

Which Seth? Untangling some close homonyms from ancient Egypt and the Near East

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to disambiguate the proper name “Seth” and its cognates or homonyms – perfect or imperfect – in texts from ancient Egypt, the Near East and the Mediterranean. It considers: (1) the Suteans, West Semitic Amorite/Aramean nomads who feature negatively in Mesopotamian records; (2) S(h)eth in the Hebrew bible, in which a disparaged southerly Sutean group (“sons of Sheth”) may have been recast as the virtuous lineage of the third son of Adam (“sons of Seth”); (3) Seth, the Egyptian god of tumult and confusion, who has some elements in common with the Judeo-Christian Satan; (4) Seth of the Jewish pseudepigrapha, a positive embellishment of the biblical figure; (5) the Gnostic Seth, a further embellishment of the biblical/pseudepigraphical figure; and (6) Seth as an agent invoked in magical texts. Accordingly, the paper provides an integrated review of six Sethian subject areas that are seldom considered together; they are examined here through an Egyptological lens. The survey reveals that the two principal Seths – the Egyptian god and the son of Adam – maintain almost entirely separate trajectories in the religious and magical literature of ancient Egypt and beyond.

KEYWORDS

Seth, son of Nut – Seth, son of Adam – Suteans/Sutians – pseudepigrapha – Sethian Gnosticism – Greek/Demotic Magical Papyri

أى ست؟ فك تشابك بعض المتجانسات القريبة من مصر القديمة والشرق الأدنى

لويد د. جراهام

الملخص

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى إزالة الغموض عن الاسم الصحيح «ست» وما يقابله أو مرادفاته - كاملة أو ناقصة - بالنصوص المصرية القديمة أو من نصوص الشرق الأدنى والبحر الأبيض المتوسط. وهي تعتبر: (1) السوتيين، الساميون الآموريون الغربيون/البدو الآراميون الذين يظهرون بشكل سلبي في سجلات بلاد ما بين النهرين. (2) ست في الكتاب المقدس العبري، حيث قد يكون تم إعادة صياغة مجموعة السوتيين الجنوبية (أبناء ست) المنكسرة باعتبارها النسب الفاضل لابن آدم الثالث (أبناء ست). (3) ست، إله الفوضى والاضطراب المصري القديم، والذي له بعض العناصر المشتركة مع الشيطان في كل من الديانتين اليهودية والمسيحية. (4) ست في البسوديبجرافا اليهودية، الزخرفة الإيجابية لشخصية توراتية. (5) ست الغنوصي، زخرفة أخرى للشكل التوراتي من البسوديبجرافا. (6) ست كعامل تم استدعاؤه في النصوص السحرية. وبناءً على ذلك، توفر الورقة مراجعة متكاملة لستة مجالات موضوعية عن ست، نادرًا ما يتم دراستهم معاً، حيث تم هنا فحصهم من خلال منظور علم المصريات. يكشف الاستطلاع أن الشخصيتين الرئيسيتين لست - الإله المصري وابن آدم - يحتفظان بمسارات منفصلة تماماً في الأدب الديني والسحري لمصر القديمة وما وراءها.

الكلمات الدالة

ست، ابن نوت – ست، ابن آدم – السوتيين – البسوديبجرافا – ست الغنوصي – البرديات السحرية اليونانية / الديموطيقية

Herman te Velde's classic book on the most challenging of Egyptian gods is titled *Seth, God of Confusion* (te Velde 1967). And confusion is a likely outcome for any novice interested in the proper name "Seth" and its cognates or homonyms – perfect or imperfect – in texts from ancient Egypt, the Near East and the Mediterranean. If Seth is indeed the "enemy of boundaries" (te Velde 1967: 56, 63), then the situation is only worsened by the necessity to ask, as the very first question, "Which Seth?"

This paper surveys the convoluted Sethian landscape as it currently stands and disentangles the various similarly-named entities that inhabit it. Actual and potential points of contact between the Seths of different genres are identified and explored. The main purpose of the paper is to provide an integrated review of six "Sethian" subject areas that are seldom considered in relation to one another; all of them are relevant to Egyptian mythology, religion and/or history and are examined here through an Egyptological lens. As a result of the survey, it proved possible to codify a set of rules that – up to a point – would correctly predict the Sethian referent without needing to know the genre of the text.

First, it is necessary to examine the Suteans. As troublesome Asiatic nomads who would have appeared Sethian to the Egyptians, and as a group whose name potentially underpins that of the biblical Sethians, they stand in the background of the main themes to be discussed. There are no sections of the paper in which they do not warrant a mention.

SUTEANS

The Suteans – Akkadian *Suti'ū*, from the Amorite/Aramean *Š'ti'ū*,¹ "descendants of Šutu or Šitu" – were West Semitic nomads (Diakonoff 1982: 19; Annus 2012: 33); etymologically, the root of the term may lie in words relating to the south (Albright 1944: 220, footnote 89; Annus 2018: 9, 21). The functional scope of *Suti'ū* is similar to that of the Egyptian term *šm.w* (Saretta 2016: 11–42). In Mesopotamia, the labels Suti, Sutu, and similar were used loosely (lacking a firm geographic or tribal anchor) and anachronistically (sometimes presenting as an archaism), but they almost always had negative connotations (van de Mieroop 2016: 94, 112, 211; Vera Chamaza 2005: 13–19; Annus 2018: 9). Cuneiform documents naturally focus on the Suteans of the Middle and Upper Euphrates, but the name encompassed heterogeneous Amorite/Aramean tribal groups that were spread over a vast area (Vera Chamaza 2005: 13–17).

Mesopotamian myths and annals locate the homeland of the Suteans at or near a mountain called Šaršar (Annus 2012: 31–32; Annus 2018: 11). In the Erra Epic (Seventh Century BC; van de Mieroop 2016: 211), the wicked Suteans were targeted for destruction by the god Ishum as he set about restoring divine order, as a result of which Šaršar was supposedly levelled (Annus 2012: 31–32; Annus 2018: 14–16). This mountain is also the birth-place of the Anzu-bird, which in the Anzu Epic threatened the established order by stealing the Tablet of Destinies from Enlil and taking it to Šaršar; it is there that he was defeated by the god Ninurta (Annus 2012:

1 Aram corresponds largely with Syria; "Amorite" – from the Akkadian word *amurru*, "west" – is the term applied to its nomadic population (and to groups migrating therefrom to Mesopotamia and Egypt) during the late-Third to early-Second Millennium BC. "Aramean" is the corresponding term used in respect of the mid- to late-Second Millennium BC; the language of the Arameans was Aramaic (van de Mieroop 2016: 36, 92–95, 111–112; Monson – Lancaster 2014: 41).

31–32; Annus 2018: 14–16).² In Mesopotamian and Eblaite sources, Šaršar seems to be identified with Jebel Bishri in central/northeastern Syria (fig. 1) (Lambert 1989: 17–18; Saretta 2016: 23; Annus 2012: 32; Annus 2018: 10–11). Amar Annus has suggested that the “mountain of the Amorites” was earlier called Tid(a)nu after the tribe’s human-faced bovid ancestor,³ who – in Mesopotamian mythology – seems to have been subdued by the sun god Šamaš (Annus 2012: 33; Annus 2018: 16). Annus has proposed Šaršar as the origin of the Greek toponym “Tartaros” and Tidanu as the origin of the Greek term “Titan” (Annus 1999: 19–27; Annus 2012: 33, footnote 79; Annus 2018: 16–17, footnote 6).

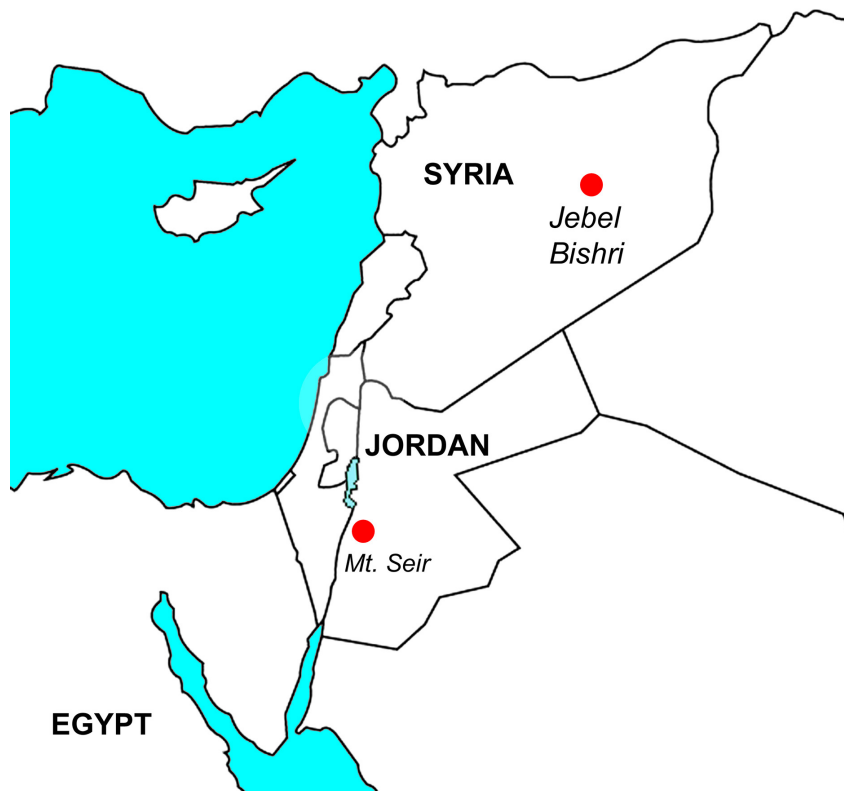


Fig. 1 Map of the Ancient Near East showing two locations identified with the “mountain of the Suteans” (image Lloyd D. Graham)

The designation *Suti' ū* has near homonym in the Egyptian term *Sty.w* (Erman – Grapow 1971 IV: 328; Faulkner 1962: 253; Hannig 2006: 844), which is used from the Middle Kingdom onward to denote the nomadic inhabitants of Western Asia, the land beyond Egypt’s northeastern border (Kupper 1982: 109; Saretta 2016: 20–21). The phonetic similarity between the Egyptian and Semitic terms has led some scholars to propose that they are cognate (Cazelles 1958: 319; Görg 1989: 163; Gertoux 2010: 4). However, an etymological connection is unlikely because *Sty.w*, like the even shorter *St.w* (TLA: lemma no. 147800), is a contraction of *St.ty.w* (Erman –

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- 2 This summary refers to the Standard Babylonian version (Grayson 2011). In its Old Babylonian precursor, Ningirsu appears in the place of Ninurta (Sparks 2005: 314).
 3 On Tidānum, Ditānu and similar names, see Saretta (2016: 24–25).

Grapow 1971 IV: 348; TLA: lemma no. 149130), which in turn is a nisbe of the toponym *Št.t*, “Asia” (Erman – Grapow 1971 IV: 348; Kupper 1982: 109). Use of the term *Št.ty.w* dates back to the Early Dynastic period (Mourad 2017: 298–300).

One southerly Sutean population has been identified with the nomads that the Egyptians called *Ššs.w* (Annus 2018: 9–10), these being Bedouins of the desert to the northeast of Egypt (Faulkner 1962: 261; Giveon 1971; Ward 1972; Görg 1976). Ramesses II fought with groups of *Ššs.w* in the Transjordan, namely in Edom and Moab (Kitchen 1964: 66–67; Worschech 1990: 124–128). *Ššs.w* is phonetically not dissimilar to Šaršar,⁴ the name of the Sutean mountain in Mesopotamian literature, but the *Ššs.w* homeland lies far to the south of Jebel Bishri (a point developed in the next section). The Egyptian toponym *Šwtw* (e.g. Posener 1940: 89–90, E52–53) – which recalls the Amorite/Aramean “descendants of Šutu” – also refers to the Transjordan, or more broadly to eastern Jordan and southern Syria (Kitchen 1964: 69, including footnote 4; Quack 1992). This *Šwtw*, which features in Middle Kingdom execration texts, has been equated with the toponym in the phrase *šm.w n(.w) Šw.t* (“Aamu of Shut”),⁵ which identifies a group of Asiatics depicted in the tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hasan (Kanawati – Evans: 2014: 48, Pl. 43a; Worschech 1997: 230; Goedicke 1984: 210; Kamrin 2009: 24–25; Cohen 2015: 23–24). From such references, the existence of *Šwtw* nomads in Moab – and in Palestine more generally – has been inferred (Görg 1989: 161–162; Worschech 1990: 124–128; Worschech 1997: 229–230; Vera Chamaza 2005: 18).

Naturally, the Egyptian *Šwtw* has been equated with the Semitic *Šʿti’ū/Suti’ū* (Kupper 1982: 109–110), although not without caveats (Görg 1989: 161–162; Vera Chamaza 2005: 18).⁶ So too has the putative Egyptian designation *Šwt.y.w*, a term thought to relate to a people in the Transjordan region (Görg 1989: 162–163; Gertoux 2010: 60–61). Functional and linguistic cognates have also been proposed for *Ššs.w* (Annus 2018: 9; Görg 1989: 161–163). Although Cazelles (1958: 319) has argued for an etymological connection of *Ššs.w* to the Suteans (*Šʿti’ū/Suti’ū*), *Šwtw* and even *Št.ty.w*, the simplest and most likely origin of the word lies in the Egyptian verb *ššs*, “to travel, to wander about, to roam” (Ward 1972: 56–59; TLA: lemma no. 151900). There is no overlap – beyond that expected phonetically – between the canonical orthography of *Ššs.w* and that of *Šty.w*, *Št.ty.w*, *Šwtw* or *Šw.t* (fig. 2a–e), whereas there is with that of *ššs* (fig. 2f). The relationship between the *Ššs.w* and *Šwtw* populations of the Transjordan is unclear (Görg 1989: 162), but Worschech (1997: 230) surmises that “Both the *šu-tu* and the earliest Moabites, however they were related, probably would have been considered by the Egyptians as typical Shasu”.

4 Especially when one considers the *s/š* slippage tolerated elsewhere, and the decline in /r/ phonemes by the time of Late Egyptian (Peust 1999: 127–129, 141–142, 151–152).

5 Because it appears to be a feminine marker (Cohen 2015: 23), the final *t* in *Šw.t* is often omitted in transliterations and translations to yield “Aamu of Shu” (e.g. Kanawati – Evans: 2014: 48; Kamrin 2009: title; Cohen 2015: 20, 22–23). I have not done so because such an omission is not practiced with other feminine country-names, e.g. *Pwn.t* is invariably translated as Punt, *Km.t* as Kemet, etc. Cohen (2015: 23) objects that the feminine *t* in *Šw.t* ought not to be matched with the radical *t* in *Šwtw*, but the rendering of uncommon foreign placenames in Egyptian is likely to be heterogeneous (Cooper 2020: 246) and the grammatical status of the consonant should make little difference as long as it is vocalised.

6 Common sense suggests that the term *šw*, “desert, dry” might also inform *Šw.t*, *Šwtw* and related terms (Faulkner 1962: 263; Lesko 2004: 114).

a		Š3s.w
b		Sty.w
c		St.tyw
d		Šwtw-hr.t
e		Šw.t
f		Š3s
g		Stš
		Stḥ
		Swth, Stḥ
		Swty, Sty
		St
		determinatives
h		Stḥ.y
i		S(w)t.y

Fig. 2 Hieroglyphic orthographies and transliterations of key names mentioned in the text. (a) Shasu, Bedouin; (b, c) Set(jet)yu, Asiatics; (d) Upper Shutu, a territory in the Transjordan mentioned in execration texts, closer to Egypt than Lower Shutu; (e) Shut, the origin of the group of Aamu depicted at Beni Hasan; (f) š3s, a verb meaning “to travel, to roam”; (g) spellings of Seth’s name (after te Velde 1967: 1); (h) normative spellings of Seti; (i) orthography of Seti that avoids the Seth-animal/god hieroglyph (all panels by Lloyd D. Graham)

BIBLICAL SETH

The biblical Seth (Hebrew שֵׁט, Šēṭ, Sheth) is the third son of Adam (Brown – Driver – Briggs 1939: 1011). He first appears in the book of Genesis. Seth is named in a Hebrew play on words in Gen 4:25;⁷ in the translation of Birger Pearson (1990: 67), “She [Eve] bore a son and called his name ‘Seth’ (שֵׁט), for she said, ‘God has “set” (שֵׁט) for me another offspring instead of Abel.” Pearson continues: “A variety of such wordplays on the name Seth is displayed in Jewish and Christian literature”.

A subgroup of the Suteans (see previous section) is thought to be represented in the Hebrew scriptures by the Shethites – שֵׁטִיָּם, the *benē Šēṭ* or “sons of Sheth” – who are associated with the land of *Sē’îr/Seir* in Edom (Num 24:17–18). In many biblical passages (e.g. Gen 14:6; 36:8–9; Deut 1:2), Seir is identified with mountainous terrain (Annus 2012: 33–35). There are Egyptian attestations of Semitic nomads inhabiting a land or mountain that bears a name like Seir. For example, one inscription of Ramesses II associates a Šš.w group with a locale called *Sʿr* (Sarer) (Adrom – Müller 2017: 98–103; Cooper 2020: 245–246) while another mentions a Šš.w mountain named *Sʿr* (Sar), usually translated as Seir (Annus 2018: 10; Givon 1971: 100–101, no. 25; Kitchen 1964: 66–67; Worschech 1997: 229–230). Papyrus Harris I records that Ramesses III subjugated the Šš.w of *Sʿr*, again translated as Seir (Breasted 1906: 201, § 404).⁸ The Egyptian and biblical regions are generally accepted to be one and the same, placing the Egyptian *Sʿr(r)* in the Transjordan, east of the Wadi Araba (Kitchen 1964: 63–67; Mumford 2005; Grosby 2007: 109; Day 2010: 339–340; Annus 2018: 10; Cooper 2020: 245–248). That some southerly Sutean groups might have based themselves in the Transjordan is consistent with the Egyptian application of labels such as *Šwtw/Swtwyw* to this region or its people (Day 2010: 339, footnote 11), as noted in the previous section.⁹ In this scheme, the Hebrew Šēṭ, Amorite/Aramean Šʿt and Egyptian *Šwt/Šwt* would be linguistic cognates (Diakonoff 1982: 19; Görg 1989: 161–162; Annus 2012: 33–34; Annus 2018: 12).

If Seir – the mountain of the Suteans known to Egyptians and Israelites – was located in the Transjordan, then clearly it lay much further south than Šaršar – the mountain of the Suteans known to the Mesopotamians, given that the latter was identified with Jebel Bishri in

7 Citations of primary sources in this paper are formatted according to their (divergent) standard conventions, as follows. Biblical books and Enochic pseudepigrapha follow the format “Book-number Book-name Chapter:verses” (e.g. 1 Enoch 7:3–6). Non-Enochic pseudepigrapha, Josephus (Niese/Loeb system), Tacitus, Theophilus, Hippolytos, Origen, and Augustine follow the format “Book-name book-number: section-number” (e.g. *Against Apion* I: 98) or “Book-name book-number: chapter.verses” (e.g. *Refutation* IX: 13.1–3). Gnostic codices follow the format “Codex-name: page.lines” or, for Nag Hammadi Codices, “NHC Codex-number: page.lines” (e.g. NHC III: 59.13–15). Magical papyri follow the format “PGM/PDM reference-number: lines” (e.g. PGM I: 247–262) or “P. Collection-name papyrus-number: page.lines” (e.g. P. Macq. I: 7.21–26). Non-magical papyri follow the latter option, noting that the entire digit string before the colon (or, absent a colon, the entire digit string) is the inventory number of the papyrus.

8 J. R. Bartlett (1969: 2) renders the passage: “I brought about the destruction of Seir (det. ‘foreign people’) among the tribes of the Asiatic nomads.”

9 There is some circularity to this argument, though, as those attributions too were motivated by the biblical data of Num 24:17–18 (Kitchen 1964: 69, footnote 4), but at least no significant incompatibilities have emerged.

central/northeastern Syria (fig. 1).¹⁰ Despite their geographic separation, Annus argues that the two mountains – and their associated populations – were connected in Israelite thought.¹¹

As mentioned above, the sedentary Mesopotamians viewed the nomadic Suteans negatively (Vera Chamaza 2005: 13–14; Annus 2018: 9), their perception no doubt jaundiced not only by frequent small-scale tribal raiding but also by the larger Aramean migrations and incursions that they had to endure in the Twelfth to Ninth Centuries BC (Black – Green 1992: 136; van de Mieroop 2016: 211, 217–218; Annus 2012: 32; Annus 2018: 11). The Mesopotamian sense of hostility toward Sutean tribes seems to have been absorbed by the Israelites during the Babylonian Exile (ca. 597–538 BC); for example, Ezekiel 35, which dates to that period or later, repeatedly prophesies doom to Mount Seir (Annus 2012: 34, footnote 80). Similarly, the fourth prophecy of Balaam (Num 24:17–18, cited above), whose final redaction appears to be post-Exilic (Douglas 1993), refers to Israel crushing the “sons of Sheth” associated with Seir. As mentioned above, these “Shethites” are traditionally linked in scholarship with the Amorite/ Aramean *Š³ti’ū*, the Suteans.¹²

Despite the long-standing convention of using different renderings in English (Sheth/ Seth),¹³ the Hebrew *שֵׁט* (*Šēṭ*) of Num 24:17 is identical to the *שֵׁט* (*Šēṭ*) used in Gen 4:25 to name the third son of Adam. As the latter verse is part of a genealogy, it was probably composed later than poetic passages such as the aforementioned prophecies of Balaam and Ezekiel.¹⁴ If Annus (2012: 35, 37; 2018: 9, 18, 21) is correct,¹⁵ then the authors/redactors chose to recast the

10 Bartlett (1969) has argued for relocating the biblical/Egyptian Seir west of Edom, placing it in the Negev south of Beersheba. Even if he is correct, this Seir still lies far to the south of Šaršar/Jebel Bishri – in fact, it would be even more distant.

11 Annus (2012: 34; 2018: 12) brings the names closer by giving (without justification) the Hebrew transliteration *Š³ir/Š³yr*, i.e. using *Š* instead of *S*. He goes on to describe the names as “parallels” of each other while admitting that they probably do not refer to the same geographic location. Annus (2018: 12–13) sees Šaršar as a mythological name that can be applied to any real location that fits a Sutean stereotype.

12 Equating the “sons of Sheth” with the Suteans is not unproblematic; on the connection, see Vera Chamaza (2005: 17–19) and Quack (1992: 76). The reference to “Num 24,37” in the latter should correctly read Num 24:17.

13 The convention is followed by the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and many other bible editions.

14 In terms of source analysis, Gen 4:25 is usually assigned to J (Klijn 1977: 1–2; Turner 2019: 148); this poses no problem if J (or its equivalent, if one abandons the traditional source-names) is dated to the Exilic period or later, as some more recent estimates allow (Coogan 1993a; Levin 1993; Niesiołowski-Spanò 2007; van Seters 2015). Accordingly, this verse would be expected to post-date poetic passages, which tend to be early (e.g. Morag 1981). The mention of Seth in Gen 5:3 poses no problem as this verse is assigned to P (Klijn 1977: 1), which is generally accepted to be Exilic or post-Exilic (Coogan 1993b). It is telling that Genesis has seven mentions of Seth, whereas the remainder of the Hebrew bible has just one mention, the New Testament has just one mention, and the Apocrypha have just one mention (Niesiołowski-Spanò 2007: 125). The paucity of biblical references to Seth outside of Genesis suggests a late date for the composition of both Gen 4:25 and Gen 5:3.

15 Further to the previous note, a pre-Exilic date for Gen 4:25 – in line with the traditional dating of J – would preclude it representing the inversion of a Mesopotamian prejudice absorbed during the Exile. Equally, if the poetic prophecies in Num 24:17 and Ezek 35 are pre-Exilic then they cannot reflect such a prejudice.

“sons of Sheth” in a positive light in the Genesis genealogy (Gen 4).¹⁶ The writers of Hebrew scripture were typically keen to subvert Mesopotamian paradigms (Annus 2012: 3), and may have been especially motivated to do so in this case because a subset of the *Š3s.w* – who in turn were ostensibly a southern Sutean people (Annus 2018: 10) – was probably one of the earliest groups to worship יהוה, YHWH, the deity who later became the God of Israel (Bietak 2015: 19–21; Annus 2018: 10; Cooper 2020: 217–220). Accordingly, in the genealogy of Adam’s descendants, the “sons of Seth” are righteous, unlike the tainted lineage of Seth’s brother, the murderer Cain (Gen 4:10–24) (Klijn 1977: 27–28).¹⁷ As a replacement for the virtuous but slain Abel (Gen 4:25), Seth embodied the true likeness of Adam (Gen 5:3) and thus of God (Gen 1:26, 5:1); his descendants Enoch and Noah “walked with God” (Gen 5:24, 6:9), and the latter was singled out as “a righteous man, blameless in his generation” (Gen 6:9).

Of course, the lineage of Cain was extinguished by the Flood, whereas that of Seth survived it through Noah and his family (Gen 7). After the Flood, the “sons of Seth” repopulated the entire world. Post-Flood lineages attested at Seir include those of Seir the Horite (Gen 36:20–30; Deut 2:12, 22) and Esau, the brother of Jacob (Gen 36:8; Deut 2:4; Josh 24:4); these people are of necessity Sethian, but are not referred to as such since the designation no longer serves to distinguish between descent groups. As Seir lay beyond Israel in Edom, it was unproblematic for the Hebrew scriptures to retain the unfavourable forecasts made for this region by Ezekiel and Balaam. It was consistent with the shameful origins given to the neighbouring lands of Moab and Ammon (Gen 19:30–38).

Having considered the Semitic Sutiens and biblical Sethians, it is now time to turn our attention to Egypt. The next section examines Seth, the Egyptian god.

EGYPTIAN SETH

As one might guess from the material already discussed, the convoluted Sethian terrain harbours some provocative linguistic overlaps. Several involve the name of Egyptian god Seth, a deity whose unruliness and brute strength caused him to be feared as a likely agent of chaos (te Velde 1967; Wilkinson 2003: 197–199; Hart 2005: 143–145). Interestingly, the Hebrew phrase in Num 24:17 – בְּנֵי־שֵׁת, “the sons of Sheth” – has for a long time been read by influential commentators as a contraction of בְּנֵי־תִשְׁבָּע, “the sons of tumult” (Brown – Driver – Briggs 1939: 1011).¹⁸ The identity of Sheth with Seth in Hebrew has already been explained in the previous

16 This is consistent with proposals from the 1960s and 1970s that Seth, the son of Adam, “might initially have been the tribal hero of the Aramaic Suti” (Onasch 1980: 106). Conveniently, J (to which Gen 4:25 is assigned; see previous two notes) has a Judahite focus (Coogan 1993a) and is therefore highly aware of traditions associated with neighboring Edom, where the “sons of Sheth” of Num 24:17 were located.

17 Some revisionist schemes in the Jewish Targumim and Midrashim – which take their lead from the failure of Gen 5:3 to mention any sons of Adam other than Seth – go so far as to claim that Seth was the only son of Adam and that Cain and Abel were in fact sons of the devil (Klijn 1977: 3–12, 16, 18, 22).

18 E.g. McNeile (1911: 140); the emendation takes its lead from Jer 48:45. For the persistence (and indeed popularity) of this interpretation in modern biblical studies, see the translation online at <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/numbers/24-17.htm> and the associated commentaries at

section. Although uncannily apposite, the Seth/tumult nexus offered by this reading of Num 24:17 is spurious, at least in respect of the name of the Egyptian god.

Tempting Semitic inputs of other kinds prove equally groundless, as follows. The “Amorite wave” of westward nomadic migration culminated in Egypt in the much-resented Hyksos rulers of the Second Intermediate Period (1648–1539 BC) (Candelora n.d.; Burke 2019). A tradition initiated or perpetuated by Josephus (*Against Apion* I: 75–92) derives the name “Hyksos” from the Egyptian *ḥkꜣ Šꜣs.w*, “Rulers of the Shasu”, *Šꜣs.w* being a designation that we have already encountered (see: Suteans); the true etymology is the more generic *ḥkꜣ ḥꜣs.wt*, “rulers of foreign lands” (Bietak 1980; Rutherford 2000: 114, footnote 33; Morenz – Popko 2010: 103–104). A general association of foreigners with Seth would be expected, given that he was “the foreign god, the lord of foreign countries” (te Velde 1967: 109), but in this case a far deeper connection developed. The main deity of these Canaanite overlords – the West Semitic storm god Baal (Mattingly 2000; Wilkinson 2003: 101–102) – became closely identified with Seth (Hart 2005: 43, 144; Wilkinson 2003: 101; Allon 2007), who was already linked with storms and bad weather of all kinds (e.g. PT § 143a; § 1150a–c; Zandee 1963; Wilkinson 2003: 198).¹⁹ Seth’s name is rendered hieroglyphically (fig. 2g) in forms that were probably pronounced Setesh, Setekh, Sutekh, Suty or Set (te Velde 1967: 1; Peust 1999: 184–185; Hart 2005: 143).²⁰ Despite the similar-sounding Semitic and Egyptian appellations *Šʿti’ ū/Suti’ ū/Sty.w/St.tyw* for Western Asiatic Amorites, and despite the worship of Seth by the disruptive – and therefore Sethian – Hyksos intruders (te Velde 1967: 121),²¹ the name of the Egyptian god long predates such considerations and is independent of them. Accordingly, the hieroglyphic orthography of Seth’s name (fig. 2g) has almost no overlap with that of the ethnonyms *Sty.w/St.tyw* (fig. 2b, c). Attestations of Seth actually date back to the Predynastic Period (Fourth Millennium BC) (te Velde 1967: 12; Wilkinson 2003: 197; Hart 2005: 143).

The *Wörterbuch* reports that Seth’s name was appropriated into Babylonian Akkadian as *Šutaḥ* (Erman – Grapow 1971 IV: 345.4). *Šutti* and *Šuta* – identified as hypocorisms of the god’s name (Moran 1992: 384, 388) – appear as the personal names of Egyptian commissioners or envoys in three Amarna letters (EA 5, 234, 288; Muchiki 1990: 393; Moran 1992: 11, 293, 331; Peust 1999: 184).²² However, neither *Šutaḥ* nor any obvious cognates (including *Sut*-forms) are included in the Oriental Institute’s *Assyrian Dictionary* (CAD), suggesting that the use of such

<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/numbers/24-17.htm> (accessed on 3rd February 2021). For opposition to the emendation, see Day (2010: 339–340, including footnote 12).

19 For example, the recumbent Seth animal (Gardiner sign V21) is used as a determinative in the verb *nšni*, “to storm, to rage” (Gardiner 1957: 460).

20 For a survey of the hieroglyphic orthography of the name Seth in the main religious texts of the Old to New Kingdoms, see Taylor (2016: 22–83). For a survey of the orthography of the name Seth in hieratic script, see Taylor (2016: 84–106). A formal discussion of the phonology of the Egyptian variants is given by Peust (1999: 184–185); some of its implications are discussed in the final section of the present paper.

21 Baal was worshipped as “Seth of Avaris” (Bietak 2015: 31). Later Asiatic invaders were also perceived by the Egyptians to be Sethian agents of chaos; Alan B. Lloyd (1982: 180) writes of the Persians that “initially, the conquerors were assigned the role of Typhonic [i.e. Sethian] beings in exactly the same way as the Hyksos invaders of the Second Intermediate Period”.

22 “Seth” (*Stḥ*) is indeed listed as an Egyptian personal name during the New Kingdom (Ranke 1935: 321, no. 29).

loanwords in Akkadian was limited to the special circumstances of New Kingdom diplomacy. An Aramaic counterpart – St – has tentatively been identified in the rendering of an Egyptian personal name (Muchiki 1990: 185).

One of the Egyptian Seth's most common epithets is “son of Nut”, which reflects his position in the final generation of the Ennead (te Velde 1967: 28). In the core myth of Egyptian religion, Seth murdered his brother Osiris and tried to usurp the kingship of Egypt from Osiris's son, Horus. Later, Seth's great strength was harnessed in the service of Re, his role being to defend the solar barque against attacks by the chaos-serpent Apophis (te Velde 1967: 99–108). Seth is traditionally denoted by the Seth-animal, a hybrid beast of uncertain composition (te Velde 1967: 7–26), but from the Late Period onward Seth is more likely to be shown as a donkey or donkey-headed man (te Velde 1967: 14; Betz 1992: 339).

The cult of Seth flourished during the Ramesside period (Dynasties 19–20). The “Son of Re” names of the Nineteenth-Dynasty pharaohs Seti I/II define the king as “He of (the god) Seth”, and normative hieroglyphic writings of these nomens (Ranke 1935: 322, nos. 7–8; Taylor 2016: 189–191) use one of the Seth animal/god logograms (Gardiner signs C7 or E20) to denote the deity (fig. 2h). However, a long-standing orthographic tradition – evident since Old Kingdom times (Kahl 2004) – resulted in Seth's name being spelled unusually or even being replaced entirely in some hieroglyphic inscriptions. Accordingly, the nomen of Seti I may appear to be written as *Tit.y* (“Titi”) due to use of the knot of Isis symbol (Gardiner sign V39, phonetic *tii*). However, in such cases the Osiris glyph (sign C83) replaces that of the Seth animal/god (fig. 2i) (cf. Kahl 2004: 232); the resulting ensemble is thought to be a cryptographic writing in which signs C83 and V39 contribute the consonants *s* and *t*, respectively, the name therefore being read *S(w)t.y* (te Velde 1967: 132, footnote 4; Pehal 2014: 194–195). Sometimes the Osiris glyph replaces the Seth one without augmentation by sign V39 (fig. 2i). Orthographies of this kind occur even in highly formal settings; for example, they are ubiquitous both in the tomb of Seti I (KV 17) and throughout his vast memorial temple at Abydos (fig. 3) (Taylor 2016: 228). Perhaps the orthographic tradition reflects a long-standing reluctance to invoke Seth by writing his name. If so, the strong association that both the tomb and Abydos have with Osiris may have further discouraged direct references to his murderer in those locations and encouraged the replacement of the Seth glyph by the Osiris one (Taylor 2016: 228). Either way, antipathy to Seth would subsequently become widespread. During the Late Period, Seth was increasingly proscribed and viewed as an enemy of the gods, although in the oases his cult persisted into Roman times (von Lieven 2006).

There are indications in the Hebrew bible that YHWH was originally a Semitic storm god, and thus a local form of (or counterpart to) the West Semitic storm god Baal, which in turn makes him cognate with Seth (Cannuyer 2017: 18–24). In fact, the West Semitic goddess Anat – considered to be the consort of Seth-Baal in the New Kingdom – was venerated as the consort of YHWH by the Jews of Elephantine (Cannuyer 2017: 29).

For Egyptians, Seth was strongly associated with the Levant and Syria; this, together with his identification with the donkey, might account for why the Egyptian writer Apion chose to disparage the Jerusalem Temple as the home of a donkey-cult (Josephus, *Against Apion* II: 79–88; Hofrichter 2003: 300–301; Assmann 1997: 37; Cannuyer 2017: 29). These links were not the only potential motive. Another Sethian connection for YHWH lies in common Roman era misrepresentations of the Jews as entrenched opponents of normative behaviour (e.g. Tacitus



Fig. 3 A cartouche of Seti I in the precinct of his memorial temple at Abydos. The orthography, which uses the Osiris and knot of Isis glyphs in place of the Seth glyph, renders the king's name cryptographically as *S(w)t.y* (photo Lloyd D. Graham, 2020)

Histories V: 5; Cannuyer 2017: 28). A further Sethian association for the Jewish deity can be found in the fact that *Iaw*, the rendering of YHWH in Greco-Egyptian texts, was phonetically similar to the Egyptian and Coptic words for donkey, ⲓ and ⲉⲓⲱ, respectively, which in turn reflect the sound of an ass braying (Assmann 1997: 37; Cannuyer 2017: 29). The *Iaw* of Greco-Egyptian magical texts features in Coptic Gnostic texts as *IAO* (IAO), an Archon who represents or assists the jealous and ignorant demiurge Ialdabaoth, who is himself a negative recasting of YHWH (Cannuyer 2017: 34; Rasimus 2009: 104–105; Turner 2019: 151). Magical and Gnostic text genres are discussed in detail below (see: *Magical Seth, Gnostic Seth*).

Moving from YHWH to his antithesis, Seth's role as the murderer of Osiris, adversary of Horus and wrecker of havoc has sometimes prompted comparisons with Satan (Onasch 1980: 105). Despite the overlap in these figures' attributes, there is no etymological connection between the names Seth and Satan. The name of the Judeo-Christian devil has its root in the Hebrew noun *שָׂטָן*, "adversary", "attacker" or "executioner" (Stokes 2014; cf. te Velde 1986: 91–94), a derivation sufficiently secure as to render superfluous the speculation of Görg (1996) about a contribution by the Egyptian verb *sdni* ("to restrain/punish") (Stokes 2014: 263–264, footnote 34). The image of the composite Greco-Egyptian deity Seth-Typhon as the chief adversary of the gods – a malign force whose counterpart in Judeo-Christian circles was Satan – is thought to underpin some Hebrew prophetic visions (Dan 7–8) as well as parts of the final book of the New Testament (Rev 12–13) (van Henten 1988). Interestingly, there is a (small) chance that the Greek "Typhon" is an Egyptian loanword. Since the Late Period, Seth was occasionally given the title *tbh* in Egyptian texts (Erman – Grapow 1971 V: 262.7; TLA: lemma no. 170740; Leitz 2002 VII: 381), a word associated with *tbhy/dbhy*, "enemies (of a god)" (TLA: lemma no. 178740; cf. Leitz 2002 VII: 381) and perhaps *dbi*, "hippopotamus" (TLA: lem-

ma no. 178280; Onasch 1980: 116) – an animal well known as an embodiment of Seth (te Velde 1967: 59). This title may have served as the phonetic model for the Greek “Typhon” (Kolta 1968: 164, 170; Onasch 1980: 116) or at least assisted in the identification of Seth with Typhon (Lloyd 1993: 111). The reverse possibility – that the Egyptian *tḥ* is borrowed from the Greek – is very unlikely (te Velde 1986).

The Typhonian dragon of the Apocalypse (Rev 12–13) went on to inspire many of the representations of Satan in Christian art. In fact, there is a provocative visual continuity between Ptolemaic temple reliefs of Horus harpooning the Seth-hippopotamus, late Roman (Fourth Century AD) depictions of a mounted Horus spearing other Sethian animals, and the Coptic tradition (from the Sixth Century AD onward) of equestrian saints spearing the devil (Turner 2012: 23; Brunner-Traut 1985: 77; Georganteli 2010: 111–112; Meinardus 2000: 83–85) – a trope continued in medieval European depictions of St. George slaying “a great dragon, possessed and moved by Satan himself” (Hanauer 1907: 56–57) (fig. 4). Depictions of the medieval dragon-slayer also have considerable visual overlap with pharaonic images of Seth spearing Apophis from atop the solar barque (Brunner-Traut 1985: 74–75) and late Roman ones where he spears the chaos-serpent from horseback (Cruz-Urbe 2009: 208, 224–226). In these cases, of course, Seth is to be identified with the saint rather than the devil. His innate nature, however, is more Satanic than saintly. Writing on the Desert Fathers’ attitudes to vice in Egyptian monastic communities, Racheli Shalomi-Hen (1998: 349–351) notes that Seth and Satan share certain characteristics through their joint association with confusion, lust, gluttony and drunkenness.

Let us now move from considering putative influences of the Egyptian Seth on early and Late Antique Christianity and look instead at developments of the biblical Seth in the same period.

PSEUDEPIGRAPHICAL SETH

In line with the positive presentation of the “sons of Seth” in the Hebrew scriptures (see: Biblical Seth), Jewish pseudepigrapha such as the First- to Fourth-Century AD *Life of Adam and Eve* identify Seth (Greek *Life*: Σήθ, Σήθ; e.g. Tromp 2005: 111)²³ and his kindred as receiving instruction from Adam in Edenic history and divine secrets shortly before the latter’s death (Latin *Life* 25.1–2, 29.2–4; Annus 2018: 17, 22).²⁴ They inscribed the information on pillars or tablets of stone and clay so that it would survive the anticipated world cataclysms of flood and fire (Latin *Life*, 49.1–51.3; de Jonge – Tromp 1997: 14, 24, 27, 59–60; Annus 2012: 35, including footnote 81).²⁵ Similarly, the First-Century AD Jewish historian Josephus credits Seth (Greek: Σήθου) and his descendants with discovering “science with regard to the heavenly bodies” and

23 The first Greek form is also used to spell Seth’s name in the Septuagint translation of Gen 4:25 and 5:3, as well as to translate “Sheth” in Num 24:17 (see: Biblical Seth). Similarly, Brown – Driver – Briggs (1939: 1011) gives Σήθ.

24 The extant Greek and Latin versions of the *Life* probably date to the Second to Fourth Century AD, with the Greek predating the Latin one (Johnson 1985: 252; de Jonge – Tromp 1997: 77). The original composition probably dates to (or at least incorporates material from) the First Century AD (Johnson 1985: 252).

25 As pointed out in the main text (see: Biblical Seth), the cataclysmic Flood is of course survived by a righteous Sethite (Noah) and his family.

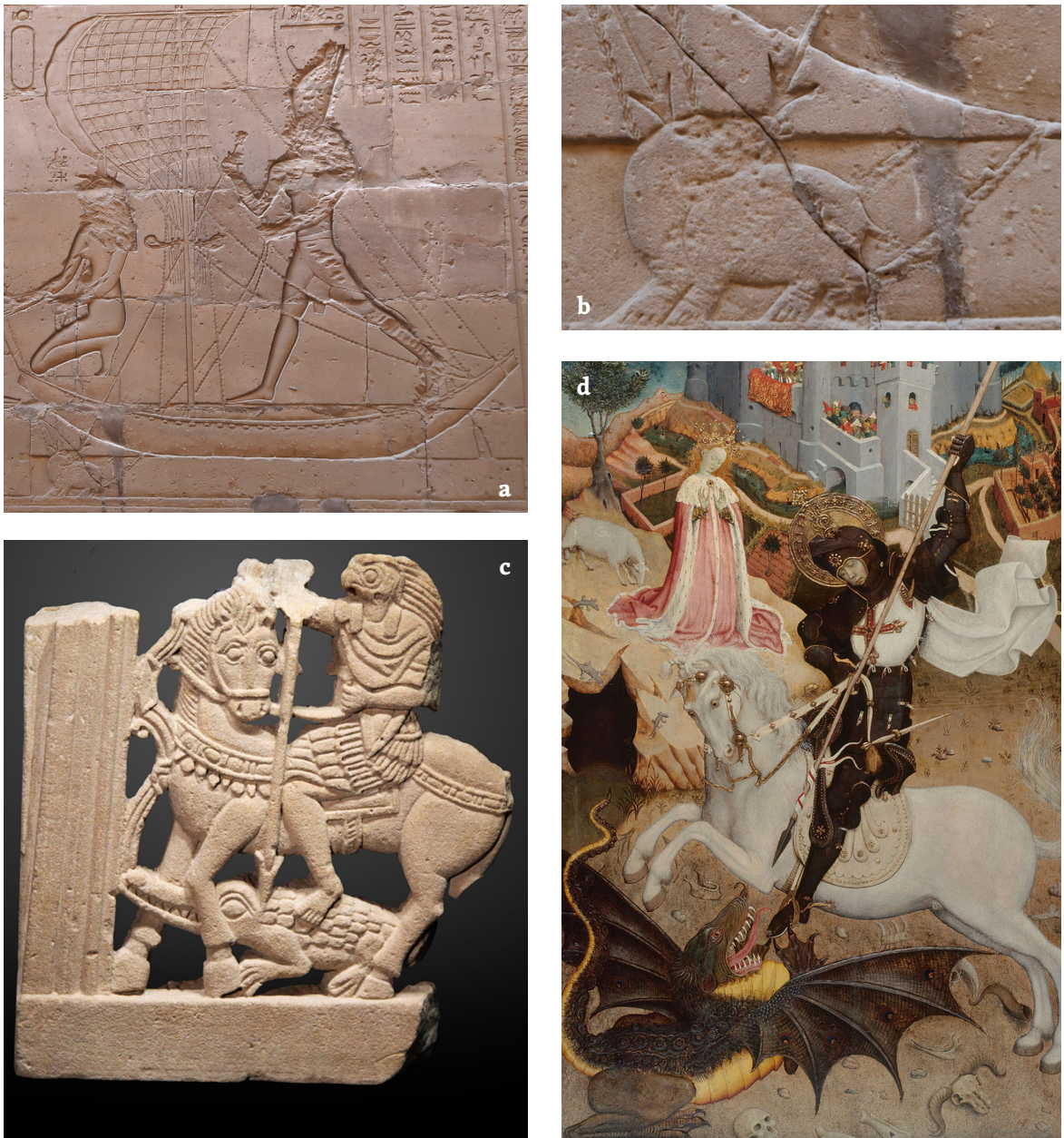


Fig. 4 Horus and Seth, saint and Satanic dragon. (a) Horus standing on a boat and spearing Seth in the form of a hippopotamus, Ptolemaic wall relief, Temple of Edfu (photo Lloyd D. Graham, 2020) (b) Detail of the Seth-hippopotamus from bottom left of panel a. (c) Horus on horseback spearing Seth as a crocodile, Fourth Century AD, sandstone window fragment, Louvre E 4850 (photo Rama, via Wikimedia Commons, Creative Commons BY-SA 3.0 FR, online at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Horus_horseman-E_4850-IMG_4871-gradient.jpg) (d) Saint George killing the dragon, Bernat Martorell, ca. 1434 AD, tempera on panel, Art Institute of Chicago 1933.786. (Image Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons, online at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bernat_Martorell_-_Saint_George_Killing_the_Dragon_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg; panel (d) has been flipped horizontally for maximum compatibility with the other panels.)

with preserving it in their land of Seiris against the coming world cataclysms (*Antiquities* I: 68–72; Annus 2012: 34; Annus 2018: 17). Various elements in the pseudepigraphic narrative seem to be relics from Mesopotamian myths about the Suteans (see: Suteans), now reworked with opposite polarity. For example, the knowledge-laden tablets/pillars reflect the stolen Tablet of Destinies that Anzu took to Šaršar in the Erra Epic, but in the revisionist scheme they are honourable works rather than ill-gotten gains. Similarly, the cataclysmic flood and fire recapitulate the destructions wrought at Šaršar by the same agents in the Anzu and Erra Epics, respectively, except that this time the preservation of Sethian heritage is assured (Annus 2012: 35–37; Annus 2018: 17–18).²⁶

One must wonder if Josephus had connected the inscribed pillars or tablets of the pseud-epigraphical Seth (his Σήθου, Sithou) with the Ramesside King Seti I (Greek: Σέθως / Σέθων / Σέθω, Sethos/Sethon/Setho)²⁷ on account of the survival of inscribed pharaonic monuments attributed (rightly or wrongly) to the latter.²⁸ We have seen that Josephus calls the Sethian homeland “Seiris”, which – although the linguistic correspondence is imprecise (Reinink 1975: 72–73) – is very reminiscent of the mountain and land of *Sê‘ir*/Seir associated with the “sons of Sheth” (see: Biblical Seth). Josephus did not provide any geographic anchor for Seiris (Reinink 1975: 72–73). It has variously been identified with Mount Seir in Edom, with the Hebrew/Babylonian Flood-mountain Ararat/Nisir, or – consistent with the possibility of Seth/Seti conflation – with Egypt (Reinink 1975: 74; Pearson 1990: 73, including footnotes 70–72). In any case, the inclusion of this toponym and of the inverted Mesopotamian correspondences lends support to Annus’s contention of continuity between the disparaged Sutean “sons of Sheth” and the virtuous Adamic “sons of Seth” (see: Biblical Seth). Failing that, Josephus’s reference to Seiris suggests a conflation of the S(h)eths of Gen 4:25 and Num 24:17 by later Jewish authors.

Seir retained its reputation as a source of ancient knowledge throughout subsequent centuries. In his early Third-Century AD *Refutation of All Heresies*, Hippolytos describes a miraculous book supposedly discovered in the early Second Century which originated among the Seres, whom he considered to be a people from Parthia (Iran) (*Refutation* IX: 8.1–3; Annus 2012: 35). “Mount Sir” features in a Third- to Fourth-Century AD text in the Gnostic library from Nag Hammadi (a corpus discussed further in the next section) in association with surviving the Flood.²⁹ The mysterious land of Seiris/Seres/Šir continued to be nominated into Late Antiquity as a premier source of revelatory writings; an even later example will be encountered below

26 Of Ninurta’s methods we read: “In the midst of the conflict, (in the midst of) the war, He launched fourteen storm floods, Dressed in armor he bathed in blood, Clouds of death sent rain, the lightning flashes were arrows” (Grayson 2011: 96). Ishum’s name means “fire” and (although the text also uses the Deluge as a simile) we are told that, at Šaršar, “He destroyed the uplands and slew their flocks, he roiled the oceans and wiped out their produce, he laid waste reedbeds and woodlands, and burned them like Fire” (George 2013: 50, 58).

27 E.g. Manetho in Josephus *Against Apion* I: 98, 231 (Waddell 1964: 102, 120) and in Theophilus *To Autolytus* III: 19–20 (Waddell 1964: 110).

28 This suggestion has venerable antecedents in scholarship. In the Eighteenth Century AD, William Whiston (1999: 53, footnote 5) suggested that Josephus had confused the biblical Seth with the Middle Kingdom king Sesostris (Senwosret).

29 A connection with the Flood-mountain was already made in the previous paragraph. The current reference occurs in the Third-Century AD *Hypostasis of the Archons* at NHC II: 92.10–14 (Bullard – Layton 1988: 166) and is discussed by Reinink (1975: 74) and Pearson (1990: 73, including footnote 72).

(see: Magical Seth) (Reinink 1975; Annus 2012: 35; Annus 2018: 19–20). Seth is typically located in the distant, and indeed mythical, east. The name is perhaps related to – or was connected belatedly with – the Greek word for silk, Σῆρες (Seres) being the people from whom silk was obtained (Liddell – Scott 1883: 1384; Schoff 1915: 236–239; Reinink 1975: 77–78).

In keeping with their reputation as the inheritors and guardians of antediluvian wisdom, the “sons of Seth” were identified in some Christian circles (Klijn 1977: 2, footnote 4; Orlov 2001: 148) with the *benê hâ-elôhîm* of Gen 6:1–8, these being the “sons of God” who, in the Enochic pseudepigrapha, are credited with imparting the divine secrets of art and technology to humankind.³⁰ The problem of the violent and lawless offspring of the *benê hâ-elôhîm* – the *nefilîm* (“fallen ones”), those “mighty men which were of old, men of renown” (Gen 6:4)³¹ – was side-stepped by a revisionist scheme which focused instead on “the great, incorruptible, immovable race of the great, mighty men of the great Seth”. The latter quotation comes from the Gnostic *Gospel of the Egyptians* (NHC III: 59.13–15, similarly III: 64.23–24; Böhlig – Wisse 1988: 215, 217); Gnostic works – including this one – are addressed directly in the next section.

In one passage in *The Life of Adam and Eve* (Greek *Life*: 9.1–12.2; Latin *Life*: 35.1–40.1), Seth walks with Eve to the gates of Paradise to beg God for a little “oil of life” from a tree there, which would relieve the pain of the dying Adam. As they travel, Seth is attacked and bitten by a beast which can talk; it is identified as the diabolical serpent that caused the Fall (Gen 3). Seth rebukes the beast, which he calls the “accursed enemy of Truth, confounder and destroyer” (Latin *Life*: 39.1; Charles 1913: 143); he then orders it to remain silent and to leave mankind unharmed until such time as God summons it for trial. The beast acquiesces, whereupon the bite it had inflicted on Seth heals instantly and the creature returns submissively to its lair. Christian Cannuyer (2017: 45–46) sees in this episode a distant memory of the daily victory of the Egyptian Seth over the serpent Apophis (see previous section).

GNOSTIC SETH

The Apocalypse of Adam – an early (First- to Second-Century AD) Gnostic tractate written in Coptic, found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt – reprises the Jewish pseudepigraphic theme of Seth (CHΘ) receiving instruction from Adam in divine knowledge shortly before his death (*Apoc. Adam* NHC V: 64.1–7; MacRae – Parrott 1988: 279); the substance of this privileged information forms the bulk of the text.³² At least some of the Sethian Gnostic texts are thought to have been composed in

30 In this interpretation of Gen 6:1–8, the formerly upright “sons of Seth” fell from grace on account of their lust for – and interbreeding with – the tainted “daughters of Cain” (e.g. Augustine, *City of God* XV: 22–23). However, Jewish pseudepigrapha such as 1 Enoch and the Book of Jubilees provide compelling evidence in favour of an alternative interpretation; in this paradigm, the *benê hâ-elôhîm* of Gen 6:1–8 were angels (“Watchers”) whose descent from heaven was motivated by lust for human women, with whom they interbred. Reeves (2014) traces the development and interaction of these mutually exclusive interpretations.

31 “Nephilim” in the NRSV; interpretation from Hendel (1983). For their description, the well-turned English phrase from the King James Version is quoted. The violent lawlessness of the giant Nephilim is described in detail in the Enochic pseudepigrapha, e.g. 1 Enoch 7:3–6.

32 This tractate lacks Christian elements, and “its close dependence on Jewish apocalyptic tradition suggests that it may represent a transitional stage in an evolution from Jewish to gnostic apocalyptic” (MacRae – Parrott 1988: 277).

Egypt; for example, the tractate named *The Three Steles of Seth* – which claims to convey the antediluvian secrets inscribed on the tablets designed to survive flood and fire (Pearson 1990: 74) – was probably written in Alexandria during the Third Century AD (Goehring – Robinson 1988: 397). Success in promoting the Sethian lineage as the guardian of ancient knowledge (as witnessed here and in the previous section) probably explains why, in Sethian Gnosticism, the biblical/pseudepigraphical Seth completely supplanted Enoch as the primary representative of antediluvian wisdom (Orlov 2001; Annus 2012: 36–37).³³ In these Gnostic circles, Seth was in fact developed into a divine Saviour who was in some cases equated with Jesus in his role as Christ (Pearson 1990: 53–54, 57, 74, 76–78; Cannuyer 2017: 39). Both figures were considered to be the authentic image of God (Turner 2019: 152), and the “new start” afforded by the birth of the biblical Seth (Gen 4:25) was considered to parallel the new beginning offered by the birth of Jesus (Onasch 1980: 107). Gnostic followers of Seth – the self-styled “seed of Seth” – were the elect, the chosen ones redeemed through *gnosis* (Pearson 1990: 68–71); they believed themselves to belong to “the great, incorruptible, immovable race of the great, mighty men of the great Seth” mentioned in the previous section (Turner 2019: 148–149).

Another Nag Hammadi codex, the Coptic Second- to Third-Century AD work commonly known as *The Gospel of the Egyptians*, has Seth as both its author and its focus,³⁴ but – despite any expectations that might be raised by the title – this Seth is once again the Gnostic version of the biblical/pseudepigraphical son of Adam rather than the Egyptian god (who, as we shall see in the next section, is the Seth invoked in Greek/Demotic Magical Papyri dating from around the same time). K. H. Kuhn’s review of the translation and commentary of the *Gospel* by Böhlig – Wisse (1975) provides a convenient summary of these editors’ opinion on the tempting onomastic overlap (Kuhn 1976: 214): “The central figure of the book is Seth. He is described as its author and the history of salvation of the Sethians is its kernel. Because of the title ‘Gospel of the Egyptians’, the editors look for a special connection with Egypt and, therefore, think it possible that the Egyptian god Seth (Set) was reinterpreted in terms of Seth, the son of Adam.”

Egyptian mythology does appear to have influenced the theology of at least some of the Nag Hammadi documents (Broze 1994; Hofrichter 2003; cf. Onasch 1980: 118–119), and a positive reformulation of the troublesome Egyptian deity within Gnostic circles might reflect the latter’s known penchant for inverting existing moral polarities (Doresse 1960: 104–105; Böhlig – Wisse 1975: 35; Turner 2019: 151; cf. Fossum – Glazer 1994: 86–87).³⁵ However, there is little sign of the Egyptian god in the *Gospel*’s characterisation of Seth (Pearson 1990: 80). Onasch (1980: 113–114) successfully refutes the editors’ suggestion of a link between the two Seths via

33 1 Enoch, which has already been mentioned several times, was an influential proto-Gnostic peudepigraphon (Second to First Century BC) in which Enoch is the wisdom-figure.

34 Dating from Hedrick (1981: 242). *The Gospel of the Egyptians* is the informal title given to it in Western scholarship; at the end (NHC III: 69.18–19) it calls itself *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (Böhlig – Wisse 1988: 208, 219). The informal title relies upon a (potentially incorrect) reconstruction of a lacuna in the (potentially secondary) colophon (Schenke 2012: 1013–1014).

35 The proposed rehabilitation would constitute a final reversal of Seth’s moral standing in a long series of such inversions; recall that Seth, at the outset the murderer of Osiris and persecutor of Horus, was next rehabilitated as the protector of Re against Apophis, only to be reviled later as an enemy of all the gods.

a shared association with fish. A more credible area of possible overlap identified by Böhlig – Wisse (1975: 35) warrants a more detailed exposition, which will now be provided.

The Egyptian Seth has a longstanding association with homosexuality (te Velde 1967: 32–46); for example, in the New Kingdom *Contendings of Horus and Seth*, Seth is lampooned as a homosexual who first violates his nephew Horus and who later is tricked into receiving Horus’s semen, which makes him pregnant (P. Chester Beatty I: 11.12; Wente 2003: 99–100; te Velde 1967: 43). In the Gnostic *Gospel of the Egyptians* (NHC III: 60.9–29; Böhlig – Wisse 1988: 215), we are told: “Then the great Seth came and brought his seed. And it was sown in the aeons which had been brought forth, their number being the amount of Sodom. Some say that Sodom is the place of pasture of the great Seth, which is Gomorrah. But others (say) that the great Seth took his plant out of Gomorrah and planted it in the second place, to which he gave the name Sodom.”³⁶

If the *Gospel’s* seemingly sexual allusions to Sodom (the toponym that underpins the English word “sodomy”, Gen 19:5–9) are euphemisms for homosexuality, then the behaviour of the *Gospel’s* protagonist has similarities with actions reported of the Egyptian god but not of the son of Adam. The connection is tenuous, though, as there is no evidence that Seth’s homosexual encounters were remembered at this late stage of post-pharaonic history.³⁷ Pearson rejects the juxtaposition outright, claiming that the invocation of Sodom and Gomorrah in such writings carries no sexual connotations (Pearson 1977: 33–34; Pearson 1990: 80–81, including footnote 103). One might speculate that the “sons of Seth” were planted in these two cities to ensure that they experienced, in addition to the already-delivered Flood (Gen 7), the promised cataclysmic fire (see previous section) (de Jonge – Tromp 1997: 93; Schenke 2006); the latter prophecy would have been fulfilled when “the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven” (Gen 19:24).³⁸ Some commentators see the city-names merely as geographic references the southern Dead Sea region (Doresse 1960: 299), which interestingly is where Num 24:17–18 had placed the “sons of Sheth” (see: Biblical Seth). A neutral or positive regard for Sodom and Gomorrah would be consistent with the already-mentioned Gnostic tendency to invert normative moral polarities.

Another attempt to give an Egyptian flavour to the Gnostic Seth interprets the first word of “Emmacha Seth” in *The Three Steles of Seth* as *hm-m33*, a Ptolemaic Egyptian epithet of the god Seth (te Velde 1967: 149–150, footnote 12; Wekel 1975: 572–573; Pearson 1990: 81). Its meaning

36 Klijn (1977: 34) notes that the references to “plant” in this passage involve a pun on the Hebrew phrase in Gen 4:25 that explains Seth’s birth (see: Biblical Seth).

37 Fragmentary papyri in Late Egyptian and Demotic bearing portions of the *Contendings of Horus and Seth* have come to light (e.g. Quack 2012), but it is unclear whether Seth’s homosexual aspects persisted into Greco-Roman times. For example, there are no such mentions in extant (Ptolemaic) copies of the *Demotic Drama of Horus and Seth* (Gaudard 2005). Equally, no connection between Seth and homosexuality or ejaculation is evident in the Greek/Demotic Magical Papyri that invoke him; claims to the contrary by Cannuyer (2017: 43) are unconvincing.

38 There is a schizophrenic quality to the *longue durée* of the Suteans/Sethians: first reviled (by the Mesopotamians), then rehabilitated (by the Israelites), now tainted (in this Gnostic text) by association with two cities that are synonymous with extreme wickedness, but more properly (within Sethian Gnosticism as a whole) considered to be the virtuous elect. This trajectory parallels the series of inversions noted of the Egyptian Seth in footnote 35.

seems to be “the convulsed one”,³⁹ *i.e.* it refers to the facial expression of someone suffering from a stomach problem.⁴⁰ Pearson (1990: 81) has dismissed the proposed borrowing on the basis that an Egyptian word starting with *h* would normally enter Greek with either σ or χ as its initial consonant, and Cannuyer (2017: 38, footnote 98) concurs. In image- rather than language-based speculation, the identification of Seth (son of Adam) with Jesus in some Christian Gnostic circles has prompted the suggestion that the association of his Egyptian namesake with the donkey (see: Egyptian Seth) might have inspired the mockery of Christians in general as donkey-worshippers (Hofrichter 2003: 300). However, it is more likely that Jesus was derided as a donkey because all Christians regarded him as an emanation or representative of YHWH, for whom pejorative identifications with the donkey have already been noted (see: Egyptian Seth) (Cannuyer 2017: 30).

As already mentioned, the Egyptian god Seth murdered his brother Osiris and tried to usurp the kingship of Egypt from the latter’s son, Horus. These actions would make the Egyptian Seth a natural parallel for the biblical Cain, who was motivated by envy to slay his brother Abel (Gen 4:1–16); he is a much less suitable fit for the biblical Seth, who was born later as a replacement for Abel (Gen 4:25). The disconnect between the two namesakes seems to have persisted in Gnostic reworkings of the biblical Seth (Onasch 1980: 112); after comparing magical texts that invoke the composite Greco-Egyptian deity Seth-Typhon with Gnostic texts of the Sethian genre, Pearson “concluded that no relationship existed between Egyptian Seth and Gnostic Seth” (Pearson 1981: 505).⁴¹ Accordingly, the pairing of the Gnostic Seth with his sibling Horaia probably owes nothing to the contending of the Egyptian Seth with his nephew (or, in some traditions, sibling) Horus, although – following Origen’s lead (*Against Celsus* VI: 32) – Tuomas Rasimus (2009: 105) wonders whether a potentially related name for one of the Archons, “(H)oraios, might be based on the Egyptian god Horus, who is [...] mentioned in the magical papyri.”⁴² Typhon occasionally features in Gnostic texts as an Archon, and thus – like IAO – as an emanation of the rogue demiurge Ialdabaoth (see: Egyptian Seth) (Onasch 1980: 116; Cannuyer 2017: 34, 37; Turner 2019: 151). Since Ialdabaoth is derived from YHWH (Rasimus 2009: 105, including footnotes 6–7) and Typhon in this period is typically shorthand for Seth-Typhon, we once again find the Egyptian Seth brought into close alignment with YHWH – this

39 The TLA, lemma no. 116980 (*hm-m33*), gives “convulsed one (?) (Seth)”; Leitz (2002 V: 733) gives “the blind one”.

40 Erman – Grapow (1971 III: 280.9) indicates that it is a Ptolemaic epithet of Seth and redirects to the medical term *hm33* (Erman – Grapow 1971 III: 281.13), whose meaning has been given in the main text.

41 The Pearson quotation is taken from within the Conference Discussion, edited by Bentley Layton. The full analysis is published as Pearson (1977) and its findings are summarised under the heading “Excursus: Egyptian Influences” in Pearson (1990: 80–82).

42 For the Egyptian gods Seth and Horus as brothers, see *e.g.* Hart (2005: 72). Horaia/Oraia, a Gnostic heroine who is the sister and consort of Seth, is more commonly given the name Norea/Noria (Pearson 1990: 59, 84–94; Burns 2018b: 16), although Pearson (1990: 92) argues that “The original form of the name Norea is, in fact, Hōraia.” As Horaia/Oraia she is sometimes identified or confused with the Archon Horaios/Oraios (Rasimus 2009: 104, 112, 120–121, footnote 55, 193–194, including footnote 21). The Archons are the offspring and supporters of the flawed demiurge Ialdabaoth (Rasimus 2009: 103–128; Turner 2019: 151).

time for reasons unrelated to their early roles as storm gods or to their associations with the donkey (see: Egyptian Seth).⁴³

Pearson (1981: 81–82) observes that the pseudepigraphical/Gnostic Seth – an inscriber and revealer of divine secrets – has far more in common with Thoth – the Egyptian god of knowledge and writing – than with the Egyptian god Seth,⁴⁴ pointing out that Manetho’s *Ægyptiaca* (History of Egypt) was supposedly based on ancient inscriptions written by Thoth. This is essentially true;⁴⁵ Syncellus relates that Manetho – an Egyptian priest writing in the Ptolemaic Period – claimed as his source “the monuments lying in the Seriadic land in the sacred language and inscribed in hieroglyphic characters by Thoth the first Hermes and translated after the deluge from the sacred language into the Greek language” (Verbrugghe – Wickersham 1996: 174).⁴⁶ These monuments afford a compelling parallel to the pillars or tablets inscribed by the pseudepigraphical/Gnostic Seth(ians), which likewise survived the Deluge in the land of Seiris/Seres (see previous section) (Reinink 1975: 73). However, the pillars/tablets paradigm is in both cases drawn from the Jewish imaginary rather than from the traditions of pharaonic Egypt (Pearson 1990: 81–82; Orlov 2001). Berossos’s *Babyloniaca* – a Hellenistic composition that is the Mesopotamian counterpart of Manetho’s *Ægyptiaca* – subscribes to a similar tradition; in this case, tablets containing antediluvian knowledge were retrieved after the Flood from the northern Babylonian city of Sippar (Verbrugghe – Wickersham 1996: 49–50; Chen 2013: 151; Steinkeller 2017: 64). We have already noted that various elements in the Jewish pseudepigraphic narratives relating to antediluvian tablets seem to be relics from Mesopotamian myths about the Suteans (see previous section); this and other evidence – including the Mesopotamian nature of the Flood motif itself (Chen 2013) – suggest that ultimate origin of the “preserved secrets” trope actually lies in Mesopotamian mythology.

Divine secrets invite exploitation by humans, of course, and harnessing the power of the supernatural is the province of magic. Let us now look at the roles played by the two principal Seths in magical formulae, beginning with the powers ascribed to the Egyptian god.

43 The enduring pseudo-etymology that interprets Ialdabaoth as “son of chaos” (Rasimus 2009: 105, footnote 7) provides an uncanny parallel to the enduring pseudo-etymology that translates “sons of Sheth” in Num 24:17 as “sons of tumult” (see: Biblical Seth). However, the temptation to exploit this nexus to create a long chain of approximations that would link Seth-Typhon (at one end) with the biblical Seth (at the other) must be resisted.

44 Like Thoth, the pseudepigraphical Seth is in many sources credited with inventing the art of writing (Orlov 2001: 141).

45 In fact it is the *Book of Sothis*, whose authorship he attributed to Manetho, that Syncellus is discussing here. This book is assessed by Verbrugghe – Wickersham (1996: 102) to be an ancient hoax, but since it is largely compatible with genuine Manethonian data (Waddell 1964: xxviii; Verbrugghe – Wickersham 1996: 186, footnote 2), the distinction between *Ægyptiaca* and *Sothis* may here be overlooked.

46 The tradition was continued in Late Antiquity, when Hermes Trismegistos – a syncretic combination of Hermes and Thoth – was credited with having inscribed potent esoteric knowledge on the *Tabula Smaragdina* or Emerald Tablet (Ebeling 2007: 49–50). Even later, he was credited with building the pyramids of Giza as an “ark” that enabled paradisiacal knowledge to survive the biblical Flood (Fodor 1970: 335–346; Klinkhammer 2021: 486, 504).

MAGICAL SETH

In Spell 108 of the Book of the Dead, Seth declares: “I am the great magician, the son of Nut, and power against you [Apophis] has been granted to me” (Faulkner 1985: 101). This reveals that, by the time of the New Kingdom, the fearsome Egyptian god was seen as a powerful agent whose magic could be relied upon to vanquish the forces of evil. Ever ambivalent, he was also feared as a likely agent of chaos, *e.g.* as the instigator of abortion and miscarriage (Onasch 1980: 103; te Velde 1967: 28–29).

The name Seth appears in Greek Magical Papyri (PGM) from the First to Fifth Centuries AD (Betz 1992),⁴⁷ many of which are Third- to Fourth-Century documents from the Egyptian city of Thebes (Betz 1992: xlii).⁴⁸ In such texts, the Seth invoked is the Egyptian god (Betz 1992: 339; Cannuyer 2017: 37) or a demonic refraction thereof (Cannuyer 2017: 33). As mentioned previously, he is often compounded with the Greek Typhon (Cannuyer 2017: 37–38); an Egyptian reluctance to write Seth’s name probably underpins its widespread replacement by Typhon in Greek literature (Onasch 1980: 117). Where it does occur in the PGM, the name Seth (Greek: $\sigma\eta\theta$, $\sigma\eta\theta$, $\sigma\eta\theta$, $\sigma\eta\theta$)⁴⁹ may be free-standing or a component of *nomina barbara* such as $\text{BOLCHOS}\Theta\text{TH}$ (*e.g.* Betz 1992: 101, 166, 334);⁵⁰ this expression, which translates as “Baal, who strikes, (that is) Seth” (Gager 1992: 266) recapitulates the previously-encountered identification of the Semitic storm god with the Egyptian one (see: Egyptian Seth). The Egyptian Seth is also invoked in the Demotic Magical Papyri.⁵¹ Magical gems, in which Seth again refers to the Egyptian god (West 2011: 138–141), may use variant spellings of the name (*e.g.* Greek: $\text{ZE}\Theta$, CHT) (CBd: no. 1417; West 2011: 140). The canonical spelling (Greek: $\text{S}\eta\theta/\sigma\eta\theta$; see: Pseudepigraphical Seth) is reported for lead *defixiones* (curse tablets) (Jordan 1985).⁵²

On rare occasions, one encounters the name Seth within Greek magical texts in compounds which suggest that the biblical figure might be intended. For example, in the Fifth-Century PGM CXXIII (Betz 1992: xxviii) one finds the *nomina barbara* $\mu\omicron\upsilon\sigma\eta\theta$ $\sigma\eta\theta$,⁵³ trans-

47 Specifically, PGM I, III–V, VII, XII, XVI, XXXVI, XLVI, LVIII, CXVI, CXXIII and CXXVI.

48 The Theban Magical Library encompasses PGM I, II, IV, V, P. Holm. + PGM Va, PGM/PDM XII/xii, PGM XIII, PGM/PDM XIV/xiv, PDM Suppl., and P. Leid. I 397 (Dosoo 2016: 710, footnote 30).

49 Variants of the name were compiled from Preisendanz (1973 and 1974) and images in McDonald (2014). As the lunate *sigma* (σ) was the standard manuscript form of the letter from the Hellenistic period to Late Antiquity, the $\Sigma/\sigma/c$ distinction does not provide a meaningful discriminator between the Egyptian and Adamic Seths; as a rule, it merely reflects whether or not the published text has been normalised in line with modern typographic conventions. A report of one instance of $\text{S}\eta\theta$ at PGM II: 67 (Onasch 1980: 104) seems to be in error, no version of the name being at that locus.

50 “A name or invocation of the Egyptian deity Seth, found on amulets, *defixiones*, and in formularies” (Gager 1992: 266).

51 *E.g.* PDM xiv: 685–690 (Betz 1992: 232). For a survey of the orthography of the name Seth in Demotic texts, see Taylor (2016: 84–106).

52 The Σ prevails in the transcriptions in the *editio princeps* of the *defixiones* from the Athenian *agora*, but presumably just reflects modern typographic conventions (see footnote 49). The inscriptions are not clear enough to allow the original form of the *sigma* letters to be verified using the published photographs, but most or all would be expected to be lunate (as they are in non-Seth words).

53 Pap. 1: 15–16; Pap. 2: 3–4 (with ι in place of $\dot{\iota}$); Pap. 3 Frag. A: 3–4 (Maltomini 1980: 64, 67, Tav. IV, VII). Maltomini’s transcript uses the standard *sigma* (σ) in place of the lunate *sigma* (σ) present in the manuscript.

literated MOUSĒTH SISĒTH (Betz 1992: 318, 320), of which the first word “may be a conflation of the names ‘Moses’ and ‘Seth’” and the second may represent the Coptic expression “son of Seth” (Maltomini 1980: 72–74, nos. 15–16 left; Betz 1992: 318, footnotes 3–4). Moses, who is himself is associated with tablets bearing divinely-revealed instructions, is often identified as a recipient of the pseudepigraphical Seth’s Edenic records,⁵⁴ suggesting that the second part of the first name may refer to the son of Adam. The childless state of the Egyptian Seth in canonical genealogies, in contrast to the numerous “sons of Seth” attested of his biblical counterpart,⁵⁵ suggest that the son of Adam may be the referent in the second part of the second word, too. However, a cautionary note is in order regarding the expression “son of Seth” in Egyptian sources. Although P. Berlin 23536 reprises the conventional wisdom about the Egyptian god that “he (Seth) does not have a child to succeed him” (Gaber 2015: 323), sometimes he is credited with a single son. This may be (a) Horus, who more correctly is his nephew or brother (PGM XXXVI: 5–20; Maltomini 1980: 73, no. 16 left); (b) a malevolent crocodile deity named Maga (te Velde 1967: 150); (c) a son by Nephthys, who may be Anubis (P. New York MMA 35.9.21; Gaber 2015: 315–316, 323); or (d) Thoth, his son by homosexual liaison with Horus (see previous section; PT § 1999c; te Velde 1967: 39, 44). In addition, *S3-Stħ* (“Son of Seth”) was used as a personal name in the Middle Kingdom (Ranke 1935: 284, no. 19).

Onasch (1980: 109, 112) claims a possible juxtaposition of the Egyptian Seth with Christ in P. Leiden I 384, but the edition that he relies upon is old – it was published in 1888. The Christian reference is absent from newer editions (PGM XII: 136–140; Preisendanz 1974: 67; Betz 1992: 158).

In Coptic magical documents, which span the First to Twelfth Centuries AD (Meyer – Smith 1994: 1), mentions of Seth (CHΘ) almost invariably refer to the son of Adam and derive either from the Jewish biblical/pseudepigraphic tradition (e.g. Zellmann-Rohrer 2017) or from Sethian Gnosticism (Meyer – Smith 1994: 60) (see previous two sections). Fossum and Glazer (1994: 90) go so far as to say that “The Egyptian god Seth [...] cannot be recognized in the Coptic magical papyri”. This is not true of a short Old Coptic segment interpolated within PGM I: 247–262, which is otherwise a Fourth- to Fifth-Century AD Greek spell for invisibility;⁵⁶ the declaration “I am OSIRIS whom SETH (CHT) destroyed” leaves no doubt that the Egyptian

54 Moses received the tablets that God had inscribed with the Ten Commandments, Exod 31:18; 34:28–29. The *Life of Adam and Eve*, whose original was supposedly recorded by the pseudepigraphical Seth (Latin *Life* 50.1–51.3) claims to have been “revealed to Moses when he received the tables of the Law” on Mount Sinai (Greek *Life*, prologue); for the latter reason it is sometimes called *The Apocalypse of Moses* (de Jonge – Tromp 1997: 12). Sethian Gnosticism also pairs Seth with Moses because the former, who actually lived in the immediate aftermath of the paradisiacal era, is repeatedly required to correct the flawed record of the latter, who did not (Turner 2019: 149).

55 “Sons of Seth” here indicates the lineage of the biblical Seth and its inheritance of the post-Flood world – from Noah to Jesus (Luke 3:23–38) and beyond – rather than his immediate male offspring, whose existence is recorded but whose number is not (Gen 5:6). In Gnosticism (see previous section), the parallel expression “seed of Seth” denotes the followers and spiritual heirs of Seth, the chosen elect (Turner 2019: 148). The Egyptian Seth is impotent (PT § 1463e); in terms of fertility, “his boundless energy is not productive [...] for his sexual power is taken from him” (te Velde 1967: 55–59).

56 While considered a precursor to Coptic, Old Coptic is actually Demotic (or an earlier form of Egyptian) that has been written phonetically using the Greek alphabet; accordingly, Old Coptic texts typically relate to ancient Egyptian mythology/religion and lack Christian references. For examples of spells that are written completely in Old Coptic, see Meyer – Smith (1994: 13–25).

god is intended (Preisendanz 1973: 14; Betz 1992: xxiii, 9). The similarly-dated figure at Gebel Teir in Kharga Oasis that bears the Coptic label $\text{C}\Theta$, for whom a magical function has been speculated, is also unambiguously the Egyptian god (Cruz-Urbe 2009: 208–209, 223).

It is possible that traces of the Egyptian Seth are occasionally present in spells of definite Egyptian origin that are written in standard Coptic; although some documents of this kind invoke specific Egyptian gods directly, Seth is usually not referred to by name (Meyer – Smith 1994: 22–23, 150). The invocations of “Seth Thioth” and “Sethioth” in a Coptic spell with unambiguously Egyptian content may be instances where the Egyptian god is in fact named (Römer – Thissen 1990: 177–178; Meyer – Smith 1994: 110–111);⁵⁷ these phrases may relate jointly to the gods Seth and Thoth, given that the latter name – itself a Greek approximation of the Egyptian *Dhwtj* (Faulkner 1962: 324) – can appear as Theouth in the Greek/Demotic Magical Papyri (Betz 1992: 339). Indeed, John Gager notes a recurring association between these two Egyptian gods in his survey of curse tablets and binding spells (Gager 1992: 13, 269).⁵⁸ Alternatively, in light of the overlaps identified by Pearson between Thoth and the pseudepigraphical/Gnostic Seth (see previous section), the phrases may represent a conjunction of these two entities. In light of the orthography of the Egyptian god’s name (CHT) in the Old Coptic segment of PGM I, the use of the canonical $\text{C}\Theta$ in “Seth Thioth” / “Sethioth” (Römer – Thissen 1990: 176, *recto* line 8 and *verso* lines 6, 10) could be seen as slight circumstantial evidence in favour of the Adamic Seth as the referent.

In first section of an Eighth-Century AD Coptic magical handbook, Christian Cannuyer finds traces of Seth-Typhon in descriptions of two celestial entites closely associated with the Gnostic Seth in his cosmic manifestation as “Seth, the living Christ” (P. Macq. I: 7.21–26). One of these entities (Atthôrak) “sits on the ships of the sea”, while the other (Koulak) “sits on the dragon” (Choat – Gardner 2013: 57–59); both descriptions use imagery that recalls the Egyptian Seth spearing Apophis from the prow of the solar barque (Cannuyer 2017: 40–41).

The magical term $\text{ABERAMENTH}\bar{\text{O}}(\text{UTH})$, which probably represents the Hebrew phrase אביר מים (“power of waters”) suffixed with the name Thoth (Tardieu 1981; Fossum – Glazer 1994: 91–92; cf. Cannuyer 2017: 44, footnote 127), is in different documents applied both to Seth-Typhon (PGM IV: 3272; PDM xiv: 686; PGM XXXVI: 95–100) and to Jesus (Askew Codex: 354.8, 360.5, 367.22) (Fossum – Glazer 1994: 91). The citations in the Askew Codex (Schmidt 1978: 706–771), which fall within the treatise *4 Pistis Sophia* a (Evans 2015: 112–116), equate $\text{ABERAMENTH}\bar{\text{O}}$ directly with Jesus (Tardieu 1981: 412; Fossum – Glazer 1994: 91; Cannuyer 2017: 44).⁵⁹ Thus, in the various applications of this one term, it is Thoth (who, as the custodian and revealer of divine knowledge, has affinities with the pseudepigraphical/Gnostic Seth) who serves as a momentary bridge between Seth-Typhon (the Hellenised form of Egyptian Seth) and Jesus (who, as a world-saviour, was considered in some circles to be a manifestation of the Gnostic Seth). It is interesting that this indirect and fleeting bond between the two disparate Seths (*i.e.* Seth-Typhon ~ $\text{ABERAMENTH}\bar{\text{O}}$ = Jesus/Christ ~ Seth, son of Adam) is mediated by Thoth, the peace-making intermediary who managed to reconcile even Horus and Seth

57 Neither source comments on the “Seth Thioth” trope.

58 “ $\text{T}\bar{\text{H}}\bar{\text{O}}\text{T}\bar{\text{H}}$ ”: with many variant spellings; an Egyptian god associated with the moon, the invention of writing, and the gods Seth and Osiris” (Gager 1992: 269).

59 Cannuyer (2017: 44) mistakenly attributes these occurrences to the Bruce Codex rather than the Askew Codex.

(te Velde 1967: 45). Apart from this tenuous connection, the gulf between the Greco-Egyptian and Judeo-Christian entities is both profound and enduring.⁶⁰ As Fossum and Glazer (1994: 92) state at the end of their critical assessment of claims to the contrary made by others, “The net conclusion of the present article is that neither Seth, the son of Adam, nor Christ is ever welded with the Egyptian god Seth-Typhon”. A corollary of this conclusion is that – as a rule spanning all genres of ancient literature – the biblical/pseudepigraphical/Gnostic Seth should be considered entirely distinct from his Egyptian namesake.

The Akkadian term *Suti’ū* is not only an imprecise ethnic designation (see: Suteans) but – as Annus points out – “also belongs to the nomenclature of Mesopotamian witches” (Annus 2012: 32; Annus 2018: 11, 16). In line with this, he notes that the destruction of the region around the Sutean mountain by flood and fire in the Anzu and Erra Epics mirrors the ordeals prescribed in Mesopotamian law for practitioners of witchcraft (Annus 2018: 16–18). Equally, one could argue that the appointment of the biblical/pseudepigraphical Seth as the guardian of antediluvian divine secrets (see: Pseudepigraphical Seth) and his Gnostic transformation into a potent salvific figure who can manifest as different historical persons (see: Gnostic Seth) effectively recasts him as a kind of cosmic magician-priest (Pearson 1990: 70, 77–79). In keeping with such ideas, parts of some Coptic magical texts – such as the already-mentioned P. Macq. I – have a strongly Sethian flavour (Choat – Gardner 2013: 31–35; Choat 2019: 221). Overall, then, one might expect to find later identifications of Suteans/Sethians as practitioners of magic. Obliging, a Syriac Christian legend from Edessa dating to ca. 1500 AD considers the Magi to be the descendants of the biblical/pseudepigraphical Sethians (Reinink 1975: 74–75; Annus 2012: 35). Their homeland – which contains a mountain in which are concealed Adamic secrets – is named Šir (Reinink 1975: 74–76), a variant of the toponym *Sê’ir/Seir/Seiris* that we already encountered above (see: Biblical Seth, Pseudepigraphical Seth) (Annus 2012: 35; Annus 2018: 20). However, any resemblance of this place-name to *سحر* (*sihr*), the Arabic term for magic or sorcery (Cowan 1994: 465), is coincidental.

SON OF ADAM OR SON OF NUT?

The foregoing survey and associated discussion has revealed that the two principal Seths – the Egyptian god and the son of Adam – maintain, for the most part, separate trajectories in the religious and magical literature of ancient Egypt, the Near East and the Mediterranean. This is remarkable. The Egyptian and Gnostic Seths are associated primarily with Egypt, so cross-talk between two divine agents with similar names would be expected at least in documents or inscriptions from that country – yet this is hardly ever the case, and claims of overlap are invariably disputed. Onasch (1980: 99, 117–119) is probably correct in suggesting that the profound separation is due to two factors: the very different temperaments and reputations of the two Seths at the time when – and in the places where – intercultural exchange was likely, and the resistance of Jewish circles – even heterodox Gnostic ones – to foreign gods, especially

60 Claims that Seth-Typhon was to some extent amalgamated with Seth-Jesus continue to be propagated but were long ago refuted (Preisendanz 1926: 23–37). Claims made in 1905 and 1931 that Seth-Typhon is the referent of the “Seth” (ΣΗΤ) in line 98 of the Coptic papyrus P. Lond. Or. 5987, where he appears to be contrasted with Jesus Christ, are no longer considered credible (Burns 2018a: 153, footnote 53; Choat – Gardner 2013: 113).

ones from a country where the Israelites had once been enslaved (Exod 1–15). Some separation might also be expected on the basis that the stressed syllable of the Egyptian god’s name in pre-Coptic Egyptian was probably vocalised /sut/ or /sut^h/ (Peust 1999: 184–185), whereas the corresponding phonemes for the Adamic Seth’s name in Hebrew, Coptic and Greek would have ranged across /ʃeθ/, /set^h/ and /set.h/. But given the effectively identical rendering of the two figures’ names both in Greek (Onasch 1980: 99) and in Coptic (see previous section) and given the notoriously syncretistic nature of magic (Bortolani – Nagel 2019), together with the overlaps between Greco-Egyptian magic and Gnosticism (Burns 2018a; Burns 2018b: 16; Choat 2019), one would still expect confusion and conflation of the two Seths in magical texts from Egypt – yet such compounding or assimilation, if it occurs at all, is very rare.

From the analysis as a whole, it is possible to make the following generalisations. Among the Seth-related options considered in the paper, cuneiform inscriptions refer only to the Suteans,⁶¹ for whom potentially cognate terms may be recognised in Egyptian and Hebrew texts. The Egyptian god Seth is the sole referent of the name in texts written in pre-Coptic Egyptian or Old Coptic. Seth, son of Adam, is the sole referent in the Hebrew scriptures and in Jewish pseudepigrapha.⁶² Far in the background of these Sethians one may discern traces of the Suteans; there are grounds for believing that the latter are represented biblically by the “sons of Sheth” from the land of Seir in the Transjordan, a locale where Ramesside Egyptians fought with local Semitic pastoralists. With just one possible exception,⁶³ the biblical/pseudepigraphical Seth underpins all instances of the name in Gnostic texts, despite the fact that many of these tractates are written in Coptic and were found in Egypt. With just two possible exceptions,⁶⁴ the biblical/pseudepigraphical/Gnostic Seth continues to be the only entity associated with the name in magical documents written in standard Coptic throughout Late Antiquity and beyond. This contrasts with the situation in Demotic and Greek magical papyri (*PDM/PGM*) from the first half of the First Millennium AD, many of which were likewise found in Egypt; in these, the referent (with just one possible exception)⁶⁵ is the Egyptian god Seth, who often appears in his Greco-Egyptian form of Seth-Typhon.

From the foregoing, one can extract predictive rules that – up to a point – operate independently of genre. The provenance of the document or inscribed artifact, if known, affords a good start in discriminating between the two principal Seths; although Seth-Typhon did travel widely in the Greco-Roman world (Gager 1992: 50, 89, 168–169, 225; Kellová 2019: 107–108),⁶⁶ texts composed in Egypt are far more likely to refer to the Egyptian god than are those from elsewhere. Next, the language of the text is helpful in deciding which Seth is intended. As a rule, we can say that occurrences of the name Seth within texts that are written in pre-Coptic

61 I exclude here the few Seth-related personal names of Egyptian officials in three Amarna letters (see: Egyptian Seth).

62 I exclude here the single instance in Num 24:17, which I have consistently rendered as “Sheth”; it is addressed in the next sentence of the main text.

63 The Sodom and Gomorrah passage in *The Gospel of the Egyptians* (see: Gnostic Seth).

64 Seth in the *nomina barbara* Seth Thioth and Sethioth, and as identified with Atthôrak/Koulak (see: Magical Seth).

65 Seth in the *nomina barbara* MOUSĒTH SISĒTH (see: Magical Seth).

66 Although perhaps not to Rome, as thought until recently. Sánchez Natalías (2020) has proposed a new interpretation for the inscription on the lead container from the Fountain of Anna Perenna in Rome, and the revisions remove Seth from the reading.

Egyptian – whether in hieroglyphic or hieratic script, and whether in the Old, Middle, Late or Demotic form of the language – refer to the Egyptian god. This is also true for documents or interpolations written in Old Coptic. In contrast, references to Seth in texts written in Hebrew or in standard Coptic relate to the biblical son of Adam or to his pseudepigraphical/Gnostic embellishments.⁶⁷ Only Greek documents straddle the divide; mentions of Seth in Greek Magical Papyri (PGM) refer to the Egyptian god, whereas mentions in Greek versions of Jewish pseudepigrapha and of Gnostic tractates – or in Greek literature drawing upon these genres, such as Josephus’s histories or the commentaries of Christian heresiologists – refer to (embellishments of) the biblical son of Adam. Last, contextual clues within the text are often conclusive; nearby mentions of other Egyptian gods or of Typhon would confirm an attribution to the Egyptian Seth, just as a reference to the sons, descendants or seed of Seth would preclude it.

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INTERNET RESOURCES

CAD The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (<https://oi.uchicago.edu/research/publications/assyrian-dictionary-oriental-institute-university-chicago-cad>)

CBd Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database (<http://cbd.mfab.hu/>)

TLA Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae (<https://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/>)

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