

STUDIES IN THE LATE EGYPTIAN DOCUMENTS PRESERVED IN THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY

I FRAGMENT OF A CROCODILE PAPYRUS (P. dem. RYLANDS no. 50)

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IN 1909 the magnificent three-volume work of the late Professor F. Ll. Griffith, *The Catalogue of the Demotic Papyri in the John Rylands Library*, was published and subsequently, although in the same year, appeared the late W. E. Crum's *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the Collection of the John Rylands Library*. Other Coptic fragments in the Library's possession were later described by Crum himself in 1920 and by the late Dr. Walter Till in 1952.¹ These publications, however, do not exhaust the Library's holdings in this field, for there remain unpublished hieratic funerary documents and various demotic and Coptic texts, as well as a number of Coptic ostraca. To these must be added documents included in a considerable collection of papyri, Egyptian, Greek, and Arabic, brought to the attention of scholars as the result of a recent reorganization of the Library's Manuscript Rooms. The uncatalogued Egyptian documents are numerous and we can speak with confidence of their value.²

A preliminary examination of the hieratic papyri and of the demotic papyri and ostraca has shown that they date from the Late Period; there does not appear to be any document earlier than the Saïtic period. Many are well preserved, although the

¹ See W. E. Crum, "New Coptic Manuscripts in the John Rylands Library", (*B.J.R.L.*, v. 497 ff.); Walter C. Till, "Coptic Biblical Fragments in the John Rylands Library" (*B.J.R.L.*, xxxiv. 432 ff.) and "Die nicht-katalogisierten Coptica der John Rylands Library" (in *Das Antiquariat*, Jahrg. 8, no. 13/18).

² An account of the uncatalogued Rylands Greek papyri is not included in this paper.

majority are fragmentary. They include a group of funerary papyri, written partly in cursive hieroglyphs and partly in late hieratic, which seems to have come from the Theban Necropolis. The demotic texts are all legal and show close affinities with those already published by Griffith. They appear to be Upper Egyptian and to have been written about the middle of the Ptolemaic period. When reconstituted they will form a set of twenty texts. The unpublished material in Coptic is much larger, for there appear to be over 700 Coptic texts written on either papyrus or parchment.

The bulk of the Library's papyri was acquired by the 25th and 26th Earls of Crawford both in this country and during visits to Egypt in the latter half of last century.¹ It came to the Rylands in 1901 when the Crawford manuscripts were purchased. Further portions were acquired for the Library by the late Dr. A. S. Hunt, Professor Bernard Grenfell and Dr. Rendel Harris during the first twenty years of this century. As mentioned above, part only of the Rylands Egyptian papyri has been catalogued in the volumes edited by Griffith and Crum or listed in the articles of Crum and Till.

It will, of course, be some time before the remaining uncatalogued material can be made fully available to scholars, but it is proposed to continue the work started by Professor Griffith by publishing in this BULLETIN several of the shorter Egyptian texts as a series under the general title *Studies in the Late Egyptian Documents Preserved in the John Rylands Library*. None of the documents dealt with in this series has been hitherto catalogued or even deciphered, though many, as even a cursory examination shows, are of considerable value and importance.

I am indebted to Dr. F. Taylor, the Keeper of Manuscripts, and to the Assistant Keeper, Miss G. A. Matheson, for their kind assistance and interest, especially during the hours of our preparatory work on these documents.

This series of *Studies* begins with the publication of a fragment of papyrus which now bears the reference number P. dem. Rylands 50. It is a light brown papyrus, consisting of two leaves,

¹ Cf. Griffith's brief report in *Ryl.* III, p. v and 37.

with horizontal fibres on the recto. The fragment is very small, measuring only $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 2 inches. The text of four lines is written only on the recto. In the left hand corner we see the picture of a crocodile carrying on its head the Solar Disk. Although there might be at first some doubt as to whether or not we have a complete text, the beginning of lines 2 and 4 makes it quite certain that here is preserved part only of a much longer text. The contents seem to show unusual features which single out our fragment from the majority of Egyptian papyri of the Late Period.

Nothing, so far, is known of the history of this text and no information has survived as to its place of origin. We know only that it may have been acquired by the 26th Earl of Crawford before the end of the last century during his travels in Egypt. In the former Crawford collection it was given the number 34. We may, perhaps, see in this a hint that it may have been purchased with the early Ptolemaic Papyri from the Theban Necropolis which are now P. dem. Rylands X-XIV. This is stated with all due caution because the text itself does not furnish any evidence to prove it.

Far greater difficulties arise from a study of the writing. The text is written in large, thick characters and shows a less trained hand. The writing is on the whole uneven. Moreover there is some doubt at a first glance as to whether we ought to describe it as demotic or hieratic. Thus, if we take the following signs—

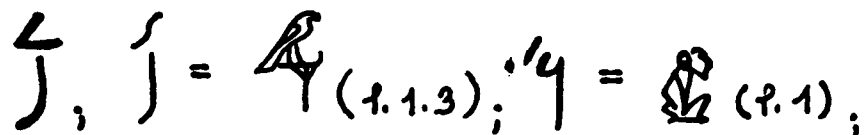
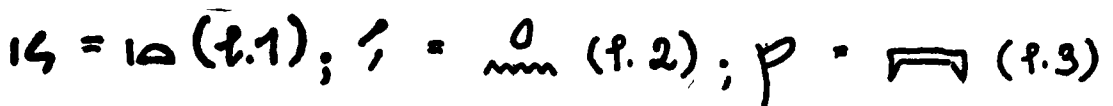
𐪓 (l. 1.3); 𐪔 (l. 1); 𐪕 (l. 1.2); 𐪖 (l. 1.2);

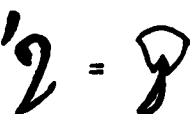

𐪗 (l. 1.2); 𐪘 (l. 1.3); 𐪙 (l. 1.3);

𐪚 (l. 1); 𐪛 (l. 1)



we shall decide in favour of hieratic. This conclusion, however, is contradicted by the manner in which the following signs are


written, for there can be no doubt that they show essentially demotic features :

;


More decisive is the sign of  which presents an indisputable demotic form against the hieratic  ; finally the sign

 for *hr* is set against the hieratic  written on

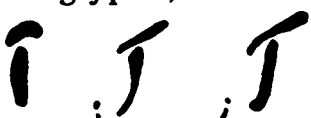
the same line. The form of the sign for the  ; 

Falcon and the manner of writing the word *pš*  are definitely in

favour of demotic. It follows that our text is written in a mixture of demotic signs closely resembling those used during Saito-Persian times and at a somewhat earlier date. In fact demotic texts often show the use of hieratic signs, especially as far as the writing of the names of gods is concerned, and this manner of writing survives to the very end of the Graeco-Roman period. In our text, however, the simultaneous use of hieratic and demotic signs exists to a greater extent. But our example is not the only one of its kind. We may refer to P. Cairo 50012¹ which introduces us a to very similar mixture of demotic and earlier signs. In his study of this text Spiegelberg pointed to this particular feature of the writing and suggested as a probable date of the Cairo document the reign of Taharka. Further evidence of the simultaneous use of both demotic and earlier writing, occurs, however, on a much reduced scale, in the early demotic

¹ Cf. Spiegelberg, CCG, II, Pl. CXLIII ; *Texte*, pp. 329-32.

legal documents from Upper Egypt. In this connection we may instance more particularly P. dem. Rylands I and II.¹ We find in the docket of witnesses' signatures elements which are relevant to our problem. Here we may note particularly the manner in which the name of 'Irt-Hr-r-r-w is written, for it occasionally occurs even in cursive hieroglyphs,² and also to the manner of

tracing the sign of deity  ; this shows exactly the same form as that which occurs in our text.

Our document is, unfortunately, too short to enable us to pursue this palaeographical analysis in greater detail. In considering the characteristics of the writing referred to, we incline to the opinion that this text might have been written about the time when demotic was in full use although its writer tended to preserve the earlier type of writing. We imagine that it was a copy of a document originally written in hieratic by a man accustomed to writing in demotic, but in this particular case he was at pains to keep, in part at least, the forms of the original writing. Perhaps he imitated deliberately the earlier writing for a special purpose, a suggestion which is supported by the contents of the text. It is therefore suggested that the text preserved in the Rylands Crocodile Papyrus may be a copy of a part of, or at least an extract from, a text originally written in hieratic, most probably about the time of the 20th-21st Dynasty, and that it was made not later than the Saïtic Period.

The surviving text of this Crocodile Papyrus begins with an invocation of Bastet and, as has briefly been pointed out above, is not complete. Half of it at least, in our opinion, is lost and there is no other Egyptian literary document preserved which will enable us to make a reasonably complete reconstruction of what is missing. It is, of course, for this reason that several problems arising from the text cannot be solved with complete satisfaction. Nevertheless, an interpretation of the remaining part of the text may be attempted.

¹ Cf. Griffith, *Ryl.* II, Pl. I-VIII ; III, pp. 44 ff. and 201 ff. ; II, Pl. IX-XIV ; III, pp. 47-48 and 207-9.

² Cf. Griffith, *Ryl.* II, Pl. 8 and also P. Ryl. V, line 6 ; *verso*, lines 8, 9 ; VI, line 5.



Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely a historical document. The text is written on a piece of paper with a grid pattern. The script is dense and appears to be a mix of letters and symbols, possibly a form of shorthand or a specific dialect. The text is written in a single column, starting from the top left and moving downwards.

P. dem. Rylands no. 50

Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely a historical document. The text is written on a piece of paper with a grid pattern. The script is dense and appears to be a mix of letters and symbols, possibly a form of shorthand or a specific dialect. The text is written in a single column, starting from the top left and moving downwards.

Transliteration

- x+1]*ind-hr* *Bstt* 'a-ms *sriw.sn* *k'h* *n* *Sbk* (?) *hr* *P'-n-*
'Irt-Hr-r-r-.w *s;* *n* *'Irt-r-r.w*
x+2]*s;* (?) *Bstt* *Hr* *sp-sn* *P'-n-Shmt*
x+3]*iwf* *n.*[*f* ?] <*P'-n*> *'Irt-Hr-r-r-.w* *nty* *hry* *s;n* *'Irt-r-r.w*
x+4] . . . (?) *pš* *n* *dnit* (?)

Translation

- x+1]Hail to thee, O Bastet, who gave birth to the *sriw*-
animal. (Episode of) greeting Sebek (?) in the presence
of Painaros son of Ithoros
x+2 . . . the *sriw*-animal] (?) son of Bastet, O Horus, Horus,
Pa-Sekhemet,
x+3] Offering of meat for him (?). Pa-inaros,
the aforesaid, son of Ithoros
x+4] has been divided into portions (?)

Notes to the Commentary

line x+1 : the word *ind-hr* and the name of Bastet (cf. also line x+2) show genuine hieratic writing, but the sign of the god is written in demotic.

'a-ms, the determinative is omitted.

sriw, the word shows clearly the spelling *sriw*, cf. *Wb.* III. 462 ; for the manner of writing the determinative, cf. *above*. *sriw* is a problematic word in this context. We do not think that it has its common meaning *ram*. We would see rather in this instance the name of a mythical animal of a rather indefinite nature often mentioned in magical papyri which are quoted in *Wb.* III. 464 (10). Here it is apparently regarded as the son of Bastet, but this is the sole evidence at the present stage of our knowledge.

-.*sn*, we suspect that *sn* is to be taken as the suff. of the 3rd p. pl. though it is not clear from the preserved text to whom it may refer. We may, very tentatively, suggest that the suffix refers to the two persons mentioned at the end of the line. This is not certain because the suffix may well refer to other persons or deities who were mentioned in the missing part of the text.

An alternative interpretation may be that *sn* forms part of the following word, and that we have here perhaps, the word *snk*, "to praise", cf. *Wb.* IV. 175 (3) ; but in that case the ' in the following word will be inexplicable. *k'h* *n*, *k'h* is common in describing a ritual act of greeting and presenting offering, especially funerary offering, cf. *Wb.* IV. 18 (8-11) ; *k'h* may be here as a participle epithet of Bastet ; if so, we must admit that Bastet herself was greeting Sebek. It is therefore suggested that *k'h* might have been used as a title of an instruction concerning a ritual episode to be completed following the invocation of Bastet. It can on the other hand be paralleled with the invocation, and may eventually be a participle describing an unspecified person who greets the Crocodile god : *O, thou who greets Sebek*.

, this group appears problematic ; from the fact that the name indicates the determinative of a deity, it is likely that the text refers to a god. *Sbk* would be an excellent reading in view of the picture of the crocodile underneath this sentence, but we must then admit that the determinative of the crocodile was omitted in the writing of the name, which may be expected at that date, as is shown by P. Cairo 50012, recto line 25 which shows also a general palaeographical similarity to our example

, two interpretations of this sign are possible, either *hr*, cf. Griffith, *Ryl. III*, p. 373 and Erichsen, *Gloss.* p. 317, or *w'h*, cf. Griffith, *ibid.* p. 343 and Erichsen, *ibid.* p. 76 ; it is difficult to decide because part of the text is missing. Much depends on whether this part of the text is to be connected with the invocation or is to be taken as the beginning of a new sentence. In our opinion the preposition *hr* with the meaning "in the presence of" or "on behalf of" gives a satisfactory meaning because we conjecture that the two ritual acts described were to be performed in the presence of the person named at the end of the line.

P'-n-'Irt-Hr-r-r.w s;n'Irt-r-r.w, the same person is mentioned on line 3 where the particle *P'-n*, however, seems to have been omitted ; both of these names are common among the people living at El-Hibeh during the Saitic Period, cf. Griffith, *Ryl. III.*, p. 206, n. 52 and 207, n. 1. The construction *P'-n*, the Coptic *πα-N* indicating dependance, is not current among the early instances of the name *'Irt-Hr-r-r.w* ; both these names show, on line 3 also, the earlier manner of writing. This tendency to preserve an archaic form in writing the name *'Irt-Hr-r-r.w* has also been noticed in P. Ryl. I., line 13 and P. Ryl. II, line 8, cf. Griffith, *Ryl. II.* pl. 8. It is worthy of note that neither Painthoros nor Ithoros bears any title, cf. *below*, pp. 162-63.

line x+2 : The beginning of the line is not clear ; there seems to be allusion to a deity who was the son of Bastet but we are not sure whether this was again the *srtw*-animal.

P'-n-Shmt, the name seems to describe a divine being rather than a person and one who was invoked together with the son of Bastet and Horus.

line x+3 : The reading *twf n* is certain ; the lacuna is too small to contain more than a suffix which may perhaps refer to the crocodile.

P'-n is omitted in this instance for the name Painaros ; the word *hry* is inserted in the filiation.

line x+4 : vague traces at the beginning of the line ; the reading *ps n* is certain and *ps* shows more cursive writing than the rest ; the last word on the line is rather puzzling ; the reading *dnit* may, very tentatively, be suggested.

There is much that is uncertain in the interpretation of this short inscription and it is not easy to define its general significance. The mythological background to which the partly preserved text

seems to allude, appears to be unusual and as far as we know there is no identical text which would help to explain what is indicated in our fragment. Nevertheless it seems to us most likely that this short text may be an extract from a much longer mythological narrative, the original version of which has not been preserved. We may imagine that a part of this presumed mythological narrative was copied for a special purpose. The text begins with an invocation of Bastet with whom are associated Horus and the Son of Sakhmet. It is well known that Bastet played an important part in Egyptian magic as a protecting deity. But no other allusion is made to her protecting power in our text. Here she is described as the mother of the *sriw*-animal. Bastet is very often found described as the mother of various deities, as, for instance, Anubis, Myesis, Nefertum ;¹ this, however, is the only evidence we have for her appearance as the mother of the *sriw*-animal. Exactly what kind of creature this name *sriw* denotes is not certain from the text. One is tempted to suggest that the *sriw* may be in some way related to the crocodile, although we make no claim for their ultimate relationship, since there is no evidence to confirm it. We read in our text that Bastet as the mother of the *sriw*-animal was invoked together with Horus and the offspring of Sakhmet. In view of these facts we may hazard a guess that our text alludes to an episode intended to have a magical effect. Perhaps it is a fragment of a letter of greeting addressed to a deity or deities, though expressed in different terms, similar in general to the letters to gods known from New Kingdom papyri, such as P. Bologna 1094 (10, 9-11, 5) or P. Anastasi IV, 10,1-10, 5. If this is correct we may conjecture that in this letter Bastet, Horus and the Son of Sakhmet were implored to come to the help of the invoker or to act on the behalf of the person in whose presence the episode described was completed. Perhaps this text derived from the belief that whoever was in possession of it and recited the spells inscribed could obtain the favour of the deities named in it.

Next to this episode comes the ritual act to be performed for

¹ Cf. Mariette, *Abydos*, I, 30b ; Brugsch, *D.G.*, p. 208 ; Naville, *Bubastis*, Pl. 39.41 ; Sethe, *Urk.* V, p. 57.

Sebek in the presence of a commoner. We know that the cult of the Crocodile god was widespread and that his associations with other deities were many and various,¹ but we cannot point to anything identical with the situation suggested by our fragment. We may venture to suggest that the Crocodile god was associated with Bastet in order to ensure and increase the magical effect desired. No more light can be thrown on our problem from the great hieratic papyrus of Tebtunis,² which is of outstanding interest for the knowledge of Sebek's cult. But it is equally well known that the Crocodile god was believed to be the destroyer of evil, a deity who helps in need³ and also the guardian of funerary images.⁴ To the evidence already known describing the Crocodile as a protecting deity we may add a text from the Middle Kingdom, a fragment of a mythological narrative which refers to the "happy day of fishing", an occasion on which offerings were set upon the fire in the name of the Crocodile to obtain his favour.⁵

Far more interesting is a piece of evidence from late Graeco-Roman times which appears, in spite of the difference in time, to be the most closely allied to our fragment. This consists of a fragment of a statue of a crocodile found at El-Debba⁶ which reveals an interesting belief associated with that reptile during the Late Period. There is engraved beneath the crocodile's eye a depiction of a man carrying a crocodile on his arms; beside it is a text of an invocation to the Crocodile (*msh*) who is associated with Min and described as a protecting deity who gives blessing to the man who has engraved this text and to every one who reads it. In our opinion it seems likely that our fragment alludes to a closely similar belief, probably having the same magical effect. We conjecture that the Crocodile god was believed to grant his favour to every one who came to perform the episode *k'h* on his

¹ For a brief survey of Sobek's associations with other deities, cf. Bonnet, *Reallexicon*, pp. 756-9.

² Botti, "La Glorificazione di Sobek del Fayyum," *Analecta Aegyptiaca*, vol. viii (1959).

³ *BD.*, chap. 17, line 43 (= *Wrk.* V, p. 42.); Caverley, *Abydos*, III, Pl. 12; Kees, *Totenglaube*, p. 193.

⁴ *E.* I, 330-1.

⁵ Cf. Caminus, *Fragments in Hieratic Scripts*, Section A, Pl. I, pp. 7-8.

⁶ Cf. Spiegelberg, *CCG*, III, Pl. IX, p. 11.

behalf. It is said in our text that this episode was to be completed in the presence of a person who does not bear any title and who could hardly be the officiant of the temple or necropolis. He would therefore most probably be a commoner. If we recall on the one hand the probable date of this text and on the other hand that the name of the person and his father mentioned in it were common among the people living at El-Hibeh during the Saitic Period, we may venture to suggest that our fragment preserves one of the local beliefs and religious customs of that region. Perhaps the episode of greeting the Crocodile god in the presence of a person came to be regarded as the means of ensuring the favour of the god. As it could have been performed during the lifetime of that person, so it could be performed for him after his death. Perhaps it was believed that when this rite was completed before the funerary statue of the deceased the Crocodile god ensured him his protection and his favour in the underworld. Although this interpretation can only be conjectural, we incline to the opinion that our fragment is an expression of popular beliefs current during the Late Period.¹

¹ When this article was in page proof we found in a study of P. Skrine no. 2 (cf. Blackman, *JEA*, V, p. 24 ff.) a depiction of a goddess named *S'ryt* representing her with two heads, the one of a lioness, the other of a crocodile. She was believed to protect the deceased and to drive away evil from his mummy in the necropolis (cf. *ibid.* pl. IV, bottom, and p. 31). The name *S'ryt* and also the association of the crocodile with Bestet suggest that both our text and P. Skrine no. 2 refer to the same belief.