

A THEOPHANY OF SETH-BAAL IN THE TEMPEST STELE

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Despite renewed interest in the Tempest Stele of Ahmose,¹ crucial parts of the text still defy proper understanding, as does its religious and historical context. The present contribution aims at highlighting some aspects of the text that have not been given appropriate attention in the debate so far. In 10F = 12B,² the text reads: *n šḥd-n tk3 ḥr t3.wj*. This has been translated as a reference to a torch as a human lighting device that could not provide light in the overwhelming darkness, despite the rather unusual adverbial expression used (but not rendered appropriately in all translations): *ḥr t3.wj* “above the two lands”, e.g.:

- RITNER (1996): “while a torch could not be lit in the two lands” (p. 11)
- ALLEN (1998): “while no torch could give light over the two lands” (p. 13)
- BEYLAGE (2002): “dass eine Fackel die beiden Länder nicht erhellen konnte”.

A different understanding of this sentence is offered by the observation that *tk3 (ḥd)* “(shining) torch” is an epithet of the sun god (Wb. V, 332, 12f.). In the eulogy of Amun-Re in the Book of the Dead of Neskhons (pCG 58032), the god is called the “shining torch (*tk3 ḥd*) with great light” (2,16).³ In several tombs from the time of Thutmose III (TT 53 of Amenemhet,⁴ TT127 of Senemayah,⁵ the tomb of Pahery at Elkab⁶), Amun is “the living flame (*tk3 nḥ*) which emerged from Nun”. TT164 of Antef (time of Thutmose III) declares about Amun-Re-Harakhte “that he is the torch” (against which the darkness cannot prevail).⁷ Hymns at Hibis speak of *tk3* as the remote “torch” of Amun in the sky.⁸ An English equivalent denoting both a heavenly body and a lighting device would be *luminary*.⁹

The stele’s author who had credited Re with installing Ahmose as Egypt’s new king at the inception of the text (1.2: *dhn-n šw rꜥ r nsw dš=f* “after Re

¹ R.K. RITNER/K. POLINGER FOSTER, Texts, Storms, and the Thera Eruption, *JNES* 55 (1996), 1–14; M.H. WIENER/J.P. ALLEN, *Separate Lives: The Ahmose Stela and the Thera Eruption*, *JNES* 57 (1998), 1–28; S.W. MANNING, *A Test of Time: the volcano of Thera and the chronology and history of the Aegean and east Mediterranean in the mid-second millennium BC*, Oxford 1999, 192–202. P. BEYLAGE, *Aufbau der königlichen Stelentexte: vom Beginn der 18. Dynastie bis zur Amarnazeit*, *ÄAT* 54 (Wiesbaden 2002), 77–85, 608–613; H. NAVRATILOVA, The “Unwetterstele” of Ahmose as a Historical Text, in: A. AMENTA (ed.), *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 2005, 81–88; K. POLINGER FOSTER/J.H. STERBA/G. STEINHAUSER/M. BICHLER, The Thera Eruption and Egypt: Pumice, Texts, and Chronology), 171–180 (176–179), in: D.A. WARBURTON (ed.), *Time’s Up! Dating the Minoan Eruption of Santorini. Acts of the Minoan Eruption Chronology Workshop, Sandbjerg November 2007, Monographs of the Danish Institute at Athens 10* (Athens 2009). For bibliographical help and discussions about the text I am indebted to J.P. Allen, P. Beylage, C. Geisen, R. Hannig, K. Polinger Foster, and M.H. Wiener.

² In referencing text passages, I follow the reconstruction given by Allen (WIENER/ALLEN, *JNES* 57) (F = Face, B = Back side).

³ J. ASSMANN, *Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete*, 2. verbesserte und erweiterte Auflage, OBO Sonderband (Fribourg/Göttingen 1999), 323.

⁴ *Urk.* IV 1217; ASSMANN, *Hymnen und Gebete*, 185.



⁵ *Urk.* IV 495; J. ASSMANN, *Sonnenhymnen in thebanischen Gräbern*, Theben 1 (Mainz 1983), 173; J. ASSMANN, *Altägyptische Totenliturgien. Band 2: Totenliturgien und Totensprüche in Grabinschriften des Neuen Reiches* (Heidelberg 2005), 236.


⁶ *Urk.* IV 111; J. ASSMANN, *Totenliturgien. Band 2*, 226.

⁷ ASSMANN, *Sonnenhymnen*, 227; ASSMANN, *Hymnen*, 183.

⁸ D. KLOTZ, *Adoration of the Ram. Five Hymns to Amun-Re from Hibis Temple*, YES 6 (New Haven 2006), 141 n. A. For the use of *tk3* as a ritual object see D.C. LUFT, *Das Anzünden der Fackel. Untersuchungen zu Spruch 137 des Totenbuches SAT 15* (Wiesbaden 2009), including references to the torch as a substitute for the sun light (J. ASSMANN, *Totenliturgien. Band 2*, 263f.). In TB 169 the deceased wishes to see “the torch” (J. ASSMANN, *Altägyptische Totenliturgien. Band 1: Totenliturgien in den Sargtexten des Mittleren Reiches* [Heidelberg, 2002]), 156.159.

⁹ Cf. the comparable rendering of Gen 1,16 *mā’ōr* = “luminary” in YOUNG’S *Literal Translation* of 1898.

had appointed him king himself”) seems to have avoided here the plain acknowledgment of the apocalyptic notion that Re was no longer able to shine over the two lands. Instead, he formulated “the luminary (= Re) could not shine over the two lands”. Re is precluded from doing so by the overclouded sky, causing absolute darkness. The text (7F = 8–9B) speaks about the “sky being occluded” (*p.t šn^c.tj*). The relevant word, *šn^c* carries additional information in the hieroglyphic writing. In 7F, the determinatives of the word are the recumbent Seth animal (E21) above the sky with rain (N4): . In 8–9B, it is the recumbent Seth animal over the normal sky: . In conformity with Egyptian understanding that could ascribe meteorological phenomena of that kind to Seth,¹⁰ and expressed visually in the arrangement of the determinatives,¹¹ Seth (worshipped only 15 km upstream from the Theban campaign capital at Deir el-Ballas where Ahmose appears to have been crowned, at Ombos) was the master (“who is upon”) of the tempest. In the historical context of the stele, it could well be correct to assume that it was more precisely Seth of Auaris, the adopted form of the Syrian weather god Baal, with a main centre of worship in the Hyksos capital, who could be presumed behind the meteorological phenomena – Near Eastern texts clearly attribute to Baal the power over clouds, storm and lightning, and see his manifestation in his thundering voice.¹² These characteristics are listed in the Tempest Stele: the beclouded sky (*p.t šn^c.tj*) without a break in the cloud cover (*n wnt 3bw*), darkness (*kkw*) so that the luminary (= Re) could not shine over the two lands (see above), torrential rain (*q³.tj r hrw rhy.t*), louder than the voice of the populace (*q³.tj r hrw rhy.t*), resounding on (or: from?) the mountain more than the

thunder of the cataract at Elephantine (*kh3 hr h3š.t r hrw qr.tj jmj.t 3bw*).¹³ From this viewpoint,  could even be seen as a visual allusion to Baal’s Ugaritic title *rkb ʿrpt*, “rider of clouds”.

Traditionally, however, the tempest has been ascribed to Amun and “the gods”, respectively. James P. Allen has argued that “the parallel theme of ‘the great god,’ on the one hand, and ‘the gods,’ on the other, (...) is sounded throughout the stela. Ahmose’s explicit response to the storm – ‘How much greater is this than the impressive manifestation of the great god, than the plans of the gods!’ (11. 10 F, 14 B) – indicates that both ‘the great god’ and ‘the gods’ were considered agents of its occurrence (...). In the mind of the Egyptians, the catastrophe was evidently seen as a manifestation of Amun’s desire that Ahmose return to Thebes and of the gods’ demand that he turn his attention to the state of their temples.”¹⁴ In this view he has been followed by Peter Beylage who has argued that it was Amun who caused the tempest to make Ahmose return south, and that the text refers to the tempest as the revelation of Amun’s power.¹⁵ However, this is arguably not the case: the tempest is explicitly stated to be a divine spectacle “much greater than the power of the great god (= Amun-Re)” and also “greater than the affairs of the gods”. Apart from the implicit written reference to Seth mentioned above, his authorship of the tempest may be pointed to in the text more explicitly. The passage 11–12F/13–14B makes the retrospective statement: “after the power of the god (*b3w ntr*) had occurred” where neither (the power of) “the great god” (t.i., Amun) nor “the gods” are mentioned. This seemingly contradicts the initial declaration in F6–7/ B8 that “the gods made the sky come in a storm of rain” (*ʿh^c-n rdj-n ntr.w jw t p.t m*

¹⁰ J. ZANDEE, Seth als Sturmgott, ZÄS 90 (1963), 147; H. TE VELDE, Seth, God of Confusion, PdÄ 6 (Leiden 1967), 85, 102–103.

¹¹ Cf. in this respect also A. McDONALD, An Evil Influence? Seth’s Role as a Determinative, Particularly in Letters to the Dead, *Lingua Aegyptia* 10 (2002), 283–291; A. McDONALD, A Metaphor for Troubled Times: the Evolution of the Seth Deity Determinative in the First Intermediate Period, ZÄS 134(2007), 26–39.

¹² See the overview by W. HERMANN, Baal, 132–139, in: K. VAN DER TOORN/B. BECKING, P.W. VAN DER HORST (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden 1999) with references.

¹³ Cf. CICERO, *De Republica*, VI, 18: “Thus, the people who dwell near the cataracts of the Nile, which are called Catadupa, are, by the excessive roar which that river makes in precipitating itself from those lofty mountains, entirely deprived of the sense of hearing.”

¹⁴ WIENER/ALLEN, *JNES* 57, 18.

¹⁵ A caveat is also appropriate regarding the conclusions derived from the assumption that Amun wished Ahmose to return to Thebes and that, when in Thebes, the god received “what he had wished”. This is, as noted by Allen (WIENER/ALLEN, *JNES* 57, 8–9) only one possibility of reconstructing and understanding the text.

dꜣ n hwy.t) which, however, has been conjectured on the basis of a proposed restoration of a lacuna in the text. It cannot be excluded that a different divine agent was mentioned, comprising the epithet *nb ntr.w* “lord of the gods”.¹⁶ Alternatively, the text could have become more specific, from initially ascribing the unprecedented events to divine intervention (“gods”) to the description of the sky’s occlusion by Seth (as spelled out in the hieroglyphs) to the acknowledgment of the tempest being “the power of a god” greater than Amun and the (other) gods of Egypt. In this respect, it is noteworthy that the word *dꜣ* “storm, tempest” used here occurs, with the god determinative, as an outright epithet of Seth.¹⁷ It is difficult to avoid the impression that the text ultimately saw the tempest as a demonstration of power and, given the presence of the resounding voice of the god, a theophany of Seth-Baal, the patron god of the king’s opponents in the North. With Amun’s power dwarfed by Seth-Baal’s, it is not astonishing to see the unusual terms on which Ahmose and Amun meet in what JAMES P. ALLEN called “a state visit rather than a pilgrimage of supplication”¹⁸ (12F/ 14B): “Gold met with the gold of this image”, evoking solar symbolism when the actual sun in the sky had been totally eclipsed (a symbolism reinforced by the provisioning of the gods with “silver, gold, and copper”; F13/B15–16). As Foster/Ritner rightly indicated in their translation (“with gold confronting (?) gold”¹⁹), *hsj m* is used to denote a hostile or military encounter (Wb. III 159, 5–6.12.15–16) so that the correct translation has to be: “Gold (Ahmose) confronted the gold of this image” – in a catastrophe of unprecedented dimension,

Ahmose urged Amun to act and respond. The bare literal translation does not do full justice to the dramaturgy of the scene where – the land obscured in darkness – the king in full panoply met with the god’s radiant effigy.

The meteorological phenomena mentioned in the text have been at the centre of a debate on whether they could be seen as the effects of the Thera/Santorini eruption. After C. Vandersleyen, H. Goedicke, and E.N. Davis, this view was advocated again in 1996 by Karen Polinger Foster and Robert K. Ritner,²⁰ provoking a refutation authored by Malcolm H. Wiener²¹ in which they were joined by Manfred Bietak.²² The alternative view is to see in the events described in the Tempest Stele one of the thunderstorms and torrential rains that intermittently are attested for the Theban era.²³ Not all the criticism mounted against the approach by Foster/Ritner was well-founded so that revisiting some of the arguments seems in place here. Wiener concludes his reasoning “by posing the following questions to those who would link the Ahmose Tempest Stela to the Thera eruption (...) These questions lack convincing answers. Accordingly, it appears unlikely on balance that the Ahmose Stela refers to the Thera eruption.” The first question – “why is the stela interpreted as *implying an unmentioned earthquake*, given the presence of terms indicative of human destruction and neglect?” – seems to overstate a point made by Foster/Ritner who argued that the lost parts of the stela *may* have contained a reference to an earth-quake; however, this assumption is by no means relevant to their interpretation of the text. This also applies to the second point of criticism (“If the

¹⁶ An additional square can be gained by assuming that the preceding sentence did not end with the conjectured *nb.w* “all”. An initial *ḥꜣ-n rdj-n* could then have been followed by a divine name occupying the upper half of the square (such as the recumbent Seth animal) and *nb* “lord”: “Then X, lord of the gods, made the sky come in a storm of rain”.

¹⁷ J.F. BORGHOUTS, *Book of the Dead [39]. From Shouting to Structure*, SAT 10 (Wiesbaden 2007), 16, 41f.

¹⁸ WIENER/ALLEN, *JNES* 57, 20.

¹⁹ POLINGER FOSTER/RITNER, *JNES* 56, 11.

²⁰ POLINGER FOSTER/RITNER, *JNES* 55, 1–14.

²¹ ALLEN, in: WIENER/ALLEN, *JNES* 57, 21–28.

²² M. BIETAK, The Volcano Explains Everything – Or Does It? *BAR* (Nov./Dec. 2006), 60–65.

²³ C. LEBLANC, Thèbes et les pluies torrentielles. A propos de *mw n pt*, *Memnonia* 6(1995), 197–214; A. DORN/M. MÜLLER, Regenfälle in Theben-West, *ZÄS* 133 (2006), 90–93. Modern evidence includes this description by Howard Carter in a letter to Alan H. Gardiner dated November 21, 1916: “I am off tomorrow to the mountains to continue our investigation there and only ask for good luck. I say tomorrow, weather permitting, as today we have had terrible rain storms, heavy hail, lightning and thunder. The Valleys are now seething rivers, and the roof of my house leaking everywhere – bestial! I have seen nothing like it since 1899! Now as I am writing a heavy wind has risen which may help matters eventually (...)” – I owe the knowledge of this reference to a note posted by Marianne Luban on EEF.

earthquake that struck Akrotiri an estimated three months to two years before the eruption also devastated Upper and Lower Egypt as Foster/Ritner appear to suggest, why were this earthquake and the supposed eruption-created tempest perceived as a single event?). Foster/Ritner well acknowledge that the destructions mentioned in the stele are primarily attributed to the flood whereas the earthquake is not central to their arguments. On the other hand, retrospectively summarizing destruction caused by different agencies within one paragraph of the text because they would have occurred within a specific time-span or would have been visible at the time of the stele's composition, does not seem unlikely from the outset.²⁴ It is also possible to invalidate the third critical question ("Why were the tempest and darkness perceived in the west, when Thera lies mostly to the north and the direction of winds carried the tephra strongly to the east?").²⁵ The Egyptian term *m r-ꜥ jmn.t* correctly means (cf. Wb. II 394) "at the end/other end of the range (not "area") of the West", while *jmn.t* denotes both the cardinal direction "west" and the place of the necropolis usually located on the Western side of the Nile. In absolute geographical terms, however, Western Thebes with the necropolis lies in the (North-)Northwest as the Nile flows here in a SW-NE direction.²⁶ But Wiener's doubts as to the suggestion that the eruption tephra reached Egypt and was able to obscure the sky, remain valid.²⁷ Long term deterioration of the climate with persistent haze would be more plausible to postulate, on the analogy of

the "years without a summer" after volcanic eruptions of the modern era but then, the presence of thunder would be difficult to explain. The most substantial argument against linking the phenomena of the Tempest Stele to the Thera eruption (not mentioned by Wiener, nor Foster²⁸) is the *flooding and torrential rain*. It is true that intense inundations and severe rain can be the direct effects of a volcanic eruption, but exclusively in its close proximity:

"Explosive events are commonly accompanied or followed by heavy rains. These eruption-induced storms together with the deposition of large amounts of ash contribute to destabilise the hydrological cycle in the areas affected by volcanic eruptions. Flooding of the region surrounding the active volcano can easily follow, increasing the complexity of the volcanic crisis and its management."²⁹

This central element of the description seems to exclude a volcanic eruption and advocate in favour of a thunderstorm and torrential rain as the phenomena referred to in the Tempest Stele. It is well possible that the perception of these events as a manifestation of Seth-Baal – a theophany in thunder, clouds and torrential rain – would have been seen as a demonstration of the god's support for the Hyksos dynasty in the North. If we are right in dating the Tempest Stele to Ahmose's first regnal year and the events described in it to the time following his accession to the throne,³⁰ the theophany must have appeared to the Thebans as impending doom:

²⁴ WIENER/ALLEN, *JNES* 57, are correct in emphasizing (question 5) that the stele's paragraph on the restoration of temples is not substantially different from other topical "restoration-of-order texts" ("so as to make the Stela uniquely a reference to damage from the eruption of Thera"). However, it is in the description of the meteorological events where the text can be expected to be unique and out-of-the-normal. In the description of actual or fictional restoration work, wide-reaching similarity is less surprising.

²⁵ In her recent response to the arguments put forth by WIENER and ALLEN, K. POLINGER FOSTER has tried to invalidate this criticism by pointing to the association of foreign peoples with specific cardinal points – the Cretans would be associated with the west – and the possibility of using the west here in a metaphorical meaning, alluding to the conditions of the Nether-

world (K. POLINGER FOSTER, in: *Time's Up! Dating the Minoan Eruption of Santorini*. Athens 2009, 176–179).

²⁶ See <http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/images/eol/2003/nile.jpg> (accessed January 26, 2010).

²⁷ This has also been accounted for by K. POLINGER FOSTER, in: *Time's Up! Dating the Minoan Eruption of Santorini* (Athens 2009), 179.

²⁸ K. POLINGER FOSTER, in: *Time's Up! Dating the Minoan Eruption of Santorini*, (Athens 2009), 178–179.

²⁹ M. TODESCO/E. TODINI, Volcanic Eruption Induced Floods. A Rainfall-Runoff Model Applied to the Vesuvian Region, *Natural Hazards* 33/2 (2004), 223–245; S.W. MANNING (*A Test of Time*, Oxford 1999, 2000) has correctly noted that the heavy rain and flooding is unlikely to be caused by a volcanic eruption..

³⁰ BEYLAGE, *Aufbau*, 81 n. 238.

Seqenenre killed on the battlefield as was, in all likelihood, Kamose (on the basis of his makeshift coffin), and only days into Ahmose's accession to the throne, the Hyksos god brought unprecedented calamity over Thebes, eclipsing the sky and the power of the Theban gods. Even if the year 1 date is to be rejected,³¹ the repercussions of the event were significant. With the sun obscured, was this not a definitive judgment on whether Seth-Baal was truly "the one whose power is great" (*ꜥ3 phtj*, his most frequent epithet) or, as Ahmose wished to proclaim in his throne-name³² (*Nb-phtj-Rꜥ*), Re? This interpretation of the text is opposite to S.W. MANNING's metaphorical/non-literal one (*A Test of Time*, Oxford 1999, 198, cf. 201) where the text is suggested to be a "symbolic encoding of Ahmose's defeat of the Hyksos, (...) the victory of Theban Amun over Hyksos Baal". Within this religious context, it is

not surprising to see Ahmose's campaign against the Hyksos start only late in his reign, and, once Auaris was taken over, find Ahmose (and the early 18th dynasty) as strict observers of the worship of Baal.³³ This set Baal well on the trajectory of becoming the patron of Egyptian kingship under Horemheb and the early 19th dynasty³⁴ but it is in the Amarna letters already that the king is likened to both Re and Baal, as described in EA147 from Abimilki of Tyre with regard to Akhenaten:

*"My lord is the Sun who comes forth over all lands day by day, according to the way of the sun, his gracious father, who gives life by his sweet breath and returns with his north wind; who establishes the entire land in peace, by the power of his arm: ḥapši; who gives forth his cry in the sky like Baal, and all the land is frightened at his cry."*³⁵

³¹ K. POLINGER FOSTER, in: *Time's Up! Dating the Minoan Eruption of Santorini*, Athens 2009, 176.

³² Irrespective of the interpretation of throne names, this is implied in the present name ("Lord of power is Re" vs. "Lord of the power of Re" vs. "Lord of power, Re").

³³ V. MÜLLER, *Tell el-Dab'a XVII: Opferdeponierungen in der Hyksoshauptstadt Auaris (Tell el-Dab'a) vom späten Mittleren Reich bis zum frühen Neuen Reich*. 2 Bde. (Wien 2008).

³⁴ Cf. T. SCHNEIDER, Texte über den syrischen Wettergott aus Ägypten, *UF* 35 (2003), 605–627; ID., Innovation in Literature on Behalf of Politics: The Tale of the Two Brothers, Ugarit, and 19th Dynasty History, *E&L* 18 (2008), 315–326; ID., Wie der Wettergott Ägypten aus der großen Flut errettete: Zur Frage inkultrierter Literatur im alten Ägypten, in: M. BOMMAS (ed.), *Inkulturation im Alten Orient*, OBO, (forthcoming).

³⁵ W.L. MORAN, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, 1992), 233. For the date of the letter: p. xxxvi.

