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An ancient Egyptian ship's log.

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AN
ANCIENT EGYPTIAN SHIP'S LOG

BY
T. ERIC PEET.

Our knowledge of the conditions of life in Ancient Egypt is very largely drawn from the scenes depicted on the walls of tombs. Another equally valuable mine of information, the papyri dealing with the official and semi-official transactions of every day life, has been much less completely worked. A papyrus in the Turin Museum, published years ago by Pleyte and Rossi in an abominable facsimile (*Papyrus de Turin*, Pls. LXVIII and LXIX), has long been known to contain portions of the log of a ship making a voyage on the Nile, but its incomplete condition has obscured the true nature of its contents and deterred scholars from paying very serious attention to it. The patient researches of Giuseppe Botti have lately succeeded in discovering fragments which almost complete the document, and which make its tenour very much clearer. The present article is not an exhaustive study of the papyrus, nor in any sense an attempt at complete translation; it is based on a rather rapid though careful collation of the text which must be regarded as not quite final, since the author has had no opportunity to verify those doubts as to reading which always emerge when one comes to translate and to try to explain one's copies. The issue of a full and final text will, we hope, be among the first tasks undertaken by the magnificent enterprise which Dr. Giulio Farina and his assistants have in hand for the publication of the papyri of the Turin Museum.

The recto and verso of the papyrus are shown in Pleyte-Rossi's Plates LXVIII and LXIX respectively. The effect of the addition of Botti's fragments is roughly as follows :

On the recto :

Page 1. The gap in the top right hand corner is filled up, and two new lines, 15 and 16, are added at the bottom.

Page 2. Ten new lines, 17 to 26, are added below.

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Page 3. The ends of the existing lines are completed, and twelve new lines, 17 to 28, are added below. To the left of these new lines is a column of figures, and to the left of the whole page traces of a fourth page of text.

On the verso :

Page 1 (= P. R. III). The beginnings of the lines are almost completed, and twelve new lines, 13-24, are added.

Page 2 (= P. R. II). Eleven new lines, 14-24, are added ⁽¹⁾.

Page 3 (= P. R. I). The existing lines are completed, and the beginnings of eight more, 15-22, are added ⁽²⁾.

The text on the recto is a straightforward day by day log of a ship. Seeing that the verso, which is clearly by the same hand as the recto, begins with a list of the “freight which is in the boat of the chief priest of Amūn” it would seem a fairly safe assumption that it is this ship whose log is presented to us, though, as we shall see in a moment, there is a slight uncertainty on this point. The document is dated in Year 7.

The log opens in “[Year 7, first] month of winter, day 17, making 2 months of voyage from Nō (Thebes)”. The entry for this day is mutilated, but the words (1. 2) “Departure from the harbour of Heliopolis” are clear, and the restoration “[arrival at] the harbour of Memphis” in line 5 is made certain by the entries for the next few days, which show that the ship did in effect reach Memphis on Day 17. The voyage from Heliopolis to Memphis was thus accomplished in a single day; unfortunately our ignorance as to the exact position of the harbours of these two towns prevents our making any but the roughest estimate of the mileage accomplished.

Day 18 of the same month is said (1. 6-7) to make “2 months 1 day of voyage from Nō and [2 days in] the harbour of Memphis”, while Day 19 makes (1. 8) “2 months and 3 days⁽³⁾ of voyage from Nō and 3 days here”

⁽¹⁾ P. R. have failed to number the top line. All their numbers should thus be increased by one.

⁽²⁾ P. R. have, under the number 10, included two separate lines. Their 11, 12 and 13 should therefore read 12, 13 and 14 respectively.

⁽³⁾ It will be noticed that the scribe has, in computing the time out from Nō, somehow skipped a day between Day 18 and Day 19, the former being 2 months 1 day out and the latter 2 months 3 days. It is not easy to account for this. Had he, perhaps, on the 17th said to himself “We set out on the 17th of the month,

i. e. in Memphis. The next four days, like these two, give only the numbers of days out from Nō and at moorings in Memphis, the periods increasing of course daily by one day. On Day 23, however, after the usual entry, “making 2 months 7 days out of Nō and 7 days here”, we find something of greater interest, for the log continues with two lines (1. 13-14) which run as follows :

[illegible]

Day of⁽¹⁾ the _____ of the Noble Staff of Amūn to (at) _____ at eventide.

Now we know that the "Noble Staff" of a deity was an object invested with the divinity of the god himself; and from Pap. Brit. Mus. 10052, 7. 5, where it is stated that a man "went downstream in the Noble Staff", it is clear that the Noble Staff possessed a boat, and that this boat could itself be called for short "The Noble Staff". In other words, the "Noble Staff" might in our passage refer either to the Staff itself or to the boat which carried it. If it refers to a boat then it is certainly not the boat whose log we are studying, for it is clear from the wording of the entry that the Noble Staff performed some active⁽²⁾ function on Day 23; now it is almost impossible to conceive what other active function our ship could have performed other than to depart, and this it certainly did not do, for on the following day and for several days after it is still at Memphis. Thus the words do not here refer to our ship, and they must relate either to another ship or to the Staff of the god itself. The latter is by no means an impossible supposition. Our ship may well have carried the Staff of Amūn, if she was, as seems likely, the ship of his chief priest, and the event recorded might well have been of a

so we are now 2 months out", instead of reckoning the correct 2 months and 1 day (the Egyptian always reckoned in both the day from which and the day to which he counted), not noticing his error on the next day, but correcting it in the log for the day after?

⁽¹⁾ The restoration *hrw n* is demanded by the following relative form *ir:n* and the analogy of 2, 24.

(2) That *p' mdrw špsī* is the subject and not the object of the lost infinitive after *hrw n* is clear from the use of the relative form *īr-n*.

ceremonial nature, such as a visit by the Staff to the temple of Ptah in Memphis.

On the other hand there is on Day 28, as we shall see later, an entry concerning a vessel bearing the title The Great Ship of the Noble Staff, and this entry is given in such a form as to place it almost beyond doubt that The Great Ship is quite distinct from the vessel whose log we are reading. This Great Ship is there stated to have left Memphis on Day 28. It is therefore tempting to suppose that the Noble Staff mentioned on Day 23 is simply an abbreviation for the Great Ship of the Noble Staff; and as it left Memphis on Day 28 what was logged on Day 23 may well have been its arrival. Lines 13-14 would in this case have run *hrw n spr ir-n p; mdw špši n 'Imn r Mn-nfr hr tr n rwh*; a restoration which would admirably suit the lengths of the lacunae and which on every ground must be regarded as highly probable.

On Day 25 the ship is still moored at Memphis, and the log records some transactions affecting the purser's department (2. 1 ff.). Thus 5000 fish and 200 bundles of *isr*-reeds are received from the boat of the butler (*wdpw*). One of these transactions is of special interest (2. 9 ff.) :

“Received⁽¹⁾ : brought by the guard Amenkhau : 4 *msb* and 1 *mdkt* of *nbb*-oil, total 5 (vessels), amounting to 262 *hin* : 55, 55, 61, 41, 54 : total 266”. Here we see that *msb* and *mdkt* are not to be regarded as liquid measures but as actual vases or jars whose contents vary considerably, as the detailed list shows. The discrepancy between the 262 and the 266 is apparently explained, or at least dealt with, in lines 12 and 13, which are uncertain in reading and difficult to interpret.





Now follows a line (2. 14) which seems to read :



Account of trading them in ----- Syria.

This is perhaps the most interesting passage in the papyrus, and it is unfortunate that its meaning is so uncertain. *tp n* is common in account-papyri as heading to a detailed account; we might almost translate it “detail”. The

⁽¹⁾ Not "Received out of what the guard A. brought"; the m is merely that of equivalence.

3rd person plural suffix of *šwi* refers to the 262 *hin* of *neheh*-oil. But what is *m irt r n Hrw*? *irt* is a possible writing of the infinitive, though this is not so written earlier in the same line. The  is little more than a dot, and might of course stand for  or even . At the same time I am inclined to believe that  is right and that we have here a reference to Syria, or to a Syrian market of some kind, probably in Memphis. The oil *neheh* was in some cases at least a foreign product⁽¹⁾, and Syria seems a likely source for it. But before we go any further we must consider the detail of the account itself, lines 15 to 17. It is as follows :

Two (read three) loin-cloths (*dšw*) of Good Upper Egyptian cloth, each worth 22 *hin*, amounting to 66 *hin*. Thirty-one tunics (*mšš*) of coloured cloth, each worth 3 *hin*, amounting to 93 *hin* ⁽²⁾. Three loin-cloths (*dšw*) ----- each worth 21 *hin*, amounting to 63 *hin*. Six ----- each worth 20 (*sic*) *hin*, amounting to 60 *hin*. Total 282 *hin*. Received 262; remainder 20.

Though there are some difficulties of reading, owing to lacunae, in these lines, there can be no doubt as to the nature of the transaction recorded. The 262 *hin* of *neheh*-oil are exchanged for a number of garments of various kinds; in other words, the ship was on a voyage which, in part at least, was commercial in scope, and the only question is whether she was buying the oil or selling it. Here fortunately there can be no doubt, for line 9 quite definitely chronicles the receipt of the oil on the date given, and the verb *ini* “to bring” in that line probably has its technical meaning of “to buy”⁽³⁾. An account of a similar transaction where garments are exchanged against oil is recorded on the verso. The ship of the chief priest was thus trading the products of Upper Egypt, made no doubt by the “weavers of Amūn” of whom we so frequently read, against *neheh*-oil, which presumably came from

⁽¹⁾ *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, II, p. 302.

⁽²⁾ This passage suffices to show how incomplete is our knowledge of the various kinds of Egyptian cloth and the garments made of them. *mšš* is usually translated “tunic” and *dšw* “loin-cloth”. Yet a loin-cloth is worth 22 *hin* of oil,

while a tunic, which one might expect to be a larger and more complicated garment, is worth only 3 *hin*. Can this be explained by the fact that the tunics are of good Upper Egyptian cloth while the loin-cloths are of coloured cloth (*n*)?

⁽³⁾ See *Journal of Eg. Arch.*, XV, p. 275.

unthinkable that it should then repeat the entry of the same departure from Memphis in formal terms and with the addition of the ship's name. It seems beyond question that the "Great Ship of the Noble Staff of Amūn" is a different ship from that whose log we are reading, and which we have proposed to identify with the "ship of the chief priest of Amūn" whose freight is described on the verso of the papyrus. What the relation of these two boats to each other is we cannot say.

Day 30 is described (3. 1) as the "day of the transport of Mut the Great, Mistress of Asheru". This festival, on which the statue of the goddess was presumably solemnly rowed on the Sacred Lake at Karnak, would naturally be regarded as of importance on any ship connected with Amūn, since Mut was his consort. This is the third day at The Castles, and the ship is still waiting for the scribe Paraemheb; we now learn (3. 3 ff.) that he, with ten other men, had been sent on some errand — lacunae and difficulties of reading obscure its nature — on the 20th day of the fourth month of inundation, "1 month 11 days ago".









On the first day of the second month of winter the ship sails again (3. 7) and arrives the same day in the harbour of The Flat⁽¹⁾ of the Castles of the House of Osiris. This was clearly a very short move, for the Flat, whatever that may have been, would hardly be far from the Castles from which it got its name, and the log continues to record the days of waiting as if the ship still lay at the Castles, Day 1 constituting "4 days in the harbour of the Castles" and Day 2, despite the move, being "5 days here".

The only other event logged on Day 1 is the departure of the guard Amen-khau (3. 10) and two other men to search for the lost scribe Paraemheb, whose absence is now disquieting the ship's officials. This expedition meets with no immediate success, for on Day 3 Paraemheb is still missing and a further search-party is sent out (3. 15), consisting of four men and a boat. The entry continues: "Given to them as rations for the boat in which they are, 1 *khar* (corn?). Given to be issued as rations for the boat which they are to take for Heliopolis in order to search for him there, 3 *khar*; total 4 *khar*, and Khay 1/2 *khar*⁽²⁾; total 4 1/2 *khar*". Then comes a list of the five

⁽¹⁾ See PEET, *The Great Tomb-Robberies of the Twentieth Dynasty*, p. 162.

⁽²⁾ Khay (reading uncertain) is the leader of the party.

men previously sent out to search for him (see above). There follows once more the list of men who were with the lost scribe, but the papyrus breaks off in the middle of it, and except for the chance of a lucky find among the fragments in Turin we shall never know whether Paraemheb was found or not.

The verso of the papyrus does not belong to the log of the ship but forms part of the purser's accounts, and calls for less notice than the recto. It begins with a "List of the freight which is in the boat of the chief priest of Amūn in charge of the scribe of the treasury Hori and the scribe Paraemheb and the guard Amenkhau". This list contains *nḥh*-oil, wine, *mimi*, *pṛt-km*     , *šby*   , papyrus-rolls, salt, *isr*-reeds, *šm't*-reeds, ropes of *wḏ*-fibre, and fish. Against some of these is entered an issue and a remainder, e. g. (1. 17) "---- fish 5000; issued 2000, remainder 3000".

Next comes a list headed by a badly damaged line (1. 20) in which little is legible except "the chief priest" and a possible reference to Kharu, whether as the name for Syria or as part of a proper name we cannot say. In this list various substances, oil (?), *pṛt-km*, *šby* and papyrus rolls, are equated in value with various garments as in the list of recto 2. 14 ff.; here again it would appear that the ship is exchanging garments of linen against other wares.

In 2. 2 begins a list headed "Reed-work brought by the sailors of the crew in the charge of the scribe Paraemheb". These include *isr*-reeds, *šm't*-reeds, and 3 ropes of 1000 cubits and 27 of 500 cubits, all of *wḏ*-plant. Here there is little room for doubt that the "reed-work", *bkw n wfi*, includes both the reeds themselves, to cut which was evidently part of the duties of the crew, and the ropes made from them. It would follow that *wfi* is here not to be translated "papyrus" but is a general name for reeds and rushes.

Now follows (2. 9) the "Contribution of the steward of the Temple of Amūn, Ramessesnakht" including wine, *mimi* and *sti*, and that (2. 14) of the royal butler Nebmarenakht (the name is unfortunately far from certain) including *nḥh*-oil, *mimi*, *pṛt-km*, *šby*, salt, *isr*- and *šm't*-reeds, cables of *wḏ*-fibre and fish.

Page 3 begins with a list of "Garments still remaining, not in the ship";

the list gives the material and type of the various garments, which are correctly totalled up to 20.

Then follow (3. 7) “The issues $\square\backslash\backslash\overline{\square}$ made from the boat”. These begin with (3. 8) “Given for seed by the hand of the scribe Petersuamun, 30 *khar* of *mimi*”. The next is (3. 9): “Given in the presence of the high-priest as sustenance for the workmen in his charge”; this issue includes 1000 fish. An issue is next recorded (3. 12) for making something in connection with “the nets (*ḏdt*) of the chief priest”; the substance issued appears to be a plant, quite possibly *wḏ*-plant. An issue recorded in 3. 15 has perished except for the opening “Given” and the words “the boats (*ḥ'w*) of the chief priest” at the end of the line. The rest of the page is lost except for traces of the beginnings of the lines.

There is just one other document from ancient Egypt with which our ship's log may be profitably compared, namely the verso of the Leyden Papyrus I. 350. This was published in transcription by Spiegelberg many years ago under the title *Das Geschaeftsjournal eines aegyptischen Beamten* ⁽¹⁾. Gardiner was, however, the first to realize that the official who kept this diary was on board a ship ⁽²⁾. It is dated in the 52nd year of a king who can be no other than Ramesses II. The official who kept the log was apparently sent by the High-Priest at Memphis to Per-Ramessu, a town which Gardiner has shown good reasons for placing on or near the site of the later Pelusium. The entries in this log, which was less regularly entered up than ours, are of much the same nature. The whereabouts of the boat are given, and any movements are noted; the rest is mainly a long catalogue of contributions (*inw*) made by various officials and issues of rations to the various groups of persons dependent on the ship.

It only remains to determine the date of our document. The writer is somewhat suspicious of attempts to fix closely the date of a document by the script, and would content himself with saying that the handwriting has most of the general characteristics of those of the masses of documents known to him from Turin and the British Museum and definitely datable to the end of

⁽¹⁾ *Recueil de travaux*, XVII, pp. 143 ff. — ⁽²⁾ *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, V, p. 182.

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the Twentieth Dynasty. The personal names would suit this date admirably, though we cannot show that any of the persons referred to here are identical with persons known to us from other documents of the period. Thus it would be unwise to argue from the name of the royal butler Nebmarenakht, for the reading is uncertain; a butler of this name is, however, well known from Papyrus Mayer A (1. 6), British Museum 10052 (1. 4) and 10383 (1. 2), Papyrus Abbott (4. 15) and the docket on its back (A. 20). In Abbott he is dated to the 14th year of Ramesses IX–Neferkere, and in Mayer A and the British Museum papyri to years 1 and 2 of the *whm mswt* or Renaissance. A scribe of the treasury Hori may possibly⁽¹⁾ be mentioned in Pap. Turin, Pleyte–Rossi XXIX, right, line 3; this fragment is dated in year 8, not, however, necessarily of Ramesses II as Pleyte and Rossi state, for the top line can hardly be part of the date⁽²⁾. In it is mentioned the chief workman (*ʿn ist*) Nekhemmut (line 5, called Nekh for short in line 7). Nekhemmut is well known from cemetery documents dating from the reign of Ramesses IX–Neferkere⁽³⁾. In view of the uncertainty with regard to the occurrence of the Hori of our log in this fragment of year 8 it would be unwise to press this piece of evidence⁽⁴⁾. None of the other persons mentioned in the log can be with certainty identified elsewhere, and if we are to place the document in the Twentieth Dynasty it must be rather on the evidence of the handwriting than on that of the persons mentioned.

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⁽¹⁾ This qualification is necessary, for only the falcon–sign remains, and the name may have been a compound with Hor, *e. g.*, Hormose.

⁽²⁾ A date in a king's reign can be referred to as “such and such a year, month and day of (ꜥꜥꜥꜥ) King X”, but this form cannot be used in the title of a document, where the more formal “under the majesty of (*hr hm n*)” is inviolable. The script of this fragment well fits the Twentieth Dynasty.

⁽³⁾ Pap. Abbott, 6. 5; BOTTI–PEET, *Il Giornale della Necropoli di Tebe*, pl. 5, line 13, and pl.

25, line 2; Turin Pap. 2074, 1. 1 (unpublished Necropolis Journal of Year 8); also just possibly in Pap. Turin P. R. XLIX, 6, dating, however, from Year 2 of Ramesses IV, though the reading is not quite certain.

⁽⁴⁾ It is quite possible that the Hori (if Hori he was) of the fragment was not scribe of the treasury in general, but specifically scribe of the treasury of the temple (*n tꜥ ht*, see beginning of line 4), which, in a cemetery document, generally means the temple of Medinat Habu.