

INNOVATION IN LITERATURE ON BEHALF OF POLITICS: THE TALE OF THE TWO BROTHERS, UGARIT, AND 19th DYNASTY HISTORY¹

By Thomas Schneider

Modern literary theory made its way into Egyptology in the late 20th century, urging the discipline to consider theoretical criteria of literature instead of classifying rather intuitively what was thought to be literary. New concepts of literacy focussed on textual features such as fictionality, intertextuality, and reception, or functional categories such as knowledge, identity, and entertainment.² This methodological turn was also applied to narrative literature, and its most prominent examples were subjected to a more precise attempt at understanding their internal structure and artistic qualities. Insightful though this has proven to be, these searches for an accurate modern comprehension of Egyptian literature have also made all the more evident how little we know about the circumstances in which it was created and for what purposes. The genre of narrative literature does not in general convey any explicit information about either the authors or the audience. Contextualizing these works is among the trickiest but nevertheless most indispensable tasks of our discipline. In what follows I undertake an attempt to question some of the fundamental assumptions about one of the best known and most discussed Egyptian literary texts and to

sketch what consequences this would imply regarding its interpretation.

1. THE TALE OF THE TWO BROTHERS

The Tale of the Two Brothers (Pap. BM 10183; after its first possessor also known as Pap. d'Orbiney) from the end of the 19th Dynasty is among the best known and most discussed Egyptian literary texts, which also saw an intensive reception beyond Egyptology proper.³ But it has continued to be one of the more enigmatic Egyptian texts. It has been described as "the creation of a gifted and imaginative tale-teller who was able to interweave into his story a great number of divergent aspects of Egyptian culture" (Susan Tower Hollis⁴) or the reverberation of a conflict between sedentary farmers and nomads (Jan Assmann⁵), a kind of Osirian myth (John Baines⁶) or even a text expressing male hatred of women (Sally Katary⁷). Most recently, Wolfgang Wettengel's 2003 monograph gave a new comprehensive interpretation of the text, with new ideas about the hero's identity and the historical embedding of this piece of literature.⁸ The tale itself runs as follows:

1. Bata, the hero of the tale, lives "like a son" in the household of his elder, married brother

¹ Earlier versions of this contribution were presented at the universities of Heidelberg, Yale and Brown in 2004 and 2005. The article was originally submitted in 2005 for inclusion in the proceedings of the conference "Kulturkontakt und Innovation: – Der Einfluß der Hyksos auf das Neue Reich", Vienna 4th–8th June 2003. It is published here following a kind offer of Manfred Bietak.

² Cf. most recently with an overview of the debate: G. MOERS, Der Spurensucher auf falscher Fährte? Überlegungen zu den Voraussetzungen einer ägyptologischen Literaturwissenschaft, in: G. BURKARD *et al.* (eds.), *Kontexte: Akten des Symposiums „Spurensuche – Altägypten im Spiegel seiner Texte“*, München 2. bis 4. Mai 2003, ÄAT 60, Wiesbaden 2004, 38–50; B.U. SCHIPPER, *Die Erzählung des Wenamun: Ein Literaturwerk im Spannungsfeld von Politik, Geschichte und Religion*, OBO 209, Freiburg/Göttingen 2005, 223–237.

³ W. WETTENGEL, *Die Erzählung von den beiden Brüdern. Der Papyrus d'Orbiney und die Königsideologie der Ramessiden*, OBO 195, Freiburg/Göttingen 2003, 1–20.

⁴ S.T. HOLLIS, *The Ancient Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers". The Oldest Fairy Tale in the World*, Norman, OK 1990, 169.

⁵ J. ASSMANN, Das altägyptische Zweibrüdermärchen (Papyrus d'Orbiney), *ZÄS* 104 (1977), 1–25.

⁶ J. BAINES, Myth and Literature, in: A. LOPRIENO (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature. History and Forms*, PdÄ 10, Leiden/New York/Köln 1996, 361–377.

⁷ S.L. KATARY, The Two Brothers as Folktale: Constructing the Social Context, *JSSEA* 24 (1997), 39–70.

⁸ WETTENGEL, *Die Erzählung von den beiden Brüdern*. A recent translation and commentary not considered by Wettengel is C. PEUST, Das Zweibrüdermärchen, in: M. DIETRICH (ed.), *TUAT. Ergänzungslieferung*, Gütersloh 2001, 147–165.

Anubis where he sees to all work in the stable, the field etc. I maintain in the following the traditional protagonists' names "Anubis" and "Bata" until a different interpretation will be proposed below.

2. Bata rejects the attempt of Anubis's wife to seduce him whereupon she falsely accuses him to her husband. Although the truth is revealed, Bata castrates himself and decides to move to the Valley of the Cedar, apparently in the Lebanon.

3. Before leaving, he informs his brother Anubis about what will happen in the future: as soon as a sign of life (beer foaming over) will indicate to Anubis that something severe happened to Bata, his brother has to travel to the Valley of the Cedar, to seek his heart for up to seven years and, when found, to put it into a bowl of water in order to bring him back to life.

4. When having arrived in the Valley of the Cedar, Bata builds himself a castle in order to be able to found a "house". He puts his heart onto the top of a cedar. The gods who come along create a woman for Bata who stays anonymous but wears the title of an Egyptian court lady.

5. Despite Bata's warnings not to approach the sea, the sea manages to take possession of one of the lady's hair locks and washes it up at Egypt's shore.

6. The king, who is bewitched by the fragrance of the lock, has the woman sought and finds her in the Valley of the Cedar. Bata wards off a first attempt of taking her to Egypt by killing the Egyptian soldiers before the king conquers the lady's heart with some jewellery and makes her his great court lady in Egypt.

7. The woman betrays the secret of Bata's vital forces – his heart on the top of the cedar – to the king. Woodcutters fell the tree, and Bata instantly drops dead.

8. In Egypt, Anubis gets a sign that his brother is in danger (his beer foams over) and finds his brother lying dead on his bed in his palace in the Valley of the Cedar. After years of seeking he finally finds Bata's heart, puts it into a bowl with water, Bata swallows the heart that is soaked with water and becomes "as he had been before".

9. Bata changes into a bull and carries his brother to Egypt. He reveals himself to his treacherous wife who has the bull sacrificed. Two persea trees grow up from its blood out of which Bata

again reveals himself to his wife. She has the trees cut down, but swallows a splinter by which she becomes pregnant.

10. She bears a son who grows up at the court and is appointed King's Son of Kush. Thus, Bata is reborn.

11. When the king dies, Bata becomes king, judges his treacherous wife and appoints his brother Anubis heir to the throne.

12. After him, this elder brother becomes king of Egypt.

Traditional research perceived the fundamental concept of this piece of literature – two brothers of whom one brings the other back to life – as an invention of the Egyptian author, even a kind of Osirian motif, although a divine pair of brothers named "Bata" and "Anubis" is not attested. John Baines holds that "while the plot relates quite closely to the Osiris myth, the text is not a retelling, lacking notably any figure that could be compared with Isis".⁹ With this perspective in mind, the tale was considered to be in principal an Egyptian one, into which a variety of mythical and folkloristic motifs had been interwoven, apart from several borrowings from the cycle of myths about the Syrian weather god Baal. Such borrowings are: building a palace in the Lebanon, as Baal does in the corresponding Ugaritic myth of KTU 1.3–1.4, and the sea's robbery of a lock of Bata's wife which was compared to Baal's struggle with the sea (KTU 1.1–1.2). The failed seduction of Bata by Anubis's wife – reminiscent of the well-known motif of Joseph and Potiphar's wife – was considered a possible reverberation of the attempt of Ashertu to betray her husband with the weather god in the Canaanite myth about Elkunirsha preserved from Bogazköy. Wettengel is the first to suggest, in his new monograph, that, in more fundamental terms, the Syrian weather god Baal-Hadad himself is hiding behind the literary character of Bata. Although I wish to emphasize that this identification seems to me indeed to be correct, I would be cautious about Wettengel's argument which is based on very insecure grounds. It relies on two documents – Pap. 1826 of the Greek National Library in Athens from the end of the 19th Dynasty and Pap. Jumilhac (Pap. Louvre E 17110) from the late Ptolemaic period – in which a god named Bata is equated with the Egyptian god Seth. Seth func-

⁹ BAINES, *Myth and Literature*, 373f.

tioned as the *interpretatio aegyptiaca* of the Syrian weather god from the Middle Kingdom onwards. However, it is not at all obvious whether Baal is in fact hiding behind the god Seth of these two particular texts and, moreover, whether the Tale of the Two Brothers has the same Bata in mind.

2. THE MYTH OF THE TWO BROTHERS

What I would like to add here is a more decisive argument in favour of the hypothesis that the literary character of Bata indeed conceals the Syrian weather god: a mythical text from Ugarit which offers a principal array almost identical to that encountered in the Tale of the Two Brothers but has been hitherto totally overlooked by the latter's interpreters. This comparative text, KTU 1.12 (RS 2.[012]), which – as we will see – will change completely the connotational frame-

work of the Egyptian tale, was found as early as 1930 in the area of the high priest's library and first edited in 1935. Most recently, Manfred Dietrich and Oswald Loretz explained this text as a myth followed by a ritual instruction for a hydrophorous ritual or water offering. Its aim is thought to have been to reanimate the dead weather god (Baal-Hadad) during the New Year celebration in autumn, at the beginning of the annual rain season.¹⁰ I am summing up here briefly the decisive parts of the Egyptian and the Ugaritic text as given in my comprehensive study about texts dealing with the Syrian weather god from Egypt,¹¹ highlighting the motifs directly suggestive of comparison. The Ugaritic text generally follows the rendering by Dietrich/Loretz, and in the last couplets, in some instances Nicolas Whyatt:¹²

Egyptian text:

I. **Bata fights** against soldiers sent by the Egyptian king. At the instigation of Bata's former consort, now lady at the Egyptian court, further soldiers cut down the cedar with Bata's heart on its top. **Bata falls dead.**

II. **His elder brother** Anubis was told to seek Bata's heart for up to **seven years**; in the end, he seeks it until the beginning of the fourth year.

III. Having found Bata's heart, Anubis **puts it into a bowl with fresh water**, **Bata** swallows the heart that is soaked with water and **becomes alive anew.**

IV. He returns to Egypt **as a bull.**

Ugaritic text:

El has a goddess bear two "devourers" with bull's heads, horns and the face of Baal. **They defeat Baal and kill him.** Then **seven years** of drought occur.

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Seven years El made to be full
and eight circles of time.

Lo, clothed as with a mourning dress were his brothers,
as with a mourning coat his kinsmen.

Truly, his seventy-seven brothers came [to him],
and his eighty-eight <companions?>.

The chief of his brothers found him,
and find him did the chief of his companions
at the most dangerous moment,
at the most crucial time:

thus: **Baal had fallen like a bull,**
and **Hadad dropped to his knees like a steer**
in the midst of the *mšmš* of Baal.

[ritual instruction]

¹⁰ M. DIETRICH/O. LORETZ, *Studien zu den ugaritischen Texten. Bd. 1: Mythos und Ritual in KTU 1.12, 1.24, 1.96, 1.100 und 1.114*, AOAT 269, Münster 2000, 29.

¹¹ T. SCHNEIDER, *Texte über den syrischen Wettergott aus Ägypten*, UF 35 (2003), 605–627.

¹² N. WYATT, *Religious Texts from Ugarit. The Words of Ilmilku and his Colleagues*, Sheffield 1998, 167f.

56 <i>i<š>ttk.lawl</i>	May one cause to libate for <i>awl</i> ,
57 <i>išttk.lm.ttkn</i>	may one cause to libate on behalf of <i>ttkn</i> .
58 <i>štk.mlk.dn</i>	Let the king pour out a jug ,
59 <i>štk.šibt.an</i>	let him pour (water) drawn from the spring .
60 <i>štk.qr.bt.il</i>	Let him pour well water from the house of El
61 <i>wmslt.bt.hrš</i>	and from the waters' depth in the house of the Wise one.

As a consequence of this ritual, **Baal becomes alive again**, which signifies that in the real world fertility is secured.

This text precisely displays the general plot of the Egyptian tale: the leader of Baal's brothers (and that is most probably his eldest brother!) finds Baal as if dead after seven years, and resuscitates him through a water offering. Anubis, Bata's elder brother, was told to seek him for seven years, finds him lying as if dead and raises him to life by soaking his heart in water. To this climax of the tale lead episodes that previous research considered to be occasional borrowings from the Syrian realm (the attempt of seducing Baal; the palace built in the Lebanon; the greedy sea). Therefore, if the general plot of the destiny of the two brothers and the other major episodes of the tale are most obviously adopted from the Levantine cycle of myths about Baal, inevitably the tale's main figure is likely to correspond to Baal himself.

This may be corroborated by an epithet of Bata which seems to be a direct translation from one of Baal's Ugaritic epithets.¹³ Bata's striking Egyptian epithet *ḥ3wtj nfr*, "perfect fighter", is likely to be an exact rendering of Baal's Ugaritic epithet *aliy qrdm*, "strongest of fighters". Cf. perhaps also the description of Bata's situation of death as *m wnw.t bjn.t*, "in the worst moment" (so C. PEUST, *Das Zweibrüdermärchen*, in: M. DIETRICH [Hrsg.], *TUAT. Ergänzungslieferung*, Gütersloh 2001, 147–165: p. 162; differently WETTENGEL, *Die Erzählung von den beiden Brüdern*, 139: "in diesem Augenblick") = ug. *b ḥdn ḥdnm*, "in the moment of moments, at the most crucial time".

Judging the Egyptian tale as primarily rooted in a Levantine, not Egyptian, context, and assuming that this Levantine text was supplemented with Egyptian elements instead of vice versa, ob-

viously changes the overall approach to the interpretation of a variety of its motifs. To give only one example: the motif of Bata who returns to Egypt as a bull while Anubis is riding on his back. In the most recent monograph on the Tale of the Two Brothers, the author wants to identify the bull with the Egyptian sun-calf in the vignette of Book of the Dead Spell 105 that represents, in his view, the mystery of the returning solar power, whereas he believes Anubis to act here as the primeval god Atum and – as a rider –, a driver of what happens.¹⁴ This interpretation is the outcome of a chain of sophisticated associations offered by our encyclopaedic knowledge about Ancient Egypt, on the assumption that the background of the tale is indeed Egyptian. With an Ugaritic background in mind, the Tale of the Two Brothers is not one of the two "New Kingdom 'mythical' narratives which depart farthest from any direct mythical model or point of reference in the world of the gods",¹⁵ rather *the reference itself* is different. Thus, any argument from Egyptian mythology alone is obsolete: Bata (that is, Baal) returns as a bull, the animal of the weather-god, since "Baal had fallen like a bull, and Hadad dropped to his knees like a steer", and he carries his elder brother on his back in consideration of the long way from Lebanon down to Egypt.

Identifying the Tale of the Two Brothers as modelled on an Ugaritic text about Baal is not as astonishing as might at first be thought. There is evidence of a considerable religious and literary impact of concepts about the Syrian weather god on Egyptian thought from the end of the 3rd millennium BC onwards. This impact strengthened in the Hyksos period and continued throughout the 18th Dynasty, establishing Baal as a patron of Egyptian kingship under Amenhotep II and as the dynastic god of the 19th Dynasty.¹⁶ The

¹³ Cf. T. SCHNEIDER, *Texte über den syrischen Wettergott aus Ägypten*, *UF* 35 (2003), 605–627.

¹⁴ WETTENGEL, *Die Erzählung von den beiden Brüdern*, 156–161.

¹⁵ BAINES, *Myth and Literature*, 373.

¹⁶ T. SCHNEIDER, *Foreign Egypt: Egyptology and the Concept of Cultural Appropriation*, *Ä&L* 13 (2003), 155–161: 160f.

mythology behind the Syrian weather god can be shown to have been known in Egypt from the end of the 3rd millennium onwards, reflected in different tales and allusions. I have sketched the literary outcome of this impact, as it has survived, in a recent article in *Ugarit Forschungen*.¹⁷ Interestingly – and as opposed to the reverberations of the Syrian weather god in all other Egyptian texts – the Tale of the Two Brothers displays the weak and vulnerable character of Baal. Who within the Egyptian elite culture might have had an interest to create and distribute this text?

In his most recent monograph, Wettengel proposed a specific political setting for the Tale of the Two Brothers.¹⁸ He considered the tale a propagandistic text that was to legitimize the introduction of the new dynastic god Baal in Egypt, symbolized through the way Bata took – out of the Valley of the Cedar – down to Egypt. At the same time, the aim of the text would have been to trace back the 19th Dynasty that stemmed from the new military elite of the eastern Delta to a divine ancestor and thus to procure it legitimacy. Wettengel sees this alleged intention of the tale confirmed by the colophon that threatens those who speak ill about it with divine punishment, and by the final line with the titles and name (or even signature) of the heir to the throne, Seti-Merenptah. There is, however, a major objection to such an interpretation. Propagating Baal in Egypt on behalf of the 19th Dynasty does not seem to be very plausible. The Egyptian evidence clearly shows that at this time Baal had been known and worshipped in Egypt for many centuries, and that myths about him had undergone literary reception long ago.¹⁹ By the 19th Dynasty, Baal and deities related to him had been closely associated with the ideology of kingship for many years. The pros and cons of whether or not to integrate them ideologically had been considered long before our text.²⁰ And

moreover: the Baal who became a protagonist of Egyptian kingship was the ferocious god who vanquished its enemies, not a Baal devoid of force – a saviour and not a god who himself needed saving. The reason for implementing this myth in Egypt must be sought elsewhere.

In Ancient Egypt, myth is not alluded to as an end in itself. It is always connected to a specific situation which it subordinates to itself. Myth interprets, legitimizes and accounts for the appearance of reality. Was there a specific reality that made necessary the implementation of the myth about Baal and his elder brother in Egypt?

It is most obvious that a major problem of state in the 13th and early 12th centuries BC was the question of the legitimate line of succession.²¹ Ramesses II engendered more than 50 sons and is supposed to have had hundreds of grandsons. Until his late death several of his sons were appointed to the function of crown prince only to be replaced by the next son in line when they died. It was only Ramesses' 13th eldest son Merenptah who eventually became king, depriving the families of his elder brothers of the hope of kingship that they must have cherished for many years. This very situation continued to impede state affairs after the death of Merenptah when his son Seti's kingship was contested by that of an usurper Amenmesse, and again after the death of Seti II when Siptah, from a collateral line of the family, seized hold of the throne against Seti's young son (Fig.1).²²

An impressive proof of this historical turmoil is an intriguing legend about two brothers striving for kingship, preserved from Manetho in Flavius Josephus' *Contra Apionem*. As far as I know, this legend has not yet been referred to with regard to the late 19th Dynasty though Manetho inserts it after the heading "Seti II" who indeed fought a civil war against his opponent Amenmesse.²³ This

¹⁷ T. SCHNEIDER, Texte über den syrischen Wettergott aus Ägypten, *UF* 35 (2003), 605–627.

¹⁸ WETTENGEL, *Die Erzählung von den beiden Brüdern*, 249–253.

¹⁹ S. n. 17.

²⁰ S. n. 16.

²¹ The contemporary succession problem is discussed by J. REVEZ, *Frère du roi. L'évolution du rôle des frères du roi dans les modalités successorales en Égypte ancienne*, Thèse Université Paris IV – Sorbonne, 1999, 2 vols, I, 139–149.

²² See T. SCHNEIDER, Siptah und Beja. Neubeurteilung einer historischen Konstellation, *ZÄS* 130, 2003, 134–146.

²³ Cf. Manetho who gives the sequence of kings "after the departure of the tribe of Shepherds from Egypt to Jerusalem". After listing the rulers from the end of the Amarna period and Haremhab (Akencheres/Akencheres/Harmais), he continues with the 19th Dynasty: "his son Ramesses (= Ramesses I), 1 year 4 months. His son Harmesses Miamun (= Ramesses II), 66 years 2 months. His son Amenophis (for correct Amenepthes, Amenophath = Merenptah), 19 years 6 months, and his son Sethos (= Seti II), also called Ramesses".

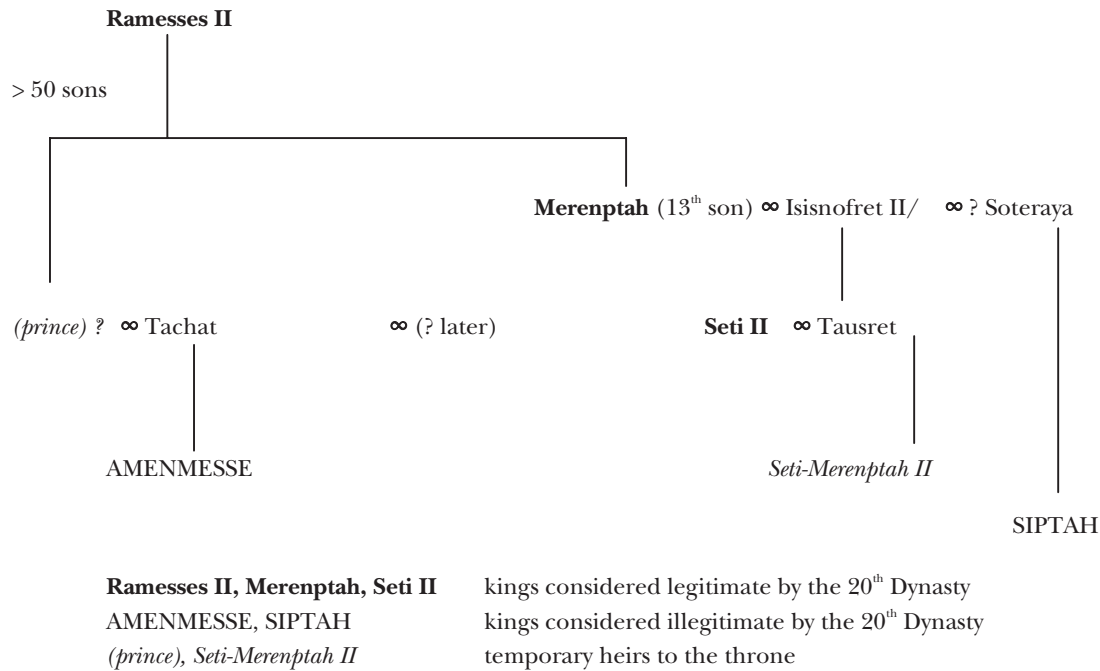


Fig. 1

legend recalls several features of the Tale of the Two Brothers and contemporary 19th Dynasty history and runs as follows:

“(98) And his son Sethos, who is also called Ramesses, having a cavalry force and a navy, appointed his brother Harmais as viceroy of Egypt and gave him all royal power, but commanded him not to wear a crown or touch the queen, who was mother of his children, and to keep away from the other royal concubines. (99) He himself went on an expedition against Cyprus and Phoenicia (...). (100) After waiting until it seemed safe, Harmais, the brother left behind in Egypt, began fearlessly to disobey all of his brother’s instructions. He raped the queen and used the concubines mercilessly. At the urging of his friends, he wore a crown and supplanted his brother. (101) The man in charge of the temples of Egypt wrote a letter and sent it to Sethos, telling him the full story of how his

brother Harmais had supplanted him. Sethos therefore returned instantly to Pelusium and recaptured his throne.”²⁴


Viewed against this background, the Tale of the Two Brothers could be interpreted as a text that legitimizes a model of royal coexistence and consecutive succession of collateral relatives – as opposed to the traditional Egyptian model that only allowed a king to be succeeded by his son. Egyptian mythology did not only not support the model of collateral succession but fiercely opposed it: it is Horus who is the legitimate successor of his father Osiris, not his father’s brother Seth. The reason for making use of the Ugaritic myth and to remodel and propagate it in the form of a new piece of literature would thus have been a *gap in mythology* that did not provide legitimization for what reality required.


A very visible adaptation of the original is extant in the names of both protagonists of the tale who are traditionally addressed as “Bata” and

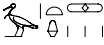
²⁴ Translation of G.P. VERBRUGGHE/J.M. WICKERSHAM, *Berosos and Manetho. Native Traditions in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt*, Ann Arbor 1996, 159; MANETHO. With an English Translation by W.G. Waddell, The Loeb Classical Library 105, London/Cambridge Mass.

²⁴1948 (with the Greek text). For a reappraisal of this tale, cf. T. SCHNEIDER, Conjectures about Amenmesse: Historical, Biographical, Chronological, in: *Ramesside Studies. Festschrift Kenneth A. Kitchen*, Bolton 2008, 98–104.

“Anubis”. In their case as well, the interpretative trap of assigning wrong connotations to specific literary motifs might possibly be apparent. Hitherto, “Bata” has been regularly equated with a bull god Bata, a regional deity of the 17th Upper Egyptian nome. When Bata turns into a bull before returning to Egypt, this fact is commented upon in the most recent monograph as follows: “Im Verlauf der Erzählung beginnen sich die der Figur immanenten, anfangs verborgenen Züge immer deutlicher abzuzeichnen. Bata, der Stiergott des 17. oberägyptischen Gaus (...) hat sich nun offenbar in jene Gestalt verwandelt, die seinem göttlichen Wesen entspricht.”²⁵ As we saw earlier, this motif is based on Baal and his appearance as a bull; it is no longer a *raison d’être* for retaining the presence of the bull god Bata in the tale. Anubis, for his part, was identified with the Egyptian mortuary god, but it is difficult to explain his appearance in the tale since Bata and Anubis are not attested together elsewhere, let alone as brothers. Thus, the most recent monograph suggests seeing the reason for Anubis’s appearance in the fact that only he as a mortuary god was able to manipulate Bata’s corpse without endangering it when he resuscitated him. However, this very episode is, as we saw above, just as little Egyptian as the bull scene, but on the contrary part of the Ugaritic text where Baal’s elder brother takes care of his body (not a corpse at all). That means that the legitimization of interpreting this character as Anubis becomes very poor too.

In what follows, I opt for an alternative understanding of both names that pertains to the ideological situation in Egypt which the Baal myth was borrowed to legitimize. In the case of Anubis (the name occurs in 1,1; 9,4; 12,8; 14,2; 15,1), I would suggest, instead of assuming the divine name  (*jnpw*), that we are dealing with the

identically written term  (*jnpw*),²⁶ which may or may not be related to the former etymologically. In the texts, the determinatives are, now and again, interchanging. This latter expression denotes the heir to the throne who eventually became king. Two recent studies have shown that this expression is usually used retrospectively: an acting king is said to have been *jnpw* before ascending the throne.²⁷ And indeed, the Tale of the Two Brothers ends with the elder one becoming king, he therefore had been an *jnpw* before (throughout the whole tale).

As to the name of the alleged deity Bata  *b3-t3* (with determinative “god” in 1,1; 9,4; 9,6; 10,5; 11,9; 12,8; 14,1; 14,4; 15,1; 15,9; 17,7; without the determinative in 12,6) who is engaged in agricultural activities in his brother’s house, one was tempted to associate it with the idea of fertility and even to attempt an etymology as “ba-soul of the bread” – whatever that may signify. But it has been observed long ago²⁸ that the name is written in what is called syllabic or group-writing, a specific variety of the Egyptian writing system for transcribing foreign words or names. The first of both groups is a very consistent rendering of the syllables /bi/ or (for lack of a notation denoting e-vowels) /be/. The second most often has the value /ti/ and may occasionally have been used for a final /t/.²⁹ Without doubt, the name of the tale’s hero was pronounced ‘Biti’ or ‘Bêti’, or just ‘Bêt’, and this is confirmed by a pun in the poem on the king’s chariot O. Edinburgh 916, 7–8 where the name of the Upper Egyptian deity Bata rimes with Semitic bît/bêt, “(house =) case, box”.³⁰

Given the Ugaritic background of the tale and the competence of the New Kingdom elite in Semitic languages from the Levant, I would like to think of a name based on a contracted form such as Ugaritic bêt, “house, palace, dynasty”. In

²⁵ WETTENGEL, *Die Erzählung von den beiden Brüdern*, 156.

²⁶ This idea was also considered by S.T. HOLLIS, *The Ancient Egyptian “Tale of Two Brothers”*, Norman, OK 1990, 167, who supposed a possible deliberate paronymasia between both terms.

²⁷ C. VANDERSLEYEN, *Inepou: un terme désignant le roi avant qu’il ne soit roi*, in: U. LUFT (ed.), *The Intellectual Heritage of Egypt. Studies presented to László Kákósy by Friends and Colleagues on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday*, Studia Aegyptiaca 14, Budapest 1992, 563–566; E. FEUCHT, *Das Kind im alten Ägypten*, Frankfurt/New York 1995, 503–512.

²⁸ As early as 1918 by W.F. Albright, cf. S.T. HOLLIS, *op.cit.*, 51.

²⁹ With regard to the explanation offered below it is noteworthy that it also occurs once in a (Middle Kingdom) writing of the noun bêt, “house”, within the toponym Beth-Shemesh (Posener execration texts E 60, see G. POSENER, *Princes et pays d’Asie et de Nubie: textes hiéroglyphiques sur des figurines d’envoûtement du Moyen Empire*, Brussels 1940, 93.

³⁰ Cf. J.E. HOCH, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and the Third Intermediate Period*, Princeton 1994, 115 (145).

meaning, *bêt* corresponds neatly to the Egyptian *pr*, “house, dynasty”, which is fundamental to our text. Already at the very beginning of the tale, Bata appears as a person who lives in the “house” of his brother and is capable of doing all domestic work. Bata’s founding a house (*pr*) in the Lebanon corresponds, in the Ugaritic myth, to the *bêt* granted to Baal. In the end, he takes hold of the “house” of the king. We have suggested that this protagonist represents the claim to the throne made by collateral offspring of the royal family. If we assume a pronunciation /*bêti*/, the tale’s hero can be seen as a personification named “offspring, family” of this claim. A contemporary 19th Dynasty example of assigning concept names to mythical figures is the Tale of Truth and Falsehood where truth and falsehood represent the ideologies of Osiris and Seth.

If we assume a pronunciation /*bêti*/, this would be likely to reflect a (later) nisbe formation (Ugaritic **bêtiya*) that expresses affiliation and conveys, in different (though only later attested) Semitic languages, the meaning of “domestic” or “belonging to the family”.³¹ Indeed, *Bêti* is characterised as a member of his brother’s household and family.

With either interpretation, the tale would thus present the mythical pattern of two brothers ascending the throne of Egypt and would allude in their names to the elder of them being the designated heir to the throne and the younger one representing the royal offspring or a less privileged particular member of the royal family.

If this general understanding is correct, we shall have to speak, from now on, about *Bêt(i)* and *Jnpw*, or the *Tale of the Offspring and the Heir to the Throne*. In this political interpretation, there is no discrepancy any longer between gods becoming kings, but the kingship appears as a regular consequence to the claims of two people to the throne.

There is one more point that suits this hypothesis well. The historical paratext of our tale – an

exceptional feature of Egyptian narrative literature – sites the present version of the text in a precise period: the colophon contains a curse formula against anybody who would slander the text, mentions historically known royal scribes of the latter 13th century BC and is authorised by the crown prince Seti-Merenptah, the future king Seti II himself. Wettengel had to admit that one of the most puzzling features of the text – its historicizing end – still defies understanding: the reborn Bata grows up at the court and is appointed viceroy of Nubia, becomes heir to the throne and finally king. He appoints his elder brother heir to the throne who, for his part, becomes ruler of Egypt after the king’s death. Here, myth seems to undergo a sudden change to history, but a history that is not normally encountered in Ancient Egypt: with a viceroy of Nubia becoming king, and the elder brother following the younger one.

However, this scenario occurs in a prominent historiographic hypothesis about the 19th Dynasty advocated since the 1970s by Rolf Krauss. Krauss has consistently argued that the contemporary king Amenmesse, who usurped power from the reigning dynasty, did not break in between Merenptah and Seti II (the majority’s opinion) but was a concurring king during Seti II’s reign and is to be identified with a King’s Son of Kush (viceroy of Nubia) Messuy attested under Seti’s father Merenptah. These hypotheses were taken up by Aidan Dodson who in his earlier studies pleaded only for Amenmesse as a *Gegenkönig* of Seti II, but declined his identity with the viceroy Messuy, while in his more recent contributions he tried to corroborate also this latter point of view.³² Interestingly, only a few researchers commenting upon the Tale of the Two Brothers observed that the final information of our tale is reminiscent of Krauss’s hypothesis – a viceroy of Kush who becomes king before the person originally designated ascends the throne. R. Krauss himself advocated the view that the historical situation at least

³¹ Cf. Middle Hebrew *bayêti*, “belonging to the house, domestic” (Ivrit *bêti*); Arab. *baiti*, “belonging to the house, domestic”; Nabat. *byty*, “administrator”; Jewish Babylonian Aramaic *bt’*, “layman”.

³² A. DODSON, The Tomb of King Amenmesse: Some Observations, *DE* 2 (1985), 7–11; *id.*, Was the Sarcophagus of Ramesses III Begun for Sethos II?, *JEA* 72 (1986), 196f.; *id.*, The Takhats and Some Other Royal

Ladies of the Ramesside Period, *JEA* 73 (1987), 224–229; *id.*, King Amenmesse at Riqqa, *GM* 117/118 (1990), 153f.; *id.*, Amenmesse in Kent, Liverpool, and Thebes, *JEA* 81(1995), 115–128; *id.*, Messuy, Amada, and Amenmesse, *JARCE* 34 (1997), 41–48; *id.*, The Decorative Phases of the Tomb of Sethos II and their Historical Implications, *JEA* 85 (1999), 131–142.

indirectly influenced the plot of the tale while the majority of researchers denied the tale any historical reliability:

„Eine gewisse Stütze unserer These bietet der pD’Orbiney. In diesem literarischen Werk wird ein Prinz zunächst Vizekönig von Nubien, später Thronfolger und König. Dieser Papyrus ist zur Zeit Merneptahs für den damaligen Kronprinzen, den späteren Sethos II., geschrieben, d.h. ungefähr zu der Zeit, als Messui nubischer Vizekönig war. Messui ist der einzige Vizekönig, von dessen prinzlicher Stellung wir mit Sicherheit wissen [this point is, however, not certain; TS]. Wir halten es für möglich, daß die zeitgenössische Existenz eines Königsenkels als Vizekönig von Nubien die Niederschrift des pD’Orbiney beeinflußt hat, dies umso mehr, da dieser Vizekönig der Sohn des Kronprinzen war [this, however, is considered very implausible by the present writer, TS], für den der pD’Orbiney niedergeschrieben wurde.“³³

Manfred Gutgesell and Bettina Schmitz, for their part, denied the tale any historical reliability:

“Allerdings wollte man eine Stütze für die These, die Vizekönige hätten auch gebürtige Prinzen sein können, in einer Stelle des pD’Orbiney sehen. Dort wird ein ‚echter‘ Königsson erst zum Vizekönig, dann zum *jrj-pʿt* eingesetzt, bevor er König wird. Aus einem Literaturwerk so weitgehende historische Schlüsse zu ziehen, scheint uns in diesem Fall sehr riskant, besonders da Brunner diesen Teil des pD’Orbiney überzeugend seinem Zyklus von der Geburt des Gottkönigs anschließen konnte. Er erhebt die Geburt des Königs in den Bereich eines ‚illustrierten Mythos‘, wodurch eine Interpretation als historisch konkrete Situation für die fragliche Stelle des pD’Orbiney unseres Erachtens entfällt.“³⁴

What is visible in these statements is a fracture line in the Egyptological debate about literature. While Egyptologists have for a long time been

prone to neatly associate with historical situations even those texts that do not display any independent information about their origin, in the last years historicizing interpretations of Egyptian literature have fallen into disrepute. Recent studies such as Richard Parkinson’s *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt* defend aestheticizing approaches that move the relation of a given literary text to its historical context to the background.³⁵

In the present case, the nature of this relationship can be defined more clearly: The Tale of the Two Brothers is, as we have seen, a mythical borrowing, thus *fictional and prescriptive* instead of *historical and descriptive*. This normative frame was needed, as proposed above, within specific political conditions that were decisive for a whole century. *The Tale of the Two Brothers is a piece of literature on behalf of political ideology*.

However, the paratext of the tale, its final lines and the rubra which were secondarily superimposed on the text, could suggest an *ultimate adjustment* of the myth to a particular historical situation, the struggle of Seti II and Amenmesse for the throne of Egypt. This hypothesis relies on the assumptions (set out in detail separately³⁶)

- that Amenmesse most likely was a grandson of Ramesses II, son of a lady Takhat, who in all probability is identical with Seti II’s later spouse Takhat. This hypothesis makes him a (younger) cousin and later perhaps stepson of Seti II;
- that Amenmesse may have been identical with the earlier viceroy of Kush Messuy (Rolf Krauss, Aidan Dodson) and prior to this, a palace official;
- that the reigns of Amenmesse and Seti II at least partly intersected although the precise events after the death of Merenptah continue to be unclear.

As argued above, Seti II was heir to the throne as designated by his father Merenptah, and later indeed became king, in Egyptian terms an *jnꜣw*. Since Egyptian kinship terminology uniformly designated collateral relationships (uncle, nephew, and parallel cousins) as *sn* “brother”, the

³³ R. KRAUSS, Untersuchungen zu König Amenmesse II, *SAK* 5 (1977), 131–174: 141.

³⁴ M. GUTGESELL/B. SCHMITZ, Die Familie des Amenmesse, *SAK* 9 (1981), 131–141: 134.

³⁵ R. PARKINSON, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom*

Egypt. A Dark Side to Perfection, London et al. 2001. See also G. MOERS (as n. 2).

³⁶ Cf. T. SCHNEIDER, Conjectures about Amenmesse: Historical, Biographical, Chronological, in: *Ramesside Studies. Festschrift Kenneth A. Kitchen*, Bolton 2008, 98–104.

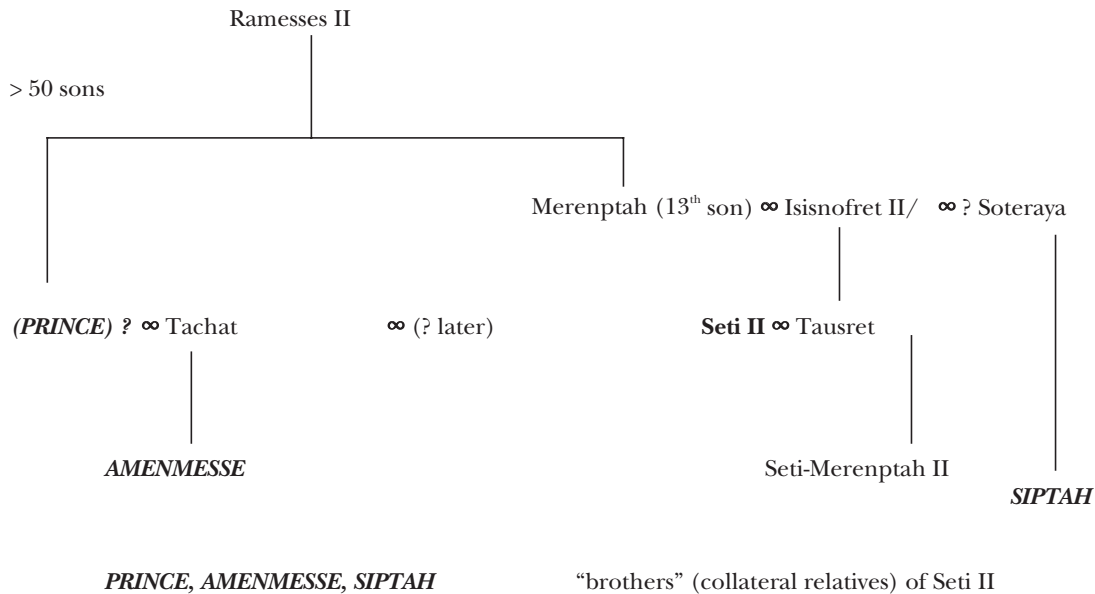


Fig. 2

mythical character of Bata (Beti) could indeed have been applied to Amenmesse who actually would have been a younger “brother” (that is, a cousin) of Seti in whose house he would have lived “like a son” (as a stepson) (Fig. 2). When Merenptah’s life came to an end and the imminent threat to Seti’s kingship through Amenmesse must have been obvious, the mythical pattern could have been put to a very particular historical use – conceding the reign of a collateral relative but insisting on the older heir’s right to the throne in the long term.

There may be further hints at Amenmesse, especially his titulature and accession date, in several motifs from the transformation episodes, which are, however, too vague in order to serve here as arguments (see *excursus*). Co-authors of the tale and its adjustments may be found in the priesthoods of the Baal temples in Memphis or the Delta residence where the Baal myth and ritual which served as a *Vorlage* were very probably known and performed as a part of the official Baal cult.³⁷

I would like to sum up the hypotheses of this article:

1. The Tale of the Two Brothers is not a genuinely Egyptian text as was held until now but a piece of literary innovation modelled on the general plot of the Ugaritic myth and water ritual about Baal and his elder brother KTU 1.12 (RS 2.[012]), complemented by other myths of the Baal cycle and only secondarily equipped with Egyptian motifs. This approach helps to remove many interpretational difficulties that arose from the assumption of an Egyptian origin and reduces the alleged complexity as regards contents.
2. The Tale of the Two Brothers is not a fairy tale as frequently thought (“Zweibrüdermärchen”), and the motive for setting it up (and affixing to it the warning not to speak ill about the text) is not very likely to have been “entertainment and amusement” (Elke Blumenthal³⁸). The reason for borrowing the Ugaritic myth was a *gap in Egyptian mythology* that exclusively legitimized the linear line of royal succession from father to son. The political landscape of the 19th Egyptian Dynasty was characterized by continuous attempts of

³⁷ WETTENGEL, *Die Erzählung von den beiden Brüdern*, 253ff. points to the Memphite Baal priests known from Berlin 8169 (G. ROEDER, *Aegyptische Inschriften aus den Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin*, 2 Bde, Leipzig 1924, II, 233). It is striking that Hori, cult officiant under Seti II,

was promoted Upper Egyptian vizir. Was that Seti’s gratitude for his and his ancestors’ intellectual and literary support in regaining the throne?

³⁸ E. BLUMENTHAL, *Die Erzählung des Papyrus d’Orbiney als Literaturwerk*, ZÄS 99 (1973), 1–17: 16.

collateral offspring of the royal family (collateral relatives of the king or *sn.w*, “brothers” in Egyptian terminology) to seize hold of power. I accordingly proposed to understand the protagonists’ names differently from what was held until now as “heir to the throne (and ultimate king)” and “member of the royal house”, respectively – dismissing the presence of the Egyptian gods “Anubis” and “Bata” in the tale altogether. The Tale of the Two Brothers appears therefore to be a text that legitimizes a model of royal coexistence and consecutive succession of collateral relatives.³⁹

3. This tentative interpretation provides us with a fine example of how Ancient Egypt incorporated external ideas in order to cope with internal needs. It is also a rare view of how, in a specific case, the mechanisms of ideological and political struggle functioned. Above all, it could offer us a unique insight into the formation of a piece of Ancient Egyptian literature.

EXCURSUS

I see the slight possibility that several motifs from the transformation episodes conceal allusions to the ultimate identity of Bêt (Bata) in the last adjustment of the tale, i.e. Amenmesse, especially his titlature and accession date. This may well be seen as overtaxing the tale, but it needs to be noted that these motifs have not yet been explained in a satisfying way.

Before returning to Egypt, Bêt (Bata) announces that he will become a great miracle (15th chapter). Evidently, his transformations in the palace and the harim (the inner palace) are conceived as miracles (explicitly in chap. 19: the

persea trees [later processed into furniture, *ipt*] are a great miracle). Is that an allusion to Amenmesse’s Nebti/Two Ladies name, “Whose miracles are great in the Harim (Karnak, *jp.t*)”? In the 17th chapter, Bêt (Bata) returns to Egypt as a bull which then is sacrificed because the queen wants to eat his liver. Dimitri Meeks has shown that the liver symbolizes Maat.⁴⁰ Is that to be seen as an allusion to Amenmesse’s Horus name “Strong bull that loves Maat”? In the 18th chapter, from his blood grow up two great (♁) persea trees in front of the palace gate (a symbol of the double kingship) – alluding to Amenmesse’s possible Gold name “Great of strength, who glorifies Thebes for the one who bore him”?⁴¹ In the 21st chapter, Bêt (Bata) has himself reborn. Is that a pun to the short form *Messe* (of Amenmesse, such as worn by the viceroy of Kush) that could be understood as “He who bore himself”?

Another possible hint to Amenmesse could be extant in the text’s structuring by rubra. As Jan Assmann first observed, this structure has been superimposed on the text and is not a genuine part of its original layout.⁴² Wettengel has tried to show that the rubra indicate the sequence of the seasons, beginning with the inundation, so that two rubra (chapters) would correspond to one Egyptian month. When applying this chronological structure, at which date are we at the historizing end of the tale? The 21st chapter – the queen swallows a splinter by which she becomes pregnant – corresponds to III shemu 1–15, the 22nd – Bêt’s (Bata’s) birth, education and appointment to the King’s Son of Kush – corresponds to III shemu 16–30, the 23rd and 24th – Bêt (Bata) becoming heir to the throne and ascending the throne – to IV shemu

³⁹ A political background was considered by Lesko: L.H. LESKO, Three Late Egyptian Stories Reconsidered, in: *id.* (ed.), *Egyptological Studies in Honor of Richard A. Parker Presented on the Occasion of his 78th Birthday*, Hanover, NH 1986, 98–103. For the general debate about the relation of literature and politics in Ancient Egypt cf. J. ASSMANN/E. BLUMENTHAL (eds.), *Literatur und Politik im pharaonischen und ptolemäischen Ägypten. Vorträge der Tagung zum Gedenken an Georges Posener, 5.–10. September 1996 in Leipzig*, BdE 127, Cairo 1999. For recent “theo-political” interpretations of Egyptian literature s. B.U. SCHIPPER, *Die Erzählung des Wenamun: Ein Literaturwerk im Spannungsfeld von Politik, Geschichte und Religion*, OBO 209, Freiburg/Göttingen 2005,

315–333; H.-W. FISCHER-ELFERT, Vom Fluch zur Passion. Zur literarischen Genese des „Tale of Woe“ (Pap. Pushkin 127), in: G. BURKARD *et al.* (eds.), *Kon-Texte: Akten des Symposiums „Spurensuche – Altägypten im Spiegel seiner Texte“*, München 2. bis 4. Mai 2003, ÄAT 60, Wiesbaden 2004, 81–89.

⁴⁰ D. MEEKS, Le foie, Maât et la nature humaine, in: T. DUQUESNE (ed.), *Hermes Aegyptiacus. Egyptological Studies for B. H. Stricker on his 85th Birthday*, Oxford 1995, 145–156.

⁴¹ T. HARDWICK, The Golden Horus name of Amenmesse?, *JEA* 92 (2006) 255–260: 259.

⁴² J. ASSMANN, Das altägyptische Zweibrüdermärchen (Papyrus d’Orbiney), *ZÄS* 104 (1977), 1–25.

1–15 and IV shemu 16–30, respectively. We know that Amenmesse commenced his reign on III shemu 18,⁴³ and Krauss⁴⁴ has argued that Amenmesse possibly counted his regnal years from his

appointment as viceroy of Nubia. That would correspond to the frame date of chapter 22 where Bêt (Bata) indeed becomes viceroy of Nubia.

⁴³ J. VON BECKERATH, *Chronologie des ägyptischen Neuen Reiches*, Hildesheim 1994, 71 (p. 73 mistakenly “8”).

⁴⁴ R. KRAUSS, Untersuchungen zu König Amenmesse (1. Teil), *SAK* 4 (1976), 161–199: 175–181.