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## Divine Conflict in the Pyramid Texts

VINCENT ARIEH TOBIN

Conflict between gods or between groups of gods was an important motif in virtually every ancient mythic system, being found in Canaan, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and even to an extent in ancient Israel, although the latter culture was, at least according to certain interpretations, a myth-free society. The signification of such conflicts varied from culture to culture and was a highly complex matter, being dependent upon natural, social, political, and religious factors. To the later philosophical mind it might appear highly incongruous that the gods, symbols of the ideal society, should do battle with one another; but it is necessary to recognize that, insofar as conflict was a common feature of life in much of the ancient world, it was only natural that it should become mythologized and used either to reflect events and happenings in the divine world or to produce a practical effect which would ameliorate or stabilize the conditions of the natural, social, and/or political order. Divine conflict in the general traditions of ancient myth could exert its influence on any of these areas of human experience, and it was not an infrequent phenomenon for a specific myth to encompass within itself two or even more of these realms. With regard to the Egyptian Pyramid Texts, the major concern of the present study is the purpose and meaning of divine conflict, specifically the conflict or conflicts which involved Seth, Osiris, and Horus, as it was formulated and presented in those texts.

It should be stressed at the outset that the conflict in which these three deities engage in the Pyramid Texts is a theomachy, a divine conflict, not an heroic conflict. Between the heroic conflict of traditional saga and the divine conflict, which belongs more properly to the realm of myth, there is little direct connec-

tion. Traditions of heroic conflict are found in most mythologies, but are more correctly assigned to the area of legend and saga rather than to that of authentic myth. Such traditions are frequently based on historical fact, however vague that fact may be, and usually have as their purpose the creation of national or local pride through the glorification of a national or local hero. This is not to deny the fact that heroic legends can eventually take on the functions of myth, thus changing their emphasis and purpose. For example, in the saga of Aqhet in Canaanite tradition, the figure of Aqhet, although of heroic nature, is very closely connected with the fertility of the earth.<sup>1</sup> Eventually, by the Classical period of Greek culture, and due mainly to the Homeric *Iliad*, Greek heroic saga became the norm for conflict traditions in that particular society, theomachies taking a secondary and even legendary position. Such a development was due also to the rise of Greek rationalism as opposed to mythologically based expression.<sup>2</sup> With regard to the

<sup>1</sup> See John Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan* (Leiden, 1965), 125f.

<sup>2</sup> Greece was the *locus classicus* of heroic conflict in the ancient world, due particularly to the account and concept of such conflict as it was defined in the Homeric *Iliad* and to a lesser extent the *Odyssey*. It is probably no exaggeration to say that the Homeric concept of heroism shaped Greek and even Roman thinking for the duration of the two civilizations. This concept of heroic conflict had little to do directly with the gods or considerations of religious belief or experience apart from the fact that heroism was favoured by the gods and often fostered by them in certain human individuals. Greek heroic conflict became an essentially humanistic value and was expressed particularly in the Homeric formula αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπέροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων ("always to be the noblest and to remain pre-eminent above others"), *Iliad* VI, 8. The essential goal of such conflict in the Homeric tradition was the proving of the worth of the individual. By way of contrast, conflict involving the gods in

Egyptian Pyramid Texts, it could be reasonably argued that the king is at times portrayed in the guise of a heroic warrior. Such an expression, however, was intended more to augment the royal prestige and position than to influence the signification of divine conflict.

That the Pyramid Texts placed a strong emphasis on the symbol of divine conflict is evident in the abundance of references to various instances of struggle, the classic instances of such conflicts being those between Seth and Osiris on the one hand and between Seth and Horus on the other. If one succumbs to the temptation to see Egyptian myth in the same category as the myth of the Classical world (particularly myth as it was delineated in the Homeric tradition), the natural tendency might be to attempt a systematization of the conflict theme in Egyptian thought and thus to create a "Pyramid Text epic" of a conflict which has a specific beginning and results in a final and definitive outcome. Although the Pyramid Texts do not present any finished account of a wider conflict, be it cosmological or political, it must be admitted that a synthesis of the various references to divine conflict can be made without any insurmountable difficulty simply by connecting a number of varied references from the texts. Nor can it be denied that the compilers of the texts may have had some concept of a temporal relationship in the events of the conflicts involving Seth, Osiris, and Horus. References to Horus avenging the death of Osiris are too numerous to permit any avoidance of

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Homeric tradition was frequently of little consequence or even comic in nature: for example, the wounding of Aphrodite by Diomedes in *Iliad* V, 334ff. This is not to deny that earlier Greek tradition had numerous symbols of divine conflict, many of them with serious purpose and significance. Hesiod in his *Theogony* provides sufficient proof of this, but in the latter work conflict among the gods assumes more of a mytho-historical character. Greek rationalism, however, was sufficiently strong that the mythic nature of these conflicts took second place to the authentic heroic tradition. Nor can it be denied that an heroic tradition was known in Egypt, at least at a later date, the descriptions and portrayals of the warrior Pharaohs of the New Kingdom being sufficient proof of this. In the Pyramid Texts, however, this heroic warrior tradition has either not yet fully emerged or has been overshadowed by the more important phenomenon of the authentic theomachy.

the idea that the conflict of Horus with Seth, at least in some of its statements, is the natural sequel to an earlier struggle between Seth and Osiris.<sup>3</sup> Nor can the absence of a detailed account of such a broader conflict be called as evidence for the lack of such a concept, for it may be argued that no specific and complete account can be expected in texts which are basically cultic and ritual. However, the essentially non-dogmatic and non-rational nature of Egyptian myth and religion<sup>4</sup> would have implied no real necessity for the creation of any orthodox version of a conflict tradition. The symbols used in the creation of myths and mythic statements need not necessarily have been static and fixed in a specific order, but were rather marked by a certain degree of fluidity. Hence their usage could without difficulty or contradiction have varied according to the needs of the particular myths and cultic situations.

A general assumption that a broad narration of a general divine conflict involving Osiris, Seth, and Horus must have existed during the Pyramid age is basically unwarranted. Textual evidence certainly shows that at later periods such a wider tradition was known,<sup>5</sup> but this

<sup>3</sup> J. G. Griffiths (*The Conflict of Horus and Seth* [Liverpool, 1960], 5) points out that the Pyramid Texts contain only one instance where Horus is said actually to kill Seth in revenge for Osiris. The passage in question (*PT* 1977b) reads: "... he has killed for you the one who killed you ..." (*sm<sup>3</sup>.n.f n.k sm<sup>3</sup> tw*). (It should be noted, however, that a similar reference to the killing of Seth as an ox or a wild bull may be found in *PT* 1544b, a text which also seems to be the accompaniment to a sacrificial ritual.) Griffiths also points out that the basic reference of the statement is to the sacrificial killing of an animal connected with Seth. While this latter suggestion does not shed any specific light on the wider significance of the Horus/Seth conflict, it does at least underscore the cultic and ritual usage of the text in question and downplays any literal interpretation of it. I would suggest, however, that if the Horus/Seth conflict had been seen as only the natural sequel to the death of Osiris, i.e., revenge for the murder of the latter, one might expect to find more references to an actual death of Seth at the hands of Horus as a suitable act of retaliation.

<sup>4</sup> See R. Anthes in *JNES* 18 (1959), 170.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Spell 148 of the Coffin Texts makes it evident that an earlier struggle between Osiris and Seth had taken place in which Osiris had been killed and that the actions of Horus are to be a continuation of that episode. Moreover, the well known Late Egyptian account of the Horus/Seth conflict shows a very detailed knowledge of a tradition of conflict which is almost epic in its proportions.

does not necessarily imply the existence of such a tradition in the age of the Pyramids. Even if such a tradition had already been formulated or was in the process of formulation during the Old Kingdom, the Pyramid Texts give no real evidence that this postulated tradition had actually influenced the usage of the materials contained in the Pyramid Text rituals. With regard to the materials presented in the Pyramid Texts, the safest approach is to see such materials as being utilized within the context of the rituals associated with each specific cultic text. Moreover, it is equally important to establish an understanding of the nature of the cult and of the myth associated with it. Each individual cultic text presents a ritual in which the articulation of the spoken word would have actualized or created a mythic event as was necessary for the specific goal and purpose of the ritual.<sup>6</sup> The nature of Egyptian myth was without doubt similar to that of Canaanite myth which has been aptly described as “[...] the creative word, which, according to the current conception of the operative force of the spoken word cast in regular measure and graphic language and imagery, could double the efficacy of the ritual act.”<sup>7</sup> The importance of myth, therefore, lay not in the correctness of the exact details of its content nor in its ability to articulate an orthodox formula of belief, but rather in its ability to produce a positive social, natural and/or political result. “The actualization in myth and ritual of the initial establishment of Order against the menace of Chaos was at once a means of preserving the status quo and a provision for the future with the effect of relieving the emotional tension of men and of assuring them of the future.”<sup>8</sup> The cult and its myth may aptly be described as the image of the reality portrayed or articulated in the ritual. The cult, the dramatically performed ritual, was the visi-

ble image, while the myth, the spoken word, was the audible image. In the official cultic setting, the combination of visible and audible imagery functioned to create a concrete reality. This reality was not only symbolically represented in the cult, but was present in actuality. The image, both acted and spoken, itself became the reality signified by that image. This is the “real” aspect of myth and cult, the actualization of an event or a state of affairs. Such an understanding of the nature of myth underscores the fact that myth need not articulate a dogmatic truth. It does more than *articulate* such a truth; in effect, it *creates* a truth which is apprehended through cultic experience.

This approach to the mythic material in question neither affirms nor denies the existence of a broader narrative system, but it does suggest that the specific cultic references would have been valid even when divorced from such a broader system or even in the total absence of the latter. In brief, the rituals recorded in the Pyramid Texts need not have depended on any wider synthesis and hence they cannot be adduced as proof for the existence of such a synthesis or extended narrative pre-existent to the creation of the individual cultic statements. The various mythic elements in the Pyramid Texts should be interpreted only within the context wherein they are found, that is, in the specific cultic and ritual setting of each text. Any claim that they may be reflections of a wider tradition of myth certainly presents a valid assumption, but does not necessarily add anything to an understanding of their specific ritual occurrences. What may be deduced from references to conflict in the Pyramid Texts, however, is that conflict as a general theme may have had a significance somewhat broader than each specific reference, and that particular cultic mentions of conflict were practical applications of this wider significance.

An important consideration lies in the question of the origin of the conflict theme; and the temptation to see its roots in the phenomena of the natural world is a strong one. Such a solution to the question of origins is made even more plausible when one considers that fertility motifs were very common in ancient Near Eastern myth. The nature and purpose of Canaanite

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The latter story, however, is a work of fiction rather than a mythic account, and with regard to Spell 148 of the Coffin Texts, one wonders if it may not have been more significant as a dramatic work than as a cultic ritual.

<sup>6</sup> R. Anthes states in *JAOS* 74 (1954), 38: “It was the word uttered in the course of the performance which *ad hoc* created the mythical event.”

<sup>7</sup> J. Gray, *Legacy*, 13.

<sup>8</sup> *Loc. cit.*

myth, for example, was largely directed towards the fertility of the earth,<sup>9</sup> a fact obvious both in the Canaanite corpus of myth and in the reflections of that myth in its influence on the religious practices of the Hebrews. The Canaanite deity Ba'al (Hbr. בעל) was "responsible for the distribution of rain. [...] his life and death meant life and death to farmers and cattle-breeders and thereby to the whole society."<sup>10</sup> The conflicts of Ba'al were no less important than those of Horus, and although Ba'al engaged in a number of conflicts,<sup>11</sup> his most significant ones were with Yam-Nahar, Mot (Death) and El. Ba'al's struggles with Yam-Nahar and with El were political in their signification,<sup>12</sup> but

<sup>9</sup> See A. S. Kapelrud, *Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts* (Copenhagen, 1952), 20.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 98ff.

<sup>12</sup> Although scholarly research has proven the importance of the conflict between Ba'al and El, it is by no means a clearly defined tradition. One interpretation of the myth states that "the young, strong Ba'al was a new god in the Ugaritic pantheon who, apparently slowly, drove El out of the leading place in the pantheon" (Oldenburg, *The Conflict Between El and Ba'al in Canaanite Religion* [Leiden, 1969], 101f.). The myth itself, however, is not so simplistic. The replacement of El by Ba'al was an historical process for which a mythic explanation had to be devised. The Ugaritic texts from Ras Shamra, however, do not provide a single detailed account of the conflict between the two deities, just as the Pyramid Texts do not provide a clear account of the Osiris/Seth/Horus struggle. Hence, it may be that there was never in existence such an account. However, the conflict did take place on the historical level as a development in religion; i.e., the growth of the new god Ba'al, and some reflections of that are found in the Canaanite texts. Any detailed account of the struggle, however, must be reconstructed, exactly as the Egyptian tradition of the Osiris/Seth/Horus conflict. Oldenburg (*op. cit.*, 122–42) provides a reconstruction of the myth of the conflict and shows it to be of virtually epic proportions. The importance of the Ba'al myth may be summarized as follows. Ba'al was a new Amorite god and, for political reasons, was made king of the gods by his worshippers. This process was then reflected in myth, but the creation of the myth was very long drawn out, as is to be expected in the conservative setting of religious tradition. Eventually, a sufficient number of mythic references to Ba'al's conquest of El were in existence to permit the realization of a generalized conquest tradition. Oldenburg (*op. cit.*, 122) speaks of the "proper chronological order" of the narrative, but one may question whether there ever was an accepted orthodox tradition of the conflict. I would suggest rather that scattered references and individual episodes may have formed a general Ba'al/El con-

his fight with Mot was clearly a fertility symbol, a cult myth dramatized at the outset of each seven-year cycle.<sup>13</sup> In this particular myth, Mot functions to an extent as a Seth figure, being responsible for the death of Ba'al, although without the traditional treachery of Seth and in a contest more equal than the struggle of Seth with Osiris. Like Osiris, Ba'al was a dying and rising god, but his death and resurrection were connected with the sterility of the earth in the dry season and its subsequent fertility after the winter rains. The point of comparison between Ba'al and Osiris is the death and rebirth of both deities, but it appears unlikely that the fertility signification of Ba'al's death and resurrection has any real parallel in the Osiris tradition. The latter tradition seems to be rather a reflection of political considerations.<sup>14</sup>

flict tradition, but that a definitive and final account of the conflict may never have existed. Finally, it must be noted that Ba'al and El never became irreconcilable enemies. In fact, the two deities eventually came to the point where they complemented one another in the mythic structure of the divine world. F. M. Cross (*Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* [Harvard University Press, 1973], 43) describes their relationship thus: "His (El's) characteristic mode of manifestation appears to be the vision or audition, often in dreams. This mode stands in strong contrast to the theophany of the storm god whose voice is the thunder and who goes out to battle riding the cloud chariot, shaking the mountains with stormy blasts of his nostrils, striking the enemy with fiery bolts. Ba'al comes near in his shining storm cloud. El is the transcendent one."

<sup>13</sup> U. Oldenburg, *op. cit.*, 37.

<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that in Egypt Ba'al was identified with Seth during and after the period of the Hyksos, the belligerent nature of Ba'al providing an obvious point of comparison as well as the fact that both Seth and Ba'al were associated with storms. The parallel was not total, however, for although Ba'al took the position of El, and El was in effect the upholder of order, Ba'al's action was not a disruption of order as Seth's was a disruption of Ma'at. The point of contact between Ba'al and Seth was the conflict and the violence. Ba'al, however, was not a villain. Nor was his defeat of El a total defeat, for the latter still retained his supreme position, although in a withdrawn manner, his primacy no longer being an active force. El became in effect a *deus otiosus*. Ba'al also had a certain Osirian function in that he was defeated in his battle with Mot (Death) and actually died, but was later resurrected. Thus, parallels with Egyptian tradition are multiple in Canaanite tradition; but they are not total, and one is hardly justified in seeing influence from either one on the other. In any event, influence from Canaan on Egypt would have been a chronological impossibility. Ba'al's entry into the Canaanite pantheon appears to

At least one interpretation of the significance of divine conflict in the Pyramid Texts can be proposed with a relative degree of safety, and that is the idea that the ultimate meaning of the conflict theme is to be found in its successful outcome. Thus, it may be suggested that the importance of the Horus/Seth conflict lies in the fact that Horus eventually defeats Seth, either in hand to hand combat or in the legal setting of a court trial and thus gains the kingship as his rightful and inherited possession. Such an interpretation does not constitute an overly ambitious reconstruction of a mythic narrative, but it does conjoin two elements, conflict and conquest, which may not have necessarily belonged together in the sense that one element was a *sine qua non vis-à-vis* the other. Thus one may ask whether the Horus/Seth conflict would have necessarily had to be resolved by the ultimate victory of Horus over Seth, or whether the conflict could have had significance as a single mythic symbol in its own right without reference to its victorious outcome.

For purposes of contrast and comparison, Canaanite tradition may again be considered at this point. Conflict in Canaanite myth quite clearly depended for its signification on the actual fact of conquest. The earliest instance of theomachy in Canaanite myth, earliest both mythologically and chronologically, was the conflict between El and his father Shamem, a struggle in which El was victorious and then castrated Shamem in order to take over the position of king of the gods.<sup>15</sup> A striking parallel may be seen here with early Greek myth wherein Kronos defeats and castrates his father Ouranos (Heaven) and consequently becomes king of the gods. Later the pattern is repeated when Kronos is defeated and thrown into the underworld by his son Zeus. In both the Canaanite and Greek traditions we find the mutilation theme (in these instances castration) which oc-

curs in the earlier Egyptian tradition of Horus and Seth, the latter tradition containing the double mutilation in the removal of the Eye of Horus and the testicles of Seth. In the Canaanite and Greek traditions, conquest and mutilation appear to belong together, a combination which may not have been absolutely necessary in the Egyptian tradition.

The Pyramid Texts contain a few statements which make reference to the mutilations resulting from the conflict between Horus and Seth without, however, stressing the victorious outcome of that conflict. I refer here to those texts which mention the Eye of Horus and the testicles of Seth as entities which have been detached from their respective owners and are presented as offerings to the dead king. *PT* 535a-b refers to the bringing of the Eye of Horus and the testicles of Seth to the king, and one version (535c) adds a reference to the bringing of the arm of Thoth. It is, however, obvious that the reference here is to offerings which are voluntarily made and need not imply any acts of hostility. *PT* 594a is more explicit in referring to a forceful removal of the Eye and testicles of the respective deities (*ih in Hr n irt.f ih in Stš n hrwy.fy*). The latter text, moreover, also adds definite references to hostilities with Seth concerning the Eye of Horus. *PT* 679d is very explicit about the aggressiveness involved against both the Eye and the testicles (*hr Hr hr irt.f pšs Stš hr hrwy.fy*), but this statement is made in the context of a spell against snakes, and the reference to the wounding of the two deities thus appears to be used as a threat against serpents. Mention should also be made of the numerous texts in which the Eye of Horus is used as a symbol of various offerings presented to the dead monarch,<sup>16</sup> but these references do not necessarily depend on any concept of a previous conflict which had resulted in the removal of the Eye. The point which should be made concerning such texts is that the detached Eye and testicles of the respective deities, although at times implying active hostilities, were also used as symbols whose significance could be totally divorced from any belligerent context. Whether the Eye and testicles came to

have started at Ugarit at about 2,000 B.C.E. and to have gradually spread over the area during the next five centuries (Oldenburg, *op. cit.*, 145). The mythological conflict between Ba'al and El may well be a reflection of the Amorite invasions of the area which commenced about the same date. Such parallels do, however, show a mythologization of common themes by both Egyptians and Canaanites.

<sup>15</sup> F. M. Cross, *op. cit.*, 41.

<sup>16</sup> See the various texts included in Utterances 39–99 (*PT* 31–36).

be used as symbols of offerings as a result of a prior tradition of conflict or whether this usage arose independently makes little difference for the present purpose. The point to be noted is the *independent* application of these symbols to a specific cultic context, a context in which the conflict element has no importance and which illustrates the highly flexible manner in which such mythic symbols could be employed.

More frequently, references to the Horus/Seth conflict are given their significance from the fact that the conflict results in a final victory for Horus. *PT* 1286–1287 presents a vivid and even bloodthirsty account of Horus' defeat of Seth and his followers, the wider context of the text containing also references to the resurrection of the King as Osiris and to the recognition given to the royal deceased. *PT* 1242b-c speaks of the conflict of Horus and Seth as what appears to be a hand to hand combat, situating that combat at On and referring to the recovery of the Eye as a symbol of ultimate victory. In this context the Eye is actually recovered by the deceased monarch (i.e., the Osiris-king), but the practical connection between Osiris and Horus is so intimate that little or no distinction need be made between the accomplishments of the two. The notable point, however, is the fact that the recovery of the Eye is the positive outcome of the battle and signifies victory for Horus and/or Osiris. Utterance 260 is very specific about the role of the king as Horus in ending the matter at On<sup>17</sup> and stopping the fight of the quarreling deities.<sup>18</sup> The role of Horus in this reference is essentially a dual one: on the one hand he is one of the two combatants, and on the other hand he is the one who, through external intervention, terminates the conflict, this duality being comprehensible when one considers the intimate identification between the earthly monarch and the more transcendent figure of Horus portrayed in the myth.<sup>19</sup> It is important to note here the fact that the

achievement of the king as Horus in ending the struggle is seen as a positive accomplishment, a sign and proof of his royal power. The same text gives indication of the political significance of the conflict, for the utterance opens with the statement that the monarch is "Horus, the heir of his father."<sup>20</sup> The complexity of the usage of the symbol in this instance is evident in the fact that said symbol may be understood on three contemporaneous levels: the mythological struggle between the two deities, the triumph of the deceased king in the next world, and the success of the heir apparent in gaining the terrestrial throne, the mythic nature of the statement making this triple usage of the symbol viable without any inherent contradiction.<sup>21</sup>

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Horus may vary, but my own inclination is to see the political role as the essential origin of Horus, even a title like Ra-Herakhtey being a later mytho-theological extension of the earthly monarch. It is, I suspect, doubtful that the two concepts would have emerged completely contemporaneously, and the practical considerations of giving a mythological justification to the earthly kingship would have probably caused emphasis to be placed on the political nature of Horus rather than on the more speculative interest in the celestial Horus

<sup>20</sup> *PT* 316a.

<sup>21</sup> The conquest theme in Canaanite myth admits of a less complex interpretation than does the same theme in the Egyptian myth. The Canaanite conflict between Ba'al and El was concerned with who would be the leading god. Like the struggle of Horus and Seth in its later version, the conflict of Ba'al and El "seems to have been a long out-drawn struggle, as much fought behind the scene as on it" (A. S. Kapelrud, op. cit., 86). There appears to be little doubt that this mythic struggle was entirely political, at least within the confines of religious tradition. Ba'al's conflict with El resulted in Ba'al winning the position as king of the gods. His (Ba'al's) followers "wanted to show that the claims of other gods to be king [...] were empty. Ba'al was the god on Sapan, king and supreme judge" (ibid., 145). It thus appears that Ba'al, the supreme god of the Canaanite pantheon, won his position through conflict exactly as Horus did in Egypt. In the case of Ba'al, however, it was he himself who was the usurper, and yet his taking of the throne was justified through his victory over El. The Egyptian myth-makers, on the other hand, showed concern to delineate clearly the fact that the victory of Horus was indeed justified by other criteria than mere conquest. The essential difference between the outcomes in the respective struggles lies in the Egyptian principle of Ma'at, a principle lacking in Canaanite tradition. Moreover, the Canaanite myth of Ba'al and El does not exhibit the same complexities of political ideology as is found in the Egyptian myth of Horus and Seth.

<sup>17</sup> *PT* 318b.

<sup>18</sup> *PT* 319a.

<sup>19</sup> Horus in the Pyramid Texts must be seen as a deity who is essentially dual, not in his nature, but in his signification. He is at one and the same time the celestial Horus and the Horus who is the earthly monarch. Opinions as to which of these two significations was applied to the original

The last reference mentioned centers the interest of the conflict around the figure of Horus, and its victorious outcome pertains only to Horus, sufficient indication that the Horus/Seth conflict need not be always seen in any wider context. This Horus-centered interest of the conflict theme is even more evident when the conflict is articulated in terms of a legal trial. Utterance 519, for example, states that “Horus took possession of his father’s house from his father’s brother Seth in the presence of Geb.”<sup>22</sup> This expression of conflict as a trial in the presence of the court of On, however, points to the same purpose as its more violent articulations, that purpose being the obtaining of his rightful inheritance on the part of Horus. The immediate context of this text appears to be in the next world, but a parallel action on the part of the terrestrial heir apparent should not be ruled out and should in fact be taken as a real possibility. Indeed, the very nature of mythic symbolism, which is confined neither to time nor to place, makes it likely that one is justified in seeing herein an essentially double signification, i.e., the recognition of the deceased monarch as king and the parallel legitimization of the crown prince as the next earthly monarch. Such an interpretation of the text underscores the essentially political use of the conflict symbol, although it does not necessarily constitute proof that a political consideration was its original source.

Other references extend the result of the conflict further and interpret the victory of Horus as having its importance in the avenging and vindication of Osiris, the practical result of this not infrequently being the resurrection of the dead Osiris. Utterance 606, for example, has Horus, presumably the heir apparent, state: “I am Horus, protector of his father. I have struck (*hwi*) for you him who struck you; I have protected you, my father Osiris-*N.*, from him who would do harm to you,”<sup>23</sup> a statement which is followed by the announcement that Osiris has been established on the throne of Atum-Re. A resurrection text (Utterance 482) expresses the same idea more concisely, stress-

ing the action of Horus as a *lex talionis*: “He has struck him who struck you; he has bound him who bound you.”<sup>24</sup> In a similar manner, Utterance 422, a text in which the dead king becomes a spirit, describes the action of Horus as protecting his father so that the latter may arise and claim his kingship: “The son has protected (*nd*) his father; Horus has protected Osiris; Horus has protected *N.* from his enemies. You shall arise, O *N.*, protected and provided as a god [. . .] on the throne of Khenty-Amentiu.”<sup>25</sup> The protection of Osiris by Horus (who is here probably the heir apparent) is equivalent to the deification of the dead god/king. A number of other references also point to the concept of Horus defeating the enemy of the dead king, although these need not be quoted in detail.<sup>26</sup> In this context, Utterance 371 is notable, for in conjunction with the statement of Horus’ protection of Osiris, Osiris is also told: “Go out against your enemy, for you are greater than he.”<sup>27</sup> Here the action of Horus results not only in Osiris’ being passively protected, but also in his being made actively aggressive against his foe who is presumably Seth but who remains unnamed.

Although the avenging and vindication of Osiris may not have been an integral part of the original Horus/Seth conflict, the editors of the Pyramid Texts have for the most part made it so. The obviously royal nature of Osiris and the stress placed on Horus’ gaining of his rightful political position as a result of his victory both indicate that in the final analysis a political signification was intended to be seen in the conflict symbolism. Despite the generally negative associations frequently attached to Seth,<sup>28</sup> he

<sup>24</sup> *hw.f hw tw k3s.f k3s tw* (PT 1007c).

<sup>25</sup> PT 758c–759b.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, PT 587b, 591a (where Horus’ act of protection is also combined with a reference to the recovery of the Eye and its presentation to Osiris), 637a, 642a, and 1333–34 (where the duty of protecting Osiris and smiting [*hwi*] Seth is given to the four sons of Horus).

<sup>27</sup> *pr ir hfty.k tw wr ir.f* (PT 648d).

<sup>28</sup> H. Te Velde (*Seth, God of Confusion* [Leiden: 1967], 3–7) gives ample evidence of the disruptive nature of Seth, and the usage of the Seth animal as a determinative in a number of terms with negative connotations also serves to underscore the fact that Seth was a force which essentially pointed to lack of order.

<sup>22</sup> *mi itt Hr pr n it.f m-c sn it.f Stš m b3h Gb* (PT 1219d).

<sup>23</sup> PT 1685.



was nevertheless given a place in the Heliopolitan Ennead, an obvious acknowledgement that he, or what he signified, was recognized by the Egyptian mind as a necessity, or at least a reality, which could not be avoided. Even if Seth be seen as a totally negative symbol, his negative force is recognized by its place in the mythic system. So also, the manner in which Seth's familial relationship can change in accordance with the specific mythic pattern (at times brother to Osiris and at other times brother to Horus) may be taken as an indication that his abstract significance is of greater importance than his position as a personalized deity. It may of course be argued with good reason that as Osiris and Horus are basically one and the same being (i.e., two hypostases of the divine essence of kingship), Osiris being nothing other than the deceased Horus, so Seth's fraternal relationship to each is readily comprehensible. Even this argument, however, serves to stress the necessary balance which is created by the juxtaposition of Seth with both Horus and Osiris, for in each case Seth is the negative counterpart of order. Such an interpretation stresses the negative nature of Seth, and it cannot be denied that the general picture of Seth in the Pyramid Texts is highly negative, Seth being the would-be usurper of the royal power which rightfully belongs to Horus/Osiris.

The Pyramid Texts also give some indication of an essential equality between Horus and Seth, an equality in which both deities share similar honor and a similar signification as symbols of legitimate kingship. Although Horus appears as the accepted deity of kingship, Seth too is at times indicated as a royal god. *PT* 204a speaks of Seth as "the one who dwells at Nubet, the Lord of Upper Egypt," and the Seth element in the name of Peribsen during the Second Dynasty gives due recognition to the regal nature of this deity. It is, therefore, not an unwarranted conclusion that the original nature of Seth may have had very little in common with his later destructive and disruptive nature. The suggestion that Seth may have been originally a royal god of Naqada,<sup>29</sup> who was only later sub-

ordinated to Horus, is a plausible one, and the origins of the conflict with Horus may reflect the rise of Nekhen and the subsequent decline of Naqada. Such a theory would thus stress the political origin for the Horus/Seth conflict,<sup>30</sup> and would moreover see it as the *original* conflict, Seth's enmity to Osiris being an element which was added only later after the addition of Osiris to the mythic system. It must, however, be stressed that other interpretations can be called to argue against the purely political origins of the Horus/Seth conflict, and one must be wary of being too dogmatic about the political interpretation. I am rather inclined to think that even earlier pre-political elements may have contributed to the formulation of the conflict theme, but such elements are too far removed in the early history of religious development to be delineated with any degree of accuracy. However, it appears to be relatively safe to suggest that for the compilers of the Pyramid Texts it was above all the political overtones of Horus and Seth which held any real importance.

It is possible to see in the Horus/Seth conflict a symbol which was given two separate—or at least eventually separated—means of expression and articulation and two distinct interpretations. In one of the traditions of this conflict, Horus and Seth are presented as respectively positive and negative forces, i.e., the rightful heir and the usurper. In such an account of the conflict, the natural outcome would have been the conquest of Seth by Horus, a conquest in which, to use Egyptian terms of reference, *isft* would have been destroyed and Ma'at established in the victory of the rightful ruling house. I would suggest that this interpretation would in all likelihood have been the later of

<sup>29</sup> J. Baines, "Egyptian Myth and Discourse: Myth, Gods, and the Early Written and Iconographic Record," *JNES* 50 (1991), 98.

<sup>30</sup> J. G. Griffiths (*The Conflict of Horus and Seth*, 39f.) argues for the basically political origin of the conflict and rejects the cosmological interpretation of Frankfort. My own inclination is towards the opinion of Griffiths, although it would probably be a mistake completely to reject the cosmological implications of the tradition. Even if the political origins were essentially prior or more influential in the formulation of the conflict tradition, the cosmological implications do not decrease significantly in importance even if they were a somewhat later addition. In dealing with the development of religion one must always bear in mind the psychological complexity of religious symbols even in a relatively primitive society.

the two, formulated at a time after issues of specific royal legitimacy had been raised, i.e., possibly the internal struggles during the Second Dynasty. An earlier interpretation, however, may have been inclined to see Horus and Seth as equally legitimate symbols of equally legitimate kingships,<sup>31</sup> and a source for this interpretation may possibly be seen in the Pre-dynastic struggles between two Upper Egyptian centers of power. This interpretation would not necessarily exclude any nature origins for Horus and Seth, but it would state that such nature origins would have had to be radically suppressed in favor of the newer political significance. In such a struggle, there would have been no right or wrong, no necessity of making Horus into the hero and Seth into the villain, nor would Horus, in such a case, be seen as the universal deity he is in some segments of the Pyramid Texts. Hence, a satisfactory outcome would not have necessitated a conquest of Seth by Horus but rather a reconciliation of the two. Although conquest and reconciliation are not necessarily mutually exclusive, reconciliation *after* conquest could be considered mythically redundant. Moreover, the different presentations of the conflict theme in the Pyramid Texts normally opt for one of the two solutions rather than attempting to combine them.

References to the conquest of Seth by Horus are sufficiently common in the Pyramid Texts to permit the general conclusion that such was the "orthodox" Pyramid Text doctrine of the out-

<sup>31</sup> The equality of Horus and Seth is evident in the similar functions which the two gods carry out with respect to the deceased king. Both, for example, in various parts of the Pyramid Texts, are said to guard the royal tomb; both raise the king; both lead him to the underworld; both provide him with shelter; and the king can be identified with both. In such references there are no traces of any previous conflict between the two deities, and hence it appears likely that statements of this nature reflect a mythic tradition in which Horus and Seth were two balanced symbols of royal power, not unlike the usage of the symbol of Isis and Nephthys. These portrayals of Horus and Seth must reflect a concept which either followed (mythically) after a reconciliation of the two or had even existed independently of any conflict tradition. If the parallel actions of the two gods are a post-reconciliation addition, then it may be possible to date them after the end of the Second Dynasty and the end of the struggles which resulted in the foundation of the Old Kingdom.

come of the conflict. At the same time, there are also references to a reconciliation between the two, implying that the combatants are equal in their rights and in their dignity. Even before the reconciliation theme, the mutual mutilations (i.e., the Eye of Horus and the testicles of Seth) imply a certain equality in that both deities suffer a loss which must be rectified. It is of interest to note that this rectification is entrusted to the deceased monarch in Utterance 215: "You shall spit on the face of Horus to remove the injury which is his; you shall pick up the testicles of Seth to remove his mutilation."<sup>32</sup>

A similar parallel healing of the two deities may be seen in Utterance 475: "Bring this to Horus, bring his Eye; bring this to Seth, bring his testicles."<sup>33</sup> This concomitant healing of the two deities does not explicitly imply their reconciliation, but it may be argued that reconciliation is naturally and necessarily implicit in the fact that the two are seemingly regarded as equals. *PT* 488a speaks of Horus and Seth as "the two who are reconciled (*twt.ty ib*)," while *PT* 34a speaks of Re as "satisfying the Two Lords (*sh.tp.f n.k nbwy*)." The restoration of the lost parts of the two deities and the reconciliation of the two were possibly originally separate symbols, the former appearing somewhat more graphic and basic than the latter, and the latter implying a stronger political signification. The description of Horus and Seth as the "Two Lords (*nbwy*)" in *PT* 34a further underscores the political role which the Pyramid Texts assign to the two deities, giving them also an equal dignity. It is tempting to postulate an origin for the reconciliation theme in a lesser conflict between two equal political powers, possibly in Pre-dynastic Upper Egypt, and to see the conquest theme as originating in a more serious encounter which resulted in a more significant victory, i.e., the conquest of Lower Egypt by Upper Egypt.

In the victory of Horus over Seth, the significant political symbol is the Eye of Horus, the testicles of Seth having no political role. The fortunes of the Eye as presented in the Pyramid Texts are highly varied. The Eye is taken from Horus by Seth who hides it or would destroy it;

<sup>32</sup> *PT* 142a-b.

<sup>33</sup> *PT* 946b-c.

it is demanded back by Horus from Seth (*PT* 65b), rescued from Seth by Horus (*PT* 160c), saved by Horus from his enemies so that Seth has no rights over it (*PT* 2071b,c); it is sought for at Pe, found at On, and taken by Horus from Seth “in the place where they fought” (*PT* 1242b,c); the wrath of the Eye strikes the enemies of Horus (*PT* 2072d), and it eventually ends up presented to Osiris. This well-travelled Eye is equally well endowed with symbolism in the Pyramid Texts, but the most obvious signification of the Eye is its symbolism as a source of physical and political power. It is difficult to credit the statement of Griffiths that the presentation of the Eye to the king has no mythological significance,<sup>34</sup> for as a symbol of political power its presentation to the king appears as one of the most effective and important mythic symbols in the whole ritual scheme of the Pyramid Texts. In effect, the Eye functions as a mythologization of royal strength, and its most powerful signification is seen in the fact that it is said to have come forth from the head of Geb, the mythological source of kingship, as both the Upper Egyptian crown and the Lower Egyptian crown, both described in the text as being “great of magic” (*wrt hk<sup>3</sup>w*: *PT* 1642b,c). The most fully developed and final symbolism of the Eye, therefore, points to the victory of Upper Egypt over Lower Egypt; and the defeat of Seth by Horus, as opposed to the reconciliation of the two, appears as a separate usage of the conflict theme to mythologize that political event. As factors determining the mythic value of the conflict symbols, reconciliation and conquest must be kept carefully separate in interpreting the various texts.

The expression of the conflict theme when connected with Osiris in the Pyramid Texts is simpler than the expression of the Horus/Seth conflict and is in keeping with the non-active nature of Osiris. Throughout the Pyramid Texts the basic role of Osiris is a passive one. The texts speak of Osiris as being served, guarded, aided, protected, raised, revitalized, etc., actions effected on him by various active divine agents. Even his chief triumphant act, that of resurrection, cannot be considered the action

of Osiris himself, for it is brought about by other agents, Horus in particular playing the most significant role, and Osiris himself remaining a passive recipient of rebirth. Even within the context of the conflict theme, Osiris remains passive. He is not an aggressor; rather he is attacked and felled, even killed, and his blood drunk<sup>35</sup> by Seth, with any aggression in favor of Osiris being carried out not by himself but by Horus. It may be argued that the intimate connection between Horus and Osiris makes the actions of the former to be essentially those of the latter, but at the same time Osiris still remains a separate hypostasis of royal divinity and as such must be considered in his passive nature. Unlike Horus, who undergoes some mythic development in his conflict with Seth, Osiris is a static figure, expressive of a state or mode of being rather than of positive action. Even the resurrected Osiris is only rarely portrayed as active or even having the potentiality for action, his main post-resurrection action being to receive the kingship which is won for him by the action of Horus in defeating Seth. In brief, the main function of Osiris in the Pyramid Texts, as in Egyptian myth in general, is to be slain by Seth, frequently in an unspecified manner, and thus to be a symbol of the divinity of the dead monarch. When conjoined with the figure of Horus, however, Osiris takes on a greater complexity and serves mythologically to extend the goal of Horus’ victory to a wider and more cosmic plane.

The simplest and most effective expression of the Osiris/Seth conflict is made in the undefined statement of Osiris’ death, a statement which opens Utterance 442: “This great one has fallen on his side; he who belongs to Nedit (*Ndit*) is knocked down (*ndi*).”<sup>36</sup> Utterance 412 begins with a similar statement: “The great one has fallen on his side; he who belongs to Nedit quivers.”<sup>37</sup> It is noteworthy that the expressions “the great one” and “he who belongs to Nedit (*imy Ndit*)” are here determined with the hieroglyph of the falcon on a perch (𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏) an

<sup>34</sup> J. G. Griffiths, op. cit., 4.

<sup>35</sup> *in b<sup>c</sup>b<sup>c</sup>.n.(f) im.k in b<sup>c</sup>b<sup>c</sup>.n Stš im.k ir gs snwty.k (PT 2127c,d).*

<sup>36</sup> *hr rf ty wr pw hr gs.f ndi rf imy Ndit (PT 819a).*

<sup>37</sup> *i.hr wr hr gs.f nmm imy Ndit (PT 721a,b).*

indication of the royal nature of the mythic figure referred to.<sup>38</sup> Both of these references are immediately followed by statements of resurrection, and both describe the death of Osiris (although the latter remains unnamed) in terms of unspecified violence against the deity, the implication being that the death of the god/king had to be effected by aggression rather than by natural causes. Utterance 677, using the same symbolism (and the same verb, *hr*) of the felling of Osiris, makes an even stronger connection between the dead god and the deceased king.<sup>39</sup> As in the other two examples quoted, this statement is not specific with regard to the manner of the god/king's death,<sup>40</sup> and is immediately followed by an affirmation of resurrection wherein the king is said to ascend to Horus. Utterance 532, describing the same felling of Osiris at Nedit and using the same verb, *ndi*, attributes the deed to Seth,<sup>41</sup> and presents Osiris as hardly even defensive, but rather a victim of Seth. Utterance 576 specifically states that Osiris was "thrown on his side by his brother Seth; he who is in Nedit quivers."<sup>42</sup> In other texts Seth's felling of Osiris is sited in the location of *Ghsty*<sup>43</sup> (𓄏𓄏𓄏𓄏𓄏, 𓄏𓄏𓄏𓄏). I doubt that any significance need be given to the localities mentioned as the place of the death of Osiris. The name Nedit appears to be derived from the verb *ndi*, "to fell,"<sup>44</sup> and *Ghsty* may possibly be a word-play on the term *gs* ("side"), although the double determinative 𓄏𓄏

suggests a geographical location bearing a name signifying "Place of the Gazelle."<sup>45</sup> My inclination is to suspect that the double determinative might indicate a rivalry of the two equal powers signified by Osiris and Seth. In any event, the actual place of Osiris' death is not important as a specific geographical location. A consideration of the event as a mythic symbol would imply that the location of both Nedit and *Ghsty* was wherever the myth was ritually and cultically performed.

In addition to the theme of Osiris being struck (*hwi*) and thrown (*ndi*) to the earth by Seth, the Pyramid Texts also make reference to his drowning (*mḥ*).<sup>46</sup> It is tempting to see the drowning of Osiris as a cosmological reference to the fertility of the Nile waters in contrast to the sterility of the desert signified in the removal of the testicles of Seth, a significance stressed by Rudolph Anthes.<sup>47</sup> The logic of the symbolism of water in the death of Osiris is evident, water being both a symbol of chaos (cf., the concept of Nun in the cosmogonic system of Heliopolis) and a source of life. (In the Heliopolitan creation symbolism it is from the Nun that all things emerge in the person of Atum-Re.) Thus it is impossible to exclude completely the idea that the conflict of Osiris and Seth may have some cosmological signification.<sup>48</sup> At the

<sup>38</sup> R. O. Faulkner (*The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* [Oxford University Press, 1969], 136, n. 1) points out that this statement is an Osirian interpolation into the text. If this theory of Faulkner's is correct, it further provides an illustration of the later transformation of the royal burial rituals by the introduction of the Osiris symbol.

<sup>39</sup> "The great one has fallen on his side, he who had stood as a god, his power with him and his *wrrt* crown upon him. *N*. has fallen on his side, *N*. who had stood as a god, his power with him and his *wrrt* crown upon him like the *wrrt* crown of Re" (PT 2018a–2019b).

<sup>40</sup> I suspect that the absence of a specific description of the death of Osiris is not "due to reticence, lest ill luck should be incurred by the more precise relating of such a matter" (J. G. Griffiths, op. cit., 5), but due rather to the solemnity and awesomeness of the event.

<sup>41</sup> *ndi.n sw sn.f Stš r tš m Ndit* (PT 1256b).

<sup>42</sup> *dy Wsir hr gs.f in sn.f Stš nmm imy Ndit* (PT 1500a,b).

<sup>43</sup> *ny.n sw sn.f Stš hr gs.f m gs pf n Ghsty* (PT 972b,c); *dy hr gs.f m Ghsty* (PT 1033b).

<sup>44</sup> *niederwerfen*, Wb. II, 367.

<sup>45</sup> Or possibly "The Two Gazelles," with the term "gazelle" being used in this case as a designation of a royal prince.

<sup>46</sup> PT 24d, 615d and 766d. These three references are made in connection with Horus causing his sons or the gods to assemble in the place where Osiris had drowned.

<sup>47</sup> *JNES* 18 (1959), 199.

<sup>48</sup> The Babylonian tradition of Marduk preserved in the *Enuma Elish* shows a combination of the themes of conflict, kingship, and creation when Marduk defeats the monster Tiamat, forms the universe out of her body, and assumes the divine kingship. It is interesting to note at this point that this Babylonian tradition is vaguely reflected in the first (although later) Hebrew account of creation in the opening chapter of Genesis. The Hebrew priestly writers who were responsible for the latter tradition responded to the Babylonian myth with a more sophisticated theological articulation of the creation process. In this largely demythologized account of creation, the Babylonian Tiamat has become the watery and chaotic depths, (תהום) made even more chaotic by the presence of a "mighty wind" (רוח אלהים), and the belligerent Marduk has been replaced by the more abstract concept of YHWH imposing order on chaos through the agency of the spoken word. This Hebrew account makes no

same time, it must be noted that such nature references are uncommon in the Pyramid Texts and that, if the death of Osiris does have any traces of such signification, it is either highly secondary or else a meaning derived at a later date. It appears more likely that the original source of the Osiris/Seth encounter was in the political world, specifically in the person of the king. Utterance 477 speaks of the death of Osiris at the hands of Seth as an encounter which has already taken place and which results in a legal trial at On concerning the legal right of kingship. That question, however, is already heavily embodied in Pyramid Text myth by the symbol of the Horus/Seth conflict. Hence, the Osiris/Seth encounter must be given a somewhat secondary role and be seen as arising from the problem of the mortality of the monarch, the earthly Horus. It was thus a way of preserving the concept of the royal immortality in the face of the obvious mortality of the king, a myth, one might say, which was fabricated to cover a secondary consideration and which did not have the same political importance as did the Horus/Seth encounter. Anthes has seen the death of Osiris as originally a statement which arose from the idea of the king as the "Great God" (*ntr* 𓄏) and only secondarily became a myth.<sup>49</sup> Whether or not this assessment decreases the mythic value of the Osiris/Seth conflict is a matter of opinion, but it does confine the encounter of Osiris and Seth to a more limited function.

The logic (or lack of logic) inherent within myth makes it possible to advance the assessment of the conflict theme a stage further and state that for the compilers of the Pyramid Texts, the Horus/Seth conflict and the Osiris/Seth conflict were essentially one and the same, the living Horus becoming the deceased Osiris at the time of death, and the two expressions of the conflict being utilized as the situation required. Osiris, therefore, came into existence only because the Horus king was seen to die.<sup>50</sup>

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mention of the kingship of YHWH, most likely because by the time of the composition of this particular creation narrative, kingship was no longer a reality in Hebrew culture.

<sup>49</sup> *JAOS* 74 (1954), 39.

<sup>50</sup> R. Anthes, *JNES* 18 (1959), 200.

Horus, as a deity embodying the kingship could not, strictly speaking, be permitted to die, for such would have seriously weakened the strength of the royal position. The role of Osiris in bolstering this position in the face of royal mortality was, therefore, of no minor importance. It may have been also that out of the Osiris/Horus identification there arose the concept of the post-resurrection victory of Osiris over Seth.

The eventual victory of Osiris is presented in the Pyramid Texts by two separate but related themes, the first of which continues the passive role of Osiris and describes a situation wherein his foes are defeated on his behalf. The normal symbolism used for this purpose centers on Horus, and its signification may be seen in the protection and continuation of the dynastic line through the succession of the crown prince, the succession itself being a vindication of the divinity of the deceased monarch. (We have seen above the concept of the victory of Horus over Seth as having its meaning in the vindication of Osiris.) In addition to the defeat of Seth by Horus, Utterance 670 provides an example of the anti-Osirian hostility expanded beyond Seth to a wider range of gods who are described as the enemies of Osiris and who are brought before Osiris by Horus and Thoth.<sup>51</sup> Utterance 356 presents a similar picture of Horus and Thoth defeating the followers of Seth,<sup>52</sup> i.e., a situation wherein the anti-Osirian power is not a single deity but a group of gods and which thus stresses a more strongly political signification for the hostility. The ultimate victory won on behalf of Osiris is stressed in Utterance 637 where Seth and his followers have been seized by Thoth and beheaded.<sup>53</sup> Other texts, however, go beyond the passive role and present Osiris as one who will himself punish his foes. For example, Utterance 364 states: "Horus has given to you his mighty Eye. He has given it to you that you may be powerful, that all

<sup>51</sup> "Your son Horus guides you. He has given over to you the gods who are your enemies, and Thoth has brought them to you," (*PT* 1979b,c).

<sup>52</sup> "Hail, Osiris-N! Horus has come to seek you. He has caused Thoth to turn back the followers of Seth on your behalf," (*PT* 575a,b).

<sup>53</sup> *PT* 635c.

your enemies may fear you. [. . .] Horus has collected the gods for you and they will not escape from you in the place where you drowned."<sup>54</sup> This presentation of the theme of Osiris' triumph underscores the victory of Osiris even further by making him into the actual punisher of his foes, both the single enemy, Seth, and the plurality of enemies who have opposed him. The post-resurrection Osiris thus becomes the full conqueror exactly as Horus had done in his victory over Seth and his followers, and the original triumph of Horus is extended from a simpler political symbol into a more complex mythic statement which combines both the terrestrial political realm and the world of the beyond into a single unity.

Beyond the individual expressions of conflict in the Pyramid Texts, the symbol of conflict, whether resolved or unresolved, came to constitute an essential element in the Egyptian mythic corpus. The symbol served to mythologize the reality of violent action and to make it an essential characteristic of the monarch both living and deceased. In attempting to define the signification of the conflict theme, it is wisest to start from the symbol itself without any reference to its outcome. Conflict in the Pyramid Texts thus represents a creative process, a struggle for order, the ongoing and perhaps never-resolved tension between *Ma'at* and *isft*. The "fighting monarch" portrayed through the conflict theme becomes a symbol of the positive active and creative function of the holder of the dual kingship, an action parallel to the creative force portrayed in the symbol of Atum-Re in the cosmogonic texts. Once an identifiable state or states had emerged in Egypt, the creation of a political order became a virtual necessity as a parallel to the cosmic creation, a concept which, although not perhaps clearly articulated in a developed mythological manner, must nevertheless have had some rudimentary mythic expression. Political myth thus parallels creation myth, the former reflecting the latter and functioning as a more practical expression of the abstract and theoretical symbols of cosmogony, whatever the original form of the latter may have been. Through the sym-

<sup>54</sup> *PT* 614b–615d.

bolism of conflict the concept of the warrior king became the natural continuation of the creative action of Atum-Re in imposing order upon that which originally lacked order.

Anthes has categorized the conflict symbolism of the Pyramid Texts into three different manifestations: 1) the conflict between Horus "senior" and Seth, resulting in the mutual mutilations; 2) the slaying of Horus "senior" by Seth, i.e., the transformation of Horus into Osiris; and 3) the punishment of Seth by Horus "junior."<sup>55</sup> He further states that these three conflicts were not originally separate, but part of the one tradition.<sup>56</sup> My own inclination is to suggest the following development for the conflict symbolism: 1) an early myth of conflict between Horus and Seth as two equal royal deities of Upper Egypt resulting in the mutual mutilation and an eventual reconciliation; 2) a broadening of this conflict into a mythic statement of a conflict between Upper and Lower Egypt in which Seth is defeated by Horus, this later myth being given the signification of legitimizing the new dual kingship;<sup>57</sup> 3) the addition of the Osiris/Seth conflict with the primary purpose of affirming the immortality of the deceased monarch, an addition in which any political implications of the Osiris/Seth symbol were probably confined to a statement of the legitimacy of dynastic succession; and 4) the addition of the concept of the final post-resurrection victory of Osiris over Seth and his followers resulting in the post mortem kingship of Osiris paralleled by the terrestrial kingship of the new earthly Horus, i.e., the living monarch. In this schema, political purposes for the original emergence of Osiris were very few or even nonexistent. It was only in the finalization and conjoining of the different myths that the entire mythic system eventually became a mythologization of the founding of the nation and its kingship.

Apart from this wider signification of the conflict theme, the same theme also appears as

<sup>55</sup> *JNES* 18 (1959), 201.

<sup>56</sup> *Loc. cit.*, A contrary opinion is expressed by J. G. Griffiths (*op. cit.*, 15) who sees the different conflict themes as originally separate and suggests that the Horus/Seth conflict was the earlier.

<sup>57</sup> *PT* 1488b speaks of the king instilling fear in "the hearts of the kings of Lower Egypt (*bityw*) who are at Pe."

an essential mark of the monarch. In fact it may be argued that the ability of the monarch to take part in and to conquer in conflict becomes a vindication of his royal prerogatives. The Pyramid Texts make no mention of any judgment of the king in the afterlife, his right to immortality and kingship being affirmed only by the fact of his victorious use of force. Even the so-called "Cannibal Hymn" (Utterances 273–74), despite its relatively savage imagery, can be justified in this manner. In *PT* 197f the monarch prays: "Cause my sword to prevail over my enemies," not a reference to any specific conflict, but rather the victory theme in general as a legitimization of the monarchy.<sup>58</sup>

From the usage of the conflict theme as a legitimization of monarchy, it must have been a relatively easy transition to the use of the same theme as an affirmation of royal immortality. In Utterance 222, where the king is portrayed as joining the sun god, his right to do so is affirmed by the fact that he has been victorious over his opponent,<sup>59</sup> and Utterance 437 speaks of the purpose of the resurrection of the monarch being so that he may oppose Seth.<sup>60</sup> This simple, but nonetheless artfully contrived, union of two significations for the same mythic symbol testifies to the mythopoeic skill of the compilers of the Pyramid Texts, a skill which appears to have been based on an acute comprehension of the value and nature of myth.

At this point, a few considerations may be stressed. The Pyramid Texts provide no extended narration of a wider epic of conflict starting with Osiris and Seth and culminating, after the involvement of Horus, in the final vindication and triumph of Osiris. The fact that

such a wider narrative can be constructed does not necessarily imply that such was actually known, although it does at least suggest the possibility. However, the absence of such a narrative in the written texts is sufficient to indicate that, even if there was an extended account of such a conflict, its ritual recitation was not regarded as a necessity. Hence, one may conclude that the important mythic elements concerning divine conflict consisted of the individual symbols of conflict which were used when and where the ritual occasion necessitated. Cultic and ritual texts, having no need of logical consistency, could with ease be adapted to each particular and practical situation and would, therefore, have required no editing to smooth out any inherent contradictions. In fact, contradictions would have been virtually impossible, insofar as there was possibly no extended narrative in which such contradictions could have become apparent. The various mythic elements in the Pyramid Texts should, therefore, be interpreted only within the context wherein they are found, that is, in the specific cultic setting of each text and in the situation which the ritual was intended to effect.

The final signification of each of the various mythic elements appears to vary according to the ritual with which each was associated. Thus the ultimate meaning of the conflict could be found in a positive outcome, in a negative outcome (i.e., the death of Osiris), in its process without any reference to its outcome, in a reconciliation of equal deities, in the gaining of immortality by the deceased monarch, or in a vindication of the Unification of Egypt. While one should be wary in speaking of any standard of orthodoxy in the Pyramid Texts, references to the actual conquest of Seth by Horus are sufficiently numerous to permit the general conclusion that such was the "orthodox" or at least the most significant Pyramid Text doctrine of conflict. From here it is an easy step to the conclusion that the final usage of the conflict theme in the Pyramid Texts was essentially political. Despite the apparent complexity of the origins and development of the conflict theme, this theme was purposely used for the practical purpose of legitimizing a specific political ideology. At a later point in time, resurrection and

<sup>58</sup> The same symbol is used in a number of texts for the same purpose. For example, in *PT* 277–79, the deceased monarch threatens to cause general chaos if he is not given a place in the afterlife, and in the same text (293c) he boasts that he has crushed his opponents and wiped out their survivors. In *PT* 1159c it is said that the monarch will "strike with a scepter and rule with a staff." Even the gods are not exempt from the violence of the king, for in *PT* 1963b he threatens to break open even their heads. It is obvious that the compilers of the Pyramid Texts would have shown little sympathy for a monarch who demonstrated gentleness and meekness.

<sup>59</sup> *PT* 203.

<sup>60</sup> *PT* 793a: "Awake for Horus! Stand against Seth!"

cosmological elements were grafted onto the conflict theme, but the importance of these, especially the importance of the cosmological elements, was highly secondary. Early Egyptian myths of conflict, far from being abstract symbols of speculation on the natural world, were very much practical and directed towards pragmatic purposes.

The place of the natural world in the Pyramid Texts is relatively small, and the texts give the impression that the "supernatural" world is used mainly as a symbol for the political world. The texts are thus a series of political statements designed primarily to legitimize the royal position and the royal authority. Such an interpretation would maintain that the actual theological system of the Pyramid Texts arose out of political considerations rather than spiritual ones. Even the fact that the texts were used in a burial context does not negate such a conclusion, for the position of the monarch in the next world was but an extension of his position in this world. Moreover, the connection between the dead Osiris-king and the living Horus-king was such that the two were totally interdependent. In fact the two rulers, dead and living, were but two hypostases of monarchy. The symbols of the conflicts in which Seth plays a central role could, therefore, be easily attached to either Osiris or Horus in their roles as personifications of royalty. From the political signification it was an easy step to the evolution of a cosmological signification for the conflict theme.

The use of myth in the Pyramid Texts was primarily practical. On the one hand, it articulated and effected the royal resurrection or rebirth in the world of the gods. Equally and perhaps even more important, however, was the role of myth in legitimizing the position of the earthly ruler on the throne of Upper and Lower Egypt. The latter goal may, in fact, have been the primary purpose of myth in the Pyramid Texts. At the same time, it cannot be denied that there is a certain amount of speculative thought in the Texts, for they do reflect certain attempts to define the cosmos in mythic symbolism. Indeed, they may well be described as a sound beginning of royal and cosmic theological speculation. The living nature of the cosmos is articulated through the gods who are

integral parts and symbols of the cosmos. Such speculation did not take the form of philosophical definitions, but retained the use of the mythic symbol for its articulation. The cosmos was not an entity which could be understood intellectually, but it could be experienced in the mythic symbol. The symbols of the gods provided a pattern of structure in the universe. By means of myth, the statement was made that the universe was not a random entity nor was its creation a random action. Although no purpose was given for the creation of the universe, it was nevertheless seen as the result of a specific action.

In contrast to the political role of divine conflict in the Pyramid Texts, it will be useful to consider briefly at this point the usage of the theme in Hebrew culture. Due to the strongly henotheistic nature of Hebrew religion, theomachies did not become an essential part of that tradition, but given the strong rivalry between the religion of YHWH and that of Ba'al throughout much of Hebrew history, it is somewhat surprising that no myths of conflict between the deities were developed, at least temporarily, in the Hebrew tradition.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, strong traditions of divine conflict do exist in the Old Testament, although these are of a somewhat different nature than their Egyptian counterparts.

In the Old Testament the significant myths of divine conflict are particularly related to the concept of the kingship of YHWH<sup>62</sup> and have little to do with the earthly kingship. This is not to say that the earthly kingship was not mythologized, for the Judaean Davidic kingship,

<sup>61</sup> Although no myth of such a struggle appears to have ever developed among the Hebrews, the YHWH religion did come into frequent conflict with the Canaanite tradition of Ba'al. Due to historical, cultural, and geographical circumstances, YHWH was often identified and confused with Ba'al, prophets such as Hosea and Amos giving ample evidence of this. Despite the absence of mythic expressions of the rivalry between the two gods, the two religions were frequently in violent confrontation. (See Oldenburg, *op. cit.*, 178ff.). Elijah's defeat of the prophets of Ba'al on Mount Carmel resulting in a storm and the ending of the drought (II Kings 18) provides but one instance of an overt clash between the two traditions, but the account of this clash is couched in historical rather than mythological terms.

<sup>62</sup> See John Gray, *Legacy of Canaan*, 87f.



centered at Jerusalem, was strongly articulated in the myth and cult of the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>63</sup> The complexities of the latter mythologization are too extensive to be discussed in the present context, but let it suffice to say that the cult myths of the Jerusalem Temple were as strong, and perhaps stronger, in their emphasis on the legitimacy of the Davidic dynasty as they were on the right of YHWH to be the only God of Israel and Judah.

With the Davidic dynasty is associated the complicated question of divine kingship in Judah. Let it suffice here to say that the Davidic kingship was a divine kingship of a type, the king being "divine" by adoption and closer to the Egyptian concept than was the Israelite concept of the monarch. I suspect that at times the Judaeen king was actually considered divine,<sup>64</sup> although not a fully divine god incarnate. The Davidic king was no Horus-king, but he was to some extent influenced by the Horus-king concept, although it is possible that some influence was exerted on the Judaeen concept from Canaanite thought, i.e., a modified divine sonship.<sup>65</sup> However, insofar as the Judaeen kingship did not approach the magnitude of

the Egyptian monarchy, the application of the mythic conflict theme to his person as was done in Egypt would have made little sense.

The Hebrew YHWH, however, is frequently portrayed as a warrior god, and it is not uncommon in the Old Testament tradition to find him described as fighting on behalf of and in defense of his people.<sup>66</sup> In several instances, the act of divine creation is presented in Hebrew tradition as the result of divine conflict, a theme which may well reflect Mesopotamian influence.<sup>67</sup> The most authentic theomachy in

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cally transformed the general oriental idea of the king, and consequently those forms of the cult which are connected with these ideas. [. . .] It (criticism of the monarchy) arose from religious motives and finally led to the kingship being regarded as contrary to Yahweh's sovereignty. Then gradually a new king ideal grew up, placing the main stress on the righteousness and justice of the king, and on his will to help the suffering, the poor and oppressed and to give them their rights, and on the divine wisdom and wonder-working power he is endowed with to do this, to 'reign in Yahweh's strength'. It is by the help of Yahweh, and because the king humbly relies on his allegiance to Yahweh and his loyalty to Yahweh's covenant, that he can do this. It is really Yahweh who does it for him" (Mowinckel, op. cit., Vol. I, 58f.).

<sup>66</sup> Such imagery, however, does not constitute a true theomachy, but an act of protection and defense on the part of the deity. In these instances, divine conflict is aimed at non-royal political purposes, i.e., the protection of the nation, and stress is laid on the victory of YHWH, not of the king or of the people. F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 91–111, provides a good discussion of the concept of the divine warrior in Israel. Of note in this tradition of YHWH as divine warrior is the Exodus theme and the defeat of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. This is described in the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15. Was the idea of the defeat of the sea based on earlier imagery, changing Ba'al's defeat of Yam-Nahar into YHWH's defeat of the Egyptians by means of the sea? This suggestion does present some possibility, however vague, in which case the text would present an example of a true theomachy which has been reworked for a purely political purpose.

<sup>67</sup> Psalms 74 and 89 represent creation in conflict imagery, especially conflict with the sea and unruly forces. Creation in Hebrew thought also contains the idea of the imposition of order on chaos, just as the Horus-king's defeat of Seth implied the restoration of Ma'at. "The repetition of the myth of creation surely also expresses the view that the Creator God sustains the created world against all the threatening powers which are ranged against it" (H. Gottlieb, in B. Otzen, H. Gottlieb, K. Jeppesen, *Myths in the Old Testament*, translated from the Danish by F. Cryer [London, 1980], 68). Psalm 74:13–14 speaks of YHWH's defeat of a sea monster and of His conquest of Leviathan, while Psalm 89:11 alludes to YHWH's crushing of the monster Rahab and the scattering of His enemies.

<sup>63</sup> Even a quick perusal of some of the royal psalms (for example, Psalms 2, 21, 45, 72, 89, and 110) will provide abundant evidence of the mythologization of the Davidic kingship. The Northern (Israelite) kingship, which developed at the time of the division of the two kingdoms following the death of Solomon, was quite different from the kingship in Judah. Israel, more cautious than Judah, was for the most part able to prevent her monarchy from taking on the same sacral associations which marked the Davidic monarchy.

<sup>64</sup> In Psalm 45:7 the Davidic king is actually addressed as "God" (אלהים).

<sup>65</sup> The Judaeen king was not divine in the same sense as the Pharaoh of Egypt. His "filial relationship to Yahweh is based on an adoption. His divinity depends on the endowment he has received at his election and anointing and on the power flowing to him through the holy rites of the cult, by Yahweh's free will, and depending on the king's loyalty and obedience towards Yahweh's commandments" (S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, translated from the Norwegian by D. R. Ap-Thomas [Oxford, 1967], vol. I, 58.). The adoptive relationship of the Judaeen monarch to YHWH is best expressed in the adoption formula given in Psalm 2:7, a major coronation psalm, "My son art thou; today I have begotten thee" (בני אתה אני היום ילדתיך).

Eventually, even this form of divine kingship was regarded with skepticism. "[. . .] the Yahweh religion has radi-

Hebrew tradition, however, and the one which comes closest to any similarity with the Horus/Seth tradition, appears to be contained in those Psalms associated with the postulated Festival of the Enthronement of YHWH,<sup>68</sup> a festival celebrating the accession of YHWH to the position of divine (celestial) monarch.<sup>69</sup>

The ritual of the Enthronement Festival, a ritual outlined nowhere in the Old Testament probably because its implications seemed “pagan” to the later compilers of the text, appears in its reconstruction by modern Biblical scholars as a highly complex ritual involving the Davidic king, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Temple clergy. The climax of the festival was the entry of the Ark into Jerusalem and its symbolic enthronement within the Temple. An important key to the signification of the festival is found in Psalm 47:9 “God *has become king* over the nations” (מֶלֶךְ אֱלֹהִים עַל-גּוֹיִם).<sup>70</sup> The festival, in other words, celebrates not only the kingship of YHWH, but the fact that YHWH gained or gains His kingship as the result of a specific action, i.e., His victory over His enemies. The victory of YHWH appears to have had a number of meanings within the context of the festival. It was a celebration of the Creation and the defeat of the personified power of chaos,<sup>71</sup> of YHWH’s victory over the other gods,<sup>72</sup> and of the found-

ing of the people of Israel.<sup>73</sup> The events celebrated in the Enthronement Festival were not necessarily historical events, although the Exodus certainly did have an historical foundation. Such events were rather *mythical*; for the experience produced by the usage of the Enthronement psalms within the context of the cult referred to the present and to a reality which takes place in the *eternal* present. It should also be noted that there was an important difference between the Hebrew Enthronement myth and the myth of the Horus/Seth struggle. Horus and Seth were essentially equal royal deities; Seth was not originally a rebellious monster, although he later took on more negative connotations. The Egyptian myth of divine conflict was thus more balanced than the Hebrew myth. Nevertheless, because of the central role of the Egyptian kingship in supporting the order of Ma’at, the ultimate effect of the Egyptian cultic ritual was basically equivalent to that of the Hebrew ritual. The point of departure between the two systems was the fact that the Hebrew myth stressed the centrality of YHWH while the Egyptian myth stressed the centrality of the Horus-king. In both cases, however, divine conflict was essential for the establishment of political and cosmic order.

To return finally to the Pyramid Texts, it may be stated that the basic content of Pyramid Text myth lay not in the gods but in the monarch. Such myth concerned not the supernatural world, but to a certain extent the natural world and, more importantly, the political world. Myth was centered around the concept of kingship with the individual ruler being the embodiment of the more abstract concept of royal power. The ultimate foundation for the structure of the cosmos was this royal power, embodied primarily in the earthly ruler and reflected in the symbolism of the gods and their creative functions of conflict. The order of importance, however, was the monarch in

<sup>68</sup> Psalms 47, 93, 96, 97, 98 and 99.

<sup>69</sup> H. Gottlieb gives a brief account of the Enthronement Festival in *Myths in the Old Testament*, 78–83, and a more extended account may be found in S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, vol. I, 106–92.

<sup>70</sup> The Massoretic pointing of the verb מָלַךְ (*malak*) indicates that the verb is perfective in meaning and hence must be translated as “has *become* king.”

<sup>71</sup> Creation “is pictured as a victorious struggle with the primeval dragon or the primeval sea ([Psalm] 93.3f.) and its monsters. We have here a mythical conception of creation which may be termed the Primeval Struggle Myth or the Fight with the Dragon Myth, which is alluded to in the mention of the ‘victory’ (98.1ff.)” (Mowinckel, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 108). Furthermore, “this poetical myth of creation has been derived from the Babylonian one, where the god—Marduk, or whichever god was considered the chief god of that district—takes up arms on behalf of the other gods against the rebellious Tiamat [. . .], pictured as a female dragon of the primeval ocean” (*ibid.*, 145).

<sup>72</sup> “The victory of Yahweh is also a catastrophe for all the *other gods*; they are now confounded, stricken with terror (96.7; 97.7; 99.3f.); Yahweh’s victory is also a victory over them” (*ibid.*, 108).

<sup>73</sup> “Besides the Creation, and the fight and victory which it represented, there is also mentioned an historical foundation for the kingdom of Yahweh, namely, *the creation of Israel*, as the Lord’s chosen people, *the election* as it was manifested in the Exodus from Egypt, the miracle of the Reed Lake, the revelation of Kadesh and Sinai with the making of *the Covenant*” (*ibid.*, 108).

the first position and the gods in the second. Thus, even the gods and their conflicts were practical expressions of a far more important and pragmatic source of authority.

In dealing with creation mythology in the Semitic world, Benedikt Otzen states that "the best way one can ensure the prosperity of the coming year is by repeating the primeval act of creation. The inauguration of the year is a cosmic event; if the cosmos is recreated, the yearly cycle is assured."<sup>74</sup> This assessment may be applied to the myth of the Horus/Seth con-

flict as follows. The ritualization of this conflict affirmed and articulated royal legality; by recreating the defeat of Seth and the rightful accession of Horus to the throne, the position of the new monarch was assured. Considering the central place which royal authority held in the Egyptian cosmic and political structure, one may without hesitation state that the theme of divine conflict in the Pyramid Texts was one of the basic foundation stones of the intellectual accomplishment of the Old Kingdom.

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<sup>74</sup> *Myths in the Old Testament*, 10.