

THE
TALE OF SETNAU.

FROM THE VERSION

OF

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THE original of the following tale is written in the Demotic character and represents a stage of the Egyptian language intermediate between the ancient language and the Coptic. The manuscript which contains it is one of the treasures of the Vice Regal Museum at Boulaq, and was discovered at Thebes

in a wooden box containing other manuscripts in hieratic and Coptic writing which had belonged to a Coptic monk and had been deposited with him in his tomb. Towards the end of 1865 M. Mariette brought the papyrus under the notice of Dr. Brugsch who stands without a rival in the decipherment and interpretation of demotic texts. Dr. Brugsch's translation of the document appeared in the *Revue Archéologique* of 1867. A facsimile of the original text was published in the first volume of the *Papyrus Égyptiens du Musée de Boulaq* edited by M. Mariette (1871).

The manuscript at present consists of four pages, and they are numbered, the first being marked as page 3; from which it is clear that two pages are missing, and their destruction has been fatal to the first words of each of the forty lines of the third page.

If we possessed the first two pages of the papyrus, says Dr. Brugsch, we should probably be able at once to explain the origin or the occasion of the facts which are developed in the narrative before the eyes of the reader and which prove that the Egyptian

writer is not describing the acts and fortunes of living persons but, on the contrary, of the dead, of mummies, who not only converse in their catacomb about certain circumstances of their past life upon earth, but have even the power of leaving their tomb and coffin and mixing in the society of the living. Or if this hypothesis is not acceptable we should be obliged to suppose that we have to do with a mere recital of a dream.

The principal personage of the story is Setnau Chā-em-uset son of a king named User-māt, whom Dr. Brugsch considers as identical with the great Rameses II. Ptah-nefer-ka and Ahura, a brother and sister married together are children of a king Mer-neb-ptah whose name (in this orthography at least) is unknown to history. Merhu is the child of Ptahneferka and Ahura. The scene is placed at Memphis in lower Egypt and at Coptos in Upper Egypt on the eastern bank of the Nile, a place renowned for a sanctuary dedicated to the goddess Isis and her son Harpocrates.

The first page of our manuscript in its present state begins in the middle of a conversation wherein

the lady Ahura, sister and wife of Ptah-nefer-ka relates to Setnau the events of her life since her marriage with Ptah-nefer-ka until her own death and the deaths of her husband and child.

P. LE PAGE RENOUF.



THE TALE OF SETNAU.

“ It is thou who wouldst have turned me away from it if I had had no child after the two children. Ought not the two to be married together? I shall marry PTAH-NEFER-KA to the daughter of a captain of soldiers (and) AHURA to the son of another Captain of soldiers, as it has long been the custom in our family.

The time came for beginning the *rejoicings* before the King. I was called and conducted to the festive entertainments (of the King). (I was) richly attired. I had not the same look as on the previous day. Did not the King say to me, “ AHURA, it is not thou who hast sent them to me, on the occasion of this dispute, to say I would wish to marry (the son of a) great (personage)?” I said to him, “ I would wish to marry the son of a Captain of soldiers. He would wish to marry the daughter of another Captain of soldiers, as it has long been the custom in our family.” I laughed and the King laughed. (Then said) the King to the Chief of the palace : “ Let AHURA be conducted during the night to the house of PTAH-NEFER-KA, let all kinds of beautiful things be taken with her.” My marriage took place in the house of PTAH-NEFER-KA to bring the presents in silver and in gold. They were all brought to me from the royal palace. PTAH-NEFER-KA spent a happy day with me he received all the precious things of the royal palace and he slept with me that night. He did not recognise me. “ except that one of us loves the other.” The time of my usual disturbances arrived, and I had them not. The King was informed of this and he was much pleased. The King sent many things he caused

most beautiful presents to be brought to me in silver and gold and raiment of byssus. The time of my delivery arrived and I brought into the world this son who is before thee and who was named MER-HU. It was inscribed in the register of the house of the Sacred Scribes.

. PTAH-NEFER-KA, my brother, remained upon earth. Having gone to the Necropolis of Memphis, he read the writings which are in the tombs of the Kings, and the tablets in hieroglyphic writing and the writings which are on (the . . . for he was very learned . . .) exceedingly, with respect to writings. After this, there was a Cher¹ named NESPTAH. PTAH-NEFER-KA having gone to the temple to offer his prayer, it happened that he walked behind the Cher reading the writings which are on the chapels of the gods. (. . . he laughed.) PTAH-NEFER-KA said to him: "Wherefore laughest thou at me?" He said "I am not laughing at thee, but ought I not to laugh when thou readest some writings without (. . . if) thou desirest to read a writing, come to me. I will conduct thee to the spot where the book is which the god THOTH wrote with his hand. Its commencement . . . below, after the gods. Two pages of the writing, those which are on the back, if thou (recitest, thou shalt) charm heaven, the earth, the abyss, the mountains, the seas. Thou shalt know what relates to the birds of the sky and the reptiles, and all that is said of them. Thou shalt see the fishes of the water and (the divine power will raise them to the surface of the water). If thou readest the second page, it will happen that if thou art in the Amenti, thou wilt have power to resume the form which thou hadst upon earth. Thou shalt see the Sun-god RA who riseth up in heaven and the cycle of his nine gods, and the moon in its form at its rising."
 "(By) the King who liveth. Let a good word be said to

¹ A sort of priest.

me. Whatsoever thou askest I will give it to thee. Send me to the place where the book is." The Priest said to PTAH-NEFER-KA: "If thou askest to be sent (to this place) (I shall do it on condition) that thou shalt give me a hundred pieces of silver for my burial; if thou givest me them" PTAH-NEFER-KA called a young servant. He caused the hundred pieces of silver to be given to the Priest he caused them to be given. . . . (Then the Priest said to) PTAH-NEFER-KA: "The book in question is in the middle of the river of Coptos, in a box of iron, the box of iron is in a box of (brass, the box of brass is) in a box of bronze, the box of bronze is in a box of ivory and ebony, the box of ivory and ebony is in a (box of silver,) the box of silver is in a box of gold and the book is in this. There are a serpent, a scorpion and all sorts of reptiles together in the box in which the book is. It is . . ." . . . of this box at the time of the discourse which had the Priest . . . had held to PTAH-NEFER-KA. He knew not where in the world he was. He went forth out of the temple and he said ("Let me remember) all the (words) that he has (said). I will go to Coptos and take the book, without stopping at the north. But if I were to *suppose* that the Priest has told lies speak before him. . . . The war, the nome of Thebes my hand and that of PTAH-NEFER-KA that he should not go to Coptos. He did not listen to (*this word*). He presented himself before (the King. He repeated) to the King all that the Priest had said. The King said to him "What is it that thou desirest? I said to him "Let a royal bark be given to me with all its crew (Let me be permitted) to take AHURA (and MERHU) her young child to the south with me. I shall bring back this book. I shall not stop." The royal bark was given to him, with its crew. We embarked in the ship at the port, we sailed and we arrived (at Coptos) and lo, the Priests of the goddess Isis of

Coptos and the High Priest of Coptos came down before us. They delayed not to present themselves before PTAH-NEFER-KA. Their wives came down before me. (We entered) the temple of ISIS and HARPOCRATES. PTAH-NEFER-KA sent for an ox, a goose and some wine to make a sacrifice and a libation in the presence of ISIS of Coptos and HARPOCRATES. We were conducted into a very beautiful house. (We entered.) PTAH-NEFER-KA remained four days. He made holiday with the Priests of ISIS of Coptos. The wives of the Priests of Isis made holiday with me in my presence. The morning of our fifth day arrived. PTAH-NEFER-KA (gave orders to the High) Priest who was by him to make a *construction* filled with his *workmen* and *tools*. He told them of the writing. He made them alive and gave them the breath. He made them go down to the sea side. He filled the royal bark with sand he . . . to the harbour.

I approached till in front of the river of Coptos before me, for I wished to know what was in it. He said "Workmen, work for me till the place in which the book is." . . (they worked) by night as well as by day. Having arrived at it, in three days, he caused the sand to be thrown before him. A took place in the river, announcing that one had reached the serpent, the scorpion and all the reptiles which were together with (the box . . .) in it, from the discovery of a small serpent with the box aforesaid. He read the writing when he came to the serpent, the scorpion and all the reptiles which were together with the box. He was not able to make them come out. (But he seized) . . . the little serpent which was inside. Having a knife with him he killed it: but it came to life again and resumed its former shape. Taking a sword he killed it a second time; it came to life once more having resumed its form. He killed it a

third time and it then remained in two pieces. He placed sand between the two. The serpent did not resume its former shape. PTAH-NEFER-KA went to the place where the box was. (He discovered the box. It was) of iron, this one. He opened it and perceived a box of brass. He opened it and perceived a box of bronze. He perceived a box of ivory and ebony. (He perceived a box of silver.) He opened it and perceived a box of gold. He opened it and perceived the box within. He took the book out of the golden box. He read a page of the writing. (He charmed heaven, the earth, the abyss) the mountains, the seas. He understood what related to the birds of the sky and to the fishes of the sea and the fourfooted beasts of the mountain. It was spoken in it of them all. He read another page of the writing and he saw (the sun rising in heaven and the cycle of his nine) gods and the moon which was rising and the stars in their forms. He saw the fishes of the water. The divine power made them rise above the water. He read the writing to the . . . river. He said to the workmen, "Work for me as far as the place (. . .) them." They worked for him by night as well as by day, in order that he might arrive at the place where I was (. . .) in front of the river of Coptos. I did not drink (. . .) I did nothing at all, I was in the condition of a person who has arrived at the "good dwelling" (the grave). I said to PTAH-NEFER-KA (it is absolutely necessary for me) to see this book. We have suffered this misfortune (?) (. . .) on account of it. He put the book into my hand. I recited a page of its writing. I charmed. I charmed the sky, the earth, the abyss, the mountains, the seas. I learnt all that relates to the birds of heaven, the fish of the sea and four-footed beasts. It was spoken of them all. I recited the other page of the writing. I saw the sun rising in the sky and the cycle of his nine gods. I saw the moon rise with

all the stars of heaven in all their forms. I saw the fishes of the water. The divine power made them rise above the water. . . . this writing? So spake I to PTAH-NEFER-KA, my eldest brother, who was a good writer and a very learned man. He took a new piece of papyrus before him. He copied each word which was on the roll before him. He had it filled with (. . .) He had it dissolved in water. When he saw it dissolved he drank it. He knew all that it contained.

We returned to Coptos on the same day. We made holiday before ISIS of Coptos and HARPOCRATES. We went up to the harbour, we sailed and at the north of Coptos suddenly encountered the god THOTH, who knew all that had happened to PTAH-NEFER-KA as regards the book. THOTH tarried not to report this to RA, saying, "Know that my law and my science is with PTAH-NEFER-KA, son of King MERNEB-PTAH; he hath gone into my great dwelling. He hath stolen them. He hath taken my box beneath my (. . .). He hath slain my guardian who watched over it." It was answered to him, "He is abandoned to thee with all the persons who belong to him." A divine power was made to descend from heaven to prevent PTAH-NEFER-KA from again entering Memphis. He was enchanted with all the persons who belonged to him. An hour passed thus, and then the young child MERHU went out under the shadow of the royal bark. He fell into the water, invoking RA, and calling upon all the people of the harbour, who stirred not. PTAH-NEFER-KA went out beneath the (. . .) He read over him the writing. He made him come up. The divine power brought him to the surface of the water. He read the writing and made him tell all that had happened to him and (also) of the form of the report which THOTH had addressed to RA. We returned to Coptos with him. We conducted him

to the good dwelling, we celebrated the rites for him; we embalmed him as became the greatness of an exalted personage and we buried him in a chest in the Necropolis of Coptos.

PTAH-NEFER-KA my brother said: "Let us embark without delay, lest the King learn what hath happened, and his heart be sad in consequence of it." We went up to the harbour and embarked. We made no delay at the north of Coptos, but on arriving at the place where the young child MERHU had fallen into the river, I went out beneath the shadow of the royal bark and fell into the river. I made invocation to RA, and called upon the people who had remained in the harbour. It was told to PTAH-NEFER-KA, who came out beneath the shadow of the royal bark. He read the writing over me. It made me rise up. The divine power brought me up to the surface of the water. He made me tell him all that had happened to me and of the form of the report which THOTH had addressed to RA. He returned to Coptos with me and had me taken to the "good dwelling." He celebrated the rites for me. He had me embalmed with the embalmment suited to the greatness of a most high personage, and caused me to be buried in the tomb wherein the young child MERHU was buried.

He went up to the harbour and embarked. He staid not at the north of Coptos. And when he came to the place where we had fallen into the river, he spake to himself, saying, "Shall I go to Coptos to be united with them? If not, it will come to pass that when I come to Memphis, the King will straightway ask for my children. What shall I say to him? I cannot tell him thus: 'I have taken thy children to the Thebais. I have slain them and I am alive.' If I go to Memphis shall I still live?"

He caused strips of byssus to be brought to him, wherewith to make a binding-band. He wrapped the book in it and placed it on his side. It made him powerful. PTAH-NEFER-KA went out beneath the shadow of the royal bark, and fell into the river invoking RA and calling upon the people who remained in the harbour. They said, "A great misfortune! A frightful misfortune! Returneth he not, the good scribe, without a peer?" The royal bark was made to sail, without any one knowing the place where PTAH-NEFER-KA was. It arrived in Memphis and the news was told to the King.

The King came down before the royal bark arrayed in a linen robe and the Menefti who all had linen vestments and the Priests of PTAH and the High Priest of PTAH and all the officers of the palace. And when they saw PTAH-NEFER-KA, who occupied the interior of the royal bark in consequence of his position as good scribe, he was taken up, and they saw the book at his side. The King said "Let the book be taken from his side!" The officers of the King and the Priests of PTAH and the High Priest of PTAH said before the King "O our great Master and King, to whom be granted the duration of RA! PTAH-NEFER-KA was a good scribe and a very learned man." The King caused him to be taken to the "good dwelling" till the sixteenth day, had him arrayed with ornaments till the thirty-fifth day and embalmed till the seventieth day. He was buried in his own tomb and sepulture.

I have undergone these misfortunes on account of this book whereof thou sayest, "Let it be given to me!" Speak not to me of it for because of it we have lost the duration of our life upon earth. SETNAU says "AHURA, let the book be given to me that I may see it, between thee and PTAH-NEFER-

KA, otherwise I shall take *it by force.*" Then PTAH-NEFER-KA rose upon his bed, and he said "Art thou not SETNAU, to whom this lady hath told all this fatal history? Beware of taking the book in question. How couldst thou retain it, in consequence of the force of its extraordinary contents?"

[SETNAU in spite of these counsels insists upon having the book and proposes to PTAH-NEFER-KA to play a game of fifty-two points for the possession of it. PTAH-NEFER-KA accepts the proposal, but attempts to cheat SETNAU and is found out by him, and loses the game.]

SETNAU called AN-HA-HOR-RAU his brother, who was by him, saying, "Go without delay upon earth and tell the King all that has happened to me. Bring the talismans of PTAH which belong to my father, and my magical books." He went to the earth without delay, and told what had happened to SETNAU. The King told him to take the talismans of PTAH, of his father and his magical books. Then straightway AN-HA-HOR-RAU descended into the tomb. He applied the talismans to the body of SETNAU, and at the same moment he flew up to heaven. SETNAU stretched out his hand towards the book and took it. Then SETNAU went out of his tomb and light went before him and darkness behind him. AHURA wept after him saying, "Glory to thee King of darkness! glory to thee King of light!" It was all (. . .) in the tomb. PTAH-NEFER-KA said to AHURA: "Let not thy heart be sad. I will make him bring back this book. A knife and a stick shall be in his hand and a brazier of fire upon his head."

SETNAU left the tomb, strong in the possession of the book, and he came into the King's presence and told him all that had happened to him and that he possessed the book.

The King said to SETNAU, "This book is taken from the tomb of PTAH-NEFER-KA, be prudent or he will cause thee to be taken. He will be a knife and a stick in thy hand, and a brazier of fire upon thy head." SETNAU listened to him, but it was by no means his design to separate himself from the book. He read it in presence of every one.

After this, it happened one day that SETNAU was walking in the dromos of the temple of PTAH. And he saw a very beautiful woman. No woman was comparable to her in beauty. There was much gold upon her, and many beautiful maidens were walking behind her. *One man was their guard.* They were fifty-two in number. As soon as SETNAU saw her he no longer knew where in the world he was. He called his young attendant SETEM-ASH and said—Go, forthwith, to the place where that lady is and try to find out what relates to . . . The youthful SETEM-ASH went straightway to the place where the lady was. He called the young maid who was walking behind her. He addressed her, saying, "Who is that lady?" And she answered, "It is TABUBU, the daughter of the Priest of the goddess BAST, the Lady of the quarter Anch-ta (of Memphis) who is going into the temple to make her prayer before PTAH, the great god." The youth returned to SETNAU, and repeated all that she had said. SETNAU told the youth "Go and tell that maiden it is SETNAU CHA-EM-USET, the son of King USERMAT who sendeth me saying—"I will give ten pieces of silver to pass an hour with thee. If not you are warned that force will be employed. I will give them to thee and I will conduct thee to a secret place without any one recognising thee." The youth returned to the place where TABUBU was. He called her young maid and spoke to her. She seemed annoyed at his words as if what he said were shameful. TABUBU said to the young man "Cease talking to that silly

girl, come and talk to me." The boy went in where TABUBU was and he said to her "I will give thee ten pieces of silver if you will spend an hour with SETNAU CHA-EM-USET, the son of USERMAT. If you do not accept it, he will do you He will take you to a secret place, so that no one will recognise you." TABUBU said, "Go and tell SETNAU what I say. I am no mean person but a sacred one. If you desire to do your will, come to the temple of BAST, at my house. Every thing is ready. You will do with me what you please. Nobody knows me and I shall not tell it in the street."

The lad returned to SETNAU and repeated all that she had said to him. He (the lad) said, what was true, "It is a shame for any one to be in company with SETNAU!" SETNAU procured a boat for himself and embarking at the harbour lost no time in making his way to the temple of BAST. He advanced to the western portion of the space till he recognised a well-built house. There was a wall of the same height and a garden in the middle. There was a platform before the door. When before it SETNAU said "Whose house is this?" He was told "It is the house of TABUBU." SETNAU went into the interior of the enclosure in order to face the hall looking upon the garden. TABUBU was told of this. She came down, seized the hand of SETNAU and said to him, The house of the Priest of BAST, Lady of Anchta, into which thou hast entered is of great splendour. Come up with me. SETNAU went in and ascended the staircase of the house with TABUBU until they perceived the terrace of the house. It was adorned and decorated, and its ornaments were of real lapis lazuli and real malachite. There were numerous couches draped with byssus. Many cups of gold were ranged upon a sideboard and each cup was filled with wine. They were placed in the hand of SETNAU. She

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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