Pehal, "Culturally Reflexive Aspects of Time and Space in New Kingdom Mythological Narratives", p. 162 ff.

<sup>732</sup> Various elements and aspects of Egyptian kingship will be discussed throughout the rest of the thesis, covering all the areas relevant to the present discussion. For a general overview of the royal institution and relevant literature, see Christiane Ziegler (ed.), *The Pharaohs*, New York: Rizzoli, 512 p. For a recent study of Egyptian kingship, see Lisa Sabbahy, *Kingship, Power, and Legitimacy in Ancient Egypt: From the Old Kingdom to the Middle Kingdom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, x + 207 p. The book is focused on Old and Middle Kingdom material but includes a comprehensive bibliography on the concept of kingship in general.

<sup>733</sup> Stephen Quirke, *The Cult of Ra: Sun-worship in Ancient Egypt*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2001, p. 171 ff. For Egyptian syncretistic deities, see Brigitte Altenmüller, *Synkretismus in den Sargtexten*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975, viii + 361 p.; John Baines, "Egyptian Syncretism: Hans Bonnet's Contribution", *Orientalia* 68 (1999): 199–214.

god-like.<sup>734</sup> The reason that the gods have instituted a substitute ruler from amongst mankind is described in the *Book of the Heavenly Cow*. As a result of human rebellion in primordial times, the solar god departs for the sky, leaving a human king in charge in his stead to maintain order in his absence.<sup>735</sup> The ancient motif of king as Horus then represented the falcon god as “the link between the heavenly royalty of the gods and the terrestrial royalty of men,”<sup>736</sup> which was transferred from one ruler to the next.<sup>737</sup> Established by the creator, Egyptian kingship was envisioned as a timeless institution which both transcended these particular rulers, but was at the same time made immanent and therefore effective through them:

“This office, that of King of Upper and Lower Egypt, was a constant; in theory, it existed forever and would continue in perpetuity. The individual within the office of pharaoh anthropomorphized it and allowed it to become a functioning authority over the land.”<sup>738</sup>

The combination of human and divine traits was an ingenious device which provided Egyptians with a visible, active, and most importantly, living, presence of godhood on Earth, something which inevitably reflected in the almost unparalleled longevity of Egypt as a political and cultural entity.<sup>739</sup>

This dual character understandably produced some issues. The divinity of the king was a benefit in that it equipped him with the authority needed to exercise his duties, but it also imbued the eternal office with the fate of mortality. The issue of succession was

<sup>734</sup> The idea of the Egyptian king’s divinity has been one of the hot topics of Egyptology for since its early days. Almost all the works cited in this chapter contribute to this discussion, with Posener’s work standing out with its significance.

<sup>735</sup> Pierre Grandet, “The State and Administration”, in Christiane Ziegler (ed.), *The Pharaohs*, New York: Rizzoli, p. 119–120. For a comparable motif of the repression of rebellion, see Joachim Quack, *Studien zur Lehre für Merikare*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992, p. 95. See also C. Leitz, *Tagewählerei*, p. 23–25. Cf. Anthony Spalinger, “The Destruction of Mankind: A Transitional Literary Text”, *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 28 (2000), p. 277 ff.

The significance of human rebellion and need to pacify it to fulfil his responsibility to the creator is likely a contributing factor to the prominence of repressive activity against unruly human elements in Egyptian royal representation. Cf. the discussion in chapter 5.7.

<sup>736</sup> Dominique Valbelle, “Pharaonic Regality: The Nature of Power”, in Christiane Ziegler (ed.), *The Pharaohs*, New York: Rizzoli, p. 97. Cf. the discussion in chapter 5.6, where the function of Horus as the connection between Amun-Re and the terrestrial king is discussed.

<sup>737</sup> Cf. the discussion of the royal *ka* and its very close association with Horus in Lanny Bell, “Luxor Temple and the Cult of the Royal Ka”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 44 (1985), p. 258 ff. See also Ursula Schweitzer, *Das Wesen des Ka im Diesseits und Jenseits der alten Ägypter*, Glückstadt: Augustin, 1956, p. 25, 52.

<sup>738</sup> D. Silverman, “The Nature of Egyptian Kingship”, p. 67–68.

<sup>739</sup> Cf. Thomas James, *The British Museum Concise Introduction to Ancient Egypt*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005, p. 8. Peter Der Manuelian, Regine Schulz, Matthias Seidel (eds.), *Egypt: The World of the Pharaohs*, Cologne, Germany: Könemann, 1998, p. 6–7.

consequently of supreme theological importance since the inevitable death of the human king and the corresponding divinization of the ascending prince highlighted the composite character of kingship whose constituent elements are of fundamentally different nature, an idea expressed through the symbolic device of the king's two bodies – one human and one divine.<sup>740</sup> It was during succession that the notion of royal *ka* became of paramount significance since its transmission amounted to the transmission of the divine aspect of kingship.<sup>741</sup>

Instead of diminishing the significance of the demise of the individual kings and stressing the atemporal constant of the royal office, the tale puts the matter of succession and the crisis that it constitutes into the foreground, presenting it as an element in a cycle of kingship in which the triumphant solar rule alternates with the darkness of interregnum.<sup>742</sup> While eternal, Egyptian kingship was a dynamic phenomenon which oscillates between fulfilment and vacation. Historically, this takes on the form of a succession of individual holders of the office, something that the Egyptians themselves have emphasized by compiling extensive king lists.<sup>743</sup> However, whereas the king-lists focus on the fulfilment in the form of individual kings, the *Contendings* focus on the period in-between the rulers, which is impacted by death and uncertainty. Showing the problematic, human side of the royal office is not a rare occurrence in Egyptian literature, and many texts seem to even present him in a satirical light.<sup>744</sup> Nevertheless, this does not seem to be the case of the *Contendings*. The crisis of succession is explored in a quite systematic

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<sup>740</sup> See Massimiliano Nuzzolo, “Human and Divine: The King’s Two Bodies and the Royal Paradigm in Fifth Dynasty Egypt”, in Tamás Bács, Horst Beinlich (eds.), *Constructing Authority: Prestige, Reputation and the Perception of Power in Egyptian Kingship, Budapest, May 12-14, 2016. 8. Symposium zur ägyptischen Königsideologie / 8th Symposium on Egyptian Royal Ideology*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017, p. 185–214.

<sup>741</sup> Lanny Bell, “The New Kingdom “Divine” Temple: The Example of Luxor”, in Byron Schafer (ed.), *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, Ithaca – New York: Cornell University Press, 1997, p. 140. See also L. Bell, *Luxor Temple and the Cult of the Royal Ka*, p. 251–294.

<sup>742</sup> Cf. J. Assmann, *Zeit und Ewigkeit im alten Ägypten*, p. 28–30.

<sup>743</sup> See Tamás Bács, “The Pride of the Ramessides: A Note on a Late Ramesside King-List”, in: Tamás Bács, Horst Beinlich (eds.), *Constructing Authority: Prestige, Reputation and the Perception of Power in Egyptian Kingship, Budapest, May 12–14, 2016. 8. Symposium Zur Ägyptischen Königsideologie / 8th Symposium on Egyptian Royal Ideology*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, p. 5–18; Donald Redford, *Pharaonic King-Lists, Annals and Day-Books: A Contribution to the Study of the Egyptian Sense of History*, Mississauga: Benben, 1986, esp. xvii ff.

<sup>744</sup> See esp. Georges Posener, *De la divinité du Pharaon*, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1960, 103 p. See also Damien Agut-Labordère, “Le roi mange: Le pharaon dans les contes égyptiens du Ier millénaire”, *Cahier des thèmes transversaux ArScAn* 11 (2013): 411–415; D. Silverman, “The Nature of Egyptian Kingship”, p. 51 ff. Cf. the discussion of the mimetic significance of satire in chapter 6.2.

manner and while there is a humanizing, humoristic element to the tale, it does not by far exhaust its message.<sup>745</sup>

The crisis of interregnum can be divided into three distinct crises, each impacting a distinct entity. Firstly, the *funerary crisis* of the deceased king, who, much like non-royal deceased, is in a liminal state between life on earth and the afterlife and is threatened with total destruction if certain ritual and moral requirements aren't met. Secondly, there is the *ascension crisis* of the succeeding prince. As we have seen in previous chapters of this thesis, the prince undergoes a symbolic death thanks to which he can be reborn as king. This is the explicit focus of the tale with Horus acting as the protagonist of the succession drama. And lastly, the royal office itself as a cosmic institution experiences a *cosmic crisis* as it is left vacant. Even though kingship is divine and eternal like the Sun or the sky, it needs to be incarnated to be efficient and fulfil its role in the universe. Without a person on the throne, the throne itself is just a chair – lifeless and irrelevant.<sup>746</sup>

## 4.2 Liminality in Cyclic Crises

### 4.2.1 Cosmic Ramifications of Royal Crises

To understand the tale's focus on the crises enveloping royal succession it is first necessary to briefly consider the crisis itself. In a normal state, the various elements of the universe are integrated according to the cosmic order, *maat*. To illustrate the rule of the king in relation to *maat*, we may cite an inscription from the Luxor temple. which conveniently presents what can be described as indigenous definition of Egyptian kingship:

“Ra has placed king upon the land of the living,  
for ever and ever,  
to judge men and satisfy the gods,  
to bring about *maat* and annihilate *isfet*,  
while making offerings to the gods  
and funeral offerings to the dead.  
The name of the king is in the heavens as is Ra's,

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<sup>745</sup> For an overview of the humoristic side of the *Contendings*, see the discussion in Andrei Murashko, “Laughter, Carnival, and Religion in Ancient Egypt”, *The European Journal of Humour Research* 9 (2021), p. 29–32. See also Ellen Morris, “Sacred and Obscene Laughter in the Contendings of Horus and Seth”, p. 197–224; David Silverman, “Humor and Satire”, in Donald Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, vol. 2, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 127–130. For Egyptian humour in general, see Jan Assmann, “Literatur und Karneval im Alten Ägypten”, in Siegmar Döpp (ed.), *Karnevaleske Phänomene in antiken und nachantiken Kulturen und Literaturen*, Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1993, p. 31–57; and esp. Patrick Houlihan, *Wit & Humour in Ancient Egypt*, London: Rubicon, 2001, xxii + 170 p.

<sup>746</sup> For throne as chair, see Klaus Kuhlmann, “Throne”, In Willeke Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2011, p. 1–13. Accessed at: <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz0026w9gt>.

And he lives in exultation, as Ra-Horakhty does,  
 seeing him, the *pat* (notables)<sup>747</sup> exult,  
 and the *rekhyt* (subjects)<sup>748</sup> address him acclamations,  
 in his appearance as a new-born,  
 at the rising of Ra in the form of Khepri.”<sup>749</sup>

Without legitimate royal rule, the maintenance of *maat* would be impossible,<sup>750</sup> which is why the gods have invested the king to be chief warrior, chief priest and chief administrator in one.<sup>751</sup> These scopes all reflect the central idea of ensuring the maintenance of proper structure in the world and a productive interplay between its constituent parts. One of the key traits of the cosmic order is that it constitutes an essentially unchanging reality. The world is locked into an endless repetition of cycles which ensure that it can remain essentially the same forever,<sup>752</sup> and which are articulated through the twin notions of *djet* and *neheh*.<sup>753</sup> Consequently, the greatest importance is assigned to the royal functions related to these eternal truths about the constitution of the universe and its maintenance, like the temple cult and the pacification of disorder.

The king's death challenges the image of a well-oiled mechanism of eternity. Death is of course an integral part of cosmic cycles, but that does not prevent the vacation of the royal office from manifesting as a problem. The whole human world revolves around the person of the king and the matrix of social relationships that constitutes *maat* in the human sphere is centred around him.<sup>754</sup> We need only to recall the case of the *Story of Sinuhe*, whose protagonist always relates his own value and the meaning of his life to the person

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<sup>747</sup> On the *pat*, the elite of Egyptian society, see e.g., Jaromír Málek, *In the Shadow of the Pyramids: Egypt during the Old Kingdom*, London – Norman – University of Oklahoma Press, 1986, p. 34–35; T. Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt*, p. 148.

<sup>748</sup> For an outline of recent discussion about the significance and function of the *rekhyt* collective, see Kenneth Griffin, *All the Rxyt-People Adore: The Role of the Rekhyt-People in Egyptian Religion*, London: Golden House Publications, 2018, 368 p.

<sup>749</sup> Hellmut Brunner, *Die südlichen Räume des Tempels von Luxor*, Mainz am Rhein: Verlag von Zabern, 1979, pl. 65. Translation of Pierre Grandet “State and Administration”, p. 116.

<sup>750</sup> See especially Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society & Nature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978, p. 51 ff. See also Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation*, Mineola: Dover, 2013, p. 43, 53 ff. For the king as “lord of *maat*”, see P. Grandet, “State and Administration”, p. 120.

<sup>751</sup> P. Grandet, “State and Administration”, p. 120. For the application of the theological model of kingship in administrative practice, see the discussion and sources cited in *Ibid.*, p. 122 ff.

<sup>752</sup> Erik Hornung, “Zeitliches Jenseits im alten Ägypten”, *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 47 (1978): 269–307, esp. 297–298, Erik Hornung, “Introduction”, in Erik Hornung, Rolf Krauss, David Warburton (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Chronology*, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2006, p. 1 ff.

<sup>753</sup> LÄ II, 47–54; Frédéric Servajean, *Djet et Neheh: Une histoire du temps égyptien*, Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 2007, 142 p.

<sup>754</sup> Cf. J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 174 ff.

of the king.<sup>755</sup> His story is also pertinent since it shows how cataclysmic the king's death could be when perceived from the position of an ideal member of the elite. With his office, livelihood and possibly life at stake, Sinuhe abandons all his ties with his country in a dramatic reflection of the existential threat of the absence of a legitimate ruling authority.<sup>756</sup> Even the future king in the *Story of Sinuhe* flees at night and in secrecy, his status suddenly in jeopardy.<sup>757</sup>

The effect of royal death on the fabric of society mirrors the impact it has on the deceased person himself.<sup>758</sup> Just as the structure of human order is suspended, so is the physical and metaphysical arrangement of the person impacted, its constituent parts losing the structure needed to maintain life, something articulated in images of dismemberment or the estrangement *ka* of the deceased from his corpse.<sup>759</sup> In this manner, we can understand the statement of the *Loyalist Teaching* that the king is the lifeblood of the land quite literally:

“He is Re, by whose rays one sees, for he is one who illuminates the Two Lands more than the sun disk.

He is one who makes (the land) green, even more than a high inundation: he has filled the Two Lands with victory and life.

Nostrils are cool when he starts to rage, but when he sets in peace, one can breathe the air (again).

He gives nourishment to those in his circle, and he feeds the one who adheres to / his path.

The king is *ka*.

His utterance is Abundance.”<sup>760</sup>

Just as the life of a person prevents its disintegration, so does the cosmic efficacy of the king maintain the order of the world and therefore its vitality. The fate of the human

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<sup>755</sup> J. Pérez-Accino, “Text as Territory: Mapping Sinuhe’s Shifting Loyalties”, p. 178 ff.

<sup>756</sup> See Richard Parkinson, “Individual and Society in Middle Kingdom Literature”, in Antonio Loprieno, (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, Leiden: Brill, p. 147–148. Compare also the discussion in Richard Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt: A Dark Side to Perfection*, London – New York: Continuum, p. 268–270.

<sup>757</sup> *Sin.* 19–22. Cf. e.g., Hans Goedicke, “The Riddle of Sinuhe’s Flight, *Revue d’égyptologie* 35 (1984): 95–103. The mention of the other royal children in the following sentences in the tale take on a sinister tone when the previously discussed idea of cultural fratricide is recalled. (*Sin.* 22–24.)

<sup>758</sup> Cf. the discussion in Nicole Hochner, “On Social Rhythm: A Renewed Assessment of Van Gennep’s Rites of Passage”, *Journal of Classical Sociology* 18 (2018), p. 304.

<sup>759</sup> See e.g., J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 23 ff. and 87 ff.

<sup>760</sup> *Loyalist Teaching* § 2,9–5,2 (Georges Posener, *L’enseignement loyaliste: Sagesse égyptienne du Moyen Empire*, Genève: Librairie Droz, 1976, p. 19–26; translation of William Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, p. 173)

world at large therefore reflects the fate of the individual. When its life, i.e., the king, is lost, it is shattered. Since it is the creative power of the king that establishes and maintains the cosmic pattern of *maat*, normality can return only when royal rule is restored to its original state.<sup>761</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Negative Images of Kingship

Interregnum so far appears as a purely negative phenomenon, something imposed on the ideal flawlessness of royal rule. What, then, is the reason for becoming the centrepiece of the longest of Late Egyptian stories? One would expect a more favourable treatment of such a sensible topic, perhaps more avoidant of the problematic and dirty nature of royal succession. Egyptian kings were, of course, not immune to criticism or ridicule, and past rulers in particular could and were depicted in a rather unflattering light.<sup>762</sup> We need only recall the rendition of Khufu in the *Westcar Papyrus*, the vision of whose autocratic cruelty was amplified by Herodotus' account and is still recounted today, more than four millennia after his death.<sup>763</sup> However, the same could not be said of the royal office itself, which, as a cosmic institution, was beyond reproach.<sup>764</sup>

It seems that while certain activities or events of the king's life were ritually significant and pertained to the king as incarnation of the eternal principle of kingship, other were perceived as more personal in nature and only tangential to his cosmic role. The latter could then be subjected to relatively varying opinions, including criticism, which seems to be the case in the *Story of Neferirkare and Sasenet*, where the corrupt king has an amorous affair with a military officer.<sup>765</sup> At the same time, however, it has been observed that the affair of the two characters occurred in the four hours of deepest night: the same hours when the union of Osiris and Re happens in the underworld, an act also framed as homosexual, as we have already seen, giving the scandalous story a rather solemn

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<sup>761</sup> Cf. Anthony Spalinger, *Icons Of Power: A Strategy of Reinterpretation*, Prague: Faculty of Arts of the Charles University, 2011, p. 10. See also, Erik Hornung, "Pharao ludens", in Rudolf Ritsema (ed.), *Das Spiel der Götter und der Menschen*, Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1983, p. 508–516.

<sup>762</sup> For a general overview, see John Baines, "Kingship, Definition of Culture, and Legitimation", in David O'Connor and David P. Silverman (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Kingship*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995, p. 19.

<sup>763</sup> G. Posener, *De la divinité du Pharaon*, p. 89–103.

<sup>764</sup> D. Silverman, "The Nature of Egyptian Kingship", p. 57 ff.

<sup>765</sup> Georges Posener, "Le conte de Neferkarê et du général Siséné", *Revue d'égyptologie* 11 (1957): 119–137. For a similar Late Period story, see Georges Posener, *Le Papyrus Vandier*, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1985, 105 p. Cf. Lynn Meskell, *Private Life in New Kingdom Egypt*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 145.



theological undertone.<sup>766</sup> Consequently, it appears that even such reproachful behaviour could still be made to conform to established patterns of king as a solar actor and that accounts seemingly critical of a ruler could represent *topoi* of official royal representation.

This does not mean that kings did not also face challenges when executing their cosmic duties, for example on military campaigns, and they were, in fact, described as less than perfect in such situations, possessing flaws undesirable even in non-royal individuals.<sup>767</sup> In the famous accounts of the battle of Kadesh, Ramesses II faces the prospect of defeat when agents of the enemy treacherously lure him into a trap in clear admission of his lack of clairvoyance.<sup>768</sup>

However, all the examples shown are different from the case of the *Contendings* in that they describe the failings of a ruler as a particular event that is not necessarily indicative of any inherent weakness within the institution itself. In fact, even though the ill judgement of Ramesses and his commanders brought his campaign to a brink, his divine might was such that the whole Hittite host is overcome regardless of their crafty stratagems.<sup>769</sup> In fact, the purpose of the way in which the events leading up to the battle are described is to contrast between the cowardice of the Egyptian soldiers and the heroism of Ramesses, this literary device serving to increase the dramatic effect of the whole account.<sup>770</sup> In the end, the divine might of the king becomes apparent even to his enemies: “Then the wretched, vanquished prince of Hatti sent (a letter) invoking the great name of My Majesty (Ramesses), the likeness of Re, saying: “You are Seth (or) Baal in person, and the dread of you is a fire-brand in the land of Hatti.”<sup>771</sup>

In the *Contendings*, the historical or personal element which can be ridiculed or subjected to critique is conspicuously absent. Although the historicity of either of the stories described in the previous paragraph should not be taken at face value, it is still clear that they are intended to represent stories about historical individuals and that they reflect a dialectic of mimetic and topical elements.<sup>772</sup> The protagonists of the *Contendings*, on the other hand, are deities, beings that are timeless and which were not accessible in the same

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<sup>766</sup> Jacobus van Dijk, “The Nocturnal Wanderings of King Neferkarē”, in Catherine Berger, Gisèle Clerc, Nicolas Grimal (eds.), *Hommages à Jean Leclant*, vol. 4, Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1994, p. 387–393.

<sup>767</sup> D. Silverman, “The Nature of Egyptian Kingship”, p. 51 ff.

<sup>768</sup> G. Posener, *De la divinité du Pharaon*, p. 77–79, *LÄ*, 31–37. See also John Wilson, “The Texts of the Battle of Kadesh”, *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 43 (1927): 266–287.

<sup>769</sup> D. Silverman, “The Nature of Egyptian Kingship”, p. 51.

<sup>770</sup> Alan Schulman, “The N’rn at the Battle of Kadesh”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 1 (1962), p. 47.

<sup>771</sup> Translation of John Wilson, “The Texts of the Battle of Kadesh”, *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 43 (1927), p. 276, with my modifications.

<sup>772</sup> Cf. A. Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, esp. p. 10–13.

way as historical characters.<sup>773</sup> The tale itself is set in an indeterminate time and place, removing the narrative as far from the historical as possible. Unless the story is a veiled critique of a particular historical ruler, an interpretation for which no evidence has so far been identified in the present work, one could argue that the crises presented are inherent to the royal institution itself.

The significance of the ring composition becomes apparent at this point. Since the crisis is presented as repetitive, it follows that it is inherent to kingship itself rather than to a singular instance of kingship. The tale points out a neuralgic aspect of the institution of kingship where theology and reality clash as the mortal humanity of the historical ruler undermines the divinity of the eternal office and shows, in mythical language, the much-complicated nature of this arrangement. The cyclical nature of this crisis means that the problematic human element is not excluded from the story of succession, but rather emphasized, indicating that it has a special significance and, possibly, benefits.

#### 4.2.3 Crisis and Rites of Passage

As we have seen, the death of the ruler represents a temporary, but recurrent break-down of the ordering effect of kingship on the world, which persists until another ruler ascends to the throne. This suspension of order in a period of transition from one historical instance of order to another represents a typical image of a *liminal state*.<sup>774</sup> The term, coined by Arnold van Gennep to describe an element of certain rites in small-scale societies,<sup>775</sup> relates to his three-phase sequential structure of a *rite of passage*. This concept, later developed by Victor Turner, postulates that in all cultures there are structured rituals to facilitate the transition of the individual or the collective from one state to another and three basic elements of this universal structure can be distinguished.<sup>776</sup> Each transition is first marked by separation, representing the break from the previous state, typically involving a metaphorical death and/or leaving something behind to break with previous

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<sup>773</sup> For contact with the divine, see Maria Luiselli, *Die Suche nach Gottesnähe: Untersuchungen zur persönlichen Frömmigkeit in Ägypten von der Ersten Zwischenzeit bis zum Ende des Neuen Reiches*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011, 73 p; Eleanor Simmance, *Communication With the Divine in Ancient Egypt: Hearing Deities, Intermediary Statues and Sistrophores*, Dissertation: University of Birmingham, 2017, 519 p.

<sup>774</sup> For a recent work on liminality in Ancient Egypt, see Dániel Takács, *Liminality in Ancient Egypt: Case Studies from the Old and New Kingdom*, Dissertation: University of Warsaw, 2022, 359 p. The work focuses on liminality outside the context of rite of passage proper, focusing instead on tombs as liminal spaces and the liminal aspects of Hathoric festivals. For Takács, their significance is rooted capacity to accommodate contact between the human world and the funerary or divine realms, which in its most general form conforms to the argument made in the present thesis related to the king.

<sup>775</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, Abingdon: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 21.

<sup>776</sup> Arpad Szakolczai, "Liminality and Experience: Structuring Transitory Situations and Transformative Events", *International Political Anthropology* 2 (2009): 141-172; Les Roberts, Hazel Andrews, "Liminality", *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2015): 131-137.

identity. This is followed by a liminal state, in which the transitioning entity stands on the threshold between its previous identity and a new one. The new identity is assumed in the third stage, incorporation, when the entity is reintegrated into the system.<sup>777</sup>

The dissolution of norms and identities in the liminal state presents essential danger to the entities passing through it. Since van Gennep's concept was originally devised to analyse ritual performances, its most apparent application in Egyptology is in relation to funerary practices, where it manifests in the various dangers facing the deceased on his way to the new life.<sup>778</sup> Physical death represents a break from one's identity as a living being, his way of life and social ties.<sup>779</sup> Until funerary rituals ensure a rebirth as a new being within a new system of relations, the deceased remains in a precarious position, articulated through various images of danger to his or her person. Indeed, the suspended state of being characteristic of an individual between death and rebirth in the afterlife, is expressed through images of dismemberment and social privation.<sup>780</sup> This, in turn, reflects how the basic condition of an orderly, desirable state, consists of a correct arrangement of elements in a given system in accordance with *maat*, both with regards to the internal arrangement of an entity and its external arrangement, i.e., with regards to other entities.

The danger of this marginal state stems from the fact that it represents pure potentiality.<sup>781</sup> In initiations, typically transitions from childhood or adolescence to adulthood, the liminal state not only serves to destroy the old identity, but also to produce a new one. Consequently, the danger and destructiveness are merely one facet of an indiscriminate creative potential. Liminality entails the possibility of change, which can go both ways and is, in the context of a rite of passage, inherently destructive. The old identity needs to be removed so that a new can be assumed. Consequently, there is a point in the transition from the former to the latter when there is, in fact, no identity at all, and the being is suspended in a situation outside categories. These notions will be discussed in detail shortly.

As we have seen in previous chapters, the death of the king actually constitutes a crisis for two royal individuals. One, of course, is the former king, now deceased. The defining element of separation is death itself, and the liminal stage is represented by the precarious period of ritual uncertainty when the deceased passes through the underworld until,

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<sup>777</sup> A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, p. 21 ff.

<sup>778</sup> See especially H. Willems, *Coffin of Heqata*, p. 380.

<sup>779</sup> J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 31.

<sup>780</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26 ff.

<sup>781</sup> See e.g., Victor Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology," *Rice University Studies* 60 (1974), p. 75

having been entombed and equipped with funerary services, he finds a new, stable identity as Osiris, a blessed ancestor.<sup>782</sup>

The other individual is the royal prince – the king-to-be. Passing the threshold between a fully human and partially divine identity, the prince is himself transformed as he accedes to the throne, gaining a new self with a new name and a new set of relationships, which represent an unambiguous change of identity.<sup>783</sup>

The notion of an intermediate condition between states can be applied to entities more abstract than a single historical individual, such as deities or institutions.<sup>784</sup> In the present case, it is kingship itself that undergoes a process of transition which is structured in this manner. When the holder of the office dies, its ability to perform its function is temporarily suspended, much like in the case of the deceased, who loses his capacity to affect the world.<sup>785</sup> Only when the office is incarnated into the person of the new king, is it restored and can perform as intended. This necessity to identify a new body in which the office can “live”, i.e., affect change in the world, is another aspect of the liminal state of the cycle of kingship similar to the liminal state of the deceased person, which too is determined by a lack of a functioning body and a need to procure a new one. Thanks to the device of positional kingship, the answer to the need for a new body is as elegant as it is with the deceased: it is the same body as before, but new and pristine. In the case of the dead person, it is a mummy, in the case of kingship, the ascending king assumes the previous one’s identity as Horus.

The three complementary crises: that of the deceased king, the succeeding king, and kingship itself, all share a common structure of a rite of passage, marked by separation, liminality and reintegration. Unlike the two individuals, the office is eternally present on earth, owing to its cyclical character. The “crisis”, a liminal state, is consequently an integral part of its life cycle, and, despite appearances, is actually the mechanism through which the vitality of the office can be maintained. The liminal state produced by the death of the king is used to transform a prince into a king, thereby reviving the office in a new, young person, a veritable *netjer nefer*, “youthful god.”<sup>786</sup>

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<sup>782</sup> See esp. Mark Smith, “Osiris NN or Osiris of NN?”, p. 325–337. Cf. Harold Hays, “The Death of the Democratisation of the Afterlife”, in Helen Strudwick, Nigel Strudwick (eds.), *Old Kingdom, New Perspectives. Egyptian Art and Archaeology 2750–2150 BC*, Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2011, p. 115–130.

<sup>783</sup> See the discussion of royal titulary in chapter 3.1.4 above. Cf. Bernard Mathieu, “The Accession of a Pharaoh: An Iconographical and Literary Theme in the Ramesside Period”, in Christiane Ziegler (ed.), *The Pharaohs*, New York: Rizzoli, p. 225–233.

<sup>784</sup> Bjørn Thomassen, “The Uses and Meanings of Liminality”, *International Political Anthropology*, 2 (2009): 5–27.

<sup>785</sup> See the discussion of the notion of *akh* below.

<sup>786</sup> Cf. Oleg Berlev, “Two Kings – Two Suns: On the Worldview of the Ancient Egyptians”. in Stephen Quirke (ed.), *Discovering Egypt from the Neva: The Egyptological legacy of Oleg D. Berlev*, Berlin: Achet,

## 5 Images of Liminality

We have seen that the death of the king which leads to the interregnum manifests on three distinct levels, each of which pertains to a different entity: the liminality of the prince, of the deceased king and of the royal institution itself. The *Contendings* express each of these liminal states using symbolic images and structures in such a way that all three transitions through the liminal period can be articulated in a single seamless narrative. We will now evaluate each of these symbolic levels in turn.

### 5.1 General Remarks

Expanding on van Gennep's work, Victor Turner developed his own concept of liminality.<sup>787</sup> Accepting the idea of rites of passage as a three-phased process in which an individual makes a transition from one state to another, he identified several elements characteristic of an inter-structural, liminal state, which such a transition necessarily involves.<sup>788</sup> Such include seclusion or other forms of hiddenness, the blurring of the boundaries between life and death or male and female, or removal of rank, all of which can be traced back to the essential ambiguity of liminality.<sup>789</sup> Furthermore, three components of liminality were distinguished, which were often interwoven in actual ritual performances: i) communication of sacred symbols, which represent the unity and continuity of the community; ii) representation of cultural institutions in an unusual way, which "forces ritual adepts to think about their society; they provoke the ritual subjects to reflect on the basic values of their social and cosmological order"<sup>790</sup>; iii) reduction of the social structure, resulting in an absence of relationship apart from the subservience of neophytes to ritual instructors and the absolute equality among the neophytes, which

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2003, p. 19-35. Berlev argues that the meaning of *nṛ nṛ* lies in its structural opposition to *nṛ ɛʒ*, defined by their junior and senior status, respectively. To paraphrase a point made later in this thesis: When a king grows too old to pass for a "youthful god" (=king), he must become a "senior god" (=Osiris, i.e., a dead king).

<sup>787</sup> For the differences between van Gennep's and Turner's work, see Ronald Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-inventing Rites of Passage*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press, 2000, p. 21 ff. See also N. Hochner, "On social rhythm", p. 299-303.

<sup>788</sup> Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between", in Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Ithaca – London: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 93-111 (article originally published in: June Helm (ed.), *The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964, p. 4-20); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1966, p. 94-96, 102-106.

<sup>789</sup> Mathieu Deflem, "Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner's Processual Symbolic Analysis", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30 (1991): 13.

<sup>790</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Turner went on to describe through the notion of *communitas*.<sup>791</sup> These and other elements of liminality and of other stages of the tripartite structure will be outlined on specific examples later in this chapter.

Turner distinguishes two main types of liminality, each specific to a distinct type of ritual:

“First, the liminality that characterizes *rituals of status elevation*, in which the ritual subject or novice is being conveyed irreversibly from a lower to a higher position in an institutionalized system of such positions. Secondly the liminality frequently found in cyclical and calendrical ritual, usually of a collective kind, in which, at certain culturally defined points in the seasonal cycle, groups or categories of persons who habitually occupy low status positions in the social structure are positively enjoined to exercise ritual authority over their superiors; and they, in their turn, must accept with good will their ritual degradation. Such rites may be described as *rituals of status reversal*. They are often accompanied by robust verbal and nonverbal behavior, in which inferiors revile and even physically maltreat superiors.”<sup>792</sup>

He goes on to relate these two types to a traditional distinction between life-crisis rites, which typically involve one of the steps in a linearly conceived passage through life from birth to death, and calendrical rites, which take place at defined places in the annual cycle and are usually related to food production and its regular changes:

“Life-crisis rites and rituals of induction into office are almost always rites of status elevation; calendrical rites and rites of group crisis may sometimes be rites of status reversal.”<sup>793</sup>

For Turner, the liminality of the neophyte in a ritual of status elevation is the essential rite of passage and usually presents the most typical image of the tripartite structure.<sup>794</sup> Since Egyptian religion ultimately treats most cosmic phenomena as characters, the transition of any such element from one state to another may, in fact, present itself as an initiation. This applies even to the world in its entirety, which is theologically subsumed into the image of the solar creator.<sup>795</sup>

The matter of kingship is especially interesting here because it is personal and cosmic at the same time. The king is a living human and therefore experiences transition between

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<sup>791</sup> See esp. V. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 94-97, 112-113, 125-140; Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Ithaca - London: Cornell University Press, 1974, p. 45-55; V. Turner, *Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975, p. 21.

<sup>792</sup> V. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 167.

<sup>793</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168-169.

<sup>794</sup> R. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, esp. p. 121-122.

<sup>795</sup> See the discussion of Egyptian cosmogony in chapter 5.6 below.

states, in this case especially royal accession and death, but the institution is also cyclic in nature, alternating between period of activity, when the king is vital, and passivity, when the king is dead or otherwise indisposed. Consequently, elements of both the ritual types may apply transitions in the context of kingship, especially when royal succession is invoked as both a singular personal event of individual transformation and a regularly happening cosmic occurrence.

Here, it is crucial to keep in mind that the *Contendings* are a piece of literary fiction. While the relationship of the narrative with possible ritual traditions is a stimulating topic, the story itself is neither a ritual, nor a description of one, however thickly veiled in symbol and metaphor it may be. The characters may undergo similar dramas to historical humans, but the former are not simple stand-ins for the latter. The link between the two is rather more sophisticated and goes beyond simple imitation.

This reminder leads to a point which needs to be addressed before we can proceed to the particular images of liminality in story. Van Gennep has developed his model for anthropological purposes, and it was consequently intended to be primarily applied to historical rituals in less complex societies which were the subject of an anthropological study. This has obviously not stopped anyone from disseminating the model outside of anthropology proper and van Gennep himself was no exception.<sup>796</sup>

This ritual focus in van Gennep's model was advanced by Turner, who understood ritual as performance related to symbols that refer to religious beliefs.<sup>797</sup> Symbol, in turn, means for Turner "objects, activities, relationships, events, gestures, and spatial units in a ritual situation", but this only applies to symbols as encountered in the field during anthropological work.<sup>798</sup> In Turner's view, a symbol is basically a repository of information, which contains a complex of "values, norms, beliefs, sentiments, social roles and relationships."<sup>799</sup> In so far as ritual is ultimately a complex sequence of symbols, the

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<sup>796</sup> A. van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, p. 157–160. Notably, van Gennep applied the model to ancient Egyptian funerals, whose character he deduced from the *Amduat* and the *Book of Gates*. For the relation of his sources and funerary practices, see esp. Edward Wente, "Mysticism in Pharaonic Egypt?" *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 41 (1982): 161–179. See also Harold Hays, "The End of Rites of Passage and a Start with Ritual Syntax in Ancient Egypt", in Claus Ambos and Lorenzo Verderame (eds.), *Approaching Rituals in Ancient Cultures / Questioni di rito: Rituali come fonte di conoscenza delle religioni e delle concezioni del mondo nelle culture antiche; proceedings of the conference, November 28–30, 2011, Roma*, Pisa – Roma: Fabrizio Serra, 2013, p. 166–167. For the significance of his work in folkloristics, see Juwen Zhang, "Recovering Meanings Lost in Interpretations of 'Les Rites de Passage'", *Western Folklore* 71 (2012): 119–47.

<sup>797</sup> M. Deflem, "Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion", p. 5.

<sup>798</sup> Victor Turner, "Symbols in Ndembu Ritual", in id., *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Ithaca – London: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 19.

<sup>799</sup> Victor Turner, *The Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968, p. 1–2.

tripartite model can likewise be expected to be applicable to comparable symbolic sequences which are not ritual in nature, like mythical narratives.<sup>800</sup>

Given that for Turner liminality is a condition in which myths are generated, and these in turn allow people to reflect upon society, nature and culture, this reflexive activity can involve the very liminality which inspired the creation of the mythical work.<sup>801</sup> Furthermore, even though the denominator “rite of passage” was introduced for actual rituals, these rites in their most general form facilitate a subject’s transition from one state to the next. Consequently, the way in which the model describes a type of symbolic interplay may be applied to other complexes of symbols in which such transformational developments appear, such as myths. One could even argue that in myth this structure can actually appear in a purer, or at least more visible, form than in ritual. Since the model itself is linear and narrative, while ritual is necessarily not, as it takes place in three-dimensional space, a myth, which in a written form is linear and narrative, shares the essential characteristics of the model.<sup>802</sup> Indeed, the umbrella term “comparative symbology,” represents an overarching category that put religious activities and narratives in parallel as “cultural genres.”<sup>803</sup>

The presence of the tripartite structure in a narrative is therefore quite conceivable. Next comes the questions of its utility, and with it the more difficult topic of its origin. On a basic level, the answer is relatively obvious. A substantial change of the principal character is required by the story and the rite of passage model is a functional way of expressing this shift. In fact, the original idea of this chapter was to present a rather general idea of liminality in the Contendings and show how the transformation of Horus is staged during his passage from one state to another. The questionable and unsavoury elements of the story, which could seem inappropriate or irreverent to some readers, are consequently an indispensable part of the model and reflect the anti-structural of the liminal state showed. The depiction of a liminal reality is “apparently ‘inversive’ and therefore potentially subversive of the extant social structure, (but) is super-functional for the maintenance of

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<sup>800</sup> Cf. Victor Turner, “Symbols in African Ritual”, in Janet Dolgin, David Kemnitzer, David Schneider (eds.), *Symbolic Anthropology: A Reader in the Study of Symbols and Meanings*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, p. 183.

<sup>801</sup> V. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 128-129.

<sup>802</sup> Cf. Ronald Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, p. 105-107; H. Hays, The “End of Rites of Passage and a Start with Ritual Syntax in Ancient Egypt”, p. 169-170. Hays’s article stops just short of implying that the model is suitable for narrative texts only.

<sup>803</sup> Victor Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology,” *Rice University Studies* 60 (1974), p. 54. Turner explicitly follows the work of Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1967, esp. p. 11 ff. Grimes’ notion of “passage narratives” is also pertinent here, which approaches the topic of individual experience of passage through the way in which the transitioning persons narrate it. (R. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, esp. p. 9-10.)



that social structure.”<sup>804</sup> The ultimate purpose of the images of the breakdown of order is to reinforce the order itself.

## 5.2 Horus as Initiate

The case of Horus presents the most apparent case of van Gennep’s rite of passage structure as it depicts his transition from a juvenile aspirant to a mature ruler. This process is clearly defined by the alternate writing described in chapter 2.2 above, which represents the transitional state of Horus. This is itself a typical element of historical rites of passage, in which “ritual subjects are given new names to denote their “no longer/not yet” status.”<sup>805</sup>

Rather than presenting the reader with a neat succession of the typical stages of van Gennep’s tripartite model, the *Contendings* show a degree of ambiguity. It will be shown later how each of the steps of Horus’ transition encapsulates the whole process, with each succeeding step going a bit further towards the final goal. While this is more apparent in the cosmogonic discourse which will be discussed later, some of the elements of each stage might seem appropriate not only to the stage in which they appear, but to other stages as well.<sup>806</sup>

The most concise symbol of Horus’ original state is the image of the solar child from the Prologue of the tale, both because it shows the god as juvenile, but also since it anticipates the solar character of his final state: the solar child is only conceivable as a precursor to the mature, royal sun.<sup>807</sup>

Isis’ fear for her son’s life is the initiating factor of the rite of passage as her actions with the harpoon set off a chain of events, which ultimately result in the enthronement of Horus. His separation from his juvenile identity is expressed through the typical motif of death and estrangement from parents.<sup>808</sup> The tale elegantly poses one as a result of the other: Horus’ matricidal act, which eliminates his sole remaining parent, leads to his sojourn in the wilderness, where Seth pushes him to the threshold of life and death.<sup>809</sup>

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<sup>804</sup> Andrew Spiegel, “Categorical Difference versus Continuum: Rethinking Turner’s Liminal-Liminoid Distinction, *Anthropology Southern Africa* 34 (2011), p. 13. Cf. V. Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual”, p. 83 ff.

<sup>805</sup> M. Deflem, “Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion”, p. 13.

<sup>806</sup> Cf. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 155.

<sup>807</sup> See esp. the discussion in Pierre Koemoth, “Le dieu-enfant sur la fleur du lotus égyptien”, p. 189–225.

<sup>808</sup> V. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 80.

<sup>809</sup> Cf. *Con.* 10,3–4: “Then Seth found him, seized him there, struck him down onto his back on the mountain and tore out his eyes from their places. Then he buried them on the mountain,” and Turner’s remark regarding the separation ceremony: “The neophyte may be buried, forced to lie motionless in the posture (...) of customary burial.” (V. Turner, “Betwixt and Between”, p. 48)

Separation from one's parents, especially the mother, is a characteristic element of the pre-liminal stage of male<sup>810</sup> initiation.<sup>811</sup> Horus' departure to the waters and subsequent flight to the mountains also represents a separation from his position in the fabric of society and his kinsmen, which is another typical marker of this stage.<sup>812</sup>

The wounding by Seth, which causes Horus to remain stricken until raised by outside help, corresponds to a ritual death, which is often enacted in the pre-liminal stage to accentuate the termination of his previous identity. Consequently, the liminal stage, in which the neophyte starts his progress towards a new identity, contains a ritual rebirth.<sup>813</sup> The coming of Hathor marks this element in the *Contendings*, her nursing of Horus evoking the image of the god as a newborn. Since the enacted death and rebirth of the neophyte have such direct connection, they often form a complex, resulting in a "symbolic milieu that represented both a grave and a womb,"<sup>814</sup> which manifests during a period of seclusion.<sup>815</sup> Here, it is also interesting to note that the alternate writing of the name of Horus is actually quite rare in the corpus of Egyptian texts and is otherwise typical for funerary literature.<sup>816</sup>

The interaction of Horus and Seth bears many anti-structural characteristics of the liminal state, notably the pronounced violence and atypical sexual relations. The same can be said of the incident in which Isis causes her son to ejaculate. This confirms to the idea that one of the components of liminality is "ludic deconstruction and recombination of familiar cultural configurations," which may produce a variety of grotesque or deviant forms.<sup>817</sup> The way in which the *Contendings* explore the interplay of the ideas constituting Egyptian kingship has already been shown in the preceding sections of the present work. While the same tendency is present in other parts of the story than the one debated now, the rather delicate images placed in this liminal stage of the *Contendings* support its anti-

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<sup>810</sup> It has been proposed that while van Gennep's model may be appropriate for male initiations, women's initiations tend to follow a different pattern. Instead of being evicted into the wilderness, they may be confined to domestic space. See Bruce Lincoln, *Emerging from the Chrysalis*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 101. See also Caroline Bynum, "Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality", in Robert Moore, Frank Reynolds (eds.), *Anthropology and the Study of Religion*, Chicago: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1984, p. 105-125. It could be remarked that a common denominator of exclusion from communal space is shared by male and female initiates. The difference is whether the place of exclusion is physically inside or outside of the communal space.

<sup>811</sup> A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, p. 74-76.

<sup>812</sup> V. Turner, *Ritual Process*, p. 80.

<sup>813</sup> A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, p. 38, 67, 77, 81, 91.

<sup>814</sup> V. Turner, *Ritual Process*, p. 96.

<sup>815</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>816</sup> *Wb* 3, 123.1.

<sup>817</sup> M. Deflem, "Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion", p. 14.

structural reading.<sup>818</sup> While it seems that there may have been nothing particularly outrageous *per se* about inebriation, homosexuality or even incest in the divine world, the contrast between these activities and the more restrained rest of the tale allows us to classify them as deviant, at least in terms of this story.<sup>819</sup>

Having left his or her old place in society, the initiate is usually accompanied by an instructor or master of ceremonies, who guides them through the liminal stage and into his new social role.<sup>820</sup> This role is, curiously enough, effectively held by Seth, who serves as a paragon of mature power which Horus gradually adopts as he repeatedly comes into contact with him. Paraphrasing Turner, Szakolczai aptly remarks that the master of ceremonies “is practically equivalent to an absolute ruler; their word is the Law – though only during a rite when there is no law.”<sup>821</sup> The tale reflects this, but in a rather complex manner. Seth’s seemingly limitless power is reflected in his unrestrainable character earlier in the tale and also in the emphatic expressions of masculinity during both the *Homosexual Episode* and the *Boat Race*, but this is not necessarily the kind of authority described by Turner. Instead, his authority can be discerned in the fact that he effectively directs their entire contest. Each separate event is proposed and defined by Seth, who produces a surprisingly organized sequence of activities which ultimately result in Horus’ maturation. Seth’s action ensures that the successive challenges he has Horus undergo lead to the latter’s ascension to kingship, while serving as a paragon of some of the masculine qualities that are essential for Horus to achieve his desired state. The apparent excess of Seth’s virility would then only serve to emphasize the crucial importance of these qualities in the context of Horus’ transition.

Such clear structure is typical of initiation rites in the liminal stage and is the result of this stages’ extraordinary character. Outside the confines of normality, anything can happen, and therefore a strictly prescribed sequence has to be followed so that “everybody knows what to do and how.”<sup>822</sup> At the same time, “the rite is not fully scripted; the middle stage involves a trial or testing where participants must prove themselves ready to become adults, and they may fail to do so.”<sup>823</sup> This potential for failure, which can be enacted as a physical threat in both ritual and myth, is a direct consequence of the liminal character of this stage. Since the old identity must be dismantled so that a new one can be established, an ambivalence of creativity and destructiveness is both inevitable and

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<sup>818</sup> Wb 3, 123.

<sup>819</sup> Cf. Alexandra von Lieven, “Antisocial gods? On the Transgression of Norms in Ancient Egyptian Mythology”, p. 181–207.

<sup>820</sup> E.g., V. Turner, “Betwixt and Between”, p. 99 ff.

<sup>821</sup> Arpad Szakolczai, “Liminality and Experience”, p. 148. Cf. M. Deflem, “Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion”, p. 13.

<sup>822</sup> Arpad Szakolczai, “Liminality and Experience”, p. 148

<sup>823</sup> Ibid.

necessary for the efficacy of the rite of transition. In historical rites, this peril, often shared by multiple initiands, meant that “the formative experiences during liminality will prepare the initiand (and his cohort) to occupy a new social role or status, made public during the reintegration rituals”<sup>824</sup> as he is symbolically “ground down to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to cope with their new station in life.”<sup>825</sup>

The disparaging treatment of Horus is a part of this ritual strategy, which is frequently attested in rites of status elevation, especially among societal leaders. Its purpose is, somewhat paradoxically, to emphasize their impending superiority.<sup>826</sup> Since the liminal state is structurally defined by its contrast with normality,<sup>827</sup> and the newly ascended king is owed deference by all his subjects, the liminal period needs to be characterized by the opposite attitude of disrespect. Discussing the topic of the prospective leader’s humbling, Turner describes a Ndembu rite aptly described as the “The Reviling of the Chief-Elect.”<sup>828</sup> The same name could be given to the sentiment which seems to permeate many parts of the *Contendings*, where Horus, who from the beginning of the story is clearly staged as the successor-to-be, is insulted, harassed and physically harmed by his future subjects. In traditional societies, the ascending leader may be expected to take their abuse without resisting, his or her passivity during the rite anticipating their unquestioned dominance over those that torment them. Ultimately, this contrast serves to highlight and reinforce the authority of the ruler.<sup>829</sup> The utterances disparaging Horus’ youth and frailty, the threats of violence, can together be seen as an example of this phenomenon, rather than deliberate cruelty on the part of Horus’ fellows. Seth, who takes the lead in what could be described as a mythical hazing ceremony, would as Horus’ ritual guide be the most appropriate for the task, not least for his innate character to break social mores, but also because of his situational dominance, which he gives up in favour of emphatic humility as soon as Horus’ passage to maturity is complete. This reading, of course, need not and would not be exclusive with interpretations in which the insults against Horus are expressions of “serious” religious tradition which should be taken at face value.

Considering again the role of the ritual instructor, we can see that much like in *Isis’ Ruse*, Seth seems to play a different part from what he vocally professes to be doing, which in this case is pursuing his own claim. This time, of course, the trickery imposed upon his

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<sup>824</sup> Bjørn Thomassen, “Liminality”, in Austin Harrington, Barbara Marshall, Hans-Peter Müller (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, London: Routledge, 2006, p. 322–323.

<sup>825</sup> V. Turner, “Betwixt and Between”, p. 101. Cf. V. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 95.

<sup>826</sup> V. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 96–101, 170–172.

<sup>827</sup> See esp. the structuralist rendition of the character of liminality in V. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 106–107.

<sup>828</sup> V. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 101.

<sup>829</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

character by the storyteller is more profound. Instead of being outsmarted by Isis, it is the narration itself that uses him for its own ends. In fact, Seth could be understood as a typically liminal character existing on the margin of boundaries that needs to be fooled to help other entities cross this boundary.<sup>830</sup> The comparison with Nemty earlier in the tale is obvious.

The twin factor of shared experience among neophytes and of absolute dependence on the master of ceremonies comprises the only relations within the period otherwise marked by a complete breakdown of social ties. Turner remarks that despite the inter-structural character of the liminal, there exists a kind of relation between neophytes and their instructors, which somewhat paradoxically constitutes a specific type of structure: “It is a structure of a very simple kind; between instructors and neophytes there is often complete authority and complete submission; among neophytes there is often complete equality.”<sup>831</sup> Curiously enough, the liminal stage of the *Contendings* shows Seth *both* as a guide and as a fellow neophyte of Horus. The first indicator of this unusual arrangement is the hippopotamus form that both gods assume in the *Diving Episode*. The reduction of the neophytes to a uniform state is a typical element, as is a submission to an ordeal, both meanings of this word – a trial (by water) and a difficult experience – fitting for this case.<sup>832</sup> The phrase “the two youths”<sup>833</sup> (*ꜥdd 2*), which is used to denote Horus and Seth, points in the same direction as it is used 7 times to describe the two gods as a pair while not being used to refer to any other character in the tale. The second clue is the presence of the “graphic game” with altered writing of Seth’s name which appears in very much the same part of the story as it does for Horus.

The significance of the altered signs for Horus and Seth is apparent, and one last point needs to be addressed with regards to it. The writing used in the pre-liminal stage is largely the same as that in the post-liminal. If the matter were judged solely by the signs used, then the two characters would simply revert to their original state once their foray into liminal space and time is finished. Nothing could be further from the truth. Even though from a purely structural standpoint they may seem to return to the same place, they are not the same as before.<sup>834</sup> In fact, the “same place” to which they return is simply the state

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<sup>830</sup> For Seth as the divine representation of boundaries, see A Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, p. 75.

<sup>831</sup> V. Turner, “Betwixt and Between”, p. 99.

<sup>832</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>833</sup> *Con* 2,13; 3,1; 8,3; 8,11; 11,3; 12,2; 13,4. The phrase is not exclusive to the liminal phase of the narrative, but the majority of the attestations are present there. Each of the three distinct stages of the liminal phase contain the phrase at least once.

<sup>834</sup> Thierry Goguel d'Allondans, *Rites de passage, rites d'initiation: Lecture d'Arnold van Gennep*, Quebec: Presses Université Laval, 2002, p. 39. The author uses a metaphor of a spiral to integrate both the cyclical and linear concepts of time which the rites enact. Compare the pendulum metaphor preferred by Edmund Leach, *Rethinking Anthropology*, London: Athlone Press, 1961, p. 133–134. See also Alice

of normality, defined only by the fact that it is the opposite of liminality: a place within a structure. The two gods may return to the structure, but their position in it is different.

The transformative potential of an encounter with the liminal goes beyond the liminal experience itself and leaves the neophyte profoundly changed. Their new position, however, is not articulated through the “graphic game,” which serves in the *Contendings* to highlight the transformational stage rather than to differentiate between the original and the subsequent states. The change between the pre-liminal and the post-liminal is instead articulated through plot development and less prominent indicators, such as the phrase “two youths”.<sup>835</sup> Whereas before and during the liminal phase the two gods are referred to as such, this is no longer the case upon its conclusion, implying that they have left behind the last vestiges of boyhood (incompleteness) and reached maturity.

The explicit enunciation and celebration of the new status of Horus is a typical element of the post-liminal state.<sup>836</sup> The final hymn exemplifies this principle, confirming not only the newly assumed position and rights of the neophyte, but also the way in which his transition impacts the society as a whole. In the case of cosmic kingship, the effect is total, and the celebration is world-wide as the entirety of existence is impacted. In more practical terms, this was expressed in the reclassification of royal brothers into royal sons as the male members of the royal family and the elite assumed a uniformly junior role in relation to the new king in line with the already described principles of positional succession. The prominent role that Isis, the mother of the neophyte, plays in the final jubilation is likewise reminiscent of many historical initiations.<sup>837</sup> The fact that Horus secludes himself upon completing the rites of transition is another item of note.

The decision to use the same sign for the pre-liminal and post-liminal state of Horus might in a way reflect the confounding paradox behind kingship: the king is always the same and yet there is a seemingly endless line of them stretching from the beginning of time until infinity.<sup>838</sup> Similarly, the not yet ascended prince is already divinely born, the

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Mouton, “Temporalité et spatialité dans les rites de passage de l’Anatolie Hittite”, in Luis Feliu et al. (eds.), *Time and History in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 56th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Barcelona 26–30 July 2010*, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013, p. 229–244.

<sup>835</sup> Cf. Erika Feucht, *Das Kind im Alten Ägypten: die Stellung des Kindes in Familie und Gesellschaft nach altägyptischen Texten und Darstellungen*, Frankfurt am Main: Campus, p. 515 ff.

<sup>836</sup> M. Deflem, “Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion”, p. 8. See also Victor Turner, “Mukanda: The Rite of Circumcision”, in id., *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Ithaca – London: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 255 ff.

<sup>837</sup> V. Turner, “Mukanda: The Rite of Circumcision”, p. 255.

<sup>838</sup> Cf. Nicole Belmont, “Rite de passage, passage matériel: les rituels de naissance”, in Anne-Marie Blondeau, Kristofer Schipper (eds.), *Essais sur le rituel II: Colloque du centenaire de la section des sciences religieuses de l’École Pratique des Hautes Études [Paris, 23–25 septembre 1987]*, Leuven – Paris: Peeters, 1990, p. 229–236. Belmont argues that in rites of passage, specifically birth, there is enacted a cyclicity which denies the linearity of a person’s existence and the definitiveness of death to decrease

sacred essence of kingship being a part of him since the theophany of his conception. From the perspective of the royal office, there is no difference at all. The office is occupied by a legitimate holder, and optimal state is restored.

### 5.3 Liminality and Rites of passage in the Human and Divine worlds

#### 5.3.1 Coming-of-Age Rites?

Compared with the almost exemplary image of an initiation rite presented in the mythical rendition of the *Contendings*, the apparent lack of rites of passage related to life-crises in Egypt becomes quite perplexing. Coming of age rituals are manifestly absent in Egypt, at least in the sense of a defined rite of passage as described by the classics of anthropology. Egyptian vocabulary naturally included terms to distinguish age categories, but these did not seem to relate to exactly defined categories.<sup>839</sup> Some activities, such as assumption of an office, were a clear mark of (male)<sup>840</sup> maturity, while some iconographical items were also age-specific, like the sidelock and nakedness for a child or clothes and cut hair for an adult.<sup>841</sup> Children of elite background aspired to an official function and preparation to it, often in the form of apprenticeship to one's father.<sup>842</sup> There is no trace, however, of

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psychological discomfort. Instead, an idea of return is articulated wherein the original state of a rite of passage is identical with the final one, the ritual transforming the drama of human life into an endless repetition of itself.

With regards to the tale's characterization as a ring, it is interesting that the Sn hieroglyph could be understood as representation of a number of a large magnitude effectively bordering infinity. See Luca Miatello, "Expressing the Eternity as Seriality: On Šn as a Number of Large Magnitude", *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 52 (2016): 101-12.

<sup>839</sup> Judith Lustig, "Kinship, Gender and Age in Middle Kingdom Tomb Scenes and Texts", in Judith Lustig (ed.), *Anthropology and Egyptology: A Developing Dialogue*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, p. 43-65.

<sup>840</sup> For women, see e.g., E. Feucht, *Das Kind in alten Ägypten*, esp. p. 91-92; Christopher Eyre, "Funerals, Initiation and Rituals of Life in Pharaonic Egypt", in Alice Mouton, Julie Patrier (eds.), *Life, Death and Coming of Age in Antiquity: Individual Rites of Passage in the Ancient Near East and Adjacent Regions*, Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2014, p. 297.

<sup>841</sup> Christopher Eyre, "Children and Literature in Pharaonic Egypt", in Marc Collier, Stephen Snape (eds.), *Ramesside Studies in Honour of K. A. Kitchen*, Bolton: Rutherford Press Limited, 2001, esp. p. 179-185. See also LÄ III, 273-274; Lyn Green, "Seeing Through Ancient Egyptian Clothes: Garments & Hairstyles as Indicators of Social Status in Old, Middle & New Kingdom Egypt", *KMT: A Modern Journal of Ancient Egypt* 6 (1995-1996): 28-40; Gay Robins, "Hair and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Egypt, c. 1480-1350 B.C.", *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 36 (1999): 55-69.

<sup>842</sup> See e.g., Elizabeth Froom, *Biographical Texts from Ramessid Egypt*, Leiden: Brill, 2007, p. 41, 43; Andrea MacDowell, "Teachers and Students at Deir el-Medina", in Robert Demaree, Arno Egberts (eds.), *Deir el-Medina in the Third Millennium AD: A Tribute to Jac. J. Janssen*, Leiden: Brill, 2000, p. 217-233. For the situation among non-elite workmen, see Kasia Szpakowska, *Daily Life in Ancient Egypt: Recreating Lahun*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, p. 110; Jaana Toivari-Viitala, *Women at Deir el-Medina: A Study on the*

ceremonies which would be associated with the apprentice's appointment to their first office,<sup>843</sup> and presence of age-specific activities or terms per se does not prove the existence of coming-of-age ceremonies or rites.

An anthropologically guided approach would point towards circumcision rituals, which served as rites of passage in many African societies.<sup>844</sup> Circumcision used to be considered as a possible rite of passage in Egyptology, but the sources are relatively ambiguous and paint a rather complicated picture which does not live up to the clear image presented by Herodotus, according to whom male circumcision was the standard in Egypt of his time.<sup>845</sup>

The practice is relatively well attested for the Old and Middle Kingdoms and seems to indicate that those who have undergone the procedure have done so during adolescence in these periods.<sup>846</sup> The artistic conventions permissive of male nudity may have been a contributing factor, since they produced visible markers of circumcision in art.<sup>847</sup> There is relatively little evidence for the practice in New Kingdom, which may, however, be a reflection of the general reluctance to show the naked male body in artistic representation.<sup>848</sup> Examination of New Egyptian mummies has produced mixed results,

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*Status and Roles of the Female Inhabitants in the Workmen's Community During the Ramesside Period*, Leiden: Brill, 2001, p. 192.

<sup>843</sup> C. Eyre, "Funerals, Initiation and Rituals of Life in Pharaonic Egypt", p. 296-297.

<sup>844</sup> See the discussion and literature in V. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, p. 151 ff. and Eric Silverman, "Anthropology and Circumcision," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 419-45.

<sup>845</sup> *Histories* 2.36.3. Cf. Mary Knight, "Curing Cut or Ritual Mutilation?: Some Remarks on the Practice of Female and Male Circumcision in Graeco-Roman Egypt," *Isis* 92 (2001): p. 331-332. See also Edward Bailey, "Circumcision in ancient Egypt", *The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 7 (1996): 15-28; Constand De Wit, "La circoncision chez ies anciens Egyptiens", *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 99 (1972): 41-48; C. Eyre, "Funerals, Initiation and Rituals of Life in Pharaonic Egypt", p. 296-297; E. Feucht, *Das Kind in alten Ägypten* p. 245-251; Maurice Pillet, "Les scènes de naissance et de circoncision dans le temple nord-est de Mout à Karnak", *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 52 (1952): 77-104; *LÄ I*, 727-729; Mohamed Megahed, Hana Vymazalová, "Ancient Egyptian Royal Circumcision from the Pyramid complex of Djedkare", *Anthropologie* 49 (2011): 157-166.

<sup>846</sup> See esp. Martin Fitzenreiter, *Statue und Kult: Eine Studie der funeren Praxis an nichtköniglichen Grabanlagen der Residenz im Alten Reich*, vol. 1, London: Golden House, 2006, p. 222-223 who argues that the circumcised penis was an iconographic marker of adulthood. Against the idea of circumcision as a cultural norm, but rather an extreme form of purification, see Stefan Grunert, "Nicht nur sauber, sondern rein: Rituelle Reinigungsanweisungen aus dem Grab des Anchnahor in Saqqara", *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 30 (2002): 137-151.

<sup>847</sup> Carolyn Graves-Brown, "Flint and Life Crises in Pharaonic Egypt", in Rachael Dann (ed.), *Current Research in Egyptology 2004: Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Symposium which Took Place at the University of Durham, January 2004*, Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2006, p. 73; Jac Janssen, Rosalind Janssen, *Growing Up and Getting Old in Ancient Egypt*, London: Golden House Publications, 1990, p. 90 ff.

<sup>848</sup> Harco Willems, "A Note on Circumcision in Ancient Egypt", in Mélanie C. Flossmann-Schütze et al., *Kleine Götter-Grosse Götter: Festschrift für Dieter Kessler zum 65. Geburtstag*, Vaterstetten: Patrick Brose,



with bodies from Deir el-Medina showing little evidence to suggest that circumcision was a common practice there.<sup>849</sup> Textual sources could indicate that circumcision was typical for New Kingdom royals, but the mummies of Amenhotep I. and Ahmose I. still include their foreskins, which complicates this proposition.<sup>850</sup>

Many scholars nevertheless argue “that priests, temple attendants, and royal and other high-ranking personages adhered fairly rigidly to the custom,”<sup>851</sup> meaning that male circumcision was generally practiced.<sup>852</sup> Furthermore, its significance seems to have been primarily ritual and therefore more obligatory for the priestly class.<sup>853</sup> The overall scantiness and inconsistency of the sources, especially during the New Kingdom, nevertheless prevents us from establishing a clear extent and context for the practice or account for the apparent changes throughout Egyptian history.<sup>854</sup> There are indications of a connection between circumcision and ritual purity, which, however, rely mainly on Greek and Roman commentators, and which are also mainly concerned with temple personnel and not necessarily with coming-of-age rites.<sup>855</sup> Considering the evidence, it could be argued that even if circumcision may have served as a rite of passage in earlier periods, when it might have also served as a precondition for participation in temple

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2013, p. 553. On the depiction of men, see Gay Robins, “Male Bodies and the Construction of Masculinity in New Kingdom Egyptian Art”, in Sue D’Auria (ed.), *Servant of Mut: Studies in Honor of Richard A. Fazzini*, Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 209–210.

<sup>849</sup> Joachim Quack, “Zur Beschneidung im Alten Ägypten”, p. 562. Lynn Meskell, *Private life in New Kingdom Egypt*, Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 88. See also C. Eyre, “Funerals, Initiation and Rituals of Life in Pharaonic Egypt”, p. 297.

<sup>850</sup> For the two kings and their foreskins, see C. Graves-Brown, “Flint and Life Crises in Pharaonic Egypt”, p. 73; James Harris, Kent Weeks, *X-raying the Pharaohs*, New York: Scribner’s, 1973, p. 126, 130. For the probable New Kingdom depictions, see esp. François Chabas, “De la circoncision chez les Égyptiens,” *Revue archéologique, nouvelle série* 3 (1861): 298–300; Gaballa Gaballa, “New Evidence on the Birth of Pharaoh”, *Orientalia* 36 (1967), p. 300; M. Pillet, “Les scènes de naissance et de circoncision dans le temple nord-est de Mout à Karnak”, esp. p. 104; Joachim Quack, “Zur Beschneidung im Alten Ägypten”, in Angelika Berlejung, Jan Dietrich, Joachim Quack (eds.), *Menschenbilder und Körperkonzepte im alten Israel, in Ägypten und im alten Orient*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, p. 631–632.

<sup>851</sup> M. Knight, “Curing Cut or Ritual Mutilation?”, p. 332.

<sup>852</sup> E.g., Edward Bailey, “Circumcision in Ancient Egypt”, *The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 7 (1996), p. 15–28; C. De Wit, “La circoncision chez les anciens Égyptiens”, p. 43; E. Feucht, *Das Kind in alten Ägypten*, p. 245–255; M. Megahed, H. Vymazalová, “Ancient Egyptian Royal Circumcision from the Pyramid complex of Djedkare”, p. 156; Mark Spigelman, “The Circumcision Scene in the Tomb of Ankhmahor: The First Record of Emergency Surgery?” *The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 8 (1997): 91–100; Karl Sudhoff, *Ärztliches aus griechischen Papyrus-Urkunden Bausteine zu einer medizinischen Kulturgeschichte des Hellenismus*, Leipzig: Barth, 1909, p. 165 ff.; Ulrich Wilcken, *Die ägyptischen Beschneidungsurkunden*, *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete* 2 (1903): 4–13.

<sup>853</sup> M. Knight, “Curing Cut or Ritual Mutilation?”, p. 332.

<sup>854</sup> J. Janssen, R. Janssen, *Growing Up and Getting Old in Ancient Egypt*, p. 95–98.

<sup>855</sup> M. Knight, “Curing Cut or Ritual Mutilation?”, p. 334–335. Cf. *Histories* 2.37.2.

ritual, it need not have also fulfilled any such purpose in the New Kingdom, which could account for the greater variance in the age of circumcised men during this period compared to earlier times.<sup>856</sup>

### 5.3.2 Priestly initiations and purification

Another activity for potential rites of passage are ceremonies related to inductions into the priestly status.<sup>857</sup> This matter is complicated since Egyptologists often use the term “initiation” in the classical sense, to describe communication of religious secrets, which may, but may not include a substantial and irreversible change of the initiate’s status, which is a key element of maturation rites. Such *esoteric* initiation is a prerequisite for overcoming certain underworldly obstacles, and the knowledge was supposed to have been communicated to the deceased in various forms to enable his or her transformation after death.

Here again, however, the plethora of allusions presented in texts recounting adventures after death is confronted with a deafening silence of sources which would illuminate us with the rites of priestly initiation into the sacred mysteries.<sup>858</sup> In fact, it is not until the Roman period that any such information is related to us, and that is in a Roman source, the *Golden Ass* of Lucius Apuleius.<sup>859</sup> Assmann does argue that since death itself was framed as an initiation, initiations of living priests may have been presented as a passage through death and rebirth but he seems to base this mostly on Lucian’s work.<sup>860</sup> While it is reasonable to assume that transmission of esoteric knowledge was a precondition for certain religious offices and activities and it may have been performed only once, unlike purification rites, which needed to be repeated on a regular basis, there seems to be little ground to argue that it would represent an actual rite of passage including the anti-structural, liminal element.

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<sup>856</sup> Edward Bailey, “Circumcision in Ancient Egypt”, *The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 7 (1996), p. 24–26.

<sup>857</sup> Significant works on the topic include the publications of Assmann cited below and also e.g., Edward Wente, “Mysticism in pharaonic Egypt?”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 41 (1982): 161–179; Walter Federn, “The ‘Transformations’ in the Coffin Texts: A New Approach”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 19 (1960): 241–257.

<sup>858</sup> See esp. Joachim Quack, “Königsweihe, Priesterweihe, Isisweihe”, in Jan Assmann, Martin Bommas (eds.), *Ägyptische Mysterien?*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2002, p. 95–108; Alexandra von Lieven, “Mysterien des Kosmos: Kosmographie und Priesterwissenschaft”, in Jan Assmann, Martin Bommas (eds.), *Ägyptische Mysterien?*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2002, p. 47–58.

<sup>859</sup> J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, p. 205. Jan Assmann, “Death and Initiation in the Funerary Religion of Ancient Egypt,” in William Simpson (ed.), *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, New Haven: Yale Egyptological Seminar, 1989, p. 152 ff. Compare H. Willems, *Coffin of Heqata*, p. 279–283.

<sup>860</sup> Jan Assmann, *Ägyptische Geheimnisse*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2004, p. 135–156; J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, esp. p. 200–208.

Ritual purifications may superficially resemble rites of passage since their vocal purpose is to enable the transition of the priest into sacred space.<sup>861</sup> In fact, purity seems to be the defining element of a person enabled to perform ritual activity.<sup>862</sup> However, there seems to have been no liminal element to the procedure which would imply a substantial and permanent change in status. Indeed, the repetitive nature of these rites implies that they may be an expression of an idea of ritual purity, which may need to be restored, rather than of status elevation of the initiated, which is typically irreversible.

Summarizing his discussion of the coming of age in Egypt, Eyre remarks that “Fitting these themes into a coming-of-age rite is slippery, although one may feel reasonably confident that coming of age for boys was marked by significant actions.”<sup>863</sup> Even today, finishing studies, getting a professional haircut and a suit, and accepting one’s first job are for many the defining experiences on the threshold of adulthood, but neither of these elements does need to contain the typically liminal element of a rite of passage.<sup>864</sup> A gradual transition from childhood to maturity can and usually does include significant milestones, like first sexual intercourse or a period of moving away from one’s parents, but neither has to conform the structure of a rite of passage. Such actions do hold special significance, but they are fundamentally different from the social institutions that certain less complex societies employ to express the abrupt change of status of their own children. The Egyptian evidence rather seem to imply a more gradual and less ritually structured passage to adulthood in the New Kingdom.

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<sup>861</sup> Joachim Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion”, in Christian Frevel, Christophe Nihan (eds.), *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism*, Leiden: Brill, 2013, esp. p. 118 ff; C. Eyre, “Funerals, Initiation and Rituals of Life in Pharaonic Egypt”, p. 299–302. For an illustration of the significance of purity within cult as a whole, see Sylvie Cauville, *Offerings to the Gods in Egyptian Temples*, Leuven: Peeters, 2012, p. 22 ff. For the illustrative case of *Papyrus Turin 1887*, see e.g., Pascal Vernus, *Affairs and Scandals in Ancient Egypt*, Ithaca - London: Cornell University Press, 2003, p. 104–105.

<sup>862</sup> C. Eyre, “Funerals, Initiation and Rituals of Life in Pharaonic Egypt”, p. 299–300. J. Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion,” p. 122 ff. See also the comment of Leach, for whom washing was the essential reintegration rite, since the liminal “holiness” needed to be washed away, in Edmund Leach, *Culture and Communication: The Logic by which Symbols Are Connected*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 75–76. Perhaps this washing could be related to Horus being spat in the face in the *Homosexual Episode*.

<sup>863</sup> C. Eyre, “Funerals, Initiation and Rituals of Life in Pharaonic Egypt”, p. 297.

<sup>864</sup> Turner argues that in post-industrial societies, the conditions are no longer suitable for the proliferation and maintenance of proper, liminality entailing rites of passage, but various authors define the rites in a manner less exclusive of modern social phenomena. For an up-to-date treatment of the issue including a discussion of the relevant academic sources, see e.g., Bernadetta Janusz, Maciej Walkiewicz, “The Rites of Passage Framework as a Matrix of Transgression Processes in the Life Course”, *Journal of Adult Development* 25 (2018): 151–159.

### 5.3.3 Liminality and the Royal Successor

Given the absence of conclusive evidence of coming-of-age rites for Egyptian elites, it is reasonable to relate the liminal images of Horus to similar processes in the royal sphere. The tale makes it clear that the maturation of Horus is synonymous with his transition from prince to king. Anthropologically, both of these advancements share the common denominator of being rites of status elevation as discussed above. The function of the tripartite structure then becomes clear. Since the royal office is a divine institution of staggering significance, whereas the royal prince is but one of many men surrounding the king, the transformation from the latter to the former is a theologically extreme event in which a human individual is suffused with a divine essence. In the discussion of royal names in a previous chapter, it was observed that while the original identity, expressed by the birth name, remains a part of the king's identity as the part of the *nomen*, it is subsumed into a new, more complex identity, which replaces the simplicity of the purely human one. Indeed, the addition of the title "Son of Re" to the birth name as part of the *nomen* means that even the prince's innate identity, which stems from his father, is replaced by the heritage of Re.

The function of a rite of passage is to facilitate precisely this kind of complete metamorphosis.<sup>865</sup> The rather extreme ritual activities or, in this case, mythic events, pave the way for a symbolically effective termination of the old identity of the royal neophyte and the establishment of a new one. The properties of this new identity and its incompatibility with that of the royal prince will be discussed later and, for now, the simple claim that the *Contendings* frame Horus' transformation is total should suffice.

### 5.4 Textual liminality: Universal structure of ritual antecedents?

Before moving on the mortuary aspect of the Horus' transition in the *Contendings*, one last question should be addressed which arose during the discussion of Horus as a mythical initiate. Specifically, the strange schizophrenia between the voiced motives and apparent function of Seth's behaviour may point to a rather controversial notion. If the insults against Horus are not to be taken as expression of ill-will, but rather ritualized actions which ultimately serve to facilitate his ascension and mark acceptance of his impending authority, then what does it say about the story as a whole? Leach has in fact proposed that the interaction of Horus and Seth bears "characteristics of ritualised farce which anthropologists have long recognised as the hallmarks of a joking relationship", going to remark that "The question thus arises whether the author of *Papyrus Chester Beatty*

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<sup>865</sup> V. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 93; For an interesting comparison, see also Ana Chelariu, "Metamorphosis Amid Myths, Initiation Rites and Romanian Folk Tales", *Nouvelle Mythologie Comparée* 3 (2016), p. 2-3, 8; Wendy Olmsted, "On the Margins of Otherness: Metamorphosis and Identity in Homer, Ovid, Sidney, and Milton," *New Literary History* 27 (1996), p. 170 ff.

I might not have been familiar with a real-life social institution involving ‘joking’ behaviour of this general type.”<sup>866</sup>

Considering the many and specific similarities between the situation described in the *Contendings* and anthropological examples and theories of rites of passage, Leach’s proposition becomes quite compelling and deserving of thought. Given the absence of any Egyptian evidence which would convincingly decide for or against it, the sensible option is to propose models which would account for the presence of the general tripartite structure and specific markers of liminality in the *Contendings*.

Four such models seem viable: i.) adoption of indigenous material, ii.) cultural memory,<sup>867</sup> iii.) adoption of foreign material, iv.) invention.

Model i.) surmises that similar rites of passage connected to maturation or royal ascension existed in the Ramesside period but are not attested in other sources. The practice of these rite would then resonate, if not reflect, in the *Contendings*, appearing in a way which can in some way be related to ritual practice.<sup>868</sup>

Model ii.) surmises that such rites of passage existed in Ancient Egypt but did not survive until the Ramesside period. Such diachronic change is a common phenomenon given the extreme nature of the liminal experience which may not remain palatable as the sensibilities in a culture change. Turner’s idea that the increase in complexity of a society is connected to a decrease in prominence or incidence of proper liminality may be relevant here.<sup>869</sup> The cultural memory of defunct, or still existing, but no longer liminal rites may still be present, especially in a society with a literary tradition, and it can be invoked to create fictional accounts or commentaries of present events, beliefs or practices.

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<sup>866</sup> E. Leach, “The Mother’s Brother in Ancient Egypt”, p. 21.

<sup>867</sup> I use the term in a rather broad sense as a concept by which past phenomena influence the present across a time span beyond the means of individual memory and everyday communication. Much like individual memory, this influence is both subjective and reflexive, meaning that the effect the past has on the present is formed by the way in which the present culture approaches its own past. Cf. Jan Assmann, John Czaplicka, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125–33. See also e.g., Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” *The American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 1386–1403; Yigal Elam, Noa Gedi, “Collective Memory – What Is It?” *History and Memory* 8 (1996): 30–50; Wulf Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies,” *History and Theory* 41, (2002): 179–97; Nicolas Russell, “Collective Memory before and after Halbwachs,” *The French Review* 79 (2006): 792–804; and of, of course, the opus magnum of this approach, Maurice Halbwachs, *La Mémoire Collective*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950, 105 p.

<sup>868</sup> The relationship between myth and ritual is a topic broad beyond the means of the present inquiry. For a concise summary and introduction to some of the approaches, see Robert Segal, *Myth: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 61 ff. Cf. Robert Segal, *The Myth and Ritual Theory: An Anthology*, Malden: Blackwell, 1998, 473 p.

<sup>869</sup> V. Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid”, p. 86.

Model iii.) assumes that the liminal images could have been inspired by observations of foreign ceremonies.<sup>870</sup> Whatever the reason for Egyptians lacking such ceremonies during the period in question, the images of unfamiliar rites, which could be observed both abroad and in communities of naturalized foreigners in Egypt,<sup>871</sup> may have been adopted by the author for their apparent efficacy or for reasons of fashion.<sup>872</sup> Adoption of foreign cultural elements was relatively popular among Egyptian elites in the New Kingdom as evidenced, for example, by the presence of Minoan wall paintings at Tell el-Dabaa.<sup>873</sup> Similarly, the motif of the rite of passage could have been adopted from foreign literature.<sup>874</sup> This could possibly have taken place without realizing the significance of the liminal symbolism, but the sophistication of the images in the *Contendings*, however, seems to argue against this.

Model iv.) largely follows the culturally universalist understanding of rites of passage along the lines of van Gennep's original concept. If the tripartite rites are specific to all humans, then they need not to be the result of particular cultural developments in a given society, but of some basic characteristics of society or the human individual in general.<sup>875</sup> It could be argued that abstract philosophical reasoning on the nature of change from one state to another could result in the rite of passage model, the character of the liminal being purely

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<sup>870</sup> See esp. Thomas Schneider, "Foreign Egypt: Egyptology and the Concept of Cultural Appropriation," *Ägypten und Levante* 13 (2003): 155-161; Thomas Schneider, "Akkulturation - Identität - Elitekultur: Eine Positionsbestimmung zur Frage der Existenz und des Status von Ausländern in der Elite des Neuen Reiches", in Rolf Gundlach, Andrea Klug (eds.), *Der ägyptische Hof des Neuen Reiches: Seine Gesellschaft und Kultur im Spannungsfeld zwischen Innen- und Aussenpolitik*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006, p. 201-216; Keiko Tazawa, *Syro-Palestinian Deities in New Kingdom Egypt: The Hermeneutics of their Existence*, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009, xii + 210 p.; Christiane Zivie-Coche, "Dieux autres, dieux des autres: Identité culturelle et altérité dans l'Égypte ancienne," in Ilai Alon, Ithamar Gruenwald, Itamar Singer (eds.), *Concepts of the Other in Near Eastern religions*, Leiden: Brill, 1994, p. 39-80.

<sup>871</sup> Rainer Stadelmann, *Syrisch-palästinensische Gottheiten in Ägypten*, Leiden: Brill, 1967, p. 146-150.

<sup>872</sup> Cf. e.g., the sources cited in C. Zivie-Coche, "Foreign Deities in Egypt."

<sup>873</sup> For the Tell el-Dabaa site, see Manfred Bietak, "Une citadelle royale à Avaris de la première moitié de la XVIIIe dynastie et ses liens avec le monde minoen", in Annie Caubet, (ed.) *L'acrobate au taureau: les découvertes de Tell el-Daba (Égypte) et l'archéologie de la Méditerranée orientale (1800-1400 av. J.-C.)*. Actes du colloque organisé au musée du Louvre par le Service culturel le 3 décembre 1994, Paris: Documentation française, 1999, p. 29-81. Manfred Bietak, Nannó Marinatos, Clairy Palivou, *Taureador Scenes in Tell el-Dab'a (Avaris) and Knossos*, Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007, 173 p.

For foreign cultural imports in New Kingdom Egypt, see the discussion and sources cited in Thomas Schneider, "Foreigners in Egypt: Archaeological Evidence and Cultural Context", in Willeke Wendrich (ed.), *Egyptian Archaeology*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, p. 155.

<sup>874</sup> Cf. esp. H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 124-126; M. Pehal, *Interpreting Ancient Egyptian Narratives*, p. 248-251; K. Tazawa, *Syro-Palestinian Deities in New Kingdom Egypt*, p. 161 ff.

<sup>875</sup> See e.g., the discussion in M. Pehal, "Culturally Reflexive Aspects of Time and Space in New Kingdom Mythological Narratives," p. 151-152.

structurally defined by its opposition to normality.<sup>876</sup> The intellectual tradition of Egypt was undoubtedly sophisticated enough to produce such strain of thought and then apply it to mythical constellations, resulting in the surprisingly well-defined images of liminality in the *Contendings*.<sup>877</sup>

Given present state of evidence, it is very hard, if not impossible, to determine which of the models above might be the most accurate. It is possible that a completely different cultural process is behind the images of liminality in the *Contendings*, but it is reasonable to assume that any of the above were at least a contributing factor. Indeed, it is fathomable that a combination of the types of the outlined cultural transmission would be behind the very specific rendering of Horus' maturation. Some type of ritualised coming-of-age ceremonies is likely to have existed in Egypt sometime during its history, if not in the period and place when the *Contendings* were likely written. By this time, foreign cultural imports have become an established element of elite culture and might have been an influence on both Egyptian ritual practice and the way in which it may have resonated in literature. Finally, abstract reflection of cultural phenomena and mythology was certainly not beyond the means and the inclinations of Egyptian intellectual elite and knowledge gained by such type of reasoning would have likely impressed on the writer of the tale.

## 5.5 Horus as Funerary Agent

### 5.5.1 Liminal Spaces in Funerary Literature

So far, we have been dealing with an aspect of liminality for which there is scant Ancient Egyptian evidence, leaving us to indulge in a degree of speculation and comparative exercises. There is, of course, one essential rite of passage which has not yet been discussed

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<sup>876</sup> V. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 366-367.

<sup>877</sup> See esp. James Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*, New Haven: Yale Egyptological Seminar, 1988, x + 113 p.; John Baines, "Interpretations of Religion: Logic, Discourse, Rationality," *Göttinger Miszellen* 76 (1984): 25-54; Gertie Englund, "Gods as a Frame of Reference: On Thinking and Concepts of Thought in Ancient Egypt," in *The Religion of the Ancient Egyptians: Cognitive Structures and Popular Expressions. Proceedings of Symposia in Uppsala and Bergen 1987 and 1988*, Uppsala: S. Academiae Ubsaliensis, 1989, p. 7-28; Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad, "Egyptian Thought About Life as a Problem of Translation," in Gertie Englund, (ed.), *The Religion of the Ancient Egyptians: Cognitive Structures and Popular Expressions. Proceedings of Symposia in Uppsala and Bergen 1987 and 1988*, Uppsala: S. Academiae Ubsaliensis, 1989, p. 29-40. The dynamic nature of Ramesside theology is concisely described in Jan Assmann, "Theological Responses to Amarna," in Gary Knoppers, Antoine Hirsch, (eds.) *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World: Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford*, Leiden: Brill, 2004, p. 179-191.

Following Van Lieven's argument, we may argue that myths do not sprout up out of socio-cultural thin air, but mythical structures may. The previously described resurgence of the chiasmus in modern times can prove an interesting comparison. See A. von Lieven, "Antisocial Gods? On the Transgression of Norms in Ancient Egyptian Mythology", p. 182.

and which is extensively represented in both texts and archaeological evidence, the funeral. Its significance seems to have been central, as Eyre describes:

“Death is the archetype context in which long and complicated rituals mediating passage are attested in Egypt: from the separation of death itself, through rituals which pass the dead through liminal states or cosmic locations to the (re-)integration of the dead in an afterlife. This is envisaged as both a passage through time and space to another place, and a passage from one physical and spiritual state to another.”<sup>878</sup>

The variety of sources related to death and afterlife is staggering. Firstly, there are ritual texts proper, which we generally believe describe historical ritual practices.<sup>879</sup> Egyptian ritual texts do not typically consist of distinctive compositions exclusively used for specific rituals.<sup>880</sup> Instead, they are composite and formulaic in nature, often reused in various contexts, individual texts borrowing from one another.<sup>881</sup> Consequently, a significant ritual is typically composed of numerous fragments coming together, resulting in a complex whole, which often defies attempts at reconstructing a narrative sequence.<sup>882</sup>

Compared to ritual texts, funerary literature such as the *Pyramid* and *Coffin Texts*, *Book of the Dead*, and various New Kingdom Underworld Books, often present death and subsequent developments as a physical transition from one place to another.<sup>883</sup> The burial, which in its essence constitutes the passage of the body to the tomb, is in these texts conflated with the passage of the deceased (or his constituent parts) to another world and way of life.<sup>884</sup> In these texts, the tripartite structure of a rite of passage often emerges: the separation marked by death itself, the liminal stage represented by the manifold dangers and obstacles to the deceased, which is overcome with the reintegration into a new life.<sup>885</sup>

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<sup>878</sup> C. Eyre, “Funerals, Initiation and Rituals of Life in Pharaonic Egypt”, p. 292.

<sup>879</sup> See esp. the discussion in Harold Hays “Funerary Rituals (Pharaonic Period)”, p. 2 ff.

<sup>880</sup> C. Eyre, “Funerals, Initiation and Rituals of Life in Pharaonic Egypt”, p. 292.

<sup>881</sup> Alexandra von Lieven, “Book of the Dead, Book of the Living: BD Spells as Temple Texts”, in *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 98 (2012): 249–267. Yvan Koenig, “Between Order and Disorder: A Case of Sacred Philology”, in Panagiotis Kousoulis (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Demonology: Studies on the Boundaries Between the Demonic and the Divine in Egyptian Magic*, Leuven: Brill, p. 121–128.

<sup>882</sup> H. Willems, *Coffin of Heqata*, p. 381.

<sup>883</sup> C. Eyre, “Funerals, Initiation and Rituals of Life in Pharaonic Egypt”, p. 293.

<sup>884</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>885</sup> J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, esp. p. 76 ff. See also C. Eyre, “Funerals, Initiation and Rituals of Life in Pharaonic Egypt”, p. 293; H. Willems, *Coffin of Heqata*, p. 380–381.



A key characteristic of Egyptian funerary rites is that while they are envisioned as a passage to another place, the movement itself is facilitated by a proxy.<sup>886</sup> For obvious reasons, the dead cannot perform this physical transition on their own, nor can they take active part in the corresponding rituals. The task instead fell to the son and successor of the deceased, who was often represented by a professional officiant, but who also embodied Horus as the essential son, meaning that the role was ultimately royal in character.<sup>887</sup> This situation is present in funerary literature as well, where various divine agents undergo the transition from a precarious location to the safe destination on behalf of the deceased.<sup>888</sup> In some cases, the deceased is presented as the officiant of funerary rites for his own father, in which he has participated while alive.<sup>889</sup> This not only serves to highlight the extent of his filial love, but also sets such behaviour as the norm, from which the deceased will now also benefit. As such, the deceased can be identified not only with Osiris, but also with Horus, who follows his father as a loyal son should.<sup>890</sup>

One of the characteristic elements of funerary literature is that it includes ideas which are not necessarily specific to funerary ritual, resulting in a significant overlap with other areas of ritual activity.<sup>891</sup> At the same time, many elements of funerary rites are clearly represented in funerary literature, such as the *Opening of the Mouth* rite, which is often enacted by divine persons in these texts.<sup>892</sup> In these texts, the protagonist, often an

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<sup>886</sup> C. Eyre, "Funerals, Initiation and Rituals of Life in Pharaonic Egypt", p. 292; Harco Willems, "The Social and Ritual Context of a Mortuary Liturgy of the Middle Kingdom (CT Spells 30–41)", in: Harco Willems (ed.), *Social Aspects of Funerary Culture in the Egyptian Old and Middle Kingdoms: Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Leiden University, 6–7 June, 1996*, Leuven: Peeters, 2001, p. 340–346, 268–369. For a comparable phenomenon in temple liturgy, see H. Hays, "Between Identity and Agency", esp. p. 17 ff.

<sup>887</sup> Jan Assmann, "Das Bild des Vaters im Alten Ägypten", in Hubertus Tellenbach (ed.), *Das Vaterbild in Mythos und Geschichte: Ägypten, Griechenland, Altes Testament, Neues Testament*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, p. 30–33. H. Hays, "Funerary Rituals (Pharaonic Period)", p. 8.

<sup>888</sup> J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 42–52.

<sup>889</sup> E.g., PT 510 § 1128a–1131a; PT 519 § 1215a–b.

<sup>890</sup> H. Willems, *The Coffin of Heqata*, p. 162–163. Interestingly, there are spells whose principal function was to dissuade the father from calling his son to him to the afterlife. See e.g., CT 37 I, 157–176. See also Reinhard Grieshammer, *Das Jenseitsgericht in den Sargtexten*, Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1970, p. 25–29; Reinhard Grieshammer, "Zur Formgeschichte der Sprüche 38–41 der Sargtexte," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 6/7 (1975/76): 231–235; Adrian de Jong, "Coffin Texts Spell 38: The Case of the Father and the Son," *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 21 (1994): 141–157.

<sup>891</sup> C. Eyre, "Funerals, Initiation and Rituals of Life in Pharaonic Egypt", p. 292.

<sup>892</sup> CT 231 III, esp. 299d–f; PT § 14 c–d. Cf. E. Otto, *Mundöffnungsritual* II, 8; 20; 84; Jean-Claude Goyon, *Rituels funéraires de l'ancienne Égypte: le rituel de l'Embaumement; le rituel de l'Ouverture de la Bouche; les Livres des Respirations. Introduction, traduction et commentaire*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1972, p. 91, Paul Barguet, "Les textes spécifiques des différents panneaux des sarcophages du Moyen Empire", *Revue d'Égyptologie* 23 (1971), p. 15; H. Willems, *The Coffin of Heqata*, p. 80. It should be noted that by the New Kingdom, when the liturgy was codified, the ritual was a complex of activities traceable back to practices outside the funerary sphere proper. For the earlier rite, see Ann Roth "The *ps̄-kf* and the

officiant acting on behalf of a deceased beneficiary, undergoes a series of interactions which as a whole conform to the rite of passage model.<sup>893</sup> These mythical interactions can be related to funerary practices, whose structure, however, is quite different. In fact, Hays has argued that van Gennep's model is unsuitable for Egyptian ritual since it imposes a narrative structure on a series of events that "follow a quite different manner of organization – one that might even be entirely unique."<sup>894</sup> Furthermore, the model assumes cross-cultural meaning to individual stages, which are significantly different from those applied to these rites by Egyptians.<sup>895</sup>

Narrative literature, unlike ritual, is essentially linear in that the text typically has a beginning and an ending.<sup>896</sup> Also, the textual medium is typically two-dimensional, unlike ritual which takes place in three-dimensional space and throughout an extended period of time.<sup>897</sup> Unlike stories, rituals do not need to have a sequential order, quite the opposite.<sup>898</sup> Although there are inevitably factors limiting the way in which ritual activities can be arranged, this needs to be distinguished from the dependence of a narrative text's

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'Opening of the Mouth' Ceremony: A Ritual of Birth and Rebirth", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 78 (1992), p. 117–118. E. Otto, *Mundoffnungsritual* II, 2. Cf. J.-C. Goyon, *Rituels funéraires*, p. 89–94. For the non-funerary connections identified by Otto, see Ann Roth, "Fingers, Stars, and the 'Opening of the Mouth': The Nature and Function of the *ntrwj*-blades", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 79 (1993): 57–79; René van Walsem, "The *psš-kf*: An Investigation of an Ancient Egyptian Funerary Instrument", *Oudheidkundige mededelingen uit het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden* 59–60 (1978–1979), esp. p. 220–222.

<sup>893</sup> Christopher Eyre, *The Cannibal Hymn: A Cultural and Literary Study*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002, p. 148–150. H. Willems, *The Coffin of Heqata*, p. 380–381

<sup>894</sup> H. Hays, "The End of Rites of Passage", p. 170.

<sup>895</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>896</sup> Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 51–60; Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time", in William Mitchell, *On Narrative*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 170.

<sup>897</sup> Remarkably, Hays' criticism of van Gennep's model is based on his analysis of the representation of a funeral procession depicted on the walls of the central hall of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty tomb of Rekhmire. Such depiction shares traits with an actual event in three-dimensional space in that it defies the idea of a fixed beginning and ending more than a linear text would. Hays has explored this topic in relation to the Pyramid Texts, which too were inscribed on walls of the pyramid chambers, arguing that there was no fixed order in which the whole of the texts inside a pyramid could be read. Instead, he identifies groups of spells, which do belong together like literary paragraphs, and which could be relatively freely arranged vis-à-vis each other to produce a complex specific to each pyramid: "from pyramid to pyramid, there is no single beginning, middle, and end." (Harold Hays, *The Organization of the Pyramid Texts: Typology and Disposition*, vol. 1, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2012, p. 113 ff.). Aspen Aarseth has cited the example of the Pyramid Texts in his description of "ergodic texts", which are defined by their relative difficulty for the reader, who has to actively find his own route through the text. This element of multicursality causes the experience of the text to be highly individual. (Espen Aarseth, *Cybertext–Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, p. 1–10.)

<sup>898</sup> H. Hays, "The End of Rites of Passage", p. 169–170. See also Stephen Prickett, *Narrative, Religion and Science: Fundamentalism versus Irony 1700–1999*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 23–25.

coherence upon the order of its constituent parts.<sup>899</sup> Since van Gennep's model is essentially narrative, it is far more suitable for narrative material than for performances.<sup>900</sup>

In each ritual, a specific syntax can be identified thanks to which its individual components constitute a sensible whole.<sup>901</sup> In funerary literature, a comparably more linear medium, the same subject matter – funerary activities – can be rendered as a narrative, where one state follows another using the metaphor of transition through space. Studying the cosmology of *Coffin Texts* ferryman spells, Willems concludes that the passage of the deceased (or proxy) would be envisioned as a transition from the western to the eastern horizon, which is in line with established Egyptian funerary beliefs.<sup>902</sup> More interestingly, he identified a set of mythical events taking part in between the two horizons.<sup>903</sup> While there is no reason to believe that there was just one correct way between the west and east,<sup>904</sup> at the same time the various paths need not be completely different either, and elements of a common structure emerge in the Ferryman Spells.<sup>905</sup>

The arrival at the Western horizon is marked by a tribunal session headed by the sun-god.<sup>906</sup> The deceased then passes gates<sup>907</sup> or ferrymen,<sup>908</sup> embarking on a night bark<sup>909</sup> or a road<sup>910</sup> traversing the netherworld. He faces the obstacle of gatekeepers<sup>911</sup> or ferrymen,<sup>912</sup>

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<sup>899</sup> Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, p. 305–313

<sup>900</sup> Cf. R. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, esp. p. 105–107.

<sup>901</sup> H. Hays, “The End of Rites of Passage”, p. 181.

<sup>902</sup> Willems distinguishes two main trajectories from the east to the west in Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom mortuary literature: a direct one and one where the north serves as an intermediate point. (H. Willems, *Coffin of Heqata*, p. 366) Cf. Hermann Kees, *Totenglauben und Jenseitsvorstellungen der alten Ägypter: Grundlagen und Entwicklung bis zum Ende des Mittleren Reiches*, Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1926, p. 62–63.

<sup>903</sup> H. Willems, *Coffin of Heqata*, p. 369–374.

<sup>904</sup> See e.g., CT 118 II, 140b. While the deceased takes “the great path” (*w3.t wr.t*) (CT 118 II, 140e), there are guides who know the *paths* to Osiris (*w3.wt n ntr ʿ3*) (CT 118 II, 141b).

<sup>905</sup> H. Willems, *Coffin of Heqata*, p. 366.

<sup>906</sup> CT 118 II, 140b; CT 644 VI, 264o.

<sup>907</sup> CT 644 VI, 264g.

<sup>908</sup> CT 117 II, 138f. The ferryman is rendered as *hr=f-h3=f* “Whose face (sight) is behind him”, a name attested since the Pyramid Texts. See e.g., PT 1091a. See also LGG V, 303; Leo Depuydt, “Der Fall des ‘Hintersichschauers’”, *Göttinger Miszellen* 126 (1992), p. 35.

<sup>909</sup> CT 118 II 139d; CT 644 VI, 264j–o.

<sup>910</sup> CT 117 II, 138f; CT 118 II 140e; 141f.

<sup>911</sup> CT 383 V, 45a ff. CT 643 VI, 263i–s.

<sup>912</sup> E.g., CT 117 II, 138f; CT 398 V, 121a ff.; CT 400 V, 171b.

which seek to bar his way. A body of water is crossed on the ferry,<sup>913</sup> which can include a stop in the northern region of the sky, where sustenance is available.<sup>914</sup> Arriving at the eastern horizon, the deceased reaches the place where Osiris resides<sup>915</sup> and brings offerings to him.<sup>916</sup> Embalming is also performed,<sup>917</sup> and the enemies of Osiris are vanquished.<sup>918</sup> As the deceased departs the eastern horizon, the sun rises, and the day bark starts its journey across the sky.<sup>919</sup>

In previous chapters, similarities with funerary rites and literature have already been identified in the *Contendings*, notably between the interaction of Isis and Nemty and the ferryman spells or in *Isis' Ruse*, where Seth plays the role of the sacrificial animal from the *Opening of the Mouth*. Against the background of Willems' synoptic reading of these *Coffin Text* spells, however, a very reminiscent structure emerges between the elements in the *Contendings*.

The commonality begins with the tribunal session excluding Isis from the proceedings, which marks a change of setting and places the lone goddess into the position of the officiant, who seeks to bring help to the beneficiary. She reaches an expanse of water where the ferryman presents himself as an obstacle. Passing her trial of wits, she secures passage across the water to Isle-in-the-Midst, an essentially intermediate place, where the gods eat. Tricking Seth, she enacts elements of the *Opening of the Mouth*,<sup>920</sup> which are followed by a favourable judgement of the divine tribunal. Here, Horus takes over the role of the protagonist, and the "beloved son" crosses to the other shore. Arriving there, he is equipped with a Crown, and enters the waters, from which he then rises. He enters the realm of Osiris, where he leaves the Eyes of Horus, the essential offering. Afterwards, Seth, the enemy of Osiris, is defeated and a with Horus as the newborn sun, a new day begins.

On top of these common elements with the Ferryman spells, the typically New Kingdom motif of the union of Re and Osiris finds a parallel in the *Contendings*. This topic has already been broached in chapter 3.9.3, but the connection has not been fully explored. In *Book of the Dead chapter 17*, the following is stated:

"-I know the Great God who is in it (the West).

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<sup>913</sup> CT 398 V, 121a ff.

<sup>914</sup> CT 241 III 326j; CT 398 V, 153a-c.

<sup>915</sup> CT 241 III 325j-326b; CT 398 V 159e-f. Cf. H. Willems, *Coffin of Heqata*, p. 173. CT 399B V, 167s.

<sup>916</sup> CT 236 III, 306a; CT 327B III, 315e. Cf. CT 207 III, 155a.

<sup>917</sup> CT 644 VI, 265a-g.

<sup>918</sup> CT 359 V, 14a-b.

<sup>919</sup> CT 75, 322a; CT 332 IV, 178a-e.

<sup>920</sup> Cf. CT 399B V, 167n-o.

- Who is he?

- He is Osiris.

*Alternatively:* Acclaimer of Re is his name; he is the *ba* of Re, with whom he himself copulates.” (*ḥknw-rꜥ rn=f bꜣ pw n rꜥ nk=f*<sup>921</sup> *im=f ds=f*)<sup>922</sup>

This unusual rendering of the nightly union of the two gods is possible because Osiris occupies a similar structural position to the body of Nut.<sup>923</sup> Since both the deities personify space through which the solar deity passes at night and where he achieves his rebirth, an interweaving of symbolic expressions specific to each of the deities occurs.<sup>924</sup> Consequently, the body of Osiris may represent the womb<sup>925</sup> or the vulva of the sky goddess, i.e., the eastern horizon.<sup>926</sup>

The passivity and generative potential of Osiris can be correlated with the situation of Seth in the *Homosexual Episode*. Despite the latter’s ostentatious virility, the only way for

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<sup>921</sup> Van Heel’s remark about the word *nk* is relevant here: “the verb *nek* is politely translated as ‘to have sex,’ although the better translation is the four-letter word.” There is no ambiguity as to the activity denoted by the Egyptian term. See K. van Heel, *Mrs. Naunakhte & Family*, p. 185. For a discussion of this word, see R. Landgráfová, H. Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess I*, p. 75, n. 143.

Toivari-Viitala argues that during the New Kingdom, this word denoted sexual relationships between individuals of unequal status, where the *neked* person may not have always been a consenting partner. The choice of word in this chapter of the *Book of the Dead* may then reflect the notion of Osiris as the passive and Re as the active participant in their union. Cf. J. Toivari-Viitala, *Women at Deir el-Medina*, p. 153 ff.

<sup>922</sup> Translation of J. Darnell, work cited in this note. See Ursula Rößler-Köhler, *Kapitel 17 des ägyptischen Totenbuchs*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1979, p. 214, 241. Cf. the earlier version in Matthieu Heerma van Vos, *De Oudste Versie van Dodenboek 17a, Coffin Texts Spruch 335*, Leiden: J. J. Groen & Zoon, 1963, p. 18. See also the discussion in John Darnell, *The Enigmatic Netherworld Books of the Solar-Osirian Unity: Cryptographic Compositions in the Tombs of Tutankhamun, Ramesses VI and Ramesses IX*, Fribourg – Göttingen: Academic Press – Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004, p. 393–396. The name Acclaimer of Re is also present in the *Amduat*, Erik Hornung, *Das Amduat: Die Schrift des verborgenen Raumes, herausgegeben nach Texten aus den Gräbern des Neuen Reich*, vol. 1, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963, p. 16; nr. 105.

<sup>923</sup> Cf. Joachim Spiegel, “Versuche zur Verschmelzung von Re und Osiris”, in: Wolfhart Westendorf (ed.), *Göttinger Totenbuchstudien: Beiträge zum 17. Kapitel*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975, p. 129–181.

From this perspective, the wording of *Con. 2,12*, where Re is said to “*sleep on* (behalf of) Osiris”, may be understood in a rather sensual manner.

<sup>924</sup> Cf. Silvia Wiebach-Koepke, *Sonnenlauf und kosmische Regeneration zur Systematik der Lebensprozesse in den Unterweltbüchern*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007, fig. III.

<sup>925</sup> Jan Zandee, “The Birth-Giving Creator-God in Ancient Egypt”, in Alan Lloyd. (ed.), *Studies in Pharaonic Religion and Society in Honour of J. Gwyn Griffiths*, London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1992, p. 177. Winfried Barta, “Osiris als Mutterleib des Unterweltlichen Sonnengottes in den Jenseitsbüchern des Neuen Reiches”, *Jaarbericht Ex Oriente Lux* 29 (1985–1986): 98–105.

<sup>926</sup> J. Darnell, *The Enigmatic Netherworld Books of the Solar-Osirian Unity*, p. 395. Cf. Wolfhart Westendorf, “Horizont und Sonnenscheibe”, In László Kákosy (ed.), *Recueil d’études dédiées à Vilmos Wessetzky à l’occasion de son 65e anniversaire*, Budapest: Chaires d’histoire ancienne, p. 391.

him to take part in the generative process is to be a gestation vessel for the semen of Horus, the active member of the pair. This duality of an active and passive element connecting to (re)produce the world is an essential element of Egyptian cosmology.<sup>927</sup> The way in which the union of Horus and Seth gives rise to the moon, the precursor to the morning sun, has already been discussed.<sup>928</sup> The comparison with the *Book of the Dead* Chapter 17 and possibly the *Amduat* allows us to confidently link the *Homosexual Episode* with the motif of the union of Osiris and Re in funerary literature, identifying another element within the *Contendings* which can be integrated into the sequence produced in comparison with the *Coffin Texts*.

The purpose of this exercise is not to show that the succession of events in the *Contendings* is the same as that described by Willems on the texts of Heqata's coffin. The narrativity of the *Coffin Texts* is significantly less visible and required a measure of interpretative work. The *Contendings* and this funerary corpus are textual entities of quite different nature, and a direct comparison would be fraught with issues. The idea is rather to show ways in which elements of funerary beliefs can be related in a narrative form to produce a meaningful whole. In the *Coffin Texts*, the elements are in the foreground while their ordering seems to be in secondary importance. Whereas in the *Contendings*, they are subdued in comparison with the narrative's progress through imaginary space. The comparison with Willems' work allows us to draw these funerary elements into the foreground, resulting in a narrative succession of funerary images, which do reflect a certain logic or, indeed, syntax: rules of arrangement between individual symbolic elements.

The result is a constellation of funerary mythemes which is both specific to the *Contendings* and consistent with those found in funerary literature. The elements chosen not only had to be established in the funerary genre and ordered in a meaningful way, but they also needed to be sufficiently polyvalent so as to allow the expression of other mythical ideas, such as those related to initiation as outlined previously, or to cosmogony, which will be discussed in the following chapters. These considerations lead to a preliminary conclusion that the *Contendings* had to be deliberately and carefully assembled to produce a coherent narrative work in which distinct cultural areas of religious significance intersected in such a way that enhanced the overall message instead of undermining it. This assumes not only an authorial context with a high degree of literary creativity, but also extensive familiarity with temple ritual and funerary beliefs, many of which are known to us only from works access to which was quite limited.

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<sup>927</sup> Cf. Jan Assmann, *Steinzeit und Sternzeit: Altägyptische Zeitkonzepte*, München: Wilhelm Fink, 2011, p. 13–85, fig. 12; Frédéric Servajean, *Djet et Neheh: Une histoire du temps égyptien*, Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 2007, 142 p.

<sup>928</sup> The association of the Opet feast with the new moon and the high rise of the Nile is interesting given the possible connection of the feast with the *Contendings* discussed in chapter 5.6.5 below. See M. Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 17–18.

The primary inspiration for the funerary symbols in the *Contendings* seems to be the Ferryman spells.<sup>929</sup> The heyday of this category of texts was in the Old and Middle Kingdoms, but they remained a staple of funerary literature throughout most of its history in the form of *Book of the Dead* Chapter 99, which is to a large extent identical with *Coffin Texts* spells 397 and 398.<sup>930</sup> Aside from its popularity, this specific vision of passage through the netherworld was likely motivated by its compatibility with other needs of the narrative and the symbolic baggage that the characters brought with them into the tale. The symbolic overlap between Nemty, himself a ferryman, and Seth, framed by the institution of the *Opening of the Mouth* rite, was probably a decisive factor. Most of the funerary motives in the *Contendings* can be traced to the Ferryman spells, with the notable exception of the union of Osiris and Re, which is typical of New Kingdom funerary compositions.<sup>931</sup> Finally, we may remark that although the relationship between Ferryman spells and corresponding funerary rites is complicated, it would be perhaps too careful to assume that no connections the *Contendings* are likely relatable to these rites themselves.

### 5.5.2 Liminality and Transition in Funerary Context

The structure of the funerary constellation in the *Contendings* is that of a rite of passage. Compared to the initiation model of Horus, however, it comprises a more complicated arrangement. In line with the remarks above, the transition through a liminal space is not performed by the deceased, but by a proxy. The tale actually includes two proxies who operate in succession – first Isis, who takes part in the interaction with the ferryman and enacts the *Opening of the Mouth* rite, and then Horus, who passes through the nightly realm between the two horizons. Now, even though the idea of a proxy accounts for the total absence of Osiris in this part of the tale, it is still quite conspicuous. The consideration, however, pales in comparison with the main difference between the account of the *Contendings*: the ferryman passages and the following acts leading up to Horus' fall on the mountain do not lead away from the west, but towards it. Only when Horus is struck down by Seth does his direction start to turn towards the point of sunrise, whose first indications are towards the end of the *Boat Race*.

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<sup>929</sup> See esp. H. Willems, *Coffin of Heqata*, p. 156–186. Cf. Radwan Ahmed, “The Celestial Ferryman in Ancient Egyptian Religion ‘Sailor of the Dead’”, *Journal of the General Union of Arab Archaeologists* 1 (2016): 125–165.

<sup>930</sup> Hermann Kees, “Zur lokalen Überlieferung des Totenbuch-Kapitels 99 und seiner Vorläufer”, in: Otto Firchow, (ed.), *Ägyptologische Studien*, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, p. 176–185; H. Willems, *Coffin of Heqata*, p. 157–158.

<sup>931</sup> Erik Hornung, *Die Nachtfahrt der Sonne: Eine altägyptische Beschreibung des Jenseits*, Düsseldorf – Zürich: Artemis und Winkler, 1998, p. 95. See also the primary sources listed in W. Barta, “Osiris als Mutterleib des Unterweltlichen Sonnengottes in den Jenseitsbüchern des Neuen Reiches”, p. 98–105.

The answer to both these questions is the same: the case of the *Contendings* is different precisely because the text is not funerary, and its beneficiary is not a deceased entity. Even though the fate of Osiris is implicit in the tale, the focus is the ascension of Horus, and everything else, including the rebirth of his father, is significant only in relation to this primary focus. However complicated the relationship between funerary literature and ritual may be, it is reasonable to believe that the texts are pertinent to the life-crisis or death of an individual and the religiously significant activities which follow it. This death is not metaphorical, but real in the strictest sense of the word: by the time the individual is subject to funerary rites, he is usually dead – the finite character of the human life is the decisive factor in the separation stage. Consequently, funerary literature focuses on the dangers of the liminal stage and on the rebirth of the deceased, which constitutes his reintegration into a new identity as a blessed ancestor. Royal succession, however, is a passage of a different kind, one where human biological processes do not so strongly interfere. From a symbolic standpoint, the matter of Horus' ascension to kingship is not only a drama of rebirth, but also of death, which must precede it. The sensitive topic is not excluded, because the story does not ultimately present a funerary rite, but an image of initiation, and a metaphorical death is less unsettling and precarious than an actual one. Finally, we may remark that the initiate does cross the threshold of his own volition, which is not typically the case with the deceased. This too may make the symbolic death a far more palatable motif.

Recalling the earlier discussion of positional kingship, we may recall that succession, especially in the royal context, is essentially imitative.<sup>932</sup> One succeeds his father by becoming him, and the funerary ritual, by which one legitimizes himself as the successor, is the same means by which the father has legitimized himself. In any state in which an Egyptian (man) might find himself, he is established and maintained in it by the virtue of his relationship with his father, and, once he is a father himself, with his son. The chain of succession forms a matrix of interdependence in which each life-stage is preconditioned by the support of one's predecessors, who have already walked the same path.<sup>933</sup> Crossing to the western shore, Horus voluntarily retraces the steps of Osiris in an expression of filial imitation and loyalty.<sup>934</sup> The path of Horus leads to his father in the realm of death, but his close encounter does not end with him taking Osiris' side, but instead propels him to the heights of cosmic hierarchy, the divine king of the netherworld serving as his partner in a mystical equivalent of a gravitational slingshot manoeuvre. Instead of becoming a definitive state, death, be it purely symbolic, or literal, is an event, which

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<sup>932</sup> Cf. J. Janssen, R. Janssen, *Growing Up and Getting Old in Ancient Egypt*, p. 59.

<sup>933</sup> See e.g., M. Pehal, "New Kingdom Royal Succession Strategies and Their Possible Old Kingdom Antecedents", p. 4 ff.

<sup>934</sup> For filial love as the force responsible for maintaining the connection between the living and the dead, see J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 41 ff.



allows an individual to change themselves fundamentally, be it from a prince to a king or from a simple man to a powerful ancestor.

We can press this point further. Burial is essentially transformative as the deceased is incorporated into a new class of beings, becoming an *akh*, a state defined by the (regained) potency and capacity for effective action.<sup>935</sup> An *akh* was a being of great power, which exercised control over natural phenomena and could move freely at will.<sup>936</sup> The effectiveness of the *akh* was related to the ability to cross “borderlines between the human and divine spheres, and between the world of the living and the realm of the dead.”<sup>937</sup> The significance of the *akh*’s capacity to negotiate this seemingly inviolable border will be important later in this work. As such, the deceased as *akh* could communicate with the living,<sup>938</sup> mediate between them and the gods,<sup>939</sup> and also act in a manner beyond the ability of normal humans.<sup>940</sup> The nature of this effectiveness is indicated by the frequently used phrase *ḳh iḳr* “an able *akh*.”<sup>941</sup> Julie Troche argues that this should be understood “with the implication of being able or effective for someone/thing.”<sup>942</sup> In fact, one of the primary roles of the dead was to be useful for the living by employing their newfound powers to benefit their relatives on earth. Consequently, a significant aspect of being *akh* was relational in nature.<sup>943</sup>

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<sup>935</sup> Gertie Englund, *Akh: Une notion religieuse dans l'Égypte pharaonique*, Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1978, 227 p.; Florence Friedman, *On the Meaning of Akh in Egyptian Mortuary Texts*, PhD Thesis: Brandeis University, 1981; Florence Friedman, “The Root Meaning of 3ḫ: Effectiveness or Luminosity?” *Serapis* 8 (1985): 39–46; Florence Friedman, “Akh”, in Donald Redford (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 47–48.; Julia Hsieh, *Ancient Egyptian Letters to the Dead: The Realm of the Dead Through the Voice of the Living*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2022, esp. p. 61 ff.; Jiří Janák, “Akh”, in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2013, p. 1. Accessed at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7255p86v>; Karl Jansen-Winkeln, “‘Horizont’ Und ‘Verklärtheit’: Zur Bedeutung Der Wurzel 3ḫ” *Studien Zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 23 (1996): 201–215; Julia Troche, *Origins of Apotheosis in Ancient Egypt*, Dissertation: Brown University, 2015, esp. p. 35 ff.

<sup>936</sup> N. Hsieh, *Ancient Egyptian Letters to the Dead*, p. 67.

<sup>937</sup> J. Janák, “Akh”, p. 1. See also Jan Assmann, *Tod und Jenseits im alten Ägypten*, München: C. H. Beck, 2001, p. 36–37, 440–444.

<sup>938</sup> Nicola Harrington, *Living with the Dead: Ancestor Worship and Mortuary Ritual in Ancient Egypt*. Oxford – Oakville: Oxbow Books, 2013, p. 7; J. Troche, *Origins of Apotheosis in Ancient Egypt*, p. 38.

<sup>939</sup> John Baines, “Society, Morality, and Religious Practise”, in Byron Shafer (ed.) *Religion in ancient Egypt*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991, p. 151–161.

<sup>940</sup> See e.g., Robert Demarée, *The Ax iqr n Ra-stelae: On Ancestor Worship in Ancient Egypt*, Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1983, p. 213–218; J. Hsieh, *Ancient Egyptian Letters to the Dead*, p. 80 ff.

<sup>941</sup> R. Demarée, *The Ax iqr n Ra-stelae*, p. 197; J. Hsieh, *Ancient Egyptian Letters to the Dead*, p. 64–70.

<sup>942</sup> J. Troche, *Origins of Apotheosis in Ancient Egypt*, p. 52.

<sup>943</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

This effectiveness of the deceased father was complemented by the effectiveness of the son, who first and foremost made sure that he did become an *akh*.<sup>944</sup> The establishment of the father as an *akh* restored his utility towards his relatives and vice versa. Consequently, this transformation amounts to a recreation of the deceased's social ties, which together with bodily integrity comprise the essential traits of a living human being.<sup>945</sup> Since the continued existence of the deceased in the afterlife had to be maintained by ritual activity, the reciprocity of mutual beneficence between father and son continued even after the successful conclusion of burial rites, their fates intertwined regardless of the former's demise.<sup>946</sup> As Horus empowers himself through his near-death experience, he ensures that the same applies to his father. That the tale emphasizes Horus' side of this complementary relationship is a matter of focus, not of theology.

### 5.5.3 Osiris as Liminal Space

In funerary literature, reaching Osiris is a crucial element and the god's absence in Horus's passage through the nightly liminal realm should therefore be addressed briefly. Thankfully, the poetic dexterity of Egyptian authors has equipped us with symbolic images that can reconcile his absence in the tale with his significance for its protagonist.

The reason Osiris is not explicitly shown as a character in the nether world is that solar Horus can be envisioned as passing through his father's body, spanned between the two horizons as the Ruty lions.<sup>947</sup> Climbing up the mountain, Horus enters Osiris' domain, and comes in direct contact with him in a cosmic equivalent of an embrace, which is the traditional means of transferring *ka* from father to son. This reading can be compared with a passage of *Memphite Theology*, where the motifs of mountain, embrace and succession coincide.<sup>948</sup> Again, we need to recall that Horus acts out the transition of Osiris in his own person, enacting both his and his father's transformation in at the same time:

“And so Osiris entered the earth in the royal mountain at the north of this land, where he had arrived. His son Horus appeared as king of Upper and

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<sup>944</sup> J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 42–52; C. Eyre, “Funerals, Initiation and Rituals of Life in Pharaonic Egypt”, p. 292; H. Willems, *Coffin of Heqata*, p. 340–346, 368–369.

<sup>945</sup> J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 39 ff.

<sup>946</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>947</sup> For Ruty, see e.g., Hans Goedicke, “Ruty und andere Tiergötter”, in Manfred Bietak et al. (eds.), *Zwischen den beiden Ewigkeiten: Festschrift Gertrud Thausing*, Wien: Institut für Ägyptologie der Universität Wien, p. 35–43. For attestations of the god in funerary literature, see D. Reemes, *The Egyptian Ouroboros*, p. 73 ff.

<sup>948</sup> J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 44.

Lower Egypt in the arms of his father Osiris, in the midst of the gods who were before and behind him.”<sup>949</sup>

The significance of Horus in this transition is such that the whole passage through the realm of the dead in the *Contendings* is framed through alternative signs as the Way of Horus, which can be compared with “The Road the Sole One Inherited” (wA.t iwa.t wa) of Coffin Texts Spell 118.<sup>950</sup> How Horus is positioned by the *Contendings* as the monadic creator god will be shown in the following chapters. As he emerges from this dangerous period of transition in a symbolic equivalent of sunrise in the eastern horizon, the role of Osiris as the “The horizon from which Re goes forth”<sup>951</sup> is recalled.

Approaching the tale from this funerary perspective, we can finally place the exhort of Isis to Northwind at the beginning of the tale into proper context. It has been shown how this motif serves to establish the dependence of the deceased upon the beneficence of the king, the ultimate guarantor of funerary provisions.<sup>952</sup> Horus, much like the king, emerges in the tale as a solar ritual officiant bringing vital offerings, embodied in the two eyes which Horus leaves on the Western Mountain.<sup>953</sup> What previously seemed an apostrophe by Isis can now be related directly to her son. In the light of Willems’ view of the north as a mediating element between the east and the west can we argue that the Northwind of Horus is likewise a force spanning the divide between death and rebirth, emphasizing the two interconnected functions of the royal person: the particular responsibility of maintaining funerary cult, and the general principle of bridging the boundary between opposing elements of the universe.

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<sup>949</sup> *Memphite Theology* 22. Original publication in James Breasted, “The Philosophy of a Memphite Priest”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 39 (1901): 39–54. Translation of J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 44.

<sup>950</sup> CT 118 II 140e; 141f.

<sup>951</sup> PT 357 § 585a; PT 364 § 621b; PT 368 § 636c; PT 664B § 1887. See also F. Friedman, *On the Meaning of Akh Ax in Egyptian Mortuary Texts*, p. 87–9.

<sup>952</sup> See LÄ VI, 663; Eberhard Otto, “Geschichtsbild und Geschichtsschreibung in Ägypten”, *Die Welt des Orients* 3 (1966), p. 165. See also the discussion in H. Hays, “Between Identity and Agency in Ancient Egyptian Ritual”, p. 17 ff.

<sup>953</sup> See esp. Jan Assmann, *Der König als Sonnenpriester: Ein kosmographischer Begleittext zur kultischen Sonnenhymnik in thebanischen Tempeln und Grabern*, Gluckstadt: J. J. Augustin, 1970, p. 19 and 58–70.

#### 5.5.4 The Significance of the Mountain

The mountain on which Horus falls and rises again is a symbol with strong connotations of birth, especially in a solar context, the *Book of the Caverns*, for example, explicitly calling the place of the emergence of the newborn sun the “Mountain of the East.”<sup>954</sup>

Consequently, the mountain reflects the same idea as the *benben* mound<sup>955</sup> and the eastern *akhet*,<sup>956</sup> which itself symbolically points to the vulva<sup>957</sup> of the sky goddess,<sup>958</sup> from whence the reborn sun emerges in the morning.<sup>959</sup> Looking back to the episode *Hathor and Re*,

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<sup>954</sup> Alexandre Piankoff, “Le livre des Quererts: sixième division (Fin du «Livre des Quererts»)”, *Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale* 43 (1945), pl. 144; Joshua Robertson, “The Early History of New Kingdom Netherworld Iconography: A Late Middle Kingdom Apotropaic Wand Reconsidered”, in David Silverman, William Simpson, Josef Wegner (eds.), *Archaism and Innovation: Studies in the Culture of Middle Kingdom Egypt*, New Haven: Yale Egyptological Seminar, 2009, p. 434.

<sup>955</sup> Jaromír Krejčí, Massimiliano Nuzzolo, “Heliopolis and the Solar Cult in the Third Millenium BC”, *Ägypten Und Levante* 27 (2017), p. 364. On the benben, see esp. Karl Martin, *Ein Garantsymbol des Lebens: Untersuchung zu Ursprung und Geschichte der altägyptischen Obeliskten bis zum Ende des Neuen Reiches*, Hildesheim: HÄB, 1977, p. 10–12; Mohamed Moursi, *Die Hohenpriester des Sonnengottes von der Frühzeit Ägyptens bis zum Ende des Neuen Reiches*, München – Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1972, p. 169. Anthony Spalinger, “Nut and the Egyptologists”, *Studien Zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 41 (2012): 353–377, esp. 364.

<sup>956</sup> See e.g., LÄ III, 7.

<sup>957</sup> With regard to the following note, it might be more appropriate to visualize the mountain on the horizon as the pubic mound of the goddess rather than her vulva. Imagining the goddess as stretched across the firmament with her feet and hands planted beyond the horizon, the mons pubis would obscure her genitalia just as non-metaphorical montes obscured the true horizon.

<sup>958</sup> The cosmic topography of the body of the sky goddess is a complex topic, due to the variety of Egyptian statements on the topic. See Silvia Zago, “Imagining the Beyond: The Conceptualization of Duat between the Old and the Middle Kingdoms”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 54 (2018): 203–217. In many of the sources, it seems that the emergence of the sun-god from the genitalia of Nut precedes the sunrise and can be correlated with the dawn, when the sun is still obscured behind the visible horizon, and which can be articulated in religious terms as being “below the *akhet*.” The text of the *Book of the Night*, for example, describes the rising Sun as “Khepri, climbing to the Akhet, having entered from the mouth (of Nut) and come out of the vulva (of Nut)”; Gilles Roulin, *Le Livre de la Nuit: Une composition égyptienne de l’au-delà*, vol. 1, Fribourg – Göttingen: Universitätsverlag – Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996, p. 341–42, and vol. 2, pl. xx, translation of Silvia Zago, “Imagining the Beyond”, p. 207.

*Papyrus Carlsberg I* expresses this idea in chronological terms, describing Re as leaving the goddess in Hour 10 of the night, and spending hours 11 and 12 outside her but not yet risen. See A. Spalinger, “Nut and the Egyptologists”, p. 369. See also the discussion in Joshua Roberson, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Earth*, Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2012, p. 32–37, 39–41, 54–59. Cf. Alexander Piankoff, “The Sky-Goddess Nut and the Night Journey of the Sun”, *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 20 (1934): 57–6.

<sup>959</sup> Otto Neugebauer, Richard Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts I: The Early Decans*, Brown Egyptological Studies, Providence – London: Brown University Press – Lund Humphries, 1960, p. 83. A. Spalinger, “Nut and the Egyptologists”, esp. p. 369. See also Cairo coffin JE 29660 (Andrzej Nawiński, *Studies on the Illustrated Theban Funerary Papyri of the 11th and 10th Centuries B.C.*, Göttingen – Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Schweiz – Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, p. 39; Victoria Museum n° 228 (Lana Troy,

which forms a parallel pair with *Hathor and Horus* in the *Contendings*, we can observe some significance in her showing her genitalia to the distraught sun-god. We have seen that this interaction mainly serves as model with which the parallel activity aimed toward Horus can be compared. In both cases, she puts her vulva to work, but where with the sun-god her (re)generative capacity is limited to raising the god's spirits, here she enacts Horus' rebirth from the threshold of death. We may also recall the Sinai connection discussed in chapter 3.5.1 to emphasize the association of Hathor with the eastern mountain, as well as her association with the hills of Western Thebes, which will be discussed in chapter 5.5.6. The significance of the mountain in solar rebirth naturally lends it a funerary aspect because the point at which the sun is reborn is not only the beginning of its journey across the sky, but also the ending of its sojourn in the realm of the dead.<sup>960</sup>

While this significance of the mountain seems an acceptable proposition, there is an issue with its generative interpretation. Naturally, the symbolic values described apply to the eastern mountain since they are related to actual solar cycle, in which the sun rises in the east. The tale, however, makes it quite clear that the affair takes place in the west. One clue is the last mention of a compass point which takes place at *Con* 8,2 when "the Ennead crossed to the western shore and sat on *the mountain* (*pꜣ ḏw*)." Horus and Seth afterwards enter the water and it is fathomable that they could emerge on the eastern side of this body of water, but there is nothing indicating that in the tale. The placement of the mountain in "Oasis-land" (*tꜣ-wḥꜣ.t*) at *Con*. 10,3 supports a western reading, since this phrase usually denotes oases Kharga and Dakhla, both in the Western desert.<sup>961</sup> In fact, the use of the definitive article at *Con*. 10,3 and *Con*. 13,7-8 in the *Boat Episode*, where Seth cuts its summit to fashion it into a boat could actually indicate that the same mountain is being referred to, localizing the entire liminal period of the two gods in the west.

It is rather interesting to see the mountain appear three times as a place of the encounter of Horus and Seth. The first two cases, when the White Crown is placed on the head of Horus with unsatisfactory results and when Horus is struck down, are inverse images of victory mixed with defeat – in the former Horus seems to win, but only finds himself in

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*Introductory guide to the Victoria Museum of Egyptian Antiquities at Uppsala University*, Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 1977). Cf. Joost Kramer, "The Symbolic Meaning of the Scene of Nut, Geb and Shu, *Kubaba* 1 (2010), p. 31.

<sup>960</sup> Erik Hornung, *Das Amduat: Die Schrift des verborgenen Raumes*, vol. 2, Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1963, p. 104; Jorge Ogdon, "Some Notes on the Name and the Iconography of the God Akr," *Varia Aegyptiaca* 2 (1986): 127–35; J. Roberson, "The Early History of "New Kingdom" Netherworld Iconography", p. 429–33. See also James Allen, "The Cosmology of the Pyramid Texts," in William Simpson (ed.), *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, New Haven: Yale Egyptological Seminar, 1989, p. 21–22, n. 143.

<sup>961</sup> Henri Gauthier, *Dictionnaire des noms géographiques contenus dans les textes hiéroglyphiques*, vol. 1, Cairo: Société Royale de Géographie d'Égypte, 1925, p. 203

more peril, whereas in the latter he seems to lose, but emerges empowered. When the mountain comes up for the last time in the *Boat Race*, it is Seth who destroys it by first removing its top for his boat, which he subsequently sinks along with his own chances of victory. Once again, we can observe the way in which Seth's excess, in this case exemplified by the powerful display of defacing a mountain, both undermines his aspirations and enables the success of Horus. Going back to the notion of the *akhet*-mountain as a cosmic feature obscuring the actual emergence of the sun in the morning, one might remark that Seth made sure that the brilliant appearance of Horus is as visible as possible. Here, we can also note that from a symbolic standpoint, the Egyptians did not necessarily differentiate between the eastern and the western *akhet* in what has been called an "inclusive disjunction basic to Egyptian speculative thought."<sup>962</sup> The *akhet* could stand for both the singular and the two horizons, representing a complex idea of space where death and rebirth intertwine.<sup>963</sup> Consequently, we could argue that the western setting is emphasized in the tale to highlight the Osirian nature of the space, which is entered through the west, as is the case in the tale. When it is exited, the symbolism of Horus as the rising sun makes it clear that the narrative has symbolically reached the east.

If we expand on the idea of the eastern horizon as the genitalia of a deity, we could argue that the cutting of the mountain may be understood as opening of the womb. In Egyptian gynaecology, the female procreative apparatus was conceptualised as a container and approached through opposing principles of closing and opening.<sup>964</sup> Whereas outside of pregnancy its openness was desirable in that it facilitated menstruation and conception, pregnancy was defined by the womb's closure and the efforts to keep it that way until the proper time of birth.<sup>965</sup> As an essential breaker of boundaries, Seth was considered to be responsible for miscarriages, causing wombs to open before their time.<sup>966</sup> Most sources dealing with this aspect of Seth treat him as a danger that needs to be dealt with.<sup>967</sup> However, in *Magical Papyrus Harris III*, a different situation is presented:

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<sup>962</sup> D. Reemes, *The Egyptian Ouroboros*, p. 72, n. 7.

<sup>963</sup> Cf. Siegfried Schott, *Zum Weltbild der Jenseitsführer des neuen Reiches*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965, p. 187. See also A. Piankoff, *Mythological Papyri*, p. 30 ff.

<sup>964</sup> Cf. the sources in Markéta Preininger, *Lives of Women in Ancient Egypt*, MA Thesis: Charles University in Prague, 2016, p. 12 ff. See also Paul Frandsen, "The Menstrual 'Taboo' in Ancient Egypt", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 66 (2007): 81–106, esp. p. 101–102.

<sup>965</sup> Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993, p. 79 ff.

<sup>966</sup> H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 28–29. See also Wolfhart Westendorf, "Beiträge aus und zu den medizinischen Texten, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*" 92 (1966): 128–154; Mia Rikala, "Once More with Feeling: Seth the Divine Trickster", *Studia Orientalia* 101 (2007), p. 221.

<sup>967</sup> See e.g., CT 148 II, 209d–215a.

“As the mouth of the womb of Anat and Astarte was closed, the two great goddesses who were pregnant, but did not give birth, they were closed by Horus and they were opened by Seth.”<sup>968</sup>


Seth’s capacity to open the womb allows the goddesses to give birth. Much like in the case of the death and rebirth of Osiris, Seth here embodies the violence necessary to maintain the life-generating processes of the world. As the gestation of Horus in the otherworldly liminal space comes to an end, the womb enclosing him needs to be opened.<sup>969</sup> Seth proceeds with a savagery mirroring the bloody business of childbirth and which ultimately constitutes another crime, for which he will be punished.

Furthermore, the breaking of the mountain not only allows Horus to be born, but it opens up a passage between the two realms. The victorious rebirth of Horus is paralleled by the reappearance of his father Osiris, who can now communicate with the world of the living. In cutting the mountain, Seth once again acts in a way that is beneficial for Horus, but harmful to himself. The hollowed-out mountain top makes for a poor boat and the same deed which ushered the reborn Horus into the world dooms Seth to submission.

Seth’s violence against Osiris is thematized once more, and this time, Horus gains the upper hand. As remarked in a previous chapter, the god spearing a hippopotamus is an emblematic display of royalty, but the funerary symbolism invoked in this part of the tale allows us to make an extra interpretative step. Since Horus’ passage through the night is framed as that of the solar god through the Duat, the defeat of his enemy can be compared with that of Apep. The evil snake is defined first and foremost as the enemy of Re, and as Horus is taking on a solar identity, Seth is structurally forced into the role of Apep.

This may seem curious since it is Seth who typically deals with Apep, but here the tables are turned, and it is Seth who is being threatened with a harpoon. The image in the

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<sup>968</sup> *Mag. pap. Harris III*, 8, 9. Translation of H. Te Velde, *Seth: God of Confusion*, ). The significance of Seth as the “opening” force and Horus as the “closing” one will be shown in chapter 5.6 below. For Seth as the principle of , see A. Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, p. 77.

<sup>969</sup> The fact that the womb-mountain is both the entry and emergence point for Horus may seem curious and, in fact, at odds with the idea of mouth-vulva passage through the sky goddess, but there are actually sources supporting such a notion, especially with regards to tomb, which could, in a poetic twist, represent the womb. For the topic, see Adolf Rusch, “Die Entwicklung der Himmelsgöttin Nut zu einer Totengottheit,” *Mitteilungender Vorderasiatisch(-Ägyptisch)en Gesellschaft* 1 (1922): 18–22. Important new material was added in Sigfried Schott, “Nut spricht als Mutter und Sarg,” *Revue d’Égyptologie* 17 (1965): 81–87. For a more comprehensive treatment, see LÄ IV, 266–271; Jan Assmann, “Tod und Initiation im alten Ägypten,” in Hans Duerr (ed.), *Sehnsucht nach dem Ursprung: Zu Mircea Eliade*, Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat 1983, p. 336–359. See also P. Frandsen, “The Menstrual ‘Taboo’ in Ancient Egypt”, p. 101.

*Contendings* actually finds a parallel in the Coffin Texts, where the deceased is equated with Horus:<sup>970</sup>

“You have assumed the crown of Horus, the White Crown is made firm for you upon the dais, just as was done by Re for Horus at his coronation. Many serve you as Horus, leader of the Two Lands. (...) Spacious is your seat in the Bark; you sit in the Ship of God and you harpoon the hippopotamus in the Winding Waterway.”<sup>971</sup>

This passage bears obvious similarities with the *Contendings*, although the matter of Apep is absent. Firstly, we can argue that the spearing from a boat is a common theme of both defeats of Apep and descriptions of hippopotamus hunts as noted by Assmann.<sup>972</sup> Secondly, the defeat is framed as a manifestation of order and a just punishment, which the tale actually describes later.<sup>973</sup> Moreover, the defeat of Seth is presented as a gradual process, which can be compared with the account of the *Book of Day*. There, Isis fights Apep in the 6<sup>th</sup> hour with the use of magic and in cooperation with Seth,<sup>974</sup> which is the same as in *Isis' Ruse*, where, however, the complicity of Seth has a comically self-destructive character. The battle continues throughout hours 6 and 8 and only in hour 9, towards the twilight, is he defeated, as it is the case in the *Contendings*.<sup>975</sup> Finally, “the Sun-god himself, according to the Solar Phases Hymn, does not fight: the enemy is despatched not by him, but ‘for him’.”<sup>976</sup> Fulfilling his role as Apep, Seth defeats himself, and instead of having Horus finish him, the divine tribunal takes over, passing judgement without any need for Horus to intervene. When defeated by Seth, Apep is forced to “vomit what he has swallowed”,<sup>977</sup> which, in a metaphorical sense, Seth is forced to do as well.<sup>978</sup>

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<sup>970</sup> A similar rendition can be found in PT 519 § 1211a–1212a. Cf. Hermann Junker, *Der sehende und blinde Gott (Mxntj-irtj und Mxntj-n-irtj)*, München: Verlag der Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1942, p. 77 ff. For the Coffin Text spell, see also Hermann Kees, *Horus und Seth als Götterpaar*, vol. 2, Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1924, p. 79–80.

<sup>971</sup> CT 61 I, 257e–259b. Translation of R. Faulkner, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 1, p. 56.

<sup>972</sup> Jan Assmann, *Egyptian Solar*, p. 52, n. 82.

<sup>973</sup> Cf. Jan Assmann, *Liturgische Lieder an den Sonnengott: Untersuchungen zur altägyptischen Hymnik I*, Berlin: Bruno Hessling, 1969, p. 301.

<sup>974</sup> Alexandre Piankoff, *Le Livre du jour et de la nuit*, Cairo: IFAO, 1942, p. 16. The two gods are described the same way in the book of Amduat. (E. Hornung, *Das Amduat*, vol. 2, p. 130 ff.)

<sup>975</sup> A. Piankoff, *Le Livre du jour et de la nuit*, p. 18–19. Cf. J. Assmann, *Liturgische Lieder*, p. 297.

<sup>976</sup> J. Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom*, p. 53.

<sup>977</sup> J. Assmann, *Liturgische Lieder*, p. 198–199; Émile Chassinat, *Le temple d'Edfou, tome cinquième*, Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1930, 121.11–12; *Urk.* VI, 97.8–10; Jan Zandee, *Der Amunhymnus des Papyrus Leiden I 344, verso*, vol. 2., Leiden: Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, 1992, p. 543–545.

<sup>978</sup> Seth too is forced to expel the Moon crown from his head in what one can imagine would be a rather uncomfortable process.



Attempting to unlawfully usurp the crown, he is compelled to renounce it, and with this act, the crisis is ended.

Concluding this line of inquiry, we may finally remark that if Seth plays the Apep, then Horus does, in fact, enact the role of Seth. Fighting off the aquatic beast which bars the solar god's passage, he appears as a violent force which cannot be withstood, aggressive and annihilating.<sup>979</sup> Wielding the excessive virility of Seth, Horus takes on the mantle of kingship, bringing destruction to his foes, as his newfound strength contrasts sharply with his earlier impotence. The fact that Seth does not represent an element of nature that needs to be destroyed, but rather an integral part of the power which a king needs to appropriate, is the subject of the following chapter.

## 5.6 The Rebirth of Horus as Cosmogony

### 5.6.1 Egyptian 'Cosmogonies' as Philosophy

The conflation of the transition of Horus into a king with a funerary passage from life on earth to the afterlife seems a logical choice for the author. Images of death and rebirth are a staple of rite of status elevation throughout the world and the apparent significance of funerary themes in extant sources makes the idea of their interweaving with the topic of succession quite appealing. Furthermore, since the process of transformation into a blessed ancestor is, to a certain degree, a process of divinization, it represents a status elevation comparable with the way in which an ascending prince is imbued with the divine power of kingship.<sup>980</sup>

A similar logic seems to have guided the description of Horus as an emerging solar deity. Anticipated by the image of the sun-child in the Prologue and supported by the alteration of day and night together with other solar symbols, the *Contendings* frame the ascension of Horus as analogous to the cosmic significance of the diurnal cycle. Since both the royal ideology and funerary beliefs were thoroughly intertwined with solar theology by the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, it makes perfect sense that the tale presents such a multifaceted view of royal succession.

Since the Old Kingdom, the sun has served as the central element of Egyptian cosmology.<sup>981</sup> In many creation accounts, the development of the cosmos was correlated

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<sup>979</sup> Cf. J. Zandee, *Amunhymnus des Papyrus Leiden I 344*, p. 106–114. See also the significance of royal anger in I. Köhler, "Royal Rage and Private Anger in Ancient Egypt", p. 88–102.

<sup>980</sup> F. Friedman, *On the Meaning of Akh in Egyptian Mortuary Texts*, p. 97 ff. It should be noted that Egyptian likely perceived varying levels of divinity in various entities. See e.g., Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt*, p. 42 ff.

<sup>981</sup> See esp. Jan Assmann, *Ägypten: Theologie und Frömmigkeit einer frühen Hochkultur*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1984, p. 70 ff.; S. Quirke, *The Cult of Ra*, 184 p.

with the solar cycle, the first sunrise representing the birth of the creator god from primordial chaos.<sup>982</sup> As such, the sun is the “determinant of all life”, which “embodies in itself the pattern of existence.”<sup>983</sup> In the so-called Heliopolitan tradition, the creator god Atum reproduces himself into the first sexually distinguished pair of deities.<sup>984</sup> Their issue form the successive generations of deities, which together form the Ennead, the totality of the divine in the world.<sup>985</sup> The outcome of this process is the emergence of Re from the horizon, which marks the beginning of the world as the Egyptians knew it, defined by the sovereignty of the son-god and with it, the establishment of *maat*.<sup>986</sup> From a philosophical standpoint, this cosmology is eminently monistic: the creator god is essentially a monad which internally divides itself until the plurality of the universe is complete.<sup>987</sup>

Since Atum and Re are two facets of solar kingship, an idea embodied by the syncretic form Re-Atum, the theology of creation is eminently cyclical “as the sun can be understood not only as the source of the Ennead (in his identification with Atum), but also as the product of the Ennead, in his identification with the god Horus. As the son of Osiris and Isis, Horus is the ‘tenth member’ of the Ennead. As the ‘heir of his father’ he is both the culmination and the prime beneficiary of the great cycle of natural elements incorporated in the Ennead.”<sup>988</sup>

With the birth of Horus in the 4<sup>th</sup> generation since the emergence of Atum, the cosmos is complete, and the solar ruler assumes kingship.<sup>989</sup> It is in this capacity that the two gods merge as Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon.<sup>990</sup> Retrospectively, the development of the world can also be conceived as the development of Horus, which is in line with the solar king as the guarantor of *maat* on earth and the idea of *maat* as the defining element of creation against

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<sup>982</sup> J. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, p. 33–35.

<sup>983</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>984</sup> See e.g., Henk te Velde, “Relations and Conflicts between Egyptian Gods, Particularly in the Divine Ennead of Heliopolis”, in Hans Kippenberg (ed.), *Struggles of Gods: Papers of the Groningen Work Group for the Study of the History of Religions*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984, p. 257; J. Zandee, “The Birth-Giving Creator-God in Ancient Egypt”, p. 169–185.; J. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, p. 8 ff.

<sup>985</sup> Winfried Barta, *Untersuchungen zum Götterkreis der Neunheit*, München – Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1973, p. 48–50; E. Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt*, p. 221–2.23; Jan Zandee, “The Birth-Giving Creator-God in Ancient Egypt”, p. 178–179.

<sup>986</sup> Jan Assmann, *Ma'at: Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten*, München: C. H. Beck, 1990, p. 201 ff.

<sup>987</sup> J. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, p. 10 ff.

<sup>988</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>989</sup> E.g., CT 760 VI, 390d–h. See also Anaïs Tillier, “Sur la place d'Horus dans l'ennéade héliopolitaine”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 140 (2013): 70–77.

<sup>990</sup> Cf. the sources cited in J. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, p. 11–12.

the formlessness of chaos. As such, the self-creation of the creator god in primordial waters constitutes the creation of kingship itself, which is ultimately referred by the creator to the human: “The king was born in Nun, before heaven and earth came into being.”<sup>991</sup>

Returning to the *Contendings*, we may recall the circular nature of the narrative which allows us to conflate the two episodes in which Hathor appears. It has been shown that she plays very much the same part both in relation to Re and to Horus, which positionally identifies the two deities in line with the solar reading of Horus in the tale. Of course, the mythology of Re and Hathor as the returning goddess is rich in cosmogonic symbolism, as shown in the discussion of *Papyrus Bremner-Rhind* above.

Given these considerations, it is possible to approach the *Contendings* from a cosmogonic perspective. At this point it is important to mention that the present thesis understands Ancient Egyptian creation accounts as philosophical in character. This means that the ideas communicated in these texts were to a significant degree produced by speculative thought which systematically attempts to unravel and communicate the nature of the universe. That the Egyptians used religious, vital imagery, instead of purely abstract concepts, does not diminish the validity of their speculation.<sup>992</sup>

The various so-called “schools” of Egyptian thought consequently reflect different approaches to similar questions, which revolved about the issue of the development of being from non-being and can be related to elements of Greek philosophy.<sup>993</sup> Quirke aptly remarks that “Western Egyptologists tended to see each city as an independent centre of theological thought, opposing a Memphite to a Heliopolitan to a Hermopolitan ‘Theology’. This seems to me an imposition against the sources: each of these deities covers a separate area within a unified system of belief, such that Ra and Ptah do not compete for primacy but rather occupy different parts or aspects of the world in existence.”<sup>994</sup> In this way, differing textual accounts can be seen as expressions of intellectual creativity focusing on various elements and using different approaches, rather than representatives of defined or even dogmatic religious schools.<sup>995</sup>

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<sup>991</sup> Jan Assmann, *Sonnenhymnen in Thebanischen Gräbern*, no. 61. Translation of J. Zandee, *The Birth-Giving Creator God in Ancient Egypt*, p. 180. Cf. PT 486 § 1040a–b.

<sup>992</sup> Cf. J. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, ix–x.

<sup>993</sup> See e.g., J. Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom*, p. 173–174.

<sup>994</sup> Stephen Quirke, “Creation Stories in Ancient Egypt”, in Markham Geller, Mineke Schipper (eds.), *Imagining Creation*, Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 73.

<sup>995</sup> Cf. the discussion in Ragnhild Finnestad, “Ptah, Creator of the Gods: Reconsideration of the Ptah Sections of the Denkmal”, *Numen* 23 (1976): 81–113, esp. p. 82–83; Jan Assmann, *Ägypten - eine Sinngeschichte*, München: Hanser, p. 348, 387 ff. See also Hermann Junker, *Die politische Lehre von Memphis*, Berlin: Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1941, p. 7–8.

### 5.6.2 The Liminal Stage as a Creation Narrative

The present thesis approaches the *Contendings* as the outcome of such speculative thought. In this light, the liminal period of the tale represents not only the phase of the narrative where its protagonist is remade, but also the (re-)creation of the sun. Looking at its beginning, the *Diving Episode*, the image of the future solar god submerged in the “the flood of the sea” (*mt.t n w3d-wr*) at *Con* 8,10 immediately recalls the tradition of Atum floating in Nun in a state of potentiality.<sup>996</sup> Even though Nun is often depicted as a divine person, his presence around Atum does not refute the uniqueness and solitude of Atum; Nun represents the absence of structure, which is personalized only so that Atum can differentiate himself *against it*.<sup>997</sup> In the very beginning, he is, however, indistinguishable from it. The *Contendings* express this situation by giving both Horus and Seth the same form. Furthermore, their seclusion in the depths is such that even Isis cannot distinguish them.<sup>998</sup> In line with the character of the original state of non-being, there are no sensible relationships which would be the hallmarks of creation. There is only a sense of waiting so deep that it is almost like death.



The symbolic significance of this connection stems from the fact that the liminal state of Horus as initiate has the same characteristics as the world before creation: Horus is alone, accompanied only by the sheer, unruly force of Seth.<sup>999</sup>

When approaching Egyptian cosmogonic images from a philosophical perspective, it is important to keep in mind that while biological metaphor and mythical renditions were the chosen mode of work for Egyptian thinkers, these metaphors and renditions need not have been used differently in this context than, for example, temple ritual. Their purpose was not to express a fixed, authoritative version of creation, but to express rather abstract

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<sup>996</sup> For the relationship between *w3d-wr* and Nun, see Claude Vandersleyen, *Le delta et la vallée du Nil: le sens de ouadj our (wAD wr)*, Bruxelles: Safran, 2008, p. 24–25.

<sup>997</sup> For differentiation and non-differentiation as the defining element of being and non-being, respectively, see Henk Te Velde, “The Theme of the Separation of Heaven and Earth in Egyptian Mythology”, *Studia Aegyptiaca* 3 (1977), p. 161.

<sup>998</sup> The choice of word for the “Flood”, *mt.t*  is interesting, since it is very similar to the word *mt.r.w* “witness” . The term *mt.t* could have been used to articulate the idea that only the water is the witness to the contest of Horus and Seth. As described above, the word-play between the word *mt.r.w* (“witness”) and *mt.w.t* (“semen”) is present in the *Contendings*, making another pun using the same word a compelling idea. Of note is also the divine classifier for both *mt.t* and *w3d-wr*, indicating that a divine, cosmical entity is denoted rather than a simple body of water.

<sup>999</sup> A similar adaptation of older cosmogonic motifs can be observed in the descriptions of the Luxor temple as the primordial place of creation, where Amun replaces Atum as the creator submerged in the waters. Notably, Horus follows Amun in this function. This comparison is significant given the theological and festive considerations discussed in following chapters. See the discussion and sources cited in M. Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 26.

ideas, which could be done through a variety of superficially conflicting images.<sup>1000</sup> Even though Nun was a very popular choice of deity to represent primordial chaos, there were other ways of considering this philosophical problem. Ultimately, what the ancient thinkers strove to expound, was the way in which the universe developed from nothing: what the nature of non-being was and how it continued to be related to the universe.<sup>1001</sup> In this most basic sense, the relationship between the sun-god and primordial chaos and the relationship between Re and Osiris are analogous. In both, the primary element of creation is faced with its opposite, its absence. Whereas in the latter, the solar deity is framed rather as a living being facing an eminently human fate, in the former, he encompasses the whole universe in his person. Ultimately, however, the universe, much like any individual being, is significant precisely because it is alive. Both Osiris and Nun are primordial sources of life, each god playing this part in different contexts and in his own way.

The eminent hostility of Seth, however, corresponds rather to the negative portrayal of the watery element in the *Astarte Papyrus*, where Yam, the Sea, opposes the Ennead, than that of Nun, whom texts usually describe simply as an impersonal substance, but not as a threat.<sup>1002</sup> Furthermore, the enemy of Yam in the tale is Seth himself, which we can also

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<sup>1000</sup> Cf. the idea “of multiplicity of approaches and answers” in Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1948, p. 4, 18, 19, 91, 121.

<sup>1001</sup> Against e.g., V. Tobin, who argues that “this (primordial nothingness) does not, however, mean that the Egyptians had evolved a doctrine of creation out of nothing, for in the period before creation there had existed the primaeva waters of Nun, symbolic of chaos and disorder, the unbounded, and the negative infinite.” (Vincent Tobin, “Mytho-Theology in Ancient Egypt”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 25 (1988), p. 175). Tobin’s misapprehension results primarily from his refusal to acknowledge Egyptian cosmological thought as philosophical, resulting in an inability to fully appreciate the abstract ideas articulated through mythical images. Consequently, even though the images of Nun and the Ogdoad represent a very elegant rendering of negative theology, defining primordial nothingness only through its lack of traits characteristic of the created state (formlessness, invisibility, countlessness), he interprets the waters of Nun as a kind of potentiality which is, in fact, actual. Furthermore, he argues that, “The ancient Egyptians were neither philosophically nor theologically minded, and hence spiritual and religious values required an expression which was concrete and anthropomorphic,” going on to say that “we cannot, of course, properly claim that the Egyptians had developed a theological system, but we can quite correctly speak of an Egyptian mytho-theological system, one which expressed through the mythic symbols of its gods and its traditions the abstract concepts which later civilizations would express through an abstract philosophy or theology.” (Ibid., p. 169) We may respond by invoking the many myths employed by Plato to articulate philosophical points and, of course, Catholic theology, which uses metaphors of God’s personality traits and emotions articulate its doctrine. Neither anthropomorphism nor mythical language are exclusive with philosophy nor “theological systems.” Cf. the work of Bickel, who instead speaks of Nun as “pre-existence,” which is reconcilable with the argument of this thesis. (Susanne Bickel, *La cosmogonie égyptienne avant le Nouvel Empire*, p. 23–32.

<sup>1002</sup> Cf. the discussion of the sources in S. Hollis, *The Ancient Egyptian “Tale of the Two Brothers”*, p. 158. See also J. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, p. 3–7; Cloé Caron, “Nun: A Traditional and Static conception? The Evolution of the Conception of Primeval Matter between the Middle and the New Kingdoms”, in Andrea Kahlbacher, Elisa Priglinger (eds.), *Tradition and Transformation in Ancient Egypt: Proceedings of the Fifth International Congress for Young Egyptologists, 15-19 September, 2015, Vienna, Vienna: Austrian*

compare to the reading of the *Two Brothers* earlier in this thesis when the character of *nht* was discussed.


An important observation needs to be made at this point. In the Ramesside period, the association of Seth and Baal into a syncretic deity marked a period in which the god was very prominent in royal ideology as a paragon of strength and vitality.<sup>1003</sup> The *Contendings* reflect this situation to some degree as they repeatedly emphasize Seth's physical prowess as a positive quality with royal connotations.<sup>1004</sup> Interestingly, Pehal argues that since Seth of the *Astarte Papyrus* represents the positive, royal aspect of Seth, then the Sea, reflects the tradition of Osiris as a dangerous lord of the underworld.<sup>1005</sup> This is visible in the *Contendings* in the threat Osiris makes to the Ennead if they do not conform to his wishes. Framed like this, an Osirian reading of Seth makes sense, especially considering Te Velde's very insightful proposition that the two gods are merely two facets of a very complex view of death, which is both an enemy of life and its ultimate source.<sup>1006</sup> Whereas typically Seth embodies its destructiveness while Osiris its fruitful nature, the *Contendings* sideline Osiris and present Seth in a more complex manner, and he exhibits both the aspects of death. This seeming paradox points to a complicated notion which hides in the very heart of the narrative: the very same power which empowers the king will also eventually consume him. This idea will be explored further later, but for now it will suffice to say that in this specific cosmogonic vision, the process of creation is described using symbolic images which are not often seen in combination with each other, but which do nevertheless conform to the general patterns of Egyptian mythical thought.

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Academy of Sciences Press, 2018, p. 207–213; Eliana Labroinho, “Nun, the Primeval Water according to the Coffin Texts”, in Alessia Amenta, Maria Luiselli, Maria Sordi (eds.), *L'acqua nell'antico Egitto: Vita, rigenerazione, incantesimo, medicamento; proceedings of the first International conference for young Egyptologists, Italy, Chianciano Terme, October 15-18, 2003*, Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2005, p. 221–227; Holger Rotsch, “The Primeval Ocean Nun and the Terminology of Water in Ancient Egypt”, in Alessia Amenta, Maria Luiselli, Maria Sordi (eds.), *L'acqua nell'antico Egitto: Vita, rigenerazione, incantesimo, medicamento; proceedings of the first International conference for young Egyptologists, Italy, Chianciano Terme, October 15-18, 2003*, Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2005, p. 229–239.

For the relationship between *w3d-wr* and *ym* (“sea” = Yam), see C. Vandersleyen, *Le delta et la vallée du Nil*, p. 61–63.

<sup>1003</sup> See the discussion in chapter 5.7 below.

<sup>1004</sup> Con 2,1; 4,4. Interestingly, the scribe chose to write the epithet *ʿ3-ph.ty* (“great of strength”) as , which can also be read (“large of buttocks”). Given the homosexual proclivities of the sun-god described in the discussion of his union with Osiris in *Book of the Dead* chapter 17, we could translate Con 1,12–2,1 in a rather satirical manner as “Re desired to give the office to Seth, who had (the) large(r) buttocks.” Such a reading can be compared to the various sources cited in A. Amenta, “Some Reflections on the ‘Homosexual’ Intercourse between Horus and Seth”, p. 9–10.

<sup>1005</sup> M. Pehal, *Interpreting Ancient Egyptian Narratives*, p. 245.

<sup>1006</sup> H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 94–98.

As in previous cases in the *Contendings*, Seth may appear to play a fundamentally passive role that seems contrary to his superficial vitality. On the contrary, Seth is presented as a fountain of vital force, which, however, requires a structuring force to enable the existence of ordered reality. It should be emphasized, that Horus does not simply represent order, nor does Seth simply embody disorder. Order denotes a relationship between elements and Horus and Seth are the elements. The question which the tale attempts to answer is what kind of relationship between them constitutes order. The tale answers this question by framing it as a cosmogonic one. This is possible since the living order of things is a product of a structured process of creation, whose essence is the progression from a disordered state to an ordered one. By transposing Horus and Seth onto the process which produces the universe, the form of relationship between Horus and Seth which is conducive to the establishment and maintenance of order is highlighted. In its most abstract form, cosmogony represents a model of how structure can spontaneously emerge from a complete lack of structure. Framed like this, the primordial state and the interregnum are analogous situations in which the same solution can be implemented. Coming back to the reading of Seth as a Nun-like character, we can, quite surprisingly, find a cosmological demotic text from the Fayum, in which Nun is depicted as a rather active participant in the drama of creation, whose significance is eclipsed only by the solar deity.<sup>1007</sup>

The first appearance of the altered sign for Horus marks his first structuring act. As in other creation accounts, the emergence of self-awareness comprises the first moment of cosmogony. As the actions of Isis cause the lack of difference between Horus and Seth to be apparent, Horus reacts. Much like in *Memphite Theology*, the creator is driven to action by emotions, but here it is fury that jump-starts the process. Isis plays the typically female role in motivating Horus to creative activity, and his violent reaction sets the stage for the arrival of the returning goddess, embodied by both Hathor and Isis remade as both mother and wife.

The Diving Episode uncovers the character of the philosophical concepts embodied in Horus and Seth as each of the gods showcases their nature. It is Seth who causes the two gods to become indistinct, proposing that they become two passive aquatic animals waiting in the waters. Horus is his opposite – lashing out against this state of affairs, he rejects any commonality, leaving the deep water for the desert mountains, and destroying the element that highlighted their identity, Isis. What Horus represents is the principle of establishing boundaries, a defining, structuring force. Seth, on the other hand, is the

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<sup>1007</sup> Mark Smith, “A New Egyptian Cosmology”, in Christopher Eyre (ed.), *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Egyptologists, Cambridge, 3–9 September 1995*, Leuven: Peeters, 1998, p. 1075–1079. See also Mark Smith, *The Carlsberg Papyri 5: On the Primaeval Ocean*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 260 p.

principle of dissolving them, a transgressive element, anti-structural in the strictest sense of the word.

Now, to emphasize the autonomous character of the self-creation of Horus as the divine Monad, the female character is removed, but that only results in the Monad remaining alone and vulnerable. On a mythical level, this is relatable to the creator lacking his Eye, whose return is necessary to progress creation. From a philosophical standpoint, it shows that the structuring element cannot exist in isolation from an anti-structural one. Horus' departure from the waters is an attempt to create a world set far apart from the potentiality of the primordial state, defined by *a lack of relationship to it*, but this is a futile exercise. Its result is just as devoid of life as the original situation of indistinctness, articulated in the image of the creator god on the brink of death lying in the desert. Instead, any viable arrangement of the universe needs to include the potentiality from which it emerges, it needs to build upon it. Any living structure relies on a process of exchange with that which lies beyond its borders.<sup>1008</sup> That means that not only does a boundary wall need to be raised, a process which the principle of Horus represents, but this boundary also has to be crossable, implying a principle which works against the former.<sup>1009</sup> Only when the two principles are properly balanced can the universe be a self-sufficient whole.<sup>1010</sup> The tale first opts to present cases in which they are not, each time emphasizing how unviable such arrangements would be.

Following this argument, *The Diving Episode* and *Horus and Hathor* constitute two extreme positions: one in which no boundaries are set and the other where the separation is too extreme. Each corresponds to one of the two principles – the *Diving Episode*, initiated by Seth, is a solely the result of an anti-structural or entropic force, while *Horus and Hathor*, initiated by Horus, is the result of a structuring force. Neither produces a desirable result. Consequently, a fundamentally different kind of relationship needs to be established between the two principles.

The choice of the sexual model is, despite its somewhat risqué character, particularly informed: not only because it is essentially generative, which is in line with the cosmogonic reading, but also because it is asymmetrical. From a purely procreative standpoint, each of the two sexual partners has, in Egyptian perspective, a different role:

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<sup>1008</sup> Cf. the discussion in chapter 5.7 below.

<sup>1009</sup> For Seth as , the principle of splitting open, see A. Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, p. 77.

<sup>1010</sup> For the anthropological notion behind this culturally specific imagery, see N. Hochner, “On Social Rhythm”, p. 306–308 and chapter 5.7 below.



one providing the life-seed and the other ensuring that it gestates.<sup>1011</sup> That the tale frames this as a matter of power hierarchy is quite clear.<sup>1012</sup>

Two different arrangements are possible: either Horus is the dominant element, or Seth. Each of these is tested out by the narrative. Whereas Seth is shown to be incapable of performing the “male deed” and cause pregnancy in the other, Horus succeeds, cementing his status as the masculine creator and advancing the drama of cosmogony to its next step, in which a new element, the lunar disc, is born. Here, the role of Seth can be compared to that of the sky goddess Nut, whom Re impregnated every night to renew himself.<sup>1013</sup> As Horus assumes the cosmic mantle of “son of Re”, so does Seth, the son of Nut, take on the role of his own parent. Much like the goddess, his role is only secondary to the sun-god, who uses his partner to express his self-generative ability.<sup>1014</sup> The image of the solar child with an erect phallus from the tomb of Merenptah seems an interesting comparison.<sup>1015</sup>

The role of Seth as the receptacle for Horus’s semen is in line with the way in which other sources depict him as infertile.<sup>1016</sup> His function is that of a vessel for the seed of Horus, which develops without any active participation on the part of Seth. The seed of Seth, on the other hand, is misplaced, and its procreative potential wasted – it does respond when prompted by Thoth, but without a womb-like vessel to contain it, it cannot grow. The image of his seed left in a field is a clear expression of his inability to initiate creation.

The tale deals with the fact that as a male deity, Seth is not ideally equipped to give birth, and the semen must negotiate its way out of his body. This comical interlude only emphasizes Seth’s passivity since he has no say in how he is going to give birth – it is the semen of Horus that decides whence it will emerge. If Störk’s reading of the ear as a dirty organ is correct, then the proposition of Thoth might be exceptionally humiliating.<sup>1017</sup>

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<sup>1011</sup> Ann Roth, “Father Earth, Mother Sky: Ancient Egyptian Beliefs About Conception and Fertility”, in Alison Rautman (ed.), *Reading the Body: Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000, p. 188–195.

<sup>1012</sup> Cf. Richard Parkinson, “Boasting about hardness”, p. 131 ff.

<sup>1013</sup> Gay Robins, “Male Bodies and the Construction of Masculinity in New Kingdom Egyptian Art”, in Sue D’Auria, *Servant of Mut: Studies in Honour of Richard A. Fazzini*, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2008, p. 209.

<sup>1014</sup> A. Roth, “Father Earth, Mother Sky”, p. 189. Cf. Jan Assmann, “Ouroboros: The Ancient Egyptian Myth of the Journey of the Sun”, *Aegyptiaca* 4 (2019), p. 24 ff.

<sup>1015</sup> Erik Hornung, *The Valley of the Kings: Horizon of Eternity*, New York: Timkin Publishers, 1990, p. 98; pl. 65.

<sup>1016</sup> See esp. the discussion in H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 53 ff.

<sup>1017</sup> Lothar Störk, “Das Ohr in den altägyptischen Sexualvorstellungen”, *Göttinger Miszellen* 5 (1973): 33–38; Lothar Störk, “Das Ohr in den altägyptischen Sexualvorstellungen – Nachtrag”, *Göttinger Miszellen* 8 (1973): 39–42.

The philosophical purport of the *Homosexual Episode* is that the only way to establish a productive balance in the world is to subordinate the anti-structural principle to the structuring one. The cosmic order maintained by royal rule is by definition a structure in which individual elements have their assigned roles and responsibilities, which is most apparent in the social aspect of *maat* as the hierarchy of Egyptian civilization. However, to ensure that the resulting sectors of the cosmos are viable in their separation, this separation must not be absolute. This is the way in which the anti-structural element serves the structuring one to produce the living structure of Egyptian cosmos: it helps ensure that vital processes of exchange remain in operation through transgression of the very boundaries which define the world. The same power which Seth uses to wreak havoc during the interregnum is the one which Horus uses to end it. How it is employed to execute his office as king will be discussed shortly.

From this perspective, the proper state of the world is envisioned as a hierarchy, which integrates the anti-structural element by subjugating it, thereby cementing its position inside the structure as a source of life, instead of an ambivalent threat. The physical embodiment of this notion can be observed in the way in which temple architecture thematizes primordial chaos. The temple is not only an *akhet*, a place from which the deity emerges and becomes visible during festival occasions, but also an image of the whole cosmos, its form reflecting the gradual development of the universe as envisioned in cosmogonic texts.<sup>1018</sup> As such, it was depicted as surrounded by the waters of primordial chaos, the exterior wall undulating to evoke the waves of the sea.<sup>1019</sup> At the same time, however, the sacred pool inside the temple precinct likewise embodied the water from which the world emerged.<sup>1020</sup> The importance of this architectural element in temple ritual as a source for purification signified that the primordial chaos is not simply kept separate from the cosmos, but it is always, to a degree, present in it, and has to be interacted within to maintain the working order of the world.<sup>1021</sup>

Before moving on, it is necessary to emphasize that the *Contendings* do not present a straightforward narrative of cosmogony, but rather a collection of cosmogonic motifs arranged in a manner consistent with accepted sources of Egyptian cosmogonic beliefs. However, this is not necessarily an argument against the present interpretation of the tale,

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<sup>1018</sup> Wilkinson, *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, p. 76–79.

<sup>1019</sup> Dieter Arnold, *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Egyptian Architecture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 256.

<sup>1020</sup> Françoise Dunand, Christiane Zivie-Coche, *Gods and Men in Egypt: 3000 BCE to 395 CE*, Ithaca – New York, Cornell University Press, 2004, p. 79–82.

<sup>1021</sup> See e.g., Kathlyn Cooney, “The Edifice of Taharqa by the Sacred Lake: Ritual Function and the Role of the King”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 37 (2000), esp. p. 46. Cf. V. Tobin, “Mytho-Theology in Ancient Egypt”, p. 175.

because the same can be said of all the attested documents relating to us Egyptian ideas about creation, as Quirke describes:

“I am presenting not so much creation stories as creation motifs. For, in ancient Egypt there are no genesis narratives. Either they do not survive, or they did not exist. They might not survive because Egyptians wrote on papyrus paper, and, like all organic material, that requires special conditions to survive. However, they might never have existed, and this possibility invites us to revisit the assumptions we may be making in the privileging of narrative form for the formulation and transmission of ideas.”<sup>1022</sup>

The discontinuous character of the cosmogonic image in the *Contendings* is an expression of the fact that it is not the tale's purpose to express a coherent vision of creation. This is a common trait of most of the relevant sources, which are typically of cultic and funerary character. In such texts, cosmogonic motifs are invoked for cultic or funerary purposes and not to express a systematic theology of creation, as seems to be the case in other cultures. Here, we may observe how closely this situation mirrors that of Egyptian myth.

Concluding this discussion of the *Contendings* as a creation narrative, we may return briefly to the discussion of the ring composition, specifically the two unpaired episodes described in chapter 2.5. When identifying parallel pairs, it was admitted that the Homosexual Episode and the Boat Race did not seem to have any parallels in the first part of the text. However, the interpretative work shown in the previous chapters has shown that the so-called liminal episodes do, in fact, do function a single narrative element, which deals with the transition of Horus from youth to maturity. Symbolic parallels, like that with the sexual aspect of the union of Re and Osiris or the funerary reading of the mountain, which was cut by Seth, support this reading, showing that the three liminal episodes represent a deeper unity. This unity can be directly related to the events of episode Hathor and Re, which are a *pars pro toto* of the religious symbolism of the solar cycle. We can consequently argue that combined, these three liminal episodes – *Homosexual Episode*, *Horus and Hathor* and *Boat Race* – are the parallel pair of *Hathor and Re*, enacting the same notions in greater length and detail. The way in which the transition of the king likewise represents a triune arrangement will be shown in the following chapters.

Looking back at the complex images of liminality in the tale and their relationship with Egyptian cosmology, it is finally possible to appreciate the similarity with scene 3 of the funerary papyrus of Herweben discussed in chapter 3.1.1. As the saying goes, however, this single image took a thousand words to express in the *Contendings*.

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<sup>1022</sup> S. Quirke, “Creation Stories in Ancient Egypt”, p. 63.

### 5.6.3 Liminality Reconsidered

At this point, we may return to the idea of theoretical basis of liminal imagery. This chapter is based on Nicole Hochner's reinterpretation of van Gennep's original work, which she believes has been underutilized and somewhat misinterpreted by anthropologists. In her view, behind van Gennep's concept lay a fundamental conviction that motion was a defining characteristic of all human activity, including societal processes, and that this dynamism was rhythmic.<sup>1023</sup> As such, human realities are subject to the same rules as cosmic ones:

“Neither individual nor society are independent from nature, from the universe, which is also submitted to rhythms, which has its impact on human life. In the universe as well, are stages and moments of passage.”<sup>1024</sup>

This rhythm allows the society to remain stable while undergoing internal changes caused by disturbances, such as death.<sup>1025</sup> Naturally, neither biological nor social movement can be sustained indefinitely.<sup>1026</sup> In order to remain stable, society needs to counter decline with growth, which is how social realities mirror cosmic cycles. The function of rites is to affect a force countering entropy, thereby producing a bivalence of forces that “sustain the social microcosm in balance by creating two contrary movements opposed to each other, so it seems that the one disturbing the social microcosm is faced with the motion created by the rite.”<sup>1027</sup> Once the disruptive social moment becomes too great, ritual produces a restorative counterforce. Consequently, a rite of passage, the “motion from one state to another is a passage from passing away to revival, from death to life.”<sup>1028</sup> The eternal tug-of-war of these two moments sustains the life cycle of society, in which a structuring and de-structuring tendency alternate. It is the boundary between decline and growth that comprises the margin (liminal state): “When there is no moon, life stops... so there's a margin period.”<sup>1029</sup>

Inevitably, the cycle reaches a stage in which the structuring force finds itself in a momentary equilibrium with its counterforce, a point of inertia, where there is no movement at all.<sup>1030</sup> This marks the low point of a cycle where vital activity is at its

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<sup>1023</sup> N. Hochner, “On Social Rhythm”, p. 301.

<sup>1024</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *Les rites de passage. Etude systématique des rites de la porte et du seuil, de l'hospitalité, de l'adoption, de la grossesse et de l'accouchement, de la naissance, de l'enfance, de la puberté, de l'initiation, de l'ordination, du couronnement, des fiançailles et du mariage, des funérailles, des saisons, etc.*, Paris: Editions A. & J. Picard, 1981, p. 4. Translation of N. Hochner, “On Social Rhythm”, p. 304.

<sup>1025</sup> N. Hochner, “On Social Rhythm”, p. 304.

<sup>1026</sup> A. van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, p. 182.

<sup>1027</sup> N. Hochner, “On Social Rhythm”, p. 306.

<sup>1028</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>1029</sup> A. van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, p. 181. My translation.

<sup>1030</sup> *Ibid.*, *Rites of Passage*, p. 182

minimum before it is ritually restarted.<sup>1031</sup> Connecting decline with growth at the end of a cycle, the margin incorporates both destruction and creation, resulting in the profound ambivalence of the liminal state, expressed in the Egyptian imagery of primordial chaos.<sup>1032</sup> Van Gennep describes this as a pivot (*point mort*), the vital minimum serving as a turning point where two forces clash and around which contradictory points maintain themselves.<sup>1033</sup>

Our second foray into the world of van Gennep's thought shows that to him, the human world is not just a static structure, but a dynamic, complex and living entity, in which the fluctuation of two opposing forces – an entropic one and a structuring one – presents itself as a stable arrangement in the long term.

Paraphrasing the historian Joel Kaye, Hochner makes a distinction between two notions of balance:

“The first conceives balance as a frozen situation, as a static and fixed state. The second is a conception of balance as a dynamic and active phenomenon in which equilibrium is reached by constantly renegotiating a counter power or a counterweight, an opposite movement that constantly re-establishes balance as a fluid/liquid equilibrium.”<sup>1034</sup>

These two notions can easily be compared to the Egyptian concepts of *djet* and *neheh*.<sup>1035</sup> Now, the distinction of the two balances is a matter of focus, of whether the internal dynamic of the social and cosmic cycle or its constancy is emphasized. The pivoting point is in fact where the two perspectives of balance meet, as the change in direction from demise to revival temporarily halts the characteristic movement of life, creating an image of absolute stillness, which it periodically attains.

Returning to the *Contendings*, we can see how the mythical constellations and the philosophical ideas they articulate can be related to more general truths about human life and society. Van Gennep's notion of two opposing forces is completely in line with the findings of this thesis, according to which the tale relates the two titular characters as precisely such forces, one 'natural', leading to entropy, the other 'cultural', leading to structure. Much like van Gennep, the Egyptians understood that the anti-structural element is an inevitable fact of life, which has to be periodically overpowered to prevent a permanent destruction of cosmic order. For van Gennep, it is a crucial function of ritual activity to prevent a “death of humanity” which threatens at the *point mort*, the point at

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<sup>1031</sup> D. Takács, *Liminality in Ancient Egypt*, p. 9.

<sup>1032</sup> *Ibid.*, *Liminality in Ancient Egypt*, p. 15.

<sup>1033</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *Les Demi-Savants*, Paris: Mercure de France, 1911, p. 508.

<sup>1034</sup> N. Hochner, “On Social Rhythm”, p. 308.

<sup>1035</sup> Cf. D. Takács, *Liminality in Ancient Egypt*, p. 8, n. 45.

which decline has to be reversed while it is still possible.<sup>1036</sup> The point mort, where this threat becomes imminent is, of course, in the heart of succession drama – the liminal period between the death of the king, when the entropic force culminates, and his rebirth in a new king, where the world returns towards regeneration.

The 1<sup>st</sup> coronation of Horus and his subsequent symbolic demise at the hand of Seth therefore not only represent the pivot in terms of ring composition, but also in those of van Gennep’s theory.<sup>1037</sup> As Horus, the emerging sun-god embodying the cyclical *neheh* aspect of the universe, finds himself in contact with its *djet* counterpart, Osiris, we see his structuring force prevail over that of Seth. The cycle of creation is complete, the entropic force leading it back to the beginning, and it can start anew in a process rendered in the *Contendings* as cosmogony. Loprieno’s notion of Seth as the “god of crisis”, which we can easily relate to the argument made here and above, illustrates how van Gennep’s idea manifests in Ancient Egypt:

“There is a word in classical Greek that, in my opinion, perfectly describes the nature of Seth, or rather his character as god of *wḏr*:<sup>1038</sup> it is the word κρίσις. In classical antiquity, this term did not yet have the necessarily negative connotations that it was given later in Western culture: κρίσις refers to the moment of separation, the distinction between two stages of a certain process, for example, in the medical context, the turning point of an illness, after which can happen the hoped-for recovery or final deterioration. In this sense, Seth is the ‘critical god’ whose characteristic are these very ‘turning points’ (such as the violence of the murder, the outbreak of Storms, the border between Egypt and the desert).”<sup>1039</sup>

Loprieno’s understanding of a force marking the *point mort* once again restates the idea that Seth and Osiris represent two distinct, but interconnected visions of death. As we will see later, the ambivalence of Seth’s disruptions to vital structures is indispensable in

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<sup>1036</sup> Cf. Arnold van Gennep, *Les Demi-Savants*, Paris: Mercure de France, 1911, p. 508.

<sup>1037</sup> Earlier in this thesis, Horus’ contact with Osiris was likened to “gravitational slingshot manoeuvre”. Since the significance of Hochner’s interpretation of van Gennep’s work was only reviewed after this simile has been made, it is very interesting to see that van Gennep similarly based his images on contemporary physics. Cf. Hochner, “On Social Rhythm”, p. 305, 308. The same is incidentally the case with the reading of Horus and Seth as opposing forces rather than states, as is usually the case in Egyptology.

<sup>1038</sup> Lit. “to separate; to judge; to appoint; to open.” (*Wb* 1, 404.3–406.12). Cf. A. Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, p. 73–81.

<sup>1039</sup> Earlier in this thesis, Horus’ contact with Osiris was likened to “gravitational slingshot manoeuvre”. Since the significance of Hochner’s interpretation of van Gennep’s work was only reviewed after this simile has been made, it is very interesting to see that van Gennep similarly based his images on contemporary physics. Cf. Hochner, “On Social Rhythm”, p. 305, 308. The same is incidentally the case with the reading of Horus and Seth as opposing forces rather than states, as is usually the case in Egyptology.

maintaining their function. As van Gennepe notes, there is no living entity that can sustain its operation indefinitely, and even a divine king eventually finds himself old and impotent. As the ruler's gradual deterioration threatens the order of the world, which he is supposed to safeguard with his youthful might, death steps in as a bittersweet reprieve. While the universe mourns, a new, young and vital pharaoh prepares to take his place on the throne, his newfound power of Horus unhampered by travails of age. The way in which the power of Seth not only serves as the pivot in the life cycle of kingship, but also sustains it throughout its whole will be discussed in chapter 5.7.

Concluding this second foray into anthropology of liminality, it is now possible to fully appreciate the significance of the transformation which the royal office itself undergoes and how it differs from that of the singular prince or the deceased. Whereas for the prince the liminal period does entail a fundamental and irreversible change of status as he becomes the king, the office, and with it, the cosmos, is not fundamentally changed. Being eternal, they only reverse the development leading to the king's death and returning the state of affairs to the optimum until the disturbances inherent to the human condition cause it to break down once again.

#### 5.6.4 Cosmic Reintegration and the Triune God-King

The defeat of Seth during the *Diving Episode* marks the end of the liminal stage of the narrative. The hard labour of transformation is largely over, and both the characters and the world are now rearranging to enact a new reality with Horus, the solar king as its centrepiece. With the departure of Horus for Sais, Seth is essentially vanquished, but the work of creation is not yet completely done.

As Horus starts to emerge as a ruler, it is up to him to start recreating the fabric of the cosmic order, which the tale collates with the (re-)creation of the cosmos itself through the images of cosmogony. Egyptians imagined a three-tier world, comprised of earth, sky and the underworld.<sup>1040</sup> Looking at the three liminal images of Horus presented in the preceding chapters, we can observe that each relates to a distinct part of the universe: his initiation to the earthly transformation of a human prince into a king, his symbolic death to the underworld, and his cosmogonic role as the solar creator to the heavens, the domain of the sun. Of course, what was described as three rites of passage are just different aspects of the same, singular transition of Horus. Even though the tri-partite character of the universe is emphasized, the cosmos is still a coherent whole, and so is the transformation of Horus envisioned as a triune process, which can be related to different parts of the world and the way in which kingship manifests in them. The result is a rendition of the royal succession which shows it not only as an elevation of a single

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<sup>1040</sup> Cf. the sources cited in J. Zandee, *Amunhymnus des Papyrus Leiden I 344*, p. 190-191.

individual, but as a drama which impacts the entire cosmos. As we have seen, the initiation of the prince into kingship is symbolically conflated with the life-crisis of death, which is a universally human phenomenon, while the New Kingdom significance of the nocturnal solar journey through the underworld inextricably linked the heaven and the underworld. At the same time, the king himself is a son and mirror image of the celestial divine ruler.<sup>1041</sup>

The last act of creation between the final emergence of the sun is the restoration of the three-tier world. Now that the twin basic elements of the cosmos – Horus and Seth – are correctly arranged and sexual reproduction takes place, the separation of heaven and earth is the obvious next step. This motif is present in the tale but is framed not as a description of the event, but in the form of a threat of its opposite. The exchange of letters between Re and Osiris includes the frequently cited threat to unleash the demonic “messengers” upon the rest of the world. Thanks to the analysis of the circular structure of the tale, we can relate this remark to the letter of Neith, in which she threatens to cause the collapse of the sky onto the earth, which would effectively restore the state before their separation.<sup>1042</sup> In both cases, these fearsome visions are framed as results of acting against *maat* in denying Horus the kingship, which emphasizes his significance in maintaining the structure of the universe. As he nears his ascension to the throne, so does subside the danger of the three-tier structure not being realized. At the same time, these threats serve as an argument against Seth as the ruling element in the cosmos: although the ability to erode boundaries is crucial for a king, if it were dominant, boundaries would cease to exist altogether and the world would revert to its unstructured state, here envisioned as reality where the dead walk amongst the living and the sky and earth are not separated. A comparison could be made to a similarly catastrophic collapse of boundaries of *Admonitions of Ipuwer*, articulated on the social level. In the text, Egypt would be “given over to sand” (*ḏi.t(w) km.t <r> šꜥy*), if foreigners are allowed to run rampant, effectively dissolving the boundary between Egypt and the desert.<sup>1043</sup>

Consequently, the final phase of the narrative develops in line with the idea of the cosmic ruler as the entity who both establishes boundaries and ensures their permeability. Just as the pre-liminal part of the *Contendings* was marked by a gradual breakdown in communication until violence was the only means of advancing the narrative, the post-liminal highlights the way in which communication is restored. As the threat of the

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<sup>1041</sup> J. Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom*, p. 207.

<sup>1042</sup> Cf. H. Te Velde, “The Theme of Separation of Heaven and Earth in Egyptian Mythology”, p. 4. Compare *Papyrus Bremner-Rhind* 5,7 and 7,3-4, where Seth is suspected of causing the sky to fall.

<sup>1043</sup> *Papyrus Leiden* I 344 Recto, 15. At 3,1, we may see the same idea expressed, but with the added notion of the nomes (i.e., the internal boundaries of Egypt), collapsing: “[O, y]et the desert is throughout the land, <nomes> are hacked up – foreign archers have come to Egypt.” (*(jw m)š ḏšr.t ḥt tš <spš.wt> ḥbš pd.t rw.tj jy.tj n km.t*)



boundaries between earth, sky and the underworld collapsing dissipates, so are the lines of communication between them restored. Horus travels to the sky-goddess Neith, while Osiris exchanges messages with the earth for the first time, emphasizing the permeability of the boundary line between the world of the living and the dead. The maintenance of communication between the earth and the two other spheres of the universe is a principal responsibility of the king, who is the guarantor of both funerary and divine cult, as is transparently described in the Middle Egyptian text called *The King as Sun-priest*:

“Re has installed king NN  
upon the earth of the living  
for ever and eternity  
judging men, satisfying gods,  
realizing Maat, annihilating Isfet.  
He gives offerings to the gods  
and mortuary offerings to the dead.”<sup>1044</sup>

Just as the king is capable of mediating between the mankind and the gods thanks to his dual character, so does the symbolic polyvalence of Horus’ transition empower him to recreate the world from top to bottom. The result of this unified process is a structured world with Horus as king on earth, Osiris as king in the realm of the dead and Re as king in the sky.

The fact that the tale achieves this situation not through three parallel developments, each impacting one of the three divine rulers, but instead enacts them in the single person of Horus reveals a fundamental idea of royal succession. Whereas during periods of normality – when the earthly king is alive and reigns – the three parts of the universe are separate, during a succession crisis, this productive separation is temporarily suspended. Their fates are intertwined as the order of the cosmos is in jeopardy and all eyes are on the king-to-be, his personal transformation impacting the world as a whole.

We have encountered the motif of the horizon repeatedly during this thesis, and now its significance becomes apparent. It is in this *akhet* that beings are reborn changed and elevated, as is the case of Horus in this tale, but it is also a place where the three parts of the universe meet and overlap. While in the visible world the horizon does represent a physical place where these meet, the tale also approaches it as a *place in time*. During the liminal period caused by the death of the king, the individual layers of the cosmos are situationally merged in a single universal drama of royal succession, which itself becomes a horizon, an institution from which the renewed order of the cosmos emerges.

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<sup>1044</sup> J. Assmann, *Sonnenhymnen in thebanischen Gräbern*, p. 48–49. Originally published in J. Assmann, *Der König als Sonnenpriester*. Translation of Jan Assmann, “State and Religion in the New Kingdom”, in William Simpson (ed.), *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, New Haven: Yale Egyptological Seminar, 1989, p. 58.

Of course, the cosmos was not conceived by the Egyptians as an oligarchy, ruled over by a trio of kings each exercising his own domain. Even though the tale may seem to suggest this division, it also points to a hidden unity behind it. The liminal character of the succession allows Horus to unite these three ‘regional’ kingships in a single development. Since Horus is first and foremost the royal god, the divine element incarnated on earth in the person of the king of Egypt, it is a natural step to relate this finding to royal ideology. An interesting comparison can be made with the notion of the king as the provider of three life-giving elements – light, water, and air – a tradition established in Middle Kingdom loyalist texts:<sup>1045</sup>

“He is Re who enables us to see  
 One who illuminates the Two land more than the sun  
 He is the one who makes things grow more than a high Nile  
 He has filled Egypt with the “wood of life”  
 When he becomes angry, noses ‘freeze’  
 When he is pacified, they can breathe.”<sup>1046</sup>

In such texts,<sup>1047</sup> the king is not only the earthly ruler, but also a life-god ensuring the flow of vital energies from the sky (sun), the underworld (water)<sup>1048</sup> and the human world in-between (air). Such descriptions reflect those of the creator god in Ramesside texts, an omnipresent deity, which fills the world, but do not necessarily hold the same level of validity:

“These *topoi*<sup>1049</sup> reveal the king as god on the social level. His efficacy as the one who provides all, gives life to all and determines fate is represented as a set of cosmic metaphors intended to express the all-embracing nature of this efficacy; but at the same time, they are always meant in the social sense. The King is not simply light, air and water, but he is ‘for’ humans or, more significantly, those who are loyal. It is precisely this limitation that becomes invalid when these *topoi* are used in the realms of theology to present the operations of god in the world as those of the all-embracing god. With reference to the god, light, air and water are not metaphors, but are meant

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<sup>1045</sup> J. Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom*, p. 186.

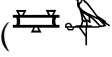
<sup>1046</sup> Georges Posener, *L'enseignement loyaliste: Sagesse égyptienne du Moyen Empire*, Genève: Librairie Droz, 1976, p. 21–22.

<sup>1047</sup> Cf. Jan Assmann, “Die ‘loyalistische Lehre’ Echnatons”, *Studien Zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 8 (1980), p. 16–19; *Sinuhe* B 232–234 (Roland Koch, *Die Erzählung des Sinuhe*. Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth: Brussels, 1990)

<sup>1048</sup> The Nile flood or fresh water in general was thought to be the efflux (*rdw*) of Osiris, a life-giving fluid issuing from the god’s corpse. See Diana Delia, “The Refreshing Water of Osiris”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 29 (1992), p. 183. Cf. PT 460 § 468a.

<sup>1049</sup> Conventional literary themes of motifs. Contrasted with *mimesis*, artistic representation of elements of the real world.

literally as cosmic energies in which the life-giving energy is manifested. If Shu as god of air and the breath of life was life god, and Amun-Re and Aten as the sun also possess this function, the Ramesside life god brought this tradition into an all synthesis, by explaining the totality of the ‘elements’ (light, air and water) as cosmic activities of the life god, who is thus god of light, air and water in one.”<sup>1050</sup>

The mythical image of Horus stands on the threshold between the social, metaphorical sense of the notion when applied to the king, and its literality when applied to the divine creator. Horus represents the connection () between the source of divine kingship and the human holding the office and is not to be simply identified with the human king. Whereas the former has to reconcile his humanity with the divinity which temporarily descended into him, Horus is the eternal power of earthly kingship which passes from one ruler to another.<sup>1051</sup> He is not a human being whose power is ultimately restricted by the constraints of mortality, but nor is he the principal god of Ramesside theology, in whom the generative power of the universe is integrated. In the finale of the *Contendings*, there are three rulers of which Horus is only the terrestrial one.

At the same time, we can observe that all three domains have a common origin in Horus’ liminal state. His multifaceted transition communicates an idea that every member of this cosmic trinity of rulers, each of whom corresponds to one part of the universe, is the result of a deeper unity, which existed before the tri-layer world came into being. Such understanding of the *Contendings* recalls the traditional Ramesside rendition of the creator as inhabiting each of the three tiers of the cosmos with one aspect of his being:

“The heaven has your *ba* and raises up your radiance  
The underworld has your corpse and conceals your body  
The land has your image”<sup>1052</sup>“The secret underworld hides its lord;  
the one in the coffin resides there.  
His *ba* is in heaven,  
Thebes is the house of his image.”<sup>1053</sup>

In the Leiden hymns and elsewhere, this universal deity is, of course, the Theban patron god Amun. The absence of this imperial deity in the narrative is significant, seeing as he was perhaps the most significant deity of the Ramesside era, but we need only to recall

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<sup>1050</sup> J. Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom*, p. 186.

<sup>1051</sup> D. Valbelle, “Pharaonic Regality”, p. 97. Cf. L. Bell, “Luxor Temple and the Cult of the Royal Ka”, p. 258 ff.

<sup>1052</sup> STG Text 17, 37–39 (=J. Assmann, *Sonnenhymnen in thebanischen Gräbern*, p. 19). Translation of J. Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom*, p. 175.

<sup>1053</sup> Papyrus Leiden I 350, VI 12–13. (Jan Zandee, *De hymnen aan Amon van papyrus Leiden I 350*, Leiden: Brill, p. 110–111) Cf. Papyrus Leiden I IV 15–16. See also J. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, p. 53.

that his very name, *jmn* “the hidden one”,<sup>1054</sup> suggests a profound imperceptibility and, reflects what many argue is the true transcendence of the god.<sup>1055</sup> The division of rulership among Horus, Osiris and Re apparently reflects the three aspects of Amun disseminated throughout the universe, secretly and invisibly uniting it. If the final state of the *Contendings* is considered in relation to these hymns, the implicit presence of the Ramesside transcendent creator becomes a sensible proposition.

Since Horus emerges as both the successor of Re and Osiris and the institution of *kamutef* is an essential element of New Kingdom kingship, the unity of three manifestations of the creator god does endure in the post-liminal stage when Horus no longer unites them in his own transformative drama. As he ascends to the throne, he is confirmed as both son of Re and son of Osiris, in a sense enacting the unity so long as he reigns as their successor. In this manner, the existence of Horus as the terrestrial king points to the transcendent principle of cosmic kingship of Amun, whose son and mirror-image the Egyptian king ultimately is.

Horus enters this relationship between the king of men and king of gods as the divine element of rulership which the creator bestows on the human ruler.<sup>1056</sup> We could even argue that such an arrangement is a manifestation of the interplay between the ancient tradition of Horus-Osirian positional succession with the idea of *kamutef*, which established itself in New Kingdom royal ideology, Horus both serving as the (proximal) source of the king’s capacity for rulership, and his divine connection to the transcendent principle of kingship, Amun.

While Horus does represent terrestrial kingship, he does not necessarily represent the particular kings in which he is incarnated in their entirety. We could argue that Horus is an abstraction of the sum of living rulers, an *idea* of a human king, which also reflects the frailties and the travails of youth, succession, and personal crises inherent to a person. Unlike individual rulers, however, Horus is a timeless, eternal principle, and the tale reconciles the eminent humanity of the institution with its divinity in an elegant way. Instead of denying its fragility, it presents its deity, Horus, as himself fragile and impacted

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<sup>1054</sup> Kurt Sethe, *Amun und die acht Urgötter von Hermopolis: Eine Untersuchung über Ursprung und Wesen des ägyptischen Götterkönigs*, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1929, § 178–86. See also Serge Sauneron, “Plutarque: Isis et Osiris (ch. IX)”, *Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale* 51 (1951): 49–51; Ronald Williams, “Some Egyptianisms in the Old Testament”, in Gerald Kadish (ed.), *Studies in Honor of John A. Wilson*, Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1969, p. 95–96.

<sup>1055</sup> See e.g., J. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, p. 48 ff; David Klotz, *Adoration of the Ram: Five Hymns to Amun-Re from Hibis Temple*, New Haven: Yale Egyptological Seminar, 2006, p. 17. The topic is, of course, the subject of various works by Jan Assmann, cited throughout this chapter. Cf. E. Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt*, p. 190–196.

<sup>1056</sup> Cf. e.g., the discussion of Hatshepsut’s conception by Amun in José Galán, *Creativity and Innovation in the Reign of Hatshepsut*, Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2014, p. 33.

by the worries of succession, albeit in an idealized form.<sup>1057</sup> The imperishable character of Horus' kingship is then not articulated through images of the god's unassailable force, but in framing his overcoming of the succession crisis as an element of a cosmic cycle.

Recalling the significance of the encircling snake as the emblem of endless cyclical time safeguarding the solar child-king, we may reflect on the circular character of the tale itself.

It is a well attested idea that the image of a ring in Egyptian script, the *šn* hieroglyph , served as an emblem of protection, notably in the form of a cartouche, which magically protected the royal name.<sup>1058</sup> Much like the serpent embodies the cosmic repetition which ensures that the sun and the world endure in perpetuity, so could we argue that the literary ring of the *Contendings* encloses the mystery of royal renewal through death.<sup>1059</sup> We will expand on this notion in chapter 5.7.

### 5.6.5 The *Contendings* in Theban Religious Context

The function of the liminal images of the *Contendings* is to highlight both the universal significance of kingship as a unifying and ordering institution in the world and the varying ways in which it manifests on the human and divine levels. The circular structure of the story makes it clear that it is not a metaphor for any specific crisis, but instead this articulates an idea of crisis which is an endemic element of the eternal dynamics of kingship. The tale enacts this purpose in line with the tenets of contemporary theology, focusing on the terrestrial king, but at the same time recognizing that the divine source of kingship is ultimately elsewhere, hidden in or, in fact, beyond the world of the gods.<sup>1060</sup> Horus may emerge as the first among the many deities of the *Contendings*, but a more profound unity exists which supersedes his primacy as described in one of the Leiden hymns to Amun:

“Secret of developments and glittering of forms,

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<sup>1057</sup> It is no coincidence that Horus is also the archetypal patient of Egyptian magical spells. The way in which Horus overcomes the troubles of succession and those of illness are analogous. Cf. Jacobus van Dijk, “The Birth of Horus According to the Ebers Papyrus”, *Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-egyptisch Genootschap Ex Oriente Lux (Leiden)* 8 (1979–1980), esp. p. 20 ff.

<sup>1058</sup> Winfried Barta, “Der Königsring als Symbol zyklischer Wiederkehr”, *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 98 (1970): 5–16.

As such, the cartouche could be depicted square or with crenelations, like the walls of a fortress. See John Baines, “Communication and Display: The Integration of Early Egyptian Art and Writing”, *Antiquity* 63 (1989): 471–482, fig. 3a.

<sup>1059</sup> Cf. the trans-cultural comparisons in Aleida Assmann, “Ouroboros: The Circle as a Concept of Infinity”, *Aegyptiaca* 4 (2019): 6–18. See also the intriguing study in Mark Roblee, “Performing Circles in Ancient Egypt from Mehen to Ouroboros”, *Preternatural: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 7 (2018): 133–53.

<sup>1060</sup> Cf. J. Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom*, p. 140 ff.

wonderful god of many developments.  
 All gods boast of him,  
 In order to magnify themselves in his perfection, like his divinity.  
 Re himself is joined with his person.  
 He is the great one in Heliopolis,  
 who is also called Tatenen.<sup>1061</sup>  
 Amun, who emerged from the Waters that he might lead mankind. (...)  
 He is the Lord-of-All, who began existence.  
 It is his *ba*, they say, that is the one who is in the sky.  
 He is one who is in the Duat, foremost of the east.  
 His *ba* is in the sky, his body in the west.  
 And his cult-image is in Southern Heliopolis,<sup>1062</sup> elevating his appearances.  
 Amun is one, concealing himself from them.”<sup>1063</sup>

he triune rendition of Horus' transformation seems to reflect these basic notions of Ramesside Amun theology, with Horus, as solar ruler, likewise described as having emerged from the Waters, so that he can lead mankind as the terrestrial king. The glorious emergence of Horus as king in the *Contendings* is aptly localized in Thebes, the centre of Amun's worship, but also one of the principal cities of Egypt, where the king, at least in theory, resided and performed crucial cultic activities.<sup>1064</sup> The Theban 'image' described in the sources mentioned refers not only to Amun's cultic statue, but also to the king himself, chosen and conceived by Amun for kingship, who resides in his Theban palace much like the god's icon dwells in the neighbouring temple of Karnak.<sup>1065</sup> Many royal

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<sup>1061</sup> The significance of Amun as the implied, unuttered unifying element behind the explicit trinity could perhaps account for the presence of Ptah in the latter part of the story, an element otherwise quite hard to make some sense of. His prominence at the conclusion of the tale can be related to the belief that Atum, Re and Ptah form a unity of gods that are distinct and yet one, encompassing the totality of the universe, like in one of the Leiden hymns to Amun: "All gods are three: Amun, Re and Ptah, whom none equals. He who hides his name as Amun, he appears to the face as Re, his body is Ptah." (*Papyrus Leiden I 350*, IV 26. Translation of Jan Assmann, *Of God and Gods*, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008, p. 64) Cf. the notion of an "imperial triad" in E. Hornung, *Conceptions of God*, p. 219–221.

<sup>1062</sup> I.e., Thebes: "The eye of Amun, the horizon on this earth." (*Urk.* IV, 164.8) Cf. Eric Cline, *Thutmose III: A New Biography*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006, p. 128. For Thebes as 'Southern Heliopolis', see the discussion in Luc Gabolde, *Le "Grand Château d'Amon" de Sésostris 1er à Karnak*, Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 1998, p. 44–46, 143–49. The phrase could also refer to Armant, the cultic centre of Montu just south of Thebes. Cf. e.g., *LÄ I*, 435 ff.

<sup>1063</sup> *Papyrus Leiden I 350* 4, 12–19.

<sup>1064</sup> Cf. the discussion in David O'Connor, "Beloved of Maat, the Horizon of Re: The Royal Palace in New Kingdom Egypt", in David O'Connor, David Silverman (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Kingship*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995, p. 278 ff.

<sup>1065</sup> *LÄ III*, 1173–1177. See also David O'Connor, "City and Palace in New Kingdom Egypt", *Cahier de Recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et d'Égyptologie de Lille* 11 (1989), p. 79–80. Some recent works about royal palaces and their significance include Manfred Bietak, "Introduction to Palaces in Egypt: What They Tell Us About The Ruler, Administration and Culture", in Manfred Bietak, Silvia Prell (eds.),

palaces were, in fact, conceived as temples, and were constructed according to the same axial design, including a pylon-like gate structure and an adjoined colonnade court.<sup>1066</sup> The palace itself therefore embodied the unity of the cosmos and at the same time the *akhet*, the place where the parts of the universe are connected and where the principal god appears as a solar deity.<sup>1067</sup> This symbolic association was especially significant between Amun's temple and the king's main palace:

“The juxtaposition of Amun-Re's main temple and the king's principal palace is most significant, for it clearly reflects the complex relationship between these two entities in the New Kingdom. Amun-Re rules Egypt and the world through the king; but simultaneously the latter takes on the aspect of the god himself.”<sup>1068</sup>

This assumption of Amun's divine power by the king took place in Thebes as well.<sup>1069</sup> During the annual Opet festival the royal *ka* was transmitted from Amun to the living ruler, who was identified with the king of gods during this major religious event.<sup>1070</sup> In short, the festival represented two successive trips by Amun: a land route from Karnak, the main residence of the god, to Luxor, where he would meet his consort, and then a boat trip back to Karnak.<sup>1071</sup> The Luxor temple, in whose deepest chambers the mystery of the Opet festival occurred, during which the “boundary between the person of the king

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*Ancient Egyptian and Ancient Near Eastern Palaces: Proceedings of the Conference on Palaces in Ancient Egypt, Held in London 12th–14th June 2013, Organised by the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the University of Würzburg and the Egypt Exploration Society*, vol. 1, Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2018, p. 23–38; Rolf Gundlach, “Horus in the Palace: The Centre of State and Culture in Pharaonic Egypt”, in Rolf Gundlach and John Taylor (eds.), *Egyptian Royal Residences*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009, p. 45–67; Peter Lacovara, “The Development of the New Kingdom Royal Palace”, in Rolf Gundlach and John Taylor (eds.) *Egyptian Royal Residences*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009, p. 83–110.

<sup>1066</sup> For the pylon-like facade, see David O'Connor, “Mirror of the Cosmos: The Palace of Merenptah”, in Edward Bleiberg, Rita Freed (eds.), *Fragments of a Shattered Visage: The Proceedings of the International Symposium of Ramesses the Great*, Memphis: Memphis State University, 1991, 167–90.

<sup>1067</sup> David O'Connor, “City and Palace in New Kingdom Egypt”, p. 74–78. Cf. Jan Assmann, *Ägypten: Theologie und Frömmigkeit einer frühen Hochkultur*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1984, p. 35–63; John Baines, “Temple Symbolism”, *Royal Anthropological Institute Newsletter* 15 (1976): 10–15.

<sup>1068</sup> David O'Connor, “Beloved of Maat, the Horizon of Re”, p. 282.

<sup>1069</sup> For the major festivals of Ramesside Thebes, see Masashi Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, ix + 290 p.

<sup>1070</sup> See L. Bell, “Luxor Temple and the Cult of the Royal Ka”, p. 251–294; Hosam Refai, “Die Bestätigung im Fest: Zur Rolle der thebanischen Feste bei der Erneuerung der Königsmacht”, *Memnonia* 9 (1998): 181–189. For the festival in general, see the discussion and sources in John Darnell, “Opet Festival”, in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2010, 15 p. Accessed at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4739r3fr>.

<sup>1071</sup> For a detailed overview of the festival, see M. Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 15–40.

and the royal ka-nature”<sup>1072</sup> is blurred, could be referred to as “p(a)lace of truth”,<sup>1073</sup> same as the locale possibly mentioned in the closing words of the *Contendings*. The emergence of the crowned king from the Luxor temple,<sup>1074</sup> which is referred to as the primeval site where the sun rises,<sup>1075</sup> during the festival reveals the ruler as the embodiment of Amun-Re and the holder of the *ka* of kingship.<sup>1076</sup> It is also of note, that according to Bell, the Luxor temple was not only the residence of Amun-Re of Karnak, but also of Amenopet of Luxor, who was hailed as Kamutef, Horus, a child and a creator god.<sup>1077</sup> The ceremonies after the exit from Luxor temple also included slaughtering of bulls, which provides an interesting comparison.<sup>1078</sup> Afterwards, he sails back “amidst the jubilation of their entourage and the public as a whole”<sup>1079</sup> to Karnak temple and palace, where the closeness of the king and Amun is once again affirmed.<sup>1080</sup> The possible reference to the Opet festival is significant, given the function the rites served in integrating the divinity of the royal *ka* with the person of the king:

“The transformation of Amenhotep III from an individual ruler to the personification of the royal *ka* through a blurring of the boundary between the person of the king and the royal ka-nature in the rear rooms of the Luxor Temple suggests that the Opet festival under Amenhotep III and his successors became amongst other things a ritual reconfirming the transmission of the royal *ka*.”<sup>1081</sup>

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<sup>1072</sup> J. Darnell, “Opet Festival”, p. 4.

<sup>1073</sup> Lanny Bell, “Luxor Temple and the Cult of the Royal Ka”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 44 (1985), p. 254 and n. 5, 6. See also the discussion in <sup>1073</sup> David O'Connor, “Beloved of Maat, the Horizon of Re”, p. 278. It should be mentioned that the phrase *s.t-mꜣꜣ.t* may simply denote a sacred place, typically a temple or a necropolis, which is how it also came to be used for Deir el-Medina. Nevertheless, the Luxor connection seems particularly interesting. Cf. *Wb* 4, 6.22; 7.1–3; Henri Gauthier, *Dictionnaire des noms géographiques contenus dans les textes hiéroglyphiques*, Cairo: Société Royale de Géographie d'Égypte, 1928, p. 75; Leonard Lesko, Barbara Switalski Lesko (eds.), *A Dictionary of Late Egyptian*, vol. 3, Berkeley: B.C. Scribe Publications, 1987, p. 3.

<sup>1074</sup> Alan Gardiner, “The Coronation of King Haremḥab”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 39 (1953), p. 24–25; M. Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 30.

<sup>1075</sup> M. Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 19.

<sup>1076</sup> On Luxor as the temple of the royal *ka*, see L. Bell, “Luxor Temple and the Cult of the Royal Ka”, p. 251–294.

<sup>1077</sup> L. Bell, “The New Kingdom “Divine” Temple”, p. 179. For the epithets of Amenopet, see Marianne Doresse, “Le dieu voilé dans sa chasse et la fête du début de la decade”, *Revue d'égyptologie* 23 (1971), 126; Marianne Doresse, “Le dieu voilé dans sa chasse et la fête du début de la decade”, *Revue d'égyptologie* 25 (1973), p. 97–98, 132.

<sup>1078</sup> M. Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 39–40.

<sup>1079</sup> David O'Connor, “Beloved of Maat, the Horizon of Re”, p. 282.

<sup>1080</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1081</sup> J. Darnell, “Opet Festival”, p. 4–5.



The *Contendings* seem to reference or even reflect the Theban ritual milieu with Horus' character referring to both the role of the king and Amun-Re. The similarities, however, can be found beyond just the feast of Opet. David O'Connor argues that the festival formed a cosmological unity with the Festival of the Valley, during which the king, likely together with the icon of Amun-Re, crossed the Nile from Karnak to the western bank to communicate with the dead.<sup>1082</sup> As in the case of Opet, the king was presented as a solar being emerging from the *akhet* in the morning upon exiting the sacred structure in Thebes:

“Appearance of the king, who is like Re, from the palace of his august house to cause his father Amun to appear at His festival of Valley! The beautiful rulership comes forth like the king at his rising in the sky in the morning from his august palace, which is like the horizon of Re when he shines in the sky every day, when Amun-Re rejoices on his house and his Ennead are contented in their chapel.<sup>1083</sup>

The procession crossed the Nile in a ritual event which a 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty stela of Ameneminet describes in terms reminiscent of the ferryman problematic discussed above:

“He (Ameneminet) says ‘Come to me Amun, mighty herdsman, May you cause me to reach the shore. Come to me Amun, the savior of the shipwrecked! May you cause me to reach firm ground. Come to me, Amun, ferryman! May you cause me to reach the West in order to reach you, the venerable one, in peace with what the lord of Thebes give me.’<sup>1084</sup>

Once the procession reached the western shore, Amun visited royal funerary temples to be ritually identified with the deceased kings worshipped there.<sup>1085</sup> Finally, the procession arrived at Deir el-Bahri and the temple of Hathor, the goddess whose multifaceted character as mother of the solar deity, consort of Amun-Re and the king and

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<sup>1082</sup> For a description of the festival, see LÄ IV, 574-579; Manfred Bietak, “Das schöne Fest vom Wüstantale: Kult zur Vereinigung mit den Toten in der thebanischen Nekropole”, in Georg Danek, Irmtraud Hellerschmid, *Rituale. Identitätsstiftende Handlungskomplexe: 2. Tagung des Zentrums Archäologie und Altertumswissenschaften an der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 2.-3. November 2009*, Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Verlag, 2012, p. 23-35; M. Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 41-78. See also Lauren Dogaer, “The Beautiful Festival of the Valley in the Graeco-Roman Period: A Revised Perspective”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 106 (2020): 205-214; Monika Dolinska, “Temples at Deir el-Bahari in the New Kingdom”, in Ben Haring, Andrea Klug (eds.), *6. Ägyptologische Tempeltagung: Funktion und Gebrauch altägyptischer Tempelräume. Leiden, 4.-7. September 2002*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007, p. 67-82. Siegfried Schott, *Das Schöne Fest vom Wüstantale: Festbräuche einer Totenstadt*, Mainz - Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1952, xii + 138 p.; Silvia Wiebach, “Die Begegnung von Lebenden und Verstorbenen im Rahmen des thebanischen Talfestes”, *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 13 (1986): 263-291.

<sup>1083</sup> KRI V, 226: 11-13. Translation of M. Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 51.

<sup>1084</sup> KRI I, 403: 9-11. Translation of M. Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 54.

<sup>1085</sup> Ibid.

the lady of dead served as the unifying factor in the complex relationship between the dead, the gods and mankind in-between.<sup>1086</sup> A similar arrangement can possibly be observed in the Opet festival, during which the union of king/Amun with Hathor took place at the furthest point from Karnak, i.e., in the Luxor temple, before returning to Karnak.<sup>1087</sup> It should be noted that the Valley festival was conceived as a transition from the east to the west, the sacred route following the well-documented Deir el-Bahri – Karnak axis.<sup>1088</sup> After crossing the Nile from Thebes to the western shore, the procession followed the road of Hatshepsut until it entered Hathor’s shrine in Deir el-Bahri, nestled among cliffs in the goddess’ domain in the Western Desert. It was from these mountains that the goddess was believed to emerge and provide nourishment for the dead.<sup>1089</sup> The greatest of these peaks of Hathor, the Qurn, i.e., “Horn”, called so for its pyramidal shape, was referred to in antiquity simply as “the mountain” (*pꜣ ḏw*), same as the western mountain in the *Contendings*.<sup>1090</sup> The road from Deir el-Medina to the Valley of Kings led

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<sup>1086</sup> See esp. Lana Troy, *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History*, p. 53–72; M. Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 59–61. See also the discussion in M. Bietak, “Das schöne Fest vom Wüstentale”, p. 23–24. For a sacred marriage between Amun and Hathor in this context, see Geraldine Pinch, *Votive Offerings to Hathor*, Oxford: Griffith Institute – Ashmolean Museum, 1993, p. 244. For the union of Amun and king during this part of the festival, see Monika Dolinska, “Some Remarks about the Function of the Tuthmosis III Temple at Deir el-Bahari”, in Rolf Gundlach, Matthias Rochholz (eds.), *Ägyptische Tempel: Struktur, Funktion und Programm. Akten der Ägyptologischen Tempeltagungen in Gosen 1990 und in Mainz 1992*, Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1994, p. 36–37. Fukaya argues that Dolinska’s reading is highly speculative.

<sup>1087</sup> M. Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 18–19. See also the discussion in *Ibid.*, p. 31–32.

<sup>1088</sup> See Daniel Polz, Ute Rummel, “Topographical Archaeology in Dra’ Abu el-Naga: Three Thousand Years of Cultural History”, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo* 68 (2012): 123–7; Ute Rummel, “Gräber, Feste, Prozessionen: Der Ritualraum Theben-West in der Ramessidenzeit”, in Kathrin Gabler, Gregor Neunert, Alexandra Verbovsek (eds.), *Nekropolen: Grab – Bild – Ritual*, Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2013, p. 210; Harco Willems, “Dayr al-Barsha and Dayr al-Bahri: Two Ritual Landscapes in the Time of Mentuhotep II”, in Christina Geisen (ed.), *Ritual Landscape and Performance: Proceedings of the International Conference on Ritual Landscape and Performance, Yale University, September 23–24, 2016*, New Haven: Yale Egyptology, 2020, p. 25–45; Ute Rummel, “Landscape, Tombs, and Sanctuaries: The Interaction of Monuments and Topography in Western Thebes”, in Christina Geisen (ed.), *Ritual Landscape and Performance: Proceedings of the International Conference on Ritual Landscape and Performance, Yale University, September 23–24, 2016*, New Haven: Yale Egyptology, 2020, p. 89–119.

<sup>1089</sup> See the sources cited in Edward Scrivens, *Goddesses in Ramessid Egypt: Representations of Gender and Gendered Agency in the Divine Sphere*, Dissertation: University of Oxford, 2019, p. 63, 67.

<sup>1090</sup> J. Černý, *A Community of Workmen at Thebes in the Ramesside Period*, p. 97. Cf. Eberhard Otto, *Topographie des thebanischen Gaus*, Berlin; Leipzig: Akademie-Verlag – J. C. Hinrichs, 1952, p. 47. For the general environs, see e.g., Kent Weeks, “Toponyms of the Valley of the Kings and its Approaches”, in Kent Weeks, Richard Wilkinson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Valley of the Kings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 25 ff.

The fact that the Ennead ate bread upon traversing the river could perhaps be related to the practice of non-royal participants to feast at private tombs during the Valley festival. Cf. the discussion in M. Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 74.

along its steep eastern slopes.<sup>1091</sup> It is said that on the highest point of this rugged pathway the “sweet breath of the Northwind” blew, which is why workmen built a lay-by there, where they could rest without having to return all the way home to the village.<sup>1092</sup>

The festival concluded with the return back to the eastern shore to Karnak, where the king emerged from the temple and was hailed as Horus and a sun-god.<sup>1093</sup> The return journey could potentially be related to the Sais journey of Horus before the final announcement of his ascension.

The Festival of the Valley was believed to be attended by the dead emerging from their tombs and represented a celebration of the fundamental unity of the cosmos which transcended not only the boundary between king and god, but also the deceased and the living, complementing the cosmic significance of the Opet:<sup>1094</sup>

“Throughout the ritual, just as the living flocked to witness and benefit from the miracles of the Opet Festival, and the Valley Festival itself, so were the dead imagined to pour from their tombs and gather in ghostly multitudes along the processional ways of the west bank, where their tombs lay. Thus the circle was closed, and the universe made ritually complete by the union of those upon whom its stability depended – Amun-Re as rising and setting sun and the king in both his living and deceased aspects.”<sup>1095</sup>

The joyful unity marking the end of the Valley Festival can easily be compared with the celebration in which the *Contendings* end. As the story concludes, we are presented with an image the terrestrial ruler and a cosmic solar deity emerging as one in a glorious, joyful appearance at the end of a long night, both literal and metaphorical. The time of turmoil is at an end and the world can rejoice at the return of the divine life-giver, the same role in which the king acts during the major festivals of Thebes.<sup>1096</sup>

It is tempting to attempt to connect the *Contendings* with the three major festivals of Thebes – Opet, the Valley feast and the New Year festival, which in a sense encapsulated the totality of the divine and royal agency in Thebes.<sup>1097</sup> Notably, the New Year festival

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<sup>1091</sup> Kent Weeks, “Toponyms of the Valley of the Kings and its Approaches”, p. 25.

<sup>1092</sup> Thomas Peet, *The Great Tomb-Robberies of the Twentieth Egyptian Dynasty*, vol. 1, Oxford: Clarendon, 1930, p. 10.

<sup>1093</sup> M. Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 62.

<sup>1094</sup> D. O’Connor, “City and Palace in New Kingdom Egypt”, p. 82.

<sup>1095</sup> D. O’Connor, “Beloved of Maat, the Horizon of Re”, p. 283.

<sup>1096</sup> Masashi Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 1.


<sup>1097</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137–138.

included an Opening of the Mouth rite,<sup>1098</sup> as well as some relevant commonalities with the two feasts covered in more detail in present thesis, like the traverse of the Nile. Its general idea of cosmic renewal is likewise significant, but more detailed connections would have to be identified to make the case more compelling.<sup>1099</sup>

The rendition of the *Contendings* makes no distinction between the human and the divine king. Both are reflected in the person of Horus, who refers both to the humanity of the individual kings and to the transcendence of the universal source of kingship. Ultimately, the king is a mirror image of Amun on earth, exercising his authority over mankind, a fact confirmed by their recurrent ritual identification.<sup>1100</sup> The communication of the essence of kingship to the individual ruler was a crucial element of New Kingdom royal ideology and the tale makes its own contribution to this centrepiece of Egyptian religious thought, expressing itself through traditional motifs, but arranged in a novel and creative way.

## 5.7 Seth and Ramesside Kingship

### 5.7.1 The Transition of Seth

The exploration of Horus's transition has led us to the pinnacles of New Kingdom theology and ritual. The various symbolic images and constellations dispersed seemingly at random throughout the tale have been found to form a web of associations reflecting established religious ideas. The transformation of Horus, central to the message of the story, found its most elegant expression in the alternate writing of the god's name as  "the way", aptly stating the transitional state of the king-to-be.

However, Horus was not the only character to receive such treatment and the interpretation of this tale would not be complete without addressing the transition of Seth. Its character is clear, at least in the broadest sense. Whereas in the beginning Seth poses a threat to order, in the end he becomes a part of it, accepting Horus' rule and finding his place alongside Re, which recalls his role as the opposer of Apep on the solar god's bark. His transition is therefore inverse to that of Horus: as Horus is empowered to enforce order, Seth needs to be inhibited.

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<sup>1098</sup> As represented in tomb TT 415, published in Victor Loret, "Le tombeau de l'am-xent Amen-hotep", *Mémoires publiés par les membres de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire* 1 (1889): 23–32. Cf. Masashi Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 113–114.

<sup>1099</sup> Masashi Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 1.

<sup>1100</sup> In addition to sources cited in this chapter, see also Katja Goebis, "King as God and God as King: Colour, Light and Transformation in Egyptian Ritual", in Rolf Gundlach, Kate Spence (eds.), *Palace and Temple: Architecture – Decoration – Ritual. 5. Symposium zur ägyptischen Königsideologie*, Cambridge, July, 16th–17th, 2007, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011, p. 57–101.

The situation becomes more complicated when our focus shifts to the details. Firstly, we may notice that Seth's position with Re includes substantial merits. He is proclaimed to be the son of Re, an appellation typical of the king, which recalls Neith's suggestion from earlier in the tale, when she proposes that Re give Seth his daughters in marriage and double his treasure.<sup>1101</sup> Secondly, as Seth loses his ground against his opponent, so does Horus take on Sethian traits. Leaving behind his earlier ineffective appeals to justice, he embraces violence to achieve his goal, defeating his enemy through displays of martial and sexual prowess.<sup>1102</sup> By the end of the tale, we observe that the characters of the two gods are remarkably inverted to their original state, Horus becoming a strong leader commanding respect, while Seth finds his place in service to cosmic order which Horus established.

The image of a ruler possessing the strength of both Horus and Seth conforms with the Ramesside royal ideology, as rendered, for example, on the *Beth-Shan Stele* from year 18 of Ramesses II: "Thus speaks Amun-Re, the Lord of Heaven: "I give you the strength of Horus (and) the power of the son of Nut (= Seth) forever."<sup>1103</sup>

The idea of king as Seth or at least the holder of his power is a hallmark of Ramesside battle scenes, notably those of Ramesses at Kadesh:

"Thereupon the forces of the Foe from Khatti surrounded the followers of his Majesty who were by his side. When his majesty caught sight of them he rose quickly, enraged at them like his father Mont. Taking up weapons and donning his armor he was like Seth in the moment of his power. He mounted 'Victory-in-Thebes,' his great horse, and started out quickly alone by himself. His majesty was mighty, his heart stout, one could not stand before him. (...) He heeded not the foreign multitude; he regarded them as chaff. His majesty charged into the force of the Foe from Khatti and the many countries with him. His majesty was like Seth, great-of-strength, like Sakhmet in the moment of her rage. His majesty slew the entire force of the Foe from Khatti, together with his great chiefs and all his brothers, as well as all the chiefs of all the countries that had come with him... His majesty slaughtered them in their places; they sprawled before his horses; and his majesty was alone, none other with him."<sup>1104</sup>

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<sup>1103</sup> It could be argued that since it was not proper for an Egyptian king to offer their daughter to a foreign ruler, Seth had to be viewed as not foreign, at least in the context of this passage. Cf. e.g., Alan Schulman, "Diplomatic Marriage in the Egyptian New Kingdom", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 38 (1979), p. 179-180.

<sup>1102</sup> For the significance of such displays, see esp. R. Parkinson, "Boasting about Hardness" p. 131 ff.

<sup>1103</sup> E.g., KRI II, 150-151. See also the various sources discussed in John Turner, *Seth: A Misrepresented God in the Ancient Egyptian Pantheon?*, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2013, p. 82 ff.

<sup>1104</sup> *Qadesh Bulletin* § 83-103. Translation of M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, p. 62. KRI II, 2 ff. Cf. e.g., *Qadesh Poem* § 19.

If we recall the close association of Baal and Seth in the Ramesside period,<sup>1105</sup> we may even find the same notion expressed in the *Encomium of Papyrus Chester Beatty I*: “Baal gives you strength, O beloved divine king, you who took hold of the two lands by his power!”<sup>1106</sup>

The exercise of royal power is eminently Sethian. This is reflected not only in the physical aspect of the god’s nature which is very much emphasized in the *Contendings*, but also in the cosmological function attributed to Seth. As we recall, the tale contrasted Horus and Seth as two cosmic forces, the former a structuring one and the latter anti-structural. The way in which the king represented the guarantor of the structure of the universe has been discussed in detail, highlighting his significance in maintaining the boundaries between the various parts of the cosmos. It has also been noted, however, that in order for these boundaries to be conducive to the existence of life in the world, they need to be permeable. The royal institution is a paragon of this idea, transcending the distinction between human and god in a single person. This capacity to penetrate boundaries is embodied by Seth, who presents it in its most extreme character, with numerous accounts of radical, anti-social behaviour.<sup>1107</sup> Whereas the god of confusion is typically the subject of reproach for such actions, the king employs the same capacity to reinforce *maat*, not to erode it.

We can see the elements of these Sethian qualities desired for kingship in the description of the Sethian man in the Ramesside Dream Book preserved on *Papyrus Chester Beatty III*.<sup>1108</sup> It is particularly notable that this composition was acquired by Kenherkhepeshef, the ‘founder’ of the Deir el-Medina archive to which *Papyrus Chester Beatty I* was added several decades later.<sup>1109</sup> While the text is quite fragmentary, we can observe characteristics which may seem unequivocally negative in a civil context, like disregard for authority, bad temper, womanizing and general aggression.<sup>1110</sup> On the other hand, all the above might

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<sup>1105</sup> See esp. N. Allon, “Seth is Baal”, p. 15–21; Wolfgang Wettengel, *Die Erzählung von den beiden Brüdern: Der Papyrus d’Orbiney und die Königsideologie der Ramessiden*, Freiburg – Göttingen: Universitätsverlag – Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, 2003, p. 234 ff. See also Jan Zandee, “Seth als Sturmgott”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 90 (1963): 144–156.

<sup>1106</sup> Verso, B9–10.

<sup>1107</sup> See the sources cited in H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 32 ff. and 81 ff.

<sup>1108</sup> See Kasia Szpakowska, *Behind Closed Eyes: Dreams and Nightmares in Ancient Egypt*, Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2003, xii + 237 p.

<sup>1109</sup> P. Pestman, *Who Were the Owners in the ‘Community of Workmen’ of the Chester Beatty Papyri?*, p. 158–160.

<sup>1110</sup> Some scholars have noted the similarities between the description of the Sethian “red man” and some contemporaries of Kenherkhepeshef at Deir el-Medina, particularly the chief workman Paneb, whose reputation as a womanizer and a brute has endured till today. It seems Kenherkhepeshef and Paneb formed a bit of a power clique in the village of their time and the former was at least once accused of receiving bribes from Paneb to cover up his crimes. One can imagine whether Amennakhte would

seem quite important in the exercise of royal duties, especially in warfare, but also in the harem:

“The god within him is Seth. (...) The redness of the white of the eye is arisen in his body. This god, he is one who drinks what he detests, he is beloved of women through the greatness [...] greatness of his loving them. (...) He will take up weapons of war [...] in front of him, a hippopotamus [...] He will not distinguish the married woman from [...] As for any woman who defies him, he pushes [...] It is slaughter which arises in him, and he is placed in the farworld (...) His make-up is like [...] uproar in order to break vessels, the destruction [...] while expunging something.”<sup>1111</sup>

It is the ability to transgress boundaries what allows the king to guarantee funerary and divine cults. Each requires that the separation of the living from the gods and the dead to be suspended, allowing for the transfer of vital energies. Much like Seth himself, this establishment of communication channels is not free of ambivalence and is in a sense violent.

The *Opening of the Mouth* ritual, which was a common element of funerary and temple ritual, ensured not only the continuing vitality of its beneficiary, but also the flow of life energies through this beneficiary back to the human world.<sup>1112</sup> Performed on the mummy

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have seen some resemblance between the corrupt relationship of his mother's first husband with the fiendish chief workman and the unscrupulous favouritism of Re towards Seth in the *Contendings*. For the corrupt relationship, see H. El-Saady, “Considerations on Bribery in Ancient Egypt”, p. 300–301. For Paneb and possible relationship to the characters of Chester Beatty Papyri, see John Romer, *Ancient Lives: Daily Life in Egypt of the Pharaohs*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984, p. 60 ff. See also Morris Bierbrier, “Paneb rehabilitated?”, in Robert Demarée, Arno Egberts (eds.), *Deir el-Medina in the Third Millennium AD: A Tribute to Jac. J. Janssen*, Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2000, p. 51–54; Mark Collier, “More on Late Nineteenth Dynasty Ostraca Dates, and Remarks on Paneb”, in Mark Collier, and Steven Snape (eds.), *Ramesside Studies in Honour of K. A. Kitchen*, Bolton: Rutherford, 2011, p. 111–122. K. Donker van Heel, *Mrs. Naunakhte and Family*, p. 31–34.

It is particularly ominous that Paneb apparently names his son Aapehty, same as the characteristic epithet of Seth, “Great-of-strength”. This Aapehty dedicated a charming stele to Seth in Deir el-Medina (BM 35630), testifying not only to the presence of his worship there, which befits his role as master of deserts, but possibly also to the overall moral preferences of his family. Cf. the discussion of the cult of Seth in the Western desert in A. Warfe, C. Hope, “The Proscription of Seth Revisited”, p. 273 ff. For Aapehty and his stele, see e.g., Milena Kooyman, “Always on the periphery? Seth and personal piety in New Kingdom Egypt, p. 366.

<sup>1111</sup> *Papyrus Chester Beatty III*, recto 11.1–11.18. Translation of K. Szpakowska, *Behind Closed Eyes*, p. 113.

<sup>1112</sup> Eugene Cruz-Urbe, “Opening the Mouth as Temple Ritual”, in John Larson, Emily Teeter (eds.), *Gold of Praise: Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honor of Edward F. Wente*, Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1999, p. 70–71. Cf. E. Hornung, *Idea into Image*, p. 115–129. The rite could even be performed on the sacred structure housing the being, reflecting the same idea of ensuring its life-generating capability. Cf. Ash Melika, “The Founding of the Temple in Ancient Egypt: Ritual and Symbolism”, in Richard Averbeck, Lawson Younger (eds.), *An Excellent Fortress for His Armies, a Refuge for the People: Egyptological, Archaeological, and Biblical Studies in Honor of James K. Hoffmeier*, University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2020, p. 218.

or the cultic statue, it involved a (symbolic) cutting of the mouth which, while necessary, represented a form of assault.<sup>1113</sup> The burden of this task was focalized in the role played by the craftsmen who took part in funerary ceremonies, namely sculptors and carpenters.<sup>1114</sup> The seemingly contradictory attitudes towards them articulated by the text of the ritual exemplify the ambivalent nature of the rite, as narrated by Assmann:

“The *sem*-priest plays the role of the son of the deceased, or vice versa. Only the son was capable of doing what is happening here: seeing the form of his father in a trance or in meditative concentration and capturing it in its outlines so that artisans can render it in stone or wood. (...) Scene 12 (of the *Opening of the Mouth* ritual) depicts him (the *sem*-priest) facing three “woodcarvers.” He says to them: “Brand my father! Make my father for me! Make it like my father! Who is it who makes it similar for me?” In scene 13, the *sem* addresses three other artisans, the bone-carver, the woodchopper, and the craftsman who wielded the polishing stone, with the words: “Who are they who wish to approach my father? Do not smite my father! Do not touch his head!” The artisans’ activities on the statue entail violence that must be neutralized. (...) Scene 15 also has the purpose of averting the disagreeable consequences of unavoidable violence. The *sem* says to the artisans, “Come, smite my father for me!” and the artisans say, “Let those who smite your father be protected!” In scene 16, the *sem* says to a woodchopper, “I am Horus and Seth; I do not allow you to make the head of my father white!”<sup>1115</sup>

Once the mouth of is “added”<sup>1116</sup> to the image of the deceased, he starts to regain his vital capacity and the attention starts to shift to his enemy. Here, the *sem*-priest addresses him again: “I have saved his eye from his mouth! I have ripped off his leg.” The chief lector priest says to the statue, “O NN, I have branded your eye for you, so that you may be brought to life by it!”<sup>1117</sup> The ritual continues with the slaughter of a bull, whose foreleg

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<sup>1113</sup> Ann Roth, “Fingers, Stars, and the ‘Opening of the Mouth’”, p. 74 ff. A similar notion of necessary violence is expressed in the image of the umbilical cord of the deceased being cut during the ritual. See Ann Roth, “The *psš-*kf** and the ‘Opening of the Mouth’ Ceremony”, p. 123 ff.

<sup>1114</sup> The same can be observed in the mummification rite. The surgical opening of the body was indispensable to ensure the successful conservation of both the body and the extracted organs, but at the same time constituted an act of violence. See Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* I 91.4. His account is from a later period but does present ritual taboo as a reasonable explanation for the lack of attested beliefs related to the surgical aspect of mummification. Cf. Bob Brier, Ronald Wade, “Surgical Procedures during Ancient Egyptian Mummification”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 126 (1999): 89–97.

<sup>1115</sup> J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 174 ff.

<sup>1116</sup> “The Egyptian term rendered “adding” here is a carpenter’s term that means putting two pieces together in such a way that they interlock. (J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 314)

<sup>1117</sup> J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 314.



is brought to the image to be used as a tool of its resurrection.<sup>1118</sup> The violence done against him now compensated by the violence done against his enemies, which now serves the deceased as a source of vitality. In the context of the *Contendings*, the bull, of course, relates back to Seth.

Returning to the transgressive duty of the king, we may observe that it is most apparent at its extreme: in warfare. As we have seen, it was in martial context that the Ramesside king manifested to the world as Seth.<sup>1119</sup> The significance of fighting against disorder was such that it was common for a new king to go on campaign in his first year, thereby confirming his cosmic role and responsibility to the gods, whose fulfilling was so ostentatiously articulated in smiting scenes which were a typical motif of temple pylons.<sup>1120</sup> Whereas in the maintenance of vertical boundaries the violence is mostly implied, in the case of horizontal boundaries, it is at its most explicit, as we see the king destroying hordes of enemies seemingly alone. It is in depictions of warfare that the king's significance as religious actor is arguably most pronounced, reflecting not only the specifics of particular campaigns, but more importantly, timeless truths about the duties of the king in spreading order.<sup>1121</sup>

From a pragmatic point of view, foreign lands were the source of crucial resources which Egypt lacked, and from a religious standpoint, the role they played in fuelling Egyptian temples and shrines with exotic wood, gold, incense, and exotic oils was indispensable.<sup>1122</sup> The acquisition of such articles was a foremost responsibility of the king, who organized trade expeditions,<sup>1123</sup> which, while relatively more peaceful, nevertheless articulated the same notion of the king facilitating the transfer of vital power to the cultural centre.<sup>1124</sup> As such, military campaigns could be framed as motivated by the need to acquire

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<sup>1118</sup> J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 315.

<sup>1119</sup> Cf. Uroš Matić, “‘The Good God in the Form of Montu’: Pharaoh as the Warrior God on the Battlefield”, *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 34 (2019): 80–91.

<sup>1120</sup> L. Sabbahy, *Kingship, Power, and Legitimacy in Ancient Egypt*, p. 24–25. For the significance of displays of violence and Egyptian kingship, see Uroš Matić, *Body and Frames of War in New Kingdom Egypt: Violent Treatment of Enemies and Prisoners*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019, xiv + 390 p.

<sup>1121</sup> A. Spalinger, *Icons of Power*, p. 11. Pragmatically, it was also harder for the king to delegate military leadership compared to cultic duties, because the political ramifications of failure were significantly higher. Cf. D. Valbelle, “Pharaonic Regality”, p. 111.

<sup>1122</sup> See also e.g., Elliott Wise, “An ‘Odor of Sanctity’: The Iconography, Magic, and Ritual of Egyptian Incense”, *Studia Antiqua* 7 (2009): 67–80; Pearce Creasman, “Ship Timber and the Reuse of Wood in Ancient Egypt”, *Journal of Egyptian History* 6 (2013): 152–176.

<sup>1123</sup> Records of the Punt expedition Senusret I provide a concrete measure of the military character of such endeavour. Of the ca. 3750 men of whom it consisted, 3200 were soldiers. See Kenneth Kitchen, “The Land of Punt”, in Andah Basse et al. (eds.), *The Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals and Towns*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 590–591.

<sup>1124</sup> Cf. the idea that Egyptian kingship originated in Upper Egypt in relation to international trade, which required organization and long-term planning, in P. Grandet “State and Administration”, p. 116.

religiously indispensable commodities, as described in the *Berlin Leather Roll* through the words of Senusret I:

“Now I have become like Horus. Having pondered at length and after having guaranteed offerings to the gods, I shall undertake work in the Great Mansion of my father Atum. He will fix its extent in relation to that which he will enable me to conquer so that I might supply his altars on earth.”<sup>1125</sup>

This text succinctly illustrates the relation between foreign conquest and cultic activity which are all aspects of the singular function of the king. Furthermore, it also indicates how campaigning constitutes an enlargement of the ordered cosmos, given the status of the temple as microcosm.

The difference in attitude towards foreigners and gods/ancestors reflects Leach's distinction between various types of cultural 'Other' based on proximity to the cultural centre. The common element of all such interactions, however, is the element of power. According to Leach, power is not inherent in individuals or things, but is a function of relationships between them. In order to generate power, boundaries between defined structural positions in a cultural system need to be transgressed.<sup>1126</sup> Power is consequently inherently liminal, profoundly ambivalent and requires a ritual actor capable of behaving in an anti-structural manner to maintain it.

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<sup>1125</sup> *Papyrus Berlin Museum 3029*: I, 14–17. Translation of D. Valbelle, “Pharaonic Regality”, p. 110 with my modifications. Cf. the different translation in Richard Parkinson, *Voices From Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Middle Kingdom Writings*, London: The British Museum Press, 1991, p. 41. Lichtheim is convinced that the text was originally inscribed on a temple wall or on a stela in Atum's temple in Heliopolis. See M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature I*, p. 115. For more information about the text, see Rolf Gundlach, “The Berlin Leather Roll (pBerlin 3029): Ritual and Royal ideology”, in Rolf Gundlach, Kate Spence (eds.), *Palace and Temple: Architecture – Decoration – Ritual. 5. Symposium zur ägyptischen Königsideologie / 5th symposium on Egyptian royal ideology. Cambridge, July, 16th–17th, 2007*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011, p. 103–114; Aldo Piccato, “The Berlin Leather Roll and the Egyptian Sense of History”, *Lingua Aegyptia* 5 (1997): 137–159.

<sup>1126</sup> Edmund Leach, “Nature of War”, p. 346 ff.

### 5.7.2 The Transmission of Transgressive Ability

These arguments show the way in which the power of Seth was a necessary tool of the Egyptian king's reign, as the king embodied elements of both Horus and Seth.<sup>1127</sup> Now we need to address the question of how this capacity is acquired. Here, the answer of the Opening of the Mouth ritual and of the *Contendings* is the same: sacrifice.

In a previous chapter, it has been shown how the mythical figure of Seth corresponds with the role played by the sacrificial bull in the Opening of the Mouth. There, the idea was expressed in emic terms: it is up to Seth as the bull to move the body of the deceased to its final resting place. The same power that forced the deceased across the boundary between life and death will also help him cross to life eternal. The defeat of Seth, framed in the *Contendings* as a gradual development, corresponds with the acquisition of his transgressive ability by Horus. Much like in the case of the deceased, the violence of Seth which brought Horus down is what allows the king-to-be to defeat his enemy.

This seemingly paradoxical notion of Egyptian religious thought finds an interesting parallel in the theory of ritual outlined by Maurice Bloch in *Prey into Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience*.<sup>1128</sup> For Bloch, the fundament of ritual, or more specifically, sacrifice, is an idea of transition from the mundane into the realm of the transcendental. This journey into what other authors might describe as liminal space, is profoundly changing in that it imbues the ritual actor or initiate with transcendental power.

This process is conceptualized as a two-stage affair. First, the “vital, local, or natural element of personhood” is symbolically negated or killed as it enters “the other world.”<sup>1129</sup> The subject's mundane vitality is replaced with a new, foreign vitality, which, unlike the former, is not native, “home-grown”, but “instead, a conquered vitality obtained from

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<sup>1127</sup> Following this line of inquiry, perhaps it would be possible to relate the notion of king as both Horus and Seth with the ancient royal title Horus of Gold. This element of traditional titulary is usually translated as “king as champion of Maat and defender of the cosmic order against the forces of Chaos”, i.e., “Horus triumphant over Seth”. (L. Sabbahy, *Kingship, Power, and Legitimacy in Ancient Egypt*, p. 23–24; T. Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt*, New York: Routledge, p. 177) At the same time, the title could be translated as “Horus (and) the Ombite” (i.e., Seth), which is how the Ramesside elite might have approached it, given the considerations of this chapter. Cf. the discussion of Seth and gold in Chapter 3.5.

An oft-made comparison is also with titulary of 2<sup>nd</sup> Dynasty king Peribsen, whose Horus name included both Seth and Horus on the serekh emblem. See e.g., Alexandra O'Brien, “The Serekh as an Aspect of the Iconography of Early Kingship”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 33 (1996): 123–38. It has in fact argued that the title using the serekh, which is called the Horus name, is in fact the king's “ka-name”, which is in line with the understanding of Horus as the personification of the royal ka.

<sup>1128</sup> Maurice Bloch, *Prey into Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, xiii + 117 p.

<sup>1129</sup> Richard Parmentier, “Review of *Prey into Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience*, by M. Bloch”, *History of Religions*, 34 (1994): 95–97.

outside beings.”<sup>1130</sup>. Consequently, the return of the initiate is framed as the conquest or consumption of this power, which leaves the person, at least temporarily, transcendental.

Violence is the essential means through which this transformation is achieved. The expelling of the original vitality is in itself a violent act, which Bloch relates to the motifs of separation rites in van Gennep’s and Turner’s models. At the same time, however, he emphasizes the dramatic character of the initiate’s return, which amounts to a subjugation of a power beyond the margins of the ordinary world and which the initiate brings back within themselves. In Bloch’s conception, the reintegration of the initiate is not so much a return to the original, temporarily vacated condition, but an “aggressive consumption of a vitality which is different in origin from that which had originally been lost.”<sup>1131</sup>

Bloch’s ideas can in fact be related to two distinct topics discussed in relation to the *Contendings*. Firstly, it provides a systematic framework for the symbolic death of Horus as a necessary precondition of the defeat of Seth. In this manner, it complements the traditional motifs of rites of passage. Secondly, it shows the way in which the ascension of Horus is not only fuelled by the acquisition of new, radically different kind of power, but that it is this power that distinguished Horus the child from the mature, royal Horus.

Nevertheless, Bloch’s theory becomes most interesting, once the image of Horus’ transition is transposed to the historical dramas of the accession of human princes. When speaking of the transcendental, he contrasts its eternal, collective character with the transience and impotence of individual biological existence. This sort of permanence is embodied in the social world by institutional structures: “while societies are composed of mortal human individuals, they are perduring entities. Bloch’s answer is that society stands before individuals as a nonbiological continuity, that is, as more than merely the product of generational succession.”<sup>1132</sup>

In order for an individual to become a part of an eternal institution, they “must appear, in a certain light at least, to be immortal and unchanging, and therefore other than human; at the same time, they must also be truly alive, in a human body which cannot but be perceived as transformative and mortal.”<sup>1133</sup> The dual character of the Egyptian king is an exemplary image of this notion, achieving its eternal authority through the paradox of being both human and divine.

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<sup>1130</sup> M. Bloch, *Prey into Hunter*, p. 5.

<sup>1131</sup> M. Bloch, *Prey into Hunter*, p. 6.

<sup>1132</sup> R. Parmentier, “Review of *Prey into Hunter*”, p. 96.

<sup>1133</sup> M. Bloch, *Prey into Hunter*, p. 19.

We can relate Bloch's ideas to Egyptian tradition by recalling the nature of the duality of Osiris and Seth, each representing a distinct aspect of death.<sup>1134</sup> Where Osiris stands for the blessed ancestor, whose past life on earth is a mirror image of the fate of the ascending king, Seth represents the violence and the sacrifice which powers the transition from one life to the next. Horus is killed by Seth, whom he then sacrifices so that he may return as a reincarnation his father, Osiris.

Each ascending king faces the transgressive power of Seth, and absorbs it, becoming his predecessor in the process.<sup>1135</sup> The institution of kingship, represented by the totality of the future and past kings, relies on this power to perform its function. As stated before, royal activity consists not only of establishing boundaries, but also in overcoming them, which is why Sethian qualities are a necessary aspect of the king's person. The king uses the anti-structural force as an instrument of his rule, and his rule lasts as long as he can control it. Eventually the antistructure itself overcomes him and he dies, slain by Seth, be the proximal cause an illness or death in battle.

This is the theological substance of the interregnum: it occurs when the structuring moment is weaker than the anti-structural one. Consequently, the power dynamics of structure and antistructure are the cause of the cyclical nature of the kingship and also a precondition for it to function at all. This is the case because the only way that kingship can be imbued by antistructure is by giving itself up to it when a particular king dies. Effectively, we can think of the ruler's demise as a trap, which locks the two moments in a perpetual cycle. By incarnating the kingship into a man, the force of antistructure is condemned to a never-ending struggle with the structural force. But no matter how often

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<sup>1134</sup> Curiously enough, Bloch also describes a Papuan initiation rite, which is surprisingly reminiscent of the tenets of Egyptian positional succession: "In the first part the community is promised permanence if it is willing to allow its young to 'die' at the hands of 'ancestors', who actually expel the initiates from the place of life and thus appear to outlive them. Continuity is apparently achieved by death replacing birth. In the second part of the ritual the young return, but this is not a reversal of the first part because by then the initiates are representing the dead and they are under the leadership of elders. The return of the initiates is therefore represented as merely a continuation of what has happened before. Once again it is the 'ancestors' who break into the place of life and conquer it." (M. Bloch, *Prey into Hunter*, p. 19–20)

<sup>1135</sup> Effectively, the king becomes both Horus and Seth, as indicated in the queenly title *mꜣꜣ.t ḥrw-stš* ("the one who beholds Horus-Seth"). Cf. S. Roth, "Queen", p. 1–2. Another expression of this idea is the deity *ḥr.wj=fy* "His Two Faces", attested in the 2<sup>nd</sup> hour of the *Amduat* and in the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the *Book of Gates*. See Colleen Darnell, John Darnell, *The Ancient Egyptian Netherworld Books*, Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018, p. 310, n. 141. See also the discussion of the reconciliation of Horus and Seth in H. Te Velde, *Seth*, p. 70 ff.

We may compare the notion of cultural fratricide discussed in chapter XX above with the significance of the royal brother during the Kushite 25th Dynasty in Jean Revez, "The Role of the Kings' Brothers in the Transmission of Royal Power in Ancient Egypt and Kush: A Cross-cultural Study, in Julie Anderson, Derek Welsby (eds), *The Fourth Cataract and Beyond: Proceedings of the 12th International Conference for Nubian Studies*. Leuven – Paris – Walpole: Peeters, 2014, p. 537–544.

it wins, the order always returns, because after a king dies, there always comes another, young and strong.

### 5.7.3 The Contendings and Ramesside Kingship

The divine character of kingship is confronted with the source of its power upon the death of the incumbent ruler, but it does not share his fate. As the old king perishes at the hand of the power which he himself used to maintain the cosmos, so does his successor use this temporary, but regular upheaval to imbue himself with the same power. This fluctuation of transgressive power, which is subordinate during the periods of rule and seems to dominate during the interregnum only to be vanquished and consumed, forms the vital cycle of kingship.

As each king ages, his ability to control the transgressive force gradually fades, and regular rites ensuring the capability of the ruler to exercise his office become more frequent to compensate.<sup>1136</sup> The Sed festival, which was typically celebrated after a king reigned for 30 years, a timespan interpreted as one generation, represents the most prominent example of this phenomenon.<sup>1137</sup> Ramesses II, who reigned for 66 long years, celebrated 14 Sed festivals, one approximately every three years after his first jubilee. Some authors have proposed that the ceremony originated to replace an older practice of killing a king who was too infirm to exercise his duties.<sup>1138</sup> Despite the numerous detailed depictions of the festival, there is a significant degree of uncertainty about its structure and meaning.<sup>1139</sup> The rite “seems to be connected to regeneration and rebirth”,<sup>1140</sup> but as Stadler points

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<sup>1136</sup> See Salvador Costa, “On the Scenes of the King Receiving the Sed-Fests in the Theban Temples of the Ramesside Period”, *Studien Zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 35 (2006), esp. p. 71; M. Pehal, “New Kingdom Royal Succession Strategies and Their Possible Old Kingdom Antecedents”, p. 3. For the significance of the transcendental nature of kingship, see Erik Hornung, Elisabeth Staehelin, *Neue Studien zum Sedfest*, Basel: Schwabe, 2006, 106 p. Cindy Ausec, *Gods Who Hear Prayers: Popular Piety or Kingship in Three Theban Monuments of New Kingdom Egypt*, Dissertation: University of California, Berkeley, 2010, 205 p. For the attestations of the festival, see Eric Uphill, “The Egyptian Sed-Festival Rites”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 24 (1965), p. 365.

<sup>1137</sup> S. Costa, “On the Scenes of the King Receiving the Sed-Fests in the Theban Temples of the Ramesside Period”, p. 61. See also Rachel Grover, “Queenship and Eternal Life: Tije Offering Palm Ribs at the Sed-Festival Thrones of Amenhotep III”, *Studia Antiqua* 6 (2008), p. 5.

<sup>1138</sup> See Alexandre Moret, *Le mise à mort du dieu en Egypte*, Paris: Geuthner, 1927, p. 5. For cases of ritual killing of the king, see Gerald Wainwright, *The Sky Religion in Egypt*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938, p. 5. For an opposing view, see esp. Claas Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals: Enactments of Religious Renewal*, Leiden: Brill, 1967, p. 114. It should be noted that this idea is not necessarily part of contemporary Egyptological mainstream.

<sup>1139</sup> R. Grover, “Queenship and Eternal Life: Tije Offering Palm Ribs at the Sed-Festival Thrones of Amenhotep III”, p. 6.

<sup>1140</sup> C. Gneisen, *The Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus*, p. 220.

out, such is the case with ritual in general.<sup>1141</sup> More interesting is the way in which the spheres of funerary and royal ritual come together in the rite, much like they do in the rite described in the *Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus*.<sup>1142</sup> Ultimately, each king is no longer able to hold the entropic force at bay, and his demise marks the end of his capability to enforce order as is his duty towards the creator.

Death is the event in which the life cycle of kingship comes full circle. The disruptive element of death is an inevitable part of any human institution, and the Egyptians developed an ingenious way in which it is not only a way of regularly revitalizing said institution, but in fact the means by which the institution performs its function. What is a tragic, destructive occurrence for the individual, becomes a part of a controlled and transparent process in which crisis is subsumed and transformed into a part of an eternally stable arrangement.

The purpose of this excursus into the world of Egyptian ritual is not to decide which ritual the *Contendings* ultimately describe hidden under the layers of mythical images. Rather, we hoped to show the way in which certain religious practices and associated beliefs resonate in the tale, connecting its specific literary constellation of mythemes with other constellations, which were performed with live actors. It is apparent that the same ideas of royal renewal that show repeatedly in various rituals of Ancient Egypt do reflect in the *Contendings* as well. Ultimately, the added value of the *Contendings* is not that the story deals with royal renewal, but the way in which it does so. Its emphasis on succession as a point of crisis is remarkable and parallels with ritual activities have been difficult to identify, as we have seen.<sup>1143</sup> Nevertheless, the similarity of some of the narrative sequences in the tale with certain rites, namely the Opet and the Beautiful Feast of the Valley, are too significant to ignore. It is clear that the local religious culture of Thebes was a major formative element behind the tale, likely framing the issue of royal succession through the imagery of the most significant festivals of the erstwhile capital where the

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<sup>1141</sup> Martin Stadler, “On the Nature of Ancient Egyptian Funerary Rituals”, in Katalin Kóthay (ed.), *Burial and Mortuary Practices in Late Period and Graeco-Roman Egypt: Proceedings of the International Conference Held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, 17–19 July 2014*, Budapest: Museum of Fine Arts, 2017, p. 19.

<sup>1142</sup> See esp. the discussion in M. Stadler, “On the Nature of Ancient Egyptian Funerary Rituals”. For a more conservative funerary reading, see C. Gniesen, *The Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus*, p. 238–245.

<sup>1143</sup> Compare the tale’s focus on crisis rather than normalcy with Parkinson’s observation that Egyptian literature can be characterized by its relatively darker tone: “The corpus often shows the dark side of human life more fully than other texts; similarly, the ‘mythical’ tales seems also to deal with problematic episodes, but in the lives of gods. Although every complete text offers a positive resolution this darkness is not simply dismissed.” (Richard Parkinson, “Teachings, Discourses and Tales from the Middle Kingdom”, p. 101). Especially interesting example of the way in which the same topic is described in significantly different ways are the two Qadesh inscription. See Thomas von der Way, *Die Textüberlieferung Ramses’ II. zur Qadeš-Schlacht: Analyse und Struktur*, Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1984, xli + 427 p.

memory of its political and religious primacy must still have strongly resonated generations after the pharaohs moved their principal residence to the north.<sup>1144</sup>

A similar argument is made by Wettengel, who supposes that the tale is a form of Theban critique of Ramesside royal ideology and especially the practice of succession by brothers of the deceased king.<sup>1145</sup> The notion that the tale denies Seth's aspirations for kingship as a form of critique of the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty succession by brothers, however, does not seem to reflect the ramifications of positional kingship, which effectively overrode the biological brotherhood between the king and his siblings and replaced it with cultural sonhood. This element of Egyptian kingship as represented by the notion of *kamutef* clearly predates the Ramesside period, and its close association with the performative nature of filiality indicates that it had been an integral part of Egyptian culture long before then.<sup>1146</sup>

While Wettengel might be correct in assuming that the attitude of Theban elites towards “the mythical royal dogma of the Ramessides with its emphasis on foreign and Seth elements, as well as actual succession”<sup>1147</sup> might not have been very warm, it would be too eager to see the story's treatment of Seth as an example of getting back at the northern upstarts. The treatment of Seth in this tale is benevolent to what is arguably the greatest possible extent given the subject matter of the *Contendings*. Some elements of the story may represent a joke at the Ramessides' expense, but if the author desired to divest from the Ramesside image of Seth and present him more adversely in line with older tradition, the character would have been treated in a fundamentally different way. He would probably not have been hailed as “son of Re” and elevated to heaven.<sup>1148</sup> In fact, we may

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<sup>1144</sup> We may note that both the fragmentary hymn and Encomium of Papyrus Chester-Beatty I have a Theban localisation. Cf. the discussion in U. Verhoeven, “Ein historischer ‘Sitz im Leben’ für die Erzählung von Horus und Seth des Papyrus Chester Beatty I”, p. 352–353.

<sup>1145</sup> W. Wettengel, *Die Erzählung von den beiden Brüdern*, p. 255–258. Cf. the view that the tale legitimizes father-son among Ramesside rulers. Namely, Michèle Broze argues that the tale legitimizes Ramesses IV, while Ursula Verhoeven relates the story to the preference for Rameses V over his uncle, the later Rameses VI. See M. Broze, *Les aventures*, p. 10, 269–275, 281; U. Verhoeven, “Ein historischer ‘Sitz im Leben’ für die Erzählung von Horus und Seth des Papyrus Chester Beatty I”, p. 362–363.

<sup>1146</sup> Cf. the discussion of positional succession above and M. Pehal, “New Kingdom Royal Succession Strategies and Their Possible Old Kingdom Antecedents”, esp. p. 8

<sup>1147</sup> W. Wettengel, *Die Erzählung von den beiden Brüdern*, p. 256–257.

<sup>1148</sup> Cf. G. Soukiassian, “Une etape de la proscription de Seth”, p. 59–68. For an up-to-date discussion and summary of significant sources, see Ashten Warfe, “Iconoclasm in Degrees: On the Proscription of Seth (again)”, in Colin Hope, Bruce Parr, Carlo Nuzzolo (eds.), *Australasian Egyptology Conference 4: Papers from the Fourth Australasian Egyptology Conference*, Oxford: Archaeopress, 115–123; Ashten Warfe, Colin Hope, “The Proscription of Seth Revisited”, in Camilla Di Biase-Dyson, Leonie Donovan (eds.), *The Cultural Manifestations of Religious Experience. Studies in Honor of Boyo G. Ockinga*, Münster: Ugarit, 2017, p. 273–284; Mark Smith, “The Reign of Seth”, p. 396–430. It should be noted that compared to older scholarship, recent works lean towards a more nuanced view of the persecution of Seth's cult after New Kingdom, indicating that the relationship towards the god after the Ramessides retained some of its earlier ambivalence, rather than giving way to unequivocal rejection.



argue that Seth is confirmed as a prince of his own domain, an assumption supported by the text of the *Cairo Calendar* for 3 Akhet 27 and 29, whose relevance will be discussed below:<sup>1149</sup>

“The land is caused to be at peace by giving the whole of Egypt (*km.t mj ꞗd=sn*) to Horus and the entire desert (*dšr.t ꜥw.t*) to Seth.”<sup>1150</sup>

“The White crown is given to Horus; the Red Crown is given to Seth.” (var. because Re gave the White crown...”<sup>1151</sup>

The second passage in particular can be related to the *Contendings*, recalling not only the traditional motif of dividing the Red and White crowns to Seth and Hours, but also its significance in the *Contendings* as the sole insignia of Egypt. In fact, we may argue that the rulership of Seth over foreign lands is taken for granted and the question is not whether Seth will rule, but whether he will rule over Egypt as well. This would underline the idea that the god’s place and function in the world is irreducible, and that the significance of the tale is to outline the way in which it needs to be reconciled with its polar opposite, Horus.

The main points of this chapter may be summarized as follows: The transition of Seth, which highlights the significance of his gradual defeat and the corresponding investment of Horus with his power, is coupled with the images of transition of Horus, which frame the whole affair of succession in the intricacies of Theban theology of Amun. This combination of ancient mythology of Horus, Seth and Osiris, coincides with New Kingdom theology and places Seth into a complex and innovative tapestry of royal ideology that is typical of Ramesside Thebes.

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It is compelling to imagine a connection between this elevation of Seth and the rite of rewarding warriors following the emergence of the king from the Luxor temple during Opet. Cf. M. Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 36–38. Alan Schulman, *Ceremonial Execution and Public Rewards: Some Historical Scenes on New Kingdom Private Stelae*, Göttingen: Universitätsverlag – Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988, p. 118

<sup>1149</sup> Leitz’ remark that the events described can be related to the receding of the floodwaters after the flood maximum on 3 Akhet 19 is quite insightful and can be matched to the cosmological aspect of the tale. See C. Leitz, *Tagewählerei*, p. 143, n. 27. Cf. Rolf Krauss, “Dates Relating to Seasonal Phenomenon and Miscellaneous Astronomical Dates”, in Erik Hornung (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Chronology*, Leiden: Brill, 2006, p. 369–379.

<sup>1150</sup> C. Leitz, *Tagewählerei*, p. 142–143.

<sup>1151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144–145.

## 6 The Contendings in Social Context

Having delved deeply into the rich tapestry of symbolism that permeates the *Contendings* in the preceding chapters, we now turn our attention to a different facet of this analysis. In this chapter, we shift our focus to the broader literary context in which our chosen work resides. While symbolism provides a lens through which we decipher hidden meanings and layers of interpretation, understanding the literary context is equally significant. The depth and extent of this exploration is inevitably limited by the scarcity of evidence of the actual origin and history of *Papyrus Chester Beatty I*. Here, the importance of Ursula Verhoeven's work is paramount, collecting most of the evidence relevant to this topic. Consequently, a large portion of this chapter will be devoted to outlining the salient points of her argument with some further comments.

The rest of the chapter will focus on the status of the *Contendings* as a literary and mythical writing, outlining some shared characteristics of these categories of text which may broaden the understanding of the tale's context beyond what can be achieved by following Verhoeven's line of inquiry. This contextual exploration will serve as a crucial bridge, connecting the nuanced symbolism we have dissected with the broader literary landscape in which our tale finds its place.

### 6.1 'Festive' Context

The significance of Ursula Verhoeven's contribution to the study of the context of the *Contendings* has already been outlined and now it will be analysed in detail.<sup>1152</sup>

Her very convincing argument is based on the similarities between two texts of *Papyrus Chester Beatty I*, the *Encomium* and the *Contendings*, and two entries in the *Cairo Calendar*, namely those for 3 Akhet 27 and 3 Akhet 28:

“3<sup>rd</sup> month of the flood season, day 27.


Good! Good! Good!

Separation of Horus and Seth. Seizing of the two fighters. Hunting of the seditious one. Finishing the tumult. Pacification of the Two Lords.<sup>1153</sup> The land is caused (rdj.t) to be at peace by giving the whole of Egypt to Horus and the entire desert to Seth. Appearance of Thoth, who decides the dispute before Re.”<sup>1154</sup>

“3<sup>rd</sup> month of the flood season, day 28.

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<sup>1152</sup> The work summarized is, of course, U. Verhoeven “Ein historischer “Sitz im Leben” für die Erzählung von Horus und Seth des Papyrus Chester Beatty I”, p. 347–363.

<sup>1153</sup> The signs  in version C make it clear that the phrase denotes Horus and Seth.

<sup>1154</sup> C. Leitz, *Tagewählerei*, p. 142–143.

Good! Good! Good!

The gods are cheering and rejoicing at the sight of the *jmyt-pr* document in favour of Horus of Osiris, to satisfy Onuphris in the land of the dead. The whole land is in celebration and the gods' hearts are satisfied because of it."<sup>1155</sup>

Verhoeven notes the close similarities between the 3 Akhet 28 entry and the *Encomium*, paying particular attention to the *imyt-pr* document:

“The allusions between *Encomium* and *Tageskommentar* (the calendar entry) are clear: in one it is the land, in the other Thebes, which celebrates a festival; the gods or people rejoice; the assignment of the inheritance to Horus, son of Isis and Osiris, is highlighted in the *Encomium* as being from Amun. Furthermore, these is the jubilation and satisfaction of of Onuphris who is mentioned in both texts. The *Encomium* is a salutation to the living king, who receives the *jmyt-pr* certificate again in the eulogy, almost through the eulogy, while the calendar refers to this day as the mythical first time of this event.”<sup>1156</sup>

As for the entry for 3 Akhet 27, she observes that the structure of the calendar entry mirrors the narrative development of the *Contendings* perfectly. The motif of the separation of Horus and Seth on 3 Akhet 27 is actually attested on *Papyrus Berlin 29013 B, 8*, a text datable no earlier than the 30. Dynasty,<sup>1157</sup> likely from Roman Tebtynis:<sup>1158</sup>

[...] Atum [satisfied?] the gods so that their hearts [...]  
[...] [3. month of Akhet, day] 27: And they decided [...]  
[...] between Horus and Seth and [...]  
[...] Satisfying Horus and Seth by the majesty (of) Thoth and the Enn[e]ad [...]  
[...] [Ho]rus with the White Crown and Seth with the Red Crown. Give [...]  
[...] [II]I. Month of Akhet time, day 28: The gods are/were in the [Fe]st [...]  
[...] [i]n the feast of the 7th day (?)/since.... (?) [...]  
[...] Corruption/crown goddesses (?) [...]<sup>1159</sup>

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<sup>1155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143–144.

<sup>1156</sup> U. Verhoeven, “Ein historischer “Sitz im Leben” für die Erzählung von Horus und Seth des Papyrus Chester Beatty I”, p. 359.

<sup>1157</sup> For the original publication, see Ursula Kaplony-Heckel, *Ägyptische Handschriften*, vol. 3, Stuttgart: Steiner, 1986, p. 68–69. For a new, more comprehensive edition including commentary, see Ursula Verhoeven, “Der hieratische Papyrus Berlin P. 29013 B, 8 (ehemals: P. 14420c): Horus und Seth, die Weiße und die Rote Krone”, in: Verena Lepper, (ed.), *Forschung in der Papyrussammlung. Eine Festgabe für das Neue Museum*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012, p. 261–266.

<sup>1158</sup> U. Verhoeven, “Der hieratische Papyrus Berlin P. 29013 B, 8”, p. 262, n. 6.

<sup>1159</sup> Translated after the transliteration of U. Verhoeven, “Der hieratische Papyrus Berlin P. 29013 B, 8”, p. 262–263. Lines of translation correspond with lines of the original text.

Verhoeven uses these calendar entries to propose that the *Contendings* might have been performed or otherwise utilized on 3 Akhet 27, with the *Encomium* following on the day after, 3 Akhet 28.

Finally, she relates this hypothetical connection between the calendar entries and the texts of *Papyrus Chester Beatty I* with two notes written upside down on the papyrus:

“Year 2, third month of the flood season, day 26 (3 Akhet 26): the day when the *fd.t*-chest was given to the scribe Patjawdianun of the temple of Amun, to general Meryre of the War Office of the Pharaoh, and to Panan.

Year 2, third month of the growing season, day 26 (3 Peret 26): the day when the *fd.t*-chest was given to Patjawdianun and to general Meryre.”<sup>1160</sup>

The *fd.t* chest is believed to have been a repository of sacred texts, and there are sources that identify the term *fd.t* with the *Book of the Heavenly Cow* and the *Amduat*.<sup>1161</sup> Verhoeven observed that the first note is dated just one day before the possible performance of the *Contendings*, proposing that the two officials may have had a role in the preparation of royal celebrations. Here, the significance of the second note, which is dated four months after, becomes apparent. It is believed that three days after this handover, on 3 Peret 29, there was a celebration of royal jubilee under Ramesses V, the same king who was the subject of the eulogy in the *Encomium*.<sup>1162</sup> Citing Assmann, she invokes a complex image of Egyptian festivals, which included not only formal ritual activity, but also music, dancing and role-playing.<sup>1163</sup>

Identifying the significance of the *Contendings* as a work of legitimation for the accession of Ramesses V, who succeeded his brother, she infers that in the cultural conditions of late Ramesside period a less formal composition made in a language closer to the local vernacular, i.e., Late Egyptian would have been best suited for this task.<sup>1164</sup> She concludes

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<sup>1160</sup> *Papyrus Chester Beatty I, verso*, E1–F3.

<sup>1161</sup> See Siegfried Schott, *Bücher und Bibliotheken im alten Ägypten: Verzeichnis der Buch- und Spruchtitel und der Termini technici*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1990, p. 32–34.

<sup>1162</sup> Cf the sources in U. Verhoeven, “Ein historischer “Sitz im Leben” für die Erzählung von Horus und Seth des Papyrus Chester Beatty I”, p. 362 and n. 52, 53; Siegfried Schott, “Das Schöne Fest vom Wüstentale”, in *Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse 11* (1952), p.

<sup>1163</sup> The work cited is Jan Assmann, “Die Ägyptische Prozessionsfest”, in Jan Assmann, Theo Sundermeier (eds.), *Das Fest und das Heilige: Religiöse Kontrapunkte zur Alltagswelt*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus G. Mohn, 1991, p. 115. Compare with specific cases of such festive diversion in Louis Mikhail, *Dramatic Aspects of the Osirian Khoiak Festival*, Uppsala: Institute of Egyptology, Uppsala University, 1983, p. 51–53. See also Emily Teeter, *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 56.

<sup>1164</sup> For an idea of a less formal performance in Egyptian setting, see the discussion of Deir el-Medina demonstrations in A. McDowell, *Village Life in Ancient Egypt*, p. 235 ff.

that based on this evidence, we can reasonably assume that both the compositions were performed during this royal jubilee ceremony and a similar event took place at the end of 3 Akhet.<sup>1165</sup>

Verhoeven's work marks a breakthrough in the study of *Papyrus Chester Beatty I* and is of immense value. Even though her study is primarily concerned with the *Encomium* and the *Contendings*, the proposed context fits well with the last major element of the papyrus, the love songs. Lately, scholarly opinion has shifted towards an idea of their use in official settings, namely in court or religious ceremonies.<sup>1166</sup> Some love songs, such as those of *Papyrus Turin 1966* and *Papyrus Harris 500*, have been linked to temple and palace gardens.<sup>1167</sup> Sadly, the line of inquiry followed by Verhoeven does not indicate what specific function the tale could have had within this festive context. Whereas a ritual use is possible, the tale does not exhibit markers typical of contemporary ritual texts.<sup>1168</sup> Performances of texts can include a wide range of activities, ranging from complicated plays to relatively small public reading sessions.<sup>1169</sup> The use of the *ʿfd.t* chest might signify

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Cf. also Baines' idea that the introduction of Late Egyptian as literary language contributed to the emergence of new literary forms in the New Kingdom. See John Baines, "Classicism and Modernism in the Literature of the New Kingdom", in Antonio Loprieno, (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, Cologne - Leiden - New York: Brill, 2011, p. 158-159.

<sup>1165</sup> Verhoeven admits that the writing of the second note is ambivalent, and it is possible that the date (is not 3 Peret 26, but 3 Akhet 26, as originally read by Gardiner. (A. Gardiner, *Papyrus Chester-Beatty Papyrus No. I*, p. 43.) She argues, however, that in this case it would have indicated a celebration for Ramesses VII, citing similar succession conditions as in the case of Ramesses V, which are in her opinion the reason why the narrative was interesting for Ramesses V in the first place. See U. Verhoeven, "Ein historischer "Sitz im Leben" für die Erzählung von Horus und Seth des Papyrus Chester Beatty I", p. 361-362.

<sup>1166</sup> See e.g., Heidi Köpp-Junk, "The Artists behind the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs: Performance and Technique", in Renata Landgráfová, Hana Navrátilová (eds.), *Sex and the Golden Goddess II: World of the Love Songs*, Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 2015, p. 37 ff.

See also the discussion of the intertextual relationship between love songs and descriptions of feasts in funerary inscriptions and Late Egyptian literature in M. Castro, "El hrw nfr en la literatura ramésida", p. 88-89.

<sup>1167</sup> Cf. J. Darnell, "The Rituals of Love in Ancient Egypt", p. 29 ff.; Cynthia Sheikholeslami, "pTurin 1966: Songs of the Fig Trees", in Renata Landgráfová, Hana Navrátilová (eds.), *Sex and the Golden Goddess II: World of the Love Songs*, Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 2015, p. 81-103.

<sup>1168</sup> Cf. the different character of the *Dramatic Ramesseum Papyrus*, which some consider to be evidence for a dramatic performance of the divine conflict of Horus and Seth, esp. C. Gniesen, *The Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus*, p. 35 ff; Kurt Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altägyptischen Mysterienspielen*, Leipzig: Hinrichs, p. 89-92. See also the discussion in chapter 6.1.2 below.

<sup>1169</sup> See e.g., Elizabeth Bell, *Theories of Performance*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2008, p. 55-84; Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, New York: Routledge, 1988, 91-124. Cf. the overview in Robyn Gillam, "Drama", in Willeke Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2005. Accessed at <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz001nf31c>. See also Robyn Gillam, *Performance and Drama in Ancient Egypt*, London: Duckworth, 2005; Ronald Leprohon, "Ritual Drama

religious importance of the performance, but that provides no indices of the size, prominence or, in fact, character of this activity.

The necessary element of a performance is, of course, the audience, and this comprises the most complicated part of this proposition.<sup>1170</sup> When conceiving the audience and reception of the *Chester Beatty I* texts, two main considerations emerge: access and familiarity. Any given performance, public or private, is in a way limited in access.<sup>1171</sup> This may be a function of hierarchy, wherein attendees may be restricted to a particular social or professional group or otherwise vetted.<sup>1172</sup> It may also be the result of physical or temporal setting of the performance, which can take place at a hard-to-access location or in a spatially restricted environment that limits the attendees to a certain number or places additional requirements on them, such as when it is not accessible for children, elderly or disabled individuals.

The performance suggested by Verhoeven could, for example, include less privileged strata of society, as indicated by the use of a literary language closer to New Kingdom Theban vernacular. The considerations of space, however, seem to argue against such a reading. Even in a relatively favourable environment, a lector could not be expected to recite the whole work at volume which would allow more than a couple hundred listeners. To my knowledge, we are not aware of structures or setting which ancient Egyptians could use to amplify the natural properties of human speech, such as the Greek *odeon*. If the audience was limited in this manner, then in the context of a royal celebration it would have inevitably been dominated by the elite, which would at any rate be best disposed to appreciate the intellectual undertones of the tale.

Essentially all attested Egyptian performances were done for the benefit of the elite, particularly in connection to the installation and appearance of the king, and the

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in Ancient Egypt”, in Eric Csapo, Margaret Miller (eds.), *The Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond: From Ritual to Drama*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 259–431.

It should be emphasized, however, that there is only very limited evidence dramatic performance in the modern sense (i.e., not formalistic and ritual) existed in Ancient Egypt. See R. Gillam, “Drama”, p. 2–3, H. Willems, “The Social and Ritual Context of a Mortuary Liturgy of the Middle Kingdom”, p. 253–254.

<sup>1170</sup> For a more detailed overview of this topic in Egyptian context, see Hana Navrátilová, “Audiences”, in Vanessa Davies, Dimitri Laboury (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Egyptian Epigraphy and Palaeography*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 102–114.

<sup>1171</sup> See John Baines, “Public Ceremonial Performance in Ancient Egypt: Exclusion and Integration”, in Lawrence Coben, Takeshi Inomata (eds.), *Archaeology of Performance: Theaters of Power, Community, and Politics*, Lanham: AltaMira, 2006, p. 261–302. Cf. Susanne Bickel, “Men in the Temple: World-Order, Prestige, and Piety”, in Elizabeth Froid, Angela McDonald (eds.), *Decorum and Experience: Essays in Ancient Culture for John Baines*, Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2013, p. 205–213.

<sup>1172</sup> Cf. the discussion K. Griffin, *All the Rxyt-People Adore*, 368 p.

performance of the *Contendings* seems to have been executed in similar conditions.<sup>1173</sup> The elite was, of course, not a homogenous group in terms of access to cultural property and institutions, such as specific books, education, or, for example, the royal court or the inner confines of temples or tombs. These differences and limitations would have inevitably reflected on the way in which individual members would interpret the performance, just as it would affect their expectations, which likewise influence reception.<sup>1174</sup> The position of the modern Egyptologist is unique in that it entails access to a variety of locations and texts which are unlikely to have been accessible for any single person in antiquity due to reasons of provenance.<sup>1175</sup> Consequently, only such individuals who would have had an access and intellectual tools comparable to those of the present thesis might be able to appreciate the performance in a way outlined here.

Alternative explanations to a performance are possible, but seem less plausible, namely that the very existence of the text would have been a source of some special significance, comparable perhaps to the efficacy of spells inscribed in tombs,<sup>1176</sup> or that the text might have been read silently in a manner somehow connected to the festivities, for which I am aware of no parallels. One could even argue that the general and the priest loaned out the

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<sup>1173</sup> Cf. e.g., the discussion and sources cited in R. Gillam, “Drama”, p. 2. For the significance of king and audience in context of royal legitimization, see J. Baines, “Kingship, Definition of Culture, and Legitimation”, p. 7. It is an unlikely, but compelling idea that the king and his family members would actually enact the role of Horus in the performance, which could account for the elements of ‘joking relationship’ referred to in a previous chapter. The same could arguably work if it was understood that the actors are substitutes for specific royal individuals, which might have been the case of some spectators, whether this would have been officially communicated or not. For king as the principal actor of festivals, see M. Fukaya, *The Festivals of Opet, the Valley, and the New Year*, p. 9.

<sup>1174</sup> For the elite as the intended audience of Egyptian written culture, see J. Baines, “Interpreting the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 76 (1990), p. 57, n. 9; R. Parkinson, “Teachings, Discourses and Tales from the Middle Kingdom”, p. 92-93.

Exploration of emic genre categories would be of immense value in the construction of possible reception patterns, but sadly the only Egyptian genre attested in sufficient details are sbA.yt, “teachings.” It is generally believed that narratives we perceived as belonging to one genre, but little more can be assumed. Cf. John Baines, “Research on Egyptian Literature: Background, Definitions, Prospects”, in Zahi Hawass, *Egyptology at the Dawn of the Twenty-first Century: Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Egyptologists, Cairo, 2000*, vol. 3, Cairo – New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003, p. 5. The situation is more favourable in later periods of Egyptian history. See e.g., John Tait, “Demotic Literature: Forms and Genres”, in Antonio Loprieno, (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, Cologne – Leiden – New York: E. J. Brill, 1996, p. 175-187.

Mathieu proposes that literary “trials” comprised a “genuine literary genre”, in which he includes the *Contendings*, but seems to base this idea mainly on legal aspect of the tale. See B. Mathieu, “Les “Procès”: Un genre littéraire de l’Égypte ancienne”, p. 162-163.

<sup>1175</sup> See H. Navrátilová, “Audiences”, p. 103.

<sup>1176</sup> Cf. e.g., the discussion in H. Hays, *Organization of the Pyramid Texts*, vol. 1, p. 91 and 201 ff. Compare the notion that statues of nonroyals situated in temples served as the permanent audience for the texts present there in Elizabeth Froom, *Biographical Texts from Ramessid Egypt*, Boston: Brill, 2007, p. 183-188.

text for unrelated personal reasons, but such an approach does not seem to have much merit.

Finally, we may consider whether there are some indicators in the tale that would support the idea that it was intended for silent or private reading, or, more specifically, if there are elements of the *Contendings* that are exclusively accessible by those who are themselves reading the papyrus.<sup>1177</sup> The various graphic games and puns, which have been shown to have a very significant function in the tale, provide a good argument for a silent reading context, but a couple of counterarguments can be made. First, it would have been possible to somehow communicate the graphic games when spoken out loud, for example by changes of tone or through gestures. Second, even if such devices of speech were not used, which may have been the case with the graphic puns that probably only worked on papyrus and not when spoken out loud, we can call upon the example of some modern jokes, which do work only when enunciated.<sup>1178</sup> Imagine hearing – not reading – the following: “If you have thirty cows, and twenty ate chickens, how many didn't?” The unsuspecting receiver of this question can unravel it only by visualizing the way in which it could be written. In this manner, the listener of the *Contendings* could visualise the way in which the spoken word would be written and appreciate the wordplay even if they did not hold the papyrus themselves. Anyone who has learned Ancient Egyptian can relate how significant such visual imagination is when learning this rather graphic language.

## 6.2 Myth...

With this outline of the text's possible 'setting in life', we can evaluate the status of the *Contendings* as a cultural article. So far, the present thesis has somewhat unproblematically

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<sup>1177</sup> There is a variety of opinions on the existence and/or prominence of reading silently, with most considering reading aloud the prevalent practice in antiquity. See Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 212 ff.; Frank Gilliard, “More Silent Reading in Antiquity: Non Omne Verbum Sonabat”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112 (1993): 689–94; Elspeth Jajdelska, *Silent Reading and the Birth of the Narrator*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007, p. 5 ff.; Robert McCutcheon, “Silent Reading in Antiquity and the Future History of the Book”, *Book History* 18 (2015): 1–32. For the notion of silent reading in Ancient Egypt, see John Baines, “Literacy and Ancient Egyptian Society”, *Man* 18 (1983), p. 581, n. 21, but for a more favourable of silent reading as more common in antiquity, see John Baines; Christopher Eyre, “Interactions Between Orality and Literacy in Ancient Egypt”, in Karen Schousboe, Mogens Larsen (eds.), *Literacy and Society*, Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1989, p. 102–103. Cf. Robert Knox, “Silent Reading in Antiquity”, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 9 (1968): 421–35. Significantly, Baines and Eyre argue that silent reading of Ancient Egyptian would require a rather skilled reader compared to reading of alphabetic scripts.

<sup>1178</sup> For the discussion of graphic puns and Egyptian wordplay in general, see Antonio Loprieno, “Puns and Word Play in Ancient Egyptian”, in Scott Noegel (ed.), *Puns and Pundits: Wordplay in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature*, Bethesda: Eisenbrauns, 2000, p. 3–20; Scott Noegel, Kasia Szpakowska, “Word Play in the Ramesside Dream Manual”, *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* (2006): 193–212.



referred to the tale as “mythical narrative” or “narrative myth” and treated it as both a literary and religious work.

Now, the purpose of this thesis is not to authoritatively decide how the *Contendings* should be denoted. Such classification usually depends on the way in which each author understands concepts such as ‘literature’, ‘myth’ and ‘religion’ and their relationships.<sup>1179</sup> For example, some, like Friedrich Junge, lean towards a view of literature that would classify the *Contendings* as non-religious.<sup>1180</sup> Similarly, for Assmann the tale represents a “link of anecdotal episodes” which reflect the profanity of everyday life, classifying them as entertainment literature.<sup>1181</sup> In his rather complex view, the *Contendings* are a literary realization of a purely abstract idea of myth, which is narrative in character, but not in the same sense as this particular New Kingdom rendition, and which can manifest itself in various cultural forms, which are determined by the uses to which that specific abstract myth is put.<sup>1182</sup> Literary manifestations of myth are characterized by their lack of instrumental utility and can be performed with other which serve a ritual, magical or other function.<sup>1183</sup>

At the same time, mythical narrativity is viewed as a relatively late invention, prompted by a need to imbue ancient rituals with new, more comprehensive meaning.<sup>1184</sup> Consequently, narrative myths are mythical, but at the same time derivative of ritual structures.<sup>1185</sup> Verhoeven’s identification of the festive context for the *Contendings* does not necessarily refute this, since it is unclear what role the story might have played in what was inevitably a very complex affair. Even if the text did not actually reflect the ritual structures of this Ramesside accession ceremony, the text could still be related to an *original* ritual or performative context as suggested by Quack.<sup>1186</sup>

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<sup>1179</sup> Cf. K. Goebis, “A Functional Approach to Egyptian Myth and Mythemes”, p. 30.

<sup>1180</sup> F. Junge, “Mythos und Literarizität” p. 83–102, esp. p. 99.

<sup>1181</sup> See J. Assmann, “Die Verborgenheit des Mythos in Ägypten”, p. 32–33; J. Baines, “Egyptian Myth and Discourse”, p. 85 ff, esp. 99. For the entertainment function of Late Egyptian literature, see the discussion and sources cited in M. Castro, “El hrw nfr en la literatura ramésida”, p. 82–83.

<sup>1182</sup> Cf. K. Goebis, “A Functional Approach to Egyptian Myth and Mythemes”, p. 31.

<sup>1183</sup> J. Assmann, “Die Verborgenheit des Mythos in Ägypten”, p. 32–33.

<sup>1184</sup> Cf. J. Baines, “Egyptian Myth and Discourse”, p. 89–90.

<sup>1185</sup> Cf. Jürgen Zeidler, “Zur Frage der Späteststehung des Mythos in Ägypten”, *Göttinger Miszellen* 132 (1993), p. 108. See also K. Goebis, “A Functional Approach to Egyptian Myth and Mythemes”, p. 30 ff. For views comparable with Assmann’s, see Eberhard Otto, *Das Verhältnis von Rite und Mythos im Ägyptischen*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1958, 28 p; Siegfried Schott, *Mythe und Mythenbildung, im alten Ägypten*, Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1945, p. 135–36.

<sup>1186</sup> Joachim Quack, “Erzählen als Preisen: Vom Astartepapyrus zu den koptischen Märtyrerakten”, in Hubert Roeder (ed.), *Das Erzählen in frühen Hochkulturen I*, Munich: Fink, 2009, p. 291–312.

Approaches like Assmann's are characteristically top-down, supposing myth as a fundamentally abstract, ideal entity, which transposes its fixed structure onto particular phenomena in various contexts. As Baines rightly points out, however, this undervalues or denies the significance of creative endeavour:

“There is no clear reason for assuming that this structure should be fixed. In many cultures different versions of myths vary widely, either in detail or in basic features of their narratives. The relationship between mythical statement and myth is thus one between two variables, not between a fixed entity and a variable one. In addition, a realization or mythical statement may affect the underlying myth: their relationship can be reciprocal.”<sup>1187</sup>

The *Contendings* are a prime example of the way in which authorial action could transform and integrate established mythical patterns in novel ways.<sup>1188</sup> Even if mythical narrativity developed to account for historical shifts in Egyptian ritual, the authors of the Ramesside period were able to weave new narrative versions of mythical constellations and relate them to non-literary religious phenomena, rituals included, with a considerable degree of creative freedom.<sup>1189</sup> Consequently, if the case were to be made for the *Contendings* as a religious work, then direct, reflective relationship with an actual ritual would not be the only possible argument. Instead, the distinctively religious nature of the characters and their constellations should be emphasized. Furthermore, and more importantly, it needs to be stated that even though the narrative may not have been part of formal religion, i.e., a temple or mortuary cult, they were all part of one discourse. The tale is an expression of a dialogue with contemporary religious forms, which tests the flexibility of their most sacred symbols by presenting variations and sequences which are coherent with tradition, but not necessarily traditional themselves. In this way, we could understand the tale as a product of creative agency in the area of religious thought or poetry which may be interested in artistic and intellectual invention for various reasons, such as

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<sup>1187</sup> J. Baines, “Egyptian Myth and Discourse”, p. 88.

<sup>1188</sup> For the issue of authorship, see e.g., Susanne Bickel, Bernard Mathieu, “L'écrivain Amennakht et son Enseignement”, *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 93 (1993): 31–51. A. McDowell, *Village Life in Ancient Egypt*, p. 127–164. See also Pascal Vernus, “Autobiography Versus Biography in the Second Person and Biography in the Third Person: Textual Formats, Authorship, and Apocryphal/Pseudepigraphic Works”, in Elizabeth Froid, Andréas Stauder, Julie Stauder-Porchet, (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Biographies: Contexts, Forms, Functions*, Atlanta: Lockwood, 2020, p. 163–203. The significant takeaway from this discussion is that reproduction of high culture was not restricted to temples and scribal schools, as evidenced by the finds in Deir el-Medina. For the likelihood of a female author, see D. Sweeney, “Gender and Conversational Tactics in The Contendings of Horus and Seth”, p. 143, n. 13.

<sup>1189</sup> See esp. Tamás Bács, “Traditions Old and New: Artistic Production of the late Ramesside Period”, in Todd Gillen (ed.), *(Re)productive Traditions in Ancient Egypt*, Liege: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2017, p. 305–332.

entertainment<sup>1190</sup> or virtue signalling.<sup>1191</sup> Both the author and the audience could use the tale's complex symbolism to prove their familiarity with the subject, thereby also emphasizing their access to religious institutions or the court.<sup>1192</sup> Finally, public expression of knowledge would also highlight the reader and an informed audience as proper scribes and priests, communicating their quality regardless of status considerations.

Now, in Assmann's conception, some Egyptian compositions were conceived as cultural texts, i.e.; parts of a "normative and cultural program which conveys cultural identity."<sup>1193</sup> In his original view, such function was exclusive with that of literary texts, which were "decontextualised, situationally abstract, non-functional",<sup>1194</sup> but Hagen has proposed that the two categories might not have been so strictly defined, and one text could assume either role in different contexts.<sup>1195</sup> A role in dissemination and confirmation of cultural values and identity is implicit in the political reading of the *Contendings* in relation to Ramesses' V succession<sup>1196</sup> as proposed by Verhoeven, and one could argue that a wider cultural function of this sort could be envisioned. For instance, the intertextual ties between wisdom literature and some passages of the tale may have served to topicalize their maxims to the audience. Finally, we may also state that there was an irreducible aesthetic function of such literary works, which Loprieno actually identified as the primary one, arguing that "many Egyptian texts will strive for aesthetic elegance and employ certain

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<sup>1190</sup> Cf. the outline of scholarly virtue in Rekhmire's autobiography: "I was a knower in [all] crafts [...] who perform. There was none [like] me in (power to) make happy or miserable." Translation of Alan Gardiner, "The Autobiography of Rekhmerē", *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 60 (1925), p. 73.

<sup>1191</sup> Against the notion of "art for the sake of art" in Egypt, see e.g., J. Baines, "Research on Egyptian Literature: Background, Definitions, Prospects", p. 5, n. 37. Cf. R. Parkinson, "Teachings, Discourses and Tales from the Middle Kingdom", p. 92 ff.

<sup>1192</sup> Cf. the discussion in H. Navrátilová, "Audiences", p. 104-106.

<sup>1193</sup> Jan Assmann, "Cultural and Literary Texts", in Gerald Moers (ed.), *Definitely: Egyptian Literature: Proceedings of the Symposium "Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms"*, Los Angeles, March 24-26, 1995, Göttingen: Seminar für Ägyptologie und Koptologie, 1999, p. 7. See also Jan Assmann, "Kulturelle und Literarische Texte", in Antonio Loprieno (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, Leiden: Brill, 1996, p. 58-83. Cf. J. Baines, "Research on Egyptian Literature: Background, Definitions, Prospects", p. 10-11.

<sup>1194</sup> See e.g., Jan Assmann, "Cultural and Literary Texts", p. 7.

<sup>1195</sup> Fredrik Hagen, *An Ancient Egyptian Literary Text in Context: The Instruction of Ptahhotep*, Leuven: Peeters, 2012, p. 56 ff.

<sup>1196</sup> Cf. the aitiological function of myth in Katja Goebis, "Functions and Uses of Egyptian Myth", *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 235 (2018), p. 650 ff. See also the contextualization of the political function in Henrike Simon, "Textaufgaben": *Kulturwissenschaftliche Konzepte in Anwendung auf die Literatur der Ramessidenzeit*, Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 2013, p. 306-312.

prosodic devices regardless of the discourse to which they belong, and to a certain extent also regardless of the nature of the information they convey.”<sup>1197</sup>

### 6.3 ...or Literature?

The question of the tale’s status as a literary work should be addressed at this point. Firstly, however, we need to admit that there is no scholarly consensus on what Egyptian literature is or how it should be studied, a situation ascribed by Baines to the challenging combination of “uniformity of tone and the complex rhetorical and compositional forms of Egyptian texts” along with backward approaches by some Egyptologists.<sup>1198</sup> The definition of Antonio Loprieno may be cited as our entryway into this topic.<sup>1199</sup> He proposed three characteristics specific to Ancient Egyptian literature: (i) fictionality, (ii) intertextuality and (iii) reception.<sup>1200</sup>

- i) A modern reader might take the fictionality of this tale for granted due to its mythical status, but this might not necessarily be the case of the ancient’s idea of myth as an articulation of timeless truth. Loprieno instead employs a more sophisticated view of fictionality, namely the presence of an “implicit mutual understanding between the author and the reader to the effect that the world presented in the text need not coincide with the real world, and that no sanctions apply in case of discrepancy.”<sup>1201</sup> The situation of the tale in the past, as indicated by the perfect tense and the emphasis on the unknowability of the principal actors can be interpreted as hints of such communication of fictionality, since the author implicitly admits that the story is at least partially an invention. Loprieno himself does trace the fictionality of certain religious texts to their mimetic character, which causes gods to “leave the realm of referential speculation (=high theology) and enter the author’s world,” which

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<sup>1197</sup> Antonio Loprieno, “Defining Egyptian Literature: Ancient Texts and Modern Theory” in Antonio Loprieno (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, Leiden: Brill, 1996, p. 42.

<sup>1198</sup> J. Baines, “Research on Egyptian Literature: Background, Definitions, Prospects”, p. 1.

<sup>1199</sup> Significant Egyptological discussions predating works cited here include Jan Assmann, “Der literarische Text im alten Ägypten: Versuch einer Begriffsbestimmung”, *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 69 (1974): 117–126; *LÄ* III, 1067–1071; Peter Kaplony, “Die Definition der schönen Literatur im alten Ägypten”, in Jan Assmann, Erika Feucht, Reinhard Grieshammer (eds.), *Fragen an die altägyptische Literatur: Studien zum Gedenken an Eberhard Otto*, Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1977, p. 289–314.

<sup>1200</sup> Antonio Loprieno, “Defining Egyptian Literature: Ancient Texts and Modern Theory”, p. 43. Cf. a very similar set in the context of Ramesside literature in Henrike Simon, “*Textaufgaben*”, p. 4–5.

<sup>1201</sup> *Ibid.* In his own set of literary characteristics, Baines subsumed fictionality under a broader classification of Egyptian literature as *belles lettres*, defined as texts which are both fictional and without single defined context. His conception is in his opinion less tailored towards narratives than Loprieno’s. See J. Baines, “Research on Egyptian Literature: Background, Definitions, Prospects”, p. 4. Cf. the idea of religious literature as *situationsabstrakt* in the works of Assmann cited above.

- in case of Ramesside stories results in a satirical or parodic rendition.<sup>1202</sup> The human character of the of the gods of the *Contendings* is, of course, obvious, as is the way in which their interaction reflects historical terrestrial reality.
- ii) The concept of intertextuality represents a notion that a text's creation is determined by factors beyond the author and that it is an integral part of a world of texts with which it has a dialectical relationship.<sup>1203</sup> The intertextual connections of the *Contendings* have been shown in preceding chapters to be numerous and detailed. It can be argued with a high degree of confidence that older texts had a formative influence on the *Contendings*. Furthermore, the way in which these references are executed indicates a form of dialogue or feedback, showing that the tale is not simply a compilation, but rather a reaction with a potential to influence the corpus which has contributed to its creation. To achieve this, the text needs to be published, and here the evidence is quite convincing as well. The likely performative context would entail a significant audience, and, in case this assumption was questioned, we can still cite at least three different ancient owners, each of whom would have had the opportunity to share the text with his fellows.
- iii) Reception is arguably the most speculative parameter in the case of the *Contendings*.<sup>1204</sup> Apart from the considerations of the previous paragraph, there is little proof of the papyrus being read during Egypt's ancient history.<sup>1205</sup> A good case can be made that the text was accessible to audiences from both Thebes and the area of Western Thebes,<sup>1206</sup> but no clear evidence of reception in the form of textual feedback can be identified. However, two reasons can be cited to account for this: first, there is the haphazard nature of ancient evidence, which makes a discovery of proof of reception largely a matter of

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<sup>1202</sup> Antonio Loprieno, "Defining Egyptian Literature: Ancient Texts and Modern Theory", p. 49-50. For Loprieno, the cause of such parody is "tension between the recognition of the absolute validity of classical standards and the perception of its relative inadequacy in tackling the challenges of contemporary culture." (Ibid., p. 55)

<sup>1203</sup> For the topic in Egyptology, see the discussion and sources cited in Pascal Vernus, "A Case of Intertextuality: Sinuhe, Neferti, Chronicle of Osorkon, Gynecological Magic and Name of a Feast", in Victoria Almansa-Villatoro, Mark Lehner, Silvia Štubňová-Nigrelli (eds.), *In the House of Heqanakht: Text and Context in Ancient Egypt. Studies in Honor of James P. Allen*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013, p. 400-414. Cf. the notion of "stream of high cultural tradition" in J. Baines, "Research on Egyptian Literature: Background, Definitions, Prospects", p. 8-11. See also Philippe Derchain, "L'auteur du Papyrus Jumilhac", *Revue d'égyptologie* 41 (1990): 9-30.

<sup>1204</sup> Baines avoids some of the trouble of Loprieno's criterion of reception by instead formulating a formal and stylistic parameter instead. In the context of the present narrative, however, it doesn't hold much advantage over Loprieno's and recalls the previously posed questions of the narrative genre. See J. Baines, "Research on Egyptian Literature: Background, Definitions, Prospects", p. 11-13.

<sup>1205</sup> Antonio Loprieno, "Defining Egyptian Literature: Ancient Texts and Modern Theory", p. 54.

<sup>1206</sup> See chapter 5.6.5 above.

chance.<sup>1207</sup> Second, the nature of the subject matter makes it extremely difficult to evaluate the tale's influence in subsequent works, since it is almost completely composed of traditional elements and episodes which are in various forms present throughout the corpus of Egyptian writing.

Other factors, such as the ring composition and the 'darker' tone introducing crisis and uncertainty into the plot, can likewise be related to typical representants of the literary corpus, particularly the *Tale of Sinuhe* and the *Shipwrecked Sailor*.<sup>1208</sup> Another such element is the widespread use of wordplay.

Before we conclude, it is necessary to admit that the literary character of the *Contendings* is generally accepted by the wider scholarship. The purpose of this chapter was not to prove a notion to which almost everyone subscribes, but rather to outline the way in which the tale relates to other literary works and which of its features can be ascribed to this shared milieu.

It is in the sense of the considerations of the above that the present thesis treats the story as a mythical narrative in which religion and literature intersect.<sup>1209</sup> The function of myth is ultimately not exclusive with that of literature.<sup>1210</sup> Great works of writing have been created and employed for religious purposes while myths have often been to entertain. The *Contendings* contain elements of both Egyptian religion and literature, presenting a combination that is not an exception in the world of mythology, but rather the norm. Such reading is largely in line with Broze's understanding, in which the tale is both literary in that it seeks to charm and distract the public, while at the same time being a mythical discourse which articulates a certain idea of cosmic order and the significance of power in it.<sup>1211</sup> These two aspects are, of course, not exclusive, as long as one could imagine an audience which could appreciate both theological sophistication of the tale and its potential for entertainment. Surely, one should not assume that Egyptian intellectuals could not think and have fun at the same time.

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<sup>1207</sup> Antonio Loprieno, "Defining Egyptian Literature: Ancient Texts and Modern Theory", p. 54.

<sup>1208</sup> J. Baines, "Interpreting the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor", p. 67 ff. Cf. the diagram in Dieter Kurth, "Zur Interpretation der Geschichte des Schiffbrüchigen", *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 14 (1987), p. 176.

<sup>1209</sup> Cf. e.g., the discussion in M. Campagno, "Two Observations on the Tales of The Contendings of Horus and Seth and Truth and Falsehood", p. 22.

<sup>1210</sup> See esp. K. Goebis, "Functions and Uses of Egyptian Myth", *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 235 (2018), p. 663–666.

<sup>1211</sup> M. Broze, *Les Aventures d'Horus et Seth*, p. 271 ff.

#### 6.4 Final Considerations

As the present thesis nears its conclusion, we may return to its beginning with some final questions related to the context of the tale as a physical artefact.

Accepting Verhoeven's proposition of the use of the *Contendings* in festive context, we sadly still do not know whether and how the tale would have been used outside of those several days when the papyrus was loaned out to Patjawdiamun and Meryre. Neither do we understand the particular role it may have had in the archive where it likely remained until its internment in the soil and sand of Deir el-Medina. We can't even say with certainty whether the hypothetical loans took place before or after Nakhtsobek gave the roll to Amennakhte, although the usurpation and transport do seem less problematic if performed after the papyrus was borrowed by the two senior officials for the purposes of the state.

Regardless of the actual order of events, we know the roll was likely used for a festive purpose as evidenced by the 'library notes', somehow appropriated by Nakhtsobek and later found its way to Amennakhte, in whose family archive it likely remained. Whether these subsequent owners read it for leisure, leased it to neighbours or even recited it out in the open is impossible to say with certainty, but it seems rather likely. There were certainly individuals in Deir el-Medina who had the education, experience and access to appreciate the literary form and make sense of the complexity of symbols, and who could have related these intricacies to those less knowledgeable, who might at any rate have enjoyed a story packed with sex, violence and a good deal of humour. Such context for the story would be just as valid and significant for the present study as any related to official ceremonies.

As this thesis reaches its end, let me finish it on a rather sentimental note. There is a remarkable letter preserved on *Papyrus Deir el-Medina* IV from 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Deir el-Medina, which was sent by a Nakhtsobek, quite likely the same "scribe of the Necropolis" whose name appears on the colophon of *Papyrus Chester Beatty I*, to none other than Amennakhte, son of Naunakhte, the caretaker of the Chester Beatty papyri in antiquity.<sup>1212</sup> The emotional urgency of this document is clearly palpable:

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<sup>1212</sup> Pestman and Gasse assume that the three "friendship papyri" (*Papyri DeM* IV, V, VI) belonging to the same archive were all addressed by Nakhtsobek to Amennakhte, but the handwriting analysis done by Sweeney seems to prove that this is the case only for *pDeM* IV, where the two names actually appear. See Annie Gasse, "Les ostraca hiératiques littéraires de Deir el-Medina: Nouvelles orientations de la publication", in Robert Demarée, Arno Egberts (eds.), *Village Voices: Proceedings of the Symposium 'Texts from Deir el-Medina and their interpretation,' Leiden, May 31 - June 1, 1991*, Leiden: Centre of Non-Western Studies, Leiden University, 1992, p. 67; P. Pestman, "Who Were the Owners in the 'Community of Workmen' of the Chester Beatty Papyri?", p. 161-162; D. Sweeney, "Friendship and Frustration", p. 101-102. For a translation of the papyri, see E. Meltzer, E. Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt*, p. 150-151.

“[The scribe] Nakhtsobek to the workman Amennakhte: In life, prosperity and health and in the favor of Amon-Re, King of the Gods! Every day I am calling upon Amon, Mut, Khonsu, and all gods of Thebes and every god and goddess who resides [in] the West of Ne (Thebes) to give you life, to give you health, and to give you a long [lifetime] and a ripe old age, while you continue in the favor of Amenophis, the lord of the Village, your good lord who looks after you.

And further: What's up? What have I done against you? Am I not your old table companion? Has the time come when you must turn your [back(?)]? What shall I do? Please write me of the wrong that I've done against you through the policeman Bes. And if you refuse to write me either good or bad, this day is really bad! I won't request anything else of you. A person is delighted when he is together with his old table companion. While certain new [things] are good to have, an old companion is better.

As soon as my letter reaches you, [you] shall send word about your condition through the policeman Bes. Inform me of the situation today. Don't make me be told not to enter your house and not to make [my] way within the walls and to flee [from] the Village.<sup>1213</sup> And don't [turn a deaf ear(?)] to me. I am going to enter the house and leave therefrom. I must have access [to this] abode of mine. May Amon be before you! If [he] lives, I shall (also) live. When I die, may Amon still be before you (text: him)! Farewell!”<sup>1214</sup>

In this letter, one hears echoes of a childhood friendship more than three thousand years old, one that was apparently beset by arguments and strained by the distance between the two comrades.<sup>1215</sup> The relationship clearly suffered, and the anguish of Nakhtsobek is hard to miss. Since this letter and the history of *Papyrus Chester Beatty I* are the only attestations of contact between these two men, it is interesting to see how prominently the topic of reconciliation appears in both these sources. To suggest that the papyrus played a role in their personal quarrel would be too audacious, but there is certainly some romantic appeal in thinking about it as a gift of reconciliation. Gift-giving was an integral part of Egyptian social life and the way in which it expressed relationship between individuals has been noted, as was the ability of such gifts to affect and change these

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<sup>1213</sup> Compare the discussion of Isis and her signet ring in chapter 3.5.3.

<sup>1214</sup> Translation of E. Meltzer, E. Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt*, p. 150–151. Publication in J. Černý, G. Posener, *Papyrus hiératiques de Deir el-Médineh I*, p. 15–17, pl. 19–20a; KRI VI, 264–265.

<sup>1215</sup> It seems likely that Nakhtsobek did not live in the village, as argues Andrea McDowell, “Contact with the Outside World”, in Leonard Lesko (ed.), *Pharaoh's Workers: The Villagers of Deir El Medina*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994, p. 55. See also Raphael Ventura, *Living in a City of the Dead: A Selection of Topographical and Administrative Terms in the Documents of the Theban Necropolis*, Freiburg – Göttingen: Universitätsverlag – Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986, p. 120–144.



relationships.<sup>1216</sup> Whatever the truth may be, we can appreciate the poetic coincidence in the fact that *Papyrus Chester Beatty I* and the letter found their way into Amennakhte's library, where they were kept safe while other books suffered and wonder whether these two men followed the example of the protagonists of the *Contendings* and made peace in the end.

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<sup>1216</sup> See the discussion and sources cited in Martina Bardoňová, "The Mechanisms of Royal Generosity (1939-1760 BCE)", *Journal of Egyptian History* 16 (2023): 127-196. See also Jac Janssen, "Gift-giving in Ancient Egypt as an Economic Feature", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 68 (1982), 253-258.

## Conclusion

The stated goal of this thesis was to explore the complex symbolism of the *Contendings of Horus and Seth* and relate them to contemporary Egyptian religious thought and royal ideology. Coming full circle, the present study will now turn back to this original intent and summarize the salient points of its findings.

The identification of the tale as a literary circle in chapter 2 has allowed us to appreciate the sophisticated manner in which this intrinsically complicated literary work was crafted by its author. The proposed structure of the narrative is based not only on scholarly intuition as was the case with previous studies on the topic, but rather on patterns of repetition, which correspond to Mary Douglas' transcultural model of a ring composition. Apart from dispelling the criticism of some scholars related to the literary quality of the *Contendings*, the circular character of the tale also serves as a means of expressing the complex idea of the life cycle of kingship and the fact that crises are its inherent and indispensable element, as argued in chapter 4.

Chapter 3 presents one of the most comprehensive collections of mythical material related to the *Contendings* and to the quarrel of Horus and Seth in general. Various new interpretative approaches have been integrated into the analysis, notably Katja Goeb's model of mythical constellations and Martin Pehal's application of anthropological theories on Egyptian royal succession. Of particular note is the systematic exploration of funerary symbolism in the narrative. Although previous scholars did identify specific similarities between the *Contendings* and funerary sources, the synoptic image outlined in chapter 5 provides a more comprehensive idea of intertextual relationship between Late Egyptian literature and funerary texts. Numerous symbolical associations of minor character have also been identified in this chapter, which may contribute to the study of other sources, where comparable symbols and symbolic constellations appear.

In chapter 4, the significance of crisis as the central motif of the tale has been explored in detail. Contrasting the recurrent crises of kingship with sources describing critical attitudes towards individual kings, the thesis argues that the *Contendings* represent a narrative, mythical image of royal succession, which is framed not as an individual occurrence, but as a recurrent event which is inherent to kingship and is of cosmic significance. The tale achieves this by emphasizing the role of the king as the guarantor of cosmic boundaries, whose establishment and maintenance are the defining characteristics of the created universe in Egyptian cosmology. These findings also allow us to attribute the 'Rabelaisian' character of the narrative not merely to its function as a work of entertainment, but also a potent and creative image of interregnum, which represents a liminal stage in the life cycle of kingship.

Of all the chapters of the present thesis, chapter 5 is arguably the most significant for scholarship beyond the narrow focus of this particular literary source. Applying

anthropological theories of liminality articulated by Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner and Nichole Hofner to the tale, Horus is shown as undergoing a transition on three different levels: as an initiate into kingship, as an officiant in funerary ritual imitating the fate of the deceased, and as the sun god bringing about the creation of the universe. Chapters 5.2–5.4 discuss the topic of coming-of-age rites in ancient Egypt before concluding that the liminal imagery in the *Contendings* reflects the substantial transformation of the royal prince prior to his accession, which confirms the function of Horus in the tale as a mythical image of a king-to-be. Comparing the physical transition of Horus and Isis through fictional space, chapter 5.5 identifies their movement and associated actions, such as the references to the Opening of the Mouth ritual, as analogous to the transition imagery of funerary literature. The outcome is a network of funeral-related mythological themes that are unique to the *Contendings*, but also align with those present in funeral literature. The elements chosen for analysis had to meet several criteria: they had to be well-established in the funeral genre, structured in a meaningful sequence, and flexible enough to accommodate the expression of other mythical concepts. Additional ideas include those linked to initiation, as discussed in chapters 5.2–5.4, and cosmogony, discussed in chapter 5.6. In this chapter, the episodes describing the violent interaction between Horus and Seth are interpreted a metaphor of Egyptian cosmogony, the gradual development of their relationship mirroring the development of the world from primordial chaos to its completed state. Finally, the analysis of the religious imagery and structures reveals an alignment of the narrative with the Theban cultic tradition, specifically the Opet Feast and the Beautiful Feast of the Valley. This finding reinforces the established reading of the text as Theban in provenance.

Chapter 6 completes the thesis with a discussion of the tale's status as a literary myth. Various theories of Egyptian literature and myth are outlined with particular attention given to the works of Jan Assmann, John Baines, Katja Goebis and Antonio Loprieno. Finally, Ursula Verhoeven's influential idea of the tale's intended function as a part of a festive celebration of a royal jubilee is shown to be consistent with the findings of this thesis, which concludes with a brief discussion of the possible uses of the tale outside of this royal ceremony.

The considerations mentioned above lead to several conclusions regarding both the creative process behind the tale and its literary and religious value. The creation of the *Contendings* required a deliberate and meticulous assembly process to construct a coherent narrative. This narrative seamlessly integrated the religious significance of various cultural domains, ultimately enhancing the overall message, rather than undermining it. This presupposes not only the presence of an author with a high level of literary creativity, but also a deep familiarity with temple rituals and funeral beliefs. Many of these beliefs are only known to us through works whose access was restricted in antiquity. This appreciation of the *Contendings* as a complex and intellectually stimulating literary work which originated in the context of Theban educated elite, is in the author's

opinion the main contribution of this thesis. Many historical scholars have expressed dissatisfaction with the tale's vulgar character and perceived literary clumsiness. The findings of the present work show that such conclusions are wholly unfounded. While there is a clear satirical element to the tale, the arguments presented above clearly show that the *Contendings* are a work of considerable intellectual sophistication, which required a substantial level of insight into the mysteries of Egyptian myth and ritual to be fully appreciated.

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Appendix 1: Transliteration of the Contendings

<sup>(1,1)</sup> [hpr.n] p3 wp[.t] hr [h]n<sup>c</sup> stš št3.w hpr.w <sup>c</sup>3.w sr.w wr.w i.hpr.yw  
 istw <sup>(1,2)</sup> [i]r w<sup>c</sup> n ms [ntr.i] hms m b3h nb-r-dr hr wh3 t3 i3w.t n it<sup>i</sup> wsir nfr <sup>c</sup>h<sup>c</sup>.w [z3] <sup>(1,3)</sup>  
 [pt]h shd [imn.t] m in.w=f iw dhwti hrp wd3.t [n] sr wr im.i iwn.w  
 dd.in <sup>(1,4)</sup> šw z3 r<sup>c</sup> m b3h tm sr wr im.i iwn.w m3<sup>c</sup>.t nb wsr [ir] sw m dd im t3 i3w.t n [hr] <sup>(1,5)</sup>  
 [dd].in dhwti n t3 [psd.t m3<sup>c</sup>.tw] m h<sup>h</sup> n zp  
<sup>c</sup>h<sup>c</sup>.n ist <sup>c</sup>š [sg]b <sup>c</sup>3 iw=s rš.tw r <sup>(1,6)</sup> i[kr zp 2 iw=s (hr) it.t m b3h nb-r]-dr iw=s hr dd mh.yt r  
 imn.t sn<sup>d</sup>m ib n wnn-nfr <sup>c</sup>nh-wd3-s(nb)  
 dd[in] <sup>(1,7)</sup> šw z3 [r<sup>c</sup> p3] hrp wd3.t m3<sup>c</sup> n psd.t [dd] tn nb-r-dr y3 ih p3y=tn ir shr <m> w<sup>c</sup>[=tn]  
<sup>(1,8)</sup>  
<sup>c</sup>h<sup>c</sup>[.n] [in-hr.t] hr dd [nhm]=f mnš n hr mtw=tw [di.t] h<sup>d</sup>.t hr tp=f  
<sup>c</sup>h<sup>c</sup>.n nb-r-dr (hr) sgr m <sup>(1,9)</sup> [i3d.t <sup>c</sup>3.t] iw=f (hr) knd.t r t3 psd.t  
 wn.in stš z3 nw.t hr dd imi h3<sup>c</sup>.tw=f r-bn[r] <sup>(1,10)</sup> irm=i di=i [ptr]=k dr.t=i iw=f t3.tw m dr.t=f [m  
 b3h] t3 psd.t iw bw rh.tw md.t <sup>(1,11)</sup> [nb n] kf3=f  
<sup>c</sup>h<sup>c</sup>.n dhwti hr dd n=f nn iw=n r rh p3 [gr]g istw i.ir.<tw di.t t3 i3w.t n <sup>(1,12)</sup> wsir n stš iw z3[=f]  
 hr <sup>c</sup>h<sup>c</sup>  
<sup>c</sup>h<sup>c</sup>.n p3 r<sup>c</sup> hr-3h.ty (hr) knd.t r ikr zp 2 ist ib n p3 r<sup>c</sup> <hr-3h.ty> <sup>(2,1)</sup> r di t3 i3w.t n stš <sup>c</sup>3 ph.ty  
 z3 nw.t iw ini-hr.t <sup>c</sup>š sgb <sup>c</sup>3 r hr n t3 psd.t <sup>(2,2)</sup> r dd ih p3 nt.i iw=n ir=f  
 wn.in tm sr wr im.i iwn.w hr dd imi <sup>c</sup>š.tw n b3-nb-dd(.t) ntr <sup>c</sup>3 <sup>(2,3)</sup> <sup>c</sup>nh wd<sup>c</sup>=f p3 <sup>c</sup>dd.wi  
 wn.in.tw ini b3-nb-dd(.t) ntr <sup>c</sup>3 hr.i-ib s3t.t m b3h tm hn<sup>c</sup> pth <sup>(2,4)</sup> t3tnn iw=f dd n=w wd<sup>c</sup> p3  
<sup>c</sup>dd.wi rwi.tw=tn sn min3 <sup>c</sup>h<sup>c</sup> tttt r<sup>c</sup> nb  
<sup>c</sup>h<sup>c</sup>.n wšb <sup>(2,5)</sup> b3-nb-dd(.t) ntr-<sup>c</sup>3 <sup>c</sup>nh m dd.t n=f m-di.t ir.y=n shr m hmt=n imi h3b.tw wh3 <sup>(2,6)</sup> n  
 n.t wr.t mw.t ntr ir p3 nt.i iw=s (hr) dd.t=f iw=n (r) ir=f  
 wn.in t3 psd.t hr dd n b3-nb-dd(.t) <sup>(2,7)</sup> ntr <sup>c</sup>3 <sup>c</sup>nh i.ir.tw wp.tw.w m zp tp.i m t3 wsh.t w<sup>c</sup> m<sup>c</sup>3.t  
 wn.in t3 psd.t hr dd n <sup>(2,8)</sup> dhwti m b3h nb-r-dr ih ir=k wh3 n n.t wr.t mwt ntr hr rn n nb-r-dr  
 k3 hri-ib iwn.w  
 wn.[in] <sup>(2,9)</sup> dhw.ti hr dd iry=i m=k iry(=i) zp 2  
 wn.in=f hms r ir.t p3 wh3 iw=f hr dd nswt-bity <sup>(2,10)</sup> r<sup>c</sup>-tm mr.y dhwti nb t3.wi iwn.w(y) p3 itn  
 shd t3.wi m in.w=f p3 h<sup>c</sup>py wr hr <sup>(2,11)</sup> mhi <p3> r<sup>c</sup>-hr-3h.ty iw n.t wr.t mw.t ntr shd hr tp.y  
<sup>c</sup>nh.tw snb.tw rnp.tw b3 <sup>c</sup>nh n <sup>(2,12)</sup> nb-r-dr k3 m iwn.w m nswt nfr n.w t3 mr.y (dd) r-nt.i b3k-  
 im sdr hr-tp wsir hr ndnd <sup>(2,13)</sup> t3.wi nb r<sup>c</sup> iw sbk wd3 r nh<sup>h</sup> ih p3 nt.i iw=n r ir=f n p3 rmt 2  
 nt.i 80 n rnp.t r t3 iw=sn m t3 knb.t hr <sup>(3,1)</sup> bn tw=tw rh wd<sup>c</sup> m p3 zi.wi ih h3b<=k> n=n p3 nt.i  
 iw=n ir=f wn.in n.t wr.t mw.t ntr <sup>(3,2)</sup> h3b h3 n t3 psd.t r dd imi t3 i3w.t n wsir n z3=f hr m ir  
 ir.t n3 zp.w <sup>c</sup>3.yw n <sup>(3,3)</sup> grg nt.i bn st r s.wt m-r3-pw iw=i knd mtw t3 pt thn p3 iwtn mtw=tw  
<sup>(3,4)</sup> hr dd n nb-r-dr k3 hr.i-ib iwn.w i.kb stš m h.wt=f imi n=f <sup>c</sup>n.t ztr.t t3y=k šr.ti mtw=k <sup>(3,5)</sup>  
 di.t hr r t3 s.t n it.i(=f) wsir



ḥḥ.n p3 wh3 n n.t wr.t mw.t ntr spr.w r t3 psd.t iw=w hms<sup>(3,6)</sup> m t3 wsh.t hr-hnt.i-ḥb.w iw.tw  
(hr) di.t p3 wsh m d.t dhwti

ḥḥ.n dhwti (hr) ḥḥ=f m b3h nb-r-dr<sup>(3,7)</sup> hnc t3 psd.t r dr st iw=sn (hr) dd m rḥ wḥ m3ḥ.tw t3  
ntr.t

wn.in nb-r-dr (hr) knd.t r hr iw=f hr dd n=f tw=k<sup>(3,8)</sup> hwr.tw m ḥḥ.w=k hr t3 izw.t ḥ3.ti r=k p3  
ḥdd bin dp.t rḥ=f

ḥḥ.n ini-hr.t (hr) knd.t<sup>(3,9)</sup> m hḥ n zp m mi.tt t3 psd.t r dr st m 30 iw b3b3 p3 ntr hr dwn=f  
iw=f hr<sup>(3,10)</sup> dd n p3 rḥ-hr-3h.ty k3r=k šw

ḥḥ.n p3 rḥ-hr-3h.ty šn.n t3 wšb.y i.dd.y n=f<sup>(3,11)</sup> iw=f (hr) sdr=f hr psd.t iw ib=f (r) dw ḥ3 wr

ḥḥ.n t3 psd.t (hr) pr.y r-bnr iw=sn<sup>(3,12)</sup> (hr) ḥḥ sgb ḥ3 r hr n b3b3 p3 ntr iw=sn hr dd n=f pr n=k  
r-bnr p3 bt3<sup>(3,13)</sup> i.ir=k ḥ3 r ikr iw=sn (hr) šm.t r n3y=sn im(3)w

ḥḥ.n p3 ntr ḥ3 hr ir.t wḥ hrw iw=f<sup>(4,1)</sup> sdr hr psd=f m p3y=f sh iw ib=f dw.w ḥ3 wr iw=f (hr) wḥ=f  
hr ir hr-s3 izd.t ḥ3.t wn.in<sup>(4,2)</sup> hw.t-hr nb.t nh3-rs.i hr iy iw=s ḥḥ m b3h iu=s nb-r-dr iw=s kf3  
k3.t=s r hr=f

ḥḥ.n p3 ntr ḥ3<sup>(4,3)</sup> (hr) zb im=s

wn.in=f hr dwn=f iw=f hms r-hnc tḥ psd.t ḥ3.t iw=f hr dd n hr hnc stš i.dd r.r=tn

wn.in<sup>(4,4)</sup> stš ḥ3 ph.ti z3 nw.t hr dd ir ink ink stš ḥ3 ph.ti m-hn(.w) psd.t hr tw=i (hr) sm3 p3  
<sup>(4,5)</sup> hft.i n p3 rḥ m-mn.t iw=i m-h3.t n wi3-nhh iw nn rh ntr nb ir=f iw=i (r) šzp t3 izw.t n wsir

wn.in=sn<sup>(4,6)</sup> hr dd m3ḥ stš z3 nw.t

wn.in in.i-hr.t hnc dhwti ḥḥ sgb ḥ3 r dd i.ir.tw di.t t3<sup>(4,7)</sup> izw.t n sn n mw.t iw z3 n h.t (hr) ḥḥ

dd.in b3-nb-dd.w ntr ḥ3 ḥnh istw i.ir.tw di.t t3 izw.t n p3<sup>(4,8)</sup> ḥdd iw stš p3y=f sn ḥ3 (hr) ḥḥ

ḥḥ.n t3 psd.t ḥḥ sgb ḥ3 r hr n nb-r-dr iw=sn hr dd n=f ih<sup>(4,9)</sup> n3 mdw.t i.dd nt.i bn š3w sdm=w

dd.in hr z3 is.t bn nfr iwn3 p3 gb.t m b3h<sup>(4,10)</sup> t3 psd.t mtw=tw nhm t3 izw.t n iti(=i) wsir m-  
di=i

ḥḥ.n is.t (hr) knd.t r t3 psd.t iw=s hr ir.t ḥnh n<sup>(4,11)</sup> ntr m b3h t3 psd.t m dd ḥnh mw.t(=i) n.t  
ntr.t ḥnh pth t3-tnn k3-šw.ti wḥf-db.wi<sup>(4,12)</sup> n ntr.w iw.tw w3h n3 mdw.t m b3h tm sr wr im.i  
iwn.w mi.tt hpr.i hr.i-ib wi3=f

ḥḥ.n dd<sup>(4,13)</sup> n=s t3 psd.t m-ir hdn iw.tw (r) di.t n3 m3ḥ.t n p3 m3ḥ.tw iw.tw ir.t p3 dd=k nb

ḥḥ.n stš<sup>(5,1)</sup> z3 nw.t (hr) knd.t r t3 psd.t m-dr dd=sn n3 mdw.t n is.t wr mw.t ntr

ḥḥ.n stš hr dd n=sn iw=i<sup>(5,2)</sup> (r) t3 p3y=i dḥm n 4500 n nms mtw=i hdb wḥ im=tn m-mn.t

ḥḥ.n stš hr ir.t<sup>(5,3)</sup> ḥnh n nb-r-dr r-dd bn iw=i r shn<=i> m t3 knb.t iw is.t im=s

ḥḥ.n p3 rḥ hr-3h.ty hr dd n=sn dḥy=tn<sup>(5,4)</sup> r p3 iw hr.i-ib mtw=tn wp.tw im mtw=tn dd n nmt.i  
p3 mhn.ti m-ir d3<sup>(5,5)</sup> z.t-hm.t nb.t m zn.ti n is.t

ḥḥ.n t3 psd.t d3 r p3 iw.t hr.i-ib iw=w hms hr<sup>(5,6)</sup> wnm ḥk.w

wn.in is.t (hr) ii iw=s spr.w r nmt.i p3 mhn.ti iw=f (hr) hms spr.w r p3y=f<sup>(5,7)</sup> dp.t iw ir=s  
hpr.w=s m wḥ izw.t n rmt iw i.šm=s m ksks<sup>(5,8)</sup> iw wḥ htm šri n nb.w r d.t=s iw=s hr dd n=k

*i.İR=i İİ n=k r dd dzy=k <wi> r <sup>(5,9)</sup> p3 İw hr.i-İb p3-wn i.İR=i İİ hr.i p3 İb n nd n p3 Ćdd řri<sup>(5,10)</sup>  
 İw=f m s3 nh İzw.t m p3 İw hr.i-İb 5 r p3 hrw İw=f hkr*

*İw=f hr dd n=s <sup>(5,11)</sup> dd.tw n=i m-İR d3 z.t-İm.t nb(.t) İw=s hr dd n=f İ.İR.tw dd.tw=f n=k hr-s.t-  
 n-r<sup>c</sup> İs.t <sup>(5,12)</sup> p3 İ.dd=k*

*İw=f hr dd n=s İw=k (r) dİ.t n=i İİ dzy tw=k r p3 İw hr.i-İb*

*Ćh<sup>c</sup>.n dd n=f İs.t <sup>(5,13)</sup> İw=i dİ.t n=k t3 wh3.t*

*wn.İN.f hr dd n=s İw=s <r> İİ n=i tzy=t wh3.t İ.İR=i d3 İİ r p3 İw hr.i-İb İw dd.tw n=i m-İR d3 z.t-  
 İm.t r-db3 tzy=t wh3.t*

*wn.İN=s <sup>(6,1)</sup> hr dd n=f İw=i (r) dİ.t n=k p3 İtm n nbw nt.İ m*

*d.t(=İ) İw=f hr dd n=s İmİ tw p3 İtm n nbw İw=s <sup>(6,2)</sup> (hr) dİ.t=f n=f*

*wn.İN=f (hr) d3=s r p3 İw hr.i-İb*

*hr İr sw m n3 hr n3 řn.w wn.İN=s (hr) nw3 İw=s (hr) ptr <sup>(6,3)</sup> t3 psd.t İw=sn (hr) İms hr wnm  
 Ćk.w m-b3h nb-r-dr m p3y=f zh*

*Ćh<sup>c</sup>.n stš (hr) nw3 <sup>(6,4)</sup> İw=f ptr st İw=s dy İ.tİ w3.tİ*

*wn.İN=s hr řn.t m h33=s İw=s (hr) İr.t hpr.w=s <sup>(6,5)</sup> m w<sup>c</sup> řr(.t) nfr.t n h<sup>c</sup>.w=s İw nn wn mİ kd=s  
 m p3 t3 r-dr=f*

*Ćh<sup>c</sup>.n=f (hr) mr.t=s r dW Ć3 <sup>(6,6)</sup> wr*

*wn.İN stš hr dwn=f İw=f İms hr wnm Ćk r-hn<sup>c</sup> t3 psd.t Ć3.t İw=f řm r İr.t n-h3.t=s <sup>(6,7)</sup> İw bw-pw  
 ptr=s hr.w r=f*

*wn.İN=f (hr) Ćh<sup>c</sup> n h3 w<sup>c</sup> nh.t İw=f (hr) Ćř n=s İw=f hr dd n=s tw=i <sup>(6,8)</sup> dy m-dİ=s řr.t nfr.t*

*İw=s dd n=f k3 p3y=i nb Ć3 İr İnk wn wİ m İm.t m-dİ w<sup>c</sup> mniw İw=i <sup>(6,9)</sup> (hr) ms n=f w<sup>c</sup> z3 t3.y İw  
 p3=i İİ mwt İw p3 Ćdd hpr.w m ř3 n3 İzw.t n p3y=f İtİ*

*<sup>(6,10)</sup> hr İr w<sup>c</sup> rmt drdr İ.y İw=f (hr) İms m p3y=i İİ.w hr=f mİ.n3 hr dd n p3y=i řr <sup>(6,11)</sup> İw=i (r)  
 kñkñ=k mtw=i nhm n3 İzw.t n p3y=k İtİ mtw=i h3=k r-bnr*

*hr=f hr dd n=f hr İb=i r dİ.t <sup>(6,12)</sup> İr=k n=f nht*

*Ćh<sup>c</sup>.n stš hr dd n=s İ.İR.tw dİ.t n3 İzw.t n p3 rmt drdr İw p3 řr <sup>(6,13)</sup> n p3 Ćh3.wİ Ćh<sup>c</sup>*

*Ćh<sup>c</sup>.n İs.t hr hpr=s m w<sup>c</sup> dr.t İw=s (hr) p3 İw=s (hr) İms hr d3d3 <sup>(6,14)</sup> n w<sup>c</sup> řn İw=s (hr) Ćř n stš  
 İw=s hr dd n=f İ.rm n=k {İn} m r<sup>c</sup>=k İ.dd sw ds=k İn řs3-hr=k <sup>(7,1)</sup> wp tw=k ds=k İİ r=k Ćn*

*Ćh<sup>c</sup>.n=f Ćh<sup>c</sup> rm İw=f (hr) řm.t r p3 nt.İ p3 r<sup>c</sup>-hr-3h.tİ <sup>(7,2)</sup> İm İw=f (hr) rmhr dd n=f İİ r=k Ćn*

*wn.İN stš hr dd n=f t3 rmt İn İ.tİ <sup>(7,3)</sup> r=i Ćn İr=s b3g İm=i Ćn İw (hr) İr=s hpr.w=s m w<sup>c</sup> řr(.t)  
 nfr.t r-hr=i İw=s hr <sup>(7,4)</sup> dd n=i İr İnk wn=i İm.t m-dİ w<sup>c</sup> mniw İw=f mwt İw=i (hr) ms n=f w<sup>c</sup> z3  
 t3y İw=f m <sup>(7,5)</sup> ř3 n3 İzw.t n p3y=f İtİ İw w<sup>c</sup> rmt drdr k3İ r p3y=i İİ.w r-hn<sup>c</sup> p3y=i <sup>(7,6)</sup> řr İw=i (hr)  
 dİ n=f Ćk*

*hr-İR m-İt hrw.w kñ.w hr-s3 nn wn.İN p3 k3İ.w hr <sup>(7,7)</sup> dd n p3y=i řr İw=i (r) kñkñ=k [w]İ mtw=i  
 nhmn3 İzw.t n p3y=k İtİ mtw=w hpr m-dİ=İhr=f hr <sup>(7,8)</sup> dd n p3y=i řri İ.n=s n=i*

*wn.İN p3 r<sup>c</sup>-hr-3h.tİ hr dd n=f İw=k (hr) dd n=s İİ*



*wn.in hr z3 is.t (hr) knd.t r<sup>(9,8)</sup> mw.t=f is.t iw=f (hr) pr r-bnr iw hr=f hz3.w mi 3b.i-sm<sup>c</sup> iw t3y=f hsk.t m d.t=f<sup>(9,9)</sup> n 16 n dbn iw=f (hr) rwi d3d3 mw.t=f is.t iw=f di.tw=f m kni=f iw=f (hr) tz r p3 dw*

*wn.in is.t<sup>(9,10)</sup> hr ir.t hpr.w=s m w<sup>c</sup> n rpw.t n ds iw nn wn m-di=s d3d3*

*h<sup>c</sup>.n p3 r<sup>c</sup>-hr-3h.ti<sup>(9,11)</sup> hr dd n dhwti ih t3 nti i.ti iw nn wn m-di=s d3d3*

*h<sup>c</sup>.n dhwti hr dd n p3 r<sup>c</sup>-hr-3h.ti<sup>(9,12)</sup> p3y=i nb nfr is.t wr mw.t ntr t3 iw rwi hr p3y=s sr d3d3=s*

*h<sup>c</sup>.n<sup>(10,1)</sup> p3 r<sup>c</sup>-hr-3h.ti (hr) s<sup>c</sup> sgb s3 iw=f hr dd n t3 psd.t hn=n ir=n n=f sb3.yt s3.t*

*wn.in t3 psd.t<sup>(10,2)</sup> (hr) tz r n3 dw r wh3 hr z3 is.t istw ir hr sw sdr hr w<sup>c</sup> nh.t snwš<sup>c</sup><sup>(10,3)</sup> m p3 t3 n wh3*

*wn.in stš hr gm.t=f iw=f (hr) mh im=f iw=f (hr) hwi=f hr 3.t=f hr p3 dw iw=f rwi<sup>(10,4)</sup> wd3.ti=f m s.wt=w iw=f (hr) tms=w hr p3 dw r shd t3 iw p3 bnr 2 n ir.ti=f (hr) hpr m shr.ti<sup>(10,5)</sup> iw=sn rd.w m sšn.wi wn.in stš hr i n=f iw=f hr dd n p3 r<sup>c</sup>-hr-3h.ti n s<sup>c</sup>d3<sup>(10,6)</sup> bw-pw=i gm hr hr iw gm=f sw*

*wn.in hw.t-hr nb.(t) nh.t rsi.t hr šm.t iw=s gm<sup>(10,7)</sup> hr iw=f sdr hr rmi hr t3 h3s.t*

*wn.in=s mh w<sup>c</sup> ghs iw=s (hr) hri=s iw=s hr dd n hr<sup>(10,8)</sup> i.wn ir.t=k iw=s di=i n3 i3r.t im*

*wn.in=f hr wn ir.ti=f iw=s (hr) di.t n<sup>c</sup> i3-ir.t im iw=s (hr) di.t r t3 wnm iw=s<sup>(10,9)</sup> (hr) di.t r t3 smh iw=s hr dd n=f i.wn ir.t=k iw=f (hr) wn ir.t=f iw=s (hr) ptr=f gm<=s> sw mnk.w*

*wn.in=s<sup>(10,10)</sup> hr šm.t r dd n p3 r<sup>c</sup>-hr-3h.ti gm(=i) hr iw gb sw stš m ir.t=f hr (hr) ir=i s<sup>c</sup>h<sup>c</sup>=f<sup>(10,11)</sup> s<sup>c</sup>n m=k sw (hr) iw*

*wn.in t3 psd.t hr dd imi s<sup>c</sup>.tw n hr hn<sup>c</sup> stš wp.tw=w*

*wn.in.tw (hr) in.t=w m-b3h t3<sup>(10,12)</sup> psd.t dd.in nb-r-dr m-b3h t3 psd.t s3.t n hr hn<sup>c</sup> stš i.šm nhm p3 dd=i n=tn<sup>(11,1)</sup> wnm=tn swr=tn htp=n rwi=tn mi n3 tttt r<sup>c</sup>-nb zp 2 zp 2*

*wn.in stš hr dd n hr mi iry=n hrw nfr m p3y=i<sup>(11,2)</sup> pr*

*wn.in hr hr dd=f iry=i m=k iry=i zp 2 hr ir m-hr tr n rwh3 iw.tw (hr) sš<sup>(11,3)</sup> n=sn iw=w sdr m p3 zi 2 hr ir m grhw.t iw stš (hr) di.t nht hnwf=iw=f (hr) di.t hn.w=f r-iwd mn.ti<sup>(11,4)</sup> n hr*

*wn.in hr hr di.t t3y=f d.ti r-iwd mn.ti iw=f (hr) šzp t3 mtw.t n stš*

*wn.in hr hr<sup>(11,5)</sup> šm.t r dd n mw.t=f is.t mi n=i is.t t3y=i mw.t mi ptr n3 i.ir stš n=i iw=f (hr) wn d.ti=f iw=f<sup>(11,6)</sup> hr di.t ptr=s t3 mtw.t n stš iw=s (hr) s<sup>c</sup> sgb s3 iw=s (hr) t3y p3 hmt iw=s (hr) š<sup>c</sup>d d.t=f iw=s<sup>(11,7)</sup> (hr) h3=f r p3 mw iw=s šdi n=f d.t m-š3<sup>c</sup>*

*wn.in=s (hr) ini nk.t n sgnn sdm iw=s (hr) di.t=f r hnw n hr<sup>(11,8)</sup>*

*wn.in is.t hr šm.t hr.i n t3 mtw.t<sup>(11,9)</sup> n hr m tr n dw3 r p3 hzp n stš iw=s hr dd n p3 k3r.y n stš ih m sm.w<sup>(11,10)</sup> p3 nt.i stš hr wnm=f d.t m-di=k*

*h<sup>c</sup>.n k3r.y hr dd n=s bw ir=f wnm sm.w nb d.t m-di=i<sup>(11,11)</sup> hr s<sup>c</sup>b.w iw is.t (hr) di.t t3 mtw.t n hr n r-r=w*

*h<sup>c</sup>.n stš hr i m p3y=f shr n r<sup>c</sup> nb iw=f wnm n3 s<sup>c</sup>b.w nt.i sw (hr) wnm m dwn zp 2*

*h<sup>c</sup>.n=f h<sup>c</sup> iwr m t3 mtw.t n hr*

*h<sup>c</sup>.n stš (hr) šm.t r-dd n<sup>(12,1)</sup> hr mi hn=n shn=i r-hn<sup>c</sup>=k m t3 knb.t*

*wn.in hr dd n=f ir=i m=k ir.i zp 2*

*wn.in=w* <sup>(12,2)</sup> (hr) šm.t r t3 knb.t m p3 zi 2 iw=w h<sup>c</sup> m-b3h t3 psd.t c3.t iw.tw hr dd nt.iw i.dd r r<sup>c</sup>=tn

*wn.in stš hr dd imi di.tw n=i* <sup>(12,3)</sup> t3 izw.t hk3 c<sup>h</sup>.w wd3.w s(nb.w) p3-wn ir hr p3 nt.i h<sup>c</sup> ir=i k3.t h<sup>c</sup> r=f

*wn.in t3 psd.t (hr) cš* <sup>(12,4)</sup> sgb c3 wn.in=sn hr bš pgs.w r hr n hr *wn.in hr (hr) zb.t im=sn*

*wn.in hr hr ir.t* <sup>(12,5)</sup> c<sup>h</sup>.w n ntr m dd c<sup>d</sup>3 p3 dd nb stš imi cš.tw n t3 mtw.t n stš ptr=n p3 nt.i iw=s (hr) wšb.t <sup>(12,6)</sup> im mtw=tw cš n t3y=i ink ptr=n p3 nt.i iw=s wšb im

*wn.in dhwti nb md.w-ntr zš m3<sup>c</sup>* <sup>(12,7)</sup> n psd.t hr w3h d.t=f hr k<sup>c</sup>h n hr iw=f hr dd mi r-bnr t3 mtw.t n stš iw=s (hr) wšb.t <sup>(12,8)</sup> n=f m p3 mw m-hnw p3 bnd.t

*wn.in dhwti hr w3h d.t=f hr k<sup>c</sup>h n stš iw=f hr dd mi* <sup>(12,9)</sup> r-bnr t3 mtw.t n hr

*wn.in=s hr dd n=f iw=i r ii tnw*

*wn.in dhwti hr dd n=s mi* <sup>(12,10)</sup> r-bnr m msdr=f

*h<sup>c</sup>.n=s hr dd n=f istw i.ir=i pr r-bnr m msdr=f iw ink mw* <sup>(12,11)</sup> ntr.i

*wn.in dhwti hr dd n=s mi r-bnr m wp.t=f*

*wn.in=s (hr) pr m w<sup>c</sup> n itn n nb.w hr tp n* <sup>(12,12)</sup> stš

*wn.in stš (hr) knd.t ikr zp 2 iw=f (hr) rwi d.t=f r mh m p3 itn n nb.w*

*wn.in dhwti hr nhm=f* <sup>(13,1)</sup> m-di=f iw=f di=f m h<sup>c</sup>.w hr tp=f

*wn.in t3 psd.t hr dd m3<sup>c</sup> hr c<sup>d</sup>3 stš*

*h<sup>c</sup>.n stš knd ikr zp 2* <sup>(13,2)</sup> iw=f cš sgb c3 m-dr dd=w m3<sup>c</sup> hr c<sup>d</sup>3 stš *h<sup>c</sup>.n stš hr ir.t c<sup>h</sup>.w c3 n ntr m dd* <sup>(13,3)</sup> bn iw.tw r di.t n=f t3 izw.t i.ir.tw tw.tw h3=f r-bnr irm=i mtw=tn mdh=n nh3 n <sup>(13,4)</sup> *h<sup>c</sup>.w n inr mtw=tn trr m p3 zi 2 hr ir p3 nt.i iw=f t3.y m p3y=f ir.i iw.tw* <sup>(13,5)</sup> (r) di.t n=f t3 izw.t hk3 c<sup>h</sup>.w wd3.w s(nb.w)

*wn.in hr hr mdh n=f w<sup>c</sup> dp.t n cš iw=f (hr) sk3h=f m kd* <sup>(13,6)</sup> iw=f (hr) h3=f r p3 mw m tr n rwh3 iw nn ptr st rmt nb nt.i m p3 t3 r-dr=f *h<sup>c</sup>.n* <sup>(13,7)</sup> stš hr ptr p3 dp.t n hr iw=f hr dd inr r=f iw=f hr šm.t r p3 dw iw=f (hr) š<sup>c</sup>d w<sup>c</sup> <sup>(13,8)</sup> dhn n dw iw=f (hr) mdh n=f w<sup>c</sup> dp.t n inr <n> 138 n mh

*wn.i<n>=sn h3.y r n3y=sn* <sup>(13,9)</sup> h<sup>c</sup>.w m-b3h t3 psd.tw

*wn.in p3 dp.t n stš hrp.w m p3 mw*

*h<sup>c</sup>.n stš hr ir.t hpr.w=f m w<sup>c</sup> db* <sup>(13,10)</sup> iw=f (hr) di.t bg3y p3 dp.t n hr *wn.in hr hr t3y hmt=f iw=f hwi=f r hm n stš*

*wn.in* <sup>(13,11)</sup> t3 psd.t hr dd n=f m ir hwi r=f

*wn.in=f hr ini n3 h<sup>c</sup>.w n p3 mw iw=f (hr) w3h=w m p3y=f dp.t iw=f (hr) hd* <sup>(13,12)</sup> r z3w r dd n n.t wr mw.t-ntr imi wd<sup>c</sup> hn<sup>c</sup> stš r nt.i 80 n rnp.t r t3 iw=n m t3 knb.t <sup>(14,1)</sup> hr bn tw=tw rh wd<sup>c</sup>=n hr bw di.t m3<sup>c</sup>=fr=i hr h3 n zp r p3 iw=i m3<sup>c</sup>(.kw)i r=f r<sup>c</sup> nb hr iw bn sw (hr) nw r i.dd nb <sup>(14,2)</sup> t3 psd.t shn=i irm=f m t3 wsh.t hr.t-m3<sup>c</sup>.t di.tw m3<sup>c</sup>=i r=f shn=i irm=f m t3 wsh.t hr <sup>(14,3)</sup> hn.ti c<sup>b</sup>.w di.tw m3<sup>c</sup>=i r=f shn=i irm=f m t3 wsh.t sh.t-izr.w di.tw m3<sup>c</sup>=i r=f shn=i irm=f <sup>(14,4)</sup> m t3 wsh.t p3 š n sh.t di.tw m3<sup>c</sup>=i r=f iw t3 psd.t (hr)dd n šw z3 r<sup>c</sup> m3<sup>c</sup>.t m i.dd=f nb hr z3 is.t <sup>(14,5)</sup> dd ir.n dhwti n nb-r-dr imi h3b wh3 n wsir wd<sup>c</sup>=f p3 c<sup>d</sup>3 2

*dd.in* šw z3 r<sup>c</sup> m3<sup>c</sup> m h<sup>h</sup> n zp<sup>(14,6)</sup> p3 *dd.w* d<sup>h</sup>wti n<sup>c</sup> t3 psd.t

*wn.in* nb-r-dr hr dd n d<sup>h</sup>wti hms i.ir wh3 n wsir n<sup>h</sup>m=n p3 nt.i iw=f dd=f

*wn.in* d<sup>h</sup>wti hms<sup>(14,7)</sup> r m<sup>h</sup> wh3 n wsir m dd k3 m3i (hr) b<sup>h</sup>s n=f nb.ti mkw.ti n<sup>r</sup>.w w<sup>c</sup>f t3.wi hr nb.w gm rmt m zp<sup>(14,8)</sup> tp.i nswt-bity k3 m hr.i-ib iwn.w z3-pt<sup>h</sup> h idb.wi h<sup>c</sup> m it.i psd.t=f wnm=f m nb.w hr thn.w nb(.w)<sup>(14,9)</sup> dsr.w n<sup>h</sup>.w wd3.w s(nb.w) ih h3b=k n=n p3 nt.i iw=n r ir=f n hr h<sup>n</sup>c stš tm=n ir shr.w m hm=n

hr ir m-ht hrw.w kn.w hr-s3 nn *wn.in* p3<sup>(14,10)</sup> wsh hr spr r nswt z3 r<sup>c</sup> 3 ttf nb df3

h<sup>c</sup>.n=f (hr) š sgb 3 m-dr š<.tw> p3 wh3 m-b3h=f

*wn.in=f*<sup>(14,11)</sup> (hr) hsf.t=f 3s.ø zp 2 zp 2 r p3 nt.i nb-r-dr im r-h<sup>n</sup>c t3 psd.t r-dd i.ir.tw sg.tw z3=i hr hr ih iw ink i.ir=tn m nht<sup>(14,12)</sup> hr iw ink ir it bty r s<sup>n</sup>h n<sup>r</sup>.w mi-n3 i3w.t hr-s3 n<sup>r</sup>.w iw bw gm sw n<sup>r</sup> n<sup>r</sup>.t nb(.t) r ir=f

h<sup>c</sup>.n<sup>(15,1)</sup> p3 wh3 n wsir spr.w r p3 nt.i p3 r<sup>c</sup>-hr-3h.ti im iw=f (hr) hms h<sup>n</sup>c t3 psd.t m t3 i3d.t hd.t m p3 h3sw.t

h<sup>c</sup>.n iw.tw š=f m b3h=f<sup>(15,2)</sup> h<sup>n</sup>c t3 psd.t iw p3 r<sup>c</sup>-hr-3h.ti hr dd ih hsf=k n=i p3 wh3 3s zp 2 n wsir mtw=k dd n=f hr p3 wh3 hn bw hpr.kwi hn bw ms=k<sup>(15,3)</sup> iw bty it hpr.w m-r3-<sup>c</sup>

*wn.in* p3 wh3 n nb-r-dr spr.w r wsir iw<.tw>=f š=f m b3h=f

*wn.in=f* h3b n p3 r<sup>c</sup>-hr-3h.ti n m dd nfr r ikr<sup>(15,4)</sup> zp 2 p3 i.ir=k nb p3 gm t3 psd.t m ir.t iw di.tw hrp m3<sup>c</sup>.t m-hn.w dw3.t ih ptr=k p3 shr gr m ntk ir<sup>(15,5)</sup> p3 t3 nt.i tw=i im=f sw mh m wpw<.tiw> hz<.w> hr.w iw bn st snd.w n n<sup>r</sup> nb n<sup>r</sup>.t <nb.t> iw=i r di.t pr=sn mtw=sn ini h3t.i n p3 nt.i nb ir.t zb.t<sup>(15,6)</sup> mtw=sn hpr r di r h<sup>n</sup>c=i i3 ih p3y=i hpr.w di htp.kwi hr imn.t iw=tn n-bnr r-dr.w zp 2 zp 2 nim im=sn iw=f nht r=i hr m=k<sup>(15,7)</sup> gm=sn grg m ir.t istw ir m-dr ir pth 3 rsw-imb=f nb n<sup>h</sup> t3.wi t3 p.t istw bn dd=f n n3 sb3.wt nt.i <m> hn.w=s i.ir=tn htp <hr> imn.t<sup>(15,8)</sup> r-tnw grh.t m p3 nt.i nswt wsir im

hr ir hr-s3 n<sup>r</sup>.w iw p<sup>c</sup>.t rhy.t htp.w m p3 nt.i tw=k im m-r3-<sup>c</sup> i.n=f

n=ihr ir m-ht <hrw.w kn.w> hr-s3<sup>(15,9)</sup> nn iw p3 wh3 n wsir spr.w r p3 nt.i nb-r-dr im h<sup>n</sup>c t3 psd.t

*wn.in* d<sup>h</sup>wti m šzp p3 wh3 iw=f (hr) š=f m-b3h p3 r<sup>c</sup> hr-3h.ti<sup>(15,10)</sup> h<sup>n</sup>c t3 psd.t

*wn.i<n>=sn* hr dd m3<sup>c</sup> zp 2 m i.dd=f nb p3 3-<sup>c</sup>ttf-nb-df3

*wn.in* stš hr dd imi t3i.tw=n r p3 iw hr.i-ib<sup>(15,11)</sup> shn=i irm=f *wn.in=f* (hr) šm.t r p3 iw hr.i-ib iw.tw (hr) di.t m3<sup>c</sup> hr r=f

*wn.in* tm nb t3.wi iwn.w (hr) h3b n is.t r dd ini stš iw=f hn<sup>(15,12)</sup> m kh

*wn.in* is.t hr ini stš iw=f hn m kh iw=f m rmt s3w

*wn.in* tm hr dd n=f i.ir=k tm di.t wd<sup>c</sup>.tw=tn<sup>(15,13)</sup> hr ih iw=k n<sup>h</sup>m n=k t3 i3w.t n hr

*wn.in* stš hr dd n=f m-bi3 p3y=i nb nfr imi š<.tw n hr z3 is.t mtw.tw di.t n=f t3 i3w.t n<sup>(16,1)</sup> iti wsir

*wn.in.tw* hr ini hr z3 is.t iw.tw (hr) di.t hd.t hr tp=f iw.tw di.tw=f r t3 st n it.i wsir iw.tw hr dd n=f tw=k m nswt nfr n t3 mr.i tw=k<sup>(16,2)</sup> m nb n<sup>h</sup>.w wd<sup>c</sup>.w s(nb.w) nfr n t3 nb r-š3 n<sup>h</sup>h h<sup>n</sup>c d.t

h<sup>c</sup>.n is.t (hr) š sgb 3 n z3=s hr m dd tw=k m nswt nfr ib=i m ršw.t shd=k t3<sup>(16,3)</sup> m iwn=k

*wn.in* pth<sup>c</sup> 3 rsw inb=f nb<sup>c</sup> nh<sup>c</sup> t3.wi hr dd ih p3 nt.i iw.tw r ir=f n stš hr mk di.tw hr r <t3> s.t  
m iti wsir

*wn.in* p3<sup>(16,4)</sup> r<sup>c</sup> hr-3h.ti hr dd imi di.tw n=i stš z3 nw.t hms=f r-hn<sup>c</sup> iw=f m-di=i m šri mtw=f  
mdw m t3 pt mtw.tw sn<sup>c</sup> n=f

*wn.in.tw*<sup>(16,5)</sup> hr šm.t r dd n p3 r<sup>c</sup> hr-3h.ti hr z<sup>c</sup> is.t h<sup>c</sup> m h<sup>c</sup>3<sup>c</sup> nh.w wd<sup>c</sup>.w s(nb.w)

*h<sup>c</sup>.n* p3 r<sup>c</sup> hr-3h.ti hr ršw.t r ikr zp 2 iw=f hr dd n t3 psd.t<sup>(16,6)</sup> nhm=tn r t3 zp 2 n hr z3 is.t  
*wn.in* is.t hr dd hr h<sup>c</sup> m h<sup>c</sup>3<sup>c</sup> nh.w wd<sup>c</sup>.w s(nb.w) t3 psd.t m hb p.t m ršw.t t3i=sn<sup>(16,7)</sup> m3h.w  
m-dr ptr=sn hr z<sup>c</sup> is.t iw=f h<sup>c</sup> m h<sup>c</sup>3<sup>c</sup> nh.w wd<sup>c</sup>.w s(nb.w) 3 n km.t t3 psd.t ib=sn hr.w t3 r-  
dr=f m h<sup>c</sup><sup>(16,8)</sup> m-dr ptr=sn hr z3 is.t iw=s swd n=f t3 izw.t n iti wsir nb dd.w

iw=s pw nfr m-hnw w3s.t t3 s.t m3<sup>c</sup>.t

## Appendix 2: Translation of the Contendings

<sup>(1,1)</sup> [THERE CAME TO PASS] THE JUDGEMENT of Horus and Seth, they of mysterious forms, greatest of existing princes and lords. <sup>(1,2)</sup> A [divine] child sat before the Lord of All, seeking the office of (his) father Osiris, him of beautiful appearances, the son <sup>(1,3)</sup> of Ptah, who illuminates the West with his gifts, while Thoth brought the Eye [to] the great prince in Heliopolis.

THEN spoke <sup>(1,4)</sup> Shu, son of Ra, before Atum, the great prince in Heliopolis: “Justice lords over power. Do it by saying: “Give the office to [Horus]!” <sup>(1,5)</sup>

[THEN] Thoth said to the [Ennead: “It is true] a million times.”

THEN Isis uttered a great cry and was overjoyed. <sup>(1,6)</sup> She [went before the Lord of] All, saying: “Northwind, go west! Please Onuphris, l.p.h.”

[THEN] <sup>(1,7)</sup> spoke Shu, son [of Ra]: “Giving the Eye is right by the Ennead.”

The Lord of All [said] this: “What is this planning of yours on [your] <sup>(1,8)</sup> own?”

THEN spoke [Onuris]: “[May] he [bring] the cartouche to Horus and let the White crown [be placed] upon his head.” Then Lord of All fell silent for <sup>(1,9)</sup> a long time as he was angry with the Ennead.

THEN spoke Seth, son of Nut: “Throw him outside <sup>(1,10)</sup> with me and I will have you [see] my hand as he is seized of his hand before the Ennead, since no one knows [any other] way <sup>(1,11)</sup> of getting rid of him.”

THEN Thoth said to him: “Will we not know this falsehood? Will the office of <sup>(1,12)</sup> Osiris be given to Seth while [his] son stands?”

THEN Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon <sup>(2,1)</sup> became very angry, since the heart of Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon would grant the office to Seth Great-of-Power, son of Nut. Then Onuris uttered a great cry towards the Ennead, <sup>(2,2)</sup> saying: “What is it that we do?”

THEN Atum, the great prince in Heliopolis, said: “Have one call to Banebjede, the great living <sup>(2,3)</sup> god, for he shall judge the two youths!”

THEN was brought Banebjede, the great god in midst of Setit, before Atum and Ptah <sup>(2,4)</sup> Tatenen. He said to them: “Judge the two youths, get rid of them now, so that the everyday quarrels cease!”

THEN <sup>(2,5)</sup> Banebjede, the great living god, answered, saying to him: “Let us not make plans without knowing! Send a letter <sup>(2,6)</sup> to Neith the great, divine mother. That, which she says, we will do.”

THEN the Ennead said to Banebjede, <sup>(2,7)</sup> the great living god: “They were judged once in the broad-hall Truth-is-One.”



THEN the Ennead spoke to <sup>(2,8)</sup> Thoth before the Lord-of-All: “Would you write a letter to Neith the great, divine mother, in the name of Lord of All, the bull in midst of Heliopolis.”

THEN <sup>(2,9)</sup> Thoth said: “I will, I will indeed.”

THEN HE sat to write the letter, saying: “Lord of Upper and Lower Egypt, <sup>(2,10)</sup> Re-Atum, beloved of Thoth, Lord of the Two Lands, the Heliopolitan, the sun-disc that brightens the Two Lands with his gifts, the Hapy great in <sup>(2,11)</sup> flowing, Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon, as Neith the Great, the divine mother, who shone upon the first face, is living, healthy and vigorous. The living *ba* <sup>(2,12)</sup> of the Lord of All, bull of Heliopolis, beautiful king of the Beloved Land, (speaks) thus: “This loyal servant sleeps on behalf of Osiris, taking counsel <sup>(2,13)</sup> of the Two Lands every day, while Sobk endures eternally. What is it that we will do for these two men that were at the tribunal for eighty years NOW? <sup>(3,1)</sup> There is none who knows how to judge these two men. Write us what we should do!”

Then Neith the great, divine mother, <sup>(3,2)</sup> sent a letter to the Ennead, saying: “Give the office of Osiris to his son, Horus! Do not do the great <sup>(3,3)</sup> evil things that are not in place, or else I shall be angry, and the sky shall strike the ground. And may it <sup>(3,4)</sup> be said to the Lord of All in Heliopolis: “Double the possessions of Seth, give him Anat and Astarte, your two daughters! And may <sup>(3,5)</sup> Horus be given the place of (his) father Osiris!”

Then the letter of Neith the great, divine mother, reached the Ennead, while they sat <sup>(3,6)</sup> in the broad-hall Horus-Foremost-of-Horns and the letter was placed in the hand of Thoth.

Then Thoth read it before the Lord of All <sup>(3,7)</sup> and the whole Ennead and they said with a single voice: “The goddess is right!” Then the Lord of All became angry with Horus, saying to him: “Your <sup>(3,8)</sup> limbs are weak, and the office is big for you, a child the taste of whose mouth is wretched!”

Then Onuris became really mad <sup>(3,9)</sup>, as did the whole Ennead that comprised the court of Thirty. Baba the god stood up and <sup>(3,10)</sup> said to Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon: “Your chapel is empty!” Then Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon suffered for the answer that was said to him <sup>(3,11)</sup> and lay on his back, his heart being very sore.

Then the Ennead went outside and <sup>(3,12)</sup> shouted a lot in the face of Baba the god, saying to him: “Go away, the crime <sup>(3,13)</sup> that you committed is great indeed!” as they went to their tent.

Then the great god spent a day <sup>(4,1)</sup> taken away lying on his back in his booth, his heart being very sore, and he was alone.

THEN AFTER A LONG TIME <sup>(4,2)</sup> Hathor, the lady of the southern sycamore, came before her father the Lord of All and showed him her vulva.

THEN the great god <sup>(4,3)</sup> laughed about it. Then he got up, sat with the great Ennead and said to Horus and Seth: “Speak for yourselves!”

Then he got up, sat with the great Ennead and said to Horus and Seth: “Speak for yourselves!”

Then <sup>(4,4)</sup> Seth Great-of-Strength, son of Nut, said: “As for me, I am Seth, Great-of-Strength within the Ennead, and I slay the enemy of Re <sup>(4,5)</sup> every day, while I am on the prow of the bark of Millions and there is none that can do it! I will take possession of the office of Osiris!” Then <sup>(4,6)</sup> they said: “True is Seth, the son of Nut.”

Then Onuris and Thoth spoke with a loud voice: “Shall the <sup>(4,7)</sup> office be given to the maternal brother, while the bodily son stands?”

Then Banebjede, the great living god, said: “But should the office be given <sup>(4,8)</sup> to this child, while his older brother Seth stands?”

Then the Ennead cried loudly in the face of the Lord of All, saying to him: “What <sup>(4,9)</sup> is the meaning of these words that are not even worthy of being listened to?”

THEN SPOKE Horus, the son of Isis: “It is not good at all to defraud before <sup>(4,10)</sup> the Ennead. Shall the office of (my) father Osiris be taken away from me?”

THEN Isis became angry with the Ennead and made a divine oath <sup>(4,11)</sup> before the Ennead, saying: “As (my) mother, the goddess Neith, lives, as lives Ptah-Tatenen, he whose plumes are tall, he who bends the horns of <sup>(4,12)</sup> the gods, this matter will be placed before Atum, the great prince in Heliopolis, and Khepri in his bark also!”

THEN the Ennead said <sup>(4,13)</sup> to her: “Do not be angry! Justice shall be given to him who is in the right. All that you say will be done!”

Then Seth said to them: “I <sup>(5,2)</sup> will seize my sceptre of 4500 ingots and shall kill one of you every day!” Then Seth made <sup>(5,3)</sup> an oath to the Lord-of-All, saying: “I will not contend before this council while Isis is in it.”

Then Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon said to them <sup>(5,4)</sup>: “You shall cross to the Island-in-the-Midst and there you shall be judged.” And they said to the Nemty the ferryman: “Do not ferry <sup>(5,5)</sup> any woman that looks like Isis.” Then the Ennead crossed to the Island-in-the-Midst, and they <sup>(5,6)</sup> sat down to eat bread.

Then Isis went, reached Nemty the ferryman, while he sat by his <sup>(5,7)</sup> boat, and turned herself into an old woman that walked all bent <sup>(5,8)</sup> with a small golden signet ring on her hand. She said to him: “I have come to you to ask you to ferry to <sup>(5,9)</sup> the Island-in-the-Midst, because I have come with a bowl of flour for a small boy, <sup>(5,10)</sup> who tends to the herds (after he lost? the office) on the Isle-in-the-Midst, five days has it been, and he is hungry.”

And he said to her: <sup>(5,11)</sup> “I was told not to ferry any woman across.”

She said to him: “That which you say was said to you <sup>(5,12)</sup> because of Isis.”

And he said to her: “What will you give me if you get ferried to the Island-in-the-Midst?”

THEN Isis said to him: <sup>(5,13)</sup> “I will give you this cake.”

THEN he said to her: “What will this cake of yours be to me? Do I ferry you to the Island-in-the-Midst, having been told: “Do not to ferry any woman!””, in exchange for your cake?”

THEN SHE <sup>(6,1)</sup> told him: “I will give you the golden signet ring that is in my hand.”

He said to her: “You hand over the golden signet ring!”, and she <sup>(6,2)</sup> gave it to him.

THEN HE ferried her across to the Island-in-the-Midst.

THEN HE ferried her across to the Island-in-the-Midst.

Now she was walking under the trees WHEN she looked and saw <sup>(6,3)</sup> the Ennead sitting and eating bread before the Lord-of-All in his booth.

THEN Seth looked <sup>(6,4)</sup> and saw her there, coming from afar.

THEN she cast her spell and made her appearance <sup>(6,5)</sup> that of a young woman with a beautiful body, the like of which did not exist in the whole world.

THEN he desired her very badly <sup>(6,6)</sup> indeed.

THEN Seth stood up, having been sitting and eating bread with the Great Ennead and he went to meet her, <sup>(6,7)</sup> whom no-one saw there apart from him.

THEN he stood behind a sycamore and shouted at her, saying to her: “I am <sup>(6,8)</sup> here with you, beautiful girl.”

Then she said to him: “Let me, my great lord: Me, I am just a wife of a herdsman, whom I <sup>(6,9)</sup> bore a son, a man. But my husband is dead, and the youth came to tend the herd of his father. <sup>(6,10)</sup> Then a man came, a stranger, and he sat in my stable, speaking like this to my boy: <sup>(6,11)</sup> “I shall beat you up, take your father's herd (office) and I shall throw you out!”

Then she said to him: “Now I would like to have <sup>(6,12)</sup> you defend him.”

THEN Seth said to her: “Will the herd (office) be given to the strange man, while the son <sup>(6,13)</sup> of the man stands?”

THEN Isis turned herself into a kite, took off, and sat on the top <sup>(6,14)</sup> of a tree, crying at Seth, saying to him: “Weep for yourself! It is your mouth that said it! It is your cleverness <sup>(7,1)</sup> that has judged you! What do you want?”

THEN he started crying and went in tears to the place where Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon <sup>(7,2)</sup> was. He said to him: “What do you want again?”

THEN Seth said to him: “That evil woman came <sup>(7,3)</sup> to me again. She made me weak again. She made her appearance that of a young beauty before me and she <sup>(7,4)</sup> said to me: “I am a wife of a herdsman, who is dead and whom I bore a son, a man, who <sup>(7,5)</sup> tended to the herd (office) of his father, when a strange man came with my <sup>(7,6)</sup> boy to my stable and I gave him bread. NOW MANY DAYS AFTER THIS the one who came <sup>(7,7)</sup> said to my boy: “I will beat you, I will take the herd (office) of your father, it will be mine!” This he <sup>(7,8)</sup> said to my boy,” she said to me.

THEN Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon said to him: “And what did you tell her?”

THEN Seth said to him: <sup>(7,9)</sup> “I have told her this: “Now, will the cattle be GIVEN to the stranger while the man's son stands?” That is what I told <sup>(7,10)</sup> her. “The one who came should be beaten in the face with a stick, thrown outside, and your boy should be put <sup>(7,11)</sup> in the place of his father.” That is what I told her.”

THEN Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon said to him: “So, you have judged <sup>(7,12)</sup> yourself, indeed! What do you want?”

THEN Seth said to him: “Have Nemty the ferryman brought, so that a great lesson is given to him, saying: “What did you <sup>(7,13)</sup> ferry her for?” This will be said to him.”

THEN Nemty the ferryman was brought before the Ennead and his toes were removed.

THEN <sup>(8,1)</sup> Nemty forsook gold until this day before the Great Ennead, saying “Gold shall be an abomination to me and my city.”

THEN the Ennead crossed <sup>(8,2)</sup> to the western shore and sat on a mountain. Now after the evening came Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon and <sup>(8,3)</sup> Atum, lord of the Two Lands and Heliopolis, sent to the Ennead, saying: “You sit here to do what, again? These two men, you will make them waste <sup>(8,4)</sup> their lives away in court.”

When my message reaches your ears, you shall place the White crown on the head of Horus, son of Isis and prostrate yourselves before the throne of his father <sup>(8,5)</sup> Osiris.

THEN Seth became really furious.

THEN the Ennead said to Seth: “Why are you angry? Should one not do that which says Atum, <sup>(8,6)</sup> the lord of the Two Lands, and Re Horus-of-the-Horizon?”

THEN the White Crown was made firm on the head of Horus, son of Isis.

Then Seth raised his voice <sup>(8,7)</sup> in the face of the Ennead, angrily saying: “Will the office be given to my junior, while I, his older brother, stand here?”

THEN he made a vow, saying: <sup>(8,8)</sup> “The White crown shall be driven from the head of Horus, son of Isis and he shall be thrown into the waters! I shall contend with him for the office of the Ruler, l.p.h.!” <sup>(8,9)</sup>

THEN Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon acted likewise. Then Seth said to Horus: “Come, let us change ourselves into hippos and sink into <sup>(8,10)</sup> the flood of the sea. As for him that surfaces in the time of three months to a day, <sup>(8,11)</sup> the office will not be given to him.” Then they sank as two men. Then Isis sat down and wept, saying: “Seth will kill Horus, my <sup>(8,12)</sup> boy.”

THEN SHE brought a reel of yarn, and she made a rope, she also brought a deben of copper and cast it into a harpoon. <sup>(8,13)</sup> She tied the yarn to it and threw it into the water towards the place where Horus and Seth sank. <sup>(9,1)</sup>

THEN the copper bit into the Majesty<sup>1217</sup> of Horus, her son.

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<sup>1217</sup> The Egyptian word *hm*, translated as “Majesty” refers to the body of the two gods, but emphasizes its powerful, divine appearance which activates the world. As such, it is typically used to denote the king of Egypt. See Tobias Hofmann, “Majestät und Diener: zur Dialektik des Begriffes Hm”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 128, (2001): 116–132, esp. 116–117.

THEN Horus raised his voice, saying: “Come to me, my mother, Isis, mother of mine. <sup>(9,2)</sup>  
Cry to your copper to let go of me! I am Horus, your son!”

THEN Isis raised her voice, saying to her copper: “Let go of him, <sup>(9,3)</sup> it is (my) son Horus,  
my boy.”

THEN her copper let go of him.

THEN she threw it <sup>(9,4)</sup> again in the water and it bit into the Majesty of Seth.

THEN Seth raised his voice, saying: “What are you doing to me, sister Isis? Cry <sup>(9,5)</sup> to your  
copper to let me go! I am your maternal brother, mother Isis!”

THEN SHE felt a great sorrow for him in her heart.

THEN Seth <sup>(9,6)</sup> cried to her, saying: “Will you love a strange man rather than the maternal  
brother Seth?” Then she cried to her copper, saying: <sup>(9,7)</sup> “Let go of him! Look, the one  
you're biting into is a maternal brother of Isis.”

THEN the copper let go of him.

THEN Horus, son of ISIS became angry with <sup>(9,8)</sup> his mother Isis, coming out, his face fierce  
like a leopard's with his 16 deben knife in his hand <sup>(9,9)</sup> and he cut off the head of his  
mother Isis, put it in his embrace and went up to the mountain.

THEN Isis <sup>(9,10)</sup> changed herself into a statue of flint that had no head.

THEN <sup>(9,11)</sup> Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon said to Thoth: “What is that coming that has no  
head?”

THEN Thoth said to Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon: <sup>(9,12)</sup> “My good lord, that is Isis, the great  
divine mother, whose head her son Horus has cut off.”

THEN <sup>(10,1)</sup> Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon raised his voice, saying to the Ennead: “Let us go and  
give him a great lesson!”

THEN the Ennead <sup>(10,2)</sup> went into the mountains to seek out Horus, son of Isis. As for  
Horus, he was sleeping under a shenusha tree<sup>1218</sup> <sup>(10,3)</sup> in the Oasis land.

THEN Seth found him, seized him there, struck him down onto his back on the mountain  
and tore out <sup>(10,4)</sup> his eyes from their places. Then he buried them on the mountain.

Towards the morning those two of his eyes outside turned into bulbs <sup>(10,5)</sup> and grew into  
two lotuses.

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<sup>1218</sup> Sadly, we have very little evidence regarding this plant, which prevents any symbolic reading of this motif. In the Ebers Papyrus there appears a *šn n wšꜥ*, which is used against swelling and pus. (*Papyrus Ebers* 519: 70, 7-9; 577: 74, 16-17) See also the discussion in M. Broze, *Les Aventures*, p. 85. For possible identification of the plant as blackberry, see Gérard Charpentier, *Recueil de matériaux épigraphiques relatifs à la botanique de l'Égypte antique*, Paris: Trismégiste, 1981, § 353, 1122.

THEN Seth went to Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon, saying to him falsely: <sup>(10,6)</sup> “I did not find Horus,” although he did find him.

THEN came Hathor, lady of the southern sycamore and she found <sup>(10,7)</sup> Horus lying and crying in the foreign land.

THEN SHE caught a gazelle, milked it and said to Horus: <sup>(10,8)</sup> “Open your eyes, so that I may put milk therein!” And she put it in the right one and she <sup>(10,9)</sup> put it in the left one. Then she said to him: “Open your eyes!” and he did open his eyes. She looked at him and found him complete.

THEN SHE <sup>(10,10)</sup> went and spoke to Re-Horus-of-the-Horizon: “I found Horus, Seth having deprived him of his eyes, but I made him stand <sup>(10,11)</sup> again. Look, he comes!”

THEN the Ennead said: “Have Horus and Seth summoned, and they shall be judged!”

THEN they were brought before the <sup>(10,12)</sup> Ennead and then the Lord of All spoke to Horus and Seth before the Great Ennead: “Come and take that which I say to you! Please, eat, <sup>(11,1)</sup> drink, and let us rest! Go away with your quarreling every day again and again!”

THEN Seth said to Horus: “Come, let's spend a feast day in my <sup>(11,2)</sup> house!”

THEN Horus said to him: “I will, look, I really will.”

NOW THE TIME OF EVENING HAS PASSED, when <sup>(11,3)</sup> beds were prepared for them, and they slept as two men.

NOW IT WAS DARK, and Seth made his member hard, and he placed it between the thighs <sup>(11,4)</sup> of Horus.

THEN Horus put both his hands between his thighs and took the seed of Seth.

THEN Horus <sup>(11,5)</sup> went and said to his mother Isis: “Come to me, Isis, my mother! Come and see that which Seth did to me!” Then he opened his hands and <sup>(11,6)</sup> let her see the semen of Seth. She raised a loud cry, grasped her COPPER (blade), and cut off his hand. <sup>(11,7)</sup> Then she threw it in the water and drew forth for him a new hand.

THEN SHE took a little sweet ointment and put it on the horn of Horus. <sup>(11,8)</sup>

THEN she went with the semen <sup>(11,9)</sup> of Horus to the garden of Seth in the morning and said to the gardener of Seth: “Which are the plants <sup>(11,10)</sup> that Seth eats here with you?”

THEN the gardener said to her: “Nothing does he eat here with me <sup>(11,11)</sup> except lettuce.” And she placed the semen on it.

THEN Seth came in his daily custom and ate the lettuce that he always ate after getting up. Then he became pregnant with the semen of Horus.

THEN Seth went and said to <sup>(12,1)</sup> Horus: “Come, let us hurry, that I may contend with you before the council!”

THEN Horus said to him: “I will, look, I really will.”

THEN THEY <sup>(12,2)</sup> went to the council as two men and they stood before the Great Ennead, and it was said to them: “Speak for yourselves!”

THEN Seth said: “Have the office of Ruler, l.p.h., given to me <sup>(12,3)</sup>, as far as Horus here is concerned, I have done a male deed to him.”

THEN the Ennead uttered <sup>(12,4)</sup> a great cry and they spat in the face of Horus.

THEN Horus laughed at them.

THEN Horus made <sup>(12,5)</sup> a divine oath, saying: “Every word of Seth is falsehood! Have anyone call out the semen of Seth and you shall see where it answers <sup>(12,6)</sup> from. Then let mine be called and you shall see where it answers from.”

THEN Thoth, master of the sacred speech, true scribe <sup>(12,7)</sup> of the Ennead, placed his hand on the arm of Horus, saying: “Come out, seed of Seth!” And it answered <sup>(12,8)</sup> him from the waters in the middle of a cucumber field.

THEN Thoth placed his hand on the arm of Seth, saying: “Come <sup>(12,9)</sup> out, seed of Horus!”

THEN it said to him: “Where am I to come out?” Then Thoth said to it: “Come <sup>(12,10)</sup> out from his ear!” THEN it said to him: “Should I come out of his ear? Me, the divine <sup>(12,11)</sup> seed?”

THEN Thoth said to it: “Come out from his brow!”

THEN it came out as a disc of gold on the head of <sup>(12,12)</sup> Seth.

THEN Seth became very angry and stretched out his hand to seize the disc of gold.

THEN Thoth took it <sup>(13,1)</sup> from him and put it as a crown on his head. Then the Ennead said: “True is Horus, false is Seth!”

THEN Seth became very angry, <sup>(13,2)</sup> raising his voice while they said: “True is Horus, false is Seth!”

THEN Seth became very angry, <sup>(13,2)</sup> raising his voice while they said: “True is Horus, false is Seth!”

THEN Seth made a great divine oath, saying: <sup>(13,3)</sup> “The office will not be given to him, until he is thrown outside with me, and we shall build some <sup>(13,4)</sup> stone ships and we shall race as two men. Now as for him who seizes his opponent, <sup>(13,5)</sup> to him will be given the office of Ruler, l.p.h.”

THEN Horus built for himself a boat of pine, coated it in plaster <sup>(13,6)</sup> and threw it in the river in the time of the evening, while no man on the entire earth saw it.

THEN <sup>(13,7)</sup> Seth saw the boat of Horus, said “Stone!” to himself. Then he went to the mountain, <sup>(13,8)</sup> cut off its summit and fashioned it into a stone-barge ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-EIGHT cubits long.

THEN THEY went down to their <sup>(13,9)</sup> ships before the Ennead. Then the ship of Seth sank into the water.

THEN Seth changed his form into a hippopotamus <sup>(13,10)</sup> and he caused the ship of Horus to sink.

THEN Horus took his copper and struck the Majesty of Seth. Then <sup>(13,11)</sup> the Ennead said to him: “Do not strike him!”

THEN HE carried his equipment to the water, placed it in his ship and sailed downstream <sup>(13,12)</sup> to Sais to say to Neith the great, the divine mother: “Judge me and Seth for it is 80 years to this (day) that we have been in court and <sup>(14,1)</sup> no one knows how to judge us. And while he has not yet been justified against me, I was justified against him a thousand times every day and he did not come to see with regard to anything <sup>(14,2)</sup> that the Ennead has said.” I have contended with him in the broad-hall Way-of-Truth and I have been justified against him. I have contended with him in the broad-hall Horus- <sup>(14,3)</sup> Foremost-of-Horns and I have been justified against him. I have contended with him in the broad-hall Field of Reeds, and I have been justified against him. I have contended with him <sup>(14,4)</sup> in the broad-hall Pool-of Fields and I have been justified against him as the Ennead said to Shu, son of Re: “Truth is in that which Horus, son of Isis, said.” <sup>(14,5)</sup>

THEN Shu, son of Re, said: “The words of Thoth to the Ennead <sup>(14,6)</sup> are true a million times.”

THEN the Lord-of-All said to Thoth: “Sit down and write a letter to Osiris and we shall receive that which he says!”

THEN Thoth sat down <sup>(14,7)</sup> to write the letter to Osiris, saying: THE BULL For-whom-the-Lion-Hunts, TWO LADIES Protector-of-Gods, He-who-bends-the-Two-Lands, HORUS OF GOLD, He-who-found Mankind-in-the-Beginning <sup>(14,8)</sup> , DUAL KING, Bull-in-midst-of Heliopolis, l. p. h., SON OF PTAH, Benefactor-of-the-Two-Shores, He who-appears-as-the-Father-of-his-Ennead, He-who-eats-Gold-from-All-Sacred-Glass, <sup>(14,9)</sup> l.p.h. “Please write to us that which we should with it for Horus and Seth, so that we won't make plans while being ignorant!”

Now many days have passed and THEN the <sup>(14,10)</sup> letter reached the king, SON OF RE Great-of-Overflowing, Lord-of-Provisions. Then he raised his voice while the letter was read before him.

THEN HE <sup>(14,11)</sup> replied with great haste to where the Lord-of-All was with the Ennead, saying: “Why do you harm (my) son Horus so much, when it is I who made you powerful? Is it not me, <sup>(14,12)</sup> who creates emmer and barley, to gives life to the gods and likewise to the herds (i.e., mankind) that come after the gods, when no god or goddess was able to do it.”

THEN the <sup>(15,1)</sup> letter of Osiris arrived to where Re Horus-of-the-Horizon was, as he was sitting with the Ennead in the White Field of Xoïs.

Then it was read before him <sup>(15,2)</sup> and the Ennead and Re Horus-of-the-Horizon said: “Please answer this letter for me with great haste to Osiris, you shall say to him about this letter: “If you did not come to be, if you were not born, <sup>(15,3)</sup> emmer and barley would still exist.”

Then the letter of the Lord-of-All reached Osiris and it was read before him.



Then he wrote to Re Horus-of-the-Horizon again, saying: “Beautiful in great <sup>(15,4)</sup> measure is everything that you have done and what the Ennead has found in doing. Justice has been caused to sink inside the netherworld! Would you see this matter that is yours also. <sup>(15,5)</sup> The land I am in is filled with messengers with fierce faces that fear neither god nor goddess, whom I will cause to emerge, and they shall bring me the heart of every evildoer, <sup>(15,6)</sup> who shall then come to be here with me. Surely, why would my form be here resting in the west, when each and every one of you is outside? Who among them is stronger than me? But look, <sup>(15,7)</sup> they have found evil in deed! When Ptah the Great, South-of-his-Wall, Lord of Memphis, created the sky, did he not say to the stars on it: “Make rest every night <sup>(15,8)</sup> in the West, where the king Osiris is! And after the gods both lords and serfs will rest where you are as well.” (This) he said to me.”

Now many days after <sup>(15,9)</sup> this the letter of Osiris arrived to where the Lord-of-All was with the Ennead.

THEN Thoht received the letter and read it aloud before Re Horus-of-the-Horizon <sup>(15,10)</sup> and the Ennead. Then they said: “Doubly right is right all that says he, Greatly-Overflowing, Lord-of-Provisions!”

THEN Seth said: “Let us go to the Isle-in-the-Midst, <sup>(15,11)</sup> so that I may contend with him!”

THEN HE went to the Isle-in-the-Midst and justification was given to Horus against him.

THEN Atum, Lord of the Two Lands, the Heliopolitan, sent to Isis, saying: “Bring Seth <sup>(15,12)</sup> in chains!”

THEN Isis brought Seth in chains as a prisoner.

THEN Atum said to him: “Why would you NOT let us judge you <sup>(15,13)</sup>, why have you taken for yourself the office of Horus?”

THEN Seth said to him: “On the contrary, my good lord! Have Horus, son of Isis, summoned and may the office of <sup>(16,1)</sup> father Osiris be given to him!”

THEN Horus, son of Isis, WAS brought and the White crown was placed on his head, he was placed on the throne of his father Osiris and it was said to him: “You are a good king of the Beloved Land, you <sup>(16,2)</sup> are the beautiful Lord, l.p.h., of the whole world for ever and ever.”

THEN Isis raised her voice to her son Horus, saying: “You are a good king! My heart rejoices, for you shall brighten the world <sup>(16,3)</sup> with your gifts!”

THEN Ptah the Great, South-of-his-Wall, Lord of Memphis, said: “What is to be done with Seth, now that Horus has been placed on the throne of father Osiris?”

THEN Re <sup>(16,4)</sup> Horus-of-the-Horizon said: “Have Seth, son of Nut, be given to me and he shall sit with me as my son, his voice shall be in the heaven and there shall be fear of him.”

THEN <sup>(16,5)</sup> he was brought and said to Re Horus-of-the-Horizon: “Horus, son of Isis, stands a ruler, l.p.h.”

THEN Re, Horus of the Horizon, rejoiced greatly and said to the Ennead: <sup>(16,6)</sup> “You shall exalt Horus, son of Isis, throughout the entire land!”

Then Isis said: “Horus stands a ruler, l.p.h., the Ennead is feasting, the heaven rejoices, for they shall <sup>(16,7)</sup> don garlands when they see Horus, son of Isis, as he stands a great ruler, l.p.h., of Egypt. The Ennead, their hearts are content, and the entire land is joyful <sup>(16,8)</sup> when it sees Horus, son of Isis, illuminated by the office of his father Osiris, the lord of Busiris.”

And so it went well in Thebes, the place of truth.

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