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TRAVEL AS NARRATIVE IN EGYPTIAN LITERATURE

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Introduction

Only the last two and a half decades witnessed the critical study of ancient Egyptian literature as a comparatively independent field of research. This new development does of course not imply that Egyptian literary texts have not been subject to different scholarly approaches prior to this era. More traditionally oriented research, however, differs distinctly from newer approaches. To begin with, a critical examination of Egyptological literary histories or anthologies such as Helmut Brunner’s Grundzüge einer Geschichte der altägyptischen Literatur or Miriam Lichtheim’s important Ancient Egyptian literature could provide the impression that everything written counts as Egyptian literature: narratives stand side by side with mortuary texts, and while religious treatments are grouped alongside administrative documents, fairy tales jostle historical texts. As arbitrary as this enumeration were the different authors’ bases of classification: here we find formal or generic reasons, there the authors adduce style or contents of a text as criteria for its incorporation into the literary corpus. Moreover, older scholarship used almost every Egyptian text as quarry for politically or historically significant information, while one and the same text could be used at the same time as a source of historical topography and social history or called upon to embody the aesthetic qualities of Egyptian literature. The authors, however, did seldom give explicit reasons or criteria for either the one or the other of their readings of a certain text. If we consider, for example, the story of Sinuhe, some scholars had major disputes in trying to establish the only route Sinuhe could have taken on his flight to the Near East, while others were not willing to decide about the literary status of the tale, since they considered it a real autobiography and hoped therefore that at some time the ‘real’ Sinuhe’s tomb would be

1 I am grateful to Antonio Loprieno for giving me the opportunity to participate in the symposium “Ancient Egyptian literature: history and forms”, and especially to the other participants for many helpful suggestions. I am very much indebted to Michael Cooperson, UCLA, for improving my English idiom and for numerous valuable comments on a previous draft of this paper.
3 Brunner, Grundzüge einer Geschichte der altägyptischen Literatur.
4 Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian literature, 3 vols.
5 A tradition mainly connected with the concept of “propaganda” developed in Georges Posener’s Littérature et politique, cf. recently Helck, “Die Geschichte des Schibbüchegen – Eine Stimme der Opposition?”, in Oeming/Kolding Nielsen (eds.), Studies Iversen, 73-76.
6 Concerning the tales of Sinuhe, Wenamun, and the Tale of Woe, I give an exemplary collection of positions taken vis-à-vis these texts in Moers, Der Aufbruch ins Fiktionsale, 30-34.
rediscovered. The methodological difficulties of all these approaches stem from reading the text literally and not in a literary way and are grounded in the lack of a general theoretical basis for Egyptological literary criticism, a theoretical basis that can be applied to the Egyptian textual material as a whole and that can enable one to 'measure' the extent of every text’s inherent literariness.

Trying to compensate for this lack, only a few scholars attempted to direct their studies to one specific genre but then remained almost always restricted to its formal aspects. For this reason these approaches were mostly unsuitable for assigning texts to their appropriate place in the system of Egyptian literature.8 This holds true especially for the so-called Metrik which reduces literariness to a numerical phenomenon based on grammatical units.9 Furthermore, it is formalistic and universalistic to such a degree that it applies to almost every written text. In consequence, it does not give any indication of the degree of literariness of the text in question.10 Another problem is the Egyptological arbitrariness in the application of this method: although the Metrik is theoretically grounded in a rhetoric (i.e. poietical; see the following remarks) approach to literature, it still claims explanatory adequacy for fictional literature.11

In addition, almost all of these studies adopt a more or less implicit and therefore not always unproblematic orientation towards rhetorical/poietical or aesthetic concepts of literature, i.e. those concepts that were the predominant ones of describing Western literature until the 1960's. However, especially if these concepts become mixed, one can not necessarily establish their applicability to the Egyptian material by means of the Egyptian sources themselves. Moreover, for reasons of their specific nature these concepts remain very much indebted to the literatures they constitute, since both were ways of pre-scribing how literature had to be rather than methods of explaining what literature may be or nowadays even more important – may do. Thus, Aristotelian poetics and its later rhetorical offsprings were the constitutive systems of literatures from the classical antiquity to the end of the 18th century and were mostly concerned with the production techniques of literature ('Regelpoetik'), while aesthetics was a more philosophical phenomenon predominant in the 19th century and grounded in the opinion of literature – as art in general – was one way of representing the ultimate truth inherent in human life.12

7 Posner, Littérature et politique, 90 f.
8 Compare now, however, the articles in part three of Loprieno (ed.), Ancient Egyptian literature, and there especially Parkinson, "Types of literature in the Middle Kingdom", 297-312, for the problems and the perspectives of genre-oriented research in Egyptological literary criticism. A list of former genre-related studies can be found in Gnin's, "Die ägyptische Autothographie", in Loprieno (ed.), Ancient Egyptian literature, 192, with n. 3.
9 A very useful summary of the discussion about Fecht's Metrick and the – if generalized – equally problematic concept of thought couples (Foster) gives Burkard, "Metrik, Prosodie und formaler Aufbau ägypischer literarischer Texte", in Loprieno (ed.), Ancient Egyptian literature, 447-463.
10 Besides, this concept neglects some important linguistic difficulties which of course have their reasons in the state of research on Egyptological linguistics, but which are nevertheless well-known. So, the phonetical and syllabic reconstruction of Egyptian as the basis of establishing stress units, the so-called kola, is not yet satisfactorily clarified.
11 For the opposition of poetry and fiction cf. Todaro, Genres in discourse, 1-12, and Egelon, Einführung in die Literaturwissenschaft, 6 ff. Apparently, Egyptological criticism has not yet taken into consideration this fundamental distinction except for Gnin's, in Loprieno (ed.), Ancient Egyptian literature, 193, with n. 7.
12 For the concepts of classical rhetoric and aesthetic cf. Ueding, Klassische Rhetorik, Isar, "Interpretationsperspektiven moderner Kunsttheorie", in Herrlich/Isar (eds.), Theorien der Kunst, 33-58, and idem, "Theorie der Literatur", 7 ff. While a classical-rhetorical model is the basis of Fecht's Metrick, the aesthetic approach to literature which is strongly connected with the concept of "Gesamtkunstwerk", finds a recent Egyptological example in Burkard, "Überlegungen zur Frage der ägyptischen Literatur".
13 See, for example, Egelon, Einführung in die Literaturwissenschaft, 1-18, Isar, Das Fiktive und das Imaginäre, 9 ff., 96 ff. and idem, Theorie der Literatur, 21-25.
14 So the translation of Volkmann, "Gattungen als literarisch-soziale Institutionen", in Hinck (ed.), Testsortenlehre – Gattungsgeschichte, 22-44, for Egyptological criticism cf. Parkinson, "Teachings, discourses, and tales from the Middle Kingdom", in Quirk (ed.), Middle Kingdom studies, 91 (with reference to Egelon, n. 13 above), and idem, in Loprieno (ed.), Ancient Egyptian literature, 297 ff.
16 Loprieno, Topos und Mimesis, esp. 10-18.
17 In the following, my use of the term "didactic" will refer to the content-side of what I shall show to be a genuine Egyptian notion of rhetoric, and not to the rhetorical/poietical concepts of Western literature mentioned above. This use of "didactic" is in part extemotional with what Loprieno, Topos and Mimesis, 20, has termed "topical"
18 For the complex of individual "authorship" as an "indecisitität epistemologische" see now the idealistic approach of Derchain, "Auteur et société" in Loprieno (ed.), Ancient Egyptian literature, 83-94, esp. 84, 92, 94.
19 I use the term "realistic" as synonymous with what Loprieno, Topos und Mimesis, 11 ff., has termed "mimetic", thereby following Erich Auerbach's influential study Mimesis, i.e. the attempt to represent experienced reality via literature.
21 Examples can be found in the list of older studies I referred to in n. 6. The same holds true for the somewhat loose use of the term 'intermediality' in Assmann, Theologie und Fremmigkeit, 192. For a critical review of the perspec-
Rhetoric and narrative

But let us for a short moment turn back to things that prior scholarship could have done — but did not do — with its mainly rhetorical/poetical instrumentality even before the just mentioned shift in Egyptological literary criticism. First of all, Egyptian literature lacks a discourse that, borrowing from the expression “explicit theology” coined by Jan Assmann,22 could be labelled as explicit literary criticism, i.e., it lacks an autochthonous Egyptian literary theory. Notwithstanding this for Egyptian literature seems to hold true what is a well-known fact elsewhere: very frequently, literary creations are in themselves carriers of ideas or theories of what should constitute literature at a certain place and a certain time and take part in the process of literary production. This means that literary texts very often define themselves as to what they are and how they are to be read. Therefore it might also have been possible for traditional scholarship to deduce the existence of an inherent Egyptian notion of literature from some Middle Kingdom sources that are self-referential in this respect. For the moment, this notion could be sketched as rhetoric, the centre of which would be the Egyptian expression of mdw.t nfr.t, perfect speech. And because it is possible to distill this concept of rhetoric from Egyptian sources themselves, it also differs, even in most likely cases of practical resemblances,23 — at least methodologically — from the rhetorical/poetical models that are bound to Western literatures but were nevertheless implicitly used in Egyptology until recently.24

So, one of the main examples of the Egyptian didactic discourse, the Instruction of Paahhetep from the early Middle Kingdom, probably the reign of Amenemhat I. (1938-1908 B.C.),25 regards itself as a manual of perfect speech when it says:26

"Beginning of the verses of perfect speech (mdw.t nfr.t)
spoken by the Patrician and Count,
the God’s father, whom the God loves,
the eldest King’s Own Son,
the Lord Vizier Paahhetep,
in teaching the ignorant to be wise,
to be the standard of perfect speech (mdw.t nfr.t),
good for him who will hear,
woeful for him who will transgress it."

Travel as narrative in Egyptian literature

The central part of the text deals with formulating rhetorical rules. But at the same time, in its introduction the text labels itself as mdw.t nfr.t which is the actual goal of the rules it will formulate. In this way the text presents itself as a textual manifestation of applied rhetoric and subordinates itself implicitly to a rhetorical concept of literature, a concept that never becomes explicit outside the Egyptian literary discourse.

Other texts as well make explicit their rhetorical nature by an act of literary self-revelation when they inscribe their raison d’être in themselves by a motivating narrative frame, a phenomenon that seems to be characteristic of literatures in the process of formation.27

For example, the Eloquent Peasant, probably from the reign of Amenemhat II. (1876-1842 B.C.), is a nfr mdw n wn mFt, "one whose speech is truly perfect".28 According to the tale, this was the only reason for the king’s command to record and publish it.

And in the Words of Neferti from the reign of Amenemhat I. (1938-1908 B.C.), an example of the Egyptian lamentation-genre, the text presents Neferti’s narration as the fulfillment of a request for mdw.t nfr.t which the king expressed in the frameliike beginning of the text:

"... Lads!
Look, I’ve had you called to make you seek me out
a son of yours who is a man of understanding,
a brother of yours who is a clever man,
a friend of yours who can achieve a perfect deed,
who will tell me a few perfect words (mdw.t nfr.t),
choice verses,
which my majesty will be entertained to hear" 29

and

"... Come now
Neferti, my friend,
and tell me a few perfect words (mdw.t nfr.t),
choice verses,
which my majesty will be entertained to hear" 30

If the results gained by these generic examples are transferable to their specific generic concept, a substantial part of the earliest Egyptian literature which developed in the Middle Kingdom, is at least implicitly orientated towards a rhetorical notion of literature. However, this rhetorical method is bound only to the didactic genres like instructions, discourses or lamentations. All together, these genres

22 Assmann, Theologie und Frömmigkeit, 192-282.
23 Cf Junge, "Rhetorik", in LA IV, 250-253.
24 Cf above, and n 17.
25 The chronological fixing of the Middle Kingdom texts follows Parkinson, Voices from Ancient Egypt, 12.
26 Pfirrse 3.6 ff. (Zahnu, Paahhetep, II. 42-50); this and all subsequent translations follow Parkinson, The tale of Sinuhe.
27 Cf Assmann, "Kulturelle und literarische Texte", in Logrieco (ed.), Ancient Egyptian literature, 63, and in this volume, 3 f.
28 Bk 1, 106 f., following the new numbering of Parkinson, The tale of the Eloquent Peasant.
29 plenguin 1116A, 5 ff. (Helm, Die Prophezeiung des Nfr u. 7).
30 plenguin 1116A, 12 ff. (Helm, Die Prophezeiung des Nfr u. 11).
make up the literary core of Egyptian "education" which tries to integrate the individual into society so
that he may live a life according to the expectations of a 'collective identity', i.e. to live a solitary
life according to the concept of mfr.t. Because of this particular referentiality, the notion of mdwt
nfr.t also implies the social dimension of spoken perfection or solitary speech. With respect to the
mfr.t-concept, mdwt nfr.t can therefore be labelled as its "mythical analogon" which has a clear
"identity function"; the only way to produce a literary text that is solidary in terms of a collective identity is to use the vehicle of perfect speech (mdwt nfr.t). In the end, by means of this referentiality,
a general rhetorical notion of literature takes shape as the specifically Egyptian rhetoric. It is this
combination of formal-rhetorical aspects and referentiality that characterizes the didactic part of
Egyptian literature, the part which constitutes the essential and constant point of reference in the history of Egyptian literary production.

But the didactic side of Egyptian literature forms only one pole in Egyptian literary history. Already in
the Middle Kingdom’s 12th dynasty (1990-1785 B.C.) we find texts like the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor or the story of Sinuhe which are narrative prose tales. Also the above-mentioned story of the Eloquent Peasant frames its didactic and for this reason, as we have seen, formally rhetorical main part, in a narrative. Moreover, the two texts mentioned first are particularly resistant to the rhetorical model. This has caused major problems in the Egyptological treatment of these texts, problems aggravated by the fact that Egyptian does not possess specific generic notions to designate the mode and the genres of Egyptian narrative. In contrast, the genres of didactic literature possess comparatively straightforward generic designations such as sibfr.t for instructions and mdwt or pr for discourses or lamentations. Thus, while we must be satisfied on the formal level with the negative data of an insufficiently suitable apparatus of description, we can compensate by referring to the relative coherence of the contents. Sinuhe and the Shipwrecked Sailor are travel narratives or at least literary treatments of the travelling-abroad motif, and the same holds true for the story of the Eloquent Peasant, although in this case only the narrative frame is involved. Thus, metaphorically speaking, the Egyptian literary discourse started to move. Although the reasons for this never become explicit, again they are formulated by a literary product itself. The Words of Khakhpepereseneb, not predating the reign of Senwos-

32 Assmann, Maat, esp. 58-85.
33 Parkinson, in Quirke (ed.), Middle Kingdom studies, 93, 100.
34 Logowski, Die Form der Individualität im Roman, 10-13. Logowski understands the "mythical analogon" as the artificial whole in which the world is rendered in a work of literature without being perceived as artificial. This unperceived artificiality is the reason for the community-creating force implicit in the mythical analogon.
35 For this term cf. Assmann, in Loprieno (ed.), Ancient Egyptian literature, 68-72, and in this volume, 7.
36 This concept of didactic literature comes very close to what Assmann recently labeled as "cultural texts", cf. Assmann, in Loprieno (ed.), Ancient Egyptian literature, 59-82, and in this volume, 1-15. To subsume under this heading, however, as Assmann does, also the Middle Kingdom narrative literature, means to oversimplify the particular differences between didactic and realistic narrative Egyptian literature, cf. the following.
37 Compare, however, the remarks of Parkinson, in Quirke (ed.), Middle Kingdom studies, 92, and idem, in Loprieno (ed.), Ancient Egyptian literature, 297-312.

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ret II (1844-1837 B.C.) criticize the literary conformity of the didactic discourse based on its static
rhetoric, a rhetoric that is comparable to the demonstrare ariem of classical rhetoric. The text expresses its criticism via dissimulative irony in its introductory literary-theoretical prologue:

The collection of words, gathering of verses
the seeking of utterances with heart-searching,
made by the priest of Heliopolis,
Seni’s son Khakhpepereseneb,
called Ankuhu,
He says, ‘If only I had unknown utterances
and extraordinary verses,
in a new language that does not pass away,
free from repetition
without a verse of worn-out speech
spoken by the ancestors!
I shall sing my body for what is in it,
– a release of all my speech.
For what is already said can only be repeated;
what is said once has been said;
this is no vain boast of the ancients’ speech
that those who are later should find it good.

No speaker has spoken yet – may one who will speak now speak and another find what he will speak good!
No one has spoken yet for a matter spoken afterwards,
as they have done long before.
Here is no speaking what is only planned to be said:
this is searching after ruin, this is falsehood –
there is none who will remember his name to others!
I have said these things as I have seen them;
from the first generations until those who come after,
they are now like what has passed away.
If only I knew what was unknown to others,
what is still unreported!’

38 Vernant, Essai sur la conscience de l’histoire dans l’Egype pharaonique, 3, proposes the end of dynasty XII or dynasty XIII as date for the composition of the text.
39 BM, EA 5645 no., 1-7 (Gardiner, Admonitores, 96-100).
Travel in ancient Egyptian literature: metaphor of movement with this text’s mixture of genres and modes, we are halfway between rhetoric and narrative.

Unlike the story of the Eloquent Peasant, the two other travelling-merchant-stories from the Middle Kingdom are first-person narratives in the history of Egyptian literary narrative until the end of the New Kingdom. I will be dealing with the first-person narratives, whereas in their times, all first-person narratives were travel narratives. This shift in the narrative style is, of course, a feature of the Middle Kingdom, but the first-person narrative is typical of the Middle Kingdom. The Eloquent Peasant is typical of the Middle Kingdom.

The first-person narrative is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second half of the 2nd century BC, the story is the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. From the second hal
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career. In my view, this constitutes yet another challenge to the concept of collective identity. Apparently, the ideal-biographical blueprint of life inherent in this concept was so clearly presupposed in Egyptian society that to follow its expectations was felt as insufficient and as lacking explanatory adequacy to present an individual life as it is done in Simuhe. In fact, Sinuhe shuns the unreactiveness of his own ideal biography. Thus, the flight itself and the withdrawal from ideal and long-established ways constitute Sinuhe's guilt. This is the reason why older scholarship could not find any substantial motivation for his flight in the text itself: as John Baines already pointed out, it is "self-sufficient, because it is all that the plot requires". In this way, flight and guilt textbookly become each other's precondition, i.e. Sinuhe is not guilty of anything but fleeting. Metaphorically speaking, it is the existence of his own text by which Sinuhe becomes guilty.

As a whole, this text is a more or less successful attempt to handle the problem of social diversification accompanied by growing individuality, a problem specific to the Egypt of the Middle Kingdom. But unlike for example the highly didactic lamentation genre which is only (re-)presentational in this respect, the tale of Simuhe is an attempt to tackle this problem realistically and to prove in this way the validity of the Egyptian concept of life.

The travel-abroad motif receives a fresh and different literary treatment after a period of relative silence in the so called Report of Wenamun either from the reign of Rameses XI at the end of the Ramessean era or – more likely – from the reign of Herihor at the beginning of dynasty XXI. But compared with the tale of Simuhe, this 'report' differs significantly in terms of its plot development and its language use. On the one hand, the plot of this text is structured by actions taking place on water which is, with respect to the motif, itself more dangerous and burdened with guilt than travelling by land. On the other hand, the story is told not in classical Middle Egyptian but in Late Egyptian which is the more realistic language. The hero Wenamun sets out on a business trip to the Near East, well endowed with money and divine support. He takes along an idol of "Amun-Of-The-Road" that initially represents Amun in his aspect of protector of travellers. Moreover, this idol is a metaphor for the New Kingdom concept of 'Amun' himself; whose cyclical movement in his bark maintains the order of creation and who therefore represents and guarantees the functional unity of the Egyptian cosmos. Thus, in a proverbial use, Wenamun and Amun are in the same boat. In the course of his trip Wenamun has several experiences that confront him with the real nature of his Egyptian identity. Again a quantity "foreign ruler" is used for this purpose. But in contrast to Sinuhe, Wenamun finds out that neither is he the one he thought himself to be, nor do the world and its representational concept 'Amun' operate as he believed. The divine idol does not protect him in any way, on the contrary, he is the one who has to hide it. And also his efforts to put the debates with his foreign counterparts on the basis of the conception of collective identity he entertains of himself result in a disaster when Tjekkerbaal, the ruler of Byblos, unmask them as nothing but rhetoric. Step by step he is deprived of his identity when nobody listens to his attempted explanations of the world and when the supplying of the wood which he understood as an expression of a higher order suddenly turns out to be a simple commercial deal. On this background one understands the important role the divine idol is playing in this text: Wenamun's travel is synonymous with an examination of the coherence of the Egyptian conception of life and ends up in a "decomposition of the mythical analogon" which results in Wenamun's complete loss of identity. This unravelling becomes evident mainly in the subject-object relation of individual and world: while Sinuhe was at most points of his life abroad the acting part of the world he encountered, Wenamun has the bitter experience of being nothing but the object of his surroundings: his ego is reduced to a mere grammatical subject. Formally, the harshness and cruelty of the disappointments Wenamun has to face is directly related to the language used in this text: it is the realism and sometimes even the naturalism of everyday written Late Egyptian that impacts to this text the character of a travel-report and - by far more important - its "serious tone". Again, as was the case with Sinuhe, Wenamun's experiences are likewise conditioned by the development of the Egyptian society in Ramessean times in which growing individuality and personal freedom on the one hand are combined with growing isolation of the individual on the other. Both in the religious sphere with the phenomenon of personal piety and in the economic sphere the individualization of society brought along the usual negative results, such as mutual indifference or greed for profit. The basic difference, however, between the tale of Sinuhe and that of Wenamun becomes visible also in another respect. As a result of its integrating power, the tale of Simuhe appeared in over 30 (mostly partial) copies and thus became one of the classics of ancient Egyptian literature, since both in form and contents it succeeded in giving an affirmative and a-temporal answer to the question whether a concept of collective identity was still valid even in times when it was challenged by growing individuality (see above).

The tale of Wenamun, however, is denied this kind of positive reception: language and contents are extreme to such a degree that from the very beginning there is no way to bring the described experiences into harmony with the Egyptian world view inherent in the concept 'Amun' (see above). On the contrary, the text openly challenges this concept as an adequate means of world-explanation instead of providing satisfactory answers how to close the fissures that become more and more visible in

63 Cf. Baines, in JEA 68 (1982), 42.
64 Loprieno, Topos and Memoria, 85-97.
66 Compare the chapter "Wasser, Krokodile und andere Gefahren", in Moers, Der Aufbruch ins Phänikazeum, 153-189.
67 See for example Baines, "Cassiusian and modernism in the literature of the New Kingdom", in Loprieno (ed.), Ancient Egyptian literature, 171 f. For the dichotomy of classical Middle Egyptian and "proletarian" Late Egyptian cf. Loprieno, "Linguistic variety and Egyptian literature", in Loprieno (ed.), Ancient Egyptian literature, 522 f.
68 P.Moskau 120.2.60 (Gardiner, LES, 73 5 f.).
69 English translation of Lugowski's German term "Zerozung des mythischen Analogons". With Lugowski, such a decomposition takes place when the artificiality of a discourse is thematized and becomes the theme of reflection in the text itself, cf. Lugowski, Die Form der 'Individualität' im Rom, 10-13, and 52-141. Exactly this happens with Tjekkerbaals ironic remark to Wenamun's applied rhetoric, cf. n. 68 above.
70 So Baines, in Loprieno (ed.), Ancient Egyptian literature, 171, who also contrasts this linguistic form with the "conventionalized hybrid" of what is normally called "Literary Late Egyptian", op. cit., 159.
71 Loprieno, Topos and Memoria, 89.
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reader as a 'copy' of the original. Thus, the isolation of the writer in this composition finds its adequate means of expression in the literary form itself.

As the movement between periphery and centre in this composition is reversed in comparison to the tale of the *Eloquent Peasant*, so is the relation between rhetorical and realistic passages. While the rhetoric is reduced to the typical epistolary formula, the realistic description of the hero's ill fortune forms the main part of the letter. For this reason there is no longer a confrontative discussion between societal expectations expressed via rhetoric and its individual realistic challenge— as was still the case at least in the dialogic parts of *Sinsue* and *Wenamun*—but an entirely realistic and sometimes fully naturalistic presentation of the total disintegration of Egyptian society and the downfall of the concept of a collective identity that should have given form to it. That this work shared the narrative of *Wenamun*'s fate regarding the aesthetics of reception should therefore stand to reason.

The last example of our group of ancient Egyptian treatments of the travelling-abroad motif is the narrative of the *Benfresch-Stela* from the middle of the first millennium B.C. Again and for the last time, in this narrative the motif is used as a literary reckoning with past and present. The stela presents a divine statue's journey to a Near-Eastern kingdom undertaken to cure Pharaoh's near relative (the Princess of Bakhtan) of a serious disease. After working a cure by expelling the disease demon and after a longer forced delay abroad, the divine statue returns safely to Egypt.

This treatment of the travelling-abroad motif differs radically from all the other instances of Egyptian travel literature discussed so far. To begin with, the medium of publication as a stela which was found in a temple, indicates that this text is an example of *decorum* and is thus materially closely linked to the rhetorical genres. Secondly, the text's narrated time is made up from past and present elements. This becomes evident mainly in the figure of Pharaoh: while the text rhetorically refers to the topos of a glorified past by composing his name of fragments of the names of different important historical kings, Pharaoh himself represents and enacts this glorified past on the contemporary level of the narrative. Thirdly, the story is told as an objectivizing third-person narrative. Taken together, these hints point to the text's being an attempt to present the contemporary situations in a more rhetorical way to express how official Egypt would like them to be, rather than being a realistic discussion of experiences acquired abroad. But in the middle of the first millennium B.C. such positive experiences with foreign countries as described by this text are only to present rhetorically. The historical reality which was determined by Egypt's striking and rapid loss of power in the Near East, looked completely different. An Egyptian Pharaoh would not receive tributes in this part of the world, nor would an Egyptian divine image be necessary to cure the local sick.

79 In this sense Loprieno, in Cooper/Schwartz (eds.), *The study of the Ancient Near East in the twenty-first century*, 214 ff.

this concept, it restricts itself to a representation of these fissures and leaves it exclusively to the reader to find possible answers. In this way left alone by the text and the questions it produces, the reader reacts by denying the tale of *Wenamun* a reception comparable to that of the tale of *Sinsue*. To return once more to the scheme of reflection that is embodied in the travelling-abroad motif: in the tale of *Sinsue* the point of departure and the destination are identical. The hero flees from being an Egyptian to accept it eventually as his only possible identity. In the tale of *Wenamun*, however, the hero is not that lucky: in his case the movement of reflection does no longer reach the point of departure, and the result is the hero's loss of identity described above.

The next example of the Egyptian genre of travel-narratives is the *Letter of Wermia*, better known as the *Tale of Woe*, a fictional letter which was found near el-Hibeh together with the tale of *Wenamun* and the onomasticon of *Amenemope*. Besides this hardly accidental fact and the identical dating of both texts, it is the close correspondence in contents that is most striking: in the letter, the travel abroad motif is transposed to Egypt itself. The text describes the strange experience of the almost kalkasque alienation of the high priest of Heliepolis, a victim of nameless evil who suddenly finds himself a foreigner in his own country. After an introductory epistolary formula that is usual for its time and that covers more than a quarter of the composition, the hero Wermia describes his experiences: he is maltreated, his property is robbed, and he is driven out of his hometown, all without any apparent reason. Driven by his ill fortune, the hero roams throughout Egypt and the Delta, tries to make new friends but fails in this effort, and has to face loneliness for the rest of his journey. Finally, he is stranded in an oasis controlled by the same evil. At this point I would briefly like to recall to mind the story of the *Eloquent Peasant*, in which the hero starts his journey in an oasis to examine the concepts of *mF.t* at the centre of the collective Egyptian identity and to find them both still valid. Wermia has the opposite experience: as the high-priest of a central cult-place, he is driven out to the periphery of an oasis to find out that the concepts of *mF.t* and with it the collective identity have become hollow and worthless and are substituted by the law of the strongest. On this background Wermia in his total isolation impersonates the final point of the literary treatment of Egyptian individuality: metaphorically speaking, he has become the victim of the very development that started in the Middle Kingdom with Sinsue's flight at the latest.

In this case too, form and contents are symmetrical. As literary genre, the letter is the most subjective and clearest form of first-person narrative as well as the most private of all narrative techniques. Since a letter in itself is normally not intended for publication in the strict sense of the word, the normal procedure of transposing it into the public domain is an editor's note which on the other hand is a clear sign of the composition's fictitiousity. This is why also the *Letter of Wermia* is presented to the
From a functional point of view, the role of the divine statue in this text corresponds to that of the “Aman-Of-The-Road” in the tale of Wenamun. The difference lies in the fact that by the successful effect of the divine idol the validity of the Egyptian world view is proved in a literary way: Pharaoh still rules the world, and an Egyptian god is still the best and still the only remedy for any problems to arise. It is on this vivid opposition between real-world conditions and their literary treatment that the narrative point of view of this text is based: only the third-person narrator can describe the former Egyptian sphere of influence in the middle of the first millennium B.C. in such a positive manner. A first-person narrative, on the contrary, would probably tell about different experiences, experiences that would more or less fit those Wenamun or Wermai had had. Seen from this angle, the narrative of the Bentrest-Stela is the literary attempt to rehabilitate an Egyptian view of the world that was proven invalid by texts like the tale of Wenamun or the Letter of Wermai. For the same reason the text – although in itself a narrative – comes formally very close to what I termed above as Egyptian rhetoric: a rhetoric that now tries to recolonize the genre of travel-narratives that it had lost at least 1500 years earlier.

Conclusion

The development of Egyptian fictional discourse is on the one hand closely connected with the occurrence of first-person narratives. These narratives openly indicate their fictionality by making use of the travelling-abroad motif which – textually shaped as a heroes' leaving Egypt – is a metaphor of the boundary-transgressing nature of fiction itself. On the other hand, fictional travel-literature is the only place where in pharaonic Egypt the apparently problematic interface of cultural and individual identity is openly discussed while didactic-rhetorical literature throughout the history of Egypt merely presents the official view on cultural and collective identity and thus – as a mythical analogon of the mF, concept – has a clear identity-function, it is fictional travel-literature that from the Middle Kingdom onwards takes up the cause of the theme of an individual de-limitation of society and thus challenges these official identity-concepts. It is in both ways taken together that Egyptian literature is able to show the rear views of those worlds that have been used to create the fictional universe.

(Idle fall 1997)

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80 Cf. Iser, *Theorie der Literatur*, 11: "Als ein 'Plenum der Möglichkeiten' deckt Literatur die Rückassisten jener Welten auf, die in sie eingegangen sind."
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