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Lisa L. Giddy

A Note on the Word [ouhat].

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A NOTE ON THE WORD

Lisa L. GIDDY

Although the word  and its various writings ⁽¹⁾ has long been identified as referring in some manner to the Oases of the Western, or Libyan, Desert of Egypt ⁽²⁾, it was not until the work of Sethe in 1920 ⁽³⁾ that the reading of the word, its origins and application were more thoroughly analysed. Thus, (a) the reading *wḥt* was firmly established; (b) its etymological association with the word    (pl.) «cauldron», proposed; and (c) its application as a *general* term, used by the Ancient Egyptians to refer to the area of the Oases, largely accepted.

(a) There now appears to be little doubt that Sethe's reading of the word as *wḥt* is correct ⁽⁴⁾. A number of documents, unknown to Sethe, provide the necessary link, which he lacked, between the earlier writing    and the later, abbreviated form  ⁽⁵⁾

⁽¹⁾ See Table. This article is extracted from a Ph. D. thesis, currently in preparation under the supervision of Professor H.S. Smith, University College London; the thesis deals with the relations between the Western Oases and the Nile Valley in Pharaonic times, with special reference to the site of 'Ayn Aşil in the Dakhla Oasis.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank M. Jean Vercoutter, Director of I.F.A.O., for his kindness and assistance regarding this research.

⁽²⁾ See, for example, J. Dümichen, *Die Oasen der Libyschen Wüste* (Strassburg 1877), who, with very little reference material available at the time, nevertheless produced the first developed study on the occurrence and meaning of the word (   *Uit*) concluding that it was a general term for the Oases of the Libyan Desert.

His discussion on its identification includes references to many earlier attempts to locate this region — variously placed in the Delta, Lower Egypt, Mareotis, the Oxyrhynchite nome, and Syria.

⁽³⁾ K. von Sethe, «Die ägyptischen Bezeichnungen für die Oasen und ihrer Bewohner», *ZÄS* 56, pp. 44-54.

⁽⁴⁾ For earlier readings, see J. Dümichen, *op. cit.* (*Uit*); Brugsch, *DG*, p. 173 (*Uit*, *Ut*); H.G. Lyons, «Notes sur la géographie physique des Oasis de Khargueh et Dakhleh», *B.S. Khéd. G.* IV, série N° 4 (1894) p. 241 (*Ouit*); and J.H. Breasted, *AR* I, p. 153 note h. (Old Kingdom    $\neq$  ; the former should be read *w'ḥt*, from the verb *wh*, «to quarry stone»),

⁽⁵⁾ See, however, note 4 above, J.H. Breasted, *op. cit.*

(see Table). Most notable of these is the 12th Dynasty stela of *K3y* on which the writing  occurs, thus effectively combining the new and the old. Near-contemporary inscriptions exhibit both the longer and older form (the Ballas Inscription, the statue of Sesostri III and the stela of *S3-Hthr*) as well as the newer form (the « Oasis dwellers » of Admonitions 3.9, and probably the stela of *Hnnw*⁽¹⁾). In a brief but excellent study of the material up to and including the Middle Kingdom, Fischer concluded that

« the shorter writing is doubtless standard by the end of Dyn. XII, as is indicated by the titles of both the *w'rtw* 'Ig3i-htp and the general 'Inw »⁽²⁾.

The compilation of the accompanying Table, summarizing the occurrence of the word, resulted in this statement being both confirmed and amplified.

(b) Yet this confirmation of the reading of the word  does not necessarily support its etymological association with the word  (pl.) « cauldron »⁽³⁾. Sethe himself noted that only from the Middle Kingdom onwards does  appear in Egyptian texts. By that time, at least in some contexts, it represented the phonetic structure *wh3·t* and was therefore employed as a « shorthand » writing for those words containing this structure. Two such words were « cauldron » (Old Kingdom ⁽⁴⁾) and « oasis » (Old Kingdom ⁽⁵⁾), both of which were consequently shortened with the aid of this phonetic device. But this by no means demonstrates that the *origin* of the word for « oasis » transcribed *wh3·t*, was linked with the word for « cauldron ». It could just as well — and perhaps more probably — have been a word of local « Oasian » origin, adopted and transcribed by the Egyptians⁽⁶⁾.

⁽¹⁾ See W.C. Hayes, « Career of the Great Steward Henenu under Nebhepetre' Mentuhotpe », *JEA* 35, pl. IV for the restored reading .

⁽²⁾ H.G. Fischer, « A God and a General of the Oasis on a Stela of the Late Middle Kingdom », *JNES* 16, pl. XXXV.

⁽³⁾ For the various writings of this word for « cauldron », see *Wb.* I 347, 12-17.

For earlier discussions on the etymology of  see H.G. Lyons, *op. cit.*, p. 241, who saw it as derived from the Egyptian word for « mummy » (Coptic *ouaché*), and W. Spiegelberg, « Die Übersetzung des Wortes Oase bei Herodot. III, 26 »,

ZÄS 42, pp. 85-86, who ingeniously explained Herodotus' « Island of the Blessed » as a faulty Greek transcription of the Egyptian word.

⁽⁴⁾ K. Sethe, *Pyr.* I, 212 — Text 405 b (plural .

⁽⁵⁾ See Table for references.

⁽⁶⁾ In this respect, it is interesting that the Egyptian word was, in turn, the sole origin of Greek *Óasis* and Coptic *ouaché*, Arabic *وَحْ* coming from the latter. Moreover, at least in Coptic and Arabic it was employed as a *toponym*, with application limited to the Oases of the Western Desert of Egypt alone. For the Greek *Óasis*,

I do not here question the transcription of the word , but its generally-accepted etymon. To state categorically that the etymon for  was the Egyptian word for « cauldron » is simply not justifiable. That its writing was *later* abbreviated in the same manner as the writing of the word for « cauldron » need have nothing whatever to do with its origin.

Use of the same phonetic device for the later abbreviation of the two words clearly caused some confusion — possibly in ancient as well as modern times — resulting in their eventual association. At least two factors may be cited as probably contributing to this confusion :

1. *The physical aspect of the Oases.* Sethe's association of an oasis with the physical image of a cauldron is both interesting and puzzling. The Oases of the Western Desert are indeed vast depressions, often with near-vertical sides 300-400 metres high, in a series of otherwise unrelieved desert plateaux ⁽¹⁾. When plotted on a contour map, they could indeed be seen as resembling a number of cauldrons, strung out through the desert. In no way, however, is this visual effect obtained at ground-level ⁽²⁾. The depressions are simply far too vast to allow the human eye to encompass their totality. Moreover, only one of the Oases (i.e. Bahariya) is clearly enclosed on all sides; the others rise gently in their southern reaches to merge imperceptibly with the surrounding desert plateaux. To claim, therefore, that an oasis, through its geographical appearance, resembles a cauldron, is difficult to support ⁽³⁾.

see Pauly-Wissowa, *RE* XXXIV, pp. 1681-1686; for the Coptic ⲟϣⲁⲗⲉ, see E. Amélineau, *La géographie de l'Égypte à l'époque copte* (Paris 1893) pp. 289-292; Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, p. 508, and Černý, *Coptic Etymological Dictionary*, p. 222; for the Arabic حَوْاء, see Maspero-Wiet, *Matériaux pour servir à la géographie de l'Égypte* (MIFAO 36), pp. 219-225.

⁽¹⁾ For a summary of the geography and geology of the Western Desert, see J. Ball, *Contributions to the Geography of Egypt* (Cairo 1939), pp. 9-10, and Rushdi Said, *The Geology of Egypt* (Amsterdam - New York 1962), pp. 11-14, 67-86.

⁽²⁾ Sethe (*ZÄS* 56, p. 46-47), not having visited the Oases himself, relied on the description of

Steindorff. Černý (« Language and Writing », in *The Legacy of Egypt*, 2nd edition, ed. by J.R. Harris (Oxford 1971) p. 205), in asserting that the origin of the Egyptian word was *wahet*, meaning « cauldron », felt it « must somehow refer to the low level of the oasis in relation to the surrounding desert, though travellers assure us that oases do not give the impression of a cauldron at all ».

⁽³⁾ As the Oases only appear truly « enclosed » when charted on a detailed contour map, it becomes even more difficult to accept such a geographical association on the part of the Ancient Egyptians.

If there did arise an association of the image of an oasis with a cauldron, one *could* suggest that they were related more because of the effects therein, rather than because of their overall physical form. Although Sethe argued only for the latter, he nevertheless noted that the particular cauldron  was employed « zum Fleischkochen »⁽¹⁾. In the Oases today one is indeed isolated, confined, and fairly well cooked. Water, often approaching boiling-point in temperature, bubbles up from numerous wells; communications with the Nile Valley are difficult to an extreme. The use of the Oases as places of banishment, both in ancient and modern times⁽²⁾, may indeed be seen as emphasising this particular aspect of their physical characteristics.

2. *The ideogram* . Similarly, it could just as well be argued that a confusion may have developed between the phonetic use of  and its concurrent use as an ideogram. According to Gardiner, the ideogram  determined «bodily growths or conditions of a morbid kind»⁽³⁾. Could it not be, then, that later confusion, assimilation or explanation of the word  contained at least an element of allusion to the more disagreeable aspects of life in the Oases?⁽⁴⁾

⁽¹⁾ K. Sethe, *op. cit.* p. 44.

⁽²⁾ See, for example, Sir Archibald Edmonstone, *A Journey to Two of the Oases of Upper Egypt* (London 1822), who cites on several occasions ancient references to the Oases as places of banishment; those exiled there included the poet Juvenal, the general Timasius, Heresiarch Nestorius and Saint Athanasius. The latter also provided a list of his own of those exiled to the Oases (« Apologie pour sa fuite, 7 », in *Sources chrétiennes* N° 56, trans. by Jan-M. Szymusiak (Paris 1958) p. 140) noting elsewhere that his enemies « n'ont pas hésité à outrepasser tes (i.e. Constantine's) ordres et ont relégué au-delà de trois provinces, dans le désert en des lieux incultes et hostiles, des vieillards, des évêques chargés d'années. Ceux de Libye ont été expédiés dans la Grande Oasis, ceux de la Thébaïde dans l'oasis d'Ammon en Libye » (« Apologie à Constance, 32 » *Sources chrétiennes* N° 56, *op. cit.*, p. 127).

At least one instance of the use of the  as a place of banishment is provided in Pharaonic times (the so-called « Banishment Stela », Louvre C 256); it is also interesting that as early as the Middle Kingdom the  was known as a place of refuge (Stela of K³y, Berlin 22820).

⁽³⁾ A.H. Gardiner, *Egypt. Gram.* (3rd ed.), p. 539, Aa2.

⁽⁴⁾ Vivid reference is made to these aspects in the post-Ramesside Papyrus Pushkin 127 (R.A. Caminos, *A Tale of Woe* (Oxford 1977)), which, in all probability, was written « from somewhere in the Great Oasis » (i.e. *Knmt* — Caminos, *op. cit.*, p. 76 and also p. 36). The subject is dealt with in detail for the Greco-Roman period by M. Guy Wagner (thesis for Doctorat d'Etat, currently in preparation) in a chapter on « La représentation des Oasis chez les anciens »; my sincere thanks to M. Wagner for allowing me access to his manuscript.

Nevertheless, there exists no positive evidence at present which may be accepted as establishing the origin of the word.

(c) Its application as a *general* term for the Oases, or the whole Oases' area, has also been largely accepted. Thus  was defined by Gauthier in the « *Dictionnaire Géographique* » :

« Terme générique désignant non pas telle ou telle des oasis du désert libyque, mais l'ensemble de ces oasis et, d'une façon plus générale encore, toute la région libyque, oasis et déserts réunis » ⁽¹⁾.

This may, however, be a gross over-simplification of the problems concerning the position of , both geographically and chronologically. It is not intended here to deal with these many problems ⁽²⁾, but some remarks should be made to emphasise their extent.

Firstly, hardly any geographical notion, let alone location, is imparted by the texts of Pharaonic date referring to the place  ⁽³⁾. That it indeed lay to the west of the Nile Valley is only deduced by probabilities and elimination; positive confirmation may only be provided by finds from the Oases themselves ⁽⁴⁾. Again, although a northern and a southern region of  was distinguished at least by New Kingdom times (see Table), the exact localization of these subdivisions depends ultimately on material from the Oases.

Secondly, what little may be gleaned from the documentary evidence from the Nile Valley depends on an analysis of the context in which  appears in each document, consideration of the provenance of the document itself, and finally interpretation of both

⁽¹⁾ H. Gauthier, *DG I*, 202.

⁽²⁾ The subject is discussed at length in Part II of the thesis from which this article is taken, with analysis of all references in the Table.

⁽³⁾ *Explicit* geographical reference to the Oases only occurred at a much later date, notably in the nome lists of the temples of Edfu and Dendera. (Ptolemaic and Roman references, although not included in the Table, are incorporated in the Thesis discussion on the subject).

⁽⁴⁾ Notably the recent discoveries near Balat in the Dakhla Oasis (A. Fakhry, « The Search

for Texts in the Western Desert », in *Textes et langages de l'Égypte pharaonique II* (I.F.A.O., *BdE*, 1972) pp. 219-222), and preliminary reports on the excavations by I.F.A.O. at Qila' al-Dabba and 'Ayn Aşil (*BIFAO* 77, 78, 79, 80 & 81). Also, the two «Dakhla Stelae» from Mut in the Dakhla Oasis (A.H. Gardiner, *JEA* 19, pp. 19-30, pls. V-VII and J. Janssen, *JEA* 54, pp. 165-172, pl. XXV), and the discoveries of Ahmed Fakhry in Bahariya Oasis (A. Fakhry, *Bahria Oasis*, 2 Vols. (Cairo, 1942 & 1950)).

within a specific historical period. That is to say, the application of the word must be studied chronologically as well as geographically, as its use in any one period need not be representative of all ⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ The question may eventually be posed whether the toponym *wh3:t* was originally confined, at least during the Old Kingdom, to the Oasis of Dakhla, or even the region of modern Balat, alone. A funerary stela, bearing the cartouche of Pepi II

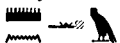
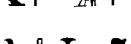
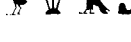
and found on the surface at the site of 'Ayn Aşil, records that the deceased (?) was  (publication announced : J. Osing, *Die Denkmäler der Oase Dachla*, Mainz, Archäologische Veröffentlichungen des D.A.I. Kairo, 28).

TABLE of references to the word *wh3·t* in Pharaonic texts (to Dyn. 28)

<i>Writing</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Date</i>
	Funerary stela, 'Ayn Aşıl (Dakhla Oasis) ^(a)	Dyn. 6 : Pepi II
	Biography of <i>Hr-hw·f</i> (tomb inscription, Qubbet al-Hāwa, Aswan)	Dyn. 6 : Pepi I-II
	Mastabas of Qilā' al-Ḍabba (Dakhla Oasis)	Dyn. 6 : Pepi I-II
	Door lintel, 'Ayn Aşıl (Dakhla Oasis) ^(b)	prob. Dyn. 6
	Admonitions 3.9 (Papyrus Leiden 344)	First Inter. Period ? ^(bb)
	Royal Inscription from Ballas (Berkeley (California) Univ. Mus. D 136)	Dyn. 11 : Mentuhotep II (?)
	Stela of <i>Hnnw</i> (New York M.M.A. 26.3.217)	Dyn. 11 : Mentuhotep II
	Stela of <i>Dd·'Ikw</i> (Berlin 1199)	Dyn. 12 : Sesostri I
	Stela of <i>K3y</i> (Berlin 22820)	Dyn. 12 : Sesostri I
	Stela of <i>S3-Hthr</i> (B.M. 569 D 12)	Dyn. 12 : Amenemmes II
	Statue of Sesostri III (Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore N° 30)	Dyn. 12 : Sesostri III
	Stela of <i>'Inw</i> (Univ. of Pennsylvania Mus. N° 54-33-1)	late Dyn. 12 - early Dyn. 13
	Papyrus Bulaq 18, XXXIII.7	Dyn. 13 : early-middle
	Scarab of the <i>w'rtw 'Ig3i-htp</i> (Cairo Cat. 36045)	Dyn. 13
	Book of the Dead (142, 8)	early New Kingdom

(a) See note 1 p. 24 above.

(b) See L. Giddy & D. Jeffreys, *BIFAO* 81, p. 196.(bb) This writing is in fact out of sequence and adds support to the interesting arguments of Van Seters, *JEA* 64, pp. 13-23, for a date in the Second Intermediate Period. At the moment the question is better left open.

<i>Writing</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Date</i>
	Book of the Dead (142, 9)	early New Kingdom
	Funerary cone of <i>S</i> (Theban tombs, provenance unknown) ^(c)	New Kingdom (Dyn. 18?)
	Door jamb, 'Ayn Aşil (Dakhla Oasis) ^(d)	New Kingdom (??)
	Kamose Stela (Luxor Museum G 43)	Dyn. 17 : Kamose
	Stela of 'It-f-nfr (Louvre C 47)	Dyn. 18 : Amenophis I
	Stela of 'Int-f (Louvre C 26)	Dyn. 18 : Hat. - Tuth. III
	Tomb of 'Int-f (N° 155, Thebes)	Dyn. 18 : Hat. - Tuth. III
	Tomb of <i>Pw-im-r</i> (N° 39, Thebes)	Dyn. 18 : Tuthmosis III
	Funerary cone of <i>Mn</i> (probably from tomb N° 109, Thebes) ^(e)	Dyn. 18 : Tuth. III - Amen. II
	Tomb of <i>Rh-mi-r</i> (N° 100, Thebes)	Dyn. 18 : Tuth. III - Amen. II
	Tomb of <i>Hrw-f</i> (N° 192, Thebes)	Dyn. 18 : Amen. III-IV
	4 jar sealings, Palace of Malkata ^(f)	Dyn. 18 : Amenophis III
	2 jar sealings, Palace of Malkata ^(g)	Dyn. 18 : Amenophis III
	2 hieratic jar labels, Palace of Malkata ^(h)	Dyn. 18 : Amenophis III

(c) N. de G. Davies & M.F. Laming Macadam, *A Corpus of Inscribed Funerary Cones*, Part I (Oxford 1957) N° 5.

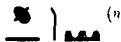
(d) A. Fakhry, «The Search for Texts in the Western Desert», *op. cit.*, p. 219, n. 2; *PM* VII, 295 (*ASAE* ?). The above sequence, however, suggests an earlier dating.

(e) N. de G. Davies & M.F. Laming Macadam, *op. cit.*, N° 222.

(f) M.A. Leahy, *Excavations at Malkata & the Birket Habu 1971-4 : The Inscriptions* (London 1978), Cat. N° X (K 15, K 251, K 321, K 334).

(g) W. Hayes, *JNES* 10, p. 158, fig. 25 Type L, and M.A. Leahy, *op. cit.*, Cat. N° XI (D.2.8.41).

(h) W. Hayes, *op. cit.*, fig. 4 N° 19, and fig. 7 N° 73.

Writing	Source	Date
	4 hieratic jar labels, Amarna ⁽ⁱ⁾	Dyn. 18 : Amenophis IV
	hieratic jar label, Amarna ^(j)	Dyn. 18 : Amenophis IV
	2 hieratic jar labels, Amarna ^(k)	Dyn. 18 : Amenophis IV
	hieratic « ostracon », Amarna ^(l)	Dyn. 18 : Amenophis IV
	jar sealing, tomb of Tut'ankhamun (Cairo Mus. J 62300)	Dyn. 18 : Tut'ankhamun
	jar sealing, Fortress of Buhen ^(m)	Dyn. 18-19 (?)
	Papyrus Ebers 43, line 16 (Leipzig Univ.)	Dyn. 18 (?)
	Tomb of 'Imn-htp (Bahariya Oasis)	late Dyn. 18 - early Dyn. 19
	Papyrus Anastasi IV (10, 9 & 11, 4)	Dyn. 19
 ⁽ⁿ⁾	Papyrus Anastasi IV (14, 7)	Dyn. 19
	Statue of P ₃ -rn-nfr (Cairo Cat. 586)	Dyn. 19
	Papyrus Chester Beatty VI Rt. 4 line 4 (B.M. 10686)	Dyn. 19 : prob. Ramesses II
 ^(o)	Papyrus Chester Beatty IX Vs. B9, 4 (B.M. 10689)	Dyn. 19 : prob. Ramesses II

- (i) Sir W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Tell el Amarna* (London 1894), pl. XXV, 94 (); T.E. Peet & C.L. Woolley, *City of Akhenaten I* (London 1923), pl. LXIII, K (); J.D.S. Pendlebury, *City of Akhenaten III* (London 1951), pl. LXXXVII, 71 () and pl. LXXXIX, 126 (and also 124?).
- (j) H. Frankfort & J.D.S. Pendlebury, *City of Akhenaten II* (London 1933), pl. LVIII, 29.
- (k) J.D.S. Pendlebury, *op. cit.*, pl. XXXVII, 51 & 64.
- (l) H. Frankfort & J.D.S. Pendlebury, *op. cit.*, pl. LVIII, 37.
- (m) H.S. Smith, *The Fortress of Buhen : The Inscriptions* (London 1976), pl. XLVII, 63 (Cat. N° 810).
- (n) Emend  (A.H. Gardiner, *Late Egyptian Miscellanies* (Bruxelles 1937) p. 50a note 14 a).
- (o) Emend  (A.H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum*, Third Series (London 1935), Vol. II pl. 59 note Vs.B 9, 4 a).

Writing	Source	Date
	Merenptah Inscription (Karnak Temple) ^(p)	Dyn. 19 : Merenptah
	Papyrus Leiden I 343 Vs. IV, 8	Dyn. 19 or Dyn. 20
	Papyrus Chester Beatty IV Vs. 9, 10 (B.M. 10684)	after Dyn. 19
	Papyrus Harris I 12 b, 13; 32 b, 14; 52 a, 3; 70 a, 2 (B.M. 10053)	Dyn. 20 : Ramesses IV (?)
	Papyrus Harris I 7, 10 (B.M. 10053)	Dyn. 20 : Ramesses IV (?)
	Maunier (« Banishment ») Stela (Louvre C 256)	Dyn. 21 : High Priest Menkheperre
	Onomasticon of Amenopē G 7, 6-8 (Mus. of Fine Arts, Moscow)	Dyn. 21 - Dyn. 22
	Dakhla Stela I from Mut (Ashmolean Mus. Oxford)	Dyn. 22 : Sheshonk I
	Dakhla Stela II from Mut (Ashmolean Mus., Oxford)	Dyn. 25 : Pi'ankhy
	Louvre Stela A 90	Dyn. 26 : Apries
	Statue of Bastet, 'Ayn al-Muftella (Baḥariya Oasis) ^(q)	Dyn. 26 : Amasis
	1st & 2nd chapels of <i>Dd-ḥnswf-ḥnh</i> , 'Ayn al-Muftella (Baḥariya Oasis)	Dyn. 26 : Amasis
	Statue of <i>Dd-ḥnswf-ḥnh</i> , El Qasr (Baḥariya Oasis) ^(r)	Dyn. 26 : Amasis
	Inscribed sandstone fragment (Baḥariya Oasis) ^(s)	?
	Faience plaque ^(t)	Dyn. 28 (?)

(p) Inside (west) of east wall connecting main Karnak Temple with Pylon VII.

(q) A. Fakhry, *Bahria Oasis*, Vol. II (Cairo 1950), pp. 21-23, pls. VII-VIII; found in front of the first chapel of *Dd-ḥnswf-ḥnh*, present location unspecified.

(r) A. Fakhry, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 6, pl. I; present location unspecified.

(s) A. Fakhry, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 79 N° 17; bought from the local inhabitants, present location unspecified.

(t) E. Chassinat, *BIFAO* X, pp. 161-162; probably from Kôm es-Sultan (1900), present location unknown (object in the hands of antiquities dealer, Cairo 1908).