

An Example of Egyptian Royal Phraseology in Psalm 132

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The adoption and adaptation of Egyptian literary motifs and conventions by Hebrew writers is one of the well-known results of the close contacts and interaction that existed between ancient Egypt and Israel¹. It has also been demonstrated that the Hebrew institution of monarchy, particularly that of Juda, shows Egyptian influence in some of its aspects², so that it is no surprise to find Egyptian literary forms adopted in Hebrew texts that have the king as subject³. A hitherto unnoticed example of Egyptian royal phraseology in the Old Testament⁴ appears in Ps 132,3-5, where the psalmist quotes an oath of king David⁵:

| | | | | | |
|------|---|---|----|---|---|
| v. 3 | 1 | { | i | { | I will not enter my house or get into my bed, |
| v. 4 | 1 | { | ii | { | I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, |
| v. 5 | 2 | { | | { | until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob. |

We encounter here the motif of the diligent monarch who, in his desire to serve his God, shuns sleep. As may be seen from the following examples, (which do not pretend to be exhaustive), this motif is often encountered in Egyptian royal inscriptions.

a) Inscription of Amenhotep III, Luxor Temple (Urk. IV, 1701.12-14)

1 See R.J. WILLIAMS in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* I, 492-505.

2 *id.*, SVT 28 (1975) 233-235.

3 Eg. the "Königsnovelle", S. HERRMANN, W.Z.d.K.M. Univ. Leipzig, *Gesellschaftl. und Sprachwiss. Reihe* 3 (1953/4) 51ff.

4 Cf. E. BLUMENTHAL/S. MORENZ, ZÄS 93 (1966) 21ff. for evidence of Egyptian royal phraseology in a hymn to Simon Maccabaeus. In *Begegnung Europas mit Ägypten*, 1968, 108¹ MORENZ raises the question of whether the phraseology found here could be traced via the OT back to Egypt.

5 RSV translation.

"May the good god live, whom the earth adores,
over whose deeds mankind rejoices

- 1 *sḏr rs.w*
2 *ḥr ḥḥj 3ḥ.t n jt(j)=f ʿmm(.w)-[r^c(.w)]*
1 who spends the night watchful
2 searching for what is profitable for his
father Amun-[Re]".

b) Alabaster Stele of Sethos I, Karnak (KRI I,39.6-7)

- 1 *tm cc_w m grḥ mj hr(w.w)*
2 *ḥr ḥḥj sp nb mnh*
ḥr ḏ^cr ḥr.t 3ḥ.t
1 "who does not sleep in the night as in the day
2 searching for every excellent deed,
seeking out profitable affairs".

c) Stele of Sethos I, E.Silsila (KRI I,60.8ff.; BAR III § 205ff.)

"H.M., l.p.h., was in the southern city
doing that (for which) his father Amun-Re
king of the gods praises him

- 1 *sḏr rs(.w) tp*
2 *ḥr ḥḥj 3ḥ(.t) n nṯr(.w) nb.w T3-mrj*
1 spending the night watchful
2 searching for what is profitable for all the
gods of Egypt". The text then relates how at dawn

the king summoned a royal officer and company of soldiers to fetch
stone for the construction of a temple.

d) Building Inscription of Sethos I, Karnak (KRI I,202,4ff.)

"As for the good god who inclines to make monuments

- 1 { i *sḏr rs(.w)*
ii *n cc_w.n=f*
2 *m ḥḥj jr(.t) 3ḥ(.t)*
1 { i who spends the night watchful,
ii he sleeps not,
2 seeking to do that which is profitable.
It is H.M. who gives the instructions, who
leads the work in his monument (ie. temple)".

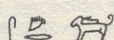
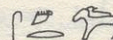


e) Ramesses III, Luxor (G. DARESSY, Rec.Trav. 16 (1894) 55-6; E. OTTO, ZÄS 90 (1963) 93-7, lines 6-7)

"As for the good god, the excellent kind who is
 over Egypt, his every limb is of the nature of god,
 1 { i \overline{sdr} rs(.w)⁶
 ii n CCw=f
 2 hr ḥḥj sp.w mnh.w r jr(.t)=w m W3s.t nḥt.t
 1 { i he who spends the night vigilant,
 ii he does not sleep,
 2 searching for excellent deeds in order to do
 them in Thebes the victorious
 for his father, the king of the gods, building
 a temple in Luxor"

A comparison of the psalm passage with the Egyptian examples shows that common to all are two elements:

- 1 the vigilance of the king
- 2 the king's search for something that will benefit the god⁷.

The greatest degree of correspondence with the biblical passage is demonstrated by the Egyptian examples d) and e), for in these, as in the psalm, the first element is expressed by two statements (i and ii). Although there are unmistakable structural parallels between the Hebrew and Egyptian texts, there are also differences, a result of the verse form of the former and the less structured form of the latter. The psalmist has skillfully adapted the Egyptian phraseology. Each of the two parts of the first element, which together form a parallelism, has itself been transformed into a parallelism, as has also the second element, making the whole passage a composition of three distichoi, the second standing in climatic parallelism to the first, and the last forming the climax of the whole.

6 OTTO reads  in place of DARESSY's  but does not comment on the variation, unlike other variant readings that he offers. Since his translation follows DARESSY's reading I assume a misprint in OTTO's text, ( for  perhaps?)

7 The concept of "finding" in the psalm naturally implicates that of "seeking". See KBL³, 586a s.v. נָחַד qal 3 ("Gesuchtes finden"; THAT I, 923f.)

As well as showing a certain thematic and formal similarity, the psalm passage and the Egyptian examples have the same "Sitz im Leben". In the psalm David's concern is to find a home for the ark of the covenant⁸, a place where Jahweh can be invited to make His abode, i.e. something that fullfills the same function as an Egyptian temple, a place in which the god can take up residence. Apart from a), all the Egyptian examples quoted are from inscriptions that have as their subject temple building projects of the king. a) is part of an inscription on an architrave of the Luxor temple and also refers, implicitly if not explicitly, to Amenhotep's building activity there.

In Egypt, the origin of the motif of the vigilance of the king can be traced back to the phraseology of private biographical inscriptions⁹, in which royal officials stress their diligence in serving the king, just as in the royal inscriptions the king emphasises his devotion to the gods. The first known example of this theme in royal phraseology is to be found in an inscription of Sesostris I of the early 12th dynasty¹⁰, in private inscriptions the motif of vigilance already appears in the Old Kingdom¹¹, and continues through to the New Kingdom¹².

The motif of sleeplessness to express vigilance is of course not confined to Egypt, it is rather something one can expect to meet in most cultures¹³. However the example of royal phraseology here discussed, i.e. literary form in which the motif appears here, is typically Egyptian. The close parallel in form and "Sitz im Leben" between the Egyptian and Hebrew examples speaks strongly in favour of the thesis that we have in Ps 132,3-5

8 H. GESE, "Der Davidsbund und die Zionserwählung", in: id. Vom Sinai zum Zion, Munich 1974, 119ff.; K. RUPPRECHT, "Der Tempel von Jerusalem. Gründung Salomos oder jebusitisches Erbe?" BZAW 144, Berlin-New York 1977, 100ff., esp. 104.

9 E. BLUMENTHAL, Untersuchungen zum ägyptischen Königtum des Mittleren Reiches I, Berlin 1970, 76, B 2.13.

10 *ibid.*

11 E. EDEL, MDAIAK 13 (1944) 53, § 50.

12 For example J. JANSSEN, Traditioneele Egyptische Autobiografie, Leiden 1946, IAj 10-12 for MK examples; Urk IV, 1077.1; 1379,13; 1887.8-9 for NK examples. These may be added to that given by J. ZANDEE (Festschrift H.A. BRONGERS, Utrecht 1974, 147) as a parallel to Prov 6,4, where the author of the wisdom text exhorts his readers to diligence in the words of Ps 132,4.

13 Thus it appears in Mesopotamia, where it is expressed by the verb *dalapu* "to be or stay awake, to be sleepless, to work ceaselessly, to continue (work) into the night". (CAD III,47.)

another example where Egypt has provided a model for the Hebrew author, a model, however, that he did not slavishly copy, but skillfully adapted for his purposes.