

WENAMUN AND HIS LEVANT – 1075 BC OR 925 BC?

By Benjamin Sass

The ‘Report of Wenamun’ is known from a single copy. Coming from an illicit excavation, reputedly at el-Hiba, the two-page papyrus was bought by Golenischeff in Cairo in the winter of 1891–92¹ and published by him a few years later (1897; 1899).² In 1909 it was acquired by the Russian government and is now in the Pushkin Museum, Moscow (inv. no. 120). The papyrus begins with an exact date at the 20th–21st dynasty transition. The text relates Wenamun’s voyage from Thebes to Tanis, the Levant, and perforce Alashia, and his misfortunes en route in that period of Egyptian decline. Two of the places in which the story unfolds are Dor, inhabited by one of the Sea Peoples, the Tjeker, and Byblos. Most authors consider the text to be incomplete.³ A jotting on the reverse of the papyrus still eludes full understanding.⁴

Scholarly assessment of the text varies. Not only did views on *Wenamun*’s nature oscillate – from literary to administrative and back to literary; opinions on its age, both the palaeographical dating of the writing down of the present copy and, more important, the linguistic dating of the composition, differ considerably. Likewise, the suggestions concerning the story’s purpose are diverse and contradictory.⁵

But as a literary text should not *Wenamun* have a discernible message, which in turn would reflect the circumstances of the age in which the text was composed? The question of the time of writing can perhaps be approached in this roundabout way. These were the thoughts that led me to the following lines,

in which I submit an alternative ‘when?’, ‘why?’ and ‘what Levant?’.⁶ Not an Egyptologist myself, I have been treading unfamiliar ground: My thesis hinges on the understanding that the range of *Wenamun*’s language is wide enough to include the early 22nd dynasty, a premise for which I can claim no expertise of my own. By following HELCK (see Section 2.1 and note 25) I hope to have overcome this; yet, as noted, views on *Wenamun* vary much.

1. FROM LITERARY TO ADMINISTRATIVE, AND BACK

Literary. Whereas Golenischeff thought it a true report, most authors after him, from MÜLLER (1900) onwards, considered *Wenamun* to be the literary reworking of an administrative report, if not a piece of fiction pure and simple.

Non-literary. A change came half a century after the discovery of the papyrus, when ČERNÝ (1952:21–22) raised two points in favour of an administrative document – the non-literary language and the direction of writing across the fibres. For several decades Černý had a large following, and as one result *Wenamun* was being cited by many as a primary historical source.

Literary after all. Not everyone was convinced by Černý’s points in the first place,⁷ and at least since HELCK 1986 these points were increasingly challenged: That the language of the story is, or – as many would have it – emulates, that of a Late Ramesside administrative text (HELCK 1986:1215, quoting ČERNÝ),

¹ The *Tale of Woe* and *Amenemope* are said to have belonged to the same lot (first mentioned in GOLENISCHEFF 1893:88). The circumstances of the discovery and subsequent history of the three papyri were summarized by CAMINOS (1977:1). Situated 50 km south of the Fayum, el-Hiba was an important centre during the Third Intermediate Period, the northernmost Theban-controlled city, and it continued in existence until the Coptic period (GRAEFE 1977; JANSSEN-WINKELN 2001, 156–157). From the New Kingdom only stray finds are known.

² For B/W Photographs see GOLENISCHEFF 1897 and KOROSTOVTSSEV 1960, a colour photograph in MATOIAN 1998:18.

³ HALLER (1999) differed.

⁴ GARDINER 1932:76; GOEDICKE 1975:8–9 with previous references; photographs in GOLENISCHEFF 1899:102; KOROSTOVTSSEV 1960:last (unnumbered) plate.

⁵ For additional bibliography see SWEENEY 2001:15, note 101, and the Munich University website, <http://www.aigyptos.uni-muenchen.de/lars/html/start.htm>.

⁶ My warm thanks go to Michael Birrell, Israel Finkelstein, Ayelet Gilboa, Deborah Sweeney and Stefan Wimmer, who kindly advised me on various points. GILBOA also gave me an advance copy of her paper with Ilan Sharon, (2001), and SWEENEY the section on *Wenamun*, when it was still in press, from the introduction of her 2001 book.

⁷ E.g. BLUMENTHAL 1973:11: “... one may doubt that Pap Moscow 120 is a copy of an authentic voyage report, ... which Wenamun had to submit to his superiors; the stylization after the model of ... stories of the Ramesside period and the artistic quality of the text suggest a composition with view of a literary public.”

should not mask *Wenamun's* literary nature. Weighing all characteristics and peculiarities of the text BAINES (1999:215–216 and *passim*) concluded that it is a “simulated report”.⁸ The non-literary language, as it were, is considered a literary device.

In this administrative-vs.-literary dispute it is also worthy of note that *Wenamun* reputedly formed part not of a ‘governmental’ archive, but rather of a small library (see note 1). Coming back finally to the direction of writing relative to the fibres of the papyrus – in an appendix BAINES (1999:232–233) has demonstrated how irrelevant for determining the genre of the text this particular point of ČERNÝ’s argumentation is.⁹

As noted, it was HELCK’s *Lexikon* article (1986) that tipped the scales back in the literary direction: in recent years most Egyptologists have come to regard *Wenamun* as a work of fiction, composed after the events it relates, its value as a historical source rather limited (see also end of Section 4). On the other hand students of the Ancient Near East and of Egypto-Levantine connections, thirsting as they are after every scrap of written information, often still treat *Wenamun* practically as a primary historical source of the late 20th dynasty.¹⁰

2. A PLETHORA OF OPINIONS

Any chronological discussion of *Wenamun* involves three dates:

- The time in which the story is set – the late 20th dynasty, mentioned in the papyrus.
- The time when the existing copy was written down – the dating of the script.
- The time when the text was composed – in agreement with the language.

⁸ See also BAINES 1999:212 on literary and non-literary texts employing narrative conventions.

⁹ “[Černý’s] description of the papyrus layout is misleading as it stands. ... The usage has parallels among literary as well as non-literary manuscripts, but it is not similar to that of normal business documents, still less to significant administrative pieces such as the tomb robbery papyri. ... The manner of inscription does not point to any particular genre for *Wenamun*.” All the same Černý’s authority remains such that the dispute has not yet been laid entirely to rest: BAINES (1999:note 81) listed three authors; others are mentioned in note 10 herein.

¹⁰ E.g. MAZAR 1992:305–306; KITCHEN 1996:XVI–XVII; MILLARD 1998:173, 176; YURCO 1999:719–720; WARD 1999:843; MARKOE 2000:*passim*; LEAHY 2001:260; WEINSTEIN 2001:286. The same may hold true for those interested in the early history of Tanis, e.g. BRISSAUD 1996:133–134.

The first of these is undisputed, whereas there is no agreement on the two latter dates among the authors who understand *Wenamun* as fiction.¹¹ As noted, there is likewise no consensus on the purpose of the story (see Section 2.2).

2.1 Published views on *Wenamun's* date

Palaeography is helpful to a limited extent; it may date the writing down of the Golenischeff copy, but as to the composition of *Wenamun*, it can furnish only a *terminus ad quem*:

	21 st dynasty	22 nd dynasty
MÖLLER (1909:29)		+
Wb. ¹²	+	+
GARDINER (1932:XII) ¹³	+	?
CAMINOS (1977:3) ¹⁴	+	+
BAINES (1999:210)	+	+

The following are some views on when *Wenamun* was composed:

	20 th dynasty	21 st dynasty	22 nd dynasty
GARDINER	late (1947:28)	early (1932:XI)	
HELCK (1986:1216) ¹⁵			early
WINAND (1992: <i>passim</i>)		+	
ASSMANN	late (1996:78)	+ (1991:311)	
JANSEN-WINKELN 1994:264 ¹⁶		+	(+)
EYRE (1996:432)	late		
BAINES (1999:211) ¹⁷		not early	
EGBERTS 2001:495		“presumably early”	
QUACK 2001:172		late	
MOERS 2001:263	late	late	

¹¹ For those still regarding *Wenamun* as a true report the language and the late 20th dynasty date obviously coincide.

¹² In the *Wb.* the “Petersb Lit Brief”, i.e. *Tale of Woe*, is alternately dated to the 21st and 22nd dynasty. By extension this refers to *Wenamun* (cf. CAMINOS 1977:4, note 1, as well as note 14 herein).

¹³ “The handwriting is clear and fine, abounding in those superfluous dots and dashes which become frequent only after the close of Dyn. XX.”

¹⁴ On the *Tale of Woe*: “The script is post Ramesside, ... sometime during the Twenty-first Dynasty, though strictly from the palaeographical standpoint ... the Twenty-second Dynasty cannot wholly be ruled out.” CAMINOS (*loc. cit.*) went on to say that “There is ... great calligraphic affinity” between the *Tale of Woe*, *Amenemope* and *Wenamun*, and that “the three texts are ... very much of the same age.”

Is the above variety of opinions on *Wenamun's* date due to considerations other than linguistic, not always specified? For evidently the language permits a certain time-range (see further note 25). In such an event what might point to a more exact date is *Wenamun's* message, likely to be tailored to the circumstances of its day. I begin with some of the published opinions.

2.2 Published views on *Wenamun's* purpose, or message

As *Wenamun* has no express message,¹⁸ the views on what it must have been (or on its absence) vary widely. The following sample is arranged by year of publication.

1. Entertainment; no message (BLUMENTHAL 1973:16).
2. “An illustration of Amun’s might beyond the borders of Egypt” (HELCK 1986:1216).
3. “A satire that shows Amun’s claimed power is null” (OSING 1987:39, paraphrased in BAINES 1999:230).
4. A means to examine the Egyptians’ self-perception by way of the numen ‘foreign lands’, a purpose common to most Egyptian travel stories (MOERS 1995:913).
5. Dissidence; Theban anti-Tanite polemic of the late 20th dynasty (EYRE 1996:432).
6. “... to show that human beings cannot serve Amun as befits him” (BAINES 1999:230).
7. “Some devaluation of kingly status... is pertinent to the text’s period of origin” (*ibid.*:note 68).

These seven views are examined next by subject, with the above ordinals in brackets.

The attitude towards royalty

(5) *Eyre*: The title-less reference to Herihor, and Smendes and his queen, was assumed to signify Theban dissidence and anti-Tanite polemic at the time of the late 20th dynasty.¹⁹ But an unorthodox picture of kingship (elsewhere also of the gods) is not unique to *Wenamun*; it is the rule in Late Egyptian tales (see note 21). Moreover – see Section 3 – this is only one of the story’s motifs, probably not even the main one.

(7) BAINES (1999:note 68) saw this demonstration of disrespect in a different light – it should indicate that *Wenamun* was composed in the mid to late 21st dynasty (see note 17), when the said royals were already considered passé. On the later composition I could not agree more, yet my dating and its rationale differ from those of BAINES (see Sections 3, 4).

The role of Amun

(2) *Helck*: Whereas I generally follow him here, HELCK’s assertion that the text’s message was “Amun’s might beyond the borders of Egypt”²⁰ is untenable. What resonates through the ‘Misfortunes of *Wenamun*’ is plainly Egypt’s international *weakness* – I return to this issue in Sections 3 and 4 – which cannot but reflect on the status of the deity.

(3) *Osing*, like nearly everyone before him, came to the opposite conclusion – that Amun’s power as claimed by *Wenamun* is null in the real world, certainly outside Egypt. He regarded this motif in the story as satire, yet at most this is part of the picture (see point 5 above).

(6) BAINES (1999:230), on the other hand, assumed the message of the same motif was “... to show that human beings cannot serve Amun as

¹⁵ “The ‘Report of *Wenamun*’ ..., written in the 22nd dynasty, takes a time some 150 years earlier as its setting.” A different approach led GREEN (1986:note 5 and *passim*) to a similar view. See also notes 25 and 27 herein.

¹⁶ “Dynasty 21 (–22)”.

¹⁷ “I would place the composition in the 21st dynasty, probably not very near to the imagined historical context. A date after the reign of Smendes seems most plausible, since the latter is neither mentioned as king nor given a salient or particularly respectful treatment. *Wenamun's* leaving his credentials at Tanis with Smendes and Tentamun also fits best with the 21st dynasty, when the country was formally divided politically so that the northern leaders might require some token to be deposited with them.”

¹⁸ The trend is general: “For Late Egyptian stories the interpreters take a moral for granted, one that need not be stated explicitly. It is only the definition of such a moral that is disputed. For not always does the pedagogical intent reveal itself clearly...” (BLUMENTHAL 1973:15).

¹⁹ “In the extreme the romance can be dissident. For instance, in the late Dyn. XX Story of *Wenamun*, the contemporary king and his dynasty are dismissed contemptuously as merely human – a polemic in justification of the political independence of the Theban regime and the priesthood of Amun at that date.” (EYRE 1996:432).

²⁰ Similarly EGBERTS 2001:496.

befits him". I agree with this, and in the next section propose to take it a step further.

Other

(4) *Moers*' 'self-perception' point is plainly pertinent, as shown long ago by BLUMENTHAL (1973:11–12), among others. Yet in *Wenamun* it is probably not a main motif, and more a means than an end (see below).

(1) *Blumenthal*: I am coming finally to *Wenamun*'s fitting classification as *Unterhaltungsliteratur*. The text clearly abounds in ironical, indeed burlesque traits. But these are not unique to *Wenamun*; they are shared by the entire genre,²¹ while obviously absent from official inscriptions. BLUMENTHAL (1973:note 142, citing Posener) underlined "the uniformly unorthodox picture of the king and also of the gods sketched by the texts", and the "renunciation of ideological obligation" (*ibid.*:16). But I find it hard to subscribe to Blumenthal's view of most Late Egyptian stories as entertainment *pur*, i.e. devoid of any message – see Section 5 and Appendix.

Not all of these seven goals, or messages, befit *Wenamun*'s genre,²² or a specific, suitable point in time; some even clash with one or more of the story's components. Any alternative to the above – assuming as I do that *Wenamun* carried a message after all – will have to take into account that the moral of Egyptian stories is as a rule implicit (see note 18), with the resulting hazard of circular reasoning (BLUMENTHAL 1998:175). If because of this impediment we shall never know with certainty whether any inferred message is indeed the one the author or his patron aimed at, I hope that the message proposed for *Wenamun* below at least meets the following requirements:

- To be reasonably evident in the story.
- Not to contradict any component of the story.
- To fit the story whether its end, presumed missing, was a happy one or not.

- To match the circumstances of a particular point in time.
- Not to contradict the genre.

3. The message

The story has two long-recognized main motifs – the eternal power of Amun and Egypt's weakness abroad. It was in fact this latter intriguing leitmotif, reverberating as it were through the 'Misfortunes of *Wenamun*', that initially kindled my interest: What led the novelist to dilute the 'good' theme of Amun's power by confronting it with the 'bad' motif of Egypt's late 20th dynasty weakness? I think that from the tension between these two arises a clear message:

When Egypt is weak, human beings cannot serve Amun as befits him.

This is Baines' wording (cf. point 6 above), augmented slightly. Now most authors who referred to *Wenamun*'s motif of Egyptian weakness founded their conclusions from it on the assumption that the story was composed in the course of this period of weakness, in the late 20th or 21st dynasty. This is not obvious: As HELCK and several others have pointed out, Egyptian literature is hardly ever set in its own day.²³ Furthermore, in order to make sense, any suggested date for *Wenamun*'s composition should be considered in tandem and agree with its suggested message, as noted. It follows that *Wenamun* – if dated in the late 20th or 21st dynasty and with such a censorious message – will have to be classified as a piece of dissident literature.²⁴ If, on the other hand, the 'consensual' options are explored first (see Appendix), the 22nd dynasty emerges as the only time-slot when the Establishment may be behind the above message. This message is then to be understood by implication:

Only when Egypt is strong can human beings serve Amun as befits him

The next sections develop the perception of *Wenamun* as a loyalist story of the 22nd dynasty.²⁵ As

²¹ On the genre at large cf. already Posener: "... one may suppose that the author seeks but to delight the ordinary citizens by making a show of the defects of the great of the land ... [and] the weaknesses of the Egyptian gods." (1957:138–139, excluding *Wenamun*). Likewise BLUMENTHAL: "The reader has great fun at the expense of the highest gods." (1973:10, including *Wenamun*).

²² "... the interpretation of a text has to set out from the characteristics of its literary class, ... for only in this manner can a one-sided, partial perception be avoided." (BLUMENTHAL 1973:17).

²³ E.g. BAINES 1999:211 on *Wenamun*. On other tales see BLUMENTHAL 1973:13.

²⁴ Indeed it was categorized as such by EYRE (see note 19).

²⁵ If it was composed in the 22nd dynasty, *Wenamun*'s Late Ramesside linguistic stage will have to be simulated. For the moment this is a working hypothesis, whose test will be the presence or absence of inadvertent post-New Kingdom elements in the language, once a specialist cares to look for them. Until now this was hardly attempted: underlying HELCK's *Lexikon* article (1986) but not substantiated, *Wenamun*'s "post-Ramesside linguistic stage" was mentioned in passing by QUACK (2001:172).

noted, the questions addressed are ‘when?’, ‘why?’ and ‘what Levant?’.²⁶

4. When and why? *Wenamun* – literature in the service of Sheshonq I

When? *Wenamun* was composed in the 22nd dynasty²⁷ on the background of Sheshonq’s Palestinian campaign.²⁸

Why? Underlining Egypt’s pre-campaign powerlessness on the Levantine coast the story, for maximum effect, is set a century and a half earlier, near the beginning of this period of decline. When Wenamun sets sail he knows that he is thrown on his own resources; he cannot expect Egyptian backup, military or diplomatic, en route. Emphasizing this woe-filled situation makes ample sense if it has since been remedied, if it can be contrasted with the glorious present: The long spell of weakness is finally over; on the throne of Egypt Amun has now placed Sheshonq, a Ramesses-like Pharaoh who, in a brilliant campaign, won back Egypt’s holdings in Asia.²⁹ And the god once again as a matter of course receives the foreign reverence, and revenue, his by rights. In a sense, the ‘Report of Wenamun’ may be a subtle literary counterpart to Sheshonq’s official report, carved on the wall at Karnak and directed at the king of gods.

Form-wise – applying the categories of BLUMENTHAL (1998:181) – the story belongs to the class *Entertainment: tales*, message-wise to *Political self-perception and self-portrayal: laments* – or a late variation on the ‘laments’ theme.³⁰ If so, perhaps no express moral is to be sought in *Wenamun*’s end, presumed missing: Whether that end was happy or not³¹ may be impertinent to the story’s main motif – Egypt’s (past) weakness, which fulfils its role in either case. Thus perceived the misfortunes endured by Wenamun, the irony with which the text is saturated, the weakness of the Land of Egypt, the deriding reference to royalty – all transpire as essential for the work’s mainstream political message. On this background it is probably no accident that the laudation of the god is spelled out, whereas Sheshonq’s praise is sung without words.

Returning once more to the ‘when?’, the suggested late *Sitz im Leben*, if accepted, could account for the story’s singularities vis-à-vis the earlier ‘laments’, as well as New Kingdom pieces of literature. On these singularities cf. BAINES 1996:172–174, and already BLUMENTHAL 1973:13.³²

Before proceeding to my last question, ‘what Levant?’, let me address the value of *Wenamun* as a historical source for Thebes, Tanis and the Levant in the early 11th century.³³ My expectations are

²⁶ In seeking the linkage between *Wenamun*’s message and the circumstances of the time when the story was composed I was inspired by works of Goedicke, HELCK and Baines; for the former two see notes 27 and 28, for BAINES see point 6 in Section 2.2.

²⁷ HELCK (1986) was the first to place *Wenamun*’s composition in the 22nd dynasty (see Section 2.1) and to regard it as political propaganda. Yet he may have misinterpreted the work’s message (point 2 in Section 2.2) and – there could be a connection – he offered no particular historical setting for the composition of the story.

²⁸ It was GOEDICKE (1975:7–9) who suggested that the reputed find-spot, el-Hiba (see note 1), together with the palaeographical dating, point to the early days of the 22nd dynasty, a period of renewed Egyptian interest in the Levant, as a suitable point in time for the Golenischeff copy of *Wenamun* to have been made from the late 20th dynasty original. As I see it, Goedicke had his finger on the story’s message in its historical setting, yet he let it slip because, considering *Wenamun* an actual report, it did not occur to him that there was a message to be sought or that the text may be later than the date mentioned in it.

²⁹ If, as is held by many, Egypt’s control in the Levant ended shortly after Sheshonq’s return home, the ‘Report of Wenamun’ can hardly postdate the early 22nd dynasty. Yet that the ‘empire’ did not come to an

abrupt end is hinted by statues of Osorkon I (924–889) and II (874–850) found at Byblos in addition to one of Sheshonq (see also note 39). This, together with the Egyptian participation in the battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C., could indicate unbroken influence in the Levant, an influence that, with ups and downs, lasted for centuries to come.

³⁰ In times of stability and prosperity this literary topos would take up elements of past chaos and decline for political purposes – to underline the need of firm kingship – see for instance LICHTHEIM 1975:134–135, 149–150; 1996:248–251. *Wenamun*, as is well known, was not seen in such light at all by Lichtheim.

³¹ BAINES’ (1999:215, 229) guess was the former. BLUMENTHAL (1973:15 and note 148) and HELCK (1992, 76) warned against attempts to interpret a story whose end is missing. Whether Helck’s pessimism concerning *Admonitions* is justified or not, has no implications here, for the type ‘laments’ is documented otherwise.

³² A 22nd dynasty date for *Wenamun* would be of relevance to the modest corpus of hieratic literature of the Third Intermediate Period (cf. VERHOEVEN 1999:255–256 with notes 2–5). This may pertain to the *Tale of Woe* as well, whose language was claimed by QUACK (2001:172) to be “hardly before the 21st to 22nd dynasty”.

³³ See also Section 1 with note 10.

low: whether, to quote LICHTHEIM (1976:197), the text is “wholly fictitious” or “the imaginative and humorous literary reworking of an actual report” that has not survived,³⁴ is of little relevance, for in either case, to quote HELCK (1986:1216), “22nd dynasty details transposed into the time of the late 20th dynasty, as well as entirely false, invented features, are likely to pass unnoticed.” In this mix *Wenamun* would not differ from countless ancient texts.

Finding the true date of everything in the story is thus impossible. To be sure, also as an early 22nd dynasty story could *Wenamun* paint a plausible portrait of Egypt and the Levant at the time of the late 20th dynasty; after all, verisimilitude will have been among the author’s aims in any case. Yet its categorization as a 22nd dynasty work will be bolstered if any detail in *Wenamun*’s Levant, such as the Tjekker at Dor, can be shown to fit the late tenth century no less well.

5. What Levant?

Wenamun’s Dor and Byblos – 1075 BC or 925 BC.?

Until not long ago everyone would have answered without hesitation: 1075 BC.! At any rate the Levant that served as background for the story, according to all authors, could not have been much later than the mid-21st dynasty, or early tenth century. Afterwards, that is at the time of Solomon, a contemporary of Sheshonq, the Old Testament tells us (1 Kings 4: 11) that Dor had become capital of the fourth district of the United Monarchy. Under such circumstances the Tjekker, if not eliminated, were certainly out of power.

But skepticism concerning the United Monarchy narratives is mounting. Their historicity has been called in question long ago, casting doubt on the existence of a proper Israelite state before the Omrides – let alone Israelite tenth-century control

of the coast. The bearing of doing away with the United Monarchy on the archaeology of the Levant in general and – for the present purpose – on Dor in particular has only quite recently been addressed. First came the low Palestinian chronology for late Iron I and early Iron II (FINKELSTEIN 1996), then the publication of still lower ¹⁴C dates from the relevant Dor strata (GILBOA and SHARON 2001: 1345–1347).

Dor. Indeed nothing was found at the site that could remotely be interpreted as Solomonic GILBOA and SHARON 2001: 1348. Rather, what emerges from E. Stern’s excavation is an urban, Phoenicianized centre that flourished from Iron I into Iron II. Thus the archaeological picture at Dor does not stand in the way of dating *Wenamun* to Sheshonq: Any missing detail about the 11th century city, the author could have supplemented with more readily available late-tenth-century data; the difference would hardly be noticed. The Tjekker of Dor could easily have retained elements of their old-country identity, including the ethnic designation, until c. 900 BC.³⁵ According to this option the Dor of Badil,³⁶ described in *Wenamun*, is not necessarily to be sought in the earlier ‘Tjekker’ level – ¹⁴C dates “till 975 BCE (at least)”,³⁷ with its enormous wall, glacis, and possibly one of the largest harbours of its time. It could as well be the city of late Iron I – ¹⁴C dates “c. 975–880 BCE”, contemporary with Sheshonq,³⁸ with its ‘monumental stone building’, ‘bastion’, ‘brick building’ and earliest Phoenician Bichrome and Cypro-Geometric wares. Egyptian pottery was found in both strata.

Byblos. Nor does what we know of this city interfere with the dating of *Wenamun* to Sheshonq: It is impossible to decide whether Zakarbaal is just a plausible name made up, or the city’s ruler at the time of the late 20th dynasty, or indeed a Byblian king contemporary with Sheshonq. In the latter case he will have to be fitted in between or, as I hope to

³⁴ The latter possibility has already been raised more than a century ago by MÜLLER (1900).

³⁵ No inscriptions were found in the pertinent Dor strata (the unprovenanced 8th century Hebrew seal of a priest of Dor [WSS 29] is too late to be of relevance), and the non-epigraphic archaeological evidence cannot show until when were the inhabitants of the city known as Tjekker. All the same, the marked continuity at Dor may suggest that this designation was still current in the early first millennium, and the analogy of the Tel Miqne inscription is revealing: ‘Philistine’ personal and divine names were in use among the Ekronites as late as

the seventh century – long after the initial Aegean elements had disappeared from the city’s material culture.

³⁶ Whether the ruler’s name was made up or is real like that of the city we do not know.

³⁷ GILBOA and SHARON, 2001: Tables 1A and 1B. These are Phases 13–12 in Area B1, 10–9 in Area G.

³⁸ GILBOA and SHARON, *loc. cit.* These are Phase 10 in Area B1, Phase 7 in Area G and Phase 9 in Area D2, that coexisted (in part?) with Megiddo VIA - the exact synchronization has yet to be worked out (Ayelet Gilboa, pers. comm. November 2001).

demonstrate elsewhere (SASS forthcoming), before Abibaal and Elibaal.³⁹ If the late-tenth-century composition of *Wenamun* is accepted, the author will have been contrasting the treatment of Egyptians in Byblos in the previous century and a half with his present when, as one possible result of Sheshonq's Levantine policy, the special ties of old were revived between that city and Egypt.

6. Conclusions

Accepting (1) that *Wenamun* is a piece of literature, (2) that Egyptian stories as a rule are not set in the present, and (3) that *Wenamun* was composed not solely as entertainment but that it carries a message, which in turn reflects the time of composition, I wish to recapitulate my three main points:

When? Set in the 20th–21st-dynasty transition, near the beginning of Egypt's period of decline, the story was composed some 150 years later. At that moment, following Sheshonq's Palestinian campaign and the resumption of Egypt's special ties with Byblos, the Egyptians for the first time since the mid 20th dynasty felt themselves masters of an empire again.

Why? The message arising from the tension between the motifs 'eternal power of Amun' and 'Egypt's weakness' is not a direct "When Egypt is weak, human beings cannot serve Amun as befits him"; the message is better understood by implication – "Only when Egypt is strong, can human beings serve Amun as befits him". The hard times in which *Wenamun* is set are a thing of the past, a common device whose purpose it is to laud the stable, prosperous present. In this *Wenamun* may be a late variant of 'laments' despite its amusing aspect.

What Levant? Until a few years ago it was impossible from a Palestinian archaeologist's point of view to accommodate *Wenamun*'s Levant other than circa 1075, the date mentioned in the papyrus. The low chronology for the Iron I–II transition, shored up by

new, ultra low ¹⁴C dates from Dor, may change this. Once the interpretation of its finds is freed from the Davidic-Solomonic dictate, an archaeological picture of remarkable continuity from Iron I to Iron II emerges at Dor. In other words, if *Wenamun*'s description of the Levantine coast circa 1075 BC was based on what the region was like 150 years later, on the eve of Sheshonq's campaign, no one in Egypt could tell the difference. The Phoenicianized inhabitants of Dor might well have preserved their Tjekker identity into the first millennium BC. The finds from Byblos (see end of Section 5) likewise do not preclude a dating of *Wenamun* around 925 BC.

In the foregoing it was my hope to further substantiate HELCK's view of *Wenamun* as a literary work with a message (yet quite a different one from the message proposed by Helck),⁴⁰ a *Tendenzschrift* of the 22nd dynasty. To this end I sought firstly to point out the most plausible message on the background of what to me seems the only time-frame suitable for such a message, and secondly to demonstrate that the Levant of *Wenamun* does not stand in the way of dating the story to that time, the reign of Sheshonq I.

Appendix: Late Egyptian stories – entertainment, dissent, loyalism

The 'nihilistic', or unorthodox tenor is indeed common to many Late Egyptian stories (see Section 2.2 with note 21). But does this justify the wholesale categorizing of these stories as message-less entertainment,⁴¹ or as word of the opposition?⁴² According to either logic, tales with a mainstream message would turn out to be in the minority – a striking conclusion.

In other words, the notion of the unorthodox aspect fulfilling exactly the same purpose(s) in *all* the stories was perhaps pushed too hard. On that account should not the 'consensual' options be exhausted before either a dissident or a 'message-less entertainment' interpretation is offered for any

³⁹ The latter two, their names written in alphabetic script on statues of Sheshonq and Osorkon found in the city, are commonly considered coeval with the two Pharaohs. This dating of the Byblian kings seems to me far too high; in any case the Egyptian royal names provide only a *terminus post quem* for the Byblian kings.

⁴⁰ See note 27.

⁴¹ "... and what unequivocal moral had *Horus and Seth*, or *Wenamun*? ...only one genuine common denominator remains [for the Late Egyptian stories]: the intention to provide entertainment and amusement... Some pro-

pagandistic purpose evidently forms the basis of none of the texts." (BLUMENTHAL 1973:16). In this Blumenthal had no few followers, among them JANSEN-WINKELN (1994:427) and ASSMANN (1996:78).

⁴² If Blumenthal's 'common denominator' argument (see note 41) is rigorously applied, the classification in the Egyptological literature of a few of the stories as oppositional would again pertain to the entire genre. On a specific reference to *Wenamun* as dissident see note 19.

Ancient Egyptian story?⁴³ The unorthodox aspect could be a literary device,⁴⁴ the provocative wrapping in which a loyalist message, political or religious, was marketed. What is more, the said aspect

may refer to a disreputable past. Precisely the latter is proposed here for *Wenamun*. Surely, if a story proves captivating *and* instructive at the same time, all the better!

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⁴³ This is not to exclude that some Late Egyptian story or other was written with only entertainment in mind after all. Or criticism.

⁴⁴ To be understood in an allegorical or hyperbolic way, in which case entertainment and dissent, the latter simulated, happen to be one and the same. EYRE (1996:432) made a similar point: “In neither case is

propaganda necessarily a distortion of literary purpose.” BLUMENTHAL (1998:182) too emphasized the multifunctionality of the texts and their fluid boundaries, that not always respect the categories into which present-day scholars (each somewhat differently) seek to divide Egyptian literature.

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