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Functions and Uses of Egyptian Myth*

This article discusses functions and uses of myth in ancient Egypt as a contribution to comparative research. Applications of myth are reviewed in order to present a basic general typology of usages: from political, scholarly, ritual, and medical applications, through incorporation in images, to linguistic and literary exploitations. In its range of function and use, Egyptian myth is similar to that of other civilizations, except that written narratives appear to have developed relatively late. The many attested forms and uses underscore its flexibility, which has entailed many interpretations starting with assessments of the Osiris myth reported by Plutarch (2nd century AD). Myths conceptualize, describe, explain, and control the world, and they were adapted to an ever-changing reality.

Fonctions et usages du mythe égyptien

Cet article discute les fonctions et les usages du mythe en Égypte ancienne dans une perspective comparatiste et passe en revue ses applications, afin de proposer une typologie générale de ses usages – applications politiques, érudites, rituelles et médicales, incorporation dans des images, exploitation linguistique et littéraire. De ce point de vue, le mythe égyptien ne diffère pas des autres mythes, avec la particularité que la mise en récits écrits semble s'être développée assez tard. Les nombreux usages et formes attestés mettent en évidence sa plasticité, source de nombreuses interprétations depuis les comptes rendus du mythe osirien par Plutarque au I^{er} s. apr. J.-C. Les mythes conceptualisent, expliquent et contrôlent le monde, et s'adaptent donc à une réalité toujours mouvante.

* This article is based upon a fuller study to appear in Hubert Roeder (ed.), *Handbuch der ägyptischen Religion*, a pre-publication version of which is online at <http://ora.ox.ac.uk>. More detailed references are available there.

Ὁ γὰρ μῦθος
φιλοσόφημα παιδῶν ἐστίν
For myth is a form of philosophy for children.

Synesios of Cyrene, *Egyptian Tales*
– or *On Providence*, First Logos, Chapter 2.2.¹

In a group of essays such as this, which seeks to answer the question of what an Egyptian myth “is”, one may perhaps start by saying a few words on terminology and establishing parameters, with a view to defining a framework for the wide range of the other contributions. In this context it is essential to clarify the distinction between fully-developed, coherent, and normally narrative forms of myths and their building blocks: the mythical actors, objects, and locations, which may stand in varying relationships with one another.² Such constitutive elements of myths have been termed mythemes,³ mythologemes,⁴ mythical allusions or statements,⁵ mythical constellations,⁶ or icons.⁷ In other disciplines, their equivalents may be named functions,⁸

1. Synesios of Cyrene: Martin Hose (ed.), *Ägyptische Erzählungen oder Über die Vorsehung*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2012, p. 41; written c. 400 CE.

2. Katja Goebis, “A Functional Approach to Egyptian Myth and Mythemes”, *Journal of Near Eastern Religions* 2, 2002, p. 27-59, esp. p. 42ff.

3. The current term, deriving from the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who defined them as “gross constituent units”: “The Structural Study of Myth”, *Journal of American Folklore* 68, 1955, p. 428-444.

4. Heike Sternberg el-Hotabi, *Mythische Motive und Mythenbildung in den ägyptischen Tempeln der griechischen Zeit*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz (“Göttinger Orientforschungen”, IV/14), 1985.

5. Siegfried Schott, *Mythe und Mythenbildung im alten Ägypten*, Leipzig, J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung (“Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde Aegyptens”, 15), 1945: “mythische Aussagen”; “mythische Anspielungen”.

6. Jan Assmann, “Die Verborgeneheit des Mythos in Ägypten”, *Göttinger Miscellen* 25, 1977, p. 7-43, and several later publications.

7. Jan Assmann, “Die Zeugung des Sohnes. Bild, Spiel, Erzählung, und das Problem des ägyptischen Mythos”, in: Jan Assmann, Walter Burkert and Fritz Stolz (eds.), *Funktionen und Leistungen des Mythos. Drei altorientalische Beispiele*, Friburg and Göttingen, Universitätsverlag and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (“Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis”, 48), 1982, p. 13-61, e.g. p. 40-41.

8. Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*² (trans. from the 1928 Russian by L. Scott), Austin, University of Texas Press, 1968; see K. Goebis, “A Functional Approach to Egyptian Myth and Mythemes”, p. 42-44, for reception in Egyptology.

motifemes,⁹ or narremes.¹⁰ We use “mythemes” for such “snippets” of myths.

A combination of mythemes may make a myth, but scholars have long discussed whether the attestation of mythemes independent of a narrative context permits one to infer the pre-existence of such a mythical narrative from which these mythemes would have derived, or whether the mythical actors and their “constellations”, as Jan Assmann, the chief proponent of this view, long argued (see n. 6), existed independently of a coherent storyline. Research based on findings in cognitive sciences, which show that the human brain can only comprehend and use snippets of information when it connects them in narrative,¹¹ suggests that an individual mytheme may only have meaning when underlain by an appropriate narrative. Thus, while mytheme and myth may occur independently, they can hardly have existed independently, and in considering functions of myth we do not distinguish between these two formats unless necessary in a specific case. The dearth of written narratives from Egypt and their slow growth as a genre probably have much to do with the greater prestige of pictorial images over writing, especially in early periods, and with the restricted range of uses of writing at least until the Middle Kingdom.¹² They do not in themselves point to an absence of narrative in the culture. In sum, we see no need to depart from a traditional definition of myth as a narrative that is mostly set outside the present world and relates to the world of the gods.

Implicit in the existence of many different mythemes is their potential to be variously combined and to produce manifold

9. Walter Burkert, e.g. “The Organization of Myth”, in: *id.*, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979, p. 5-6.

10. Eugene Dorfman, *The Narreme in the Medieval Romance Epic. An introduction to narrative structures*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1969.

11. See e.g. Michael S. Gazzaniga, “Organization of the Human Brain”, *Science* 245(4921), 1989, p. 947-952; *id.*, *Who’s in Charge? Free will and the science of the brain*, New York, Harper Collins, 2011, esp. p. 75ff. For a first application of this insight to Egyptian myth see Katja Goebis, “Egyptian Mythos as Logos: Attempt at a redefinition of ‘mythical thinking’” in: Elizabeth Froom and Angela McDonald (eds.), *Decorum and Experience: Essays in Ancient Culture for John Baines*, Oxford, Griffith Institute, 2013, p. 127-134.

12. See already John Baines, “Egyptian Myth and Discourse: myth, gods, and the early written and iconographic record”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 50, 1991, p. 81-105.

accounts, of varying length and format, of relationships between the different deities of the pantheon, their characteristics, and the localities and objects with which they are associated. Good Egyptian examples of this are how Hathor and other solar Eye goddesses may be – even at the same time – mothers, wives, and daughters, mostly of solar deities, and can occur in varying guises, including those of woman, cow, lioness, snake, but also tree, rock formation, and others; four of these are encapsulated in a single Late Period statue (**Fig. 1**).¹³

Other examples include Osiris, who can be a celestial deity from the *Pyramid Texts* onwards, where he is identified with the constellation Orion,¹⁴ yet he is also the source of legitimate kingship for the king as Horus and is primarily associated with rule over the afterlife and thus with death and the subterranean realm.¹⁵ Aspects of deities are particularly explicit in the collections of epithets found in hymns and litanies such as the New Kingdom *Litany of Re*, which lists 72 different names and roles of the sungod,¹⁶ or texts

13. See e.g. Saphinaz A. Naguib, “‘Fille du dieu’, ‘épouse du dieu’, ‘mère du dieu’ ou la métaphore féminine”, in: Ulrich Luft (ed.), *The Intellectual Heritage of Egypt: Studies presented to László Kákossy by friends and colleagues on the occasion of his 60th birthday*, Budapest, Chaire d'égyptologie de l'Université Loránd Eötvös, 1992, p. 437-447; René Preys, “Les manifestations d'Hathor: protection, alimentation, et illumination divines”, *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 34, 2007, p. 353-375.

14. See Rolf Krauss, *Astronomische Konzepte und Jenseitsvorstellungen in den Pyramidentexten*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz (“Ägyptologische Abhandlungen”, 59), 1997, p. 146-204.

15. For summaries of theories: Mark Smith, *Following Osiris. Perspectives on the Osirian Afterlife from four Millennia*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017. On royal aspects of Osiris see e.g. Katja Goebis, “How ‘Royal’ (and how ‘Mythical’) are the Coffin Texts? Reflections on the definition, function, and relativity of some etic concepts in a Middle Kingdom funerary text corpus”, in: Rune Nyord (ed.), *Concepts in Middle Kingdom Funerary Culture*, (in press); on local variation in conceptions of Osiris, see Lucía Díaz-Iglesias Llanos, *Naref and Osiris Naref: A study in Herakleopolitan religious traditions*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter (“Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde Beihefte”, 3), 2017.

16. Hymn to Osiris, enumerating cult centres, roles, and manifestations including Orion, bringer of vegetation, and legitimate king, followed by the myth's major episodes (Louvre stela C286; see e.g. Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. II. *The New Kingdom* (2nd ed.), Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006, p. 81-86. *Litany of Re*: Erik Hornung, *Das Buch der Anbetung des Re im Westen (Sonnenlitanei): Nach den Versionen des Neuen Reiches*, 2 vols, Geneva, Éditions des Belles-Lettres (“Aegyptiaca helvetica”), 1975.

such as the Ptolemaic *Book of Hours*,¹⁷ which focuses on the many roles of Osiris.

In line with their multifaceted nature, myths played a role in many areas of Egyptian culture and are attested in diverse media and genres that include:

- Fully composed, written mythical narratives; such stories may also have been recited and performed in lost oral settings;
- Written excerpts that could be quoted in many different contexts;
- Iconic evocations of individual mythical actors, objects, or scenarios, used on their own – for example as amulets – or in combination with other referents or media, within pictorial compositions or in architectural forms.

This abundance of potential formats and applications, in turn, will have had additional bearing on the conspicuous flexibility in the characteristics of individual mythical actors, and the manifold and varying relationships in which they could stand with one another, as well as the contexts in which they could be used. This process may be modelled as one of spiralling as well as hermeneutic causation, incorporating components along the lines illustrated in **Fig. 2**.

With these preliminaries in mind we introduce what we consider to be the most important types of occurrences of myth in Egypt, with the aim of homing in on a more productive definition of this concept. In proposing this kind of typology, we hope to facilitate discussion, and potentially comparison, with other traditions. Some of these, such as the Near Eastern or Greek traditions, influenced that of Egypt, at least in later periods. Moreover, the *interpretatio graeca* of the Egyptian pantheon¹⁸ attests to the “translatability” of its mythical actors; the same applies in the opposite direction to the

17. Andreas Pries, *Die Stundenwachen im Osiriskult: Eine Studie zur Tradition und späten Rezeption von Ritualen im Alten Ägypten*, 2 vols, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz (“Studien zur Spätägyptischen Religion”, 2), 2011.

18. See in general Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in cross-cultural discourse in the biblical world*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck (“Forschungen zum Alten Testament”, 57), 2008; for Egypt, see Alexandra von Lieven, “Translating Gods, Interpreting Gods. On the mechanisms behind the *interpretatio graeca* of Egyptian gods”, in: Ian Rutherford (ed.), *Graeco-Egyptian Interactions. Literature, Translation, and Culture, 500 BC-AD 300*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 61-82.

integration, assimilation, and “Egyptianization” of foreign deities.¹⁹ If comparable typologies can be established for these other traditions, it may become more feasible to approximate the essence of myth. For reasons of space, we treat only a small number of mythical uses. We also concede that there is some overlap among our proposed categories.

I/ AETIOLOGICAL USES; MYTHICAL FRAMING OF THIS-WORLDLY EVENTS

A relatively common function of Egyptian myth is aetiology, in which a narrative element accounts for the origin and meaning of certain phenomena ranging from the establishment of the cosmos and the state to specific rules of behaviour or names of places, deities, or festivals. The explanations are often based on analogy, which may be phonetic, substantive, or a simple assertion of a link. In Egypt, aetiologies are commonly framed in terms of “This is how/when X came into being (*hpr* X (*pw*))”, although other formats are equally widespread.²⁰ Cosmic and ritual examples of this pattern are found, for example, in the New Kingdom *Book of the Heavenly Cow* (or *Destruction of Mankind*),²¹ which explains the rhythm

19. See Keiko Tazawa, *Syro-Palestinian Deities in New Kingdom Egypt: The hermeneutics of their existence*, Oxford, Archaeopress (“British Archaeological Reports International Series”, 1965), 2009; Christiane Zivie-Coche, “Foreign Deities in Egypt”, in: Jacco Dieleman, Willeke Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2011, (<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/7tr1814c>); also Océane Henri, “Plusieurs personnes sous un seul masque: l’*interpretatio* d’Artémis en Égypte”, in: Frédéric Colin, *et al.* (eds.), *Interpretatio: traduire l’altérité culturelle dans les civilisations de l’Antiquité*, Paris, de Boccard (“Études d’archéologie et d’histoire ancienne”, 25), 2015, p. 123-145.

20. Examples in Dimitri Meeks, *Mythes et légendes du delta d’après le Papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.84*, Cairo, Institut français d’archéologie orientale (“Mémoires publiés par les membres de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale”, 125), 2006; see e.g. p. 14-15: explanation of the cyclical absence of the moon, due to the Eye of Re being swallowed by a pig, and of its reappearance when Thoth placed it back in the horizon; p. 17, §18: Origin of green unguent from the iris of the Wedjat Eye when Nefertem placed it at his forehead. See also below, (4) Intellectual Uses.

21. Erik Hornung, *Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh: Eine Ätiologie des Unvollkommenen*, 2nd ed., Friburg and Göttingen, Universitätsverlag and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (“Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis”, 46), 1991.

of day and night, the origin of the “Festival of Drunkenness” in honour of the solar Eye-goddess Hathor, and that of some of her epithets.²²

A. Aetiology of a Divine Epithet – Phonetic Analogy

<i>ḏd.jn ḥm n R'w n nṯrt tn</i>	And then the majesty of Re said to this goddess:
<i>ḳy.tj-wy m ḥtp jmzyt</i>	“Welcome, welcome in peace, O Lovely One (Imayt)!”
<i>ḥpr nḥrt m Jmzw</i>	- That is how the Beautiful One in Imau came into being. ²³
...	

B. Aetiology of a Festival – Substantive Analogy, based in mythical precedent

<i>jr n=s sḏrwt m trw rnpwt</i>	“Drinks shall be prepared for her on the annual festivals,
<i>jp st r ḥmwt=j</i>	and they shall be entrusted to my female servants ...”
<i>ḥpr jrt sḏrwt pw</i>	This is how there came into being the preparing of drafts
<i>m jpt ḥmwt ḥb n ḥwt- ḥrw</i>	as a task of the servants at the festival of Hathor ...

And later in the text, in a dialogue between the sungod and the moongod Thoth:

22. See e.g. Betsy M. Bryan, “Hatshepsut and Cultic Revelries in the New Kingdom”, in: José M. Galán, Betsy M. Bryan, Peter F. Dorman (eds.), *Creativity and Innovation in the Reign of Hatshepsut*, Chicago, Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (“Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations”, 69), 2014, p. 103-106, for the “Hall / Porch of Drunkenness” in the Mut temple at Karnak; Heike Sternberg-El Hotabi, *Ein Hymnus an die Göttin Hathor und das Ritual ‘Hathor das Trankopfer darbringen’ nach den Tempeltexten der griechisch-römischen Zeit*, Turnhout, Brepols (“Rites égyptiens”, 7), 1992.

23. Translations based on E. Hornung, *Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh*: A: p. 9, 40, 58 with nn. 67, 70, verses 92-95; B: verses 97-99 (B); C: p. 23-24, 45, verses 244-245.

C. Aetiology of a Cosmic Situation – Analogy plainly asserted

<i>jw=j gr r rdjt jnh=k pty</i>	“I will cause that you encircle the two skies
<i>m nfrw=k m hqwt=k</i>	with your beauty and your light” –
<i>hpr j’h pw n dhwtj</i>	That is how the moon of Thoth came into
	being.

In some cases, the aetiological significance of a myth is less explicit, as when an entire myth accounts for a particular state of affairs. For example, Wolfgang Wettengel has proposed that the *Tale of the Two Brothers* may include a justification of the kingship of Baal (here named Bata), and thus of an originally Canaanite/Near Eastern figure, as ruler of Egypt.²⁴ We address further examples below.

Besides aetiologies, simple couching in mythical terms is common. The Egyptians, like many other cultures, employed a genealogical system of temporal, structural, and political succession to explain the origins and configuration of the world, with a creator deity making himself into many and passing on his powers.²⁵ In early sources such as the *Pyramid* and *Coffin Texts* the most common pattern is a cosmic succession, in which the sungod as creator bestows kingship on transitory successors, such as the moon (as in the *Cow Book*), morning star, or Osiris-Orion.²⁶ In the terrestrial sphere, the succession of the heir to the throne after his father’s death is normally presented in terms of Horus succeeding Osiris, as in the Ramesside mythical compositions of the *Contentings of Horus and Seth*, or the somewhat later *Memphite Theology*. This succession is at the same time viewed as reflecting the glorious rule of Re or Harakhte following the darkness of the night. In the Victory stela of Piye (ca. 730 bce), Peftjauawybast addresses Piye in such cosmic terms:

24. Wolfgang Wettengel, *Die Erzählung von den beiden Brüdern. Der Papyrus d’Orbiney und die Königsideologie der Ramessiden*, Friburg and Göttingen, Universitätsverlag and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (“Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis”, 195), 2003, e.g. p. 241.

25. See Paula Philippson, *Genealogie als mythische Form. Studien zur Theogonie des Hesiod*, Oslo, Brøgger (“Symbolae Osloenses Fasc. Supplet.”, 7), 1936.

26. See K. Goebis, “How ‘Royal’ (and how ‘Mythical’) are the Coffin Texts?”, (in press).

<i>twt js hrw-3hty</i>	For you are Harakhte,
<i>hry-tp jhmw-sk</i>	chief of the immortal stars
<i>wnn=f wnn=k m njswt</i>	– as long as he exists, you are king,
<i>n(n) sk=f n(n) sk=k</i>	as long as he does not perish, neither do you... ²⁷

Mythical aetiologies generally explain, justify, or rationalize an aspect of the world or a specific situation.

II/ POLITICAL USES

As is evident in this last example, myths were mobilized politically, the most important probably being the conception of the king as deputy and bodily offspring of the god(s), which is most explicit in the *Myth of the Divine Birth*.²⁸ This is attested from the Old Kingdom onwards,²⁹ with a full version, combining images and text, being known from the early 18th dynasty reign of Hatshepsut. The head of the pantheon, here Amun-Re, takes on the form of the ruling king to impregnate the queen, whose offspring, the heir to the throne, is thus the god's "bodily son (*z3 n ht*)", a widespread epithet of kings from early on. The deity explicitly confers rule on the newborn child.

Such political myths served to cement the the king's and the dynasty's claim to the throne. Perhaps more importantly, they underpinned the very existence of the state and its system of rule. Thus, the 19th dynasty Turin kinglist enumerates all kings believed to have ruled Egypt to the end of the 17th dynasty, but

27. Lines 75-76; see e.g. Robert K. Ritner, *The Libyan Anarchy. Inscriptions from Egypt's Third Intermediate Period*, Atlanta, Society for Biblical Literature, 2009, p. 466, 472, 483, with references.

28. Hellmut Brunner, *Die Geburt des Gottkönigs: Studien zur Überlieferung eines altägyptischen Mythos*², Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz ("Ägyptologische Abhandlungen", 10), 1991, pl. 14 for the transfer of kingship by Amun-Re.

29. Mohamed Megahed and Hana Vymazalová, "Ancient Egyptian Royal Circumcision from the Pyramid Complex of Djedkare?", *Anthropologie* 49, 2011, p. 155-164; 12th dynasty: Adela Oppenheim, "The Early Life of Pharaoh: Divine birth and adolescence scenes in the causeway of Senwosret III at Dahshur", in: Miroslav Bárta *et al.* (eds.), *Abusir & Saqqara in the Year 2010: Prague May 31st to June 4th 2010 I*, Prague, Czech Institute of Egyptology Charles University, 2011, p. 171-188.

the “historical” dynasties, which begin with Meni, are preceded by a dynasty of gods, the Followers of Horus, and a sequence of “spirit” rulers (*ꜥḥw*).³⁰ The fragmentary list of god-kings (the beginning of which was unfortunately destroyed) starts with Geb, Osiris, Seth, and Horus, that is, the male members of the Heliopolitan Ennead. The Greek version of such a list produced by the historian Manetho a millennium later places Ptah, Re, and Shu before this group; Ptah (translated into Hephaistos) heads the line in accord with the Memphite version of the creation account. As the traditional Ennead would have been headed by (a form of) Atum, the myth of the gods ruling Egypt in antiquity may have been adapted to particular political and religious circumstances – potentially by the time of the Ramesside Royal Canon.³¹

This kind of adaptation seems to have been current in Egypt into the Roman Period, and political legitimation emerges as an important application of myth, with some motifs also transmitted to Rome. According to Cassius Dio, the daughter of emperor Caligula was born in a “supernatural way (*daimonios*)”, carried to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, and placed on the god’s knee, before being handed over to Minerva to be suckled by her.³² For earlier Egypt some suggest that myths may have been performed to celebrate and legitimize royal accession. Thus, Ursula Verhoeven proposes that the Ramesside narrative version of the

30. Alan H. Gardiner, *The Royal Canon of Turin*, Oxford, Griffith Institute, 1959, pl. I, fr. 11.

31. On the dynasty of gods, and its transmutations in later copies, see E. Hornung, *Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh*, p. 88-90; Donald B. Redford, *Pharaonic King Lists, Annals, and Day-books: A contribution to the study of the Egyptian sense of history*, Mississauga (Ont.), Benben (“Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities Publication”, 4), 1986, p. 231-234. The Turin list appears to have space for at least three more divine names before Geb, and it too could have begun with Ptah, in line with the new importance of the Memphite creator in the aftermath of the Amarna Period (cf. E. Hornung, *Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh*, p. 89).

32. Cassius Dio, LIX, 28, 2-6, and Egyptian parallels: Hans Peter L’Orange, “Das Geburtsritual der Pharaonen am römischen Kaiserhof”, *Symbolae Osloenses* 21, 1941, p. 105-116; see also Erich Winter, “Octavian/Augustus als Soter, Euergetes und Epiphanes: Die Datierung des Kalabscha-Tores”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 130, 2003, p. 207, who cites an ode of Horace (III, 5) in which Augustus is presented as a terrestrial equivalent to celestial Jupiter.

Contendings of Horus and Seth may have been used to justify the succession of Rameses V to the throne: in reinforcing the schema of passing the kingship from father to son rather than to the deceased king's brother, this version might reflect a decision in favour of Rameses V and not his uncle, the later Rameses VI.³³ Others have proposed different legitimizing interpretations.³⁴ Such political purposes might fit with the large amount of deliberation in the tale before the final verdict asserted the *status quo* and assigned the office to the predecessor's son, Horus, rather than his brother.

Political legitimation has also been seen as underlying the *Ramesside Tale of the Two Brothers*, which narrates episodes like those of the struggle of Horus and Seth but with the protagonists being the siblings Anubis and Bata, local gods of Upper Egyptian nomes 17 and 18. Bata, having overcome many attempts on his honour and life, finally becomes king and is ultimately succeeded by his elder brother Anubis. Wolfgang Wettengel has suggested that the text was composed at the command of Seti II of Dynasty 19, who would have sought to legitimize his rule vis-à-vis Amenmesse in this way.³⁵ Another instance of mythical legitimation of an unusual, fratrilineal inheritance of the throne may be Papyrus Westcar's birth story of royal triplets, which Detlef Franke tentatively interpreted as relating to the

33. Ursula Verhoeven, "Ein historischer 'Sitz im Leben' für die Erzählung von Horus und Seth des Papyrus Chester Beatty I", in: Mechthild Schade-Busch (ed.), *Wege öffnen. Festschrift für Rolf Gundlach zum 65. Geburtstag*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz ("Ägypten und Altes Testament" 35), 1996, p. 347-363. Jean Revez points out that the title *sn njswt*, "King's Brother" is not attested before the 25th dynasty, when fratrilineal succession became common: "The Role of the Kings' Brothers in the Transmission of Royal Power in ancient Egypt and Kush: A cross-cultural study", in: Julie R. Anderson and Derek A. Welsby (eds.), *The Fourth Cataract and Beyond: Proceedings of the 12th international conference for Nubian Studies*, Leuven, Peeters, 2014, p. 538.

34. Michèle Broze argues for legitimizing Ramesses IV: *Mythe et roman en Égypte ancienne. Les aventures d'Horus et Seth dans le Papyrus Chester Beatty I*, Leuven, Peeters ("Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta", 76), 1996, p. 10, 269-275, 281.

35. W. Wettengel, *Die Erzählung von den beiden Brüdern*, esp. p. 250-263, who also notes the myth's significance in evoking the agricultural seasons and combining solar and Osirian aspects (p. 216-218); for a different interpretation: Thomas Schneider, "Innovation in Literature on Behalf of Politics: The Tale of the Two Brothers, Ugarit, and 19th dynasty history", *Ägypten und Levante* 18, 2008, p. 315-326.

13th dynasty succession of three brothers, Neferhotep I, Sahathor, and Sobekhotep IV.³⁶

A different mythical development of the succession of brothers appears in the *Memphite Theology* on the 25th dynasty Shabaka Stone. Here Geb, as earthgod and first holder of the kingship, bestows the succession initially on both Horus and Seth: Seth is to rule the South, Horus the North; Geb later changes his decision and assigns the entire country to Horus. A political explanation holds that the text would legitimize the Nubian dynasty, which had annexed Egypt progressively: king Shabaka would have needed to justify to Kushite and Egyptian elites that he had “united” Kush and Egypt under a single Kushite rule, and perhaps also the choice of his heir.³⁷ The 30th dynasty Naos of el-Arish, finally, presents a *Myth of Divine Kings* in which first Shu and then – after a revolt against him that entails his death – Geb inherits the throne of Re-Harakhte. This myth has been interpreted as relating to the political situation between Dynasties 29 and 30, involving kings Akoris and Nectanebo I.³⁸

36. Detlef Franke, *Das Heiligtum des Heqaib auf Elephantine: Geschichte eines Provinzheiligtums im Mittleren Reich*, Heidelberg, Heidelberger Orientverlag (“Studien zur Archäologie und Geschichte Altägyptens”, 9), 1994, p. 69-70. For the text, see e.g. Richard Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems, 1940–1640 BC*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, p. 116-120. On this unusual succession see also J. Revez, “The Role of the Kings’ Brothers in the Transmission of Royal Power”, p. 538-540, who demonstrates that all three kings avoided the title *sn njswt*, “King’s Brother” and rather presented themselves as *sz njswt*, “King’s Son” in line with the expected Osirian and Horian mythical precedent, even though their own father had only borne the priestly title “God’s Father” (*jtj ntr*).

37. Amr El-Hawary, *Wortschöpfung. Die Memphitische Theologie und die Siegesstele des Pije – Zwei Zeugen kultureller Repräsentation in der 25. Dynastie*, Friburg and Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (“Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis”, 243), 2010, e.g. p. 206-207. The revised order of Shebitqu before Shabaka fits with this argument and with evidence relating to the succession of Taharqa; see Claus Jurman, “The Order of the Kushite Kings according to Sources from the Eastern Desert and Thebes. Or: *Shabataka was here first!*”, *Journal of Egyptian History* 10/2, 2017, p. 124-151. References to the same pattern of distribution between Seth and Horus are found in the Saite P. Brooklyn 47.218.84 XII, 2-4, where they are located in Lower Egyptian Hermopolis, with Thoth appearing as the great judge and vizier: D. Meeks, *Mythes et légendes du delta*, p. 26, 266-267.

38. Thomas Schneider, “Mythos und Zeitgeschichte in der 30. Dynastie. Eine politische Lektüre des ‘Mythos von den Götterkönigen’”, in: Andreas Brodbeck (ed.), *Ein ägyptisches Glasperlenspiel: Ägyptologische Beiträge für Erik Hornung aus seinem Schülerkreis*, Berlin, Mann, 1998, p. 207-242.

If these interpretations are correct, such examples suggest that myths were adapted, and in some cases perhaps composed, to validate a new dynasty, ruler, or individual religious preference and cultural differences, as with the emphasis that Nubian royal texts place on the relationship between Isis and Horus as a mythical precedent for royal accession which, Jean Revez proposes, mobilizes the salience of kings' mothers and sisters in their ideology.³⁹ Parallels for such political, legitimizing uses of myth are easily found in other cultures.⁴⁰ This may indeed be a general function of such narratives, while the stories' adaptability to different political scenarios highlights the flexibility of Egyptian myths.

III/ USES IN RITUAL, MAGICAL RECITATIONS, MEDICAL PRESCRIPTIONS

Extensive written narrative constitutes a tiny portion of evidence for myth in Egypt, with the earliest reasonably clear examples dating to the Middle Kingdom. Instead, from very early on, episodes of mythical cycles (perhaps ones that were prominent in oral contexts) were used to enhance the efficacy of ritual and medico-magical spells and objects through the analogies they presented.⁴¹ The daily ritual of Egyptian temples offers excellent

39. Jean Revez, "Looking at History through the Prism of Mythology: Can the Osirian myth shed any light on ancient Egyptian royal succession patterns?", *Journal of Egyptian History* 3/1, 2010, p. 60-66.

40. E.g. Eckhard Frahm, "Counter-texts, Commentaries, and Adaptations: Politically motivated responses to the Babylonian Epic of Creation in Mesopotamia, the Biblical World, and elsewhere", *Orient* 45 (special issue: Akio Tsukimoto (ed.), *Conflict, Peace and Religion in the Ancient Near East*), Tokyo, 2010, p. 3-33; for a classic study on Greece: Martin P. Nilsson, *Cults, Myths, Oracles and Politics in Ancient Greece; with two appendices: the Ionian phylae, the phratries* (2nd ed.), Göteborg, Paul Aström, 1986.

41. Thomas Schneider, "Die Waffe der Analogie. Altägyptische Magie als System", in: Manuel Bachmann and Karen Gloy (eds.), *Das Analogiedenken. Vorstöße in ein neues Gebiet der Rationalitätstheorie*, Friburg-Munich, Karl Alber, 2000, p. 37-85; Joris F. Borghouts, *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts*, Leiden, Brill ("Religious Texts Translation Series NISABA", 9), 1978, p. ix-x, who speaks of "mythologizing" the spells, while Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, Chicago, Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago ("Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations", 54), 1993, p. 76 with n. 338, terms such passages historiolas (compare David Frankfurter, "Narrating Power:

examples, as attested in the 19th dynasty temple of Seti I at Abydos and early first millennium papyri with versions for Amun and Mut at Karnak.⁴² Strikingly, these rituals abound with references to both the Osirian and the solar cycles. Typically, every recipient of the cult has the role of Osiris and performers have those of Osirian helper-deities, including Horus as son and avenger, Anubis as embalmer, and Thoth as keeper and enforcer of divine knowledge and law, as well as judge.⁴³ Every cult object is referred to as the Eye of Horus, evoking the episode in the struggle between Horus and Seth in which the Eye is lost and later restored, in several versions with Thoth's help. But solar myths too are mobilized, especially the reappearance of the sun after a period of absence and the ascription of the solar Eye's sheen to shimmering objects such as crowns or unguents.

Also in texts from broadly medical contexts, most mythical analogies draw on episodes from the Osirian cycle, but references to the victorious sunrise are also common. Where mother and child are to be protected, the mother is equated with Isis and the child with her son Horus. Since Isis shielded her child from all adversity, especially attempts on his life by Seth, equating the sick person with Horus would aid their survival and recovery. While such mythemes are widespread in medical papyri, such as Papyri Ebers, Edwin Smith, or Berlin 3027,⁴⁴ a particularly

The theory and practice of the magical *historiola* in ritual spells", in: Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (eds.), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, Leiden: Brill, 1995, p. 457-476).

42. Papyri Berlin 3053, 3014, 3055; see Nadja S. Braun, *Pharao und Priester – Sakrale Affirmation von Herrschaft durch Kultvollzug. Das tägliche Kultbildritual im Neuen Reich und in der Dritten Zwischenzeit*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz ("Philippika", 23), 2013; Katherine Eaton, *Ancient Egyptian Temple Ritual: Performance, pattern, and practice*, New York, Routledge ("Routledge Studies in Egyptology", 1), 2013; Katja Goebis, "King as God and God as King", in: Rolf Gundlach and Kate Spence (eds.), *Palace and Temple: Architecture – decoration – ritual. Cambridge, July, 16th-17th, 2007. 5. Symposium zur ägyptischen Königsideologie*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2011, p. 57-101.

43. K. Goebis, "A Functional Approach to Egyptian Myth and Mythemes", esp. p. 51-54 for solar myths; for Thoth see Martin A. Stadler, *Weiser und Wesir. Studien zu Vorkommen, Rolle und Wesen des Gottes Thot im Ägyptischen Totenbuch*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck ("Orientalische Religionen in der Antike", 1), 2009, p. 129-134, 335-343.

44. For example, a spell in P. Ebers for removing a bandage (1,12-2,1) refers both to Horus having been "released" from the evil done to him by Seth, and to Re being reborn from the primeval waters: Jacobus van Dijk, "The Birth of

striking example is the narrative *Legend of Isis and Re*, which forms part of a spell against the effects of scorpion bite. Isis uses a scorpion bite, which causes Re unspeakable pain, to extract his sole true name from him, which she then uses in healing counter-magic.⁴⁵ Unusually, this spell includes a long mythical narrative, in the course of which Horus appears as the only other person who may have knowledge of Re's name. Ritual instructions follow at the end:

“Break out, scorpions! Leave Re! Eye of Horus, leave the god! ... See, the great god has given his name away. Re shall live, once the poison has died! NN, born of NN lives, once the poison has died!” – so said Isis, the great one ... who knows Re by his own name.

Words to be spoken over an image of Atum-Horus-Hekny, a woman's figure of Isis and an image of Horus. To be drawn on the hand of the sufferer. To be licked off by the man. To be done in the same manner on a piece of fine linen, to be applied to the sufferer's throat. The herb is Scorpion's Herb. To be ground with beer or wine. To be drunk by the one who suffers from scorpion's sting. It is an excellent means to kill (the effects of) poison, proven an infinite number of times.”⁴⁶

The amount of detail in this text may suggest that the myth had other applications. The seemingly superfluous reference to passing the secret name on to Horus could, for example, point toward a royal context. Together with the statement at the beginning that kingship over gods and men was identical, this would fit with use in contexts of royal legitimation such as those discussed in section 1.

Another myth known only from magico-medical contexts is *Isis and the Rich Woman's Son*, which is attested in papyri and on protective statues and stelae (cippi)⁴⁷ (**Fig. 9**) that typically

Horus according to the Ebers Papyrus”, *Jaarbericht van het vooraziat.-egyptisch Genootschap, Ex Oriente Lux* 26, 1980, p. 10-25. Other examples: Naoko Yamazaki, *Zaubersprüche für Mutter und Kind. Papyrus Berlin 302, Achet B2*, Berlin, Norbert Düring, 2003, p. 5 with n. 5.

45. See J. F. Borghouts, *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts*, p. 51-55 (no. 84); R. K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, p. 76, 95-96; Pascal Vernus, “Isis et les scorpions: le frémissement du littéraire sous le fatras magique”, in: Jean-Pierre Montesino (ed.), *De Cybèle à Isis*, Paris, Cybèle, 2011, p. 27-37.

46. Translation after Borghouts.

47. E.g. the 30th dynasty Metternich Stela: James P. Allen, *The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt*, New York- New Haven-London, Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2005, p. 49-63, with refs.

bear images of the Horus child standing on crocodiles, iconizing his triumph over adversity.⁴⁸ As in *Isis and Re*, the goddess is first responsible for, then cures, scorpion bite, again highlighting her role as provider of maternal care and protection. This characteristic produced the iconography of *Isis lactans*, common, from the New Kingdom onwards, as a motif for amulets, among other contexts (see section 8).

The same factors of mythical analogy and precedent applied in funerary ritual contexts, where myth facilitated access to the afterlife or the divine sphere by setting the deceased or cult performer in relation to the gods. The third millennium *Pyramid Texts* abound with mythical references.

IV/ INTELLECTUAL USES

Elements of myths served intellectual purposes, as when astronomical texts present the movement of the planets and decans in the forms of Horus, Seth, and Osiris travelling across the sky in barques (**Fig. 3**).⁴⁹

Some of these uses overlap with aetiologies, as in the *Cow-Book*'s explanation of the nightly presence of the moon in the sky. A good example is the short mythical story accompanying the Nut picture attested in the cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos,⁵⁰ which

48. Heike Sternberg-El Hotabi, *Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der Horusstelen: Ein Beitrag zur Religionsgeschichte Ägyptens im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz ("Ägyptologische Abhandlungen", 62), 1999.

49. See also Otto Neugebauer and Richard A. Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, vol. III, *Decans, planets, constellations and zodiacs*, Providence (RI), Brown University Press ("Brown Egyptological Studies", 3), 1969, p. 153-156, 175-182, e.g. pl. 3; for the Graeco-Roman Period see Gyula Priskin, "The Dendera Zodiacs as Narratives of the Myth of Osiris, Isis, and the Child Horus", *Égypte nilotique et méditerranéenne* 8, 2015, p. 133-185.

50. "Text G" / the "Dramatic Text" of the *Book of Nut*; see Henri Frankfort, *The Cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos*, London, Egypt Exploration Society ("Memoirs of the Egypt Exploration Society", 39), 1933, pl. lxxxii; attested also in other late New Kingdom and Late Period funerary structures, and in a double, Hieratic and Demotic, version and commentary, in Papyrus Carlsberg 1 (2nd century AD); Alexandra von Lieven, *The Carlsberg Papyri*, vol. VIII. *Grundriss des Laufes der Sterne. Das sogenannte Nutbuch*, 2 vols, Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Forlag ("CNI Publications", 31), 2007, edition with parallels; O. Neugebauer and R. A. Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, vol. I, *The Early Decans*, Providence

explains the cyclical disappearance and heliacal rising of the decanal stars by making them into children of Nut and Geb, born and swallowed again every day by their mother, who is referred to accordingly as a “sow”.⁵¹ Geb quarrels with Nut, complaining that she keeps devouring their offspring, but is reassured by Shu that his children, the stars, will be reborn cyclically:

“She will give birth to them and they will live, and will go out from the place under her behind in the East each day, just as she (habitually) bears Re every day. Her name is not pronounced as ‘mother of the gods’ until she gives birth (again).”⁵²

Other, damaged sections of the text concern the genesis and behaviour of the moon and planets, exploiting the structure of myths surrounding Horus and Seth.⁵³

Many sources attest the progressive reassembly of the Eye of Horus that had been torn apart by Seth – the mythical object par excellence – signifying the perpetual waxing and waning of the moon, but beyond astronomical interpretations, the Eye came to represent mathematical fractions of measures no later than the New Kingdom (**Fig. 4**).⁵⁴

(RI), Brown University Press (“Brown Egyptological Studies”, 3), 1960, p. 67-80, pls 51-54.

51. Nils Billing, *Nut: The Goddess of Life in Text and Iconography*, Uppsala, Uppsala University Press (“Uppsala Studies in Egyptology”, 5), 2002, p. 18-21; for a rare representation of this divine form see Alison Roberts, *My Heart my Mother: Death and Rebirth in Ancient Egypt*, Rottingdean, NorthGate, 2000, p. 103 with fig. 80. Geb can be termed a “pig” by association with his consort’s sow form: D. Meeks, *Mythes et légendes du delta*, p. 82 n. 192, with earlier literature.

52. Translation after A. von Lieven, *Grundriss des Laufes der Sterne*, p. 81; O. Neugebauer and R. A. Parker *Egyptian Astronomical Texts I*, p. 77, pl. 52; p. 54.

53. A. von Lieven, *Grundriss des Laufes der Sterne*, p. 293-294. The sections dealing with lunar mythology are absent from P. Carlsberg 1 (*ibid.*, p. 9-10), but elements occur in the Late Period collection of myths from the Delta in P. Brooklyn 47.218.84 §13; D. Meeks, *Mythes et légendes du delta*. Planetary phenomena are explored mythically in P. Carlsberg 228 and other fragments: Alexandra von Lieven, *Grundriss des Laufes der Sterne*, p. 12, 190-203.

54. The generally accepted interpretation, summarized by Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar: Being an introduction to the study of hieroglyphs*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1927, p. 197-199, has been attacked by James Ritter, “Closing the Eye of Horus: the rise and fall of ‘Horus-eye Fractions’”, in: John M. Steele and Annette Imhausen (eds.), *Under One Sky: Astronomy and mathematics in the Ancient Near East*, Münster, Ugarit-Verlag, 2002, p. 297-323, who traces the hieratic and hieroglyphic fraction signs and concludes that the association with

A conspicuous gap is in evidence for the use of myth in school education. Whereas the Mesopotamian scribal curriculum employed myths abundantly, even in the teaching of cuneiform to Egyptian scribes at Amarna,⁵⁵ and students in Graeco-Roman Egypt learned about Homeric and other Greek myths and epic heroes at all educational levels,⁵⁶ any use of Egyptian myth in such contexts remains elusive. There is indirect evidence for learning about gods in education, as shown by texts such as the perhaps late Ramesside *Onomasticon of Amenemope*, “Scribe of God’s Books in the House of Life” – the official scriptorium and library. This self-titled “Instruction ... to guide the ignorant to know all that exists” (*rḥ wnnt nbt*) is a tabular list of nouns that includes the generic terms *nṯr* “god” and *nṯrt* “goddess”,⁵⁷ but no individual deities or myths. A Graeco-Roman Period text in

the Eye of Horus is no earlier than the New Kingdom. Yet such a system might at least partly explain the complicated way in which calculations are represented, with fractions shown as sums of certain basic fractions rather than compounded ones, e.g. 11/15 as 2/3 (+) 1/15 (see e.g. Annette Imhausen, *Mathematics in Ancient Egypt: A contextual history*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2016, e.g. p. 4-5, 53-54).

55. Evidence from the “Records Office” at Amarna, where cuneiform texts were composed, stored, and plausibly studied by Egyptian scribes, perhaps instructed by Hittite teachers, includes material from all levels of a Mesopotamian scribal curriculum, with myths such as Nergal and Ereshkigal or Adapa and the South Wind, on tablets that bear Egyptian verse points (EA 356 + EA 357), probably showing that they were written there from dictation: Shlomo Izre’el, *The Amarna Scholarly Tablets*, Groningen, Styx, 1997, p. 2, 11, 43-60; see p. 4-14 for evidence for a cuneiform scribal school at Amarna.

56. Evidence collected in Raffaella Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1996, e.g. p. 43, 89; *ead.*, “The Grammarian’s Choice: The Popularity of Euripides’ Phoenissae in Hellenistic and Roman Education”, in: Yun Lee Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, Leiden, Brill, 2001, p. 241-259. Daniela Colomo and Chiara Meccariello show that mythological references are found across papyri, attesting to various levels of school education from the 3rd century BCE to the 8th century CE. Evidence relates to 18% of beginners’ exercises, 50% of intermediate exercises, and 66% of advanced rhetorical exercises: project “Learning (from) mythology”, presented at the Scholars’ Colloquium of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities, November 2016; we thank Chiara Meccariello for providing some preliminary results prior to publication. For *mythos* – storytelling – as a basic school exercise in Greek and Roman culture in general see e.g., George A. Kennedy (ed.), *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, Leiden, Brill, 2003, 9-10, who cites “The exercises of Aelius Theon”; Anne Gangloff, “Mythes, fables, et rhétorique à l’époque impériale”, *Rhetorica* 20, 2002, p. 25-56.

57. They represent a category of beings following terms for sky, water, and earth and preceding spirits (*zḥw*) and the king: Alan H. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, vol. I, London, Oxford University Press, 1947, p. 13*, nos. 63-64.

Greek, likely a teacher's model, contains a list of Egyptian and Greek gods intermingled, reading: "Of Isis, of Sarapis, of Hermes, of Harpokrates, of Apis, of Mestasytmis (Egyptian *msdr sdm*), of Anubis", where Hermes may signify the moon/Thoth here)⁵⁸ and thus attests to Egyptian-Greek syncretism. While most of the deities listed belong to the Osiris cycle, they cannot be used by themselves to infer school education through myths.

For pharaonic Egypt, there is to date no evidence for the use of narrative myth as part of scribal education in places such as Deir el-Medina. Similarly, the walls of Tomb N13.1 at Asyut, which is credibly identified as a New Kingdom place of instruction, are covered in school-texts that are otherwise known to have featured in scribal education but do not include a single myth.⁵⁹

V/ LITERARY USES

The absence of myths in evidence for Egyptian schooling may be set in relation to the question of the "literariness" of Egyptian texts, its relatively late development, and the range of genres that it covers. Scholars such as Antonio Loprieno have proposed a set of identifying characteristics for Belles Lettres, primarily fictionality, intertextuality (the mixing of genres and styles within a text), and reception (dissemination and transmission). An intent to entertain is another relevant factor.⁶⁰ While some scholars redate several

58. O. Michigan I, 656, inv. 4609, 3rd century CE; Trismegistos database 64004.

59. For tables and figures, see Ursula Verhoeven, "The New Kingdom Graffiti in Tomb N13.1: An overview", in Jochem Kahl *et al.* (eds.), *Seven Seasons at Asyut: First results of the Egyptian-German cooperation in archaeological fieldwork; Proceedings of an international conference at the University of Sohag, 10th-11th of October, 2009, The Asyut Project 2*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2012, p. 47-58. All the texts are of the Instruction genre, except for *Kemyt* and the *Hymn to the Inundation*.

60. Antonio Loprieno, "Defining Egyptian Literature: Ancient texts and modern theory", in: Antonio Loprieno (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and forms*, Leiden-New York-Köln, Brill ("Probleme der Ägyptologie", 10), 1996, p. 39-58; see also John Baines, "Research on Egyptian Literature: Background, definitions, prospects", in: Zahi Hawass and Lyla Pinch Brock (eds.), *Egyptology at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century: Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Egyptologists Cairo, 2000*, 3, Cairo-New York, American University in Cairo Press, 2003, p. 1-26; Henrike Simon, "Textaufgaben": *Kulturwissenschaftliche Konzepte in Anwendung auf die Literatur der Ramessidenzeit*, Hamburg, Buske, 2013, p. 4-5.

literary “classics” generally considered as Middle-Kingdom to the New Kingdom, a core of them is attested from Dynasty 12, and Middle Egyptian remained the language of literature for many centuries thereafter.⁶¹ Middle Egyptian narrative myths, however, are few, and extant fragments have sometimes been interpreted as forming part of magical or ritual texts, such as the already ancient homosexual episode between Horus and Seth in P. Lahun VI.12, or the *Cairo Mythological Tale*,⁶² which mentions the god Sia “Percipience” and a divine council. The *Herdsmen’s Tale*, which has been the source of much debate and speculation, stems from a collection of literary texts deposited with a burial and is on the same papyrus as the *Dialogue of a man and his Ba*.⁶³ It might be counted as a myth since it features a probably Hathoric divine figure, but the protagonist appears to be a human cattle herder, and the story unfolds in the here-and-now; the text also includes a “water spell” attested in a Theban *Coffin Text* and thus also exhibits intertextuality.⁶⁴ The Shipwrecked Sailor⁶⁵ encounters a giant speaking serpent deity in a mythical location termed the “Island

61. For a critical summary of approaches and criteria: Joachim F. Quack, “Irrungen, Wirrungen? Forscherische Ansätze zur Datierung der älteren ägyptischen Literatur”, in: Ralf Ernst *et al.* (eds.), *Dating Egyptian Literary Texts*, Hamburg, Widmaier, 2013, p. 405-469.

62. P. Cairo CG 58040: Richard Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt: A dark side to perfection*, London-New York, Continuum (“Athlone Publications in Egyptology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies”), 2002, p. 294-295, also listing other possible mythical narrative fragments; John Baines, “Myth and Literature”, in: A. Loprieno (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, p. 361-377, esp. 366, suggests that narratives about gods may have been common to genres of *belles lettres* and magical texts.

63. On P. Berlin 3024, dated to the later 12th dynasty by R. Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt*, p. 300, as part of the “Berlin Library” from Thebes. The find of additional fragments of this papyrus (P. Mallorca I and II) has improved the understanding of both literary works and of the history of their archiving: Marina Escolano-Poveda, “New Fragments of Papyrus Berlin 3024. The missing beginning of the Debate between and Man and his Ba and the continuation of the Tale of the Herdsman (P. Mallorca I and II)”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 144, 2017, p. 16-54.

64. R. Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems*, p. 287-288; *id.*, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt*, p. 300. Water spell: *Coffin Texts*, spell 836; see Mordechai Gilula, “Hirtengeschichte 17-22 = CT VII 36m-r”, *Göttinger Miszellen* 26, 1978, p. 21-22.

65. Translations e.g. Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. I. *The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (2nd ed.), Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006, p. 211-214; R. Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems*, p. 93-96.

of the Ka” and identified by scholars as a liminal area between existence and non-existence or life and death,⁶⁶ while the deity is most often interpreted as a manifestation of the creator god.⁶⁷ The god reports on the life and misfortune of his own clan, but the framing story is an expedition narrative set in the human sphere.⁶⁸ Other literary texts, such as the *Instruction for Merikare*, make use of solar mythical ideas, referring to the sun god’s first creative act of masturbation and to the *Destruction of Mankind*⁶⁹ to underpin their message – in this case the prerogatives and responsibilities of kingship. Thus, while mythical motifs and mythemes occur in Middle Kingdom literary texts, full mythical narratives that did not have a primarily religious context are not attested until the New Kingdom, and most are written in Late Egyptian or Demotic.⁷⁰ The only surviving prose narrative of the Osiris myth, by the early 2nd-century AD priest of Delphic Apollo Plutarch, is in Greek. Its author used the myth, among other things, to support his own views on the essence and multiple manifestations of the divine,⁷¹ which are based in his background in classical philosophy. Several of

66. John Baines, “Interpreting the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 76, 1990, p. 67; Gerald Moers, *Fingierte Welten in der ägyptischen Literatur des 2. Jahrtausends v. Chr.*, Leiden, Brill (“Probleme der Ägyptologie”, 19), 2001, p. 249-250, for interpretations and references.

67. E.g. Maria Theresia Derchain-Urtel, “Die Schlange des ‘Schiffbrüchigen’”, *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 1, 1974, p. 83-104; for a different view: Andrea M. Gnirs, “Die levantinische Herkunft des Schlangengottes”, in: Heike Guksch and Daniel Polz (eds.), *Stationen. Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte Ägyptens Rainer Stadelmann gewidmet*, Mainz, Philipp von Zabern, 1998, p. 199-207.

68. See e.g. G. Moers, *Fingierte Welten in der ägyptischen Literatur*, p. 245-251, who sets this tale at the beginning of the travel narratives that highlight literary fictionality.

69. Joachim F. Quack, *Studien zu Lehre für Merikare*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz (“Göttinger Orientforschungen”, IV/23), 1992; translations e.g. M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. I, p. 105-106; Richard Parkinson, *op. cit.*, p. 225-226. Some scholars date the text to the New Kingdom, but the matter is not settled; see J. F. Quack, “Irrungen, Wirrungen? Forscherische Ansätze zur Datierung der älteren ägyptischen Literatur”, p. 415.

70. Notably the *Myth of the Distant Goddess / Solar Eye*, in both Demotic (mss 2nd century AD) and Greek; see Jacqueline E. Jay, *Orality and Literacy in the Demotic Tales*, Leiden-Boston, Brill (“Culture and History of the Ancient Near East”, 81), 2016, p. 225 with n. 52.

71. Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, “Religion and Myth”, in: Mark Beck (ed.), *A Companion to Plutarch*, Hoboken, Wiley-Blackwell, 2014, esp. p. 168-169; for the text see J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch’s De Iside et Osiride: edited with an introduction, translation and commentary*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1970.

the best-attested Late Egyptian mythical narratives display foreign influence, some more clearly – the *Battle between Baal and the Sea/Yam* –⁷² and others less so, as with the *Tale of the Two Brothers* (discussed above). For yet others such as the *Contendings of Horus and Seth*, an originally ritual or performative context is possible.⁷³ In sum, while texts with mythical content and exhibiting markers of literariness can be identified from no later than the Middle Kingdom, with fragments pointing to the presence of further compositions,⁷⁴ it seems clear that fully narrative written myths that can be counted as belonging to *Belles Lettres* were not prominent in Egyptian traditions and were primarily a phenomenon of the New Kingdom and later periods.⁷⁵

72. Often termed *Astarte and the Insatiable Sea* and being an Egyptianized version of the tale, known from Ugaritic, of *The Battle between Baal and Yam*; see e.g. Philippe Collombert and Laurent Coulon, “Les dieux contre la mer. Le début du ‘papyrus d’Astarté’ (p. BM 202)”, *Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale* 100, 2000, p. 193-242; William K. Simpson (ed.), *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 3rd edition, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 2003, p. 108-111; Thomas Schneider, “Wie der Sturmgott Ägypten aus der Flut rettete”, *Journal for the Society of the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 38, 2011-12, p. 173-194; Martin Pehal, *Interpreting Ancient Egyptian Narratives: A structural analysis of the Tale of Two Brothers, the Anat Myth, the Osirian Cycle, and the Astarte Papyrus*, Fernelemont, EME Editions (“Nouvelles études orientales”), 2014.

73. See section 2, “Political Uses”, above; similarly Joachim F. Quack, “Erzählen als Preisen: Vom Astartepapyrus zu den koptischen Märtyrerakten”, in: Hubert Roeder (ed.), *Das Erzählen in frühen Hochkulturen I*, Munich, Fink, 2009, p. 291-312. Others have cited the *Contendings* as a literary and potentially non-religious text: Friedrich Junge, “Mythos und Literarizität: Die Geschichte vom Streit der Götter Horus und Seth”, in: Heike Behlmer (ed.), *Quaerentes scientiam: Festgabe für Wolfhart Westendorf zu seinem 70. Geburtstag*, Göttingen, Seminar für Ägyptologie und Koptologie, 1994, p. 83-102, esp. p. 99.

74. E.g. P. Deir el-Medina 39, which seems to narrate the killing of a divine falcon by the god Herishef with the help of a human general and a craftsman; see Frank Kammerzell, “Die Tötung des Falkendämonen”, in: Elke Blumenthal, *et al.* (eds.), *Weisheitstexte, Mythen und Epen*, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus (“Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments”, 3), 1995, p. 970-972.

75. Even the best-attested Demotic myth, the *Distant Goddess/Solar Eye*, has been suggested to derive from a performed ritual that was only later recorded in writing, in various forms and languages; see J. E. Jay, *Orality and Literacy in the Demotic Tales*, esp. p. 237-239 with n. 100; 244. The great length of some of its late versions suggests literary development.

VI/ LINGUISTIC AND METAPHORICAL USES

In view of the intellectual and literary uses of myth, it is logical that mythical referents should also inform metaphorical language. We encountered earlier the presentation of Piye “as Harakhte” on his Victory Stela, which is based in royal solar associations that are attested from the Old Kingdom onwards.⁷⁶ In this text Tefnakhte further declares Piye to be “The Ombite (Seth), foremost of the Southland, Montu, the mighty bull”,⁷⁷ assimilating the Nubian’s overwhelming power to the strong-men of the Egyptian pantheon. Royal inscriptions, especially of the New Kingdom and later, are a treasure trove for such mythical analogies and conceptual metaphors,⁷⁸ and literary texts exploit them as well. Middle Kingdom instances include the ironic invocation of a corrupt official in terms of Thoth in the *Eloquent Peasant*, which builds on the god’s mythical role as patron of writing and thus of knowledge and wisdom.⁷⁹ Even clearer are cases where two mythical referents are set in contrast against each other. Thus, the *Loyalist Instruction of*

76. E.g. Shih-Wei Hsu, *Bilder für den Pharao. Untersuchungen zu den bildlichen Ausdrücken des Ägyptischen in den Königsinschriften und anderen Textgattungen*, Leiden-Boston, Brill (“Probleme der Ägyptologie”, 36), 2017, p. 159 with n. 86 for the Son of Re name, 165, 398-402, 412 (New Kingdom attestations).

77. See e.g. Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. III. *The Late Period* (2nd ed.), Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006, p. 79.

78. S.-W. Hsu, *Bilder für den Pharao*, p. 17-26 for the use of metaphor versus that of comparative analogy. The idea is that specific aspects of deities can be discerned in the king’s appearance and actions, as when in the Qadesh texts Ramesses II appears as “Seth great-of-strength, Baal in person” (*swth ʿz phty bʿl m h ʿw=f*; *KRI* II, p. 53 §158); elsewhere it is his physical appearance that is analogous to a god’s: he appears from his tent in the morning “like the rising of Re, after having received the panoply of his father Montu” (*mj wbn r ʿw šsp.n=f hkrw nw jtj=f mnṯw*; *KRI* II, p. 103 §5). See e.g. Diana Liesegang, “‘Visual images’: Ein königliches Ritual in versprachlichten Bildern”, in: Alexander Manisali and Benedikt Rothöhler (eds.), *Mythos und Ritual. Festschrift für Jan Assmann zum 70. Geburtstag*, Tübingen, LIT-Verlag, 2008, p. 77-82; S.-W. Hsu, *Bilder für den Pharao*, p. 17-26, 165ff: terms and images for the relationship between king and god; 189-211: bellicose associations; see also Nicolas Grimal, *Les termes de la propagande royale égyptienne de la XIX^e dynastie à la conquête d’Alexandre*, Paris, De Boccard (“Mémoires de l’Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres”, 6), esp. p. 61-91; p. 358-436.

79. E.g. P. Berlin 3023, lines 179-82; cf. Richard Parkinson, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant: A reader’s commentary*, Hamburg, Widmaier (“Lingua Aegyptia. Studia Monographica”, 10), 2012, p. 28; *id.*, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems*, p. 65-66 for translations; also Martin A. Stadler, *Weiser und Wesir. Studien zu Vorkommen, Rolle und Wesen des Gottes Thot im Ägyptischen Totenbuch*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck (“Orientalische Religionen in

*Kairsu*⁸⁰ describes the king as a “Bastet who guards the Two lands” (*B3stt pw hw t3wy*), who thus also protects his loyal official, but as “Sakhmet to the one who strays from what he has commanded” (*Shmt pw r th m wdt.n.f*).⁸¹ This metaphorical pair draws on the mythical complex of the Distant Goddess, who in her enraged, leonine form must be propitiated in order to turn into a protective, maternal feline. Comparable mythical associations are mobilized fifteen hundred years later in the Demotic Wisdom Book of Papyrus Insinger, which assigns all women to the polar categories of maternal Mut or volatile, promiscuous, and easily enraged Hathor.⁸²

In all these cases, the mythical actors invoked seem to function as emblems or icons of characteristics signified by their mythical associations that are analogous and meaningful for the description and understanding of the present context. The same cognitive processes may underlie the rare occurrences of myths in dreams: in the New Kingdom Dream Book a man may see himself “copulating with a kite”, in a clear evocation of the Osiris myth. The interpretation provided is negative, in line with the mytheme of Osiris, whom Seth tricked out of his birthright:

“Bad, it means that something might be grabbed right out from his hand”.⁸³

der Antike”, 1), 2009, 343-344, esp. n. 115: Thoth as model and prototype for officials of all periods.

80. Ursula Verhoeven, “Von der ‘Loyalistischen Lehre’ zur ‘Lehre des Kairsu’ – Eine neue Textquelle aus Assiut und deren Auswirkungen”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 136, 2009, p. 87-98.

81. On the 12th dynasty stela of Sehetepibre (Cairo CG 20538, ll. 16-17) and in New Kingdom manuscripts; see e.g. M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. I, p. 128; R. Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems*, p. 235-245; Georges Posener, *L’Enseignement Loyaliste: sagesse égyptienne du Moyen Empire*, Geneva, Droz (“Hautes Études Orientales”, 5), 1976, §5.13, p. 91.

82. Papyrus Insinger (1st century CE, text likely Ptolemaic), 9th instruction (8.18), and other fragments. See e.g. M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. III, p. 192; Friedhelm Hoffmann and Joachim F. Quack, *Anthologie der demotischen Literatur*, Münster, LIT (“Einführungen und Quellentexte zur Ägyptologie”, 4), 2007, p. 249 with n. 383, who note the astrological significance of this passage. Martin Stadler (“Zwei Bemerkungen zum Papyrus Insinger”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 130, 2003, p. 186-196) argues that the text was originally for funerary use.

83. Alan H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum, third series: Chester Beatty gift*, 2 vols, London, British Museum, 1935, p. 17 pl. 7, P. BM EA 10683,3, recto 8.10.

VII/ MYTHICAL SPACE IN THIS-WORLDFLY GEOGRAPHY, ARCHITECTURE, AND CULT

Some architectural forms constitute material realizations of myths. Tombs may embody mythical conceptions of the afterlife, as with pyramidal superstructures evoking solar rebirth from the primeval mound. Subterranean chambers may refer to the daily progression of the sungod through the netherworld (*dw3t*) and horizon (*3ht*), and this interpretation has been extended to contemporaneous mastaba tombs.⁸⁴ A similar meaning can be established for New Kingdom royal tombs, whose descending corridors represent the sun god's descent – here into the Theban escarpment – and his progress through the night, ideas that are also presented in the Underworld Books shown on their walls.⁸⁵ The design of temples incorporates mythical ideas, such as the sanctuary as a primeval mound and place where creation took place.⁸⁶ First millennium temple complexes included birth-houses (or *mammisis*, *pr-mswt*) that signified the place where the local

84. James P. Allen, "Reading a Pyramid", in: Catherine Berger, Gisèle Clerc, Nicolas Grimal (eds.), *Hommages à Jean Leclant*, vol. I, Cairo, Institut français d'archéologie orientale ("Bibliothèque d'étude", 106), 1994, p. 5-28; Deborah Vischak, "Common Ground between Pyramid Texts and Old Kingdom Tomb Design: the case of Ankhmahor", *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 40, 2003, p. 133-157. The approach was critiqued by Harold Hays, "Unreading the Pyramids", *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 109, 2009, p. 195-220, rebutted in turn e.g. by Bernard Mathieu, "Re-reading the Pyramids: repères pour une lecture spatialisée des Textes des Pyramides", in: Susanne Bickel and Lucía Díaz-Iglesias Llanos (eds.), *Studies in Ancient Egyptian Funerary Literature*, Leuven, Peeters ("Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta", 257), 2017, p. 375-462, who identifies *3ht* and *dw3t* with slightly different areas of the structures.

85. E.g. Silvia Wiebach-Koepe, *Sonnenlauf und kosmische Regeneration: Zur Systematik der Lebensprozesse in den Unterweltsbüchern*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz ("Ägypten und Altes Testament", 71), 2007.

86. Thus, in one example among many, an inscription on the exterior of the Luxor temple designates it as the god's "great place of the first time (of creation), in an effective work of eternity (*ḏt*)" (*Urk.* IV, 1709.13-14). See also Erik Hornung, "The Temple as Cosmos", in: id., *Idea into Image: Essays on ancient Egyptian thought*, New York, Timken, 1992 (trans. E. Bredeck), p. 115-130; Luc Gabolde, "L'implantation du temple. Contingences religieuses et contraintes géomorphologiques", *Égypte Afrique et Orient* 68, 2012, p. 3-12; Arielle P. Kozloff, *et al.*, *Egypt's Dazzling Sun: Amenhotep III and his world*, Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art, 1992, p. 73-124: influence of solar and lunar myths on architecture.

deity, or the deity's son, was born and nurtured. These structures, first attested in a 12th dynasty text,⁸⁷ were the places of conception and birth of the young, kingly gods who were so prominent in late religion.⁸⁸ Temples also possessed "horizons" represented by a pylon or pylons⁸⁹ and a sacred lake, the latter being vital for temples of solar Eye-goddesses, where it may signify the red flood in the myth of the *Destruction of Mankind*.⁹⁰

Natural and man-made structures could be interpreted as mythical locations, as with the western escarpment at Thebes, which was both the entrance to the underworld and an embodiment of the goddess of the West, who was variously called Hathor, Imentet, or Meresger, and was also seen as present in a natural rock formation that resembles the image of a colossal cobra.⁹¹ Similarly, the Abydos tomb of the 1st dynasty king Djer came to be considered the tomb of Osiris no later than during the Middle

87. Annals of Amenemhat II: Hartwig Altenmüller, *Zwei Annalenfragmente aus dem frühen Mittleren Reich*, Hamburg, Buske ("Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur Beiheft", 16), 2015, p. 317, col. x+14; see p. 54-57 for discussion. Late birth houses: François Daumas, *Les mammis des temples égyptiens*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres ("Annales de l'Université de Lyon, 3^e série, Lettres", 32), 1958.

88. See e.g. Dagmar Budde, "Child deities", in: Jacco Dieleman and Willeke Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2010 (<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/9cf2v6q3>); Dagmar Budde et al. (eds.), *Kindgötter im Ägypten der griechisch-römischen Zeit: Zeugnisse aus Stadt und Tempel als Spiegel des interkulturellen Kontakts*, Leuven, Peeters ("Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta", 128), 2003.

89. Philippe Derchain, "Réflexions sur la décoration des pylônes", *Bulletin de la Société française d'égyptologie* 46, 1966, p. 17-24; Steven B. Shubert, "Studies on the Egyptian Pylon", *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 11/3, 1981, p. 135-164; Ulrike Fauerbach, "Architektur, Licht und Schatten: Pylon und Hof von Edfu als Sonnenkalender?", in: Ben J. J. Haring and Andrea Klug (eds.), *6. Ägyptologische Tempeltagung: Funktion und Gebrauch altägyptischer Tempelräume. Leiden, 4.-7. September 2002*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2007, p. 105-118.

90. Attested from the Old Kingdom onwards; see Beatrix Gessler-Löhr, *Die heiligen Seen ägyptischer Tempel: Ein Beitrag zur Deutung sakraler Baukunst im alten Ägypten*, Hildesheim, Gerstenberg ("Hildesheimer ägyptologische Beiträge", 21), 1983, p. 401-424. On the Graeco-Roman Period: Ragnhild B. Finnestad, "Temples of the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods: Ancient traditions in new contexts", in: Byron E. Shafer (ed.), *Temples of ancient Egypt*, Ithaca-London, Cornell University Press, 1997, p. 185-237.

91. Ute Rummel, "Der Leib der Göttin: Materialität und Semantik ägyptischer Felslandschaft", in: Susanne Beck et al. (eds.), *Gebauter Raum: Architektur – Landschaft – Mensch. Beiträge des fünften Münchner Arbeitskreises Junge Ägyptologie (MAJA 5), 12.12. bis 14.12.2014*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz ("Göttinger Orientforschungen", 62), 2016, p. 41-74.

Kingdom,⁹² becoming the destination of the annual “Mysteries of Osiris”, in which the god’s death, burial, and rebirth were enacted in an ultimately mythical landscape.⁹³

During festivals, different sectors of such landscapes were connected in ritual processions, with statues of gods visiting one another, in part re-enacting mythical episodes.⁹⁴ Examples include the Osiris mysteries at Abydos, where the re-enactment of his death and resurrection drew thousands of participants, the so-called “sacred marriage” of Horus of Edfu and Hathor of Dendara, the visit to the primeval deities of Edfu/Behdet, and the celebration of the return of the “distant goddess” to Egypt at Philae.⁹⁵ Here as in

92. Probably under Khendjer in the 13th dynasty, a basalt statue of the mummiform god on his bier, impregnating Isis in the form of a kite, was placed in this tomb: Anthony Leahy, “The Osiris ‘Bed’ Reconsidered”, *Orientalia* 46, 1977, p. 424-434; David O’Connor, *Abydos: Egypt’s first pharaohs and the cult of Osiris*. London, Thames & Hudson (“New Aspects of Antiquity”), 2009, p. 89-90 with fig. 42; Franck Goddio and Aurélia Masson-Berghoff (eds.), *Sunken Cities: Egypt’s Lost Worlds. The British Museum Exhibition*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2016, p. 155.

93. Survey: Marie-Christine Lavier, “Les fêtes d’Osiris à Abydos au Moyen Empire et au Nouvel Empire”, *Égypte Afrique & Orient* 10, 1998, 27-38; D. O’Connor, *Abydos: Egypt’s First Pharaohs and the Cult of Osiris*, p. 70-135; Ute and Andreas Effland, *Abydos: Tor zur ägyptischen Unterwelt, Sonderbände der Antiken Welt*, Darmstadt, Philipp von Zabern, 2013; John Baines, *High Culture and Experience in Ancient Egypt*, Sheffield-Bristol, Equinox (“Studies in Egyptology and the Ancient Near East”), 2013, p. 27-150, 102-117 (mortuary landscapes).

94. See e.g. Arne Egberts, “Mythos und Fest. Überlegungen zur Dekoration der westlichen Innenseite der Umfassungsmauer im Tempel von Edfu”, in: Rolf Gundlach and Matthias Rochholz (eds.), *4. Ägyptologische Tempeltagung; Köln, 10.-12. Oktober 1996: Feste im Tempel*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz (“Ägypten und Altes Testament”, 33/2), 1998, p. 17-29; Martina Ullmann, “Thebes: Origins of a ritual landscape”, in: Peter F. Dorman and Betsy M. Bryan (eds.), *Sacred Space and Sacred Function in Ancient Thebes*, Chicago, Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (“Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations”, 61), 2007, p. 3-25, highlights Karnak as the core of the Theban ritual landscape.

95. See Felix Arnold, “Pharaonische Prozessionsstraßen. Mittel der Machtdarstellung unter Königin Hatschepsut”, in: Ernst-Ludwig Schwandner and Klaus Rheidt (eds.), *Macht der Architektur – Architektur der Macht: Bauforschungskolloquium in Berlin vom 30. Oktober bis 2. November 2002*, Mainz, Philipp von Zabern (“Diskussionen zur archäologischen Bauforschung”, 8), 2004, p. 13-23; Dieter Kurth, “Die Reise der Hathor von Dendera nach Edfu”, in: Rolf Gundlach and Matthias Rochholz (eds.), *Ägyptische Tempel: Struktur, Funktion und Programm. Akten der Ägyptologischen Tempeltagungen in Gosen 1990 und in Mainz 1992*, Hildesheim, Gerstenberg (“Hildesheimer ägyptologische Beiträge”, 37), 1994, p. 211-216; Andreas Effland and Jens-Peter Graeff, “Neues zur Lage von Behedet”, in: Andreas Effland et al. (eds.), *“Nunmehr ein offenes Buch...” – Das Edfu-Projekt. Herausgegeben zum 160. Geburtstag des Marquis*

many contexts, local traditions and geography played a significant role;⁹⁶ while comparable rituals in the delta are altogether less well attested, they are likely to have been equally important.

Temples, details of their cults, and late compositions such as the *Book of the Fayyum* show how regions of the land were understood as mythical landscapes.⁹⁷ When the resurrection of Osiris is associated with the cycle of inundation and of the growth and death of vegetation, as represented among other ways in Osirian corn-mummies (**Fig. 5**),⁹⁸ Egypt as a whole emerges as a topographical and agricultural manifestation of the reassembled god. The solar and Osirian complexes merge in this mytheme, which is based in the idea of the sun as a life-giving force fertilizing the earth and illustrated in the fusion of Re and Osiris in the depths of the night as well as in object types such as the Corn-Osiris.⁹⁹ By the Late Period, Osiris' scattered body parts were believed to be distributed over many nomes. Particularly important body parts were housed in the god's chief cult centres, with his head resting at Abydos.¹⁰⁰

Maxence de Rochemonteix (1849-1891), Hamburg, University of Hamburg, 2009, p. 34-52.

96. A survey focusing on late evidence: Joachim F. Quack, "Lokalressourcen oder Zentraltheologie? Zur Relevanz und Situierung geographisch strukturierter Mythologie im alten Ägypten", *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 10, 2008, p. 5-29; for myths of the delta see D. Meeks, *Mythes et légendes du delta d'après le Papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.84*, 2006. A striking example can be found in the Fayyum, where the sungod and creator emerges from Lake Moeris every morning as a crocodile: Horst Beinlich, *Der Mythos in seiner Landschaft: das ägyptische „Buch vom Fayum“ 1: Die hieroglyphischen Texte*, Dettelbach, J. H. Röhl ("Studien zu den Ritualszenen altägyptischer Tempel", 11/1), 2013, with refs; Horst Beinlich, *et al.* (eds.), *Egypt's Mysterious Book of the Faiyum*, Dettelbach, J. H. Röhl, 2013, p. 53-55 with fig. 28; p. 75 fig. 51; p. 77 § 3; see also the next note.

97. For conceptions and uses of landscape, see J. Baines, *High Culture and Experience in Ancient Egypt*, p. 21-150; p. 127 with fig. 41: Lake Moeris identified both as "The temple of Sobek" and as the "Shen-ring around Ra, Osiris, Horus, and Pharaoh" (P. Boulaq I, Cairo, JE 95571).

98. Maria Costanza Centrone, *Egyptian Corn-Mummies: A class of religious artefacts catalogued and systematically analysed*, Saarbrücken, Dr. Müller, 2009.

99. E.g. Silvia Wiebach-Koepeke, *Sonnenlauf und kosmische Regeneration: zur Systematik der Lebensprozesse in den Unterweltbüchern*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz ("Ägypten und Altes Testament", 71), 2007, p. 11 fig. 2, 175, 195, 198, 203-204.

100. Horst Beinlich, *Die "Osirisreliquien": Zum Motiv der Körperzergliederung in der altägyptischen Religion*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz ("Ägyptologische Abhandlungen", 42), 1984.

VIII/ VISUAL USAGES THAT ICONIZE MYTHEMES

Single images and iconographically distinctive figures can evoke mythemes. Groupings of figures and actions can do more and can bring together different cosmic domains, in particular to depict cyclical processes or fundamental change. Such possibilities were only rarely exploited in the decoration of temples or nonroyal tombs, but they are pervasive in contexts of transition, magic, and the underworld. Myths were probably represented pictorially at least from late prehistory, which we do not study in this article, to the end of Egyptian civilization; they are especially well documented from the New Kingdom onward. It is seldom possible to enforce a sequential viewing of images, and in the Egyptian case this lack of constraint means that they fit with the low prestige of canonized, written mythical narrative and the prevalence of mythemes over whole myths.¹⁰¹ Large compositions with many tableaux, such as the “underworld books”, are an exception, and organized as something like a visual narrative; also the *Myth of the Divine Birth* and the Ptolemaic Horus Myth of Edfu are presented in a sequence of partly pictorial scenes.¹⁰²

We can only discuss a few examples of mythical references in images. Furniture and elite personal objects from tombs, many of which may have been used during life, display many relevant motifs. Hathoric designs and symbolism abound on cosmetic items such as vessels and mirrors, including ones belonging to royal women (**Fig. 6**). The viewing disc of mirrors has a distinctive flattened elliptical shape, which is that of the dawn and evening sun, so that its use invoked the goddess’s vivifying role as daughter of the sungod at points of transition and crisis.¹⁰³ Much early furniture

101. See e.g. Erik Hornung, “Die Tragweite der Bilder: Altägyptische Bildaussagen”, *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 48, 1979 [1981], p. 183-237, focusing on images of sunrise and sunset; “narrative” detail in underworld books: Katja Goebis, “Expressing Luminosity in Iconography: Features of the solar bark in the tomb of Ramesses VI”, *Göttinger Miszellen* 165, 1998, p. 57-71.

102. *Divine Birth*: see section 2 with n. 28; Edfu: e.g. Arno Egberts, “The Chronology of the Horus Myth of Edfu”, in: Jacobus van Dijk (ed.), *Essays on Ancient Egypt in Honour of Herman te Velde*, Groningen, Styx, 1997, p. 47-54.

103. E.g. Heinrich Schäfer, “Die Ausdeutung der Spiegelplatte als Sonnenscheibe”, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 68, 1932, p. 1-7; Constance Husson, *L’offrande du miroir dans les temples égyptiens de l’époque gréco-romaine*, Lyon, Audin, 1977; other cosmetic items: Christiane

had bovid legs that exemplify difficulties in interpretation. Royal thrones, such as that of the famous statue of Khephren,¹⁰⁴ may be compared with the bull of the sky attested in late prehistoric imagery and mentioned in the *Pyramid Texts*.¹⁰⁵ Other examples may perhaps evoke the celestial cow; these were later replaced with leonine forms that have potential solar significance. Beds and stools commonly bore figures of Bes (**Fig. 7**) and Taweret, respectively as protective forms of the sungod and his solar eye.¹⁰⁶ All these associations are explicit in the funerary biers found in the tomb of Tutankhamun, where a hippopotamus form occurs beside a bovine and leonine example. Cow, lioness, and hippopotamus are united in some compound images of Taweret, who has been argued to be a personification of the bier. Her mythical role is to bear up the sungod, together with the deceased, who is likened to him.¹⁰⁷ Headrests for sleeping and funerary purposes could also evoke mythemes of the sunrise, as illustrated by a headrest from the tomb of Tutankhamun, which shows the god of light and

Desroches-Noblecourt, “Un ‘lac de turquoise’: godets à onguents et destinées d’outre-tombe dans l’Égypte ancienne”, *Monuments et mémoires* 47, 1953, p. 1-34.

104. Cairo CG 14. See e.g. Mohamed Saleh and Hourig Sourouzian, *The Egyptian Museum, Cairo: Official Catalogue*, Cairo-Mainz, Organisation of Egyptian Antiquities and Philipp von Zabern, 1987, no. 31. The throne has lion heads but bovid legs.

105. Michael Berger, “The Petroglyphs at Locality 61”, in: Michael Allen Hoffman, *The Predynastic of Hierakonpolis: An interim report*, Giza and Macomb (Ill.), Cairo University Herbarium and Macomb Department of Sociology and Anthropology (“Egyptian Studies Association Publication”, 1), 1982, p. 62, fig. I.18; Pyramid Text attestation for example in the Cannibal Spell, Pyr. 397a.

106. See e.g. Geoffrey Killen, *Ancient Egyptian Furniture: 4000-1300 BC / boxes, chests and footstools*, Warminster, Aris & Phillips, 1980-1994 [reprinted 2017], p. 32 nos 12-13, pl. 40. Middle Kingdom “magic wands” place Bes-like figures in a cosmic context: Stephen Quirke, *Birth Tusks: The armoury of health in context – Egypt 1800 BC*, London, Golden House (“Middle Kingdom Studies”, 3), 2016, p. 357-363.

107. Early Old Kingdom bovine furniture legs: Alexander Wenzel, *Die Formen der altägyptischen Liege und Sitzmöbel und ihre Entwicklung bis zum Ende des Alten Reiches*, Heidelberg, Hörning, 1939, e.g. p. 49, who saw them as evoking royal associations with a wild bull; leonine legs: *ibid.*, p. 49, 76, 115. See also G. Killen, *Ancient Egyptian Furniture*, pls 1, 36, 40, 42. Later royal furniture is additionally ornamented with leonine heads: *ibid.* p. 62-63 with fig. 32. For Taweret as the personified bier see H. Beinlich, *et al.* (eds.), *Egypt’s Mysterious Book of the Faiyum*, p. 55-59 with figs 31-32, 35, 37; in the *Book of the Fayyum* the bier-goddess appears as a form of Neith.

air, Shu, between the pair of lions of the horizon, Ruty or Aker, bearing up the head of the sleeper or the deceased as in myth he would the sky-goddess and sungod (**Fig. 8**).

The most widespread, often elaborate, use of mythical icons is on amulets and jewellery found in funerary contexts; these motifs are comparable with ones known in images of funerary scenes and of “daily life”. The pervasive amulet of the Wedjat-eye (see **Fig. 4** for its mathematical significance), for example, evokes the mythical fight between Horus and Seth, in which Horus’s eye was lost but retrieved and Horus was vindicated as heir to his father’s throne, as well as the analogy of this mytheme with the cyclical absences of cosmic bodies, notably the waning and subsequently waxing moon.¹⁰⁸ Amulets depicting individual deities and groupings of them may be iconized mythemes relating to specific mythical episodes. Vast numbers of artefacts show the morning sun, Khepri, in the form of a dung-beetle pushing the solar disc up, bearing iconic testament to the myth of the sungod’s birth and journey across the sky and highlighting the importance of the first solar phase as a moment of regeneration. From the New Kingdom onward, amulets showing Isis suckling Horus, Horus as child, or Hathor in cow-form were common. From the Late Period, amulets of Seth as a hippopotamus being speared by Horus, or of the triad of Isis and Nephthys flanking Horus, can be found,¹⁰⁹ at a time when there was a vast increase in protective objects ranging up to large stelae dedicated in the name of kings, of which the 4th-century BC Metternich stela offers a prime example (**Fig. 9**).¹¹⁰ From miniature to large scales and across many contexts, the mythical icons would have assimilated the user or wearer into a mythical context, affording to them the powers, characteristics or benefits that the mythical actors were believed to possess.

108. E.g. Cyril Aldred, *Jewels of the Pharaohs: Egyptian Jewellery of the Dynastic Period*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1971, pls 106, 108; Hans-Wolfgang Müller and Eberhard Thiem, *The Royal Gold of Ancient Egypt*, London, I. B. Tauris, 1999, p. 178: pectoral of Tutankhamun with winged Khepri pushing the lunar Wedjat into the sky.

109. See Carol Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt*, London, British Museum Press, 1994, e.g. p. 16, 22, 23 fig. 19b, for a Saite amulet showing Neith suckling two crocodiles.

110. See J. P. Allen, *The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt*, no. 52, p. 49-63.

CONCLUSION

Egyptian myth was a means of conceptualizing and describing the world as well as of explaining and controlling it. In line with these functions, it was flexible and could be adapted to many contexts. This fact is acknowledged explicitly by Plutarch, who reports interpretations that Egyptian myths and gods provoked among both indigenous people and Hellenistic visitors from the Graeco-Roman world. Thus, he describes how some Egyptians regard the Osiris myth as relating to the Nile flood, with Osiris representing all kinds of moisture and fresh water while Seth(-Typhon) stands for either dryness or the salt water of the sea. Others relate the myth to the phases of the moon, with Seth standing for the sun's destructive power, and yet others to lunar eclipses. Further groups believe Osiris to be the sun and Isis the moon, yet "boring people" associate the activities of these gods with seasonal change or the growth, sowing and ploughing of crops.¹¹¹

Meanings and configurations of Egyptian religion and its myths spread to other cultures, for example with the Isis cult in the Graeco-Roman world,¹¹² while myths from outside were incorporated into the Egyptian repertory. Egyptian and other forms were thus broadly intelligible and relevant in non-culture-specific ways. A striking late example is Synesios of Cyrene's early 5th-century AD adaptation of the Osiris myth to represent structures and events in the Byzantine court of Constantinople.¹¹³ With the

111. For these interpretations, see chapters 33-38 (J. G. Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride*, p. 168-179); 41-43 (*ibid.*, p. 182-87); 44 (*ibid.* p. 186-189); 52 (*ibid.*, p. 202-203); 65 (*ibid.*, p. 220-221). For Plutarch's meticulous descriptions of religions, gods, and cults, see e.g. R. Hirsch-Luipold, "Religion and Myth", esp. p. 172-176; for his interpretations in the context of his time see e.g. Lautaro Roig Lancillotta, "Plutarch at the Crossroads of Religion and Philosophy", in: Lautaro Roig Lancillotta and Israel Muñoz Gallarte (eds.), *Plutarch in the Religious and Philosophical Discourse of Late Antiquity*, Leiden-Boston, Brill ("Ancient Mediterranean and Medieval Texts and Contexts", 14), 2012, p. 1-21.

112. See e.g. Reinhold Merkelbach, *Isis Regina – Zeus Serapis. Die griechisch-ägyptische Religion nach den Quellen dargestellt*, 2nd ed., Leipzig-Munich, Saur, 2001. Older account of these cults: Reginald E. Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman world*, London, Thames and Hudson ("Aspects of Greek and Roman Life"), 1971.

113. Synesios of Cyrene: Martin Hose (ed.), *Ägyptische Erzählungen oder Über die Vorsehung*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2012; with thanks to Frank Feder for this reference.

exceptions of the employment of myth in school education and the relatively late emergence of narrative myth as a written literary genre, the uses and functions we have outlined for Egypt are comparable with what is known from many cultures. An approach based on function may thus contribute to a wider understanding of the essence of myth.

From an Egyptian viewpoint, however, the wide-ranging manifestations of myth may be most accessible if they are viewed as flowing from the foundational idea that the creator fashioned the many aspects of the world out of himself, in a pattern that is recurrent – daily, annually, and rising globally up to the perpetual cycle of *nḥḥ* – and yet evolves in linear fashion (*ḏt*),¹¹⁴ as well as entailing continued interaction among the created elements. Thus, a single, canonical version of Egyptian myths cannot be distilled: for as long as the world evolves, myths will be created or adapted to describe it.

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114. In the sense of Philippe Derchain, “Perpetuum mobile”, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 6/7, 1976, p. 153-161. On interpretations of these designations of time, see e.g. Ina Hegenbarth-Reichard, *Der Raum der Zeit, eine Untersuchung zu den altägyptischen Vorstellungen und Konzeptionen von Zeit und Raum anhand des Unterweltbuchs Amduat*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz (“Ägypten und Altes Testament”, 64), 2006, p. 35-37; see also Frédéric Servajean, *Djet et Neheh: une histoire du temps égyptien*, Montpellier, Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée (“Orientalia Monspeliensia”, 18), 2007, with a different approach.

Fig. 1. Sandstone statue of Hathor in four forms: cow, snake with human head, Hathor-Nebet-hetepet, with head of a lioness. Late Period. Height 67 cm, depth 73 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, E 26032.
Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Franck Raux.

Fig. 2. Graphic of the interaction of aspects and functions of deities, on the example of Osiris.

Fig. 3. Decans and planets, with Osiris-Orion, Isis-Sothis, the planets Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars as forms of Horus, and Mercury as Seth. Ceiling of tomb of Seti I in the Valley of the Kings. After C. R. Lepsius, *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien*, vol. III, Berlin, Nicolai, n.d., pl. 137.

Fig. 4. Wedjat-eye fractions as presented by Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar: being an introduction to the study of hieroglyphs*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1927, p. 197.

Fig. 5. The evening sun fertilizes Osiris with its rays. Back of the mummy board of the coffin set of Nespawershefit. 21st dynasty. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum E.1.1822. Courtesy of Museum.

Fig. 6. Hathoric mirror of one of the Syrian wives of Thutmose III.
Purchased in Luxor. Height 33.4 cm.
Disk: silver; handle: wood (modern) sheathed in gold; inlays restored.
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 26.8.98. Courtesy of Museum.

Fig. 7. Hatnefer's chair, with frontal Bes image and leonine legs.
Height 53 cm. Boxwood, cypress, ebony, linen cord.
From her tomb at Sheikh Abd el-Qurna.
Reign of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III.
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 36.3.152.
Rogers Fund, 1936. Courtesy of Museum.

Fig. 8. Tinted ivory head-rest from the tomb of Tutankhamun. Height 17.5 cm, width 29 cm. Excavator's no. 403c, Cairo JE 62020. Photo by Harry Burton (P1236), reproduced with permission of Griffith Institute, University of Oxford.

Fig. 9. The Metternich stela, with magical images and texts on both sides: central scene. Dedicated in the name of Nectanebo I, ca. 380 BC. Siltstone. Height 83.5 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 50.85. Courtesy of Museum.