

Report on the Thesis

Michal Čermak, *The Way of Horus. Kingship and Transition in the Contendings of Horus and Seth*

by

Katja Goebis

University of Toronto, 6 June 2024

The thesis under review presents a re-evaluation of the text known as the *Contendings of Horus and Seth*, as found on the 20th Dyn. Papyrus Chester-Beatty I, written in Hieratic script in the Late Egyptian dialect. The text is of particular scholarly interest for a number of reasons, all of which the author indicates (either explicitly or implicitly) in his discussion:

a) It represents one of only few well-preserved prose-narrative myths; b) it is an exemplar of the limited corpus of Late Egyptian narrative literature; c) it presents the fullest known version of the mythical competition between the gods Horus (son of the royal predecessor Osiris) and Seth (brother of the same) for the inheritance of kingship and throne and in this way illustrates the fundamentals of Egyptian royal succession ideology; d) it describes the involvement and role of a plethora of different deities and sheds light on both, well-known and little-known aspects of their theology; e) it has been the subject of much scholarly interpretation, with assessments ranging from suffering from a lack of sophistication to showing evidence of having been performed in the context of the royal coronation/accession rituals; f) annotations on the papyrus indicate that it was in circulation amongst some key individuals known from the workers' town of Deir el-Medina, shedding light on issues such as reading and gifting practices in this community and beyond. In light of all of the above, the text, its carrier, and its content present a rich and promising subject for study.

The thesis presents a characterisation and analysis of the text, a voluminous and near-exhaustive bibliography, as well as the full text of the papyrus in transliteration and translation. In his analysis, the author addresses essentially all of the above-listed issues in an exhaustive and always insightful manner, surveying previous scholarship on the subject in masterly fashion and, in this reviewer's opinion, adding to existing interpretations in significant and thought-provoking ways. Analysis is based on aspects ranging from what might be called the micro to the macro-levels, including issues such as the choice (and at times changing use of) Hieratic/Hieroglyphic signifiers—as in the writing of the names Horus and Seth, the use of particular grammatical forms to structure the text, or the interpretation of mythical and political symbols appearing in

it—two examples among many are the “north wind” invoked by Isis, which is shown to be one of the items associated with the sustenance of Osiris in contemporary ritual offering practice/texts, or the White Crown conferred upon Horus as part of his accession to the throne. Perhaps most importantly, the author uses theoretical models in the analysis of the text that provide new insights into the intellectual and religious culture of the time. Of particular note is the extensive discussion of the concept of “Ring Compositions”, as defined comprehensively by Mary Douglas’s work (2007) and basing itself on earlier studies of Chiasm in subjects such as the Classics, Biblical Studies, and Literary Criticism. Further theoretical approaches of note include Goeb’s (respectively Goeb’s/Baines’s) Structural Relationship/Functional Use model (chapter 2), van Gennep’s concept of “Liminality”, as one of the three stages of Rites of passage (e.g. chapter 4, with further discussion of later elaborations by Turner and Hoche in chapter 5), Bloch’s theory of Sacrifice (chapter 5), and Verhoeven’s proposed performative use of the *Contendings* in the context of accession rituals (chapter 6).

Chapter 1

The introduction aptly and comprehensively presents the *Contendings*, its text carrier, and the previous scholarship. Objective, method, and structure of the thesis are clearly presented.

Chapter 2

The section on the partitioning of the narrative (2.1-2) into episodes is well-presented and argued and presents a very nice survey and critique of earlier literature, esp. where it comes to the change of the graphemes used to write the divine names of Horus and Seth, respectively. Author succeeds in adducing evidence, critiquing earlier interpretations, and carefully suggesting a new solution, yet acknowledges the limitations of both, the evidence and his own approach. Reviewer’s only quibble relates to the critique of the concept of episode, which is all but deconstructed as “haphazard”, yet is then used in describing different parts of the narrative. Author should ideally be clearer on whose “episode-count” he is using in this section of the thesis (Patane’s? Broze’s?).

Discussion and application of Mary Douglas’s work on Ring-compositions is, in this reviewer’s opinion, one of the highlights of the present thesis. Douglas’s set of rules as to what characterizes such compositions are outlined and explained, then successfully applied to the *Contendings*. The second coronation of Horus with the White Crown is convincingly identified as the pivotal turning point, the mid-turn, that marks the return of the “ring” plot (chapter 2.4). The ensuing section then proposes to structure the *Contendings* in 14 episodes using the motif and terminology of relative peace/quiet on

the one hand, and anger/violence on the other, as indicators demarcating these segments (2.6. e.g. p. 50). To the literature cited in this section (and beyond) should be added Jay, Jacqueline E. (2016) *Orality and literacy in the Demotic tales*. Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 81. Leiden; Boston: Brill, who discusses some (earlier) Egyptian ring compositions in her chapter 1.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 discusses the religious symbolism encountered in the *Contendings* by relating it to evidence for Egyptian myth, ritual, and literature from other contexts. It follows the structure of 14 segments that were proposed in chapter 2. The discussion is largely far-reaching and includes evidence from a variety of backgrounds, also including legal texts and visual symbols.

To the discussion of the Wedjat eye (3.1.1) the approach of H. Roeder (1996) *Mit dem Auge sehen: Studien zur Semantik der Herrschaft in den Toten- und Kulttexten*. Studien zur Archäologie und Geschichte Altägyptens 16. Heidelberg: Heidelberger Orientverlag, should be added.

To p. 54 with n. 142 we would like to add the remark that representations of baboons, especially where seen adoring the rising sun, should also be associated with the 18 solar baboons greeting the sun in the first hour of the Amduat. A useful addition to the discussion of the sunrise/sunset icon of Herweben (p. 55) might have been Goebis (2015) “‘Receive the Henu - that you may shine forth in it like Akhty’: feathers, horns and the cosmic symbolism of Egyptian composite crowns”. In Coppens, F. (et al.) (eds), *Royal versus divine authority: acquisition, legitimization and renewal of power, Prague, June 26-28, 2013*. 7th symposium on Egyptian royal ideology, 145-175. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (esp. pp. 165-66), which in turn makes abundant use of Tarasenko, M., (2007) “Ruti-scene in ancient Egyptian religious art (19-21 dynasties)”. In Kormysheva, E. and I. Ladynin (eds), *Cultural heritage of Egypt and Christian Orient* 4, 77-122. Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies. Tarasenko has meanwhile published several other studies on the sunrise vignettes of BD chapter 17 also.

While perhaps not surprising as a statement by the present reviewer, it is felt that the application of Goebis (2002)'s Structural Relationship/Functional Use theory to the *Contendings* is generally well-taken. The suggestion that the focus of the text is to be seen in the transformation of Horus from one of his forms – Horus *p3-ḥrd*/Harpokrates / needy child – to the mature form *ḥr-nd-jtj=f*/Harendotes (e.g. on pp. 55-6) is appropriate, but the focus on the ritual aspect of Horus as (potential) cultic performer seems a little misguided, or at least to limit the argument unnecessarily: reviewer wonders if the transformation addressed here should perhaps rather be made more

explicitly about one from immature child, whose claim is contested, to that of confirmed /acclaimed heir to the throne (see perhaps also Goebis, “Egyptian mythos as logos: an attempt at a redefinition of 'mythical thinking' ”. In Froot, E. and A. McDonald (eds), *Decorum and experience: essays in ancient culture for John Baines*, 127-134. Oxford: Griffith Institute) for the various roles and functional aspects of Horus, which are interpreted as functioning as mytho-metaphorical classifiers in this context. Further, the table of structural relationships (p. 57) seems a little confusing and unnecessarily complicated, as well as – potentially – not representative of the mythical status-quo here (→ see below for a suggestion for a potential discussion of the issue at defense).

On p. 56, after having explained how the *Contendings* are to be seen as a Ring-composition according to the criteria advanced by Mary Douglas, which presents with a sequence of elements such as A B C B' A', author proceeds to state that the "linear" nature of the narrative (which would present as something like A B C D E) allows the desired “optimal state” to be achieved; a Ring-composition according to Douglas never displays a linear sequence, so the section seems to be contradicting itself somewhat.

The coronation of Horus with the White Crown, which was presented as the “mid-turn point” in tale’s Ring-structure in chapter 2, is an important motif (3.1.4) and we may suggest the addition of H. Roeder (1996) *Mit dem Auge sehen* (see previous section), who focuses on a perceived connection between this crown and the concept of *shw*-power; also Goebis (2008), *Crowns*, esp. chapter 2.1 on the *wrrt* could be studied in a little more depth as it explores aspects of the crown’s symbolism that go beyond the lunar aspects cited by the thesis author (pp. 69-71; see also pp. 136, 176; NB: p. 179 fn. 693 cites a hymn to Senwosret III in support of the lunar White Crown, where the hieroglyphic text actually writes *wrrt*). Fn. 218 seems wrong – should it refer to Goebis 2008? The same work also contains chapters on crowns as mothers (3.1.2, 3.2.2), which could be usefully added to fn. 220 (instead of Wilkinson?).

Chapter 4

With the *Contendings* preserving ancient Egypt’s foremost and most extensively attested myth of the kingship and rules for the succession, Chapter 4 presents a broad discussion of the institution of the kingship and in particular its role in times of crisis as described in the text: The office is vacant and two candidates are fighting for the right to rule. Since the kingship is a divine institution created by the creator god, a vacancy on the throne equals a cosmic crisis. *M3t* is only reestablished once Horus, as son of his father Osiris, is crowned king; the reigning king is the embodiment of Horus (chapter 4.2.1). In terms of methodological approaches put to the text, the focus is Arnold van Gennep’s three-step model of Rites of passage (chapter 4.2.3), with the second step, entailing separation from the previous status quo and a phase of

transformation (commonly referred to as a liminal state) then applied to the mythical situation of Horus before he is finally confirmed as heir and king. The suggestion of three spheres affected by crisis in the absence of the office holder (funerary, royal, and cosmic, or deceased king, succeeding king, and office/institution of kingship) is well-taken (e.g. pp. 197, 204) The discrepancy in the circularity of the *Contendings*' form (with clear Ring-composition features) and content – where an initial situation of need is resolved – is convincingly explained (pp. 194-95). I am not entirely clear on the statement on p. 195 concerning the placing of a “human king” as substitute ruler in the Myth of the Heavenly Cow – the myth places Thoth, of course. Perhaps author can explain at defense?; n. 737 should be augmented with Johnathan Winnerman, *Rethinking the royal Ka* (Diss. U Chicago 2018); Rameses II's “lack of clairvoyance” at the Battle of Kadesh is an indispensable *precondition* for his final single-handed and divinely guided victory (- this fact should be added at p. 201 w. nn. 768ff and chimes with statements found later in the thesis); p. 202: being set “in an indeterminate time and place” is a genre-characteristic of myth(s). P. 203: a little-known fact relating to the terminology of “applying” van Gennepe's model in Egyptology is that he actually received Egyptological training; see e.g. Goebis, “How ‘Royal’ (and ‘Mythical’) are the Coffin Texts?” 2019, pp. 68-69 (author makes ref. to van Gennepe's use of Eg. funerary rituals in n. 796, however, so perhaps is aware).

Chapter 5

The notion of liminality and its relevance for the Egyptian ideology and myths of the kingship is explored in detail; later studies by Turner (distinguishing the liminality of rituals of status elevation and those of status reversal (p. 206) and Hochner are adduced. The observation that Egyptian religion renders cosmic phenomena as “characters” (→ Reviewer would suggest that “Mythical Actors” is a better term here; p. 206), which means that a “transition” from one state to another could be understood as an “initiation”, is particularly interesting. Reviewer would like to point to a parallel approach in Philippson, P. (1936) *Genealogie als mythische Form: Studien zur Theogonie des Hesiod.* Symbolae Osloenses 7, Broegger, where cosmic phenomena (among others) are studied as they relate to divine kinship relationships (also relevant for chapter 5.6). The finding that the “unsavory elements” of the *Contendings* are an indispensable part of the Liminality/Transition model, in that they are apparently inversive, yet “super-functional for the maintenance of (the) social structure” that is undergoing the ritual transformation, is particularly notable. (pp. 208-9). The ensuing exploration of the different stages of Horus's transformation “from juvenile aspirant to mature ruler” as they might be related to this model (chapter 5.2) is convincing, particularly clear in Horus's sojourn in the wilderness, where he is beaten by Seth/loses his eyes before he is healed by Hathor and returns transformed. The important role of Seth in dictating the various steps of Horus's coming-of-age is another fascinating insight (p. 211).

Fnn. 849 + 850: full citation of Quack should be moved up. Sections on evidence for Egyptian coming of age rituals and liminality (5.3. - 5.5) are in-depth and convincing. The somewhat half-hearted mention of the Hays' critique of van Genep (p. 226) is left near-uncommented; potentially see Goebis 2019, 68 n. 18 for a few remarks. The parallels drawn up between the movements of Horus (and Isis) and the group of Coffin Texts known as Ferryman spells is remarkable (pp. 227-31) → see suggestion for a question/discussion at defense below. The insight (p. 230) that the *Contendings* contain “funerary mythemes ... consistent with those found in the funerary genre ... (which) needed to be sufficiently polyvalent so as to allow the expression of ... mythical ideas related initiation ... or cosmogony” is an important one. But reviewer feels that the overlap in royal and funerary rites of passage has been established by past authors (→ see e.g. Hocart, A. M. *Kingship*, Oxford: OUP, 1927, 83-4; see also below for potential question at Defense). The remark that the author of the *Contendings* would have been a widely-read and learned man still holds. The discussion of chapter 5.6, on the significance of liminality in the Egyptian cosmogonic tradition and in particular the section exploring the alignment of many of the *Contendings*' facets with contemporary Theban ritual landscape (e.g. p. 267), is convincing and based in good evidence. Chapter 5.7 on the role of Seth in both, the evolving narrative of the *Contendings* and in late New Kingdom royal ideology more broadly, holds a few important points, including that Horus acquires the more violent characteristics of Seth (here described in terms of “transgressive ability”, e.g. p. 275) as the myth of the *Contendings* unfolds, while Seth morphs from opponent of *m³t* to representing a part of it (e.g. p. 268). Accordingly, the reigning king embodied elements of both deities (e.g. p. 270 for Ra. II). P. 274 n. 1125: E. Graefe (2019), “Die Berliner Lederhandschrift: à propos Berlin P3029, I, 17-19.” *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 146 (2): 138-143 should be added; p. 275 w. n. 1127: “Horus of Gold” name perhaps rather “Horus the Ombite” (not “Horus (and) the Ombite”), signalling Horus's victory (or “absorption of transgressive ability”)? For the processes involved in Horus's and Seth's evolution, Bloch's theory on sacrifice is aptly explored.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 contains an extensive discussion of the performative context for the *Contendings* and showcases the author's command of the relevant literature - again, Jacqueline Jay's *Orality and literacy* is missed and should be added, including also considerations on aspects such as genre. The discussion in chapters 6.2 and 6.3 of the relationship between Egyptian myth(s) and literature, or the literary facets of mythical narratives, including issues such as functionality, intertextuality, and reception of the work, is quite exhaustive and thought-provoking. The remark that most aspects of the *Contendings*' format as well as its production – as it can be inferred from the former – align with traditional facets of Egyptian literary text production and thus point to a

“shared milieu” with these earlier traditions (p. 294) is well-taken. The described overlap in royal accession ritual and funerary ritual texts – in that both can be seen as “transforming” the individual from one state to another – which is also presented as one of the results of the thesis, is not in itself a new insight. See also below for a potential question at defense. The suggestion that the papyrus as it is preserved today was perhaps gifted to the Deir el-Medina citizen Amunnakhte as part of resolving an otherwise attested quarrel between him and his old “table friend” Nakhtsobek is an interesting one, even though it cannot be proven.

Formal Criteria

The thesis is well-written and presented, an easy and interesting read. Throughout the discussion, a number of small typographical and grammatical mistakes can be observed (including misspellings such as “arlier” for “earlier”, “and” written instead of “a”, “Gesellschaft” instead of “Gesellschaft”; and many more). The transliteration font is not present for some of the transliterations of Egyptian text presented throughout the study. There are also misspellings of some of the cited authors’ names (e.g. Gniesen and Gneisen instead of Geisen; e.g. p. 130 fn. 495), and some small issues with full citations in both footnotes and bibliography (e.g. Universität Drukerpresse for Lausberg, p. 326, which a search reveals was in fact published by Max Hueber Verlag; p. 217 n. 852 should read Karl Sudhoff, *Ärztliches aus griechischen Papyrus-Urkunden*, rather than “Arztliches as friechischen Papyrus-Urkunden”); on p. 62 n. 170 one of the barque hieroglyphs is printed in poor quality. In some cases, works, even books, are cited in full in the notes where a single concept is to be clarified and a specific p. number needed (e.g. p. 95 n. 333: Rolf Krauss, *Astronomische Konzepte und Jenseitsvorstellungen in den Pyramidentexten* Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997, xvi + 297 p. is given instead of indicating the page on which the concept under study (here the Winding Waterway) is discussed in this work). This should ideally be remedied throughout the thesis. In some cases, 2nd editions and reprint editions are not indicated in either bibliography or footnotes (e.g. n. 775 van Genep), but several instances throughout. Place of Publication should ideally be presented in English throughout in the interest of consistency. Author should be held to go over the manuscript once more with the proverbial “fine-toothed comb” to correct any such mistakes before submitting the final copy. Further, while the papyrus under study is well-published and studied, reviewer feels that inclusion of the Hieratic original and, potentially, hieroglyphic transcription would have been helpful in allowing the reader to follow arguments made on the basis of particular sections of text even better. It is possible, however, that the page limit imposed by the degree-conferring institution prevented this.

The transliteration and translation of the primary text under study, as presented on pp. 352-370, overall demonstrate the author's adequate grasp of the Late Egyptian language, grammar, and nuances of (sometime metaphorical) meaning. However, there are a number of issues and problems esp. with the transliteration. Reviewer started to go over the entire text but found that there are too many issues to enumerate here, so only some general formal points will be addressed, with some examples given. Author should be held to go over the entire transliteration again and make sure that conventions are followed consistently and that the system followed is explained to reader.

A) destroyed text is not presented consistently throughout by [...]. Some destroyed parts are not indicated at all; b) text augmentation (as dictated by Late Egyptian grammar) is not consistently presented (e.g. *Cont.* 4.1-2: $\text{ḥ}^c.n p3 ntr 3 (ḥr) zb jm=s$ vs. *Cont.* 4.9: $\text{ḥ}^c.n t3 psd.t 3 sgb$; c) transliteration often does not follow the hieroglyphs presented. While Late Egyptian/Hieratic does use “filler” signs at times, the decision which signs to transliterate and which ones not amounts to an interpretation by author (e.g. 3rd pers. Sg. Fem, suffix =*st* vs =*s*) ; also, reader should be made aware which system is generally followed; d) the system for rendering fem./pl. endings is not consistent: sometimes a dot is used (e.g. *sr.w* (*Cont.* 1.1), *wd3.t*, *Cont.* 1.2), in others it is not (*ist*, *Cont.* 1.5); also *dhwtj* (*Cont.* 2.8) vs *dhw,tj* (*Cont.* 2.9); e) other grammatical markers are not always consistently presented either, e.g. *Cont.* 2.7: *i.ir.tw wp.tw.w* (where the *wp.tw.w* should likely be changed to *wp=w* in any case, but) in contrast with =Suffix pronoun for most of the rest of the text, and specifically *iw=w ḥms* in *Cont.* 3.5; a mistake appears on p. 184, where *Con.* 14,4 is rendered *dd.n dhwtj* but then analyzed as a *sdm.jn=f* form; in the presentation of the text in translit. on p. 358, the passage appears as *dd jr.n dhwtj*; other mistakes include *Cont.* 15.7: *dd=f n sb3.wt nt.i <m> hn.w=s ... ḥtp <ḥr> imn.t r-tnw grḥ.t* → should be *dd=f n sb3.w nt.i(w) <m> hn.w=s ... ḥtp <ḥr> imn.tt r-tnw grḥ{t}* [NB: *imn.t* to be changed to *imnt.t* throughout].

Finally, the discussion of the text, in particular in chapter 3, is based exclusively on the author's own translation, with many cases of ambiguity in meaning not addressed. While it seems to reviewer that the objective pursued by the thesis, of (re-)interpreting the text as a Ring-composition presenting the transmission of royal power and the transformation of Horus/the king into the legitimate office-holder, is ultimately not affected negatively by this approach, this shortcoming should nevertheless be noted. To cite but one example from the beginning of the text (*Cont.* 1,1-1,3):

[*hpr.n*] *p3 wp[.t]* *hr* [*h*]^c *stš št3.w hpr.w 3.w sr.w wr.w i.hpr.yw*
istw [*i*]^r *w^c n ms [ntr.i] hms m b3h nb-r-dr hr wh3 t3 i3w.t n iti wsir*
nfr *h^c.w [z3] [pt]h shd [imn.t] m in.w=f*

In reviewer's opinion should be presented as something like:

[*hpr.n*] *p3 wp[.t]* *hr* [*h*]^c *stš št3.w hpr.{j}w 3.yw{t} sr.w wr.w i.hpr.yw*
[i]stw [*i*]^r *w^c n ms [jstw? sw?] hms m b3h nb-r-dr hr wh3{h} t3 i3w.t n iti wsir*
nfr *h^c.yw [z3] [pt]h shd [imnt.t] m i(w)n=f*

Apart from the cited issues with the transliteration, there are some actual mistakes (e.g. *wsir nfr h^c.w* instead of *nfr h^c.w*; *shd [imnt.t] m in.w=f* rather than *m j(w)n=f*, which make for very different translations: “standing/positions” vs. “manifestations/appearances” (although author presents the latter translation); “gifts” of Osiris vs. “character” or even “(luminous) colour”. Reading of the statement in the following section (Cont. 1,4), presented by author as: *m3^c.t nb wsr* and translated “justice lords over power” (p. 57, 60) is far from clear and deserves at least some comment in a footnote. What is written is *m3^c.yw*, possibly *m3^c.(t)yw*, and an interpretation as Maat cannot be assumed just like that; rendering *nb* verbally here might also deserve some comment. One might just as well assume that *m3^c.yw* could refer to (a) “justified one(s)”, although the lack of a divine or other person determinative means this interpretation is equally uncertain. In any event, a brief discussion would have been appropriate since this phrase has a major bearing on the interpretation of the *Contendings*’ theme – the transfer of the kingship according to Maat and Horus’s supposed lack of *wsr* at this early stage.

As already indicated above, the near-exhaustive presentation and analysis of previous scholarly work on the topic is commendable. Author demonstrates excellent command of the literature on a) the text under study, b) the genres of text that it presents – including discussions of both myth and Egyptian literature and its genres and definitions of the analytical terms used – as well as c) on the theoretical concepts that have been used in its interpretation, which are then augmented by new models and concepts. In this reviewer’s opinion, there are only few exceptions to this general impression. These include: the in-depth study by Jacqueline E. Jay, (2016) *Orality and literacy in the Demotic tales* – a volume that, while focusing on Demotic narratives, offers important theoretical considerations on several of the issues studied in this thesis, in particular those of orality and thus also performance of text, as well as specific narrative forms encountered in prose texts. Her chapter 1 has several references to the *Contendings* and also includes a few references to the Ring-structure of some earlier Egyptian tales, such as Sinuhe, identifying it as a marker of orality in many cases. Of value might also

be the same author's doctoral dissertation (UChicago 2008), *The Narrative Structure of Ancient Egyptian Tales: From Sinuhe to Setna*, which discusses the *Contendings* more extensively. Further, although Parkinson is cited frequently in the discussion of literature and literary analysis, consulting his (2009) volume *Reading ancient Egyptian poetry: among other histories*. Chichester; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell explores in detail issues such as how to best approach ancient texts and their performance and would have rounded out the arguments advanced in this thesis. Similarly, a useful addition to the materials discussed in chapter 3 and 5.5.3 in the context of analyzing the sunrise/sunset icon might have been the above-cited items Goebis (2015) “‘Receive the Henu - that you may shine forth in it like Akhty’: feathers, horns and the cosmic symbolism of Egyptian composite crowns”, and Tarasenko, M., (2007) “Ruti-scene in ancient Egyptian religious art (19-21 dynasties)”. In Kormysheva, E. and I. Ladynin (eds), *Cultural heritage of Egypt and Christian Orient* 4, 77-122. Tarasenko has meanwhile published several other studies on the sunrise vignettes of BD chapter 17 also. In the discussion of the White Crown (chapters 3, 4), the monograph by H. Roeder (1996) *Mit dem Auge sehen: Studien zur Semantik der Herrschaft in den Toten- und Kulttexten* should be added. The discussion of ritual and ritual actors (Chapter 5.6.5) might benefit from a look at Rummel, U., (2010) *Iunmutef: Konzeption und Wirkungsbereich eines altägyptischen Gottes*. SDAIK 33. Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, and Ead. (2010), “Generating ‘millions of years’: Iunmutef and the ritual aspect of divine kingship”. In Leblanc, Ch. and G. Zaki (eds), *Les temples de millions d'années et le pouvoir royal à Thèbes au Nouvel Empire: sciences et nouvelles technologies appliquées à l'archéologie*, 193-208. Le Caire: Dar el-Kutub, who discusses the role of the “divine Sem” Iunmutef and his role in facilitating and transcending liminality. In terms of rather different overall approaches to the *Contendings*, the work of Rolf Krauss, while cited in part (e.g. Krauss 1997), has not really been used in the discussion. That author favors astronomical interpretations of the battles between Horus and Seth, which in his view reflect the planetary behaviour/interchange of Venus and Mercury as morning star at different times. (as an aside: Krauss's study is cited on p. 95 n. 333 in the context of defining the Winding Waterway of the Pyramid Texts but is misrepresented here). The discussion of the rituals and ideology of the kingship might have benefitted from a brief look at the classic study by Hocart, *Kingship*, 1927.

In terms of its structure and presentation, reviewer finds very few shortcomings indeed. The thesis describes its topic and the associated problems well, is explicit on what its objectives are – to further interpretation and understanding of the *Contendings* by applying new methodological frameworks and models – and successfully presents the various facets of these models and how they align with the text under study. The one exception to the rule is found in the important discussion on how the *Contendings* might be structured in the absence of unambiguous section markers (chapter 2). As indicated, the concept of the “episode” is first critiqued as an unsuitable term and tool

for analysis in this context but is then continuously used in ensuring parts of the discussion. This shortcoming should be remedied – at the latest prior to publication, if publication is intended.

The thesis ends with a number of interpretative statements, including that the text should be viewed as a narrative of royal succession framed as a “recurrent event ... inherent to kingship and ... of cosmic significance” (p. 298) as well as affirming it as a product of Theban Ramesside culture, but also of older literary traditions more broadly (e.g. p. 293). It further defines the *Contendings* as “a mythical narrative in which religion and literature intersect” (p. 294). While the usefulness of some of these statements in their current form could be discussed further (→ see below section on potential questions for the defense), the thesis gives a clear sense of closure and of objectives having been met. One quibble reviewer might adduce is that that concept of the Ring-composition, which was so successfully espoused and applied to the composition of the *Contendings* in chapter 2, is not brought up again in the Conclusion, at least not as one of the main findings of the preceding discussion. Reviewer feels that this finding is the most innovative and important finding of the thesis under review, representing a useful analytical tool for future generations of scholars (of the *Contendings*, but also of Egyptian myth and literature more broadly) and should be highlighted as appropriate.

Questions for Discussion/Defense

The following issues or questions occurred to reviewer while reading the work, and (a selection) might be usefully discussed in the context of the defense. Bold print indicates questions that are perhaps more important to discuss:

Chapter 2: Can we discuss the usefulness of viewing the mythical actors – especially the varying forms of Horus throughout the tale (as manifest in the changed writing of their names as well as their changing characteristics) – as mytho-metaphorical classifiers (for which see Goebis 2013)?

(p. 56): Having explained how the *Contendings* are to be seen as a Ring-composition according to the criteria summarized by Mary Douglas (2007), which presents with a sequence of elements such as A B C B' A', author proceeds to state that the “linear” nature of the narrative (which would present as something like A B C D E) allows the desired “optimal state” to be achieved; a Ring-composition according to Douglas never displays a linear sequence. Can author clarify?

(p. 57, Table): The structural relationships presented seem unnecessarily complicated and not fully appropriate. “God in need – needs but is NOT AIDED by – Helper” does not seem to align with the mythical situation. Rather,

Thoth is identified as helper in the opening section/prologue and brings the Wedjat (here symbolizing either crown or royal office more broadly) to the “Great Prince in Heliopolis” – later in the text identified as Atum. It would seem he does so to enable Atum to crown Horus with it, and Thoth is clearly a supporter of Horus throughout the text and beyond. Reviewer would suggest a structural relationship of “God in need – is not YET given – needed object” is more appropriate for this passage, if a negative this statement is the aim (only in later episodes, when the exact process is outlined, does the situation conform with the negative phrasing suggested). Reviewer would prefer to split the mytheme into three mythical relationships: “God in need (Horus) – needs/requests – Object (Crown/kingship)”; “Helper (Thoth) – brings – needed item (Symbol of crown/kingship)”; “Granting deity / God with authority over the situation (Atum) – receives – item (symbol of crown/kingship)”. ...

(p. 66) (and preceding discussion of Northwind): point concerning the "self-sustaining cycle of royal legitimacy" as relating to both Horus sustaining Osiris in cult, and Osiris supporting Horus in bid for kingship is well-taken indeed! one additional note as relating to the symbolism of the Northwind metaphor here: Reviewer would indeed see the Northwind as a symbol for sustaining Osiris, but Isis' exclamation to it travelling north to see Wenennefer/Osiris as referring to the joy/satisfaction/resulting sustenance/invigoration that Osiris will experience when he hears of the excellent news. In other words, the metaphor may here stand for the positive news of the decision in favor of Horus.

(p. 174): If the golden disc emerging from the head of Seth (and being seized by Thoth) is “undoubtedly the lunar Eye”, with Broze identifying it as the Wedjat Eye – which in turn is what, as per the first part of the *Contendings*, is brought by Thoth to Atum – is the only possible interpretation really that “the connection of the lunar [Eye; my addition, KG] with the royal office is established” and that “the homosexual episode” is consequently related to the “main challenge for Horus ... the lack of the wedjat”? → The symbolism of the Wedjat was multivalent at all times and this is borne out by the myth also, where Horus’s Eyes are gauged out by Seth (and restored by Hathor).

(p. 177): Author states that the “solar god” is essentially Horus “by this time in the *Contendings*” – can author explain if he means that this is a form /evolution of Horus in the tale (only)? Are there other possible interpretations of Horus in this context?

And, following on from the last point:

Could author be asked to say a few words about potential astronomical interpretations of the conflict between Horus and Seth (as advanced e.g. by Rolf Krauss). Reviewer notes that, for example, the mythical transformation of Horus is cast in astronomical terms e.g. on p. 209: “the solar child is only conceivable as a precursor to the mature, royal sun.”

(p. 179 and elsewhere): does author have a view on how the *hdt* and *wrrt* crowns relate? (hymn to Senwosret III cited in fn. 693 actually writes *wrrt*). Is that one to be seen as lunar in nature also then?

(pp. 227-31): The parallels drawn up between the movements of Horus (and Isis) and the group of Coffin Texts known as Ferryman spells is remarkable but what led to this comparison? Are the earlier PT not relevant yet?

(p. 230; similarly p. 299): The insight that the *Contendings* contain “funerary mythemes ... consistent with those found in the funerary genre ... (which) needed to be sufficiently polyvalent so as to allow the expression of ... mythical ideas related initiation ... or cosmogony” is an important one (p. 299: remarks on overlap in royal accession ritual and funerary ritual texts). But is the overlap in royal and funerary rites of passage not a given? → see e.g. Hocart, *Kingship*, 83-4 as also cited in Goebis 2008, p. 377: “It is all one since death = birth = coronation ...”.

(p. 293): In what way is the “human character of the gods of the *Contendings* ... obvious”? – Author has previously stated that they are “unknowable” (p. 292). Can this be clarified?

(p. 294) The author presents as one of his results his (re-)definition of the tale as a “mythical narrative in which religion and literature intersect”. Yet, statements such as that the text contains “elements of both Egyptian religion and literature” could be said to be something of a truism in that a myth is by (the most standard) definition a story about “religious entities/gods and their interaction” (e.g. Goebis/Baines, “Function and uses of Myth” (2019) w. earlier lit.). What about political uses of both literature and myth/religion? Does this aspect deserve more attention in the concluding section, perhaps?

(p. 296): The suggestion that the papyrus was gifted to Amunnakhte by Nakhtsobek is intriguing. Author lists some evidence for gift-giving in Deir el-Medina, but do we have any evidence for the gifting of papyri from other contexts? (this might make a useful extra fn. also).

(p. 298): The final assessment of the *Contendings*' significance as representing a narrative of royal succession framed as a "recurrent event ... inherent to kingship [perhaps add: "ideology" here?; KG] and ... of cosmic significance" might be usefully related to the time-denominators *nḥḥ* and *dt*. (The terms are mentioned on pp. 184-85, when explaining the relationship between Re and Osiris, and p. 198, in the context of explaining cosmic order, and again on p. 253, where Hochner's view of two types of balance ("frozen" and "dynamic") is compared to *dt* and *nḥḥ*). Describing Re/Horus (also p. 254) as the "dynamic element" and Osiris as the "static" one is perhaps too simplistic. Does author have views on this? Reviewer would like to suggest that Egyptian ritual (and its implications of perpetuated/accomplished *m3't*) could align with *nḥḥ* while historical development might be seen as represented in *dt*'s linearity. Ritualized history – as in a sequence of mythical Horus-kings (morphing into Osiris-predecessors at death) – might then be seen as a combination of the two. (brief attempt in Goebs (2024), "Botched, tweaked, reinterpreted: three case studies of manipulated royal rituals in ancient Egypt". In Morgan, K.R. (ed.), *Pomp, circumstance, and the performance of politics: acting politically correct in the ancient world*, 209-234. Chicago: Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, esp. pp. 212-13. The model might be described as: Eternal mythical/ritual interchange of Horus ascending – becoming Osiris at death – (vacating throne for next) Horus ascending - ... and so on, represents *nḥḥ*; consecutive sequence of Horus kings on the throne (respectively "History") could be seen as *dt*. This might be seen *contra*, or else as a supplement, to author's interpretation of the mythical evolution of Horus (the child) from incumbent to throne to ultimate heir/acclaimed king (chapters 3 and 4; or chapter 5.3 with observation that the "royal succession is ... both a singular personal event of individual transformation and a regularly happening cosmic occurrence" (p. 207).

Final Assessment

In conclusion, this reviewer is of the opinion that Michal Čermak's *The Way of Horus. Kingship and Transition in the Contendings of Horus and Seth* presents an exhaustive, multifaceted study of papyrus Chester-Beatty I's mythical account. While there are a few problems with the presentation of the Egyptian text and some small issues with the interpretation of some of the passages and mythical symbols, the thesis brings novel approaches and models to the study of the *Contendings* and succeeds in adding to existing scholarly interpretations. Given that it is a dissertation in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, the shortcomings in the Egyptian text presentation can also be said to be of lesser importance than the methodological innovations advanced. Particularly noteworthy, in reviewer's opinion, is that the author is able to demonstrate how the structure of the *Contendings* aligns with essentially all seven aspects of Ring-compositions as enumerated by Mary Douglas and in this way identifies the text as a

carefully crafted work of literature. This contrasts with earlier assessments as a lower-register work and having been composed for purely popular consumption only, which were largely due to the inclusion of some bawdy elements and the use of sexual content. The arguments advanced in favor of the *Contendings* presenting the transformation of the incumbent to the throne (in essence Harpokrates) into the mature and legitimized heir to the throne (Harendotes) is another highly important contribution to both, the future study of the *Contendings* and the understanding of Egyptian kingship ideology and its mythical representation. The thesis is therefore eligible as a PhD thesis submitted in conjunction with the processes leading to the conferral of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and should proceed to Defense. Despite having some minor criticisms as regards a few of the arguments advanced, this reviewer recommends that the thesis be passed.