

A Master of Secrets in the Chamber of Darkness

*Egyptological Studies in Honor of Robert K. Ritner
Presented on the Occasion of His Sixty-Eighth Birthday*

EDITED BY FOY D. SCALF AND BRIAN P. MUHS



INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF ANCIENT CULTURES
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
STUDIES IN ANCIENT CULTURES • NUMBER 3

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Robert K. Ritner illuminating ancient Egyptian secrets in a darkened chamber for tour participants, March 6, 1989. Photo by George Jacobi, used by permission of Angela Jacobi.

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2024938840

ISBN (paperback): 978-1-61491-110-4

ISBN (Adobe PDF): 978-1-61491-111-1

ISBN (Adobe Digital Editions): 978-1-61491-112-8

*Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures
of the University of Chicago*

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Printed in the United States of America.

Studies in Ancient Cultures
formerly
Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization

Series Editor

Andrew Baumann

with the assistance of

Connie Gundry Tappy

Cover Design

Foy D. Scalf

Cover Illustrations

Front cover: The god Heka as a sphinx. Detail from Émile Prisse d'Avennes, "Sculpture: types de sphinx," *Histoire de l'art égyptien d'après les monuments depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à la domination romaine* (Paris: Bertrand, 1878). New York Public Library Digital Collections, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Art and Architecture Collection.

Back cover: Head of the god Bes from a Horus on the Crocodiles cippus currently in the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures Museum (ISACM E16881, photograph D. 9259).

Background: Hand copy of column 6 from P. British Museum EA 10070,2 showing one of the last dated references to the god Heka. From F. Ll. Griffith and Herbert Thompson, *The Demotic Magical Papyrus of London and Leiden* (London: Grevel, 1904).

Layout

PerfecType, Nashville, TN

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

AN HONORARY VOLUME SUCH AS this could not have been completed without the help and hard work of many people, and in particular the work of the staff of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures—West Asia & North Africa (ISAC), known before 2023 as the Oriental Institute. The editors would like to thank former ISAC director Chris Woods and former interim ISAC director Theo van den Hout for supporting this project from the beginning. In the ISAC Museum, registrar Helen McDonald and associate registrar Susan Allison fielded many queries about examining objects and acquiring image permissions. Archivist Anne Flannery provided unflagging support, assistance, and research in the archives. Her predecessor as archivist, John Larson, had a major impact on this volume as well. John was a close friend of Robert's for a very long time, and we spoke with him about this Festschrift for several years, going back to at least 2016. The tens of thousands of digitized and born-digital image files produced and saved by John provided an important source for the compilation of this volume. John is also owed an immense debt of gratitude for all the help he offered to Robert throughout his career, particularly in helping digitize and organize his files. Robert could not have been the scholar he was without John's help. We would like to thank Charissa Johnson, Steven Townshend, Andrew Baumann, and all the former and current staff in the ISAC publications office for their help in bringing this volume to fruition and making it available to the world.

The editors would also like to thank all the contributors whose work fills the following pages. We realize the tedium that goes into writing, editing, proofreading, and ultimately publishing this material, and we thank them for their contributions, patience, and cordial agreement to participate. Please accept our apologies for the length of time this volume was in production.

Finally, the editors would like to thank Robert K. Ritner and make an offering on the altar in his memory. We miss him as the *ḥry-ḥ3b.t ḥry-tp* “chief lector” of Egyptian philology at ISAC and in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago, and as the *ḥry-sšḫ* “master of secrets” for his many students.

PREFACE

A VOLUME SUCH AS THIS with contributions from many individuals will inevitably contain some inconsistencies. In general, all dates have been converted to BCE/CE unless within a direct quote, for which the original designations remain unchanged. The reader may encounter in such quoted passages dates designated by BC/AD. Individual contributors employed their own lists of abbreviations. Readers should consult the list of abbreviations that accompanies each essay for clarification, as the same work may be referenced in various ways or under different abbreviations within separate contributions. A consistent transliteration font has been used throughout this volume for any romanized transliteration characters, used for Egyptian or otherwise; however, choice of transliteration characters and style has been left up to the individual contributors. Therefore, where one contribution may use *i* another may use *j* or *y* or *j*; where one uses =*f*, another may use =*f* or .*f* and so on. As this work has been compiled primarily for a technical audience, the editors hope that these minor inconsistencies will not pose much difficulty.

A note is in order here about the title of this volume. All readers will likely be familiar with the Egyptian title *ḥry-sšt*, often translated as “master of secrets,” a title that Robert himself discussed in numerous publications. However, perhaps less well known is the *‘t kky* “chamber of darkness.” For Robert’s colleagues working in Demotic, this reference will be immediately familiar from the so-called Book of Thoth as a cryptic reference to the “house of life” scriptorium. Not only does the frontispiece illustration show Robert exercising his skills as a “Master of Secrets in the Chamber of Darkness,” but a further allusion is made to Robert’s dedication to Janet Johnson in her Festschrift, titled *Essays for the Library of Seshat*. There, Robert included an image from the temple of Philae and an inscription mentioning the “library of Seshat,” Seshat being a goddess referred to at Edfu as the “foremost of the chamber of darkness.” As such, the editors hope that the title will be seen as a fitting tribute filled with wordplay and allusion.

Finally, it was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Robert K. Ritner on July 25, 2021, after several years of compounding health issues, including kidney disease and leukemia. A draft of this Festschrift was presented to Robert on his sixty-eighth birthday—May 5, 2021—in a private visit while he was in a rehabilitation hospital in the suburbs of Chicago. He was extremely touched at the gesture of his colleagues. Because of troubles with his eyesight from medical treatments, he was unable to read the contributions. In June 2021, we were able to read to Robert each of the dedications written in this volume in his honor, a gesture that was extremely important and comforting to him during a difficult time. Since Robert knew this publication as his Festschrift, the editors have decided to retain the Festschrift designation, and we hope in the near future to arrange a much more inclusive Gedenkschrift to honor Robert’s legacy and scholarly contributions.

THE MASTER OF SECRETS: ROBERT K. RITNER

Foy D. Scalf and Brian P. Muhs

ROBERT KRIECH RITNER JR. WAS born on May 5, 1953, to Robert (“Bob”) Kriech Ritner (November 16, 1923–June 5, 2006) and Margaret Ritner (*née* Shelton) (October 8, 1929–October 31, 2013) in Houston, the metropolitan center of Harris County, Texas. Robert’s younger brother, Richard (“Rick”) Mark Ritner, was born five years later, on October 2, 1958. Robert’s interest in ancient Egypt was fostered by an enthusiastic second-grade teacher who introduced young students to a wide variety of cultures in a series of educational modules; it was the cardboard pyramids and mummies of ancient Egypt that stuck with Robert and inspired the rest of his intellectual life.¹ These interests were further fueled by Boris Karloff’s portrayal in *The Mummy* (1932) and Henry Rider Haggard’s *Cleopatra: Being an Account of the Fall and Vengeance of Harmachis*. Robert’s love of Egyptomania film and kitsch is legendary, with his childhood partially influenced by the Egyptian revival ornamentation of the Metropolitan Theatre in downtown Houston (demolished in 1973) and in more recent years witnessed by an ever-growing, and quite stunning, personal collection of vintage movie posters, statues, books, and figurines.² By the time he entered high school, Robert had devoured what books were available on ancient Egypt in the Houston Public Library, allowing him to pester his unsuspecting and unprepared world history teacher with questions about whether the human remains found in KV 55 were those of Akhenaten. As Robert’s students and lecture audiences over the last thirty-five years of his life know, he continued to entertain and pester with “deep and penetrating historical” questions about Akhenaten and his Aten-centric religion. By self-admission, Robert characterized his junior-high self (fig. 1) as “probably horribly obnoxious,” noting that he went on to be the head of the debate team and sharpened his well-known rhetorical skills during acting classes at college. In Robert’s own words, he had “no trouble standing on a stage and being forceful, and I don’t get embarrassed.”

Robert’s father earned a bachelor of science in engineering from Rice University in 1944 and went on to a very successful career as owner and president of Independence Sheet Metal, where Robert’s mother also spent twenty years as an office manager. When it came time for Robert’s secondary education, he stayed close to home, acquiescing with the wishes of his father by studying at Rice University, where he would receive a bachelor of arts in 1975. However, Robert steered clear of engineering and instead studied psychology, while unofficially minoring in medieval studies.³ His first published article resulted from these interests: “Egyptians in Ireland: A Question



Figure 1. Robert K. Ritner, senior portrait, ca. 1971.

1 For an oral account of Robert Ritner’s background, see the Mormon Stories podcast #1339. The direct quotes in this section have been taken from this interview. Several *in memoriam* articles have appeared, including Muhs 2021 and Scalf 2023.

2 Most of Robert’s Egyptomania collection was inherited by Jennifer Houser Wegner. His scholarly library was donated to Rice University, and we would like to thank Sophie Crawford-Brown and Scott Vieira for all their help. His academic papers are in the ISAC Museum Archives.

3 Woods 2020, p. 3.



Figure 2. Demotists at the University of Chicago revive the Chicago Demotic Dictionary Project, originally started by William F. Edgerton using the *Nachlass* of Wilhelm Spiegelberg. Left to right: George Hughes, Mark Smith, Janet Johnson, Michael Fitz Patrick, Robert Ritner (holding a portrait of Wilhelm Spiegelberg), Richard Jasnow, Charles Nims.

of Coptic Peregrinations” appeared in *Rice University Studies* 62 (1976), just as Robert was entering the PhD program in Egyptology at the University of Chicago. This was the first and only article he would ever publish with the author line “Robert K. Ritner, Jr.” Although as the eldest son Robert had the opportunity to join his family’s successful business, his interests in humanistic studies, and his passion for Egyptology in particular, ultimately took him to Chicago for graduate school, leaving the family business interests to his father, mother, and younger brother.

At the University of Chicago, Robert joined a cohort of students studying with Janet Johnson, Ed Wente, Klaus Baer, and the recently retired George Hughes, many of whom would go on to shape generations of Egyptologists around the world. These student colleagues included Richard Jasnow (Johns Hopkins University), Tom Logan (Monterey Peninsula College), and Mark Smith (Oxford University), among many others, including several contributors to this very volume. Robert and a number of these colleagues formed the early staff working on the Chicago Demotic Dictionary (CDD), formally launched under the direction of Janet Johnson with the support of George Hughes (fig. 2). The translations, notes, and hand copies of these scholars remain in the CDD archives and include many pages written in Robert’s hand.

From 1983 to 1990 while completing his PhD, Robert taught classes as a lecturer in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations of the University of Chicago on “practically every Egyptological subject”; former ISAC director William Sumner called him an “all purpose, multitalented lecturer.”⁴ He also regularly taught adult education classes for the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. Despite these many commitments, Robert received his PhD with honors in 1987, writing a 342-page dissertation that

⁴ Quotations of William Sumner, former ISAC director, while introducing Robert during his talk “Seven Brides with Seven Stingers: The Scorpion Wives of Horus” in Breasted Hall for an ISAC members lecture on October 9, 1996.



Figure 3. Robert Ritner with his mother, Margaret, inscribing roof tiles for ISAC in 2001.

contained 897 footnotes and a Demotic note dedicating the work to his parents (*n p³y=y iṯ ḥnᵀ t³y=y mw.t*), with whom he remained close (fig. 3).

Robert's dissertation committee consisted of Ed Wente as chair, Klaus Baer, Robert Biggs, and Janet Johnson (fig. 4). His PhD thesis is well known to all of us: *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, published formally in 1993 as volume 54 of the Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization series,⁵ has been not only one of the most influential ISAC volumes but also a "perennial best seller."⁶ This volume helped launch a renaissance in the study of ancient Egyptian religion and magic, exemplified well by the contributions to this very Festschrift.

In 1991, Robert was lured away from Chicago to become the inaugural Marilyn M. Simpson Assistant Professor of Egyptology at Yale University (fig. 5). While at Yale, Robert suffered a major setback when floods caused by Hurricane Bob in 1991 destroyed reams of his "personal volumes, papers, correspondence, and notes."⁷ Much of his professional library had to be rebuilt. However, one would not recognize such a setback in Robert's professional career, as his publication record during his Yale years was extremely active: several seminal articles appeared, in addition to the publication of his revised dissertation in 1993.

While at Yale, Robert's *Mechanics* volume would win the university's Heyman Prize for Outstanding Scholarly Publication or Research by a Junior Faculty Member in the Humanities. During 1995–96, which would turn out to be Robert's last year at Yale, he was awarded the Morse Fellowship for Scholarly Research. Ultimately these accolades led the University of Chicago to lure him back, hiring him as associate professor of Egyptology in 1996, and promoting him to associate professor with tenure in 2001 and to full professor in 2004. One of the great honors of Robert's professional career was being appointed as the first Rowe Professor of Egyptology, announced at ISAC's centennial celebration on September 28, 2019 (fig. 6).

Over the course of his career, from Chicago to Yale and back, Robert taught innumerable classes, covering all phases and scripts of the ancient Egyptian language. Many of his classes were extremely popular

⁵ Succeeded by the Studies in Ancient Cultures series, to which the current volume belongs.

⁶ As described by William Sumner.

⁷ Ritner 1994, p. 205, n. 2.



Figure 4. Robert Ritner with members of his dissertation committee, George Hughes and Janet Johnson, at the University of Chicago's graduation ceremony on August 28, 1987.



Figure 5. Robert Ritner in his office at Yale, ca. 1991. His photocopy of Erichsen's *Glossar* sits on the windowsill behind him and would remain a fixture in his office throughout his career.



Figure 6. Jeanne Rowe, Robert Ritner, and John Rowe at the ISAC centennial celebration following the announcement of Robert's appointment to the Rowe Professorship of Egyptology on September 28, 2019. Photo by Anne Ryan.

with students. As expected, Robert's course on Egyptian religion and magic always reached its enrollment cap, with many overflow students petitioning directly to be added to the course. Classes on Ptolemaic hieroglyphs, Ptolemaic and Roman hieratic, and Coptic dialects were also much in demand. As one contributor to this volume has remarked, Robert's teaching, while certainly demanding of the highest academic standards, was relentlessly fun, and he "was really the best teacher I had at the OI." Robert brought an infectious enthusiasm to class, wanting students to know every morphological form but also peppering discussions with fascinating insights and asides. Anyone who has seen Robert's media interviews about the Egyptomania themes in Katy Perry's "Dark Horse" video will immediately recognize the enjoyment he passed on to his students. Of course, everyone knows of his renown as a dazzling lecturer, which during the last five years of his life reached a much wider audience through ISAC's YouTube channel, where his presentations consistently ranked among the most viewed.

As a tribute to Robert K. Ritner, Rowe Professor of Egyptology at the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago, the editors hope the contributions in this volume reflect Robert's continuing influence and past stewardship of Egyptology, both in Chicago and beyond. We have sought an intimate group of contributors—former students, close colleagues, and academic collaborators—to celebrate Robert's outstanding career. Space limitations necessarily restricted us to this cohort, but of course Robert advised, lectured, and collaborated with people from around the world for over thirty-five years. Certainly, many more volumes could be placed upon his offering table—and they likely will be! The contributions here reflect Robert's diverse interests and interdisciplinary methodologies, as well as his close guidance of his students and his willingness to collaborate and contribute with his colleagues. More importantly, these contributions are a testament to Robert's enduring friendships from around the world. All of us offer them to Robert K. Ritner as the merest token of our esteem and gratitude for all that he gave to the field of Egyptology and to us as friends.

ⲓⲙⲣⲓ

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Woods, Christopher

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PUBLICATIONS OF ROBERT K. RITNER

Foy D. Scalf and Brian P. Muhs

THE PUBLICATION LIST OF ROBERT K. RITNER is long and varied. It includes many pieces in popular publications, media, and a wide variety of interviews. In the list that follows, the editors have compiled his academic and scholarly contributions, a task facilitated immensely by the up-to-date *curriculum vitae* maintained by Professor Ritner himself until 2021.

- 1976 "Egyptians in Ireland: A Question of Coptic Peregrinations." *Rice University Studies* 62: 65–87.
- 1980 "Khababash and the Satrap Stela: A Grammatical Rejoinder." *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache* 107: 135–37.
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THE RITNER STELA

Megaera Lorenz and Mary Szabady

IN 2006, WE WERE SECOND-YEAR graduate students in the PhD program in Egyptology at the University of Chicago. Between the two of us, we had taken several courses with Robert, including “Ptolemaic Hieroglyphs,” “Ptolemaic and Roman Hieratic,” and “Coptic Texts.” By this time, we were both thoroughly familiar with his favorite scholarly talking points. While we still viewed Robert as a somewhat intimidating figure, we had also begun to get a better sense of the unique and endearing personality that lay beneath his prickly exterior. He was a larger-than-life figure whose presence in our academic lives was both delightful and, at times, infuriating. When we spoke about ancient Egyptian language or religion, the conversation would inevitably turn to him. “Of course, you know what Ritner would say,” was a phrase we uttered frequently.

It was autumn, and our Middle Egyptian comprehensive exams were looming. In the interest of preserving our sanity, we decided to study together—a process that involved many late nights reviewing texts. Among these was a bombastic gem from Hatnub dating to the Middle Kingdom, the *Laudatory Autobiography of Kay*.¹ *Kay* has long been a staple text in Middle Egyptian reading courses, and we had both encountered it several times. *Kay*’s unabashed pride in his wisdom and accomplishments reminded us of Robert, who seemed endlessly (and justifiably) confident in his Egyptological acumen. Late one night, in a giddy mood after several hours of studying, we joked about writing our own “Ritnerized” version of *Kay*—in good Middle Egyptian. It was not long before we found ourselves actually composing the text, complete with descriptions of the beloved Egypto-kitsch that adorned the shelves in Robert’s office, references to his frequently self-cited publications, and even a section invoking several of his pet grammatical preoccupations.²

While the original *Kay* text was a hieratic graffito, the document that we produced was modeled after a typical funerary stela, with an illustrated lunette at the top (fig. 7). In keeping with our general disregard for the conventions of both medium and genre, we included several rubrics within the text. These were a nod to Robert’s merciless wielding of the red pen, a tradition that he gleefully traced back to the practice of ancient Egyptian master scribes correcting their students’ work in red ink.³ Given the limitations of known Middle Egyptian vocabulary, we were also forced to invent a number of *hapax legomena*.⁴ We dubbed our creation “The Ritner Stela.” Despite our various modifications, any reader familiar with *Kay* will undoubtedly recognize sentence structures, vocabulary, and complete phrases lifted directly from the original text. Observant readers will also recognize a brief reference to the letters of Heqanakht, which the authors had also read recently in class.⁵

At the time, we were not sure what the upshot of our efforts would be. We knew we had to share it with Robert, but we were less certain how he would react. It was our hope that he would receive our masterpiece in the spirit in which we had intended it: as a gentle roast, but also an homage to a brilliant scholar, an amazing teacher, and a fellow Egyptology nerd. Once it was completed to our satisfaction, we crept into the

1 Hatnub Gr. 24. Originally published in Anthes 1928, pp. 54–56; drawing on pl. 24. See also de Buck 1948, pp. 73–74.

2 Most of Robert Ritner’s Egyptomania collection was inherited by Jennifer Houser Wegner.

3 Cf. MMA 28.9.4, a gessoed writing board inscribed with a model letter copied by a student scribe. Several misspellings have been corrected by a teacher in red ink. Published in James 1962, pp. 98–101, pl. 30.

4 There is, for instance, no extant Middle Egyptian term for a hamster in Ptolemaic queenly attire that dances to “Walk Like an Egyptian” by The Bangles.

5 Extensively published and discussed in Egyptological literature, but see especially Allen 2002.

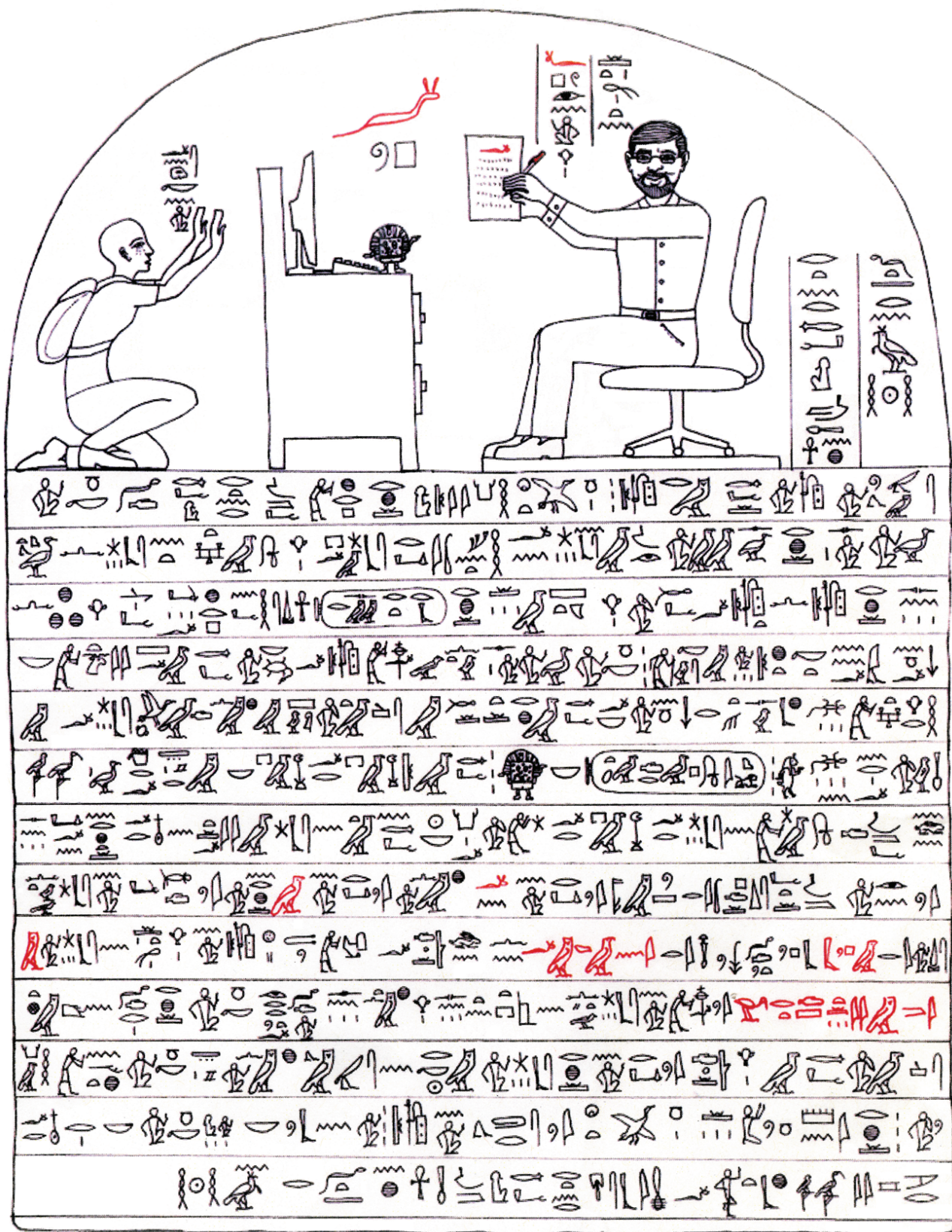


Figure 7. The Ritner Stela.

Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures early one morning and attached it to his office door. When we showed up for class later that day, he was sitting at the table with the stela in front of him, grinning. To our immense joy and relief, he was delighted. We soon confessed that we were the culprits, and the stela was eventually given a place of honor on his office wall, where it would serve to remind future generations of students of his greatness.

Revisiting the stela for this publication has been a deeply poignant experience for both of us. The boilerplate honorifics that we appended to Robert's name—typical of the kinds of funerary monuments our stela was designed to emulate—held little significance for us at the time. Today, our text feels less like a loving practical joke and more like a sincere monument to Robert's brilliance. It is a testament not only to his wisdom but also to his fiercely indomitable spirit and his sparkling sense of humor. May he live forever and ever.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STELA

Authors: Text composed by Mary Szabady and Megaera Lorenz; art and epigraphy by Megaera Lorenz
 Materials: Paper; black and red ink
 Date: Ca. 2006 CE
 Provenance: Discovered on the office door of Robert K. Ritner, Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, Chicago, Illinois, USA. Now part of the papers of Robert K. Ritner in the ISAC Museum Archives.

Although the Ritner Stela is drawn on paper, the document is clearly intended to imitate a round-topped stone stela, a type of monument attested in Egypt from at least the First Dynasty. An illustrated lunette comprises roughly the top third of the stela, while the remaining portion is inscribed with a biographical text written in hieroglyphs. Robert Ritner (designated *Rtnr-3* in the text) is represented at the right-center of the lunette, seated in a wheeled office chair. His status is indicated not only by his relatively large stature compared to the student supplicant at the left side of the scene, but also by the fact that he is slightly elevated on a raised dais. In his upraised hands, he holds a paper and a pen with a red cap. The paper features a large red  at the top, over several indistinct lines of writing. Unusually, the artist has chosen to render Ritner's face in a frontal view rather than in profile. This is perhaps an allusion to conventional portrayals of the god Bes, a deity Ritner was known to favor. Directly to Ritner's left is an office desk, which holds a computer monitor, a keyboard, and a small figure of Spongebob Squarepants dressed in a *nemes* headcloth.⁶ The Spongebob was one of several *objets d'art* with clear Egyptianizing influences that adorned Ritner's office at the time of the stela's composition. That this particular object was a tribute offering presented to Ritner by one of the authors of the stela may explain its prominent placement in the lunette illustration. At the far left side of the lunette, a weeping student kneels with arms raised in a gesture of propitiation. The student is generic in appearance and is unlikely to represent a specific individual.

LUNETTE

Caption behind the student supplicant:

*sf**n=k* *n=i* "May you be merciful to me!"

Caption before the student paper:

*f**pw* "It is an **F**!"

⁶ The Pharaoh Spongebob figure was part of a series of *Spongebob Squarepants: Lost in Time* collectible figurines released by Burger King in early 2006, establishing a clear *terminus post quem* for the Ritner Stela. See *Chief Marketer* 2006.

Caption above Ritner the Great:

*f*pw *ir.n=i hr mḏ3.t tn* “It is an **F** which I have made upon this paper.”

Caption behind Ritner the Great:

Rtnr-3 m3-ḥrw ḥnh ḏ.t r nhḥ “Ritner the Great, true of voice, living forever and ever.”

MAIN TEXT

1. *sšmw sš 3 imy-r sš.w ny.w p3.w.t ḥk3y rh hrp m3- Rtnr-3 ḏḏ ink*

The leader, the great scribe, overseer of writings of the primeval time, the magician, who knows how to administer truly, Ritner the Great, who says: “I am

2. *s3 s rh s33 m3 n sb3.w=f n-ḥnty rḏi sb3=f hr w3.t n(y).t sb3.w n ḥqt=sn*

the son of a man, knowledgeable and wise, who looked after his students continually, who placed his door upon the path of his students before they had entered,⁷

3. *rh sš n sšt=f⁸ mh hr št3.w rh |(Rbrt-Zmmr) ḥnh wḏ3 snb ḥn-ḥrp.w=f w⁹ ḥr-ḥw⁹ iwti*

who knew writing before it is written, who pondered upon mysteries, known of Robert Zimmer,¹⁰ l.p.h., together with his administration, exclusively unique one, without

4. *snw=f iy.n n=f k.t-ḥ.t m ksw ink s3 s iwti ḥsf sš=f nb snḏ 3 šf.yt nb*

his equal, to whom others came bowing. I am the son of a man, without one who opposes his writing, lord of fear, great of majesty, lord of

5. *hr.t 3 ḥbsw.t r snw=f nb 3 rh.t mh m s3.t šw m ḥm ḏ3 sb3.w=f m*

dread, more plentiful of beard than any of his fellows, great of knowledge, replete with wisdom, bereft of ignorance, whose students trembled at

6. *hrw n(y) r=f 3 n(y) hmstr.w |(Qliw3p3dr.t) nb Spnd-Bb Ifd-ḥbs.w 3 ḥ3=f r ḥ3 nb m t3 r-dr=f s3 ḏḥwti*

the sound of his speech, plentiful of Cleopatra hamsters,¹¹ lord of Spongebob Squarepantses,¹² whose office is greater than any office in the entire land, a son of Thoth

7 The implication is that he would prevent students from entering by closing the door before they could do so. This is a reference to an early encounter between Ritner and the authors, who were at the time waiting for him to return to his office so they could register for classes. When he arrived and saw the authors and several other students waiting in the hall, he quickly slipped into his office and closed the door. This incident was subsequently a frequent topic of conversation between the authors.

8 A rare passive use of the active *n sḏmt=f* construction. While this phrase translates literally to “who knew writing before he had written it,” the intended meaning is clear (or at least it was to the authors at the time of composition). The authors were attempting to emulate the phrase *rh ḏw3w [n] iwt=f* (“who knew the morning [before] it had come”) from *Kay*, line 1, which is a more typical active construction with a pronominal subject.

9 The phrase *w⁹ ḥr-ḥw*, as written here, also appears in *Kay*, line 2. While the compound preposition *hr-ḥw* alone means “except for” or “in exclusion of,” in expressions like *w⁹ ḥr-ḥw(=f)* and *nn wn ḥr-ḥw(=f)* it expresses uniqueness or exclusivity. See Gardiner 1957, §178.

10 Robert Zimmer served as president of the University of Chicago from July 2006 to August 2021. See University of Chicago 2021.

11 Perhaps the only known occurrence of the loanword “hamster” in Middle Egyptian.

12 Literally, “Square of Garments.”

7. *n wn m3^c dw3.n sb3.w=f r h3=f r dw3 k3=f r^c nb n-3.t-n sb3.y.t=f n nfr n rh.t di.(t)=f n=sn*

in very truth, whose students rose early to (go to) his office in order to adore his ka every day on account of the greatness of his teaching (and) on account of the perfection of the knowledge which he gave to them.

8. *iw ir.n=i m3^c.t spd.ti r wsm iw rdi.n=i f n hm iw rdi.n=i 3 n rh iw sd.n=i sb3 iwti*

I made justice sharper than a carving knife.¹³ I gave an **F** to the ignorant; I gave an **A** to the knowledgeable.¹⁴ I rescued the student who was without an advisor.¹⁵

9. *sd3=(f) ir A pw B B pw dd.(t).tw sw tpy ir in A sdm=f nn wn=f h3 tw sp-sn ss.n=i hr md3.t n(y.t) sb3.w=i m*

As for “**A pw B**” (sentences), that which one must say first is “B.”¹⁶ As for “**in A sdm=f**,” its form does not exist.¹⁷ Pay attention, pay attention!¹⁸ **It is in red ink** that I have written

10. *imy.t dsr.t iw hsf.n=i sb3.w iwti n s.t tn <sn>¹⁹ hr hm.t=sn dd=i irr.tw=f ink rh dd r n Km.t*

upon the papers of my students! I opposed the teachings which did not belong to this place on account of their ignorance. As I speak, so it is done.²⁰ I am one who knew how to speak the language of Egypt,

11. *s3 3 hr qd iw rdi.n=i rh sb3.w=i m rk n(y) ssm hm t3 ink nht hk3w*

wise and great in every respect. I caused my students to learn in the time of an ignorant one leading the land.²¹ I am one mighty of magic,

12. *rh imn.w n(y).w p3.wt iw sphr.n=i ss.w=i n bw nb ink nb r nfr*

who knew the secrets of antiquity. I caused my writings to circulate to everyone.²² I am the lord of excellent speech,

13. *mry Dhwty hbt=f mi Bs Rtnr-3 m3^c-hrw nh d.t r nhh*

one beloved of Thoth, whose dance is like Bes,²³ Ritner the Great, true of voice, living forever and ever.”

13 Those who studied the *Laudatory Autobiography of Kay* in Ritner’s class inevitably spent considerable time discussing the hieratic determinative associated with this word and the veracity of the translation given in Faulkner 1996, p. 70, as “ear of corn.” Such memorable in-class discussions are no doubt why the full sentence from *Kay* was included here *verbatim*.

14 Had this stela been composed a few years later, the authors would undoubtedly have written this statement as a *Wechselsatz*, in honor of how fond Ritner was of pointing out this grammatical construction in class.

15 In honor of Ritner’s stepping in to read the master’s theses of many students during a turbulent year.

16 For Ritner’s opinions on the translation of “**A pw B**” sentences, see Ritner 2002, n. 5. Note how the A-element of this particular “**A pw B**” sentence is, in fact, the letter “B” in a clever attempt to trick Ritner into a paradox in which B must be said last. The authors feel obliged to report that Ritner was not tricked in the slightest and had a good chuckle at them for the sneaky attempt.

17 Ritner also held strong opinions on the so-called prospective nominal. In at least one class the authors can recall, he mischievously asked the students to identify this form, to which one of the authors answered: “It’s that form that you say doesn’t exist.” Ritner deemed this response acceptable.

18 A phrase repeated with comical frequency in the letters of Heqanakht, to the extent that Allen 2002, p. 15, noted that it was “ignored in translation” in his publication of the texts. While the literal meaning of *h3* is “fight,” it is used here and in the Heqanakht documents in the sense of “take care” or “be vigilant.”

19 This *sn* is apparently a scribal error.

20 A *Wechselsatz* in honor of Ritner’s fondness for them, and one that earned a distinct chuckle of approval from him upon reading the stela in class.

21 A reference to the US presidential situation in 2006. One can only imagine that more recent students experienced a similar contrast between the quality of wisdom in Ritner’s class and the lack thereof on the national stage.

22 For example, Ritner 2002. See also Ritner 1985 and Ritner and Foster 1996, both frequently cited.

23 A reference to the “Bes dance” that Ritner was known to perform in his “Introduction to Egyptian Religion and Magic” class.

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1 BLACK MAGIC (WOMAN)

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THIS CHAPTER¹ HONORS THE SCHOLARSHIP of Professor Ritner, my first and only teacher of Demotic, with whom I read “The Romance of Setna Khaemuas and the Mummies” (Setna I) during my time as a doctoral student at the University of Chicago. I offer this commentary on his translation of “The Adventures of Setna and Si-Osire” (Setna II)² to emphasize and highlight a different perspective, one that prioritizes the cultural context of the Nubian magicians depicted in this Egyptian tale. As part of a larger tradition of Egyptian Demotic literature, this tale sheds light on the contemporary culture and beliefs while employing titles for the Nubian magicians that are derived from the cultural context of the kingdom of Meroe (300 BCE–300 CE), contemporaneous with the transmission of the Setna cycle.

Written on the verso of two Greek papyri joined to form a single scroll, the tale of Setna II consists of seven preserved columns.³ Several columns are missing at the beginning of the document. The papyrus, held by the British Museum (P. BM EA 10822-1, P. BM EA 10822-2), was purchased in Aswan in 1895. The Greek texts on the verso are land registers dated to the seventh year of the Roman emperor Claudius (46–47 CE) that relate to a locality called “Crocodilopolis.” Several towns in Egypt bear this name. Based on the site of purchase of the scroll (Aswan), Griffith suggested that the land registers refer to a town in the vicinity of Gebelein,⁴ an opinion accepted by Ritner. Copies of this tale have been found throughout Egypt and as far north as Tebtunis in the Fayyum. Some scholars have posited Akhmim as the locality called “Crocodilopolis” in the Greek texts; this is currently the majority opinion.⁵ Yet definitively connecting this copy of the tale to the site of Gebelein is not necessary in order to make a claim that the scribe and transmitter of the tale had direct knowledge of Nubian customs.⁶ Increasingly we are aware of a Nubian presence in Egypt throughout all chronological periods and at numerous sites, including those in the north of Egypt.⁷ However, the town of Gebelein serves as a particularly potent example of Nubian presence in Egypt. Populated as early as the Predynastic period, Gebelein had Nubian residents in the late Old Kingdom/

1 I would like to thank the volume editors and an anonymous reviewer for their comments, especially Foy Scalf who suggested copious additional citations and graciously provided PDFs of many of them.

2 Ritner 2003, pp. 470–89. See also Hoffmann and Quack 2007, pp. 118–37; Quack 2005, pp. 36–40; Jay 2016, pp. 250–57.

3 As mounted at the British Museum, the first scroll (BM EA10822-1; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA10822-1) in its frame measures 141.0 cm wide × 50.5 cm high; the second scroll (BM EA10822-2; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA10822-2) as mounted measures 148.4 cm wide × 50.5 cm high.

4 Griffith 1900, p. 68.

5 Jay 2016, p. 62 n. 173, citing Wilcken 1908, pp. 535–37.

6 On the use of Meroitic-language titles such as *kwr* and *ate* in the papyrus, Hofmann says: “Die Verwendung der beiden meroitischen Titel zeigt, daß die Schreiber in Ägypten der meroitischen Terminologie gegenüber nicht ganz unkundig waren.” See Hofmann 1993, p. 210.

7 De Souza 2020, pp. 148–50; Ashby 2020; Meurer 2021, among others.

early First Intermediate Period,⁸ Middle Kingdom,⁹ and Thirteenth Dynasty/Second Intermediate Period¹⁰ and was home to a Blemmye community during the Roman period.¹¹ It is during the latter period, the first century CE, that this scroll containing the tale of Setna II is believed to have been written.¹² The association of Gebelein (Greek Pathyris, from the Egyptian *Pr-Hwt-Hrw* “temple of Hathor”) with the goddess Hathor¹³ and the temple dedicated to her there (or at Akhmim, if the alternative location of Crocodilopolis is accepted)¹⁴ will also bear relevance to our interpretation of the tale of Setna II.

The papyrus records three distinct tales: the miraculous birth of Si-Osiris; a journey to the underworld by Si-Osiris and his father, Setna; and a magical duel with Nubian magicians. It is the third episode with which this chapter is concerned. Told as a story within a story, Si-Osiris is magically able to read a scroll, still sealed, that has been brought to the court of his grandfather, the king of Egypt. The scroll records events that took place during the reign of Thutmose III (1479–1425 BCE) when a king of Kush overheard three Nubian magicians boasting of magical exploits they hoped to perform as acts of aggression against Egypt. One magician hoped to plunge Egypt into darkness for three days; the second schemed to spirit the Egyptian king away at night to Nubia, where he was to be beaten with 500 blows before being returned to Egypt within six hours; and the third magician planned to render the fields of Egypt unproductive for three years. The Kushite king commanded the second magician to carry out his plan to magically kidnap the king of Egypt in order to beat him in the presence of the Kushite king.¹⁵ In this story, as read aloud from the scroll by Si-Osiris, a fourth magician, Hor Paneshy, came to the aid of the Egyptian king.

By placing the action of a magical conflict between Egypt and Nubia in the period of Thutmose III, the height of Egyptian imperialism and direct domination of the lands of Nubia, this Demotic tale hearkens back to the days of Egypt’s glory as the ideal setting for the victory of one powerful Egyptian magician who defends the honor of Egypt from the treachery and devious scheming of Nubia. Yet in the period when the tale of Setna II was recorded on this papyrus, the first century CE, Egypt had been reduced to the status of a colony of Rome, while in Nubia the kingdom of Meroe was enjoying a classical period of wealth, with the flourishing of native traditions, and had met Roman troops in battle to expel them from the land of Nubia. Nostalgia for the dominant power of imperial Egypt threads through this tale of dueling magicians, a fantasy along the lines of “Make Egypt Great Again.”

This essay will explore the portrayal of the Nubian culture of the first century CE in the tale of Setna II through a close analysis of the names of the three Nubian magicians, who not only share the first name “Horus” with their Egyptian rival but also bear epithets that portray central tenets of Nubian society and reflect the power of women as wives, mothers, priestesses, and sole-ruling queens. Several Meroitic titles rendered in the Demotic language of the text will be explored, adding the Nubian cultural context and removing the disparaging translations offered in earlier published versions of this text. Finally, actual Nubian magicians employed by the king of Meroe and attested through their prayer inscriptions at the temples of Philae and Dakka will be discussed to demonstrate that the tale of Setna II was no mere fantasy. Rather, during this period, professional magicians from Nubia did journey to participate in rites at Egyptian temples—not as aggressive antagonists, but as well-received colleagues of their peers: Egyptian priests.

8 Fiore Marochetti 2013, p. 4.

9 Darnell and Darnell 2002, p. 145. Graffiti at a site in the western desert called “Dominion behind Thebes” depict Nubian warriors.

10 Darnell and Darnell 2002, p. 132.

11 Török 1985, p. 59.

12 Griffith 1900, p. 70; Ritner 2003, p. 470.

13 Fiore Marochetti 2013, p. 2.

14 Centers of Hathoric worship existed at Akhmim, Cusae, and Naga ed-Der as early as the Sixth Dynasty. See Gillam 1995, pp. 228–30.

15 Ritner 2003, pp. 480–81.

WHAT IS A MAGICIAN?

The Demotic term *hry-tb* is translated as “magician” in this text, but more precisely it refers to the temple title “chief (lector priest),”¹⁶ attested from as early as the Old Kingdom until late antiquity (2700 BCE–500 CE). The more complete title *hry-hb hry-tp* referred to the priest’s role as the one in charge of the festival scroll. Lector priests assisted the clothing priests in performing temple rituals and were “those responsible for the ritual texts and guardians of a correct performance of rites and a faultless recitation of hymns and invocations.”¹⁷ They could also be called “scribe of the divine book” and “feather bearer (πτεροφόροι)” for the two feathers they wore atop their heads in the Late Period. These priests served alongside the prophet, god’s father, and *wab*-priest, while also occasionally being designated as “scribe of the House of Life.”¹⁸ The translation “magician” is justified by the importance of written and spoken spells used by the principal characters in Setna II, yet it demeans the ritual role accorded to these temple priests in the Egyptian context. The knowledge of the sacred scripts recorded on temple scrolls and the ability to properly intone those spells afforded the magicians in this tale—Egyptian and Nubian—the power and ability to transport kings via litters constructed of wax and spells spoken to teleport them. Additionally, we see the lector priest serving his king as a representative in diplomatic relations with other kingdoms.¹⁹

Two Nubian magicians, bearing the Demotic title *hry-tb* in their third-century CE prayer inscriptions in the Egyptian temples of Dakka and Philae, arrived as representatives of the Meroitic king in order to perform rites on his behalf and conduct political negotiations with the officials of Roman Egypt. These magicians are discussed later in this chapter.

THE NAMES OF THE FOUR MAGICIANS

The four magicians in Setna II share the spiritually potent name “Horus,”²⁰ signifying, in Egyptian religion, the son of Osiris and a defender of his father. In Egyptian kingship iconography, the king is a manifestation of the god Horus who has claimed his deceased father’s throne to rule Egypt as a god-king. Si-Osiris’s name, meaning “the son of Osiris,” connects him to the group of four magicians named Horus and emphasizes Horus’s role as protector of his father and, by extension, savior of Egypt.

In the Nubian context, Horus, Lord of *T3-sti* (Lower Nubia), was worshipped as four highly localized manifestations in Lower Nubia: Lord of Baki (Kuban), Lord of Miam (Aniba/Qasr Ibrim), Lord of *M-h3* (Abu Simbel), and Lord of *Bhn* (Buhen).²¹ Yet it is not these localized Nubian manifestations of Horus who lend their names to the enemy magicians of Setna II. Rather, each Nubian magician bears a name that refers to his mother, whose epithet provides hints as to her identity.

The three Nubian magicians bear the names Horus-the-son-of-the-Sow, Horus-the-son-of-[the]-Princess, and Horus-the-son-of-the-Nubian-Woman. Each magician’s name includes a reference to a facet of the divine feminine, in keeping with the centrality of the mother in Nubian culture,²² the importance of the Kushite queen mother’s participation in coronation rites for her son,²³ and the culture’s general attitude

16 EG, pp. 321–22; Ritner 1993, pp. 220–22; Dieleman 2005, pp. 205–8, esp. p. 205 n. 43.

17 Dieleman 2005, p. 207.

18 Dieleman 2005, p. 205 n. 43; Ritner 1993, p. 222.

19 Lucarelli 2020, p. 3. This is precisely what we see with the Nubian lector priests and their family members (primarily members of the Wayekiye family) who arrive at Philae to conduct rites and to undertake diplomatic negotiations with officials in Egypt.

20 Griffith 1900, p. 55, note to line 10.

21 Ashby 2020, pp. 38–39.

22 Khalil 2017, pp. 5–7.

23 Lohwasser 2001, pp. 68–69.

of reverence for the maternal lineage.²⁴ Furthermore, this divine feminine principal is none other than the goddess Hathor as she appears in the Myth of the Eye of Re.

Horus-the-son-of-the-Sow (Demotic *ryr*) is the Nubian magician who would “not let [Egypt] see the light for three days and three nights.”²⁵ His name incorporates the Egyptian word *rr.t*,²⁶ meaning “pig” or “hippopotamus” and translated by Ritner as “Sow.” Both Erichsen’s *Glossar*²⁷ and the *Wörterbuch*²⁸ offer a translation of this word with an astrological meaning—the Sow as a constellation—which offers a connection to the astronomical titles and knowledge claimed by Nubian magicians who engraved their prayer inscriptions at Philae in the third century CE (discussed later in this chapter). Yet another facet of the word’s semantic range is its use as the title of the mother goddess²⁹ or as a verb meaning “to raise (a child),” attributed to the goddess who raises the king.³⁰ This concept derives from the meaning of *rr.t* “nurse, guardian.”³¹ Of course the standing hippo goddess who protects infants³² is Taweret, a powerful figure evoked in Nubia as early as the Kerma period (2600–1550 BCE), when her image was used for mica inlays on beds used in funerary contexts and beautiful faience figurines that may have served as amulets. The image was associated with the burial of high-status women and appears to have been used together with other elements as a “representation of high-status female Kerman identity.”³³ Finally, *rr* is used as a magical word³⁴ in Middle Egyptian and maintains this sense as late as the Coptic magical texts.³⁵

The rearing Taweret is associated with the Distant Goddess who has returned to Egypt. On a stela discovered on the west side of the Nile at the site of Hagar el-Gharb, in view of Qubbet el-Hawa (Aswan), a priest is shown worshipping the rearing hippopotamus goddess. In the graffito she is called *ir.t R* “the Eye of Ra,” an epithet of the Distant Goddess. Darnell suggests that the rearing hippo is the transformed roaring lioness, the Distant Goddess who, having bathed in the cool waters of the Nile, has become the “protective riverine beast of Nubia.”³⁶

Hippopotamus goddesses (*rr.i.t*) appear at the end of a hymn that decorates the kiosk in front of the temple of Monthu at Medamud, 5 km northeast of Karnak.³⁷ Decorated during the reign of Ptolemy XII (ca. 80–51 BCE), the kiosk contains a three-part hymn that describes the Egyptian, Nubian, and animal worshippers of the goddess Hathor (called “Rat-Tawy”) as she returns to Egypt from Nubia. Embedded among a variety of Nilotic animals that worship the returning goddess, the hippopotamus goddesses (*rrty.w*) open their mouths (*rʒ=sn wn*) and raise their arms in adoration of Hathor (*dr.ty=sn m iʒw n hr=t*).³⁸

Darnell and Darnell stress the association of the hippopotamus goddesses with the desert areas to the west of Thebes. Several rock-art depictions of hippopotami from the Middle Kingdom attest to the association of this goddess with the region:

24 Hintze 1974, pp. 26–27.

25 Ritner 2003, p. 480.

26 Griffith 1900, p. 176, line 10: “*ryr* probably the fem. of *pṛp* ‘pig,’ Eg. *rr.t*, ‘pig,’ ‘hippopotamus.’”

27 EG, p. 251. For the continuation of this meaning in Coptic, see *pṛp* in Crum 1939, p. 299a.

28 *Wb.* II, p. 438/9.

29 *Wb.* II, p. 438/11; Schlögl 1975, p. 243: “In der Spätzeit tritt dann R[eret] besonders als Benennung einer der in Ägypten zahlreichen Nilpferdgottheiten hervor, deren Hauptaufgabe es ist, den Frauen bei der Geburt und im Wochenbett beizustehen und den Schutz des neugeborenen Kindes zu übernehmen.”

30 *Wb.* II, p. 439/1.

31 *Wb.* II, p. 439/8.

32 *Wb.* II, p. 438/10.

33 Minor 2018, pp. 257, 259, fig. 8; Reisner 1923, pp. 266–67, pls. 54–56.

34 *Wb.* II, p. 439/13.

35 Crum 1939, p. 299a: AM 59B “used by magician.”

36 Darnell 1995, p. 90 n. 229.

37 Darnell 1995, pp. 52, 89.

38 Darnell 1995, pp. 80–81.

At several sites behind Thebes, from near Gebel Tjauti in the north to *w3s h3 W3s.t*, “Dominion behind Thebes” in the south, there are Middle Kingdom depictions of hippopotamus goddesses, Rerit or Taweret. . . . Their positions along the routes north and west of Thebes represent a hemispheric line of goddesses “around behind” Thebes—a magical force field protecting the back door to Thebes, and the religious counterparts to the towers and patrols of the Alamat Tal Road and Nubian soldiers.³⁹

It is precisely this type of magical protection that is being evoked in the matronymic of the Nubian magician Horus-the-son-of-the-Sow, which connects him to the local hippopotamus goddesses of the western desert and their protection surrounding the area of Thebes and its environs, including Gebelein with its long-attested Nubian populations, and to the apotropaic, knife-wielding standing hippopotami depicted at Kerma. Furthermore, the threat of Horus-the-son-of-the-Sow to block out the light in Egypt for three days may also include a reference to the light from the torches that guide the Distant Goddess from the desert back to the riverine temples of Egypt. Darnell connects the hippos depicted at Medamud with Hathoric worship and the eastern desert of Nubia:

The *rr.t*-goddesses at times appear with the *hit/ihty* entities and Bes himself, all of whom make music for Hathor. Just to the right of the Medamûd hymn, which concludes with a mention of Reret-goddesses, there is carved a large figure of Bes. Thus the last in a list of real and fabulous animals recalls the human celebrants through its composite nature, and the Hathoric dancing itself through association with other music-making apotropaic deities. . . . In the Medamûd hymn, those beings present on the magical knives of earlier Hathoric celebrations have come in the flesh out of the Eastern Desert.⁴⁰

By explicitly connecting the rearing hippo goddess to Hathor, her musical rites, and the magical knives used in birth rituals, as well as to worshippers arriving in Egypt from the eastern desert, Darnell connects the hymn at Medamud with the Nubian context of Hathor as the Distant Goddess. I suggest that the name of the Nubian magician, Horus-the-son-of-the-Sow, makes a similar, multifaceted symbolic reference.

Horus-the-son-of-[the]-Princess (Demotic *rpyt*⁴¹) boasts, “I shall cast my magic up into Egypt. I shall not allow the fields to be productive for three years.”⁴² Although Ritner translated the final element of the magician’s name as “Princess” and Griffith tentatively rendered it as “noblewoman,” a better option exists that is more firmly rooted in the Nile Valley magical tradition. Waraksa suggests that “the term *rpyt* may be understood as a generic one applied to female images of all sizes and materials, including magical figurines.”⁴³ Four female figurines and a paddle doll excavated as part of a cache of ritual texts (two of which are concerned with gynecology, pediatrics, and childbirth) and other ritual artifacts from the late Middle Kingdom “magician’s kit” buried beneath the storerooms at the Ramesseum lend credence to this suggestion.⁴⁴ Their discovery shows that female figurines were paired with texts that contain ritual incantations used by literate priests. Waraksa suggests that these figurines stood in for the goddess and could be activated by the magician as part of the rites he performed:

It is likely that female figurines were fashioned as generic females so that they could serve as any one of numerous goddesses, depending on the situation at hand. . . . It was through the recitation of a spell that a female figurine actively became a goddess for the temporary purposes of healing and protection.⁴⁵

39 Darnell and Darnell 2002, p. 145.

40 Darnell 1995, pp. 88–89. Schlögl 1975, p. 243: “Im Mammisi (Geburtshaus) erscheint sie häufig in der Gemeinschaft mit den Schicksalsgöttern Schai und Renenutet, aber auch mit dem pantheistischen Bes und dem löwengestaltigen Miysis ist sie verbunden.” See also Quack 2010, p. 348 for a discussion of the hymn at Medamud, p. 353 for a discussion of musical scenes in the forecourt of the temple of Hathor at Philae.

41 EG, pp. 244–45; *Wb.* II, p. 416/8. Wüthrich cites Zibelius-Chen’s translation of two Nubian divine names from Book of the Dead chapter 164, the first of which, *sp-khr*, is rendered as “princess.” See Wüthrich 2009, p. 276.

42 Ritner 2003, p. 480.

43 Waraksa 2008, p. 2; EG, p. 244; CDD R (01.1), p. 29.

44 Ritner 1993, pp. 222–23; Miniaci 2020, pp. 14–21.

45 Waraksa 2008, p. 3.

Female figurines were associated with many goddesses: Hathor, Mut, Nut, Taweret, Isis, and Selqet. In relation to the tale of Setna II, the goddesses Hathor (whose temples stand at Gebelein, Cusae, and Akhmim) and Taweret (referred to as *ryr* above) are most relevant. Horus-the-son-of-[the]-Princess issues the threat to revoke the fertility of the fields of Egypt for three years. The Nubian magician's name makes reference to goddesses associated with childbirth and, by extension, fertility: Hathor, Isis, and Taweret.⁴⁶ His threat might be understood as casting a spell of infertility on a woman, with the "woman" in this case being *t3 kmt*, the land of Egypt being conceived of as feminine and her black soil as imbued with fertility by the Nile in an act of conception carried out annually by the flood.

The final and most prominent Nubian magician in the tale of Setna II is Horus-the-son-of-the-Nubian-Woman (Demotic *t3 nḥs*⁴⁷), who threatens to transport the Egyptian king to Kush to have him beaten with 500 lashes before returning him to Egypt. He is the magician who actually carries out his threat with the blessing of the ruler in Kush and engages in a ritual battle with the Egyptian magician, Hor Paneshy. At first sight, Horus-the-son-of-the-Nubian-Woman has the least impressive name. Yet his matronymic refers to a female magician (his mother) who appears near the end of the tale to save her son when he is bested by the Egyptian magician. While Horus-the-son-of-the-Nubian-Woman's name seems to refer simply to a generic woman, it reflects the high regard in which Nubian mothers were held by their communities. Kinship lineages, the central point around which Nubian communities were organized, were based on the maternal line.⁴⁸ Nubians consistently employed matronymics in preference to the general use of patronymics in Egypt.⁴⁹ Furthermore, in the Prophecy of Neferty, the titular character is a lector priest who predicts the coming of a savior-king from the south: "But then there shall come a king from the south. His name will be Ameny, justified. He will be the son of a woman of Ta-Sety."⁵⁰ While the translator conceives of Ta-Sety as the first Upper Egyptian nome, it is the exclusive reference to the mother of Ameny that identifies him as a Nubian. The practice of identification by descent from a mother (as opposed to a father) is a practice that is standard in Meroitic-language funerary texts.⁵¹ The deep respect accorded to mothers in Nubia is completely lost in Griffith's translation of the name of Horus-the-son-of-the-Nubian-Woman as "Hor, son of the Negress."⁵² Ultimately, the name is used as an epithet of the goddess Hathor (*Nḥsi.t*⁵³) in her role as the Distant Goddess, whose close association with Nubia is made explicit through a connection with multiple Nubian locations: Keneset, Bougem, or more generally Ta-Sety and Ta-Nehes. In this role as the raging goddess Tefnut who is lured back to Egypt, we can see a parallel with the mother of Horus-the-son-of-the-Nubian-Woman who flies up to Egypt to rescue her son. The glorious return of the Distant Goddess to Egypt has, in the tale of Setna II, been turned on its head, however. Instead of a glorious welcome for a revered goddess, traditionally celebrated by festivals throughout Egypt, we see the ignoble defeat of both mother and son at the hands of the triumphant Egyptian magician.

Before embarking on his sorcery against the Egyptian king, Horus-the-son-of-the-Nubian-Woman consults with his mother, who advises him to "leave some signs between me and you, so that if something happens that you are suffering, I shall come to you and see if I can save you."⁵⁴ Horus-the-son-of-the-Nubian-Woman chooses food and drink as signs to alert his mother to his distress. The fact that food will change

46 CDD R (01.1), p. 29, "female statue, goddess," with reference to *Wb.* II, p. 415/2, "Göttin Hathor-Isis u.a.," and *Wb.* II, p. 416/9, "von Göttinnen," for the Greco-Roman period.

47 EG, p. 224, "die Negerin"; *Wb.* II, p. 303/9–10, "die Südländerin, die Negerin."

48 Edwards 2004, p. 175; Ashby 2020, p. 16.

49 Hintze 1974, pp. 235–36; Ashby 2020, p. 17. While some exceptions apply in both cultures, the strong preference for the use of matronymics in Nubia is striking and unparalleled in Egypt.

50 Tobin 2003, p. 219.

51 Griffith 1911b, p. 32; Trigger 1970, pp. 22, 49, table 6; the table shows the order in which the parents' names are listed at Karanog, Shablul, and Faras: (B) name—mother, (C) name—father. The vast majority list the mother's name first.

52 Griffith 1900, p. 177, line 13.

53 *Wb.* II, p. 303/11.

54 Ritner 2003, p. 485.

to the color red may be related to color symbolism in Egyptian magical practice as described by Waraksa in relation to female figurines excavated at the Mut Temple at Karnak.⁵⁵ The color red is associated with both the blood that ensures bodily health and the blood that is copiously present at childbirth, but also the sickness and disease meant to be cured by transferring it to the female figurine during the rites of healing. As a color fraught with negative associations in Egyptian magical practice, it is fitting that the enemy magician would choose red to signify his need for assistance from his mother if his magic should fail in Egypt. As Waraksa and Ritner both note, red is the color of the execration rite “The Breaking of the Red Vessels,” meant to protect Egypt apotropaically against its enemies. Waraksa notes that “given the abundance of scenarios in which red is a signifier of a dangerous force, the presence of red on so many New Kingdom and later ceramic female figurines may be taken as evidence that these objects, too, were embodiments of dangerous forces, and ones that needed to be execrated.”⁵⁶ The color red extends to the description of a woman who has recently given birth as a *ḥm.t dšr.t*, “a red woman.”⁵⁷ This interpretation may be relevant in the agreement between the Nubian woman and her son as he embarks on a dangerous mission in Egypt by highlighting the preeminent bond between them: his emergence from her body at the moment of his birth.

The name of the Egyptian magician, Hor Paneshy, is rendered as “Horus-the-son-of-the-Wolf” in Ritner’s translation,⁵⁸ while Griffith maintained the name as written in the papyrus, translating it as “Hor son of Paneshe.”⁵⁹ While generally concurring with Griffith’s reading of the text, Ritner proposed that “the writing *P3-nšy* is a contraction for *P3-wnšy* ‘The Wolf.’”⁶⁰ Ritner referred to another Demotic literary text published by Zauzich to support the translation of *P3-wnšy* as “The Wolf” based on similarities between the two stories.⁶¹ Porten published an Aramaic text from the Persian period (525–404 and 343–332 BCE) that references a magician named Hor bar Punesh and relates him to the powerful Egyptian magician of Setna II, Hor *P3-wnš*,⁶² who, the reader will recall, lived during an earlier time and was reincarnated as Si-Osiris. However, the *wnš* of Setne II does not refer to a wolf but rather to the primate form taken by Thoth in Nubia. Prada takes the translation of the enigmatic name *wnš* a step further by comparing Greek and Demotic versions of the Myth of the Eye of Re and showing that *wnš-kwf* means “dog-faced monkey,” a cynocephalus simian (an African primate) that is a manifestation of the god Thoth sent to fetch the Distant Goddess from Nubia.⁶³ Prada notes the depiction of the lute-playing simian on the columns in the entrance to the Hathor temple at Philae with a hieroglyphic label that reads *p3 kwf*.⁶⁴ Junker connects this primate to the Nubian region of *T3-w3d* (near Pnubs) and to Thoth of Pnubs:⁶⁵ “Hier sei auch auf das Herkunftsland der Affen hingewiesen; wir lernten die tanzenden Affen oben . . . in *T3-w3d* kennen, und den äthiopischen Affen Thot von Pnubs sehen wir in Dakke gerade in der Szene der Entführung der Göttin, in gleicher Rolle wie der ‘kleine Wolfsaffe.’”⁶⁶

55 Waraksa 2009, pp. 103–10. See also Ritner 1993, pp. 147–48, 169–70.

56 Waraksa 2009, p. 106.

57 Waraksa 2009, pp. 105–6.

58 Ritner 2003, p. 482 n. 28.

59 Griffith 1900, pp. 182–83, pl. Va.

60 Ritner 2003, p. 482 n. 28.

61 Ritner 1993, pp. 70–71 n. 320; Zauzich 1978.

62 Porten 2004, p. 437; Jay 2016, p. 254: “Several additional factors indicate that Setna II ‘borrowed’ the character of Horus-son-of-the-Wolf from his own separate story cycle. His earliest appearance occurs on an Aramaic papyrus with a date (based on paleography) of the third quarter of the fifth century BC; here, he is called ‘Hor bar Punesh.’”

63 Prada 2014, p. 113. The *šm wnš-kwf* (*Wb.* I, p. 325/1; EG, p. 92) was a small, dog-nosed monkey closely associated with the worship of Hathor as the Distant Goddess with her strong connections to Nubia. In Darnell’s analysis of the hymn to the Distant Goddess found in the kiosk of the Ptolemaic period at Medamud, the *wnš-kwf* is closely associated with the *rr.t*-goddess who appears in the name of Horus-the-son-of-the-Sow in this tale. See Darnell 1995, p. 88.

64 Prada 2014, p. 163.

65 Junker 1917, pp. 10, 162–63.

66 Junker 1917, p. 163; Quack 2010, p. 342: “These ape forms, be it guenon or baboon, are not native to Egypt at the time of the story, but imported from the south.”

The temple of Dakka is dedicated to the god Thoth of Pnubs, a distinctly Nubian manifestation of Thoth. While Thoth was an Egyptian god, Thoth of Pnubs appeared in Egyptian temples only in Lower Nubia: in Dakka, Dabod, Dendur, Kalabsha, and Philae. The god's hypostasis was a primate, not the ibis of the Egyptian god Thoth. Within the sanctuary (built by the Meroitic king Arqamani II, ca. 218–200 BCE), a relief on the inner east wall shows the king offering to Shu and Tefnut,⁶⁷ prominent protagonists in the Myth of the Eye of Re, while Thoth as the *wns-kwf* worships Tefnut in her fearsome lioness form in a narrow room to the east of the sanctuary of Arqamani II (fig. 1.1).⁶⁸

The presence of a sacred jujubier tree (Egyptian *nbs*) in the ancient religious precinct of Doukki Gel, near the ancient Kushite capital Kerma, suggests that this variant of Thoth had southern origins. Doukki Gel, called *pr nbs* “house of the jujubier-tree” in ancient times, was the New Kingdom town founded by Thutmose I. Charles Bonnet, who has excavated at the site for fifty years, remarked on the discovery in 2011 of “an extraordinary African town” under the New Kingdom site built by Thutmose I. Palace A, a circular ceremonial building more than 50 m in diameter, was surrounded by 4 m thick walls and contained two thrones, a large offering table in a chapel, and a circular enclosure perhaps for the sacred jujubier tree.⁶⁹ While “Pnubs” was the name given to the New Kingdom town founded at Kerma, the sacred tree for which Pnubs was named had been worshipped in Kerma before the Egyptian conquest. This suggests that the association of a divinity with the toponym Pnubs—be it Amun or Thoth—was originally a Kushite concept, adopted for the worship of Thoth in Lower Nubia.⁷⁰



Figure 1.1. Thoth of Pnubs worshipping Tefnut.

⁶⁷ Roeder 1930, pp. 255–56, fig. 28.

⁶⁸ Roeder 1930, pl. 115 (small room off the sanctuary of Arqamani II, south wall, upper row); Junker 1911, p. 55: “Am wichtigsten aber sind die Darstellungen auf der Rückwand. Da steht ein Affe mit erhobenen Armen, in der Stellung des Preisens vor einer Löwin mit erhobenem Schweife, die auf ihrem Kopfe die Sonne mit Uräus trägt.” See Griffith 1937, pp. 17–18, for a plan of the temple of Dakka.

⁶⁹ Bonnet 2016, p. 4.

⁷⁰ Boylan 1922, p. 170; Sauneron and Yoyotte 1952, pp. 163–69. *Ziziphus spina-christi* (Egyptian *pnbs*) is attested from the Neolithic period at the Lower Nubian site of Nabta Playa; it belongs to the native flora of Sudan. See Lityńska-Zajac and Wasylkowa 2018, p. 553.

Thus, each of the four magicians named “Horus” in Setna II was associated with the goddess Hathor, the consort of Horus and the mollified Distant Goddess who returned to Egypt to consummate the “sacred marriage” with the god.

MEROITIC WORDS USED IN SETNA II

The inclusion of identifiable (proto-)Meroitic lexemes in the supplemental spells of the Book of the Dead dates to the late New Kingdom/early Third Intermediate Period and demonstrates a familiarity with Kushite ritual practice and language among Egyptian theologians.⁷¹ In his recent survey of foreign words borrowed from elsewhere in Africa, Julien Cooper notes evidence of religious exchanges that occurred between Egypt and Nubia over the course of their long, mutually entangled history:

The foreign African lexical material in the “Supplementary Spells” of the *Book of the Dead* presupposes some detailed religious exchange between Egyptian and Nubian theologians. Such intimate exchanges are also observed in the “Kushite spells” of Egyptian magical papyri. These passages contain a small number of non-Egyptian words, suggesting the incorporation of foreign phrases and words in the performance of these rituals.⁷²

We see lexical evidence of this mutual exchange in the presence of several Meroitic words in the tale of Setna II. While discussing the cultural context of such words as used in Nubia, I want to offer a corrective to the disparaging terms used to translate them. There is nothing in the original Demotic text to indicate such demeaning terminology. In fact, the incorporation of indigenous titles for the Nubian protagonists in this tale reveals a familiarity with Nubian culture and a choice to depict that culture appropriately by using the correct Meroitic-language terms for cultural elements not present in Egypt.

ATE

The word *ate*⁷³ is used in reference to the Kushite individual (*3te n 'Igš*) who arrives at the Egyptian court demanding to know whether there exists in Egypt someone who is able to read his unopened scroll. Ritner translated this term as “shaman,”⁷⁴ which suggests that the Nubian magician somehow comes from a different ritual milieu than does Hor Paneshy, who is described as a lector priest—a title that acknowledges his training as a literate priest and scribe. The *ate* issues a challenge in the court of the pharaoh:

[Is there anyone who] will read this letter that I have brought to Egypt before Pharaoh without removing its seal, and who will read the writings that are on it without opening it? If it happens that [there is no good scribe or wise man] in Egypt who will be able to read it without opening it, I shall take the humiliation of Egypt to the land of Nubia, my country.⁷⁵

Labeling the Nubian magician a “shaman” deflects the shame to be ascribed to Egypt—namely, that “there is no good scribe or wise man . . . who will be able to read” the letter—onto the Nubian. Using the term “shaman” suggests that the Nubian magician may not have received sufficient priestly training to be called a lector priest. Horus-the-son-of-the-Nubian-Woman is called a shaman precisely because he is Nubian: “As the role of these individuals regularly concerns Nubian magic, the title is here translated ‘shaman.’”⁷⁶ As I will show later in this essay, fully literate Nubian priests, trilingual in Egyptian, Meroitic, and Greek, were participants in cultic practices at Egyptian temples in Lower Nubia during the time when the tale of Setna II

71 Vernus 1984; Zibelius-Chen 2005; Wüthrich 2009, pp. 275–82; Rilly 2007, pp. 19–26; Rilly 2010, p. 14; Wüthrich 2010, pp. 12–26, esp. pp. 22–26; Zibelius-Chen 2011.

72 Cooper 2020, p. 11.

73 The term *ate* is found in the following columns and lines of the Setna II text: II, 29; III, 2, 13, 25, 26, 29, 32; IV, 2, 23.

74 Ritner 1993, p. 476 n. 12.

75 Ritner 1993, p. 477.

76 Ritner 2003, p. 477 n. 12.

was written. As Naether suggests, “the Nubian shaman from the Second Setna Novel bears a Meroitic title corresponding to the Egyptian priestly title of *hry-hb*.”⁷⁷ Why then is he not simply called a “lector priest”?

While Griffith leaves the Meroitic term *ate* untranslated, he offers an explanatory note: “Man (?) of Ethiopia”; the meaning of *ate* can only be guessed from the context:—‘foreigner,’ ‘magician,’ ‘rascal,’ ‘slave,’ ‘captive?’”⁷⁸ Elsewhere, Griffith muses that *ate* “from the det. may mean ‘foreigner’ or ‘negro,’ unless it be an expression for sorcerer or an abusive term.”⁷⁹ The negative connotations of Griffith’s suggested meanings are clear. Horus-the-son-of-the-Nubian-Woman is not honored as a lector priest trained in the temple tradition but is instead labeled with a host of terms that range from derogatory to “othering”: slave, foreigner, negro, shaman. This is not historically accurate.

What does the Meroitic context offer by way of possible meanings? Ritner identified the term *ate-qere* “royal *ate*” used in late Meroitic-language funerary inscriptions from Arminna West (dated to the third century CE⁸⁰ and thus contemporary with the Nubian magicians’ inscriptions at Philae and Dakka), a short distance north of Abu Simbel.⁸¹ This site lies north of the Second Cataract and is situated in a cluster of important Nubian centers: Aniba and Qasr Ibrim to the north and Ballana/Qustul and Faras to the south. The Pennsylvania-Yale Expedition in 1963 excavated eleven Meroitic funerary stelae and two inscribed offering tables at Arminna West. Two of the stelae bore two inscriptions each, so a total of fifteen Meroitic funerary texts were found at the site.⁸² Among them, Text 3A is a funerary stela inscribed in the Meroitic cursive script. The text names members of the deceased’s family using the Meroitic term *yetmede*,⁸³ which likely is a kinship term connecting the deceased to the status and social web of his extended family. After opening with an invocation of Isis and Osiris, the text provides the name of the deceased’s parents, although the first five lines of the text containing this information are broken. Line 7 begins the list of *yetmede* relatives, including several *hrphn*-officials in Faras, messengers to Rome, an official of the governor of the northernmost Meroitic province of Akin (Meroitic *pesheto* < Egyptian *p3 s3 nisw.t*⁸⁴), and a general/cult association president (Meroitic *pelmeš* < Egyptian *p3 mr-mš*⁸⁵). Lines 15–16 of Text 3A⁸⁶ read *ate-qere yetmede-lewi*, announcing that the deceased is related to the *ate* of the king (*qere*, rendered *kwr* in Setna II).⁸⁷ The royal association of the title *ate* at Arminna West echoes the status of the magicians of Setna II, who are all in the employ of a king, and reflects the title claimed by Nubian magicians in their Demotic-language prayer inscriptions at Philae and Dakka who are in the employ of the king of Kush, two of whom are also a “royal scribe of Kush” (see below).

The stela containing Text 3A belongs to a group of six stelae found at Arminna West that break with Nubian tradition by naming the father before the mother in the inscribed funerary texts. Trigger suggests that:

77 Naether 2019, p. 105 n. 4.

78 Griffith 1900, p. 51.

79 Griffith 1900, p. 162.

80 Trigger 1970, p. 7.

81 Ritner 2003, p. 476 n. 12; Trigger 1970, p. 13 (Text 3A). Hofmann already connected this title (*3te*) to that of Meroitic priests. See Hofmann 1993, pp. 209–10. For the Meroitic priestly title *ant* derived from Egyptian *hm-ntr*, see Trigger 1970, p. 28.

82 Trigger 1970, p. 55.

83 Trigger 1970, pp. 22–23; Hintze 1999, pp. 235–36; Ashby 2020, pp. 16–19. On this type of extended kinship forming a social consciousness as typical of Nubian culture, see Edwards 2004, p. 175.

84 Trigger 1970, p. 56 (*pestê*); Ashby 2020, pp. 163–64.

85 Ashby 2020, pp. 167–69.

86 Trigger 1970, p. 13.

87 Meroitic employs the subject-object-verb grammatical structure; thus the “nominal phrase” *yetmedelowi* follows the subject *ate-qere* and serves as the verbal element. The nominal phrase *yetmedelowi* consists of the noun *yetmede* followed by the singular article *-l*, the singular copula *-o*, and the emphatic marker *-wi*. See Rilly 2016, p. 7.

It is noteworthy that on all the stelae, except stela 6, the father's name precedes that of the mother. This is contrary to common Meroitic practice elsewhere. The reason for this difference is not clear. In view of the lateness of the cemetery at Arminna West, it might be interpreted as reflecting a change in kinship relations in late Meroitic times or it might reflect the apparently close connections that the inhabitants of this site had with the Dodecaschoenus and Roman Egypt. Possibly, these two phenomena are interrelated.⁸⁸

As mentioned above, Arminna West is located between the important Lower Nubian centers of Karanog and Qasr Ibrim to the north and Gebel Adda (near Faras) to the south. Each of these sites contains epigraphic evidence of the extended family members of the Nubian magicians Hornakhtyotef II and his father Wayekiye A attested at Philae and Dakka. It is possible that the *ate* of Arminna West belonged to one of the two powerful Nubian families that merged when Wayekiye A married Taese.⁸⁹

KWR

The Meroitic term *kwr* is used in Setna II to refer to the king of Meroe, translated by Ritner as “chieftain” and by Griffith as “viceroy.” Both translations ignore the clear meaning of the word, which is used in the Meroitic context exclusively for the ruler, whether male or female. Derived from a proto-Northeast Sudanic word meaning “head,” the term *qore* is used for the paramount king, foremost among rulers.⁹⁰ Ritner suggested that his use of the lesser term “chieftain” reflects the “ethnocentric Egyptian perspective.”⁹¹ Yet elsewhere in the text, the scribe of Setna II uses the term *kwr* to refer to the Egyptian king: “the *kwr* of Egypt.”⁹²

This term for the Kushite ruler was known to Egyptian writers and was employed in a variety of contexts. In the Rituals of Mut and Nekhbet, preserved on a papyrus in Berlin (Berlin P. 3053) and on blocks from El Kab, the *kwr* is said to perform a Nubian dance called *ksks*.⁹³ Darnell describes the participation of the *kwr* as the one who performs the *gsgs*-dance (*ksks*) in the rites performed for Hathor as recorded in the hymn at Medamud.⁹⁴ The presence of the Meroitic term *kwr* and the Kushite ruler as a character in Setna II evoke these earlier Egyptian references to the Kushite king's performance of sacred dances for the goddess Hathor in her role as the Distant Goddess in the Myth of the Eye of Re. The Kushite king himself is said to have been one of the worshippers of the Distant Goddess as she made her way from Bougem, in far south-eastern Nubia, to Egypt. The Nubian nome lists at Philae (western doorway through the first pylon) record hieroglyphic texts that tell how the god Shu danced before Hathor in Bougem.⁹⁵ Kushite kings adopted the imagery of Shu/Onuris in his role as the one who brings the Distant Goddess to Egypt; the performance of dance as an act of worship was central to this concept.⁹⁶

Actual Kushite kings are attested in Egyptian temples. In their Meroitic-language inscriptions they claim the title *qore* and assert political control over the Egyptian temples of Lower Nubia at Dakka and Philae. In the late first century BCE, Teriteqas and his queen, the kandake Amanirenas, had their cartouches engraved in the facade of the pylon that stands before the temple of Dakka (MI 92),⁹⁷ which also includes a

88 Trigger 1970, p. 56. It is possible that Trigger is mistaken, as line 4 of Text 3A contains the Meroitic nominal phrase associated with the mother's name (*tdhelewi* “born of”) followed by approximately eight missing characters. The nominal phrase is repeated again in line 7, perhaps justifying Trigger's assertion that these stelae name the father before the mother, yet one wonders whose name preceded the “born of” nominal phrase in line 4.

89 Ashby 2020, pp. 76 n. 78, 146–47; p. 76 n. 78: “The marriage of Wayekiye A and Taese in Generation 3 of the Wayekiye family combined the Meroitic military titles held by Taese's family with the Egyptian priestly titles held by Wayekiye A's family.”

90 Rilly 2010, pp. 136–38; Griffith 1911a, p. 64. Recently, Rilly has modified the pronunciation of the Meroitic term *qore* to /*qur*/, which more closely reflects the writing of this term in Setna II as *kwr*. See Rilly 2021, p. 663.

91 Ritner 2003, p. 480 n. 19.

92 Griffith 1900, p. 175, line 4. Translated by Ritner as “chieftain of Egypt.” See Ritner 2003, p. 480.

93 Wild 1959, p. 86; Ashby 2018, p. 76.

94 Darnell 1995, pp. 69–70.

95 Junker 1917, p. 74. For Ptolemy VI's Nubian nome list, see Junker 1958, pp. 263–77; *FHN* II, pp. 614–30.

96 Bonnet 2006, pp. 119, 128, 160.

97 Griffith 1912, pp. 25–26.

sanctuary built by an earlier Meroitic king, Arqamani II (ca. 218–200 BCE), described above. Centuries later, the penultimate Meroitic ruler, Yesbokheamani (ca. 300 CE), had two nearly identical prayer inscriptions (MI 119 and MI 120)⁹⁸ added to an image of a king presenting the fields of the Dodechaschoenos on the interior north and south walls of the Gate of Hadrian, an important locus of Nubian piety at Philae.

QM³

The term *qm³* describes Nubian food. The Setna II papyrus speaks of Nubia as “the land of Nubia, country of gum eaters” (*p³ t³ nḥs tš n wnm qm³*).⁹⁹ A type of porridge made with grain is compared in its viscosity to the gum incense derived from the lands of Nubia. The porridge eaten in Nubia was distinct from the bread and beer consumed by the Egyptians and thus could serve as an ethnic marker for the foreigner at the Egyptian court: “They made for him swill (*nb’y³*)¹⁰⁰ in the Cushite manner.”¹⁰¹ Griffith translates this word as “wickedness(?)”. In a footnote to this line, Griffith indicates that he is extrapolating the meaning of this otherwise unknown term from a Coptic word: “may be *ⲛⲟⲃⲓⲛⲟⲃⲉ* ‘sin,’ ‘error.’”¹⁰² All other translators have followed Griffith’s lead, yet it is often the case that Egyptian expressions for Nubian cultural items are derived from Nubian words. Might this be so with the name of a food unique to Nubians? Rather than indicating “wickedness,” the term rendered *nb’y³* in the Demotic script may simply attempt to capture a Nubian word that lacks an Egyptian equivalent. This happens fairly often in the Demotic prayer inscriptions in the temples of Lower Nubia, where Meroitic titles without Egyptian equivalents (e.g., *qeren*, *ḥbḥn*, *kroro*) are simply transcribed into the Demotic script. Perhaps advances in our understanding of the languages of Nubia will reveal an indigenous word for a typical Nubian dish that will allow us to cease translating the word as “swill.” In the heartland of Kush, a potentially similar gumlike food was considered worthy of serving as an offering to the god Amun.

Pope has analyzed the Sanam Historical Inscription to identify the type of food offered at the temple of Sanam.¹⁰³ Built for Amun-Re under the Kushite king Taharqo in the seventh century BCE, the temple of Sanam is situated at the Fourth Cataract of the Nile in Sudan in close proximity to the Kushite capital of Napata and the sacred site of Gebel Barkal. A hieroglyphic text from the forecourt includes a long list of offerings made at the temple. Pope examines references made to a pot and its contents labeled *īwš* in Egyptian hieroglyphs and mentioned repeatedly.¹⁰⁴ Exploring the word’s cognates from the Afroasiatic language family, Pope includes “kneading” and “mixing” among the lexical range of the word written *īwš* at Sanam:

The temple inventory at Sanam also stands as our first textual evidence *commissioned by Nubians themselves* [emphasis original] to give testimony of the Sahelian “Porridge-and-Pot” tradition otherwise manifested in the abundant evidence of archaeology, ethnography and iconography; in the process, the unpublished passages of the Sanam Historical Inscription demonstrate that the culinary contrast between Nubia and Egypt was manifested not only in the material and visual dimensions of Nubian culture, but also in its textual expression.¹⁰⁵

98 Griffith 1912, pp. 44–45. Interestingly, the royal image claimed by the Meroitic king Yesbokheamani on the north wall stands in close proximity to the last dated hieroglyphic inscription (394 CE), that of Esmet Akhom dedicated to the Nubian god Mandulis.

99 Ritner 2003, p. 477; Griffith 1900, p. 164.

100 EG, p. 214.

101 Ritner 2003, p. 478. Following Lichtheim, Woods renders the term as “muck.” See Woods 2006, p. 154 n. 135. The term is translated as “Dreck” in Quack 2005, p. 125 n. 200.

102 Griffith 1900, p. 165, line 6.

103 Pope 2013, p. 489. In a more recent publication, Pope revisits his analysis of Nubian food referred to in Demotic literature in light of new archaeological discoveries. See Pope 2018, p. 509.

104 Pope 2013, pp. 480–81.

105 Pope 2013, p. 485.

Smith provides an indigenous context for understanding Nubian foodways in his study of the Egyptian fortress of Askut, called by the Egyptians “Destroyer of the Nubians,”¹⁰⁶ located at the Second Cataract of the Nile. Smith surveys the changes in cooking and serving vessels excavated at the site to determine the culinary practices of the different populations that were resident at the fort from the Middle Kingdom period, when the fortress was built, through the Late Period, after the Kushite Twenty-Fifth Dynasty was expelled from Egypt.¹⁰⁷ The fortress of Askut was occupied during the entire time. After establishing the distinctiveness of the two pottery corpora—handmade Nubian fine ware and Egyptian mass-produced utilitarian pottery—Smith uses the ceramic assemblage of Askut to track the prevalence of one type of pottery in relation to the other over time. Nubian service and storage vessels follow an expected ebb and flow with the change in power from dominant Egyptians in the Middle Kingdom to dominant Kerman Nubians during the Second Intermediate Period. Thus we see a “peak [in Nubian wares] in the Second Intermediate Period and a small decline following, though still at higher levels than during the Middle Kingdom.”¹⁰⁸ The change in cookware seems to demonstrate an acculturation of the Egyptian population at Askut to Nubian foodways:

Nubian cookpots are disproportionately represented at Askut, constituting almost half of all cooking vessels during the Middle Kingdom and increasing steadily over time to dominate the culinary assemblage. In comparison, Nubian serving vessels remain a minor component of their respective sub-assemblages as do storage vessels. . . . During the Second Intermediate Period, not only does the frequency of cookpots jump, but the relative frequency of Nubian service vessels, most of which are fine wares used for display and in feasting, also surpasses cook pots for the first and only time, again supporting the political scenario. Nevertheless, the dramatic rise in cook pots points towards the incorporation scenario, perhaps with intermarriage between colonists and Kerman Nubians.¹⁰⁹

In stark contrast to the denigration of Nubian food recorded in the translation of these terms by Egyptologists (“swill,” “dreck,” “muck”), the reality of cultural entanglement is, of course, more complex. It seems that over the course of their long cohabitation, the Egyptian residents at the fortress of Askut came to appreciate the foodways of Nubia, as reflected in the growing prevalence of Nubian cookware required to produce the porridge typical of Nubian cuisine. Rather than regarding the characteristic Nubian meal as “swill,” it seems the Egyptians chose to join their Nubian neighbors in the consumption of porridge “in the Kushite manner.” The ideology of a militarily dominant Egypt may have been comforting in the literature of the Greco-Roman period, when Egyptians found themselves under foreign political control. However, the reality of human-to-human interaction in a culturally diverse Egypt and Nubia, even at the height of Egyptian colonization in Nubia, speaks to an openness to the adoption of Nubian cultural elements by Egyptians who lived in Lower Nubia or even in communities with long-lived, sizable Nubian populations in Egypt proper:

The ideological construction of both physical and cultural boundaries drew a strict black and white divide between inner civilization and outer barbarism in order to legitimate royal power and authority. The distribution of culinary equipment in the form of ceramics for food service and cooking at Askut shows Egyptian frontier communities did more than simply implement central policy. . . . In spite of the politically charged ideology of separation and otherness, the patterns of Nubian pottery and other artifacts at Askut indicate that Egyptians and Nubians interacted and probably intermarried. In particular, Nubian women had a profound impact on colonial society through the gradual dominance of Nubian foodways reflected in cooking vessels.¹¹⁰

I imagine it is no coincidence that it is once again Nubian women who are at the center of this story of cultural entanglement. Just as they are prominently featured in the names of their sons, the Nubian magicians of Setna II, Nubian women are central to the creation of a shared, hybrid culinary culture among family members even while living under the imposition of Egyptian hegemonic dominance in Nubia. Through

¹⁰⁶ Smith 2003, p. 41.

¹⁰⁷ Smith 2003, pp. 40–45.

¹⁰⁸ Smith 2003, p. 52.

¹⁰⁹ Smith 2003, p. 52.

¹¹⁰ Smith 2003, pp. 59–60.

sharing food, Nubians and Egyptians came together in community to consume the tangible evidence of their shared humanity, disregarding the bombastic pronouncement of Egyptian superiority and Nubian oppression. It may be safe to assume that no one turned up their nose at the “swill” brought to the table at Askut by Nubian women.

NUBIAN MAGICIANS AT PHILAE AND DAKKA

Postdating the period in which the Setna II papyrus was written (first century CE), actual Nubian magicians (*hry-tb*) are attested by their prayer inscriptions at the temples of Philae and Dakka. Members of the prominent Wayekiye family of priests and provincial officials in Lower Nubia are attested for seven generations at these sites. The earliest family member to inscribe a prayer at Philae was Paese the Elder (*P3-Is.t-3*), who wrote his prayer in Egyptian Demotic on the southwest wall of the pronaos of the Temple of Isis.¹¹¹ While Paese’s inscription (Ph. 251) is undated, we can extrapolate from a dated inscription of his grandson to place this earliest Wayekiye family inscription at approximately 175 CE.¹¹² The accumulation of increasingly prestigious titles shows the family’s rise over the course of four generations, reaching its zenith in the mid-third century CE. While Paese held titles that indicate he was a minor financial official in the cult of Isis,¹¹³ his son Hornakhtyotef I rose to attain the position of *lesonis* “chief financial officer” at Dakka.¹¹⁴ The first attested Nubian magician at Philae was Paese’s grandson Wayekiye A. In his prayer inscription (Ph. 421)—one of the few dated Nubian inscriptions (year 7 of Severus Alexander [227 CE])—Wayekiye A claims the title of chief lector priest of the king of Kush (*hry-tb n nsw n Kš*).¹¹⁵ As a flourish, and to showcase his ability to read and write the sacred scripts of Egypt, Wayekiye A wrote every divine name and his priestly titles in the hieroglyphic script, while the rest of the graffito is written in the Demotic script.

Wayekiye A’s son Hornakhtyotef II dedicated several prayer inscriptions, in which we see a steady accumulation of titles. In Ph. 257 he holds the titles “*qeren* of Isis” and “agent of Isis,” titles that his great grandfather Paese the Elder claimed, as well as the title “prophet of Isis” (*hm-ntr Is.t*), demonstrating Nubian entry into the Egyptian priesthood. In Ph. 410, at the peak of his career, Hornakhtyotef II together with his maternal uncle Maniawawi (brother of Hornakhtyotef II’s mother Taese) claimed the priestly titles of his earlier inscription and added a series of titles that demonstrate that he had become a powerful official in the administration of Meroitic Nubia—agent of the king of the land of Nehes, hereditary prince (*r-p’t*) of the country of Takompso, chief (*hry-tp*) of the Triacontaschoenos, and royal scribe of Kush (*sš nsw n Kš*), as well as *hm-ntr* priest of Isis.¹¹⁶ Yet it is in his inscription at the temple of Dakka (Dakka 30) that Hornakhtyotef II claims the title “magician of the king of Kush” (*hry-tb n nsw n Kš*).¹¹⁷ It is surely no coincidence that this title appears in the first four lines of the inscription, which are written in hieroglyphs while the rest of the text, comprising seven lines, is written in Demotic. Just as his father Wayekiye A did in Ph. 421, Hornakhtyotef II writes the priestly titles including “chief lector priest of the king of Kush” in the ancient sacred script, probably to show reverence for the titles and to demonstrate his proficiency in the hieroglyphic script associated with the role of royal magician. Hornakhtyotef II also claims the title

¹¹¹ Griffith 1937, p. 83.

¹¹² Ashby 2020, p. 2.

¹¹³ Paese the Elder’s titles were *qeren* of Isis and agent of Isis (Ph. 251). See Ashby 2020, p. 86.

¹¹⁴ Hornakhtyotef I was mentioned as father in the graffiti of his sons Sosen (Ph. 223) and Wayekiye A (Ph. 421).

¹¹⁵ Griffith 1937, pp. 121–22. For *hry-tb* as the Demotic word for “magician” and a late abbreviation of the earlier title *hry-hb hry-tp*, see Ritner 1993, pp. 220–22; EG, p. 321; CDD H (09:1), p. 211.

¹¹⁶ Griffith 1937, p. 112. The title “royal scribe of Kush” was also held by Hornakhtyotef II’s paternal uncle, Sosen (Ph. 409).

¹¹⁷ Griffith 1937, pp. 26–31, esp. p. 27; FHN III, p. 982.

“professional magician” (*rh-ht*).¹¹⁸ Furthermore, he is simultaneously the magician of the king of Kush in Meroe and of the cities of the “Great Green” (*rh-iḥi¹¹⁹ wr m niwt w3d-wr*).¹²⁰

Hornakhtyotef II begins his prayer inscription with an invocation of Thoth of Pnubs (chief deity of the temple at Dakka), followed by Tefnut, daughter of Re. The reference to Tefnut as daughter of Re refers to her role as the Distant Goddess in the Myth of the Eye of Re. Hornakhtyotef II’s status as magician of the cities of the Great Green also associates him with the Distant Goddess, as this toponym appears in the Myth of the Distant Goddess.¹²¹ In the Nubian nome list of Ptolemy VI, engraved in the western passage through the first pylon at Philae, the personified district of *T3-w3d* offers to Hathor as she comes out of Bougem; Shu stands before her and dances for her Ka.¹²² In his description of the Nubian nome list of Ptolemy VI, Junker notes that *T3-w3d* (*w3d-wr*) was located between two sites, Abu Simbel and Pnubs, which were arrival points on the Nile of a route through the eastern desert from Bougem, the region where the Distant Goddess (Hathor/Tefnut) was said to reside: “Hinter *T3-w3d* schreitet der Gau von Pnubs. . . . Es könnte sein, daß wie von Pnubs, so auch von *Mht* (Abu Simbel) aus ein Weg durch *Bwgm* zum Myrrhenlande gedacht war.”¹²³

Closely related to the title of chief lector priest are the astronomical priestly titles held by Wayekiye A and his son Hornakhtyotef II. Both men were prophets of Sothis (*hm-ntr Spdt*), the star Sirius that rises just before the Nile’s inundation and inaugurates the New Year. Each man expands upon the title of prophet of Sothis with the assertion that he “knows the rising and setting of the moon,” a clear reference to his skill as an hourly priest (*wnwt*) trained in astronomical knowledge.¹²⁴ Furthermore, both Wayekiye A and Hornakhtyotef II are *wab*-priests of the five living planets, to which designation Hornakhtyotef II adds that he “knows the time of obscuration of the Sun and Moon.”¹²⁵

In contrast to the negative depiction of Nubian magicians as fearsome enemies of Egypt, prayer inscriptions at Philae attest to the friendly, collegial relations between Nubian priests and their Egyptian counterparts. Sasan, Nubian author of the longest known Demotic inscription (Ph. 416), which was engraved at Philae in 253 CE, states: “Fine were the honors which the prophets and the priests and the people of the city did to me until [we] were [taken] to the temple of Isis.”¹²⁶

THE POWER AND DANGER OF NUBIAN MAGICIANS

The power and danger of Nubian magicians is a trope that appears frequently in Egyptian literary sources and magical texts. Execration texts performed against Nubian enemies likely targeted both the foreign ruler and the magicians he employed. In his discussion of execrating the one who rebels against the pharaoh, Koenig says that “Nubia was famous for its magic and alluding to it was believed to increase the efficacy of formulas.”¹²⁷ Rilly has used Egyptian execration texts as rich sources from which to recover the names of early Nubian leaders who were targeted as enemies.¹²⁸ Setna II plays with this trope to highlight the danger

118 Ritner 1993, pp. 229–30.

119 Ritner 1993, pp. 229–31.

120 Graffito Dakka 30; see Griffith 1937, pp. 27–28. The *w3d-wr* “Great Green” is to be identified with the *T3-w3d* “Green Land” listed between Sedeinga and Pnubs, an area on either side of the Third Cataract, in the Nubian nome list of Ptolemy II on the Dodecaschoenos stela that stands before the second pylon at Philae. See *FHN* III, p. 987 n. 606, and *FHN* II, p. 564 (*T3-w3d*).

121 Junker 1917, p. 74.

122 Junker 1917, p. 74.

123 Junker 1917, p. 74.

124 Griffith 1937, pp. 27–28 (Dakka 30, line 4), 121 (Ph. 421, line 14).

125 Griffith 1937, pp. 28 (Dakka 30, line 4), 112 (Ph. 410, lines 7–8).

126 Griffith 1937, p. 115.

127 Koenig 2007, p. 227; pp. 236–37: “This also explains why, during the Late Period, a period of invasions, the priests spent a great deal of their time performing execration rituals to maintain the very survival of the country, and showed a compulsive need of purity to lessen their anxiety.” See also Wüthrich 2009, p. 281; Thissen 1991.

128 Rilly 2014, pp. 1169–70; Rilly 2007, p. 35.

posed to the Egyptian king by a trio of Nubian magicians, one of whom appears at court with a seemingly impossible challenge: to read the sealed scroll that he carries. This scroll contains the entire story of Setna II, a story within a story, which Si-Osiris reads effortlessly. The end of the tale reveals that Si-Osiris is a reincarnation of a powerful magician from the time of Thutmose III—Hor Paneshy—who came back to life as Si-Osiris to defeat the aggressive and rebellious Nubian magicians. Yet the tension of the story would be impossible without relying on the culturally efficacious trope of the fearsome Nubian magician and the power of “black magic” at his command: “The efficacy of Kushite magic was well known in Egyptian circles.”¹²⁹

It seems that the Nubian magician’s power derived from his association with powerful Nubian gods: “The Magician tried to seize the nature of the god under all its aspects, all its forms or names, according to the Egyptian belief which held that the essence of the thing was expressed in its name. . . . In a way, such invocations of the god Amun are exceptions founded on the Nubian origin of the god.”¹³⁰ Setna II repeatedly invokes “Amun, Bull of Meroe” in relation to the Nubian characters as a way to associate them with the power and foreignness of the god from whom they derive their power. This is done in recognition of the tight association of Kushite royal power with the god Amun, yet this association dates to an earlier period, as do many elements of this story, when the Napatan kings built their royal iconography around a narrative of divine descent from the ram-headed Amun of Napata. Amun was not the only Kushite god to bestow power on the Nubian magicians. Several gods associated with the sacred site of Pnubs, itself located adjacent to the most ancient Kushite capital of Kerma, are evoked in reference to the practice of magic in Nubia: “Other magical texts establish a relationship between Osiris and Pnoubis in Nubia (Dukki Gel).”¹³¹

In her recently published study of Egyptian priests in the Greco-Roman period, Escolano-Poveda explores various literary sources to describe the activities of Egyptian priests in the Late Period. Regarding the Nubian magician of Setna II, Escolano-Poveda reiterates the Egyptian propaganda against the enemy magicians as recorded in literary sources while ignoring the lived reality of Egyptian temple practice as detailed in the prayer inscriptions at Philae, Dakka, and elsewhere: “In the magical contest, the Nubian sorcerer is also the one who starts the attacks, which are always repelled by Horus son of Paneshe, proving the superiority of Egyptian magic, despite its similar procedural character.”¹³² The Nubian magicians are relentlessly aggressive, yet undoubtedly inferior. The tale of Setna II may serve as the literary equivalent of an execration text against the feared power of the Nubian magician by narrating the triumph of the Egyptian magician. Yet the tale also preserves references to earlier collaborations between the two protagonists—Horus-the-son-of-the-Nubian-Woman and Horus Paneshy. After flying up to Egypt in defense of his Kushite king, Horus-the-son-of-the-Nubian-Woman is confronted by Horus Paneshy, who calls the Nubian magician a “villain of Kush” but adds a reference to his prior rescue of the Nubian magician:

Are you not Horus-the-son-of-the-Nubian-Woman, whom I saved in the gardens of Pre when your companion from Cush was with you, and you were both fallen into the water, cast down from the mountain on the east of Heliopolis?¹³³

To this, Horus-the-son-of-the-Nubian-Woman retorts, with an allusion to the Egyptian magician as an upstart former pupil: “Is it the one whom I had instructed in the language of wolves who now performs magic against me?”¹³⁴ Ritner used this passage to argue for interpreting the name of the Egyptian magician as evocative of the “jackal” ape (*p3 šm wnš-kwf*) of the Myth of the Eye of Re. I concur and further understand this passage to acknowledge the antiquity of Nubian ritual knowledge and the training received by Horus Paneshy from his Nubian nemesis in the art of magic, referred to here as “jackal language” (*mt.t*

129 Cooper 2020, p. 11. Cooper cites a letter of Amenhotep II to his viceroy in Nubia warning him of the power of Nubian magicians (*Urk.* IV, 1344/11–12); Wüthrich 2009, p. 275.

130 Koenig 2007, p. 227.

131 Koenig 2007, p. 235.

132 Escolano-Poveda 2020, p. 68.

133 Ritner 2003, p. 486.

134 Griffith 1900, p. 197; Ritner 2003, p. 486: section VI, line 13.

wnš).¹³⁵ Ritner noted the depiction of a jackal on the top of a box containing a Middle Kingdom “magician’s kit,” reading it as a sportive writing of *hry sšt* “He who is over the secrets,” which may have indicated one with privileged access to cultic mysteries.¹³⁶ In the Late Period this title was held by specialists in magic and ritual. If the Nubian magician taught this “jackal language”—words of power used in magic—to the Egyptian hero, how does the Egyptian magician emerge victorious from their magical battle? I would argue that the victory is equivalent to the victory of Moses over the Egyptian magicians of Pharaoh in the book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible.¹³⁷ In each tale, an ethnocentric narrative drives the story and ultimately the outcome. The magicians of the morally superior and divinely sanctioned group emerge triumphant to underscore cultural superiority against a more powerful enemy. Why Egyptologists choose to revel in the ethnocentric and derogatory depiction of the Nubian “other” in this tale is a question for another day. Yet none of the terms I have surveyed in the original Demotic text of the tale of Setna II need be translated as demeaning to the Nubians. Although the tale itself is clearly meant to bolster an Egyptian concept of cultural superiority that harkens back to the glory days of Egyptian empire under the New Kingdom pharaohs, the fact that Setna II was composed in the period when Egypt had been reduced to a colony of Rome (“aegypto capta”¹³⁸) shows the tale to be only a dream of former glory.

The title of this chapter is an allusion to three distinct yet interrelated cultural phenomena: the Nubian feminine in the tale of Setna II evoked through the matronymic epithets of the Nubian magicians that invoke birth and fertility goddesses; royal Nubian women; and the centrality of the Nubian woman in her society’s extensive kinship ties. They are the Black magic women. The title also alludes to the popularly held belief through time and geography of the inherent danger and power of African magicians that informs the horror-story tropes of voodoo priestesses, African root doctors, and the often-female Sudanese *zar*-practitioners of the medieval Muslim world. These African religious practices are typically referred to as “black magic.” Finally, the title also refers to the 1970 hit song from the Carlos Santana album *Abraxas*. The song mixes various musical elements, including jazz and blues, and incorporates African drums—the congas and timbales—thus infusing a spiritual quality into a song originally written and performed by Fleetwood Mac. The album’s cover features a nude African woman reclining near her altar while a nude African angel riding a conga drum hovers above her, evoking a vague sense of African religiosity that dabbles in otherworldly magic centered on the African woman and the trance-inducing power of African drumming, which is itself evident in the extended riff toward the end of the song.

The presence of the divine feminine in the tale of Setna II is not clearly visible when the tale is viewed through the standard Egyptological lens. With an understanding of the Nubian context that informs the nomenclature, the divine references, and even the foodways associated with the Nubian characters in this tale, the presence of Hathor as the Distant Goddess emerges, as does the centrality of the mother in Nubian culture. Finally, by approaching the Nubian characters with an understanding of the history, language, and religious practices that were indigenous to Nubia, it is possible to offer improved translations of Meroitic words used in the text—free of the unwarranted, demeaning connotations injected into them in previous publications. While the Egyptian author of Setna II certainly meant to “put Nubians in their place,” the writer also displayed an understanding of and familiarity with Nubian culture that demand the same of scholars who wish to comment on this text.

135 Ritner has explored various animal “speakers of divine language,” including dogs, jackals, snakes, and especially baboons. Ritner 2022, p. 336: “In the symbolic extensions of the ‘Ptolemaic’ hieroglyphic system, the figure of the baboon does acquire a relevant value as *dd* ‘to say/speak.’” The baboon is the hamadryas baboon, which is the cynocephalus simian called *wnš-kwf* in Egyptian mythical texts. See Ritner 2022, p. 337. It is especially apt that the baboons that Ritner discusses from the Book of Thoth “invoke the sacred name of Abrasax,” a metathesis of the name of the Carlos Santana album from which the title of this chapter takes its name. See Ritner 2022, p. 336.

136 Ritner 1993, pp. 231–32; Ritner 2006, p. 206. For an alternative interpretation, see Miniaci 2020, pp. 21–22, who lists previous interpretations of the identity of the recipient(s) of the assemblage, among them lector priest, midwife, and magician. See Miniaci 2020, p. 85.

137 Discussed in Ritner 2006.

138 Text on a coin minted in 28 BCE to celebrate victory in the Egyptian campaign of the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1866-1201-4189.

ABBREVIATIONS

- CDD Janet H. Johnson and Brian P. Muhs, eds. *The Demotic Dictionary of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago*. Chicago: Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, 2001–. <https://isac.uchicago.edu/research/publications/chicago-demotic-dictionary>
- EG Wolja Erichsen. *Demotisches Glossar*. Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1954
- FHN Tormod Eide, Tomas Hägg, Richard Holton Pierce, and László Török, eds. *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum: Textual Sources for the History of the Middle Nile Region between the Eighth Century BC and the Sixth Century AD*. Bergen: University of Bergen, 1994–2000
- Ph. Philae graffito numbered according to Francis Ll. Griffith, *Catalogue of the Demotic Graffiti of the Dodecaschoenos*. Vol. 1, *Text*. Les temples immergés de la Nubie. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937
- Urk. IV Wolfgang Helck, ed. *Urkunden der 18. Dynastie*. Part 17, *Historische Inschriften Thutmosis' III. und Amenophis' II*. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1955
- Wb. Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow. *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*. 5 vols. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1926–63

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