

The Reception of a Middle Egyptian Poem: *The Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All* in the Ramesside Period and Beyond

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It is difficult to assess the history of reception of Middle Egyptian literary works in later periods. The attempt is complicated by the high degree of continuity in literary phraseology, with the inevitable possibility that textual and thematic parallels may represent recurrent clichés, rather than a meaningful link between specific texts. I have attempted elsewhere to provide an overview of the evidence for the reception within Ancient Egyptian culture of one particular Middle Egyptian literary text, the *Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All*.¹ It is a great pleasure to dedicate the following further comments on *Ipuwer's* reception, in the Ramesside period and beyond, to Prof. Kitchen, who has done so much to advance the study of the texts of that period and others.

Ipuwer and a New Kingdom prayer to Amun

It has recently been suggested² that a passage in a fragmentary literary Late Egyptian prayer to Amun (labelled as *Utilité d'un protecteur divin* by G. Posener³) refers to *Ipuwer*. This text is partially preserved in two copies on two Ramesside ostraca, at least one of which comes from Deir el-Medina.⁴

O. Gardiner 304, vso 14–15 + O. DeM 1645, rto 5–6⁵

[... ...]šꜣ[...] m pꜣ-šwꜣ [...]
mk-sw m-nb-ḥꜣw
ḥr-pꜣ[... ...]

¹ The references to the text of *Ipuwer* in this paper follow the new edition of R. Enmarch, *The Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All* (Oxford, 2005). Interpretative questions, including those of reception, are addressed in R. Enmarch, *A World Upturned: Commentary and Analysis of The Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All* (British Academy Postdoctoral Monograph Series; Oxford, 2008).

² M. V. Panov, in his review of Enmarch, *Dialogue of Ipuwer*, available online: <<http://www.egyptology.ru/annotations/Enmarch.pdf>> accessed 01.01.2007.

³ G. Posener, *Catalogue des ostraca hiéroglyphiques littéraires de Deir el Médineh*, III/3: Nos 1607–1675 (DFIFAO 20/3; Cairo, 1980), 91.

⁴ Composite edition: H.-W. Fischer-Elfert, *Lesefunde im literarischen Steinbruch von Deir el-Medineh* (KÄT 12; Wiesbaden, 1997), 126–39, with references. See also H.-W. Fischer-Elfert, *Die Lehre eines Mannes für seinen Sohn: Eine Etappe auf dem 'Gottesweg' des loyalen und solidarischen Beamten des Mittleren Reiches* (ÄA 60; Wiesbaden, 1999), 72 n. e.

⁵ Fischer-Elfert, *Lesefunde*, 127–8, verses 28–9.

[... ...] who began [...] as the poor person [...],⁶
 Look, he is the owner of riches.
 Now, the [... ...]

The speaker apparently praises the power of Amun to elevate the status of the lowly man who believes in him. The social inversion depicted here, with its ‘then–now’ contrast, is identified by M. V. Panov as an allusion to *Ipuwer* 2.4–5:

jw-ms-šwʒw-hpr m-nbw-špssw
tm-jr-n.f tbtj m-nb-ḥʿw

O, yet the poor have become the owners of riches;
 he who could not make for himself sandals is the owner of wealth.

This suggestion is problematic, not least because both copies of the *Utilité d’un protecteur divin* are damaged at the passage in question, with the breaks being of uncertain length, so that other reconstructions of the passage are imaginable. Moreover, although the prayer does mobilise similar vocabulary to that in *Ipuwer*, the passage is too short, and the similarities too vague, to posit a direct textual relationship. More importantly, although both the text passages quoted display the same ‘then–now’ schematic social inversion, they are opposite in sense: where *Ipuwer* laments this social inversion, the *Utilité d’un protecteur divin* apparently praises the ability of Amun to transform the status of his believers. As H.-W. Fischer-Elfert points out, the passage quoted from the prayer can therefore be rather more directly compared to the loyalistic eulogy to the socially transformative power of the king in *The Teaching of a Man for his Son* 4.5–6:⁷

šw m-hrt m-nb-ḥʿw
ʿnd m-nb-hnw


One devoid of property is (now) a possessor of wealth;
 one who had few⁸ is (now) owner of dependents.

Further illustration of the complexity of the literary associations of the *Utilité d’un protecteur divin* is to be found in another passage from it, which vividly describes how Amun saves the believer from the dangers of crocodile attack:

O. Gardiner 304, vso 4–7⁹

ʒh-sw r-jb-mnh hr-mʒst-hntj
tʒjj-dpjjw dpw-rʒ rʒw:sn-wn
kʒp:n m-hnw:f
nn-snd:j-n:w ...


He (i.e. Amun) is more beneficial than an effective refuge on the sandbanks of Khenty,
 seizing the crocodiles, and the ‘biters’(?),¹⁰ when their mouths are open;

⁶ It is possible that no word is lost between *šʒʿ* and *m*; Panov suggests restoring *šʒʿ[... hpr] m pʒ šwʒ*. Fischer-Elfert, *Lesefunde*, 130 and 137 n. 28 suggests ‘Not’, or ‘Armut’, for *šwʒ*, but the determinative  suggests otherwise.

⁷ Fischer-Elfert, *Lehre eines Mannes*, 72–3.

⁸ Assuming an elliptical phrase, ‘he who was few (of underlings) is now ...’; one manuscript has *ʿnd-tʒ* ‘he who had little land’, see Fischer-Elfert, *Lehre eines Mannes*, 73 n. f.

⁹ Fischer-Elfert, *Lesefunde*, 126–7, verses 11–14.

¹⁰ The context and determinative suggest that the otherwise unattested  is a term for crocodiles; the *dpw* in *dpw-rʒ* probably derives from the root *dp* ‘to taste, experience’ (*Wb.* V, 443.7), and W. Guglielmi and J. Dittmar, ‘Anrufungen der persönlichen Frömmigkeit auf Gans- und Widder-Darstellungen des Amun’, in I. Gamer-Wallert and W. Helck (eds), *Gegengabe*:



let us take cover within it/him (i.e. the refuge),
I shall not fear them ...

It is likely that the crocodile imagery used in this passage is a metaphor for the inimical behaviour (perhaps evil speech?) of other human beings, who are elsewhere in the prayer likened to lions.¹¹ The evocation of the dangers of crocodile attack is a well established topos already in Middle Egyptian literature,¹² not only in a literal sense, but also, as apparently in the prayer, as a metaphor for inimical human activity.¹³ The mention of Khenty, the fearsome crocodilian god of death, is also redolent of Middle Egyptian literature; he is mentioned, amongst other places, in *Ipuwer* 5.8,¹⁴ and the whole tenor of the Ramesside prayer to Amun is somewhat reminiscent of *Ipuwer* 2.12–13:

jw-ms-mšhw [hr(?)]-šff(t) n-jt.n:sn
šm-n:sn rmtw ds-jrj
ḥd-pw n-tʔ(?)
dd.tw-m-dgs ʔ
mk-sj <m>-šnw
mk-ḥnd:tw-šht mj-rmw ...
n-tnj-sw sndw m-ᶜ-ḥrjt-jb

O, yet the crocodiles gorge, but do not seize,
(for) men go to them themselves.
It is the destruction of the land(?),
(since) one says, ‘Don’t tread here;
Look it’s a net!’
Look, one (still) treads on the trap like fish ... ;
the fearful man could not distinguish it because of heart’s terror.

However, the *Utilité d’un protecteur divin* also has parallels in several other Middle Egyptian poems; for example, crocodiles lurking on the riverbank waiting to opportunistically attack are evoked in *The Teaching for Merikare* (E97–8)¹⁵ and *Khety (The Satire of the Trades)* (21d–f).¹⁶ Similarly, in the first parable of the Ba in *The Dialogue of a Man with his Ba* (74–5),¹⁷ crocodiles basking on the bank devour the wife and children of an unfortunate commoner, who then laments that they ‘saw the face of Khenty before they had lived’ (79–80). A closer parallel still is provided by *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*, where

Festschrift für Emma Brunner-Traut (Tübingen, 1992), 40 n. 73 accordingly translate ‘diejenigen, deren Mund man “kostet” (zu spüren bekommt?)’. The phrase is perhaps related to  *jr-dpt-rʔ* ‘to take a mouthful’ attested in P. Ebers, see H. von Deines and W. Westendorf, *Wörterbuch der medizinischen Texte: Zweite Hälfte (h-d)* (Grundriss der Medizin der Alten Ägypter VII.2; Berlin, 1962), 977. P. Ebers also contains what may be an unetymological writing of the same phrase in a more crocodilian context,  *tp-rʔ n-mšh* ‘crocodile bite’: see von Deines and Westendorf, *Wörterbuch*, 947.

¹¹ See Fischer-Elfert, *Lesefunde*, 134 n. 12 and 138 n. 69.

¹² See e.g. C. J. Eyre, ‘Fate, Crocodiles and the Judgement of the Dead: Some Mythological Allusions in Egyptian Literature’, *SAK* 4 (1976), 103–14; G. Moers, *Fingierte Welten der ägyptischen Literatur des 2. Jahrtausends v. Chr. Grenzüberschreitung, Reise-motiv und Fiktionalität* (PdÄ 19; Leiden, 2001), 202–11.

¹³ R. B. Parkinson, ‘“No One is Free from Enemies”: Voicing Opposition in Literary Discourse’, in H. Felber (ed.), *Feinde und Auführer: Konzepte von Gegnerschaft in ägyptischen Texten besonders des Mittleren Reiches* (ASAW 78/5; Leipzig, 2005), 18–19.

¹⁴ This passage in *Ipuwer* in fact juxtaposes the lion and Khenty as inimical forces, just as the *Utilité d’un protecteur divin* does. For Khenty, see C. Leitz, *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen*, V (OLA 114; Leuven, 2002), 936.

¹⁵ Edition: J. F. Quack, *Studien zur Lehre für Merikare* (GOF IV/23; Wiesbaden, 1992).

¹⁶ Edition: W. Helck, *Die Lehre des Dwʔ-Htj* (Wiesbaden, 1970).

¹⁷ Edition: R. O. Faulkner, ‘The Man who was Tired of Life’, *JEA* 42 (1956), 22–6.

shelters (*jbw*, the same word used in the Ramesside prayer to Amun)¹⁸ are several times mentioned as being ineffectual against crocodiles (B1 160–1; B1 209–10; similarly B1 254; see also B1 327–9).¹⁹

It is not the case, however, that the New Kingdom prayer is evoking a specifically Middle Egyptian literary topos, since the threat from crocodiles remained current as a productive literary motif in other New Kingdom compositions, as is amply demonstrated by Fischer-Elfert in his commentary on this prayer.²⁰ Links are also present with royal ideological discourse, where the king can be described as a ‘crocodile on the sandbank’ attacking his (or her) enemies mercilessly (cf. *Wb.* V, 447.16); most explicitly relevant to the Amun prayer is Hatshepsut’s description of herself in the Red Chapel at Karnak as ‘a concealed one, a crocodile, a raiser of shadows, one who is concealed within the shelter (*jbw*)’.²¹

This complex web of intertextual connections that can be demonstrated for the *Utilité d’un protecteur divin* makes it impossible to confidently identify specific allusions to any particular Middle Egyptian text, let alone *Ipuwer*. The prayer is best characterised instead as deeply steeped in both Middle and New Kingdom Egyptian literary tradition, and makes creative reuse of the vocabulary and topos of both.

Ipuwer and modern literature

Notwithstanding the comparative lack of evidence for the reception of *Ipuwer* in antiquity, the poem has had a significant impact on modern audiences. Although the most detailed engagement with the text has been academic, the poem has also been used by a number of more widely known authors.

A. Erman’s summary and translation of *Ipuwer*²² filtered into 1920s and 1930s German political discourse, and the poem’s depictions of social inversion (particularly *Ipuwer* 2.7–8 and 6.7–8) were held up as an early and deplorable example of social revolution by the anti-Marxist historians and cultural commentators, Hans Delbrück and Karl Jaspers.²³ Interestingly, this reading of the poem was followed closely by the German Egyptologist Joachim Spiegel in his 1950 study.²⁴ An exactly opposite, and Marxist, reading of the same passages of *Ipuwer* was offered by the German playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) in an article entitled ‘Fünf Schwierigkeiten beim Schreiben der Wahrheit’²⁵ published in 1935 in the clandestine antifascist magazine *Unsere Zeit*.²⁶ He interpreted the passages from *Ipuwer* describing social inversion as a speech, ostensibly lamenting social revolution, but subversively encouraging it through subtle and ambiguous wording. Subsequently Brecht incorporated a larger number (nine passages) of *Ipuwer*’s social reversal laments into a speech in his widely known play *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis*, first performed in 1948.²⁷ He removed the repeated refrains that introduce each passage in *Ipuwer*, and

¹⁸ Cf. Moers, *Fingierte Welten*, 205–6.

¹⁹ See Parkinson, in Felber (ed.), *Feinde und Aufrührer*, 19.

²⁰ Fischer-Elfert, *Lesefunde*, 134–5 notes further parallels in New Kingdom love songs, Late Egyptian Miscellanies, other New Kingdom hymns to Amun, and in the *Teaching of Amenemope*. Guglielmi and Dittmar, in Gamer-Wallert and Helck (eds), *Gegengabe*, 139–41 provide further New Kingdom parallels.

²¹ P. Lacau and H. Chevrier, *Une chapelle d’Hatshepsout à Karnak*, I (Cairo, 1977), 150.8. I am grateful to Angela McDonald for drawing this passage to my attention: see A. McDonald, *Animal Metaphor in the Egyptian Determinative System*, DPhil. thesis, Oxford University, Oxford, 2003.

²² A. Erman, ‘Die Mahnworte eines ägyptischen Propheten’, *SPAW* 1919.42 (1919), 804–15; A. Erman, *Die Literatur der Ägypter: Gedichte, Erzählungen und Lehrbücher aus dem 3. und 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Leipzig, 1923), 130–48.

²³ See R. Ley, ‘Brecht’s Methodology and the Admonitions of a Prophet’, *Comparative Literature* 18.4 (1966), 312–23.

²⁴ J. Spiegel, *Soziale und weltanschauliche Reformbewegungen im alten Ägypten* (Heidelberg, 1950).

²⁵ Text: B. Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke: Schriften zur Literatur und Kunst*, II: 1934–1941 (Frankfurt am Main, 1967), 11–34.

²⁶ S. Wenig, ‘Bertolt Brecht und das alte Ägypten’, *ZÄS* 96 (1969), 64.

²⁷ Text: B. Brecht, *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis* (Berlin, 1954), 80; see also J. Assmann, *Ägypten: Eine Sinngeschichte* (Munich, 1996), 127.

reordered the material,²⁸ but otherwise altered Erman's translation little. He interpreted these passages in the same fashion as his earlier essay, turning them into a chaos song in the mouth of a character named Azdak, one of the play's heroes, who declaims them in covert praise of a failed revolt.²⁹

In a less overtly politicised context, the German novelist and essayist Thomas Mann (1875–1955) apparently referred to *Ipuwer* in his tetralogy of novels *Joseph und seine Brüder* (Berlin and Stockholm, 1933–43). Mann probably also used as his source Erman's 1923 translation,³⁰ or possibly a description of the poem by J. H. Breasted.³¹ In the third novel in the sequence, *Joseph in Ägypten*, there is a description of the Egyptian official Potiphar's library, which includes a pessimistic prophetic book that says 'daß die Reichen arm und die Armen reich sein würden'; this may be a loose quotation of *Ipuwer* 2.7. Potiphar is entranced by this work, listening to it repeatedly

perhaps only for the shudder which he might enjoy while reflecting that the rich were still rich and the poor still poor, and that they would remain so if one avoided disorder and sacrificed to the gods.³²

Later in the novel, Joseph meets Amenhotep IV to interpret his dreams, and the young king also dismissively quotes some hackneyed dire prophetic warnings; these are drawn mostly from the laments of *Neferti*, though some probably come from *Ipuwer*.³³

The early works of the Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz (1911–2006) include stories and novels drawn from Ancient Egyptian history and literature,³⁴ inspired by a children's book on Ancient Egypt.³⁵ One of his earlier works, *Khufu's Wisdom*,³⁶ is set in Khufu's court and centres on the royal succession, drawing extensively from *P. Westcar*. One of its minor characters is 'His Highness Prince Ipuwer, Governor of the Arsina Nome', who arrives from the Eastern Delta frontier to inform the king that tribes of Sinai are harrasing his territory.³⁷ This probably derives from the descriptions of foreign encroachment in *Ipuwer*. There is no mention of *Ipuwer* in Baikie, *Ancient Egypt*, and so it is not clear where Mahfouz read about the poem. The governorship of Arsina apparently refers to Harsina, the Hebrew for Mt. Sinai.³⁸

More recently, the name 'Ipuwer' has also been used for other characters in historical novels set in Ancient Egypt,³⁹ though not usually with any discernable connection to the Middle Egyptian poem.

Ipuwer, the Exodus, and the Thera eruption

The broadest modern reception of *Ipuwer* amongst non-Egyptological readers has probably been as

²⁸ The speech in Brecht's play is comprised of the following extracts of *Ipuwer*, in order: 2.7–8; 6.7–8; 4.8–9; 3.4–5; 9.4; 2.14; 7.10; 7.12; 10.2–3.

²⁹ Ley, *Comparative Literature* 18.4 (1966), 320–1; Wenig, *ZÄS* 96 (1969), 65.

³⁰ E. Blumenthal, 'Thomas Manns *Joseph* und die ägyptische Literatur', in E. Staehelin and B. Jaeger (eds), *Ägypten-Bilder: Akten des 'Sympions zur Ägypten-Rezeption', Augst bei Basel, vom 9.–11. September 1993* (OBO 150; Göttingen, 1997), 314.

³¹ J. H. Breasted, *Geschichte Ägyptens*, tr. H. Ranke (Berlin, 1910), 186–7; see A. Baskakov, 'Die Bibliothek eines ägyptischen Hofbeamten, wie Thomas Mann sie sich vorstellte', *LingAeg* 2 (1992), 6–7.

³² T. Mann, *Joseph and his Brothers*, tr. H. T. Lowe-Porter (London, 1970), 610–11. German text: T. Mann, *Gesammelte Werke. Joseph und seine Brüder*, III: *Joseph in Ägypten* (Frankfurt am Main, 1983), 255–6; see also Enmarch, *A World Upturned*, 63–4.

³³ See Baskakov, *LingAeg* 2, 11; one of the prophetic warnings Amenhotep IV cites, 'the King is taken and snatched away', is probably a reference to *Ipuwer* 7.1–2.

³⁴ See e.g. N. Mahfouz, *Voices from the Other World. Ancient Egyptian Tales*, tr. R. Stock (Cairo, 2002), originally published 1936–45.

³⁵ J. Baikie, *Ancient Egypt* (London, 1912).

³⁶ N. Mahfouz, *Khufu's Wisdom*, tr. R. Stock (Cairo, 2003), originally published in 1939.

³⁷ Mahfouz, *Khufu's Wisdom*, 97.

³⁸ See the glossary by R. Stock in Mahfouz, *Khufu's Wisdom*.

³⁹ E.g. M. George, *The Memoirs of Cleopatra* (London, 1997); P. Doherty, *The Mask of Ra* (London, 1998).

a result of the use of the poem as evidence supporting the Biblical account of the Exodus.⁴⁰ This arises from some of the poem's descriptions of suffering, particularly the striking statement that 'the river is blood and one drinks from it' (*Ipuwer* 2.10), and the frequent references to servants abandoning their subordinate status (e.g. *Ipuwer* 3.14–4.1; 6.7–8; 10.2–3). On a literal reading, these are similar to aspects of the Exodus account. A popular extension of this analysis is the suggestion that *Ipuwer's* laments, and the *Exodus* plagues, are both witnesses to natural phenomena resulting from the volcanic eruption of Santorini/Thera.⁴¹

Immanuel Velikovsky's bestselling *Ages in Chaos* (London, 1952), took a slightly different approach, and proposed fixing the events of both *Ipuwer* and *Exodus* in a historical context by radically revising ancient chronology and linking them to a worldwide catastrophe caused by planetary motions. Velikovsky quoted extensively from *Ipuwer*,⁴² arguing that it was an eyewitness account to these events, and his book gave rise to a voluminous literature in revisionist catastrophism.⁴³

Apart from any possible objection that may be made to these analyses on the basis of chronology, and in the case of Velikovsky's work on grounds of physical impossibility,⁴⁴ it is noteworthy that all these approaches read *Ipuwer* hyper-literally and selectively. Even if a literal interpretation of *Ipuwer* as an eyewitness account of historical events were to be accepted, several of the its laments would contradict the Biblical account, and imply that they described different occasions. For example, the Egyptian poem actually laments the invasion of Asiatics (e.g. *Ipuwer* 1.9; 2.2; 3.1; 3.1–2; 4.6–7), rather than their large-scale emigration.

However, it is more likely that *Ipuwer* is not a piece of historical reportage,⁴⁵ and that historicising interpretations of it fail to account for the ahistorical, schematic literary nature of some of the poem's laments. *Ipuwer* is comparatively lacking in specific historical data: it contains no preserved historical setting, no kings' names, very few and generalised toponyms and ethnonyms. The majority of its laments are timeless portrayals of a world turned on its head; even those which conceivably might refer to specific events (e.g. rebellion against the king, and despoiling royal tombs: *Ipuwer* 7.1–4) are presented in vague terms, and such activities are likely to have happened numerous times in Egyptian history. For these reasons, attempts to link the poem to a historical event that might also be recorded in *Exodus* are unconvincing. The same is true of attempts to identify the impact of the Thera eruption in the poem's laments.

Consider the most extensively posited parallel between *Ipuwer* and *Exodus*: the river becoming blood. This image cannot to be taken absolutely literally as a description of a historical occurrence. One possible metaphorical interpretation is that both *Ipuwer* and *Exodus* may refer to the appearance of the River

⁴⁰ Numerous online examples, e.g. from a Jewish perspective M. Becher, *The Ten Plagues – Live from Egypt*, <<http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/838>> accessed 01.01.2007. Similar interpretations are also found from the Christian perspective: J. Lloyd, *Escape from Planet Egypt – Part 2*, <<http://www.christianmediaresearch.com/cmc-47.html>> accessed 01.01.2007; also from an Islamic perspective: H. Yahya, *The Historical Miracles of the Qur'an: The Troubles which Afflicted Pharaoh and Those about him*, <http://www.miraclesoftheguran.com/historical_03.html> accessed 01.01.2007.

⁴¹ A recent example: S. Trevisanato, *The Plagues of Egypt: Archaeology, History and Science Look at the Bible* (Piscataway, 2005), esp. 20, 135–6.

⁴² I. Velikovsky, *Ages in Chaos*, 18–52. His renderings of the text are based on those of A. H. Gardiner, *The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage, from a Hieratic Papyrus in Leiden (Pap. Leiden 344 recto)* (Leipzig, 1909).

⁴³ For which, see e.g. M. Lowery, 'Dating the "Admonitions": Advance Report', *Society for Interdisciplinary Studies Review* 2.3 (1977–8), 54–7; M. Lowery, 'A Response to Forrest', *Society for Interdisciplinary Studies Review* 6.4 (1981–2), 112–13.

⁴⁴ For a convincing rejection of the scientific aspects of Velikovsky's theories, see S. Dutch, *Velikovsky*, <<http://www.uwgb.edu/dutchs/pseudosc/vlkovsky.htm>> accessed 01.01.2007; for a convincing non-Egyptologist's critique of Velikovsky's use of *Ipuwer*, see R. Forrest, "'Papyrus Ipuwer" and *Worlds in Collision*', *Society for Interdisciplinary Studies Review* 6.4 (1981–2), 108–11.

⁴⁵ See Enmarch, *A World Upturned*, 19–20.

Nile in years of a disastrously high inundation, when the river is full of red earth washed down by the current.⁴⁶ The evocation of a destructive inundation would certainly sit well with the other laments in *Ipuwer*. As Prof. Kitchen has noted, *Ipuwer* and *Exodus* would both then refer to the same kind of natural phenomenon.⁴⁷ Because such inundations very probably occurred on numerous occasions over Egypt's history, it would not however be possible, on this basis alone, to identify the two texts as describing the same actual event. Moreover, other interpretations of the river becoming blood are possible: rather than searching for a physical explanation, it can be read as a horrific metaphor evoking pervasive violence. In this case, the lament in *Ipuwer* would not report a historical event, but instead would constitute a classic example of the 'inverted world' lament, where life-giving water has undergone the most dire change imaginable. Parallels for this are found in the *Aeneid*, and in the Late Antique hermetic tract the *Apocalypse of Asclepius*,⁴⁸ suggesting that the imagery may be more widespread, and therefore that it may be inappropriate to posit a specific link between two particular occurrences of it.

Ipuwer in the twenty-first century

The wide range of responses to *Ipuwer* in the last century in some ways mirrors the ongoing debate within Egyptology about the nature of Middle Egyptian literature.⁴⁹ The historicising approach of religious scholars, and Thera chronologists, reflects the earlier twentieth century Egyptological tendency to treat Middle Egyptian literary works as historical sources rather than literary works. The polarised political readings of Brecht and the Weimar historians are paralleled by the ongoing Egyptological debate about the social role played by Middle Egyptian literature, particularly the often drawn and overly reductive opposition between state propaganda and dissident literature. Mann's reference to the poem privileges its aesthetic aspects, with Potiphar listening in rapt attention to the poem's baroque descriptions of chaos, in a way that resembles a recent focus within Egyptology on pleasure, and enjoyment, as important factors in the production and reception of Middle Egyptian poetry. The theodic and dystopian aspects of the poem, much discussed by Egyptologists, have even in the twenty-first century been evoked in L. Santipriya, *The Ipuwer Chronicles. A Narrative Suite on Spiritual Warfare* (New York, 2005), a book which describes itself as 'an author biographical narrative ... capturing the psychological, spiritual and economic devastation of the Bush regime over the populace and intensifying with the Iraqi war'.

Ipuwer has clearly, therefore, retained in modernity some of the appeal that it must have had for its first audiences in antiquity, as well as gaining quite new horizons of meaning. As the preceding discussion has sought to demonstrate, while its discursive style perhaps renders *Ipuwer* less accessible to modern audiences than narratives like *Sinuhe*, the pessimistic tone and subject matter of the poem continue to provide material for an ongoing cultural dialogue.

⁴⁶ See K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Cambridge, 2003), 249–54, with references.

⁴⁷ Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 250–2.

⁴⁸ See Enmarch, *A World Upturned*, 28.

⁴⁹ For an extensive and detailed discussion of which, see R. B. Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt: A Dark Side to Perfection* (London, 2002).

