BIRTH OF THE PHARAOHS

BY

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The legend describing the birth of the kings who were to replace the 4th dynasty and establish the next, the Raʿ-dynasty, is related in a hieratic papyrus of the Berlin Museum, the so-called papyrus Westcar. It has been edited by Adolf Erman, who also gives a translation in "Die Literatur der Aegypter". There is a hieroglyphic printing "Aus den Wundererzählungen vom Hofe des Königs Cheops" in Kurt Sethe's "Ägyptische Lesestücke", with a commentary, to which I shall refer in the following.

The news of the children to be born is broken to king Cheops by a man who has been brought to his court to work wonders of different kinds. There is something this man can not or will not do, however. The king wants a box, probably of sacred or magic character, brought to him from Heliopolis, and receives the answer that the eldest one of three children who are in the body of a woman called Red-*d*edet will fetch it.

Naturally, the king wants to know who this woman is, and it comes out that she is the wife of a Raʿ priest, pregnant with three children by Raʿ of Sa*h*ebu himself. Three sons of Raʿ are to be born. King Cheops is somewhat upset at this announcement, of course, inquires about the expected time of birth, and declares his intention to visit the sanctuary of Raʿ of Sa*h*ebu. This, and a few lines before the manuscript is broken off, give the impression that the king has in mind to interfere in an attempt to save his throne, which would be the ordinary sequence in a story of this kind.

Here the birth-story starts (Sethe, p. 32,l.21). We hear that one of these days Red-*d*edet came into her pains, (and) difficult was

her delivery. His Majesty Ra‘ of Sa*h*ebu then expresses his wish to Isis, Nephtys, Meseḫent, Ḥeḳet and Chnum that they go and deliver Red-*d*edet of the three children in her body. The party went off, and the goddesses were dressed up as musicians. They all arrived at the house of Ra‘ Woser, the priest.

So far so good. Now comes a sentence which I never found adequately translated (Sethe, p. 33,1.8–9). The story goes on: "They found him (as) he stood . . .",—then different solutions have been tried—, with his skirt hanging down, with his clothes in disorder, or simply declaring "Sinn unverständlich" as in Sethe's commentary. I shall presently return to this point, but let us follow the story for a few more lines.

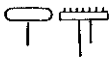
The goddesses bring out their instruments to play for the priest, but he interrupts them, saying: "My Ladies, here is a woman in travail, (and) difficult is her delivery." The goddesses now disclose that they are experts in assisting women in child-bed, and ask to see the woman. The priest brings them inside, and everything works out the way we must expect when a god is the father and three goddesses are available to help his offspring into the world.

But what exactly was the priest doing when they found him standing outside the house? "They found him (as) he stood . . .",—gm. n. sn. sw ḫ‘ . . . This is parallell to p. 29,1.15: "He found him (as) he lay . . .", gm. n. f. sw s*dr* . . . In both cases I would suggest we face an old perfective giving a discription of circumstance, to be completed by the following words, cfr. Gardiner, § 314.

Now what precisely were the circumstances they found him standing in? The raison d'être of the whole story is the birth of the children. Twice we are told that the birth is difficult. Goddesses are sent out to assist. What would a husband do in the circumstances? He would assist too. How does a husband assist in primitive society? He resorts to magic. I refer to examples in Frazer's "The Golden Bough" and Hasting's Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics to illustrate what husbands have to observe when the wife is in travail. We find that husbands are no passive by-standers, but charged with responsibilities and actively cooperating to secure a good result. I would consider it safe and

reasonable to assume that our priest is up to some sort of magic. This would be the circumstances they found him in.

The last word in the sentence, sḫd, as the determinative strongly enough indicates, means "upside down". What importance has upside down in connection with child-birth? The child should be upside down in his mother's womb to secure a normal birth, head first. If this is not the case, her delivery will be difficult, ḳsn mss.s, as in our present text. If difficulties turn up, homoeopathic, imitative magic must be applied to set things right. I conclude that our priest was hanging up clothes upside down, maybe a doll, or even, though less likely, he might be standing on his head himself.

This picture is given in a circumstantial clause, the two signs  have no consonant reading attached to them, and there is no furher explanation. This indicates that the situation was well familiar to the readers, and that no far-fetched solutions must be sought. There is no doubt that the two signs express a noun meaning "garment", maybe to be read "dꜣiw" and limited to mean "loin-cloth". Then sḫd must be a qualification and the meaning will be "the garment was upside down". The complete sentence then will read: "They found him (as) he stood (and) the garment was upside down".

This marks a dramatic point in the story, conveying much the same idea to the readers as we would take from a passage "the rescue party arrived and observed the ship flying the flag of distress". However, to keep the readers or listeners in suspense, the goddesses pretend not to see the "flag of distress", and prepare to make music, a device well known in eastern story-telling. This seems to be too much on the good priest, and he exclaims in an unmistakably reproachful tone: "My Ladies, there is a woman who is in pain, (and) her delivery is difficult". There is a puzzling "pw" in this sentence, ... s.t. pw ntt ḫr mn.s . . . Sethe suggests in the commentary that this "pw" might be intended to explain the "dꜣiw sḫd", which would eventually fit well into the story as set forth above. Thus referring to his magic activity he would actually say: "My Ladies, this (is on account of) a woman in pain . . .". Can't they see the garment is upside down and that

he is preoccupied with a serious matter which leaves no room for music and joy?

The solution I argue would stand infinitely stronger, of course, if magic of this specific kind were observed and registered among the ancient Egyptians or elsewhere, but I have failed to find any example of this distress procedure. Nevertheless, I dare to bring out this point hoping that there will be a scholar better versed in magic who can fill the gap, and thus finally erase this white spot from the text.

I shall not fail to mention, however, as a fact of possible relevance, that in medieval Norway, in case of difficult delivery, the woman was hoisted up by her legs and suspended upside down under the roof. (I. Reichborn-Kjennerud: Vår gamle trolldomsmedisin, Oslo 1933, Vol. II, p. 67 f.). The idea behind this barbarous treatment, which may be traced all through Europe and dated back to Hippocrate, was, I should think, that the child should remain in its original position, and that turning around the mother would set things normal. The operation itself seems to represent an intermediate stage between magic and medical care, if I may use this expression. I would consider it most unlikely if this procedure should be without some sort of parallell in magic aiming at the same result, the complication of abnormal position of the child being the most common among women in child-bed.

Magic is man's resort in difficulty, we read in the "Teachings for Merikare": "God created magic a weapon for man to ward off the strikes of events".

THE NOTIONS *mēnōg* AND *gētīg* IN THE PAHLAVI TEXTS AND THEIR RELATION TO ESCHATOLOGY

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The Zoroastrian religion is primarily known as dualistic in the sense that the opposition between the powers of good and the powers of evil occupies in its thought a central position. In addition to this opposition there is, however, in Zoroastrianism another pair of notions, which is no less important for a proper understanding of Zoroastrian ideas: the contrast between the notions of *mēnōg*, Avestan *mainyava-*, 'that which is non-material, non-sensual, intelligible', sometimes best translated 'ideal' in the sense of a conceptual prototype of a concrete existence, on the one hand, and *gētīg*,[1] Avestan *gaēiθya-*,[2] 'the material, earthly (world), that which can be apprehended through the senses', on the other. This pair of contrasting notions is neutral to the ethical dualism

[1] The word is often spelled in the Pahlavi texts *gyt'x*, and was read by H. S. Nyberg **gētāh* or *gētēh*, to distinguish between the substantive and the adjective, read by him *gētīk*; cf. *Hilfsbuch des Pehlevi*, II, Uppsala 1931, 80f., and *Journal Asiatique*, 219 (1931), p. 31 ff. There is however no evidence for a vocalization *-ā-* in Middle or New Persian texts. Pāzand *gētī*, *gētī*, *gītī*, NP *gētī*, MPT *gytyg*, can all be best explained as reflecting a MP *gētīg*. The fact that an additional suffix *-yk* is usually added to the word in order to form the adjective (to be read *gētīgīg*) shows that the basic word had no formal distinction between substantive and adjective as Nyberg suggests, in the same way as *mēnōg* is a substantivized adjective, with a secondary adjectival form *mēnōgīg*. (In this I believe I am following the view of W. B. Henning.)

[2] In the Avestan text the same opposition was often expressed by other words. It is found already in the Gāthās, expressed for example as follows: *dāvōi ahvā astvatasčā hyaṯčā manaŋhō*, Y 28,2 (and similarly Y 43,3).