

Asiatic Labour during the Middle Kingdom: Organizational Structures in Light of Hieratic Papyri

العمالة الآسيوية خلال عصر الدولة الوسطى: الهياكل التنظيمية في ضوء البرديات الهيروغليفية

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Abstract:

The depiction of foreigners in ancient Egyptian art and texts reveals how the Egyptians perceived and interacted with neighboring peoples, including Asiatic, Kushites, and Libyans. In the Egyptian worldview, Egypt represents *m3ʿt* (order), while foreigners are often associated with *isft* (chaos). However, the Egyptians did not always view foreigners negatively, as they played significant roles in various aspects of Egyptian society, sometimes leading to shifts in Egyptian self-identity. Despite this, foreigners rarely enjoyed equal status. This article examines the roles and professions of Asiatic, in particular, during the Middle Kingdom as reflected in hieratic papyri. These texts highlight the functional roles of Asiatic labor in Egypt, offering insights into how foreign workers were managed, integrated, and positioned within Egyptian society. Through these papyri, we gain a deeper understanding of the daily lives of foreign laborers and their contributions to the administrative and economic systems of Egypt.

الملخص:

يُظهر تمثيل الأجانب في الفن والنصوص المصرية القديمة تصور المصريين وتفاعلهم مع الشعوب المجاورة مثل الآسيويين والكوشيين والليبيين. ووفقاً للرؤية المصرية، كانت مصر تمثل ماعت (النظام)، بينما غالباً ما يرتبط الأجانب بالإسفت (الفوضى). ومع ذلك، لم ينظر المصريون دائماً إلى الأجانب بشكل سلبي، حيث لعبوا أدواراً متعددة في جوانب مختلفة من المجتمع المصري، وأسهم ذلك أحياناً في تحولات في الهوية المصرية. تتناول هذه الدراسة أدوار ومهن الآسيويين خلال عصر الدولة الوسطى، كما وردت في البرديات الهيروغليفية، حيث تسلط هذه النصوص الضوء على الأدوار الوظيفية للعمالة الآسيوية في مصر، وتقدم رؤية حول كيفية إدارة العمال الأجانب ودمجهم وتحديد مكانتهم داخل المجتمع المصري. فمن خلال هذه البرديات، تتضح صورة أعمق للحياة اليومية للعمال الأجانب ومساهماتهم في النظم الإدارية والاقتصادية في مصر.

Keywords:

Middle Kingdom, Hieratic, Asiatic, Labour organization

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الآسيويين، هيروغليفية، عصر الدولة الوسطى، تنظيم العمالة

1. Introduction :

In the Egyptian language, foreigners could have been variously termed. One of the most ancient and the commonest of the terms designating generally for foreigners in the Egyptian is (*h3st.i.w*)

'the Desert-people'¹ because Egypt was surrounded by mountainous and desert lands (*h3s.wt*). It is a term that seems to have been used throughout the entire Egyptian history. Another term is (*pd.t.i.w*) 'Bow-people' which is related to the traditional designation of Egypt's enemies as the Nine Bows (*pd.wt*)². Middle Egyptian used also two other terms for foreigners that became more common in Late Egyptian: (*drdr*)³ and (*hpp.w*)⁴. In addition to these general terms, the Egyptians gave specific terms to other peoples, who may have been usually designated by a specific name (such as 'Aamu for the Asiatics for those from the north (east)⁵, Nehesiu for the Nubians for those from the south and southeast⁶ and Tjehenu or Tjemehu for the Libyans for those from the west).⁷

Through the papyri, the common word used for Asiatic was *3m*, *3mt*, *3mw*.⁸ The *3m* term is a West Semitic loanword in Egyptian⁹, deriving from an Amorite dialect, rather than a native Egyptian word.¹⁰ Clarification of the term will bring into sharper focus the identification of West Semitic Asiatics in Egyptian papyri, as distinct from the identity of other groups from Mesopotamia, Syria and Canaan.

According to Luft,¹¹ the term likely derives from a Near Eastern word referring to Semitic peoples from Syria or Canaan. He suggests three potential candidates for the origin of the Egyptian term *3m*:

rm: This term is an unknown toponym found in Ugaritic texts, possibly indicating a geographic origin.

¹Wb. III, 235,14

²Wb. I, 570,1-4.

³Wb. V, 604,8-13.

⁴Wb. III, 259,13

⁵For more on individuals and groups that originate from Egypt's north (east), see Smith, W. S., *Interconnections in the ancient Near East: a study of the arts of Egypt, the Aegean, and Western Asia*. Pelican history of art. New Haven: Yale University Press, (1965); Bietak, M., "From Where Came the Hyksos and Where Did They Go?," in M. Marée (ed.), *The Second Intermediate Period (Thirteenth-Seventeenth Dynasties). Current Research, Future Prospects*, OLA 192. Leuven, Paris, and Walpole: Peeters, 139-81; Mourad, A. L., *Rise of the Hyksos. Egypt and the Levant from the Middle Kingdom to the Early Second Intermediate Period*. Archaeopress Egyptology 11. Oxford: Archaeopress, (2015); and Saretta, P., *Asiatics in Middle Kingdom Egypt: Perceptions and Reality*. London and New York: Bloomsbury, (2016).

⁶For more on individuals and groups that originate from Egypt's south, see Trigger, B. *Nubia Under the Pharaohs*. Ancient Peoples and Places, London: Westview, (1976); Smith, S. T., *Askut in Nubia. The Economics and Ideology of Egyptian Imperialism in the Second Millennium B. C*. Studies in Egyptology. London: Kegan Paul International., (1995); Smith, S. T., *Wretched Kush: ethnic identities and boundaries in Egypt's Nubian empire*. London: Routledge, (2003); Kendall, T., *Kerma and the Kingdom of Kush, 2500-1500 B.C.: The Archaeological Discovery of an Ancient Nubian Empire*. Washington, (1996) and Liskza, K., "We Have Come to Serve Pharaoh": *A Study of the Medjay and Pangrave as an Ethnic Group and as Mercenaries from c. 2300 bce until c.1050 bce*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, (2012).

⁷For more on individuals and groups that originate from Egypt's west, see Hölscher, U., *Libyer und Ägypter. Beiträge zur Ethnologie und Geschichte libyscher Völkerschaften nach den altägyptischen Quellen*. Ägyptologische Forschungen 4. Gluckstadt: Verlag J. J. Augustin, (1937), 12-14, 25; Spalinger, A., "Some Notes on the Libyans of the Old Kingdom and Later Historical Reflexes," *JSSEA* 9 (3), (1979), 125-60; Houssel, D., *The Occupation of Marmarica in the Late Bronze Age: An Archaeological and Ethnographical Study*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Liverpool, (2002), 45-54; Cooney, W. A., "Egypt's Encounter with the West: Race, Culture and Identity," in J. Corbelli, D. Boatright, and C. Malleson (eds.) *Current Research in Egyptology 2009: Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Symposium, University of Liverpool 2009*, Oxford: Oxbow Books, (2011), 43-52 ; and Moreno García, J. C., "Invaders or Just Herders? Libyans in Egypt in the Third and Second Millennia bce," *World Archaeology* 46 (4), (2014), 610-23.

⁸Woodcock, T., B., *Noticing Neighbors: Reconsidering Ancient Egyptian Perceptions of Ethnicity*, Master thesis, The American University in Cairo, (2014), 42.

⁹Alejandro, F. Botta mentioned also "The West Asiatic presence in Egypt is well documented by epigraphic and archaeological material as well as by the presence of West Semitic loan words. By the time of the New Kingdom (1539-1292 B.C.), foreigners and foreign communities were a prominent characteristic of Egyptian society". See Botta, A. F., "Outlook: Aramaeans Outside of Syria: Egypt," in Niehr, H. (ed.), *The Aramaeans in Ancient Syria*, Leiden, (2014), 366.

¹⁰Saretta, *Asiatics in Middle Kingdom Egypt: Perceptions and Reality*, 161.

¹¹Luft U., "Asiatics in Illahun: A preliminary report," in: Sesto Congresso Internazionale di Egittologia, atti 2, Turin, (1993), 291.

lm: This Semitic root appears in Ugaritic with the meaning "slave" and in Hebrew as "young man," suggesting a connection to servitude or youth.

rm: This term relates to the Aramean population, indicating interactions or connections between Egyptians and Arameans.

Müller explained ʕmw "Asiatic" in Egyptian papyri as a term deriving from Egyptian ʕmw, "boomerang" or "throwing stick".¹ Stephen Quirke states that there are two words, ʕm and kmw, both written with the throw-stick sign, but ʕm adds only the m-owl, whereas kmw sometimes has the hekat-bushel sign, and the alif-vulture and/or w-quail chick - the two words might have been written the same way in some examples.² Saretta suggests that this term was "used by West Semitic people in Egypt to address one another or, through personal names, to emphasize their lineage, blood ties, and the perceived inner homogeneity of a group viewed as biologically and/or socially related."³

In his study, Wolfram Grajetzki highlights a notable discrepancy between textual and archaeological data concerning Asiatics and Nubians during the late Middle Kingdom. Written records from this period often make frequent mention of Asiatics, but archaeological evidence presents little to no material proof of their distinct presence outside the Eastern Delta region. This contrast is particularly striking when compared to the Nubians, whose archaeological remains are abundant despite their limited mention in contemporary texts. Grajetzki argues that the term 'Asiatic' referred to a broader set of social categories, which went beyond simple ethnic identity—a framework that does not apply to Nubians in the same way.⁴

2. The Sources:

The study analyzes 46 papyri originating from a time span that extends from the early Twelfth Dynasty through to the later years of the Thirteenth Dynasty. (Table 1)

Source	Date	Source	Date
Berlin .10002	Amenemhat III	Berlin 10003	late 12th Dyn
Berlin 10004	late 12th Dyn	Berlin 10061	late 12th - 13th Dyn
Berlin 10010	late 12th Dyn	UC 32191	Amenemhat III
Berlin 10102	Amenemhat III	UC 32151 A-B	late 12th Dyn
UC 32151 A-B	late 12th Dyn	Berlin 10236 c	late 12th - 13th Dyn
UC 32167	Amenemhat III	Berlin 10021	late 12th Dyn
P. Brooklyn 35.1446	Sobekhotep III	UC 32101 E, H	late 12th - 13th Dyn
Berlin 10391	late 12th Dyn	Berlin 10071	Amenemhat III
UC 32127	Amenemhat IV	Berlin 10236 c	late 12th - 13th Dyn.
UC 32295	late 12th - 13th Dyn	Berlin 10244 a, c-e	late 12th Dyn
P. Boulaq 18	13th Dyn	Berlin 10076	late 12th - 13th Dyn.
UC 32294	late 12th - 13th Dyn	Berlin 10044	late 12th Dyn
UC 32098 D	late 12th - 13th Dyn	Berlin .10036	late 12th Dyn
UC 32147 A-C, E-G	Amenemhat IV	Berlin .10039	late 12th Dyn
UC 32168 + 32269	Amenemhat III	Berlin .10047	late 12th Dyn
UC 32143 B	late 12th Dyn	Berlin .10050	late 12th Dyn
UC 32124	late 12th Dyn	Berlin .10051	late 12th Dyn
UC 32201	late 12th - 13th Dyn	Berlin .10054	late 12th Dyn
UC 32058	Amenemhat IV	Berlin .10055	late 12th Dyn
UC 32286	late 12th Dyn	Berlin .10057	late 12th Dyn
Berlin 10080	Amenemhat III	Berlin .10066	late 12th Dyn

¹Müller, W. M., *Asien und Europa nach altägyptischen Denkmälern*. Leipzig: Hinrichs, (1909), 123.

²Quirke, S., *The administration of Egypt in the Late Middle Kingdom*, New Malden. SIA (1990), 186, n.68, quoting Posener who pointed out the difficulties with the reading ʕmw vs. kmw. See Posener, G., "Les Asiatiques en Egypte sous les XIIe et XIIIe Dynasties;" in *Syria* 34, (1957), 151-152.

³Saretta, *Asiatics in Middle Kingdom Egypt: Perceptions and Reality*, 11-17.

⁴Grajetzki, W., "People Called Asiatic or Nubian in Middle Kingdom Written Sources: A Comparison," in *ÄL XXXIV*, (2024), 223-232.

Berlin 10106	Amenemhat III	Berlin .10081	late 12th Dyn
Berlin 10244 a, c-e	late 12th Dyn	Berlin .10087	late 12th Dyn

Table 1: Inventory of the sources of study

3. Identification system of the Asiatic recorded in papyri:

The Middle Kingdom papyri present an insightful view into the role of foreign individuals in ancient Egypt, specifically during the late Middle Kingdom. It highlights the social dynamics surrounding foreign workers, their integration into Egyptian society, and the complex relationship between ethnicity and identity during this time.

Many foreign workers integrated into Egyptian society by adopting Egyptian names. This helped facilitate their acceptance and assimilation into the broader cultural and social systems of Egypt. The act of adopting Egyptian names was likely a way for foreign individuals to signal their loyalty and desire to belong to Egyptian society. It might also have reflected the prestige of having an Egyptian identity, which could have been seen as more dignified or authoritative¹.

While many foreign workers had Egyptian names, some names retained foreign elements or aspects, making them somewhat "hybrid" in nature. The use of both Semitic names and Egyptian-style names reflects the ongoing tension between foreignness and assimilation. While the Egyptians allowed for some degree of integration, ethnic identity remained a significant factor in the way individuals were perceived.

The presence of *ʿ3m* (a term meaning "foreign" or "ethnic origin") as a prefix to an Egyptian name suggests that while the individual had adopted an Egyptian identity, their foreign origins were still recognized. This would have marked them as outsiders to some extent, despite their adoption of Egyptian customs and language.

In general, the scribe structured the name of Asiatic by using the term "*ʿ3m*", followed by the person's name, when he listed multiple Asiatics consecutively, he would write the term "*ʿ3m*" before the first name and leave a blank space before each subsequent name- without repeating the title. (Fig.1) Luft suggests that, Asiatics who had another title were no longer obliged to use the term *ʿ3m* before their name.² While this may hold true in certain instances, it is not entirely accurate, as evidence indicates that many Asiatics bore different titles while still retaining the designation *ʿ3m*.



Fig. 1: P. UC32167© Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL

¹ David R. *The pyramid builders of Ancient Egypt. A modern investigation of Pharaoh's workforce*, London. Boston. Routledge & K.Pul, (1986), 190.

² Luft, Asiatics in Illahun: A preliminary report, 292

The Middle Kingdom papyri record the identification system of the Asiatic in five ways (Table.2)

types	Identification											examples
A	Title/n	ʿm/t		Father Name					NN	Nickname	Deter	Berlin 10002
	Title	ʿm/t		Father Name					NN		Deter.	Berlin 10004
	Title	ʿm/t							NN		Deter.	Berlin 10003
	Title	ʿm/t							NN			Berlin 10003
B		ʿm/t		Father Name					NN	Nickname	Deter.	Berlin 10002
		ʿm/t		Father name					NN		Deter.	Berlin 10046
		ʿm/t		Father name					NN			Berlin 10039
C		ʿm/t	NN							Nickname	Deter.	UC.32167
		ʿm/t	NN								Deter.	UC.32127
D		ʿm/t	NN		rn.f /s pw			Title			Deter.	Brooklyn 35.1446
E		ʿm/t	NN			ddw n.f/s	Nickname	Title			Deter.	Brooklyn 35.1446

Table.2: The different forms of the Identification system of the Asiatic names

A) Category A:

The key distinguishing element of this type is that it contains the surname at the beginning of the name registration. It can be divided into four types as follows:

The first type represents the complete form of how Asiatic names are recorded in the hieratic papyri, starting with the name, followed directly by the identification of ethnicity (ʿm), then the father's name, followed by the name. A blank space is then left, followed by the nickname, and then another space followed by the determinative. (Table 3 A). The second, third, and fourth types differ from the complete form by removing some elements, such as a nickname, as in the second model (Table 3 B), or removing the father's name and nickname, as in the third type (Table 3 C), or keeping only the title, ethnicity, and first name, as in the last type (Table 3 D).

Title	ʿm/t	Father name	Name	Nickname	Deter.
					

A: Sketch of category A.1 (ex. p. Berlin 10002)

Title	ʿm/t	Father name	Name	Deter.
				

B: Sketch of category A.2 (ex. p. Berlin 10004)

Title	ʿm/t	Name	Deter.
			

C: Sketch of category A.3 (ex. p. Berlin 10003)

Title	ʿm/t	Name
		

D: Sketch of category A.4 (ex. p. Berlin 10003)

Table 3 A, B, C, and D: Sketch of the different form of category A

B) Category B:

This form appeared similar to the previous one but without the title. When he listed multiple Asiatics consecutively, he would write the term "3m" before the first name and leave a blank space before each subsequent name (Table 4 A, B, and C)

3m/t	Father name	name	Nickname	Deter.

A: Sketch of category B.1 (ex. p. Berlin 10003)

3m/t	Father name	Name	Deter.

B: Sketch of category B.2 (ex. p. Berlin 1046)

3m/t	Father name	Name

C: Sketch of category B.2 (ex. p. Berlin 10036)

Table 4 A, B, and C: Sketch of the different forms of category B

C) Category C

This category is the simplest form of writing foreign names, as it only includes the ethnicity, the name, and the determinative.

3m/t	name	Deter.

Table 5 Sketch of the different forms of category C (ex. p. Berlin 10066)

D) Category D

The Brooklyn papyrus no. 35.1446 (Fig.2) contained two different models compared to what was commonly found in other papyri, where the position of the title was altered. It began with the identification of ethnicity, followed by the name, then the term *ddw n.f/s* was used, followed directly by the nickname, and it ended with the title and designation.

3m/t	Name	<i>rn.f/s pw</i>	title	Deter.

Table 6: Sketch of Type D of the Identification system of the Asiatic names in p.Brooklyn 35.1446

E) Category E

In cases where there was no nickname, it was replaced *ddw n.f/s*+ nickname with the form *rn.f/s pw*.

3m/t	name	<i>ddw n.f/s</i>	Nickname	title	Deter.

Table 7: Sketch of Type E of the Identification system of the Asiatic names in p.Brooklyn 35.1446

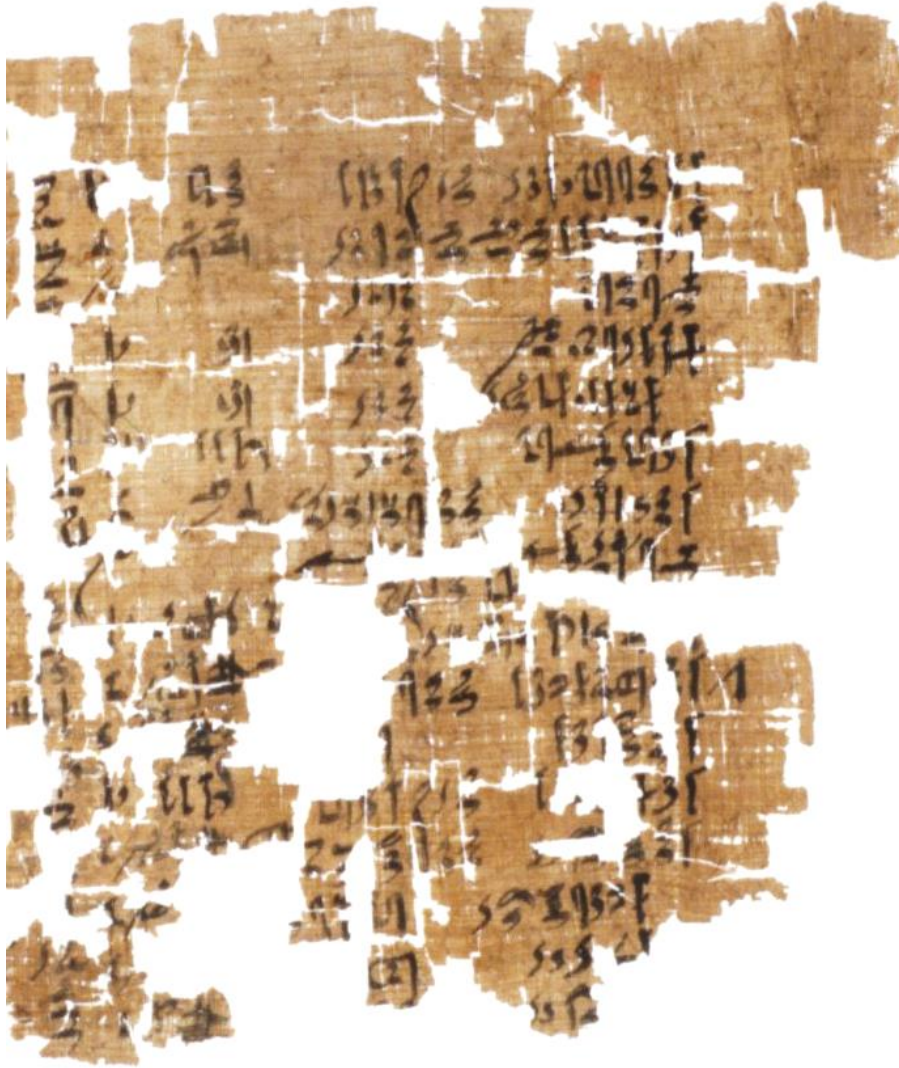


Fig.2- p.Brooklyn 35.1446

4.The bureau and departments of labour organization:

During the late Middle Kingdom, royal institutions implemented an administrative structure that included regulations for the division of official areas. This structure was evident in cities like el-Lahun, Abydos, and Thebes, where the urban space was divided into two sections: one for the general population and another for priests and temple personnel¹. The latter section functioned as a camp (*hnrt*).

At el-Lahun, *hnrt* appeared frequently in papyri, which were daily reports on workers and temple employees, indicating careful management of the camp's inhabitants². The term *hnrt* (*wr* (great camp) was often associated with the community of *sh̄m snwsrt m3̄ hrw* (Sekhem-Senwosret). While the exact translation of *hnrt* remains debated, it likely derives from the verb *hnr*, meaning 'to imprison', 'to restrain', or 'to confine'³. Faulkner linked it to *hnrj*

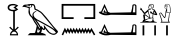
¹Quirke, *The administration of Egypt in the Late Middle Kingdom*, 178; Doyen, F., "La Résidence d'élite: un type de structure dans l'organisation spatiale urbaine du Moyen Empire", in M. Bietak et alii (eds.) *Cities and Urbanism in Ancient Egypt: papers from a workshop in November 2006 at the Austrian Academy of Sciences*, Wien. Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, (2010), 81; Bietak, M., "The present state of Egyptian archaeology", in *JEA* 65, (1979), 115.

²Luft, *Asiatics in Illahun*; Quirke S., *Lahun, a town in Egypt 1800 B.C., and the history of its landscape*, London. Golden House Publication, (2005).

³Wb III, 295-296.

('criminal, prisoner'), suggesting it referred to a prison-like institution,¹ while Gardiner also connected it to *hn(r)j*, meaning 'to restrain'.² The *Wörterbuch* defined *hnrt* as a 'prison', 'fortress', or 'barrier'.³ Scholars such as Hayes (according to P. Brooklyn 35.1446), connected the term to prisons and, in the case of *hnrt wrt* ('great prison'), potentially to forced labor camps.⁴ Roccati followed this interpretation, describing *hnrt wrt* of Thebes⁵ as a 'concentration camp' for state labor.⁶ However, Quirke, in his detailed analysis, proposed a milder interpretation, suggesting that terms like 'compound' or 'enclosure' would be more appropriate.⁷

Despite the ambiguities in Egyptian terminology from the Old and Middle Kingdoms, *hnrt* generally refers to *hsb.w* ('conscripted' or 'confined men/women'). The *hnrt wr* was the authority responsible for overseeing, managing, and executing state labor duties.⁸ This role was not assigned to the office during the First Intermediate Period, as sources confirm that it played a defensive military role instead.⁹

The other department involved in labor organization is  the *h3 n dd rmt*. This term has been rendered in different ways, including "bureau of workforce", the office of the provider of people,¹⁰ or "bureau of issuing people."¹¹ This office has been cited in connection with the transfer and organization of labor, including Asiatics—men, women, and children—in four papyri from the Middle Kingdom period.

In Insert C of P. Brooklyn 35.1446 (2.4.1 A), the *h3 n dd rmt* and an 'overseer of fields' is mentioned in relation to the replacement and transfer of people for labor purposes. This leads to a transfer of property, specifically individuals from the household of another official: 45 'Asiatics' (including eight children) and 33 lower-status Egyptians. Among the Egyptians, 15 men and 12 women are identified as *hm(w)-nsw ʿnd hmwt*, with their modest occupations.

The *h3 n dd rmt* is also referenced in UC 32167,¹² where a *sš hry htm n h3 n dd rmt* ('The scribe in charge of the seal of the bureau for issuing people') is involved in a transfer of four Asiatic women,¹³ the papyrus drawn up in the bureau of the vizier in the presence of the vizier himself "*t3ty hty*".¹⁴

Further mentions of the *h3 n dd rmt* appear in P. Berlin 10004 (2.3.1 D), which records the number of 'Asiatics' owned by minor officials. In this document, the office is noted as the provider of five workers (*mrt*), who are assigned to the *šn n htpw-ntr*, the 'provisioning area of the god's offerings' at the Amun temple in Karnak.

The papyri seem to indicate that the office, "*h3 n dd rmt*," was responsible for supplying people to meet labor needs and played a role in legal processes related to transferring household members as property for labor purposes. These records were documented in the vizier's office and in the presence of the vizier himself.

¹Faulkner, R. O., *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, (1962), 193.

²Gardiner, A. H., *Egyptian Grammar: Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, (1957), 519.

³Wb III, 296.

⁴Hayes, W., *A Papyrus of the Late Middle Kingdom in the Brooklyn Museum: Papyrus Brooklyn 35.1446*, Wilbour Monographs 5, New York: Brooklyn Museum. (1955), 16, 36-42, 49, 53-54 65-66.

⁵Lacau, P., 'Une stèle juridique de Karnak', *ASAE, Cahier 13, Supplément*, Cairo: IFAO. (1984), 24; and Ilin-Tomich, A., 'Theban Administration in the Late Middle Kingdom', *ZÄS 142*, (2015), 127-128.

⁶Roccati, A., 'Su un Passo di Hardjedef', *JEA 68* (1982), 16-19.

⁷Quirke, S., 'State and Labour in the Middle Kingdom', *RdE 39* (1988), 86.

⁸Di Teodoro, *Labour organisation in Middle Kingdom Egypt*, 89.

⁹Mazzone, D., "The Dark Side of a Model Community: The 'Ghetto' of el-Lahun", *JAFA 2*, (2017), 19-54.

¹ Hayes, *A Papyrus of the Late Middle Kingdom in the Brooklyn Museum*, 54-6

¹ Quirke, *Titles and bureaux of Egypt 1850-1700 B.C.*, 92

¹ Collier & Quirke, *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Legal*, 119.

¹ The papyrus UC32150, is the *swnt*-document was written by the scribe in charge of the seal of the bureau for issuing people *imn m h3t son imny*. Collier, M. & Quirke, S., *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Legal*, 119.




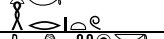
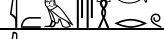
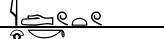
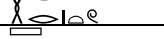
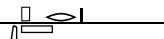





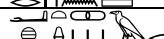
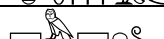
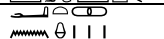


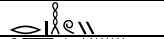

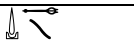


¹ Collier & Quirke, *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Legal*, 119.

5. Asiatics Professions according to the Middle Kingdom Papyri

Tombs, Domestic architecture, artefacts, and the human osteological material still taken as proof a constant flow of Asiatic migrants coming from the northern Levant, who then settled at different sites¹ as El-lahun, Elephantine², Abydos³, Lisht, and Tell el-Dab'a. At Tell el-Dab'a in the Delta where a vast Middle Bronze Canaanite site of the Late Middle Kingdom was discovered⁴.

Rosalie David suggested that some burials at el-Lahun was not an Egyptian custom, but was introduced by immigrant, Asiatic workers employed in Egyptian households⁵. In addition to the strange burial customs, Petrie discovered an interesting collection of weights and measures. he argued that they were of foreign origin because none of the measuring instruments were in the usual Egyptian cubit. In addition to the materials from which they were made, as they were made of soft materials, unlike the Egyptian weights which were made of hard materials⁶.

Through textual documents, we will examine the topic of the social stratification of Asiatic living in Egypt during the Middle Kingdom and collect data from papyri belonging to different places and regions, in order to open new lines of investigation and character assessment Asiatic presence in Egypt in the Middle Kingdom. In the Middle Kingdom papyri, there were more mentions about These Asiatics, they were often recruited for expeditions to gather minerals and stones, and many worked as weavers (especially women) or as singers and dancers (both genders) during religious festivals and other functions. (Table 8)

Profession	Title	Person name	Gender	Sources
Weavers	 <i>sht h3wty</i>		F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 10
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 11
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 13
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 14
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 15
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 16
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 21
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 23
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 25
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 32
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 33
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 55
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 61
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 17
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 26
	 <i>d3 h3wty</i>		F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 59
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 64
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 7
	 <i>sht 8sr</i>		F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 22
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 47

¹Bader, B., *Material Culture and Identities in Egyptology: Towards a Better Understanding of Cultural Encounters and their Influence on Material Culture*, AESL 3, the Austrian Academy of Sciences, 73-76.


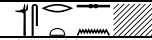
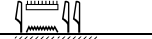

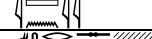




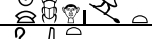
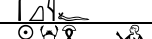



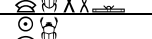
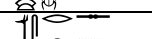
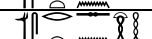








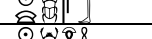
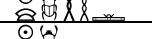
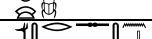

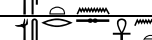

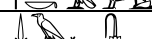

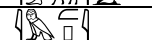


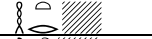




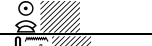


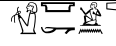


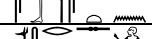
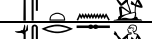
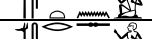






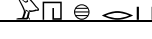
²Kaiser, W. et al., 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 19./20. Grabungsbericht,' *MDAIK* 49, (1993), 182.

³Richards, J. E., *Society and Death in Ancient Egypt: Mortuary Landscapes of the Middle Kingdom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2005), 66, 169-170; Wegner, J., 'The Town of Wah-sut at South Abydos: 1999 Excavations,' *MDAIK* 57, (2001), 303.

⁴Bietak, M., *Avaris, The Capital of the Hyksos: Recent Excavations at Tell el-Dab'a*, The British Museum Press, London, (1996); David, A., Bietak, M., *Tell el-Dab'a VIII. The Classification and Chronology of Tell el-Yahudiya Ware*, with contributions by H. Charraf, R. Mullins, L. E. Stager and R. Voss. ÖAW, Wien, (2012).

⁵David, *The Pyramid Builders of Ancient Egypt*, 189-90.

⁶Petrie, *Kahun, Gurob and Hawara*, 40-44; David, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Egypt*, 280; David, *The Pyramid Builders of Ancient Egypt*, 188. A useful summary is given by Cour-Marty, M.-A., "Les poids égyptiens, de précieux jalons archéologiques," in *CRIPPEL* 12, (1990), 17-55.

			M	10054
			M	10054
			M	10036
			M	10102
			M	10102
			F	UC 32143 E
Singers			M	10071
			M	10057
			M	10057
			M	10057
			M	10057
			M	10054
			M	10046
			M	10046
			M	10046
			M	10046
			M	10046
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			M	10046
			M	10036
			M	10036
			M	10036
			M	10044
			M	10002
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			M	10002
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			M	10002
			M	10002
			M	10002
			M	10002
Dancers			M	32191
			M	32191
			M	32191
Temple staff			M	10066
			M	10087
			M	10087
			M	10050
			M	10043
			M	10003
			M	10055
			M	10055
			M	10061
			M	UC 32191
			M	UC 32191

			M	UC 32191
			M	10010
			M	UC 32286b
			M	UC 32201
			M	1003
			M	10067
			M	10003
			M	10044
			M	10106, (.8)
			M	10244 a, c-e
			M	1003
Scribe			M	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 27
			M	10054
			M	10010
			M	10102
Messenger			M	10081
			M	10066
Military			M	UC.32151C
			M	10004
Servant-labourer			M	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 18
			M	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 19
			M	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 9
			M	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 6
			M	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 12
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 34
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 56
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 62
			F	p.Brooklyn 35.1446 line 69
			F	UC 32167
			F	UC 32167
			Child	UC 32167
			Child	UC 32167
			F	UC 32127b
			F	UC 32127b
			F	UC 32294
			F	UC 32098
			M	UC 32101C

Table 8: The Inventory of Asiatic Professions listed in the Middle Kingdom Papyri

1- Weavers

In ancient Egypt, textile work was primarily a female-dominated field¹, with women engaging in various roles such as weavers and laundresses. Artistic representations and historical records show women actively involved in tasks like flax harvesting², highlighting their crucial contributions to the

¹The Hermans mentioned “Lahun was home to an Asiatic weaver”, in Hermans, T., *Translating Others*, Volume 2, Routledge, London, (2012), 278; Wendrich, W. Z., "Textile", in Nicholson P.T. & Shaw, I. (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology*, Cambridge University Press, (2000), 268-299.

²Through tomb of Paheri at Elkab, dating to New Kingdom, it is notice that both men and women were involved in the process of flax harvesting. See Wendrich, "Textile", in Nicholson P.T. & Shaw, I. (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology*, 268-299.

textile industry. However, a gender division was evident in supervisory roles, which were predominantly held by men.

Interestingly, while women typically worked with horizontal looms, men were tasked with operating the heavier vertical looms,¹ indicating a specialization in the types of weaving that aligned with their physical capabilities. This division of labor reflects broader societal norms of the time, as noted by Barber in her studies. She pointed out that textile production was a suitable occupation for women, as it could be done alongside childcare. The Middle Kingdom lists further illustrate this dynamic, documenting women and sometimes their children engaged in textile work, emphasizing the integration of labor and familial responsibilities in ancient Egyptian society.²

The Brooklyn papyrus listed nineteen servants who were weavers, only one was Egyptian, the rest comprising only Asiatics.³

p.Brooklyn 35.1446



21-The female Asiatic, *šp-r*. she is called *snb-ḥnwt.s*. Weaver of *ḥ3ty*-cloth

22-The female Asiatic *sk-r-wpwtj*. she is called *Mryt-nbw*. Warper of *šst*- cloth

23-The femal Asiatic *Isr*. she is called *Wr-int.f*. Weaver of *ḥ3ty*-cloth

There is substantial evidence and archaeological remains of linen that highlights the role of Asiatics as weavers within el-Lahun society. Although the papyri do not explicitly indicate that Asiatics worked as weavers, the verso of the El-Lahun account fragment UC32147G records 24 Asiatic and Egyptian women.

UC32147G:



‘...Deliveries of temple of Sobek Lord of Djedu [...] of Sobek Lord of Geregbaḥ [...] of Sobek Lord of Resehwy [...]...Asiatic women 12(?)’⁴

¹Wendrich, "Textile", in Nicholson P.T. & Shaw, I. (eds), *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology*, 277.

²Barber, E. J. W., *Prehistoric Textiles: The Development of Cloth in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages, with Special Reference to the Aegean*, Princeton (1991) 289. The fragmentary account UC32094A is with eight lines lists the work of nine women turning given quantities of flax into fine yarn with their children, for more details see Nassar, M& Ewais, M., "El-Lahun Textile during the Late Middle Kingdom through the hieratic Papyri," *GM* 260 (2020), 109-125.

³Hayes, *A Papyrus of the Late Middle Kingdom in the Brooklyn Museum*, 105.

⁴Collier, M., & Quirke, S., *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Accounts*, BAR 1471, Oxford: Archaeopress, (2006),, 259.

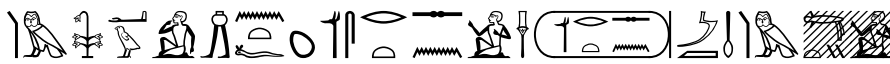
While the specific roles of these women are not detailed, the recto indicates that their activities are linked to the recording of supplies for the three Sobek cult temples, likely situated in the western sector of el-Lahun town in the far south¹.

The papyri often refer to a number of Asiatic women working in the temple, though they do not explicitly mention the nature of their work. However, by observing their numbers (12 Asiatic) and the occasional inclusion of their children in the lists, we can suggest that their work was likely related to food production for temple offerings and the meals prepared for various religious festivals. Alternatively, their role may have been as weavers, a job that would have allowed them to bring their children along to work.

2- Singers

In ancient Egypt, Asiatics were often involved in various roles within Egyptian society, including as singers and dancers during religious festivals. These roles were typically associated with entertainment, ritual performance, and religious expression, and they reflect the broader cultural integration and exchange between Egypt and neighboring regions, especially during periods of the late Middle Kingdom.

For instance, in Berlin .10047²



Asiatic, the singer, Initef's son Senwosret of *shm sn-wsrt m3'- hrw* and [Asiatic Shedty]

The Berlin .10002, dating to year 36 of Amenemhat III's reign, lists 50 singers (*šm'w*), a significant number of whom are Asiatic performers at the Residence. Among the Asiatic names mentioned in the papyrus are:



24-Name list of singers who perform at the Residence

25-Commander of Asiatic Senwosret's son, Khakheperra-seneb, whose second name is Ityi

29-Asiatic Iet's son, Khakheperra-wah, whose second name is aA

31-senet's son Senwosret, whose second name is Iwef

33-Ibehab's son Khakheperra-seneb with a second name of bbi.

This reflects the diverse presence of Asiatic individuals within the temple's musical and performing community. Foreigners, including Asiatics, who worked as entertainers in religious festivals were likely able to gain some degree of social recognition or upward mobility. While they may not have been part of the elite, these roles provided them with a relatively stable position within society. Their participation in religious events, particularly in highly visible roles like singing and dancing,

¹For more details, see Eweis, M., *A social history of writing through hieratic sources of the Middle Kingdom from El-lahun*, PhD thesis, Fayoum University, (2017), 624; Horváth, Z., 'Temple(s) and Town at El-Lahun. A Study of Ancient Toponyms in the El-Lahun Papyri', in D. Silverman, W. Simpson and J. Wegner (eds.), *Archaism and Innovation: Studies in the Culture of Middle Kingdom Egypt*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, (2010), 171-203.

²Luft, *Urkunden zur Chronologie der Späten 12. Dynastie, Briefe aus Illahun*, 91-96. See also P. Berlin. 10046, rt 3.34 mentions *šm'w*; *3m s-n-wsrt*, see rt 3.33, rt 3.34, rt 3.35, rt 3.36, rt 3.37, rt 3.38, rt 3.40.

could lead to increased recognition and potential patronage from the Egyptian elite, especially if their talents were appreciated or seen as valuable in the context of the rituals. This integration into temple life allowed for some degree of social visibility, and in some cases, these foreign performers could have enjoyed a measure of prestige or even material support from influential Egyptian patrons.

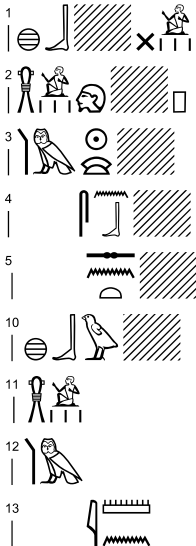
The Asiatic male singers are also attested in Berlin .10066¹



Brought by the singer,
 ʕm Senwosret-seneb

3- Dancers

In the Lahun Papyri, numerous 'Asiatics' of both genders appear next to Egyptians in name-lists of dancers and musicians. For instance UC 32191² records the Festival Sailing of Hathor and lists 5 of Asiatic *hb.w* ('dancers') in this fest as follows:



- 1- Dancers
- 2- first watch
- 3- Asiatic Khakheperra- [...]
- 4- Asiatic Seneb- [...'s son ...]-seneb
- 5- Asiatic Senet['s son Kha]-kheper-[ra]-seneb
- 10- Dancers
- 11- [second] watch
- 12- Asiatic [...'s son Kha]-kheper-[ra]-herheb
- 13- Asiatic Amen [...'s son] ...

¹Luft, *Das Archiv von Illahun: Briefe 1*, Berlin .10066.

²Collier & Quirke, *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Accounts*, 92–95.

4- Temple staff

The mention of an "Asiatic labours" in P. Berlin. 10050¹ illustrates the ethnic diversity and complex social fabric of ancient Egypt, particularly in the context of the temple economy. Foreigners, including Asiatics, were involved in temple service, and specific professional roles, such as the butcher, door-keeper could be filled by individuals from outside Egypt. This provides valuable evidence of the integration and employment of foreigners in ancient Egyptian society, highlighting both the multicultural nature of the temple workforce and the practical aspects of temple ritual, which often required specialized skills.

The papyrus Berlin .10050 lists a group of phyles that were connected to the temple. Among the various groups listed, there is one identified as an Asiatic butcher, marking an intriguing detail regarding the diversity and structure of temple workers.



(1) List of phyles of the priesthood of this temple who are in attendance in the month...(10) Butcher, Asiatic Meri

the butcher was likely responsible for preparing meat for religious ceremonies and offerings at the temple. Animal sacrifice was a significant part of temple rituals in ancient Egypt, where offerings to the gods were an important part of the daily functioning of the temple. The butcher would have played a key role in ensuring that animals were slaughtered and prepared according to ritual and dietary laws.

The fact that one of the groups listed is an "Asiatic butcher" highlights the presence of non-Egyptians working in Egyptian temples, particularly those of Asiatic origin.

In the daybook of the temple from year 36 of Amenemhat III (P.Berlin. 10002B), the scribe recorded a letter sent to the overseer of seals, Senwosert's son, Senebtefy, in *hṯp sn-wsrt m³ḥrw*. The text mentions that the door-keeper, the Asiatic Senwosert-ankh, had brought to *hṯp sn-wsrt*. The phrase continues:



sn-wsrt son *snb.ti.fi* that brought the Door -Keeper of the temple, the Asiatic *sn-wsrt ḥnh*³

There is another mention of an "Asiatic door-keeper " in P. Berlin. 10050.



(1) List of phyles of the priesthood of this temple who are in attendance in the month.....

(9) Door-keeper of a temple, Asiatic Senwosret.

The association between profession and social class in ancient Egypt was not rigid but instead characterized by flexibility. While professions like brewer or butcher were often linked to individuals of lower social standing, their position could change if they were associated with more

¹Borchardt, L., "Der zweite Papyrusfund von Kahun und die zeitliche Festlegung des mittleren Reiches der ägyptischen Geschichte." ZÄS 37, (1899), 97-98; Luft, "Asiatics in Illahun: A preliminary report," 296.

²Borchardt, "Der zweite Papyrusfund von Kahun und die zeitliche Festlegung des mittleren Reiches der ägyptischen Geschichte." 97-98; Luft, "Asiatics in Illahun: A preliminary report," 296.

³Berlin .10002B is a Day-book of year 36 of Ammenemes III, still unpublished; see Kaplony-Heckel, *Handschriften*, n 2.

powerful figures. This flexibility allowed for a certain degree of social fluidity, where even individuals in modest professions could rise in status through familial or institutional connections¹. The occupational designations like baker, brewer, cook, and fisher should not be considered formal titles within the context of ancient administrative structures. These terms are seen as descriptive labels for the work individuals perform, rather than titles that indicate a formal, appointed position within a government or organizational hierarchy². The profession was practiced by both Egyptians and Asiatic.

5- Messenger

During the Middle Kingdom there was no specific job as there is today called a postman, but anyone who held any other job could be a messenger or deliverer of messages. For example, if we look at the huge number of letters that were discovered in el-lahun, we will find that the profession of each of these messengers differs³. However, the main link between them is their good knowledge of the places and the people of the city in order to deliver the letters to the specific person. It is noteworthy that among these messengers there was one Asiatic who bore the title of follower⁴. The work of Asiatics in transmission letters expressed that they were highly knowledgeable in all places and all the residents of the settlement of el-lahun.

6- Construction tasks

The *hsbw* and *mnyw* were unskilled laborers who were more often employed in construction projects than in agriculture⁵. Furthermore, the term 'stone haulers' could apply not only to construction and quarrying but also to various menial tasks involving the transportation of materials like straw and clay⁶. The translation of *mnyw* as "corvee" makes us suggest that only unskilled workers can be said to be represented, but Balanda states that: "this word did not reflect a collection of individual workers of a certain kind, but was a collective noun describing a united group"⁷. In most of Middle Kingdom papyri, both *hsbw* and *mnyw* were commonly identified by their name only.

For instance, UC32174, is a name-list of work crews for stone-hauling for *htp-snwsrt*, mentions *hsbw ithw inrw* one of them is 'Asiatic' origin. Additionally, the letter UC32201, is an administrative document regarding shipping and conscripts from *iry-sw* to *imy-r hnw s3 k3 inw*. The initial section of this lengthy papyrus lists "three enlistees" (*hsb 3*), one of them is Asiatic⁸.

7- State Administrative Positions

The El-Lahun papyrus from the Middle Kingdom (UC32143E) seems to reference a title or position connected to the vizierate. The text mentions one unclear or ambiguous title that may be associated with this high-ranking office, but its exact nature and meaning are still uncertain. The title appears in a fragmented form, possibly referring to a member of the vizierate, but the specific role or position cannot be definitively identified due to the incomplete state of the papyrus. As such, it is

¹Di Teodoro, *Labour organisation in Middle Kingdom Egypt*, 40, 83.

²Quirke S., *Titles and bureaux of Egypt 1850-1700 B.C.*, London. Golden House Publication, (2004), 3.

³Eweis, A social history of writing through hieratic sources of the Middle Kingdom from El-lahun, 153-155.

⁴Pap. Berlin .10033:Luft, U., *Das Archiv von Illahun: Briefe. Hieratische Papyri aus den Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz 1. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag*, (1999),105-107.

⁵Teodoro M. D., "The organization of seasonal labour during the Middle Kingdom," in *CRE 14* (2013), 77. *mnyw* may also share in levigating and loosening clay to make mud bricks for activities on the river banks as mentioned in UC32190. See Collier& Quirke, *The UCL Lahun Papyri:Accounts*, 13.

⁶UC32272, Collier& Quirke, *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Accounts*, 271-272; UC32201, Collier& Quirke, *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Letters*, 100-104, and UC32174 referring to *hsbw* and *mnyw* as hauling stones, Collier& Quirke, *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Accounts*, 41. And Berlin .10080 appeared *hsbw ithw inrw* might have been recruited for quarrying tasks, Kaplony- Heckel, *Ägyptische Handschriften*, 36.

⁷Balanda, S. Z., *Society and Government in Ancient Egypt to the End of the New Kingdom*, 2nd ed, Stanbal Publications, 473.

⁸Collier& Quirke, *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Letters*, 105-109.

8- Scribe

9- The police and military units.

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the presence of Asiatics in the Wadi el-Hôl and appear to have been created around the same period. These inscriptions contribute valuable evidence regarding the interactions between Egyptians and foreign groups, emphasizing the significance of such foreign populations in this region during the late Middle Kingdom period.

There are inscriptions belonging to Bbi, who held the title of "*imy-r mšc n 3mw*"—translated as "general of the Asiatics" or "overseer of the troop of persons of Western Asian origin."¹

10- Replacements (Substitutes)

The El-Lahun papyri mention various types of labourers associated with *shm sn-wsrt m3c hrw*, most of whom were female and labeled as *iw3w*, *iw3yt* or "female substitutes"² Regarding their functional nature, the papyri do not indicate any direct connection between *iw3w* and quarry or construction sites. Micol Di Teodoro describes them as substitutes—individuals who could be requested and provisionally assigned when regular workers were unavailable or unable to complete their tasks.³ Additionally, Quirke characterizes them as individuals taken by the state to replace those listed for work.⁴ In line with Quirke, it is likely that wealthier officials registered for *h3w* avoided manual labor by sending their dependents to do it instead.⁵ This practice may echo the Old Kingdom "replacement mechanism" in a religious context, as documented in the Abusir archive.⁶

Most of these substitutes were Egyptian and foreign women, with *iw3yt* not identified by their primary profession; they were likely involved in various stages of food and textile production and recruited for temporary labor.⁷ The female 'substitutes' known as *iw3yt* are primarily linked to textile work, particularly in temple settings. A key difference in the evidence from el-Lahun texts is that textile production was a compulsory duty for *iw3yt*, whereas at Tell el-Dab'a, it was viewed as a domestic craft.

Additionally, P. Berlin 10021 features a communication divided into two patterns. The first side introduces a mustering of people for *h3w*,⁸ preceded by a heading that indicates these people are *int* "brought" to an unspecified destination. The authority behind this action is not identified.



(2) the herdsman Bebi from the fields of the Lake (3) the 'Asiatic' Iaru who is in "Camp"?⁹.

¹Darnell, J.C., Dobbs-Allsopp, F.W., Lundberg, M.L., McCarter, and P.K., Zuckerman, B., Two Early Alphanumeric Inscriptions from the Wadi el-Hôl. New Evidence for the Origin of the Alphabet from the Western Desert of Egypt (together with: M.S. Chesson et al., *Results of the 2001 Kerak Plateau Early Bronze Age Survey*), AASOR 59, Boston, MA, (2005), 87.

²For *iw3w* see UC32118E, 32119A in Collier, M& Quirke, S., *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Letters*, (2002). Also in papyri Berlin .10016A, 10019, 10021, 10030A, 10043, 10056A, 10081B, 10098, 10098 for these papyri see Kaplony-Heckel, *Ägyptische Handschriften*; Luft, *Urkunden zur Chronologie der späten 12. Dynastie. Briefe aus Illahun*; Luft, U., *Die chronologische Fixierung des ägyptischen Mittleren Reiches nach dem Tempelarchiv von Illahun*, (1992), and Scharff A., 'Briefe aus. Illahun', ZÄS 59, (1924). We notice the word *iw3w* generally used for women, and they were likely employed in the different stages of food and textile production, in close relationship with *shm sn-wsrt*. Teodoro, "The organization of seasonal labour during the Middle Kingdom," 68-71.

³Teodoro "The organization of seasonal labour during the Middle Kingdom," 68, 69.

⁴Quirke, S., 'State and Labour in the Middle Kingdom', *RdE* 39, (1988), 88, note 17; Scharff, 'Briefe aus. Illahun', 45-47.

⁵Quirke, S., "Townsmen in the Middle Kingdom; on the term *s n niwt tn* in the Lahun Temple Accounts", ZÄS 118, (1991), 145.

⁶Di Teodoro, M., *Labour organisation in Middle Kingdom Egypt*, 19.

⁷P. Berlin 10021

⁸Di Teodoro, M., *Labour organisation in Middle Kingdom Egypt*, 40.

⁹place where the 'Asiatic' Iaru in (line 3) can be found, translated by Di Teodoro as camp see: Di Teodoro, M., *Labour organisation in Middle Kingdom Egypt*, 37; translated as a settlement for Asiatics by Fischer H.G., "A Scribe of the Army in a Saqqara Mastaba of the Early Fifth Dynasty", *JNES* 18, (1959), 261-4.

The lists feature low-ranking officials from both the religious and civil branches of the administration, one individual labeled as 'Asiatic,' and individuals recognized by their humble professions.

The El-Lahun papyri indicate that the action represented by *iw3* is closely associated with *h3w*.¹ The verb *iw3* means "to replace" or "to take the place of another," while the nouns are translated *iw3yt* and *iw3w* as "substitutes".² The "*iw3w*" served as substitutes in the absence or unavailability of workers, and some sources indicate that the "substitute" was a family member of the "ordinary" worker.³ Berlin 10030A is Letter concerning an *iw3t*-substitute to be taken from *sh̄m sn-wsrt* by the steward himself.

11- Servants

From the Fourth Dynasty onwards, slaves were brought from Asia and Nubia to Egypt via trade or as prisoners of war to form classes of the workforce of *hmw/hmwt* ('male/female slave').⁴ The Asiatic were usually referred to as *b3k.w* ('servants') but generally not as *hm.w* ('slaves'). The generic word for *3m.w* became synonymous with 'slave', referring to those condemned to live on the margins of Egyptian society.⁵

The Brooklyn Papyrus (P. Brooklyn 35.1446), thought to have originated from Thebes and dated to the reign of Sekhemre' Sewadjtawi Sebekhotep III,⁶ is one of the most significant pieces of evidence for understanding the social position of Asiatics (*3mw*) in Egypt during the late Middle Kingdom. This document lists seventy-nine servants (*hmnw*) transferred to a new owner from the household of an official, with forty-five identified as Asiatics, thirty-three as Egyptians, and one of undetermined nationality.

The papyrus details the names and titles of these servants, along with their specific occupations, highlighting that many Asiatics were given Egyptian names in addition to their Semitic ones.⁷ This aspect underscores their integration into Egyptian society.

The significant presence of Semitic populations, particularly in regions like Upper Egypt, is further illustrated by the fact that over 56% of the individuals listed carry Northwest Semitic names.⁸ The inclusion of a tutor among the servants suggests a level of intellectual engagement and cultural exchange between Egyptians and their Semitic neighbors.

These demographic details imply broader trends in trade, migration, and the complexities of social hierarchies within ancient Egypt. The concentration of Semitic slaves on a single estate indicates larger patterns of slave ownership and a high demand for labor, especially in agricultural and

¹P. Berlin 10081A, Luft, *Urkunden zur Chronologie der späten 12 Dynastie*, 101-2; P. Berlin 10023 A-B, Luft, U., *Das Archiv von Illahun, Berlin*. Akademie-Verlag, (1992).

²Kóthay, K.A., "Categorisation, classification and social reality: Administrative Control and Interaction with the population", in J. C. Moreno García (ed.) *Ancient Egyptian administration*, Leiden. Brill (2013), 519; Luft, U., *Das Archiv von Illahun, Berlin*. Akademie-Verlag, (1992); Luft U., "The ancient town of El-Lahun" in S. Quirke (ed.) *Lahun Studies*, (1998), 1–41; Luft, U., *Urkunden zur Chronologie der späten 12 Dynastie :Briefe aus Illahun*, Wien. Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, (2006); Pantalacci, L., "Organisation et contrôle du travail dans le province oasite à la fin de l'Ancien Empire. Le cas des grands chantiers de construction à Balat", in *IFAO 151* (2010), 139–153; Quirke, S., "State and labour in the Middle Kingdom. A reconsideration of the term *hnrt*", in *RdÉ* 39, (1988), 83-106; Quirke, S., *The administration of Egypt in the Late Middle Kingdom*, 163.

³P. Berlin 10023A, UC32119A.

⁴Yeivin, S., 'Amenophis II's Asiatic Campaigns', *JARCE* 6, (1967), 119-128; Mazzone, D., "The Dark Side of a Model Community: The 'Ghetto' of el-Lahun", *JA EA* 2, (2017), 39.

⁵Mazzone, D., "The Dark Side of a Model Community: The 'Ghetto' of el-Lahun", 40.

⁶Hayes, *A Papyrus of the Late Middle Kingdom in the Brooklyn Museum*, New York: The Brooklyn Museum, (1955).

⁷Hayes, *A Papyrus of the Late Middle Kingdom in the Brooklyn Museum*, 99.

⁸Posener, G., "Les Asiatiques en Égypte sous les XIIe et XIIIe dynasties", *Syria* 34 (1957)145–63; Albright, W. F. "Northwest-Semitic Names in a List of Egyptian Slaves from the Eighteenth Century B. C.", *JAOS* 74 (1954), 222–233; Hayes, W., *A Papyrus of the Late Middle Kingdom in the Brooklyn Museum*, (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1955).

domestic contexts throughout Egypt, particularly in the Delta area.¹ Overall, the papyrus serves as an important piece of evidence for the multicultural dynamics of ancient Egyptian society during the late Middle Kingdom.

-The el-Lahun legal Pap. UC32058² is an *imt-pr* papyrus (deed of conveyance) consists of two deeds belonging to members of one family. The owner of the document is called Ankh-ren, the trustworthy sealer of the director of works, who leaves all his property his Asiatic slaves, and his officials to his brother Wah.³ What is striking in this legal document is that the owner of the contract considered the Asiatic servants (4 *3mw*) to be among his private properties that he could inherit, transfer, or dispose of as he wished with a legal document.



(7) Deed of conveyance made by pure-priest in charge of a phyle of Sopdu, lord of the East, Wah ...

(9) ... It is she who may give (10) to any one she wishes of her children whom she bore for me. I give her the four Asiatics(11) given to me by my brother, the trustworthy sealer of the director of works, Ankhren.⁴

-Asiatic servants were also sold according to a legal document, and the evidence for that is: Pap. UC32167 a *swn.t* ('deed of cession') deals with the sale of slaves as an Asiatic female was sold to an employee named Ihysoneb.



(4) Transfer deed of the assistant to the treasurer Shepset's son Ihseneb of the northern sector...

(7) Asiatic Akhiatef Kemetni.⁵

-The Pap. UC32147G⁶ records numbers of Asiatic and Egyptian female servants.

3mt 12 "Asiatic 12", *hmt* 12 "servant-women 12".

- The Pap. UC32127 verso⁷ lists a name list of servant women, Egyptians and Asiatics, in three columns, the first one is the servant names, the second column mentions the person or authority for whom the servants is brought, then the last column, only one line remaining.

Conclusions:

The Middle Kingdom was a time of relative stability after the chaos of the First Intermediate Period. Egypt was becoming more cosmopolitan due to trade and military activities, especially with Semitic-speaking peoples from the Levant and other neighboring regions.

¹Hoffmeier, J. K., *Israel in Egypt: the Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*, Oxford: University Press, (1997), 61.

²Collier & Quirke, *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Legal*, 104-105.

³Eweis, A social history of writing through hieratic sources of the Middle Kingdom from El-lahun, 287,288.

⁴Collier & Quirke, *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Religious, Literary, Legal, Mathematical and Medical*, 104-106.

⁵Collier & Quirke, *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Religious, Literary, Legal, Mathematical and Medical*, 119.

⁶Collier & Quirke, *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Accounts*, 259.

⁷Collier & Quirke, *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Accounts*, 225.

Foreign workers, especially those from the eastern Mediterranean, were an important part of the Egyptian economy and labor force. The integration of these individuals into the Egyptian system may have been a pragmatic response to labor needs, as well as a reflection of Egypt's expanding cultural horizons.

In summary, the integration of foreigners into Egyptian society during the Middle Kingdom was a complex process. While some foreign workers were able to assimilate by adopting Egyptian names, their foreign origins were still often acknowledged, as seen in the use of prefixes or the retention of certain foreign elements in their identities. This suggests a nuanced relationship between identity, ethnicity, and societal roles in ancient Egypt, where assimilation was possible but not without its challenges

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