

The Famine Stela

Composed during Ptolemaic Era, 332-31 BCE

translation from M. Lichtheim. *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*. Vol. 3, pp. 94-100.)

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Year 18 of Horns: *Neterkhet*; the King of Upper and Lower Egypt: *Neterkhet*; Two Ladies: *Neterkhet*; Gold-Horus: *Djoser*; under the Count, Prince, Governor of the domains of the South, Chief of the Nubians in Yebu, Mesir. There was brought to him this royal decree. To let you know:

I was in mourning on my throne,
Those of the palace were in grief,
My heart was in great affliction,
Because Hapy had failed to come in time

In a period of seven years.

Grain was scant,

Kernels were dried up,

Scarce was every kind of food.

Every man robbed his twin,
Those who entered did not go.
Children cried,
Youngsters fell,
The hearts of the old were grieving;
Legs drawn up, they hugged the ground,
Their arms clasped about them.
Courtiers were needy,
Temples were shut,
Shrines covered with dust,
Everyone was in distress.

I directed my heart to turn to the past,
I consulted one of the staff of the Ibis,
The chief lector-priest of Imhotep,
Son of Ptah South-of-his-Wall:
"In which place is Hapy born?
Which is the town of the Sinuous one?
Which god dwells there?
That he might join with me."

He stood: "I shall go to Mansion-of-the-Net,
It is designed to support a man in his deeds;
I shall enter the House of Life,
Unroll the Souls of Re,
I shall be guided by them."

He departed, he returned to me quickly,
He let me know the flow of Hapy,
His shores and all the things they contain.
He disclosed to me the hidden wonders,
To which the ancestors had made their way,
And no king had equaled them since.

He said to me:

"There is a town in the midst of the deep,
Surrounded by Hapy, Yebu by name;
It is first of the first,
First nome to Wawat,
Earthly elevation, celestial hill,
Seat of Re when he prepares
To give life to every face.
Its temple's name is 'Joy-of-life,'
'Twin Caverns' is the water's name,
They are the breasts that nourish all.

It is the house of sleep of Hapy,
He grows young in it in [his time],
[It is the place whence] he brings the flood:
Bounding up he copulates,
As man copulates with woman,
Renewing his manhood with joy;
Coursing twenty-eight cubits high,
He passes Sema-behdet at seven.
Khnum is the god [who rules] there,
[He is enthroned above the deep],
His sandals resting on the flood;
He holds the door bolt in his hand,
Opens the gate as he wishes.
He is eternal there as Shu,
Bounty-giver, Lord-of-fields,
So his name is called.
He has reckoned the land of the South and the North,
To give parts to every god;
It is he who governs barley, [emmer],
Fowl and fish and all one lives on.
Cord and scribal board are there,
The pole is there with its beam

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His temple opens southeastward,
Re rises in its face every day;
Its water rages on its south for an *iter*,
A wall against the Nubians each day.
There is a mountain massif in its eastern region,
With precious stones and quarry stones of all kinds,
All the things sought for building temples
In Egypt, South and North,

And stalls for sacred animals,
And palaces for kings,
All statues too that stand in temples and in shrines.

"Their gathered products are set before the face of Khnum and around him; likewise tall plants and flowers of all kinds that exist between Yebu and Senmut, and are there on the east and the west.

"There is in the midst of the river-covered by water at its annual flood-a place of relaxation for every man who works the stones on its two sides.

"There is in the river, before this town of Yebu, a central elevation of difficult body which is called *grf-3bw*.

"Learn the names of the gods and goddesses of the temple of Khnum: Satis, Anukis, Hapy, Shu, Geb, Nut, Osiris, Horus, Isis, Nephthys.

"Learn the names of the stones that are there, lying in the borderland: those that are in the east and the west, those [on the shores] of Yebu's canal, those in Yebu, those in the east and west, and those in the river: *bhn*, *mt3y*, *mhtbtb*, *r'gs*, *wtSy* in the east; *prdn* in the west; *tSy* in the west and in the river.

"The names of the precious stones of the quarries that are in the upper region-some among them at a distance of four *iter*-are: gold, silver, copper, iron, lapis lazuli, turquoise, *thnt*, red jasper, *k'*, *mnw*, emerald, *tm-ikr*. In addition, *nSmt*, *t3-mhy*, *hm3gt*, *ibht*, *bks-'nh*, green eye-paint, black eye-paint, carnelia, *shrt*, *mm*, and ochre are within this township."

When I heard what was there my heart was guided. Having heard of the flood <I> opened the wrapped books. <I> made a purification; <I> conducted a procession of the hidden ones; <I> made a complete offering of bread, beer, oxen, and fowl, and all good things for the gods and goddesses in Yebu whose names had been pronounced.

As I slept in peace, I found the god standing before me. <I> propitiated him by adoring him and praying to him. He revealed himself to me with kindly face; he said:

"I am Khnum, your maker!
My arms are around you,
To steady your body,
To safeguard your limbs.
I bestow on you stones upon stones,
That were not found before,
Of which no work was made,
For building temples,
Rebuilding ruins,
Inlaying statues' eyes.

For I am the master who makes,
I am he who made himself,
Exalted Nun, who first came forth,
Hapy who hurries at will;
Fashioner of everybody,
Guide of each man in his hour,
Tatenen, father of gods,
Great Shu, high in heaven!

The shrine I dwell in has two lips,
When I open up the well,
I know Hapy hugs the field,
A hug that fills each nose with life,
For when hugged the field is reborn!
I shall make Hapy gush for you,
No year of lack and want anywhere,
Plants will grow weighed down by their fruit;
With Renutet ordering all,
All things are supplied in millions!
I shall let your people fill up,
They shall grasp together with you!
Gone will be the hunger years,
Ended the dearth in their bins.
Egypt's people will come striding,
Shores will shine in the excellent flood,
Hearts will be happier than ever before!"

The Donation

I awoke with speeding heart. Freed of fatigue I made this decree on behalf of my father Khnum. A royal offering to Khnum, lord of the cataract region and chief of Nubia: In return for what you have done for me, I offer you Manu as western border, Bakhu as eastern border, from Yebu to Kemsat, being twelve *iter* on the east and the west, consisting of fields and pastures, of the river, and of every place in these miles. All tenants who cultivate the fields, and the vivifiers who irrigate the shores and all the new lands that are in these miles, their harvests shall be taken to your granary, in addition to your share which is in Yebu. All fishermen, all hunters, who catch fish and trap birds and all kinds of game, and all who trap lions in the desert- I exact from them one-tenth of the take of all of these, and all the young animals born of the females in these miles [in their totality]. One shall give the branded animals for all burnt offerings and daily sacrifices; and one shall give one-tenth of gold, ivory, ebony, carob wood, ochre, carnelian, *shrt*, *diw*-plants,,*nfw*,-plants, all kinds of timber, (being) all the things brought by the Nubians of Khent-hen-nefer' (to) Egypt, and (by) every man who comes with arrears from them No officials are to issue orders in these places or take anything from them, for everything is to be protected for your sanctuary. I grant you this domain with (its) stones and good soil. No person there - - - - - anything from it. But the scribes that belong to you and the overseers of the South shall dwell there as accountants, listing everything that the *kiry*-workers, and the smiths, and the master craftsmen, and the goldsmiths, and the . . . and the Nubians, and the crew of Apiru, and all corvée labor who fashion the stones, shall give of gold, silver, copper, lead, baskets of . . . firewood, the things that every man who works with them shall give as dues, namely one-tenth of all these. And there shall be given one-tenth of the precious stones and quarrying stones that are brought from the mountain side, being the stones of the east. And there shall be an overseer who measures the quantities of gold, silver, copper, and genuine precious stones, the things which the sculptors shall assign to the gold house, <to> fashion the sacred images and to refit the statues that were damaged, and any implements lacking there. Everything shall be placed in the storehouse until one fashions

anew, when one knows everything that is lacking in your temple, so that it shall be as it was in the beginning.

Engrave this decree on a stela of the sanctuary in writing, for it happened as said, (and) on a tablet, so that the divine writings shall be on them in the temple twice. He who spits (on it) deceitfully shall be given over to punishment.

The overseers of the priests and the chief of all the temple personnel shall make my name abide in the temple of Khnum-Re, lord of Yebu, ever-mighty.