

THE REPORT OF WENAMON

The Report of Wenamon is preserved on a papyrus of Dynasty 21 or 22. From the manner in which the text is inscribed on the papyrus it would appear to be an official document, perhaps one where the writer made a conscious effort to transform what may have originally been rough entries in a diary into a polished account that has literary merit. But despite the format of the papyrus, it can also be argued that the report is fundamentally a literary work, to a large extent fictitious, though with some historical underpinnings.

The dating of the report has traditionally been to Year 5 of the Renaissance era, which corresponded to Year 23 of Ramesses XI, the last pharaoh of Dynasty 20, but there is now good reason to believe that the Year 5 of the report is of the joint rule of Herihor in the south and Smendes in the north after the death of Ramesses XI. Although Herihor and Smendes did assume royal titles in certain inscriptions, their joint kingship was subordinated to that of the god Amon-Re. The weakening of the older pharaonic concept of kingship possibly relates to the Libyan tribal background of Dynasty 21. At any rate, the report clearly reflects the decline of Egypt's prestige abroad following the collapse of the New Kingdom empire. The reader will find the article by Arno Egberts in ZÄS 125 (1998): 93–108, especially illuminating in its reassessment of the literary and historical aspects of Wenamon's report.

E.F.W.

1,1 Year 5, fourth month of the third season, day 16, day on which Wena-
mon, the Elder of the Portal of the Temple of Amon, [Lord of the Thrones]
of the Two Lands, departed to obtain lumber for the great and noble river-
ine barge of Amon-Re, King of the Gods, [the name of which is A]mon-
Userhat.¹ On the day when I arrived at Tanis, at the place [where Smen]des
and Tanetamon are,² I gave them the rescripts from Amon-Re, King of
1,5 the Gods, and they / had them read out in their presence. They said, “Will
do, will do according to what Amon-Re, King of the Gods, our [lord], has
said.” I stayed from the fourth month of the third season in Tanis. Smendes
and Tanetamon sent me off with the ship captain Mengebet,³ and I went
down to the great Syrian sea in the first month of the third season, day 1.

I reached Dor, a Tjeker town;⁴ and Beder, its prince, had fifty loaves,
1,10 one amphora of wine, / and one ox haunch brought to me. A man of my
freighter absconded, stealing a golden [vessel worth] five *deben*, four silver
jars worth twenty *deben*, and a purse containing eleven *deben* of silver.
[Total of what] he [stole]: five *deben* of gold and thirty-one *deben* of silver.⁵

I got up that morning, and I went to where the prince was and said to
him, “I have been robbed in your harbor. Now not only are you the prince
of this land, but you are also its investigator. Search for my money! Indeed,
1,15 as for this money, it belongs to Amon-Re, / King of the Gods, the lord of the
lands; it belongs to Smendes; it belongs to Herihor, my lord, and the other
magnates of Egypt. It belongs to you; it belongs to Weret; it belongs to
Mekmer;⁶ and it belongs to Tjekerbaal, the Prince of Byblos.”

And he said to me, “Are you serious, or are you ‘joking’? See here, I
cannot understand this allegation you have made to me. If it were a thief
belonging to my land who boarded your freighter and stole your money, I
1,20 would repay it to you from my own storehouse until / your thief, whatever
his name, has been found. Actually, as for the thief who has robbed you, he

1. The great barge of Amon, “Mighty of Prow,” used in river processions during major Theban feasts.

2. Tanis, located in the northeast portion of the Delta, was governed by Smendes and his wife Tanetamon.

3. The captain is a Levantine.

4. Dor, a port town on the north coast of Palestine, was controlled by the Tjeker, one of the Sea Peoples related to the Philistines.

5. The value of this money to pay for the lumber was equivalent to 1.2 lb. troy of gold and 7.5 lb. troy of silver.

6. These two individuals may have been princes of Tyre and Sidon.

belongs to you and he belongs to your freighter. Spend a few days here by me that I may search for him.”

1,25 So I spent nine days moored in his harbor, and I went to him and said to him, “Look here, you haven’t found my money. Please [send] me [off] with the ship captains and those who go to sea.” But he said to me, “Quiet! [If you wish to] find [your money], hear [my words and do what] I tell you, but don’t / [...] the place where you will be. You shall take possession [of] their [...]s and be compensated like [...] until] they set out to search for their thief who [has robbed you ...] the harbor. Now [you shall proceed in this manner.”⁷ Then I reached] Tyre.

1,30 I left Tyre at crack of dawn [...] Tjekerbaal, the Prince of Byblos, [...] / a freighter. I found thirty *deben* of silver in it, and I seized possession of it. [I said to the ship’s owners,⁸ “I have seized possession of] your money. It shall remain in my possession [un]til you have found [my money or the thief] who stole it. I have not robbed you, but I shall hold on to it. But as for you, [you shall ...] me to [...].”

1,35 So they went off, and I celebrated my triumph [in a] tent on the seashore in the harbor of Byblos. [I found a hiding place for] Amon-of-the-Road⁹ and placed his possessions within it. The Prince of Byblos sent word to me, saying, “G[et out of / my] harbor!” And I sent word (back) to him, saying, “Where should [I go? ...] ‘I’ go [...]. If [you can locate a ship] to transport me, let me be taken back to Egypt.” I spent twenty-nine days in his har[bor while] he daily [spent] time sending word to me, saying, “Get out of my harbor!”

1,40 Now when he offered to his gods, the god took possession of a page¹⁰ (from the circle) of his pages and put him in an ecstatic state. He¹¹ told him, “Bring [the] god up! Bring the envoy who is carrying him! / It is Amon who sent him forth. It is he who had him come.” For when the ecstatic

7. The tenor of Beder’s poorly preserved speech seems to be that Wenamon should exercise restraint in the hope that the money will be recovered, but apparently Wenamon impatiently left for Tyre.

8. Those whose money Wenamon confiscated were Tjeker.

9. The name of the idol that accompanied Wenamon to protect him on his trade mission.

10. Lit. “big boy” or “adolescent.” Despite the orthography, others have proposed instead a Semitic word for “seer,” see James E. Hoch, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period* (Princeton, 1994), 86–87.

11. I.e., the ecstatic individual speaking to the prince.

became ecstatic that night, I had located a freighter headed for Egypt and had (already) loaded all my possessions into it but, so as to prevent another eye from seeing the god, I was waiting for darkness to fall that I might put him aboard.

The harbor master came to me, saying, "Stay until tomorrow, so the prince says." And I said to him, "Are¹² you the one who daily has spent time coming to me to say, 'Get out of my harbor!?' Are you now telling me to stay
1,45 tonight / so that the freighter I located might first depart and you might then return and say, 'Move on!?' And he went and told it to the prince, and the prince sent word to the captain of the freighter, saying, "Stay until tomorrow, so the prince says."

When morning came, he sent (for me) and brought me up while the god was resting in the tent where he was on the seashore. I found him sitting in his upper chamber, with his back turned toward a window, while behind his
1,50 head were breaking the waves of the great Syrian sea. / I said to him, "Amon be merciful!" And he said to me, "How long has it been until today since you came from where Amon is?" I answered him, "Five whole months ago." He said to me, "Now are you being truthful? Where is the rescript from Amon which is in your charge? Where is the letter from the High Priest of Amon which is in your charge?" And I answered him, "I gave them to Smendes and Tanetamon." He became very irritated and said to me, "Now look, you have neither rescripts nor letters in your charge. Where is the ship for (transporting) cedar which Smendes gave you? Where is / its
1,55 Syrian crew? When he entrusted you to that barbarian ship captain, was it to have him murder you and have you thrown into the sea? (If so), from whom then would the god have been sought? And you too, from whom would you also have been sought?" so he said to me.

I said to him, "Isn't it an Egyptian ship and thus an Egyptian crew that sail under Smendes? Does he have Syrian crews?" And he said to me, "Aren't there twenty cargo ships here in my harbor which are in commerce
2,1 with Smendes? As for that Sidon, / the other (port) which you passed, aren't there another fifty freighters there which are in commerce with Werketer and are hauling to his (commercial) house?"¹³

12. Throughout my previous translation of this report *nn* was interpreted as a negative.

However, more recent consideration of the use of *nn* in Wenamon has convinced me that *nn* throughout this text is a writing of the interrogative *in*.

13. Perhaps with the nuance of drawing in profit to his commercial house.

2,5 I was dumbfounded at this great moment, and he reacted, saying to me, “On what sort of business have you come?” And I answered him, “It is in quest of lumber for the great and noble barge of Amon-Re, King of the Gods, that I have come. What your father did and / what your father’s father did, you will also do,” so I said to him. And he said to me, “They did in fact supply it. You have but to pay me for supplying it, and I will supply it. Indeed my (forebears) carried out this commission, but only after Pharaoh, l.p.h., had sent six freighters loaded with Egyptian products, and they were emptied into their warehouses. You, what have you brought me in my turn?”

2,10 He had a journal roll of his forefathers brought and had it read out in my presence. A thousand *deben* of silver and miscellaneous items were found (entered) in his (journal) roll. / And he said to me, “As for the Ruler of Egypt, is he the lord of what is mine, and I his servant as well? (If so), would he have been needing to send silver and gold in order to say, ‘Carry out the commission from Amon!’? Or was it rather a gift that used to be presented to my father? As for me in my turn, am I your servant? Or am I a servant of the one who sent you? I have but to let out a shout to the Lebanon so that as soon as the heavens open up, the logs will be deposited here on the seashore.¹⁴ Give / me the sails you brought to take your freighters carrying your logs back to ⟨Egypt⟩. Give me the ropes you brought [to lash the cedar]s which I am to fell in order to make them for you [...] which I am to make for you ⟨for⟩ the sails of your freighters, or the yards will become too heavy and break and you will perish ⟨in⟩ the midst of the sea. Look here, it was only after he had placed Seth beside him that Amon could thunder in the sky. Now it is all the lands that Amon / has founded, but he founded them only after he had initially founded the land of Egypt, whence you have come. Thus not only was it from there that technology went forth to get to where I am, but also it was from there that learning went forth to get to where I am. What’s (the point of) these foolish journeys that you have had to make?”

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2,25 But I said to him, “That’s wrong! They are not foolish journeys that I’m involved in. There is not any ship upon the river which doesn’t belong to Amon. His is the sea, and his is the Lebanon, which you claim is yours. It is for Amon-Userhat, the lord of every ship, that he maintains / a growing-

14. For a different interpretation of Tjekerbaal’s speech up to this point, see Jean Wiand, in *GM* 138 (1994): 95–108.

tract (there). Indeed it was Amon-Re, King of the Gods, who told Herihor, my lord, to send me forth, and he had me come bringing this great god. But see, you have made this great god spend these twenty-nine days moored in your harbor, without your knowing whether he, who has been there, was present or not. You stand ready to haggle over the Lebanon with Amon, its lord. As for your mentioning that the former kings used to send silver and gold, if they had had life and health, they would not have sent such products. / It was instead of life and health for your fathers that they sent such products. Now as for Amon-Re, King of the Gods, it is he who is the lord of life and health, and it is he who was the lord of your fathers. They spent their lifetimes offering to Amon. You too, you are a servant of Amon. If you say, 'Will do, will do so for Amon,' and accomplish his commission, you shall live, prosper, and be healthy and be beneficial for your entire land and your people. Don't covet for yourself anything belonging to Amon-Re, <King> of the Gods. Truly, a lion covets his own possessions. Have your scribe brought to me / that I may send him to Smendes and Tanetamon, the planners Amon has installed in the north of his land, and they will cause whatever is (necessary) to be brought. I will send him to them with the words, 'Have it brought until I go (back) south, and (then) I shall remit to you whatever deficit is still due you,'¹⁵ so I said to him.

He put my letter in his messenger's hand; and he loaded aboard the keel, the bow piece, the stern piece, along with four other hewn timbers, totaling seven, and sent them to Egypt. His messenger, who had gone to Egypt, returned to me in Syria in the first month of the second season, Smendes and Tanetamon having sent along / four bowls and one *kakmen*-vessel of gold, five bowls of silver, ten articles of clothing of byssus, ten 'coverlets' of fine thin linen, five hundred mats of smooth linen, five hundred ox hides, five hundred ropes, twenty sacks of lentils, and thirty baskets of fish, while she sent me (personally) five articles of clothing of fine thin linen, five 'coverlets' of fine thin linen, one sack of lentils, and five baskets of fish. So the prince rejoiced, and he detailed three hundred men and three hundred oxen and assigned supervisors in charge of them to have them fell the timbers. They felled them, and they lay there throughout the winter.

In the third month of the third season they were hauled to the seashore, and the prince went out and attended to them. He sent word to me, /

15. Wenamon is asking for an advance from the Tanite rulers, which he promises to pay back as soon as he returns to Thebes.

saying, “Come!” Now when I stepped into his presence, the shadow of his lotus fan fell upon me, and Penamon, a cupbearer whom he had,¹⁶ interposed, saying, “The shadow of Pharaoh, l.p.h., your lord, has fallen upon you.” And he¹⁷ became angry at him, saying, “Leave him be!” I presented (myself) to him, and he reacted, saying to me, “Observe that the commission which my fathers carried out previously, I have carried it out, although you in turn have not done for me what your fathers used to do for me.¹⁸ See, the last of your lumber has arrived and is stacked. Do as I desire and come
 2,50 to load it aboard. But should they not give it to you, / don’t come (simply) to observe the terror of the sea. If you should observe the terror of the sea, you would have to face my own. Truly, I have not done to you what was done to Khaemwase’s¹⁹ envoys when they had spent seventeen years in this land, and they died right at their post.” And he said to his cupbearer, “Take him, let him see their tomb in which they lie.”

But I said to him, “Don’t make me see it! As for Khaemwase, they were humans whom he sent to you as envoys, and he was a human himself. You don’t have one of his envoys (now before you) that you should say, ‘Go and
 2,55 see your fellow men.’ Can’t you be so joyful / as to have a stela [made] for yourself and say on it, ‘Amon-Re, King of the Gods, sent to me Amon-of-the-Road, his envoy, l.p.h., and Wenamon, his human envoy, in quest of lumber for the great and noble barge of Amon-Re, King of the Gods. I felled it; I loaded it aboard. I provided it <with> my own freighters and my own crews. I let them reach Egypt to request for me fifty years of life from Amon in excess of my fate.’²⁰ And it may chance after another day that an envoy comes from the land of Egypt, who is acquainted with writing, and he reads your name on the stela; (then) you will receive water of the
 2,60 West like the gods who are / there.”

He said to me, “That’s quite a wordy bit of advice you have given me.” And I said to him, “As for the many things you have told me, if I arrive home to where the High Priest of Amon is and he sees your commission, it is your commission which will draw in profit to you.”

I went off to the seashore to where the timbers were stacked and

16. The cupbearer’s name indicates that he was an Egyptian.

17. I.e., Tjekerbaal.

18. Assuming that Tjekerbaal had previously received payment under Ramesses XI; most translators have understood “for me” to mean “for mine.”

19. Khaemwase was probably the pharaoh Ramesses XI.

20. An indication that a person’s fate could be altered through prayer to a god.

2,65 watched eleven freighters coming in from the sea belonging to the Tjeker, (who were) saying, "Apprehend him! Put no freighters at his disposal (headed) for the land of Egypt." So I sat down and wept. The letter scribe of the prince came out to me / and said to me, "What's up?" And I said to him, "Can't you see the migratory birds that have (already) gone down twice to Egypt? Look at them journeying (north) to the cool region.²¹ How long am I to be abandoned here? For can't you see those who have come again to apprehend me?"

2,70 He went and told it to the prince, and the prince started to weep because of the words which were said to him, for they were bitter. He sent out to me his letter scribe, bringing me two amphoras of wine and one sheep, and he had Tanetnē, an Egyptian songstress who was with him, brought to me, saying, "Sing for him! Don't let his mind be preoccupied with concern." And he sent word to me, / saying, "Eat and drink, don't let your mind be preoccupied with concern. You will hear whatever I have to say tomorrow."

When morning came, he had his assembly summoned, and he stood in their midst and asked the Tjeker, "What's (the purpose of) your journeys?" And they answered him, "It's in pursuit of those blasted freighters which you are sending to Egypt with our rivals that we have come." He said to them, "I cannot apprehend the envoy of Amon within my land. Let me send him off, and (then) you set out in pursuit of him in order to apprehend him."

2,75 So he put me aboard and sent me off from there at the harbor of the sea. The wind wafted me to the land of / Alasiya,²² and the townsmen came out against me to kill me. So I jostled my way through them to where Hatiba, the princess of the town, was. I met her when she had left one house of hers and was about to enter her other one. I saluted her and asked the people who were standing near her, "Is there no one among you who understands Egyptian?" And one of them replied, "I understand (it)." So I said to him, "Tell my lady I used to hear as far away as Nē,²³ at the place where Amon is, that although in every town injustice is practiced, in the land of Alasiya justice is practiced. Is it here (too) that injustice is being practiced every day?"

21. Located north of Egypt, see A. Egberts, in *JEA* 77 (1991): 62–67.

22. I.e., Cyprus.

23. Nē, meaning "the City," was the popular designation of Thebes.

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She said, “Now what do you mean by / saying this?” And I answered her, “If the sea rages and the wind wafts me to the land where you are, will you let them take charge over me to kill me although I am an envoy of Amon? Now look, as for me, they will be searching for me until whatever day.²⁴ Regarding this crew of the Prince of Byblos whom they are seeking to kill, won’t its lord in turn find ten crews belonging to you and kill them too?”

So she had the people summoned, and they were arraigned.²⁵ And she said to me, “Sleep well!”

(The remainder of the report is lost.)

24. I.e., incessantly.

25. Or simply, “reprimanded.”