

UNIT 9 TASK BOOKLET

– The Blemmyes and the Eastern Desert in Late Antiquity



A representation of one of the Blemmyes (βλέμμενες) from the *Nuremberg Chronicle* (1493)

For this online task you will examine some of the written source material (epigraphic and literary) relating to the Blemmyes, a people who can be associated with the southern Eastern Desert region (eastern Sudan), but who at certain points were able to extend their power and influence to the eastern Nile region below the first cataract and sometimes further north into the Thebaid. How these people relate to the “barbaroi” of the ostraka from the *praesidia* running from Koptos, or indeed to the Trogodytes (a term more common in Hellenistic and early Imperial literature) is debated. It is very likely they are strongly interrelated, if not one and the same. A selection of translations of inscriptions and literary texts is given on the following pages. You should examine these and then consider the questions set out below [some suggested modern scholarship can be found on Moodle (Unit 9) if you need further aid in contextualising this material]. Having collated your thoughts into a brief summary (a few paragraphs), please consider posting them to the Unit 9 discussion forum.

Questions to consider:

- 1) How should we think of this group? Is the label Blemmyes an overly generalised one imposed by outsiders on a disparate, but loosely related series of peoples? Or can we identify a confederation of interrelated kinship/tribal groups? [Your answer may vary depending upon the period being looked at]
- 2) What relationships did the Blemmyes seem to have with the Roman state at different periods?
- 3) What relationships do the Blemmyes appear to have with their neighbours?

Written excerpts relating to the Roman military, Blemmyes and other inhabitants of the Eastern Desert Region

Literary sources on the Blemmyes

Pliny *Natural History* 5.8.46 – Trans. from Bostock and Riley (1855).

‘The Blemmyes are said to have no heads, their mouths and eyes being seated in their breasts.’

***Historia Augusta The Life of Probus* 17.2-6** – Trans. from D. Magie (1932).

‘He [the emperor Probus, r. 276-282 CE] also subdued the Blemmyes, and the captives taken from them he sent back to Rome and thereby created a wondrous impression upon the amazed Roman people. Besides this, he rescued from servitude to the barbarians the cities of Koptos and Ptolemais and restored them to Roman laws. By this he achieved such fame that the Parthians [erroneous, by this point we are dealing with Sassanians] sent envoys to him, confessing their fear and suing for peace, but these he received them with much arrogance and then sent back to their homes in greater fear than before.’

Zosimus *New History* 1.71.1 = *FHN* 323 – Trans. from the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum* vol. 3.

‘When Ptolemais in the Thebaid revolted against the Emperor and under took a war against the people of Coptos for a short time, Probus overcame both it [Ptolemais] and the Blemmyes who were its allies, using those who were in command at that time.’

Procopius *Wars* 1.19.26–37 – Trans. from H. W. Dewing (1914).

‘From the city of Auxomis to the Aegyptian boundaries of the Roman domain, where the city called Elephantine is situated, is a journey of thirty days for an unencumbered traveller. Within that space many nations are settled, and among them the Blemmyes and the Nobatae, who are very large nations. But the Blemmyes dwell in the central portion of the country, while the Nobatae possess the territory about the River Nile. Formerly this was not the limit of the Roman Empire, but it lay beyond there as far as one would advance in a seven days' journey; but the Roman Emperor Diocletian [r. 284-305 CE] came there, and observed that the tribute from these places was of the smallest possible account, since the land is at that point extremely narrow (for rocks rise to an exceedingly great height at no great distance from the Nile and spread over the rest of the country), while a very large body of soldiers had been stationed there from of old, the maintenance of which was an excessive burden upon the public; and at the same time the Nobatae who formerly dwelt about the city of Oasis used to plunder the whole region; so he persuaded these barbarians to move from their own habitations, and to settle along the River Nile, promising to bestow upon them great cities and land both extensive and incomparably better than that which they had previously occupied. For in this way he thought that 'they would no longer harass the country about Oasis at least, and that they would possess

themselves of the land given them, as being their own, and would probably beat off the Blemmyes and the other barbarians. And since this pleased the Nobatae, they made the migration immediately, just as Diocletian directed them, and took possession of all the Roman cities and the land on both sides of the river beyond the city of Elephantine. Then it was that this emperor decreed that to them and to the Blemmyes a fixed sum of gold should be given every year with the stipulation that they should no longer plunder the land of the Romans. And they receive this gold even up to my time, but none the less they overrun the country there. Thus, it seems that with all barbarians there is no means of compelling them to keep faith with the Romans except through the fear of soldiers to hold them in check. And yet this emperor went so far as to select a certain island in the River Nile close to the city of Elephantine and there construct a very strong fortress in which he established certain temples and altars for the Romans and these barbarians in common, and he settled priests of both nations in this fortress, thinking that the friendship between them would be secure by reason of their sharing the things sacred to them. And for this reason he named the place Philae. Now both these nations, the Blemmyes and the Nobatae, believe in all the gods in which the Greeks believe, and they also reverence Isis and Osiris, and not least of all Priapus. But the Blemmyes are accustomed also to sacrifice human beings to the sun. These sanctuaries in Philae were kept by these barbarians even up to my time, but the Emperor Justinian decided to tear them down. Accordingly, Narses, a Persarmenian by birth, whom I have mentioned before as having deserted to the Romans, being commander of the troops there, tore down the sanctuaries at the emperor's order, and put the priests under guard and sent the statues to Byzantium. But I shall return to the previous narrative.'

Epiphanius of Salamis, *De XII gemmis* 19-21 [Latin version (5th century) of an original Greek text from the 4th century CE] = *FHN* 305 – Trans. from the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum* vol. 3.

It now remains for us to say in what land that mountain is situated which was once wet (with oil) Nero, as is commonly reported, or by Domitian ['Epiphanius, earlier in his discussion of the emerald, mentions a report to the effect that the rocks of the mountain were dyed with a green oil so as to enhance their colour and sparkle' – note from *FHN* vol. 3, p. 1117]. It lies inside the Red Sea, as it is called, at the very approach to the region of the Indians [not actually India but north-eastern Africa]. Of these there is a great variety of peoples (*gentes*). For the Indians [understand peoples inhabiting area equating with modern Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Yemen] were once separated into nine kingdoms, according to tradition, i.e., those of the Alabastri, the Homerites, the Azomiti with the Adulites, the Bugaei, the Taiani, the Isabeni, the Libeni, the Dibenii with the Ichthyophagi, and the Sirindibenii with the Evilaiei. But they are now much more numerous, because the Dibenii are separated from the alliance they had earlier with the Ichthyophagi, and the Sirindibenii from the Evilaiei. But about these I report in my historical narrative when I again come to the place for them.

The mountain, however, which is our subject now, was then under the Romans. It is naturally enough called Smaragdinum [i.e., 'emerald'] and is an island [most likely a reference to St John's Island in the Red Sea] of modest size lying off Berenike, where the port for the traffic between India and the Thebais is situated. The distance from this island to the mainland of the Thebaid is one day's crossing when the sailing is prosperous, i.e., 80 (Roman) miles. Now,

Berenike, as it is called, is contiguous with the district of Elephantine, and also with Telmis [Kalabsha], which is now held by the Blemmyes. The mines of this mountain, however, have caved in. There are also other mines established in the mountains in the barbarian district of the Blemmyes, near Telmis, where the natives now dig to extract emeralds.'

Olympiodorus, fragm. 1.37 (= Photius, Bibliotheca cod. 80 p. 62a9-26) = FHN 309 – Trans. from the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum* vol. 3.

'The historian [i.e., Olympiodorus] says that when he was staying around Thebes and Syene to do research, the tribal chiefs (*phylarchoi*) and priests (*prophetai*) of the barbarians around Talmis (Kalabsha), i.e., the Blemmyes, formed a desire to meet him; and that it was his reputation that motivated them to this.

"And," he says, "they took me as far as Talmis itself so as to investigate as well those regions which extend for a distance of five days' (journey) from Philae as far as a city known as Prima, which was at one time the first city in the Thebaid when entering from the land of the barbarians. For this reason the Romans called it in Latin Prima, i.e., "First"; and that is what it is called now, even though long occupied by the barbarians together with four other cities, Phoinikon, Khiris, Thapis (Taphis), and Talmis."

He says he learned that in these regions there were also emerald mines from which the kings of Egypt used to obtain emeralds in abundance. "These too," he says, "the priests (*prophetes*) of the barbarians urged me to visit, but this was not possible without a royal order."

Cosmas Christian Topography 11.339 – Trans. from J. W. McCrindle (1897)

'These people set great store by the emerald stone and wear it set in a crown. The Ethiopians who procure this stone from the Blemmyes in Ethiopia take it into India and, with the price it fetches, they invest in wares of great value. All these matters I have described and explained partly from personal observation, and partly from accurate inquiries which I made when in the neighbourhood of the different places.'

Jordanes Romana 333 = FHN 329 – Trans. from the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum* vol. 3.

'For he [Marcianus, r. 450-457 CE in the Eastern Roman Empire] made peace with the Parthians [Sassanians] and Vandals, who had been constantly making inroads; he brought to an end Attila's menaces; through Florus, the procurator of the city of Alexandria, he checked the Noubades and Blemmyes who had made incursions from Aithiopia, and expelled them from Roman territory; and before he died he learned of the death of Attila and the end of the Isaurian Zeno—himself happy, they hapless: treading on the necks of all his enemies by virtue of his imperial valour he found rest in peace in the sixth year and sixth month of his reign.'

Priscus, fragm. 21 = FHN 318 – Trans. from the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum* vol. 3.

‘The Blemmyes and the Noubades, having been defeated by the Romans, sent ambassadors to Maximinus [*dux et praeses* (governor) of the Egyptian Thebaid in 452-453 CE] from both peoples, wishing to enter into a peace treaty. And they proposed that this be observed so long as Maximinus remained in the country of the Thebans. When he refused to enter into a treaty for such a short period, they said that they would not take up arms for the rest of his life. But as he would not accept even the second proposal of the embassy, they made a treaty for one hundred years. In this it was agreed that (any) Roman prisoner be released without ransom (regardless of) whether he had been captured during this or any other attack, that the animals carried off at that time be returned, and that the compensation for the expenses be paid; further, that the well born among them be handed over as hostages to guarantee the treaty, and that, in accordance with the ancient law, their crossing to the temple of Isis be unhindered, Egyptians having charge of the river boat in which the statue (*agalma*) of the goddess is placed and ferried across the river. For at a stated time the barbarians bring the wooden statue (*xoanon*) to their own country and, after having consulted it, return it safely to the island. Therefore Maximinus decided that it was appropriate that the text of the compact be ratified in the temple of Philae. Some (people) were sent. Also present were those of the Blemmyes and of the Noubades who were to conclude the treaty on the island. After the terms of the agreement had been committed to writing and the hostages had been handed over—they were children of the ex-despots and former sub-despots (*hypotyranos*), something that had never before happened in this war, for never had children of Noubades and of Blemmyes been hostages with the Romans—it turned out that Maximinus fell into precarious health and died. When the barbarians learned of Maximinus' death, they took away their hostages by force and overran the country.’

Besa, *Vita Senutii*, Leipoldt 1951, 89-90. = FHN 301 – Trans. from the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum* vol. 3.

‘And it happened one day that the Blemmyes (Balnemmāzvi) came north and seized some cities and took captive the people and their cattle. They went south with all their captives and paused in the district of Psoi (Ptolemais).

Then my father, Apa Shenute, wanted to hasten to them on account of the captives whom they had taken. And when he crossed the river to go east after them, those whom he first approached raised their spears, intending to kill him. At once their hands became stiff and dried out like (pieces of) wood; they stood (there, hands) outstretched, and were unable to bend them toward them and were crying out in great distress.

Likewise again, the same thing happened to the rest of the tribe(smen) until he arrived at the place of their king. When that man understood that the power which was with him was invincible, he rose up (and) prostrated himself (and) adored him, saying, "I beseech you, heal the hands of my men." And when he made the sign of the cross over them, their hands were healed at once. And when the king promised him gifts of honor, he refused to receive them from him but himself said to him, "Give me the people. Take all the plunder for yourself."

Well, the king gave them all to him without remuneration; and he (Shenute) transported them across the river to the west bank (and) brought them to the monastery. And he gave them

expense money (and) sent them off in peace, each one to his home, as they glorified God and his holy prophet, Apa Shenute.’

Boissonade, *Anecdota Graeca* 5, p. 41-43. = *FHN* 327 – Trans. from the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum* vol. 3.

‘His Piety [the Emperor Justin] wrote also to the same Elesbas [King Ella Asbeha of Aksum] as follows: "I know the most Christian attitude of Your Brotherhood. It has come to our attention that the rebel, to whom you entrusted the kingship of the Homerites [Himyarites], grasping his chance, massacred all the Christian Aithiopians who have come under your rule, along with the Roman and Persian Christians who were found in the same region, unless they chose to renounce Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He even went so far as to leave the town of Negrān [Najran] deserted and uninhabited. He also wrote to Alamoundaros, surnamed Sakikas, in Persia, asking that they too [the Lakhmids] take similar action against the Christians subject to them.

So we exhort and adjure Your Brotherhood by the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity, that you go forth by sea or by land, with the power of the holy angels and archangels as your helping hand, against that foul and lawless Jew. If Your Legitimacy shrink from this task the wrath of God will come from heaven upon you and your country. And we for our part will send forth by way of Koptos and Berenike a huge army, consisting of both the so-called Blemmyes and Noubades; as it passes through your territory our army will crush everybody, and they will utterly obliterate the Homerite with his whole country. Farewell.’

Papyri and epigraphic material relating to the Blemmyes

P. Abinn. 1. CPL 265. ChLA III 202. = FHN 295 – Trans. from the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum* vol. 3.

A papyrus from the archive of Flavius Abinnaeus, a cavalry commander at Dionysias in Egypt (342-351 CE).

“Your clemency and piety, etern[al] Lords [...] (2) Constantius and Constans, always victorious[...] his [soldi]ers, particularly those from the Protectors, that is, those (3) who by eagerly dem[on]strating] their obedience are seen to [mer]it yo[ur] [benefi]ts, a promising occasion has arrived.

(4) I [...] family. [...] transferred to the detachment of the Parthian Archers (5) stationed at Diospolis (Thebes) in the province of Upper Thebaid. B[u]t a[fter a period of] thirty-three [years] I was ordered by Senecio, formerly (6) count (*comes*) of the frontier region of the said province, to bring refugees from the Blemmyan people to the holy footprints of Your piety at Constantinople, and when, after (7) our arrival there with envoys of the said pe[ople] and with the c[oun]t of the same Frontier, they had been presented to Your clemency, Your divinity ordered (8) me, from being a *ducenarius*, to adore [to perform *adoratio*] Your venerable purple. And being then instructed to escort the said (9) envoys to their homeland I spent a period of three years with them, and on my way back to Your holy court I brought recruits from the

province (10) of the Thebaid whom I delivered at Hierapolis, and when I had thus obtained release from (this) service Your clemency deigned to promote me to the office of cavalry commander (*praefectus alae*) of Dionysias in the (n) province of Egypt.

But when the sacred letter was presented to Count [Vala[c[ius] his office replied that also (12) other men had adduced letters of this kind. Therefore, since [it is clear] that these had been promoted by suffrage, I by a holy decree, may Your clemency, by considering, (13) as is Your wont, my said services, in accordance with Your decree mentioned above, (14) deign to ordain that I be appointed a tribune on the staff of the cavalry squadron at Dionysias, and that those who, through suffrage, have obtained the promotion in the same camp be removed.

Having obtained this I shall forever render the greatest thanks to (15) Your eternal Might.

SB I 1521-1523. Gauthier 1914, Pl. 66A = FHN 310 – Trans. from the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum* vol. 3.

Some graffiti from the Temple of Mandulis at Kalabsha, on the southern façade of the pronaos. These graffiti relate to a king Tamal who was most likely a Blemmyan king.

Translation

[I, Kin[g] (basileus) Tamal [have presented (?)]

2 to Mararouk the place up to

3 her boundaries (?).

II

In the reign of King (basileus) Tamal

2 the boundaries (?) were set (?)

3 when Sentaesis

4 was high priest (archiereus).

III

In the reign of King (basileus) Tamal

2 the boundaries (?) were set (?)

3 when Patebor(as) was priest (prophetes).

SB I 1524. Gauthier 1914, Pl. 66A = FHN 311 – Trans. from the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum* vol. 3.

A Greek graffito of King Isemne from the Temple of Mandulis at Kalabsha. This epigraph seems to add further evidence of the Blemmyes controlling the Kalabsha region, at least around

the late fourth to mid-fifth century CE. This is also sometimes used to support the hypothesis that the Blemmyes were a tribal confederation.

I, King Isemne, have presented (the) place to Ploulan, just (5) as Marouk presented (it) to King Degou and he to his daughter Ploulan, up to ...

R. Ast and J. Radkowska, *ZPE* 215 (2020), pp. 147-158 – Trans. R. Ast

An inscription set up at the port of Berenike by a Mochosak, an interpreter [ἐρμηνεύς] of King Isemne of the Blemmyes. This inscription was inscribed on a 2.5m block of gypsum that originally formed a lintel of a structure known as the so-called “Northern Complex”. Preliminary dating of the pottery material in the surrounding context, seems to indicate a late fourth to fifth century CE date. The closest parallels for the lettering of the inscription are those from *I.Philae* 194 (ca. 449-468 CE), with similarities also to *I.Philae* 218 and 219 (both sixth century). King Isemne is probably the same individual mentioned in the Greek graffito at the Temple of Mandulis in Kalabsha. This also seems to point to a date around the late fourth to mid-fifth century CE. The use of a Diocletian era dating system can be attested at other locations, notably Philae (i.e. starting from year 284 CE, the start of Diocletian’s reign).

For the preservation of our Lord Isemne, King of the tribe of Blemmyes, and his whole house and(?) for (their) permanence, I Mochosak the interpreter built the... to Isis (and) Serapis, the greatest gods. Year (year) 10 [month(?)]. For the good. [Year X of Diocleti]an.

Ast, R., Sz. Poplawski and J. Rądkowska, *Chiron* 52 (2022), pp. 201-216.

Another more fragmentary inscription also from a lintel in the Northern Complex – this inscription and the one related to Mochosak and Isemne outlined above, seem to connected to monumental entranceways. The editors are of the opinion that the Kabantia one predates the Isemne inscription, although neither have firm dates.

[. . .] of our Lord Kabantia, King of the tribe of [Blemmyes(?)]...

***SB* V 8697. Gauthier 1914, Pl. CIII A. *SEG* XXXIV 1631, XL 1591. = *FHN* 313 – Trans. from the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum* vol. 3.**

This Greek inscription alludes to Blemmyan cult societies at Kalabsha. It was incised onto the outside of the back wall of the cella of the Mandulis temple.

When Phonoin [Phonen] was tribal chief (*phylarkhos*), Gamatifant Psentaesis priest (*prophetes*), and Menroukhem Plokhkarour the city cult president (*demoklinarkhos*),

the King (*basileus*) made these (?) presidents (*klinarkhoi*) and chairmen (*epistatai*) (?) (*scil.*, of the cult societies):

Altik[.] Pison president of the cult society (*synodos*) of Abene,

Pisai Plou president of the cult society of Khopan, (5) and

Psentaese Loukani president of the cult society of Mander.

We (the presidents) write because of the letter (sent) to the city of Talmis (Kalabsha) from the Count (*comes*) (which said): "The city's cult president (*klinarkhos tes poleos*) two thirds and the three cult societies one third, from this day and for ever." If (this is) (10) a gift, we have no objection, but to the three cult societies one third, the city cult president (*demoklinarkhos*) two thirds.

What we have written, is valid and (is) what Menroukhem Plokhkarour, the [city] (?) cult president, has demanded (?), and we swear before (these) witnesses: (15) Pades Bok, Menr[ou] Kalau the priest (*weep*), and Atrek Atero (?).

OGIS I 201. Lefebvre 1907, No. 628. SB V 8536. I. Prose 67. = FHN 317 – Trans. from the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum* vol. 3.

A Greek triumphal inscription honouring King Silko, set up at Kalabsha sometime before 450 CE. The inscription was carved on the west wall of the forecourt of the temple of Mandulis. King Silko seems to be a Christian king of the Noubades who had wrested control of this area from the Blemmyes. The territory of Nobatia or Nobadia was in Lower Nubia; this at certain points extended between the first and third cataracts.

I, Silko, King (*basiliskos*) of the Noubades and all the Aithiopians, came to Talmis (Kalabsha) and Taphis (Tafa). On two occasions I fought with the Blemmyes; and God gave me the victory. On the third occasion I was again victorious and took control of (5) their cities. I occupied (them) with my troops.

On the first occasion I conquered them, and they sued me for terms. I made peace with them, and they swore to me by their images (*eidolon*), and I trusted their oath in the belief that they were honest people. I withdrew (10) to my upper regions.

When I had become king (*basiliskos*), I did not by any means proceed behind the other kings (*basileus*), but well ahead of them. For those who contend with me I do not permit to remain settled in their country unless they have beseeched me and entreat me. (15) For I am a lion in the lower regions, and a bear in the upper regions.

I fought with the Blemmyes from Primis (Ibrim) to Telelis (Shellal); on one occasion I ravaged the country of the others too, above the Noubades, because they contended with me. (As for) the rulers (*despotes*) of the other peoples who contend with me, (20) I do not allow them to sit in the shade, but in the sun outside, and they did not drink water inside their hous(es). For I rob my adversaries of their women and children.

Rea 1979, 147 ff. = FHN 319 – Trans. from the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum* vol. 3.

This Greek letter of King Phonen was found on a papyrus found at Qasr Ibrim on the floor of a storehouse at the Temple of Taharqo. It seems to date to around 450 CE. It is a letter from King Phonen of the Blemmyes to King Abourni of the Noubades. Phonen is probably the same individual referred to as Phonoin in the Kalabsha inscription, evidently suggesting that his rank had risen by this point.

(OPENING FORMALITIES)

(1) The most distinguished Phonen, king of Blemmyes, (2) (to) Abourni, king (of) Noubades and (to) Nakase (empty space) and Mouses, your sons. Many greetings I address, first of all, to your majesty and all the people of your country; and (4) I pray to God for (3) the preservation of your populace (4) —[which is altogether the most important thing.

(PHONENS ASSERTION OF HIS NOBILITY)

Now I am writing to you, your excellency, inasmuch as he (i.e., you) wrote me that "(It is) a great (thing) for a man who is (5) great [in his clan]." For indeed like you I have a son, I too. I have a son, Breytek and Yeny's brothers, and (6) [many] (5) other (6) [for]ces. So don't think that "He is not of a very noble family."

(YENY'S DEATH)

For indeed the whole of what has happened no one sees, if not God. And my (7) son Breytek and Yeny's brothers I want to look into Yeny's death. And after this your ambassador (8) met with me here, and you summoned Breytek and Yeny's brothers, and I stopped them. No one can ever fight (9) [without] my command. But perhaps your men don't obey you, but (instead) you listen to the words of your men. As (10) he wrote me that "I want us to have concord between one another" (and that) "we have my cattle with your cattle, pasturing one with another (11) and the sheep," is altogether acceptable. If you wish, I and you (will) stay well in our homes.

(A RECAPITULATION OF BACKGROUND EVENTS)

For indeed, first Silko won (12) and took Talmis. Today you won and took Talmis. First Silko seized our lands and kept us off them. Today you won and took Talmis. First Silko said that "Give me sheep and cattle and camels enough" so that our (13) lands be given (back). (14) And I gave them all, and you were insolent, and he kept (them) from us. And I wrote to Yeny for the peace and sent my ambassadors (15) under a flag of truce; and you were insolent and killed (a) tribal chief (*phylarkhos*) and (a) sub-despot (*hypotyrannos*) and took the priests (*prophetes*) in the place Phontauou.

(PHONENS INDIGNATION AT THE VIOLATION OF THE RULES OF DIPLOMACY)

(16) Well, it is possible to become warlike, but it is not permissible that you should insult our men and kill the men (who were) under a flag of truce. For indeed, (17) because of what

happened (with regard to) Silko of which you insulted Yeny, because of this you caused offence, and I came down to fight too.

(THE TURNING POINT, A WILL TO COMPROMISE)

For indeed, the words (about) Silko (18) and Yeny I (am prepared to) disregard. Perhaps the fate (of) Yeny and Silko we can (settle) with one another. For now I and you, as brother and elder, (can) make (19) (a) good time with one another.

(PHONENS DEMANDS)

Withdraw from our land and send the gods to the temple so that I and you (can) make (a) good (20) time with you. And he made (it) plain to me about silver-plate and sheep and camels. What we found I sent to you. (So now) withdraw from (21) my country and give us our property and the gods, (for) I have sent you what I have. If you see fit, give me our lands (22) and the gods. (Then) I (will) have a good peace with you.

(THE CONSEQUENCES OF A FAILURE TO COMPROMISE)

Understand, mark you, that if you keep us from our lands and the gods, we are not able to remain (passive) (23) and to let everything perish.

(YOURS IS MORALLY THE WEAKER CASE)

For indeed, you are not fighting for your lands; you are fighting for our lands.

(A CHANGE OF TOPIC: ADDITIONAL GRIEVANCES?)

I write you in addition that Pakhenios came (24) and devastated Danant and withdrew from your (sic) land. For indeed, Koy came to (the lands) beyond Tabales and made the altars, (25) and you (sic) defeated Kabantia.

(MORE ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF A FAILURE TO COMPROMISE)

And we (can) not abide your conquering our lands, all we (lit.: the) kings. And I do not wish to keep your lands (26) since it is not good.

(BACK TO THE INCIDENT INVOLVING YENY)

When your ambassador met me, he appointed Skaroou son of Aynem at once so as to give him (back) (27) my lands. When the ambassador came, I trusted you and sent my brother Yeny. Look, I swore that "Give me our lands. (28) They will be at peace for ever." And I also gave my oaths to my brother Yeny so that you (should) hand over to him my lands.

(SUBSCRIPT FOR BREYTEK)

And I, (29) Breytek, tribal chief (*phylarkhos*), greet my lord's brother Abourni, king (of the) Noubades, [together wit[h the gods of Talmis (in margin) (30) (and say) that "If you return our lands, no longer to fight with one another for (31) ever, if I shall not keep the peace well." (empty space)

(SUBSCRIPT FOR PHONEN)

(32) And I, Phonen, king, have sent you one camel. My greeting it is. I write you that (33) "I and Breytek withdraw our lands ...

(on the back of the papyrus)

(A POSTSCRIPT)

(34) And about Iasatek, don't let him fall asleep; but (with regard to those (who) have fled, don't listen to his words.

SB III 6257. Eide-Flägg-Pierce 1984, No. 6. Hendrickx 1996, No. 1. = FHN 336 – Trans. from the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum* vol. 3.

This is a Greek document (probably 6th century CE) from Gebelen, which seems to relate to a Blemmyan king entrusting the administration of an island (Temsir / Tanare) to three or two of his children. The customary dues may relate to some kind of gratuities paid by the Roman state.

(1) (Sign of the cross) I, Kharakhen, King (*basiliskos*) of the Blemmyes, (2) write to (my) children Kharakhen, Kharapatkhur, (3) and Kharahiet (or: Kharaziet)

so that I order to give (to you) (4) the administration (*curatoria*) of the island called Tanare. (5) And no one is ordered to hinder you. But if (6) the Romans make difficulties (and) do not hand over the customary (dues), (7) the tribal chief (*phylarkhos*) shall not be hindered, nor the sub-despot (*hypotyrannos*), (8) from seizing the Romans until (they) pay the customary (dues) (9) for my island.

(empty space) Kharakhen, king (basilisk(os)). (Sign)

(empty space) Laize, domest(icus), (I am) a witness. (Sign)

(empty space) Tiutikna, dom(esticus), (I am) a witness. (Sign of the cross)

(Sign of the cross) Wri(tten) by me, Sansnos, on the 24th of the mo(nth) Phaophi, 1st ind(iction).