

THE STORIES OF SETNE KHAMWAS

This is a sequence of two stories built around the personality of Prince Khamwas, the fourth son of King Ramses II. The historical Prince Khamwas had been high priest of Ptah at Memphis, and in that capacity he had been in charge of the Memphite temples and cemeteries. We possess a number of objects inscribed with his name that bear witness to his activities as builder and restorer of sacred monuments. In his lifetime he also acquired fame as a very learned sage. After his death, the popular imagination shaped his memory into that of a powerful magician. And the knowledge of his devotion to the examining and restoring of monuments formed the basis for attributing to him a consuming passion for the study of ancient works. These traits of character, both real and imagined, provided the motivations and motifs of the actions and adventures which the Demotic tales spun around his name.

The principal title by which the historical Khamwas called himself was that of *setem*-priest of Ptah. In the Demotic tales the title is spelled *stme* or *stne* and is used as if it were a personal name. Hence it is customary to call the hero of these Demotic tales Setne Khamwas, and to refer to the two stories about him as Setne I and II, or as I and II Khamwas.

The two stories are preserved on two different papyri; and they are in fact a cycle rather than a sequence. This is so because the second story consists of two distinct tales that have been linked together. Furthermore, there exist text fragments that contain variants and additional episodes.

The first story, *Setne I*, is preserved in the Cairo Museum Papyrus No. 30646. The papyrus originally had six pages, but the first two have been torn away and are lost. A part of the missing beginning, or a variant of it, is preserved on another Cairo Papyrus (No. 30692). This fragment and related fragmentary texts have not been included here. The text of Setne I is written in a careful hand and the writing is of Ptolemaic date. It belongs to the best period of Demotic writing and is free of corruptions and misspellings. An unusual feature of the papyrus is that the pages are numbered, so we know that exactly two pages are missing in the beginning. The third page is damaged at the beginning of each line. The other three pages are in good condition.

The second story, *Setne II*, is written on the *verso* of the British Museum Papyrus No. 604. The writing dates from the Roman period and is careless, abounding in errors and omissions. Here, too, the beginning of the papyrus is lost, but since the pages are not numbered it is not possible to say just how much is missing. Large portions of what is now the first page are also lacking.

Both stories are remarkable for the color and vividness of their narration. In particular, the episode of Setne and Tabubu is a masterpiece of suspenseful storytelling. The central theme of Setne I is the desire of Prince Setne Khamwas to possess a book of magic that had been written by the god Thoth himself. The book had been acquired by force by Naneferkaptah, a prince who had lived long before Setne, who had taken the book with him to his grave, having paid for the possession of the book with his life and the life of his wife and son. When Setne finds the tomb and robs the book, the two princes, both powerful magicians,

engage in a contest of skills until Setne is vanquished and returns the book. The tale exemplifies the traditional Egyptian view that magic is a legitimate weapon for man, but the ultimate secrets of life and the world belong only to the gods and may not be acquired by man.

Setne II consists of two distinct tales that are linked through the person of Si-Osire, the son of Setne Khamwas, who is the true hero of both tales and overshadows his father. The centerpiece of the first tale is Setne's visit to the netherworld, to which he is guided by his son Si-Osire. There Setne witnesses the blessed existence of the just who find the reward of their good deeds, and the tortures of the sinners who suffer everlasting punishment.

H. Gressmann's penetrating study, "Vom reichen Mann und armen Lazarus," has made it plausible that the contrasting scenes of the richly buried nobleman who is tortured in the netherworld and the cursorily buried poor man who becomes an honored nobleman in the netherworld were genuinely Egyptian motifs that formed the basis for the parable of Jesus in Luke 16,19–31, and for the related Jewish legends, preserved in many variants in Talmudic and medieval Jewish sources.

The Egyptian conception of the netherworld, as found here in a late form, had also absorbed elements of Greek origin, notably the tortures of Oknos and Tantalos, and the central theme itself, the visit to the netherworld by a living person, which recalls Orpheus descending into Hades and Odysseus conversing with the shades of the dead. The absorption of Greek motifs also underlines the combination of two distinct views of the netherworld: it is both a place in which the life lived on earth continues in a related form, and a place of judgment and retribution. The people whom Setne sees plaiting ropes that are always chewed up by donkeys, and the people who are prevented by pits under their feet from reaching the food suspended above them (Oknos and Tantalos motifs) are not great sinners but rather persons who were luckless in life and receive similar fates in the netherworld.

The presence of Greek motifs in *Setne II* is one of many testimonies to the intermingling of Egyptian and Greek cultures in Greco-Roman Egypt. As the known materials bearing on this phenomenon are more intensively studied, and as new sources come to light, the symbiosis of the two peoples and their cultural syncretism will become ever more tangible.

Setne I: Pap. Cairo 30646

Publication: F. Ll. Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis*, Vol. I (Oxford, 1900). W. Spiegelberg, *Die demotischen Denkmäler*, Vol. II: *Die demotischen Papyrus*, Catalogue général . . . du musée du Caire (Leipzig, 1908), p. 88 and pls. 44–47. Erichsen, *Lesestücke*, pp. 1–40.

Translation: B. Gunn in B. Lewis, ed., *Land of Enchanters* (London, 1948), pp. 67–83. Brunner-Traut, *Märchen*, pp. 171–192. Bresciani, *Letteratura*, pp. 615–626.

Setne II: Pap. British Museum 604 verso

Publication: F. Ll. Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis*, Vols 1–2 (Oxford, 1900). Erichsen, *Lesestücke*, pp. 41–49, excerpts.

Translation: Brunner-Traut, *Märchen*, pp. 192–214. Bresciani, *Letteratura*, pp. 627–641.

Comments to either tale: H. Gressmann, *Vom reichen Mann und armen Lazarus*, Abhandlungen der Berliner Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historische Klasse, 1918, No. 7 (Berlin, 1918). M. Pieper, *ZÄS*, 67 (1931), 71–74. K.-T. Zauzich, *Enchoria*, 1 (1971), 83–86. M. Gilula, *Enchoria*, 6 (1976), 125.

On the historical Prince Khamwas: F. Gomaà, *Chaemwese, Sohn Ramses' II. und Hoherpriester von Memphis*, Ägyptologische Abhandlungen, 27 (Wiesbaden, 1973).

References to additional older publications and to the fragments of the Setne cycle not translated here are to be found in the literature cited, and see K.-T. Zauzich, *Enchoria*, 6 (1976), 79–82.

SETNE KHAMWAS AND NANEFERKAPTAH (SETNE I)

The lost beginning may be reconstructed as follows:

Prince Khamwas, son of King Ramses II and high priest of Ptah at Memphis, was a very learned scribe and magician who spent his time in the study of ancient monuments and books. One day he was told of the existence of a book of magic written by the god Thoth himself and kept in the tomb of a prince named Naneferkaptah (Na-nefer-kaptah), who had lived in the distant past and was buried somewhere in the vast necropolis of Memphis. After a long search, Prince Khamwas, accompanied by his foster brother Inaros, found the tomb of Naneferkaptah and entered it. He saw the magic book, which radiated a strong light, and tried to seize it. But the spirits of Naneferkaptah and of his wife Ahwere rose up to defend their cherished possession.

Ahwere and her son Merib were not buried in this Memphite tomb but rather in distant Coptos, where they had lost their lives. But the spirit of Ahwere was with her husband at this critical moment, and she now stood before Prince Khamwas and told him how her husband had acquired the magic book and how they had all paid for it with their lives. She begins her story by relating that she and Naneferkaptah had been brother and sister and the only children of a Pharaoh named Mernebptah. They had loved each other very much and had wanted to marry. But Pharaoh wished to marry his son to the daughter of a general and his daughter to the son of a general. In her anguish Ahwere had asked the steward of Pharaoh's palace to plead with Pharaoh in her behalf. The steward had done so and Pharaoh had become silent and distressed. To the steward's question, why he was distressed, Pharaoh answered:

(Here begins the story on page 3 of the papyrus)

"It is you who distress me. If it so happens that I have only two children, is it right to marry the one to the other? I will marry Naneferkaptah to the daughter of a general, and I will marry Ahwere to the son of another general, so that our family may increase!"

When the time came for the banquet to be set before Pharaoh, they came for me and took me to the banquet. But my heart was very sad and I did not have my former looks. Pharaoh said to me: "Ahwere, was it you who sent to me with those foolish words, 'Let me marry [Naneferkaptah, my] elder [brother]?"

I said to him: "Let me marry the son of a general, and let him marry the daughter of another general, so that our family may increase!" I laughed and Pharaoh laughed.¹

(5) [When the steward of the palace came] Pharaoh [said to him]: "Steward, let Ahwere be taken to the house of Naneferkaptah tonight, and let all sorts of beautiful things be taken with her."

I was taken as a wife to the house of Naneferkaptah [that night, and Pharaoh] sent me a present of silver and gold, and all Pharaoh's household sent me presents. Naneferkaptah made holiday with me, and he entertained all Pharaoh's household. He slept with me that night and found me [pleasing. He slept with] me again and again, and we loved each other.

When my time of purification came I made no more purification.² It was reported to Pharaoh, and his heart was very happy. Pharaoh had many things taken [out of the treasury] and sent me presents of silver, gold, and royal linen, all very beautiful. When my time of bearing came, I bore this boy who is before you, who was named Merib. He was entered in the register of the House of Life.³

[It so happened that] my brother Naneferkaptah [had no] occupation on earth but walking on the desert of Memphis, reading the writings that were in the tombs of the Pharaohs and on the stelae of the scribes of the House of Life⁴ and the writings that were on (10) [the other monuments, for his zeal] concerning writings was very great.

After this there was a procession in honor of Ptah, and Naneferkaptah went into the temple to worship. As he was walking behind the procession, reading the writings on the shrines of the gods, [an old priest saw] him and laughed. Naneferkaptah said to him: "Why are you laughing at me?" He said: "I am not laughing at you. I am laughing because you are reading writings that have no [importance for anyone]. If you desire to read writings, come to me and I will have you taken to the place where that book is that Thoth wrote with his own hand, when he came down following the other gods. Two spells are written in it. When you [recite the first spell you will] charm the sky, the earth, the netherworld, the mountains, and the waters. You will discover what all the birds of the sky and all the reptiles are saying. You will see the fish of the deep [though there are twenty-one divine cubits of water] over [them].⁵ When you recite the second spell, it will happen that, whether you are in the netherworld or in your

form on earth, you will see Pre appearing in the sky with his Ennead, and the Moon in its form of rising."

(15) [Naneferkaptah said to him]: "As he (the king) lives, tell me a good thing that you desire, so that I may do it for you, and you send me to the place where this book is!"

The priest said to Naneferkaptah: "If you wish to be sent [to the place where this book is] you must give me a hundred pieces⁶ of silver for my burial, and you must endow me with two priestly stipends tax free."

Naneferkaptah called a servant and had the hundred pieces of silver given to the priest. He added the two stipends and had [the priest] endowed with them [tax free].

The priest said to Naneferkaptah: "The book in question is in the middle of the water of Coptos in a box of iron. In the box of iron is a box of [copper. In the box of copper is] a box of juniper wood. In the box of juniper wood is a box of ivory and ebony. In the box of ivory and ebony is a [box of silver. In the box of silver] is a box of gold, and in it is the book. [There are six miles of]⁷ serpents, scorpions, and all kinds of reptiles around the box in which the book is, and there is (20) [an eternal serpent around] this same box."

When the priest had thus spoken to Naneferkaptah, he did not know where on earth he was. He came out of the temple, he told [me everything that had happened to him]. He [said] to me: "I will go to Coptos, I will bring this book, hastening back to the north again." But I chided the priest, saying: "May Neith curse you for having told him these [dreadful things! You have brought] me combat, you have brought me strife. The region of Thebes, I now find it [abhorrent]." I did what I could with Naneferkaptah to prevent him from going to Coptos; he did not listen to me. He went to [Pharaoh and told] Pharaoh everything that the priest had said to him.

Pharaoh said to him: "What is that [you want]?" He said to him: "Let the ship of Pharaoh be given to me with its equipment. I will take Ahwere [and her boy Merib] to the south with me, I will bring this book without delay."

The ship of Pharaoh was given [him] with its equipment. We boarded it, we set sail, we arrived (25) [at Coptos]. It [was announced] to the priests of Isis of Coptos and the chief priest of Isis. They came down to meet us, hastening to meet Naneferkaptah, and their wives came down to meet me. [We went up from the shore and went into] the temple of Isis and Harpocrates. Naneferkaptah sent for an ox, a goose, and wine. He made burnt offering and libation before Isis of Coptos and Harpocrates. We were taken to a very beautiful house [filled with all good things].

Naneferkaptah spent four days making holiday with the priests of

Isis of Coptos, and the wives of the priests of Isis made holiday with me. When the morning of our fifth day came, Naneferkaptah had [much] pure [wax brought] to him. He made a boat filled with its rowers and sailors. He recited a spell to them, he made them live, he gave them breath, he put them on the water. He filled the ship of Pharaoh with sand, [he tied it to the other boat]. He [went] on board, and I sat above the water of Coptos, saying: "I shall learn what happens to him."

He said to the rowers: "Row me to the place where that book (30) is!" [They rowed him by night] as by day. In three days he reached it. He cast sand before him, and a gap formed in the river. He found six miles of serpents, scorpions, and all kinds of reptiles around [the place where the book was]. He found an eternal serpent around this same box. He recited a spell to the six miles of serpents, scorpions, and all kinds of reptiles that were around the box, and did not let them come up. [He went to the place where] the eternal serpent was. He fought it and killed it. It came to life again and resumed its shape. He fought it again, a second time, and killed it; it came to life again. He [fought it again, a third] time, cut it in two pieces, and put sand between one piece and the other. [It died] and no longer resumed its shape.

Naneferkaptah went to the place where the box was. [He found it was a box of] iron. He opened it and found a box of copper. He opened it and found a box of juniper wood. He opened it and found a box of ivory and ebony. (35) [He opened it and found a box of] silver. He opened it and found a box of gold. He opened it and found the book in it. He brought the book up out of the box of gold.

He recited a spell from it; [he charmed the sky, the earth, the netherworld, the] mountains, the waters. He discovered what all the birds of the sky and the fish of the deep and the beasts of the desert were saying. He recited another spell; he saw [Pre appearing in the sky with his Ennead], and the Moon rising, and the stars in their forms. He saw the fish of the deep, though there were twenty-one divine cubits of water over them. He recited a spell to the [water; he made it resume its form].

[He went on] board, he said to the rowers: "Row me back to the place [I came] from." They rowed him by night as by day. He reached me at the place where I was; [he found me sitting] above the water of Coptos, not having drunk nor eaten, not having done anything on earth, and looking like a person who has reached the Good House.⁸

I said to Naneferkaptah: (40) ["Welcome back! Let me] see this book for which we have taken these [great] pains!" He put the book into my hand. I recited one spell from it; I charmed the sky, (4,1) the earth, the netherworld, the mountains, the waters. I discovered what all the birds

of the sky and the fish of the deep and the beasts were saying. I recited another spell; I saw Pre appearing in the sky with his Ennead. I saw the Moon rising, and all the stars of the sky in their forms. I saw the fish of the deep, though there were twenty-one divine cubits of water over them.

As I could not write—I mean, compared with Naneferkaptah,⁹ my brother, who was a good scribe and very wise man—he had a sheet of new papyrus brought to him. He wrote on it every word that was in the book before him. He soaked it¹⁰ in beer, he dissolved it in water. When he knew it had dissolved, he drank it and knew what had been in it.

(5) We returned to Coptos the same day and made holiday before Isis of Coptos and Harpocrates. We went on board, we traveled north, we reached a point six miles north of Coptos.

Now Thoth had found out everything that had happened to Naneferkaptah regarding the book, and Thoth hastened to report it to Pre, saying: "Learn of my right and my case against Naneferkaptah, the son of Pharaoh Mernebptah! He went to my storehouse; he plundered it; he seized my box with my document. He killed my guardian who was watching over it!" He was told: "He is yours¹¹ together with every person belonging to him." They sent a divine power from heaven, saying: "Do not allow Naneferkaptah and any person belonging to him to get to Memphis safely!"

At a certain moment the boy Merib came out from under the awning of Pharaoh's ship, fell into the water, and drowned.¹² All the people on board cried out. Naneferkaptah came out from his tent, recited a spell to him, and made him rise up, though there were (10) twenty-one divine cubits of water over him. He recited a spell to him and made him relate to him everything that had happened to him, and the nature of the accusation that Thoth had made before Pre.

We returned to Coptos with him. We had him taken to the Good House. We had him tended, we had him embalmed like a prince and important person. We laid him to rest in his coffin in the desert of Coptos. Naneferkaptah, my brother, said: "Let us go north, let us not delay, lest Pharaoh hear the things that have happened to us and his heart become sad because of them." We went on board, we went north without delay.

Six miles north of Coptos, at the place where the boy Merib had fallen into the river, I came out from under the awning of Pharaoh's ship, fell into the river, and drowned. All the people on board cried out and told Naneferkaptah. He came out from the tent of Pharaoh's ship, recited a spell to me, and made me rise up, though there were twenty-one divine cubits (15) of water over me. He had me brought up, recited a spell to me, and made me relate to him everything that had happened

to me, and the nature of the accusation that Thoth had made before Pre.

He returned to Coptos with me. He had me taken to the Good House. He had me tended, he had me embalmed in the manner of a prince and very important person. He laid me to rest in the tomb in which the boy Merib was resting. He went on board, he went north without delay.

Six miles north of Coptos, at the place where we had fallen into the river, he spoke to his heart saying: "Could I go to Coptos and dwell there also? If I go to Memphis now and Pharaoh asks me about his children, what shall I say to him? Can I say to him, 'I took your children to the region of Thebes; I killed them and stayed alive, and I have come to Memphis yet alive?'"

He sent for a scarf of royal linen belonging to him, and made it into a bandage; he bound the book, placed it on his body, (20) and made it fast. Naneferkaptah came out from under the awning of Pharaoh's ship, fell into the water, and drowned. All the people on board cried out, saying: "Great woe, sad woe! Will he return, the good scribe, the learned man whose like has not been?"

Pharaoh's ship sailed north, no man on earth knowing where Naneferkaptah was. They reached Memphis and sent word to Pharaoh. Pharaoh came down to meet Pharaoh's ship; he wore mourning and all the people of Memphis wore mourning, including the priests of Ptah, the chief priest of Ptah, the council, and all Pharaoh's household. Then they saw Naneferkaptah holding on to the rudders of Pharaoh's ship through his craft of a good scribe. They brought him up and saw the book on his body.

Pharaoh said: "Let this book that is on his body be hidden." Then said the council of Pharaoh and the priests of Ptah and the chief priest of Ptah to Pharaoh: "Our great lord—O may he have the lifetime of Pre—Naneferkaptah was a good scribe and a very learned man!" Pharaoh had (25) them give him entry into the Good House on the sixteenth day, wrapping on the thirty-fifth, burial on the seventieth day. And they laid him to rest in his coffin in his resting place.

These are the evil things that befell us on account of this book of which you say, "Let it be given to me." You have no claim to it, whereas our lives on earth were taken on account of it!

Setne takes the book

Setne said to Ahwere: "Let me have this book that I see between you and Naneferkaptah, or else I will take it by force!" Naneferkaptah rose from the bier and said: "Are you Setne, to whom this woman has told these dire things and you have not accepted them? The said book, will

you be able to seize it through the power of a good scribe, or through skill in playing draughts with me? Let the two of us play draughts for it!" Said Setne, "I am ready."

They put before them the game board with its pieces, and they both played. Naneferkaptah won one game from Setne. He recited a spell to him, struck his head with the game-box that was before him, and made him sink into the ground as far as his legs. He did the same with the second game. He won it (30) from Setne, and made him sink into the ground as far as his phallus. He did the same with the third game, and made him sink into the ground as far as his ears. After this Setne was in great straits at the hands of Naneferkaptah.

Setne called to his foster-brother Inaros, saying: "Hasten up to the earth and tell Pharaoh everything that has happened to me; and bring the amulets of my father Ptah and my books of sorcery." He hastened up to the earth and told Pharaoh everything that had happened to Setne. Pharaoh said: "Take him the amulets of his father Ptah and his books of sorcery." Inaros hastened down into the tomb. He put the amulets on the body of Setne, and he jumped up in that very moment. Setne stretched out his hand for the book and seized it. Then, as Setne came up from the tomb, light went before him, darkness went behind him, and Ahwere wept after him, saying: "Hail, O darkness! Farewell, O light! Everything that was (35) in the tomb has departed!" Naneferkaptah said to Ahwere: "Let your heart not grieve. I will make him bring this book back here, with a forked stick in his hand and a lighted brazier on his head!"¹³

Setne came up from the tomb and made it fast behind him, as it had been. Setne went before Pharaoh and related to him the things that had happened to him on account of the book. Pharaoh said to Setne: "Take this book back to the tomb of Naneferkaptah like a wise man, or else he will make you take it back with a forked stick in your hand and a lighted brazier on your head." Setne did not listen to him. Then Setne had no occupation on earth but to unroll the book and read from it to everyone.

Setne and Tabubu

After this it happened one day that Setne was strolling in the forecourt of the temple of Ptah. Then he saw [a woman] who was very beautiful, there being no other woman like her in appearance. She was beautiful and wore many golden jewels, and maid servants walked behind her as well as two men servants belonging to her household. (5,1) The moment Setne saw her, he did not know where on earth he was. He called his man servant, saying: "Hasten to the place where this woman is, and find out what her position is." The man servant

hastened to the place where the woman was. He called to the maid servant who was following her and asked her, saying, "What woman is this?" She told him: "It is Tabubu, the daughter of the prophet of Bastet, mistress of Ankhtawi. She has come here to worship Ptah, the great god."

The servant returned to Setne and related to him every word she had said to him. Setne said to the servant: "Go, say to the maid, 'It is Setne Khamwas, the son of Pharaoh Usermare, who has sent me to say, 'I will give you ten pieces of gold—spend an hour with me. Or do (5) you have a complaint of wrongdoing? I will have it settled for you. I will have you taken to a hidden place where no one on earth shall find you.'"

The servant returned to the place where Tabubu was. He called her maid and told her. She cried out as if what he said was an insult. Tabubu said to the servant: "Stop talking to this foolish maid; come and speak with me." The servant hastened to where Tabubu was and said to her: "I will give you ten pieces of gold; spend an hour with Setne Khamwas, the son of Pharaoh Usermare. If you have a complaint of wrongdoing, he will have it settled for you. He will take you to a hidden place where no one on earth shall find you."

Tabubu said: "Go, tell Setne, 'I am of priestly rank, I am not a low person. If you desire to do what you wish with me, you must come to Bubastis, to my house. It is furnished with everything, and you shall do what you wish with me, without anyone on earth (10) finding me and without my acting like a low woman of the street.'"

The servant returned to Setne and told him everything she had said to him. He said, "That suits (me)!" Everyone around Setne was indignant.

Setne had a boat brought to him. He went on board and hastened to Bubastis. When he came to the west of the suburb he found a very lofty house that had a wall around it, a garden on its north, and a seat¹⁴ at its door. Setne asked, "Whose house is this?" They told him, "It is the house of Tabubu." Setne went inside the wall. While he turned his face to the storehouse in the garden they announced him to Tabubu. She came down, took Setne's hand, and said to him: "By the welfare of the house of the prophet of Bastet, mistress of Ankhtawi, which you have reached, it will please me greatly if you will take the trouble to come up with me."

Setne walked up (15) the stairs of the house with Tabubu. He found the upper story of the house swept and adorned, its floor adorned with real lapis-lazuli and real turquoise. Many couches were in it, spread with royal linen, and many golden cups were on the table. A golden cup was filled with wine and put into Setne's hand. She said to him, "May it please you to eat something. He said to her, "I could not do that."

Incense was put on the brazier; ointment was brought to him of the kind provided for Pharaoh. Setne made holiday with Tabubu, never having seen anyone like her.

Setne said to Tabubu: "Let us accomplish what we have come here for." She said to him: "You will return to your house in which you live. I am of priestly rank; I am not a low person. If you desire to do what you wish with me you must make for me a deed of maintenance and (20) of compensation in money for everything, all goods belonging to you."¹⁵ He said to her: "Send for the schoolteacher." He was brought at once. He made for her a deed of maintenance and of compensation in money for everything, all goods belonging to him.

At this moment one came to announce to Setne, "Your children are below." He said, "Let them be brought up." Tabubu rose and put on a garment of royal linen. Setne saw all her limbs through it, and his desire became even greater than it had been before. Setne said: "Tabubu, let me accomplish what I have come here for!" She said to him: "You will return to your house in which you live. I am of priestly rank; I am not a low person. If you desire to do what you wish with me, you must make your children subscribe to my deed. Do not leave them to contend with my children over your property." He had his children brought and made them subscribe to the deed.

Setne said to Tabubu: "Let me accomplish (25) what I have come for!" She said to him: "You will return to your house in which you live. I am of priestly rank; I am not a low person. If you desire to do what you wish with me, you must have your children killed. Do not leave them to contend with my children over your property." Setne said: "Let the abomination that came into your head be done to them." She had his children killed before him. She had them thrown down from the window to the dogs and cats. They ate their flesh, and he heard them as he drank with Tabubu.

Setne said to Tabubu: "Let us accomplish what we have come here for! All the things that you have said, I have done them all for you." She said to him: "Come now to this storehouse."¹⁶ Setne went to the storehouse. He lay down on a couch of ivory and ebony, his wish about to be fulfilled.¹⁷ Tabubu lay down beside Setne. He stretched out his hand to touch her, and she opened her mouth (30) wide¹⁸ in a loud cry. Setne awoke in a state of great heat, his phallus in a . . . ,¹⁹ and there were no clothes on him at all.

At this moment Setne saw a noble person borne in a litter, with many men running beside him, and he had the likeness of Pharaoh. Setne was about to rise but could not rise for shame because he had no clothes on. Pharaoh said: "Setne, what is this state that you are in?" He said: "It is Naneferkaptah who has done it all to me!" Pharaoh said: "Go

to Memphis; your children want you; they stand in their rank before Pharaoh." Setne said to Pharaoh: "My great lord—O may he have the lifetime of Pre—how can I go to Memphis with no clothes on me at all?" Pharaoh called to a servant who was standing by and made him give clothes to Setne. Pharaoh said: "Setne, go to Memphis; (35) your children are alive; they stand in their rank before Pharaoh."

Setne returns the book

When Setne came to Memphis he embraced his children, for he found them alive. Pharaoh said to Setne: "Was it a state of drunkenness you were in before?" Setne related everything that had happened with Tabubu and Naneferkaptah. Pharaoh said: "Setne, I did what I could with you before, saying, 'They will kill you if you do not take this book back to the place you took it from.' You have not listened to me until now. Take this book back to Naneferkaptah, with a forked stick in your hand and a lighted brazier on your head."

When Setne came out from before Pharaoh, there was a forked stick in his hand and a lighted brazier on his head. He went down into the tomb in which Naneferkaptah was. Ahwere said to him: "Setne, it is the great god Ptah who has brought you back safely." (6,1) Naneferkaptah laughed, saying, "It is what I told you before." Setne greeted Naneferkaptah, and he found one could say that Pre was in the whole tomb. Ahwere and Naneferkaptah greeted Setne warmly.

Setne said: "Naneferkaptah, is there any matter which is shameful?"²⁰ Naneferkaptah said: "Setne, you know that Ahwere and her son Merib are in Coptos; here in this tomb they are through the craft of a good scribe.²¹ Let it be asked of you to undertake the task of going to Coptos and [bringing them] (5) here."

When Setne had come up from the tomb, he went before Pharaoh and related to Pharaoh everything that Naneferkaptah had said to him. Pharaoh said: "Setne, go to Coptos, bring Ahwere and her son Merib." He said to Pharaoh: "Let the ship of Pharaoh and its equipment be given to me."

The ship of Pharaoh and its equipment were given to him. He went on board, he set sail, he reached Coptos without delay. It was announced to the priests of Isis of Coptos, and the chief priest of Isis. They came down to meet him, they conducted him to the shore.

He went up from it, he went into the temple of Isis of Coptos and Harpocrates. He sent for an ox, a goose, and wine, and made burnt offering and libation before Isis of Coptos and Harpocrates. He went to the desert of Coptos with the priests of Isis and the chief priest of Isis. They spent three days and three nights searching in all the tombs on the desert of Coptos, turning over the stelae of the scribes of the

House of Life, and reading the inscriptions on them. They did not find the resting place (10) in which Ahwere and her son were.

When Naneferkaptah found that they did not find the resting place of Ahwere and her son Merib, he rose up as an old man, a very aged priest, and came to meet Setne. When Setne saw him he said to the old man: "You have the appearance of a man of great age. Do you know the resting place in which Ahwere and her son Merib are?" The old man said to Setne: "My great-grandfather said to my grandfather, 'The resting place of Ahwere and her son Merib is at the south corner of the house of the [chief of police].'"

Setne said to the old man: "Perhaps there is some wrong that the chief of police did to you, on account of which you are trying to have his house torn down?" The old man said to Setne: "Have a watch set over me, and let (15) the house of the chief of police be demolished. If they do not find Ahwere and her son Merib under the south corner of his house, let punishment be done to me."

They set a watch over the old man, and they found the resting place of Ahwere and her son Merib under the south corner of the house of the chief of police. Setne let the two noble persons enter into Pharaoh's ship. He had the house of the chief of police built as it had been before. Naneferkaptah let Setne learn the fact that it was he who had come to Coptos, to let them find the resting place in which Ahwere and her son Merib were. Setne went on board Pharaoh's ship. He went north and without delay he reached Memphis with all the people who were with him. When it was announced before Pharaoh, he came down to meet the ship of Pharaoh. He let the noble persons enter into the tomb in which Naneferkaptah was. He had it closed over (20) them all together.

Colophon

This is the complete text, a tale of Setne Khamwas and Naneferkaptah, and his wife Ahwere and her son Merib. It was copied by ----- in year 15, first month of winter.

NOTES

1. By her pert quotation of the king's own words Ahwere won the king over, so that he permitted her to marry her brother.
2. I.e., her menstruation period had failed to come.
3. If that is the correct rendering it implies that members of the royal house were registered in the House of Life.
4. I.e., the inscriptions composed by the scribes of the House of Life.
5. Restored in accordance with the recurrence of the sentence in line 3/37. The correct understanding of the passage is from K.-T. Zauzich,