

Egyptian Myths and Tales

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The Memphite Theology of Creation

ANET, 4–5

When the First Dynasty established its capital at Memphis, it was necessary to justify the sudden emergence of this town to central importance. The Memphite god Ptah was therefore proclaimed to have been the First Principle, taking precedence over other recognized creator-gods. Mythological arguments were presented that the city of Memphis was the “place where the Two Lands are united” and that the Temple of Ptah was the “balance in which Upper and Lower Egypt have been weighed.”

The extracts presented here are particularly interesting, because creation is treated in an intellectual sense, whereas other creation stories (like *ANET*, pp. 3–4) are given in purely physical terms. Here the god Ptah conceives the elements of the universe with his mind (“heart”) and brings them into being by his commanding speech (“tongue”). Thus, at the beginning of Egyptian history, there was an approach to the Logos Doctrine.

The extant form of this document dates only to 700 B.C., but linguistic, philological, and geopolitical evidence is conclusive in support of its derivation from an original text more than two thousand years older.

(53) There came into being as the heart and there came into being as the tongue (something) in the form of Atum. The mighty Great One is Ptah, who transmitted [*life* to all gods], as well as (to) their *ka*'s, through this heart, by which Horus became Ptah, and through this tongue, by which Thoth became Ptah.¹

¹Ptah thought of and created by speech the creator-god Atum (“Totality”), thus transmitting the divine power of Ptah to all other gods. The gods Horus and Thoth, a commonly associated pair, are equated with the organs of thought and speech.

(Thus) it happened that the heart and tongue gained control over [every] (other) member of the body, by teaching that he² is in every body and in every mouth of all gods, all men, [all] cattle, all creeping things, and (everything) that lives, by thinking and commanding everything that he wishes.

Fig. 158

(55) His Ennead is before him in (the form of) teeth and lips. That is (the equivalent of) the semen and hands of Atum. Whereas the Ennead of Atum came into being by his semen and his fingers, the Ennead (of Ptah), however, is the teeth and lips in this mouth, which pronounced the name of everything, from which Shu and Tefnut came forth, and which was the fashioner of the Ennead.

The sight of the eyes, the hearing of the ears, and the smelling the air by the nose, they report to the heart. It is this which causes every completed (concept) to come forth, and it is the tongue which announces what the heart thinks.

Thus all the gods were formed and his Ennead was completed. Indeed, all the divine order really came into being through what the heart thought and the tongue commanded. Thus the *ka*-spirits were made and the *hemsut*-spirits were appointed, they who make all provisions and all nourishment, by this speech. (*Thus justice was given to* him who does what is liked, (*and injustice to*) him who does what is disliked. Thus life was given to him who has peace and death was given to him who has sin. Thus were made all work and all crafts, the action of the arms, the movement of the legs, and the activity of every member, in conformance with (this) command which the heart thought, which came forth through the tongue, and which gives value to everything.

Gen. 2:2

(Thus) it happened that it was said of Ptah: "He who made all and brought the gods into being." He is indeed Ta-tenen, who brought forth the gods, for everything came forth from him, nourishment and provisions, the offerings of the gods, and every good thing. Thus it was discovered and understood that his strength is greater than (that of the other) gods. And so Ptah was satisfied,³ after he had made everything, as well as all the divine order. He had formed the gods, he had made cities, he had founded nomes, he had put the gods in their shrines, (60) he had established their offerings, he had founded their shrines, he had made their bodies like that (with which) their hearts were satisfied. So the gods entered into their bodies of every (kind of) wood, of every (kind of) stone, of every (kind of) clay, or anything which might grow upon him,⁴ in which they had taken form.

² Ptah, as heart and tongue.

³ Or, "so Ptah rested."

⁴ Upon Ptah, in his form of the "rising land." Note that divine images were not the gods themselves, but only places.

So all the gods, as well as their *ka*'s gathered themselves to him, content and associated with the Lord of the Two Lands.

Deliverance of Mankind from Destruction

The themes of this myth are the sin of mankind, the destructive disappointment of their creator, and the deliverance of mankind from annihilation. However, the setting of the present text shows that its purpose was magical protection rather than moral teaching. On the walls of three royal tombs of the Empire, it accompanies certain charms to protect the body of the dead ruler. This implies that the former deliverance of mankind from destruction will be valid also in this individual case.

ANET, 10–11

It happened that . . . Re, the god who came into being by himself, when he was king of men and gods all together. Then mankind plotted something in the (very) presence of Re. Now then, his majesty—life, prosperity, health!—was old. His bones were of silver, his flesh of gold, and his hair of genuine lapis lazuli.

Gen. 6:5–7

Then his majesty perceived the things which were being plotted against him by mankind. Then his majesty—life, prosperity, health!—said to those who were in his retinue: “Pray, summon to me my Eye,⁵ Shu, Tefnut, Geb, and Nut, as well as the fathers and mothers who were with me when I was in Nun,⁶ as well as my god Nun also. He is to bring his court (5) with him. Thou shalt bring them *secretly*: let not mankind see; let not their hearts escape.⁷ Thou shalt come with them to the Great House, that they may tell their plans, since *the [times] when I came from Nun to the place in which I came into being.*”

Fig. 158

Then these gods were brought in, and these gods [*came*] beside him, putting their heads to the ground in the presence of his majesty, so that he might make his statement in the presence of the father of the eldest, he who made mankind, the king of people. Then they said in the presence of his majesty: “Speak to us, so that we may hear it.”

Then Re said to Nun: “O eldest god, in whom I came into being, O ancestor gods, behold mankind, which came into being from my Eye⁸—they have plotted things against me. Tell me what ye would do about it. Behold, I am seeking; I would not slay them until I had heard what (10) ye might say about it.” Then the majesty of Nun said: “My son Re, the god greater than he who made him and mightier than they who created him, sitting upon thy throne, the fear of thee

⁵ The eye of the sun-god was an independent part of himself, with a complicated mythological history.

⁶ The abysmal waters, in which creation took place.

⁷ Was Re unwilling that mankind repent its rebellious purposes?

⁸ Mankind originated as the tears of the creator-god.

is great when thy Eye is (directed) against them who scheme against thee!" Then the majesty of Re said: "Behold, they have fled into the desert, their hearts being afraid because I *might* speak to them." Then they said in the presence of his majesty: "May thy Eye be sent, that it may *catch* for thee them who scheme with evil things. (But) the Eye is not (*sufficiently*) prominent therein to smite them for thee. It should go down as Hat-Hor."

Fig. 162

So then this goddess came and slew mankind in the desert. Then the majesty of this god said: "Welcome, Hat-Hor, who hast done for me *the deed for which I came!*" Then this goddess said: "As thou livest for me, I have prevailed over mankind, and it is pleasant in my heart!" Then the majesty of Re said: "I shall prevail over them *as a king* (15) by diminishing them!"⁹ That is how Sekhmet came into being, the (beer)-mash of the night, to wade in their blood from Herakleopolis.¹⁰

Then Re said: "Pray, summon to me swift and speedy messengers, so that they may run like the shadow of a body." Then these messengers were brought immediately. Then the majesty of this god said: "Go ye to Elephantine and bring me red ochre very abundantly." Then this red ochre was brought to him. Then the majesty of this great god caused . . . , [and He-With]-the-Side-Lock who is in He-liopolis¹¹ ground up this red ochre. When further maidservants crushed barley to (make) beer, then this red ochre was added to this mash. Then (it) was like human blood. Then seven thousand jars of the beer were made. So then the majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt: Re came, together with these gods, to see this beer.

Now when day broke for (20) the slaying of mankind by the goddess at their season of going upstream, then the majesty of Re said: "How good it is! I shall protect mankind with it!" Then Re said: "Pray, carry it to the place in which she expected to slay mankind." Then the majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt: Re went to work early in the depth of the night to have this sleep-maker poured out. Then the fields were filled with liquid *for* three palms, through the power of the majesty of this god.

Then this goddess went at dawn, and she found this (place) flooded. Then her face (looked) beautiful therein. Then she drank, and it was good in her heart. She came (back) drunken, without having perceived mankind.

(The remainder of this story has to do with the origin of certain names and customs, such as the use of strong drink at the Feast of Hat-Hor.)

⁹ It soon becomes clear that Re wishes the destruction to cease, whereas Hat-Hor is unwilling to halt her lustful annihilation.

¹⁰ The formula by which the origin of a name was explained.

¹¹ An epithet of the High Priest of Re.

The Story of Si-nuhe

ANET, 18–22

A strong love of country was a dominant characteristic of the ancient Egyptian. Though he might feel the responsibilities of empire-building, he wished the assurance that he would close his days on the banks of the Nile. That sentiment made the following story one of the most popular classics of Egyptian literature. An Egyptian official of the Middle Kingdom went into voluntary exile in Asia. He was prosperous and well established there, but he continued to long for the land of his birth. Finally he received a royal invitation to return and join the court. This was his real success in life, and this was the popular point of the story. Much of the tale is pompous and over-styled in wording and phrasing, but the central narrative is a credible account, which fits the period as we know it. If this was fiction, it was based on realities and deserves a respected place in Egyptian literature.

The story opens with the death of Amen-em-het I (about 1960 B.C.) and continues in the reign of his successor, Sen-Usert I (about 1971–1928 B.C.). Manuscripts are plentiful and run from the late Twelfth Dynasty (about 1800 B.C.) to the Twenty-first Dynasty (about 1000 B.C.). There are five papyri and at least seventeen ostraca. The most important papyri are in Berlin.

(R1) THE HEREDITARY PRINCE AND COUNT, Judge and District Overseer of the domains of the Sovereign in the lands of the Asiatics, real acquaintance of the king, his beloved, the Attendant Si-nuhe. He says:

I was an attendant who followed his lord, a servant of the royal harem (and of) the Hereditary Princess, the great of favor, the wife of King Sen-Usert in (the pyramid town) Khenem-sut, the daughter of King Amen-em-het (R5) in (the pyramid town) Qa-nefru, Nefru, the lady of reverence.

Fig. 105

YEAR 30, THIRD MONTH OF THE FIRST SEASON, DAY 7.¹² The god ascended to his horizon; the King of Upper and Lower Egypt: Sehetep-ib-Re was taken up to heaven and united with the sun disc. The body of the god merged with him who made him.¹³ The Residence City was in silence, hearts were in mourning, the Great Double Doors were sealed shut. (R10) The courtiers (sat) head on lap, and the people were in grief.

Now his majesty had sent an army to the land of the Temeh-Libyans, with his eldest son as the commander thereof, the good god Sen-Usert, (R15) and even now he was returning and had carried off living captives of the Tehenu-Libyans and all (kinds of) cattle without number.

¹² Around 1960 Amen-em-het I's death would have fallen early in March.

¹³ The pharaoh was the "Son of Re," the sun-god. At death he was taken back into the body of his creator and father.

The courtiers of the palace sent to the western border to let the King's Son know the events which had taken place at the court. The messengers met him on the road, (R20) and they reached him in the evening time. He did not delay a moment; the falcon¹⁴ flew away with his attendants, without letting his army know it. Now the royal children who had been following him in this army had been sent for, (B1) and one of them was summoned. While I was standing (near by) I heard his voice as he was speaking and I was a little way off. My heart was distraught, my arms spread out (in dismay), trembling fell upon all my limbs.¹⁵ I removed myself *by leaps and bounds* to seek a hiding place for myself. I placed (5) myself between two bushes, in order to *cut (myself) off from the road and its travel*.

I set out southward, (but) I did not plan to reach this Residence City, (for) I thought that there would be civil disorder, and I did not expect to live after him. I crossed Lake Ma'aty near Sycamore, and I came to Snefru Island. I spent the day there on the *edge* of (10) the fields, I *came into the open* light, while it was (*still*) day, and I met a man standing near by. He stood in awe of me, for he was afraid. When the time of the evening meal came, I drew near to Ox-town. I crossed over in a barge without a rudder, by aid of the west wind. I passed by the east of the quarry (15) above Mistress-of-the-Red-Mountain.¹⁶ I gave (free) road to my feet going northward, and I came up to the Wall-of-the-Ruler, made to oppose the Asiatics and to crush the Sand-Crossers. I took a crouching position in a bush, for fear lest the watchmen upon the wall where their day's (duty) was might see me.

I set out (20) at evening time, and when day broke I reached Peten. I halted at the Island of Kem-wer. An attack of thirst overtook me. I was parched, and my throat was dusty. I said: "This is the taste of death!" (But then) I lifted up my heart and collected myself, for I had heard the sound of the lowing of cattle, (25) and I spied Asiatics. The sheikh among them, who had been in Egypt, recognized me. Then he gave me water while he boiled milk for me. I went with him to his tribe. What they did (for me) was good.

One foreign country gave me to another. I set off for Byblos and approached Qedem, and spent (30) a year and a half there. Ammi-enshi—he was a ruler of Upper Retenu—took me and said to me:

¹⁴The new king Sen-Usert I.

¹⁵We are never directly told the reason for Si-nuhe's sudden fright and voluntary exile. Later both he and the king protest his innocence. He may have been legally guiltless, but the transition between kings was a dangerous time for one who was not fully identified with the new king. Assume that Si-nuhe had adequate reason for his sudden and furtive departure and his long stay in Asia.

¹⁶Gebel el-Ahmar, east of Cairo.

“Thou wilt do well with me, and thou wilt hear the speech of Egypt.” He said this, for he knew my character, he had heard of my wisdom, and the people of Egypt who were there with him¹⁷ had borne witness for me. . . .

He set me at the head of his children. He married me to his eldest daughter. He let me choose for myself of his country, (80) of the choicest of that which was with him on his frontier with another country. It was a good land, named Yaa. Figs were in it, and grapes. It had more wine than water. Plentiful was its honey, abundant its olives. Every (kind of) fruit was on its trees. Barley was there, and emmer. There was no limit to any (kind of) cattle. (85) Moreover, great was that which accrued to me as a result of the love of me. He made me ruler of a tribe of the choicest of his country. Bread was made for me as daily fare, wine as daily provision, cooked meat and roast fowl, beside the wild beasts of the desert, for they hunted (90) for me and laid before me, beside the catch of my (own) hounds. Many . . . were made for me, and milk in every (kind of) cooking.

Num. 13:23, 27

I spent many years, and my children grew up to be strong men, each man as the restrainer of his (own) tribe. The messenger who went north or who went south to the Residence City (95) stopped over with me, (for) I used to make everybody stop over. I gave water to the thirsty. I put him who had strayed (back) on the road. I rescued him who had been robbed. When the Asiatics became so bold as to oppose the rulers of foreign countries, I counseled their movements. This ruler of (100) (Re)tenu had me spend many years as commander of his army. Every foreign country against which I went forth, when I had made my attack on it, was driven away from its pasturage and its wells. I plundered its cattle, carried off its inhabitants, took away their food, and slew people in it (105) by my strong arm, by my bow, by my movements, and by my successful plans. I found favor in his heart, he loved me, he recognized my valor, and he placed me at the head of his children, when he saw how my arms flourished.

A mighty man of Retenu came, that he might challenge me (110) in my (own) camp. He was a hero without his peer, and he had repelled all of it.¹⁸ He said that he would fight me, he intended to despoil me, and he planned to plunder my cattle, on the advice of his tribe. That prince discussed (it) with me, and I said: “I do not know him. Certainly I am no confederate of his, (115) so that I might move freely in his encampment. Is it the case that I have (ever) opened his *door* or overthrown his fences? (Rather), it is hostility because he sees me carrying out thy commissions. I am really like a stray bull

¹⁷ Other exiles like Si-nuhe? He is in a land of refuge from Egypt.

¹⁸ He had beaten every one of the land of Retenu.

in the midst of another herd, and a bull of (these) cattle attacks him. . . .”¹⁹

I Sam. 17:51

During the night I strung my bow and shot my arrows,²⁰ I gave free play to my dagger, and polished my weapons. When day broke, (Re)tenu was come. (130) It had *whipped up* its tribes and collected the countries of a (good) half of it. It had thought (only) of this fight. Then he came to me as I was waiting, (for) I had placed myself near him. Every heart burned for me; women and men groaned. Every heart was sick for me. They said: “Is there another strong man who could fight against him?” Then (*he took*) his shield, his battle-axe, (135) and his *armful of javelins*. Now after I had let his weapons issue forth, I made his arrows pass by me uselessly, one close to another. He charged me, and I shot him, my arrow sticking in his neck. He cried out and fell on his nose. (140) I felled him with his (own) battle-axe and raised my cry of victory over his back, while every Asiatic roared. I gave praise to Montu,²¹ while his adherents were mourning for him. This ruler Ammi-enshi took me into his embrace. Then I carried off his goods and plundered his cattle. What he had planned to do (145) to me I did to him. I took what was in his tent and stripped his encampment. I became great thereby, I became extensive in my wealth, I became abundant in my cattle.

Thus did god to show mercy to him upon whom he had *laid blame*, whom he had led astray to another country. (But) today his heart is assuaged.²² . . .

Now when the majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt: Kheper-ka-Re, the justified,²³ was told about this situation in which I was, then his majesty kept sending (175) to me with presentations from the royal presence, that he might gladden the heart of this servant like the ruler of any foreign country. The royal children in his palace let me hear their commissions.²⁴ . . .

Then they came for this servant. . . . I was permitted to spend a day in Yaa handing over my property to my children, my eldest son being responsible for my tribe. (240) My tribe and all my property were in his charge: my serfs, all my cattle, my fruit, and every pleasant tree of mine.

¹⁹ Si-nuhe goes on to state that he accepts the challenge, which has come to him because he is an outsider.

²⁰ In practice.

²¹ The Egyptian god of war.

²² It is not clear how Si-nuhe expiated his sins, except by being a successful Egyptian in another country.

²³ Sen-Usert I.

²⁴ They also wrote to Si-nuhe.

Then this servant came southward. I halted at the “Ways of Horus.”²⁵ The commander there who was responsible for the patrol sent a message to the Residence to make (it) known. Then his majesty sent a capable overseer of peasants of the palace, with loaded ships in his train, (245) carrying presentations from the royal presence FOR THE ASIATICS WHO HAD FOLLOWED ME, ESCORTING ME TO THE “WAYS OF HORUS.” I called each of them by his name.²⁶ Every butler was (busy) at his duties. When I started and set sail, the kneading and straining (of beer) was carried on beside me, until I had reached the town of Lisht.

Gen. 45:21–23

When day had broken, very early, they came and summoned me, ten men coming and ten men going to usher me to the palace. I put my brow to the ground between the sphinxes, (250) while the royal children were waiting in a *recess* to meet me. The courtiers who usher into the audience hall set me on the way to the private chambers. I found his majesty upon the Great Throne in a *recess* of fine gold. When I was stretched out upon my belly, I knew not myself in his presence, (although) this god greeted me pleasantly. I was like a man caught in the dark: (255) my soul departed, my body was powerless, my heart was not in my body, that I might know life from death.

THEN HIS MAJESTY SAID TO ONE OF THESE COURTIERS: “Lift him up. Let him speak to me.” Then his majesty said: “Behold, thou art come. Thou hast trodden the foreign countries *and made a flight*. (But now) elderliness has attacked thee; thou hast reached old age. It is no small matter that thy corpse be (properly) buried; thou shouldst not be interred by bowmen. Do not, do not act thus any longer: (for) thou dost not speak (260) when thy name is pronounced!” Yet (I) was afraid to respond, and I answered it with the answer of one afraid: “What is it that my lord says to me? I should answer it, (but) there is nothing that I can do: it is really the hand of a god. It is a terror that is in my belly like that which produced the fated flight. BEHOLD, I AM BEFORE THEE. THINE IS LIFE. MAY THY MAJESTY DO AS HE PLEASES.”

THEREUPON the royal children WERE ushered in. Then his majesty said to the Queen: “Here is Si-nuhe, (265) come as a Bedu, (*in*) *the guise of* the Asiatics.” She gave a very great cry, and the royal children clamored all together. Then they said to his majesty: “It is not really he, O Sovereign, my lord!” Then his majesty said: “It is really he!” Now when they had brought with them their bead-necklaces, their rattles, and their sistra, then they presented them to his majesty. “. . . Loose the horn of thy bow and relax thy arrow! (275) Give breath

Exod. 15:20–21

²⁵ The Egyptian frontier station facing Sinai, probably near modern Kantarah.

²⁶ He introduced the Asiatics to the Egyptians.

to him that was stifled! Give us our goodly gift in this sheikh Si-Mehit, a bowman born in Egypt. He made a flight through fear of thee; he left the land through terror of thee. (But) the face of him who beholds thy face shall not *blench*; the eye which looks at thee shall not be afraid!"

Gen. 41:42 Then his majesty said: "He shall not fear. (280) He has no *title* to be in dread. He shall be a courtier among the nobles. He shall be put in the ranks of the courtiers. Proceed ye to the inner chambers of the *morning (toilet)*, in order to make his position."²⁷

Gen. 41:14 So I went forth from the midst of the inner chambers, with the royal children giving me their hands. (285) Thereafter we went to the Great Double Door. I was put into the house of a royal son, in which were splendid things. A cool room was in it, and images of the horizon.²⁸ Costly things of the Treasury were in it. Clothing of royal linen, myrrh, and prime oil of the king and of the nobles whom he loves were in every room. (290) Every butler was (busy) at his duties. Years were made to pass away from my body. I was *plucked*, and my hair was combed. A load (of dirt) was given to the desert, and my clothes (to) the Sand-Crossers. I was clad in fine linen and anointed with prime oil. I slept on a bed. I gave up the sand to them who are in it, (295) and wood oil to him who is anointed with it. I was given a house *which had a garden*, which had been in the possession of a courtier. Many *craftsmen* built it, and all its wood(work) was newly restored. Meals were brought to me from the palace three or four times a day, apart from that which the royal children gave, without ceasing a moment.

Fig. 192 (300) There was constructed for me a pyramid-tomb of stone in the midst of the pyramid-tombs. The stone-masons who hew a pyramid-tomb took over its ground-area. The outline-draftsmen designed in it; the chief sculptors carved in it; and the overseers of works who are in the necropolis made it their concern. (305) Its necessary materials were made from all the outfittings which are placed at a tomb-shaft. Mortuary priests were given to me. There was made for me a necropolis garden, with fields in it *formerly (extending)* as far as the town, like that which is done for a chief courtier. My statue was overlaid with gold, and its skirt was of fine gold. It was his majesty who had it made. There is no poor man for whom the like has been done.

(So) I was under (310) the favor of the king's presence until the day of mooring had come.²⁹

²⁷ Si-nuh's new rank is to be established by a change of dress in a properly designated place.

²⁸ Painted decorations. "Cool room" may have been either a bathroom or a cellar for preserving foods.

²⁹ Until the day of death.

The Story of Two Brothers

ANET, 23–25

This folk tale tells how a conscientious young man was falsely accused of a proposal of adultery by the wife of his elder brother, after he had actually rejected her advances. This part of the story has general similarity to the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. The two chief characters are brothers named Anubis and Bata. These were the names of Egyptian gods, and the tale probably does have a mythological setting. However, it served for entertainment, rather than ecclesiastical or moral purpose. The story is colloquial and is so translated.

Gen. 39:1–20

Papyrus D'Orbiney is now British Museum 10183. Facsimiled in *Select Papyri in the Hieratic Character from the Collections of the British Museum*, 11 (London, 1860), Pls. ix–xix, and in G. Möller, *Hieratische Lesestücke*, 11 (Leipzig, 1927), 1–20. The manuscript can be closely dated to about 1225 B.C. in the Nineteenth Dynasty. Transcription into hieroglyphic in A. H. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories (Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca, 1, Brussels, 1932)*, 9–29, Translation in Erman, *LAE*, 150–61.

NOW THEY SAY THAT (ONCE) THERE WERE two brothers of one mother and one father. Anubis was the name of the elder, and Bata was the name of the younger. Now, as for Anubis, he [had] a house and had a wife, [and] his younger brother (lived) with him as a sort of minor. He was the one who made clothes for him and went to the fields driving his cattle. He was the one who did the plowing and who harvested for him. He was the one who did all (kinds of) work for him which are in the fields. Really, his younger [brother] was a good (grown) man. There was no one like him in the entire land. Why, the strength of a god was in him.

[NOW] AFTER MANY DAYS AFTER THIS,³⁰ his younger brother (5) [was tending] his cattle in his custom of every [day], and he [left off] (to go) to his house every evening, loaded [with] all (kinds of) plants of the field, [with] milk, with wood, and [with] every [good thing of] the fields, and he laid them in front of his [elder brother], who was sitting with his wife. And he drank and he ate, and [he went out to sleep in] his stable among his cattle [by himself].

NOW WHEN IT WAS DAWN AND A SECOND DAY HAD COME, [he prepared food], which was cooked, and laid it before his elder brother. [And he] gave him bread for the fields. And he drove his cattle out to let them feed in the fields. He went along after his cattle, [and] they would say to him: "The grass [of] such-and-such a place is good," and he would understand whatever they said and would take them to the place (ii 1) of good grass which they wanted. So the cattle which were before him became very, very fine. They doubled their calving very, very much.

³⁰The unthinking formula of a storyteller making a transition.

Fig. 16 NOW AT THE TIME OF plowing his [elder] brother said to him: “Get a yoke [*of oxen*] ready for us for plowing, for the fields have come out, and it is fine for plowing. Also come to the fields with seed, for we shall be busy (with) plowing [in] the morning.” So he spoke to him. THEN [his] (5) younger brother did all the things which his elder brother had told him to [do].

NOW WHEN IT WAS DAWN [AND A SECOND] DAY HAD COME, they went to the fields with their [seed], and they were busy [with] plowing, and [their hearts] were very, very pleased with their activity at the beginning of [their] work.

Fig. 10 NOW [AFTER] MANY [DAYS] AFTER THIS, they were in the fields and ran short of seed. THEN HE sent his younger brother, saying: “Go and fetch us seed from the village.” And his younger brother found the wife of his elder brother sitting and doing her hair. THEN HE said to her: “Get up and give me (some) seed, (iii 1) for my younger³¹ brother is waiting for me. Don’t delay!” THEN SHE said to him: “Go and open the bin and take what you want! Don’t make me leave my combing unfinished!” THEN the lad went into his stable, and he took a big jar, for he wanted to carry off a lot of seed. So he loaded himself with barley and emmer and came out carrying them.

THEN SHE said to him: “How much (is it) that is on your shoulder?” [And he] said to her: (5) “THREE sacks of emmer, two sacks of barley, FIVE IN ALL, is what is on your shoulder.”³² So he spoke to her. THEN SHE [talked with] him, saying “There is [great] strength in you! Now I see your energies every day!” And she wanted to know him as one knows a man.

THEN SHE stood up and took hold of him and said to him: “Come, let’s spend an [hour] sleeping (together)! This will do you good, because I shall make fine clothes for you!” THEN the lad [became] like a leopard with [great] rage at the wicked suggestion which she had made to him, and she was very, very much frightened. THEN HE argued with her, saying: “See here—you are like a mother to me, and your husband is like a father to me! Because—being older than I—he was the one who brought me up. What (iv 1) is this great crime which you have said to me? Don’t say it to me again! And I won’t tell it to a single person, nor will I let it out of my mouth to any man!” And he lifted up his load, and he went to the fields. THEN HE reached his elder brother, and they were busy with activity (at) their work.

NOW AT THE [TIME] OF EVENING, THEN his elder brother left off (to go) to his house. And his younger brother tended his cattle, and [he] loaded himself with everything of the fields, and he took his

³¹ Read “elder.”

³² Read “my shoulder.” He was carrying more than 11 bushels.

cattle (5) in front of him, to let them sleep (in) their stable which was in the village.

But the wife of his elder brother was afraid (because of) the suggestion which she had made. THEN SHE took fat and grease,³³ and she became like one who has been criminally beaten, wanting to tell her husband: “It was your younger brother who did the beating!” And her husband left off in the evening, after his custom of every day, and he reached his house, and he found his wife lying down, terribly sick. She did not put water on his hands, after his custom, nor had she lit a light before him, and his house was in darkness, and she lay (there) vomiting. So her husband said to her: “Who has been talking with you?” Then she said to him: “Not one person has been talking with me except your (v 1) younger brother. But when he came [to] take the seed to you he found me sitting alone, and he said to me: ‘Come, let’s spend an hour sleeping (together)! Put on your curls!’³⁴ So he spoke to me. But I wouldn’t listen to him: ‘Aren’t I your mother?—for your elder brother is like a father to you!’ So I spoke to him. But he was afraid, and he beat (me), so as not to let me tell you. Now, if you let him live, I’ll kill myself! Look, when he comes, *don’t* [let him speak], for, if I accuse (him of) this wicked suggestion, he will be ready to do it *tomorrow* (again)!”

THEN his elder brother became (5) like a leopard, and he made his lance sharp, and he put it in his hand. THEN his elder (brother) stood behind the door (of) his stable to kill his younger brother when he came back in the evening to put his cattle in the stable.

Now when the sun was setting, he loaded himself (with) all plants of the fields, according to his custom of every day, and he came back. When the first cow came into the stable, she said to her herdsman: “Here’s your elder brother waiting before you, carrying his lance to kill you! Run away from him!” THEN HE understood what his first cow had said. And (vi 1) another went in, and she said the same. So he looked under the door of his stable, and he saw the feet of [his] elder brother, as he was waiting behind the door, with his lance in his hand. So he laid his load on the ground, and he started to run away and escape. And his elder brother went after him, carrying his lance.

THEN his younger brother prayed to the Re-Har-akhti, (5) saying: “O my good lord, thou art he who judges the wicked from the just!” Thereupon the Re heard all his pleas, and the Re made a great (body of) water appear between him and his elder (brother), and it was full of crocodiles. So one of them came to be on one side and the other on the other. And his elder brother struck his hand twice because of his not killing him. THEN his younger brother called to him from the

³³ Apparently to make her vomit.

³⁴ The wig of her festive attire.

(other) side, saying: “Wait here until dawn. When the sun disc rises, I shall (vii 1) be judged with you in his presence, and he will turn the wicked over to the just, for I won’t be with you ever [*again*]; I won’t be in a place where you are—I shall go to the Valley of the Cedar!”

NOW WHEN IT WAS DAWN AND A SECOND DAY HAD COME, the Re-Har-akhti arose, and one of them saw the other. THEN the lad argued with his elder brother, saying: “What do you (mean by) coming after me to kill (me) falsely, when you wouldn’t listen to what I had to say? Now I am still your younger brother, and (5) you are like a father to me, and your wife is like a mother to me! Isn’t it so? When I was sent to fetch us (some) seed, your wife said to me: ‘Come, let’s spend an hour sleeping (together)!’ But, look, it is twisted for you into something else!” THEN HE let him know all that had happened to him and his wife. THEN HE swore to the Re-Har-akhti, saying “As for your killing (me) falsely, you carried your lance on the word of a filthy whore!” And he took a reed-knife, and he cut off his phallus, and he threw it into the water. And the shad swallowed (it).³⁵ And he (viii 1) was faint and became weak. And his elder brother’s heart was very, very sad, and he stood weeping aloud for him. He could not cross over to where his younger brother was because of the crocodiles. . . .

THEN (the younger brother) went (7) off to the Valley of the Cedar, and his elder brother went off to his house, with his hand laid upon his head, and he was smeared with dust.³⁶ So he reached his house, and he killed his wife, and he threw her out (to) the dogs. And he sat in mourning for his younger brother. . . .

(The story continues with a number of episodes).

Josh. 7:6;
II Kings 9:33, 36

ANET, 25–29

The Journey of Wen-Amon to Phoenicia

When the Egyptian Empire disintegrated, it left a vacuum in its place for a generation or two. Egyptians, Asiatics, and Africans continued to think in terms of an authority which was no longer real. In the following tale Egypt had already become a “bruised reed” but was continuing to assert traditional expressions of dominance. The Asiatics were beginning to express their scepticism and their independence of their great neighbor to the south.

Isa. 36:6

The story is almost picaresque in its atmosphere and must be classed as a narrative. Nevertheless, it deals at close range with actual individuals and

³⁵The mutilation was a self-imposed ordeal to support his oath to the sun-god. There was a familiar element in the swallowing of the phallus by the fish. In the Plutarch account of the Osiris myths, it is related that Seth dismembered Osiris and scattered the pieces. Then Isis went about and buried each piece as she found it. However, she could not find the phallus, which had been thrown into the river and eaten by certain fishes, which thereby became forbidden food.

³⁶Thus showing his grief.

situations and must have had a basis of fact, here exaggerated by the conscious and unconscious humor of the narrator. It does represent the situation in Hither Asia about 1100 B.C. more tellingly than a document of the historical-propagandistic category could do.

Wen-Amon, an official of the Temple of Amon at Karnak, tells how he was sent to Byblos on the Phoenician coast to procure lumber for the ceremonial barge of the god. Egypt had already split into small states and did not support his mission with adequate purchasing value, credentials, or armed force.

The papyrus, now in the Moscow Museum, comes from el-Hibeh in Middle Egypt and dates to the early Twenty-first Dynasty (11th century B.C.), shortly after the events it relates.

YEAR 5, 4TH MONTH OF THE 3RD SEASON, DAY 16: the day on which Wen-Amon, the Senior of the Forecourt of the House of Amon, [Lord of the Thrones] of the Two Lands, set out to fetch the woodwork for the great and august barque of Amon-Re, King of the Gods, which is on [the River and which is named:] "User-het-Amon." On the day when I reached Tanis, the place [where Ne-su-Ba-neb]-Ded and Ta-net-Amon were,³⁷ I gave them the letters of Amon-Re, King of the Gods, and they (5) had them read in their presence. And they said: "Yes, I will do as Amon-Re, King of the Gods, our [lord], has said!" I SPENT UP TO THE 4TH MONTH OF THE 3RD SEASON in Tanis. And Ne-su-Ba-neb-Ded and Ta-net-Amon sent me off with the ship captain Mengebēt, and I embarked on the great Syrian sea IN THE 1ST MONTH OF THE 3RD SEASON, DAY 1.

Fig. 99

I reached Dor, a town of the Tjeker, and Beder, its prince, had 50 loaves of bread, one jug of wine, (10) and one leg of beef brought to me. And a man of my ship ran away and stole one [vessel] of gold, [amounting] to 5 *deben*, four jars of silver, amounting to 20 *deben*, and a sack of 11 *deben* of silver. [Total of what] he [stole]: 5 *deben* of gold and 31 *deben* of silver.³⁸

Jdg. 1:27

I got up in the morning, and I went to the place where the Prince was, and I said to him: "I have been robbed in your harbor. Now you are the prince of this land, and you are its investigator who should look for my silver. Now about this silver—it belongs to Amon-Re, (15) King of the Gods, the lord of the lands; it belongs to

³⁷ Ne-su-Ba-neb-Ded was the *de facto* ruler of the Delta, with Tanis as his capital. Ta-net-Amon was apparently his wife. At Thebes in Upper Egypt, the High Priest of Amon, Heri-Hor, was the *de facto* ruler. Ne-su-Ba-neb-Ded and Heri-Hor were in working relations with each other, and were shortly to become contemporary pharaohs.

³⁸ This value—about 450 grams (1.2 lb. troy) of gold and about 2.8 kilograms (7.5 lb. troy) of silver—was to pay for the lumber.

Ne-su-Ba-neb-Ded; it belongs to Heri-Hor, my lord, and the other great men of Egypt! It belongs to you; it belongs to Weret; it belongs to Mekmer; it belongs to Zakar-Baal, the Prince of Byblos!”³⁹

And he said to me: “Whether you are important or whether you are eminent—look here, I do not recognize this accusation which you have made to me! Suppose it had been a thief who belonged to my land who went on your boat and stole your silver, I should have repaid it to you from my treasury, until they had (20) found this thief of yours—whoever he may be. Now about the thief who robbed you—he belongs to you! He belongs to your ship! Spend a few days here visiting me, so that I may look for him.”

Fig. 98

I spent nine days moored (in) his harbor, and I went (to) call on him, and I said to him: “Look, you have not found my silver. [*Just let*] me [*go*] with the ship captains and with those who go (to) sea!” But he said to me: “Be quiet!” . . . I went out of Tyre at the break of dawn. . . . Zakar-Baal, the Prince of Byblos, . . . (30) ship. I found 30 *deben* of silver in it, and I seized upon it.⁴⁰ [And I said to *the Tjeker*: “*I have seized upon* your silver, and it will stay with me [until] you find [my silver or the thief] who stole it! Even though *you have not stolen*, I shall take it. But as for you . . .” So they went away, and I enjoyed my triumph [in] a tent (on) the shore of the [sea], (in) the harbor of Byblos. And [*I hid*] Amon-of-the-Road, and I put his property inside *him*.⁴¹

And the [Prince] of Byblos sent to me, saying: “Get [out of (35) my] harbor!” And I sent to him, saying: “Where *should* [*I go to*]?. . . . If [*you have a ship*] to carry me, have me taken to Egypt again!” So I spent twenty-nine days in his [harbor, while] he [spent] the time sending to me every day to say: “Get out (of) my harbor!”

I Sam. 19:24

NOW WHILE HE WAS MAKING OFFERING to his gods, the god seized one of his youths and made him possessed.⁴² And he said to him: “Bring up [*the*] *god*! Bring the messenger who is carrying him! (40) Amon is the one who sent him out! He is the one who made him come!” And while the possessed (youth) was having his frenzy on this night, I had (already) found a ship headed for Egypt and had loaded everything that I had into it. While I was watching for the darkness, thinking that when it descended I would load the god

³⁹On the one hand, the gold and silver belong to the Egyptians who sent Wen-Amon. On the other hand, they belong to the Asiatics who would receive it. Beder thus has double responsibilities to recover them.

⁴⁰Nearly the same amount as the silver which had been stolen from him, without account of the gold.

⁴¹The divine image would have its daily cult and therefore its cultic apparatus would be stored within the hollow image.

⁴²Perhaps a court page was seized with a prophetic frenzy.

(also), so that no other eye might see him, the harbor master came to me, saying: “Wait until morning—so says the Prince.” So I said to him: “Aren’t you the one who spend the time coming to me every day to say: ‘Get out (of) my harbor’? Aren’t you saying ‘Wait’ tonight (45) in order to let the ship which I have found get away—and (then) you will come again (to) say: ‘Go away!’?” So he went and told it to the Prince. And the Prince sent to the captain of the ship to say: “Wait until morning—so says the Prince!”

When MORNING CAME, he sent and brought me up, but the god stayed in the tent where he was, (on) the shore of the sea. And I found him sitting (in) his upper room, with his back turned to a window, so that the waves of the great Syrian sea broke against the back (50) of his head.⁴³

So I said to him: “*May Amon favor you!*” But he said to me “How long, up to today, since you came from the place where Amon is?” So I said to him: “Five months and one day up to now.” And he said to me: “Well, you’re truthful! Where is the letter of Amon which (should be) in your hand? Where is the dispatch of the High Priest of Amon which (should be) in your hand?” And I told him: “I gave them to Ne-su-Ba-neb-Ded and Ta-net-Amon.” And he was very, very angry, and he said to me: “Now see—neither letters nor dispatches are in your hand! Where is the cedar ship which Ne-su-Ba-neb-Ded gave to you? Where is (55) its Syrian crew? Didn’t he turn you over to this foreign ship captain to have him kill you and throw you into the sea? (Then) with whom would they have looked for the god? And you too—with whom would they have looked for you too?” So he spoke to me.

BUT I SAID TO HIM: “Wasn’t it an Egyptian ship? Now it is Egyptian crews which sail under Ne-su-Ba-neb-Ded! He has no Syrian crews.” And he said to me: “Aren’t there twenty ships here in my harbor which are in commercial relations with Ne-su-Ba-neb-Ded? As to this Sidon, (ii 1) the other (place) which you have passed, aren’t there fifty more ships there which are in commercial relations with Werket-El, and which are drawn up to his house?” And I was silent in this great time.

And he answered and said to me: “On what business have you come?” So I told him: “I have come after the woodwork for the great and august barque of Amon-Re, King of the Gods. Your father did (it), (5) your grandfather did (it), and you will do it too!” So I spoke to him. But he said to me: “To be sure, they did it! And if you give me (something) for doing it, I will do it! Why, when my people carried out this commission, Pharaoh—life, prosperity, health!—sent six

Ezek. 27:8–9

⁴³ Pictorially, not literally. Wen-Amon gives his vivid first view of Zakar-Baal, framed in an upper window overlooking the surf of the Mediterranean.

ships loaded with Egyptian goods, and they unloaded them into their storehouses! You—what is it that you're bringing me—me also?" And he had the journal rolls of his fathers brought, and he had them read out in my presence, and they found a thousand *deben* of silver and all kinds of things in his scrolls.

(10) So he said to me: "If the ruler of Egypt were the lord of mine, and I were his servant also, he would not have to send silver and gold, saying: 'Carry out the commission of Amon!' There would be no carrying of a royal-gift, such as they used to do for my father. As for me—me also—I am not your servant! I am not the servant of him who sent you either! If I cry out to the Lebanon, the heavens open up, and the logs are here lying (on) the shore of the sea! Give (15) me the sails which you have brought to carry your ships which would hold the logs for (Egypt)! Give me the ropes [which] you have brought [*to lash the cedar*] logs which I am to cut down to make you . . . which I shall make for you (as) the sails of your boats, and the *spars* will be (too) heavy and will break, and you will die in the middle of the sea! See, Amon made thunder in the sky when he put Seth near him.⁴⁴ Now when Amon (20) founded all lands, in founding them he founded first the land of Egypt, from which you come; for craftsmanship came out of it, to reach the place where I am, and learning came out of it, to reach the place where I am. What are these silly trips which they have had you make?"

And I said to him: "(That's) not true! What I am on are no 'silly trips' at all! There is no ship upon the River which does not belong to Amon! The sea is his, and the Lebanon is his, of which you say; 'It is mine!' It forms (25) the *nursery* for User-het-Amon, the lord of [every] ship! Why, he spoke—Amon-Re, King of the Gods—and said to Heri-Hor, my master: 'Send me forth!' So he had me come, carrying this great god. But see, you have made this great god spend these twenty-nine days moored (in) your harbor, although you did not know (it). Isn't he here? Isn't he the (same) as he was? You are stationed (here) to carry on the commerce of the Lebanon with Amon, its lord. As for your saying that the former kings sent silver and gold—suppose that they had life and health; (then) they would not have had such things sent! (30) (But) they had such things sent to your fathers in place of life and health!⁴⁵ Now as for Amon-Re, King of the Gods—he is the lord of this life and health, and he was the lord of your fathers. They spent their lifetimes making offering to

⁴⁴ As god of thunder. Thus Amon and Seth were gods of all lands, not of Egypt alone.

⁴⁵ In contrast with the past, Wen-Amon has brought an actual god in "Amon-of-the-Road," so that there may be spiritual rather than material advantages for Zakar-Baal.

Amon. And you also—you are the servant of Amon! If you say to Amon: ‘Yes, I will do (it)!’ and you carry out his commission, you will live, you will be prosperous, you will be healthy, and you will be good to your entire land and your people! (But) don’t wish for yourself anything belonging to Amon-Re, (King of) the Gods. Why, a lion wants his own property! Have your secretary brought to me, so that (35) I may send him to Ne-su-Ba-neb-Ded and Ta-net-Amon, the *officers* whom Amon put in the north of his land, and they will have all kinds of things sent. I shall send him to them to say: ‘Let it be brought until I shall go (back again) to the south, and I shall (then) have every bit of the debt still (due to you) brought to you.’” So I spoke to him.

So he entrusted my letter to his messenger, and he loaded in the *keel*, the bow-post, the stern-post, along with four other hewn timbers—seven in all—and he had them taken to Egypt. And in the first month of the second season his messenger who had gone to Egypt came back to me in Syria. And Ne-su-Ba-neb-Ded and Ta-net-Amon sent: (40) 4 jars and 1 *kak-men* of gold; 5 jars of silver; 10 pieces of clothing in royal linen; 10 *kherd* of good Upper Egyptian linen; 500 (rolls of) finished papyrus; 500 cowhides; 500 ropes; 20 sacks of lentils; and 30 baskets of fish. And she sent to me (personally): 5 pieces of clothing in good Upper Egyptian linen; 5 *kherd* of good Upper Egyptian linen; 1 sack of lentils; and 5 baskets of fish.

And the Prince was glad, and he detailed three hundred men and three hundred cattle, and he put supervisors at their head, to have them cut down the timber. So they cut them down, and they spent the second season lying there.⁴⁶

In the third month of the third season they dragged them (to) the shore of the sea, and the Prince came out and stood by them. And he sent to me, (45) saying: “Come!” Now when I presented myself near him, the shadow of his lotus-blossom fell upon me. And Pen-Amon, a butler who belonged to him, cut me off, saying: “The shadow of Pharaoh—life, prosperity, health!—your lord, has fallen on you!” But he was angry at him, saying: “Let him alone!”⁴⁷

So I presented myself near him, and he answered and said to me: “See, the commission which my fathers carried out formerly, I have carried it out (also), even though you have not done for me what your fathers would have done for me, and you too (should have done)! See, the last of your woodwork has arrived and is lying (here). Do as I wish, and come to load it in—for aren’t they going to give it

Fig. 89

⁴⁶Seasoning in the mountains.

⁴⁷Perhaps we have to do with the blight of majesty. The butler’s jest has point if the shadow of pharaoh was too intimate and holy to fall upon a commoner.

to you? (50) Don't come to look at the terror of the sea! If you look at the terror of the sea, you will see my own (too)!⁴⁸ Why, I have not done to you what was done to the messengers of Kha-em-Waset, when they spent seventeen years in this land—they died (where) they were!" And he said to his butler: "Take him and show him their *tomb* in which they are lying."

But I said to him: "Don't show it to me! As for Kha-em-Waset—they were men whom he sent to you as messengers, and he was a man himself. You do not have one of his messengers (here in me), when you say: 'Go and see your companions!' Now, shouldn't you rejoice (55) and have a stela [made] for yourself and say on it: 'Amon-Re, King of the Gods, sent to me Amon-of-the-Road, his messenger—[life], prosperity, health!—and Wen-Amon, his human messenger, after the woodwork for the great and august barque of Amon-Re, King of the Gods. I cut it down. I loaded it in. I provided it (with) my ships and my crews. I caused them to reach Egypt, in order to ask fifty years of life from Amon for myself, over and above my fate.' And it shall come to pass that, after another time, a messenger may come from the land of Egypt who knows writing, and he may read your name on the stela. And you will receive water (in) the West, like the gods who are (60) here!"⁴⁹

And he said to me: "This which you have said to me is a great testimony of words!"⁵⁰ So I said to him: "As for the many things which you have said to me, if I reach the place where the High Priest of Amon is and he sees how you have (carried out this) commission, it is your (carrying out of this) commission (which) will *draw out* something for you."

And I went (to) the shore of the sea, to the place where the timber was lying, and I spied eleven ships belonging to the Tjeker coming in from the sea, in order to say: "Arrest him! Don't let a ship of his (go) to the land of Egypt!" Then I sat down and wept. And the letter scribe of the Prince came out to me, (65) and he said to me: "What's the matter with you?" And I said to him: "Haven't you seen the birds go down to Egypt a second time?⁵¹ Look at them—how they travel to the cool pools! (But) how long shall I be left here! Now don't you see those who are coming again to arrest me?"

So he went and told it to the Prince. And the Prince began to weep because of the words which were said to him, for they were

⁴⁸If you use wind or weather as excuses for delay, you will find me just as dangerous.

⁴⁹A libation to help maintain the dead.

⁵⁰We cannot be sure whether the irony was conscious or unconscious.

⁵¹Wen-Amon had been away from Egypt for more than a year, seeing two flights of birds southward.

painful. And he sent out to me his letter scribe, and he brought to me two jugs of wine and one ram. And he sent to me Ta-net-Not, an Egyptian singer who was with him,⁵² saying: “Sing to him! Don’t let his heart take on cares!” And he sent to me, (70) to say: “Eat and drink! Don’t let your heart take on cares, for tomorrow you shall hear whatever I have to say.”

When morning came, he had his assembly summoned, and he stood in their midst, and he said to the Tjeker: “What have you come (for)?” And they said to him: “We have come after the *blasted* ships which you are sending to Egypt with our opponents!” But he said to them: “I cannot arrest the messenger of Amon inside my land. Let me send him away, and you go after him to arrest him.”

So he loaded me in, and he sent me away from there at the harbor of the sea. And the wind cast me on the land of (75) Alashiya. And they of the town came out against me to kill me, but I *forced my way* through them to the place where Heteb, the princess of the town, was. I met her as she was going out of one house of hers and going into another of hers.

So I greeted her, and I said to the people who were standing near her: “Isn’t there one of you who understands Egyptian?” And one of them said: “I understand (it).” So I said to him: “Tell my lady that I have heard, as far away as Thebes, the place where Amon is, that injustice is done in every town but justice is done in the land of Alashiya. Yet injustice is done here every day!” And she said: “Why, what do you (mean) (80) by saying it?” So I told her: “If the sea is stormy and the wind casts me on the land where you are, you should not let them take me *in charge* to kill me. For I am a messenger of Amon. Look here—as for me, they will search for me all the time! As to this crew of the Prince of Byblos which they are bent on killing, won’t its lord find ten crews of yours, and he also kill them?”

So she had the people summoned, and they stood (there). And she said to me: “Spend the night. . . .”

(At this point the papyrus breaks off. Since the tale is told in the first person, it is fair to assume that Wen-Amon returned to Egypt to tell his story, in some measure of safety or success.)

The Tradition of Seven Lean Years in Egypt

ANET, 31–32

The prosperity of Egypt depends upon the satisfactory flow of the Nile, particularly upon its annual inundation, and that river is antic and unpredictable. Ancient Egyptian texts have frequent references to hunger, “years of

⁵² Egyptian women who entertained or participated in cult ceremonies in Asia are known in the inscriptions on the Megiddo ivories.

Fig. 162

misery,” “a year of low Nile,” and so on.⁵³ The text which follows tells of seven years of low Niles and famine. In its present form the text derives from the Ptolemaic period (perhaps around the end of the 2nd century B.C.). However, its stated setting is the reign of Djoser of the Third Dynasty (about 28th century B.C.). It states the reasons why a stretch of Nile land south of Elephantine had been devoted to Khnum, god of Elephantine. It is a question whether it is a priestly forgery of some late period, justifying their claim to territorial privileges, or whether it correctly recounts an actual grant of land more than 2,500 years earlier. This question cannot be answered in final terms. We can only affirm that Egypt had a tradition of seven lean years, which, by a contractual arrangement between pharaoh and a god, were to be followed by years of plenty.

Year 18 of the Horus: Netjer-er-khet; the King of Upper and Lower Egypt: Netjer-er-khet; the Two Goddesses: Netjer-er-khet; the Horus of Gold: Djoser, *and under* the Count, Mayor, *Royal Acquaintance*, and Overseer of Nubians in Elephantine, Madir. There was brought to him⁵⁴ this royal decree:

Gen. 41:27

To let thee know. I was in distress on the Great Throne, and those who are in the palace were in heart's affliction from a very great evil, since the Nile had not come in my time for a space of seven years. Grain was scant, fruits were dried up, and everything which they eat was short. Every man *robbed* his companion. They moved without going (*ahead*). The infant was wailing; the youth was *waiting*; the heart of the old men was in sorrow, their legs were bent, crouching on the ground, their arms were *folded*. The courtiers were in need. The temples were shut up; the sanctuaries held [*nothing but*] *air*. Every[*thing*] was found empty.

I extended my heart back to the beginnings, and I asked him who was the *Chamberlain*, the Ibis, the Chief Lector Priest Ii-em-(ho)tep,⁵⁵ the son of Ptah, South-of-His-Wall: “What is the birthplace of the Nile? *Who is . . . the god there? Who is the god?*”

Then he answered (5) me: “I need the guidance of Him Who Presides over the House of the Fowling Net,⁵⁶ . . . *for the heart's confidence*

⁵³ Vandier gives a previously unpublished text from the First Intermediate Period (23rd–21st century B.C.), from a tomb some distance south of Thebes. “When the entire Upper Egypt was dying because of hunger, with every man eating his (own) children, I never allowed death to occur from hunger in this nome. I gave a loan of grain to Upper Egypt. . . . Moreover, I kept alive the domain of Elephantine and kept alive Iat-negen in these years, after the towns of Hefat and Hor-mer had been satisfied.” He took care of his home districts first.

⁵⁴ To Madir, the Governor at Elephantine.

⁵⁵ The famed minister of Djoser, whose reputation for wisdom later brought him deification.

⁵⁶ Thoth of Hermopolis, the god of wisdom and of priestly lore.

of all men about what they should do. I shall enter into the House of Life and spread out the Souls of Re,⁵⁷ (to see) if some guidance be in them.”

So he went, and he returned to me immediately, that he might *instruct* me on the inundation of the Nile, . . . and everything about which they had written. He uncovered for me the hidden spells thereof, to which the ancestors had taken (their) way, without their equal among kings since the limits of *time*. *He said* to me:

“There is a city in the midst of the waters [*from which*] the Nile rises, named Elephantine. It is the Beginning of the Beginning, the Beginning Nome, (*facing*) toward Wawat. It is the *joining* of the land, the primeval hillock of *earth*, the *throne* of Re, when he *reckons to cast* life beside everybody. ‘Pleasant of Life’ is the name of its dwelling. ‘The Two Caverns’ is the name of the water; they are the two breasts which pour forth all good things. It is the couch of the Nile, in which he becomes young (again). . . . He fecundates (the land) by mounting as the male, the bull, to the female; he renews (his) virility, assuaging his desire. He rushes twenty-eight cubits (high at Elephantine); he hastens at Diospolis seven cubits (high). Khnum is there as a god. . . .” . . .

(18) . . . As I slept in life and satisfaction, I discovered the god standing over against me. I propitiated him with praise; I prayed to him in his presence. He *revealed* himself to me, *his face* being fresh. His words were:

“I am Khnum, thy fashioner. . . . I know the Nile. When he is introduced into the fields, his introduction gives life to every nostril, like the introduction (of life) to the fields . . . The Nile will pour forth for thee, without a year of cessation or laxness for any land. Plants will grow, bowing down under the *fruit*. Renenut⁵⁸ will be at the head of everything. . . . Dependents *will fulfill* the purposes in their hearts, (22) as well as the master. The starvation year will have gone, and (people’s) *borrowing* from their granaries will have departed. Egypt will come into the fields, the banks will sparkle, . . . and contentment will be in their hearts more than that which was formerly.”

Then I awoke *quickly*, my heart cutting off weariness. I made this decree beside my father Khnum:⁵⁹

“An offering which the King gives to Khnum, the Lord of the Cataract Region, Who Presides over Nubia, in recompense for these things which thou wilt do for me:

I Kings 3:5

Gen. 41:56

⁵⁷The scriptorium in which the sacred and magic books “The Souls of Re,” were kept.

⁵⁸The goddess of the harvest.

⁵⁹That is, in the temple of Khnum.

“I offer to thee thy west in Manu and thy east (in) Bakhu,⁶⁰ from Elephantine as far as [Takompso], for twelve *iters*⁶¹ on the east and west, whether arable land or desert or river in every part of these *iters*. . . .”

(The remainder of the text continues Djoser’s promise to Khnum, the essence of which is that the land presented to the god shall be tithed for his temple. It is finally provided that the decree shall be inscribed on a stela in the temple of Khnum.)

⁶⁰ Manu was the western and Bakhu the eastern mountain range bordering the Nile.

⁶¹ The *Dodekaschoinos* known from the Greek writers.