Triumphal Accounts in Hebrew and Egyptian

~ Richard Abbott ~

Triumphal Accounts in Hebrew and Egyptian

A Structural and Literary Comparison

Richard Abbott

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Triumphal accounts in Hebrew and Egyptian

A structural and literary comparison

Richard Abbott

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol and Trinity College in accordance with the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts

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Abstract

This thesis considers the literary structure of the triumphal song recorded in Exodus 15 of the Hebrew Bible, commonly known as the Song of the Sea and attributed in the biblical text primarily to Moses and secondarily to Miriam. This literary structure is investigated in relation to triumphal material and other poetry written in Egypt, predominantly in the New Kingdom period. It is argued that cross-cultural literary influences shaped the construction of the Song of the Sea, to the point that the author's familiarity with Egyptian styles and conventions can still be recognised.

The exploration begins with a review of both Hebrew and Egyptian poetry, considering some of the typical patterns used in each culture. In particular, the construction of poetic couplets and the relationships between A- and B-lines of these couplets is studied in order to derive some basic principles of composition in common use.

The Israel Stele of Merenptah is chosen as a suitable point of comparison, and the large-scale structures of both this work and the Song of the Sea are compared and contrasted to highlight key areas of stylistic overlap. In particular, the use of chiasmus to structure these works, the use of divine or Pharaonic names as structural markers, and the use of complex arrangements of geographical or ethnic names in each text are highlighted.

In the later stages of the work, some additional lines of evidence are reviewed which lend support to the idea that Egyptian habits of writing may have been familiar to writers in early Israel, even after the decline of Egypt's territorial ambitions in the Levant. This in turn suggests ways to understand the subsequent incorporation of the Song of the Sea into the larger Exodus narrative, as well as the social location of the author.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

This thesis has taken shape over a considerable time – about seven years passage through the formal stages of progression as a part-time external student at Trinity College, Bristol, but longer in terms of internal development and aspiration. A great many people have been involved in this process, and their diverse levels of input and assistance are very happily acknowledged.

In academic terms, I am extremely grateful to Dr John Bimson for providing invaluable support and direction during my time at Trinity. He has been consistently willing to apply himself to material as it developed, and offer helpful and provocative insights. His grasp of the wider subject area has been essential in broadening my own understanding, and where my cross-cultural interests have led the work into areas initially unfamiliar to both of us, he has been generously willing to follow the trail and see where it leads. I hope he will see in this work a reflection of his own attention to detail. Other staff and students at Trinity have made comments and suggestions as occasion permitted. Prof Gordon McConville of the University of Gloucester has also provided helpful input at key points of the development of this work.

The process of study would have been immensely harder without the work of Su Brown, librarian at Trinity College. Her continuing effort on my behalf to secure books and journal articles of apparently ever-increasing obscurity from other libraries has been an essential part of the process.

Other people of whom mention must be made include Dr Wojtek Zakrzewski, Dave Edwins and Rev Gordon Tuck. Special mention is also due to Rev Andrew Hemmens, and to his support and encouragement over many years. I have never met Michael and Margaret Farmery, but I am profoundly grateful to them for providing regular conversation and encouragement by email, and wish them every blessing for their unexpected and unlooked-for support. Another friend known only via electronic means, whose long-standing interest has been very supportive, is Cami McGraw, Texas, USA.

The most profound debt is, naturally, acknowledged to my family, who have with great cheerfulness and no little humour been a foundation in all things. Seven years is a long time in the life of a family, and there have been no shortage of changes for all of us in that time. They will each, I hope, recognise in these pages an abundance of places where I owe debts of many kinds to them all: fresh ideas, new ways to look at source material, a renewed sense of excitement in the process of exploration, and a constant supply of common-sense to prevent detachment from reality. Special thanks are due to Ruth for multiple proof-reading sessions: fair exchange is no robbery!

The personal journeys of my children, Ruth and Paul, as they have found their own passages of Yam Çuph, their own wilderness experiences, and their own ways to cross over from the plains of Moab, shape the larger backdrop for this enterprise. Their individual life-poems have structured this work.

Above all else, credit is due to my wife Roselyn for all that she is and does, and for the creativity she inspires. This work is dedicated to her.

Dedication Poem

As I extend these arms,	*ḥpt.i sw gbȝw*
hers spread wide wings about me -	*st pšw dnḥ ḫr.i*
like a soul in paradise,	*mi nty m pwnt*
like taking her hand in the blossoming reeds,	*iw.f mi mˁi sy iw*
stepping out into the brimming pools -	*pry m dmdt [šw]*
yet for all these perfumes about this heart	*[swt] sty st nȝ ib*
to me you are both balm and flower's fragrance.	*ri mrḥt sft*
	Cairo Ostracon 25218 love poem 1

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this declaration was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

Richard Abbott

This thesis was defended at a viva interview on August 8th 2011, with Professor R.S. Hess (Denver, Colorado) as external examiner and Rev Dr E. Lucas (Bristol) as internal examiner. Revisions were accepted as complete by both examiners by November 24th 2011. The degree was awarded by the University of Bristol and Trinity College on January 24th 2012 and presented at a degree ceremony on January 28th 2012.

Preface to ebook published edition

This ebook published edition contains the same text as approved by the external and internal PhD examiners. The main body text is unchanged: the appendices and a few footnotes contain a small amount of additional information and explanation that may be helpful for a non-technical audience but was not felt necessary in the academic world. You are therefore reading essentially the same thesis that formed the basis for the PhD degree award.

The main change for the ebook edition is that the text has been completely reformatted to be appropriate for an ebook reader such as the Amazon Kindle, rather than a printed layout on fixed-size pages. Text layout, images and tables have all been reworked to display well on a wide variety of eReader devices. Some parts of the text use different colours to highlight important features, which obviously will not display to full effect on a device able to show only shades of grey. However, other kinds of display signals such as different font styles or highlighting are used to reinforce colour differences. eReader devices such as the Kindle Fire, or Kindle readers on tablets and computers, will recover the proper colours. The original printed version used Hebrew, Egyptian and transliterated character fonts a great deal. Most eReader devices cannot correctly display these fonts, and screenshot images are used extensively instead.

Footnotes for each chapter are shown in a block at the end of that chapter, and are shown by small numbers in the text like this. 0. The bracketed number is a link which will jump to the main footnote text, and from there you can jump back to the footnote insertion point using the built-in epub device capability. Footnotes are additional information about the sentence in question - in some cases they give extra detail that may help explain the point, but in most cases they acknowledge the citation reference from which the information was obtained. Footnotes do not need to be read to grasp the main thrust of the argument. At the end of the chapter text, before the block of footnotes, a link is provided so you can jump straight to the next chapter. A full bibliography may be found at the very end of the thesis, before a series of appendices which contain details of the raw data used to support the main arguments. These appendices are, frankly, quite dull, though important on a theoretical level, and I would not expect many readers to plough through them!

For an initial read it may be helpful to start with the introduction and then jump straight to the conclusions section. This will give a good idea of the basic conclusions reached during the study. The interior chapters can then be tackled individually depending on the area of interest. Issues of poetics are addressed in chapters 1 and 2. The Israel Stele of Merenptah and the Hebrew Song of the Sea are tackled in detail in chapters 3 and 4. Wider issues of context and historical development are the subject of chapters 5 and 6. The chapters can be read in isolation from each other, but since they form succesive parts of the overall argument there are places where they assume earlier deductions or prepare the ground for later conclusions.

[0] This is the text for the trial footnote.

Introduction

Scope and limitations

The Florentines have recently caused their deeds to be published in six books; the Venetians are also composing their own writings and poems to commend themselves and their cities to immortality. And to the degree that they extol their own deeds, to that degree are they trying to obscure our own deeds, both recent ones and older ones...

In my view, since we don't have a man whose talent, devotion and literary skill are equal to watching out for and answering the detractors of our prince, we should bring one from the ends of the earth, even if it costs no small sum.

Bartolomeo Capra to the Duke of Milan, Filippo Maria, 4 Apr 1429.[1]

Rather over two millennia before the deeds of the prince of Milan whose potential obscurity so concerned Bartolomeo Capra, the emerging community of Israel felt that they had witnessed deeds well worth "commending to immortality". To this end, like the Venetians, they composed writings and poems. It is this written record which is the concern of this study, and in particular the poetic record preserved in Exodus chapter 15. Like the Milanese, the Israelites required individuals of talent, devotion, and literary skill to create this record, and it is one of the contentions of this thesis that such people first developed the necessary skills in Egypt.

This suggestion is, in itself, hardly new, and has been explored in various ways in the past. For example, drawing on quotations directly related to ancient Israel, we find Williams in 1969, citing Wilson in 1951: "'When Hebrew religion had reached a point where it needed a certain mode of expression it could find in another literature phrases and thoughts which would meet the need'. Its geographical location and the fortunes of history combined to draw Israel into the cultural orbit of Egypt".[2] The methods and strategies used for comparisons with Egyptian material have varied greatly; here we shall consider ways in which literary devices are used to structure both large and small scale poetic design, focusing especially on triumphal poems.

Tracing dependence of one manufacturing style upon another has become a standard tool in the field of archaeology, seen for example in the way pottery styles and technologies can be

followed along routes of communication and cultural contact. This dependence may be analysed at several different levels simultaneously.3 For example, neutron activation analysis can identify the source of clay deposits used to make a particular pot, while examination of the physical shape and structure indicates technologies used during manufacture, and consideration of the artistry of exterior decorations – or their absence – can yield information about the cultural and ethnic influences bearing on the potter. All these levels are available for analysis.

An analogous process may be carried out for works of literature. Here too one may analyse a text on many levels, including its physical production, its use of epigraphy or vocabulary, or the range and choice of literary devices employed in the writing. This last factor is the main focus of the following chapters. Several years ago Gevirtz wrote:

> "No poet's work stands unique: it is no more *creatio ex nihilo*, an event without precedent, than is its author without parentage. Every poet in his day is but the last, the most recent, in a long line of poets from whose work he may be said to have in some manner benefited... to fail to acknowledge these... is to fail to grasp the formal foundations of his art... in short, it is to ignore the distinctive qualities of his poetic achievement."4

The biblical narrative relates that emerging Israel had spent many years in Egypt, initially as invited and appreciated guests and subsequently as an exploited labour force. As they left Egypt, the Israelites took with them many aspects of the material, cultural and religious life of their former hosts, some proving acceptable and some unacceptable in the light of their subsequent religious development. Previous work has shown the debt owed by Israelite narrative styles to Egyptian precursors;5 here the parallel issue of poetic style is considered. Following Gevirtz, to uncover the formal foundations of the poetic achievements of early Israel, it is necessary to identify and acknowledge influences arising from the Egyptian sojourn.

This thesis, then explores comparisons between early Hebrew poetry and relevant Egyptian material. Important results have already been obtained over the years by reviewing the themes, preoccupations and vocabulary of key non-biblical poems of known composition date.6 This study aims to extend the scope of these comparisons, and to draw on insights from other areas of study, by exploring the choice and range of formal literary devices selected. Consider the similarities between the poem in Exodus 15, "The Song of the Sea", and the Israel Stele of the Egyptian 19th dynasty pharaoh Merenptah. Both works celebrate the triumph of their respective nations over threatening adversaries, somewhat to the surprise of the majority of the participants. Both works firmly attribute success to divine favour, and as will be shown later, both works share certain characteristic formal styles and devices.

This work is deliberately structured in an inter-disciplinary manner, as befits the nature of the investigation. Techniques and insights are drawn from various branches of biblical studies, Egyptology, archaeology, and more general literary studies in poetics. In exploring this subject, it is clearly essential to adopt an integrative approach rather than become too deeply immersed in any single discipline. This follows an increasing trend amongst modern authors such as Hoffmeier, Currid

and Watts, who perceive considerable value in tracing avenues of dependence for biblical writers on literary techniques used in neighbouring countries.[7] Approaching from a more archaeological perspective, but equally keen on amalgamating appropriate insights from other disciplines in order to build up a coherent composite, are authors such as Miller, Higginbotham, Killebrew, or Faust.[8] These particular authors form a representative but by no means exhaustive sample, illustrating a perceived value in looking beyond the borders of ancient Israel in order to understand Israelite history, and its record in text and artefact.

Brief statement of the aim of this study

This study aims to show that the Israel Stele of Merenptah and the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 share sufficient common compositional principles and poetic devices as to support a similar dating for the two works. Indeed, the specific combinations of large-scale principles and small-scale devices are shown to be unique within their respective cultures. These claims are supported by analysis of a wide spectrum of both Egyptian and Hebrew triumphal material, together with insights drawn from wider studies in poetics and culture. Some original insights into Egyptian principles of poetic composition are suggested, together with the corresponding cross-cultural implications for Israelite poetry. The later textual history of incorporation of the original poetic work into its current narrative context is also considered.

Broad outline of this study

There are three main sections to this work, each of two chapters. The first two chapters explore some background formalities, relating mainly to literary and poetic analysis. The next two chapters investigate Merenptah's Israel Stele and Exodus 15 in detail. The last two chapters review several other Egyptian and biblical triumphal accounts and related material for comparative purposes. The whole is then drawn together in a short conclusion; a number of appendices contain certain details that support the argument but would detract from a fluent reading.

Considering the first two chapters in a little more detail, then...

Introduction - Footnotes

[1] Taken from a letter written on 4 Apr 1429 by Bartolomeo Capra to the Duke of Milan, Filippo Maria. Capra was serving as the Duke's governor in Genoa, a city which the Milanese had captured at the beginning of the third Milanese War, and which a few years later revolted against Milan and re-established its republican government. The letter aims to convince the Duke to hire Antonio Beccadelli, 'il Panormita', as his court poet: Published by R Sabbadini, "Come il Panormita diventò

poeta aulico", Archivio storico lombardo, ser. 5, 3=43 (1916): pp 27-8. I am grateful to Joe Thomas for bringing this quotation to my attention.

[2] Williams 1969, p93, citing Wilson 1951, p229.

[3] For example Bahn and Renfrew 2000, especially chapter 4 on dating methodologies.

[4] S. Gevirtz 1963, Introduction. Perhaps the first person in recent times to express this idea vigorously was T.S. Eliot 1919 (1953 edition), p14 "...the most individual parts of [the poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously". The principle, however, is implicit in the ideas of the early 18th century Augustan poets, and nowadays is regarded as commonplace in literary criticism. I am grateful to R.H. Abbott for clarifying aspects of this issue as it relates to English literature.

[5] For example Hess 1989, Goldwasser 1991, Hoffmeier 1994, Krahmalkov 1994 and others.

[6] For example Muilenberg 1966, Albright 1968, Craigie 1969, Sarna 1986 and others. Typical comparisons include Ramesses II's Kadesh account, the Assyrian victory-poem of Tukulti-ninurta I, and Ugaritic epic poetry as well as the Israel Stele.

[7] Hoffmeier 2005, Currid 1997, Watts 1992.

[8] Miller 2005, Higginbotham 2000, Killebrew 2005, Faust 2006.

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Chapter headings

Introduction (part included here)

~ Scope and limitations
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~ Broad outline of this study
~ Ethnic boundary issues and cultural heritage
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About the author

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About the author

As well as participating in the lively academic debate surrounding this period of history in the ancient near east, Richard Abbott also writes historical fiction based in this place and time.

Richard now lives in London, England. When not writing he works on the development and testing of internet applications, and also creates mobile and tablet apps with a focus on the ancient world. He enjoys spending time with family, walking and wildlife - ideally combining all three of those pursuits at the same time.

Look out for his other works, which include the following.

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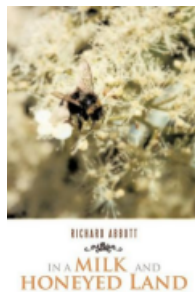
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The Lady of the Lions

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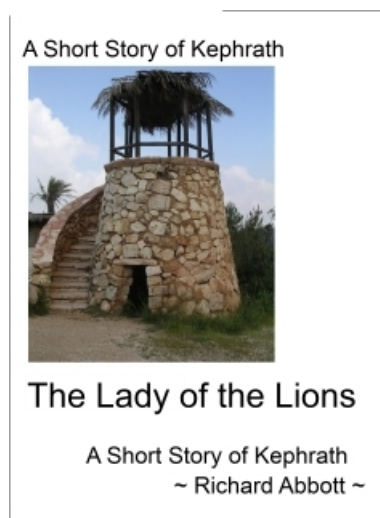
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