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## **“THE DESERTED KING...” IN EGYPTIAN LITERATURE**

*Sergei Ignatov*

My exploratory work on the Kadesh inscriptions and more specifically on the so-called “Poem”, which narrate how Ramesses the Great has succeeded alone, with the help of God Amun, in overpowering the Hittites, has directed my attention to a peculiar plot line in the Egyptian literature, which I have named “The Deserted King...”. That story starts sending impulses through texts from the beginning of the epoch of the New Kingdom, in times when political tensions acquire noticeable density.

We know of three quite characteristic scenarios of the “Deserted King...”. The first case is from the epoch of the expelling of the Hyksos, i. e. from the very beginning of the New Egyptian Kingdom epoch!; the second case is linked to the Kadesh inscriptions of Ramesses II; the third case is Herodotus’ story about the King of priestly background Sethon, in which events from the VII B.C. are described.

Out of the three sources outlined above, the substance of the “Deserted King...” is best clarified in Herodotus’ story about Sethon, in which the Father of History explains personally why the King was abandoned. This circumstance permits us to explain the priests’ supportive mood of Herodotus’ story with authentic historical facts. Therefore, we would start the study of the issue under consideration by analyzing Herodotus’ story:

μετὰ δὲ τοῦτον βασιλευῖσαι τὸν ἱρέα τοῦ Ἥφαιστου, τῷ οὐνόμα εἶναι Σεθῶν· τὸν ἐν ἀλογίῃσι ἔχειν παραχρησάμενον τῶν μαχίμων Αἰγυπτίων ὡς οὐδὲν δεησόμενον αὐτῶν, ἄλλα τε δὴ ἄτιμα ποιεῦντα ἐς αὐτούς, καὶ σφεας ἀπελέσθαι τὰς ἀρούρας· τοῖσι ἐπὶ τῶν προτέρων βασιλείων δεδόσθαι ἐξαιρέτους ἐκάστῳ δυώδεκα ἀρούρας. μετὰ δὲ ἐπ’ Αἴγυπτον ἐλαύνειν στρατὸν μέγαν Σαναχάριβον βασιλέα Ἀραβίων τε καὶ Ἀσσυρίων· οὐκ ἔθέλειν τοὺς μαχίμους τῶν Αἰγυπτίων βοηθέειν. τὸν δ’ ἱρέα ἐς ἀπορίην ἀπειλημένον ἐσελθόντα ἐς τὸ μέγαρον πρὸς τῷγαλμα ἀποδύρεσθαι οἷα κινδυνεύει παθεῖν. ὀλοφυρόμενον δ’ ἄρα μιν ἐπελθεῖν ὕπνον, καὶ οἱ δόξαι ἐν

τῆ ὄψι ἐπιστάντα τὸν θεὸν θαρσύνειν ὡς οὐδὲν πείσεται ἄχαρι ἀντιάζων τὸν Ἀραβίων στρατόν· αὐτὸς γάρ οἱ πέμψειν τιμωρούς. τούτοισι δὴ μιν πίσυνον τοῖσι ἐνυπνίοισι, παραλαβόντα Αἰγυπτίων τοὺς βουλομένους οἱ ἔπεσθαι, στρατοπεδεύσασθαι ἐν Πηλουσίῳ· ταύτη γὰρ εἰσὶ αἱ ἐσβολαί· ἔπεσθαι δέ οἱ τῶν μαχίμων μὲν οὐδένα ἀνδρῶν, καπήλους δὲ καὶ χειρώνακτας καὶ ἀγοραίους ἀνθρώπους.

“After him (i.e. Anisis) a High Priest of Hefest (i.e. Ptah) named Sethon, who demonstrated his disregard for the Egyptian militaries, treating them poorly, as if not at all expecting that he would be needing them in the future. By committing also various other outrageous acts in regard to them, he went on to deprive them of their land plots, which had been bestowed upon them by former pharaohs (to each one twelve selected plots – aruri). After all these events, Sanaharib– the King of the Arabs and the Assyrians sent a great army against Egypt. Having fallen into a political gridlock and stepping into the holy of holies, the Priest started to complain in front of the statue of the God of his sufferings when being exposed to danger. And well, while complaining, he fell into a sleep, and had a vision as if the God appeared and began to give him inspiration that he would not suffer anything unpleasant from the Arab army, because He (the God) will send him defenders. And hence, putting his trust into all that deserved it and taking with him the Egyptians who were willing to follow him, he positioned himself in Pelusia. It is namely there that the door-gates to Egypt are located. Yet, he was accompanied not by military persons but by merchants, craftsmen and salesmen from the markets.” (Hdt. II 141)

The result was that the army had deserted the King-Priest, Sethon, because he was treating them very badly, depriving the military personnel of the land plots rendered to their ownership. God Ptah, on his behalf, did not abandon the King but promised him help. Thus, the King-Priest Sethon, God Ptah, the merchants, craftsmen and the salesmen from the markets were shown in unity. They all encountered the opposition of the caste of the military. Due to Herodotus, this story is understandable, because the concrete reasons for the situation that was created are disclosed. The comparative analyses of Herodotus’ story with other ancient oriental texts provide favourable circumstances for the reconstruction of the socio-economic character of the reasons that had brought to the deplorable situation in Egypt at the eve of the Assyrian conquest. A detailed analysis of Herodotus’ story is presented in the article by A. L. Vassoevich “An attempt for comparison of Hdt. II 141 with some ancient oriental texts”, (Vassoevich, 1984: 25–4) This is what is being said in that work about the personality of the King-Priest Sethon: “Following Griffith I also presume that Σεθῶν is a Greek form of the Egyptian priestly title *stm*. As a Russian parallel to Hero-

dotus' King Sethon one could refer to Pushkin's Tsar Saltan (Sultan)." (Vassoevich, 1984: 28).

In defining the personality of Sethon, F. G. Mishcenko has demonstrated great cautiousness and perspicacity:

"... it is possible to accept that Egypt's priests in Herodotus's stories have arisen as a King one of the members of their own caste, who had opposed the attack by Sanaharib at the times when in Upper Egypt was reigned by the Ethiopian King Taharka." (Mishtenko, 1988: 568).

Based on the fact that the Ruler of Lower Egypt, Tefnacht, who was striving to reign over the whole of Egypt, and was also "se/t/em" of Ptah, A. L. Vassoevich concludes that the King-Priest Sethon was also the High Priest of Memphis (Vassoevich, 1984: 28). The real danger to the High Priest Sethon was coming not from Kush, but from the side of *μαχιμων;οιμαχιμοι*, i.e. from the side of the military colonists in Egypt (the caste of the military) (Vassoevich, 1984: 29). It goes without any doubt that under *μαχιμων;οιμαχιμοι* Herodotus understood the Libyan military colonists (Vassoevich, 1984:33). Considering that a plot of land of *δωδεκα αρουρας* (12 arura = 3.28 hectares) opened the right to a tax-free status (Hdt. II 168), then the fact of the confiscation would by itself have created deep dissatisfaction among the Libyan military settlers.

And so after the military had refused to stand against Sanaharib, Sethon turned to the God – a situation which is very similar to the battle at Kadesh. Sethon's action was similar to what Ramesses II had done, and that proved to be the correct course of action, because after the army deserted the King-Priest, the salvation came from God.

Hence, the story that was fixed by Herodotus in Chapter 141 is distinguished by its open pro-priest's orientation.

As concerns the substance of the story – the God who appears in one's sleep and predicts future victory or success, it is also very characteristic of many historic sources (Vassoevich, 1984:35).

The counter-posing to the military personnel, who had refused to stand against the Assyrians, by the merchants, craftsmen and the salesmen from the markets, who rendered their support to Sethon, shows that the predominant part of the town population with the start of the Assyrian-Egyptian conflict rose in support of the pro-Kush priesthood and was prepared to fight against the conquest. The real reasons behind the forced decision of the citizens showing to be prepared to support Sethon are not disclosed by Herodotus (if we do not exclude the real life intervention of Hefest = Ptah (Vassoevich, 1984:37). In line 86 of the inscriptions of Pi/anhi/ one can read:



“They allowed the army to march against the not so many solders of his Majesty, namely: craftsmen, masters of the construction workers, personnel from the fleet.”

(Schafer, 1905: 1–56)

One can see that the same strata of the urban population stood against Pi/anhi/ which later on rose against Sanaharib, as described by Herodotus.

It is obvious that Herodot’s story contains doubtless historical value and reflects correctly on the socio-political situation that was dominant in Egypt on the eve of the Egyptian-Assyrian conflict.

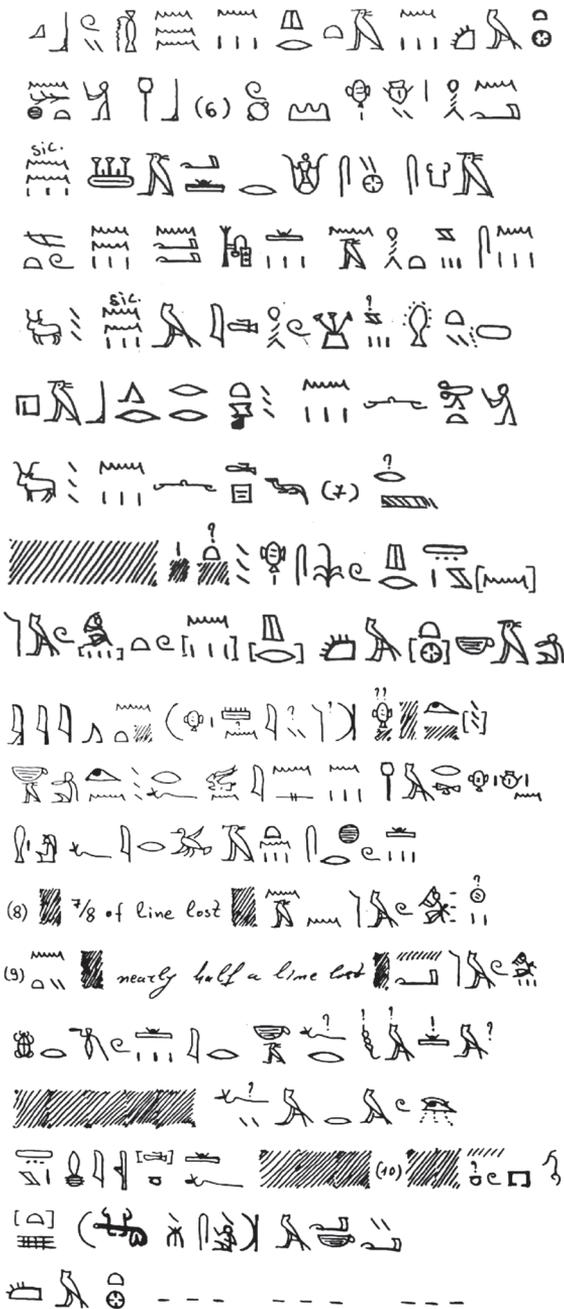
In the sense of a working hypothesis it is possible to conclude that the confiscated land parcels from the military profession were incorporated into the temple estate of the pro-Kush oriented clergy of the Memphis Ptah because the social supporters of the latter – the merchants, craftsmen and the salesmen from the markets – did not need land.

After the confiscation of the plots of land had occurred with God Ptah’s protection, the following presentation of the “Deserted King...” in Herodot’s story is a primary example of the social demagogy as one of the forms of conducting the political affairs in the Egyptian state, since the King was deserted by that caste, which was inconvenient to the priesthood, while the latter as is well known represents the basis of the ideological apparatus of Ancient Egypt. Such was the case in Egypt in the VII century B.C., and so was it centuries earlier during the epoch of the fight with the Hyksos. In this respect, quite indicative is the example from the “Carnarvon Table” and before all the description of the Military Council and the start of the military action “under Amun’s order”:



“The nomarchs from the Council came up with their speech:

“Look... The Asians are as close as Kush. They are sticking out their tongues in a group-wise manner, but we are confidently ruling over Egypt, unshakable is Elephantina; the middle of Egypt is with us as far as Kush.



We own the best pastures; our bulls are grazing in the regions of Lower Egypt. The food for our pigs surpasses the needs; there was no banning for our bulls... about that.

He governs the land of the Asians, we rule over Egypt. Look, if anyone appears in our ports and attacks us, we will then act against him."

And they became boring to His Majesty: As concerns your advice...the Asians, who...

(I shall fight the Asians. Prosperity will come.

If... in tears is the whole country in the Thebes area, Kamesu is the one, who defends Egypt."

(And I floated down the Nile to attack the Asians on Amun's order, my truest advisor. My powerful army was before me like a scorching breath of the Fire...")

(Gardiner, 1916: 95–110).

The story about the refusal of the nobles to start the fight and about the heroics of the rank-and-file military was immortalized by Kamesu on a plate in the stately temple in Thebes, and the march itself was proclaimed as one undertaken at Amun's orders. At the time of the reign of the last pharaoh of the XVII Dynasty Kamesu, the court aristocracy and the lords were tightly connected to the nomes, many of whom had just very recently aligned under with kings from Thebes.

The ancestors of the nomarchs of the Middle Kingdom, who until the years of reign of the dreadful (to them) Amenemhe III were living quite carefree in the nomes, were not interested in the strengthening of the central power at the end of the XVII Dynasty. The situation however demanded the strengthening of the unity of the country, reinforcing the central power, concentration of all human and material resources in order to defeat the enemy. In these circumstances the main support to the Egyptian kings comes from the ever growing in might army, which in its greater part consisted of recruits stemming from the working layers of the society. One can also observe the desire of the new kings, with the aim of reinforcing their personal power, to attract in the country's various spheres of governance persons of non-noble background, of whose loyalty they could rely upon, and counter posing them to the opposition minded old aristocracy.

In such a way, the kings from Thebes of the XVII and the beginning of the XVIII Dynasty in conducting the policy of centralization lean upon a wider circle of newer people – military and administrators, who as it was understood as a natural consequence in return for their loyalty would receive the relevant compensation.

Unavoidably, a gradual forced re-allocation of the material and human resources took place in favour of these new persons, including on the account of the provincial and the capital upper layers.

It is namely in this initial period of the New Kingdom that one should search for the sources of the stubborn struggle between the new "civil servants" upper strata, which had arisen with the support of the Egyptian kings from the numerous layers of Egyptians, who had turned during these times in support to the regal power and the notably suppressed but still holding strong economic and political positions old provincial and capital city aristocracy.

In connection to what has been said so far it is worthwhile considering the position of the priesthood. As early as by the time of the Hellenized Egyptian priest Manetho, who lived in the IV-III centuries B.C., he had condemned the Hyksos for invading the country and for desecrating numerous Egyptian temples. Naturally, in starting the struggle against the Hyksos, the Egyptian kings relied upon the support of the priesthood. However, its highest positioned representatives were connected unseparatingly to the central and the urban aristocracy by links of kin. Traditionally the higher priesthood originated from the circles of the nomarchs and district governors; the title of head of the priests of the local cult was too usual for

the heads of the relevant local administrations. The union between the kings from Thebes and the numerous and influential Egyptian priesthood was possibly quite strong, yet it needs to be underlined that this would have been the case only at the beginning of the fight against the Hyksos. It began to weaken with the rising of the tension between the hereditary aristocracy and the new "clerks" top. Obviously the kings of the XVIII Dynasty tried to sustain that union. After the victorious marches they granted the major part of the plunder to the temples. Most of all the riches were granted to the priests of the main God of Thebes – Amun, who was identified with the old God of Heliopolis, God Re, turning into the image of Amun-Re as the most respected God in Egypt throughout the epoch of the New Kingdom.

By the end of Dynasty XVIII the priests of Amun-Re are the main opponents to the new "clerks" upper class in its obvious struggle with the old hereditary aristocracy for a place closer to the wheel of power (Vinogradov, 1982: 246–249). At this stage, just as a working hypothesis, we could note that the general rehearsal of this open counter posing is the complicated situation arising from the struggle between Queen Hatshepsut and Thutmose III.

Such is in very general outlines the characteristics of the political groupings from the time of the repulsion of the Hyksos. There are no doubts around the historical truthfulness of the events described in the "Carnarvon Table" and consequently also the fact that in a decisive moment of the liberation struggle Kamesu had been deserted by the representatives of the hereditary aristocracy is also historically trustworthy, so just as the opposing to Amun of Thebes by this higher social layer, because it was said that the march was undertaken under an "order by Amun". The last statement underlines the union of the King with the priesthood of Amun of Thebes. The stronghold of this union was the army.

This political union was opposed by the representatives of the old hereditary aristocracy, however it needs to be noted that the refusal of the latter is presented in quite moderate tone, which might eventually be explained with the fact that the King himself, as well as the priesthood, were connected with the old hereditary aristocracy by family ties.

Rather different is the situation with the internal political dealings in Egypt, which we discover in the Kadesh inscriptions. The King of Egypt is abandoned again, yet this time by the military, the chariot drivers and by his "foster-children" "Seru". Although the Kadesh inscriptions narrate about a natural historic event, about how at the fifth year of his reign Ramesses II met the Hittites in front of the walls of Kadesh, lying on the Orontes river, about how the leading Egyptian detachments together with the King fell into a trap staged by the Hittites, about the counter play of the Egyptian counterespionage as a result of which the last to remain on the battle field were the Egyptians. Many issues provoke misunderstanding and bewilderment. The first and most substantial issue is why the army was exposed to

such humiliation. Because Ramesses II had fought with that same army against the Hittites during a 15–16 years' period. Its main detachments were founded by his father Sethoy I (Petrie, 1905: 107), the memory of whom Ramesses II jealously respected (Stuchevskii, 1984: 6). On the other hand, the "Poem" itself highlights the fact that the military as well as the "Seru" are the King's foster-children and the support to his power. The last statement is illuminated by the specific role of the new capital, which is reflected in the "Poem" as well. As it was shown in my previous researches (Ignatov, 1999), in the Poem over the historical facts dominates the propaganda thesis of the idea of Amun-worship, aiming at magnifying Amun of Thebes, its priesthood, and Thebes, and at downplaying the role of these new persons and social strata, which had been permitted to the governing of the Egyptian state. In the "Poem", there are shown the unattained ambitions of the Thebes priesthood to curb the power of the pharaoh and to transform him into its obedient tool. These ambitions lead their original roots from the times of the exit from the worship of the Sun, when the ghostly possibility existed of the winners undertaking measures to cut on the King's power, which of course did not happen (Perpelkin, 1956: 352).

In that manner in the Kadesh epos "The Deserted King..." was staged by the priesthood with the aim of propagating the idea of "Amuno-cracy". The creators of these inscriptions wanted to link Ramesses II with Amun of Thebes and to present themselves in an ideological plan under the wing of Amun of Thebes and of his priesthood, but that was unachievable in view of the real political situation in the country – restriction of the role which Thebes was playing in Egypt's political life by magnifying the new capital city of Per – Ramesses.

Drawing the closing line, one could conclude that "The Deserted King..." scenario was directed by the clerical cast with political purposes, in forming the necessary attitudes towards the loathsome class, or classes. The effect of that peculiar device in the political propaganda must have been astounding, because according to the ancient Egyptian teaching about the King, each and every Egyptian was to be considered to be a part of the flesh and bone of the pharaoh (Berlev, 1972); the breach of the duty towards the Over Lord brought with itself both judicial (Diod. I, 175) and religious consequences, because the pharaoh was not a human being but a God.

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