Some introductory remarks concerning the metaphorical use of the Egyptian words for „light“ and „heavy“

In this contribution, the metaphorical use of the Egyptian words of „light“ and „heavy“ is investigated. The question is dealt with for the first time in greater detail. The words „isi“ to be light, „wdn“ to be heavy and „dnc“ to be heavy will play the most significant role. The transferred meanings come from an unexpectedly large number of examples.

Keywords: Egyptian philology – Egyptian lexicography – metaphorical use of the Egyptian words for „light“ and „heavy“

In this contribution, the metaphorical use of the Egyptian words for „heavy“ and „light“ is explored. The question was tackled in the past rather sporadically. The most important pioneering work was done by the authors of the Wörterbuch. Otherwise, the observations amounted more or less to single remarks. However, the scope of the material can be extended considerably. The following examples are able to paint a highly vivid picture of the variability of the Egyptian language. The investigation seems to be absolutely worthwhile before this background. The words „isi“ „to be light“, „wdn“ „to be heavy“ and „dnc“ „to be heavy“ will hereby stand in the centre of the statements. It will become clear that in some cases links can be constructed between these three words. The necessary information about the age of the examples can be taken from the details in the brackets. The collection endeavors to be as complete as possible, which may not have been achieved. The examples can at least provide a general overview.

The word „isi“ „to be light“

The root „isi“ „to be light“ will arouse the first interest in this context. The figurative sense becomes obvious in the following examples.

The primary meaning could apparently be changed to „to be superficial“. Confirmation can be obtained in the passage „isi ib is [cxr (?)]=f“³, for which the translation „someone light of heart is someone light in his advice“ stands to reason. The same interpretation seems to be valid for the passage „nn isi ib dnc

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¹ zu „wdn“ WB I, 390, 10-15; zu „dnc“ WB V, 468, 7-16/469, 2-7
³ J. W. Barns, Five Ramesseum Papyri (1956), 6 (22)
cxr X.t (Middle Kingdom), for which the translation „no one light of heart is weighty of intent” represents a possible option. The translation is altered by Clère in “il nest pas d’inconsidéré qui sache garder caches ils intentions”, which seems to be absolutely possible. The same explanation holds true for the passage “m Dd grg iw=k wr.t(i), m isi iw=k dnc.t(i), m Dd grg ntk iw’cw” (Middle Kingdom), for which the translation “Speak not falsehood, for you are great! Be not light, for you are weighty! Speak not falsehood, you are the scales!” works best. The word “isi” “to be light” is interpreted by Parkinson as a derogatory quality for the poet. The passage probably means that the addressed person should not make a flippantly or hasty judgement. The German expression “leichtfertig” can be compared in this context, which is also based on the root “leicht”. The last quoted texts can serve as a good example for the direct juxtaposition of the two core terms “isi” and “dnc”. The two words do not appear so closely behind one another in other sources.

The process could also be inverted in the opposite direction, as can be shown by the use of the word “Ac” “to be quick” in the sense of “to be light”.

The word “wdn” “to be heavy”

In the second paragraph, metaphorical meanings of the word “wdn” “to be heavy” are taken into account. The following examples can claim the most figurative style.

The primary meaning could apparently take on the sense “to be numerous”. The same case will reappear in the third paragraph. The fact that the same association can be found in two different words with the meaning “heavy” is noteworthy. The idea seems to be expressed in the passage “ini=f n=k pH cx.t Xr pgA.w=f wdn m aw.t Hna mmmn.t” (Graeco-Roman Time), for which the translation “he brings you the swamp “bird catch” with its open areas, which is densely packed with small and large cattle” can be offered. The same interpretation holds true for the passage “ini=f n=k pH cx.t Xr xa.t=f wr.ti

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4 R. B. Parkinson, The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant: A Reader’s Commentary, LingAegStudMon 10 (Hamburg, 2012), 199
5 J. J. Clère, L’expression dnc mhw.t des autobiographies égyptiennes, JEA 35 (1949), 41k; cf. H.-W. Fischer-Elfert, Die Lehre eines Mannes für seinen Sohn, Eine Etappe auf dem „Gottesweg“ des loyalen und solidarischen Beamten des Mittleren Reiches, Textband, ÄgAb 60 (Wiesbaden, 1999), 197
8 E IV, 180, 10-11; for this passage cf. Chr. Leitz, Die regionale Mythologie Ägyptens nach Ausweis der geographischen Prozessionen in den späten Tempeln, Soubasementstudien IV, Teil 1: Text, SSR 10 (Wiesbaden, 2017), 192
m Xmc.w m ng wdn.ti m kA.w Hna id.wt (Graeco-Roman Time), which can be translated most easily by “he brings you the swamp “bird catch” with its hill country, which is big with opened corn ears and densely packed with bulls and cows“. The same aspect plays a role in the passage “ini=f n=k pH cx.t x r.x=t=f wdn m a.wt Hna mn.mn.t” (Graeco-Roman Time), for which the translation “he brings you the swamp “bird catch” with its products, which is densely packed with small and large cattle“ seems to be useful. The transfer process from “to be heavy“ to “to be numerous” is difficult to explain. The interpretation that for the Egyptians more hooves of larger herds put more pressure on the ground must remain speculative.

The primary meaning could apparently be modified to “to be thick, to be swollen“. The passage “DADA=f wdn m-a tAw n Atf nti m DADA=f” (Graeco-Roman Time) shows the influence of this idea, for which the translation “his head was swollen from the heat of the Atef-crown, which was on his head.“ can be given. In the passage, the god Osiris and his head ornate are hinted at. The explanation can probably be found in the fact that the swollen head, viewed from the outside, expands in size and thus becomes more massive.

The primary meaning could apparently undergo a transformation process to “to be thick”. The verification for this can be detected in the passage “ir mAA=i [ich Hr nf]w wnn=f ir.ti=f(i) cTp rni.w=f wdn.w” (Middle Kingdom), for which the translation “if I see [a cow, which is suffering from the nfw (?)-illness], its eyes dripping and its tears being heavy“ seems to be appropriate. The “heavy tears” are seen by Guth as thick outflow of the eyes, following a proposal of Lord. The explanation pertains probably to the belief that viscous substances fall more easily to the ground by the larger gravity.

9 Médamoud=FIFAO 3, 2, Nr. 173, for this passage cf. Chr. Leitz, Die regionale Mythologie Ägyptens nach Ausweis der geographischen Prozessionen in den späten Tempeln, Soubassementstudien IV, Teil 1: Text, SSR 10 (Wiesbaden, 2017), 192
11 Chr. Leitz, Die regionale Mythologie Ägyptens nach Ausweis der geographischen Prozessionen in den späten Tempeln, Soubasementstudien IV, Teil 1: Text, SSR 10 (Wiesbaden, 2017), 338
12 S. Guth, Hirtenbilder, Untersuchungen zur kulturimmanenten Sicht auf eine altägyptische Personengruppe, BSAK 21, Hamburg 2018, 127
The word “dnc“ “to be heavy“

The third paragraph is devoted to the study of the figurative meanings of the word “dnc“ “to be heavy“. The metaphorical use is strongly developed in its case.

The primary meaning could apparently alternate to „to be burdensome“. The respective sense builds the quintessential of the passage “dnc rnp.t r sn.w=c“14 (First Intermediate Period), for which the translation “one year is more burdensome than the other“ makes a good impression. The same attitude can be detected in the German word “beschwerlich“, which depends semantically on the word “schwer sein“.

The primary meaning could seemingly also be modified to “to be reticent“. The passage “ntk dnc cxr.w hAn wSB.t bwt=k xnw-didi Dr mcii.t=k“15 (New Kingdom) tests this idea, for which the translation “You are one reticent in counsel, one who weighs (his) answer, your abomination is obscene talk since your birth“ is a good solution. The meaning “to be heavy“ may perhaps even go as far as “to be profound“ in a figurative sense.

The primary meaning could apparently alternate to “to be heavily loaded“. The idea dominates obviously the passage “imn.tiw iAb.tiw dnc Xr ix.wt=cn“16 (Graeco-Roman Period), for which the translation “the western ones und the eastern ones, heavily loaded with their products“ seems to be a good choice. In this passage, tribute bearers from the cardinal points of the earth are described. The statement is literally not to understand. The heaviness really belongs to the burden on the wearer´ s shoulders and has been referred figuratively here to the people themselves. The author of the text has taken a great deal of poetic interest here.

The primary meaning could apparently also change in “to be earnest“. The passage “dnc imi=k wAi r Sfi.i.t“17 (Middle Kingdom) is here fore of high significance, which seems to call for the translation “Be earnest! You should not be far from dignity“. The words are spoken by a teacher to his pupil.

The primary meaning could also be shifted to “to be dull“. The idea is manifested in the passage “kri Sri aA wsi ib=k, bw cDm=k iw=i md.t. dnc ib=k r mnw aA, n mH 100 m xii wmt 10, iw=f grH r r-a Atp=f“18 (New Kingdom), for which the translation “Young fellow, how conceited you are! You do not hearken when I speak. Your heart is heavier than a great monument of a

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15 A. H. Gardiner, Late-Egyptian Miscellanies, BibAeg VII (Bruxelles, 1937), 114; R. A. Caminos, Late-Egyptian Miscellanies, Brown Egyptological Studies I (London, 1954), 421; N. Tacke, Verspunkte als Gliederungsmit in ramessidischen Schülerhandschriften, SAGA 22 (Heidelberg, 2001), 117
17 W. Helck, Die Lehre des dwA-xtii, Teil II, KÄT 3 (Wiesbaden, 1970), 131; for this passage see St. Jäger, Altägyptische Berufstypologien, LingAegStudMon 44 (Göttingen, 2004), 151
18 A. H. Gardiner, Late-Egyptian Miscellanies, BibAeg VII (Bruxelles, 1937), 101; R. A. Caminos, Late-Egyptian Miscellanies, Brown Egyptological Studies I (London, 1954), 377; N. Tacke, Verspunkte als Gliederungsmit in ramessidischen Schülerhandschriften, SAGA 22 (Heidelberg, 2001), 88
hundred cubits in height and ten in thickness, which is finished and ready to be loaded“ is a good choice. The inflexibility of the pupil is expressed by the comparison with the stone object very clearly.

The primary meaning could apparently receive the secondary sense “to be restrained“. The idea is relevant for the understanding of the passage “dnc tw m HA.ti=k cmm HA.ti=k, m ir iri Hm m nc.t=k“ (New Kingdom), for which the translation “Pull back in your heart, strengthen your heart, do not steer with your tongue“ is quite accurate. The interpretation of “dnc“ as “to contain/to be reserved“ has been suggested already by Grumach. The same notion is important for the correct understanding of the passage “dnc r ib iw=tw (Hr) mdw.t, m-iri tpi-rA [m w]Sb.t=k Hr nDnD ix.t, xpr i-dd=k nb mnx“ (New Kingdom), for which the translation “Be cautious, if one speaks. Do not give hasty answers in the council, so everything you say becomes good“ seems to be appropriate. The statements differ only by the two different heart names, but that does not change their content.

The primary meaning could apparently be developed further to “to be important“. The very sense can be demonstrated in the passage “m-ir pSn HA.ti=k r nc=k xpr cxr.w=k nb m ar, xpr dnc.tw m-bAH.tA kw i iw=k wDA.tw m Dr.t nTr“ (New Kingdom), for which the translation “Do not divide your heart from your tongue, so all plans of you become successful. You will be important by the people, while you are sane in the hand of the god“ seems to be realistic. The text has to be analyzed according to Grumach that the tongue should not be robbed from the refreshing power of the heart. The passage “dnc=k rm n sA=k iri mrr.t=k“ (New Kingdom) evidently requires the same explanation, for which the translation “may you make [the name] of your son important who does what you want“ best fulfills its purpose. The words can be found in a prayer for the king. The German language also mimics the connection between “gewichtig“ and “wichtig“. The primary meaning could apparently be expanded to “to be annoying“. The passage “iw-mc Hm.wt nb.wt cxm m rA.w=cn mdw Hn.wt dnc pw r bAk.w“ is here fore a case in point, for which the translation “Lo, all female slaves are impudent with their mouth, but the speech of the mistresses is annoying for the servants“ can be proposed. The statement is probably to be understood as meaning that the speech of the mistresses is hard to bear for the servants. The concept of heaviness has therefore been raised to a psychological sense.

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19 I. Grumach, Untersuchungen zur Lebenslehre des Amenope, MÄS 23 (München-Berlin, 1972), 125
20 J. Fr. Quack, Die Lehren des Ani, Ein neuägyptischer Weisheitstext in seinem kulturellen Umfeld, OBO 141 (Freiburg/Schweiz-Göttingen, 1994), 87
22 I. Grumach, Untersuchungen zur Lebenslehre des Amenope, MÄS 23 (München-Berlin, 1972), 84
23 I. Grumach, Untersuchungen zur Lebenslehre des Amenope, MÄS 23 (München-Berlin, 1972), 86
24 Sv. A. Gülden, Die hieratischen Texte des P. Berlin 3049, KÄT 13 (Wiesbaden, 2001), 37
level. The motive has to be seen against the background of the reversal of conditions in times of political anarchy.

The primary meaning could apparently be devolved to “to be weighty”. The striking proof can be found in the passage “mdw {t} r-tr=f wSb r nw=f Swi m xAX-rA dnc rA;26 (Late Period), for which the translation “who speaks, when it is time, who answers at the right moment, who is free from hasty mouth, with weighty speech“ offers a good solution. The words are chosen to praise the honourable private person. The German expression “rhetorisches Schwergewicht” can be mentioned for comparison. The statement is probably to be explained that the man’s speech has also moral weight. The meaning “to be weighty” of “dnc” is suggested by Fischer-Elfert27 to be changed to “to be hidden”, who interprets it as alternative for “imn“ und “hrp“ in comparable texts. The abstraction could, however, go a little too far, because the famous principle “varietas delectat“ is neglected totally.

The primary meaning was apparently used to reproduce numerical large quantities. The same case could be found in the second paragraph about “wdn“.

The relevant pattern pervades the passage “ix.t wAwA.t dnc.t.i r Sa n wdB m c.t-wr.t-n.t-Hr-Ax.t.i”28 (Graeco-Roman Time), for which the translation “The products of Wawat may be in “Great-Seat-of-Harachte“ more numerous than the sand of the shore“ seems to be recommendable. In the Egyptian language, the sand served generally as synonym for countless lots of humans or things29.

The same idea is reflected in the passage “ini=i n=k … cx.t dnc m kA.w id.wt30 (Graeco-Roman Time), for which the translation “I bring you … the swamp “Bird catch”, which is densely packed with bulls and cows“ seems to be plausible. The same aspect shines through in the passage “ini=f [n=k] pH cx.t Xr mAw.t=f dnc m kA.w Hna id.wt31 (Graeco-Roman Time), for which the translation “He brings [you] the swamp area „Bird catch“ with its new land, which is densely packed with bulls and cows“ serves well. The explanation proves equally suitable in the passage “rdi(=i) n=k Scr.w wr.ti m

26 K. Kuhlmann/W.-Schelenkel, Das Grab des Ibi, Obergutsverwalters der Gottesgemahlin des Amun, Band I (Mainz, 1983), 74 u. Taf. 25
27 H.-W. Fischer-Elfert, Die Lehre eines Mannes für seinen Sohn, Eine Etappe auf dem „Gottesweg“ des loyalen und solidarischen Beamten des Mittleren Reiches, Textband, ÄgAb 60 (Wiesbaden, 1999), 196
28 St. Baumann, Schatzkammern, Ihre Dekoration und Raumkonzeption in ägyptischen Tempeln der griechisch-römischen Zeit, Teil I, SSR 19 (Wiesbaden, 2018), 284
29 H. Grapow, Die bildlichen Ausdrücke des Ägyptischen, Vom Denken und Dichten einer altorientalischen Sprache (Leipzig, 1924), 59-60
nmt=k, mxtm(t) dnc.ti m kAw\textsuperscript{32} (Graeco-Roman Time), for which the
translation „(I) give you that the animals for slaughter are numerous in your
slaughter-house and the bulls are in abundance in your cowshed“ is objectively
most correct. The problem of the development from “to be heavy” to “to be
numerous” was already tried to solve in the second paragraph.

The primary meaning could apparently evolve to “to be enormous” The
sense adheres obviously to the passage “dnc bAw=\(c\) r Dw n bIA\textsuperscript{33}, for which the
translation “More enormous is her anger than a mountain of ore“ looks
promising. The words are spoken to characterize the goddess Toeris. In this
example, the concept of heaviness is imposed on an abstract entity.

The primary meaning could apparently be amended to “to be
cumbersome”. The aspect shines through in the passage “sXAw qd.wt m c.t
mAa.t [….] dnc Dt… Dw … nDH… icmr\textsuperscript{34} (New Kingdom), for which the
translation “The pre-painter in the place of Maat […] with weighing hand…
Dw … nDH-mineral…icmr-mineral“ serves pretty well. According to Fischer-
Elfert\textsuperscript{35}, the fragment has to be interpreted to the effect that it alludes to the
strenuous work of the pre-painter by the registration of the afterwards named
minerals. The feeling of being heavy may also be caused by a certain tiredness.

The semantic spectrum of the word could apparently be expanded to “to be
high rising“. The message is clearly in the mind of the author of the passage
“Hapi im=k wcf, sAw dnc=k\textsuperscript{36} (New Kingdom), for which the translation
“Hapi, do not be to slow, but do not also be to high“ can be given. The
quotation is taken from a lesser known Nile hymn. According to Westendorf\textsuperscript{37},
the expression aims at the overabundant water masses on the inundated land.
The pressure of the water on the square centimetre of earth certainly played the
decisive role.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the Egyptian words for “light“ and
“heavy“ were metaphorically very productive. The examples range over a time
frame from the Middle Kingdom to the Graeco-Roman Period. The Old
Kingdom seems to be absent in the present material. However, the coincidence
of tradition should never be disregarded in such cases. The new creations give
a surprisingly diverse picture, such that no homogeneous system can be found.
The possibility that in some cases ad-hoc-formations exist must therefore be
calculated in. The phenomenon is far from being restricted only to the Egyptian
language. The opposite is true, for it can be observed in a number of other
oriental idioms. The following selection shall grant a first impression:

\textsuperscript{32} D. Kurth, Edfu VII, Die Inschriften des Tempels von Edfu, Abteilung I, Übersetzungen,
Band 2 (Wiesbaden, 2004), 604
\textsuperscript{33} J. Assmann, Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete (Fribourg/Göttingen,\textsuperscript{2} 1999), Anhang Nr. 2, vers 27
\textsuperscript{34} H. Goedicke, WZKM 59 (1963), 4 und Taf. VIII (Faks.)
\textsuperscript{35} H.-W. Fischer-Elfert, Lesefunde im literarischen Steinbruch von Deir el-Medineh, KÄT 12
(Wiesbaden, 1997), 57
\textsuperscript{36} H.-W. Fischer-Elfert, Literarische Ostraka der Ramessidenzeit in Übersetzung, KÄT 9
(Wiesbaden, 1986), 59
\textsuperscript{37} W. Westendorf, Beiträge aus und zu den medizinischen Texten, V. Der „lastende“ Nil und
„die Seuche des Jahres“, GM 49 (1981), 80
The Akkadian language serves as first example, where full attention has to be directed to the root “kabātu”¹. The lexica give for this root the standard meaning “to be/become heavy”¹³, where at the same time the secondary value “to be honoured”¹⁴ is hinted at. The nominal base “nakbatu”, lit. “heaviness of the army”, follows the same path, which must be understood according to von Soden¹⁵ as “tied order”. The same phenomenon can be mentioned for the Amorite language, where it is attested very well. The concentration turns there to the root KBD, the etymological relationship of which with the Akkadian “kabātu” is beyond any doubt. The common meaning of this word is “to be heavy”, the semantic shade of which could be altered to “to be honourable”¹⁶. The Hebrew language fits in here quite excellently with its root “KBD”, the meaning of which can be analyzed in the segments “to be heavy” and “to be honoured/to be important”¹⁷. In such cases, the Aramaic language shows a larger degree of individuality, which usually replaces the root “KBD” by the root “YQR”¹⁸. In contrast to this, the same situation is plainly indicated in the Hittite language¹⁹, to name a non-semitic example.

In the question of interest here, the mentioned languages have taken the same intellectual-historical direction. The series could be safely increased by targeted search. However, the present examples are enough to get a first impression. After having reached a certain cultural level, the human mind is inspired according to these examples to the same or at least similar trains of thought.

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² A. L. Oppenheim (Ed. in Charge), The Assyrian Dictionary, Volume 8, K (Chicago, 1970), 16
³ W. von Soden, Zum akkadischen Wörterbuch, 6-14 (*), Or 16 (1947), 78-79
⁴ J. J. Gelb, Computer-Aided Analysis of Amorite, Assyriological Studies No. 21 (Chicago, 1980), 22