

# The Exodus Account in the Light of Egyptian Literary and Magical Texts

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## MOSES AS EQUAL TO PHARAOH

Exodus 7:1 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה רְאֵה נִתְּתִיךָ אֱלֹהִים לְפָרְעֹה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶחָיֶךָ יְהִי נְבִיאָךְ:

“Look, I have set you (as) a god to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your prophet.”

Exodus 4:16 וַדַּבֵּר־הוּא לְךָ אֶל־הָעַם וְהָיָה הוּא יְהִי־לְךָ לִפֶּה וְאַתָּה תִּהְיֶה־לּוֹ לְאֱלֹהִים:

“And it will be, he will be for you as a mouth, and you will be for him as a god.”

## HORUS AND SETH (from P. Jumilhac, Ptolemaic period)

*Another version:* Seth was ranging about looking for Horus when he was a child in his birthplace at Khemmis. His mother hid him in a papyrus-thicket, and the coverlet of Nephthys was over him. She hid him as “the royal-child (*inpw*) who is in the papyrus-thicket,” and so his name Anubis (*inpw*) came into being, and Mehet-imy-wet became his cult image.

*Another version:* he was sailing about in a boat (*inp*) of papyrus, and Isis said to Thoth, “Let me see my son who is hidden in the marshes.” Thoth said, “See him.” And Isis said, “Is that him (*in p3y pw*)?” And that is how his name Anubis (*inpw*) came into being, a name which on that account is given to every royal-child (*inpw*).

## **HORUS AND SETH** (pieced together from a variety of texts, O.K. onward)

To escape the wrath of Seth, Isis fled to the swamps of the Delta. There she gave birth to a boy, Horus. Isis “suckled the child in solitude, no one knew where.” The goddess of Buto, protectress of the Delta, cared for her. During his infancy Horus was subject to attacks of venomous snakes, scorpions, and diseases, from which only the magical powers of Isis could defend him. Horus grew and flourished in seclusion, and “when his arm was strong” he fought against Seth.

## **THE WAX CROCODILE** (P. Westcar, Hyksos period)

When day broke and the second day came, the caretaker informed the chief lector-priest Webaoner of the matter. Then he made a fire and from ebony and gold he made a crocodile of wax seven fingers long. He read out his magic words saying . . . “If anyone comes to bathe in my lake.” . . . Then he gave it to the caretaker and he said to him: “After the townsman goes down to the pool, as is his daily fashion, you shall cast the crocodile after him.” The caretaker went forth and he took the crocodile of wax with him.

. . . . .

After nightfall, the townsman returned as was his daily fashion, and the caretaker threw the crocodile of wax behind him into the water. At once it grew into a crocodile of seven cubits, and it took hold of the townsman. Webaoner tarried with his majesty the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Nebka the justified, for seven days, all the while the townsman was in the lake without breathing. After seven days had passed, his majesty the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Nebka the justified, came forth, and the chief lector-priest Webaoner placed himself in his

presence and said to him, “May your majesty come and see the marvel which has taken place in your majesty’s time.” His majesty went with Webaoner. He called out to the crocodile and said, “Bring back the townsman.” The crocodile came out of the water. Then the chief lector-priest said, “Open up!” and he opened up. Then he placed . . .

His majesty the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Nebka the justified, said, “This crocodile is indeed fearful!” But Webaoner bent down, and he caught it and it became a crocodile of wax in his hand. The chief lector-priest Webaoner told his majesty about the affair which the townsman had in his house with his wife.

. . . . .

This is the wonder which happened in the time of your father, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Nebka the justified, the deed of the chief lector-priest Webaoner.

## **PARALLELS TO THE TEN PLAGUES**

THE ADMONITIONS OF IPUWER (Egyptian sage, c. 1900 B.C.E.)

The river is blood. If one drink of it, one rejects it and thirsts for water. . . .

Barbarians from outside have come to Egypt. They are really no people.

HERODOTUS, *THE HISTORIES* (5th century B.C.E.), Book Two, section 37

Their priests shave the whole body every other day, that no lice or aught else that is foul may infest them in their service of the gods.

THE PROPHECY OF NEFERTI (Egyptian sage, c. 2000 B.C.E.)

The sun disc is covered. It will not shine, allowing people to see. . . . No one knows when midday occurs, for his shadow cannot be distinguished.

SETNE KHAMWAS AND SI-OSIRE (SETNE II) (Demotic text, P. BM 604 verso)

Setne Khamwas is the son of Rameses II and high priest of Memphis, and a great magician, about whom there is a series of stories. But in one story his son Si-Osire surpasses him in wisdom and magic. In the course of the story, Si-Osire quotes an unnamed Nubian magician:

One of them was talking in a loud voice and said among other things: “Were it not that Amun would find fault with me, and that the king of Egypt would punish me, I would cast my sorceries upon Egypt and would make the people of Egypt spend three days and three nights seeing no light, only darkness.”

PYRAMID TEXT (from pyramid of Unas at Saqqara, c. 2300 B.C.E.)

It is the king who will be judged with Him-whose-name-is-hidden on that day of the slaying of the first-born.

COFFIN TEXT (c. 2000 B.C.E.)

I am he who will be judged with Him-whose-name-is-hidden on that night of the slaying of the first-born.

## **PARALLELS TO THE SPLITTING OF THE SEA**

SETNE KHAMWAS AND NANEFERKAPTAH (SETNE I)

(Demotic text, P. Cairo 30646)

He [Naneferkaptah] said to the rowers, “Row me to the place where the book is!” They rowed by night as by day. In three days he reached it. He cast sand before him, and a gap formed in the river. He found six miles of snakes, scorpions, and all kinds of reptiles around the place where the book was. He found an eternal serpent

around this same box. He recited a spell to the six miles of snakes, scorpions, and all kinds of reptiles that were around the box, and did not let them come up. . . .

#### THE BOATING PARTY (P. Westcar, Hyksos period)

Said his majesty, “Djadja-em-ankh, my brother, I did as you said. His majesty’s heart was refreshed seeing them row. Then a pendant of new turquoise of one of the princesses fell into the water. She stopped rowing and thereby ruined her side. I said to her, “Why have you stopped rowing?” She said to me, “Because the pendant of new turquoise fell into the water.” I said to her, “Row! I shall replace it for you!” She said to me, “I prefer my thing to one like it.”

Then the chief lector-priest Djadja-em-ankh said his say of magic. He placed one side of the lake’s water upon the other, and he found the pendant lying on a shard. He brought it and gave it to its owner. Now the water that had been twelve cubits deep on its back had become twenty-four cubits when it was turned back. Then he said his say of magic and returned the waters of the lake to their place.

His majesty spent the day feasting with the entire palace. Then he rewarded the chief lector-priest Djadja-em-ankh with all good things. This is the wonder that happened in the time of your father King Snefru the justified, the deed of the chief lector-priest and scribe of books Djadja-emankh.

## DROWNING MOTIF

AMDUAT, 10TH HOUR (19th Dynasty)

You are those who are within Nun, the drowned ones who are in his following.

May life belong to your *bas*!

HERODOTUS, *THE HISTORIES* (5th century B.C.E.), Book Two, section 90

When anyone, be he Egyptian or stranger, is known to have been carried off by a crocodile or drowned by the river itself, such a person must by all means be embalmed and tended as fairly as may be, and be buried in a sacred coffin by the townsmen of the place where he is cast up. Nor may any of his kinsfolk or his friends touch him, but his body is deemed something more than human, and is handled and buried by the priests of the Nile themselves.

