

STEFANIE WEST

ASTROLOGOUMENA

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Zola Packman's republication of P.Wash.Univ. 181 ('Instructions for the use of planet markers on a horoscope board', ZPE 74 (1988), 85-95) prompts a fresh look at another text dealing with what may loosely be called astronomical equipment, P.Oxy. 470 (Pack 2044; III A.D.)¹ This gives a tantalizingly scrappy account of the use of a πεσσευτήριον, followed by detailed (if often inaccurate) instructions for making a water-clock; this note concerns the former.

col.I

· · · · ·
 φωτὸς [·
 μεταθο[·
 σων ἀπὸ τ[ῶν . . .] χωρ[ῶν
 ὧν ζ μὲν εἰσιν μέλανε[ς
 5 ξδ λευκοὶ καὶ πάντες κυ-
 νὸς προσηγορίαν ἔχουσιν,
 οὕτως, ιε ις ιζ ιη ιθ κ κα
 κβ κγ κδ κε κς κζ κη
 κθ λ, γείνονται τξ, ις
 10 τὴν λεγομένην ἐν τῷ
 πεσσευτηρίῳ Φορώρ,
 ἔστιν Ὀρρου οἶκος, ἰς συμ-
 πλήρωσιν λ χωρῶν
 [ι]ς τὸν ἀριθμὸν τῶν ἡ-
 15 μερῶν τῆς συνόδου.
 [ι]ς ταύτην δὲ τὴν χώραν
 οὐ μεταφέρουσιν ψῆφον
 ἐπειδὴ καὶ ἐν τῇ συνοδικῇ
 ἡμέρᾳ ἀφώτιστός ἐσ-
 20 τιν ἡ σελήνη. ἀφ' ὧν ἀρι-
 θμῶν ἐὰν ἀφελῶμαι

col.II

· · · · ·
 [· ιι letters]ριθ[· . . κα-
 θάπερ. γάρ σοι ου . [· . .
 βίβλος λέγει ε . . . [· πε-
 25 ρὶ τῆς Φερνούφως [· . . .
 διόπερ καὶ τὴν εν[· . .
 τῇ Φερνούφι θεὰν [· . .
 μεγίστην λέγουσ[ιν ἀ-
 πὸ τῆς μεγάλης περ[· .
 30 ας τὴν προσηγορίαν ἔχ[ον-
 τες.

¹ Ed.pr. B.P.Grenfell and A.S.Hunt, The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, III (1903). Republished by M.Pieper, Zeitschr.f. ägyptische Sprache 66 (1931), 29-33, with some slight improvements by Grenfell; the only one of importance is ι]ς at the beginning of l.16, omitted in the ed.pr. For a photograph see L.Borchardt, Die altägyptische Zeitmessung (Die Geschichte der Zeitmessung u. der Uhren 1, Berlin-Leipzig, 1920), Tafel 7.

The ed.pr. quotes a passage of Eustathius which throws invaluable light on the πεσσευτήριον (on Od. 1.107):

καὶ ὅτι Πλάτων τὴν τῶν πεσσῶν εὕρεσιν Αἰγυπτίοις ἀνατίθησιν ἐν Φαίδρῳ λέγων αὐτοὺς πρῶτον ἀριθμὸν εὕρειν καὶ γεωμετρίαν καὶ ἀστρονομίαν ἔτι δὲ πεττεῖαν τε καὶ κυβείαν καὶ δὴ γράμματα· καὶ ὅτι οἱ τοῦ Πλάτωνος ὑπομνηματισμοὶ οὐ τὴν παρ' Ἑλληνισι πεττεῖαν σημανθῆναί φασι ὑπὸ Πλάτωνος ἀλλὰ τὴν τοῦ λεγομένου πεττευτηρίου. καταγράφεσθαι γάρ τι πλιυθίου ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ πεττευτικῇ παιδιᾷ δι' οὗ τὰ κινήματα τοῦ ἡλίου καὶ τῆς σελήνης ἔτι δὲ καὶ τὰ ἑλλειπτικὰ πραγματεύονται οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι.

The fragment's Egyptian antecedents are clear enough from ll.10-11 (Φορῶρ (ἔστιν Ὀρου οἶκος). The editors suggested that the equally Egyptian-looking Φερνοῦφιδ (ll.25,27) was 'another division of the πεσσευτήριον'; but since 1915 we have known that it was a lower Egyptian town, giving its name to the Phernuphite nome.²

The reader hitherto unfamiliar with this text may be surprised that it is described in Pack's catalogue as 'Rules for a board-game'. What remains lacks any suggestion of competition; there is no mention of alternative moves, nor does the text conclude, as our experience of such instructions would lead us to expect, by explaining how to determine the winner. Pack's designation is due to Max Pieper,³ who interpreted this fragment in terms of the Egyptian game played on a board of 3 x 10 cells (the most popular type of Egyptian gaming-board), which developed an esoteric significance as a representation of the soul's Journey through the land of the dead;⁴ in P.Oxy. 470, he argued, we see instead the imposition of an astral meaning.

Pieper seems not to have realised that Phernuphis was a real place,⁵ and his whole interpretation is forced. Our πεσσευτήριον had at least 30 cells (1.13), but it is quite arbitrary to assume that it had no more, or that it was rectangular; it might, like Nectanebo's de luxe equipment,⁶ have been circular, a format certainly better suited in general to representing the workings of the heavens. Nor are we bound to explain πάντες κυνὸς προσηγορίαν ἔχουσιν (ll. 5-6) by reference to the use, both Greek and Egyptian, of 'dog' to mean a piece in a board-game.⁷

² From P.Ryl. 216 (274) and 217 (57,59); see further A.Calderini, Dizionario dei nomi geografici e topografici dell' Egitto greco-romano 5 (Milan, 1987), s.v.

³ loc. cit. (n. 1).

⁴ See Lexikon der Ägyptologie I (Wiesbaden 1975), s.v. Brettspiel; H.J.R.Murray, A History of Board-games other than chess (Oxford, 1952), 17-8, R.C.Bell, Board and Table Games from many Civilizations I² (Oxford 1969), 26-9.

⁵ op.cit. (n. 1) 30 'Das Phernuphis Feld ist das sogenannte "pr nfr", das ist nach der gewöhnlichen Zahlung das 26. Feld.'

⁶ Ps.-Callisthenes, Hist.Alex.Magni 1.4.5 (quoted by Packman, op.cit. 86).

⁷ Pieper's discussion rather suggests that he did not realise that this was Greek usage (see Cratin., F 61 K.-A., with Pollux quoted ad loc.), as well as Egyptian, both ancient and modern (for the latter cf. E.W.Lane, The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians (1836), ch. 17, Bell, op.cit. (n.4) II (London, 1969), 49).

The concluding emphasis on Phernuphis rather suggests that this text had a local significance, and it may be worth considering the possibility that it is comparable to the Calendar for the Saite nome of P.Hibeh 27 (Pack 2011; III B.C.). The latter's introduction reminds us that (41-46) χρῶνται ταῖς κατὰ σελήνην ἡμέραις οἱ ἀστρολόγοι καὶ οἱ ἱερογραμματεῖς πρὸς τὰς δύοσεις καὶ ἀνατολὰς τῶν ἄστρον and refers to the use of an instrument which must be a water-clock (26-8), ὄλμου τοῦ λιθίνου [ὃς ἐκ]αλεῖτο Ἑλληνιστὶ [γν]ώμων.⁸ I suspect that our text dealt with the application to its area of the principles contained in the book mentioned in l.24, which the editors connected with the 'four books of Hermes on astronomical matters' mentioned by Clement of Alexandria in his famous description of Egyptian priests in procession (Strom. 6.4); Plutarch (de Iside 61) cites 'the so-called books of Hermes' in a way that suggests a translation had been made.

On this hypothesis I suggest that κυνός of 5/6 is the dog-star, Sirius/Sothis, whose heliacal rising marked the beginning of the Egyptian lunar year; κυνὸς προσηγορίαν ἔχουσιν seems more likely to mean 'are called "the dog's" ' (as we speak of dog-days), not 'are called "dogs" '. The text presumably concludes at this point because it has reached the year's end.

Isis, according to the famous invocation of P.Oxy. 1380 (ll. 57-8), was worshipped at Phernuphis as ἄνασσα πόλεων; she must surely be regarded as a strong candidate for identification as the goddess of l.28.⁹ It may be relevant that, as Plutarch tells us (de Iside 12), her birthday was celebrated on the fourth epagomenal day.

I subjoin two suggestions on the Washington papyrus. l.1 φωνή as subject of ἔρχεται is disconcerting. Despite the attractions of attaching ὀμιλοῦσα to it, I wonder whether a dative was intended. Could the first sentence be part of a comparison ('as if *viva voce*')?

l.3 ἀστέρες οἱ κατὰ φύσιν: 'the sense of the qualifying phrase escapes me' ed. Should we emend ἀστέρες οἱ to ἀστερίσκοι 'little stars of the same nature (as the real ones which they represent)'? (The expensive equipment here prescribed suggests that many practitioners could have excused embarrassing discrepancies between their forecasts and actual events by reference to their inferior apparatus and the difficulty of achieving greater accuracy without heavy capital investment.)

⁸ See further CQ 23 (1973), 61-4.

⁹ Conceivably it is relevant that Isis there seems to be credited with services to the calendar, (ll. 154-5) ... κατὰ ἀρετὴν τῶν συνεστηκυῶν ἡμερῶν τξε.