

Locust and its signification in Ptolemaic texts

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Key words

Locust - Grasshopper - Sauterelle - Grashüpfer

Abstract

The locust mentioned in the pyramid texts, Coffin texts and Book of the Dead. It is also appear in the New kingdom texts. In the Ptolemaic period the locust appear in the texts with new purpose. That is representing the core of this paper. This all mean that the ancient Egyptians notice the behavior of that insect and connects between it and some religious thoughts. That what will this paper discuss throw examine number of texts.

- Locust in review:

Locust has a numerous studies that deal with the insect and its behavior. And the significance of locusts was discussed in many articles.⁽¹⁾ In pyramid texts the king was flying to the sky as locust.⁽²⁾ Locust appears in coffin texts.⁽³⁾ In the Book of the Dead locust linked with a palace called  *sht n snhmw* “the field of locusts or grasshoppers”.⁽⁴⁾ In the New kingdom Egyptian texts it is usually the defeated enemies who are compared with locusts; for example, in inscriptions of Ramses II and of Merneptah.⁽⁵⁾ Locust also has a positive metaphor by compare the army of Egyptian king with locust in their multitude. The locusts’

swarms could consist of billions of locusts covering several hundred square kilometers, and they were capable of travelling great distances in a single day. Although the image of locusts' swarms descending upon fertile fields is an obvious metaphor, further meanings have been explored by other scholars.⁽⁶⁾ The image of the locust can be both favorably used to describe the multitudinous Egyptian army and negatively applied to enemy forces. The locust also appears in the holy books as a plague and divine punishment; in the holy Bible, the Gospel and the holy Quran.

"Else, if thou refuse to let my people go, behold, tomorrow will I bring the locusts into thy coast."

Exodus 10: 4-5

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land, even all that the hail hath left."

Exodus 10: 12

"The east wind brought the locusts. And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt, and rested in all the coasts of Egypt: very grievous were they; before them there were no such locusts as they, neither after them shall be such."

Exodus 10: 13-14

"And the Lord turned a mighty strong west wind, which took away the locusts, and cast them into the Red sea; there remained not one locust in all the coasts of Egypt."

Exodus 10: 19

"All thy trees and fruit of thy land shall the locust consume."

Deuteronomy 28: 42

"If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land."

Chronicles 7: 13

"That which the palmerworm hath left, hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left, hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left, hath the caterpillar eaten."

Joel 1:4. ⁽⁷⁾

"And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you".

Joel 2:25.

"فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ الطُّوفَانَ وَالْجَرَادَ وَالْقُمَّلَ وَالضَّفَادِعَ وَالدَّمَ آيَاتٍ مُفَصَّلَاتٍ فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا وَكَانُوا قَوْمًا مُجْرِمِينَ (١٣٣)".

القرآن الكريم – سورة الأعراف – آية ١٣٣

"Therefore we sent upon them widespread death, and the locusts and the lice and the frog and the blood, clear signs; but they behaved haughtily and they were a guilty people."

The holy Quran - Al-Araf - Verse 133.

"خُشِعًا أَبْصَارُهُمْ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ كَأَنَّهُمْ جَرَادٌ مُنْتَشِرٌ (٧)"

القرآن الكريم – سورة القمر – آية ٧

"Their eyes cast down, going forth from their graves as if they were scattered locusts".

The holy Quran - Al-Qamar - Verse 7.

Some texts mentioned locust as a food:

“And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.”

Matthew 3: 4

“And John was clothed with camel’s hair and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey.”

Mark 1: 6

Locust as an amulet:

Amulets in the form of a locust made from glazed steatite and glazed composition occur in both the late Old kingdom and eighteenth dynasty and are carefully and naturalistically shaped yet a series of cornelian examples, probably contemporary with the former, are so stylized that they resemble a pair of aero plane wings with only an inverted ‘V’ at the central point representing the legs and a few striations at the front for the head. Because of the reproductive qualities of this insect, the amulet probably bestowed fertility, although its swarming behavior may also have led to connotations of plenty or riches. However, Utterances 467 and 627 of *Pyramid Texts* both speak of ascent to heaven in the locust’s form, suggesting that the amulet had a purely funerary function.⁽⁸⁾

-Iconographic:

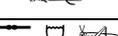
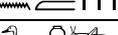
Locust has the code L4 according to Gardiner’s list. It has three shapes:



The clearest sign is  which found in JSesh an open source hieroglyphic editor. ⁽⁹⁾

-Epigraphic:

The locust has the name *snḥm*.⁽¹⁰⁾ In the New kingdom texts the word is written *s3-nḥm* as if it were 'son of one who takes', 'son of seizing' referring to the destructive nature of the creature.⁽¹¹⁾ In Ptolemaic texts the word has many of orthographies in writing:

n.	Epigraphic	Text
1		Dendara III 176,4-5
2		Dendara IV 18,4-6
3		Dendara V 56,12-13
4		Dendara IX 152,4-5
5		Dendara XII 265,7-9
6		Dendara XIV 136,2-3
7		Dendara XV 298,6-7
8		Mammisi Dendara 24,6
9		Edfou IV 3,3
10		Edfou VI 132,13
11		Edfou VI 133,8
12		Edfou VII 71,2-7
13		Edfou VII 123,6-7
14		Edfou VII 200,4-5
15		Edfou VII 284,3-5
16		Esna III n°. 208,69

Phonetic value of locust sign: ⁽¹²⁾

Sound	Texts	Source
<i>snḥm</i>	 <i>snḥm</i> Locust	Edfou VI 132,13 And passim in Ptolemaic texts.
<i>s</i>	 <i>Wsir</i> Osiris	Esna III n°. 208,69
<i>r</i>	 <i>ḥpr̄r</i> Khepr̄r	LGG V P.718

- Documents:

1-Dendara III 176,4-5



Di (.i) ᶜš3 mnftyw^(a).k mi snḥmw, msw.k mi šᶜ.

I (Horus-Behdety) make your infantry soldiers as numerous as **locusts**, and your children as numerous as grains of sand.

2-Dendara IV 18,4-6



Ḥnk ḥrw-ᶜ^(b) dd mdw: Nb nḥḥ, šn.k ḥ3.k, ist^(c) mi snḥm ir.sn nht.k rᶜ-nb

Offer the elixir, Utterance: lord of eternity, your circle of protection is behind you, the combatants are like **locusts**, they protect you every day.

3-Dendara V 56,12-13



[Nswt-bity ᶜnh]^(d) ms-ḥᶜw, ᶜn ḥr-nb n m33.f, nb š3w shpr rnpwt, stḥn š3 ḥr w3dw3d, šn(w)^(e).f ḥ3.f twt.sn r snḥm, Ḥr-bḥdty ntr ᶜ3 nb pt.

[King of Upper and Lower Egypt, live] brightness, rejoice everyone for seeing him, lord of vineyards to create the fresh plants, to make bright the vineyard carrying vines, your circles of protection are behind

you, they are numerous more than **locust**, Horus-Behdety the great god lord of the sky.

4-Dendara IX 152,4-5



*Hnk hrw-^c, dd mdw: hrw-^c n nb Bhd̄t s3b-šwt, šn^(f).k
h3.k^(g) mi snhm.*

Offer the elixir, Utterance: the elixir for the lord of Behdet, him of the dappled plumage, your circle of protection is behind you as numerous as **locust**.

5-Dendara XII 265,7-9



*Dd mdw in Hr-bhd̄ty ntr ʿ3 nb pt s3b-šwt pr m 3ht
ʿhm šps šhb šnbty ntr wr sr ntrw, šnw.f h3.f, šnwt.f^(h)
) r gs.f iw.sn wr.tw mi snhm, nfr hr bnr mrwt psd m
pt m r^c-nb.*

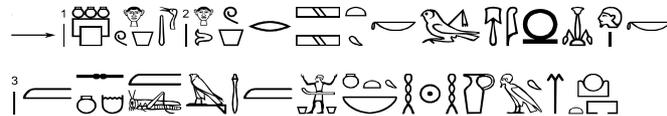
Utterance by Horus-Behdety, the great god, lord of the sky, him of the dappled plumage, who comes forth from the horizon, the noble falcon image, to make festive the falcon image, the great god, prince of gods, his circles of protection are behind him, his followers are beside him, they as numerous as **locust**, beautiful of face, sweet of love, who shine in the sky in every day.

6-Dendara XIV 136,2-3



*Wdn ḥrw-ꜥ, dd mdw: iht wrt prt m Knmt⁽ⁱ⁾ mw^(j).f
bnr.tw r šnbt.k nḥḥ r.k, ḥk3.n.k t3wy, šnwt.k m snḥm*
Offer the elixir, Utterance: great offerings comes
from Kharga Oasis, its water (i.e. wine) is sweet for
your chest, eternity for you, and you rule the two
lands, your followers as numerous as **locust**.

7-Dendara XV 298,6-7



*Ḥnk ḥrw-ꜥ, dd mdw: ḥrw-ꜥ r š3š3yt.k šnbt s3b-šwt šn
ḥ3.k m snḥm, ntr 3 m ḥꜥ, ntf nb nḥḥ hnm b3.f m 3ḥt.*
Offer the elixir, Utterance: the elixir for your throat,
falcon him of the dappled plumage, the circle of
protection is behind you as numerous as **locust**, the
great god in rejoice, he is lord of eternity, his Ba
united with the horizon.

8- Mammisi Dendara 24,5-6



*jw3w, wndww n rh^(k) tnw.sn, kbḥw jm.s m dm ʿg3t, d3t
mnt^(L) ʿ3 r snḥm.*

Cattle and short horned cattle their numbers are not
known (i.e. numberless), the water birds (i.e. prey
birds) inside it are sharp of talons, crane bird and
pigeon are numerous more than **locust**.

9-Edfou IV 3,3

jw3w, wndww wr.tw r snhmw.

Cattle and short horned cattle are more numerous than **locusts**.

10-Edfou VI 132,13

Nswt-bjty () s3-R^c (Ptwlmys ʿnh dt mry Pth) ntr nfr jty nb nhh šn h3.f m snhm.

King of Upper and Lower Egypt () son of Re (Ptolemy live forever Beloved of Ptah) the good god, the sovereign lord of eternity, the circle of protection is behind him as numerous as **locust**.

11-Edfou VI 133,8

Rdj^(m) j3rrt-r-mw jn nswt dd mdw s3-R^c () ntf nb nhh šn(wt) h3.f m snhm ʿm mjn wgj j3rrt Hr-bhdty ntr ʿ3 nb pt.

Presenting grapes and water by the king, Utterance: son of Re () he is lord of eternity, his circle of protection is behind him as numerous as **locust**, drink grape juice and chews grapes.

12- Edfou VI, 345,18

Wr phytj hr ptrt⁽ⁿ⁾ <šnwt> .f h3(.f) m snhmw.

Great of strength in battlefield (i.e. arena) his <followers> are behind (him) as numerous as **locusts**.

13-Edfou VII 71,2-7



H3yw⁽⁰⁾.s r snḥmw, ḥntš.s 3ḥ3ḥ.tj m šm^cw mḥw, sš.s jr w hr sšn nḥmt.

Its birds are more numerous than **locusts**; its fields are flourishing with cereals of Upper and Lower Egypt, all its basins are filled with lotus buds and flowers

14-Edfou VII 123,6-7



Wnn nb nḥ^(p) wbn.ti m Bḥdt, šnwt.f ḥ3.f m snḥmw, ḥr šsp iḥt.f ḥr s^cm hrt.f ḥr štp ib.f m irt-Hr.

Lord of eternity shine in Behdet, his followers around him as **locusts**, receiving his things, eating his rations, and pacifying his heart with Eye of Horus (i.e. wine).

15-Edfou VII 200,4-5



Dd mdw jn Hr-bḥdtj, ntr 3 nb pt, wr pḥtj ḥnt Wtst-Hr, 3š mnftyw mj snḥmw, ḥb ptrt jnj pḥwj n thj.⁽⁹⁾

Utterance by Horus-Behdety, the great god lord of the sky, great of strength inside Edfou (i.e. throne of Horus), numerous of infantry soldiers like locusts, treading the battlefield, to bring an end to one who attacks.

16-Edfou VII 284,3-5



ᵐ.n.k mw ntj wgj^(r) j3rtt, mš^c [.k h3.k]^(s) mj snhmw.

You drink water and chew grapes, [your] army [behind you] as numerous as locusts.

17- Esna III n°. 208, 69.



n Wsjr m rn(w).f nbw .

For Osiris in all his names.

Comments:

(a) The word  read as *mnftyw*⁽¹³⁾ and it is different about  which read as *mšc*⁽¹⁴⁾ mean “army”, the different is in what the soldier holds in his right and left hand. *mnftyw* are infantry of the army rather than chariotry. At Edfou, the word refers in general to soldiers of Horus, whose main function is to protect him.⁽¹⁵⁾

(b)The elixir *hrw-c*  is a kind of aromatic beverages. Grapes are the main ingredient and water. *hrw-c* was prepared at the first victory of Horus and it gives strength and vigour. Its red colour associates it with the drink which made Sakhmet drunk at the destruction of Mankind.⁽¹⁶⁾ Elixir appears as an offering only in temples of the Ptolemaic period. Thirty examples are known, at Philae, Edfou and Dendara The reddish colour evokes the blood of enemies spilled into the water; moreover, the potion is offered only to Horus.⁽¹⁷⁾ The recipient in eight of the rites at Edfou is Horus Behdety and in one Re of Behdet and Horakhty, but in all cases the warlike

attributes of the recipient are stressed, so that it seems the drink was supposed to improve performance in battle perhaps as 'Dutch courage'.⁽¹⁸⁾ The elixir *hrw-ꜥ* was also the male equivalent of the female *mnw* drink which referred to as the inebriation of goddesses.⁽¹⁹⁾ The locust related with the elixir *hrw-ꜥ* as it mentioned in the most of elixir offering scenes.

(c) The word *ist* could be correct into *ist*. The word *ist* was used to denote a band or company of men performing various tasks, from field work and transport, to helping in a slaughter house. It also refers to a group of soldiers [Schulman, Military Rank, 25 and 43] and came to be the crew of a ship and the crew of the sun boat of Re. Depending upon context *ist* can imply slightly different meanings.⁽²⁰⁾

(d) The lacuna can complete with *ist* or *ist* read as *Nswt-bity ꜥnh*.⁽²¹⁾

(e) The sign *ꜥ* is a tied loop of cord forming an unending, eternal circuit and so *šn* can be a circuit or circumference of some concrete object. It is the concept of a circle being a 'whole' 'complete', without end in space and total in time. Most of the phrases using *šn* refer to universal 'wholes' implying that the earth, sky, sun; moon and underworld were seen as being part of an unending circuit. The *šn*-sign is also a sign of protection - for it is a barrier without breaches and a safe place for anything inside it such as the name of the king.⁽²²⁾

(f) The sign $\overset{sic}{\curvearrowright}$ should be correct into Ω read as *šn.k*

(g) The sign $\overset{sic}{\curvearrowleft}$ should be correct into \curvearrowleft read as *.k*

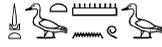
(h) In court circles the title may have applied to the trusted advisors, counselors and bodyguard of high officials and the king. At Edfou 𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏 *šnwt* usually refers to the followers of a god. In origin it may be those who are 'around' or who 'enclose' the king or god and therefore in origin is a participle from *šni* 'to enclose'.⁽²³⁾

(i) *Knmt* refers to Kharga Oasis.⁽²⁴⁾ It was a famous place which produces wine with the other places such as “Baharia Oasis”, “Nebsheh”, “Pelusium” and “Lake of Mariut”.⁽²⁵⁾

(j) The word $\overset{sic}{\equiv}$ should be correct into \equiv read as *mw.f*

(k) The sign 𓂏 read as *n rh*⁽²⁶⁾ this reading is a rare phonetic value in Ptolemaic texts.

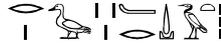
(L) 𓂏𓂏 *d3t* and 𓂏𓂏 *mnt* are two kinds of birds. The word *d3t* written in disorganization orthography as 𓂏𓂏 and it should write as 𓂏𓂏 . It appear in parallel texts as 𓂏𓂏 ⁽²⁷⁾ ; 𓂏𓂏 ⁽²⁸⁾ The *d3t* bird is “the crane” referred to as Crane *Grus grus*.⁽²⁹⁾ In other hand *mnt* refer to pigeon.⁽³⁰⁾ The two birds appear together as an offering:



d3t mnt

The crane and pigeon. ⁽³¹⁾

The Crane bird also appears with the *r3w*-gees:



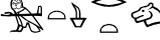
r3w hn d3t

The gees with cranes. ⁽³²⁾

(m) The sign  read as *rdj* “to offer”. ⁽³³⁾

(n) *ptrt* refer to the arena or battlefield. ⁽³⁴⁾ The word was written  in disorganization orthography, it appear in document n°.15 as . ⁽³⁵⁾ The earliest examples of the word are *prj* from D.18 are spelled . ⁽³⁶⁾ In Ptolemaic texts the word is usually written *ptr(t)* and used in war contexts. There are some synonyms of the word such as:

1- *pg3*  (37)

2- *mtbr*  (38)

3- *mtwn*  (39)

4- *r3-pdt*  (40)

5- *r3-d3t* / *r3-wd3t*  (41)

(o) The lacuna in the word *h3yw*  could be complete as . The word *h3jw* derives from the verb *h3j* 'to descend, go down'; a reference to birds in flight and it is often associated in puns with *h3yt* 'heaven'. It does not seem to refer to a specific species. ⁽⁴²⁾

(p) This sign  read as *nhh* it could also be written in the forms ;  or . ⁽⁴³⁾

(q) The idiom “*jn pḥwj n thj* ” mean “to bring an end to the one who attack”. It is a metaphorical meaning for destruction of the enemies. The idiom used always with the synonyms words of enemas such as *hftjw*; *sbjw*; *h3kw-jbw* ; *sntjw* and etc.

(r) The lacuna in the word *wgi*  could be complete as .⁽⁴³⁾

(s) The lacuna  could be complete as  or .

- Locust and elixir a signification approach:

From the examination of documents it is noticed that locust appear frequently in elixir offerings. Among 17 documents linked with locust, 11 of them were elixir offerings [Docs. 1- 2 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 10 - 11- 12 - 15 - 16]. Two of them were equivalent beverage to elixir one as *wnš* “wine” [Doc.3] and the other as *j3rrt-r-mw* “grapes with water” [Doc.14]. In the texts of elixir offerings the warlike attributes of the recipient are stressed. Another point was to focus on the numberless of soldiers by compare with locusts swarms. So that it seems the drink was supposed to improve performance in battle perhaps as 'Dutch courage'. And locusts play a metaphoric role in increase soldiers’ numbers. That is what makes locusts appear in the most of elixir scenes.

Doc.	Location	Kind of text
1	Dendara III 176	<i>elixir offering</i>
2	Dendara IV 18	<i>elixir offering</i>
3	Dendara V 56	wine offering
4	Dendara IX 152	<i>elixir offering</i>
5	Dendara XII 265	<i>elixir offering</i>
6	Dendara XIV 16	<i>elixir offering</i>
7	Dendara XV 298	<i>elixir offering</i>
8	Mammisi Dendara 24	doorjamb text
9	Edfou IV 3	foundation text
10	Edfou VI 132	<i>elixir offering</i>
11	Edfou VI 133	<i>elixir offering</i>
12	Edfou VI 345	<i>elixir offering</i>
13	Edfou VII 71	field offering
14	Edfou VII 123	grapes with water offering
15	Edfou VII 200	<i>elixir offering</i>
16	Edfou VII 284	<i>elixir offering</i>
17	Esna n°. 208	hymn to Osiris

Conclusion:

Locust was mentioned in Ptolemaic texts for numerous metaphorical propose. The metaphorical nature of the word for the plural form represents “the multitude” or “an infinite number of things”. The texts used locust as a simple method to focus on the idea of unlimited. The texts compare between locust and different words such as *soldiers*, *followers*, *army*, and *circle of protection*. The locusts appear frequently in elixir offerings. It linked with elixir of courage as they complete each other. The elixir improves performance in battle and locust metaphorically reflexes the unlimited number of

soldiers. They are together guaranteeing the victory.
The texts give number of synonyms for the arena or
battlefield.

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- (3) CT, VII, 244 d.
- (4) BD, Chapter 125. "I have rested in the northern city, in the field of locusts."
- (5) KRI II 19 § 51; M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature II* :
The New Kingdom (Berkeley,1976), P.64. ; KRI IV, 11.74, lines 9, 10; C. Manassa, *The Great Karnak Inscription of Merneptah: Grand Strategy in the 13th Century BC.* (New Haven, 2003), P.72.
- (6) Wilson, P.; a Ptolemaic Lexicon, P.867, where she notes the metaphorical nature of the word for the plural form represents "the multitude" or "an infinite number of things."
- (7) Ovid R. Sellers , "Stages of Locust in Joel," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 52, no.2 (Jan., 1936), P.81-85.
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- (9) Rosmorduc, Serge; : <http://jseshdoc.qenherkhopeshef.org> Online [access 12 Oct. 2017].
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