

Shield of Achilles, Armor of Pemou:
Greek influence in Late Egyptian Literature?

The *Inaros Petubastis Cycle* is a series of stories written in Demotic Egyptian conventionally dated to the Hellenistic Era. Set in the close of the tumultuous Third Intermediate Period, these tales detail the heroic exploits of the various semi-historical warrior-princes of that era. It is perhaps not surprising that many scholars, starting with the earliest publications (e.g. Spiegelberg 1910), have argued that the *Cycle* shows considerable signs of influence or even inspiration from Greek epic. Having been consensus for many years, this idea was rendered controversial by Hoffman's authoritative publications of two major *Inaros Petubastis* texts (Hoffman 1995, 1996). Since then, the presence or absence of influence has remained an open question.

I will demonstrate that the *Inaros Petubastis* texts show signs of Greek influence in their use of ecphrasis. *The Breastplate of Inaros*, one of the major surviving *Inaros Petubastis* texts, digresses from the action of the narrative at a crucial juncture, in order to describe in minute detail the armor of one warrior. It is difficult to look at this passage and not be reminded of Shield of Achilles in book 18 of the *Iliad*, a scene which was unquestionably widely known, and frequently imitated in antiquity. Indeed, *Inaros Petubastis* in general contains a surprising amount of descriptive scenes, with a level of detail unparalleled in Pharaonic literature, but hardly unusual among Greek authors.

This influence helps to place Demotic literature within the complex, cosmopolitan world of the Hellenistic Mediterranean.

Hoffman, *Ägypter und Amazonen: Neue Bearbeitung zweier demotischer Papyri, PVindob. D 6165 und P.Vindob. D 6165A*, 1995

Hoffman, *Der Kampf um den Panzer des Inaros, Studien zum P. Krall und seiner Stellung innerhalb des Inaros-Petubastis- Zyklus*, 1996

Spiegelbrg, *Der Sagenkreis des Königs Petubastis*, 1910