
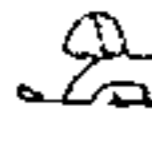
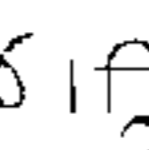
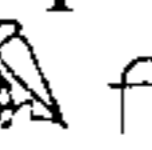
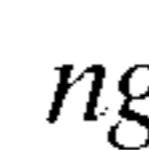
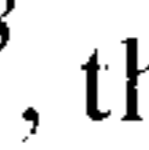
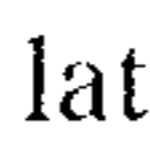
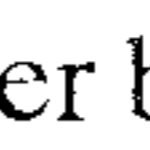
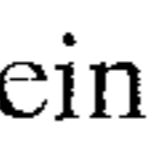
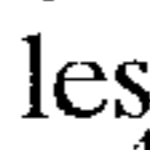

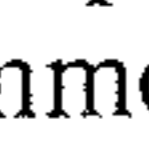


EWA ROWIŃSKA

The Akkadian Origin of the Word    *mhr* 'Basket'

The foreign origin of some Egyptian words has been the subject of several articles and studies. The borrowings appearing in non-literary texts are of particular importance, as they must have belonged to the popular vocabulary of the Egyptian society.

The word    *mhr*¹ 'basket' occurs twice in the non-literary text copied on a limestone ostrakon² dating from the Ramesside Period. In both cases it is listed among the articles given as payment by the workman Hori to a priest and is followed by    *mndm* and    *ng*³, the latter being a less common writing of    *nkr* 'sieve'.³ According to Wb *mndm* is a kind of basket.⁴ D. Meeks, however, adds the translation 'sieve', particularly 'sieve for flour' ('tamisà farine').⁵ Since the words *mndm* and *nkr* are often found together, *nkr* is supposed to be the lid of *mndm*.⁶

The meaning of *mhr* was defined on the grounds of context and determinative which is characteristic of the objects made of wicker or reed.⁷ W. Helck presumes that *mhr* is a Semitic loan-word and he compares it with the Hebraic verb-stem *mhr* 'to receive, to accept, to take in'.⁸ This connection, which may seem plausible on

¹ Not in Wb; see D. Meeks, *Année Lexicographique* I, Paris 1980, p. 170.

² J. Černý-A.H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Ostraca*, Oxford 1957, pl. LXI, 3.

³ Cf. J.J. Janssen, *Commodity Prices from the Ramessid Period*, Leiden 1975, p. 147 §17.

⁴ A. Erman, H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der Ägyptischen Sprache*, Berlin 1982, vol. II, p. 93, 16–17.

⁵ Meeks, op.cit., p. 162.

⁶ Cf. W. Helck, *Materialien zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte des Neuen Reiches*, Wiesbaden 1961–1969, vol. V, p. 917 and Janssen, op.cit. p. 147, § 17.

⁷ Cf. J. Černý, BIFAO 57, 1958, pp. 206–208.

⁸ W. Helck, *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens zu Vorderasien im 3. und 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, Wiesbaden 1962, p. 561.

account of the similarity of the corresponding phonemes, is not clear enough when we consider the meanings of the two words.

It seems that the Egyptian word has its exact equivalent in the Akkadian language which was a source of numerous borrowings throughout the period of the New Kingdom. Perhaps *mhr* is to be connected with the Akkadian word *maḥḥalu*, 'basket', which occurs in Old Babylonian and Middle Assyrian texts and which is a derivative (with nominal prefix *ma-*) of the verb *naḥālu* 'to sift'.⁹

A. Salonen in his study on house-equipment in Ancient Mesopotamia put forward a suggestion that the *maḥḥalu* basket was used as a sieve, since its Sumerian counterparts: *gi.gur.sè.sè.ga.* and *gi.gur.še.nu.tuk.* describe it as 'a basket of throwing, shaking' ('einen Korb des Werfens, Schüttelns') and 'a basket that does not hold flour' ('einen Korb, der Getreide, hier Mehl, nicht hält').¹⁰ It is not out of place to mention another Akkadian word, namely *maḥḥaltu*, which differs from *maḥḥalu* only in having the feminine ending *-t* and, beyond any doubt, designates a kind of sieve.¹¹ Both these words apparently represent *nomina instrumenti* derived from the verb-stem *nhl* 'to sift', according to the pattern *mapras* (*maprast*) with assimilation of *n* to the following *h*.¹²

The determinatives of the word *maḥḥalu* indicate that the basket was made of wicker or reed (GI), or of wood (GIŠ).

Thus the word *mhr* probably designates a basket used as a sieve (perhaps with other uses as well). This suits the context well, for *mhr* is mentioned among similar objects. It seems probable that *mhr*, *mndm* and *ng*³ are three kinds of sieves here.

The common use of the word *mhr* can be concluded not only from its occurrence in a non-literary text, but also from the fact that it survived in Coptic as MWIP^(B,A)₂ 'censer, box for incense, pot'.¹³

⁹ J.A. Brinkman, M. Civil, I.J. Gelb, T. Jacobsen, B. Landsberger, A.L. Oppenheim, E. Reiner, *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, Chicago 1956–1982, vol.10, part I, p.89.

¹⁰ A. Salonen, *Die Hausgeräte der Alten Mesopotamier*, Wiesbaden 1965–1966, part I, pp. 222;68f.

¹¹ J.A. Brinkman *et al*, *op.cit.*, vol. 10, part I, p.89.

¹² W. von Soden, *Grundriss der Akkadischen Grammatik*, Roma 1952, p.64, §56a–c.

¹³ J. Černý, *Coptic Etymological Dictionary*, Cambridge 1976, p.97; see also W. Vycichl, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue copte*, Leuven 1983, p. 129.