

## On *Wenamun* as a Literary Text<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

The narrative of *Wenamun*'s journey to Byblos and beyond at the end of 20th dynasty is one of the best known Egyptian texts. It is so unlike most Egyptian tales in style and so superficially "realistic" in its treatment of events that it has often been considered a copy of a genuine official report on the conduct of an expedition, rather than a work composed with imaginative intent.<sup>2</sup> While the majority have probably seen *Wenamun* as fictional literature<sup>3</sup>—a problematic category in itself—even if perhaps closely based on circumstances of the period of its composition, it has received rather little literary attention, either in itself or for its position in relation to the tradition of literary narrative. Its character has been undervalued in relation to the "classic" works of the Middle Kingdom in particular.

In this paper I explore features of *Wenamun*, in diverse rather than methodically rigid fashion, in order to contribute to interpretation rather than evaluation. I do not seek to uncover any ultimate meaning of the work—which different interpreters might see in such aspects as its social message, relation with central values, or aesthetic aspects of its development of character, balance, and symmetries (which are difficult to approach for an incompletely preserved work).

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I cite *Wenamun* in parenthesis by "page" (see Appendix) and line number of the papyrus. Text: Alan H. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories* (BAe 1, 1932) 61–76; M. A. Korostovtsev, *Puteshestvie Un-Amuna v Bibl: Egipetskii ierarcheskii papirus N°120 Gosudarstvennogo muzeya izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv im. A. S. Pushkina v Moskve*, Akademiya Nauk SSSR, Institut Vostokovedeniya, Pamyatniki Literatury Narodov Vostoka, Teksty, Bol'shaya seriya 4 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vostochnoi Literatury 1960); valuable especially for photographs. For reasons of brevity I refer to other Egyptian literary texts by title only.

The secondary literature on *Wenamun* is extensive and I cite only some of it. The most significant published treatment is that of Antonio Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis: Zum Ausländer in der ägyptischen Literatur*, AÄ 48 (1988) 64–72, upon which I attempt in places to build even though I do not refer to it specifically. See also Gerald Moers, "Epische Texte in ägyptischer Sprache" and "Die Reiseerzählung des *Wenamun*", in Wilhelmus C. Delsmann et al. (eds.), *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments III: 5 Mythen und Epen III* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 1995) 874–75, 912–21. After I had presented this paper, Moers most kindly gave me access to his dissertation, *Der Aufbruch ins Fiktionale: Reisemotiv und Grenzüberschreitung in ägyptischen Erzählungen des Mittleren und Neuen Reiches* (Göttingen 1996), which contains a wealth of valuable discussion of *Wenamun*; the two of us sometimes cover similar ground. Since his work is not yet published, I hardly address it here, but look forward to the published version.

<sup>2</sup> It could conceivably be a "literary" adaptation of a real report, as suggested, for example, by e.g. Anne Scheepers, "Le voyage d'Ounamon: un texte 'littéraire' ou 'non-littéraire'?" in Claude Obsomer and Anne-Laure Oosthoek eds., *Amosiadès: mélanges offerts au Professeur Claude Vandersleyen par ses anciens étudiants* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain 1992, 355–65), but it is so much a unity that I find this very unlikely.

See Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, 64 with n. 14.

*Wenamun* poses issues of literary type and discourse that should in part underlie more extraneous or more comprehensive interpretive strategies. I start from the premise that *Wenamun* is a fictional narrative tale and seldom focus on that issue.

### *Date and context*

The surviving manuscript of *Wenamun* was discovered at el-Hiba<sup>4</sup> together with those of two “literary” texts that relate more evidently to the Egyptian stream of tradition: the *Tale of Woe*, and the *Onomasticon of Amenemope*.<sup>5</sup> Most specialists have dated the find palaeographically to the end of the 21st or the 22nd dynasty, around 100–150 years after the period in which *Wenamun* is set. While the *Tale of Woe* is less historically specific than *Wenamun*, it too can be seen as relating to the situation of the end of the New Kingdom.<sup>6</sup> Alternatively, the prominence of the Great Oasis as the final destination of the text’s protagonist could point to a later date, since this was a place of exile from Thebes in the 21st dynasty.<sup>7</sup> The “advanced” orthography of its manuscript also favours a late date, unless it is rather implausibly assumed that the text was extensively edited into its preserved form. The composition of the *Onomasticon* cannot be dated closely. On grounds of content, its editor Alan H. Gardiner proposed a date no earlier than Ramesses IX,<sup>8</sup> but that may be too precise; other features may suggest a later date (see also n. 16). The known manuscripts are no earlier than the end of the New Kingdom and hence fit his date. Overall, the papyrus find points to a time of composition for the texts in the century or so preceding their deposition at el-Hiba.

El-Hiba was an important Theban stronghold in the Third Intermediate Period but is not known to have been significant any earlier.<sup>9</sup> All the three texts appear Theban in character—*Wenamun* evidently so and the *Tale of Woe* through its focus on the Oasis, while the name of the author to whom the *Onomasticon of Amenemope* is attributed points in the same direction. They thus have the appearance of a collection of relatively recent literary compositions assembled at el-Hiba by someone who was culturally Theban during the Third Intermediate Period.

So far as I know, no reason for dating *Wenamun* as early as the end of the 20th dynasty has been proposed other than that it is set in that period. Yet Egyptian literary works, like those of most other premodern traditions, rarely if ever have a contemporaneous setting.<sup>10</sup> The exceptional phase of the *whm-mswt* “Repeating of Manifestations”, in which the tale is probably set, could have been remembered long afterward, while knowledge of the manufacture of the barque of Amun, which forms the occasion for the narrative, would have been easily available.<sup>11</sup> Thus,

See Ricardo A. Caminos, *A Tale of Woe from a Hieratic Papyrus in the A. S. Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow* (Oxford: Griffith Institute 1977) 1, with references.

Alan H. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, 3 vols. (London: Oxford University Press 1947).

See especially the reading of Gerhard Fecht, “Der Moskauer ‘literarische Brief’ als historisches Dokument”, *ZÄS* 87 (1962) 12–31.

Jürgen von Beckerath, “Die Stele der Verbannten im Museum des Louvre”, *RdE* 20 (1968) 7–36.

*Ancient Egyptian Onomastica* I: 26–35.

See A. Egberts, “The Chronology of *The Report of Wenamun*”, *JEA* 77 (1991) 60 n. 21.

E.g. Baines, “Ancient Egyptian Concepts and Uses of the Past: 3rd to 2nd Millennium BC Evidence”, in Robert Layton (ed.), *Who Needs the Past? Indigenous Values and Archaeology* (London: Unwin Hyman 1989) 136; “Classicism and Modernism in the Literature of the New Kingdom”, in Antonio Loprieno (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms* (PÄ 10, 1996) 157–74.

<sup>11</sup> As Edward F. Wente has noted among others (in Epigraphic Survey, *The Temple of Khonsu I: Scenes of King Herihor in the Court*, OIP 100, 1979, xiv = KRI VI, 713, 5–6), this date has been pressed too hard, for example

these features of context need not argue for a date very close to specific events. Since no other precise criterion seems to be available, I would place the composition in the 21st dynasty, probably not very near to the imagined historical setting. A date after the reign of Smendes seems most plausible, since the latter is neither mentioned as king nor given a salient or particularly respectful treatment. Wenamun's leaving his credentials in Tanis with Smendes and Tentamun also fits best with the 21st dynasty, when the country was formally divided politically so that the northern leaders might require some token to be deposited with them.

### *Point of departure and ending*

Unlike fictional narrative texts except for *Sinuhe*, *Wenamun* starts from a date and proceeds at once into the action. A rather stilted rendering brings out this point: "Year 5, month 4 of šmw, day 16: Day of the commission performed by the Elder of the Portal Wenamun, of the Estate of Amun, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands ..." (1,1–2). Essentially the same formula is used again at once, but without enumerating the date: "Day of arriving which I accomplished at Tanis, where [Smen]des and Tentamun were ..." (1,3–4).

This formulation does not identify itself specifically as fictional in the same way as, for example, the opening of the *Shipwrecked Sailor*, but it contains noteworthy features. The date is not assigned to a particular king or epoch. Such a treatment is standard for an administrative document but might be less so for a text that does not indicate the identity of the person commissioning the expedition on which it reports—the high priest of Amun Herihor—until farther through. Anyone who might later consult an actual document would have to know to which "Year 5" it dated. That would only be clear if the responsible person were named. Both factually and fictionally, the commissioning agency could be the god through an oracle, rather than Herihor himself, who would plausibly have addressed the god first.<sup>12</sup> *Wenamun* bears a single title that is widespread in Old Kingdom sources and remained in use into the Second Intermediate Period, where it applied to quite low-ranking positions in the royal entourage, but it appears not to be attested for an individual from the New Kingdom.<sup>13</sup> The title is not functional

by Kenneth A. Kitchen; see also Karl Jansen-Winkel, "Das Ende des Neuen Reiches", *ZÄS* 119 (1992) 25 with nn. 36–37. The text source is *Temple of Khonsu* I, pl. 21, right vertical inscription on baldachin in middle of barque, which says that the barque was made by Herihor of Lebanese wood (see *ibid.* p. 8 with n. m). A parallel text is *The Temple of Khonsu II: Scenes and Inscriptions in the Court and the First Hypostyle Hall* (OIP 103, 1981) pl. 143C, lower line, mid section (= KRI VI, 729, 8–10), with slightly more explicit content: *mdhfwj3.fm š hnt-šj* "He crafted his barque from Lebanese pine".

The wording of the response of Smendes and Tentamun that they will act according to what Amun said (1,5–6) may allude to an oracle. See Irene Shirun-Grumach, *Offenbarung, Orakel und Königsnovelle* (ÄAT 24, 1993) 123; Jan Assmann, *Ägypten: Eine Sinngeschichte* (Munich and Vienna: Carl Hanser 1996) 326.

*Wenamun* is the only New Kingdom example cited in *Wb.* II, 476, 8–11; add the mid 18th dynasty Amenemhat: Nina de G. Davies and A. H. Gardiner, *The Tomb of Amenemhät* (No. 82), Theban Tombs Series 1 (London: Egypt Exploration Fund 1915) 7. For the Late Period the *Wörterbuch* cites "Lyon 14"; I am unable to track this reference. Another example is in the *Onomasticon of Amenemope*: Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica* I: 60/61\* no. 536. This interesting coincidence with a work from the same find as *Wenamun* cannot establish when *smsw h3jt* was in active use. Wolfgang Helck, *Zur Verwaltung des Mittleren und Neuen Reiches* (PÄ 3, 1958), 65, 280, believed that the title was no longer operative in the New Kingdom. He cited the Installation of the Vizier text, dated by him to the Middle Kingdom, in which the *smsw h3jt* are "chamberlains" who make the way clear for the vizier (not discussed by G. P. F. van den Boorn, *The Duties of the Vizier: Civil Administration in the Early New Kingdom*, London and New York: Kegan Paul International 1988). See also material collected by Stephen Quirke, *The*



in administration but probably a fictitious and archaistic “honorific”. While the way in which Wenamun’s title, name, and institutional affiliation are arranged is standard for the period, an emissary on an important mission would probably bear more than one title and give precedence to a functional one over the honorific. Moreover, although Wenamun later states that he took the portable Amon-of-the-Way with him, he does not bear a priestly title.

The abrupt and unsignalled transition from the impersonal infinitive of the formulaic opening to the first person, which is then used for the entire narrative, would look normal in an official text or, for example, a biography, only if some marker such as *dd.f* “he says” were present. That would be problematic here because the opening passage names Wenamun as the protagonist but not as the narrator. The text of an official report might perhaps have continued in the first or the third person, but in either case the treatment seems to presuppose that Wenamun will be the focus, and hence that the text will be essentially a narrative. Such an assumption is suitable for fiction.<sup>14</sup> It is quite different from official reports that have a significant narrative component, such as P Abbott;<sup>15</sup> those are strongly and overtly structured, anonymous in style, and generalizing in viewpoint—which does not preclude their being strongly slanted to the benefit of particular parties.

If *Wenamun* should be assigned, factually or fictionally, to the *whm mswt* in the last decade of the reign of Ramesses XI, this opening passage is the ostensibly earliest preserved mention of Tanis (for an alternative, see ahead). That city has so far produced no remains originating on the site that can be dated before the 21st dynasty.<sup>16</sup> A 20th dynasty dating for the city’s occupation might in theory be reinforced by the mention of Smendes and Tentamun in *Wenamun*, for the text gives them neither titles nor cartouches (a descriptive clause is added to a later mention of them, 2,35): they could thus not yet be king and queen. But the absence of titles renders any interpretation problematic, while itself constituting a strong statement of some kind, since Egyptians were hardly ever presented in writing without titles, be it only *nbt pr* “mistress of the house” for a woman who lacked anything else; in the *Shipwrecked Sailor*, the characters are even designated by title and not by name. As with the date and the general context, so with Smendes and Tentamun, the bald treatment means that the audience must know something about them, or be prepared to find it out while reading or listening on, if the narrative is to make sense. While exploiting the urge to learn more is a strategy for audience involvement, the paradox remains that the couple are cited as being in Tanis at a time when it appears not to have been a significant place. Other features of their mention are noteworthy. The absence of titles before their names could evoke a familiar or personal context, rather as Egyptian letters between equals often dispense with titles after the initial address. There is, however, no reason why Wenamun should

*Administration of Egypt in the Late Middle Kingdom: The Hieratic Documents* (New Malden: Sia 1990) primarily from the 13th dynasty P Boulaq 18: pp. 7 n. 11, 72, 78–80, 87–89, 91–93, 99 nn. 8–9 with references, 107–08, 117, 143. This establishes that for the late Middle Kingdom the title covered a rather unspecialized and low-ranking role in the royal entourage.

Compare Pascal Vernus, “Littérature et autobiographie: les inscriptions de *S3-mwt* surnommé *Kyky*”, *RdE* 30 (1978) 118–21.

T. Eric Peet, *The Great Tomb-Robberies of the Twentieth Egyptian Dynasty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1930) 28–45.

Cf. Malte Rømer, “Tanis”, *LA* VI, 194–209. The earliest mentions are in the *Onomasticon of Amenemope* and *Wenamun*. These cannot help to date the founding of Tanis because their manuscripts are probably post-21st dynasty. As Gardiner noted for the *Onomasticon* (*Ancient Egyptian Onomastica* I: 25, II: 199\*), this may point to a 21st dynasty date of composition.

know Smendes and Tentamun well. More plausibly, the absence of titles is a marker of fictionality that also invokes audience complicity through background knowledge that may be deceptively evoked. Moreover, with obvious exceptions such as the opening of *Sinuhe*, strings of titles are not common in tales.

The sparseness of the opening contrasts with the description of the object of Wenamun's mission: "in order to bring the timber for the great and sublime bark of Amon-Re', King of the Gods, which is on [the river and whose name is] 'Amun is Mighty of Prow'" (1,2-3). This relative extravagance fits the text's focus on the supremacy of Amun, and the placing of this rhetoric is significant for the whole composition.

There has been much discussion of the apparently inconsistent dates in *Wenamun*,<sup>17</sup> but less of the historical or locational paradoxes of siting. Karl Jansen-Winkel has proposed a relatively simple solution, which is to redate Herihor to the reign of Smendes in the 21st dynasty, when Tanis would have been the new or prospective capital and would therefore be reasonably mentioned.<sup>18</sup> He explains the mention of Smendes in *Wenamun* without markers of kingship by reference to the work's "satirical" character,<sup>19</sup> retaining the notion of factual reference—he states that *Wenamun* is probably "based upon historical facts"—while also seeing it as a satire.<sup>20</sup> It is, however, unlikely that a work of fiction would respect historical facts enough to be a central element in their reconstruction by modern scholars—any more than European history could be reconstructed from Shakespeare or Schiller. This stricture applies more strongly to distorting "satire" than to fiction that uses a historical setting simply as a background; in satire, only the most incidental background is likely to be at all reliable.

It may seem circular to start instead from the hypothesis of the text's fictionality, but it is hardly more so than the alternative. If Herihor is again placed within the reign of Ramesses XI,<sup>21</sup> the dates must refer to the *whm-mswt* and the paradoxes remain. The narrative is sited in relation to a known episode. Its imaginary context is the period before the current political situation. Adjustments can be made to "improve" the picture. The author of *Wenamun* probably created an

On the dates, see A. Egberts, *JEA* 77 (1991) 57–67. Egberts' attempt to rescue the readings of the manuscript seems problematic to me, for example in allowing many months for Wenamun's stay in Tanis, which is not a focus of narrative interest; a "misfortune" (Egberts, p. 60) hardly counts as such if it is not in any way brought out in the text and can only be noted by an arithmetically inclined reader. His reading also involves a rather forced construction of Wenamun's statement to Zakarba'al that it is five months since he left 'the place where Amun is' and by implication his receipt of his commission (1,51–52). Before fiction written as recently as the mid nineteenth century, such details have seldom concerned writers unduly; these dates may be simply unresolvable. Compare John Sutherland, *Is Heathcliff a Murderer? Great Puzzles in Nineteenth-century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996) e.g. 14–15, 123.

"Das Ende des Neuen Reiches", *ZÄS* 119 (1992) 22–37; "Die thebanischen Gründer der 21. Dynastie", *GM* 157 (1997) 49–74.

For this, he cites Jürgen Osing, "Die Beziehungen Ägyptens zu Vorderasien unmittelbar vor und nach dem Neuen Reich", in Piotr O. Scholz and Reinhard Stempel (eds.), *Nubia et Oriens Christianus: Festschrift für C. Detlef G. Müller zum 60. Geburtstag* (n.p.: Jürgen Dinter 1987) 37–39.

*ZÄS* 119 (1992) 25 with n. 35. The only Egyptian texts that are often termed satires are the *Instruction of Khety* and the letter of P Anastasi I. These are internal to scribal traditions, rather than making any general social or political critique. Another possible "satire" is the *Tale of Neferkare and Sisene*.

<sup>17</sup> As Klaus Ohlhafer argues should be done on historical grounds. Jürgen von Beckerath, "Zur Chronologie der XXI. Dynastie", in Dieter Kessler and Regine Schulz (eds.), *Gedenkschrift für Winfried Barta: htp dj n hzj*, MÄU 4 (Frankfurt a.M. etc.: Peter Lang 1995) 49–53, argues in the same direction on purely chronological grounds.

imaginary past, as did his forerunners who composed *Merikare* as an elaboration of past “history” and freely devised the narrative of *Sinuhe*, setting it in a plausible social and geographical context. Writers such as Gary Greig,<sup>22</sup> who assume that ancient authors of fiction were incapable of feigning in such ways, patronize those authors. The broad range of fictional genres attested in the ancient stream of tradition does not support literalist readings.<sup>23</sup>

It is nonetheless possible to analyse institutional implications of *Wenamun*, on the assumptions that its period of composition was not too far removed from its historical setting and that the setting draws upon practice that was broadly known. This is essentially the approach of Guy Bunnens<sup>24</sup> and Mario Liverani,<sup>25</sup> who have studied the text in terms of diplomatic and trading conditions in Syria-Palestine at the end of the second millennium, proposing different models within a comparable framework. Their studies valuably exemplify the narrative’s internal logic and the coherence of the characters’ actions (see also Conclusion here).

It should be asked how the tale ended.<sup>26</sup> *Wenamun* must have returned to Egypt, because otherwise he would not have survived to present his narrative in the first person. He will also have brought the timber for the divine barque, both because there is a probable connection between it and the barque depicted in the temple of Khons at Karnak (see n. 11 here), and because he ultimately succeeded with all other aspects of his mission and it would be inappropriate for him to have failed in this one. Byblos was his goal, toward which Tanis and Dor were staging posts, and it was surely the centre of the narrative. The return journey might have been comparable in extent to the outward one, or perhaps a little longer, in view of the relative expansiveness of the preserved section of the *Alasiya* episode.

The amount missing at the end might be similar to the opening as far as the departure from Dor—say around 25 manuscript lines. The well preserved papyrus breaks off at the end of a line (2,83), leaving a wide blank band. Either the manuscript was laid down incomplete at the end of the available piece of papyrus, or the conclusion was written on another, lost sheet. The state of the manuscript is thus no guide to how much is missing at the end (see further Appendix).

## Texture of the narrative

### 1 Style and presentation

One reason for the debate on whether *Wenamun* is fiction or report is doubtless its unique narrative “texture”. More than almost any Egyptian text, it appears to tell things “as they happened”. Two aspects of this treatment are worth singling out and underlie my discussion: the linguistic or stylistic presentation; and the use of setting, place, and the lapse of time.

*Wenamun* does not use repetitive formulae and could appear almost artless in treatment and organization. It is in “pure” Late Egyptian, containing just a couple of linguistic archaisms in a single passage (see pp. 16–17) and appearing almost flat and without stylistic artifice. It is

“The *sdm=f* and *sdm.n=f* in the Story of Sinuhe and the Theory of the Nominal (Emphatic) Forms”, in Sarah Israelit-Groll (ed.), *Studies in Egyptology presented to Miriam Lichtheim I* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1990) 336–42.

Moers, *Der Aufbruch ins Fiktionale*, 108–10, presents an important additional criterion in the parallel between a turn of phrase used by Zakarba'al and an encomium preserved as addressed to Ramesses V. I am not, however, convinced by the argument for the other criterion he adduces of the “shadow of pharaoh” (see n. 55 here).

“La mission d'Ounamon à Byblos: point de vue d'un non-Egyptologue”, *Rivista di Studi Fenici* 6 (1978) 1–16.

*Prestige and Interest: International Relations in the Near East ca. 1600–1100 B.C.*, History of the Ancient Near East: Studies 1 (Padua: Sargon 1990) 247–54.

Compare the excellent reconstruction of Elke Blumenthal, *Altägyptische Reiseerzählungen: Die Lebensgeschichte des Sinuhe; Der Reisebericht des Wen-Amun* (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam jun. 1982) 63.



impossible to say how much conscious literary elaboration of form and of modes of narration went into its composition. Since it is later than other Late Egyptian narratives, much of its individuality must be in how it contrasts with other texts, all of which have evident and frequent literary signals. They are simpler in language and episodic in structure, in contrast to the more complex, free-flowing *Wenamun*. Apparent linguistic and structural “formlessness” gives *Wenamun* a texture that might be compared with a rather “realistic” novella. The ancient and modern texts may appear at first sight to simulate a natural way of speaking or writing, but they do not do so in fact. To use a very remote analogy, in texture and presentation *Wenamun* is the aria-less *Falstaff* to *Sinuhe*’s set-piece-based *Nozze di Figaro*. More generally, formulae delimiting sections of narrative are absent from *Wenamun*.<sup>27</sup>

Among other writing from the period before *Wenamun*, texts that come close to it are the Late Ramesside Letters, some of which include narrative passages, notably about the scribe Thutmose’s journey to Nubia.<sup>28</sup> Another category with more extensive narrative is the witness report in legal texts.<sup>29</sup> The conventionalized summaries can relate to information extracted over some time from recalcitrant people who had been beaten, or in less adversarial cases would be devised by scribal officials on behalf of inexperienced litigants. Such parallels do not demonstrate that *Wenamun* simply drew upon a narrative style current in letters or legal documents. Rather, both may point to narrative conventions that overlapped oral and written contexts and would be used for recounting experiences and perhaps for constructing narratives in non-literary written contexts, as against the more rigid and fanciful forms of the Late Egyptian Stories. Such differences in linguistic register can be observed in other traditions.<sup>30</sup> What seems distinctive and novel in *Wenamun* is the use of narrative but not closely literary registers for an imaginative work. Thus, the text may fuse the simulated report of its opening lines with mixed spoken and written conventions for narrating personal experiences—an activity that had an evident social value.<sup>31</sup> Here *Wenamun* differs from the *Tale of Woe*, which is presented as a letter with evident “literary” characteristics. The art of *Wenamun* is its disguise of art. Because the find which produced the two works is unique and the surviving range of papyrus texts is insufficient, we cannot tell whether they were truly original, but they probably were original in relation to tales of the preceding period.

These quasi-linguistic aspects relate to the literary category of viewpoint. The first-person *Wenamun* has its closest parallel in the *Tale of Woe*, which also uses the single perspective of an omnipresent narrator to present events as well as emotional and rhetorical content. The strategy of the *Tale of Woe* is more overt, since its protagonist states that he is wronged and oppressed and addresses a specific interlocutor. *Wenamun* is among the narrative texts which least evidently

The lack of formulae applies also to *Sinuhe*, which nonetheless delimits its sections strongly in other non-formulaic ways. The mode of separation of sections and use of dialogue delimiters in *Wenamun* would repay detailed study. For one aspect, see Carsten Peust, *Indirekte Rede im Neuägyptischen* (GOF IV: 33, 96) 120–22.

See e.g. Edward F. Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt*, SBL Writings from the Ancient World 1 (Atlanta: Scholars’ Press 1990) 185–201, with references, esp. nos. 308 = LRL 4; 313 = LRL 9; P Abbott (n. 11 here); Paul J. Frandsen, “Editing Reality: The Turin Strike Papyrus”, in *Studies in Egyptology Presented to Miriam Lichtheim*, ed. Sarah Israelit-Groll (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University 1990) I: 166–99.

Analysed grammatically in the unpublished Liverpool doctoral thesis of Michael A. Green (1979).

“Register” is a better term than “style” for such differences in usage. Compare e.g. Orly Goldwasser, “On the Choice of Registers—Studies on the Grammar of Papyrus Anastasi I”, in *Studies ... Lichtheim*, I: 200–240.

This idea is evident in the *Shipwrecked Sailor*: Baines, “Interpreting the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor”, *JEA* 76 (1990) 60 with n. 28; for another parallel, see Vernus, *RdE* 30 (1978) 118–21.

mobilize their audience, and its balance of moral advantage and adversity is less evident. Instead, part of what the first person form does is to present a character in an apparently detached way. In *Sinuhe* a particular individual emerges both from the narrative and from meditations on motive and situation. *Wenamun* handles character without *Sinuhe*'s metalevels of passages that stand back to comment upon the narrative and upon the protagonist's sense of what it means and where it is going. In this respect too, *Wenamun*'s treatment is comparable with literary techniques of very different periods and cultures. What is said seems to be wholly related to the narrative and descriptive concerns at hand. It is left to the audience to model any broader meaning.

The audience may have a harder task creating a meaning for *Wenamun* than for much Egyptian literature, but the work presents a world that can involve them more totally than a text with overt metalevels. The absence of these is not a sign of simplicity. Rather, *Wenamun* probably counterpoints those more "conventional" and classical strategies, inhabiting narrative ground where audience involvement was solicited for new mimetic purposes.<sup>32</sup> The ancient and modern audience must construct some sort of protagonist from the "I" voice before ascribing meaning to the whole. Both then and now, this is a relatively novel interpretive exercise.

The evaluation of character should be seen in this context. Discussions of *Wenamun* include comments on the protagonist as the "underdog",<sup>33</sup> as the resourceful traveller who wins through despite adversity,<sup>34</sup> or as the almost absurd bearer of the ideological burden of the religious and oracular practices and obsessions of his time.<sup>35</sup> These readings reasonably but hazardously imply that one comes to know the character and can hope to capture his essence. While part of the text's art is that it encourages such responses, another part is that it does not encourage closure or greatly favour one reading. As in life itself, character and motive cannot ultimately be known.

The viewpoint is not rigidly applied. The text recounts episodes at which the protagonist was not present without indicating how he knew about them<sup>36</sup>—in modern terms a relatively loose first-person convention. Examples are the trance among Zakarba'al's entourage which first leads him to agree to see Wenamun (1,38–40) and the appearance of the Tjeker ships near the end, where Wenamun first reports that the Tjeker had sent ten ships that were to seize him and prevent him from returning to Egypt (2,62–4) and later tells of Zakarba'al's dealings with them, including significant diplomatic details (2,71–4). This strand of the plot may have re-emerged in the lost final part, but the indirect treatment leaves the situation open to be renegotiated, as Wenamun himself does in Alasiya, and perhaps ignored, if he did not encounter them near the end.

The style of the first-person treatment might relativize what is narrated. The protagonist who says that certain things happened may be guessing and the progress of his narrative may prove his guesses wrong. This generally common narrative device is not certainly present in the tale, but the treatment of the Tjeker could imply something of the sort. The text repeatedly uses dialogue to discuss the objective status and intentions of participants and place them in question (studied in more detail ahead). Such a negotiation of intentions and meanings is a powerful alternative to other uses of the unexpected. There is also the possible filtering of viewpoint incorporated in reconstructed speeches. This is clearest in Zakarba'al's speech to the Tjeker,

As Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, emphasizes in particular.

Widespread, e.g. Howard M. Jackson, "'The Shadow of Pharaoh, your lord, falls upon you': once again *Wenamun* 2:46", *JNES* 54 (1995) 273–86. For the underdog, see further n. 41.

Hellmut Brunner, *Grundzüge einer Geschichte der altägyptischen Literatur*<sup>4</sup> (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1986) 81–82.

E.g. Assmann, *Ägypten: Eine Sinngeschichte*, 328.

See e.g. Brunner, *Grundzüge*, 82, who commented on only one such instance.



where he says "I cannot arrest the envoy of Amun within my own land. Let me despatch him, and you can go after him to arrest him" (2,73-4). By terming Wenamun the "envoy of Amun" he seems to accept the latter's view of his status and mission, something he might not need to do. While this detail could be no more than an automatic transposition of a reference into Egyptian terms,<sup>37</sup> it contrasts with the immediately preceding allusion of the Tjeker to the "wretched ships you are despatching to Egypt for(?) our adversaries" (2,72), so that the way Zakarba'al refers to Wenamun gives the latter's mission some relative standing. The status of such a distinction is, however, difficult to evaluate.

The text uses a complementary technique of not mentioning something that will later prove significant at the chronological point where it occurs. Wenamun reveals retrospectively to Zakarba'al (1,52-53) that he has not merely presented his credentials in Tanis but actually left them there, casting a different light on the very brief description of that episode. The shifting perspective of the narrative both enhances the sense of viewpoint and veils the action in such a way as to increase tension.

Another aspect of the text's mimesis is its fluctuating focus on the story line. Egyptian tales generally jump from rapid coverage of spans of time and space to concentrate upon individual episodes. *Wenamun* is no exception, but differs in its seemingly leisurely approach to time and space. Whereas other tales contain little that is not essential, *Wenamun* includes elements that do not appear to take events forward but do contribute to presenting its "realistic" world. A frequently cited case is the opening of Wenamun's first encounter with Zakarba'al, where he describes that the latter sat "with his back turned to a window, while behind him broke waves of the Syrian Sea" (2,48-50).<sup>38</sup> Near the end of the preserved text, physical detail is given when Wenamun "pushed myself among" the homicidal Alasiyan crowd to reach their ruler Hatiba, whom he found "after she had come out from her one house (compound?) and was entering her one" (2,75-6). When he then addresses Hatiba, he adds that the crowd is also attempting to kill the ship's sailors. This retrospectively makes the passage more realistic, because a crowd was intent on killing a lone traveller could surely do so, while the evocation of a physical setting and the corporeality of forcing one's way through a crowd also convey a sense of place rare in Egyptian texts.

Although rather little is learned about the rulers' dwellings, more of a physical setting is presented than in most tales. In an exception, such as the episode in the *Eloquent Peasant* where Sinakht places a piece of cloth on the path in order to bar the protagonist's passage, the detail is essential to the plot; this cannot be said for Zakarba'al's window or Hatiba's two house compounds. These details aid suspension of disbelief through the illusion that one can "look into" within the setting as well as concentrating on the plot. Moreover, the interest in the details of rulers, however sparsely expressed, adds to the text's human character. Such examples

compare Zakarba'al's reference to Thebes as the 'place where Amun is' at Wenamun's first meeting with him (1).

For this passage, see Heinrich Schäfer, "Bildhorizont in einem ägyptischen Literaturwerk um 1100 v.Chr.," *OLZ* 9 (1982) 821-19; Irene J. Winter, "Art as Evidence for Interaction: Relations between the Assyrian Empire and Egypt," in Hans-Jörg Nissen and Johannes Renger (eds.), *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn*, Berliner Museum für Vorderen Orient 1 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer 1982) 363; "'Seat of Kingship'/'A Wonder to Behold': The Palace as Construct in the Ancient Near East," *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993) 30-31. The *ḥt* "upper room" could be a floor or something like a piano nobile; the palace might also have been situated up a hill, so that the *ḥt* perspective would be present at ground level. Either way, a detail is present that would contrast with the habitations in Egypt.

can be contrasted with the fantastic tower in which the *Doomed Prince*'s ruler of Naharin shuts up his daughter. As elsewhere, *Wenamun* is far more realistic.

Although these features do not take the narrative forward, they could bear symbolic or emblematic weight. The window in the Byblos residence may bring home that everything which happens in the tale depends on the sea and transport upon it, and that neither *Wenamun* nor *Zakarba'al* can be free from it. The two houses of *Hatiba* do not offer such evident possibilities, but might be related in some way to the ruler's being a woman who would dwell apart, or perhaps to implied wealth. Such questions belong with another order of investigation of the work.

Implications of details can be elaborated upon to enhance the structure of the whole. The clearest case is the episode on the sea shore at the end of the Byblos phase (2,62–70). This appears to continue seamlessly the confrontation between *Wenamun* and *Zakarba'al* by the logs that have finally been brought ready for shipment (discussed further ahead), while moving onto a quite different plane. It opens, however, with the statement that *Wenamun* came to the shore (where he seems already to be) and so is partly distinct, even though the *jw.f (hr) sdm* construction at the start—"I went to the seashore to where the timber was lying"—is a continuative.

The episode's content appears almost entirely emotional: *Wenamun* sees the *Tjeker* ships at sea, assumes that they intend to take him captive, and weeps. But when *Zakarba'al*'s document scribe comes—simply for reasons of plot?—and asks why *Wenamun* is weeping, the latter cites the renewed passage of the migratory birds before mentioning the ships. His evocation of time passing by reference to the birds picks up *Zakarba'al*'s taunt a little earlier that if *Wenamun* is worried by the length of time he has spent in Byblos, he should view the graves of some of his predecessors who died while still there (2,51–52). (As parallels confirm, *Wenamun*'s stay has been brief compared with quite a few diplomatic missions.<sup>39</sup>) *Wenamun* may also implicitly contrast his own predicament, in which he cannot safely stay or go, with the freedom of the migratory birds, which no human agency can stop (another plausible reading that is difficult to control). Such an inscribing of interior states onto natural phenomena is cross-culturally prominent, less often in narrative than in lyric contexts (as in *Egyptian love poetry*). This comment on the meaning of events is integrated into the narrative and explicitly formulated, circumventing the metalevels of some Classical Egyptian tales (p. 10 here) while having some of the same function.

When *Wenamun*'s emotional state is reported to *Zakarba'al*, the latter does not taunt further but weeps too, and consoles *Wenamun* by sending him food, drink, and an Egyptian woman singer. These developments almost mirror the entire plot, whose basic generating principle after *Wenamun*'s departure from Egypt is that each success he achieves brings in its wake a new adversity; only Egypt reliably produces what he needs—after his initial insufficient preparation—and even adds a little extra with *Tentamun*'s personal gift to him. They also comment to some extent upon *Zakarba'al*, who up to now has respected *Wenamun*'s person and in the end done what was asked of him, but always tardily and with ill grace. Finally, the next day *Wenamun* is sent on his way from Byblos and the *Tjeker* do not play a part in his destiny in the next and last preserved passage.

The weeping is as it were bypassed. *Zakarba'al*'s later actions do not display any special sympathy for *Wenamun*, as against a quasi-legal scruple that restrains him from arresting him in his own territory.<sup>40</sup> But this does not mean that the episode is unimportant. Rather, it signifies that

See Bunnens, *Rivista di Studi Fenici* 6 (1978) 11–12.

Ibid. 13.

the apparently successful outcome of the entire stay in Byblos is not a triumph for Wenamun, whose tribulations are to continue. For Zakarba'al, the detail displays a more sympathetic facet of his "character", again contributing through diversion to the rounded presentation of the protagonists. The episode is also a separate, quasi-proverbial anecdote: one person weeps and the weeping is reciprocal, encompassing even his antagonist. A brief circularity is drawn out from the continuing narrative.<sup>41</sup> Zakarba'al's weeping could also undercut the seriousness of Wenamun's and be ironic for the narrative as a whole.

The treatment of emotion creates broader structural patterns and echoes. Wenamun celebrates in his tent after he has purloined the valuables on his ship, arrived in Byblos, and set up accommodation for Amon-of-the-Way, here mentioned for the first time (1,33–34). This action contrasts with the later weeping episode, emphasizing that what he achieves comes through struggle and adversity. Wenamun is perhaps wiser by the time he leaves Byblos. The only time when Zakarba'al is said to be happy, and the only other mention of happiness, is when he receives the shipment of goods from Smendes (2,42), at the turning point of the Byblos phase. These statements are different in presentation from the weeping and much closer to the normal treatment of emotion in Egyptian tales. Zakarba'al's happiness may have the implication that he is content only with material things, but the report of his satisfaction probably also relates to an unstated relief of Wenamun at progress in securing the timber.

The circularity of the weeping episode has a parallel at the beginning of the Byblos phase. Wenamun celebrates his arrival in his tent, but then makes so little headway that he plans to depart without accomplishing anything. This brief episode makes play with the paradox, mobilized in the indirect exchanges of Zakarba'al and Wenamun, that the former persistently asks the latter to leave until he makes to do so, whereupon he is asked to remain. This opening episode foreshadows negatively the positive outcome of the long stay in Byblos; it is also the initial and extreme instance in Byblos of how that whatever Wenamun does, it leads to further difficulty. Thus, these vignettes set up episodes within episodes to counterpoint the narrative's forward thrust, varying the pace and contributing in form and content to its fully imagined character.

## 2 Dialogue and argument

Much of *Wenamun* is taken up by speech and dialogue, while major actions are often passed over briefly or, like the journey of Zakarba'al's scribe to Egypt, reported indirectly (2,37–42).<sup>42</sup> This feature is shared with other tales—the extreme case being the *Eloquent Peasant*<sup>43</sup>—but several speeches in *Wenamun* are notably long and complex, while fitting so closely into the action that they do not acquire the near-autonomy of such set pieces as Sinuhe's eulogy of Senwosret I (B 46–73).

As in *Sinuhe*, the centre of *Wenamun* is a contest, for *Sinuhe* the fight with the strong man of Retjenu, and for *Wenamun* the long negotiations with Zakarba'al. Whereas Sinuhe makes a rhetorical speech (B 114–26) but then conquers with action, Wenamun and Zakarba'al contend almost wholly in speech, which is not far from being as central to the outcome as it is in the *Eloquent Peasant*. It would be desirable to study their speeches as carefully as those of the

A more general and quasi-proverbial notion of sympathy for the underdog may play a part here. It has a parallel in *Sinuhe* (B 131–34), where the people Retjenu feel for Sinuhe when his case seems hopeless before his combat with the local strong man.

Blumenthal, *Altägyptische Reiseerzählungen*, 63.

The *Shipwrecked Sailor* as a whole is a speech with a response in the last sentence, but this is a rather different device.



Peasant have been analysed;<sup>44</sup> here I comment only on some features.

There is a sharp difference between the almost comically brief acceptance by Smendes and Tentamun, "Yes, yes, we shall do what Amon-Re, King of the Gods, our lord, has commanded" (1,5-6),<sup>45</sup> and the extensive speeches of the foreigners Badar of Dor and Zakarba'al. Different characters emerge for the latter two, as well as local colour in the later Alasiya episode, so that dialogue styles convey a sense of person and place. The flow of dialogue is enhanced by the omission of the common verbal markers of the end as well as the beginning of speeches. The next speech or stage in the narrative follows more immediately than normal.

The dialogues often contrast perorations by one party with absent or laconic responses by the other, a pattern that is thematized more than once. In the first encounter of Zakarba'al and Wenamun, their argument about the character of trade in the Levant and Egypt's position in it leads up to a set of questions addressed to Wenamun. The text continues:

I was silent at that important moment (*n t3j wnw t 3t*).<sup>46</sup>

He answered, saying to me: "On what mission have you come?" (2,2-3)

To judge by its position in the sequence, "that important moment" is the point when preliminaries are over and discussion starts in earnest. Both sides are making play with their positions, since Zakarba'al surely knows already why Wenamun is there, and so is now asking only for an explicit statement. At this point, for Wenamun silence has the same tactical role as speech; his lack of response elicits a "reply" from Zakarba'al. The role of silence as a ploy in discussion is exemplified, perhaps especially for those in a position of weakness (even though speech is generally powerful in the text). The evocation of silence may also incongruously or ironically evoke the Egyptian ideal of the "truly silent man",<sup>47</sup> who could hardly win through in Wenamun's predicament.

The second example, which I study also for other implications, is at the end of the discussion on the sea shore after the logs have been brought down from the mountains. Wenamun concludes his speech by suggesting:

E.g. Gerhard Fecht, "Der beredte Bauer: Die zweite Klage", in P. der Manuelian (ed.), *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson I* (Boston: Egyptian Department, Museum of Fine Arts 1996) 227-66; R. B. Parkinson, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant: A Commentary* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford, 1988).

This response may have further implications, notably because all Smendes and Tentamun do for Wenamun at this stage is to find him a ship. This point cannot be pursued here.

Edward F. Wente, in William Kelly Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1972) 148, rendered "for such a long time that", but such a reading does not take the *t3j* "this/that" into account. The *wnw t 3t* may well be both important and long.

Jan Assmann, "Reden und Schweigen"; Emma Brunner-Traut, "Schweiger", *LÄ V*: 195-201, 759-62.

to rhetoric, ironically characterizing the style of Wenamun's vignette while perhaps implying more generally that the two have been speaking past rather than at each other. This crucial aspect of their dialogues could embody cultural differences both positively, in that each can retain his own values while communicating to some extent with the other, and negatively, in that suspicion and misunderstanding between them are rife. Whether or not this last point is intrinsic to the text, the contrast between *Sinuhe* and *Wenamun* here is the opposite of the pattern in which *Sinuhe* is the more explicitly self-reflexive of the two. Nonetheless, the treatment in *Wenamun* stays within the text's narrative strategies, because Zakarba'al's comment is addressed to Wenamun rather than to an audience. Here as elsewhere, the narrative comments upon itself without using a metalevel for the purpose.

The second important difference between *Sinuhe* and *Wenamun* at this point is that Wenamun seizes the last word so that Zakarba'al's quip cannot stand by itself. But then the larger narrative undercuts this small victory as it moves immediately to the weeping. The distinction between verbal sparring and Wenamun's general sense of his situation is clear.

What Wenamun says is significant in other ways. Apart from the speech's status as a debating ploy, it adds shape to the passage and ultimately to the relationship of Egypt and Byblos. It begins with a loaded reference to the 'many things' Zakarba'al says, in implied contrast to fewer things he has done, even though in this address he has spoken far less than Wenamun. In structure Wenamun's speech parallels earlier discussions where ideological sparring ends with a practical suggestion of a way forward (a feature of negotiation anywhere). Wenamun concludes by providing a foil for his own suggestion of a stela by naming material rewards that Zakarba'al can expect from Herihor, like those he has received from Smendes.<sup>48</sup> The "something (*nkt*)" might include a blessing on his name secured from Amon-Re or the despatch of a token signifying such a blessing, but is unlikely to consist solely in that. Rather, Herihor is expected to round out the whole transaction with a significant prestation to Zakarba'al, perhaps comparable with the latter's initial advance of some of the most important timbers for the divine barque (2,37–38). According to widespread conventions, this would maintain the ruler of Byblos's indebtedness and keep relations active for resumption when exchange was again desired.<sup>49</sup> This

This reverses the "delegation" from Herihor to his northern counterpart, which is visible in Smendes' acceptance that he must make the first payment to Zakarba'al when Wenamun sends word back from Byblos. This shift in institutional focus creates another symmetry in the narrative that points toward its lost resolution.

See e.g. Mario Liverani, "'Irrational' Elements in the Amarna Trade", in his *Three Amarna Essays*, trans. Matthew L. Jaffe, *Sources and Monographs on the Ancient Near East* 1:5 (Malibu: Undena 1979) 21–33. The case

concluding gambit may have at least three meanings: maintenance of relations; safeguarding Wenamun himself, since the terms come into effect only when he returns to Thebes; and a renewed implication that Zakarba'al is a materialist who cannot understand the deeper meaning of things—although that does not characterize him entirely (see also p. 25). A question that may then arise is whether Zakarba'al is also a realist while Wenamun is not. The text may not resolve this; it hardly even shows any favour between the two poles of being a “realist” or an “idealist”.

This most complex thematization of dialogue and other aspects of relations between groups concludes exchanges between Wenamun and Zakarba'al, who do not meet again face to face. Their separation on Wenamun's departure passes through indirect communication, as had their initial contact—another symmetry in the structure of the Byblos phase.

The Alasiya episode treats dialogue in a new way. In contrast with earlier exchanges, where Wenamun almost always spoke second or was put into the position of respondent, here he takes the initiative to make a public statement, for which the hostile crowd and Hatiba are the audience. His speech begins as a formal address: “Say to My Lady” (2,78), and continues with artificial local flattery, that he has heard as far as Thebes that of all lands Alasiya is the one where right is done, and yet... This inverts earlier patterns, in which Wenamun presented and debated how all of value came from Amun and from Egypt. Especially since he had not expected to come to Alasiya, the obvious reading of this is as a quick-thinking improvisation, different in character from his more measured and earnest speeches. This does not mean that the overall presentation of Wenamun is incoherent, but that he develops or reveals a new side of himself in reacting to new dangers: despite its adversarial character, the Byblos phase remains within a regular framework of diplomatic and commercial relations. In mortal danger in this new and exotic land, pure rhetoric can start negotiations. As Wenamun continues, he refers first to how he is the messenger of Amun, but then, in an appeal to Hatiba's diplomatic self-interest, adopts arguments about patterns of shipping and of vengeance very close to those of Zakarba'al. Her response is partly in her indirectly reported command to arraign the miscreants and partly in her saying to

of relations between civilizations of the Ancient Near East is not closely similar to the models of small society reciprocity elaborated, for example, by Marshall Sahlins (“On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange”, in his *Stone Age Economics*, London: Tavistock 1974, 194–95 and passim), building upon Marcel Mauss (*Essai sur le don: forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*, in his *Sociologie et anthropologie*, Paris: Quadrige/PUF 1950, 143–279), but the underlying principles are comparable. For the Ancient Near East in the period before Wenamun, see Carlo Zaccagnini, *Lo scambio dei doni nel Vicino Oriente durante i secoli XV–XIII*, *Orientis Antiqui Collectio* 11 (Rome: Centro per le Antichità e la Storia dell'Arte del Vicino Oriente 1973). Wenamun represents a later stage and a different case, see Bunnens, *Rivista di Studi Fenici* 6 (1978) 6–9.



Wenamun "Stay for the night", at which point the manuscript breaks off. Whether a character unfolded for her cannot be said. The absence from her speech of an initial greeting or question is worth noting, but can hardly be interpreted.

The examples I have given do little more than illustrate the multiple uses of dialogue in *Wenamun*. The diversity and complexity of the speeches is incorporated within a continuous and seemingly realistic flow that surely relates to oral as well as written practices that were familiar to the audience. Within the elite, the international dimensions of conventional exchanges and argumentative strategies might also have been known. One feature characteristic of relations between Egypt and its vassals in the Amarna Letters is the vast disproportion between the amount the vassals wrote and the sparsity of the Egyptian response, which was restricted to what the dominant party needed.<sup>50</sup> It is said proverbially in the *Shipwrecked Sailor* that a man's speech saves him.<sup>51</sup> The plot of *Wenamun* works out such an idea, as well as the perhaps related conception that those in the weaker position must talk the more and the more persuasively. The protagonist comes a long way from his initial, exiguous address to Zakarba'al: "May Amun bless you(?)" (1,50).

#### **Treatment of the ordinary: women, Egyptians, languages, rulers**

Women play a significant or dominant part in some Egyptian tales, notably those in Late Egyptian. They tend to have stereotyped roles as evil seductresses, wives, mothers, or combinations of those, as in the Webainer episode of P Westcar and in *Truth and Falsehood*, or a single figure appearing in successive guises, as in the *Two Brothers*. At the opposite extreme is the *Shipwrecked Sailor*, where we learn only that the protagonist has a wife to whom he can return and narrate his adventures. For Sinuhe, marriage with a local Syrian signifies acceptance, but nothing is said of the woman, while the queen and the royal children appear more as incumbents of roles than as "characters".

Three women appear in *Wenamun*, an unusually large number. They are not prominent, yet relatively much is said about them. The women are Tentamun, the consort of Smendes, Tentne,

Mario Liverani, "Rib-Adda, giusto sofferente", *AoF* 1 (1974) 175–205; "Pharaohs's Letters to Rib-Adda", in his *Three Amarna Essays*, 3–13.

This sentence appears ironic in the context of the whole tale. It is more like the response of Sinuhe to Ammunenshi, or even that of the shipwrecked sailor to the snake, than the use of the proverb in the *Shipwrecked Sailor*. The idea that the right response brings good fortune is vital to such narratives the Djedi episode in P Westcar or sections of the Late Egyptian *Horus and Seth*, as well as being a major theme in instruction texts.

the Egyptian singer who is sent to console Wenamun when he is weeping by the sea shore, and Hatiba, the ruler of Alasiya. All show some favour to him.

Tentamun sends Wenamun a personal gift to accompany Smendes' official gifts or payment to Zakarba'al. The gift consists of half the number of garments Zakarba'al received and a smaller fraction of the amounts of lentils and fish (2,41–42). Mario Liverani suggests that this extra gift may fit a rule of hospitality.<sup>52</sup> This could apply if Wenamun had been provided at the outset with special rations and suitable clothing for his mission; but in general envoys must have been maintained by those to whom they had been sent—as is made clear by Badar of Dor's gift of provisions to Wenamun (1,9). While Tentamun's gift could reinforce Wenamun's status in the eyes of Zakarba'al, it is just as likely to be a pure embellishment—a detail, like those discussed on pp. 11–13, that adds to narrative texture rather than plot.

Tentne, whose name "She of Thebes" is significant in context, consoles Wenamun as she is directed to do, and in that sense shows him favour. As a seemingly unattached "singer", the consolation she offers to Wenamun probably does not consist solely in singing.

Hatiba helps Wenamun decisively, but her role cannot be evaluated because her episode is incomplete. Her position is significant: female kings are known historically from Egypt, but woman rulers are rare in the Ancient Near East outside Arabia, and those who occur, such as the Queen of Sheba, may be figures of legend.<sup>53</sup> This lack of historical parallels renders it the more likely that Hatiba is fictitious. The female ruler may combine with other elements to present Alasiya as the most exotic place Wenamun visits, despite its being known to the Egyptians and no farther away than Byblos. The homicidal reception of the ship blown off course have similar implications. Such a possibility is in part comparable with the other paradoxes of setting.

Apart from their positive treatment of Wenamun, the women are characterized by their relatively casual presence. If a male ruler of Alasiya could also have been helpful, none of them is pivotal to the plot. This relatively plain treatment fits with the superficially plain character of the whole work. The text asserts, as it were, that even in fiction women can play a normal part and—if my reading of the Tentne episode is acceptable—that casual sexual consolation is an inconsequential gift a ruler offers to a visitor, in contrast with the serious consequences of sexual actions in other tales.

Wenamun's reception at the hands of women might indicate that he is someone who evokes

*Prestige and Interest*, 251–52 n. 14.

I am grateful to Jack Sasson for discussing this matter and suggesting parallels.

positive responses in them and thus may be a feature of his “character” conveyed by interaction with others—as against the rather negative reactions he produces in the male characters, Badar of Dor, Zakarba'al, and Penamun. The strong actions of negatively portrayed women in other tales suggests that this pattern is meaningful. Thus, this perhaps rather occidental mode of interpretation may correctly identify a feature of the original.

In comparable fashion, Egyptian exiles, one of whom is Tentne, are integrated rather neutrally into the narrative. Here *Sinuhe* is a forerunner to *Wenamun*, both in presenting an Egyptian living in the Near East for up to a generation and for Ammunenshi's mention of how *Sinuhe* will hear Egyptian spoken if he stays with him.<sup>54</sup> In *Wenamun*, Zakarba'al's cupbearer, who is called Penamun “He of Amun”, taunts *Wenamun* with falling under the “shadow of Pharaoh” when he comes into the lee of the ruler's sunshade.<sup>55</sup> This taunt requires that its author and its butt be Egyptian and has complex symbolic implications, but the mention of the cupbearer is casual and this vignette, like other details, contributes to the richness of setting and events rather than moving the action forward. As with the weeping episode, a nuance in the character of Zakarba'al is added, but the motivation of his anger at the cupbearer's intervention is uncertain. Howard M. Jackson may be correct in seeing it as in part due to Penamun's arrogation of a privilege Zakarba'al keeps for himself.<sup>56</sup>

Both these Egyptians form part of the entourage of Zakarba'al, who is not an Egyptianizer. Their presence seems plausible in the perspective of earlier periods, which may be a reason for their presence, while Zakarba'al's rejection of Penamun's insinuation may emphasize the gulf between times when Byblos aped Egyptian ways, whether or not Egyptians served there, and the present, when it no longer apes those ways but Egyptians are part of a multiethnic scene. With Egyptians as with women, *Wenamun*'s world is more nuanced and more fully imagined than those of most literary works.

The use of languages is relevant here in a rather different way. Until *Wenamun* arrives in

B 31–34. It is uncertain whether *Sinuhe* was still read in the time of the author of *Wenamun*; the latest known manuscripts date to the Ramessid period. Here, the presentation of Nicolas-Christophe Grimal, “Bibliothèques et propagande royale à l'époque éthiopienne”, in IFAO, *Livre du Centenaire 1880–1980*, MIFAO 104 (1980) 37–48, seem to me to accept similarity in phraseology too readily as demonstrating that a particular text was known by later authors.

2,46; much discussed, recently by Jackson, *JNES* 54 (1995) 273–86, who does not sufficiently mobilize the Egyptian cultural background. For an alternative, supporting Meltzer, see Moers, *Der Aufbruch ins Fiktionale*, 110–11; for another possibility, see Baines, *Fecundity Figures: Egyptian Personification and the Iconology of a Genre* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips; Chicago: Bolchazy Carducci 1985) 74.

*JNES* 54 (1995) 284.



Alasiya, language is perpetually mobilized but not specifically mentioned. Elke Blumenthal has suggested that this means Wenamun conducted his business in Egyptian,<sup>57</sup> but that seems unlikely in view of the use of Akkadian as the international language even during the preceding Egyptian domination of the region.<sup>58</sup> One possible clue to the language used is in the passage about the putative stela, where Wenamun evokes an envoy who might come who would “know writing”. The “writing” in question is Egyptian hieroglyphs—for Wenamun no doubt the quintessential writing. Even though only a minority of those who had learned hieratic would be able to read a hieroglyphic stela, Wenamun’s suggestion fits best if there would be no local literacy in Egyptian, not least because the value envisaged as attaching to the inscription derives from Egypt.

Thus, even if business were conducted in Egyptian, it would be through interpreters since there would be no developed local use of the language. Alternatively, and more plausibly, business could be in a lingua franca that would be the counterpart of the Levantine written Akkadian of the Amarna Letters—probably again through interpreters.<sup>59</sup> The apparatus of transferring communication from one language to another, involving the presence of additional parties at all conversations, is not mentioned. Only in exotic Alasiya, where conventions of the Levant, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia cannot be taken for granted, need such an issue be mentioned and, I suggest, it is solved in a different, local and ad hoc manner.

Much else in the context may be not mentioned because not relevant. Everyone would know that a ruler would not receive people alone. Similarly, just as Greek hoplites went to battle with servants,<sup>60</sup> people of high rank or those sent on important missions would not travel by themselves. One should envisage Wenamun as being accompanied by servants,<sup>61</sup> and probably, since he is not given a priestly title, by a priest and a porter to minister to Amon-of-the-Way, although he does mention seeing to the statue’s accommodation himself. Presumably Amon-of-

*Altägyptische Reiseerzählungen*, 65.

I have not seen Helmut Satzinger, “How Good Was Tjekker-Ba’l’s Egyptian? Mockery at Foreign Diction in the Report of Wenamun”, *LingAeg* 5 (in press); cited from Moers, *Der Aufbruch ins Fiktionale*. If Zakarba’al speaks bad Egyptian, this could be an artificial device, like the use of regional dialects in translations, and would not prove that the exchanges were envisaged as happening in Egyptian.

The records of earlier missions that are brought for Zakarba’al to inspect are not described. Perhaps they would have been on papyrus or, for example, skin in an alphabetic Semitic script, or in cuneiform on clay. The text can dispense with detail here.

Everett L. Wheeler, “The General as Hoplite”, in *Hoplites: The Classical Greek Battle Experience*, ed. Victor Davis Hanson (London and New York: Routledge 1991) 140. I am grateful to Angus Bowie for this reference.

Here I differ from Bunnens, *Rivista di Studi Fenici* 6 (1978) 5–6.

the-Way is looked after by Wenamun's staff while Wenamun himself is taken up to audiences with Zakarba'al (message of the trance, 1,39). The text states explicitly that the god is left in his tent during Wenamun's meeting (1,47–48), and a deity would hardly be unattended. Nothing is later said of his whereabouts and he does not play any further part in the preserved plot.

The confrontations of Wenamun and Zakarba'al are thus played out before an audience that is only occasionally brought into the action. This feature does not affect the personal character of the business conducted because it belongs with the presuppositions of social life. These are compatible with what the text recounts, whereas a tale like the *Doomed Prince* requires that its protagonist travel unrealistically alone in its folklore-style world. *Sinuhe*, in contrast, specifically presents its protagonist as travelling alone, in implied contrast with general practice.

The aspects of the world around that can be explored through thinking about the context of *Wenamun* are not special. Their lack of distinctiveness is part of their significance for the tale. The specifically "ordinary" character of the tale's world emerges from a comparison with the more schematic "pastoral" Palestinian world of *Sinuhe*.<sup>62</sup> The character of *Wenamun* as an imaginative work that lacks sharp definition against other genres is exemplified in the treatment of everyday events and characters as much as it is in other aspects reviewed here. The tale treats a world of rulers, leading characters, and potentially significant events, but it assimilates them to the everyday. While rulers are perpetually interesting for narratives (see also n. 68), in *Wenamun* even they are ordinary, if more powerful people who are subject to chance events and must negotiate their way through life like anyone else. Fiction, the tale seems to say, has few privileges.

### **Conclusion: ideology, tone, fictionality**

This paper has addressed problems, themes, and approaches to *Wenamun*, principally in order to open out an already open text through examining facets of how it incorporates and conveys meaning. A close reading would be richly rewarding. In conclusion, I consider two aspects more briefly: tone; and ideology and fictionality. Both relate to the recurring issue of "realism".

The issue of the tone of *Wenamun* is well illustrated by the title Gardiner gave to it in *Late-Egyptian Stories*: "The Misfortunes of Wenamun". Like most Egyptian literature, *Wenamun* appears serious, and Gardiner felt for its protagonist's reversals. Such audience involvement

Title of Anson F. Rainey's study, *Israel Oriental Studies 2: In memoriam Samuel Miklós Stern, 1920–1969* (1972) 369–408.

relates to the work's "realism": one suffers with Wenamun.<sup>63</sup> It may not, however, contain further useful insight. The successful ending I suggest would cancel out the protagonist's negative experiences on the way. While the episodes of adversity bear more weight than the successes, this is in part a structural feature. *Wenamun* is probably serious, but it is less sombre than quite a few works. Its "realism" precludes much lightness of tone, but the events narrated are never in great danger of ending disastrously. In this respect, it is a tale of adventure—with many other facets—whose audience can suspend disbelief and be involved in its vicissitudes because the outcome will be positive; it may contain much irony and humour.<sup>64</sup> In comparison, the *Shipwrecked Sailor* takes a darker view of the human condition. The tone of *Wenamun* is not very heavy.

Ideology relates to the text's most salient feature, which is the amount of space devoted to extolling and discussing the status of Amun. This includes a passage where Zakarba'al and Wenamun directly exchange arguments about the relation of Byblos to Amun (2,19–28)—while weaving them in with other considerations—in contrast with their general tendency to ignore the ostensible content of each other's speeches.

This aspect of *Wenamun* has elicited comment from Wolfgang Helck,<sup>65</sup> Jürgen Osing (n. 19 here), and Jan Assmann (n. 12 here), among others. Amun is the point of departure and purpose of the mission. At all possible opportunities Wenamun uses Amun as his side in bargaining, in positions from which he then has to depart. This organizational feature has been seen as demonstrating that the text is a satire that shows Amun's claimed power is null.<sup>66</sup> An ancient writer is perhaps unlikely to have propounded such a vision in stark terms. In any case Wenamun ultimately achieves what he has set out to do. To see the tale as questioning the power of Amun may be a little like reading the pessimism of a Catholic writer such as Georges Bernanos as showing a questioning of faith. *Wenamun* is more likely to show that human beings cannot serve Amun as befits him than to question his efficacy.

Apart from this reservation, a difficulty here is that at Byblos religion is vital to both sides. Its position is unquestioned, while the rivalry of perspectives is difficult for non-polytheists to comprehend. The trance of one of Zakarba'al's own people is what leads him to agree to see Wenamun. This message crosses cultural-religious boundaries, because it is a Levantine deity

An extreme instance of such sympathy is Egberts, *JEA* 77 (1991) 57–67.

See especially Brunner, *Grundzüge*, 80–82; Christopher Eyre in this volume.

"Wenamun", *LÄ* VI (1986) 1215–17.

By implication, this is the position of Osing and of Jansen-Winkel (ZÄS 119, 1992, 22–36). Assmann focuses on the regulation of life at Thebes by oracles, an aspect that is probably present, but not salient, in *Wenamun*.



(Ba'al?) who induces the trance and requests that the Egyptian Amun be heeded (1,38–40). “Materialist” though he may be, Zakarba'al worships his gods,<sup>67</sup> listens to their messages, and is open to what these may imply about deities from other realms. In this perspective Amun's power is not null; nor does Wenamun imply that Zakarba'al's deities are worthless.

More generally it is difficult to see *Wenamun* as focusing on a single topic in the way a text defined as “satire” should do. I would see two principal focuses.<sup>68</sup> One is the narrative itself, which is constructed in interlocking and overarching episodes to enhance its meaning and tension to a high degree. The second is the texture of reality, and of dialogue and argument, studied above. These aspects are interlinked. Among surviving texts, *Wenamun* takes a new and more complex approach to narrative representation. It is thus meaningful to ascribe salience to its mimetic strategies. But a tale worth telling has a meaning beyond the process of telling.

A feature explored by Antonio Loprieno is *Wenamun*'s approach to the Egyptians' other, which is different from that of most texts. Many technical and rhetorical features can be related to its orientation toward apprehending the other.<sup>69</sup> Here, the approach of Mario Liverani<sup>70</sup> comes into its own, while leading back to the issue of how fiction is mobilized. Liverani draws a sharp distinction between the audiences addressed, consisting of Zakarba'al and other Levantine rulers on the one hand, and Egyptians on the other. He suggests that Wenamun's and the text's discourse about Amun, although pronounced to Badar and especially Zakarba'al, in terms of audience is addressed more or less directly to the Egyptians who will hear or read the work. This will mean that the text blurs and exploits the distinction between its own fiction and outside reality by making ostensibly “internal”, fictional matters into external, “propagandizing” ones—in which the propaganda content will naturally be relativized by the fictional context with its attendant ironies.

This reading must be valid on at least one level. Liverani extends his interpretation with discussion of how the ideological relates to the economic in the transactions. Literary aspects too can be pursued a little further. The text does not simply displace the Egyptian ideological discourse onto the Near East and address it where for the local actors it may not belong; it makes

As noted by Liverani in a different connection: *Prestige and Interest*, 253–54.

Another focus of interest is on kingship. No one is given kingly titles in *Wenamun* even though three people who held them—Kha'emwese (perhaps Ramesses IX), Smendes, and Herihor—are named. Some devaluation of kingly status must be involved, and this is pertinent to the text's period of origin. This point would merit discussion.

Dominique Valbelle, *Les neuf arcs: l'égyptien et les étrangers de la préhistoire à la conquête d'Alexandre* (Paris: Armand Colin 1990) 185–88, cites *Wenamun* several times in a brief discussion of this issue in literary texts.

*Prestige and Interest*, 247–54.

this separation one motor of the plot. Wenamun's leaving his credentials in Tanis is the first stage in working out this aspect, but mismatches between action and ideology recur throughout. In addition to its virtuoso development of the interlocutors' verbal sparring and shaping of their arguments, *Wenamun* as fiction seems to ask how things would be if what the participants know to be ideology—a crucial ideology that complements rather than contradicts reality—were mobilized in literal terms, in relations whose surface forms are in any case agonistic. In his negotiations with Zakarba'al, Wenamun starts each time from the purely ideological and moves as slowly as he can to the economic and practical. The narrative seems to exploit an implicit tension that can be expressed by asking "When will he have to change his terms of argument?" As indicated earlier (p. 18), he is able to turn the end of an exchange into a small victory that sits between the ideological and the material and can be read in more than one way. Such play with ideas and processes creates a hierarchy of meaning within the text's fictional terms, above and beyond any reference there may be to the realities of Egyptian-Levantine relations in "factual" terms or in the pragmatic unfolding of the plot within the tale.

Play with levels of meaning and ideology may thus be a profoundly fictional device, made persuasive by the superficially "realistic" presentation.<sup>71</sup> To propose that *Wenamun* adopts such a strategy and to explore its implications is to move far from reading it as an administrative document. This is an internal literary analogy for Liverani's distinction among audiences, and it means that the text's fictionality operates on more than one level.

One might term the mismatches between the perceptions and actions of different characters comic strategies. The agonistic, performative side of *Wenamun* and the potential for comic readings are evident. Yet the ideology mobilized and evaluated is serious, while the notion of comedy is too narrow to encompass the whole work. The text's discourse can be seen in part as a debate between idealism and materialism,<sup>72</sup> where the steps of negotiation, which the actors observe according to convention, are polarized far from the accompanying rhetoric. But this is only one among a number of possible readings. It is unlikely that such a debate could achieve closure through a resolution in the lost ending of the tale. Openness characterizes the whole composition and is vital to any reading because there are no overt metalevels. We should be cautious in seeking an ultimate meaning for *Wenamun*. The difficulty of identifying such a

I discuss these matters here independently from Moers, *Der Aufbruch ins Fiktionale*; the reader may compare the two approaches.

This happens also to be Hans Goedicke's characterization of Sinuhe's internal debate before his duel with the strong man of Retjenu: "Sinuhe's Self-realization", *ZÄS* 117 (1990) 139.

meaning points to one of its salient qualities as a work of literary art.

### Appendix: Note on the form of the manuscript

Jaroslav Černý wrote that the manuscript of *Wenamun* was laid out as a business document across the papyrus fibres, citing this arrangement as showing that what we have should be the authentic report of the returning protagonist.<sup>73</sup> This opinion has been widely quoted but his description of the papyrus layout is misleading as it stands. It is therefore worth spelling the matter out.

The scribe of *Wenamun* took short papyrus rolls (or lengths from a roll) made up from sheets about 18 cm wide that had been pasted together.<sup>74</sup> He rotated the lengths at ninety degrees to the normal direction of inscription. He then wrote across the fibres in long lines that are the complete "height" of the papyrus. As Alan H. Gardiner explained,<sup>75</sup> what we have are two lengths of papyrus about 23 cm high,<sup>76</sup> with the text written continuous down the lengths in 59 and 83 lines respectively. As Gardiner put it, "A third page will have given the conclusion of the tale." I suggest that the third page would have had fewer lines of text than the first two. Whether the owner of the surviving manuscript owned such a page or his copy was incomplete cannot be known.

The manuscript is mounted in separate glass frames for pages 1, "3" (now known to be part of 1), and 2. Its exact ancient makeup is not quite clear. So far as can be told, the papyrus with "page 1" was physically separate from "page 2", which in turn was separate from the hypothetical "page 3". No available photograph shows the physical bottom of page 1, but there are several centimetres of blank papyrus below line 1,59. Page 2 begins with an edge strengthened by an extra strip of papyrus. It is a complete object in itself<sup>77</sup> that is unlikely to have been gummed to page 1, because the strengthening strip would have made the roll excessively thick at that point. The last line of the text on page 2 (2,83) is full to the end. The relatively large area beyond this was probably left as a protective strip, matching the strengthened area at the beginning of the page (and that at the beginning of page 1). In this end area two large signs are written, seemingly at right angles to the text; these could point to an intention to use the papyrus for another purpose as a more conventional "recto", or they could conceivably derive from an earlier use. The bottom

*Paper and Books in Ancient Egypt* (London: H. K. Lewis 1952) 22.

Compare the valuable presentation of the manuscript by Moers, *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments* III: 5 *Mythen und Epen* III, 912–13.

*Late-Egyptian Stories*, xi–xii; quotation from xii. The layout of the papyrus can be seen on the excellent unnumbered plates of Korostovtsev, *Puteshestvie Un-Amuna v Bibl.*

A half-height of a rather large New Kingdom or later papyrus roll; see Černý, *Paper and Books*, 16–17.

This is visible on the Griffith Institute photograph, Gardiner MSS 30.419.5; only partly visible on Korostovtsev's unnumbered plate with the beginning of page 2.



edge of the papyrus is rather irregular in shape and does not look as if it would have been joined to another piece.

The most distinctive feature of the mode of inscription appears thus to be the use of several separate pieces of papyrus rather than a single roll. This is not the normal practice of business documents. The disposition of the writing across the fibres does not derive either from using the "verso" as the primary inscribed surface or from cutting a strip off a roll and writing across it, as is done in letters, but from rotating a relatively large, half height length of papyrus and then writing "down" what would normally be the "recto". Why this was done is difficult to say. The usage has parallels among literary as well as non-literary manuscripts, but is not similar to that of normal business documents, still less to significant administrative pieces such as the tomb robbery papyri.

Thus, as Joachim Friedrich Quack has stated,<sup>78</sup> the manner of inscription of the manuscript of *Wenamun* does not support a categorization of the papyrus or of the text inscribed upon it as an administrative document. He cites two examples of the same manner of inscription in the 21st dynasty decrees for Neskhons and Pinudjem,<sup>79</sup> although those are unitary papyri and not sets of sheets like *Wenamun*. This parallel could possibly suggest that a procedure of this sort was relatively common in the earlier Third Intermediate Period. An older manuscript with the same layout is P Anastasi VI, British Museum EA 10245, which belongs to the category of the Late Egyptian Miscellanies and is thus broadly literary.<sup>80</sup> Like *Wenamun*, it is 23–24 cm high.

The manner of inscription does not point to any particular genre for *Wenamun*. We should therefore follow the evidence of form, mode of narration, and content, and should retain the opinion of earlier writers, from Golenishchev to Gardiner, that *Wenamun* is a work of fiction and not a report. I see no good reason for continuing to leave the question open, as do several authors.<sup>81</sup>

*Die Lehren des Ani: Ein neuägyptischer Weisheitstext in seinem kulturellem Umfeld* (OBO 141, 1994) 31.

Cairo CG 58032, 58033; Woldemar Golénischeff, *Papyrus hiératiques*, CG (Cairo: IFAO 1927) 169–209.

Alan H. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies* (BAe 7, 1937) 72–78; compare pp. xvi–xvii, which give references to other papyri that have large royal protocols written across the fibres. Richard Parkinson kindly drew this papyrus to my attention after reexamining the original.

E.g. Assmann, *Ägypten: Eine Sinngeschichte*, 328; Egberts, *JEA* 77 (1991) 57; Scheepers, in *Amosiadès* (n. 2 here).