

# **Hatred of lying in Ancient Egypt**

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**دورية الانسانيات . كلية الآداب . جامعة دمنهور**

**العدد الثاني والستون - يناير - الجزء الثاني - لسنة 2024**



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### **Abstract:**

Numerous Ancient Egyptian texts focus on lying as a sin, yet some of these texts make a connection between this sin and its hatred. This relation is our aim in order to investigate the reason for putting them in a relation.

### **Keywords:**

**Hatred, Lying, Sin, Abomination**

**Introduction:**

The word ‘lying’ sometimes has to be translated as: *ims*, *aDA*, *md*, *saDA* and *grg*. It should be noted that *isft*, which means evil in general, was one of the terms used to embody this meaning. So it put in an antithetical relation with *mAat* ‘truth’<sup>1</sup> to emphasize the idea of contrast between their meanings.

The ancient Egyptian realized the wide negative effects of lying and perjury crimes. So he put a group of penalties to besiege it. In general, these crimes were punished by a variety of penalties consists of corporal punishments (beating) or mutilations of noses and ears (having nose and ears cut off), or in extreme cases the death penalty which was carried out by impalement. The body was placed on the pointed top of a wooden stake and the victim’s weight drew the body down the pole. Although there is no representation of this procedure, there is a hieroglyph that depicts a person atop a stake after the phrase “to give on the wood.”<sup>2</sup>

In the light of the above, both gods (theoretical) and the ancient Egyptians showed their hatred towards lying. i.e., lying was a motivator for hate because it was an incentive to gain the hatred of gods and people. Moreover, there is no idea that has been more consistently linked to ethics and morality than the idea of loving truth and hating lying because the ancient Egyptian believed that this would guarantee him a good position in the netherworld.

**Gods’ Hatred of Lying:**

It would be a truism to state that gods regard lying as a model for hatred. This divine ethical principle has been proven through many textual evidences. One of these evidences contained in the Pyramid Texts contains the following quotation: *bwt nTr snt mdw* “The abomination of the God is a deceitful saying/word”.<sup>3</sup>

Two explanations come to mind because of the emphases on the hatred of lying in the earlier quotation. Firstly, the term *bwt* encompasses not only hating, but also the concept of taboo<sup>4</sup>, i.e.,

<sup>1</sup> *CT* II, 138f, 139a; *Urk* IV, 492.5-6; *KRI* II, 314.13; *KRI* VI, 390.14-15.

<sup>2</sup> Müller-Wollermann, R., *Crime and Punishment in Pharaonic Egypt* <<https://www.asor.org/anetoday/2016/01>> (accessed 06.09.2022)

<sup>3</sup> *Pyr.* 1161a; Mercer 1952: 1161a; *Fpyr.* 188 § 1161.

<sup>4</sup> Frandsen 1986: 135. *Taboo* is thought to be one of the few Polynesian words that incorporated into European Language and thought. It was a word brought back and introduced into the English language by Captain James Cook in 1777. See:

prohibition was instilled by gods and kings to build up the complex fabric of society as well as to protect people and societies from anomalies.<sup>5</sup> So, bwt was perceived as the opposite of mAat. Thus, Violating a "bwt" would threaten the destiny of an individual, as it had a very negative impact on its doer, an act that would result in the second death for the people and God involved<sup>6</sup>.

Secondly, I believe that not only the term snt mdw has an allusion to lying, but it also covers a broad range of meanings, some of them are: 'slander', 'slur', 'traduce', 'vilify', 'gossip', 'backbiting', etc. This is because it literally means 'transgression<sup>7</sup> of speech' encompasses all those sins of the tongue. However, hate is motivated by any of those meanings because it is an incentive to gain God's hatred.

In an invocation to his gods, User-Hat (the sculptor of King Seti the First) referred to God's hatred as follows: |<sup>2</sup>...i |<sup>3</sup> nTrw imyw |A-wr nbw anxw tpy (.w) tA, msddyw grg isfwt anxyw m mAat " |<sup>2</sup> ... O |<sup>2</sup> Gods who are in Thinite, the lords of life upon earth, who hate lies and evils (isfwt), who live upon right"<sup>8</sup>.

An interesting point is that the earlier quotation used the divine epithet: msddyw grg isfwt "who hate lies and evils (isfwt)" in an antithetical relation to the other divine epithet: anxyw m mAat "who live upon right". This relation puts an assertion unto hatred of lying in opposite of loving justice in order to push back against lying, as a great sin, and so to enlarge loving good as a sign of ethical conduct and a great manifestation of god's hatred of lying.

Meanwhile, attention should be paid to the bonding between grg (lying) and isfwt (evils in general). I think that putting a focus on grg, as a specific vice, then mention isfwt, as a encompass of all vices, gives a much stronger sense on lying as one of the most hateful sins in ancient Egyptian thought, and gives clearly alludes to lying as a sin often accompanies other sins.

It suffices to find a bonding between excrement and lying to prove the extreme god's hatred of lying. This is proved by the

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Kamal, S. *Taboo in Ancient Egypt* <<https://www.academia.edu/29529039>> (accessed 07.09.2022)

<sup>5</sup> Kamal, S. *Taboo in Ancient Egypt*.


<sup>6</sup> Frandsen 2000: 10; Kamal, S. *Taboo in Ancient Egypt*.


<sup>7</sup> snt is an infinitive derived from the verb sni which means "transgress" and 'surpass'. (FCD. 229).

<sup>8</sup> KRI I, 361(5-6); KRIT I, 296.

following quotation in book of the dead: *ir nw n bwt nTrw* *His pw grg* “what the gods hate is excrement and lying”.<sup>9</sup> As such, making equality between gods’ hatred of lying and their hatred of excrement emphasizes gods’ rejection of lying.

Another evidence puts an assertion unto god’s hatred of those people who acquire this fault, it is contained in the instruction of Amenemope, one of his wise sayings is: |<sup>13.15</sup> *m ir mdy r m-a rmT n aDA* |<sup>13.16</sup> *tA bwt n pA nTr...* |<sup>14.2</sup> *msd nTr saDA md* |<sup>14.3</sup> *tAy=f bwt aA Snn Xt* “|<sup>13.15</sup> “Do not speak falsely to a man, |<sup>13.16</sup> the god abhors it... |<sup>14.2</sup> god hates the falsifier of word, |<sup>14.3</sup> he greatly abhors the dissembler.”<sup>10</sup>

A noteworthy usage is the term  *Snn Xt* which means literally “a liar of body”. In fact, the exact meaning of this term is sometimes difficult to determine, but the general sense is usually apparent equals to “the dissembler”, due to lichthem<sup>11</sup>, or “duplicity”, according to Wilson.<sup>12</sup>

We believe that the rendering “hypocrite”, “Munafiq” in Arabic, suits the present situation as it indicates to an act or a practice of feigning to be what one is not. Therefore, a hypocrite is a false pretender and dissembler. Furthermore, it seems clear from the determinative  that the ancient Egyptian had a hostile perspective on this unethical vice. This perspective was a strong motive for besieging and eliminating this fault as if it were an enemy that hoped to capture and destroy.

In a number of instances, it should be noted that hatred of lying came to be regarded as an abomination to specific gods such as Osiris. So, he was addressed: *ntk bwt=f grg* “O you who hate lying”.<sup>13</sup> This epithet suits his role as the god of the underworld, in particular, the just judge of the dead who oversaw his life on earth.

Thoth, also, was one of those deities who hated lying. So, He, as a scribe, accompanied the sun-god into the underworld and there noted down on his writing palette the results of the weighing of the hearts

<sup>9</sup> Budge 1898: 67 (Chapter XVII); Allen 1974: 31 (Spell 17*b*).

<sup>10</sup> BM. Pap.10474, 13.15-16; 14.1-3= Lange 1925: 70, Kap. 10; Lichthem, 1976: II, 154.

<sup>11</sup> Lichthem, 1976: II, 154.

<sup>12</sup> Simpson 1973: 253.

<sup>13</sup> Budge 1898: 39 (Chapter XV (7)).

of the dead. He did it conscientiously, for he "loved truth" and "falsehood was his abomination".<sup>14</sup>

It is striking that hatred of lying was a remarkable property of Amenophis I, as a god, who was referred to him: |<sup>10</sup> wpt mAa, gmH=f r HAty, bwt=f grg "who determines the truth, who looks into the heart, his abomination is lying".<sup>15</sup>

### Human's Hatred of Lying:

The ancient Egyptian insisted on showing his adhering to good moral standards, especially justice, and rejecting lying. So, it is germane to have a cursory look at textual evidences for a proper appreciation of human's hatred of lying in ancient Egypt. One of these texts concern Ahmos (an ancient Egyptian *vizier* under Pharaohs *Hatshepsut*) who *praised himself saying*: bwt=f grgw n ir=f sw 'who hates lies, and doesn't commit it'.<sup>16</sup>

Ahmos was careful to declare that he hadn't committed *bwt* "lying", i.e. prohibition. The Egyptian had to seize every opportunity to deny willingness to adhere to the forces of disorder; that is accomplished by refusing to behave in a disordered fashion.<sup>17</sup>

For on the one hand, Tutu<sup>18</sup>, (from Ekhenaton era), praised himself in a boastful manner: |<sup>8</sup>... bw ir=i msddt Hm=f bwt=i grg m Xt=i 'I do not do that which his majesty hates, (for) my abomination is lying in my body'.<sup>19</sup> And so, May and Ay<sup>20</sup> (from Ekhenaton era), praised themselves and informed us about their king's moral attitude saying: di=f mAat m Xt.i, bwt(=i) grg "He (i.e., the king) put justice in my body, (my) abomination is lying".<sup>21</sup>

The previous examples are compatible with Ekhenaton's Hatred of lying as an antithesis of justice which the king had adopted. Not only this adoption confirms king's love of justice and hatred of lying, but it also refers to him as an established of this principle ethic which was widely obvious during Ekhenaton reign, and marked all Egyptian fields as an echo to a divine one.

<sup>14</sup> Černý 1952: 61.

<sup>15</sup> On a stele from Deir El-Medina dating from the Ramesside period (Edward 1963: 30- 34, figs. 1, 2.)

<sup>16</sup> *Urk* IV, 490 (14-15).

<sup>17</sup> Douglas 1966: 35.

<sup>18</sup> Tell el-Amarna, Tomb no. 7, the northern group.

<sup>19</sup> LD III, 107a; BAR II, 417 § 1013.

<sup>20</sup> When he was an official.

<sup>21</sup> BAR II, 410 § 993-994; 413 § 1002; Davies 1908, V: Pl. II; *Urk* IV, 1999 (7).

But the antithesis between mAat and grg can hardly be regarded otherwise than as a moral attitude when they refer to an official, in which case they must refer to an ethical conduct shows the feeling of hate toward lying as a manifestation of rejection of unethical conduct and moral culpability.

It is known that Ekhnaton insisted on calling himself "King who lives in Truth", this shows that he attached much importance to the "Truth". It is quite possible that "Truth" is here to be understood as what we call "reality" and that Ekhnaton considered himself and wanted to be considered a realist.<sup>22</sup>

There is much evidence that Tutankhamen showed a tendency toward our ethical principle, so he had the epithet: |<sup>5</sup>...mAat mnti[m st] di=f wn grg m bwt tA mi sp=f tpy "Who established justice, and made lying hateful all over the country."<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Ramsess II ensured the same moral attitude, so he referred to himself: |<sup>12</sup>...mr(y) mAat, /// isft, di.n(=f) wn grg m bwt '12... who loves truth, [and hates] evils, he made lying hateful'.<sup>24</sup>

In general, the antithetical relation between grg and mAat<sup>25</sup> can be seen as an antithesis between 'good' and 'evil' if grg translated by "the committed wrong", as one of its meanings.<sup>26</sup> So, there is no doubt that these epithets, as a moral value, put all the king's deeds under a cover of justice and put evils, in general, and lying in particular, away from his personality. As for the king, he is the ethical authority who watches over justice and punishes liars.

This last task, i.e. the king's authority to punish liars, is proved by Ramsess II who referred to himself: |<sup>4</sup>...dit wn grg m btA<sup>27</sup> "who made laying a crime". Kitchen translated this sentence 'who made lying hateful',<sup>28</sup> but I believe that this translation does not suit the word btA because it means here 'crime, 'offence', 'sin', 'wrong' and 'fault'.<sup>29</sup> Müller has therefore rightly said the term for "crime"

<sup>22</sup> Černý 1952: 65.

<sup>23</sup> *Urk* IV, 2026 (18-19); Fontaine 1981: 156.

<sup>24</sup> *KRI* II, 314 (13); *KRIT* II, 154.

<sup>25</sup> *Wb* I, 129 (9); *Wb* V, 189 (2).

<sup>26</sup> *Wb* V, 189.5.

<sup>27</sup> Ostracon Cairo CGC 25,204 = *KRI* II, 379 (14-15).

<sup>28</sup> *KRIT* II, 210.

<sup>29</sup> *Wb* I, 484 (1-11); *FCD* 85; Lesko 1982: I, 142; Mcdowell 2001: 318.



is *bt3*.<sup>30</sup> So this confirms the modern rule that the reaction against crime is not the affair of the single individual, but of the state.<sup>31</sup>

It is worth noting that *grg* may have, in part, the meanings of *isft*, i.e., “a mess” as counter-functional to social and political order which is one of *mAat* meanings. If that was the intended meaning, therefore the idea presented here is more consistently linked to policy than the king’s ethical authority or the idea of ethics and morality.

In other words, the Antithesis referred to entrench the king’s political role as an organizer of land, a protector of the order and a warrior of Chaos against the disruption of order and the absence of indispensable organization to render a viable and prosperous country of Egypt. Therefore, the task of the king on earth is to realize *mAat*, i.e., its true function and value and drive out lying (as an opposite of *mAat*). This antithesis has a political necessity. This is because it tends to be a manifestation of the required order and unity.

Moreover, some wise men and officials showed a feeling of hate toward lying as a moral attitude. For instance, Duau-khety<sup>32</sup> is ‘quoted’ to have said: |<sup>9</sup> m Dd grg r mwt=k, bwt wrw “Do not tell lies against your mother, the magistrates abhor it’.<sup>33</sup> I suggest that, with some hesitation, the word *wrw* has an ethically allusion, not a social position, i.e., it is a term describe those adhere to ethical and moral principles.

In addition, Bay (from Ramsess era) offers another example; he refers to himself: |<sup>5</sup>...bwt=f gr|<sup>6</sup>gw isfwt<sup>34</sup> ‘his abominations are lying and evils’. This was, obviously, an assertion unto rejection of unethical conduct and moral culpability

Similarly, Psamtik I used Antithesis between loving justice and hating laying, as an evil, to show his policy as a king and to put a focus on his ethical character. So he praised himself saying: |<sup>3</sup>... nsw mr |<sup>4</sup> mAat bwt=i Dsr pw ims ‘|<sup>3</sup>...I’m a king loves |<sup>4</sup> justice, my abomination is lying’.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Müller-Wollermann, R., *Crime and Punishment in Pharaonic Egypt*.

<sup>31</sup> Höffding 1912: 691.

<sup>32</sup> His instruction known as ‘The Teaching of Khety’, also known as ‘The Satire of the Trades.

<sup>33</sup> DM 1529, vs= Lichtheim 1973, I: 191; Lalouette 1984: I, 197.

<sup>34</sup> *KRI* V, 640 (13),

<sup>35</sup> Caminos 1964: 74, Pl. VIII.

## Conclusion

The essay concludes that the ancient Egyptian held a strong relation between “feeling hate”, as a sign of rejection, and “lying” to emphasize his dismissive stance toward this vice as a sign of ethical conduct. Not even exaggerating when we say this moral philosophy refers to the obligation to oneself and self-respect as a form of moral obligation. Moreover, it offers an Egyptian definition of conscience and moral responsibility.

On closer observation it appears that the divine hate was a response to lying, while lying was a strong motive for creating gods hate. So, the ancient Egyptian believed that his positive rejection toward lying will guarantee him a divine acceptance in the afterlife. In other words Gods’ Hatred of Lying intended to be a way to encourage people not to continue to give in to the temptation to lie their way through life.

### Abbreviations

- BAR.** Breasted, J.H. *Ancient Records of Egypt from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*, 5 vols. Chicago. 1906.
- BM.** British Museum.
- CG.** *Catalogue Général du Musée du Caire*. Le Caire.
- CT.** De Buck, A. *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 7 vols. Chicago, Illin. 1935-1961.
- FCD.** Faulkner, R.O. *Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, Oxford. 1962.
- FCT.** Faulkner, R.O. *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 3 vols. London. 1973-77.
- FPyr.** Faulkner, R.O. *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*. Oxford. 1969.
- JARCE.** *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. Boston, New York.
- JEA.** *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*.
- JNES.** *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*. Dep. of Near Eastern Lang. and Civilis., Univ. de Chicago. Chicago, Illin.
- KRI.** Kitchen, K.A. *Ramesside Inscriptions: Historical and Biographical*. 8 vols. Oxford: B. H. Blackwell, 1968-1990.
- KRIT.** Kitchen, K.A. *Ramesside Inscriptions, Translated and Annotated: Translations*. 7 vols. Oxford: B. H. Blackwell. 1993-2014.
- LÄ.** *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, 7 Vols. Helck, W. and Otto, E. (eds). Wiesbaden. 1975-1992.
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- Pyr.** Sethe, K. *Die Altägyptischen Pyramidentexte nach den Papiertabdrücken und Photographien des Berliner Museums*, 4 vols. 1908-19022. Leipzig.
- Urk.IV.** Sethe, K. *Urkunden der 18. Dynastie..*
- Wb.** Erman, A. and Grapow, H. *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*. 6 vols. Leipzig, Berlin. 1926-1950.

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