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QUEEN NITOCRIS OF THE SIXTH DYNASTY

By PERCY E. NEWBERRY

NITOCRIS, the famous queen of Egypt, is mentioned by Herodotus,¹ Eratosthenes,² and Manetho;³ at the time of the Roman Emperors she appears as one of the old heroines of the country.⁴ Placed by Manetho at the end of his Sixth Dynasty, she is described by him as of fair complexion and the bravest and most beautiful woman of her time. He adds that she was said to have built the Third Pyramid and reigned twelve years. Eratosthenes gives the length of her reign as six years and remarks that her name means Ἀθηνᾶ νικηφόρος, 'Athena the victorious'. Herodotus records that 'after Menes came 330 kings whose names the priests recited from a papyrus roll. In all these generations were eighteen Ethiopian kings and one queen, a native of the country; the rest were all Egyptian men. The name of the queen was the same as that of the Babylonian princess Nitocris.'⁵ The Greek historian continues: 'To avenge her brother (he was king of Egypt and was slain by his subjects who then gave Nitocris the sovereignty) she put many Egyptians to death by guile. She built a spacious underground chamber; then, with the pretence of handselling it, but with far other intent in her mind, she gave a great feast, inviting those Egyptians whom she knew to have been most concerned in her brother's murder; and, while they feasted, she let the river in upon them by a great secret channel. This was all that the priests told of her, save that when she had done this, she cast herself into a chamber full of hot ashes, thereby to escape vengeance.' In the light of our present knowledge it is not possible to say whether there is any truth in these details of the queen's life, but it is remarkable that some modern historians have declared Nitocris to be a king⁶ and that others have regarded her as an entirely mythical personage.⁷

The earliest authority for the name of this Sixth Dynasty queen is the Royal Papyrus of Turin, where it is written  Nitikrti.⁸ Hincks,⁹ in 1846, had suspected

¹ II, 100.

² Waddell, *Manetho* (Loeb Classical Series), London, 1940, p. 221.

³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 54-7.

⁴ Dio Cassius, LXII, 6: Julian, *Orat.*, pp. 126-7.

⁵ The Babylonian princess was Nitocris (Hdt., I, 185-8), probably a daughter of a Saite king. Hdt., III, 1 also mentions a daughter of Apries named Nitetis ('Neith is come'), 'a very tall and fair damsel', sent by Amasis to Cambyses.

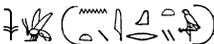
⁶ Stern, *ZÄS*, xxiii, 92.

⁷ H. R. Hall (*JHS* xxiv [1904], 213) wrote: 'it seems to me that we must abolish the Nitocris of the VIth Dynasty, who is a mere theory of Manetho's'. Cf. the same writer in *CAH* I (1925), 296, where he says 'the successors of Pepi II were entirely ephemeral and are only interesting because one of them, Neterkere, appears, though a man, to be the original of the Nitocris of Herodotus: Manetho accepts the identification and speaks of a queen in this place. Neterkere was followed by Menkere and the similarity of his name to that of Menkaure led to the association of Neterkere (confused with the Saïte queen's name Neitakrit, i.e. "Nitocris") with the Third Pyramid of Gizeh.'

⁸ Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen*, 1935, p. 181, gives no example of the name of earlier date than Dyn. XXVI, but Petrie found a statuette of a Queen Nitocris dated to the reign of Ammenemes III (Gardiner-Peet, *Inscriptions of Sinai*, pl. 29, No. 98). The name suggests a Saite origin. It was a princess Nitocris who, as daughter of Psammetichus I, was sent from the palace at Sais to Thebes, where she was installed as High Priestess and wife of the god Amün. In earlier times the queens of Menes and Djēt (both of Dyn. I) bore names compounded with Neith: Nitētp and Mertneith respectively; these queens were certainly princesses of the north-western Delta.

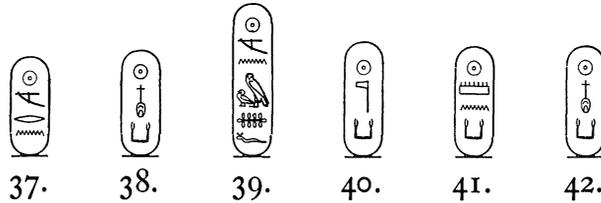
⁹ *Trans. Royal Soc. of Literature*, Second Series, III (1850), 129 ff. Hincks's paper was read 12 March 1846.

that Fragment 43 of the papyrus on which the name appears should be attached to Frag. 59, and placed nearly where Frag. 53 stands in Wilkinson's facsimile of the papyrus,¹ for he had recognized that although the names of the kings are destroyed in the uppermost part of Col. V, the lengths of their reigns are preserved, and that as the last two numbers read 'ninety years' and 'one year', they must apply to those of King Phiops and Menthesuphis, which, in the lists of Manetho and Eratosthenes, have that marked difference of duration. In the recent reconstruction of the papyrus made by Dr. Ibscher,² Frag. 43 is placed two lines lower down in Col. V than in Wilkinson's facsimile, and gives room for three names, now destroyed, between Menthesuphis and Nitocris. Adding the years on Frag. 61, the entries on Frag. 43 now read:

- (1)  Nitocris, 2 years, 1 month, 1 day.
 (2)  Neferka the child, 4 years, 2 months, 1 day.
 (3)  Nefer, 2 years, 1 month, 1 day.
 (4)  'Ib, 1 year, 8 days.

This list was followed by a summary of the number of kings comprising Manetho's Sixth Dynasty and the sum total of years (181) of the Dynasty. If Ibscher's reconstruction is correct, the number of kings will have been thirteen.

The Abydos List of Kings gives as the immediate successors of Pepy I the following:



The Şakḫārah List records only four names of Sixth Dynasty kings, Teti, Pepy I, Merenrē, and Neferkarē (Pepy II). Of the three royal names after Nitocris in the Turin List, the first, Neferka 'the child', perhaps corresponds to the Neferkarē of the Abydos List placed after Menkarē near the last of the names included in the Sixth Dynasty. The second, Nefer, may be a scribal error for  Nefersaḥor, who is known from an inscription at Hetnub⁴ and from graffiti at Tomas⁵ in Nubia. The last name is 'Ib whose pyramid has been discovered by the Swiss Egyptologist Jéquier⁶ among the Pepy II group at Şakḫārah. 'Ib's pyramid is situated near that of Neith,⁷ a queen of Pepy II, and although she bears only the simple name of the Saite goddess in

¹ Sir Gardner Wilkinson, *The Fragments of the Hieratic Papyrus at Turin containing the names of Egyptian Kings*, London, 1851, p. 53.

² G. Farina, *Il Papiro dei Re*, Rome, 1938, pl. 4, with p. 32.

³ Dr. Gardiner has kindly told me that in his transcription made many years ago the supposed  in Wilkinson's facsimile is really  and so is either  or .

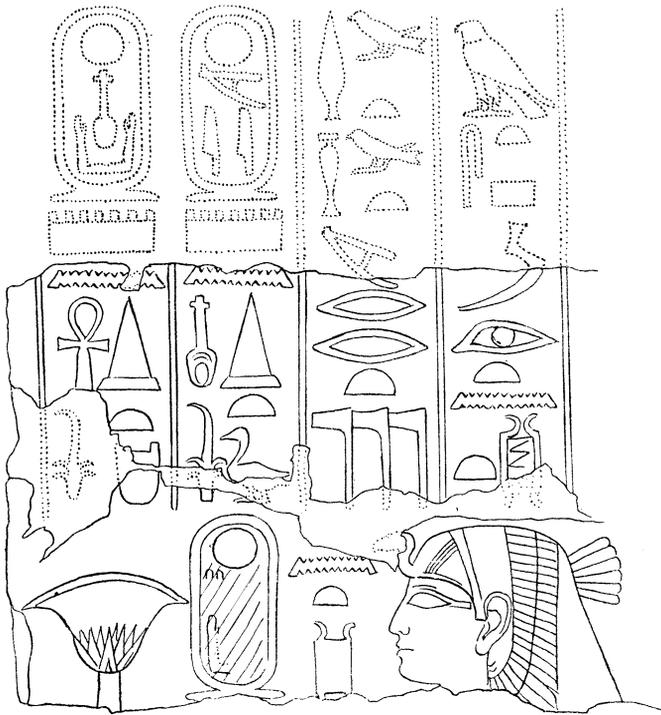
⁴ Anthes, *Die Felseninschriften von Hatnub*, Leipzig, 1828, pl. 4, with p. 13. Nearby in the quarry are graffiti of Pepy I, Merenrē, and Pepy II.

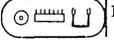
⁵ Weigall, *Antiquities of Lower Nubia*, Oxford, 1907, pls. 56 and 58. There is also a block of alabaster with the king's name in University College, London (figured in Petrie, *History of Egypt*, I, 1923 [revised], p. 125, fig. 77).

⁶ G. Jéquier, *La Pyramide d'Aba*, Cairo, 1935.

⁷ Id., *Les Pyramides des Reines Neit et Apouit*, Cairo, 1933.

without the details of the cord binding the two bows, as will be seen from the figure below. It is, moreover, remarkable that the queen's name is given twice in the same



scene, first above her head and then again in front of her face. The cartouche appears to be cut on a slightly lower surface of the wall than the vertical columns above; it has been partly defaced but  is clearly recognizable. In the photograph reproduced in pl. 5 of Jéquier's book (which is much better than the outline drawing in pl. 4) I think that I can see traces of the upper corner of a -sign below the . If these slight traces could be confirmed by an inspection of the slab, the cartouche would read ¹ Menkarē, which is No. 41 of the Abydos List and follows the otherwise unknown Neterkarē. If the cartouche had been Neferkarē, why should it have been partially

defaced? If the inscription had given the title of the queen it would have been written with the king's prenomen followed by the name of his pyramid and  'King's-Wife', for this was the customary way of writing the title in the latter part of the Sixth Dynasty. In my view it is much more probable that the partly erased cartouche and the duplication of the queen's name were carved when Neith became virtual ruler of Egypt at the time of Pepy II's infancy, and that the cartouche was mutilated at some later period by a priest who regarded her as an illegitimate sovereign. I do not think that the absence of the title  'Daughter of Rē' above the cartouche, or the fact that Neith's name is not enclosed in a cartouche, militates against the view that Menkarē was the prenomen of the queen, for it is not until the end of the Twelfth Dynasty that we find a royal woman's nomen written in a cartouche. If Neith's prenomen was Menkarē, this may have been the reason for her having been confused with Menkaurē (Mycerinus), the builder of the Third Pyramid at Gīzah, as Lieblein (*Recherches sur la Chronologie Égyptienne*, 1873, 40) and Petrie (*Hist.* I, 1894, 195) suggested.

¹ In the cartouches of the Old Kingdom no  is written under  on any contemporary monument.