



Variable View of the Mouse in Ancient Egyptian Society

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ARTICLE INFO	Abstract
<p>Keywords: <i>Etymology, Mouse, Rat, Toy, Medicine, Trap</i></p> <p>(IJTHS), O6U</p> <p>Vol.6, No.1, January 2024, pp. 206 - 221</p> <p>Received: 9/3/2024 Accepted: 23/4/2024 Published: 30/4/2024</p>	<p>This study focuses solely on the mouse as an animal, without going thought into other topics such as depicting it behaving like a human on ostraca and papyri. The tiny creature played a surprisingly complex role in ancient Egyptian society. Evidence from etymology suggests a specific term "<i>pnw</i>" for the mouse. Interestingly, personal names that include "mouse" suggest a possible positive connection besides the plant names referencing it.</p> <p>One of the earliest representations of a mouse is found of the in the 5th Dynasty on the Unas causeway at Saqqara, as well as depicted breeding and confronting a cat in the tomb of Baqet III at Bani Hassan during the 11th Dynasty. In addition, one ostracon suggests a satirical intent. Furthermore, the presence of mouse toys in ancient Egyptian tombs which found it way in several museums, suggests a playful side, while mouse traps indicate a practical need for pest control. Additionally, the dual nature of mice, depicting them as both destructive and vulnerable. Exploring the concept of mouse medicine could provide further insight into the potential healing properties of mice for certain ailments.</p>

1- Objective of the Study

This study aims to create a more refined picture of the mouse in ancient Egypt, shifting from its negative connotations to its positive aspects. And avoiding its representation behaving like human in art and literature. The paper also deals with it as a pest as a creature of symbolic, practical, and even of potentially medicinal significance.

2-Introduction:

Mice, rats, and other small rodents inhabit various habitats such as fields, deserts, or semi-desert areas (e.g., jerboa, gerbil), and are classified under the hypernym *pnw*. One can see that many different species were included in this designation, such as the house mouse or the gray mouse (*Mus musculus*), the spiny mouse (*Acomys cahirinus*), and the Nile rat (*Arvicanthis niloticus*). It is possible that the Egyptians made secondary distinctions, marked by other names such as *ḥdkḳ* (mouse) (Yoyotte, J., and Vernus, P., 2005: 628).

The popular rat of ancient Egypt was the grass rat or Nile rat, (*Arvicanthis niloticus*). The house rat was introduced from Asia after the ancient Egyptian period. Species of mice dating back to pharaonic times have been identified from animal bones such as the Egyptian spiny mouse, (*Acomys cahirinus*), and the house mouse, (*Mus musculus*). The spiny mouse is known to have lived in great numbers on the rocky island of Elephantine, while the house mouse, which has a smooth coat, preferred the margins of the Delta (Arnold, D., 1995:58).


The House Mouse, known as "Far" in Arabic, is commonly found in Egypt, specifically in the northeastern and western Sinai Peninsula, as well as the Suez Canal area. It has also been spotted in regions such as the Gulf of Suez, the Red Sea Coast extending to Mersa el Alem, the Nile Delta, the Valley, and the oases of the Western Desert. Typically, its tail is slightly longer than its head and body. It has a light or dark brown back with a white or buffy belly, and belly hairs usually have gray bases. However, the domestic rat is proven to have only appeared in Egypt in Roman times (Bohms, I., 2013: 266).

On the other hand, the spiny mouse (*Acomys cahirinus*) has outcompeted the house mouse in certain regions of Egypt. It could mainly be in the cemetery of Elephantine, but it can also be found in Tell el Maskhuta. Today, the animal is native to the Nile Valley and Delta, the Eastern Desert, the Egyptian oases, and the Sinai Peninsula (Bohms, I., 2013: 236).

The bones of rodent species have occasionally been identified in archaeological contexts, such as house mice (*Mus musculus*), house rats (*Rattus rattus*), Norway rats (*Rattus norvegicus*), and the Nile grass rat (*Arvicanthis niloticus*). Rats and mice are visually similar; however. All rodents have small bodies, round ears, pointed muzzles, and long tails. Like other rodents, their hind limbs are usually longer than their forelimbs, and their teeth are adapted for chewing. Individual species can be identified based on variations in color and texture of their fur and other features, but to a casual observer, they are often difficult to distinguish. (Evans, L., 2019: 155).

3- Etymology:

Animals appear in two principal forms in the hieroglyphic script. First, animals may be used as representations of themselves, either in a full or abridged form, as phonograms, ideograms, and determinatives. Secondly, ideograms, especially as determinatives, may be used as metaphors. Their metaphorical connotations tend to stem either from their external appearance or from some perceived internal characteristic (Sweeney, D., 2009: 361)

The Egyptians usually used only one word,  "pnw," to describe both a mouse and a rat (Bohms, I., 2013: 236). However, the *pnw*, sometimes was translated as mouse (Table 1), sometimes as rat (Wassell, B. A.,1991: 88-89). The word survived into Coptic as "πιν" or "πειν" which means mouse (Černý, J., 1976: 125; Brugsch, H., 1855: 23, 92, 123) or as a rat (Champollion, J., 1841:84, 107). The earliest recorded occurrence of the term "pnw" is found on a relief fragment from the 5th Dynasty causeway of Unas at Saqqara. The relief depicted numbers of mice while giving birth, *ms pnw*, and two pairs of morphologically identical mice copulate as shown in a panel below (Evans, L., 2019: 156).



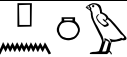









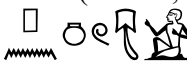



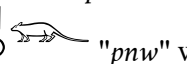
An inscription from the 25th Dynasty in the temple of Kawa, reveals the inaccuracy of the scribes regarding the determinative of the mouse  *hdḳk*, which signifies rodent/rat (Yoyotte, J., and Vernus, P., 2005: 67, n. 46; Gozzoli, R. B., 2009:237-238, fig. 1/ line 12 p. 67). It was derived from  *hdḳ*, meaning "to cut or destroy" (Yoyotte, J., and Vernus, P., 2005: 67, 79; Wb. I, 206/1; Hannig, R., 2006: 1817), which suitable the devastating side of mice.






Table 1: Different forms of *pnw* “mouse”

Glyph	Translit.	Sources
	Pnw	Champollion, J., 1841: 84, 107
		Vycichl, W., 1983 : 160
		Von Deines, H., and Grapow, H., 1959 :197
		Faulkner R.O., 2002:89; Gardiner, A, 2007: 464; Bates, Robert D., 2004: 81; Der Molen, R.V., 2000: 132; Rodríguez, Á. S., 2000: 178; Brugsch, H., 1868: 469; Lambert, R., 1925: 265; Pierret, P., 1875: 150; Vycichl, W., 1983: 160; Wb. I, 508.
		Hannig, R., 2000: 839; Von Deines, H., and Grapow, H., 1959 :197.
		Budge, E.A.W., 1920: 236
		Wb. I, 508
		Hannig, R., 2000: 839; Von Deines, H., and Grapow, H., 1959 :197
		Brugsch, H., 1868 : 469

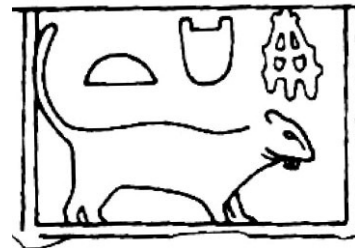
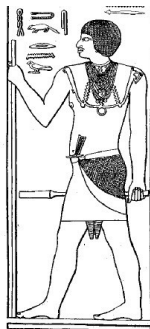
4- Mouse as Personal name

The Egyptians were quite fond of naming their children after animals, probably because something in the animal’s character or behavior reminded them of similar characteristics observed in the animal world. There are many examples, including frogs, mice, gazelle, and monkeys to wolves, hounds, crocodile, and hippopotamus. Most people seem to have only one name, although a few instances of two names are uncommon. (Malek, J., 1997: 47).




Pnw is also recorded several times as a personal name at Saqqara, such as  *hts* the male jumping mouse (fig. 1) (Ranke, H., 1935: 261). Here, the name of *Khabawsker* was used as a pet name (Junker, H., 1941: 21; Murray, M. A., 1905: pl. 1: Wb. III, 204/13). Other names include  *Pnw* and,  *t3 pnw* as a personal name (Wassell, B. A., 1992:351). In addition, , ,  "*pnw*" was used as a name referring to a male mouse (Ranke, H., 1935:133/6).




Furthermore, there is an inscription at the Giza necropolis of a man holding a vase called  *pnw* (fig. 2).  *pni* this version of the name has not been officially recorded. It should be distinguished from  which is a shortened form of *htp-nj-Pth*. However, it may be related to  and  "*pnw*," both of which mean "mouse." (Junker, H., 1941: 20, fig. 18).



(Figs.1-2-3) Mouse as a Person Name



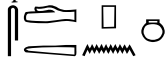


(1) Murray, M. A., 1905: pl. 1 (2) Junker, H., 1934: fig. 18 (3) Leitz, C., 2019: fig. 2

Person names of women appeared on a Middle Kingdom Cairo stela (CG 20441) as *hmt*, (Ranke, H., 1935: 240), with a mouse as determinative, one can see a four-footed, short-legged animal with a long tail representing the determinative of *hmt* (fig. 3), it also appeared as a personal name with a cow skin as a determinative  (Leitz, C., 2019: 245, fig. 1-2; Hannig, R., 2006: 1681). In addition, it was documented with a determinative like a hyaena, and as a woman's name (Wb. III, 80/14). The term "*hmt*" was found twice, once with a hyena or leopard  "*iw hmt*" where it referred to *hmt*-island, and the other time "*iw hmt*" with a leopard  as a determinative, indicating the island of *hmt*-animal (Der Manuelian, P., 2009: 79).

This confusion may be due to the unclear representation of the animal. Sometimes the writer uses the hyena  or the leopard  to the same word, beside the mouse  (Leitz, C., 2019: 245).

Furthermore, the confusion between two prototypical signs,  (mouse/rat) on one hand, and the lizard  on the other hand. Small mammals, in particular, such as the shrew and the jerboa to small rodents like the mouse, the rat, and lizards are assigned an ideogram for poorly discriminating signs, resulting from both simplification and confusion of two prototypical signs (Yoyotte, J., and Vernus, P., 2005: 66).

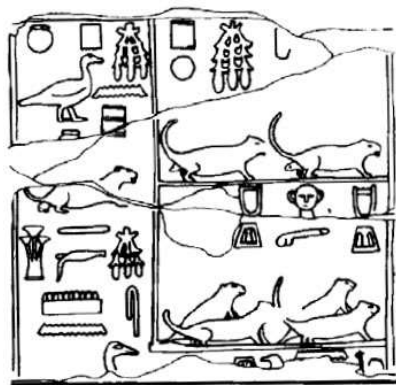
5- Mouse as a Plant’s Name

The word *pnw* "mouse " has been documented multiple times as the name of various plants, including  *šd pnw*, a plant known as mouse tail (Wb. I, 508/10), and *mšt(j)-pnw*, a plant used for making wreaths which was mistakenly interpreted as *jšt-pnw*. (Takáca, G., 2008: 605; Wb. I. 136/4; Budge, E.A.W., 1920: 25). Additionally, there is a reference to  *msdr n p3 pnw*, meaning "mouse's ear," (Takáca, G., 2008: 605; Wb. II, 154 /13; Meeks, D., 1988: 173), and *pnw*  being referred to as "ratsbane." (Budge, E.A.W., 1920: 236).

6- Displaying Scenes

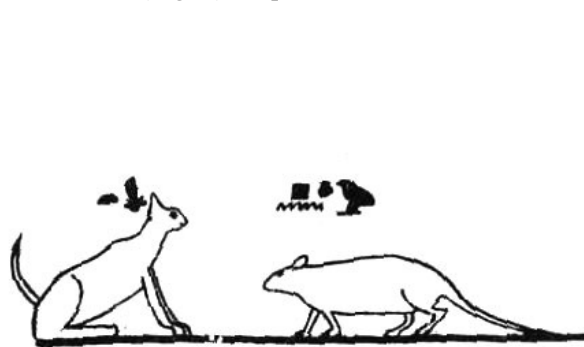
Very few scenes depicting mice have been observed in ancient Egyptian sources. One of these early scenes was found during the 5th dynasty in the causeway of the pyramid of King Unas at Saqqara. The mural scene depicts the giving birth of mice (Fig. 4), as well as various birds. The scene was accompanied by the words: “Giving birth to a mouse, giving birth to one mouse's son through the mouse” (Leitz, C., 2019: fig. 1; Smith, W. S., 1965: 145, fig. 179; Porter, B., & Moss, R., 1981:419). The illustration shows the Nile grass rat giving birth and mating. Bone finds from graves of the 5th Dynasty in Elephantine and the Middle Kingdom site of Tell el-Maskhuta show that this animal was already part of the fauna of the Nile Valley since early times (Bohms, I., 2013: 236). Although Evans sees the depicted animals resemble rats or mice, the lack of surviving paint or other diagnostic details prevents a more refined identification. She confirmed that the reliefs of Unas Causeway represent the Nile grass rats (Evans, L., 1919: 156).

(Fig. 4) Breeding mouse in Unas Causeway



Smith, W. S., 1965: fig.179

(Fig. 5) Baqet III mouse



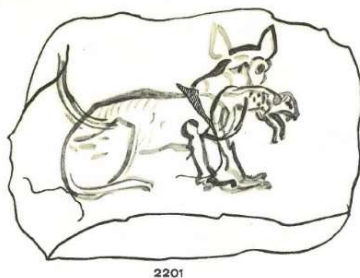
Newberry, P. E., 1893: pl. VI

Moreover, ancient Egyptians were well aware that the cat was the greatest enemy of mice, and they depicted this relationship in two representations. The first depiction comes from the 11th dynasty tomb of Baqet III at Beni Hassan. In one image, a cat and a mouse are depicted facing each other, while in another image, a cat is shown catching a mouse in its mouth on an ostrakon from Deir el-Medina during the Ramesside period. These scenes are believed to have been inspired by everyday observations (Brachmańska, M., 2021: 152, fig 14.2; Houlihan. P., 1966: 82-83).

The confrontation between a cat and a rat in a painted scene in the tomb of Baket III at Beni Hasan (Malek, J., 1997: 49, fig. 27; Porter, B., & Moss, R., 1968: 153) is considered by Bohms to depict a sand mouse or desert mouse (Bohms, I., 2013: 237). Meanwhile, Leitz and others identify it as a Nile grass rat (*Arvicanthis niloticus*). The tail-to-body length size is appropriate for a Nile grass rat, indicating that the large body structure also aligns with the characteristics of this species. (Leitz, C., 2019: 243, fig. 1; Newberry, P. E., 1893: pl. VI; Champollion, J.F., 1845: Pl. CCCXXVIII). The mouse on the other hand, has received more sensitive handling from the artist. Outlined in a delicate, well-controlled red line, the animal's body and tail are painted in a pale pinkish-yellow, thinly applied to the wall surface. Its torso is large and round, and its thin, tapering tail is approximately three-quarters the length of its body. Its legs are short, but its hind limbs are longer than its forelegs; the animal's forepaws are considerably larger and more robust than its hind paws. (Evans, L., 1919: 157).

There is no way of knowing whether the cat of Baket III at Beni Hasan, was domesticated or just tamed, but there is little doubt that the animal was an accepted member of the household and not just a passing visitor. The inclusion of the rat must be significant and indicate the cat's usefulness and value as a pest-destroyer (Malek, J., 1997: 50). The Baket's rat was executed in a highly controlled manner according to Evans. In the same register, the rest of the animals are facing towards the right, whereas the rat faces left to confront the cat and the armed caretaker. It may also be significant that the animal is turned away from the offering shrine. The positioning of the figures implies a symbolic monitoring of the potentially hazardous and harmful rodent. Furthermore, as the Egyptians believed that control over an object or thing could be achieved through the writing or recitation of its name, it seems that Baqet's grass rat was safely and effectively trapped (Evans, L., 1919: 158).

(Fig. 6) A cat devours a mouse



(Fig.7) an ostrakon with a mouse and Senenmut



Lewis, S., and Llewellyn-Jones, L., 2018: p. 392, 394

The second confrontation was illustrated on an ostrakon from Deir el-Medina dated back to 19th Dynasty (fig. 6), The image depicts a cat sitting down, looking to the right, and catching a mouse in its mouth (D'Abbadie, V., 1936: 42, fig. 2201; Malek, J., 1997: 113). Cats were frequently kept in Egyptian homes to catch mice and rats.

This vivid ink sketch depicts a domestic cat proudly holding its prey in its jaws, with the mouse's carcass dangling limply. It is unclear which species of mouse or rat the artist has depicted here. The Egyptian language did not differentiate between 'mouse' and 'rat'. However, it is possibly the house mouse that is depicted here, although a rat cannot be ruled out. (Lewis, S., & Llewellyn-Jones, L., 2018: 395). The abundance of mice in food storage areas and waste likely attracted wild cats to venture into human settlements (Malek 1993, 45). This method of coping with mice is also reflected in the Ebers Papyrus. One formula is based on the cat-and-mouse antagonism. It states: "Another way to prevent mice from reaching things is by using cat fat. Placed on all things. This formula belongs to the field of magical practice but offers a very practical approach to dealing with rodents. (Brachmańska, M., 2021: 153)

Another ostrakon from the 18th Dynasty, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (no. 31.4.2) depicts a rat, which could be a spiny mouse or a grass rat (fig. 7). The drawing is on the reverse of a sketch showing two profiles of Senenmut, the renowned Chief Steward of Queen Hatshepsut, making this a rare example of the art of political caricature (Arnold, D., 1995: 58; fig. 78). Due to his close relationship with Hatshepsut, he was frequently the victim of defamatory attacks by artists. This particular ostrakon contains another image on its reverse showing a drawing in black ink of a lean, hairy rat with prodigiously long whiskers (Hayes 1959: II 110), suggesting that the image of a rat and his straggly whisker-like beard, had a satirical intent when coupled with Senenmut (Lewis, S., and Llewellyn-Jones, L., 2018: 392).

7-Toys and other Objects

Many toy mice have been found in several museums around the world. Although "toys" and "dolls" have been found in Egyptian tombs, the exact nature of their purpose is never entirely clear. Were these objects intended as playthings for the deceased owner in the next world, or did they have a religious significance as models brought to life to provide entertainment for the tomb owner? However, they were made for and used by the children (David, R., 2003: 162). Sometimes children were offered a toy like mice with an articulated jaw and a mobile tail (Yoyotte, J., and Vernus, P., 2005: 629).

A mouse toy made from ivory was found on a snake at the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden, dating back to the Middle Kingdom (fig. 8). This snake with a mouse-like creature on its back is likely a toy. The seated animal rotates around an axle inserted into the snake's body. The snake, which symbolizes chaos, is attacked by another animal. There may be a religious significance to this, but it is challenging in this case to distinguish clearly between being used as a toy or of religious function (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, AH 175).

(Fig. 8) An ivory Toy with a mouse and a snake



Image ©Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, AH 175

(Fig. 9) a clay and wood mouse toy



Image ©British museum, EA65512

From the New Kingdom, a toy mouse was found in the National Museums Scotland (no.1952.178), it was crafted from dark grey clay coated with remnants of a brown pigment and red spots. It features a wooden stick for the tail and a movable wooden jaw. Similarly, the British Museum housed two mouse toys, probably dated from the New Kingdom. The first toy was modeled in clay and decorated with black paint lines (fig. 9). The tail and lower jaw are both moveable and were composed of wood. While the second toy was painted a brownish-purple color and is made of clay that has been improperly fired. The lower jaw made of wood remains moveable. Movement is made possible via a wooden toggle pin that was strung to the lower jaw (British Museum, EA65512, EA38540). Similar items have been found at the Fitzwilliam Museum, such as a mouse toy dating back to the 18th Dynasty (Fitzwilliam Museum E.GA.4594).

Even in historic times, elegant spoons made of bone or ivory were found in graves, and placed close to the bodies of the deceased. During the entire Pharaonic period, implements of this type must have been used in daily life to apply small amounts of cosmetic substances to the face and body. People must have held containers of this kind in the palms of their hands. This cosmetic spoon is a fine representation of a crouching mouse, now in Metropolitan Museum of Art (No. 44.4.55) (Fig. 10). The mouse's right side is represented by the spoon's inner side, while its left side is represented by the spoon's back. The mouse, with its thin tail wrapped around its body, displays the typical demure expression that has endeared these rodents to children and adults through the ages (Arnold, D., 2005: 216, fig. 139; Arnold, D., 1995: 58, fig. 77; Metropolitan Museum of Art, no. 44.4.55).

(Fig. 10) Cosmetic spoon like mous



Arnold, D., 1995: fig. 77

(Fig.11) a ring decorated with a mouse



Roehring, C. H., et al. 2006: fig. 195a

Furthermore, during the 18th Dynasty, ancient Egyptian artisans crafted a ring in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (No. 30.8.418) set with an amulet of a mouse (fig. 11), made from gold and steatite (Roehring, C. H., et al. 2006: fig. 195a; Metropolitan Museum, no. 30.8.418). During the Ptolemaic period, terracottas, depicting mice were prevalent, with numerous examples having been identified. The representations varied: the rat was represented alone, without any attributes, While the mouse was laying, it held a cluster of grapes between its legs on a bottle shaped like a bunch of grapes (fig. 12). Additionally, in the Egyptian Museum (no. CG26493), an oil lamp made from terracotta with a mouse crouching on top, with a leaf-shaped handle, and a hanging ring at center back (fig. 13). Furthermore, a container takes the form of a mouse standing on its hind legs nibbling a fruit that it is holding in its front legs (Boutantin, C., 2014: 524; Perdrizet, P., 1921: pl. LXVI). Other pieces depicted an animal next to a rectangular mousetrap with two rodents nibbling on a bunch of grapes (Boutantin, C., 2014: 525).

(Fig. 12) A bottle decorated with a bunch of grapes and a mouse on top



Perdrizet, P., 1921: Pl. LXVI

(Fig. 13) Oil lamp decorated with a mouse



Boutantin, C., 2014: 369

8- Mouse Trap

In the 12th dynasty, nearly every room in Kahun houses, had its corners tunneled by rats, and the holes were stuffed with stones and rubbish to keep them out (Petrie, W.M.F., 1891: 8; Yoyotte, J., and Vernus, P., 2005: 628). The pottery trap in The Petrie Museum (UC. 16773) which was found in the rubbish heap in the northern part of the town of Kahun, is pierced with air holes and fitted with a sliding door (see fig. 14-15). It had been partly broken while in use because the handle was missing from the top, and one of the holes had been filled up with plaster, presumably occurred when repairs were being carried out on it in antiquity. The door of the trap is now missing, and only the stumps of the handles remain (Bourriau, J., 1981: 66; David, A. R., 1996: 154). Many uses have been proposed for these traps. It has been claimed that they may have been used to kindle a fire or to carry fire to a hearth, but there is no evidence of burning on them, or they may have been used as portable ovens (David, A. R., 1996: 154).

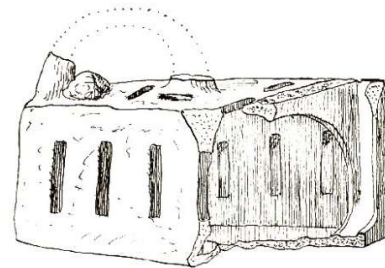
Petrie suggested that the pierced air holes and the sliding door were not intended merely for a trap, as the number of air holes indicates. Therefore, it must have been for retaining animals alive. Moreover, it seems very possible that the purpose of the pottery cage was to hold eggs in the hatching oven. This way, when the chicks hatched, they would not wander off and could be safely transported in the warm pottery cage without getting chilled (Petrie, W.M.F., 1891: 8, pl. V). The more convincing identification as a "rat catcher" came later (Bourriau, J., 1981: 66, fig. 118).

(Fig. 14) Mousetrap made from pottery



Stevenson, A., (n.d) U.C. 16773

(Fig.15) line drawing of Petrie mouse trap




Petrie, W.M.F., 1891: pl. V/8


This baked clay box trap appears to have been designed to keep its captive alive, although it is likely that the trap was baited with poison to kill the rat. In this case, the Egyptian rat-trap resembles examples found in Mesopotamia and Iran in both form and function. The high number of rats in the village of Kahun during this period may help to clarify the discovery of rat traps in the archaeological findings (Lewis, S., and Llewellyn-Jones, L., 2018: 391-392). The Egyptians had little tolerance for the pests that plagued them and tried to prevent mice from causing damage by employing traps and cats to catch them (Lewis, S., and Llewellyn-Jones, L., 2018: 395). However, the identification of a 12th Dynasty pottery rat trap from Kahun reveals that rodents were viewed as a problem. Petrie's discovery of extensive rat holes and tunnels in the walls of buildings at the same location, many of which had been deliberately plugged, further supports this notion (Evans, L., 1919: 158).

9-The Bad Mice Effects


The destructive behavior of the mouse became its iconic feature and was used as a symbol in the dream book written by P. Chester Beatty III. One of the dream interpretations suggests that if a man sees himself bringing mice from the field, it is considered a bad omen, indicating a miserable heart. The mouse was seen as a negative omen, symbolizing despair and destruction as it appeared in the field. The symbolism of the dream stems from an analogy: just as the mouse that ruins the harvest devastates the field, it also devastates the heart of the person who brings it. As the great devourer of household supplies (Brachmańska, M., 2021: 150; Yoyotte, J., and Vernus, P., 2005: 629; Gardiner, A.H., 1933:19, pl. 7-8).

Their proliferation was particularly evident when heavy floods forced them to concentrate in inhabited areas, rendering them homeless due to rising waters. The inscription on the Kawa V stela, which records the significant inundation during the sixth year of the 25th Dynasty under Taharqa's reign, reflects the devastating impact that various pests had on the crops. Eliminating locusts, worms, and rodents was deemed as one of God Amon's four wonders for Taharqa. The king states, "It made the whole field fertile, eradicated the vermin and worms within it." The author

of the text used two unusual terms for what is here translated as worms and vermin 

 *im.w.t3* for the first and *hdkk.w*, written with the determinative of the small rodent similar to a mouse. As for *im.w.t3* means 'those who are on the earth', and *hdkk.w* refers to little animals like toads, insects, and rats. The latter has been translated as insects, rodents, or vermin by various researchers. (Brachmańska, M., 2021: 150; Gozzoli, R. B., 2009: 237-238, fig. 1/ line 12; Kitchen, K. A., 1973; p. 169). It seems likely that the author used both of these unusual phrases to differentiate worms, which are associated with the soil, from creatures walking on the ground (Brachmańska, M., 2021: 150). However, King Taharqa is delighted that an exceptional flood has killed rodents and crawling creatures. (Yoyotte, J., & Vernus, P., 2005: 628).


In addition to the worms or locusts, sparrows and hippos are mentioned. The statement in Anastasi V papyrus referring to the proliferation of mice in the fields:


n3 pnw. (w) c33 m t3 sh.t

'The mice/rats are numerous in the field'. After everyone has helped themselves to the harvest.

In such a situation, the farmer has no choice other than to counter the plague with some strong cats (Gardiner, A. H., 1937: V 16/1-2; Bohms, I., 2013: 237). The destruction of food by mice and rats could seriously jeopardize food supplies for the population. Sometimes, the large rodents caused significant damage to a substantial portion of the crops (Bohms, I., 2013: 237). However, the mouse was still directly pointed out as one of the main field pests causing damage in the Ptolemaic period. (Brachmańska, M., 2021: 150). On the other hand, house rats (*R. rattus*) and Norway rats (*R. norvegicus*) were not introduced into Egypt until the Roman period. The most likely culprit for such damage was the native Nile grass rat (*Arvicanthis niloticus*) (Evans, L., 1919:158).

10- The Helpless Mouse in Literature

The ancient Egyptians ranked the *pnw* among the most insignificant and the most helpless of creatures (Wassell, B. A., 1991:89). The military records of Rameses III refer to the helplessness of the enemies. They documented them laying themselves under his arms like mice' (Edgerton, F, W., and Wilson, J. A., 1956: 76, note. 14a: 76); moreover, the tribes of the Libyans during the reign of king Mernptah were widespread on the dikes, like mice  (Lefebvre, M.G., 1927:22, 25). Furthermore, the Coffin Texts (Spell 369 v, 31), stated that the mouse must be removed. It says: You have eaten a mouse, which Osiris detests. (Faulkner, R.O., 1977: 8; De Buck, A., 1934: sp.369/31; Yoyotte, J., and Vernus, P., 2005: 629).



Animal metaphors can manifest themselves in extremely intricate ways in Egyptian texts, both in formal hieroglyphs and in hieratics (Sweeney, D., 2009: 363). To drive off a serpent, for instance. Spell 33, from the papyrus of Nu (British Museum no. 10.477), advised the deceased to recite the following:



"O Rerek, move not; Behold, Geb, and Shu rose against you. You have eaten a mouse, that Re detests" (Allen, T.G., 1974: 44; Houlihan. P., 1966: 170; Budge, E.W., 1898: 100). Furthermore, a love poem serves to evaluate the little importance that the lover exalts by danger. Whereas his love transports him beyond the realities of life. When the crocodile is lowered into the water, "I want to cross the waves. Khenty (the monstrous crocodile) will have nothing more than a mouse to me." (Yoyotte, J., and Vernus, P., 2005: 629; Sweeney, D., 2009: 364; Lichteim, M., 1976: 193).



Moreover, Middle Kingdom texts compare the privileges of the scribe to others, and the task he would face when the mice abound in the fields (Gardiner, A.H., 1941: 19). As well as, Merenptah's Stela described the Libyan tribes strewn upon the desert like mice (Gunn, B., 1941:148; Lefebvre, G. M., 1925: 25).

Other texts mention *pnw* in burrows. Where the waters of the inundation flooded it. One text compared the soldier's hard life with that of the mouse during the flood season (Wassell, B. A., 1991: 89).

11- Mouse-medicine

Even though they hold a humble status within the animal hierarchy, the *pnw* were important, as recorded several times in the medical texts. In one case the mouse is to be eaten; references to the eating mice are known from other contexts (Wassell, B. A., 1991:89). It is rarely reported that mice and rats were eaten in Egypt. Medical texts recommend eating mice to cure illnesses. Mouse/rat fat was used, along with fats from other animals, to make ointments. Cooked mice were also given to the sick as medicine. A skeletal of a mouse find in the stomach of a mummified child suggests that these rodents were consumed. (Bohms, I., 2013: 238). Bones of both species of mice have been recovered from the stomachs of mummies. The eating of mice was occurred with some regularity. The Egyptians and Romans might have force-fed mice with raisins, nuts, and seeds to fatten them (Ikram, 1994: 33; Smith, G.E., 1911: 43).

A prescription in the Hearst Medical Papyrus for the hair care says: 'Cooked mouse put in fat until it is rotten: do likewise' (i.e. anoint the hair with it) (Dawson, W. R., 1924: 84). Moreover, magical papyrus (No. 3027) at Berlin Museum, it contains many spells for the protection of mothers and children, to drive away *sesmi* (some infantile ailment) which ends with these words: 'Make this child, or his mother, eat a cooked mouse. Put the bones upon his neck, bound with a string in which seven knots have been tied' (Erman, A., (1901: 30-31; Dawson, W. R., 1924: 84; Lewis, S., and Llewellyn-Jones, L., 2018: 395).

12- Conclusion:

The ancient Egyptians had different kinds of mice, such as the house mouse or gray mouse, the spiny mouse, and the Nile mouse or grass mouse. However, the grass mouse has been a part of the Egyptian fauna for a long time and was the most probable cause of the field damage. Meanwhile, there is no specific term for mice in ancient Egypt. The ancient Egyptians only used one word, "*pnw*," to describe mice and rats. However, this term could also be applied to other rodents such as jerboas and gerbils. Apart from other uncommon terms such as *hmt* and *hdkk*. Moreover, the determinative of the word "*pnw*" was either a cow skin, a mouse and a herb. Furthermore, some of the word's meaning was unclear due to the different determinatives of the word *Pnw*. However, it was also used as determinative for a plant and personal name.

The Egyptians were familiar with the mouse trap since ancient times as a way to manage the large population of mice, particularly the house mouse. Due to the small size of mice and their quick reproduction, which led to significant damage to the fields, the Egyptians compared them to the enemies of Egypt. In written texts, whether in literature or military records, only the negative and vulnerable side of mice was portrayed. On the other hand, the mouse was used as a satirical tool to defame others, as seen in the Metropolitan Museum ostrakon

However, the charming qualities of mice were highlighted, in art, cosmetics, household items, and toys. Moreover, it is rarely reported that mice and rats were eaten by the Egyptian. They only did so under medical advice.

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National Museums Scotland:

<https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/collection-search-results/mouse-toy/299672>

The Fitzwilliam Museum:

<https://data.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/id/object/59046>

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نظرة متنوعة للفأر في المجتمع المصري القديم

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الملخص العربي:

تركز هذه الدراسة فقط على الفأر كحيوان ، دون الخوض في جوانب أخرى مثل تصويره يتصرف كإنسان على الأوستراكا والبرديات. ولقد لعب هذا الكائن الضئيل دورًا معقدًا بشكل مفاجئ في المجتمع المصري القديم. وتشير الأدلة المستمدة من علم الاشتقاق إلى وجود مصطلح محدد "بنو" للفأر. ومن المثير للاهتمام ، أن الأسماء الشخصية التي تتضمن "الفأر" تشير إلى احتمال وجود صلة إيجابية إلى جانب أسماء النباتات التي تشير إليه. كما تم العثور على أحد أقدم صور الفأر من الأسرة الخامسة على الطريق الصاعد لهرم أوناس في سقارة ، فقد تم تصويره وهو يتكاثر ، كذلك وهو يواجه قطة في مقبرة باقت الثالث في بني حسن خلال الأسرة الحادية عشرة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، تشير أحد قطع الأوستراكا إلى نية ساخرة. علاوة على ذلك ، فإن وجود ألعاب الفئران في المقابر المصرية القديمة والموجودة في العديد من المتاحف ، يوحي بجانب مرح ، بينما تشير مصائد الفئران إلى الحاجة العملية لمكافحة الآفات. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، فإن الطبيعة المزدوجة للفئران ، تصورها على أنها مدمرة وضعيفة في نفس الوقت. علاوة على ذلك يمكن أن يؤدي استكشاف مفهوم طب الفئران إلى توفير مزيد من الأفكار حول خصائص الشفاء المحتملة باستخدام الفئران لأمراض بعينها .

الكلمات الدالة : علم الاشتقاق – الفأر – لعبة – دواء - مصيدة