

## SOME REMARKS ON THE EXECUTION PLACE xbt IN ANCIENT EGYPT

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# SOME REMARKS ON THE EXECUTION PLACE *hbt* IN ANCIENT EGYPT

BY

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## ABSTRACT

[AR]

بعض الملاحظات عن مكان الإعدام (xbt) في مصر القديمة

في هذه المقالة ، تحاول الباحثة إلقاء الضوء على أحد أماكن العقاب في مصر القديمة ، ألا وهو مكان الإعدام الذي يسمى Xbt . ومن خلال الدراسة ، نلاحظ أنه وعلى الرغم من تعدد أماكن العقاب وتنوعها في مصر القديمة ، إلا أن التفاصيل قليلة في وصف هذه الأماكن ، ولم ينتشر تصويرها سواء في المناظر أو في كتب العالم الآخر . وقد كان الإعدام يقطع الرأس موجود في التصاوير منذ العصور المبكرة ، وكان عقابا لأعداء الملك كما سجل على بعض الصلايات من العصور المبكرة وبصفة خاصة صلاية الملك نعرمر ، ولكن عقوبة الإعدام كنتيجة لجريمة ارتكها شخص ما ، لم تثبت بصورة واضحة . والإعدام يعني فناء الشخص نهائيا ، والنجاة من العقاب بالإعدام كان غاية الشخص دائما حتى ولو كان مسينا . ومكان الإعدام xbt لم يصور بشكل صريح وهو يعبر عن أداة الإعدام نفسها وليس المكان . ويبدو من خلال الدراسة أنه يعبر عن مكان يتم فيه الإعدام بواسطة الأداة xbt . وقد ظهرت في كتاب الموتى بردية أي ، الفصل 50 . حيث يصور المتوفي مارا بسلام موجها ظهره لأداة الإعدام ، التي يتم تمثيلها بقاعدة تشبه القتل ، يخرج من أطرافها عمودان ، ومن فوقها سكيننا كبيرا ، ينزل للأسفل لقطع الرأس ، وهناك قطرات من الدماء تسقط منها . ومن خلال هذا البحث ، نستطيع أن نلقي الضوء على بعض المحاولات التي من الممكن أن تضمن حتى للمذنب أن ينجو من مصير الفناء بنجاح .

[EN] In this paper, I highlight one of the punishment places in ancient Egypt [*hbt*], i.e., the place of execution, which was mentioned early in the Pyramid Texts. This place is considered the oldest known punishment place in ancient Egypt. Many punishment places for the wrongdoers were mentioned in texts, but were not precisely described or clearly represented. It is well known that in the early period, decapitation existed. It was a traditional performance against the enemies of the king. It could be traced as early as king *Narmer*, as recorded on his palette exhibited in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. However, beheading as a consequence of a crime was not attested definitively. The enemies of the king were represented on the palette with their heads cut off, and each enemy had his head between his legs. Keeping the heads of the enemies with the bodies was an exceptional habit in ancient Egyptian representations. That notice made the author wonder why the ancient Egyptians were keen to preserve the heads of the guilty, although they were considered enemies and deserved total extinction. Thus, the author thought of the execution place [*hbt*] in order to know more about this place and determine the destiny of the guilty, whether a total extinction or another chance to survive. The execution place was known from the Old Kingdom and continued through the Greco-Roman Period. It was in the shape of a shrine upon which a huge knife was descended downwards to cut off heads and two upright posts. The only representation of the place of execution appeared in Spell 50 of the Book of the Dead. The act of cutting off heads, the ancient Egyptians never expressed clearly in art, but the heads were cut off in many scenes. Even when the tool of execution was represented as in the Book of the Dead, only the tool, not the act, was shown. Moreover, the deceased was given his back to it, as if he meant only to warn the people from falling into this tortured place. In this study, the author gives some remarks on the place of execution, and how the deceased tried to avoid entering such place, as he prayed to pass safely by the execution place. The author noticed that the ancient Egyptians ignored the details of the punishment places. They only showed the beheaded bodies of the enemies or the sinners in different scenes in life and the books of the afterlife. They let us wonder, if there were a total extinction by beheading the wrongdoers or if there were some ways to escape that ugly fate. In this paper, the author searched for the ways that the ancient Egyptians used to avoid extinction and found out that (1) by some religious texts from different periods, (2) by some sacrifice, especially an animal to save the person, and (3) by the help of some deities (e.g., Thoth, Shesemu, Sekhmet, Mehit, Matyt, and Horus-Merty) he might survive and have another chance to escape that ugly fate.

**KEYWORDS:** Decapitation, death, execution, evildoers, knife, punishment, seth.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The ancient Egyptians believed that the fate of the enemies of *Re* and *Osiris* was the destruction of their souls after death<sup>1</sup>. The sinners were considered enemies of the god who deserved avenging just as the criminals on earth. *Apophis*<sup>2</sup>, the great traditional snake enemy of the sun-god, who was eternally threatening the voyage of the sun god *Re* was said to be punished by putting him in irons<sup>3</sup>. The head of the god Seth was cut off by the sharp knife<sup>4</sup>.

The Netherworld was not simply a paradise, but it was also a place of punishment and torment for the enemies of the gods. Thus, some spells allowed the deceased to pass safely by the punishment places, while the wicked were slaughtered by executioners described as those of «sharp of fingers»<sup>5</sup>. There were several ways to punish the wrongdoers, as the juridical procedures were essential to keep justice (*Maat*) both in life and in the afterlife<sup>6</sup>.

The punishment of cutting off heads was one of the most severe penalties in ancient Egypt<sup>7</sup>. The paper dealt with the place of punishment and execution called *hbt*, where heads were cut off. It is well known that in early periods, decapitation existed. It was a traditional performance against the enemies of the king, but beheading as a consequence of a crime, was not attested definitively<sup>8</sup>.

The representations of the convicted with hands tied from behind were an artistic standard in ancient Egypt, the action that referred to the following step was the cutting off the head. When the head was cut off, it was said to be eaten by a mythical animal<sup>9</sup>, which the author suggests that it was just a kind of threat. The «slaughter» was especially used in a butchery context. It often appeared as a punishment for the deceased in funerary compositions, especially during the New Kingdom.

Terrible threats could occur on the passage through the otherworld, which the deceased dreaded and wanted to avoid, especially the decapitation in the execution place of the god *Osiris* by the hands of the slaughtering demons, as shown in a picture from the tomb of *Ramses VI*<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> ZANDEE 1960: 19, 147–158.

<sup>2</sup> It was depicted as a huge serpent. It was believed to exist from primeval times, but the texts did not mention its name until the Middle Kingdom. It appeared in the realm of *Duat* to destroy the sun bark. TROY 2017: 323–326; WILKINSON 2017: 221.

<sup>3</sup> CT 1954: vol.5, 245c; ZANDEE 1960: 22; MORENZ 2003: 201–205.

<sup>4</sup> URK 1929: vol. 6,49, 7.

<sup>5</sup> TAYLOR 2010: 5f.

<sup>6</sup> SELIM & SUZAN 2001; MAHMOUD 2003; ALLAM 2012: 129–145; MÜLLER-WOLLERMANN 2012: 147–158.

<sup>7</sup> BOOCKS 1986: 68–72.

<sup>8</sup> Several studies addressed corporal/capital punishment and punitive mutilation, as well as the chronological limits of the evidence. LORTON 1977: 2–64; LEAHY 1984: 199–206; VAN DEN BOORN 1984: 373; BOOCHS 1986: 68–72; VAN DEN BOORN 1988: 118–19; WILLEMS 1990: 27–54; BOOCHS 1991: 57–64; MCDOWELL 2001: 315–320.

<sup>9</sup> HORNUNG 1968: 17; HELCK 1977: 1219;. Ammyt was a mythical creature represented beside the balance in the juridical hall. It eats the heads when they were cut off. See: SEEBER 1976:186.

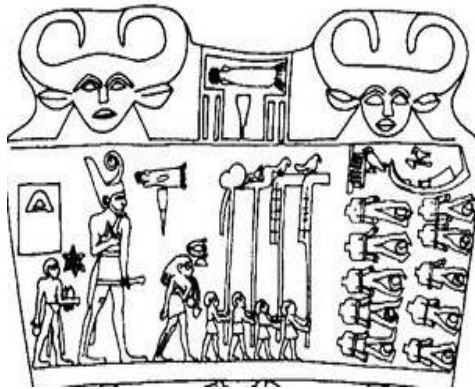
<sup>10</sup> PIANKOFF 1954: 195.

For the ancient Egyptians, decapitation meant irreversible second death and total extinction<sup>11</sup>. It was the fate of all unrighteous sinners, who failed the final judgment before Osiris. We have many terms and phrases that refer to decapitation and the places where that action took place. In this research, the author spots the light on:

- The punishment place (*hbt*) where heads were being cut off.
- Did the sinners have a chance to survive extinction or not?
- Was there a sacrifice by an animal instead of a guilty human?

## II. THE DECAPITATION IN ANCIENT EGYPT

In early periods, decapitation was a traditional custom performed as one of the various known methods of punishment<sup>12</sup>. Some representations of persons whose heads were cut off appeared on king *Narmer* Palette<sup>13</sup> [FIGURE 1].



[FIGURE 1]: WILKINSON 2003: 172.

Ten persons-considered enemies- were to the right of the palette, with their heads being cut off and bounded, each with his head between his legs. The main tool used in the execution was the knife, so the place of execution was distinguished in hieroglyphics with the knife sign. In reading the scene above, one can say that the act of decapitation took place inside a place called «the execution place». The god Horus opened the gate to the king to show him this victory, while another representation of Horus above seemed to be holding a «knife» by which the prisoners were executed<sup>14</sup>. Throughout Egyptian history, the representations of people with heads being cut off were noticed. For example, from the books of the afterlife: In the Book of *Amduat*, the eighth hour [FIGURE 2], nine standards are fixed in the ground, each with a knife and a human head is hanged to a stick.

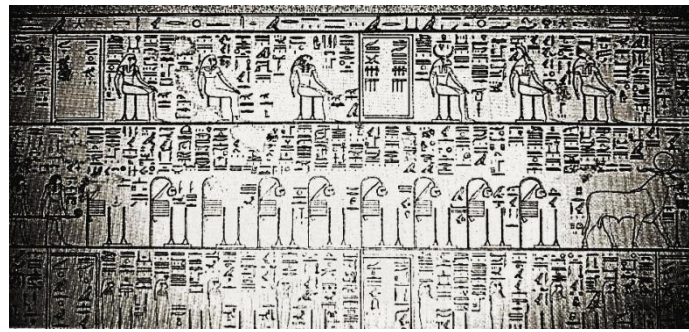
<sup>11</sup> HORNUNG 1963: 149–64.

<sup>12</sup> CAPART 1936: 125-126; PICARDO 2007: 221ff.

<sup>13</sup> QUIBELL 1898-1899; PETRIE 1953: PL. K.; WILKINSON 2003: 172.

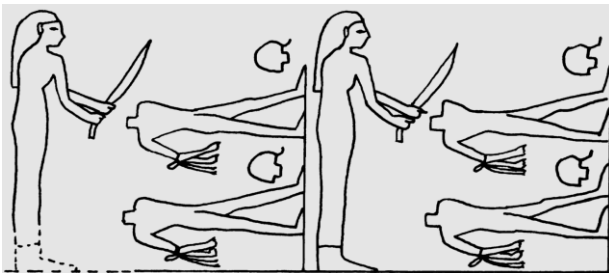
<sup>14</sup> O'Connor gave the scene a «celestial interpretation», as he said the ship was the sun-god *Re*'s morning bark with a swallow at the prow representing sunrise. Horus hovering above the bark represented protection and the defeated enemies were those of *Re*, see: O'CONNOR 2011: 149-152. For more details on the Palette, see: Davies, W.: *Masking the Blow, The Scene of Representation in Late Prehistoric Egyptian Art*, Berkeley 1992.

The texts are read as follows, «What they are doing is getting rid of the enemies of sun-god (*Re*) everywhere in this city, then they put their heads on the edge of the knife»<sup>15</sup>.

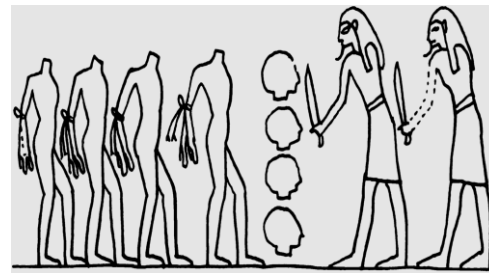


[FIGURE 2]: LEFEBURE 1886: PL.XLVIII.

In the Book of Caverns, the sixth division [FIGURE 3] shows the punishment and torture of the enemies of *Re*. One of these shows two goddesses holding knives, and two enemies with their hands tied together from behind, everyone with a decapitated head placed in front of them.



[FIGURE 3]: PIANKOFF 1954: FIG. 20.



[FIGURE 4]: PIANKOFF 1954: FIG.11.

In the Book of *Amduat*, the seventh division and the second chapter in the book of Caverns [FIGURE 4] showed the enemies tied from behind, with heads being cut off. The *Amduat's* Eleventh Hour text also commented on the ultimate import of their inclusion, capturing the essence of the theme of decapitation in mortuary religion: «You have been decapitated, that you may not come into being»<sup>16</sup>.

**In the scenes of decapitation, the author could notice that:**

**First:** The enemy had banded hands from behind, although this act was performed only with animals that were tied well before slaughtering.

**Second:** Although many terms referred to the place of execution, the ancient Egyptians ignored the details of such places.

**Third:** In all the decapitation scenes, the ancient Egyptians preserved the decapitated heads, between the legs, in front of the body or simply beside the body. The head was not taken away from the body, so the author suggests the possible resurrection and not extinction of those punished ones.

<sup>15</sup> HORNUNG 1963: vol.1, 142-143; II, 589-597.



<sup>16</sup> HORNUNG 1963: vol.1, 189 & vol.2, 181; HORNUNG 1994:782.

### III. NOTIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF *hbt* 𓂏𓂏<sup>17</sup>:

Several terms referred to the punishment places<sup>18</sup> in religious texts, including the Coffin Texts, Book of the Dead, Book of Gates, and Book of Afterlife (*Amduat*).

They were written as follows:

𓂏𓂏, 𓂏𓂏<sup>x</sup>, 𓂏𓂏<sup>x</sup>i, 𓂏𓂏𓂏, 𓂏𓂏<sup>19</sup>, 𓂏𓂏, 𓂏𓂏<sup>20</sup>.

They took the determinative as  ,  in the Late Period and the Greco-Roman period.

*hbt* is known as «the Place of Execution»<sup>21</sup>, «the Place Where the Enemies Fall»<sup>22</sup>, «the Place Where the Rebels Fall»<sup>23</sup> or «Destroyed», and «the Place Where *Apophis* was killed»<sup>24</sup>.

They were also translated as «the Place of Truth» and the «*dw't hbt*», i.e., «the Place of Truth of the Afterworld»<sup>25</sup>.

In the Middle Kingdom, it was translated as «the Place of Execution in which the Evil persons were Slaughtered»<sup>26</sup> or «the Slaughterhouse»<sup>27</sup>.

The word was derived from the verb *hb*, which means «to Execute»<sup>28</sup> and the verb *hbt*, which means «to Punish the Enemy»<sup>29</sup>.

The consonant letter «*d*» sometimes replaced the «*t*» letter, and the word, in this case, was read as *hbd*, derived from the verb *hbd*, i.e., «to be hated»<sup>30</sup>.

In the Temple of Edfu, there was a «slaughterhouse» called «The Eastern *hbt*», where the sun rose<sup>31</sup>. As the sun god *Re* rose every morning, *Re* defeats his foes in the east to establish *Maat*<sup>32</sup>. The significance of which might be mythological, and there might be such a building to the east of the main temples of the supreme god of the country<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> ERMAN & GRAPOW (eds.): *Wb.* 1929: vol.3, 252(9-14) MK.

<sup>18</sup> *šyt-wrt, išt, shwn.*

<sup>19</sup> DAVIES 1913: TAF. 8, 43; BLOCK 1961: 105.

<sup>20</sup> WILSON 1997, 719.

<sup>21</sup> FAULKNER 1962: 187.

<sup>22</sup> WILSON 1997, 719.

<sup>23</sup> *CT* 1935: vol.1, 70 d spell 23.

<sup>24</sup> EDFOU 1928: vol.3. 252, 2-3.

<sup>25</sup> HANNIG 2006: 635.

<sup>26</sup> ERMAN & GRAPOW (eds.): *Wb.* 1929: vol.3, 252,9-19.

<sup>27</sup> BUDGE 1911: vol.31, 299. LESKO suggested that the word may be translated as «a cellar» or «a dungeon». See: LESKO 2002: 354; *KRI* 1968: vol.1, 69, 6.

<sup>28</sup> BUDGE 1911: 298; *Urk* 1915: vol.5,13, 87; *CT* 1956: vol.6, 73g; ERMAN & GRAPOW (eds.) *Wb.* 1929: vol.3, 252,7.

<sup>29</sup> ERMAN & GRAPOW (eds.): *Wb.* 1929: vol.3, 285,5.

<sup>30</sup> ERMAN & GRAPOW (eds.): *Wb.* 1929: vol.3, 257,10 MK; LESKO 2002: 355; BAKIR 1943: 79, PL.2; 79,(3)

<sup>31</sup> LEPSIUS 1842: TAF.13[13].

<sup>32</sup> WILSON 1997: 719.

<sup>33</sup> BAZIN 2004: 31-40.

### In the Pyramid Texts:

The place *hbt* was the oldest of the punishment places. It was mentioned once with the determinative of a «mountain» or a «sand- hill», as follows<sup>34</sup>:

*ndr hnty imntyw c.k hr spt hbt*

«The Foremost of the Westerners, takes your hand on the edge of the *hbt* -mountain» .

Faulkner translated *hbt* here<sup>35</sup> as «a mountain», but we notice that the word «edge» here represents the place of slaughter, on which the neck of a guilty man was placed to be cut off, and the sign here is the base of the *hbt* tool as appeared in the Book of the Dead, which looked like a mountain (*dw*). Accordingly, the author suggests the translation would be «the *hbt* place» not a mountain.

### In the Coffin Texts:

The word *hbt* was mentioned several times in the Coffin Texts as follows:

*n iti.k m m imyw hb(t) m-m iryw 3wwt*

«You won't be among those who are in the execution place<sup>36</sup>, among those who belong to the long Knives *3wwt*»<sup>37</sup> .

*n ck(i) r hbt*

«(I hate the eastern land), I will not enter to *hbt*» .

*n rdit.k m hbt*

«You are not taken to the place *hbt* »<sup>38</sup> .

*s3s.k hbt (nh.i.i) hbt*

«You will pass the place of execution»<sup>39</sup> .

<sup>34</sup> SETHE 1910: Pyr.1393.

<sup>35</sup> FAULKNER 1962: 187.

<sup>36</sup> CT 1935: vol.1, 197 c-e .

<sup>37</sup> FCD 1962: 2; ERMAN & GRAPOW (eds.): *Wb* 1926: vol.1, 4,10-14. *3wwt* was a long knife that was held by the demons of the afterlife. It was the punishment tool inside the execution place in the afterlife. See: WILKINSON 1992:189; EISSA 2009: 512.

<sup>38</sup> CT 1935: vol.1, 196 h-197 a-c

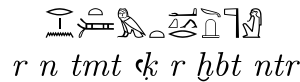
<sup>39</sup> CT 1951, IV, 353 c.



«You will escape the execution place»<sup>40</sup>.

**In the Book of the Dead (the Papyrus of *Ani*)<sup>41</sup> [FIGURE 5]**

In Spell 50, the name of the chapter is labeled as:



«Word for not entering the god's place of execution»<sup>42</sup>.

*Ani* walks away from the shambles, represented symbolically by a knife dripping blood on two supports that protrude from a sand mound<sup>43</sup>. Those who were to be slaughtered placed their necks between the two upright posts, and the huge knife descended to cut off their heads<sup>44</sup>.



[FIGURE 5]: FAULKNER 1985: 66 (BM.10470/16).

Here, *Ani* is seen standing with his back turned to the slaughter's block<sup>45</sup>, suggesting that he passes the dangerous area unharmed<sup>46</sup>. The deceased is put on a slaughter block and killed like a piece of cattle. *Ani* says:

«I have joined up my head and neck in heaven (and) in earth...may nothing happen to break them apart make me strong (the gods) against the slaughterer of my divine father»<sup>47</sup>.

The drops of blood dripping from the knife might be the blood of something else, not the deceased. Therefore, the author suggests that these drops of blood might belong to a sacrificed animal in order to avoid being tortured as *Ani* walked soundly and safely.

<sup>40</sup> CT 1951, IV, 366 d.

<sup>41</sup> BARGUET 1967; BUDGE 1910: 287.

<sup>42</sup> ALLEN 1974:61.

<sup>43</sup> FAULKNER 1985: 66 spell [50]

<sup>44</sup> BUDGE 1910: 287.

<sup>45</sup> BLOK 1961: 109.

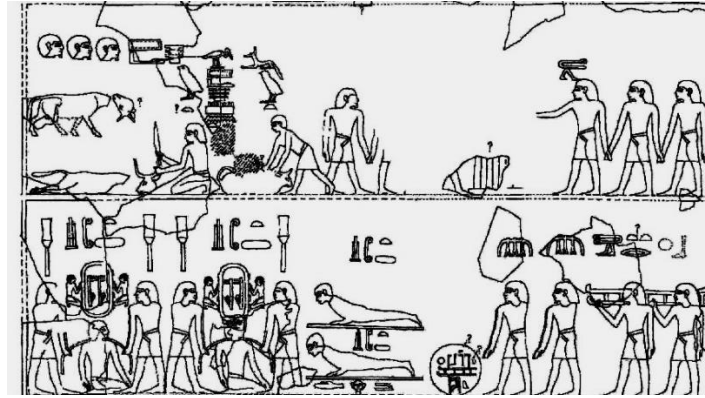
<sup>46</sup> MUNRO 2018: 56, FIG.4,12.

<sup>47</sup> BUDGE 1910: 102ff.



**In the Tomb of Montuherkhepeshef - Thebes (TT 20)<sup>48</sup>:**

A sacrifice scene, on the wall of the tomb, in the first register, represents the decapitation of three humans and three oxen. The scene could be read as torture or execution, whether performed in reality or not.



[FIGURE 6]: DAVIES 1913: PL.8 [scene 3].

In the center of the second register, there is a circle, representing the burial shaft or a pit. A sled is shown with two poles set upright in it by two men, and another two are carrying a sled on their shoulders, used in the funeral cortege. The legend says, «The pit *hbt* of burial». The first two men are in the act of consigning something to the pit. Above them is the legend «conveying it to the pit». Two kneeling men on the left with a cord around their necks, the ends of which are in the hands of two strong men<sup>49</sup>. Blok designates the word «pit» here like a kind of passage supposed for the offerings sent to the underworld<sup>50</sup>. But as the enemies are prepared to be executed and they are tied well, as it seems to be the place of execution.

From the scene above, the author suggests that cutting off the heads of the sinners could be replaced by cutting off the heads of the animals because of the presence of the human heads with the ritual of cutting off the heads of the animals.

The slaughtering of animals in ancient Egypt was performed in a place called the *nmt* place. It was originally related to cutting off the animals in temples. Then, it was extended to be used as a punishment place for sinners and was confused with the *hbt* place. The two places *hbt* and *nmt* were interfered together and might support the idea of sacrificing an animal in order to rescue the convicted people.


<sup>48</sup> PORTER & MOSS 1927: *PM 1*, 34-35 (Time of King Thutmosis III, Dra Abou El Naga).

<sup>49</sup> DAVIES 1913:15.

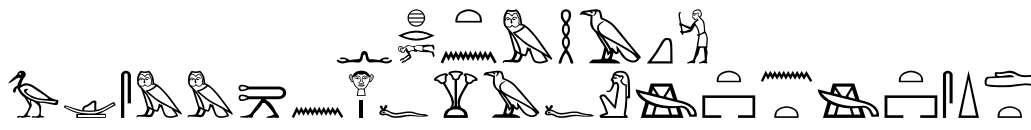
<sup>50</sup> BLOK 1961: 106.

#### IV. THE EXECUTION PLACE *hbt* AND THE SLAUGHTER BLOCK *nmt*:

Originally, the word  *nmt*<sup>51</sup> referred to a «slaughter block» or a «chopping

block». It took the determinative of a butcher's wooden table, with a knife upon it  upon which animals were cut for the benefit of the king in his temple<sup>52</sup>. It was derived from the word *nm*, i.e., «knife» used for butchering<sup>53</sup>. Then, it was extended to be the room or the place where the enemies of the gods were defeated<sup>54</sup>. The slaughter place *nmt* was known in the Middle Kingdom<sup>55</sup>. It was one of the dangerous places that faced the most often, enemies were brought to *nmt* to meet their end: «Behold your foes are in *nmt*»<sup>56</sup> and «Those who do evil to you are on *nmt*»<sup>57</sup>. The author suggests that there was a kind of sacrifice by an animal instead of humans to avoid the ugly fate of extinction. Therefore, confusion is found between the *hbt* and the *nmt*.

In a text, we read:


  
*n hr.i m h3kt b3.s m-m it(w).n hr.f h3.f nmt nt nmt spdt*

«I have not fallen as a prey whose soul is with he who is around the slaughter-place of the slaughter place of Sothis»<sup>58</sup>.

The deceased is describing himself as a «prey», just like animals that fall as «preys» or «plunders».

#### V. SOME DEITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE EXECUTION PLACE

The deceased prayed to the gods in order to save him from the dangerous place (*hbt*), as in the following text from the book of the Dead:

  
*swd3 h3wt.w swd3.w st r t3 hbt n 3tw nty m h3-bin*

«May you keep their bodies safe, protect them from the place of execution of the enemies who are in the dangerous chamber»<sup>59</sup>

Some deities with severe character were closely associated with the places of execution, such as *Sekhmet*, *Mehit*, *Matyt*, *Shesemu*, *Thothh*, and *Horus-Merty*.

<sup>51</sup>ERMAN & GRAPOW (eds.): *Wb.* 1928: vol.2, 264,1; *UrK* 1915: vol.5,16, 56.

<sup>52</sup> ABUEL-YAZID 2019: 7-24; ZANDEE 1960: 166; BLOK 1961: 105.

<sup>53</sup> WILSON 1997: 521.

<sup>54</sup>ERMAN & GRAPOW (eds.): *Wb.* 1928: vol.2, 2, 264.

<sup>55</sup>GARDINER 1957:515.

<sup>56</sup> EDFOU 1884: vol.1, 498, 3.

<sup>57</sup> EDFOU 1929: vol.4, 16,235.

<sup>58</sup> LESKO 1972: 102, 106; *CT* 1961: vol.7, 1099 [B1Bo].

<sup>59</sup> Chapter 164, 165 from the Book of the Dead.

## Sekhmet:

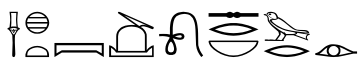
*Sekhmet* was famous for her power, violence, and vengeance<sup>60</sup>. One of her important tools was the knife<sup>61</sup>. She was considered an enemy, who threatened the deceased in the afterlife, and he feared her<sup>62</sup>. Her slaughterers were mentioned in the Book of dead<sup>63</sup>.

On the top of a stele that dates back to the Persian Empire <sup>64</sup>- Hannover Museum, the god *Seth* is depicted with a human body and the head of an ass<sup>65</sup>. His hands are tied from behind. He is depicted inside the place of execution, which takes the form of a shrine, above which there are two knives, while a turtle<sup>66</sup>and a lizard <sup>67</sup>- two of the symbols of Seth<sup>68</sup>- under it.



[FIGURE 7]: BLOK 1961: TAF. II.

The goddess *Sekhmet*, is seated with the body of a woman, and the head of a lion, wearing the *Atef* crown, holding the *wag* scepter in her left hand , and the sign of life in her right hand<sup>69</sup>. *Sekhmet* is captioned as:

  
*shmt hry nmt psdt.s r nb wr(t) ir*

«*Sekhmet*, Mistress of the execution place (block) , whose fire threatens all, the great»<sup>70</sup>.

The text on the stele refers to the place of execution with only the determinative of a shrine upon which is the knife. The author thinks that the transliteration of the place of execution could be written as *nmt* or *hbt*, as they have the same determinative.

<sup>60</sup> SCHMITZ 1985: 325; HOENES 1976: 32f.

<sup>61</sup>HOENES 1976:241.

<sup>62</sup> ZANDEE 1960: 214.

<sup>63</sup> ZANDEE 1960: 205.

<sup>64</sup> GUENTCH-OGLOUEFF 1940: 128.

<sup>65</sup> A similar stele in Egyptian Museum in Cairo *Jd* 43014. BLOK 1961: 97-113.

<sup>66</sup> EDFOU 1897: vol.2, 74 (7). As the aspect of Seth. CRUZ-URIBE 2009: 208.

<sup>67</sup> TAYLOR 2016: FIG. 9,96; LOSSE 1998: 36, FIG.15.

<sup>68</sup> LEFÉBURE 1874: 53; MORET 1915: 254; FISHER 1968: 19.

<sup>69</sup> GUENTCH-OGLOUEFF 1940: 129.

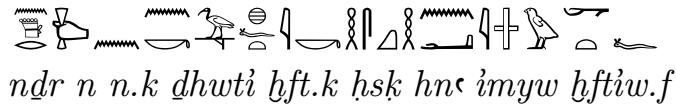
<sup>70</sup> DERCHAIN 1964: 20-21, PL.2.

*Seth* is represented with his arms tied from behind,. Some scenes showed him attached to a pole<sup>71</sup>. This punishment gesture appeared in the Ptolemaic period, in *Jumilhac* Papyrus, in which *Seth* had a similar image <sup>72</sup>.

The shape in which the god *Seth* was represented is the shape of the shrine of execution above which the knife is represented. Blok described the place where *Seth* was tied, as a sandhill upon which *Seth* was executed<sup>73</sup>.

### Thoth:

In the Pyramid Texts, Thoth appears against the enemies of Osiris as a butcher<sup>74</sup>



«Thoth has laid hold of your foe for you, he having been decapitated together with those who are in his following».

Thoth's blade was sharpened, and the knife that removes heads and cuts out hearts was honed, and [it] will remove the heads and cut out the hearts of those who will cross NN when he goes to you, Osiris<sup>75</sup>.

dmd mds.k dhwti nšm mds dr tpw hsk hštiw

«Sharpen your knife, O Thoth which is keen and cutting which removes heads and cuts out hearts».

It shows the importance of using words, such as sharpening the knife before decapitation, which was performed before slaughtering an animal.

### Shesmu

*Shesmu* was identified as a «butcher»<sup>76</sup>. He was often represented with the head of a lion or completely anthropomorphic<sup>77</sup>. Certain passages in the Coffin Texts attested to the blood thirstiness of *Shesmu*<sup>78</sup>. He was the one who cooked the flesh of the guilty<sup>79</sup>. He held the stone knife<sup>80</sup>.

He was given the title «Slaughter of the Souls»<sup>81</sup>. He was connected with wine with red color as blood, and he was identified as the «lord of blood». Since the wine was a good thing, his association with blood was considered one of righteousness, making him an

<sup>71</sup> See examples in CAUVILLE 2000: vol.3, 264; WILSON 1997: 650; DERCHAIN 1946: 20.

<sup>72</sup> VANDIER 1962: 149, PL.10.

<sup>73</sup> BLOK 1961: 113.

<sup>74</sup> BLOK 1961: 108; Pyr.635c, 962, 2110c.

<sup>75</sup> The translation here is that of J. Pyr. 477; SETHE 1910: 961–63; ALLEN 2005: 129; FAULKNER 1969: 165. Thoth also decapitates enemies of the deceased in *Pyr.* 367.

<sup>76</sup> HELCK 1985: 590-591.

<sup>77</sup> CICCARELLO 1977: 43ff; DRIOTON 1939: 77-78 n.c

<sup>78</sup> CT 1935: vol.1, 123b & 1956: vol.4, 179h; ZANDEE 1960: 16-216.

<sup>79</sup> Pyr.403 a.

<sup>80</sup> NAVILLE 1886: 153A:32.

<sup>81</sup> CICCARELLO 1977: 47.

executioner of the unrighteous, being the slaughterer of souls. When the main form of execution was by beheading, it was said that *Shesmu* ripped off the heads of those who were wicked, and threw them into a wine press to be crushed into red wine, which was given to the righteous dead. Beheading was commonly carried out by the victim resting their heads on a wooden block, so *Shesmu* was referred to as the overthrower of the wicked at the block<sup>82</sup>. This violent aspect led to the depiction, in art, as a lion-headed man, which perhaps was a bridge between him and *Sekhmet*, the goddess of vengeance<sup>83</sup>.

He was responsible for the slaughter place in the famous spell of chapter 17<sup>th</sup> of the Book of the Dead<sup>84</sup>:



*dd sphw m isftiw r nmt.f dnt b3w ptr rf sw šsmw pw sj 3ti pw n wsir*

«Who lassoes evildoers for his Slaughter block who cut souls, who is he? He is *Shesmu*, the butcher of Osiris»<sup>85</sup>.

The god *Re* was called upon to rescue the dead from *Shesmu*, who dragged the guilty enemies of Osiris to his slaughter<sup>86</sup>. In the temple of *Hathor* in Dendera- the east staircase east side *Shesmu* was depicted with a human head carrying pieces of meat after the first priest. He is labeled as:



*dd mdw in šsmw nb shw-hr hry-tp nmt hsk m3-hd m3i-hsy hr hftyw*

«Recitation by *Shesmu*, lord of the slaughterhouse of Horus, lord of the slaughter place, who slaughters the white antelope, the lion before the enemies»<sup>87</sup>.

### ***Mehit*** (*mḥit*)<sup>88</sup>:

She was a lion goddess<sup>89</sup>, whose name means «she from the north»<sup>90</sup>. In Edfu, her guardian character appeared, as she was identified with goddesses: *Menhit*, *Neseret*, and *Sakhmet*. She was identified as «she brules the enemies»<sup>91</sup>.

<sup>82</sup> SCHOTT 1938: 88-93, Pl. VI.

<sup>83</sup> «Shezmu»: <https://ancientegypt.fandom.com/wiki/Shezmu>. Accessed on 01/01/2022

<sup>84</sup> NAVILLE 1886: PL. XXV.

<sup>85</sup> NAVILLE 1886: 17; Urk 1915: vol.5, 55- 56, 16-17, 57,1-2(=TB 17).

<sup>86</sup> CICCARELLO 1977: 46; PETERSON 1964: 84.

<sup>87</sup> MARIETTE 1873-1874 : PL.VII, VII,184(1), PL. DCLXXI, VII,184 (2-3); XVI.

<sup>88</sup> A goddess could be assimilated with Isis and Hathor. LEITZ 2002: vol.3, 371.

<sup>89</sup> KAKOSY 1982: 5-6; JUNKER 1917:57.

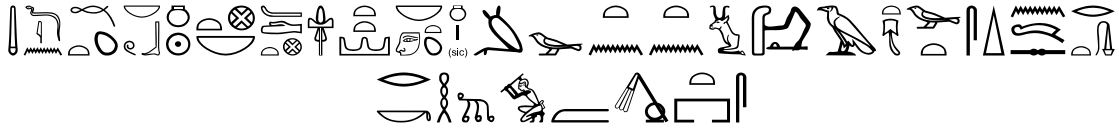
<sup>90</sup> KEES 1956:10

<sup>91</sup> EDFOU 1884: vol.1, 2, 313; JUNKER 1917: 57; DE WIT 1951: 301ff.



*wnn mh̄yt m h̄ry nmt h̄ry h̄bt nt bh̄dt ʾʾbtt*

«Mehit, the one who presides over the block and the place of execution in eastern Edfu»<sup>92</sup>.



*dd mdw ʾn mh̄yt nbt wbnt nbt bh̄dt ʾʾbtt nbt h̄nt...dndn*

*h̄ʾt wrt spd nsrt r.k h̄ryw m h̄bt.s*

«Words spoken by Mehit lady of Webnet, lady of eastern Edfu, the forward lady the great warrior goddess, she is furious and the flame is hot for you and the enemies are in her execution place»<sup>93</sup>.

**Matyt<sup>94</sup>:**

One of the lioness goddesses, worshiped in the 2<sup>nd</sup> provinces of Upper Egypt. She was represented holding two knives as a protectress goddess with the goddess Sekhmet in Dendara, who defeated Seth as the text says:



*dd mdw ʾn M̄tyt h̄ry-ʾb t̄nʾ špst wsrt h̄nt Pr-špst rd̄i st̄š hr h̄bt n pr.f ʾm.s n k̄.f r ʾbdw dt*

«Words spoken by Matyt in the middle of Thinis, the favorable, the strong in the temple of (Hathor), who placed Seth in the execution place and he never go out and never enter Abydos forever»<sup>95</sup>.

<sup>92</sup> EDFOU 1987: vol.2, 16, 85.

<sup>93</sup> EDFOU 1884: vol.1, 314, 17-18.

<sup>94</sup> DE WIT 1951: 292-367; Leitz 2003: 213.

<sup>95</sup> CAUVILLE 1997 : X/1, 219,2, X/2, PL.103;132.



## V. CONCLUSION

The main target for the ancient Egyptians was how to get rid of all evils from the world of the living and the hereafter. They believed that the fate of the enemies of the gods was the destruction of their souls after death.

The place of execution took the shape of a shrine, upon which a knife descended to cut off heads. It was known in the Old Kingdom and continued to be known in the Greco-Roman Period. The only representation we have of the place of execution is in Spell 50 of the Book of the Dead. This place was represented as two upright posts, and a huge knife descending downwards.

The ancient Egyptians never represented the act of decapitation clearly in art. Nevertheless, the heads were cut off in many scenes, even when the tool of execution was represented as in the Book of the Dead, only the tool, not the act, as if they meant only to warn people from falling in this torturing place.

The author concluded that the deceased might survive with the help of:

- I-The magical spells that helped the deceased from falling in the place of execution, as the deceased prayed to survive total extinction by decapitation. Even in the case of decapitation, his head was never taken away from his body, it was always represented beside his body, hoping to rejoin the body by magical spells.
- II- The sacrifice of an animal to avoid the ugly fate of entering the place of execution, as seen in the similarity between the slaughter of an animal and that of the human, e.g.,
  - 1-The scenes of the convicted that showed the person with his hands tied from behind, as animals were tied well before slaughtering.
  - 2-The sharp knives to cut off heads were mentioned when punishing the guilty, as they were necessary when slaughtering animals.
  - 3-The drops of blood were shown dripping from the knife in the Book of the Dead, while the deceased was shown in good shape without any injuries in the body.
- III-Finally, with the help of the deities they may survive by the petitions made for all severe deities as Sekhmet and the above mentioned.



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