

Original article

THE CONNOTATION OF THE EXPRESSION  $\text{r}n\text{p}t\ n\ n3\ \text{h}t\text{y}w$   
"YEAR OF THE HYENAS" IN THE LATE OF THE TWENTIETH DYNASTY

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**Abstract**

This paper sheds light on the expression  $\text{r}n\text{p}t\ n\ n3\ \text{h}t\text{y}w$  "Year of the Hyenas" as a sign of the famine that afflicted Egypt in the Late New kingdom, the related texts, and troubles in the Late Ramesside period. It also addresses the civil war during the reign of Ramses XI at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> dynasty, mainly caused by Panehsy, pharaoh's viceroy in Kush, who rebelled against the pharaoh.

**Keywords:** Famine, Civil war, Flood, Hyena, Fluctuation in prices, Late Ramesside period

**1. Introduction**

In the ancient Egyptian texts, the hyena was called  $\text{h}t\text{t}$   $\text{r}n\text{p}t$ , first appeared in the archival sources since the old kingdom period (Wb 111, 203, 16.) [1] and continued in Coptic as  $\text{xoeite}^s$ ,  $\text{xwit}^b$  [2] The Hyena (*Hyaena Hyaena*) is one of the carnivorous mammals with a fat body and a thick neck. Its forelimbs are longer than rear ones. Therefore, the body looks as if it slopes downward towards the rump. There are black stripes on both sides of the Hyena's body and has a dense mane that stands erect when it gets angry, in addition to large ears and short tail [3]. It is characterized by sharp canine teeth, large molars, and very strong jaws muscles. Therefore, the Hyena can extremely crush the bones regardless of their solidity [4]. It is well-known for its cowardliness or cautiousness, as it usually hides at

night into the villages looking for food. It attacks preys as long as it needs food. [4] Additionally, it is accustomed to living alone, hunting little animals by night. The hyena's food mainly comprises reptiles, insects, and fowls. It gets food of large mammals from the carcasses of animals killed by predators, e.g. lions and leopards. Generally, they consume the skin and the bones of the victim and tell much about hyenas they stick to keep away from these predators [5]. The hyena is a crop-damaging animal that habitually devours and kills the cattle [6]. Nowadays, it inhabits the eastern and western deserts, and Sinai Peninsula. Broadly speaking, it mainly lives in deserts, oases, and coastal areas.<sup>[3]</sup> It is fairly probable that 'Tell El-Dabaa' 'the hill of the (female) hyena' might have been given its name due to the spread of hyenas therein [7].

## 2. Hyena in the Pictorial Sources

It is noteworthy that, some remnants of the hyena's bones date to the Pleistocene, discovered in Kom ombo. In addition, some other Neolithic remnants were found in Beni Salama. Moreover, the hyena appeared on many of the predynastic inscribed objects, such as knives, seals, and pottery [3]. For example, it was depicted on an ivory label discovered in a royal tomb from Abydos (tomb *UJI*) [8]. Furthermore, the hyena appeared in the pictorial sources of the mortuary temple of *Sahure* in Abusir among other desert animals in the desert-hunting scene, wherein the king and the royal sons are hunting some tamed animals that were remarkably accompanied by the hyena, fig. (1-a) [9]. The wild and robust predator that can attack and devour humans [10]. It is worthwhile reporting that hyena's depiction was very common in the tombs of the high officials of the Old kingdom in the Memphite cemetery. For example, the hyena was depicted in the offering lists of the early or middle 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty tomb of *Nsw-nfr* in Giza (G4970) PM,III,2,143 [11]. A hyena-hunting scene also appears in the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty tomb of *Ptah-Hotep, I* in Saqqara (D 62) PM,III,2,596, [12]. Additionally, a scene of the hyena being fattened before slaughtering is depicted in some other tombs of Saqqara, e.g. the tomb of *Mereruka*, fig. (1-b) [13]; the tomb of *Inumin*, fig. (1-c) [14]; and the tomb of *Kagemni* PM,III,2,596 [15]. Similarly, the hyena was frequently depicted in the tombs of the early middle kingdom viziers and governors. It is notable that, the scene of the hyena in some of the middle kingdom tombs was actually imitating its earlier counterparts that were depicted on the walls of the mortuary temple of *Sahu Re* in Abusir [10]. This is exactly the case as in the scene of the tomb of *Sebni* in Meir that dates to the reign of *Amenmhat I* PM, 1v, 249 [16], and that of *Khnumhotep II* in Beni-Hassan that dates to the reign of *Senwesrt II* [17]. After the reign of *Senwesrt II*, hyena's

scene appeared on the tombs of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> dynasty's officials. In addition, it was preferably depicted in the tombs that date to the reigns of *Thotmosis III* and his son *Amenophis II* [18]. From this period, we come across a hyena-hunting scene in the celebrated tomb of *Rekhmere*, the vizier of *Thotmosis III*, PM,1.I,210 [19]. Furthermore, some hyena's bones were discovered scattered inside and outside the houses of the workmen in Amarna [20]. In the Ramesside period, as Ikram indicates, the hyena was neither depicted on the tombs nor other objects of the nobles. Yet it remarkably appeared in the so-called satirical vignettes on papyri and ostraca [10] e.g. the scene of hounds attacking a hyena on an ostrakon in *Cairo museum N.2726*, fig. (1-d) [21]. In addition, a depiction of the hyena offering food to a cow appears on a papyrus in *Cairo museum*, fig. (1-e) [22]. Another example can be found in the vignette of the *British museum's* papyrus (EA10016), where a hyena grazes goats, fig. (1-f) [22]. Although it was a robust wild animal, the hyena-hunting scenes on the tombs of the Old kingdom's nobles imply that it was controlled by humans [23]. However, this was not necessarily domestication of the animal, the Ancient Egyptian gradually accustomed to catch wild hyenas [24]. According to Ikram, the hyena, which was seen as a terrifying evil animal and was ranked second place after the lion in terms of power, was killed by the pharaohs, as depicted in the scene of *Sahure's* mortuary temple [10]. The symbolism of the hyena-hunting scenes stands for their representation of the evil power in deserts. By killing it, the pharaoh would overcome all the evil power and chaos, and thus maintains justice and order across the country and the cosmos, as well [10]. The nobles may have to boost their egos by hunting the hyenas as the most powerful animal after the lion. Such hunting was meant to equalize that of the lions that were carried out exclusively by the pharaohs [25].

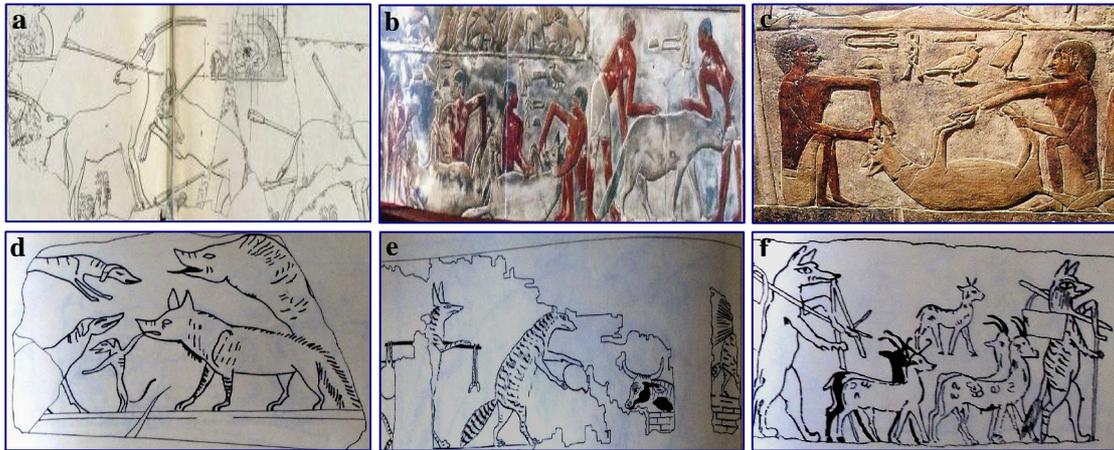


Figure (1) Shows **a.** Hyena in the desert-hunting scene among other desert animals from the mortuary temple of *Sahure* in Abusir, **b.** hand feeding a hyena, *the Mastaba of Mereruka*, Saqqara Cemetery, **c.** force-feeding of the hyena in the tomb of *Inu-min*, *Teti Cemetery*, **d.**, hyenas and saluki hounds in dispute on an *ostrakon* from Deir el medineh, Dynasty 19-20, **e.** a hyena offers food to a cow; a *papyrus* in Cairo Museum, Dynasty 19-20, **f.** hyenas graze goats; the *British museum papyrus* (EA10016) from Deir el medineh, Dynasty 19-20

### 3. Hyena in the Ramesside Period Texts

Being an evil animal, the hyena was depicted in the magical papyri, e.g. *papyrus Harris 499* in Heidelberg museum,

dating to 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty. As the text mentions in Verso I, Ll.2-3:



*Nb.t*-[t3-ḥw.t t3y=i sn].t ḥ3[<sup>c</sup>.w] n=i s3[.w r rsit=i mḥ.t]=i imnt.t=i [i3bt.t=i ḥtm.w] r3 n [m3i].w [Ht]i.w

"Nephtys my sister appeared for me (and) protected to my south, my north, my west, my east (and) closed the mouth of lions and hyenas" [26].

Furthermore, the word for hyena in the ancient Egyptian texts attested in the tomb robbery papyrus (*BM 10052*) as a part of the expression "the year of

the hyenas", which historically refers to a specific year of economic troubles. This is expressed in the tombs robbery papyrus *BM 10052*, 11,7 – 8, as follows:



*dd=w n=s n3 šnyt ih p3 šḥr n p3 ḥd i.b3kw P3 nḥsy n Sbk-m-s3=f dd=s i.ir=i in=f r-db3 it m t3 rnpt n n3 ḥty.w iw=tw ḥkr*

"They said to her (namely) the courtiers, what is the matter of the silver which *P3 nḥsy* has made to *Sbk-m-s3.f*. She said: I have brought it in exchange for grain in the year of the hyenas, (when) one was hungry" [27, 28].

### 4. Discussion

The expression *rnpt n n3 ḥt(w)*, as Spiegelberg elucidates, does not refer to a formal dating, rather it refers to some

local events of great significance [29]. As a matter of fact, the practice of using certain expressions to distinguish certain

years is not uncommon in ancient Egypt. For example, the expression "the year of the rebellion of Thinis" was used to describe the rebellion of Thinis in the reign of Monthohotep Neb-hepet-re [30]. While in Peet's view, this term expresses a famine that was not caused by the low-level inundation [31]. Moreover, this term may be used to designate foreigners in Thebes, whether Libyans or Nubians; a usage that falls into line with using *i3dt* "plague or affliction" as a designation of the Hyksos in the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty Texts [32]. This year, i.e. "the year of the hyenas", might have been given this name due to certain troubles. It might also describe the attitude and behavior of people in such bad conditions and the paucity of food, from which they were suffering so much that they were ready to eat anything even hyenas [18]. Additionally, there might be a high increase in the death rate among people and animals, insomuch as the hyenas exceedingly appeared among the

dead human bodies, animal carcasses, and inhabited areas. Therefore, they might have used this expression to illustrate the severity of the situation they experienced. Although the hyenas were desert animals only active by night, they freely walked around [33]. Toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> dynasty, some aspects of economic instability emerged in Egypt. The country experienced severe famine manifested in the inability to pay the officials' wages [34]. There were also increased migratory flows of Nubian and Libyans [35]. Furthermore, there was a lack of flooding of the Nile River in the Ramesside era, causing shortfalls of food and fluctuation in food prices [36], especially those of grain during the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty [37]. Such conditions contributed to the collapse of the New Kingdom [38]. A further reference to this famine can be found in *Turin papyrus 2083B1, 6*, dating to the reign of Ramses IX, in which the text mentions: (RI,VI,p.571).



*H3t-sp 17 3bd 2 prt sw 9 p3 n iswt p3 hr iw=sn hkr.w*

"17<sup>th</sup> year, 2<sup>nd</sup> month of the winter season, day 9, the crew of the necropolis (shouted) they are hungry".

A similar reference occurred in the tombs robbery papyrus *British Museum*

10403, p. 3, l. 4- 6, which mentions the same famine as follows:



*hr hpr.i hms.kwi hkr.tw hry n3 nhw mtw hpr n3 rmt (hr) irt šwy n bi3*

" now I happened to be sitting down hungry under the Sycamore tree, and the men chanced to be trading with copper [27, 28].

It is likely that the year mentioned in the *British Museum's papyrus no. 10052,11,7-8*, known as "a year of Hyenas", is the year (17) of Ramses IX's reign, where famine in Thebes occurred according to *Turin papyrus 2083B1, 6*. Egypt suffered from a civil war during the reign of Ramses XI at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> dynasty, mainly caused by Panehsy, pharaoh's viceroy in Kush, who rebelled against the pharaoh. This rebellion, which spread from Thebes to *Hr-di*

region (Nome 17 of upper Egypt) in the far north middle Egypt [39], and paved the way for the dominance of the priests of Amun, increased the severity of the famine and economic troubles in Egypt; known as "year of the hyenas" [40]. During this rebellion, Panehsy's troops committed all kinds of robbery, murder, and severe destruction all over the occupied territories up to the north to *Hr-di* (Kenopolis), before they returned to Nubia [41]. References to these

troubles were found in some of the contemporaneous papyri, such as papyrus Mayer A, 13, B2, which indicated that the robbers have been killed by Panehsy [31]. In addition, the tomb robbery papyrus BM 10052, 10, 18, which mentions "when the maidservant were asked about the time when she came as a servant, she said: when Panehsy destroyed *Hr-di* (Kenopolis)" [28]. Thence, the

high priest faced Panehsy in the so-called "high priest war", and fought Panehsy wherever he existed [42]. So Panehsy was possibly responsible for the tombs robbery in the Valley of the Kings. With this in mind, people of Thebes called this year as "year of the hyenas", as a historic reference to these events [41].

## 5. Conclusion

*In conclusion, the ancient Egyptians used many expressions to signify certain years by means of some specific historical events, such as economic and political troubles. One of these expressions was (year of the hyenas), which was used to indicate the economic troubles at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> dynasty, when the country went through a severe famine. Such famine was mainly caused by the civil war, which led to the spread of murder, destruction, and robbery all over upper and middle Egypt. This resulted in a sharp increase in the animal carcasses.*

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