Case of the Prince and His Dog: Accommodating Ambiguity

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Résumé

Many studies have been devoted to the analysis of the Tale of the Doomed Prince. However, none have sufficiently explained the choice of the three animals representing the Hero’s fate (snake, crocodile, dog) and-more importantly-the sequence of plot episodes in which they interact with the main characters.
In my presentation I will argue that the "animal sequence" forms the conclusive part of a narrative process which mediates between a series of binary categories which are all in relation to the Hero in his capacity of the crown prince. I will show that the composition belongs to a broad category of mythological narratives-characteristic of the New Kingdom period-in which the issue of royal (il)legitimacy is developed through the interaction of "Egyptian" and "foreign" (i.e. Near-Eastern) motifs. It is in this context that the animals represent a mechanism through which the process of Hero’s maturation and gradual development into a legitimate ruler can take place.
In case of the Doomed Prince, fate in the form of the three animals is primarily represented as something threatening, disruptive, and negative. I will therefore also present a brief survey into the associations of the three animals with categories of evil and subsequently also the god Seth who-even though not mentioned in the text itself-is traditionally associated with these categories. I will show how the conclusions of this survey corroborate the situation as presented by the narrative itself: the snake being on one end of the spectrum (completely evil), crocodile in between, and the dog on the opposite end (friend).

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