



Μαραβέλια, Άλίκη / Maravelia, Alicia: 2021 'Η 'Ιστορία του Ναυαγοῦ: Εἰσαγωγή, Σχολιασμός καὶ Μετάφραση ἐκ τοῦ Πρωτοτύπου τοῦ Ἀρχαιοτέρου καὶ Ὠραιοτέρου Αἰγυπτιακοῦ Διηγήματος / The Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor: Introduction, Commentary and Translation from the Original of the most Ancient and Beautiful Ancient Egyptian Tale, Ἀθήναι / Athens: Σέραπις / Serapis, 240 pages. In Greek.

Reviewed by Themis G. Dallas

Let me start by admitting that I am no Egyptologist, but an Astronomer – Archaeoastronomer teaching courses on Cultural Astronomy and History of Science. However, my love for ancient Egypt prompted me to read Alicia Maravelia's book on *The Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor*, where she also examines this ancient Egyptian tale as an astronomical allegory. The author describes it on the frontispiece as the "most ancient and beautiful Egyptian tale". You may be aware that this is a Middle Kingdom short story in narrative verse and with quite unusual features for a species pertaining to the ancient Middle Egyptian literature. Privileged are those who can read literature in its original language, to enjoy every poetry and nuisance. For the rest of us, it is nice to have a scholarly and well-worked translation to enjoy.

The story has three characters: a captain, his lieutenant and a divine snake. The captain is afraid of a possible punishment from the Pharaoh for his failed mission. Thus, his officer narrates a similar situation from his past, where he was shipwrecked and eventually saved by the divine snake; who in turn narrates his similar story of destruction when a meteorite killed all his serpent-family and relatives.

The author is a respected Egyptologist and Archaeoastronomer, founder and President of the Hellenic Institute of Egyptology, and the main teacher at the Institute's Egyptological Seminar, currently in its twelfth year. Her research focuses on astronomical and cosmological elements in the ancient Egyptian funerary texts, so she is certainly qualified to translate and comment on the *Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor*.

A 240-page book may seem too much for a text that has just 189 verses, but the book goes beyond being a simple translation, as it contains background information, commentary, analysis and an extensive bibliography. The book starts with two short introductory texts by Arlette David and Christian Casey (both in English and translated in Greek) and a prologue by the author. Then comes the first part of the book, with high quality black-and-white facsimile reproductions of the original papyrus (*pHermitage 1115*) and its transcription into hieroglyphics by the author. This is followed by an introduction in the author's elaborate (and slightly old-fashioned) language style; includes sections on the history of the Middle Kingdom of Egypt, a comparison of the *Shipwrecked Sailor* to other Egyptian literature specimens and an analysis of the plot. She describes the tale as going beyond perseverance through hard times; for her it is a hymn to the adventurous nature of humans, their perpetual search for new places, broader horizons and progress, combined with the longing for return. She also compares it to an allegoric (Jungian) trip of the soul.

In the next section, the author (as a well-qualified astronomer, too) discusses the tale as an allegory of the night and day skies (with emphasis on the meteorite fall) providing a list of astronomical words in the text, their meaning and their relevance to the Egyptian cosmology and theology. After discussing the possible connection of the divine snake to deities of the era, she points out that he should be identified par excellence to Neheb-kaou; and further agrees with Derchain-Urtel that he is also a symbol of Re-Atum, whilst his 75 relatives correspond to the 75 forms of the Sun god in the *Litany of Ra*. Then she divides the astronomical relevant words of the text into five categories: light and darkness; time, timing and eternity; sky, stars and sky deities; cosmogony and theogony; symbols and archetypes plus meteorological and geological terms. For each category, she discusses the terms and their connection to other texts. The falling star/meteorite (often just mentioned in passing from other authors) is the most discussed, and definitely the most important astronomical term. The destructive power of meteorites, that can even kill minor gods, is wonderfully captured. The connection of meteoritic iron with specific ancient Egyptian funeral practices and rituals is also discussed. However, the mention of the meteorite that caused the Cretaceous extinction is too exuberant; it is most likely that the Egyptians had knowledge of a meteorite fall in their long history, but certainly not of a planet-wide destruction.

The final section of the second part includes a formal line-to-line translation as well as a free translation, divided into thematic units. Both translations are useful and help the readers to get a glimpse on the ancient Egyptian mind. Whilst the free translation is the one of choice to enjoy the story itself, the formal one is best for keeping the original as accurate

as possible, yet converting the lines into a sentence structure that follows the Greek rather than the Egyptian syntax and presentation rules.

Probably a reader like me, interested in the tale and its background information, would regard this as enough, but Maravelia went a huge step further, as the third part of the book contains the original hieroglyphic text, its phonetic transliteration and a word-to-word translation to Greek. This could turn into a perfect reading book for students of hieroglyphics. More so taking into consideration the fourth part, featuring a 70-page commentary on every line of the text, its syntax, grammar and explanation, as well as a discussion of important notions with emphasis on main concepts, ideas, objects, as well as plant and animal species mentioned in this tale.

Moreover, this is further followed by a 20-page bibliography of all the references in the book plus suggestions for further reading. Finally, the book reproduces, after permission (and with amendments and additions) Christian Casey's list of the hieratic and hieroglyphic signs of the tale, with their word count and the lines they appear in the original manuscript. Last but not least, comes a dictionary of all the words in hieroglyphic text, their phonetic transliteration, their translation in Greek, grammatical information and the lines they appear in, as well as the Coptic equivalents of many of them (something that was not included in Casey's book).

In fact, most recently, Maravelia has also just produced a fourth version of the translation. With the collaboration of Iris Hoogeweyj (who made the drawings), they have created a children's book out of the *Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor*, a most commendable way to create a new generation of modern Greeks who might be interested in ancient Egypt (Maravelia 2023)!

The volume is hard-bound and printed in colour on high quality paper, an unusually luxurious treatment nowadays, making the book even more attractive. Some quirks remain, e.g. lines in the hieroglyphic transcription from hieratic and words in the translation from hieroglyphics are occasionally not in sync with each other. In some instances in the introduction, I was longing for more details than just a short text, with a list of references and further readings. However, most of the Greek books on ancient Egypt are about the Pyramids and the Sphinx, or Ramses and Tutankhamun. Therefore, this volume is a much welcome addition to the Greek bibliography on ancient Egypt, being the only modern one devoted to ancient Egyptian literature and certainly the only one featuring a direct translation from the hieratic text.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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