



Ancient Fanfiction: Chaonnophris/Nativist Revolt

By Celine Baumbach

The palace was quiet, and I didn't like it. I had ridden hard to come here when the messenger arrived, and the empty palace hallways were an eerie contrast to the thunder of hooves that had been my companion for two days. It was almost a relief to see the handful of generals poring over a map in front of the vacant throne. But the news that Haronnophris was gone still sat heavy in my stomach. The fact that our northern border was left almost defenseless after the Ptolemies had ambushed the pharaoh only made it worse.

"Chaonnophris!" A young man I didn't recognize rushed towards me, bowing a few feet away from me. "We have been awaiting your return, sir."

I joined the others by the table. "What is the situation at the border now? Have we sent in more troops to secure it?"

General Seti looked down at the map, shoulders sagging. "Chaonnophris, I don't think you understand. We —"

"Are giving up? I understand quite well." I stepped away from the table, surveying the other generals. They were running from the fight like dogs with their tails between their legs. "Is that it then? Is this how this rebellion dies? Do you no longer care that these Greek pharaohs tax us relentlessly to fund their wars? That they think themselves above us, the people of this land? That they put swords in our hands and forced us to die in Syria? Have you forgotten about that war? You were right there beside me almost two decades ago, Seti. Do you fight for Haronnophris or for Egypt?"

Seti said nothing, casting his gaze down.

I took another step back. "Figure out where we can spare people. Send them to the border. We can't let the Ptolemies gain more ground than they already have."

General Nakht stepped forward. “Even if we could amass the necessary numbers, there is no officer left high enough to lead such a contingent.”

I looked around the room, at the scared faces of the people I had thought were my equals, the empty throne, and at the map showing the advancing forces of the Ptolemies. “Then I’ll ride there right now. I’ll lead them myself.”

I turned to leave and found myself face to face with the young man again. This time, instead of bowing, he knelt. “Your Excellency,” he addressed me.

I swallowed thickly. I had never said anything about becoming pharaoh, but if I returned successful, they would crown me anyway. It didn’t matter whether I wanted power or what I had set out to accomplish originally: The revolution would die if no one stepped up as leader. Was I ready? Or was I dooming us all? If Haronnophris had failed, what hope was there for me?

I straightened up. It didn’t matter. There was no time for second guessing.

“Just get me the numbers,” I said again. “This revolution is far from over.”

Context:

Absolutely nothing is known about the biography of Chaonnophris or his predecessor Haronnophris except that they were the leaders of a nativist revolt against the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt around the end of the 200th century BCE. Haronnophris came to power towards the end Ptolemy IV’s reign, and the revolt stretched for twenty years, mainly under the rule of Ptolemy V. The Rosetta stone, one of the most famous artefacts of Egyptology, stems from that period, issued to proclaim Ptolemy V’s supremacy and serving as antirevolutionary propaganda in three different scripts – allowing Egyptologists later to decipher Hieroglyphs by comparing them to the known



Greek script. The revolt was eventually squashed and Chaonnophris killed by one of Ptolemy's military leaders.

Resources:

<https://www.archaeology.org/issues/274-1711/features/5997-egypt-thmuis-rosetta-stone>

<https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/files/TheGreatRevoltoftheEgyptians.pdf>