

"HE HATH SUBDUED THE WATER MONSTER/CROCODILE":
GOD'S BATTLE WITH THE SEA IN EGYPTIAN SOURCES

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Abstract

The Battle of God with the Sea, which designates the conflict between the cosmic order and the chaotic powers, was a myth prevalent in the ancient world, of which different versions from Babylon, Ugarit, Mari and Hatti have long been known. Allusions to it occur also in the Bible (e.g. Gen 1:21; Isa 27:1; 51: 9-10; Ps. 74:13; Job 7:12; 26:12-13; Hab 3:8-9, 15). The common view in research is that the Hebrew texts bear the imprint of the Mesopotamian or the Ugaritic versions, and lately even an impact of Asia Minor was mentioned.

The aim of the present discussion is to demonstrate that a parallel myth that unfortunately has not attracted the attention it merits, was known in ancient Egypt as well. The Egyptian tradition is documented from the Second Millennium BCE until the Roman period, thus predating most of the ancient Near Eastern versions, the oldest of which is from the 18th-17th century BCE.

The Egyptian myth has been preserved in fragments from many literary and iconographic sources. To reconstruct it one must collect and assemble all these scattered fragments into one whole.

The present investigation establishes that the tradition of god's battle with the sea was well known in ancient Egypt, and one should not rule out the possibility that it left its traces in the Biblical texts.

The spotlights have always swung northward over the ancient Near East when examining the myth of God's battle with the Sea, which as we know left its mark on the Hebrew Scriptures in the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms and the Wisdom Literature.¹

It began when H. Gunkel published his pioneering work, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit (Creation and Chaos at the Beginning and the End of the World)* in 1895.² Scholars pointed out the parallels with the Babylonian Creation story "Enuma Elish", dated to the end of the second millennium BCE.³ This work describes the struggle of the god Marduk against Ti'amat, the goddess of salt water, and her dragons, vipers and monster serpents. Later on, from the 1940s when early discoveries in Ugarit were published up until today, researchers like M.D. Cassuto and then others such as S.E. Loewenstamm, G. Day and T.L. Fenton continue to emphasize the comparison between biblical material and the famous Ugaritic myth, "The Poem of Ba'al".⁴ This myth, apparently composed in the 14th — 13th centuries BCE, tells

¹ See e.g. Gen. 1: 22; Isa. 27: 1-2; 51: 9; Ps. 74: 13 ff.; Job 7: 12.

² H. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*, Göttingen, 1895.

³ See e.g. W. G. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis", in: H.P. Müller (ed.), *Babylonien und Israel*, Darmstadt 1991, 94-113.

⁴ U. Cassuto, "The Israelite Epic", *Biblical and Canaanite Literatures, Studies on the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, vol. 1, Jerusalem 1972, 62-90 (Hebrew); S.E. Loewenstamm, "The Ugaritic Myth of the Sea and its Biblical Counterparts", *Eretz-Israel* 9 (1969), 96-101 (Hebrew); idem, *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ancient Oriental Literatures*, (AOAT 204), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1980, 346-361, 465-470; J. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament*, Cambridge 1985; T. L. Fenton, "Different Approaches to

of the struggle between Ba'al and the god of the sea: Ba'al fights and overcomes him. Another version depicts the goddess Anath fighting the variously named sea monster: prince of the sea, judge of the river, crocodile, leviathan and serpent (*zbl ym, tpt nhr, tnn, ltn, b'n, brh*).

More recently scholars have noted similarities between biblical passages and 19th century BCE texts from Mari that tell of the storm god Hadad's struggle with the sea.⁵ They have also indicated the closeness to Hurrian-Hittite traditions that similarly go back to the first half of the second millennium.⁶

Egypt, too, had an ancient tradition of God's battle with the sea personified as a monster. However, unlike the northern traditions this one has not received the attention it deserves. At most, scholars have discussed the story known as Astarte and the Sea⁷ from the time of the New Kingdom, pointing out Egyptian borrowing from the northern cultures. Some thought the Canaanite story on Ba'al at war with the sea, or another western Semite myth,⁸ inspired the Astarte story, while claims were also made for a Hurrian-Hittite source.⁹ Others even went so far as to regard it as an Egyptian translation of a Canaanite or a Hurrian-Hittite myth.¹⁰

The present discussion attempts to show that the Egyptians had an independent tradition of God's battle with the sea that appeared in the second millennium BCE and survived into the Roman period, (the first centuries of the Common Era). It is among the oldest known story cycles about the sea in the ancient Near East and may even be the oldest of them all.

Fragments of the story of God's battle with the sea have been preserved in various sources. Examining these, however, one should bear in mind how the ancient Egyptian faith perceived the myth. The Egyptians believed myths contained secret information dangerous to disclose. Hence they were not put into writing, but rather handed down orally to the privileged few. For example the noted Osiris myth, of which Egyptian sources have preserved only fragments, comes to us in its entirety only through the Greek author Plutarch of the 1st century CE. In this respect the Egyptian myth of God's battle with the sea is not different from the others. This, too, is preserved in different fragmented versions and to reconstruct it one must craft together all the scattered pieces from their various sources.

the Theomachy Myth", in: Y. Avishur and Y. Blau (eds.), *Compiled Studies Presented to Shmuel E. Loewenstamm in Honor of his 70th Birthday*, Jerusalem 1978, 337-381 (Hebrew).

⁵ See A. Malamat, *Mari and Israel: Two West-Semitic Cultures*, Jerusalem 1991, 161-167 (Hebrew).

⁶ See e.g. H.A. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, Atlanta 1988, 10-13; J.M. Durand, "Le mythologème du combat entre le dieu de l'orage et la mer en Mésopotamie," *MARI* 7 (1993), 41-61; I. Singer, "The Origins of the 'Canaanite Myth' of Elkurniša and Ašertu Reconsidered", in: D. Grodek and M. Zorman (eds.), *Tabularia Hethaeorum. Hethitologische Beiträge Šilvin Košak zum 65. Geburtstag*, Wiesbaden 2007, 631-642. My thanks to the author for graciously allowing me to read it before publication.

⁷ See subsequent discussion.

⁸ This is the view of the following researchers: A. Malamat (note 5 above), 165; *idem*, "The Divinity of the Mediterranean Sea in a Pre-Ugaritic Text", in: *Studies in Bible in Memory of U. Cassuto on the 100th Anniversary of his Birth*, Jerusalem, 1987, 184-188; (Hebrew); J. Day, note 4 above, 1-7; O. Kaiser, *Die Mythische Bedeutung des Meeres in Ägypten, Ugarit und Israel*, Berlin 1962, 4-39, 78-91; R. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-Palästinensische Gottheiten in Ägypten*, Leiden 1967, 127-131; R.K. Ritner, "The Legend of Astarte and the Tribute of the Sea", P. Amherst xix-xxi, in: W.W. Hallo and K.L. Younger (eds.), *The Context of Scripture*, Leiden 1997, vol. 1, 35-36.

⁹ E. Collombert and P. Coulon, "Les dieux contre la mer: le début du 'papyrus d'Astarte' (pBN 202)", *BIFAO* 100 (2000), 193-241. For resemblance of the Astarte Papyrus to the Hittite myth see note 33 below, and *ibid.* bibliography.

¹⁰ T.H. Gaster, "The Egyptian 'Story of Astarte' and the Ugaritic Poem of Baal", *BiOr* 9 (1952), 82-85; W. Helck, "Zur Herkunft der Erzählung des Sog. 'Astartepapyrus'", *Fontes Atque Pontes, Eine Festgabe für Hellmut Brunner (ÄAT 5)*, Wiesbaden 1983, 215-223; D.B. Redford, "The Sea and the Goddess", in: S. Israelit-Groll (ed.), *Studies in Egyptology Presented to Miriam Lichtheim*, Jerusalem 1990, vol. 2, 824-835.

Some sources are literary — the wisdom instructions, magic-medical formulae as well as folk tales and legends. Then there are iconographic sources such as illustrations in the Books of the Dead, tombstone reliefs, and the decorations on scarabs, seals and amulets.

A. *The Instruction addressed to Merikare*

This was preserved in an 18th Dynasty manuscript but was probably composed in the Second Millennium.¹¹ A hint as to God's battle against the primordial monster appears in a hymn of praise to the creator god, Re. It describes the act of Creation, placing man at its center, like Genesis 2-3.

God (Re) provided the people — God's cattle,
 Making heaven and earth at their desire.
 He subdued the monster of the waters (*snk n mw*),¹²
 He gave the breath of life to their noses,
 They are his images, who came from his body.
 He shines in the sky for their sake,
 He created for them the plants,
 Cattle, birds and fish for their sustenance.
 He killed his enemies, yea destroys his children,
 Because they plotted to rebel.
 According to their wish he created the daylight,
 And to see them he sails forth in heavenly bark ...
 He makes for them rulers in the egg,
 Leaders to raise the back of the weak (lines 130-138).

As in the Babylonian story of the god's struggle against the water monster and in vestiges of that myth in the Bible, here, too, the confrontation takes place within the cosmogenic framework of the first days of the universe.¹³ It is described in one terse line "He defeated the monster of the waters", from which one infers that the myth was completely familiar and that everyone would understand what it signified. In the Instruction to Merikare the enemy of the creator god is described as a "crocodile". Not by chance did the writer use this term, which is *hapax legomenon*: *snk*, written with a determinative indicating a crocodile differs from *skn*, meaning to covet, only in the order of its letters. With this word play the author stresses the nature of the primordial monster that resembles the gluttonous, covetous crocodile.¹⁴

¹¹ Most scholars accept this dating to the Middle Kingdom. However, some attribute it earlier, to the First Intermediate Period (c. 2150-2050 BCE). See S. Quirke, *Egyptian Literature 1800 BC: Questions and Readings*, London 2004, 112.

¹² This is the translation in A. Volten, *Zwei altägyptische politische Schriften*, Copenhagen 1945, 76; Redford, note 3 above, 834; Other translations offered: "the sea monster", M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Berkley-London-Los Angeles 1973, vol. 1, 106; J.A. Wilson, *ANET*, 417; "the lust of the waters", R.O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, Oxford 1964, 234; R. Hannig, *Grosses Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch (2800-950 v. Chr.)*, Mainz 1995, 724; G. Posener, "La légende égyptienne de la mer insatiable", *Annuaire de l'institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves*, 13 (1953), 472-473; W. Helck, *Die Lehre für König Merikare*, Wiesbaden 1977, 85; J. F. Quack, *Studien zur Lehre für Merikare*, Wiesbaden 1992, 79-80; a designation for "primordial water" (Urwasser) *Wb* IV: 177, 2.

¹³ This is shown additionally by mentioning the myth of the Destruction of Mankind (see above, "He killed... plotted to rebel"), also belonging to the primeval era. It recalls man's sin and fall in the stories of Eden and the Flood in Gen. 6:5-7; 7: 23; 8: 21-22. See S. Israeli, *Egyptian Mythology*, Tel Aviv 2005, 49-51 (Hebrew).

¹⁴ In Egyptian literature the crocodile frequently has the derived significance of insatiability, covetousness and gluttony. Thus the drawing of a crocodile is a determinative of terms that have these meanings, e.g. *hnty*, *3f*, *skn*.

Who is this crocodile? The crocodile of the waters was known in Egyptian as *ʿ3pp*, mentioned in that literature from the 21st century BCE, and in Greek as Apopis. The etymology is unclear: one explanation holds that it is merely a play on the verb *pʿy*, meaning to spit, *ʿ3pp* in the sense of "(he who was) spat out". In fact, a later myth tells that the monster was created from the saliva of the creator goddess Neith.¹⁵

Most of our information about *ʿ3pp* comes from the literature of the dead, beginning with the Coffin Texts from the Middle Kingdom (2100-1800 BCE), the Book of the Gates and the Book of What is in the Underworld from the New Kingdom (1550-1070). It also appears in hymns to the Sun God and in magic incantations from that period.¹⁶ No less important are the iconographic findings that vividly depict the monster who is described in Egyptian sources until Ptolemaic times.

ʿ3pp is sometimes described as a crocodile,¹⁷ but usually appears as a giant serpent some 30 meters long, living in the waters of the underworld. He is the everlasting foe of the creator god, the sun god Re. *ʿ3pp* symbolizes the forces of chaos ever trying to destroy the sun god who sails nightly with his retinue in his bark. The monster's eyes mesmerize,¹⁸ his voice is thunder, his movements earth-shaking. When he writhes, he creates shoals and worst of all he drinks the water of Nun, the primeval ocean, and thus impedes the bark of the sun.

In ancient Egypt dread of *ʿ3pp* was so great that a book was written called "Casting out Apopis", listing means to destroy the monster: spitting, binding, stabbing, slashing and burning. We know, too, of magic ceremonies against Apopis in the temples¹⁹ and of magic incantations to bring about his destruction.

In drawings and friezes that decorate the Books of the Dead and burial steles, *ʿ3pp* attacks the sun god's bark. Generally, the god Seth, renowned for his valor and defending the sun god from his terrible foe, is at the prow plunging his spear into the monster's throat (figs. 1-2).²⁰ Other gods are sometimes seen helping, whether by jabbing the body with knives, binding the

See N. Shupak, *Where Can Wisdom Be Found? The Sage's Language in the Bible and in Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Freiburg-Göttingen 1993, 110, 114-116; Cf. also P. Wilson, "Slaughtering the crocodile at Edfu and Dendera", in: S. Quirke (ed.), *The Temple in Ancient Egypt: New discoveries and recent research*, London 1997, 193-194, 198-199.

¹⁵ In view of the Coptic, some scholars assume it means "the huge", *Wb* 1: 67; see H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin-New York 1971, 51. For other theories on the name of Apopis see L.D. Morenz, "Apopis: On the Origin, Name and Nature of an Ancient Egyptian Anti-God", *JNES* 63(2004), 201-205.

¹⁶ For references in the Coffin Texts and in the Book of the Dead see, e.g., R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, Warminster 1973-1975, vol.1, 138-139; Spell 160; *ibid.* vol. 2, 65, Spell 414; *idem*, *The Book of the Dead*, London 1985, 36, Spell 7: 60-61, Spell 39: 101-102, Spell 108. For additional references see J. Assmann, *Liturgische Lieder an den Sonnengott*, Berlin 1969, 77-78, 188, 200, 295-297 and *passim*. E. Hornung, *Das Buch von den Pforten des Jenseits: Nach den Versionen des Neuen Reiches*, Basel 1980, vol.2, 153-157, 246-276; *idem* and A. Brodbeck, "Apopis", *LÄ* 1, 350-352; J.F. Borghouts, *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts*, Leiden 1978, 94-97; M. Görg, *Die Barke der Sonne*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 2001, 36-38, 138-141.

¹⁷ On the crocodile's appearance see A.W. Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, New York 1969, vol. 1, 325; E. Brunner-Traut, "Ägyptische Mythen im Physiologus (zu Kapitel 26, 25 und 11)", in: W. Helck (ed.), *Festschrift für Sigfried Schott zu seinem 70. Geburtstag*, Wiesbaden 1968, 29; *idem*, "Krokodil", *LÄ* 3, 795; (here the crocodile is called Sebek); M.G. Nagel, "Set dans le barque solaire", *BIFAO* 28 (1929), 36; Compare also Brunner-Traut, *Gelebte Mythen: Beiträge zum altägyptischen Mythos*, Darmstadt 1988, 109-116.

¹⁸ J.F. Borghouts, "The Evil Eye of Apopis", *JEA* 59 (1973), 114-150.

¹⁹ On the ceremony to destroy Apopis at the Edfu temple in Ptolemaic times see P. Wilson, *A Ptolemaic Lexikon: a Lexicographical Study of the Texts in the Temple of Edfu*, Leuven 1997, 137-138.

²⁰ Other less common weapons are arrows and a forked stick like those used to catch snakes. For illustrations see Appendix.

monster with ropes and chains or intoning magic incantations (fig. 3-4). Sometimes the god Re himself appears as a great cat slashing into the monster with a knife (fig. 5), while sometimes the deceased replaces Seth, because Apopis threatens him, too, in the underworld (fig. 6). The motif recurs in small iconographic findings — scarabs, seals and amulets from the Iron Age — generally incised with the image of the god Seth plunging his spear into the serpent facing him. Since some such findings have come to light in tells in the land of Israel, one assumes that here, too, the myth of the fight between god and monster was familiar (figs. 7-10).²¹

God's fight with the sea monster in the Instruction to Merikare and the confrontation between the god Re or his emissary Seth and the serpent Apopis are thus two versions of the same tradition of the fight between God and the sea. Further evidence comes from medical-magical texts.

B. Medical-magical texts

The ancient Egyptians had prescribed remedies for various illnesses that did not differentiate between medicine and magic. To bring relief and healing the patient's condition would be likened to specific mythological events of the distant past, including a god's battle with the sea. This emerges from at least three medical-magical texts from the New Kingdom period. In the incantations presented below the disease or pain are compared to the sea, the god's enemy, and as the sea was defeated by Seth, so the pain and disease would be banished from the body.

1. The Hearst Papyrus from the beginning of the 18th Dynasty (c. 1500 BCE) contains an incantation to cure what is called "the Asian disease": "Just as Seth conjured the sea (*w3d wr*)²², so may Seth conjure you the Asian (*t3 nt ʿ3mw*) (disease); spread not in the body of x born of y!" (said twice) (lines 11, 12-14).²³
2. Berlin Papyrus 3038, dated to the 19th Dynasty, c. 1300 BCE, contains a formula for drinking a medicine: "may you wake in good manner and endure until eternity! May all the evil (pain) within you be dispelled ... Words spoken by Nephthys (goddess of burial). They (the words) will be useful to him ... as the listening of sea (*p3 ym*) to the voice of Seth."²⁴ (Spell 189, lines 21,2-3).²⁵

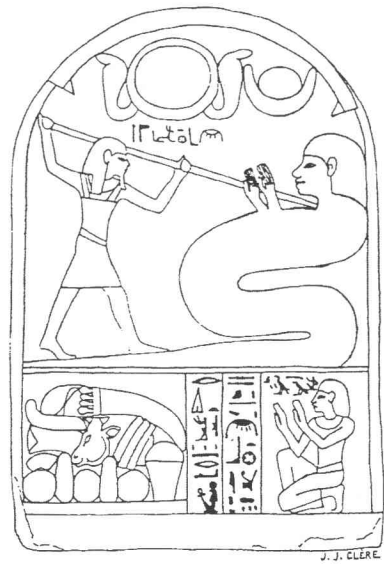
²¹ Iron Age findings in the land of Israel (figs.8-9) reveal blending of the Canaanite tradition — the fight of Ba'al, god of the storm, against the sea god who threatens the earth's fertility — with the Egyptian, where Seth, fighting Apopis, defends the created world. In both, the serpent symbolizes the forces of chaos. Egyptian elements predominate, with primarily religious symbols like the sun disk and Seth's animal head. However, scarabs and seals from the land of Israel also display northern elements like fringed garments and the horned serpent. See O. Keel, "Review Article: Ancient Seals and the Bible", *JAOS* 106 (1986), 309; *idem*, M. Shuval and C. Uehlinger, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina Israel*, Freiburg-Göttingen 1990, vol. 3, 320; *idem*, *Das Recht der Bilder gesehen zu werden: Drei Fallstudien zur Methode der Interpretation altorientalischer Bilder*, Freiburg-Göttingen 1992, 231

²² Emphases in the texts quoted are mine.

²³ For the text see H. Grapow, *Grundriss der Medizin der alten Ägypter V, Die medizinischen Texte in hieroglyphischer Umschreibung autographiert*, Berlin 1958, 440; G.A.Reisner, *The Hearst Medical Papyrus*, Leipzig 1905, 6. For discussion of the nature of the disease see H. Goedicke, "The Canaanite Illness", *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 11(1984), 91-105; T. Bardinot, "Remarques sur les maladies de la peau, la lèpre, et le châtement divin dans l'Égypte ancienne", *RdEg* 39 (1988), 16-18.

²⁴ The "voice" of Seth, the storm god, in Egyptian sources is his characteristic thunder. Referring here to the subjugation of the sea it recalls the voice of God who rebukes and shouts at the sea, cf. e.g. Isa. 17: 13; Hab. 3:10; Ps. 18: 14. Also in the Ugaritic poem the verb *g'r* appears in a similar context. See Cassuto, note 1 above, 76.

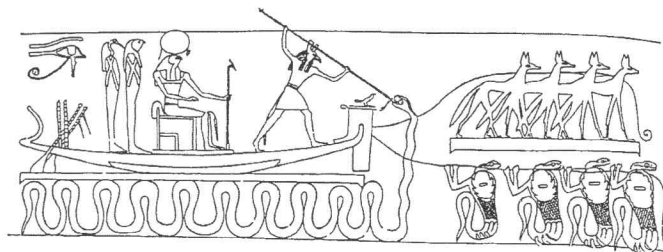
²⁵ On the text see Grapow, *ibid.* 267-268; on text and explication see W. Wreszinski, *Der grosse medizinische Papyrus des Berliner Museums* (Pap. Berlin 3038), Leipzig 1909, 102-103; For translation see Borghouts, note 16 above, 45-46, no. 73.



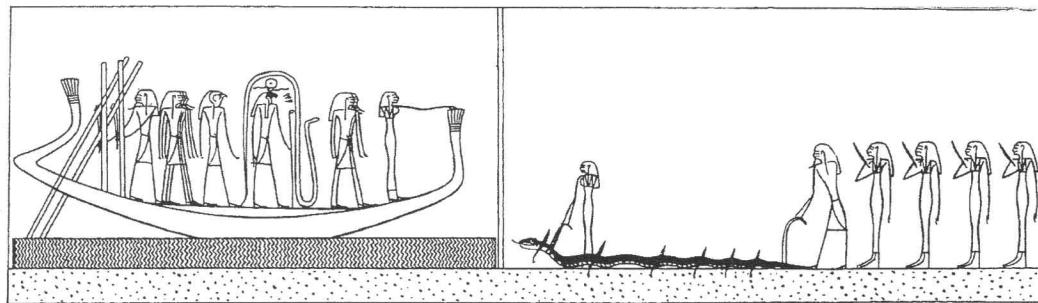
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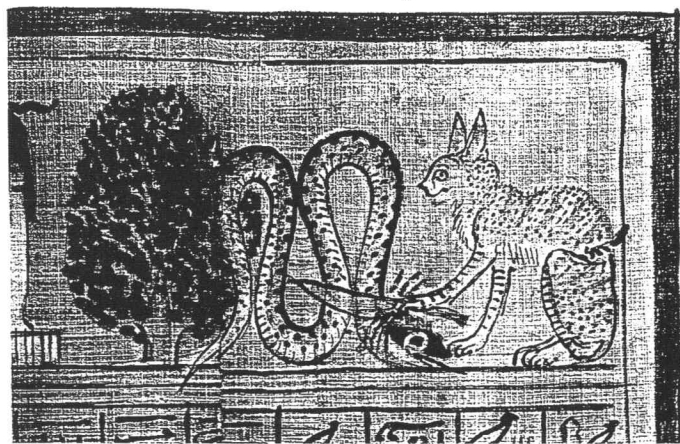


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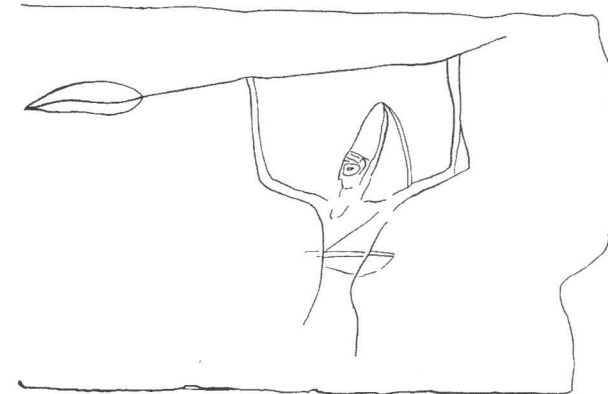


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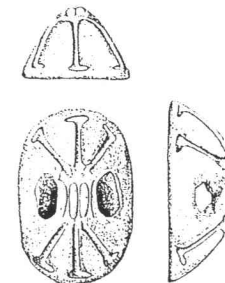
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3. The magic papyrus from Leiden, from the Ramsesside period, sets forth an incantation to cure a disease called *hw*: "Another oath: The raging of Seth is against the disease *hw*! The wrath of Seth is turned on you! ... He will put an end to the violence by laying his arms upon you so that you will suffer (literally, you will taste) what the sea (p3 in[m]) suffered (literally: tasted) at his hand." (lines 1, 343, 345).²⁶

True, these medical-magical texts are about the god Seth's battle with the sea, sometimes called by its Egyptian name, "the Great Green (Blue)" (*w3d wr*) and sometimes by the borrowed Canaanite name *yam* (*p3 ym*),²⁷ and not about the creator god's battle with the serpent of chaos, as found in the texts previously mentioned. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that we have before us three versions of a single tradition dealing with god's battle with the sea, which has left its imprint on Egyptian folk tales as well.

C. Folk Tales

1. The composition of The Story of Two Brothers (D'Orbiney Papyrus)²⁸ has been dated to the 19th Dynasty (early 13th century BCE). It has many parallels in world literature, including the story of Joseph and Potiphar's Wife. A younger brother, a shepherd called Bata lives with his older brother, the farmer Anubis. One day when Bata was sent to the house to bring seeds, his brother's wife tries to tempt him, with no success. Again like Potiphar's wife, she tries to pin the blame on him and he flees for his life. In the end Bata manages to convince his brother of his innocence, and Anubis kills his wife. Bata sets forth and wanders into the Valley of Lebanon. The gods grant him mercy and create a wondrously beautiful woman for him. When Bata goes hunting he warns his wife: "Do not go out, lest the sea (*p3 ym*) carry you away, for I will not be able to rescue you from him." (lines 10, 1-2). But she does go out, "and the sea called to the pine tree saying: 'Catch her for me!' And the pine tree took away a curl of her hair." The curl reached Pharaoh who sent servants to search for her. The woman was found and brought to the palace. She was married to Pharaoh and brought about Bata's death. As in previously mentioned texts, here, too, the sea is a dangerous and menacing element. But for the first time the sea is presented as lusting after women, a trait not previously mentioned, although it recurs in story of Astarte and the sea, to be discussed later.

2. The Story of the Swallow and the Sea²⁹

This is a Demotic story from the early centuries of the Common Era. The heroine is a swallow who entrusted her chicks to the sea, but the waves carried them off. The hapless mother

²⁶ For text and translation see A. Massart, *The Leyden Magical Papyrus I 343 + I 345*, Suppl. OMRO, 1954, 16-17, 64-67. For translation see also Borghouts, note 18 above, 18-19, no. 23; Collombert and Coulon, note 9 above, 207.

²⁷ During the New Kingdom the Semitic term "yam" (*p3 ym*) sometimes replaced the Egyptian *w3d wr* used from the time of the Pyramids to denote large bodies of water: the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Nun (the primordial ocean) and the water in the heavens. See J.E. Hoch, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period*, Princeton NJ 1994, 52-53; C. Vanersleyen, *Oudj our= w3d wr: un autre aspect de la vallée du Nil*, Bruxelles 1999; J. F. Quack, "Zur Frage des Meers in ägyptischen Texten", *OLZ* 97 (2002), 454-463; W. Helck, "Meer", *LÄ*, 3, 1277; H. Ringgren, "yām", *TDOT*, 6, 87-88.

²⁸ For translation see Y.M. Grintz, *From the Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Jerusalem 1975, 93-105 (Hebrew). For comprehensive research see S. Tower-Hollis, *The Ancient Egyptian Tale of Two Brothers*, Oklahoma 1990; W. Wuttengel, *Die Erzählung von den beiden Brüdern: Der Papyrus Orbiney und die Königsideologie der Ramessiden*, Freiburg-Göttingen 2003.

²⁹ For translation see E. Brunner-Traut, *Altägyptische Märchen*, Düsseldorf-Köln 1976, 126-127.

punishes the sea by draining its waters with her beak and filling it with sand. The significance of this late tale lies in showing that the negative aspects of the sea survived in the Egyptian tradition for thousands of years.

To conclude, in the above sources the sea is depicted as the enemy of the sun, the creator god. He symbolizes the chaotic power striving to conquer the created world. Sometimes he takes the form of a crocodile but is generally pictured as a huge serpent. His main qualities are violence, covetousness and untrustworthiness.³⁰

Now, to return to the story I began with.

3. Astarte and the Sea (Amherst Papyrus 19-21)³¹

Known as the Astarte Papyrus, this document originally composed 20 pages, of which only two could be deciphered. Recently an additional passage has been published (No. 202, National Library, Paris), and is of the utmost importance in understanding and dating the work.³² This is the opening passage, and in it appears the name of Pharaoh Amenhotep, apparently Amenhotep II, dating the composition to his time, c. 1420 BCE.

It begins with an eulogy to the god Seth who saved the Ennead, the nine primeval gods, from their foe, the god of the sea. After a description of the separation of heaven and earth, and the creation of the universe, the god of the sea (*p3 ym*) appears. The sea demands tribute of the gods in recognition of his sovereignty. Renenutet, goddess of the harvest, does his bidding but this does not satisfy him. Sending a bird as her messenger, she seeks the help of Astarte, who weeps but goes down to the seaside. She sings and dances before the lustful one, and from the question he poses, she apparently reveals herself naked before him: "Where have you come from, O daughter of Ptah, O angry and wrathful goddess? Have you worn out your sandals that are on your feet, have you torn your clothes that are on you, when moving about between the heavens and earth?"³³ Astarte captivates Yam, who demands that the gods give her to him as a wife. They consent, but Yam continues to make demands, and Neith, goddess of heaven, and Geb, god of the earth, have to give him their jewels. The end of the story is fragmented and impossible to decipher, but the god Seth's name is mentioned, so one may assume that Seth fights and conquers Yam.

As previously stated, many scholars believe that the Astarte Papyrus is either directly derived from or inspired by a foreign source — a Canaanite or a Hittite-Hurrian myth.³⁴ The reasons they give are:

³⁰ Seth's war against the sea may be mentioned in a largely obliterated fragment of a hymn to Ramses III preserved on an ostrakon from Deir-el-Medineh. Fischer-Elfert translates it as "Seth's power on? [...] the [wave]s of the sea (*p3 ym*)". H.W. Fischer-Elfert, *Lesefunde im literarischen Steinbruch von Deir el-Medineh*, Wiesbaden 1997, 65-72. For the text see also K.A. Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions: Historical and Biographical*, Oxford 1968-1990, V 562:6-7. Compare with Collombert and Coulon, note 9 above, 20, note 27.

³¹ Publication of the text, A.H. Gardiner, *Later Egyptian Stories*, Bruxelles 1932, 76-81; Collombert and Coulon, note 9 above. Translation, Israeli, (note 13 above, 133-134 (free translation); Gardiner, "The Astarte Papyrus", *Studies Presented to F. Ll. Griffith*, London 1932, 74-85; W.K. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, New Haven-London 2003, 133-136; Ritner, note 8 above.

³² See Collombert and Coulon, note 9 above.

³³ Reinforcement for the idea of Astarte's nakedness comes from a Hurrian-Hittite story cycle. In the legend of the serpent *hedammo*, Astarte comes down to the seaside with her maid and a musical instrument. *hedammo*, who sees the goddess naked, is captivated. In the story of Ullikummi, the stone monster, Astarte tries to charm the water monster with song and dance, but this time in vain because he is deaf and blind. See Gaster, note 10 above, 84-85; J. Friedrich, "Der Churritische Mythos vom Schlangendämon *hedammu* in Hethitischer Sprache", *ArOr* 17 (1949), 230-254; H.G. Güterbock, "Hittite Mythology", in: S.N. Kramer (ed.), *Mythologies of the Ancient World*,

- a. The gods have Semitic names, Yam and Astarte, and the text contains other Semitic words such as armor (*tryn*) and siege (*isbt/ispt*).³⁵
- b. The traits of Seth as set forth in the hymn of praise opening the work are similar to those of the Canaanite god Ba'al: he shoots with a bow, a pair of horns typical of Asiatic storm gods graces his head, and hills and valleys, also under Ba'al's control, are mentioned.
- c. The description of the naked Astarte singing to tempt Yam bears a remarkable resemblance to the Hittite-Hurrian cycle about Hedammu, the serpent with the insatiable appetite, and Ullikummi, the stone monster of the sea. Here, too, Astarte uses her feminine charms to trap the enemies of the gods.³⁶
- d. A myth in which the sea is the protagonist could not have developed in Egypt, since for inhabitants of Upper (southern) Egypt the sea was inaccessible, and for those of Lower (northern) Egypt, while the Mediterranean was accessible, they were not seafarers. Since ancient times the Egyptians used the services of Syrian-Phoenician seamen.³⁷

However, most of these reasons can be refuted:

- a. Today opinions vary on the Egyptians' utilization of the services of Syrian-Phoenician seamen.³⁸ However, while the ancient Egyptians perhaps were not seafaring culture, they did not avoid sea voyages. According to the archeological, iconographic and textual evidence³⁹ seagoing Egyptian ships sailed in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea from the 3rd millennium BCE until the 6th century BCE.⁴⁰ In addition, part of the population lived along the coast and can be assumed to have been familiar with the phenomenon of a stormy, raging sea that threatens to cover and swallow up the shore.
- b. The Semitic words in the Astarte Papyrus do not necessarily point to the adoption of a western Semitic myth, just as the same words in the Instruction of Amenemope do not show that the Egyptian instruction was translated from or influenced by Hebrew or Aramaic wisdom literature. What we have here is an adoption of Semitic words common in the time of the New Kingdom, recently studied by J.E. Hoch.⁴¹ Thus the Semitic term *yam* came into use at this time, along with others in the geographic-topographic field such as plain/wetland, cave, shore, mountain and river.⁴²
- c. While the Astarte Papyrus bears similarities to other myths of the ancient Near East, there are differences too: the confrontation between the gods and the sea is not a personal one, unlike the stories of the battles of Ba'al and Hadad in Ugarit and in Mari, or of the storm god against the monster Illuyanka in Hatti. Many gods take part in the Egyptian confrontation — Ptah, head of

New York 1961, 141-175; I. Siegleová, *Appu-Märchen und Hedammu-Mythus*, Wiesbaden 1971, 81; for similarity between the Hittite and Egyptian texts, see Ph. Houwink ten Cate, "The Hittite Storm God: His Role and his Rule According to Hittite Cuneiform Sources", in: D.J.W. Meijer, *Natural Phenomena. Their Meaning, Depiction and Description in the Ancient Near East*, Amsterdam 1992, 117-118.

³⁴ See notes 8-10 above.

³⁵ See Collombert and Coulon, note 9 above, 220-221.

³⁶ Compare with note 33 above.

³⁷ See Helck, note 27 above.

³⁸ See S. Wachsmann, *Seagoing Ships and Seamanship in the Bronze Age Levant*, London 1998, 12-14.

³⁹ Cf. the famous adventure stories of The Report of Wenamun or The Shipwrecked Sailor.

⁴⁰ For an encompassing and an instructive survey of the history of Egyptian seafaring see G. F. Bass, "Sea and River Craft in the Ancient Near East", in: J. M. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, New York 1995, vol. 3, 1421-1431; cf. Wachsmann, note 38 above, 9-38, 303-315. Also see P.B. Adamson, "The Possibility of sea trade between Mesopotamia and Egypt during the late pre-dynastic period", *Aula Orientalis* 10 (1992), 175-179, who assumes a maritime trade route between Mesopotamia and Egypt, via the Red Sea, from the middle of the 4th millennium BCE onwards. On a Middle Kingdom port on the Red Sea coast, see A. Monem A. H. Sayed, "Discovery of the Site of the 12th Dynasty Port at Wadi Gawasis on the Red Sea Shore", *RdEg* 24 (1977), 138-178.

⁴¹ See Hoch, note 27 above.

⁴² Hoch showed that the relatively numerous Semitic terms from this field made up 8.2% of all Semitic terms adopted into Egyptian. See *ibid.* 463.

the Memphitic pantheon, the goddesses Renenutet, Neith and Astarte and the gods Geb and Seth. Moreover, the other stories do not go into Yam's extortion, which is congruent with descriptions of Yam, rapacious and covetous, in the Egyptian stories cited above. Another significant difference is the support of El, chief of the Canaanite gods, for his favorite, the sea god, quite differently from Ptah in the Egyptian myth.

There are, then, significant differences between the Astarte Papyrus and the western Semitic stories since the former is based, as we shall see, on ancient Egyptian mythic-religious traditions. The setting of the Astarte story is truly cosmogenic, exactly like the description of the defeat of "the water crocodile" in the Instruction to Merikare, which is several hundred years older. Most gods in the Astarte Papyrus are clearly Egyptian — Geb, god of the earth, Nut, goddess of the heavens, Renenutet, goddess of the harvest, Ptah, god of the crafts and creator god of Memphis, and the nine primeval gods, the Ennead of Heliopolis. Moreover, the acts of the gods are comprehensible in the light of their place and role in the Egyptian pantheon. Thus the tributes are offered to the sea by Renenutet, which fits in with her role as goddess of the harvest. Seth, however, is chosen to defend the gods from the sea monster because he is the one who defeated Apopis, the eternal enemy of the sun god. His coming forth in Astarte's defense is comprehensible in the light of another Egyptian myth of Horus and Seth, in which the god Re gives Astarte as a wife to Seth in compensation for giving the kingship to Horus.

There is no doubt, then, that the Astarte myth is rooted in Egyptian tradition.⁴³ That said, and since the motif of the battle of God against the sea appears as early as the Instruction to Merikare in the second millennium BCE, it is difficult to regard the Astarte Papyrus as an adaptation of a Semitic or western Semitic myth. It is more reasonable to assume we are looking at different versions of one single myth that took on a variety of forms through the many generations that it remained current in Egypt. And so sometimes the protagonist was the primordial sea monster, defeated by the creator god (the Instruction to Merikare). Sometimes he is the fearful serpent Apopis defeated by the valiant god Seth in the sun hymns in the Books of the Dead. At other times the water god is described as arrogant, coveting the gods' wealth and their wives (The Story of Two Brothers, The Swallow and the Sea, The Astarte Papyrus).

The story of Astarte is thus an additional version of the ancient Egyptian myth of the battle of God and the sea, but one adapted to the new cosmopolitan spirit of the New Kingdom, notably in the time of Amenhotep II, to which the Astarte Papyrus has been dated. It was he who introduced the worship of several Semite gods in the Memphis region in the 14th century BCE.

This therefore was the background for the Astarte Papyrus, based on an ancient Egyptian myth but combined with elements deriving from neighboring cultures.

Traces of this Semitic influence are discernible in other New Kingdom literary sources noted above. The medical-magic spell of the Hearst Papyrus writes of the Asian disease, while in the Leiden Papyrus, where names of Semitic gods abound, Seth appears with the Semitic god Ba'al. Then too, the Story of the Two Brothers takes place in the Lebanon Valley in the north, far away from Egypt.

⁴³ See Posener's view, note 12 above, 461-478.

This combination of Egyptian and Semitic elements is typical of the iconographic findings of the era as well. Egyptian religious symbols and motifs appear alongside Semitic faces and dress, and there is a new god called Ba'al-Seth, the outcome of identifying the Egyptian storm god Seth with his Semitic counterpart Ba'al.⁴⁴

Such a combination, then, typifies Egyptian culture of the New Kingdom, which, however, by no means rules out the possibility of a primeval Egyptian myth about the creator god's battle with the sea. It was composed in parallel with other such myths current throughout the ancient Near East and may even have drawn substance from an ancient mythic prototype.⁴⁵ Thus to the words of T.L. Fenton in his article on the Theomachy Myth in the Bible- "The Ugaritic stories and the Babylonian narrative all appear to be different incarnations of the same myth that evolved on the shores of the Mediterranean ..."⁴⁶- we can now add the Egyptian versions of the god's battle against the sea: the Ugaritic stories, the Babylonian narrative and the Egyptian versions are all incarnations of that same myth that evolved on Mediterranean shores.

Appendix: Illustrations of the Battle of the God against the Sea

1. Stele from Leiden from the New Kingdom era: Seth, with human head and arm, stands on the tail of Apopis and plunges his spear into his neck. Inscription over Seth's head with his name and title: "Nebty the great god". At the upper edge of the monument, above Apopis is the symbol of the moon and above Seth the sun symbol with two uraei (cobras). (M.G. Nagel, *BIFAO* 28 [1929], 38, fig. 2; courtesy of Institut Français d'Archeologie Orientale).
2. Monument from the chapel of Seti II (early 12th century BCE), at Deir el-Medina. The scene resembles the previous one. Above it is the inscription "Seth from Ombos, the valiant, lord of the heavens". (Ibid. 29 [1929], 66, fig. 1).
3. The Book of the Dead of Her-weben, singer of Amon-Re, 21st Dynasty (early first millennium BCE). The sun bark, drawn by four jackals and four uraei, stands on the symbol of the heavens, under the vessel a great snake facing the prow. There stands Seth with his characteristic animal head, plunging his spear into the snake's jaw. In the middle of the bark the sun god Re sits on a throne holding a scepter representing life in his right hand, and one representing power in his left. Above his head is the circular sun symbol with a uraeus. Behind him is the god Horus with a hawk's head and the god Thoth with the head of an ibis, depicted as mummies. Over the steering oars, is the eye of Horus, a symbol of protection. (O. Keel, *Das Recht der Bilder gesehen zu werden*, Freiburg-Göttingen 1992, 249, fig. 229; courtesy of Prof. Dr. Othman Keel).
4. Tomb of Thutmose III (15th century BCE) in the Valley of the Kings. This scene, appearing in the Underworld Books, depicts the defeat of Apopis through magic. At the center of the bark stands the sun god with a ram's head, the sun disk between his horns and protected by a snake that surrounds him. In front of him stand Seth called "the eldest of the magicians" and Isis who holds a rope. On a sandbank opposite the bark lies Apopis after drinking the waters of Nun, the primordial ocean. His body is pinned to the ground by six knives, ropes tied to his head and tail, held by Selket and the "Knife" goddess. Beside her are four goddesses with names that are eponyms for their functions: "the Binder, the Slasher, the Punisher and the Destroyer". (Ibid. fig. 231).
5. Hunufer's Book of the Dead, possibly from Memphis, early 13th century BCE. The god Re as a cat kills Apopis with a huge knife under the Ished tree, a symbol of longevity. (J. Malek, *The Cat in Ancient Egypt*, London 1997, 85, fig. 52; courtesy of the British Museum).

⁴⁴ See note 21 above.

⁴⁵ Compare with Stadelmann, note 8 above, 127-130.

⁴⁶ Fenton, see note 4 above, 339.

6. Book of the Dead — the deceased plunges a spear into the head of Apopis who crawls before him (Keel, illustration 3 above, 248, figs. 230 a-c).
7. Graffiti from the Lachish temple from the Late Bronze Period (14th-13th centuries BCE) show Seth with the white Egyptian crown, from which a streamer descends along his back, holding a large spear in both hands. There is nothing left of the snake: the snake is obliterated. (M. Shuval, C. Uehlinger and O. Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel*, Freiburg-Göttingen 1990, vol. 3, 321, fig. 96; courtesy of Prof. Dr. Othman Keel).
8. Scarab from Tell el-Far'ah South (1500-1150 BCE). A bearded and winged Ba'al-Seth strides to the right. He wears the white crown with its streamer, a uraeus rearing up from it, and a short fringed apron. He plunges his spear into the horned serpent, one foot treading upon it. (Ibid. 313, fig. 85).
9. Scarab from Lachish (1300-900 BCE). Ba'al-Seth wears a horned headdress, a long streamer running down his back, and an apron. In his right hand he wields a chepesh (*ḥpš*) sword and his left grasps a horned serpent. To the left is a small sun disc. (Ibid. 317, fig. 91).
10. A plaque from Tell Keisan, Iron Age I, 1200-1000 BCE. Seth, with a typical animal head grasps a stick and strides to the right. Before him is a uraeus. (Ibid. 33, fig. 22)⁴⁷.

BIFAO Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale

LÄ Lexikon der Ägyptologie, eds. W. Helck and W. Westendorf, Wiesbaden 1972-1989

TDOT Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, eds. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, trans. J. T. Willis, Michigan 1974-

Wb. Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache, eds. A. Erman and H. Grapow, 7 vols., Berlin-Leipzig 1926-1963

⁴⁷ Other scarabs with this motif have been found. See e.g. scarabs from Jerusalem, Keel, Shuval and Oehlinger, note 21 above, 317 fig. 93. Scarab from Tell Deir Alla, *ibid.* fig. 92. For a discussion of iconographic material see also I. Cornelius, *The Iconography of the Canaanite Gods Reshef and Ba'al: Late Bronze and Iron Age I Periods 1500-1000 BCE*, Freiburg-Göttingen 1994, 161-167, 212-224, 263.