

Early Text Cultures (Oxford)
Writing Orality Reading Group: Textual Fabrics of Orality
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Mouvance and the Storyteller's Art in Manuscripts of a Demotic Novella

Joey Cross
University of Chicago

The Demotic novella *The Battle for the Prebend of Amun*: a brief synopsis

The beginning and end of the novella is lost. The following synopsis relies on the preserved portions for reconstruction, with as little recourse to speculation as possible. Some aspects of the story are left out for the sake of space.

Text in **bold** marks portions of the story that correspond to the brief extracts from the two versions of *Prebend* given below.

Pharaoh Petubastis and an entourage including his son Ankhhor and grandson Djedhor sail from their residence in the Nile Delta to the temple of Karnak at Thebes in order to participate in a religious festival. The purpose of their visit is to secure the title of the high priesthood of the god Amun for Ankhhor, as a way to extend Petubastis's control into Upper (southern) Egypt. The transfer is agreed upon by the High Priest of Amun, possibly in exchange for the return of a lost cult image of the god Montu to Karnak. Petubastis and his men, including Ankhhor, dressed in priestly garb as the High Priest, celebrate the festival by transporting a scaled-down, portable sacred boat bearing an image of the god Amun across the Nile to visit tombs on the west bank in a sacred procession.

Before they are able to return the image of Amun to the boat and cross the Nile back to Karnak, an unnamed priest from the Delta city of Buto, accompanied by thirteen fierce warriors called "shepherds," appears, demanding that the office of the priesthood, which is now Ankhhor's, be transferred to him instead. He presents his case in an elaborate theological argument, whose veracity is affirmed by the oracular response of the god Amun himself. Petubastis, probably eager to make sure no harm is done to the image of Amun and to his own reputation, and not willing to contravene something the god decrees to be true, seems ready to transfer the office to the priest of Buto (with no protest by Ankhhor), but Djedhor (Ankhhor's son) provokes him instead.

This leads to a bout of combat between the priest and Ankhhor, and then one of Petubastis's generals and one of the shepherds. Petubastis's men are defeated and captured. The priest of Buto and the shepherds comander the boat which was meant to transport Amun back to Karnak, and hold Petubastis's men, as well as the festival itself, hostage. The priest now not only demands the title to the office, but that he be given the image of Amun to transport back to Karnak himself. Petubastis refuses, suspecting that the priest will abscond back to Buto with Amun. He is at a loss as to what to do. **His advisor Pekrur suggests that he not listen to Djedhor (who wants Petubastis to keep attacking), but consult the oracle of Amun once again**, and it is revealed that the only men in all of Egypt who can defeat the priest of Buto and the shepherds are two, Petechons and Pami, whom Petubastis happened to greatly offend by not

inviting them to Thebes to celebrate the festival, probably because Pami, the scion of a rival royal clan, could contest the transfer of the office of the priesthood. **Distraught, Petubastis asks Pekrur to write to Petechns, who happens to be his son, and implore him to come help.** He does. A messenger delivers the letter, and Petechns, quite enraged, decides that it is worth saving the cult image of Amun, even though it means coming to the aid of the despicable (in his estimation) Petubastis. He summons Pami, and the two head to Thebes. Their arrival—after a brief complication, where another valiant warrior, unprompted, shows up and finds some success against the shepherds—is narrated right as the scroll breaks off...

Presumably, the priest of Buto and his shepherds are defeated and the cult image of Amun is returned to Karnak. We actually know this because Petubastis asked Amun himself if this would happen, and he answered in the affirmative. This is interesting, because the ending of the story is largely revealed! The reader need not fear! On the other hand, still up for grabs (and unfortunately not known to us given the damaged state of the text) is whether Petubastis is able to save face once confronted by Petechns and Pami, and whether his son Ankhhor retains the priesthood of Amun.

Comparison of two versions of *Prebend* in short extract

Green highlights verbatim correspondence between the two versions.

Yellow highlights text with a degree of general verbal correspondence, but formulated in a new syntactic environment.

Blue highlights substantially new text in the Carlsberg version.

Extract 1

Context: Pekrur (vocalized “Peklul” in P. Carlsberg 434) criticises Djedhor, who has just suggested to Petubastis—after his two best men were defeated and the combat prowess of the enemy made clear—that he have the entire army attack the priest of Buto and his men.

P. Spiegelberg (ca. 50 BCE)

P. Carlsberg 434 (1st-2nd century CE)

<p>The [Great of the East Pe]krur ans[were]d him:] “Is what you are doing frenzy? Or is...to take revenge on the shepherds who captured Prince Ankhhor and General Wertepamunniut? The army will not be able to withstand any of them. Do you say, ‘The army of Egypt may prepare against them!’ that the shepherds cause a great bloodbath among them?” And further, Amun, the great god, is here with us. [It is] not [appropriate¹] that we do anything without Amun. Let Pharaoh consult! If he commands us to fight, we will fight. If it happens to be something different that Amun will command,</p>	<p>...the Great of the East, Peklul, the exceedingly great, [said] to him: “.....your cleverness is what has allowed them to capture Prince Ankhhor and.....their hands (and) their feet, sending them on board.....[the army of] Egypt [will not (be able?)] to overcome him upon the banks of the [river].....they (sc. the shepherds)] cause a great bloodbath (to be) among [the] army of Egypt.....with them. It is not appropriate to do anything without consulting him (sc. Amun). Let [Pharaoh] consult.....to [fight,] we will fight. As for that which he (sc.</p>
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1 Spiegelberg (1910, 24) and *TLA* suggest restoring *hpr* in the gap. The traces do not suggest it, however. We might restore *ph* based on the traces as well as the parallel in P. Carlsberg 433, x+1.8.

we will (10.10) act accordingly.”

Amun) will com[mand].....

Implication of the variance: Pekrur criticises Djedhor more overtly, and refers explicitly to how Djedhor led to the conflict by his earlier provocation of the priest of Buto. When reading this portion of the story in P. Spiegelberg, it is clear that this is what happened, but it nevertheless is left subtle.

Extract 2

Context: Petubastis has just learned that he has to ask the two heroes he has gravely offended to rescue him. Confiding in Pekrur, he informs him of this, and Pekrur responds:

P. Spiegelberg (ca. 50 BCE)

P. Carlsberg 433 (1st-2nd century CE)

The Chief of the East, Pekrur said, “If it pleases Pharaoh, may one send for the youths, that they come to the south! Everything that Pharaoh will want, they will do.”

...the Chief of the East, Paklul [said] ...“.....send for them, they will not come.’ If Pharaoh so desires,come south...everything that is required of them.”

Pharaoh said, “By Amun! (11.11) If I send [south?] after them, they will not come because of the insult I did to them (11.12) when I was traveling south to Thebes without inviting them to the procession² (11.13) of Amun the Great God. My father, Chief of the East, Pakrur! It is up to you to send for them. If anyone else sends for them, they will not come south on my command.”

Pharaoh said, “If I send for them, they will not come.....because I have not brought them south to Thebes. It is up to you, my father, Chief [of the East, Paklul.....Bulls of Egypt...send for them.”

The Chief of the East, Pekrur said: “The insults you do to (11.16) the young ones are millions, one after another. You never think of the fighters (11.17) until you desire them regarding your misfortune!”

The Chief of the East, Paklul, said, “Nevertheless, they strike against you.....disaster.”

Pharaoh said: “By (11.18) Amun, the great God! It is not I who insult them: the evil confusions of (11.19) Djedhor, son of Ankhhor, are they. It is he who caused me to leave them behind without (11.20) having brought them south with me, saying, ‘They do not care to keep fight and strife (11.21) under the army of Egypt.’”

Pharaoh said, “As Amun the great god lives.....as for Djedhor, son of] Ankhhor: it is he who caused me to do it, saying, ‘Do not bring them [south] to Thebes.....str]ife in the army of Egypt.....”

Implication of the variance: Pekrur, in P. Carlsberg 433, appears to begin speaking by reassuring Petubastis, quoting him back to him: in effect, “Why do you say, ‘Do not tell me to send for them, they will not come’: if you send for them, they will come!” This is markedly different from P. Spiegelberg: there, Pekrur sarcastically suggests to Petubastis that he should send for Petechons and Pami, knowing full well that this will result in great embarrassment for Petubastis: note how directly Pekrur criticizes Petubastis in P. Spiegelberg, something that appears to be absent in P. Carlsberg. Nevertheless, much of

2 *hr*, the word elsewhere referring specifically to the processional bark.

the same language found in P. Spiegelberg is used, but rearranged and re-cast. When Petubastis points the finger at Djedhor in P. Spiegelberg, he is trying to defend himself before the accusatory Pektur; in P. Carlsberg 433, he seems to be explaining to Pektur that he is not himself liable for an impending disaster that Pektur fears will happen (although the text is too fragmentary to know for sure).

Further Reading

Overviews of Demotic Egyptian literature

Hoffmann, Friedhelm. 2012. "Hieratic and Demotic Literature." In *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, ed. Christina Riggs, 543-562. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Tait, W. J. 1996. "Demotic Literature: Forms and Genres." In *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, ed. Antonio Loprieno, 175-187. Leiden: Brill.

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Hoffmann, Friedhelm and Joachim Friedrich Quack. 2018. *Anthologie der demotischen Literatur*. 2nd ed. Einführungen und Quellentexte zur Ägyptologie 4. Berlin: LIT. [**The Battle for the Prebend of Amun, pp.100-120**]

Lichtheim, Miriam. 2006. *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings, Volume III: The Late Period*. Berkeley: University of California Press. [<https://archive.org/details/MiriamLichtheimAncientEgyptianLiteratureVolIII>]

Simpson, William Kelly (ed.). 2003. *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies, and Poetry*. 3rd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press.

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Textual culture and text transmission in Ancient Egypt

Hussein, Ramadan B. 2017. "Text transmission or text reproduction? The shifting materiality of Pyramid Texts spell 267." In *Studies in Ancient Egyptian Funerary Literature*, ed. Susanne Bickel and Lucía Díaz-Iglesias, 295-329. Leuven: Peeters

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[<https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004323070>]

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Reintges, Chris H. 2010. "The Oral Composition Form of Pyramid Text Discourse." In *Narratives of Egypt and the Ancient Near East: Literary and Linguistic Approaches*, eds. F. Hagel et al. *Orientalia Lovanensia Analecta* 189. Leuven: Peeters.