

## Impartiality as an Ethical Behavior in Ancient Egypt:

### A Textual Investigation

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#### ABSTRACT

The occasional recurrence of formulae concerning assertion of equality among people is tempting to explore. In shaping the image of the good character, fairness was regarded as a rule establishing connections among human beings in the ancient Egyptian civilization. The research is a study of a personal attitude that strengthens our understanding of the concepts of impartiality in ancient Egypt. The texts identify the principles governing proper conduct, outlining an important self-portrait and identifying a key structural issue in relationships. Several textual sources include warnings to commit morally denied social acts; among which partiality is mentioned. The study is an attempt to contextualizing impartiality, considered as the correct conventional character in the culture of the ancient Egyptian society. Based on the lexicographical and textual study, the analysis brings forth examining contexts in which people conceived favouring someone's side as unjust and partial. Concerning the topic of impartiality, the ancient Egyptian language was expressive. All the terms are complementary in emphasizing morality and rendering fair judgements. The texts confirm the importance of not favouring one of two persons by supporting one instead of the other. Expressions denoting impartiality made their appearance starting from the Old Kingdom.

#### Introduction

It is certainly the ancient Egyptians' self-consideration and estimation of matters that should be taken into account while trying to understand and evaluate their own concepts concerning the other. The occasional recurrence of formulae concerning assertion of equality among people is tempting to explore. Qualifying the possessor of good character creates the portrait of the personality who righteously treats others. In shaping the image of the good character,<sup>1</sup> fairness was not regarded as a quality, rather

<sup>1</sup> M. Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, OBO 120 (Freiburg, 1992), 11.

as a rule establishing connections among human beings. M. Lichtheim<sup>2</sup> wrote: “By the formulation of Coffin Text spell 1130, where the sun-god declares “I made every man like his fellow”,<sup>3</sup> and by later formulations as well, the Egyptian made explicit what was implied in his ever repeated teachings on benevolence to all. He recognized the brotherhood of mankind. By this recognition his ethic was an ethic for everyone.”

Morals constituted the strongest principle repeated in auto/biographies. A positive character in Egyptian texts was characterized by honesty as a significant requirement for maintaining relationships,<sup>4</sup> as well as for being efficient and for inhibiting corruptible administration.<sup>5</sup>

The research is a study of a personal attitude that strengthens the understanding of the concepts of impartiality in ancient Egypt. The texts identify principles governing proper conduct, with reference to profiled attributes outlining an important self-portrait and identifying a key structural issue in relationships.

*M3ʕt* doing originated since the Thinite period, and was ever since a major element in ancient Egyptian morals.<sup>6</sup> Fair judging was emphasized in tomb inscriptions as early as the Old Kingdom. Impartiality and objective judgements were integral constituents of the idea of *M3ʕt* in ancient Egypt.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it appears that both injustice and partiality were paralleled. Variations and parallels of the terms identifying the ethic of persons denote virtuous behavior; in particular, for not being partial.

### **Impartiality as marker of inequality**

The teachings and autobiographies confirm that power abuse should be avoided. In Old Kingdom autobiographies, officials deny measures to increase their wealth wrongfully or incorrectly acquire property.<sup>8</sup> In the meantime they confirm avoiding exercising discrimination, in a culture where inequality and unfairness were regarded as mistreatment and immoral behaviors.<sup>9</sup>

It is therefore significant to explore the words and expressions that they used to express denial of partiality and biased treatment. One of the most valuable and accurate sources of such documents are auto/biographies and teachings. The

<sup>2</sup> M. Lichtheim, *Moral Values in Ancient Egypt*, OBO 155 (Freiburg, 1997), 95.

<sup>3</sup> A. de Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts VII. Texts of spells 787-1185*, OIP 87 (Chicago, 1961), Spell 1130, hereunder document (1.5).

<sup>4</sup> J. F. Quack, *Die Lehre des Ani. Eine Neuägyptischer Weisheitstext in seinem kulturellen Umfeld*, OBO 141 (Freiburg, 1994), 99 (B 18, 6-9); A. Verbovsek and B. Backes, “‘Ich hatte viele Freunde unter allen Leuten meiner Stadt ...’ Zur Bedeutung von Freundschaft im Alten Ägypten,” in Elisabeth Froid and Angela McDonald, eds., *Decorum and Experience: Essays in Ancient Culture for John Baines* (Oxford, 2013), 79.

<sup>5</sup> Lichtheim, *Moral Values in Ancient Egypt*, 60.

<sup>6</sup> W. Helck, “Maat”, in W. Helck and E. Otto (eds.), *LÄ III* (Wiesbaden, 1980), 1110-1111.

<sup>7</sup> S. Allam, “Gerichtsbarkeit”, in W. Helck and E. Otto (eds.), *LÄ II* (Wiesbaden, 1977), 541, 542; S. Allam, “Richter”, in W. Helck and E. Otto (eds.), *LÄ V* (Wiesbaden, 1984), 255.

<sup>8</sup> A. M. Gnirs, “The Language of Corruption: On Rich and Poor in the Eloquent Peasant”, *LingAeg* 8 (2000), 128.

<sup>9</sup> Lichtheim, *Moral Values in Ancient Egypt*, OBO 155 (Freiburg, 1997), 87, 88.

phraseology includes the particular context of the need to confirm impartiality and credibility towards all humans.

Affirmations of not being partial were prominent in literary texts, teachings and biographies.<sup>10</sup> The texts include warnings of favoritism on the basis of personal bondings rather than professional achievements.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, partiality was conceived as an unethical behavior. Several sources include warnings to commit morally denied social acts; among which partiality is mentioned. Yet, would biased treatment be equaled to a corruptive act or to an immoral behavior?

The study is an attempt to contextualising impartiality, considered as the correct conventional character in the culture of the Egyptian society. Based on the textual study, the analysis brings forth examining ways in which people conceived favouring someone's side as unjust and partial.

### **Definition of impartiality**

The character of someone impartial suggests a range of meanings which find expression in the texts. In terms of genre, relevant texts hint at correctness of behavior, with associations of not being greedy and good self conduct; often highlighted for the respectable character.<sup>12</sup>

Biased treatment would be defined as a mere practice of favouring someone or show partiality whether in judging or in acting, regardless of righteousness. In this sense it invokes injustice and deviation from rectitude. Supporting someone regardless of whether he was known to the person or not, was obviously paramount in considering a person possessor of good morals. The main aim was to prevent obscuration of the heart<sup>13</sup> that would lead to injustice, in contrast to 'someone who listened truly' *sdm.w r wn-m3c* (document 3.2.).<sup>14</sup>

The purpose of studying the repertoire of texts and expressions denoting impartiality is twofold: First, providing a definition of impartiality in ancient Egypt, and second, studying the varied expressions hinting at impartiality. In this respect it is noteworthy that different terms and expressions alluding to partiality and denoting corruption were used interchangeably.

### **Impartiality in the language**

Occurrences of expressions denoting impartiality, affirmations of making correct judgements and acting honestly are the subject of the study. It is noteworthy that the research does not concern texts related to judgements; rather evidence for declarations of impartiality. Denying any wrongful act was subject of tomb autobiographies since

<sup>10</sup> Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, 126.

<sup>11</sup> Gnirs, "The Language of Corruption: On Rich and Poor in the Eloquent Peasant", 134.

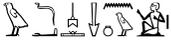
<sup>12</sup> Lichtheim, *Moral Values in Ancient Egypt*, OBO 155 (Freiburg, 1997), 33; *Urk. IV*, 2155.

<sup>13</sup> S. Quirke, *Egyptian Literature 1800 BC : questions and readings*, GHP Egyptology, (London, 2004), 164; Parkinson; *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* (Oxford, 1991), 296; Gnirs, "The Language of Corruption: On Rich and Poor in the Eloquent Peasant", 137.

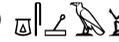
<sup>14</sup> K. Sethe, *Aegyptische Lesestücke zum Gebrauch im akademischen Unterricht. Texte des Mittleren Reiches* (Leipzig, 1924), 79-80.

the Old Kingdom.<sup>15</sup> The texts confirm the importance of not favouring one of two persons by supporting one instead of the other. Expressions denoting impartiality made their appearance starting from the Old Kingdom. Yet, affirmations of having been righteous *m3<sup>c</sup>ty*, *m3<sup>c</sup>-ib* were frequent during the Middle Kingdom.<sup>16</sup>

Concerning the topic of impartiality, the language was expressive. All the terms are complementary in emphasizing morality and rendering fair judgements. Following are specific terminology used to denote partiality, followed by a detailed analysis of textual examples.

-  **w<sub>d</sub><sup>c</sup> snwy ‘judging between two parties’**

The term *w<sub>d</sub><sup>c</sup> snwy* ‘judging between two parties’ was translated by the *Berlin Wörterbuch* as “die Beiden (streitenden) trennen”.<sup>17</sup> The form appeared since the Old Kingdom in a few occurrences studied thereunder.<sup>18</sup> It is noteworthy that *w<sub>d</sub><sup>c</sup> snwy* is to be differentiated from *w<sub>d</sub><sup>c</sup>* ‘judging’,<sup>19</sup> the later being the more general term for the act of judging. The texts emphasize the negative consequences of unfair judgement as a corruptive misconduct. This does not imply that the person in charge was necessarily a judge; it rather applies to anyone who would be making preferences.

-  **gs<sub>3</sub> ‘favour someone’**,<sup>20</sup>  **gs<sub>3</sub> ‘favourite’**<sup>21</sup> are expressions derived from *gs* ‘side’, ‘show partiality’ (of judge); ‘incline to one side’ (of balance).<sup>22</sup> Both expressions are attested since the Middle Kingdom. The texts include warnings regarding taking someone’s side by inclining toward one side. *Pth-htp* advises ‘do not be partial when you judge two men’,<sup>23</sup> and it is also paralleled to *rdit hr-gs*, *rdi hr-gs* ‘to give to the side / to favor’ ‘to be partial or in favour of’. A parallel expression is *rdi k<sup>c</sup>h* ‘to turn the shoulder’; i.e. to incline to someone.<sup>24</sup> In this sense the expression has a negative meaning. On the other hand, *iri k<sup>c</sup>h* ‘to make the shoulder’ means to be positively a support of someone.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cf. examples in: *Urk.* I, 47 (5), 49 (4), 57 (16); Gnirs, “The Language of Corruption: On Rich and Poor in the Eloquent Peasant”, 128.

<sup>16</sup> Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, 34, 135.

<sup>17</sup> *Wb* I, 404, 10. Cf. similar translation in R. Hannig, *Ägyptisches Wörterbuch I Altes Reich und Erste Zwischenzeit*, Band 98 (Mainz am Rhein, 2003), 400, {9082} “richtend trennen (2 Personen).

<sup>18</sup> An occurrence was as well detected reading  *w<sub>d</sub><sup>c</sup> snwy* on a Late Period statue nr. 564. See L. Borchardt, *Statuen und Statuetten von Königen und Privatleuten im Museum von Kairo. Text und Tafeln zu Nr. 381 - 653*, Catalogue Général des antiquités égyptiennes du musée du Caire (Nr. 1-1294) (Berlin, 1925), nr. 564.

<sup>19</sup> *Wb* I, 404, 3-9 “trennen, richten”.

<sup>20</sup> *Wb* V, 192, 20; R. O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford, 1988), 292.

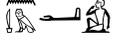
<sup>21</sup> Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 292.

<sup>22</sup> Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 291; *AnLex* II, 405, 78.4484.

<sup>23</sup> Z. Zába, *Les maximes de Ptahhotep* (Prague, 1956), 49 (418-19 L1).

<sup>24</sup> *Wb* V, 19, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Gnirs, “The Language of Corruption: On Rich and Poor in the Eloquent Peasant”, 134.

- , var.  *nm<sup>c</sup> (n)*<sup>26</sup> is also attested since the Middle Kingdom, and is translated ‘to be biased’;<sup>27</sup> i.e. ‘be one-sided, partial’.<sup>28</sup> During the Middle Kingdom it was either determined by the man with the hand to the mouth  or the corner of wall . The term *nm<sup>c</sup>* ‘partiality’ is synonymous with *gs3* and *rdi hr-gs*,<sup>29</sup> also translated as ‘to be in favour of, to incline towards someone’.<sup>30</sup> The word *nm<sup>c</sup>* was the concern of many texts, and was described by Parkinson as “a major crime of the official”.<sup>31</sup>
- Besides the above discussed terms, more general expressions were used to affirm fairness in judgement; therefore, being impartial. The contexts help detecting the meaning, especially in Old Kingdom texts. The studied examples highlight meanings such as judging between two (parties) in a way that contents both of them (document 1.1), treating people whom one knows like the ones whom he does not know (document 1.6) and performing justice (document 1.7).

### Misuse of authority

Being partial might suggest a kind of pressure that could be exercised on someone of lower position. It could also be someone who was not necessarily supported by a person in charge, or who was further his dependant(s). Such an act might be in connection with assuring protection and favour by someone powerful or in authority. This was considered as improper superior’s inclination towards supporting someone, with the possibility of exploitation of authority.<sup>32</sup> The term  *nm<sup>c</sup>* ‘partiality’ which made its appearance in the Middle Kingdom, was even defined by Parkinson as “a major crime of the official”.<sup>33</sup> The texts therefore highlight renunciation of mistreatment and of privileging one person to another.

The heart *ib* and the character *kd* were forces that shape and channel man’s thoughts and actions. In this respect listening to the heart *sdm n ib* meant ‘to look after personal interests’ (Peasant, B2 104-105).<sup>34</sup>

The studied texts constitute a corpus of sociological treatments that help to define the importance of equality. The occurrence of such contexts in the teachings aim at justifying one’s willingness to treat people equally regardless of previous knowledge of any of them. Such a behavior would entail that knowing a person of importance was considered influential in facilitating support. However, the sources do not explicitly mention the kind of given support. Justice due to the common man was as

<sup>26</sup> Gnirs, “The Language of Corruption: On Rich and Poor in the Eloquent Peasant”, 133.

<sup>27</sup> *Wb* II, 267, 1-2 “parteeisch sein”.

<sup>28</sup> Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 133; *AnLex* I, 192, 193, 77.2108.

<sup>29</sup> Parkinson, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*, 296.

<sup>30</sup> H. Goedicke, *Die privaten Rechtsinschriften aus dem Alten Reich* (Wien, 1970), 86; Gnirs, “The Language of Corruption: On Rich and Poor in the Eloquent Peasant”, 134 n. 60.

<sup>31</sup> Parkinson, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*, 296.

<sup>32</sup> R. O. Faulkner, “The Installation of the Vizier”, *JEA* 41 (1955), 1955, 29.

<sup>33</sup> Parkinson, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*, 296.

<sup>34</sup> See Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, 23; Gnirs, “The Language of Corruption: On Rich and Poor in the Eloquent Peasant”, 137.

well subject of literary texts, an example of which is the tale of the Eloquent Peasant.<sup>35</sup>

### **Social aspects that might cause biased judgements**

The texts highlight principles that should govern human conduct, especially for people holding official posts. Intentional inclination towards a friend *hnms*, a comrade *mhnk* or someone with family ties (e.g. a brother *sn*),<sup>36</sup> were warned of in order to avoid social inequality. This would ensure dealing with people with no beneficiary status. Gnirs discussed a passage of the peasant's third petition, associating Rensi's biased behavior with his personal ties. The peasant's petition (B 1 199-202) provides examples of the use of the neutral terms *sn* and *hnms*.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, the nomarch *hty* left inscriptions in his tomb (nr. IV) at Assiut concerning the same theme highlighting how a person in charge should be keen not to be partial. Nevertheless, the text indicates an excessive degree of overdoing correctness; resulting in repudiating family members and related people.<sup>38</sup> Partiality was equally stated among wrongful acts as in the tomb-chapel of *df3(.i) h<sup>c</sup>py* (nr. I) in Assiut.<sup>39</sup>

Less explicit ways likewise hint at forms of obtaining support. Persons in high political positions or high-ranked were additionally sometimes invited to some feasts. According to Jauhiainen, such gatherings could have possibly been occasions for obtaining support from influential members of the society.<sup>40</sup> Although the offices of foreman and scribe were passed from father to son, it seems that there were opportunities to form alliances to improve career advancement chances. An example might be the reference to a feast from the Ramesside period mentioned in Ostrakon Cairo CG 25532, vs. 6.<sup>41</sup> Indications led Janssen to similarly suggest that *Nfr htpw* wanted to pass his position to a favorite.<sup>42</sup>

### **Textual sources**

Apart from the specific terminology pointing at denunciation of partiality, the corpus of the study further includes texts invoking the significance of how being correct and straightforward were praised. Henceforth, they were documented from the following literary sources:

- Didactic literature
- Autobiographies (stelae, statues and tomb inscriptions)

<sup>35</sup> Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, 42.

<sup>36</sup> Both *hnms* and *sn* characterize equal standing. Franke, *Verwandschaftsbezeichnungen*, 311. 355-362.

<sup>37</sup> Gnirs, "The Language of Corruption: On Rich and Poor in the Eloquent Peasant", 137.

<sup>38</sup> Gnirs, "The Language of Corruption: On Rich and Poor in the Eloquent Peasant", 138, n. 87. "Kheti, nomarch of Assiut, claims that he was (a man) who was powerful (*sh<sup>m</sup>*) [in his nome], [who judges everyone rightfully], [without being] partial (*nm<sup>c</sup> n*) in favor of his fathers, his mothers, his wives, his children, his retainers (*šmsw.f*) or [any person] who followed him (*[rm<sup>t</sup> nb] iw.w m-ht.f*)".

<sup>39</sup> *Urk.* VII, 63, 5-7.

<sup>40</sup> On Ostrakon BM EA 50744, rt. 1-2 and Ostrakon Cairo CG 25290 I, 1-4, it is further stated that the vizier was present at certain festivities. H. Jauhiainen, "Do not Celebrate Your Feast Without Your Neighbours. A Study of References to Feasts and Festivals in Non-Literary Documents from Ramesside Period Deir el-Medina" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2009), 301; KRI VI, 1983, 143-144.

<sup>41</sup> Jauhiainen, "Do not Celebrate Your Feast Without Your Neighbours", 301, 302.

<sup>42</sup> Jac. J. Janssen, *Gleanings from Deir el-Medina*, in: R.J. Demarée and Jac. J. Janssen, *EgUit 1* (Leiden, 1982), 110, 113.

- Literary compositions and/or tales

Illustrative examples were analyzed according to the following textual categorization:

1. Fair judgement
2. Warnings of being partial and/or of taking someone's side
3. Denial of partiality
4. Correctness in behavior

### 1. Fair judgement

#### 1.1 False door, tomb of *Nfr sšm Pth šši*, Saqqara<sup>43</sup>

**Date:** Sixth Dynasty, Old Kingdom (Tety)

On the false door, *Nfr sšm Pth šši* states that he spoke fairly. Following this declaration, he states having been fair in judging between (two) people.



*wp.n(.i) snwy*<sup>45</sup> *r htp sn*

(I) judged (between) two so as to content them.

#### 1.2. Tomb of *hr hwf*, Elephantine

**Date:** Sixth Dynasty, Old Kingdom (Pepy II)

Fair judgement was declared as follows:



*n [sp wd(.i)]*<sup>47</sup> *snwy*

*m sp sšwy*<sup>48</sup> *s3 m hrt*<sup>49</sup> *it.f*

Never did (I) [judge] (between) [two contenders] in a manner to deprive a son of his father's property.

#### 1.3. Tomb of *Ppy-nht hk3 ib* (no. 35), Aswan, Qubbet el-Hawa

**Date:** Sixth Dynasty, Old Kingdom (Pepy II)

A similar parallel example reads:



<sup>43</sup> J. Capart, *Une rue de tombeaux à Saqqarah* (Brussels, 1907), pl. 77.79.

<sup>44</sup> *Urk.* I, 200, 16.

<sup>45</sup> *Wb* I, 298, 17. *wp snwy* "die Beiden (Streitenden) trennen" (Zwei Personen richtend trennen, ihren schlichten).

<sup>46</sup> *Urk.* I, 123, 3-4 (architrav).

<sup>47</sup> Hannig, *Ägyptisches Wörterbuch I Altes Reich und Erste Zwischenzeit*, 400, {9082}.

<sup>48</sup> Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 247.

<sup>49</sup> The word *hrt* was copied so by Sethe: *Urk.* I, 123, 4.



*ink ir m3ʿt*

I was one who performed justice.

### 1.8. Stela of *hty* (Cairo JE 45057)

**Date:** Late Eleventh Dynasty

**Provenance:** Thebes, El-Tarif



*n sp iry(.i) hr n rmt nb*

Never did (I) act according to the face (i.e. the standing) of any man.

Gardiner<sup>58</sup> interprets *iry hr NN* as ‘to follow his wish’ by observing his reactions, apparent in his face. Schenkel,<sup>59</sup> likewise, interprets the text as never acting according to the looks (or standing) of any person.

### 1.9. Stela of *Rdiw hnmw* (Cairo CG 20543)

**Date:** Eleventh Dynasty

**Provenance:** Dendera



*sm<sup>61</sup>.n(.i) hm.n(.i) mi rh.n(.i)*

(I) helped (the one) (I) did not know like the one (I) knew.

### 1.10. Tomb of *Imn-m-h3t*, Beni Hassan

**Date:** Twelfth Dyasty (Senwsert I)



*dd m3ʿt wp.f snwy šw m dd grg<sup>63</sup>*

<sup>56</sup> J. J. Clère and J. Vandier, *Textes de la première période intermédiaire et de la XIème dynastie*, BAeg 10 (Brussels, 1948), 2-3; H. O. Lange and H. Schäfer, *Grab und Denksteine des Mittleren Reichs in Museum von Kairo II*, Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du musée du Caire (Nr. 20400-20780) (Berlin, 1908), 4-5.

<sup>57</sup> A. H. Gardiner, “The tomb of a much-travelled Theban official”, *JEA* 4 (1917), 33-35; R. Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember: Egyptian biographical texts on Middle Kingdom stelae* (Prague, 2011), 54, 9.

<sup>58</sup> Gardiner, “The tomb of a much-travelled Theban official”, 34, n. 7.

<sup>59</sup> W. Schenkel, *Memphis - Herakleopolis - Theben: die epigraphischen Zeugnisse der 7.-11. Dynastie Ägyptens*, AA 12 (Wiesbaden, 1965), 282-283. See Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember*, 55, n. 140.

<sup>60</sup> H. O. Lange and H. Schäfer, *Grab und Denksteine des Mittleren Reichs in Museum von Kairo* (Berlin, 1908), 164, 167.

<sup>61</sup> Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 225. *smn* is also determined with the sign

<sup>62</sup> *Urk.* VII, 19, 18.

<sup>63</sup> *Wb* V, 189, 2 “Lüge, Unwahrheit”.

(One who) speaks truth (when) he judges two men, (who is) free of speaking falsehood.

### 1.11. pHermitage 1116A, verso 44 (Petersburg Museum) = pMoskau 4658 (Teaching for King Merikare)

**Date:** New Kingdom (Eighteenth Dynasty)



*nm<sup>c</sup>.f n mry.f*

He will be partial toward (the one whom) he likes.<sup>65</sup>

## 2. Warnings of being partial and/or taking someone's side.

The negative imperative form 'do not' is common to all examples in this category.

### 2.1. Tomb-chapel of *df3(.i) h<sup>c</sup>py* (nr. 1), Assiut

**Dating:** Twelfth Dynasty (Senusert I)



*nn nm<sup>c</sup>*

There is no partiality.

### 2.2. Tomb-chapel of *df3(.i) h<sup>c</sup>py* (nr. 1), Assiut

**Dating:** Twelfth Dynasty (Senusert I)



*nn nty [gs3.f]*

Do not be [one who takes someone's (lit. his) side] (i.e. favour someone).

### 2.3. pBerlin 3023 + pAmherst II (B2), 103-4 (Peasant)

**Dating:** Middle Kingdom (late Twelfth Dynasty)

In the peasant's speech in terms of partial justice, he accuses Rensi of not fulfilling his role as protector; a sign of partiality and nepotism.<sup>68</sup>



*m nm<sup>c</sup> m-sdm n ib*

<sup>64</sup> H. W. Helck, *Die Lehre für König Merikare*, KÄT 5 (Wiesbaden, 1977), 25.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. W. K. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt. An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies and Poetry* (Cairo, 2003), 156. Compare with pBM EA 10509, 7, 2-3. R. A. Caminos, *Literary Fragments in the Hieratic Script*, Oxford 1956, 52-53, Pl. 28-30 [P, T].

<sup>66</sup> *Urk.* VII, 59, 15.

<sup>67</sup> *Urk.* VII, 59, 17.

<sup>68</sup> Gnirs, "The Language of Corruption: On Rich and Poor in the Eloquent Peasant", 137.

<sup>69</sup> F. Vogelsang, *Kommentar zu den Klagen des Bauern*, in: Sethe, K., *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde Aegyptens VI* (Leipzig, 1913), 222.

Do not show bias in hearing the heart.<sup>70</sup>

#### 2.4. pHermitage 1116A, verso 61 (Petersburg Museum) = pMoskau 4658 (Teaching for King Merikare)

**Date:** New Kingdom (Eighteenth Dynasty)<sup>71</sup>



*m tnt s3 s r nds*

Do not prefer the son of a man to an ordinary man.<sup>73</sup>

The expression *s3 s*<sup>74</sup> ‘son of a man’ which occurred in the Letter to the Dead on the Cairo Text on Linen, was discussed by S. Donnat pointing out that it refers to someone belonging to the elite.<sup>75</sup> Hence, the interpretation of the text would explicitly denote social equality of people. Social status was therefore meant to be put aside, aiming at reinforcing impartiality and fairness.

#### 2.5. pPrisse 13, 2 (Teaching for Ptahhotep)

**Date:** New Kingdom (Eighteenth Dynasty)



*m [nm] wpi.k [s 2]*<sup>77</sup>

Do not [be partial], when you judge [two men].<sup>78</sup>

#### 2.6. pPrisse 13, 2 (Teaching for Ptahhotep)

**Date:** New Kingdom (Eighteenth Dynasty)



*mdy.k m rdi hr gs*

<sup>70</sup> Quirke, *Egyptian Literature*, 164; Parkinson (*The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*, 296) translates the text “Be not partial. Do not listen to the heart.” The meaning entails following one’s interests. See Gnirs, “The Language of Corruption: On Rich and Poor in the Eloquent Peasant”, 137.

<sup>71</sup> Paleographically the papyrus is dated to late Eighteenth Dynasty. P. Seibert, *Die Charakteristik*, ÄA 17 (Wiesbaden 1967), 87.

<sup>72</sup> Helck, *Die Lehre für König Merikare*, 36.

<sup>73</sup> Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 115. Cf. The translation of Helck (*Die Lehre für König Merikare*, 37) is “Mach keinen Unterschied zwischen dem Sohn eines (angesehenen) Mannes und einem Bürger”.

<sup>74</sup> *Wb* III, 409, 14.

<sup>75</sup> S. Donnat, “Le rite comme seul référent dans les lettres aux morts. Nouvelle interprétation du début du Cairo Text on Linen”, *BIFAO* 109, 2009, 78.

<sup>76</sup> *Zába*, *Les maximes de Ptahhotep*, 49, (418 L1).

<sup>77</sup> Cf. pBM EA 10509 (L2+L2G), line 7, 2.

<sup>78</sup> For *wp*: Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 59.

<sup>79</sup> *Zába*, *Les maximes de Ptahhotep*, 49 (418-19 L1).

*s3w*<sup>80</sup> *dd.f shr.f*

*srw rdi.f mdt hr gs iry*

(In) your speech, do not take one side. Beware lest he (i.e. someone) speaks his opinion (to) the officials: ‘He set the case on that side’.<sup>81</sup>

## 2.7. pPrise 13, 2 (Teaching for Ptahhotep)

**Date:** New Kingdom (Eighteenth Dynasty)



*s3w*<sup>83</sup> *šm nm<sup>c</sup>.k im*

Beware lest your partiality might go out (i.e. emerge) there.<sup>84</sup>

## 2.8. Biographical inscription, tomb of *Rh mi R<sup>c</sup>*, Sheikh Abd el Qurna

**Date:** New Kingdom, Eighteenth Dynasty (Thutmosis III)



*n rdi hr gs*

Do not take one side.

## 2.9. Installation text, tomb of *Rh mi R<sup>c</sup>*, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna

**Date:** New Kingdom, Eighteenth Dynasty (Thutmosis III)



*m sdm(?) [(?)] bwt ntr rdit hr gs*

Do not listen (?) [unfairly (?)], for God abhors partiality.<sup>87</sup>

## 3. Denial of partiality

The context of denial makes partiality undoubtedly conceived as a wrongdoing.

### 3.1. Stela of *Ini-iti.f*, son of *Myt* (Ny Carlsberg 1241)

**Date:** Eleventh Dynasty

**Provenance:** Thebes



*wd<sup>c</sup> mdwt r-ntt m [...] [nn rdit] hr gs*

<sup>80</sup> For *s3w* “ward off”: Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 208.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 142; Quirke, *Egyptian Literature*, 97.

<sup>82</sup> *Zába*, *Les maximes de Ptahhotep*, 51, (438 L1).

<sup>83</sup> Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 208.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. *Zába*, *Les maximes de Ptahhotep*, 95. “prends garde qu’il n’en sorte pas ta partialité”.

<sup>85</sup> *Urk.* IV, 1082, 13.

<sup>86</sup> Faulkner, “The Installation of the Vizier”, fig. 2, 11. Cf. *Urk.* IV, 1090, 2.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Faulkner, “The Installation of the Vizier”, 22.

<sup>88</sup> Clère and Vandier, *Textes de la première période intermédiaire et de la XIème dynastie*, § 32.

(I am one who) judges an affair according to what [...] [without inclining] to one side (i.e. without being partial).

### 3.2. Stela of *Mntw wsr* (MMA 12.184)

**Dating:** Middle Kingdom (Senwsert I)

**Provenance:** Abydos

The Steward *Mntw wsr* was ‘someone who listened truly’ *sdm.w r wn-m3<sup>c</sup>*, ‘who was not partial’.



*ink sdm.w r wn-m3<sup>c90</sup> tm nm<sup>c</sup> n nb db3<sup>91</sup>*

I am (one who) listened to righteousness, (who was) not partial to the briber.

In this sense personal wealth was perceived as being preventive from bribery;<sup>92</sup> the text thus connects wealth with correctness in behavior.

### 3.3. Tomb-chapel of *df3(.i) h<sup>c</sup>py* (nr. 1), Assiut

**Date:** Twelfth Dynasty (Senwsert I)



*iwty gs3w.f*

(I was a man who) did not favor anyone.

### 3.4. Stela of *Tni-iti.f* (Louvre C. 26)

**Provenance:** Thebes, Dra<sup>c</sup> Abu El-Naga

**Date:** New Kingdom, Eighteenth Dynasty (Thutmose III)



*iwty nm<sup>c</sup> f n grgy<sup>95</sup>*

(I was a man who) was not partial towards a liar.

### 3.5. Statue of *Imn-htp s3 h<sup>c</sup>pw*, Karnak (CG 42127)

**Date:** New Kingdom, Eighteenth Dynasty (Amenhotep III)

<sup>89</sup> C. L. Ransom, *The Stela of Menthu-Weser* (New York, 1913), [P,H,Ü,K]; K. Sethe, *Aegyptische Lesestücke zum Gebrauch im akademischen Unterricht. Texte des Mittleren Reiches* (Leipzig 1924), 79-80, (Nr. 19) [H]; R. Landgrafova, *It is my good name that you should remember* (Prague 2011), 130, 14.

<sup>90</sup> The expression *wn-m3<sup>c</sup>* was attested since the Old Kingdom, rarely as  *r wn-m3<sup>c</sup>* “wirklich, Wahrhaft”. *Wb* I, 310, 8.

<sup>91</sup> *Wb* V, 559, 9.

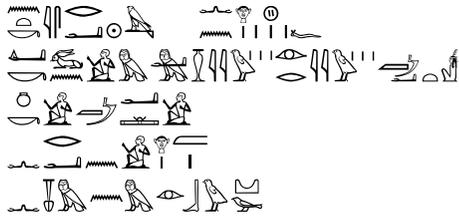
<sup>92</sup> Gnirs, “The Language of Corruption: On Rich and Poor in the Eloquent Peasant”, 140, 141.

<sup>93</sup> *Urk.* VII, 63, 7.

<sup>94</sup> *Urk.* IV, 971, 14.

<sup>95</sup> Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 291.

On the statue *Imn-ḥtp s3 ḥpw* is addressing his righteousness to Amon-Re.<sup>96</sup>



97

*ntk is R<sup>c</sup> nn ḥr ḥw.f*<sup>98</sup>

*di.k wn.i m-m ḥsyw iryw m3<sup>c</sup>t*

*ink m3<sup>c</sup>*

*n rdi.n.i ḥr gs*

*n sm3.n(.i) m ir bw-dw*

You are Re, beside whom there is none (lit. there is none beside him).

May you cause that I be among the favored, the doers of Maât.

I am righteous.

I was not partial,

(I) was not allied (lit. united) with the evildoer.<sup>99</sup>

### 3.6. pHermitage 1116A, verso 43 (Petersburg Museum) = pMoskau 4658 (Teaching for King Merikare)

**Date:** New Kingdom (Eighteenth Dynasty)



100

*n nm<sup>c</sup> n ḥwd*<sup>101</sup> *m pr.f*

A man rich in his house will not take sides.<sup>102</sup>

### 3.7. Block-Stela of the official *ḥi3*<sup>103</sup> (Cairo JE 89624)

<sup>96</sup> Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, 60, 117, 118.

<sup>97</sup> *Urk.* IV, 1827, 12-16.

<sup>98</sup> Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 186 *nn wn ḥr ḥw.f* ‘there is none beside him’; (i.e. he is unique).

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, 60, 61. The text is paralleled with the Negative Confessions of the Book of the Dead (text 19).

<sup>100</sup> Helck, *Die Lehre für König Merikare*, 24; A. Volten, *Zwei altägyptische politische Schriften : Die Lehre für König Merikarê (Pap. Carlsberg VI) und die Lehre des Königs Amenemhet*, *Analecta Aegyptiaca* 4 (Kopenhagen, 1945), 19.

<sup>101</sup> *AnLex* I, 273, 77.3029.

<sup>102</sup> Helck’s translation of the first part (*Die Lehre für König Merikare*, 25) “Denn einer, der in seinem Haushalt reich ist, braucht nicht parteiisch zu sein” entails the meaning of not needing to be partial. Cf. Quirke, *Egyptian Literature*, 114, 9; W. K. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt. An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies and Poetry* (Cairo, 2003), 156.

<sup>103</sup> From the titles of *ḥi3* it appears that he was the Treasury chief of the Ramesseum, and of the cattle of Amun. *KRI* III, 366.

**Provenance:** Thebes, Dra<sup>c</sup> Abu El-naga

**Date:** New Kingdom, Nineteenth Dynasty (Ramesses II)



*ink*<sup>105</sup> *w<sup>c</sup> ikr nfr bi3t*<sup>106</sup>

*w3h-ib r irt m3<sup>c</sup>t*

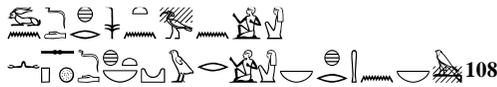
*mty*<sup>107</sup> *m3<sup>c</sup> tm rdit hr gs*

I am trustworthy, good of character,  
attentive to do justice,  
truly righteous and not partial (lit. not take one side).

#### 4. Correctness in behavior

##### 4.1. Tomb inscriptions of *Ssm nfr* (no. 53) at Giza

**Date:** Old Kingdom, Fifth Dynasty (Isesi)



*wn(.i) dd(.i) hr nswt 3h n rmt*

*n sp dd(.i) ht nb dw r rmt nb hr hm n nb(.i)*

(I) was telling the king what is useful to people.

Never did (I) tell an evil thing against any people to the majesty of (my) lord.<sup>109</sup>

##### 4.2. False door of the tomb of *Nfr ssm Pth šši*, Saqqara<sup>110</sup>

**Date:** Old Kingdom, Sixth Dynasty (Tty)

The catalogue of virtues included among the standardized formulae:



*dd.n(.i) nfr whm(.n.i) nfr*

(I) spoke good, (I) repeated good.

##### 4.3. Tomb of *hr hwt*, Elephantine

<sup>104</sup> KRI III, 366, 16.

<sup>105</sup> The pronoun *ink* was here written with the vertical stroke.

<sup>106</sup> Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 80. *bi* “good deed”, also “character, qualities”.

<sup>107</sup> Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 120.

<sup>108</sup> *Urk. I*, 57, 15-16.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, 106.

<sup>110</sup> Capart, *Une rue de tombeaux à Saqqarah*, pl. 77.79.

<sup>111</sup> *Urk. I*, 200, 14.

**Date:** Old Kingdom, Sixth Dynasty (Pepy II)



*ink dd nfr whm mrrt*

I was one who spoke good, who repeated what was liked.<sup>113</sup>

#### 4.4. Tomb inscriptions of *Nḥbw* at Giza

**Date:** Old Kingdom, Sixth Dynasty



*ink dd nfrt whm nfrt*

*n sp dd(.i) ht nb dw r rmt nb*

I was one who spoke good and repeated good.

Never did (I) say any evil thing against any people.<sup>115</sup>

#### 4.5. Stela of *Ini-iti.f*, son of *tḥi* (MMA 57.95)

**Date:** Eleventh Dynasty (Mentuhotep II)

**Provenance:** Unknown<sup>116</sup>

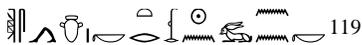


*šw m isft dd(.w) mdwt r wn.s m3c*

(I was one) free of evil, (one) who gives speech according to its true being.<sup>118</sup>

#### 4.6. pPrisse 7, 9 (Teaching for Ptahhotep)

**Date:** New Kingdom (Eighteenth Dynasty)



*šms ib.k<sup>120</sup> tr n wnn.k*

<sup>112</sup> *Urk. I*, 122, 17.

<sup>113</sup> M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: a book of readings. volume I. The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley, 1973), 24.

<sup>114</sup> *Urk. I*, 219, 6, 7.

<sup>115</sup> Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, 107.

<sup>116</sup> The provenance of the stela might probably be Thebes. H. Fischer, "The Inscription of In-it.f, born of Tḥi", *JNES* 19/4 (1960), 258-268; Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, 49-51; Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember*, 29.

<sup>117</sup> The provenance of the stela might probably be Thebes. Fischer, "The Inscription of In-it.f, born of Tḥi", pl. VI; Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, 49-51; Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember*, 28.

<sup>118</sup> Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember*, 30.

<sup>119</sup> Zába, *Les maximes de Ptahhotep*, 30 (186).

<sup>120</sup> The expression *šms ib.k* is to be differentiated from *sḏm n ib* 'listen to the heart'; i.e. to look after personal interests (Peasant, B2 104-105).

Follow your heart as long as you live.<sup>121</sup>

#### 4.7. pPrisse 10, 1 (Teaching for Ptahhotep)

**Date:** New Kingdom (Eighteenth Dynasty)

 <sup>122</sup>

*ḥ3 tw ḥr sp n ḥwn ib*<sup>123</sup>

Resist the opportunity of greed.<sup>124</sup>

#### 4.8. pPrisse 11, 3 (Teaching for Ptahhotep)

**Date:** New Kingdom (Eighteenth Dynasty)

 <sup>125</sup>

*k3 pw k3 n mty ḥtpw im.f*

The spirit of the correct (man) is the spirit that brings peacefulness with it.<sup>126</sup>

#### 4.9. Tomb of Ay, chief courtier of Akhenaten, El-Amarna

**Date:** New Kingdom (Eighteenth Dynasty)

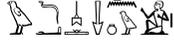
 <sup>127</sup>

*ink mty m3<sup>c</sup> šw m ḥwn*

I am truly straight, free of greed.

#### Analysis and Discussion

Studying contexts concerning warnings of being partial gives an insight on conducts of interaction with others in ancient Egypt. The research considers moral and ethical values as tools of interpretation of the Egyptian social behaviors. It sheds light on embedded attitudes in view of fair judgement. Treating people with impartiality would result in benevolence, patience and equality, indispensable for acquiring righteousness. A positive character in Egyptian texts is characterized by honesty and performing equality as significant requirements for maintaining friendships.<sup>128</sup>

The terminology used highlights a variety of expressions, some of which acting as idioms for impartiality. Acknowledging equality in treatment was expressed in tomb inscriptions as early as the Old Kingdom where the term  *wd<sup>c</sup> snwy*

<sup>121</sup> Quirke, *Egyptian Literature*, 93.

<sup>122</sup> Zába, *Les maximes de Ptahhotep*, 39 (300).

<sup>123</sup> *Wb* I, 172, 13. ḥwn ib “habgierig”.

<sup>124</sup> Quirke, *Egyptian Literature*, 95.

<sup>125</sup> Zába, *Les maximes de Ptahhotep*, 43, (344 L1).

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Quirke, *Egyptian Literature*, 95, 25.

<sup>127</sup> *Urk.* IV, 1997, 13 (inner doorway, left jamb).

<sup>128</sup> A. Verbovsek, B. Backes, “Ich hatte viele Freunde unter allen Leuten meiner Stadt ...’ Zur Bedeutung von Freundschaft im Alten Ägypten”, in ..., *Decorum and Experience: Essays in ancient Culture for John Baines*, 79; J. F. Quack, *Die Lehre des Ani. Eine Neuägyptischer Weisheitstext in seinem kulturellen Umfeld*, *OBO* 141, 1994, (B 18, 6-9).



The principle of impartiality was outspoken as a social obligation. Henceforth, an ethically conceived behavior would not favor the powerful. High officials' statements denying taking sides was imperative as indication of respect of functions. The texts highlight that rank should not be regarded as an opportunity for showing favours either to friends or strangers.<sup>136</sup> Impartiality was compulsory in order to prevent corruptive acts such as injustice and nepotism. However, Davies discussed cases of advancing workers' sons in the work gang at the Deir el Medineh community.<sup>137</sup> Janssen, likewise, suggested that being someone's protégé occurred in some cases at Deir el Medineh.<sup>138</sup>

Improper use of power was associated to the expression *ḥbs ḥr* 'hide the face',<sup>139</sup> describing obscuration of righteousness. The statements exemplify that taking sides was regarded as an unacceptable behavior. Incorrectness was likewise associated with the state of *sdm n ib* 'hearing the heart'<sup>140</sup> and *ḥbs ḥr* 'hide the face'.<sup>141</sup> Correctness of the tongue *n nm<sup>c</sup>.n ns.sn* 'their tongue is not partial' (pAmherts 3 + pBerlin 3024)<sup>142</sup> was, on the other hand, connected with the inner intentions leading the self to rectitude.

Biographical statements were not only limited to assertions of efficiency; they ascertained preoccupation with being unfair. Impartiality was expressed in varying versions highlighting social roles, regardless of the hierarchic structure. An examination of the concept of impartiality in the context of morals adds value in understanding the ancient Egyptian society and culture. Such emphasis on prime qualities reveal much about attitudes and views of deeds and righteousness.

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<sup>136</sup> R.O. Faulkner, "The Installation of the Vizier", 29.

<sup>137</sup> B. G. Davies, *Genealogies and Personality Characteristics of the Workmen in the Deir el-Medina Community during the Ramesside Period* (phD diss., University of Liverpool, 1996), 464.

<sup>138</sup> Janssen, *Gleanings from Deir el-Medīna*, 113.

<sup>139</sup> Gnirs, "The Language of Corruption: On Rich and Poor in the Eloquent Peasant", 137. See *Wb I*, 64, 13, 14.

<sup>140</sup> Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, 23; Gnirs, "The Language of Corruption: On Rich and Poor in the Eloquent Peasant", 137.

<sup>141</sup> The same meaning is paralleled by the use of the expression 'turn the face towards'; i.e. who does not favour': Faulkner, "The Installation of the Vizier", 22; see also *Urk. IV*, 972, 1.

<sup>142</sup> Quirke, *Egyptian Literature*, 130 (The Dialogue of a Man and His Ba). However, the translation was rendered by R. O. Faulkner ("The Man who was tired of Life", *JEA* 42, 1956, 30, n. 1) 'to question' someone, where *nm<sup>c</sup>* is an activity of the tongue.

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## الحياد كسلوك أخلاقي في مصر القديمة: دراسة في النصوص

رانيا يونس مرزبان

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### المخلص

يعد تكرار وجود الصيغ التي تتعلق بالمساواة بين البشر عامل جذب أساسي للدراسة. وفي محاولة لتحديد سمات الشخصية القويمة، فإن العدالة كانت تعد قاعدة تؤسس للعلاقات بين الأشخاص في الحضارة المصرية القديمة. ويعد البحث دراسة عن سلوك شخصي يعمق فهمنا لمفهوم عدم المعاملة بتحيز في مصر القديمة. وتحدد النصوص القواعد الحاكمة للسلوك القويم؛ موضحة ملامح هامة للشخصية، ومحددة لموضوع غاية في الأهمية فيما يخص العلاقات. وفي هذا السياق تتضمن مصادر النصوص تحذيرات ضد ارتكاب أفعال مرفوضة أخلاقيا واجتماعيا؛ ومن ضمنها تم ذكر الانحياز. ويشمل البحث دراسة مضمون النصوص المتعلقة بالحياد؛ باعتباره سلوكا قويا في ثقافة المجتمع المصري القديم. ومن ثم فإنه من خلال الاعتماد على القواميس ومصادر النصوص في الدراسة، فإن التحليل يساعد على دراسة مضمون النصوص التي تعبر عن أن تفضيل جانب شخص ما يعد بمثابة إخلال بالعدالة وانحياز. وفيما يتعلق بموضوع الحياد، فإن اللغة المصرية القديمة تمتلك التنوع في التعبير، وتتكامل كل التعبيرات للتأكيد على الأخلاقيات وتحقيق العدالة. وتؤكد النصوص على أهمية عدم تفضيل شخص من بين اثنين من خلال مساندة أحدهما دون الآخر. وقد ظهرن التعبيرات التي تشير إلى الحياد منذ الدولة القديمة.

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