Lexical Studies on the Concept of Dirtiness in Ancient Egyptian Daily Life

Paul David Larson

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.memphis.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.memphis.edu/etd/3065

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by University of Memphis Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of University of Memphis Digital Commons. For more information, please contact khggerty@memphis.edu.
LEXICAL STUDIES ON THE CONCEPT OF DIRTINESS IN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN DAILY LIFE

by

Paul David Larson Jr.

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: History

The University of Memphis
August 2023
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I cannot possibly thank each of the people who have assisted and influenced me on my academic journey and have, thus, played a role in the completion of this dissertation. However, I want to specifically thank a few individuals who were more directly involved in the completion of this dissertation. I want to thank James Hoffmeier, who first taught me hieroglyphs and who kindled my interest in Egyptology. Thanks to each of the members of my dissertation committee, Joshua Roberson, Suzanne Onstine, and Benjamin Graham, who provided many helpful comments and suggestions. Thanks to Peter Brand, who, in addition to all he taught me in the classroom, was always available to answer any questions I might have, provide helpful suggestions, and to guide me in the completion of my degree. I also want to thank my parents, who fostered in me a love of learning, taught me to be diligent and have supported me every step of the way. To each of my siblings who have always been a support and encouragement. Finally, I thank my wonderful wife, Abby, who supported and encouraged me every day throughout this process. I could not have done it without you.
ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of ancient Egyptian conceptions of dirtiness. While the subjects of ritual purity and taboo in ancient Egypt have been examined in Egyptological studies, less attention has been paid to understanding the general conceptions of dirtiness and impurity in the day to day, mundane lives of the ancient Egyptians, including its role in social distinctions. This is partly because Egyptian texts, while frequently mentioning purity, often in a ritual or cultic context, usually do not state or explain exactly what is defiling or dirty. Rather than another study of ritual purity or taboo, this dissertation attempts to examine what the Egyptians considered to be dirty or impure in “everyday” life and how they reacted to it. The primary focus of this study is on dirt as a material substance rather than the metaphorical uses of the concept, and the study is primarily lexically focused, as it is an attempt to understand the meaning and nuances of the words that the ancient Egyptians used to refer to or describe what they considered dirty. Categories of words related to dirtiness examined in this study include soil and earth, bodily dirtiness, putrefaction, foul odors, and disgust.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .......................................................................................................................... iii

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS .......................................................................................................................... v

ABBREVIATIONS ................................................................................................................................. vi

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY ................................................................. 1

CHAPTER 2: THE OPPOSITE OF DIRTY: CLEANLINESS IN ANCIENT EGYPT ....................... 30

CHAPTER 3: SOIL AND EARTH AS DIRTY ......................................................................................... 73

CHAPTER 4: TERMS FOR DIRTINESS RELATED TO THE BODY .................................................. 93

CHAPTER 5: PUTREFACITION .............................................................................................................. 153

CHAPTER 6: FOUL ODORS ................................................................................................................ 177

CHAPTER 7: ARE >window:N-EGP:AMW< AND >window:N-EGP:AMW(T) USED TO REFER TO DIRT? 205

CHAPTER 8: OTHER WORDS POSSIBLY RELATED TO DIRT ...................................................... 227

CHAPTER 9: DISGUST ......................................................................................................................... 251

CHAPTER 10: THEME OF DIRT IN SELECTED TEXTS .................................................................. 275

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSIONS ........................................................................................................... 304

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................................................. 315
# ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BD</td>
<td>Book of the Dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>Coffin Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCD</td>
<td>Faulkner, Raymond O., <em>A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEM</td>
<td><em>Late Egyptian Miscellanies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIU</td>
<td>Karnak Identifiant Unique (<a href="http://sith.huma-num.fr/karnak">http://sith.huma-num.fr/karnak</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KRI</td>
<td>Kitchen, Kenneth A., <em>Ramesside Inscriptions, Historical and Biographical, I–VIII.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Pyramid Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLA</td>
<td><em>Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae</em> (<a href="https://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/index.html">https://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/index.html</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urk</td>
<td><em>Urkunden des Ägyptischen Altertums</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wb</td>
<td><em>Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache im Auftrage der Deutschen Akademien</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Mentions of purity and cleanliness (\textit{w\textsuperscript{w}b}) are ubiquitous in ancient Egyptian texts, especially those of a religious nature. However, in light of the seeming importance of purity to the ancient Egyptians, detailed, modern studies of the Egyptian conceptions of purity and cleanliness have been somewhat lacking. Joachim Quack summarized the state of the study of purity in ancient Egypt in this way:

To say that purity played a major role in Ancient Egyptian culture is hardly more than a triviality. Nevertheless, it must be added that detailed research on what precisely purity in Ancient Egypt means has not yet reached the levels already seen for other cultures...Indeed, it is notable how often dictionary articles are used as the main references,\textsuperscript{1} in the absence of substantial, comprehensive surveys. The problem is by no means a lack of sources, but evidently the opposite. It almost seems that one is threatened with drowning in the vast sea of relevant texts and images.\textsuperscript{2}

Quack goes on to explain the difficulties inherent in trying to explain and define purity in ancient Egypt. “There are many sources, but very few are substantial, normative and explicit at the same time.”\textsuperscript{3} The studies of ritual purity in ancient Egypt that have been done to date, have primarily focused on purity as a requirement for priests\textsuperscript{4} and as a requirement to enter sacred spaces such as tombs and temples.\textsuperscript{5} For example, John Gee in his study of the requirement of ritual purity

\textsuperscript{1} For example, Dmitri Meeks, “Pureté et purification en Égypte,” in Dictionnaire de la Bible. Supplement. 9, 9, (Paris: Letouzey et Ane, 1979), 430–52. Alyward M. Blackman, “Purification (Egyptian)” in James Hastings, \textit{Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics}. (Edinburgh : T.&T. Clark ;, 1908), 476–82. We should note, however, the recent, detailed study of purification in the Greco-Roman period by Marcel Kühnemund (Marcel Kühnemund, \textit{Die rituelle Reinheit in den Tempeln der griechisch-römischen Zeit Teil 1 Text}, Studien zur spätägyptischen Religion 34 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2021).


\textsuperscript{3} Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion,” 115.


\textsuperscript{5} For example, the need of purity for access can be seen in Old Kingdom tomb inscriptions (Nigel Strudwick, \textit{Texts from the Pyramid Age}, Writings from the Ancient World, no. 16 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 40–
offers the following definition of purity. “Purity consists of those things required to enter sacred space.”6 Thus, in his study Gee focuses primarily on texts mentioning the need for purification in order to enter sacred space,7 and also on the requirements imposed on priests in order to enter these sacred spaces.8 Other studies of purity, typically focus on the religious aspects of purity and cleanliness.9

While the subjects of ritual purity10 and taboo11 in ancient Egyptian have been examined in Egyptological studies, seemingly less attention has been paid to understanding the general

41. Cf. David P Silverman, “The Threat-Formula and Biographical Text in the Tomb of Hezi at Saqqara,” Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt 37 (2000): 1–13.) For an example of purity as a requirement to enter a temple, see near the base of entrance of both doorposts to the south court of the temple of Khonsu where we find the statement, “All who come into the temple, be pure! Be pure!” (Trans. in University of Chicago, Oriental Institute, and Epigraphic Survey, The Temple of Khonsu Vol. II (Chicago: Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, 1981), 8,11.) For more detailed examples from Ptolemaic temples, see translations in Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion,” 118–22.


8 Although Gee does survey the means of priestly purification, the bulk of his work is actually concerned with the Negative Confession of Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead (Gee, “The Requirements of Ritual Purity in Ancient Egypt,” 2003, 51–243.). He suggests that the Negative Confession has its origins in a priestly purification oath (Gee, “The Requirements of Ritual Purity in Ancient Egypt,” 2003, 312–14.)


concept of dirtiness and impurity in the day to day, mundane lives of the ancient Egyptians.\textsuperscript{12}

This is partly due to the fact that the texts which frequently mention purity (typically texts of a ritual or religious nature) often do not state or explain exactly what is defiling or dirty.

Rather than offering another study of ritual purity or taboo, my intention is to examine what the Egyptians considered to be dirty or impure in everyday life, and how they reacted to it. How are dirtiness and impurity described, and what social, emotional, and cultural implications did dirtiness have for the ancient Egyptians? What did the ancient Egyptians consider to be disgusting and why?\textsuperscript{13} How did the Egyptians respond to what was perceived as filthy or disgusting? A lack of understanding of the Egyptians’ daily, practical, and “secular” understanding of dirtiness inhibits a fuller understanding of purity in the ritual sense. If the

\textsuperscript{12} Maitland study examines these issues, but her study is limited to the Middle Kingdom and focuses on dirt and purity as a form of social control. (Margaret Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom,” \textit{Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections} 17 (2018): 47–72.). Joachim Quack has explored Egyptian ideas of purification outside of the religious sphere, namely social and “magical” aspects of purification, such as in the setting of a royal court (Joachim Friedrich Quack, “Reinigen Durch Anschwärzen? Zum Motiv Des Antagonistischen in Ägyptischen Reinigungsritualen.,” in \textit{How Purity Is Made}, ed. Udo Simon and Petra Rösch (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 107–21.) There have been several recent examinations of hygiene in ancient Egypt. For example, Daniela Rosenow has a helpful article on hygiene in ancient Egypt, but the article primarily focuses on this as it relates to diseases prevalent in ancient Egypt (Daniela Rosenow, “Es Stinkt: Hygiene Im Alten Ägypten.,” in \textit{Marburger Treffen Zur Älteren ägyptischen Medizin: Vorträge Und Ergebnisse Des 1.-5. Treffens 2002-2007}, ed. Rainer Hannig, Petra vonberg, and Orell Withuhn (Göttingen: Alfa-Dr., 2007), 35–46.). Similarly, Kolta also deals with hygiene as it relates to disease, although spending a bit more time on cosmetic issues such as skin and hair care (Kamal S. Kolta, “Eine Spurenforscher: Zur Hygiene Und Körperpflege Bei Den Altägyptern Und Den Kopten.,” in “... Denn Das Eigentümliche Studium Der Menschheit Ist Der Mensch.” \textit{Beiträge Aus Der Ägyptologie, Der Geschichtswissenschaft, Der Koptologie, Der Kunstgeschichte, Der Linguistik, Der Medizin Und Ihrer Geschichte, Der Musikwissenschaft, Der Philosophie, Der Politikwissenschaft, Der Provenienzforschung Und Der Rechtsgeschichte Zu Ehren Alfred Grimms Anläßlich Seines 65. Geburtstags}, ed. Barbara Magen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018), 152–71.). For a general discussion of cosmetics in ancient Egypt see Lise Manniche, \textit{Sacred Luxuries: Fragrance, Aromatherapy, and Cosmetics in Ancient Egypt} (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), 127–42.

\textsuperscript{13} Although there are numerous studies and theories of what is disgusting and why, much of the debate of disgust surrounds the question of if there are common explanations for what humans find disgusting and why (Paul Rozin, Jonathan Haidt, and Clark McCauley, “Disgust,” \textit{in Handbook of Emotions}, ed. Lisa Feldman Barrett, Michael Lewis, and Jeanette M Haviland-Jones, 2016, 815–34.). In my study, however, I am interested in what was considered disgusting in a specific culture and period, i.e., ancient Egypt.
temple is seen as a divine household, one might expect that the Egyptians’ ideas of dirt in their own houses might be applied in a real and/or metaphorical sense in the temple and rituals. Thus, a study of dirtiness and impurity in ancient Egypt should be informative for understanding daily life in ancient Egypt, Egyptian social and cultural values, and how these ideas manifest themselves in social distinctions, but it also may have implications for understanding Egyptian ritual purity.

Any attempt to examine the ancient Egyptian cultural conceptions of dirt and dirtiness, must necessarily grapple with these ideas in the Egyptians’ own words. Material culture is a valuable, necessary, and many times the primary tool for studying many aspects of Egyptian daily life. However, in order to really gain a glimpse, even a very imperfect and microscopic glimpse, at the Egyptian cultural mindset concerning dirtiness, one must examine the words of the Egyptians’ themselves as they pertain to this topic. Of course, these are only available in texts, which, in an ancient Egyptian context, almost by definition implies that we are only getting

---


the viewpoint of a minority of ancient Egyptian society, namely the elite and scribal classes. As explained by Stephen Quirke:

“Despite the restricted social scope of written sources, then, language itself offers features crucial for research into any period. On the numerous depictions of manual producers, Oleg Berlev noted the question unanswered by visual analysis alone: who are these people, what is their position in society? Only lexical analysis would allow us “to hear the answer from the lips of the Egyptians themselves.” In its varying degrees of mediation, ancient script brings a chance to hear the maker in and with languages that are theirs and not ours.”

While archaeology provides invaluable data about the ancient Egyptians, it does not provide the Egyptians’ own voices as texts do. Even if those texts only provide a miniscule perspective of a narrow portion of Egyptian society, they provide us with the best window we have for understanding the Egyptians’ conceptions of dirtiness on their own terms. Thus, since the purpose of this study is to attempt to understand the ancient Egyptians’ conceptions of dirtiness, and their cultural, social, and emotional reactions to dirtiness and unpleasant substances and odors, this study will necessarily be primarily text driven. While acknowledging that, due to the limited nature and perspective of textual sources, this study is, in some ways, flawed from the start, we will proceed with the understanding that one can only work with what data is available. Some attempt at understanding, even if imperfect, is better than none.

The approach I will take to the question of dirtiness and impurity is primarily lexical. While some lexical studies have been done relating to Egyptian words for dirt and impurity, I

---

17 Quirke is quoting Oleg Berlev here.


will attempt to understand the Egyptian conceptions of dirtiness through a more comprehensive understanding of the wide variety of terms the Egyptians could use to refer to and describe these concepts. This study will pay close attention to the contexts in which certain terms for dirtiness appear, and in what contexts certain substances appear to be considered dirty or defiling. The purpose of the lexical study is to understand the nuances of Egyptian words for impurity in their literary, social, emotional, and physical context. We will also consider terms that might refer to the emotional reaction to dirtiness, which we might characterize as “disgust.”

Since the focus of this study is to try to get at the mundane, daily, and “practical” conception of dirtiness in ancient Egypt, terms related to dirtiness that appear in literature, letters, Late Egyptian miscellanies, administrative texts, etc. will receive priority in analysis. Medical texts can also provide relevant data for the lexicography of dirtiness in ancient Egypt, and they are used in this study. Finally, while this study is not primarily interested in ritual purity and cleanliness, religious, magical, and funerary texts can still be useful for illuminating

---


However, it should be noted that, as a general rule, if a term only appears in the medical corpus and not in any other text genres, I have not necessarily included it in this study. The same principle applies to religious, magical, and funerary texts.

the meaning and nuance of terms. Also, if one asks the right questions, these texts can be suggestive regarding Egyptian attitudes towards dirtiness and uncleanness in daily life. In sum, while a variety of genres are examined in the course of this study, my reading of texts and lexical analysis is always directed towards the question of what these might indicate regarding Egyptian conceptions of dirtiness in daily life.

It should also be noted that the chronological focus of this study is on the Pharaonic period, primarily from the Old through the New Kingdoms. Thus, although occasional reference is made to later texts, these are largely excluded from this analysis.

**What is dirt?**

So far, I have simply assumed the meaning of the terms “dirty” and “dirtiness,” but before proceeding further it is important to examine these concepts in more depth. While virtually everyone has conceptions about what is “dirt” or “dirty,” defining these terms precisely is rather difficult. Below we will survey some of the more influential theoretical and methodological approaches of understanding dirt and dirtiness.

**Mary Douglas**

Probably the most influential writer on the topics of dirt and impurity in the last half century or so was the anthropologist, Mary Douglas. Thus, any discussion of “what is dirt” must begin by examining her work. According to Douglas:

---

“As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. If we shun dirt, it is not because of craven fear, still less dread or holy terror. Nor do our ideas about disease account for the range of our behavior in cleaning or avoiding dirt. Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment.”

Thus, for Douglas, dirt is not connected with hygiene or avoidance of disease. Cleaning is about order, and dirt represents disorder, at least to the person creating the order. Thus, if pathogenicity and hygiene are subtracted from our understanding of dirt, then “we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place.”

She continues that this definition “implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.”

Douglas then gives her famous example involving shoes on the table:

“Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining-table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing; similarly; bathroom equipment in the drawing room; clothing lying on chairs; out-door things in-doors; upstairs things downstairs; under-clothing appearing where over-clothing should be, and so on. In short, our pollution behavior is the reaction of which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classification.”

Thus, she writes:

“In chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea. There is nothing fearful or unreasoning in our dirt-avoidance: it is a creative movement, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience.”

---


To summarize Douglas’s ideas, all people(s) order their world into systems. However, every system of organization inevitably leads to anomalies and ambiguities. “Dirt” is what does not properly fit into a symbolic system for ordering the world. For Douglas then, “dirt” becomes almost synonymous with “anomaly,” since anomaly is “an element which does not fit a given set or series.” Since every culture or group has its own system(s) of ordering the world, what is “dirt” will be different for every culture. However, the basic principle of “dirt is matter out of place” is consistent and is evidence of a system of ordering the world.

Evaluation of Mary Douglas’ “dirt is matter out of place”

Since Douglas’s ideas have been tremendously influential across numerous disciplines, it is not surprising that her understanding of “dirt” has received numerous criticisms as well. It is well beyond the scope of this work to summarize all the ways her work has been critiqued or adapted. However, a few aspects useful to our study will be discussed here.

Douglas’ “anomaly theory” has been criticized for “making unmediated explanatory links between categorical systems and the social structure of society as a whole.” Douglas speaks of

---

28 According to Douglas, although these terms are technically distinct, “there is very little advantage in distinguishing between these two terms in their practical application (Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 37.).


30 Douglas’s *Purity and Danger* has been considered one of the “hundred book which have most influenced Western public discourse since the Second World War” (Duschinsky et al., *Purity and Danger Now*, 1.).

31 According to Robbie Duschinsky, criticisms of Mary Douglas’ *Purity and Danger* generally fall into three categories or lines of criticism. First, she “jumps too readily from how society is structure to explaining how purity and impurity classifications operate.” Second, she “dismisses too quickly the contribution of sociobiological accounts of the origin of disgust for understanding social and cultural processes.” Third, “the universal theory of purity and impurity presented does not always readily work for all cultures, which make greater or lesser appeal to these” (Duschinsky et al., *Purity and Danger Now*, 6.).

32 Duschinsky et al., *Purity and Danger Now*, 6.
things such as “the system,” or “the form,” or “order,” “as if they were on monolithic thing,” but a given society or culture can have multiple forms of classification within it due to the variety of groups, classes, individuals, etc. that it contains.  

Second, as noted by Ben Campkin, “the formulation is not reversible: all matter out of place is not dirt.” For example, if a number of papers are put in the wrong file, we would say they are “misplaced” or “disorganized” or possibly “messy,” but it would be strange to say that they are “dirt” or “dirty.” Similarly, in Olli Lagerspetz’s critique of Mary Douglas, he notes:

“Douglas, who is generally alive to nuances and conceptual distinctions, for some reason simply ignores differences between various forms of displacement…Distinctions between particular cases are simply blurred and dirt is allowed a free ride on the shoulders of mess and untidiness. Surely no one will deny that mess and untidiness involved disorder or lack of order, but the connection between dirt and disorder is less evident. To tidy up a room is not necessarily to clean it, and things can be cleaned without changing the way they are (dis) ordered.”

Lagerspetz suggests that a “less literal reading of ‘out of place’ as merely ‘offending’ or ‘improper’ is, on the other hand not directly wrong, but it no longer conveys the idea of disorder.” However, in spite of the problems with Douglas’s definition of dirt, Lagerspatz also acknowledges the following:

“Defining dirt, in a very general sense, as matter out of place at least highlights the fact that our general attitude towards dirt involves rejection. My objection to Douglas is then

---

33 Duschinsky et al., *Purity and Danger Now*, 6.


simply that out-of-placeness is not an explanation of why we reject certain materials as ‘dirt’; it is only a reformulation of that rejection.”

In other words, Douglas’ definition does not explain or define what dirt is, but it does highlight a primary way people respond to dirt.

Another weakness of Douglas’ approach is that understanding dirt to be only culturally determined in a symbolic system, ignores the many cross-cultural commonalities in conceptions of dirty and impure. As summarized by Feder:

“Anthropological studies since Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger* (1966) have tended to focus on culturally contingent aspects of pollution. Though Douglas tackled this topic as a cross-cultural phenomenon, her emphasis on the role of cultural context led to a particularistic focus that all but ignored its universal aspects. Ironically, in establishing a cross-culturally applicable methodology for studying pollution, she moved attention away from the commonalities linking purity behavior, which run much deeper than her abstract definition of dirt as “matter out of place.” By focusing on the role of purity and pollution in establishing “symbolic patterns” by which cultures could make order out of their experience, she did not adequately address the reasons for the high level of cross-cultural uniformity in the material cases of pollution, such as bodily fluids, disease, death and decomposition.”

Another criticism of Mary Douglas is that she seems to conflate dirt with metaphors of dirt. Thus, it has been noted that in “Douglas’s analysis, a ‘dirty job’, a ‘tarnished institution,’ a ‘tainted career’ and so forth, are not merely metaphorical extensions of the category ‘dirt,’ these

---


actually are forms of ‘dirt’ in that they demarcated the same kind of cultural designation.”40 This criticism does not apply only to Mary Douglas, but to the work of many scholars writing about “dirt.” Much of the writing about dirt concerns dirt as symbolic; it discusses how societies characterize certain types of people, professions, groups, things, space, etc. as dirty and how they are “othered” or “marginalized.”41 However, while this approach has its merits, perhaps it goes too far. While metaphors of dirt and dirty are frequently used, perhaps overemphasizing them can cause us to lose sight of the basic materiality of dirt. While dirt and dirty can be used symbolically or metaphorically to smear or “other” someone(s), is there something more fundamental behind this?

**Materiality of Dirt**

As noted by Anne Krossa, “despite the fact that dirt can never be classified in a definitive way, a useful starting point when discussing dirt is its assumed material basis.”42 While much of the literature concerning “dirt,” has focused on its symbolic usages, there has more recently been a movement to bring back the “materiality” of dirt into the discussion. As noted by Rosie Cox concerning dirt in domestic settings, “Little attention has been paid to the physical matter being

---


41 For example, Mark Cousins makes a connection “ugliness” and “dirt.” He says that ugliness “can be thought of not simply as the negation of beauty but as having a real and independent dimension in which it is experience as that which is there and which should not be there.” (Mark Cousins, “THE UGLY [Part 2],” *AA Files*, no. 29 (1995): 3.) He follows Mary Douglas’ definition of dirt in order to arrive at this conclusion. He writes, “in so far as dirt is matter out of place it must have passed a boundary, limit or threshold into a space where it should not be. The dirt is an ugly deduction from ‘good’ space, not simply by virtue of occupying the space, but by threatening the contaminate all the good space around it. In this light, ‘dirt,’ the ugly object, has a spatial power quite lacking in the beautiful object.” (Mark Cousins, “THE UGLY [Part 1],” *AA Files*, no. 28 (1994): 63.)

dealt with—dirt—and cleaning practices themselves.” In a recent study by Hughes et al., they “seek to overcome a tendency in current accounts to focus on the cultural significance of dirt as ‘matter out of place’ and on stigma and discursive strategies to counter taint to the detriment of its more material and embodied dimensions.” Thus “dirt” cannot be viewed simply as an “abstraction,” but it has a “materiality that is not reducible to the symbolic product of particular interactions.” While there may be social stigma around a “dirty” job such as a refuse collector, focusing entirely on the symbolic or social implications of dirt loses sight of the basic fact that dirt also “marks physical bodies,” and “dirt therefore has a physical presence as ‘object’ or ‘matter,’ felt through the materiality of its touch (sliminess, stickiness) and the smells that adhere to the body.” According to Simpson, et al.,

“A key insight from the dirty work literature is that dirt is not simply material—a status insult can mark the person as durably as a physical stain which cannot be entirely cleaned away. Furthermore, it is precisely the symbolism of various forms of ‘dirt’ that serves as a primary vehicle for myriad forms of taint and social degradation: it is one thing to wash off the physical matter that clings to the body of a refuse worker ‘doing a round’ on a hot summer’s day; it is another to reframe the negative status attributions that engaging in such work also attracts.”

---


This quote illustrates the multiple ways in which “dirt” operates. “Dirt” and “dirty” can reference literal, physical material, but it can also function symbolically. The different levels or ways “dirt” is used in regard to professions can be broken down into three categories.49 One can “delineate three forms of taint based on different occupations or roles: physical taint, namely, occupations associated with dirt or danger (e.g. refuse collectors, miners); social taint, namely, occupations involving regular contact with people from stigmatized groups or where the job is seen as servile to others (e.g. prison officers, domestic workers); and moral taint, namely, occupations regarded as sinful or of dubious virtue (e.g. debt collectors, sex workers)-the latter two capturing largely, though not exclusively, the ideological aspects of dirt.”50

Thus, when discussing dirt, one must pay attention to multiple levels on which the terminology can be used. In a study of dirt, one can focus almost entirely on the symbolic meanings of dirt, yet the symbolic or metaphorical meanings of dirt seem to require a more literal, physical reference to dirt in order to make sense. In other words, it seems that in order to understand what symbolic dirt is in a given culture, one must also consider the more mundane, literal meaning of dirt in daily life. Lagerspatz says that the concepts of clean and dirty “constitute an organizing principle that is universally applicable and possible to find in every human society in some form at least.”51 He continues, “Thus, while we expect to find different degrees of tolerance of dirt and various cleaning methods in use in different cultures, we could only shake our heads at the idea of discovering a culture where the categories of clean and dirty are completely missing.”52


The Opposite of Dirty

We have discussed the concept of dirt, but we have not yet considered its opposite. As discussed above, for Mary Douglas, the opposite of dirt would be “order.” However, some of the problems with this were discussed above. Perhaps, for many people, the opposite of dirt would be “clean.”

If clean is the opposite of “dirty,” then the question of what “clean” means is closely related to the concept of dirty. In one sense, these terms are relative to every person, group, and culture. However, since virtually every culture uses these categories, it is useful to further reflect on what these concepts imply. Lagerspetz takes a philosophical approach to these questions, which may be useful to consider. He writes:

If philosophy is descriptive, its preferred aim is to make sense of concepts, not to explain them away, hereby getting rid of them. The analysis of a concept requires us to attend to its applications and hence, to start by identifying meaningful instances of its use. The crucial question for the descriptive analysis is not, do the words ‘dirty’ and ‘clean’ correspond with real qualities in the world, but rather: given that we use these words in order to relate to the material environment, what are we able to learn about the implicit assumptions made with regards to this environment which guide our thinking and acting?”

In light of the wide variety of conceptions of dirt and cleanliness throughout history and across cultures, it is easy to conclude that dirt is entirely relative. However, perhaps this is because too often dirt is approached absolutely as a thing in itself. Instead, according to Lagerspatz, “dirty and clean are ‘transcedentals,’” which means that “we do not extract these concepts from some

53 For an object or a person to be “clean” it implies that some action or “cleaning” was done in order to move the object from the “dirty” state to the “clean” state. Bredenbroeker, Hanzen, and Kotzur note that in anthropology and related disciplines, the “practice of cleaning” as an activity or an action has not received much attention; instead “identification of states” in regards to purity and pollution has received more attention. (Edited by Isabel Bredenbröker, Christina Hanzen, and Felix Kotzur, Cleaning and Value. Interdisciplinary Investigations, 2020, 24, https://www.sidestone.com/books/cleaning-and-value.

54 Bredenbröker, Hanzen, and Kotzur, Cleaning and Value. Interdisciplinary Investigations, 57.
specific class of things, but they are, rather, something that we may apply to all reality.”\textsuperscript{55} While there may not be a specific substance or substances, which one can point to and say, “that is dirt” in all contexts, yet that does not necessarily imply that there is no such thing that we can call “dirt.” As Lagerspatz explains:

“Dirty”—like ‘damaged,’ ‘chipped’ or ‘dented’—implies a shortcoming of something. There is an implicit reference to an ideal, unblemished, normal state and to a deviation from that state. The implication is that dirty objects require cleaning… Dirty is also analogous with ‘damaged’ in another way. The logically primary notion in this usage is not dirt as a \textit{substance} but the underlying object’s \textit{quality} of being dirty or soiled. It is a quality that appears when two elements combine: an unwashed substance makes contact with some item perceived as standing in need of protection. The additive collects on the original item, sticks to it or—as with liquids—blends into it. Dirt in this general sense certainly consists of matter, but it is ‘dirt’ because of its relation to the master object. Analogously, an object is \textit{wet} when water is applied to it and stays on as moisture. Moisture consists of a substance, namely water, but water only becomes moisture by uniting with some other substance (clothes, hair, air and so on).\textsuperscript{56}

The concepts of “dirt” and “cleaning” are also closely related to the value of the object that needs to be cleaned of “dirt.”

“The background assumption in our judgements about soiling must be that the master object is in principle possible to clean, that it in some sense \textit{needs} to be cleaned and is \textit{worth} cleaning. Perhaps this is why bits of toilet paper are typically not described as dirty but as \textit{used}. We do not think there is an underlying substance worth cleaning; …Used toilet paper is called dirty mainly when it may soil \textit{other} objects. The normative position outlined here implies a judgement concerning the relative values of the (valuable) master object and the (worthless) additive.”\textsuperscript{57}

Lagerspetz summarizes three conclusions or aspects to consider for understanding what dirt means. First, “dirt can only be conceptualized in its relation to the master object.”\textsuperscript{58} Second, “dirt related concepts are defined teleologically.”\textsuperscript{59} In other words, for something to be dirty, it

\textsuperscript{55} Lagerspetz, \textit{A Philosophy of Dirt}, 13.

\textsuperscript{56} Lagerspetz, \textit{A Philosophy of Dirt}, 45–46.

\textsuperscript{57} Lagerspetz, \textit{A Philosophy of Dirt}, 49.

\textsuperscript{58} Lagerspetz, \textit{A Philosophy of Dirt}, 50.

\textsuperscript{59} Lagerspetz, \textit{A Philosophy of Dirt}, 50.
must be compared to an ideal or goal that is clean or pure, i.e., not dirty. Finally, the “judgement whether an item is clean or dirty is always tied up with a context or situation.”

Lagerspetz illustrates this last principle with the question “Are your hands clean?” The answer to this question is dependent on what the person is expected to do with their hands.

**Contagion and Pollution/Contamination**

Closely related to the idea of dirtiness are the concepts of contagion and pollution/contamination. According to Nemeroff and Rozin, “the law of contagion holds that physical contact between the source and the target results in the transfer of some effect or quality (essence) from the source to the target.” Furthermore, the qualities which can be transferred “may be physical, mental, or moral in nature, and negative or positive in valence.” When qualities and their effects are negative in valence, the terms “contamination” or “pollution”

---

62 Carol Nemeroff and Paul Rozin, “The Makings of the Magical Mind: The Nature and Function of Sympathetic Magical Thinking,” *Imagining the Impossible: Magical, Scientific, and Religious Thinking in Children*, October 11, 2012, 3, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511571381.002. In another paper, Rozin and Nemeroff define the law of contagion as follows: “the “law of contagion” holds that people, objects, and so forth, that come into contact with each other may influence each other through the transfer of some or all of their properties. The influence continues after the physical contact has ended and may be permanent.” (Carol Nemeroff and Paul Rozin, “The Contagion Concept in Adult Thinking in the United States: Transmission of Germs and of Interpersonal Influence,” *Ethos* 22, no. 2 (1994): 159.).

apply.” Contamination is not only physical, but it can be psychological as well; often what matters most in conceptions of contagion is the perception of contamination.

As noted with the example of toilet paper from Lagerspetz above, objects are often classed as dirty, when there is the fear or concern that they will contaminate, pollute, or dirty other objects. Meigs explains the relationship as follows:

“Dirt and pollution are not really opposed categories…Rather they represent two different aspects or perspectives on the unsanitary. Plain dirt is something unsanitary which is not threatening to get inside one’s body; pollution is something unsanitary which is making this threat.”

Thus, “to call something ‘dirty’ directs attention to the object itself and its unsanitary character” whereas “to call something ‘polluting’ draws attention to the power of the dirty object to harm if some of its dirt is taken into our bodies.” While Meigs here emphasizes dirt that is entering the body, the same principle can apply between objects as well. As noted by Yitzhaq Feder, instances of contamination are quite common in everyday life and often quite easily observed. For example, according to Feder,

“We experience actual contagion in numerous domains: the handling of a smelly object transfers its odor, interaction with a sick individual leads to infection and so on. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that these everyday experiences shape our expectations when interacting with our environment.”

While a symbolic approach, such as that of Mary Douglas, might suggest that ideas of contamination or pollution are simply cultural ways of organizing the world, Yitzhaq Feder’s

---

68 Feder, Purity and Pollution in the Hebrew Bible, 4.
approach to understanding and interpreting contamination may be more fruitful, since he also attempts to account for the more universal, cross-cultural aspects of contamination in addition to the culture-specific aspects of these ideas. Feder argues for a “unified account” of contamination and pollution, which “incorporates both biological and cultural factors.” He writes:

“Prepared affective capacities (which include but are not limited to disgust) are shaped by embodied experience and cumulative social learning represented in pollution beliefs. These beliefs emerge from observation and metaphoric conceptualization which determine how different contamination threats are spread and the proper behavioral means to avoid and/or remove them. In turn, these embodied contamination appraisals are shaped by pollution beliefs and are thereby culturally situated, in that they are adapted to the dominant fold theories of the natural and supernatural worlds of the particular culture.”

In other words, people’s beliefs about contamination and pollution are shaped by both biological factors and cultural factors. Furthermore, the “process of detecting contamination motivates both prospective avoidance of contact with the perceived source of contamination and desire to undergo “purification” after contact has been made.” What must be done about

---

69 Feder, “Contamination Appraisals, Pollution Beliefs, and the Role of Cultural Inheritance in Shaping Disease Avoidance Behavior,” 1566.

70 Feder defines “pollution beliefs” as “explanatory theories articulated in cultural discourse which inform contamination appraisals in individuals, for example, the belief that germs in toilets can be spread by contact and cause illness.” (Feder, “Contamination Appraisals, Pollution Beliefs, and the Role of Cultural Inheritance in Shaping Disease Avoidance Behavior,” 1562.).

71 Feder defines “contamination appraisals” as “response mechanisms in individuals that interpret environmental cues as indicating a potential for actual contamination, that is, that a disgust- and/or fear-inducing essence can be or has been already transferred.” (Feder, “Contamination Appraisals, Pollution Beliefs, and the Role of Cultural Inheritance in Shaping Disease Avoidance Behavior,” 1562.).

72 Feder, “Contamination Appraisals, Pollution Beliefs, and the Role of Cultural Inheritance in Shaping Disease Avoidance Behavior,” 1578.

73 Feder, “Contamination Appraisals, Pollution Beliefs, and the Role of Cultural Inheritance in Shaping Disease Avoidance Behavior,” 1562.
perceived contamination may vary based on the source of the contagion, as well as culturally shaped beliefs concerning contamination and purification.74

According to Feder, any plausible explanation of contamination “must acknowledge three partners” which make up a person’s response to contamination: “innate predispositions, experience (learning), and culture.”75 Feder argues for a framework of “embodied cognition” in approaching the topics of purity and pollution.76 Rather than focusing solely on either biological or cultural explanations for pollution beliefs, Feder argues for a synthetic approach which recognizes that both play an important role in the construction of an individuals and/or groups’ ideas of purity and pollution.77 In other words, language and culture play an important role in shaping one’s ideas of what is “dirty” or “contaminating,” yet at the same time there are innate, biological and psychological factors, which shape ideas about these concepts. A third factor is one’s personal experience, although, since this is the most difficult to study experimentally, it receives little attention.78

Feder’s approach is useful because it reminds scholars that beliefs about contamination, dirt, and impurity in ancient cultures (even religious or ritual purity) do not simply emerge from abstract reflection; rather, they are also closely linked with bodily perception and experience.79

74 Feder, “Contamination Appraisals, Pollution Beliefs, and the Role of Cultural Inheritance in Shaping Disease Avoidance Behavior,” 1563.

75 Feder, Purity and Pollution in the Hebrew Bible, 10.

76 Feder, Purity and Pollution in the Hebrew Bible, 18–26.

77 Feder, Purity and Pollution in the Hebrew Bible, 18–20.

78 Feder, Purity and Pollution in the Hebrew Bible, 10.

This is not meant to imply that cultural, linguistic, or symbolic aspects do not play an important role in the shaping of these beliefs. Certainly, they do. However, an academic must be careful not to approach ideas of purity and impurity by assuming that they are only culturally shaped and enforced. After all, it seems extremely unlikely that the Egyptians began finding excrement disgusting after abstract reflection on its symbolism, or after some priests decided it was ritually impure for the deceased. Instead, the experience of things such as excrement, putrefaction and decay is almost certainly fundamental to the shaping of responses to them.

Methodological Approaches to Dirt in This Study

While the above survey is by no means comprehensive, hopefully it helps lay some groundwork from which to approach the subject of dirt in ancient Egypt. The study of dirt in a dead language and ancient culture, such as ancient Egypt, clearly presents unique challenges. One cannot speak with native speakers of the language or culture in order to gain a better understanding of the nuances of words or of an explanation of cultural practices. Additionally, the fragmentary and biased nature of the sources from ancient Egypt further complicates these factors. Since much of the population was probably illiterate, the perspectives concerning dirtiness, which we do possess, are from the perspectives of scribes, kings, officials, and elites. Furthermore, the surviving texts usually concern religious, royal, or funerary concerns and relatively few, if any, texts deal with mundane, daily life aspects of dirt and cleaning. In light of this, it seems unwise to lock oneself solely into any one particular approach or perspective on dirt. Instead, since as much information as possible must be gleaned from the limited sources, it makes sense to use any elements from these theoretical perspectives that may be useful in gathering data.
With that being said, however, a few qualifications are necessary. First, in general, I find Lagerspetz’s and Feder’s approaches to be more nuanced and more convincing than that of Mary Douglas and others following her symbolic framework. Also, while studies of the symbolic or metaphorical usage of dirt are certainly valuable, in this study I am primarily concerned with the materiality of dirt. It seems that the symbolic or metaphorical uses of dirt derive out of actual substances or material that are considered dirty, at least in certain contexts. Thus, in this study, I am primarily concerned with the materials and substances that the Egyptians considered “dirty.” Of course, as Lagerspetz reminds us, we must always be aware of contextual aspects of dirt and not necessarily be looking for an absolute definition of dirt. In other words, substances and materials may not be considered dirty in an absolute, unchanging sense by the Egyptians. Instead, certain substances may be considered dirty in certain contexts or situations, yet they can be acceptable in others. Thus, contextual considerations must always be kept in mind.

This study is primarily a cultural study of ancient Egyptian attitudes towards dirt and impurity, and thus biological aspects of these topics will not receive a lot of emphasis in the context of this study. However, it is important to recognize and acknowledge the more universal aspects of these topics as has been briefly mentioned above. Since things such as excrement, bodily fluids, and putrefaction are almost universally considered to be dirty or defiling, it seems reasonable to consider that they were viewed similarly in ancient Egypt, at least until there is evidence suggesting otherwise.
Archaeology of the Senses

This study will also attempt to incorporate insights from the study of the senses. Interest in the “archaeology of the senses” and “cultural history of the senses” have been increasing in recent decades. According to Howe,

“Sensory studies is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry where history, anthropology, and numerous other humanities and social science disciplines coalesce. It is predicated on a cultural approach to the study of the senses and a sensory approach to the study of culture. The senses thus figure as both object of study and means of inquiry within this emergent paradigm.”

Sensory archaeology acknowledges “our shared human corporeality” and thus “the body becomes the starting point for sensory archaeology.” Further, “This body is the physical, perceiving body, the body equipped with the sensory organs found in a fully functioning human being: nose, mouth, eyes, ears, skin, brain and nerves, as well as limbs to allow movement.” In other words, sensory archaeology attempts to better understand how the world was sensed and experienced by the people(s) of the past. As Neumann and Thomason write, “The use of sensory experiences to cast a lifeline to the “dead” ancient past offers a way for scholars and students of


the ancient Near East to better understand, reimagine, and bring to life the human experience in antiquity.”

Incorporating insights from the archaeology of the senses may provide new insights into the culture of ancient Egypt and how the phenomenon of “dirt” was understood and experienced by the people of ancient Egypt.

An important tenant of much research on the archaeology or history or the senses is that the five categories of “Western” senses and its imposed hierarchy of the senses is problematic.

According to Jo Day:

One of the essential tenets of contemporary sensory research is that the senses, five of which are mentioned above, are as much culturally constituted as physically given. The contemporary Western sensorium happens to name and recognize five (taste, touch, olfaction, hearing, and vision), but this is neither the sole way nor the “right” way to order perception.  

While acknowledging this critique, this study will continue to use the basic categories of the five senses. In large part, this is due to the difficulties of understanding and interpreting the evidence

---


86 Day, “Introduction: Making Senses of the Past,” 3. According to Constance Class, “In the West we are accustomed to thinking of perception as a physical rather than cultural act. The five senses simply gather data about the world. Yet even our time-honoured notion of there being five senses is itself a cultural construction. Some cultures recognize more senses, and other cultures fewer. In Buddhist cultures the mind is classified as a sixth sense. The Hausa of Nigeria divide the senses into two, with one term for sight and one for all the other senses.” (Classen, Worlds of Sense, 1–2. In part, this is supported by neuroscience research on perception as research into the neurophysiology of perception has “given the lie to the canonical five-sense model of the perceptual apparatus, which Western culture inherited from Aristotle…Thus, the sense of touch has been dissected into a panoply of senses-pressure, temperature, pain, as well as the introspective senses of kinaesthesia, proprioception, and balance; the sense of vision has been dismembered into separate senses for light and colour (and arguably, separate senses for red, green, and blue); taste has been broken down into separate receptor organs for sweet, salt, sour, bitter, and, for the fifth flavour, umami; and, no one is sure how many distinct receptors there are for smell. In any event, a conservative estimate would put the number of senses at 10, but it is generally accepted by neurobiologists that our sense number 21, and radical estimates put the number as high as 33” (Howes, “Digging up the Sensorium: On the Sensory Revolution in Archaeology,” 22.).
for the senses from the ancient world. As noted by Elisabeth Steinbach-Eicke, “a crucial point in talking about sense perception in ancient Egypt is the fact that there is (according to the evidence) no surviving discourse within ancient Egypt on the topic of perception.” Thus, “conclusions about the number and understanding of sensory modalities can only be drawn indirectly from textual evidence or material culture.” Thus, although imposing a five sense classification system on ancient Egypt risks misinterpreting the Egyptians’ native understanding of the senses and perception, without clear solid evidence that the Egyptians’ interpretation of the senses differed from the categories of the five senses, the adoption of any other system risks imposing two nonnative categorizations of the senses on ancient Egypt—that of the modern

---

87 As Baltussen notes concerning the difficulties of interpreting the senses in ancient Greece: “considered views on sensory experiences from the ancient world are among the most difficult representations to interpret: we are faced with particular challenges of complex evidence, a problem of access to the actual sensory affections, and the fluid and variable language across periods and schools of thought…. The nature of sensory experiences themselves also poses special challenges. Not only are they now disembodied and distant, but the descriptive terms and underlying concepts are also often intricate, and we have trouble determining to what extent the scope of recorded instances of seeing, hearing, or smelling (by choice or by chance) coincides with the actual range of sensations. These three issues (access, language, subjectivity) perhaps suggest limited opportunities for reconstructing theories about sensory experiences. As serious as these limitations are to our inquiry, we should not consider them insurmountable obstacles to probing the question of how the ancients expressed their sensory experiences in a more theoretical form.” (Han Baltussen, “Early Theories of Sense Perception: Greek Origins,” in The Routledge Handbook of Sensory Archaeology, ed. Robin Skeates and Jo Day, Routledge Handbooks (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor and Francis group, 2020), 35–36.)


interpreter as well as another classificatory system that is equally foreign to the ancient Egyptian understanding. In light of these challenges, it seems best to continue to work with the classical five senses model while at the same time noting that this might not have been the Egyptians’ own classificatory system of the senses.

With this being said, however, the hieroglyphic determinatives used for Egyptian words of perception may indeed suggest that the five senses model closely mirrors the Egyptians’ understanding. Steinbach-Eicke suggests that the classifiers or determinatives for the Egyptian words for the senses (“an eye for sight, an ear for hearing, a finger or an arm for touch, a nose or a face in profile for smell, and a tongue of a cow for taste”) might justify the use of the five senses model for studying the senses in ancient Egypt. While this evidence from hieroglyphic

It should be noted that there are several lexical studies of Egyptian words for visual perception, their semantic range, and how their meaning(s) change and adapt over time. For example, according to Jean Winand, prior to the Amarna period, m33 appears to be the most common verb of visual perception and the one with the widest semantic range. In this period, ptr seems to have the more specific meaning of “seeing” in the sense of “intellectual analysis” while dgj emphasizes the effort of the subject in “seeing,” however, in texts written entirely in Late Egyptian, ptr seems to have largely lost this more particular nuance, and becomes a more general, common word for “to see” with a broader semantic range similar to m33, while dgj seems to have dropped from usage altogether (Jean Winand, “Champ Semantique et Structure En Egyptian Ancien: Les Verbes Exprimant La Vision,” Studien Zur Altegyptischen Kultur 13 (1986): 293–314.). Leo Depuydt distinguishes verbs of visual perceptions, which refer primarily to the physical act, i.e., “to see,” from those which also indicate the mental activity involved in visual perception, i.e. “to look.” “Seeing” is a function of the body, or more specifically the eyes, while “looking” implies an act of will. Thus, “seeing” is often the result of “looking.” Depuydt argues that in Old and Middle Egyptian dgj means “to look,” while m33 means “to see,” whereas in Late Egyptian nw means “to look,” while ptr means “to see” (Leo Depuydt, “Die ‘Verben Des Sehens’: Semantische Grundzüge Am Beispiel Des Ägyptischen,” Orientalia 57, no. 1 (1988): 1–13.).

The possibility that the Egyptians themselves never had a formal classification or interpretive system of the senses should also be considered.


---

90 It should be noted that there are several lexical studies of Egyptian words for visual perception, their semantic range, and how their meaning(s) change and adapt over time. For example, according to Jean Winand, prior to the Amarna period, m33 appears to be the most common verb of visual perception and the one with the widest semantic range. In this period, ptr seems to have the more specific meaning of “seeing” in the sense of “intellectual analysis” while dgj emphasizes the effort of the subject in “seeing,” however, in texts written entirely in Late Egyptian, ptr seems to have largely lost this more particular nuance, and becomes a more general, common word for “to see” with a broader semantic range similar to m33, while dgj seems to have dropped from usage altogether (Jean Winand, “Champ Semantique et Structure En Egyptian Ancien: Les Verbes Exprimant La Vision,” Studien Zur Altegyptischen Kultur 13 (1986): 293–314.). Leo Depuydt distinguishes verbs of visual perceptions, which refer primarily to the physical act, i.e., “to see,” from those which also indicate the mental activity involved in visual perception, i.e. “to look.” “Seeing” is a function of the body, or more specifically the eyes, while “looking” implies an act of will. Thus, “seeing” is often the result of “looking.” Depuydt argues that in Old and Middle Egyptian dgj means “to look,” while m33 means “to see,” whereas in Late Egyptian nw means “to look,” while ptr means “to see” (Leo Depuydt, “Die ‘Verben Des Sehens’: Semantische Grundzüge Am Beispiel Des Ägyptischen,” Orientalia 57, no. 1 (1988): 1–13.).

91 The possibility that the Egyptians themselves never had a formal classification or interpretive system of the senses should also be considered.

determinatives is certainly not decisive or the last word on the subject, it does suggest that application of the five senses model when interpreting ancient Egyptian evidence is reasonable.

This dissertation is not a study of the senses in ancient Egypt. However, it does attempt to make use of insights from sensory archaeology as another lens or tool to better understand the ancient Egyptians and their culture.\textsuperscript{93} Thus, in this study, I will attempt to consider how various forms of “dirt” were perceived in ancient Egypt. In other words, when aspects of “dirt” are referred to in ancient Egypt, which sense(s) is it primarily affecting? For example, is something perceived as “dirty” by sight, smell, touch, taste, hearing or a combination of these senses? Considering questions such as this could prove illuminating in understanding how the ancient Egyptians perceived something as “dirty.”

**Summary**

In sum, the question around which this study is focused is, “how did the ancient Egyptians define, describe and experience dirt and dirtiness?” We will examine ancient Egyptian conceptions of dirt and impurity, and specifically focus on these conceptions in daily life. My focus in this study is primarily lexical. What words did the Egyptians use to describe dirt and impurity, what did they mean, and in what contexts were they used? How did the Egyptians describe uncleanness and what things did they consider to be dirty and why? How did the

---

\textsuperscript{93} I tend to follow Robyn Price’s assessment and see sensory archaeology not so much as a paradigm shift or revolutionary overhaul of traditional Egyptological studies, but rather it is a new tool which can be used alongside more traditional approaches to provide new insights. See Robyn Price, “Sniffing out the Gods: Archaeology with the Senses,” *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 17 (2018): 142. For study of the role of the sense in Egyptian worship see Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad, “Enjoying the Pleasures of Sensation: Reflections on an Interesting Feature of Egyptian Religion,” in *Gold of Praise: Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honor of Edward F. Wente*, ed. John A. Larson and Emily Teeter (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1999), 111–19.
Egyptians react and respond to the dirtiness in their environment? Since my focus is on daily dirtiness rather than ritual impurity my focus will be primarily on texts that do not primarily have a ritual or religious focus. Finally, while ideas of dirt are often used in a moral, religious, or metaphorical sense, I am primarily focused on dirt as a material substance, since these other uses of the concept of dirtiness likely have a material basis rather than vice versa.

The organization of this study is as follows. First, in order to have an adequate understanding of how the ancient Egyptians perceived dirtiness, it is helpful to have a basic conception of what constituted clean and pure to the ancient Egyptians. Thus, we will begin by briefly surveying Egyptian conceptions of cleanliness. Next, we will examine a wide variety of Egyptian terms related to conceptions of dirt or dirty. This makes up the bulk of this work. Next, we will examine in more detail two Egyptian literary texts, namely Satire of the Trades and Sinuhe, which contain extensive passages in which the idea of dirtiness seems to be a significant theme. The final section is a brief synthesis of the foregoing sections and the implications for our understanding of dirty in ancient Egyptian culture and society.
CHAPTER 2: THE OPPOSITE OF DIRTY: CLEANLINESS IN ANCIENT EGYPT

In order to understand the Egyptian conceptions of dirtiness, it is necessary to understand their conceptions of its opposite, i.e., cleanliness. In other words, we must examine what components were necessary for an Egyptian individual to be “clean.” Of course, we must always keep in mind that in regard to what is “clean,” context plays a major role. We should expect that the standards of cleanliness required for entry into a temple are more than for a common house, the standards of an elite home are probably higher than a simple peasant’s home, the standards of cleanliness for a holiday may be higher than those for a normal day, and so on. In other words, context plays a major part in determining the standard that must be achieved in order to be “clean.” Of course, factors such as class, profession, and even individual preference are also involved. In light of the limited and fragmentary evidence surviving from ancient Egypt, we will of course, not be able to consider every aspect of context that might relate to any given example. Instead, our goal here is simply to lay out several aspects of hygiene and cleanliness that seem to have been considered important to the ancient Egyptians. This will provide us with a basic context for comparison when we turn to an examination of the ancient Egyptian conception of “dirty.”

Since this is not a study of ritual purity or hygiene, our primary focus will be on evidence, which indicates what was “clean” in daily life. Since we are primarily focused on mundane dirtiness, we are primarily concerned with mundane cleanliness. In other words, this survey is not meant to be a study of ritual or religious conceptions of purity. In other words, religious or ritual purity is examined here, only insofar as it might reflect on cleanliness in daily life. We will first examine aspects of personal or bodily cleanliness in ancient Egypt, and then we will examine “clean” as it relates to spaces and objects.
**Bodily Cleanliness**

In this section, we will examine the Egyptian’s understanding of personal cleanliness or bodily hygiene. Perhaps a good place to begin looking at the Egyptian conceptions of cleanliness is the end of Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead.¹ This chapter ends with instructions on how the spell is to be performed.

\[\text{qd.tw r pn w'b twrj} \]
\[\text{wnlh w mbsw tbw m ḫḏty} \]
\[\text{sḏmw m msḏmt wrḥ m ʿntyw} \]
\[\text{wḏn n=f ksw spdw snṯr} \]
\[\text{t ḫnh ṣmw} \]
\[\text{jṣ ḫr.n=k ṣḥm pn nty m ṣš} \]
\[\text{ḥr sḏtw w'b m sty sḥr m ṣḥ} \]
\[\text{nty n ḫḥd ṣḏj ʿwt ḫr=f} \]

This formula is to be spoken pure and cleansed, Clothed in linen, clad in white sandals, Eye-lined with eye-paint, anointed with scented oils, Offering to him cattle and fowl, incense, bread, beer, herbs, when you have made this guide in writing on a pure block with ochre, inscribed on earth on which no swine or herd has trodden.²

This text provides a good summary of some important aspects of what was considered clean and pure according to the ancient Egyptians. The terms *w'b* and *twrj* probably included washing with water. Wearing linen and white sandals seem to be aspects of cleanliness and purity, as well as wearing eye-paint and anointing oneself with fragrant oils. Of course, these are likely luxuries

---

¹ It should be noted not all scholars agree that the origin of this spell is in the mortuary sphere. Grieshammer (R. Grieshammer, “Zum Sitz Im Leben Des Negativen Sündenbekenntnisses,” in Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 2.1974, 1974, 19–25.) suggested its use for priests in the temple and this proposal was argued in more depth by Jonathan Gee (Gee, The Requirements of Ritual Purity in Ancient Egypt.). Quack has suggested that this text originated in rituals at the royal court (Joachim Friedrich Quack, “From Ritual to Magic: Ancient Egyptian Forerunners of the Charitesion and Their Social Setting.,” in Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition, ed. Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari, and Shaul Shaked (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), 51–56.).

² Following transliteration and translation in Stephen Quirke, Going out in Daylight: Prt m Hrw - the Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead: Translations, Sources, Meanings, 2013, 276.
that the lower classes could not afford, and thus these aspects of cleanliness probably marked social status as well. Since this is a ritual or funerary text, one might consider that what is described is “ritual purity” and not everyday cleanliness. Yet, perhaps conceptions of “ritual purity” should not be considered as entirely distinct and unique from ideals of cleanliness in daily life. There may be higher standards for purity in the religious realm, yet those ideals probably find a basis in what was considered clean and pure by the Egyptians in general. These ideals of cleanliness will be further explored below, but Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead provides a good starting point for exploring what the Egyptians considered clean and pure in daily life, or at least what were the ideals of cleanliness and purity.

Washing

Although many may take it for granted that washing with water is a fundamental aspect of cleanliness, this is not necessarily an idea that all cultures share. However, that washing was a basic aspect of Egyptian culture seems clear from numerous examples in Egyptian texts. In general, the Egyptians seem to have washed themselves in the morning, before meals and for ritual purposes. The Egyptians probably did not wash themselves for medical or health purposes

3 Joachim Quack argues that the purity requirements of the first-person statements in the Book of the Dead actually apply to the living ritualist instead of to the deceased. For his argument see Joachim Friedrich Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion,” in Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism, ed. Christian Frevel and Christophe Nihan (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 144–52.

4 For example, in seventeenth century Europe, linen was used to wipe the body without water because it was feared that the water would “rob the skin of its protective qualities” (Jean Gelman Taylor, “Bathing and Hygiene Histories from the KITLV Images Archive,” in Cleanliness and Culture, ed. Kees van Dijk and Jean Gelman Taylor, vol. 272, Indonesian Histories (Brill, 2011), 43–44. Cf. Kees van Dijk, “Soap Is the Onset of Civilization,” in Cleanliness and Culture, ed. Kees van Dijk and Jean Gelman Taylor, vol. 272, Indonesian Histories (Brill, 2011), 1–40. For a study of changing views of cleanliness in France from the Middle Ages to the beginning of the twentieth century including extended discussion of the role of water and washing, or lack thereof, in conceptions of cleanliness see Georges Vigarello and Jean Birrell, Concepts of Cleanliness: Changing Attitudes in France since the Middle Ages, Past and Present Publications (Cambridge ; New York : Paris: Cambridge University Press ; Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1988).

in a modern sense; instead, the primary motivations for washing may have been the removal of
dirt (whether literal or symbolic) and to feel refreshed.\(^6\) Washing could be done by bathing in the
Nile or, perhaps more commonly, by pouring water over one’s body.\(^7\) While the mention of
washing in religious and ritual texts are frequent, here we will primarily offer examples from
texts which indicate that washing was a part of daily life.

It seems that washing with water was a frequent and perhaps even a daily practice in
ancient Egypt. In the Calendar of Lucky and Unlucky Days, it says the following for the 22\(^{\text{nd}}\)
day of Akhet: “Uncertain, uncertain uncertain. You should not wash with water on this day.” (ḥḥ ḥḥ ḥḥ jm=k \(w^r\)b=k m mw m hrw pn).\(^8\) This seems to imply that washing was regularly
performed.\(^9\)

Similarly, in the Tale of Two Brothers, the text indicates that the custom, when the older
brother returned home in the evening, was for his wife to put water on his hands. However, since
his wife was pretending to be sick, she did not perform this habit.

\((4,9)\) jw st ḥr tm djt mw ḥr drt-f m pṣy-f ṣḥrw

---

\(^6\) Rosenow, “Es Stinkt: Hygiene Im Alten Ägypten.,” 29; Kolta, “Eine Spurensuche: Zur Hygiene Und Körperpflege
Bei Den Altägyptern Und Den Kopten.,” 153.

\(^7\) Rosenow, “Es Stinkt: Hygiene Im Alten Ägypten.,” 29. Scenes depicting water being poured over an individual are
frequent in temples and tombs. For some examples see Alan Gardiner, “The Baptism of Pharaoh.,” Journal of
Egyptian Archaeology 36 (1950): 3–12; Emil Buzov, “The Role of the Heart in the Purification.,” in L’acqua
Nell’antico Egitto: Vita, Rigenerazione, Incantesimo, Medicamento; Proceedings of the First International
Conference for Young Egyptologists, Italy, Chianciano Terme, October 15-18, 2003, ed. Alessia Amenta, Maria

\(^8\) Hieroglyphic text edition can be found in Christian Leitz, Tagewählerei: Das Buch HAt NHH PH.Wy Dt Und

\(^9\) The same admonition is given for the first month of Peret day 17 and the fourth month of Peret day 18  (Leitz,
Tagewählerei: Das Buch HAt NHH PH.Wy Dt Und Verwandte Texte., 55:210–11; 319.).
Then she was not putting water on his hand according to his custom.\textsuperscript{10}

This text clearly implies that it was customary for Anubis to wash his hands when he returned home in the evening. Later in the text, after the pine with the younger brother’s heart is cut, the scene shifts to the older brother and describes how he finds out.

\begin{mostlyarab}
(12.8–12.9) jw (J)npw p\textsuperscript{3} sn rz n B\textsuperscript{3}t\textsuperscript{3} hr \textsuperscript{3}k r p\textsuperscript{3}y-f pr jw-f hr ḫms j r drt-f\end{mostlyarab}

Then Anubis, the older brother of Bata, was entering his house and sitting, washing his hands.

Again, when the older brother returns to his house, he washes his hands. The implication seems to be that this was a typical action of his when he entered his house. A higher standard of cleanliness may have been expected in domestic space than outside of it.\textsuperscript{12} From at least the time of the Middle Kingdom (if not earlier), but certainly by the time of the New Kingdom at least elite houses and palaces had latrines and facilities for washing in the home.\textsuperscript{13} These sanitary installations may have been used by the inhabitants and visitors of the residence to wash themselves, or at least their hands, when entering the house.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{footnotes}
\begin{footnote}{Alan H. Gardiner, \textit{Late-Egyptian Stories.}, vol. 1, Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca (Bruxelles: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1932), 13.}

\begin{footnote}{Gardiner, \textit{Late-Egyptian Stories.}, 1:22.}

\begin{footnote}{This concept may be similar to that of the temple. Increasing levels of purity are required to enter deeper regions of the temple (Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion.,” 118.).}


\begin{footnote}{Gräzer, “Hygiène et Sécurité Dans l’habitat Égyptien d’époque Pharaonique.,” 2009, 42, 49.}

\end{footnotes}

34
Washing hands also seems to have been necessary before entering the palace. Thus, in the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor, an attendant tells his commander:

(13-14) $\text{jw tw jm} $ mw $\text{hr dbw}=k$

Wash yourself, put water on your fingers.

In addition to the need to wash before entering the palace, this text could also indicate a need to wash upon returning from a journey.\(^{15}\)

Several texts from the Amarna period, seem to imply that washing upon rising was a typical practice for the entire population of Egypt (or at least this is the idealized picture presented). The Great Hymn to the Aten describes activities around the rising of the Aten in the following way:

(4) $\text{hd t3 wbn.tj m 3ht}$
\[\text{psd}=t \ m \ jtn \ m \ hrw}\]
\[\text{Rwj}=k \ kk(w) \ dj=k \ stwt=k\]
\[\text{t3.wy m 3hb}\]
\[\text{hnmt} \ ^{16} \ \text{rs} \ ^{16} \ \text{hr rdwy}\]
\[\text{t3.n}=k \ \text{sn}\]
\[\text{W^n b}=\text{sn} \ \text{ssp} \ (5) \ \text{wnhw}\]
\[\text{3wy}=\text{sn} \ m \ j3w \ n \ h=c=k\]
\[\text{t3 r dr=f jr}=\text{sn} \ k3t=\text{sn}\]
\[\text{j3wt nb(wt) htp(w) hr smw}=\text{sn}\]
\[\text{3nw smw hr 3h3h}\]
\[\text{3pw3 m s}=\text{sn}\]
\[\text{dn}=\text{sn} \ m \ j3w \ n \ k3=k\]
\[\text{w3nl nb(wt) hr tjian hr rdwy}\]
\[\text{p3yw hnn(w)t nb} \ (6) \ \text{5nh}=\text{sn} \ \text{wbn}=k \ n=\text{sn}\]
\[\text{5h}=\text{m} \ \text{hdy} \ \text{mjw} \ \text{mjit} \ \text{w3t nb(t) wn n h}=\text{k}\]
\[\text{rmw hr jtrw hr tft n-hr}=\text{k} \ \text{stwt}=k \ \text{m-hnw w3d-wr} \ ^{17}\]


\(^{16}\) The text has $\hat{\text{h}}$. Other translation translate this ideogram as “light” (William J. Murnane, Texts from the Amarna Period in Egypt., ed. Edmund S. Meltzer, vol. 5, Writings from the Ancient World (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 113.).

\(^{17}\) Maj Sandman, Texts from the Time of Akhenaten., vol. 8, Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca (Bruxelles: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1938), 94.3-10.
When the earth brightens, you rise in the horizon,  
as you shine in the Aten in the day,  
you drive away the darkness and you give your rays.  
The two lands are in festival,  
Humankind awake and stand on (their) feet.  
after you have raised them up,  
their bodies are cleansed, and (their) clothes put on (5),  
Their arms are in praise because you appear.  
The land to its limit, they are doing their work.  
All the cattle are satisfied with their pastures,  
Trees and plants are flourishing.  
The birds which fly from their nests,  
Their wings are in praise of your ka.  
All flocks are leaping on (their) feet.  
All which fly and alight (6)–they live when you rise for them.  
Boats are heading upstream and downstream; likewise, every way is open because you appear.  
Fish in the river are leaping before you, while your rays are in the sea.\textsuperscript{18}

This text is interesting for our purposes, since it mentions people awakening and then “their bodies are cleansed, and (their) clothes are put on” (\textit{w\textsuperscript{r}b h\textsuperscript{r}w sn \textit{ssp wn\textit{nhw}}}).\textsuperscript{19} This text might imply that washing one’s body was considered a normal morning routine. Since this is a religious text, it is possible that part of the nuance of what is described is ritual and religious in nature. While one does not want to downplay the importance of ritual purity for the ancient Egyptians, one wonders if there may be a more fundamental, mundane aspect behind this description as well. As can be seen from the extensive context quoted above, all of the various activities


\textsuperscript{19} Sandman, \textit{Texts from the Time of Akhenaten.}, 8:94, 4–5. Although Murnane translates as “wearing clothes,” \textit{ssp} usually has more the idea of “taking” or “receiving.” Thus, rather than describing people as dressed, perhaps a better understanding is of people getting dressed for the day. Cf. The similar text in the tomb of Tutu where Murnane translates as “putting on clothing” Murnane, \textit{Texts from the Amarna Period in Egypt.}, 5:191.
attributed to the activities of, or adoration of the Aten cannot be attributed exclusively to religious or exceptional occurrences. For example, phrases such as “the land to its entirety are doing their work” \((t\, \text{r} \, \text{dr-f} \, j\, r \, s\, n \, k\, \text{st-sn})^{20}\) implies that all the people in the land are doing their normal, daily occupations. Similarly, the descriptions of the animals such as birds flying out of their nests, cattle prancing, and fish leaping imply normal, animal activities. There does not seem to be anything inherently religious about ships going upstream and downstream. However, in the context of the poem, these “mundane” activities are attributed to the worship of the Aten. In other words, the sense of the passage seems to be that normal, everyday activities are adoration of the Aten or attributable to the rising and presence of the Aten.\(^{21}\) In this context then, the reference to people cleansing their bodies when they arise should probably be seen as a normal activity. This text seems to imply that washing one’s body upon rising was a normal, everyday activity for the Egyptians.\(^{22}\) While one must be conscious of the fact that this reference is from

---


\(^{21}\) According to Jan Assmann, “These texts are not dealing with worship in the ordinary sense. It is not a question of a particular ritual act, but rather the ordinary life impulse of nature awakening which is interpreted as a single hymn of praise offered up by the light-created world to the creative power of light: waking, rising, washing, dressing, going to work by human beings, whose arms are spread out in praise, exactly like the wings of birds, the life impulse of animals, the growth and movement of plants, everything praises the life-giving creator in its natural response to the sunlight” (Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom*, 90.).

\(^{22}\) Others have interpreted the reference to cleansing in the Amarna period as a new custom. For example, Spieser argues that Akhenaten established a “new hygiene” in his city of Akhetaten, and she argues that this indicates that the Amarna religion led to an increase of ritual type purity in the private sphere (Spieser, *Offrandes et purification à l’époque amarnienne*, 17. She uses this portion of the text of the Great Hymn as key evidence for this assertion. However, she seems to only consider washing and purity in the realm of rituals and temples and not have taken adequate account of the fact that washing may be an important part of daily life in ancient Egypt as well. In other words, I think she goes beyond the evidence in her assertion that Amarna religion indicates a new requirement of purity and hygiene for all. The texts that she cites from Amarna tombs may not be assertions of new hygienic or purity practices by the people of Amarna, but rather could also be understood as a typical Egyptian practice of washing and dressing when the sun rises.
an elite tomb, the text does clearly imply that washing of the body is done (or perhaps ideally should be done) by everyone in the land of Egypt.23

Similar ideas are found in the text on the south wall thickness in the tomb of Tutu, also from the Amarna period.24 Unfortunately, the text is somewhat damaged at the portion describing the cleansing it appears to parallel the line from the Great Hymn above. (The word ḫ nbw is missing and only the ρ of ḫsp is undamaged, but it seems almost certain that these words should be restored in the lacuna based on the parallel in the Great Hymn).25 Murnane’s translation of this portion of the text (with the restoration of ḫ nbw and ḫsp) is below.  

\[ (4) \smw \ṣnw \hr \wnwn \nt-hr=k \]
\[ Jm(j)w \mw \hr \fft \nt \ḥfr=k \]
\[ Jrt \ nb(t) \ ḫnbw \ hr \ st=st \]
\[ Wb (5) [ḥnb=sn \ṣs] \rp= [s]n \ wnhw\]

Plants and trees move to and fro before you,
And those in the waters are leaping because you appear.
Every eye stands on its place,
their bodies cleansed (5), and their clothes put on.27

Again, as can be seen in the text above, many of the activities described as performed before the Aten are not “ritual” or “religious” but, rather, everyday occurrences. The implication of the text

---

23 This washing may not have been done in a tub or basin, however. According to Kemp, “in the absence of evidence for bathing tubs (even shallow ones), we have to picture water being poured over the bather, draining from the spout into a small stone tank (which had to be emptied by hand) or into a pottery vessel sunk into the ground.” Barry J. Kemp, The City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti: Amarna and Its People, New Aspects of Antiquity (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012), 204–5.

24 Murnane, Texts from the Amarna Period in Egypt., 5:190–92; Sandman, Texts from the Time of Akhenaten., 8:75–78.


26 Sandman, Texts from the Time of Akhenaten., 8:76.3-4.

seems to be that everything normally done on earth is due to the Aten. This then suggests that the washing of the body was a normal everyday activity for the Egyptians.

Washing, at least of one’s hands, may have been a common practice before eating.²⁸ Pyramid Text 436 says:

\[ f^c \text{ tw j[a]} \text{ sw k3=k hms k3=k wnm=f hnr=k} \] ²⁹

Wash yourself and your \( ka \) washes itself, your \( ka \) sits and eats bread with you.³⁰

Another example, in the Demotic tale of Amasis and the Skipper, “Pharaoh washed himself for a meal together with his wives,”³¹ and the young skipper Hormaakheru “went to his house. He washed himself for a meal with his wife.”³² These examples suggest that it was normal to wash before eating.³³

We should also note that the Egyptians may not have completely separated “daily” or “mundane” hygienic cleansing from “religious” or “ritual” cleansing. In a student’s miscellany in Chester Beatty Papyrus IV³⁴ the student is told to praise the god every day in order to gain his favor (verso 4,9–12). The student is then told:


³¹ Trans. Ritner in Simpson et al., The Literature of Ancient Egypt, 451. Ritner notes that literally the phrase is “Pharaoh purified himself” (n. 3).

³² Trans. Ritner in Simpson et al., The Literature of Ancient Egypt, 452.


(4,12) \( w^b m jb \ mr= k \ twr \ tj \ r^f nb \)

Be pure in heart so that you may love. Cleanse yourself every day.

It does not seem entirely clear from the text whether this cleansing should be performed in order to visit a shrine or temple or if it is simply “mundane” cleansing, which a scribe should perform every day. Whatever the case, the text probably should caution us from driving too hard of a wedge between “ritual” cleansing and “daily life” cleansing. The Egyptians may have seen all cleansing as in some sense “religious.” According to Gräzer, “La dimension indiscutablement magique de la purification dans l’Égypte pharaonique m’a donc conduit à penser que l’hygiène corporelle, telle qu’elle était pratiquée au sein de la maison, était elle aussi concue comme un acte à portée rituelle et non uniquement sanitaire.” Regardless, whether or not the Egyptian conceived of daily washing as a religious activity, it seems clear that it was practiced daily, and not only for reasons connected with a temple or mortuary cult.

Anointing, Fumigation, Incense, Oils, Unguents and Aromatics

Although washing with water was an essential component of cleanliness for the ancient Egyptians, it was not the only aspect of cleanliness. Various fumigations and anointings with a variety of oils and aromatics also seem to be important components of being “clean” or “pure” in ancient Egypt. The ancient Egyptians seem to have used a wide variety of substances for these purposes and to have “consumed” them in a variety of ways (i.e., rubbing, fumigation, anointing, rinsing the mouth or swallowing, etc.). While the Egyptians likely considered the substances


36 Quack writes concerning how purification was accomplished that “the typical combination in actual practice is the pouring of water and the fumigation with incense. Alongside that, there is a purification with natron, which of course is normally part of the water pouring, as natron is dissolved in water. These are the usual purification substances, and all others must be classified as unusual.” (Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion.,” 118.)
used and how they were used as significant, exploring all of these aspects is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is helpful to establish a number of ways in which these types of substances were used for “cleansing” in ancient Egypt. Again, while the use of incense and unguents was clearly considered essential for sacred space and rituals, our focus here is on establishing that fumigation and anointing were also important for establishing “mundane” or “day to day” cleanliness. Daily “cleanliness” may have differed from “ritual purity” in degree more than quality. In other words, in many cases, mundane cleanliness and ritual purity may have differed in the amount or standard of cleaning required rather than consisting of a completely different nature or using completely different techniques. Below we will consider several examples which imply that substances such as incense and oils were an important component of cleanliness in ancient Egypt.

That incense could be considered cleansing is clear from the text of the so-called “hymn to incense.” The version of it from Chapter 21 of the Daily Temple Ritual for Amun-Re is offered here (Papyrus Berlin 3055, VII,9–VIII, 5):

---

37 See Manniche, Sacred Luxuries.

38 Yitzhaq Feder argues that the idea that “religious” or “ritual” purity is somehow unique or distinct from “normal” cleanliness is “deeply mistaken” (Feder, “Contamination Appraisals, Pollution Beliefs, and the Role of Cultural Inheritance in Shaping Disease Avoidance Behavior,” 1566.) He writes, “pollution beliefs did not originate as matters of theological reflection but served as a means of explaining and coping with unseen forces that cause disease and death in daily existence” (Feder, “Contamination Appraisals, Pollution Beliefs, and the Role of Cultural Inheritance in Shaping Disease Avoidance Behavior,” 1566.).


40 Nadja Stefanie Braun, Pharao und Priester: sakrale Affirmation von Herrschaft durch Kulvvollzug : das Tägliche Kultbildritual im Neuen Reich und der Dritten Zwischenzeit, 2013, 130; Claude Carrier, Le rituel du culte divin journalier de l’??gypte ancienne: Papyrus Berlin 3055 (Brest: ??ditions PAM, 2015), 113–16; Alexandre Moret, Le
Speech for incense: Speaking words: When the incense comes, the scent of the god comes. May its scent come to you, O Amun-re lord of the throne of the two lands. The scent of the eye of Horus is to you; the smell of Nekhbet which comes from El-kab is to you. May it wash you, may it adorn you, and may it take its place on your arms. Hail to you, O incense; hail to you, O Menwer,\(^{41}\) which is in the limb of the eye of Horus the great, after Pharaoh has diffused\(^{42}\) you in this your name of pedj-incense,\(^{43}\) and after Pharaoh has censed you in this your name of incense. O Amun-re lord of the throne of the two lands, take for yourself the eye of Horus whose scent comes to you, the scent of the eye of Horus is toward you.

The incense here “washes” (j") the god which implies that the incense offers some kind of cleansing.\(^{44}\) The repeated emphasis on scent (stj) indicates that the pleasant aroma of the incense was an integral part of this process. Having the aroma of incense adhering to one’s person (instead of an unpleasant odor) indicates one’s cleanliness.\(^{45}\) A number of sources for the “incense hymn” conclude with the phrase “Be pure, be pure” (wʃb sp sn) which implies the close connection between purity and the “washing” scent of the incense.\(^{46}\) While this spell is of a ritual or religious nature, it does suggest that where we find incense in other texts, we should consider the possibility that it implies cleansing or cleanliness.


\(^{42}\) For this meaning of pd see *Wb I* 568.16–569.1.

\(^{43}\) Or perhaps “a measure of incense.” See *Wb I* 568.

\(^{44}\) Other texts also connect incense with purity or cleansing. For example see Chapter 61 of the Karnak ritual for Amun (Braun, *Pharaon und Priester*, 183–84.). Burning incense may also drive off insects.


\(^{46}\) Tacke, *Das Opferritual des ägyptischen Neuen Reiches Band I Texte*, 97.
Papyrus Anastasi IV is a Late Egyptian Miscellany, which contains a section giving instructions to prepare for the arrival of Pharaoh.\textsuperscript{47} Among other instructions, this text describes how the servants (\textit{hmw}) are to be prepared for the Pharaoh’s arrival.

\begin{verbatim}
(16,2) hmw Krk mn\textit{h}w m s\textit{?}w m s\textit{?}w wb\textit{3} n (16,3) \textit{hm}=f \textit{c} w s \textit{jw=}\textit{w} \textit{w}\textit{b} s\textit{gn} n \textit{f}y m \textit{sfr}\textit{y} m \\
\textit{smt hry} p\textit{3} s\textit{s}d
\end{verbatim}

The servants of Kerek and the youths are in the phyles in order, and the butlers of his person l.p.h. They are washed and anointed and clad in \textit{sfr}y, walking beneath the window.

In order to be properly prepared for the coming of Pharaoh these servants must be washed and anointed. It is possible that \textit{w}\textit{b} here means only to be “clean” instead of wash, but since washing is frequently part of becoming clean, it seems likely that washing included in becoming clean here. Unfortunately, it is not specified with what these servants are to be anointed, but it seems that anointing with some kind of oil or unguent is also a part of these servants being clean and presentable for the Pharaoh’s visit. Exactly what \textit{sfr}y refers to is uncertain, but it must be some kind of garment or cloth, which clean and appropriate for a kingly visit.

Another example of a text which indicates a variety of components of cleansing is a rubric of the myth of the Heavenly cow it reads:

\begin{verbatim}
\textit{dd s mdwt pn hr=}\textit{f} ds=\textit{f} sn m b\textit{3} kmrt shtpw hr \textit{c}.wy=\textit{fy} m sntr h\textit{3} msdr=\textit{fy} hsmn b\textit{d} tp \\
r=\textit{f} wnhrt=\textit{f} s\textit{w}rwy m m\textit{?}w t w\textit{b} f sw m mw mhwwy tby m tjw nty hd.ty sh\\n\textit{3} m\textit{c}t hr nw=\textit{f} m \\
ryt hdt n sh\textit{3} jr wnn jb n D\textit{hwy} t \textit{sd}=\textit{st} hr \textit{f} w\textit{b} .hr=\textit{f} m \textit{w}\textit{b} \textit{9} hr\textit{w} jr \textit{hmw rmtt} m mjtt \\
\textit{jry}^48
\end{verbatim}

A man may speak this speech being rubbed with moringa oil and unguent, a censer on his arms with incense, behind his ears \textit{hesmen}-natron and \textit{bed}-natron on his mouth, and his

\textsuperscript{47} Alan H. Gardiner, \textit{Late-Egyptian Miscellanies.}, vol. 7, Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca (Bruxelles: Fondation égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1937), 49–54; Ricardo A. Caminos, \textit{Late-Egyptian Miscellanies.}, vol. 1, Brown Egyptological Studies (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 198–201. Papyrus Anastasi IIIA is a parallel text Gardiner, \textit{Late-Egyptian Miscellanies.}, 7:33; Caminos, \textit{Late-Egyptian Miscellanies.}, 1:117.

clothing being two new linen fabrics. He should purify himself with inundation water, being shod with sandals which are white, and the writing of maat\(^49\) on his tongue with white ink\(^50\) of a scribe. If the heart of Thoth exists to recite before Re, he must purify in a purification of nine days. Servants and people likewise.

This text implies that rubbing oneself with certain oils and ointments, burning incense, putting natron behind one’s ears as well as in one’s mouth, and wearing new linen and white sandals could be components of cleanliness. In other words, it seems that each of these activities could be associated with purity by the ancient Egyptians.

A text which clearly associates purity and anointing with various oils and ointments is the version of Chapter 145 of the Book of the Dead in the Papyrus of Iahtesnakht (26\(^{th}\) dynasty).\(^51\) In this chapter, the deceased dialogues with the gatekeepers of 21 gateways in order to enter the gates. To gain access, the deceased must declare that he is pure with the necessary purifications, after which he is allowed proceed. To illustrate this, the declaration of the deceased’s purity for entrance to the first gate is given here.

\[
\begin{align*}
W^c b &= j m \ mw \ ptn \ w^c b \ R^c \ jm=f \\
kJ^3. n. tw &= f \ m \ gs \ j^3 bty \\
jw \ wrh. kw \ m \ h^t \ nt \ r^f \ s \\
St. kw \ m \ mnht \ (?)
\end{align*}
\]

\(^49\) The interpretation of this phrase is difficult. Seti I’s version has \(\text{Piankoff translated as “the figure of the Truth goddess being painted on his tongue in green painter’s colors”} (Alexandre Piankoff, \textit{The Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon} (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1977), 32–33, \text{http://archive.org/details/shrinesoftutankh00pian}.)\) Hornung translated as “Ein (Zeichen der) Maat soll auf seine Zunge gemalt sein” Hornung, \textit{Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh.}, 46. Both of these translations appear to take this writing literally. L. Popko’s translation for the Thesaurus Lingae Aegyptiae suggests “Das Wohlzusprechende (?) sei mit der roten Tinte des Schreibers aufgezeichnet.” (L. Popko in: “Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae - Displaying a Segment of Cotext,” accessed February 7, 2023, \text{https://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/servlet/GetCtxt?u=guest&f=0&l=0&db=0&tc=774&ws=2156&nv=3}.) In the notes, he suggests that this phrase refers to the appearance of the text which the man is to read from rather than to the man himself. Perhaps the reference is meant metaphorically: the tongue of the person reciting it should be truthful.

\(^50\) Perhaps there is a mistaken writing of h\(^d\)t instead of w\(^d\)t in which case the writing is in green ink. This is the translation adopted by Piankoff, \textit{The Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon}, 33. Hornung translates as “weißen Farbe,” however (Hornung, \textit{Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh.}, 46.).

\(^51\) Quirke, \textit{Going out in Daylight}, 334.
I am pure with those waters with which Ra is pure,
When he is unveiled on the side of the east.
I am anointed with first-quality oil of cedar.
I am wrapped in cloth,
My scepter in my hand is of hard wood(?)
Proceed then! You are pure.53

The formulas for many of the other gateways follow the same general pattern. The purity
involves washing with some kind of water, anointing with some kind of oil or ointment, being
clothed with a certain type of garment, and holding a certain staff.54 The main point to note here
is the close connection with a variety of types of oils and ointments and purity. Every time oils or
ointments are mentioned it does not necessarily imply that cleanliness or purity is in view;
however, anointing and cleanliness do seem to be closely related concepts.

The Egyptians may have used fat, natron, and various herbs as a kind of shampoo,
although this is not entirely certain.55 They also used oils in their hair or wigs.56 Tassie says that
“the oiling of hair to keep it supple and pleasant-smelling was probably performed on a daily
basis as part of the ancient Egyptians’ morning toilette ritual. This was done with perfumed
preparations made of animal fat imbued with scent.”57 Perhaps the depiction of “scent-cones” is

52 Following transliteration in Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 334–35.

53 Translation from Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 334–35. Cf. Translation in Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in
Egyptian Religion,” 147.

54 Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 334–41.

55 Manniche, Sacred Luxuries, 131–34. Amy Joann Fletcher, “Ancient Egyptian Hair: A Study in Style, Form and
Function.” (Ph.D., University of Manchester, 1995), 444.

56 Fletcher, “Ancient Egyptian Hair,” 444–47.

57 Geoffrey J. Tassie, “Hairstyles Represented on the Salakhana Stelae,” in The Salakhana Trove: Votive Stelae and
Other Objects From Asyut, ed. Terence DuQuesne (London: Da’ath Scholarly Services; Darengo, 2009), 470. Tassie
cites a variety of evidence which indicates that various types of oils, unguents, etc. were put in the hair. She also
discusses scent-cones and their interpretation at some length (Tassie, “Hairstyles Represented on the Salakhana
reflective of this. However one interprets the reality behind the depiction of scent-cones,\textsuperscript{58} it is probably significant that scent-cones, or the scent or odor they signified, were depicted as worn by “men, women, and children” and that “they were not just limited to the upper classes, but were also sometimes shown being worn by musicians, dancers, servants, and even market traders.”\textsuperscript{59} This might suggest that, although the means the means which people of various classes and professions may have had to acquire quantities and types of oils and unguents may have varied, the ideals of cleanliness and hygiene aspired to were probably shared by the majority of the population.\textsuperscript{60} In other words, although a poor laborer may not have been able to

\textsuperscript{58} A discussion of the interpretation of scent-cones is beyond the scope of this study. While scent-cones are depicted in Egyptian scenes, whether this depicts a real practice or is a symbolic indication that the wigs are scented is a matter of debate (Ian Shaw and Paul T. Nicholson, \textit{The Dictionary of Ancient Egypt} (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 140–41.). For a discussion of the evidence for scent-cones and how have been interpreted see Tassie, “Hairstyles Represented on the Salakhana Stelae.,” 470ff. Renata-Gabriela Tatomir, “To Cause ‘to Make Divine’ through Smoke: Ancient Egyptian Incense and Perfume. An Inter- and Transdisciplinary Re-Evaluation of Aromatic Biotic Materials Used by the Ancient Egyptians Moesica et Christiana : Studies in Honour of Professor Alexandru Barnea, 2016,” January 1, 2016, 674–75. Fletcher, “Ancient Egyptian Hair,” 445–47.

\textsuperscript{59} Tassie, “Hairstyles Represented on the Salakhana Stelae.,” 470.

\textsuperscript{60} For discussion of the economic value of \textit{sntr} and \textit{\textquoteleft nt\textquoteleft}yw and their availability see Pearce Paul Creasman and Kei Yamamoto, “The African Incense Trade and Its Impacts in Pharaonic Egypt,” \textit{African Archaeological Review} 36, no. 3 (September 1, 2019): 356–58, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10437-019-09348-8. They argue that while \textit{\textquoteleft nt\textquoteleft}yw was a valuable commodity with restricted access, \textit{sntr} was more widely available, and not necessarily limited to only elite circles. They reach this conclusion in part by comparing the prices for \textit{sntr} with other goods in texts from Deir el-Medina. However, they also note that “the affordability of incense in the New Kingdom might be due to the broad definition of the word \textit{sntr}, which did not necessarily designate the rare and high-quality frankincense from Punt but also referred to pistacia resin and other less-prized alternatives from the Near East and Nubia” (Creasman and Yamamoto, “The African Incense Trade and Its Impacts in Pharaonic Egypt,” 357.). In other words, there may have been a range of value and quality of aromatics available in ancient Egypt. While the higher quality incense and aromatics was certainly limited to elites and temples, low quality products may have been available to and used by a wider range of the population. Of course, how often incense or aromatics were used by various sectors of the population is another question entirely. For distribution and access to aromatics in the Old Kingdom see Andrés Diego Espinel, “The Scents of Punt (and Elsewhere): Trade and Functions of \textit{sntr} during the Old Kingdom.,” in \textit{Flora Trade between Egypt and Africa in Antiquity: Proceedings of a Conference Held in Naples, Italy, 13 April 2015}, ed. Pearce Paul Creasman and Ilaria Incordino (Oxford; Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2017), 29–35.
acquire the finest oils or been able to obtain oil to place on his body or in his hair every day, this may have still been an ideal, which he desired to achieve.

According to Kamal Kolta, in a hot and dry climate such as Egypt, the skin must be carefully cared for in order to prevent dehydration and wrinkling; thus rubbing various ointments and oils on the skin were important.\(^1\) Perhaps this is why anointing with oils and unguents was connected with rebirth by the ancient Egyptians.\(^2\) Beautiful women are described in Berlin Papyrus 3027 as, “(3,5) where your beautiful women are being given myrrh (3,6) to their hair and fresh incense to their armpits” (\(hmwt=k\\ nfrwt\ jm\ m\ rdym\ ntjwr\ s\ s\ n\ tr\ w\ 3d\ r\ htt\ t\)).\(^3\) Similar remedies are also used to eliminate stench (\(hn\h\h\h\)) (Payrus Ebers no. 708–711, 86, 8–14).\(^4\)

---

\(^1\) Kolta, “Eine Spurensuche: Zur Hygiene Und Körperpflege Bei Den Altägyptern Und Den Kopten.,” 161. Other cosmetics such as eye-paint probably also may have served practical purposes such as protection from insects and the sun and perhaps functioned as an antiseptic (Rosenow, “Es Stinkt: Hygiene Im Alten Ägypten.,” 30.).


\(^4\) See Manniche, Sacred Luxuries, 131.
Natron

Natron is frequently used as a means of cleansing or purification, and natron could be mixed with water for washing. In the letter oDEM 314 (see below), natron was used in washing garments. Natron is also used as a cleansing substance for the mouth. To offer one example, natron is used for cleansing the mouth in Pyramid Text 553.

\[(1368) \text{s}^\text{f} \text{b} \text{ r=f m ntr ly hsmn s}^\text{f} \text{b} \text{ 3ntw=f hrt hrt} \]

His mouth is cleansed with netjeri-natron and hesmen-natron. Here two types of natron are used to cleanse the mouth of Pepi. Along similar lines, the Dialogue of Ipuwer, in a passage regarding the performance of rituals for the gods, exhorts one to “remember the chewing of natron” \((11,2) \text{s}^\text{h} \text{w w}^\text{s} \text{ hsmn})\.

In the Turn Indictment Papyrus, one of the charges brought against the priest is that he did not properly perform cleansing via

---


67 For example see PT 536 (Allen, The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts, 172.)


69 Cf. Pyramid text 676. See also Chapter 172 of Book of the Dead (Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 425.

70 For analysis of the various Egyptian terms for natron see J. R Harris, Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1961), 190–98.

71 Enmarch suggests the context in view could be either “regular purification at the beginning of ritual service or in a ceremony of initiation into priesthood” (Roland Enmarch, A World Upturned: Commentary on and Analysis of The Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All, A British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship Monograph (Oxford ; New York: Published for The British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2008), 173.)
drinking natron for the proper number of days. Natron was considered to renew the mouth (make it like the mouth of a new-born calf), and it could also ritually purify someone to utter divine names and spells. While these examples are from ritual contexts, one wonders if chewing or drinking natron was also performed in “daily life” for “practical” reasons of cleanliness. Perhaps chewing natron cleansed the mouth and teeth and kept one from having bad breath. Papyrus Ebers 853 (98, 14b–18b) seems to indicate that having pleasant breath was desirable since it contains a recipe “to sweeten the smell of their mouths” (r sn_dm sty rw=sn). Thus, it seems plausible that the chewing of natron may have been practiced for more than solely ritual purposes.

### Linen and White Garments

References to linen are frequent in ancient Egypt, but not every context indicates that linen or clothing is “cleansing.” However, there are a few texts which do seem to imply that

---


74 For example, see Pyramid Text 25 (Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 22.).

75 Gee, *The Requirements of Ritual Purity in Ancient Egypt.*, 298.

76 One thinks of the passage in the Contendings of Horus and Seth, in which Horus seems to be described as having bad breath. A literal translation would be “the taste of his mouth is bad” (3,8 hjn_dpt r=f). Lichtheim translated as “whose breath smells bad” (Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature.*, 552. Wente translated as “the odor of whose mouth is bad” in Simpson et al., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 94.) One wonders if the Egyptians chewed or drank natron in order to prevent bad breath.

77 White linen can be a status symbol. However, the cleanliness and status can be closely associated so these concepts are not mutually exclusive. As Maitland writes, “cleanliness was a luxury enjoyed by the ancient Egyptian elite, since they did not have to perform manual labor. As such, in visual representations, the elite are shown wearing their finest white linen. Large quantities of linen served as a status symbol.” (Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom,” 49.)
garments themselves could be “purifying.” For example, Chapter 171 of the Book of the Dead is a “Formula for tying on a pure garment” (r n ḫrk ḫb 𓇋𓊇𓊙𓊑). The determinative for ḫb here indicates that the word is referring to a garment. The text of the spell itself, after addressing a number of deities, reads:

\[
\begin{align*}
W\text{ḥbw} &\ 3 hl \\
Jkr=tn &\ 3hl=sn \\
dr=tn &\ dwt jrt=f \\
W\text{ḥbw} &\ pn n Wsjr s\text{ḥ} \\
Jp sw &\ r=f nhḥ hr ḫ dt \\
dr=tn &\ dwt jrt=f \\
\end{align*}
\]

A pure garment of the transfigured spirit.
May you be excellent, in their light-power.
May you remove the evil (dirt?) attaching to him.
This pure garment of Osiris, of the son.
Reckon it then, for eternity and everlastingness.
May you remove the evil (dirt?) attaching to him.

What is interesting in this text, is that the garment itself seems to be the means of “cleansing.” While the garment may not actually be removing physical “dirt” from the body, the association between the garment and cleansing seems clear. Clean clothing could make a person feel and appear clean.

Papyrus Anastasi IV regarding the preparation for the visit of the Pharaoh includes instructions for servants to be properly attired. The references to servants washed and anointed

---

78 Transliteration and translation in Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 424. The hieroglyphs of the title can be found in Edouard Naville, Das Aegyptische Todtenbuch: der XVIII. bis XX. Dynastie aus Verschiedenen Urkunden, (Berlin: Verlag von A. Asher, 1886), 203.

79 Concerning dwt see chapter 7.

80 Following transliteration and translation in Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 424.

81 For another example where clothing itself appears to be cleansing see Papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.50 I, 5–8 (Jean-Claude Goyon, Confirmation du pouvoir royal au novel an: (Brooklyn Mus. Papyrus 47.218.50). [2] [2 (Le Caire: L’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1974), Plate IA.
were discussed above. The text also mentions servants clad in white sands, $sfry$ garments (mentioned in the above as well) and wearing bracelets.

\[(16,4) \text{hmw Kn}^r < n > \quad \text{h3r} \text{w mnh nfrw (16,5) nh} \text{sy nfrw n K} \text{s n s3w hbs bh} \text{3 jw dby t} \text{bw t h} \text{dw t t} \text{y m sfry (16,6) n3y-sn krmr r drwt-sn} \]

Servants of Canaan of Kharu, beautiful youths, and beautiful Nubians of Kush for proper clothing of the fan. They wear white sandals and are clad with $sfry$ and their bracelets are on their hands.

White sandals are frequently connected with cleanliness and purity.83 White sandals also appear in the teaching of Merikare where it reads:

\[\text{Jr s (64) 3hwt n b3=f w} \text{wt b3d ssp hdoty} \quad \text{hnw r-pr=f kfs hr sstsw ckh hr hm wnm t m hwtntr} \]

A man should do what is profitable for his ba: serving monthly as priest, taking the white sandals, joining the temple estate, uncovering the mysteries, entering the khem-shrine, eating bread in the god’s house.

The passage continues mentioning aspects of the monthly service; however, what is significant is the specific mention of white sandals as a part of the priestly service. Apparently, having white sandals was a necessary part of being able to enter the temple for which purity was essential.86

According to Fredrik Hagen, “Sandals formed a barrier to dirt, and elsewhere in the Book of the

---

82 Anastasi IV writes $m$ but the parallel text Anastasi IIIA writes $n$. I follow the writing of Anastasi IIIA here. It may be a scribal error but could also be an error of hearing as well.


84 Determined with a pair of sandals (S33).

85 For hieroglyphic text see Joachim Friedrich Quack, Studien zur Lehre für Merikare (Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1992), 177.

86 For further discussion of the motif of white sandals and further references see Schwarz, “Zur Symbolik Weißer Und Silberner Sandalen.”

51
Dead the deceased proclaims that ‘I will not step on it (i.e. feces) with my sandals’ as a way of expressing his purity. The link between white sandals and ritual purity has long been known, exemplified by the advice of Merikare.  

Similarly, in examining Middle Kingdom tomb decoration Margaret Maitland writes:

“Tomb decoration depicts the elite using various methods to avoid dirt and protect themselves from the natural environment. Outdoors, they are depicted wearing sandals. The symbolism of sandals separating the clean and orderly from the dirty and chaotic is evidence from their role in images and descriptions of the king trampling enemies as well as their removal on sacred land.”

Additionally, Maitland notes that being barefoot was associated with the poor. Thus,

“In Ipuwer, the poor are characterized by their lack of sandals: ‘he who could not make for himself sandals is (now) the owner of wealth (‘ḥw’).’...”

Although white garments were the “clean ideal,” they could easily become soiled. Keeping their garments clean by means of washing seems to have been important to the Egyptians. In a letter from the time of Rameses II, the wḥb-priest Nebiemon writes to the stable master Neferabu. In the letter he says:

---

87 Frederik Hagen in Veldmeijer, Tutankhamun’s Footwear, 198.

88 Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom.,” 51.


90 Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom.,” 51.

(2) Another matter: after I arrived here from with you three days ago, (3) the retainer had departed on his business on this side of Per-bener. He reached me only in the evening, at night. He will wash his clothes during the day (4), and I will be attentive and return with him.

Unfortunately, all of the circumstances surrounding this letter are not clear. However, the mention of the retainer washing his clothes is certainly intriguing. There does not appear to be any indication that this is for ritual purity or religious reasons. Perhaps there is a connection between the fact that the retainer arrived late and that he must wash his clothes the next day. One wonders if clothes were usually washed every day, and the fact that he arrived late meant that he was unable to wash them the previous day. Perhaps the clothes needed to be clean before returning to the residence, where Neferabu was the stable master. Unfortunately, these speculations cannot all be answered. However, this passage does seem to suggest that washing the clothes was important enough that the return had to be delayed until this task was completed. Also, the text seems to imply that the retainer was washing them himself.

Another intriguing letter also dating from the Ramesside era regarding washing clothes is Deir el-Medina Ostraca 314.\textsuperscript{92}

Recto

(1) n sš Jmn-m-jpt jr (2) p3 jr.n=k jmj 4 prw (3) m rhty n p3 rhty m bj3t (4) [...] prw [m- dj.wt] n=f pr-c3 3nš wd snb hr ptrj (5)[..] dj.tw n=f 6 prw m bšk n hrw 2 (6) Jr.n 3 prw m-mnt hr sw (7) [ptrj […] dd.n (8) […]w=k

Verso

(1) hr= {f(y)}=sn n=f hš=b=k (2) hr=sn r p3 […]=j [tw]k [hr] djw [p3] (3) […]ry]ty n Bšk-n-n-mwt nfr p3 jr.n=k (4) P[t]rj jrw ht[ht…] m-bš=h=sn Nšt-šbk (5) Bwpwy=j gm ḫsmn m-

[dj]=f[...](6) [s]t hr=f p3 jr.n=k wmn=k hr rh p3 [...] wdf3 jw=sn hr (7) {hr} wh3 hsmn p3 hbsw hr bn twk [...] rt (?) [...] p3 tm djt (8) [h]smn hr jw djw n=tn pr-c3 snh wdf3 snb hsmn bn jw=<w> djt=f mtw=sn (9) [k]j p3y=tn g3bw hr rh=k w^ rjt93

Recto

(1) To the scribe Amenemope: As for (2) the 8 (households) that you have done, <saying> ‘Give 4 households (3) as washing to the washerman,’ No! (4) [It ought to be 3] households [from those] which Pharaoh, l.p.h., has given to him. Now look, (5) he has been given 6 households as 2 workdays, which makes 3 households per day. Now, (7) [look…] said (8) […]

Verso

(1) So they said to him. May you send (2) concerning them to the […]. You are to give [the (3) wash]ing(?) to/of Bakenmut. It is a good thing that you have done! (4) Look, (1) have made investigations in their presence. (As for) Nakhtsohek, (5) I did not find (any) natron in his possession, even though you gave him (some) […] (6) it for it. This is what you have done. When you learn the [reason] for the delay, they will (7) be in need of natron for the garments. Now you must no [allow] this failure to supply (8) natron, since it is Pharaoh, l.p.h., who has given natron to you. If it will not be given, they (9) will emphasize your deficiency/cheating. Now you know one side (of the matter).94

Although there are several difficulties in understanding this text,95 for our purposes it is interesting to note that natron seems to have been an essential substance used in washing clothes.

Also, the text implied that the proper amount of work for the washerman was three households every two days.96 This suggests that clothes were washed frequently, perhaps implying that

---


95 For detailed discussion of this text see Davies and Toivari, “A Letter of Reproach (O. DeM 314): Corruption in the Administration of the Washing Service at Deir El-Medina."

96 Davies and Toivari, “A Letter of Reproach (O. DeM 314): Corruption in the Administration of the Washing Service at Deir El-Medina.,” 72. The process of washing clothes in ancient Egyptian seems to have been hard, difficult labor. For discussion see Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom.,” 58–59.
having clean garments was considered important, at least for those who were of high enough status to be assigned washerman by Pharaoh.⁹⁷

Garments could even need to be washed from the “dirt” of beneficial substances. As Manniche notes, “the garments worn by the Egyptians were usually white,” yet in “banquet scenes where large quantities of perfume are involved, they are often rendered with orange or yellow stains.”⁹⁸ Further, “it is the scented oil that produces the discoloration.”⁹⁹ In the Tale of Two Brothers, the plait of hair of Bata’s wife which is carried away by the sea is said to have an “exceedingly sweet odor” (11,3 sty ndm r jkr sp sn).¹⁰⁰ However, when this odor (sty sgnn 10,10) had gotten into the clothes of the Pharaoh, Pharaoh became angry with his washerman (10,8–11,3). Perhaps Pharaoh was angry with washermen because there was an unknown smell in his clothes, or perhaps he was angry because the clothing should not have an odor (even a very pleasant one) after they had been washed.¹⁰¹ In a love song, a boy wishes he was the washerman of his beloved so that “then I would be the one to wash out the oils that are in her scarf” (jw jnk j.jr.t f° n3 b3k.w nty m p3=y=s jdg).¹⁰² Implied in this text is that the oils need to be washed out of

---

⁹⁷ Davies and Toivari, “A Letter of Reproach (O. DeM 314): Corruption in the Administration of the Washing Service at Deir El-Medina.” 72. For titles of officials that seem to be related to maintaining clean linen see Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom,” 58.

⁹⁸ Manniche, Sacred Luxuries, 95.


¹⁰⁰ For the text see Gardiner, Late-Egyptian Stories., 1:20–21.

¹⁰¹ Manniche says that “while the scent of the lock of hair was seductive, it was not considered desirable to wear clothes heavily stained with old perfume” (Manniche, Sacred Luxuries, 91.).

the garment. While oils could be desirable in clothing,\textsuperscript{103} it was also important to the Egyptians to have them washed out of the garments in order for the garments to be clean again.

**Hair and Nails**

That Egyptian priests shaved their heads for the purposes of purity is well known.\textsuperscript{104} However, the relationship between shaving hair and cleanliness may extend further than simply ritual purity for priests.\textsuperscript{105} According to Gay Robins’ study of how hairstyles were depicted in Egyptian art, it appears that elite men had shaved heads but more frequently wore wigs, which may have been a sign of status.\textsuperscript{106} Male household servants are depicted with shaved heads as well.\textsuperscript{107} According to Robins, “This may relate to their sphere of work inside the house, since

\textsuperscript{103} For example earlier in the same love song the girl desires to be “in a dress of the best royal linen, soaked with camphor oil (\textit{m mss n s\textsuperscript{3}r: w-nswt tpy f\textsuperscript{2}w=s t\textsuperscript{2}hb.w m tj\textsuperscript{3}ps} ODM 1266 + oCG 25218 8–14, A 3) Following transliteration and translation in Landgráfová and Navrátilová, \textit{Sex and the Golden Goddess.} I, 178–79.

\textsuperscript{104} Priests shaving the head was not always a requirement in ancient Egypt. In the Old Kingdom priests can be shown performing rituals without a shaved head, but it seems to have been “increasingly common” “from the New Kingdom onwards” and it was “compulsory for priests to be shaved” in the Late Period (Gay Robins, “Hair and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Egypt.,” \textit{Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt} 36 (1999): 61–63; Tassie, “Hairstyles Represented on the Salakhana Stelae.,” 455.

\textsuperscript{105} We should note that although a shaved head does seem to have a clear connection with cleanliness and purity in ancient Egypt, this does not necessarily mean that natural hair was considered dirty. Mummies from all periods of Egyptian history have been found with hair which would suggest that hair was not necessarily unclean. (Tassie, “Hairstyles Represented on the Salakhana Stelae.,” 454; Joann Fletcher, “Hair.,” in \textit{Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology}, ed. Paul T. Nicholson and Ian Shaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 495; Geoffrey J. Tassie, “The Ancient Egyptian Hairdresser in the Old Kingdom.,” \textit{Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo} 73 (2017): 255–56.). It should also be noted that in many cases, it is virtually impossible to determine if the depiction of a person in Egyptian art is wearing a wig or their natural hair (Tassie, “Hairstyles Represented on the Salakhana Stelae.,” 426.). “Where the hair is cropped or shaved it is obvious that not wig is being worn” but “where longer styles are shown” whether natural hair or a wig is depicted can only be determined if the artist depicted natural hair creeping out from under the wig (Tassie, “Hairstyles Represented on the Salakhana Stelae.,” 426–27.).

\textsuperscript{106} Robins, “Hair and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Egypt.,” 58. It is important to note, however, that these artistic depictions may be idealized rather than necessarily reflecting reality as numerous mummies have been found with hair (Tassie, “Hairstyles Represented on the Salakhana Stelae.,” 454.) For discussion of the materials and techniques used to make wigs see Fletcher, “Hair.,” 495–501.

\textsuperscript{107} Robins, “Hair and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Egypt.,” 58,62. As noted by Tassie, however, it can often be difficult to distinguish between a cropped or shaved head in Egyptian art (Tassie, “Hairstyles Represented on the Salakhana Stelae.,” 454.)
they would not need protection against the sun, a practical benefit from wearing a wig, or it may indicate a concern with cleanliness.”

While elite men, their household servants, and priests seem to have shaved their heads, “laborers working outdoors in the fields or marshes, and occasionally workshop personnel” are frequently, although not always, depicted wearing their own hair. In spite of these artistic depictions, Fletcher says that

Although an excessively hirsute appearance generally characterized manual workers (in contrast to the carefully depilated and bewigged elite) most Egyptians seem to have appreciated the cleanliness of hair cropped short or completely removed. This would also reduce the health risks associated with parasitic infection, since head-lice can only thrive in the natural hair close the host’s blood supply and a wig removed on a daily basis would prove an entirely unsuitable habitat.”

Geoffrey Tassie gives similar reason for shaving the head.

There were a number of reasons for shaving the head, the major reasons being to show cleanliness and therefore piety and reverence, and also in the latter stages of their life-in blessed old age-to show they were ready for the Afterlife. One of the reasons for shaving the hair off would have been to get rid of lice and other parasites, which would also have made it easier to keep clean, and keep the head cool beneath the wigs and head-coverings. For the majority of the populace it would have been a cheap and efficient method of looking after their hair and scalp, especially when working in a hot and dusty atmosphere.”

While differences in the depiction of hairstyles between elites, priests, and laborers probably indicates the difference in status between these people, cleanliness is likely a


component in this distinction as well. The elites, priests, and their servants probably considered themselves “cleaner” than the “dirty” laborers. According to Robins,

“Shaving the head solves the problem of keeping the hair clean and free from headlice and their eggs (nits), for lice do not infest wigs. Therefore, a shaven head guaranteed cleanliness and perhaps became associated with ritual purity, so that for a priest it may have encoded a message of ritual purity rather than strict social hierarchy.”

---

112 Whether shaving the head was limited to Egyptian men is a difficult question to answer definitively. Gay Robins says that women “are never shown with shaved heads” and “even when a wig was worn, the natural hair remained underneath, as is demonstrated by some female statues on which the natural hair is represented emerging from under the wig at the forehead” (Robins, “Hair and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Egypt,” 63.). However, she also says that “it is not clear how elite women wore their hair under their wigs” and notes a female mummy from the tomb of Amenhotep II which had “hair that had been cut very short or had perhaps been shaved” (Robins, “Hair and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Egypt,” 63, 64 n. 41.). As noted in a note above, it can be virtually impossible to distinguish between a wig and natural hair in artistic depictions of long hair. Thus, Robins conclusions are possible, but not certain. According to Tassie, “many more men are shown with shaved and cropped hair than women, although it is a style worn by both men and women…Although women could be shown with shaved heads, they were usually depicted with a cropped hairstyle…Although in the Old and Middle Kingdoms women were often shown with cropped hair, it was rare for them to be figured as totally shaven-headed” (Tassie, “Hairstyles Represented on the Sakakahana Stelae,” 454–55.). Perhaps part of the difference in analysis is how close of a haircut one considers as “shaved.”

113 According to Margaret Maitland, “in the Middle Kingdom, shaved heads appear to have been required for roles in which cleanliness was important, including priestly duties, but also food preparation, especially butchery of offerings, as well as laundry and the care of elite clothes (Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom,” 49.


115 Robins, “Hair and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Egypt.,” 61. Cf. Papyrus Boulaq 13 (pCairo CG 58041) which contains an, unfortunately, rather fragmentary tale (Fayza Haikal, “Papyrus Boulaq XIII.,” Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale 83 (1983): 213–48.). In fragment IX of this probably Ramesside era papyrus, a phrase reads “like whoever shaves in order to be pure” (mj nty h²kw r w³b). Unfortunately, the text immediately before and after this phrase is missing, but connection between shaving and purity or cleanliness is clear. The purity mentioned could be ritual purity for access to a temple, but the fragments of the papyrus seem to indicate that the text contained a story “situated among workers” and located “in, or near, a port” and involved some kind of criminal accusation (Haikal, “Papyrus Boulaq XIII.,” 248.). Although it is impossible to be certain due to the state of the papyrus, one wonders if the shaving here was not necessarily tied to “ritual purity” but may have involved “normal” cleanliness. Unfortunately, this must remain completely speculative in light of the fragmentary nature of the text.
If one of the purposes of shaving was to prevent lice, this would suggest that lice were thought “dirty” or “unclean.” Not only the shaving of the head, but also the removal of body hair may have been practiced, at least by the upper classes.\textsuperscript{116}

It is also important to note that conceptions of purity in relationship to hair and shaving may have gradually changed or developed over the course of Egyptian history. As Quack notes:

“The typical pictures of shaven-headed priests appear only in the course of the New Kingdom; for example, at the sanctuary of Hatshepsut they are still shown with wigs. In contrast, from the Ramesside Period onward, depictions of priests with hairless heads become common. This could be a sign that purity restrictions had become stricture at this time, or at least that more value was attached to demonstrating them visibly to the outside. Still, it should be noted that there are already occasional depictions of people with shaven heads in the Late Middle Kingdom, even though their titles do not clearly link them to the priesthood. By far the most explicit ones among the textual sources are very late texts, mostly from the Graeco-Roman period.”\textsuperscript{117}

It appears that oils and unguents may also have been placed in the hair.\textsuperscript{118} Putting oil or fats in the hair, possibly via fat cones, would “help to keep the hair free from infestation by lice: as lice prefer clean to dirty hair, the smell and oily texture would deter them from settling on the head.”\textsuperscript{119} Tassie says that, “the oiling of hair to keep it supple and pleasant-smelling was probably performed on a daily basis as part of the ancient Egyptians’ morning toilette ritual. This

\textsuperscript{116} Teeter, “The Body in Ancient Egyptian Texts and Representations (Plate 6),” 158. Teeter references the passage of cleansing in Sinuhe which mentions hair (B 291 ʿt.kw “ḥ šnw=f”). For discussion of this passage, see section on the theme of dirtiness in Sinuhe. Teeter further suggests that ʿr (smooth) can indicate hairlessness (Teeter, “The Body in Ancient Egyptian Texts and Representations (Plate 6),” 158.).

\textsuperscript{117} Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion.,” 127–28.

\textsuperscript{118} Tassie, “The Ancient Egyptian Hairdresser in the Old Kingdom.,” 256. In Ipuwer, it reads, “Look, he whose hair had fallen out, who had no oil, has become the owner of ḫḥḥrt-jars of sweet myrrh” (8,A mtn wš swana jwty mrḥt=f hpr m nb ḫḥḥrt ʿntjw nbm). Translation from Enmarch, A World Upturned, 139.). This seems to suggest that putting oil in hair was a luxury of the upper classes.

was done with perfumed preparations made of animal fat imbued with scent.”

Perhaps well-oiled hair (or wig) was considered “clean” by the ancient Egyptians.

Having clean and trimmed fingernail and toenails may also have been important for the Egyptians. For example, in Pyramid Text 553 we read that “his finger and toenails have been cleansed” (§1368 $s^b$, $\epsilon ntw=f\ hrt\ hrt$). Several tombs at Saqqara have scenes depicting the manicuring or trimming of nails. Some scenes also depict the shaving of the head and pubic hair. Roth suggests the scenes in the tomb of Anchmahor at Saqqara depict young men being cleaned and groomed including manicure and pedicure, scrubbing of the back and feet, and

---

122 Cf. Pyramid text 676.
123 Grunert argues that $sab$ is the causative of $\theta h$ which he argues refers to internal purification. He argues that trimming fingernails and toenails (as well as hair) is considered to be internal cleansing because it is the removing of an “excretion” from inside the body (Grunert, “Nicht Nur Sauber, Sondern Rein: Rituelle Reinigungsanweisungen Aus Dem Grab Des Anchmahor in Saqqara,” 149–51.).
124 Other spells also suggest the important of having clean or beautiful fingernails and toenails. See PT 536.
126 There has been debate surrounding whether the scene in the tomb of Ankhmahor depicts circumcision, shaving the pubic hair, or both. For discussion see Badawy, The Tomb of Nyhetep-Ptah at Giza and the Tomb of ‘Ankhm‘ahor at Saqqara, 19; Ann Macy Roth, Egyptian Phyles in the Old Kingdom: The Evolution of a System of Social Organization (Chicago, Ill.: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1991), 62–72; John F Nunn, Ancient Egyptian medicine (London: British Museum Press, 1996), 169–71; Grunert, “Nicht Nur Sauber, Sondern Rein: Rituelle Reinigungsanweisungen Aus Dem Grab Des Anchmahor in Saqqara.” However one interprets the scenes in the tomb of Ankhmahor, the fact that that some Old Kingdom scenes from Saqqara depict the shaving of pubic hair is clear. For example, a caption in the tomb of Pthahshepses reads “shaving the phallus hair ($s^f\ rm\ h^\ j^k(w)$)” (Soleiman, “The Hair-Shaving and Nail-Cutting Scenes in Pthahshepses’ Tomb at Saqqara,” 34.).
shaving pubic hair. Grunert interprets the scenes of “rubbing” or “massaging” the legs in the tombs of Niankhkhnum and Khunmhotep and Ankmahor as depicting the shaving of the legs. Perhaps not only shaving the head but also shaving body hair and trimming or manicuring the nails was associated with “cleanliness.”

It is interesting to note that at the Esna temple, those wishing to enter the temple “shall have shaved his limbs and clipped his nails.” Another portion of the same texts reads:

“Whoever wears a hairstyle of grief does not enter into this temple! Shaving, nail clipping and combing is what (justifies) entering into it. All fine linen as a dress is what (justifies) entering into it. Natron water is what (justifies) settling down in it.” While a higher standard of purity and cleanliness was certainly required for access to the temple than for daily life, these texts do demonstrate the close connection between these ideals of grooming and cleanliness.

**Domestic Cleanliness**

The importance of maintaining the purity or cleanliness of tombs and temples is well known and need not be dwelt upon here. Instead, we will briefly establish the importance of

---

127 Roth, *Egyptian Phyles in the Old Kingdom*, 66–68.


129 Translation in Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion.,” 120.

130 According to Quack, “it must be noted that certain mourning customs do actually breach the rules of normal purity. The most glaring case concerns the hairstyle. Whereas under normal purity regulations a completely shaved head is desired, one let’s one’s hair grow long during the mourning period….Thus we can see that the mourning period required abstention from the usual condition of purity as a sign of personal pain and sympathy, accepting impurity as a mortification period with a final purification and to reenter the usual state of purity.” (Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion.,” 144.)

131 Translation in Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion.,” 120.

132 According to Dieter Kurth, “The temple had to be pure if the god was to accept it as his house. Purity began with the building itself: no noise or impurity was allowed inside the temple. This is why the temple was carefully swept, sprayed with water, and purified with incense to remove even those impurities that might hover in the air.” (Dieter
maintaining cleanliness in the domestic sphere in ancient Egyptian “daily life.” Maintaining cleanliness in personal residences is a subject that is less well known due to the lack of evidence. However, if the temple could be understood as in the residence of a god, then perhaps many of the methods for cleaning the temple space also apply to that of domestic space. Dmitri Meeks includes the house as an “espaces reserves” for which purity is necessary along with the palace, the temple and the tomb. Gräzer picks up on this idea and claims that the Egyptians “craignaient effectivement l’invasion de leur maison par des forces obscures qui pouvaient générer, entre autres malheurs, des maladies: les textes évoquent ainsi des “morts dangereux” et des demons qui pouvaient s’introduire dans la maison, autant par les protes et les fenêtres que par la saleté, et contaminer ainsi les lieux et les corps.”

---

Kurth, The Temple of Edfu: A Guide by an Ancient Egyptian Priest (Cairo ; American University in Cairo Press, 2004), 8.).

133 The issue of waste disposal in both domestic and urban environments is an important question to consider. However, since it must be examined almost entirely using archaeological evidence, we will not consider it here. A possible reference to waste disposal may be found in pBM 10042 Recto IV, 7-8 where the writer asks Amun-Re-Horakhty to make his enemies “like pottery shards through the street” (mj sdt qrH m-ḥt mrt) which could suggest that some waste was simply thrown out into the street (Christian Leitz and Christian Leitz, Magical and Medical Papyri of the New Kingdom, 1. publ, Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum 7 (London: British Museum Press, 1999), Plate 15.). For discussion of archaeological evidence for waste disposal see Arnold, “Clean and Unclean Space: Domestic Waste Management at Elephantine.”; Kemp, The City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, 206–7. Cf. Sergio Donadoni, ed., The Egyptians (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 24–25.

134 Archaeological evidence may provide some clues. For example, certain areas of the house may have been “cleaner” than others and tasks considered “dirty” may have been performed only in certain areas of the house. See Johanna Sigl and Peter Kopp, “Working from Home: Middle Kingdom Daily Life on Elephantine Island, Egypt.”, in Approaches to the Analysis of Production Activity at Archaeological Sites, ed. Anna K. Hodgkinson and Cecilie Lelek Tvetmarken (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2020), 21–22.


A fragment of a letter of the Middle Kingdom from Lahun (pMichaelides B)\textsuperscript{138} may reflect on the importance with which the Egyptian valued a beautiful or clean home. The verso of the papyrus seems to indicate that it is addressed to someone name Neni.

(1)…\textit{dd dj=q rhr=k r ntt hnw=k nb jd mk wj r spr r Shm-Sn-wsr-t-md3-hrw} (2)…\textit{pw jh dj=k gmy=j p3 pr jnj m bw nb nfr hnn h3b n=j hr} (3) \textit{shr nb n snb nd nh n mn t Tjm3 dd=k grt spr=q j3 jw p3 pr sm3r}

(1)…saying, “I let you know that all your affairs are safe. Look, I will arrive at Sekhem-Sesostris-True-of-Voice-is-Powerful (2)…may you please let me find the house in the best condition and send to me all about (3) the condition of the health and life of the nurse Tima. Moreover, make me arrive there only when the house is made pleasantly clean.”\textsuperscript{139}

The writer of this letter seems to be planning on returning to the house, but he wants to make sure that the house is in good condition before he arrives. According to Wente, the first phrase concerning the house is “so please let me find the house in very good shape,” and he translates the last phrase as “only after the house has been tidied up, shall you have me come there.”\textsuperscript{140} Grdseloff translated these phrases as “that I may find the house in good order” and “once the house is put in order.”\textsuperscript{141} Although the precise details and nuance of what exactly is meant by these requests may be elusive, this text is suggestive of the importance, which the author of this letter placed on having the house in good condition.


\textsuperscript{139} The precise nuance of this word here is difficult to assess. According to the Worterbuch, \textit{sm3r} means “reinigen,” when referring to nails, and “gut machen, glücklich manchen” (Wb IV, 130-131). According to Faulkner it means to “make fortunate” or “cleanse” (Raymond O. Faulkner, \textit{A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian}, Repr (Oxford: Griffith Inst., Ashmolean Museum, 1991), 228.) Perhaps the idea is more than basic cleaning but carriers the further idea of making beautiful.

\textsuperscript{140} Wente, \textit{Letters from Ancient Egypt.}, 1:76.

\textsuperscript{141} Grdseloff, “A New Middle Kingdom Letter from El-Lāhūn,” 61.
Amarna tomb scenes depicting the palace contain images showing individuals sprinkling or pouring water from a jar to the ground and individuals bending over to sweep the floor.\(^{142}\)

Barry Kemp writes the following concerning dust and cleaning in Amarna homes:

Windows in the Amarna houses seem to have been provided with shutters, but when the wind blows, the dust it raises filters through every tiny crack, the heavier particles forming little drifts not far inside, the lighter particles hanging suspended in the air and dispersing through the rooms. Mud wall plaster, whether whitewashed or painted with bright colours, has a matte surface. Dust finds innumerable places where it can cling and form a fine but still visible surface of its own, turning white to grey-brown, and dulling colors. Old dust, gathered into the fabric of cloth, gives off a slight smell, which can only be described as that of old dust. Amarna people, nonetheless, at least tried to keep their floors clean...Scenes of palace life depict men sprinkling the floors with water flicked from a jug and sweeping with brushes that look like tied bundles of long reeds. Even in the palaces, however, most of the floors were of mud bricks covered with a layer of mud plaster. The effect of sprinkling with water would be not only to reduce the amount of dust dispersed again into the air by brushing, but also to create a slight temporary mulch into which the latest dust would be incorporated, soon to be tramped flat.\(^{143}\)

It may be appropriate here to briefly discuss the “bringing the foot” (\(jnt\ rd\)) rite and to consider whether it might be in any way related to cleaning practices.\(^{144}\) As noted above, there may be similarities between temple and domestic cleaning. Thus, it seems possible that some temple rites might be reflected in domestic cleaning, although perhaps without a ritual or religious connotation. The right of “bringing the foot” is found in numerous ritual texts,\(^{145}\)

---

\(^{142}\) Norman de Garis Davies, *Tombs of Parennefer, Tutu, and Ay.* (London, 1908), Plates XIX, XXVIII. Perhaps in addition to being used for bodily hygiene, water from basins and sanitary installations in residences may also have been used for house cleaning. cf. Gräzer, “Hygiène et Sécurité Dans l’habitat Égyptien d’époque Pharaonique.,” 2009, 49.

\(^{143}\) Kemp, *The City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti*, 72.


temples, and tombs from the Old Kingdom into the Late Period. The *jnt rd* is found in both image and text, and these can be found independent of the other. Some texts indicate that the rite is performed with the *hdn*-plant, although the identification of this plant is uncertain. The *hdn*-plant may have had a strong or distinctive odor as suggested by Pyramid Text 400.

\[hdnwt\ hdnwt\ m\ jn\ st(j)\ hdn=t\ r\ ttj\ tm.hr=t\ jn\ st(j)\ hdn=t\ r\ ttj\]

---


151 Staatliche Museen (Berlin and Sethe, *Die Altägyptischen Pyramidentexte*, 1908, 696e-g.)
O Hedenut, Hedenut, do not bring the scent of your *heden*-plant against Tetj; you must not bring the scent of your *heden*-plant against Teti.\(^{153}\)

The rite of the *jnt rd* has been interpreted as the priest removing his footprints while leaving the sanctuary,\(^{154}\) and/or as warding off evil beings from entering the sanctuary.\(^{155}\) These interpretations are not necessarily mutually exclusive as evidenced by a portion of the spell, which accompanies a number of the temple versions, indicates: “A male or female enemy will not enter this temple” (\(\text{nn} \text{Šk dl ŋ bšt pr pn}\)).\(^{156}\) While the rite certainly has more than a mundane purpose and meaning,\(^{157}\) for our purposes here we will briefly consider what, if anything, the rite could suggest regarding cleaning practices. In the scenes, the priest (or king) appears to be dragging the *hdn*-bundle behind him and, according to the “traditional” interpretation is sweeping away his footprints as he leaves.\(^{158}\) However, Nelson notes that in a

---

\(^{152}\) This deity is only attested in this text (Christian Leitz et al., *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen. Band IV, nbt-h*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Department Oosterse Studies, 2002), 816.


\(^{155}\) Nelson, “The Rite of ‘Bringing the Foot’ as Portrayed in Temple Reliefs.”

\(^{156}\) For hieroglyphic text of a number of sources see Tacke, *Das Opferritual des ägyptischen Neuen Reiches Band I Texte*, 175. Tacke argues that the footprints had to be removed because if they were left behind they could show an enemy the way into temple (Tacke and Assmann, *Das Opferritual des ägyptischen Neuen Reiches. Band II Übersetzung und Kommentar*, 157.). For alternate spell accompanying the *jnt rd* see Otto, *Das Ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual Teil I: Text*, 185–86; Otto, *Das Ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual Teil II: Kommentar*, 157. Cf. Goyon, *Rituels funéraires*, 173–74. This second version of the is only attested once on a Ptolemaic papyrus cf. Altenmüller, “Eine Neue Deutung Der Zeremonie Des ’IN’IT RD,” 148.

\(^{157}\) For discussion of possible mythological precedents behind the rite see Altenmüller, “Eine Neue Deutung Der Zeremonie Des ’IN’IT RD.”

\(^{158}\) For example, see Lacau and Chevrier, *Lacau, Pierre; Chevrier, Henri - Une chapelle d’Hatshepsout à Karnak I (1977)*, 293.
few depictions, “the hdn-bundle does not even touch the floor,\textsuperscript{159} a fact which, however, may be
due merely to the artist’s carelessness in detail, or to the perfunctory manner in which the hdn-
bundle had come to be used when those reliefs were carved.”\textsuperscript{160} Thus, we should be cautious not
to assume that the scene is depicting sweeping, but we also cannot exclude this interpretation
simply because some depictions do not show the bundle touching the ground. Perhaps the palace
scenes from the Amarna tombs of Tutu\textsuperscript{161} and Ay,\textsuperscript{162} which appear to contain images of someone
sweeping the floor are a more “mundane” version of “bringing the foot” with the hdn-bundle.
However, the evidence does not allow us to draw any firm connections.

An alternative interpretation of the rite suggests that the significance of the hdn-plant is
its odor; by waving the odiferous plant, its odor was spread in order to ward off potential
enemies or harms.\textsuperscript{163} It is also possible that these interpretations of the rite are not mutually
exclusive. The hdn-plant could be used for its odor, as well as its functionality in wiping away
footprints. If there is there is any connection between the use of the hdn-plant and mundane
cleaning, it could be that the plant was used like a broom for sweeping as well as for its odor,
which, as Goyon suggested, might have repelled insects or other pests.\textsuperscript{164} This is largely
speculation, however.

\textsuperscript{159} For example see Medinet Habu IV: Festival Scenes of Ramses III, University of Chicago Oriental Institute
Publications, 1940, Plate 242.

\textsuperscript{160} Nelson, “The Rite of ‘Bringing the Foot’ as Portrayed in Temple Reliefs,” 84.

\textsuperscript{161} Davies, Tombs of Parennefer, Tutu, and Ay., Plate XIX.

\textsuperscript{162} Davies, Tombs of Parennefer, Tutu, and Ay., Plate XXVIII.

\textsuperscript{163} Altenmüller, “Eine Neue Deutung Der Zeremonie Des ‘IN’IT RD,” 151–52; Helck, Otto, and Westendorf,
Lexikon der Ägyptologie. Band III, Horhekenu - Megeb, 156.

\textsuperscript{164} Goyon, “Une Identification Possible de La Plante Hdn Des Anciens Égyptiens.,” 250.
A recipe in Papyrus Ebers (pEbers no. 852; 98, 12–14b) suggests that maintaining a pleasant odor in the house was desired by the ancient Egyptians. It reads: “Fumigation which is done in order to sweeten the smell of the house or garments” (k3pt165 jrw t snm sty pr ḫbsw r-pw). A list of ingredients follows. Then these ingredients are “made into one mass placed on the fire” (jrw m hwt wer rdw jm ḥr ḫt). One thinks of the burning of incense performed in the temples which were the house of the god. While there is a difference in the degree of cleanliness or purity expected in a temple versus a domestic residence, the basic principles probably had much in common. Thus, it is not surprising that burning sweet smelling substances was performed in both places. Not only houses, but also cities could be said to be purified using substances such as natron and incense.166 Thus, after capturing the city of Memphis, the Piye sent men into the city for the purpose of “purifying Memphis with natron and incense (swřb Mn-nfr m hsmn sntr).167

Finally, we should note that, although perhaps not cleaning per se, Papyrus Ebers contains several instructions for how to remove vermin from the house. For example, pEbers no. 840 and 841 (97, 15–17) are for removing fleas from a house.

\[ h3t^5 m prjw t dr pyw m pr ntš.hr=k sw m mw nw hsmn r rwj \]

---

165 According to Lisa Manniche, k3pt “originally means any substance used in fumigation, just as the word ‘perfume’ defines a scent released ‘through smoke.’ By the end of pharaonic civilization it had come to designate one particular brand of scent” (Manniche, Sacred Luxuries, 47.).


Beginning of the remedies, which are done in order to drive away fleas\textsuperscript{168} from the house. You should sprinkle it with water of natron in order to expel (them).

\[ kt\ bbt\ nd\ hr\ \acr\ bt\ shr\ pr\ jm(=s)\ r\ mnh\ r\ rwj \]

Another: fleabane,\textsuperscript{169} crushed over charcoal. Brush the house thoroughly with (it) in order to expel (them).

While perhaps not technically dirt, fleas are pests, and these remedies indicate that it was desirable to rid the house of them.

Fleas were not the only pests that needed to be removed from the house. The next instructions are also given for how to not let snakes/worms (\textit{hフw})\textsuperscript{170} go out from their holes (\textsc{pebers} no. 842–844, 97,17–20). While the text does not specifically indicate that the holes of the snakes or worms are in the house, several factors make this likely. First, in the previous remedies for removing fleas, it was clearly specified that they needed to be removed from the house, which might suggest that a domestic abode is still in view in the following instructions concerning \textit{hフw}. Each of the instructions, including the first (no. 842) for preventing the \textit{hフw} from exiting their holes is introduced by the word “another” (\textit{kt}), which further suggests a

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{168} For \textit{pj/py}, “flea” see \textit{Wb I}, 502.2; Belinda Ann Wassell, “Ancient Egyptian Fauna : A Lexicographical Study.” (Doctoral, Durham University, 1991), 163, http://theses.dur.ac.uk/1152/.

\textsuperscript{169} Manniche identifies \textit{bbt} as fleabane Lise Manniche, \textit{An Ancient Egyptian Herbal}, 1st University of Texas Press ed (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 109. She says, “Fleabane is a large perennial plant...The leaves have a very penetrating scent disagreeable to animals.” (Manniche, \textit{An Ancient Egyptian Herbal}, 109–10.) Brachmanska says that “attention should be paid to using ashes as desiccants...even today, plant ash is added to grain as an insecticide in East Africa because it absorbs water from insects' bodies and causes their fatal desiccation.” (Malwina Brachmanska, “What Was Eating the Harvest? Ancient Egyptian Crop Pests and Their Control,” in \textit{Fierce Lions, Angry Mice and Fat-Tailed Sheep: Animal Encounters in the Ancient Near East}, ed. Laerke Recht and Christina Tsouparopoulou, 2021, 152, https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.76169.). Brachmanska then notes several ancient Egyptian archaeological sites, which appear to have ashes spread on the ground, and suggests that this may have been a form of insecticide.

\textsuperscript{170} For \textit{hフw} meaning worm see \textit{Wb III}, 73.2–5. Although \textit{hフw} usually means “snake” or “serpent,” “ancient Egyptian terminology did not differentiate clearly between snakes and certain other creatures, include worms. Both were parts of the class of crawling-creatures, in which snakes were the most prominent of species” (Brachmanska, “What Was Eating the Harvest? Ancient Egyptian Crop Pests and Their Control,” 147.). According to Wassel, “\textit{hフw} probably meant originally ‘creeping thing’ (unless the verb \textit{hフ} meant ‘to move like a snake’ and was derived from the name of the animal)” (Wassell, “Ancient Egyptian Fauna,” 17.).
\end{footnotesize}
connection between them and the remedies for fleas in the house. Egyptian houses were frequently made of mudbrick,\textsuperscript{171} so it would not seem unlikely that snakes or worms might burrow or make a hole in a house. However, this was undesirable, or in the case of snakes even dangerous, thus, the need for them to be removed from the house.

Finally, Papyrus Ebers no. 847 (98, 1–2) also suggests that mice and/or rats were domestic pests. “Another for not letting a mouse/rat (\textit{pnw})\textsuperscript{172} approach things: fat of a cat placed on anything” (\textit{kt nt tm rd(w) tkn pnw m hwt mrht mjw rdj r hwt nbwt}). Again, while preventing or removing pests from the house, may not technically be “cleaning,” it does indicate that steps were taken to maintain certain standards for a house, and certain animals were undesirable in domestic spaces.

**Summary**

Although far from exhaustive, we have briefly surveyed aspects of what the ancient Egyptians considered to be “clean” or “pure” in everyday life, as well as aspects of what could be done to achieve cleanliness. As noted by Gräzer, purification in ancient Egyptian often has a “double role” as it often functions both curatively and preventatively at the same time.\textsuperscript{173} Thus, when cleaning is described, it can refer to the removal of dirt, while at the same time it can be preventing dirt. Of course, the standard of cleanliness certainly varied based on the context, as


\textsuperscript{172} The Egyptian word \textit{pnw} probably was used to refer to a variety of species of mice and rats (Linda Evans, “Trapping Baqet’s Rat.,” in *Creatures of Earth, Water, and Sky: Essays on Animals in Ancient Egypt and Nubia*, ed. Salima Ikram, Stéphane Pasquali, and Stéphanie Porcier (Leiden: Sidestone, 2019), 155–57. Wassell, “Ancient Egyptian Fauna,” 88–90.).

\textsuperscript{173} Gräzer, “Hygiène et Sécurité Dans l’habitat Égyptien d’époque Pharaonique.,” 2009, 34.
well as the resources available to the person. A higher standard of cleanliness was almost
certainly required for visiting the palace or a temple than was expected to visit a neighbor’s
house. Also, the standard of cleanliness, which a peasant or laborer was able to attain, was
certainly less than that of a nobleman or priest. As noted by Margaret Maitland, “Cleanliness was
a luxury enjoyed by the ancient Egyptian elite, since they did not have to perform manual
labor.” However, the basic ideals of cleanliness may have been largely shared, even if their
attainment may have been out of reach for many of the lower classes.

From the survey above, the Egyptians seem to have desired that the body be washed
daily. Washing would presumably remove soil, oils, sweat, and other forms of dirt or substances
which may cling to the skin. Thus, we should expect these types of substances to sometimes be
considered “dirty” in Egyptian sources. Additionally, since the Egyptians seem to have valued
white, clean garments, if garments are described as tainted or besmirched with a substance, we
should consider that the substance may have been considered dirty. Anointing and rubbing the
skin with various ointments and oils seems to have been considered important. Thus, we should
be aware of descriptions in which individuals are lacking ointment or oil, or in which they are
anointed or smeared with an undesirable substance. These could be examples of “dirty” people.
Negative descriptions of hair or nails might also be the sign of a “dirty” state. Finally, incense

174 Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and
Culture during the Middle Kingdom.,” 49.

175 Maitland says that this was forced on the lower classes by the elites. “Purity requirements were established by the
elite and their imposition on others was a form of social control, even though they may have been adopted willingly
through imitation or social expectations” (Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives
on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom.,” 49.). While this is probably true in elite
households, one wonders if this really applied to the entirety of the population.
and other pleasant-smelling substances are frequently referred to, thus we should be aware of unpleasant odors in descriptions of “dirty” people or places.
CHAPTER 3: SOIL AND EARTH AS DIRTY

Here we will examine “dirt” that is considered “dirty.” In other words, we will examine terms for mud, soil, dust, etc., but our focus will not necessarily be on all the words or usages of terms for earth, dirt, soil, mud, etc., but on the occurrences where these terms may have the connotation of “dirty” or where they might refer to something that needs to be cleansed.¹

*Jwtn*

According to the *Wörterbuch*, *jwtn* (𓊍𓊌) can mean “Erdboden, Boden, Grund, Schmutz, Staub”² and according to Faulkner, it means “ground; floor, flooring.”³ Harris says that *jwtn* is a “fairly common word for ground or ground-level, particularly in Late Egyptian” and also has an “extended meaning of dirt or dust.”⁴ *Jwtn* often means nothing other than ground with no implications that it has a connotation of “dirty.” For example, in the Tale of Two Brothers, when the tree is cut down, it falls to the ground (*jwtn*) (8,4–8,5). However, there are occasions where the term *jwtn* might refer to “dirt” or to something that needs to be cleaned. We will survey some of these uses below.

---

² *Wb I*, 58.
⁴ Harris, *Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals.*, 199.

73
The section of Papyrus Lansing entitled by Gardiner “All callings are bad except that of
the scribe”\(^5\) includes a comment comparing numerous professions to that of the scribe. The
potter (\(jkd.w-nds.t\)) is one of the professions mentioned. A point of emphasis in this description
of the potter seems to be his physical dirtiness. The description is as follows:

\[
4,4 \text{jkd-nds wr h m jwtn} \quad \text{(4,3)}
\]
\[
m j nty \text{ rmt w=f m t}
\]
\[
drw=f \text{r dwy=f (4,5) m h m }^\text{mt}
\]
\[
jw=f \text{mj nty m p }^3 \text{m t}
\]

The potter is anointed (smeared) with earth,
like someone whose people have died.
His hands and his feet are filled with mud,
he is like what is in the mire.\(^6\)

These lines are clearly describing the potter as physically dirty. In this description, the
potter is not anointed or smeared with a pleasant ointment such as myrrh, but instead he is
anointed or smeared with earth or dirt. Presumably, the “anointing” of the potter with dirt was
meant to be a sarcastic, mocking description.\(^7\) When taken with the lines that follow, it is safe to
assume that \(jwtn\) is indicating that the potter is physically dirty. However, there may also be a
connection between being smeared with dirt (\(jwtn\)) and mourning. The comparison of the potter’s

---

\(^5\) Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 7:103.

\(^6\) According to Guglielmi, this section of Papyrus Lansing can be divided into verse couplets. The section concerning
the potter consists of two verse couplets (Waltraud Guglielmi, “Berufs satiren in Der Tradition Des Cheti.,” in
*Zwischen Den Beiden Ewigkeiten: Festschrift Gertrud Thausing*, ed. Manfred Bietak et al. (Wien: Institut für
Ägyptologie der Universität Wien, 1994), 51, 53. He notes that the section concerning the potter is uses alliteration
with m.

\(^7\) Basma Koura suggests that smearing with \(jwtn\) may have been used to restore dry or unhealthy skin; however, no
sources are referenced to back up this assertion Basma Koura, “Die Allgemeinen Und Einzelnen Bezeichnungen Der
satirical nature of the text see R. B. Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt: A Dark Side to
273; James E. Hoch, “The Teaching of Dua-Kheti: A New Look at the Satire of the Trades,” *Journal of the Society
for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 21–22 (1992 1991): 88–100. Parkinson describes the “tone of these stanzas” as
“one of savage humour” (Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt*, 273.). Also, see chapter 10 on
the Theme of Dirt in the Satire of the Trades below.
smearing with *jwtn* is with someone whose “people have died.” Apparently, the scribe thinks that the potter being smeared with earth makes him look like he is mourning.\(^8\)

Another example of a connection between being smeared with dirt and mourning is in the Tale of Two Brothers. After hearing the speech of his younger brother, the older brother returns to his house.

\[
\begin{align*}
  Wn.jn= & \text{f hr smt (8,7) n=f r t3 jnt p3 \jmath w sn} & 53 \text{ hr smt n=f r p3y=f pr jw drt=f w3h} \\
  hr d3d= & \text{f jw=f wrh n jwtn spr pw jr. n=f r p3y=f pr jw=f hdb (8,8) t3y=f hmt jw=f hr h3c} \\
  st n n3 jww jw= & \text{f hms m gs n p3y=f sn}
\end{align*}
\]

Then he went to the Valley of the Cedar, while his older brother was going to his house with his hand on his head and smeared with dirt. He arrived at his house, he slew his wife and cast her to the dogs. Then he sat in mourning for his brother.

Here we have another reference to being smeared with dirt (\(wrh\ jwtn\)) and context is closely connected with mourning since the end of the passage indicates that the older brother was sitting in mourning. Elsewhere in the story, it is indicated that it was customary for the older brother to wash his hands when returning home (4,9; 12,8–12,9), but in this passage, the older brother returns home smeared with dirt without washing. It is not entirely clear whether this passage and Papyrus Lansing indicate that smearing with dirt was intentionally done as a mourning custom or if a person who is in distress or mourning does not wash and thus remains smeared with dirt. One may call to mind the comment of Herodotus on Egyptian mourning practices.

> “They mourn and bury the dead as I will show. Whenever a man of note is lost to his house by death, all the womenkind of the house daub their faces or heads with mud; then, with all the women of their kin, they leave the corpse in the house, and roam about the city lamenting, with their garments girt round them and their breast showing; and the men too lament in their place, with garments girt likewise. When this is done, they take the dead body to be embalmed (Book II, 85).”\(^9\)

---

\(^8\) Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies.*, 1:385.

From these texts, it would appear that there was some connection between smearing oneself with dirt and mourning.\textsuperscript{10} Perhaps being “dirty” and “unkept” was an indication that one was in such distress that “normal” cleansing of oneself could not be undertaken.

An ostracon (\textit{ODM 228})\textsuperscript{11} containing a letter from Deir el-Medina dating to the reign of Siptah refers to the need to remove \textit{jwtn} from a house (\textit{pr}). In the letter, the scribe Burekhtuinuf writes to the scribe Renakht and requests tool to remove dirt (\textit{jwtn}) from a house. The pertinent section is translated below.

\begin{equation}
\begin{align}
(5) \text{ Wnn } & \beta y=j \, \delta y(t) \, s p r \, r=k \, j w=k \, (r) \, d j t \, j n. t w \, (6) \, n=j \, p \, t j k y=k \, \varepsilon-n-\textit{hntj} \, f \beta y=j \, n \, \overline{n} \, j w t n \, (\varepsilon \textit{Hntj} \, \overline{n} \textit{wtn}) \, (7) \, m \, j m \, \overline{\varepsilon} \, h r \, d j t \, n=k \, p t y \, p \, t j k y \, n b \, j w \, m \, j r \, (8) \, \nu n \, j \, s m y \, y \, \varepsilon \, s=k \, r \, f \beta y \, (9) \, n \, \overline{n} \, j w t n \, (\varepsilon \textit{Hntj} \, \overline{n} \textit{wtn}) \, n t y \, d j \, j \, m \, p t y \, p r
\end{align}
\end{equation}

When my letter reaches you, you will cause that one brings to me your \textit{a-en-kenty} so that I might carry the dirt from here quickly. But (I) will set for you Pety(?) your lord. Do not send back to me a complaint since you should hurry in order to carry the dirt which is there for me in the house.

Apparently, there is earth or dirt in the house of Berukhtuinuf and he needs a tool to remove it. Exactly what sort of a tool an \textit{\varepsilon-n-hntj} is uncertain but, based on the determinative (\textit{\varepsilon}) it is probably made of wood and used for moving earth.\textsuperscript{12} It seems likely that the amount of \textit{jwtn} in the house must be significant and thus required a certain tool in order to carry (\textit{f\beta y}) it

\begin{flushright}
notes that in more modern Egypt “it is only the women who smear themselves with mud” (Lloyd, \textit{Herodotus Book II}, 352.). Cf. Goyon, \textit{Rituels funéraires}, 11.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{10} Compare the ancient Israelite practice of putting dirt or dust on one’s head as a sign of mourning (Job 2:12; Lam 2:10; Ezek 27:30).
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{12} Perhaps \textit{hnty} refers to some type of bowl (see Faulkner, \textit{A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian}, 1991, 326; Leonard H. Lesko and Barbara S. Lesko, eds., \textit{A Dictionary of Late Egyptian}, 2nd ed (Providence, RI: B.C. Scribe Publications, 2002), 367. If this is the case then perhaps \textit{\varepsilon-n-hnty} is a “stick of a bowl” or tool consisting of a handle and a “bowl-like” scoop on one end.
\end{flushright}
away. How or why there is a large amount of *jwtn* in the house is not clear, but the letter indicates that it is important to have it removed quickly. Clearly, the presence of the *jwtn* in the house was undesirable and needed to be “cleaned” or removed, but it may be for more reasons than simply dirtiness.

In a student’s miscellany from Papyrus Chester Beatty IV,\(^\text{13}\) it is emphasized that writings are more enduring than funerary monuments. Being covered with *jwtn* is a sign of being forgotten. Doors and halls fall to pieces and those servicing the tomb will go away.\(^\text{14}\)

\[
n\hat{\partial}y=sn \ (2,12) \ w\partial w \ h\partial w \ m \ jwtn \ jsy=sn \ sm\hat{h}\]

Their stelae are covered with dirt (\(\hat{\partial}\hat{\partial}\hat{\partial}\hat{\partial}\hat{\partial}\hat{\partial}\)), their tombs forgotten.\(^\text{15}\)

Probably the emphasis here is not on the dirtiness of *jwtn*, but that over time dirt builds up over the funerary monuments causing them to be forgotten.\(^\text{16}\) A few lines later the text reads,

\[
(3,3) \ s \ 3k\partial \ h\hat{\partial}r\hat{\partial}f=m \ jwtn \ h\hat{\partial}w=f \ nbw \ m \ sby \ n \ t\hat{\partial}
\]

*A man perishes*, his corpse is in the ground, all his kin are going to the earth.\(^\text{19}\)

---


\(\text{16}\) A similar theme is found in the Abydos Dedicatory Inscription of Ramesses II (*KRI* II, 325:13–326:1). Spalinger translates: “and he found that the chapels of the Sacred Land, of the kings of aforetime, and their tombs which are in Abydos had become dilapidated, half of them were in a state of construction, and [the other half of them covered/filled?] with earth (\(s\hat{\partial}t\)), and their walls [were lying?] on the ground. And a brick did not touch its companion, and what was on the foundation was (now) become dirt (\(jwtn\)) (Anthony Spalinger, *The Great Dedicatory Inscription of Ramesses II: A Solar-Osiran Tractate at Abydos*, electronic resource, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East, v. 33 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2009), 25.).

\(\text{17}\) According to Gardiner’s notes this spelling (\(\hat{\partial}\hat{\partial}\hat{\partial}\hat{\partial}\hat{\partial}\hat{\partial}\)) is “an eccentric writing for \(\hat{\partial}\hat{\partial}\hat{\partial}\hat{\partial}\hat{\partial}\hat{\partial}\) (Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum: Third Series: Chester Beatty Gift.*, Plate 19, n. a.).

\(\text{18}\) *Jwtn* is spelled the same as in the line above.

Again, the emphasis does not seem to be on dirtiness, but on transitoriness. Gardiner translated as “his corpse is become dirt. All his kindred have crumbled to dust.”20 While this is a plausible translation, one wonders if it is better understood as saying that they are all buried in the ground rather than that they have become dirt although we should not rule out a double meaning.

**3ḥt**

According to Harris, 3ḥt is the “usual word for field or arable land” and is also a “term for the Nile alluvium of which cultivated fields in Egypt were largely composed, and from which bricks and the coarser kinds of pottery were commonly made.”21 The vast majority of references to 3ḥt simply refer to a field or arable land22 without a connotation of “dirty.” However, the description of the potter in the Satire of the Trades is worthy of further exploration. The chapter on the potter is one of the longest in the Satire of the Trades; 23 here we will focus on the first half of the description.

(9,1) Jkdw-ndst ḫr 3ḥt ḫw=f m ḫnhw  
(9,2) ḫw=f sw ḫw=f ḫw r ḫw r pst ḫw=f  
(9,3) ḫbw=f ḫt m=f ḫw=f m ṣtp

The potter is under the field although his lifetime is among the living. He is one who hacks up the mud(?)^24 more than pigs in order to fire his pots.

---


21 Harris, *Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals.*, 199. He further says that “it is abundantly clear that 3ḥt as a material is simply clay made from Nile alluvium, for which it is evidently the most precise, though not the only, term.”


24 The meaning of this word is not entirely certain. Determining the precise meaning is not helped by the lacuna in a number of sources for this passage and the different spellings in the sources that survive (cf. Jäger, *Altägyptische Berufstypologien*, XXXV). ḫw is clearly something that pigs would dig in and this particular word is probably chosen for the purposes of word play with ḫw (pig). For discussion of the various interpretations of this word see Youri Volokhine, *Le Porc En Égypte Ancienne.*, vol. 3, Collection Religions: Comparatisme - Histoire -
His clothes have become stiff with mud. His belt is in rags. Since the potter must gather clay in order to make his pots, he must necessarily dig in the earth in order to gather it. While the reference may imply dirtiness (being under the field), the following phrase could also imply that the reference is more to death. The idea seems to be that the potter’s life is like one already dead since he spends his time “under (carrying) the earth.”

While on its own, the line about the potter being under the field may indicate something along the lines of his existence being living death, the next phrases may imply something along the lines of “dirtiness.” The potter’s digging compared to that of a pig probably communicates dirtiness in this context. The meaning of *dbn* will be discussed below, but it should be noted here that the description of the potter’s clothes as stiff with “clay” also communicates a dirty picture. In sum, while the use of *ḥt* in the initial phrase (“under the field”) may communicate the idea of death more than of dirtiness, the lines following bring out the idea of dirtiness and thus we should not completely discount this association in the first line. However, while *ḥt* may communicate dirtiness in this passage, this is a rare connotation for this word.

---


**m∔t, m∔mt**

The *Wörterbuch* lists *m∔t* 27 (𓊁 𓊁) and *m∔mt* 28 (𓊁 𓊁) as separate entries although it defines them both as “art Ackerboden.” However, Gardiner argued that the entries in the *Wörterbuch* “relating to this and some cognate words need radical revision.” 30 He argued that both *m∔t* and *m∔mt* were different writings of the same word and thus the entries should not have been separated. 31 He concludes that “we may distinguish for *m∔t*, var. *m∔mt*, three meanings: 1, ‘mud’ (as substance, in medical texts); 2, ‘muddy ground,’ 3, ‘mud-flat,’ as agricultural land.”32

The type of mud referred to by *m∔t* and *m∔mt* seems to be a wet, oozy kind of mud. For example, in Papyrus Lansing, the cultivator (𓊁 𓊁) loses his team (6,4–6,7) (presumably a team of oxen or cattle). 33 Three days later, he finds the team in the *m∔mt*, but not much is left of them.

---

27 Wb I, 185.

28 Wb I, 186.

29 Unless otherwise noted, all the occurrences of *m∔t* and *m∔mt* discussed in this section are determined with the 𓊁 sign.


31 Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica. 1, 1*, 10–11.

32 Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica. 1, 1*, 12. Cf. Harris, *Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals*, 200–201. An example of *m∔mt* describing a piece of land is found in papyrus Berlin 8523 where the ownership of a particular “field of mud” (𓊁 𓊁) is discussed (Allam, *Hieratische Ostraka und Papyri aus der Ramesseidenzeit*, 274–75; Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt.*, 1:209.) It may also be worth noting here the word 𓊁 𓊁 𓊁, which appears twice (Column 4, line 16 and Column 5, line 1) in Papyrus Pushkin 127 (also known as “A Tale of Woe”). The determinative seems to clearly indicate that a type of grain is meant. Is there a certain type of grain that is grown in an *m∔mt* “mud-flat” and thus is called *m∔m* grain? (Ricardo Augusto Caminos and Gosudarstvennyi muzei izobrazitel’nykh iskusstv imeni A.S. Pushkina, *A Tale of Woe: From a Hieratic Papyrus in the A.S. Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow* (Oxford [England: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1977), 62; Plates 10 and 12.

33 Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 1:392–93. Cf. Papyrus Turnin A 2,7 where in a similar context the type of team (𓊁 𓊁) is specified (Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 7:122.)
since they have been eaten by jackals. A similar example occurs in Papyrus Turin A where the team being used by the cultivator falls into the \( \text{'m'}\text{t} (2,7) \).\(^{34}\) It would seem that \( \text{'m'}\text{t} \) must refer to something such as wet, oozy mud since teams of cattle get immobilized in it and can become helpless prey for predators.

In medical texts, \( \text{'m'}\text{t} \) can be applied as a remedy.\(^{35}\) For example, in Papyrus Ebers no. 482 (67,17) black mud (\( \text{'m'}\text{t} \text{kmt} \)) is to be applied to a burn on the first day. Possibly wet mud would be soothing and cool the burn. Similarly, \( \text{'m'}\text{t} \) is rubbed on the legs and calves of a woman aching in her legs and calves after walking.\(^{36}\) A wet type of mud would fit both of these contexts well.

The word \( \text{'m'}\text{t} \) also appears in Chapter 25 of the Wisdom of Amenope.\(^{37}\) The context of the chapter is not mocking a blind, lame or short man since he is possessed and made by god. Line 24,13-14 of pBM 10474 reads:

\[
(24,13) \text{Jr rmTt} \text{'m'}\text{t}(t) \quad dh3wt (24,14) p3 ntr p2y=f kd
\]

Concerning people, (they are) mud and straw and the god is his builder.

\(^{34}\) Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies.*, 7:122.


\(^{38}\) The spelling is unusual here (\( \text{m}^\text{\text{\normalfont D}} 1 \)). This portion of the text is also preserved in \( t \text{Turin CGT 58005} \), where it is spelled \( \text{m}^\text{\text{\normalfont D}} 1 \) (line 8) (Lange, *Das Weisheitsbuch Des Amenemope: Aus Dem Papyrus 10,474 Des British Museum.*, 11:120.)
The main idea of the text here seems to be that man is the creation of the god and the god does with him what he desires. While the idea of dirtiness may not be prominent here, it may be commenting on the relative value of humanity as compared to the divine. The idea behind the used of mud and straw is likely the concept of construction since mud and straw are common building materials in mud bricks.

We will now return to the passage in Papyrus Lansing discussed above concerning the potter. While above we focused on the first half of the passage concerning jwtn; here we will focus on the second half of the passage.

4,4 jkdw-ndst wrh m jwtn
mj nty rmtw=f m
drwt=f rdwy=f (4,5) mh m ¢mt
jw=f mj nty m p3 mhn

The potter is anointed (smeared) with earth, like someone whose people have died. His hands and his feet are filled with mud, he is like what is in the mire.

It should be noted that the line concerning ¢mt parallels the first line. In the first line the potter is smeared with jwtn. In the next couplet, parts of the potter are mentioned (hands and feet), mh (filled) parallels wrh in the first line, and ¢mt parallels jwtn in the first couplet. Both lines are communicating similar, if not the same, ideas. The word mhn which appears in the last line is a very rare word and its precise meaning is unknown. The Wörterbuch defines mhn as “schlammige”\(^{39}\) and Lesko glosses as “mire(?).”\(^{40}\) Following the parallels of the verse couplets, there could be some kind of connection between mhn and death. If mhn refers to mud or mire, it

\(^{39}\) Wb II, 134.1.

\(^{40}\) Lesko and Lesko, A Dictionary of Late Egyptian, 202. See also discussion in Alan H. Gardiner, Ancient Egyptian Onomastica. 2, 2, (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), 217.
could be that what gets stuck in it frequently dies. In any case, these lines depict the potter as someone totally full of mud.

A somewhat enigmatic text referring to \textit{\textae{m} \text{mt}} occurs on the verso of papyrus Turin 1879.\footnote{\textit{KRI VI}, 335–337. Photographs, hieroglyphic transcription and description of the text can be found at https://collezionepapiri.museoegizio.it/en-GB/document/9/?inventoryNumber=1879.} This text seems to be for the foundation of a statue cult of the king and is in the “form of a letter addressed to the king.”\footnote{Willem Hovestreydt, “A Letter to the King Relating to the Foundation of a Statue (P.Turin 1879 Vso.).,” \textit{Lingua Aegyptia} 5 (1997): 114.} The first half of the text offers a description of a statue of Rameses VI (1,3–1,14) and in the second half it appears to offer a request for a soldier to restore and provide for the offering cult for the statue (1,15–2,6).\footnote{For discussion of the possible motivations for the institution of a private statue cult see Hovestreydt, “A Letter to the King Relating to the Foundation of a Statue (P.Turin 1879 Vso.).,” 114–21. For discussion of the endowment of statue cults see Ben J. J. Haring, \textit{Divine Households: Administrative and Economic Aspects of the New Kingdom Royal Memorial Temples in Western Thebes}, Egyptologische Uitgaven 12 (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1997), 142–55.} While this is a very interesting text, for our purposes we will focus on the last lines after the writer has requested a soldier be sent to make offerings for the statue (1,20–2,2). The text then reads:

\begin{verbatim}
2,2) y3 bn twj hr th <b> r\textdwy m t3 \textae{m} t (\text{\$d\text{\$z}}) n [...] (2,3) lr bn twj hr \textae{h} n p3 hmw smw twj jn\text{\$h} [...] (2,4) \textae{h} t j hr \text{\textae{r}wt hm} s\text{\textae{t}n} j n3 gww n p3 [...] (2,5) gbw wd\text{\textae{t}} p3y=f ss3t
\end{verbatim}

Indeed, I am not immersing(?) (my) legs into the mud of […] and I am not standing for the dust of harvest. I am enclosing […] I stand on pebbles and I sit (on) the mountains of the […] leaves and \textit{wedjwedj} plant are his sustenance.

Unfortunately, this text is difficult to understand even without the breaks. However, there seems to be a contrast between mud (\textit{\textae{m} t}) and the dust of harvest and with standing on pebbles and sitting on the mountains. The contrast could be between the stability of the different types of

\begin{verbatim}
41 KRI VI, 335–337. Photographs, hieroglyphic transcription and description of the text can be found at https://collezionepapiri.museoegizio.it/en-GB/document/9/?inventoryNumber=1879.
43 Following the translations of Kitchen (\textit{RITA VI}, 337:11) and Hovestreydt, “A Letter to the King Relating to the Foundation of a Statue (P.Turin 1879 Vso.).,” 114 uu. The text appears to write \textit{\textae{\$f\text{\$z}}}.
\end{verbatim}
terrain, or it could indicate that mud and dust are dirty compared to life on the mountains. A third possibility is that the writer is simply stating a physical fact of his current location. It is difficult to be certain.

\textit{dbn}

In the third verse couplet of the Satire of the Trade’s description of the potter (see above under \textit{3ht}), the potter’s clothes are described as “strong with \textit{dbn} (\begin{figure}{c}
\end{figure}).”

\begin{equation}
(9,3) \textit{hbsw=f nht m=\text{dbn}’gs=f m stp}
\end{equation}

His clothes have become stiff with mud. His belt is in rags.

The term \textit{dbn} appears to refer to a material used in building as is evidenced by the substance “\textit{dbn} of the potter” (\textit{dbn n jkdw}) which appears in several remedies in Egyptian medical texts.\footnote{Deines and Grapow, \textit{Wörterbuch Der Ägyptischen Drogennamen.}, 6:577.}

It is not specified in these texts whether the \textit{jkdw} referred to is a “potter” (\textit{jkdw ns\text{d}}) or a “builder of walls” (\textit{jkdw jnbw}). This could mean it was a material used by both professions. The term has been translated “mortar,”\footnote{Gonzalo M. Sanchez et al., eds., \textit{The Edwin Smith Papyrus: Updated Translation of the Trauma Treatise and Modern Medical Commentaries} (Atlanta, Ga: Lockwood Press, 2012), 278.} “mud,”\footnote{R. B. Parkinson, ed., \textit{The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems, 1940-1640 BC} (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 276. Cf. Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, 137.} and “clay.”\footnote{Lichtheim, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature.}, 233.} Harris suggested that it refers to some “semi-liquid substance” that “has been spattered on the potter’s clothes and has dried, and only clay or slip seems possible.”\footnote{Harris, \textit{Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals.}, 207.} Von Deines and Grapow suggested that it was “eine speziell Bezeichnung fur Ton oder Lehm.”\footnote{Deines and Grapow, \textit{Wörterbuch Der Ägyptischen Drogennamen.}, 6:577.} Perhaps the term refers to clay or a mixture of clay and other materials
used in making bricks or pottery. If \textit{dbn} denotes a type of clay or slip used by the potter, one can imagine that the potter’s garments would become covered with wet clay. As the clay dries, the clothing would become stiff or hard by the clay. There may also be a practical reason for the potter to use clothes soaked in mud or clay. According to Verly, the potter may have used a “cloth soaked in mud” in order to protect himself against fire and heat.\footnote{Georges Verly, “Khety or the Satire of Trades, Mud and Experimental Archaeology: The Usage of Mud as Protection by Metallurgists in Pharaonic Egypt.,” \textit{Göttinger Miszellen} 252 (2017): 140.}

He writes:

> “Experimentation has demonstrated that as long as the mud contained water, precise, rapid movements could be made within a 1200˚ C atmosphere. The risk of burns comes once the water has evaporated. All that is needed at that stage is to re-imbibe the cloth or body with mud, immediately reactivating its protective role.”\footnote{Verly, “Khety or the Satire of Trades, Mud and Experimental Archaeology: The Usage of Mud as Protection by Metallurgists in Pharaonic Egypt.,” 140.}

In other words, although smearing oneself with mud probably served a practical use in the potter’s trade, it also was easily mocked by the scribes. Since \textit{nht} is typically a word used for strength or victory,\footnote{Faulkner, \textit{A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian}, 1991, 138–39. \textit{Wb II}, 314–317.} there may be a hint of sarcasm in this description. Far from having white, clean, linen garments (the “clean” clothing ideal), the potter is presented as having clothing that is “strong with clay.” It is difficult to imagine a greater contrast to white, clean garments.

The same word “\textit{dbn}” referring to a material of the potter seems to appear in an incantation directed against a demon called Saqeq.\footnote{The extant copies of the text seem to come from the Ramesside Era, but Edwards suggests the incantation dates much earlier (I. E. S. Edwards, “Kenkhropshef’s Prophylactic Charm,” \textit{The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology} 54 (1968): 155–60, https://doi.org/10.2307/3855919.).}
The text describes the demon as a strange being with phrases such as

\[ h\dot{y} = k ~ \text{Sjkk pr m pt} \text{ tjr.ty=f m tbn=f nst=f m ʻrt=f wnm=f m t ḥry} \]

\footnote{For photographs, hieroglyphic transcription, and translation of this text see Edwards, “Kenkhropshef’s Prophylactic Charm,” 158, Plate XXIVA and XXIV. Incantations that have close parallels to this one can be found in
Get back! O Saqeq, who goes out from sky and land. His eyes in his head, his tongue is in his hinder parts and he eats the “under-bread.”

The text also describes Saqeq as one who “lives on dbn” (\(\text{\text{n}h=f m \text{ dbn} \leftarrow \text{\text{o}r \text{m}}\)). Based on the description of Saqeq, this would seem to be a negative thing. Edwards indicates that this word was the same as that used in the Satire of the Trades and the medical papyri. Since animal dung may have been mixed with clay or mud as a binder when making bricks or pottery, Edwards suggests that “dung” may be the connotation of the word dbn in this incantation. Even if dbn did not include excrement, it seems to be a wet, perhaps slimy clay and would not appear to be an appetizing material. In any case, eating “clay,” “mud,” or “mortar” or whatever mixture(s) that may have been used in making mud-bricks or pottery is clearly not something with a positive connotation and is associated with a demon whose “tongue is in his hinder parts” and who eats “under-bread.” If dbn did indeed call to mind a connection with animal excrement to the ancient Egyptians, then this adds another layer of uncleanness to the description of the potter in the Satire of the Trades.

---

56 Since the context is describing a being whose body parts on not in their normal place, presumably this reference indicates that the eyes are in the wrong location as well. Perhaps this phrase is indicating that the eyes are on the top of his head or on his forehead.

57 Probably a euphemism for “excrement” (Edwards, “Ḳenḥikhopshef’s Prophylactic Charm,” 158i.).

58 Edwards, “Ḳenḥikhopshef’s Prophylactic Charm,” 159m.

59 Lucas and Harris, Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries, 49, 368.
hmw

The meaning of hmw (𓊝) as “dust” is fairly well established.\textsuperscript{60} The verb “hm” is typically glossed as “to be dry,”\textsuperscript{61} but the Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte defines as “staubtrocken sein” which keeps the idea of dust.\textsuperscript{62} These words are typically determined with the \textsuperscript{𓊩} sign, perhaps because of the association of wind blowing dust although occasionally the determinatives of grains ⾰ or . . .\textsuperscript{63} In light of the climate of Egypt, it seems somewhat surprising that hmw is not more frequently invoked as a substance that needed to be cleaned. This does not necessarily mean that it was not, but it was not explicitly mentioned as such in surviving sources.

It is not uncommon for the shaking off of dust to be referenced in connection with the “resurrection” of the deceased. For example, in the Great Dedicatory Stela for Ramesses I\textsuperscript{64} it says concerning Ramesses I:

\( (x+19) \ tj\ sw\ m\ ntr\ nmj=f\ dw\; t\ swb\; n=f\ Sw\ m\ st\ kkt\ kf\; y=f\ hr=f\ nh=f\ hmw=f\)

Now he is divine as he traverses the Duat, Shu illuminates him in the place of darkness, he uncovers his face, and he shakes off his dust.

\textsuperscript{60} Faulkner, A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 1991, 190. Wb III, 277–278. Harris, Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals., 202. Orly Goldwasser suggests that the sail determinative might be used with xmw because it is “a substance carried by the wind” (Orly Goldwasser, From Icon to Metaphor: Studies in the Semiotics of the Hieroglyphs., vol. 142, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis (Freiburg (Schweiz); Göttingen: Universitätsverlag; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 94.

\textsuperscript{61} Faulkner, A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 1991, 190. The Wörterbuch defines it as “zu trocken werden” (Wb III, 177).

\textsuperscript{62} Hildegard von Deines and Wolfhart Westendorf, Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Zweite Hälfte (h–ḏ)., vol. 7, Grundriss Der Medizin Der Alten Ägypter (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962), 656.


\textsuperscript{64} KRI I, 110–114.
Numerous other examples of shaking off or removing dust can be found in the mortuary literature.\textsuperscript{65} According to Eaton’s study of terms for decay in the Pyramid Texts,

$h_{mw}$ is a general word for “dust,” most frequently appearing with the sail determinative, P5, in later texts, indicating its’ windborne nature. It can be stirred up by work and walking, but also shaken off when the dead rise. It is clearly something meant to be cast off because it is hindering the deceased, as in PT 676 §4, where it is paralleled with “bonds” ($k_i\text{sw}$). Thus, the dust ($h_{mw}$) mentioned in parallel with forms of bodily decay and sweat in PT 535 should probably be understood as metaphorical. Like the other words associated with dry forms of decay, $h_{mw}$ does not appear in the medical literature as a product of the living body. Thus, again dry forms of decay, metaphorical as well as literal, were associated with the corpse, but not the living body.\textsuperscript{66}

It seems that $h_{mw}$ is something that must be removed for the deceased to arise, but it may be a stretch to say it is “dirty.” In any case, $h_{mw}$ is not considered to be very dirty or polluting because it is relatively easy to remove; it can simply be shaken off.

In the passage describing Sinuhe’s flight from Egypt, “dust” ($h_{mw}$) is be mentioned in describing how his throat felt dry from thirst.\textsuperscript{67} He says $hh\ h_{mw}$.\textsuperscript{68} The context clearly refers to Sinuhe’s throat being parched with thirst. Lichtheim translates the phrase “my throat burned.”\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{65} For examples see PT 413, 419, 535, 536, 553, 676. See also the references in Rami van der Molen, \textit{A Hieroglyphic Dictionary of Egyptian Coffin Texts} (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2000), 386. See also the expression $whj=j\ h_{mw}=k$ in Chapter 68 of the book of the dead (Quirke, \textit{Going out in Daylight}, 167.). Cf. a Saite Tomb-Stone which reads: $\begin{array}{c} \text{wxA}=T \quad \text{r}=k \quad r=k \quad r \leftrightarrow \quad r=k \end{array}$ “May you shake off your dust with respect to you to your earth.” Alternatively, $\text{rkrk}$ could be read as the word “to creep” although lacking the determinative. In this case the text would say, “May you shake off your dust which creeps (on) your land.” (Ed. Mahler, “Egyptian Antiquities in the Hungarian National Museum of Budapest.,” \textit{Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale} 27 (1927): 51ff.).


\textsuperscript{68} The determinative for “dust” ($h_{mw}$) is the sail ($\overrightarrow{P5}$).

\textsuperscript{69} Lichtheim, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature.}, 274.
Parkinson translates as “my throat parched.” Simpson translates as “my throat dry.” Allen makes the connection with dust and translates as, “my throat dusty.” He says that “hm “become dusty” is a denominal verb, from the noun hmw “dust.” Sinuhe experiences this feeling of the “taste of death” (dpt mwt) when he “arrives at the island of the Great Black, in Peten in the Asiatic regions;” in other words, after he has left Egypt. According to Lopes and Pires:

The arrival into this new space is experienced in bad terms. Somehow the distance from Egypt, the sacred land, negatively affects Sinuhe, although the local inhabitants rescue him. According to Perez-Accino, this movement of the main character to the East is inappropriate since it is contrary to the Sun and consequently contrary to the pharaoh himself, which causes Sinuhe to face a symbolic death.

While it is probably a stretch to consider hmw in this context as “dirty,” the location where Sinuhe experiences hmw is probably significant; the mention of his throat as hm occurs after Sinuhe has left the land of Egypt.

§§§

The term $\delta^\gamma$ (𓊁) refers to sand. Although sand is common in the region of Egypt, explicit references indicating sand was “dirty” are very uncommon. On the contrary, sand often

---


71 Simpson et al., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 56.


73 Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom*, 72.


76 Harris, *Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals*, 205.
can be a pure or purifying substance. However, there is a passage at the end of the Tale of Sinuhe which indicates that sand could be associated with dirtiness. After Sinuhe has returned to Egypt, he begins the process of cleansing and “Egyptianizing” himself again. Part of the passage describing his transformation mentions sand as something needing to be removed.

\[
\begin{align*}
Jw \ rdj \ sbt & \ (292) \ n \ h\text{\textasciimacron}st \\
\text{hbsw} \ n \ nmjw \ s^8 & \\
\text{sd=kw} & \ (293) \ m \ p\text{\textasciitilde}kt \\
gs=kw & \ m \ tpt \\
sd=kw & \ (294) \ hr \ \text{hnkyt} \\
dj.n & \ s^8 \ n \ jm\text{\textasciitilde}f \ mr\text{\textasciitilde}ht \ n \ ht \ n \ wr\text{\textasciitilde}h \ jm=s
\end{align*}
\]

A cargo\textsuperscript{78} was given to the desert;\textsuperscript{79} Clothes to the sandfarers. I was clothed with fine linen\textsuperscript{80} and anointed with oil I slept on a bed, after I gave the sand to those who are in it and the merhet-oil of a tree\textsuperscript{81} to the one anointed with it.


\textsuperscript{78} In the story of the shipwrecked sailor, the sailor is given a \textit{sbt} of oils and exotics by the snake which he loads onto the boat to take him home (column 162). The spellings are identical in the two literary works. \textit{sbt} (with identical spelling) also clearly refers to a ship’s cargo in Papyrus Anastastii VIII, 6 (see transcription in Sarah I. Groll, “The Egyptian Background of the Exodus and the Crossing of the Reed Sea: A New Reading of Papyrus Anastastii VIII.,” in \textit{Jerusalem Studies in Egyptology}, ed. Irene Shirun-Grumach (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 174.) El-Hamrari translates sb.t as “schmutz” Mahmoud El-Hamrawi, “Gapping Bei Nicht-Ersten Satzkernen Im Mittelägyptischen,” \textit{Studien Zur Äußeregyptischen Kultur} 31 (2003): 189.

\textsuperscript{79} Gardiner says that “the burden given to the desert is of course the dirt which Sinuhe’s ablutions removed from him and the clothes given to the Sandfarers are Sinuhe’s discarded Asiatic garments (Alan H. Gardiner, \textit{Notes on the Story of Sinuhe}. (Parie: Honoré Champion, 1916), 112.)


\textsuperscript{81} \textit{mr\text{\textasciitilde}ht} \ n \ \textit{ht} seems to refer to a specific kind of \textit{mr\text{\textasciitilde}ht}-oil, apparently of lower quality or associated with the foreigners Sinuhe had been living among (Basma Koura, \textit{Die “7-Heiligen Öle“ Und Andere Öl- Und Fettnamen: Eine Lexikographische Untersuchung Zu Den Bezeichnungen von Ölen, Fetten Und Salben Bei Den Alten Ägyptern von Der Frühzeit Bis Zum Anfang Der Ptolemäerzeit (von 3000 v.Chr. - ca. 305 v.Chr.).}, vol. 2, Aegyptiaca Monasteriensia (Aachen: Shaker, 1999), 122.). Harris suggested that expression \textit{mr\text{\textasciitilde}ht} \ n \ \textit{ht} indicated “wood tar or resin” (Harris, \textit{Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals.}, 174.).
As the last line of this section makes clear, the sand had to be removed from Sinuhe as part of the process of cleansing. However, there is probably much more to the removal of sand than the substance itself as “dirty.” This passage clearly associates the sand with people “other” than Egyptians. Sinuhe was associated with the sand when he had fled from Egypt, but now that he has returned not only the clothes had to be returned to the “sandfarers,” but also the sand itself had to be given back to those who are in it. Sand is clearly undesirable and probably “dirty” in this context, but this seems to be due to the association of sand with the “sandfarers” and “un-Egyptianness” more than the material of sand itself.

Summary

As can be seen from the above survey of references to soils as “dirty,” the idea that soil is “dirty” appears rather rarely in Egyptian texts. Certainly, the descriptions of the potter characterize him as “dirty” with a variety of terms related to soil. However, there are few unambiguous references to soil as “dirty” or needing to be cleansed in Egyptian literature. However, this does not necessarily imply that soils were not considered “dirt” or that the Egyptian were unconcerned about soils as “dirt” on their bodies or in their homes. The frequent references to washing in ancient Egyptian (see chapter on Cleanliness in Ancient Egypt) would suggest that the Egyptian were concerned with dirt and its removal (in at least some of these references). Either the Egyptians preferred not to mention the substance(s) that were removed via washing, or it was simply assumed that soils were removed by frequent washing. Having soil upon one’s person was clearly undesirable—at least to the scribes and elites—otherwise the mocking description of the potter makes no sense. However, we must keep in mind that context is always the key to understanding what is considered “dirty” and when. For example, being dirtied with soils may have been normal and understandable when one was working outdoors,
yet it becomes “dirty” in another context such as one’s home, for example the elder brother’s washing when he returns to his home.

In the mentions of soils as “dirt” discussed above, they are almost entirely experienced with the sense of sight. There seems to be little indication that “soils” are experienced by smell. Presumably, the soils are sometimes experienced as “dirty” with the sensation of touch, but this does not seem to be very explicit in the texts. This may be because the descriptions of the people as “dirty” such as the potter, are from the perspective of a third person. The scribes experience the dirtiness of the potter by his visual appearance, not through touching him or smelling him. The possible exception may be the description of the potter’s clothes as “stiff with mud” which might indicate a sensation of touch. Presumably, the potter himself experiences the sensation of the soils via touch. However, we do not have his viewpoint if he experienced them as “dirty” or found the experience unpleasant in any way.
CHAPTER 4: TERMS FOR DIRTINESS RELATED TO THE BODY

In this section, we will examine a few terms that may be related to the idea of dirt or dirty in ancient Egypt. Each of these terms seems to frequently be related to the human body in some way. We will begin by analyzing excrement and urine, since across cultures, these seem to be bodily fluids most closely associated with dirt and disgust.¹ We will also briefly examine if semen and menstrual blood were related to dirtiness by the ancient Egyptians. Finally, we will examine the words ʰḥ, ʰmr(t), and ḥsì.

Excrement and Urine

We proceed by examining excrement and then urine in Egyptian texts, before summarizing the analysis of them together. We will begin our examination of excrement as it relates to the concept of dirt by examining it in the Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead.

Excrement in Funerary Literature

As is widely known, statements about detesting excrement and not eating excrement occur frequently in the Coffin Texts as well as the Book of the Dead.² We will not exhaustively


look at each of the texts with this theme or offer an in-depth analysis of the meaning and purpose of these and related statements. However, it is worth exploring these texts somewhat for what they might indicate about Egyptian attitudes to excrement as well as how they relate to an Egyptian conception of dirt.\(^3\) Although found on coffins, we should not necessarily assume that the Coffin Texts are only relevant for understanding Egyptian conceptions of death and the afterlife.\(^4\) Indeed, if one asks the right questions, they may actually indicate aspects of Egyptian attitudes of dirt and cleanliness in daily life, as well as in ritual and death.\(^5\) In this study, we will explore these texts only insofar as we can use them to examine Egyptian conceptions of and attitudes towards dirt. Since Coffin Text 173 is a text, which offers an extended discussion of the theme of excrement, we will begin with this text.\(^6\)

---

\(^3\) For a broader discussion of excrement in the Ancient Near East see Staubli, “Feces: The Primary Disgust Elicitor in the Hebrew Bible and in the Ancient Near East.”


\(^5\) Indeed, one might ask, “where does all the excrement in the afterlife comes from?” Anne Landborg presents several references which indicate that the excrement which the deceased rejects in the underworld could come from demons, but also gods such as Osiris, Horus and Seth as well as the deceased himself (Landborg, “Holy C**p,” 262–65.). Apparently, the act of defecating was not considered defiling, but undesired contact with the product of defecating, i.e. excrement, was defiling (Landborg, “Holy C**p,” 265–69.).

\(^6\) For translations of many of these spells see Frandsen, “Faeces of the Creator or the Temptations of the Dead.” For translation and discussion of Coffin Text 173 see Kadish, “The Scatophagous Egyptian.”; Zandee, “Egyptian Funerary Ritual: Coffin Texts, Spell 173.”
Not eating excrement and not drinking urine in the necropolis. My disgust, my disgust is what I will not eat, excrement is my disgust. I will not eat it. That which pacifies the ka\textsuperscript{12}—it will not enter this my mouth. I will not eat it with my mouth. I will not touch it with my fingers; I will not tread on it with my toes because I will not eat excrement for you, and I will not drink urine for you. I will not descend upside down for you, I will not take this mat of Seshemetet because I will not eat this “that which pleases the ka” which went out from the buttocks of Osiris.

This text clearly indicates that excrement is a highly contaminating substance. Although the most striking thing about these texts is the statements about eating excrement, we should also note that the deceased will not touch excrement with his fingers or his toes. Touching excrement with one’s fingers or toes does not seem to be as remote of a possibility as that of eating it.

\textsuperscript{7} Classified with a pustule (균) in all three sources of this spell.

\textsuperscript{8} Following B3C. B1C and B2L write §fn.

\textsuperscript{9} Faulkner translated as “finger” following B3C and argued that tp written in B1C and B2L was “obviously absurd” Raymond Oliver Faulkner, The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts. I. 1, (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1994), 149 n. 2. However, Frandsen translates as “head” and notes that the writing contained in B1C and B2L are “probably less unlikely than previously assumed” Frandsen, “Faeces of the Creator or the Temptations of the Dead.,” 39 n. 93. While noting that Faulkner’s comments are certainly too strong, I have followed B3C’s db\textsuperscript{5}w rather than B1C and B2L tp here.

\textsuperscript{10} Following B3C. B1C and B2L have ꜣ, but de Buck notes this seems “impossible” Adriaan de Buck, The Egyptian Coffin texts. III, III, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), 47 n. 3.

\textsuperscript{11} Buck, The Egyptian Coffin texts. III, III, 47–48.

Cleaning up after children, working with animals, or even wiping oneself, an Egyptian could conceivably touch excrement with their fingers. It is also not unlikely that excrement may have been present in Egyptian streets, depending on how and where sanitation was dealt with in Egyptian towns and villages.\textsuperscript{13} If excrement was present in the streets, getting it on one’s feet may have been a likely possibility. Also, if animal dung is included in the excrement being detested in these spells, then the likelihood of an Egyptian stepping on or in excrement is increased even more. While Coffin Text 173 says the deceased would not tread on excrement with his toes, other spells indicate treading on it with sandals or feet was also a problem. For example, Coffin Text 184 says I will not tread on it with my sandals\textsuperscript{14} \((n \text{ hnd}=j \text{ hr}=f \text{ m tby})\).\textsuperscript{15} Similarly, Coffin Text 188 reads, “I will not tread on it with my feet, I will not unite with it with my fingers \((n \text{ hnd}=j \text{ hr}=s \text{ m rdwy}=j \text{ n sm}\text{2} \text{ jm}=f \text{ m db}\text{5} \text{ w}=f)\).\textsuperscript{16} As Lieven notes,

“Aufgrund des Umfangs der diesbezüglichen Textüberlieferung und der Vehemenz der Formulierungen steht außer Frage, daß Urin und Kot im Alltag als abstoßend angesehen wurden und man diese Substanzen nicht nur nicht konsumieren wollte, sondern sie auch nicht mit den Händen berühren oder mit den Sandalen darauf treten wollte.”\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{13} For some discussion of waste management in Egypt see Arnold, “Clean and Unclean Space: Domestic Waste Management at Elephantine.”; Donadoni, \textit{The Egyptians}, 24–25. Kemp, \textit{The City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti}, 205–7. Some evidence from Amarna suggests that some homes may have had a latrine, but it seems that there was a chamber pot that would then have need to be emptied. Exactly how or where this was emptied is not known. Grazer suggests that excrement may have been eaten by goats and pigs. For discussion of latrines and their disposal see Gräzer, “Latrines Domestiques d’époque Pharaonique: Tentative de Reconstitution Des Dispositifs et Des Pratiques.”

\textsuperscript{14} Other spells which refer to not treading on excrement with one’s sandals include CT 189, 193, 203, 204, 213, 220, 1011, 1012. Not treading on excrement with one’s toes is also mentioned in CT 190 and 192.

\textsuperscript{15} Buck, \textit{The Egyptian Coffin texts. III, III}, 80f-g.

\textsuperscript{16} Buck, \textit{The Egyptian Coffin texts. III, III}, 96g-h.

\textsuperscript{17} von Lieven, “„Where There Is Dirt There Is System“. Zur Ambiguität Der Bewertung von Körplichen Ausscheidungen in Der Ägyptischen Kultur,” 292.
Other texts take the avoidance of excrement a step further. For example, in Coffin Text 174, the deceased says he will not even smell it.

\[ Bw\text{-}j\ pw \ h\text{-}s \ nm \ \text{wnm}\text{-}j \ sw \ nm \ \text{ssn}\text{-}j \ sw \]

My disgust is excrement. I will not eat it. I will not smell it.

While this text is about the deceased refusing reversal in the next life, it seems safe to infer that the ancient Egyptian found the smell of excrement unpleasant. In any case, the very strong statements of rejecting excrement in the Coffin Texts, as well as parallel texts in the Book of the Dead, suggest that excrement was considered one of the most disgusting and polluting substances by the Egyptians.

### Excrement in the Satire of the Trades

The word \( h\text{-}s \) appears in the description of the mason (\( j\text{-}kd\text{-}jnb \)) (10,4) and the washerman (\( r\text{-}ht\text{y} \)) (19,4) in the Satire of the Trades. We will examine the descriptions in order of occurrence.

The description of the mason (\( j\text{-}kd\text{-}jnb, \ “the one who builds walls” \)) immediately follows that of the potter (\( j\text{-}kd\text{-}nds\text{t} \ “the little builder” \)). The passage concerning the mason is offered in full below in order to make clear the context of the use of \( h\text{-}s \).

\[
\begin{align*}
(10,1–5) & \quad d\text{-}d=j \ n=k \ m\ j \ j\text{-}kd \ jnb \ m\ r\ dpt=f \\
& \quad h\ r \ \text{wnn}=f \ m \ r\ w\text{t} \ n \ \text{sbH} \ jkd=f \ m \ d\text{-}jw \ kd=f \ m \ d\text{-}j
\end{align*}
\]

---

18 Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin texts. III, III*, 60c-e.

19 See Book of the Dead Chapters 17, 51–53, 82, 102, 116, 124, and 178. For transliteration and translation of these see Quirke, *Going out in Daylight*, 62, 131–34, 194, 228, 259, 267, 444.

20 Jäger, *Altägyptische Berufstypologien*, XLI.

21 Jäger, *Altägyptische Berufstypologien*, LXVI.

22 Following Jager’s number of the chapters in his synoptic edition.

23 Jager suggests emending to \( m \) Jäger, *Altägyptische Berufstypologien*, 76.
Let me tell you (what it is) like (for) the one who builds walls. His experience is bitter. Now he exists outside in the wind as he builds in a loincloth. His belt is a lotus of the weaving mill as far as his backside. His arms are carrying the earth in excellence and all his excrement is mixed. When he eats bread, he washes himself at the same time.

Support for the idea of the mason as dirty is found in the phrase about mixing his excrement.

Although there are variants in the spelling of $h$s, all sources use the same determinative ($\Omega$). It is possible that literal excrement would have been used, whether intentionally or unintentionally, in mortar by the mason. Whether or not literal excrement was actually meant in this text, what the builder was mixing may have looked like excrement, and in his mocking way, the scribe depicts him as mixing excrement.
The next line clearly continues to play on the idea of dirtiness. According to the scribe, the builder only washes when he eats. Presumably, the builder has dirty hands from his work, when he goes to eat, and, whether by choice or through lack of water, he is unable to wash them before eating. Thus, he gets the dirt from his hands on his bread as he eats it. Ideas of contamination are certainly present here as it seems that the scribe is implying that the mason eats excrement. One thinks of the deceased’s refusal to eat excrement in the Coffin Texts and the book of the Dead, as well as the negative beings in these texts, who are said to eat and live on excrement. It seems that characterizing the mason as consuming excrement, painted him as defiled.

The word $hs$ also appears in the chapter on the washerman ($rḥty$). The first half of the section on the washerman seems to be concerned primarily with the dangers of the profession, so only the second half of the chapter on the washerman is offered below.

\[(19,4–7)\] $ṣbb=f\; šbn\; n\; st\; hṣ\; nn\; r.^t\; w^7b.t\; jm=f$
$dd=f\; sw\; d\; jw\; n\; s.t\; wnn.t\; m\; hςnn$
$Rmyt=j\; n=f\; wṛ\; hṛ\; mknt\; f[w]\; jm\; j[nr]?\]
$dd=tw\; s^3m\; ms\; r=j\; śhr\; sp.t\; jm=κ$

He kneads a mix of everything filthy, there is no clean limb in him.

---

34 Others translate the phrase as “he washes himself but once a day” (Simpson et al., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 434.

35 For discussion of this theme and references see Kadish, “The Scatophagous Egyptian.”; Frandsen, “Faeces of the Creator or the Temptations of the Dead.”

36 Nyord writes that “the description of the dirty work of the bricklayer here seems based on ideas very similar to the attitude towards purity and excrements found in the Coffin Texts, which is here explicitly contrasted to the function of the fingers in relation to eating” (Rune Nyord, *Breathing Flesh: Conceptions of the Body in the Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Copenhagen; Lancaster: Museum Tusculanum ; Gazelle [distributor, 2010), 493.).

37 Text is fragmentary and difficult here. See Jäger, *Altägyptische Berufstypologien*, 100.

38 Cf. Jäger, *Altägyptische Berufstypologien*, 147. Taking here the $st-hṣ$ (lit seat of excrement) as referring to the water the washerman is washing in has having dirty water.
He is given it with the loincloth of a woman who was menstruating (or he puts himself into the garment of a woman who was menstruating). He weeps for him who spends the day with the launderer’s club [and the stone]? One says, “dirty laundry, come to me!” Overthrow the occasion of lips from you!

Ideas of dirt and contamination play are a major theme in the section on the washerman. He mixes dirt or contaminated substances, and there does not exist any clean limbs for him. In other words, he is entirely dirty. We will examine the rest of the lines in more detail at another point; here instead we will focus on the use of the term hs. In the description of the mason described above, he is also said to mix (šbn) hs. Mixing excrement seems to be the ultimate way to characterize someone as dirty, and indeed, the next phrase indicates that there is no part of the washerman’s body that is clean. Mixing the “place of excrement” leads to entire defilement. Clearly, hs is a substance which contaminates those who touch it; hs here seems to be almost the superlative of an unclean substance.

---


40 Following Hoch who suggests that the “dirty laundry” is a vocative used in reference to the washerman himself (Hoch, “The Teaching of Dua-Kheti: A New Look at the Satire of the Trades,” 96.). Maitland says that the view of the washermen as being contaminated with menstrual blood “impacts how the washerman is treated, being given orders with terse imperatives.” (Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom,” 59.).

41 This phrase is exceedingly difficult, so this translation is highly speculative. Perhaps the idea is something like “shut up.” In other words, the person calling “dirty laundry” to come also tells him not to talk back but mind his place. Lichtheim does not even attempt a translation of this phrase. For discussion see Jäger, *Altägyptische Berufstypologien*, 100–101.

42 It may be worth noting here, that it has been suggested that the Egyptian words mḥsḥs and jḥs were profanities derived from a verbal form of ḫs. (For this argument see Hartwig Altenmüller, “Kälberhirte Und Schafhirte: Bemerkungen Zur Rückkehr Des Grabherrn,” *Studien Zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 16 (1989): 4ff.). However, since each of these terms (mḥsḥs and jḥs) is a hapax, the verbal form of ḫs is hypothetical, and, since there are alternative possibilities for the derivation of mḥsḥs and jḥs, this proposal is highly speculative. (For these critiques see I. Köhler et al., “Vom Schimpfen Und Schänden Und Vom Lügen Und Betrügen … Und Vom Kleinen Unterschied,” *Göttinger Miscellen* 227 (2010): 49–50. See also Stefan Grunert, “Vertrakt, Aber Nicht ‘Bekackt’,” *Göttinger Miscellen* 223 (2009): 63–68.

43 See Chapter 10 on “Theme of Dirt in Selected Texts.”
In the “Rebuke addressed to a dissipated scribe” in Papyrus Anastasi IV, a scribe is rebuked for his drunkenness. At the end of the text, a rather unpleasant description of this scribe in his drunken state is given.

(12,4) jw ṭḥb m mḥt jw Ṿṣy=k ṿmḥ w n jštp n ḫḥ=k ḫr (12,5) ṭḥbt ḫr ḫṭ=k ṿrp=k ṿwk ḫy ḫr ḫṭ=k ṿwk ṿwr ḫ <ḥṣ>⁴⁵

You are soaked with merkhet-oil, your garlands of Ishetpen are on your neck, and you are beating on your belly. You stumble. You go down on your belly. You are smeared with excrement.

Clearly, this picture of the scribe is less than flattering. His intoxication leads him to behavior unfitting for a scribe and ultimately to embarrassment and humiliation. When the scribe falls onto his belly, he becomes smeared with excrement. Unfortunately, the text is not specific on exactly where the scribe is falling. One could speculate that he falls into a latrine of some sort, but one would expect that so specific of a location would be specified. Another possibility is that ḥṣ is just referring to dirt in general, rather than excrement in particular. A third possibility is that the scribe simply falls to the ground in the street or around the village, but since Egyptian villages are dirty places without adequate sanitation, the scribe falls into sewage or animal manure, which is in the street. If this is indeed the case, it is noteworthy that the likelihood of one falling into excrement is simply taken for granted. Of course, the exaggerated nature of this text must be kept in mind.

⁴⁴ For the hieroglyphic text see Gardiner, Late-Egyptian Miscellanies., 7:47–48.

⁴⁵ The text as written is ꜙ. However, Gardiner suggested it was a mistake for ḥṣ (Gardiner, Late-Egyptian Miscellanies., 7:48a n. 3.), and this has been followed by Caminos (Caminos, Late-Egyptian Miscellanies., 1:188.) and Vernus (Pascal Vernus, Sagesses de l’Égypte pharaonique, La salamandre (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 2001), 382.). It is easy to see how a scribe could have mistakenly switched these two signs, and ḥṣ makes good sense in the context.
One more thing to note about this episode is the word choice of the scribe being “smeared” (wrḥ) with ḫs. Wrḥ is often used of anointing with positive substances such as oils,\textsuperscript{46} yet here, instead of being smeared with myrrh or other fragrant oil, the scribe is smeared with excrement. This word choice is probably intentionally for sarcastic or ironic reasons. Although the odor of the feces is not specifically mentioned, one can imagine that the smell being smeared with feces climaxes the description of the unruly scribe.\textsuperscript{47}

Excrement in Medical Texts

Excrement appears relatively frequently in various medical remedies.\textsuperscript{48} Most of these remedies use various types of animal dung, although there are three examples which use human excrement.\textsuperscript{49} According to the \textit{Wörterbuch Der Ägyptischen Drogennamen}, in most examples, the remedies with excrement are applied externally,\textsuperscript{50} although in three cases they are ingested.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Wb} I, 334.8–335.7.

\textsuperscript{47} That the odor of excrement could be repulsive is indicated by Coffin Text 174. In his rejection of excrement, the deceased indicates that he will not even smell it. “My disgust is excrement. I will not eat it. I will not smell it” (Bwt=j pw ḫs nn wnm=j sw nn ssn=j sw) (Buck, \textit{The Egyptian Coffin texts. III, III}, 60c-e.).

\textsuperscript{48} For a listing of these references see Deines and Grapow, \textit{Wörterbuch Der Ägyptischen Drogennamen.}, 6:358–63.


\textsuperscript{50} One example involves the use of crocodile dung as a contraceptive. There does not appear to be a real medical reason for this use although it was also practiced by Arabs (Jacques Guiter, “Contraception En Égypte Ancienne.,” \textit{Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale} 101 (2001): 232.). According to Guiter, this may be due to the fact that “Pour de nombreuses ethnies, et tout particulièrement en Afrique noire, les excréments sont considérés comme chargés des caractéristiques intrinsèques de celui (homme ou animal) dont ils sont issus. En Égypte, le crocodile du Nil représente une entité ambivalente, à la fois hypostase de Sobek, divinité bénéfique (parfois associé à Rê), luttant contre les ennemis de l’ordre cosmique, et émanation de Seth, promoteur du désordre et de la confusion, symbole des ténèbres et de la mort. Pourrait-on envisager les excréments de crocodile, correspondant à ce deuxième aspect (dans les deux prescriptions alors stigmatisé), comme vecteurs des potentialités négatives que véhicule le saurien à savoir son opposition à l’ordre cosmique et naturel des choses et, par assimilation, à la conception d’un être humain?” (Guitre, “Contraception En Égypte Ancienne.,” 232.).

\textsuperscript{51} Deines and Grapow, \textit{Wörterbuch Der Ägyptischen Drogennamen.}, 6:362. A remedy including bird dung is drunk on four days to cure the ghw disease (Ebers 326). A remedy to drive away excessive crying of a child includes fly
One should be cautious about extrapolating Egyptian attitudes towards excrement as “dirty” from these references. It is possible that there were some practical benefits from the use of excrement in at least some of these remedies, in which case, belief in the efficacy of the remedy may have trumped ideas of uncleanness or disgust. Another possibility is that excrement and urine are used precisely because they are disgusting, and thus could be useful in frightening or driving off a disease or the being that caused it. This may be the case with diseases considered to be caused by “demons.” According to Elana Urzi:

dung which was on a wall (ḥs ⰱ hhw 莛 n ṭnḥ) which is drunk four days (Ebers 782). The final example is in the Hearst Medical Papyrus (208) in a remedy for the nsyt disease. This remedy used the dung of a donkey (ḥs ⰱ ᵃ?) and wine and is drunk on one day.

52 We should note here that it has been argued that Egyptian medicine believed feces (ḥs) to be the cause of disease and that the Egyptian term for this was ḡdwh. Thus, Robert Steuer argued that “being adherent to faeces ḡdwh infiltrates as the materia peccans of ḥs, the mtw in the immediate neighborhood of ḫwıy, and rises subsequently in the system to various organs, which on their part may become infiltrated (Robert Otto Steuer, ... ... ḡdwh: Aetiological Principle of Pyaemia in Ancient Egyptian Medicine (Johns Hopkins Press, 1948), 11–12. See also. Robert Otto Steuer and John Bertrand de Cusance Morant Saunders, Ancient Egyptian & Cnidian Medicine (University of California Press, n.d.), 3–4.). However, while ḡdwh may have been understood as a cause of disease that could be carried through the vessels of the body (cf. Robert K. Ritner, “Innovations and Adaptations in Ancient Egyptian Medicine,” Journal of Near Eastern Studies 59, no. 2 (2000): 114; Robert K. Ritner, “The Cardiovascular System in Ancient Egyptian Thought,” Journal of Near Eastern Studies 65, no. 2 (April 2006): 65.), more recent studies have called into question whether there is as close of a relationship between feces and disease as Steuer argued. For example, Kolta and Tessenow agree that ḡdwh refers to a pathological principle, but they doubt whether it can be clearly connected with feces, mucus, or putrefactive products, since in no Egyptian medical text is a direct connection made between these products and ḡdwh. Instead, they argue that ḡdwh is a general, non-specific term for disease causing agents (Kamal Sabri Kolta and Hermann Tessenow, “‘Schmerzen’, ‘Schmerzstoffe’ Oder ‘Fäulnisprinzip’? Zur Bedeutung von ḡdwh, Einem Zentralen Terminus Der Altägyptischen Medizin.,” Zeitschrift Für Ägyptische Sprache Und Altertumskunde 127 (2000): 48–52.).


54 Clémentine Audouit, “The Perception of Bodily Fluids in Ancient Egypt.,” in Current Research in Egyptology 2019: Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Symposium, University of Alcalá, 17-21 June 2019, ed. Patricia Mora Riudavets et al. (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2021), 147. Paul Veiga says that excrements “were offered to demons as they were considered filthy; these would be their food, the good food was offered to the gods” (Paula Alexandra da Silva Veiga, Health and Medicine in Ancient Egypt: Magic and Science, 2009, 44. For the use of donkey excrement because it was impure see Marie Vandenbeusch, Sur les pas de l’âne dans la religion égyptienne (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2019), 147–50. According to Geraldine Pinch, “the use of excrement in medicine was often motivated by the principle of treating like with like. Many illnesses were attributed to faults in the digestive process. The digestion of food was compared to the putrefaction of a corpse. If residues of rotting food remained in the body, they were thought to rise and cause trouble. Medicines or fumigations containing excrement were thought to encourage these
“Demons seem to behave in a way opposite to humans; therefore, the patient has to drink something regrettable to him to chase away this being. With remedies, since excrement and/or urine are actually desirable for the demons, they are used as a sort of “bait” in order to get the demon to attach itself to the remedy, and then evacuated.”

wsšt, mwyt and Urine

The primary Egyptian terms used to refer to urine seem to be wsšt and mwyt. The word wsšt (and the corresponding verb wsš/wš “to discharge, evacuate”) is probably best understood as a term for “discharge” or “evacuation,” and thus could refer to both urine and excrement, as well as other bodily evacuations. Several determinatives can be used with wsšt (Ω). The term mwyt (most commonly determined by или ) refers to urine, but it can also refer to fluid in the body more generally. 

residues to come down to the rectum.” (Geraldine Pinch, Magic in Ancient Egypt, 1st University of Texas Press ed (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 134.).


56 Wb I, 357.

57 Hildegard von Deines and Wolfhart Westendorf, Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Erste Hälfte (–r.), vol. 7, Grundriss Der Medizin Der Alten Ägypter (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961), 220–23; Deines and Grapow, Wörterbuch Der Ägyptischen Drogennamen., 6:142–43.). Cf. Westendorf, Handbuch der altägyptischen Medizin, 219. Papyrus Louvre E 32847 describes a case in which wsš seems to refer to an evacuation (wsš) of fluid from the body that is neither urine or excrement. This case concerns a “man under the thn in the head” (recto x+21 s hry thn m tp). In the course of the treatment, the text indicates that the creation of an evacuation is desired (Q = f wsš) and the context implies that the evacuation is from an incision in the head (Thierry Bardinet, Médecins et magiciens à la cour du pharaon: une étude du papyrus médical Louvre E 32847 (Paris: Éditions Kheops : Louvre éditions, 2018), 163–64.). Another example in the same papyrus contains a remedy for “driving away the wsš of much blood” (Rx+6,7 dr wsš (k=s) snf aSA). Thierry Bardinet translates as “pour chasser des diarrhées sanglantes repetees” (Bardinet, Médecins et magiciens, 71.). Some further examples in which it is not entirely clear whether the verb wsš/wš refers to a discharge of urine or excrement include pEbers no. 8 (2b, 12–16), no. 20 (6,10–16), and no. 34 (8, 3–11).

58 See Wb I, 358.


Several texts suggest that mwyt refers to the actual substance of urine, while the verb ws$s refers to its discharge. For example, Papyrs Ebers no. 261 (48, 21–22) is the “beginning of the remedies for driving away an accumulation of urine when the pubic region is ill” (48, 21 ḫꜥt- ⲁ m ḫrw$t nt ḏr ṭst nt mwyt mr ksn). The following remedy (no. 262) is “another for causing that a child evacuate an accumulation of urine which is in his belly (48, 22–49, 1 kt nt rdjt wsḥḥ ḫrd ṭsw n mwyt nty m ḫt=f). Clearly, the verb wsḥḥ is referring to the discharge of urine (mwyt) here. The remedy continues: “an old papyrus boiled in fat. Rub it on his belly in order to make right his discharge (or urine) (49, 1–2 ṣꜣt jst nwh.tḥ ḫr mrḥḥ ḫṛ=ḥ ṭ r mḥḥ ṭ$f wsḥḥ=f). The context here makes clear that wsḥḥ refers to urine.

Another example occurs in papyrus Louvre E 32847 in what appears to be a test for determining if blood is coming from the phallus or the anus.

...jr wp=k ḫḥt (9, 7) m ḫḥw=y=f ḫḥn=f snfr ḫḥr=k ḫḥms=f ṭ r wsḥḥ mwyt mḥḥ ḫḥr=k ḫḥn=f...64

...if you discern that the condition in (either) his rear or his phallus is bloody, then you should have him sit in order to discharge urine. Then you should see his phallus...

Unfortunately, the context before and after this phrase is missing. However, enough remains to discern that mwyt refers to the substance of urine, while the verb wsḥḥ refers to its discharge.

Many of the occurrences of these terms for urine (mwyt and wsḥḥ65) occur in the medical corpus, in which urine is used in various remedies or in a description of the symptoms of a


64 Bardinet, Médecins et magiciens, 193.

65 Interestingly, one passage in the Edwin Smith papyrus (III, 21–IV, 1) explicitly connects wsḥḥ with odor (ṣṭḥ). It reads: “As for “the odor of the box of his head being like the excrement of goats,” it means, how the odor of the
disease. In these occurrences, the comments on the use of *hs*, as it relates to concepts of dirt in the medical corpus mentioned above, apply. Since the purpose of our examination of urine is to see if and how it was perceived as dirty, we will not survey these applications of urine here.

Urine, especially the term *wsšt*, also occurs numerous times in the funerary literature, where it is usually in conjunction with the deceased refusing to eat excrement. Since *wsšt* here could refer more generally to excretion, it is possible that in some occurrences it may be a synonym for *hs* (excrement); however, occasions in which it is paired with a word for drinking (*swrj*) seem to indicate that urine indeed is meant. In a somewhat related manner, Coffin Text 698 describes a demon who lives on his urine (*znh m wsšt=f*) which is clearly a negative
crown of his head is like the *wsšt* of goats (*Jrsj hnn tp=f mj bk(n) n 5wt wnn sty wpt=f pw mj wsšt nt 5wt*). According to Sanchez and Meltzer, the odor mentioned here probably refers to “the smell of an infected intracranial wound (Sanchez et al., *The Edwin Smith Papyrus*, 79 n. 77.). The word *bkn* appears here and in 3,11 of pEdwin Smith and seems to refer to the excretion of small livestock (see Deines and Westendorf, *Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Erste Hälfte (r)*, 7:254.). If *wsšt* in this passage refers to urine (and not excrement), then the text contains a reference to the smell of urine. Presumably, this odor would have been considered unpleasant, but the text is not explicit on this point. Regardless, what is certain is that the odor of either the urine or excrement of small livestock is referred to. For the text see François Resche, *Le papyrus médical Edwin Smith: chirurgie et magie en Égypte antique*, Médecine à travers les siècles (Paris: l’Harmattan, 2016), 42–45, 108.

For references to urine in the medical corpus as well as the various ways it is used see the entries in Deines and Westendorf, *Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Erste Hälfte (r)*, 7:218–22, 361–63. Deines and Grapow, *Wörterbuch Der Ägyptischen Drogennamen.*, 6:142–43, 235–37.

We should note that *wsšt* is seems to be a cause of sickness according to Ebers no.102 (25,3–25,8), no. 296 (52,1–52,7), no. 856h (103,16–103,18), and papyrus Berlin 3038 no. 163h (16,3–17,1). It does not seem entirely clear, however, if *wsšt* here refers specifically to urine or excrement, or if it is indicating a buildup of something in the body that needs to be excreted. See Thierry Bardinet, *Les papyrus médicaux de l’Egypte pharaonique: traduction intégrale et commentaire* (Fayard, 1995), 117ff. Ritner, “The Cardiovascular System in Ancient Egyptian Thought,” 100–101, 108–9.


description. The words for urine rarely appear outside of the funerary corpus or the medical texts. However, in light of their occurrences in the funerary corpus, it seems safe to assume that, in general, urine was considered dirty or disgusting in a manner similar to excrement. In the ritual of the Overthrowing of Apep, the image of Apep is “(23,10) burnt in a fire of bryony and his remains placed in a pot of wsš (𓊾𓊼𓊹) and pounded up into one mass.” If wsš does indeed refer to urine here, then this text would provide further indication that urine must be a very defiling substance, since the point of the ritual is to destroy Apep.

Summary of Excrement and Urine

Since excrement and urine are almost universally regarded as disgusting substances (see chapter on Disgust), it is not surprising that the Egyptians considered them to be highly polluting substances. Most of the five senses are involved in the rejection of excrement as the deceased refuses to taste, touch, or even smell it. While these are funerary texts and perhaps extreme examples, they are probably based on sentiments that Egyptians would have held in daily life. Indeed, excrement appears on several occasions in other texts in order to paint certain people as defiled or unclean. In sum, excrement was probably thought of as one of the most dirty and polluting substances in ancient Egypt. While urine is not mentioned as frequently, it seems that it was considered polluting in a manner similar to excrement. Of course, while the deceased

---

70 Buck and Gardiner, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts. VI, VI*, 332i.


72 Cf. Teeter, “The Body in Ancient Egyptian Texts and Representations (Plate 6),” 162.
could claim to completely reject excrement and urine, they would have been unavoidably present in the daily lives of most ancient Egyptians.

**Reproductive Fluids**

Having examined excrement and urine, we will now briefly examine reproductive fluids, namely semen and menstrual blood. Our examination will focus on these fluids only insofar as they may be related to conceptions of dirt or disgust in ancient Egypt.

**Semen**

The most used Egyptian words to refer to semen are *mtwt* and *sē*. We will examine both of these words in this section. It should be noted that although *mtwt* and *sē* are the words that most commonly refer to semen, these terms do not exclusively refer to male reproductive fluids. It should be also noted that although here we are focused on semen as “dirty” or “contaminating,” this should not necessarily be taken to imply that Egyptian conception of semen was primarily negative. Similar to other bodily fluids, semen was ambivalent, as noted by Pehal and Svobodova.73 They note that semen was not “considered poison by the Egyptians *per se*” but must “be understood contextually and related to the concept of power stemming from the matter “out of place.””74 Obviously, semen was an essential part of procreation and thus in this case and related metaphors semen could be considered positively.75 However, semen also could be “dirty” or “contaminating,” and it is these contexts to which we will focus here.

---


75 For a helpful study examining both positive and negative aspects of bodily fluids including semen see Pehal and Preininger Svobodová, “Death and the Right Fluids: Perspectives from Egyptology and Anthropology.” For discussion of ideas of procreation in Egypt more generally see Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, 419–78. The Egyptians do
Before diving into the Egyptian evidence, it may be useful to consider the explanation of the anthropologist Anna Meigs for how a bodily substance, such as semen, could be considered at times to be desirable and at other times highly polluting. According to Meigs, the feeling of disgust and the “labelling as ‘dirty’ or ‘polluting’” reflects “a fear of contamination by substances originating with other persons.”

Pollution derives from body emissions, carriers of them, or symbols of them. However, these things are not inherently polluting; instead, according to Meigs, two conditions must be met for them to be considered polluting. First, the substances must be threatening to gain access to one’s body. The second condition is that “body emissions and carriers of them are felt to be polluted only if access to them is not desired.”

Thus, while blood might normally be considered polluting, it is desirable in a blood transfusion and the sharing of bodily fluids that would normally be considered polluting is acceptable in a mutual sexual relationship. In other words, a key point in understanding if and when semen is considered beneficial or polluting is if contact with it is desired. If it is not, semen would be considered highly polluting, even dangerous. However, when contact with it is not

---

76 Meigs, “A Papuan Perspective on Pollution,” 310.
77 Meigs, “A Papuan Perspective on Pollution,” 310.
78 Meigs, “A Papuan Perspective on Pollution,” 311. It should further be noted that Meigs argues that the way(s) in which the polluting substance may be able to gain access can be culturally determined. In other words, for North Americans the sight or smell of a polluting substance such as excrement is not necessarily considered threatening, but touch and taste of the substance is.
79 Meigs, “A Papuan Perspective on Pollution,” 311.
80 Meigs, “A Papuan Perspective on Pollution,” 311.

109
unwanted such as in a mutual sexual relationship or in procreation, then semen will be considered positive and beneficial.

The term *mtwt* (𓊭𓊕𓊫) can refer to semen, although this term is also frequently used to refer to poison, especially snake or scorpion venom.81 Panagiotis Kousoulis defines *mtwt* as follows:

“*Mtwt* can refer to any liquid which is forcibly injected and ejected and, thus to the poison of snakes or scorpions. In origin it may come from the same root as *mtwt* ‘vessels.’ It also means ‘semen’, underlying the life-giving potential inherent in Maat and cosmic order, or used metaphorically of the Nile flood, paralleling the watering of the fields by the flood with the impregnation of women by semen.”82

While the association of semen and venom may seem strange, it should be noted that the Egyptians seem to have associated semen with spittle.83 The reason(s) for this association have been variously explained. In Ritner’s view,

“The ejection of bodily fluids is obviously common to both, and it is as bodily fluid84 that the pairing of semen and spittle most likely arose. The perceived bond is thus not an exclusive relationship but shared among all bodily emissions. Divinity was felt to reside within the creator and was therefore inherent in the god’s tissues and fluids. Examples of mythological creation by semen or saliva should be understood no differently from tales of the creation of mankind from the creator’s tears, the goddess Sakhmet from his eye,”

81 *Wb II*, 169; Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 1991, 121. According to the *Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte*, *mtwt* refers to “Same” or to the “Gift vom Skorpion” or “von Krankheitsdämonen” (Deines and Westendorf, *Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Erste Hälfte (𓊭–𓊭)*, 7:412.). Penelope Wilson says that *mtwt* “can be any liquid which is forcibly ejected and injected, for it refers also to the poison of snakes or scorpions and in origin may come from the same root as *mtwt* ‘vessels’” (Penelope Wilson, *A Ptolemaic Lexikon: A Lexicographical Study of the Texts in the Temple of Edfu*, vol. 78, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 474.). See also Panagiotis Kousoulis, “‘Stop, O Poison, That I May Find Your Name According to Your Aspect’: A Preliminary Study on the Ambivalent Notion of Poison and the Demonization of the Scorpion’s Sting in Ancient Egypt and Abroad,” *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 3, no. 3 (2011): 14–26.

82 Kousoulis, “‘Stop, O Poison, That I May Find Your Name According to Your Aspect’: A Preliminary Study on the Ambivalent Notion of Poison and the Demonization of the Scorpion’s Sting in Ancient Egypt and Abroad,” 22 n. 17.


84 Emphasis his.
plans and minerals from divine sweat, blood, et cetera. In each instance, the cast-off portion of the god’s body retains divine power and may engender new life.”

Gordon and Schwabe argue that the Egyptians thought of the spine as “a principle source of, and channel for, semen.” If this is true, it may further explain the association between spittle and semen as well as snake venom. “Saliva (spittle) also was used euphemistically for (or as an analog of) semen, which may relate to the anatomical facts of the head and mouth being at the top of the spine and the penis at the bottom. Also, it may relate to the analogy drawn between semen and poison (both mtwt) from the snake.” After all, a snake “is mostly a living spinal column and clearly this resemblance could not have escaped the ancient Egyptians’ notice.”

Since snake venom comes from the snake’s mouth, the association makes sense according to this explanation.

Another word that can refer to semen is 𓊫 (determined with 𓊭). 𓊫 is another term which refers to semen, but it is frequently associated with disease or sickness. It seems that 𓊫 as a disease is caused by a “demon” or other malevolent being injecting its “semen” or “poison” into a victim, especially at night. “The term 𓊫 therefore does not designate an arbitrary illness, but is rather connected to problems caused by the displacement of a fluid from the body of a god


87 Gordon and Schwabe, The Quick and the Dead, 147.


90 Westendorf, Handbuch der altägyptischen Medizin, 361ff; Deines and Westendorf, Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Erste Hälfte (𓊭–𓊯)., 7:132–33; Nunn, Ancient Egyptian medicine, 63.
or a dead person.” It should be noted that as a cause of disease can be from either a male or female being. Thus, perhaps ideas of as disease should be understood as a metaphorical extension based on the idea of semen being ejected into the body. Another explanation is that of Nyord who suggests that although usually refers to semen, it may “be used here to refer generally to the “pouring out” or “shedding” of bodily fluid, likely here in connection with giving birth.” While is more frequently used of disease than , both terms are used in pBerlin 3038 no. 58 (5.9–5.11). This text suggests that the description of how evil beings cause disease was connected to the concept of “semen” (or “pouring out” bodily fluid) and not necessarily specific to the term .

Perhaps we can sum up the difference between and as follows: refers primarily to the ejection of a bodily fluid, while refers more to the fluid itself, which had flowed in the of the body. Thus the emphasis of may be more on the action of ejecting the bodily fluid, while emphasizes that it is a fluid. Thus, we also should recognize that, while both terms frequently refer to the male reproductive fluid, they are not necessarily terms specific to semen and can on occasion refer to other bodily fluids (including female fluids).


92 pEbers 99; pBerlin 3038, no. 58 and 189; Westendorf, Handbuch der altägyptischen Medizin, 361. In CT 334, aAa may be associated with the female. For discussion see Nyord, Breathing Flesh, 474–75.

93 Nyord, Breathing Flesh, 473.


An example of semen being considered defiling is found in the *Contendings of Horus and Seth.* Seth attempts to have sex with Horus, but Horus prevents the semen (*mtwt*) from entering his body by catching it with his hand (11,3–4). Horus then reports this to his mother Isis and shows her the semen in his hand. Upon seeing this, “She cried a great shriek then she took her copper and she cut off his hand and threw it into the water” (11, 6–7). In the story, Isis then remakes Horus’ hand. Clearly, the unwanted semen must have been seen as defiling for Isis to take such extreme steps as to cut off the hand, which it had touched. While Seth’s act itself may have been considered defiling, Isis’ actions indicate that the semen itself was polluting, since the horrified Isis hacked off the hand of her son holding Seth’s semen.


98 Cf. the lines of PT 1036 which read: “Horus conveyed his semen into Seth’s anus, Seth conveyed his semen into Horus’ anus” (Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 151.). Allen numbers this spell as 501c.

99 Clementine Audouit suggests that “attempting to rape and discharge of seed in order to dominate an opponent” might be considered a *bwt.* (Audouit, “Bodily Fluids in Ancient Egypt: Vital Waters but Dangerous Flows. Concerning an Ongoing Research Project..” 59.).

100 Isis may have placed the semen on lettuce because a variety of Egyptian lettuce has a “large amount of milk-like sap” and thus “could have been related by analogy to the semen of the god” (Gordon and Schwabe, *The Quick and the Dead*, 135. Thus, placing Horus’ semen on the lettuce could have been a good way to disguise it. For the association of semen with lettuce as well as milk see Cathie Spieser, “La Nature Ambivalente Du Sang, Du Lait, Des
tricked into letting Horus’ semen enter his body.\textsuperscript{101} As te Velde put it, “\textit{mtwt} is poison and seed. Seth was not bitten by a poisonous snake. He is pregnant i.e., poisoned by the seed of Horus.”\textsuperscript{102} If unwanted semen was so contaminating to the touch that Isis cut off Horus’ hand, certainly ingesting it into the body would be considered even more disgusting and dangerous. While Seth’s ingesting of Horus’ semen in this story may be about power and domination, ideas of contamination and disgust certainly play a role as well. In the \textit{Contending of Horus and Seth}, contact with the other’s semen is undesired, and, therefore, physical contact with it defiles. Although the mythological tale uses hyperbole (i.e., hacking off the defiled hand), it seems reasonable to assume that, although such extreme measures were not undertaken in the world of humans, unwanted semen was still considered highly polluting on contact.

As noted above, \greek{qof} is a disease-causing substance, and thus, remedies occur in magical and medical texts in order to remove it. For example, pHearst no. 83 (6.16–7.2) reads: “driving away the \greek{qof} of a god or dead from the belly of a man or woman ($dr \ greek{qof} n nTr mt m ht nt s st r pw$).\textsuperscript{103} Clearly, in this text the \greek{qof} of these malevolent beings is contaminating and must be removed from the patient in order for them to recover. While \greek{qof} is used in this way more commonly than \textit{mtwt}, \textit{mtwt} injected into the body by a malevolent being can also be the cause of disease. For example, the beginning of the title of pBerlin 3038 no. 58 (5.9–5.11) “remedy for

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{101}{For the story of Horus’ impregnating Seth as indicating domination over him see Gordon and Schwabe, \textit{The Quick and the Dead}, 135–36.}


\footnote{103}{Cf. Ebers 99 (24, 14–15); pBM 10059 (IX, 3–7), pBerlin 3038 no. 58 (5.9–5.11); For discussion of \greek{qof} in these texts, references and translations see Westendorf, \textit{Handbuch der altägyptischen Medizin}, 361–66.}
\end{footnotes}
driving out the "♀" of a god, goddess, the seed (mtwt) of a male or female dead (phrt nt dr "♀ n ntr ntrt mtwt mt mtt).

In sum, it seems clear that when contact was undesired, semen was highly polluting and potentially dangerous, especially when it came from a malevolent demon or deity. It seems that touch is the primary sense that is violated by semen, since it is upon contact that it becomes defiling and dangerous. While external contact was highly polluting, as evidenced by the tale of Horus and Seth, if undesired semen enters the body, it is poisonous and even more dangerous.

Menstruation

As with most bodily fluids, we should not be surprised if menstrual blood was associated with dirtiness or contamination in ancient Egypt. Before examining Egyptian views of how menstrual blood relates to conceptions of impurity, we should note at the outset that, in general, “little is known about menstruation in ancient Egypt.” Thus, in light of the limited and fragmentary evidence concerning menstruation, any conclusions drawn concerning the extent to

---


which menstruation is considered impure or polluting are necessarily somewhat tentative and subject to change.

As Frandsen has noted, “the ordinary term for menstruation is *hsmn*.106 This word is also attested with the meaning “purification,” and as the term for the principal purificatory agent “natron.”107 Furthermore, the association between *hsmn* “menstruation” and *hsmn* “purification; natron” may imply something about how the Egyptian understood the relationship of menstrual blood and ideas of impurity. As Frandsen writes,

“The interrelationship of the terminology for menstruation and purification is suggestive. As a term for menstruation, “purification” might simply be a euphemism or perhaps even a so-called taboo-word. It is, however, tempting to infer that what is seen as a taboo is actually bodily refuse in the form of blood. The women rids herself of the blood and is thereby purified, that is, restored to her normal status.”108

---

106 Although some scholars have argued that *hsmn* refers to post-partum purification, Wilfong points out that in clear examples, the term *wib* is used and not *hsmn* (Wilfong, “Menstrual Synchrony and the ‘Place of Women’ in Ancient Egypt (Oriental Institute Museum Hieratic Ostracon 13512),” 423. For further evidence that *hsmn* refers to menstruation see Frandsen, “The Menstrual ‘Taboo’ in Ancient Egypt,” 82–84.

107 Frandsen, “The Menstrual ‘Taboo’ in Ancient Egypt,” 82ff. For *hsmn* meaning “menstruation” see also Wilfong, “Menstrual Synchrony and the ‘Place of Women’ in Ancient Egypt (Oriental Institute Museum Hieratic Ostracon 13512),” 422. According to Wilfong, “*hsmn* is the term traditionally associated with menstruation in Egyptian, known with this meaning from the Middle Kingdom and surviving into Demotic…the writing of *hsmn* usually taken to refer to menstruation is determined with the mortar and pestle and is also determined with the spewing lips. Less frequently…*hsmn* for menstruation is determined with a book roll. Shorter writings of *hsmn* for menstruation consist of the determinatives in various combinations. Shorter writings of *hsmn* for menstruation consist of the prepositional phrase *m hsmn* or as clause subjects, most often followed by a possessive suffix pronoun *hsm.s*. Enough of the sources are clear on the meaning of these examples of *hsmn* to leave little doubt of the translation “menstruation.”

108 Frandsen, “The Menstrual ‘Taboo’ in Ancient Egypt,” 84. It should be noted that Wilfong denies a connection between these terms. Wilfong argues that *hsmn* “menstruation” should be seen as distinct from the word *hsmn* for “natron” or “purification” since “the exclusivity of *hsmn* with appropriate determinatives for cases in which “menstruation” is clearly meant indicates that the Egyptians saw these writings of *hsmn* as having a specific meaning. Thus, the translation “menstruation” in cases where this is appropriate reflects a distinction often made, at least in writing, by the Egyptians themselves.” (Wilfong, “Menstrual Synchrony and the ‘Place of Women’ in Ancient Egypt (Oriental Institute Museum Hieratic Ostracon 13512),” 422–23.). While acknowledging Wilfong’s point, it seems that he goes a little too far in denying the relationship between the terms.
Perhaps it is not too much of a stretch to see the use of $\text{hsmn}$ for menstruation as analogous to the term $\text{t}b$, which may refer to internal purification.\textsuperscript{109}

Perhaps the clearest indication of the impurity of menstrual blood in the Pharaonic period is found in the Satire of the Trades. Several lines in the passage concerning the washerman indicate that menstrual blood was considered a polluting substance.

\textit{19,4 $\text{sb}b=f \text{sb}n \text{n st hs nn $\text{t wt jm}=f$
19,5 $\text{d}d=f \text{sw d$\text{jw n s.t wnnt m hs}m

He kneads a mix of everything filthy,\textsuperscript{110} there is no clean limb in him.
He puts himself into the garment of a woman, who was menstruating!

Line 19.4 clearly establishes the theme of dirtiness in the context suggesting that it is reasonable to read the following line as communicating more along this theme.\textsuperscript{111} The mention of the garment of the menstruating woman in the following line should probably be best understood, as a specific and noteworthy example of why no limb of the washerman is clean. The fact that the writer has chosen menstrual garments as his example here, probably suggests that menstrual blood was considered a highly polluting substance. In commenting on this passage, Clementine Audouit notes that “the worst of all indignities is long-term, recurrent contact with the blood of menstruating women.”\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{109} See section below on $\text{t}b$.

\textsuperscript{110} Cf. Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, 147. Taking here the \textit{st-hs} (lit seat of excrement) as referring to the water the washerman is washing in has having dirty water.

\textsuperscript{111} Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, 147. Jäger suggests that this line might be depicting the washerman as a transvestite and thus committing a “tabu.” Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, 179. While possible, it seems to me that the motif of dirtiness or disgust is more likely. Otherwise, why emphasize that the woman was menstruating? If transvestitism was what was condemned here, simply saying that the washerman puts himself into the garment of a woman would suffice.

\textsuperscript{112} Audouit, “The Perception of Bodily Fluids in Ancient Egypt.,” 148.
While there are currently no texts from the Pharaonic era, which clearly indicate that menstrual blood was considered a \textit{bwt}, some late period cult monographs indicate that menstruating women were considered \textit{bwt}.\footnote{Frandsen, “The Menstrual ‘Taboo’ in Ancient Egypt.,” 87–89. For discussion of prohibitions in these cult monographs generally see Sydney Hervé Aufrère, “Recherches sur les interdits religieux des régions de l’Égypte ancienne d’après les encyclopédies sacerdotales,” \textit{Droit et cultures. Revue internationale interdisciplinaire}, no. 71 (May 1, 2016): 15–41, \url{https://doi.org/10.4000/droitcultures.3695}.} Frandsen notes that this indicates that “in Egypt menstruation was coded as something negative.”\footnote{Frandsen, “The Menstrual ‘Taboo’ in Ancient Egypt.,” 89.} While menstruation was “coded negatively,” this does not necessarily mean it was “taboo.” As Clementine Audouit notes that “menstruation is qualified as a \textit{bwt} only in cult monographs, dating from the Graeco-Roman periods.”\footnote{Frandsen, “The Menstrual ‘Taboo’ in Ancient Egypt.,” 89.} This is the case in only three specific Egyptian provinces: the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} provinces of Upper Egypt (Cynopolite region) and the 10\textsuperscript{th} province of Lower Egypt (Anthribis).\footnote{For example, In papyrus Jumilhac, one of the \textit{bwt}s mentioned is that of a menstruating woman (Odet de Jumilhac et al., \textit{Le papyrus Jumilhac} (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1962), 27.} While it is possible that the late date of these texts indicates that menstruation was not considered a \textit{bwt} until after the Pharaonic period, it is equally a possibility that this is simply an accident of preservation. In any case, even if it was not considered \textit{bwt}, the Satire of the Trades clearly indicates that menstrual blood could be considered dirty and polluting.

Administrative lists of absentee workmen from the Ramesside era might suggest that menstruating women, and by extension menstrual blood, was considered polluting.\footnote{Audouit, “Bodily Fluids in Ancient Egypt: Vital Waters but Dangerous Flows. Concerning an Ongoing Research Project.,” 58. Cf. Wilfong, “Menstrual Synchrony and the ‘Place of Women’ in Ancient Egypt (Oriental Institute Museum Hieratic Ostracon 13512),” 422.} Basically, these administrative texts record absences of various workmen. As Frandsen explains, “Included
in the varied list of reasons for absence are also ten cases where a workman stayed away from work because either his daughter or his wife had *hsmn*. The word is never written out phonetically, but the combined evidence of the three different notations is unambiguous.”

Perhaps, this suggests that the husband or father was unable to come to work because he had been polluted by the menstruating women. Frandsen suggests that the reason for these absences was because menstruation was incompatible with the tomb, which was understood as a womb or place of rebirth. Frandsen further suggests that in ancient Egypt “there is no general taboo regarding contact with menstruating women,” but instead “the avoidance of them” was “generated by specific contexts in which female fertility exerts an exceptional influence.” In this interpretation, the workmen are absent, not necessarily because the Egyptians feared contaminating each other because of being in the presence of a menstruating women, but instead the concern was fear of contaminating the tomb, in which the workmen were working.

In contrast, Wilfong argues that these texts are not indicative of taboo or impurity. He does not find clear evidence for “a formal, universal taboo against women in menstruation.” In regard to the Deir el-Medina evidence for the “place of women,” he suggests that it was not “inherently negative” and “might well have been a positive” experience. According to Wilfong, “special places for women who are menstruating are known from many cultures; these

---

118 Frandsen, “The Menstrual ‘Taboo’ in Ancient Egypt.,” 90.
119 Frandsen, “The Menstrual ‘Taboo’ in Ancient Egypt.,” 100–104.
120 Frandsen, “The Menstrual ‘Taboo’ in Ancient Egypt.,” 82.
121 Wilfong, “Menstrual Synchrony and the ‘Place of Women’ in Ancient Egypt (Oriental Institute Museum Hieratic Ostracon 13512.),” 431.
122 Wilfong, “Menstrual Synchrony and the ‘Place of Women’ in Ancient Egypt (Oriental Institute Museum Hieratic Ostracon 13512.),” 431.
places have often been considered indicative of some sort of menstrual taboo, but more recent studies suggest that menstrual space at least began as something instituted by (and empowering for) women.\textsuperscript{123} He suggests that the absences of the workmen are not because of purity concerns, but instead because either due to the absence or illness of the woman on her period, the man was needed around the house.\textsuperscript{124}

As can be seen from the above, the interpretation of the implications of these administrative texts as regards menstruation is rather speculative, and thus we should be cautious about reading too much into these references. However, if the Satire of the Trades passage and the late period cult monographs are suggestive, it should at least be considered that the absentee lists suggest that menstruation was, at least on some level, considered to have associations with contamination.

In sum, while the evidence for Egyptian attitudes towards menstrual blood is slim, the general indication seems to be that, at least in some contexts, it was considered a highly polluting substance. The text about the washerman in the Satire of the Trades provides a strong suggestion that menstrual blood was perceived as polluting to the touch, since the text emphasizes the washerman’s physical contact with the menstrual garment and that “no limb of his is clean.” Perhaps the sight and smell of menstrual blood was also perceived as offensive to these senses, but we do not have clear evidence of this.

\textsuperscript{123} Wilfong, “Menstrual Synchrony and the ‘Place of Women’ in Ancient Egypt (Oriental Institute Museum Hieratic Ostracon 13512).,” 429. Wilfong notes that, some “Demotic legal texts refer to a woman’s hsmn taking place in a special part of the house.” (Wilfong, “Menstrual Synchrony and the ‘Place of Women’ in Ancient Egypt (Oriental Institute Museum Hieratic Ostracon 13512).,” 422.).

\textsuperscript{124} Wilfong, “Menstrual Synchrony and the ‘Place of Women’ in Ancient Egypt (Oriental Institute Museum Hieratic Ostracon 13512).,” 424.
“ђ “unclean, impure.”

Understanding the term ‘ђ meaning “unclean, impure” presents some unique difficulties. These difficulties are not only related to its precise meaning, but also if and how it is related to the word ‘ђ(w) referring to purification. While in many later texts, ‘ђ “impurity” is written differently than ‘ђ(w) “purification,” this is not necessarily always the case as it appears that they can also be spelled identically, e.g. ❖❖❖❖. The word ‘ђ is used throughout Egyptian history from the Old Kingdom to the Ptolemaic period. Wilson summarizes the dilemma this way:

“This word (‘ђ) for ‘impurity’ in fact exists from the Pyramid Texts, though its similarity to ‘ђ(w) ‘purity, to purify’ has led to confusion in the understanding of the word. There is an antithetical connection between the words; both have the stem ‘ђ, but they have opposite meanings. For something to be purified, it must first be ‘impure,’ so that

---

125 Wb I, 174–175; The Wörterbuch lists several words with the root ‘ђ that seem to be thematically related to ideas of dirt or impurity and which may or may not be related. ❖❖❖❖, ❖❖❖❖, ❖❖❖❖ is defined as “Unheil, Sündhaftes; Schmutz, Unreines” and listed as attested in the New Kingdom and Greco-Roman eras (Wb I, 174.16–17). ❖❖❖❖ is an “Ausdruck für Schmutz?” attested in the Coffin Texts (Wb I, 174.19). ❖❖❖❖ is “in m ‗bw=f, hr ‘bw=f‘um seiner selbst willen’ (s.a.) vom unbefugten Betreten von Gräbern” and attested in the Old Kingdom (Wb I, 175.21).

126 Wb I, 175.

127 I.e, ❖❖❖❖, ❖❖❖❖, ❖❖❖❖, etc. See Wilson, A Ptolemaic Lexikon: A Lexicographical Study of the Texts in the Temple of Edfu., 78:143.

128 For example, see the hieroglyphic transcriptions of numerous Old Kingdom tombs in Elke Blumenthal, “Die ‘Reinheit’ Des Grabschänders..,” in Religion Und Philosophie Im Alten Ägypten: Festgabe Für Philippe Derchain Zu Seinem 65. Geburtstag Am 24. Juli 1991, ed. Erhart Graefe and Ursula Verhoeven (Leuven: Departement Orientalistik; Peeters, 1991), 47–56. A number of these are spelled identically to ‘ђw “purification” with the sign ❖❖❖❖. The similarities between the writing of the words can also be seen in Faulkner’s dictionary, where he lists ❖❖❖❖ as “purification,” ❖❖❖❖ as “purity,” ❖❖❖❖ and ❖❖❖❖ as “impurity” (Faulkner, A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 1991, 40. For more examples, see the discussion below.

impurity/purity are a balanced pair of concepts and words, neither existing without the other.”

How ‘b could have seemingly opposite meanings has been explained in several ways. According to Alan Gardiner, the word ‘bw certainly seems to mean ‘impurity’” but that “the derivation from w’b ‘purify oneself seems at first sight a fine instance of lucus a non lucendo, but ‘bw may have as its primary meaning ‘offscourings’, ‘what is to be cleansed away’, whence the transition of meaning.” In a somewhat analogous argument, Blumenthal argues that the ancient Egyptian language could replace a non-existent gerund with other grammatical forms, such as the passive participle, and through this could arrive at oppositional word meanings. Blumenthal further suggests that ‘bw could be a euphemism used in order to avoid mentioning the actual impurity in proximity to the tomb; in other words, the unwanted word “impurity” is replaced by its opposite “purification.”

Stefan Grunert disagrees with Blumenthal’s interpretation. Grunert argues that in the grave of Ankhmahor, there are both similarities yet distinctions between the terms ‘b and w’b: before someone enters the grave in his ‘b, he must first have been made w’b. He argues that

---


131 That is “a paradoxical or otherwise absurd derivation; something of which the qualities are the opposite of what its name suggests” (“Lucus a Non Lucendo,” Oxford Reference, accessed January 30, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100118402.).

132 A. H Gardiner, Egyptian Letters to the Dead (London, 1928), 10 n. 3.


w’b primarily refers to external bodily cleansing whereas ‘h(w) refers to internal purification. In the process of internal purification, however, the impure things, which may be contained inside the body, separate themselves from the body as they exit, and thus, via purification, the impure substances become located outside of the body. This explains how ‘h(w) can seem to refer to both purity and impurity: the process of internal purification results in previously invisible impurities becoming visible substances outside of the body. In a sense then, ‘h(w) refers to bodily excretions. Grunert argues that the combination m ‘bw=f in the Old Kingdom tomb threats warns the potential enterer not to enter “with their excretions.” While there was a clear distinction between internal and external cleansing in the Old Kingdom (‘b and w’b), Grunert argues that the frequent connection between the terms eventually led them to be frequently equated.

As can be seen, this is a difficult problem to decipher precisely. Either ‘b “impure” and ‘b “pure” could be understood as two completely different words, which happen to be (sometimes) spelled the same way, or they could be the same word, which can sometimes have seemingly opposite meanings. Perhaps the simplest working hypothesis for us to begin with is that ‘h(w), when seeming to refer to impurity, refers to “that which is cleansed.” We will also consider if


Kühnemund suggests that ‘bw “impurity” is a passive participle of w’b (Kühnemund, Die rituelle Reinheit in den Tempeln der griechisch-römischen Zeit Teil I Text, 81.)
and/or when it might refer to internal cleansing. While the explanation for the derivation of “b, “impurity,” is a significant question, our primary purpose here will be to focus on the meaning of “b, when it seems to refer to uncleanness. In short, our purpose here is to attempt to understand what kind(s) of impurity it may refer to, and thus, if and how it relates to what is dirty. Our examination will be diachronic, since we should consider if the term changed or became more specific in its meaning in later periods. Thus, even if the word only meant something like “that which is cleansed” in the Old Kingdom, it is possible that “b(” “impurity” acquired a more specific meaning in later periods.

“bw meaning “impure” may appear twice in Pyramid Text 222, although it is not entirely certain whether “bw impurity or w“bw purification is meant. The first occurrence (PT 207a) reads:

\[ jfh=k \text{ “b(w)=k} \text{n Jtm m jnw} \]

You release your impurity/purification(?) for Atum in Heliopolis.

A little later in the same text (PT 208c), it reads:

\[ W“b=k m 3ht sfh=k \text{ “b(w)=k m sw Sw} \]

142 See Blumenthal, “Die ‘Reinheit’ Des Grabschänders.,” 51. Allen translates these with “cleansing” and “cleaning” (Allen, The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts, 43.).

143 Spelled in the pyramid of Unis and in the Pyramid of Pepi II.

144 Hieroglyphic text in Staatliche Museen (Berlin and Sethe, Die Altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte, 1908, 119).

145 Mostly following translation in Allen, The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts, 43.

146 Written .

147 Spelled in the Pyramid of Unis and spelled in the pyramid of Pepi II.

148 Staatliche Museen (Berlin and Sethe, Die Altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte, 1908, 120.)
You become clean in the Akhet and release your impurity/purification (?) in the Lakes of Shu.\footnote{149}

It would seem more likely that one would release dirt or impurity than that one would release purification. In this case, especially in the second phrase, ‘\(bw\) would seem to refer to something that was removed in the process of cleansing (\(w\)\(b\)).\footnote{150} However, Grunert notes that in other places in the Pyramid Texts, the identical spellings are used in a positive manner, which would cast some doubt on interpreting this passage differently.\footnote{151} Perhaps ‘\(b(w)\) could be understood with a passive meaning of something like “that which is cleansed.”\footnote{152} The text could then be translated, “you become clean in the Akhet, and you release what is cleansed from you in the Lakes of Shu.”

The term ‘\(bw\) appears frequently in Old Kingdom tomb inscriptions warning those who might enter the tomb in a state of impurity.\footnote{153} A few representative examples are translated below. Although each of these texts are similar, ‘\(b(w)\) is written in a variety of ways.

Inscription from the grave of Pehenwika from Saqqara (\textit{Urk I}, 48–49)

Right door jamb

Concerning any man who enters at this image in his "abw" and concerning any man who enters at these images in his "abw," I will be judged with him in the place where judgment is. I never did anything evil to the property of any person.\textsuperscript{154}

Tomb of Hetepherakhet at Saqqara (\textit{Urk I}, 49–51)

\begin{quote}
\textit{Jr rm\texttt{t} nb "ktj=sn jr js pw m "b=sn (esi) jrtj=sn hwt dw jr nw}
\end{quote}

With regard to any person who shall enter this tomb of mine in their "b," or who shall do anything evil to this\textsuperscript{156}

Text of Ankhmahor from Saqqara Left Side of Façade (\textit{Urk I}, 201–203)

\begin{quote}
\textit{[jr rm\texttt{t}] nb "ktj-sn r js pn m "b=sn (esi) wnm=sn bwt [bw]t n \texttt{s}h jkr n w"b=sn n mj w"b=sn n \texttt{s}h jkr jr hsst nb}\textsuperscript{157}
\end{quote}

[With regard to] any person who shall enter this tomb in their "b," having consumed the abomination, which is [abhorrent] to an excellent akh, and not having purified themselves according to the manner in which they should be pure for an excellent akh, one who regularly did what his lord favored.\textsuperscript{158}

Inscription in the Tomb of Ti at Saqqara\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{154} Largely following translation in Nigel Strudwick, \textit{Texts from the Pyramid Age}, Writings from the Ancient World, no. 16 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 232.

\textsuperscript{155} Largely following translation in Strudwick, \textit{Texts from the Pyramid Age}, 2005, 252.

\textsuperscript{156} Following Strudwick, \textit{Texts from the Pyramid Age}, 2005, 274.

\textsuperscript{157} \textit{Urk I}, 202.3–5.

\textsuperscript{158} Following Strudwick, \textit{Texts from the Pyramid Age}, 2005, 264.

2) [jr rmt $\kappa t=sn r js pn n] dt m $\beta =sn (\subseteq) wnm.n=sn bwtw bwt \exists h nt hp r $hrt-ntr [n] w$\beta =sn r tr mj w$\beta =sn r hwt-ntr nt ntr wnn wdf-mdw $hnr=sn hr=s jn ntr $3 m bw nt wdf-mdew jm m$\beta 160

With regard to any person who shall enter this my tomb of eternity in their $\beta$ after they have eaten abominable things which is an abomination to an akh who has gone to the necropolis (3) and who are not pure at the time when they should be pure as in the temple of a god, then I shall be judged with them on this matter by the Great God in the place where judgment truly is. 161

As can be seen from the above translations, these texts largely parallel each other in their use of $\beta$, yet there is variation in the writing of the word. 162 In light of the similar nature of these texts, it seems reasonable to assume that the same meaning of $\beta$ is meant in each of these occurrences in spite of the variations in spelling. The texts are clearly concerned that someone might enter the premises of the tomb without the necessary purity that is required to enter a temple or tomb. Although presumably any number of impurities could be referred to, the texts, which specifically indicate an impurity, refer to having eaten something that is $bwt$. 163 The impurity caused by eating certain things may have been singled out for several different reasons. It could be because it was the impurity of the most concern, considered the most dangerous, or, because it was not a visible impurity, it was the most difficult to prevent from entering the


161 Translation from Strudwick, Texts from the Pyramid Age, 2005, 236.


163 Strudwick, Texts from the Pyramid Age, 2005, 41.
tomb.\textsuperscript{164} It may be worth noting that if someone has eaten something that is \textit{bwt}, then their impurity is internal.\textsuperscript{165}

There are few unambiguous references to \textit{\textit{b(w)}} meaning “impure” in the Coffin Texts.\textsuperscript{166} One fairly clear example, however, is in Coffin Text 201.\textsuperscript{167} In this spell it said that this N will not eat excrement or urine, and that excrement and going upside down are his \textit{bwt}. He also says that “\textit{\textit{b(w)}} are my \textit{bwt}; I will not eat them” (\textit{bwt}=\textit{j pw \textit{\textit{b(w) wnm=f sn}}}). \textit{\textit{b(w)}} is written as follows in the various sources: S1C and BH20x write \textit{j yg}, while B1B0 writes \textit{j yg}. Both spellings include a phallus as the determinative, perhaps suggesting bodily fluids, excretions, or sexual impurity of some kind. Whatever the \textit{\textit{b(w)}} impurities are, they are something that could potentially be eaten, which suggests that a physical substance is referred to here. Since the statement that “\textit{\textit{b(w)}} are my \textit{bwt}” is near the end of the spell, \textit{\textit{b(w)}} may be a summary category, which includes the other \textit{bwt}s of bodily excretions mentioned earlier in the spell, i.e. excrement and urine. This makes good sense in the context of this spell, as well as of the determinatives chosen in this case. This interpretation also could fit with Grunert’s understanding of \textit{\textit{b(w)}} as

\textsuperscript{164} Assmann suggests that curses (rather than laws) were frequently employed when crimes were difficult or impossible to detect. In regard to these tomb curses Assmann writes: “Secret criminality is involved in desecration caused by a visitor who enters a tomb ‘in his state of impurity’ or ‘without being pure’ because nobody except the person himself can tell whether he has ‘eaten what a spirit abominates’ or not. The tomb-owner protects himself against such abuses by calling in ‘metaphysical agency’ in the form of himself and presenting himself as a source of terror and violence” (Assmann, “When Justice Fails,” 152.).

\textsuperscript{165} The example from the Piankhy stela in which the kinglets are not allowed to enter his presence because they have eaten fish might be a similar example from a much later period (lines 150–151 of the stela). For transliteration and translation of the text see Ritner, \textit{The Libyan Anarchy}, 477, 490. For hieroglyphic text see Nicolas-Christophe Grimal and Mathaf al-Miṣri, \textit{La stèle triomphale de Pi(ʻankh)y au Musée du Caire, JE 48862 et 47086-47089} (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1981), XII.

\textsuperscript{166} For possible occurrences see Molen, \textit{A Hieroglyphic Dictionary of Egyptian Coffin Texts}, 69.

originally referring to internal purification. In this framework, urine and excrement have been “purified” from the body, and, while the body is now “pure” from them, they now exist outside the body as impurities. To consume again a substance that the body had already been purified from would make the deceased impure.

Moving to the time of the New Kingdom, on the lower register on the north side of the east wall in the chapel of Seti I in the Temple of Seti I at Abydos is a text, which appears to mention "h referring to an “impurity.” The image accompanying the scene is heavily damaged, but most of the text is intact. The spell is as follows.:

\[ R n \text{Hr sb}3 tpy n st wrt dd mdw j jryw n r-pr pn s\text{snf}yw \text{cbw (}} \text{}} n nsw M\text{nnf-rt-re nn rdjt } \text{k=sn m-s3=f r r-pr pn hr=sn m-s3 ht=sn cbw (}} \text{}} s3 R\text{Sthy-yr-n-Pth cbw (}} \text{}} n Hr \]

Spell for entering the first gate of the great seat. Recitations: O gatekeepers of this temple, who repel every "bw for King Menmaatre without letting them enter following after him to this temple, their faces behind as they retreat. The purifications of the Son of Re, Seti Merenptah, are the purifications of Horus. The spell continues and mentions purifications ("bw), and that the king is pure (w"h) several more times. What is interesting in this text is that "bw (impurities) seems to be mentioned in the same context of "bw (purifications) and, in this case, the distinction between them is clearly indicated by the way that they are written. It is clear that the term for impurities is negative, since it is determined with the bad bird sign (♀). Additionally, it seems, in this passage, that "bw

---


(purification) is a right of entrance. The king can enter the *r-pr* because of his purifications. However, the gatekeepers repel the *CHASE bw*. Also, the *CHASE bw* seem to be living beings or are at least personified in this text, and their faces are mentioned. They are repelled by the gatekeepers and prevented from following the king into the temple.

The term *CHASE b* also appears in Ramses IV’s Great Stela to Osiris and the Gods) at Abydos (Cairo JdE 48831). In one of the sections of this stela, the king states numerous things he has not done in a manner analogous to the Negative Confession. In one of these statements the king says:

\[ Nn \textit{mnh} n=f \textit{r pr} m \textit{CHASE b} \]  

I did not come upon a god in his impurity/purity (?) inside of his temple.

It is difficult to discern if *CHASE b* refers to purity or impurity in this text. It may be significant to note that no jar or water is present as the determinative. Kitchen translates this phrase as “I have not intruded on the god in his pure state within temple.” If this is referring to purity, then it would indicate that the king did not enter upon and defile the god’s purity.

After the section of negative declarations, the king addresses a series of gods and declares what he has done for them. *CHASE b* seems to appear in several of these addresses. *CHASE b* may appear in the address to the god Anhor, although it is not entirely certain since part of the word *CHASE b* is damaged. The phrase reads *CHASE jw dr.n=j chase b(?) nb nty m h^c=k.* “I have expelled every *CHASE b(?)* which is in your

171 *KRI VI*, 20–25.


173 *KRI VI*, 23.9.


175 *KRI VI*, 24,11–12.
flesh.”

Although part of the word is damaged here, it seems likely that the word “b” was meant, since the identical phrase occurs a little later in the same text in the king’s address to Geb.

\[Jw \ dr.n=j \ Ab \ (\text{\footnotesize 131}) \ nb \ nty \ m \ h=\text{k}\]

I have expelled every “b” which is in your body.

This “b” might be the same “b” as mentioned earlier in the text, and perhaps, it could be the same “b”, which is mentioned in the Old Kingdom tomb threats. The fact that “b” is in the body might suggest that it is some kind of illness or disease. It may be worth noting that the address to the next god, Thoth, includes the statement “I have expelled for you suffering” \((dr.n=j \ n=k \ mnt)\), possible referencing sickness of some kind.

While most of the texts in which “b” impurity occurs, seem to be related to ritual contexts, the word seems to appear in Papyrus Pushkin 127, called “A Tale of Woe” by Caminos.

\[\text{\footnotesize Abw} \ (\text{\footnotesize 130}) \ m \ 3bb \ jr=k \ h=\text{k} \ tmw \ mdt \ nb \ r \ st \ tw=f \ jb=k \ m \ hnw=f \ s\ss s3 \ nst=k \ mj \ wn=f \ nn \ nw=\text{f}\]

“b” \footnotesize{\textit{182}} are separated from you. Your body is whole. Everything in its place. Your heart is in its chest. Your tongue is one who makes wise like it was (before), there is no change.

\footnotesize{\textit{176}} Peden translates as “I have removed every impurity from your body.” (Peden, The Reign of Ramesses IV, 99.).

\footnotesize{\textit{177}} KRI VI, 24.15.

\footnotesize{\textit{178}} KRI VI, 24.16.


\footnotesize{\textit{180}} According to Caminos transcription.


\footnotesize{\textit{182}} Quack translates as “infektion” (Quack, “Ein Neuer Versuch Zum Moskauer Literarischen Brief.,” 174.).
In this passage, the wholeness of the body seems to be in view. According to Caminos, “$c(w)$ means ‘enemy, impurity;’ yet in view of the context, which related to Usimarenakhte’s physical fitness, that noun must be used here for ‘disorder(s) of the body.’” Quack says that the term $c(w)$ must refer to something more specific than simply “uncleanness.” He indicates that $c(w)$ means “impurity” or “infection” and is one of the things that needed to be removed in purification rituals. The idea of $c(w)$ being a sickness, disease, or other internal disorder of some kind could make good sense in this passage. Perhaps disorders of the body could be broadly classified as “internal impurities.”

Other, later texts, also suggest that $c$ could refer to disease. In Column I of Papyrus Brooyklyn 47.218.50, A Ritual for Royal Power, it reads:

(3) $R n mw \text{ mw dr}=k c^b (\sim \sim \sim ) \ nb \ dw n \ pr^{-53} n^h wd^3 \ snb j H^p $$f^j=k \ sm^3yw=f \ f^j=k \ hr n \ Hr \ nd=k \ hr n \ Sts \ f^j=k \ Njt \ (4) \ nd=k \ hr n \ hndw(t)=s \ f^j=k \ hr n \ pr^{-53} n^h wd^3 \ snb \ ds=k \ mj \ hr n \ nsw \ wts=f \ wrt \ wh \ [ts]w \ jn \ Hr \ sfh \ k3s=f \ (5) \ jn \ Sts \ c^bw=f \ c^bw \ ntr=f \ nn \ h3=f \ hr \ sdbw \ nbw \ dw \ htp \ dj \ nsw \ jw \ pr^{-53} n^h wd^3 \ snb \ w^c^b$

(3) Utterance for the water: Oh water! May you drive away every $c^b \ gw$ for Pharaoh l.p.h. Hail Hapy! May you wash his disease demons.

---

183 It is possible that the wishes are for the afterlife as well.

184 Caminos and Gosudarstvennyi muzei izobrazitel’nykh iskusstv imeni A.S. Pushkina, A Tale of Woe, 19.


187 According to Jerome Rizzo, the integrity of the body was an important defense against impurities (Rizzo, “Le Terme $\text{ Dw}$ Comme Superlatif de l’impur l’exemple de $\text{ bw Dw}$.,” 2007, 130.


189 Cf. Edwin Smith Papyrus Verso Second Incantation where it says, “I am Horus, who passes by $sm^3mw$ $\sim \si
you crush the face of Seth. May you wash the face of Neith. (4) may you crush the face her tramplers.\textsuperscript{190} May you yourself wash the face of Pharaoh l.p.h., when he wears the Werret-crown.\textsuperscript{191} Loosing the knots by Horus, releasing his bonds (5) by Seth. His purification is the purification of his god. He will not descend onto any evil obstacle. The king gives an offering. Pharaoh l.p.h. is pure.

In this text, water is obviously a cleansing agent. The verbs used for the cleansing with water are $dr$ (to drive away) and $jfr$ (to wash). In the spell, the dirt, which the water drives away is $'bw\ .dw$ (bad impurity?), and what is washed is $\hat{s}m\hat{3}yw$ or “disease demons.”\textsuperscript{192} The expression $'bw\ .dw$ could refer to all forms of impurity and thus be a general statement covering all potential kinds of dirt and impurity. However, the next phrase referring to $\hat{s}m\hat{3}yw$, which have a connection with disease,\textsuperscript{193} may suggest that $'bw\ .dw$ may have a more specific referent. As noted in some other examples, $'b$-impurity may be connected with impurities inside the body and thus might refer to sickness or disease or similar. Considering this, and the following phrase referring to $\hat{s}m\hat{3}yw$, perhaps the expression is referring to “internal impurities” such as disease in this text as well.

\textsuperscript{190} The determinative indicates that these “tramplers” are female.

\textsuperscript{191} The face of various gods and pharaoh is said to be washed while the face of others is crushed. This could reflect the fact that when washing with water one surface is cleansed while the dirt is removed, or it could be that Seth and the “tramplers” are symbolic of the dirt that is removed by washing. Cf. Section 33 of Chapter 17 of the book of the Dead where it reads, “If Horus is cleansed, Seth is bound, and vice versa.” (\textit{twrj hr wirt stş ts pfr}) Quirke, \textit{Going out in Daylight}, 62.


Although many of the texts examined so far might imply that Ꜥḥ is something in or coming from inside of the body, Chapter 105 of the Book of the Dead suggests that Ꜥḥw is also something that can be done.

\[Jn.n=j\ n=k\ bd\ sn\ tr\ sw\ Ꜥḥ=j\ tw\ jm=sn\ sw\ Ꜥḥ=j\ nt\ nt=sn\ tsw\ pwy\ dw\ dd.n=j\ Ꜥḥw\ (\ldots) pwy\ dw\ jr.n=j\ rdy\ n=j\ \text{hr}\ ntt\ fnk\ w3d\ pwy\ jry\ \text{h}h\ y\ n\ R^e\]

I have brought to you natron and incense so that I may purify you with them, so that I may purify your sweat(?) with them. This bad saying, which I have spoken, this Ꜥḥw dw which I have done, are not given to me because I am this greenstone with respect to the neck of Re.

In this text, Ꜥḥw seems to refer to an action which can be performed.\(^{196}\) It is modified by dw which would clearly indicate that this is a bad thing. Rizzo suggests that the expression Ꜥḥw dw may be a way of stating the superlative for the impure; in other words, Ꜥḥw dw refers to the most impure while Ꜥḥw wr refers to “absolute purity.”\(^{197}\) While this may be true, another possibility is that dw, as an adjective, is used to clearly indicate that the Ꜥḥ mentioned is referring to impurity rather than purity.

While Book of the Dead chapter 105 indicates that Ꜥḥw dw is something that can be done, is there any more precise indication of what this might involve? Although it is later in date,\(^{198}\) the magical papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.156 may indicate that Ꜥḥw dw could enter someone via magic.

---

\(^{194}\) Günther Lapp, British museum (Londres), and Department of ancient Egypt and Sudan, *The Papyrus of Nu (BM EA 10477)* (Londres: British Museum Press, 1997), Plate 19, 105, Columns 3-5; Quirke, *Going out in Daylight*, 232.


"Nh  dj=k shm  nb bw (װ�) dw jm=f hsf=k ḫḥkw [nb] dw jrn sn r=f jw=f wnb 199

You will not let any evil impurity have power in him and you will repel any evil magic which they may do against him. He is pure. 200

According to Rizzo, “dans le context de la pratique d’une magie dw, que l’on pourrait à cet égard qualifier de “noire,” bw dw désigne les “pollutions” instillées par le sorcier dans le corps de sa victime.” 201 If this is the case, then perhaps this is what is envisioned in Book of the Dead 105. Doing bw dw could perhaps refer to performing “black magic” in order to afflict ‘b(w) in someone else.

At this point, it is probably useful to step back and consider again the variety of ways that ‘b (impurity) can be written. As can be seen in the survey above, ‘b is written in a variety of ways and with a variety of determinatives. Thus, we should consider why this word can be written and classified in so many ways. First, the sign װ� could be understood simply as phonetic. 202 As noted above, the strong similarities in wording among the Old Kingdom tomb threats suggests that the expression m ‘b=f should be understood as writing the same word despite the spelling variations. This being the case, the writings with װ�, while they can be explained as logographic or phonetic, 203 also suggest that there is indeed a close connection

---


200 Brooklyn Museum. Manuscript. Papyrus 47.218.156, Le papyrus magique illustré de Brooklyn, 18–19; Rizzo, “Le Terme Dw Comme Superlatif de l’impur l’exemple de ‘bw Dw,”” 2007, 134. For ab in this text see also line x+3.2–3.3.


203 Gardiner, Egyptian Grammar, 463 F17.
between ℓ b(w) “impurity” and ℓ b(w) “purification.” However, one explains precisely how this came to be the case, the term probably originally referred to what was cleansed in the purification process. The writing of the classifier in the tomb of Ankhmahor (𓊶𓊱𓊳) is especially intriguing, as it seems to depict a substance coming out of the horn.²⁰⁴ Perhaps this indicates, as Grunert argued, that ℓ b(w) “impurities” are depicting as coming out during the process of purification.²⁰⁵ This also would be consistent with the writings in Coffin Text 201 discussed above. Again, as noted above, there is a close association in the Old Kingdom tomb threats between ℓ b and having eaten something that is bwt. The writings, which include the bad bird determinative (𓊢), are easily explained as this indicates that ℓ b is in the class of bad things. Finally, the death stick (Z6 𓊤) classifies things in the area of “death” and “enemy.”²⁰⁶ When classified this way, ℓ b(w) is probably indicating something dangerous or deadly, such as perhaps black magic, demons, or disease.²⁰⁷

Perhaps we can sum up the meaning and development of the term ℓ b(w) impurity in this way. ℓ b(w) impurity is probably derived from ℓ b(w) “purification” and originally referred to something like “what was cleansed.” Whether one accepts Grunert’s suggestion that ℓ b(w) originally referred to internal purification or not,²⁰⁸ ℓ b(w) “impurity” does seem to become

²⁰⁴ Perhaps this writing is a combination of ℓ b with a writing of rdw. For this suggestion see Wolfgang Schenkel, Aus der Arbeit an einer Konkordanz zu den altdiätischen Sargtexten (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1983), 99; Grunert, “Nicht Nur Sauber, Sondern Rein: Rituelle Reinigungsanweisungen Aus Dem Grab Des Ankhmahor in Saqqara.,” 148.


closely associated with the inside of the body from the time of the Old Kingdom. Over time, this association of what needed to be cleansed inside the body, led to the term becoming primarily a term for “impurity,” which was located inside of the body. Thus, it could refer to a variety of impure and harmful things that could get inside one’s body and thus needed purification.

\[
\text{\textit{\textit{\textit{m}}} and \textit{\textit{\textit{mt}}} }
\]

The terms \textit{\textit{\textit{m}}} (masculine)\textsuperscript{209} and \textit{\textit{\textit{mt}}} (feminine)\textsuperscript{210} are included in the discussion here, since they may, in at least some contexts, have a meaning related to impurity.\textsuperscript{211} There have been several studies of these words, yet their precise meaning has proved elusive.\textsuperscript{212}

In Coffin Text 364,\textsuperscript{213} it says, “I am the \textit{\textit{m}} who went out from Re, I have issued from between the thighs of the Enneads; Shesmet conceived and bore me.”\textsuperscript{214} In the sources, \textit{\textit{m}} is determined with the seated god (\textsuperscript{215}B2La), the phallus (\textsuperscript{216}B1C), or both.\textsuperscript{217} While \textit{\textit{m}} does have a divine determinative in some of the sources, this is probably do to the divine personification of

\textsuperscript{209} Wb I, 185.13, “Unbeschnittener?”

\textsuperscript{210} Wb I, 185.15–16, “als Bez. fur Frauen, deren Urin in der Medizin un im Zauber gebraucht wird.”


\textsuperscript{215} B2La

\textsuperscript{216} B1C

\textsuperscript{217} B2P, B2Lb
‘m’ in the spell, and thus should not be overemphasized.\textsuperscript{218} This tricolon results in conception
and birth, and thus O’Rourke suggest that it refers to the semen of Re.\textsuperscript{219}

‘m’ and ‘m’ occur together in Coffin Text 1117, where substances from these people are
used in the spell.\textsuperscript{220}

\begin{quote}
\textit{Jr swt mr-f rh s’nh hr rdwy-f s/dd-f s r’ nb sjn.n-f jwf-f m bzd n jd(y)t ‘m’ fn jn ‘m’
\end{quote}

If, however, he desires to know making alive on his feet, he should read it aloud every
day, after he rubs his flesh with the \textit{bzd} of a girl, who is ‘m’ (or an ‘m’ girl), and the
flakes of a bald\textsuperscript{221} man, who is ‘m’ (or an ‘m’ bald man).

There are several difficulties in interpreting this passage. For one, the identification of the \textit{bzd}
substance is uncertain.\textsuperscript{222} The substance \textit{snft} is not certain either. Faulkner suggested “flakes of
skin” based on a parallel reference to fish scales in the tomb of Ahmes at Amarna, but the word
\textit{snft} is restored in this occurrence.\textsuperscript{223} For the ‘m’, all sources (which are undamaged at this
point), include a phallus determinative (\textsuperscript{6}) as well as the seated woman (\textsuperscript{6}). Similarly, the ‘m’
is determined with a phallus (\textsuperscript{6} or \textsuperscript{6}), as well as, either \textsuperscript{6} or \textsuperscript{6}. The presence of the phallus
may indicate that this word has some kind of sexual connotation, but it may also mean that it

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{218} O’Rourke, “The ‘m’-Male.,” 51.
\item \textsuperscript{219} O’Rourke, “The ‘m’-Male.,” 51.
\item \textsuperscript{220} Buck and Gardiner, The Egyptian Coffin Texts. VII, VII, 450d.
\item \textsuperscript{221} Molen, A Hieroglyphic Dictionary of Egyptian Coffin Texts, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{222} Molen, A Hieroglyphic Dictionary of Egyptian Coffin Texts, 116; Raymond Oliver Faulkner, The Ancient
‘m’t-Woman.,”” 167.
Amarna: Part III : The Tombs of Huya and Ahmes (London, 1905), XVIX, 8. Van der Molen suggests “scales of
fish” or “flakes of skin” but only lists this reference in VII 450d Molen, A Hieroglyphic Dictionary of Egyptian
Coffin Texts, 626.
\end{itemize}
relates to a bodily discharge. The presence of the human determinatives, in this case, may mean that the terms refer to a person, but in light of the clearly gendered nature in this text, the determinatives may reflect that 'mfinance; in this case, is gender specific. We should note that the determinative of the man seated in the chair, likely indicates that the term is not negative in this context. In light of the uncertainties in this text, it is difficult to determine more than this concerning the meaning of 'mfinance; and 'm't.

The beginning phrase of CT 1145 reads:

\[ h3yw 'm'f s'h s33 sw m hnw hm-f \]

O protectors of his 'mfinance;', the ones who fight and the ones who protect him inside his hm-shrine.

In this case, no person determinatives are used in any of the sources, only the phallus ( or ). As O’Rourke points out, “the absence of such a determinative and the context of the present passage suggests that the word 'm'finance; refers here not to a being nor to a state of being, but rather to something that one possesses.” Whatever 'm'finance; refers to, it is something that one possesses and that can be protected.

In Ebers 729 (88,7), the secretion of either an 'm'finance; or 'm't are to be applied. “Another, the secretion of an 'm'm finance; or an 'm't female, give to her” (kt mtwt nt 'm'm \[ \text{kt} \text{ mtwt} \text{ nt} 'm'm \text{ dj r=s} \]). While 'm'm does not have a person determinative, 'm't does. It seems

224 O’Rourke, “The ‘m’t-Woman.,” 167.

225 Buck and Gardiner, The Egyptian Coffin Texts. VII, VII, 492c. This line is written retrograde.

226 B1Be has and B1P and B5c write .

227 O’Rourke, “The ‘m’t-Male.,” 48.

228 Lalanne, Le Texte Médical Du Papyrus Ebers, 181. This remedy also appears in papyrus Louvre E 32847 (Bardinet, Médecins et magiciens, 60.
again that the \( ^{\text{m}} \text{r} \) can be gender specific, and these people produce a secretion which can be used in the prescription.\(^{229}\)

A prescription for “driving away heat from the anus” (\( \text{dr tsw m phwy} \)) in Papyrus Ebers (no. 154; 32, 17–21)\(^{230}\) includes \( ^{\text{m}} \text{r} \) dates (\( \text{bnrw } ^{\text{m}} \text{r} \)).\(^{231}\) Whatever exactly \( ^{\text{m}} \text{r} \) dates are, it should be noted that the word \( ^{\text{m}} \text{r} \) here is spelled the same way as is in other occurrences above, although here it clearly is not referring to a person. It should also be noted that \( ^{\text{m}} \text{r} \) (\( \mathbf{b} \mathbf{n} \mathbf{r} \mathbf{w} \mathbf{a} ) \) seems to refer to a part of a date or plant, and this word occurs twice in papyrus Ebers (22,17 and 46,20).\(^{232}\) However, neither of these occurrences use the phallus determinative. If the word \( ^{\text{m}} \text{r} \) in 32,21 is the same word \( ^{\text{m}} \text{r} \) we have been examining, which seems likely since it is spelled with the \( \mathbf{r} \mathbf{r} \) determinative, then this occurrence indicates that \( ^{\text{m}} \text{r} \) is not necessarily a person or even linked to a person. Perhaps \( ^{\text{m}} \text{r} \) refers to excretion more generally, and in this prescription dates, which are secreting liquid, are what is called for.

Urine (\( \text{mwy} \)) from an \( ^{\text{m}} \text{r} \)-woman is called for three times in the medical Papyrus Berlin 3038.\(^{233}\) The word \( ^{\text{m}} \text{r} \) is written with the phallus (\( \mathbf{b} \mathbf{n} \mathbf{r} \mathbf{w} \mathbf{a} \mathbf{m} \)) twice and once with the inclusion of the pustule determinative (\( \mathbf{b} \mathbf{n} \mathbf{r} \mathbf{w} \mathbf{a} \mathbf{m} \mathbf{r} \mathbf{i} \)). In none of these occurrences is a person

\(^{229}\) O’Rourke, “The ‘m’t-Woman.,” 168.


\(^{231}\) The \( \text{Wörterbuch} \) lists \( ^{\text{m}} \text{r} \) in \( \text{bnrw } ^{\text{m}} \text{r} \) as a separate lemma in spite of the fact that it is spelled the same way as some of the other occurrences of \( ^{\text{m}} \text{r} \) which seem to refer to male persons (\( \text{Wb I} \), 185).


\(^{233}\) For hieroglyphic transcriptions, transliteration, and translation of these spells see O’Rourke, “The ‘m’t-Woman.,” 168.
determinative written. The urine of an amat (\texttt{ amat}) is used in the Book of the Overthrowing of Apep in Papyrus Bremner-Rhind (29,15),\textsuperscript{234} and in this case, a female determinative is used.\textsuperscript{235} In pRam C v^0, x+5–6, the spell reads “to extinguish with the urine of an amat-female” (\texttt{ amat}).\textsuperscript{236} According to Meyrat, who understands this phrase as referring to a menstruating woman, menstrual blood is linked with impurity and is thus used here in actions of destruction and desecration on execration figurines.\textsuperscript{237}

Perhaps the most well-known occurrence of the word amat is in the Piye Stela. When the kings come to present themselves to Piye at the palace, the text says that:

(149) Js gr nn n nswt h3ty-\texttt{ amat} nw tj-mhw jj r m33 nfr hm=f rdwy=sn (150) m rdwy hmwnt n \texttt{ amat} n=sn r pr-nsw dr ntt wnn=sn m \texttt{ amat} (151) \texttt{ amat} n=sn r pr-nsw dr ntt wnn=sn m w'b n wnn=f rmw \texttt{ amat} n=sn (153) \texttt{ amat}

Now, moreover, these kings, princes of the Delta, came to see the perfection of his person, their legs were like the legs of women.\textsuperscript{239} They could not enter into the palace since they were in amat and were ones who eat fish. It is a disgust of the king’s house. However, Nimlot was entering the palace since he was in a state of purity, and he did not eat fish. Three stood (on) their legs while one entered into the palace.


\textsuperscript{238} Grimal and Mathaf al-Miṣrī, \textit{La stèle triomphale de Pi(ʻankh)y au Musée du Caire}, JE 48862 et 47086-47089, 49*.

\textsuperscript{239} Following the translation of Ritner Ritner, \textit{The Libyan Anarchy}, 490. Ritner says that this means they were “trembling in fear” (Ritner, \textit{The Libyan Anarchy}, 492 n. 24.) However, Quack suggests that the phrase should be interpreted to mean that “their position was like that of women” (Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion.,” 136.). Quack says “that women had generally less access authorization than men is clearly attested in the Book of the Temple” (Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion.,” 136 n. 65.)
It can easily be observed that there is a contrast between Nimlot, who could enter the palace, and the three princes who could not, and that the reasons for the distinction are given in a parallel fashion. In other words, the statement of the three princes eating fish is parallel to the statement concerning Nimlot not eating fish.\textsuperscript{240} Similarly then, the fact that the three princes were in \textit{\textordmasculine\textordmasculine} is parallel, and in contrast to, the statement of Nimlot being in a state of purity.\textsuperscript{241} While it refers to some type of impurity, what exactly the term refers to in this context is the subject of debate.

Before assessing the term \textit{\textordmasculine\textordmasculine} in more detail, some considerations of the context must be taken into account. While we must be cautious in assuming that the customs mentioned here are specifically Egyptian, since it is possible that they are reflective of Kushite rather than Egyptian customs, Piye is trying to present himself as an ideal Egyptian king in this text. However, the nature of the purity, which is required to enter the palace, appears to be foreign to these rulers. Since they were coming to “kiss the ground” before Piye, one might assume that they would have prepared themselves for the meeting, but the fact that they are not may suggest Piye’s standard of purity was foreign to them.\textsuperscript{242} It may also be possible that they intentionally scorned the purity requirements in an attempt to scorn the newly established King Piye. In either scenario, Piye uses this episode to stress “the extraordinary purity around the sacred king of

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{240} Since fish were commonly eaten by the Egyptians, the nature of the defilement from fish is not entirely clear. Perhaps the prohibition was relative-only certain people at certain times and places were required to abstain from fish (P. Galpaz-Feller, “The Stela of King Piye: A Brief Consideration of ‘Clean’ and ‘Unclean’ in Ancient Egypt and the Bible,” \textit{Revue Biblique} 102 (1995): 508–11.) Another possibility is that the prohibition on eating fish referred to here was not Egyptian at all, but instead a Kushite custom (cf. Martin Fitzenreiter, “Piye Son of Ra, Loving Horses, Detesting Fish,” in \textit{La Pioche et La Plume: Autour Du Soudan, Du Liban et de La Jordanie. Hommages Archéologiques à Patrice Lenoble}, ed. Vincent Rondot, Frédéric Alpi, and François Villeneuve (Paris: Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2011), 265–66.)

\footnote{241} O’Rourke, “The \textordmasculine\textordmasculine-Male,” 137.

\footnote{242} Cf. Fitzenreiter, “Piye Son of Ra, Loving Horses, Detesting Fish,” 267–68. The fact that these rulers are not following the purity standards here should cause us to be cautious in equating this episode to the Egyptian concept of purity.
\end{footnotes}
Kush.”243 The recounting of this episode near the end of the stela, in a sense encapsulates much of the message of the entire stela. As Assman puts it, “In Piye’s admittance of Nimlot and attendant humiliation of the Delta kings, he represents himself not only as a legitimate ruler but as a ‘pure,’ priestly king.”244 Similar to Piye’s need to ritually purify himself before entering the temple of Re, the other rulers need to be in a state of ritual purity in order to enter the presence of Piye.

While it is clear that being ‘m’ was one of the primary reasons why the three kings were not permitted to enter the presence of Piye, it still has not been established exactly what ‘m’ means. Breasted translated as “unclean” but included a note that it may mean “uncircumcised.”245 Many have followed the interpretation that ‘m’ refers to being uncircumcised.246 Goedicke argues that the rulers were defiled, not because they were uncircumcised, but because they had been among uncircumcised men.247 Some have suggested that ‘m’ here does not refer to uncircumcision, but to some other kind of ritual impurity of a sexual nature, such as not abstaining from sexual activity before entering a pure place.248 In a similar vein, Paul O’Rourke argues that the term ‘m’ did originally refer to sexual impurity, but

243 Fitzenreiter, “Piye Son of Ra, Loving Horses, Detesting Fish.,” 268.


246 Ritner, The Libyan Anarchy, 490; Grimal and Mathaf al-Miṣrī, La stèle triomphale de Pt(‘ankh)y au Musée du Caire, JE 48862 et 47086-47089, 178; Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature., 80.


by the time of Piye had come to refer to impurity in general.\(^{249}\) Whatever the term ‘\(m\)’ refers to in the Piye stela, I would argue that it is best to interpret this occurrence of the word in light of the other usages of the term in ancient Egyptian.

Having surveyed most of the occurrences of ‘\(m\)’ in ancient Egyptian, we can attempt to discern some things concerning its meaning. The first question to be addressed is whether or not the understanding of ‘\(m\)’ as “uncircumcised” can be sustained. There appear to be references to uncircumcision in ancient Egypt apart from the term ‘\(m\)’. The phrase \(hnny \ m \ krnt\) in the Medinet Habu reliefs seems to refer to uncircumcised phalli.\(^{250}\) As O’Rourke points out, “if the term ‘\(m\)’ meant “uncircumcised,” one must ask why, by the Ramesside Period, the Egyptians need to employ the periphrastic term \(hnyn \ n \ krnt\) to express essentially the same idea.”\(^{251}\)

An additional difficulty with understanding ‘\(m\)’ as “uncircumcised” is that, if the terms ‘\(m\)’ and ‘\(m\)\(t\)’ are related, which based on their parallel uses in the same texts seems to be the case, then it suggests that ‘\(m\)\(t\)’ must refer to an uncircumcised female. Feucht examines the possibility of the practice of female circumcision in Egypt and examines whether the word(s) ‘\(m\)’ and ‘\(m\)\(t\)’ refer to an uncircumcised male and female respectively.\(^{252}\) She notes that the interpretation of ‘\(m\)’ as “uncircumcised” is based primarily on the determinative and the occurrence in the Piye stela.\(^{253}\) Furthermore, it is difficult to explain some of the other occurrences of ‘\(m\)’, such as that

\(^{249}\) O’Rourke, “The ‘m’-Male.,” 45–53.


\(^{251}\) O’Rourke, “The ‘m’-Male.,” 137.

\(^{252}\) Feucht, “Pharaonische Beschneidung.”

\(^{253}\) Feucht, “Pharaonische Beschneidung.,” 88.
of Coffin Text 1145, as a reference to uncircumcision. In light of these challenges to interpreting ‘mār’ as meaning “uncircumcision,” it seems justified to look for another interpretation that can better take into account the variety of occurrences of the word.

Feucht concludes that these terms are probably not related to circumcision and suggests that they are related to some other kind of sexual impurity, perhaps relating to extramarital intercourse or of not washing after sexual intercourse.254 In another article, Feucht further examines the possibility that ‘mār’ refers to sexual impurity of some kind.255 She mentions several Biblical passages which indicate that an emission or sexual intercourse rendered one ritually impure.256 Feucht suggests that if these were customs in ancient Israel, it is reasonable to consider whether these customs may have been present in other ancient Near Eastern cultures such as Egypt.257 Feucht notes the claim of Herodotus that:

“Furthermore, it was the Egyptians who first made it a matter of religious observance not to have intercourse with women in temples or to enter a temple after such intercourse without washing. Nearly all other peoples are less careful in this matter than are the Egyptians and Greeks, and consider a man to be like any other animal; [2] for beasts and birds (they say) are seen to mate both in the temples and in the sacred precincts; now were this displeasing to the god, the beasts would not do so. This is the reason given by others for practices which I, for my part, dislike, but the Egyptians in this and in all other matters are exceedingly strict against desecration of their temples.” (Herodotus Book II, 64-65.1)


255 Feucht, “Noch Einmal Zu Ꜥmꜥauf Der Pianchistele: Ein Beitrag Zu Reinheitsvorschriften.”


257 Feucht, “Noch Einmal Zu Ꜥmꜥauf Der Pianchistele: Ein Beitrag Zu Reinheitsvorschriften.,” 192. See also the comments of Quack on the Piankhy stela Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion.,” 136. Quack says, concerning the term ama, that “for a long time it has been understood as “uncircumcised,” but there is not substantial evidence for this. It should rather be understood as a kind of sexual activity. With the combination of sexual and food taboos, the rules correspond especially to the performance instructions in the Book of the Dead and to core issues of purity in later magical texts.” Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion.,” 136.
A similar idea can be found as early as the sixth dynasty in the tomb of Hezi, which includes a threat against anyone who enters the tomb “after he has had sexual relations with women” (*nk.n=f ḫmwt*). Chapter 64 of the Book of the Dead says, “This formula is to be read pure and cleansed (*wḥ*b twr*) without eating small livestock or fish, without approaching women (*nn tkn m ḫmwt*).” At the temple of Esna, in order to enter the surroundings of the temple, “Everybody, moreover, has to be pure from a woman in a purification (period) of one day, they shall purify them and moisten their clothes.” However, higher levels of purity in regards to approaching women were required to enter further into the temple. For example, “As for having allowance to enter it, they should be pure from a woman in a purification (period) of nine days.” Feucht suggests that if one sees the *ʾmꜣ* as “those who copulate with women,” the idea behind these texts is the same as in the Piankhy stela. In other words, *ʾmꜣ* refers to one, who is in a state of ritual impurity due to an emission or sexual intercourse.

Westendorf disagrees with Feucht and argues that *ʾmꜣ* and *ʾmtꜣ* refer to “das Geschlecht beziehende Zustand der jugendlchen Unreife,” which may also imply an uncircumcised state, since circumcision was not practiced until puberty. According to Westendorf, the prescriptions in the medical texts refer to secretion of immature youths, and the kings in the Piankhy stela

---


259 Quirke, *Going out in Daylight*, 156.

260 Translation from Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion.,” 120.

261 Translation from Quack, “Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion.,” 120.


were forbidden to enter because they were old enough to be circumcised, but had not been. Some of the difficulties of interpreting ‘m‘ as uncircumcision have been noted above. If ‘m‘ and ‘m‘‘t refer primarily to age, one wonders why, in Coffin Text 1117, the text specifies that the bsd needed for the prescription is from a young woman, who is ‘m‘ (jdyt ‘m‘‘t). If ‘m‘‘t refers to the person’s age as a youth as Westendorf suggests, then it seems unnecessary to point out the age of the woman in this spell with another term for youth (jdyt).266

While Feucht is on the right track and may have the right understanding of the meaning of ‘m‘ in the Piankhy stela, this does not adequately explain the uses of the terms ‘m‘ and ‘m‘‘t in the Coffin Texts or in the medical texts. In other words, while some occurrences of the term ‘m‘ imply that it refers to impurity, other occurrences seem more neutral, or even positive, in regards to the purity of the person or substance. For example, the occurrences in Coffin Text 364 and Coffin Text 1145 seem to have positive connotations. As can be seen in the above survey of the uses of the term, ‘m‘ or ‘m‘‘t used in a clear reference to impurity does not occur until the Piye stela. While the use of substances from an ‘m‘ or ‘m‘‘t person in the medical texts could be used because the person is impure, this is not clear from the context and should not be assumed, especially in light of the seemingly positive references in Coffin Texts 364 and 1145. Thus, it seems that ‘m‘ (and ‘m‘‘t) referred to something that was not necessarily negative or impure, but over time the word came to have a negative or unclean connotation.

O’Rourke argues for an association between the ‘m‘‘t woman and menstruation.267 Based on the connection between secretion (mtwt) and ‘m‘‘t in the Ebers Papyrus and urine in Berlin

266 O’Rourke, “The ‘m‘‘t-Woman,” 167.
267 O’Rourke, “The ‘m‘‘t-Woman.”
Papyrus 3038, O’Rourke suggests that it “points to a natural product of the ‘m†t woman.”\textsuperscript{268} O’Rourke then gives two more possible occurrences of the term from a Late Period papyrus (Papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.49), which refer to the blood of an ‘m†t woman.\textsuperscript{269} He suggests that “taken in conjunction, the passages in these texts would suggest that the blood referred to here is menstrual blood. In the Ebers and Berlin texts, it may be the blood-tinctured urine of a menstruating woman that is called for.”\textsuperscript{270}

If ‘m†t refers to a menstruating woman or her menstrual blood or urine with blood, one still has to explain the ‘m†-male. O’Rourke, noting the connection between ‘m† and procreation in the Coffin Texts, suggests that it refers to seminal fluid. To explain the Piye stela, he suggests that, based on the fact that Egyptians seemed to have refrained from sexual activity prior to entering a temple, the term ‘m† may have “acquired a more generalized meaning like “impure” or even “ritually impure.”\textsuperscript{271} He suggests that the scribes, who wrote the text of the stela, may not have had “an appreciable understanding of the word’s original and explicit sexual overtones” or that “the term may have been employed metaphorically.”\textsuperscript{272} While this is possible, perhaps there is another explanation, which can better explain the connection between the occurrence in the Piye stela and the earlier texts.

\textsuperscript{268} O’Rourke, “The ‘m’t-Woman.,” 168.
\textsuperscript{269} O’Rourke, “The ‘m’t-Woman.,” 169.
\textsuperscript{270} O’Rourke, “The ‘m’t-Woman.,” 170.
\textsuperscript{271} O’Rourke, “The ‘m’-Male.,” 52.
\textsuperscript{272} O’Rourke, “The ‘m’-Male.,” 52.
If we accept O’Rourke’s argument that the ʿmṯ women probably refers to a menstruating woman or a bloody genital excretion, perhaps a similar explanation could be offered for that of the ʿmṯ male. That the disease Schistosomiasis was present in ancient Egypt is well known. One of the most visible symptoms of the disease is the presence of blood in the urine. Brett Heagren notes that “blood in the urine is one of the main symptoms (of Schistosomiasis) and Napoleon’s troops reported that Egypt was the land of menstruating men.” With this fact in mind, it may be that the word ʿmṯ(t) refers to a bloody genital discharge (whether menstruation or bloody urine) or to a person who currently is experiencing bloody genital discharges.

In the texts where the substance is taken from an ʿmṯ(t) person, it is specified when, specifically, bloody urine is meant as opposed to the bloody discharge more generally. In other words, the qualification of urine (mwyṯ) is added, when it needs to be clarified that bloody urine is needed and not menstrual blood. The example of Coffin Text 364, which seems to have a positive connotation, refers to a discharge from the creator god, Re. Perhaps a bloody discharge in the context of a creator god is seen as combining both feminine and masculine aspects (menstrual blood and seminal discharge), and thus is an appropriate description of a creative act

---


276 I am grateful to Dr. Peter Brand for first bringing this possibility to my attention.
of a creator deity.²⁷⁷ Perhaps -placeholder- dates refer to something like a date syrup, which could be made from the “excretion” of the fruit but could have a dark color resembling bloody urine. Finally, if menstruation had any connotation of ritual impurity for the ancient Egyptians, it could make sense that men, such as the Libyan kings, who had bloody discharges or urine, would also be considered ritually impure, and thus unable to enter a pure place such as the palace. It is interesting to note that the passage from the Piye stela also notes that the Libyan kings had legs “like the legs of women.”

\[hs\]

The term \(hs\) has been understood to mean something like “unanointed,”²⁷⁸ which is an undesirable state for the Egyptians (see chapter on cleanliness in ancient Egypt). In the Instructions of Ptahhotep, (Papyrus Prisse 245; column 8, 6–11) \(hn\) appears:

\[Wnn\ jib\ sdm\ n\ ht=f\ dj=f\ kn.wt=f\ m\ st\ mrwt=f\ jz= f\ 3kw\ h\ w=f\ h\ hs\ (\underset{\text{Agag}}{\text{}}\)\]

The one whose heart listens to his belly, he will put dislike of him in place of love of him. His heart becomes worn away(?)²⁷⁹ and his flesh unanointed.


²⁷⁹ Following translation of Parkinson, The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems, 1940-1640 BC, 255. Allen translates “his mind bare” (Allen, Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom., 188.), while Quirke translates “his heart is afflicted” (Stephen Quirke, Egyptian literature 1800 BC: questions and readings (London: Golden House Publications, 2004), 94. Neither the Wörterbuch (Wb I, 22.4) nor Hannig offer a gloss (Rainer Hannig, Großes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch: 2800 - 950 v. Chr., Marburger Ed., 6., unveränd. Aufl, Hannig-Lexica 1 (Darmstadt: von Zabern, 2015), 16.).
According to this text, $\text{hs}^{3}$ is something which affects or describes the body ($h^n w$). Flesh that is $\text{hs}^{3}$ is clearly a negative description. The word is determined with the hair sign, which, in addition to being a classifier for hair, can also classify words for skin such as $jnm$ and words for “bald, empty, forlorn.”

The term $\text{hs}^{3}$ also occurs in Hatnub Graffiti 12, which appears to be an autobiographical composition of a scribe name Djehuty-ankh (line 2). In the text, he states his accomplishments. Beginning in line 12, he says:

\[
\text{jw sm=j n hkr wrh (13) hs}^{3} (\text{achte Form}) \text{jw dj.n (=j) hbsw n nt h}^{3} w \text{jw hk}^{3}. n= (j) jnd (14) \text{ sn} t n \text{ st}\
\]

I helped the hungry, anointing the unanointed. I gave clothes to the naked. I did magic on the afflicted, conjuring for the odorous.

The writer of this inscription claims to have anointed ($wrh$) the unanointed ($\text{hs}^{3}$). Apparently, being unanointed for the Egyptians was considered similarly to going hungry or to being unclothed. Anointing was thus considered essential. Perhaps it would be more accurate to see $\text{hs}^{3}$ as referring to dry, rough or broken skin, which would be made whole or smooth by anointing or rubbing with oil.

A similar use of $\text{hs}^{3}$ is in the Dialogue of Ipuwer (6,3).

---


Surely barley has perished at every way, (people) are stripped of clothes and unanointed with oil.

In this text, lack of clothing and being ḫs3 are again connected, perhaps suggesting that their necessity was viewed similarly by the ancient Egyptians. Here the solution for ḫs3 would be mrḥt-oil, however, the problem is that this is lacking. It is interesting to note that ḫs3 also is used as an epithet for some gods, especially Osiris, primarily in the Greco-Roman period but beginning in the New Kingdom. Perhaps this describes a state of the appearance of the skin of the deceased during the mummification process.

From this survey of ḫs3, it seems that the term probably refers to the state of the skin as rough, dry, cracked, or similar, and that this state can be remedied by anointing or rubbing with oil. Thus, ḫs3 would probably be experienced by both sight and touch. Presumably, one could tell by the appearance of the skin that it needed to be anointed, and the feel of ḫs3-skin would probably be different than anointed skin, perhaps feeling rough to the touch. If oiled skin was considered an aspect of cleanliness in ancient Egypt, then it is probable that ḫs3-skin may have been perceived as unkept or unclean.

---

284 The determinative is unfortunately damaged. Enmarch reads �✕. 

285 According to Enmarch’s commentary on Ipuwer, “clothes and oil are often related luxuries” cf. Sinuhe B292 (Enmarch, A World Upturned, 114.). Enmarch comments that “this strophe continues the theme of famine from the last, broadening it to portray a lack of everything (Enmarch, A World Upturned, 114.).


287 For discussion of the role of skin and its rejuvenation see Colazilli, “Skin in Ancient Egyptian Belief: Sacred Texts and Rituals.”

CHAPTER 5: PUTREFACTION

Since revulsion to or avoidance of putrefaction and decaying flesh seems to be a cross-cultural trait among humans,¹ it would not be surprising if the Egyptians viewed putrefaction as disgusting or dirty. However, before examining the Egyptian views of decay and if it was considered to be disgusting or dirty, it is helpful to have a general understanding of the decomposition process. This may prove helpful in analyzing Egyptian terminology.

According to M. Lee Goff:

Decomposition is a continuous process, beginning at the point of death and ending when the body has been reduced to a skeleton. Although this process is a continuum, virtually every study presented has divided this process into a series of stages. The number of stages has varied from one to as many as nine, depending on author and geographic region.²

For our purposes here, the exact number and characteristics of the process of decomposition are not essential, but a brief summary of general description of the process may be useful.³ The Fresh Stage of decomposition “begins at the moment of death and continues until bloating of the body becomes evident. There are few distinctive, gross decompositional changes associated with the body during this stage, although greenish discoloration of the abdomen, livor, skin cracking,

---


² M. Lee Goff, “Early Postmortem Changes and Stages of Decomposition,” in Current Concepts in Forensic Entomology, ed. Jens Amendt et al. (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2010), 2, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9684-6_1. A chart of several decomposition studies, and the number of stages they have suggested is included in this article.

³ Further discussion of the process of decomposition can be found in Norman L. Cantor, After We Die: The Life and Times of the Human Cadaver, electronic resource (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 75–90; Goff, “Early Postmortem Changes and Stages of Decomposition.” Discussion of the process of decomposition with a specifically Egyptological perspective can be found in Tasha Leigh Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell: Ancient Egyptian Conceptions of Decomposition” (Ph.D., United States -- Connecticut, Yale University), accessed November 12, 2021, https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/1539974736/abstract/A6246760E76E4724PQ/1; Falk, “‘My Putrefaction Is Myrrh’: The Lexicography of Decay, Gilded Coffins, and the Green Skin of Osiris.”
Tache noir may be observed.”

Furthermore, “within one to six hours after death the process of “rigor mortis,” that is stiffening of the muscles begins.” During the Fresh Stage various insects will begin infiltrating the body and lay eggs, “although there may be little evidence of this on the surface.” Rapidly after death, the color of the corpse begins to change; “within forty-eight hours a greenish-black palette of bacteria growth appears on patches of skin.”

During the Bloated Stage, “the principal component of decomposition, putrefaction, begins.” Putrefaction is “the dissolution of the corpse into liquids and gases.” In this stage, the gasses begin to build up inside the body given it an inflated appearance. Some liquids may begin to seep out of bodily openings, and some insects or maggots may begin to become visible. “While the start and termination points for the stages of decomposition are largely subjective, there is a definite physical event marking the start of the Decay Stage. This is when the combined activities of the maggot feeding and bacterial putrefaction result in the breaking of the outer layer of the skin and the escape of the gasses from the abdomen.”

Strong odors are associated with this stage, and

4 Goff, “Early Postmortem Changes and Stages of Decomposition,” 16.
5 Cantor, *After We Die*, 76.
7 Cantor, *After We Die*, 76. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, the various changes in the color of the corpse are almost certainly significant for understanding the colors with which the skin of Osiris or other mumiform deities are often depicted. For discussion of this see Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 176–91. Cf. Falk, “‘My Putrefaction Is Myrrh’: The Lexicography of Decay, Gilded Coffins, and the Green Skin of Osiris.”
8 Goff, “Early Postmortem Changes and Stages of Decomposition,” 17.
9 Cantor, *After We Die*, 77.
10 Goff, “Early Postmortem Changes and Stages of Decomposition,” 17.
11 Goff, “Early Postmortem Changes and Stages of Decomposition,” 17.
12 Goff, “Early Postmortem Changes and Stages of Decomposition,” 18.
the presence of insects and maggots is obvious.\(^{13}\) “The Decay Stage characterizes advanced decomposition of the soft tissues, significant leakage of putrefactive fluids, and loss of the integrity of the skin.”\(^{14}\) By the end of this stage, only skin, cartilage and bone is left.\(^{15}\) This can be called the “Skeletal/Remains Stage”\(^{16}\) or the “Dry Stage,” which “signifies natural mummification and/or skeletonization.”\(^{17}\)

Of course, many variables can affect aspects of this general description of the process of decay. The rate of decay and the speed at which the corpse moves through the various stages of decomposition is closely connected with the climate and environment in which the corpse is located. Dobbin-Bennet suggests that “the Egyptian climate and environment would have contributed to relatively quick decomposition timeframes. A body would have entered into the earliest stages of decomposition within the first few days after death, and by day four would, most likely, have been in full bloat.”\(^{18}\) Of course, even within Egypt itself climatic and environmental difference would affect the rate of decay.\(^{19}\) Human intervention can significantly affect the natural process of decay as well.

According to Dobbin-Bennett, while many Egyptian texts mention various stages of decomposition, few of these texts demonstrate a concern for presenting the process of

---

\(^{13}\) Goff, “Early Postmortem Changes and Stages of Decomposition,” 18.

\(^{14}\) Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 54.

\(^{15}\) Goff, “Early Postmortem Changes and Stages of Decomposition,” 18.


\(^{17}\) Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 54.

\(^{18}\) Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 7.

\(^{19}\) For an analysis of the rate of decay in an Egyptian environment and attempts to compare the rate in different areas of Egypt see Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 21–67.
decomposition in a chronological order. However, Chapter 154 of the Book of the Dead may be an exception and seems to describe aspects of decomposition in a chronological fashion. If this is the case, this could be useful for identifying more specific aspects of some Egyptian terms for decay. Chapter 154 of the Book of the Dead is a “Spell for preventing the body from passing away” (r n tm rdjt sby h3t), and it seems to describe the process of the bodily decay from an Egyptian perspective. According to Dobbin-Bennett, there are three stanzas in this chapter which describe the process of bodily decay; the first stanza is the most general while the last is the most descriptive of the process of decay. The first stanza reads:

```
sby.ty=fy pr b3=f m-h3t mwt=f
h3=f m=h3t sby=f
swt pw hnn=f ksw=f tmw hw3=sn
sm3yw h5w sgnn ksw
jryw jwf m-5 dw24 sns=f hw3=f
hpr=f m fntw 53yw tm
fntw tm jr=f
jw=f sbw n jrt sw m ntr nb m ntrt nbt
m 3pdw nb m rmw nb
m hfyt nbt m ddft nbt
m 5wy nbt tm tm
```

He who shall pass away, his ba-soul goes out after his death,
And goes down after his passing.

---

20 Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 34.

21 Cf. Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 383. The earliest text of this spell is found in the eighteenth dynasty Papyrus Nu (BM 10477) (Lapp, British museum (Londres), and Department of ancient Egypt and Sudan, The Papyrus of Nu (BM EA 10477), Plate 51-52.


23 Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 68.

24 Following the transliteration of Dobbin-Bennett (Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 68.) Quirke transliterates as m "dhw and translates as “the making of the flesh into fat” (Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 383.). However, the text appears to write 𓊟𓊝𓊡𓊝 (Lapp, British museum (Londres), and Department of ancient Egypt and Sudan, The Papyrus of Nu (BM EA 10477), Plate 52, Column 8.) This is an unusual writing of "d “fat,” but it is a typical spelling of “dhw” “evil.”

25 Transliteration mostly follows Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 383.
Such is he who decays: all his bones are putrid, which slays the body, which weakens the bones, which makes the flesh into corruption, he stinks as he putrefies, he turns completely into numerous maggots, all maggots he becomes, as he passes to the eye of Shu, as does every god, every goddess, as all birds and all fish, as all snakes and all worms, as every flock, entirely, entirely.

Dobbin-Bennet says that this stanza “lays out the potential results of letting a body fully decompose with the end result being the dissolution of the body into maggots.”

“The use of the lexeme hmn clearly paints the description of the fully decayed deceased… hmn is perhaps used here with the same connotation as the “process of decomposition,” while the use of hw3 “to rot, to putrefy” signifies decomposition events during that overall process. The verb hw3, alongside the s-causative sgnn, describes the action which the bones are undergoing. The bones are putrefying (hw3), which in turn leads those bones to be made weak. From a forensic pathological viewpoint, it may not be the bones, per se, which are putrefying, but rather the soft tissue surrounding those bones.”

---


27 Following Dobbin-Bennett (Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 69.).

28 Or “worms” cf. Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 383.

29 “Eye of Shu” is the translation given by Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 383. Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 358. Cf. translation of Book of the Dead 154 in University of Chicago Oriental Institute, The Egyptian Book of the Dead: Documents in the Oriental Institute Museum at the University of Chicago (Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2010), 279. The text appears to write (Lapp, British museum (Londres), and Department of ancient Egypt and Sudan, The Papyrus of Nu (BM EA 10477), Plate 52, Column 9.). There may be a reference to the eye of Shu in the Book of the Heavenly Cow (for text see Hornung, Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh., 11.). In the text, Nun says to Re, “O (my) Son, Shu, [your] eye belongs to (your?) father…” (s3 Šw jrt=[k] n j=[k?]). Unfortunately, there is a break in the text following jt, so what follows is not entirely certain. However, it does seem that there may be a reference to the eye of Shu in this passage, although its significance is not entirely certain. As Spalinger’s commentary on this text notes, “It is fair to say that a cycle woven around the eye of Shu is unknown to us” (Anthony Spalinger, “The Destruction of Mankind: A Transitional Literary Text,” Studien Zur Altägyptischen Kultur, January 1, 2000, 273 n. 63, https://doi.org/10.2307/25152827.

30 Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 69.

31 Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 69–70.
It should also be noted that the text makes clear that this process is not isolated to the human corpse, but the text emphasizes that the process of decay happens to all animals as well.

The next section reads as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Jnd-hr} &= k \, j t=j \, W s j r \\
\text{wnn} &= k \, h f w=k \, n \, h w \ddot{z}=k \\
nn \, f n t w &= k \, n n \, f \ddot{z}=k \\
nn \, s n s n &= k \, n n \, j m=k \\
nn \, h p r &= k \, m \, f n t w
\end{align*}
\]

Hail my father Osiris!
You will exist in your body, you shall not \( h w \ddot{z} \)-putrefy,
You shall not become maggoty, you shall not be distended,
You shall not stink, you shall not \( j m k \)-decay,
You shall not become worms.\(^{32}\)

In this section, which Dobbin-Bennet calls the second stanza, the “description is more specific, and highlights events and stages of decomposition that are not mentioned in the first stanza.”\(^{33}\)

According to Dobbin-Bennet, in this stanza, the Egyptian terms used are related to specific stages in the process of decomposition. She writes, “In the second stanza, the general topic of the process of decomposition has been specified and negated through the syntactic and semantic structure; a structure that clearly identifies the process of decomposition: initial putrefaction \((h w \ddot{z})\), insect colonization \((f n t w)\) bloat \((f \ddot{z} j)\), cadaveric odor \((s n s n)\), advanced putrefaction \((j m k)\), and decrease in biomass resulting from necrophagous larvae \((h p r=k \, m \, f n t w)\).”\(^{34}\)

In Dobbin-Bennett’s third stanza, the deceased is identified with Khepri.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Jnk Hprj wnn h f w-(j) r dr} \\
N \, h w \ddot{z} &= j \, n \, h n=j \, n \, j m k=j \\
N n \, h p r &= j \, m \, f n t w
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{32}\) Translation following that of Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 70–71.

\(^{33}\) Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 71.

\(^{34}\) Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 71–72.
I am Khepri, my body will exist forever.
I have not putrefied, I have not decomposed, I have not further putrefied,
I will not turn into worms.
I will not pass away at the eye of Shu.\textsuperscript{36}

According to Dobbin-Bennett, “the three negations summarize three of the stages of decomposition: initial putrefaction ($hw\dot{y}$), the dissolution of the body which occurs through the process of decomposition ($hnn$), and advanced putrefaction ($jmk$).”\textsuperscript{37}

It is beyond the scope of this study to do a comprehensive examination of each of the Egyptian terms related to decomposition and decay. Instead, our primary concern with

\textsuperscript{35} Largely following the transliteration of Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 72.

\textsuperscript{36} Largely following translation of Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 73. It should be noted that the “third stanza” continues describing the continued existence of the deceased and that his body is not destroyed. Text reads: \textsuperscript{37} Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 74. $jnk$ occurs a number of times in the Pyramid Texts, most frequently paired with $hw\dot{y}$. Eaton suggests that $hw\dot{y}$ refers to wet rot, while $jnk$ refers to dry decay (Eaton, “Ancient Egyptian Concepts of Bodily Decay in the Old Kingdom Part 1, PT 684,” 49.). Evidence suggesting this may be found in PT 535 (1283 a–b).

\begin{align*}
N jnk=k & Ppy pw \\
N fdr=k & Ppy pw \\
N rdw=k & Ppy pw \\
N hmw=k & Ppy pw
\end{align*}

You have no $jnk$-rot, this Pepy;
You have no sweat, this Pepy;
You have no efflux, this Pepy;
You have no dust, this Pepy.

In these phrases, sweat and efflux are, in all likelihood, wet, while dust is clearly dry. If these phrases are to be understood to have the outer lines parallel and the inner lines parallel, then $jnk$ would be parallel to the dry substance of dust, perhaps suggesting that $jnk$ is dry rot or decay (Eaton, “Ancient Egyptian Concepts of Bodily Decay in the Old Kingdom Part 1, PT 684,” 49.). This is consistent with Dobbin-Bennett’s idea that $jnk$ refers to the advanced stages of putrefaction as the latter stages of decay would consist of more dry decay. In contrast to $hw\dot{y}$, $jnk$ is used infrequently, and although it is undesirable, as is evidenced in the Pyramid texts, it does not necessarily appear to have a particularly “dirty” or “disgusting” nature.
examining putrefaction is related to the association with ideas of dirtiness, especially as relates to daily life. Numerous terms and phrases are used, especially in funerary literature such as the Pyramid Texts, the Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead, to describe various stages and aspects of bodily decay. However, in our examination, we will focus on the terms that seem to refer primarily to putrefaction, and seem to refer to most frequently, at least outside the funerary corpus, with a dirty or disgusting connotation, namely, $\text{hw3}$, $\text{hw3t}$, and $\text{shw3}$.

$\text{hw3}$, $\text{hw3t}$, $\text{shw3}$

These three terms all contain the same root, and thus will be discussed together. The root $\text{hw3}$ can be an adjective or a verb, while $\text{hw3t}$ is a noun. The word $\text{shw3}$ is an infrequently used causative verb from the same root. Faulkner glosses the adjective as “foul, offensive,” the verb as to “rot, putrefy; smell offensive,” and the noun as “putrefaction.” The Wörterbuch gives “faulen, verwesen” for the verb and “faulige stoffe” for $\text{hw3t}$. The Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte has “Krankhaftes fault” and notes that the term can refers to part of the “Heilprozess” or “krankhafte Zustande.” Since $\text{hw3}$ and $\text{hw3t}$ refer to putrefaction, it is not surprising that these terms frequently occur in the funerary literature, but they also occur relatively frequently outside of the funerary corpus. We will look at some of the uses in the funerary corpus before turning to see how they are used in other contexts.

---

38 For a detailed, interdisciplinary study of the stages of bodily decay and the corresponding ancient Egyptian descriptions of the process see Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell.” Other recent studies of the Egyptian terms for rot include Falk, “‘My Putrefaction Is Myrrh’: The Lexicography of Decay, Gilded Coffins, and the Green Skin of Osiris.”; Eaton, “Ancient Egyptian Concepts of Bodily Decay in the Old Kingdom Part 1, PT 684.”


41 Wb III: 50–51.

As seen above, Chapter 154 of the Book of the Dead seems to suggest that \textit{hw3} refers to the earlier stages of putrefaction, while \textit{jmk} refers to the later and more advanced stages of decomposition.\textsuperscript{43} Chapter 154 also indicates that \textit{hw3} produces an odor. Thus, in the following study of \textit{hw3}, we will also consider which senses appear to be engaged by \textit{hw3} or \textit{hw3t}.

\textbf{\textit{hw3} and \textit{hw3t} Referring to Liquid Putrefaction}

The terms \textit{hw3} or \textit{hw3t} seem to frequently refer to something with a wet or liquid nature. For example, Coffin Text 73 concerns putrefaction.\textsuperscript{44} In this spell, Isis and Nephthys come to the corpse. Then the text reads:

\begin{quote}
\textit{hw=sn s\lowercase{3}b} \textit{hw3wt=k} r t\lowercase{3} m \textit{rn=k pw n s\lowercase{3}b-\textit{sm}}\textsuperscript{c} \textit{hw=sn} \textit{dw} \textit{st(j) h3t=k r t\lowercase{3} m \textit{rn=k pw n Hr}}\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

May they protect the oozing\textsuperscript{47} of your putrefaction to the earth in this your name of Upper Egyptian Jackal. May they prevent the bad-of-smell of your corpse to the earth, in this your name of Horus.

In this spell, Isis and Nephthys prevent the decay of the corpse. The \textit{hw3wt} is said to \textit{s\lowercase{3}b} (to flow, to drip) to the earth.\textsuperscript{48} The verb \textit{s\lowercase{3}b} also appears in case 32 of the Edwin Smith Surgical papyrus (11,5). In this case, \textit{mr\lowercase{h}t}-oil is placed on the head of the patient in order to drip down to his neck: “you must put \textit{mr\lowercase{h}t}-oil on his head in order to flow to his neck” (\textit{rd.hr=k mr\lowercase{h}t m tp=f r

\textsuperscript{43} Dobbin-Bennett, “Rotting in Hell,” 74.

\textsuperscript{44} Adriaan de Buck, \textit{The Egyptian Coffin texts. I, I}, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1935), 303–5. The spell is very similar to PT 532. For discussion of this pyramid text as it relates to rot see Eaton, “Ancient Egyptian Concepts of Bodily Decay in the Old Kingdom Part 1, PT 684.”

\textsuperscript{45} Three of the five sources for this spell determine \textit{hw3wt} with a pustule with liquid flowing out (Aa3).

\textsuperscript{46} Buck, \textit{The Egyptian Coffin texts. I, I}, 304a-d.

\textsuperscript{47} Cf. Allen, \textit{The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts}, 169.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Wb III}, 420.3–4.
In Coffin Text 73, the verb $s3b$ might have been chosen for the purpose of word play with the $s3b$-jackal at the end of the phrase. It seems that $hw3wt$-putrefaction is a wet or liquid substance, since it drips or oozes from the corpse to the earth. The following line indicates a close connection with a foul smell as well.

Chapter 94 of the Book of the Dead also suggests that $hw3jt$ can have a wet or liquid aspect. The chapter is entitled “Formula for requesting a water-pot and writing palette” ($r n dbh p3s gstj$). In the spell, the deceased commands:

$$Jn n=j \ hw3jt \ Wsjr \ ss=j \ jm$$

“Bring me the putrefaction of Osiris, that I may write with them.”

Clearly, the putrefaction, which $hw3jt$ refers to here, must be a liquid because it can function as ink. This is probably metaphorical, but the $hw3jt$ must have some kind of wet or liquid association in order for the metaphor to be meaningful.

Another example is on the Recto of the Magical Papyrus Leiden 1343 +34S (XXV1+x+2–4) where it reads:

$$Kt \ [z]nf=k \ nn \ Hr \ ryt=k \ nn \ Sth \ hw[\beta] \ wt^{52} \ nn \ Sth \ fdt=k \ nn \ Mn[n]ty-n-jrty^{53} \ jnn=j \ r \ dr \ [st-\eta] \ nt[r] \ st<{\epsilon} \ mwt \ st<{\epsilon} \ h[t](y) \ st<{\epsilon} \ hft(j)<\epsilon> \ st<{\epsilon} \ d3yw \ […] \ mn \ n \ mn(t) \ dd \ mdw \ sp$$

---


50 Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 213.

51 Transliteration and translation following Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 213.

52 Pustule $\Theta$ determinative.


54 Restorations are those of Beck, Exorcism, Illness and Demons in an Ancient Near Eastern Context: The Egyptian Magical Papyrus Leiden 1343 + 345., 18:78–79.
“Another: this is your blood, Horus! This is your pus, Seth! This is your putrefaction, Seth! This is your sweat, Mekhentieniirti, which I have brought so as to remove the effect of a god[dess], the effect of a dead person, the effect of a male enemy, the effect of a female enemy, the effect of an opponent […] NN born of NN.

Words to be said seven times.

In this spell the blood of Horus forms a couplet with the pus of Seth. Similarly, the putrefaction of Seth forms a couplet with the sweat of Mekhentieniirti. Sweat is a liquid substance on the surface of the skin. The parallelism would suggest that hw3wt is also a liquid. Putrefactive liquids seeping out of the corpse might seem comparable to sweat to the Egyptians.

In regard to the senses, it seems that hw3 as a liquid could be experienced as sight and touch. The liquid or wetness could have been observed by sight as well as by touch. Presumably, the feeling of damp or wet putrefaction could be considered unpleasant, as, for example, in Coffin Text 73, the goal was for it to be prevented.

\textit{hw3 as Odor}

In Coffin Text 334, there is a close connection between hw3/hw3t and odor. In the spell it reads:

\begin{align*}
\text{hw3} . \text{n} = \text{j} & \text{ jm sns}n = \text{j jm m rn} = \text{j pw n sns}n \text{ nm} \text{t ntr hw3t} = \text{j pw } ? \text{ ntjw ddw n} = s \text{ mwt} = j \text{ Hwt- hr r tp} = s sT = j \text{ pw sntrw} [\text{ddw n} = s \text{ mwt} = j] \text{ Hwt- hr r k3p} = s
\end{align*}

\begin{footnotes}
55 It is not entirely certain what the spell is for due to the lacuna in the papyrus and the fact that the title only says “another” (Beck, \textit{Exorcism, Illness and Demons in an Ancient Near Eastern Context: The Egyptian Magical Papyrus Leiden I 343 + 345}, 18:79.

56 On ryt “pus” (\textit{\textsuperscript{\textregistered}}) see Deines and Westendorf, \textit{Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Erste Hälfte (?–r).}, 7:521–22.


58 Before this portion of the text, there is a lacuna, then the phrase “children of the great god” (n\textit{nhw nw ntr} ?t). Unfortunately, because of the lacuna, the immediately prior context is uncertain.

59 Buck, \textit{The Egyptian Coffin texts. IV, IV}, 182s–83.
\end{footnotes}
I putrefied there, I smelled there in this my name of the smell of man and god. My putrefaction is the myrrh which my mother Hathor put on her head. My scent is the incense which my mother Hathor put on her censer.

Clearly, this text implies a close connection between $hw\bar{3}$ putrefaction and odor. The deceased says that his putrefaction is myrrh. This text seems to imply that normally putrefying has a foul smell, but in this case, what is normally a foul smell, actually is, or has been transformed into, myrrh and incense for this deceased person.

The verso of the Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus contains a remedy for a woman who is not able to menstruate. The text (verso 3,13–4,3) provides a recipe which is then smeared on her vagina.

$Jr\ h\bar{3}=k\ st\ hr\ mn\ r-jb=s\ n\ jj.n\ {n}=s\ m\ hsmn\ gmm=k\ hwt\ m\ gs\ hry\ h\bar{3}(?=)=s\ dd.hr=k\ r=s\ sn^e\ pw\ n\ snf\ (15)\ hr\ jd=s\ jr.hr=s\ n=s\ w/m\ 1/16\ mrh.t\ r-8\ hnk.t\ ndmt\ 1/8\ (16)\ psj\ swrj$

---

60 Faulkner translates sssn as “brotherly” in this passage (Faulkner, The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts. 1, 1, 258.) However, while sssn can refer to brotherliness ($Wb$ IV, 172–173), in this context with reference to putrefaction, myrrh, and incense it makes more sense to read sssn as “to smell, inhale” ($Wb$ IV, 172.2–10) or perhaps even “to stink” ($Wb$ IV, 174.3).

61 Faulkner, The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts. 1, 1, 258; Buck, The Egyptian Coffin texts. IV, IV, 182.


63 The text has $n\ jj.n\ n=s\ m\ hsmn$. The phrase as written is difficult to interpret as it stands. If it is a $sdm.n=f$ followed by $n=s$ (to her), it seems that the subject has been omitted. The note by P. Dils in the TLA edition suggests deleting the preposition $m$ thus making $hsmn$ the subject (“Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae - Displaying a Segment of Cotext,” accessed March 11, 2023, https://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/servlet/GetCtxt?u=guest&c=0&l=0&db=0&tc=1642&ws=18&mv=3.). Deleting the $m$ preposition would make the text align with the expression in pEbers no. 833 (97, 1–2) ($n\ jj.n\ n=s\ hsmn=s$). Another explanation could be dittography of the $n$. A third explanation could be that the subject is an implied 3fs suffix pronoun. Regardless of exactly how one interprets this, the basic idea is the same; the woman’s menstruation has not come as expected. Cf. Resche, Le papyrus médical Edwin Smith, 185.

64 Only the pustule sign is written and thus the word that is meant is not entirely certain. François Resche suggests $h\bar{3}$ (navel) (Resche, Le papyrus médical Edwin Smith, 186 n. 198.), and “navel” is the translation in Evžen Strouhal, Břetislav Vachala, and Hana Vymazalová, eds., The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians. 1: Surgery, Gynecology, Obstetrics, and Pediatrics / Eugen Strouhal; Břetislav Vachala; Hana Vymazalová (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2014), 115.
If you examine a woman having pain in her belly and she cannot enter into menstruation, and you find things in the upper side of her naval, you should say about it, “It is an obstruction of blood on her uterus.” You must make for her: \(\frac{1}{16}\) wam, \(\frac{1}{8}\) oil, and \(\frac{1}{8}\) sweet beer. (16) Cook and drink on four days. Also, doing for her causing the blood to descend: sefetj-oil, cumin, eye-paint, and sweet myrrh which is made into one thing and smeared on her pubic region many times. (18) Then you put ears of the hedjeret-plant on oil. If later she/it rots, you must rub her and anoint her groins there many times. You must put myrrh and incense between her thighs which makes the smoke thereof enter her flesh.

In this case, the problem is “delayed menstruation connected with pains of the hypogastrium and an uncertain finding above the navel.” The prescription for the case “includes three different medicines, which are to be applied in various ways:” the first is to be drunk, the second is to be applied externally, and the third is to be applied conditionally—if the patient experiences

---

65 The Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte suggests that this is another writing of ḵns although the exact meaning of the term is not certain (Deines and Westendorf, Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Zweite Hälfte (h–ḏ), 7:907–8).

66 Following François Resche who notes that r-jb is usually translated “stomach,” but he suggests that “belly” is a better translation considering ancient Egyptian anatomical knowledge and the context of this case (Resche, Le papyrus médical Edwin Smith, 185 n. 194).

67 While the determinative of hdrt indicates that a plant is referred to (plants), exactly what plant is not certain. Allen translated as “aardwolf ear plants” (Allen, The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt, 111.) and this is followed by Eaton (Eaton, “Ancient Egyptian Concepts of Bodily Decay in the Old Kingdom Part 1, PT 684,” 53.). Deines and Grapow simply said it was the “Ohr des ḏdr.t Tieres als Name für eine Pflanze” (Deines and Grapow, Wörterbuch Der Ägyptischen Drogennamen, 6:290.). Vymazalová translates as “the plant ‘hyena’s ear’” (Strouhal, Vachala, and Vymazalová, The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians. 1, 116).

68 Allen translates as “after she begins bleeding” (Allen, The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt, 111.), but as Eaton notes, “hw3 does not have this meaning in any other context” (Eaton, “Ancient Egyptian Concepts of Bodily Decay in the Old Kingdom Part 1, PT 684,” 53 n. 121.). It is also possible that the hw3-rot is referring to the mrHt-oil and not necessarily to the woman herself (Resche, Le papyrus médical Edwin Smith, 187 n. 218.).

69 Strouhal, Vachala, and Vymazalová, The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians. 1, 147–48. In their commentary on this case, the authors suggest several possibilities for the medical diagnosis of the case.

putrefaction (ḥwꜣ). The putrefaction could refer to the woman, \(^{71}\) or it may refer to the remedy which was smeared on her, \(^{72}\) or perhaps the distinction was not considered important. Since the remedy is smeared on the woman, if ḥwꜣ here includes, as seems likely, the smell of putrefaction, the precise distinction of whether the remedy or the woman began to “putrefy” might not have been considered significant. According to Eaton, “the goal of the remedy is two-fold, to open the passage and to release the menstrual blood.”\(^{73}\) Perhaps, the remedy may result in the release of a discharge, which is foul-smelling and similar to putrefaction.\(^{74}\) Possibly, in order to combat the foul smell of this discharge, the pleasant smells of myrrh and incense are applied in order to counteract the foul smell coming out of the woman. In this case, ḥwꜣ (as a verb) might refer to a liquid discharge that is foul or rotten smelling.

\(\text{Ḥwꜣ}\) putrefaction appears in other cases in the medical texts. For example, the beginning Papyrus Ebers 522 (70, 12–14) reads:

\(^{71}\) The most common interpretation seems to be that the 3fs pronoun refers to the woman. See Allen, The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt, 111; Strouhal, Vachala, and Vymazalová, The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians. 1, 116; Eaton, “Ancient Egyptian Concepts of Bodily Decay in the Old Kingdom Part 1, PT 684,” 53.

\(^{72}\) Resche, Le papyrus médical Edwin Smith, 187 n. 218.


\(^{74}\) Eaton, “Ancient Egyptian Concepts of Bodily Decay in the Old Kingdom Part 1, PT 684,” 53. Some translators have understood the term ḥwꜣ in the condition of the third case as simply a reference to the menstrual blood flowing again (Allen, The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt, 111; Strouhal, Vachala, and Vymazalová, The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians. 1, 116, 148.). However, this understanding is problematic as pointed out by Eaton. She notes that “ḥwꜣ does not have this meaning in any other context,” “common terms for menstruation (ḥsmm) and blood (snfw) appear earlier in this remedy,” and “if the woman had started bleeding at this point, she would have been cured as menstruation was restored” (Eaton, “Ancient Egyptian Concepts of Bodily Decay in the Old Kingdom Part 1, PT 684,” 53 n. 121.). It is possibly that ḥwꜣ does refer to blood flowing, but it is not the normal flow, but is especially foul or rotten smelling and thus needs another prescription. Breasted clearly understood ḥwꜣ as referring here to a foul smell as he translated the phrase as “if afterward she has an evil odor” (Breasted, The Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus: Published in Facsimile and Hieroglyphic Transliteration with Translation and Commentary, 3, 4:490.)
Remedies for wounds: (12) first day: fat of a bull in order to putrefy it, or flesh of a bull. If, however, it putrefies a lot, you should bandage it on bread of fermented barley in order to dry it (14) beneath it. You should repeat bandaging him on fat in order to putrefy it.

This text is interesting because $hw\dot{3}$ seems to be desired, since the fat or meat of the bull is used to induce $hw\dot{3}$ in a wound. According to Westendorf, $hw\dot{3}$ can refer to the “Heilprozess.”

Perhaps it is going too far to say that $hw\dot{3}$ is “healing,” but in the case of the wound, the Egyptians do seem to have considered $hw\dot{3}$ to be a necessary part of healing a wound. However, the positive aspect of $hw\dot{3}$ in wound healing was limited, since if the wound putrefies too much, steps must be taken to lessen it. $Hw\dot{3}$ must be wet here since the fermented barely bread is said to be used to dry it, if it putrefies too much. It is possible that $hw\dot{3}$ refers to the odor of a wound as well. It is not uncommon for wounds to have a foul or even putrid odor (or to leak liquids), and malodor of a wound can be due to a variety of causes. Perhaps, since the Egyptians frequently experienced foul odors from wounds which eventually healed, they associated the odor as a part of the healing process.

In Ebers no. 102 (25,3–8) and 296 (52, 1–7) (these cases are virtually identical), a patient has pain in his or her stomach because mucus ($stt$) cannot find a way out of his or her belly ($ht$).
Since the stt cannot get out of the belly, it putrefies (hwḥ) in the belly and turns into worms, but after the person passes them, they feel better.

While some hwḥ in medical texts is considered positive, in other cases, it is negative. For example, Ebers no. 491 (68, 12–15) is entitled:

\[Kt\ nt\ sd\ t\ hwḥ=s\]

Another for a burn when it putrefies.

This seems to imply that putrefaction (hwḥ) in a burn is bad, and thus requires a remedy. Similarly, in instructions for how to treat a split ear (no. 766f, 91,12–19) the text makes clear that “it should not putrefy at all!” (91,16 jm=f hwḥ rsy). The word hwḥ may be largely descriptive of conditions of a wound or ailment, and thus, it can be positive or negative depending on the context and circumstances.

The verb hwḥ appears in the Satire of the Trades in a description of the profession of the stnwy. Unfortunately, the exact identity of the profession of the stnwy is not entirely certain. Brunner did not translate the term,79 Lictheim translated as “stoker,”80 Hoch translated as “fire-tender,”81 and Jӓger as “Der Kӧhler.”82 The description of the stnwy is as follows:

\[(17,\ I)^{83}\ stnwy\ \ db\ f\ \ hwḥ\ sy\ m\ \ h\ \ ḥw\ t^{84}\]

79 Hellmut Brunner, Die Lehre des Cheti, Sohnes des Duauf (Glückstadt ; Hamburg; New York: Augustin, 1944), 23.

80 Lictheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature., 235.


82 Jӓger, Altägyptische Berufstypologien, 145. See also Jӓger’s discussion of the term on page 95.

83 Following Jӓger’s edition and chapter and line numbers (Jӓger, Altägyptische Berufstypologien, LXI–LXIII.

84 In the various sources for this text (see Jager), hwḥ is most frequently written with the pustule determinative although a few sources use the death stick (Z6).

85 Similarly, most writings of hḥw include the pustule although some use the death stick (Z6).
The *stnwy*—his fingers are putrefied. The smell corresponds to (what is in) corpses. It is specifically the fingers of the *stnwy*, which are said to be *hw3*. The next phrase clearly indicates that the foul smell of *hw3* is primary. The mention of corpses also indicates that the foul smell of *hw3* is related to death, specifically that of decaying flesh and putrefaction. The profession of the *stnwy* marks the second time that foul smell is a major theme in the satire (the first being the coppersmith (*hmtwyw* 4.3). However, since *hnš* was the term used for the smell of the coppersmith, the malodors associated with these trades are distinct and each of these professions were associated with a different kind of foul odor.

### Putrefying Food and Drink

Although many references to *hw3* are describing the putrefaction or rotting of a corpse, it can also be used of food or drink going bad. For example, in the Tale of Two Brothers, after the tree of the younger brother Bata is cut down and he dies, a description is given of the older brother in his house and how he finds out what has happened.

(12,8) *jw* *(J)* npw p3 sn *3 n B3t3 hr ∗k r p3y=f pr jw=f (9) hr hms j∗ drt=f jw tw hr djt n=f w*f n tbw n hnkt jw=f hr jr stf (10) jw.tw hr djt n=f ky n jrpw jw=f hr jr hw3wt

86 The profession *stnwy* is written with the inclusion of the pustule (⊙) determinative in most of the sources.

87 As noted by Jäger, the fingers are “thematized” several times in the Satire (4,3 and 13,2) Jäger, *Altaegyptische Berufstypologien*, 177. It should be noted that the fingers also were a motif the last time smell played a major theme in 4,3.

88 There are several other terms which also can refer to aspects of food going bad. For example, in the Pyramid and Coffin texts, the verb *hsd* refers to bread going moldy (*Wb* III, 339.4; Molen, *A Hieroglyphic Dictionary of Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 410.). The verb *w3* refers to beer going bad or becoming sour (*Wb* I, 172.3–5; Molen, *A Hieroglyphic Dictionary of Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 68.). For example, both these terms occur together in Coffin Text 327 (Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin texts. IV*, 163g-h.). It reads: “It is his bread which extinguishes moldiness. It is his beer which extinguishes spoiling” *(r=f pw jhm hsd hnk=f pw jhm w3)*. Cf. PT 521 (RDA) Staatliche Museen (Berlin and Kurt Heinrich Sethe, *Die Altauergyptischen Pyramidentexte: nach den Papierabdrücken und Photographien des Berliner Museums. Zweiter Band, Zweiter Band*, (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1910), 1226a-b.) and CT 67 (Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin texts. I, I*, 284c-d.).
(12,8) Then Anubis the older brother of Bata was entering into his house. He (9) was sitting and washing his hands. One was bringing to him a jar of beer, but it was overflowing. (10) Then one was giving to him another of wine, but it was producing putrefaction.

Since Bata had previously predicted that this would happen, Anubis is able to deduce that the cedar tree with Bata’s heart has been cut down (8,4–6). Hw3wt would seem to indicate that the wine has spoiled or gone bad. Since wine is already a liquid, it seems that hw3wt is more likely indicating that wine has an odor of foulness or putrefaction, although it is possible that the wine had a bad taste as well.

Another possible connection between hw3 and food may be found in Book of the Dead Chapter 149. At mound 10 of those of the city of Qahu, it refers to “the ones who eat fresh things and who recoil at putrefying things” (wnmy w3d hnmnmw hw3t). Quirke translates as “you who eat fresh meat and recoil at decomposed meat” (wnmy w3d hnmnmw hw3t). Quirke’s translation takes these as referring to meat, but the TLA translation suggests vegetables.

Thomas Allen

89 The word stf appears to be a relatively rare word. It appears here and earlier in the text in Bata’s prediction with this spelling (8,6). Lesko glosses as “bad, spoiled” (Lesko and Lesko, A Dictionary of Late Egyptian, 95.). Lichtheim translated as “fermented” (Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature, 544.) while it is translated as “it produced froth” in Simpson et al (Simpson et al., The Literature of Ancient Egypt, 87.). Perhaps the word stf in Papyrus Orbiney is the same word as stf “to pour off;” “abgiessen” (Wh, 4, 342; Deines and Westendorf, Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Zweite Hälfte (h–d), 7:818; Wilson, A Ptolemaic Lexicon: A Lexicographical Study of the Texts in the Temple of Edfu., 78:964–65.) The word stf may also appear in the Bremner Rhind Papyrus of the overthrowing of Apep (32,2 Faulkner, The papyrus Bremner-Rhind, (British Museum no. 10188), 86.). Faulkner translates the phrase as, “The water shall rage(?) against thee” and suggests that it refers to water raging or rising up as a storm against Apep (Faulkner, “The Bremner-Rhind Papyrus,” 1938, 46, 51. It would seem if stf in Papyrus Orbiney is the same word as the other examples, then the beer of Anubis would have overflowed from the jar or something along those lines. However, the context implies that the beer has gone bad or spoiled in some way. Perhaps the beer overflowing or pouring out of the jar somehow indicated spoiling to the Egyptians.

90 According to Papyrus Nu (BM EA 10477) (Lapp, British museum (Londres), and Department of ancient Egypt and Sudan, The Papyrus of Nu (BM EA 10477), Plate 85, Columns 67-68. Cf. Sir Ernest Alfred Thompson Wallis Budge, Budge The Chapters Of Coming Forth By Day, 1898, 375.).

91 Translation and transliteration Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 361.

translates as “eaters of fresh food, who disdain carrion.” The contrast is probably just between fresh and rotting in general, without necessarily specifying a specific type of food.

Although it does not concern human consumption of food or drink, Coffin Text 369 may suggest that eating putrefaction (ḥwꜣꜣwt) was considered repulsive.

\[ Pr \ r(?)^95 \ sȝwty sw jw \ wnm.\,n\,=\,k \ pnw \ bwt \ Wsr \ pw \ jw \ w\,s.\,n\,=\,k \ ksw \ mjwt \ ḫwꜣꜣwt \ hsf \ ḫꜣꜣw \ m \ ḫṛt\,nṯ\]p

Go out! O snake (by) the movements of Shu. You have eaten a mouse. This is the disgust of Osiris. You have chewed the bones of a putrefied cat. DRIVING AWAY THE SNAKE IN THE NECROPOLIS.

A version of this spell also occurs as chapter 33 in the Book of the Dead.

\[ R \ n \ hsf \ ḫꜣꜣw \ dd \ mdw \ jn \ jmy\,r \ pr \ n \ jmy\,r \ htnt \ nw \ m\,jt \ hrw \ jr \ n \ jmy\,r \ pr \ Jmn\,htp \ J \ rrk \ m \ šm \ mk \ gb \ šw \ ḫf \ r.k \ iw \ wnm.\,n\,=\,k \ pnw \ bwt \ r\,f \ iw \ w\,s.\,n\,=\,k \ ksw \ nw \ myt \ ḫwꜣꜣt\]p

93 Institute, The Egyptian Book of the Dead, 262.


95 This is a difficult phrase to decipher (𓊆𓊃𓊃), Faulkner says “31a is unintelligible as it stands, and is evidently a garbled version” Faulkner, The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts. Vol. II, Vol. II, 8. Faulkner translated as “Go forth, O snake, at the movements of Shu.” Van der Molen notes several different words for snake that may be adapted to fit in this context: rṯ (Molen, A Hieroglyphic Dictionary of Egyptian Coffin Texts, 267.), rrp, (Molen, A Hieroglyphic Dictionary of Egyptian Coffin Texts, 283.), rrk (Molen, A Hieroglyphic Dictionary of Egyptian Coffin Texts, 283.). Probably one of these words should be read in this text although what, precisely, word for snake is meant is uncertain. Quirke suggests the Coffin Text version of this spell uses “the term prr “snake emerging (from the ground)” Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 106.

96 The rubric in yellow only appears in K1T.


98 Transliteration in Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 106.
“Formula for repelling a snake. Words spoken by the estate manager of the treasurer, Nu, true of voice, born to the estate manager, Amenhotep. O rrk-snake!\(^9\) Do not move! See, Geb and Shu are stood against you. You ate a mouse, the disgust of Ra. You chewed the bones of a rotted cat."\(^10\)

In many ways this spell raises more questions than answers and can lead to numerous speculations. Perhaps this spell indicates that mice were considered unclean or impure. We should note that Papyrus Ebers 847 (98, 1–2) gives instructions for how to keep mice (\(pnw\)) away, which may suggest that they were considered pests.\(^10\) Chapter 33 may also suggest that a \(hw\text{-}\text{cat}\) is unclean, perhaps due to its putrefaction. Similarly, the text could suggest that the snake may become unclean because it eats these. These suggestions are largely speculation; however, at the very least, it seems reasonable to infer from this spell that eating something containing putrefaction could render something unclean or undesirable.

\(hw\text{-}\text{heart}\)

The use of \(hw\) in conjunction with the heart (\(h\text{\text{'ty}}\)) is a Late Egyptian idiom. The \textit{Wörterbuch} notes that with reference to the heart, \(hw\) means “sich gramen, verdriesslich sein.”\(^10\) In Papyrus Bologna 1094,\(^13\) the scribe Pwhem writes to his lord Mahu in order to inform him of some things.\(^10\) Toward the end of the letter, he asks him to pass by Memphis, since his heart is worried or concerned, literally, “heart putrefied.”


\(^10\) Translation in Quirke, \textit{Going out in Daylight}, 106.

\(^11\) If mice were considered unclean, it was not in an absolute sense, since, in some funerary contexts, mice appear in a positive role as protectors (’Aboudy, “Mice as Protectors in the Books of the Netherworld..,” 115–26.).

\(^12\) \textit{Wb III}, 50:16

\(^13\) Gardiner, \textit{Late-Egyptian Miscellanies.}, 7:5.

\(^14\) Caminos, \textit{Late-Egyptian Miscellanies.}, 1:16.
Likewise, you should pass by here in Memphis, since my heart putrefied and I did not know (how to) send to you.

Similarly, Papyrus Sallier IV contains a letter of rebuke to the deputy (*jd nw*) Mentikhepeshef, because he sent a bad load of grain.  

The end of the surviving text tells Mentikhepeshef:

(9,5) *y3 jḥ [p3y].w*  

What is the point of this causing your heart to putrefy since you know their conduct?

Another example of the idiom of the putrefying heart occurs in the Tale of Two Brothers. The chief launderer of Pharaoh becomes dismayed or worried about fighting with Pharaoh every day over the smell of the tress of hair in the clothes. The expression used to describe his dismay is that “his heart was exceedingly putrefied very much after fighting with him” (11,1 *jw h3ty=f ḫw3wt r jkr sp sn m-s3 n3 ʿḥ3wty m-dj=f*).  

The context of each of these examples seems to indicate that the idiom of *h3ty ḫw3* implies worry or concern, or perhaps even depression or despair. In any case, the putrefaction is clearly not positive. Perhaps a person with a “putrefying heart,” was unpleasant to be around, similar to being around the smell of putrefaction.

---


**shw3**

According to the *Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte*, *shw3* occurs in the medical corpus “nur in den Magendiagnosen belegt” and is glossed as “Faulnisprodukt.” The term occurs in two remedies in Papyrus Ebers. Remedy 192 (37, 17–20) reads:

\[(37, 17) \text{Jr} \, h3= k \, s \, hr \, mn \, r \, jb= f \, jw= f \, k3s= s \, \mathit{shw} \, jr \, (18) \, gm= k \, st \, hnty \, r \, h3t= f \, jw \, jr. \, ty= f \, \mathit{ssh}= ty \, jw \, hnty= f \, t3hb= f \, (19) \, dd. \, hr= k \, r= f \, sh3w \, p\, w \, nw \, stwt= f \, n \, h3. \, n(=s) \, r \, nplw= f \, m \, stw= f \]

If you examine a man suffering in his heart, since he is vomiting much, if you find it at the front of his front, while his eyes are inflamed and his face (nose?) is running(?). Then you should say to him, “It is the putrefactive products of his secretions.”

Remedy 196 (39, 2–7) also uses the causative *shw3*. In this remedy, a man is suffering in his heart/stomach (*jb*) and a *hsd* swelling has produced *shw3 ryt* “putrefactive products of pus.”

Perhaps, the most interesting reference to *shw3*, in regards to dirt, occurs in the Triumphal Stela of Piye. The context is the siege of Hermopolis. The text indicates that as the siege wore on, the city began to smell.

\[(32) \, hpr. \, n \, hrw \, jw \, Wnw \, shw3= s \, n \, fnd \, g3 \, m \, (33) \, hnm= s\]

As days passed, Hermopolis was causing a putrefying (smell) to the nose, lacking in its sweet smell.

According to Grimal, *shw3* is a rare causative verb that refers to the “smell of decay,” and *hnm* here does not refer to a “good odor,” but instead to “pure air” or “the possibility of breathing.” Ritner translated as, “Days passed and Hermopolis became foul to the nose, deprived of its

---

ability to breathe.”

Lichtheim translated as “Days passed, and Un was a stench to the nose, for lack of air to breathe.”

The word *hnm* can refer to breathing air, but it can also refer to smell or odor, usually a sweet or pleasant odor. Although most translators adopt the view of *hnm* as referring primarily to breathing here, we should also consider the possibility that a pleasant odor is meant. The actual hieroglyphic phrase is ꔬ8. As can be seen, there is some difficulty here, since the *ndm*-pod appears to be written in the middle of the word *hnm*. Perhaps the *ndm* sign was meant as a determinative and was accidentally transposed in the writing. In any case, the presence of this sign here may be an indication that a sweet or pleasant smell was meant in contrast to the decaying smell of *sHw3*.

Although today cities are often thought of as having an unpleasant smell, ancient Egyptians not infrequently described their cities as full of pleasant smells. According to Goldsmith:

To the ancient Egyptians, the smell of the city was a symbol of civilization, peace, and authority. Cities were the spatial and olfactory representatives of the concept of maat, the world of peace, justice, order, and truth. The smell of the city was embodied by the fragrance of perfume oils and unguents. The pleasant aroma of cities, symbolized by the scent of perfume, was an inseparable part of urban life and culture in ancient Egypt.

---

111 Ritner, *The Libyan Anarchy*, 481.


If Goldsmith is correct that the Egyptians conceptualized the city as a locus of pleasant smells, then it makes sense that the stela would indicate that the city had lost its formerly pleasant spell. During the siege, the smell of rottenness and decay filled the city, instead of the smell of oils, perfumes, and unguents. Whether or not the city actually smelled like these aromatics, rather than human and animal waste, body odor, and garbage, is not as important as the fact that the Egyptians’ conception of the city was of a pleasant-smelling place (or at least the conception of the elites or official propaganda was). Goldsmith further comments that “what cities and pleasant smells had in common was that they both required a central government.” Furthermore, “The world of cities, justice, and sweet scents were inseparable matters. When there was order, truth, and justice, or in other words maat, perfume pervaded the sky and the land, and the sweet aroma filled the court halls. It was the king’s duty to assure the presence of sweet scents. The king was commissioned by the gods to bring cities, justice, and fragrance to the world, which provided a livable environment for society.”

In the context of the Piye stela then, the emphasis on the odor in the city of Hermopolis may function on more than one level, since the city is in rebellion against the “rightful” king. When the city is in rebellion, it loses its formerly sweet smell and instead is filled with the smell of rottenness and decay. It may also be relevant that the motif of the smell of cities seems to appear again later in the stela with reference to the city of Memphis. After Piye has conquered the city of Memphis but before he personally enters the city, “His Majesty sent men into it” who were “(97) purifying Memphis with natron and incense.”

---

115 For discussion of the importance of cities in Egyptian ideology see Ragazzoli, “Why Ancient Egyptians Longed for Their Cities? City, Nostalgia and Identity Fashioning in the New Kingdom.”


117 Ritner, The Libyan Anarchy, 486.
CHAPTER 6: FOUL ODORS

In recent years there has been an increase in the study of the roles and importance of odors and scents in Ancient Egypt. In our study, we will focus on “bad” smells, especially as they may relate to the concept of dirtiness in ancient Egypt. Thus, we will not examine all of the Egyptian terms for odor and smell, but only those which are frequently used for stench or foul odors.

It is helpful to note a few general things about ancient Egyptian perceptions of odor, before beginning our examination of specifically bad odors. It is worthwhile to note at the outset, that odors can be perceived to be closely connected with essence, or identity, and contagion. As Rozin and Nemeroff explain, “There is a relation between essence, viewed as a physical substance, and odor. Both can constitute individual, unique, and invisible carriers of identity. An individual’s odor can be left behind, as a residue to be incorporated by others, as can his or her essence.” Thus, we should not be surprised if odors were associated with identity, as well as ideas of contagion and contamination, in ancient Egypt.

---


Smell was closely linked with identity for the ancient Egyptians. The relationship between sweet fragrance and divinity is well established, and the presence of a deity in Egyptian texts can be indicated by their pleasant odor. Indeed, the word sntr seems to be related to the word ntr, “god,” suggesting the close association between the odor of incense and divinity. The divine scent is also “a means of identifying the deceased in a way that they will be accepted as one belonging among the gods.” For example, Pyramid Text 412 says,

\[(730c–d) \text{st}=k \text{ m st}=\text{ sn fdt}=k \text{ m fdt psDt} \]

Your scent being their scent, your sweat being the sweat of the ennead.

---

3 Price, “Sniffing out the Gods: Archaeology with the Senses.,” 144–45. The close connection between odor and identity is not unique to ancient Egypt. According to Classen et al., family members can identify each other by smell alone (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, *Aroma*, 2).


7 See also PT 508, 524, 576, 637. For further discussion of this see Price, “Sniffing out the Gods: Archaeology with the Senses.” 145.
In the Book of the Dead Papyrus of Ani (BM EA 10470),\(^8\) as the deceased enters the broad hall (\(wsht\)), Anubis says to Osiris,

\[
hrw s jw m t3 mrj jw=f rhy w2tn dmjn=nt htp.kw snsn=j stj=f m w\(^5\) jm=tn
\]

A man is heard coming from the Land of the Reed, he knows our way and our landing-stage, I am satisfied: I sense his odor as one of you.\(^9\)

Apparently, since the smell of the deceased is the same as the smell of Osiris, he is allowed to enter the hall. Thus, it seems that one of the goals of the deceased is to identify his odor with the gods rather than his own odor.\(^10\) This can be accomplished by the deceased taking the eye of Horus, receiving offerings of incense, and/or being anointed with aromatic oils.\(^11\)

The numerous references to sweet smells and fumigations in ancient Egyptian texts testifies not only to the importance of pleasant smells to the ancient Egyptians, but it also might suggests that bad odors were ubiquitous and needed to be constantly combatted. That the burning of incense and other pleasant fragrances was a constant practice in Egyptian temples is well known.\(^12\) While this is in part to ensure the constant presence of the deity, who is represented by sweet fragrance, the emphasis on offering these fragrances to the deity may also be an indication that preventing the presence of unpleasant odors was a constant battle.

Although it is rarely explicitly stated in Egyptian texts, the need to maintain pleasant smells in private homes was also important to the ancient Egyptians. For example, Papyrus Ebers

\(^8\) Labeled Chapter 125A or Chapter 194. See discussion in Quirke, *Going out in Daylight*, 495.

\(^9\) Transliteration and translation following Quirke, *Going out in Daylight*, 495.


\(^12\) For description of a variety of the scents of the temple see Goldsmith, “Smellscapes in Ancient Egypt,” 644–47.
852 (98, 12–14b) is for “fumigation which is done in order to sweeten the smell of the house or garments” (k3pt jrwt r snedm stj pr hbsw r-pw). A list of ingredients follows. Then these ingredients are “made into one mass placed on the fire” (98, 13b–14b jrw m hwt w7t rdw jm hr htr). This recipe implies that there were odors considered unpleasant that would get into one’s house or clothes. The need to “sweeten” the smell of the house implies that without this practice, the opposite might occur. The Egyptians seemed to value pleasant smells in their clothes and homes.

The next spell (pEbers 853 (98, 14b–18b) communicates a similar idea:

\[ ky\ jr(w)\ hmt\ r=s\ rdj=tw\ nn\ n(y)\ phrt\ mj\ ssm\ pn\ hr\ hjt\ ps(w)\ 3mjw\ jr\ m\ jppwt\ k3p.hr=sn\ jm=sn\ jw\ gjt\ jr=sn\ dpt\ r\ jm=sn\ r\ sn dm\ stj\ rw=sn \]

Another made by women concerning it: this recipe is put, according to this procedure, upon honey, cooked, mixed, made into pellets. They must fumigate with them. Furthermore, they make mouth-flavor pills\(^\text{13}\) with them in order to make pleasant the smell of their mouths.

The latter portion of this spell implies that the Egyptians found bad breath offensive and thus had a method to make one’s mouth smell pleasant. Clearly, the Egyptians valued pleasant smells in their temples, homes, and bodies. However, the very emphasis placed on this implies that without constant fumigations and anointings, their bodies and spaces would begin to have unpleasant odors. What were these unpleasant, bad, or “dirty” odors which the Egyptians felt the need to constantly combat? We will approach this question through an examination of the primary Egyptian words that can refer to unpleasant odors.

\(^{13}\) Literally “taste of mouth.” My translation follows Westendorf who translates as “Mund-Geschmack(-Pillen)” (Westendorf, Handbuch der altägyptischen Medizin, 691). Ghalioungui translates as “mouth relishes” but says it is “probably a designation of mouth-pills” (Ghalioungui, The Ebers Papyrus: A New English Translation, Commentaries and Glossaries, 216.) Hannig lists dpt-r as “Mundpille” (Hannig, 1049).
The noun *stj* seems to simply refers to “odor” or “scent.” The usual determinative for *stj* is the pustule (☊). It is important to note that this term is not inherently negative. In fact, the term is used more frequently of pleasant smells than it is of unpleasant odors. However, in our examination of the term below, we will focus on occurrences where the term *stj* refers to an odor that is foul or unpleasant.

Perhaps the best place to begin our examination of the negative uses of *stj* is the Dispute of a Man with His *Ba*. Smell plays a prominent role in the section of the man’s first litany (the man’s third speech, Cols. 85–103). A translation of the relevant passage is below.

(85) Jw wp.n=j r=j n b⃦=j wšb=j gdt.n=f

I opened my mouth to my *ba* in order that I might answer what he had said.

*Mk* (87) b⃦h16 rn=j mk r st ʿsw (88) m hrw šmw pt t⃦.t

Look! My name is flooded, look, more than the smell of bird dung(?) on a summer day when the sky is burning.

*Mk* (89) b⃦h rn=j mk <r st> šsp sbnw (90) m hrw rsf pt t⃦.t

Look! My name is flooded, look, more than a catch of fish on the day of the catch when the sky is burning.

(91) mk b⃦h rn=j mk r st (92) ʿp<d> w r bw⃦t nt trjw (93) h⃦ msyt

Look! My name is flooded, look more than the smell of ducks at a thicket of reeds beneath a brood (of ducks).

*Mk* b⃦h rn=j (94) mk r st h⃦mw r h⃦sw (95) nw sšw h⃦m n=sn

---


16 See discussion of this word below.
Look, my name is flooded, look more than the smell of the fowler (heading) towards creaks of bird nests which they have fowled.

*Mk* (96) bṣḥ *rn=j* mk *r st mšhw* (97) *r ḫmst ḫr *ḏw ḫr mṛyt

Look! My name is flooded, look more than the smell of crocodiles, than sitting at the edge full of crocodiles.

*Mk* (98) bṣḥ *rn=j* mk *r hmt ḏd grg* (99) *r=s n ṯy

Look, my name is flooded, look more than a woman when a falsehood is said concerning her to a man.

*Mk* bṣḥ (100) *rn=j* mk *hṛd ḫn ḏd ḫw=f Ṯ n mṣdw=f

Look, my name is flooded, look more than a strong child against whom is said, “He is for his rival.”

(101) *mk bṣḥ* *rn=j* (102) *mk dmj n mšḥ šnn bṣtw mḤ sḥ=f

Look my name is flooded look more than a town of the crocodile which utters rebellion after his back was seen.

As can be seen, scent (*ṣjt*), is a major theme in this litany, occurring four times in the eight stanzas (five occurrences if, as seems likely, the scribe “inadvertently omitted the preposition *r*, and probably also the word *ṣjt*” in column 89). Each of the occurrences in the first five stanzas seem to deal with smells in the physical world; *ṣjt* does not occur in the last three stanzas, which refer to people who do repulsive actions rather than literal smells. Although odor (*ṣjt*) is not explicitly mentioned in these last three stanzas, the idea of foul odors probably carries over. In other words, these are “stinking” persons and actions. It should be noted that in each of the references to *ṣjt*, the word is in direct genitive construction, perhaps indicating the close and binding relationship between smell and identity in Egyptian thought.

---


Before examining *stj* in this passage in more detail, however, we must first examine another important word in this passage, *bꜣḥ*. While in this passage *bꜣḥ* is clearly related to odors, it is not certain that the word itself carries the idea of stench. The word is determined with a fish sign\(^{19}\) followed by the man with hand to his mouth (𓆀), and this spelling only occurs in this text.\(^{20}\) Both Faulkner’s Concise Dictionary\(^{21}\) and the *Wörterbuch*\(^{22}\) seem to consider the word *bꜣḥ*, in this passage, to be unique and a distinct word from the more common word *bꜣḥi* “to be inundated, to flood, overflow.”\(^{23}\) The *Wörterbuch* defines the spelling in the *Dispute of a Man and his Ba* as “in üblen Geruch gebracht” (brought into foul odor),\(^{24}\) while Faulkner has “be detested.”\(^{25}\) Allen notes that the verb was “initially interpreted as ‘despised,’ and later interpreters suggested ‘offensive’ and ‘stink.’”\(^{26}\) Allen thinks that “stink” is the most likely “both

\(^{19}\) It should be noted that the fish determinative has been transcribed from hieratic to hieroglyphic differently due to the difficulties of distinguishing similar fish signs in hieratic. Allen transcribed it as the oxyrhynchus fish (K4 𓇳) while Barta and Faulkner seem to transcribe it as K5 𓇵 (Winfried Barta, *Das Gespräch Eines Mannes Mit Seinem Ba: Papyrus Berlin 3024*, München Ägyptologische Studien, 18 (Berlin: B. Hessling, 1969); Faulkner, “The Man Who Was Tired of Life.” For our purposes, the most important thing to note is that it is classified with a fish sign.

\(^{20}\) Allen, *The Debate between a Man and His Soul*, 79.


\(^{22}\) *Wb I*, 448–450.

\(^{23}\) *Wb I*, 448–449.

\(^{24}\) *Wb I*, 450.6.


\(^{26}\) A comprehensive notation of how this word in this passage has been interpreted and translated is not pertinent to this study, for numerous references see Allen, *The Debate between a Man and His Soul*, 79.
from the determinatives and from the comparison to "smell" throughout the litany; the usual meaning of $b^\prime hj$, "overwhelm," suggests the connotation of an overpowering smell."\(^{27}\)

The context, as well as the juxtaposition with $stj$ in this passage, does imply that $b^\prime h$ refers to an overpowering smell, and thus "reeks" or similar is a valid, interpretive translation. However, it does not necessarily follow that $b^\prime h$ means "to reek," or that it is a unique word occurring only here in Egyptian literature. In contrast to Faulkner and the *Wörterbuch*, Rainer Hannig understands the word here to be the same as $b^\prime h$ (/readably} $\overset{\text{}}{\text{}}$) “to overflow” and offers the translation “siehe, meine Name ist überflutet mit Gestank.”\(^{28}\) Goedicke also follows this line of reasoning and translates as “flooded.”\(^{29}\) He argues that the comparisons do not concern the man himself, but the treatment he has received from his $ba$.\(^{30}\) He further argues that the “determination of $b^\prime h$ by $\overset{\text{}}{\text{}}$ is incongruent with the assumed inherent derogatory meaning of the term. If it really does express such a notion, a determination by $\overset{\text{}}{\text{}}$ would seem to be required.”\(^{31}\) He continues that “there is no reason to derive a meaning ‘to be detested’ from the verb $b^\prime h$, “to be flooded,” “to overflow,” “to have an overflow,” with its primarily neutral-descriptive connotation.”\(^{32}\) Thus he claims that “the verb does not convey any derogatory implication” but

\(^{27}\) Allen, *The Debate between a Man and His Soul*, 79. Parkinson and Lichtheim translate $b^\prime h$ in this passages as “reeks” (Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems, 1940-1640 BC*, 158; Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 210–11.

\(^{28}\) Hannig, *Großes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch*, 266.


\(^{30}\) Goedicke, *The Report about the Dispute of a Man with His Ba*, 145.

\(^{31}\) Goedicke, *The Report about the Dispute of a Man with His Ba*, 145. However, it should be noted that Goedicke ignores the fish determinative also present. Goldsmith argues that the fish classifier “serves to denote ‘stench’” here (Goldsmith, “Fish, Fowl, and Stench in Ancient Egypt.”, 338 n. 11.

\(^{32}\) Goedicke, *The Report about the Dispute of a Man with His Ba*, 145.
instead refers to something like being “inundated,” “covered over,” “superseded.” The subject which “overflows,” however, can be negative. Further evidence pointing toward this interpretation may be found in the love poem in The Chester Beatty Papyrus, No. I. Referring to the woman in this love poem, it reads:

\[ Jn.\ tw=stj \ n=k \ hnm=st \ stj \ b^r hy (\text{script}) \ tw.\ tw \ n\ jw \ hft \ hr \ (\text{Recto XVII, 1}) \]

She brings to you her fragrance and her scent overflows, causing that those who are present be intoxicated.

In this passage there is again a close connection between \( b^r h \) and \( stj \), yet the connotation is positive, as is evidenced by the more typical determinatives for \( b^r h \). The idea of “overflow” or “flood” seems clear, as the smell of the women emanates from her person and overwhelsms and intoxicates all those, who are in her presence. It seems that a parallel connotation occurs in the Dispute of a Man and His Ba, only in this case the overwhelming smell is negative instead of positive. Thus, the scribe chose a more pertinent determinative for “stench,” a fish. We should also note that another reason for the association of flood with stench may be because the annual Nile flood was, in fact, accompanied by negative effects such as disease and probably including foul odor as well.

---

33 Goedicke, The Report about the Dispute of a Man with His Ba, 145.

34 Goedicke, The Report about the Dispute of a Man with His Ba, 145.


Having examined the meaning of $b^r\text{h}$ in this passage, we can proceed to examine more closely the foul odors that are mentioned in this text, as well as what they may imply for our study. Since the first five stanzas deal with real, not metaphorical, odors, we will focus our attention on these lines (columns 85–97).

The first comparison the man makes of the smell of his name is the word $\beta\text{sw}$ ($\text{kh} \text{ w}$), which, at least in this spelling, appears to be a hapax Egyptian texts.\(^{39}\) Blackman argued for a connection with $\beta\text{s}$, “bald,” and that it thus refers to “bald-headed vultures.”\(^{40}\) However, as Goedicke noted, the “reference to hot summer days casts doubt on Blackman’s view, as it would make little sense with an understanding of $\beta\text{sw}$ vultures.”\(^{41}\) Instead, he argues for a connection with the word $\beta\text{s}$ found in medical texts and suggests that it “is a broad term for "manure," which, however, could also denote the perishable viscera or in the present case "bird-droppings."”\(^{42}\) Faulkner thinks it is a confusion of $\beta\text{sw} \text{ ‘vultures’}$ and $\beta\text{pdw} \text{ ‘ducks,’}” which “from the context the latter are obviously meant.”\(^{43}\) Scharff suggested “vogelmist” (bird dung).\(^{44}\) Parkinson

\(^{39}\) According to Allen, “the noun $\beta\text{sw}$ is unattested elsewhere with this determinative” (Allen, The Debate between a Man and His Soul, 80. The Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae lists only this occurrence of the bird and suggests the glosses “bird droppings” or “vulture” both with a question mark “Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae - Detailed Information for an Entry in the List of Lemmata,” accessed February 27, 2023, https://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/servlet/GetWcnDetails?u=guest&f=0&l=0&wn=276&db=0.


\(^{41}\) Goedicke, The Report about the Dispute of a Man with His Ba, 147.

\(^{42}\) Goedicke, The Report about the Dispute of a Man with His Ba, 147.


translates as “bird-droppings.” Lictheim and Allen translate as “carrion’s smell.” Allen acknowledges Scharf and Goedicke’s suggestions but says that “the determinative here, in place of the usual “pustule,” suggests an image of carrion.” At this point, it is difficult to be dogmatic on the precise meaning of ṣsw. However, what can be said is that it is related to birds, refers to a foul odor, and the smell is noticeable or increased in the heat of the summer.

The next comparison is with the smell of a ṣsp sbnw. This expression has also been variously interpreted. The word sbnw has been understood as a fish or a type of fish based on the determinative, but the word appears to be another hapax. Faulkner understood the phrase as a “catch of fish,” and Lichtheim follows this in her translation. Goedicke argued that the term sbnw does not refer to a specific species of fish, but instead identified the term as coming from the verb sbn “to go astray, to turn wrongly.” He then explains the picture as of fish “floating

45 Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems*, 1940-1640 BC, 158.

46 Lictheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature.*, 211.

47 Allen, *The Debate between a Man and His Soul*, 79.

48 Allen, *The Debate between a Man and His Soul*, 80. Quirke translates as “more than the smell of meat on a summer day of burning sky.” Quirke, *Egyptian literature 1800 BC*, 132.

49 The Wörterbuch glosses as “Fisch” (Wb IV, 89.11). There may be another occurrence in the Stele des Amenemhat (BM EA 893) (British Museum. Dept. of Egyptian Antiquities, British Museum. Dept. of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities. Hieroglyphic texts from Egyptian stelae, and Philip David Scott-Moncrieff, *Hieroglyphic Texts from Egyptian Stelae, Etc* (London Trustees of the British Museum, 1911), Plate 48-49. Towards the end of the stela it reads, “I am the fourth of these four gods who drive away sbn (lines 16–17). Unfortunately, the determinative of this word is damaged, so it is not certain if it is indeed a fish. Assman translates as “Ich bin der vierte jener vier Götter, die den Irrleiter abwehren” (Jan Assmann, *Ägyptische Hymnen Und Gebete: Übersetzt, Kommentiert Und Eingeleitet.*, 2nd rev. and extended, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis (Freiburg (Schweiz); Göttingen: Universitätsverlag; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 469. Barucq and Daumas translate as “je suis le quatrième de ces quatre dieux qui ecartent le faux-pas (André Barucq and François Daumas, *Hymnes et Prières de l’Égypte Ancienne.*, vol. 10, Littératures Anciennes Du Proche-Orient (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1980), 113.


51 Lictheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature.*, 211.

belly up, as dead fish do,” and thus the reference here is to “receiving dead fish.” Parkinson translates as “a haul of spiny fish,” although without any explanatory notes. Allen claims that šsp is a noun, and that it refers to an “eel-trap.” He argues that sbnw is derived from sbn meaning “to glide,” and thus refers to eels. Although uncertain, Allen’s suggestion that sbnw might refer to eels is interesting, since another word to refer to eels in Egyptian is unknown, and eels are found in the Nile and appear to be depicted in some tombs. Again, the text emphasizes that this smell is on “the day of catching when the sky is hot.” While all of the precise details may not be certain, clearly the smell is related to fish, and it is especially unpleasant on a hot day.

The next stanza (columns 91–93) again relates a foul odor to birds. If the writing špsu is correct, then it appears to be another hapax. Goedicke suggests that it should be seen as a unique word and suggests that it refers to people in some way connected with fowling. However, other interpreters see a scribal error of some kind here. Some scholars, such as for example Scharff, have suggested it is an error for šsw which appears in line 87. Thus, in this view both line 87

53 Goedicke, The Report about the Dispute of a Man with His Ba, 147–48. Similarly, Quirke translates as “a haul of dead fish on trawling days of burning sky” Quirke, Egyptian literature 1800 BC, 132. Presumably, fish caught on a hot summers day quickly die in the sun and begin to smell.

54 Parkinson, The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems, 1940–1640 BC, 158.

55 Allen, The Debate between a Man and His Soul, 81.


57 Goedicke, The Report about the Dispute of a Man with His Ba, 149.

58 Scharff, Der Bericht Über Das Streitgespräch Eines Lebensmünden Mit Seiner Seele., 1937:44.
and 92 are referring to the same birds. Others such as Faulkner and Allen think that it is an error for ḫpdw “ducks,” which seems a reasonable interpretation.\textsuperscript{59} In any case, it again refers to a foul odor relating to birds.

The next line of the stanza seems to refer to the place where these birds are located. According to Goldsmith, the text is describing an area of the Nile Delta.

“What is meant by a thicket of reeds is like a wetland hammock or hydric hammock, which grows on soils that are poorly drained or that have high water tables, subject to occasional flooding. They are usually found on gentle slopes just above swamps, marshes, or wet prairies, and they tend to have a strong unpleasant smell.”\textsuperscript{60}

The msywrt is, most likely, the same word as “the collective for children and foals,”\textsuperscript{61} and it is determined with a bird sign, probably because young waterfowl are referred. In other words, the reference is probably to a nest of waterfowl. One can see how the smell of a nest of ducks or waterfowl, likely filled with bird droppings and in a swampy environment, would have been an exceedingly unpleasant odor.

The next stanza continues the idea of the bad smell of waterfowl and their broods. However, this time it is extended to the people, who enter these areas to fowl, and thus, are foul-smelling, just like the birds. The word ḫsm can refer to fishing or fowling, but here it is only determined with a bird and thus fowling is meant.\textsuperscript{62} The next phrase refers to the places, where fowling occurs, and again the nests, and presumably their foul smell, is emphasized. For the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[59] Faulkner, “The Man Who Was Tired of Life.,” 37; Allen, \textit{The Debate between a Man and His Soul}, 82.
\item[60] Goldsmith, “Fish, Fowl, and Stench in Ancient Egypt.,” 338.
\item[61] \textit{Wb} II, 140. Allen, \textit{The Debate between a Man and His Soul}, 82.
\item[62] \textit{Wb} III, 31–32.
\end{footnotes}
writer of this text and his audience, the smell of birds and their nests, and by implication those who enter these areas to fowl, must have been considered repulsive, and these bad smells would have resonated with them. It is interesting that the foul odors in the first lines are now being extended from animals to people.

The final stanza, with an explicit reference to foul smells in this text, refers to the “smell of crocodiles” (stj mšhw) (col. 96). Although it is difficult to determine exactly what places are referred to in column 97, there was a foul odor that the Egyptians associated with crocodiles and the places, which they inhabited.

Although most of the references to scents (stj) in the Dispute of a Man and His Ba are negative, in the man’s Third Litany (col. 130–142), he declares how death seems pleasant to him, and several of the comparisons he makes involve pleasant smells. In columns 132–133 he says, “Death is in my sight today like the smell of myrrh” (stj nṯjw), and in columns 134–135, death is “like the smell of lotuses (stj sšnw). Again, these are direct genitives, perhaps suggesting a close and binding association between these substances and their odor. While bad odors describe the repulsiveness of the man’s current condition (at least in his own mind), pleasant odors are

63 Hawkins says of this text that “the impression is that the marshland and, by extension the marshmen, smells unpleasant” (Simon Hawkins, “‘If Only I Could Accompany Him, This Excellent Marshman!’: An Analysis of the Marshman (Sḥty) in Ancient Egyptian Literature,” in Current Research in Egyptology 2012: Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Symposium, University of Birmingham 2012, ed. Emily Millward et al. (Oxford; Oakville, CT: Oxbow, 2013), 90. Hawkins suggests that “it is possible that the practice shown in many tomb scenes involving the females of the scene holding flowers to their noses is an attempt to combat this smell, though this cannot be proven” (Hawkins, “‘If Only I Could Accompany Him, This Excellent Marshman!’: An Analysis of the Marshman (Sḥty) in Ancient Egyptian Literature,” 90.).

64 For various proposals and references see Allen, The Debate between a Man and His Soul, 84–85.

65 The next line reads “like sitting under sails on a breezy day” and Goedicke suggests these lines may be meant to parallel the description of the foul odors of the man’s first litany. Thus the smell of myrrh parallels the smell of ssw and the breezy days contrast with the “summer day when the sky is burning” (Goedicke, The Report about the Dispute of a Man with His Ba, 174.)
used to reflect the pleasantness, which death seems to offer him. While the smells of fish, birds, and crocodiles brought unpleasant thoughts to the mind of the author and his audience, other smells such as myrrh and lotuses brought more pleasing things to mind.

Fish are associated with foul odors in several other texts. For example, Papyrus Ebers 788 (93, 18–20) is a remedy to recognize bad milk. Since it is in a section of the papyrus dealing with feminine health, it may be referring to a woman’s milk. It reads as follows:

\[ m33 \text{ jrtt hjt m33.jr}=k \text{ stj}=s \text{ mj snj n mhyt} \]

Seeing bad milk: you should see its scent like the smell of mehyt-fish.\(^{66}\) Although \(m33\) here probably has the sense of “to recognize,”\(^{67}\) it is interesting to note that a verb of visual perception is used of the olfactory sense.\(^{68}\) The use of \(hjn\) clearly indicates that the smell was considered bad by the Egyptians. Jerome Rizzo argues that the use of \(hjn\) (rather than \(qhw\)) in this case, indicates that the text is emphasizing a “qualitative” degradation rather than a “process of putrefaction.”\(^{69}\) In this view, the milk is “bad” primarily because it has the quality of

\(^{66}\) Jerome Rizzo translates this passages as, “EXAMEN DU LAIT (MATERNEL) ALTÉRÉ : (Si le lait est altéré a) tu remarqueras forcément son odeur qui est semblable à la puanteur du poisson mëhyt!” (Jérôme Rizzo, “Bjn: De Mal En Pis.,” Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale 105 (2005): 303. According to Rizzo, the protasis “if the milk is old” is implied. While this may be the case, it raises questions about if the Egyptians are storing breast milk or if this spell is referring more generally to milk from animals, which may have been sitting out and thus gone bad. It is also possible that if a woman was eating a diet high in fish, that a fishy smell may be in her milk. The milk may not have been “bad” in a rotten sense, but the Egyptians may have considered this to be a bad thing.


\(^{68}\) For discussion of this phenomenon in ancient Egypt see Steinbach-Eicke, “Metaphors of Perception Verbs in Ancient Egyptian.”

\(^{69}\) Rizzo, “Bjn: De Mal En Pis.,” 316.
bad taste and/or nutritional value, and the foul odor is a “secondary consequence.” In any case, this text again associates fish with unpleasant odor.

Another example of the association of fish with bad odors can be found in a magical papyrus from the library of Pwerem Son of Kiki (P. BM 10288). In a “Spell for driving away the accomplices of the Evil One together with the dead, not allowing them to enter among the blessed spirits,” the text lists numerous bad and calamitous things which will happen to these enemies. One of these bad things is that “the smell of your way is like the food of fish” (stj wšt=tn m snm rm Column A, Line 14). Although a later text, this again associates fish with a bad smell. The context of the spell clearly indicates that the smell is considered bad, since the text is calling calamities down on his enemies. Since this is in a magical text, one wonders if odors had some association with magic.

Another text which seems to associate odor with magic is Hatnub Graffiti 12. This Graffiti appears to be an autobiographical composition of a scribe name Djehuty-ankh (line 2). Beginning in line 12 he says:

---

Rizzo, “Bjn: De Mal En Pis.,” 316.


Caminos, “Another Hieratic Manuscript from the Library of Pwerem Son of Kiki (Pap. B.M. 10288),” 213.

M as a writing for mj. See Caminos, “Another Hieratic Manuscript from the Library of Pwerem Son of Kiki (Pap. B.M. 10288),” 209 n. 3.

The hieroglyphic text reads: (Caminos, “Another Hieratic Manuscript from the Library of Pwerem Son of Kiki (Pap. B.M. 10288),” Plate LX, Line 14.).

Caminos argues the papyrus must “have been composed sometime under the Ptolemy, say between 310 and 30 B.C., a closer dating being unattainable with the evidence at our disposal” (Caminos, “Another Hieratic Manuscript from the Library of Pwerem Son of Kiki (Pap. B.M. 10288),” 206.).

Jw sm=j n hkr wrh (13) ḫṣ3 jw dj.n ḥbsw n nt ḫ3w jw ḫk3.n jnd (14) šnt n st (𓊐𓊔𓊗𓊒𓊕) I helped the hungry, anointing the unanointed. I gave clothes to the naked. I performed magic on the afflicted, conjuring for the odorous(?)  

The mention of both ḫk3 and šnj suggest that “magic” is in view. Perhaps because odor was invisible, it was considered to have unique properties. Considering the context, the odor here is presumably associated with the poor or the less fortunate and is probably considered to be a bad odor, which needed to be removed. It is interesting that odor was associated with nakedness and hunger and was something that Djehuty-ankh considered virtuous to help the needy with.

Odors (stj) are used to negatively characterize those in certain professions. For example, the odor of the stnwy⁷⁹ is described as “The stnwy⁸⁰— his fingers are putrefied. The smell corresponds to (what is in) corpses (17, 1⁸¹ stnwy djb= f hw3w⁸² stj jry m ḫ3wt). The odor of this profession is said to be like that of corpses, and this is clearly an odor with a negative association (for further discussion of this passage see section on hw3).

---

⁷⁷ A more recent, German translation of this portion of the text can be found in Engelmann and Hallof, “Studien Zur Entwicklung Des Ärztlichen Berufsbildes in Der Frühzeit Ägyptens.,” 23.

⁷⁸ For the meaning of šnj see Ritner, The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice., 54:43–44.

⁷⁹ Unfortunately, what exactly the profession of the stnwy is not entirely certain. Brunner did not translate the term (Brunner, Die Lehre des Cheti, Sohnes des Duauf, 23.) Lictheim translated as “stoker” (Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature., 235.) Hoch translated as “fire-tender” (Hoch, “The Teaching of Dua-Kheti: A New Look at the Satire of the Trades.,” 95. and Jäger as “Der Köhler” (Jäger, Altägyptische Berufstypologien, 145.).

⁸⁰ The profession stnwy is written with the inclusion of the pustule (𓊐) determinative in most of the sources. See Jäger, Altägyptische Berufstypologien, LXI–LXII.

⁸¹ Following Jäger’s edition and chapter and line numbers (Jäger, Altägyptische Berufstypologien, LXI–LXIII.

⁸² In the various sources for this text (see Jager), hw3 is most frequently written with the pustule determinative although a few sources use the death stick (Z6).

⁸³ Similarly, most writings of ḫ3wt include the pustule although some use the death stick (Z6).
Another description of the smell of a profession is that of the sandal-maker in papyrus Lansing. 84

(4,5) p' tbw šbn bhw p'=f st<y>85 (4,6) stn

The sandal maker mixes a tanning agent; 86 his smell is distinguished. 87

Since the context negatively describes numerous professions as compared to that of a scribe, this is likely a sarcastic or satirical reference. Although the smell of the tanner is not specifically described, or what exactly he smells like is not explicitly stated, whatever the smell is, it is noteworthy, and certainly in a negative way. Perhaps the smell associated with the tanner was that of decay since he worked with animal corpses. Audouit says, “The tanner is in permanent contact with animal carcasses, and he is, therefore, himself perceived as carrion, a putrefied corpse. The emphasis is placed on the smell he releases; it is a nauseating death scent that sets him apart from others.” 88 Presumably, one could recognize the sandal maker simply by his distinctive odor, and this was looked down upon, at least by the scribal class.

Sometimes a foul stj is indicated by the term ġw. Papyrus Ebers 617 (78, 6–78, 10) 89 describes diseased fingers or toes.

Jr gm=k ġḥ sḥ r-pw m=sn pḥr mw ḥ=sn ġw stj=sn kmḥ=sn sḥ

84 Gardiner, Late-Egyptian Miscellanies, 7:103–4.
85 See Gardiner’s note Gardiner, Late-Egyptian Miscellanies, 7:103a.
86 Exactly what substance bhw (𓎁⟨𓎄⟩) refers to is uncertain although it probably has something to do with tanning.
87 Another interpretation would be to take the 3ms possessive as referring to the bhw instead of to the tanner himself. Thus the “distinguished” smell is of the tanning agent. Either way it basically amounts to the same thing.
89 Papyrus Hearst no. 174 is a similar case with the same phrase concerning the fingers and toes (Walter Wreszinski, Der Londoner medizinische Papyrus (Brit. Museum Nr 10059) und der Papyrus Hearst in Transkr., 1912, 41.
If you find a finger or toe which is aching, liquid is circulating behind them, their smell is bad and their appearance is (like) *sa*-worms.\(^{90}\)

The odor given off by these diseased fingers or toes is clearly repulsive, but without further description, it is difficult to know more specifically what the foul smell is like. However, the phrase “*dw stʃ*” appears in funerary texts in reference to the foul, putrefying smell of the corpse.\(^{91}\) Perhaps the smell of these digits is similar to that of putrefying flesh. In light of the Egyptians’ tendency to connect odor with the identity of a person, one wonders if a person with a foul-smelling condition, such as this, was ostracized or excluded from certain spaces.

\(\textit{hnʃ}\)

The term \(\textit{hnʃ}\) refers to a stench or stinking.\(^{92}\) For example, in the *Teaching of Khety*, the coppersmith (\(\textit{hmtyw}\)) is said to “stink more than fish eggs” (4,3 \(\textit{hnʃ sw r shwt rmw}\)).\(^{93}\) Fish eggs must have been considered a foul smell to the ancient Egyptians, and the work of a coppersmith was considered to smell foul as well (at least to scribes). Again, we have a close association between fish and unpleasant odor.

\(^{90}\) The text has \(\textit{sN} \textit{wm}\) which is probably some kind of worm. Bardinet takes this as referring to maggots (Thierry Bardinet, “Quelques Aspects Du ‘Monde Du Minuscule’ Dans La Pensée Médicale de l’Égypte Ancienne.,” in *Le Microcosme Animal En Égypte Ancienne: De l’effroi à La Vénération. Études d’archéo- et Ethnoarthropodologie Culturelle*, ed. Sydney H. Aufrère and Cathie Spieser (Leuven; Paris; Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2021), 161. According to Susanne Radestock, “the word *sʃ* is a veritable metaphor here, in other words, it is not worms that are meant…but rather "worm-like curd from pus or water” as Westendorf paraphrases” (Susanne Radestock, “Types of Diagnoses in Papyrus Ebers and Smith.,” in *Systems of Classification in Premodern Medical Cultures: Sickness, Health, and Local Epistemologies*, ed. Ulrike Steinert (London: Routledge, 2020), 114, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203703045-7.).

\(^{91}\) For example, see Pyramid Text 412, 532 and Coffin Text 73.


\(^{93}\) Jäger, *Altägyptische Berufstypologien*, XXIII.
In the Papyrus Ebers, remedy 708 (86,8) is entitled “A remedy for driving away the stench of Shomu” (珺 dr ḫnš m ṣmwró).⁹⁴ A few lines later, the next remedy is “another for driving away the stench in the body of a man or women” (kt nt dr ḫnš m ḫw n ᵉ s ᵖt r-pw).⁹⁵ The next two remedies (no. 710 and 711, 86,11–13) are simply entitled “another” (kt) which implies that they are also for driving away ḫnš. The first three of these remedies are each “smeared” (gs) onto the body.⁹⁶ The fourth remedy for ḫnš (711) is “put at the place where limb touches limb (86,13 rd(w) r bw dmn.w ᶭ t ᶭ jm).

Similar cases are also found in the Medical Papyrus Hearst. Spells 150 and 151 in the Hearst papyrus are addressing ḫnš. No. 150 is for “driving away the smell on the body of a person in summer (dr ḫnš m ḫw n rmttl m ṣmwró),⁹⁷ while no. 151 is for “driving away the smell in the face of a man or woman” (dr ḫnš m ḫr n ᵉ s ᵖt r-pw).⁹⁸ No. 150 is smeared (gs) onto a man in a manner similar to the first three remedies for ḫnš in Papyrus Ebers, while no. 151 is similar to Ebers 711 and is applied “where a limb touches a limb.”

Smearing of a remedy on the flesh (珩w) seems to imply that the remedy is applied externally to the skin, and it is not uncommon for珩w to refer to the skin or the external surface of the body in medical texts.⁹⁹ Additionally, the reference in two of the remedies to the

---

⁹⁷ Wreszinski, Der Londoner medizinische Papyrus (Brit. Museum Nr 10059) und der Papyrus Hearst in Transkr., 35.
⁹⁸ Wreszinski, Der Londoner medizinische Papyrus (Brit. Museum Nr 10059) und der Papyrus Hearst in Transkr., 35.
⁹⁹ Hildegarde von Deines and Wolfhart Westendorf, Grundriß der Medizin der alten Ägypter 7 2 7 2, 1962, 586.
application where “the limb meets limb” suggests a joint. These factors led Westendorf to suggest that $hn\text{š}$ in these remedies refers to “Schweißabsonderung” or “perspiration.” Perhaps, more accurately, $hn\text{š}$ refers to the bodily odor, which results from perspiration, and the remedies in these texts are to “drive away” bodily odors, which result from sweat. Kevin Cahail argues that the remedy makes a powder and that “a fragrant crushed powder containing incense would both mask odor, and absorb sweat.” One wonders if the bad odor of the coppersmith in the Satire of the Trades is due to excessive perspiration from working around a furnace, which results in more bodily odor than normal. It is interesting to note that in the examples from Papyrus Ebers, $hn\text{š}$ is classified with the pustule, while in Papyrus Hearst the classifiers are a fish followed by the bad bird, although the spells are similar in many respects.

In papyrus Deir el-Medina no. I verso, there are magical/medical texts dealing with a “man under the death” ($hry\text{ mt}$) of a particular god. These texts explain the symptoms and then

100 Deines and Westendorf, Grundriss der Medizin der alten Ägypter 7 2 7 2, 662.

101 Deines and Westendorf, Grundriss der Medizin der alten Ägypter 7 2 7 2, 661–62. This is followed by Ghalioungui as well Ghalioungui, The Ebers Papyrus: A New English Translation, Commentaries and Glossaries., 181–82; 263.

102 Maitland suggests that the sashes depicted being worn by both laborers and priest have been used to “absorb sweat” and also to “wipe away dirt” (Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom,” 53.).


105 For study of this phrase see Koleva-Ivanov, “Être Sous l’emprise de La Mort (Hry Mt).” Koleva-Ivanov suggests that “l’homme qui se trouve sous l’emprise de la mort (Xry mt) de la part d’une divinité, est un possédé ayant des symptômes qui rappellent certains traits du caractère divin. Pour qu’il soit guéri ou plutôt exorcisé, il est nécessaire de faire un rite d’apaisement propre à la divinité donnée (Koleva-Ivanov, “Être Sous l’emprise de La Mort (Hry Mt),” 1003–4.).
prescribe a remedy. Odor (ṣṣ) appears in these as one of the symptoms. For the man under
the death of Re, “the odor of his mouth is leeks” (1,4 [jw s]ṭj r=f m j3kt). For the man under the death
of Ptah, “the odor of his mouth is like a bull after he eats vegetables, then heat goes out
from…”106 (1,6 …[jw s]ṭj r=f m j3 k3 (ḥΩ) wnm.n=f smw jw t3 ḫr pr m…). The man under the
death of Osiris, “The smell of his mouth is myrrh” (2,5–6 jw sṭj r=f m [ṃn]ṭjw). The description
of the odor of the mouth of the man under the death of Thoth uses the word ḫnš. The full
description of the symptoms of this case are as follows.

(1,8) ḫr s ḫry mt n ḫwty (2,1) wnm=f ḫr…3 m ḫhw[l]t=f ḫr wgt ḫr nst=f ḫr ḫβ nhb=t=f r 3t ḫ t
3t (2,2) ḫr jrt…[m] ḫw[l]=f jw sṭj r=f m j ḫnš (ḫΩ) mṭwt ḫβw fdt m ḫw=f

If a man is under the death of Thoth, he is…with his teeth, chewing on his tongue, lifting
his neck from time to time, and doing….with his limbs, and the smell of his mouth is like
the stench of the venom of a snake. Sweat is in his limbs.

Recognition of these odors in the mouth are important components of the diagnoses in these
texts. The context is negative since the text is describing how to recognize these sicknesses.
However, we should be cautious before jumping to the conclusion that each of these odors
mentioned were necessarily considered bad or unpleasant. It is possible that the odor in the
mouth was simply a symptom of the negative condition as a whole, and not that the odor itself
was considered unpleasant. The man under the death of Osiris is a clear example in this regard,
since myrrh is usually a desirable smell, but here it appears to be a symptom of the sickness.
Thus, while the other odors, which are mentioned, might be unpleasant, we cannot assume this
only from these diagnoses. The exception, however, might be the odor of the snake venom

106 Text is damaged here so the rest of the phrase is uncertain.
referred to in the “man under the Death of Thoth,” since the text specifically indicates that this odor stinks (ḥnš).

While ḥnš can refer to a real odor, the word is also frequently used metaphorically. Thus, the term ḥnš seems to be frequently used in connection with the one’s name. For example, in the wisdom text of Chester Beatty Papyrus IV, ḥnš refers to one’s getting a bad reputation. Unfortunately, the beginning of the line mentioning ḥnš is missing. However, the text then reads:

(Verso 1,13) ẖḥ=tw hr tkn s.t hm.t tm rn=k ḥnš (᛫᛫) ¹⁰⁸

May you fight against drawing near to a woman⁰⁹ so that your name does not reek. The student is here warned that the action of “drawing near a woman,” will cause his name or reputation to become foul. While the reference is not to a literal foul smell, the metaphor indicates that ḥnš has a bad connotation.

A similar example can be found in Papyrus Anastasi I. At the end of his letter of rebuke, the scribe Hori tells Amenemope:

(28,7) tm=k ḥnš= k (᛫᛫) rn=j n k3wy hr nbw

You should not say that I have made your name reek before foreigners and all.¹¹⁰ Amenemope is not to complain that the rebuke, which he has received, has “made his name reek.” Again, the metaphor of a reeking name implies a bad reputation and indicates the negative connotation of ḥnš. The expression is used similarly in the Teaching of Ani to refer to a bad


¹⁰⁸ The text is in hieratic so one should not make too much out of the particular fish sign used.

¹⁰⁹ Perhaps referring to “a married woman.”

reputation. Perhaps, a foul odor is a fitting metaphor for a bad reputation, since a bad smell is not visible, and it can precede or linger after a person or thing has been in a place.

A very intriguing occurrence of $hn$s can be found in pBM EA 10085, II–III recto. According to Leitz, this text can be characterized as several, distinct Late Egyptian Miscellanies and consists of four separate sections. Quack, however, argues that the various texts are united as a single composition with alternating speeches between a man and a woman. However, instead of a typical love song, the couple in this text is bickering with each other, according to Quack.

The text describes foreign trade and various types of cloth, etc. Unfortunately, portions of the text around the pertinent section are missing which makes the interpretation difficult. In III,3 mention is made of “my Syrian ($H3rw$),” which Leitz translates as “my Syrian

---

111 The word $hn$s occurs twice in the teaching of Ani; both in reference to a name. The first occurrence (16,17) warns not to “go back and forth to court so that your name does not reek $\text{\textit{jw rn=f hns}}$ $\text{\textit{bjt bjn}}$” (following translations of Joachim Friedrich Quack, Die Lehren des Ani: ein neuägyptischer Weisheitstext in seinem kulturellen Umfeld (Freiburg; Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 158; Pascal Vernus, Sagesses de l’Egypte pharaonique (Arles: Actes Sud, 2010), 244.). The other reference (18,15) is also to a name. The instruction is to not befriend someone when “his name stinks (and his) character is bad” ($\text{\textit{jw rn=f hns}}$ $\text{\textit{bjt bjn}}$).


114 Leitz and Leitz, Magical and Medical Papyri of the New Kingdom, 88–92.


117 Leitz and Leitz, Magical and Medical Papyri of the New Kingdom, Plate 50.
woman, presumably because the verb forms following the lacuna are feminine. Following the mention of the Syrian, there is a lacuna of several words before the text resumes by mentioning “distributing” ($dnj$). Then follows mention of a repulsive woman. The suggested transliteration and translation offered here largely follows that of Leitz.\textsuperscript{119}

\begin{equation}
(\text{III,3}) \text{t} \text{t} \text{y}=j \text{H} \text{r} \text{w} \text{n}=f [\ldots] \text{h} \text{r} [\ldots] \text{t} \text{j} \text{m} \text{d} \text{n(j)} \text{d} \text{d} \text{m} \text{n} \text{t} (\text{III,4}) \text{m} \text{s} \text{d} \text{tj} [\ldots] \text{m} \text{j} \text{w} \text{h}^\text{c} \text{n} \text{h} \text{w} \text{z} \text{jw} \text{st} \text{h} \text{n} \text{s} [\ldots] \text{w} \text{n} \text{m} [\ldots] \text{r} \text{b} \text{s} \text{st}
\end{equation}

(III,3) My Syrian…by distributing, saying: “Such and such a woman is hated [..] like a fisherman who is putrefying. She stinks ($\text{...}$)\textsuperscript{120}…eating [..] in order to vomit.

Quack reads the text differently and translates as “meine Gemahlin in Heliopolis ist und meine syrische Dienerin in…, wobei sie [..] ist mit dem Korb (?). Deine Art (?) ist ein Korb wie ein gepackter (?) Mormyrus, indem er ganz [gewaltig] stinkt. Man isst davon, bis man es erbricht.”\textsuperscript{121}

In light of the several lacunae in this text, as well as difficulties reading and interpreting the surviving hieratic text, much of this text is difficult to interpret.\textsuperscript{122} Thus, it is difficult to know who, precisely, is the person described by $hn\text{s}$, and exactly why they are hated or disliked. However, it is clear that dirty and unpleasant imagery is used in the description. However, despite these difficulties we can glean a few things concerning the foul smell. In both Leitz’s and Quack’s interpretations, the foul smell is primary is related to fish. Thus, this text seems to

\textsuperscript{118} Leitz and Leitz, \textit{Magical and Medical Papyri of the New Kingdom}, 90.

\textsuperscript{119} Leitz and Leitz, \textit{Magical and Medical Papyri of the New Kingdom}, 90.

\textsuperscript{120} The lizard sign may be a different word, but since it is followed by a lacuna it is difficult to be precise.


\textsuperscript{122} For discussion of the various exegetical issues see especially Quack’s edition (Quack, “Zur Frage Der Botanischen Natur Des Bꜣḥ-Baumes,” 283–84.).
present another example of fish being an unpleasant smell, and for a person to be associated with the smell of fish clearly has a negative connotation. The mention of stinking followed by eating and then vomiting is tantalizing, but in light of the lacuna, it is difficult to make anything definite out of this.123

There are several determinatives used with hns, the most common being fish signs (i.e., 🐟🐟🐟🐟) and the sparrow (さえ). Frequently, these are used in combination with the fish sign written first followed by the sparrow. For example, in the various sources for the Satire of the Trades Chapter 4,3, every copy in which the word hns is undamaged follows this pattern (🐟🐟🐟🐟).124 This is also the pattern in the Hearst Papyrus and Chester Beatty IV as mentioned above. According to Goldwasser,

“In the word “stink” 🐟🐟🐟🐟, the 🐟 “FISH” classifier creates the additional simile “stinking like a fish,” whereas the final common classification into the 🐟 “INFERIORITY-EVIL” informs the reader of the negative nature of the smell as well as of the word. The fish in this case plays the prototype for the category “STINKING THINGS” (the theme of the bad smell of the fisherman is a well-known theme in Egyptian literature).”

It is interesting that the stench, which hns seems to refer to in pBM 10085 III, is related to fish. Perhaps this suggests that the smell of fish is the primary odor that the Egyptians associated with the word hns. Occasionally, the pustule classifier is used as in the examples in Papyrus Ebers and in Papyrus Anastasi I. The Anastasi I occurrence is interesting because the pustule is

123 It is interesting that in the tale of two brother the wife of the elder brother pretends to be sick and lays vomiting (bš) (4,10) (Gardiner, Late-Egyptian Stories, 1:14.). Perhaps she would also have been considered an example of a “hateful woman” (according to Leitz’s translation).

124 Jäger, Altägyptische Berufstypologien, XXIII.

followed by the man with hand to mouth ( mano ), perhaps indicating that the word is related to the senses.\textsuperscript{126}

**Summary**

The perception of odor was an important sense in ancient Egypt and seems to have been closely connected with identity. Being contaminated by something with a foul odor, may have implied that one was taking on the bad essence of that thing. Thus, being identified with foul odors may have been considered indicative of bad character and was certainly used as a metaphor for a bad reputation. Fish, birds, and things relating to them appear to be some of the most commonly referred to subjects of stench. As Dora Goldsmith notes, “fish and birds were considered the prototype of stench in ancient Egypt. As the epitome of evil smells, fish and fowl reflect collective olfactory values of the ancient Egyptian society, which were culturally shaped.”\textsuperscript{127} While fish and birds were certainly not the only things considered foul smelling by the Egyptians, it seems that when they wanted to make a strong impression of bad odor, fish and birds were some of the most potent examples of stench. Recipes from medical texts indicate that body odor was also a concern of the Egyptians. Putrefaction also was considered an unpleasant odor (for discussion of putrefaction see section on rot and decay).


\textsuperscript{127} Goldsmith, “Fish, Fowl, and Stench in Ancient Egypt.,” 337.
CHAPTER 7: ARE DW AND DW(T) USED TO REFER TO DIRT?

In this section, we will examine several Egyptian words with the common root, dw.

According to the Wörterbuch, the adjective dw (𓊧𓊤) has the basic meaning of “schlecte” (“bad, evil”). As an attributive adjective it can describe: i. lebenden Wesen (living beings) such as “Schlange” (snake) or “Feind” (enemy) (Wb V, 545.9); ii. Konkreten Dingen (concrete things) such as “Schweiss” (sweat), “Ausfluss der Leiche” (outflow of the corpse), “Schmutz” (dirt, grime), and “Unreinlichkeit” (uncleanliness) (Wb V, 545.10–13); iii. “Von der Zeit” (of time) especially of “unheilbringenden Tagen” (ominous days) (Wb V, 546.1–3); iv. “von Abstrakten verschiedenster Art” (of abstract things of various kinds) such as “schlected Wrote, Rede” (bad word, speech), “böse Art, schlechtes Wesen” (bad kind, evil being), “schlechter Gedanke “(bad thought), “schlechter Schlummer, schlechte Träume” (bad sleep, bad dream); v. “from Krankheiten” (of diseases), etc. (Wb V, 546.4–11); v. “von Handlungen” (of actions) as in “schlechter Kampf, schlechte Unruhen, schlechtes kommen” (evil conflict, evil unrest, evil coming) (Wb V, 546.12); and in “allgemeinen Ausdrücken” (general expressions) (Wb V, 546.13–19). It is also used with a “bestimmendem Substantiv” (defining noun) only in the expression dw-ka”, “der Bösertige” (the malicious) which describes a “schlechten Menschen” (bad man) or Apophis (Wb V, 546.21–22); As a predicate, dw describes: i. “der Geruch der Leich oder von etwas krankhaftem ist schlecht” (the smell of a corpse or of something diseased is bad) (Wb V, 547.1–2); ii. A person as “böse” or “schlecht” (evil or bad) (Wb V, 547.3); iii. hearts in the sense of “betrüb sein” (to be sad) (Wb V, 547.4); iv. Impersonally as in “es ist schlecht” (it is bad) (Wb V, 547.5–7); and v. adverbially as in to speak or do something “schlecht” (badly) (Wb V, 547.8–9).

2 In a more detailed breakdown, the Wörterbuch lists i. “das Schlechte, Böse vernichten, vertreiben” (to drive off or destroy bad, evil) (Wb V, 547.13–548.1). This can be of officials or the king in the sense of repelling injustice (Wb V, 547.11–12), of eliminating diseases (547.13), clearing away debris of a building (Wb V, 547.14), “das Schlechte am Toten, an seinen Leibe u.a. d.h. Schmutz u. d.g., auch im moralichen Sinne” (the bad thing about the dead, about his body, etc. i.e. dirt and the like, also in a moral sense) (Wb V, 547.15); or the god warding off the “Schlechte” (bad) from the king (Wb V, 547.16); ii. of “Bösem schützen” (of protecting from evil) (Wb V, 548.2); iii. “das Böse vermeiden, hass” (to avoid or hate evil) (Wb V, 548.3–5); iv. “Schlechtes, Böses planen, beabsichtigen” (to plan or intend evil or bad) (Wb V, 548.6); v. “Böses antun, zufügen” (to do or inflict evil) (Wb V, 548.7); vi. “Böses geschicht, trifft” (evil happens or strikes someone) (Wb V, 548.8); vii. “jemandem dem Bösen übertun” (to deliver someone to evil) (Wb V, 548.9); viii.-x. Various expressions such as “es gibt nichts Böses” (there is no evil) (Wb V, 548.10–17).

3 The semantic range and usage of dw (Wb V, 548.18-549.20) is virtually identical to dwt according to the Wörterbuch (see above). Of note, under the heading “i. “das Schlechte, Böse vertreiben” (to drive out the bad, evil) it notes that Dw often means “Schmutz, unreins” (dirt, uncleanness) (Wb V, 548.19–22) and gives the examples of a building (Wb V, 548.19), of the dead (Wb V, 548.20), and in temple purification ceremonies (Wb V, 548.22).
there may be more specific aspects to the Egyptian conception of $d\omega(t)$.$^5$ A comprehensive study of all of the uses of the terms $d\omega(t)$ and $d\omega$ and thus a full understanding of its meaning(s) and nuance is beyond the scope of this study.$^6$ However, an examination of the possible relationship between these terms and the concept of “dirt” may be helpful for our understanding of the Egyptian conception of “dirt” and it may also prove illuminating for understanding some aspects of the meaning of $d\omega(t)$. In this section, we will examine several occurrences when these terms with the root of $d\omega(t)$ could be understood to have at least a partial reference to a material substance that is perceived as “dirt” or “dirty.” In the course of the examination, we will also consider if the terms with the root $d\omega$ might have a physical reference that is then extended metaphorically into other areas.

$d\omega(t)$ and its Removal from places and objects

An example of $d\omega t$ being removed in a temple ritual text can be found in a “spell for $df(\delta)w$ the great house” ($r\ n\ df(\delta)w\ pr-wr$) in the temple of Seti I at Abydos.$^7$ In this scene, the king is depicted kneeling before a seated deity.$^8$ The king appears to be wiping the feet of the

---

$^5$ For example, some of the terms glossed as “evil” or similar include $jw$ ($Wb\ I$, 48.5–10), $jsft$ ($Wb\ I$, 129.9–14 $wit$ ($Wb\ I$, 244.14), $bjn$ ($Wb\ I$, 442–444), $nbd$ ($Wb\ II$, 247), $sbt$ ($Wb\ III$, 432.14–16), $sdb$ ($Wb\ IV$, 381–382). For a helpful list of Egyptian terms for evil and short discussion see Mpay Kemboly, “Grappling with the Notion of Evil in Ancient Egypt,” in Illuminating Osiris: Egyptological Studies in Honor of Mark Smith, ed. Richard Jasnow and Ghislaine Widmer (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2017), 173–80. See also Edmund S. Meltzer, “Perspectives on Evil in Ancient Egyptian Sources: A Work in Progress,” in Explaining Evil, ed. J. Harold Ellens, vol. 2, 3 in 1 vols. (Santa Barbara, CA; Denver, CO; Oxford: Praeger, 2011), 12–21.


$^8$ In the Re-Horakhty chapel the caption says that the deity is Atum, although the two deities seem to be equated in the spell where it appears that Atum is used in apposition with Re-Horakhty.
deity with a cloth and is holding a burning arm censer in his left hand. According to the title of the spell it is for “dfβ-ing” the great house (pr-wr).” Before examining the text of the spell, it is useful to comment on the word dfβ which occurs in the title of the spell. The root dfβ typically refers to “provisions” and as a verb can mean “to provide.” However, in these occurrences it is typically determined with a loaf sign ☩ and not the arm determinative (← or →) as it is here. Rosalie David translates the title of the spell as “provisioning the sanctuary,” but she includes a question mark. The Wörterbuch defines dfβ with an arm spelling as a “verbum vom reinigen.” It should be noted that the scene accompanying this spell in all of the chapels could be interpreted as depicting the king wiping around the feet of the statue with a cloth. Thus, perhaps the title of the spell could be translated as “cleaning the sanctuary.” Alternatively, it could refer to “provisioning the sanctuary,” but implying that cleansing the sanctuary is one of

9 Discussion of this term below.


11 Cf. Wb V, 569–571; In none of the chapels at the Abydos temple is the word in the title of this episode written with the bread loaf. In each chapel the word is determined with either ☩ or ☪. For the scenes see Calverley, Broome, and Gardiner, The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos. Volume I, Volume I, Plates 6, 18, 27; Calverley et al., The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos. Vol. 2 Vol. 2, Plates 5, 15, 28.


13 Wb V, 571; See also Scott N. Morschauser, “The End of the Sḏf(ȝ)-Tr(Yt) ‘Oath,’” Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt 25 (1988): 93–103, https://doi.org/10.2307/40000872. Morschauser suggests that the sDfA-tryt oath means something along the lines of “purging of guilt.” He includes a discussion of the root DfA and suggests that it can have the meaning “cleanse” or “wipe.” Meltzer suggests that the root dfβ is linguistically connected with the Semitic root kpr (i.e. Hebrew kippur) (Edmund S. Meltzer, “Egyptian dfβ ‘Purify’ = Semitic Kpr?,” Journal of Ancient Civilizations 11 (1996): 53–55.) However, neither Hoch (James E. Hoch, Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1994), 410–11, 432.) nor Muchiki (Yoshiyuki Muchiki, Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords in North-West Semitic (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 314.) indicate that Egyptian D corresponds with Semitic k. Thus, while it is possible that the terms may be conceptually related, it is extremely unlikely that there is any direct relationship between the terms.
the early steps in this process. The speech begins with the king saying that he is Horus, that he had been searching for his eyes, and that he will not let them be far from Re-Horakhty. The text then reads:

\[ Mk \text{ wj} \ hry= s \ jj.tj \ m \ htp \ dr.n=s \ dwt=k \ nb(t) \ twt.n=k \ n=k^{14} \ sw \]

See! I am bearing it and it comes in peace. It (the eye of Horus) drove away all your \textit{dwt} after you assembled it for yourself.\(^{15}\)

From this spell, it appears that \textit{dwt} could attach to the deity (or its cult statute), since the \textit{dwt} is possessed by a pronoun, which in the context must refer to the deity. That the \textit{dwt} is the deity’s is further indicated by the fact that in the chapel of Isis the pronoun is feminine rather than masculine as in the other chapels.\(^{16}\) This \textit{dwt} must be removed from the deity or their cult statue. Perhaps the \textit{dwt} referred to in the temple spell may have at least a partial reference to cleaning dirt or dust off of the image which is mythologically described in the spell. There may be a functional aspect to this spell, and it could possibly have a physical act of wiping off dirt from the image. In this ritual act, dust and/or dirt (\textit{dwt}) may be literally wiped off of the image; the \textit{dwt} of the god could refer on some level to the literal dirt and dust which had accrued on the image of the god in the time since the last cleaning of the sanctuary.

\(^{14}\) The chapel of Re-Horakhty has the preposition \textit{m}, but since all the other chapels have \textit{n} I have followed their readings here.

\(^{15}\) The chapels of Re-Horakhty, Horus and Osiris contain the word \textit{jj.tj}, but this word is absent in the other chapels. This stative could be translated “may you come” and refer to the deity (see David, \textit{A Guide to Religious Ritual at Abydos}, 65.). However, if the stative refers to the eye, then the spell has the same meaning in both the chapels where the verb is written as in those where it is not written.

\(^{16}\) Calverley, Broome, and Gardiner, \textit{The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos. Volume I, Volume I}, 19.
On the biographical stela of the wab priest Si-Mntw (CG 20712)\textsuperscript{17} from the second intermediate period, the text seems to describe the activities of a priest performing the Daily Temple Ritual.\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{equation}
(1) [jn]k w^f b n nb Jwnj jbh (2) n nsw ntrw \textsuperscript{f}k \textsuperscript{h}r sb\textsuperscript{3} w\textsuperscript{3}h \textsuperscript{r}npwt sw\textsuperscript{3}d sijn m pr wr (3) smfr hnw [h]m hsr \textsuperscript{d}w[t] m r\textsuperscript{2}-\textsuperscript{5}w=f y
\end{equation}

\begin{equation}
(1) I am a wab priest of the Lord of Armant, a libationer of the (2) king of the gods, one who enters the door “enduring of years,” who breaks the seal in the sanctuary, (3) who cleans the interior of the chapel and removes the (dwt) with his hands.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{equation}

Unfortunately, the text is somewhat damaged, but it appears (following Kubisch) that dwt was removed by actions of the priest. While dwt may refer to “evil” generally, it also could be that dwt here includes physical dirt which was cleaned or removed by the priest. Dust, dirt, remnants of food offerings, etc. would accumulate in the temple and the chapel of the god and would need to be cleaned and removed from the sacred precincts.\textsuperscript{20} Thus, it could also make sense in this context if the word dwt was referring to physical dirt which was cleaned by the priests.


\textsuperscript{18} Kubisch, “Biographies of the Thirteenth to Seventeenth Dynasties.,” 315.

\textsuperscript{19} Transliteration and translation following Kubisch, “Biographies of the Thirteenth to Seventeenth Dynasties.,” 315.

\textsuperscript{20} Rites such as “Utterance for wiping off ointment” (r sfr mdt) and suggest that part of the priest’s duties was to clean off the ointment from the day before (David, Temple Ritual at Abydos, 143.). According to Katherine Eaton, “in the Daily Ritual cycle in the Temple of Sety I at Abydos, “utterance for wiping off ointment” and “utterance for taking off the clothing” presuppose that ointment and clothing had been put on the previous day” (Eaton, Ancient Egyptian Temple Ritual: Performance, Pattern, and Practice, 52. At the very least, priests were involved in “cleaning” at least some remnants from the previous days rituals and also the god’s statue and chapel (Cf. Serge Sauneron, The Priests of Ancient Egypt, Evergreen Profile Book 12 (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 85–89.). The offerings themselves were not left, but after the god finished, the “reversion of the offerings” took place and ultimately, they were consumed by the priests. However, it is probable that food residue was left behind on food table, altars, etc. and would have needed to be cleaned. For discussion of the reversion(s) of the offerings see Harold H. Nelson, “Certain Reliefs at Karnak and Medinet Habu and the Ritual of Amenophis I.,” Journal of Near Eastern Studies 8, no. 3 (1949): 313–19; Haring, Divine Households, 7–12; Katherine Eaton, The Ritual Functions of Processional Equipment in the Temple of Seti I at Abydos (UMI, 2004), 234–36; David, Temple Ritual at Abydos, 183–84.
In a building inscription of Thutmose III at Karnak (Urk IV, 833–838), Thutmose III declares how he desired to build a monument for his father Amun-re at Karnak. Then the text reads:

(4) jst gm.n=f Hm=j Snw m Dbt sAtw wA r Hap jnbw wD Hm=j jnt sAt=s r=s wsḥ.n=(j) r-pr pn swḥ.b.n=(j) sw ḫsr=j ḫwt=f¹ dr ṣdyt nty ḫr gs.wy=fy wn ḫr (5) r jwyt

(4) Now, my incarnation found the enclosure made of brick, but earth was about to hide the walls, so my incarnation commanded the removal of its earth from it. I widened this temple, I made it pure as I removed its ḫwt, and I drove away the rubble which was on both of its sides which had risen (5) to the sanctuary.²²

While one could interpret ḫwt here as referring to some general “evil” which was removed ritually, in context, it may also be that ḫwt has a literal reference to some sort of physical dirt that was covering some part of the temple and had to be cleared away.²³ Another possibility is that a term connotating moral evil is applied to the physical dirt being removed for emphasis. In either case, ḫwt here seems to be at least partially referring to physical dirt or rubble.

In the Great Harris Papyrus 1 27,7,²⁴ ḫwt is referred to in another context which could suggest that literal dirt of some kind is meant. In the context, the king is saying how he cleaned and restored temples in Heliopolis. The relevant passage is below.

---

²¹ The phrase ḫsr ḫwt is also found on a door inscription of Thutmose III at Karnak in the Northeast Solar Rooms. See Paul Barguet and Alain Arnaudiès, Le temple d’Amon-Rê à Karnak : essai d’exégèse (Le Caire: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1962), 121–22. A similar example from the Middle Kingdom is found on a post of a gate at the temple of Sesostris III at Medamoud. The text reads: “He has made his monument for his father Montu who is in the midst of Medamoud, making for him the gate “Sesostris who drives away the ḫwt which is on the Lord of the Theban Nome who is in the midst of Medamoud.” (Jr.n=f m mnw=f n jrt=f Mntw ḫr(y)-jh Mḏdw jrt [n=f] šbš Snṣrt ḫsr ḫwt ḫr(y) nb ḫst ḫr(y)-jh Mḏdw). The hieroglyphic text can be found in Jacques Jean Clère and F Bisson de La Roque, Rapport sur les fouilles de Médamoud (1928). (Le Caie, 1929), 113.) Translations are in Silke Grallert, Bauen, Stiften, Weihen: Ägyptische Bau- Und Restaurierungsschriften von Den Anfängen Bis Zur 30. Dynastie, Abhandlungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo, Bd. 18 (Berlin: Achet, 2001), 428; Rizzo, “L’exclusion de ḏw de l’espace Sacré Du Temple.,” 2012, 120.)

²² For discussion of the building activity described and its location see Grallert, Bauen, Stiften, Weihen, 268–69.

²³ Wb V, 547.14; Faulkner cites this reference as “dirt encumbering ruin” (Faulkner, A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 1991, 320.).

I purified the divine canals of your estate. I removed all the ḏw which was on their faces. Based on the context, ḏwt might have a physical reference here. Apparently, there had been some sort of dirt on or in the divine canals which the king had removed. Perhaps this dirt was vegetation or algae buildup, or various kinds of garbage and debris that had built up in the canals over time. Certainly, there may be a deeper reference to “evil” but that does not mean that there is not a “practical” reference to removing physical dirt as well.

In the inscriptions of several cube-statues in the temple of Amun at Karnak the word ḏw is used to refer to food scraps which needed to be cleaned off of the statues. Although these types of statues are found from earlier periods, those with more lengthy and descriptive inscriptions are more rare and range in date from the 26th dynasty into the Ptolemaic period. For example, Statue Caire JE 37199, a, 8–10 (26th dynasty) reads:

\[ jrw\) mr(wt)=k hr stj mw ḏt=j nd-hr hnt(y)=j m sp nb n(y) hnw(w)=k sk ḏw jry=j m wnḏw=f \]

The one who accomplishes that which you desire while sprinkling water on my body in order to protect my statue from any residue from your food service and to wipe away the ḏw that pertains to me from his food offerings.

---

25 This word begins to replace the term ḏwt beginning in the 18th dynasty (Wb V, 548).
28 Following Rizzo’s transliteration (Rizzo, “Une Mesure d’hygiène,” 513.).
29 A reference to the statue, according to Rizzo (Rizzo, “Une Mesure d’hygiène,” 513.)
30 Rizzo translates “infection” (Rizzo, “Une Mesure d’hygiène,” 513.
31 Following Rizzo’s translation (Rizzo, “Une Mesure d’hygiène,” 513.)
Another example is Statue Caire JE 37354 (30th dynasty) which reads:\[32\\]

\[
sk\ df^3 w\ r\ j^m(y)\ tw\ h^w=j\ (...\)\ ss^p=j\ snw\ hr\-tp\ s^wy\ bhd=j\ m\ sntyw\ sntr\ njs=w\ rn=j\ m\ r\ w^c\ m\ pr=f\ hr\ jrt\ stj\ mw\ hr=j\ sk=w\ hr=j\ wndww\ dr=sn\ dw\ jry=j^{35}
\]

Wipe away the provisions which are in the midst of my body...May they call on my name with one voice in his estate while pouring water on me and may they wipe off me the (residue of) the offerings and may they drive away the dw which clings to me.\[36\\]

Apparently, while the food offerings were beneficial to the statue and were placed on the statue, the residue left on the statue by the food was “Dirty” or corrupting and needed to be washed off. In these cases, it seems that dw refers, at least in part, to a physical substance, in this case food residue, that needs to be wiped away or washed off of the statue.\[37\\] The pouring of water onto the statue was apparently part of the cleaning ritual for removing the remnants of food offerings.\[38\\]

These texts could be an illustration of the principle that what is “dirt” depends on the context.\[39\\]

---

32 Rizzo also notes a third example (JE 36918) where dw seems to refer to remnants of food offerings on a statue (Rizzo, “Une Mesure d’hygiène,” 513.) This statue dates to the Ptolemaic period. For the text of the stela see Ramadan El- Sayed, “Deux Statues Inédites Du Musée Du Caire.,” Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale 84 (1984): 129–46.

33 Following Rizzo’s transliteration (Rizzo, “Une Mesure d’hygiène,” 514.).

34 A reference to the statue, according to Rizzo (Rizzo, “Une Mesure d’hygiène,” 514.).

35 A reference to priests according to Rizzo (Rizzo, “Une Mesure d’hygiène,” 514.)

36 Following the translation of Rizzo (Rizzo, “Une Mesure d’hygiène,” 514.)


38 Rizzo, “Une Mesure d’hygiène,” 516.

39 Lagerspetz describes this principle using a teacup. “The right answer to ‘Is that cup clean or dirty?’ is ‘clean’ when I am sitting with a teacup in my lap, waiting for a few drops more, and ‘dirty’ when you collect it to take to the sink with everyone’s cups and saucers. The transformation of my teacup from clean to dirty may look mysterious, for it did not coincide with an visible physical change in the item itself. ...What we need to see here is that the change of situational context is just as ‘real’ as any physical change would be. There is no contradiction involved in saying correctly that ‘dirty’ and ‘clean’ are real qualities of objects, and saying that what correctly counts as clean in one situation may correctly count as dirty in another. The apparent contradiction would only be created by the implicit assumption that the question, ‘Is the cup dirty?’ has a completely fixed meaning, staying the same regardless of situation. This kind of context dependence is often overlooked, here and elsewhere, because the background of the questions we ask in everyday life is for the most part obvious. At the tea party I would know whether you are serving more tea of collecting the china.” (Lagerspetz, A Philosophy of Dirt, 52–53.).
When the food offerings are presented they are beneficial to the statue cult; however, the remnants of the food are later considered “dirty” and need to be cleansed in order to keep the statue “clean.” The term *dw* can be used to refer to the “dirt” left by the food offerings that need to be removed.

Statements claiming that offerings are pure are frequent in ancient Egypt, but statements indicating what term(s) would be used to describe a defiled offering are rare, at least for the Pharaonic period. However, a text from Edfu may be suggestive in this regard (*Edfu VII*, 127,15–128,3). This spell is for offering pure meat.

\[
(127,15) \text{hnk wfw(t) dd mdw stpw(t) n(t) (127,16) sbjt stp.tj m-bjw= k sjjw wr ssn nw(t) (128,1) wfbw(t) wfb.tj h=jw nb(w) r-j= sn wfb.tj r (128,2) bnb dw kk= k j= sn (128,3) } <jw> k j= sn rwj dnd= k j= sn \]

Offering pure (pieces of meat): Recitation: The pieces of flesh of the enemies lie drawn out before you, O great falcon who spreads his talons. The pure things are pure and all the pieces of meat lie there cleansed of any foul impurity (*bnb dw*). If you eat of it and consume them, then your anger will be driven away by them.

---

40 Cf. spells for purifying offerings Goyon, “Une Formule Solennelle de Purification Des Offrandes Dans Les Temples Ptolémaïques.”


43 Following Kurth’s German translation (Kurth, *Edfou VII*, 128.)
‘b dw\textsuperscript{44} is the expression used here to refer to the impurity which said to be cleansed from the meat offering.\textsuperscript{45} The Egyptians seem to have understood that one could get sick from food\textsuperscript{46} and perhaps part of the purpose of this spell is to prevent this from happening.\textsuperscript{47}

### Removal of dw(t) From Persons

As seen above, there are a number of texts that suggest that dwt can refer to physical dirt, which was removed from a place or object. In the following section, we will look at a few examples in which the term dw(t) could refer to material dirt that is removed from person(s).

In Book of the Dead spell 86, several forms of “evil” are “washed off.” It reads:

\[
W^\text{x}(j) \text{ wjt twy wst dr}=j \text{ dwt}=j \text{ hmr}=j \text{ jsf}=j \text{ hsr}=j \text{ dwt jrt jwf}=j \text{ r t}.\]

\textsuperscript{44} Perhaps Grunert’s suggestion that ‘b refers to internal purification applies here (Grunert, “Nicht Nur Sauber, Sondern Rein: Rituelle Reinigungsanweisungen Aus Dem Grab Des Anchmahor in Saqqara.,” 148–50. In this understanding, ab would refer to the what is cleansed from the meat and the adjective Dw clearly indicates that what is cleansed is bad.

\textsuperscript{45} For the protection of food offerings (probably meat) from insects that appears on two Middle Kingdom coffins see Nadine Guilhou, “Repousser l’insecte Nécrophage: Procédés Magiques et Pratiques Rituelles.,” in _Le Microcosme Animal En Égypte Ancienne: De l’effroi à La Vénération. Études d’archéo- et Ethnoarthropodologie Culturelle_, ed. Sydney H. Aufrère and Cathie Spieser (Leuven; Paris; Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2021), 130.

\textsuperscript{46} For example, see pEbers no. 207 (42, 8–20) which clearly connects the consumption of “burnt meat” (\textit{dEf \textsuperscript{\textbullet}}) with stomach ailments. See also pEbers no. 189 (36,17–37,4). John Nunn suggested that “Ebers 207 may perhaps refer to some form of food poisoning” (Nunn, _Ancient Egyptian medicine_, 89.), while according to Westendorf some stomach ailments are triggered by consumptions of “unbekömmlichem Fleisch” (Westendorf, _Handbuch der altägyptischen Medizin_, 189. See also Ebers 855v (102, 6–9), which suggests a connection between ingesting food or drink and ailments (Westendorf, _Handbuch der altägyptischen Medizin_, 697.). Cf. Strouhal, Vachala, and Vymazalová, _The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians_. 2.). According to Herodotus, the Egyptians “think that it is from the food they eat that all sicknesses come to men” (Book II, 77; trans. Herodotus and Godley, _Herodotus_, 362–65.). The Egyptians do appear to be rather concerned with the stomach and its ailments in the medical texts; however, specific diagnoses of the causes of the ailments of the stomach are frequently not given (Nunn, _Ancient Egyptian medicine_, 89–90.). For discussion of stomach ailments in general see Westendorf, _Handbuch der altägyptischen Medizin_, 188–92; Strouhal, Vachala, and Vymazalová, _The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians_. 2, 211–29.

\textsuperscript{47} This is certainly a concern if some of the meat offerings were raw and were not cooked until later following the reversion of the offerings. See Emily Teeter, “The Raw, the Cooked, and the Immolated: The Preparation of Meat Offerings in Ancient Egypt.,” in _Religion et Alimentation En Égypte et Orient Anciens_, ed. Marie-Lys Arnette, vol. 2 (Le Caire: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 2019), 355–58.
I purify myself on this great sector, driving off my dwt, rubbing off my jsft, casting off the dwt that was on my flesh to the earth.  

The removal of each of these “bad things” seems to be depicted in ways in which one would wash off or cleanse oneself from various forms of dirt or impurity. The term jsft (disorder, chaos) is mentioned as being removed in a context of cleansing, but the term dwt appears twice as something removed in this passage, the second specifically specifying that the dwt was on his flesh, but then cast off to the ground. It is tempting to speculate that this description of dwt being released to the ground is based on the practice of washing by means of rinsing with water. One thinks of the numerous depictions of a king or the deceased having water poured over his head. If one is washed in this manner, as dirt is washed off, it would flow from the body of the person being washed to the ground. Perhaps this is what is envisioned by the description of dwt being released to the ground. In any case, this text suggests that, in at least one of the references to dwt here, the term refers to physical dirt or grime which was on the body.

Similar examples can be found in the Pyramid Texts. For example, Pyramid Text 451 reads:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{dd mdw h3 Ppj pw j.rs ts tw $h$ w$b$ k3=k w$b$ b3=k w$b$ sh$m=k jj n=k mwt=k jj} \\
\text{n=k Nwt Snt-wrt sw$b$=s tw Ppj pw $Sn$s=k tw Ppj pw $hw$y j3w51=k h3 Ppj pw w$b$.tw$b$} \\
\text{k3=k w$b$ sh$m=k jm(j) 3hw w$b$=k jm(j) ntrw h3 Ppj pw $j$=n=k $ssp$ n=k tp=k hr Gb j.dr=f} \\
\text{dwt jrt=k Ppj pw hr Jtm.52}
\end{align*}
\]

48 Following translation and transliteration in Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 201.

49 For examples see Gardiner, “The Baptism of Pharaoh.”


51 Written with the sign \(\text{V96}\) which can have the phonetic value gi (“Hieroglyphic Sign - Thot Sign List,” accessed January 24, 2022, https://thotsignlist.org/mysign?id=6476.).

52 Following the version from Pepi I’s pyramid (Staatliche Museen (Berlin and Sethe, Die Altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte, 1908, 466–68.
Recitations: Oh Pepi! Awake! Raise yourself. Stand up! May you be clean, may your \textit{ka} be clean, may your \textit{ba} be clean, and may your \textit{sekhem}-scepter be clean. Your mother comes to you. Nut the great strainer comes to you. She makes you clean, O Pepi. She unites you, O Pepi. She prevents your lacking. O Pepi! You are clean while your \textit{ka} is clean and your \textit{sekhem}, which is among the \textit{akhs}, is clean and your \textit{ba}, which is among the gods, is clean. O Pepi! “Take for yourself your bones. Seize for yourself your head” says Geb. “May it drive away the \textit{dwt} which concerns you, Pepi” says Atum.\textsuperscript{53}

This spell concerns ideas of cleansing and purification. Most of the emphasis throughout the spell is on the state of cleanness or purity into which Pepi is entering. However, the final phrase of the spell is interesting since it seems to indicate what is cleansed from Pepi, namely \textit{dwt}. The result of the cleansing seems to be that \textit{dwt} is driven off from Pepi. Most of the terms used for cleansing in this spell (\textit{wꜣb} and \textit{swꜣb}) seem to refer to the resultant state of purity. However, the verb \textit{dr} refers to the removal of the unwanted substance, namely \textit{dwt}. Of course, the exact referent of \textit{dwt} is not clear. The \textit{dwt} could be a material substance that is washed away, or it could be a metaphorical use such as the removal of “moral dirt.”\textsuperscript{54} Perhaps both are referred to.

In a funerary context, a physical reference could also include substances related to the process of putrefaction and decay.\textsuperscript{55} In either case, \textit{dwt} is removed via cleansing perhaps further suggesting that \textit{dwt} could be understood as an Egyptian term related to the concept of dirt.

A similar example is Pyramid Text 452.

\begin{center}
\textit{dd mdw h3 Ppj pw ṣḥ wꜣb=k ṣwꜣb ṭw Hr m khꜣw wꜣb=k ṣbw=k ṣbw Šw ṣbw=k ṭbw Tjnt ṭbw=k ṭbw 4 ṭhw prw ᴥnɪj m P wꜣb ḣr=k ṭw mwt Nwt Hnwt-wrt Hnm=s ṭw ṣꜣp n=k ṭp=k ṣt n=k ṣkw=k ḫr Gb ḫt ṭw ḣr Ppj pn ḣt m ṭw ḣr=f ḫr ḣtm}\textsuperscript{56}
\end{center}


\textsuperscript{55} See \textit{Wb V}, 547.15: “oft: das Schlecte am Toten, an seinem Leibe u.a. d.h. Schmutz u. dgl.,” (often: the bad thing about the dead, his body, etc. i.e. dirt and the like).

\textsuperscript{56} Following the version from the Pyramid of Pepi I. Staatliche Museen (Berlin and Sethe, \textit{Die Altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte}, 1908, 470.
Recitation: O Pepi! Stand up that you may be clean and let your ka become clean. Horus cleanses you with cool water. Your cleansing is the cleansing of Shu. Your cleansing is the cleansing of Tefnut. Your cleansing is the cleansing of the four akhs who went out rejoicing from Pe. Be clean with respect to yourself since your mother Nut, the great strainer cleanses you and joins you. “Seize for yourself your head. Unite for yourself your bones” says Geb. “Destroy the dwt that concerns this Pepi. Cease the dwt that concerns him,” says Atum.\(^{57}\)

Cleansing and purification are clearly a focus of this spell. The only indication concerning what the “dirt” that needs to be cleansed from Pepi might be are the two quotations by Geb and Atum at the end of the text. These indicate that the dwt, which concerns Pepi, is to be destroyed and ended. Perhaps dwt here is related to physical manifestations of decay in the body.\(^{58}\) This might explain why it says that the dwt must “cease,” i.e., that the process of decay must be stopped as well as the physical manifestations of it removed. While dwt may or may not be literally a physical substance that is to be washed away here, it is interesting to note the connection between dwt and cleansing. This spell would suggest that the substance(s) that are removed from Pepi in the process of these purifications are referred to as dwt.

A third example is Pyramid Text 455.

Recitations: The canals fill, the rivers flood with the cleansing which goes out from Osiris. O sem priest, or member of the patricians, O great ten of the palace, O great ten of Heliopolis, O great Ennead: sit so that you may see this cleansing of father Osiris, this Pepi, with hesmen-natron and with bed-natron. The spittle which went out from the mouth of Horus, the saliva which went out from the mouth of Seth—Horus is clean by it. The dwt which pertains to him is released from him to the ground after Seth acted against him. Seth is clean by it. The dwt, which pertains to him, is released to the ground after

\(^{57}\) Translation mostly follows that of Allen, The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts, 114.

\(^{58}\) Wb V, 547.15.
Horus acted against him. This Pepi is clean by it. The dwt which pertains to him is released to the ground.

Again, this spell concerns cleansing and dwt is the object which is removed or in this case released during the process. Interestingly, the dwt is repeatedly said to be released to the ground, perhaps because it is washed off with water. Again, if washing was performed by pouring water over someone, then in the process, the substances removed would be “released” to the ground.

The close connection between dwt and what is removed via cleansing continues into the Coffin Texts. For example, in Coffin Text 761, the deceased is told:

\[(391f) \text{Pr } r=k \text{ w}^\circ b=k \text{ m } s n \text{ n}^\circ n (391g) \text{ hrs} \text{t } \text{dwt=k}^6 m s \text{ k}^b h w \text{ pt}\]

Go out so that you may be cleansed in the pool of life, that your dwt be driven away in the cool pool of the sky.

In this text, there is a close connection between washing with water and the removal of dwt. The word dwt must refer to the dirt that is removed via the washing. Of course, dwt could be used metaphorically to refer symbolically to uncleanness or impurity that must be removed. However, the metaphor makes good sense if there is a physical or material substance to dwt that is then extended to a metaphorical meaning. In any case, the parallel lines are illuminating here. The first phrase positively states the clean state to be achieved via washing while the second phrase indicates what is removed via the washing in order to achieve the clean state.

Similarly, section 12 of Chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead reads:

\[\text{s}h\text{r=j dwt jrt=j ptr rf sw w}^\circ b.t=w=j \text{pw h}r\text{w mswt m s}^\circ w\text{y wrwy }\text{f}^\circ wy \text{ nty m }\text{h}^n\text{n-nswt}^6\]

---


60 Determined with the pustule (Aa2). Cf. CT 755 (Buck and Gardiner, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts. VI, VI*, 384).-

61 Following transliteration of Quirke, *Going out in Daylight*, 56.
I remove the dwt attached to me. What is that? It means that I am purified on the day of birth in the two great and mighty pools, which are in Henennesut.62

The term dwt here refers to something that pertains to the individual and that can be removed in pools of water.63 While this text may have a symbolic meaning, it does suggest that dwt can be "washed off."

In Chapter 169, a rare Book of the Dead spell,64 it is stated that natron is a purifying substance which can remove dwt.65

\[ \text{Jw}=k \ \text{w}^\circ b.tj \ sp \ sn \\
\text{h}^\circ ty=k \ m \ ^\circ bw \ phwy=ky \ twrj \\
\text{M} \ bd \ hsmn \ kbh \ m \ sntr \\
\text{W}^\circ b=k \ m \ jrrt \ hpt \\
\text{M} \ hnk\ nt \ tnm\tyt \\
\text{M} \ hsmn \ hr \ dwt=k \]

You are pure, you are pure, 
Your front is pure, your back cleansed, 
With bed-natron and hsmn-natron, and cool water with incense. 
You are pure with the milk of Apis, 
With the beer of Tenemyt, 
With the hsmn-natron that clears out your dwt.66


63 In his study of the body in the Coffin Texts, Nyord notes the following concerning the expression “pertains to.” He writes, “Apart from the CONTAINER structure, several similar substances are also said to “pertain to” (r) the flesh instead of actually being inside it. This is the case with such negative substances as badness (d\(w\))", corruption (d\(w\)t) and efflux (rd\(w\)), but also the positive quality of “the fragrance of a god.” In a different context, the eye of Horus is said to “have appeared and become visible on (r) your flesh and joined to (r) your flesh.” Likewise, the preposition r is used to describe ointment being applied to the flesh. Thus, the preposition r seems to describe substances that are external in relation to the flesh, either by coming out of it or by being joined to it from the outside.” (Nyord, Breathing Flesh, 336.) This further supports the idea that dwt(i) can refer to material dirt that is being washed off of the body.

64 This Book of the Dead Spell is only known on the Papyrus of Neferwebenef Turi (Louvre N 3092) (Suzanne Ratié, Le Papyrus de Neferoubenef (Louvre III 93)., vol. 43, Bibliothèque d’étude (Le Caire: Institut français d’Archéologie orientale, 1968), 48–49; Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 419.).

65 For the hieroglyphic text see Ratié, Le Papyrus de Neferoubenef (Louvre III 93)., 43:Pl. XV.

66 Transliteration and translation following Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 419.
It is possible that a number of substances mentioned here all combined in the cleaning process to remove the dwt. However, at the very least, hsmn-natron is specifically referred to as “clearing out dwt.” Again, while the dwt mentioned could be functioning on multiple levels, it seems that it could at least partially refer to a physical substance removed from the body.\textsuperscript{67} Even if there is not a material reference behind dwt in this spell, the metaphorical reference to clearing dwt with natron still could still have a basis in material reality.

The term dwt is mentioned as a substance that is removed from the priest in temple rituals. In the “speech for unfastening the seal” (r sfḥt ḫbtyt) of the Daily Temple Ritual from the temple of Seti I at Abydos,\textsuperscript{68} after saying he is breaking the cord and releasing the seal, the priest performing the ritual says:

\begin{quote}
Jw dr.n=j dwt nb jry=j r t\textsuperscript{3}
\end{quote}

I have driven every dwt pertaining to me to the ground.\textsuperscript{69} Again, we have the idea of the removal of dwt to the ground. Earlier episodes of the ritual had emphasized the purity of the priest, but they did not make explicit what was cleansed from the priest.\textsuperscript{70} The word dwt may function on more than one level here. It could refer to physical taint that is removed, and it could also refer to a metaphorical or moral taint that is removed or

\textsuperscript{67} Suzanne Ratié says that the purifications taking place in Chapter 169 are both “physique que moral” (Ratié, Le Papyrus de Neferoubenef (Louvre III 93)., 43:49.

\textsuperscript{68} David, Temple Ritual at Abydos, 138.

\textsuperscript{69} The scene can be found in Calverley and Broome, The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos, Volume II: The Chapels of Amen-Rê’, Rê'-Harakhti, Ptah, and King Sethos., 14. A transliteration and translation is in David, Temple Ritual at Abydos, 138.

\textsuperscript{70} David, Temple Ritual at Abydos, 137. The Karnak version of the temple ritual includes more chapters which emphasize the purity of the priest. For examples see chapters 1-8 of the Karnak liturgy (Braun, Pharao und Priester, 97ff.)
washed away.\textsuperscript{71} In any case, \textit{dwt} seems to refer to whatever has been removed by the priest in order to enter the sanctuary and perform the ritual.\textsuperscript{72}

One last example, in which \textit{dwt} seems to refer to the “dirt” that is removed via purification, is the 20\textsuperscript{th} dynasty papyrus Chester Beatty XVI (BM 10696).\textsuperscript{73}

\begin{verbatim}
(Recto 1) R n jr cbw jr n Dwhty nb mdw-ntr n psqt…(2) hrw nb m ddtj j mn ms n mnt jj
hr= k jnk Dhwty mr…ntr…(3) [t]\m s3=f hr ds=f wn=j r=k s s spt=k…dww nb…(4)
\cbw=f Sth \cbw Sth \cbw=f sn\trj n=f Dhwty…(5) [sn]trj n=f Sth jw=f w\b m mw nw
pf…3hty nt…(6) jw=f \w\b [m mw nw] pw pr m \b pr m r n …(7) wrj…[jw=f] w\b m
mw ntry pr m tph wrty…
\end{verbatim}

(1) Spell for doing the purifications which Thoth lord of divine words did for the Ennead… (2) Every day in what was said: O N born of N, come to you! I am Thoth…god…(3) Atum being his own son. Let me open your mouth. Spread open your lips…every \textit{dwt}…(4) his purifications are (those of) Seth and the purifications of Seth are his purifications. May Thoth cense for him…may Seth cense for him. He is pure with the water of that ….two horizons of….(6) He is pure with that water, which went out from Heliopolis…which went out from the mouth of…. (7) great….he is pure with the divine water, which went out from the two great caverns…

Unfortunately, this purification text is rather fragmentary, but it can still be informative since the “use of water for the removal of evil (\textit{dwt}) figures prominently in the ritual.”\textsuperscript{74} As is typical, the text primarily emphasizes purification and does not specifically mention what physical or non-physical substance(s) are removed. Unfortunately, the text is fragmentary, but there is mention of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} In papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.84, the text mentions some festivals of Behbeit (XIII, 6-9). Concerning one of these the texts reads: “The women undress and sprinkle with cool water, doing purifications and making pure this goddess and driving away \textit{dwt}” (\textit{hw m hzw jw h kkubt jr cbw sw\b ntrj tw hsr dw nb(w)} (Dimitri Meeks and Institut français d’archéologie orientale, \textit{Mythes et légendes du Delta d’après le papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.84} (Le Caire: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 2008), 29.). Here again we see that the term used for the substance that is purified is \textit{dwt}. In this case, Meeks suggests that the “evil,” which is being cleansed, is related to the sexual defilement of the goddess (Meeks and Institut français d’archéologie orientale, \textit{Mythes et l?}, 278.).
\item \textsuperscript{72} See also Chapter 24 of the Karnak liturgy where the priest says, “There is not any \textit{dw} pertaining to me…I am pure” (\textit{mn dw nb jrj=j…w\b kw}) (Braun, \textit{Pharaos und Priester}, 134.).
\item \textsuperscript{73} Gardiner, \textit{Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum: Third Series: Chester Beatty Gift.}, 127; plate 71.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Gee, \textit{The Requirements of Ritual Purity in Ancient Egypt.}, 291–92.
\end{itemize}
although the word(s) immediately before and after are missing. It seems reasonable to assume that the $dw$ mentioned in this text is removed via the washing and/or the censing mentioned later in the text. Again, the $dw$ could be a physical substance, metaphorical or both.

Other Expression involving $dw(t)$

The term $dw(t)$ appears in several expressions in which it is worth briefly exploring if it might be related to the concept of “dirt.” For example, the adjective $dw$ is occasionally used to describe speech or words. For example, the tomb inscription of Seshem-nefer says:

$$Wn=(j) \; dd=(j) \; hr \; ns\; wt \; 3h \; n \; rmt$$
$$N \; sp \; dd=(j) \; ht \; nb \; dw \; r \; rmt \; nb \; (Urk \; I, \; 57.15–16)$$

I used to tell the king what serves people,
I never spoke a $dw$ thing against people. 

Jerome Rizzo suggests that in regard to speech, $bjn$ refers to language used to “degrade” or “devalue” someone, whereas $dw$ refers more to “dirtying” or “sullying” someone’s reputation or character. Thus, in regard to speech, $dw$ often has an “obscene” or “scatological” connotation.

---

75 This is the later term that gradually replaces $dwt$ beginning in the 18th dynasty ($Wb \; V$, 548). This text dates to the 20th dynasty.


77 Rizzo, “$bjn$: De Mal En Pis.,” 317. In his comparison of the terms $bjn$ and $dw$ Rizzo argues that, “Sur le plan du sens, ces deux verbes de qualité rendent compte d’un processus de dégradation. Cependant, alors que, comme nous l’avons commenté précédemment, le terme $bjn$ met plutôt en exergue les effets mécaniques d’un tel processus, $dw$ évoque plus distinctement une corruption physicochimique ou une putréfaction organique qui, par relation métaphorique, entraîne vers les notions de souillure, d’impureté et de pollution. On notera que l’élargissement du champ sémantique à des notions abstraites concerne conjointement les termes $bjn$ et $dw$. Partant, aux sens « devenir diminué », « devenir dégradé », « devenir dépravé », etc., relatifs au terme $bjn$ seront opposées les acceptions « devenir infect », « devenir abject », « devenir corrompu », dont le terme $dw$ semble départi” (Rizzo, “$bjn$: De Mal En Pis.,” 315.). Thus, $bjn$ water is harmful or dangerous, whereas $dw$ water is chemically or ritually impure. Similarly with regards to animals, $bjn$ animals, such as the crocodile or wolf, or harmful or dangerous in the sense that they can seriously injure or kill their victim. A fly, however, can be $dw$, since it is a vector for disease which enters and corrupts a person. (Rizzo, “$bjn$: De Mal En Pis.,” 316–17).

78 Rizzo, “$bjn$: De Mal En Pis.,” 317.
If this is the case, then words said to be metaphorically \( dw \) could fit with a connotation of \( dw(t) \) as “dirt.”

In a similar manner, the expression \( dw-kd \) has typically been understood to mean something along the lines of those with “evil” or “malicious character,”\(^79\) as in, for example, the statement:

\[ N \text{ sm3 } jb=j \text{ m } dw-kd \]

I did not consort with the \( dw \)-of-form.\(^80\)

However, if there is a relationship between \( dw \) and the concept of dirt or dirty, perhaps one can speculate that the expression could have had a connotation of a “dirty” character or a “dirty” man.\(^82\) Regardless, even if the metaphor is based off of a metaphor of dirtiness, the expression refers to “dirty” in a moral sense.

**Summary**

While this is far from a comprehensive examination of the term \( dw(t) \), the above examples suggest that the term, on at least some occasions, seems to have a close connection to the concept of “dirt” and in some contexts the term at least partially applies to a material substance. Rizzo notes that the term “\( dw \)” is “situe à la croisée des domaines de l’impur et du mal.”\(^83\) While in the vast majority of cases, the determinative for \( dw(t) \) is the “bad bird” (G37),

---


\(^80\) From the door jamb of the chief sculptor Userhat of time of Seti I (Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, 70.).

\(^81\) Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, 70.

\(^82\) For the expression \( dw-kd \) see *Wb* V, 546.21–22, which glosses as “der Bösartige” (the evil one).

\(^83\) Rizzo, “Le Terme \( Dw \) Comme Superlatif de l’impur l’exemple de ‘bw Dw.,’” 2007, 124.
occasionally the pustule determinative is used. He argues that the fact that pustule determinative (Aa2) can be substituted for the “bad bird” determinative (G37) is evidence that the term $dw$ bridges both of these categories.\(^8^4\) Thus, the term $dw$ often appears in contexts where questions of physical or moral evil as well as impurity are present at the same time.\(^8^5\)

> It is worth noting here again that in many cultures and/or religions ideas of dirty/clean and pure/impure are often closely related to ideas of ethics and morality.\(^8^6\) Thus it is not surprising that the Egyptian term $dw(t)$ can, at times, appear to operate in both realms.\(^8^7\) Perhaps it is useful at this point to also recall the categorization in some anthropological studies that occupations can be classed as “dirty” due to physical taint, social taint, and/or moral taint.\(^8^8\) Perhaps we can understand the Egyptian term $dw(t)$ functioning in a similar way, although with a broader focus than simply occupations. In other words, $dw(t)$ can refer to “dirt” in a variety of spheres or on a variety of levels and could reference multiple dimensions or levels of dirt simultaneously. Thus, when a person is cleansed from $dw(t)$ it could be referring to material “dirt,” moral “dirt,” or both simultaneously. In the Egyptian context, “dirt” might also include

---


\(^8^7\) Cf. Braun, Pharao und Priester, 237–38.

\(^8^8\) Ashforth and Kreiner, “‘How Can You Do It?’”; Hughes et al., “Beyond the Symbolic.”
aspects of disease and sickness, various forms of dangerous corruption, and moral “dirt” could include “dirty” offenses against deities as well people.

While it is going too far to say that ḏwt means “dirt” since the term can refer to a wide variety of evil generally, at the same time in a number of contexts, the term ḏw(t) seems to have at least a partial reference to a physical substance(s) that need(s) to be cleansed, i.e. dirt. Orly Gal has suggested that the term ḏw functions on “two levels of understanding,” similarly to the term ḏb. According to Gal, “the word ḏb means “pure one,” and is “a metaphor and has two levels of understanding,” namely “cleanliness” and “moral purity.” It seems likely that ḏw(t) functions similarly; it can refer to both physical and moral impurity. In light of this, it is at least worth considering that ḏw(t) might be one of the closest Egyptian terms to the concepts of dirt or dirty, broadly defined.


90 Rizzo suggests translating ḏw with the French words “infection, abjection, and corruption,” when referring to a body or organism. However, Rizzo also notes that ḏw does not only apply to things related to gods and men such as “gestures, thoughts, and speech”, but ḏw affects “toutes les strates de la Création à savoir, les éléments-principalement l’eau, l’air et la terre-, les corps célestes ainsi que certaines phases du continuum temporal.” Rizzo concludes that, “Il ressort de ce rapide inventaire que le processus Dw, qu’il opère par une atteinte organique ou par le médium de la metaphore, ne peut être dissocié d’un principe général de corruption et de désagrégation du monde ordonné.” (Rizzo, “Une Mesure d’hygiène,” 519–20.


93 Gal, “Uncleanness and Sin, Cleanliness and Purity.,” 244.

94 According to Braun, “In vielen Sprachen wird sogar ein und dasselbe Wort für ‘Sünde’ und ‘Schmutz’ verwendet (z. B. ägypt. ḏw- “Böses, Schlechtes, Unrecht; Schmutz”).” (Braun, Pharao und Priester, 238.).
CHAPTER 8: OTHER WORDS POSSIBLY RELATED TO DIRT

This section examines a few more Egyptian words which may have some relation to the concept of dirt or dirty, but do not clearly fit into the other categories discussed previously. Most of these are only attested a handful of times, so determining their meaning is often somewhat speculative.

\hspace{1cm} \textit{ḥt̪b\textit{w}}

Both the \textit{Wörterbuch}\textsuperscript{1} and Gardiner\textsuperscript{2} understood the meaning of the word \textit{ḥt\textit{b}w} to be “dirty,” especially of clothes. However, Caminos, in contrast, argued that the term means to “be shabby, threadbare, in rags.”\textsuperscript{3} Several passages contrast \textit{ḥt\textit{b}w} with \textit{wbt\textit{t}} or “bright” garments. In a Hymn in honor of Ramesses IV\textsuperscript{4}, it reads:

\begin{quote}
(2) \textit{n\textit{h} n\textit{ty ḥ\textit{r} (3) ḕ\textit{y st wnh m p\textit{kṭ n\textit{ḥ} wnw ḥt\textit{b} wbt (\textit{ḥt\textit{b}w) wt\textit{t} }}\\
Those who were naked, they are clothed with fine linen. Those who were \textit{ḥt\textit{b}w} are bright.\textsuperscript{5}
\end{quote}

Similarly, the Teaching of Amenemope exhorts:

\begin{quote}
21,1–2) \textit{m-d\textit{ḥt} \textit{ḥr=ḥ n s\textit{ṭ} wbt m\textit{ṭw=ḥ b\textit{ḥ s ḥt\textit{b} ḫ (\textit{ḥt\textit{b}w) ḫ)}}}
Do not set your face toward the bright sedju\textsuperscript{7} garment and you refuse him who is \textit{ḥt\textit{b}w}.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{1} “schmutzig (von den Kleidung)” (\textit{Wb III}, 182).

\textsuperscript{2} Gardiner, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Onomastica. I, I}, 22–23.

\textsuperscript{3} Caminos, \textit{Late-Egyptian Miscellanies.}, 1:290–93.

\textsuperscript{4} O. Turin N. 57001 Recto (\textit{KRI VI} 68–69).

\textsuperscript{5} The word is determined \textsuperscript{8}. Presumably the idea is of bright, white, clean clothing.

\textsuperscript{6} Following transliteration of Vincent Pierre-Michel Laisney, \textit{L’Enseignement d’Aménémopé} (Roma: Pontificio Istituto biblico, 2007), 188–90.

\textsuperscript{7} This word has been understood as “loincloth” but it seems to refer to a more valuable garment here. For discussion of this word see Jac J. Janssen, \textit{Daily Dress at Deir El-Medîna: Words for Clothing}, GHP Egyptology 8 (London: Golden House Publications, 2008), 46–49.
A meaning of “dirty” in these passages makes excellent sense. However, one could also interpret the contrast as primarily reflecting “rich” vs “poor” rather than “clean” vs “dirty” in which case a meaning such as “ragged” could also make sense in the context. Even if “ragged” is the meaning, however, this still might have a connotation of dirty.

\(ht\) appears to be an activity or action which someone can do. Thus, in Chester Beatty IX verso B 13. 5–6:

\[
\text{bn } \text{ht} \text{w nb jr.n=}k \text{ mn wn } \text{dwt} \ (6) \ nbt \ jry \ \text{ht}t=k \ [\ldots] \ sdm=f \ n=k \ m-b\text{h nbw } m3\text{t} \ (7) \ j \ mn \ msw \ n \ mn(t) \ sw^5b \ tj \ R^c \ m \ prwt=f
\]

Any ragged things which you have done are not reproached. There is not any evil (dirt?) corresponding to your body. […] he will hear for you in the presence of the lords of maat. (7) Oh, NN born of NN. May Re purify you in his goings forth.

\(ht\) here refers to something bad which a person may have done and from which he can be purified (sw^5b). Certainly, a meaning related to “dirtying” or “besmirching” would make good sense in this context. However, if \(ht\) refers to an act that is wrong or evil, the purification could be removal of the damage or guilt resulting from it.

---

8 According to Borghouts, the term can be an adjective or a substantive (J. F. Borghouts, “The Magical Texts of Papyrus Leiden I 348.,” Oudheidkundige Mededelingen Uit Het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden 51 (1970): 121.). The term may appear in Papyrus Leiden I 348 Recto 12,2 although the papyrus is damaged and thus of little help in determining the meaning of the word. Borghouts suggests that in Leiden I 348 it main mean “rags” or “raggy”, “dirty attire.” (Borghouts, “The Magical Texts of Papyrus Leiden I 348.,” 25, 121.)

9 It is interesting to note prescription No. 721 in Papyrus Ebers (87, 15–17), which is “another for driving away \(ht\) of the face” (\(kt \ nt \ dr \ ht\text{w nw } hr\)). Caminos argues that \(ht\) here must be something more permanent than just dirt, since, presumably, dirt could just be washed off and not require a medical prescription (Caminos, Late-Egyptian Miscellaneous., 1:291.). The \(\text{Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte}\) says it means “Flecken” and refers to a disease on the face (Deines and Westendorf, \text{Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Zweite Hälfte (h–q).}, 7:638.). While the remedy must be prescribed for something more permanent than dirt that can be washed off, this does not necessarily mean that the term \(ht\) could not refer to the concept of dirtiness, broadly defined, since more permanent spots on the skin could appear to “dirty” the face and require a stronger prescription to remove than just water. Cf. The Ramesseum Onomasticon where the term \(\text{I\hspace{-.1em}H\hspace{-.1em}E\hspace{-.1em}E}\) is used of the skin of a bull (Alan H. Gardiner, Ancient Egyptian Onomastica. 3, 3, (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), VA.).
\textit{ht\textbeta} may appear in Papyrus Anastasi VI (39–40)\textsuperscript{10} This appears to be a letter of complaints and the pertinent section is as follows.\textsuperscript{11}

(39) \textit{bn jw=w (r) rh šmt hr tβ mjt p3-wn tw=n dy [h]tβw m mnt hn\textsuperscript{c} nβy=[n] rmtn m-dj nβ nty hr hmw wsrw dyt n=j r (41) ġhwty

We do not try\textsuperscript{12} to go on the street because we are here ragged(?) daily with our people together with those who are crafting oars and those who were given to me as field workers.

Whatever precisely \textit{ht\textbeta} refers to here it is something that prevents a number of people from going onto the streets. Since this letter largely deals with complaints concerning weavers and various types of cloth being taken away, it seems reasonable to assume that the writer would complain of his people now being “ragged” or “threadbare” rather than “dirty.” Presumably, if \textit{ht\textbeta} meant dirty clothes they could be washed, but if the clothes were old and ragged cloth and weavers would be required to remedy this situation.

It seems that in light of the context of the entirety of Papyrus Anastasi VI, a meaning of “ragged” for \textit{ht\textbeta} may be the more likely interpretation. However, we should not necessarily discount the fact that the word still may have communicated an aspect of “dirtiness.” If the Egyptians (or at least the upper classes) appreciated fine, white garments and associated them with cleanliness, it would not be unlikely that ragged garments could be associated with dirtiness or unkemptness.

\textsuperscript{10} Gardiner notes that the signs \textsuperscript{1} and \textsuperscript{2} are “quite uncertain.” (Gardiner, \textit{Late-Egyptian Miscellanies.}, 7:75a.

\textsuperscript{11} For the text see Gardiner, \textit{Late-Egyptian Miscellanies.}, 7:75; Caminos, \textit{Late-Egyptian Miscellanies.}, 1:282.

\textsuperscript{12} For this construction involving \textit{rh} see François Neveu, \textit{The Language of Ramesses: Late Egyptian Grammar} (Oxford ; Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2015), 68.
The word *btk* (𓊧𓊢𓊭), which occurs in the Dialogue of Ipuwer (9.1), has been glossed as “squalor,” and thus we will briefly consider its meaning here. This writing of *btk* with the pustule determinative is only attested in this line of Ipuwer. Although words written *btk* with different determinatives occur a handful of other times in Egyptian texts, they do not seem to have a connotation of “dirty.” For example, 𓊰𓊢𓊭 occurs twice in the Old Kingdom autobiography of Weni. The *Wörterbuch* defines as “Aufrührer” and suggests that it might refer to “eintrichtenden Nomaden.” However, this interpretation has been disputed. According to Goedicke, “the conjectured noun *btk* “rebel” is not tenable;” instead, he suggests reading 𓊰𓊢𓊭 as a verb for “fleeing” and the seated figure as an ideogram for *Amw*, “Asiatic.” In the Greco-Roman period, *btk* (𓊦𓊥𓊥) seems to be used for slaughtering enemies. These few occurrences

---

13 Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 1991, 86. The *Wörterbuch* defines as “Schmutz” and notes that the term occurs in Literature of the Middle Kingdom (*Wb I*, 485.1). Presumably, the reference is to the occurrence in Ipuwer.

14 According to the TLA, the Ipuwer reference is the only attestation of 𓊰𓊢𓊭 and it is given a unique lemma number (58220) (“Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae - Detailed Information for an Entry in the List of Lemmata,” accessed February 9, 2023, https://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/servlet/GetWcnDetails?u=guest&f=0&l=0&wn=58220&db=0.).

15 *Urk I*, 104.12; 105.4

16 *Wb I*, 485.2.


18 Hans Goedicke, “The Alleged Military Campaign in Southern Palestine in the Reign of Pepi I (VIth Dynasty),” *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali* 38, no. 3 (1963): 8. It has also been suggested to read this word *btk* in line x+12 of a fragmentary 11th dynasty royal inscription from Deir El-Ballas (Henry George Fischer, *Inscriptions from the Copite Nome, Dynasties VI-XI* (Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1964), 114.). However, the text is broken at this point and thus the reading is highly speculative and disputed (John Coleman Darnell, “The Eleventh Dynasty Royal Inscription from Deir El-Ballas,” *Revue d’Egyptologie* 59 (2008): 93.).

19 *Wb I*, 485.4.
make it difficult to determine precisely the meaning of btk although those with the walking legs
determinative (ขา) might suggest the idea of motion. It is difficult to determine if these few
occurrences are of the same word with different determinatives or if they are distinct terms as the
Wörterbuch suggests.\textsuperscript{20} Below we will focus on the occurrences in the Dialogue of Ipuwer in
order to see if the meaning of “squalor” is a probable meaning and whether the term may be
related to the conception of dirty.

The word btk appears twice in the Dialogue of Ipuwer (3.4 and 9.1) although it is
classified differently in each case.\textsuperscript{21} The first occurrence in line 3.4 is determined with the
walking legs ขา\textsuperscript{22} while the second (line 9.1) is determined with the pustule .ptr. In lines 3.2–3.3,
the writer laments that gems are on the necks of maidservants (hmtwt) while ladies of the estate
(nbwt pr) are hungry. The text then reads:\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{verbatim}
(3.3) Jw ms bw […] (3.4) špswt hcfw-sn snm.w jsjjwt jb=sn btk hr nd-hrt […]
\end{verbatim}

Surely, […] abhor […] rich ladies, their limbs saddened because of old clothes, their
hearts btk at greeting […]

The next occurrence is in 9.1, again following Enmarch’s transliteration and translation.

\begin{verbatim}
[mtn] nbw hnkwt hr s3tw sdr btk r=f m sdt n=f šdw
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Wb I}, 485.

\textsuperscript{21} The term btkw appears in CT 1133 (CT VII, 476d). Unfortunately, as Nyord notes, this is “a remarkably obscure
passage,” and thus it is difficult to determine if the term in CT 1133 is related to btk in Ipuwer. The term btkw in CT
1133 may be related to the lungs. See Nyord, \textit{Breathing Flesh}, 127–28, esp. 127 n. 835.

\textsuperscript{22} The Wörterbuch has ขา as “vom bekümmerten Herzen” and attested in literature of the Middle Kingdom
(\textit{Wb I}, 485.3). Presumably, it is referring to this occurrence in Ipuwer since this appears to be the only time it is
attested. See TLA lemma no. 58240 (“Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae - Detailed Information for an Entry in the List
of Lemmata,” accessed February 9, 2023, https://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/servlet/GetWcnDetails?u=guest&f=0&l=0&wn=58240&db=0.).

\textsuperscript{23} The transliteration and translation below follows Enmarch Enmarch, \textit{A World Upturned}, 86.
[Look,] the owners of beds are on the ground; he who slept btk is one who smooths for himself a skin.

The following line again picks up the theme of the rich ladies (špswt) going hungry.

    Gardiner noted that in 9.1, btk “seems to mean something bad” and he translated that line as “he who passed the night in squalor is one who prepares for himself a water skin.” He suggests that in 3.3 “the sense may be” that “noble ladies are now so ill clad that they are ashamed to greet their friends.” Enmarch says that “In the Old Kingdom btk occurs as a term for foreign enemies and btk occurs in the Graeco-Roman period Kom Ombo text (“they are here btk-ing the downcast”) suggesting a base meaning of the sort “strike down, afflict,” which would suit the parallelism here.”

In line 9.1, whatever precisely btk means, its meaning must fit in with the parallelism of the phrase before: “owners of beds are on the ground.” Btk must have some similar meaning or association with ššt (ground) in order for the contrast to make sense here. If btk means something like “sinking” as Enmarch suggests, perhaps the idea is that these people used to sleep directly on the ground and were “sinking” into the ground, sand, or dirt as they slept. This may account for both the determinatives used. In the first occurrence (3.3), the walking legs are used, since the word is referring to downward motion. In 9.1, however, the word is not emphasizing the movement itself, but a negative condition, i.e. these people sleep “sunk” into the dirt and thus they are dirty.


26 Enmarch, A World Upturned, 86.
The theme of the passage in 9.1 is clearly that of role reversal; however, for our purposes it is interesting for what it suggests concerning the idea of dirtiness. While a bed may be a sign of status and also provide comfort, another aspect of sleeping on a bed may be the separation from the ground and “dirt,” which the bed provides. Those who were once on beds now must sleep on the ground (s3t) while those who used to sleep in btk now have a barrier between themselves and the ground when they sleep. While the main idea may be comfort or status, we should not discount the possibility that the ancient Egyptians considered sleeping on a bed less “dirty” than sleeping on the ground.27 One thinks of the story of Sinuhe, where, in the context of his cleansing upon his restoration in Egypt, he says “I slept on a bed after I had given the sand to those who are in it” (B 293–294).

\[s3t, s3d\]

According to the Wörterbuch, s3t (also spelled s3t or s3d) as a noun means “Schmutz” and as a verb “besudeln,” “das Unrecht hassen” or “Schaden erleiden.”28 The word seems to appear for the first time in New Kingdom ritual texts, and is used relatively frequently in Ptolemaic temple texts to refer to dirt or impurity.29 According to Penelope Wilson, it may be

---

27 For discussion of a barrier between a person and the ground as a symbol of cleanliness see Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom,” 51–52.

28 Wb IV, 27.

derived from $s3w$ (“be weak” and referring generally to bad things) or it may be derived from $s3t3$ (“ground” and thus probably “dirty”). ³⁰ Marcel Kühnemund indicates “Dieses Nomen konnte auf $s3t3$ "Erde" zurückzuführen sein und entsprechend diesen Schmutz meinen, der jemanden äußerlich verunreinigt.”³¹

The word appears amongst other terms for impurity in Speech 24 of the Daily Temple Ritual at Karnak (pBerlin 3055 9,8–10,1). ³² Although the impurities in this spell are not directly said to be pertaining to the deity, it does seem to be implied that they could be inflicted on him, in this case by the priest if he is not careful. The pertinent portion of the spell follows:

```
nn $dd$ tw $n=j$ hm $jw=j$ r $rdjt$ $htp$ $ntr$ st=f $nn$ $s3d=j$ $hw=j$ $nn$ $dw$ nb $jry=j$
```

One will not say to me, “Turn back!” I will cause that the god be content in his seat. I will not harm (or “dirty” ($s3d$)) that which I protect. There is no impurity ($dw$) pertaining to me.

The priest is entering further into the temple to serve the god who appears to be angry or upset. The presenting of the offerings, as well as the performance of the rest of the ritual, will pacify the god. As the priest approaches, he says that he does not have any impurity, and that he would not in any case harm the god but instead he will protect him. Presumably, if there is danger of dirt or harm being placed on the god by the priest, then this can affect the god, and if/when it does would need to be removed.

³⁰ Wilson, A Ptolemaic Lexikon: A Lexicographical Study of the Texts in the Temple of Edfu., 78:794.. According to Wilson, at Edfu $s3$ is removed by incense or water. For a brief discussion of $s3$ and priests see Leroux, Les recommandations aux prêtres dans les temples ptolémaïques et romains, 17–24. According to a text at Edfu, priests should “N’entrez pas en étant souillé” (Ibid, 17).

³¹ Kühnemund, Die rituelle Reinheit in den Tempeln der griechisch-römischen Zeit Teil I Text, 78.

³² For the hieroglyphic text see Alexandre Moret, Le Rituel Du Culte Divin Journalier En Égypte, d’après Les Papyrus de Berlin et Les Textes Du Temple de Séti 1er, à Abydos, (Paris : E. Leroux, 1902), 96. For a recent translation and analysis see Braun, Pharao und Priester, 134–35.
Sḥt is also mentioned in the scenes of the temple of Seti I at Abydos in the spell for “kissing the ground.” In the spell the king mentions several things he will not do, one of which is  Nun w d=j sḥt (I will not place dirt). While this reference could certainly be metaphorical, there could be a simple, literal meaning as well. The priest will be careful that he does not, either intentionally or inadvertently, get dirt on the god’s statue in any way.

The stelaphorous statue of Nakhtefmutef (CG 42208) dates from the reign of Osorkon II. As Lichtenheim describes, “the bulk of the text consists of Nakhtefmut’s prayers and requests to Amenre to protect his daughter from being deprived of the property he has bequeathed to her. In the end, he reminds the god of his faithful service to him and requests to spend his old age in peace in the temple.”

(20) ḥnk=(j) n=k mḥṣ t bwt=j jsft ḥrl=j r sḥd ṣf b=k knj m grg

I offered to you mḥṣ t, my bwt is jsft. I was far from sḥd your pureness by false complaints. Here the soiling done is not physical dirt but lying. Leroux notes that the term sḥt is frequently associated with sacerdotal service or ṣf b which is referred to in one of two ways: “my pure

---


34 Calverley et al., The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos. Vol. 2 Vol. 2, 4. A similar use of the term is found in some manuscripts of Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead where the deceased says: O one who brings his arm! I did not dirty the city god ( J n = f n sḥt=j n r njwty) Lapp, British museum (Londres), and Department of ancient Egypt and Sudan, The Papyrus of Nu (BM EA 10477), Plate 67, Column 62. Cf. Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 273.

35 Cf. Braun, Pharao und Priester, 122d.

36 Lichtenheim, Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies, 82.

37
service” or “your pure service.” The term may be derived from a meaning related to physical dirt, but it also seems to refer to ritual-type defilements.

As can be seen, virtually all of the references to s3t, both as a verb and a noun, are related to ritual or religion in some way, and thus we do not know if the term would have been in used in daily life to refer to dirt or soiling. A possible exception may be in the Book of the Heavenly Cow where after giving instructions for how a person is to recite the text, the text relays some of the benefits of doing so.

\[Jw=fmj Rhw n ms.tw=f n šrj.n hwt=f n s3t.n rrryt=f\]

He is like Re on the day he was born. His possessions cannot be small, his gate cannot be besmirched.

Hornung translates the phrase as “sein Torweg nicht verspert sein” and he thought that it referred to free movement through the gates of the underworld. Gerhard Fecht, in contrast, thought it referred to the earthly existence of the reciter of the spell. Lutz Popko in the Thesaurus Lingae Aegyptiae edition of the text says, “Dagegen sprechen jedoch das Verb, der Singular von rrryt (bei jenseitigen Wegen erwartet man einen Plural) und das Suffixpronomen

---

38 Leroux, *Les recommandations aux prêtres dans les temples ptolémaïques et romains*, 22. For other similar texts referring to s3t from the Late and Ptolemaic period see Leroux, *Les recommandations aux prêtres dans les temples ptolémaïques et romains*, 22–24.


40 Hornung, *Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh.*, 25, 46.

41 Hornung, *Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh.*, 25. From KV 17 Tomb of Seti I 82-83.

42 Hornung, *Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh.*, 46.

43 Hornung, *Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh.*, 68 n. 183.

(Letzteres von Hornung selbst bemerkt).” If the gate referred to is earthly, then it is possible that it could refer to a private house. In light of the ambiguities in the interpretation of this passage, however, we cannot draw any firm conclusions.

\[ \text{sbw} \]

The term \( \text{sbw} \) appears in line 2,8 of Ipuwer and appears to be related to dirtiness in some way. The difficulty with interpreting this passage, however, is that \( \text{sbw} \) appears to be a hapax.

\[
2.8 \text{jw ms rmt mj gmw sbw ht tβ nn ms ḫd ḫbsw m p̣ n rk}
\]

Surely, people are like black ibises, \( \text{sbw} \) is throughout the land. Indeed, there are no white garments in this time.

“Squalor” is the gloss for \( \text{sbw} \) offered by Faulkner and Gardiner, although both include a question mark with their suggestion. Enmarch says that \( \text{sbw} \) is “probably identical with the

---


46 According to Patricia Spencer, “the original meaning” of \( \text{rryt} \) and “one which seems to have been preserved throughout Egyptian history was the ‘approach’ to a building. This could describe the area immediately in front of the door of a temple, palace or private house. This area could be lightly roofed to provide some protections from the sun for those awaiting admittance.” (Patricia Spencer, The Egyptian Temple : A Lexicographical Study (London ; Boston : Kegan Paul International, 1984), 154.). See also Wb I, 210.12.


48 For possible derivations for this word in Ipuwer see Gardiner, Admonitions, 26–27; J. J. Clère, “À Propos Du Mot (Zbi) de l’inscription de Nékhébou,” Revue d’égyptologie 4 (1940): 120–21; Enmarch, A World Upturned, 77. The word may be related to \( \text{F} \) in Sinuhe (B 291) for discussion of which see below and section on dirt in Sinuhe.


50 Gardiner, Admonitions, 26.
unidentified but undesirable sbr.” He further suggests that it “may derive from the verb sbj” (putrefy). He translates as “filth” but includes a question mark as well.

Before examining this line in more detail, we will examine several words beginning with sbr that have been suggested to be in some way be related to sbw in Ipuwer. Rainer Hannig lists a word sbw (meaning “Schmutz.” However, he only lists two attestations. The first is CT 1127, but, in this text, this is better understood as the verb sbj “to go.” The other attestation listed by Hannig is the stela of Sebekhetep, however, even by Hannig’s own admission, this attestation is unclear.

Papyrus Ebers no. 750 (89, 16–18) provides a remedy for driving away the dfrt-sbr ( ). Westendorf translates as “schmutzige/schwindende (?) Bitternis.” Clearly, sbr here is negative, but it does not seem clear that it is necessarily “dirty” or “unclean.” The word sbr here could be derived from sbj “to faint, fade away, perish.”

52 Wb III, 430.13.
53 Enmarch, A World Upturned, 77.
54 See Gardiner, Admonitions, 26–27; Clère, “À Propos Du Mot (Zbi) de l’inscription de Nékhébou.,” 120–21.
55 Rainer Hannig, Ägyptisches Wörterbuch II: Mittleres Reich und Zweite Zwischenzeit, Kulturgeschichte der antiken Welt (Mainz am Rhein: P. von Zabern, 2006), 2154.
59 Deines and Westendorf, Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Zweite Hälfte (h–ḏ)., 7:673.
60 Wb III, 430.9–17; cf. Faulkner, A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 1991, 219. This appears to be the interpretation of dfrt-sbr in several translations. Bernard Lalanne and Gérard Métra translate as “un souffle morbide malfaisant” (Lalanne, Le Texte Médical Du Papyrus Ebers, 183.), and Strouhal, Vachala, and Vymazalová translate
Ebers 855v (102, 8–9) explains one of the causes of a disease of the hāty as follows:

\[ \text{Jr=st hpr m swrj mw wnm sbyt (𕝃) t3 dd hpr} \]

It happens from drinking water. Eating hot sbyt is what (also) causes that (it) happen.\(^{61}\) Here sbyt might refer to food that has spoiled (perhaps “gone” bad).\(^{62}\) Alternatively, it might be a kind of fish.\(^{63}\) If sbyt here does refer to spoiled food, perhaps it is derived from the use of the verb sbj meaning “to pass away, to perish.”\(^{64}\)

A term sb (𕝃) appears three times in the biographical stela of Nekhebu (JE 44608).\(^{65}\) It has been suggested that the term means something like “unclean.”\(^{66}\) The Wörterbuch suggests “von unfreundlicher Gesinnung”\(^ {67}\) and suggests it might be related to the word sbn.\(^ {68}\)

---

\(^{61}\) Westendorf translates as “es entsteht durch Trinken von (schlechtem ?) Wasser; (auch) das Essen von verdorbenen Speisen in heißem Zustand (t3) ist es, das (es) entstehen läßt” (Westendorf, Handbuch der altägyptischen Medizin, 697.). Strouhal et al. translates as “it is caused by drinking (bad?) water. It (also) emerges through eating spoiled foods in a warm state” (Strouhal, Vachala, and Vymazalová, The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians. 2, 91.). Lalane and Métra translate as “Cela peut arriver du fait de boire de l'eau. Manger ce qui est avarie et chaud peut faire (aussi) que (cela) arrive” (Lalanne, Le Texte Médical Du Papyrus Ebers, 209.).

\(^{62}\) Deines and Westendorf, Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Zweite Hälfte (h–ḏ), 7:735.

\(^{63}\) Wb III, 432.13; Ghalioungui, The Ebers Papyrus: A New English Translation, Commentaries and Glossaries., 229.


\(^{67}\) Wb III, 432.12.

\(^{68}\) Wb III, 434–434.
The first occurrence of \textit{sb} in the inscription is as follows:

\[ \text{dr wnn mr.n=t}n \text{ sb=(j) hr t}n \text{ m hrt-n}tr \text{ dd=t}n \text{ n hrdw=t}n \text{ hrw s}3.n=(j) jm mdt nt prt-hrw n=(j) \]

Since you desire that I \textit{sb} on your behalf in the necropolis, then teach your children the words of making invocation offerings for me on the day of my passing there.

The context here implies that even though \textit{sb} is written with some kind of fish determinative, the use of the term is positive in this instance. It is possible that this is simply an unusual spelling of \textit{sb}, “to go,” which, followed by the preposition \textit{hr}, probably means something along the lines of “to advocate for someone” or “to watch over.” In any case, based on the context, as well as the parallels for this expression, it seems unlikely that \textit{sb} here has a meaning of “unclean” or “tainted.”

The next two occurrences of the term in the inscription seem to require a more negative interpretation.

\[69\quad \text{Urk I, 218.2–4.}\]

\[70\quad \text{Strudwick translates as “intercede on your behalf” (Strudwick, Texts from the Pyramid Age, 2005, 268.).} \]

\[71\quad \text{Lichtheim translates as “protect you” (Miriam Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian autobiographies chiefly of the Middle Kingdom a study and an anthology, 1988, 13.).} \]

\[72\quad \text{Following translations of Strudwick, Texts from the Pyramid Age, 2005, 268.} \]

\[73\quad \text{Cf. Sainte Fare Garnot, “Une Graphie Fautive Du Verbe Zbi .,” 66.} \]

\[74\quad \text{The same or similar expression occurs with the typical spelling of sb (\textit{장}) without the “fish” determinative} \]


If you wish that the king might favor you and that you may be imakhu in the sight of the great god, then do not enter this tomb sbt on account of your ġbw. With regard to any man who shall enter therein in sb after this…

In this passage of the inscription, sb appears to have a negative connotation and is associated with entering the tomb. The context of these two occurrences of sb has led some to suggest an association with “impurity” or “uncleanness.” Clère noted the connection with ġbw (impurity) in the text and suggested that there might be a root sb meaning something like “impurity” that was a homonym with sb, “to go.” However, since all three examples of the word in this inscription include the “fish” determinative, we should probably be cautious of assuming that the second and third occurrences of sb in the stela represent a new, unattested word. Also, while the term is closely connected with ġbw “impurity,” the text is damaged here so the precise relationship between the terms is not entirely clear. One could speculate that perhaps the use of sb here is similar to in Ebers 855v and refers to something, perhaps food, that has “gone bad.” This might

75 Urk I, 218.8–12.

76 Strudwick translates “as you are tainted…on account of your impurity” (Strudwick, Texts from the Pyramid Age, 2005, 268.). Lichtheim translates as “enter not this tomb profanely, uncleanly!” (Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies, 14.).

77 Strudwick translates as “in a hostile manner” (Strudwick, Texts from the Pyramid Age, 2005, 268.). Lichtheim translates as “anyone who enters it profanely despite this” (Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies, 14.). Dunham translated both occurrences of sb in this section as “hostility” (Dunham, “The Biographical Inscriptions of Nekhebu in Boston and Cairo,” 6.).

78 Translation following Strudwick, Texts from the Pyramid Age, 2005, 268.


80 It should be noted that while the occurrences of sb in this inscription have been translated in various ways, no translation of this text, to my knowledge, has connected the first occurrence in this stela with ideas of “dirt” or “uncleanness.” All translations take the first occurrence as a positive example. For translations see Strudwick, Texts from the Pyramid Age, 2005, 268; Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies, 13–14; Clère, “À Propos Du Mot (Zbi) de l’inscription de Nékhébou,” 15; Dunham, “The Biographical Inscriptions of Nekhebu in Boston and Cairo,” 5–6.
parallel the emphasis in a number of Old Kingdom tomb inscription warning visitors of entering having eaten something *bwt*. Alternatively, it could refer to the way in which one enters the tomb, i.e. with hostility. In any case, at this point we should probably regard the hypothesis that *sb* here is a rare word, meaning something like “uncleaness,” as rather speculative.

Finally, a connection between *sbt* (𓊔 𓊕) in Sinuhe (B 291–292) and *sbw* in Ipuwer has been suggested. In the Sinuhe passage, as his “cleaning up” is described, the text reads: “*sbt* was given to the foreign land,” (*jw rdj sbt n h3st*). The context here suggests that *sbt* refers to something “dirty” or “undesirable;” however, this does not necessarily imply that *sbt* means “dirt.” Since *sbt* is a well-known word meaning “cargo,” and that meaning fits well in

---

81 For example, see *Urk I*, 173.10–13; 202.3–5; Wild, “L’”adresse Aux Visiteurs” Du Tombeau de Ti.,” 104.

82 This is how Strudwick interprets the third occurrence of *sb* in the inscription, “with regard to any man who shall enter therein in a hostile manner” (Strudwick, *Texts from the Pyramid Age*, 2005, 268.). Cf. Dunham, “The Biographical Inscriptions of Nekhebu in Boston and Cairo,” 6.

83 Perhaps a third possibility could be that it is a writing of *bs* “to enter, to introduce” (*Wb I*, 473–474). Against this interpretation is that one must read the s and b as transposed in all three occurrences which seems improbable. However, it should also be noted that none of the occurrences of *sb* are written with the sign 𓊔. Instead, the 𓊔 and 𓊕 are written separately in all three instances. Reading *bs* would also explain the fish determinative. This is another speculative interpretation, however.

84 For further discussion on this passage see section on Dirt in Sinuhe.


86 *Wb III*, 432.5–8; Lesko and Lesko, *A Dictionary of Late Egyptian*, 25. In the story of the shipwrecked sailor, the sailor is given a *sbt* of oils and exotics by the snake which he loads onto the boat to take him home (column 162). The spellings are identical in the two literary works (𓊔 𓊕 ).The term *sbt* (with identical spelling) also clearly refers to a ship’s cargo in Papyrus Anastasti VIII, 6 (see transcription in Groll, “The Egyptian Background of the Exodus and the Crossing of the Reed Sea: A New Reading of Papyrus Anastasi VIII.,” 174.)
context, the simplest interpretation is to understand *sbt* here as “cargo,” “load,” or “burden.” However, in this context the cargo is the “dirt” that was removed from Sinuhe. 87

Having surveyed some terms which may or may not be related to *sbw* in Ipuwer, let us return to an examination of that text. Gardiner suggests interpreting the metaphor of the black ibis as follows: “the allusion may be either to its somber colouring, or to its habit of wallowing in the mud.”88 Enmarch says that there is no evidence for Gardiner’s suggestion that the birds wallow in the mud, however.89 Instead, according to Enmarch, “the bird’s black colour may explain the simile, or it may be a pest: in a broken passage in a miscellany it is described as a pest in cucumber fields (LEM 35.16).”90 A third suggestion is that of Karnal Kolta who suggests that the word *sbw* which appears here is similar to the Arabic word “seban” which refers to the eggs of head lice.91 She further suggests that the pustule determinative looks like the nit of a body louse.92

Since the writing ⲫ𓊈 is appears to only occurs here, it is unlikely that we will reach a definitive conclusion regarding its interpretation. However, we will entertain several possibilities below.

---

87 Gardiner says that “the burden given to the desert is of course the dirt which Sinuhe’s ablutions removed from him and the clothes given to the Sandfarers are Sinuhe’s discarded Asiatic garments (Gardiner, *Notes on the Story of Sinuhe.*, 112.


One possibility for the derivation of *sbw* could be from the meaning of *sbi* “to pass away.” Perhaps *sbw* depicts the idea that society has gone so far in a downward direction that all that is good has decayed and has “passed away.” Perhaps this is somewhat parallel to *sbyt* in Ebers 855v discussion above, and means something like “gone bad” or “spoiled.” Perhaps Ipuwer is saying that only perishing and decay is present throughout the land, and thus, people this is the conditions that people are living in.

In considering the interpretation of this passage, the classical author Strabo’s comments on the ibis in Egyptian Alexandria may be useful. Strabo writes:

The ibis, however, is the tamest bird; it is like a stork in shape and size, but it is of two kinds in colour, one kind like the stork and the other black all over. Every crossroad in Alexandria is full of them; and though they are useful in one way, they are not useful in another. The bird is useful because it singles out every animal and the refuse in the meat-shops and bakeries, but not useful because it eats everything, is unclean, and can only with difficulty be kept away from things that are clean and do not admit of any defilement (Book 17, 2.4).

Although this text is from a later classical author, it may provide an indication of why the ibis seems to be associated with dirtiness here. Assuming, as seems reasonable, that the ibis behaved in the same way over the centuries, it is not unlikely that the black ibis may have had some of the same associations with dirtiness in ancient Egypt, which Strabo describes. Strabo says that the ibises are dirty and pollute everything that is clean. If the comparison of people with black ibises in Ipuwer is making similar connections with the habits of the ibis, then it might

---

93 *Wb III*, 430.9–17.


96 Of course, this does not mean that the connotation of the ibis was exclusively negative. Clearly, the ibis also has positive connotations not least because of its association with the god Thoth. For discussions of the ibis in ancient Egypt see Vernus and Yoyotte, *Bestiaire Des Pharaons*, 387–92.
suggest that all of the people are dirty, and that they contaminate everything. This leads to nothing being clean. The following phrase that there are not any white garments supports this suggestion.  

Assuming that the black ibis was eating garbage in ancient Egypt, we should consider if there could be associations with garbage in this passage. Let us consider if the term sbw here is related to the term s bt (𓊙𓊭𓊪) meaning “burden” or “cargo.” The term s bt does not usually have negative connotation, but simply refers to cargo or something transported, such as goods loaded onto a ship. However, in the story of Sinuhe, when Sinuhe is being transformed back into an Egyptian, his “cargo” or “burden” is returned to the desert (B 291). Clearly the “cargo” here is unwanted and must be removed from Sinuhe and taken far into the desert. In other words, the “cargo” is something that needed to be disposed of.

While sbw in Ipuwer is not written with the t this may not be definitive proof that it cannot be a writing of s bt “cargo.” A similarly written word, differing only in the determinative, “sbw” (𓊙𓊭𓊪) appears in Papyrus Lansing (4,10), but it clearly refers to the cargo of ships and thus should be interpreted as a Late Egyptian writing of s bt meaning “cargo.” Of course, this is

---

97 Perhaps if white garments were a luxury of the high classes, this also is a comment on the role reversal lamented by Ipuwer.


100 For example, in the story of the Shipwrecked sailor, the sailor is given a s bt of oils and exotics by the snake which he loads onto the boat to take him home (column 162).

101 Cf. Lesko and Lesko, A Dictionary of Late Egyptian, 25.)
a Late Egyptian text so that the loss of the $t$ is unsurprising. However, the paleography of papyrus Leiden 344, which contains the manuscript of Ipuwer, is “broadly Ramesside,” and “the copyist certainly had no qualms elsewhere about using the orthography of the Later New Kingdom.”\footnote{Enmarch, \textit{The Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All.}, 10. For discussion of the date of the composition itself see Enmarch, \textit{A World Upturned}, 18–24.} In light of this, the lack of the $t$ in Ipuwer is probably insignificant.

If $sbw$ in Ipuwer is related to $sbt$ (cargo), perhaps the “cargo” referred to here is garbage or other waste that would normally be removed from buildings or living areas to a dump or the desert.\footnote{Unfortunately, there has been little analysis of refuse disposal in ancient Egypt. However, it does seem that, at least in some cities, waste was removed to a dump or outside the city. According to Shaw’s study of disposal at Amarna, there do seem to be some patterns to waste disposal at Amarna (Shaw, “The Archaeology of Refuse Disposal in New Kingdom Egypt: Patterns of Production and Consumption at El-Amarna.”). In his study of waste management in domestic structures at Elephantine, Felix Arnold argued that “As a result of these efforts, little waste actually accumulated inside the house during its period of use. In all likelihood, a lot of the garbage that did originate was removed from the house entirely...Refuse must have been carried farther, outside the limits of the settlement, probably using donkeys” (Arnold, “Clean and Unclean Space: Domestic Waste Management at Elephantine,” 158. For waste disposal see also Hodgkinson, “Waste Management at Amarna.” Kemp, \textit{The City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti}, 206–7. Arnold, “Pottery Use and Disposal in a ‘Priest’s House’ at Dahshur.,” 170–71.} Instead of the “cargo” being removed to its proper place, however, it has now built up “throughout the land.” If ibises are associated with being among and eating garbage, then understanding $sbw$ as referring to garbage here makes good sense of the metaphor. In the upside-down world described by Ipuwer, things that were normally waste and disposed of have instead piled up and now garbage is throughout the land. Thus, people are like ibises and living among the garbage and squalor, thus resulting in no white garments or cleanliness anywhere.

It must be admitted that this interpretation of this passage of Ipuwer is somewhat speculative. The association of ibises with dirt and garbage, is taken from a later classical source and thus it is an assumption that the birds had similar associations for the ancient Egyptians. However, since the Ipuwer reference is clearly negative and the reference to there being no white...
garments is suggestive of a dirty connotation, this does not seem to me to be an entirely unreasonable assumption. Similarly, although there are no other occurrences of sbw “cargo” written with the pustule determinative, the writing of sbw with the pustule determinative appears to be rare, if not unparalleled, so any derivation is bound to be somewhat speculative.  

Although the pustule is an unlikely determinative to be used for a writing of sb(t) “cargo,” if the cargo in this instance is “garbage,” then perhaps this is not completely unexplainable, as the pustule can be used as a determinative of words for negative things (including foul-smelling or decomposing things).  

An advantage of reading sbw here, as a writing of “cargo,” is that then one does not have to posit an otherwise unknown or rare word.

While we have considered two possibilities for the meaning of sbw in Ipuwer 2.8, we cannot claim to have reached any definitive conclusions. However, the association of the ibis with garbage and waste seems to be suggestive regarding the interpretation of sbw. Whatever way one explains the derivation and meaning of sbw the comparison of the ibis with people

104 To date, the only other words I have found that begin with sb and are written with the pustule determinative are sbh (leprosy) (Lesko and Lesko, A Dictionary of Late Egyptian, 28; Hannig, Großes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch, 744.) and sbn (constriction) (Lesko and Lesko, A Dictionary of Late Egyptian, 28.

105 “Hieroglyphic Sign - Thot Sign List,” accessed February 24, 2023, https://thotsignlist.org/mysign?id=953. Cf. Tanja Pommerening, “Classification in Ancient Egyptian Medical Formulae and Its Role in Re-Discovering Comprehensive and Specific Concepts of Drugs and Effects,” in Classification in Ancient Egyptian Medical Formulae and Its Role in Re-Discovering Comprehensive and Specific Concepts of Drugs and Effects (De Gruyter, 2017), 173, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110538779-006. According to Clementine Audouit, the pustule classifiers is “often used for dangerous, foul-smelling, morbid secretions. It implies the idea of decomposed materials such as fluids secreted by rotten bodies or excreta substances” (Audouit, “The Perception of Bodily Fluids in Ancient Egypt,” 144.). Biase-Dyson and Chantrain note that the pustule (Aa2) is “used for negative things in general, but also, more precisely, for negative elements in relation with the body: diseases, putrefaction, fluids, and so on” (Camilla Di Biase-Dyson and Gaëlle Chantrain, “Metaphors of Sensory Experience in Ancient Egyptian Texts: Emotino, Personality, and Social Interaction,” in The Routledge Handbook of the Senses in the Ancient Near East, ed. Kiersten Neumann and Allison Thomason (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis, 2022), 619. Cf. Mahmoud I. Hussein, “Notes on: Some Hieroglyphic Determinatives,” Discussions in Egyptology 34 (1996): 17–25. The pustule determinative is most often associated with the body, but it is possible that bodily excreta were included with waste and garbage.
without white garments could suggest that the habits of the ibis have been associated with “garbage” and “dirtiness” for millennia.

\[ \textit{\$n\$} \]

All of the known occurrences of the word \$n\$ (\textit{\$n\$}) are in Late Egyptian Miscellanies describing the life of the soldier.\(^{106}\) The term is used in reference to land outside of Egypt and specifically the land of Syria (\textit{h\$r\$w}).\(^{107}\) In Papyrus Anastasi IV, the writer is refuting the claim that “the soldier’s (condition) is sweeter than the scribe’s (9,4 \textit{ndm w\$w r s\$}).\(^{108}\) In the second half of the composition, the soldiers going to Syria (\textit{h\$r\$w}) is described. One of the hardships of the soldier’s life here is drinking \$n\$ water.

\[(9,10) \textit{Jw swrf}=m m w \textit{\$n\$} (\textit{\$n\$})\]

He drinks from \$n\$ water.

The determinatives used suggest a liquid (\textit{\$n\$}) while the sign N33 (\textit{\$n\$}) typically suggests sand or mineral.\(^{110}\) This could suggest that the water referred to is brackish, smelly, sandy, muddy, or filled with similar particles which make it unpleasant to drink.

\(^{106}\) Lesko and Lesko, \textit{A Dictionary of Late Egyptian}, 131.

\(^{107}\) E.g. Papyrus Anastasi IV 9,8; Papyrus Lansing 9,9

\(^{108}\) Gardiner, \textit{Late-Egyptian Miscellanies.}, 7:44–45.

\(^{109}\) pAnastasi III contains a virtually identical text. In line 5,11, the same phrase is found. \$n\$ is spelled \textit{\$n\$}. For the text see Gardiner, \textit{Late-Egyptian Miscellanies.}, 7:26.

A similar text is found in Papyrus Lansing with a similar context. The profession of the soldier is being put down as miserable as compared to that of the scribe. The occurrence of šnš is again in a description of the soldiers’ journey and hardships in Khor.

\[(10,1) jw n\textsuperscript{3}y=f m\textsuperscript{2}w k\textsuperscript{3}y m tswt swrf=f mw hrw 3 jw=w šnš (\textsuperscript{10}0) mj dpw hm\textsuperscript{3}mwy (10,2) sdt ht=f whw\]

His marches are long in the hills. He drinks water over three days, and it is šnš like the taste of salt. His flesh is broken (with) dysentery. 

This text specifies that the soldier is in the hills of Khor, when he is drinking the šnš water. One of the negatives of the water is its unpleasant salty or minerally taste. The pustule determinative could reflect the uncleanness of the water or perhaps its smell. Additionally, the Egyptians seem to have understood a relationship with the bad water and a disease in the belly, perhaps dysentery and/or diarrhea.

---


112 The fragment of Papyrus Deir el-Medineh 35 is almost the same as papyrus Lansing above (Serge Sauneron, “Les Désillusions de La Guerre Asiatique (Pap. Deir El-Médinéh 35),” Kêmi 18 (1968): 17–27.). The context and main elements appear to be the same as pLansing, but SnS is spelled \textsuperscript{10}0 in this text. This is similar to the spelling in Chester Beatty V, Recto 7,5 (\textsuperscript{10}0) (Gardiner, Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum: Third Series: Chester Beatty Gift., Plate 25.). Gardiner suggested it may simply be a corruption (Gardiner, Late-Egyptian Miscellanies., 7:44a). Sauneron repeats the suggestion but notes that it is curious that there are two parallel examples which might make this suggestion less likely (Sauneron, “Les Désillusions de La Guerre Asiatique (Pap. Deir El-Médinéh 35),” 20.). The very similar context of all of the occurrences of this word would seem to suggest that it is indeed the same word spelled differently.


114 Sauneron, “Les Désillusions de La Guerre Asiatique (Pap. Deir El-Médinéh 35),” 26. Cf. Deines and Westendorf, Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Erste Hälfte (\textsuperscript{10}r.), 7:201–2. For water related diseases in ancient Egypt and discussion of which would have been most likely to affect the Egyptian army on campaign see Heagren, “Water Related Diseases in Ancient Egypt.” For an analysis of the effects of drinking brackish water from the Arava Rift Valley in southern Israel see G. M. Berlyne and M. Morag, “Metabolic Effects of Drinking Brackish Water,” Desalination 10, no. 2 (April 1, 1972): 215–19, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0011-9164(00)80086-7. The authors note that “The Arava Rift Valley of Israel has brackish water supplies. The high summer temperatures in the desert stimulate high daily intakes of the water with a concomitant massive intake of salts, mainly the sulphates of
A few things can be gleaned from these texts concerning šnš water. First, this water is not found in Egypt, but only in the land of Khor. Thus, if we understood šnš as related to “dirty,” it is a reflection of the “dirtiness” of a foreign land and not of Egypt. Second, these texts might reflect that the Egyptians valued “pure” tasting water. Perhaps one could say that the water in the hills of Khor was “impure” compared with the water in Egypt.

---

magnesium and of calcium. These give rise to diarrhea in newcomers but after a few months the laxative effect disappears” (Berlyne and Morag, “Metabolic Effects of Drinking Brackish Water,” 218.). This parallels the description of the soldiers’ life in Khor nicely. I am grateful to Dr. Peter Brand for this reference.


CHAPTER 9: DISGUST

In studies of dirt, disgust is often considered to be related to ideas of contamination, dirt, and uncleanness.\(^1\) Thus, it is appropriate to consider the Egyptian terms, which might refer to the concept of “disgust.” Before examining the Egyptian evidence, however, it is important to understand what is meant by the word “disgust.” Thus, we will briefly examine the emotion of disgust in recent research.

Disgust has become a major topic of research on emotions in the last several decades.\(^2\) According to Rozin et al., there are three reasons why disgust has received so much attention. These are “the evolutionary perspective, focusing on pathogen avoidance,” “the cognitive neuroscience perspective,” and “the psychopathology perspective, with disgust taking its place beside fear in the understanding of anxiety disorders.”\(^3\) According to Rozin et al.,

Most of the current theories of disgust agree on four points: (1) disgust originates in part or whole as a food rejection system; (2) pathogen avoidance has some fundamental role in explaining the origins and expansion of disgust; (3) a process like preadaptation (recruitment of something already present for a new function) is involved in the expansion of disgust elicitors; and (4) the disgust emotion program (facial and bodily expression, psychophysiological events, behavioral withdrawal, and feeling of revulsion) is relatively conservative as disgust expands, while the class of elicitors and their meanings is more plastic.\(^4\)

Furthermore, disgust has four components according to Rozin et al; these are behavioral components, physiological components, expressive components, and qualia.\(^5\) The behavioral

---


component of disgust “is manifested as a distancing from some object, event, or situation, and can be characterized as a rejection or withdrawal.” The physiological component of disgust “is associated with a specific physiological state — nausea— that is typically measured by self-report. Disgust is the only “basic” emotion that has such a specific visceral signature.” The expressive component of disgust refers to the facial expressions, which have been identified as showing disgust, although the precise components of the “disgust face” are a subject of debate and need further study. Finally, qualia is the “mental or feeling component of emotion” and may be “the most central component of disgust and the most difficult to study. The qualia of disgust is often described as revulsion.” When analyzing disgust in an ancient culture such as Egypt, we will not be able to analyze each of these components, since it is unlikely that there will be any evidence for the physiological or expressive components of disgust.

At its most basic level, core disgust can be defined as “revulsion at the prospect of oral incorporation of an offensive object.” While touching or being close to something considered disgusting may provoke revulsion, “aversion to an offensive entity in the mouth is usually stronger than aversion to the same entity on the body surface near but not inside the mouth or inside the stomach.” While oral incorporation of an offensive substance may provoke the

---

10 Since disgust can operate on several levels, “core disgust” is considered the most basic, or primitive level of disgust and is often linked to pathogen avoidance. (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley, “Disgust,” 817.).
strongest feelings of disgust or revulsion, touching and smelling offensive objects also frequently provoke feelings of disgust.\textsuperscript{13}

While it must be recognized that what is considered disgusting frequently differs among individuals, groups, and cultures,\textsuperscript{14} certain generalizations concerning what is disgusting can be made, since many things considered “disgusting” are often shared across cultures.\textsuperscript{15} “Feces seems to be a universal disgust substance, with the odor of decay as perhaps the most potent sensory attribute associated with disgust.”\textsuperscript{16} Similarly, “contact with death and corpses is a particularly potent elicitor of disgust” as “the prototypical odor of disgust is the odor of decay, which is the odor of death.”\textsuperscript{17} In general, “there is widespread historical and cultural evidence for aversion and disgust to virtually all body products, including feces, vomit, saliva, mucus, sweat, urine, and blood (especially menstrual blood), but typically not tears or milk.”\textsuperscript{18} This led Angyal to argue that “disgust is a specific reaction towards the waste products of the human and animal body.”\textsuperscript{19} While disgust may be elicited by a number of things, human and animal waste products,

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Ro15} Curtis and Biran, “Dirt, Disgust, and Disease.”
\bibitem{Ro17} Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley, “Disgust,” 819.
\bibitem{Ro18} Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley, “Disgust,” 818. Since most of these bodily secretions come from holes in the body, some suggest that “disgust centers on the holes in the body. Most of the disgusting body products (e.g., feces, vomit) emanate from holes, and the holes are also foci for disgust sensitivity.” (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley, “Disgust: The Body and Soul Emotion in the 21st Century,” 22.).
\bibitem{Ro19} Angyal, “Disgust and Related Aversions,” 395. He also says, however, that “the concept of waste or excretory products must, however, be understood in a rather broad sense, and not in the sense of a biological definition.”
\end{thebibliography}
as well as decay, are some of the most common elicitors of disgust. Finally, although the specifics of which animals are considered disgusting varies widely amongst cultures, many cultures consider certain kinds of animals to be disgusting.

Disgust can also be a “moral emotion” as certain immoral acts can trigger the disgust emotion, and disgust is also frequently linked with sexual acts. While the specifics of the immoral acts, which elicit the disgust response, may vary based on the individual, society, or culture, it is significant that disgust is frequently connected with morality. Thus, it would not be surprising if a similar pattern were present in ancient Egypt.

Having briefly summarized research on disgust, we will turn to examine two Egyptian words that have been associated with disgust and evaluate how well they fit with research on disgust. These terms are ft and bwt.

**ft**

Ft has usually been glossed as “to be disgusted” or “to be tired.” Faulkner glosses the noun “disgust” and the verb verb “to show dislike.” Lesko offers “to be tired, weary, disgusted, discouraged, to feel distaste,” “to become erased.” Hannig’s Handwörterbuch offers

---

20 Curtis and Biran, “Dirt, Disgust, and Disease.”


25 Lesko and Lesko, A Dictionary of Late Egyptian, 165.
“abwenden, ekeln, überdrüssig werden, entmutigt fuhlen; Abneigung haben.”\textsuperscript{26} The \textit{Wörterbuch} offers “sich ekeln, überdrüssig werden”\textsuperscript{27} and suggests that it can be a medical term, although the word is not uncommon outside of the medical corpus. In fact, according to the \textit{Wörterbuch der Medizinischen Texte}, \textit{ft} only occurs twice in the known corpus of medical texts.\textsuperscript{28}

In order to assess if “disgust” is the best understanding of the term \textit{ft}, we will survey the occurrences of the word in Egyptian texts in order to evaluate whether the meaning “disgust” or “to be tired” better fits in each occurrence. We will also consider how well the uses of the term parallel the research on disgust summarized above. Since the \textit{Wörterbuch} seems to suggest it can be a medical term, we will begin our discussion with the medical texts, since they are probably the earliest known occurrences of the word.

The word \textit{ft} appears in 855f (11, 16–17)\textsuperscript{29} of Papyrus Ebers. The case is that the heart (\textit{jb}) is \textit{ft}.

\textit{Jr ft (\textsuperscript{-} \textsuperscript{-}) jb wgg h\textit{ḥty} pw m\textsuperscript{<} hh n ḫ\textsuperscript{ḫ}wt gmm-k sw wr sḫp ḫ\textsuperscript{ḥ}wt m r jb=f mj=s m jrt

If the heart is \textit{ft}, it is that the heart is weak from the heat of the anus. You find it large and things rolling\textsuperscript{30} about at the entrance of the heart like it is in the eye.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26} Hannig, \textit{Großes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch}, 326.
\item \textsuperscript{27} \textit{Wb I}, 580.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Deines and Westendorf, \textit{Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Erste Hälfte (i–r).}, 7:308.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Lalanne, \textit{Le Texte Médical Du Papyrus Ebers}, 205.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Following Westendorf, although he notes that this translation of \textit{sḫp} is largely a guess based on the comparison with the eye (Deines and Westendorf, \textit{Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Zweite Hälfte (h–d).}, 7:794.)
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
In this text, Ghalioungui translates \( ft \) as “his heart is bored,”\(^{31}\) while Lalanne and Metra translate “le \( ib \) est degoute.”\(^{32}\) Westendorf says it is a symptom of a sickness and means “überdrüssig sein.”\(^{33}\) This case could be describing a sickness in which the heart is weary, and a person has no energy, or it could be describing that someone is feeling a sickness internally that could be described as a feeling of disgust or revulsion.

The other possible occurrence of the word \( ft \) in medical texts is in the Edwin Smith Papyrus (XVI, 19), although the reading and interpretation of this word in the text is not certain. Breasted transcribed as \( b\), but suggested that it should be read \( r \ f w \).\(^{34}\) He did not translate \( f w \), however, but said that it “evidently contains a corruption of the text.”\(^{35}\) Westendorf, however, argues that since \( f \) is clearly written before \( r \) and, since no word \( fr \) or \( frw \) is known, \( ft \) should be read, since it is determined with the bad bird (\( \image \)) and since a meaning of “being tired” could fit in the context.\(^{36}\) In a more recent edition of this text, however, Meltzer does not follow Westendorf’s suggestion, although noting that \( frw \) is an otherwise unknown Egyptian word.\(^{37}\) Meltzer suggests that this word might be “related to, or a variant of, \( fn \), to be weak, faint.”\(^{38}\)


\(^{33}\) Deines and Westendorf, *Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Erste Hälfte (\( \text{r} \)-r).*, 7:308.

\(^{34}\) Breasted, *The Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus: Published in Facsimile and Hieroglyphic Transliteration with Translation and Commentary.*, 3, 4:417, 419.

\(^{35}\) Breasted, *The Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus: Published in Facsimile and Hieroglyphic Transliteration with Translation and Commentary.*, 3, 4:419.

\(^{36}\) Deines and Westendorf, *Wörterbuch Der Medizinischen Texte: Erste Hälfte (\( \text{r} \)-r).*, 7:308.


\(^{38}\) Sanchez et al., *The Edwin Smith Papyrus*, 288.
Thus, although opting for a different reading than Westendorf, the suggested meaning is similar. Finally, François Resche transcribes the text as $\text{\textasciitilde} \text{\textasciitilde}$, but suggests emending to $j()r=fw$ and reading the word as an archaic suffix pronoun. In any case, if $ft$ is the correct reading of this text, then a meaning of “to be tired” seems most likely. However, since it is doubtful that $ft$ is even the correct reading of this text, it seems best to not make much of this occurrence for advocating a particular meaning for the word $ft$.

The word $ft$ also occurs on two stelae of Seti I. In the Seti I’s year four Abydos Decree at Nauri, the context in which $ft$ occurs is after the king describes how he has purified the temple and established the servants and offerings for it. He then says:

\[ Nn nt=j (\text{\textasciitilde} \text{\textasciitilde}) nn mhy=j m hnw hr mw hr t3 mn sp sn w3h sp sn r nhh hn3 dt \]

I will not $ft$. I will not neglect (any) obligations on the water or on the land which are doubly firm and doubly enduring eternally and forever.

What follows on the stela is a decree, which forbids various violations of the people or property of the temple and threatens severe punishments for those who would do so. “Disgust” does not

---


40 The term $ft$ also appears on an inscription from the Out Sarcophagus of Merenptah. In line 14 of the inscription, it reads: “May they stop the enemy and the evil character, when I put you on his back. He does not escape from you. You will not be $ft$ concerning him forever ($shm=sn sbjw dw-kd dj=j tw hr st=f n nhp=f m=c=k jm=k ft (\text{\textasciitilde}) hr=f dt$). For the text and translation see Jan Assmann, “Die Inschrift Auf Dem Äußeren Sarkophagdeckel Des Merenptah.,” *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo* 28 (1972): 47–73.


42 *KRI I*, 50: 11–12.

43 Following Kitchen’s translation (*RITA*, 44). Kitchen translates $ft$ as “I will not tire.”

seem to be the best interpretation of *ft* here, especially in light of its use with the parallel term *mhy* which means “to be forgetful” or “to be neglectful.” A meaning for *ft* of “to be tired” seems to make more sense in this text, since growing tired of performing one’s duties is the first stage of neglecting (*mhi*) them. It seems that Seti is saying that he will not grow weary or tired, and thus neglect fulfilling his obligations.

In Seti I’s Great Dedicatory Stela for Ramesses I at Abydos, *ft* also occurs, but it is used nominally. Towards the end of the stela, after stating that his father is a god who traverses the Duat, Seti notes how concerned he was about the condition of his father’s place. He then says:

\[ Jb=jp \ r ^3tt \ w rt \ s hrw \ n \ st=f \ js \ pw \ nn \ wn \ ft \ (\overrightarrow{\text{}}) \ ] \ j b \ r=f \ \ h z ty=j \ phr \ m-s3 \ nfrw=f \ twj \ mj \ hjk \ hr \ msw \ sww=j \ hr=f \ m \ p^3y \ nd.n=j \ dt=f \ mj \ Bhdt \ m \ ssmw=f \ m \ j^3t \ nt \ Bhdt \]

My heart was very much considering the condition of his place as there does not exist *ft* of heart against him; my heart going about after his beauty. I am like a falcon over the one who gave birth; my wings are over him in flight after I have protected his body like the Behdetite in his image in his mound of Behdet.

In contrast to not having *ft*, Seti says that his heart (*hztj*) “went after his beauty” (*phr m-s3 nfrw=f*). In this passage it seems that Seti is saying that he did not dread or feel distaste towards

---


49 Or “concerning him.”

50 Kitchen translates as “as my heart was (so) greatly concerned about the condition of his place, there was not (inner) reaction against him, my mind was occupied with his goodness” (*RITA I*, 95).

51 The expression *phr m-s3* does not appear to be a frequently occurring phrase. It occurs in an inscription of Intef (*Urk IV*, 971:11) where he says he is “one who goes about after *maat*” (*phr m-s3 m^5t*). In the prophecy of Neferti it says, *phr tj m-s3 phr ht* (Petersburg 1116B, 55) (Wolfgang Helck, *Die Prophezeihung des Nfr. tj.* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1970), 48. The meaning of this phrase is not certain, as can be seen from the variety of translations that have been proposed. Parkinson translates the phrase as, “the man who followed after, now the man leading a generation” (Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems, 1940-1640 BC*, 138.) Lictheim
doing his duties for his father. In this context, a meaning of either “to be tired” or “to be
distasteful” would fit, although a meaning of “disgust” or “revulsion” may be too strong.

Having examined the occurrences of \( ft \) in the medical texts and in royal texts, we will
survey the other contexts in which this word occurs. The corpus in which \( ft \) seems to appear most
frequently is in the Late Egyptian Miscellanies and related texts. We will begin by examining
several of its occurrences in the satirical letter of Papyrus Anastasi I before turning to the other
occurrences in the Miscellanies.

The first occurrence of \( ft \) in papyrus Anastasi I\(^52\) is in the opening of the letter in which
the scribe Hori lists his talents and abilities.

\[(1.5) \text{ mryty m jbw nn jtn=f zbb=tw hnm=s=f (1.6) nn ft=f (\text{folios}) jm=f} \]

One who is beloved in hearts, there is no one who opposes him. One longs for his
friendship; no one \( ft \) of him.\(^53\)

The next occurrence of \( ft \) in this papyrus is the section describing the hardships of the

\( maher (23,1–26,9)\).\(^54\) The context of this passage is the scribe is in danger of enemies in a narrow
pass and his chariot and team is experiencing difficulties in reharnessing the team. The text then

\[^{52}\text{The word } ft \text{ occurs three times in Papyrus Anastasi I. Here we will examine the first two, since other difficulties of}
interpretation in the third occurrence make it difficult to focus the analysis on the meaning of } ft. \text{ This final occurrence of } ft \text{ in Anastasi I is at the end of the letter when Hori gives a final rebuke. He says that Amenemope’s tongue is “wrapped up in confusion and laden with errors” and that he “splits words apart in charging straight ahead” (Wente, Letters from Ancient Egypt., 1:109.). He then says: “You will not } ft \text{ in order to } gmn. \text{ (28,3) Nn ft=k (folios) r} gmgm \text{ (folios). Wente suggested the translation, you “are not loath to grope (for words)” (Wente, Letters from Ancient Egypt., 1:109.).}}\]

\[^{53}\text{Wente translates as, “one beloved in people’s hearts and not rebuffed, whose friendship one longs for and never gets tired of” (Wente, Letters from Ancient Egypt., 1:100.}}\]

\[^{54}\text{According to Hoch, a “military officer commanding troops and handling logistics” (Hoch, Semitic Words in}
Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period, 1994, 147–49.}}\]
reads $h\dot{iy}=k\ ft \ (\text{図 }) \ (24,7)$. Wente translates as “you are disgusted.”\textsuperscript{55} Gardiner translated as “thy heart is weary.”\textsuperscript{56} From the context of the passage it makes sense that the scribe could be both weary and frustrated, since he is in a dangerous situation, which he is unable to fix. The text specifies that the heart ($h\dot{iy}$) is $ft$, not the body. One wonders if $ft$ describes emotional tiredness, frustration, or despair. It should be noted that $ft$ has the seated man with hand to mouth determinative which can be used to classify the word as [Senses and Emotions].\textsuperscript{57}

In the Late Egyptian Miscellanies, the word $ft$ occurs several times in contexts exhorting a scribe to remain diligent. For example, pAnastasi III “Advice to the youthful scribe” (3,9–4,4) is an exhortation by the scribe Amenemope to the scribe Pbes to be diligent and not to slack off. At the end of the text Amenemope says:

\begin{verbatim}
(4,3) tnr-tw\ m ndnd\ jm=k\ whs\ sw\ ssw\ jm=k\ ft\ (\text{図\ })\ jm(j)\ jb=k\ sdm\ mdwt=j\ gm=k\ st
(4,4)\ m\ sft
\end{verbatim}

May you be strong in taking advice. May you not slack off from it. Writing—may you not $ft$.\textsuperscript{58} Set your heart (on it). Hear my words that you may find them beneficial.

While it is possible that $ft$ could carry the meaning of disgust or distaste here, in light of the previous phrase of not slacking off ($whs$) and the theme throughout this passage of being diligent and not slacking, it might make better sense to the exhortation with $ft$ to be telling Pbes not to grow tired or mentally exhausted of writing.

\textsuperscript{55} Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt*, 1:108.


\textsuperscript{58} In papyrus Anastasi V there is a similar text (9,1) (Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 7:60.) The text ends with the same phrase although spelled a little differently, $jm=k\ ft\ (\text{図\ })\ (9,1)$. 

260
In another Miscellany in papyrus Sallier I, Amenemone begins his letter to the scribe Pentwere by saying,

(7,10) hnty=j ft m qd mtrw

My heart is ft from speaking advice.

Amenemone then goes on to rebuke Pentwere for being stubborn and not listening to his teaching. *Ft* could communicate the idea of distaste in this passage, but the meaning of “to be tired,” especially in an emotional sense, would also fit well in the context.

Papyrus Lansing compares the pleasantness of writing to that of a mother, who has given birth.

Jr sšw ndm sw r snqd jb m tšy bšy (3,2) wḥw ndm sw r mwt msw nty bw ft (← × →) n 
jb=st jw st rwd m mnst s3=st mndt=st m r=f rb nb

Concerning writing: It is more pleasing than making the heart pleasant with a box of bay cakes and carob beans. It is more pleasant than a mother who has given birth whose heart is not ft,59 when she is persistent in nursing her son. Her breast is in his mouth every day. The idea here seems to be that a mother does not get tired or weary of feeding her child. The continual nature of her task is emphasized by the phrase “every day,” yet the mother is persistent at continually feeding her son. In this context, it seems that *ft* most likely means she does not get tired or weary of feeding her son. It is not drudgery for her. Thus again, *ft* seems to refer to not getting tired, most likely emotionally. Perhaps English words such as “dejected” or “discourage” are similar ideas.

59 *Ft* also occurs at the beginning of papyrus Lansing (1,5). The text says, “my heart is not ft” (bw ft.n ← × → jb=j). Unfortunately, however, the context immediately before and after the phrase is lost; thus, it is difficult to analyze the occurrence there.
In the teaching of Ani, the word *ft* may also occur in a similar context. In the text, Ani exhorts his son to support his mother.

(20,17) *j.k3b p3 kw j.dj n=k mwt=k ft j=s w mj fAj=sw (20,18) tw j=r=st knw 3tp= tw m=k jw bw <dd>= sw w’h n=j tw=k ms.w m-h’t 3badv=k nhb=st (20,19) sw m-r-c mndjdj=st m r=k m 3 rnpwt*

(20,17) Double the rations which your mother gave to you; Carry her like she carried (20,18) you. She did many things, while pregnant with you, And she did not say “Discard (this) from me.” You were born after your months. She yoked (20,19) herself likewise. Her breasts were in your mouth for three years.

As can be seen above, Ani reminds his son of how long and hard his mother labored to care for him, when he was a baby. The text then reads:

(20,19) *Jw rwD=tw ft Hs=k bw ft jb Dd j=r y= j lh 66*

(20,19) Then you grew and your excrement *ft*, (but) (her) heart was not *ft* saying, “What will I do?”

---


61 For 3fs suffix pronoun written *sw* see Cerny and Groll, *A Late Egyptian Grammar*, 27; Neveu, *The Language of Ramesses*, 19.

62 Following pDeir el-Medineh I (Quack’s Text D), which includes the word *dd*. The word *dd* is not present in pKairo CG 58042, also known as pBoulaq 4 (Quack’s Text B). For synoptic edition of the sources see Quack, *Die Lehren des Ani*, 314.

63 For the hieroglyphic text see Quack, *Die Lehren des Ani*, 314–15. My transliteration follows pKairo CG 58042, also known as pBoulaq 4 (Quack’s Text B).

64 More literally as “one loaded with you.”

65 The word is spelled slightly differently in both of its occurrences in this passage, and both are unique. The first occurrence is spelled ꜩ (∫, 3), while the second is spelled ꜩ (∫, 3).

66 Text translated from Quack, *Die Lehren des Ani*, 315.

It is difficult to determine if ft refers to the idea of disgust here, or if ft means tiredness or weariness. Quack translates ft as “ekelhaft,”68 and Lictheim translates as “disgusted.”69 As noted above, bodily wastes and especially feces are one of the substances that are usually considered disgusting across cultures. However, the text could also be communicating the idea of weariness from continually doing an unpleasant task for years. The lines before do seem to emphasize the length of time in which the mother labors in caring for her son. Either suggested meaning of the word ft appears to fit in this context, although it should be noted that this is the first occurrence of the term ft we have examined, which could be closely connected to the idea of “core disgust” referred to above.

We will now turn to papyrus Lansing and the description of the “estate” (bhn) of Raia.70 After briefly describing the estate, the text says that:

\[(12,2) \text{ Nn ft=tw } m\overline{3}=f \text{ wnf=tw } hr \text{ sb\#yt=f th(j)=tw m ws\#wt=f}\]

One will not ft, when he sees (it); one rejoices on its gates, one gets drunk in its halls.

There appears to be a contrast between emotional responses mentioned in this passage. Instead of being ft by seeing it, one rejoices and gets drunk in the estate. One could argue that a meaning of “disgust” or “revulsion” is possible in this passage. However, it might be a little extreme to say that one will not “feel revulsion” upon seeing the estate. However, an interpretation of ft

\[\text{———}68\text{ Quack,} \text{ Die Lehren des Ani,} \text{ 111.}\]

\[\text{69 Lictheim,} \text{ Ancient Egyptian Literature.}, \text{ 468.}\]

\[\text{70 For discussion of the meaning of bhn see Ellen Fowles Morris,} \text{ The Architecture of Imperialism: Military Bases and Evolution of Foreign Policy in Egypt's New Kingdom} \text{ (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 821–23. Morris suggests that bhn refers to an estate with “a large and important building, associated structure, and a surrounding cultivated area” Morris,} \text{ The Architecture of Imperialism}, \text{ 822.}\]
meaning “to be tired” or even “to despair” can fit well with the context. The idea could be that one never grows tired of looking at it.\(^{71}\)

Finally, we should note that the word \(ft\) might occur in the Tale of the Two brothers.\(^ {72}\) The word is written \(\text{𓊥}𓊪\), but Gardiner suggests that it is the verb \(ft\) \((\text{𓊥}𓊪)\).\(^ {73}\) The younger brother tells the older brother to come and look for the pine tree after he learns that something bad has happened to the pine tree with his heart. The younger brother says, “If you spend seven years searching for it, do not let your heart \((ḥꜣty)\) be \(ft\).” \((8,5\text{ jr jry=k} 7\text{ rnpwt whꜣ=f m dyt f<֡> ḫꜣty=k})\).\(^ {74}\) If this is indeed a writing of the word \(ft\), it would be another passage that seems to suggest a meaning of emotional tiredness or discouragement from a repeated activity undertaken over a long period of time.

As can be seen above, \(ft\) is written with a variety of determinatives in varying combinations. One of the most common determinatives for \(ft\) is the seated man with his hand to his mouth \((A2\text{ 𓊥})\). This might suggest that \(ft\) refers to sense or emotion, since, as Goldwasser notes, “the \(𓊥\) sign stands for the complex category [SENSES AND EMOTIONS].”\(^ {75}\) Another common determinative for \(ft\) is the cow’s tongue \((F20\text{ 𓊪})\) which may suggest an association

\(^{71}\) Lichtheim translates as “one does not tire of looking at it” (Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature.*, 504.).

\(^{72}\) Papyrus d’Orbiney 8,5. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories.*, 1:18:1.

\(^{73}\) Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories.*, 1:18a.


with the sense of taste. Since tasting can be used as a metaphor for experiencing something, including emotions, the use of the tongue classifier in ft is consistent with interpreting the word along the lines of emotional weariness or with interpreting the word as disgust. The bad bird determinative (G37) classifies ft as something bad. Finally, the determinatives (A24) and (D40) often classify [ACTION], and may on occasion have the metaphorical meaning of “feeling something” as in the [ACTION] of “feeling something.” In sum, while there are a variety of determinatives used with ft, generally speaking, they all can be consistent with a basic meaning of emotional weariness.

Having surveyed numerous occurrences of the word ft in Egyptian texts, it appears that a meaning “of to be tired” is the better fit in most occurrences. While, as noted above, “disgust” may make sense in some of the occurrences, a meaning of “to be tired” can fit virtually every occurrence, while disgust does not make the best sense in several of the examples. Additionally,

---


77 Steinbach-Eicke, “Experiencing Is Tasting: Perception Metaphors of Taste in Ancient Egyptian.,” 380–82. It should be noted that Steinbach is specifically discussing the Egyptian word dp, and not the tongue classifier. However, it does make clear that the Egyptians used the sense of taste as a metaphor for experiencing something, including emotions.


81 The word ft may also occur in an ostraca from Deir el-Medina (Ostracon IFAO OL 3968) (Andreas Dorn and Stéphane Polis, “Nouveaux Textes Littéraires Du Scribe Amennakhte (et Autres Ostraca Relatifs Au Scribe de La Tombe).” Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale 116 (2016): 84ff.). Unfortunately, this text is too fragmentary for any meaningful translation. However, the word ft (Dorn and Polis, “Nouveaux Textes Littéraires Du Scribe Amennakhte (et Autres Ostraca Relatifs Au Scribe de La Tombe).” 87.).
with the possible exceptions of the Ani passage and perhaps the occurrence in the Ebers Papyrus, few of the occurrences of the term seem to relate to the components of core disgust described above, such as the fear of oral incorporation or touching of disgusting substances. In light of this, the term *ft* is probably best not understood as “disgust,” and perhaps it is more accurately understood as referring to some type tiredness. Based on the survey of the term above, it seems that *ft* does not primarily refer to physical tiredness, but refers to more of an emotional weariness, especially for a repeated, burdensome task. Perhaps, English glosses for *ft* would include “to be discouraged,” “to be frustrated,” or even “to become apathetic.”

**Bwt**

Since the term *bwt* (frequently translated along the lines of detest, abomination,\(^82\) horror or abhorrence,\(^83\) taboo or forbidden\(^84\)) has been studied by Paul Frandsen rather extensively,\(^85\) we will begin by summarizing his interpretation of the term. Although *bwt* has often been translated as “taboo,” Frandsen argues that the application of this category to the ancient Egyptian concept is unhelpful.\(^86\) Instead, Frandsen argues that the Egyptian concept of *bwt* should be understood within the ancient Egyptian worldview. According to Frandsen, the Egyptian envisioned “evil” as present at the beginning and thus the term *bwt*:


\(^{83}\) Lesko and Lesko, *A Dictionary of Late Egyptian*, 133.

\(^{84}\) Hannig, *Großes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch*, 267.


\(^{86}\) Frandsen, “Taboo - Bwt?,” 188–89.
operates at a level corresponding to the preconceptual structures of the Egyptians…it is an intrinsic property of material as well as immaterial phenomena—a part of their very nature and essence, a characteristic instilled in them when the world was created. Thus, it became a creator given property of certain objects, persons, forms of behavior. This definition does not exclude, however, the occasional occurrence of the term bwt in a metaphorical or jocular sense.”

Furthermore, Frandsen argues:

This understanding of the cosmos further implied that nothing every really changed. The world had to be as it had been at the time of creation—the first occasion. It was the principle duty of the king to maintain that state and to re-establish the order of the universe if breaches were made. Threats from evil came in the form of the negative components that were bwt by virtue of having been thus classified from the beginning. No ordinary person could declare things bwt, such as for instance in Polynesia where every person had the power to declare something taboo. Only the king in his capacity as god could make things bwt, but could only do so in order to reestablish the primeval order. Bwt is therefore neither a quality, or a temporary property of certain persons, things or phenomena.”

Although according to the Egyptian worldview what was bwt was classified as such from the creation of the world, in practice “with the passage of time, an increasing number of phenomena were subsumed into the category.” Not only did what was bwt develop over time, but it also could have geographic variation as each Egyptian nome could be considered a mini cosmos and thus have its own bwts. Additionally, there may have been variation in bwts based on the beings involved. Thus, for example, some things are bwt for certain deities and one could repulse certain beings by consuming what was bwt to them.

---

87 Frandsen, “Bwt in the Body.,” 141.
88 Frandsen, “Taboo - Bwt?,” 186.
89 Frandsen, “Taboo - Bwt?,” 188.
90 Frandsen, “Taboo - Bwt?,” 188–89.
91 For example, the pig is bwt for Horus (CT 157, BD 112), the mouse is bwt for Ra (CT 369, BD 33), and the eye of Horus is bwt for Seth (CT 587). Cf. Frandsen, “On Fear of Death and the Three Bwts Connected with Hathor.”
92 For example see CT 424 and BD 32 (Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 104–5.) Cf. Nyord, “Experiencing the Dead in Ancient Egyptian Healing Texts,” 88.
My purpose here is not to criticize Paul Frandsen’s work or to offer an exhaustive study of the term *bwt*. For this, and the mythological and theological implications of the word in ancient Egypt the reader is referred to Frandsen’s work. Here I simply want to explore if and to what extent the Egyptian term *bwt*, and the corresponding verb *bw*, are related to the disgust emotion and if so, if they should then be considered the closest Egyptian term to the concept of disgust.

When we consider many of the things that are said to be *bwt*, the possibility of a connection between *bwt* and disgust becomes more apparent. One of the substances referred to most commonly as *bwt* is feces. Feces is said to be *bwt* in multiple Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, and book of the Dead chapters and urine is frequently included as *bwt* as well. As noted above, feces is one of the substances considered most disgusting across cultures. This, in itself is suggestive that the term *bw(t)* may refer to the disgust emotion. Several animals such as a mouse and a pig are said to be *bwt*, and it is interesting to note that some disgust studies suggest that small animals including mice and rats tend to be more likely to be considered disgusting.

As Frandsen has noted, the mouth is “the focal point” of many of the texts mentioning *bwts* and refusal to eat or ingest an offensive substance or *bwt* is mentioned relatively

---

93 Some of the Pyramid Texts with this theme are PT 210, 409. Frandsen has translated the entire corpus of Coffin Texts mentioning feces as *bwt* in Frandsen, “Faeces of the Creator or the Temptations of the Dead.” Book of the Dead spells include Chapters 17, 51, 52, 53, 82, 102, 116, 189.


95 It should be noted that these *bwts* are said to be of particular gods. A mouse is said to be the *bwt* of Ra (CT 369, BD 33) and the pig is said to be the *bw* of Horus (CT 157, BD 112)

frequently.\textsuperscript{97} For example, the deceased refuses to eat feces or urine. Coffin Text 220 is one of numerous examples which demonstrates this.\textsuperscript{98}

\begin{verbatim}
   Bwt=j sp sn n wnm=j bwt=j pw hs n wnm=j bwt=j pw ws\textsuperscript{š}t n swr=j
\end{verbatim}

My \textit{bwt}, my \textit{bwt} which I will not eat! Feces is my \textit{bwt} and I will not eat. Urine is my \textit{bwt} and I will not drink.

As noted above, oral incorporation of an offensive object frequently elicits the strongest feelings of disgust,\textsuperscript{99} and feces is one of the substances that seems to be universally considered disgusting.\textsuperscript{100} Thus these types of texts are a strong indicator that the term \textit{bwt} may have a close relationship with the concept and emotion of disgust.\textsuperscript{101} The Egyptian’s forceful rejection of eating or touching feces, which appears in these funerary texts, seems to fit rather closely with the concept of “core disgust” described above.\textsuperscript{102}

\begin{verbatim}
   Bw(t) is used not only for feces, but also for consumption of unwanted or undesirable foods and substances more generally. In a stela of Antef son of Myt from the time of Mentuhotep II,\textsuperscript{103} Antef describes his service to the gods. The following lines are from his stela.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{97} Frandsen, “Bwt in the Body.,” 158–63.
\textsuperscript{98} Buck, \textit{The Egyptian Coffin texts. III, III}, 201–3.
\textsuperscript{100} Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley, “Disgust,” 822; Curtis and Biran, “Dirt, Disgust, and Disease.”
\textsuperscript{101} For more on these texts referring to rejection of eating feces or drinking urine see Frandsen, “Faeces of the Creator or the Temptations of the Dead.”; Kadish, “The Scatophagous Egyptian.”; Zandee, “Egyptian Funerary Ritual: Coffin Texts, Spell 173.”
\textsuperscript{103} Renata Landgráfová and Hana Navratilová, \textit{It Is My Good Name That You Should Remember: Egyptian Biographical Texts on Middle Kingdom Stelae} (Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, Czech Institute of Egyptology, 2011), 32–34. Another stela of Antef son of My (Ny Carlsberg 1241) contains this passage. For the text see Landgráfová and Navratilová, \textit{It Is My Good Name That You Should Remember}, 40–42.)
Who knows the offerings of the temples, experienced in the time of bringing offerings to them, one who bwt for them their bwt, who knows what their heart receives, each god according to his needs, who knows his offering bread, who knows the demons of the mounds and the farmland, as well as their affairs, one for whom the content of the spell-book is opened, who knows the morning house, one apt at its doors;

Antef here is emphasizing his knowledge of the gods and how he cared for them. A major emphasis of this knowledge deals with food offerings. This knowledge not only involves knowing the offerings that the gods prefer, but also knowing what they reject. Bw(t) here is in a context of consumption of food, and thus disgust makes good sense. Antef knows what food(s) each god finds disgusting, and he caters their menu accordingly.

According to several Old Kingdom tomb threats, consuming something that is bwt renders one impure, again demonstrating a connection between bwt and oral incorporation.

The Tomb of Ti at Saqqara is a representative example which reads:

[Concerning any person when they enter into this my tomb of] eternity in their impurity after they have eaten bwt things which are the bwt of an akh who has gone to the necropolis.

---

104 Landgráfová translates as “one who makes their abomination abominable to them” Landgráfová and Navratilová, It Is My Good Name That You Should Remember, 33.

105 Transliteration and translation following Landgráfová and Navratilová, It Is My Good Name That You Should Remember, 33.


108 For other Old Kingdom tomb threats, which also refer to eating something bwt, see Urk I, 201–203, Naguib Kanawati and A. Hassan, eds., The Teti Cemetery at Saqqara. 2: The Tomb of Ankhmahor / N. Kanawati and A. Hassan, Reports / The Australian Centre for Egyptology 9 (Sydney: Australian Centre for Egyptology, 1997), 28.
The text continues, but this portion is enough to illustrate the connection between bwt and consumption. Additionally, although many of the funerary texts referring to the rejection of feces and urine are primarily focused on the refusal to eat them, some texts also include the refusal to touch, step on, or even smell feces further suggesting a relationship with disgust since avoiding touching or being near offensive substance is also a part of the disgust response.

While normally, one would try to avoid bwts, a bwt can also provide protection. For example, if one becomes the bwt of something dangerous or threatening, then that danger or threat will avoid its bwt. For example, a spell on the verso of Papyrus Edwin Smith (Verso 1,17–19) reads:

\[ ky s\ddot{s} n j\ddot{d}t r\ddot{n}pt jnk bwt pr\ddot{t} m dp m\ddot{sh}nt pr\ddot{t} m j\ddot{w}m n\ddot{r}t w m\ddot{w}t h\ddot{r} r= k jnk bwt \]

Another protection for the yearly plague: I am the bwt which goes out from Dep, the Meskhenet who goes out from Heliopolis. O people, gods, akhs, and dead ones be far from me! I am bwt.

Here, one identifies himself as a bwt in order to keep disease and other dangerous things away. Avoidance and fear of contamination seems to be closely tied in with the idea of bwt. Thus, if a

\[ nn dp=k mHy[t]\ldots n\ddot{h} bwt n\ddot{tr} nb n\ddot{tr} t nb jw=k w^h tw h^r=k w^b. \]

The context suggests that the bwt of the god or goddess would be something that is eaten. For the hieroglyphic transcription and translation see Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum: Third Series: Chester Beatty Gift.*, 75, Plate 47.

\[ CT 184, 187, 188, 189, 192, 204, 220. \]

\[ CT 184, 187, 188, 189, 192, 204, 220. \]

\[ Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin texts. III, III*, 60c-e. \]

\[ Angyal, “Disgust and Related Aversions,” 394; Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley, “Disgust,” 815. \]
person becomes the something, which disease or other dangerous things find disgusting, then they will avoid coming close to that person, thus rendering the person reciting the spell safe from the malevolent forces.

The next spell in Papyrus Edwin Smith contains similar ideas (verso. 3,8–12).\textsuperscript{114}

\begin{verbatim}
Ky š3msw r= j bwt šmsw= t hw wj šm3(γ)w= t hw wj sht n j3dt= t jnk wth n 3pdw= t Ḥr sp sn wȝd n Sḥmt hȝ jwñ= j tm n ḫnḫ ḡd s r pn jw rdj n=f š3msw m drt=f
\end{verbatim}

Another: shamas-plants\textsuperscript{115} are with me, the bwt of your\textsuperscript{116} followers. May your wanderers\textsuperscript{117} exempt me. May the trap of your plague exempt me. I am a fugitive of your birds. Horus, Horus, the sound one of Sekhmet is behind my flesh, which is complete for life. A man should say this spell after he has put shamas-plants in his hand.

In this spell, certain plants which are said to be the bwt of followers of Sekhmet are used in order to protect the one performing the spell from their harms. Another example is Book of the Dead chapter 32 in which the deceased tells crocodiles to back off because “your bwt is in my belly” (jw bwt=k m ḥt=j).\textsuperscript{118} Having or becoming what a dangerous being finds repulsive or disgusting can be a way for one to protect himself from their power.

\textsuperscript{114} Breasted, The Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus: Published in Facsimile and Hieroglyphic Transliteration with Translation and Commentary., 3, 4:XXA.

\textsuperscript{115} Allen translates as daisies (Allen, The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt, 111.). Westendorf suggests it possibly refers to Pyrethrum (Westendorf, Handbuch der altägyptischen Medizin, 506.). For Egyptian remedies in which this plant appears see Deines and Grapow, Wörterbuch Der Ägyptischen Drogennamen., 6:477–79.

\textsuperscript{116} Probably referring to Sekhmet.

\textsuperscript{117} For discussion of these are similar beings see Lucarelli, “Illness as Divine Punishment: The Nature and Function of the Disease-Carrier Demons in the Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts.”

\textsuperscript{118} Quirke, Going out in Daylight, 104. See also CT 424. Cf. Nyord, Breathing Flesh, 74 n. 336.
Similar to the disgust emotion, which is often extended to moral issues, the Egyptian term *bwt* is also frequently connected to moral issues. For example, lies (*grg*),\(^{119}\) speaking falsely (*ḥḏ*),\(^{121}\) rebelliousness (*mdt bšt*),\(^{122}\) and *smꜣ*-killing\(^{123}\) are all said to be *bwt*.\(^{124}\) In texts of the Harim conspiracy, both the criminals and their crimes become the *bwt* of the land and of every god and goddess.\(^{125}\) If we were to understand this in terms of much of the research on disgust, these “moral disgusts” are an extension of “core disgust” to another domain.\(^{126}\) It is interesting to note that the term *bwt* “is first attested in the Pyramid Texts, where it is used in connection with bodily waste.”\(^{127}\) Thus it would appear to be consistent chronologically with the Egyptian evidence to see the “core disgust” of eating bodily waste later extended in usage to refer to disgust in other domains.

---


\(^{120}\) See Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, 60, 64, 82, 97. Quirke, *Going out in Daylight*, 199, 277, 382. Cf. CT 307. According to Rozin et al., “people usually report that moral violations, including pure violations of the ethics of autonomy (e.g., stealing and lying) cause them to feel some degree of disgust (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley, “Disgust,” 821.).

\(^{121}\) Instruction of Amenemope 13,16; 14,3 (Laisney, *L’Enseignement d’Aménémopè*, 135.)

\(^{122}\) *Urk IV* 1795,4; Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, 58.

\(^{123}\) Paul John Frandsen, “To Kill or Not to Kill.,” in *Aere Perennius: Mélanges Égyptologiques En l’honneur de Pascal Vernus*, ed. Philippe Collombert et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 219–40.

\(^{124}\) Cult monographs, such as the Papyrus Jumilhac, also include *bwts* that are “moral” in nature. For example see Jumilhac et al., *Le papyrus Jumilhac*, 123–24. For discussion of these types of texts see Aufrère, “Recherches sur les interdits religieux des régions de l’Égypte ancienne d’après les encyclopédies sacerdotales.” Cf. Frandsen, “The Menstrual ‘Taboo’ in Ancient Egypt.,” 88–89.

\(^{125}\) See *KRI V*, 350,10; 361, 9–10; 362,12; 363,3–4. Cf. Frandsen, “To Kill or Not to Kill.,” 231–33.

\(^{126}\) Whether the use of disgust in a moral sense is metaphorical or something deeper is a matter of debate amongst scholars of disgust. For discussion and references see Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley, “Disgust,” 821–22.

\(^{127}\) Frandsen, “Taboo - Bwt?,” 187.
In sum, the uses of the Egyptian term *bwt* seems to parallel, fairly closely, much of the research on the emotion of disgust. While we do not have evidence to assess if there was an expressive or physiological component to the term *bwt*, the uses of the term do seem to be consistent with the behavioral and qualia components of the components of disgust. Thus, it seems reasonable to understand *bwt* as the closest Egyptian term for the emotion or concept of disgust. However, in the Egyptian worldview, the term *bwt* may carry more theological and mythological meanings than simply referring to the emotion of disgust. For these aspects of the term *bwt*, the reader is referred to the analysis of Paul Frandsen referenced above.
CHAPTER 10: THEME OF DIRT IN SELECTED TEXTS

A closer look at the theme of dirtiness in two Egyptian literary texts may prove profitable. The motif of dirtiness occurs several times in the Teaching of Khety, also referred to as the Satire of the Trades. Thus, we will examine the role this theme plays in this text. Also, several passages near the end of the story of Sinuhe may provide useful evidence for dirtiness and cleaning in ancient Egypt. Thus, we will offer some discussion of these passages as well.

Theme of Dirt in Satire of the Trades

The Satire of the Trades, also referred to as the Teaching of Khety, has traditionally been dated to the Middle Kingdom, although this dating is not beyond dispute. Although some have questioned the humorous or satirical nature of the text, the text does seem to have a satirical tone towards the non-scribal professions mentioned. The literary setting of the text is the father Khety preparing his son Pepi to enter school. The text has two main parts. In the first part of

---

1 For summary of the arguments for a Middle Kingdom date and references see Kai Widmaier, “Die Lehre Des Cheti Und Ihre Kontexte: Zu Berufen Und Berufsbildern Im Neuen Reich.,” in Dating Egyptian Literary Texts, ed. Ralf Ernst et al. (Hamburg: Widmaier, 2013), 483–557. Widmaier doubts that there is enough evidence to date the composition to the Middle Kingdom (Widmaier, “Die Lehre Des Cheti Und Ihre Kontexte: Zu Berufen Und Berufsbildern Im Neuen Reich.”). The latest possible date for the composition is the early eighteenth dynasty as this is when the oldest extant sources are attested.

2 John L. Foster, “Some Comments on the Instruction for Little Pepi on His Way to School (The Satire on the Trades),” in Gold of Praise: Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honor of Edward F. Wente, ed. John A. Larson and Emily Teeter (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1999), 121–29. Cheti, Die Lehre des Dw-Htjj T. 2., 1970, 161–62. In my opinion, even if a text is “serious” or instructive, this does not imply that it cannot include satirical, humorous, or mocking elements. One can use satire to drive home a point even in a “serious” context. For discussion on how to classify the genre of the text see Jäger, Altägyptische Berufstypologien, 2–3.


4 For analysis of the authorship of the Teaching of Khety and if the Khety mentioned here was a historical figure see Widmaier, “Die Lehre Des Cheti Und Ihre Kontexte: Zu Berufen Und Berufsbildern Im Neuen Reich.,” 486–502.

5 Widmaier doubts whether the Teaching of Khety, and Egyptian miscellanies in general, should be assumed to be school texts (Widmaier, “Die Lehre Des Cheti Und Ihre Kontexte: Zu Berufen Und Berufsbildern Im Neuen Reich.”)
the text, Khety denigrates a number of professions. In the second part of the text, Khety gives Pepi wise instruction for how to behave.6

In this section, we will explore the motif of “dirtiness” in the Satire of the Trades. Several of the passages in this text have already been discussed in the sections on individual words. For more detailed lexical analysis the reader is referred to those sections. In the Satire of the Trades, there are a variety of motifs that are used to denigrate other professions such as weariness, danger, hard labor, etc.7 Thus, while here we will only focus on the motif of dirtiness, this should not necessarily be taken to imply that this theme is the only, or most important theme of denigration in the text.8

492–503.). For discussion of the possible intended audience of the text see Parkinson, Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt, 273–77.

6 It should be noted that the text of this composition presents many interpretive challenges. There are many variant readings amongst the source texts for this composition, and, as Foster says, it “is one of the most confusing, garbled, and unintelligible literary texts to survive from ancient Egypt.” (Foster, “Some Comments on the Instruction for Little Pepi on His Way to School (The Satire on the Trades),” 121.). Parkinson, however, argues that the “corruption is not unparalleled, and has been exaggerated by modern editors' tendency to emend” (Parkinson, Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt, 274.). For the various sources for the composition see Jäger, Altägyptische Berufstypologien, 5–10.

7 It should be noted that we must not assume that this text necessarily provides an accurate depiction of the social status of craftsman in Egyptian society. As Caroline MacLeod notes: “The literary texts noted here are also not written as historical documents but were by and for professional scribes. The ancient authors have selected a stereotyped image of laborers and describe the least enticing aspects of craft production and field work as a contrast to their own glorified profession. While the texts may reflect the high value associated with literacy in Egyptian society, the distinct gulf between the scribal class and craft producers is artificial, and used by the scribal class to exaggerate their superiority” (Caroline Arbuckle MacLeod, “The Social Pyramid and the Status of Craftspeople in Ancient Egypt,” in Ancient Egyptian Society: Challenging Assumptions, Exploring Approaches, ed. Kathlyn M. Cooney, Nadia Ben-Marzouk, and Danielle Candelora (London; New York: Routledge, 2023), 65, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781000303403-9.). Cf. Andréas Stauder, “Staging Restricted Knowledge: The Sculptor IrtySEN’s Self-Presentation (ca. 2000 BC),” in The Arts of Making in Ancient Egypt: Voices, Images, and Objects of Material Producers 2000–1550 BC, ed. Juan Carlos Moreno Garcia et al. (Leiden: Sidestone, 2018), 240, https://www.sidestone.com/books/the-arts-of-making-in-ancient-egypt.

8 Fischer-Elfert notes that that “Aber anstelle einer Verfemung spricht die ägyptische Schreiberelite eher von den Plagen oder dem Elend der Handwerker und Bauern. Um wie auch immer geartete Randgruppen handelt es sich in Ägypten schon deswegen nicht, weil die literarisch sich über sie aussernden Systemrepräsentanten berufsbedingt in standiger Interaktion mit Topfern, Gerbern, Garnern, Metallarbeitern und sonstigen Metiers stehen.” (Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert, Abseits von Ma‘at: Fallstudien zu Aussenseitern im alten Ägypten, Wahrnehmungen und Spuren
The theme of dirtiness begins almost as soon as the text begins mentioning non-scribal professions.

(4.1) N m33.n=j ksty m wpt nbyw bw h\textsuperscript{3}b.tw=f (4.2) jw m33.n=j ḫnty ḫr b\textsuperscript{3}kw=f r r n ḫryt=f (4.3) db\textsuperscript{5}w=f mj ḫwt m\textsuperscript{5}h\textsuperscript{6}w ḫn\textsuperscript{8} sw r sw\textsuperscript{4}hwt rm\textsuperscript{5}w

I have not seen a sculptor on a mission or a goldsmith (at) a place where he was sent. I have seen a coppersmith at his work at the opening of his furnace. His fingers are like the things of crocodiles, and he stinks more than the eggs of fish.\textsuperscript{10}

In the beginning of the chapter Khety says that neither the sculptor nor the coppersmith is sent on a mission. He then continues by comparing these to what he has seen the coppersmith doing—namely “working at the door of his furnace.”\textsuperscript{11} Khety then offers a description of what the coppersmith is like.

The first description of the coppersmith is that “his fingers are like the things of crocodiles” (db\textsuperscript{6}w=f mj ḫwt m\textsuperscript{5}h\textsuperscript{6}w). Wolfgang Helck claimed that ḫwt was misunderstood in all of the sources, and that the correct reading should be wḥ\textsuperscript{3}w referring to the crocodiles claws.\textsuperscript{12} However, since this reading does not appear in any of the text witnesses, and the reading ḫwt appears in seven sources (the only variant appears to be ḫrt),\textsuperscript{13} it seems highly doubtful that we

---

\textsuperscript{9} I am following the chapter and verse numbers from Jäger’s edition of the text. Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}.

\textsuperscript{10} Both of the comparisons in this line are from the “Flusswelt” (river world) Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, 168.

\textsuperscript{11} Cf. Hoch, “The Teaching of Dua-Kheti: A New Look at the Satire of the Trades.,” 90.

\textsuperscript{12} Wolfgang Helck, \textit{Die Lehre Des DwA-Xijj. Teil 1.}, vol. [3], Kleine Ägyptische Texte (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1970), 38. Helck’s suggestion is followed by Lichtheim, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature.}, 232. and Simpson et al., \textit{The Literature of Ancient Egypt}, 432.

\textsuperscript{13} Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, XXIII.
should emend the text in this way.\textsuperscript{14} Hoch translates the phrase as “his fingers like a crocodile’s,”\textsuperscript{15} and Jager translates the phrase as “krokodilsartig” (crocodile-like).\textsuperscript{16} Perhaps this expression could mean that the skin of his fingers is rough and calloused, or dry and scaly like the skin of a crocodile.

Coppersmiths may have intentionally smeared their hands with mud in order to protect themselves from the heat of the furnace. Verly translates as “his fingers are like crocodile skin.”\textsuperscript{17} He argues that “metalworkers would have protected themselves with Nile silt, charged with organic material. These multiple layers ended up drying, provoking cracks in the protection resembling crocodile skin. His smell reflects the intensity of his work.”\textsuperscript{18} Although the scribes viewed this with contempt, for the coppersmith, smearing himself with mud may have had a practical purpose of protection.\textsuperscript{19}

The appearance of skin like crocodiles was probably experienced by both sight and touch. The skin, or the mud covering the skin, probably had the visual appearance of something like scales and felt rough to the touch, as if one was rubbing the skin of a crocodile. For scribes, this was perceived negatively and possibly as “dirty,” since for a scribe, smooth skin was the ideal. In

\textsuperscript{14} Hoch, “The Teaching of Dua-Kheti: A New Look at the Satire of the Trades.,” 90.
\textsuperscript{15} Hoch, “The Teaching of Dua-Kheti: A New Look at the Satire of the Trades.,” 90.
\textsuperscript{16} Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, 133.
\textsuperscript{17} Verly, “Khety or the Satire of Trades, Mud and Experimental Archaeology: The Usage of Mud as Protection by Metallurgists in Pharaonic Egypt.”
\textsuperscript{18} Verly, “Khety or the Satire of Trades, Mud and Experimental Archaeology: The Usage of Mud as Protection by Metallurgists in Pharaonic Egypt.,” 140.
\textsuperscript{19} Jäger also suggests that the description may be of a “Berufskrankheit” (occupational disease) (Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, 168.)
a student’s miscellany in Papyrus Chester Beatty IV, the writer describes the benefits of being a scribe. The writer notes that the scribe is exempt from taxation and hard labor and instead he controls business and taxes. Then the text reads:

\[(4,3) \text{ jr sš nfr ţ=f hrpr ḏrtg g3ḥty pry=k wbḥ.tj}\]

Be a scribe that your limbs may be smooth and your hands may become soft and you go out having become bright.

As can be seen, the description of the coppersmith is virtually the opposite of the description of the scribal life. As noted by Ragazzoli, “in a way that can seem paradoxical to us, scribes were proud of their weak and delicate hands.” This may be because it distinguished them from manual laborers and, thus, was a mark of status. The negative description of the coppersmith includes his appearance as well as smell since he “stinks more than fish eggs.” Thus, according to Gardiner, the scribe should have a “clean” and “white” appearance, which is a mark of status.

---


21 According to Ragazzoli, “nfr suggests clearly a positive weakness, implying softness and delicacy. It is used with a moral as well as a physical meaning (Chloé Ragazzoli, “Weak Hands and Soft Mouths: Elements of a Scribal Identity in the New Kingdom.,” Zeitschrift Für Ägyptische Sprache Und Altertumskunde 137 (2010): 160.). According to Biase-Dyson and Chantrain, “used alone, nfr, “smooth,” can be read metaphorically as “free” in the sense of being a “libertine” (Biase-Dyson and Chantrain, “Metaphors of Sensory Experience in Ancient Egyptian Texts: Emotino, Personality, and Social Interaction,” 619. Thus, alternatively, perhaps the meaning here is that the scribe is not bound to anyone.

22 Usually, g3ḥ has a negative connotation of being weak or tired. However, here it has a positive connotation. As outlined in the previous section of this papyrus (3,11–4,1), the scribal profession will save one from hard labor, which would lead to blistered and calloused hands. In contrast to those who perform hard labor, the scribe’s hands would be soft. For soft as a use of g3ḥ see Lesko and Lesko, A Dictionary of Late Egyptian, Vol. II, 185; Hannig, Großes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch, 965.

23 Gardiner translated “that you mayst go forth in white attire” (Gardiner, Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum: Third Series: Chester Beatty Gift., 41.).


25 Spalinger notes, “I am surprised that the idea of smell, of stinking humans, is never discussed in the Egyptological literature. “This “over-refined” attitude is not due to any medical reason. It is based on the development of what Norbert Elias described as “civilization.” An elite-in this case of a middling level-has separated itself not only by means of literacy (that is the first step) but more importantly by self-awareness of differences in clothing, attitudes (restraint, quietude, “rationality” in disputes, smell, and small things as well as gestures.” (Spalinger, “The Paradise of Scribes and the Tartarus of Soldiers,” 12 n. 22.).
to the description by Khety, the profession of the coppersmith offends at least three senses: sight, touch, and smell.

In the next sections, Khety describes craftsmen (ḫmw) and jewelers (ms-ʿ3t), but the theme of dirtiness does not seem to be part of the description. Instead, other negative aspects of these professions are emphasized such as weariness and hard labor. Similarly, the description of the barber does not seem to have an explicit connection with dirtiness, although since shaving appears may have had some association with purity, one could speculate whether the profession of barber may have had an association with dirt and cleanliness. This would be purely conjecture though, since this is not mentioned in this text. Similarly, the reed cutter (ḥty) does not seem to be explicitly associated with dirtiness in this text, although again, one wonders if this association could have been made since in other texts the Delta marshes are associated with stench.27

The description of the potter, however, seems to clearly imply that Khety associated this profession with dirtiness.

(9,1) Jkw-nds  hr ḫlt ḫw=f m ṅh.w
(9,2) ḥmfw sw šsw r ššw r pst kḥw=f
(9,3) ḥbšw=f ṅh t mn ḫ dbn ṅš=f m s t
(9,4) ḫ t r fnd=f prj ššw=f wš
(9,5) Jš=f tft m rd.wy=f šhm jm=f dš=f
(9,6) ḥmw h n pr nb.t ḡwj n nš ḫwy.wt

The potter is under the field, although his lifetime is among the living. He is one who hacks up the mud(?)29 more than pigs in order to fire his pots.

26 Interestingly, ḫty is determined with the pustule determinative in pSallier II and oDeM1525.

27 For example, see Dispute of a Man and His Ba columns 88–95. Cf. Goldsmith, “Fish, Fowl, and Stench in Ancient Egypt.,” 337–40.


29 The meaning of this word is not entirely certain. Determining the precise meaning is not helped by the lacuna in a number of sources for this passage and the different spellings in the sources that survive (cf. Jäger, Altägyptische Berufs typologien, XXXV.). šsw is clearly something that pigs would dig in, and this particular word is probably
His clothes have become stiff with mud. His belt is in rags.

Wind enters his nose, which goes out from his well-functioning(?) furnace.

He works a pestle with his feet, grinding with it himself.\(^{30}\)

Hacking up the courtyard of every house and smiting (earth) in the public places.

A similar description of the potter is also found in the Ramesside papyrus Lansing (4,4–4,5), which suggests that the association of the potter with dirtiness was a longstanding association.\(^{31}\)

This is not surprising since the very nature of the profession of the potter necessitates his working in and with mud and, thus, becoming covered with it. If we contrast this image of the potter with that of the scribe, the potter appears as the antithesis to ideals of scribal life. The potter’s clothes are “stiff with mud” in contrast to the clean linen of the scribes.\(^{32}\) Additionally, the potter’s belt is ragged, which perhaps could be associated with a dirty, unkept appearance.

The potter looks dirty since his clothes are covered with mud, and it seems implied that these clothes feel hard, heavy, and stiff, in contrast to the smooth scribe. Even the air that the potter breathes is not good. As Nyord notes, “it is the quality of the air that is problematic here, as rather than being fresh, it comes straight out of the kiln, which causes discomfort and impedes the function of the nose.”\(^{33}\) One could speculate that breathing in “bad air” could have in some way been considered impure.

\(^{30}\) Nyord suggests that the author is here “using a metaphor connecting the feet with a tool,” and thus this “non-prototypical function” of the feet should be considered negatively (Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, 492–93.).

\(^{31}\) For the hieroglyphic text see Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 7:103.

\(^{32}\) Chester Beatty Papyrus IV exhorts (verso 4, 3–4), “Be a scribe, so that your limbs may be smooth, so that your hands may become tired, and so that you can go out in bright clothing” (\(\text{Jr sš n’(f) w‘t= f hpr drty=k gžhy pry=k wbht=k}\)). Papyrus Lansing (8,10) indicates that the scribe is dressed in “fine clothing” (\(\text{jw=k gb’c m mnht}\)). For discussion of fine garments and white linen as a sign distinguishing classes in ancient Egypt see Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom,” 49–58.

\(^{33}\) Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, 493.
The potter’s digging is compared to that of a pig. Although the precise meaning of §hwت here is not entirely certain,34 comparison to a digging pig certainly does not have a good connotation, and it is not unlikely that it communicates some concept of “dirtiness.”35 The deceased, the pig and the potter all have in common that they are “regularly” underground.36 Additionally, it is possible that pigs were associated with refuse and digging in and eating garbage, possibly even including excrement.37 If this is the case, then the comparison with the pig’s digging could imply that the potter is being associated with digging in garbage.

The motif of dirtiness continues into the next pericope concerning the builder of walls (jkd jnbw).

(10.1–5)38 dd=j n=k mj jkd jnb mr dpt=f
hr wnn=f m rwty n39 sbh jkd=f m d3jw kd=f m d3j

34 Lichtheim translates as “mud” (Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature., 233. Jager translates as “Schlamm” (Jäger, Altägyptische Berufstypologien, 137.) Parkinson translates as “he grubs in the meadows” (Parkinson, The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems, 1940-1640 BC, 276.). Hoch also translates as “meadows” (Hoch, “The Teaching of Dua-Kheti: A New Look at the Satire of the Trades.,” 93. Vernus suggested it may be related to the word §hw in medical text referring to excrement (Wb IV, 402; Vernus, Sagesse de l’Égypte pharaonique, 184, 198 n.34. Volokhine suggested the meaning “ordures” (Volokhine, Le Porc Égypt Ancienne., 3:II, 51.).

35 Volokhine, Le Porc En Égypte Ancienne., 3:II, 51. After summarizing the various interpretation which have been given of this passage, Volokhine summarizes the meaning of this passage this way: “Dans tous les cas, le passage met l’accent sur une activité des porcs, connotée négativement, considérée comme sale ou dégradante, qui serait le fait de « fouiller/creuser dans les ordures/excréments/boue/ » (hm r §hw), selon le sens que l’on voudra bien prêter au vocabulaire utilisé ici. Si l’on admet le sens de « excrément » pour §hw, ce passage serait alors la première association connue du porc à la scatophagie.). For possible use of pigs for cleaning up refuse see Miller, “Hogs and Hygiene.”

36 Jäger, Altägyptische Berufstypologien, 171.


38 Following Jager’s number of the chapters in his synoptic edition.

39 Jager suggests emending to m (Jäger, Altägyptische Berufstypologien, 76.).
Let me tell you (what it is) like (for) the one who builds walls. His experience is bitter. Now he exists outside in the wind as he builds in a kilt. His belt is a lotus of the weaving mill as far as his backside. His arms are carrying the earth in excellence, and all his excrement is mixed. When he eats bread, he washes himself at the same time.

According to Jager, there are two themes in this chapter “unzureichende Kleidung” and “Schmutz.” Jager wonders why this profession is singled out for working outside; he suggests

---

40 Probably a loan word, perhaps derived from the Hebrew עקש “to twist” (Hoch, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period*, 1994, 84.). Hoch glosses as “belt.”

41 Some sources have ‘.wy=f 3k (his arms perished…).

42 A few sources write hbs, although presumably hs is meant. See Jäger, *Altägyptische Berufstypologien*, XLI–XLII.

43 This garment has traditionally been translated “kilt” and Janssen thinks that this is still the best translation (Janssen, *Daily Dress at Deir El-Medîna*, 52–54.) For discussion of a few examples which may be “higher class” versions of this garment see (Janssen, *Daily Dress at Deir El-Medîna*, 52–54.) Although she does not include any discussion of the lexicography of Egyptian words for garments, detailed discussion of the types of kilts in ancient Egypt can be found in Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, *Pharaonic Egyptian Clothing*, Studies in Textile and Costume History, v. 2 (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1993), 53–69. Here the emphasis may be on the fact that the scribe transitions from childhood to manhood more quickly than others.

44 An arm determinative as well as cord determinative are used in writing this word. This could be because the cloth was worn on the arm or because the cloth was used to wipe one’s sweat and thus requires the arm determinative for action.

45 Or “His loincloth is a woven cord(?) to the far part of his rear.”

46 This theme of “under the field” (hr iht) occurs several times in this text. It is not always clear if it has a dirty connotation. Here the primary idea may be a sarcastic or mocking meaning that he is really good at carrying soil, although this is not really a picture of an excellent or noble task. It should be noted that some of the sources have a variant which has ikw instead of iht. This variant emphasizes tiredness or weariness from physical labor rather than dirtiness. See discussion on iht in Chapter 3.

47 Probably sarcastic.

48 Jager suggests that there may even be some sort of purity law which the builder has to violate in the course of his work because of the smearing of mud and rubbish Jäger, *Altägyptische Berufstypologien*, 172. Jager suggests that the satire addressed the external dirt of the mason and to the inside.

that perhaps the bricklayer is more dependent on the worksite than other professions and this makes him more likely to suffer occupational diseases such as rheumatism.  

Since we have discussed this passage above, when discussing the word ḫs, we will focus on the broader themes here. First, it is interesting to notice that both the first and the last line of this description have the theme of “tasting.” The most basic meaning of the word dpt is “taste.” However, it also frequently has extended or metaphorical meanings involving “more abstract concepts like feelings or general emotional states (i.e. “to experience something”), and even reference to mental domains are expressed by the sense of taste.” While the meaning of “dpt” in the first line is certainly metaphorical, we should not miss the connection with the last line, which mentions the builder’s eating bread. The line before seems to imply that he has excrement on his hands, perhaps implying a disgusting “taste” or “experience” (see section on the word ḫs).

While the theme of dirtiness does not appear in the description of the carpenter, the description of the gardener gives an unpleasant image of his neck.

(12,1) k3ry hr innt m3wd k5h=f nbt hr tnw
(12,2) f’t wrt nhbt=f jw st hr irt qdw

The gardener is carrying a pole; both his shoulders are in (the condition of) old age.

---


52 Steinbach-Eicke, “Experiencing Is Tasting: Perception Metaphors of Taste in Ancient Egyptian.”


54 Although it uses different words, remedy no. 861 in the Ebers papyrus (105, 8–16) seems to describe swelling and pus on the neck.

55 Jager translations refers to carrying water. “Der Gartner tragt Wasser mit der Tragestange” (Jäger, *Altägyptische Berufstypologien*, 141.)
A great limb is on his neck. It is making puss.  

The “great limb” on the neck of the gardener is clearly an unflattering description, and one can speculate that the puss oozing from it may have elicited disgust. Perhaps something like a blister or sore from the constant use of the carrying pole is in view here.  

Dirtiness does not seem to play a major role in the description of any professions again until the fire-tender(?) (stnwy).  

((17, 1) stnwy\(^{59}\) \(db=f hw3\(^{60}\) sty\(^{61}\) jry h3wt\(^{62}\)  
(17, 2) Jrt(y)=fy whf\(^{3}\) m hwr nn hsf=f s3=r st=f  
(17, 3) wrs=f s'd m jsw bwt=f\(^{64}\) pw hbsw=f  

The fire-tender—his fingers are putrefied. The smell corresponds to (what is in) corpses.  

---

56 Cf. Hoch who translates as “oozes puss” but notes that it literally means, “that makes grease.” (Hoch, “The Teaching of Dua-Kheti: A New Look at the Satire of the Trades.” 93.). Normally, when "d refers to fat or grease, it is determined with a stone or a jar, but here it is determined, in almost every extant source of the Satire, with the pustule determinative. Jager translates as “Eine Grosse Geschwulst ist auf seinem Nacken, und die eitert.” (There is a large lump on his neck, and it festers.) Jager, Altägyptische Berufstypologien, 141.

57 Jäger suggests “Folge hiervon ist wieder eine beruflich bedingte krankhafte Erscheinung.” (Jäger, Altägyptische Berufstypologien, 174.).


59 The profession stnwy is written with the inclusion of the pustule (Aa2) determinative in most of the sources.

60 hw3 is most frequently written with the pustule determinative (Aa2) although a few sources use the death stick (Z6).

61 In all the sources, sty is written with the pustule determinative (Aa2).

62 Most writings of h3wt include the pustule although some use the death stick (Z6).


64 In some sources bwt is written with the pustule determinative (Aa2) and in others with a fish determinative (K1 or K5).
His eyes are inflamed in weakness; he will not drive his son to his place(?). He spends the day cutting in the reeds; his clothes are his disgust.

The profession of the fire-tender marks the second time that foul odor plays a major role in the satire. The fingers are again “thematized” here, and it should be noted that they also were a motif the last time smell played a major theme in 4,3. Perhaps it is only coincidental, but it is interesting that both times foul odor is described in this text, it refers to the fingers. While the coppersmith’s odor was compared to fish eggs, the fire-tender’s is compared to putrefaction. Perhaps this suggests that the odor of each profession was distinct, yet each was foul.

The text also says that he found his own clothes disgusting (or an abomination). Unfortunately, it is not entirely clear exactly why his clothes are, or become, disgusting. The phrase is paired with a statement about spending the day cutting reeds. Perhaps his clothes become ragged or tattered from this work, and thus, the fire-tender is disgusted or ashamed of them. Another possibility is that the work is so hot, that wearing of clothes become disgusting or an abomination. A third possibility could be that, like his fingers, the clothes of the fire-tender also have a putrid (hw3) smell. In any case, the nature of the work of this profession causes his clothes to become disgusting. By the principle of contamination, this probably implies that the fire-tender is also contaminated, since his clothes are certainly touching his body.

Khety then turns to the profession of the sandal maker.  


66 Jäger, Altägyptische Berufstypologien, 177.

The sandal maker—he is very bad, bearing his needs eternally.  
If he is well, it is only wellbeing through corpses. He only bites skins. 

As Vernus notes, “the basic intention is to caricature the sad fate of the sandal-maker, doomed to live on corpses and skins.” Vernus argues that the mocking characterizations made here are based on the realities of the work of the sandal making. “Since the basic material…on which the sandal-maker works is leather, it is not entirely false, ultimately, that his professional success and more generally his life depends on ‘corpses.’” Additionally, “the craftsman is compelled to clench the leather strap between his teeth to keep his two hands free to handle his tools and/or the sandal on which he is working.” Thus, while the tone is clearly satirical the description fits the actual process of sandal making. It may be a bit of a stretch, but if “biting corpses” was

---

68 According to Vernus, dbh₃ “means basically something like ‘necessaries.’ The jug determinative in some of the versions might reflect the more or less conscious knowledge that the sandal-making process needed liquid products; but not too rigid conclusions should be drawn from such use of determinatives” (Pascal Vernus, “Literary Exploitation of a Craftman’s Device: The Sandal-Maker Biting Leather (Teaching of Chety, PSallier VIII, 12). When Philology, Iconography and Archaeology Overlap.,” in The World of Middle Kingdom Egypt (2000-1550 BC): Contributions on Archaeology, Art, Religion, and Written Sources. Volume II, ed. Wolfram Grajetzki and Gianluca Miniaci (London: Golden House, 2016), 250.).

69 Following Pascal Vernus’ interpretation of these as second tenses. He translates these lines as, “The sandal-maker, he is very bad busy with his necessaries for eternity. If he is prosperous it is in the way one is prosperous thanks to the corpses (lit.: it is in a manner-of-being-prosperous thanks to the corpses that he is prosperous)! It is his skins that he has to put-between-his-teeth.” For discussion of this passage see Vernus, “Literary Exploitation of a Craftman’s Device: The Sandal-Maker Biting Leather (Teaching of Chety, PSallier VIII, 12). When Philology, Iconography and Archaeology Overlap.,” 250.


considered unclean or disgusting, perhaps hinting that he is like a carrion-feeder, there could be a hint of dirtiness in this passage.\footnote{Cross-culturally, leather tanning has been perceived as “dirty” or “unclean,” perhaps because of the foul smells that accompany the process, or the contact with animal corpses that the profession requires. For example, in 17th century Connecticut, “town-folk complained bitterly of the unpleasant piling of foul smelling animal remains in “tann-hills”” (Peter C. Welsh, “A Craft That Resisted Change: American Tanning Practices to 1850,” Technology and Culture 4, no. 3 (1963): 301, https://doi.org/10.2307/3100859.). In Japan, the socially outcast Eta class “were principally butchers, tanners, and leather workers” (John A. Price, “The Economic Organization of the Outcasts of Feudal Tokyo,” Anthropological Quarterly 41, no. 4 (1968): 210, https://doi.org/10.2307/3316728.). In India, “the leather worker became a distinctly untouchable caste in the early medieval period” (Vivekanand Jha, “Leather Workers in Ancient and Early Medieval India,” Proceedings of the Indian History Congress 40 (1979): 102.). In general, tanning seems to have been one of the professions associated with “untouchability” in Japan, India, Korea, and Tibet (Herbert Passin, “Untouchability in the Far East,” Monumenta Nipponica 11, no. 3 (1955): 247–67, https://doi.org/10.2307/2382914.). Tanners in Medieval Europe were “often relegated to the outskirts of towns because of the smells associated with their activities. Toxic chemicals were involved in tanning leather—tannic acid, dung, and lime” (Kathryn Reyerson, “Urban Sensations: The Medieval City Imagined,” in A Cultural History of the Senses in the Middle Ages, ed. Richard Newhauser, The Cultural Histories Ser (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 59.). In ancient Rome, “certain neighborhoods were associated with particular smells, such as the area across the Tiber where the tanners worked” (Toner, “Introduction: Sensing the Ancient Past,” 6.). In ancient Rome, “certain neighborhoods were associated with particular smells, such as the area across the Tiber where the tanners worked” (Toner, “Introduction: Sensing the Ancient Past,” 6.).}

The profession of the washerman is closely connected with dirtiness, since his job is to remove dirt from clothing.

19,1 \textit{Rhyt} hr rht hr mryt s3h=f m hnty
19,2 Pr.\textit{n}=j \textit{jt}=j hr mw \textit{pd} hr s3=f s3t=f
19,3 Nn i3wt htp n=f tnw i3wt nbwt
19,4 s3b=f s3n n st hs nn \textit{t} w4ht jm=f
19,5 dd=f sw d3jw n st wnnt m hsmn
19,6 Rmyt=j \textit{n}=fwr\textit{s} hr mkrnt jfw]\textit{jnr}\footnote{Text is fragmentary and difficult to understand here. See Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, 100.}
19,7 dd=tw s3m\footnote{This term is used metaphorically in the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant. In his seventh discourse, the peasant says, “I have washed my dirty laundry” (B 310 j.\textit{n}=j s3mw=f). (Richard Bruce Parkinson, \textit{The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant} (Oxford: Griffith institute, Ashmolean museum, 1991), 39; R. B Parkinson, \textit{The tale of the eloquent peasant: a reader’s commentary} (Hamburg: Widmaier, 2012), 250.). Maitland says, “elite petitioning is presented as a process of cleansing. However, since this is an intellectual form of cleansing, the elite are not contaminated, unlike washerman who take on the burden of pollution. Perhaps cleaning performed on behalf of the elite may have been seen as part of a reciprocal process, preserving the purity of the elite so that they could continue to maintain order amongst the rest of society” (Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom,” 59.).} ms r=f shr sp sptj jm=k

The washerman is washing on the shore, where he reaches a crocodile.
“I have gone out on the safe water, my father,” so says his son and his daughter.\(^{76}\)
There is not a satisfied profession before you, more distinct than every (other) profession.\(^{77}\)
He kneads a mix of everything filthy,\(^{78}\) there is no clean limb in him.
He puts himself into the garment of a woman, who was menstruating!\(^{79}\)
I weep for him, who spends the day with the launderer’s club [and the stone]?\(^{80}\)
One says, “dirty laundry, come to me!”\(^{81}\) Overthrow the occasion of lips from you!

While the first theme in the chapter on the washerman is danger (specifically the danger of
crocodiles where he works), we will here focus on the theme of dirt in this section. Beginning in
line four, the theme of the text focuses on dirtiness. Although his job is to render things clean,
what the washerman works with is dirt. As he washes the clothes with water, the dirt from them
would come out into the water. A literal translation of \textit{st hs} would be the “place of excrement.”

When considered together with the strong statement about not eating or touching feces in

\(^{76}\) Line 19,2 is very difficult to translate. Hoch translates as “My father goes out to the waters of slaughter for me,”
so say his son and his daughter” (Hoch, “The Teaching of Dua-Kheti: A New Look at the Satire of the Trades,” 96.).
Lichteim translates as “Father, leave the flowing water,” say his son, his daughter” (Lichteim, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature}, 235.). Parkinson translates as “Father, I shall leave the flowing(?) water,” say his son and daughter.” (R. B. Parkinson, ed., \textit{Voices from Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Middle Kingdom Writings} (London: British Museum, 2004), 75.). Jäger translates as “Mein Vater geht für mich auf das gefährliche Wasser hinaus, sagen seine Tochter
und sein Sohn,” (Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, 147.). Jäger adopts the reading \textit{nw \textit{tA}}\(^{77}\) and the translation
“dangerous water;” for discussion of all the possibilities see Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, 97. The writing
of the word \textit{\textit{tA}} uses the pustule determinative in almost every extent source of this text.

\(^{77}\) This phrase is very difficult primarily due to variations in the text sources. My translation is thus tentative. For
discussion of the variants see Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, 98.

\(^{78}\) Cf. Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, 147. Taking here the \textit{st-\textit{hs}} (lit seat of feces) as referring to the water the
washerman is washing in has having dirty water.

\(^{79}\) Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, 147. Jäger suggests that this line might be depicting the washerman as a
transvestite and thus committing a “tabu.” Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, 179.

\(^{80}\) Following Hoch who suggests that the “dirty laundry” is a vocative used in reference to the washerman himself
Hoch, “The Teaching of Dua-Kheti: A New Look at the Satire of the Trades,” 96. Jäger disagrees (Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, 100.). He does not explain why, however, other than stating that it seems to him to be “unwahrscheinlich.” Maitland says that the view of the washermen as being contaminated with menstrual blood
“impacts how the washerman is treated, being given orders with terse imperatives.” Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and
Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle
Kingdom.,” 59.

\(^{81}\) This phrase is exceedingly difficult, so this translation is highly speculative. Perhaps the idea is something like
“shut up.” In other words, the person calling “dirty laundry” to come, also tells him not to talk back but to mind his
place. Lichteim does not even attempt a translation of this phrase. For discussion see Jäger, \textit{Altägyptische Berufstypologien}, 100–101.
funerary texts, it seems likely that feces (ḥs) was one of the most defiling substances for uncleanness that could be mentioned.

The next phrase indicates that this renders the washerman completely defiled; there is not one part of his body that is clean. It is interesting that the washerman’s uncleanness is stated by negating purity rather than using a term for impurity. Perhaps this is to emphasize the totality of his dirtiness—there is not part of him that can be considered clean. A major reason for this is probably that because the washerman works with dirty substances, he becomes contaminated by them so completely that it comes to define him.

If this mockery was not defiling enough, Khety continues by adding that, not only does the washerman mix feces, but he also “puts on” unclean menstrual garments.82 This statement should not be taken entirely literally, as it is probably an exaggeration. The washerman is probably handling and putting his hands and arms inside of soiled menstrual garments in the process of washing them. Thus, he is “putting himself inside” of them. This would be further evidence that “no limb of him is clean.” In any case, handling these garments would have been seen as contaminating and probably a job for someone low in society. Thus, Khety weeps for those in this profession.

Finally, the “dirty” nature of the washerman is summed up in the last line, where “dirty laundry” is how he is addressed. In other words, the very identity of the washerman is “dirty laundry.” Thus, the washerman should probably be understood as the dirtiest profession described so far. His dirtiness is so complete that it virtually becomes his identity in society. Of

82 Whether or not there was a “menstrual taboo” in ancient Egypt, handling and cleaning menstrual garments was certainly considered a “dirty” task. For discussion of the “menstrual taboo” see Frandsen, “The Menstrual ‘Taboo’ in Ancient Egypt”; Wilfong, “Menstrual Synchrony and the ‘Place of Women’ in Ancient Egypt (Oriental Institute Museum Hieratic Ostracon 13512).”
course, the nature of this text is satirical and exaggerated, yet there may be an element of truth regarding the status of the washerman in society. According to Maitland, “paying someone to deal with dirt reinforces both parties’ social status and also signals it to others.” Maitland says that “washermen themselves appear to have been viewed ambiguously; holding a liminal position between dirt and cleanliness, elite culture presents them as potentially needing to be controlled or excluded.” Furthermore, “through the cleaning process, the dangers of pollution are transferred to those who conduct it: cleaners serve as a conduit for contamination away from the elite, but are tainted by this contact.”

The next two professions attacked by Khety are the fowler and the fisherman. Surprisingly, themes of dirtiness or smelliness are lacking in these sections. This fact is striking because in other texts, fish, birds and those associated with them are described as associated with

83 Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom,” 58.


85 Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom,” 59.

86 Fishing and fowling could also be understood positively as is evidenced by numerous scenes of these activities in tombs. However, it may be that while, for elites, hunting and fishing could be a positive activity, close contact with the fish themselves was dirtying. Interestingly, the fragmentary text, “The Pleasure of Fowling and Fishing” may suggest that the gutting of fish was considered unpleasant. “Gutting (fish) cannot please me” (n hnm.n wj wgs Section B, page 2, line 9). For the text see Ricardo A. Caminos, Literary Fragments in the Hieratic Script. (Oxford: Oxford University Press for Griffith Institute, 1956), Plate 2A. for translation see Quirke, Egyptian literature 1800 BC, 212.). Maitland suggests that “this passage includes a pun on the word for ‘delight,’ hnm, which also means ‘smell,’ evoking dislike for the stench from cleaning fish” (Margaret Maitland, “Fishing and Fowling for Pleasure versus Produce: Ancient Egyptian Representations of Social Status in Relation to Animals and the Natural Environment,” in His Good Name: Essays on Identity and Self-Presentation in Ancient Egypt in Honor of Ronald J. Leprohon, ed. Ronald J. Leprohon et al. (Atlanta, GA: Lockwood Press, 2021), 272.). For scenes depicting fish gutting see Harpur and Scremin, Decoration in Egyptian Tombs of the Old Kingdom, 148–49. On the topic of class distinctions regarding fishing and fowling see Maitland, “Fishing and Fowling for Pleasure versus Produce: Ancient Egyptian Representations of Social Status in Relation to Animals and the Natural Environment.” Cf. Ronald J. Leprohon, “Ideology and Propaganda,” in A Companion to Ancient Egyptian Art, ed. Melinda K. Hartwig (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 322–23.
foul odors. Perhaps, the trope about the foul smell of fish and birds in the marshes was well-known, and Khety felt it would be more effective to mock these professions from another angle.

Readings of Dirt in Sinuhe

The story of Sinuhe follows a circular pattern or structure as “the protagonist returns to the place and social position that were his at the beginning or where he might have found himself had he not abandoned his post.” In the story, Sinuhe flees from Egypt to Palestine. The description of Sinuhe’s flight, according to Parkinson, “embraces elements of geographical confusion,” and “the resonant place-names mentioned here create a sense of an Egyptian abandoning his cultural identity.” After Sinuhe has left Egypt, when he “arrives at the island of the Great Black, in Peten in the Asiatic regions” (B20–24), he becomes overcome with thirst and says, “this is the taste of death” (dpt mt nn B23). In other words, Sinuhe experiences “death” after he leaves the borders of Egypt. It is at this point in the story that he meets the Asiatics and begins becoming one of them. Thus, as Barta and Janak write, “during this journey, he

87 For examples, see the chapter on foul odors in ancient Egypt. See also Goldsmith, “Fish, Fowl, and Stench in Ancient Egypt.”

88 José M. Galán, Four Journeys in Ancient Egyptian Literature, vol. 5, Lingua Aegyptia, Studia Monographica (Göttingen: Seminar für Ägyptologie und Koptologie, 2005), 92.


90 Parkinson, Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt, 154. Morschauser, “What Made Sinuhe Run.”

undergoes a social and cultural transformation from a civilized Egyptian of high rank into a member of a Bedouin clan, and eventually becomes a chieftain of one of their tribes.” As Baines summarizes, “once he has made the transition to Asia, his status rises continuously until his combat with the strong man of Retjenu gives him a dominant position in the local society.”

Although Sinuhe achieves great success, status, and wealth outside of Egypt, he realizes that the greatest achievements outside of Egypt are not enough and longs to return to Egypt. As Baines writes, “There is no fundamental difference in Sinuhe’s status at the beginning and the end, and in literalistic terms he is not changed by his experiences. The ‘true’ state of things, the Egyptian state, is, therefore, implicitly superior to what goes between, for it requires no change to reassert its superiority.” As Sinuhe begins the process of his transition back to Egypt, it begins to become clear that, what may have seemed to be achieved outside of Egypt, cannot actually compare with life in Egypt. Of course, a primary concern is fear of being buried

---

92 Miroslav Bártá and Jiří Janák, “Sinuhe: Popular Hero, Court Politics, and the Royal Paradigm.,” in Middle Kingdom Palace Culture and Its Echoes in the Provinces: Regional Perspectives and Realities, ed. Alejandro Jiménez-Serrano and Antonio J. Morales (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2021), 103. Spalinger phrases it as “Sinuhe divests himself of anything Egyptian after he leaves Egypt; he ceases to be Egyptian” (Spalinger, “Orientations on Sinuhe,” 327.).


96 For a helpful discussion of the ways in which the ideological view of Asiatics and the “realistic” view (i.e. topos and mimesis) interact in the story of Sinuhe, see Marcelo Campagno, “Egyptian Boundaries in the Tale of Sinuhe.,” in Fuzzy Boundaries: Festschrift Für Antonio Loprieno, ed. M. Müller et al., vol. 1, 2 vols. (Hamburg: Widmaier, 2015), 335–46.
outside of Egypt. Here, however, we will focus on the motif of dirt and uncleanness in Sinuhe’s transition back to Egypt.

After he receives the king’s letter allowing him to return, “Sinuhe begins a reverse transformation from a “barbarian” into a civilized person, i.e., an Egyptian.” When Sinuhe returns to Egypt, he is granted an audience with the king. Surprisingly, there does not seem to be any mention of Sinuhe purifying himself prior to entering the presence of the king; instead, the cleansing of Sinuhe takes place after the audience. According to Galan, “Sinuhe presented himself in the audience chamber, still in his Canaanite (semi)nomadic garb, or in what, to the eyes of the Egyptians, was the same as saying a savage appearance: unshaven, dirty, smelly and badly dressed.”

When the king addresses Sinuhe, he notes that Sinuhe has returned after roaming the foreign lands (B257), but that this has attacked him and made him grow old (B257–258). The king then says: \( nn \ šrr \ 'bt \ h3t \ nn \ bs=k \ jn \ pdtjw \ m \ jr=k \ sp \ sn \ gr. \) The interpretation of the first phrase is difficult and hinges on how one reads ‘bt. Allen translates these phrases as “Not

---


98 Bártai and Janák, “Sinuhe: Popular Hero, Court Politics, and the Royal Paradigm.,” 104. Spalinger notes that, “when one half of the tale has passed by the inverse reactions occurs, and even a simple approach to the text reveals that, once more, Sinuhe becomes a person, rm, and Egyptian” (Spalinger, “Orientations on Sinuhe,” 327.).

99 Galán, Four Journeys in Ancient Egyptian Literature., 5:91.

100 Galán compares this with how old age is described in the Learning of Ptahhotep (Galán, Four Journeys in Ancient Egyptian Literature., 5:76–77.).

101 Roland Koch’s transcription of these lines (B257–258) is as follows:

Rolle Koch’s transcription of these lines (B257–258) is as follows: \( \text{(Roland Koch, Die Erzählung des Sinuhe (Bruxelles: Editions de la Fondation Egyptologique Reine Elisabeth, 1990), 75.).} \)
insignificant is your corpse’s internment: nor will you be buried by bowmen.” Quirke, however, translates as, “It is no trifle that your body will be purified, that you will not be interred by nomads.” Similarly, Galan has “The purification of your body is not futile: do not be buried by foreigners.” Lichteim translates as “It is no small matter that your corpse will be interred without being escorted by Bowmen.” Parkinson translates as “Your burial is no small matter; you will not be laid to rest by barbarians.” As can be seen, while some translators interpretate a reference to purification in this line, this is not certain. While ideas of cleaning do come into play later in the story, it would seem unusual for ṣb(w) (“purification” or “impurity”) to be classified with a book roll ( ). Thus, while intriguing, we should be cautious in interpreting this as a reference to purification.

When Sinuhe is (re)-introduced to the king’s family, the king’s wife and children give a great cry of surprise, or perhaps better understood as a shriek of horror at his appearance and ask if it is really Sinuhe (B263–268).

\[Rd.jn \text{ṣ}t\text{t} msw nsw dd.jn \text{hm}=f n hmt nsw mt S\text{ṣ}-nht jw m ṣ\text{m} km\text{ṣ} n \text{ṣt}jw \text{wd}=s sb\text{ḥ} \text{ṣ} jw \text{wrt} msw nsm m dnyt wṣ t dd.jn=sn ḫt \text{hm}=f nn ntf pw m mṣṭ jty nbw dd.jn \text{hm}=f ntf pw m mṣṭ\]

Then the king’s children were ushered in and his person said to the king’s wife, “Look, Sinuhe has returned as an Asiatic, a product of nomads.” She uttered a very great

---

102 Allen, Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom., 140.
103 Quirke, Egyptian literature 1800 BC, 68.
104 Galán, Four Journeys in Ancient Egyptian Literature., 5:71.
105 Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature., 282.
106 Parkinson, The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems, 1940-1640 BC, 40.
107 Understanding kmṣ as a perfective passive participle.
108 ṣṭyw probably refers to people who live a nomadic lifestyle. According to Saretta, “the term ṣṭyw may best be construed as a socio-economic term used for the (semi-)nomadic, unstable elements within society. It is thus a further qualification of the broader ethnic designation, ṣṭmw. The difference between the two is attitudinal. The pejorative associations of the nomadic lifestyle go beyond the more neutral description of a foreign population. One
cry, the king’s children in a single shriek. Then they spoke before his person, “Truly it cannot be him, our lord.” Then his person said, “It is really him.”

The cry of surprise from the queen and the royal children may be shock that Sinuhe is still alive, but it may also be responding to Sinuhe’s dirty, foreign appearance. According to Parkinson, their shriek “voices the central question of identity and demonstrates how dramatically Sinuhe has changed physically. His earlier claims to have attained an Egyptian-like prosperity and possess white linen (B 153) are revealed as delusory here.”109 The statement of the king that Sinuhe had become an Asiatic is certainly significant for understanding Sinuhe’s need for transformation in order to become an Egyptian again.110 In what follows, although Sinuhe had become an Asiatic, as he is cleaned up, he becomes Egyptian again.

It is interesting to note that the details of Sinuhe’s appearance, which make him an Asiatic, are left unstated. Perhaps this is because the audience would have known what these characteristics were. However, it should also be noted that in Egyptian literature in general, there are “few examples of straightforward, explicit references to a physical deformity or to what the Egyptian authors and their audience would probably have deemed as physical ugliness. All such references to negative physical features either describe a temporary only feature or are vague and provide no concrete details.”111 Thus, as a general rule, the Egyptians seem to have avoided can compare it to the term gypsy, often used pejoratively to describe an unstable lifestyle” (Phyllis Saretta, *Asiatics in Middle Kingdom Egypt: Perceptions and Reality*, 2017, 20–21.

---


111 Nikolaos Lazaridis, “Physical Characterization in Ancient Egyptian Narrative Literature,” *Égypte Nilotique et Méditerranéenne* 6 (2013): 130. In a similar vein, Emily Teeter says that “the negative aspects of aging are rarely mentioned or portrayed in representations” and “there is little tradition of indicating infirmity” (Teeter, “The Body in Ancient Egyptian Texts and Representations (Plate 6),” 152.). Teeter lists a handful of references which may depict representations of aging or infirmity.
explicit references to dirtiness or uncleanness. In commenting on the description of Sinuhe in this passage, Lazaridis writes:

The negative description of Sinuhe looking like a Bedouin possibly constitutes a vague, unexplained reference to a mixture of features, including the state of his hair and face, as well as his clothing and odor; in other words, the reference here is explicitly physical and negative, but it does not provide the audience with any concrete details. Instead, the details of Sinuhe’s current appearance can be deduced by reading later in the text about the stages of his “physical restoration” back to his Egyptian looks. Once again, as is the case with all reference to negative physical features in the corpus, the Egyptian author shied away from diving into the details of an aesthetically unappealing look.”

As noted above, Sinuhe does not seem to have cleansed or purified himself prior to his audience with the king. This might appear unusual, since purity for the king and the palace is stressed is other texts. Thus, Galan wonders, “how is it that Sinuhe did not clean himself up before his audience with the king? He did have enough time and the opportunity to do so.”

Instead, Sinuhe is cleaned up, only after he has been accepted into the court. Since cleansing is such an important part of becoming Egyptian again, perhaps Sinuhe needed the king’s approval and restoration before he could become clean and, thus, “Egyptian” again.

After the queen and the king’s children express surprise at seeing Sinuhe, they recite a poem in praise of the king and his ability to restore (B 268–279). In the context of the story, the references to the king giving life, etc., could be understood as referring to Sinuhe. In this poem, line B272–273 says that “you have delivered the men of low station from evil (dirt?) (shr.n=k

---

114 Galán, Four Journeys in Ancient Egyptian Literature., 5:91.
115 Galán, Four Journeys in Ancient Egyptian Literature., 5:91.
In the context of the story, it could be possible that dwt refers to literal dirt, since Sinuhe needs to be cleansed of his Asiatic dirt to be restored as an Egyptian.

Following the audience with the king, the most significant passage on Sinuhe’s “cleaning up” and transformation back into an Egyptian follow (B 283–295):

\[
\text{Prt=} j \text{ r=f m } \text{hnwtj msw-} \text{nsw hr rdjt w } \text{sn (285)} \text{ sm=n m-ht rwty wrty (286) rdj-kw r pr } s^3- \text{nsw spssw jm=f (287) sbbwy}^{117} \text{ jm=f } \text{hnmw nw } \text{ht sdjtw jm=f (288) nt pr-hd hbs nw ssrw nsw } \text{ntjw (289) tpt nsw srw mrr=f m } t \text{ (290) nbt wpdw nbw hr jrt=f rdj swj rnpwt hr } h^2w=j \text{ (291) t}j. \text{kw } c^2b \text{ snw=j Jw rdj sbt (292) n j3st hbsw n nmjw } s^6 \text{ sd=kw (293) m p}s^6t \text{ gs=kw m tpt sdr=kw (294) hr } \text{hnktyt dj.n } s^6 \text{ n jmw=f (295) nrht n } h^2t \text{ n wrh jm=s}
\]

So, I went into the inner chambers of the palace, the children of the king were giving their arms (285) as we went through the great double gate. (286) I was assigned to the house of a king’s son. Precious things were in it. (287) A bathroom(?) was in it with images of the horizon. Sealed things (288) of the treasury were in it and clothes of the king’s things, myrrh and fine oil (289) of the king, noblemen whom he loves in every chamber (290), and every attendant at his duty. Years were caused to pass from my body (291) as I was shaved\(^{118}\) and my hair was being combed. A load\(^{119}\) was given (292) to the foreign land,\(^{120}\) clothes to the sandfarers. I was clothed (293) with fine linen\(^{121}\) and

---

116 Allen translates as “distance for yourself dependents from evil” (Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom*., 148.). Quirke translates as “you have removed the weak from evil” (Quirke, *Egyptian literature 1800 BC*, 68.).


118 Allen argues that *tjf* means “pluck” not “shaved” and thus this refers to the plucking of Sinuhe’s body hair Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom.*, 148.

119 In the story of the shipwrecked sailor, the sailor is given a *sbt* of oils and exotics by the snake, which he loads onto the boat to take him home (column 162). The spellings are identical in the two literary works (\(\text{\textsuperscript{\textbf{\textregistered}}}{\text{\textcircled{\textbf{\textregistered}}} \text{\textsuperscript{\textbf{\textregistered}}} \text{\textsuperscript{\textbf{\textregistered}}} \text{\textsuperscript{\textbf{\textregistered}}}}\)). The word *sbt* (with identical spelling) also clearly refers to a ship’s cargo in Papyrus Anastasti VIII, 6 (see transcription in Groll, “The Egyptian Background of the Exodus and the Crossing of the Reed Sea: A New Reading of Papyrus Anastasi VIII.,” 174.) El-Hamrari translates *sbt* as “schmutz” El-Hamrawi, “Gapping Bei Nicht-Ersten Satzkernen Im Mittelägyptischen,” 189. See also discussion in Chapter 8 on *sbw* in Ipuwer.

120 Gardiner says that “the burden given to the desert is of course the dirt which Sinuhe’s ablutions removed from him and the clothes given to the Sandfarers are Sinuhe’s discarded Asiatic garments” (Gardiner, *Notes on the Story of Sinuhe.*, 112.

anointed with the best oil. I slept (294) on a bed, after I had given the sand to those who are in it (295) and the merhet-oil of a tree to the one anointed with it.

The process of “cleaning up” Sinuhe now begins in earnest. Perhaps strikingly, Sinuhe is taken further into the palace in his “dirty,” “foreign” condition. Of course, the purpose of him entering further is in order to be re-Egyptianized; nevertheless, it seems striking that he is allowed deeper into the palace before the cleansing process begins.

The transformation that happens to Sinuhe is described as “years passing from his body.” Earlier, Sinuhe’s condition was described by the king as “the flight has worked its impact on you, you are grown old. You have reached old age.” However, apparently the appearance of age changes as the foreignness is removed and Sinuhe becomes Egyptian again. As Sinuhe is “cleansed,” he becomes young and refreshed.

The next phrases are probably related to hair, although the precise nuance is not entirely clear. The mention of šnw (šn) “hair,” clearly indicates that hair is in view at the end of the line. Probably because of the mention of hair at the end of the line, tĮj (the text reads štš štš tĮj) has been taken to refer to shaving or plucking of hair. Perhaps, it refers to the removal of a beard which, although common among Asiatics, was not customary for Egyptians. Foster translated tĮ.kw as “I was stripped,” which would probably then refer to the

---

122 Quirke, *Egyptian literature 1800 BC*, 68.


124 Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom*, 148; Gardiner, *Notes on the Story of Sinuhe*, 112; Simpson et al., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 66. For the means which were used for shaving and depilation see Veiga, *Health and Medicine in Ancient Egypt*, 49.

removal and return of his clothing to the sandfarers.\textsuperscript{126} In any case, \textit{tj} probably refers to the removal of something from Sinuhe that was considered “dirty.”\textsuperscript{127} The word \textit{\textit{hō}} ( empreson ) appears to be a hapax,\textsuperscript{128} and has been translated as “combed.”\textsuperscript{129} At the very least, although some uncertainties remain, this phrase probably indicates that something considered “dirty” was removed from Sinuhe, and that something with his hair/head needed to be “cleaned” or transformed in some way.

The text then says that “a cargo was given to the desert.” This suggests that the “dirt” or “foreign baggage” of Sinuhe was a burden he was carrying. Based on his description of his life in Retjenu (B 149–156), it seems that he was previously unaware of this burden. However, once he is in Egypt, the “dirt” that he has on his person is seen as a cargo or burden to be returned to where it belongs, i.e., it must be “unloaded” back into the hill country. Perhaps the “burden” refers specifically to the hair mentioned in the previous line or to the clothing in the following phrase. However, it seems best to understand the \textit{sbt} that is given to the desert to refer to all aspects of “dirt,” which Sinuhe had picked up in his time outside of Egypt.


\textsuperscript{127} Another, though less likely, possibility could be that the stative of \textit{tj} here refers to Sinuhe being “taken” by the servants to be cleansed.

\textsuperscript{128} TLA lemma-no. 35770 “Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae - Detailed Information for an Entry in the List of Lemmata,” accessed February 23, 2023, https://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/servlet/GetWcnDetails?u=guest&f=0&l=0&wn=35770&db=0.

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Wb} I, 169. Gardiner suggested that \textit{\textit{hō}} is “probably akin” to \textit{\textit{jō}} meaning “to join, unite” (Gardiner, \textit{Notes on the Story of Sinuhe.}, 112; cf. Foster, \textit{Thought Couplets in the Tale of Sinuhe: Verse Text and Translation. With an Outline of Grammatical Forms and Clause Sequences and an Essay on the Tale as Literature.}, 3:61; Simpson et al., \textit{The Literature of Ancient Egypt}, 66; Lichtheim, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature.}, 283; Faulkner, \textit{A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian}, 1991, 39.
Clothing also plays an important role in the cleaning up of Sinuhe. Earlier, Sinuhe had claimed that he possessed fine garments in Retjenu (ḥḥt ṣpḥt B153), yet here his garments are returned to the sand dwellers. Apparently, although he considered himself to possess fine clothing when abroad, now that he is back in Egypt, that clothing is inferior and no longer proper. Thus, it must be returned to where it belongs. It is interesting that the same word (ṣpḥt) is used that Sinuhe said he possessed while abroad. Perhaps the ṣpḥt in Syria was inferior, or the difference is merely in context: foreign can never compare with Egyptian. In any case, the most important thing to note is the importance of proper clothing for “clean,” Egyptian status.\footnote{For discussion of white linen garments as required for ritual purity see Gee, \textit{The Requirements of Ritual Purity in Ancient Egypt.}, 303–4.}

Similar to clothing, being anointed with the proper oil(s) is also a distinction between proper Egyptianness and unclean foreignness.\footnote{For anointing with oils as a part of ritual purity see Gee, \textit{The Requirements of Ritual Purity in Ancient Egypt.}, 305–11.} Although he was still anointed with oil while in Retenu, it was not of the same type/quality and thus inappropriate for an Egyptian noble.\footnote{Koura, “Die Allgemeinen Und Einzelnen Bezeichnungen Der Ölhaltigen Produkte Im Alten Ägypten,” 122.} According to Basma Koura, “Statt mit mrḥt-Öl des ḫt-Baumes, das Sinuhe im Ausland verbraucht hat, salbte er sich in Agypten mit dem tpt-Öl des Königs; das tpt-Öl ist wohl eine bessere Qualität als da mrḥt-n-ḥt-Öl.”\footnote{Koura, \textit{Die “7-Heiligen Öle” Und Andere Öl- Und Fettnamen: Eine Lexikographische Untersuchung Zu Den Bezeichnungen von Ölen, Fetten Und Salben Bei Den Alten Ägyptern von Der Frühzeit Bis Zum Anfang Der Ptolemäerzeit (von 3000 v. Chr. - ca. 305 v. Chr.).}, 2:122. Harris suggested that expression mrḥt n ḫt indicated “wood tar or resin” (Harris, \textit{Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals.}, 174.).} Whether it was due to its inferior quality or foreignness, it also had to be returned.
Sinuhe claims to have slept on a bed after he returned the sand to the sand dwellers. This could suggest that there was an association between dirtiness and sleeping on the ground. Sleeping on a bed would have separated one from the earth and thus from being on the soil or sand. While a bed may have been a status symbol, we should not discount the association with cleanliness, since a bed forms a barrier between the sleeper and the dirt. Maitland argues that the Middle Kingdom elite depicted themselves with separation between themselves and the ground in order to demonstrate their cleanliness and thus to emphasize their social status.\textsuperscript{134} For example, “in other methods of dirt avoidance, tomb owners are shown sitting on chairs that are often further removed from the ground by a reed mat or a raised platform with in a pavilion.”\textsuperscript{135} In contrast, “while the elite are always shown physically separated from the earth, laborers are depicted sitting directly on the ground while they work, and herdsmen even sleep crouched in the dirt.”\textsuperscript{136} Thus, sleeping on a bed may suggest Sinuhe’s new “clean” status as well as social status.

Finally, sand is returned to those who are in it. Although sand can be seen as a pure substance,\textsuperscript{137} here it is something which must be removed from Sinuhe and returned to the foreigners, or more specifically “the sandfarers” ($nmjw$-$\delta$). The mention of sand here indicates that the removal of physical substances was a part of the cleansing of Sinuhe. Apparently, having sand on one’s person was acceptable for those living on the sand, but this was inappropriate for an Egyptian, or at least for those of the upper classes. Being a clean, proper member of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[134] Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom.,” 51–52.
\item[135] Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom.,” 52.
\item[136] Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom.,” 52.
\end{footnotes}
Egyptian elite meant that one should remove substances such as sand from one’s body, and, in Sinuhe’s case, this sand also may have represented his former status as a “sand dweller.”

Several things can be inferred from this passage. First, Sinuhe’s transformation involved both the removal of the “dirty” as well as the application of the “clean.” Thus, Sinuhe had to remove his “burden” of sand, *mḥrt*-oil of trees, and the clothing of sandfarers, in order to put on the best oil, fine linen garments, and sleep on a bed. Cleaning Sinuhe involved both removal of dirt as well as the addition of what was clean. Second, the dirt, which was removed from Sinuhe, was associated with life in a foreign land.\textsuperscript{138} While it may not be explicitly stated that foreigners were “dirty,” the implication of the text does seem to imply this. While foreign lifestyle may be appropriate outside of Egypt, for an Egyptian, it has no place in Egypt.\textsuperscript{139} According to Maitland, “dirt is portrayed as synonymous with “other,” whereas cleanliness, linen, and beds are emblems of a return to Egyptian civilization.”\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{138} Cf. Spalinger, “Orientations on Sinuhe,” 327.

\textsuperscript{139} For Egypt itself as “sacred space” see Trindade Lopes and Borges Pires, “Sacred Space in Ancient Egypt: Some Observations and Remarks from the Great Hymn to the Nile and the Tale of Sinůhe.” If Egypt was indeed considered “sacred space” when compared with foreign lands, then it is understandable that a higher standard of “cleanliness” was expected of those living in it. “Cleanliness” here should be understood as referring to the Egyptian customs of bodily hygiene.

\textsuperscript{140} Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom.,” 57.
CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSIONS

In concluding this study, I want to offer a few comments of synthesis. First, I will offer a general summary of the conceptions of dirtiness in ancient Egypt as it emerged from this study. Then we will briefly offer some concluding thoughts on three more specific points related to this study: a comparison of mundane and ritual purity, the role of dirtiness as a marker of social distinctions, and some conclusions regarding the senses and the perception of dirt.

In the foregoing analysis, we focused on the ancient Egyptians’ conceptions of dirt primarily through a lexical approach. This approach was necessary because the surviving textual sources are the window, which we must use, in order to attempt to understand something about the Egyptians’ own conceptions of dirtiness. We focused on several categories of words which could be related to the concept of dirtiness and attempted to understand their meanings, as well as how they might convey Egyptian attitudes of dirt and uncleanness. While the concept of dirty can be used in a variety of domains such as religion, ritual, medicine, morality, and metaphor, we primarily focused our attention in this study on dirt as a material substance.\footnote{Kühnemund says there are four categories of impurity in Graeco-Roman Egypt. They are physical impurity, i.e. external dirt, medical impurity which includes pathogens and diseases, cultic or ritual impurity, and general impurity, which is a catch-all category for everything that does not fit into the other categories (Kühnemund, \textit{Die rituelle Reinheit in den Tempeln der griechisch-römischen Zeit Teil 1 Text}, 78. In this study, we primarily focused on the first category.}

The Egyptian words \textit{jwtn} (ground, earth dust), \textit{3ht} (field), \textit{'mr} (mud, muddy ground), \textit{'mrmt} (mud, muddy ground), \textit{dbn} (mortar, clay), \textit{hmw} (dust), and \textit{s\textdegree y} (sand) all refer to kinds of physical dirt, and they seem to be perceived as dirty in at least some contexts. These substances seem to be able to soil both the body and clothing. Presumably, these substances were removed via washing with water. Since washing with water appears to have been important to the ancient Egyptians, things that would be removed by this practice might be considered dirty, at least at the
time when it was necessary to wash. Explicit references to these substances being removed via washing do not appear to be attested in Egyptian texts. However, there are at least some occasions when \( d\hat{w}(t) \) seems to have a to have at least a partial reference to a physical substance that is removed via washing. Perhaps these substances might have been included in the reference to \( d\hat{w}(t) \) in these contexts.

Ancient Egyptians seem to have considered excrement (\( hs \)) and urine (\( ws\hat{t}t \)) to be some of the most polluting substances. Semen (\( mt\hat{w}t \) and \( \hat{m}\)t) and menstrual blood (\( hsmn \)) also can be perceived as highly polluting, especially when contact with them is not desired. Our analysis of \( \hat{m}t \) and \( \hat{m}\)t suggested that these terms might refer to bloody urine or discharge, and the Piye stela clearly indicates that this could be considered unclean. The term \( \hat{b} \) (impurity) may be derived from \( \hat{b}(w) \) (purification) and referred to “what was cleansed” in the process of purification. In later periods, it seems to refer primarily to impurities located inside of the body. Finally, ragged garments (\( h\hat{t}\)t) and unanointed skin (\( h\hat{s}\)t) also may have been perceived as communicating a dirty appearance.

While perhaps not directly a material substance, foul odors seem to have been an important way in which the Egyptians perceived something or someone as dirty. Scent may have been closely linked with identity, and metaphorically, being identified with foul odor meant a bad reputation. Thus, pleasant odors seem to have been very important to the Egyptians. Conversely, the avoidance or masking of what were perceived as foul odors was also a priority. The word \( stj \) refers to odor in general and can refer to foul odors, while \( hns\) refers specifically to foul odor. Among the odors that were perceived as unpleasant were fish, fowl, crocodiles, body odor, and feces. Putrefaction (\( hw\), \( hw\hat{t}t \), \( s\hat{w}\)) also could be perceived as a bad odor.
We also compared the Egyptian terms *ft* (to be emotionally weary) and *bwt* (abomination, disgust) to components of the disgust response. While *ft* does not seem to fit well with the components of the disgust response, the uses of the Egyptian term *bwt* do seem to parallel many of the components of disgust. Since there may also be religious meanings tied with the Egyptian term *bwt*, we cannot conclusively say that the word means “disgust,” but it may suggest that *bwt* is the closest Egyptian term for the concept of disgust, as described by recent psychological studies.

Let us now turn to summarize some basic concepts of the Egyptian conception of dirt. First, we should not look for a material or substance that is dirt at all times and in all places; rather, certain substances are dirty in particular contexts. In a particular context, we can refer to what is dirt, but that should not necessarily be taken to mean that the same substance would be dirt in every other context. For example, having dust on one’s body outdoors, might have been less dirty, than the same dust on one’s body in a house, while dust on one’s skin when entering the presence of a god was even more offensive and, in this context, even contaminating. While there could be a variety of reasons for the customary practice of washing, in a dusty environment such as Egypt, washing would be a way of removing dust, mud, sand, etc. from one’s body. Thus, although explicit mentions of the dirt or impurity that is removed via washing are rare in Egyptian texts, almost certainly these substances were among those removed via washing with water. While dust, dirt, mud, etc., might be minor impurities and may not be considered high on the scale of contamination, they still were considered dirty in some contexts. Elites were probably able to maintain more of a barrier between themselves and dust and other soils; however, there do appear to be occasions, such as when in mourning or in certain medical remedies, when placing dirt or dust on one’s body was done intentionally. Similarly, while feces...
was clearly perceived as highly contaminating in some (if not many or most) contexts, it could also be perceived to have beneficial uses in some medical remedies. Again, this suggests that its dirtiness is, on some level, context dependent.

Secondly, how dirty a substance is perceived to be (in a particular context) can often be measured by the intensity of the contamination responses. While substances such as soil or dust, could be perceived as dirty in some contexts, they could simply be washed off. Other substances seem to have higher degrees of dirtiness as measured by their fear of pollution. For example, contact with bodily wastes seems have been considered especially defiling and feces and urine are clear examples in this regard. For example, in the Coffin Texts one refuses to touch, step on, eat, or smell excrement (ḥs). These texts indicate a strong aversion towards becoming contaminated by ḥs. There does not seem to be a similar fear of contamination by other substances such as jwtn (ground, earth, dust) or hmw (dust), which seems to suggest that ḥs was considered “dirtier” or more defiling than these. Since bwt appears to be the Egyptian word most closely related to the disgust emotion, it is not surprising that excrement is called bwt, while less contaminating dirt such as dust (hmw) may not be. Other bodily fluids, such as semen, seem to be especially defiling when contact with them is undesired. Thus, for example, while semen can be productive and creative, it can also be extremely polluting and dangerous.

**Religious Implications**

While this was not a study of ritual purity per se, perhaps a few comments on the relationship between mundane cleanliness and ritual purity are in order. However, we must also be careful to not simply conflate the two types of cleanliness. In keeping with the focus of this study, my comparison is primarily on dirt as a material substance. While the basic conceptions of what materials are considered dirty and when, appear to be related, there are certainly many
other aspects that can make up the requirements for ritual purity. John Gee classifies ritual purity into two categories: general ritual purity and specific ritual purity.\footnote{Gee, \textit{The Requirements of Ritual Purity in Ancient Egypt.}, 244–45.} “General ritual purity consists of those things that must be done to participate in any general ritual” whereas “specific ritual purity consists of those things that must be done to participate in a specific ritual.”\footnote{Gee, \textit{The Requirements of Ritual Purity in Ancient Egypt.}, 244–45.}

Additionally, when examining requirements of ritual purity, one must also consider the scope of the requirements as “potentially, the requirements might apply to the priests (1) only during the rituals, (2) only inside the temple, (3) only while the priest was on phyle duty, (4) at all times.”\footnote{Gee, \textit{The Requirements of Ritual Purity in Ancient Egypt.}, 250.}

In this summary, we are not comparing the relationship with all of these components of ritual purity. Primarily, we will examine the similarities between general ritual purity and mundane cleanliness. Additionally, we should again note that we are examining aspects of dirtiness as dirt as a material substance, and not necessarily moral or behavioral components of purity.

While we should not conflate the concepts of mundane and ritual purity, it does appear that, in some respects, they differ in degree and in intensity rather than in type. In other words, many of the concepts and practices of ritual purity are related to those practiced in day-to-day cleanliness. For example, washing was certainly required of the priest in order to enter the temple, yet washing upon entering a house also seems to be customary.\footnote{If aspects of temples and temple rituals were modeled after those of elite households, then this is not surprising. For the idea that of temples were modeled on elite households see Eaton, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Temple Ritual: Performance, Pattern, and Practice.}, 41–56; Haring, \textit{Divine Households}, 1; Sauneron, \textit{The Priests of Ancient Egypt}, 77–78; Wolfgang Helck and Wolfhart Westendorf, eds., \textit{Lexikon Der Ägyptologie VI: Stele-Zypresse.} (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), 414.} John Gee defined ritual purity as “those things required to enter sacred space.”\footnote{Gee, “The Requirements of Ritual Purity in Ancient Egypt,” 2003, 5, 314.} Although probably not as high
standards or strict enforcement applied, similar ideas seem to be present in daily life cleanliness. While we should probably refer to it as more of a custom than a rule, there does seem to be the idea that one should at least wash his or her hands when entering a house. While the intensity of the washing and the standard of cleanliness for ritual washing may be higher, the basic concepts behind both appear similar—prior to entering a house, whether human or divine, one should wash oneself to remove undesired dirt and impurities. Thus, many of the Egyptian terms for “dirt,” “soil,” “dust,” etc., may have been considered dirty in both the mundane and ritual spheres. Of course, what is dirty is dependent on the context; it may be perfectly acceptable outside, but dirty inside the walls of a house.

Similarly, incense and oils seem to be components of cleanliness in both the ritual and mundane realms, which might suggest that foul odors (for example, fish, putrefaction, and body odor) were considered dirty in both mundane and ritual contexts. Obviously, the standards of ritual purity were higher than mundane cleanliness and there are certainly social distinctions involved in the cleanliness standards (i.e., elite vs peasant, etc., see below), yet the basic ideas behind what counted as clean (at least for the upper classes) appear to be similar.

In short, mundane cleanliness and ritual purity are related in some respects. It is probably a pointless “chicken and the egg” debate to attempt to determine whether mundane or ritual cleaning had priority in informing the other. Perhaps it is best to simply conclude that they may have been mutually informing.

**Social Implications**

The dichotomy of dirtiness and cleanliness frequently seems to imply social and class distinctions in ancient Egypt. The upper classes use cleanliness to separate themselves from their
dirty social inferiors. Maitland examined this motif in the Middle Kingdom, and the results of this analysis are consistent with her conclusions.\textsuperscript{147} Perhaps the clearest example of this motif is the Satire of the Trades in which a variety of professions are denigrated for dirtiness, while the son is exhorted to be a scribe.

However, while the elites prided themselves on their cleanliness and these standards of cleanliness were unattainable for peasants and laborers, this does not necessarily imply that the lower classes had completely different conceptions of cleanliness, or that they did not follow some of the same practices to the extent that they were able too. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the sources, we have virtually no access into the conceptions of cleanliness among most of the Egyptian population.\textsuperscript{148} However, texts such as the Aten Hymns might suggest that, at least in the Amarna period, it was customary for everyone to perform some kind of washing upon waking up in the morning (Chapter 2). Perhaps this is an idealized vision, but it does remind us to be cautious about assuming that the lower classes did not make use of the means of cleanliness available to them.

With that being said, however, it is clear that the ability to maintain cleanliness was a marker of social status. Even if a peasant or craftsman washed themselves in the morning, once they began their day’s work, they would soon become sweaty and dirtied by their work. For example, one thinks of the potter who is “anointed with earth”\textsuperscript{149} and “his clothes are stiff with

\textsuperscript{147} Maitland, “Dirt, Purity, and Spatial Control: Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Egyptian Society and Culture during the Middle Kingdom.”

\textsuperscript{148} As John Baines commented, “It is also impossible to know how far elite and nonelite shared the same ideology” (John Baines, “Restricted Knowledge, Hierarchy, and Decorum: Modern Perceptions and Ancient Institutions,” Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt 27 (1990): 1, https://doi.org/10.2307/40000070.).

\textsuperscript{149} Papyrus Lansing 4,4.
mud.”

It seems that that the normal expectation, at least for the upper classes, was that one would wash before eating. However, the Satire of the Trades suggests that this practice might also reflect a social distinction, since the builder-of-walls is denigrated for “when he eats bread, he washes himself at the same time.” In other words, it seems likely that these kinds of cleansing practices were a distinction and barrier setting apart the upper classes from their dirty inferiors.

While presumably it was possible for scribes and elites to strive for white garments, white sandals, smooth skin, and a pleasant aroma, these were obviously unattainable for peasants, laborers, and craftsmen who had to perform manual labor. For example, the trade of a potter necessitates being covered with clay, the fisherman or fowler must inevitably smell like these animals, and a washerman inevitably becomes contaminated by soiled clothes. Thus, if the clean ideals could only be achieved by a certain portion of the population, they would have marked social distinctions. One could tell who a scribe or official was by their cleanliness, while their social inferiors would be marked by a greater degree of dirtiness.

**Perception of Dirt**

The sense of sight is frequently used in the perception of dirty in Egyptian texts. In part, this might reflect social distinctions, since a scribe might see that an inferior was dirty, but a clean scribe would probably avoid experiencing this dirt via touch whenever possible.

The sense of smell, however, seems to be highly involved in the perception of “dirtiness.” There seem to be at least three separate words that can refer to foul odors, *stj*, *hnš*, and *hw3*. The

---

150 Jäger, *Altägyptische Berufstypologien*, XXXVI–XXXVII.

151 Jäger, *Altägyptische Berufstypologien*, XLII.
term *ṣtj* seems to be a general term for odor that can apply to good or bad odors. The term *ḥnš* specifically refers to “stench” and seems to refer to stench such as fish and body odor. The term *ḥwš* refers to putrefaction and, when referring to odor, it specifically refers to the odor of putrefaction. The Egyptians, or at least the elites (the lowers classes probably did not have the luxury of avoiding these odors) seem to have considered the odor of fish, fowl, crocodiles, body odor, feces, and putrefaction to be dirty, and this odor must be avoided or covered up. While dust or soils on one’s person may have been dirty to sight or touch, there does not seem to be any indication that any of the terms used for dust, dirt, mud, etc. were offensive to the sense of smell.

Disgust and taste are closely linked, and at its most basic level, core disgust\(^{152}\) can be defined as “revulsion at the prospect of oral incorporation of an offensive object.”\(^{153}\) Thus, one does not really perceive or experience dirt by taste; if something dirty actually enters the mouth, it is disgusting. Feces and urine are clearly in this category. Many of the other things that are called *bwt* could also fall in this category, although these can be context dependent, or specific to a person or deity.

It is not surprising that the sense of hearing seems to be the sense least involved in perceiving dirt. However, this is not surprising since this analysis primarily focused on dirt as a material substance. However, while hearing is not really involved in the perception of material dirt, it may be involved in the metaphorical and moral extensions of the category as in, for example, a statement such as

\(^{152}\) Since disgust can operate on several levels, “core disgust” is considered the most basic, or primitive level of disgust and is often linked to pathogen avoidance. Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley, “Disgust,” 817.

I never spoke a dirty thing against people.\textsuperscript{155}

Thus, while the sense of hearing was little involved in the perception of dirt in this study, perhaps if one examined the metaphorical and moral extensions of dirty one might find that hearing was involved in its perception in these extended categories of dirt. However, since we have here focused on the materiality of dirt, that is beyond the scope of this study.

\textsuperscript{154} Urk I, 57.15–16.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Colazilli, Alessandra. “Skin in Ancient Egyptian Belief: Sacred Texts and Rituals.” In *Cult and Belief in Ancient Egypt: Proceedings of the Fourth International Congress for Young


Fitzenreiter, Martin. “Piye Son of Ra, Loving Horses, Detesting Fish.” In La Pioche et La Plume: Autour Du Soudan, Du Liban et de La Jordanie. Hommages Archéologiques à


Koura, Basma. *Die “7-Heiligen Öle” Und Andere Öl- Und Fettnamen: Eine Lexikographische Untersuchung Zu Den Bezeichnungen von Ölen, Fetten Und Salben Bei Den Alten*


Lapp, Günther, British museum (Londres), and Department of ancient Egypt and Sudan. *The Papyrus of Nu (BM EA 10477).* Londres: British Museum Press, 1997.


Lichtheim, Miriam. *Ancient Egyptian autobiographies chiefly of the Middle Kingdom a study and an anthology,* 1988.


———. “How ‘Funerary’ Are the Coffin Texts?” In *Concepts in Middle Kingdom Funerary Culture: Proceedings of the Lady Wallis Budge Anniversary Symposium Held at Christ’s


*Medinet Habu IV: Festival Scenes of Ramses III.* University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications, 1940.


——. Going out in Daylight: Prt m Hrw - the Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead: Translations, Sources, Meanings, 2013.


Verly, Georges. “Khety or the Satire of Trades, Mud and Experimental Archaeology: The Usage of Mud as Protection by Metallurgists in Pharaonic Egypt.” *Göttinger Miszellen* 252 (2017): 135–44.


