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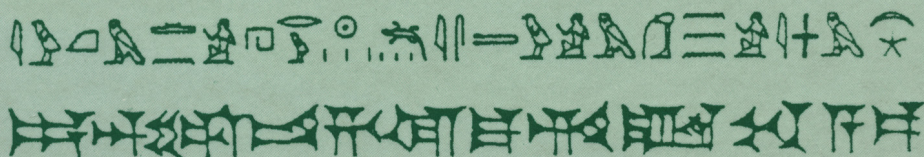
TOWARD A GEOGRAPHY OF EGYPTIAN LITERATURE

Por ANTONIO LOPRIENO

Professor da Universidade de Basileia
(Universität Besel)

One of the ways to define ″literature″ in Ancient Egypt is to identify texts that problematize personal concerns: not the concerns of the gods, or of the king, or of the deceased - to choose the three most frequent groups of referents —, but rather the problems of the individual human being in his dialogue with these groups: with god (or the gods), with society (or with the king, who in Egypt represents its symbolic personification), with death.

In previous works, I tried to address the problem of literary discourse in Ancient Egypt from a different angle, namely by looking at form-based, rather than *content*-based criteria[1]: first of all, *fictionality* as the sign of a complicity between author and reader that allows the text to transcend referential truth and present a possible world created by the author and recognizable as such by the reader. The author of the Shipwrecked Sailor offers to his reader a protagonist's itinerary which is clearly imaginary if measured against objective geographic criteria, but which becomes fully understandable as an individual journey *in orem leonis* thanks to the cleavage between the narrative frame and the contents of the snake's tale. In the Middle Kingdom Theban tomb of Intef-Iqer and Senet (TT 60), a hymn to Hathor is framed within the decorative registers,[2] thus offering an objective sign of this cleavage and, therefore, of the different referential status of the hymnic text within the funerary context in which it appears. My second criterion, *intertextuality,* i.e. the internal dialogue between texts belon-

ging to a specific genre *{sbi.yt* ″instruction", *shmh-jb* ″entertainment", *sdd-bl.w* ″hymn", etc.) is the most problematic one to assess in a culture such as Ancient Egypt, which privileges the esthetics of repetition over the esthetics of innovation and which prevents us, therefore, from understanding whether the echo of an earlier formulation is due to its anonymous cultural survival or rather to the author's conscious reference to a specific ″classic". In this context of blurred boundaries between ″implicit" and ″explicit" intertextuality, we can say that a text such as the ″Complaints of Khakheperre'-seneb[3] stands out as a literary text in the narrower sense because it thematizes precisely the problems inherent in the esthetics of repetition, and he does this by using formal devices such as the wordplay.[4] The third criterion I posited, *reception,* refers not only to the presence of a readership often many centuries after the putative date of composition of a text - a criterion that would also apply to funerary and liturgical textual corpora and does not, therefore, characterize only the literary domain in the narrower sense - but also to its ″classical" status, i.e. to its educational function in the formation of the cultural identity of Egyptian literate elites. That a text such as the ″Instructions of Amenemhat I" is documented by a wealth of Ramesside scribal copie[5] is a sign of its paradigmatic function for Late bronze Age intellectuals. The presence of the colophon *(jw=f pw m htp mj gmj.t m zhl.w* ″here ends the text precisely as it was found in writing") is also a formal sign of literary reception: by citing itself, the text shows that it is not *referential,* but rather *self-referential.*

The combination of these three criteria defined in my previous work Egyptian literary discourse. I would like to lay the emphasis on the *combination* of factors, because - if taken individually - fictional, intertextual, or receptional features can indeed be encountered in a variety of non-literary genres. The Pyramid Texts are copied down to the Late Period[6] and are echoed in later funerary corpora such as the Coffin Texts or the Book of the Dead; thus, they certainly partake of the criteria of intertextuality and reception, but they are not fictional: they do not present the author's episodic (*hpr*) world (Sh. S. 21-23 *sdd=j r=f n=k mj.tt jry hpr(.w) m-'=j ds=j* ″I shall tell you something similar that happened to myself"), but rather the true *(mï)* world of the gods, of the king, and of the dead: Pyr. § 4 *dd.jn nw.t nhb.t wr.t mry(=j) pw ttj zl(=j) rdj.n(=j) n=f ?h.t(j) shm=f jm=sn(j) hrw >h.t js ntr.w nb.w dd=sn bw-mï pw mry=t pw ttj m-m msj.w=t stp-zî hr=f d.t* ″Then said Nut of el-Kab, the Great One: ‚My son Teti is the one that I love: I have given him the Two Horizons that he may control them as Horus of the Horizon.' And all the gods say: ‚It is true that Teti is the one you

love among your children. May protection be upon him eternally. The texts of the so-called ″Royal Tale″ *(Königsnovelle)*,(7) on the other hand, do indeed report an individual noteworthy episode, e.g. the king's decision to build a temple or to dig a well in an improbable place in the desert and are imbued with intertextual references (e.g. the *topos* of the officials' council suggesting prudence to the king), but are not the object of cultural transmission, i.e. of ″classical″ reception. From the point of view of the hierarchy of cultural texts, they do not display a paradigmatic function.

But there are limits to this approach. Some of them are addressed by H. U. Gumbrecht with his suggestion that ″literature″, or ″literary history″ in our contemporary sense is a product of the European enlightenment with the emergence of individual concerns packaged in ″national″ literatures.[18]* Thus, implicitly denying the existence of an Egyptian literature in the narrower sense, Egyptologists should concentrate on the more ″material″ features of Egyptian *Schrifttum,* on the philological, rather than *literaturwissenschaftlich* dimension of Egyptian cultural texts.[9] Another limit is the fragmentary nature of our knowledge of the societal context of Egyptian literature. Who was the target of Sinuhe's (covert) polemic against the political conditions of Middle Kingdom Egypt or of the Eloquent Peasants (overt) criticism of the officials' lawlessness? [10] Should we be content with a ″naive″ reading of the texts - ″naive″ in the sense that we take the fictional setting to reproduce real-world conditions?

In order to address some of these problems, I am going to present today a slightly different approach to the issues revolving around literature in Ancient Egypt, an approach that I would qualify as ″semiotic″ in the sense that it does not take statements or settings contained in literary texts at face value, but rather dwells on the universe of its implicit ″signs″, of those features that do not represent an ostensible authorial goal, but nonetheless convey important aspects of his cultural horizon, of his ″encyclopaedia″.[01]* In this approach, the exegete takes a look at narrative details that are apparently rather insignificant; but precisely because they are marginal to the main message of the text, they are less at risk of having been ″manipulated″ by the author himself or by the sociopolitical censorship to which he was exposed. The disadvantage of this procedure is that, in so doing, we may tend to neutralize the author's original features, i.e. what makes literature primarily an individual experience. But the advantage is that this procedure certainly helps us identify more precisely the cultural conditions, the intellectual climate in which these texts were written and read.

One of the literary signs that have been very little investigated within the Egyptological tradition is the ″geographic sign". By using this term I refer to the treatment and the organization of the narrated space. Where do the protagonists of the text live? Where do they go? Where do they come from? What do they say à propos the place in which they happen to be? How do they define it? Needless to say, the subjective geography contained in texts many of which are presumably fictional will not offer us necessarily a faithful, ″objective" image of contemporary geographic knowledge. But that is precisely what makes this investigation interesting: rather than the physical *organization* of space, the implicit geography contained in texts ranging from narrative to instructional, from royal to scribal, from official to private will offer us fragments of its underlying *cultural* hierarchies. Oppositions such as ″close" vs. ″far", ″national" vs. ″foreign", ″city" vs. ″country" are all associated with a highly marked cultural universe.

In his *Atlante del romanzo europeo* (Torino 1997),<12> the Roman literary historian Franco Moretti describes in the following manner the difference between what he calls the ″topography" of traditional folktales à la Vladimir Propp and the ″geography" of European novels from the XVIII century onward:<13)

″Morphology of fable. We could just as well speak of a *topography.* two worlds, a demarcation line, two borders, two symmetrical and circular movements: an elegant, well-organized pattern. To the contrary of the world of a Jane Austen or of a Walter Scott, of the cities of Balzac or Dickens. The fable needs this axiological form, its space of action has a clear and simple meaning: to build an unassailable polarity and to project it to the world. For better or for worse, we have lost this possibility: our world without magic does not know any more moral ″kingdoms" clearly separated from each other, but only a *geography.* And it precisely here, at the crossroads between both cultures, that the European novel came into play: it accepted and brilliantly mastered the decisive challenge of serving as a bridge between the old and the new, *between the cold world of contemporary knowledge and the magic topography of the tale.* Between a new geography that we cannot ignore and an old narrative matrix that we will not forget."

In this short essay, I would like to verify the value of this analysis by checking it against the background of selected Egyptian literary texts. In order to present to you my thesis from the beginning, I will reach the conclusion that Egyptian literary history seems to display an

opposite development to the modern European voyage from the topography of the fable to the geography of the novel. Rather, the organization of space in Egyptian texts proceeds, chronologically as well as typologically, from a geography of the novel to a topography of the fable. And we shall see that the resulting treatment of space is linked both to the sociocultural conditions of the different periods of Egyptian history and to the functions of the textual genre in which it appears.

Since Assmann's work on the tomb as the "cradle" of Egyptian literary activity through the vehicle of autobiography,[14] it has become apparent that this genre displays the two main features that characterize Egyptian literary discourse in later periods, namely the concern for moral behavior (in what is now called "encomiastic biography") and the narrative of individual achievements (in what is now called "event biography"). The first of these two forms will be expanded on by wisdom literature, the latter by what I call "mimetic", narrative literature. Many autobiographies on the late Old Kingdom thematize expeditions to foreign countries. If we look at the opposition between Egyptian and foreign places as it is conveyed by the determinative they display, whether "urban" or "mountainous", we will observe that the expedition leads the protagonist to different territories which, if unknown, must be "opened" (wfr¿).[15] We could define this geographic distribution as experience-driven: it corresponds to the opposition between what is Egyptian in the sense "urbanized" on the one hand *vs.* what is foreign in the sense of "geographically different" on the other.[16] Yet, this opposition is presented so to say in a neutral way: it is not accompanied by the thematization of a cultural hierarchy, and proceeds gradually: the island of Elephantine, which was already the center of a powerful Egyptian settlement from the Early Dynastic, remains *his.t,* presumably because of its geographic markedness as a frontier space. In a parallel way, the town of Coptos, from which many expeditions begin, is *km.t*, whereas the Great Oasis of el-Kharga,[17] where an Egyptian presence can already be assumed for the Old Kingdom but lies outside the traditional Egyptian landscape of Valley and Delta, is *hls.t*. In the OK autobiographies, therefore, the protagonist of the narrative does not thematize the concept of "border", one of the most important concepts in literary discourse, in Egypt as much as elsewhere: from the transition to the world of the dead in Dante's *Divine Comedy* to the progression of narrative steps as the hero's psychological "rites of passage" in Propp's structural analysis of traditional fables. The awareness of a border is absent from late Old Kingdom autobiographic narratives, that tend to conceal the emotional dimension of the hero's trip behind economic or political concerns. The

foreign country is seen here as a reality that exists ″horizontally″ to the hero's sphere. This is shown, e.g., by the fact that the travelling official frequently holds the title of a *jmj-rl* ˙**ʾ.w** ″ h e a d of the translators″, which represents an official thematization of linguistic diversity.

This ″horizontal″ geography of late Old Kingdom autobiographies is radically challenged in the ″literary″, i.e. instructional as well as narrative texts of the Middle Kingdom, in which the ″publication″ of ethical maxims and narrative details transcends the boundaries of a funerary *Sitz im Leben* to acquire fictional traits. Let us take a look at the itineraries of most heroes of Middle Kingdom literature: the Eloquent Peasant travels ″southward to Herakleopolis″ (R 6.2-3 *sm.t pw jr.n sh.tj pn m hnt.yt r Nn-nsw)* on his descent from the Wadi Natrun *(sh.t hml.t)* to ″Egypt″ (R 1.7 *hlj.t pw jr.n sh.tj pn r km.t),* passing the Nile at Medenit, immediately to the North of Memphis, i.e. at the very juncture between Upper and Lower Egypt. Coming from Libya, Sinuhe turns southward but avoids the central, yet dangerous Residence (Sin. B 5-7 *jrj.t—j sm.t m hnt.yt n ki=j spr=j r hnw hmt.n=j hpr híʾ.yt),* crossing the Nile at *Gʾw* or *Nglw* (Sin. B 12-13), a place near the apex of the Delta,[18] approximately in the same location as the Eloquent Peasant; then he continues his journey along the border of the Delta, passes ″the Walls of the Ruler, which were built to repel the Asiatic″ (Sin. B 16-17 *dmj.n=j jnb.w hkl jry r hsf stjw),* and finally reaches Asia, the place beyond; at once, he is overtaken by thirst, that he associated with the ″taste of death″, but he gives himself courage and collects himself; he hears the lowing sound of cattle and sees Asiatics (Sin. B 23 ff. *dd.n=j dp.t mw.t nn ts.t=j jb=j sʾk h\w=j sdm.n=j hrw nmj n mnmn.t).* We shall come back to this scene. At the beginning of the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor, we learn that the protagonist has passed Wawat and is approaching the Residence (Sh.S. 2-10 *mk ph.n=n hnwph.n=n ph.wj wlwl.t znj.n=n zn-mw.t).*

We are here in the presence of a completely different intellectual perspective on the relationship between ″Egypt″ and ″abroad″. The most visible difference is the opposition between a ″center″, usually identified with the ″Residence″ (the Egyptian word for ″residence″, *hnw,* also means ″inside″) and a ″periphery″. The protagonists of Middle Kingdom stories (such as Sinuhe or the Shipwrecked Sailor) as well as speeches (such as the Eloquent Peasant) always move from the periphery towards the center. Even Sinuhe, who devotes to his expe-Hence in Asia the better portion of his tale, presents this phase as a transition between his flight abroad and his return home. We could label this type of cultural organization of space *centripetal geography.*
A basic feature of this geography is the important role played by the

passage of a ″border″, of a separation line that is psychologically experienced by the hero during his journey, a psychological experience unknown, or at least unverbalized by Herkhuf or Pepynakht: on his trip from the Oasis of Wadi Natrun *(hls.t)* to Egypt *(km.t),* and precisely to the North of Medenyt (R 6.4), i.e. just about at the juncture between Upper and Lower Egypt, the Peasant meets the evildoer Nemtynakht; during his flight to Asia, and more precisely at the ″border of cultivated land″ and "on the verge of the road" (B 9-10 *wrs.n=j m ᵓd n sh.t hd,n=j wn hrww hp.n=j zj* **71'** *m rl wl.t tr.n=f wj snd(=j) n=f),* Sinuhe encounters an unknown man whom he is afraid of him (or who is afraid of him - the text is ambiguous, but the functional yield is the same). Focussing the attention of the reader (or hearer) through a wordplay,<[19)] the Shipwrecked Sailor informs us from the very beginning of the narrative that his crew had reached the ″last corners of Nubia″ and had passed the Nile cataract (Sh.S. 8-10 *ph.n=n ph.wj wlwi.t znj.n=n zn-mw.t).* This means that the representation of the opposition between ″Egypt″ and ″abroad″ is now accompanied by the perception, on the part of the protagonist, of a *border* between two spheres: a border that needs to be *overcome* rather than simply *passed,* a border that is associated - following a well-known pattern in world literature - with the experience of danger, of injustice, of fear; in short, with a *liminal* experience: *dp.t mw.t nn* ″this is the taste of death″.

We could generalize this observation and argue that Middle Kingdom literature conveys an orderly, *hierarchical* organization of space, founded on a clear demarcation between ″here″ and ″beyond″ a border that is tantamount to a rite of passage for the literary hero. Ammunenshi, the Asiatic prince who welcomes Sinuhe to his tribe and to his own family, this Ammunenshi who is Sinuhe's ironical counterpart as the complementary vehicle of the author's world view, states it explicitly: B 121-122 *nn pd.tj zml m hlw* ″a bowman (i.e., an Asiatic) cannot be friend a Delta peasant (i.e. an Egyptian)″. Egyptians and Asiatics belong to two different worlds, and the cleavage between them is neutraüzable only within the frame of literary fiction, of what I called ″individual *mimesis.* Between these two realities there are no intermediaries, no ″chief translators″.

A third point is that it is now Egypt as a whole - perhaps we should say, in polemic with Gumbrecht and Moers,<[20)] as a ″nation — that represents the scenario, the theater of literary fiction. The fictional journeys of literary heroes, including the fiction within the fiction of the Shipwrecked Sailor, overlap completely the coordinates of the contemporary Egyptian world, from the Western oasis of the Wadi Natrun to

the Delta and Asia, from Lower Nubia to the ″Residence″ in *jt-tl.wj,* i.e. Lisht, from the maritime routes in the Red Sea to the Egyptian "colonies" in Syria and Palestine. The subjective geography of Middle Kingdom fictional $dr.w$ turns out to be an ordered reading, a hierarch¡zation of the objective *tës.w* of Middle Bronze Egypt.[21]

The development of this thematization of an ordered space can be traced even more precisely from an historical point of view. Let us take a closer look at the organization of space in Lower Egypt in the tale of Sinuhe and in the Eloquent Peasant. The use of the determinatives $km.t$ ″town″ *vs.* $his.t$ ″mountain″ v′s. β ″cultivated land″ gives us very precious information on the cultural organization of geographic space. The Wadi Natrun, for example, the place of origin of the Eloquent Peasant, is determined by $his.t$ in the oldest witness of the manuscript tradition, i.e. pBerlin 3023 (B,). The centripetal journey leads the protagonist from a "foreign" periphery, through the transition of Nemtynakht's cultivated land, where he makes the liminal experience usually associated with the ″border″, down to ″Egypt″: R 1.2-3 $m=t\ wj\ m\ h>j.t\ r\ km.t$ ″I make myself on my way to Egypt″ is what he says to his wife before leaving. But in the subsequent manuscript tradition, i.e. in pRamesseum A (R), something strange happens: from being ″foreign″ or ″mountainous″, the Wadi Natrun has now become ″Egyptian″. The hero's mimetic adventure causes his own place of origin to be fictionally promoted to the status of ″Egypt″ - that is to say, the story now takes place wholly within Egypt. That this innovation is not the result of haphazard distribution, but rather the product of a specific cultural approach is shown by another difference in the semiotic geography of the older (B) vs. the one-century or so younger (R) witness.[22] It is a difference we also detect in the tale of Sinuhe: when Sinuhe discusses with Ammunenshi the psychological consequences of his flight, in the older version he says: ″I do not know what brought me to this place: it was like a divine decision (B 43 $shr\ ntr$)″**:** in the more recent witnesses, beginning with R 65, he adds: ,^as if a Delta man all of a sudden saw himself in Elephantine, a Northerner in Nubia″. The addition to the text of Sinuhe as well as the change of lexical classifier for the Wadi Natrun in the Eloquent Peasant can be dated to a period in which the hierarchical organization of geographical space played a key role in Egyptian culture. If we read literary history against the background of political history, it is possible to recognize in these two changes the result of the administrative centralization (with the end of provincial autonomy and concentration of elites in the residence) which took place under Sesostris III (XIX cent. BCE), who thus provides the context for the differences between B

and R. The B-texts precede, therefore, the administrative reform, whereas R-texts follow it and document its effects in terms of the assimilation of the centralist ideology of this reform.

If we ask ourselves the question of the cultural import of this correspondence between political and literary history, we discover a striking parallelism with the history of European literatures in the XIX century. Recent work has shown that the emergence of the *roman bourgeois* is closely linked to the emergence of modern national ideology:[23] from Jane Austen to Charles Dickens in England, from Balzac to Flaubert in France, from Alfieri to Manzoni in Italy, etc. It seems to be that it is possible to understand the organization of space in Middle Kingdom literature following the same lines and serving the same interests, i.e. the emergence of a national (or protonational) identity and the role of the Egyptian elites in it. It is interesting to note that, both in Middle Kingdom Egypt and in bourgeois Europe, the hierarchization of space is paired with a questioning of social hierarchy: a peasant who wins his legal battle against an official (El.R), a fugitive whom the king himself asks to come back to Egypt (Sin.), a ″capable attendant″ who advises a prince and dialogues with a divinity (Sh.S.).

If in the Middle Kingdom the centripetal representation of space accompanies the emergence of a form of national consciousness, the other great epoch of Egyptian fiction, the Ramesside era, confronts us with a drastically changed cultural setting. In the tale of Apophis and Seqnenre‘, in the Doomed Prince, in the Taking of Yoppe, the locus of the fictional space is situated abroad, in a foreign country. From the *centripetal* geography of Middle Kingdom Egypt we have now moved to the *centrifugal* movements of the heroes of Ramesside ″proletarian″ (i.e.., non-classical) literature.[24] This literature often thematizes in a legendary way past historical periods or figures and offers parallels with what is called ″historical novel″ in European literatures, à la Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* or Alessandro Manzoni's *Promessi Sposi*: in both genres, protagonists move away from the center toward a periphery that neutralizes the import of the concept of ″border″. A fundamental element of this literature is a far less precise and organized geography than Sinuhe's or the Eloquent Peasant's: we do not find a detailed description of the locals through which the protagonist travels, but rather a fictive closeness between Thebes and Avaris, whose ruler is disturbed in his sleep by the noise of the hippopotami in Thebes *(LES* 87,11-13: "cause the pond of the hippopotami to the East of the City to be cleared, for they don't let me sleep by day or by night"), or a punctual jump from Egypt to the Asiatic Naharina without intermediate stations by a spaceless and timeless Egyptian prince *(LES* 3,2-4:

"and he traveled northward to the desert following his heart, living on the best of all desert animals. He then reached the Prince of Naharina"). ″Egypt" and ″abroad" are still distinct entities, but the former has lost a hierarchical prominence over the latter. In this geography, narrative *lines* - whether they be temporal or spatial - are replaced by *points.* The border that the protagonist has to pass is not any longer that between Egypt and a foreign country, but rather that between the real and the imaginary sphere. We might consider the representation of exotic plants and animals in the *Jardin Botanique* at Karnak[25] from the time of Thutmosis III or the contemporary image of a non-Egyptian hyaena in the contemporary Theban tomb of Arnenemhab[26] as protoforms of this geography coming from artistic rather than literary discourse. Here too, it is not difficult to recognize the signs of a more internationally inclined culture, an international culture that corresponds to the complex political balance of power in the Near East during the Late Bronze Age.

This picture changes again considerably at the end of this historical period, with the transition from the Late Bronze to the Iron Age. In the Tale of Wenamun, the foreign place is not only where the hero travels to, as it was already in earlier Ramesside literature, but has in fact become itself the center of the fictional space. The periphery is now Egypt, lost as it is in an administrative jungle (Herihor vs. Smendes, Smendes and Tentamun, etc.) that jeopardizes its reception abroad. Let's look once again at the play of the determinatives: If Naharina in the Doomed Prince or Yoppe in the tale of its taking were still determined by the sign of ″mountains", Dor and Byblos have been now so to say adopted by the Egyptian encyclopaedia: they are classified by a double determinative that characterizes them as "Egyptian" and "foreign" at the same time. They are place of what we might call "fictive Egyptization", places that become part of the Egyptian world because they represent the new center of the author's literary space. This is also shown by the renewed thematization of linguistic pluralism: in Alashia Wenamun asks prudently where there is anyone around who understands Egyptian: *LES* 75,5 *jn mn* **w'** *jm=tn jw=f sdm md.t-km.t.*

I would like to see in these features of the Tale of Wenamun the sign of a global renegotiation of the hierarchy of space that had emerged in the centripetal "national novel" of the Middle Kingdom and had already been substantially modified in the Ramesside "historical novel". An organization of the fictional space very closely related to Wenamun's is displayed by this tale's *alter ego,* namely the "literary letter" of Wermai (pPushkin 127).[27] This text was discovered in the

same location of Wenamun (in a jar in el-Hibe, in Middle Egypt), belongs to the same philological, linguistic and chronological horizon and in many respects represents a symmetrical version of Wenamun, in which the Wenamun's journey to the Syro-palestinian coast is replaced by Wermai's exile in the Great Oasis of el-Kharga (*knm.t*)**.** Thus, this extreme periphery of the Egyptian world becomes in this fictional letter the center of the literary space and, quite expectedly within the interpretive model I am proposing to you, appears determined by the "urban" sign, whereas in contemporary referential texts (such as the Onomastica) oases maintain the "mountain" determinative they already displayed in the Old Kingdom, as we saw before. This "appropriation" of the Great Oasis into the author's literary space is mirrored by a similar treatment in the case of the Libyan regions of the Tjehenu and Tjemehu and of certain Asiatic localities. While in the Middle Kingdom the physical sphere of the protagonists was hierarchically organized according to *national* contours, Wenamun and Wermai follow purely *individual* criteria. The author's subjective geography corresponds to the fragmentation of the objective political map of Egypt, a fragmentation perhaps culturally perceivable also in the emphasis on the list of the twon of Egypt in contemporary Onomastica, such as the Onomasticon of Amenemope,[28] another text from el-Hibe.

From this *fragmentary* geography that, at the end of the Late Bronze, replaces the *centrifugal* geography we saw at work in Ramesside literature, we now turn to the last station of our analysis of the geography of Egyptian fictionality. I would like to label it *imaginary* geography: it characterizes the image of space in the texts of the Egyptian Late Period, from the end of Dyn. XXV-beginning of Dyn. XXVI onward (VIII-VII cent. BCE), a period which sees the renewal of literary activity after almost three centuries of silence. I label this geography "imaginary" because usual geographic conventions appear here neutralized. To illustrate this point, let us cast a look at the map indieating the journey of the statue of Khonsu-who-gives-counsel-in-Thebes (*hnsw-pl-jjr-shr-m-wls.t*) to a country called Bakhtan in the text on the so-called Stela of Bentresh, which probably stems from the Persian period.[29] The problem is that there is no real country called *bhtn,* a name that is presumably an overlapping of Khatti in Anatolia and Baktriana in Iran and that offers, therefore, a geographic counterpart to the prosopographic mixture in the protocol of the king's name, which combines features of Thutmosis IV and of Ramses II.[30] Bakhtan is an imaginary location located beyond the boundaries of the political other. At the beginning of the narrative, the Egyptian king is

staying in Naharina, on geographically (and politically) identifiable soil: quite expectedly, the foreign country of Naharina is determined by the lexical classifier *hls.t*. The same happens with Thebes that is obviously determined with the Æw.r-sign. Here we are still within a context of referential locations, a referential setting seemingly reinforced by a precise date: "The twenty-second day of the second month of the summer season of the fifteenth year".[31] But the core of the narration, the journey to Bakhtan, brings the divine statue to a space that is not only fictional, but also *imaginary*.[32] The move to an imaginary context is also marked by a different choice of determinative: not the "foreign" determinative, as in the case of the real-world Naharina, but rather the juxtaposition of "Egyptian" and "foreign" determinative. Thus, Bakhtan clearly emerges as a place of "fictive Egyptization", a place that is located in a fictional black hole somewhere between Anatolia and Iran, but also - which is more important - a place that has been adopted, as it were, into the Egyptian world by means of the author's literary mimesis.

What appears clearly from Late Periods texts is that this new literary geography has a basis in the religious, or better in the priestly elite. In pVandier,[33] which tells the story of a king Sisobek affected by a mortal disease and of a magician Merire who accept to go the Netherworld in the king's stead and which contains on the *verso a* copy of the Book of the Dead, "all of Egypt" is coextensive with "all the temples of Egypt".[34] The temple has now become the point of intellectual reference, the ideal "city" indicated by the crossroads of the urban determinative, and also the place where literature is written and read. We can now understand why even the West (*jmn.tt*), i.e. the Netherworld, the place of the dead is not any longer a taboo, but has now become a place that be visited by the protagonist of a literary text, i.e. that can be appropriated as part of the author's fictional geography.

This horizontal as well as vertical extension of the literary space during the Late Period, this substitution of real places with imaginary locations remains a constant feature of Demotic literature. In the Myth of the Sun's Eye, we encounter a place called *bw-gm,* which is easily etymologizable as "the place that has been found/invented" and, depending on the needs of the narrative, is applied to different local landscapes, from the Nubian *knst* to the Egyptian desert by el-Kab.[35] The locus of the fight between Petekhons and the Amazones is in a mythical Syria,[36] the heroes of the war for the armor of Inaros travel in a second from one place to the other,[37] and the same happens to the rivaling Ethiopian and Egyptian magicians and kings in the second

tale of Setne-Khaemwaset, who move in the night hours from Egypt to Ethiopia and *vice versa.* In a fragmentary papyrus from Copenhagen, Djoser and his vizier Imhotep begin a war against an Assyrian king-dom ruled by a woman.[38] In Demotic literature we find a small Delta town, Daphne, playing a crucial role in a variety of texts: Ankhshes-honqy is imprisoned there, the protagonist of the tale on the drunken-ness of Amasis is sent there by the king, the "young priest" of pBerlin 13588 travels there. Also, after Merire in pVandier, the way to the Netherworld is wide open to literary heroes: we need only think of the young Si-Osiris or of the beginning of the war for the armour of Inaros, which begins when Osiris sends demons to the earth.[39]

How can we culturally interpret the different models of hierarchi-zation of space that we detected throughout the historical evolution of Egyptian "individual" texts, beginning with the *horizontal* geography of Old Kingdom autobiographies, followed by the *centripetal* geography of Middle Kingdom "classical" tales, and then by the *centrifugal* geogra-phy of Wenamun and Wermai, ending with the emergence of *imagi-nary* geography? I would like to interpret this evolution as the sign of a gradual divorce between "Egypt" as an ideological entity and "Egyptian literature" as cultural discourse. If Middle Kingdom literature was *national* in the sense that the subjective geography of the prota-gonists - precisely like their intellectual and emotional concerns - tended to modeled upon the official hierarchization of the Egyptian world, in the course of fifteen centuries Egyptian literary discourse gradually became on the one hand more *individual,* in the sense of a more perfect authorial emancipation from political requirements, but on the other hand it also became more *transnational,* in the sense that both its themes and its style were closer to what was happening at the same time in the Levant (in the case of the Late Bronze Age) and in the Hellenistic world (in the case of Demotic literature). This is an evolution whose emergence goes back to the Shipwrecked Sailor, with the common elements it displays with the Northwest Semitic cycle of Yam, Baal and Astarte,[40] which then continues with the narrative literature of the New Kingdom, some of whose motifs are reminiscent of Ugaritic and Biblical literature, and which finally finds its peak after the literary Renaissance of the Late Period, when Egyptian (now Demotic) literature shares with other literatures of the Hellenistic world a high number of rhetorical devices and conceptual features.[41]

To say that Egyptian literature in Demotic is transnational does not imply, of course, that the evolution we have briefly analyzed in this paper is borrowed from foreign literary traditions. In fact, many appa-rent innovations of Demotic narrative literature find their antecedents in

classical Egyptian literature, as F. Hoffmann has shown in his analysis of the Inaros cycle.[42] Rather, the term "transnational" implies that national concerns *per se* do not play any major role in the creation of a literary space which, as in the case of the Hellenistic novel *Hephesiaka*,[43] is characterized pretty much everywhere in the Mediterranean world by a break in the existing conventions of representation of time and especially, by a recourse to the fantastic, or imaginary dimension. And it is precisely in this emergence of a literature which is both more embedded into international literary discourse and "freer" from explicit (i.e., *national)* ideological concerns, that we can recognize the end of the process that led to the creation of a literary domain that in Egypt presents the same features it displays in contemporary Asia Minor, Greece or Rome. It took the rise of Enlightenment to replace the warm topography of the European fables with the cold geography of bourgeois novels. It took two millennia to change the realistic geography of Middle Kingdom novels into the imaginary topography of Hellenistic fables.

Notas

[1] **A. LOPRIENO, Defining Egyptian Literature: Ancient Texts and Modern Literary Theory",** in J. S. Cooper - G. M. Schwartz (eds.), *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the Twenty-First Century The William Foxwell Albright Centennial Conference.* Winona Lake 1996, 209-232.

[2] **Cf. L. D. MORENZ, *Beiträge zur Schriftlichkeitskultur im Mittleren Reich und in der* 2. *Zwischenzeit.* ÄAT 29, Wiesbaden 1996, 58-77.**

[3] **Cf. P. VERNUS, *Essai sur la conscience de l'histoire dans ΓEgypte pharaonique.* BE HE 332. Paris 1995, 1-33.**

[4] **Cf. A. LOPRIENO, "Puns and Word Play in Ancient Egyptian", in Scott B. Noegel (ed.), *Puns and Pundits. Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature.* Bethesda 2000, 3-20.**

[5] **Cf. W. HELCK, *Der Text der 'Lehre Amenemhets I. für seinen Sohn'*. KÄT. Wiesbaden 1969, 1-5.**

[6] **For a paradigmatic example see E. BRESCIANI - S. PERNIGOTTI - M.P. GIANGERI SILVIS, *La Toma di Ciennehebu, capo della flotta del re.* Biblioteca degli Studi Classici e Orientali 7. Pisa 1977, 28 ff.**

[7] **A. LOPRIENO, "The King's Novel", in A. Loprieno (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature. History & Forms.* PdÄ 10. Leiden 1996, 277-295.**

[8] **H. U. GUMBRECHT, "Does Egyptology need a theory of literature?", in Loprieno (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature,* 3-18.**

(9) **On this issue see also the general remarks in K.L. PFEIFFER, "The materiality of communication", in H.U. Gumbrecht - K.L. Pfeiffer (eds.), *Materialities of Communication,* Stanford 1994, 1-12.**

(10) **On the latter see now the contributions from a variety of theoretical perspectives in *LingAeg* 8 (2000).**

(11) **Partially in this sense see the model underlying the analysis of F. KAMMERZELL, "Das Verspreisen der Götter. Religiöse Vorstellungen oder poetische Fiktion", *LingAeg 7* (2000), 183-218.**

<2> **I shall cite this work from its German edition: *Atlas des europäischen Romans. Wo die Literatur spielte.* Köln 1999.**

<13> ***Ibid.,*** 100.

<14> **J. ASSMANN, "Schrift, Tod und Identität: das Grab als Vorschule der Literatur im Alte Ägypten", in A. Assmann - J. Assmann - Ch. Hardmeier (Hgg.), *Schrift und Gedächtnis.* Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation 1. München 1983, 64-93; A. GNIRS, "Die ägyptische Autobiographie", in Loprieno (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature,* 191-241.**

<15> **Cf. *Urk.* I 124,12 (Herkhuf), 133,10 (Pepynakht), *passim.***

(16) **For the cultural, "encyclopaedic" quality of determinatives see O. Goldwasser, *From Icon to Metaphor.* OBO 142. Fribourg - Göttingen 1995.**

<17> **See Lisa L. GIDDY, *Egyptian Oases.* Warminster 1987, 164-166.**

(18> **H. GOEDICKE, 'The route of Sinuhe's flight", *JEA* 43 (1957), 77-85.**

<19> **Ch. EYRE, "Why was Egyptian literature?", in *Atti del VI Congresso Internazionale di Egittologia.* Vol. II. Torino 1993, 115-127; A. LOPRIENO, "Literature as Mirror of Social Institutions: The Case of The Eloquent Peasant", *LingAeg* 8 (2000), 187-192.**

<20> **G. MOERS, "'Bei mir wird es Dir gut ergehen, denn Du wirst die Sprache Ägyptens hören!'. Verschieden und doch gleich: Sprache als identitätsrelevanter Faktor im pharao-nischen Ägypten", in U.-Ch. Sander und F. Paul (Hgg.), *Muster und Funktionen kultureller Selbst- und Fremdwahrnehmung.* Göttingen 2000, 45-99.**

<21) **On *dr* and *βí* as "absolute" vs. "geographic" limit see E. HORNUNG, "Von zweierlei Grenzen im Alten Ägypten", *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 1980, 393-427.**

<22> **Cf. R. B. PARKINSON, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant,* Oxford 1991, xxv-xxviii.**

<23> **GUMBRECHT, in Loprieno (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature,* 6-10; Moretti, *Atlas,* 25-101.**

<24> **LOPRIENO, in *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the Twenty-First Century,* 226-227.**

(25) N **BEAUX, *Le cabinet de curiosités de Thoutmosis III.* OLA 36. Leuven 1990.**

<26> **TT 85, cf. *PM* 1.1, 173; F. KAMPP, *Die Thebanische Nekropole. Teil I.* Theben 13. Mainz 1996, 336-338.**

<27> **R. A. CAMINOS, *A Tale of Woe, Papyrus Pushkin 127,* Oxford 1977.**

<28> **Cf. A. H. GARDINER, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica,* Oxford 1947, II 236*.**

<29> **BROZE, *La princesse de Bakhtan.* Monographies Reine Elisabeth 6. Bruxelles 1989, 9-11.**

(30> *Ibid.,* 16-17

<3'> *Ibid.,* 34.

(32) The difference between "fictional" and "imaginary" is that the former defines the entities of the literary text as non-referential in the real world, while the latter refers to a discourse in which the basic conventions of the real world may appear broken,   cf.LOPRIENO,   in *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the Twenty-First Century,* 215.

(33) G. POSENER, *Le Papyrus Vandier,* Bibliothèque Générale 7. Le Caire 1985.

<34> pVandier 1,14, 4,3, *passim*; cf. also the discussion in A. LOPRIENO, "Le Pharaon reconstruit. La figure du roi dans la littérature égyptienne au 1er millénaire avant J.C.", *Bulletin de la Société Française d'Egyptologie* 142 (1998), 20-22.

(35) A. LOPRIENO, "Der demotische Mythos vom Sonnenauge", in *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments.* Band III/5, Gütersloh 1995, 1043.

(36) F. HOFFMANN, *Ägypter und Amazonen.* Mitteilungen aus der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek XXIV. Wien 1995, 17-20.

(37) F. HOFFMANN, *Der Kampft um den Panzer des Inaros.* Mitteilungen aus der Papyrus-Sammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek XXVI. Wien 1996, 45-48.

(38) Cf. the reference in HOFFMANN, *Ägypter und Amazonen,* 25.

<39) On the significance of these texts within Egyptian literary history see   LOPRIENO,*BSFE* 142 (1998), 12-23.

(40) A. M. GNIRS, "Die levantinische Herkunft des Schlangengottes″, in H. Guksch - D. Polz (Hgg.), *Stationen. Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte Ägyptens Rainer Stadelmann gewidmet.* Mainz 1998, 197-209.

(41) M. LICHTHEIM, *Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature in the International Context.* OBO 52, Fribourg - Göttingen 1983, 1-12.

(42) HOFFMANN, *Der Kampft um den Panzer des Inaros,* 49-105.

<43> MORETTI, *Atlas,* 74-75.