

“AS HE DISREGARDED THE LAW, HE WAS REPLACED DURING HIS OWN LIFETIME”

On Criticism of Egyptian Rulers in the So-Called *Demotic Chronicle*

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Before going into detail, it might be appropriate to provide some basic information on Egyptian history and the concept of kingship in Ancient Egypt. Egyptian history is commonly structured by means of a division into “dynasties”, a term which goes back to the historical work, written in Greek, of Manetho, an Egyptian priest living in the early Ptolemaic period (3rd century BCE).¹ In Manetho’s work, “dynasties” are defined not by genealogical descent but by common geographic origin. Nevertheless, they are considered nowadays to usually consist of a sequence of kings from the same family. Chronologically, the dynasties are organised into larger units of “kingdoms” (the Old Kingdom, ca. 2700 to 2200 BCE; the Middle Kingdom, ca. 2000 to 1750 BCE; and the New Kingdom, ca. 1550 to 1070 BCE). In between these, there are so-called “intermediary periods”, and it has become customary in recent times to add to this a “Third Intermediate Period” (ca. 1070 to 715 BCE), which follows after the New Kingdom before the Late Period as such sets in.

Whereas Egypt was under indigenous rule for the largest part of the older period (and often expanded into neighbouring territories), from the first millennium BCE onwards it experienced different types of foreign rulers. While the families of Libyan descent ruling for most of the Third Intermediate period had their actual power bases within Egypt, the picture began to change with the Nubian pharaohs of the 25th dynasty (ca. 715 to 664 BCE). Although they often still resided in Egypt, their actual home was outside Egypt. The situation became more extreme with the Assyrian invasion of Egypt (671 BCE) and later with Persian rule (526 to 404 and 342 to 330 BCE), when Egypt was only a small part of an empire the center of which lay outside Egypt itself. In between these two phases of foreign rule, we have the 26th dynasty (664 to 526 BCE) and a sequence of short-lived dynasties between the two Persian occupations (404 to 342 BCE).

The concept of kingship in Egypt has been the subject of considerable scholarly attention.² However, most studies are either very general or restricted to limited time

1 Basic edition Jacoby 1958: 5–112; handy bilingual (Greek-English) edition Waddell 1940; for a recent study of the dynastic tradition and its possible Egyptian antecedents, see Quack 2012b.

2 Besides the “classic” study by Frankfort 1948, more recent studies are e.g. Blumenthal 1970; Barta 1975, Grimal 1986; Schade-Busch 1992; O’Connor/Silverman 1995; Gundlach 1998;

periods, sometimes even to single kings, and there is as yet no overarching diachronic study which traces the changes over time in detail. Such an endeavour would probably be quite difficult to undertake and the time is not yet ripe for it. Nevertheless, we should at least bear in mind that the different concepts are likely to have evolved substantially over such a long period of time, and that even the use of similar or identical expressions can imply different meanings when considered in detail.

In modern times, there has been considerable discussion as to what extent the Egyptians really considered their king to be divine. In general, older publications take such a claim seriously while, since Posener's 1960 ground-breaking study on the question of divine kingship, as well as a more specific study by Goedicke (1960) on Old Kingdom royal phraseology, the preferred solution has been to distinguish between a genuinely divine office and the individual (human) incumbent. I am far from being persuaded that this is the correct solution; it seems to be driven to too great an extent by modern considerations of what is acceptable and what is not.³ There are even explicit statements that survive that say that the king is a god and not a man (Edfou VI.301.13).

Ancient Egypt was a culture in which monarchy as a form of rule was never questioned as such. This may be taken as confirmation of prejudices concerning Oriental despotism by whomsoever feels so inclined,⁴ but at least the Egyptians provided a clear definition of what they considered the king's main tasks to be. However, this definition is not found as part of a discursive, theoretical treatise, but of a religious text which, in research on the subject, is generally called "cult-theological tract" or "The King as Sun-Priest", but which was in fact either a companion text to the representation of the sun cycle in the temple or an integral constituent of funerary compositions for private individuals. In any case, it hardly satisfies the expectations one would have of a politico-philosophical discursive text today.⁵

The passage in question reads as follows:

The sun-god has appointed King NN on the earth of the living for all eternity
so that he may judge humans and satisfy the gods,
so that he may create truth and destroy falsehood.

He gives the gods sacrificial food,
invocational sacrifices to those who have become transfigured.

The name of King NN is in heaven the same as (that of) the sun-god,
his life is in his heart's joy as (is that of) Horus of the horizon.

The noble rejoice when they see him,
his subjects pay homage to him in his shape of a young man.⁶

Windus-Staginsky 2006; Blöbaum 2006; Frandsen 2008.

3 Quack 2010a. Frandsen 2008: 62–65 has argued that the transmission of an *imi.t-pr*-document (a sort of testament) would be an indication of the human character of the king. However, this legal document is also recorded for the divine sphere in Egypt (some examples already in Frandsen 2008: 64; additionally e.g. pCairo CG 58034, l. 9; cf. Quack 2012d: 225).

4 On this subject, cf. Assmann 1992, especially 39–44, with a very considered position. He also already refers to the "Demotic Chronicle", discussed below, as the only Egyptian text in which monarchy is criticised.

5 On the text, cf. Assmann 1970; Betrò 1990: 27–50.

6 Cf. Assmann 1970: 19 and 22; Betrò 1990: 27 and 46–50.

Of course, this definition of function, with its unquestioned and unquestionable religious legitimation, makes a critical reflection regarding the point of a monarchic form of government (or lack thereof) impossible from the outset. At this point, one might consider the extent to which the system would, given this situation, even allow for an open, controversial discussion and, furthermore, to what extent the place of such a discussion is taken instead by court intrigue as the most eminent implement for deciding between two options. In any case, the importance of rituals in Egyptian culture which served the purpose of obtaining favor and popularity, especially with the king is noticeable, as is the amount of evidence which shows that it was possible to systematically obliterate the names and images of high officials with richly decorated graves – the specific reason being, apparently, that they had lost royal favor.⁷

Such an examination could lead on to further discussion of what Egyptologists call the “king’s novel” and which is, in fact, less of a literary genre than a way of describing how political decisions should be made according to the following understanding: the king announces a decision, and either his council rejoices from the outset or they are shown the error of their ways.⁸ Controversial situations at court are never mentioned in this context; the court is always represented as a homogeneous bloc, although one can assume that, in practice, different opinions and factions existed often enough. But the existence of different factions is subject to negative cultural judgment in Egypt in any case. Key evidence of this is, for instance, the Instructions for Merikare, in which the demagogue is described in the following way: “He creates two factions among the young” (Merikare E 25);⁹ furthermore, an explicit appeal is made to oppose such people. Accordingly, the entire decision-making structure in Egypt is strongly marked by the principle of consensus. A judge’s ideal virtue, for example, is the ability to deliver a judgment concerning two people in such a way that both are satisfied.¹⁰

On the other hand, one should of course bear in mind that in such a situation, too, which involved the court and which was supposedly characterised by a superficial harmony and consensus, different groups with varying interests would, in actual fact, have participated in the decision-making process. It is just that the actual process diverges considerably from that of a parliamentary democracy of today.

For all that, criticism of individual rulers is not entirely out of the question. However, in such cases, the situation tends to turn quickly to the other extreme. Rulers who, often almost immediately after their death, have been classified in a negative way are quickly seen in such a bad light that there is no discursive discussion of their rule, and they are simply forgotten in a process which is as prescribed as it is effective. It is telling how the names of certain rulers who have been subject

7 On this, cf. Quack 2011; Quack 2012c: 111–115.

8 For recent discussions on this group of texts, cf. for example Jansen-Winkel 1993; Loprieno 1996; Beylage 2002: 553–618, Hoffmann 2004; Quack 2010b: 223; Quack 2012a: 282–286.

9 Quack 1992: 20f. and 167.

10 Cf., for example, Jin 2003; Jin 2014.

to an unfavorable judgement by immediate posterity are indeed actively consigned to oblivion. They are not found in the ritual compilations of kings' names for sacrificial purposes,¹¹ and, in those cases where lists from the administrative tradition necessitate transmission of the name, for example for administrative purposes, circumlocutions are used in order to avoid naming the ruler explicitly.

In the king lists, which contain a consecutive listing of all rulers along with the length of their reign, the number of years of a given reign has been labelled with the word "empty" at certain points. As the number of years of the reign has, in all cases, been preserved in these entries but the name of the specific ruler hasn't, and as other sources usually indicate that the rulers in question were ones who were problematic in certain respects, one can assume that their names were deliberately considered not worthy of preservation and that the omission cannot be put down to coincidental damage to the archival exemplar that was used in that specific instance.¹² Such rulers are, then, also notoriously subjected to a kind of *damnatio memoriae* insofar as their depictions and names were systematically hacked out of hieroglyphics wherever they were accessible. The difference from Roman *damnatio memoriae* is that no historian preserved the names and facts in his work.¹³

The circumstances are not yet entirely clear in cases in which images and texts of rulers who were later condemned remained on buildings and continued to be publicly visible, and it is a matter which would require more detailed examination. Particularly in the case of Queen Hatshepsut there are occasional instances in which her image was originally present but was then covered by other decoration. However, it is also fairly common for her image as king to have remained intact but for the accompanying names to have been rewritten to refer to unproblematic predecessors (especially Thutmose I and II).¹⁴ The aim is clearly to maintain the function of the images in question as representations of kings carrying out rituals. Furthermore, it means that there is no 'gap' which might cause the observer to ask questions that could potentially keep the ruler in question alive in oral discourse more than ever.

Circumlocution is another tangible method that was used in order to avoid naming a ruler explicitly when referring to his rule was unavoidable for practical reasons. An example of this occurred in a major lawsuit concerning property, which is relatively well documented in an inscription on a grave.¹⁵ The inscription refers to an earlier event, which happened to have taken place during the time of the heretical king Akhenaten, whom later tradition tried very much, and with considerable success, to forget. The inscription states that something took place during the time of the "enemy from Akhetaten". The name of the short-lived Egyptian capital, relevant for the time in question, is just about given, but the inscription avoids giving the actual name of the ruler; the negative classification of the ruler as an enemy is

11 Redford 1986: 18–64.

12 For this view, see, for example, Redford 1986: 14–16.

13 On "the art of forgetting" in Rome, cf. Flower 2006.

14 Cf. the overview in Ratié 1979: 302–209.

15 On the text, cf. Text Gardiner 1905: 11 and 54 (line S 14); Gaballa 1977: 25, pl. LXIII.

firmly defined. Similarly, a fragmentary administrative papyrus from the Egyptian Museum in Berlin states that someone died in the ninth year of “the rebel”.¹⁶

This very distinctive tendency to act as if events had never occurred or people had never existed forms a conspicuous contrast with conditions in the ancient Near East. There, the concept of “ill-fated kings” did, by all means, exist; their specific names are preserved for posterity, but they are preserved as examples of bad rule.¹⁷

At most, the admission of mistakes and of events which did not turn out in the best way is possible in a very specific genre, namely that kind of wisdom literature which a king composes for his son and successor and in which he gives good advice for his future rule. There are two surviving texts of this kind, the “Instructions of Amenemhat” addressed to his son Senusret¹⁸ and the “Instructions for Merikare” (a lacuna in the text means that the name of the father whose teachings are represented has been lost).¹⁹ The first text constitutes an apparently successful attack on the father whose teaching is described, while in the other an unfortunate event during the speaker’s own reign is admitted. However, both texts appear to be *de facto* posthumous works and it seems more likely that they represent a later ruler’s attempts to publicize his own political orientation as well as to provide a foil to his own glorious rule.

However, once they have died, criticism of the rulers in question and of their government does not constitute a genuinely discursive and perhaps controversially dealt with point of personal opinion; instead, it is prescribed, official policy. In such a case, criticism of the ruler is not a personal decision that involves risks. Rather, it is only a refusal to accept the official condemnation which would carry risks, and substantial ones at that. Condemnation of a ruler is implemented so consistently, however, that one does not even find the ruler’s name as a negative example along with a list of his terrible deeds (as Tacitus might have done). In the case of an Egyptian ruler, however, the failing which he represents is obliterated by the power of hard facts, as it were, thus making the slightest opportunity of criticizing the fundamental political structures even more impossible.

By contrast, negative statements about a ruler who is still in power carry heavy sanctions. This is to be seen as a culturally pronounced warning in wisdom literature, especially texts of that kind from the Middle Kingdom (c. 1950 to 1700 BCE), which are characterized by a strong exhortation to loyalty.²⁰ The compositions known to Egyptologists as “The Loyalist Instructions”²¹ (by now identified as the “Teachings of Kairsu”) and as “The Teaching of a Man for his Son”²² are especially relevant.

16 Gardiner 1938; the text is now edited in KRI III 158: 14 f.

17 Cf. for example Braun-Holzinger/Frahm 1999 as well as Wiesehöfer (in this volume).

18 Adrom 2006 is the most recent edition of the original text.

19 For an edition and study, see Quack 1992. On both works cf. Burkard/Thissen 2007: 102–114 with further references.

20 Cf. for example Quack 2005a; Wilke 2006: 127 f.

21 For a basic edition, see Posener 1976. In addition, cf. Chappaz 1982; Verhoeven 2009; Hagen 2011: 25 f.

22 For an edition, see Fischer-Elfert 1999; in addition see Fischer-Elfert 1998; Hagen 2011: 37–39.

In Kairsu's teachings there is a call to render homage to the king. In addition to positive remarks such as "Worship the king!" (§ 2.1) or "Exalt him at all times" (§ 2.3), there are also descriptions of what will happen to those who treat him correctly and those who treat him incorrectly. The text states, for example, that "His antagonist will become a have-not" (§ 3, 10); "He (the king) is Sekhmet²³ to anyone who disobeys his orders. He who disregards him will succumb to the demons" (§ 5.13–14); "Be free of any act of rebellion! The king's follower will become a venerable person. There is no grave for anyone who rebels against his majesty. His corpse will be thrown into the water" (§ 6.2–5).

"The Teaching of a Man for his Son" also contains similar statements: "Worship the king by loving him as a follower!" (§ 2.2); "He who is neglectful towards him receives no burial" (§ 2.4); "There is no grave for anyone who abuses his name, no gift of water for the one who defames him" (§ 7.7–8).

Similarly, there is a relevant passage in the so-called Negative Confession.²⁴ This is a text which has been preserved in the context of the Egyptian Book of the Dead and which, in the form in which it survives, is connected to the judgement of the dead. On the evidence of the wording of certain passages in the postscript concerning its practical application, it may be possible that it originally formed part of a ritual installation of future courtiers and that its function was to declare them as pure and thus eligible to enter court.²⁵ The main part of the text is a solemn declaration by the candidate that he has not committed any of a long series of transgressions. Tellingly, the statement "I have defamed the king" is also found in this list.

Considerable space is also devoted to negative speech acts against the king in the context of the so-called execration formulae. Using these formulae, a curse was placed on a potential enemy that was then fulfilled if the deed named as deserving punishment was carried out.²⁶ Conscious contortions of language, which appear to have been common practice, illustrate the extent to which even simply saying that something negative had happened to the king, let alone formulating this as a reproach, was considered inopportune.²⁷ Thus, it is said that "the king's enemy" is ill or unhappy,²⁸ or that a bad event is "far from" happening.²⁹ Expressing out loud that

23 This is a dangerous goddess who sends out demons.

24 Maystre 1937: 95.

25 Cf. Quack 2004: 18 f.; Quack 2013: 150; Quack (forthcoming).

26 Cf. Assmann 1994; Quack 2002.

27 The expression "freedom fries" instead of "French fries", created in 2003, is on a somewhat similar plane; even if, in this case, the aim was to avoid connecting an association perceived as positive with a political entity which was viewed in a negative light in the political situation of the time.

28 Posener 1969; Quack 2005b: 173 with further references. Cf. Schorch 2000: 87 f. on comparable phenomena in other cultures, too.

29 Cf. Quack 1993; Omar 2008: 49 and 136 (with n. 745). Unfortunately, the lack of mental agility on the part of today's researchers is reflected in the fact that Franke 1998 and Depuydt 1998 have tried to explain away the findings with more or less useful auxiliary hypotheses and with often numerous necessary emendations, instead of taking seriously the nature of the culturally characteristic treatment of problematic situations and the means of expressing them.

the king had actually been ill at some point or another thus proves to be not without its problems.

The danger associated with negative statements about the king is reflected in a case from the New Kingdom (c. 1200 BCE) in which the court dealt with an accusation of defamation of the king. The case is recorded on ostracon Cairo CG 25556.³⁰ The case took place in the workmen's village of Deir-el-Medina, where the craftsmen who carved out and decorated the kings' rock-cut tombs were accommodated. The foreman there told the court that one of the workers had defamed the ruling king, Seti (II). The committee of judges questioned the witnesses regarding the incident, but they claimed not to have heard any statements of that kind. They were thereupon made to swear an oath which threatened them with serious mutilations should they keep back statements against the pharaoh, but disclose them on another day. It is possible to speculate on this incident. Presumably some thoughtless words had indeed been uttered but the witnesses ultimately had the feeling that it was not worth exposing one of their neighbours to the full severity of state punishment which he would have been certain to suffer had there been a sworn report of *lèse-majesty*.

A letter (pBerlin 10487) dating to the very end of the 20th Dynasty (c. 1070 BCE),³¹ a time of considerable internal problems, represents contemporaneous written evidence of a very rare case of the ruling king's authority being called into question. The author of the letter, who is on campaign in Nubia as the king's general, wrote to his trusted contact, who was implementing his orders as a scribe in Thebes. The letter talks about two Nubian soldiers who are obviously making undesirable speeches in Thebes, although the text avoids giving any more precise details. The recipient of the letter is to join forces with two other people (to each of whom a letter with similar content was sent),³² is to get to the bottom of the matter and, if the accusations turn out to be true, put the two Nubians into sacks and throw them into the water at night without anyone else noticing.³³ This drastic demand is followed by a declaration (rt. 8–vs. 1): “As regards pharaoh – how is he able to still reach this country? And as regards pharaoh, of what is he even still the ruler?”

This passage has occasionally been interpreted as an example of criticism of the ruler or of the author's own excessive desire for power, perhaps even as an example of a treasonous plot.³⁴ In my view, if one takes into account the situation in which the letter was written, it does not represent criticism so much as a recognition of the royal party's actual weak position (a party to which the letter's author by all means belongs!). The passage merely explains why it is necessary to take recourse to the somewhat questionable procedure of carrying out a political murder and subsequently destroying the evidence instead of taking the men to court in the normal

30 Allam 1973: 61–63. Cf. Lippert 2008: 69.

31 For an edition of the text, see Černý 1939: 36 f.; an English translation is found in Wente 1967: 53 f.; Wente 1990: 183.

32 pBerlin 10488 and 10489, see Černý 1939: 53 f.

33 It is no coincidence that these letters were given the heading “Ein Fall abgekürzter Justiz” (“A case of reduced justice”) in the first edition of them by Erman 1913.

34 Gardiner 1912–13: 61 f.; Helck 1981: 207; Vandersleyen 1995: 649.

way, condemning them and having them quite officially executed. It appears that the risk that they might disclose explosive information and thus damage the king's cause further, or perhaps even that it might not have been possible to enforce their execution officially, was too great.

Brief mention, at least, should be made of another text, the interpretation of which is very problematic. It is generally called "Reproach to god" by Egyptologists and it is preserved in a text which, since its original title has not been preserved, is usually called "The Admonitions of Ipuwer", although a better title is "The Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All".³⁵ Because of the poor state of preservation of the papyrus, the context of the passage is not particularly clear. Above all, there is profound disagreement about whether it represents a reproach to a god or to a king. Personally, I am of the opinion that there is a first part, in which someone is mentioned in the third person, that clearly refers to a creator-god. There is no doubt that this figure has the power to intervene directly in the matters of the world. Thus, the text says the following: "Would that he had recognized their character in the first generation! He would have damned, he would have stretched out his arm against it, and would have destroyed its seed (?) and their inheritance" (12.2 f.). The very reference to the first generation excludes the possibility that a figure who is still of current relevance is a human ruler – only a creator-god can be meant.

Following this, however, someone is addressed in the second person. It is difficult to ascertain the nature of this figure, as the beginning of the text, which must have stated the situation of the dialogue more precisely, is missing. A later passage, however, makes it clear that the figure is to be identified as the Lord of All (*nb-r-ḥr*). This term is usually applied to a deity in Egypt. Especially in the Middle Kingdom (to which period the composition is likely dated), however, it was also used as a designation of the king, and this is probably also the case here.³⁶ In contrast to the deity, the king is addressed directly instead of just being spoken about. The text then says of the king: "Truly,³⁷ utterance and insight³⁸ are with you. (But) upheaval is what you have caused throughout the country, as well as the din of unrest" (12.12 f.). Ipuwer, the speaker, then summarizes the current lawless situation once again and contrasts it with an ideal image of society. Comments concerning the political situation, which deny a genuine threat from foreign enemies and, instead, lay the blame at the door of the country's own conscripted soldiers, should probably be interpreted

35 See Gardiner 1909 for an edition and treatment; a new edition of the Egyptian text is found in Enmarch 2005; for a translation and an analysis of the contents, see Enmarch 2008. On the section under discussion here, see the special study by Fecht 1972. On the fundamental question of determining the genre of the text, I refer to my remarks in Quack 1997.

36 Enmarch 2008: 30 f. also takes this view and considers the statement regarding a third person as a reference to a creator-god; with regard to the statements addressed to a second person, on the other hand, he takes the king as being the most likely addressee.

37 In my opinion, the manuscript reading *nḥm* must stand for the particle *nḥm.n*, as has already been argued by Buchberger 1993: 342; cf. exactly the same orthography in the New Kingdom ostraca of Sinuhe B 46. Enmarch 2008: 189 f. takes a different view, but is forced to admit that the construction, assumed by him, of *nḥm* with the preposition *ḥm'* is not attested.

38 These are Hu and Sia, deified personifications who appertain to the sun god as well as the king.

as the answer of Ipuwer's interlocutor.³⁹ The rest of the discourse becomes increasingly difficult to understand due to the very poor state of the text's preservation.

It is fairly certain that the text questioned the status of a specific ruler in addition to containing sceptical comments about the creator-god.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the name of the ruler concerned has not been preserved, which contributes to the considerable uncertainties surrounding the text's historical context.⁴¹ I would expect it to be someone who was subject to negative propaganda of a political nature, and so I would attribute the text to a movement which was either a contemporary political opposition of that time or which wanted to distance itself from a particular past. Given that the manuscript is certain to have been written several centuries after the particular historical situation, it is likely that this was a movement which was ultimately successful or rather bequeathed its assessment of the relevant historical situation to posterity with a degree of dominance or popular approval.

At least in the context of a literary tale, namely "The Contest for the Beneficence of Amun", there is criticism of a ruler.⁴² In this tale, a prince speaks disparagingly about the ruler, to whom he does not want to give the title of king. He applies epithets to him which are clearly derogatory, but philological problems make it difficult to understand them precisely. The following can, however, be understood: "The Tanitic (...) fish-catcher,⁴³ this Butic (?) headrest-catching (?) sailor,⁴⁴ to whom I did not say 'Pharaoh'" (pSpiegelberg 13.14–15). It is clear that this openly stated assessment is derogatory, but its interpretation as a remark directed against a monarch is limited by the fact that, from the point of view of the speaker, the person in question is, after all, denied this very status. One should also take into account that the protagonists of this tale are members of the Libyan warrior elite, and so are not acting on the basis of Egyptian moral concepts that had been handed down traditionally.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the prince who expresses this criticism is described as an unpleasant squabbler by other characters in the text.

39 There is no explicit statement that there has been a change of speaker, but this could easily be supplied in one of the larger lacunae.

40 However, most recently, Morenz 2010 has taken a different view and, on a relatively weak basis, understands these sections, too, as a reproach to god.

41 Enmarch 2008: 18–24 provides arguments for a possible composition date in the later Middle Kingdom or the Second Intermediate Period.

42 An overview is found in Quack 2009a: 61–66; a translation into German is found in Hoffmann/Quack 2007: 88–107 and 336–338.

43 Cf. also Jasnow 2001: 71 (n. 59); his suggestion of taking *hlte* as a variant of *štl* "ichneumon" is, however, phonetically impossible nor would it fit in with the determinative; for criticism of the argument, see Hoffmann/Quack 2007: 338.

44 The assumption generally held up to now that the word in question is the word for "trapping pit", which appears in pInsinger 19.13; 20.20 and 30.5 as *hyt.t* with the dying-man determinative, is precluded by the fact that the word *hyt* has the leg determinative and is of masculine gender. The way the word is written only fits *hyt* "sailor". *wrs* with the wood determinative is otherwise securely attested as "headrest"; cf. Vos 1993: 140. However, the meaning of this expression remains unclear. Are we perhaps dealing with the Egyptian equivalent of a "womanizer"?

45 On this subject, cf. Jansen-Winkel 2000: 3–13; Vittmann 2003: 1–20.

In the main part of my contribution I want to focus on an interesting borderline case: a text which speaks badly of specific rulers, who are named explicitly. In most cases these rulers are, admittedly, dead, but it is possible that there are some, at least, whose power had not yet been completely abrogated. This involves genuine criticism of specific people instead of the vague pretence that someone who had fallen out of favor had never existed.

My source text is given the title “Demotic Chronicle” in the field of Egyptology.⁴⁶ However, it is generally acknowledged that the term “chronicle”, which was given to the work in the early period of modern scholarship, does not come anywhere close to adequately describing the text. For this reason, the designation “Demotic Oracle” has also been used, although this too has its problems. The text is preserved in a single papyrus (Bibliothèque Nationale 215), which dates to around the late 3rd century BCE – that is, to the time of Ptolemaic rule in Egypt. The demotic Egyptian text has been written over an erased older Greek text; the scroll is thus a palimpsest. Understanding the text is made difficult by the fact that only the middle section, comprising of 5 well-preserved columns and a few remnants of a further column, has been preserved, whereas the beginning and end are missing.

The structure of the text is reasonably complex, so I consider a more detailed explanation necessary. Essentially, the source consists of a base text which is in itself already extremely enigmatic. To this is added an interpretation concerning the recent past, the present and the future of Egypt; in concrete terms it refers primarily to political history. The modern designation of “oracle”, which is sometimes used, attempts to reflect this situation. However, it is not really appropriate because it is difficult to imagine the base text as a genuine oracle, especially not in the context of Egyptian culture, where divine oracles are invariably delivered as clear statements which do not require laborious interpretation of the wording. Furthermore, an oracle is supposed to respond to explicit requests, but, in the text under consideration, signs requiring additional interpretation seem to have appeared somewhat more spontaneously. Unfortunately, any precise information concerning the circumstances in which this base text appeared and who is interpreting it with reference to contemporary history, has vanished due to the loss of the first pages of the text.

It was already noted by Eduard Meyer how similar the situation may have been to the familiar writing on the wall from the biblical Book of Daniel and I recently elaborated on this further. It might at least be conceivable, as well as compatible with those parts of the texts that have been preserved, that a mysterious text appeared at the palace in supernatural circumstances, that interpreting it proved too difficult for those at court, and that, for this reason, an external expert in interpretation was consulted.

46 An edition is found in Spiegelberg 1914; Meyer 1915 attempts an initial historical contextualisation on the basis of Spiegelberg’s translation; for more recent secondary literature, see especially Johnson 1983; ead. 1984; Huß 1994: 143–162; Lippert 2001; Felber 2002; Gozzoli 2006: 283–290. I provide a new German translation in Hoffmann/Quack 2007: 183–191. On the interpretation of the text see, most recently, Quack 2009b. See also Griffiths 1991: 176–183; Assmann 1996: 419–422.

The composition is divided into chapters, of which the section beginning roughly in the middle of the sixth chapter and running into the thirteenth has actually been preserved. With regard to content, it should be noted that the text does not simply progress through history in a linear fashion, but instead shows a conspicuous doubling in its sequence. Starting with Amyrtaeus, who was historically the one to successfully shake off the yoke of Persian supremacy over Egypt in 404 BCE, the last indigenous rulers of Egypt are discussed in the sixth chapter. The final ruler whose name we are given is Teos, from the middle 30th dynasty, c. 362/360 BCE. In this run of rulers, for the most part only the names are provided and there is no additional information on the nature of their government. Following the reference to Teos, it is merely said: "The things they did were written down by Thot when he was examining their affairs in Herakleopolis" (2.4). Thus it is possible that a critical examination may have composed part of the document, but concrete negative evaluations are not really expressed. This is rather more striking when one considers what follows afterwards: for the period after the rule of Teos, the text announces a ruler who will come "after them" (2.5), but it does not give his name. The main section of chapters seven to nine is devoted to him.

This change of government, however, is not a peaceful or normal process. Rather, it is brought about by a rebellion, which is also the way the Demotic text explicitly describes it. The historical facts are reasonably clear: when Teos leaves for his great campaign in Syria, his uncle Smaus rebels and is able to place his son Nectanebo (II) on the throne of Egypt; the rebellion ultimately succeeds.⁴⁷ Our text deals with the situation in some detail:

Left will be confused with right. Egypt is to the right, Syria is to the left. That is, he who will go to Syria, which is to the left, will be exchanged for the person who will be in Egypt, which is to the right.

The one from Herakleopolis – it was the one from Hermopolis who found him. The one from Herakleopolis is Herishef. He was found by the one from Hermopolis. That is, when Thot went to Herakleopolis, it was examinations of the things which he had given as orders to Herishef for Egypt that he carried out.

Herakleopolis, Herakleopolis, Herakleopolis. That is, the one who went to Herakleopolis and disregarded the laws, [concerning him] [an] exam[ination] was carried out [in] Herakleopolis. Punishment was delivered on him. Punishment was delivered on his son.

(2.12–17)

Two people at once, father and son, are considered to have been punished, and, in the case of the father, it is explicitly stated that the reason was his disregard for the law. The people in question are not, of course, just any private individuals, but the rulers themselves, that is Nectanebo I and his son, Teos. To say that they had disregarded the law is thus a fairly politically charged claim. At the same time, however, it is also obviously a point which should be connected to Nectanebo's rebellion, as its success and the deposition of the other line is understood precisely as a punishment for wrongdoing.

47 An overview of the history of that period is found in Kienitz 1953; cf. Huß 2001: 43–51.

However, the text is still comparatively terse and vague in this whole section. On the one hand, the future ruler's revolt is described in more detail in a "ritualized" form, as it were, but on the other hand, joy about his rule is expressed. A positive statement is then made, namely that he does not disregard the laws (3.7–16). The composition could seemingly end with this, but in fact it continues, or rather starts anew.

In a second run, which returns to the beginning of the account, i.e. to Amyrtaeus again, matters are treated in much more detail. Now each individual reign is explicitly assessed, and indeed in most cases, the result is distinctively negative. This process begins right away with the first and only representative of the 28th dynasty:

"Pharaoh Amyrtaeus. As violations of the law were committed in his time, he was made to do the walks of yesterday. His son did not wield power after him" (3.18–19). The expression "walks of yesterday" is relatively difficult to interpret. I myself suspect that it means that he was made to become obsolete. The concluding sentence, which in accordance with the historical facts denies dynastic continuity, is clear, at any rate.

Now the text turns to the 29th dynasty. The following statement is found concerning the first ruler: "Pharaoh Nephertites (I). As he carried out the things he did with diligence, his son was allowed to succeed him. However, he was only given a short time span on account of many sins that were committed in his time" (3.20–21).

At this point the text contains a sort of loop, the reason for which is difficult to see. Once again, there is a statement concerning Amyrtaeus: "As he ordered injustice to be done, one considered the things that were done to him. His son was not allowed to succeed him. Furthermore, he was deposed while he was still alive" (4.1–2). This is followed by another statement about Nephertites: "His son was allowed to succeed him" (4.3–4).

There is an anticipatory remark, as it were, about Nectanebo here, who is explicitly named as the current ruler of Egypt: "It is he who has given away the possessions of Egypt and of all the temples in order to gain money" (4.4–5). The critical undertone is clear.

With this, the text returns to the linear sequence. The following remark is not associated with a named ruler, but appears to refer to Hakor during the first phase of his rule: "As he disregarded the law, he was replaced during his own lifetime" (4.6). Thus this implies that he was ousted from his position of power by another ruler during his lifetime. This is probably Psammuthes, who is dealt with next: "He did not exist. That is, he was not on the path of the god. He was not allowed to stay in power" (4.7–8). This statement refers to the fact that the rule of Psammuthes remained ephemeral and that Hakor regained power after him for a second phase of rule: "His days of exercising power were allowed to reach fullness, that is, because he was beneficent to the temples. They ended. That is, he disregarded the law and no longer carried out inspections because of his brothers" (4.9–10). Subsequently, Hakor's son Nephertites (II) has to bear the consequences of this behaviour which is regarded in a negative light. It is said about him: "It was ordered that he should not

be allowed to exist, because the law had been disregarded under his father. Punishment was dealt on his son after him" (4.11–12).

The 29th dynasty ends with this instance of family liability, which affects not only the governing ruler but also his son, and the composition can then devote itself fully to the thirtieth dynasty, described as ruling at that time. It does this extensively. What is worthy of note is the fact that the length of a reign is announced by way of complex combinations of numbers, the function of which is not yet entirely clear. Nectanebo and Teos are treated in this way first, before an anonymous, future ruler, who, on the basis of succession and the length of his rule, is plainly recognisable as Nectanebo. Besides this establishment of the length of the reign, developments up to the second period of Persian rule, described as a time of atrocity, are also traced.

Chapter 11 returns to Nectanebo I. First, his self-confident demeanour is demonstrated using expressions which are attributed to him.⁴⁸ But the problems of precisely this attitude are expounded by putting it into words. It is true that the first-person speaker of the passage does give the king the option that certain deities could act on his behalf, but it is immediately turned into a rebuke. "You forgot them when you were thinking of acquiring possessions" (5.13).

This essential point of criticism, namely that Nectanebo acted against the interests of the gods and the temples because of his great avarice, is illustrated further in chapter 12. Here rebuke and instructions for potentially better behaviour are combined in a complex way. Although demands such as "Pharaoh, carry out your work!" (5.17) or "Pay attention to the avaricious people" (5.20) initially appear to offer the option of a better future under the same king, all hope seems ultimately lost when even the Uraeus, itself, the fire-spewing cobra which the king wears on his head in order to repel enemies, implores the ruler of the gods, Amun: "Provide the ruler who will be charitable" (6.3). With this, the old king is disavowed for good, and the only hope that remains is for a new king.

However, there are no further concrete details about this new king, or, to put it more accurately, the state of the text here is such that a trained eye should immediately recognise the signs of redactional revision. On the one hand, the text says that the Barbarians are to be called in order to rule in Egypt after "you (pl.)" (6.15) – that is the group addressed by the first-person speaker. On the other hand, "his" time – that is, the time of a single ruling being – is understood as a time which is by all means happy (6.15–16). The section of the papyrus which has been preserved breaks off after the announcement that there will be a long period of Greek rule in the future.

Rather than just giving a summary, I will now attempt to interpret what precisely is intended here and what political positions are implied. Practically all Egyptian rulers following the first period of Persian rule – that is every ruler whose name was actually mentioned in the text at all – are subject to negative assessment.

48 Contrary to the view in Johnson 1983: 63, this does not, of course, mean that the author of the text himself considers Nectanebo to be the legitimate king, but rather that the king sees himself in this way.

Nepherites I is the only one who comes off relatively well. As a person, he is judged in a positive manner, the reward being that his son succeeds him directly. Given these circumstances, his reign is oddly short, and the many sins of the time, which are independent of Nepherites, are given as an explanation for this.

The evaluation of Hakor is also still reasonably positive. The full completion of his time as a ruler is considered a reward for a beneficent attitude towards the temples, and this may also be an interpretation of the historical fact that he managed to regain control over the country after having been temporarily ousted from power. Only an alteration in behaviour, which the text blames on his brothers, leads to a change. As far as I know, independent means by which these facts might be verified do not exist. Nepherites II does not appear to be personally culpable, but is nonetheless held to account for the sins of his father.

All other specifically named rulers are judged negatively; only the future savior-king is described in a positive way. Coming after Nectanebo and Teos, this can, historically, only be Nectanebo (II). The disguise of anonymity, as well as the classification as savior-king, are, of course, very significant, especially when one considers Nectanebo II's true historical situation as a usurper who gained power without genuine legitimation and who had to first assert himself in an intense struggle. It is hard to imagine that this is a coincidence. Instead, I would firmly put forward the proposition that an original version of the so-called *Demotic Chronicle* was a piece of political propaganda composed with the interests of Nectanebo II in mind and probably also at his behest. I use the term "original version", because the version that actually survives and which announces Persian rule and the Greek supremacy over Egypt "for a long time" (6.15–21) cannot have been written much before the 3rd century BCE. I would consider continuation and redacting to have taken place here.

In this way – and this is a first conclusion – the background to the criticism of Egyptian rulers which is expressed so clearly is formed by a rebellion, which is probably the most pronounced form of criticism of a ruler that there is. Moving beyond the specific situation, one can also state generally that the last indigenous Egyptian dynasties do not exactly present a time of particularly smooth or unproblematic rule. Frequent changes of dynasty, with familial continuity of three generations at most, constant disagreement within families with subsidiary lines attempting to take over power, together with typically short periods of rule, all bear eloquent witness to the precariousness of an Egyptian king's reign at this time.⁴⁹ It should not come as too much of a surprise that, given these circumstances, concrete criticism of individual rulers was voiced more clearly than in earlier periods.

Nevertheless, I would like to add some further observations here, which examine this particular type of criticism and possible external influences once again. The most common form of criticism is the accusation that the rulers in question are acting illegally. Indeed, in one case, the ruler is said not to be on the path of the god. Somewhat more concrete accusations are levelled against Nectanebo I, who is specifically accused of being avaricious, a fact expressed clearly by his behaviour to-

49 Cf., for example, Blöbaum 2006: 15–20.

wards the temples and their property. The actual historical background is fairly clear with regard to the last point: the great Syrian campaign, on which Teos ultimately embarked, had been in preparation for a long time and had involved great expenditure. It depended to a large degree on the recruitment of Greek mercenaries, for which the minting of money was begun in Egypt.

A significant gauge of a ruler is thus his relationship to the law (*hp*). This is relevant because it is not a concept that traditionally held a particularly important place in the legitimization of Egyptian kings.⁵⁰ Rather, one might have instinctively expected *ma'at* as the leading concept of justice and cosmic order.⁵¹ The term is used less in the later period, but it still exists in Demotic, too, either independently or in the linguistically younger abstract *mꜥ.t-mꜣ'.t*.⁵² There were also occasional proposals of making a connection with the Persian term *data*. In addition, one should also take into account a possibility which has already been discussed with regard to the text since Eduard Meyer anyway,⁵³ and that is the similarity with the assessment of the kings of Israel and Judah in Deuteronomy. Here, too, kings were classified as good or bad depending on their relationship to the divine law. In doing so, specific connections were made between the quality of the reign when viewed in this light and the fate, good or bad, of the ruler; in the case of Israel, this also affected the continuation of the dynasty. The unhappy fate of rulers who, really, ruled without any obvious personal faults, was attributed to the sins of their time. The *Demotic Chronicle* really does the same for Nephertites I, the short length of whose reign is said to be caused by the sins of his time despite his own honest behaviour.

In principle, the possibility of Jewish influence on Egypt should in no way be excluded in this period. However, whether one need necessarily apply it as an explanation is yet another question. To a certain degree, one can safely assume that similar historical situations have resulted in analogous occurrences. The Israelite and Judean monarchies were fairly weak, endangered entities which ultimately succumbed to great foreign powers; similarly, between the two phases of Persian rule, the Egyptian kingdom was constantly under threat and ultimately could not be upheld. The normal attitude in an ancient Near Eastern empire was to rely on the power of one's own deity and to expect protection and support from it. If the winds of history are constantly in one's face, a need for explanations can arise. Unless one wants to present one's own gods as powerless, the obvious route is to interpret them as angry; that is, the gods are not prepared to help their own people, or rather the king, because of misconduct.

Viewed in this light, I would conclude that the fundamental criticism of Egypt's own kings in the so-called *Demotic Chronicle* results from its character as a political attack directed against a specific ruler on the one hand, and from the precarious state of Egypt in real political terms on the other.

50 Cf. also Lorton 1986: 53–62.

51 On *ma'at*, cf. Assmann 1990; Lichtheim 1992.

52 Cf. Thissen 1998: 1045.

53 Meyer 1995: 299; Griffiths 1991: 178–183.

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