

## 2 Pharaonic Egypt

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### 2.1. Introduction

Pharaonic history covers nearly 2,000 years.<sup>1</sup> Institutional change was considerable, reflecting growth in the size and penetration of government, economic expansion, and eventually a very limited development towards a market economy. However, the data for social history is too limited to follow change in detail. Key sources are typically isolated in the evidence they provide, and the recognition of continuities is usually more important.<sup>2</sup> In practice the major fluctuations in Egyptian history are closely tied to ecological changes. Disastrous inundations and droughts in marginal areas brought famine, social disorder, and political instability, triggering mass population movements. In contrast, stable conditions provided opportunities for economic growth, with rising populations based on agricultural development. Cycles of depopulation and re-colonisation of marginal land are normal for Egypt.

The society of the Nile Valley was rooted in subsistence arable farming. Control of the floodwater was very limited and highly localised, so that the viability of cultivation depended entirely on the natural flood regime. Field cultivation was highly productive on land refreshed by the annual flood, but very patchy compared to the artificial irrigation regime in the modern, over-populated Nile Valley. The main social and economic unit was a compact village, located on its own low *kom* (mound), or on the riverside *levée*. During the inundation, the village existed as a small island in the middle of its flooded lands. Individual status was a matter of social and economic position within the community, and not one of legal status.<sup>3</sup> The low population densities of pre-modern Egypt meant that political and economic power lay in the acquisition and management of people to work the land rather than in the physical ownership of land. The model of pre-colonial

1 Egyptian chronology before the mid-seventh century BCE is not exact, with greater margins of error for earlier periods. For a detailed survey of the issues, see Hornung et al. 2006. Dates used here are based on the tables presented by Shaw 2000: 479–481.

2 Eyre 2015.

3 Eyre 2004.

Africa and elsewhere then provides a better basis for comparison than that of later European societies.<sup>4</sup>

There are then two ways in which anachronism clearly distorts modern questions asked of the data. The first is the assumption that social institutions are sufficiently universal to be measured in terms of our own society. All modern definitions of slavery take a clear moral view: the 'liberal' model of human nature, that implicitly 'assumes that man is a freedom-loving and autonomy-seeking being, pursuing his natural rights and rebelling when he is thwarted',<sup>5</sup> and defines failures to do this as markers of oppression, in direct antithesis to the modern articulation of individual 'human rights', and so failing to address the possibility of other models, in which ideas of social integration and security take priority. The Western model, colonialist and capitalist, is focused on slavery as a commoditisation of people; it does not integrate pre-modern ideas of communal identities and patron–client dependences. It is also closely connected with racist attitudes, which the Egyptian data rarely reflects directly, although foreign captives – Nubian, Asiatic, and Libyan – make up large groups of such dependent people at all periods.

It is a common error of modern historiography to overestimate the complexity of pharaonic society. There is even a marked difference here with contemporary Mesopotamia, where the compact political and social structures of the city state differ from the limited penetration of government and local diversity of pharaonic Egypt. A particularly marked difference is the absence from Egypt of the so-called 'law codes' typical of the Mesopotamian record, which there contain extensive sources for the practice of slavery.

Pharaonic Egypt did not have a large, departmentalised or bureaucratic government, nor did it have a formal or autonomous legal system: dispute settlement involved local councils – essentially mediation – or involved appeals to great men in the hierarchy to act as patron. It was not characterised by a commoditised or broadly monetised economy: recorded prices for slaves only become a significant part of the surviving record in the Ramesside Period, and so market practices provide little evidence for the depersonalisation of individuals. The payment of a wage is not useful as a criterion in a society without coinage: all primary payment for labour was necessarily in food. Coercion, physical abuse, and limitations on freedom of movement are not themselves direct markers of the physical ownership of a person. The contrasting concept of freedom is equally difficult to trace. Socio-economic individuality is not generally an explicit theme in the Egyptian

4 Goody 1971, esp. 12–14, 24–25, 29–30; Kopytoff and Miers 1977, esp. 14, 65–66 stressing a 'readiness and willingness to absorb people'; Lane and MacDonald 2011: 1–3, stressing that 'low population densities in much of Africa inevitably led to production systems focussed more on raiding and the control of labour than on the acquisition of land', and 'the foundation of new slave villages as agricultural production units'.

5 Kopytoff and Miers 1977: 54.

data. In autobiography a degree of individual agency is expressed in terms of social responsibility, and social role, as leader of a kinship or local group, but not as an individual personality.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, to be socially isolated – not to belong – is presented as a terrifying fate. Questions about the inheritance of slave status, or the nature of emancipation, must then rely on very limited, fragmentary data, but still have to be mediated by the contrast between belonging and being excluded. Within a household, a practical distinction between the concepts of slave and servant is not clearly articulated.

## 2.2. The vocabulary of dependence

The English terms ‘slave’, ‘slavery’, and ‘serf’ do not, of course, translate directly into hieroglyphic Egyptian. The starting point for ordering Egyptian concepts of social differentiation lies in the extensive vocabulary used to refer to groups of people and their interrelationships.<sup>7</sup> This vocabulary was, however, so rooted in the practical realities of the ancient society that all translation necessarily distorts, at the cost of fluency and precision in English rendering. Behaviour was deeply rooted in reciprocal social relationships, marked by expectations of patron–client relationships, modelled on household order, and mediated by personal violence rather than depersonalised enforcement. Contemporary ideology was that of a patriarchal house: the nuclear family house as the smallest socio-economic unit, through the great estates of the big men, and God’s Houses – the temples – to the King’s House as Great House – *per-aa*, ‘Pharaoh’ – that is, the state as socio-economic unit. Egalitarianism plays no part in the social vision.

Egyptian has no verbal root translatable as ‘to have’, ‘to own’, but uses paraphrases, saying that things are ‘for’, or ‘of’, or ‘in the hand of’ somebody. It has no verb for ‘to buy’ or ‘to sell’, using the roots ‘bring’ or ‘give’, sometimes expanded by phrases such as ‘to replace’ or ‘in exchange for’. The word ‘lord’ provides the only Egyptian word in any way equivalent to English ‘owner’. Linguistically, ‘possession’ is construed in Egyptian as a personal relationship,<sup>8</sup> although transactions may seem more obviously commercial and monetary in later periods of pharaonic history. In the absence of coinage, transactions remained rooted in a highly personalised exchange of things. The formal expression of satisfaction on both sides is central to any exchange of property. Ownership and lordship are not then distinguished in ways that differentiate between authority over the physical person or over his production.<sup>9</sup> Within an extensive vocabulary of terms for social relation-

6 Eyre 2019.

7 Baillet 1905, 1906, 1907, and 1913, as the beginning of this approach; Bakir 1952: ch. 2.

8 Eyre forthcoming; cf. Patterson 1982 with critical review by Cruz-Uribe 1986.

9 Menu 2000.

ship and hierarchy, four terms are of primary importance in defining a fixed and dependent role as producer for a lord, and two terms for people apparently standing outside such a relationship. The following sections explore this vocabulary.

### 2.2.1. *bak* and *hem* people

The roots *bak* and *hem* are those conventionally translated as equivalents of English ‘servant’ and ‘slave’. As collective nouns, the terms *meret* and *djet* are then also used to refer to groups of people in a dependent relationship to an individual lord or to a temple endowment.

Here ‘slave’ is used as translation for *hem*, and ‘servant’ for *bak*, as a convenience to mark which word is used in the original text: the English distinction does not represent a clear cultural distinction in the Egyptian, where they are essentially synonyms (for later developments see 5.5).<sup>10</sup> The contrast lies more in context of use than in specific meaning. The root *bak* refers to any sort of productive work and service, as opposed to *kat*, ‘(physical) labour’. A *bak*-person is a subordinate whose work benefits his superior – his *neb*, ‘lord’ – and *bak*-produce is the result of his efforts, which naturally results in its translation as ‘revenues’, ‘taxation’, or ‘tribute’ according to context. Any person – even of the very highest rank – refers to himself as *bak* when describing his service to the king: formulaic phraseology in autobiographies of high-ranking functionaries of the Old Kingdom distinguishes between *ser*, as a ‘functionary’ in office, *sah* ‘noble’ as a person of high status, and *bak* ‘servant’ as a person in the service of the king, but these do not mark clear categorical distinctions between separate elite social groups and are used of the same person according to context (1). The terms ‘lord’ and ‘servant’ are relational, not status-derived, used to refer to a person of any rank and his subordinates and clients. For instance, in the standard formulation of letters from the Old and Middle Kingdom, the writer refers to himself as ‘*bak* there’ – conventionally translated as ‘this servant’ – and addressing his superior as *neb*, ‘(the) lord’ or ‘(my) lord’.

*bak* is not used as a title: nobody is referred to as ‘*bak* so-and-so’, although compound descriptive titles such as ‘*bak* of the house-of-*djet*’ are standard. In contrast, the noun *hem* is an overlapping synonym of *bak*, used regularly as descriptive title – ‘*hem* so-and-so’ – but not expected as a categorising term in the same way as *bak*. So, for instance, in the Ramesside Adoption Papyrus (51), the surrogate mother and children are referred to individually as *hem* but categorised as *bak*. The same is found in the early Ramesside Cairo slave-sale text (41), where a woman purchases a young Syrian female-*hemet*, but then refers to her as *baket*

<sup>10</sup> Where other words are used for personal or household service, the translation ‘servant’ is marked by the distinct Egyptian word.

in her oath; or in the later Ramesside letter *P.Bankes* I (43), where the dispute is about ‘the *hemet* Tintuendjedet with the *hem* Gemamon, her child’, but she is referred to in the body of the letter either as ‘this woman’ or as female-*baket*.

The word *hem* is rare in the Old Kingdom, although its use in the compound *hem-netjer*, ‘god’s-servant’, as standard priest’s title, and *hem-ka* ‘ka-servant’ as mortuary priest, are then normal. In texts of the New Kingdom, the distinction between those who produce – *bak* – and those who control and draw revenues from such production is presented explicitly as one of class. The scribe does not perform *bak*; his dependent workers are referred to as *hem* (2). This generic use of *bak* and *hem* does not refer to any sort of chattel ownership of the body of a person. People are ‘yoked’ (*htr*) to their productive work, a term used broadly of expected revenues and services. So a temple endowment decree, dating to the reign of Amenhotep III, categorises the female ritual staff of the temple – the chantresses, who were local women of some status – but also apparently the whole female population of the town, as *hemut*, with their *bak*-production ‘yoked’ to the temple economy, and ‘clean’ (*wab*), that is ‘free’ from the demands of the King’s House (3). Describing the people of Thebes here as ‘free’ is not a statement of ‘freedom’ in a social sense, but of protection from state demands.

### 1. Terms for status from the autobiography of Weni

*Urk.* I, 105.17–106.11 (lines 34–35)

**Written and found:** his tomb at Abydos (a partial duplicate comes from his second tomb at Saqqara)

**Date:** 6th Dynasty, reigns of Pepi I and Merenre (c. 2285 BCE)

**Material:** limestone block

**Location:** Cairo, Egyptian Museum, CG 1435

I was an officer and sandal-carrier (of the king). His Majesty favoured me for my vigilance in the royal service, which I did in the place of attendance, (more) than any magistrate of his, than [any] noble [of his], than any servant of his. Never ever before had this office been performed by any servant. I carried out (the function of) Overseer of Upper Egypt for him to satisfaction.

### 2. Describing the wealth of a scribe (from A Satire on the Trades)

Gardiner 1937: 107.11–16

**Written and found:** probably Thebes

**Date:** late 20th Dynasty (c. 1150 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** London, British Museum, P.Lansing 9.1–9.4 (P.BM 9994)

A villa has been built in your town, and you have a powerful function, as the king's gift to you. Male and female slaves are about you, and those who had been in the countryside will grasp your hand, in fields of your making.<sup>11</sup> Look, I am appointing you to the service staff of life! Set writings in your mind, and you will be protected bodily against all work (*bak*), and you will do (the job of) an effective magistrate. Do you not think about the one who cannot write? His name is not known. He is loaded like a donkey, carrying (things) in front of the scribe who knows his business!

### 3. Exemption decree of Osorkon II, copying an original of Amenhotep III

Naville 1892, pl. 16; Jansen-Winkel 2007: II, 112–114

**Written:** probably originally in Thebes

**Found:** Bubastis; original from Soleb

**Date:** year 22 of Osorkon II (c. 853 BCE); original year 30 of Amenhotep III (c. 1360 BCE)

**Material:** granite block

**Location:** Bubastis

Year 22, month 4 of inundation. Appearance in the chapel of Amun, which is in the *sed*-festival<sup>12</sup> precinct. Sitting on the litter. Initiating the exemption of the Two Lands by the King.

Exempting the musicians <and chantresses> of the Temple of Amun, and exempting all the women of his town, who are slaves since the time of his fathers, they being female slaves in every House, tied over their production (*bak*) annually.

Now His Majesty was seeking (some) great deed of benefit to his father Amun-Re, equivalent to him foreseeing a first *sed*-festival for his son, sat on his throne, and foresaw very much for him in Thebes, Mistress of the Nine Bows. Then the King said, in the presence of his father Amun:

‘(I) have exempted Thebes, in its length and breadth, free (*wab*, literally ‘clean’) and given to its lord, without interference with it by agents of the King's House. Its people are protected for ever in the Great Name of the Good God.’

<sup>11</sup> The sequence of tenses implies that he has settled (landless) countrymen on secure arable land.

<sup>12</sup> Royal jubilees, first celebrated after thirty years of a reign.

2.2.2. *hem-nesu* people: 'king's-slaves'

A group of people referred to as 'king's-slaves' first appear in a reaping scene from the tomb of Werireni (see Fig. 2.1), which shows the agricultural cycle for grain cultivation at Sheikh Said (c. 2375 BCE).<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 2.1** Scenes from the tomb of Werireni. N. de G. Davies, *The Rock Tombs of Sheikh Saïd* (London, 1901), 23, pl. XVI.

<sup>13</sup> Davies 1901: 23, pl. XVI.

They also appear in significant numbers in a group of tabulated registers of about the same date, from Gebelein,<sup>14</sup> listing the full range of population of some local settlements (in one case specifically villages of a house-of-*djet*).

These lists seem to exemplify the sort of accounts to be expected for a large house-of-*djet* estate: these king's-slaves do not appear to be royal property, but simply a part of the rural population. A Middle Kingdom letter is concerned with preventing such a king's-slave from absconding from a personal estate (4). It is then difficult in Middle Kingdom sources to distinguish ordinary slaves from king's-slaves.<sup>15</sup> For instance, the Second Intermediate Period tomb of Bebi at el Kab (5) lists twenty-two women in his service as female slaves, but then twenty-one men as a group, defined as his *meret*-people, are individually listed as king's-slaves: an apparent gendered differentiation in terminology. The term generally falls out of use in the New Kingdom, although the 18th Dynasty tomb of Tjanuni (6) shows scribes recording people and animals, and here the term 'king's-slaves' seems simply to be used to refer to the broadest spectrum of 'king's servants', assessed as payers of revenues.

#### 4. Letter to a superior

Griffith 1898: 79, pl. 35; Collier and Quirke 2002: 132–135

**Written:** Kahun

**Found:** Kahun

**Date:** late 12th Dynasty (c. 1785 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** London, University College, P.U.C. 32210 = P.Kah VIII.1, lines 1–17<sup>16</sup>

Servant of the house-of-*djet* Kemni says:

....

[It is] a communication [to] my lord [about causing] attention to be paid to your king's-slave Wadjhaw, over assigning his writings, (and) not letting him run, as my lord acts entirely well, <in> health [and life]!

<sup>14</sup> Posener-Kriéger 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Berlev 1987: 154–156 has argued that these examples support his general argument that *hemu* was an abbreviation of *hem(-nesu)*, and simply 'comprehends the agricultural population of Egypt'. Cf. Eyre 1987a: 34–35, for the possible overlap with rural population referred to as *nsutyu* 'king's (people)(?)', and the use of 'female servant of the Ruler' as a regular title of respectable women of some status in the Middle Kingdom: Stefanović 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. also 34, Griffith 1898: 78–79, pl. 34; Collier and Quirke 2002: 128–131.



And also (about) causing attention to be paid to [your] house, as my lord acts entirely well – <in> health [and life]! – because it is my lord who does everything in response to (?) this servant.

### 5. Lists from the tomb of the officer of the ruler's company Bebi

Lepsius 1849–1856: IV, 52–54

**Written, found, and location:** el Kab (Tomb 8<sup>bis</sup>)

**Date:** Second Intermediate Period (c. 1600 BCE)

**Material:** limestone (tomb wall)

Woman (?) of truth (?)<sup>17</sup> Iisat, female slave Reri, female slave Nebuhetepti, female slave Iatib, female slave Nefretmehedu, female slave Rai, female slave Anqetnefret, female slave Neshi, female slave Nefru, female slave Tjawyeniimery, female slave Tjawyeniptw, female slave Peernebu, female slave Senenakhenefib, female slave Tjawyemnut, female slave Pesederitef, female slave Userhermues, female slave Nenryerib, female slave Hedhetepiryjiry, female slave Wenenwates, female slave Heseniernefer, female slave Katishret, female slave Timi.

Total of *meret*-people of *senet*<sup>18</sup> inside my house. List of them: king's-slave Iry, king's-slave Rekhtyumes, king's-slave Montuemtjesef, king's-slave Hesenetqeb, king's-slave Horirerefeni, king's-slave Bebi, king's-slave Hori, king's-slave Kaher(?), king's-slave Rahotep, king's-slave Senires, king's-slave Nesenedjiqeb, king's-slave another Rahotep, king's-slave Bebiemheset; man of truth Sebeknakhte, king's-slave Iwsa, king's-slave Horemmer, king's-slave Nebuhesqeb, king's-slave Khertynetjerpaent(y)eni, king's-slave Tit, king's-slave Wegef, king's-slave Ankefeni.

**Bibliography:** Kubisch 2008: 274–279, biographical text without list of slaves.

### 6. Caption from the tomb of Tjanuni

Brack and Brack 1977: 43–44, scene 15, text 37, pl. 29b

**Written, found, and location:** Thebes (TT74)

**Date:** 18th Dynasty, Tuthmosis III–Tuthmosis IV (c. 1395 BCE)

**Material:** painted plaster over limestone (tomb wall)

Census of the entire land in the presence of His Majesty. Visual inspection of everybody (?). Knowing the army, *wab*-priests, king's-slaves, all craftsmen of the

<sup>17</sup> The initial signs are obscure, and it is not clear that this first name is a 'slave' on a par with the following, but cf. the inclusion of a 'man of truth' in the middle of the list of male *hem-nsu*; the sense of the term is unclear.

<sup>18</sup> The meaning of the term is obscure.

entire land, all cattle, poultry, and flocks, by the army scribe, beloved of his lord, Tjanuni, called Hemen.

### 2.2.3. *djet*- and *nedjet*-people

In the Old and Middle Kingdoms, the clients and dependents of great men were referred to as their *djet* or *nedjet*.<sup>19</sup> Old Kingdom tombs depict the tomb owner overseeing the people of his *per-djet* ‘house-of-*djet*’: the full range of agricultural and craft production from the manors of the great man (7). The term has conventionally been translated as ‘house of eternity’ – a funerary foundation – since the word *djet* is a homonym with the common term for ‘eternity’. The term is not, however, restricted to funerary contexts: rather, it is best understood as a projection of the house of the tomb owner, the things and people under his control, etymologically perhaps his ‘personalty’. (*ne*)*djet* refers to the clients and dependents of the great man as individuals, and ‘house-of-*djet*’ to the totality of such people: the villages and manors that made up his estates. His kin are then also referred to as children and brothers of his *djet*. His managers (notably stewards), village or advisory councils, and local headmen belong to the house(-of-*djet*), and tomb owners also regularly refer to the *ka*-priests, and even the tomb of their *djet*. The range of provision is encapsulated most fully in the tomb of Ibi (8) (c. 2200 BCE), which exemplifies the very varied economic status of the personnel. Ibi distinguishes his inherited and personally acquired wealth from that derived from his royal service: his office specifically involved the management of food revenues destined for a storage or work institution. All his people and property – whatever the source – were part of his house-of-*djet*, whose personnel were economically dependent, and managed by his own scribal administration.

Promotion within that clientage is referred to in a late Old Kingdom decree for the vizier Shemay (9), which authorises the recruitment of ritualists from among the *meret*-people of his *djet*. The extent, then, to which people were able to leave that service is unclear: the documented concern is to protect staffing and revenues – if necessary through a substitute – and not with the physical person of the individual. So the endowment for an Old Kingdom tomb asserts family responsibility for ritual duties: primarily a liability of his sons, but that of wives and broader kinship (*abt*-family) when the individual priest does not perform.

In the reign of Pepi I (c. 2290 BCE), Nekhebu succeeded his brother as Overseer of All Works of the King. His autobiography (10) provides information about

19 Eyre 1987a: 32–36; van Elsbergen 1997: 87–96, 106 with survey of previous discussions; Moreno García 2007.

his earlier role as manager of his brother's extensive house-of-*djet*, stressing the relationship between the great man and his dependent workforce: both the level of violence he used on its people, and the social support he provided. Depictions of the flogging of peasants – specifically village headmen – are standard in the scenes showing the accounting of revenues in Old Kingdom tombs. By the Middle Kingdom such massive estates do not seem to be the norm, and documentary sources that survive show smaller groups of people as part of a *djet* group. A household register (II) records the people of a lector priest of the pyramid temple of Sesostris II (c. 1770 BCE): his immediate family – a son, daughter (and dead wife) – and three groups of *djet*-people – a first group associated with his office of lector priest, a second group given him by another functionary, and a third group that had come from his aunts. Each group seems to represent a single family. These lists consist almost entirely of women and their infant children: with one probable exception males are only mentioned as dead or as children.

## 7. Depiction from the tomb of Kayemnofret

Simpson 1992: 15, pl. E

**Written, found, and location:** Saqqara

**Date:** probably late 5th Dynasty (c. 2375 BCE)

**Material:** limestone (tomb wall)

**Location:** Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, accession no. 04.1761

The owner is shown facing seven registers that depict the accounting and presentations of animals. Kayemnofret is captioned:

Watching the writing of the greeting-gifts brought from his towns of house-of-*djet* from Lower and Upper Egypt, very abundantly.

The top register depicts four men, kneeling in gestures of respect, and labelled as cou[ncil] of king's-slaves.

Below them are four scribes writing.

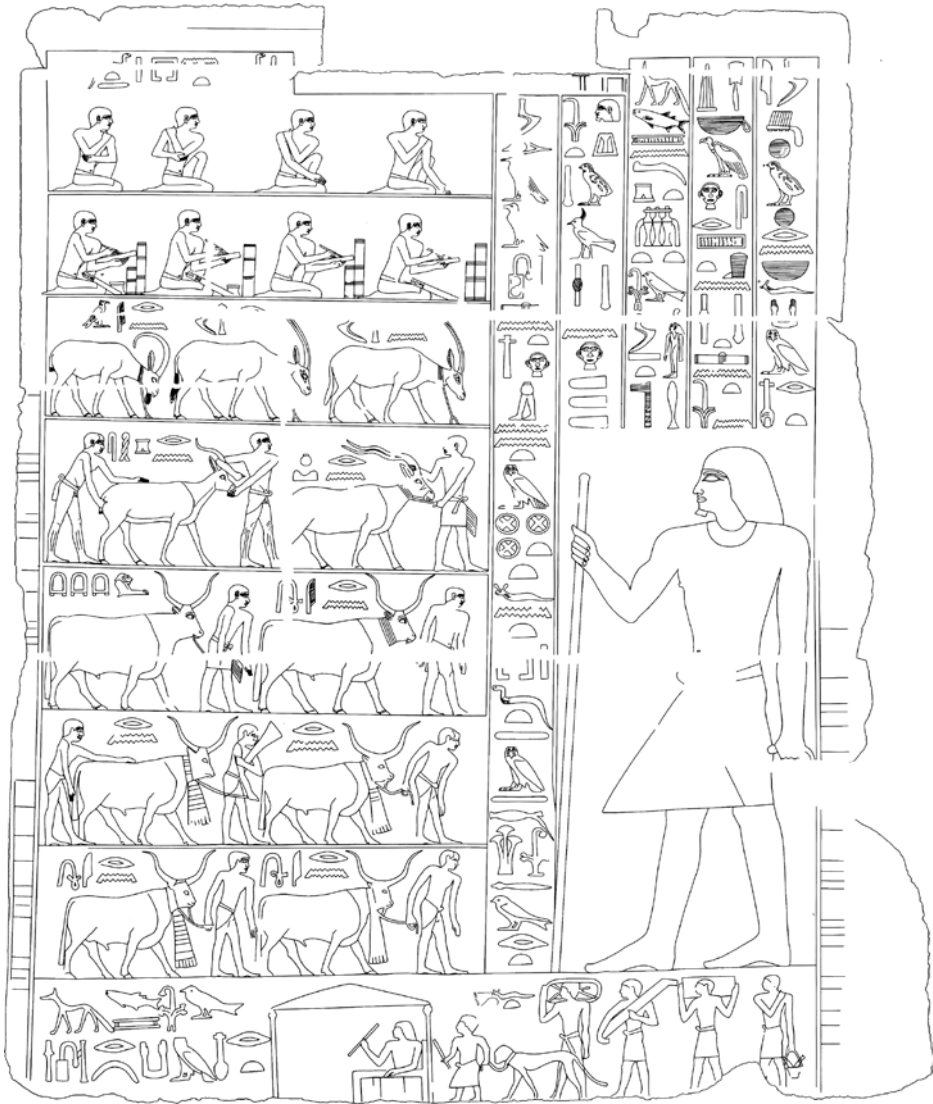
## 8. From the autobiography of Ibi, nomarch and overseer of Upper Egypt

Kanawati 2007: 52–54, with pls. 29–30, 54, 73 + 36–37, with pls. 17, 50, 69 top register, right; and third register, right + 46, 51, with pls. 26, 53, 72

**Written, found, and location:** Deir el Gebrawi, Tomb S8

**Date:** Pepi II (c. 2200 BCE)

**Material:** limestone (tomb wall)



**Figure 2.2 7.** The offering chapel of Kayemnofret. W. K. Simpson, *The Offering Chapel of Kayemnofret* (Boston, 1992), 15, pl. E. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photograph © 2024 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

I have done this from the towns of my *djet*, as clear (from revenue demands (?)), (and) as mortuary offerings which the Majesty of (my) Lord gave me (to) make for myself .... this, under *meret*-people of my *djet*; full of cattle, of goats, of donkeys, being [what I have] acquired [with my own arm], apart from the things of my father, when I was Estate Ruler of the Workshops, (and) the 203 *arouras* of fields which the Majesty of (my) Lord has given me in order to strengthen me.

Scribes accounting the production brought in are labelled:

Doing the tasks and accounting of the house-of-*djet* by scribes(s) honoured by their lord.

And among the various activities seen on this wall is that of:

washermen of house-of-*djet*.

Elsewhere Ibi is shown watching a wide variety of craft production by people from outside his personal estates:

Watching all the labour in the craftsmen's workshop, by the hands of all craftsmen of the Residence and outside. Accounting the craft production by scribes of his *djet*.

Only in the bottom left corner, the fifth register of craft work, are the stonemasons specifically labelled:

Masons of the Residence (and) the house-of-*djet*, who do what is favoured.

**Bibliography:** Drenkhahn 1976: 139–140.

## 9. Decree of King Neferkauhor for the vizier Shemay and his wife Nebet

Goedicke 1967: 206–213, fig. 27, lines 3–4 and 12–14 (Coptos K)

**Written:** unknown; possibly issued in Memphis

**Found:** Coptos

**Date:** 8th Dynasty (c. 2170 BCE)

**Material:** stone

**Location:** unknown; apparently last seen in the hands of an antiquities dealer in Luxor

My Majesty has decreed that there be recruited for you twelve senior *ka*-priests into the *ka*-chapel<sup>20</sup> of your *djet*, to be (ritually) pure (*wab*) for you, to recite a month (of service) for you; and My Majesty has decreed that (the) senior

20 The regular title of funerary priest and cult place for the soul of the dead.

*ka*-priests be recruited [...] from *meret*-people of your *djet* (and) that [...] be recruited [from] kindred (?) from the Two Falcons [nome] [...] of your *djet*.

### 10. Autobiography of Nekhebu

*Urk.* I, 217.2–10 (lines 6–7); Dunham 1938

**Written:** presumably Memphis

**Found:** Giza, Tomb G 2381

**Date:** 6th Dynasty, Pepi I (c. 2290 BCE)

**Material:** limestone (stele, from his tomb)

**Location:** Cairo, Egyptian Museum, JdE 44608

I did indeed administer for him all things in his house-of-*djet* for a period of twenty years. I never beat anybody there until he came to collapse under my fingers. Never did any people do service (*bak*) there. As for any people there who were in dispute, I was the one who satisfied them. I never went to bed outraged over it with anybody. It was I who used to provide clothing to all the naked, bread to all the hungry there. I was loved (by) everybody.

### 11. Household census document

Griffith 1898: 25–29, pls. X–XI; Collier and Quirke 2004: 116–117 and fold-out

**Written:** Kahun

**Found:** Kahun

**Date:** End of 12th Dynasty–beginning of 13th Dynasty (c. 1770 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** London, University College, P.UC 32166 = P.Kah IV.1

The reading of the names is often uncertain. It was common in this period for people to have a second name for ordinary use: such names are added as a second column, and where not used the entry ‘it is her name’ notes that the first name was complete. The processes underlying the check marks are entirely obscure.

## Col. I

### Complete to Year 2.

Census of the ordinary lector priest of Sekhem-Senwosret deceased, Senwosretsonob's son Khakauresnefru, called Snefru.

Year 1 under the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Sekhemre-Shedtauey, given life for ever and ever; which the Overseer of Dispute(s) of the Head of the South, Sobekwer has made.

The ordinary lector priest Senwosretsonob's son Khakauresnefru, Snefru. 947 (sic) He swore in Y[ear] 3, month 1 of summer, day 4.

His son, Senwosretsonob, his name is Soneb [...], whom his wife, Nakhuisoneb's daughter Senet, who is dead, bore to him, the daughter of the controller of the rota of this temple, Meket's son Nakhuisoneb. Year 40 (of Amenemhet III).

His daughter Senet, Satka, [...] brought.

His *djet*-people of (his office of) ordinary lector priest:

X • *djet*-person: Hetepi's daughter Rehut(?)ankh's daughter Senet

Clear • Her son Ameny

Clear Clear Her daughter Senisenwosretbubu

[.....]The daughter [...] her mother [...]

Clear [.....]Senisenwosretbubu

• Clear Her sister (?) Iy

• Her daughter Senet

• Her daughter Satsnefru

• Her daughter Renefsenob

• The daughter of the daughter of the sister of her mother, Satsnefru's

daughter Paentyeni

• Her daughter Senet

•• Her sister Mutiankhti

•• Her daughter Shenet (?)

His *djet*-people, being what the King's Acquaintance Senwosret gave him in Year 3, from his *djet*-people in Perbaku:

• *djet*-people: Senet's daughter Senisenwosretbubu

• Her daughter Senet

Clear • Clear Sathathor's son(*sic*) Senisenwosretbubu: found entered 'dead' against him into the census of year 40 (?).

Ini

Key

Paentyeni

it is her name

Paentyeni

it is her name

it is her name

it is her name

it is her name

child (? *ms*) brought

child (?) brought

child (?) 1 (year?) 3 months

it is her name Her son Sehwy(?) child(?)

Ankhtyisy child(?) brought

Tita

it is her name child (?)

Tawenes

Ini

#### 2.2.4. *meret*-people

In the Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom the term *meret* was used for people<sup>21</sup> working the fields, dependent on the king, a temple, or a great man; in the inscriptions of Bebi (5) (c. 1600 BCE) these are explicitly made up of his 'king's-slaves'. Such people can then be referred to as *meret*-people of a house-of-*djet* (8), or *meret*-people who are on the god's fields,<sup>22</sup> or those of a workshop. The obvious sense is that they are dependents, working land for the benefit of a lord,<sup>23</sup> but liable to conscription. The Dahshur decree of Pepi I (12) protects the land rights of the established retainers<sup>24</sup> of the temple endowment from encroachment,<sup>25</sup> and specifically from the land being worked by *meret*-people of members of the royal family (best understood as their dependent peasant farmers). The Middle Kingdom autobiography of Khnumhotep talks about the endowment for his funerary cult with fields and *meret*-people (13), and his administrators as people chosen from among them.

Later, *meret* is more typically used to refer to the personnel of a temple institution. From the reign of Tuthmosis III, scenes from the tomb of Rekhmire (14) show children brought as captives from the royal campaigns to provide *meret* for the production facilities of the temple of Karnak. They are bound to production and defined as *bak*; their production is the theme, rather than the status of their physical person. The Nauri Decree of Sethi I (61) then protected the entire personnel of his temple from requisition or conscription: 'They shall not be interfered with by others; there shall not be interference with them, from son [to son], fixed in their jobs to the end of time .... I have put *meret*-people whom I have fostered into my temple, and will not be separated from them'.<sup>26</sup> Similarly slaves of the personnel of the temple were protected from conscription: against 'the one who will take any woman (or) any person of the Temple .... (and) likewise their slaves, by abduction to do any commission'.<sup>27</sup> Such protection against conscription is an issue of protecting endowed revenues: normally *meret*-people

21 Allam 2004 and 2010; Moreno García 1998; Römer 2017. There is confusion in writing with a homonym *mryt*, 'weavers'.

22 *Urk.* I, 171.7–8, in a protection decree.

23 Eyre 1987a: 35–36; and cf. Römer 2017: 90 *contra* Moreno García 1998, who categorises them as a rural social class.

24 The term here – *khentiu-esh* – is used both of people involved in palace service of the living king and then of those endowed with lands in the pyramid-temple service of the dead king.

25 For discussion see below pp. 56–58, 80, 115.

26 Lines 26–27, *KRI* I 50.6–9.

27 Line 44, *KRI* I 53.1–2; similarly lines 65–66 and line 100, *KRI* I 55, and 57.8–96, both banning the taking of 'their women (or) their servants'.



seem to have been liable – like the rest of the labouring populace – to conscription for royal demands.

## 12. The Dahshur Decree of Pepi I

*Urk.* I, 209–213; Goedicke 1967: 55–77

**Written:** presumably issued in the palace at Memphis

**Found:** Dahshur, from the outer wall of the temple

**Date:** year 23 of Pepi I (c. 2299 BCE)

**Material:** limestone block

**Location:** Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, ÄM 17500 (architectural block)

Horus Meryre. Year of the 23rd Occasion (*sc.* of the cattle count), month 1 of winter, day 23.

Royal Decree: (to) the [Overseer of the writing of] King's [document(s)] (and) vizier [Rawer], the Overseer of Works Meryptahmeryre, the ...-official Ihykhent, the Overseer of Retainers Weni, the Overseer of Commissions of the Divine Offerings Khenu, the Sole Companion Ihyempermeryre, the Overseer of the House of (Offering) Reversions Meri, the Inspector of Foreigners and Overseer of Medja, Iam and Irtet [...].

The King of Upper and Lower Egypt Snefru in the twin-pyramids Khawy-Snefru.

My Majesty has decreed that the town of these twin-pyramids be exempted for him: from doing any labour or imposition of the King's House or any department of the Residence, or any service or place of service, at anybody's say, for the extent of eternity; (and to exempt) the retainers of the twin-pyramids' town from the charge of any envoys, on water or on land, going south or going north; so as not to allow any field of [the town of] these [twin-pyramids] to be cultivated, as place of cultivation for *meret*-people of any king's-wife, king's-son, courtier, or functionary, or by any settled Nubian, but only retainers of the town of these twin-pyramids.

Nor to take any retainers of the town of these twin-pyramids who have come, or who will come under their authority, by any person, (including) by any of the settled Nubians, with whom they used to be. Their authorisation is not (valid) in respect of them.

Nor to include female children, nor provisions for cattle in any revenue-demands (?) imposed in the town of these twin-pyramids.

Nor to bring any people to dig in the flood basin (?) of (the pyramid) Netjer-*aswt-Ikauhor* from the town of these twin-pyramids.

Nor to (ac)count canals, pools, wells, channels, or trees in the town of these twin-pyramids.

Nor that any settled Nubian should go to plunder in the town of these twin-pyramids.

Nor that anybody who is connected to these settled Nubians should enter into the *wab*-priesthood, or the monthly service, or consume any income-share in the temple which is in the town of these twin-pyramids.

(But) that the census of every section of the town of these twin-pyramids be according to what was decreed for the decree of census of the town of these twin-pyramids.

(And) that all the retainers of the town of these twin-pyramids be brought up to number, so that all children of the established (inhabitants) are recruited and assigned to the authority (?) of the town of these twin-pyramids.

You are indeed not to give any field, any *wab*-priesthood, any income-share to anybody who lives in another pyramid's town, but only those who live in the town of these twin-pyramids.

You are indeed not to allow any retainers of the town of these twin-pyramids to be conscripted at the word of any person apart from something decreed in the instructions (for) there.

My Majesty has enacted these exemptions (for) the town of these twin-pyramids in this way in order that the *wab*-priest service, the monthly service, and the god's ritual be done in the town of these twin-pyramids [for] the King of Upper and Lower Egypt *Snefru*, in the [twin-py]ramids *Khawy-Snefru* [.....]

[Sealed in the presence of the King himself].

### 13. Autobiography of *Khnumhotep* (II)

Sethé 1935: 29, 13–17, 25, 19–26, 5; Kanawati and Evans 2014: 31, 33, pls. 7, 9, 110–111

**Written, found, and location:** Beni Hasan (wall of Tomb no. 3)

**Date:** 12th Dynasty, reign of *Senwosret II* (c. 1875 BCE)

**Material:** limestone (tomb wall)

*Lines 83–90:*

I followed my statues into the temple; I presented their offering-loaves to them; bread, beer, cool water, wine, incense, and meat accounted to my *ka*-priest; I endowed him with fields and *meret*-people; I decreed mortuary offerings – bread, beer, beef, and poultry on every festival in the necropolis.

*Lines 4–12:*

He made (this) as his monument – his first example of endowing his town – to make his name endure forever, so that he endowed it forever in his necropolis, and to make the name(s) of his council endure, commemorated according to their offices, the beneficial ones who belonged to his estates, whom he chose from his *meret*-people, every office which he controlled, and all crafts, as they took place.

**Bibliography:** Lloyd 1992.

#### 14. Selected scenes from the tomb of Rekhmire

Davies 1943: 29, pls. XXI–XXIII, bottom register (= *Urk.* IV, 1102–1103); 47, pls. LVI–LVII, first register (= *Urk.* IV, 1147) and 54–55, pl. LIX (= *Urk.* IV, 1153.8)

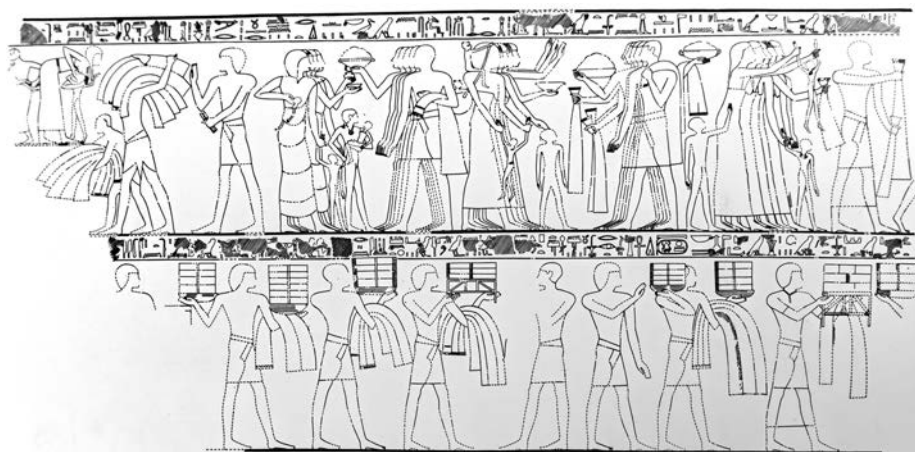
**Written, found, and location:** Thebes (TT 100)

**Date:** reign of Tuthmosis III (c. 1430 BCE)

**Material:** limestone (tomb wall)

A first scene shows Rekhmire supervising the arrival and recording of processions of foreigners under escort: rows of women leading and carrying children as well as adult males:

Northern lands, brought as head of His Majesty's plunder, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Menkheperre, given life, from all lands, to fill the workshop(s), to (be) *meret*-people of the divine offerings of his father Amun, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands, as he gave all lands to him, assembled in his grasp, and their



**Figure 2.3** 14. Arrival and assignment of slaves to the Temple of Amun, Karnak; scenes from the tomb of Rekhmire. N. de G. Davies, *The Tomb of Rekh-mi-rē*<sup>4</sup> at Thebes (New York, 1943), 29, pl. LVII, first register (= *Urk.* IV, 1147).

chiefs thrown down under his sandals. It is the governor, the trusted one of him who is in the palace, Overseer of the Town, Vizier [Rekhmire], who receives the plunder of every land, brought by the might of His Majesty.

A further register – in the broader context of the temple workshops – shows groups of women, bringing and presenting their children, and interacting with groups of men holding cloth and food (?):

Doing inspection of the *meret*-people of the [temple (?) of Amon] along with the workshops of divine offerings, whom the king brought as prisoners of war, their children assessed with (or ‘as’) production; and they gave linen, oils, and clothing, as their regular practice annually.

In the sets of scenes showing work carried out as part of the great temple-building projects under Rekhmire’s control, the men working in the brick fields<sup>28</sup> are labelled as:

Plunder which His Majesty brought for the work of the Temple of [Amun].

### 2.2.5. *nedjes* ‘little’-people and *nemehu* ‘orphan’-people

The concept of ‘slave’ might seem to stand in contrast to the concept ‘free’, but that is no more clearly defined in Egyptian vocabulary than are terms translated as ‘slave’. In particular there is no terminology and so no evidence for an explicitly free peasantry.<sup>29</sup> In the Middle Kingdom the term *nedjes*, ‘little-man’,<sup>30</sup> is used to refer to people of some independent standing and even authority. For instance, during a period of political disorder, and absence of effective central government, the 11th Dynasty magnate Ity (c. 2120 BCE) defines himself as an ‘effective little-man’, acting with his own arm, as he claims extensive authority in Gebelein. As a local authority, negotiating a fluctuating political situation and assembling extensive property, he is able to feed and act as patron for his town (I5).

Similarly, in the New Kingdom, the term *nemehu*, ‘orphan’, sometimes more explicitly ‘orphan (of the land of Pharaoh)’, is used of persons of some standing and economic independence: people without a ‘lord’ (other than Pharaoh), and so without explicit dependence on or protection from a patron or institution. The translation ‘independent (person)’ is used here. So in the late Ramesside P.Valençay I (I6) (c. 1070 BCE), the mayor of Elephantine refuses to pay certain harvest revenues to the temple administration at Karnak, on the grounds that specific plots were worked by such independent-people, who paid directly to the

28 Cf. I17, I21.

29 Eyre 2004.

30 Franke 1998.

crown.<sup>31</sup> Similarly a decree of Horemheb deals with a series of abuses by state agents, specifically to protect such people and their property against improper exactions (38).<sup>32</sup> The usage here seems to be quite general: in reference to anybody acting in a personal capacity, and on his own behalf, so needing royal protection.

The term *nemehu* is used in texts of the New Kingdom and later to deny directly that somebody is *bak*. It is characteristically translated as ‘freeman’, or depending on context ‘freedman’, but the best understanding is that it refers to the absence of a claim to specific subordination and service in context. In the Adoption Papyrus (51) (c. 1082 BCE), the children of a female slave are declared not to be *bak*, but *nemehu*. The earliest examples of interest come from the late Middle Kingdom, where a household declaration from Kahun (17) (c. 1750 BCE) records the mother and three aunts of the protagonist as ‘female-orphans of the necropolis workers/quarrymen of the northern sector’. It is simply a guess, whether these are genuinely ‘orphans’ or (former) ‘female-servants’, who were in some way cared for or employed by their local community, or were simply members of the quarrymen community, who had become part of a soldier’s family by marriage. In practice an institutional status of ‘freedman’ is not traceable.

## 15. Stele of Ity

Lange and Schäfer 1902: I, 1–2, and IV, pl. I; Landgráfová 2011: 68–70, no. 23

**Written and found:** Gebelein

**Date:** 11th Dynasty (c. 2120 BCE)

**Material:** limestone stele

**Location:** Cairo, Egyptian Museum, CG 20001

I was a competent little-man (*nedjes*), who acted with his own arm; I was a great pillar in the Theban nome, a man of standing (?) in the South; I provisioned Imyitru in the painful years, when 400 men were accordingly provisioned (?). I did not take a man’s daughter; I did not take his field.

I assembled ten herds of goats, men in charge of each herd; I acquired two herds of cattle and a herd of donkeys; I acquired all (sorts) of flocks; I made a 50-cubit (?) boat, and another 30-cubit boat. I gave Upper Egyptian barley to Iuni and to Hefat, after Imyitru was provisioned, while the Theban nome travelled up and down stream (as refugees); I never had Imyitru travel up or downstream to another nome.

31 For the later transfer or sale of *akhet nemehu* along with the *hemu hemut* who worked them, see 81 (c. 915 BCE).

32 Kruchten 1981: 31–33.

(Whether) I followed a great lord, or a little lord, no bad came of it. I built a house and field (?) ....., filled with all rich things, so that people would say, 'One free from robbing another!'

His beloved eldest son T[ti] made (this) for him.

## 16. Letter concerning revenue demands

P.Valençay I, verso 2–4. Gardiner 1948b: 73, 1–4

**Written:** sent from Elephantine

**Found:** Thebes or Elephantine (purchased from dealer)

**Date:** reign of Ramesses XI (c. 1070 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** Valençay (France), Château de Valençay, collection of the Duc de Valençay

It is a field of some independent people (*nemehu*), who carry gold to the Treasury of Pharaoh, which these independent-people have cultivated. They regularly transmit its gold to the Treasury of Pharaoh, and I have not dealt with a field there.

**Bibliography:** Vittmann, in Porten et al. 2011: 58–60.

## 17. Extract from a household census document

Griffith 1898, pl. IX, 1–15; Collier and Quirke 2004: 110–111

**Written and found:** Kahun

**Date:** 13th Dynasty, year 3 of a king Sekhemkare (c. 1750 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** London, University College, P.UC 32163 = P.Kah I,3

Year 3, month 4 of inundation, day 25, under the Majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Sekhemkare, alive for ever and ever.

Copy of the (household) report of the soldier Hori's son Snefru; his father is in the second (section) of *djamu*(-troops).<sup>33</sup>

checked: His mother Satsopdu's daughter Shepset	<i>wabet</i> (-priestess) of Gesiab
The mother of his father, Harekh<ni>	female-orphan ( <i>nemehet</i> ) of the necropolis workers of the northern sector

<sup>33</sup> A term for an age group, liable to service (?), rather than a purely military group.

The sister of his father Qatsenut	<i>ditto</i>
The sister of his father Iset	<i>ditto</i>
checked: The sister of his father Satsnefru	<i>ditto</i>

Entered under the (household) re[port of] his father, year 2.

### 2.3. The social contexts of dependence: criteria for distinguishing slavery from clientage

At the core of pharaonic presentations of social structure lies an expanded model of patronage: the patriarchal head of a household, responsible for his nuclear and extended family, and then a broader population as his clients. For instance, in the early Middle Kingdom, the Leading Overseer of a Troop of Herdsmen, Montuhotep's son Antef (18) stresses his inheritance of wealth (in the fifth generation) – persons, fields, flocks – and then his personally acquired control over additional people. He stresses his role as local headman: a leading figure in local village dispute resolution, expected to use his resources for local charitable needs. His title is not otherwise associated with possession of monuments, and the likelihood is that he in fact represents the rural, village wealthy: in Franke's words, 'a member of the old-established peasantry who transmitted their practical knowledge in cattle-herding from generation to generation'.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, a Montuwoser son of Sekhasen (19) stresses his role as patron of his town, controlling his *meret*-people, and then bequeathing them to his son.<sup>35</sup>

A core theme of Egyptian literature – expressed for instance in the 12th Dynasty *Loyalist Instruction* (20) – is that this patron–client relationship is central to public well-being, to the benefit of both sides: the great man and his people, here categorised as 'slaves' or *meret*-people. The apocalyptic vision of the *Dialogue of Ipuwer* (21) then mobilises the image of social reversal as the antithesis of good socio-economic order, when the 'slave' usurps the social and economic position of his or her lord. These *nouveaux riches* are said not to provide the patronage their own 'slaves' need, but to avoid them. The 'slave' is unfit for social responsibility, so marking the collapse of distinction between the legitimate line – whose status is no longer socially recognised – and the child of his 'female-slave', who is put on a par with him.<sup>36</sup>

34 Franke 2007: 161.

35 Franke 2006.

36 Contrast Sethe 1935: 63, 11 (Autobiography of Hapdjefai), who '[did not cause] a female slave to be valued above her mistress' with Ipuwer 4, 13–14, 'Indeed, all female slaves are full of their own utterances; it is burdensome to the servants when their mistresses speak', and Maxims of Ptahhotep,

The Dahshur Decree of Pepi I (12) outlines the broader socio-economic context. It is addressed to the highest officials of the court: those with the authority to demand service and revenues. The beneficiaries, settled in the town, are defined as retainers of the endowment (see above, n. 24), inhabiting its agricultural lands. The decree is then concerned to prevent inhabitants of the town leaving for work or service elsewhere – specifically to keep local children in the community and the service of the pyramid – and to prevent other people from moving onto the lands cultivated for the pyramid, posing direct questions about the status of individual landholdings and the people who worked them.

### 18. Stele of Montuhotep's son Antef

Budge 1914a, pls. 1–2; Franke 2007; Landgráfová 2011: 264–266, no. 84, lines 5–15

**Written and found:** provincial Upper Egypt, possibly Thebes (purchased from dealer)

**Date:** end of 11th Dynasty or very beginning of 12th Dynasty (c. 1985 BCE)

**Material:** limestone stele

**Location:** London, British Museum, 1628

I am a Leading Overseer of a Group, son of a Leading Overseer of a Group, superior to every (other) Overseer of a Group, descended as 5(th) heir. I am Leading Overseer of a Group of Herdsmen, possessor of flocks. I am lord of emmer; I gave emmer to the hungry. I have also made live every man of my kinship group in famine; I did not allow (anybody) to die. I have buried the dead in a coffin of mine; I have clothed him in clothes of mine. I have many cattle, son of one who had many cattle, having come down as fifth heir. I am possessor of donkeys, possessor of *khebsu*-lands and (the) threshing floors which I dug there. I am, also, a leading one of his town, who judges <in> the office on the day of council. I am one who presided (?) on the day of court, and took the oath on the day of oath-taking.

I have people of my father Montuhotep, house-born as property (lit. 'things') of his father (and) property of his mother. I have my people likewise, as property of my father and property of my mother, and as my own things which I have acquired by my arm.<sup>37</sup>

lines 58–59 (Žába 1956: 20–21), 'Fine speech is more hidden than greenstone, but it is found with female slaves at the grindstones.'

37 He emphasises his inheritance of house-born people from his father's parents, and then also people inherited from his own father and mother, and then his personal acquisition of people.



### 19. Stele of Montuwyser son of Sekhasen

Bosticco 1959: 24–25, no. 18, lines 6–7, pl. 18

**Written and found:** Luxor

**Date:** early Middle Kingdom (c. 1950 BCE)

**Material:** limestone stele

**Location:** Florence, Museo Archeologico di Firenze, 6365

I was one shrewd in administering his *meret*-people until the ‘beautiful day’ came to me, (and) I give them to my son by a house-contents document.

### 20. Excerpts from the Loyalist Instruction

Posener 1976

**Written:** presumably at the Middle Kingdom royal court at Memphis

**Found, material, and location:** a literary text surviving in many copies, on papyrus, stele, writing boards, and ostraca, from 12th to 20th Dynasty, in multiple locations

**Date:** composition early 12th Dynasty (c. 1950 BCE)

#### §9

Another example for developing your understanding,  
in what is more useful, concerning your slaves.

Engage with people; pull together a group,<sup>38</sup>

(and) you will fasten (to yourself) the slaves of those who act.

It is people who bring about what exists!

One lives from what is from their hands.

When one is lacking in that respect, then poverty takes charge.

#### §12

He who imposes revenue-quotas (*baku*) in proportion to the barley,  
[he is ...] in the opinion of God.

The heaps of the unjust man do not last;  
his children find no surplus from him.

He who is slack makes an end of his (own) life;  
he does not have children close to him.

*meret*-people belong to the one who controls (?) himself;

<sup>38</sup> *wndju*, ‘associates’, ‘clients’ (of people, as here), but at root a term for a herd of cattle or goats. §14 classes his people as his ‘profitable flock’.

there is no heir to the one who is inconsistent(?)–hearted.

**Bibliography:** Parkinson 1997: 235–245.

## 21. From the Dialogue of Ipuwer

Enmarch 2005: 2.4–5, 2.14

**Written:** presumably at the Middle Kingdom royal court at Memphis

**Found:** probably found (in a tomb) at Saqqara (purchased)

**Date:** probably late Middle Kingdom (c. 1850 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** Leiden, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, P.Leiden I 344 (AMS 27)

But the poor have become possessors of luxuries;  
 He who could not make himself sandals has become the possessor of heaps,  
 But their slaves, their hearts are depressed;  
 The magistrates do not interact with their people who cry out.  
 But every (gentle)man's son, his recognition is lacking;  
 The child of his lady has become the son of his female slave.<sup>39</sup>

**Bibliography:** Enmarch 2008; Parkinson 1997: 166–199.

### 2.3.1. The acquisition of people

The Nile Valley was relatively sparsely populated in the pharaonic period. Wealth lay not in land itself – which was available, if not always workable – but in people, and their production. The abandonment of land, consequent on low Niles, resulted in famine and the breakdown of local security, as refugees moved to seek lords who could help. In good periods the creation of ‘new towns’ provided a base for economic expansion. Private stelae from Upper Egypt of the First Intermediate Period emphasise this ability of local magnates to provide for both their local populations and refugees from famine.<sup>40</sup> They stress the increase in their dedicants’ status through the acquisition of people, animals, and productive land, although the verbs they use – ‘make’ and ‘bring’ – imply an essentially economic relationship of patron and client rather than a commoditised ownership, with people working the great man’s farmlands, but also working in his house, where they are likely to be referred to as ‘slaves’ (22). Such magnates claim to have

39 There is presumably a play on words here between the homonyms *hemet* ‘wife’ and *hemet* ‘female slave’.

40 Moreno García 2000: 128–130.

increased the numbers of people under their authority, beyond those inherited from their fathers.

Interactions with the population outside the margins of the floodplain provided a parallel resource for the acquisition and settlement of people. Pastoralists were a marginal and potentially disruptive stratum of the population, and the uncontrolled immigration of foreign pastoralists is a motif in descriptions of social chaos. Reliefs from late Old Kingdom pyramid temples show Bedouin in a severely emaciated state, reflecting Egyptian expectations of the reality of life outside the Nile Valley,<sup>41</sup> as well as (transhumant?) pastoralists feeding flocks on Egyptian territory. The Middle Kingdom Semna Dispatches, documenting the surveillance of the southern border, specifically record the arrival of some (Nubian) Medjay-people at the border, driven by hunger, and asking to be taken into the service (*bak*) of the Egyptian king (23). The presence of large numbers of people referred to as ‘Asiatics’ in texts of the Middle Kingdom clearly reflects a stratum of people of foreign origin in a marked position of dependence (33).

In practice, then, there was a structural relationship between the need of the settled area to acquire population and the periphery as the location for such acquisition through ecologically driven migration and slave raiding.<sup>42</sup> In such contexts it is not possible to draw a distinction between the acquisition of dependent people as immigrant and as slave.

## 22. Stele of Nakhtu

Petrie 1900: 50, pl. XI

**Written and found:** Dendera

**Date:** 11th Dynasty (c. 2120 BCE)

**Material:** limestone stele

**Location:** Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, E3927

The owner stands to the left with wife and (small) daughter depicted behind:

The honoured, Nakhtu, says: I have acquired, I have acquired thirty-one head of people,<sup>43</sup> thirty-three cattle, thirteen donkeys, 100 goats, four *im*-boats, five *depet*-boats. I have built my house (better) than my father, (with) fields, *pekher*-land, and orchards in the countryside. The honoured before the great god, Lord of the Sky, the priest Nakhtu.

41 Spalinger 2017: 412.

42 Eyre 2017: 108.

43 In a very similar context the stele of Beb (Daressy 1915) refers to acquiring ‘3 servants and 7 female servants’.



**Figure 2.4 22.** Stele of Nakhtu. Ashmolean Museum, AN1896-1908.E.3927. Photograph © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

The honoured, his wife whom he loves, Hapu, true of voice.<sup>44</sup>

Daughter(?) Niu.

Facing the couple, a first register shows three men presenting offerings, named:

The butler Sobekhotep; his son Sobekhotep; his son Sobekhotep.

A second register shows three figures making gestures of respect, behind an offering table, named:

His son Iniitef; his son Bebiaa; his daughter Niu.<sup>45</sup>

Behind them, in the bottom right corner, separated by a line of pots and loaves, is a woman with a strange, tied up hairstyle, grinding grain on a stone, and named as:

Slave Idi.

<sup>44</sup> The epithet 'true of voice' refers to success in passing through the judgement of the dead. However, its use is not necessarily restricted to those dead at the time the monument was carved, but may reflect the future and eternal validity of that status.

<sup>45</sup> The Niu standing behind the wife has an adult hairstyle; the Niu here is depicted as a child, with so-called 'sidelock of youth'.

The female slave is depicted as a household worker – grinding grain for breadmaking – where the stele otherwise shows children bringing offerings to their parents.

**Bibliography:** Schenkel 1965: 285–286.

### 23. Reports by the border administration from the Semna Dispatches

Smither 1945; Dispatch no. 5, iv.6–12

**Written:** presumably in Elephantine

**Found:** Thebes (in tomb under the Ramesseum)

**Date:** late 12th Dynasty: year 3 (probably of Amenemhet III) (c. 1829 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** London, British Museum, P.BM 10752

Copy of a document brought to him from the fortress [of] Elephantine, as fortress passes [to] fortress:

Informing you – healthy and alive – that two Med[ja]y and three female Medjay and two children (?) came down from the desert in year 3, month 3 of winter, day [2]7. They said, ‘We have come to work (*bak*) for Pharaoh.’ (They) were interrogated about the state of the desert. Then they said, ‘We have heard nothing, (but) the desert is dying from hunger.’ So they said. Then this servant had (them) expelled (back) to their desert today. Then one from these female Medjay said, ‘Have my Medjay given to me in ... (?)’. Then the Medjay [said], ‘It is the one who brings himself who trades!’<sup>46</sup>

**Bibliography:** Vittman, in Porten et al. 2011: 42–43; Kraemer and Liszka 2016.

#### 2.3.2. Slave raiding and the creation of slave communities

##### 2.3.2.1. *Slave raiding*

Xenophobia is clearly expressed in Egyptian political ideology, but Egypt’s relationship with its periphery was presented primarily as one of defence. From the first, royal iconography shows the king striking bound and helpless foreigners with a mace. Military actions are presented as punitive rather than acts of conquest, with a focus on slaughter and destruction.<sup>47</sup> For instance, Pepinakhte Hekaiab, sent to ‘hack up’ Nubia in the reign of Pepi II, emphasises first the slaughter and then the number of captives he brought back alive, together with large herds of animals. From the earliest periods, pharaonic Egypt was marked by what one

<sup>46</sup> The general sense of the final two lines is probably that they have only themselves to ‘sell’.

<sup>47</sup> Eyre 2017; Matic’ 2019.

can call a continuous policy of large-scale slave raiding, rather than one of territorial expansion. In general the resources of Egypt's periphery were limited to people and their animals. Lower Nubia – the natural extension of Egypt – was occupied and exploited for natural resources – gold and stone – from an early date, but was otherwise of little value. Rich plunder of goods was not an explicit target of campaigning before the wars in Syria and Palestine in the 18th Dynasty.

The Palermo Stone (24) records destructive raids in both Nubia and Libya, associated with the establishment of estates in Egypt. The implication is that the captives were used to create new settlements, both farming and pastoral communities. This raiding implies a policy of internal colonisation and economic development that is repeatedly attested in the Old Kingdom. For instance, a relief from the 5th Dynasty pyramid temple of Sahure shows the goddess Seshat accounting the prisoners of war brought from all countries: 123,44[x] cattle, 223,3[xx] donkeys, 232,313 goats, and 243,313 sheep, and named members of a Libyan royal family. The relief itself was plagiarised by later kings.

The Semna stele of Sesostri III emphasises the necessity of violence to control the Nubian frontier (25), expressing an essentially racist contempt for the Nubian, and emphasising that it was their women and families that were carried off. A stele of the reign of Amenhotep III similarly emphasises the killing of men and the predominance of women and children among those taken back to Egypt (26). The most detailed accounting of such prisoners comes in the Annals of Tuthmosis III from Karnak, presented in a quasi-documentary format, and concerned with detailed quantification of people and property brought to Egypt as a consequence of military campaigns, both directly as 'plunder' and as the payments of *bak*-production by foreign rulers (27). The largest figure is 2,503, from a set of towns allied to the ruler of Megiddo in the campaign of year 23, made up of [474 (which at least included) chiefs and their wives], together with thirty-eight *mariannu* of theirs; eighty-seven children of chiefs, and five *mariannu* of theirs; 1,796 male and female slaves; and 103 men who had come out and surrendered through hunger. The overall impression is of a regular stream of personnel transferred to Egypt, but numbering in the hundreds, not thousands, for most years of the reign.

The Egyptian standpoint distinguishes those 'felled' – the dead – from prisoners of war – those 'struck (but) alive' – and those who were 'plunder'. In the New Kingdom, those 'struck-(but)-alive' (rarely also 'head' of people), are then distinguished from 'hands', cut from the dead, to quantify the numbers of living and dead taken in fighting. These are sometimes also distinguished from the 'peaceful', apparently those who surrendered themselves in contexts other than battle, as in the case of those said to have come out through hunger during the Megiddo campaign of year 23. Captives from Western Asia are also distinguished on a social

level: local potentates, their wives and children, then their *mariannu* and then simply male and female slaves, who are presumably to be understood essentially as civilians driven off as captives. Some children of rulers were explicitly held as hostages, potentially to be returned (Egyptianised) as heirs to deceased rulers of vassal kingdoms. The *mariannu* were a military class, and New Kingdom lists of plunder from Western Asia focus strongly on captured military equipment of all sorts, but especially horses and chariotry. The impression is that the richer class of captive, trained in chariotry, provided a source for Egyptian military recruitment. An isolated distinction is made between Nubian ‘male and female slaves’ and ‘Nubians, male, brought to follow’: the numbers of these mentioned are only ten or twelve. Here, as in the Semna Dispatches, the situation is apparently those seeking freely to enter Egyptian service.

It is normal, if transplanting male populations, to select those with a particular skill. The expansion of craft production in 18th Dynasty Egypt – notably, for instance, glass-making and chariot manufacture – evidently included the import of craft skills in a context of military raiding, although the royal inscriptions are not explicit in connecting craft skills with captives. In so far as female captives are associated with economic activity, this is with weaving, and weaving workshops – the characteristic sphere of female production. This influx of people is partly quantified in Tuthmosis III’s summary of personnel assigned to the Temple of Amun at Karnak: firstly to the production and storage facilities, then *meret*-people specifically said to weave linen, and then to farm the lands that filled the temple granaries. Fields and flocks are not, however, quantified here, and the numbers of personnel are mostly lost, except for 1,578 ‘Hurrians’ or ‘Syrians’, who probably formed the largest group.

#### 24. Palermo Stone, entry for the reign of Snefru

*Urk.* I, 236.8–13

**Written and found:** unknown

**Date:** probably late 5th Dynasty (c. 2375 BCE), recording earlier events, but possibly a later (25th Dynasty) copy

**Material:** basalt

**Location:** Palermo Museum, no. 1028; additional fragments in Cairo, Egyptian Museum, JdE 44859, 39735, 39734, 44860, 18220, and University College, London, UC 15508

Palermo Stone 6, 2

Year of assembling (with) *meru*-wood a boat The-Two-Lands-Adore, of 100 cubits, (and) sixty king’s-boats of the 16-width type.

Hacking up the land of the Nubian. Bringing (male and female) prisoners of war, 7,000 (and) cattle, 200,000.

Building (in) Upper and Lower Egypt, estates of Snefru.

Bringing forty boats, full (of) conifer-wood.

(Nile-height) 2 cubits 2 fingers.

**Bibliography:** Wilkinson 2000: 141–143 and fig. 1; Nuzzolo 2021.

## 25. Excerpt from the Semna Stele of Sesostris III

Sethe 1924: 84, 2–11, lines 9–16

**Written:** a semi-literary royal self-presentation, presumably composed at the royal court in Memphis and inscribed on site

**Found:** Semna (with duplicate from Uronarti)

**Date:** year 10 of Sesostris III (c. 1861 BCE)

**Material:** limestone

**Location:** Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, ÄM 1157

As for quiescence after an attack, it is strengthening the heart of the enemy. Being aggressive is being manly; withdrawing is being effete; he who is driven back from his border is a real male-woman.<sup>48</sup> Because the Nubian hears, to fall at speech (alone)! It is the one who responds to him who causes him to withdraw. If one rages at him, he shows his back; if one withdraws, he starts to be aggressive. It is not a people to be in awe of. They are despicable, broken spirited. My Majesty has recognised this, without qualification.

This introduces Sesostris III's claim to have both devastated and depopulated lower Nubia, and to have deported the population:

I plundered their women and I brought (away) their families who had gone out to their wells; their cattle were driven off, their grain cut, and fire set there.

**Bibliography:** Eyre 1990; Seidlmayer 2000.

## 26. Extract from a stele erected by Merymose, viceroy of Nubia, at Semna

*Urk.* IV, 1659–1661; Edwards 1939, pl. 20

**Written:** possibly Semna

**Found:** Semna

<sup>48</sup> The word used appears to be that for a woman – *hemet* – made masculine by the removal of its feminine ending *t*, and determined with a phallus.



**Date:** Amenhotep III (c. 1360 BCE)

**Material:** sandstone stele

**Location:** London, British Museum, EA657 [138]

Great slaughter was done [among the enemies]. [Their children,] their w[ives], and their herds [were brought away]; not one of them escaped. [There was not] one among them who [.....] fear. The sword of Amenhotep, Ruler of Thebes, overcame them. The desert people among them did not go missing – men or women – through the strategy of Horus, Lord of the Two Lands, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Nebmaatre, great of might.

Ibhet was loud, and their hearts were full, (but) the Ruler was a fierce lion, when he slaughtered them at the command of Amun, his magnificent father. It is he who guided him in heroism and victory.

Total of the plunder His Majesty brought from the land of vile Ibhet:

Nubians alive	150 head
<i>mega</i> -youths <sup>49</sup>	110 head
Nubian women	250 head
female(?) attendants of Nubians	55 head
Their children	175 head
Total	740 head alive
Hands of them	312
Total (including) head of living	1,052

The King's-son, vigilant for his lord, who fills the heart of the Perfect God, overseer of all the lands of Kush, king's scribe, Merymose, he says: 'Hail to you, O Perfect God! Greater is your (divine)-power than that of him who attacks you. You cause the rebellious against you to say, "We have provoked a bonfire of our names", when you have slaughtered all opposed to you, they being thrown under your feet.'

## 27. Extracts from the Annals of Tuthmosis III

*Urk.* IV, 645–756

**Written, found, and location:** Karnak

**Date:** from year 23 to year 42 (c. 1457–1416 BCE)

**Material:** limestone (temple wall)

This excerpt recounts the Palestinian campaign of year 30 (*Urk.* IV, 689.1–690.10). It is a full and characteristic list of campaign conduct and results.

<sup>49</sup> Unclear whether this is a military or an age category of young persons.

Year 30, when His Majesty was in the land of Retjenu<sup>50</sup> on His Majesty's sixth victorious expedition.

The town of Qadesh was reached.<sup>51</sup> It was devastated. Its trees were felled. Its grain was cut.

The (region of) Seshryt was crossed, and the town of Sumur was reached, and the town of Ardata. The same was done to them.

Account of the revenues brought to the divine power of His Majesty by the Chiefs of Retjenu in this year. The children of the chiefs, and their brothers, were brought to be hostages in Egypt, and if any among these chiefs died, then His Majesty would send his son to stand in his place.

**Account:** children of chiefs brought in the year, 36 men.

**Male and female slaves, 181.**

**Horses, 188.**

**Chariots, (both) worked with gold and silver and plain (?), 40.**

The next excerpt lists the booty from the Megiddo campaign of year 23 (*Urk. IV*, 663.4–665.12).

[Account of the people seized which the army of His Majesty brought from the town of] Megiddo:

prisoners of war: 340

hands: 83

horses: 2,041

foals: 1,091

brood-mares (?): 6

young [...]

chariot worked in gold, (with) components(?) in gold, for that fallen one: 1

beautiful chariot worked in gold, for the chief of [Megiddo: 1]

[long gap – to add up to 30 chariots]

chariot(s) of his vile army: 892

total: 924

bronze, good shirts for fighting, of that fallen one: 1

bronze, good shirt for fighting, of the chief of Me[giddo: 1]

[bronze], shirt(s) for fighting, of his vile army: 200

bows: 502

tent poles(?) worked in gold of the tent of that fallen one: 7

Now the army [of His Majesty] seized [herds of these towns]

<sup>50</sup> The normal Egyptian term for (roughly) Palestine.

<sup>51</sup> The Egyptian here uses infinitives to create a formal impersonal style, which translates best into English passive constructions.

[.....] 387

cattle: 1,929

small flock animals: 2,000

white flock animals (sheep): 20,500

Account of what was brought afterwards by the king from the things of this fallen one, which are [from I]nuamu, from Iniugesu, and from (Me?)hurenkaru, together with things of the towns which had associated themselves with him (lit. 'put themselves on his water'), which [the divine power of His Majesty] brought:

[.....]

[wives of this fallen one and (of) the chiefs who were with him: 474]<sup>52</sup>

[*mariannu*] belonging to them: 38

children of that fallen one and the chiefs who were with him: 87

*mariannu* belonging to them: 5

male and female slaves and their children: 1,796

ones who surrendered and came out through hunger from this fallen one: men  
103

Total: 2,503.

(There then follows a long and varied list of valuables taken.)

At the end of the record for year 29, an unusual note (*Urk.* IV, 686.13–687.3):

Now two boats were seized [equipped with their crews], (and) loaded with all (sorts of) things: with male and female slaves, copper, lead, quartz sand (?), and all good things, after His Majesty had proceeded south to Egypt, for his father Amun-Re, in joy.

In a formulaic tribute list (*Urk.* IV, 728.1–3):

male and female [slaves] Nubian: 8

Nubians, male, taken to follow: 12

Total: 21

Year 33, battle on Euphrates (*Urk.* IV, 698.3–8 (and cf. *Urk.* IV, 704.2–15)):

[Account of the plunder brought from this place] by the entire army:

chiefs: 3

their wives: 30

people seized: 80

male and female slaves with their children: 65

ones who surrendered, [their] wives [and their children: ...]

52 A total of 474 persons are missing from the break here, whoever they were.

Donation of captives to Amun temple (*Urk.* IV, 742.12–743.9):

[plunder .....] as head of hostages which he (Amun) gave me, to fill his workshops, to be his *meret*-people, to make for him Upper Egyptian linen, fine white linen, *sekheru*-linen, *wemet*-linen, to be farmers to work arable land, to produce grain to fill the granaries of the divine offerings. [...] me on the good road.

Account of male and female Asiatics, male and female Nubians, which My Majesty gave to my father Amun, from year 23 until the erection of this inscription on this chapel:

Hurrians 1,578,

[.....]

**Bibliography:** Redford 2003; Spalinger 2021: 84–108.

### 2.3.2.2. *Prisoners deported to create new communities*

The Dahshur Decree of Pepi I (12) specifically bars any *nhs htp* ‘settled Nubian’ from involvement with the pyramid town. The natural presumption is that there was a Nubian settlement nearby, whose inhabitants were liable to encroach on the endowment. It is extremely rare for ethnically identified foreigners to appear in the decoration of Old Kingdom tombs,<sup>53</sup> but the assimilation of prisoners in ethnically distinct colonies was probably normal at all periods. For instance, the archaeological record of so-called ‘pan grave people’ in Upper Egypt, in the late Middle Kingdom, appears to provide evidence for the presence of culturally distinct Medjay people. The clearest statements come in the New Kingdom,<sup>54</sup> with male and female slaves assigned to ‘workshops’, that is the production facilities, of temple foundations (14). A stele of Ramesses III (28) talks of the establishment of Libyan captives in military colonies, assimilated linguistically, and serving in his army.

Ramesses III probably had little choice in the matter. His claims to have settled huge numbers of captives as slaves simply recognise reality, following unstoppable mass immigration and the occupation of large areas of the Western Delta by discrete Libyan tribal groups, whose leaders were the direct ancestors of the Libyan chiefs and rulers of the Third Intermediate Period. The account given in Papyrus Harris I – a summary of his achievements from the end of his reign – describes the prevailing situation and the following (re)settlement of the devastated Western Delta (29).

53 Drenkhahn 1967.

54 Cf. Haring 1997: 41–42.

**28. From a rhetorical stele praising Ramesses III**

KRI V, 91, 5–10; Bruyère 1930: 32, 34–37, fig. 17 and pl. IV

**Written:** either at the royal court or *in situ*

**Found:** Deir el-Medina, Chapel C

**Date:** Ramesses III (c. 1170 BCE)

**Material:** limestone, cut in the rock wall

**Location:** unclear (*in situ*?)

*Lines 2–6*

He has plundered the land[s of the Tjemehu], the Libu, and the Meshwesh, and caused them to cross the river, being brought to Egypt. They were settled in strongholds of the victorious king. They heard the language of Egyptians, following the king. He suppressed their speech, and reversed (?) their tongues, and they travelled a road that they had not gone down (before) .... He has ploughed up the lands of the south: the Nubians of Tjeraway and Irem, and stopped them from [...] when they attack the territory of the king; they have been made as shield-bearers, charioteers, followers, and fan-bearers following the king.

**29. From the post-mortem statement of the achievements of Ramesses III**

Erichsen 1933: 92–93; Grandet 1994

**Written and found:** Medinet Habu

**Date:** beginning of the reign of Ramesses IV (c. 1153 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** London, British Museum, P.Harris I, 77, 4–6 (= P.BM 9999)

I brought those I let be, which I had identified as the numerous plunder, pinioned like birds in front of my horses, and their women and children by the tens of thousands, their flocks counted in the hundreds of thousands. I settled their leaders in strongholds in my name, and I gave them great Chiefs of Bowmen of their tribes, branded and made as slaves stamped with my name, and their women and children done the same. I presented their flocks to the House of Amun, made for him as herds for ever.

## 2.3.3. Individual acquisition of people through warfare

The acquisition of slaves by individuals is most clearly described in the same context of military raiding and plunder. The motif of the individual hero, killing

or allowing to live on the battlefield, begins to appear in Middle Kingdom autobiographical texts, as in the stele of Khusobek (30), who records that he was rewarded with sixty, and then later 100, head of people for his role in the campaigns of Sesostri III.<sup>55</sup> The numbers may simply represent the size of household appropriate to the prestige of a ‘follower’, as a close member of the royal entourage, and say nothing about the origins of his subordinates, but they probably reflect something of the very poorly understood economic hierarchy of that period, with great men holding authority over extensive numbers of people (33).

In the early 18th Dynasty the motif of the individual hero, killing and capturing individual prisoners on the battlefield, is conflated in more explicit detail with the gift of gold objects and captives as reward. The underlying theme seems to be that an individual captive naturally became the property of his identifiable captor, but that more senior and favoured military personnel were assigned extra persons. The most extensive narrative is that of Ahmose son of Abana, at the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, recording his personal acquisitions over a number of campaigns, and the land and people presented to him by the king as a reward (31).<sup>56</sup> A Ramesside satire on the life of a soldier then describes the acquisition of a captive in all the difficulty of bringing her safely back to Egypt (32).

### 30. Stele of Khusobek

Sethe 1924: 82–83, no. 22

**Written and found:** Abydos

**Date:** Sesostri III (c. 1840 BCE)

**Material:** limestone (stele)

**Location:** Manchester, Manchester Museum, 3306

His Majesty caused me to carry out work in fighting behind and beside His Majesty, with (?) seven men of the Residence. Then I was sharp in his presence. His Majesty had me appointed to be a Follower of the Ruler. I was given sixty head (of people).

His Majesty proceeded southwards to fell the tribesmen of Nubia. Then I struck (the) Nubian (chief?), in Kenkef, next to my town(’s contingent). Then I travelled north, following, with six (men) of the Residence. Then he appointed (me) as officer of followers. I was given 100 head (of people) as gift.

55 In the literary Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor (lines 176–179) a ‘follower’ was similarly rewarded with ‘200 head’. For similar claimed personal acquisitions see Clère and Vandier 1982, §7, 1–2 (twenty head); Petrie 1900, pl. 11, 1–2 (thirty-one head).

56 For a similar narrative see the Autobiography of Amenemheb (TT 85), from the reigns of Tuthmosis III and Amenhotep II: *Urk.* IV, 889–897.

His Majesty proceeded northwards to fell the tribesmen of Asia. His Majesty reached a land called Sekmem. His Majesty made a good start on proceeding to the Residence of Life, Prosperity, and Health. Then Sekmem, it attacked (lit. 'fell'), together with vile Retjenu. I was acting as rearguard of the expedition. Then the soldiers of the expedition entered the *mêlée* to fight with the Asiatics. Then I struck (the) Asiatic (chief?). Then I had his equipment taken by two soldiers, not (personally) ceasing to fight, (but) my face was turned (forward), (and) I did not turn my back to the Asiatic. I swear by Senwosret that I have told the truth. Then he gave me a staff of electrum and gold to my hand, (and) a sheath and dagger worked in electrum along with its handle.

**Bibliography:** Baines 1987.

### 31. **Autobiography of Ahmose son of Abana**

*Urk.* IV, 1–11

**Written and found:** el Kab

**Date:** reigns of Ahmose, Amenhotep I, and Tuthmosis I (c. 1495 BCE)

**Material:** limestone (tomb wall)

**Location:** El Kab, Tomb no. 5

Chief of the Navy, Ahmose son of Abana, true of voice, he says: I address you, all people, so that I may inform you of the favours which came to me. I have been rewarded with gold seven times in the face of the entire land, and in the same way with male and female slaves. I have been granted very many fields. The name of a hero is in what he has done, not perishing in this land for ever!

.....

There was fighting on the water in Padjedku of Avaris. Then I took (a) captive, and I brought off a hand, it being reported to the Royal Herald. The gold-of-bravery was given to me. Then more fighting happened in this place. I again took (a) captive there, and I brought off a hand. The gold-of-bravery was given to me again.

There was fighting in Egypt south of this town. Then I brought off a prisoner of war – a man: I had gone down to the water – look (?) he was brought off from capture on the town path – and I had crossed over carrying him over the water, and it was reported to the Royal Herald. Then I was rewarded with the gold-of-bravery another time.

Avaris was plundered. I brought off plunder from there: one man, three women, total four head. His Majesty gave them to me to be slaves.

Sharuhen was besieged for three years. His Majesty plundered it. Then I brought off plunder from there: two women and a hand. The gold-of-bravery was given to me, and (human) booty given to me to be slaves.

Now after His Majesty had slaughtered the tribesmen of Asia, he went to Khenet-hen-nefer, to destroy the bowmen of Nubia. His Majesty was making a great corpse (heap) of them. Then I brought off plunder there: men, two alive and three hands. I was rewarded with gold another time, and two female slaves given to me. The journey north was made by His Majesty, his heart swelling with bravery and victory, after he had seized southerners and northerners.

Then Aata had come, of the south: his fate hurried on his end. The gods of the south were grasping him. He was found by His Majesty at Tinetaa. His Majesty brought him as a prisoner (of war), and all his people as free plunder. Then I brought off two *mega*-people as captives from the ship of Aata. Five head (of people) were given to me, and a section of fields – 5 *arouras* – in my (home) town. The entire navy was treated in the same way.

Then that enemy had come – Tetian was his name – having gathered the disaffected to himself. His Majesty killed him, and his crews were as if they had never existed. Then three head (of people) were given to me, and fields – 5 *arouras* – in my (home) town.

I transported the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Djeserkare (= Amenhotep I), true of voice, when he was going south to Kush to expand the borders of Egypt. His Majesty struck down that Bowman of Nubia, in the middle of his army,<sup>57</sup> which had been brought in fetters, none of them missing; fugitives had been disposed of like those who had never existed. Now I was at the head of our army. I really fought, and His Majesty saw my bravery, (when) I had brought off two hands, they being presented to His Majesty. Then his people and his herds were hunted down. Then I brought in a prisoner of war, he being presented to His Majesty. I brought them back to Egypt in two days from the upper well. Then I was rewarded with gold. Then I brought off two female slaves as plunder, over and above those I had presented to His Majesty. I was appointed as a fighter-of-the-Ruler.

.....

After this, an expedition was made to Retjenu, for him to rampage through the lands. His Majesty reached Naharin. His Majesty found that enemy marshalling his troops. His Majesty made a great (heap of) corpses among them. The captives were innumerable, whom His Majesty brought off from his victories. Now I was at the head of our army; His Majesty watched me being brave, (when) I had brought off a chariot, its horses, and the (man) who was in it as prisoner (of war), he being presented to His Majesty. I was rewarded with gold another time.

.....

Additionally given to me by the King of Upper and Lower Egypt [.....]: 60 *arouras*

<sup>57</sup> Enacting the standard, ritualised motif of the Egyptian king striking a bound and helpless enemy with his mace.



in Hadjaa; total [... *arouras*].

List of the male and female slaves of the plun[der, who were given to me]:

slave Pamedjay (= the Medjay);

slave Payabdju (= the one of Abydos);

slave Senebneb[ef] (= [his] lord shall be healthy);

slave Pa[...];

slave Qenpaheqa (= the Ruler is brave)

slave Djehutysenbw (= Thoth is healthy)

slave Sobekmose (= Sobek is born)

slave Haray

slave Paamw (= the Asiatic)

female slave Taa

female slave Baket (= servant)

female slave Ka[...].isy (= I [...] her)

female slave Taametju

female slave Wabentasekhmet (= Sakhmet is pure for the land (?))

female slave Istarium

female slave Itefnefer (= his (or my) father is good)

female slave Hedetkush (Kush is beaten)

female slave Amonhersedeb (Amun makes healthy)

**Bibliography:** Davies 2009 with collations and improved readings.

### 32. From A Satire on the Trades: being a soldier

Gardiner 1937: 108.15–109.2

**Written and found:** probably from Thebes

**Date:** late 20th Dynasty (c. 1150 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** London, British Museum, P.Lansing 10.3–5 (= P.BM 9994)

The victory has happened. His Majesty has dispatched the (human) plunder, going down to Egypt. The foreign woman has collapsed on the journey. She is put on the shoulders of the soldier. His pack is abandoned. Others take it. He is loaded with a captive woman (*srt*).

#### 2.3.4. The renaming of slaves

The integration of foreigners into Egypt is difficult to quantify, not least because of the habit among people of foreign origin of using Egyptian names. The

autobiography of Ahmose son of Abana (31) lists the male and female slaves given to him from the plunder of expeditions in which he took part: nine male and ten female. With isolated exceptions these individuals have Egyptian names, evidently replacing original Nubian or Asiatic personal names. Similarly the slave brought back by Sibastet (52), in the reign of Tuthmosis III, is called Iiwyamon – ‘Welcome-Amun!’ – evidently an Egyptian name given to a non-Egyptian; and in the Cairo slave-sale text (41), the young Syrian girl is given a very odd-looking Egyptian name after purchase. Similarly in the earlier inscription in the tomb of Bebi (5) the names of his ‘king’s-slaves’ and female slaves are largely recognisable as grammatically Egyptian, but several are not standard name formations. The long list of dependents in the Middle Kingdom (33) distinguishes between king’s-slaves and female slaves – apparently Egyptian in origin – and Asiatics, some of whom have Egyptian names and others not, but are also called by a second Egyptian name.<sup>58</sup> The practice of renaming seems to have been common, and often using non-standard names.

## 2.4. Slaves’ economic roles

### 2.4.1. The assignment of slaves to agricultural and other work

The difficulty of keeping workers on the land, to maintain revenues, is a central issue in Egypt in all periods. The most extensive data for their flight, and its management, is found in a lengthy document of the late Middle Kingdom (33). The main text is a long list of defaulters – mostly men – responsible to their local ‘Scribe of the Fields’. Generally they are named, with filiation, as a ‘man of’ such-and-such a place, and occasionally with reference to the land they worked. The names are typically Egyptian, but their status is not made clear. The document seems to belong to an administrative body referred to as the Great Enclosure, and its associated Office of Assigning People, known in practice only from mention of their scribes; here they are concerned with the recovery of defaulters and the assignment or reassignment of the rural population to lands for cultivation. The underlying picture is of a peasantry effectively tied to the land, but by administrative measures that focus on their payment of revenues – their production – rather than a legal status: a dependency rather than an ownership. In that sense the text provides the mirror image of the arrangements presented in protection decrees, to ensure the cultivation of revenue-producing lands by putting farmers on them and keeping them there, with their dependency protected.

<sup>58</sup> Hayes 1955: 99–103.

The text of the verso of the Brooklyn Papyrus (33) was written much later, but picks up the same issue: authority over a large number of individuals as members of a socio-economic household. A man declares that he has given property to his wife Senebtisi<sup>59</sup> and her children: possibly as a marriage settlement for a second marriage.<sup>60</sup> This is challenged by his daughter (of an earlier marriage?), who claims that he is giving away her inheritance and matrimonial property. The gift includes a long list of people (seventy-eight of ninety-five damaged lines survive). Of those whose names are preserved, thirty-three are Egyptians and forty-five marked as Asiatics: twenty are men (fifteen Egyptians and five Asiatics), against forty-three women (twelve Egyptians and thirty-one Asiatics). Fourteen children are included, listed with their mothers as 'her son' or 'her daughter', and carrying Egyptian names regardless of the ethnicity of the mother. The text presents an Upper Egyptian household of the mid-13th Dynasty containing at least forty Asiatics. The ratio of women to men of about 3:1 might imply an origin as prisoners of war, or through the slave trade, rather than ordinary immigration. Fifteen of the Egyptian men are identified as 'king's-slave', and the twelve women as 'female slave'; the categories evidently overlap with that of 'Asiatic' in so far as they imply a dependent or servile status. A number of the Egyptian king's-slaves are listed as field workers, but the other men are domestic servants; the women are typically employed in cloth production, but others are in personal and domestic service.

The practical mechanisms and degree of force used by the Great Enclosure and the Office of Assigning People are not made clear. However, two royal decrees – copied onto the recto considerably later – show these institutions acting in coordination with the Office of the Herald, the official who, in this period, seems to be the one responsible for local enforcement of royal interests. A contemporary letter from Kahun (34) deals with the case of a king's-slave who had gone missing, and once caught was committed to the 'Enclosure': the writer is concerned that he be returned, and is worried that he may die in the Office of the Herald.

A Ramesside letter (35) describes the assignment of a Syrian captive, transported through the military organisation, as a field labourer for the endowment of the Temple of Thoth at Memphis. The details of distribution of captive slaves, through the official in charge of a border fortress, the chief herald of the army, and a subordinate but ranking army officer, emphasise both the economic and administrative roles of the army at this date, as well as rivalries over the acquisition of people.

59 Text B lines 26–27 (Hayes 1955: 114–123, pl. XIV) includes: 'together with giving my fifteen head (of people), my *khentyu*-people, being my household (*khenmu*), to my wife Senebt(y)sy'.

60 Hayes 1955: 116, 122–123; Eyre 2007.

Conflict between people in authority over control of individual slaves – both their physical person and their labour – is similarly illustrated in two 18th Dynasty letters: the first to, and the second from, a scribe named Ahmose of Peniati, who was an official concerned with the control of works. The first (36) deals with an attempt to resolve a dispute between two mayors over control of a female slave. In the second (37) Ahmose asks to be allowed to cover the value of a girl's production – at a standard expected level – and not have the girl removed from his care, since she is young, not able actually to carry out the work herself, and her mother is holding him personally responsible for her care. The implication here seems to be that the lord employs his 'slaves' as and how he wishes, including their removal from their family circle. One of the orders in the Horemheb Decree (38), protecting people against the malfeasance of minor functionaries, specifically bars the conscription of the slaves of 'orphan'-people to take part in the saffron harvest. Such cases exemplify the same sort of issues presented in royal protection decrees (12, 61), where the explicit interest lies in rights to work and revenues, and only incidentally in the physical person of the individual slave or dependent.

### 33. From a register of agricultural defaulters

Hayes 1955

**Written and found:** Thebes

**Date:** late 12th Dynasty (Amenemhet III) and mid-13th Dynasty (Sobekhotep III) (c. 1831–1700)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** Brooklyn, Brooklyn Museum, P. 35.1446

Samples of the main text of the recto (Hayes 1995, pls. I–VI). The list begins with three brothers (?), working land in the same location (recto a1–3):

Sobekaa's son Nedjemib: a man of <Batyu>.

Sobekaa's son Senwosret: a man of Batyu.

Sobekaa's son Hetep: (of) the *khebsu*-fields of the Steward, Senib's son Saanhur. Exceptionally (recto a8) one man is listed as:

Idenmerahau's son Amenemhet, a *djet*-person of the Overseer of the Treasury Anhernakhte.

A repeated formula explains the context (d55–57):

It was ordered to the Great Enclosure, (in) year 31, month 2 of summer, final day, to release his dependents from the council, as an order to do the law in respect of him, for one deliberately missing for six months.

Continued:

Month 3 of summer, day 5, to assign to *khebsu*-fields, together with his dependents, for ever, [as] the court says.

Then:

Day 9, saying, 'The family is handed to the Office of Assigning People, of the one [ex]pelled over his ...., the one removed from (the appointment of) ship's captain of the Treasury, deprived of (or 'cursed be') his name, Dedamon's son Montuhotep.

Or as variant (a63 + d63):

Saanhur's daughter Teti .... as an order to do the law in respect of her for one who fled without doing his task.

Or as variant (d54):

As an order to do the law in respect of him [for one] who fled the Enclosure.

Recto Insertion B (Hayes 1955, pl.V):

[Year 5?], month 3 of winter, day 20[+x]. Copy of a royal decree brought to the [office] of the Herald of Southern Town. Royal decree to the Town Overseer, Vizier, Overseer of the six Great Mansions, Ankhu. Look, this decree of the king is brought to you to inform you that the Elder of the Portal, Ibiia's son Remenyankhhas, [petitioned], saying, 'So one shall <act> (?) in writing (?) by the grace of royal favour, in accounting the one who is in charge of the Enclosure-people, who has been violent over the fugitive Sankhu, (that is) Pay, by having him brought to the Residence. He is to be interrogated over the violence which he did', so he said this. Look, it has been heard. Have him brought under guard to the Residence. So you are to act against him. Look, the king (alive, prospering, healthy) approves (?). [You are informed accordingly.]

A second related decree expands on the affair:

Insertion C (Hayes 1955, pl.VI):

Year 6, month 3 of winter, day 3. [Copy] of an[other royal decree] brought to the office of the Herald of Southern Town. [Royal] decree to the [Over]seer of [Tow]n, Vizier, and Overseer of the six Great Mansions, Ankhu. Look, [this decree of] the king is brought to you, to inform you that the King's Seal-bearer, the Overseer of Fields of Southern Town, [...]'s son Ibiia has petitioned, saying, 'Requisitioners (?) are in [my] house, transporting people of (my) home (?), by conscription (?) to Iatsekhtyu. May there be given to me, by the Office of Assigning People, (the) household-people of Pay – the accursed (?) – causing (them) to be given to me to (be) (my) household-people', so he said.

See, (it) has been heard, what was done. Look, what is commanded about (it). He who is in the Residence shall come (?). So you are to have an order issued (?) [over] those involved. He who is in Southern Town shall come (?). So you are to act in relation towards him. Look the king approves (?). You are informed accordingly.

Verso, sample of main text, lines 1–10 (Hayes 1955: 87–109, pls.VIII–XIII):

- (1) king's-slave Renesenb's son Ankhu – called Hedjeri – servant (*hery-per*) – man
- (2) female slave Iy's daughter Gemenisat – it is her name – hairdresser – woman
- (3) her daughter Renseneb – it is her name – [*left blank*] – female child
- (4) king's-slave Iueseni's son Asha – it is his name – field worker – man
- (5) Iy's son Ibu – it is his name – field worker – man
- (6) Asiatic Senebresseneb – it is his name – cook (?) – man
- (7) female Asiatic Rehwy – called Ka(i)puneb(i) – linen-worker (?) – woman
- (8) her son, Tjau's son Renseneb – called Renefres – [*blank*] – male child
- (9) [Asiatic] Aperreshpw – [...] – brewer – man
- (10) female Asiatic Haimmi – called [...] – weaver of *hatiu*-cloth – woman

**Bibliography:** Quirke 1990: 127–154.

### 34. Letter about a missing agricultural worker

P.UC 32209, col. I, lines 2–7; col. II, 1–10; Griffith 1898: 78–79, pl. 34; Collier and Quirke 2002: 128–131

**Written and found:** Kahun

**Date:** late 12th Dynasty (c. 1785 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** London, University College, P.Kah XII.1 = P.UC 32209

The address is lost, but from the pronouns the letter seems to be addressed to a woman.

col. I, lines 2–7: Look, I am delighted. Look, I have found the king's-slave Sobekemheb. Look he had fled. Look I have given him to the Enclosure of hearing. Look [...] said [...] about working (*bak*) for me .....

col. II, 1–10: which I had had brought to the scribe of fields Seryu, because of everything I had said. Look, now, it is in your hands; so you will let him die in the Office of the Herald! Have somebody petition him immediately, saying (that) he is to give [him (?)] to you, and then you shall have [him (?)] brought [...] every [...]. If [...] says, 'Have [him (?)] come!', one has [se]nt to him [...]

### 35. Letter about the assignment of a field-labourer

P.Bologna 1086: Wolf 1930; KRI IV, 78–81

**Written and found:** probably from Memphis

**Date:** year 3 of a king of the later 19th Dynasty, probably Merenptah (c. 1211 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** Bologna, Museo Civico Archeologico, 1086

The scribe of the offering table Bakenamon, to the priest Ramose, of the House of Thoth.

.....

I have heard the message you sent asking about me. It is Pre (and) Ptah who will ask about you! And I do not know whether my boy will reach you. Now I sent him to Sekhem-pehty, (and) I was going to have a letter brought to you by his hand as well. Do not keep avoiding sending (a letter back) to me, so that I may hear your condition.

To the effect that: I have made enquiries (about) the Syrian of the House of Thoth, about whom you sent (word) to me. I have found him to have been assigned as a field worker of the House of Thoth, under your charge, in year 3, month 2 of harvest, day 10, from the slaves of the cargo of the boat which the Overseer of the Fortress brought. To inform you of his name: the Syrian Naqady son of Ruratja, his mother being Qedy, of the land of Arad (?); a slave of the cargo of the boat of this temple, being the boat of the captain Kenro, and his inspector (?) says, 'It is the Chief of Heralds of the army, Khaïemopet, of the garrison of Pharaoh, who received him, and had him taken (away).'

I have gone to the Chief of Heralds of the army Khaïemopet, of the garrison of Pharaoh (life, prosperity, and health!). He made his excuses to me, (and) he said to me, 'It is the vizier Merysakhmet who received him and had him taken (away).'

I have gone to the vizier Merysakhmet, and he made his excuses, along with his scribes, saying, 'We have not seen him.' I am now chasing the Chief of Assault Troops (?), saying 'Hand over the Syrian field worker of the House of Thoth you received, (to) take him for the priest!' I am speaking with him in the great court as well.

### 36. Letter to Ahmose of Peniaty

P.BM 10107, ed. Glanville 1928

**Written and found:** probably from Thebes

**Date:** first half of the 18th Dynasty (c. 1450 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** London, British Museum, P.BM 10107

The mayor refuses to go before the normal tribunal for dispute settlement. Probably he is too important to accept a settlement process administered by a tribunal of his inferiors, over a complaint brought forward by an inferior.

Ptahu greets the scribe Ahmose: In life and prosperity! In the favour of Amun-Re! This is a message to cause you to know about the case of <the> female servant who is in the charge of the mayor Tetimose. Then the Chief of Weavers Abwey was sent to him, saying, 'Come!' So you shall dispute with him. He does not answer [to] Min, (or) to what the Overseer of the Countrymen Ramose said. Look, as for the female servant, (she) is a servant of the mayor Mini-nefu, but he does not listen to me, to dispute with me in the court of magistrates.

**(Address):** Ptah to the scribe Ahmose.

### 37. Letter of Ahmose of Peniati

P.Louvre 3230b, ed. Peet 1926; Glanville 1928: 309–311

**Written and found:** Thebes (?)

**Date:** first half of the 18th Dynasty (c. 1450 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** Paris, Louvre, P. Louvre E 3230b

What Ahmose of Peniaty says to his lord, the Overseer of Treasure Tay: What (is the reason) for the seizure of the female servant who had been with me, and her being given to another? Am I not your servant, hearing your command night and day? Have her exchange (?) with me accepted, because she is a child. She is not able to work (*bak*). Or, have my lord order that I carry her work(load) (*bak*), like (that of) any female servant of my lord, because her mother sends to me, saying, 'You are the one who has had my daughter taken: she was here with you. And I have not complained to my lord, because she is in your charge as a child,' so she says to me, in complaint.

### 38. Horemheb Decree from Karnak

Kruchten 1981: 58–79; *Urk.* IV, 2146.16–2147.15, lines 21–23

**Written:** issued in the royal court, probably to be displayed on multiple sites: a duplicate fragment was found at Abydos

**Found and location:** Karnak, *in situ* in Karnak Temple

**Date:** Reign of Horemheb (c. 1320 BCE)

**Material:** sandstone (stele)



**Location (Abydos fragment):** Cairo, Egyptian Museum, CG 34162

Similarly, if the attendants of the offering storerooms of Pharaoh are going and abducting people in the town to gather saff[ron .... and the]se attendants [shall take the male or female slave of the independent] person (*[pa nemeh]y*) and these servants shall send [them on the job of gathering the saffron] for six or seven days, though going with them is not freely allowed: that this is a serious abuse. Do not anybody act in this way either! As for any place ....

[Moreover, as] for any servant(s) of the [offerings] storeroom [of Pharaoh, about whom it] will be heard, that they are still conscripting to gather saffron, and that someone comes to complain, saying, 'My male or my female [slave] was taken ....' [let the law be applied to him by cutting off his nose, sending him to Tjaru, and by exacting from him the production of the male or female slave]<sup>61</sup> for every day he spent [with him].

#### 2.4.2. Economically active slaves

The individual personhood – the ability of slaves to take the initiative and form stable family relationships – is best documented when a slave is seen to be economically active on an apparently personal basis. For male slaves the independent activity documented is that of farming, but it is not possible to show specific restrictions on types of activity, and it is notable in the documented interrogations of slaves involved in the late Ramesside tomb robberies at Thebes that they were not treated differently – in terms of torture or punishment – from their associates or masters (42).<sup>62</sup>

The Wilbour Papyrus (39) records grain revenues due on holdings under the overall management of the Temple of Amun at Karnak. Areas of land are listed under the institution to which revenues are due, and the high(er)-ranking officials under whose general charge they came. Individual sections then list assessments on individual plots of land giving the size of the individual plots (in *arouras*), and the (standard) assessments due on them (in grain): represented here conventionally by the abbreviation *mc* for 'measure of corn'.<sup>63</sup> The plots are typically family subsistence holdings of 3 and 5 *arouras*, the named holders being those responsible for payment of the revenues: they may have worked the land themselves, but may also have sublet to field workers. Eleven entries refer to slaves as holders respon-

61 The restorations are based on lines 47 and 23 of the Nauri Decree (see Kruchten 1981: 65).

62 See BM 10052, 7.1–8; 8, 1–16; 12, 1–11; 14, 1–9; 16, 3–7; 47 = P.Mayer A, 4.12–20; 5.1–8; 9.9–12; 12.8.

63 'Corn' refers to grains generically. Probably the measure was the standard sack (*khat*), although the annotation used is simply the grain determinative: Gardiner 1948a: 61–65.

sible for plots of land, in all cases holders at the lowest level. In one case the entry shows the children of a slave continuing his tenure after his death. These slaves appear among holders who are not of high rank: women (presumably the heirs and widows of primary holders), low-ranking priests, soldiers, Sherden (probably also soldiers), and a goatherd. The category of ‘follower of the Sherden’ – plural Sherden as a group – appears in twenty-one examples. Also there are numbers of *sedjemu*, ‘hearers’, ‘servants’.

### 39. Slaves as landholders

Wilbour Papyrus, ed. Gardiner 1941b, pls. 12, 17, 23, 24, 39

**Written and found:** Thebes (Karnak) (?)

**Date:** year 4, month 2 of inundation, reign of Ramesses V (c. 1144 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** Brooklyn, Brooklyn Museum, P.Brooklyn 34.5596.4

*Lines 26, 1 + 26, 34–37*

Apportioning [*doma*]in<sup>64</sup> of this house (in) the Tract of Hardai.

.....

I(aken)<sup>65</sup> Measurement west of the Cattleshed of Horus:

The slave Panebtjau	•3•I mc I 2/4
The lady Tabes	•3•I mc I 2/4
The follower of the Sherden Pakharu	•3•I mc I 2/4
The <i>wab</i> -priest Parenakhte	•5•I mc I 2/4
The Sherden Paqaruiu	•5•I mc I 2/4
The <i>wab</i> -priest Qeneresetkh	•5•I mc I 2/4
The lady Tanakhte	•5•I mc I 2/4
The goatherd Nakhteamon	•5•I mc I 2/4
The lady Tadjja	•5•I mc I 2/4
The lady Meneith.	•5•I mc I 2/4
The <i>wab</i> -priest Pamehefpanebiu	•5•I mc I 2/4
The lady Temiou	•5•I mc I 2/4

*Lines 36, 34–39*

Fields of Pharaoh (in) this domain:

64 The crucial term here is *pesh*, literally ‘share’, marking lands from which the revenues were shared and not assigned to the single institution.

65 An annotation, in a different hand, to the right of the column.

**Measurement south of Hutsahta:**

Apportioned (for) Amun of the City, in the hand of the slave Tjaty

10 $\downarrow$ 5• $\frac{1}{2}$  mc  $\frac{1}{2}$ / $\frac{4}{4}$

Measurement in the pond of the villa of Hotpu:

The lady Medjetmwia, who is dead

•10 $\downarrow$ 5• $\frac{1}{2}$  mc  $\frac{1}{2}$ / $\frac{4}{4}$

Field for horses, the stable master Pabes

10 $\downarrow$ 5• $\frac{1}{2}$  mc  $\frac{1}{2}$ / $\frac{4}{4}$

*Lines 49, 5–12:*

T(aken) Measurement northwest of Aaru:

Donated land to the god of Pharaoh, under the charge of the captain of the shield-bearers of Pharaoh, Ahutynefer, in the hand of the stable-master Aapahty

•20 $\downarrow$ 5• $\frac{1}{2}$  mc  $\frac{1}{2}$ / $\frac{4}{4}$

The soldier Setemheb

•3• $\frac{1}{4}$  mc  $\frac{1}{2}$ / $\frac{4}{4}$

The soldier Penaaniamon

•3• $\frac{1}{4}$  mc  $\frac{1}{2}$ / $\frac{4}{4}$

The soldier Pakharu

•3• $\frac{1}{4}$  mc  $\frac{1}{2}$ / $\frac{4}{4}$

The slave Amenmose, field of the *khato*-land of Pharaoh, under the charge of the Chief Taxing-Master

•3• $\frac{1}{4}$  mc  $\frac{1}{2}$ / $\frac{4}{4}$

*Line 81, 46:*

The slave Nebnefer, who is dead: in the hand of <his> children

5 $\downarrow$ 1• $\frac{1}{4}$  mc  $\frac{1}{2}$ / $\frac{4}{4}$

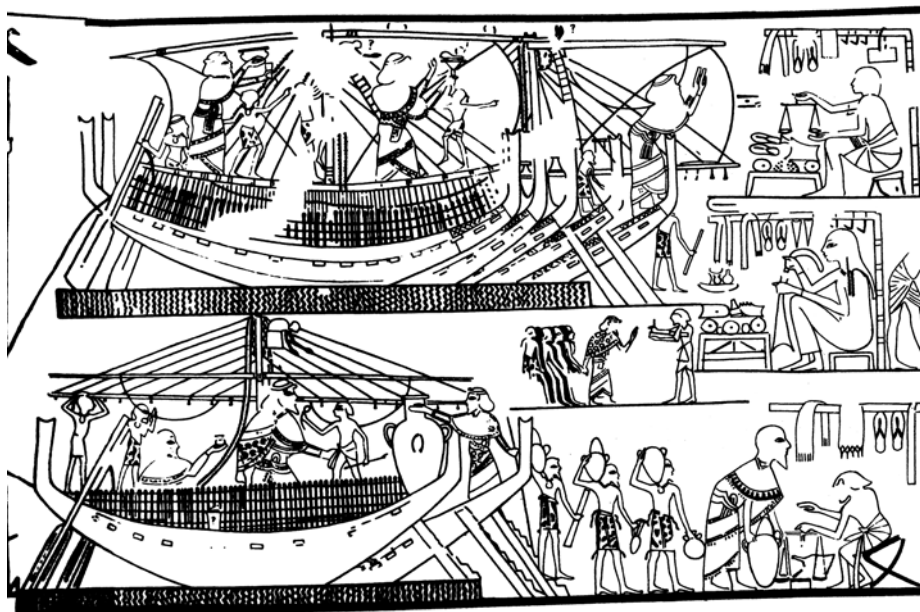
Similar entries are also found P.Wilbour 8, 52 (holding 2); 35, 44 (holding 3) 46, 20 (holding 3); 78, 18 (holding 5) 82, 2 (holding 5).

**Bibliography:** Gardiner 1948a: 26–27, 51, 54, 87.

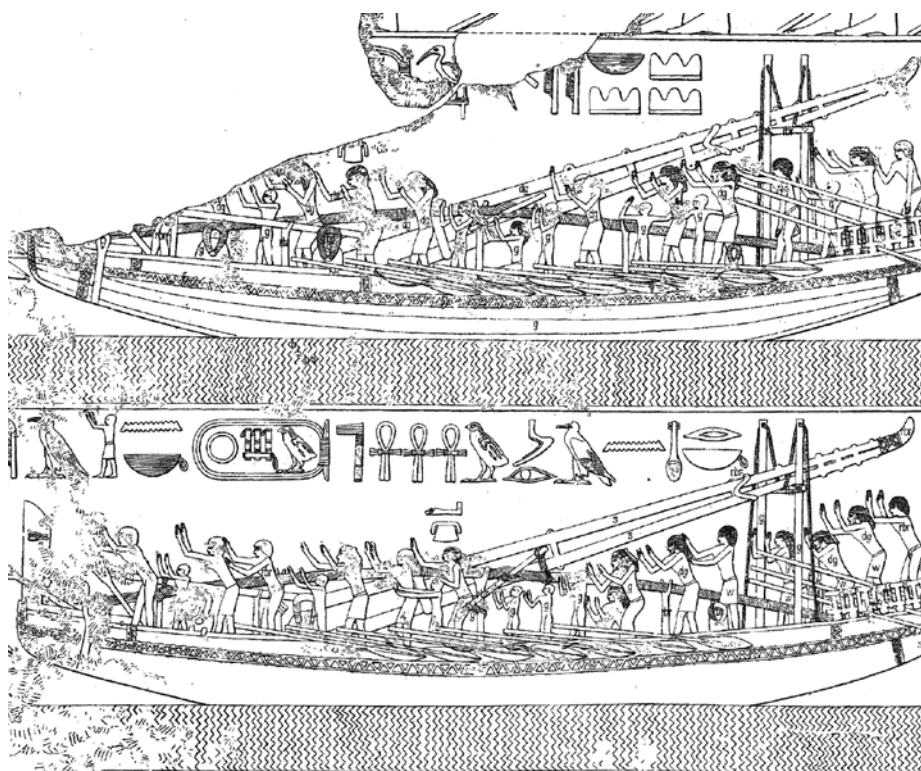
## 2.5. The trade in people

### 2.5.1. Foreign slave trade

Direct evidence of how people were incorporated in service is rarely explicit, other than by military capture. The existence of an organised, purely commercial trade in individuals from abroad cannot be clearly documented: the occasional purchase of slaves of foreign origin may involve the (re)sale of prisoners of war, or second-generation slaves. However, a scene from the 18th Dynasty Theban tomb of Qenamun (see Fig. 2.5) shows Syrian ships mooring at a quayside, bringing rich goods and cattle to Egypt. On the quay there are stalls, with individuals apparently there to trade with the boats' crews: in the top register two well-dressed women and a child are received by an attendant; and in one small section, between the boats and the quayside stalls, a scribe is shown meeting a richly



**Figure 2.5** 18th Dynasty Theban tomb of Qenamun. N. de G. Davies and R. O. Faulkner, 'A Syrian trading venture to Egypt', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 33 (1947), pl. 8.



**Figure 2.6** Relief from the pyramid complex of Sahure. L. Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs S'ahu-Re*, Vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1913), Blatt 13.

dressed Syrian who leads a group of much poorer figures; pictorially these scenes could reasonably represent the delivery of slaves to trade, but this interpretation is no more than a plausible guess.

In a much earlier example, reliefs from the pyramid complex of Sahure show boats bringing exotic items from abroad, including saluting Asiatics (Fig. 2.6).

These may be traders, or themselves the objects of trade. What is pictured here is put into words in the early 6th Dynasty autobiography of an expedition leader, Iny<-Djefau>, who talks of returning from Lebanon with ships loaded with silver and male and female Asiatics (40).

#### 40. Autobiography of Iny-djefau

Marcolin and Espinel 2011, continuing Marcolin 2006

**Written and found:** Saqqara (?)

**Date:** Pepi I–Merenre (c. 2285 BCE)

**Material:** limestone blocks from tomb wall

**Location:** Los Angeles, private collection, Royal–Athena Fragment + Tokyo, MECC, no. 11581

Sole Companion, Lector-priest, Seal-bearer of the God in two big ships, In-[y-djefau]. The Majesty of Neferkare sent me to the Lebanon. I brought (back) one Byblos ship and cargo ships loaded with silver, and Asiatic men and Asiatic women.

##### 2.5.2. The purchase of individual slaves

Slave-sale documents become a regular part of the record only after the Rameside Period, but sale documents of any sort rarely survive from earlier periods, so that the type of transaction cannot safely be regarded as a new phenomenon when such documents first appear. The clearest references are incidental (46, 51), most notably in an argument about the funding of purchases (41). The text records a typical dispute in which leading members of the local community mediate, the participants swearing to their case and calling down severe retribution in the name of the king and god if they are found to have been dishonest in their evidence. Here a woman Irytnefret had been approached by a ‘merchant’ and acquired a young Syrian slave girl that he was offering, at a cost of 4 *deben* and 1 *qite* of silver: approximately 365 g. In the pre-coinage economy of pharaonic Egypt, physical payments were made in kind. The commodities actually exchanged were valued for exchange purposes as equivalents of weights of silver, or copper for smaller sums; monetary valuations – money – are then

referred to as 'silver'. The use of actual bullion was exceptional, but where metal objects were included in the exchange they do seem to have been valued simply at their (bullion) weight.<sup>66</sup> The price for the slave girl purchased here seems very high: equivalent, crudely, to about eleven years of subsistence grain ration, so too high to be a simple investment in labour, when it would seem cheaper to pay wages than buy and feed a slave. However, Irytnefret appears to have been engaged in a profitable domestic weaving business, and the purchase of the girl probably represents the use of those profits. The girl is specifically young, and Syrian. After acquisition, she is given a rather surprising Egyptian name: 'I-found-on-(the)-west'. Her origin is obscure: an Egyptian-born child of Syrian slaves, or directly brought from Syria in the aftermath of military activity. Iryt-nefret is also then, in testimony, said to have used a tomb to fund the purchase of a male slave.

The period of disorder and civil war at the end of the 20th Dynasty was marked by local famine, and widespread tomb robbery as the residents of the Theban West Bank sought resources to fund the purchase of food as well as personal enrichment. A group of papyri of the end of this period record the interrogation of gangs involved in the robbery of tombs, and of their associates, by a royal commission. The impression is that the tomb robbers regarded the purchase of slaves as an appropriate use of the proceeds of their thefts, buying people caught up as prisoners taken in the civil wars, and then sold individually. One such slave – one Karbaal – has a marked foreign name, and talks of himself as having come from Syria,<sup>67</sup> and many others are simply referred to by the title of 'foreigner'. Such slaves then appear both as participants in the tomb robberies, and as witnesses interrogated about them at trials, where their treatment is no different from that of others investigated. The formulaic phrase introducing the testimonies is, 'He was interrogated with the stick,' before other forms of torture were imposed on the recalcitrant.

A slave Degay seems to have cost the equivalent of something over 3 *deben* of silver, paid in silver, copper, and grain (42). A woman Ese is interrogated about claims that her husband, the gardener Karoy had stolen from tombs (42). She denies having seen any 'silver' acquired in this way, but she is not believed. Her claim that the money came from the produce of her *hespet*-plot has an air of ironic mockery of the interrogator, whether the term refers to a domestic garden or a country estate. The story here is a chequered one, but apparently a soldier, taking a 'slave' in battle, for whom he had no personal use, had sold him on. The price mentioned here is cheaper: only 2 *deben* of silver. Another woman claimed that

66 Janssen 1975.

67 PBM 10052, 12.1–11; cf. 42.



she and her husband used grain to buy slaves during a famine, in ‘the year of the hyenas’.<sup>68</sup>

A later Ramesside letter deals with a dispute over the propriety of the transfer of a female slave and her (infant) son, and if necessary their appropriate replacement, in a transaction involving a trader of the temple of Amun (43). Again the context may be that of women employed in weaving production (59, 60). The ‘merchants’ (*shuty*-people) mentioned in these texts dealt with the movement of goods along the Nile and into Palestine and Syria. Although translated here as ‘merchants’, they do not represent a genuinely independent commercial class. They are characteristically associated with major institutions or great estates, acting as their agents.<sup>69</sup> There is no suggestion here of professional slave traders, or that there was an institutionalised slave market.

#### 41. Dispute about the funding for purchase of a slave

P.Cairo 65739, ed. Gardiner 1935

**Written and found:** Thebes

**Date:** Ramesses II (c. 1250 BCE) (?)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** Cairo, Egyptian Museum, P.Cairo 65739

*An unknown amount is lost at the beginning.*

[DATE: on this day, the soldier Nakhi came before the magistrates to make report against the lady Irynefer ...]

[Statement by the soldier Nakhi .....]

Statement by the lady Iryt-nefret: ‘[I am the wife of the Overseer of the District (?) Samut], and I came to live in his house, and I was working on (?) [weaving (?)] and I provided my clothing. And in year 15, seven years after I had entered the house of the Overseer of the District Sa[mut], the merchant Raia approached me with the Syrian female slave Gemeniherimentet, she being a [little] child, and [he said] to me: ‘Buy this girl and give me her price!’ So he said to me. And I bought the little child, and gave him her [price], and look, I am declaring the price I gave in respect of her before the magistrates:

Fine linen: cover (?) 1, makes silver, *qite* 5

Fine linen: sheet 1, makes silver, *qite* 3 1/3

Fine linen: kilt 1, makes silver, *qite* 4

Superior fine linen: loincloth 3, makes silver, *qite* 5

68 P.BM 10052, 11–14.

69 Römer 1992; Bickel 1998.

Superior fine linen: kilt 1, makes silver, *qite* 5

Bought (?)<sup>70</sup> from the lady Kafy, bronze, *gay*-vessel 1, makes *deben* 18, makes silver, *qite* 1 2/3

Bought (?) from the Overseer of the Workshop Piay, bronze *gay*-vessel 1, makes *deben* 14, makes silver, *qite* 1 1/2

Bought (?) from the *wab*-priest Huypanehsy, copper in beaten form, *deben* 10, makes silver, *qite* 1

Bought (?) from the *wab*-priest Iny, bronze, *gay*-vessel 1, makes *deben* 16, makes silver, *qite* 1 1/2; (and) honey, *menet*-jar 1, makes *hekat* 1, makes silver, *qite* 5

Bought (?) from the lady Tjuiay, bronze, *qehen*-vessel 1, makes *deben* 20, makes silver, *qite* 2

Bought (?) from the steward Tutuia of the Temple of Amun, bronze, *qebet*-vessel 1, makes *deben* 20, makes silver, *qite* [1]; and superior Upper Egyptian cloth, tunics 10, makes silver, *qite* 4

Total: silver, consisting of all (sorts of) things, *deben* 4 *qite* 1, and I gave them to the merchant Raia, there being nothing belonging to the lady Bakmut among them, and he gave me this little girl, and I gave her the name Gemeniherimentet (Found-on-[in?]-the-west)'.<sup>71</sup>

Statement by the assembly of magistrates to the lady Irytnefret: 'Make an Oath by the Lord, saying, "and then witnesses should arise against me, that there was any property of the lady Bakmut in the silver I gave in respect of this female servant, so that I am concealing it, I will be for 100 lashes and be deprived of her".'

Oath by the Lord (and) statement by the lady Iryt-nefret: 'As Amun endures, as the Ruler endures, then witnesses should arise against me, that there was any property of the lady Bakmut in this silver I gave in respect of this female servant, so that I am concealing it, I will be for 100 lashes and be deprived of her.'

Statement by the assembly of magistrates to the soldier Nakhi: 'Present to us the witnesses which you have said know this silver of the lady Bakmut that was given to buy the female slave Gemeniherimentet, along with the witnesses of this tomb of which you said, "It is the lady Bakmut who made it, and the lady Irytnefret gave it to the merchant Nakht, and he gave her the slave Tenerptah in exchange for it".'

List of witnesses which the soldier Nakhy declared before the assembly of magistrates: Chief of Medjay Min..., Mayor of the West Ramose, *wab*-priest Huypanehsy (the elder brother of the Overseer of the District Samut), the lady Kafy – the wife of the Chief of Medjay Pashed, who is dead – the lady

70 Or 'brought' (?); unclear whether she records previous purchases or current loans from other persons, now used towards the purchase.



Weretnefret, the lady Hutia (the elder sister of the lady Bakmut). Total men, 3; women, 3. Total 6. And they were standing in front of the assembly, and they made an Oath by the Lord, and also an Oath by God, saying: 'We are telling the truth. We will not tell untruths, and should we say untruths, the servants will be taken from us.'

Statement by the assembly of magistrates: to the *wab*-priest Huy: 'Tell us (about) the business [of] the Syrian female slave [Gemeniherimentet .....]'

*The rest is lost.*

#### **42. Extract from the interrogation of tomb robbers**

KRI VI, 767–803; Peet 1930: II, pls. 25–35

**Written and found:** Thebes (probably Medinet Habu)

**Date:** year 19 of Ramesses XI = year 1 of the 'Repeating of Births' (c. 1081 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** London, British Museum, EA 10052

a. 2. 23–25 (in testimony listing recipients of the proceeds of the robberies)

the attendant Shedbag, in exchange for the slave Degay: silver, 2 *deben*; copper, 60 *deben*; emmer, 30 *khar*, I having obtained them in exchange for good Upper Egyptian cloth, 16 wraps of 8 cubits, and width 4 (cubits), and smooth cloth, 2 loincloths.

10.11–20

Interrogation: the lady Ese was brought, the wife of the gardener Karoy, [of] the *Ka*-chapel of Ramose. The oath by the Lord, was administered to her, to the effect 'if she shall lie, [she] shall be mutilated and impaled'. The vizier said to her, 'What is the story of this silver which [yo]ur husband brought from these Great Places (= the tombs)?' She said, 'I didn't see (anything).'

The scribe Djehtymose said to her, 'What is the story of the purchase you made of these servants that you bought?' She said, 'I bought them with grain from my *hespet*-plot.' The vizier said, 'Have Paynekh, her servant brought. He will accuse her.'

The slave Paynekh was brought. The oath by the Lord was administered to him as well. They said to him, 'What have you to say? What is the story of this silver which your owner brought?' He said, 'After Paynehsy seized Hardai, the young Nubian Butehamon bought me, and the foreigner Pentasekhenu bought me from him, and he gave 2 *deben* of silver in exchange. When he was killed, the gardener Karoy bought me (for) my price.'

### 43. Letter concerning the abduction of a slave

P.Bankes I: Edwards 1982; Demarée 2006: 7–9; KRI IX, 165–167

**Written and found:** Thebes

**Date:** end of the 20th Dynasty (c. 1075 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** London, British Museum, P.BM 75015

The builder Wenamun of the House of Amun-Re, King of the Gods, greets the merchant Amonkhau of the House of Amun-Re, King of the Gods. In the favour of Amun-Re, King of the Gods. I say to Amun, Mut, and Khonsu every day: ‘Make you live! Make you healthy! Make you youthful!’

And also: You went off from Town, after the female slave Tintuendjedet with the slave Gemamon, her child, had been entrusted to you, (but) you had given them to the fisherman Pamershenuty (and) the follower Hori, after they had said to you, while I was present, (that) ‘This (female) person was taken illegally,’ so they said to you; and you said, ‘Untrue! I bought this female person from the Chief of Weavers Ikhterpay,’ so you said to them, ‘And I paid her money!’ And they said to you, ‘We will meet with the (male) person who gave <her> to you,’ so they said to you, and I went with you before the Chief of *Téher*-troops Iuhpy, your chief, and he said to me, ‘Release the female servant. She has been entrusted to the merchant Amonkhau,’ so he said, and I trusted you, and I entrusted this female slave to you until now.

And look, you have sent me the scribe Iuefenamon, saying, ‘They have abducted your female slave, like the many (others) that they have abducted!’ So you said, writing to me. And you know that (some)one came and took my female slave when I was inside the enclosure walls of Mut, and they [...] people, saying, ‘Our sister!’, so they said about her. So you are to deal with her case while you are there.

When my letter (*verso*) reaches you, you will deal with the case of the female slave [...] people who took her. <If> they shall be stronger than you, and you find out that she is a stolen slave and it is the Overseer of Weavers who stole her, you will have him give you (a) satisfactory female slave, with her child in her embrace as well, and you are to bring them south when you come.

Look, I am sending to provide you with (written) evidence. Now you know the considerable good I have done you. Don’t forget that, and you won’t ... (?), and then your dishonesty catches up with you.

**Address:**

The builder Wenamun of the House of Amun to the merchant Amonkhau of the House of Amun.

**Bibliography:** Navailles and Neveu 1988.

## 2.6. Inheritance and gift

Two private documents of the Middle Kingdom refer to transfers of Asiatic women within a family. The so-called Will of Wah (44) specifies that his wife has free disposal among her children of three Asiatics whom Wah had himself inherited from his brother. The other text (45) seems to refer to a direct purchase of Asiatic women in a transaction involving a scribe of the Office of Assigning People.

The greatest incidental detail of this sort appears in a late Ramesside *procès-verbal* (46) dealing with a father's assignment of property between his second wife and the children of his first marriage. Amonkhau, a middle-ranking professional priest, had nine slaves as part of the matrimonial property of his first marriage, inherited by his children along with their mother's property. An additional four slaves – two female, with children, and two male – were acquired during his second marriage. The two male slaves were a secondary gift: it is a reasonable guess that these were the children of slaves. In addition, the possibility is suggested that somebody might transfer property to 'a Syrian or a Nubian, whom he had loved', but who was not recognised as a wife. This would seem to emphasise the propriety of providing for a (female) slave. There must be a suspicion that the case here is similar to that of the Adoption Papyrus (51), where the children of a slave were recognised as heirs. The legitimate children inherit directly, but a second wife, the two slave women, and two male slaves are established in a separate household, not under the control of the direct heirs. The names of the two female slaves express a direct personal relationship with Mut as saviour and protector. Those of the two male slaves reflect similar relationships to Thoth and Amun. The forms of the names are unusual, very personal, and this might imply a local renaming of foreign slaves.

In a case (47) at the end of the 20th Dynasty, a female slave was confiscated and handed over to the work organisation of the Royal Tomb, because her owner's family were involved in the tomb robberies. The implication was that she had been bought with the proceeds of robbery.

### 44. So-called Will of Wah

P.Kah I.I, ed. Griffith 1898: 31–35, pls. 12–13; Sethe 1924: 90–91, no. 29b; Collier and Quirke 2004: 104–105 and fold-out

**Written and found:** Kahun

**Date:** year 44 of Amenemhet III–year 2 of one of his successors (c. 1788–1785 BCE or later)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** London, University College, P.UC 32058

Copy of the house-contents document<sup>71</sup> which the confidential treasurer of the Controller of Works Ankhreni made.

Year 44, month 2 of summer, day 13. House-contents document which the confidential treasurer of the Controller of Works, Shepset's son Ihysonb called Ankhreni (of) the northern district made. 'All my property, in countryside and in town, is for my brother, the *wab*-priest in charge of a rota (?) of Sopdu, Lord of the East, Shepset's son Ihysonb called Wah. All my household are for this my brother.'

This was put in a copy into the bureau of the Second Herald of the South in year 44, month 2 of summer, day 13.

Year 2, month 2 of inundation, day 18. House-contents (document) which the *wab*-priest and chief of the rota of Sopdu, Lord of the East, Wah made. 'I am making a house-contents (document) for my wife, a woman of the east side, Sopdu's daughter Satshefet called Teti, consisting of all the things which my brother, the confidential treasurer of the Controller of Works Ankhreni, gave me, on top of every object in its place, consisting of everything he gave me. She shall give (them) to whomsoever she wishes among her children, which she bears to me.<sup>72</sup> I am giving her the Asiatics, three head, which my brother, the confidential treasurer of the Controller of Works Ankhreni, gave me. She shall give them to whomsoever she wishes among her children. As for my tomb in which I am buried, together with my wife, nobody is allowed to interfere with her. And as for the rooms which my brother, the confidential treasurer Ankhreni, built, my wife shall be there, without letting her be put out from them by anybody.

It is the deputy Gebu who shall act as guardian for my son.'<sup>73</sup>

Name list of people in whose presence this was done: Scribe of fishermen (?) Kemeni; Doorkeeper of the Temple Ankhthify's son Ipu; Doorkeeper of the Temple Sonb's son Sonb.

(*Verso docket*): House-contents document made by the *wab*-priest and chief of the rota Wah.

#### 45. Document recording the sale of slaves

PKah. 1.2, ed. Griffith 1898: 35–36, pl. 13; Collier and Quirke 2004: 118–119

**Written:** probably at Kahun

**Found:** Kahun

**Date:** year 29 of Amenemhet III (c. 1803 BCE)

71 Literally 'what-is-in-house', used as a property transfer document, but not restricted to wills in the modern sense.

72 The tense here is not marked past, so that the reference could refer to the possibility of future children, and not to be restricted to children already born.

73 This final line seems to have been added later in a different hand.

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** London, University College, P.UC 32167

Year 29, month 3 of inundation, day 7.

Made in the bureau of the vizier, before the town overseer and vizier Khety, by the scribe in charge of the seal, of the office of assigning people, Amenemhet's son Ameny.

Sale: the assistant of the Overseer of Treasure, Shepset's son Ihysonb (of the northern district, with the *wab*-priest in charge of a rota (?) of Sopdu, Lord of the East, Shepset's son Ihysonb.

Assent: scribe of this town Ptahwenenef's son Sehetepibre.

Female Asiatic Akhiatef	Kemeten	female determinative <sup>74</sup>
Kemeni	Sopduemmer(et)i	female determinative
Meshy	<Year>2, month 3 (?)	female determinative
[..]am	[...]benu	female determinative.

#### 46. Court record of arrangements about inheritance of slaves

Černý and Peet 1927; Allam 1973: 320–327, no. 280, pls. 112–119; *KRI* VI, 738–742

**Written and found:** Thebes, probably Medinet Habu

**Date:** end of 20th Dynasty (c. 1075 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** Turin, Museo Egizio, Cat. Fab. 2021 + (former) Papyrus Geneva D 409

*Page 1 is fragmentary:*

.... lady Anok[sunedjem] ...

... I entered ...

... the great god, and she became [...] my house, and I built ...

... children, and I [...] our children ...

*Page 2*

and the god denied [.. and I swo]re about it/her in the council of the Temple, and I shared 2/3 against 1/3 in everything of mine with her;<sup>75</sup> and I [entered] the house of the lady Anoksunedjem, this woman who stood in front of the vizier,

<sup>74</sup> The woman hieroglyph, as determinative to these names, is presented here in a separate column, as visual aid in the reading.

<sup>75</sup> The division of matrimonial property rights between husband and wife.

and I acquired four servants<sup>76</sup> [wi]th her; and she was good to me, and she followed my character, and she did for me what a c[hil]d (?) does; [...] and I gave her the female slave Numuteri and the female slave Bupumutkhaen, together with [thei]r children [into he]r  $\frac{1}{3}$ ; and I invested her with the slave Sapeterdjehuty and the slave Gemamon[pay]ash, these two servants whom I have as share from my [division] of all that I acquired with her, she having acted as a child just like the children of my former wife, who had been in my house, although {I (?) } did not [define (?) .. (?) ] a single preferred one (?).<sup>77</sup>

And see, I am come before the vizier and the magistrates of the council today to cause that each know his share among my children, [and] this arrangement which I will make for the lady Anoksunedjem, this woman who is in my house at present; for Pharaoh has said, 'Cause that every man does what he wants with his things!'

I am giving all that I have acquired with the lady Anoksunedjem, the woman who is in my house, to her (?) on this d[ay], consisting of the (*page 3*) two male servants and two servants – that is female servants, total four, together with (their) children, being the  $\frac{2}{3}$  on top of her  $\frac{1}{3}$ ; and I will give these nine servants, which came down to me as my  $\frac{2}{3}$  with the lady Tatjary, to my children; and the house of the father of their mother is in their possession as well. They are not [miss]ing anything I acquired with their mother; and I would have given them from what I acquired with the lady Anoksunedjem; but Pharaoh says, 'Give every woman her dowry!'

What the vizier said to the *wab*-priest and chief of workmen Ahawtynefer and the *wab*-priest Nebnefer, the children of the god's-father Amonkhau, who stood before him, the elder brothers of his children: 'What have you to say about this statement which your father, the god's-father Amonkhau made? Is it true about these nine servants, of whom he said, 'I gave them to you as my  $\frac{2}{3}$ , which I shared with your mo[ther], together with the house of the father of <your> mother?'

They said, with one voice, 'Our father is right. They are really with us.' What the vizier said: '[What have you to say about] this arrangement your father has made for the lady Anoksunedjem, this second wife of his?'

They said, '[We have heard (?) ] what our father has done. As for what he has done, who can challenge it? His property is his (own). Let him give it [to whomsoever] he [wants]!'

What the vizier said: 'If it were not a wife of his, but a Syri[an or a Nu]bian, whom he had loved, and he gave her his property, [who] would have nullified

76 The identity of meaning between *hem*, conventionally 'slave', and *bak*, conventionally 'servant', is particularly marked in this text, the terms used interchangeably of the same people, even in a single clause.

77 The reading is not clear, but the sense seems to be that he has not named a preferential heir.

what he did? Give [her the] four servants which [he has acquired w]ith Anok-sunedjem, as well as [all he has acquired] with her, of whom he has said, “I am giving her my  $\frac{2}{3}$  [on top of h]er  $\frac{1}{3}$ , and no son nor daughter shall oppose (*page 4*) this arrangement which I have made for her today.”

<What> the vizier said: ‘Act according to the declaration of the god’s-father Amonkhau, this god’s-father who is standing before me!’ The vizier commissioned the *wab*-priest and scribe of the mat Ptahemheb, of the council of the Temple of Usermaatre-Meryamon, saying, ‘Have this arrangement which I have made fixed on a roll of papyrus in the Temple of Usermaatre-Meryamon, and do the same in the great council of Town, before very many witnesses.’ The list of them: .....

**Bibliography:** Eyre 2007.

#### **47. Confiscation of a slave from the family of a tomb robber**

P.Mayer A.10, 21–24, ed. Peet 1920, no. 1; *KRI* VI, 823.11–14.

**Written and found:** Western Thebes, probably Medinet Habu

**Date:** years 19–20, Ramesses XI (c. 1081–1080 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** Liverpool, World Museum, M11162

The Scribe of the Army Hori son of Iuefenamon was brought (for interrogation) because of his father, because they said he had been in the tomb as well as the portable shrine, although he (personally) had not gone, being a child. The magistrates said, ‘Hand over his female slave Baki to The Tomb!’ He was left in the charge of (?) the Overseer of the Treasury.

### **2.7. The integration of slaves as individuals in private households**

Private stelae of the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period typically include the depictions of significant numbers of broader family, servants, and associates beyond the nuclear family of the owners of the stelae. The limited nature of the captions means that precise family relationships can rarely be traced,<sup>78</sup> but large numbers of female dependents appear. In a number of examples women labelled as female slaves are shown with, and as the mothers of, children. No husband is mentioned, and as is generally the case where women are depicted with-

78 Olabarria 2020.

out husbands, these sons and daughters are labelled as ‘her children’.<sup>79</sup> The paternity is then not clear: the context is insufficient to show whether such women had normal and recognised marital relationships. Personal concerns about the welfare or behaviour of such women appear in Middle Kingdom letters to the dead, written on pottery bowls used to make offerings and asking for help from a deceased relative. In one case (48) a woman writes, probably to her dead husband, asking for intercession to help a female servant who is ill. In another (49) two servant women are accused of malevolent behaviour – haunting or the evil eye (?) – thought to be preventing the writer’s wife from producing a child.

Formal polygamy was not a feature of Egyptian social structure. The economic core of Egyptian marriage was based on the rights of children of a first marriage to the entirety of the husband’s property.<sup>80</sup> These stelae may, then, provide examples of the social acceptance of children of the head of the household and a female slave or other subordinate woman incorporated in his household. In truth, sexual relations outside the primary marital relationship – including the extent of established concubinage – are not well documented, and their moral context and social consequences cannot be satisfactorily evaluated. An exceptional example is seen when an 18th Dynasty High Priest of Amun, Amenemhet, asserts in his autobiographical teaching for his children, that: ‘I did not know’<sup>81</sup> a female slave of my father’s house, I did not copulate with his female attendant (*wbayt*)’ (*Urk.* IV, 1409.11–12). The existence of children of such subordinate women, and the potential for their recognition as heirs in the absence of a son, may be indicated by the exceptional phrase in the autobiography of Indi, ruler of This, in the First Intermediate Period:<sup>82</sup> ‘pleasant to his family and his children, raised from the back of his father’s house by the strength of Onuris’. So in the Admonitions of Ipuwer, social disorder is marked by collapse in social distinctions (21), with the complaint that the son of the man’s wife is not distinguished from that of his female slave, and the distinction between the wife – the mistress of the house – and the female slave breaks down.

The complexities of family relationships are exemplified by the Middle Kingdom stela of Dedsobek (50). In the top register the owner is shown seated, with both his wife and his female slave Ided standing behind. Opposite them, making the offerings, is ‘his slave Dedsusobek, born to his female slave Ided’. Behind him there are two further female figures, labelled as his daughters, and a male figure labelled as his ‘son’, but Dedsusobek is acting in the role of primary heir, and the

79 Stefanović 2011; Roth 1999.

80 Eyre 2007.

81 The sense here is a sexual relationship.

82 Stele MMA 25: 2:3; Dunham 1937: 92–94, pl. XXVIII, 2, section B, line 1.



likelihood is that the legitimate son has died, and it is the additional son with the female slave who has been recognised as heir, even though he is named as a 'slave' on the stele. The uneven use here of the epithet 'true of voice' is not a certain guide to who was alive and who dead at the date of manufacture of the stele.

The situation seems comparable to that recorded in the so-called Adoption Papyrus (51). At the beginning of the reign of Ramesses XI, a husband adopted his (childless) wife, to be his own child and heir. Eighteen years later the wife declared that they had together bought a female slave, who bore three children – a boy and two girls – whom the wife then brought up. In the absence of any other children, she now declares that she has made them (and any children they might have) 'independent-people (*nemehu*) of the land of Pharaoh'. She has also accepted her own younger brother as husband for the elder of these girls: he has entered the lady's house, and married the girl. She adopts them all as her children and joint heirs. All claims that relatives might make on them are barred, and the wife curses anybody who shall claim them as 'servant'. On the face of it, this passage justifies the translations of *bak* as 'slave' and *nemehu* as 'freeman', but the purpose of the papyrus is to define the succession of property and protect the position of the heirs in the family rather than to define an absolute legal status.

The picture of deliberate surrogacy apparent in the Adoption Papyrus (51) cannot be directly paralleled in pharaonic sources, but a text of the reign of Tuthmosis III records the case of a slave brought back from the wars and then effectively adopted as heir (52). The king's (hereditary) barber Sibastet accompanied him on an expedition, and brought back a slave, identified by the Egyptian name Iiwyamon. He can hardly have been a very small infant, since he is marriageable in year 27, and the first campaign of Tuthmosis III is dated only to his 22nd year. He had ensured the appointment of Iiwyamon as king's barber, in succession to both Sibastet himself, and to his father Nebseheh, and he was formally given access to the palace, although there is no specific statement that he is no longer to be considered 'slave'. Sibastet married Iiwyamon to his sister's daughter – whose name translates as 'the blind woman' – and shared his property between his own wife, his sister, and this niece. Evidently he had no children himself, so that the arrangement is a sort of adoption, providing an heir to his office (with its income), and ensuring care for the females of his household.

#### 48. Letter to the dead

Cairo Bowl, ed. Gardiner and Sethe 1928: 7–8, 22, pls. 6–6A

Written and found: Saqqara

Date: early 12th Dynasty (c. 1950 BCE)

**Material:** ceramic

**Location:** Cairo, Egyptian Museum, CG 25375

Dedi gives<sup>83</sup> to the priest Antef, born to Iunakhte.

As for this female servant Imiu, who is ill; you are not fighting on her behalf, night and day, with every male acting against her and every female acting against her. Why do you want your threshold to be desolated? Fight on her behalf today, as if it were something new! (Re-)establish her household, (and) water will be poured for you. If there is nothing from you, then your house will be hacked up. Do you not know that it is this female servant who maintains your house among (living) people?

Fight on her behalf. Be vigilant on her behalf. Save her from every male acting against her and every female acting against her. Then you will establish your house and your children.

It is good that you listen.

**Bibliography:** Donnat Beauquier 2014: 56–58; Hsieh 2022: 258–269.

#### 49. Letter to the dead

Chicago Jar, ed. Gardiner 1930

**Written and found:** probably Naga ed-Deir

**Date:** late First Intermediate Period (c. 2000 BCE)

**Material:** ceramic

**Location:** Chicago, Oriental Institute Museum, 13945

This is a reminder of that which I said to you concerning (myself). You know that Idu has said about his son, ‘As for what will be (or) has been there, I will not allow him to suffer (?) any form of suffering.’ Act, please, in the same way for me!

Look, also, this (?) pottery vessel (?) has been brought, on which your mother makes (reference to) her legal case. How sweet it will be if you support her!

Cause, also, that a healthy male be born to me! You are an effective ghost!

Look, also, those two, the *bak*-women who have caused my sister to suffer – Nefertjentet and Itjay – confound (?) them! Put an end for me, then, to all the suffering which is (directed) towards my wife! You know that she has need of (it). <Also, I request a second healthy male for your daughter.><sup>84</sup>

Put an end to it! Put an end to it! I swear by you, the (female) Great One will favour you; the face of the Great God will be happy with you. He will give you pure bread with his two hands!

83 Presumably referring to the offerings made on the bowl.

84 Added later as an additional line.

**Bibliography:** Donnat Beauquier 2014: 41–44; Hsieh 2022: 156–168.

## 50. Stele of Dedsobek

Gauthier-Laurent 1930

**Written and found:** probably Abydos

**Date:** 12th Dynasty (c. 1870 BCE)

**Material:** limestone

**Location:** Langres, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Stèle 110

The top register shows a seated man:

To the *ka* of this Osiris, Dedsobek, born to Hapy, true of voice.

Behind stands a woman:

His wife, whom he loves, Senwosret, born to Nofret, true of voice.

Behind is a much smaller woman, carrying a basket on her head:

His female slave Ided.

Facing them, across an offering table and making offerings is one standing male, performing the ritual:

His slave Dedsusobek, born to his female slave Ided.

Then two kneeling female figures:

His daughter, whom he loves, Hapywet, true of voice.

His daughter, Hathoriyet.

And a standing male figure:

His son, Aainheret, true of voice.

The second register shows a seated man:

Senwosret born to Iunu.

Standing behind is a woman:

His wife, whom he loves, Satinheret.

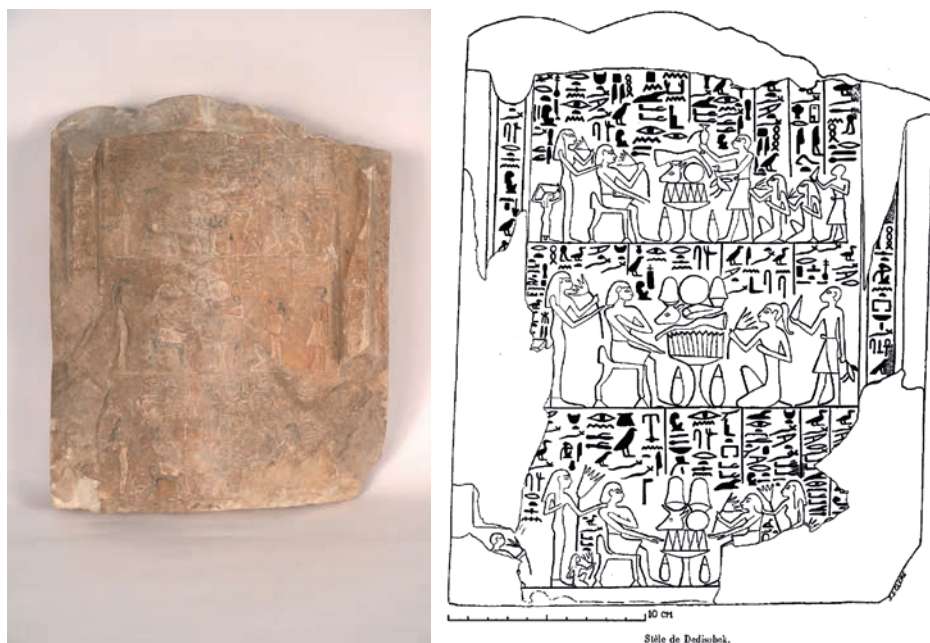
Behind her, although almost entirely lost, again a much smaller woman, carrying a basket on her head:

His slave, of Punt, Satmesyt.

Facing them, across an offering table, is a kneeling woman, shown as a child with the sidelock of youth:

His daughter, whom he loves, Iunesseneb.

And a standing male figure:



**Figure 2.7 50.** Stele of Dedsobek. Langres, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Stele 110. (a) Photo by C. Lenoir, courtesy of the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Langres. (b) Drawing from M. Gauthier-Laurent, 'Quelques objets égyptiens du Musée de Langres', *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 30 (1930), 111.

His son, whom he loves, Neferhotep, true of voice.

The third register shows another similar family group, although in this case no slave is shown. The individuals bear similar names – Senwosret and Dedsobek recur – and they are presumably members of an extended family.

### 51. Adoption of the children of a female slave as surrogate mother

Gardiner 1941a

**Written and found:** probably from Sepermeru (in Middle Egypt)

**Date:** year 18 (?) of Ramesses XI (c. 1082 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, P.Ashm.Mus. AN1945.96 (the Adoption Papyrus)

*Recto Page 1*

Year 1, month 3 of summer, day 20, under the Majesty of King of Upper and Lower Egypt Ramesses Khaiemwasset, Meryamon, Netjeryheqaiunu, given life for ever and ever.

On this day: proclamation of the accession of this noble god to Amun, when he was stood, crowned and offering to Amun.

Then Nebamon, my husband, made a writing for me – the Chantress of Seth Nanefer – and he made me a daughter for himself, and he wrote everything belonging to him for me, having no son or daughter apart from me myself, consisting of:

‘All profits which I have made with her, I entrust them to Nanefer, my wife, (even when) it is (one of) the brothers of mine who stands against her at my death, tomorrow or after tomorrow, and says, “Give (me) the share of my brother.”’

Before very many witnesses: Chief of the Stable Rara; Chief of the Stable Kairysu; Chief of the Stable Beniryerduanefer; before the Chief of the Stable Nebnefer son of Anerkaia; before the Sherden Pakamen; before the Sherden Sataмениu (and?) his wife Adjedaa. ‘Look, I have bequeathed to Rennefer,<sup>85</sup> my wife, on this day in the presence of Huirymu, my sister.’

*Recto Page 2*

Year 18, month 1 of inundation, day 10, under the Majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Lord of the Two Lands Menmaatse Setepenptah, Son of Re Ramesses Khaiemwaset, Meryamon, Netjeryheqaiunu, given life for ever and ever.

On this day: statement of the Chief of the Stable Nebnefer together with his wife, the Chantress of Seth (of) Sepermeru, Rennefer, to the effect that:

‘We bought a female slave Dinihutiry, and she bore these three children – one male and two female, total three – and I took them and I looked after them and brought them up, and I have reached today with them, with them not doing anything bad against me, but they acted well to me, and there being no (other) son or daughter (of ours) apart from them; and the Chief of the Stable Pendiu entered my house, and he made Taamonnit, their elder sister, as wife, he being mine – my younger brother – and I accepted him for her. He is with her today. Look, I have made them independent (*nemeh*) people of the Land of Pharaoh. If she shall give birth, a son or daughter, they are independent people of the Land of Pharaoh, just the same, being with the Chief of the Stable Pendiu, this younger brother of mine, the younger ones together with their elder sister in the house of Pe<n>diu, this Chief of the Stable, this younger brother of mine. I am making him (*verso*) into a son for me today just like them.’

She said: ‘As Amun endures, as the Ruler endures, I make these people whom I have publicised independent people of the Land of Pharaoh, so that if the son or daughter, brother or sister of their mother or their father should make claim against them, apart from Pendiu, the son of mine, to whom they are in no way

85 The name of the wife varies between Nanefer and Rennefer.

“servant”, but with whom they are brothers and children, being independent people of the Land <of Pharaoh>, a donkey shall copulate with him, and a donkey shall copulate with his wife, the one who shall say, ‘servant!’ to one of them. If I have fields in the countryside, if I have any property in the world, if I have tradeables (?), they are divided up for my four children, Padiu being one of them. As for all the things I have said, they are entrusted to Padiu, this child of mine who has acted well to me when I have been a widow, and my husband dead.’

Before very many witnesses: Chief of the Stable Sethemheb; Chantress of Seth Tayouhery; farmer Sudedamon; in front of Taymutnefer; Chantress of Nemty Tintnebethut.

**Bibliography:** Eyre 1992.

## 52. Adoption of a slave taken on campaign

Statue of Sibastet, de Linage 1939; *Urk.* IV, 1369

**Written:** unknown

**Found:** recorded as from Horbeit (north of Zagazig)

**Date:** year 27 of Tuthmosis III (c. 1453 BCE)

**Material:** black granite

**Location:** Paris, Louvre, E11673

Year 27 under the Majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Menkheperre, given life and stability, Son of Re Tuthmosis Heqamaat, like Re for ever. Petition by the barber of the King, Sibastet, in the presence of the Children of the Nursery of the King’s House, saying, ‘My slave assigned to me personally, called Iiwyamon, I brought him off by my (own) arm when I was following the Ruler, hear [... 3 lines lost ...] of Bastet, Lady of Bubastis, in the place of my father, the barber Nebseheh. He will not be beaten. [He] will not [be turned] back from any doorway of the king. I have given to him the daughter of my sister Nebetta, called Takmenet, as wife, and (I have) made division (of my property) for her together with [my] wife and my sister. [He] goes out (freely (?)), and he does not lack (anything). If he acts [well], and if he does (his) duty (?) towards my sister, he is not interfered with by anybody for ever.’

This writing has been made by [...].su, in the presence of the guardian Amemheb, the king’s scribe Ahmose, the king’s scribe and agent Baki, the king’s scribe Amonmose, and the overseer of the court (Amonpa[..]).

## 2.8. The joint ownership of slaves

Property rights of any sort in Egypt – but notably to land and houses – are characterised by rights to ‘shares’ following inheritance, as part of the social continuity of a more-or-less extended family over time. The same sort of sharing seems to characterise rights over (the work of) people: essentially as rights to productivity. So, for instance, in the dispute over purchase of a slave girl in P.Cairo 65739 (41), the heirs of a deceased woman claim that she had (at least partly) funded the purchase, and demand compensation; the defendant’s case, made in great detail, is that the funds came from other people.

Three very battered pages of a leather manuscript of the late Middle Kingdom record a dispute about the services of a female slave called Senbet (53). She is said to belong to the *djet* of the people of Elephantine, and so to have multiple ‘lords’ or owners. At the same time she is said to be in a marital relationship as wife (*hebeset*)<sup>86</sup> of a ‘king’s-slave’. The substance of the dispute is not made clear, beyond assertions about the propriety of her assignment to the town. Nothing is said about the nature of her service, and how it might be managed; this was no doubt self-evident to the protagonists. Her marital relationship, and the multiplicity of claims on her, at least imply limitations on the ownership of her physical person.

From Ramesside Deir el-Medina a number of references appear in grain-ration texts to issues made to ‘the female slaves’ as a group (54, 55).<sup>87</sup> In some cases they are listed separately, with the separate calculations of grain for the two administrative halves – ‘sides’ – into which the workforce was divided, and so probably individuals were attached, for their work, to one or other of these sides. The number of such women fluctuated, but never seems to exceed six.<sup>88</sup> Although payments were typically partial and irregular, a monthly issue of 2 *oipe* (c. 38 litres) seems to be the expected payment for each female slave.<sup>89</sup> That figure seems to represent a woman’s subsistence grain wage, in contrast to the generous monthly grain payments for the specialist tomb workers,<sup>90</sup> but it should be remembered that the payment in grain does not represent the whole consumption of the individual, only the bread and beer at the core of their diet.

The individual communal rights to service from such women may have been quite complicated (cf. also 47). The implication is that such service was part of

86 The term is best understood to refer to a second wife at remarriage.

87 See also Hofmann 2006.

88 Janssen 1997: 23.

89 Janssen 1997: 23–26.

90 Janssen 1975: 460–471.

the overall (if fluctuating) stipend of members of the crew, but the role of these women is never made explicit: the assumption that they provided domestic labour services cannot be documented.<sup>91</sup> Nor do they appear in the Ramesside lists of inhabitants of the village houses. They may have lived (like other service staff) outside the village proper.

A number of texts are concerned with shares in the 'days of servants', or in one case 'day(s) from the female slave so-and so'.<sup>92</sup> A case from 19th Dynasty Deir el-Medina is concerned with people inherited in the family of the twice-married sculptor Qen (56). The family relationships are complex, and uncertain in detail, but the theme is clear: that shares of the work of a single coherent group of (with the one exception) male slaves were inherited, and that the matriarchs of the families had a direct interest and share. Another text from Deir el-Medina records payment made to a lady, in return for transfer of her 'days of servants' (57): ten days each month – that is, the equivalent of one ten-day week in the Egyptian thirty-day month – for a total of 480 days: a contract for four years, adding up to the equivalent of one year and four months of work. Although the figures for the payment are incomplete, the total cannot have been much above the  $26 \frac{3}{4}$  *seniu* (of silver) that survives: about  $\frac{3}{4}$  *seniu* for each regular day. At standard 19th Dynasty conversion rates<sup>93</sup> of 1 *seniu* of silver to 5 *deben* of copper, this gives a total cost of  $133 \frac{3}{4}$  *deben* of copper, or a notional equivalent to 67 *khar* of grain: roughly 0.14 *khar* a day or 4.5 *khar* a month calculated as a daily rate. For comparison, the basic subsistence wage was 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  *khar* a month, and the very well-paid workmen at Deir el-Medina received 5  $\frac{1}{2}$  *khar* grain a month. The calculations are only approximate, but the value of these days seems surprisingly high as a day rate for simple labour.

A group of late 18th Dynasty documents provides similar references to payments made by a herdsman Messuia in return for the transfer of days of slave women, apparently over a period of thirteen or fourteen years (58). These documents provide that if the days are 'hot', or if a claim is made on the woman, they will be replaced, either by days of a different slave or by return of their equivalent value in money. It is the days, and not the women, who are referred to as 'hot', but it is the women who are replaced: probably a general guarantee against non-fulfilment, and not to recurrent bad weather or illness. The individual valuations here vary from transaction to transaction, but they indicate a standard valuation of 2 *shat* per day – an earlier variant spelling for the *seniu*-measure used at Deir

91 Černý 1973: 175–181.

92 Neveu and Navailles 1989.

93 Janssen 1975: 106–107.



el-Medina.<sup>94</sup> These valuations again seem impossibly high for single days of work, and likewise probably represent the purchase of a share in the slave, calculated by days per month. It is perhaps worth noting that in P.Cairo 65739 (41) the slave girl was purchased for 4 *deben* 1 *qite*, equivalent to just over 49 *shat*, which would represent approximately a daily rate of 1 2/3 *shat* if divided *pro rata* as days per month.

Elsewhere a Ramesside papyrus (59) – perhaps a model letter – refers to shares in servants, individually referred to as female slaves, in an arrangement between a Chief of Weavers in the Delta capital and two women, and their heirs in the Fayyum town of Gurob, a known centre of weaving. The employment of female slaves in weaving enterprises may indeed have been normal (see 4.3). A Middle Kingdom letter addressed by a married lady – a ‘mistress of the house’ – to her (unnamed) ‘lord’, appears to show her taking responsibility for temple weaving: female slaves, with Egyptian names, are not carrying out the weaving tasks expected of them because the ‘lord’ has not arranged necessary supplies (60).

Running through all these texts is the theme of interest in the work quotas of these people, rather than commoditised physical ownership.

### 53. Extracts from a letter about the joint ownership of the female slave Senbet

P.Berlin 10470 col.i.8–end, ed. Smither 1948

**Written and found:** Elephantine

**Date:** late Middle Kingdom/Second Intermediate Period (c. 1750 BCE)

**Material:** leather roll

**Location:** Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, P. 10470

Decree for the Herald of Elephantine Hekaib, to the effect: a decree of the Bureau of the Vizier was issued in year 1, month 1 of summer, day 27, (in the) time of Khubak (i.e. the ruling king).

The decree is about the petition by the Chief-of-*tem* Itefonb, son of Hekaib, to the effect, ‘Senbet, daughter of Senmut is a female slave of the *djet* of the people of Elephantine. She is, however, the female slave and second wife of a king’s-slave (?). Make me live, my lord, and have her given to me (and) to the town, as satisfies her owners,’ so he said. ‘It is resolved, to the effect that it shall be done as satisfies her owners,’ so it says, the things decreed.

**Bibliography:** Helck 1983: 50–54; Helck 1988; Vittmann, in Porten et al. 2011: 36–41, A2.

94 Janssen 1975: 102–105.

**54. Account of payment of grain rations<sup>95</sup>**

O.Cairo 25608 recto, ed. Černý 1935: 37 and 59\*

**Written and found:** Deir el-Medina

**Date:** mid-20th Dynasty (c. 1150 BCE)

**Material:** limestone ostrakon

**Location:** Cairo, Egyptian Museum, CG 25608

Month 1 of summer, on behalf of the right side.

The issue of grain payments for month 2 of summer.

The foreman, 2 *khar* (of barley) and 5 1/2 (of emmer)

The scribe, 2 *khar* (of barley) and 5 1/2 (of emmer)

Men, 17; each 1 1/2 *khar* (of barley) and 4 (of emmer):

comes to 25 1/2 *khar* (of barley) and 68 (of emmer)

Apprentices, 2; each 1/2 *khar* (of barley) and 1 1/2 (of emmer):

comes to 1 *khar* (of barley) and 3 (of emmer)

The guardian, 1 1/4 *khar* (of barley) and 3 1/4 (of emmer)

The female slaves, 1 1/2 *khar* (of barley) and 1 1/2 (of emmer)

The gatekeeper, 1/2 *khar* (of barley) and 1 (of emmer)

The physician, 1/2 *khar* (of barley) and 1 (of emmer)

Total: 32 1/2 *khar* (of barley) and 84 3/4 (of emmer)

**55. Account of payment of grain rations**

KRI IX, 115

**Written and found:** Deir el-Medina

**Date:** year 3 of Ramesses III (c. 1182 BCE)

**Material:** limestone ostrakon

**Location:** Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, P. 14302 recto

Year 3, month 2 of inundation, day 1[4?]. Supplementary grain rations for month 2 of inundation.

Leaders, 3; each 5 *khar*, makes 15 *khar*; scribe, *khar* 3 (?).

Men, 44; each 1 *khar* 1 *oipe*, makes 55.

Men, 16; each 1 *khar* 2 *oipe*, makes 24 *khar*. Tener[montu? XX]

The female slaves, 5 *khar*. Amonmose, 2 *oipe*. Ka[? XX]

<sup>95</sup> Similarly O.DM 376 (Černý 1951: 10, pl. 9; KRI IV, 423–424) and O.DM 737 (Grandet 2000a: 124–125, pls. XXIV and XXVIII–XXIX; Grandet 2000b: 5–6, 32–33, 138–139).

Total of all use (?) for month 2 of inundation: supplementary grain rations, 102 *khar*, 2 *oipe*.<sup>96</sup>

Total, *khar* 199; its deficit, 2 *khar*, 3 *oipe*.

[.....], 1 [*khar*], 2 *oipe*.

### 56. Transfer of slaves by will

O.Ashmolean Museum 0090 (formerly O.Gardiner 90), ed. Černý and Gardiner 1957, no. 51(2); *KRI* III, 683<sup>97</sup>

**Written and found:** Deir el-Medina

**Date:** 19th Dynasty (Ramesses II or later?) (c. 1250–1200 BCE)

**Material:** limestone

**Location:** Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, O.Ashmolean Museum 0090

The sculptor Qen said to his son Penduau: In life, prosperity, health! As for all days of the servants of the Lady Maatnefret, my mother, who are in town (i.e. Thebes) (and) are double (?), they are for Penduau my son. I cause you to know

their names:	slave Parehny
slave Anhetep	slave Nakhy
slave Nefersekheru	female slave Nedjemethemes (and)
slave Hesiherim[ntet]	[her] four (?) children
slave Iry[...]	

*verso*

[the]ir son (or) daughter [...].

Scul<ptor> Penduau, my son, who is good to me.

[To] cause you to know (about) the servants who are double (?).

Look, the regulation for [...]

There are to be two shares for me, one being these [...]

To cause you to know my one share [...]

(and) one on behalf of Qen.

**Bibliography:** Navailles and Neveu 1989: 122.

### 57. Purchase of days of slave work

O.Ashmolean Museum 0123 (formerly O.Gardiner 123), ed. Černý and Gardiner 1957, no. 54(1); *KRI* IV, 219–220

<sup>96</sup> This apparently leaves 3 *khar* for the missing entries for Tener[montu] and Ka[...].

<sup>97</sup> O.Colin Campbell 17 = O.Glasgow D.1925.83 (McDowell 1993: 22–25 and pl. 25; *KRI* VII, 192–193) and O.DM 10097 (Grandet 2006: 99–100, 293) deal with the same affair.

**Written and found:** Deir el-Medina

**Date:** year 3 (of Amenmesses) (c. 2101 BCE)

**Material:** limestone

**Location:** Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, O.Ashmolean Museum 0123

Year 3, month 3 of summer, day 21 (?): day on which the lady [...] gave her days of servants to the crewman Any: ten days of a month, which comes to 120 to a year [...] which comes to 480 days.

To publicise the silver which the crewman Any gave to her:<sup>98</sup>

Smooth cloth, 1 wrap [comes to silver,] *seniu* 1 1/4 (?) (and) 1 (bed)sheet (?), comes to *seniu* 2 1/2

Fine Upper Egyptian cloth, 1 cloak (?), comes to silver, *seniu* 6

Smooth cloth, 1 (bed)sheet (?), comes to silver, *seniu* 2 1/2

Smooth cloth, 1 tunic, comes to silver, *seniu* 1

Sesame oil, 6 *hin*, comes to silver, *seniu* 2

Basketry, 2 *mendjem*-baskets, 2 basket lids (?), 1 *sheker*-container, comes to (*seniu*) 1/2

Basketry, 1 *k<b>s*-basket (and) 1 stool, comes to *seniu* 1/2

Wood, a *sheker*-container, comes to *seniu* 1/2

Basketry, a *denit*-basket, comes to *seniu* 1/2

Reeds [...], comes to *seniu* 8(?)1/2

Total, comes to [...]  
*seniu* 1 (and) 1 mat

(Unknown if there is further loss)

**Bibliography:** Navailles and Neveu 1989: 120.

## 58. Purchase of days of work of female slaves

Gardiner 1906

**Written and found:** Kahun<sup>99</sup>

**Date:** year 27 of Amenhotep III to year 3 of Akhenaten (c. 1364–1350 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, P. 9784

Year 27, month 3 of summer, day 20, under the Majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Nebmaatre, Son of Re Amenhotep, divine ruler of Thebes, living for ever and ever, like his father Re every day. Day of petition by Nebmehy,

<sup>98</sup> For the different objects, and the recorded range of their values, see Janssen 1975; Janssen 2008.

<sup>99</sup> Also P.Berlin 9785; P.Gurob 2.1 = UC 38177; P.Gurob II, 2 = UC 38178 [a], from a single find in the Kahun town.

who is a herdsman of the House of Amenhotep, on the account of the herdsman Messuia, saying, 'I am naked. Have the price of two days from the female slave Kharayta given to me!' Then the herdsman Messuia gave him one kilt, value  $3 \frac{1}{2}$  *shat*, and a *sediu*-garment, value  $\frac{1}{2}$  *shat*; and he petitioned again, a second time, saying, 'Give me the price of four days from the female slave Henut!' Then the herdsman Messuia gave him grain [...] 6 *khar* (of barley) and 8 (of emmer), value 4 *shat*, and six flock animals, value 3 *shat*, and 1 *shat* of silver, total 12 *shat*.

Then the two (*sic*) days from the female slave Henut were hot, and he gave me two days <from the slave> Meryremetef (and) two days from the slave Nekhsety in the presence of many witnesses. List of their names: in the presence of the herdsman Aper, the herdsman Naen, Kafy, of [...]y, of [...]y, of Itefeat (?), of Puna, Mut, Tuia, in the presence of the (female) Nubian Merqashati, [*half line lost*]seti.

Made by the scribe Tjutju on this day.

Year 3, Birthday of Isis, under the Majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Neferkheperurre-Waenre, Son of Re Amenhotep, divine ruler of Thebes, living for ever and ever, like his father Re every day. This day. Petition by <Itef(?)>at, son of the soldier Menkheper on the account of the herdsman Messuia, saying, 'Buy for yourself two days from the female slave Henut. Have so[me things] given <to> our lords afterwards over the request.'

Then the herdsman Messuia gave him the price for it: bronze, a *gay*-vessel, value  $1 \frac{1}{2}$  *shat*; cloth, ..... value 1 *shat* and a *shetyt*-cloth value  $\frac{1}{2}$  *shat*, total 4 *shat*. He said, 'I am complete and satisfied with the price (of) m[y] female [slave]. By Amun and by the ruler, if the two (*sic*) days which I am giving you from the female slave Henut are hot, (then) *shat* covers *shat*.' In the presence of many witnesses: in the presence of the soldier Nebmehy, of Aper, of Tjaysety, of May, of Satia (and) her daughter Sem..y, of Naen, of Tia, of Puna, in front of Py, of Itjuta, of the *wab*-priest Iruru..., of his wife Neferru, of his daughter Tuy, (and) of Ptahmy.

Made by the scribe Tjutju son of Inan(a) <on> this day.

*Verso:*

The witnesses to the sale made (for) the female slave (of) Nebmehy, (called) Iihersa: in the presence of May, in the presence of Ti[...]a.

## 59. Dispute over control of the work of female slaves

PBM EA 10568. col. i, ed. Allam 2001a: 89–96; KRI VII, 100–101

**Written and found:** Gurob (?)

**Date:** probably the reign of Ramesses II (c. 1250 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** London, British Museum, EA 10568

The Overseer of Town and Vizier Rahotep [in (?) Per]–Ramesses–Meryamon, the Great *ka* of Pre–Horakhty, and the [great] council of the court of Pharaoh, saying, ‘The council of hearers (of Gurob), to the effect that [this] writing [as] communication has been brought to you, saying: there has been report to us [about (?)/by (?)] the Chief of Weavers (?) Khaemtener, of the weavers of [Per(?)–]Ramesses–Meryamon, beloved (?) like Pre.’

The Chief of Weavers (?) Khaemtener, saying, ‘I am dividing some servants with the lady Hatshepsesy and the lady T<a>bakperep (?) as well as all their heirs. And if the servants take their ..., giving to me from them,’ [and] the lady Hatshepsesy said it as well, saying, ‘We (?) do not have more than the female slave Rennut(et). She is mine, and I [...] give her [to (?)] the Chief of Weavers (?) Khaemtener. (I) do not have her at present.’ And [...]

## 60. Letter about the work of female slaves in weaving

PKah III.3, ed. Griffith 1898: 75–76, pl. 32; Collier and Quirke 2002: 114–117

**Written and found:** Kahun

**Date:** late 12th Dynasty (c. 1785 BCE)

**Material:** papyrus

**Location:** London, University College, UC 32203

The Mistress of the House Irer sends (lit. ‘gives’). It is a communication to my lord, to the effect that all affairs of my lord are safe and sound in all their places. In the favour of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Khakheperre, true of voice, and all the gods, as this servant desires!

It is a communication to (my) lord, about this (?) neglect (?) of my lord. Are you (pl.) safe [and sound? But the .....] are left (?) destitute (?) over bringing <to> us responses (?), since our (?) messages have not been heard. It is good that (my) lord hears.

It is a communication to the/my lord about [th]ese female slaves who are here, without being able to weave [.....] you by [...] over warp threads (?). This servant (could) hardly (?) have come himself, because this servant has entered the temple on day 20 to do service (for) the month.

*verso*

[So (?)] the lord shall bring it with (?) him. It is a case (for) giving attention to Tak[et]et (and) to Emheb over (the) arrival (of) [Qem]aw. When my lord shall

spend the day here, (then) look, [there is not] any cloth on me (? = my responsibility) in relation to the temple. Warp threads (?) are set up, without (anybody) being able to weave (?).

It is a communication to (my) lord. It is good that (my) lord hears.

**Address:** My good lord.

## 2.9. Enslavement as punishment or for debt

Enslavement is not presented in a direct way as punishment for crime or to cover individual debt. However, the judicial oath in the late Ramesside Period includes the threat of being sent to the garrison of Kush: the threat is not simply that of condemnation to the mines, as known from the Roman period, although the New Kingdom military garrison was responsible for mining and quarrying, and the posting was clearly unwelcome (see 5.4). The Nauri Decree (6I) of Sethi I protects the personnel and revenues of his temple at Abydos against conscription – on ‘missions of Pharaoh’ – and against individual speculation that diminishes the revenue. The penalties are repetitive and formulaic, targeting the replacement of lost revenue, and threatened against all levels of temple or state functionary: floggings and mutilation as well as financial penalties. Offenders are condemned to be made field workers of the temple; their families, including their slaves, are to be put to similar low-class and dependent labour, including being put to the *djet* of the Steward of the estates.

### 6I. Excerpts from a royal protection decree, for the Temple of Sethi I at Abydos

Griffith 1927; *KRI* I, 45–58

**Written:** royal decree issued in Memphis

**Found:** Nauri

**Date:** year 4 of Sethi I (c. 1291 BCE)

**Material:** sandstone: stele cut into the natural rock

**Location:** *in situ*

*Lines 17–18*

The workshops there contain provisions, the divine offerings multiplied in millions, the slaves there (being) from the children of the Great Ones, brought from the country of Retenu.

*Lines 25–27*

A decree has been made so that its (the temple's) *meret*-people be commissioned throughout the districts of Upper and Lower Egypt, all its people being safeguarded and protected like geese on the riverbanks of their delight, their every commission being directed [to] his *ka* in the great nome which he loves; they shall not be interfered with by others; there shall not be interference with them from son [to son], fixed in their jobs to the end of time.

'I have purified my temple a million times. I have safeguarded those who are in it repeatedly. I have put the *meret*-people whom I have fostered into my temple, and I will not abandon them.'

*Lines 42–47*

Any King's-Son (of Kush), any military commander, any mayor, any agent, any person who shall take any people of the Temple of Menmaatre-Content-in-Abydos by abduction, from district to district, on *bart*(-service)<sup>100</sup> or on *beh*(-conscription) for harvesting; likewise the one who will take any woman (or) any person of the Temple of Menmaatre-Content-in-Abydos, and likewise their slaves, by abduction, to do any commission in the entire land, and likewise any charioteer, any stable master, any person of the King's House, sent on any commission of Pharaoh, who will take any people of the Temple of Menmaatre-Content-in-Abydos from district to district on *bart*(-service) or on *beh*(-conscription) for ploughing, or on *beh*(-conscription) for harvesting, and likewise to do any commission, the law will be done against him, by flogging him with 200 strokes and five open wounds, together with exacting from him the service (*bak*) of the people of the Temple of Menmaatre-Content-in-Abydos, consisting of every day which he will spend with him, it being given to the Temple of Menmaatre-Content-in-Abydos.

*Lines 50–52*

As for any magistrate, any Overseer of Fields of this House, any ... of ploughing, any agent who will interfere with the borders of the fields of the Temple of Menmaatre-Content-in-Abydos, to shift their borders, the law will be done against him, by cutting off his nose and ears, and being put as field labourer in the Temple of Menmaatre-Content-in-Abydos.

100 The terms under which local populations were recruited or conscripted for various types of service – and so the accurate meaning of the terms here – remain obscure; but here the accusation is that, in effect, of violent seizure, using the verb *kfa*, familiar from the taking of captives in warfare. *bart* is an exceptional term, of uncertain implication, and seems to be a Semitic loan-word; on *bh* conscription see Trapani 2004.



*Lines 55–74*

Likewise, His Majesty has decreed ..... not to allow (any) cattle, donkey, pig, goat, (or) any head of livestock among them to be taken, (either) by seizure (or from) straying; not to allow any Overseer of Cattle or any Overseer of Herdsmen or any herdsman of the Temple of Menmaatre-Content-in-Abydos to take any cattle, any donkey, any pig, any goat of the Temple of Menmaatre-Content-in-Abydos, to [sell] to another, or alternatively to have it directed to another god, and not be directed to Osiris, their lord, in his splendid temple, which His Majesty has made; not to allow that any herdsman of the Temple of Menmaatre-Content-in-Abydos be attacked on his cattle pastures by any official, any mayor, any overseer of cattle, any manager, any overseer of donkeys, or anybody in the entire land; not [to] allow their wives or their servants to be seized, or abducted on any task of Pharaoh.

As for anybody who will transgress this decree, and will take a herdsman of the Temple of Menmaatre-Content-in-Abydos by abduction, from district to district on any task, and the herdsman [shall] say, 'As for (the time) since so-and-so took me, there has been a loss in my herd, as one individual (beast) of the flock, or two or three or four', the law shall be done to him, by flogging him with 200 strokes, together with exacting from him the head of livestock of the Temple of Menmaatre-Content-in-Abydos (at) penalty, being 100 to one.

Likewise the one who is caught taking (any) head of livestock of the Temple of Menmaatre-Content-in-Abydos, the law shall be done to him, in cutting off his nose and his ears, and being put as field labourer in the Temple of Menmaatre-Content-in-Abydos, to ... (?) his plough, and putting his wife and his children into the *nedjet*-people of the Steward of this <House>.

**Bibliography:** Edgerton 1947; Gardiner 1952.

## 2.10. Overall evaluation

Sources which might appear to reflect a commercial and commoditised idea of slavery – the buying and selling of individuals – only appear in the later New Kingdom. This may in fact reflect a limited commoditisation of some sectors of the economy, but may equally reflect changes in the nature of the documents that were written and survive. However, at no date do the pharaonic sources provide evidence for a legal status of slave defined by a marked inferior legal personality or subject to ownership rights over their physical person, or by any particular social inferiority. The sources are more interested in protecting claims on the productivity of dependent individuals and communities.

There is similarly no evidence for a legal status of free peasant, whereby ecological and social practicalities meant that any form of personal security was tied

to a social context: the family, village, or the great estate of a magnate or institution. The theme of acquiring people as dependents is then central to the political and economic hierarchy: within Egypt, the migration of people under economic pressure to new lords, and then a form of royal slave raiding outside the borders. The context was one of general economic development, settling communities in new villages, with no suggestion of a commercial market, but reflecting a fluid boundary between the contemporary identification of people as 'slaves' or as 'Asiatic' or 'Nubian' foreigners. The incorporation of foreigners into military (and other royal) service was a norm in all periods, although they may essentially be captives by origin, like those assigned in other texts as 'slaves'. Even in the New Kingdom the majority of captives were settled in communities that expanded the estates of the great temples, for agricultural production and to create their own institutional building and craft workforces.

The enrichment of individuals by royal gift was likewise rooted in the expansion of their estates by the assignment of personnel, often specifically those captured abroad. The concern of all estate holders – individuals, temples, the crown – was then to prevent the loss of personnel by flight – including flight to the protection and service of other lords. While conscription by functionaries was evidently the mechanism used for royal and official projects, records of such work emphasise good conditions for the workmen, and there is no indication that royal building works specifically involved slave labour: the pyramids were not built by slaves, but by well-paid workforces.<sup>101</sup>

The sorts of dependency seen in pharaonic Egypt then included agricultural workers – sometimes carrying an apparent title of 'slave' – but whose work was that of an ordinary farmer, expected to pay a share of his harvest. In contrast, household dependents referred to as 'slave' were largely female, providing domestic labour: characteristically, the hard labour of hand-grinding grain and profitable weaving. In general, people classed as 'slave' seem – after the trauma of capture – to have fit rapidly into the general patterns of social dependency: an essentially patron–client relationship within the hierarchical order modelled on that of an (infinitely) expanded household, and not a commoditised ownership. Sources that document a continuity over generations of specific 'slave' status, by birth, or the removal of such status, are lacking outside of specific domestic contexts in which a 'slave' is in practice adopted into the household as heir. Similarly, the sources do not indicate specific modes of enslavement of the indigenous population, through debt or criminal punishment, outside the general picture of dependent social relationships between the population as a whole and their 'lords' in the hierarchy.

<sup>101</sup> Lehner 2015.