Connotation of Some Words in Story of Adultery in Westcar Papyrus

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Abstract

This thesis presumes that some words in the tale of adultery from Westcar Papyrus have connotation that express symbolic idea besides their direct meaning in the context. For example the unfaithful wife of priest Ubainer sent ḫbsw “clothes” to the commoner. The word ḫbsw with letter t forming ḫbswt means “wife” and “concubine”. Therefore sending the clothes might symbolize idea of the wife who offered herself as a paramour to the commoner. Word ḫrt-m-ḥt “after” was used in sentences that followed the immoral meeting of the adulterers. The first part ḫr in word ḫr-m-ḥt means “to fall” indicates idea of the commoner who fell in the sin of committing adultery with a married woman. Word sspt “pavilion” comprised sign of fence used to surround houses to keep intruders away. Probably this refers to idea of the wife who removed obstacles to let the commoner reach her easily. The word mṣḥ n mnḥ “crocodile of wax” expressed the feelings of the priest Ubainer and his desire to revenge. The wife received brutal punishment of being burnt in ṣdw “field” and this was due to the equation between a married woman and fertile agricultural land.

Key Words: Adultery - Connotations - Words - Symbolic Ideas.

Introduction

The second story in Westcar Papyrus was narrated by Prince Khaefre to his father king Khufu about a priest named Ubainer whose wife had committed adultery with a commoner. For the synopsis, during absence of Ubainer who was accompanying king Nebka, his wife sent her maid-servant to give the commoner chest of clothes. The commoner came to the wife and they spent their times together in Ubainer’s pavilion. At night the commoner used to take bath in the lake garden after leaving the pavilion until he was seen by the house supervisor who went to tell Ubainer. Ubainer used his magical ability to fashion crocodile of wax and he ordered the house supervisor to throw it in the lake after the commoner. After fulfilling Ubainer’s order the wax crocodile was transformed into a real one and it captured the commoner for seven days in the lake depth. When Ubainer returned with king Nebka, he summoned the crocodile which released the commoner. Then Ubainer told the king about what the commoner had done with his wife. Consequently King Nebka ordered the crocodile to seize the commoner and
commanded to take the unfaithful wife to a field where she was burnt and her corpse was thrown in the river ¹.

Among the interesting opinions concerning this marvelous story, the brutal methods of punishing the adulterers intended to destroy them completely in the afterlife ²; although the deceived husband in his honor was having right to take revenge but the death penalty was only executed by the king as occurred in the story ³; the crocodile deprived the commoner from obtaining breath and detained him for seven days in the lake depth without eating him was because of its nature represented in drowning victims and preserving them as food ⁴; literally, there are words-play between msh “crocodile”, mnḥ “wax” and mḥ “seize” which are related with the commoner annihilation ⁵; the wife’s corpse was thrown in the river to be captured by the crocodile as happened to her lover ⁶; Ubainey was considered as having power over life when he caused the crocodile let loose the commoner and the crocodile itself was association with resurrection ⁷ and according to an interpretation Ubainey was equated with the Twelfth Dynasty King Snusert when he annihilated his enemies ⁸ because the story in Westcar Papyrus was suggested to display historical characters in symbolic way ⁹.

It is noticed that the author did not use direct words like ḫnḫ “to copulate” ¹⁰ and ḫsdṁ “to lay with” ¹¹ to express the act of committing adultery between Ubainey’s wife and the commoner which is only understood through the context. Beside, the brutal punishments against the unfaithful wife and the commoner were not actually executed in real life ¹². Therefore this study presupposes that the author had used some

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³ Eyre, “ Fate, Crocodile and the Judgment of the Dead”, p. 7.
⁶ Eyre, “ Fate, Crocodile and the Judgment “, p. 113.
⁸ H. Jennie, “ Der Papyrus Westcar “ in SÄK 25, 1998, p. 120.
words with certain connotation besides their direct meanings as a literal method to present symbolic meanings to the minds’ readers.

The selected words are represented in 𓊊𓊂𓊤𓊠 hbsw “clothes”, 𓊏𓊂𓊤 wbxyt “Maid-Servant”, 𓊊𓊤 hr-m-ḥt “after”, 𓊏𓊤 sspt “pavilion”, 𓊊𓊤 swr “drink”, 𓊊𓊤 hmst “sit”, 𓊊𓊤 msḥ n mnḥ “crocodile of wax”, 𓊊𓊤 mh “seize”, 𓊊𓊤 hmt “wife” and 𓊏𓊤 sdw “field”.

I. Word 𓊊𓊂𓊤 hbsw “clothes”.

The wife of Ubainer sent her maid-servant to give the commoner 𓊊𓊂𓊤 hbsw “clothes” 15. As being thought, the wife planned to give them to the commoner so he would visit her to show his gratitude 16. Perhaps giving clothes to lowly man was a seductive method performed by bad woman in ancient Egypt to have love affair with him as witnessed in tale of the “Two Brothers” when the wicked wife of Anubis demanded from his younger brother Bata to sleep with her in return of making two beautiful garments for him 17.

It seems interesting to suggest two connotations concerning the word hbsw “clothes” according to following hypothesis:-

I. The first three letters hbs with letter y and t forming hbsyt and with the two letters w and t beside determinative of a seating woman hbswt gives meanings of “wife” and “concubine” 18. In the Middle Kingdom letter of Hekanakhte he commanded his household to give good treatment to his hbswt “concubine” 19 and not to make any sexual contact with her 20. These might lead to think that sending hbsw

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17 Simpson, Literature of Ancient Egypt, p.3 and footnote 8 and Parys, Papyrus Westcar, p. 89.


19 James, Hekanakhte Papers, p. 17 and Ward, Feminine Titles of the Middle Kingdom, p. 65.

“clothes” carried symbolic idea about the wife of Ubainer who offered herself as a paramour to the commoner.

II. The word hbs with determinative of a seating man means “veiled priest” 21. It is believed that the wife had taken the clothes from wardrobe of her husband the priest Ubainer 22. Probably the wife wanted from the commoner to wear the priestly costume of her husband with a veil covering his face so no one from the house-servants would recognize his real identity when he comes to the house of Ubainer with the maid-servant.

II. Word wb3yt “maid-servant”.

The wb3yt “maid-servant” 23 was the mean of communication between the wife and the commoner. She delivered the clothes to the commoner 25 and most probably she revealed the wife’ desire to have his company. Then the commoner came to the house with the maid-servant.

Looking to the phonogram of first part of word maid-servant represented in wb3yt it separately means “to open” 26. This might have relation with role of maid-servant as the one who enabled the commoner enter Ubainer’s house to meet the wife.

III. Word hr-m-ht “after”

When the commoner came to the wife in the house of Ubainer a sentence stated:-

hr-m-ht hrww sw3(w) hr nn 28

“After days had passed after this” 29

The same word hr-m-ht was used in another two sentences when the commoner leaved the pavilion after spending his sinful moments with the wife to take his bath in the lake garden:

hr-m-ht m3r w3pr w3t pw ir.n.f 31

21 Wb 3, 66.21.
26 Wb 1, 290.1-291.7.
28 Bagnato, Westcar Papyrus, p. 25 and Parys, Papyrus Westcar, p. 27.
29 Parys, Papyrus Westcar, p. 27.
“After it had become evening, he came out”  

The word hr-m-ht includes sign of a man in position of falling and its first part hr itself means “to fall” and its first part hr is also inscribed as without sign of a falling man and as m-ht without hr.

Thus hr expresses concept of the author who wanted to present symbolic idea of the commoner had fallen in act of committing adultery with a married woman which was a great sin in ancient Egypt. This was clearly shown in chapter 125 from Book of Coming Forth by the Day when the deceased confirmed that he did not make sexual relation with married woman. In addition, Ptah-hotep in his instructions advised men to avoid having sexual relation with married women.

From another point sign of the falling man was used as determinative in word to drown. These might also refer to the terrible fate that awaits the commoner represented in being taken by the crocodile into the lake depth as happened in the story.

IV. Word ssp “pavilion”.

Ubainer’s wife fulfilled request of the commoner to spend their enjoyable times in the sspt “pavilion” of Ubainer. Indeed Ubainer was supposed to spend his private times with his wife inside this pavilion. According to an opinion the word sspt has allusion with the affair between the wife and the commoner because it was derived from the verb ssp “to receive” and “to take” that also refers to making sexual relation.

As clearly shown, the word sspt includes fence sign and determination of a house plan. These illustrates fence which surrounds house to keep privacy of its inhabitants and to secure them from the introducers. Thus the word sspt might refer in indirect way to idea of the unfaithful wife who surrendered to her lustful desires that led her to remove

32 Parys, Papyrus Westcar, p. 27.
34 Wb 3, 319-321.5.
35 Wb 3, 346.2.
38 Wb 1, 235.
39 Simpson, Literature of Ancient Egypt, p. 15 and 16.
41 Parys, Papyrus Westcar, p. 27.
42 Simpson, Literature of Ancient Egypt, p. 15.
43 Parys, Papyrus Westcar, p. 89 no. 12.
44 Allen, Middle Egyptian, p. 440, sign O42.
45 Allen, Middle Egyptian, p. 439, sign O1.
all obstacles before the commoner and to permit him reach her in the private place of her husband.

V. Words 𓊠𓊢𓊪𓊣 “drinking” and 𓊦𓊬𓊣 “commoner”.

The word 𓊠𓊢𓊪𓊣 “drinking” was used in a sentence to portray the indecent behavior of Ubainer’s wife with the commoner inside the pavilion 46:

\[wrš.n.s hr swr ] hm\(\)c p3 nds\] 48

“She spent the day there drinking with the commoner” 49.

It seems interesting to hint certain contradiction in the previous sentence between the words 𓊠𓊢𓊪𓊣 “drinking” and 𓊦𓊬𓊣 “commoner”. The word 𓊠𓊢𓊪𓊣 “drinking” includes fork-tailed sparrow 50 which was used as phonogram for wr that means “great” 51. On the other hand, the word nds “commoner” has determinative of sparrow with rounded tail 𓊬 that indicates “small” and “bad” 52.

Thus the two words swr and nds might lead to think that the wife through drinking with the commoner had promoted his position through giving him irresistible chance to enjoy the luxurious life of her husband Ubainer. This hypothesis can indicated through the word swr through dividing first three letters swr into s-causative and word wr “great”. Both the s and wr forming swr means “to increase” and “to make great” 53.

VI. Word 𓊱𓊨𓊦 “sit”

The wife of Ubainer ordered the garden supervisor to prepare the pavilion for her staying:

\[sspd tw t3 šspt ntt m p3 s mk.wi ii.kwi r ] hmst im.s\] 55

“Let the pavilion that is in the garden be prepared since I am coming to sit in it” 56.

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46 Simpson, Literature of Ancient Egypt, p. 15.
48 Parys, Papyrus Westcar, p. 27.
49 Parys, Papyrus Westcar, p. 27.
50 Allen, Middle Egyptian, p. 434, sign G36.
51 Wb 1, 328.14- 329-18.
52 Allen, Middle Egyptian, p. 434, sign G37 and p. 5.
53 Wb 4,70,2-23.
54 Blackman, Kheops and the Magicians, p. 3, lines 7-8;3,7-3,8 and Parys, Papyrus Westcar, p. 28.
55 Bagnato, Westcar Papyrus, p. 25 and Parys, Papyrus Westcar, p. 29.
56 Bagnato, Westcar Papyrus, p. 27 and Parys, Papyrus Westcar, p. 29.
The word *hmst* might have certain allusion with the wife’s irresistible desire to have sexual relation with the commoner inside the pavilion. This is because word *hms* with determinative of male sexual organ means “phallus”.

**VII. Words** 

When the priest *Ubainer* knew about what the commoner had done with his wife, he became angry and used his magical abilities to fashion a *crocodile of wax*. The crocodile incarnated terror and it was the punisher against sinners. For the wax was thought to have magical power for being associated with the Sun god Re. The wax was also symbol of total extermination because of being used by the ancient Egyptian magicians to make figures to destroy the enemies because of its elasticity.

It seems interesting from dramatic view to assume that both words *msh* “crocodile” and *mnH* “wax” have certain connotations with feelings of *Ubainer* in moment of knowing what the commoner had committed with his wife.

Starting with word *msh* “crocodile”, perhaps it reflected the outrage of *Ubainer* because this animal was closely connected with rage and its image was used as determinative in word “to become angry.” Associating the crocodile with angry feelings is witnessed in the “Tale of Blinding the Truth” when the frustrated son threatened to summon the crocodile against his mother in the presence of her family because she caused his blinded father to work as a doorkeeper and denied his fatherhood.

For the wax, its letters *mnH* with knife determinative means “to slay”. This might refer to *Ubainer’s* internal desire to slaughter the commoner who copulated with his wife. According to this assumption, *Ubainer* can be equated with *Anubis* in tale of the “Two Brothers” when he became angry like a southern panther and took sharp knife to

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57 *Wb* 3, 99.8.
62 Eyre, “Fate, Crocodile and the Judgment”, p. 112-113.
70 *Wb* 2, 84.2.
kill his brother Bata because he sexually assaulted his wife as she claimed. This reaction suits the writing of Diodorus about emasculating the man who made sexual relation with a married woman.

VII. Word $\text{mh}$ “seize”.

The wax crocodile after being thrown in the garden lake, it was transformed into a real monster to snatch the commoner:

$$\text{mh} \ n.f \ m \ p3 \ nds$$

“It seized the commoner”.

The verb $\text{mh}$ “seize” suits the common saying “Retribution of the work type”. This idea can be figure through the other negative aspect of the crocodile as symbol of greediness for its image was used as determinative in words with meaning of gluttony like $\text{hnti}$ and $\text{skn}$. The obscene behaviors of the commoner made him like a crocodile because he had usurped the life of Ubainer through copulating with his wife, enjoying his luxurious times inside his pavilion and moreover he habitually took bath in the garden lake while receiving the service of the maid-servant. Therefore the verb $\text{mh}$ represented the perfect revenge of Ubainer because as the commoner pleasurably enjoyed sinful moments with Ubainer’s wife he reached extreme stage of fear and panic when he was captured by the crocodile for seven day symbol of completeness until the return of Ubainer with king Nebka.

VIII. Words $\text{hmt}$ “Wife” and $\text{sdw}$ “Field”.

King Nebka ordered to take the wife of Ubainer to a “field” in order to burn her as stated in the following sentence:

71 Simpson, Literature of Ancient Egypt, p. 84.
75 Bagnato, Westcar Papyrus, p. 27 and Parys, Papyrus Westcar, 2017, p. 31.
76 Vernus, Bestiaire des pharaons, p. 51.
77 Wb 3, 121.12-13; Faulkner, Concise Dictionary, p. 173
78 Wb 4, 318.9-10; Faulkner, Concise Dictionary, p.251.
79 Wb 4, 318.9-10; Faulkner, Concise Dictionary, p.251.
80 Simpson, Literature of Ancient Egypt, p. 15.
82 Blackman, Kheops and the Magicians, p. 4, lines 14-15: 4,8-4,10 and Parys, Papyrus Westcar, p. 34.
"the wife of Ubainer is taken away to the northern field of the residence and he (=the king) set fire in her" 84.

There might be an inquiry about the reason of burning the wife in a field. The answer can be explained through the allusion of words hmt “wife” and sdw field according to the author’s concept.

The word hmt “wife” includes the vulva image 85 and with determinative of cow’s uterus 86 it means “womb” 87. This might lead to symbolically regard the “wife of Ubainer” as the vessel which was supposed to receive the semen of her husband to become pregnant. This was expressed in the wife’s title hmt tby “married woman” 88 which included vulva image in hmt and male organ with fluid followed by a man in tby. In addition both instructions of Hordjedef from the Old Kingdom and Ani from the New Kingdom recommend to take woman as wife to give a child 89.

Concerning the word sdw “field”, remarkably with determinative of meat piece 89 it gives meaning of “vulva”. These might lead to make equation between the married woman and the fertile land. According to this, the commoner in his copulation with Ubainer’s wife and putting his semen inside her womb is like a peasant who implants his agricultural land with seeds. This hypothesis can be indicated in the following aspects:

- The verb sDAm with determinative of penis with liquid 92 had been used with two meanings represented in “to make land fertile” 93 and “to lie with a woman” 94.
- The verb TAm “to fertilize an agricultural land” ends with determinative of penis with the liquid 95.
- A text described the wife as fertile land in the Maxims of Ptah-hoteP 96. Also in an Amarna letter, prince of Byblos identified his field which is not ploughed with an unmarried woman 97.

84 Bagnato, Westcar Papyrus, p. 28; Simpson, Literature of Ancient Egypt, p. 16 and Parys, Papyrus Westcar, p. 35 and p. 99 no. 45.
85 Allen, Middle Egyptian, p. 430 sign D280a.
86 Allen, Middle Egyptian, p. 432 sign F45.
87 Wb 3, 76.1-3.
88 Wb 3, 77.16.
90 Allen, Middle Egyptian, p. 433 sign F51.
91 Wb 4, 566.14.
92 Allen, Middle Egyptian, p. 430, sign D 53.
93 Wb 4, 380.2.
94 Wb 4, 381.1.
95 Wb 4, 357.7.
(d) Hymn no. 90 in Leiden Papyrus I 350 stated that the wife of the god is like fertile land.

(e) In tale of the Two Brothers, the word prt “seed” is written as with determinative of penis although it was usually written as with determinative of grains.

(f) The word mi “seed” has determination of penis with liquid.

(g) An inscription in the Cairo Museum mentioned the justification of a man who assured that he never touched a wife of a man and never plundered his field.

According to the previous aspects, it seems reasonable to realize that the field where the burning punishment was executed has symbolic allusion of regarding the fornicated wife as an agricultural land which was decayed because of being filled with rotten seeds.

Conclusions:

The story of adulterers might be considered a unique literary work for the author used words with connotations to present symbolic ideas to the readers’ minds about the act of committing adultery instead of using direct sentences. This literary method was because the story was narrated in the royal court by prince Khaefre to his father king Khufu. So the sentences should be decent because it is not reasonable to hear the kings using impolite and obscene language. As a result the following words might be believed to carry symbolic ideas and connotations beside their direct meanings in the context:

A- Act of sending hbsw “clothes” to the commoner is a symbolic invitation from the wife to have a love affair with the commoner.

B- The word wbA “to open” in the name of the wbAyt “maid-servant” referred to her role acting as point of connection between the wife and the commoner and she made path or opened way for the commoner to reach the wife.

C- The word hr “to fall” in first part of hr-m-ht “after” incarnated idea of the commoner who became a fallen man because he committed adultery with the married woman instead of directly stating that he copulated her which is considered immoral

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98 Pehal, Analysis of the Tale of the Two Brothers, p. 104.


100 Wb 1, 530. 9 and 531.4.

101 Allen, Middle Egyptian, p. 437, sign M 33.

102 Wb 2, 36, 4-5.

103 Shupak, “ Female Imagery in Proverbs ”, p. 321 footnote 42.
sentence said by a prince to a king. This idea is also fulfilled through the word *lmst “sitting” for it expressed the insatiable wife who surrendered to her sexual desire and to enjoy the sinful moments with the commoner.

D- The fence sign in word *špt “pavilion” indirectly referred to the unfaithful wife who betrayed her husband and dishonored him through allowing her lover to reach her easily. This might suit the common concept about the unfaithful wife who would deceive her husband even if he imprisoned her behind fortified door. On the other hand the noble woman with grand ethics is the one who preserve honor of her husband during his absence.

E- The words *swr “to drink” which described behavior of wife with the *nds “commoner” might have carried idea of the wife who gave the commoner the chance to live as great man who enjoys the luxurious life.

F- The author used title of *hm n Wb’-lnr “wife” of *Ubainer” without mentioning her names because he wanted to refer to her main role as the vessel which received the semen of her husband to become pregnant. Thus the author would evoke the hatred feelings of the readers towards her because of betraying the husband with stranger.

G- Although the *msh n mnh “crocodile of wax” gives the story a legendary aspect but they expressed the exact angry feelings of *Ubainer who wanted to take revenge from the commoner through the word. The word *msh “crocodile carried two contradicting connotations; firstly it expressed the rage of *Ubainer and secondly it incarnated the greediness of the commoner who replaced position of *Ubainer in his house with his wife.

H- The word *mh “seize” represented the perfect method of punishing the commoner for his relation with the married wife. As he embraced the wife he would suffer forever for being captured by the crocodile.

I- Punishing the wife by burning her in the *šdw “field” which also means “womb” presented the exact regard of the ancient Egyptians society towards the wife as fertile land. This is because the fertile land represented main source of life in agricultural society. So the act of burning the wife was because she had received semen of strange man. It seems interesting to mention that the term violate is used to refer to the act of raping woman and usurping agricultural land.

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ملخص البحث
دلالات بعض الكلمات في قصة الزنا في بردية وستكار
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يتناول البحث دلالات بعض الكلمات في قصة الزنا بين زوجة الكاهن وبا-بانر ورجل من العامة ببردية وستكار والأفكار الرمزية التي تقدمها لمخلة القارئ. فعلى سبيل المثال كلمة "حبسو" (ملاص) التي أرسلتها الزوجة للرجل تعمل دلالة رمزية في إنها تقدم نفسها له، المقاطع الأول "خر" من كلمة "خر-خت" (بعد) تعني السقوط وهي تشير بأسلوب غير مباشر إلى سقوط الرجل في خطأ يثبتها المجتمع المصري وهو إرتكاب الزنا مع إمرأة متزوجة، كلمة "شسب" (المنزل الصيفي) يوجد بها شكل سوز وذلك تحمل إشارة ضمنية إلى الزوجة التي أزالت الحواجز أمام عشيقها ليصل إليها بكل سهولة، كلمة "حمست" (جلس) تحمل دلالة مخفية عن رغبة الزوجة في إقامة علاقة جسدية مع العشيق، كلمتا "ممح-ن منح" (التماسح الشماع) يعكس مشاعر غضب الكاهن وبا-بانر عندما علم بأمر علاقة الرجل مع زوجته ورغبته في الحصول، كلمة "مح" (خاطف) تشير إلى العقاب المستحق الذي ناله الرجل عن طريق المقصود وكلمة "شدو" (الحقل) الذي شهد حرق الزوجة يشير رمزيا إلى النظر إلى المرأة الزوجية مثل الأرض الزراعية والعلاقة الزوجية تتشابه مع الفلاح الذي يغرس الحبوب في التربة الزراعية لذلك تم حرق الزوجة لأنها فسدت مثل الأرض التي تم غرس نطفة رجل غريب بها.