

## THE ROMANCE OF SETNA KHAEMUAS AND THE MUMMIES (SETNA I)

**D**uring Egypt's Late Period, the fourth son of the legendary Ramesses II became the central focus of one or more cycles of tales, somewhat reminiscent of the Arthurian cycles of medieval Western literature. In the Egyptian tales, Prince Khaemuas is designated by his priestly title Setna (older Setem), and it is his interest in ancient religious texts and magic that motivate the plot. This characterization has a firm basis in history, since the real Khaemuas served as High Priest or Setem of the Memphite god Ptah and justly may be termed the first known Egyptologist. His zeal for the investigation and restoration of ancient monuments is documented by his inscriptions throughout the Memphite necropolis, where he was buried beside the sacred bulls of Ptah. Such public texts undoubtedly inspired the Demotic romances of later authors. By Ptolemaic times, Khaemuas appears even in the "Book of the Dead," where he is credited with discovering ancient magical writings beneath the head of an entombed mummy, a scenario closely related to the following romance.<sup>1</sup>

Tales of magicians are a traditional genre of Egyptian literature, extending back to Papyrus Westcar set in the Old Kingdom. The Setna tales, however, cast the central figure as an intelligent but "flawed" hero who brings misfortune upon himself. Such a character type is also traditional, as evidenced by Sinuhe,

1. Spells Pleyte 167–69; see T. G. Allen, *The Book of the Dead*, SAOC 37 (Chicago, 1974), 216.

*Wenamon, and the pivotal Naneferkaptah in the following tale. Told within a series of interlocking narratives nested like the chests enclosing the critical scroll of Thoth, the tale employs sophisticated symbolism, symmetry, and word play. The importance of this and similar Egyptian romances for the development of the later Alexandrian “novel” has been much debated, but there can be little doubt that these Egyptian tales reached a Greek audience. One tale of Setna is even recorded by Herodotus (II, 141). The Setna story has proved influential in modern popular culture as well. The tale was recast into English verse by Gilbert Murray in 1911 (as Nefrekepta), provided the model for the seductress in Mika Waltari’s *The Egyptian* in 1949 (filmed in 1954), and is the source of the “scroll of Thoth,” central to the 1932 Universal film *The Mummy* and its many sequels. Boris Karloff’s transformation into an aged Egyptian who leads excavators to the hidden tomb of his ancient love is borrowed directly from the final page of *Setna I*. In 1990, the ancient novel was in turn “novelized” as *Mirage* by Pauline Gedge.*

*The manuscript of the first Setna tale, P. Cairo 30646, lacks the initial two columns, as indicated by the surviving pagination numbers. The Demotic handwriting is of excellent quality and dates to the early Ptolemaic period. In the lost beginning, Setna and his foster brother Inaros have entered the Memphite burial chamber of a long deceased Prince Naneferkaptah in search of the magical scroll of Thoth, the divine scribe and patron of science and magic. There they confront the mummy of Naneferkaptah as well as the disembodied ghost (akh) of his wife and sister, Ihweret, and that of her child, Merib. Ihweret relates their family history to a disinterested Setna, explaining that in her love for her brother, she sent a steward to entreat her father to allow them to marry. Pharaoh is irritated by the request, and when questioned by the steward, he replies with the words that begin column 3.*

R.K.R.

3/1<sup>2</sup> [...]

“You are the one who irritates me. If it happens that I have but two children, is it the custom to cause that they dwell with each other? I shall cause Naneferkaptah to dwell with the daughter of a general, [and I shall cause] Ihweret [to dwell] with the son of another general. May it happen that our family will multiply!”

2. Labeled “the third (page).”

The time came for setting up the festival in the presence of Pharaoh. They came for me, and they took me to the festival, [though my heart was] exceedingly sad, nor did I have my demeanor of yesterday. Pharaoh said to me: "Ihweret, is it you who had them come to me regarding these foolish words, saying: 'Let me dwell with [Naneferkaptah, my] elder [brother]'?"

I said to him: "Let me dwell with the son of a general. Let him dwell with the daughter of another general for his part. May it happen that our family will multiply!" I laughed and Pharaoh laughed.<sup>3</sup>

3/5

/ [The palace steward came,] and Pharaoh [said to him]: "Palace steward, let Ihweret be taken to the house of Naneferkaptah tonight. Let everything that is beautiful be taken with her, omitting nothing." They took me as wife to the house of Naneferkaptah [on that night, and Pharaoh] caused that they bring to me a gift of silver and gold. The entire household of Pharaoh had themselves brought to me. Naneferkaptah celebrated with me, and he received the entire household of Pharaoh. He slept with me that very night. He found me [very pleasing, and he slept] with me again and again. Each one of us loved the other.

My menstrual cycle came, and I did not menstruate.<sup>4</sup> It was reported in the presence of Pharaoh, and his heart became exceedingly happy. Pharaoh caused that many things be taken [from the treasury of Pharaoh]. He caused that they bring to me a gift of silver, gold, and royal byssus, all of which was exceedingly beautiful. My time of giving birth came, and I bore this youth who is before you, named Merib. He was taught to write letters in the House of Life.<sup>5</sup>

3/10

[It happened that] Naneferkaptah, my brother, had no occupation on earth except to walk on the *gebel* of Memphis reading the writings that were in the tombs of the Pharaohs and the stelae of the scribes of the House of Life and the writings that were on / [the other monuments, for] exceedingly [great was his zeal] about writings. After these things, there occurred

3. The literary device of "borrowed speech" is used to less comic effect by the devious wife in The Tale of the Two Brothers (col. 5/2–3).

4. Lit. "My time of making natron happened and I did not make natron again." Natron, a naturally occurring bicarbonate of soda, was used as a cleanser for medical and ceremonial purposes.

5. The sentence indicates that Merib was taught "letter writing" (the common term for Demotic) in the temple scriptorium, in contrast to Ihweret, who does not write (col. 4/3). The traditional translation assumes the existence of a birth registry ("They caused that he be inscribed in the documents of the House of Life").

a processional festival pertaining to Ptah. Naneferkaptah went into the temple to worship. It happened that he was walking behind the procession, reading the writings that were on the shrines of the gods. [An] old [priest looked] at him, and he laughed. Naneferkaptah said to him: "Why are you laughing at me?"

He said: "I am not laughing at you. I am laughing just because you are reading some writings that have no [value at all.] If you wish to read writing, come to me that I might take you to the place where this scroll is, since it was Thoth who wrote it with his own hand when he was going down following the gods. There are two written formulas that are on it. If you [read the first formula, you will] enchant heaven, the earth, the underworld, the mountains, and the seas. You will find out what all the birds of the heaven and all the reptiles will say. You will behold the fish of the deep, though there are [twenty-one divine cubits<sup>6</sup> of water] above them. If you read the second formula, whether it is the case that you are in the West or you are in your earthly form either, you will behold Pre appearing in heaven with his Ennead together with the moon in its manner of rising."<sup>7</sup>

3/15

/ [Naneferkaptah said: "My good lord,] O may he live! Let me be told a favor that you desire so that I might do it for you, and you send me to the place where this scroll is." The priest said to Naneferkaptah: "If it happens that you wish [me to] send you [to the place where this scroll] is, you will give to me 100 *deben* of real silver toward my burial, and you will have my two brothers made priests tax free." Naneferkaptah called to a servant. He had the 100 *deben* of silver given to the priest. He caused that the wishes [for his] two [brothers] be done. He had them made [priests tax free.]

[The priest said to] Naneferkaptah: "As for the scroll in question, it is in the midst of the sea of Coptos within a chest of iron, with the chest of iron within a chest [of bronze, with the chest of] bronze within a chest of Aleppo pinewood, with the chest of Aleppo pinewood within a chest of ivory and ebony, with the chest of ivory and ebony within a [chest of silver, with the chest of] silver within a chest of gold, with the scroll within it, with

6. 11.025 m. or almost 36 feet. The reading here and in cols. 3/37 and 4/3 was established simultaneously by Frank T. Miosi, "‘Wassergeist’(?)," *SSEA Newsletter* 2/2 (1971): 6–9; and K. Th. Zauzich, "Gottesellen statt Gotteskraft," *Enchoria* 1 (1971): 83–86.

7. For such magical techniques, see R. K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, SAOC 54 (Chicago, 1993), 63–64.

one [*schoinos*]<sup>8</sup> of snakes, scorpions, and all manner of reptiles about  
 3/20 the perimeter of the chest in which the scroll is, and with / [an eternal snake  
 about the perimeter] of this same chest.”<sup>9</sup>

At the very moment when the priest recounted [this before] Naneferkaptah, he did not know where on earth he was. He came out from within the temple, and he related [to me everything that the priest said to him] in its entirety. He [said] to me: “I shall go to Coptos. I shall bring back this scroll, [without having] delayed in coming north again.” It happened that I accused the priest, saying: “May Neith curse you, O priest! You have already related before him these [dreadful things. You have brought] me conflict; you have brought me strife. As for the Thebaid, I have found it [abhorrent.” I did] all that I could with Naneferkaptah to prevent him from going to Coptos. He did not listen to me. He went before [Pharaoh, and he related before] Pharaoh everything that the priest said to him in its entirety.

Pharaoh said to him: “What is it that [you wish?]” He said to him: “Let the royal yacht be given to me together with its equipment. I shall take Ihweret [and Merib, her] child, to the south with me. I shall bring back this scroll, without having delayed.” The royal yacht was given to him together  
 3/25 with its equipment. We went up on board it. We sailed, and we reached /  
 [Coptos. Report was made] of it before the priests of Isis of Coptos and the chief inspector of Isis. They came down before us. They did not delay in going before Naneferkaptah. Their wives came down before me, myself. [We went up from the shore, and we went into the] temple of Isis and Harpocrates. Naneferkaptah caused that there be brought beef, fowl, and wine. He made a burnt offering and a libation before Isis of Coptos and Harpocrates. They took us to a house which was exceedingly beautiful, [filled with all good things].

Naneferkaptah spent four days celebrating with the priests of Isis of Coptos, while the wives of the priests of Isis celebrated with me, myself. The morning of our fifth day occurred, and Naneferkaptah had pure [wax brought] before him. He made a boat filled with its rowers and its sailors. He recited a spell to them. He caused them to live. He gave them breath.

8. Approximately 10.5 km.

9. The ouroboros imagery corresponds to that found on protective stelae; see R. K. Ritner, “A Uterine Amulet in the Oriental Institute Collection,” *JNES* 43/3 (1984): 219–21.

He cast them into the sea. He filled the pleasure boat of Pharaoh with sand, [and he tied it to the other boat.] He went up on board, and I myself sat above the sea of Coptos, saying: "I shall find out what will happen to him."

3/30 He said to the rowers: "Row bearing me up to the place where this scroll / [is." They rowed by night] as by day. In three days he reached it. He cast sand before him, and a gap formed in the river. About the perimeter [of the chest] where the scroll was he found a *schoinos* of snakes, scorpions, and all manner of reptiles. About the perimeter of the same chest he found an eternal snake. He recited a spell to the *schoinos* of snakes, scorpions and all manner of reptiles that were about the perimeter of the chest. He prevented them from flying up. [He went to the place where the] eternal snake was. He fought with it. He killed it. It returned to life. He did the same thing again. He fought with it again for a second time. He killed it. It returned to life again. He [fought with it again for a] third time. He cut it into two pieces. He placed sand between one piece and the other. [It died.] It did not resume its form ever again.

3/35 Naneferkaptah went to the place where the chest was. [He found that] it was a chest of iron. He opened it. He found a chest of bronze. He opened it. He found a chest of Aleppo pinewood. He opened it. He found a chest of ivory and ebony. / [He opened it. He found a chest of] silver. He opened it. He found a chest of gold. He opened it. He found the scroll within it. He brought up the scroll from within the chest of gold. He recited a written formula from it. [He enchanted heaven, the earth, the underworld, the] mountains and the seas. He found out what all the birds of heaven, the fish of the deep, and the herds of the desert were saying. He recited the other written formula. He beheld [Pre appearing in heaven with his Ennead] together with the rising moon and the stars in their arrangement. He beheld the fish of the deep, though there were twenty-one divine cubits of water atop them.

He recited a spell to the [water. He caused it to resume its form. He went up on] board. He said to the rowers: "Row bearing me up to the place [from which] you [came]." <sup>10</sup> They rowed bearing him by night as by day. He reached the place where I [was, even as I was sitting] above the sea of Coptos without having drunk or eaten, without having done anything at

10. Or, "[from which] you [took me]," which would also fit the space and traces, but cf. F. Hoffmann, "Einige Bemerkungen zur Ersten Setnegeschichte (P. Kairo CG 30646)," *Enchoria* 23 (1996): 54–55.

all, looking like a person who has reached the Good House.<sup>11</sup> I said to  
 3/40 Naneferkaptah: / [“Welcome back.] Let me look at this scroll for which we  
 have taken these [great] pains.” He put the scroll in my hand. I recited a  
 4/1 written formula from it. I enchanted heaven,<sup>12</sup> / the earth, the underworld,  
 the mountains, and the seas. I found out what all the birds of heaven, all the  
 fish of the deep, and all the herds were saying. I recited another written  
 formula. I beheld Pre appearing in heaven with his Ennead. I beheld the  
 rising moon and all the stars of heaven and their arrangement.<sup>13</sup> I beheld  
 the fish of the deep, though there were twenty-one divine cubits of water  
 above them, even though I can’t write,—I was speaking with regard to  
 Naneferkaptah, my elder brother, who is a good scribe and a very wise man.  
 He caused that a new sheet of papyrus be brought before him. He wrote  
 down every word that was on the papyrus before him, completely. He had it  
 burned with fire; he dissolved it in water. He recognized that it had dis-  
 solved; he drank it and he knew that which was in it.<sup>14</sup>

4/5 / We returned to Coptos on that very day. We celebrated before Isis of  
 Coptos and Harpocrates. We went up on board, we sailed downstream,  
 and we reached the north of Coptos by one *schoinos*.<sup>15</sup>

However, Thoth had already found out everything that had happened  
 to Naneferkaptah concerning the scroll. Thoth did not delay in going to  
 report it before Pre, saying: “Ascertain my legal rights and my judgment  
 with Naneferkaptah, the son of Pharaoh Merneptah.<sup>16</sup> He went to my  
 treasury, and he plundered it. He took my chest containing my legal docu-  
 ment. He killed my guardian who was watching over it.”

They said to him: “He is at your disposal together with absolutely every  
 person belonging to him.” They sent a slaughtering demon down from

11. Euphemistic designation of the embalmers’ workshop.

12. The page begins “The fourth” and repeats by dittography: “I enchanted heaven.”

13. The constellations.

14. For this magical procedure and its association with funerary spells, see Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 102–10, esp. 107–8.

15. Setna can go no farther than one river measure from the base at Coptos, a restricted perimeter corresponding to the one *schoinos* circuit of the eternal snake about Thoth’s scroll. In both cases, there are “chests” (coffers/coffins) surrounded by one *schoinos* of divine force.

16. The name of this ancient royal ancestor is a garbled form of Merneptah, the younger brother of Khaemuas who succeeded Ramesses II.

heaven, saying: "Do not allow Naneferkaptah to reach Memphis safely, nor any person belonging to him at all!"

4/10 But a moment later,<sup>17</sup> Merib the youth came out from under the canopy of the royal yacht.<sup>18</sup> He fell into the river, and he became a "praised one"<sup>19</sup> of Pre. Absolutely every man who was on board uttered a loud cry. Naneferkaptah came out from under his canopy. He recited a spell to him, and he caused that he fly up, though there were / twenty-one divine cubits of water atop him. He recited a spell to him, and he caused that he relate before him everything that had happened to him in its entirety, together with the nature of the complaint that Thoth had made before Pre. We returned to Coptos with him. We caused that he be taken to the Good House, we caused that they attend to him, and we caused that he be embalmed like a wealthy aristocrat. We caused that he rest in his stone chest<sup>20</sup> on the *gebel* of Coptos. Naneferkaptah my brother said: "Let us sail downstream. Let us not delay, lest Pharaoh hear the things that happened to us and his heart become sad because of it." We went up on board, we sailed downstream, and we did not delay in going to the north of Coptos by one *schoinos*, the place where Merib the youth fell into the river.

4/15 I came out from under the canopy of the royal yacht. I fell into the river. I became a "praised one" of Pre. Absolutely every man who was on board uttered a loud cry. They told it to Naneferkaptah. He came out from under the canopy of the royal yacht. He recited a spell to me, and he caused that I fly up, though there were twenty-one divine cubits / of water atop me. He caused that I be brought up, he recited a spell to me, and he caused that I relate before him everything that had happened to me in its entirety,

17. Lit. "It was a moment that happened."

18. The members of Setna's party fall victim to Pre's vengeance only when they are exposed to the rays—and thus the power—of the sun. For similar reasons, magical potions are either exposed to or hidden from sunlight, and Akhenaton's solar temples were unroofed.

19. An expression for the deified "drowned." For the idiom and Setna's consultation of his deceased wife and son, see the discussion in R. Ritner, "Necromancy in Ancient Egypt," in Leda Ciruolo and Jonathan Seidel, eds., *Magic and Divination in the Ancient World* (Leiden, 2002), 89–96; and idem, "Des preuves de l'existence d'une nécromancie dans l'Égypte ancienne," in Yvon Koenig, ed. (Paris: 2002), 285–304. *La magie en Égypte: à la recherche d'une définition*.

20. The term for the "chest" of Merib is the same word used for the various chests that enclosed the scroll of Thoth. For plundering the set of divine chests, Setna's family now fills a series of funerary chests.



together with the nature of the complaint that Thoth had made before Pre. He returned to Coptos with me. He caused that I be taken to the Good House, he caused that they attend to me, and he caused that I be embalmed like a very wealthy aristocrat. He caused that I rest in the tomb where Merib the youth rested. He went up on board, he sailed downstream, and he did not delay in going to the north of Coptos by one *schoinos*, to the place where we fell into the river. He spoke with his heart, saying: "Shall I be able to go to Coptos and dwell there, or were it to happen that I went to Memphis at once, and Pharaoh asks me about his children, what is it that I shall say to him? Shall I be able to say to him: 'I took your children to the Thebaid, I killed them, though I am alive, and I have returned to Memphis, though I am yet alive?'"

4/20 He had them bring before him a strip of sheer royal linen that he possessed. He made it into a linen bandage.<sup>21</sup> He bound the scroll, he placed it on his body, / and he made it tight. Naneferkaptah came out from under the canopy of the royal yacht. He fell into the river. He became a "praised one" of Pre. Absolutely every man who was on board uttered a loud cry, saying: "Great woe! Vile woe! Has he withdrawn himself, the good scribe, the wise man, like whom no other has existed?"

The royal yacht sailed downstream without anyone on earth knowing the place where Naneferkaptah was. They reached Memphis, and it was reported before Pharaoh. Pharaoh came down before the royal yacht wearing mourning linen, while all the population of Memphis wore mourning linen as did the priests of Ptah, the chief inspector of Ptah, the councilors of Pharaoh, and all the household of Pharaoh. They beheld Naneferkaptah, even as he was grasping the rudders of the royal yacht by means of his skill as a good scribe. They brought him up, and they beheld the scroll on his body. Pharaoh said: "Let them remove this scroll that is on his body."

4/25 Then the councilors of Pharaoh together with the priests of Ptah and the chief inspector of Ptah said before Pharaoh: "Our great lord, O may he attain the lifetime of Pre! Naneferkaptah was a good scribe and a very wise man." / Pharaoh caused that he be given entry to the Good House for sixteen days, with a wrapping of thirty-five, for an embalming of seventy days. He was caused to rest in his stone chest in his resting place.

Such are the evil matters that happened to us because of this scroll of

21. For this passage, see R. K. Ritner, "Two Demotic Notes," *Enchoria* 13 (1985): 213–14.

which you say: 'Let it be given to me!' You have nothing to do with it, whereas because of it our life on earth was taken!"

Setna said: "Ihweret, let me be given this scroll that I have seen between you and Naneferkaptah, or I shall take it by force!" Naneferkaptah raised himself from upon the bier. He said: "Are you Setna before whom this woman is saying these woeful matters, without your having taken them in at all? As for the scroll in question, will you be able to take it by means of the strength of a good scribe or by contest through playing a game against me? Let us adopt the procedure of playing for it, just us two." Setna said: "I'm ready."

The game board was brought before them together with its pieces.<sup>22</sup> The two men played. Naneferkaptah took one game from Setna. He recited a spell to him. He gave a blow to his head with the gaming board that was before him. He caused that he go into the ground up to his feet. He did the  
4/30 same in the second game. He took it / from Setna. He caused that he go into the ground up to his penis. He did the same in the third game. He caused that he go into the ground up to his ears.

After that, Setna was in great difficulty at the hands of Naneferkaptah. Setna called out to Inaros, his foster brother, saying: "Don't delay in going up to the surface and relate everything that has happened to me before Pharaoh and bring back to me the amulets of Ptah, my father, together with my scrolls of taking security."<sup>23</sup> He did not delay in going up to the surface. He related before Pharaoh everything that had happened to Setna. Pharaoh said: "Take to him the amulets of Ptah, his father, together with his scrolls of taking security."

Inaros did not delay in going down into the tomb. He put the amulets on the body of Setna, and he flew upwards at that very instant. Setna stretched out his hand after the scroll, and he took it. It happened that Setna was coming up from within the tomb as the light went before him and the darkness went after him, while Ihweret wept behind him, saying: "Hail,  
4/35 O darkness! Farewell,<sup>24</sup> O light! Everything that was / in the tomb has gone away in its entirety." Naneferkaptah said to Ihweret: "Don't be sad hearted!

22. Lit. "dogs," a term generalized from the popular game of "hounds and hares."

23. Setna's magical books. For the term, see Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 68–69.

24. Lit. "Horus be your protection!" The scroll radiates illumination; cf. col. 6/2, below.

I shall cause that he bring this scroll back here, with a forked stick in his hand and a brazier of fire on his head.”<sup>25</sup>

Setna came up from within the tomb, and he secured it in its proper fashion. Setna went into the presence of Pharaoh. He related before him everything that had happened to him on account of the scroll. Pharaoh said to Setna: “Take this scroll back to the tomb of Naneferkaptah like a wise man, or he will cause that you take it back with a forked stick in your hand and a brazier of fire on your head.” Setna did not listen to him. It transpired that Setna had no occupation on earth except to spread out the scroll and read aloud from it before everyone.

After that, a day occurred when Setna was strolling on the dromos of Ptah. He beheld a woman who was exceedingly beautiful, no woman having existed with her look. She was beautiful, with some works of gold in great quantity upon her, some female servants walking behind her, and with two men of the household assigned to her.

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/ At the very moment that Setna beheld her, he did not know where on earth he was.<sup>26</sup> Setna called out to his attending servant, saying: “Don’t delay in going to the place where this woman is. Learn what is happening with her affairs.” The attending servant did not delay in going to the place where the woman was. He called out to the maidservant who was walking behind her. He asked her, saying: “What sort of person is she?” She said to him: “She is Tabubu,<sup>27</sup> the daughter of the prophet of Bastet, the Lady of Ankhtawy. She has come here specifically to worship before Ptah, the great god.”

The servant returned to Setna. He related before him everything that she had said to him in its entirety. Setna said to the servant: “Go! Say to the

25. This penitential posture reflects the hieroglyphic symbol for a defeated enemy, bound to a forked stake. The brazier shooting fire is a reinterpretation of the blood trail or axe depicted atop the head of this hieroglyph. See Ed Meltzer, *SSEA Newsletter* 7/1 (1976): 10–11.

26. The column is labeled “The fifth.” For this idiom of lovesickness, cf. the reaction of Naneferkaptah regarding the scroll of Thoth (col. 3/20) and R. K. Ritner, *JNES* 45 (1986): 244, n. 3. The phrase is translated into Greek in the love charm PGM LXI; see H. D. Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago, 1986), 291.

27. “She of The Radiant One,” probably a reference to Bastet or Hathor, goddesses of love.

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maidservant that it is Setna Khaemuas, the son of Pharaoh Usermaatre,<sup>28</sup> who has sent me, saying: ‘I shall give you 10 *deben* of gold. Spend an hour with me! Or, should you / have an accusation of rape, I shall have it done to you. I shall have you taken to a hidden place where no man on earth will find you.’ ”

The servant returned to the place where Tabubu was. He called out to her maidservant. He spoke with her. She made a cackling noise as if it were blasphemy that he had said. Tabubu said to the servant: “Stop speaking with this stinking girl! Come and speak with me!” The servant hurried to the place where Tabubu was. He said to her: “I shall give 10 *deben* of silver. Spend an hour with Setna Khaemuas, the son of Pharaoh Usermaatre. Or, should you have an accusation of rape, he will have it done, too. He will take you to a hidden place where no man on earth will find you.”

5/10

Tabubu said: “Go! Say to Setna that I am pure; I am not a lowly person. If it happens that you wish to do what you desire with me, you will come to the estate of Bastet to my house. All manner of supplies are within it. You will do what you desire with me only while no man on earth has / discovered me, and while I have not acted as a common woman in the street either.”

The servant returned to Setna. He related before him everything that she had said to him in its entirety. He said: “It is agreeable.” Woe to every man who was in the vicinity of Setna!<sup>29</sup> Setna caused that a ship be brought for him. He mounted up on board it. He did not delay in going to the estate of Bastet. He came to the west of the cultivation.<sup>30</sup> He found a house that was extremely tall, with a wall surrounding it, with a garden on its north and with a bench before its gate. Setna inquired, saying: “This house, whose house is it?” They told him: “It is the house of Tabubu.” Setna went inside the wall. He turned his attention directly to the guardhouse of the garden, and it was reported to Tabubu. She came down, and she grasped the hand of Setna, saying: “By the fortune of the house of the prophet of Bastet, the Lady of Ankhtawy, which you have penetrated,<sup>31</sup> it will please me greatly! Sail yourself on up with me.”

28. The throne name of Ramesses II, preserved in Greek as Ozymandias.

29. A direct intrusion of the narrator, rare in Egyptian literature.

30. Lit. “the (land of) Egypt.” For this passage, see J. C. Darnell, “Articular *Km.t/Kmy* and Partitive **KHME** (Including an Isis of Memphis and Syria, and the *Kmy* of Setne I 5,11 West of Which Lived Ta-Bubu),” *Enchoria* 17 (1990): 69–81.

31. The verb “to reach/penetrate/attain orgasm” is employed throughout the text for a series of erotic word play.

5/15

Setna went up / upon the staircase of the house with Tabubu. He found the upper story of the house swept, decorated,<sup>32</sup> with its floor decorated with real lapis lazuli and real turquoise, with many beds in it spread with sheer royal linen, and with some gold cups in great quantity on the dining table.<sup>33</sup> A gold cup was filled with wine, and it was placed in the hand of Setna. She said to him: "Let it be so, that you will eat as you please." He said to her: "There is nothing that I shall be able to do."<sup>34</sup> Incense was placed upon the brazier. Unguents were brought before him of the quality of royal provisions. Setna celebrated with Tabubu, never having seen her like, ever!

5/20

Setna said to Tabubu: "Let us accomplish that for which we came here!" She said to him: "You will reach your house, the one in which you are. I am pure; I am not a lowly person. If it happens that you wish to do what you desire with me, you will make for me a deed of financial support, together with a / document of sale regarding everything and all movable property belonging to you in its entirety." He said to her: "Let the scribe of the school be brought." He was brought immediately. He caused that there be made for her a deed of financial support and a document of sale regarding everything and all movable property belonging to him in its entirety.

It was but a moment that transpired, and it was reported before Setna that: "Your children are below." He said: "Let them be brought up." Tabubu arose. She put on a dress of sheer royal linen. Setna beheld all her limbs within it. His desire surged even in excess of what he had been in previously. Setna said: "Tabubu, let me accomplish that for which I came here!"<sup>35</sup> She said to him: "You will reach your house, the one in which you are. I am pure; I am not a lowly person. If it happens that you wish to do what you desire with me, you will cause that your children subscribe my document. Do not leave them to contest with my children for your property." He caused that his children be brought. He had them subscribe the document.

5/25

Setna said to Tabubu: "Let me accomplish / that for which I came here!" She said to him: "You will reach your house, the one in which you

32. Lit. "sprinkled." Perhaps a reference to mosaic inlay of lapis and turquoise.

33. "The pure place," a term used also of the embalming table, an appropriate word play here.

34. Setna's inability to eat or drink corresponds to the standard threats of Egyptian love magic, which render the "lovesick" victim an abject slave of the magician, unable to eat, sleep or think properly.

35. In his excitement, Setna changes his demand from "let us" to "let me."

are. I am pure; I am not a lowly person. If it happens that you wish to do what you desire with me, you will cause that your children be killed. Do not leave them to contest with my children for your property.” Setna said: “Let there be done to them the abomination that has reached your heart.” She had his children killed before him. She cast them down out of the window before the dogs and cats. They ate their flesh while he listened to them, drinking with Tabubu.

Setna said to Tabubu: “Let us accomplish that for which we came here!<sup>36</sup> Everything that you have said, I have already done it for you in its entirety.” She said to him: “Sail yourself over to this treasury.” Setna went to the treasury. He lay down on a bed of ivory and ebony whose value was worth gold.<sup>37</sup> Tabubu lay down beside Setna. He stretched out his hand to touch her. She opened her mouth to / the ground in a great cry.

5/30

Setna awoke in a heated state, with his penis inside a chamber pot(?)<sup>38</sup> and without any clothing on him at all. It was but a moment that transpired, and Setna beheld a noble mounted upon a palanquin, who had many men running beneath his feet and who was in the guise of Pharaoh. Setna started to raise himself, but he was unable to raise himself because of the shame that he had no clothing on him. Pharaoh said: “Setna, what is with you in this condition that you are in?” He said: “It is Naneferkaptah who has done it all to me.” Pharaoh said: “Go to Memphis! As for your children, they are seeking for you. They are standing in their ranks in the presence of Pharaoh.”<sup>39</sup>

36. The only discernable reaction of the enchanted Setna to the death and mutilation of his children is the switch back to “let us” from the self-absorbed “let me.” The local cats and dogs may be a sly reference to the sacred animals of the nearby Bubasteion and Anubeion. Being exposed to animals is the ultimate disgrace, entailing the destruction of body and spirit; cf. the fate of the evil wife in *The Tale of the Two Brothers* (col. 8/8).

37. Lichtheim translates: “his wish about to be fulfilled,” lit. “his wish receiving gold.” The gender is incorrect for the word “wish/desire,” however, and the term is here taken as a feminine abstract “desirability.”

38. The uncertain word, attested uniquely here, is determined by two signs indicating dung and either water or a pot. Maspero (1915, 140, n.2, and 1880, 16 and 17, n. 2) translated the term as a jar. Compare early Western symbolic associations between chamber pots and promiscuous women in Mary Ellin D’Agostino, “Privy Business: Chamber Pots and Sexpots in Colonial Life,” *Archaeology* 53/4 (2000): 33–37.

39. The aristocrat “in the form of Pharaoh” is either Naneferkaptah or the god Ptah, Setna’s divine protector (cf. 5/39).

Setna said in the presence of Pharaoh: “My great lord, O may he attain the lifetime of Pre! How shall I be able to go to Memphis with no clothing at all on me?” Pharaoh called out to a servant who was standing by. He had him give clothing to Setna. Pharaoh said: “Setna, go to Memphis! As for your children, they are alive. They are standing in their ranks in the presence of Pharaoh.”

Setna returned to Memphis. He embraced his children when he found them alive. Pharaoh said: “Was is drunkenness that you were in previously?” Setna related everything that had happened to him with Tabubu and Naneferkaptah in its entirety. Pharaoh said: “Setna, I did all that I could with you previously, saying: ‘They will kill you if you don’t take this scroll back to the place from which you brought it away.’ You have not listened to me up to this moment, either. Let this scroll be taken to Naneferkaptah while there is a forked stick in your hand and a brazier of fire on your head.”

6/1 Setna came away from the presence of Pharaoh with a forked stick in his hand and a brazier of fire on his head. He went down to the tomb in which Naneferkaptah was. Ihweret said to him: “Setna, it was Ptah, the great god, who brought you back safely.” Naneferkaptah laughed, / saying: “It is what I said to you previously.”<sup>40</sup> Setna greeted Naneferkaptah. He found that one would say that it was the sun which was in the whole tomb.<sup>41</sup> Ihweret and Naneferkaptah greeted Setna enthusiastically.

Setna said: “Naneferkaptah, is there a matter which is a problem?” Naneferkaptah said: “Setna, you know that Ihweret and Merib her child are in Coptos. It is only by the craft of an excellent scribe that they are here in this tomb. Let it be your obligation,<sup>42</sup> and take the trouble and go to Coptos and bring them back / here.”

Setna came out from within the tomb. He went into the presence of Pharaoh. He related before Pharaoh everything which Naneferkaptah had said to him in its entirety. Pharaoh said: “Setna, go to Coptos! Bring back Ihweret and Merib her child!” He said before Pharaoh: “Let me be given the royal yacht together with its equipment.” He was given the royal yacht

40. The column is labeled “The sixth” and repeats: “‘It was Ptah, the great god, who brought you back safely.’ Naneferkaptah laughed.”

41. The return of the scroll fills the tomb with light, evoking imagery of the sun god’s passage through the underworld as described in the Amduat texts.

42. Lit. “Let it be commanded before you.”

together with its equipment. He mounted up on board. He sailed, he did not delay, and he reached Coptos.

It was reported before the priests of Isis of Coptos and the chief inspector of Isis. They came down before him and they conducted him to the banks. He went up among them. He reached the temple of Isis of Coptos and Harpocrates. He had oxen, fowl, and wine brought, and he made a burnt offering and a libation in the presence of Isis of Coptos and Harpocrates. He went to the *gebel* of Coptos together with the priests of Isis and the chief inspector of Isis. They spent three days and three nights seeking in all the tombs that were on the *gebel* of Coptos, turning over the stelae of the scribes of the House of Life and reading the texts that were on them. They did not find the resting / places in which Ihweret and Merib her child were.

6/10

Naneferkaptah discovered that they had not found the resting places of Ihweret and Merib her child. He arose as an elder priest who was extremely aged. He came before Setna, and Setna looked at him. Setna said to the old man: "You have the appearance of a man who is old. Do you know the resting places in which Ihweret and Merib her child are?" The old man said to Setna: "The father of the father of my father said before the father of my father: 'The father (of the father) of my father said before the father of my father that it is beside the southern corner of the house of the chief of police [Harsiese(?)] that the resting places of Ihweret and Merib her child are.'"<sup>43</sup>

Setna said to the old man: "Perhaps there is an injury which the chief of police has done to you, and you are going to have his house brought down because of it." The old man said to Setna: "Let them watch over me, and let them / destroy the house of the police chief. If it happens that they have not found Ihweret and Merib her child under the southern corner of his house, let me be punished."

6/15

They watched over the old priest, and they found the resting place of Ihweret and Merib her child under the southern corner of the house of the chief of police. Setna gave a processional entrance to the nobles onto the royal yacht. He had them rebuild the house of the chief of police in accordance with its former condition. Naneferkaptah caused that Setna discover

43. Or, "My great-grandfather said before my grandfather that his great-grandfather said before his grandfather..." The scribe has omitted a generation in copying from col. 6/12 to 6/13. The priest's great-grandfather relates a story of his own great-grandfather, thus six generations before the priest impersonated by Naneferkaptah. The passage is unduly truncated in Lichtheim's translation.



the fact that it was he who had come to Coptos to cause them to find the resting place in which Ihweret and Merib were.

Setna mounted up on board the royal yacht. He sailed, he did not delay, and he reached Memphis with the whole group that was with him. It was reported before Pharaoh. He came down before the royal yacht. He gave a processional entrance to the nobles into the tomb in which Naneferkaptah was. He caused that they be sealed / over all together.

It is the complete text, the narrative of Setna Khaemuas and Naneferkaptah and Ihweret his wife and Merib her child. This hand copy was written by Pasher[...] in regnal year 15, the first month of Winter.