Locust and its signification in Ptolemaic texts

Abstract

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

Keywords: locust, grasshopper, sauterelle, heuschrecken, grashüpfer

Locust in review

Locust has a numerous studies that deal with the insect and its behavior. And the significance of locusts was discussed in many articles.1 In pyramid texts the king was flying to the sky as locust.2 Locust appears in coffin texts.3 In the Book of the Dead locust linked with a palace called introsnHwmw “the field of locusts or grasshoppers.”4 In the New kingdom Egyptian texts it is usually the defeated enemies who are compared with locusts; for example, in inscriptions of Ramses II and of Merneptah.5 Locust also has a positive metaphor by compare the army of Egyptian king with locust in their multitude. The locusts’ swarms could consist of billions of locusts covering several hundred square kilometers, and they were capable of travelling great distances in a single day. Although the image of locusts’ swarms descending upon fertile fields is an obvious metaphor, further meanings have been explored by other scholars.6 The image of the locust can be both favorably used to describe the multitudinous Egyptian army and negatively applied to enemy forces. The locust also appears in the holy books as a plague and divine punishment; in the holy Bible, the Gospel and the holy Quran.

“Else, if thou refuse to let my people go, behold, tomorrow will I bring the locusts into thy coast.” Exodus 10: 4-5

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land, even all that the hail hath left.” Exodus 10: 12

“The east wind brought the locusts. And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt, and rested in all the coasts of Egypt: very grievous were they; before them there were no such locusts as they, neither after them shall be such.” Exodus 10: 13-14.

And the Lord turned a mighty strong west wind, which took away the locusts, and cast them into the Red sea; there remained not one locust in all the coasts of Egypt.” Exodus 10: 19.

“All thy trees and fruit of thy land shall the locust consume.” Deuteronomy 28: 42 “If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land.” Jerusalem 7: 13.

“That which the palmerworm hath left, hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left, hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left, hath the caterpillar eaten.” Joel 1:4.

“And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you”. Joel 2: 25.

“Therefore we sent upon them widespread death, and the locusts and the lice and the frog and the blood, clear signs; but they behaved haughtily and they were a guilty people.” The holy Quran - Al- Araf - Verse 133.

“Their eyes cast down, going forth from their graves as if they were scattered locusts”. The holy Quran - Al-Qamar - Verse 7.

Some texts mentioned locust as a food: 7 Ovid R. Sellers, “Stages

1The ancient Egyptian artistic representations of locusts and literary references to them have been gathered with exhaustive thoroughness by Dr. Ludwig Keimer in: Pendeloques en forme d’insectes faisant partie de colliers égyptiens. ASAE. 1932;32:129–150; 1933;33:97–130, 193–200; 1937;37:143–172. And for more about locusts see:

Meeks D. De quelques insectes égyptiens entre lexique et paléographie, Perspectives on Ancient Egypt, supplément aux annales du Service des antiquités de l’Égypte, 2010;40: 273–304.

LGg.VI, P.392.


Ovid R. Sellers; Stages of Locust in Joel; The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures. 52(2):81–85.


Pyr. § 891 d.; 1772 b-c.

CT, VII, 244 d.


Wilson, P.; a Ptolemaic Lexicon, P867, where she notes the metaphorical nature of the word for the plural form represents “the multitude” or “an infinite number of things.”
of Locust in Joel,” The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures 52, no.2 (Jan., 1936), P.81-85.

“And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.” Matthew 3: 4.

“And John was clothed with camel’s hair and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey.” Mark 1: 6.

Amulets in the form of a locust made from glazed steatite and glazed composition occur in both the late Old kingdom and eighteenth dynasty and are carefully and naturalistically shaped yet a series of cornelian examples, probably contemporary with the former, are so stylized that they resemble a pair of aero plane wings with only an inverted ‘V’ at the central point representing the legs and a few striations at the front for the head. Because of the reproductive qualities of this insect, the amulet probably bestowed fertility, although its swarming behavior may also have led to connotations of plenty or riches. However, Utterances 467 and 627 of Pyramid Texts both speak of ascent to heaven in the locust’s form, suggesting that the amulet had a purely funerary function.\(^7\)

**Iconographic**

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

The clearest sign is \[\text{Locust}\] which found in JSesh an open source hieroglyphic editor.\(^8\)

**Epigraphic**

The locust has the name snHm.\(^9\) In the New kingdom texts the word is written sA-nHm as if it were ‘son of one who takes’, ‘son of seizing’ referring to the destructive nature of the creature.\(^10\) In Ptolemaic texts the word has many of orthographies in writing: Phonetic value of locust sign (Table 1) (Table 2):\(^11\)

**Documents**

**Dendara III 176,4-5**

\[\text{aSA mnftyw (a).k mi snHmw, msw.k mi SA.I (Horus-Behdety) make your infantry soldiers as numerous as locusts, and your children as numerous as grains of sand.}\]

**Dendara IV 18,4-6**

And passim in Ptolemaic texts.

**Dendara V 56,12-13**

\[@\text{nk Hrw-a (b), Dd mdw: Nb nHH, Sn.k HA.k, ist (c) mi snHm, ir.sn nht.k ra-nb Offer the elixir, Utterance: lord of eternity, your circle of protection is behind you, the combatants are like locusts, they protect you every day.}\]

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<th>Table 1 Ptolemaic text of orthographies</th>
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<th>Table 2 Phonetic value of locust sign</th>
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brightness, rejoice everyone for seeing him, lord of vineyards to create the fresh plants, to make bright the vineyard carrying vines, your circles of protection are behind you, they are numerous more than locust, Horus-Behdety the great god lord of the sky.

**Dendara IX 152.4-5**

@nk Hrw-a, Dd mdw: Hrw-a n nb BHdt sAb-Swt, Sn (f).k HA.k (g) mi snHm. Offer the elixir, Utterance: the elixir for the lord of Behdet, him of the dappled plumage, your circle of protection is behind you as numerous as locust.

**Dendara XII 265.7-9**

+d mdw in @r-bHdty nTr A nb pt sAb-Swt pr m Axt aXm Sps ShB Snbt.k nTr wr sr nTrw, Snw.f HA.f, Snwt.f (h ) r gs.f iw.sn wr.tw mi snHm, nfr Hr brn mrwt psD m pt m ra-nb. Utterance by Horus-Behdety, the great god, lord of the sky, him of the dappled plumage, who comes forth from the horizon, the noble falcon image, to make festive the falcon image, the great god, prince of gods, his circles of protection are behind him, his followers are beside him, they as numerous as locust, beautiful of face, sweet of love, who shine in the sky in every day.

**Dendara XIV 136.2-3**

Wdn Hrw-a, Dd mdw: ixt wrt m Knmt i ( i ) mw( j ).f bn r tw r Snbt.k nHH r k, HqA.n.k Tawy, Snwt.k m snHm Offer the elixir, Utterance: great offerings comes from Kharga Oasis, its water (i.e. wine) is sweet for your chest, eternity for you, and you rule the two lands, your followers as numerous as locust.

**Dendara XV 298.6-7**

@nk Hrw-a, Dd mdw: Hrw-a r SASAyt.k Snbt sAb-Swt Sn HA.k m snHm, nTr A a nb Ha, nfr nb nHH Xam hA.f m Axt. Offer the elixir, Utterance: the elixir for your throat, falcon him of the dappled plumage, the circle of protection is behind you as numerous as locust, the great god in rejoice, he is lord of eternity, his Ba united with the horizon.

**Mammisi Dendara 24.5-6**

+jwAw, wnDww n r(k )TNw.sn, qBHw jm.s m dm agAt, DAt mnt(L ) A a nb snHm. Cattle and short horned cattle their numbers are not known (i.e. numberless), the water birds (i.e. prey birds) inside it are sharp of talons, crane bird and pigeon are numerous more than locust.

**Edfou IV 3.3**

+jwAw, wnDww wr.tw r snHmw. Cattle and short horned cattle are more numerous than locusts.

**Edfou VI 132.13**

Nswt-bjty (¼ sA-Ra (Ptwlmyx anx Dt mry PtH¼ nTr nfr jty nb nHH Sn HA.f m snHm. King of Upper and Lower Egypt (¼ son of Re) Ptolemy live forever. Beloved of Ptah¼ the good god, the sovereign lord of eternity, the circle of protection is behind him as numerous as locust.

**Edfou VII 133.8**

Wr pHtj Hr ptrt(n ) <Snwt>.f HA(.f ) m snHmw. Great of strength in battlefield (i.e. arena), his <followers> are behind (him) as numerous as locusts.

**Edfou VII 71.2-7**

!Ayw(o ) s r snHmw, xnt.S AxAx.tj m Smaw nHHw, sS.s jrw Xr Sn nHmt. Its birds are more numerous than locusts; its fields are flourishing with cereals of Upper and Lower Egypt, all its basins are filled with lotus buds and flowers.

**Edfou VII 123.6-7**

Wnn nb nHH(p ) wbn.ti m BHdt, Snw.t.f HA.f m snHmw, Hr Sgp ixt.f Hr sam Xrt.f Hr shPt ib.f m irt-qfr. Lord of eternity shine in Behdet, his followers around him as locusts, receiving his things, eating his rations, and pacifying his heart with Eye of Horus (i.e. wine).

**Edfou VII 200.4-5**

+d mdw jn @r-bHdtj, nTr A nb pt, wr pHtj xnt WTst-@r, aSA mnhwyw mj snHmw, lb ptrt jnj pHw j Thj.(q) Utterance by Horus-Behdety, the great god lord of the sky, great of strength inside Edfou (i.e. throne of Horus), numerous of infantry soldiers like locusts, treading the battlefield, to bring an end to one who attacks.
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Edfou VII 284,3-5
am.k mw nj wjt (r) jArtt, mSa [.k HA.k] (s) m nj snHmw. You drink water and chew grapes, [your] army [behind you] as numerous as locusts.

Esna III n°. 208, 69
n Wsjr m rm(w).f nbw . For Osiris in all his names.

Comments
The word ḫnḥ (read as mntyw) and it is different about which read as mSa[13] mean “army”, the different is in what the soldier holds in his right and left hand. mntyw are infantry of the army rather than chariotry. At Edfout, the word refers in general to soldiers of ḫnḥ, whose main function is to protect him.[14] The elixir ḥrw–ā (read as mw.f) is a kind of aromatic beverages. Grapes are the main ingredient and water. ḥrw–ā was prepared at the first victory of Horus and it gives strength and vigour. Its red colour associates it with the drink which made Sakhmet drunk at the destruction of Mankind.[15] Elixir appears as offering only in temples of the Ptolemaic period. Thirty examples are known, at Philae, Edfou and Dendara The reddish colour evokes the blood of enemies spilled into the water; moreover, the potion is offered only to ḫnḥ.[16] The recipient in eight of the rights at Edfou is Horus. Behedty and in one Re of Behedt and Horakhty, but in all cases the warlike attributes of the recipient are stressed, so that it seems the drink was supposed to improve performance in battle perhaps as ‘Dutch courage’.[17]

The elixir ḥrw–ā was also the male equivalent of the female ḫnḥ (read as mntyw) which referred to as the inebriation of goddesses.[18] The locust related with the elixir ḫnḥ (read as mntyw) mentioned in the most ḫnḥ scenes. The word ḫnḥ could be correct into ḫnḥ. The word ḫnḥ was used to denote a band or company of men performing various tasks, from field work and transport, to helping in a slaughter house. It also refers to a group of soldiers [Schulman, Military Rank, 25 and 43] and came to be the crew of a ship and the crew of the sun boat of Re. Depending upon context ist can imply slightly different meanings. The recipient in eight of the rights at Edfou is Horus. Behedty and in one Re of Behedt and Horakhty, but in all cases the warlike attributes of the recipient are stressed, so that it seems the drink was supposed to improve performance in battle perhaps as ‘Dutch courage’. The word ḫnḥ was used to denote a band or company of men performing various tasks, from field work and transport, to helping in a slaughter house. It also refers to a group of soldiers [Schulman, Military Rank, 25 and 43] and came to be the crew of a ship and the crew of the sun boat of Re. Depending upon context ist can imply slightly different meanings. The recipient in eight of the rights at Edfou is Horus. Behedty and in one Re of Behedt and Horakhty, but in all cases the warlike attributes of the recipient are stressed, so that

The sign 〈 should be correct into 〈 read as Sn.k
The sign 〈 should be correct into 〈 read as ḫnḥ
In court circles the title may have applied to the trusted advisors,

4. Bodyguards and bodyguard of high officials and the king. At Edfou the sign ḫnḥ usually refers to the followers of a god. In origin it may be those who are ‘around’ or who ‘enclose’ the king or god and therefore in origin is a participle from Sn ‘to enclose’. ḫnḥ is a kind of aromatic beverages. Grapes are the main ingredient and water. ḫrw–ā was prepared at the first victory of Horus and it gives strength and vigour. Its red colour associates it with the drink which made Sakhmet drunk at the destruction of Mankind.

5. Knm refers to Kharga Oasis.[21] It was a famous place which produces wine with the other ḫnḥ places such as “Baharia Oasis”, “Nebesheh”, “Pelusium” and “Lake of Mariut”.[24]

6. The word ḫnḥ should be correct into ḫnḥ read as mw.f.

7. The sign ḫnḥ read as rĀ read as mw.f. This reading is a rare phonetic value in Ptolemaic texts.

8. ḫnḥ DAt and ḫnḥ mnt are two kinds of birds. The word ḫnḥ written in disorganization orthography as and it should write as ḫnḥ. It appear in parallel texts as ḫnḥ. The ḫnḥ bird is “the crane” referred to as Crane Grus grus. In other hand mnt refer to pigeon. The two birds appear together as an offering:

9. ḫnḥ DAt mnt: The crane and pigeon
10. The Crane bird also appears with the rĀ-gees:
11. The two birds appear together as an offering:
12. ḫnḥ DAt mnt: The crane and pigeon
13. rĀ Hna DAt: The gees with cranes.
14. The sign ḫnḥ read as ḫnḥ “to offer”,[22]

[26] Cauville, S.; Offerings to the gods, P.50.
[27] Wilson, P. ; a Ptolemaic lexicon, P.112.
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Locust and elixir a signification approach

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

### Table 3 Locusts appear in elixir scenes

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dendara</td>
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<td>Dendara IV 18</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Dendara</td>
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<td>Edfou  IV 3</td>
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<td>Edfou VII 71</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Esna  n° 208</td>
<td>hymn to Osiris</td>
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### Conclusion

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

### Acknowledgements

None.

### Conflict of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.