

COMMENTATIONES

Egyptian Twins¹

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I

On the stela of Suty and Hor of the reign of Amenhotpe III there is what appears to be the only unambiguous reference to twin or multiple birth from dynastic Egypt, except for the mythical birth of three kings in P. Westcar². The following discussion of this and other pairs of twins is presented partly in the hope of stimulating the identification of further material, for which a systematic search would be difficult. New examples may also suggest different implications from those considered here. I review the evidence for three cases from the Old to the New Kingdom, starting with the certain occurrence, and then discuss a variety of other data, including those of myth, before moving to possible broader interpretations.

II

Suty and Hor say of each other³:

I am a righteous one (*m3'*), whose abomination is evil (*jsft*)^a. ¹⁸(I am) not content^b with any words of one who speaks falsely (*dd 3ms = jwms*), but only with (those of) my brother (*sn*)^c, (who is) like me, with whose ways I

¹ Paper read at the ARCE Annual Meeting, Austin, March 1982; summary published in a fascicle with the title of the meeting, p. 6.


The initial stimulus for this article was given by Y. M. Harpur, who has published the suggestion that my second pair may have been twins (*JEA* 67 [1981] 29 n. 31); I have profited greatly from discussion with her. For references and suggestions I am most grateful to those named in the notes, and to Jan Assmann, Erika Feucht, Erhart Graefe, J. R. Harris, Robert K. Ritner, William Stini and Kent Weeks. The final version was completed during a Humboldt-Stiftung fellowship at the University of Heidelberg in 1982.

² K. Sethe, *Aegyptische Lesestücke*² (Leipzig 1928) 33,14–34,1.

³ London, Brit. Mus. 826 : I. E. S. Edwards, *British Museum, Hieroglyphic texts* 8 (London 1939) 22-5, pl. 21; *Urk* IV, 1943-9. Translations and bibliography: M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian literature* 2 (Berkeley etc. 1976) 86-9; J. Assmann, *Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete* (BAW; Zürich/München 1975) no. 89, pp. 209-12, 555-7; G. Fecht, *ZAS* 94 (1967) 25-50, with refs. to many earlier treatments. Photograph: British Museum, *An introduction to ancient Egypt* (London 1979) 138 fig. 52.

am satisfied. He went forth^d with me from the womb on the same day^e; ¹⁹the overseer of the works of Amun in southern Opet Suty/Hor^f. While I supervised (*hrp*) work on the right, he was on the left. We supervised the great monuments ²⁰at Karnak and on the south of Thebes, the city of Amun^g. . . . [The text continues in the first person singular.]

^a The polarity of *ms't* and *jsft* in this prominent position probably relates, at least stylistically, to the antagonistic naming of the twins, while the use of *jsft* instead of *grg* gives an added emphasis, placing the assertion in the broadest possible context.

^b Text . This is not grammatical as it stands, and could be read *nn hrj(j)* "I will not be content" or *n hrj(j)* "I was not content".

^c *sn* does not correspond to any single word in English, and may include anything from "twin" to "kinsman" (cf. G. Robins, *CdE* 54/108 [1979] 204; H. O. Willems, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 139 [1983] 158-62; D. Franke, *Altägyptische Verwandtschaftsbezeichnungen im Mittleren Reich* [Hamburger Ägyptologische Studien 3; 1983] 61-83).

^d *prjnf* should be an initial emphatic form and is so translated here, but one is tempted to link the sentence to the previous one: "satisfied, (for) he went forth . . .". If the force of the Middle Egyptian *sdmfn* was being lost at this date, this would be possible.

^e *m hrww pn*, lit. "on this day". There is no easy explanation for this wording, because the idea could have been expressed in more obvious terms. As well as being mannered, the usage evokes the twin birth as if it belonged to the present or immediate past. For the twins, it seems to imply, their exceptional birth is constantly present and significant.

^f For the arrangement of the text see below.

^g The division of labour according to "sides" is widely attested, cf. e.g. Mounir Megally, *BIFAO* 81 suppl. (*Bulletin du Centenaire*; 1981) 303-6 with refs. Here it gives the two men conveniently distinct positions at work, but the next sentence shows their separation to be without substance. Monuments were normally built with a single controller of works, as is desirable in organisational terms. These two, however, worked in harmony (n. *a* above).

The figures of the two men on the stela have been erased, but the texts show that Suty faced right and Hor left. In the scene at the top of the inset round-topped stela, the men were accompanied by their wives (who may not have been named). In the horizontal bands of text at the top, the right-facing offering formulae name Amon-Re', Mut and Hathor, while opposite [Amon-Re'] (wrongly restored as Hathor in the post-Amarna period), Khons and Hathor are the deities. Thus Hor is given the cadet member (Khons) in an otherwise equal enumeration. The same hierarchy is found in the stela field, where Suty offers to Osiris and Hor to Anubis, a less important deity. The arrangement of the vertical framing columns is more complex and cannot be reconstructed with certainty. In line 1 of the main stela text the two are given the title "overseer of the works of Amun" in front of their names, while in the passage translated

above a longer title is written once only in front of the names of both. This fusion is not so elaborate as in my next example, probably because of the context of running lines of inscription.

The twins are named after the archetypal pair of *sn* in myth, Seth, of which Suty is probably a vernacular form, and Horus, with whose name Hor is apparently identical⁴. As is shown in layout and naming, Suty is the senior, presumably elder twin, just as Seth is older in myth, and Hor is the junior, but this ranking means little for their roles in life, however punctiliously it is adhered to on the monument. The choice of names, however, is more significant, and is clearly deliberate, because the name Suty does not become normal in the form Sety (*sthj*) until the next century (Hor is common in all periods). The ambivalent character of Seth is ignored, except perhaps in the elaborate play with *ms't* and *jsft*. What is relevant is that the two gods are *sn*, so that the twins are subsumed in a much wider category. Seth and Horus are never said to be twins, and are indeed as often uncle and nephew as brothers (both *sn*)⁵. This implies that the category of twins is not acknowledged or is being avoided. *htr* may already have been used as a word for twin in speech, but in this period it cannot have been of any ideological account. The discursive description of twin birth is probably more than an elaborate piece of writing: as part of their special status, Suty and Hor treat their birth in a fashion that both disguises and celebrates it.

III

The joint tomb owners Ni'ankhkhnum and Khnumhotpe of the late 5th dynasty provide a second possible case of twinning, as is noted without comment by Altenmüller in his publication of their monument⁶. The tomb is exceptional in many ways. It gives equal space throughout to the two men, and contains groups of them embracing and holding hands; their titles are almost identical and their names closely similar; a series of figures probably constituting a family scene gives them a special treatment; there is a unique detail in their fish-spearing scenes. Their kinship, if any,

⁴ Suty appears not to be in Ranke, *PN*, but see 1, 302, 29 (*sth*); 1, 322, 7-12; 3, 119 (*sthj*); for Hor see 1, 245, 18.

⁵ This is their relationship in the Late Egyptian Horus and Seth story, cf. E. Leach, "The mother's brother in ancient Egypt", *Royal Anthropol. Inst. News* 15 (1975) 19-21 with refs.; G. Robins, *CdE* 54/108 (1979) 205-08, 203 n. 3.

⁶ Ahmed M. Moussa — H. Altenmüller, *Das Grab des Nianchkhnum und Chnumhotep* (Old Kingdom Tombs at the Causeway of King Unas at Saqqara excavated by the Department of Antiquities; AV 21; Mainz 1977; hereafter *GNC*) 22. Altenmüller dates the tomb around the reign of Menkauhor (pp. 44-5).

is never stated, which is not surprising, because Old Kingdom tombs are relatively sparing in the genealogical information they give. The point is therefore insignificant for their proposed status as twins, except in that it makes it unprovable. It is another matter whether it would have been mentioned in a more loquacious age.

Titles and the distribution of scenes give Ni'anekhkhnum a slight superiority over Khnumhotpe⁷. Ni'anekhkhnum has the symbolically superior south and west, Khnumhotpe the north and east. This distinction does not, however, obscure the largely identical treatment of the two. The best illustration of this is the west wall of the offering room, which contains a false door for each owner, that of Ni'anekhkhnum being to the south, but a group of the two embracing on the "pilaster" between the false doors renders identity much more prominent than hierarchy⁸.

Their titles can be laid out so that they are identical but separate, as on the "pilaster" just mentioned and in various other cases, but in the "family" scene they are fused so that both names are written at the end of a single title string. Sign arrangements of this sort are by no means unknown⁹, but they must be extremely rare when applied to two prominent individuals on their own monument. One set of titles allows only one role for the two.

The figures of the tomb owners holding hands are all close to the first room of the mastaba, where they occur in a representation of a pair statue on the east thickness of the entrance¹⁰, in the "family" scene on the east wall¹¹, and in a scene of the supervision of deliveries on the south wall¹². The first embracing pair is on the east wall of the same room, where the two sit facing a legal text¹³; the remainder are in another "family" group on the west wall of the first rock-cut chamber¹⁴, and on the east¹⁵ and west¹⁶ walls of the offering room. The symbolism of hand-holding and embracing is probably similar. The hand-holding groups are part of larger entities in which the two deceased face outwards in the same direction, as

⁷ GNC 22.

⁸ GNC pl. 90, 92. This motif may well be derived from the adjacent, slightly earlier tomb of Nefer, where husband and wife embrace on the "pilaster" separating two of a series of false doors: Ahmed M. Moussa — H. Altenmüller, *The tomb of Nefer and Kahay* (Old Kingdom Tombs at the Causeway of King Unas at Saqqara; AV 5; Mainz 1971) pl. 32.

⁹ E.g. *Urk* 1, 134, 14.

¹⁰ GNC pl. 16, 19a.

¹¹ GNC pl. 29.

¹² GNC pl. 35a = fig. 13.

¹³ GNC pl. 28, sc(ene) 12.1–12.3, pp. 86–8.

¹⁴ GNC pl. 72–3 sc. 32.3, pp. 149–50.

¹⁵ GNC pl. 90, 92, sc. 39.1, p. 163.

¹⁶ GNC pl. 91, sc. 42.2, p. 172.

is true also of the statue group¹⁷, which implies the presentation of offerings to it. The only exception to this pattern of occurrence is the embracing pair facing the legal text; this too relates to an outside entity, the priests with whom the contract is made. On these figures hand-holding would not be so easily visible as an embrace. Also, the embrace is not "active", but resembles the clasping of seated spouses, who normally relate to other figures, although the degree of reciprocity, in which each has a hand on the other's shoulder, is better paralleled in New Kingdom sculpture than in Old Kingdom relief¹⁸. Both here and in GNC pl. 15A, the symbolic attributes of staff and strip of cloth, which are usually carried by a single figure, are distributed between the two. In this composition it would not be possible to show two of each attribute, but the arrangement is in any case apt. A single status or role in the form of two individuals views the scenes.

The first "family" scene has been plausibly analysed by Altenmüller as showing two parents with their eight children¹⁹. Ni'anekhkhnum and Khnumhotpe are placed at the end of the sequence, either as the junior members of the family or, more probably, because this gives them a position balancing that of the parents at the other end. Here again, they hold hands in a broader context. They are also altogether less prominent than is normal with tomb owners; kinship excludes other associations. No figure in the scene holds any emblems or insignia. All except Khnumhotpe, whose hand is in that of Ni'anekhkhnum, have their forward hands clasped to their chests. Thus the two men appear again as a unit, their two names also being written under a single set of titles (see above).

The embracing scenes in which the two face each other have few parallels among figures of human beings²⁰, whereas comparable groups are relatively common with deity and king, especially in restricted contexts such as pillars²¹. As noted by Altenmüller, all three groups are on the

¹⁷ Much rarer in sculpture than embraces, but still well attested, e.g. J. Vandier, *Manuel d'archéologie égyptienne* III (Paris 1958) pl. 25, 6; 27, 2 (spouses, OK); 26, 2 (group of three men); 95, 5 (king and deity, MK); 111, 1 (royal couple, NK); 112, 1 (royal couple and princess); 135, 1 (king and deity); 139, 6 (spouses).

¹⁸ E.g. Vandier, *Manuel* III (last note) 101, 6 (king and god); 103, 1 (king and mother); 142, 3; 143, 1–4; 144, 2 (all spouses); 145, 3 (woman and her mother?); 147, 1–5 (spouses); 148, 1 (man and two women). On the general point see also H. Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian art* (Oxford 1974) 175–6 with refs.

¹⁹ GNC 89–90, sc. 12.4, pl. 29.

²⁰ See the material gathered by H. G. Fischer, *Ancient Egypt in the Metropolitan Museum Journal volumes 1–11* (1968–76) (New York 1977) 166 n. 8 with refs.

²¹ Common in the Middle Kingdom. See e.g. D. Arnold, *Der Tempel des Königs Mentuhotep von Deir el-Bahari*: 2. *Die Wandreliefs des Sanktuars* (AV 11; Mainz 1974) pl. 15, 18, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 33; K. Lange — M. Hirmer, *Ägypten/Egypt** (München/London 1967/8) pl. 93, 96–7; 18th dyn.: E. Naville, *Deir el Bahari* 3 (London n.d.) pl. 65–6; 5 pl. 130; U. Hölscher, *The excavation of Medinet Habu* 2 (OIP 41; Chicago 1939) pl. 18–19.

same alignment, in key positions in the inner part of the tomb. They occupy the stretch of wall that divides the axes of the two owners; in the inner, offering room this forms a pillar and a pilaster. The groups are thus in a position that can easily be paralleled in temples²² but scarcely in private tombs (for the possible source see n. 8 above). The scenes therefore have an architectural as well as symbolic significance, forming a bridge and centre-piece uniting the two owners' sections, yet expressing relatively little functional content.

The most expansive embracing group is the first, in the long rock-cut chamber (n. 14 above). This is another family scene, but it shows the owners' children (for Khnumhotpe, who probably had fewer, other dependants are also shown). Wives are not included, possibly because their placing would have been difficult. The very large signs *ms.f* "his child(ren)" by the shoulder of each tomb-owner announce the topic, so that there is effectively an ascending and peer family scene, in which the owners play a modest role, and a descending one, which, unlike the other, contains a statement of kinship. The exclusion of wives may have an analogy in the legal text, which states that the wives may not tamper with the mortuary endowment (n. 13 above), and perhaps in the erasure of one figure of the wife of Ni'ankhknum²³, but the two wives are shown in a number of places, so that they can be no more than relatively less prominent than in normal tombs. Another point of contact between the legal text and family scenes is in the text's mention of ascendants ("fathers and mothers") and others "who are (will be?) in the necropolis", suggested by Altenmüller to be the children of the deceased²⁴.

The other embracing pairs fill their respective spaces, containing only names and titles of the deceased in addition. Altenmüller remarks that the final pair, on the "pilaster" separating the false doors, is more "distanced" than the others²⁵. This probably relates to the composition as a whole, rather than expressing any specific distinction; there are parallels among scenes of king and deity (n. 21 above).

Apart from the seated pair, all embraces are in the rock-cut part of the tomb. As one moves towards the focal false doors, the owners cease to relate to other figures, becoming concerned instead with each other and the next generation (*GNC* pl. 72-3), and then with each other only (pl. 90-

²² Nn. 14, 16, 15 above; for the siting see the plan *GNC* fig. 1. The best parallel context in a temple is the multiple set of axes in the temple of Sety I at Abydos (A. M. Calverley et al., *The temple of King Sethos I at Abydos* 1-4 [London/Chicago 1933-58] plans); the entrance portico with embracing reliefs on the pillars is unpublished.

²³ *GNC* pl. 68, 70 a, sc. 31.1.A, p. 143.

²⁴ *GNC* 87 n. e.

²⁵ *GNC* 172.

92). Their identification is stronger the nearer they approach the centre of the tomb and the next life. Such a processual reading of the hand-holds and embraces seems apt, but since the tomb was built in stages²⁶ and constraints other than those of content affect the decoration, it could be coincidental. Even so, it is not likely to have been unwelcome to the designer.

Since the embracing and hand-holding scenes are unique in private tombs, little can be said about their meaning beyond the fact that they express publicly the close involvement of the two men. Elsewhere the motifs do not have a sexual meaning, as opposed to displaying socially and emotionally linked roles, and such a meaning should not be sought here²⁷. The lack of sexual associations can perhaps be seen most easily in cases where several figures in a group have their arms round one another, more or less regardless of sex or relative age²⁸. Embraces normally symbolise protection or close identification and reciprocity (nn. 18, 21 above), of which the latter is relevant here. Most examples of hand-holding in private relief are not good parallels, but the detail occurs in temple relief, where, in the simplest terms, it normally signifies the bestowal of a favour from god to king, or that the roles of those holding hands are linked in a scene. From the Old Kingdom there are good examples on the greywacke triads of Menkaure²⁹, which have the same implication of facing the viewer as the pairs of Ni'ankhknum and Khnumhotpe (especially the depicted pair statue); among the triads it is noteworthy that both embraces and hand-holds are found. It may be significant that the best parallels for the hand-holds and embraces are religious and royal rather than secular and private; the mythical associations of the names of Suty

²⁶ *GNC* 15-16.

²⁷ Most heterosexual motifs in representation are heavily disguised, cf. e.g. P. Derchain, *SAK* 2 (1975) 55-74. Westendorf (*LÄ* 2 [1977] 1273) has suggested that Ni'ankhknum and Khnumhotpe could have had "an intimate relationship of two friends". The fact the two were married is fully compatible with such a possibility, but their probable kinship does render the homosexual interpretation rather extreme. (I am grateful to John Callender for references and discussion).

²⁸ E.g. Vandier, *Manuel* III (n. 17 above) pl. 26, 2 (three men); 33, 4 (three men, one with an arm round a second); 73, 4 ("pseudo-pair" of kings, probably hand in hand); 146, 5 (two men and a boy). In relief see W. K. Simpson, *The terrace of the great god at Abydos* (Publ. of the Pennsylvania-Yale Exped. to Egypt 5: New Haven/Philadelphia 1974) pl. 55, ANOC 37.2 (two men and a woman); Cairo JE 45626, PM 1², 2, 618, in e.g. W. Wolf, *Die Kunst Ägyptens* (Stuttgart 1957) 389 fig. 336 (seated group of two men and a woman; woman has arms round middle man's shoulders; men hold hands and have arms round each other's shoulders). The parallel between these cases and sculpture is noteworthy. Klaus Baer refers me to the tomb of Haremka'uef at Kom el-Ahmar, where a man and his *hnms* "friend" are linked; see also W. Wreszinski, *Bericht...* (Schr. d. Königsberger Gel. Ges., Geisteswiss. Kl. 4, 2; Halle a.S. 1927) pl. 42: handholding of two men (?); inscriptions illegible on plate. For *hnms* see also Franke (n. c above) 355-62.

²⁹ All illustrated by W. Wood, *JEA* 60 (1974) pl. 23-5.

and Hor point in the same direction (see VI below). The treatment of Ni'ankhkhnum and Khnumhotpe could derive from lost precursors in private tombs and not be original, but there is no alternative to interpreting it on its own terms and taking the religious parallels seriously, if only as formal models.

The tomb contains two compositions of fowling and fish-spearing scenes, one in the entrance portico and the other on the west wall of the main rock-cut chamber³⁰; Ni'ankhkhnum is the fowler and Khnumhotpe the fisherman. In both Khnumhotpe has two tilapia on his spear. All other such scenes from the Old Kingdom show a tilapia and a *lates*³¹. In later periods these scenes have a strong symbolic content³², and in view of their prominence and elaboration in Old Kingdom tombs and the general similarity between examples of different periods, it is likely that the earlier versions have a comparable symbolism. Of the fish the tilapia, which is a widespread symbol of rebirth³³, is probably the more important; in private tombs the *lates* certainly plays less part. The best explanation of the paired tilapia is that the more dispensable of the fish is omitted in favour of a composition showing the linked aspiration of the two men in a single image. If the tilapia symbolises the rebirth of one man, two may signify the rebirth of two. Their destinies in the next world are implicitly indissociable.

The placing of these two compositions can be related to the processual reading of the other pairs suggested above. The first scene is in the entrance leading to the room with the hand-holding figures, while the second balances with the first major embracing group, being seen before it on the same wall as one moves towards the offering room³⁴. Thus the two sets can be read A (fishing/fowling), B₁ (hand-holding), A, B₂ (embracing)³⁵. In their placing, then, the fishing and fowling scenes may symbolise the passage from one state to another implied by the tilapia motif. The tomb with its scenes of everyday life should then be a liminal area, with the offering room perhaps already relating to the hereafter.

All the details I have reviewed are unparalleled or poorly paralleled,

³⁰ *GNC* pl. 2, 4, sc. 4.3.1, pp. 58-61; pl. 74, sc. 33.A.2, pp. 151-2.

³¹ Pointed out to me by Y. M. Harpur, who has also suggested the extension of the symbolic reading to earlier scenes.

³² See esp. Derchain (n. 27 above).

³³ E. Hornung, E. Staehelin et al., *Skarabäen und andere Siegelamulette aus Basler Sammlungen* (Äg. Denkm. in der Schweiz 1; Mainz 1976) 110-11 with refs.

³⁴ One might expect the second to be in the vestibule to the rock-cut chamber and thus exactly comparable with the first in location, but no suitable space for the composition is available there.

³⁵ This leaves aside the many other scenes in the tomb, but since they are not so exceptional such a step may be justified, if only in a preliminary analysis.

and all tend to identify the social role and destiny of the two tomb owners. Apart from the fish-spearing scenes, the family scenes are significant here, for they unite the men in relation to their elders and, with some necessary distinctions, their children; they become symbolic of the process of kinship through time. On another level, their identical titles and function in the state would be held by one man in most cases. Their hierarchical ranking, in which Ni'ankhkhnum is placed first presumably because he is the older, does not affect their singleness.

The two are the most prominent known holders of the title "supervisor/overseer of manicurists of the palace"³⁶. Instead of assuming, as Altenmüller does, that this is because of a real but transitory importance of this office, I suggest that the evident status of these men has other causes; it is scarcely likely that there was a sudden demand for manicurists in large numbers. The title indicates proximity to the king, in the same manner as hairdressing ones do³⁷, and the explanation may rather lie there. In some non-manicuring sense they were special people.

The cause of their high status is probably not their social origin; although there are possible connections between them and tombs at Giza³⁸, they do not ally them with anybody exceptional. It could be because they were twins. Twinship could elevate status in some cases, rather as happened with rare dwarfs, who were also close to the king³⁹. No single detail reviewed here is decisive, but the general effect of the tomb is of an extended analogy to the presentation of the certain twins Suty and Hor, who also appear to have enjoyed a higher status than their unknown kinsmen — but they did perform jointly an important function.

Ni'ankhkhnum and Khnumhotpe carried their joint status a little further into the real world than we see in their tomb. They are attested from the tomb of the vizier Ptahshepses at Abusir, for which they acted as quarrymasters, although their "manicurist" titles are used in the quarry marks on the stone blocks⁴⁰. They are also shown at the head of a series of offering bearers in the tomb, and were "supervisors of mortuary priests" of Ptahshepses. As in their own tomb, Ni'ankhkhnum comes first. There is more differentiation between them than elsewhere in that

³⁶ Examples in *GNC* 29-30.

³⁷ Cf. W. Helck, *Untersuchungen zu den Beamtentiteln des ägyptischen Alten Reiches* (ÄgFo 18; Glückstadt etc. 1954) 36, 43, 65-6.

³⁸ *GNC* 42-3.

³⁹ For material see K. R. Weeks, *The anatomical knowledge of the ancient Egyptians and the representation of the human figure in Egyptian art* (PhD. diss.; Yale 1970) 163-204. Note, however, that very many more dwarfs than twins are known from Egypt; this is unlikely to reflect the incidence of the phenomena.

⁴⁰ *GNC* 44-5.

they do not bring identical offerings. None the less, they continue to be indissociable when they are exercising a real function. It is not clear from the published information whether quarrying was a state task of the two men, or whether they acted for Ptahshepses; the former is perhaps more likely. Whichever is correct, when their work is visible, it has nothing to do with manicuring — rather the opposite. Function cannot be read off title.

IV

A third possible case of twins can be considered very briefly. On a 12th dynasty Abydos stela two women are shown together, both captioned “his beloved daughter Sitamun”⁴¹. The first woman holds a lotus to her nose with her forward hand. The second probably has her arm round the shoulder of the first, although no hand is visible on the forward shoulder of the first. The backward hands of both hang empty. The identical naming of the pair and their embrace, which leaves no separate activity for the second figure, may suggest that they have a fused status like the two pairs reviewed above. If they are twins, they are significant in supplying a female pair⁴².

V

So far I have considered largely iconographic material. From the third intermediate period on the evidence becomes more various.

The word *htr* “twin” is first attested in an oracular amuletic decree of perhaps the 22nd dynasty, where the deities say of a woman: “We shall fill her womb with male and female children. We shall save her from a Horus birth (?), from miscarrying (?) (and) from giving birth to twins”⁴³.

⁴¹ Louvre C 167: Simpson, *Terrace* (n. 28 above) pl. 10, ANOC 4.1.

⁴² I am inclined to reject the possible pair of twin princesses Meritamun, daughters of Thutmose III, tentatively suggested by G. Robins, *GM* 56 (1982) 87 n. 22, because there is no fusion in their presentation. In general, identity of names is not by itself sufficient evidence for twinship, because identical names for siblings seem to have been relatively common; cf. A. H. Gardiner, *ZAS* 79 (1954) 95-6. Such people were presumably distinguished by appellations not recorded on the monuments.

Unless and until larger numbers of pairs of twins are discovered, it is best to accept only those for whom more than one criterion speaks; some genuine pairs might of course be rejected in this way; see also next note.

⁴³ I. E. S. Edwards, *Oracular amuletic decrees of the late New Kingdom* (Hier. Pap. in the Brit. Mus. 4th ser.; London 1960) pl. 26, pp. 67-9 with n. 69 to line 115: T2 rt. 112-16; variant without the mention of twins p. 86, P3 69ff.

The birth of twins is thus an accident or misfortune of childbirth on a par with others, but worth singling out. The text does not provide evidence for attitudes to twins who survived infancy, but it makes their initially inauspicious character plain.

From the 25th dynasty on there is attested a personal name *P3-htr*, fem. *T3-htrt* “the twin”^{43a}. The declaration of a person’s at least theoretical identity as a twin in a name implies that the treatment of twins had changed since the time of Suty and Hor, and probably since that of the amuletic decree. The transition may well have been gradual and irregular, and a fear of twin births could reasonably outlast a general fear of twins⁴⁴. From now on, however, twins are in the open, and in demotic and Greek *P3/T3-htr(t)* and Didymos/me are among the commonest names⁴⁵. They are in fact so common that it is most improbable that all their holders were twins; they became simply names. There are related, perhaps unanswerable, questions such as that of the possible naming of the two twins in a pair — one called “the twin” and the other not? — or the treatment and naming of pairs of whom only one survived infancy⁴⁶. However all this may be in detail, no special presentation of twins analogous to that of Suty and Hor is visible in late and Graeco-Roman material.

The chief interest of the word *htr* is that it is probably transferred from a non-human context to human beings. Typical derivatives from the root are words for a pair or team of cattle yoked to the plough or

B. Letellier, in IFAO, *Livre du centenaire 1880-1980* (MIFAO 104; Le Caire 1980) 127-33, publishes an ostrakon whose author wants a seer(?) to be consulted over the death of two children and the well-being of their parents (the writer is probably the father). She suggests that this may refer to the inauspicious birth of twins and their death — natural? — shortly afterwards (see also Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, *Naissance de l'écriture: cunéiformes et hiéroglyphes* [Paris] 1982, 303 no. 259), supporting this interpretation by reference to the inclusion of the mother, whose health might have been endangered, in the question for the seer. But the father is also mentioned, so that there need be no close physical connection with childbirth. There is therefore no specific reason for thinking that the two dead children were twins.

^{43a} Earliest example: E. Graefe, *Untersuchungen . . . Gottesgemahlin des Amun* (ÄgAbh 37; 1981) 1, 69-70 (25th dyn.); Ranke, *PN* 1, 116, 7 (*p3-htr*; demotic only — see also n. 45); *PN* 1, 366, 8 (*B-htrt*; several examples).

⁴⁴ Cf. T. J. H. Chappel, “The Yoruba cult of twins in historical perspective”, *Africa* 44 (1974) 250-65. Compare also the contrasting modern Egyptian attitudes cited in nn. 76, 78 below.

⁴⁵ For demotic I owe this observation to Robert K. Ritner. For Greek see F. Preisigke, *Namenbuch* (Heidelberg 1922) 87 (Δίδυμος; Δίδυμη; Δίδυμος); D. Foraboschi, *Onomasticon papyrologicum alterum* (Milano/Varese 1967) 65; note several examples where there is an alternative appellation, presumably because the name is so common. On chronological grounds it is conceivable that Greek influenced demotic in the wide dissemination of the name.

⁴⁶ Among the Nuer the child born after a twin has died substitutes for the dead twin (see n. 75 below). Among the Yoruba the child born after twins has a special designation and significance (n. 44 above). Analogous considerations could affect the Egyptian/Greek names, which could also be applied to non-twins for quite different reasons.

horses drawing a chariot and, perhaps by extension of the notion of yoking or binding, dues or taxes⁴⁷. It would be surprising for a word to be extended from this kind of usage to humans unless it filled a gap in the lexicon; such a gap would probably reflect the suppression of a category. The root itself is attested from the Old Kingdom on, more than 1500 years before *htr* occurs for twins. Although it could have existed earlier in speech, the fact that it is used in a personal name, a context that tends to keep up fairly well with the spoken language, makes this not very likely.

The extent to which twin status is now normal or even prestigious is visible in the epithet of Ptolemy VI Philometor *p³ htr* (often written $\text{𓂏𓂏} n p³ hpj 'nh$ "the twin of the living Apis", to which some examples add *hr mshn.sn* "in their birthplace" (or: "on their birth bricks(?)")⁴⁸. Only with considerable latitude can this twinship be affirmed, because the Apis in question was born in January 186 and Ptolemy VI around October 7-8⁴⁹; it looks more as if the king was conceived at about the time of birth of the Apis. It is unlikely that in earlier times this phrasing would have been used to link sacred animal and king, especially when the coincidence was so tenuous.

Evidence of native Egyptian twins also occurs in Greek material, as with the Egyptian mistress of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, Didyme, whose name could be a translation of *T³-htr*⁵⁰, and the twin (?) Egyptian girls Thaues and Taous known from the 2nd century Serapeum papyri⁵¹. The latter were taken in by the recluse Ptolemaios and acquired the post of *didymai* "twins", whose function was to act as Isis and Nephthys in mourning the Apis bull and subsequently to present offerings to Osorapis. This role of Isis and Nephthys has very long antecedents. From as early as the Pyramid Texts the two are called *sntj* "sister pair", a form that appears to be attested only for goddesses, not for human beings⁵². In this context the pairing subordinates the far more significant position of Isis as

⁴⁷ *Wb* 3, 199,8–202,3. For "wages" see J. J. Janssen, *Commodity prices from the Ramessid period* (Leiden 1975) 456-7.

⁴⁸ *Wb* 3, 199, 7; Gauthier, *LR* 4, 294-305; H. Junker — E. Winter, *Das Geburtshaus des Tempels der Isis in Philä* (DÖAW, Sonderband; Wien etc. 1965) 168-9 line 1; see also D. J. Crawford, in *Studies on Ptolemaic Memphis* (Stud. Hellenistica 24; Lovanii 1980) 14 with n. 1. The epithet does not seem to be part of the king's Greek titulary.

⁴⁹ L. Koenen, *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 17 (1960-2) 13-14 n. 2; Gauthier, *LR* 4, 288 n. 2. Koenen suggests that the king and Apis calf could be thought of as suckling from the same cow, and since the motif of a king suckling from the Hathor cow is quite well known, such an explanation is possible; see e.g. E. Naville, *The XIth dynasty temple at Deir el-Bahari* 1 (MEEF 28; London 1907) pl. 28, 30.

⁵⁰ E.g. E. Bevan, *A history of Egypt under the Ptolemaic dynasty* (London 1927) 77; but see the reserves on literal interpretation expressed above.

⁵¹ U. Wilcken, *Urkunden der Ptolemäerzeit (ältere Funde)* 1 (Berlin/Leipzig 1927) 46-7, 177-85, 354 no. 77 and *passim*.

⁵² *Wb* 4, 151, 14-16.

an independent goddess. The pair occur with striking regularity in late sources, and come to be shown together on one side of a relief or figure of Osiris, not flanking on either side as had been normal; they can also have headdresses reading *sntj*⁵³. The Greeks may have called those who performed the role *didymai* because of this prominent pairing and the special use of *sntj*, not because Isis and Nephthys or the officiants were necessarily twins. A specific designation as twins is not attested in Egyptian for either pair, nor are there grounds for assuming that Egyptians of earlier periods considered Isis and Nephthys to be twins⁵⁴.

Wilcken, following Walter Otto, assumed that twins would have taken the part of *didymai* wherever possible and stated that, although unproven, the opinion that Thaues and Taous were in fact twins was surely correct⁵⁵. In view of their close similarity of name and indissociable roles, the idea is certainly attractive, and looks back thousands of years to our earlier cases of twins, but it remains no more than a possibility. The assumption that twins would have been employed may fuse roles in and outside the cult too much. It is also likely that with the new treatment of twins in the late period pairs were not so indissolubly linked as they had been when their status was problematic.

All the evidence considered so far is for like-sexed twins, and mythical identifications appear to use the category *sn(t)*, not twinship, as the point of departure. Another strand of material points to unlike-sexed twins and Shu and Tefenet, the original pair of creation, who are rendered identical in form by the association with *rwjtj*, the lion pair or double

⁵³ With *sntj* headdresses: N. de G. Davies, *The temple of Hibis in el-Khargeh Oasis* 3 (Metr. Mus. of Art, Eg. Exped. 17; New York 1953) pl. 3 reg. 9, towards L; for paired examples see *ibid.* pl. 4 reg. 4, nos. 6-7 from L; 10 reg. 2 from above, mid; 18 top R, lower reg.; 20, N wall, bottom reg., mid, with various further examples; 24 R; 25; 38 top R; 53 lower; 54 lower; 57 bottom R. I cite this as the earliest well preserved late temple. For earlier examples still see A. Piankoff, *RdE* 1 (1933) 169 fig. 9 (each captioned as *snt*), 171 fig. 11; P. A. A. Boeser, *Beschrijving . . . Leiden* 7 ('s-Gravenhage 1915) pl. 3 (two naoi of the reign of Amasis). For a later example see Junker—Winter, *Geburtshaus* (n. 48 above) 168/9.

⁵⁴ Since according to myth Osiris, Seth, Isis and Nephthys were born to Nut on virtually successive days (S. Schott, *Altägyptische Festdaten* [AMAW 1950, 10; Wiesbaden 1950] 112-3; Horus intervenes in the calendar between Osiris and Seth), they could be "quadruplets", but they are referred to only as the "children" of Nut (*msw*; *z(t)* has no plural and, for humans, no dual); such a literal reading of myth is in any case inappropriate.

Egyptian is sparing in its use of kinship terms to link deities. Few "consorts" of deities are in fact stated to be so (a point perhaps related to the secular character of marriage). The treatment of Shu and Tefenet (n. 60 below; see also *CT* 2, 5 b, 32 c), of the "children of Nut", Seth and Horus, and Isis and Nephthys, is therefore exceptional. In general, terms for ascendants and descendants (*jtj/mwt*; *z(t)*) are very much commoner with deities than laterals (*sn(t)*). This point may have a wider significance for the ideology of Egyptian kinship. For material and terms see G. Robins, *CdE* 54/108 (1979) 197-217; see also p. 462, n. c above.

⁵⁵ *Urkunden* (n. 51 above) 177.

lion⁵⁶, and referred to in relation to the creator by the term *z'tj* "child pair"⁵⁷, another form that does not seem to be attested for humans. Kees⁵⁸ and following him de Wit⁵⁹ translated *sntj* and *z'tj* as "(pair of) twins" in relation to Shu and Tefenet. As with the birth of Isis and Nephthys (n. 54 above), the still more unusual procreation of Shu and Tefenet by masturbation and/or expectoration of the creator is not immediately relevant to the everyday category of twins, so that this rendering would require supplementary justification. The texts do, however, present the birth of the two deities in indissoluble association, so that the basis for a treatment as twins is there from the start. But the divine world does not necessarily provide a model for the human, and the potential analogy does not seem to have been taken up until the late period. So long as neither the form *z'tj* applied to humans nor pairs of unlike-sexed twins are known from dynastic times, the idea that Shu and Tefenet were then understood as twins must remain unproven⁶⁰.

Both *sntj* and *z'tj* are ancient linguistic forms, transmitted as fossils from the Old Kingdom on. Both use a dual for a pair that is not as necessary a grouping as, for example, two feet, and this is not to be expected after Old Egyptian. For *z'tj* there is the additional point that the feminine for pairs of mixed sex or gender is known only in Old Egyptian⁶¹; in later times the word would have been masculine if such a usage was possible at all. It remains significant that the forms are not found with humans, because this implies that close pairings of siblings were not normal, whether divine or human pairs of them were twins or not, and thus provides additional evidence for the general absence of the category of twins.

The earliest iconographic allusion to a paired Shu and Tefenet may be a faience knob of Akhenaten and Nefertiti⁶². The two are shown squat-

⁵⁶ C. de Wit, *Le rôle et le sens du lion dans l'Égypte ancienne* (Leiden 1951) 123-37. Just as Isis is a far more significant deity than Nephthys, in most periods Shu is more widespread than Tefenet; only cases where they are paired are relevant here.

⁵⁷ *Wb* 3, 412, 8-12.

⁵⁸ *ZAS* 57 (1922) 109.

⁵⁹ *Lion* (n. 56 above) 116, 122 (*sntj*) and *passim*.

⁶⁰ Like Seth and Horus (II above), Shu and Tefenet are identified as *sn* and could have provided a model for treating unlike-sexed twins in earlier periods. No relevant material seems to be preserved, but this means little, because there is so little referring to twins at all. It is, however, relevant that Shu and Tefenet do not occur as elements in personal names before the late period (Ranke, *PN* 3, 120, 133). One might conjecture that someone called Nesshutefenet "He belongs to Shu and Tefenet" (*PN* 1, 179, 7; late and Graeco-Roman) was a twin on account of the exceptional presence of the names of two deities in his name; but other explanations are possible.

⁶¹ E. Edel, *Altägyptische Grammatik* 1 (AnOr 34; Roma 1955) § 300. Cf. *PT* 1248 d, where the designation *z'tj sntj* is applied to Shu and Tefenet. *rwj* "double lion" has the same gender characteristic.

⁶² On loan in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen: J. R. Harris, *Meddelelser fra*

ting and adoring the sun in identical barks. The analogy with the later material (see below) is made particularly close by the apparent presentation of the two as youthful figures. The occurrence of this motif cannot prove that Shu and Tefenet were interpreted as twins, but because it is so close in time and in general religious ambiance to the monument of Suty and Hor, the piece is particularly suggestive. Here we could have a model that can show twins being used for the king and queen, who were not twins. However, the gap between this case and the next close and youthful assimilation about a millennium later renders the Amarna case uncertain (examples from the gap might always be identified). Because of the special character of the Amarna period, it is uncertain how such a development relates to the mainstream of religious thought. The much later iconographic parallels make it improbable that this was a pure aberration, but equally clearly it was not a major motif.


In the late and Graeco-Roman periods a new depiction of Shu and Tefenet is found in which they are shown as identical children, only their sex being different⁶³, and they occur more often as a pair in relief than hitherto⁶⁴. In itself this still does not show that they are twins or provide a model for twins, although their status as children is suggestive because it brings the circumstances of birth closer. Both this innovation and the increased pairing of Isis and Nephthys are therefore in broad terms comparable to the appearance of the personal name *P3-htr*. In the Roman


Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek 33 (1976) 78-84, esp. 83 n. 12 (I am most grateful to the author for showing me the English draft of the text); id., *Burlington Magazine* 119 no. 890 (May 1977) 340-3 (English text without footnotes); id., *AcOr* 38 (1977) 10 nn. 38-40 with refs.; see already G. Fecht, *ZAS* 85 (1960) 117-8. For a much earlier identification of Shu and Tefenet see *CT* 2, 28 d, 23 a-c, where they are paired with the time/eternity concepts *nhh* and *dt*. Here it is not clear how consistent a conception lies behind the parallel; see also E. Hornung, *Der ägyptische Mythos von der Sonnenkuh* (OBO 46; Freiburg/Göttingen 1982) 103-5. The implications of the hieroglyph for *n'rjw* cited in n. 64 below are virtually identical to those of the knob.

⁶³ E.g. Davies, *Hibis* 3 (n. 53 above) pl. 2 reg. 6, 5 from R (parallel pl. 3 reg. 6, 8 from L, where the figures are named Geb and Nut); pl. 3 reg. 6, L (two eggs; parallel to both these groups E. Naville, *Bubastis* [MEEF 8; London 1891] pl. 46D); 4 reg. 4, 17 from L (two children named Geb and Nut, but note the alternation just cited; context is figures of Onuris = Shu); E. Naville, *Goshen and the shrine of Sati el Henneh* (1885) (MEEF 4; London 1887) pl. 5 reg. 2, R = G. Roeder, *Naos* (CGC; Leipzig 1914) pl. 30 top with p. 91 § 336 nos. 15-16 (no male genitals on Tefenet — Naville drawing unreliable); Naville pl. 5 bottom L = Roeder pl. 28 with p. 85 § 331 (Naville inaccurate; one male figure, one female [?], unnamed); E. Chassinat — F. Daumas, *Le temple de Dendara* 6 (IFAO; Le Caire 1965) 156, 11, pl. 579 upper R, pl. 583; cf. Daumas, *BIFAO* 52 (1953) 166: perhaps based on an earlier source.

⁶⁴ E.g. Piankoff, *RdE* 1 (1933) 170 fig. 10 (naos of Amasis: as two *b*-birds); Davies, *Hibis* 3 pl. 5 R, reg. 5, mid (pair of birds); 9 top; 51 upper L; 57 R, reg. 2 from top (Onuris and Tefenet); 65 mid; 71. Note also Junker — Winter, *Geburtshaus* (n. 48 above) 2/3 line 12, where the word *n'rjw* in *n'rjw prjw* "the two Epiphanes" (Ptol. V and Cleopatra I) is written with figures of Shu and Tefenet. These people were certainly not twins.


period, however, proof of the use of Shu and Tefenet to depict twins is forthcoming in the iconography of the sign of the zodiac Gemini.

The form of Gemini relates to a motif used as a hieroglyph for *htr* or *snsn* (another root possibly related to twinning), two people facing each other and holding hands ⁶⁵ — half-way between the embrace and the hand-hold of Ni'anekhnum and Khnumhotpe. This is used in the full pictorial mode in the form of Gemini⁶⁶. The group again reads *htr*⁶⁷. Several examples show a male and a female figure, and in three these are mythologised as Shu and Tefenet⁶⁸. It is as if the iconographic developments mentioned above find their logical conclusion in the imported zodiac, but it remains uncertain just how far this understanding of Shu and Tefenet should be generalised. The most obvious models for twin deities in the Classical world, Castor and Pollux, are both male, so that the use of Shu and Tefenet has the appearance of a purely Egyptian analogy used for unlike-sexed twins and implying a prior identification of them as twins⁶⁹.

One new Graeco-Roman phrase that uses the word *snsn* is the name of the festival day alluded to in texts, *snsn* (in one case ) *kswj* "the meeting of the two bulls", plausibly suggested by the *Wörterbuch* to be the day of the full moon⁷⁰. The sun and the moon are therefore a pair of (twin) bulls who can on occasion be seen together. This idea may find a parallel in the naming of the twins of Mark Antony and Cleopatra VII as Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene, Alexander the Sun and Cleopatra the Moon⁷¹. Sun and moon as "twins" could also be related to Shu and Tefenet through the multiple associations of the latter pair with the solar


⁶⁵ *Wb* 3, 199, 6-7 (ref. to Brugsch is wrong); 4, 172,12-174,2.

⁶⁶ O. Neugebauer — R. A. Parker, *Egyptian astronomical texts* 3 (Brown Eg. Stud. 6; Providence/London 1969) 206. The zodiacs published in Ahmed Fakhry et al., *Denkmäler des Oase Dachla* (AV 28; Mainz 1982) pl. 36-7, 40, 41, 44a, do not show Shu and Tefenet.

⁶⁷ W. Erichsen, *Demotisches Glossar* (Kopenhagen 1954) 342; W. Spiegelberg, *ZÄS* 48 (1910) 147 no. 3, pl. 4; the normal demotic sign is derived from , itself not attested before the Graeco-Roman period.

⁶⁸ Neugebauer—Parker, *EAT* 3 (n. 66 above) pl. 42 ("Dendera E"); no. 72 ("Atribis A & B"): W. M. F. Petrie, *Atribis* (BSAE, 14th year; London 1908) pl. 36, 37 (= frontispiece), 38.

⁶⁹ A case where Shu and Tefenet are used as the mythical model for a woman's children, who are not said or implied to be twins, occurs in a Graeco-Roman biographical inscription: E. A. W. Budge, *Some account of the collection of Egyptian antiquities in the possession of Lady Meux*² (London 1896) 134 line 22; cf. E. Otto, *Die biographischen Inschriften des ägyptischen Spätzeit* (PÄ 2; Leiden 1954) no. 60, pp. 34-5, 83. As Otto remarked (p. 34), the turn of phrase shows a somewhat reduced conception of the gods. The kinship model for Shu and Tefenet (n. 54 above) is very relevant here.

⁷⁰ *Wb* 4, 174, 2; example with : Chassinat, *Edfou* 1, 87, 6. See also P. Derchain, in *La lune, mythes et rites* (Sources orientales 5; Paris 1962) 43.

⁷¹ E.g. Bevan, *History* (n. 50 above) 375-6, 383-4.

cycle, and especially through the Onuris legend, which is attested both in Egyptian and Greek⁷².

In sum, various late and Graeco-Roman mythical and iconographic motifs are strongly suggestive of twins or allude explicitly to them. No marked distinctions can be seen between native Egyptian (largely religious and Greek (more varied) evidence. In human society of the time twins appear to be a mundane occurrence. Thus in early periods the presentation of the divine world ignores the possibility of twins, who are meanwhile treated for humans as an anomaly which is inauspicious if not elaborately corrected. In the late and Graeco-Roman periods the motif of twins comes to be exploited in the divine world, if seldom explicitly, while human twins cease to be a marked category. There is a hierarchy and logic in the relations between the treatments of the divine and the human in the two cases, but other combinations would also be possible.

VI

It remains to consider these materials, especially the earlier ones, in a more general context. In what follows I assume that all the proposed pairs of twins are correctly identified. Because of the uncertainty of this, my conclusions and suggestions can be no more than very tentative and hypothetical.

Apart from the children of Mark Antony and Cleopatra VII, all the human pairs are like-sexed; if unlike-sexed pairs exist in the record, they will be harder to find. In earlier periods like-sexed pairs of either sex appear to have been treated in more or less the same special way, but unlike-sexed pairs could have been treated differently; in the late period one might expect both unlike-sexed and like-sexed pairs to have a comparable unmarked status. Below I mostly omit unlike-sexed pairs from consideration.

Even if unlike-sexed pairs, who form rather under half of all twin pregnancies⁷³, are excluded, and generous allowance is made for failing to identify twins, the number of like-sexed pairs is very small in relation to

⁷² S. West, "The Greek version of the legend of Tefnut", *JEA* 55 (1969) 161-83. The material gathered by H. Junker, *Die Omurislegende* (Kais. Akad. d. Wiss. in Wien, phil.-hist. Kl., Denkschr. 59, 1-2; Wien 1917) contains no specific parallel for this point, but the identification of (Hathor)-Tefenet with the solar eye is generally relevant.

⁷³ Identical (monozygotic) twins (0.03-0.05% of pregnancies throughout the world) are like-sexed; dizygotic twins are more or less evenly divided between like-sexed and unlike-sexed: M. Bulmer, *The biology of twinning in man* (Oxford 1970) 2-5 (the argument is slightly circular in this context).

the many thousands of people known from ancient Egypt. Suitable statistics are not available, but one might place the frequency of twin pregnancies in Egypt nearer to that of Caucasians (0.9%) than that of South African blacks (2.2%)⁷⁴. Live twin births will have been fewer and survival through infancy of one or both lower still⁷⁵, but, other things being equal, perhaps one per cent of the adult population would have been twins, 0.6% like-sexed twins, and 0.3% surviving pairs of like-sexed twins. The fact that virtually all our information relates to a small elite does not affect these figures except in making it a little more likely that twins in that class would survive than they would in the poorer classes, so that the discrepancy between our data and the possible incidence is the more awkward.

The simplest explanation would be that one or both of like-sexed twins were killed, phenomena that are quite widespread in other cultures⁷⁶. This would leave unexplained why a few were allowed to survive, unless clues could be discovered in the cases themselves. A weaker version of the same idea would be that twins were excluded from the monuments and from public life or that their status was studiously ignored when they

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 83-91; see also A. P. and E. J. Mange, *Genetics: human aspects* (Philadelphia 1980) 533 table 22-4. The extremes are Nigeria (4%) and the Far East (0.03–0.06%).

⁷⁵ Bulmer, *Biology* 175-81, rates the chances of survival of a single twin per twin pregnancy into adulthood a little below those of an infant from a single pregnancy (applies to pre-modern societies). For comments from actual observation see E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer religion* (Oxford 1956) 129, who refers to infant twins dying "as so often happens"; Robert M. Netting (pers. comm.) suggests on the basis of fieldwork among the Kofyar in Nigeria, the country of the world with the highest incidence of twins, that the viability of twin babies in a non-western society is not vastly inferior to that of single babies. The actual rate of survival obviously depends greatly on attitudes to twins.

⁷⁶ Cf. e.g. E. S. Hartland, "Twins", in J. Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of religion and ethics* 12 (Edinburgh 1921) 491-500; P. E. Leis, "The nonfunctional attributes of twin infanticide in the Niger delta", *Anthrop. Quart.* 38 (1965) 97-111; A. Southall, "Twinship and symbolic structure", in J. S. La Fontaine (ed.), *The interpretation of ritual: essays in honour of A. I. Richards* (London 1972) esp. 79-81; all give much further material. The remarks of Scheinfeld, quoted by Bulmer, *Biology* 178, are rather simplistic.

Diodorus (1.80.3-6) stated that the Egyptians did not expose children, citing in argument that the state needed all the people it could get, and that it was cheap and easy to bring them up. There is, however, clear evidence for exposure among the Greek population of Egypt (especially of girls, cf. K. Hopkins, *Comp Stud. in Soc. and Hist.* 22 [1980] 316-7, 339 n. 69; both cases cited date around the turn of the era), and the practice was legally permissible on the sole authority of the father or of a widow (R. Taubenschlag, *The law of Greco-Roman Egypt in the light of the papyri 332 B.C. — 640 A.D.* 1 [New York 1944] 103, 104, 114). The exposure of twins could well be different from and more acceptable than that of single babies. From recent times James K. Hoffmeier tells me that in the area round Asyut the girl of a pair of unlike-sexed twins was often not fed. Samia al-Azharia Jahn, *Paideuma* 25 (1979) 160 assumes that in pre-Muslim times exposure and twin infanticide were practised in the northern Sudan. Although these examples are from cultures with a stronger male bias than the ancient Egyptian, the possibility of similar practices in earlier times cannot be dismissed (for modern Egypt see also n. 78 below).

were shown on the monuments; this too fails to account for the exceptional examples. Any hypothesis will probably not be easily reconciled at once with the rarity of the examples and with the nature of the special treatment, which gives the appearance of being customary rather than idiosyncratic. It is thus best to assume that there was a taboo on twins, whether expressed in a suppression of the fact that they were twins or of the twins themselves, which could be circumvented occasionally by treating the pair as far as possible as a single social person; it is impossible to know why the particular pairs we have were singled out. They are required to exhibit an exaggerated reciprocity and affection, in keeping with the general idealisation of social forms on Egyptian monuments.

Although the twins are shown in a special way, the male ones are normal insofar as they are married to different women, however unprominent the women are, and have separate families of children; the female pair is shown in a context where a separate family would in any case be absent⁷⁷. The dominant features of their special status are thus their official position and titles and, less easily defined, their relations with each other and their passage into the hereafter. The first and last of these are typical of the thrust of Egyptian ideology as a whole and imply that, at least when twin status is acknowledged and transcended, it is viewed not as a private affliction or benediction but within a wider social context, as is appropriate to a large-scale, centralised society. There are two further, still broader approaches to understanding the phenomenon.

All the best parallels for the treatment of Ni'anekhnum and Khnumhotpe are in the royal or divine spheres, while Suty and Hor have an explicit divine identification in their names. Does this imply that they are given liminal or semi-divine status? Since any normal presentation of kings or deities is excluded from Old Kingdom tombs, closely comparable material is lacking. It is possible either that only semi-divine people could take over such forms or that the forms are simply forms, chosen for their aptness in the absence of other models, and no more than coincidentally similar to the iconography of relations between god and god or king and gods. On the level of symbolism, too, the assimilation of king to god could be appropriate to twins because no such close identifications apply

⁷⁷ Compare Nuer twins, who are treated as distinct individuals in normal life, but have their unity affirmed symbolically and in rituals, especially of marriage. No mortuary ceremonies are performed for them, partly because this would be inappropriate while one survived (Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer religion* [n. 75 above] 128-9).

Since the place of women on the monuments is mostly with their husbands, married twin women would not normally be shown together; only linguistic evidence would reveal their existence. Even if female twins were treated in a special way, there could therefore be many more shown than we could hope to identify.

to human beings. Arguments of this sort are extremely uncertain, but are worth mentioning because of the analogy with other divine treatments of twins, of which the best known is perhaps that of the Nuer⁷⁸. Nuer say that "twins are birds", and that, like birds, they belong in the realm of "spirit" or God, to which they return when they die. Infant twins are not buried but placed in the fork of a tree, while adult twins are given a special burial mimicking the tree disposal. These features are suggestive in relation to the Egyptian material, particularly in view of the exceptional passage of Ni'ankhkhnum and Khnumhotpe into the afterlife (III above), but there is no close general correspondence. If the Egyptians celebrated the status of some twins, a comparable model of liminal beings, whose only way of stepping outside the normal social sphere may be to move towards the divine, might have been used. The divine symbolism of Nuer twins is, however, stronger.

A better approach is probably to see twins as an anomaly in the order of the world which is honoured when approached positively, but still requires symbolic correction in order to be acceptable. The Egyptian solution of making the twins a single social person is paralleled among the Nuer, where this status is explicitly formulated in these terms⁷⁹.

Nuer twins are anomalous and auspicious, but the idea that human beings are set off from the rest of creation by their single births, so that multiple births are a monstrosity, is widely reported (cf. n. 76 above). The Egyptians could have had such a belief, and there may be a specifically Egyptian reason why this dilemma of single/dual should need to be overcome. Here the naming of Suty and Hor is relevant. By alluding to

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 128-33 (much later discussion, bibliography: T. O. Beidelman, *History of Religions* 21 [1981] 136 nn. 47-8). Evans-Pritchard was able to provide a satisfactory analysis of the statement that "twins are birds", but he did not give a specific explanation of the "divine" character of twins. Again the model of a liminal being seems possible, but I know of no evidence to support it.

Here note again the representation of Shu and Tefenet as *bt*-birds (n. 64 above); this can surely be no more than coincidence, and the *bt* is a separate and significant phenomenon in itself.

From modern Egypt note the belief that the souls of twins who have survived infancy may leave their bodies at night and enter into those of cats: W. S. Blackman, *The fellāhīn of Upper Egypt* (London etc. 1927) 89; for the *ukht* "sister" as a cat see p. 75. Comparison with cats is generally favourable, p. 220. Samia al-Azharia Jahn, "Zwillinge und ihr tiergestaltiges alter ego im Volksglauben der Sudanaraber und Nubier", *Paideuma* 25 (1979) 159-72, provides valuable contemporary ethnographic data on this and related beliefs, which she says are richer and more various nearer to Egypt.

⁷⁹ Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer religion* 128-9 (*ran* in Nuer). There is no single Egyptian term for "person", but this does not mean that the concept, or a similar one, was absent: cf. J. Assmann, "Persönlichkeitsbegriff und -bewusstsein", *LA* 4 (1982) 963-78. See also the famous essay of M. Mauss, "Une catégorie de l'esprit humain: la notion de personne, celle de moi" (1938; reprinted in *Sociologie et anthropologie* [Bibl. de sociologie contemporaine; Paris 1950, and later editions] 333-62).

Seth and Horus this refers to the chief case in the ordered world where a duality is a source of continuing tension and is not resolved into a unity, Seth being also the general symbol of anomaly in creation⁸⁰. Otherwise, all significant unities are composed of dualities: in the well-known formulation, the world before creation is the world before there were "two things"⁸¹. But most other dualities, such as the "two lands" and so forth, present themselves as unities, not as pairs, unless they are secondary pairs⁸². Twins might present an incompletely formed unity or an excess over a unity, but either way they contradict unity. Both Seth and Horus and Shu and Tefenet are acceptable resolutions of similar contradictions because they are in the divine world.

In earlier periods close identifications between humans and deities and the representation of deities in human contexts are not normal or perhaps permissible, and this is probably one reason why the Old and Middle Kingdom pairs do not seem to be assimilated to a myth; instead, they are fused in presentation. This fusion operates on a different level from an assimilation, so that the two are able to come together in the case of Suty and Hor, who both point to the anomaly of twins in their naming and resolve it in their fusion of roles. After the New Kingdom the increasingly negative attitude to Seth would probably have excluded this particular assimilation.

It is impossible to establish why an unmarked treatment of twins developed in the late period, in contrast with the general increase in evidence for taboo and similar practices at the time. Foreign influence, such as Kushite, cannot be discounted, but nothing points towards it. It is equally possible that attitudes to anomaly in creation changed and that, for example, favourable analogies for multiple birth came to be preferred. These could relate in turn to more general attitudes to childbirth. All these areas are very little studied, and the earlier evidence relating to them is more abundant and better known. Even in a society such as the Yoruba, where the material is much more accessible (n. 44 above), such change is very difficult to explain satisfactorily.

⁸⁰ H. te Velde, *Seth, god of confusion* (PÄ 6; Leiden 1967).

⁸¹ E.g. E. Hornung, *Der Eine und die Vielen* (Darmstadt 1971) 170-1 = *Conceptions of god in ancient Egypt* (Ithaca/London 1982) 175-6. In creation, the first "two things" are Shu and Tefenet, who are therefore a powerful symbol of duality. In the case of Suty and Hor, however, unlike sex excludes the use of Shu and Tefenet as a model for the human twins; see also n. 60 above.

⁸² The splitting of deities according to the two halves of the country is relevant here, cf. E. Otto, "Die Lehre von den beiden Ländern Ägyptens in der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte", in *Studia Aegyptiaca* 1 (AnOr 17; Roma 1938) 10-35. In their position as the first differentiated beings of creation, Shu and Tefenet are not relevant here.

Finally, the cross-cultural materials I have cited deserve a brief comment. These do not do more than indicate that twins may — or may not — be the object of special beliefs and observances, and suggest how wide the range of possible attitudes is. The Egyptian evidence must be studied within Egyptian culture and its elucidation be sought there. No significant cross-cultural pattern emerges and, with such possibilities as the creation of twins by substitution or adoption, the phenomenon itself may not always be simply defined⁸³.

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⁸³ For Nuer substitution see n. 46 above. These possibilities are mentioned chiefly out of caution, but the “twinning” of Ptolemy VI and the Apis is an example of how the category may be mythically defined. It could also have a purely social definition within human society.

[POSTSCRIPT. I have not had access to R. Kuntzmann, *Le symbolisme des jumeaux au Proche-Orient ancien* (Beauchesne Religion 12; Paris 1983), which explores themes related to those of this article for the ancient Near East; for an abstract see J. W. Rogerson, *Society for Old Testament Study Booklist* 1985, 108.]
