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# **Bakalářská práce**

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**Seth, the guardian of Ra**

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**Prohlášení:**

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## **Abstrakt**

Bakalářská práce pojednává o specifické roli staroegyptského boha Seta jakožto ochránce slunečního boha Rea. Činí tak zejména na základě epigrafických a ikonografických pramenů a zároveň zasazuje debatu o Setovi do širšího historického, náboženského, ikonografického a ideologického kontextu. Práce konstatuje, že ačkoli se na první pohled může role Seta jakožto ochránce slunečního boha zdát nelogická, jde ve skutečnosti o představu zcela v souladu a očekáváními starých Egyptanů a jejich náboženství.

## **Abstract**

This B.A. thesis is a study of the ancient Egyptian god Seth and his very particular role as the guardian of the sun god Ra. The focus is primarily on available epigraphic and iconographic evidence whilst at the same time examining Seth from a wider historical, religious, iconographic and ideological perspective. Although the image of Seth in the role of the guardian of Ra might seem out of place at first, this thesis concludes that such a concept is wholly in accordance with the expectations of the ancient Egyptians and their religion.

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## Introduction

Among the hundreds of deities making up the ancient Egyptian pantheon there is no god so cursed, so loathed, so vilified and at the same time so misunderstood as Seth. For a better part of Ancient Egyptian history, Seth was viewed as the murderer of his brother and king, the usurper of his nephew's throne, the incarnation of violence, and the spirit of chaos. Indeed, this image has become so engrained that even to this day and age Seth is regarded as the stereotypical evil god of ancient Egypt not only in popular culture<sup>1</sup> but this prejudice has been, perhaps unconsciously, reproduced by some scholars as well.

Yet Seth is so much more than a “god of confusion, spirit of disorder and personification of violence” as Te Velde (2001: 269) chooses to describe him. Wilkinson (2003: 197-198) points out that Seth as a deity had negative (god of violence, chaos and confusion) and positive (god of strength, cunning and protective power) aspects. Though this is certainly true, it does not follow that Seth was a good or a bad god, as he escapes our normative framework within which most of us operate and make assumptions about ancient religions. Seth's character and role in Egyptian mythology is definitively more nuanced than it might appear at first.

In his seminal work on Seth, Herman Te Velde (1967) lists several distinct roles in which the god appears: as the enemy and friend of Horus, the murderer of Osiris, and as the foreigner. Seth's behaviour towards his brother Osiris and his nephew Horus coupled with the influx of non-Egyptians into the Two Lands *en masse* during the Second Intermediate Period become key to the god's demonization in the Egyptian heartland towards the end of the Third Intermediate Period, around 700 BC.<sup>2</sup>

However, Te Velde (1967: 99-108) also lists a fourth role for Seth which seems to be somewhat out of place – he is the unrelenting defender of the solar bark of Ra, the only force standing against the imminent destruction of the Egyptian cosmos by the monstrous serpent of

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<sup>1</sup> The introduction of Seth into popular Western culture can probably be traced to the adventures of Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian in the 1930s. During the fictional Hyborian Age, which according to Howard's writings arrived after the sinking of Atlantis and before ancient Earth history, the so-called Set was venerated as the god of darkness and was closely associated with serpents. To this day, Seth has appeared numerous times in many different forms and interpretations, e.g. in role-playing games (*Dungeons & Dragons* franchise, *World of Darkness*), videogames (*Age of Mythology*), film (*Gods of Egypt*), television series (*Doctor Who*, *Puppet Master*) or cartoons (*Conan the Adventurer*, *Papyrus*, *Tutenstein*).

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this paper, dating is according to Shaw (2000).

chaos, Apophis.<sup>3</sup> And it is precisely in this very specific role as the guardian of Ra that this thesis will examine Seth, whilst at the same time considering the god in a broader historical, religious, cultural and ideological context. The basic questions that this thesis aims to answer is, why does Seth appear as the guardian of Ra and why does the god of confusion become the champion of *ma'at*.

Seth's role as the guardian of Ra is very specific, and research into this aspect is somewhat limited. The first systematic attempt to study this topic was by George Nagel in 1929, who laid the cornerstone for further research by listing all known occurrences at that time. Te Velde built upon Nagel's work in his 1967 monography *Seth, god of confusion*, which even to this day represents the basic study for any scholar interested in Seth. However, Seth's role as the protector of Ra is unfortunately the shortest chapter in Te Velde's book. In the following decades other scholars have examined this particular role of Seth and other examples of the god's battle with Apophis have come to light, but a systematic study on the subject is still lacking. It is thus more common that references relating to Seth's role as the defender of the solar bark are scattered across many different sources – archaeological, linguistic, religious, cultural, epigraphic, iconographic etc. – relating not only to the Egyptian heartland but to the deserts and oases surrounding the valley of the Nile as well.

In addition, though there are several reliefs and depictions of Seth battling Apophis, these sources are not very informative about the conflict itself, as the accompanying text usually adds little information to that which is already shown. Ancient Egyptian religious texts do not offer much help either, often merely stating that Seth is on the prow of Ra's bark and sometimes adding that the god is there to slay the sun god's enemies. The most important sources for the battle with Apophis thus remain two spells: spell 160 from the Coffin Texts and spell 108 from the Book of the Dead. But even these textual sources will tell the reader little without a wider religious and cultural context. Thus, the methodology and the structure of this thesis must address and reflect these issues.

This B.A. thesis, apart from the Introduction and the Conclusion, consists of the following chapters:

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<sup>3</sup> Mathieu (2011) suggests a different classification of the roles of Seth: Seth de Noubet; Seth de Noubet vaincu par Horus de Nékhen; Seth de Noubet « pacifié » dans le couple divin référentiel « Horus et Seth »; Seth de Noubet dans la désignation royale binaire « Horus-Seth »; Seth « l'Ancien » Mutilateur de l' Oeil d' Horus; Seth l'Héliopolitain, frère et assassin d'Osiris; Seth céleste et astronomique.

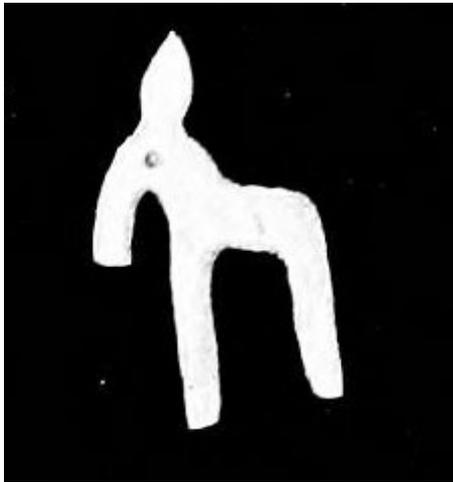
*Chapter I* introduces Seth and the many different roles the god played in the ancient Egyptian pantheon. Within this part I examine the evolution of Seth's cult from its beginnings in the fourth millennium BC until the Roman era. Historical developments, archaeological evidence and other indications supporting the changing nature of the god's cult show Seth as a complex god defying black-and-white definitions of good and evil, and casting into doubt his universal demonization which has often been taken for granted, often ignoring available evidence.

*Chapter II* focuses on what kind of characteristics the ancient Egyptians associated with Seth. For this purpose, three canonical religious texts are examined, namely The Pyramid Texts, The Coffin Texts, and the Book of the Dead, though other sources also prove useful. The main argument of the chapter is that all the descriptions of Seth directly build on, or at least draw much inspiration, his immeasurable strength - after all, Seth's most enduring epithet was "great of strength".

*Chapter III* examines Seth's role as the defender of Ra in the solar bark during its night-journey through the Amduat. This chapter builds on the arguments presented in Chapter I and Chapter II and shows that Seth battles Apophis not because of some twist of fate or act of good will, but because the god of chaos due to his strength and other abilities is the only being capable of defeating the serpent of chaos, very much in line with the prevalent ancient Egyptian belief that "like heals like". The concept of Seth as the guardian of Ra thus does not appear out of the blue nor is it some exception to the rule, but is a highly logical conclusion building on the god's character and his place within ancient Egyptian beliefs.

## Chapter I – Seth: a story of vilification (?)

Seth belongs to one of the oldest Egyptian deities both from a theological and historical point of view. It is generally assumed that Seth was worshiped as the local god of the Upper-Egyptian settlement of Nubt (Ombos) lying near the modern village of Naqada<sup>4</sup> – after all, one of his typical and common nicknames was “*nwbty*”, the Ombite<sup>5</sup> – as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. However, these claims concerning Seth’s earliest cult are rather tentative and based on some abstruse assumptions about two depictions of the so-called Seth-animal which, in addition, do not come from Nubt itself but from predynastic sites more than a hundred kilometres away. Nevertheless, as shall become apparent from the evidence presented below, it seems reasonable to claim that the cult of Seth was already active during the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC despite the fact that the presence of the god’s cult at Nubt comes from a much later date.<sup>6</sup>



*Ivory figure from Tomb H 29*



*Pot from Chozam ÄM 22391*

Baumgartel (1955: 34) claimed that the earliest known portrayal of the Seth-animal came in the form of a small ivory figure bearing asinine features which was found in Tomb H 29 at Mahasna dated to the Naqada I period (Ayrton and Loat 1911: pl. XII.2). Scharff (1926: 17-

18, pl. I, 2) assumed that the ass-like animal on a pot from the Naqada I cemetery at Chozam and now in the Neues Museum in Berlin (ÄM 22391) might also be a depiction of Seth in

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<sup>4</sup> Nubt was not the only city connected to the worship of Seth. According to ancient Egyptian beliefs, Seth was born in the town of Su located in the 20<sup>th</sup> Upper-Egyptian nome. The god was worshipped e.g. by the Hyksos during the Second Intermediate Period in Avaris, during the New Kingdom at Piramesse, and in the oases of the Western desert in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. For a list of locations connected to Seth, see Taylor (2017: 110-153).

<sup>5</sup> Seth is often referred to as “the Ombite” on inscriptions and in texts. For example, he is called by this epithet on monuments such as the relief from Sahura’s mortuary temple, Senwosret’s I statue from Lisht or a lintel recovered from the temple of Seth at Nubt (see below), but also in the Pyramid Texts (e.g. spells 222, 268, 510, 779), Coffin Texts (e.g. spells 397, 404) or the Book of the Dead (e.g. spell 125).

<sup>6</sup> According to Petrie and Quibell (1896: 66-70) first evidence of cultic activity from the temple of Seth in Nubt comes from the time of the Fourth Dynasty, with extensive renovations carried out during the New Kingdom, and last archaeological evidence dates to the Third Intermediate Period. See also Guerneur (2015: 77).

animal form, though on the other hand one might speculate that the distinct vertical lines could suggest the animal is a zebra. The uncertainty surrounding these two portrayals led Te Velde



*Limestone statuette from tomb 721  
(Oxford AN 1895.138)*

(1967: 12) to reject the claim that they represent the Seth-animal readily identifiable by its hallmark features.<sup>7</sup>

These aspects, in turn, are somewhat identifiable on a pink limestone statuette from tomb 721 at Naqada

(Oxford AN 1895.138, Crowfoot Payne 1993: 15) dated to Naqada IIc, specifically around 3450 BC (Baumgartel 1970:7, XXVIII),<sup>8</sup> and more prominent on a carving found at Gebel Tjauti a site located on an ancient



*Gebel Tjauty carving (Seth-animal at top right)*

<sup>7</sup> Though the Seth-animal is easy to spot – due to its distinct, possibly truncated ears, its raised and often forked tail, and its signature long-curved snout – the jury is still out whether Seth’s depiction was based on an actual creature, whether it was a composition of several real-world animals (as was the case with Ammut) or whether it was a made-up animal altogether. Early European visitors thought Seth reassembled a giraffe or okapi (Schorsch and Wypyski 2009: 184), nowadays the aardvark or anteater seems to be a more popular choice (Castillos 2016: 85), though the Seth-animal was also linked to an ass, oryx, greyhound, fennec, jerboa, camel, long-snouted mouse, or boar (Te Velde 1967: 13; Mathieu 2011 : 137-137; Guermeur 2015: 76). One can certainly find arguments for both positions, however those arguing against a real animal seem more convincing. Ancient Egyptian artists tended to be very accurate in their portrayal of the world around them, and their attention to detail was so meticulous that it was possible for modern researchers to identify the species they depicted: a case in point are the famous Meidum geese from the mastaba of prince Neferma’at and his wife Itet from the reign of king Snofru (2613-2589 BC) where it is possible to identify the Red-breasted, Bean and White-fronted goose. To assume that Egyptian artists could not or would not depict the Seth-animal in such a manner that we could identify the species it represents, seems extremely unlikely.

<sup>8</sup> Scholars remain divided on whether the object from tomb 721 actually represents Seth. For example, Patch (2012: 261) lists the statuette as a “model standard in the shape of a mythological animal”, Hendrickx and Eyckerman (2012: 40, footnote 36) speak of a “composite of an unidentifiable quadruped, eventually a lion, with a bird head”. On the other hand, Darnell (2002 :19) maintains that identifying the statuette as Seth “can scarcely be questioned”. It has also been suggested by Kahl (2001: 53-54) that the Seth-animal made an appearance in the iconic tomb U-j at Abydos (ca. 3300 BC), though this connection is rather obscure when compared to the statuette from Naqada.

road cutting across the Qena bend and leading from Thebes to the oases of the Western desert, which Darnell (2002:19) dates to the Naqada III/Dynasty 0 Period (ca. 3100 BC).<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, the first undisputed canonical depiction of the Seth-animal must thus be on the votive macehead of the proto-dynastic ruler Scorpion from around 3100 BC (Oxford AN 1896.1908.E.3632; Gautier and Midant-Reynes 1995), where two Seth-animals standing on nome standards are depicted with their characteristic snouts, raised tails and truncated ears.



*Oxford AN 1896.1908.E.3632 (Seth-animals on standards at top)*

And there are further indications that around the time of the unification of Egypt Seth had already become an established part of Egyptian religious and royal symbolism (Wilkinson 1999: 37). For example, during the First Dynasty (3000-2890 BC) the god's name had become part of the titulary of queens, some of whom, like the wife of king Den,

Seshemetka, bore the title “She who sees Horus, she who carries Seth” (*mꜣꜣ.t Hr.w rmn.t Stš*; Petrie 1901: pl. XXVII. 96, 128, 129) which was probably to evolve into the title “She Who Sees Horus and Seth” (*mꜣꜣ.t Hr.w Stš*) in the Old Kingdom.<sup>10</sup> A First Dynasty calcite bowl (Cambridge E.3.1901) decorated with a festival inscription of Seth suggests a thriving cult of the god already during this period.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Darnell (2002: 21) attests that there are visual similarities between the statuette from tomb 721 at Naqada and the depiction of the presumed Seth-animal at Gebel Tjauti, and that the latter could be a “transition of this composite creature toward its more familiar canonical form”. In the Gebel Tjauti carving the Seth-animal is part of a larger scene which is dominated by a group of five falcons, an elephant, two other not readily identifiable animals, some vegetation and numerous signs similar to the letter “M”, especially around the presumed Seth-animal. Darnell further speculates that the scene might represent a procession of the Horus king through the desert and that the “M” signs might represent a mountainous landscape and chaos of the desert.

<sup>10</sup> Numerous examples of this title can be found in the tomb of Queen Meresankh III at Giza (Dunham and Simpson 1974: 7-22). For a general overview of queens' titles, see Grajetzki (2005), for the titles of queens from the Early Dynastic Period to the Old Kingdom, see Callender 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, apart from the vase being bought at Qena, the origin of the object has been lost to history. See Green (1913).

The events of the Second Dynasty (2890-2686 BC) remain shrouded in mystery, for we have archaeological evidence mainly from the reigns of the last two kings, Peribsen and Khasekhemwy. Seth seems to have achieved particular prominence during their reigns, though why this happened, remains unclear. What we do know is that during the reign of Peribsen the Seth-animal replaced for some reason the falcon of Horus that customarily adorned the top of the serekh, as attested not only by numerous sealings (Petrie 1901: pl. XXII) but also by the famous granite stela of Peribsen found at his tomb at Umm el-Qaab (London EA 35597; Strudwick 2006: 42-43). During the reign of Peribsen's successor, king Khasekhemwy, Horus made a comeback and was depicted atop the serekh next to Seth (see e.g. seals in Petrie 1901: pl. XXIII, XXIV), leading to much speculation about the reasons for such a change.<sup>12</sup> The increasing prominence of Seth's cult may also explain why the god starts to appear in a non-royal context, e.g. on a stela as part of the name of a high Second-Dynasty official buried at Helwan (tomb 247 H6) called Nefer-Seth (Saad 1957: 51-53, pl. XXX), which seems to be the first of many names which included the god.<sup>13</sup>

From the above evidence it seems plausible to assume that towards the end of the Early Dynastic Period, Seth had already become a household name in Egypt. During the 500 years dividing the sketching at Gebel Tjauti and the rise of the Old Kingdom, there must have been considerable development in the Egyptians' perception of Seth. The god kept his job as the local deity of Nubt, the city of gold, but he also acquired new attributes. Seth, one might speculate, became connected to remote places, untamed regions such as deserts and oases, as well as gold-mines (Pinch 2004: 192) due to the proximity of his home town to routes leading to the Western desert.<sup>14</sup> From the onset though, the god was not associated with negative

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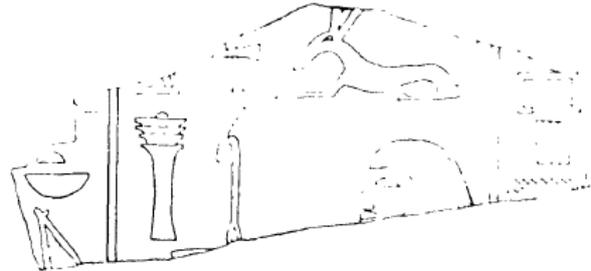
<sup>12</sup> It has been suggested for example that Peribsen replaced Horus with Seth after a rebellion leading to a short-lived independence of Upper Egypt, and that Khasekhemwy possibly brought the two lands under one rule again (Bard 2000: 79-80; Te Velde 1967: 72-73). The fact that both chose to be buried at Abydos as the only kings of the Second Dynasty can be supportive of both points of view. For a more detailed discussion on the last kings of the Second Dynasty, see i.a. Dodson (1996) or Wilkinson (1999: 89-94).

<sup>13</sup> Seth and the Seth-animal were used in Egyptian names throughout much of Egypt's history, though most surviving examples come from the New Kingdom. For a list of names, see Taylor (2017: 237-244).

<sup>14</sup> Te Velde (1984: 909) points out that Seth's connection with desert supports the argument that the Seth-animal is a fabulous beast much like the griffin that, according to the Egyptians, also lived in the sandy wastes. Support for this argumentation can be found in the tombs of Baqt III (Tomb 15) and Khety (Tomb 17) at Beni Hasan where the Seth-animal is depicted among other fantastic beasts of the desert (Newberry 1893: pl. IV and pl. XIII; Altenmüller 2015).

feelings nor did he stand out in the incipient Egyptian state pantheon. On the contrary, Seth was seen as an essential part of the family of gods, certainly in the first half of the Old Kingdom.

Evidence for this claim comes from the time of king Netjerykhet (2667-2648 BC), during whose reign the concept of the Great Ennead of Heliopolis, of which Seth was an integral part, had already been established. This assumption is based on one of the fragments from a shrine in Heliopolis built by Netjerykhet (Turin S 2671; Smith 1949: 134-135) on which a human-like Seth and on another possibly Geb are depicted.<sup>15</sup>



*Fragment from Netjerykhet's shrine (Turin S 2671)*

Further evidence of Seth's cult at this time is provided by the false door of Sekerkhabau from his tomb in Saqqara who acted as a priest in the god's sanctuary (Murray 1905: 2-3, pl. I, II) and Seth seemed to be worshipped on the Sinai Peninsula in the Fourth Dynasty (Kees 1961: 198).

However, during the Fifth Dynasty the story gets more complicated as Egyptian religious beliefs undergo considerable evolution. These changes were reflected in the Pyramid Texts which first appear in the pyramid of king Unas (2375-2345 BC) in Saqqara. Though Unas was the last king of the Fifth Dynasty it seems logical to assume that the Pyramid Texts evolved from theological principles and myths which had been around for at least several hundred years. Within the Pyramid Texts Seth's role became more ambiguous and took on several new meanings mainly due to the rising importance of the cult of Osiris<sup>16</sup> in which Seth plays the part

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<sup>15</sup> The depiction of Seth as a human is a rare occurrence in the Old and Middle Kingdoms, the shrine of Netjerykhet in Heliopolis is actually the only one, which we are aware of. The next portrayal of this kind comes from the speos of king Horemheb (1323-1295 BC) at Gebel el-Silsila (Thiem 2000: pl. 97). Here Seth was depicted in mummiform among the other gods of the Great Ennead. From that time the portrayal of Seth in full human form becomes increasingly common, there are several cases of such a depiction in the Temple of Amun at Karnak, e.g. in the Hypostyle Hall (Nelson and Murnane 1981: pl. 52).

<sup>16</sup> Smith (2017) provides a detailed account regarding Osiris and the origins of his cult and remains unconvinced (pp. 107-114) that there is any evidence of the Osirian cult (architectural, symbolic, textual etc) in the Early Dynastic Period and the first two dynasties of the Old Kingdom, despite claims to the opposite. Smith (2017: 114-117) maintains that the first tangible attestation of Osiris' name comes from the Fifth Dynasty (from a relief fragment from the pyramid of Djedkara at Saqqara) and later from the Pyramid Texts. Griffiths (1980: 21) also asserts that the earliest evidence comes from the closing phases of the Fifth Dynasty, though tangible evidence of

of not only the first murderer, but the murderer of his own brother and king at that. Little wonder that the Pyramid Texts mirror these developments - simple statistics show that negative descriptions of Seth were prevalent and became more pronounced as time progressed.<sup>17</sup>

Let us, however, interrupt our examination of Seth's cult and take a closer look at the Osirian myth and the impact it had on the Egyptians' attitudes toward Seth. To appreciate this, we must examine the ramifications of Seth's fratricide. The murder of Osiris upset the divine order governing the world (*ma'at*), opening the door to disorder and chaos (*isfet*). A counterreaction was required to bring back balance to Egypt and who else was better suited for this job than the one who had been wronged the most – Horus. To claim the throne, Horus was forced to battle Seth, who used every dirty trick imaginable to retain power. The intensity and scale of the conflict between Horus and Seth threatened to cast the whole world into chaos, so the other deities decided to intervene and separate the two gods.

This action, however, had far-reaching dialectical consequences. As Te Velde (1967: 60) points out: “The separating of Horus and Seth is equalled to setting a boundary between cosmos and the chaos surrounding it like a flood. The separation, indeed, has creative significance, for it is a decisive mythical event.” Te Velde adds that the significance of this separation was, in the eyes of the Egyptians, literally evident in everyday life and its numerous examples were the life-blood of the Egyptians' world-view: heaven and earth, the land of the living and the land of the dead, the black land and the red land,<sup>18</sup> the Nile valley and the Delta, *d.t* and *nḥḥ*, *ma'at* and *isfet*... The list could go on.

On the level of the two belligerent gods, the separation had the effect that Horus became the lord of the papyrus country (*t3 mḥw*). i.e. Lower Egypt and king of the earth, and Seth

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Osiris or his symbols could be traced to the First and Second Dynasties. The appearance of Osiris in a non-royal context is even more difficult to establish (Smith 2017: 117-123).

<sup>17</sup> Taylor (2017: 483-514) established that Seth was portrayed in a negative light in 64.58 % of the utterances in the pyramid of king Unas, 64.41 % in the pyramid of king Teti (2345-2323 BC), and 59.41 % in the pyramid of king Pepi I (2321-2287 BC). The progress of the Osirian myth can also be seen on the number of punishments inflicted on Seth: whereas in the pyramid of Unas it is just one in connection to his murdering Osiris, in the pyramid of Teti there are 14 cases and in the pyramid of Pepi I there are 29 cases (Taylor 2017: 41). Also, the Seth-animal appears only in Unas' Pyramid Texts, from the Sixth Dynasty the Seth-animal is replaced by the phonetic spelling of the god's name (Faulkner 1925: 5; Taylor 2017: 22-24). This, however, is not something exclusive to Seth, nor does it automatically imply a negative connotation – phonetical spellings are applied to other gods as well.

<sup>18</sup> For the association of Seth with the colour red, see Ritner (2008: 147-148, esp. footnote 622).

became the lord of the land of sedges (*t3 šm<sup>c</sup>*), i.e. Upper Egypt,<sup>19</sup> and god of thunder in heaven. Furthermore, the separation was “the acknowledgement of the contrasts existing in the world” and even more importantly that neither of the two gods could be eliminated (Te Velde 1967: 63). In other words, it was a recognition that *both* gods, no matter how sinister and reprehensible Seth’s actions were, were crucial for the existence and maintenance of *ma’at*.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the first seeds for the eventual rejection and demonization of the lord of Nubt had been sown.

Seth was still the god of deserts and distant lands but these, in contrast with the known, hospitable and civilized lands of Egypt ruled by the pharaoh in accordance to *ma’at*, had become even more disorderly, foreign, barren, savage, and threatening. Furthermore, putting the murder of Osiris to one side, most things about Seth suggested that he was a god apart – for example, his violent and unexpected birth, his homosexual acts aimed to intimidate his enemies, his estrangement from his mother Nut and his wife and sister Nephthys (Te Velde 1967: 28-31). Seth as the embodiment of disorder and chaos became an “anti-social god, cut off from the community of the gods” (Te Velde 1967: 31-32), constantly trying to upset *ma’at*. Yet at the same time the fact that Seth was an important member of the Great Ennead could not had been simply dismissed or ignored. For many centuries to come, Seth would play a prominent role in Egyptian culture and kingship in particular, as attested by numerous statues, amulets, seals,

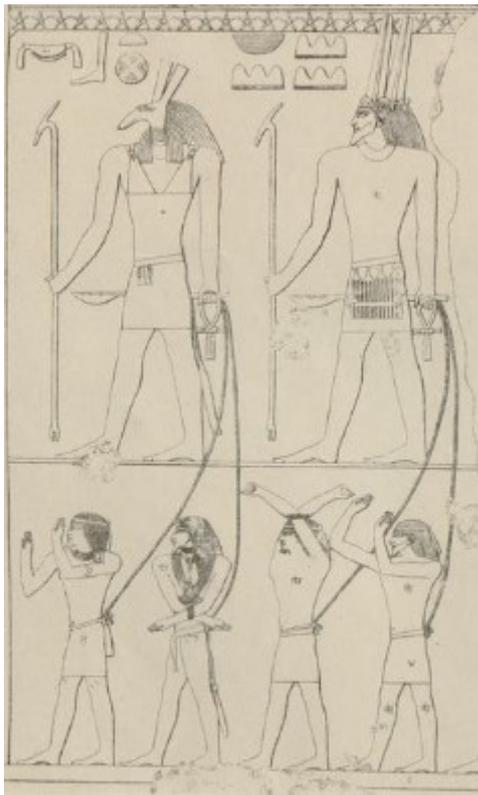
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<sup>19</sup> One would logically assume that Seth would sport the white crown, which is not always the case. A Seth-animal wears the red crown e.g. on a seal showing a serekh of Khasekhemwy (Petrie 1901: pl. XXIII, 193), and Seth wears the red crown of Lower Egypt on the north wall of Horemheb’s speos at Gebel el-Silsila (Thiem 2000: pl. 88). The red crown may not necessarily symbolize Lower Egypt in these cases, but Seth’s home town of Nubt.

<sup>20</sup> It is only at this point that the narrative concerning Horus and Seth diverges (Smith 2010: 398-400). Seth is either reconciled with Horus, who assumes leadership, and becomes his friend and helper as the inscription on the Shabaka stone suggests – perhaps the last attempt to reconcile the two gods (London EA 498; Sousa 2017, Strudwick 2006: 260-261, Lichtheim 1973: 51-57) – or Horus is justified vis-à-vis Seth who is driven out into the desert, fights back but ultimately loses, as is the story on papyrus Jumilhac (Louvre E 17110; Vandier 1961). Whatever the ending to the story, it is obvious that Seth’s character had undergone considerable development since the Early Dynastic Period. The reconciliation of Horus and Seth ultimately results in the fusion of the two gods into one deity known as “His Two Faces” (*Hrwī=fj*) who appears in the Book of the Hidden Chamber (second hour, e.g. in the tomb of Seti I; KV 17) and in the Book of Gates (eleventh hour); see Darnell and Darnell (2018: 310, footnote 141). For a more general discussion about the struggle between Horus and Seth described on papyrus Chester Beatty 1, see e.g. Gardiner (1931), Griffiths (1960), Oden (1979), Broze (1996) or Assmann (2001: 134-141).

inscriptions, reliefs, papyri or stelae.<sup>21</sup> The evidence coming from royal iconography speaks for itself: throughout the three millennia of Egyptian history, Seth can be seen as a part of the procession of gods, crowning and purifying the king, uniting the lands of Upper and Lower Egypt, presenting the king with offerings, but also being venerated by the king. As Smith (2010: 398) points out, “Seth was associated with kingship long before any belief in Osiris had arisen”.<sup>22</sup>

Returning now to our search for the cult of Seth and its developments, in the Old Kingdom we can thus see Seth for example presenting captives to king Sahura (2487-2475 BC)



*Berlin ÄM 21782*

on a relief from the king’s mortuary temple in Abusir (Berlin ÄM 21782; Borchardt 1913: pl. 5), giving life to pharaoh Djedkare-Isesi (2414-2375 BC) in his mortuary temple in Saqqara (Stockfisch 2003: doc. 5.8.1) or standing amongst the deities depicted in the mortuary temples of the Sixth Dynasty kings Teti (2345-2323 BC; Lauer and Leclant 1972: 60-62, pl. XXII) and Pepy II (2278-2184 BC; Jéquier 1938: pl. 46-47, 50, 53-54, 56). King Niuserre (2445-2421 BC)

is depicted in his sun temple of king at Abu Ghurab visiting the chapel of Seth at Nubt (von Bissing 1907: pl. 18-19), Seth together with Horus is depicted crowning king Unas on a relief from his mortuary temple in



*Cairo JE 52021*

Saqqara (Labrousse, Lauer and Lecant 1977: pl. XXXIV, docs. 47-49),

and Pepi II on a plaque from a small coffer discovered in the pharaoh’s mortuary temple (Cairo JE 52021; Jéquier 1928: 57, pl. IV; Jéquier 1940: 39, fig. 27).<sup>23</sup> R. Landgráfová assumes that

<sup>21</sup> This thesis mentions just some depictions without going into further detail whether Seth is portrayed in his animal, human or other form, unless necessary for the overall argument. For an exhaustive list of images of Seth and the Seth-animal in temples, tombs and on artefacts, see Taylor (2017) and Cruz-Urbe (2009: 210-226).

<sup>22</sup> The Royal Canon of Turin in fact lists Seth as a king of Upper and Lower Egypt who reigned for at least 100 years (Smith 2010: 397).

<sup>23</sup> It is difficult to judge why exactly Seth and Horus appear in coronation scenes. Apart from the obvious, and admittedly most probable reference to Upper and Lower Egypt, it might be an indication that for *ma’at* to reign,

two faience inlays from the funerary complex of king Raneferef (2448-2445 BC) depicted a purification scene of the pharaoh by Horus and Seth (Landgráfová 2011: fig. 1). All these aforementioned scenes from the Old Kingdom would create a foundation for depictions which later generations would repeat and expand upon.

Such was the case in the Middle Kingdom whose pharaohs had no qualms about portraying Seth. For example, several images showing Seth taking part in a procession of other deities were recovered from the mortuary temple of Senwosret III (1870-1831 BC) at Dahshur (Arnold 2002: 139-140, pl. 159e). The Twelfth Dynasty also introduced new contexts in which Seth appeared, most notably the *sm3-t3.wy* scenes which build on the god's connection with royal iconography and the concept of kingship (Assmann 2008: 39-40), e.g. depicted on one of the statues of Senwosret I (1956-1911 BC) from the cache at Lisht (Cairo JE 31139; Gautier and Jéquier 1902: 30-31).

Seth also appeared in presentation scenes during the *sed* festival where he often presented the *rnp.t*-staff to the king together with Horus. These scenes first appeared in Montuhotep-Nebhepetra's (2055-2004 BC) mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahari, (Arnold 1974: 22-3, pl. 10) and in the coming years were often reproduced, i.a. on the lintel of Amenemhat I (1985-1956 BC) from his mortuary temple at Lisht (Cairo JE 40484; Simpson 1963: 61, pl. VIII), or Senwosret III from the temple of Montu at Medamud (Cairo JE 56497; Cottevienelle-Gireudet 1933: 3-5, pl. I). Judging from the statue of a devotee of Seth, the priest Sebekemhat (Detroit Institute of Arts, 51.276.A) which mentions a chapel of Seth (*hw.t-3.t Stḥ*; Simpson 1976), the god's cult seemed to be thriving as well.

At the same time the ambiguity the Egyptians felt towards Seth continued. The Seth determinative appeared in words describing evil supernatural diseases (MacDonald 2002: 285).<sup>24</sup> It is true that the Coffin Texts that represent the link between the Pyramid Texts and the Book of the Dead took on much of the negative emotions aimed against Seth, but also

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there must be a balance between order and justice, represented by Horus, and chaos and destruction, depicted as Seth. Kees (1923: 26-27) also suggests that Horus might be representative of the West and Seth of the East. For a further discussion and a list of coronation scenes involving Seth, see Kees (1923). It is worth noting that Seth is not the only god appearing in these scenes along Horus but is frequently replaced by Thoth (Kees 1923: 27-29) probably due to his association as the murderer of Osiris. On the other hand, both Seth *and* Horus are also replaced by other gods (e.g. Atum and Montu) from time to time (Kees 1923: 29-38).

<sup>24</sup> The Seth determinative appears in words such as e.g. affliction (*nkm.t*), suffering (*mr.t*); ill (*ind*); disease (*h3.t*). This determinative is used in very specific cases of supernatural diseases, for the run-of-the-mill ailments the bad bird sign was used instead.

introduced the god in a new capacity: as the protector of Ra on his solar bark (this aspect will be discussed in detail in Chapter III below).

The events of the Second Intermediate Period must have strongly impacted on the Egyptians' perception of Seth. The Hyksos, who took control of the Delta and ruled Lower Egypt from their capital Avaris, adopted Seth for their own, elevating him to their principle god judging from e.g. papyrus Sallier 1 (EA 10185; Wentz 2003: 70) or a black granite offering table (Cairo CG 23073; Sourouzian 2006: 344) of the Fifteenth Dynasty king Apepi (ca. 1555 BC) with a dedication to "Seth, lord of Avaris" (*Sth nb Hwt-w<sup>c</sup>r.t*). It was at this time that Seth was likened to the Near-Eastern god Baal, strengthening the god's association with non-Egyptian religion and culture even further.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, in Upper Egypt, no noticeable change regarding Seth's role seemed to take place despite the Hyksos' favouritism of this particular deity. Providing we can make such generalizations from the scarce archaeological evidence available, it is tempting to claim that the god was still closely connected to kingship and royal iconography as a lintel (Cairo JE 56496) from the temple of Montu at Medamud of the early Thirteenth Dynasty pharaoh Sobekhotep II Amenemhat (reign unknown) suggests. It celebrates the king's *sed* festival on which the ruler is seen receiving the *rnp.t*-staff from Horus and Seth (Cottevienelle-Gireudet 1933: 7, pl. V) bearing a striking resemblance to the aforementioned lintel of Amenemhat I. The two centuries separating the reign of both rulers seemed to matter very little.

A true golden age for all things Seth dawned with the advent of the New Kingdom. The god appears in many already familiar scenes - Seth offers the *rnp.t*-staff to Amenhotep I (1525-1504 BC) on a *sed* festival relief from the mortuary temple of at Thebes (Winlock 1917: pl. IV), on a lintel recovered from the temple of Seth at Nubt (Cairo JE 31881; Petrie 1896: 67, pl. LXXVII) the god participates in giving life to Thutmose I (1504-1492 BC) or appears alongside

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<sup>25</sup> For a detailed discussion of Seth's role as a foreigner, see Te Velde (1967: 109-51) and for his relation to numerous foreign gods, see Turner (2013: 65-7). Concerning foreign gods in Egypt see Zivie-Coche (1994) for a general overview and e.g. Turriziani (2014) for developments in the Old Kingdom. For a brief discussion of foreign influences and their dynamics, see Schneider (2003) who is dismissive of "the cliché of an isolationist Egypt" which is "immune from innovation from abroad" (Schneider 2003: 158, 161). He points out, aside Baal, two other examples of cultural appropriation in ancient Egypt: glass and the horse. According to Schneider (2003: 160-161) the story of Baal and his fight against the sea, which seeped through to papyrus Astarte, was originally a Canite myth which the Egyptians appropriated and modified as evidenced by the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor assumed to be penned as early as the Middle Kingdom.

Horus in two coronations of Hatshepsut (1473-1458 BC) in her mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahari (Neville 1896: pl. LXIV; Ćwiek 2008: 45).

Of all the pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty, however, Thutmose III (1479-1425 BC) seemed to be Seth's most faithful and avid fan. In the mortuary temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri there are two most peculiar reliefs of Thutmose III wearing a cloak with two falcons with wings spread over the wearer's chest (so-called Königsjacke), one of which sports the head of Seth (Ćwiek 2008: 38-40).<sup>26</sup> The god is depicted several times in Thutmose's Festival Hall (Akh-Menu) in the temple of Amun at Karnak - Seth takes part alongside Horus and Amun in the *sed* festival of the king (Lepsius 1849-1859: pl. 33g), presents the *rnp.t*-staff (Lepsius 1849-1859: pl. 35a), is seen embracing the pharaoh along with his wife and sister Nephthys (Lepsius 1849-1859: pls. 34c, 35e). And Seth appears on a unique relief showing the god acting as an archery teacher to Thutmose III who is about to draw his bow (Lepsius 1849-1859: pl. 36b).<sup>27</sup>



*Thutmose III's Königsjacke*

The Ramesside Period spanning the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties was a true apogee for the veneration of Seth (Assmann 2008: 40-41) at which time the god even became seen as a protective deity alongside Horus (Kees 1923: 20). Yet again, the god appeared in many familiar scenes. For example, in the Temple of Amun in Karnak Seth was depicted among other deities (Nelson and Murnane 1981: pl. 36, 52, 201) or took part in the purification ritual of Seti I (Nelson and Murnane 1981: pl. 148). A similar scene was repeated in the temple of Rameses III (1184-1153 BC) at Medinet Habu (Epigraphic Survey 1940: pl. 234). Seth and

<sup>26</sup> The other pharaoh depicted with a Königsjacke not with one, but two Sethian heads was Rameses II (1279-1213 BC) on the south wall of the Great Pillared Hall in the Great Temple at Abu Simbel standing in a speeding chariot about to shoot his bow (Rosellini 1832: pl. LXXXI).

<sup>27</sup> Curiously, Thutmose III in his tomb (KV 34) chose to have Seth replaced by Horus as a member of the Great Ennead (Hornung and Abt 2007: 143) but had no worries about depicting him in his typical head as the Divider of the Netherworld in the fourth hour of the Amduat (Hornung and Abt 2007: 122). This character in exactly the same context, on the other hand, is shown in human form in the tomb of Seti I (KV 17), though Seth appears as part of the Great Ennead on the astronomical ceiling in the Burial Chamber but spelled phonetically (Hornung 1991: 239-41). Seth also appears in non-royal tombs in the New Kingdom. For example, in the Eighteenth-Dynasty tomb of Nakhtdjhuty (TT 189), the Seth-animal is despite the damage recognizable (Kitchen 1974: fig. 1, row 21) and in the Nineteenth-Dynasty tomb of Ipuy (TT 217) the god is a part of a *sm3-t3.wy* scene (Davies 1927: pl. XXXVII). This shows how extremely difficult and treacherous it is to generalize about the Egyptians' feelings towards Seth.

Horus crowned Ramesses II (1279-1213 BC) in the Small Temple of the king at Abu Simbel (Rosellini 1832, pl. LXXVII), perhaps inspired by an analogous relief once adorning Karnak (Murnane 1997: 108-10), and Rameses III in one of the iconic examples of New Kingdom statuary (Cairo JE 31628). Seth in sphinx-form also took part in the giving of life to pharaoh Merenptah (1213-1203 BC) on a lintel from the king's temple in Memphis (Petrie 1909: 14, pl. XXI).

The prominence of the Sethian cult around that time can be deduced not only from the incorporation of the god's name into royal cartouches of king Seti I (1294-1279 BC), Seti II (1200-1194 BC) and Sethnakht (1186-1184 BC), but also from reliefs where Seth was the subject of veneration by the king, for example by being offered bread by Seti I (Nelson and Murnane 1981: pl. 139), and wine by Rameses III (Epigraphic Survey 1957: pl. 282 C; Epigraphic Survey 1964: pl. 555 A, 572 F), incense and libation (582 E) and even *ma'at* (555 B). So deep was Seti's I reverence for Seth that he had the Seth-animal protect him on a statue (Cairo JE 42993; Sourouzian 2006: 339, pl. IIa), chose to have himself depicted on his obelisk as a sphinx with a Seth-animal head (the so-called Obelisco Flaminio at the Piazza del Popolo in Rome; Brand 2000: 133-4) and pictured prostrated before Seth on an offering-table (New York MMA 22.2.22; Brand 2000: 188-90).

Rameses II celebrated four centuries of the Sethian cult by the 400-Year Stela (Cairo JE 60539) on which the god is referred to as the ancestor of the new line of Ramesside kings hailing from Avaris.<sup>28</sup> Veneration of Seth is further attested by a lintel from the god's temple at Nubt, where Amun and Seth are depicted sitting back to back on a pedestal symbolizing the joining of the Two Lands while receiving praise from a priest of Seth (Petrie 1896: 70, pl. LXXIX). And it is in the Twentieth Dynasty at Medinet Habu where the earliest surviving temple relief of Seth spearing Apophis from the solar bark of Ra appears (Epigraphic Survey 1963: pl. 421).<sup>29</sup>

Though we lack conclusive archaeological evidence, the cult of Seth during the Third Intermediate Period seemed to continue unabated. The god took part in the coronation of general Herihor in the temple of Khonsu at Karnak (The Epigraphic Survey 1979: pl. 57 B) as well the Twenty-Second Dynasty king Osorkon II (reign unknown) in the temple of Bastet at

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<sup>28</sup> Seth is pictured in human form with a crown sporting two horns and has been identified here with the Near-Eastern god Baal (Te Velde 1967: 124-6) See also e.g. Montet (1933: pl. XIV), Goedicke (1966), and regarding the cult of Seth at Avaris, see Bietak (1990). For a list of verbal homages and prayers to Seth found mostly on private votive stelae and private votive stelae dedicated to Seth, see Hope and Kaper (2011: 231-234). For a discussion concerning Seth and personal piety in the New Kingdom, see Kooyman (2017).

<sup>29</sup> For a list of artefacts from the New Kingdom featuring Seth, mainly stelae, see Vandier (1969).

Bubastis (Neville 1892: pl. II. 8). On the other hand, however, Seth's foreign role became more accentuated, especially towards the end of the Third Intermediate Period, during which Egypt was divided by into numerous, often foreign-dominated principalities and suffered the brunt of the Assyrian war-machine, and in the Late Period with its two Persian invasions. Seth turned into the supporter of the foreign invaders and the enemy, i.e. the forces of disorder (Lucarelli 2011: 116; Smith 2010: 414), and a convenient scapegoat as well, blamed for all things bad which happened to Egypt.<sup>30</sup> Seth becomes the blasphemous iconoclast for whom nothing is scared destroying every secret and breaking every taboo (Assmann 2008: 48; Koenig 2007: 234).<sup>31</sup> Unsurprisingly, around this time Seth had to cede his position on the prow of the solar bark to Horus, as Seth became equated with oppression coming from the north and the east which, as which Assmann points out (2008: 41), was had political rather than religious roots.

It was also during these periods that the Seth-animal underwent dramatic changes – its formerly rather canine head was typically replaced by that of an ass,<sup>32</sup> which the Egyptians considered a demonic and impure animal, along with the pig (Lucarelli 2011: 118) into which Seth transformed himself on one occasion as described in CT 157.<sup>33</sup> Archaeological evidence

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<sup>30</sup> The author of a papyrus from the Thirtieth Dynasty dated to 363 BC describing an execration ritual of overthrowing Seth and his crew (London BM 10252; Schott 1939), claims that Seth returned from Asia to destroy temples in Egypt and kill the sacred animals (Koenig 2007: 234). Lucarelli (2011: 117) speculates that this story might have been a reference to the Persian invasion of Artaxerxes III in Egypt (343-332 BC). Seth's blasphemous acts against other gods and their cult are described in two important sources: the Rite of Overthrowing Seth and his Confederates and The Rite of Repelling the Aggressor, see Smith (2010: 405-406).

<sup>31</sup> During the Late Period numerous execration rituals targeting Seth emerged (Assmann 2008: 49-52) and remained in use for hundreds of years to come. See also Altmann (2010 and 2015).

<sup>32</sup> See Daressy (1920). First examples of this practice without the negative connotations start to appear towards the end of the New Kingdom in the tomb of Ramesses VI (KV 9) where an ass-headed deity standing on the prow of the solar bark labelled as Geb and a similar scene in the tomb of Ramesses IX (KV 6) which has no description. Cruz-Urbe (2009: 205, 218-220) speculates that these are depictions of Seth, though there is no hard evidence for this. He points out that other deities, like Osiris, were found sporting an ass' head.

<sup>33</sup> CT 157 recounts the story how Ra gave Horus Pe as compensation for the mutilation of his eye. "It so happened that Seth had transformed himself into a pig and had projected a wound into his Eye. And Re said: 'The pig is detestable to Horus.' " (*Stš pw ir.n=f hpr.w=f m š3. °h°.n st.n=f skr m ir.t=f. Dd.in R<sup>c</sup>: bw š3 n Hrw*; Faulkner 1973: 135). Other animals became linked to Seth, e.g. the goat (Kees 1961: 91), the turtle and the hippopotamus. Horus for example spears Seth in the form of a miniature hippopotamus on a relief from the Temple of Horus at Edfu (Edfou XIII: pl. DVIII), being one of several such reliefs. On others the king is seen spearing an ass and a turtle (Edfou IX: pl. LXXXII; for more about the rite of destroying the turtle and a discussion of its connection with Seth and Apophis, see Gutbub (1979) and on a general discussion about the turtle in Egyptian religion, see

from the Late Period, or the lack thereof, seems to support claims that Seth's reputation took a turn for the worse. Seth practically disappears from the Egyptian heartland – certainly as far as temples are concerned – and that it is increasingly common to see Seth either substituted by another god or ritually killed with knives (e.g. in spell BoD 23 on the papyrus of Tashepenkhonsu, see Munro and Taylor 2009: 2, taf. 8, line 146) following an old Egyptian custom to render helpless potentially harmful beings such as snakes, a depiction more prominent in Ptolemaic times, e.g. in the temple of Hathor at Dendera (Dendara X/2: pl. 51, 77). In the Temple of Khnum at Esna during the Roman Period, Seth is noticeably absent: the god's day of birth is omitted from the list of the epagomenal days, he is supplanted by Thoth in the list of the Heliopolitan gods, and he is replaced by a falcon-headed deity on the prow of Ra's bark in the act of spearing Apophis (Labrique 1998: 893-900).

It is tempting to claim that during Ptolemaic and Roman period, especially in the Nile valley and delta, a universal demonization of Seth took place, but careful examination presents us with a picture which is not so clear-cut. There is no denying that Seth's temples were destroyed, his depictions defaced, and his name erased throughout the valley and delta, questions have been raised as to how systematic such attacks were (Hope and Warfe 2017; Smith 2010: 415-417). Furthermore, there are occurrences where Seth appears in temples in his typical form, despite overt hostility in those very same temples. Thus, Seth can be seen on the walls of Dendera in human form (Dendara XI/2: pl. 47), but also in mummiform in Edfu (Edfou I: pl. XLd). Furthermore, in the temple Edfu Seth appears twice in his stereotypical form in one relief: standing on Apophis and holding a knife and holding the giant snake's neck (Edfou X/2: pl. XXXVb).

It is thus problematic to claim that towards the end of the first millennium BC the Egyptians saw Seth as a purely negative force. Even though the god's aspect as a foreigner and murderer was emphasised especially during the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, Seth still remained an important part of the Egyptian pantheon and as such could not be cast away and entirely ignored.

In addition, the Egyptian oases provide us with a somewhat different story than the Egyptian heartland. Here the cult of Seth not only survived the events of the Third Intermediate and the Late Period, but even thrived throughout the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods (Smith

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Van de Walle (1953). Seth could also be linked to jackals, though this connection is rather obscure. For a discussion on this, see DuQuesne (1998).

2010: 413; Koenig 2007: 233; Hölbl 2005: 73-74; Kaper 1998: 149).<sup>34</sup> Though the oases and the Western desert were inhabited in prehistoric times (Hendrickx and Vermeersch 2000), evidence concerning Seth comes at the earliest from the late New Kingdom and from the two southernmost sites, Dakhla and Kharga, where the god's role as the slayer of Apophis seems to have played the most prominent role.<sup>35</sup>

At Kharga Seth appears on a famous relief from the temple of Amun at Hibis, which was the administrative heart of the oasis. The temple was completed during the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty (664-525 BC) probably on the site of an earlier sanctuary, with additional building-work until the reign of Nectanebo II (360-343 BC; Cruz-Uribe 1987: 230). The relief of a hawk-headed Seth spearing Apophis (Davies 1953: pl. 42, 43, 77 B) comes from the Twenty-Seventh Dynasty.<sup>36</sup>



*Relief of Seth at the temple at Hibis*

The Dakhla Oasis was particularly rich in depictions of Seth in its temples at Mothis, Kellis, Deir el-Hagar and Ain Birbiyeh. Evidence for the god's thriving cult is further reinforced by a statue of a priest of Seth called Penbast from the Twenty-First Dynasty (Kaper 1997b) and two stelae from Dakhla at the Ashmolean Museum: the greater one dating to the reign of Sheshonk I even mentioning a festival of Seth (ca. 945 BC; Oxford 1894.107a; Gardiner 1933), and the smaller dating to the reign of Piye (747-716 BC; Oxford 1894.107b; Janssen 1968) and a not-so-long-ago excavated stela containing a very rare hymn to Seth (Hope and Kaper 2011: 226-231) from the Ramesside Period.

<sup>34</sup> The oases were acknowledged as one of the four cult centres of Seth in the Ptolemaic inscriptions at Edfu and Dendera, alongside the Upper-Egyptian towns of *N3-snw.t*, *Wn.t* and *Sp3.t-mr* (see Edfou I, pl. XXIIIa).

<sup>35</sup> Supporting evidence that the cult of Seth was active around Kharga and Dakhla is provided also by the so-called Seth rock named for the many depictions of the Seth animal. For more information see the North Kharga Oasis Survey (<http://schools.aucegypt.edu/huss/SEA/fieldwork/NKOS/Pages/default.aspx>, accessed Jan. 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019) which also examined the Darb 'Ain Amur, a route connecting Kharga and Dakhleh Oases (see Rossi and Ikram 2018).

<sup>36</sup> The dating is disputed by Taylor (2017: 199-204) according to whom the original carving in the Hypostyle Hall was remade during the Ptolemaic Period.

At the temple of Mothis (Mut el-Kharab), dating to the Eighteenth Dynasty, Seth was the principle deity alongside Amun-Ra, and it was not unusual for the two gods to be associated with each other and to have a common cult (Hope and Kaper 2011: 226, 228).

At Kellis (Ismant el-Kharab) a winged Seth spearing Apophis resembling the scene at Hibis appears (Kaper 1997a: 210) as well as on a dipinto in the same location from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (Kaper 2002: pl. 5).

The Roman temple of Deir el-Hagar dating to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD with two reliefs of a hawk-headed Seth, who is accompanied by Nephthys (Osing 1985: 230-231, pl. 36-37), with one fragmentary inscription mentioning the fact that he has slain Apophis from the prow of Ra's bark.

And finally, Seth appears on a relief in the originally Ptolemaic temple at Ain Birbiyeh which was added to during the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD under the Romans (Arnold 1999: 246; Kaper 2004: 136) originally constructed for a falcon-headed deity called Amun-Nakht.<sup>37</sup> This deity was the Ptolemaic union of Amun-Ra with Horus meant to replace Seth, yet the intention seems not to have been successful as during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD a relief of Seth was added to the temple (Kaper 2004: 136-137), probably the last depiction of the god in ancient Egypt.<sup>38</sup>

However, was Seth worshiped in the oases the same god as the one first mentioned in the Pyramid Texts? There is no clear answer to this question, but available evidence provides us with some good clues that Seth worshiped from the end of the Third Intermediate Period onwards in the Western desert was a different god that Egyptians were used to. Seth from the oases had a very different feel about him – he was still part of the Egyptian pantheon but seemed more distant, more detached. In the surviving depictions Seth was either an object of worship, often among other gods, or was cast as a defender of the cosmic order, the guardian and defender of Ra, and the slayer of Apophis, a role which was highlighted well into the Roman Period (Frankfurter 1998: 112-115). Furthermore, towards the end of Third Intermediate Period Seth underwent a change of appearance in the oases. As Kaper (2004: 136) pointed out, he was no

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<sup>37</sup> Abd el-Rahman (2011: 17) identified a figure on a rock drawing in Wadi al-Gemal dating to the Roman Period also as Amun-Nakht, which was probably a transposition of the Ayn Birbiyeh relief.

<sup>38</sup> Cruz-Urbe (2009: 224-226) points out (after studying the field notes of Herbert E. Winlock who conducted excavations at the site in 1908-1909) a nowadays non-existent fresco from the site of Ain Turba, which was occupied until the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, near the temple of Hibis at Kharga. The painted scene depicted three figures on horseback with lances spearing a dragon-like creature – the figure on the left was that of a man, the central figure had the head of Seth and the figure on the right closely reassembled the famous scene in the Hibis temple. Cruz-Urbe speculates that the three figures might had been representations of Seth.

longer associated with the Seth-animal – indeed, the Seth-animal seemed to have been completely banned from iconography and inscriptions in the oases as well (Kaper 2001: 74) – and was depicted with the head of a falcon wearing the double crown and sporting a solar disk, thus bearing a close resemblance to Horus.

It is evident that the feelings of unease and apprehension surrounding Seth due to his proscription percolated even into the Western desert. A case in point are the two stelae from Dakhleh mentioned above: whereas the greater one dating to the Twenty-Second Dynasty had no qualms about depicting the Seth-animal, the smaller stela from the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty steers clear of the Seth-animal. This development is also supported by a fragment of a door jamb discovered at Mothis on which the Seth-animal was supplanted by other hieroglyphs (Kaper 2001: 72-74). In the Temple of Amun at Hibis, the Seth-animal is absent and only a god determinative is used, and Seth's name is spelled phonetically without any determinatives in the Temple at Deir el-Hagar.

Thus, with regards to the cult of Seth in the Western desert, we witness change and continuation hand in hand. Seth from the oases is certainly not the same god who crowned king Unas, who tied the two lands for Senwosret I or who steadied the aim of Thutmose III. For Hope and Warfe (2017: 274) the cult of Seth throughout the Western desert came about as “the result of regional variation in ancient Egyptian culture”.

It may have well been that the myth concerning the slaying of Apophis was for some reason particularly important for the local cult and the changing of Seth's visage, not his name, was one way to tackle the developments in the Nile valley and delta. On the other hand, maybe only Seth's name remained, whereas his essence was supplanted by a Horus-like deity. Or it could have been that the myth itself lost its meaning: though it was a depiction of a hawk-headed Seth spearing Apophis, it was regarded as a mere symbolic representation of a bird of prey slaying a snake, a scene that was no doubt quite common in ancient Egypt. There are obviously a number of possible and plausible explanations.

Looking back, we have come a long way in our story about the origins and evolution of one of Egypt's most memorable and enigmatic deities. From one of the first depictions of Seth on a rock at Gebel Tjauti, to his heyday during the New Kingdom, and his subsequent damnation in the Late Period and beyond, we have been witness to many different twists and turns.

Throughout the three millennia of pharaonic history Seth and his cult had played many parts in many different contexts: the local god of Ombos linked to deserts, oases and distant

lands; one of the deities closely connected to the concept of kingship and the divine order; the murderer of his brother and king; the usurper and the tyrant; the instigator of chaos and destruction; the scapegoat on whom all wrongs were pinned. The bad reputation which Seth acquired during the first millennium BC seems to have had political and power motives though to what extent this process was an intentional form of character assassination by the devotees of Osiris and later the uncritical adoption of their narrative by egyptologists, as Castillos (2016: 82) suggests, will remain a matter of debate.

What we can be sure of is, that Seth was a complex god, a god defying simple categorisations of good and evil, right and wrong, order and chaos. And this held true even when Seth became the subject of extensive demonization which eventually lead to his identification with Apophis (Guermeur 2015: 82; Cruz-Urbe 2009: 207) and to accusations of sabotage towards the solar bark upon the prow of which the god was replaced by other deities (Smith 2010: 421).

## Chapter II – Seth, great of strength

The study of Seth’s cult through the ages has told us much of the different, and at times contradictory, attitudes the ancient Egyptians had towards Seth. We have seen the god in various roles though this was illustrated mainly on iconographic evidence. It is now time to look at Seth through epigraphic and palaeographic sources.

There is a vast corpus of inscriptions and writings to draw upon, yet it is beyond the scope and ambition of this thesis to list each and every Sethian reference available. Rather a more eclectic approach is called for. A sensible place to start are the religious texts which provide us with many accounts concerning the role Seth played in the lives and beliefs of the ancient Egyptians, the three canonical collections of spells and incantations spanning from the Old to the New Kingdoms, i.e. The Pyramid Texts (PT), The Coffin Texts (CT), and the Book of the Dead (BD) offer a representative survey.<sup>39</sup>

Apart from Seth’s common nickname “The Ombite” (*Nwbty*)<sup>40</sup> the god’s most distinguishing and typical epithet is “great of strength” (*ꜥ3 pḥty*) appearing in many texts and inscriptions i.a. on the abovementioned *sed* festival scene of Thutmose III, bread-offering scene of Seti I at Karnak, the spearing of Apophis at Hibis. Indeed, the deputy foreman Aapehty from Deir el-Medina even went as far as to adopt Seth’s epithet as his name (London BM 35630; Davies 2014: 397).

The god’s strength (*pḥty*) is also invoked on numerous occasions in religious texts by the deceased. In PT 510 the deceased says how he claims the sky and the stars which causes the gods to bow before him and the akhs to follow him, stating that: “my strength is Seth the Ombite’s strength“ (*pḥt N pḥt/pḥty Stš Nbw.t*; Allen 2015: 158) whilst comparing himself to a great bull or a flood. CT 857 ensures that the speaker receives the type of strength he desires which, unsurprisingly, is that of Seth: “You have the soul of Horus, you have the strength of Seth” (*b3 n Hr w n=k, pḥty Stš n=k*; Faulkner 1978: 37). In CT 945 the deceased compares

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<sup>39</sup> For the purpose of translation, for the Pyramid Texts I use Allen’s (2015) translation; for the Coffin Texts, Faulkner’s (1973, 1977, 1978); for the Book of the Dead, Quirke’s (2013). For textual references, I used Sethe (1908, 1910) for the Pyramid Texts, de Buck and Gardiner (1935-1961) for the Coffin Texts and Quirke’s transliteration for the Book of the Dead.

<sup>40</sup> Seth had many other epithets such as “The Son of Nut”, “Lord of the Sky”, “Lord of the Foreign Lands”, “Lord of Upper Egypt”, “Lord of the Oasis” being the most common but also was sometimes called “the Outcast” (*wḏꜥ*). Not all of these nicknames were exclusive to Seth, but it is not within the scope of the thesis to examine these and other epithets in detail.

himself, parts of his body and his abilities to different Egyptian gods stating that: “My striking-power is Khons, my strength is Seth” (3.t(=i) Hns, pht(=i) Stš; Faulkner 1978: 84). BD 54 mentions the “strength of Seth” (phty Swty; Quirke 2013: 136) and in BD 108 (discussed in detail in the next chapter) the speaker compares himself to Seth battling Apophis by claiming: “I am the one who raises strength” ([ink] w[ts] phty; Quirke 2013: 239). Indeed, Seth himself was well aware of his physical power, when putting forth his claim for the office of Osiris, as described on the Chester Beatty papyrus:

*Thereupon Seth, great of strength, the son of Nut, said: “As for me, I am Seth, the greatest of strength among the Ennead, and I slay the enemy of Prēc daily, being in the front of the Bark-of-Millions, and none other god is able to do it. I am entitled to the office of Osiris.”*<sup>41</sup> (papyrus Chester Beatty I, IV, 4-5; Gardiner 1931: 16).

Judging from the several examples above, phty seems almost certainly to be linked to raw physical strength and power. This is supported also by Wilson (1997: 362) who points out that especially in connection with the lion’s head determinative the word “may refer to physical strength and power”. However, the term is not used exclusively for Seth, nor is it the only Egyptian word used to describe the god’s strength.

3.t appears in three spells – CT 407, CT 408 and CT 568 – which mention Seth. CT 407 and CT 408 are almost the same and are entitled a “Spell for knowing the seven knots of the celestial kine” (i.e. cows; Faulkner 1977: 58-60).<sup>42</sup> Their meaning is rather obscure but deal with the protection of the speaker and the taming of celestial cattle, for which amongst other things and gods, Seth and his “power” (3.t) is invoked. CT 568 is a very short spell which states: “Stand up, O Power, and meet Geb, for your faces are spirits and the power of Seth is brought to naught” (ḥc šhm ḥsf m Gb, hr.wy=tn 3ḥ.w, 3.t Stš nw.wt; Faulkner 1977: 171). One could thus assume that 3.t seems to indicate more of a potency, ability or might, rather than mere raw strength. Wilson (1997: 25) lists several options such as the “moment of attack, readiness to

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<sup>41</sup> Broze (1996: 45) translates with several small differences: “Seth, grand de force, fils de Nout, déclara: “Quant à moi, je suis Seth, grand de force, au sein de l’Ennéade, et je tue l’ennemi de Rê chaque jour, quand je me trouve à la proue de la barque des millions, alors qu’aucun dieu ne serait capable de la faire. Je recevrai la fonction d’Osiris.” (Wn.in Stš c3 phty s3 Nw.t hr ḏd: ir ink ink Stš c3 phty tw m-hnwy psd.t, hrtw sm3c.w p3 (p3) ḥf.tyw p3 Rc m-mn.t, iw=i m-h3.t n wi3 n ḥḥ.w. Iw nn rḥ ntr nb ir=f. Iw=i šsp(=i) t3 i3.t n Wsir).

<sup>42</sup> Gordon and Schwabe (2004: 188) suggest that the seven knots of the celestial kettle are probably a reference to “the seven cervical vertebrae in cattle and people”. Pinch (2002: 125, 139) that the dead could be welcomed to the underworld i.a. by seven cows and that spirits of the dead could acquire eternal life from the milk of the seven Hathor cows.

strike” asserting that it could have been associated with the “quick road and snap of the lion, or the hiss and bite of the snake, which led to *3t* becoming not only a word for ‘rage’ and ‘power’ but also for a period of time, a moment”.

Closely connected to *3.t* was possibly the word *sh̄m*. CT 16 likens the deceased to a young Horus and it is stated that “the powers of Seth I served him over and above his own powers” (*iw p̄hr(=i) n=f sh̄m.w Stš m-h3w sh̄m.w=f*; Faulkner 1973: 10, who adds in a footnote: “Apparently even Seth was unable to avoid adding his strength to that of the young Horus, a most unexpected phenomenon.”) BD 62 is entitled a “Formula for drinking water in the god’s land” (*r n swri mw m hr.t-ntr*; Quirke 2013: 149) during the incantation of which the speaker claims: “I am granted power over canal-water, like the limbs of Seth” (*dd n=i sh̄m m mr mi ʿw.t Stš*; Quirke 2013: 149), clearly a position of power. Finally BD 137a is a lengthy piece concerning the Eye of Horus which amongst other abilities “exposes the powers of Seth” (*iw=s sdg3=s sh̄m.w Swty*; Quirke 2013: 308). Wilson (1997: 902-903) translates *sh̄m* as “might, power” which is closer to strength as it provides the “means by which the king destroys his foes” but clearly does not have exclusively physical connotations. It is not without interest that *sh̄m* is also used to designate “statue” indicating that statues of gods projected their might through their image.

The word power (*wsr*) is used on two occasions. Unfortunately CT 956 and the almost verbatim CT 957 are somewhat fragmentary but it is obvious that the deceased clearly likens himself to a young Horus who is protected by the other gods – the spell mentions that, amongst other things, “the powers of Seth will be sealed-off (?)” (*htmy wsr.w St̄h*; Faulkner 1978: 88, 89). These two spells suggest that *wsr* also does not mean mere physical strength but powerful presence or manifestation. Admittedly though, the two spells which are almost the same, cannot be a representative sample for a persuasive argument. Wilson (1997: 257) translates *wsr* as “be powerful, strong” pointing out the verb is usually associated with battle and destroying one’s foes, which again seems to indicate not only physical strength but an ability as well.

Even though one cannot be sure of the exact meanings the words *p̄hty*, *3.t*, *sh̄m* and *wsr* had for the ancient Egyptians, from the examples presented above it seems probable there are two broad groups at play here: there is a difference between physical strength (*p̄hty*) on the one hand, and might, power or ability (*3.t*, *sh̄m*, and *wsr*) on the other.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Vandier (1969: 193) discusses a limestone stela in the Louvre (E 26017) which features an offering scene of the pharaoh Rameses II to the goddess Astarte. Above them is a depiction of a sphinx with the head of Seth accompanied by the following text which Vandier translates as: “Paroles dites par Seth, le dieu grand, le maître du

In any case, it should come as no surprise that Seth carried a sceptre weighing in modern terms over 2,000 kilograms (almost certainly made from metal) with which he could kill even a god, and made his threat good when he discovered that the Ennead were inclined to give preference to Horus, and assured Isis of their intention: “And Seth, the son of Nut, was angry with the Ennead, when they said these words to Isis, the mighty, the god’s mother. And Seth spake unto them: I will take my sceptre of four thousand and five hundred pounds and I will kill one of you each day.” (*ḥꜥ Stš s3 Nw.t knd.t r t3 psd.t m-dr dd=sn md.wt n 3s.t wr(.t) mw.t ntr. ḥꜥ Stš hr dd.n=sn: Iw=i t3y p3y dꜥmw.t n 4500 n nms.t m.tw=i hdb.w wꜥ im=tn m-mn.t;* pChester Beatty I: V, 2; Gardiner 1931: 17).<sup>44</sup>

Metal or iron (*bi3*) itself became associated with Seth whose bones were believed to be made from this material no doubt because of its hardness and durability. As PT 21 shows, this was a desirable quality, especially when one had to be sure of the result. This particular spell deals with the opening of the mouth ritual, describing how Horus parted the deceased’s mouth with Anubis’ metal adze. Horus used the same metal adze to part the mouth of his father Osiris “with the metal that came from Seth, the [metal] Striker [that] parted the mouth of the gods” (*m bi3 pr m Stš msh.tyw bi3 wp rꜥ n ntr.w;* Allen 2015: 249). At first glance it might seem paradoxical that the adze should have anything to do with Seth, as it was he who murdered Osiris. However, one must remember that Seth was also Osiris’ brother and a member of the Great Ennead and a projection of raw power. Surely for such an important ritual, it was important to have an unbreakable instrument with which one was bound to succeed in reanimating the recipient.

Much of Seth’s other characteristics are indeed connected to his unparalleled forte. The god’s very birth described in PT 222 was so violent that Seth burst out of the womb of his mother, Nut: “you whom the pregnant one spewed forth and you illumined the night, provided as Seth” (*nšnš.n iwr,t ispš.n=k grh htm.ti m Stḥ ḥbḥb;* Allen 2015: 43). This passage is rather abstruse and unclear. The Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae (<http://aew.bbaw.de/tla/index.html>; accessed April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019) translates these lines as: “Kaum hat (dich) die Schwangere ausgespien (?), da hast du die Nacht erleuchtet, ausgestattet als Seth, der hervorbrach.” This could be

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ciel, aimé de Re: “Je te donne le courage et la force.” (“Words spoken by Seth, the great god, lord of the sky, beloved of Ra: ‘I have given you courage and strength.’”; *Dd in Stš ntr ‘3 nb p.t mry n R :di.n=i n=k kn.*) The Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae translates the verb *kni* as “to be brave; to be strong; to be capable”.

<sup>44</sup> Broze (1996: 50) translates in a similar vein: “Si bien que Seth, le fils de Nout, se mit en colère contre l’Ennéade, parce qu’ils avient tenu ces propos à Isis, la grande, la mère de dieu. Et que Seth leur dit: ‘J’empoignerais mon sceptre de quatre mille cinq cents *némès* et je tuerais l’un d’entre vous chaque jour.’ ”

translated as: “Once the pregnant one spat (you) out (?), you lit up the night, equipped as Seth, who burst forth (?)”.<sup>45</sup>

Seth’s great strength made him on the one hand useful, and on the other dangerous. Thus, the god helps the deceased navigate through the dangerous terrain in the underworld in CT 686, who claims: “a path has been cleared for me by Seth” (*iw s<sup>c</sup>h.n=fw3.t in Stš*; Faulkner 1977: 251). In CT 647, where the speaker seems to compare himself to Ra, he states that Seth is there to defend him: “I am the Lord of Life, ruling in the sky, while Seth is my protection because he knows the nature of what I do; I am the Lord of Life” (*Ink pw nb <sup>c</sup>nh srr m Nw.t sk Stš m gs-dp.t=i n rh=f sšm n ir.t=i. Ink nb <sup>c</sup>nh*; Faulkner 1977: 223).

Yet, equally, Seth was at times a god to be to be feared and hidden from. PT 81 shows that the terror which Seth could invoke was ultimate, as the spell commands to make the Two Lands afraid of the deceased “as they are afraid of Seth” (*mi/imr nr.w=sn n Stš*; Allen 2015: 25). In PT 427 Nut is commanded to “conceal” (*sdh*) the deceased from Seth (Allen 2015: 108) and if that failed and an encounter with Seth was inevitable, Thoth could be invoked as the one who “has turned away the will of Seth” (*sh̄m.n=f ib n Stš*; Allen 2015: 76) in PT 356. The incantation of PT 29 assures the deceased that Horus’ eye will “defend you from the inundation of the hand of Seth” (*hw (i)s tw m-<sup>c</sup> 3gb n c n Stš*; Allen 2015: 252) and PT 485 encourages the deceased (Osiris) to show himself to his father Geb so “that he may save you from Seth” (*ind=f tw m-<sup>c</sup> Stš*; Allen 2015: 138). In CT 790 the deceased shows his might and faithfulness by claiming: “I am a son beloved of my father; I have come so that I may protect Osiris from Seth” (*ink s3 mry n it(i)=f; ii.n(=i) n nḏ Wsir m-<sup>c</sup> Stš*; Faulkner 1978: 1). PT 562 speaks of Horus’ eye which “is not given to Seth’s wrath” (*n rdi=s/di=s n dnd n Stš*; Allen 2015: 177).

Little wonder then that Seth was seen as the enemy full of anger and rage: in CT 148 Horus calls Seth “the enemy of my father Osiris” (*hfty n (i)t(i)=i Wsir*; Faulkner 1973: 126) and in BD 90 Osiris calls Seth “his enemy”. CT 464 states that the sky is stifled “because of the anger of Seth” (*n šp.t Stš*; Faulkner 1977: 90), whereas the badly preserved CT 607 describing the powers of the Eye of Horus claims that it “repelled Seth in his rage” (*hsf Stḥ m nšn=f; nšn=f*; Faulkner 1977: 195; this part is clearly visible, though). PT 587 speaks of Horus and how he i.a. saved (*nḥm*) his eye “from everything painful that Seth did to you” (*mr.t nb(.t) ir.t.n Stš r=t*; Allen 2015: 270).

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<sup>45</sup> This particular text is rather damaged, especially *hbhb* (to burst forth) is tentative and Allen omits it. For more on the birth of Seth, see Kemboly (2010: 229-240) and Te Velde (1967: 27-29).

It logically follows that the Egyptians loathed Seth. In CT 303 the speaker acts as the defender of his father claiming “for I have smitten Seth for you” (*ḥw.n=i n=k Stš*; Faulkner 1973: 222), the exact same words are used when the deceased proclaims his might in CT 441, 444, 445 and 446 (Faulkner 1977: 78, 81-82). PT 541 asserts that in order for the deceased king to be saved, Seth should be attacked: “Strike Seth, save this Osiris Pepi from him before dawn” (*iḥ Stš indi Wsir Ppy pn m<sup>c</sup>=f dr ḥd.t t3*; Allen 2015: 175). And CT 312 intended as a spell for the transformation into a divine falcon maintains that “the heart of Seth is cut out” (*isp ib n Stš*; Faulkner 1973: 232).

Seth’s power could be threatening and lethal not only to mortals and the deceased, but to the gods, too. Seth was described as a being who could hold sway over the Nine gods – CT 640 describes the deity as “Seth, in whose power the Ennead were at first” (*Stš psd.t m wsr=f tp*; Faulkner 1977: 218) and that his power was so impressive that in CT 694 the speaker claims: “I have put the awe of you into the spirits like Seth among the gods” (*iw rdi.n=i ššf.t=k m 3ḥ.w mi Stš m-m ntr.w*; Faulkner 1977: 259). In addition, Seth was not one to shy away from using direct threats against other gods – CT 50 speaks about the appearance of Ra and his boarding the solar bark ready to set sail. Alongside the other deities, Seth also arrives in a manner one would expect: “See, Seth has come in his own shape and has said: ‘I will cause the god's body to fear, I will inflict injury on him, I will slaughter him.’ ” (*mk Stš ii.w m ḥpr.w=f dd.n=f ssnd(=i) ḥ<sup>c</sup>w ntr di(=i) ḥm nkn=f ir(=i) š<sup>c</sup>.wt=f*; Faulkner 1973: 47).<sup>46</sup> The myths involving Osiris and Horus give ample examples of Seth’s cruelty.

Seth’s might was seen not only as raw physical power, but as magical and supernatural strength, too. For example in PT 511, the god’s force manifests itself through his thunderous voice that would force others into opening doors (“I yell as Seth”; *nḥmḥm=i{f}* m *Stš*; Allen 2015: 158) and his ability to summon destructive storms (BD 39).<sup>47</sup> For the ancient Egyptians, magic (*ḥk3*) and speech were invariably linked as “creation was a development of the spoken

<sup>46</sup> See also Seth’s threat to kill a god every day in papyrus Chester Beatty I (V, 2) above.

<sup>47</sup> Seth’s connection with storms, rain and other weather phenomena is also evident by the type of words that have a seated Seth or Seth-animal as a determinative such as *nšni* (storm, rage), *kri* (storm, storm-cloud) *ḥ3ty* (storm), *phph* (tempest), *snm* (storm), *nḥnh* (to roar), *ḥrw-kri* (thunder, i.e. “voice of the storm”); see also Mathieu (2011: 152). Seth’s affinity with tempests and rain may have also been a result from the import of foreign gods into Egypt, notably the Syrian god Baal as evidenced by the Tempest Stela of Ahmose, the two gods joining as Seth-Baal (see Schneider 2010) seen e.g. in the New Kingdom papyrus Astarte (Pehal 2014: 239-254). For the worship of Seth-Baal by private individuals, see Kooyman (2017: 371-372). On the connection of Seth with various foreign gods, see i.a. Te Velde (1967: 109-151).

word, and magic was the principle through which a spoken command was turned into reality” (David 2002: 258; see also e.g. Allen 1988: 36). This is why religious texts speak of Seth as possessing magic or in Allen’s (2015) translation “great-of-magic” (*wr/wr.t/wr.t=f hk3.w/hk3.w=f*; PT 222, PT 443; CT 526; CT 803).

Seth is also the only one able to withstand Apophis’ gaze, whilst Ra and the other gods on the solar bark could not (Wilkinson 2003: 211; Borghouts 1973: 115, 120). During the seventh hour in the Amduat, Seth, called the Eldest Magician (*hk3 smsw*),<sup>48</sup> uses his magical powers – alongside Isis – to guide the solar bark (Hornung and Abt 2007: 219), to keep Apophis at bay (Hornung and Abt 2007: 229), and to sap the strength of the serpent of chaos (Hornung and Abt 2007: 232):

*This god (Re) achieves another form at this cavern. He leads away the path from Apophis through the magic of Isis and the magic of the eldest magician. The name of the gate of this place, through which the god passes, “the gate of Osiris” is its name and the name of this place is “the mysterious cavern”, the mysterious path of the West, upon which this great god passes in his sacred bark (Kemboly 2010: 259).<sup>49</sup>*

There is a subtle link at play here between the notion of durability and the god’s presumed immortality (Hornung 1982: 157-158). Textual evidence suggests that due to his great power and might, Seth had the ability to cheat death: for example in CT 564 and BD 8 Seth says: “I am Seth who is among the gods, and I will not perish” (*ink Stš imy ntr.w n tm(=i)* Faulkner 1977: 169; Quirke 2013: 24 translates the passage in BD 8 as: “I am Seth, the one who is with the gods, I have not failed”). PT 570 and PT 571 allude to Seth’s indestructability noting the god’s ability of “escaping his death-carrying day” (*nh.t Stš hrw=f Hri m(w)t*; Allen 2015: 181, 182). The claim that Seth’s *ba* is “distinct from that of all other gods” (*tnw r ntr.w nb.w*) in BD 175 – entitled a formula for not dying a second time (*r n tm mwt m whm*; Quirke 2013: 437) – could indeed be a veiled nod to Seth’s immortality.<sup>50</sup> This notion is obviously contrary to the Egyptian belief that gods were mortal (Wilkinson 2003: 20-22, Hornung 1982: 157) but does make sense when one sees Seth as a god apart: he is a member of the Egyptian pantheon (Seth claims in CT 564 and BD 8 that he is one of the gods, and is sometimes listed amongst

<sup>48</sup> Such an epithet appears also in CT 1127. See Barta (1985: 70) for a more on the Eldest Magician.

<sup>49</sup> Transliteration according to Kemboly (2010: 259): *Iw ntr pn ir=f ky irw r tph.t tn. Stmn=f w3.t r c3pp m hka.w 3st hka.w smsw. Rn n sb3 n niw.t tn cpp.w ntr pn hr=f rwtj Wsr rn=f rn n niw.t tn tph.t št3.t w3.t št3.t n.t imn.t cpp ntr pn hr=s m wi3=f dsr.*

<sup>50</sup> For further on the subject, see Gaudard (2017).

the other gods rejoicing the defeat of Apophis in BD 140) but also distinct from the other gods, and religious texts reflect this.

In summary, we can see that in texts and iconography Seth remained true to his complex nature – he was seen as the member of the original pantheon, as the enemy and the invader, a threatening force towards men and gods, but also as the defender of Ra.

What, however, runs like a red line through almost all references to Seth, are descriptions of his enormous, and often dangerous strength. Unfortunately, there seems to be no distinguishable pattern to the Egyptian terms used to describe Seth's power and might – the god was strong not only in the physical sense, but also by his ability to fight, his presence and his magical skill. All in all, Seth was a formidable power to be reckoned with and it was precisely because of this great strength that Seth is chosen as the champion of Ra and stood on the prow of the solar bark when Apophis halted its progress and attacked.

### Chapter III – Seth on the solar bark of Ra

Each and every night during the seventh hour of Ra's journey through the Amduat<sup>51</sup> the world, as the ancient Egyptians knew it, came to the brink of the abyss. Apophis, the embodiment of pure chaos (Guermeur 2015: 67), appeared before the sun bark hell-bent on destroying Ra's ship and with it *ma'at* binding the Egyptian universe together.<sup>52</sup> Standing high upon the prow of Ra's bark wielding a mighty spear was Seth,<sup>53</sup> the last line of defence of the cosmic order, submitting himself each and every night to the service of the Sun god and with the help of Isis<sup>54</sup> protected Ra (Schweitzer 2017: 89).

It is unclear where and when the concept of Seth as the guardian of Ra first appeared. The earliest evidence of this particular role originates from one particular Coffin Text (discussed below), however most examples come from the New Kingdom (Te Velde 1967: 100). Though Seth's presence in Ra's solar bark is well attested in ancient Egyptian texts and inscriptions, the writings themselves provide very little detail about the events during the seventh hour of the Amduat, when Apophis first swallows thousands of gallons of water to stall the progress of Ra's solar bark, and then attacks.

Nagel (1929) presented the first survey of available evidence, which was later elaborated on and expanded by Te Velde (1967: 99-108). The corpus of material is straightforward and rather repetitive: more often than not it is a mere statement that Seth is

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<sup>51</sup> The "Book of that which is in the Underworld" (Amduat - *imy dw3.t*) and the description of the afterlife originates from the royal tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty, two especially fine copies adorn the walls of the burial chambers of Thutmose III (KV 34) and Amenhotep II (KV 35). The text and illustrations were intended as a guide to help the deceased king navigate the dangerous underworld as the pilot of Ra's bark. The book was typically divided into twelve hours, the culmination being the battle between Ra and Apophis in the seventh hour. The major theme of the journey through the Amduat is the regeneration of Ra who enters the underworld in the evening as an old and tired god and emerges as the rejuvenated sun in the morning onto the day sky. For a detailed study of the Amduat, see i.a. Schweitzer (2010); Hornung and Abt (2007); Hornung (1990). For a description of the netherworld in the Coffin Texts, see Bickel (1998).

<sup>52</sup> Apophis' role in Egyptian religion and cosmology is very specific. Lucarelli (2011: 114) describes the giant snake as a "cosmic arch-enemy" and a physical manifestation of *isfet* but points out that Apophis shares two characteristics typical of demons: the lack of a cult, and a specific and limited purpose. These two features are in stark contrast to Egyptian gods.

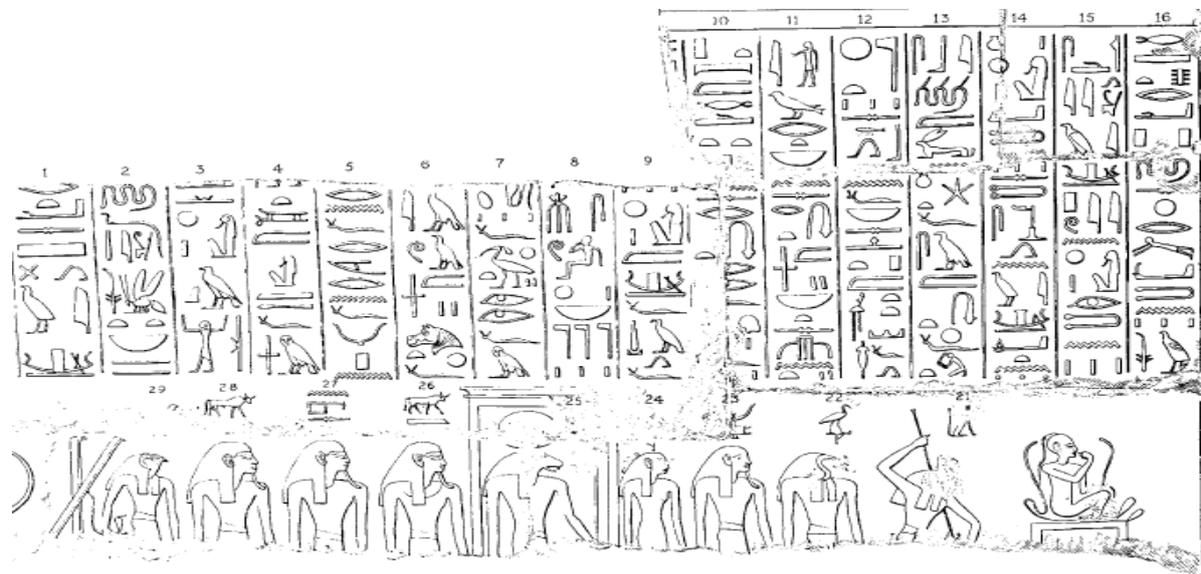
<sup>53</sup> Other gods could protect Ra from Apophis as well, e.g. Thoth, Ma'at or Shu (Kemboly 2010: 256).

<sup>54</sup> The role of Isis during the confrontation with Apophis is not discussed in this paper, for details, see e.g. Régen (2015). The goddess appears in such a role first during the New Kingdom and becomes more common from the Late Period onwards. One can speculate that this is probably connected to the demonization of Seth.

present in the solar bark (*m wi3*),<sup>55</sup> some sources add that the god is standing on the prow of Ra’s ship (*m-ḥ3.t wi3 n R<sup>c</sup>*; see Nagel 1929 and also Guerneur 2015: 80-81).<sup>56</sup> Occasionally we read that the god is in the bark to battle against the Sun god’s enemies (e.g. The 400-Year Stela, see Sethe 1930: 87). Rarer still are textual references mentioning that Seth is in the bark to battle Apophis (papyrus Chester Beatty I: IV, 4–5; Gardiner 1931: 16; Broze 1996: 45).

Depictions of the slaying of Apophis may be somewhat helpful from a graphic point of view but the accompanying texts are on the whole disappointing as they add little detail. To make matters even more complicated, portrayals of the battle between the god of chaos and the serpent of chaos are quite rare.

The earliest depiction comes from the temple of Medinet Habu (Epigraphic Survey 1963: pl. 421), where Ramesses III is depicted offering incense and libation to Ra’s solar bark.



*Seth (second from the right) spearing Apophis in the bark of Ra in the temple of Medinet Habu*

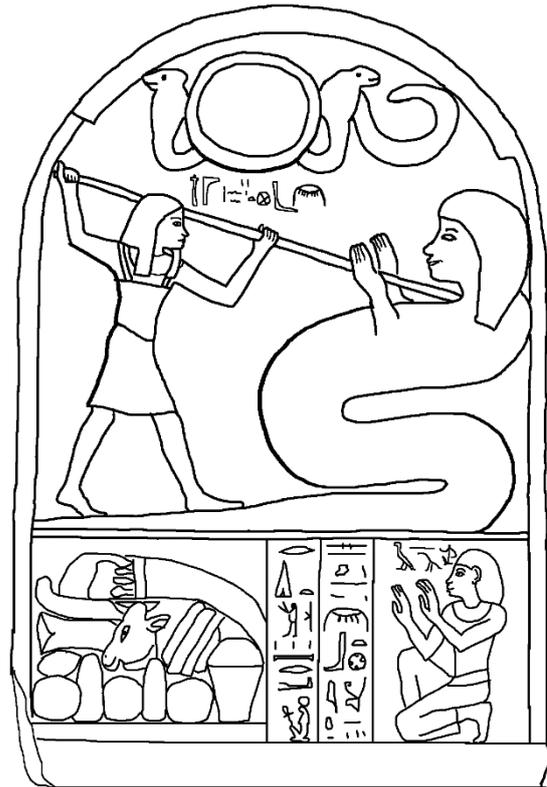
Even though his head has been defaced, Seth is easily recognizable (mainly due to the Seth-animal pictured above him) grasping a spear with both hands, whilst Apophis is slithering under the bark. The remaining text, unfortunately, provides no detail about the battle between Seth

<sup>55</sup> “Seth in the bark” (*Stš m wi3*) was the name of one of the sons of Rameses II (Nagel 1929: 34).

<sup>56</sup> Such a description is by no means unique to Seth, e.g. in the Litany to Ra-Harakhty in the Hall of the Litanies in the Ramesseum, other gods such as Hathor, Chonsu or Wepwawet are mentioned, too (Goyon and el-Achirie 1974: 4-5, 24; pl. VIII).

and Apophis, nor do the hieroglyphs mention Seth at all. In relation to the conflict with Apophis, only the “Mistress of Flame” (*nb.t-nsrt*), a metaphor for the uraeus, is invoked to protect Ra as well as the Ennead who “make a slaughter on Apophis” (*ir=tn cdt r cpp*).<sup>57</sup>

The Nineteenth Dynasty Stela of Taqayna (AP 60; Te Velde 1967: pl. VIII, 2) now in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden is not of much interest textually, as the simple formula merely gives praise to the Ombite (“Giving praise to Ra, kissing the earth before the Ombite by Taqayna”; *rdi.t i3.w n R<sup>c</sup> sn-t3 (n) Nbw.ty in Tk3n3*; see also Kooyman 2017: 370), but has a curious depiction of Seth and Apophis, who are portrayed with human heads. Apophis, who is not named, tries to defend himself from Seth’s spear with the use of his human hands.



*Stela of Taqayna (AP 60)*



*Seth, the bull of Ombos (Æ.I.N. 726)*

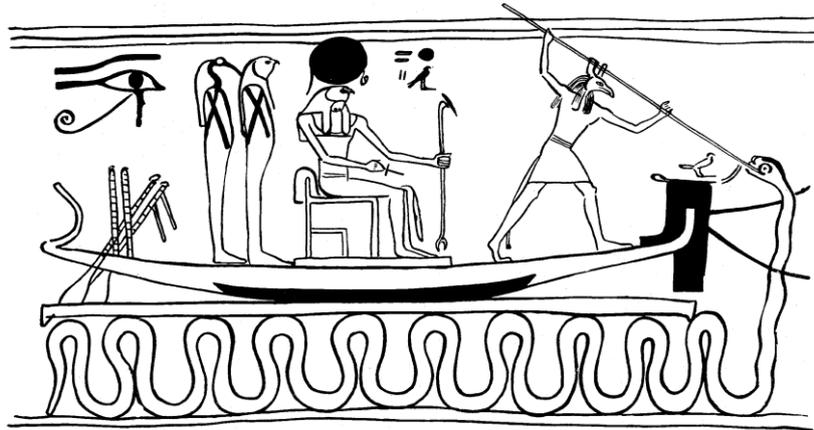
Another Nineteenth Dynasty stela featuring a bull-headed and winged Seth - the “bull of Ombos” (*Stš k3 nbty*) - in a bark spearing presumably Apophis (Æ.I.N. 726; Koefoed-Petersen 1948: pl. 43; Cornelius 1994: 163-166) is from the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen. Yet again, the stela does not provide anything beside the depiction and description of Seth.<sup>58</sup> There might had been more text attached, unfortunately the bottom part of the stela is missing.

<sup>57</sup> For a translation and a transliteration of the whole text, see Voß (1996: 381–382); interestingly though, Voß names the litany, which to date appears only at Medinet Habu, the “Hymn to the Day Bark”).

<sup>58</sup> Cornelius (1994: 164) maintains that despite the description, this is actually a depiction of Seth-Baal, namely “Baal with the head of a bull, but with Seth-like wings”, a melange of Cretan, Canaanite and Egyptian motifs.

Another simple depiction of the battle between Seth and Apophis can be seen in the Book of the Dead of Heruben (papyrus B) dating to the Twenty-First Dynasty (pCairo 133; Cairo JE 19323; see also Piankoff 1949, Piankoff and Rambova 1957: 75-76, fig. 54).

As was already mentioned in Chapter I, there are depictions of Seth's battle with Apophis at the temples at Kellis and



*Papyrus of Heruben (Cairo JE 19323)*

Hibis, the one at Kellis having a more informative text stating: “He has slain Apophis on the bow of the bark” (*šhr.n=f<sup>c</sup>3pp m-h3t wi3*; Kaper 1997a: 210).

The fact that the actual mentioning of Seth spearing Apophis and the description of the conflict is very rare indeed, is particularly striking due to the fact that, from a cosmological point of view of the ancient Egyptians, the defeat of Apophis was a crucial event.

To date we know of just two ancient Egyptian accounts describing the battle which takes place in the seventh hour, paradoxically none from the Book of the Amduat. The earliest evidence of Seth as the defender of the solar bark<sup>59</sup> comes from the Coffin Texts, specifically spell 160, in which the deceased is likened to Seth, who faces a serpent measuring 30 cubits in length with a front made from flint or stone (*ds*).<sup>60</sup> The serpent dwells on “that mountain of Bakhu upon which the sky rests” (*dw pw n B3hw nty p.t rhn=s hr=f*), an underworld region ruled by Sobek.<sup>61</sup> It is worth noting that one of the titles of spell CT 160 is “Not dying because of a snake” (*tm mt n hf3w*) and one of the end-titles “Seth, Lord of Life” (*Stš nb cnh*). What follows is the relevant passage of the spell in Faulkner’s (1973: 138-139) translation:

<sup>59</sup> CT 1128 describes Ra’s flaming bark: “The company which is in the bow is Isis, Seth and Horus. The company which is in the stern is H̄u, Sia and Re<sup>c</sup>” (*šn.wt imy.tt h3.t 3s.t Stš Hr̄w šn.wt imy.tt phwy H̄w Si3 R<sup>c</sup>*; Faulkner 1978: 166).

<sup>60</sup> Priskin (2017: 530) suggests that CT 160 is in fact the oldest written account of a solar eclipse where the serpent represents the moon. According to Priskin (2017: 527) spells CT 154-160 are full of lunar references and were used “to imbue the dead with the moon’s inherent capacity of renewal and resurrection”; accordingly, he dubs this group of spells as the “Book of the Moon”.

<sup>61</sup> According to ancient Egyptian mythology the sky rests on the summits of two mountains: the eastern Bakhu, and the western Manu.

*I know the name of this serpent that is upon the mountain, its name is Whn.f.<sup>62</sup> Now at eventide he will turn his eye against Re, and a stoppage will occur in the crew and a great astonishment (?) in the voyage, and Seth will bend him with his hand. Spell, which he utters as magic: 'I rise up against you and the voyage is directed aright. O you whom I have seen from afar, close your eye, for I have bound you. I am the Male, so cover your head; I am hostile. I am one great in magic which I have sent forth against you.'*<sup>63</sup>

Then, presumably the serpent, which Kemboly (2010: 248) asserts is “unmistakably” Apophis, asks: “What is it, this power?” (*išst pw 3ḥ pw*; Faulkner 1973: 138). To which the deceased answers the serpent with these words: “O you who go on your belly, your strength belongs to your mountain. See, I go off with your strength in my hand, for I am he who displays strength.” (*šm ḥr ḥ.t=f, pḥty=k n ḏw=k. Mk wi šm(=i) r=i pḥty=k m<sup>c</sup>=i, ink wṯs pḥty*; Faulkner 1973: 138).

The second, even more detailed description of the battle between Seth and Apophis, dates to the New Kingdom. This comes from the Book of the Dead, specifically spell 108 called the “Formula for knowing the western ba-souls” (*r n rḥ b3.w inm.tyw*; Quirke 2013: 238).<sup>64</sup> It

<sup>62</sup> More probably the serpent’s name is either *Tp-ḏw-imy-whn=f*, i.e. “He who is on the mountain and in his fire” (see also Borghouts 1973: 114) or merely *imy-whn=f*, i.e. “The one who is in his flame” (Kemboly 2010: 248).

<sup>63</sup> Transliteration: *iw=i rḥ.kwi rn n ḥf3w pf tp-ḏw-imy-whn=f. Ir rf m tr m mšrw pn<sup>c</sup>.ḥr=f ir.t=f r R<sup>c</sup>, ḥpr.ḥr<sup>c</sup> w m is.t, sgw.t<sup>c</sup>3.t m-ḥnw skd.wt, k<sup>c</sup>ḥ.ḥr sw Stš m ḏr.t=f. iy ḏd=f m ḥk3: <sup>c</sup>ḥ<sup>c</sup>=i m-ḏr=k m3<sup>c</sup> skd.wt. M33=i w3.t, <sup>c</sup>ḥn r=k ir.t=k, snḥ.n=i ṯw. Ink ṯ3y, ḥbs tp=k; ḏ3ḏ3.kwi (an alternative version of the spell has “wḏ3.kwi wḏ3=i” instead of “ḏ3ḏ3.kwi”). This would change the translation altogether and would mean “Being well/whole, I am well/whole” much like the later spell BD 108, see below). *Ink wr ḥk3.w iw rdi.n=i r=k.**

<sup>64</sup> Translation by Quirke (2013: 238-239). Faulkner (1990: 101-102) translates as follows: “*Now after a while he will turn his eye against Re, and a stoppage will occur in the Sacred Bark and a great vision among the crew, for he will swallow up seven cubits of the great waters; Seth will project a lance of iron against him and will make him vomit up all that he has swallowed. Seth will place him before him and will say to him with magic power: ‘Get back at the sharp knife which is in my hand! I stand before you, navigating aright and seeing afar. Cover your face, for I ferry across; get back because of me, for I am the Male! Cover your head, cleanse the palm of your hand; I am hale and I remain hale, for I am the great magician, the son of Nut, and power against you has been granted to me. Who is that spirit who goes on his belly, his tail and his spine? See, I have gone against you, and your tail is in my hand, for I am one who exhibits strength. I have come that I may rescue the earth-gods for Re so that he may go to rest for me in the evening. I go round about the sky, but you are in the fetters which were decreed for you in the Presence, and Re will go to rest alive in his horizon. I know those who govern the matter by reason of which Apep is.’*”

shows clear parallels with CT 160 as the opening passages mention the mountain of Bakhu, its lord Sobek and the serpent, alluded to here also as “the one that is in its flame” (presumably the mountain of Bakhu’s; *imy-h3=f*; Quirke 2013: 238) measuring 30 cubits in length. What follows then is the description of the battle:

*After the sessions of the day, he is to overturn his eyes to Ra, and then standstill will hit the boat, with great astonishment within the sailings. Then he is to gorge the seven cubits of high water. Then Seth is to fend him off with a lance of metal, to force him to spew out all he swallowed. Then Seth is to set him in his grip, and then he is to speak in word-power: Back! At the metal point that is in my hand, as I stand gripping you, so that the sailing may be smooth, seeing far. Cloak your head. Let me cross. Back! Before me, for I am the male. Cloak your head, refresh your palm. I am well, being well: I am the great in word-power, son of Nut, my light-power is given to me against you. What is it? That transfigured spirit the snake that walks on its belly, his strength is at his bond. See me, gone against you; your strength is with [me]. [I am] the one who [raises] strength. I have come to assault the earth snakes of Ra, so that he may be content with me in the evening, as I circle this sky, while you are in chains. This is the order against you from the presence. Then he may rest, Ra, in life, at his horizon. I know the procedure of the things for which Aapep is punished. I know the western ba-souls.<sup>65</sup>*

There are other descriptions and allusions to the battle none, however, shed any more light on the subject. BD 111, called a “Formula for knowing the ba-souls of Pe” (*r n rḥ b3.w P*; Quirke 2013: 248) is an uncommon abbreviated version of BD 108. After introducing the setting of the underworld mountain of Bakhu, a familiar scene unfolds ending with the deceased’s announcement that he has the same strength as Seth:

*After the sessions of the day, he is to overturn his eyes towards Ra, and then standstill shall happen, with great astonishment within his boat, with Seth casting his armoury, so that the sailing may be smooth. What is he*

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For a useful website discussing the individual spells from the Book of the Dead with e.g. translations (in German), a list of objects on which individual spells appear and bibliography, see <http://totenbuch.awk.nrw.de> (accessed April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019).

<sup>65</sup> Transliteration after Quirke (2013: 238-239): *Ir-m-ḥ.t ḥ<sup>c</sup>w hrw, pn<sup>c</sup>.ḥr=firty=fy R<sup>c</sup>, ḥpr.ḥr ḥ<sup>c</sup>.w m wi3, sdg3.wt ḥ<sup>c</sup>3.t m-ḥnw skd.wt. Shp.ḥr=f mḥ sfḥ n mw ḥ<sup>c</sup>3. Rdi.ḥr Swty w<sup>c</sup>r mt3 r=f n bi3, rdi.ḥr=f bš=f mt.n=f<sup>c</sup>nb.t. Rdi.ḥr sw Stš m dri=f, dd.ḥr=f m ḥk3.w: ḥm n bi3 imy ḥ<sup>c</sup>=i, ḥ<sup>c</sup>=i dri=k, m3<sup>c</sup> skd.wt m33 w3. Hbs tp=k. d3y=i. Ḥm n=i ink t3y. Hbs tp=k kb šsp.t=k. Wd3=i wd3.kwi: Ink wr ḥk3.w s3 Nw.t, iw rdi n=i 3ḥ.w=i r=k. Išt pw? 3ḥ pw, šm ḥr ḥ.t=f pḥty=f n ts=f. Mk wi šm.kwi r=k pḥty.ky m<sup>c</sup>[=i]. [Ink] w[ts] pḥty, ii.n=i ḥw3y=i 3kry.w n R<sup>c</sup>, ḥtp=f n=i m mšr.w, dbn=i p.t tn iw=k m int.t. Wdd.t pw r=k m-b3ḥ, ḥtp.ḥr=f R<sup>c</sup> m ḥ<sup>c</sup>nḥ r 3ḥ.t=f. Iw=i rḥ.kwi sšm.w ḥ.t ḥsf n ḥ<sup>c</sup>3pp ḥr=s Iw=i rḥ.kwi b3.w imn.tyw.*

before him as word-power: You who see from afar, close tight your eyes, bound. I am the male, cloak your head. As you are well, I am well. I am the one who raises strength.<sup>66</sup>

BD 39 describes the slaying and the cutting up of Apophis (called here Rerek - *Rrk*), though it does not elaborate on the battle between the demonic snake and Seth, who is mentioned only once. Apophis in BD 39 is described as the “enemy of Ra” (*hfty R<sup>c</sup>*), the “rebel of his light” (*sbi šsp=f*), against whom the other gods should unite in their effort to protect Ra, who then in turn becomes “justified against Aapep” (*m3<sup>c</sup>-hrw R<sup>c</sup> r<sup>c</sup> 3pp*). The deceased identifies himself with Seth: “I am the son, Seth, who clears the turbulence of the storm circling within the horizon of the sky, like the crooked god. That is his desire.” (*Ink s3 Stš<sup>c</sup> d hnn.wt kri phr=f m hnw 3h.t mi nkn. Ib=fpw*; Quirke 2013: 114).<sup>67</sup>

The descriptions of the battle in CT 160, BD 108, BD 111 repeat many of the themes and features which have been discussed in the pages above: Seth is described as someone who possesses great strength, is male, who commands magic, and is aggressive and full of fury. All of these characteristics, again, have to do with strength and force, one way or another.

It is telling in this respect, that before his battle with Apophis, Seth is restrained or placated in Ra’s solar bark until the right time comes, as described in BD 175. This spell offers a lengthy exchange between Atum and Osiris about the life cycle, time and eternity in the first part and a wish of the speaker to receive life, prosperity and health like Osiris did from his father Ra in the second part. Between these two parts there is a somewhat incongruous section, which seems rather out of place and reads: “And has the ba-soul of Seth been sent out, as distinct from that of all the other gods? I have placed a guard on his ba-soul in the boat, of his wish to revere the body of the god (*gr.t h3b b3 n Stš, tnw r ntr.w nb.w? iw rdi.n=i sw3.t b3=f imy wi3 n mr=f snd h<sup>c</sup>w ntr*; Quirke 2013: 438).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Translation and transliteration after Quirke (2013: 248) *Ir m-h.t<sup>c</sup> h<sup>c</sup> hrw, pn<sup>c</sup>.hr=f irty=f r R<sup>c</sup>, hpr<sup>c</sup> h<sup>c</sup> pw, sgg<sup>c</sup> 3 m-hnw wi3=f. Rdi Swty mdr=f, m3<sup>c</sup> skd. Dd.t hr=f m h3.w: m33 w3.w<sup>c</sup> hn irty=k<sup>cc</sup>. Ink t3, hbs tp=k. Wd3=k wd3=i. Ink ts phty.*

<sup>67</sup> For a detailed survey of this particular spell, see Borghouts’ (2007) monography.

<sup>68</sup> The German translation (<http://totenbuch.awk.nrw.de/spruch/175>; accessed April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019) presents a different reading: “Ich <habe> auch veranlaßt, daß der Ba des Seth (fort)geschickt wird, unterschieden von den Göttern. Ich habe veranlaßt, seinen (des Seth) Ba zu bewachen, damit er dem Gottesleib keine Angst einjagt.” The translation of the last sentence creates a very different emphasis as in English it means “so that he does not scare the body of the god”. Quirke’s use of the word *snd* which must be a variant on *snd* (“to fear”) and his translation as “to revere” is rather uncommon, although *snd* can be interpreted as “awe” which would support Quirke’s translation.

When the right time did eventually come, to unleash Seth was to release the Kraken. The god would leap to his feet, grasp his heavy metal lance and with all his might and fury attack and defeat Apophis. It was the only possible solution as Seth's power was the only thing which could defend the solar bark of Ra, as the sun god himself – though already rejuvenated during the sixth hour of the Amduat – was still too weak to meet Apophis head on and often suffered from injuries from his previous encounter with the serpent of chaos (Kemboly 2010: 257).

By itself Seth's strength was neither good, nor evil in much the same way as Seth was not a positive deity nor an inherently evil one. Hornung (1982: 213) points out that Egyptian gods could be “terrifying, dangerous, and unpredictable, but they cannot be evil” - an assumption that was true even of Seth before he suffered the demonization from the Late Period onwards. An altogether different point is Apophis who is the embodiment of evil, evil that after being burned up and destroyed by Ra, lies in wait for the solar bark the next night. Hornung (1982: 159-160) points out that the serpent of chaos is characterized by his “unchanging endlessness” and his “nonexistence” (*iwtt*) in which evil is inherently present as opposed to the transitory “existence” (*ntt*) of the gods.<sup>69</sup> Hornung (1982: 158) sees Seth as a complex figure with a “twilight nature, which partakes of the existent and nonexistent (...) Seth, whose realm is the desert and other marginal areas of the world, exists on the boundary between the transitory and the everlasting. The same boundary separates order and chaos, the existent and nonexistent.”

Assmann (2008: 34) also sees Seth in many different shades of grey, pointing out his duality in relation to Ra on the one hand and Osiris on the other. Yet he also notes that as the defender of the sun god Seth uses “violence to inflict death on the personification of evil”, i.e. Apophis. His evil side is more obvious in the Osirian myth, and though in this particular case Assmann points out that Seth personifies violent evil, he also hastens to add that this is not absolute evil. “He represents an evil that is necessary to keep the world going in its ‘Re’ aspect, but that must simultaneously be controlled and contained because it threatens the world in its ‘Osiris’ aspect.” (Assmann 2008: 34).

Neither does Kemboly (2010: 223) find “firm evidence that Seth is absolutely associated with evil”; when it is the case, it is most often connected to Seth's conflict with Osiris. According to Kemboly (2010: 244) it is possible to see Seth “as someone who challenges the authority, the establishment, the status quo, social conventions, etc.” The god may represent a

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<sup>69</sup> For a detailed discussion of the nonexistent, see Hornung (1982: 172-185).

principle through which society keeps itself open to criticism while at the same time tolerating a certain level of disorder which in Kemboldy's view can actually be beneficial.

Returning to our discussion of Seth's role on the prow of Ra's solar bark, the point I wish to make is that concerns of normativity are not relevant here, because Seth does not act "morally" but represents some primal, massive, untamed, raw power of nature similar to the natural phenomena the ancient Egyptians regularly encountered, like the inundation brought by the Nile, the shining sun, the wind, or fire. These phenomena could be beneficent, but when left to their own devices, they could be exceptionally deadly. Fire, for example, can give light and warmth, but it can also reduce an entire city to a smouldering ruin. Water is lifegiving and helps seeds to germinate, but a flood can wipe out an entire crop and cause famine. One should regard Seth in much the same way – he can be useful to the other gods when fighting against their enemies, but if left unchecked poses a lethal threat to the very gods themselves.

The fact that Seth protects Ra's bark each and every night is not some moral choice but necessity and logic. Seth stands on the prow, spear in hand, not because he is good, but because he is stronger and more aggressive than any other god, and because failure to defeat Apophis would result in a disaster of cataclysmic proportions, which ultimately would destroy Seth as well.<sup>70</sup> Thus Seth, the "representative of blind desire, a dark, emotional, primal power and energy, (...) becomes the first and most important of Re's defenders. *Similia similibus curantur*, runs the old saying: 'like heals like'. Thus, it is precisely Seth, the rebel, the foreigner, the thunderer, and the murderer of Osiris, who has been chosen to defeat Apophis, and thereby ward off ultimate chaos and cosmic catastrophe." (Schweitzer 2017: 141).

In other words, it *must* be Seth who defeats Apophis, as it takes a being of chaos to defeat a being of chaos. The concept that "like heals like" is a prominent and significant feature of ancient Egyptian religion and there are numerous examples of this belief. For instance, the jackal-headed Wepwawet was the guardian of the cemeteries, even though jackals were the very creatures responsible for digging out graves and disturbing the dead buried in the desert (Pinch 2004: 213). A cobra (uraeus) protected Re though it was the snake Apophis who tried to destroy the sun god's bark every night (Pinch 2004: 198-199). Serket, whose symbol was the

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<sup>70</sup> Te Velde (1967: 106-107) actually that Seth could be interpreted as a violent aspect of Ra and maybe the two deities could at times be regarded as one god. He also points out that Seth is called the son of Ra which had not only a biological but religious meaning as well. "The son and the father are one (...) the father manifests himself in the son who carries out his orders. Maat in the solar bark specifies as 'daughter of Re' his truth and justice, Seth in the solar bark as 'son of Re specifies his anger and aggression." (Te Velde 1967: 108).

scorpion, was invoked by ancient Egyptians to ward off precisely these venomous creatures (Pinch 2004: 189). Sobek, the patron god of fishermen, was often depicted with the head of the crocodile, a creature posing a constant threat to people on the riverbanks. And hippopotamus goddesses like Taweret acted as protective maternal deities (Pinch 2004: 141-143) despite the fact that even today these animals are responsible for more deaths of people in Africa than crocodiles, lions or elephants. These are just a few examples of the concept that “like heals like” employed by ancient Egyptians.<sup>71</sup>

Summing up, the Egyptians certainly had more gods to choose from as a symbol of strength and violence, for example Sekhmet and Montu. Yet they chose to depict Seth as the champion of Ra “not that he was as friendly and good as other gods, but that he was aggressive as other mythical figures, even surpassing them in violence and viciousness. As the notorious rowdy and thunder-god, the opponent of Horus and the slayer of Osiris, he was eminently suitable to do the dirty work.” (Te Velde: 1967: 106).

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<sup>71</sup> Though it is obvious that the principle “like heals like” was well established in ancient Egypt it does not follow that this concept was universal. A case in point are the so-called Horus *cippi*, stelae with a pictorial motive of a child-like Horus standing on two crocodiles (possibly a representation of Seth), and sometimes holding snakes or other dangerous animals in his hands. The stelae were often accompanied by magical inscriptions intended chiefly to protect the owner from attacks of wild animals but various illnesses and ailments as well. The Horus *cippi* came in different shapes and sizes but the most famous of them by far is the Metternich Stela (MMA 50.85; Scott 1951) created during the reign of Nectanebo II (360-343 BC). For more on the subject, see Draycott (2011), Ritner (1989) or Seele (1947).

## Conclusion

It is evident that Seth is a multifaceted god and the role he plays in Egyptian mythology is very complex. Out of his four roles ascribed to him by Te Velde (1967), Seth as the guardian of Ra seems to be, at first glance, out of place. Wilkinson's (2003: 197-198) description of Seth as a god of violence, chaos and confusion, and as the god of strength, cunning and protective power on the other is too sharp, too divisive and does not do justice to the inner dynamism, tension, and ambivalence one comes to appreciate when deconstructing Seth.

Trying to separate Seth's violence on the one hand, and his strength on the other, is a mistake. Seth *is* the god of violence *and* chaos *and* strength, as all these concepts are inseparably linked. But Seth is much more, as this thesis has shown – he was a god connected to kingship, magic, foreigners, etc., and despite all his vile deeds and his intentions to do harm to his brothers and sisters, still had his indisputable place in the Egyptian pantheon for much of history.

To truly appreciate Seth, one should regard him first and foremost as a being of chaos who plays a unique and irreplaceable role in the Egyptian pantheon. The only way to achieve order (*ma'at*) is to have chaos (*isfet*) to oppose it. On a symbolic and cosmological level, the voyage of Ra through the netherworld and his conflict with Apophis was the clash between the concept of natural order and chaos. "Isfet, however, was thought of as a natural state in the world, since some elements of chaos were necessary for survival and could be harnessed but not definitely eliminated, similar to the process of Death and Rebirth" (Lucarelli 2011: 114).

Seth's role of disturbing order was key: "as limited disorder was accepted as essential to a living order, Seth was accepted and venerated as a god with whom one had to come to terms" (Te Velde 1984: 909). "Battle, constant confrontation, confusion, questioning the established order (...) are all necessary features of the existent world and of the limited disorder that is essential to the living order." (Hornung 1982: 213; see also Rikala 2015: 223). "Limited disorder" is the key phrase here. In this light, Seth as the protector of Ra is quite logical. If Apophis – as the creature of ultimate chaos – were to triumph over the sun god, the whole cosmos would cease to exist, and chaos itself would become irrelevant. Hornung's nonexistence would rule supreme.

In summary, when viewed in all his complexity, Seth's role as the protector of Ra's solar bark seems fitting. The god embodies supernatural strength, raw power, untamed fury and all the unpredictable and violent tendencies one expects from a being of chaos. Yet despite all his at times reprehensible and condemnable behaviour, Seth never loses his godly status, and

remains an integral part of the divine order. It is exactly because of these characteristics, not because of some benevolent feelings, morality or conscience, that Seth confronts Apophis.

As it was pointed out, the concept that “like heals like” – in the case of Seth and Apophis a more apt description would be “fighting fire with fire” – was readily accepted and applied in ancient Egypt. Who else than the strongest and most aggressive of the gods, a divine murderer, and the personification of disorder and chaos, should confront a demon of ultimate chaos? There could only be one choice.

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