


SETH IS BAAL – EVIDENCE FROM THE EGYPTIAN SCRIPT

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1. INTRODUCTION

During the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom, some words related to illness and suffering receive the Seth classifier.¹ This phenomenon² disappears after the Middle Kingdom, and is not found in New Kingdom texts. However, the causes of this evolution in the usage of the Seth classifier have remained elusive.

In a recent article, “A Metaphor for Troubled Times,”³ McDonald surveys this evolution, reviewing the preliminary list compiled by Te Velde⁴ and adding a few new words to the list. McDonald undertakes a diachronic examination of the occurrences of the words (i.e. mostly with the words appearing with the Seth-deity form ) , and suggests that the reasons for this evolution be located in the mytho-political sphere. In the First Intermediate Period, Egypt was divided into small political units, and retrospectively, this was considered as a time of instability and even anarchy. According to McDonald, Seth was taken as a symbol of the misfortunes of this period, being the “ultimate and archetypal disturber of the established order,”⁵ as a part of his mythological role as the unjustified treacherous enemy of

Horus, who tries to attain dominance over Egypt.

In this article, I shall try and draw a first sketch of an idea I have been developing and rethinking over the course of the last year regarding this question. I have come to the conclusion that the question itself should be framed differently: *instead of asking why the Seth classifier disappeared from the “negative” words after the Middle Kingdom, I suggest that a more revealing question is why the negative words disappeared from the Sethian category, and why other words found their place in this category.*

In order to answer this question, I shall try and examine the change that the Sethian category undergoes from three distinct but interrelated perspectives:


- The extent of the category, i.e., the set of words that are classified by Seth classifier.
- The main semantic clusters of the category.
- The central members of the category, i.e., what are the “good examples” of the category.⁶

2. THE EVOLUTION OF THE CATEGORY

In Fig. 1 it is attempted to visually present the diachronic evolution of the Sethian category.⁷

* Hebrew University Jerusalem. I am grateful to Orly Goldwasser for many fruitful conversations, in which many of the ideas presented here were developed. I would like also to thank Eitan Grossman for his important suggestions and his comments on the English. A full discussion of the words and their occurrences will appear in a future article.

¹ I use here the term ‘classifier’ as defined by Goldwasser in her series of articles and books (GOLDWASSER 2002; 2005 and forthc.), rather than determinative.

² Early on, Polotsky remarked in his publication of the stela of Heka-Yeb:  “appearing as such with certain words of evil meaning in some texts of the First Intermediate Period and the Early Middle Kingdom.” He also mentions the examples from Hatnub and from the Letter to the Dead; see POLOTSKY 1930:198.

³ McDONALD 2007.





⁴ TE VELDE 1977: 22–26. A preliminary list of Sethian words was collected by Zandee already in his article in 1963, which enumerates the words *nšn*, *hnnw*, *krj*, *sh3*,

swb3, and *khb*; Zandee saw the metaphorical-cognitive meaning of this category, saying: “Solche Gedanken wurden also mit Seth assoziiert,” cf. ZANDEE 1963: 147.

⁵ McDONALD 2007: 32. McDonald differentiates between the deity form of the god Seth  , and its animal forms:  , .

⁶ For *central members* and *fuzzy edges*, see GOLDWASSER 2002: 27–29.

⁷ *nbwty*, *nbwy*, *ntrwy*, *Rhwy*, and *Stj* which McDonald adds to the list are all epithets of the god Seth, and therefore do not stand in the center of our discussion. The case of *bʿl* will be discussed below.

In other cases words which are included in the list may find their place there because of strong similarity of signs in Hieratic, such are the sign of the donkey ( and *htrw*):
Donkey: , (VOGELSANG & GARDINER 1908: R.64)
Seth: ,  (MÖLLER I, 13; no. 144).

Other similar cases are *3krw* (see McDONALD 2007: 36, note a), and probably also the Giraffe (*sr*, cf. McDONALD 2007: 36, note p, and *mmi*, see GOLDWASSER, forthc.).

OK	<i>nšnj</i> , 'storm, rage' 	<i>sšn</i> , 'storm' ⁸ 	<i>jsd</i> , 'dribble, saliva' ⁹ 		
FIP		<i>jnd</i> , 'to be sick' 	<i>nkm</i> , 'to be afflicted' 	<i>mr</i> , 'pain, to be ill' 	
MK	<i>nšnj</i> , 'storm, rage' 	<i>hnn(w)</i> ; 'disruption, chaos, tumult' 	<i>rswt</i> , 'dream' ¹⁰ 		<i>krj</i> , 'storm, clouds'
SIP	<i>nšnj</i> , 'storm, rage' 		<i>jh</i> , 'suffer, feel poorly' ¹¹ 		
NK	<i>nšnj</i> , 'storm, rage' 	<i>hnn(w)</i> , 'disruption, chaos, tumult' 	<i>nkm</i> , suffering' ¹² 	<i>swhi</i> , 'to vaunt, to boast' ¹³ 	<i>krj</i> , 'storm, clouds' ¹⁴
			<i>nš</i> , 'to be strong, to roar' ¹⁵ 	<i>nm</i> , 'to be partial one sided' ¹⁶ 	<i>hnhmt</i> , 'war-cry'

Fig. 1a The Sethian Category according to Chronological Distribution

⁸ *sšn* is attested with the Seth classifier twice in PT 1270d and in Urk. I, 183; the word appears only four times according to HANNIG 2003: 1239–1240 and DZA 29.613.350, but in the latter without a Seth classifier.

⁹ SETHE 1962: 258. The word *jsd* is attested with the Sethian classifier only in PT 261a in the Unas Pyramid, cf. TE VELDE 1977: 85.

¹⁰ This one occurrence has already been discussed at length by SIMPSON 1966, pl IX; SZPAKOWSKA 1999 and McDONALD 2002, who proved, I believe, the sign to be the deity form of the god Seth.

¹¹ *jh* appears only once with a Seth-classifier. McDonald dates the occurrences of the word *jh* in the pEdwin Smith with the Sethian classifier to the Old Kingdom as "it is generally acknowledged that P. Edwin Smith goes back to an older original manuscript" (McDONALD 2007: 29, note 14). Nevertheless it may be dangerous to date the classifier to a non-existing older manuscript. The Coffin Texts allow us to see many cases in which a classi-

fier is changed by the copier of the text. Therefore it would be preferred to retain the dating to the end of the Second Intermediate Period (ALLEN 2005: 70).

¹² *nkm* is attested with the Seth classifier only once in the New Kingdom according to McDONALD 2007: 36, note k.

¹³ *swhi* is listed by TE VELDE 1977:23–24; cf. GARDINER 1909: 28 for a discussion on this word.

¹⁴ *krj* is attested twice in the New Kingdom with the Seth classifier in L. Ahmose-Henut-Tjemehu, Tb 39: 63, and pJwja: 152, Tb 17 (BACKES in TLA, August 2007); *krj* appears also with the Seth-deity form in the Amenemope Onomasticon, cf. AEO I: 5*, 10.

¹⁵ *nš* according to TE VELDE 1977:25 and GOLDWASSER forthc; McDONALD reads this word as š, cf. McDONALD 2007:36, note d.

¹⁶ Although McDonald refers to sources in which *nm* appears with a Seth classifier already in the Middle Kingdom, I could not find such examples, cf. McDONALD 2007: 35.

OK					
FIP	<i>pryt</i> , ‘crisis’ (?) ¹⁷ 	<i>mnt</i> , ‘to suffer’ 	<i>hrrt</i> , ‘Hereret’ ¹⁸ 		
MK	<i>sh3</i> , ‘to be in confusion’ ¹⁹ 		<i>h3t</i> , ‘disease’ ²⁰ 	<i>k3hs</i> , ‘to be harsh’ ²¹ 	
SIP					
NK	<i>sh3</i> , ‘to be in confusion’ 	<i>phph</i> , ‘storm’ ²² 	<i>srk</i> , ‘snow’ ²³ 	<i>h3h3tj</i> , ‘storm’ ²⁴ 	<i>n nhn</i> , ‘to roar’ ²⁵
	<i>snm</i> , ‘rainstorm’ ²⁶ 	<i>khw</i> , ‘to harm, rage’ 	<i>kh3</i> , ‘shout, bellow’ 	<i>nhs</i> , (the Seth animal?) ²⁷ 	<i>wn</i> , ‘to rob, despoil’ ^{27a}

Fig. 1b The Sethian Category according to Chronological Distribution continued

¹⁷ *pryt* is a hapax legomenon, cf. FCD: 91, and McDONALD 2007: 34 citing POLOTSKY 1930: 23,1.9.

¹⁸ McDONALD enumerates two attestations of *hrrt* with the Seth classifier, cf. McDONALD 2007:28–29.

¹⁹ Te Velde names two different words under with a quite similar writing: (10) *sh3*, ‘to be in confusion, to confound’ (FCD: 237) and (12) *shw3*, ‘to break up (of ship; FCD:217)’. I agree with McDonald’s decision to treat these two words as one, cf. McDONALD 2007:36. The only occurrence of the latter is in GARDINER 1909: 2.11, where it is translated as ‘gone adrift.’ GARDINER analyzes the word as the same word as *sh3*, ‘to be in confusion,’ cf. GARDINER 1909: 28 and TE VELDE 1977: 23–24.

²⁰ *h3t* appears only once with the Seth classifier, in Hatnub, cf. McDONALD 2007: 30.

²¹ According to McDONALD, *k3hs* can be omitted from the list, because of confusion with the dog classifier, which is the common classifier of the word, cf. McDONALD 2007: 36, note s.

²² *phph* appears also only once, according to TE VELDE 1977: 24–25 and DZA 23.463.700.

²³ *srk* is a Semitic loan word cf. HOCH 1994: 264. It appears only once with the Seth classifier in the Amenemope Onomasticon, cf. AEO I, *6, no.20.

²⁴ McDONALD mentions only the animal form of Seth occurring with *h3h3tj*. It appears in the Amenemope Onomasticon, with Seth-deity form, cf. McDONALD 2007: 36; DZA 28.191.780; AEO I: 5*,11.

²⁵ I have found only one occurrence of *n nhn* with a Seth classifier: Wb II 286; DZA 25.184.010.

²⁶ *snm(w)* is attested twice, both in the 18th Dynasty cf. Urk. IV, 84 and 386.

²⁷ *nhs* appears only once with the Seth classifier, cf. McDONALD 2007: 35, 36 note h. I am not sure that McDonald’s argument concerning the different writing in pNu is relevant, as we may well be dealing with a different version.

^{27a} GOLDWASSER 1995: 103; *wn* appears in a rather late text pPushkin 127, 2:5, dated to the 21st dynasty, cf. Caminos 1977: 3–4.

2.1 The Extent of the Category






During the New Kingdom the number of words which take the Seth classifier increases dramatically (7 in the First Intermediate Period and 5 in the Middle Kingdom versus 16 in the New Kingdom), although one observes the disappearance of words related to disease and suffering.

2.2 The Main Semantic Clusters

Whereas after the Middle Kingdom one of the main semantic clusters of the category²⁸ disappears, some old-new clusters emerge in the New Kingdom. The words in the New Kingdom can be divided into two main semantic clusters. One semantic cluster is **Aggressive behavior**, including words such as *hnn*, ‘disrupt,’ *khb* ‘to harm, rage,’ *kh3* ‘shout, bellow.’ Another — even bigger — semantic cluster is **Weather Disturbances**, reflected in words such as *srk*, ‘snow,’ *smnw* ‘rain-storm,’ *krj* ‘storm, clouds,’ *nšnj* ‘storm, rage,’ *h3h3tj*, and *phph*, both bearing the meaning ‘storm.’ Under the category of weather disturbances one should include the new subcluster of **Uproariousness**, with such words as *hmhm* ‘war-

cry,’ *nhh* ‘to roar,’ and *sh3* ‘to roar, to disturb,’ through the idea that a common phenomenon of a storm is **Thunder**.

The development in the semantic clusters can also be seen, as we begin to map the adjacent and overlapping categories, through the question which classifier can interchange with the Seth classifier in each period (Fig. 2²⁹).

The disappearance of the illness-suffering cluster is also indicated by the shift in the possibilities for alternative classification of words from the relevant semantic domains. The Seth classifier no longer interchanges with the “evil bird”³⁰  (GARDINER 1957: 471 G37) or the “pustule”  (GARDINER 1957: 539 Aa1), which is an alternative classifier for illnesses. One of the typical features of the Seth classifier during the New Kingdom is that in many of the cases it doesn’t appear alone.³¹ It is usually accompanied by the [WEATHER] classifier, , or by the [POWERFUL ACTIVITY], , and , the latter stressing the more anthropomorphic attributes of the deity.

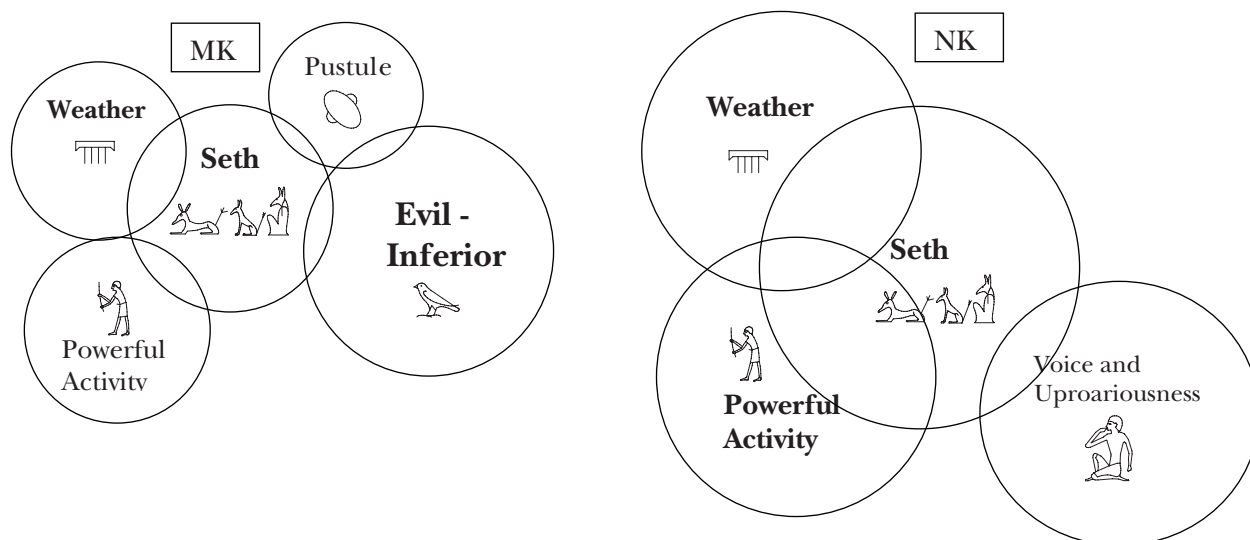


Fig. 2 The Seth category and its adjacent categories during the Middle and the New Kingdoms.

²⁸ Goldwasser discusses the different semantic clusters of the category in GOLDWASSER 1995: 99–103; cf. also McDONALD 2000: 79 and McDONALD, 2007. For a further discussion of the Sethian category, cf. GOLDWASSER 2005:107–109.

²⁹ An illustration of the interchangeability of the Sethian category. The bold letters represent the prominence

and the size represents the amount of words which can be placed in both categories.

³⁰ The category of the “Evil Bird” is discussed thoroughly by DAVID 2000.

³¹ From the New Kingdom on, many words tend to take a few classifiers instead of one.

2.3 Central words in the Seth Category³²

Although the Seth category exists from the Old Kingdom onward, the center of the category remains weak until the New Kingdom. Only in this period do words begin to move to the center of the category, as most of their occurrences appear with the Seth classifier. During the Middle Kingdom even *nšnj*, ‘storm, rage,’ which is a constant member in the category, appears only in about a third of the occurrences with the Seth classifier. Other members such as *mr*, *jnd* and *hnn* are only fringe members in the category, i.e. they are classified mostly by other classifiers and belong to Seth only very marginally.

This situation changes in the New Kingdom, as in the center of the category stand the words *sh3*, *kh3* and *khh*, *hnn* and *nšnj*. These changes indicate that the strengthening semantic clusters result in a change in the prototypical value in the New Kingdom of the category, when Seth becomes a “better example” of two values – **Aggressive behavior** (*sh3*, *kh3*, *khh*, *hnn*) and **Weather disturbances** (*nšnj*, *h3h3tj*).

3. SETH IS BAAL

When rethinking the material presented here, it seems that the Sethian category undergoes an interesting shift in its size, its semantic clusters, and its prototypical values in the New Kingdom. And although McDonald’s article suggests an interesting explanation for the phenomenon of omission of the negative attributes related to illness and suffering, this is only a partial explanation. The category experiences a more substantial change.

The answer, I believe, can be found in the fig-

ure of Seth himself, which undergoes remarkable changes in this period, which reaches its peak apparently during the 19th–20th Dynasty, with three kings naming themselves after him (Sety I, Sety II and also Sethnakhte; however, this rise in his status can be traced already to the Second Intermediate Period, when through a process of syncretism Seth was identified with the god Baal.³³

Baal, who is well known by the name Baal-Haddu from the texts found at Ugarit (Ras-Shamra), appears originally as an epithet of the god Hadad (or Haddu, Addu etc), whose cult had begun to spread in the ancient Near East as early as the third millennium BCE. Baal has characteristics of the god Hadad, who was known throughout the region for his violent and fierce attributes, but the former also has local attributes associating him strongly with fertility, and as such, comprises both revival and growth on the one hand, and withering and decay on the other.³⁴

Evidently, Baal was known in Egypt as early as the 13th Dynasty, although possibly by his “former” name as Hadad. Moreover, the Seth-Baal cult in Avaris continued to exist throughout the Hyksos Period into the New Kingdom, as the temple of Seth of Avaris was functioning continuously until the Ramesside period.³⁵ According to the 400 Year Stela, it began to function already some 70 years before the Hyksos Period.³⁶

His warrior aspect is expressed in the myth of Baal and Yam, in which Baal defeats the divinity of the seas, rivers, lakes, and the subterranean abyss, Yam, and gains his kingship.³⁷ Papyrus Astarte³⁸ contains an Egyptian version of this myth dated to the reign of Amenophis II, which according to Schneider “seems to sketch Baal as a prototype of belligerent Kingship.”³⁹ Baal was promoted to the status of

³² For a full discussion of the terms ‘central’ words and ‘fringe members’ and their applications to the Egyptian scripts, cf. Goldwasser 2002; for a general discussion of the terms, see LAKOFF 1987.

³³ The title Baal derives from the root *bʿl* which means “husband,” “owner,” “Lord” etc, due in part to the storm-god’s exalted position among the gods and his increasing importance, developing from the generic use to the proper name for one specific god, Hadad, cf. GREEN 2003: 173–175. To the question of the possibility of syncretism of Baal with the god Hadad, cf. STADELMANN 1967: 27, but GREEN 2003: 175 and SCHWEMER 2001: 505–511, saying: “All diese Überlegungen verbleiben jedoch im Bereich der Wahrscheinlichkeiten und Plausibilität.”

³⁴ GREEN 2003: 170–176.

³⁵ With an interruption only in the Amarna period, BIETAK 1990.

³⁶ BIETAK 1990: 14, for further discussion of the stela cf. MONTET 1933; SETHE 1930; HELCK 1966 and GOEDICKE 1981; STADELMANN 1965.

³⁷ For a thorough discussion of the Baal-Yam myth, cf. GREEN 2003: 179 and UEHLINGER 1990. For its Egyptian implications, cf. STADELMANN 1967: 32–33, and SCHNEIDER 2003: 160–161.

³⁸ COLLOMBERT & COULLON 2000 and SCHNEIDER 2003: 160.

³⁹ SCHNEIDER 2003: 161.

god of Egyptian kingship already by Amenophis II. Related to this myth, Baal was apparently also considered as god of the seamen (mainly in his title Baal-Sapan). A temple for him was held in the harbor of Peru-nefer,⁴⁰ in the 18th Dynasty.

The identification between Baal and Seth was so successful not only because of the latter's role as the god of the foreign lands,⁴¹ but also through his storm-god characteristics, which are common to both gods.⁴² The depth of this syncretism is indicated by the fact that most of the attestations of the name Baal in Egyptian texts are classified with the Seth sign.⁴³ But it wasn't just Baal who was identified with Seth, but also Seth was identified with Baal, in a clear case of *cultural appropriation*,⁴⁴ or an enrichment of the Seth concept as Te Velde describes it: "It would seem that the foreign god Baal, who is regarded as manifestation of Seth because the latter is the lord of foreign countries, is now enriching the Egyptian concept of Seth with a new function".⁴⁵

A stimulating example of the effect this *inter-cultural ligature*⁴⁶ had on Seth can be seen in a figure of Seth from the 400-Year Stela (Fig. 3).⁴⁷ In his various representations, Baal is mostly depicted in human form. In this stela, the deity figure is shown in an anthropomorphic Baal form, wearing Canaanite and Egyptian symbols. The inscription above reads "Seth of Ramses".⁴⁸

I believe that through the identification with Baal, Seth was "set free" of his negative attributes during the New Kingdom. The common attributes of Seth and Baal were accentuated, shifting the center of the category towards more human features, as indicated by the more frequent usage of the anthropomorphic classifiers (𓆎, 𓆏 and 𓆑). The semantic clusters **Storm** and **Aggressive behavior**, two attributes which were also an inseparable part of Baal's character, became very prominent.

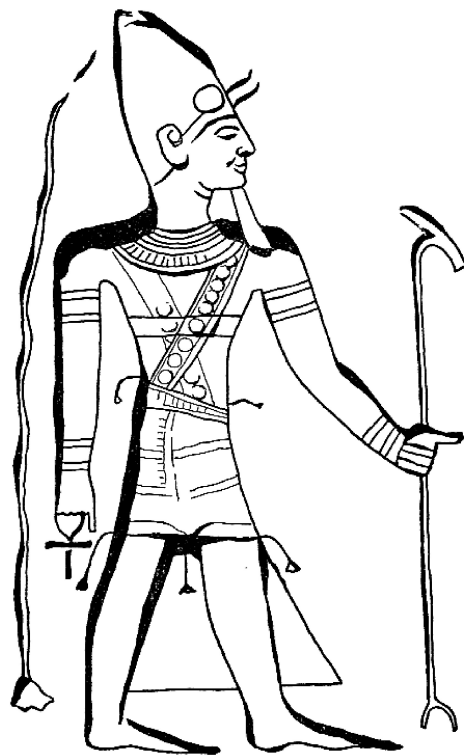


Fig. 3 Seth on the 400-Year Stela (after MONTET 1933, pl. XIII)

When Green describes the theophany of Baal, he enumerates **heavy rains, snow, and clouds**.⁴⁹ Stadelmann adds that his voice can be heard in the yell of the thunder.⁵⁰ Those elements of Baal's theophany find their clear expression in the Sethian vocabulary: in *smnw* 'rainstorm,' *srk* 'snow,' *krj* 'storm, clouds,' *nšnj* 'storm, rage,' and in the subcategory of Uproariousness.

One should observe that although the Sethian category lost the negative cluster of illness, it still maintained and even augmented the semantic cluster of **Aggressive behavior**, containing words such as *hnn*⁵¹ and *khb*.

⁴⁰ HABACHI 2001: 106–108, following DARESSY 1928–29; 1929–31 proposed, that Peru-Nefer was the former Avaris and not Memphis, see also BIETAK 2005.

⁴¹ Seth was also identified with the Hittite god Teshub and with the Libyan god Ash, cf. TE VELDE 1977: 120.

⁴² ZANDEE 1963: 148; TE VELDE 1977: 128 and BIETAK 1990: 13.

⁴³ STADELMANN suggest that the Seth-animal sign in the pPetersburg 1116A is to be read as a logogram for Baal, cf. STADELMANN 1967: 35.

⁴⁴ SCHNEIDER associates this term with the works of Michel de Certeau and Paul Ricoeur and shows its applicability for Egyptology, cf. SCHNEIDER 2003.

⁴⁵ TE VELDE 1977: 123

⁴⁶ "For the particular phenomena of cultural appropriation, the sociolinguistic Hannes Kniffka has coined the apt term of intercultural ligatures" (SCHNEIDER 2003:158).


⁴⁷ Cf. discussion in TE VELDE 1977: 124–125; STADELMANN 1967: 41–42 and BIETAK 1990: 11.

⁴⁸ STADELMANN 1967: 31, 42.

⁴⁹ GREEN 2003: 194.

⁵⁰ STADELMANN 1967: 27.

⁵¹ It is striking to see that during the New Kingdom the word *hnn* "grows" a new semantic cluster, with the meaning of disease – but this time classified without

But the identification with the cult of the Baal worked both ways, and unfortunately, when different times came by, it proved to be fatal to the cult of Seth.⁵² The temporary interest in the foreign god changed into hatred as a part of the hatred for foreigners.⁵³ I would like to suggest that even this deterioration is revealed in the script, when some members of the category such as *hnn* begin to be classified with the “evil bird” , a classifier that was alien to them until this period.⁵⁴

4. CONCLUSION

The Sethian classifier – and the cultural-cognitive categories it delimits – undergoes subtle but significant shifts over the course of Egyptian history. During the New Kingdom the Sethian category (a) increases its extent, and (b) experiences a shift in its semantic clusters toward notions of aggression and unusual or violent weather phenomena; moreover, the Sethian classifier assumes a more central role as classifier of words from these semantic domains.

This shift in the category’s semantic clusters is effected in no small part by the elimination of the sub-categories of suffering and illness, which

changes the nature of the category as a whole. Nevertheless, the loss of this domain does not in itself constitute an explanation for the phenomenon.

I have argued that this change can be located in the syncretism of Seth and Hadad/Baal, which evidently happened before the Hyksos Period but lasted into the New Kingdom. During the short-lived period of Seth-Baal’s elevated prestige, the Sethian category was purged of its unambiguously negative sub-categories, while the shared domains of the two gods – aggression and weather disturbances – were enhanced. The expansion in its extent reflects, I believe, the increase in the cultural centrality and relevancy of Seth himself.

The extent to which Seth-Baal constitutes a real *cultural ligature* in Hyksos and post-Hyksos Egypt is demonstrated by the deep impact that this syncretism had on Seth and the Sethian category, leading to their positive and extensive transformation, which reaches its peak during the New Kingdom. This change is realized in the classification system of the Egyptian script, which under closer scrutiny reveals, to paraphrase Te Velde, a piece of the history of an Egyptian *theologia religionum* mirrored in the script.⁵⁵

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- FCD = R.O. FAULKNER, 1962. *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, Oxford.
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- pJwja = pKairo CG 51189 in I. MUNRO, 1994, pls. 47–49.
- PT = see SETHE, K. 1910–1922
- TLA = Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae (<http://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/index.html>)
- Urk. I = K. SETHE, 1903. *Urkunden des Alten Reiches*, Leipzig.
- Urk. IV = K. SETHE, 1927. *Urkunden des 18. Dynastie*, Leipzig.
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the Seth classifier, as a metaphorical extension of the former cluster of the category.

⁵² TE VELDE 1977: 109.

⁵³ TE VELDE 2001: 270.

⁵⁴ For example  from Edfou after DZA 28.244.530.

⁵⁵ TE VELDE 1977: 109.

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