

A GOOD COMING AND A BAD COMING  
The Dual Symbolic Roles of Mice in Ancient Egyptian Representations

by  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the symbolic role played by textual, 2- and 3-dimensional representations of mice in Ancient Egypt from the Old Kingdom to the New Kingdom. Many of these attestations are found in funerary contexts and performed a medico-magical role. By building on an interpretive framework established by Warren Dawson in the 1920s, this paper demonstrates that the mouse had two opposing yet complimentary roles in Egyptian medical and religious practice. On one hand, the mouse's powerful fertility was life giving, but on the other, its fertility could turn to the propagation of disease. Certain conventions of depiction and verbal description ensured that the mouse was controlled and prevented from expressing its negative qualities. Furthermore, the power of the mouse was subordinated to both the Nile and the sun god. These symbolic roles are reflective of much later medical interpretations of mice that prevailed from the Greco-Roman period into the early modern era. Thus, this study expands on Dawson's work to demonstrate the historical origins of later medical practices. The study concludes with an examination of mouse representations in the broader context of Egyptian mythology and cosmology. It is evident that the duality expressed by the mouse is a common element of Egyptian invention as is the convention of controlling a dangerous force by verbal cues and terminology. Lastly, these mouse objects are indicative of the Ancient Egyptian's familiarity with the physical world and the role of disease vectors and water in the spread of disease.

## LAY ABSTRACT

This thesis sets out to determine the significance of mice in Ancient Egyptian paintings, reliefs, statuary, and a variety of texts. In order to interpret the meaning of these objects, the thesis uses an explanation of the medical and magical role of mice given in a quote by Pliny the Elder. This quote explains that mice were the spontaneous product of the Nile. The thesis establishes that this claim is an accurate reflection of the Ancient Egyptian beliefs about mice. Thus, the thesis provides an ideological origin for the medical use of mice that continued into the modern era and shows how Ancient Egyptian thoughts continued to influence the practice of later civilizations.

## PREFACE

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Leesha Cessna.

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## INTRODUCTION

Animals formed a key part of Ancient Egyptian artistic displays. They are represented in every type of visual two and three-dimensional art including, most famously, the written language of hieroglyphs. Within this artistic corpus, each animal possesses a particular symbolic purpose and expresses some part of an Ancient Egyptian worldview. Identifying the network of symbolic roles allows the audience to interact with Egyptian ideological conceptions of the world. Many animals have been examined for their connotations of rebirth<sup>1</sup> or fertility,<sup>2</sup> or other culturally specific meanings,<sup>3</sup> or for their connections to religious cult. Much has been said regarding the animals associated with major cults: cats, jackals, crocodiles, falcons, etc. This study will focus on the role of mice as part of this stock of symbolic imagery.

Unlike the famous animal representatives of gods and goddesses of Ancient Egypt, the mouse has received little attention. Yet, mouse representations are attested for every period of Egyptian history. They occur in textual sources, as part of two-dimensional scenery, and as three-dimensional figures. When such images and textual

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<sup>1</sup> The scarab is perhaps the most famous, as its natural habit of rolling dung balls was paralleled with the sun god's daily rebirth and passage across the sky. See Houlihan 1996, 188ff.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, animals are so frequently associated with fertility that this seems to be a 'catch-all' interpretation for depictions that scholars are otherwise unable to assign a purpose. Nonetheless, certain rapidly producing animals carry the same fertility connotations in modern society that it does seem reasonable to recognize fertility as one of their key traits. For an example, see Osborn's (1998, 42ff.) discussion of the rabbit.

<sup>3</sup> The lapwing is a particularly fitting example of this interpretive scheme. It was employed throughout Egyptian history as a metaphor for the general populace and was frequently employed in royal imagery to emphasize the king's power over his people. See Houlihan 1996, 154.

references are considered, the work done on them is primarily descriptive.<sup>4</sup> What little interpretive work exists was primarily published at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by scholars interested in the historical longevity and continuity of the then-contemporary association between mice and plague.<sup>5</sup> Warren Dawson in particular traced the association with disease back to Ancient Egypt.

While Dawson and others found the origins of the Greco-Roman and Medieval interpretations of mice, they did not examine the role of this creature in Egypt itself. Yet, the very continuity of later examples suggests the possibility that such an interpretation also prevailed in Ancient Egypt. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to expand on the early modern interpretive work. Thus, uncovering the symbolic significance of mice in Egypt has implications not only for the study of Ancient Egyptian understandings of medicine and religion, but also for much later periods, as well as for the intercultural transmission of ideas. The examination of Egyptian interactions with mice clarifies not only an ancient worldview, but also the ancient experience of disease.

In order to conduct this study, I have assembled a representative collection of Ancient Egyptian mouse attestations. They date from the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms and include text, two- and three-dimensional imagery. I have specifically chosen to exclude three samples that I would term as ‘prosaic,’ that is, examples where the mouse is used only as a passing metaphor used to describe a different subject, not the

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<sup>4</sup> See for example: Oppenheim 2015, Germond 2001, Roehrig 2005, and Friedman 1998, where these objects are included in compendiums of beautiful color photos and accompanied by little more information or analysis than their find data and a paragraph of description.

<sup>5</sup> Powell 1929; British Medical Journal 1921, 1924; Dawson 1924.

mouse directly.<sup>6</sup> In these instances, I argue that the mouse is not being employed in its primary symbolic role. Instead, one facet of the animal is being highlighted to elicit or convey a particular emotional response. I have likewise limited the examples to remains from the Old through New Kingdoms. While there are many fascinating mouse objects from the Late and Ptolemaic Periods, the attestations here become very confused with the rising cult of Horus of Letopolis and the incorporation of Greek deities like Apollo Smintheus.<sup>7</sup> The influx of new religious materials represents a dynamic shift in the interpretation of mice, which it is beyond the scope of this study to parse.

Unfortunately, this temporal limit also sets a restriction on the total number of objects available for discussion. Barring further discoveries, there are few enough mouse attestations from the Old through New Kingdoms that, excepting the examples given above, they are all discussed in this thesis. However, the compilation of these diverse materials creates the unique opportunity to study the diachronic development of Egyptian ideas regarding mice and to examine the nature and possible causes of interpretational changes as they present themselves.

In addition, I have included a number of mouse attestations that do not appear to the modern eye to be mice, strictly speaking. Indeed, this is true. In English, the term mouse refers to the zoological species *mus musculus*, the field and house mouse. There is

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the mouse is used as a metaphor for a frightened, submissive creature in Cairo love poem #20 and in the Stele of Kamose. Likewise, Thomas Schneider has identified an attestation of the name pn.t, ‘female mouse’ (Schneider 2003).

<sup>7</sup> The mongoose and shrew imagery from this period is from a clearly independent stream of development. Never before this period are mice conflated with mongoose, in which relationship the mouse becomes secondary and its significance questionable. Likewise, before this period, no rodent is given divine attributes. In light of the presence of Greek religious traditions in Egypt, exemplified by the worship of Apollo Smintheus that spread across the Near East, (see Kiernan 2014) such imagery is likely a new invention and therefore not reflective of the preceding development of Egyptian mouse imagery.



no similar limitation to the Egyptian term *pn.w*, which is applied to a number of species related to or resembling mice.<sup>8</sup> I am confident in employing mouse-like imagery primarily because of two funerary scenes. In both instances, the term *pn.w* is explicitly applied to mouse-like rodents that have been zoologically identified as Nile rats and jird.<sup>9</sup>

These representations will then be examined against the interpretive framework Dawson recognized in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. His work revealed the amazing longevity of a dual symbolic role for mice that became prominent in medieval sources and endured into his era. The medieval sources traced their medical practices back to Greco-Roman applications and interpretations of mice. The Ancient Greek authors in turn appeal to the claim that the Ancient Egyptians first recognized the relationship between mice and disease via the Nile River.

Many of the artifacts covered in this discussion fit very comfortably in a framework structured around the relationship between disease and health characterized by an association with pests. This framework can also be used to elucidate a number of Egyptian depictions of mice that suffer from a lack of context. Thus, after providing an overview of the criteria, claims, and origins of the early modern interpretation of mice in Chapter One, my thesis will be divided into four parts. To ground the early modern data, Chapter Two will study the presence of and evidence for mice in the archaeological record. This section will demonstrate the close relationship between mice and the ancient human habitat, a situation that parallels the early modern context.

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<sup>8</sup> Osborn lists the house rat, Norway rat, Nile rat, spiny mouse, Bandicoot rat, jird, and jerboa (1998, 46-52).

<sup>9</sup> The Nile rats are seen on a relief in the Causeway of Unas (Osborn 1998, 48) and the jird comes from a painting in the tomb of Baqt III (Osborn 1998, 51).

Next, Chapter Three will examine those artifacts that lend themselves to interpretation via the established framework. By viewing each artifact through this lens, I hope to create a unified description of the symbolic role of mice. This discussion will conclude in Chapters Four and Five with the exploration of the symbolic and thematic network evidenced by the artifacts, which allows me to examine the ways in which connotations of disease fit into a larger cosmological context. In Chapter Six, my thesis will discuss artifacts that fall outside this framework. I will discuss possible alternative frameworks, recognizing that there must have been regional, temporal and stylistic variation in the presentation of ideological concepts. This chapter will focus on the so-called ‘satirical ostraca.’ Of the various depictions of animals in Ancient Egyptian sources, these ostraca and papyri have received some of the most interpretative attention.<sup>10</sup> Thus, through the following six chapters I will evaluate the various interpretive models that have been proposed for these mouse representations. In conclusion, the study will provide an analysis of the suitability of this early modern interpretive framework and explore the possible application of this framework in other artistic traditions, including, for example, Near Eastern and Classical attestations of mice. Such a pursuit may further clarify how permutations of certain Ancient Egyptian medical practices continued to find expression in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>10</sup> See de Garis Davies 1917, Bohm 2013, Malek 1999, Houlihan 1996, and Brunner-Traut 1968, 1979.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK

During the Medieval period, when the Black Death rampaged across Europe, Egypt was recognized as an unparalleled source of pestilence. Likewise in 1800, Noah Webster noted that the climate of Egypt was particularly prone to pestilence.<sup>11</sup> Beyond establishing this geographic origin, early writers also recognized an important correlation between major outbreaks of plague: the spread of mice and rats. Egypt was recognized not only as a source of plague, but of mice, as well.<sup>12</sup> Thus, when plague stretched around the world at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, attention again diverted to Egypt. By following the work of their predecessors, the early modern scientific community identified rodents, namely rats, as primary disease vectors. So, in order to combat the current round of plague, scientists turned their efforts to the study of the relationship between mice and humans in Egypt.

One study conducted between 1911 and 1913 at Kom Ombo helmed by the *British Medical Journal* discovered that land and water were both infested with rats, as well as the rodent's ever-present companion, the flea.<sup>13</sup> The results of the study revealed a seasonal correlation in rat and flea populations: rats bred during summer, the same season when plague spread most rapidly. The fleas themselves were the subjects of another study conducted by the famous Flinders Petrie.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, this study demonstrated that *Rattus rattus* was not the only disease-bearing rodent. The Cairo spiny

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<sup>11</sup> Cole 2010, 79.

<sup>12</sup> Powell writing in 1929 (176) identifies mice with a series of plagues throughout the Near East and the Greeks blamed mice carried on Egyptian grain vessels for spreading the Justinian Plague.

<sup>13</sup> British Medical Journal 1924.

<sup>14</sup> Bacot et al. 1914.

mouse (*Acomys cahirinus*) readily infested the high-density urban centers, while the water-loving Norway rat (*Rattus norvegicus*) populated Nile bound boats, especially those stocked with cargos of grain. Petrie's flea study concluded that flea-bearing rodents infested Egypt from the north and that this might be due to unfavorable climatic conditions in Upper Egypt.<sup>15</sup> Recognizing the correspondence between fleas, mice, and plague was the first step toward the modern understanding of plague: that fleas bear disease-causing bacteria and that they infect their hosts, whether rodent or human, when they bite.<sup>16</sup>

No doubt, it was the prevalence of plague and mice during the 1910s and 20s that inspired scholars like Warren Dawson to study the history of the role of mice in society. In the 1920s, Dawson published a number of articles that examined the development of European beliefs concerning the role of mice in medicine and disease and he was not alone in writing on this topic.<sup>17</sup> What Dawson and others noted is that rodents were blamed for more than the spread of plague. They had a long-standing association with disease and were seen to have negative influence from the Greco-Roman period through the contemporary early modern period. That is, mice and their relatives were seen as supernatural agents that spread disease and death.

The Greek epic, the Iliad, famously opens with a plague spread by Apollo Smintheus, 'of the mouse' (Hom. Il. 1.39) and later Roman sources also make reference

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<sup>15</sup> Bacot, et al. 1914, 506.

<sup>16</sup> Lotfy 2015, 550.

<sup>17</sup> Dawson 1924, 'The Mouse in Egyptian and Later Medicine,' 1925, 'The Mouse in Fable and Folklore,' 1936, 'The Magicians of Pharaoh,' and Powell 1929, 'Rodent Gods in Ancient and Modern Times.' However, aside from a recent article by Amadine Marshall in 2015, 'About the Efficacy of Eating a Cooked Mouse,' which rediscovered some of Dawson's conclusions, there has been virtually no study since this period of mice and plague with reference to Egypt.

to this pestilence-spreading manifestation of the god (Ov. Fast. 6.425, Met. 12.585). By the 7<sup>th</sup> c. CE, this association had spread to Christianity. Devotees of St. Gertrude were accustomed to pray to her to avert sickness and to protect their agriculture from mice. She was usually depicted with a mouse climbing her habit or staff.<sup>18</sup> According to J.U. Powell, she still had followers and festivals in her honor in parts of Belgium as late as the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. Lucinda Cole supplies a multitude of pre-modern attestations of mice where they are usually associated with miasma, pestilence and witches, including, quite famously, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.<sup>19</sup>

The consistency and duration of the disease-related role of mice begs the question of its origin. Fortunately, Dawson has traced these diverse references back to the works of Pliny the Elder. In *Natural History* (9.84), Pliny asserts:

But all these things, singular as they are, are rendered credible by a marvel which exceeds them all, at the time of the inundation of the Nile; for, the moment that it subsides, little mice are found, the first rudiments of which have been formed by the generative powers of the waters and the earth: in one part of the body they are already alive, while in that which is of later formation, they are still composed of earth.

Cole effectively demonstrates how medieval writers drew on Pliny's description of mice to contextualize their understanding of the spread of plague. Direct reference to Pliny can be found in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. work *Natural Magick* by philosopher Giambattista Delia Porta, and again in 1607 in Topsell's *Historie of Foure Footed Beastes*, where both

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<sup>18</sup> Powell 1929, 176-77.

<sup>19</sup> Cole 2010.

authors describe the mouse as the product of putrefaction.<sup>20</sup> By Delia and Topsell's reasoning, it was the mouse's ability to reproduce via moisture, earth, and the Nile that became the impetus for its spread of disease. This reasoning flowed out of the belief that air, or 'vapors,' could become corrupted by breeding pestilence.<sup>21</sup> Usually, this corruption was envisioned as moist, cloudy air that was expelled by the ground.<sup>22</sup> Mice, born from the miasma of Nile moisture and silt, therefore embodied corruption and putrefaction.

While Pliny's explanation was used to associate mice with disease, his description ties them yet more directly to the topic of fertility. Later in his *Natural History* (10.85), Pliny also asserts that mice surpass all other animals in fertility. A single female might give birth to 120 offspring at once, and these young mice were born already pregnant. Here he also states that mice reproduced by licking salt. Thus, mice had, according to different cosmologies, diverse methods of reproduction beyond normal copulation. Such an abnormal ability connected mice to other spontaneously generated animals, like frogs, worms, and scorpions.<sup>23</sup> These creatures, too, have long been the subjects of negative popular opinion, so any association with them only serves to increase the negative view of mice. Cole further argues that overabundant fertility in mice was actually another facet of their negative connotation.<sup>24</sup> Mice frequently infest fields and storehouses, consuming

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<sup>20</sup> Cole 2010, 69.

<sup>21</sup> Cole 2010, 68.

<sup>22</sup> Cole 2010, 66 & 69.

<sup>23</sup> The Egyptians believed frogs were autogenerative (Prell 2009; 229). Pliny explains that certain species of worms were generated by the bodies of dead mice (*Nat Hist.* 10.85). Cole cites Topsell's references to the scorpion as being born of putrefying matter. All of these associations continued to be developed and expressed by medieval authors (Cole 2010, 69).

<sup>24</sup> Cole 2010, 74. See also Fissell 1991, 21ff.

the grain intended for human consumption. This habit puts them in direct competition with humans, competition that grows more threatening in seasons of reduced food supply, which are also, usually, seasons of increased disease because of malnutrition. These examples serve only to briefly summarize a field of diverse commentary on mice but they all agree on the animal's disease-propagating role. Furthermore, it is clear that Pliny's *Natural History* provided the source for the negative medieval interpretation of mice that prevailed into the early modern period.

Yet, while the association with sickness might be understood in light of the very real role of mice as disease vectors, perhaps the most significant discovery of the early modern scholars is that the mouse possessed a second, positive connotation. The application of mice as medical treatment has the same depth of history as its negative disease connotations. A brief overview of the medical role of mice reveals a striking consistency over centuries of use. It was frequently an ingredient in medical treatments and its curative powers were still evidently accepted at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both Dawson and Amandine Marshall note that children in the United Kingdom were prescribed to eat a cooked mouse as treatment for excessive salivation, whooping cough, or incontinence.<sup>25</sup> This treatment was the latest manifestation of a long-standing trend to treat childhood ailments with mice. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century it was customary to give a child a sodden mouse to prevent them urinating overmuch. Medieval bestiaries also included a number of prescriptions involving mice. Applied externally, a butterflied mouse can be expected to treat an arrow wound and a pulverized mouse mixed with wine would help

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<sup>25</sup> Dawson 1924, 86; Marshall 2015, 41.

one's hair grow. A mouse might also be taken internally to treat lung ailments.<sup>26</sup> Greco-Roman sources, including Pliny's *Natural History*, also give instructions for the medical application of mice. Indeed, Pliny might be the first author to have suggested using a boiled mouse to treat incontinence.<sup>27</sup>

The same longevity of application is demonstrated in regard to the prescription for a mouth-related ailment. As in the 20<sup>th</sup> century United Kingdom, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Algerian doctor Abd er-Razzak recommended that a child eat a mouse in order to stop excessive salivation.<sup>28</sup> Like the closely related incontinence treatment, this cure can even be traced back to the Greco-Roman period, where it is found in the writings of Dioscorides (2.69). This application is even attested in Ancient Egyptian sources. pBerlin 3027, *Zaubersprüche für Mutter und Kind*, gives a magical remedy to treat the Ancient Egyptian ailment of *ssmy*. The medico-magical spell instructs the mother to feed her child a cooked mouse. Dawson and Marshall both associate *ssmy* with excessive salivation because the preparation and consumption of the mouse corresponds with the later prescriptions.<sup>29</sup> It is therefore possible to trace a direct course of development from the Egyptian treatment to that employed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

What emerges from this survey is a two-fold understanding of mice in which they cause disease but can also be used to treat and cure it. There has been much less

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<sup>26</sup> Moore 1988, 515-516.

<sup>27</sup> Marshall 2015, 41.

<sup>28</sup> Dawson 1924, 84.

<sup>29</sup> Marshall 2015, 40. She also cites the determinative (Gardiner A2) for *ssmy* as possible evidence because the sign is a figure holding its hand to its mouth. However, considering the range of words associated with this determinative, from prayer to love, this assertion is highly unlikely. In fact, I agree with Naoko Yamazaki's interpretation that *ssmy* is a communicable disease passed from mother to child. This argument will be expanded in section 3.2.



explanation given for the choice to employ mice as medical treatments than for their negative interpretations. However, I believe that the explanation can be found in the same passage in Pliny used to explain their powers to spread disease. The ability of mice to spontaneously reproduce in large numbers makes them exceptional examples of fertility and creative power. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the multitude of medical treatments involving mice was intended to ‘borrow’ the life-giving powers inherent to the mouse. At this point, it is essential to consider the question of whether Pliny’s assertions accurately reflected contemporary Egyptian beliefs regarding mice, and whether beliefs current at the beginning of the Common Era accurately reflected Egyptian beliefs centuries earlier.

Pliny’s explanation for the appearance of mice may provide the modern scholar with the ‘missing link’ necessary to understand the Ancient Egyptian symbolic conception of mice. Yet, certain fundamental assumptions must be proven for this assertion to have interpretive value. First, the archaeological record must provide sufficient evidence of interaction between humans and mice that disease would have the opportunity to spread between them. Secondly, there must be evidence that humans observe this correlation and understood the spread of disease. If both of these conditions are met, then it must be further demonstrated that mice were conceptually associated with the Nile, fertility and disease. Lastly, the mouse must have demonstrable positive and negative connotations. Chapters Three through Five will address the possible ideological interpretations of mouse representations and the framework of thematic connections this reveals.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE AND TEXTUAL CONTEXT

Before an analysis of mouse representations can be performed, certain foundational facts must be ascertained. For mice to have symbolic significance to the Ancient Egyptians, they must have had sufficient familiarity with the species. Furthermore, in order for the Egyptians to have associated mice with the Nile and with disease, they must have had basic knowledge of water-bourne illness that could be transmitted by mice and a knowledge of the communicability of disease. Archaeological and textual evidence supports both suppositions.

#### 2.1 MICE AND HUMANS: A COMMENSAL RELATIONSHIP:

Mouse and human interaction is as old as civilization in Egypt. The evidence for this conclusion is two-fold. First, agricultural competition with mice is suggested by the early domestication of the cat. James Baldwin proposes a so-called ‘period of commensality’ in which cats were encouraged to live in human settlements, where they subsisted on vermin. This period was to have existed for approximately 3000 years from 5000-2000 BCE, until cats developed an association with religious cult and underwent more intensive domestication.<sup>30</sup> Direct pre-dynastic evidence for mice was also excavated at Naga el-Deir in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>31</sup> While the details of the discovery remain obscure, it is clear that mouse remains were uncovered in the intestinal tract of a number of naturally preserved child mummies. These remains, which the excavators confirm do not represent late intrusion, suggest that mice were intentionally consumed.<sup>32</sup> This may have been for subsistence or, in light of the much later pBerlin 3027, early evidence of

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<sup>30</sup> Baldwin 1975, 436-438.

<sup>31</sup> Smith & Dawson 1924, 162.

<sup>32</sup> Marshall 2015, 41.

Egyptian medical practice. Whatever the motive, this discovery provides the earliest indication of human and rodent interaction in Ancient Egypt.

The Middle and New Kingdoms provide similar examples of the mouse's presence. In his 1891 excavation report from Lahun, Flinders Petrie claimed that the village houses were almost universally undermined by a crisscrossing of 'mouse' tunnels.<sup>33</sup> While neither the domestic mouse nor rat is a frequent tunneler, there are other species native to Egypt, such as the Nile rat, that might have been responsible for the damage.<sup>34</sup> This example also serves to demonstrate the variety of species that interacted with Ancient Egyptians in very comparable situations. J. Boessneck and A. von den Driesch have conducted a number of surveys at a Middle Kingdom necropolis at Elephantine that confirm the variety of rodent species present. In their 1982 report, the authors describe recovery of bones from the spiny mouse and the Nile rat. Boessneck notes that it is frequently difficult to distinguish different rodent species and some of the bones were classified simply according to size.<sup>35</sup> The difficulty of modern scientists to identify rodent remains reinforces the principle set forth in the introduction to this study, which argues that the term *pn.w* was used broadly to refer to all related rodent types. Linguistically, there was no need for Ancient Egyptians to develop categories in order to distinguish the various types of rodents they encountered on a daily basis.

Like the village of Lahun, the Theban necropolis was evidently overrun with rodents. D. M. Dixon argues that they came in search of funerary offerings left for the

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<sup>33</sup> Petrie 1891, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Osborn 1998, 48.

<sup>35</sup> Boessneck & von den Driesch 1982, 26-29.

deceased.<sup>36</sup> It is just as likely that these rodents came in frequent contact with the workmen of Deir el-Medina, judging by the number of casual drawings made of rats by these artisans;<sup>37</sup> thus, mice may have come to the Valley of the Kings in search of edible offerings and stayed for the tidbits left by busy workmen. Theban evidence provides yet one more example of human interaction in the form of funerary models excavated between 1918 and 1920. While excavating an intact secret chamber in the tomb of Mehenkwtre, workmen revealed a cache of funerary models.<sup>38</sup> According to the excavator, H.E. Winlock, some of these models were covered in animal refuse—namely spider webs, fly specks, mouse droppings, and nest material. Some models even showed evidence of having been gnawed. Winlock takes care to note that the chamber itself was free of animal remains, and that not all models were in this condition. He then concludes that the models were exposed to the pests while they were in storage during the owner's lifetime, implying that contemporary settlements were replete with these common vermin.<sup>39</sup>

While the vast majority of rodent remains were found in Egyptian cemeteries, they were not mummified or ritually buried. When first discovered, a cache of 20 rodent mummies found at Saqqara was tentatively identified as mice; however, modern CT

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<sup>36</sup> Dixon 1989, 194.

<sup>37</sup> For example, the Senenmut ostrakon (Osborn 1998, 49) depicts a mouse in profile. This mouse is not part of a scene or connected to any other images. It could very possibly have been sketched during leisure time when an artist happened to notice a passing rodent. The rough sketch of a cat with a mouse in its mouth (Osborn 1998, 46) is even more indicative of such spontaneous composition. Its deft, thick lines must have been quickly laid just when the event occurred.

<sup>38</sup> Winlock 1920, 18.

<sup>39</sup> Winlock 1920, 24.

scans have confirmed that they are shrews.<sup>40</sup> The lack of mouse mummies is not unexpected, considering that mice are not associated with any animal cult, unlike the shrew.<sup>41</sup> This dimension of mortuary ritual creates one more distinction between the cultural roles of mice and shrews. Mice are not manifestations of a major god and so they must draw their ritual (and thence medical) significance from other sources.

## 2.2 ANCIENT EGYPTIAN KNOWLEDGE OF DISEASE:

Paula da Silva Vega provides a table of parasitical diseases transmitted by water ingestion and contact as well as those spread by vectors.<sup>42</sup> Of these, schistosoma (bilharzia), filariasis, and trypanosomiasis are perhaps the most significant because they are spread to humans by the bites of rodents, mosquitoes, and tse-tse flies, respectively. Each of these ailments is caused by parasitic worms and leads to severe fevers.<sup>43</sup> I also include malaria as a key disease because, while it is not parasitic, it is water-borne and spreads to humans via mosquitoes. It too causes fever.

Ancient Egyptian mummies provide ample evidence of these parasitic diseases. M.A. Ruffer first identified schistosoma eggs in two Twentieth Dynasty mummies in 1910.<sup>44</sup> He concluded that the parasitic infection must have been very common in Ancient Egypt.<sup>45</sup> Schistosoma has since been identified in the “majority” of human

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<sup>40</sup> Bleiburg 2013, 119-121; Ikram 2004, 48.

<sup>41</sup> Baldwin 1975, 437.

<sup>42</sup> da Silva Vega 2009, 48.

<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, the other parasitic diseases: ascariasis, dracunculosis, and tricuriasis, are also caused by worms and are frequently accompanied by fever. Thus, Egyptians might not have distinguished between the various diseases in their treatment methods. Likewise, they may have blamed all these diseases on recognized vectors.

<sup>44</sup> Sandison & Tapp 1980, 39.

<sup>45</sup> Kolta & Schwarzmam-Schafhauser 2000, 52.

remains from the Pre-Dynastic to early Islamic periods in Egypt.<sup>46</sup> Malaria, likewise, was extremely frequent in Pharaonic times.<sup>47</sup> The antigen has been detected in the soft tissues of mummies and identified through the characteristic enlargement of marrow space in bones.<sup>48</sup> The other parasites are less commonly attested, however there is at least one instance of filariasis in the Leeds Mummy.<sup>49</sup> Examples of dracunculosis have also been identified.<sup>50</sup>

It is one thing for archaeologists and scientists to identify the symptoms of parasitic diseases in mummies; however, the Ancient Egyptians must have also identified these prevalent diseases and sought treatments for them. Many ancient sources recognized the existence of parasitic worms and the Egyptians were no exception. Worms are frequently discussed in the various medical papyri and a number of parasitic examples have been identified. pEdwin Smith (1.17) provides the especially significant attestation of the *ḥnḥr.t* worm, which is associated with blood clots and lives in water. The identification with water could apply to any of the parasites here discussed, however the frequent pairing with blood clots could connect the worm to schistosoma because haematuria (blood in the urine) is a primary symptom of the infection. The London Medical Papyrus (5.5) also connects the *zpy.w* worm to the passing of an unidentified liquid. pEbers describes two types of intestinal worms. *Hfz.t* has been identified as tapeworm, however the *pnd* worm is specifically distinguished from the tapeworm in pEbers 20.17. Thus, it could refer to any of the parasitic worms that reside in the gut,

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<sup>46</sup> Nunn & Tapp 2000, 150.

<sup>47</sup> Nunn & Tapp 2000, 151.

<sup>48</sup> Cockburn 1973, 470.

<sup>49</sup> Sandison & Tapp 1980, 41.

<sup>50</sup> Sandison 1967, 180.

such as strongyloides.<sup>51</sup> Lastly, pEbers 62 also provides remedies for the *hrr.t* worm, which is famously described as the result of the *ꜥꜣꜥ* disease.

Scholars seeking to identify parasitic diseases in the medical texts have had frequent recourse to debate the *ꜥꜣꜥ* disease. It was first identified as schistosoma in 1937 by Ebbell and the identification was taken up by well-known Egyptologists, however it has had as many detractors as proponents.<sup>52</sup> Of the 21 occurrences of the word *ꜥꜣꜥ* in medical papyri, only one links it to the *hrrt* worm, so the possibility of assigning this ailment to schistosoma is very remote. J.F. Nunn and Edward Tapp also argue against an identification of malaria in the medical texts, citing the lack of reference to its characteristic fever.<sup>53</sup>

Another possible water-bourne disease is the *jꜣd.t rnp.t*. The ‘plague of the year’ was believed to afflict Egypt during the highly dangerous epagomenical days that fell between the standard 360 days of the civil calendar and the new year.<sup>54</sup> Christian Leitz believes that the plague was a seasonal ailment because it lasted from the third month of *ꜣh.t* until the first month of *pr.t*, that is, during the height of the Nile inundation, when there would have been much stagnant water.<sup>55</sup> There is also a notable correlation between agricultural irrigation and the prevalence of the water snail that carries the

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<sup>51</sup> Larvae of this roundworm parasite were found in the small intestines of a mummy in the Manchester collection. Nunn & Tapp 2000, 150.

<sup>52</sup> Ebbell 1937, Lefebvre 1956. Nunn & Tapp make a very thorough argument for why the identification is highly unlikely, but they are not the first. Alternative interpretations were proposed as early as 1930 (Bryan 1930, 118-19).

<sup>53</sup> Nunn & Tapp 2000, 151.

<sup>54</sup> Dawson 1926, 260.

<sup>55</sup> Leitz 1994, 207; Westendorff describes the flood season as the optimal environment for propagating epidemics, which he also likens to the Plague of the Year (Westendorff 2000, 57).

immature schistosoma parasite.<sup>56</sup> Whatever the specific identification of *jꜣd.t rnp.t*, its frequency in textual sources underscores the Egyptian knowledge of the seasonality of disease and associates at least one prominent disease with the Nile.

Whether or not the Ancient Egyptians identified and named specific diseases, they certainly had treatments for the various symptoms. The primary symptom that all these ailments share is fever. Egyptian texts identify a particular entity, *nsy* as the cause of fever.<sup>57</sup> This entity was one of the ‘demons,’ identified as undead male and female spirits, commonly blamed for diseases. Thus, it could be treated by the typical process of expulsion. Egyptians applied salves and drank solutions to force a disease demon to leave the patient. In one remedy, the patient was made to drink warm oil and honey (pEbers 3.7), while in another, the magician is warned that the fever is untreatable (pEbers 9.1). In addition to treating the symptoms, many of the remedies prescribed for worms include vermifuge ingredients like absinth, pomegranate, and antimony, so the Egyptians also had methods for expelling the disease-causing parasites.<sup>58</sup>

In consideration of the later practical and ideological correlation between mice and plague, it is worth exploring whether there is any evidence for plague in Ancient Egypt. There are no mummies that demonstrate the symptoms of bubonic or pneumonic plague. Thus, the conclusion propounded by Nunn and Tapp is that plague did not reach Egypt until the 4<sup>th</sup> c. CE, although they leave open the possibility that individuals who died of plague were denied normal burial, so the record has been lost.<sup>59</sup> This is an important consideration to maintain because German scholars have identified plague in

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<sup>56</sup> Cockburn 1974, 470.

<sup>57</sup> Szpakowska 2009, 801.

<sup>58</sup> Nunn & Tapp 2000, 151.

<sup>59</sup> Nunn & Tapp 2000, 151.



the medical texts and argue for its association with the goddess Sekhmet.<sup>60</sup> Still, a firm conclusion regarding plague in Ancient Egypt relies on more paleopathological evidence.

The archaeological and textual evidence assembled here indicates that the Ancient Egyptians had a close relationship with mice that fostered their understanding of rodents as well as the communication of water-bourne illnesses. Egyptian medical papyri provide ample attestations of worms and fever to indicate their knowledge of parasitic disease. Now it remains to demonstrate that the practical connection between mice, the Nile, disease, and fertility was also expressed ideologically in representations.

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<sup>60</sup> Westendorf connects the goddess to epidemic plagues (2000, 57ff). Leitz also posits the possibility that *jꜣd.t rnp.t* is a plague caused by Sekhmet (1994, 206-208). Finally, Engelmann & Holoff go the farthest, arguing that a primary function of the priests of Sekhmet was the magical and ritual protection against plague (1996).

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEMATIC CONNECTIONS TO THE NILE

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first set of examples makes explicit reference to the Nile and/or fertility. There are four texts in this section. However, due to the difficulty of assigning symbolic significance to any visual object without contextual clues, all two- and three-dimensional representations are included in the context-based section. This section consists of examples that can be connected to other objects with demonstrable connections to the Nile and fertility. Not all of these examples make explicit reference to disease. As the following chapter will indicate, the disease association is frequently established via a network of interconnecting themes.

#### EXPLICIT NILE AND FERTILITY REFERENCES

##### 3.1 THE FATE OF THE HOT-BLOODED MAN:

You are praised!  
The lotus blossoms bloom  
The water-fowl is caught by the wing  
One sends the workforce into the field  
One brands his offspring  
Your hot-bloodedness is under Amun's  
lordship.  
He is the abhorrence of men.  
The sun does not rise regarding him.  
The inundation does not flow for him.  
He is like a mouse in the high Nile flood.  
It finds no place on which it can rest.  
The (harrier) hawk watches to seize it.  
The crocodile is eager to swallow it up.  
You should take note of this plea.  
(pChester Beatty V)<sup>61</sup>

You are praised,  
when the lotus blossom blooms,  
that the wrd-bird is caught (by the wing),  
that man releases the workforce into the  
field,  
that man brands his offspring,  
and that your heat/hot-temper is in the  
(warlike) power of Amun.  
The hot-blooded man is the abomination  
of men.  
The sun god will no longer pass over  
him,  
hereafter the Inundation overflows for  
him,  
and he was (like) a mouse in a great  
flood:  
He found (could find) no place upon  
which he might rest.  
He is (like) a bird, which is caught (by  
the wing) by the hand of men.  
He finds no chance to flee.  
(pAnastasi V)

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<sup>61</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations of primary texts are my own, made from earlier German editions. The German translations can be found in the Appendix.

Entitled *A Warning against Prattling* (pChester Beatty V) or *The Fate of the Hot-blooded Man* (pAnastasi), this didactic poem exists in two extant copies that both date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty, specifically during the reigns of Merneptah and Seti II.<sup>62</sup> The longer version of the text provides much clarification on the relationships expressed in the poem. It begins by praising the sun god for his life-giving power in every season and for his power over a foul temper. The poem then continues with a warning of what happens to the prattler/hot-blooded man when he is not in submission to the sun god. Then, he becomes a snared bird or a mouse caught in the annual flood. While the purpose of the poem is to warn against the dangers of a short temper, its metaphorical use of the mouse can still inform our understanding of the Ancient Egyptian views regarding mice and the Nile.

The poem demonstrates the supremacy of the Nile during the inundation season. The river is listed alongside the sun as two features directly controlled by the solar/creator god Amun. The mouse, by comparison, is weak, beset by dangers on every side. It is especially significant that the Chester Beatty text expands on the threats to the mouse because these threats emphasize Nilotic elements. The crocodile is a typical predator of the Nile and was a regular danger to humans. This reptile is also traditionally representative of the inundation in the cultic practices at Koptos and Ombos.<sup>63</sup> Even the harrier hawk recalls the annual passage of the flood. Three species of harrier hawk, the pallid, western marsh, and montagu's harrier, migrated to Africa for the winter season,

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<sup>62</sup> Gardiner 1935, 46.

<sup>63</sup> Prell 2009, 230.

when the flood came.<sup>64</sup> Scenes from the sun temple of Niuserre from the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty indicate that the Ancient Egyptians were not only aware of migratory bird patterns but regarded such patterns with significance.<sup>65</sup> Thus, the hawk appeared and disappeared in a cycle keyed to the Nile inundation. By employing these specific creatures, this poem emphasizes not only the power and significance of the Nile River, but of the inundation in particular. The conclusion then reached is that the mouse is subject to the vicissitudes of the river, which in turn is subject to the power of the sun god.

There is no reference to disease in this text, however the poem clearly demonstrates the dangers and power of the Nile. The inundation and the creatures associated with it have power over the fate of the mouse. The threatened end of the Nile's flow in pChester Beatty ln. 4 is represented as a curse, while the overabundance of water threatened in pAnastasi is likewise an undesirable event. The poem does, however, end on a hopeful note. If the addressee takes this warning seriously, then they will be spared the punishment of Amun. By invoking the creative solar god, the poem also hints at the source for the power of the Nile that, in further examples, will provide a counterpoint to the negative association depicted here. These solar references will be further explored in section 4.1.

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<sup>64</sup> Limiñana 2011.

<sup>65</sup> Houlihan 1996, 137.

### 3.2 A SPELL FOR MOTHER AND CHILD (pBERLIN 3027 SPRUCH L):

To Expel *ssmj*

O you who are in the water, hurry and say to this... who is in their chapel, to Sekhmet, who came behind him to the shining... of Uto, the Lady of Buto “bring to her this milk”...

To speak... One permits the child or its mother to eat a cooked mouse; its bones are hung about the neck in a bundle of fine linen and one makes seven knots.

The Removal of the *ssmj* Sickness  
Oh you in the water, go and say to that *Qnb.tj*, who is in their chapel, to Sekhmet, when she went behind the Residence on account of this matter, and when Uto, lady of Buto, is visible, that for her the milk of this great, growing mouse was required, which was in its hole, when the *snw.t* and *dnj.t* were celebrated for you in Heliopolis: the gift (?) of your eyes through the Great One to the other beautiful ones, by which Seth sees it

One should recite this spell, when one permits either this child or its mother to eat the cooked mouse. Its bones should be hung around their neck in a bundle of fine linen, in which seven knots have been tied.

The foregoing magical prescription is Spell L from the papyrus *Zaubersprüche für Mutter und Kind* (pBerlin 3027). This collection of spells is roughly contemporary with the famous Ebers medical papyrus and dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty.<sup>66</sup> The spell in question is labeled as a treatment for the ailment *ssmj*, which is otherwise unattested in medical papyri, so scholars have been unable to identify it.<sup>67</sup> Naoko Yamazaki has recently released a new edition of the spell that greatly expands the portion legible in the original publication by Adolf Erman.<sup>68</sup> Certain features of the new edition are especially insightful for this discussion. First, Yamazaki notes that the yet untranslatable *qnb.tj* is used elsewhere in Egyptian texts (the Amduat) to refer to a deity who comes in a pair

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<sup>66</sup> Richter 1909, 155; Yamazaki 2003.

<sup>67</sup> Yamazaki 2003, 30.

<sup>68</sup> Erman 1901.

with Sekhmet.<sup>69</sup> She also recognizes a Late Period syncretism between the goddesses Uto and Sekhmet. While the Late Period is chronologically beyond the scope of this paper, this connection nonetheless references the protective aspect of Sekhmet that will be expanded upon in section 4.2. Finally, the expanded form of the spell gives greater description of the mouse, specifying that it is ‘in its hole,’ which presents a striking contrast to the mouse in the didactic poem that is unable to find a resting place.

Like most Ancient Egyptian spells, the verbal invocation is accompanied by specific actions.<sup>70</sup> The spell is to be recited while the magician feeds either the mother or the child a cooked mouse. After this, the bones of the mouse are to be placed in a bundle of fine linen and tied around the child’s neck with a cord in which have been tied seven knots. The linen bundle then becomes a powerful amulet designed to protect the child from evil influences. Amulets formed of bespelled objects hung around a child’s neck were commonly prescribed in the *Zaubersprüche*.<sup>71</sup>

The connection between this spell and the Nile is found in the type of illness it is meant to treat. Medico-magical spells of this type are frequently addressed to the disease in question.<sup>72</sup> Thus, *ssmj* is a disease ‘in the water.’ While this spell has been traditionally understood as a method of combating a childhood complaint like teething, Yamazaki proposes that the ambiguity in the application of the spell means that it could instead be intended to treat a communicable disease.<sup>73</sup> The phrasing of the spell in both the early translation and the new edition does not specify whether the mother or the child should

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<sup>69</sup> Yamazaki 2003, 30.

<sup>70</sup> Dawson 1936, 238.

<sup>71</sup> For example, see Spruch A in Erman 1901.

<sup>72</sup> Azzam 2010, 186.

<sup>73</sup> For the arguments in favor of a childhood illness, see: Erman 1901, Bardis 1966, Marshall 2015. Yamazaki presents her explanation in her new edition (2003, 31).

be the individual who consumes the mouse. If either party could eat the mouse, then the implication is that both of them were vulnerable to the disease. Furthermore, the spell gives no indication that *ssmj* is a childhood illness and the later illnesses associated with eating a mouse are not child exclusive (incontinence, salivation, whooping cough) and they vary so widely that this suggests a divergence from the original ailment. The danger to the child, then, was not from the disease specifically, but from the possibility of contracting the disease from its mother. This was a very pressing concern in Ancient Egypt, as up to 1/3 of babies might die from water-borne illnesses.<sup>74</sup>

The implication of a contagious disease ‘in the water’ recalls the many diseases carried by the Nile. *Ssmj* could then refer to malaria, a parasitic disease, or an associated symptom. Thus, as in *The Fate of the Hot-blooded Man*, the Nile is represented as a danger to humanity. Yet, while *The Fate* emphasized the mouse’s weakness compared to the Nile, this spell employs a mouse as part of a ritual to overcome Nile-related disease. The mouse bones are a primary feature of the protective amulet. Mouse milk is also an essential part of the spell, as it is given to Sekhmet as a sacrifice.<sup>75</sup> This spell is thus the first instance when the mouse is clearly a curative element, demonstrating that the mouse could have both a positive and a negative relationship to disease, as Pliny’s description first suggested.

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<sup>74</sup> Chamberlain 2004, 284.

<sup>75</sup> Section 4.2 will explore the significance of the mouse in relation to the goddess Sekhmet and the implications of this connection as regards the mouse’s symbolic significance.

### 3.3 HYMN TO AMUN-RE (PBOULAQ17 & PCAIRO CG58038):

You are the One who made all that is,  
the Only One, the creator of what is.  
Mankind comes from your eyes and the  
gods proceed from your mouth. The one  
who made the plants that keep the cattle  
alive, and the tree of life which bears  
fruit for mankind, and what the fish live  
on and the birds who live in the air. The  
one who gives breath to the creature in  
the egg; the one who sustains the young  
of the snake, the creator of food for the  
mosquitos, worms, and fleas likewise;  
who cares for the mice in their holes and  
who sustains the beetles (?) in every tree.

Sole Perfection who made all that is,  
unique Activity who brought forth all  
existence, from whose eyes mankind  
came forth, at whose command the gods  
began; who creates the pastures for the  
animals and food-plants for mankind,  
who provides for fishes in the river and  
for birds who mount the sky; who offers  
breath to all who are unborn, brings life  
to the offspring of the worm, provides  
for gnats, insects and fleas as well,  
supplies the fieldmice in their burrows  
and cares for all the bird-shapes in the  
trees. (Foster 1995 60-62)

One of many hymns praising the sun god, this Hymn to Amun-Re from pBulaq 17 dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty, although the earliest edition of the text dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> dynasty and it was frequently copied throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> dynasties.<sup>76</sup> There is quite a lot of variation in the last line between the German translation of Jan Assmann and the English translation by John Foster.<sup>77</sup> Maria Luiselli gives an orthographic explanation for this divergence when she specifies that *qy.w* was misread as *pwj.w* in earlier editions, so the correct rendering is ‘birds,’ although the lack of attestations for both words makes translation difficult.<sup>78</sup> The organization of animals in these verses reveals two thematic groupings. The first demonstrates the breadth of the god’s power by attributing to him the maintenance of all land-, water-, and sky-dwelling creatures. The second group includes nuisance animals (*ḥpnn.t*, gnats, insects, fleas, mice, and birds) that are similarly grouped in other Egyptian texts, such as *The Traits of the Farmer*

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<sup>76</sup> Luiselli 2004, xxii.

<sup>77</sup> Foster 1995, 62.

<sup>78</sup> Luiselli 2004, 30.



(section 3.4), and which are further associated with one another as disease vectors (see section. 4.4). It is also important that this hymn describes the mouse as burrow dwelling, a notable thematic continuity with both of the preceding examples. Furthermore, it indicates that the mouse was originally created to remain in its burrow, rather than frequently emerging.

While the hymn emphasizes Amun's superiority over the gods, men, and animals, it also describes the Nile's relationship to the sun god. In line 74, the hymn declares that the inundation (*hꜥpj*) comes for love of him.<sup>79</sup> This line again harkens back to the *Fate of the Hot-blooded Man*, where the power to withhold the flood is attributed to Amun. Indeed, Luiselli's translation makes this subordination even more explicit: 'Hapi ist gekommen gemäss seines Wunsches.'<sup>80</sup> Thus, the Nile flood is under the complete control of the sun god.

Here the mouse is neither positive nor negative. It, along with all the rest of creation, receives the benevolent care of the sun god. Yet, these verses do help explain the correct or desirable state of affairs in Egypt. Just as the river flows reliably year after year, the mouse remains securely in its burrow.

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<sup>79</sup> Assmann 1999, 198 and Foster 1995, 61.

<sup>80</sup> Luiselli 2004, 12.

### 3.4 THE TRAITS OF THE FARMER:

It has been said to me that you  
surrendered the text,  
that you indulged yourself with pleasure,  
that your attention has turned to the  
work of the field and  
that you have turned your head from the  
word of the god.  
Can you not consider the efficiency of  
the farmer when the harvest is counted?  
The worm has stolen half the grain and  
the hippo eats the other half.  
The mice in the field are countless.  
The locust has descended.  
The livestock eats.  
The sparrows take a share.  
Woe betide the farmer!  
(pSallier I)

Someone has said to me that you  
abandoned writing  
and that you have roamed about in  
pleasure;  
that you turned your attention to the  
work of the field  
and turned your back on the words of the  
gods.  
Can you not bear in mind the status of  
the farmer in the registration of the  
harvest tax, after the worm takes away  
half of the barley,  
and the hippo has eaten the rest?  
The mice are countless in the field;  
the locust has indeed fallen.  
The herd eats,  
the sparrows steal;  
famine threatens the farmer.  
The rest that remains on the threshing  
floor  
the thief has removed  
so that the fees for hiring the livestock  
are lost  
and the oxen team is dead.  
(pAnastasi V)

Like the didactic poem described above, this poem can be found in two copies, one from pSallier I, *The Traits of the Farmer* and the other from pAnastasi V, *The Different Taxes of the Farmer and Scribe*, both of which date to the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty reign of Seti II.<sup>81</sup> The latter papyrus includes the *Satire of the Trades*, of which this appeal forms a part. In the *Satire*, an elder scribe teaches his student(s) all the advantages of being a learned scribe, concluding that it is far better to be a scribe than to have any other profession. The fact that the *Fate of the Hot-blooded Man* also appears on pAnastasi V indicates that both were didactic texts used to educate aspiring scribes.

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<sup>81</sup> Gardiner 1941, 19-20. See also Jäger, 2004 [non vidi].

The *Traits of the Farmer* does not include any Nile references, however the fertility of mice plays a key role. Unlike the other animals in the text, which explicitly eat the produce of the field, the primary problem caused by mice is their sheer numbers. This peculiarity is also highlighted by the grammatical structure of the poem. Every animal, with the exception of the sparrows and mice, is described in the singular. Thus, the primary characteristic of mice is multiplicity and, by implication, their very great fertility. What is more, the fertility of the mouse is regarded in a negative light because it contributes to the famine that threatens farmers. Again, this attestation puts the mouse in a negative light, thereby reinforcing the full range of negative, positive, and neutral manifestations of the mouse.

Comparing this mouse reference to the preceding examples reinforces the correlation between the way the mouse is regarded and its physical environment. That is to say, when the mouse is described as ‘in its hole,’ then it has either positive or neutral connotations, as in the *Spell for Mother and Child* and *Hymn to Amun-Re*. On the other hand, when the mouse is outside its natural habitat, then it is either endangered or causing harm. Thus, based on the evidence so far presented, the connotation of the mouse is not dependent on its relationship to the Nile. Additional examples that connect the mouse to fertility and the Nile will help to determine what other factors influence the role of the mouse in disease.

## CONTEXTUALLY BASED NILE AND FERTILITY REFERENCES

### 3.5 CAUSEWAY OF UNAS:

The causeway of Unas<sup>82</sup> was part of the king's mortuary complex and connected his mortuary temple at the river's edge to his pyramid on the margins of the desert at Saqqara. The causeway of Unas is much older than the other examples in this chapter and dates to the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty. Unas was the last king of that dynasty. One of the decorative panels along the walls of the causeway includes what has been termed a 'visual hymn.'<sup>83</sup> The upper register of this panel depicts two mice giving birth. The lower panel includes two pairs of copulating mice.

It would be easy to assume that this scene is one of the common depictions of daily life found in funerary contexts. However, the nature of the composition is much more closely related to the imagery in the contemporary 'chamber of the seasons' of the solar temple of Niuserre. This temple was constructed near Saqqara at Abu Ghurab by the 6<sup>th</sup> king of the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty. Numerous scenes there reflect the theme of copulation but two are of special interest: two weasels giving birth and three pairs of mating goats with their four kids.<sup>84</sup> The subject matter is, of course, not unique but these images stand out because of the number of animals involved and their descriptive 'tags,' as well as the contemporary nature of the funerary and temple imagery.

The multitude of animals in the causeway and temple scenes suggests an emphasis on fertility and reproduction. Other funerary scenes show mating animals, such as the contemporary tomb of Ptahhotep or the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty tomb of Nebamun as part of

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<sup>82</sup> Visual attestations of mice are included in the Appendix.

<sup>83</sup> Houlihan 1996, 25.

<sup>84</sup> Houlihan 1996 25, 42.

idealized ‘daily life’ imagery designed to provide the deceased with a satisfactory afterlife.<sup>85</sup> However, in these scenes, there is only one pair of mating animals and they are part of a larger tableau of natural animal functions. The focus is not on the copulating animals. However, emphasis is placed on the fertility features of the causeway and temple imagery by labels that not only name the animal depicted, but also clearly define the actions being performed. The figures in the upper panel of the mouse scene are explicitly identified as *pn.w* by the foregoing inscription, which says that ‘a mouse is born.’ The same explanatory inscription appears with the weasel scene, where the word ‘is born’ is placed between mirrored writings of the word ‘weasel.’ On the second register of the mouse scene, the males are described as being on top of the females.<sup>86</sup> This is reflected in the temple goat scene where the males are said ‘to leap onto’ the females. The various similarities between these scenes and their contemporary dating suggest that they were crafted for similar purposes and that the same interpretive framework can be applied to both.

The interpretive similarities between these scenes are important because it allows the specifically Nilotic context of the temple scenes to be transferred to the funerary scenes. As mentioned previously, the scenes from Niuserre’s temple are part of the ‘Chamber of Seasons.’ James Atwell demonstrates that the scenes in this portion of the Chamber of the Seasons are meant to depict the activities associated with the inundation and season of ‘deprivation’.<sup>87</sup> Here, then, is a direct connection between the inundation and the topic of fertility, which is made a key feature of that season. The positive

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<sup>85</sup> These scenes included in Osborn 1998, 70 and Houlihan 1996, 26. For a discussion of the role of daily life scenes in the funerary cult, see Davis 2014.

<sup>86</sup> Osborn 1998, 48.

<sup>87</sup> Atwell 2000, 458.

association with the Nile presented here contrasts with the negative view prevalent in the textual sources but it again asserts that neither view represents the whole picture. Thus, the Nile (and consequently the fertile mouse) has both positive and negative aspects.

### 3.6 CALENDAR OF LUCKY AND UNLUCKY DAYS:

C/S/BM: 1<sup>st</sup> Month of *pr.t* (sowing season), Day 11

C: Dangerous! Dangerous! Dangerous!

S/BM: Dubious! Dubious! Dubious!

C/S: You should not go near any fire on this day.

S: He has given it to Re, in order to defeat every enemy.

C/S: Anyone who goes near it on this day, this one will no longer be healthy in their entire life.

C/S/BM: 1<sup>st</sup> Month of *pr.t*, Day 12

C: Dangerous! Dangerous! Dangerous!

S: Dubious! Dubious! Dubious!

BM: Good! Dubious! Dubious!

C: If you see a greyhound on this day,

S: you should not see a rat on this day.

C/S: You should not come near them in your house. That day, on which one repelled all the affairs of Sekhmet on this day.

C/S/BM: 1<sup>st</sup> Month of *prt*, Day 13

C/S: Good! Good! Good!

BM: Dubious! Dubious! Dubious!

C/S: Prolonging of life. Reestablishment of Maat in the house (C)/on the horizon (S).

In contrast to the civil calendar, and religious lunar calendar, Ancient Egyptians employed a *Calendar of Lucky and Unlucky Days* to predict the relative fortune of each day of the 360-day year. There are three extant papyri that have allowed scholars to reconstruct the yearly predictions: pCairo 86637 (20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty), pBM 10474 (21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty), and pSallier IV (19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty).<sup>88</sup> Each day in the calendar is described as good, bad or mixed and the possible fortunes are expressed as thirds of a whole.<sup>89</sup> The day in question, 12<sup>th</sup> of *tybi*, is classified slightly differently in each calendar, but always in a

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<sup>88</sup> Spalinger 1994, 297; Dawson 1926, 20.

<sup>89</sup> Dawson 1926, 21.

negative sense. Christian Leitz views this day as part of a narrative unit that also comprises the preceding and following days. On the 11<sup>th</sup> day of *tybj*, the sun god Re uses fire to combat his “enemies”. The Egyptian term used here, *hfty*, is also the word to refer to disease demons, specifically to the unjust dead who possess the bodies of the living and cause dangerous symptoms by their presence.<sup>90</sup> The same word is used in Spruche O, P, and V in the *Zaubersprüche für Mutter und Kind*.<sup>91</sup> Re’s supernatural combat presumably continues on the 12<sup>th</sup> day and then concludes on the 13<sup>th</sup> when the supplicant is promised *ma’at* and the return of health.<sup>92</sup>

Additional Egyptian sources establish a connection between 12 *tybj* and the Nile that in turn undergirds the relationship between mice, disease, and the Nile in this fortune. The association of this fortune with the season of *pr.t* establishes a mutual relationship between the Nile and disease. Although the calendrical seasons drifted from the natural progression of seasons, *pr.t* was nominally the season for sowing, when the Nile inundation retreated to reveal a new layer of alluvial soil. This would have been the period in which Egyptians, according to Pliny, observed the spontaneous emergence of mice from the ground. It was also the height of disease season, when mosquitoes were rampant and stagnant water fostered bacterial and parasitical growth. It is then no surprise that the gods would have been engaged in a battle with disease during *pr.t* and that the human residents of Egypt would be affected by this combat. What is most significant, however, is the discovery of a graffito from the 26<sup>th</sup> dynasty that was scrawled on the wall of the Luxor temple. This inscription describes a festival honoring the god Amun-Re

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<sup>90</sup> Kousoulis 2007, 1044.

<sup>91</sup> Erman 1901.

<sup>92</sup> Leitz 1994, 208.

as the bringer of the Nile inundation that was celebrated on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of *tybj*.<sup>93</sup> The exact nature of this festival remains obscure, however, it clearly establishes a link between this day with its provisions against the spread of disease and the inundation, with the celebration of Amun-Re connecting the two themes.

### 3.7 MOUSE FIGURINES:

There are four small faience figurines in the Fitzwilliam Museum and Metropolitan Museum that were once part of a set found in a Middle Kingdom (Dynasty 11 or 12) tomb at el-Matariya.<sup>94</sup> The figurines depict crouching *pn.w*, usually zoologically identified as jerboas, which hold their paws to their mouths.<sup>95</sup> They are of white-glazed faience with brown details to distinguish their ears, toes, and large eyes. Although it is recognized that their mortuary context suggests a role in a funerary ritual, scholars remain puzzled as to the exact purpose of these small animals. Yet, context and association with other faience figurines can help descry their meaning.

The jerboa figurines do not exhibit inherent nilotic qualities, but many of the faience animals and magical objects with which they are associated do. Faience figurines of this type are not especially common in funerary contexts, and are found exclusively during the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Periods.<sup>96</sup> The jerboa from el-Matariya were found in a cache with at least one frog figurine (Fitzwilliam E.278.1939)

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<sup>93</sup> Prell 2009, 241.

<sup>94</sup> Houlihan 1996, ix.

<sup>95</sup> Most publications of the figurines describe them as jerboa, the Egyptian species of kangaroo mice. Their petite ears raise grave concerns about this identification. Osborn (1998, 51) see them as gerbils or jird. This is a perfect example of the flexibility of the Egyptian term *pn.w* and Egyptian ability to assimilate multiple species into a single representative creature.

<sup>96</sup> Miniaci 2014, 133.



and a ‘magic wand.’<sup>97</sup> Contemporary figurines also include frequent hippotami, hedgehogs and a rabbit figurine from el-Lahun that dates to the 12<sup>th</sup> dynasty.<sup>98</sup> Of these animals, the frog and the hippopotami have the clearest relationship to the Nile. The frog was sacred to the Nile cult and the inundation god Hapi was sometimes depicted with a frog head. Its association with the cult was occasioned by the Egyptian belief that the frog was born spontaneously from the alluvial soil, just as Pliny later asserts for the mouse.<sup>99</sup> Additionally, the male counterparts of the Ogdoad of Hermopolis were depicted as frog-headed deities, whom Richard Wilkinson asserts were so depicted because of their association with water and the primeval flood.<sup>100</sup> Many of the hippopotami figurines, unlike the other animals, were painted with images of Nile plants like papyrus, which visually emphasized the association with their riverine habitat.<sup>101</sup> The hedgehog also has connections to alluvial soil. The *Hemiechinus auritus* variety of hedgehog, unlike the common desert hedgehog, lived and still lives in the alluvial soils of the Nile Delta, where it constructs burrows.<sup>102</sup>

Additionally, all of these animals had fertility associations in Ancient Egyptian cosmology. Since the frog was autogenerative, it was naturally tied to ideas of multiplicity. Likewise, the hippopotamus represented the ‘constantly multiplying life’ of the marshes.<sup>103</sup> Both of these animals were also connected to childbirth. The goddess of

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<sup>97</sup> Houlihan 1996, ix; Arnold 1995, 21.

<sup>98</sup> Hippopotamus: Osborn 1998, 146; Germond 2001, 172. Hedgehog: Houlihan 1996, 68; Osborn 1998, 22; Fitzwilliam E.345.1954. Hare: Houlihan 1996, 70. Frog: Houlihan 1996, ix.

<sup>99</sup> Prell 2009, 229.

<sup>100</sup> Wilkinson 2003, 78.

<sup>101</sup> Germond 2001, 172.

<sup>102</sup> Arnold 1995, 20.

<sup>103</sup> Germond 2001, 172.

pregnancy, Taweret, was usually depicted as a female hippopotamus and the frog was associated with Heqet, the goddess of childbirth. Thus, frog imagery was employed for protection in the nursery.<sup>104</sup> These animals recall the *Zaubersprüche für Mutter und Kind* and even the didactic poetry for student scribes in their defense of children. Perhaps the medieval and early modern application of mice for children finds its roots in a branch of Egyptian folk belief.

The hedgehog expressed another kind of birth, namely the rebirth that came after death. Its propensity to disappear underground for long periods of time before reemerging during seasons of plenty recalled the sun's daily journey and the yearly arrival of the inundation.<sup>105</sup> This cyclical seasonality is also reminiscent of the harrier hawk described in *The Fate of the Hot-blooded Man*. The rabbit does not have explicit Nilotic connotations, however it too was prized for its fertility.<sup>106</sup> The grouping of these animals in Middle Kingdom tombs shows a particular interest in fertility imagery. It is reasonable to conclude that, since all the animals except the rabbit had Nilotic associations, this fertility came from the Nile. This conclusion can easily be extended to the jerboa figurines, considering the Nile and fertility associations demonstrated in other depictions of this animal.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The examples given in this chapter satisfy two of the criteria necessary to prove the efficacy of the proposed interpretive model. There are texts and objects that establish a relationship between the Nile and mice, as well as fertility and mice. Some, like the

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<sup>104</sup> Germond 2001, 174.

<sup>105</sup> Arnold 1995, 20; Houlihan 1996, 68.

<sup>106</sup> Houlihan 1996, 70.

mouse figurines and imagery in the causeway of Unas, demonstrate both relationships. This relationship can cast the Nile and fertility in positive and negative hues and the mouse can have either a positive or negative role, depending on its associations and application in each attestation. These examples emphasize the Nile's power in regard to the mouse. Their hierarchical relationship supports Pliny's assertion that the mouse's spontaneous generation was the result of the Nile. Specific texts and images focus on the negative features of the inundation; it is repeatedly described as having power to cause death through disaster and disease. Here is a clear predecessor to the medieval and early modern beliefs that the mouse, as a subject of the Nile, is able to spread disease. However, other examples present the positive, life-giving, power of the Nile. Likewise, the great fertility of the mouse can either be harmful, as in the *Traits of the Farmer*, or beneficial, as with the Causeway. These examples further stress that fertility is a product of the Nile inundation, again subordinating the mouse to the power of the Nile.

However, at this stage, the hierarchical relationship between the Nile, the mouse and its fertility, and disease is still spotty. It frequently hinges on interpretation of contextual information and requires thematic leaps between objects to arrive at the associative tie Pliny asserted. Fortunately, these pieces are part of a larger ideological corpus. The cultural and religious significance of the Nile and fertility did not exist in vacuum. Rather, as these pieces demonstrate, they were connected to other ideological concepts that in turn enhanced the connection between these subjects. Thus, the mouse attestations discussed in this chapter made reference not only to the Nile and fertility but also to a symbolic network. This network and its implications for the interpretation of mice will be addressed in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A THEMATIC NETWORK

The mouse attestations addressed in the preceding chapter also express themes and symbolic connections to solar deities, the goddess Sekhmet, *ma'at*, and disease vectors. The thematic network created by these additional associations helps to qualify and explain the primary relationships established in the previous chapter.

#### 4.1 SOLAR DEITIES:

Almost every one of the examples discussed in the previous section make an explicit reference to the sun god, Amun-Re or Re. The other examples nonetheless establish implicit associations. The explanation for this correlation may lie in Egyptian mythology related to the annual inundation. Silvia Prell demonstrates that one of the Ancient Egyptian explanations for the inundation was the movement of the sun.<sup>107</sup> Thus, the sun god was directly responsible for the arrival and departure of the annual flood. The following section will explore how each of the examples provided establishes this association with the sun and its significance for the interpretation of mice.

The Hymn to Amun-Re is a text that explicitly praises the nature, and power of the sun god. A number of lines in the poem serve to describe how Amun-Re is the source of solar elements. In ln. 55, he is described as the 'creator of light.' Likewise, light is the brilliance of the god in ln. 79. Finally, the poem (ll. 168-9) describes the sun god's daily journey across the sky and through the underworld: 'who rises in the eastern land of light and goes to rest in the western land of light.' These solar elements are the products of Amun-Re, just like the Nile in ln. 74. Thus, the sun and the Nile are firmly connected

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<sup>107</sup> Prell 2009, 218.

when the poem goes on to describe how the sun god created the mouse and gave it a place to hide.

By contrast, the warning against a mouse in the *Calendar of Lucky and Unlucky Days*, displays the negative potential of mice in their relationship with the sun god. On the 11<sup>th</sup> day of tybj, Re burns his enemies with fire. This is a characteristic also assigned to the sun god in ln. 58 of the Hymn to Amun-Re. Clearly, the solar deity is the active power in this instance. It is his efforts that occasion the end of disease and the return of *ma'at*. In warning against the mouse, the prediction sets this animal in opposition to the life-giving power of the sun god.

If the connection between sun temples and the causeway of Unas is accepted, then this example gives another instance in which the sun is responsible for the Nile. In this case, the imagery gives the Nile credit for the great fertility of the animals depicted. However, its context demonstrates that the Nile in turn owes its life-giving properties to the power of the sun. This establishes an additional stage in the hierarchical relationship between the Nile and the mouse, further subordinating both ideas.

This theme of subordination to the sun god is further demonstrated by *A Warning Against Prattling*. In the first line, the gossiping man is warned that he is under the power of the god Amun. As this individual is later paralleled with the mouse, this same relationship is created between the god and the mouse. Indeed, the warning creates a valuable parallel to the Hymn to Amun. In this instance, the mouse/man who disobeys the sun god is dispossessed and is unable to find a place to rest. In contrast, the animal that praises the sun god's power in ln. 119 of the Hymn is provided with a hole in which to

hide. By this reasoning, it is possible for the mouse to either be in accord with or disobedient to the power and will of the sun god.

The mouse figurines found at el-Mataraya then demonstrate an example of mice that are submissive to the sun god. Most faience is colored with copper to give the finished product a blue-green tone that is frequently associated with rebirth.<sup>108</sup> This is true of the frog found with the mouse figurines and of the other animals described in section 3.7. Yet, the mouse figurines were glazed white, an alteration that implies a particular purpose. The glaze does not represent the native coloring of jerboa, which is typically sandy brown. However, white has very specific connotations in Egyptian cosmology. *Hd*, the color term applied to both white and silver, represented purity and its luminosity has solar associations.<sup>109</sup> While the coloring of the mice establishes a solar connection, their posture may be indicative of submission. As stated in section 3.7, the exact purpose of these figures is unknown. Nonetheless, it has been proposed that their pose reflects the human posture for praying. In this case, the jerboa mouse is understood as praying to the solar deity.<sup>110</sup>

The intentionality in all the features of the figurines, including posture and color, stresses the connections between the mice and the sun god. The desire to emphasize these elements recalls the Egyptian belief in the power of images and the consequent mutilation of potentially harmful images, such as the determinative in the name of Apophis.<sup>111</sup> Thus, these figurines reveal the possibility that mice could act outside of good order and

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<sup>108</sup> Robins 2002, 58-59.

<sup>109</sup> Morgan 2001, 4; Robins 2002, 58.

<sup>110</sup> Arnold 1995, 21.

<sup>111</sup> Apophis 2004, 202.

become destructive figures. It was therefore necessary, in order to benefit from their positive characteristics, to keep their dangerous aspects in line.

When considered together, the solar references in these instances serve to qualify the relationship between mice and the Nile. Both are subjected to the sun god, which is the source of life, light, and fertility. However, it is evident that both can act in destructive ways. The Nile's inundation brings disease and can cause destruction. Likewise, the mouse can oppose the efforts of the sun god to promote peace and order. In context of disease and fertility, the ready conclusion is that when the mouse acts in accord with the sun god, it benefits from the god's fertility. When it acts outside this order, then the mouse becomes associated with disease. The above examples do not indicate whether the mouse is the cause, victim, or result of disease. Yet, the references to Sekhmet in some attestations can answer this question.

#### 4.2 SEKHMET:

Among her various manifestations and aspects, Sekhmet was most clearly recognized by the Ancient Egyptians as a goddess of disease, chaos, and war.<sup>112</sup> She is the source of many diseases and commanded the force of demons known as *šm ʒy.w* (wandering demons) that spread disease.<sup>113</sup> She also exerted influence over the *h ʒyt.w* demons, who were specifically responsible for plague and pestilence.<sup>114</sup> It is also important for this discussion that Sekhmet was known as the daughter of Re, thus linking her to the sun god as well.

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<sup>112</sup> Westendorf 2000, 57-58.

<sup>113</sup> Szpakowska 2009, 802.

<sup>114</sup> Szpakowska 2009, 801.

The role of Sekhmet in the *Spell for Mother and Child* is especially significant because it encodes an additional Nilotic association and characterizes the mouse in its relationship to disease. In the performative portion of the spell, the magician instructs the mother or child to debone and eat the mouse. While doing so, they are to address the goddess Sekhmet, saying that “the milk of this great, growing mouse was required, which was in its hole.” According to the spell, then, the milk of the mouse is given to the goddess as a propitiation to convince her to remove sickness from the suppliant. However, a mouse is not a typical milking animal nor is it even possible to milk one.

There are a number of possible explanations for the use of blood prescribed here. Milk was a common ingredient in medical treatments and the medical texts assert that Isis heals Horus (identified with the patient) with her breast milk.<sup>115</sup> In a similar vein, the Libyan lion goddess who appears in the Tale of the Herdsman offers her followers a ‘sea of milk.’<sup>116</sup> This propitiation scene is very reminiscent of the *Tale of the Destruction of Mankind*, where Sekhmet is tricked into drinking a sea of blood-colored beer. This sates her bloodlust and pacifies her so that she assumes the benign manifestation of Bastet. One version of the text notes that the beer is “three hands deep.” Traditionally, this is the ‘ideal’ depth of the Nile inundation.<sup>117</sup> Thus, the beer represents both blood and also the Nile. There is a similar correspondence between menstrual blood, breast milk, and the Nile in medical texts.<sup>118</sup> The maternal connections in Spruch L are clear and by extending

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<sup>115</sup> Poole 2001, 75-181. pEbers includes two spells that involve milk: 36.4, 44.12 while the London Medical Papyrus gives a good example of Isis healing Horus (10.11).

<sup>116</sup> Schneider 2007, 317.

<sup>117</sup> Spalinger 2000, 271.

<sup>118</sup> In a spell against miscarriage, the mother’s passage of blood is anthropomorphically addressed as Hapi (Kousoulis 2007, 1046). Likewise the Isis’s milk is termed ‘the wholesome water within my breasts’ in a different spell (Leitz 1999, 72). In an altogether



this metaphor, the mouse milk also parallels the Nile flood. The Sekhmet myth indicates that the ravaging goddess can be ‘defeated’ by the Nile inundation and by the mouse, which is the product of the Nile.

In addition, the description of the mouse as ‘in its hole’ indicates that the mouse is opposed to the goddess. By parallel with the Hymn to Amun and *A Warning against Prattling*, the mouse in its hole is in submission to the sun god and is thus opposed to the forces of chaos and disease promulgated by Sekhmet. This association with the sun god is likely the source of the mouse’s efficacy in curing disease. That is, in Egyptian medical practice, disease was caused by the possession or infestation of a supernatural being usually termed a ‘demon.’<sup>119</sup> Evicting the demon then cured the disease. Frequently, this was achieved by having the patient consume a substance so noxious that the demon no longer desired to remain.<sup>120</sup> Substances that are noxious to demons were typically things found pleasant to humans, like honey. Thus, in this instance, the mouse was considered a positive force of life and that this positivity, courtesy of the sun god, was effective in evicting disease demons.

The 12<sup>th</sup> day of *tybj*, according to the *Calendar of Lucky and Unlucky Days*, culminates in the defeat of ‘all the affairs of Sekhmet.’ Clearly this passage establishes the victory of Re over his enemies and the sun god’s implicit superiority. Yet, the mouse, which is his servant in the *Spell for Mother and Child*, is considered a bad omen on this day. The negativity results from an encounter with a hunting hound that occurs earlier in the day. The royal hunting ritual frequently displayed on tomb walls was a symbolic

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different context, the metaphor is applied to Isis’ milk in PT413 from the Pyramid of Teti. Here it is specifically referred to as the ‘overflow.’

<sup>119</sup> Azzam 2010, 184.

<sup>120</sup> Dawson 1936, 243.

method to demonstrate the role of the king in establishing *ma'at*, one of his primary religious roles.<sup>121</sup> Hunting hounds were present in nearly every such scene from the Old Kingdom.<sup>122</sup> Michael Rice devotes a chapter of his book on the hunting hounds of Egypt to explore the dog's symbolic role in the hunt. As part of this ritual, the hound was unleashed against chaotic swarms of prey animals. When the hound downed its target, it became the embodiment of *ma'at* in the defeat of chaos.<sup>123</sup> The events of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of *tybj* are reminiscent of such a hunting ritual. The god-king Re is hunting his enemies and has brought his hound to help root them out. Thus, the mouse is cast as a creature of chaos in this narrative. It must be avoided if the supplicant is to experience the health promised on day 13. The negative role of the mouse in this example contradicts the positive role played by the mouse in other attestations but it supports the argument that the mouse could hold both helpful and harmful roles in Egyptian cosmology. Other examples also draw on the mouse's relationship with *ma'at*.

#### 4.3 MA'AT:

*Ma'at*, a complex idea in Egyptian cosmology, is usually translated as 'order' and is opposed to the concept of *isfet*, or 'chaos'. As the previous sections have indicated, Re was the maintainer of *ma'at*, while Lilotte Buchheim notes that as a goddess of war, Sekhmet is automatically associated with destruction and chaos, as well as disease and pestilence, thus making her an agent of *isfet*.<sup>124</sup>

Three of the attestations assume an explicit relationship between the sun god and *ma'at*. As explained above, Re's role in the *Calendar of Lucky and Unlucky Days* is to

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<sup>121</sup> Rice 2016, 79.

<sup>122</sup> Marshall 2012, 134.

<sup>123</sup> Rice 2016.

<sup>124</sup> Buchheim 1963, 202.

restore health by the removal of disease. The 13<sup>th</sup> day of *tybi* specifically describes this resulting health as a part of *ma'at*. The Hymn to Amun-Re stresses the superiority of the sun god in regard to *ma'at* by calling him the 'Lord of Ma'at' and 'the one for whom Ma'at lives day by day' (ll. 62, 157). Finally, by its parallel with imagery from the solar temple of Niuserre, the causeway of Unas also acknowledges the sun god's lordship over *ma'at*, for temple inscriptions repeatedly give Re the same title of 'Lord of Ma'at' later accorded to Amun-Re.<sup>125</sup>

In these examples, *ma'at* appears as another element that proceeds from the sun god. The mouse's positive role seems to be contingent upon its response to *ma'at* when the term is understood as 'right order.' This further nuances the mouse's relationship to the sun god and disease. Its correct position within *ma'at* is achieved by remaining in the position in which the sun god created it, namely 'in its hole.' By remaining thus, the mouse expresses subordination to the sun god. Of course, this implies that the mouse can be out of correct alignment. Its association with Sekhmet in the *Calendar of Lucky and Unlucky Days* is one such example. Other attestations, like the faience figurines, demonstrate the steps taken by Ancient Egyptians to create a positive relationship between the sun god and mouse, presumably to activate the fertility benefits that the mouse possesses, or to turn its fertility to good purpose. Thus, the mouse moves between positive and negative connotations based on its associations. The following section will explore the impact of an additional negative association.

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<sup>125</sup> Atwell 2000, 458.

#### 4.4 DISEASE VECTORS:

Mice were not the only animals associated with disease in Ancient Egypt. Medical texts supplied many methods by which to combat a host of noisome pests that were also real disease vectors. Worms were a frequent cause for disease in Egyptian medical papyri. They were said to frequently ‘occupy and destroy the human body.’<sup>126</sup> One clear example of this is the *hrrt* worm mentioned in section 2.2, which was caused by the mysterious  $\text{𓆎}$  ailment. Medical texts also advised against flies and provided remedies to get rid of them, such as sprinkling the house with natron-infused water. This remedy was said to be effective against fleas and mice, as well.<sup>127</sup> If practical remedies failed, then one could resort to magical spells like that given in the Ebers Papyrus.<sup>128</sup> The grounds for avoiding these animals are not hard to find. Mice and fleas carried any number of illnesses, specifically bilharzia and pestilence, as described in Chapter 2, while flies (mosquitoes) carried malaria. Two of the extant examples pair the mouse with other disease carrying creatures.

The mouse’s prominent association with pests in the Hymn to Amun-Re further establishes a negative reputation for the mouse because of the pestilential nature of the other animals. The 5<sup>th</sup> stanza of the hymn describes the sun god’s creative and protective power over each of the major categories of animal life: land, riverine, avian, reptile, and insect. Yet, it goes beyond the general categories to specifically state that the god provides nourishment to the gnat, worm, flea, mouse, and bird which are lumped together at the end of the passage. This separation implies a distinct category of animals, one that

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<sup>126</sup> da Silva Veiga, 2009; 46.

<sup>127</sup> Inskip 1969, 23.

<sup>128</sup> da Silva Veiga 2009, 48.

combines creatures of the land and air. It suggests that the Ancient Egyptians recognized the disease bearing aspect of these animals as a primary facet of their nature and that they were pests foremost, beyond their inclusion in other categories of animal life.<sup>129</sup>

In the first section of this chapter, I asserted that the mouse in its hole is the benign form of the creature, when it is in accord with the sun god. The association of the mouse in its hole with these disease vectors might seem to contradict this assertion. However, the inclusion of this category of animal was intended as a method of invoking the sun god to ensure that these creatures remained passive. In contrast, the *Traits of the Farmer* demonstrates what occurs when these creatures are allowed to go unchecked.

The farmer's warning associates the mouse with additional pest creatures that add another qualification to the disease-spreading character of the mouse. Whereas the hymn emphasizes primary disease vectors, the warning introduces additional pests that can be termed 'secondary vectors.' The warning focuses on how pests have consumed the harvest, naming, in addition to the aforementioned worm, the hippopotamus, locust, "pest", and sparrows. The situation in this text closely parallels the brief mention of mice made in dream interpretations. Christopher Leitz discusses one dream in which the dreamer sees a man bringing in mice from the field. Such a dream is interpreted as heralding a calamity.<sup>130</sup> Although the calamity is not specified, in context of texts like the *Traits of the Farmer*, the envisioned hardship is likely famine, a direct result of the presence of the disease vector animals in this text.

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<sup>129</sup> It is clear that Egyptians did establish such categories of animals, based on the system of determinatives used to denote words. Thus, *pn.w* was written with the determinative Gardiner F27, which paired it with hedgehogs, fleas, and shrews. Goldwasser 2002, 62.

<sup>130</sup> Leitz 2000, 228.

## CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the examples presented in this chapter, the mouse is predominantly associated with the sun god or the goddess Sekhmet. This dual association is reflective of the mouse's positive and negative roles in the spread of disease. When tied to the sun god, the mouse becomes an object of fertility and an agent of *ma'at*. It is from these features that the mouse's curative properties proceed. On the other hand, when the mouse is associated with Sekhmet and other disease vectors, then it operates outside the order established by the sun god and becomes an agent of chaos. The additional evidence presented in this chapter continues to support the depiction of mice made prevalent by Pliny's description. Likewise, the additional thematic connections discussed in this chapter reveal secondary Nilotic and disease references, further "meshing" the corpus of mouse attestations within one interpretive structure. The strength of this interpretive paradigm can then be tested against mouse representations that do not have Nile or fertility references but nonetheless possess associations with the other themes established in this chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ADDITIONAL THEMATIC EXAMPLES

The following attestations of mice share thematic associations with the sun god, Sekhmet, *ma'at*, and disease vectors. So, by extension the interpretations applied to examples with clear Nilotic and fertility references, these examples can also be used to further qualify the ideology that undergirds these objects while also reinforcing its pervasive longevity.

#### 5.1 A FORMULA TO REPEL A SERPENT:

O Rerek, go with the legs of Shu because you have eaten a mouse, the abomination of Re; and you have crunched the bones of a putrefied cat. (CT 369)<sup>131</sup>

O Rerek, do not pass! See, Geb and Shu are arrayed against you (because) you have eaten a mouse –abomination of Re- (and) you have devoured the bones of a putrefied cat! (BD33)<sup>132</sup>

Magic was an all-pervasive aspect of Ancient Egyptian culture. It found expression in medical practices, as demonstrated by the *Spell for Mother and Child*, as well as additional spells in the Ebers medical papyrus. Other categories of spells were primarily employed in a funerary context. The preceding spell is one such example, drawn from the Coffin Texts.

This spell is found in copies of the Coffin Texts<sup>133</sup> and was frequently included in Book of the Dead papyri. Its purpose is to protect the deceased from attack by the *rrk* snake. There are a number of different snakes that figure in the Coffin Texts, enemies

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<sup>131</sup> Grajetzki 2006, 211. See also Borghouts, 2007 [non vidi] for an in-depth discussion of this spell, including Late Period attestations.

<sup>132</sup> Carrier 2010, 59. “O Rerek, ne bouge pas! Vois, Geb (et) Chou sont dressés contre toi (car) tu as mangé une souris –abomination de Rê—et tu as dévoré les os d’une chatte putréfiée!”

<sup>133</sup> On three coffins from el-Bersha, one from Qaw el-Kebir, and the coffin of queen Mentuhotep. Grajetzki 2006, 213.

who would attempt to harm the deceased. The proscription against the snake described in CT 369 is successful because it employs the healthful aspects of the mouse. Namely, it references the mouse as a servant of *ma'at* and the sun god, while disassociating it from disease vectors.

The eating of a mouse in this passage is described as the 'abomination of Re,' which demonstrates that the mouse is here thought to be in alignment with the god. Arlette Davis argues that the spell indicates that the mouse is an enemy of the sun god by applying this appellation directly to the animal.<sup>134</sup> While the mouse is sometimes opposed to the sun god, that interpretation does not make sense in this context. As discussed in previous sections, the Ancient Egyptians employed apotropaic magic to disperse negative influences, as in the *Spell for Mother and Child*. If the mouse in this text were operating in its negative capacity, then it could not perform the apotropaic function here assigned to it. *Rrk* is also admonished for consuming the bones of a putrified cat; this additional charge identifies the snake as an enemy of *ma'at*.

The snake's potency in the afterlife is likely tied to their potency in daily life. Poisonous snakes were a constant threat to Ancient Egyptians, who devoted great effort to combating the effects of a bite with many magical spells.<sup>135</sup> In the afterlife, this combat takes on an additional, cosmic element. Snakes were frequently viewed as agents of chaos; the most famous supernatural snake, Apophis, was a direct threat to the sun god himself.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Davis 2014, 250.

<sup>135</sup> Leitz 1999 includes numerous spells intended to counteract snake and scorpion venom.

<sup>136</sup> Morenz 2004, 203.



## 5.2 FUNERARY VIGNETTES:

There are four very similar examples of a funerary motif that occur in the tombs of Khnumhotep, Sahure, Ukh-hotep, and Ptahhotep II.<sup>137</sup> Most of the tombs date from the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty, although that of Ukh-hotep is from the 12<sup>th</sup> dynasty, thus demonstrating the longevity of this imagery. In all four instances, the mouse is part of a larger hunting scene that depicts hounds attacking a variety of prey animals while the hunter stands ready with his weapon. The mouse is not the direct prey of any of the hounds; instead it is shown fleeing into its burrow to escape. Indeed, in each example, the mouse and its burrow were inserted in the margin between two panels of the hunting scene. This both highlights the mouse and separates it from the surrounding scene. While there is certainly a prosaic aspect to these scenes, they were also encoded with religious significance.

The mouse's attempt to escape the hunt acts out the mythological struggle between *ma'at* and *isfet*. As discussed in section 4.3, royal hunting scenes are symbolic of the king's role of maintaining *ma'at*. Certain animals represent the threatening powers of chaos while the hounds striking their prey represent the power of *ma'at* overcoming the forces of *isfet*.<sup>138</sup> The popularity of hunting scenes in elite tombs suggests that the imagery still holds great, if diluted, cosmological significance. In the selected images, the mouse is not a direct target of the hunt. However, its inclusion in the composition is not accidental, as each of the components in these scenes were intentionally selected.<sup>139</sup> presented as part of the chaotic scene that must be subdued. The fact that the mouse is fleeing into its burrow is immediately reminiscent of the *Hymn to Amun-Re* and the

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<sup>137</sup> Osborn 1998, 52, 61, 64.

<sup>138</sup> Rice 2016, 82.

<sup>139</sup> Marshall 2012, 125.

*Warning against Prattling*. Thus, by showing the mouse retreating into its hole, the scene can be read as compelling the mouse to transition from its dangerous to benign aspect.

This interpretation is further supported by the addition of a hedgehog burrow in the scene from the tomb of Ptahhotep. Here, the mouse burrow is positioned opposite a hedgehog burrow, also placed in the margin between scenes. The hedgehog is emerging from its burrow with a locust in its mouth.<sup>140</sup> Like the mouse, the hedgehog has connotations of rebirth and life (see section 3.7). It is no accident, then that the hedgehog is performing exactly the opposite action of the mouse and that it reinforces the rebirth motif by consuming one of the great causes of famine in Ancient Egypt. Not only does this imagery enforce the victory of *ma'at* over *isfet*, it does so by employing the language of disease and pestilence, and by employing the locust in its symbolic role as a disease vector. Unfortunately, the other scenes do not include such an explicit contrast, however they do include hedgehogs in the scene. In the other three examples, the hedgehog is present in the midst of the chaotic struggle, however it is never shown as the prey of hounds. While this may reflect the very real likelihood that a dog will learn not to bite a spiky creature, it nonetheless serves to demonstrate on the symbolic level that some creatures are servants of *isfet* and must be subdued while others are not and can, therefore, be allowed to remain unmolested.

### 5.3 COSMETIC SPOONS:

Four cosmetic spoons from the reign of Hatshepsut involve nearly the same imagery as the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty funerary vignettes, although they most likely appeal to the health benefits of the mouse, rather than the dangers. Two of the spoons were recently

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<sup>140</sup> Osborn 1998, 21.

included in an exhibition of 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty artifacts celebrating Hatshepsut at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City.<sup>141</sup> The first is shaped like a long, narrow dog lying with its forepaws crossed. The mouse-shaped spoon is ovoid and the obverse depicts a pudgy mouse with its tail wrapped around its back legs and its head resting on its forepaws. The reverse is hollowed out so that the body of the mouse forms the well of the spoon. Both spoons are carved ivory. There is a third, contemporary, spoon at the Toledo Museum; this spoon depicts a bound gazelle, and is made of wood; one spoon is made of glazed steatite and depicts a bound oryx.<sup>142</sup>

In the publication *Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh*, which accompanied the Metropolitan Museum's exhibition, Dorothea Arnold argued that the term "cosmetic" has been misapplied to many of the spoons found in Egyptian tombs. Following the investigations of Ingrid Wallert, she posits that the spoons in this exhibit were actually ritual ladles used to adorn images of the deities with sacred substances. They were included in tomb assemblages so the deceased might carry on those rituals in the afterlife.<sup>143</sup> However, Wallert specifically excludes both the mouse and the dog spoons from her study's catalogue.<sup>144</sup> The reasons for this exclusion are readily apparent. In her study, Wallert focuses on two key features of the ritual ladels: their handle design and mussel-shaped bowl.<sup>145</sup> None of the three spoons discussed here have a handle and the shape of the bowl differs between each one, as it conforms to the shape of the animal depicted. Based on these divergent characteristics, I also conclude that these spoons are

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<sup>141</sup> Roehrig 2005, 216.

<sup>142</sup> Germond 2001, 90. Houlihan 1996, 48.

<sup>143</sup> Roehrig 2005, 216.

<sup>144</sup> Wallert 1967, 132-33.

<sup>145</sup> Wallert 1967, 63.

not part of the ritual process that Wallert examines. Instead, they should be studied in light of the traditional interpretation, that is, as mixing bowls for cosmetics.

Cosmetics in Ancient Egypt fulfilled not only a decorative role, but also a medically beneficial one. It is unclear what materials might have been mixed in these particular bowls, as they were produced as funerary items and do not have any of the helpful residues often found on cosmetic palettes.<sup>146</sup> Nonetheless, they were most likely meant to represent receptacles for eye paints or scented unguents. Kohl, made of green malachite or grey galena and applied to the eyes, was understood to have healing and protective powers.<sup>147</sup> The color of the substance applied was frequently the source of its healthful benefits. Green malachite, for example, could treat eye ailments because green was symbolic of life and rebirth.<sup>148</sup> Thus, the incorporation of the mouse might have been a method to enhance the health benefits of the cosmetics prepared in this bowl. This interpretation parallels the use of the mouse in the Spell for Mother and Child, in which the mouse helped expel sickness and protect from new infection. This protective interpretation may also be applied to the dog, in light of its associations with *ma'at*. An alternative interpretation of the mouse shape might have been an attempt to draw on the potent fertility of this rodent. This application is reminiscent of the use of mouse imagery in the causeway of Unas (see section 3.5). The implication, then, is that the man or woman applying makeup prepared in this vessel would share the mouse's fertility. Either interpretation accords well with the previously established symbolic role of mice.

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<sup>146</sup> Lucas 1930, 43.

<sup>147</sup> Tyldesley 1994, 159.

<sup>148</sup> Tyldesley 1994, 173.

#### 5.4 SCARABOID RING:

Also part of the Metropolitan Museum's exhibit was a scaraboid ring inscribed with the throne name of Thutmose III. This gold finger ring was ornamented with a faience mouse amulet on whose base the king's name was written. There is no provenance available for this piece, however some interpretive proposals may be set forth, based on the themes present in other examples.<sup>149</sup>

Connecting the mouse scaraboid directly to the king by inscribing his name recalls the recurrent imagery of the hunt employed during the 18th dynasty, including the cosmetic spoons, with the royal duty to maintain ma'at. Therefore, including this motif in the king's jewelry may serve the amuletic function of guaranteeing his successful defeat of chaotic forces, as seen in the funerary vignettes. It may even inform the viewer that the king has already done so. Another frequent explanation given for non-scarab seals of this kind is that they serve as fertility amulets. This explanation was applied to the bezel scaraboid duck and feline head in the collection. It is also the explanation given for use of the bolti fish imagery used on a number of objects during the period. Such an interpretation may be supported by the addition of the phrase 'living forever' that accompanies the king's cartouche on the base of the mouse scaraboid. This is a blessing frequently applied to kings and the mouse shape may have been chosen to enhance the power of the blessing. According to this interpretation, the mouse is then serving an apotropaic function intended to ward off disease, as is seen in the Spell for Mother and Child as well as CT369.

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<sup>149</sup> Roehrig 2005, 264.

## CONCLUSIONS

The thematic network established in the preceding chapter is evidenced in material remains of great variety: textual sources include spells and didactic poetry, 2D remains include diverse funerary scenes, and 3D remains include statuary and cosmetic supplies. Examples that correspond to this ideology can be found as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty and are still produced into the Late Period. The additional examples given in this chapter demonstrate the applicability of the interpretive model. Yet, the lack of Nilotic references has serious implications for the viability of Pliny's claim as a reflection of Ancient Egyptian cosmology. Instead, the emphasis on *ma'at* in these additional representations highlights the previously attested relationship between the mouse and sun god. There is the possibility, then, that the sun god, not the Nile is the operative link between the mouse and disease.

Yet, this does not imply that every instance of a mouse representation was intended to appeal to this symbolic framework. There are a number of attestations that appear as an independent corpus with its own methodology and interpretation. They will be discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SATIRICAL POPYRI AND OSTRACA

In addition to numerous artifacts that shed light on the daily lives of skilled craftsmen in the New Kingdom, the village of Deir el Medina was the find spot for numerous ‘satirical’ ostraca and papyri that date from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> dynasty. The various sketches produced by these artists are united by their common subject matter: animals in human and naturalistic attitudes. The exact purpose and implication of these imaginary scenes has received much consideration.

The primary interpretation is that they are intended to represent some form of social critique. Jaromir Malek, Phillippe Germond and Patrick Houlihan see it particularly as political commentary, although Houlihan acknowledges that the playful form was probably chosen simply because it was amusing.<sup>150</sup> The other major interpretation of these pieces is championed by Emma Brunner-Traut, who sees them as evidence of an oral tradition that preserved a set of animal-themed tales that were never written down.<sup>151</sup> Thus, the images on these papyri and ostraca did not have the same purpose as others described here. These images were not intended to serve an official medical or religious purpose like the previously discussed representations.

For the purposes of this discussion, then, the significance of the ostraca comes from the evidence they provide of the widespread nature of mouse symbolism. Not only were mice a common subject of these scenes, but they were also frequently depicted in attitudes reminiscent of the symbolic significance given to the creature elsewhere.

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<sup>150</sup> Malek 1999; Germond 2001, 210; Houlihan 1996, 209.

<sup>151</sup> Brunner-Traut 1968.

The cohabitation of mice and humans coupled with certain elements of word play in the Egyptian language suggest one explanation for the frequency of mice in the so-called satirical ostraca. In his discussion of mice in dream interpretations, Christian Leitz argues that the sight of a mouse could be interpreted in a negative sense because of the similarity between the Egyptian words for mouse, *pn.w*, and hardship, *bjn*.<sup>152</sup> The same explanation is given for the negative implications of a harp, *bnt*. This evidence for wordplay in Egyptian interpretations of imagery can also be applied to the ostraca. Many of them depict an inversion of reality in which mouse lords and ladies are tended by cat servants. In Egyptian, the word for ‘lord’ is *nb*, which, through consonantal transformation, becomes *np* over time. This pronunciation is the reverse of *pn.w*, a verbal inversion entirely in line with the ‘topsy turvy’ world of the ostraca. Mice, then, may have been chosen as the subject in part because of this linguistic coincidence.

However the mouse was chosen to represent this imaginary world, the specifics of its depiction in certain scenes recalls the thematic associations of other mice attestations. In one scene, a series of jackal priests/servants carries a mouse deity/king through a procession. There are two possible causes for the jackal to be the mouse’s counterpart here, rather than the more frequent dog or cat in other images. One explanation is in the similarities between the Egyptian words for jackals and mice, *jnpw* and *pn.w*. On the other hand, this scene recalls the fact that the mouse is not an animal traditionally associated with a religious cult while the jackal is a symbol of Anubis and related underworld gods. Thus, according to the rules of this upside-down imaginary world, the greater jackal praises the lesser mouse. The divine/royal associations in this scene are the

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<sup>152</sup> Leitz 2000, 228.



antithesis of the royal connotations of the mouse established by the Thutmoses III's scaraboid ring. Here, the mouse is exalted and worshiped while in reality the mouse ring was worn by the king to emphasize its subservience.

In another series of ostraca, the mouse acts as a judge and presides over the punishment of a criminal.<sup>153</sup> Based on Sekhmet's frequent depiction as a goddess of punishment, one might expect the animal representative of justice to be a cat or lion. Instead, the choice of mouse continues the inverted theme present throughout the ostracan. It also serves to emphasize the mouse's subservience to Sekhmet in the real world, indicated by the fact that the cat is the officer in charge of administering the punishment.

Another scene, this one found on the Turin satirical papyrus, shows the culminating scene of a battle between cats and mice. The mouse army launches its assault on the cat fort.<sup>154</sup> The king of the mice rides in a chariot pulled by two hounds. The inclusion of the dogs in this scene might be a humorous alliance between two opponents of the cat; however, I have already addressed a number of instances where the mouse and dog are associated as mutual agents of order. In a chaotic battle scene that demonstrates a reversal of the natural order, this association is especially ironic. Together, these few examples argue for the pervasive nature of the symbolic associations of the mouse. Although the scenes were not crafted to take advantage of this particular function, the fact that they are contemporary with many of the other mouse attestations and that they show an awareness of a similar interpretive framework argues that this symbolic interpretation was present throughout Egyptian society during the Ramesside period.

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<sup>153</sup> Van Esseche 1991, 81; Brunner-Traut 1979, 13.

<sup>154</sup> Houlihan 1996, 211; Van Esseche 70.

Indeed, the depiction of a battle between cats and mice has been found in Egypt as late as the 7<sup>th</sup> c. CE.<sup>155</sup> This battle is also reminiscent of Greek narratives about the Battle of Frogs and Mice and the Battle of Weasels and Mice. There are even medieval versions of the battle between cats and mice, such as the fable of Jean Le Fontaine from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>156</sup> Such a contest between the reigning power and weaker rebels has even be read into early modern depictions of Mickey Mouse.<sup>157</sup> Thus, not only mouse imagery, but specific details of mouse imagery from Egypt finds astounding historical continuity. The symbolic role of mice in these ostraca and papyri as well as in numerous other attestations likewise exhibits dramatic continuity throughout the medieval and early modern periods.

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<sup>155</sup> Brunner-Traut 1979, 14.

<sup>156</sup> Shapiro 2007, 324.

<sup>157</sup> Brunner-Traut 1979, 14.

## CONCLUSION

### EFFICACY OF THE INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK

In order for the proposed interpretive structure to be considered relevant, certain criteria established in Chapter One needed to be met. The various mouse artifacts presented in this thesis demonstrate a thematic association with the Nile, an emphasis on the fertility aspects of the mouse, and have demonstrably positive and negative connotations. Some examples present the Nile and the mouse as dangerous forces that spread disease and destruction. Others emphasize the mouse's positive role in propagating health and reproduction. In most instances, too, the mouse is explicitly subordinate to the Nile. Thus, the study of Ancient Egyptian remains supports Pliny's proposed understanding of the origins of mice. Four of the primary artifacts studied in Chapter Three, the *Fate of the Hot-blooded Man*, *The Traits of the Farmer*, the *Spell for Mother and Child*, as well as the mouse figurines, also exhibit associations with childhood and the role of magic in preserving and advancing life. This wider association suggests a source for that most long-standing medical practice of treating children with mice.

However, the solar associations of the mouse cannot be overlooked; the mouse's subordination to the sun god is even more operative than its relationship to the Nile. Ultimately, the corpus reveals that the sun, not the Nile, is the ultimate source of fertility. Both the mouse and the river gain their life-giving power from the sun god. In the same way, the positive and negative impact of the mouse depends on its relationship with the sun god. The lack of solar elements in Greco-Roman and later interpretations of mice suggests a disconnect between the Egyptian beliefs and later applications. Very likely this

is an instance in which the conclusion (mice are creatures of powerful fertility) is transmitted without its attendant cause (the solar cult).

#### REVELATIONS ABOUT ANCIENT EGYPTIAN COSMOLOGY

There are certain features of the mouse that agree with earlier analyses of Egyptian religion and cosmology. The duality of the mouse is especially fitting. Other important cult creatures like the scarab were believed to have a positive and negative side. This beetle is most famous as the self-creating representation of the sun god who ferried the solar orb across the sky on its daily journey.<sup>158</sup> Even so, the Ebers papyrus included spells to ward scarabs from mills and grain storage in a manner reminiscent of the spells to ward off mice and other pests.<sup>159</sup> The gods themselves had a positive and negative side. This is clearly expressed in PT483 when the spell enjoins Osiris, Horus, Seth, Thoth, Isis, Nephthys, and other minor deities “not to come in that bad coming of [theirs].” Likewise, Sekhmet had a good and a bad coming in her relationship with disease. In her malevolent form, she was the lion-headed goddess sent to destroy mankind; when she was appeased, she transformed into the protective cat goddess Bastet. It is only to be expected, then, that the mouse has a similar good and bad coming.

The recognition that deities had a good and bad coming appears foundational to the formation and application of Egyptian medical magic. Much of Egyptian magic had an apotropaic function intended to disperse the evil influences of invading disease demons. This purpose was achieved via the administration of a balancing positive force. A sick patient might be identified with Horus so that he receives the same divine aid from

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<sup>158</sup> Houlihan 1996, 189.

<sup>159</sup> da Silva Veiga 2009, 48.

the mother goddess Isis as she administered to her own son.<sup>160</sup> Or, the poison of the dead could be likened to Osiris' life-giving semen.<sup>161</sup> Thus, the mouse could be applied for medicinal purposes only when it expressed its good coming.

I have further argued throughout this thesis that the good coming of the mouse is indicated by the phrase 'in its hole.' When the mouse remains in its burrow, then it serves the sun god and *ma'at*. Yet, the mouse might emerge and wreak havoc, so it must be enjoined to remain in its burrow. Thus, if it was not somehow controlled by the magician's spells, then it was a dangerous force that must be warded against. An important parallel to this situation is present in certain magical spells against snakes. In Louvre E 25485, the *rrk* snake (see section 5.1) is addressed as the one who came out of its hole in order to go against Re.<sup>162</sup> On the other hand, PT581 promises that those on the earth will have abundance because the one that came out of its hole has returned. The word used for 'hole' in both of these spells, *tph.t*, is the same as that used in Zauberspruch L. Thus, this phraseology was common from the Old Kingdom through the New Kingdom.

This study's application of a diachronic study of mouse attestations also gives new insights into the development of the Egyptian solar cult as characterized by the mouse's relationship to Re and Amun-Re. There are two prescient features. First, mouse attestations tend to cluster during periods of increased solar worship. The initial growth of Re's cult began in the 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, from which period date the causeway of Unas and

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<sup>160</sup> Leitz 1999.

<sup>161</sup> Kousoulis 2007, 1049.

<sup>162</sup> Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae, Schlangenzauber Mittleres Reich, Louvre E 25485, Rerek-Spruch. The word used here for 'hole,' *tph.t*, is the same as that used in Zauberspruch L.

most of the funerary vignettes. Most of the artifacts examined date from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasties, when the solar cult at Thebes received royal patronage. Only two of the eleven artifacts studied date from the Middle Kingdom: the mouse figurines, and CT 369.

Admittedly, it is always dangerous to forward arguments based on the distribution of the highly random archaeological record. Nonetheless, I think in this case, the clustering is statistically significant.

The solar association is also supported by the fact that Dorothy Arnold recognized a similar correlation in artistic styles. In her summary of Egyptian art history, she notes that Egyptians employed primarily naturalistic imagery in the 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty and during the New Kingdom.<sup>163</sup> These periods were divided by an emphasis on magical applications that made the Middle Kingdom imagery less interested in accurate depictions. Assmann traces a theological continuity between the Hymn to Amun-Re and the imagery found in 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty solar temples, thus directly linking two of the mouse attestations discussed here.<sup>164</sup> At a minimum, the chronological correspondence reinforces the association of the mouse with the solar cult and explains why mouse imagery appeared to be so popular during certain periods.

Secondly, the mouse's assumption of fertility symbolism may be evidence in support of certain proposals set forth by Gianluca Miniaci. In arguing for the significance of faience figurines during the Middle Kingdom, she believes that these apotropaic figurines were intended to protect the newly-born sun god and by extension, the recently deceased.<sup>165</sup> This makes good sense as regards the fertility and childhood associations of

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<sup>163</sup> Arnold 1995, 61.

<sup>164</sup> Assmann 1995, 124.

<sup>165</sup> Miniaci 2014, 122.

the faience animals and is further defended by the childhood associations of the Spell for Mother and Child and the didactic poetry. The argument can also be expanded to include the scenes in the causeway of Unas, which seem to draw on the reproductive fertility of the mouse to ensure the rebirth of the deceased. This particular interpretation would readily explain the prevalence of mouse imagery in funerary contexts and connect it to the role of mice in daily life.

#### FURTHER APPLICATION

Having established the solar and fertility connections of the mouse in both funerary and medical contexts, this invites the examination of other animals in a similar context. Medical spells also make use of the hippopotamus, gazelle, frog, etc. and funerary scenes include attestations of nearly all the animals in Egyptian zoology.<sup>166</sup> I have in small part addressed some of these animals: the hedgehog, frog, hippopotamus, hunting dog, etc. It would be very beneficial to learn whether these animals share the same relationship with the solar cult in addition to their shared fertility significance.

Furthermore, it is clear that at some point in time the solar connotations of the mouse fell out of favor or lost relevance compared to the Nile connections. It is likely that this transition occurred during the Late Period, when Egypt experienced an influx of new divinities and religious interpretations because of its governance by foreign powers. A similar study of the role of mice in Greek and Near Eastern contexts would shed great light on the development of the later applications of mice. In both regions the mouse had significant textual and visual representation. The association of the mouse with Apollo Smintheus in early Greek epic concurs with the Egyptian evidence of disease

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<sup>166</sup> Bryan 1930, 34-35.

connotations. So too does the Biblical tale of the bronze mice that were dedicated to YHWH by the Philistines as propitiation so that he would remove the sickness he had inflicted (1 Sam. 6:4). Mesopotamian cuneiform tablets include spells to ward against field pests that are similar to those found in the Ebers papyrus.<sup>167</sup> Even the satirical ostraca find parallels in Ancient Greece, especially in the Battle of Frogs and Mice, where the mice find temporary victory over their enemies. Clearly the borders of Egypt could not restrain mice and they had significant cultural impact wherever their paws carried them.

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<sup>167</sup> George 2010.



## FIGURES

### 3.5 CAUSEWAY OF UNAS:

Figure 3.1 Osborn 1998, 48.



Figure 3.2 Houlihan 1996, 25.

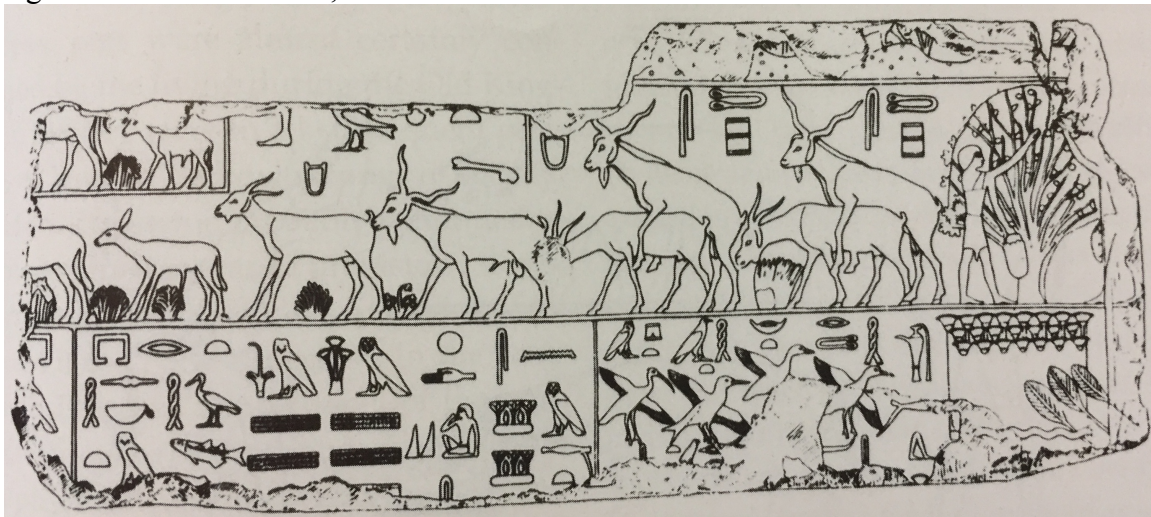


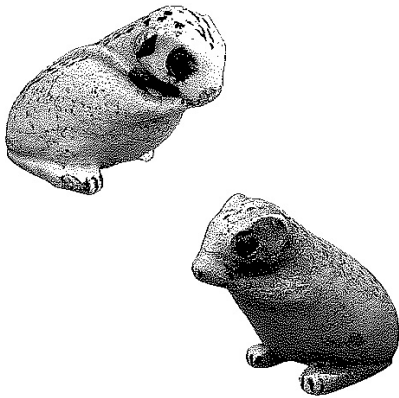


Figure 3.3 Houlihan 1996, 42.



### 3.7 MOUSE FIGURINES:

Figure 3.4 Friedman 1998, 149.



### 5.2 FUNERARY VIGNETTES:

Figure 5.1 Osborn 1998, 21.

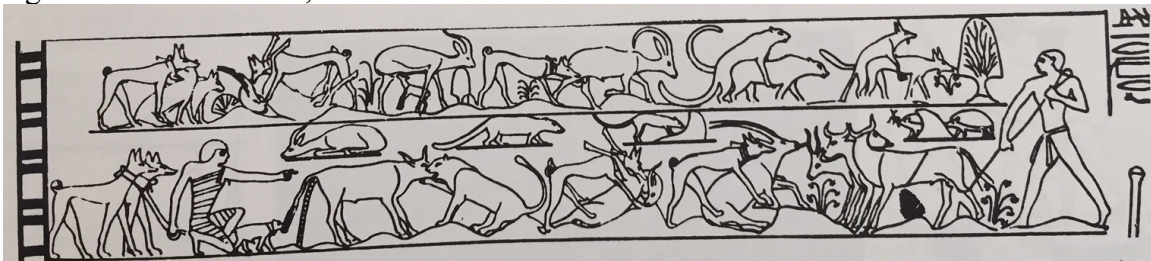


Figure 5.2 Osborn 1998, 52.

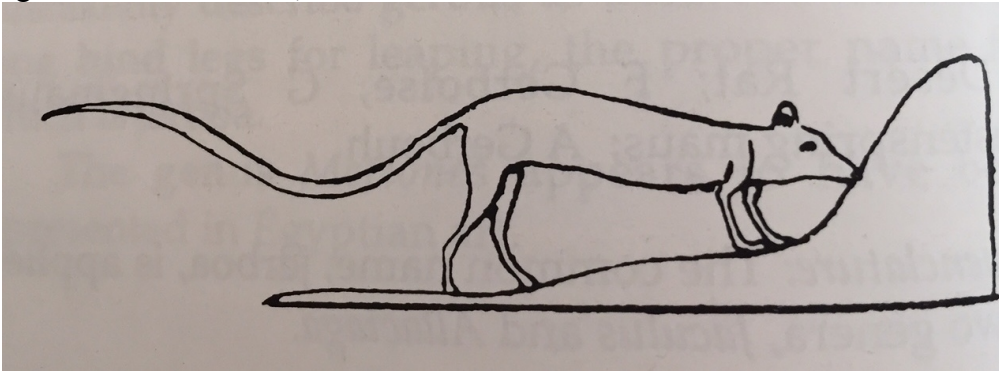
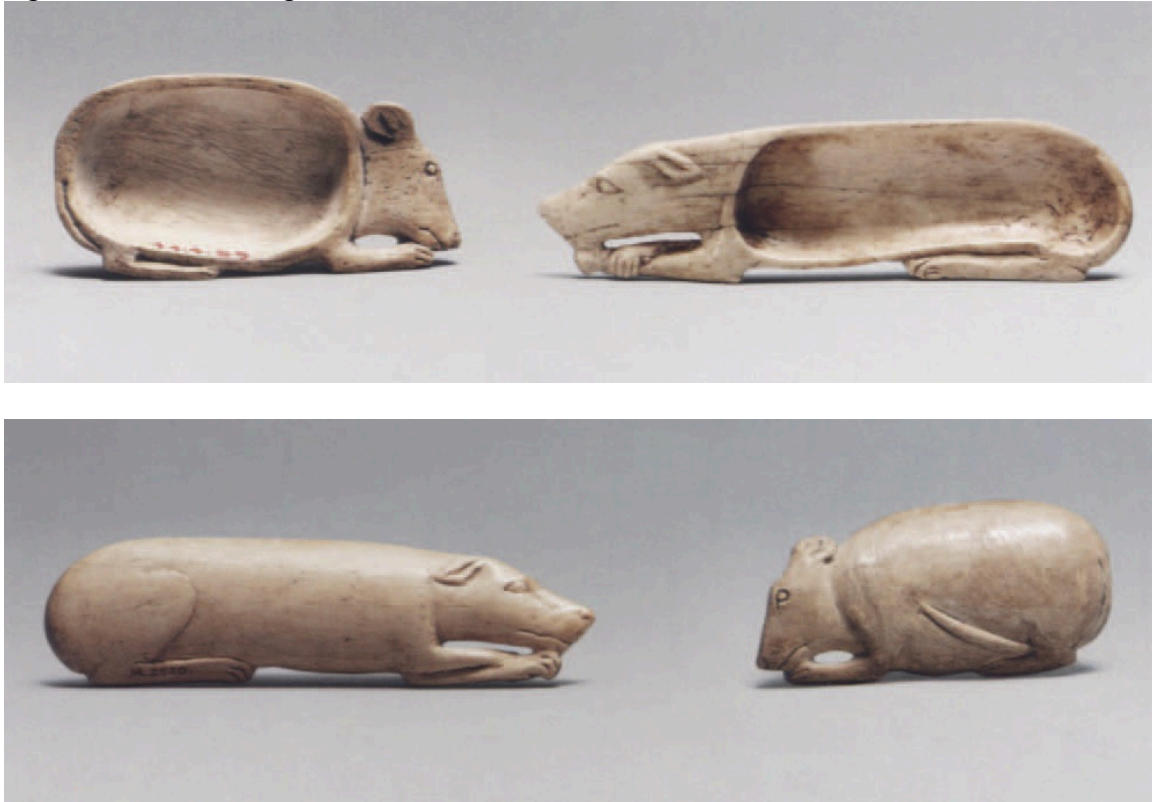


Figure 5.3 Osborn 1998, 61



5.3 COSMETIC SPOONS:

Figure 5.4, 5.5 Roehrig 2005, 216.



5.4 SCARABOID RING:

Figure 5.6 Roehrig 2005, 264.





6 SATIRICAL OSTRACA AND PAPYRI:

Figure 6.1 Brooklyn Museum 37.51.



Figure 6.2 Van Essche 1991, 70.



Figure 6.3 Van Essche 1991, 72.



Figure 6.4 Van Essche 1991, 81.



Figure 6.5 Brunner-Traut 1979, 14.



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## APPENDIX GERMAN TRANSLATIONS

### 3.1 DAS SCHICKSAL DES HEIßEN:

Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae, pAnastasi V = pBM EA 10244 (Miscellanies), 7.5-8.1

Gepriesen seist du!  
Die Lotosblüten blühen.  
Das Sumpfgeflügel ist (an den Flügeln) gepackt.  
Man schickt das Heer ins Feld.  
Man brandmarkt ihre Nachkommenschaft.  
Dein Heißer ist in der Gewalt des Amun.  
Er ist der Abscheu der Menschen.  
Das Sonnenlicht geht nicht auf ihm gegenüber.  
Die Nilschwemme fließt nicht für ihn.  
Er ist wie eine Maus in der hohen Nilflut.

### WARNUNG VOR GESCHWÄTZIGKEIT

Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae, pChester Beatty V = pBM EA 10685, Rto. 6,7-6,12

Gepriesen seist du,  
wenn/da die Lotosblume blüht,  
da der wrd-Vogel (bei den Flügeln) gepackt ist,  
da man das Heer aufs Land entläßt,  
da man sein Gefolge brandmarkt,  
und da dein Heißer/Hitziger in der (strafenden) Macht des Amun ist.  
Er (d.h. der Heiße) ist der Abscheu der Menschen.  
Der Lichtgott wird ihm gegenüber nicht (mehr) aufgehen,  
nachdem die Überschwemmung für ihn übergeströmt ist,  
und er (wie) eine Maus in einer großen Überschwemmung war:  
Er hat keinen Ort gefunden (oder: er konnte keinen Ort finden), auf den er sich verlassen konnte.  
Er ist (wie) ein Vogel, der (bei den Flügeln) gepackt ist durch die Hand des Menschen.  
Er findet keine Möglichkeit (weg)zufliegen.  
Ende.

### 3.2 ZAUBERSPRÜCHE FÜR MUTTER UND KIND:

#### SPRUCH L

Erman 1901, 30-31.

Das ssmj zu vertreiben.  
O der du im Wasser bist,  
eile und sage zu diesem ... der in seiner Kapelle ist  
zu der Sechmet die hinter ihm kommt  
zu der glänzenden ... der Uto, der Herrin von Buto:

»bring' ihr diese Milch«.

Zu sprechen .... Man lässt das Kind oder deine (sie) Mutter eine gekochte Maus essen; ihre Knochen werden in einem Beutel von feinem Leinen an seinen Hals gehängt und man macht sieben Knoten.

SPRUCH L

Yamazaki 2003, 30-31.

Das Beseitigen der ssmj-Krankheit

O du im Wasser, geh und sage zu jenem Qnb.tj, der in seiner Kapelle ist, zu Sachmet, wenn sie hinter (?) die Residenz (?) [wegen (?)] der Angelengenheit (?) gekommen und [als (?)] Uto, Herrin von Buto, erschienen ist, daß für sie die Milch dieser großen, wach[enden (?)] Maus gebracht wird, die in ihrem Loch war, wenn für sie das snw.t und dnj.t in Heliopolis gefeierter wird: das Geben seines Auges durch den Großen zu dem anderen Schönen, damit Seth <es> sieht (?).

Man soll diesen Spruch rezitieren, indem man entweder dieses Kind oder seine Mutter die gekochte Maus essen lässt. Ihre Knochen sollen an Binden aus feinem Leinen an seinen Hals gegeben werden, wobei sieben Knoten geknüpft werden.

3.3 HYMN TO AMUN-RE:

Assmann 1999, 200.

Du bist der Eine, der alles Seiende geschaffen hat, der Eine Einsame, der schuf, was ist. Die Menschen gingen aus seinen Augen hervor, und die Götter entstanden aus seinem Mund. Der die Kräuter erschafft, die das Vieh am leben erhalten, und den <Lebensbaum> für die Menschheit, der hervorbringt, wovon die Fische im Fluß leben und die Vögel, die den Himmel bevölkern. Der dem, der im Ei ist, Luft gibt; der das Junge der Schlange am Leben erhält, der erschafft, wovon die Mücke lebt, Würmer und Flöhe gleichermaßen; der für die Mäuse in ihren Löchern sorgt und die Käfer (?) am Leben erhält in jeglichem Holz.

3.4 BAUERNCHARAKTERISTIK:

Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae, pSallier I = pBM EA 10185, Rto. 5,11-6,9

Mir wurde gesagt, dass du das Schreiben aufgegeben hast, dass du dich in Vergnügungen ergehst, dass du deine Aufmerksamkeit der Arbeit auf dem Feld zugewendet hast (und) dass du deinen Kopf von den Gottesworten abgewendet hast.

Kannst du dich nicht {der Tüchtigkeit} <der Lage des> Bauern erinnern, wenn die Ernte registriert wird (?)?

Der Wurm hat die Hälfte des Getreides geraubt.

Das Nilpferd frisst die andere (Hälfte).

Die Mäuse sind zahlreich auf dem Feld.

Die Heuschrecke ist herabgestiegen.

Das Kleinvieh frisst.

Die Spatzen nehmen weg.  
Wehe dem Landarbeiter!

#### DIE UNTERSCHIEDLICHE BESTEUERUNG VON BAUER UND SCHREIBER

Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae, pAnastasi V = pBM EA 10244 (Miscellanies), 15.6-17.3

Man hat mir gesagt, daß du das Schreiben aufgegeben (wörtl.: weggeworfen, abgelegt)  
und dich in Vergnügungen herumgewälzt (?) hast;  
daß du deine Aufmerksamkeit der Feldarbeit zugewandt  
und deinen Rücken den Gottesworten zugekehrt hast (wörtl.: deinen Hinterkopf den  
Gottesworten zugeworfen).

Kannst du dich nicht an die Lage des Ackermannes angesichts (oder: konfrontiert mit)  
der Registrierung der Ernte(steuer) erinnern,  
wenn/nachdem das Gewürm eine Hälfte <der Gerste> weggenommen  
und das Nilpferd das Übrige (wörtl.: die anderen Sachen) gefressen hat?

Die Mäuse sind (zu) zahlreich auf dem Feld;  
die Heuschrecke (oder: der Heuschreckenschwarm) <ist (dort) eingefallen>.

Das Kleinvieh frißt;

die Spatzen rauben;

Mangel/Hungersnot droht dem Ackermann.

Die Reste, die (noch) auf der Tenne liegen,  
die Diebe haben sie beseitigt (oder: ein Ende bereitet),

wobei (also) die Dreschviehmiete (?) verloren  
und das Gespann vor Dreschen und Pflügen gestorben ist.

Und der Schreiber ist am Uferdamm angelandet.

#### 3.6 TAGEWÄHLEREI:

Leitz 1994, 204-209.

##### 1. prt 11

C/S/BM: 1. Monat ser Saatzeit, Tag 11

C: Gefährlich! Gefährlich! Gefährlich!

S/BM: Ungewiß! Ungewiß! Ungewiß!

C/S: Du sollst dich nicht irgendeinem Feuer nähern an diesem Tag.

S: Er hat es auf Re L.H.G. gegeben, um jeden Feind zu schädigen.

C/S: Jeder, der sich ihnen nähert an diesem Tag, der wird nicht mehr gesund werden in  
seinem ganzen Leben.

##### 1. prt 12

C/S/BM: 1. Monat der Saatzeit, Tag 12

C: Gefährlich! Gefährlich! Gefährlich!

S Ungewiß! Ungewiß! Ungewiß!

BM: Gut! Ungewiß! Ungewiß!

C: Wenn du irgendeinen Windhund siehst an diesem Tag

S: Du sollst keine Ratten erblicken an diesem Tag.

C/S: Du sollst ihr nicht zu nahe kommen in deinem Haus. Jener Tag, an dem man sämtliche Angelegenheiten der Sachmet abwehrte, an diesem Tag.

1. *prt* 13

C/S/BM: 1. Monat ser Saatzeit, Tag 13

C/S: Gut! Gut! Gut!

BM: Ungewiß! Ungewiß! Ungewiß!

C/S: Verlängerung der Lebenszeit. Wiederherstellung der Maat im Haus (C)/im Horizont (S).