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Real Fights and Burlesque Parody: The Depiction of Violence in the Inaros Cycle

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Collective Violence and Memory in the Ancient Mediterranean

Edited by

Sonja Ammann, Helge Bezold, Stephen Germany
and Julia Rhyder

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Real Fights and Burlesque Parody: The Depiction of Violence in the Inaros Cycle

Damien Agut-Labordère

Abstract

The Cycle of Inaros is a collection of epic stories written in Demotic known from papyri dating to the late Hellenistic and Roman periods. These narratives depict the fights and adventures of a group of Egyptian princes and warriors who lived in the early first millennium BCE. For nearly a century these texts have been at the heart of a controversy between the proponents of a Homeric (or at least Hellenic) origin to those who see them as purely Egyptian works. The present essay analyzes these texts from a slightly different perspective—namely, it inquires into the narrative tone rather than the literary origins of some of these stories. Indeed, while some battle scenes appear to be truly epic, in the sense that they describe bloody battles, another seems comic. These different registers may reflect different types of memorialization of the historical events being depicted.

Keywords

Demotic – humor – epic literature – Petubastis – parody – narratology

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Il est probable, en effet, que les textes égyptiens recèlent encore bien des traits d'esprit ou des allusions dont la finesse nous échappe totalement, même quand leur sens littéral nous paraît intelligible.

BAUDOIN VAN DE WALLE

••

The question of humor in ancient and medieval literature is one of the most difficult to address: how can we be sure whether an author is being serious or humorous?¹ Laughter is so intimately bound up with culture and even with the personality of the author that the goal of identifying comic intentionality in texts produced not only within the context of a different civilization but also two thousand years ago seems illusory. The problem becomes far more complex when it concerns epic literature, which narrates the adventures of legendary figures. In two recently published studies, Isabel Ruffell and Katharina Wesselmann have investigated the comical aspects of the Homeric lists.² It is true that the precise enumeration of details can border on the ridiculous, as in Chaucer's lists of men, places, and authorities or the lists of synonyms in Rabelais. Demotic literature most probably attests to this phenomenon in the so-called Gardening Agreement, even if this text still awaits a commented edition that takes this aspect into account.³ This *comique de liste* is perhaps also present in the most important piece of Demotic epic literature: the Cycle of Inaros, in which the enumerations of warlords, landing places, and other items regularly interrupt the narrative.⁴ But this is not the point that I wish to examine in the following pages. The purpose of this short study is to highlight the parody of battle scenes at the heart of one of the most important pieces of the Cycle of Inaros: the Battle for the Prebend of Amun. By analyzing the literary function of this parody, this essay will highlight the complex use of humor and mockery in depictions of collective violence and military agency in Demotic literature of the first millennium BCE. It will also address the questions surrounding the comparative study of these materials, especially their relationship to Homeric literature and the violent narratives it preserves, while exploring their roles in memorializing violent events in Egyptian collective memory.

The Cycle of Inaros (hereafter called the Cycle) is a group of Demotic literary texts relating the adventures of Egyptian warriors (*rmt.w qnqn*). These warriors were the descendants or the companions of Inaros of Athribis, a historical figure involved in Egypt's resistance against the Assyrians who later became a key figure in Egyptian epic literature. The action of these so-called epic tales takes

1 The epigraph is from van de Walle, *L'Humour*, 21.

2 Ruffell, "Aesthetics" and Wesselmann, "Homeric Heroes."

3 Parker, "Late Demotic Gardening Agreement."

4 One of these lists, concerning tribunes (*b3k.t*) occupied by warlords, will be discussed briefly in the second part of this essay.

place against the backdrop of Egyptian history during the first half of the first millennium BCE.⁵

Three of these epic tales are particularly well preserved: The Battle for the Prebend of Amun (Prebend), The Battle for the Armor of Inaros (Armor), and Petekhons and the Amazons (Amazons). In 1910, Wilhelm Spiegelberg formulated the hypothesis that these narratives may have been influenced by Homeric literature.⁶ He noted that several of the duels punctuating the tales are similar to *monomachiae* that pit different warriors against each other in the *Iliad*. Later, Günther Roeder insisted that in the *Iliad* as in the “Armor” the possession of a weapon belonging to a dead hero was the object of the disputes.⁷ In 1996, Friedhelm Hoffmann summarized all of these discussions in the introduction to his new edition of the Armor.⁸ He concluded that most of the so-called Homeric features identified until then could just as well have come from earlier Egyptian literature—with the exception of the conflicts concerning weapons that had belonged to a great dead warrior. Hoffmann’s skepticism provoked a reaction by Heinz Joseph Thissen and, more recently, by Ian Rutherford who, rather than evoking the direct influences of Homeric texts on demotic epic literature, prefers to emphasize the presence of more broadly Greek or Aramaic literary traits within the Cycle.⁹ But these debates are far removed from the issues I will discuss here.¹⁰

The question of humor in Demotic literature is part of a broader framework that concerns the narratological analysis of texts, focusing not on the narrative itself but on the way the story is told. Narratological study of Egyptian literary texts was initiated by John Baines in an article published in 1998 devoted to the Story of Wenamun.¹¹ In the field of Demotic studies, Richard Jasnow paved the way in 2007.¹² He noted the originality of the passages in the Cycle devoted to descriptions of landscapes, buildings, and objects: “Still particularly in the Inaros Cycle, these are elaborate passages which little resemble anything

5 On the historicity of Inaros, see Quack, “Inaros.”

6 Spiegelberg, *Der Sagenkreis*, 10.

7 Roeder, *Altägyptische Erzählungen*, 337.

8 Hoffmann, *Der Kampf*, 49–105.

9 Thissen, “Homerischer Einfluss” and Rutherford, “The Earliest Cross-Cultural Reception.”

10 An excellent overview of the debate concerning Homeric influence on the Cycle can be found in Salim, “Cultural Identity,” 114–120. See also Quack, “Gibt es eine ägyptische Homer-Rezeption?,” who examines in great detail the circumstances in which Homer was received by Egyptian literati.

11 Baines, “On *Wenamun*.”

12 Jasnow, “Through Demotic Eyes.”

found in earlier material.”¹³ Before that, in 2001, Jasnow published another study on humor in Demotic literature, which remains an essential introduction to the question of humor in Egyptian literature of the first millennium BCE.¹⁴ Despite a somewhat disillusioned conclusion (“the subject of humor is inherently inviting, but quite treacherous”), this work provides a firm ground for future research.¹⁵ Indeed, it played a major role in the passages devoted to humor in Jacqueline Jay’s recent book *Orality and Literacy in the Demotic Tales* (2016). The author brings out comical repetition in the story of Amasis and the Sailor and erotic puns in Setne I but concludes that the Cycle seems to be devoid of any comical features.¹⁶ The hypothesis I will defend here is that humor also plays a role in these epic narratives. Moreover, it is embedded in the most dramatic scenes: those depicting battles. While some of these are clearly fights to the death, others are more akin to fist fights or brawls. At the end, there are two ways to stage the violence in the Cycle, an epic one and a burlesque one, two ways of recounting historical violence that could correspond to two models of memorialization. After a general overview of the main texts of the Cycle, I will consider the two types of battle scenes, epic and comic.

1 The Inaros Cycle: An Overview

In this section, I will briefly describe the three main stories of the Cycle. The Prebend is known to us thanks to the so-called Papyrus Spiegelberg from the first century BCE, which comes from Akhmim, in Middle Egypt.¹⁷ The first several columns of this text are damaged to the extent that we do not know the

13 Jasnow, “Through Demotic Eyes,” 442. I have recently discussed the literary techniques used in the Cycle’s detailed descriptions of royal or princely fleets in Agut-Labordère, “Flottes royales.” I failed to mention there Jasnow’s analysis of the “description of the sacred bark of Amun” (pSpiegelberg 1.1–2.2) (440–441). Yet it is questionable to what extent the description of Amun’s sacred bark constitutes a description in a strict sense; the nautical terms are, in fact, scattered among theological and mythological references. This passage seems to be primarily an exegesis of the theological meaning of the boat; following Traunecker, “Le Pap. Spiegelberg,” Jasnow compares this description to that of the boat of Horus in CT 398. The intentionality thus seems very different from that observed in my aforementioned article.

14 Jasnow, “And Pharaoh Laughed,” 62–69.

15 Jasnow, “And Pharaoh Laughed,” 62.

16 For “Amasis and the Sailor,” see Jay, *Orality and Literacy*, 98. For Setne I, see Jay, *Orality and Literacy*, 103–104 and Rutherford, “Earliest Cross-Cultural Reception,” 248 n. 14.

17 Spiegelberg, *Der Sagenkreis*.

precise length of the scroll.¹⁸ The beginning of the story must therefore be reconstructed on the basis of fragments preserved in Paris and Philadelphia.¹⁹ It begins in Tanis, the capital of the Pharaoh Petubastis. At the instigation of one of his advisers, captain Jeho, Petubastis decides to organize a grand tour in the south of the country under the pretext of celebrating the feasts of the local gods. In reality, Petubastis wants to reinforce royal control over these remote provinces. The main goal of the expedition is the holy city of Thebes, where the royal visit coincides with the great annual festival during which the god Amun leaves his shrine at Karnak to cross the Nile and visit the temples on the left bank. Petubastis wishes to take the opportunity to impose his son, Prince Chahor, at the head of the Theban clergy by recovering for him the prebend of the high priest of Amun. Yet he does not anticipate encountering a mysterious “young priest” accompanied by his thirteen herdsmen of Pi-Djuf (*p3 13 3m n Pr-dwf*), ready to do anything to dispute the precious prebend with the king and his men.

The Armor is known from Papyrus Krall from the Fayum, dated to the first half of the second century CE.²⁰ This long text has some twenty-six columns. The story begins in the aftermath of a successful defense against an Assyrian invasion. Egypt has regained peace under the debonair rule of Pharaoh Petubastis. Yet a sacrilege committed in one temple, presumably related to the theft of the sacred armor of the late King Inaros, leads the god Osiris to summon the council of gods to inflict punishment on the entire country. The gods then send two demons to sow discord between the Egyptian princes, who will come to blows over the possession of the armor of Inaros.

The story of the Amazons is the most poorly preserved of the three texts. It is taken from two papyri, probably dating to the second century CE, coming from Dime (Soknopaiu Nesos) in the northern Fayum. The son of Prince Pekrur, the valiant Count Petekhons, undertook the conquest of Asia at the head of an Assyrian army. He invaded the mythical “country of the women” located in the east, in the direction of India.²¹

All these epic stories are rooted in specific episodes of Egyptian history of the first millennium BCE. “Armor” takes place a few years after the Assyrian invasion of 671 BCE and before the advent of the Saite dynasty in 664 BCE. The presence of the Assyrian army in the account of Amazons places its narrative setting before 614 BCE. The date of the historical events to which the

18 Hoffmann, “Die Länge.”

19 Agut-Labordère, “Des fragments.”

20 Hoffmann, *Der Kampf*.

21 Hoffmann, *Ägypter und Amazonen* and Collombert, “Padikhonsou.”

Prebend relates is more delicate, but it is likely to derive from the expedition led by Osorkon B in Thebaid during the ninth century BCE. This last episode is known from a long inscription designated as the Chronicle of Prince Osorkon carved inside the Bubastide portico of the Karnak temple. This text was written under the authority of Osorkon (known as Osorkon B), the eldest son of King Takelot II of Tanis (850–25 BCE). It tells how this prince imposed himself as head of the clergy of Amun of Thebes against the advice of some of the local elite. Like Takelot II, King Petubastis reigned from Tanis and, like Prince Osorkon B, the royal son Chahor of the Prebend wishes to become the high priest of Amun.²²

To sum up, the Hellenistic and Roman Inaros Cycle memorializes political and military events from the ninth and seventh centuries BCE. It is impossible to know precisely when the different stories that make up the Cycle were imagined and set down in writing, but it is certain that the Cycle bears witness to how Egyptians living during the Hellenistic and Roman periods perceived the history of the first part of the first millennium BCE.

Even if all the tales of the Cycle are rooted in historical reality, we still have to distinguish between the truly epic fights characterized by bloody battles in the Armor and the Amazons, on the one hand, and the conflicts in the Prebend on the other, in which the fights are more akin to wrestling than to the archetypal duel between Achilles and Hector.²³

2 Epic Battles in the Armor and the Amazons

In general, the ethics of combat—that is, the warrior's moral code—reflected in the Armor is of an aristocratic nature. This means that the fighters renounce trickery and, even more importantly, employ the skills provided by military training. The winner owes his victory solely to his physical strength, as expressed by Pami, son of Inaros, addressing General Urtiameno: “Did you act by using your physical strength (*p3y=k in-nht.t n nmty*) or by [...] your excellence (*p3y=k t^lqn¹*) in military art?” (Armor 7.8–9).²⁴ As in Greek epic and medieval chivalry literature, the warrior ethos is accompanied by an aestheticization of weaponry. The proponents of the hypothesis of a Homeric influence on the

22 Agut-Labordère, “Flottes royales”, 18–19.

23 “In general, scenes of battle and combat are far more extended in *Armor* than in *Amazons* and *Prebend* and, in this respect, *Armor* provides the best parallel to the *Iliad*” (Jay, *Orality and Literacy*, 175).

24 The reading *tkn* is proposed by Chauveau, “Review of *Der Kampf*,” 615.

Cycle have compared this passage to the “dressing and arming scene” identified among the Homeric type scenes. Also perfectly Homeric are the man-to-man duels (*monomachiae*) that punctuate the Cycle. In the Armor, the same General Urtiameno says to Pami: “then the war will become as a one to one (fight) (*w'wb3 w'*), again, for the armor” (Armor 9.12–13). The fights of the Cycles are ritualized, like medieval tournaments. A passage in the Armor describes the “architectural” preparations that precede a battle:²⁵

A high tribune (*b3k.t*) was erected f(or) Pharaoh Petubastis. Another was erected for the Chief-of-the-East Pekrur, in front of it (*wb3f*). One was erected for Jeho, son of Chahor. Another was erected for Petekhons, in front of it (*wb3f*). One was erected for Welheni, the general of Meidum. Another was erected for the Royal son Chahor, the son of Pharaoh Petubastis, in front of it (*wb3f*). (Armor 18.9–12)

The list goes on for a few more lines, describing three more pairs of tribunes.²⁶ This passage is followed by a new list of Egyptian military leaders who are arranged by Petubastis on the battlefield like pieces on a chessboard.

Pharaoh then said: ‘Chief-of-the-East Pekrur! I see that there is no one (except me) who is able to place the two shields by pairs (*'wy.w*), province against province (*tš wb3 tš*), city against city (*tmy wb3 tmy*)’ (Armor 18.20–21).

‘General Urtiameno, you are the adversary (*iry ddy*) of General Pami, the young son of Inaros, bear (the shock of) his twenty-seven warriors (who are) with him and who were part of the Forty Heroes, the divine sons of the noble Inaros. Those of the province of Heliopolis! Dispose against the army of the province of Mendes, (that) which is so numerous. Whoa! The most valiant Petekhons, you are the adversary of the Royal son Chahor, the son of the pharaoh Petubastis’ (Armor 18.30–32; 19.1–3)

Afterwards, it is indeed a fight to the death that is described. The arrival of Montubaal, a new protagonist, in the melee is accompanied by massive carnage:

25 On the placement of the warriors face-to-face on the battlefield, see Jay, *Orality and Literacy*, 171–172.

26 The list of tribunes should be seen in parallel with the list of moorings; see pSpiegelberg 17.24–18.3.

He (= Montubaal) slipped into his armour with his war equipment (*stbh qnqn*) and leapt into the midst of the army of the province of Sebennytos and (also against) those of Mendes, those of Djure, those of Natho, and (all) the camp of Ourtiamenno. He accomplishes great carnage and devastation among them (*dl'f' h'3 wty iwtw*) like Sekhmet in her hour of rage when she spreads fire in the brushwood. The (enemy) army scattered (*dl'*) before them, while one made a carnage of their eyes and a slaughter of their hearts (*iwtw ir h'3 <n> i[r].tsw š'y n h'3.tsw*), they did not tire of sowing devastation (*wty*) among them (Armor 18.30–32; 19.1–3).

The same bloody violence is attested in the story of Petekhons and the Amazons. When the Assyrian army led by the hero is destroyed by Sarpote, queen of the Amazons:

[Sarpote rushed] into the army of the [Assyrians who formed] a multitude and slaughtered [many of them]. Those who stood in the way made their place of battle a place of death] in an instant. Those who aspired [to fight, she made them fall in the same way. It is] a massacre and a butchery [terrible that she] inflicted [on them soon. The killing of a bird of prey falling] among fowls, that is what [Sarpote did] against the Assyrians. The immolation] of the serpent Apophis, that is what Sarpote did [against the army of Petekhons ...] (Amazons 3.8–12).

It seems that the intra-Egyptian struggles that followed the Assyrian invasion were fixed in Egyptian memory in the form of aristocratic jousting organized by a royal power incapable of restraining them. Yet these are not simulated battles; some of the combatants are killed on the field.²⁷

3 A Comic Battle in the “Prebend”

The Prebend shows a very different type of fight in which the protagonists engage without the clear intention of shedding the blood of their opponents, as in the so-called mock battles described by classical British anthropology.²⁸

27 This type of arranged fight recalls the “Combat of the Thirty” in Brittany in March 1351 between two lords, Jean Beaumanoir and Jean de Montfort, each of whom had the right to be accompanied by thirty armed partisans; see Luce, *Chroniques*, 338–340.

28 Fournier, “Introduction,” 456, who refers to the works of McLennan, *Primitive Marriage* and Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer*.

When Prince Chahor, son of Petubastis, realizes that the young priest challenges his right to claim the prebend of Amun, he defies his opponent in single combat. All this begins as an ordinary epic battle scene, with the arming of the warriors:²⁹

Prince Chahor then retired to the chapel, dropped the royal linen garment on his back and adorned himself with gold ornaments, brought his warrior outfit, and donned the insignia of command (*n3 s3 [n p3] 'š-sħn*) and he returned to the dromos of Amun [while] the young priest [had retired] to the chapel itself. There was a young servant who was hiding among the crowd, clutching a beautifully decorated new breastplate. The young priest beckoned to him and he received (immediately) the breastplate in his hands. He put it on and returned to the dromos of Amun (Prebend 3.21–4.5).

At the first moment of the fight, Chahor's son exhorts the crowd to help his father. But the intervention of the "thirteen strong herdsmen" accompanying the young priest breaks the ardor of Chahor's friends. This scene has a comic undertone:

Then Jeho, son of Chahor, opened his mouth and uttered a deep battle cry (*3rl hrš rmt-qnqn*) to the army, saying: "Can you stand (there) near Amun while a herdsman fights Pharaoh's son, without you having let him feel your weapons?" Then the Egyptian crowds were agitated on all sides: those from Tanis, Mendes, Natho, Sebennytos, the soldiers from the four rough(er) provinces of Egypt (*p3 4 tš hrš n Kmy*), they came and marched to the ba<ttle>field to defend Royal Prince Chahor. The thirteen herdsmen of Pi-Djuf marched in the middle of the army, clad in their armor with their bull-faced helmet on their heads, their shields flanking their arms, and their hands laden with their scimitars. They came to the right and left of the young priest as their voices rang out: "We swear here before god Amun, the great god, who manifests himself here on this day: No one in the world among you will let the prophet of Horempi of Bouto (another designation for the young priest) hear a word without the ground drinking his blood (and) the aura of his '...¹ courage (*p3hy n t3yʃf nmt3.t '...¹!*)" The terror of the thirteen herdsmen (was in) the heart of Pharaoh and the

29 On this kind of type scene, see Jay, *Orality and Literacy*, 166–169.

army; no one in the world could open his mouth to say a word (*bn-pw rh rmt n p3 t3 wpy hrwf r md.t*) (Prebend 4.8–22).

It should be noted that, far from standing up valiantly against his son's adversaries, Pharaoh Petubastis is paralyzed by the same terror that gripped his troops. The fear that so easily penetrates his heart before the battle has even begun highlights the comic dimension of the king's character. The attitude of Petubastis, and of his army, recalls the description of Saul and his troops when the giant Goliath launched his terrible challenge: "When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and terror-stricken" (1Sam 17:11, NJPS). The cowardice of Petubastis leads him to refrain from fighting and instead to rely on the advice of Amun. One can imagine his relief when the oracle advises the king to equip the sacred bark with a stretcher and a sail of royal linen and, moreover, to wait "until that the business between us (Petubastis and his men) and the herdsmen comes to an end" (*š'-tw n3 md.t wsf iwṭ-n irm n3'3m*, Prebend 6.7–8). The use of the verb *wsf* is very interesting in this context because it expresses the passivity of the king who, faced with the violent challenge of the herdsmen, chooses to let the matter "rot" by itself.³⁰

Unsurprisingly, a little further on in the story, Petubastis is also mocked by his subjects. Prince Petekhons thus responds to the king's call for help with derision, using derogatory language to refer to Petubastis: "the Tanitic birdcatcher of the *hlt*-bird (*p3 hm hlt rmt n T'ne*), the Butic sailor *gp* 'of' *wrs* (*p3 hyṭ gp 'n' wrs 'n' rmt ṭp3*), this Petubastis son of Chahor to whom I did not say 'Pharaoh!'" (Prebend 13.14–15).³¹ Prince Petekhons outright denies that Petubastis is a king. It is even more pathetic and, indeed, comical (at least for the contemporary reader) that Petubastis was aware of the weakness of his authority. In fact, he anticipates the disobedience of the "young men" of the north whom he calls to the rescue. Addressing Pekrur, he says:

By Amun! If I invite them [to come to the South], they will not go because of the affront I made to them when I went (myself) to Thebes, without having invited them to the feast of the Great God Amun, my father. Pekrur,

30 Erichsen, *Demotische Glossar*, 100 notes the meaning of *wsf* as "to be lazy" ("faul sein").

31 This passage is commented upon in detail by Salim, "Cultural Identity," 79–80. The term *hlt* should probably be compared to Coptic ελατ, "flying creature, bird"; see Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 671b. The suggestion made by Jasnow, "And Pharaoh Laughed", 71 n. 59 to relate *hlt* with *štl* "ichneumon" should probably be discarded for the reasons given by Quack, "As He Disregarded," 33 n. 43 and Quack and Hoffmann, *Anthologie*, 379 n. *bt*. On the Butic sailor, I follow the suggestion made by Quack, "As He Disregarded," 33 n. 44.

Chief-of-the-East! It is for you to invite them. If anyone (else) invites them, they will not respond (Prebend 11.10–14).

The ridicule of the royal family in the story of the Prebend reaches its peak when one reads the account of the duel between Prince Chahor and the young priest:

The young priest then pounced on (*fy ... r-hn-hr*) the Royal Prince Chahor, like a lion on a ...³² in the desert (*m-qdy p3 nty iw w' m3y ir-f r-db3 ... n tw*), like a nurse with her fidgety child (*m-qdy p3 nty iw w'.t mnh-iry.t [ir-f r-db3] p3y-s hm-hl swg*). He grabs the inner part of his armor (*t3y-f p3 hn n n3y-f lbše(.w)*). He made him go to the ground (*dif iw r p3 itne*). He tied it to [...] (*sh-f s [...]*). He threw it on the road before him (*hw-y-f s r p3 myt h3.t-f*).³³ The thirteen herdsmen rushed down the path after him, and no one could hurt them, so great was the terror they inspired. Their attention turned to the boat of Amun. They boarded it, leaving their weapons on the ground. They sent Royal Prince Chahor to the bottom of the Amun's boat, tied with Cádiz rope, and dropped the hatch³⁴ on him (*iw-f sh w' msh-t n Gtetn di<w> iw p3 tms r-hr-f*). They sent the sailors and rowers back to the dock. They placed their shields beside them and washed for the feast. They brought the bread, meat, and wine that was on board. They drank and enjoyed themselves (*swr-w ir-w hrw nfr*) as they watched over the docks toward the epiphany of the great god Amen, while offerings were presented and incense burned before him (Prebend 4.24; 5.1–16).

What I perceive as comic in this passage is based on at least three elements. The first is the content of the two metaphors describing the action of the young priest against the unfortunate Prince Chahor. If the content of the first metaphor escapes us in part, the second one is clear and rather humiliating for Petubastis's son, who is compared to a turbulent child seized by his nurse. The prince is lifted up in the air by the young priest, like in a wrestling match, then

32 This animal remains unidentified. See the suggestions made by Spiegelberg, *Der Sagenkreis*, 19 (wild donkey [?]); Agut and Chauveau, *Héros, magiciens et sages*, 77 (jerboa, desert rat) and Quack and Hoffmann, *Anthologie*, 109 (small cattle [?]).

33 The structure of this passage, organized around a series of short verbal sentences, is discussed by Jay, *Orality and Literacy*, 86–87.

34 The translation “hatch” is rather conjectural. In Demotic, *tms* usually designates a “tomb”; see Erichsen, *Demotisches Glossar*, 633. In the Prebend, *tms* is determined by the sign for wood and must, in the naval context, designate by analogy a “boat hold.” This term seems to refer to the hold as a whole, not to the “hatch” specifically.

the loser is tied up and thrown to the bottom of the sacred bark of Amun. The young priest doesn't even bother to draw his sword and instead just grabs his opponent. Impeded and powerless, the prince is thrown without further ado into the hold of Amun's boat. The humiliation is complete when the winners, without worrying any further about the unfortunate loser, meet to enjoy a banquet on the deck of the boat. The comic dimension of this fight, which could be better qualified as a brawl, comes from the total imbalance between the protagonists. This deep disequilibrium between the fighters is not attested in the Amazons or in the Armor; Sarpote and Pekrur fight against opponents who are in a position to defeat them. Compared to these figures, the fight between the young priest and Chahor appears as a farce.³⁵

4 Conclusion: Two Types of Memorialization?

In the end, it appears that the Cycle juxtaposes very different, even opposing, literary genres. If stories, or parts of stories, are really epic in the sense that they concern glory in battle and powerful princes of the past, the Cycle also contains at least one comic passage in which some heroes of the past are ridiculed. By comparing the pathetic struggle engaged in by Prince Chahor against the thirteen herdsmen with the bloody melees attested in the Armor, it is possible to characterize the comic process at work here as a parody, a burlesque imitation of one of the most important type scenes of the Cycle.³⁶ Nevertheless, one question remains: is the comic dimension related to the whole story narrated in the Prebend, or exclusively to the figure of Petubastis, who could be considered as a comic character?³⁷ I must confess that it is still impossible for me to answer this question in a satisfactory manner, although I wonder whether the latter of the two possibilities is perhaps preferable. Pursuing this question further, however, would require a larger study than this one.

It is at this point of reflection that the notion of memorialization allows us to go a little further. Indeed, one will observe that the two stories linked to the memorialization of the Assyrian invasions, the Armor and the Amazons,

35 This last scene is indeed a parody of Egyptian epic literature by an author who knows its codes but subverts them for the reader's pleasure. This type of parody exists in European literature, as in the figure of Frère Jean des Entonneurs in Rabelais.

36 On parody in Middle Egyptian literature, see Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture*, 36–37. Concerning New Kingdom Literature, the "Taking of Joppa" is sometimes treated as a parody of royal inscriptions; see Jay, *Orality and Literacy*, 43. On the role of humor in this tale, see also Manassa, *Imagining*, 84.

37 On King Petubastis as a literary figure, see Salim, "Cultural Identity," 79–81.

contain real epic battles, while the one linked to a conflict between Egyptian princes is of a parodic nature. Although the small sample size of only three stories does not allow for certainty on this question, I would suggest that this difference is the result of two processes of memorialization. While the internal conflicts between Egyptian kinglets left a memory of a period marked by ridicule, the memory of the Egyptian heroes who fought against the Assyrians remained full of glory. To conclude, we could distinguish between two types of memorialization processes of the violence at work in the Cycle: an epic form of memorialization, which places death and carnage at the end of the battle, and a comic form of memorialization, where confrontations between more or less historical figures turn into a farce.

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This book reveals how violent pasts were constructed by ancient Mediterranean societies, the ideologies they served, and the socio-political processes and institutions they facilitated. Combining case studies from Anatolia, Egypt, Greece, Israel/ Judah, and Rome, it moves beyond essentialist dichotomies such as “victors” and “vanquished” to offer a new paradigm for studying representations of past violence across diverse media, from funerary texts to literary works, chronicles, monumental reliefs, and other material artefacts such as ruins. It thus paves the way for a new comparative approach to the study of collective violence in the ancient world.

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