Seth. The name of the god Seth (šš, zš, sth, zth, sut, stj, sutj) was probably pronounced Suta and especially in Lower Egypt Sutekh. As in the first mill. B.C. the š evolved to e the Greek rendering of the name became Set or Seth. The meaning of the name is unknown. The Egyptian explanations of the name: 'instigator of confusion', 'deserter' or 'drunkard' connected with the words is and et are pseudo-etymologies. The name was often written with the hieroglyph of the so-called Seth-animal as an ideogram or as a determinative. Although many attempts have been made to determine the
zoological identity of the S.-animal, it seems to be a
fabulous animal (*Fabeltier) supposed to live in
the desert just like the griffin (*Greif). In the
system of writing the S.-animal served as a deter-
mative for some 25 words denoting distur-
bances and confusion in cosmic, social and per-
sonal life such as storm, tumult, illness. Obviously
S. represented a reality that was not according to
order (m3?), the earliest representation of the S.
animal is on the mace-head of King Scorpion
dyn. 1), if not on pots and combs from Negada I
or II.
Already in the Pyr. and later texts S. has an impor-
tant and outstanding role as the enemy and friend
of Horus (*Horus und Seth) and as the murderer
of *Osiris. As such he is the god of confusion who
disturbs the order. But as limited disorder was
accepted as essential to a living order, S. was
accepted and venerated as a god with whom one
had to come to terms. Since the CT and later texts
S. is also famous in a third and more positive role
as repelling *Apophis. He is imagined in texts and
depictions as standing on the prow of the barque
of the sungod (*Sonnentarke) and conquering
Apophis by word or deed. In the myth of *Re S. is,
however, not totally different from the Seth in the
myth of Osiris/Horus: In many primitive cultures
the figure of the "trickster" — as this Egyptian god
of confusion may be called — is also slayer-of-the-
monster. In a land where the ideal gentleman is
the truly modest or silent man (gr m3?), charac-
terized by self-control, S. is the one who raises the
voice (šd ḥrū) who causes commotion. In a land
that is irrigated by the Nile and where thunder-
storms are of course a rather confusing and super-
fluous phenomenon in contrast with other near-eastern
countries, S. rather braquingly reveals himself
in the fight with Apophis with the words 'I am S.,
the originator of confusion (šd hmnw), who thun-
ders in the horizon of heaven' (Tb 39). S. was
considered to have great physical strength who
could easily kill a god with his scepter. A standing
epithet of S. is 'great of strength' (*pḥt). In
the course of history, already indicated in the
OK, but especially in ramessid times S. proves to
be lord of foreign countries. The god of the Lybians
*Asch, the god of the western Semites
*Baal, the god of the Hittites Teshub were recog-
nised as forms of S., whereas identification of Seth
with other Egyptian gods are rare, although he
had his traditional place in the Ennead (*Neun-
heit) of *Heliopolis. As it is apparent from the
disorders between Horus and Seth with sometimes
drastic pederastic details (*Homosexualität), S. is
not considered as a typical sedate family god. His
marriage with *Nephtys does not include a
divine child and remains a rather formal affair. It
is at least doubtful whether S. was ever held to be
the father of *Anubis, the child of Nephthys.
Incidentally S. whose exuberant sexual activities
are so well-known that he may be invoked in love
charms and whose testicles are a religious symbol
as a pendant of the eye of Horus, is connected
with other goddesses: *Hathor, *Neith and espe-
cially the foreign goddesses *Anat and *Astarte.
S. may be represented in animal form as the sit-
ing, standing or lying S.-animal, but also in
human form, often with the head of the S.-animal.
He may wear a crown, mostly the double crown,
because he is together with Horus lord of the two
lands. The bipartition of the world between these
two lords could be imagined in such a fashion
during the NK that Horus was not just lord of
Lower Egypt but lord of the home country and S.
not just lord of Upper Egypt but lord of foreign
countries and the desert. As such he may easily
be represented as a foreigner in exotic costume,
as a Baal, wearing not an Egyptian crown, but a coni-
cal tiara with horns and sun.
Places in Egypt with a special cult of S. lay on the
border of the desert and where caravan routes
began. Main cult centers of S. were inter alia
*Ombos (5th U.E.nome) *Seper-meru (19th U.E.
nome), the *oases in the western desert, and
*Aauris and Piramesse (*Ramsesstadt) in the
northeastern delta. But the frontier god and rather
disorderly foreigner became a god of state and
court when pharaohs of the 19th and 20th dyn.
had their residence in Piramesse in the northeast-
ern delta. Even pharaohs took their name from
him: *Sethos and *Sethnacht.
The special reputation of S. in mythology and his
reputedly disorderly character have not prevented
at least some Egyptians to accept him unrestrict-
edly as their god. It is interesting that personal
names show that some did not hesitate to ascribe
the same qualities to S. that others assigned to
other gods: 'Seth-is-great'; 'Seth-is-gracious';
'Seth-is-kind'; 'Seth-is-content'; 'Seth-gives-salva-
tion'; 'Seth-causes-to live', etc.
It seems that no temples for S. were built or rest-
tored after the 20th dyn. His name, which ap-
peared so often in the personal names of the 19th
and 20th dyn., disappears practically from the
ensuing period. Texts and images referring to S.
are scarce after the 20th dyn. compared with the
time before. Hatred against foreigners combined
with the growing importance of the cult of Osis-
tis leads in the first mill. B.C. to a growing disin-
terest and even persecution of S. as enemy of the
gods.
The turning-point from veneration to demonisa-
tion must be dated in the 25th dyn.

H. te V.