

Original article

TWO UNPUBLISHED WOODEN LIDS NOS.1410 AND 1411 IN EL-
ASHMUNEIN MAGAZINE

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Abstract

The main purpose of this article is the publication and study of two wooden lids in El-Ashmunein Magazine. Illustrated drawings are produced for the first time. The complete text of the five columns of hieroglyphs on the lid No.1410 and of the four columns of the lid No. 1411 are the Nut formula, PT 638- 639 (sections a-d), which were incorporated later into the last part of the 178th chapter of the Book of the Dead.

Keywords: *Baboon coffin lid, Pyramid Texts, The underground galleries at Tuna el-Gebel.*

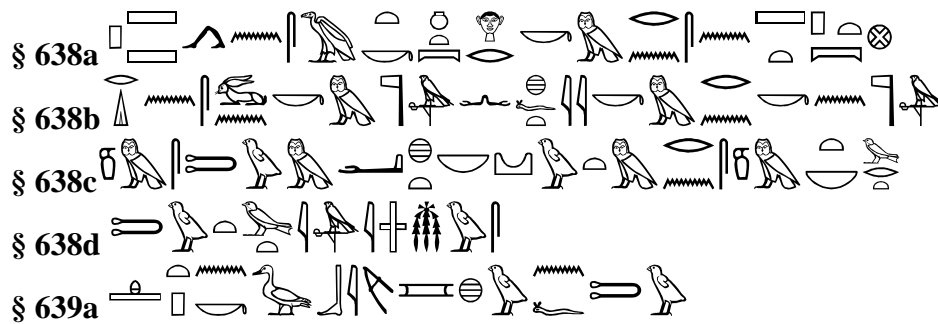
1. Introduction

The two sycamore wooden lids with which we are concerned in this paper were probably presented to El-Ashmunein Magazine by S. Gabra^(a). They were bequeathed to the museum as part of a collection of wooden objects^(b) [1] probably all made in the same carpenter's workshop since they exhibit the same style of simple vertical lines bearing of hieroglyphic texts in black ink with the Nut formula for the deceased baboon running down from the head to the foot. The exact provenance of these objects is not known; the archive of the magazine of El-Ashmunein Museum provides no information. I would suggest that the two lids in the present paper and all of the pieces in this wooden collection probably came from Hermopolis where they may have been placed as part of complete boxes for enclosing the mummified bodies of baboons in the underground Ibis Galleries at Tuna el-

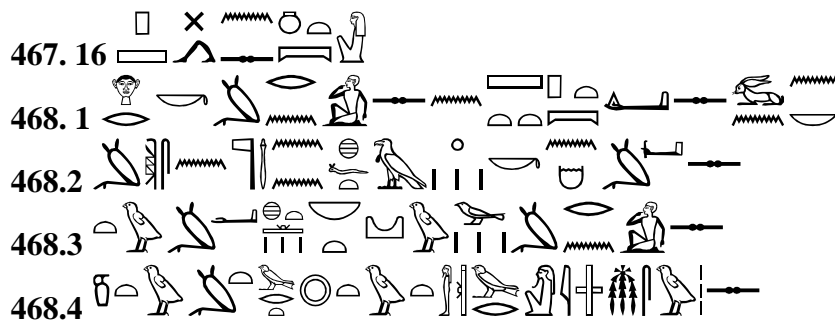
Gebel^(c) [2]. Similar burials were found at Saqqara where, after mummification, most of the upper level baboons were linen-wrapped and each was deposited in its own purpose-built rectangular wooden box without a plaster filling. The boxes were placed in niches which were sealed with limestone slabs [3,4]. These baboons were the living images of the god Thoth and therefore worshipped during their lifetimes. They were then mummified and buried in the galleries. The introductory line of the text reinforces this by saying "*Osiris of the baboon, justified*". The complete text in the five columns of hieroglyphs on the lid No.1410 and of the four columns of the lid No. 1411 is the Nut formula, PT 638- 639 (sections a-d), according to its phrasing, the sky-goddess Nut is to spread herself over the deceased as *štt-pt*, perhaps "lake-lady of the sky" and protects the deceased as the "Great Sieve". The

phrase might, specifically denote the salt lake sources for natron, Wadi Natron and /or the upper Egyptian sources near Elkab. If so, this widely-attested passage PT 638 would provide a “sacramental interpretation” for the sieving of natron over the body presumably the crucial stage in the physical treatment to preserve the body of the deceased [5]. These very popular texts were also written on non-royal coffin of Nekht-ankh and Khnum-Nekht, dating back to the 17th dynasty and discovered in their tomb in the cliffs of Deir Rifeh [6]. Another hieroglyphic version of a few portions of these texts were inscribed on two

wooden fragments with Inv. Nos. 263 and 264 in the Mallawi Museum [1]. Furthermore, they were also written on the sarcophagi Nos. 10 and 11 in Berlin Museum [7], on a later coffin lid from Hawara [8] and on about ten lids stored at present in El-Ashmunein magazine as part of a collection of wooden objects^(d). The texts of the two lids do not contain clear dating criteria, such as royal names or events, although I would suggest that they are to be dated to the end of the late period or to the early Ptolemaic period. The version of the PT 638- 639 (sections a-d) comes as follows:



The last part of the 178th chapter of the Book of the Dead comes as follows:



2. Lid No. 1410

2.1. Description

This piece is of light brown wood of good quality, fig (1-a, b). Its dimensions are as follow: height 49 cm width 43 cm and thickness varying between 3 and 4 cm. Six peg holes were made in its edges, two of them still filled with wooden dowels. So it is immediately clear that this was the method used to attach the lid to the rest of the coffin^(e) [9]. A vertical break which makes its shape slightly

trapezoid is clearly visible on the left side. One side of the lid bears five clear handwritten vertical lines of inscriptions from the upper to the lower edge. The vertical lines are framed by five vertical black lines. The other side bears one *nfr* hieroglyph. This may have been merely the ancient scribe testing his brush after first dipping it in the black ink, since the single glyph was written on the hard surface and is not seen on the

corresponding lids. It could possibly have been written on purpose to determine that the mummified baboon is male or he is regarded as a beautiful

one. The characteristic neatness and regularity of the chirography make the signs easily legible.

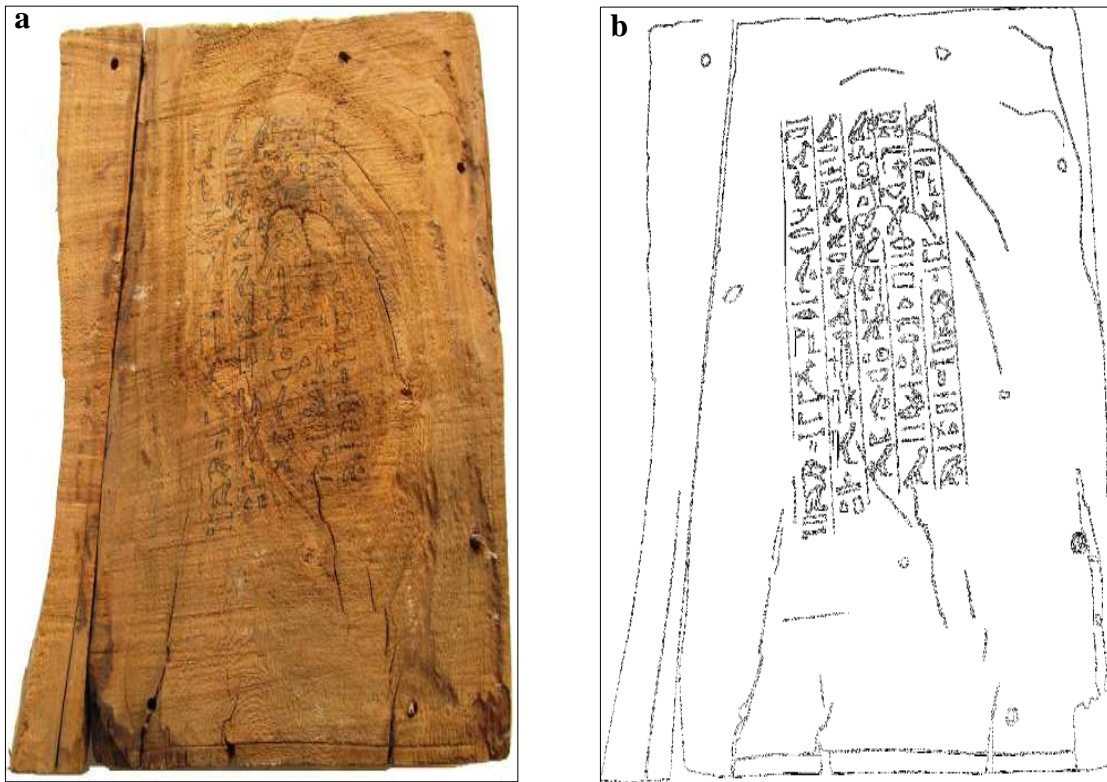


Figure (1) Shows **a** lid No. 1410. Photograph. **b** lid drawing by the author.

2.2. The Hieroglyphic inscriptions



2.3. Transliteration and translation

- *dd mdw Wsir p3* ^(I)ny m3^c-hrw ^(II)psš.t. s mwt.
- *.k Nwt* ^(III)hr.k m rn.s n Št3-pt ^(IV)rdi.t.s wn.k m.
- *ntr* ^(V)n hftyw ^(VI).k hnm ^(VII).s tw m-^c ht nb dw ^(VIII).
- *m rn.s n Hnm-wrt* ^(IX)twt wr imy msw.s htp.
- *n.k Gb mry.f tw Wsir p3* ^(X)ny m3^c-hrw.

- Words spoken, Osiris (of) the baboon, justified, your mother Nut spreads herself.
- over you in her name of Sheta-pet. She causes you to be.
- a god, without enemies against you. She defends you from all evil things.
- in her name Khnmet-wert. You are the eldest of her children, Geb is
- satisfied with you. He loves you (oh) Osiris (of) the baboon, justified.

2.4. Textual commentary

(I) *Wsir p3 ʕny m3ʕ-hrw*, There is only little variation of this formula displayed on different lids from Saqqara as shown, *Wsir iʕh* or *Wsir-Hp*[10] and also *Wsir p3 hb m3ʕ-hrw* [2]. ʕny is twice spelled upon the lids Nos. 1404 and 1411^(f) [11-14]. (II) *psš.t*, is a verb which can be translated as “to spread out”^(g) [11,15]. It occurs already in the Pyramid Texts and refers mainly to the goddess Nut who acts as the protectress of the deceased king^(h, i) [16]. This verb is also found associated with Nut in many examples from the Book of the Dead^(j, k, l) [17]. The Sarcophagus itself is the goddess Nut [18,19]. (III) *Mwt.k Nwt* is a funerary title reflecting the goddess Nut as the universal cradle for the resurrection after death, protecting, nursing and bearing the deceased baboon [20]. In Pyramid Texts^(m) [16], coffin texts⁽ⁿ⁾ [21] and the Book of the Dead^(o) [22], she is said to be the enfolding and hugging mother of the deceased pharaoh, a union that euphemistically denies death, transferring the king’s existence from the terrestrial mortal world to the celestial divine realm of gods, whose mother [*mw.t ntrw*] was considered to be Nut [20]. The sky goddess as the body from which all life

originated, and to which all returned. The Pyramid texts repeatedly refer to Nut as giving birth as well as receiving the dead [23]. (IV) *Št3-pt*, is a proper name of the goddess Nut that occurs twice in the Pyramid Texts as *Št-pt*^(p) [16]. In the Book of the Dead it occurs as *Štt-pt*^(q) [22]. On two lids from El-Ashmunein magazine it occurs as *Št3-pt*^(r). Naville translated it as “Veil of the Sky” [24], whereas Allen T. G., gave the translation “the goddess of the Wadi Natrun oasis” [17]. (V) In the Book of the Dead, this line is as follows: “She makes you as a follower of the great god” [17]. (VI) *Hftjw*, plural strokes are clearly written upon the lids Nos. 1398, 1401 and 1411. (VII) The parallel of the Book of the Dead uses the verb *nḥm* “to save”^(s) [11] instead of *hnm* as follows: *nḥm.s tw m-ʕ ht nb dw*. “she saves you from everything evil”. (VIII) *dw*, this reading involves a reversal of signs which may be acceptable in view of the second lid No.1411. (IX) *Hnm.t-wrt*, this epithet is attested and mentioned for Nut in the Pyramid Texts^(t) [16], Coffins Texts^(u) [21] and Book of the Dead [22], it was written later as *Hnm.t-wrt*, meaning a sieve, indicating that the sky came to be thought of as resembling a huge sieve [25].

3. Lid No. 1411

3.1. Description

The dimensions of this lid are: height 50 cm, width 46 cm, thickness varying between 3 to 4 cm as shown in fig (2-a, b). Nine peg holes were made in its edges, seven of which are still filled with wooden dowels. It bears four handwritten vertical lines of inscriptions from the upper to the lower edge. The vertical lines are framed only by one

horizontal black line at the top. However, the inscribed surface is slightly crude and this creates difficulties in reading some signs, particularly at the top of the second column and in the middle and lower part of the third column. Comparisons with the previous lid show that all the signs clearly belong to the same PT 638- 639

(sections a-d). The only difference between the two lids is the chirography. This change dramatically into a much

more cursive script and several signs are awkwardly written. The reverse is even more irregular.

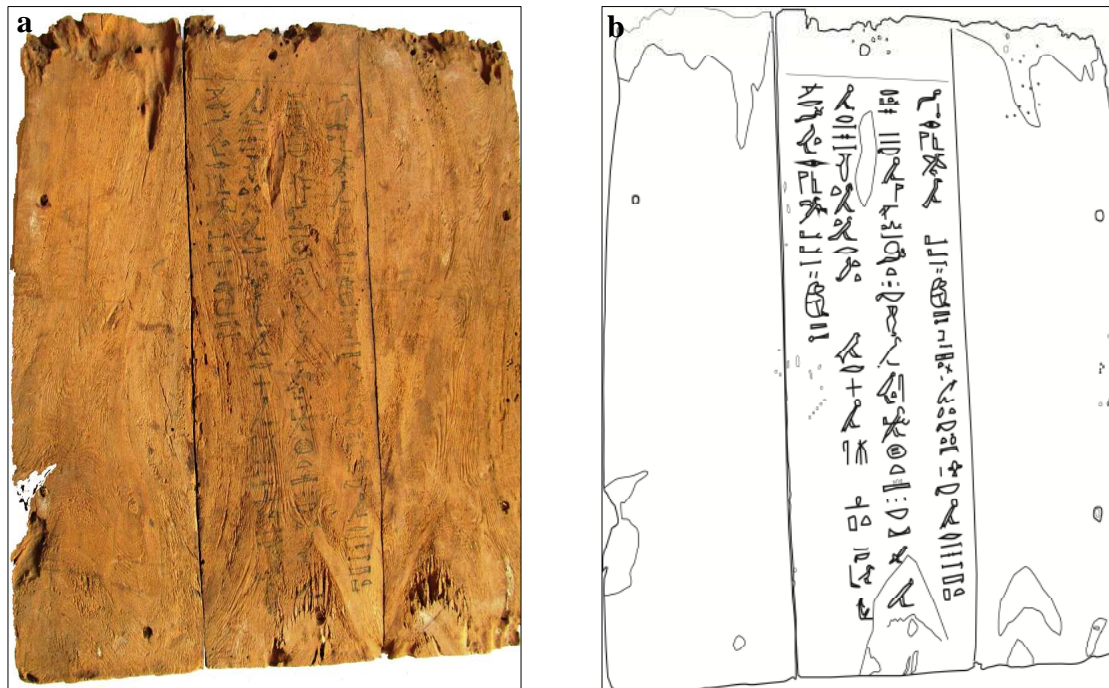
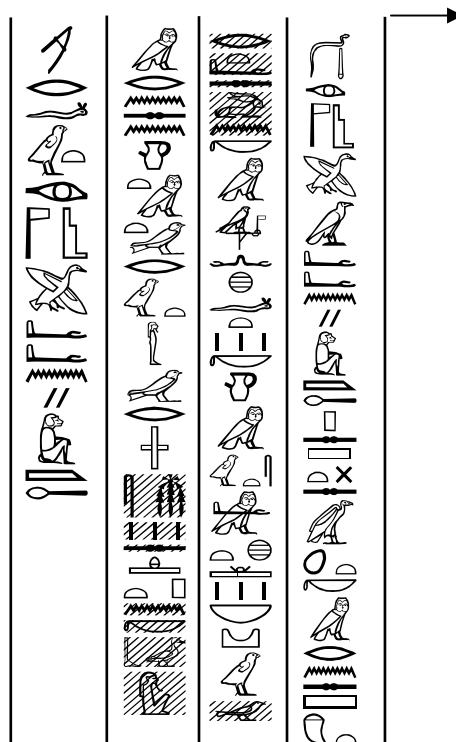


Figure (2) Shows **a** lid No. 1411. Photograph. **b** lid drawing by the author.

3.2. The Hieroglyphic inscriptions



3.3. Transliteration and translation

- *dd mdw Wsir p3* ^cny m3^c-hrw psš.t.s mwt.k Nwt hr.k m rn.s n Št3[-pt]^(X).
- *rdi.t.s wn.k m ntr*^(XI) n hfytw.k hnm.s tw m-^c ht nb dw^(XII).
- *m rn.s n Hnm-wrt twt wr imy msw.s htp.n.k Gb*^(XIII).
- *mry.f tw Wsir p3* ^cny m3^c-hrw.

- *Words spoken, Osiris (of) the baboon, justified, your mother Nut spreads herself over you in her name of Sheta [-pet].*
- *she causes you to be a god, without enemies against you, she defends you from all evil things.*
- *in her name Khnmet-wert. You are the eldest of her children, Geb is satisfied with you.*
- *he loves you (oh) Osiris (of) the baboon, justified".*

3.4. Textual commentary

(X) *Št3-[pt]*, here the text seems to have omitted the second part of Nut's name, *pt* (N1) judging by the other lids in this collection and by comparisons with the version in the Book of the Dead. (XI) *Ntr*, the scribe has omitted the divine determinative of the falcon upon the standard (G7) in this line-

based on the previous lid.(XII) *dw*, despite the slightly crude surface remains, traces of a bird sign (G37) are visible at the end of this line. (XIII) *Msw.s htp.n.k Gb*, there are traces of damaged signs at the end of this line which are clearer in the more complete text of the previous lid.

4. Results

- * The two lids are from the coffins of sacred baboons which were brought from all over Egypt to be laid to rest in the subterranean galleries at Tuna el-Gebel. They may be from gallery C.
- * The paleography and distinctive orthography of the two lids point to the early Ptolemaic period.
- * Quoted protective spells from the Pyramid Texts are inscribed on the

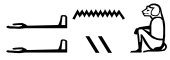


surfaces of the two lids and on variant lids in El-Ashmunein Magazine.

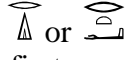
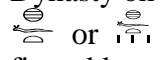
- * The deceased baboon is analogous to Osiris lying both as a mummy in the Duat and as the force of rebirth in Nut's womb which is the embodiment of the sarcophagus itself [19].
- * The shared features of the two lids suggest that they were produced in a single workshop and inscribed by the same scribe.


5. Discussion & Conclusion

The two lids with hieroglyphic inscriptions described in this paper are introduced and concluded with mortuary formula of the deceased baboon as follows: *Wsir p3 ʿny m3ʿ hrw*. None of the texts are inscribed with the name of a reigning pharaoh


and therefore they can be dated only by internal criteria or by imprecise indications in the handwriting. The vocabularies of the two lids are essentially Old Egyptian mixed with Middle and Late Egyptian orthography. Examples of these are presented below:

- *  This word is of a date from the 22nd dynasty onwards^(v) [1,11,12].
- *  This word with two strokes crossed is typically Middle Kingdom^(w) [11,26].
- *  This abbreviated writing is typically late^(x) [7,8, 11, 27, 28].

- *  are two varied writings; the first one is typically of Old Kingdom^(z) [11,16, 29], but the other one is of a date from the 22nd Dynasty onwards^(aa) [7, 8,11, 30].
- *  are variant writings; the first abbreviated one is typical of the Old Kingdom^(bb) [11, 16] but the other one exhibiting plural strokes is of a date from the 22nd Dynasty onwards^(cc) [7, 8, 11].

*  The 2nd person singular independent pronoun *twt* is characteristic of the PT ^(dd) [16].

The two texts focus on the goddess Nut, who stretches her body protectively over the corpse of the mummified baboon in her name Shet-pet, This imagery is seen in the texts and depictions of her with protective wings on numerous sarcophagi dating from various periods where she is always the defender against everything evil so that a god would have no enemies in her name of “*Khnmet-wert*”. The deceased baboon is analogous to Osiris lying both as a mummy in the Duat and as the force of rebirth in Nut’s womb, which is embodiment of the sarcophagus itself. In the texts studied here the deceased is addressed not only by a name or an epithet but also as Osiris himself as, “Osiris of the baboon” [19], he was therefore the son of Geb and Nut as cited previously. This vision lay behind the ancient

*  is characteristic writing of the PT ^(ee) [16].

Egyptian concept of the afterlife. Coherent evidence shows that no mistakes were made in writing the two inscriptions, apart from inattention in the first column of the second lid where the name of Shet-pet is written with only the first signs of the group and in the second column where the divine determinative of the falcon (G7) on the standard was omitted (G7). Despite these points, the small number of grammatical errors together with the careful handwriting demonstrates the work of a competent scribe. The same style, context, handwriting and peg holes with wooden dowels in the edges used as a stretching technique make it easier to imagine that they were produced in a single workshop and inscribed by the same scribe, suggesting that they date back to the same period.

Endnotes

- (a) I am very grateful to professor Piers Lither land, Director of the New Kingdom Research Foundation and professor Michael Jones, American Research Center in Egypt, for their careful reading and for their many useful corrections and insightful comments.
- (b) This collection bears inventory numbers as follows: 1369, 1395, 1397, 1398, 1399, 1400, 1401, 1404, 1405, 1407, 1409, 1410, 14011. Add to that two wooden lids from Mallawi Museum Nos. 263-264, see Zaghoul, El., (1994). An Ancient Egyptian pyramid text on two wooden fragments from the Mallawi Museum, *MDAIK*, 50, pp. 307-308, plate 52 (a-b).
- (c) The same feature is regularly found in one lid from Tuna el- Gebel with a hieroglyphic and a demotic inscription, see Mark, D., (2010). Words Spoken by Osiris or the Ibis? An Ibis box with a Hieroglyphic Inscription in the Macquarie University Museum of Ancient Cultures, *ZÄS*, 137(2), pp.98-103. Add to that some items of these wooden collection bear fire effects that were happened exclusively in the subterranean galleries of Tuna el-Gebel.
- (d) Beside this collection there are some wooden lids bear hieratic and demotic inscriptions still unpublished till now.
- (e) As a technique also used in human wooden coffins see, for example, Elzbieta, D.S. (1968). Coffins found in the area of the Temple of Tuthmosis III at Deir el-Bahari, *BIFAO* 66, p.174.
- (f) Wb, I, 41 (7-8); LGG, I, 136. For variant baboon-names from Tuna el-Gebel see, Kessler, D., (1989). Die heiligen Tiere und der König, Teil 1: Beiträge zu Organisation, Kult und Theologie der spätzeitlichen Tierfrie-

- dhöfe, *ÄAT*, 16, Wiesbaden, pp. 211-216; Boylan, P., (1922). *Thoth, the Hermes of Egypt*, Oxford University press, London, pp. 173-200.
- (g) Wb, I, 560 (13-16); Lesko, Dictionary, I, I57.
- (h) PT, §580a. For the similar spell see, §638d.
- (i) PT, §825a.
- (j) Allen, T. G. BD, 168 a.
- (k) Allen T. G., BD, 168 b.
- (l) Allen, T. G. BD, 178O.
- (m) See for instance, PT, § 1a, 2a; §441b; §580c; §616d; §626b; §638d; §825a; §827b; §838a; §842d.
- (n) CT, VII, 3g-j.
- (o) BD, 181, 6.
- (p) PT, 580c; M.A. Murray, Op. cit, Pl. 19; The parallel from the Papyrus W.551 Column 7, 1.
- (q) BD, 468, 1.
- (r) Lids Nos. 1396, 1400, still unpublished till now.
- (s) Wb. II 295 (12)-297 (4).
- (t) PT, §827c; §834c; §838a; §842d; §1608a.
- (u) CT, VII, 9u.
- (v) Zaghoul, El., (1994). An Ancient Egyptian pyramid text on two wooden fragments from the Mallawi Museum, *MDAIK*, 50, p. 308; Wb, I, 41 (5); LGG, I, 136.
- (w) Wb, I, 560(13).
- (x) Wb, II, 15 (3). For close parallel texts see, El-Sayed, R. (1978) *BIFAO* 78 pp.461-464-465.
- (z) Wb, II, 464 (4); PT§ 638b; Urk, I, 35, 12.
- (aa) Wb, II, 464 (2).
- (bb) Wb, III, 276 (12); PT§ 638b
- (cc) Wb, III, 277 (2).
- (dd) PT § 638d.
- (ee) PT § 639a.

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