

THE SO-CALLED DEMOTIC CHRONICLE (4.5)

Joachim-Friedrich Quack

The composition is preserved on only one single papyrus (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 215 rt.), which, given that it lacks both the beginning and the end, seriously impedes interpretation. The papyrus is a palimpsest, i.e. the text in question was written after the preceding text inscribed on the papyrus was erased. It dates to the late 3rd century BCE and probably comes from the Memphite region. On the back of the same papyrus, a number of unrelated shorter texts were inscribed. They present a story about king Amasis who, suffering from a hangover, is distracted by means of a story about a sailor set in the time of king Psammetichus¹; rules about Egyptian priests when they are sick; a tradition about the rules Cambyses set for the Egyptian temples as well as the compilation of Egyptian law by Dareios I²; and finally some fragmentary sections describing the dire condition of people working in the swamps.³

While there is an entrenched tradition of labelling the text of the recto as a “chronicle,” it is by no means such a composition. An alternative proposal has been to call it an “oracle,” but this also does not really fit. What we have in the preserved parts is basically an enigmatic text organized in chapters and concerned, among other things, with priestly service according to the lunar cycle, measures and weights. This is followed by an interpretation applying the basic statement to the political situation of Late-Period Egypt: beginning with the 28th dynasty and continuing until the 30th dynasty; the second period of Persian rule; and, in the last preserved parts, also the Greeks.⁴ Sometimes further comments or even explanations for the interpretative framework are given, with the technique of the commentary having been compared to that of Jewish writings from Qumran.⁵

It is noteworthy that not only the period of foreign Persian rule is viewed very negatively, as a traumatic period, but that also most of the indigenous rulers of the 4th century BCE are seen quite negatively. Especially pronounced is the critique directed against Nektanebes I⁶ and his son Teos. Given that parts of the text speak of a “future ruler” coming after them, there is some likelihood that the original composition was an instrument of political partisanship used by Nektanebos II who rebelled against Teos. Still, other parts of the text show knowledge of the length of the reign of Nektanebos II, as well as the second period of Persian rule and the Greek conquest. Therefore, these parts could not have been written before 332 BCE, i.e. the conquest of Alexander the Great, and were probably written quite a bit later, since a “long time” of Greek rule is mentioned.

Indeed, there are inconsistencies and fault lines which point towards a complicated redactional history preceding the text preserved on our only extant manuscript. Thus, what originally might have constituted a pamphlet in support of a specific (and ultimately successful) inner-Egyptian rebellion, became a vague hope of future independence from Greek rule.

The communication situation seems to be that of a court session at which king Nektanebes I is present, since he is addressed as “you” several times. The one who speaks and interprets the enigmatic is not identified anywhere in the preserved parts, but the way he addresses the king with harsh critique makes it likely that he must be somebody with independent authority. Perhaps the situation can be conceived as being somewhat similar to the biblical story of Daniel reading the writing on the wall for Belshazzar (Dan 5). It has been pointed out that the basic concept behind the text, that the length of a king’s rule is related to the virtues and vices of that king, has strong similarities to the deuteronomistic history of the kings of Israel and Judah. It remains to be seen if this is due to genuine cultural borrowings or simply results from a similar situation of precarious political power.

The decipherment and translation of the text still pose some serious problems.⁷ Furthermore, there are some indications that the copy transmitted to us is not free of writing faults and even serious omissions.

(1.1) [.....] the first shrine.

(1.2) [.....]

(1.3) [.....]

(1.4) [.....]

(1.5) [.....] fear⁸ (?), dust.

(1.6) [.....] go to Heliopolis.

¹ The commonly used designation “Amasis and the skipper” is inaccurate and misleading as it combines a figure from the frame story with a figure from the main story.

² The priestly rules, as well as the records of decisions and law-collection are probably excerpts of a larger collection of rules and laws for the Egyptian temples of which a fragmentary Roman-period copy from Tebtunis is preserved (to be published by Fabian Wespí).

³ Ever since the edition by Spiegelberg 1914, these passages have been assumed to be animal fables, but there is no positive evidence, and the bird names introducing them are likely to be simply an “alphabetic” organization, see Quack 2009a:172–173.

⁴ For the relation of the data of the “Demotic chronicle” to other sources, see Johnson 1974.

⁵ Daumas 1961.

⁶ The name of this king is often erroneously given as Nektanebo(s) in modern publications.

⁷ The translation given here is mainly based upon the German translation that I gave in Hoffmann and Quack 2007:183–191. Only points where I have changed my mind substantially are noted.

⁸ I propose to read *snty(.t)*.

<p>(1.7) [.....]</p> <p>(1.8) [.....] the slaughtering⁹ (?)</p> <p>(1.9) [.....] the ... which</p> <p>(1.10) [.....]</p> <p>(1.11) [.....] a man will reach them.</p> <p>(1.12) [.....]</p> <p>(1.13) [.....]</p> <p>(1.14) [.....] in order to say it.</p> <p>(1.15) [.....] the way</p> <p>(1.16) [.....] ..., and he will</p> <p>(1.17) [.....] his sins</p> <p>(1.18) [.....] That is [the] place of enquiry.</p> <p>(1.19) [.....]</p> <p>(1.20) [.....] Memphis. What they did</p> <p>(1.21) [.....] together with him</p> <p>(1.22) [.....]</p> <p>(1.23) [.....] towards Egypt.</p> <p>(1.24) [.....]</p> <p>(2.1) May the last day of the month happen! The last day of the month will happen. That means: The completion of the enquiries, which will be done by the aforementioned gods, will come about.</p> <p>(2.2) May the first day, second day, third day, fourth day, fifth day, sixth day of the month become full. May the (first) date become full. That means: Pharaoh Amyrtaios.¹⁰ The second date. That means: Pharaoh Nephertites (I).¹¹</p> <p>(2.3) The third date. That means: Pharaoh Hakoris.¹² The fourth date. That means: Pharaoh Nephertites (II).¹³ The fifth. That means: Pharaoh Nektanebes.¹⁴</p> <p>(2.4) The sixth. That means: The king¹⁵ Pharaoh Teos.¹⁶ What they did is written down by Thoth when he revised their matters in Herakleopolis.</p> <p>(2.5) May the seventh day be given to Ptah. He will name the ruler who will succeed him in order to revise the matters in Memphis, because what he will do – they will revise what he will do (2.6) in Memphis.</p> <p>(2.7) End. The seventh chapter.</p> <p>(2.8) The last day of the lunar cycle is correct in Pe¹⁷ in the month of Mekhir. That means: The fulfillment of the generation is in accordance with what had been ordered in the month of Mekhir. That means: The fatality¹⁸ will occur in it (2.9) because the last</p>	<p>day of the lunar cycle is the fulfillment of the month.</p> <p>(2.10) (The) beginning of (the) first day of the lunar cycle is in Dep¹⁹ in the month of Pamenoth. That means: (The) beginning of rule which the one who will be ruler will do is in the month of Pamenoth, because (the) first day of the lunar cycle is (the) beginning of (the) month.</p> <p>(2.11) The moon traverses the flood. The ruler will circulate around the entire land. That means: The ruler who will succeed them will leave Egypt.</p> <p>(2.12) Left will be given in exchange for right. Right is Egypt, left is the land of Syria. That means: The one who will go to the land of Syria, which is the left side, (2.13) he will be replaced by the one who will be in Egypt, which is the right side.</p> <p>(2.14) The one from Herakleopolis; the one from Hermopolis found him. The one from Herakleopolis is Aseph.²⁰ The one from Hermopolis found him. That means: When Thoth went to Herakleopolis, (2.15) enquiries about what he had commanded to Aseph concerning Egypt were what he made.</p> <p>(2.16) Herakleopolis, Herakleopolis, Herakleopolis! That means: The one who went to Herakleopolis and abandoned the law, they enquired [about him] in Herakleopolis. (2.17) They had punishment dealt out against him. They had punishment dealt out against his son.</p> <p>(2.18) End. The eighth chapter.</p> <p>(2.19) (The) first phyle, may it push the bolt! That means: The future ruler in Egypt will push the bolts. This is that the king opens it.</p> <p>(2.20) (The) second phyle, which has opened. That means: It is the second ruler who opens it.</p> <p>(2.21) (The) third phyle, which has opened before the uraeus. That means: The third future ruler, they will be happy about his rule. The rest²¹: (The) third will be among the foreigners. (2.22) That is: Happiness on the part of the gods (because of) their rule.</p> <p>(2.23) The smooth(-snake), she will come, she will bring the one of Herakleopolis in her apron. That means: The smooth(-snake), which is the uraeus, [she] will bring (2.24) the one from Herakleopolis,</p>
--	--

⁹ For *this* compare perhaps *Wb* V, 328, 4–7.

¹⁰ Amyrtaios (404/401–399 BCE), the only ruler of the 27th dynasty.

¹¹ Nephertites I (399–393 BCE), the founder of the 29th dynasty.

¹² Hakoris (393–380 BCE), a king of the 29th dynasty.

¹³ Nephertites II (380 BCE), the last king of the 29th dynasty.

¹⁴ Nektanebes (380–362 BCE), the founder of the 30th dynasty.

¹⁵ Only for this king does the scribe make use of a more archaic word for “king” besides the usual “pharaoh,” perhaps marking that this is the actual living king.

¹⁶ Teos (364/62–360 BCE), a king of the 30th dynasty.

¹⁷ A place in the Delta in the region of Buto, strongly linked to Horus.

¹⁸ Probably the death of a king (Nektanebes I or Teos) is meant.

¹⁹ A “sister-city” to Pe, also in the region of Buto.

²⁰ The name of this god (who is the main deity of Herakleopolis) is usually rendered as Harsaphes in modern scholarship, but Aseph comes closer to the forms attested in Greek administrative documents.

²¹ I.e. an explanation of the rest of the basic statement.

being content, in her apron to Pharaoh's palace. It is Aseph who will give orders to the future ruler. It is said: "It is a man of Herakleopolis who will rule after the foreigners (and) the Greeks."

(3.1) Now receive happiness, oh priest²² of Aseph. That means: The priest of Aseph will be happy after the Greeks (have left). That is: A ruler manifests in Herakleopolis.²³

(3.2) May he open the ovens, then I will give to him the fattened oxen. That means: The future ruler will open [the doors (?)] of the temples (3.3) and he will have offerings presented (to) the gods.

(3.4) Be valiant, be valiant, Herakleopolis! Be good, be good, Herakleopolis! That means: Much happiness will come about in Egypt in the time in question.

(3.5) May Ta-te-iy²⁴ go southwards, so that she opens. That means: The uraeus will go southwards and will open. That is a coming out of Upper Egypt and going to Lower Egypt.

(3.6) End. The ninth chapter.

(3.7) Month Athyr, pregnancy. That means: The future ruler in Herakleopolis will rebel in the month of Athyr.

(3.8) Month Khoiak, birth. That means: He will gather (troops) in the month of Khoiak.

Month Tybi, nourishment. That means: He will subsist²⁵ on weapons of war in the month of Tybi.

(3.9) "Call to me, then I will call to you" in the month of Mekhir. That means: A warrior will fight with his opponent in the month of Mekhir.

(3.10) A titular is mine in the month of Pamenoth. That means: He will be revealed, appearing with a crown of gold in the month of Pamenoth. That is: He rules in the month of Pamenoth.²⁶

(3.11) They will give a seat in Pe. That means: They will place his eldest son upon his throne, namely (of) the future ruler. That is: To compare him with Harsiesis.

(3.12) They will give bread in Dep. (That means): They will give bread to those who are in Dep, for they are his army.

(3.13) The widow of the djed-pillar,²⁷ they received her sprout. That means: The widow of the djed-

pillar, she has stopped mourning. That means: Isis will be (3.14) of joyful disposition towards the future ruler.

(3.15) Glad be her heart, that of the lady of Atfih! That means: (The) heart of the One, namely Isis who is the lady of Atfih. That is: Gladness of heart towards the (3.16) future ruler since he will not abandon the law.

(3.17) End. The tenth chapter.

(3.18) Yesterday is what has passed. That means: The first ruler who ruled after the foreigners, who are the Persians – pharaoh Amyrtaios. As (3.19) violations of the law were committed in his time (i.e. during his rule), he was made to do the walks of yesterday.²⁸ His son did not succeed him.

(3.20) Today is what has come about. That means: The second ruler who ruled after the Persians, namely Pharaoh Nepherites (I). As he carried out his occupations (3.21) with diligence, his son was allowed to succeed him. (However,) he himself was only given a short time span (i.e. rule) on account of (the) many sins that were committed in his time (i.e. during his rule).²⁹

(3.22) Today is what has come about. That means: What is said today when ordering is what will happen because of it.

(4.1) First. If he says "first", it is (concerning the first) who ruled after the Persians. As he ordered injustice to be (done); one has seen the things that were done to him. His son was not allowed to succeed him. (4.2) Furthermore, he was deposed from his throne during his own lifetime.³⁰

(4.3) The second one of the palm of the hand³¹ (?). That means: The second ruler who followed the Persians, namely Nepherites (I). You have seen what has happened to him. (4.4) His son was allowed to succeed him. Of the palm of the hand(?).³² He says it concerning the ruler of today, namely Nektanebes (I): He is the one who has given away the property of Egypt and all temples (4.5) in order to acquire wealth.³³ If he has said "palm of the hand (?)", which is a female name, as (the) name of Nektanebes, that is like saying that he was not male (?) in his time (i.e. during his rule).

²² The word used here is commonly translated as "prophet" which, however, might evoke the wrong associations because an Egyptian "prophet" is very different from a Hebrew one.

²³ Literally "that is coming into existence by a ruler in Herakleopolis."

²⁴ The exact reading is doubtful.

²⁵ The word *stb* is to be understood as ancient *sgb* (*Wb* IV, 381, 1–6).

²⁶ Literally "ruling by him in the month of Pamenoth."

²⁷ Written like this, but perhaps "the widow of Busiris" was intended. In any case, Isis as the widow of Osiris is meant.

²⁸ Probably this means that he was made obsolete.

²⁹ Nepherites I reigned for only 6 years.

³⁰ This is about Amyrtaios who lost his throne to a revolt after a short rule.

³¹ I propose to connect the enigmatic word *hm3.t* with Coptic *hiōme* "palm of the hand" which would constitute a phonetic pun with *hime* "wife." In any case, this seems to be a derogatory designation for the family of the 29th and 30th dynasty.

³² The second part of the basic text is taken up again in order to receive a special explanation.

³³ Nektanebes I imposed strenuous economic measurements in order to finance his war against the Persians, in particular the hiring of Greek mercenaries.

(4.6) Third. They gave him. That means: The third ruler who ruled after³⁴ the Persians. “They gave to him.” That means: As he disregarded the law, he was replaced during his own lifetime.

(4.7) Fourth. He did not exist. That means: The fourth ruler who ruled after the Persians, namely Psammuthis.³⁵ That means: He was not on the path of the god. (4.8) He was not allowed to remain ruler. (4.9) Fifth. He became full. That means: The fifth ruler who ruled after the Persians, namely Hakoris who repeated coronation.³⁶ He was allowed to fulfill his days of rule, (4.10) because he was beneficent to the temples. They ended. That means: He disregarded the law and no longer carried out inspections on account of his brothers.

(4.11) Sixth. He did not exist. That means: The sixth ruler, who ruled after the Persians, namely Nephertites (II). He did not exist. That means: It was not ordered that he should be allowed to exist,³⁷ (4.12) because the law had been disregarded under his father. They had punishment dealt out against his son after him.

(4.13) Seventh. A decade of days, add³⁸ (?) to it day 30. That means: The seventh ruler who will follow the Persians, namely Pharaoh Nectanebes. He will be granted 6 (+) 10 (=) 16 (4.14) years. They will give him day 30. That is the completion of the decades of days, [for] three months and three decades of days are what becomes three years, which are a surplus to 16, making 19, in order to let you know (4.15) his years of rule, those which he makes.

(4.16) The yardstick (?) of the builder, day 1. That means: The one who is on the way of building of his father. Day 1, that means: One year of rule is what he will be allowed to enact, (4.17) namely Pharaoh Teos, who will walk by the yardstick of his father.

(4.18) The balance of the stonemason, day 7. That means: The ruler who will succeed him, 18 years is what he will be allowed to make, because the balance of the stonemason (4.19) is the sword, which is (constituted of) five parts. Find³⁹ (?) (it), in order to say it: That is 6 (+) 7, makes 13; fill out with 5, making again 18 years.

(4.20) May the gates of the brewer (?) of a third of a *heqat*⁴⁰ be opened. The gates of duplicating⁴¹ (?) the third of a *heqat*-measure will be opened. That means: (The) beginning of those who will succeed

him, namely the Persians.⁴² (4.21) That is: To open before the uraeus. That is: The foreign countries.

(4.22) Our lakes (and) our islands are full of tears. That means: The houses of the people of Egypt don't have people to live in them, namely in the time in question, (4.23) as if one says that the Persians will massacre them, they will take their houses and live there.

(5.1) “I love the first day of the month more than the last day.” What he says is, namely: “The first year is better than the last year of the time which they, namely the Persians, will spend”.

(5.2) Rain on the stone. The sky is clean. That means: They are massacring the people of Egypt while the sun sees them. That is the offering for the sun-god. (5.3) If he has said: “The sky is clean”, that means: “The sun sees them.” If he has said: “Rain upon the stone,” that means: “They will cast (the) people to massacre.” Water is man; (5.4) the stone is the massacre.

(5.5) End. The eleventh chapter.

(5.6) “I am clothed from my head to my feet.” {namely} What you are saying⁴³ is namely: “I am appearing with the golden diadem; it will not be removed from my head.” He only says it (5.7) about Pharaoh Nectanebes (I).

(5.8) “My cloak (?) is upon me.” That means: “My professional garments are upon me, they will not be removed.”

(5.9) “The sickle-sword is in my hand.” What he is saying, is: “Are you perhaps saying by yourself⁴⁴: “[The] office of (the) ruler is in my hand, it will not be removed (5.10) from me”?” The sickle-sword is the office of (the) ruler, which means to appear as a falcon, because “the sword of victory” is what should be said.

(5.11) He will act if you act. He will be strong if you are strong. That means: The god will act for you according to what you will do. If you make your heart strong, he will be stronger than you.

(5.12) Apis, Apis, Apis! That means: Ptah, the sun-god and Horus-son-of-Isis who are the lords of the office of (the) ruler. You have forgotten (i.e. forsaken) them when you were thinking of acquiring possessions. (5.13) His happiness has worked in the three cases. That means: The Apis-bull is the three gods which he has mentioned above. The Apis-bull

³⁴ The manuscript has “among” which is obviously an error, given the parallel phrases in 4.1, 4.3, 4.7 and 4.9.

³⁵ A rival king during the reign of Hakoris, probably about 393/92 BCE.

³⁶ This epithet is connected to the fact that Hakoris repeated his coronation after crushing the revolt of Psammuthis, see Ray 1986.

³⁷ Nephertites II was overthrown during the first year of his reign.

³⁸ The reading is not clear, the group resembles a group for “sum, amount” which, however, is otherwise not attested as a verb.

³⁹ The group looks most like *gmi*.

⁴⁰ With all due reserve, I propose to analyze the sequence in question as first the word for “brewer” (CDDc: 59–60), and afterwards, the sign for a third of the *heqat*-measure (for which see Zauzich 1987).

⁴¹ I propose to read *kb p3*, and then the group for the third of the *heqat*-measure.

⁴² The second period of Persian rule over Egypt (342–332 BCE).

⁴³ This passage is particularly significant for understanding the reconstruction of the communicative setting, with the king being addressed directly by the interpreter of the enigmatic text.

⁴⁴ Literally “speaking with your heart.”

is Ptah, the Apis-bull is the sun-god, the Apis-bull is Horus-son-of-Isis.

(5.14) End. The twelfth chapter.

(5.15) The flocks (?) of the desert game have moved towards Egypt. That means: The foreigners who are in the east and the west of the land (i.e. of Egypt). They have moved (5.16) towards Egypt. They are the Persians.

(5.17) The crocodiles will catch them. What he says is that the god will take them to the places from which they came, namely the foreigners – they are the Persians.

(5.18) Gardener, carry out your work! That means: Pharaoh, carry out your work! He says it concerning Pharaoh Nektanebes (I), namely: His work of greed.

(5.19) Oh Chief gardener, raise up your hedge! He says it concerning him yet again. The rest of the other: To erect a hedge around his looted possessions.

(5.20) Give water to the small trees; let the large trees live! The rest of the other things which he has said is like saying: “Be wary of the covetous people!”

(5.21) Your one eye, there is no illness in it. That means: Your uraeus which is upon your head; it is not what is ill. (It is) like saying that (5.22) it does not have respect (?) for a ruler, namely, the one who will be charitable is the one whom she will love.⁴⁵ He says it concerning the white crown, which is the uraeus of Upper Egypt.

(5.23) There is opacity in it, in the other (eye), it is full of honey. (That means:) There is opacity in the uraeus, which is upon your head. That means: The red crown, which is full of loot. (5.24) That is honey, [namely possessions (?)] that are acquired by robbery.

(6.1) Mut is its medicaments, namely: (For) the one whom she will love. That means: Mut is the mistress of love.

(6.2) Mut, (the) cow, she was not provided for. She is hungry and implores Amun. That means: (The) uraeus is hungry; (6.3) she could not eat from your loot. She implores Amun, saying: “Provide the ruler who will be charitable!”

(6.4) The palette is reduced,⁴⁶ the tongs (?) are slackened, the rope is dangling.⁴⁷ He says it con-

cerning Nektanebes, (6.5) namely: “Your palette, tongs and rope have ceased being covetous in Egypt.”

(6.6) The profit (?) does not have measure. That means: The profit (?) which you have, does not have measure. We have accounted and (6.7) we know that it is the voice of the gods.

(6.8) The peasant is crying; his wife is beautiful. That means: The farmer will walk to the field, crying. (...) ⁴⁸ Barley and emmer are his way (6.9) of life. That means: The barley of the fields of Pharaoh never becomes full.

(6.10) The small children will go away to the ... of (the) craftsman. He will give chaff to them. That means: The small children who are living in your (6.11) time (i.e. during your rule); they are hungry; they will go away. (The) craftsman is Memphis.⁴⁹ He will give chaff to them. That is something which does not constitute nourishment, (6.12) because it⁵⁰ exists upon the sycamore, whose name is Mut. And additionally, milk (i.e. sap) comes out of it, which again is fastened with ...⁵¹

(6.13) End. The thirteenth chapter.

(6.14) The great river (i.e. the Nile), may his origin be great in Elephantine, may it nourish the bakers. It is said concerning pharaoh (6.15) Nectanebes (I), namely: They will let the foreigners come to rule Egypt after you.⁵² The water (i.e. inundation) will be high in his time (i.e. during his rule); (6.16) the bakers will live in the time in question.

(6.17) Rejoice, oh you serfs! You will be able to eat. That means: The small children who will live in the time in question; [they will] find bread to eat; (6.18) they will not starve like those who live in your time (i.e. during your rule).

(6.19) The small children who are (in) the streets; they will stand in the street (while) their ... is with them. That means: It will happen again in the time in question (6.20) that it is the Greeks who will come to Egypt; they will exercise control over Egypt for a long time.

(6.21) May the dogs live! The big dog,⁵³ he will be able to eat; he will leave the weak ones (?).⁵⁴ They will rule in the time in question.

(6.22) End.

(7.1) The [fourteenth] chapter.⁵⁵

⁴⁵ This means that the uraeus-snake, as protector of the king, will not automatically help him, but decide her behavior according to his virtue.

⁴⁶ This and the following verb are more likely to be qualitatives (with passive meaning) than infinitives.

⁴⁷ Literally “dancing.”

⁴⁸ Something seems to be missing here, especially concerning the wife.

⁴⁹ Probably this is related to the title of the high priest of Ptah of Memphis who was called “greatest of craftsmen.”

⁵⁰ Perhaps this refers to “nourishment.”

⁵¹ The word *hꜣ* (with tree-determinative) is of uncertain meaning.

⁵² The Egyptian text has the second person plural here, perhaps referring to Nektanebes and Teos, if both constitute the audience for the interpreter.

⁵³ This might be a nickname for Alexander the Great, especially since a place in the Fayum which in Greek documents is called “The Island of Alexander” is rendered in Demotic as “The Island of the Dog.” See Schentuleit 2008:158–159.

⁵⁴ Perhaps read *gbe.w*.

⁵⁵ Of column 7, only the beginnings of words are preserved, which cannot be translated in a meaningful way.

REFERENCES

Text: Spiegelberg 1914. Translations: Felber 2002; Hoffmann and Quack 2007: 183–191 and 353–354. Overview: Quack 2009a: 181–186 (with additional bibliography) and Quack 2015.