

REPORT ON MARTIN PEHAL: “INTERPRETING ANCIENT EGYPTIAN NARRATIVES”

This is a well-written Dissertation and one that, despite being convoluted from time to time, presents new interpretation of key Late Egyptian Stories. (I will use the work “Thesis” below, but the terms are interchangeable.) Needless to say, the methodology followed is one that has not been used rigorously within the previous Egyptological scholarly literature. I have provided a specific commentary below but shall outline my conclusion here at the beginning. I would also like to add at the start that the English is fine and I have caught only one typo. There may be others, but, frankly, if so they are hard to locate. The style, as well, is fine.

In answer to the three key points sent to me I:

- feel that this work “meets the standard customarily required of a doctoral dissertation.
- do recommend that this submitted work be recommended for a public defense.
- and I assess the final product as a “Pass.”

The detailed comments which follow can be brought up in the oral defense. Note that my analysis is succinct except for the final section concerning the Doomed Prince.

It is highly useful to have a public defense in this case because the subject matter *plus* interpretations will reveal the grounds for the methodology followed by Pehal. That, I suspect, will be the core of the oral discussion.

PART ONE

Introduction

1. Myths. Then terminology. Methodology covered. See many limitations; etc.
2. Prefers “configurational coherence” Correct? — Pehal should have checked with Igor Diakonov on myths: *Archaic Myths of the Orient and the Occident* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis; 1995).
3. “Structural analysis.” Good use can be made of this, he says, for Egyptian religious thinking. E.g., by employing a binary scheme.
4. Pehal wants (especially Chapter 2) — “configurational coherence”; so why not use the methodology of “narratology” more? I would argue that Sequential AND configurational meanings can be covered better this way. Comment by me: are they opposed as diachrony and non time-oriented studies (synchrony)?

Chapter I

1. He says, following Harco Willems, primitive > developed. Evolutionist. Yet that word need not apply here. Cf. Norbert Elias's well-known studies on Court Society *et al.*
2. Pehal notes the historicizing school.
3. Ritual > myth (Myth/Ritual): Schott *et al.* discussed.
4. Assmann wanted narrative in myths; again see Diakonov. Assmann used the term "constellation."
5. And Assmann used the term "mythical statements." Again: early accounts are short separate/independent from one another even if about or concerning the same gods or things, etc. Then later put these disparate short narratives were combined and unified (by literary people etc.)
6. Did the Egyptians always need myth for their cultic religion so much? E.g., perhaps it is better to argue for — necessity.
7. On pages 31-32 he has a good refutation of this "progression."
8. "Narrativity". Has to be connected to what narratives we later have. The Horus and Seth "constellation" still seem to predominate, à la Diakonov, owing to kingship in Egypt.
9. So Pehal concludes by arguing that "narrative coherence" is not the key.

Chapter II

1. "Configurational Coherence" is the main theme.
2. To me the discussion of writing by Derrida is very simplistic, and not Western in any case. Via language we come to express complexity; we reach out to explain the world; we become more world-congruent. How else? Force? Non-verbal activities. Very limited.
3. I would argue: then develop "pictures" in the mind moving to words moving to speech and then to writing. Snapshots (eg, 'I,' 'we,' 'run,' 'eat,' and so forth, without connectives [parataxis], case endings, inflections, etc.).
4. Thus on page 37: puns. Of course. And they are a primitive means of linguistics and science; i.e., they give explanations.
5. His fig. 1 (the famous statue of Ramesses II as a boy, now located in the Cairo Museum) is a historically rather late example from pharaonic Egyptian history and was sculpted at an epoch wherein metaphoric explanations/descriptions had already come to the fore.
6. Page 40: to say organization is "western" is trivial, perhaps demeaning, but to me wrong headed.

Conclusion

1. Goebis (still) returns to a quasi Assmann-Baines viewpoint: narrative not required. Yet she, too, got hung up on lengthy narratives versus basic small (simple /) accounts, those which I do not view as *Aussage(n)*, à la Assmann.
2. Are the stories "strange" (page 42)? — not to me anyhow.
3. He views it as a "frame" (page 43) — no need for sequential ordering.
4. Back to definition of myth.

PART TWO

Introduction

1. Astarte: this is a difficult to understand narrative. Pehal wants to see it as a variant of Egyptian traditions — I wonder. I maintain that it is an alteration of foreign story which has been partly transformed to fit within the Egyptian consciousness and culture.

Chapters I-II (Astarte)

1. Date of III prt 19. I cannot find any specific importance for this date. Yet 19 is bothersome from a calendrical point of view (= the solar-lunar epact or the difference between a lunar year of 354 days and a solar year of 365 days: $19 = -11 \pmod{30}$)
2. The eulogy section is noted on page 58 note 163. The tribute analysis on page 66 note 188 is poor.
3. Yam (Ym) versus ennead. Stress more of Amunhotep II and foreign influences at this time.
4. Two different Seths?: page 71.
5. Pages 74-75: discussion of (anti-)Nibbi hypothesis thin; page 75: is not Leclant outdated?

Chapter III (Method)

1. Lévi-Strauss's "Mythical Redundancy": but is this not what Diakonov discusses when he shows the later (second millennium BC) reworkings of "archaic myths", and, moreover, what Ovid did (*Metamorphosis*)? — namely to make a coherent narrative out of short and scattered accounts? And moreover: exactly what Graves did badly when he presented his versions of "complete" Greek myths.
2. Page 80: the "transforming" of mythemes.
3. Binary oppositions.
4. Lévi-Strauss versus narratives.
5. Ricoeur: stressed Lévi-Strauss's rejection of narrative = diachrony.
6. Then to Turner: where the plot is not "the diachronic aspect of myth" for him (page 89). Maybe I say.
7. Turner: dialectical; Hegelian;
8. Then Assmann, pages 92ff. via Wente as Lévi-Straussian methodology; Wente's remarks were overlooked by Goebis (page 95).

Chapter IV (Application of Structuralism)

1. Two Brothers used here. Idyllic setting is first presented, yet this is commonplace. The drama then follows (and very fast indeed) immediately after that beginning.
2. Adultery (pages 107ff.); page 110 — but if castration then does not Bata negate the negative relationship between him and his brother.

3. Is there a “female-line Bata” (page 113)? Without possessing a heart he is not human I would feel — or sentient? But even more: he cannot tell right from wrong, he cannot decide on anything and he cannot even formulate a “plan.”
4. The “heart,” HAty; page 115; symbolic unlike jb (< Nyord); page 116 – I agree here (no heart and no phallus). But see the lengthy work of María Isabel Toro Rueda, *Das Herz in der ägyptischen Literatur des zweiten Jahrtausends v. Chr. Untersuchungen zur Idiomatik und Metaphorik von Ausdrücken mit jb and H3tj* (Göttingen: PhD Thesis, University of Göttingen; 2003).
5. Page 117 killing of wife: fine. I concur.
6. He has three “initial episodes.” Can we call them “starting points,” of the “Thesis”?
7. Yet is this story a “myth”?
8. “Mediators”: pages 119ff.; Bata’s wife and ym (the ‘sea’).
9. Pages 121-122: no names for females; they represent “forces”; page 123: on Bata’s “bifurcation”; I do not feel that he is correct on: the heart = masculinity.
10. He argues that Bata’s wife, a maiden, is a mediator, and a case of “character bifurcation” (page 126) and a materialization of Bata’s acquired femininity. But she cannot have sex with Bata because she will/must leave for Egypt etc.; i.e., the plot demands more important roles for her.
11. Page 128: Anubis, Bata and P(haraoh); yes — all are eventually rulers; all mediators between humans and the gods. Is this correct??
12. But Bata keeps himself separate. Did not Pehal remember this (as via ym): page 129?
13. But does Bata want his wife to be taken away as Pehal argues page 131? I think not.
14. And I do not think that pharaoh “lures” Bata’s feminine quality/aspect to Egypt. He takes a woman, and because he is a man; pages 131-132. Bata lacks all power, sexual and otherwise. Which is why the former wife of Bata wants the tree to be cut down: end B totally.
15. Note the negative characteristics of the two women: Bata’s wife and earlier Anubis’s wife. Why not is this issues pressed by Pehal?
16. Page 133: very useful
17. Bata > Osiris, pages 134-8; good on the petrification liquids; Depends on Winkler a lot: *Göttinger Miscellen* 211 (2006): 125-139; Pehal’s pages 139-141 present a fine analysis
18. Note 413, page 141: better discussion of statues needed.
19. Is Anubis a “split image” of pharaoh (see page 143)? — I question this.
20. But then we have the identity of Anubis and Bata, and furthermore the identity of Bata and the pharaoh; cf. page 144.
21. Valley of the Pine: part of Egyptian-held territory or simply outside? Pehal argues, page 154, for its nether-worldly characteristics. No solution given on page 146.
22. Bull’s death: is just a sacrifice? Why does Pehal not discuss this?
23. The next 2/3 “episodes” are surely typical; pages 150-153.
24. Page 154 note 453: more on Kamutef needed here.
25. Very fast coverage at the end; Pehal goes back to Kamutef. Note that the mother bears the son! So the new Bata is the direct heir of a woman (but not of the pharaoh)!
26. Is Bata “really” split? Hard question.

Chapter V (Inner Structure of 2 Brothers)

1. Pehal has a problem identifying the NIMs (= Non-Initial main Sentences) etc. I am surprised that little linguistic-philological is present here.
2. Assmann and chapters. Maybe correct? (24).
3. I do not see that there was a clear-cut system as advocated with the “clusters” of three Episodes. Actually, Propp is easier to read and to understand. Is this complicated system advocated by Pehal a Rube Goldberg contraption?
4. Fig.128 page 172: OK.
5. Note 440 page 173 with Perez-Accino: yes I agree, as in my *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* study.
6. And with the 24 rubra; I agree with Pehal; and Assmann was on the wrong track. Moreover, see Pehal’s interesting chart on pages 176-177. True??
7. “Characterizations” are not just “characterizations” surely. They are attitude-tropes for certain schemata such as narrative, encounters, antitheses, etc. All of his cases show the lack of generalizations and the reliance on mythological poetic elements/actors/etc. They are concrete, and already known (or given) forms/figures/personages/actors/etc. As such they fulfill or perform given roles in the narrative.
8. See on page 188 — his “four corners.” Osiris-Horus, Re-Horus, Re-Seth, Re-Osiris (but he ignored the Solar-Osirian Unity prevalent in the Ramesside Period), Seth-Osiris: all really akin to the combinations of forms advocated by Assmann and Diakonov.

Chapter VI (Osirian Cycle of Two Brothers)

1. Page 200: I do not know if Seth has too much and Osiris too little ?
2. I also see the introduction of Horus and Seth: yet not discussed by Pehal in detail at this point — is this a glaring error?
3. The sexual relationship in the Horus and Seth constellation: it is made to emphasize Seth’s power, and which is not morally acceptable; thereby this leads to (or aids in) Seth’s defeat.
4. Page 203: Goes back to “constellations” (sex; father/son); yet the data are derivative; or, better put: developed from the “archaic” myth. I would place: uncle/son of brother here.
5. Wettengel: unclear is a correct analysis. No evidence: pages 205ff.
6. Page 206: maybe truly needed Diakonov here! Verhoeven read but digested?
7. Anat: pages 210ff.: van Dijk edition used; note the stronger foreign elements. I concur with the Isis “intervention” that a Horus-Seth constellation may be present.
8. But is myth used in incantation/medical curing. So we return to Assmann after all!
9. Is Hathor the divine prostitute?
10. The study is rambling from page 218 onwards. Too much is provided and the center of the discussion is diverted.
11. Eg, the “double quality” of females is stressed; see page 224.
12. Page 229: female characters are stated not to be “identical.”
13. He wants their mediating role. OK.
14. Structural “map.” Yet the tale of The Two Brothers is not a myth!
15. Is Bata “balanced” between Osiris and Seth?? Not proven I feel.

Chapter VII (Astarte)

1. Why again?
2. I agree import into Egypt: the basic “story,” and I shall not use the word “myth” — page 239.
3. He regards the “seashore” as the limes.
4. Is Astarte a “marginal figure”? page 243.
5. Yet on page 244 (again): the crucial point is the eulogy to Amunhotep II!
6. Oh! A different Seth, however. Pehal slipped here, I feel. If King > Seth, then this Seth is not the Sethian Egyptian deity versus Horus, etc.
7. Is the Egyptian account an “infiltration or appropriation of a West Semitic “myth”? But the core “myth” has not yet been shown< Hence, I would say that the *Urtext* was a secondary myth: pages 247ff.
8. Goes for appropriation; OK.

Accommodating Ambiguity

1. Here we reach Pehal’s additional chapter/section devoted to the Doomed Prince. This clearly has been added later than the completion of the previous analysis.
2. This final analysis presents an approach different than what was written previously or, to be more exact, Pehal has diverged a bit from his stated earlier methodological procedures that he followed from the start.
3. The analysis depends more upon the folkloric orientation of this literary account as befits its presentation. I noted, in particular, the reliance on the folklorist Dundes. See, as well, his discussion of “mythemes,” an aspect that fits well within the (universal) folkloric tradition. On the other hand, see Pehal’s discussion of the Isis-Osiris connection (xxix), although is this stretching the point too much?
4. The comparison with The Two Brothers makes sense, but with the *caveat* that the Doomed Prince does not really indicate an emphasis on Egyptian kingship and Egyptian religion. That is to say, unlike The Two Brothers, the Doomed Prince is quite simplistic in its plotting and backgrounding. It is also not as sophisticated with respect to the involutions of narrative development, See, in particular, pages vii and following. Note Pehal’s comments upon their “intensity” (page x). On the other hand, the issue of “intertextuality,” with respect to Manassa’s recent volume on New Kingdom literature, was worthwhile to read.
5. On pages ix and following Pehal rightly sees the weaknesses in Biase-Dyson’s approach, especially with respect to any comic aspect. Indeed, I adhere to Pehal’s term for the prince: “hero.” In many ways I found Biase-Dyson to be stretching (and not merely stating) the obvious (cf. pages xvi-xvii in re: the use of the vocative).
6. As for the prince surviving on “desert game.” Well, is this not an all too simple means of advancing the man’s travel northwards, somewhat akin to Sinuhe’s rapid progress described as “land passed me to land”? I.e., it is a rapid “space filling” of a radical nature.
7. Because the narrative/story is a simplistic one, was it necessary to provide a detailed study of the events? I believe that some of the paragraphs on pages xvii and following could have been condensed.
8. Note 59: *contra* Hornung. Is this correct? Similarly is not the analysis on pages xxxviff. also moot? — where are the dogs? Indeed, I do not agree with Pehal’s conclusion on the Seth/dog issue. The dog is last, I feel, because it is the closest

associate of the Hero. Indeed, the dog has been inseparable from the prince since the man was young. Was the dog killed at the end? I suspect that a good case can be made for 'no' instead of 'yes.'

9. Page xxxix, and on the 400 Year Old Stela: there are other later studies on this important document that could have been consulted.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Anthony Spalinger".

prof. Anthony Spalinger

2. 11. 2015