

Warlike Women in Ancient Egypt

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In this paper, I am going to give a more or less chronological overview of the warlike aspect of women in ancient Egypt, including the bellicose goddesses. Lack of space prevents me from giving more than only a short sketch.

Neith

The earliest sources relevant for our subject date back as early as the predynastic period, that is about 3000 B.C. In this epoch (and still later), the goddess Neith² played an important role in the Egyptian pantheon. Two attributes are typical for Neith: the Lower Egyptian Red Crown on her head and arrow and bow in her hand. Therefore, Neith originally was not only a goddess of the northern half of Egypt – and indeed her main cult centre in historical times was at Sais – but

also a goddess of hunting and warfare. For the Egyptians, both hunting wild animals and fighting against enemies were aspects of the same effort of maintaining the order of the world and dispelling chaos. Although Neith had or with time got many further qualities, her aspect as goddess of hunting and war was still alive in the Roman Period. The so-called Book of the Fayum, whose preserved manuscripts date from this time, also includes a vignette showing Neith with her weapons.³ The Greeks and Romans not unsurprisingly identified Neith with Athena.

Sakhmet

Another old Egyptian warlike goddess is Sakhmet,⁴ whose name means „the Mighty One“.

1. Universités de Munich et de Würzburg. I would like to thank C.J. Martin for patiently correcting my English.

2. Hans Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin - New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000): 512-517; Wolfgang Helck, Eberhard Otto, Wolfhart Westendorf (eds.), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, 7 vols. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1975-92) 4: 392-394; Donald B. Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 3 vols. (Oxford - New York - ...: Oxford University Press, 2001) 2: 516-517.

3. Horst Beinlich, *Das Buch vom Fayum. Zum religiösen Eigenverständnis einer ägyptischen Landschaft*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1991) text: 131. Cf. also the Ptolemaic religious papyrus Louvre N 3079 col. 111 l. 87 (38), where Osiris is addressed thus: „Neith has put her arrow in her bow in order to fell your enemies every day.“ (ed. Jean-Claude Goyon, „Le cérémonial de glorification d'Osiris du papyrus Louvre I. 3079 (colonnes 110 à 112),“ *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 65 [1967]: 106).

4. Bonnet 643-646; Helck, Otto, Westendorf (eds.) 5:

She is already attested in the Old Kingdom, that is the 3rd millennium B.C., and is normally represented as a woman with a lion's head. Sakhmet, whose main cult centre was at Memphis, was a really fierce goddess. She was thought to accompany pharaoh in battle. In the poem on the battle of Kadesh, it is said of the Egyptian king:

„Lo, Sakhmet the great is she who is with him. She is together with him upon his horse, and her hand is with him. As for whoever goes to approach him, a breath of fire comes to burn up his body.“⁵ Sakhmet truly can be called a goddess of war.⁶

But Sakhmet does not only help pharaoh against his enemies in battle. Sakhmet and goddesses that can be connected with her and with the complex idea of the sungod's burning eye also kill the evildoers in the netherworld with their fiery blast.⁷

Sakhmet is also the one who sends out poisonous arrows and wild demons in order to cause sicknesses and plagues. In a myth of the New Kingdom Hathor-Sakhmet was even chosen by the sun-god to destroy mankind completely.⁸

Another goddess that can be associated with Sakhmet is Shesemtet/Smithis.⁹

323-333; Sigrid-Eike Hoernes, *Untersuchungen zu Wesen und Kult der Göttin Sakhmet* (Bonn: Habelt, 1976).

5. Translation after Alan Gardiner, *The Kadesh Inscriptions of Ramesses II* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1975): 13, P287-8. For a more recent translation see K.A. Kitchen: *Ramesside Inscriptions. Translated & Annotated. Translations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 2: 12.

6. So Bonnet 644. Sakhmet is called «woman who 'makes' an army» in the temple of Hathor at Dendara (*Dendara III* 165,5; cf. S. Cauville, *Dendara III. Traduction* [Leuven: Peeters, 2000]: 280-281).

7. Cf. Erik Hornung, *Tal der Könige. Die Ruhestätte der Pharaonen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983): 161.

8. Translation: Erik Hornung, *Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh. Eine Ätiologie des Unvollkommenen* (Freiburg Schweiz: Universitätsverlag - Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982): 37-40.

9. Bonnet 679; Helck, Otto, Westendorf (eds.) 5: 587-90 and 992; Philippe Derchain: *El Kab I. Les monuments religieux à l'entrée de l'Ouadi Hellal* (Brussels: Fondation Égyptologique

Anat¹⁰

At the end of the Middle Kingdom, a warlike goddess entered the Egyptian pantheon, whose origin was in the Near East: Anat.¹¹ First attested in Egypt in onomastic material, Anat became better known only in the New Kingdom, an epoch of close contacts between Egypt and the Near East, especially during the Ramesside period – that is about the 13th century B.C. Anat often appears together with Astarte, who was also of Near Eastern origin. Anat was almost exclusively connected with the Egyptian royal family. Her main task was to protect the king in battle. After the Ramesside period she shows up only sporadically, but is attested in Egypt up to the time of Augustus, still enjoying cult worship.

Astarte

Astarte¹² seems to have played a more prominent role. She appears in royal and non-royal documents. She was especially associated with the horse, which in Egypt was mainly used in warfare. Therefore Astarte is often shown riding. One should note that driving in a chariot, not riding, was the normal way of using horses in ancient Egypt. Matters are complicated by the fact that

Reine Élisabeth, 1971): 15-32.

10. Recent general works on Near Eastern goddesses include: Johanna H. Stuckey, «The Great Goddesses of the Levant,» *The Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 29 (2002): 28-57; Joan Goodnick Westenholz, «Great Goddesses in Mesopotamia: The Female Aspect of Divinity,» *The Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 29 (2002): 9-27; Izak Cornelius, *The Many Faces of the Goddess. The Iconography of the Syro-Palestinian Goddesses Anat, Astarte, Qadesh, and Asherah c. 1500-1000 BCE* (Freiburg Schweiz: Universitätsverlag - Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004); Edward Lipiński, «Syro-Canaanite Goddesses in Egypt,» *Chronique d'Égypte* 80 (2005): 122-133.

11. Bonnet 37-8; Helck, Otto, Westendorf (eds.) 1: 253-8; cf. also the works cited in the previous footnote.

12. Bonnet 55-7; Helck, Otto, Westendorf (eds.) 1: 499-509; see also footnote 10.

there was probably not only one goddess Astarte in Egypt but a complex of several similar forms or closely connected goddesses whose names can be written slightly differently, as in a representation in the temple of Hibis of the fifth century B.C.¹³ Astarte is attested well into the Roman period.

As far as literature is concerned, there exists a papyrus from the 5th year of Amenophis II (i.e. about 1423 B.C.) with the tattered remains of a story of the Fight against the Sea in which Astarte plays an important role in the better preserved parts.¹⁴ Although the remains of about 20 columns are extant, it is nearly impossible to get an idea of the plot. It is evident, however, from the structure of the better preserved beginning of the text, from certain motives and from the fact that the earth gives birth, although it is masculine in the Egyptian language and mythology, that the Egyptian text is based on Near Eastern mythology and is probably a translation or an adaptation of a Hurrian or Hittite original.¹⁵

The Egyptian Queen Defeating Foreign Women in the New Kingdom

In the same period, the New Kingdom, Egyptian queens could be depicted in quite warlike poses.¹⁶ They can be shown smiting

the enemy in the same way as pharaoh is depicted.¹⁷

Modelled according to royal iconography, the throne of the Egyptian queen could also show the conquered peoples. In the tomb of Kheruef (14th century B.C.), the defeated *women* are depicted at the queen's throne.¹⁸ The Egyptian king and queen are obviously considered to be complementary to each other: the Egyptian king kills the men, the Egyptian queen defeats the women of the enemy. She even can appear as a sphinx,¹⁹ a shape that normally is restricted to the king or to gods and, with its semi-lion form, hints at the fierce triumphant nature of the subduer of the foreign peoples.²⁰

These violent images of queenship²¹ are backed up with the appropriate titles. Many of them are feminine forms of king's titles, e.g. „female ruler“ (*hq3.t*). Quite interesting is the title „mistress of all women“ (*hnw.t hm.wt nb.wt*), which can serve as a good explanation for the

lichen Frauen in der fiktiven und realen Außenpolitik des ägyptischen Neuen Reiches (Freiburg Schweiz: Universitätsverlag - Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002): 23-42; Robert Morkot, „Violent Images of Queenship and the Royal Cult,“ *Wepwawet* 2 (1986): 1-9.

17. Sayed Tawfik, „Aton Studies,“ *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 31 (1975): 163. Cf. also Earl L. Ertman, „Smiting the Enemy in the Reign of Akhenaten: A Family Affair,“ *Kmt* 17,4 (Winter 2006-07): 59-65 with notes to the later development.

18. The Epigraphic Survey, *The Tomb of Kheruef. Theban Tomb 192* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1980): pl. 49; similar on the throne dais of Nefertiti Donald B. Redford, *From Slave to Pharaoh. The Black Experience of Ancient Egypt* (Baltimore - London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004): 6 fig. 1 (row of captured women).

19. Dorothea Arnold, *The Royal Women of Amarna. Images of Beauty from Ancient Egypt* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996): 107.

20. The sphinx is attested already in the Middle Kingdom as a form of royal women: Louvre AO. 13075 is a sphinx of princess It, daughter of Amenemhat II (Bertha Porter, Rosalind L. B. Moss *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings* (Oxford: Griffith Institute - Ashmolean Museum, 1962) 8: 392.

21. This is the title of Morkot (cf. footnote 16)!

13. Norman de Garis Davis, *The Temple of Hibis in el Khargeh Oasis*, ed. Ludlow Bull, Lindsley F. Hall, 3 parts (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1953) 3: plate 3, third register.

14. Alan H. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories* (Bruxelles: Fondation égyptologique reine Elisabeth, 1981): 76-81a; Philippe Collombert, Laurent Coulon, „Les dieux contre la mer. Le début du „papyrus d'Astarté“ (pBN 202),“ *BIFAO* 100 (2000): 193-242.

15. Wolfgang Helck, „Die Erzählung des sog. „Astartepapyrus“,“ Manfred Görg (ed.), *Fontes atque pontes. Eine Festgabe für Hellmut Brunner* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983): 215-223. For a more general perspective on the myth, cf. Donald B. Redford, „The Sea and the Goddess,“ Sarah Israelit-Groll (ed.), *Studies in Egyptology Presented to Miriam Lichtheim*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1990) 2: 824-835.

16. Silke Roth, *Gebierterin aller Länder. Die Rolle der könig-*



depictions of the Egyptian queen subduing the foreign women.²²

A Woman Fighting a King (Ostrakon Cairo CG 25125 [fig. 1²³])

Directly relevant to our subject is an ostrakon in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.²⁴ In the upper register, a royal or divine²⁵ woman is standing on

22. The warlike image of the Egyptian queen during the New Kingdom is different from the Egyptian attitude during the Middle Kingdom, when it was considered to be unheard of that women had troops (Teaching of Amenemhat IXa; cf. Richard B. Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt. A Dark Side to Perfection* [London - New York: Continuum, 2002]: 244 bottom with references). For a 20th dynasty letter to a high ranking woman who is explicitly asked to order a murder, see the famous *Fall abgekürzter Justiz* (P. Berlin 10489; Adolf Erman, *Ein Fall abgekürzter Justiz in Ägypten* [Berlin: Verlag der Königl. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1913]; Edward F. Wente, *Late Ramesside Letters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967): 69 no. 35).

23. This is a reproduction of the woman only. I would like to thank Joachim Friedrich Quack for his agreement to include this detail here. The drawing, done by Olga Koch, is published in its entirety in the anthology of Demotic narratives by Quack and myself.

24. Reproduced e.g. in *Nofret – die Schöne. Die Frau im Alten Ägypten* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1984): 181 no. 89 (in colour) or William H. Peck, John G. Ross, *Ägyptische Zeichnungen aus drei Jahrtausenden* (Bergisch Gladbach: Gustav Lübbe, 1979): 158-159 (detail).

25. This is the traditionally held opinion. But the typi-

a chariot, fighting a male person also standing on a chariot. They are shooting arrows at each other, as do some people in the lower register who seem to represent the troops of the main protagonists. In interpreting this picture which is to be dated to the Late New Kingdom 20th dynasty, i.e. the 12th or 11th century B.C., Egyptologists have put forward several interpretations. According to one of them, Astarte is shown fighting pharaoh. The picture would express the political vision of the destruction of the corrupt Egyptian regime at the end of the New Kingdom by Astarte as a *dea ex machina*.²⁶ In my opinion this interpretation is completely unfounded and must be rejected.²⁷ For it is the horses of the woman that are hit by arrows, not those of the man. Apart from this, the people fighting the woman include different human races traditionally representing the enemies the Egyptian king smites. Why should they be included among the troops of the regime? And finally also the troops – not only the horses – of the supposed *dea ex machina* suffer losses as can be seen on the left side of the lower register, where an archer²⁸ is about to be hit by an arrow.

Another scholar sees this as a depiction of the quarrel between the Egyptian queen Tawosret and the Egyptian king Sethnakhte who became the founder of the 20th dynasty.²⁹ This theory would at least explain why the woman seems to be the defeated party. Yet another explanation was sought in declaring the ostrakon an illustra-

cally Ramesside clothing does not speak in favour of identifying the woman as a goddess.

26. *Nofret* 181.

27. Compare also footnote 25.

28. Unfortunately it is impossible to determine whether this is a male or female person.

29. Vivienne G. Callender, «Queen Tausret and the End of Dynasty 19,» *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 32 (2004): 103-4; Michael Höveler-Müller, *Am Anfang war Ägypten. Die Geschichte der pharaonischen Hochkultur von der Frühzeit bis zum Ende des Neuen Reiches ca. 4000–1070 v. Chr.* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2005): 257 and 259.

tion of a story.³⁰ It would be a moot question, however, whether the ostrakon might illustrate the story familiar as „King and a Goddess“.³¹ In fact, we merely know of the *existence* of such a literary composition but are unable to get any clear idea about its plot, because the surviving manuscripts – all dating to the New Kingdom – are mere tatters. Military actions, however, do occur.³²

I personally would be reluctant to try to give an interpretation of the scene. But it is certain that we are dealing here with a woman fighting with a man and that the Egyptians in some way were acquainted with the idea of fighting women.

Female Rulers of Foreign Countries

Perhaps the Egyptians combined this notion with their knowledge of real foreign countries ruled by queens. Famous examples are the queen of Punt shown in an 18th dynasty relief of the first half of the 15th century B.C.,³³ and later also on an ostrakon,³⁴ and the female ruler of a town in Cyprus during the Third Intermediate Period who appears in the Tale of Wenamun.³⁵ But already in Egyptian execration texts of the

very beginning of the second millennium B.C., a foreign female ruler is found.³⁶

God's Wife of Amun

The Egyptian idea of warlike women must have been alive during the first millennium B.C. We not only have goddesses like Neith and Sakhmet, but we also find the god's wife of Amun, a position of considerable influence in the temple of Amun at Thebes, and which was, at this period, typically held by a daughter of the king,³⁷ performing kingly rites like the shooting of arrows in the directions of the four cardinal points which symbolises the subduing of the entire world.³⁸

Asiatic Sorceresses in Demotic Stories

From an early Roman period demotic papyrus,³⁹ we know of a story in which Djoser, the famous king of the 3rd dynasty in the 27th century B.C., and his vizier Imhotep play an important role. Djoser marches into Ninive, the Assyrians are subjugated and bring tribute. In

30. Peck, Ross 158-9.

31. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories* 95-8a.

32. Cf. P. Vienna 36 5 and 10 (Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories* 96).

33. Cairo JE 14276. Often reproduced, e.g. Mohamed Saleh, Hourig Sourouzian, Jürgen Liepe, *Die Hauptwerke im Ägyptischen Museum Kairo* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1986): no. 130a.

34. Heinrich Schäfer, „Ägyptische Zeichnungen auf Scherben,“ *Jahrbuch der Königlich-Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 37 (1916): 38.

35. Wenamun 2.74ff. (Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories* 74-6a; Bernd U. Schipper, *Die Erzählung des Wenamun. Ein Literaturwerk im Spannungsfeld von Politik, Geschichte und Religion* [Freiburg Schweiz: Universitätsverlag - Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005]: 97-101 and 215-219).

36. Georges Posener, *Cinq figurines d'envoûtement* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1987): 29. For the most recent translation of this section see Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert, *Altägyptische Zaubersprüche* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005): 79-81, esp. 79.

37. Erhart Graefe, *Untersuchungen zur Verwaltung und Geschichte der Institution der Gottesgemahlin des Amun vom Beginn des Neuen Reiches bis zur Spätzeit* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981).

38. For a scene of the 7th century B.C., compare Richard A. Parker, Jean Leclant, Jean-Claude Goyon, *The Edifice of Taharqa by the Sacred Lake of Karnak* (Providence: Brown University Press - London: Lund Humphries, 1979): pl. 25.

39. Cf. Joachim Friedrich Quack, *Einführung in die altägyptische Literaturgeschichte III. Die demotische und gräko-ägyptische Literatur* (Münster: Lit, 2005): 27-8 and Kim Ryholt, „The Assyrian Invasion of Egypt in Egyptian Literary Tradition. A survey of the narrative source material,“ J. G. Dercksen (ed.), *Assyria and Beyond. Studies Presented to Mogens Trolle Larsen* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004): 500-502.

another fragment, Imhotep fights in a magical duel against an Asiatic sorceress who, however, bears the *Egyptian* name Seshemneferem.

In the "Inaros Epic", known from demotic papyri of the first and second century A.D., a duel between Inaros, the main Egyptian hero, and an Assyrian sorceress in the shape of a griffin takes place.⁴⁰

The Story of Sarpot: Egyptians and Amazons

While the Djoser-text and the Inaros Epic have only a marginal bearing on our subject, another demotic story is extremely important.⁴¹ The text is generally called „Egyptians and Amazons“ or „The Story of Sarpot“, Sarpot being the main female character. Two fragmentary Roman demotic papyri⁴² which partly parallel each other are known. As far as the deplorable state of preservation allows, one can reconstruct the story roughly as follows.

The Egyptian prince Petekhons, a famous character in many of the other Inaros-Petubastis-Texts, enters⁴³ a country which is called the Land of the Women. There he and his troops, which interestingly include Assyrians, pitch their camp. Sarpot, the queen of the Land of the Women,

sends her younger sister Ashteshit into the enemy's camp as a spy. Ashteshit puts on male dress, is successful and reports back to Sarpot about the enemy. Sarpot, asking Isis and Osiris for help, decides to preempt the Egyptian prince, calls together the army of the Land of the Women into what I think must be the main fortress of that country and musters her troops, which also includes cavalry and perhaps even chariots (cf. 2.32). Then Sarpot puts on her armour, gives encouragement to her army and advances against Petekhons. Now he sends his troops against the women. Sarpot, however, carries out a terrible slaughter amongst Petekhons's soldiers, who are forced to flee back to their camp.

Petekhons, who obviously did not fight himself, fills his soldiers with new courage. On the next day he goes to the battlefield. Sarpot, too, prepares herself and fights Petekhons in single combat. Only in the evening, when it becomes dark, do they stop fighting. Obviously, when they take off their helmets, they fall into love with each other (4.5ff.).

Nevertheless Sarpot, Petekhons and the two armies fight again on the following day (5.2ff.). There is then a missing section, but in the next surviving part we find Sarpot, Petekhons and their people feasting together (col. 6). After this episode there is again an almost completely lost section. Later we read that the Indians have invaded the Land of the Women (7.35ff.). Very soon after this the text is lost once more and when it reappears (A,1.x+1ff.), we are in the middle of difficult to understand military matters and movements, perhaps different attempts to outmanoeuvre the enemy. In the end, Sarpot fights for two days successfully against the Indian army (11.x+8ff.) and captures the chief of the Indians (12.30f.). In the last preserved lines of the text the Indians seem to pay tribute (12.40ff.).

Already Volten, who was the first editor of the demotic story, had been struck by the fact that the same motive of a land inhabited by warlike

40. Ryholt, „The Assyrian Invasion of Egypt in Egyptian Literary Tradition,“ 493-4.

41. Friedhelm Hoffmann, *Ägypter und Amazonen. Neubearbeitung zweier demotischer Papyri*. P. Vindob. D 6165 und P. Vindob. D 6165 A, (Wien: Brüder Hollinek, 1995); Friedhelm Hoffmann, „Neue Fragmente zu den drei großen Inaros-Petubastis-Texten,“ *Enchoria* 22 (1995) 27-29; Michel Chauveau, „Les romans du cycle d'Inaros et de Pedoubastis,“ *Égypte. Afrique & Orient* 29 (2003): 22-28. For an attempt to find a historical background cf. Jeremy Goldberg, „Legends of Iny and „les brumes d'une chronologie qu'il est prudent de savoir flottante“, *The Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 26 (1996): 22-41.

42. Some still unpublished fragments are also kept at Vienna.

43. Or is about to enter: Cf. 2.28 (The women who want to fight against Petekhons prepare themselves to fight against a foreign country which lies outside their own land.).

women appears also in Greek literature. In the commentary of my re-edition I expressed doubts as to whether this similarity really goes beyond the constellation of a female and a male hero fighting against each other. The rest of the story abounds in differences.⁴⁴ For example: Achilles kills Penthesilea and only *then* falls in love with her. Alexander the Great on his way to India⁴⁵ does not enter the land of the Amazons – unlike Petekhons. And, as far as I can see, the Greek male hero never fights together with the Amazon queen against a third country.⁴⁶

Other researchers⁴⁷ think I went too far in stressing the differences between the Greek and Demotic texts. I cannot go into detail here. The discussion has focused solely on whether the Sarpot-Text is purely Egyptian or influenced by Greek literature. Other possibilities have not been taken into account. In the most recent book on Demotic literature by Quack,⁴⁸ the author gives only one reason why in his opinion there must be Greek influence on the Sarpot-Story, namely that the geographical expansion of the plot would only be understandable in light of „the actual experience of Alexander's expedition and the myth of Dionysos' campaign to India“.⁴⁹

44. Sceptical also John Ray, „Two Inscribed Objects in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge,“ *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 58 (1972): 250-251; Michel Chauveau, review of Hoffmann – Der Kampf um den Panzer des Inaros, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 56.5/6 (1999): 611; Mark Smith, „Egyptian Invective,“ *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 86 (2000): 186 note 54.

45. I would like to correct a mistake in Hoffmann, *Ägypter und Amazonen* 30 end of third paragraph: Alexander's campaign to India took place *after* he had conquered Egypt.

46. According to Arrianus: Anabasis VII 14,1-3, however, the satrap of Media brings Amazon warriors as support for Alexander's troops.

47. Günter Vittmann, „Tradition und Neuerung in der demotischen Literatur,“ *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 125 (1998): 62-77; Heinz J. Thissen, „Homerischer Einfluss im Inaros-Petubastis-Zyklus?,“ *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 27 (1999): 369-387.

48. Quack, *Demotische und gräko-ägyptische Literatur*.

49. Quack 59-60 („das reale Erlebnis des Alexanderzuges

Quack adds, however, that one also has to take into account the Egyptian trade with India.⁵⁰

In my opinion Quack mixes up two different things. One is the real historical Alexander campaign, the other a mythological narrative. Only the latter can be really decisive for the question of *literary* influence, since knowledge of a real military campaign could easily have reached the Egyptians by other means. They could have known of India exclusively from real historical experience, maybe even direct contact. Think of the trade between Egypt and India in the later Ptolemaic and in the Roman times.

And the Amazons? I would like to ask two questions which are perhaps not altogether new but which have not played so far a role in the debate about Greek literary influence on the demotic text.

My questions are: first, could the Amazons be historical? And second, which ideas about Amazons were common in antiquity apart from the Greek stories? In either case, there would be good reasons for rejecting a specifically *Greek literary* influence on the Egyptian story. The Egyptians could have learned about *real* warlike women by direct or indirect contact of *any* kind. And as the Egyptians had become acquainted with foreign ethnographic or fictional texts, there would be no reason to assume a reception of just *Greek literature*. Therefore, I would like to present here some details that the demotic story gives about the Land of the Women, hoping to find matches and agreements with the archaeological data or with non-Greek texts that the readers of this article might know of.

According to the demotic text, the Land of the Women is situated somewhere between „Syria“ (*hr*) and „India“ (*hntw*).⁵¹ A problem with the Inaros-Petubastis-Texts, to which the Sarpot-

sowie den Mythos von Dionysos' Siegeszug bis Indien»).

50. Quack 60.

51. 7.35ff. (Indian invasion); cf. 3.27 (Assyrians in the army of Petekhons).

Story also belongs, is that they tend to mix up elements from different epochs. This means that, depending on to which historical situation the terms „Syria“ and „India“ apply, the location of the Land of the Women must be shifted west or east.⁵² I guess the Parthian Empire would give a rough idea of where to look for the Land of the Women.

There also seems to be at least one river in the Land of the Women.⁵³

According to the story, the Land of the Women is divided into several „nomes“ or „districts“ (*tš.w*),⁵⁴ but one has to treat this information with caution, since it could be a transfer of Egyptian notions. The bad state of preservation of the text makes it impossible to decide whether there was only *one* „town“ (*imy*) in the Land of the Women or whether the town mentioned is just the one playing an important role at this stage of the story.⁵⁵ But anyway, there must have been at least one town in the Land of the Women. There is also a fortress (*htm*,⁵⁶ *sbt*⁵⁷) obviously only one,⁵⁸ unless it is singled out, because it is perhaps the capital. Here there also seems to exist the big „bastion“ (*ht3*).⁵⁹ Another type of building could perhaps be a palisade (*dr*).⁶⁰

52. „Here in the Land of *hr*“ in A,2.x+29 means that the Land of the Women is to be sought in Syria (in the broadest sense); Vittmann, „Tradition und Neuerung,” 76 does not take the „here” into account. But it is of course evident from the whole plot that the Land of the Women must have been thought of as having a common border with „India”, which itself, however, is not well defined.

53. 12.12.

54. 2.27; 4.13; 4.19; cf. perhaps also A,2.x+29.

55. 6.x+29 and 7.35ff. In A,2.x+29, there are mentioned «the towns». But it could be simply a current Egyptian expression. Furthermore, it is not absolutely clear whether the towns of the Land of the Women are meant, because the text continues «here in the Land of *hr*» after a short lacuna.

56. 2.48; 5.5; 5.6; 5.10.

57. 2.10; 2.18; 2.30 (read *p3 sbt*); 6.x+22.

58. Always *p3 htm/sbt* „the fortress” unless used attributively (as in 6.x+22).

59. 2.30; cf. 6.x+22.

60. 8.5.

Finally a „half-roofed“ building⁶¹ used for feasting occurs. This means that the weather in the Land of the Women is often fine. But we do find a reference to rain, too.⁶²

At the head of the Amazons there is a queen – the Egyptian word „female pharaoh“ (*pr-3.t*) is used as her designation.⁶³ Interestingly her name „Sarpot“⁶⁴ is Semitic, meaning „lotus“. But perhaps it was a foreign name that was incorrectly assumed by the Egyptians to be connected with this Semitic word.⁶⁵ By the way, the name of Sarpot’s sister, Ashteshit, has so far withstood all attempts to find an acceptable etymology.

The Land of the Women does seem to be inhabited only by women. At least, men do not seem to play any important role.⁶⁶ In any way,

61. *ks-hbs* in 6.x+3-6.x+11.

62. 2.5.

63. Passim. In our text, the word *pr-3.t* seems already to be used as a general word for „queen”, like Coptic *ppw*. But note Günter Vittmann, „Feinde” in den ptolemäischen Synodaldekreten. Mit einem Anhang: Demotische Termini für „Feind”, „Rebell”, „rebellieren”, Heinz Felber (ed.), *Feinde und Aufführer. Konzepte von Gegnerschaft in ägyptischen Texten besonders des Mittleren Reiches* (Stuttgart – Leipzig: Hirzel, 2005): 199-201, who points out that for demotic this is indeed a quite unusual use of the term. In the meantime another instance of *pr-3* as a designation of a foreign king has appeared; see Günter Vittmann, „Iranisches Sprachgut in ägyptischer Überlieferung,” Thomas Schneider (ed.), *Das Ägyptische und die Sprachen Vorderasiens, Nordafrikas und der Ägäis. Akten des Basler Kolloquiums zum ägyptisch-nichtsemitischen Sprachkontakt. Basel 9.-11. Juli 2003* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2004): 157 (I owe this reference to G. Vittmann).

64. Written *srpt(.t)* in P. Vienna D 6165 and *srpt3(.t)* in P. Vienna D 6155A; cf. Hoffmann, *Ägyptler und Amazonen* 168.

65. The Semitic word is to be found in Egyptian since the New Kingdom (Adolf Erman, Hermann Grapow (eds.), *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, 7 vols. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1982) 4: 195,2-3). An earlier transfer of the same word resulted in the Egyptian form *s3pt* (Erman, Grapow [eds.] 4: 18,5-7).

66. If the *Chicago Demotic Dictionary* 5: 39 (<http://www.oi-uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/PUB/SRC/CDD/CDD.html>, version of 23 July 2003) is right in translating *ʿys* (2.27 and 11.x+10) as „herald” and not as „trumpet”, then we would have to reckon with a male herald (*p3! ʿys*) in the Land of the Women.

fighting specifically seems to be reserved for the women.

Normally they wear female dress. But in order to spy in the enemy's camp they have men's dress at their disposal.⁶⁷ They use horses and another kind of riding animal – due to a lacuna it is unclear which this might be – and perhaps also chariots.⁶⁸

The women's armour includes what is called a bull's head helmet,⁶⁹ a type of helmet which seems to cover most of the face⁷⁰ and which is – at least according to demotic narratives – not exclusively used by the inhabitants of the Land of the Women.⁷¹ We also find references to body armour or a cuirass of some sort (*lbš.w*)⁷² and a shield⁷³ which obviously can be referred to as „protection“ (*mky.w*) in the text.⁷⁴

Offensive weapons include the scimitar, that is the sickle sword (*hpš n sfy*),⁷⁵ and spears.⁷⁶ Sarpot opens the battle by throwing a spear into the enemy's army. Due to a problematic expression, it is not clear, however, whether it is a spear which bends because it is so long and heavy, or whether it is a spear which is rotating when thrown.⁷⁷

We do not learn very much about the religion of the women. The information that they pray to Isis and Osiris⁷⁸ could but does not necessarily reflect a real religious situation. It could well

be an Egyptian projection. In Hellenistic and Roman times the cult of Isis and Osiris spread all over the ancient world.⁷⁹ So they could easily be conceived of as being venerated in any foreign country including the Land of the Women. It is worth mentioning that in our story Osiris is also the god of the Indians.⁸⁰ A connection with Dionysos' campaign to India could be possible. But again it could be the invention of an Egyptian in the Hellenistic or Roman period who thought it was natural that Osiris is also the god of the Indians.

As I said, it would be really interesting to know whether all these traits could speak in favour of the possible historicity of the Land of the Women and whether they can be connected with other ancient sources apart from Egyptian or Greek literature.⁸¹

Amazons in Coptic Art

I would like to conclude with the remark that, to the best of my knowledge, with the end of the pagan Egyptian culture the cults of the Egyptian warlike goddesses and the idea of their existence was also extinguished. Depictions of Amazons in Coptic, that is in the late antique period, do not reflect an uninterrupted Egyptian tradition but make use of classical Greek and Roman myths and iconographic features.⁸²

67. 2.12-2.16.

68. 2.32.

69. 2.33.

70. Cf. 4.26ff.

71. In P. Spiegelberg 4.15 this kind of helmet is also worn by the people of the Horus priest of Buto (Wilhelm Spiegelberg, *Der Sagenkreis des Königs Petubastis nach dem Straßburger demotischen Papyrus sowie den Wiener und Pariser Bruchstücken* [Leipzig: Hinrich, 1910]: 18-19).

72. 2.35; 5.4; 8.34; 11.x+11; 11.x+13.

73. 3.47.

74. 3.43.

75. 12.18.

76. 3.46; 12.1f.

77. Suggestion by Joachim Friedrich Quack (personal communication). The problem is the word *sqrqr* in 12.1.

78. 2.10; 2.22; 2.39; 2.45; 3.35; 3.41; 4.11; A.2.x+18; perhaps also 6.16; 7.15 and A.2.x+33.

79. For a vivid picture cf. Laurent Bricault, *Atlas de la diffusion des cultes isiaques (IV^e s. av. J.-C. – IV^e s. ap. J.-C.)*, (Paris: De Boccard, 2001).

80. 9.4 + A.2.x+7.

81. Egyptian accounts of foreign countries tend to be rather sober and free of monstrous and fabulous elements. But of course, this does not imply that foreign countries are necessarily described in a realistic way (Günter Vittmann, «Zur Rolle des „Auslands“ im demotischen Inaros-Petubastis-Zyklus», *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 96 [2006]: 317-318). One should not forget, however, that costumes, weapons, artifacts etc. of foreigners are rendered in great detail in Egyptian art.

82. Aziz S. Atiya (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, 8 vols. (New York - Toronto ...: Macmillan, 1991) 6: 1750-1752.