



Ancient Egypt: The Quarrel of Apophis and Sekenenre

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Limestone hippo, Middle Kingdom

Source: Journal of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

The Quarrel of Apophis and Sekenenre

It once happened that the land of Egypt was in misery, for there was no Lord, L.P.H., (as) (sole) king. A day came to pass when King Sekenenre, L.P.H., was (still only) ruler, L.P.H., of the Southern City. Misery was in the town of the Asiatics, for Prince Apophis, L.P.H., was in Avaris, and the entire land paid tribute to him, delivering their taxes, (and) even the north bringing every (sort of) good produce of the Delta.

So King Apophis, L.P.H., adopted [Seth](#) for himself as lord, and he refused to serve any god that was in the entire land except Seth. He built a temple of fine workmanship for the eternity next to the House of the [King Apo]phis, L.P.H., and he appeared [at break of] day in order to sacrifice ... daily to Seth, while the officials [of the palace], L.P.H., carried garlands, exactly as is practiced (in) the temple of Pre-Harakhte.

Now as for King A[pophis], L.P.H., it was his wish to s[end] an inflammatory message (to) King Sekenenre, [L.P.H., the] Prince of the Southern City. And a[fter] many days following this, King [Apophis, L.P.H.], then had [the high official]s of his [palace] summoned, [and he proposed to them that a messenger should be] sent [to the Prince of the Southern City with] a complaint...[concerning the] river, [but he was unable to compose it himself.

Papyrus Sallier I, ca. 1274 BCE
 L.P.H.: Life, prosperity, health
 Sekenenre: Tao II
 Seqenenre
 Southern City: Thebes
 Apophis: Apepi I
 Auserre, (ca.1600 to 1560 BCE)
 Asiatics: Here: Hyksos
 the town of the Asiatics: Avaris

This Egyptian story of the beginning of hostilities between the Hyksos and the rulers of Thebes is interesting for a number of reasons.

It is openly tendentious in its description of the political state of the country (*there was no Lord, L.P.H., as sole king*), the economy under Hyksos rule (*Misery was in the town of the Asiatics*), and even of the Seth worship as something alien in its exclusivity (*he refused to serve any god that was in the entire land except Seth*).

On the other hand, Apepi is recognized as the dominant ruler in the country (*the entire land paid tribute to him*) and the behaviour of his officials, presumably Hyksos as well, is

Thereupon his] scribes and wise men... and high officials [said: "O so]vereign, [our lord, demand that there be a withdrawal from the] canal of hippopotamuses [which lies at the east of the City because] they don't let [sleep come to us either in the daytime or at ni]ght, [for the noise of them is (in) our citizens' ear(s)."

And King Apophis, L.P.H., answered them saying: "I shall send to the Prince of the [Southern Ci]ty... command... [that we may assess the power of the god who is] with him as protector. He does not rely upon any god that is in the [entire land] except [Amun-Re](#), King of the Gods."

Now after many days following this, King Apophis, L.P.H., then sent to the Prince of the Southern City (with) the complaint that his scribes and wise men had concocted for him.

And when the messenger of King [A]pophis, L.P.H., reached the Prince of the Southern City, he was then taken into the presence of the Prince of the Southern City. Then one (Sekenenre) said to the messenger of King Apophis, L.P.H.: " Why have you been sent to the Southern City? Wherefore have you come journeying here?"

The messenger then told him: "It is King Apophis, L.P.H., who has sent (me) to you in order to say, 'Let there be a w[ithdrawa]l from the canal of hippopotamuses which lies at the east of the City, because they don't let sleep come to me either in the daytime or at night, ' for the noise of them is (in) his citizens' ear(s)."

Then the Prince of the Southern City became stupefied for so long a while that he

similar to that of the natives (the officials of the palace, L.P.H., carried garlands, exactly as is practiced in the temple of Pre-Harakhte).

The blame for stirring up trouble is put on Apepi whose absurd complaint left the Thebans flabbergasted. Hippopotami were destructive, dangerous creatures. They were often hunted because of this, and Apepi's accusation might be interpreted as an insult to Sekenenre by implying that he was incapable of upholding order in his realm, the chief duty of a ruler; or, conversely, if Sekenenre claimed that he did suppress the hippo population, he could be accused of insulting Seth, often symbolized by a hippo.

In the ensuing war Sekenenre Tao was killed in battle.

became unable to render [a reply] to the messenger of King Apophis, L.P.H. Finally the Prince of the Southern City said to him: "Is it through this (remark) that your Lord, L.P.H., would investigate matters regarding [the canal of hippopotamuses which lies at t]he east of the Southern City?"

Then the messenger [said to him: "Effectuate the m]atters for which he sent me."

[Then the Prince of the Southern City caused] th[e messenger of King Apophis, L.P.H.], to be taken care of [with] good [thing]s: meat, cakes,....[The Prince of the Southern City said to him: "Go and tell] your [lord], 'As for whatever you will tell him, he will do it,' so you shall tell [him]" ...

[Then the messenger of King Apophis, L.P.H., hastened to journey to where his lord, L.P.H., was.

So the Prince of the Southern City had his high officials summoned, as well as every ranking soldier of his, and he repeated to them every issue concerning which King Apophis, L.P.H., had sent to him. Then they were uniformly silent for a long while, without being able to answer him, be it good or bad. Then King Apophis, L.P.H., sent to

(The remainder of the story is lost)

Translation by Edward F. Wente
William Kelly Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, New Haven and London, 1973, pp. 77 ff



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