

SIX SHEKEL AND A HALF
(NOTES ON HERMOPOLIS PAPYRI 2 AND 6)

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In the Hermopolis letters 2 and 6 an amount of silver (6 shekel and a half) is mentioned which was in the possession of Makkibanit the son of Psami¹. The subsequent use he made of it also concerned Banitsar the son of Tabi (Herm. 2: 4ff.). The relevant lines in both letters give rise to a number of problems on which there is no *communis opinio*. The reason partly lies in the fact that letter 6 is rather damaged. In this short article the author wishes to present some proposals which, hopefully, may contribute to solving the problems involved.

In Herm. 2:5 two words present difficulties: *nttn* and *wpd/rt*. Undoubtedly *nttn* can be interpreted as Peal Pf. 2p.pl.f., but this interpretation does not fit the context. A communication "the silver which was in my possession you have given" makes less sense contextually². For this reason I prefer to consider *nttn* as a scribal error for *ntnt* - Peal Pf. 1p.s.³.

The interpretation of *wpd/rt* as w+verbal form seems preferable to that of it as a noun or adverb of uncertain meaning⁴. Donner already proposed to read *wpdt* and to derive *pdt* from the root *pdy*⁵. However his interpretation of *pdt* as Peal Pf. 3p.s.f. is less probable, and an interpretation as Peal Pf. 1p.s. is contextually preferable⁶. The *l* of *lbntsr* has to be interpreted as a so-called *l-objecti*⁷.

This means that the silver in question was used to redeem Banitsar either from prison or from slavery⁸. According to Herm. 2:6ff. his mother Tabi has to repay at least part of this amount of silver procured by Makkibanit in wool.

The addresser of Hermopolis letter 6 tells that a certain person has given the amount of silver and "has made me and my son go out" (ll. 3f.). The name of the person in question is almost entirely lost (only the first letter *m* is preserved), but because of what is told in letter 2 the restoration *m[kbnt...]* seems assured⁹. In view of the interpretation of *wpd/rt* (Herm. 2:5) given above an inter-

pretation of *ʔpqny* in Herm. 6:4 as "he made me go out" sc. out of slavery or out of jail is most probable¹⁰.

One would expect that the addresser of Hermopolis letter 6 was identical with Banitsar the son of Tabi known from Herm. 2:5. Unfortunately the name of the addresser is lost, and only the last letter *r* preserved. Some authors have proposed to restore the lost name as [...*bnts*]r¹¹. However, in my opinion it is absolutely impossible to identify the addresser of letter 6 with Banitsar the son of Tabi. Letter 6 is addressed to "my sister Tabi" (l. 1) and I consider it impossible that a son would address his mother in this way (for the "my mother" in l. 11, see below).

Whereas in Hermopolis letters 2 and 6 the same amount of silver is concerned and in both instances Tabi is a party to the matter in question, it seems certain that we have to do with the same case in which Banitsar was also involved. This would mean that if the addresser of letter 6 is not identical with Banitsar, then his son who "went out" with him must be¹². Banitsar then is the son of the addresser, who must be the (former) husband of Tabi.

The fact that the formal address speaks of "my mother [...]" might contradict this solution, especially if one were to restore "my mother [Tabi]" as is often done¹³. However in the formal address another name can be mentioned from the one at the beginning of the letter. So Hermopolis letter 1 is written to "my sister R^cyh", but according to the formal address the letter is directed to "my father Psami". Now Tabi is also known from Hermopolis letter 5 which is written to Taru and to her (l. 1). In the formal address only Taru is mentioned (l. 10). From this letter it is probable that both women have a close relation¹⁴. The fact that in the formal address only Taru is mentioned could mean that she was the more important of the two. Therefore it is possible to presuppose that letter 6 was addressed to "my mother [Taru...]"¹⁵.

In Herm. 6:8f. the letter speaks about Banitsar and his son. This mentioning of Banitsar was already used in the past as an argument against identifying the addresser with him¹⁶. Wesselius has tried to evade this difficulty by restoring l. 8 as follows: *wšlm trw [wkn ʔmrn lkn k]ʔt šlm bntsr tnh*, thus making the words *k]ʔt šlm bntsr tnh wbrh ʔl t[špn...* the quotation of words said by Nabushe and Makkibanit. According to l. 7 both ask after the welfare of Tabi and Taru¹⁷. But the information that all is well with a person and/or that the addressee need not worry, can be found elsewhere in the letters given by the addresser himself (cf. Herm. 1:3f., 2:2f., 3:3f., 12, 4:8), so that the idea of a quotation of the words of two "outsiders"

seems less probable. It seems probable that the addresser, Banitsar his son and a son of Banitsar were together in Memphis¹⁸. The father of Banitsar writes to his (former) wife who is in Ofi (Luxor).

We have already seen that in l. 3 probably the name of Makkibanit has to be restored, and after this name some other words are lost. It remains possible that at this point the text mentioned the person to whom the amount of silver was given¹⁹. However, whereas in Herm. 2:5 Makkibanit says that he has given the silver without saying to whom (only for whom), it is quite possible that the line has to be restored *m[kbnt br psm] ḥtnh...*²⁰. If this is right Makkibanit probably was the brother-in-law of his partner Nabushe.

According to l. 5 the addresser wrote a document for him (sc. for Makkibanit), probably a document confirming his debt to him²¹. A restoration *ktbt lh ḥlʿh spr* or a comparable one seems probable²². Then he urges his (former) wife to buy as much wool as possible and to send it to Sewan (Assuan). Here the restoration *wʿw[šry ... s]wn* is highly probable²³. The person in Sewan to whom the wool has to be sent, is probably Makkibanit's wife Tashi, the addressee of letter 2. In Herm. 2:6f. Makkibanit asks her to write to Tabi (in Ofi) that she may send her wool²⁴. Wesselius' proposal to restore *wʿw[šry lʿbhy bs]wn* is not impossible, but seems less likely against the background of Herm. 2:6f. (This proposal is based on the presupposition that Makkibanit was not well-known to Tabi and that Banitsar was not familiar to Makkibanit's wife²⁵, Makkibanit being introduced as brother-in-law of Nabushe and Tabi as Nabushe's sister [Herm. 2:5f.]²⁶).

Another problem remains: why does letter 2 speak only of the redeeming of Banitsar, and letter 6 of the redeeming of two persons, one of whom is Banitsar? Moreover Makkibanit urges his wife to write Tabi about her part of the silver (i.e. her part of the debt), one shekel which she has to pay in wool, whereas the addresser of letter 6 asks Tabi to send as much wool as possible to Sewan²⁷? Perhaps the following remarks will help. The addresser of letter 6 makes no distinction between help intended especially for Banitsar and help for himself and he does not restrict his plea for help to a certain limited amount of wool. Makkibanit in letter 2 speaks only of help for one person and only of a certain circumscribed amount of wool. Moreover he speaks of Banitsar as the son of Tabi, mentioning him not by the name of his father but by the name of his mother, probably because the discharge of a part of the debt spoken of in letter 2 had to be paid by the mother. The fact that Makkibanit does

not mention Banitsar's father in letter 2 could mean that, as far as help on the part of Tabi was concerned, only help for Banitsar was self-evident. The fact that the addresser of letter 6 tries to get as much help as possible from Tabi without distinguishing between help to Banitsar and to himself, might mean that he could expect some help of her, eventually, even if this help was not self-evident. If this is true he was probably still her husband. The fact that a woman's assistance in discharging the debts of a son was (to a certain extent) self-evident, and that help on her part in discharging her husband's debts was not, can possibly be explained in this way that a wife was financially related to her son (the son being her heir) but not to her husband (since she was not his heir nor he hers)²⁸.

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- ¹ On this amount of silver, cf. the remarks of R. Yaron, *Minutiae Aramaicae* : JSS, 13 (1968), 202-11, on 202f.
 - ² Against E. Bresciani-M. Kamil, *Le lettere aramaiche di Hermopoli* (Atti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, ser. VIII, vol. XII, fasc. 5), Roma 1966, 385, 387, and P. Swiggers, *Notes on the Hermopolis Papyri I and II* : AION, 41 (1981), 144-46, on 146. The interpretation of *bydy* as "belonging to me" by H. Donner, *Bemerkungen zum Verständnis zweier aramäischer Briefe aus Hermopolis*, in H. Goedicke (ed.), *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, Baltimore-London 1971, 75-85 on p. 84 is not in agreement with the use in Aramaic papyri of *byd* expressing a certain type of possession. In the relevant instances *byd* must be interpreted as "in the possession of", "at the disposal of" (cf. Cowl. 8:18,22; 10:12,14,19,20; Herm. 6:6; NESE I 11:2).
 - ³ Cf. B. Porten-J.C. Greenfield, *The Aramaic Papyri from Hermopolis* : ZAW, 80 (1968), 216-31, on 219 n. 10; P. Grelot, *Documents araméens d'Égypte*, Paris 1972, 154 n. a; B. Porten-J.C. Greenfield, *Hermopolis Letter 6* : IOS, 4 (1974), 14-30, on 17 n. 6; TSSI II, 134; J.W. Wesselius, *The Restoration of Hermopolis Letter 6 and the Ransom of Prisoners*, in J.W.v. Henten a.o. (ed.), *Tradition and Re-interpretation in Jewish and Early Christian Literature. Essays in Honour of Jürgen C.H. Lebram* (-Studia Postbiblica, 36), Leiden 1986, 7-18 on 11. The proposal of J.T. Milik, *Les papyrus araméens d'Hermopolis et les cultes syro-phéniciens en Égypte perse* : Biblica, 48 (1967), 546-622 on 551 to interpret *nttn* as a form of the Peal Pf. 1p.s. is less convincing (cf. J.P. Hayes-J. Hoftijzer, *Notae Hermopolitanae* : VT, 20 [1970], 98-106 on 102; Donner, *Bemerkungen...*, 83f).
 - ⁴ For the last-mentioned interpretation, cf. Milik, *Les papyrus...*, 551, 582; Porten-Greenfield, *The Aramaic Papyri...*, 222; Hayes-Hoftijzer, *Notae...*, 102; E.Y. Kutscher, *The Hermopolis Papyri* : IOS, 1 (1971), 103-19 on 119; Grelot, *Documents...*, 154 n. a; TSSI II, 134; J. Hoftijzer, *De Hermopolis-papyri, Aramese brieven uit*

- Egypte, 5e eeuw v. Chr.*, in K.R. Veenhof (ed.), *Schrijvend Verleden, Documenten uit het oude Nabije Oosten vertaald en toegelicht*, Leiden-Zutphen 1983, 107-19 on 111, 112 n. k.
- 5 Cf. Donner, *Bemerkungen...*, 84.
 - 6 So Swiggers, *Notes...*, 146; Wesselius, *The Restoration...*, 11.
 - 7 So Wesselius, *The Restoration...*, 11. For the use of *l-objecti* in official Aramaic, cf. DISO 131 ll. 39ff. The translation of Swiggers, *Notes...*, 146, of *pdt* as "I paid" is less convincing.
 - 8 Cf. Swiggers, *Notes...*, 146; Hoftijzer, *De Hermopolis-papyri...*, 118 n. e; Wesselius, *The Restoration...*, 10f.
 - 9 So already Milik, *Les papyrus araméens...*, 548. Cf. also e.g. Grelot, *Documents...*, 165 n. e.
 - 10 Cf. Hoftijzer, *De Hermopolis-papyri...*, 118 n. h; Wesselius, *The Restoration...*, 9, 10. Cf. also the absolute use of the Qal of *yš'* in classical Hebrew indicating the going out of slavery: e.g. Ex. XXI 4,7; Lev. XXV 54. The interpretation of *wpd/rt* given above also excludes an interpretation that the money was given to Banitsar to help two other people (for this last-mentioned interpretation, cf. e.g. TSSI II, 140ff.) or an interpretation that the addresser and his son are people to whom Banitsar came (after he got the silver from Makkibanit) and who were brought by him to the scribe (*'pqny 'nh wbry*) and who, acting for Makkibanit, wrote for him a document concerning the affair (against Porten-Greenfield, *Hermopolis Letter...*, 25f.).
 - 11 Cf. Milik, *Les papyrus araméens...*, 548; Wesselius, *The Restoration...*, 8, 9f.
 - 12 Cf. Hoftijzer, *De Hermopolis-papyri...*, 118 n. i.
 - 13 Cf. Milik, *Les papyrus araméens...*, 548; Grelot, *Documents...*, 167; Porten-Greenfield, *Hermopolis Letter...*, 16; TSSI II, 141; Wesselius, *The Restoration...*, 9, 15. In itself it is possible to address the same woman as "mother" and "sister" (cf. letter 7 written by "your brother" to "my mother", in the formal address the letter is directed to "my sister"; on this point, cf. Hayes-Hoftijzer, *Notae...*, 104 [n. 2]).
 - 14 Cf. also letter 6:7f. where two people send their greetings to both Tabi and Taru.
 - 15 Cf. already Hoftijzer, *De Hermopolis-papyri...*, 119 n. t.
 - 16 Cf. Porten-Greenfield, *Hermopolis Letter...*, 18; Grelot, *Documents ...*, 165 n. b.
 - 17 It is probable that the people mentioned in this line, who ask after the welfare of Tabi and Taru are not identical with the addresser and that l. 7 has to be restored [... *nbšh wmk]bnt š'In šlmky*, cf. Grelot, *Documents ...*, 166 n. k, TSSI II, 141; Wesselius, *The Restoration...*, 14.

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- 18 For the Hermopolis letters being written in Memphis, cf. Herm. 2:3. If my interpretation is right the ²nḥn of Herm. 6:9 must refer to the addresser and Banitsar.
- 19 So e.g. Porten-Greenfield, *The Aramaic Papyri...*, 219 n. 10: restore *m[kbnt lbntsr] htḥ zy nbšh*, cf. also both authors *Hermopolis Letter...*, 16, 18f.; Grelot, *Documents ...*, 165 n. e; TSSI II, 141. It is improbable (see my argumentation above) that the name Banitsar has to be restored here, but the restoration of *l* + another name remains possible.
- 20 Cf. Milik, *Les papyrus araméens...*, 548; Wesselius, *The Restoration...*, 8, 10.
- 21 Cf. Wesselius, *The Restoration...*, 13.
- 22 Compare Porten-Greenfield, *Hermopolis Letter...*, 16, 20; Wesselius, *The Restoration...*, 9, 13.
- 23 Cf. Milik, *Les papyrus araméens...*, 548; Grelot, *Documents ...*, 166 n. j; Porten-Greenfield, *Hermopolis Letter...*, 16, 21; TSSI II, 141; Wesselius, *The Restoration...*, 9, 13.
- 24 Cf. Milik, *Les papyrus araméens...*, 548; Grelot, *Documents ...*, 166; Porten-Greenfield, *Hermopolis Letter...*, 16, 21; TSSI II, 141.
- 25 Wesselius, *The Restoration...*, 10.
- 26 Wesselius presupposes that Nabushe's family lived in Ofi (Luxor), *The Restoration...*, 10. However, Nabushe himself lived in Sewan, because a letter written by him from Memphis (Herm. 4) was addressed to Nnyḥm (probably his wife) who lived in Sewan (cf. l. 15).
- 27 Why Tabi's share in the debt is only 1 shekel is not clear.
- 28 For a woman not being the heir of her husband, compare the situation in Elephantine, cf. J. Hoftijzer-P.W. Pestman, *Hereditary Rights as Laid Down in the Marriage Contract Krael. 2* : BO, 19 (1962), 216-18 on 217f. (n. 11; the wife not being the heir of her husband). Cf. also B. Porten-H.Z. Szubin, *Litigants in the Elephantine Contracts: the Development of Legal Terminology* : *Maarav*, 4 (1987), 45-67, who rightly identify the heirs with blood relatives (cf. e.g. 47; cf. also the literature quoted in this article).