

Animal Metaphor in ancient Egyptian literature⁽¹⁾

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Abstract:

This study investigates how one may excavate and extract ancient metaphors from ancient Egyptian literature.

This paper discusses the representation of the King, the God, the enemies, or the author in animal images like lion, panther, or crocodile as metaphor of different emotions, strength, speed or the case of Egypt.

Keywords:

Metaphor – Animals - Literature - Ancient Egypt.

Introduction:

Origin and meaning of metaphor:

The origin of the word metaphor is from the Greek word *metaphora*, which is comprised of *meta* meaning “over” and *pherein* meaning “to carry”⁽¹⁾

There are many dictionary definition of metaphor such as “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison”.⁽²⁾

Therefore, according to Hawkes, metaphor means “a particular set of linguistic processes whereby aspects of one object are “carried over” or transferred to another object, so that the second object is spoken of as if it were the first”⁽³⁾

Metaphor like icons, and frequently based on them, often refers to characteristic features associated with a person, object, situation, or

⁽¹⁾ Hawkes, T., *Metaphor*, London, UK: Methuen & Co., 1972; Ortony, A., Why metaphors are necessary and not just nice. *Educational Theory*, 25(1), 1975, 45-53.

⁽²⁾ American Heritage Dictionary, New York, NY: Dell Publishing, 1994, 524.

⁽³⁾ Hawkes, T., *op.cit.* 1.

sensory experience that are easily recognizable and hence in some way idealized, or prototyped.⁽¹⁾

Such metaphors may render the object in question literally 'visible' to the 'mental eye' or allow connection of its perception with broadly similar experiences.⁽²⁾

Composition of metaphor:

Most metaphors consist of verbal descriptions of, or word plays on, concrete objects, persons or physical experiences, and/ or their visual representation in what might be called icons.⁽³⁾

Opinions about the Context of metaphors:

There exists a long-standing belief that metaphor is a figurative, linguistic expression and an abnormal ornament of use of language. That is to say, it was (or still is) a common belief that metaphors are not a part of ordinary everyday language but rather a figurative, decorative, and beautifully-refined, unique language function that can be found in literature, especially in poems and allegories.⁽⁴⁾

In this narrow sense, metaphor is regarded as only literary devices.⁽⁵⁾ Black argued that "recognition and interpretation of a metaphor may require attention to the particular circumstances of its utterance".⁽⁶⁾

This remark seems to emphasize the significance of the context of metaphors. Given that metaphor is not only a figurative expression but also a reflection of a conceptual structure, one can explore how specific people in specific contexts conceptualize things that they

⁽¹⁾ Orly Goldwasser, Prophets, lovers and giraffes: word classification in ancient Egypt, (2002) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz), 91–110.

⁽²⁾ Katz, Albert N., Figurative language and thought, Counterpoints Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 3–43.

⁽³⁾ Feldman, Jerome A., From molecule to metaphor. A neural theory of language, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008, 194. / John Baines, Decorum and experience essays in ancient culture, Griffith Institute, Oxford 2013, 128.

⁽⁴⁾ John Baines, Decorum and experience essays in ancient culture, Griffith Institute, Oxford 2013, 128.

⁽⁵⁾ Gannon, M. J. (Ed.), Cultural metaphors: Readings, research translations, and commentary. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication, 2001.

⁽⁶⁾ Black, M., Models and metaphors: Studies in language and philosophy, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962, 29.

face by analyzing both explicit and implicit metaphors. In many cases, because there is no referent anywhere in the text, one can infer the meanings from the context.⁽¹⁾

Embedded Metaphor is used to indicate the idea that metaphors are so widespread in everyday life that people are even unaware of their usage.

If metaphors are predominantly a product of the embodied mind, it is not surprising that many of them may appear universal.

Zoltán Kövecses⁽²⁾ has argued that more fundamental metaphors called primary by Lakoff and Johnson⁽³⁾ are more likely to be universal, while complex (secondary) metaphors tend to be culturally specific.⁽⁴⁾

Using animals in metaphor:

Animals have held an important place in written literature for thousands of years even prior to the written languages, ancient peoples told animal stories by drawing symbolic visual narratives on the walls of their cave homes.⁽⁵⁾

There has been a considerable amount of work on animals, animals sacrifice and on the theological significance of animals but little work done on the wider use of animal imagery in ancient Egyptian literature.⁽⁶⁾

⁽¹⁾ Steen, G., Metaphor and discourse: Towards a linguistic checklist for metaphor analysis, In L. Cameron & G. Low (Eds.), Researching and applying metaphor, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. 1999, 81-104.

⁽²⁾ Zoltán Kövecses (Kövecses, Z., Metaphor in culture: universality and variation, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

⁽³⁾ Lakoff, G., and Johnson M., Metaphors we live by, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

⁽⁴⁾ Goebis, K., "Egyptian mythos as logos: an attempt at a redefinition of 'mythical thinking'. /Decorum and experience, essays in ancient culture for John Baines, Edited by Elizabeth Froom and Angela McDonald, Griffith Institute, Oxford 2013, 127-134.

⁽⁵⁾ Ahmad Abo el Magd, Dehumanization of the "Other": Animal Metaphor of Defeated Enemies in The New Kingdom Military Texts, 1-18.

⁽⁶⁾ T. Gillen, "His Horses are like falcons: war imagery in Ramesside Texts", in Endrelby, K., Gulyus Andrias (eds.), Proceedings of the Fourth Central European

A characteristic feature of the historical military texts during the New Kingdom is the use of animal similes and metaphors of wild, dangerous, aggressive and fast-moving (noble) animals like: lions, panthers, wolves, falcons and crocodiles not only to symbolize the King's strength, courage, aggressive reactions and political power but rather to stress his role in connection to the entire cosmic system as protector of Order (Maat).⁽¹⁾

On the other hand, there are other typical animals that always appear to stress the King's prowess, strength and control over his enemies through their comparison to weak, helpless, easy trampled, disgusting animals like: fish, dogs, locusts, tadpoles, foxes to demonstrate their inferior status.⁽²⁾

Examples for animals' metaphor:

1/ crocodile:

The Tale Of The Eloquent Peasant:

-The king is in the palace, and the tiller is in your hand, But evil is done all around you. Lengthy is my petition, and heavy is my lot. People will say, 'What business does that fellow have? Construct a refuge, keep your river bank hale, for behold, your abode reeks of crocodiles.'⁽³⁾

*The peasant described the enemies who spread everywhere as the crocodiles which bad smell spreads in the country, referring to the danger that comes to Egypt.

Conference of Young Egyptologists, 31August – 2September (Budapest,2006), 133-146. /A. Abo el Magd, "Animal imagery in expressing royal and divine rage in ancient Egyptian Texts". /Journal of Association of Arab Universities for Tourism and Hospitality, Special issue for the Proceedings of the Third International Arab Tourism Conference, Alexandria 13-15November 2012, 1-10.

(1) T. Gillen, "His Horses are like falcons: war imagery in Ramesside Texts", (Budapest, 2006), 133-146

(2) Ahmad Abo el Magd, Dehumanization of the "Other": Animal Metaphor of Defeated Enemies in The New Kingdom Military Texts, 1-18.

(3) William Kelly Simpson , "The Literature Of Ancient Egypt", Yale University Press/New Haven & London , 2003, 33. M. /Lichtheim,Ancient Egyptian Literature,vol. 1 (Berkeley, 1973), 169–84. /R. B. Parkinson,The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940–1640 bc(Oxford, 1997), 54–88.

-Behold, you are a poor shepherd of the flock, for you take no heed. Act, therefore, less like a gluttonous crocodile, for there is no safety in any town of this entire land.⁽¹⁾

*The peasant described the Chief Steward in his neglecting the needs of the people and not protecting them as a gluttonous crocodile which cares about its needs only, or the peasant wanted to drive the chief to take care about his people and their needs at least as the gluttonous crocodile do for his needs.

The lion:

Stela Of Neferabu (Turin N 50058):

-Now see, I shall tell senior(s) and junior(s) who are in the gang: Beware of the Peak! For a lion exists within her. The / Peak strikes with the stroke of a fierce lion When she is in pursuit of the one who has transgressed against her.⁽²⁾

*The scribe, the servant in the Place of Truth, Neferabu, identified Goddess Peak as a lion in following and bunching the person who transgressed and sinned against her, referring to her strength and speed.

The Capture Of Joppa:

-“look at me, O Rebel of Joppa! Here is King Menkheperre, l.p.h., the fierce lion, Sakhmet’s son, to whom Amon has given his strength.”⁽³⁾

*Djehuty, a prominent general and garrison commander under Thutmose III is talking to the Prince of Joppa about the king, and identified the king as the fierce lion, referring to the strength of the king.

(1) W. Simpson , "The Literature Of Ancient Egypt", 2003, 35. M. Lichtheim,Ancient Egyptian Literature,vol. 1, 1973, 169–84. R. B. Parkinson,The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1997,54–88.

(2) W. Simpson , "The Literature Of Ancient Egypt", 2003,287. Georges Posener in RdE 27 (1975): 195–210.

(3) W. Simpson , "The Literature Of Ancient Egypt", 2003,73.

The Hawk:

The Tale Of The Eloquent Peasant:

-Behold, you are / a hawk to the commoners, One who lives on the most worthless of the birds.⁽¹⁾

*The eloquent peasant describes Chief Steward of the crown as a hawk referring to his strength

Unas Pyramid Texts:

-Unas is the divine hawk, the great hawk of hawks,
Whom he finds on his way he devours whole.⁽²⁾

*Describing the king Unas as the great hawk referring to his strength that he devours his enemies.

The falcon:

The Story Of Sinuhe:

-When the messengers found him upon the road / and reached him at dusk, he did not delay for a moment. The Falcon flew off with his followers without letting his expeditionary force know it.⁽³⁾

*Sinuhe describing king Senwosret son of king AMENEMHET I as a falcon in his strength and his speed of response and reaction

Admonitions Of Anegyptian Sage:

-Behold now, deeds are done which have never before occurred,
For the king has been overthrown by the rabble.
Behold, he who was buried as a falcon (now) sleeps on a bier,

⁽¹⁾ W. Simpson , "The Literature Of Ancient Egypt", 2003, 35. M. Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature, vol. 1, 1973, 169–84. R. B. Parkinson, The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1997, 54–88.

⁽²⁾ Miriam Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature, Volume 1: The Old and Middle Kingdoms, the Regents of the university of California, 1973, 2006, first paperback edition published 1975, 37

⁽³⁾ W. Simpson , "The Literature Of Ancient Egypt", 2003, 56

And what the pyramid once held hidden will (now) be wanting.

Behold now, the land begins to lose the kingship, At the hands of a few men who ignore tradition.⁽¹⁾

*Ipuwer is portrayed as addressing a king whose name is not known as a reflection of the chaos which pervaded Egypt during the First Intermediate Period, ipuwer describing how the rich became poor and how the poor became rich by identifying the rich one as a falcon who was buried in a great tomb but now sleeps on a bier also the treasures of the pyramids are stolen.

Birds:

The Prophecies Of Neferty:

-Foreign birds will breed in the Delta marshes,
Having made their nests beside the people,
For men have let them approach through laxness.
Perished and gone are those joyful places,
The fish ponds where dwell fish-eating birds,
(Ponds) alive with fish and fowl.
All joy has been driven out,
And the land is plunged into anguish
By those voracious Asiatics who rove throughout the land.⁽²⁾

*The lector-priest of Bastet, whose name is Neferty predicts to the King Snefru about what will happen in Egypt, and described the Asiatics as foreign birds which will breed in the Delta marshes, Having made their nests beside the people, in a Reference to the misery case into which Egypt will be.

The Leiden Hymns:

-Bird of prey who swoops to seize His assailant,
talons keen to shred flesh and crack bone!
How He delights to do battle, secure in His puissant arm!
Hills quake to His tread when the war-fit masters Him, Earth shakes
as He bellows His war-cry, creation cowers in fear.
O, woe to any who challenge Him, who taste the play of His twin-tipped weapon, For He, our God, is skilled above any, Lord of the deadly horns.⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ W. Simpson, "The Literature of Ancient Egypt", 2003,198.

⁽²⁾ W. Simpson, "The Literature of Ancient Egypt", 2003, 217.

*The poet describes God Amun as a bird of prey who catch his prey ,while his talons sherd flesh and crack bones of this prey, referring to his might.

The bull:

The Story Of Sinuhe:

-I am like a bull of a grazing herd in the midst of another herd. The bull of the kine attacks him, but the (Egyptian) bull prevails against him. Is a subject loved when he acts the master?

There is no foreign bowman who is an ally of a Delta man. What is it that can join a papyrus plant to a rock? Does a bull wish to fight? Then a champion bull will wish to retreat through fear of one who might equal him. But if his intention is to fight, let him say what he wants. Is God ignorant of what he has ordained, knowing (as he does) how the matter stands?⁽²⁾

*Sinuhe refer to himself as an Egyptian bull who is stronger than any other champion bull. That means the Egyptian fighter is stronger than any one from other countries.

The Tale Of The Two Brothers:

-Presently he went out from his country villa and encountered the Ennead as they were walking (along) governing the entire land. The Ennead spoke in unison, saying to him, “Oh, Bata, Bull of the Ennead, are you alone here having abandoned your town before the face of the wife of Anubis, your elder brother?⁽³⁾

*Referring to the strength of Bata.

(1) JOHN L. FOSTER, Ancient Egyptian Literature, An Anthology, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS PRESS, 2001, 167.

(2) W. Simpson, "The Literature of Ancient Egypt", 2003, 59.

(3) W. Simpson, "The Literature of Ancient Egypt", 2003, 85.

Dogs and hounds:

The Story Of Sinuhe:

-Not to mention Retenu, for it belongs to you even as your hounds.⁽¹⁾

*Sinuhe in his replay to the decree of king Senwosret, and talking about the city Retenu, and its loyalty to the king as his hounds.

The Teaching Of King Amenemhet I For His Son Senwosret:

-I subdued lions, I captured crocodiles,
I enslaved the men of Nubia, took prisoner the Medjay,
And I forced the Asiatic tribes to cower away like dogs.⁽²⁾

*Referring to the weakness of the Asiatic tribes in front of the might of the king Amenemhet.

The panther:

The Tale Of The Two Brothers

-Then the youth became like an Upper Egyptian panther in furious rage over the wicked proposition she had made to him, and she became exceedingly fearful.⁽³⁾

*Bata the younger brother of Anubis, became very angry as an Egyptian panther, because of the words of the wife of his brother. That referring to the great anger.

-Then his elder brother became / like an Upper Egyptian panther, and he sharpened his spear and put it in his hand.⁽⁴⁾

*Anubis the elder brother became like panther referring to the great anger because of what his wife told him about Bata.

⁽¹⁾ W. Simpson, "The Literature of Ancient Egypt", 2003, 63.

⁽²⁾ W. Simpson, "The Literature of Ancient Egypt", 2003, 170.

⁽³⁾ W. Simpson, "The Literature of Ancient Egypt", 2003, 82.

⁽⁴⁾ W. Simpson, "The Literature of Ancient Egypt", 2003, 84.

The snake / serpent:

The Teaching Of King Amenemhet I For His Son Senwosret:

-Weapons (intended for) my protection were raised against me,
While I acted like a snake of the desert.
I woke up to the fighting, pulled myself together, and found that it
was a skirmish of the palace guard.⁽¹⁾

*The snake referring to the speed and cleverness in running away.

The Victory Stela Of Piye:

-Behold, [he is] / beleaguering Heracleopolis (Ihnasya el-Medina),
and he has made himself an enclosing uroborous, not allowing goers
to go nor allowing entrants to enter, while fighting every day.⁽²⁾

*uroborous means “tail-in-mouth,” designating a snake biting its
tail, a symbolic enclosure both protective and hostile.

Jackal:

Pyramid Texts:

-Utterance 412: a spell for resurrection:

The portals of heaven open to you, the gates of the Duat unfold to
you,

For you have descended as the jackal of Upper Egypt,

Even as Anubis who reclines upon his stomach,

Even as Wepiu who is at the head of On.⁽³⁾

=Note: The Duat, the netherworld, had its significance not so much
as a geographical location, but as a place where the deceased king
ruled and from where he was reborn at dawn. The opening of the
gates of the Duat for the king indicates the recognition of his
authority and his ability to enter and to leave freely.

⁽¹⁾ W. Simpson, "The Literature of Ancient Egypt", 2003, 169.

⁽²⁾ W. Simpson, "The Literature of Ancient Egypt", 2003, 370.

⁽³⁾ W. Simpson, "The Literature of Ancient Egypt", 2003, 253.

*The scribe identified the king as the jackal of upper Egypt referring to his strength and as the God Anubis the black Jackal reclines upon his stomach referring to his stability and as the god Wepiu the White one referring to his authority upon Heliopolis, (the ancient sanctuary of the creator solar deity Re-Atum, situated not far from Memphis, and the mythological center of the Heliopolitan Ennead).

The Poetical Stela Of Thutmose III:

-I have come to empower you to crush the leaders of the earth;
You will fetter the Bedouins as prisoners;
I shall cause them to know your Majesty as the Jackal of Upper Egypt, The swift runner who traverses the Two Lands.⁽¹⁾

*God Amun Ra identified the king as the Jackal, referring to his strength and speed.

Leopard:

The Autobiography of Ahmose Son of Abana : Nubian campaign of King Thutmose I:

-At this his majesty became enraged like a leopard. His majesty shot, and his first arrow pierced the chest of that foe. Then those enemies turned to flee, helpless before his Uraeus.⁽²⁾

*Ahmose Son of Abana is Depicting the angry king (Thutmose I) as a leopard referring to his strength power and speed.

The Donkey:

Papyrus Lansing:A School Book

Made by the royal scribe and chief overseer of the cattle of Amen-Re, King of. Gods, Nebmare-nakht for his apprentice, the scribe Wenemdianun:

⁽¹⁾ W. Simpson, "The Literature of Ancient Egypt", 2003, 354.

⁽²⁾ Lichtheim, Miriam, Ancient Egyptian literature II– the New Kingdom, 2nd edn. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2006, 14.

-Do you not recall the (fate of) the unskilled man? His name is not known. He is ever burdened like an ass carrying in front of the scribe who knows what he is about.⁽¹⁾

*Describing the unskilled man as a donkey referring to that he is idiot and how bad he is.

-They go in and out in the halls of the palace, saying: "Get laborers!" He is awakened at any hour. One is after him as after a donkey. He toils until the Aten sets in his darkness of night. He is hungry, his belly hurts; he is dead while yet alive. When he receives the grain-ration, having been released from duty, it is not good for grinding.⁽²⁾

*Referring to the soldier in his fleeing from the enemy like the donkey which his owner is after him to move quickly, and after releasing him from the duty he is not ready for grinding because he became old and tired.

⁽¹⁾ Lichtheim, Miriam, Ancient Egyptian literature II– the New Kingdom, 2006, 171

⁽²⁾ Lichtheim, Miriam, Ancient Egyptian literature II– the New Kingdom, 2006, 172.

Conclusion:

After all, metaphor formation is the process of understanding and describing one domain (a source) in terms of another (a target).⁽¹⁾

A wealth of evidence highlighting the importance of divine metaphor can be gleaned from texts describing the effectiveness of the king and his nature, which is habitually likened to that of a variety of deities.⁽²⁾

One example will suffice: In the famous account of the Battle of Qadesh between Ramesses II and the Hittite King Muwatalli II⁽³⁾

the king appears as Montu, Atum, the Consuming Flame (i.e. uraeus goddess), and Seth, but also as a bull, wild lion, strong wall around, and shield for his soldiers. Thus myth meets metaphor – in highly figurative language.⁽⁴⁾

The mythical characters invoked function, in essence, as icons, allowing the reader to visualize the king in terms of the various deities and their characteristics.⁽⁵⁾

Any treatment of the animal imagery or animal metaphor in ancient Egyptian literature requires special attention to its contextual meaning and cultural evaluation. The understanding of the text context is very important to recognize the exact meaning.⁽⁶⁾

⁽¹⁾ Feldman, Jerome A., from molecule to metaphor. A neural theory of language, 2008, 194. /Decorum and experience essays in ancient culture for John Baines /The sensory world: art, religion, experience 128.

⁽²⁾ Grimal, Nicolas-Christophe. Les termes de la propagande royale égyptienne: de la XIXe dynastie à la conquête d'Alexandre, Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres 6 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1986, 358-436.

⁽³⁾ Lichtheim, Miriam. Ancient Egyptian literature II– the New Kingdom, 2006, 62-63.

⁽⁴⁾ Katz, Albert N, Figurative language and thought, Counterpoints, (1998), 3-43.

⁽⁵⁾ John Baines, Decorum and experience essays in ancient culture, 2013/ 131.

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