

THE WIFE OF BATA

A significant aspect of Egyptian narrative literature is the extent to which stories are localised in a historical setting¹⁾. The mention of actual persons and real events is used to lend colour to various types of fiction, as, for example, in tales about the campaigns of Tuthmosis III²⁾, or the nocturnal adventures of Neferkarē and his general Sisenet³⁾ or, at two different levels, in both the recit cadre and the individual episodes of P. Westcar. In each of these, well-known kings are placed in fictitious circumstances, or are related to situations with little foundation in fact⁴⁾.

A somewhat similar process, though perhaps differently motivated, is the allegorisation of historical events, of which P. Westcar again provides an excellent illustration in the account of the birth of the first three kings of the Vth dynasty, a piece of political propaganda told in the form of a fairy tale⁵⁾. Here facts are disguised as fiction, and the historical person of Cheops is linked with others whose true identities are concealed under fictitious names.

That the composer of the 'Story of Two Brothers' may also have taken his inspiration for certain details in the story from a real historical background has not as yet been recognized⁶⁾. The possibility is, however, suggested by the exceptional use of the title špst⁷⁾, the occurrence of which in the closing phase of the story may mirror a shadowy figure belonging to the previous century.

The only surviving copy of the 'Two Brothers' was written out by the scribe Inina sometime in the reign of Sethos II⁸⁾. The tale is made up of at least two stories, originally separate⁹⁾, each with a plot revolving around an unfaithful wife. The first section, relating the unsuccessful attempt by Anubis' wife to seduce the young Bata, her brother-in-law, is simple and straightforward: the second part, describing the exile of Bata, is interwoven with myth and magic. The woman who appears in the latter is the wife of Bata, eventually to become queen of Egypt under the name Ta-Shepset.

The king of Egypt first comes to know of her through a lock of her hair, which he is told belongs to a daughter of Prē-Harakhty. Envoys are sent to search for her in all foreign lands, but especially in the Valley of the Pine Tree - which was presumably somewhere in northern Syria or Asia Minor¹⁰⁾. When she is brought to the king, he loves her exceedingly and appoints her as špst ꜥꜣt. Although created by Rē-Harakhty and fashioned by Khnum, the girl is of foreign origin - her lock of hair is described as 'tribute from another country' - and up to this point in the story she has been nameless¹¹⁾. From now on she is referred to as tꜣ špst¹²⁾,

and this in effect becomes her name, in the combination hmt nsw t3 špst (18,4).

The creator of the story must have had a specific reason for calling the woman (t3) špst, in that the word was no longer in ordinary use as a title¹³. His choice of the term may well have been prompted by the knowledge that this part of the story reflected actual happenings, in which the lady involved had held the title, or had been known as (t3) špst. The designation is indeed so exceedingly rare in the New Kingdom¹⁴ that it is tempting to identify the wife of Bata with the only other woman in the not too distant past who seems to have borne it, i. e. Kiya, the 'other' wife of Akhenaten¹⁵.

Kiya is given the title of špst in a docket relating to her estate at el-Amarna¹⁶, and the domain of t3 špst mentioned, without any name, on another docket¹⁷ was doubtless the same one¹⁸. Moreover, in view of the rarity of the title, it is extremely probable that the estate of a lady t3 špst, known from a funerary cone of compatible date¹⁹, was again the same - the reference being the more important in that she is described as t3 špst <n> nhrn, i. e., as coming from Nahrin²⁰.

If one accepts the idea that the three inscriptions refer to a single estate and to one woman, this would imply that Kiya was of Mitannian origin²¹, and the parallel between her and the wife of Bata becomes the more obvious. Both girls were apparently from Western Asia, the wife of Bata from a locality which by inference must have been in the region of Nahrin, and Kiya - if it is she - from Nahrin itself. The former was brought to Egypt with all the pomp of an alien princess, and Kiya was probably one of the several pawns in the game of diplomacy between the rulers of Egypt and those of Mitanni. Each of the ladies acquired the very rare title of špst when taken into the harfm, and each was referred to as t3 špst: the špst (par excellence)²². The wife of Bata eventually functioned as hmt nsw; Kiya did not, but she was the hmt mrrty ʿt of Akhenaten²³. Both, finally, fell from grace, the one condemned and probably executed²⁴ (having produced a son, the successor to the throne), the other erased from memory - perhaps on becoming the mother of Tutankhaten²⁵.

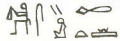
To consider the working out of the story of Bata's wife as an allegorical rendering of the Kiya incident may appear rather far-fetched, but some connection between these very exceptional instances of the title špst seems almost inevitable. That the reference to Kiya should be obscured by the omission both of her name and of her characteristic titular epithet may be explained in terms of the kind of oblique allusion to the Amarna period found in some XIXth dynasty contexts²⁶, though it should also be borne in mind that the royal mother in P. Westcar (?Khentkawes) was not in fact named as such²⁷.


The lack of any precise historical links, the anonymity of the king in whose

reign the events occur, the important role of a foreign consort²⁸, and even the opening formula of the text²⁹, are paralleled in the 'Story of the Doomed Prince', of which the sole manuscript dates from the reign of Sethos I, or that of Ramesses II, and it is even possible that the two stories were cast in their present form at about the same time, in the early years of the XIXth dynasty.

The closing section of the 'Two Brothers', set at the court of the Egyptian king, is indeed filled with incidental details suggesting the way of life known from representations at el-Amarna. Perhaps the most striking of these is the reference to the queen's going forth in a chariot after the king (17,5), as seen in the tombs of Meryrē I and Panehesy³⁰, though her pouring of drinks for the king (16,2-3; 17,9), as in the tomb of Meryrē II³¹, and her absolute influence over him (16,4; 17,10) are also characteristic. The king in turn is described as appearing at the (palace) window wearing a garland of flowers (17,4), as in a number of scenes of the Amarna period³², and the reference to his taking his son on his lap (18,9-10) is again reminiscent of an unfinished group in Cairo³³. None of these items would in itself be adequate evidence of an Amarna background, but taken together they do suggest that this was the period of the original incident involving 'the wife of Bata'.

Lise Manniche

- 1) The point was made long ago by Maspero, Popular Stories of Ancient Egypt, pp. xxiv f; cf. also - in connection with the Greek novel - Barns, Akten des VIII. Internationalen Kongresses für Papyrologie, Wien, 1955, p. 33 f.
- 2) Notably the story of the taking of Joppa (cf. Goedicke, CdE, XLIII (1968), pp. 219-33), and a Ramessid fragment (Botti, JEA, XLI (1955), pp. 64-71) - together with the suggestion that the incident of the approach to Megiddo may have been fairly well known (cf. the allusion to it in Urk. IV.1246.18 f.).
- 3) Posener, RdE, IX (1957), pp. 119-37.
- 4) For other such narratives cf. Maspero (above, n.1); Posener, Littérature et politique, pp. 31 f., 141 f.
- 5) cf. in particular Otto, Ägypten: der Weg des Pharaonenreiches⁴, p. 68; Brunner, Grundzüge einer Geschichte der altägyptischen Literatur, p. 48.
- 6) That the end of the story is relevant to the royal succession has, however, been noticed; cf. Jacobsohn, Die dogmatische Stellung des Königs, pp. 13-15; Brunner, Die Geburt des Gottkönigs, pp. 205-6.
- 7) Written: 
- 8) cf. Lefebvre, Romans et contes égyptiens, p. 158, n. 88.
- 9) cf. Maspero, Popular Stories, pp. xv-xvii; Lefebvre, Romans et contes, pp. 137-40; Blumenthal, ZAS, XCIX (1972), pp. 1 ff.
- 10) cf. Loret, ASAE, XVI (1916), pp. 33-51.
- 11) In IO,5 she is referred to as t3 ddt; cf. Wb. I.242.18-19.
- 12) For the significance of the article t3 cf. Vandersleyen, CdE, XLV (1970), pp. 68-75, especially 72 f.
- 13) In the Old Kingdom the title was quite frequent in the form špst nsw, and, together with others such as hkrt nsw and hmt ntr Ht-hr, was applied to wives or daughters of high officials (not to members of the royal family - the reference in Gauthier, Livre des Rois, I, p. 194 seems doubtful; cf. Borchardt, Denkmäler des Alten Reiches, II, no. 1616). In the Middle Kingdom it disappears entirely, to be revived again only in the Late Period. The sole example of Ramessid date seems to be that of a certain Isinofret, a wife or daughter of Merneptah, who is once given the title of špst: P. Leiden I 350 vs. II, 7 (cf. Janssen, Two Ancient Egyptian Ship's Logs, p. 26.) Apart from the three instances discussed below, it is apparently not attested during the XVIIIth dynasty.
- 14) The word is used in a less precise sense, to designate women of a certain

class as opposed to those of inferior status, but it is not in this case a title. The references given in Wb. IV.449.13 and 450.3 are clearly mistaken: the Belegstellen are from the Turin 'Giornale', where in the former case  is simply an element in the term t3 st nfrw (cf. Černý, A Community of Workmen at Thebes, pp. 88-9), while in the latter the seated figure is merely an added determinative of the word hmt nsw.

- 15) cf. Harris, CdE, XLIX (1974), pp. 25-30.
- 16) Petrie, Tell el Amarna, pl. 25 (95).
- 17) Frankfort and Pendlebury, City of Akhenaten, II, pl. 58 (16).
- 18) The dates of the two inscriptions are years 11 and [1]6, and the respective vintners are hry k3mw Khay and hry b'ḥ Ramose; cf. Černý, JEA, L (1964), pp. 38-9. The docket of year [1]6 presents a problem if it refers to Kiya, since there is no other evidence of her existence as late as this; but the estate may still have been known as that of t3 špst (without the name) even after her death.
- 19) Davies and Macadam, Corpus of Inscribed Eg. Funerary Cones, no. 527. The cone is that of a steward of the estate (3 n pr) with the unusual name of Bengay. This name occurs on two other cones, which it is fair to assume belong to the same man. On one of these (no. 260) he is described as steward (imy-r pr) of hnwt m pt, and on the other (no. 528) as w'b-priest of Amün.
- 20) Helck, Materialien zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte, II, p. 994 (no. 9), assumes that the lady was Gilukhepa, but offers no argument in support: Gilukhepa, of course, cannot be identified with Kiya, in view of her age. It may be, however, that Kiya was the Egyptian name of the other Mitannian princess, Tadukhepa (cf. in general Worms, Journal Asiatique, VII (1916), p. 474), being either a shortened form (cf. Černý, in JEA, XLIII (1957), p. 33, n.1), or a pet name meaning 'the monkey' (cf. Harris, CdE, XLIX (1974), p. 26, n. 9 - to which may be added a hkrt nsw of Amenophis III by the name of k3fy: Legrain, ASAE, IV (1903), p. 146 (no. 20); V (1904), p. 141).
- 21) For the equation of Nahrin with Mitanni cf. Gardiner, Ancient Eg. Onomastica, I, pp. 171* ff.
- 22) cf. above, n. 12.
- 23) cf. Harris, CdE, XLIX (1974), p. 27, n. 1.
- 24) cf. Lefebvre, Romans et contes, p. 158, n. 80.

- 25) cf. Harris, CdE, XLIX (1974), p. 30, n. 6.
- 26) cf. Harris, JEA, LIV (1968), p. 97, with nn. 2,3. A somewhat similar reference occurs in the 'restoration' stela of Tutankhamūn, where ḥd sn iryt: 'what was done damaged them' (Urk. IV. 2027. 20) clearly alludes to the action taken against the gods in the Amarna period. (I owe this suggestion to Prof. J. R. Harris, to whom I am also grateful for various references.)
- 27) For the historical identity of the royal mother cf. Grdseloff, ASAE, XLII (1943), pp. 64-70; Smith, The Old Kingdom in Egypt (CAH², I, ch. 14), pp. 36-7; Altenmüller, CdE, XLV (1970), pp. 223-35: Lexikon der Agyptologie, I, 6, p. 930, s.v. Chentkaus.
- 28) This unnamed princess is the daughter of the ruler of Nahrin, and having married the likewise anonymous prince, she was presumably destined eventually to become queen of Egypt.
- 29) cf. Černý, ASAE, XLI (1942), pp. 336-8.
- 30) Davies, Rock Tombs of El Amarna, I, pl. 17; II, pl. 16.
- 31) Davies, op. cit., II, pl. 32; cf. also the little stela Berlin no. 20716: Lange, König Echnaton und die Amarna-Zeit, pl. 40, and a scene on the gilded shrine of Tutankhamūn (Carter obj. no. 108): Lange and Hirmer, Egypt, 4th ed., colour plate 33 (top right).
- 32) Davies, op. cit., I, pl. 6; II, pls. 10, 33; III, pls. 16, 17; VI, pls. 4, 19, 29; Davies, Tomb of the Vizier Ramose, pl. 33; Davies, JEA, IX (1923), pl. 24 (1).
- 33) Cairo JE 44866: Lange, König Echnaton, pl. 37; cf. Roeder, ZAS, LXXXIII (1958), p. 50.