



DIRT, PURITY, AND SPATIAL CONTROL: ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ANCIENT EGYPTIAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE DURING THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

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ABSTRACT

The concepts of purity and pollution were central to the maintenance of social boundaries in ancient Egyptian culture. Anthropological approaches, in particular the work of Mary Douglas, are useful in examining their impact on social structure and individual lived experience. Cleanliness and dirtiness were represented as defining characteristics of the ancient Egyptian elite and lower class. Dirty laborers were compared to animals, reinforcing the perception of the existing social order as natural. Even the process of cleaning itself could be presented as potentially polluting, when enacted by the lower class. The control of space and the body according to purity requirements were used to enforce social boundaries and restrict access. In the Middle Kingdom in particular, the introduction of literature, and innovations in iconography and scene-types depicted in tomb chapel decoration and tomb models may indicate new developments in society. Fear of pollution is particularly evident in the literary theme of “the reversal of order,” a nightmare vision of a world upturned, primarily the inversion of social status.

O, but the wealthy are in woe;
The poor are in joy...
O, but people are like black ibises,
filth (?) is throughout the land,
and there is no one white of clothes in this time.
O, but the land is spinning as does a potter's wheel...
The Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All 2.8¹

Ancient Egypt was a highly unequal society, in which wealth and power were concentrated in the hands of a small number of the elite. The hierarchical system centered on the king and his court of high officials, supported by an administrative elite and sub-elite forming about 3 to 5 percent of the population, while by far the largest proportion were the lower classes, laborers focused on food and craft production.² The visual and written culture produced by and for the elite largely reinforced this disparity. Although a number of Egyptological studies have examined elite self-presentation and the construction of elite identity,³ there has been limited discussion of the representation of the rest of society in elite culture. The methods used to differentiate elite officials from lower-ranking laborers in visual and written culture may have reflected and even shaped Egyptian

society. This paper uses anthropological and sociological approaches to explore representations of social difference in literature and funerary art, focusing on the concepts of purity and dirt in relation to the control of space and social boundaries.

PURITY AND THE DANGERS OF DIRT

The ways in which various cultures enforce hierarchy and social boundaries were explored by anthropologist Mary Douglas (1921–2007) in her classic work *Purity and Danger*, which investigates how concepts such as purity and fear of pollution are used to maintain symbolic boundaries and enforce social conformity.⁴ Douglas defined “dirt” as “essentially disorder”⁵ or “matter out of place.”⁶ For example, shoes are not inherently dirty in and of themselves, but in the context of placement on a table, they would be perceived as such. While such distinctions might appear trivial, “it is the everyday nature of dirt and cleaning, and their apparently ‘natural’ delineation that make them so important as objects of study.”⁷ On a broader scale, Douglas viewed dirt as “the by-product of the systematic ordering and classification of matter,” attempting to make “the world conform to an idea.”⁸ Douglas’

approach parallels sociological theories of authority and deviance, for example in Émile Durkheim and Erving Goffman, whereby deviancy only arises through social control.⁹ The creation of order and boundaries involves defining these in opposition to something else. Rather than outlining Douglas' theories in full, I explore them further within the context of the Egyptological evidence presented below.

Egyptologist John Baines and Assyriologist Norman Yoffee argue that the ancient Egyptian elite appropriated "order" and its maintenance as a legitimation of inequality and their authority.¹⁰ Order was characterized by the concept of *ma'at*, signifying truth, order, rightness, and justice: a value defined by balance, with everything in its proper place.¹¹ This included the maintenance of the existing social order; for example, in the chaotic "reversal of order" described in the poem *The Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All*, social rank is upturned: "look, each office (*ḥwt*) is not in its place, / like a wandering herd without its herdsman" (9.2).¹² In contrast, the concept of *bwt*, approximately translated as "taboo," was defined by improper location or context, as described in the work of Paul John Frandsen: impurity in ancient Egypt occurred when things were where they did not belong and behavioral boundaries were transgressed, such as entering a temple or tomb unwashed, eating forbidden foods, or using inappropriate speech (e.g., *Khety* 28.1; *Ptahhotep* 159–160).¹³ Such prohibitions limited access and behavior as a form of social control.

MIDDLE KINGDOM VISUAL AND WRITTEN CULTURE

I focus on the Middle Kingdom, since this period followed significant political and economic changes in the late Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period; there has been much debate about social changes that may have stemmed from these, such as the possible emergence of a "middle class."¹⁴ Political rule was transformed in the late Old Kingdom, when a new class of provincial governors developed, now referred to as nomarchs, who often held the title *ḥry-tp ʕ n spʕt X*;¹⁵ then the centralized administration collapsed.¹⁶ Scholars previously described this era, referred to as the First Intermediate Period, in purely negative terms, such as socio-economic decline, administrative chaos, and environmental catastrophe.¹⁷ However, recent research argues that it was characterized by increased localized control and wealth distribution.¹⁸

By the time Egypt was reunified at the beginning of the Middle Kingdom, many nomarchal positions had been eliminated, but nomarchs remained in power in Middle Egyptian provinces that had been controlled by border rulers for the Herakleopolitan kingdom.¹⁹

The earliest attested narrative literature and poetry dates to the Middle Kingdom.²⁰ Its creation and flourishing have been linked to a "media revolution,"²¹ which saw an increased use of writing, and the rise of an intellectual "middle class," or sub-elite.²² Literary texts were probably produced under high elite patronage by members of the elite and sub-elite, and during the Middle Kingdom, they explore themes such as morality, theodicy, individualism, and social upheaval.²³ The Middle Kingdom literary corpus has been particularly controversial in terms of dating and recently low dates have come into favor.²⁴ I examine securely dated manuscripts including *The Teaching of Ptahhotep*, *The Eloquent Peasant*, and *The Tale of Sinuhe*, but also the less certainly dated texts *The Teaching of Khety* and *The Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All*, whose composition dates have been debated, ranging from Dynasty 12 to early Dynasty 18. Biographical self-presentation texts from the Middle Kingdom and earlier also offer useful information about social distinction, although they are sometimes formulaic;²⁵ I occasionally refer to such texts, but they are not my primary focus.

Some of the largest private decorated rock-cut tomb chapels date to the Middle Kingdom. They served as monumental memorials to the deceased, as centers for the mortuary cult, and as a means of encouraging the giving of offerings. They were intended to affirm the tomb owner's social position, to impress peers and relatives, to legitimize the appropriation of wealth and manpower, and to assure the deceased's place in the next world.²⁶ The scenes depict the tomb owner's life on his estate, especially agriculture and craft production depicted within registers, and the receiving of offerings. As a form of conspicuous consumption, the tomb's architecture, location, and the quality and extent of the decoration expressed the status of the owner and his family.

Middle Kingdom tomb decoration features a range of social details that have so far not been extensively examined,²⁷ probably due to the frequent dismissal of its provincial style as inferior.²⁸ A great deal of the content and style of Middle Kingdom tomb chapels was inspired by the decoration of Old

Kingdom mastabas and tomb chapels,²⁹ but they also exhibit innovations such as the introduction of new scene-types like wrestling and laundry. The best-preserved Middle Kingdom decorated tomb chapels belonged mostly to nomarchs at Beni Hassan, Meir, Deir el-Bersha, and Qubbet el-Hawa, and high officials at Thebes.³⁰ Fieldwork at Beni Hassan and Meir gave me the opportunity to note previously undocumented features in these tombs, especially since Newberry's Beni Hassan publications are often simplified to the point of inaccuracy. Since this paper addresses precise details in tomb decoration, references to scenes give not only the plate number, but also the register and relative location within it. Registers are numbered sequentially from the top down because there is usually better preservation higher on tomb walls, while the lower registers may be fragmentary and not readily identifiable.³¹

Wooden tomb models depict scenes of food and craft production similar to those found in tomb decoration, often in an architectural setting. They were included in a wider range of burials, from the sub-elite at Beni Hassan, such as the "Overseer of Fields Ma,"³² to King Nebhepetre Montuhotep II at Thebes.³³ The subject matter and quantity of these models vary, and as such, they may have served to communicate the breadth and complexity of the tomb owner's socio-economic network. As Angela Tooley suggests, the models likely "represent not the number of servants in one's household, but the standard-of-living expected by persons within the ranking and professional strata."³⁴

CLEANLINESS AND DIRTINESS

Cleanliness was a luxury enjoyed by the ancient Egyptian elite, since they did not have to perform manual labor. As such, in visual representations, the elite are shown wearing their finest white linen. Large quantities of linen served as a status symbol.³⁵ The long kilt was commonly used in depictions of mature, successful officials, and kilt length is often differentiated between lower and higher status figures within tomb registers.³⁶ The long kilt also signaled a more leisurely lifestyle, since it would have hampered manual labor.³⁷ The fineness of elite linen is often demonstrated by its representation as unnaturally diaphanous, generally in the form of a long, fine overtop to a short kilt (Fig. 1), with decorative elements, such as pleating or a weft-fringe (Fig. 2).³⁸ Fine white linen is mentioned frequently in *Ipuwer*:

the distinguished ones (*bw³w*) of the estates stand
watching the jubilation from their houses,
clad in best quality linen (*hbsw m h³tiw hbsw*),
(holding) staves before (them). (13.14–14.1)³⁹

Linen is even described as being laid out on the ground as part of a festival, perhaps as a form of conspicuous consumption, or a display of ritual purity: "Indeed it is good when fine linen (*p³qt s³sty*) is spread out on the day / of the land's (?) festival, when e[verybody (?) is on] the bank, / when fine linen is spread out, and best quality linen (*h³tiw*) is on the ground" (14.3–5).⁴⁰ The reversal of social order described in *Ipuwer* is signified by the swapping of clothes between ranks: "look, the owners of linens (*d³ywt*) are in old clothes (*isywt*); / (yet) he who could not weave for himself is the owner of fine linen" (7.12).⁴¹

In their desire for cleanliness, the elite regulated not only their own behavior and bodies, but also that of their subordinates. Shaved heads are first depicted in early Middle Kingdom tomb decoration and tomb models. There are no earlier attested examples,⁴² although paint is less often preserved on early monuments. For shaved heads, the scalp is indicated by an orange-yellow or brown-tinged color, which probably represents newly-exposed skin (Fig. 1). Sometimes stippling indicates stubble on the scalp (Fig. 3). Head shaving came to be associated with priests, cleanliness, and purity from the New Kingdom onwards,⁴³ though it was not exclusive to the priesthood. In the Middle Kingdom, shaved heads appear to have been required for roles in which cleanliness was important, including priestly duties,⁴⁴ but also food preparation, especially butchery of offerings, as well as laundry and the care of elite clothes.⁴⁵ In the tombs at Beni Hassan and of Ukhhotep III at Meir, scenes of food preparation show figures with shaved heads preparing and cooking meat.⁴⁶ In the tomb of Khnumhotep II, the "Keeper of Linen/Clothing"⁴⁷ is shown with a shaved head, presumably dictated by the purity of the material which was his responsibility (Figs. 1, 3–4).

Purity requirements were established by the elite and their imposition on others was a form of social control, even though they may have been adopted willingly through imitation or social expectations. These practices are evidence of the personal cost of maintaining the existing social order. Shaved heads were also apparently linked to social status, as

FIGURE 1: Khnumhotep II spearing fish, wearing a long transparent kilt with a weft fringe over a form of *shendyt*-kilt, accompanied by the "Keeper of the Linen/Clothing", who has a shaved head and wears a non-priestly sash, tomb of Khnumhotep II, Beni Hassan. Photograph by the author; cf. *BH I*, pl. 34.



FIGURE 2: Djehutihotep wearing a pleated cloak and sandals, followed by attendants carrying a palanquin, tomb of Djehutihotep, Deir el-Bersha. Adapted from *Bersheh I*, pl. 13.



FIGURE 3: Detail of stipling on the shaved head of the “Keeper of Linen/Clothing”, tomb of Khnumhotep II, Beni Hassan. Photograph by the author; cf. *BH I*, pl. 33 [1st reg. left].

evident from the distribution of their depiction. For example, the scribes and overseer in the granary of Meketre have shaved heads (Fig. 13), as does the tomb owner, his son, and an official on Meketre’s

sporting boat, while the rest of the figures have full heads of hair.⁴⁸

Tomb decoration depicts the elite using various methods to avoid dirt and protect themselves from the natural environment. Outdoors, they are depicted wearing sandals (Fig. 2).⁴⁹ The symbolism

of sandals separating the clean and orderly from the dirty and chaotic is evident from their role in images and descriptions of the king trampling enemies, as well as their removal on sacred land.⁵⁰ *The Teaching of Merikare* instructs the wearing of “white sandals (*šsp ḥḏti*)” while performing priestly duties (E 64) (Fig. 7).⁵¹ Similarly, Coffin Text Spell 149 requires priestly attire be worn during its recitation, including “white sandals” (CT II, 227).⁵² In *Ipuwer*, the poor are characterized by their lack of sandals: “he who could not make for himself sandals is (now) the owner of wealth (*ḥʿw*)” (2.4–5). Sandal-bearers were important because of their association with the tomb owner, and are thus generally identified in depictions by name and title.⁵³ Even until recently, shoes remained a key indicator of social status in Egypt, with many lower-class people going barefoot.⁵⁴ New Kingdom Papyrus Harris I records the delivery of large numbers of sandals to Theban temples,⁵⁵ so it seems unlikely that they were completely restricted to elite usage.⁵⁶ Regardless, the



FIGURE 4: Khnumhotep II holding a fly-whisk and sitting on a low-backed chair on a reed mat before a table of offerings, attended by the “Keeper of Linen/Clothing”, tomb of Khnumhotep II, Beni Hassan. Photograph by the author; cf. *BH I*, pl. 35 [top left].



FIGURE 5: A herdsman sleeping on the ground and a laborer delivering a calf, both naked apart from laborer's sashes, tomb of Senbi I, Meir. Photograph by the author; cf. *Meir* I, pl. 10 [2nd reg. left].

representational distinction between sandal-wearers and barefoot individuals was a powerful symbol in the written and visual record.

In other methods of dirt avoidance, tomb owners are shown sitting on chairs that are often further removed from the ground by a reed mat or a raised platform within a pavilion (Fig. 4).⁵⁷ For example, in the cattle count model of Meketre, the tomb owner and his officials sit within an elevated pavilion, but he sits on a chair while they sit cross-legged.⁵⁸ High elite are also shown being carried on palanquins (Fig. 2),⁵⁹ protected by sunshades.⁶⁰ It would have been expensive to sustain a high degree of purity, and as such the objects used to maintain it were status symbols; for example, beds, headrests, and cushions are celebrated in *Ipuwer* (e.g., 9.1, 14.2–3).⁶¹ Suitable wood being relatively scarce, furniture was an expensive luxury.⁶² A frequent theme in *Ipuwer* is the elite being relegated to sleeping rough, for example: “those who used to be on the beds of their husbands, / ‘Let them sleep in ditches (*šdyt*) [a]mong the have-nots!’” (4.9–10).⁶³ While the elite are always

shown physically separated from the earth, laborers are depicted sitting directly on the ground while they work, and herdsman even sleep crouched in the dirt (Fig. 5).⁶⁴ *Ipuwer* suggests a negative attitude towards those who sleep outdoors: “the door is closed on the one who slept in a bush” (14.3). Such individuals are to be shut out and shunned for not conforming to social norms. As Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert notes, “lacking a permanent residence and thus keeping out-of-reach of the administration was regarded as a threat to the Egyptian society’s safety.”⁶⁵

Handkerchiefs, presumably used to wipe perspiration,⁶⁶ and fly-whisks are shown being carried by the tomb owner as symbols of purity and authority (Fig. 4). It has been debated whether the fly-whisks held by elite officials might be associated with the royal flail, a symbol of the king’s coercive power.⁶⁷ The items depicted in the hands of tomb owners differ in shape from the typical flail; they may have been a different kind of object, or perhaps more likely, another form used to avoid direct royal



FIGURE 6: A laborer wearing a sash tied with the ends hanging loose, tomb of Ukhhotep III. Adapted from *Meir* III, pl. 7 [2nd reg. left].

comparison. In Middle Kingdom tomb decoration, the fly-whisk is almost always depicted when the tomb owner is seated at a table of offerings, which suggests that it had a practical function in protecting the purity of the food.⁶⁸

Similar items were used by both the elite and non-elite to maintain cleanliness, but their representation may have conveyed very different symbolism in relation to purity and status. For example, the cloth diagonal body sash shown worn by lector priests has been interpreted as a badge of office.⁶⁹ However, a similar sash worn by laborers has generally been identified as a cloth used to absorb sweat and wipe away dirt.⁷⁰ Although the two sashes appear quite similar, they are worn differently. Laborers wear a long strip of cloth either loosely draped over one shoulder (Figs. 1, 5)⁷¹ or hung across one shoulder and tied around the body with the ends left dangling (Fig. 6).⁷² Lector priests' sashes are usually worn over the front shoulder and tucked in, with no loose ends left hanging (Fig. 7). These sashes usually feature a triangle of fabric at the individual's back that may represent the end of the fabric tucked into the kilt.⁷³

Sem-priests wore sashes striped in blue, white, and/or red higher across the upper body.⁷⁴ The plain white priestly sashes in Theban tomb 60 of Senet and earlier examples at Meir are worn in the same fashion,⁷⁵ although later Meir examples are also



FIGURE 7: A *hry-hbt* priest wearing a priestly sash and white sandals, tomb of Khnumhotep II, Beni Hassan. Photograph by the author; cf. *BH* I, pl. 35 [2nd reg. center].

tucked in.⁷⁶ It may also be significant that some non-priestly officials are shown wearing the same kind of sash as laborers (Fig. 1).⁷⁷ These men are shown in outdoor settings, such as attending the tomb owner fishing and fowling, observing the livestock count, and overseeing funerary boats, activities that may have been viewed as closer to physical labor. Priestly sashes may have been more than insignia, also serving to absorb perspiration and maintain purity. These garments may have served almost exactly the same function for the elite and non-elite; their distinction is purely in their representation. White linen was not in itself inherently pure, rather its use affected how it was perceived and given meaning.

In contrast to depictions of the elite, lower-class work is often presented as unclean. Tomb chapels depict laborers engaging in messy activities, such as wrangling and butchering cattle.⁷⁸ Explicit depictions of dirt are rare, but occasionally appear in tomb decoration, for example a baking scene in which dough spills down the sides of jars,⁷⁹ or in butchery scenes that show blood gushing from the slit throat of a cow (Fig. 8).⁸⁰ Examples of dirt depicted in tomb models include clay shown on the



FIGURE 8: Butchery scene depicting blood gushing from a cow's slit throat, tomb of Amenemhat, Beni Hassan. Photograph by the author; cf. *BH I*, pl. 18 [6th reg. center].



FIGURE 9: Model slaughterhouse with a butcher depicted with a blood-stained kilt (lower right) (MMA 20.3.10), from Theban tomb 280 of Meketre; <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544257>.



FIGURE 10: Baker with dough-covered hands, model bakery/brewery (MMA 20.3.12), from Theban tomb 280 of Meketre; <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/685331>.

arms of the potters, mud on the hands of a brick-maker, blood on the kilts of butchers, and bakers' dough-covered hands and arms (Figs. 9–10).⁸¹ One model depicts a butcher's kilt smeared with blood, both front and back.⁸²

Tomb decoration frequently shows laborers as naked or in a state of undress. In elite culture, nakedness was perceived as a marker of poverty or youth; it was regularly cited in biographical texts as a problem that elite benevolence sought to alleviate.⁸³ However, the nakedness depicted in tomb decoration is also functional and conveys the strenuous and dirty nature of laborers' work, involving sweat, and contact with animals, water, earth, ash, or blood. Marsh-laborers are often depicted either naked or wearing only rope-belts/waist-sashes,⁸⁴ for example, fishermen and boatmen (Fig. 11),⁸⁵ men netting birds and gathering papyrus.⁸⁶ Others working in dirty conditions often wear only belts, such as potters, gardeners, agricultural workers, and metalworkers.⁸⁷ Men birthing calves or carrying them are also typically depicted naked or wearing only a belt or sash (Fig. 5).⁸⁸ Men shown working with cattle are often shown wearing open-faced kilts that leave their genitals exposed.⁸⁹ On the west wall of the tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hassan, 19 out of the 32 agricultural workers wear open-faced kilts, although their genitals are not depicted.⁹⁰ These represen-

tations of nakedness may have been intended to be emasculating.⁹¹

Similar to these visual representations, the *Teaching of Khety*, which describes various occupations as negative alternatives to becoming a scribe, draws attention to the scant, filthy clothing worn by various laborers. The wall-builder, who would have worked with mudbricks, labors nearly naked: "he builds without a kilt (*dʒiw*), / his loincloth is a rope from the weaving shop, / a cord for his behind" (10.2–3).⁹² The field-worker "is always in rags (*stpw*)" (13.3).⁹³ The potter, "his clothes are stiff with mud (*dbn*), / and his loincloth (*ʿgs*) in rags (*stpw*)" (9.3).⁹⁴ These forms of dress are functional requirements of dirty work, but their representation is not neutral. Although clothing the naked was a standard topos of virtuous action, in *Khety*, the laborers' nakedness does not reflect elite neglect, but rather is given as a reason for scorning them. In contrast, *Khety* equates becoming a scribe and being sent on a mission with putting on a kilt (*dʒiw*) for the first time and attaining manhood (3.6).⁹⁵

Limitations on the extent of dirtiness that could be shown in a tomb chapel were due to its role as an ordered space associated with the identity and status of the tomb owner. The controlled depiction of certain forms of dirt was permissible in differentiating elite and non-elite, but it is equally revealing to examine what was not represented. Pollution fears are evident in the exclusion of certain activities and unclean matter from depiction, particularly more physically offensive materials such as excreta, viscera, and refuse. Douglas argued that there are no essential properties to dirt, that it exists solely in the eye of the beholder,⁹⁶ but dirt can be more than just a construct or a violation of a norm. Some types of dirt, such as excrement and decaying organic matter, have innate and unpleasant physical properties that evoke visceral responses.⁹⁷ Ancient Egyptian laborers would have had to endure unpleasant stench, heat, smoke, wetness, amongst other discomforts.

While tomb decoration largely glosses over the materiality of dirt, literary texts explore this theme in depth, contrasting the idealized lives of the elite with descriptions of laborers as wretched and filthy. The *Teaching of Khety* lists 19 occupations as negative alternatives to becoming a scribe, of which seven are described as unclean. It describes filth in terms of both dirt and stink that extend to the body and clothes:

The stoker (*stnwi*)—his fingers are putrid
 (*hw³w*),
 their smell is of corpses (*h³wt*),
 ... he cannot remove (*shsf*) the dirt (?) (*stnw*),
 ... his clothes are his abomination (*bwt*).
 (17.1–3)⁹⁸

In this case, it is matter out of place, the inability to remove the dirt and stench that is presented as so negative; the adherence of filth and the lingering of smell such that it becomes part of the worker's identity. The potter in *Khetu* breathes polluted air directly from the burning kiln (9.4). Stench is also a recurring motif in the *Dialogue of a Man and His Ba*, in which a despairing man expresses his self-loathing with the refrain "my name reeks (*b^h*)" (87–103).⁹⁹

Khetu says of the washerman that "his food is mixed with excrement (*hsw*), / and no part of him is clean (*w⁶bt*)" (19.4). His unclean occupation is even said to contaminate his food, so that he ingests filth; thus it becomes part of him, polluting his very being from within. *Khetu* says of the wall-builder:

his arms are covered with earth (*3ht*),
 and mixed with all kinds of excrement (*hs*).
 Though he eats bread with his fingers,
 he can wash himself only once a day.¹⁰⁰
 (10.4–5)

He is not only dirty, but his opportunities to clean himself are limited, and the consumption of filth is invoked again as taboo. Pollution fears even extended into the next world; numerous spells in the Coffin Texts guard against the deceased touching or eating faeces, such as Spell 173: "Feces is my detestation, / and I will not eat it. / Filth shall not enter into this mouth of mine" (CT III, 47e–j).¹⁰¹ This nightmare scenario is presented as the reality of lower-class life, although some of this is obviously exaggeration intended to increase social distance. *Khetu's* evocative descriptions would likely have inspired revulsion, corrupting the perception of these occupations as "unclean."

DEHUMANIZATION

It is within this context of potential physical integration that perceptions of dirt polluted attitudes towards laborers. Literary texts suggest that negative behavior in such individuals was anticipated or seen as natural. Douglas states that in the case of social outcasts, the expectation is that "to behave anti-

socially is the proper expression of their marginal condition."¹⁰² Fear of contamination can elicit interpersonal disgust.¹⁰³ Present-day research on social attitudes finds that many people in the West today associate poverty and dirty work with a lack of morality.¹⁰⁴ The stigma of negative labeling may have had a psychological impact on ancient Egyptian laborers, who might have internalized some of the negative messages in elite culture, so as to "emotionally experience their *power* inferiority as a sign of *human* inferiority,"¹⁰⁵ as described by sociologists Norbert Elias and John Scotson. For example, a study of *burakumin*, a modern Japanese outcast group employed in "impure" occupations, such as undertakers, slaughterhouse workers, and butchers, revealed their internalization of discriminatory attitudes, self-describing as "bad people" and "dirty."¹⁰⁶

In the *Eloquent Peasant*, the peasant criticizes the High Steward Rensi by comparing him to a negative list of occupations. His unhelpful behavior is presented as typically lower-class, and exceptional for the elite. A washerman who cleans soiled clothing is described as greedy, driven by petty business interests:

Look, you are a wretched washerman (*hw⁶rw
 n-r⁶ti*),
 a selfish one (*wn-ib*) who is destroying
 friendship
 and who forsakes his associate (*m⁶h⁶nk*) for his
 customer (*tw³*) (B1 199–202).¹⁰⁷

The negative list of occupations in *Ipuwer* similarly characterizes the washerman as rebelliously neglectful of his work: "the washerman has no [intent]ion of carrying his load" (1.2).

Many literary descriptions of uncleanness compare lower-class individuals to animals, dehumanizing and reducing them to sub-human elements of the natural world that need to be controlled. Dirt is used as a key element in communicating the debased nature of laborers. For example in *Ipuwer*, the general population is likened in filthiness to mud-grubbing marsh birds: "O, yet people are like black ibises (*gmw*), / filth (?) (*sbw(t)*) is throughout the land" (2.8).¹⁰⁸ The *gmt* is identified as the glossy ibis, which may have been associated with dirt because it uses its long, curved beak to probe in the mud for food.¹⁰⁹ In *Khetu*, the metalworker (*hmti*) is at his furnace "with his fingers like a crocodile's (*msh*), / he stinks (*hns*) more than



FIGURE 11: Naked fisherman, tomb of Senbi I, Meir. Photograph by the author; cf. *Meir I*, pl. 3 [3rd reg. center].

fish spawn (*swht rmw*)" (4.3).¹¹⁰ The washerman (*rhtj*) and fisherman (*wh' rmw*) are also described as consorting with crocodiles (19.2, 21.4, 21.7). Crocodiles are associated with filth in Coffin Text Spell 424, where they are described as "living on stinking feces" (CT V, 266d).¹¹¹ Almost all words determined by a crocodile sign have negative connotations relating to greed, uncontrollable appetite, and aggressive behavior.¹¹²

Laborers' work is compared to animal activity, which emphasizes its physicality in contrast to the intellectual nature of elite work. *Khety* says of the potter: "he grubs (*hmm*) in the fields more than pigs (*š'zw*)" (9.2), "grubbing (*hm'*) the courtyard of every house" (9.6).¹¹³ In *Ipuwer*, poor people subsist on only water and plants, referred to as "seed taken from the pig's mouth" (6.1–2).¹¹⁴ Pigs were subject to taboo, as in Coffin Text Spell 157, in which the god Seth injures the god Horus while in the form of a black pig: "this is how the detestation (*bwt*) of the pig came about" (CT II, 344a).¹¹⁵ Although there is archaeological evidence for pork being widely eaten in ancient Egypt,¹¹⁶ there seems to have been a strong elite view of pigs as unclean, possibly due to their consumption of excrement.¹¹⁷ However, the taboo may have pertained largely to sacred contexts,¹¹⁸ and adherence probably varied between the elite and

lower classes.¹¹⁹

In *The Tale of Sinuhe*, dirt is associated with foreignness and the outsider status that the official Sinuhe casts off when he comes home from abroad:

I became clean-shaven, and my hair was combed.
A load was given back to the foreign country,
and clothes back to the Sand-farers.
I was clad in fine linen;
I was anointed with fine oil.
I slept in a bed. I returned sand to those who are upon it. (B 291–295)¹²⁰

Dirt is portrayed as synonymous with "other," whereas cleanliness, linen, and beds are emblems of a return to Egyptian civilization.

Freud postulated that one of the first features of civilization to distinguish mankind from animals was the "urge for cleanliness": the development of sensibilities of shame and distaste for dirt and excrement.¹²¹ The dehumanization of the lowest-ranking members of society by likening them to animals has been used to assert power in many cultures throughout history.¹²² Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle promoted the notion of natural

slavery, that some are fit by their nature for physical labor (*Politics* 1254b16–21), while a medieval northern French text lists and describes twenty-three varieties of peasants, who are compared to animals and excrement,¹²³ similar to the negative lists of occupations in Egyptian literature discussed above. Historian Paul Freedman comments on these representations: “The peasant by nature is fit for toil and, moreover, toil that does not deserve a reward but rather is assured by coercion. To the extent that he is naturally base, the peasant is appropriately exploited.”¹²⁴

By establishing a dichotomy of clean and unclean that depended on occupation and wealth, ancient Egyptian elite written culture presented the existing social order as natural and legitimized exclusion. As Douglas described, beliefs about dirt and pollution are determined through inextricably linked bodily sensations, physiological and psychological processes, which appear to be natural or intuitive.¹²⁵ This has also been described using the term “abjection,” popularized by Julia Kristeva: a sense of moral repulsion, which is felt to be a “natural” reaction against an external menace that should be distanced.¹²⁶ The extent to which ideas of dirt and cleanliness are perceived as “natural” or self-evident makes the significance of their role within representations of social status problematic; inequality is given an added appearance of normality. Within the dominant ancient Egyptian world view, the purified elite and the dirty laborers were perceived to be in their proper “places.”

THE CLEANING PROCESS

Theoretical work on dirt has mostly ignored cleaning itself,¹²⁷ but the process and who does it are worth examining. Paying someone to deal with dirt reinforces both parties’ social status and also signals it to others. A study of modern domestic workers in Brazil indicated that the standards and boundaries imposed on cleaners were

accepted and applied to their own homes and attitudes, reinforcing pollution criteria as a structural aspect for all social groups.¹²⁸

Representations of laundry are first attested in the Middle Kingdom.¹²⁹ Tomb chapels at Beni Hassan depict the cleaning of linen as rigorous work carried out by men, who beat the cloth as they wash it.¹³⁰ They wring it out using a stake, leaning back with the effort, as water is shown streaming from the cloth (Fig. 12). These processes are also depicted in tomb models from Saqqara, which include figures who carry stacks of freshly laundered linen on their heads.¹³¹ In ancient Egypt, while some household washing may have been done by women, professional launderers were men according to representational and administrative evidence from the Middle and New Kingdoms.¹³²

The value placed on linen and its purity is evident from the supervision of laundry in tomb scenes by an overseer, the “Sealer of the Bedlinen” (*htmw n hnkyt*), who presumably protected the clean linen by sealing it in a chest. One of the most frequently depicted personal attendants of the high official Khnumhotep II is referred to as a “Keeper of the Linen/Clothing” (Figs. 1, 3–4; see n. 46). He is depicted five times, always in close company with the tomb owner.¹³³ This policing of clean laundry may have arisen largely out of issues of ownership and protection of property, but it may also have related to social boundaries. For example, in modern Brazil, those employers of maids/cleaners were found to have a strong aversion to mixing their personal laundry with that of their servants.¹³⁴

Washermen themselves appear to have been



FIGURE 12: Laundrymen wringing out cloth, tomb of Baqt III, Beni Hassan. Photograph by the author; cf. *BHI*, pl. 4 [2nd reg. center].

viewed ambiguously; holding a liminal position between dirt and cleanliness, elite culture presents them as potentially needing to be controlled or excluded. In addition to the pejorative descriptions of washermen cited above, *Khety* also mentions that they were required to clean menstruation blood: “he puts himself to the underskirts of a woman / who is in her period” (19.5).¹³⁵ As a bodily fluid out of place, and one associated with women, this may have been seen as taboo. Frandsen argues from this and other sources that menstruation was considered *bwt* and that men in ancient Egypt were supposed to avoid contact with menstruating women. He suggests that washermen may have been viewed as contaminated by their work and hence “were considered to be among the lowest ranking in the social hierarchy.”¹³⁶ This negative perception impacts how the washerman is treated, being given orders with terse imperatives: “he is told, ‘Here are dirty clothes (*šm*)! Get over here (*ms tw r.i*)!’” (*Khety* 19.7).¹³⁷ Through the cleaning process, the dangers of pollution are transferred to those who conduct it: cleaners serve as a conduit for contamination away from the elite, but are tainted by this contact.

In contrast, the elite are depicted as having the ability to purge the lower classes through exertion of their authority: the ancient Egyptian system of petitioning, whereby grievances could be presented to elite adjudicators, who dispensed judgments.¹³⁸ The Eloquent Peasant, upon completing his petition to the High Steward Rensi concerning the theft of his property, says:

I have now ... bailed out my water (*pnq.n.i mwy.i*),
unloaded (*snf*) what was in my body,
washed my soiled clothes (*i^c.n.i š³mw.i*);
my plaint is done, my wretchedness (*m³ir*)
ended before you. (B 1 309–310)¹³⁹

These verses use metaphors that reference human excreta, equating the peasant’s psychological wretchedness with physical pollution: elite petitioning is presented as a process of cleansing. However, since this is an intellectual form of cleansing, the elite are not contaminated, unlike washermen who take on the burden of pollution. Perhaps cleaning performed on behalf of the elite may have been seen as part of a reciprocal process, preserving the purity of the elite so that they could continue to maintain order amongst the rest of society.

SPATIAL CONTROL: PURIFICATION, EXCLUSION, AND ORGANIZATION

Cleanliness was key to access in ancient Egyptian culture. By regulating spaces using purity requirements, places that could confer status and power were restricted to the elite. For example, in the *Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor*, a high official is advised before he goes to the palace: “Wash yourself! Pour water on your hands! / So you may reply when you are addressed, / and speak to the king with self-possession” (13–16).¹⁴⁰ Elite culture presented cleanliness as an ethical value that made them suitable to perform religious rituals and access the realm of the divine. Elite biographical epithets boast that their fingers or hands are “pure (*w^b*)” or “clean (*twr/twy*)”.¹⁴¹ The earliest scenes of ritual purification in private tombs date to the Middle Kingdom. The tombs at Meir depict pouring water and burning incense.¹⁴² In the tomb of Djehutihotep at el-Bersha, his sons pour water over his figure, presumably a statue, while elsewhere a priest pours water at his feet.¹⁴³ Purification of the body, through washing, chewing natron, and wearing fresh garments were cultic requirements for entry to temples and tombs.¹⁴⁴ *Ipuwer* invokes these as strict rules: “remember the adhering to regulations (*ndr tp-rd*), /... the removal of one initiated into ritual purity (*w^bt*) because of bodily vileness (*hst*)” (11.4–5).¹⁴⁵ As such, people in dirty occupations were likely amongst those who were excluded from access to official religion. The Book of the Temple also states that people who have physical disabilities or diseases should be excluded, indicating a fear of contamination and pollution.¹⁴⁶

Archaeological evidence indicates that elite and non-elite areas were often kept distinct in both life and death.¹⁴⁷ Middle Kingdom necropoleis in Middle Egypt were hierarchically-tiered, with the decorated nomarchal tombs highly visible at the tops of desert cliffs, the rock-cut shafts of their subordinates close below, and the lower classes presumably buried in pit graves at the bottom.¹⁴⁸ In the Middle Kingdom town Lahun, a dividing wall formed a physical barrier between the large elite residences and administrative buildings of the eastern section, and the much smaller domestic residences of the rest of the inhabitants.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, the elite residences in the Middle Kingdom town of Wah-sut at South Abydos were also grouped in a distinct area on the highest ground.¹⁵⁰ Physical separation would have psychologically reinforced distinctions between social groups. These



FIGURE 13: Model granary, with scribes who have shaved heads, and a doorkeeper (MMA 20.3.11), from Theban tomb 280 of Meketre. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/545281>.

settlements were both purpose-built by the state, so their segregated organization may have been ideologically motivated.

Access to the Egyptian royal palace was hierarchically restricted, and various Middle Kingdom elite titles refer to exclusive access to inner areas of the residence and other state buildings.¹⁵¹ *Sinuhe* describes approaching and entering the palace; each space is associated with increasingly higher status individuals, indicating “spatial configurations can be experienced as manifestations of social order.”¹⁵² Officials also served to reinforce these physical boundaries, for example the late Dynasty 11 stela of Intef, son of Tjetji, king’s servant

to Montuhotep II, describes his role as: “one who acts as a door for what is and what is not (*ntt iwtt*). / Favorite of the king in his palace / in keeping commoners (*rmt*) distant (*shri*) from him” (MMA 57.95, l. 5–6).¹⁵³

Doorkeepers were employed, apparently not only to protect property, but also to control laborers’ movements. The mat-maker in *Khety* is described as being virtually imprisoned, he: “has to give provisions to the doorkeeper (*iry-ꜣ3*) to let him see daylight (*hdwt*)” (14.3–4).¹⁵⁴ While this statement may be exaggerated, doorkeepers in tomb decoration and models attest to the physical enforcement of restricted access, generally shown holding a stick to

demonstrate their potential use of force (Fig. 13).¹⁵⁵

Limited archaeological evidence suggests that occupational areas were organized hierarchically, presumably in order to control production, goods, and access. Elongated corridor-like rooms, especially in parallel arrangement, appear to have had a general meaning of control for the ancient Egyptians, as evidenced by typical storeroom architecture in both the archaeology and in tomb models.¹⁵⁶ The galleries that have been interpreted as possible barracks in the pyramid construction town at Giza have an elongated plan, possibly to enable supervision and restrict access with doorkeepers.¹⁵⁷

Some kinds of architectural space, such as courtyards, may have been intended to offer both protection from pollution and containment of dirt. For example, beef was a high-status food and a key component of offerings; meat required protection from external pollution, but the architecture also needed to contain the dirtiness it created during butchery and storage/drying, especially within temple complex contexts.¹⁵⁸ There are numerous depictions of slaughterhouses in funerary art, although they may be more notional than realistic.¹⁵⁹ The most extensive remains of an ancient Egyptian slaughterhouse are just southeast of the pyramid temple of Fifth Dynasty King Neferefre at Abusir.¹⁶⁰ It was originally a free-standing rectangular mud-brick structure, but it later became incorporated into the temple. The walled, open-air courtyard and the interior aerated columned area for hanging drying meat would have protected the purity of the meat, while also maintaining separation to avoid pollution of other temple areas. The exterior and interior walls of the slaughterhouse were plastered and whitewashed, “underlining the pure state and

sacred nature of the building.”¹⁶¹ The significance of this decoration is confirmed in *Ipuwer*: “the priest cleansing the sacred areas / and the temple plastered (white) like milk (*irtt*)” (11.3).¹⁶²

The desire to regulate dirt likely impacted laborers’ actual working environments: some occupations could work indoors while others were relegated outdoors. In the carpenter–potter–smithy model of Gemniemhat, the potters are shown outdoors, perhaps due to the dirty nature of their work, while the others are indoors.¹⁶³ *Khety* is again relevant, describing the potter as “grubbing (*hm*) the yard of every house, / treading public places (*hw n iwyt*)” (9.6). Working seated on the ground would not only have been perceived as “dirty,” it would have had a physical toll, with laborers often enduring uncomfortable positions. *Khety* describes the jeweler who “sits down to his daily food / with his knees and back still bent” (6.3).¹⁶⁴ This is illustrated in the tomb of *Khety* at Beni Hassan where jewelers and metalworkers are shown squatting on the ground with bent knees (Fig. 14). This squatting posture was sometimes used for representations of gods, however they are always shown cloaked, hence separated from dirt.

Douglas argued that “ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose a system on an inherently untidy experience.”¹⁶⁵ Ancient Egyptian literature and art demonstrate that social hierarchy was conceptualized spatially. Tomb decoration imposed order on chaos through its organization into registers, including processions of officials ordered according to rank.¹⁶⁶ Offering lists dominate Middle Kingdom tomb walls much more than in the Old Kingdom. Extensive lists of burial



FIGURE 14: Jewelers and metalworkers squatting on the ground, tomb of *Khety*, Beni Hassan. Photograph by the author; cf. *BH II*, pl. 14 [3rd reg. right].

goods and food offerings,¹⁶⁷ as well as scenes of production and taxation, present these goods as the lawful property of the tomb owner, legitimizing his socio-economic control of the province. The ability to impose order signaled authority and ownership.

Literature uses a similar organizational technique to ordered tomb registers. Several texts use lists in their representations of the lower classes, indicating that the format was a generic feature. The list was itself a genre—the “onomasticon,”¹⁶⁸ which created order by categorizing the world. Lists were an ancient and prestigious form of writing, given prominent positions in temples, annals, and other royal contexts.¹⁶⁹ In the *Eloquent Peasant* (B1 200–210), *Ipuwer* (1.1–5), and *Khety* (4–22), lists are used to impose order on the chaotic lower classes, potentially helping to neutralize elite fears.¹⁷⁰

POLLUTION FEARS, SOCIAL ANXIETY, AND CHANGE

According to Douglas, “a rule of avoiding anomalous things affirms and strengthens the definitions to which they do not conform” and helps to enforce conformity in the rest of society.¹⁷¹ However, perceptions of purity and pollution give rise to “pollution fear”: “the fear that the privileged feel of those at whose expense their privilege is enjoyed.”¹⁷² In this vein, *Khety* denigrates lower-class working conditions, abilities, cleanliness, and even humanity, articulating the fear and distaste that the poor could evoke in the elite.

Fear of pollution and the transgression of social boundaries were preoccupations of Egyptian literature, particularly evident in the theme of the “reversal of order,” a nightmare vision of society inverted. It is more than just a blurring of social categories: in *Ipuwer*’s lament, entire lifestyles are swapped, violently upsetting the established social order; people themselves become matter out of place. The abjection felt by the elite against the filth and discomfort of impoverishment suggests that each class is best suited to their own place in society. Although the composition date of *Ipuwer* is disputed, it “may have been influenced by the memory of historical events” of political and social upheaval that occurred in the late Old Kingdom, First Intermediate Period, and parts of the Middle Kingdom.¹⁷³

When there is marked ambiguity or instability in a society’s social structure, clear differentiation of identity and establishment of status are salient. Sociologist Richard Jenkins notes that “change, or its prospect, is particularly likely to provoke concerns

about identity” and the persecution or belittling of specific groups may be recognized as the product of “crises of identity.”¹⁷⁴ *Ipuwer* uses the topos of a chaotic reversal of order to explore elite fears about the poor and possible social unrest. In this binary perspective, the poor are depicted as benefitting at the expense of the elite, reinforcing their negative characterization. *Ipuwer*’s fictional concerns may have been suggested by anxieties about real or imagined social change. In the archaeological record of the early Middle Kingdom, increases in the numbers of official titles, seals, and seal impressions indicate growth in the administration, which may have resulted in greater social mobility.¹⁷⁵ Seals reflect a wide range of society at the late Dynasty 12–13 Abydos town of Wah-sut, from high elite and sub-elite to non-elite, such as the “Brewer Amenemhat.”¹⁷⁶ Shifts in social structure may have created tensions and prompted the fear of pollution expressed in literature.

Changes in tomb decoration are also revealing. The diversification of scene types in Middle Kingdom tomb chapels and tomb models, including new scenes such as laundry, spinning, and weaving, increased their focus on the local in order to show a wider variety of activities on the estate. This representation of a microcosm of society expanded the tomb owner’s sphere of influence, replicating a provincial power structure based on that of the king, in which “the court surrounding a local ‘official’ mirrored that of the central regime.”¹⁷⁷ Depictions of dirt and purification played a significant role in conveying social distinction, emphasizing the tomb owner’s respected position within society, while “othering” laborers.

CONCLUSIONS

In tomb decoration, the elite were able to create a model of the world conforming to their ideals of order. It was necessary to depict lower-ranking members of society, so the tomb owner could be seen to be exerting authority and creating order. Literature was able to explore tensions and complexities more freely, but was still reinforcing of social boundaries. By establishing a dichotomy of clean and unclean, dependent on occupation and wealth, and equating it to morality, elite culture presented the existing social order as necessary and natural. Concerns about purity and pollution were used to justify physical barriers and separation. Controlling space, movement, and access aided the elite in maintaining privileges that favored them.

Ancient Egyptian dirt was both symbolic and materially essential; representations convey the unpleasant realities of dirt and the personal cost of purity requirements. Consideration of these representations demonstrates the extent to which the symbolic constructs of purity and dirt reinforced divisions in ancient Egyptian society.

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Abbreviations

BH I = Newberry, Percy E. 1893. *Beni Hasan I*. London: Egypt Exploration Fund.
BH II = Newberry, Percy E. 1893. *Beni Hasan II*. London: Egypt Exploration Fund.
Bersheh I = Newberry, Percy E. 1893. *El Bersheh I*. London: Egypt Exploration Fund.
Bersheh II = Newberry, Percy E. 1893. *El Bersheh II*. London: Egypt Exploration Fund.
Meir I = Blackman, Aylward M. 1914. *The Rock Tombs of Meir I: The Tomb-chapel of Ukh-hotp’s Son Senbi*. London: Egypt Exploration Fund.
Meir II = Blackman, Aylward M. 1915. *The Rock Tombs of Meir II: The Tomb-chapel of Senbi’s Son Ukh-hotp (B, No. 2)*. London: Egypt Exploration Fund.
Meir III = Blackman, Aylward M. 1915. *The Rock Tombs of Meir III: The Tomb-chapel of Ukh-hotp and Mersi (B, No. 4)*. London: Egypt Exploration Fund.
Meir VI = Blackman, Aylward M. 1953. *The Rock Tombs of Meir VI: The Tomb-chapels of Ukhhotpe, Son of Iam (A, No. 3), Senbi, Son of Ukhhotpe, Son of Senbi (B, No. 3), and Ukhhotpe, Son of Ukhhotpe*

and Heny-hery-ib (C, No. 1). London: Egypt Exploration Society.

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- 7 Campkin and Cox 2007, 1.
- 8 Douglas 1966, 48, 2.
- 9 Durkheim 1989 [1897], 160–163; Goffman 1963, 126–153.
- 10 Baines and Yoffee 1998, esp. 213, 235.
- 11 E.g., *Teaching of Neferti* 15d: Parkinson 1997, 139; Assmann 1989, esp. 12; Assman 1990, esp. 15–19.
- 12 Adapted from Enmarch 2008, 147–148; Parkinson 1997, 181. The shepherd metaphor is often used for the king as society's leader and protector (e.g., *Merikare* E 131: Quack 1992, 78–79; *Ipuwer* 12.1–3: Enmarch 2008, 181–183; see also Blumenthal 1970, 27 [A2]).
- 13 Frandsen 1998; Frandsen 2001; Frandsen 2007.
- 14 Loprieno 1988; Quirke 1991; Richards 2005, 172–180.
- 15 Willems 2013.
- 16 Gundlach 1998, 227–237; Bárta 2013.
- 17 Vandier 1936; Bell 1971.
- 18 Seidlmayer 1987; Moreno García 2003; Willems 2010, esp. 82.
- 19 Willems 2013, 384–387.
- 20 Parkinson 2002, 46, 71–73, 297, 314.
- 21 Parkinson 2002, 65–66.
- 22 Loprieno 1988; Morenz 1996, 3, 201.
- 23 Loprieno 1988, 86–97; Parkinson 2002, 129–146; Enmarch 2008.
- 24 Quack 1992, 116–118; Stauder 2013; Widmaier 2013.
- 25 E.g., Doxey 1998.
- 26 Baines 1991, 140; Doxey 1998, 182.
- 27 Exceptions include Kanawati and Woods 2010.
- 28 E.g., Smith 1946, 238; Taylor 2001, 151.
- 29 Harpur 1987.
- 30 Frequently referenced tomb publications are abbreviated as listed in the Abbreviations section. For Qubbet el-Hawa, see Müller 1940. The best-preserved tomb at Thebes is that of Senet, the wife or mother of a vizier: Davies 1920.
- 31 For example, in the tomb of Baqt III at Beni Hassan, the statue-dragging vignette at the far left-hand side of the top register of the south wall is indicated thus: (*BH* II, pl. 7 [1st reg. left]).
- 32 Garstang 1907, 226.

NOTES

- ¹ Translation adapted from Enmarch 2008, 77; and Parkinson 1997, 172.
- ² Baines and Eyre 2007 [1983], esp. 66–67; Baines 2010.
- ³ E.g., Baines 2015; Doxey 1998; Frood 2007.
- ⁴ Douglas 1966.
- ⁵ Douglas 1966, 2.
- ⁶ Douglas 1966, 36–37. In later editions, Douglas attributes the phrase to Lord Chesterfield (1694–1773) without giving a source; for further discussion, see Campkin 2013, 47–48.

- ³³ Arnold 1981.
- ³⁴ Tooley 1989, 377.
- ³⁵ Meskell and Joyce 2003, 116; see also the estimated 845 m² of linen found in tomb of Wah: Winlock 1940.
- ³⁶ E.g., *BH* I, pls. 12 [4th reg. right], 30 [6th reg. right]
- ³⁷ Freed et al. 2009, 157; Dann 2000, 41–43.
- ³⁸ E.g., *Bersheh* I, pl. 33; *Meir* I, pls. 2, 9 [2nd reg. right]; on pleating, see Vogelsang-Eastwood 1993, 41–46.
- ³⁹ Enmarch 2008, 198–199; Parkinson 1997, 187.
- ⁴⁰ Enmarch 2008, 201.
- ⁴¹ See also *Ipuwer* 4.9 and 8.9: Enmarch 2008, 99–100, 136, 143; Parkinson 1997, 175, 179–180.
- ⁴² Arnold 1996, 55.
- ⁴³ Shafer (ed.) 1997, 15.
- ⁴⁴ E.g., in the tomb of Djehutihotep, el-Bersha, four rows of statue-dragging teams are depicted. The “priests of the Hare nome” in the third row from the top are distinguished by their shaved heads, unlike the other figures (*Bersheh* I, pl. 15 [4th reg.]).
- ⁴⁵ Examples of shaved heads in tomb models: Inpuemhat and Usermut, Saqqara laundry Cairo JE 46765 and combined bakery-brewery-butchers Cairo JE 45497: Quibell 1927, pls. 24.1, 25.2; Tooley 1995, fig. 46; in the Gemniemhat, Saqqara storehouse AEIN 1632 and combined baker-brewer-butcher AEIN 1631: Jørgensen 2002, no. 21–22.
- ⁴⁶ *BH* I, pl. 35 [5th reg. center]; *BH* II, pl. 15 [7th reg. right]; *Meir* III, pl. 23 [4th reg. left], 31.
- ⁴⁷ This title’s reading is uncertain because the hieroglyph after *iry* is apparently not otherwise attested (pers. comm. Marcel Marée and Richard Parkinson 2011). The symbol is a white square with a weft fringe on top. For more on the titles “Keeper of Clothing (*iry hbsw*)” and “Keeper of Linen (*iry sšrw*)”, see Ward 1982, nos. 529, 544; Quirke 2004, 73–74.
- ⁴⁸ MMA 20.3.11, MMA 20.3.6: Winlock 1955, 25–27, pls. 20, 51.
- ⁴⁹ Depictions in tomb decoration: *BH* I, pls. 29 [2nd reg. center], 32; *BH* II, pls. 28, 32 [1st reg. left]; *Meir* I, pl. 20 [right]; *Meir* III, pl. 14; *Meir* VI, pls. 9, 11, 18; Müller 1940, figs. 5, 10, pl. 6; *Bersheh* I, pls. 7, 11, 20, 33. See also Cherpion 1999; Goffoet 1992; Veldmeijer 2011.
- ⁵⁰ Cherpion 1999, 229; Goffoet 1992, 119.
- ⁵¹ Quack 1992, 38–39, 177; Parkinson 1997, 221.
- ⁵² Faulkner 1973, 127.
- ⁵³ Cherpion 1999, 229.
- ⁵⁴ Amin 2004 [2003], 72.
- ⁵⁵ Janssen 2008, 95–107.
- ⁵⁶ Goffoet 1992, 117–119.
- ⁵⁷ Depictions in tomb decoration: *BH* I, pls. 17 [top left], 35 [top left]; *Meir* II, pl. 32; see also Kamrin 1999, 123.
- ⁵⁸ Cairo JE 46724: Winlock 1955, 18–20, 26, fig. 8.
- ⁵⁹ Depictions in tomb decoration: *Meir* I, pls. 12, 13 [3rd reg. left], 29 [3rd reg. right]; *BH* I, pl. 29 [3rd reg. left]; Kamrin 1999, 64; MMA 26.3.354–2: unpublished from Tomb of Khety, Deir el-Bahri (TT 311), see Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1 November 2017: <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/590880>. Tomb model of a palanquin from Sedment tomb 1525 (Manchester 6956a-e): Tooley 1995, fig. 59. Literary references: *Khufu’s Court* 7.12–14: Parkinson 1997, 113; *Ipuwer* 4.11: Enmarch 2008, 101.
- ⁶⁰ Depictions in tomb decoration: *BH* I, pl. 29 [3rd reg. left]; *BH* II, pls. 16, 31 [far left]; Kanawati and Woods 2010, fig. 5. See also Fischer 1972; Fischer 1984.
- ⁶¹ Enmarch 2008, 146–147, 199–200.
- ⁶² Svarth 1988, 49.
- ⁶³ Enmarch 2008, 99–100; see also 7.10: Enmarch 2008, 135.
- ⁶⁴ E.g., *Meir* III, pl. 4 [3rd reg. right]; Davies 1920, pl. 15 [1st reg. center].
- ⁶⁵ Fischer-Elfert 2005, 345.
- ⁶⁶ E.g., *BH* I, pl. 12 [4th reg. right]; *Meir* I, pl. 9 [2nd reg. right]. See Fischer 1975; Fehlig 1986; Harpur 1987, 128.
- ⁶⁷ Newberry 1929; Graham 2001; Kamrin 1999, 156.
- ⁶⁸ Depictions of fly-whisks with owner seated at a table: *BH* I, pls. 17 [left], 35 [left]; *BH* II, pl. 30 [right]; *Meir* I, pl. 12 [right]; *Meir* III, pl. 3 [left]; *Meir* VI, pl. 17 [left]. Exceptions are Khnumhotep II seated outdoors (*BH* I, pl. 29 [2nd reg. center]) and Ukhhotep IV in a pavilion (*Meir* VI, pl. 28

- [top left]).
- ⁶⁹ E.g., *BH* I, pl. 17 [1st and 2nd regs. right]; *BH* II, pl. 30; for discussion of sashes, see Hall 1986, 22; Vogelsang-Eastwood 1993, 87. Priestly sashes are also worn by the tomb owner and his son (e.g., *BH* I, pls. 17, 33; *Meir* VI, pl. 13), and occasionally by offering bearers and funeral dancers (e.g., *Meir* I, pl. 10 [1st reg. right]; *Meir* II, pl. 10 [left]).
- ⁷⁰ Hall 1986, 26; Harpur 1987, 170–171.
- ⁷¹ E.g., *BH* I, pl. 17 [6th reg. right]; *Meir* I, pl. 10 [2nd reg. left].
- ⁷² E.g., *Meir* III, pl. 7 [2nd reg. left]; *BH* II, pl. 4 [2nd reg. right].
- ⁷³ E.g., *BH* I, pls. 33, 35 [2nd reg. center]; *BH* II, pl. 30 [3rd reg. right]; *Meir* II, pl. 23; Vogelsang-Eastwood 1993, 86, fig. 5.20, interprets this as part of a high-waisted kilt.
- ⁷⁴ E.g., Davies 1920, pls. 14 [center right]; 18 [2nd reg. right]; 28 [2nd reg. center], 32 [2nd reg. center]; *BH* I, pl. 17 [1st reg. right]; *BH* II, pl. 16 [bottom left].
- ⁷⁵ E.g., Davies 1920, pls. 18, 19 [1st reg. center], 21 [2nd reg. right, left]; *Meir* I, pl. 10 [1st reg. right].
- ⁷⁶ E.g., *Meir* III, pl. 23 [2nd and 3rd reg. right]; *Meir* VI, pl. 15 [3rd reg. left].
- ⁷⁷ E.g., *BH* I, pl. 30 [far right]; *BH* I, pls. 30 [far right], 34 [left]; Davies 1920, pl. 18 [2nd reg. right].
- ⁷⁸ E.g., *Meir* II, pls. 3 [1st reg. right], 4 [1st reg. left].
- ⁷⁹ Davies 1920, pls. 12 [1st reg. right], 12A.
- ⁸⁰ *BH* I, pl. 18 [6th reg. center]. See also *Meir* I, pl. 9 [1st reg. center], pl. 32; *Meir* I, pls. 32, 34; Davies 1920, pl. 26 [3rd reg. center].
- ⁸¹ Potters of Gemniemhat, Saqqara (AEIN 1633): Jørgensen 2002, 91; Tooley 1995, 44, fig. 42; brickmaker of Djehutinakht IV, el-Bersha (Boston MFA 21.411): Freed et al. 2009, 165, fig. 125; slaughterhouse, MMA 20.3.10, kitchen Tender S, MMA 20.3.3, and bakery/brewery, MMA 20.3.12 of Meketre, Thebes: Winlock 1955, pls. 18–19, 21, 44, 60–61; Arnold 2005, 5; Roehrig 2002, figs. 10, 14.
- ⁸² Combined bakery-brewery-butchers of Inpuemhat and Usermut, Saqqara (Cairo JE 45497): Quibell 1927, 15, pl. 24.1.
- ⁸³ E.g., Doxey 1998, 198–201. Also *Eloquent Peasant* B1 94–95, B1 273–275; Parkinson 2012, 78, 221.
- ⁸⁴ Vogelsang-Eastwood 1993, 76, 86.
- ⁸⁵ E.g., *BH* I, pl. 34 [2nd reg.]; *Meir* I, pls. 3 [3rd reg. center, right], 4 [1st reg. left]; *Meir* II, pl. 4 [3rd reg. center]; *Bersheh* I, pls. 17 [1st reg. left], 20 [2nd reg. left], 22 [1st reg.]; *Bersheh* II, pl. 16.
- ⁸⁶ E.g., *Meir* II, pls. 3 [2nd and 3rd reg. center and right], 4 [3rd reg. center].
- ⁸⁷ E.g., potters: *BH* I, pl. 11 [4th reg. center]; *BH* II, pl. 7 [4th reg. left]; gardeners: *Bersheh* I, pl. 26 [1st reg.]; agricultural labourers: *Bersheh* I, pls. 25 [1st, 2nd reg.]; metalworkers: *BH* II, pl. 7 [4th reg. left, 6th reg. left].
- ⁸⁸ E.g., *Meir* I, pl. 10 [2nd reg. left]; *BH* I, pl. 13 [4th reg. right]; *BH* II, pls. 7 [4th reg. center], 22A [1st reg.].
- ⁸⁹ E.g., *Meir* I, pls. 10 [3rd reg. center left], 11 [3rd reg.]; *Meir* II, pls. 3 [1st reg. right] and 4 [1st reg. left].
- ⁹⁰ *BH* I, pl. 29.
- ⁹¹ Robins 2008, 213.
- ⁹² Jäger 2004, 76–77, 172; Parkinson 1997, 277.
- ⁹³ Jäger 2004, 85–86, 174–175; Parkinson 1997, 277.
- ⁹⁴ Jäger 2004, 74, 171; Parkinson 1997, 276.
- ⁹⁵ Jäger 2004, 132–133, 158–167; Parkinson 1997, 275.
- ⁹⁶ Douglas 1966, 2.
- ⁹⁷ For more on decay and disgust, see Curtis and Biran 2001, 17–31.
- ⁹⁸ Jäger 2004, 92–94, 177–178.
- ⁹⁹ Allen 2011, 78–89.
- ¹⁰⁰ Jäger 2004, 77–78; Parkinson 1997, 277.
- ¹⁰¹ Coffin Text Spells 173, 179, 181, 184–195, 197, 199, 201–208, 213–218, 220, 580–581, and 587 deal with preventing the consumption of excrement (Faulkner 1973, 147–149, 151–152, 154–175, 183–185, 190); see also Nyord 2009, 207, 268, 287, 493. For possible exceptions to the negative perception of feces, such as sacred waste from divine animals and medicinal use, e.g., Douglas’ dirt is “in the eye of the beholder”, see von Lieven 2011, 291–300.
- ¹⁰² Douglas 1966, 98.
- ¹⁰³ Rozin et al. 2008, 760–762.
- ¹⁰⁴ For example, a recent UK study reported refuse collectors being perceived as potential thieves:

- Hughes et al. 2016. See also Lee 1990.
- ¹⁰⁵ Elias and Scotson 1965, xxvi.
- ¹⁰⁶ Elias and Scotson 1965, xxviii.
- ¹⁰⁷ Parkinson 2012, 168.
- ¹⁰⁸ Enmarch 2008, 77.
- ¹⁰⁹ Houlihan 1986, 27; Mackintosh 1977, 27–28.
- ¹¹⁰ Jäger 2004, 132–133, 167–168; Parkinson 1997, 275.
- ¹¹¹ Faulkner 1977, 70.
- ¹¹² Goldwasser 1995, 103–105; McDonald 2002, 473, 488.
- ¹¹³ Jäger 2004, 73, 75, 136–137, 171; Parkinson 1997, 275.
- ¹¹⁴ Enmarch 2008, 113–114.
- ¹¹⁵ Faulkner 1973, 135.
- ¹¹⁶ Hecker 1984; El-Huseny 2006, 41–117; Bertini 2011; Bertini and Cruz-Rivera 2014, 83–107.
- ¹¹⁷ Miller 1990.
- ¹¹⁸ Smith 2003, 46.
- ¹¹⁹ El-Huseny 2006, 426–430.
- ¹²⁰ Parkinson 1997, 42. Compare *Ipuwer* 15.2–3: Enmarch 2008, 206–207.
- ¹²¹ Freud 1929 [2002], 42, n. 1.
- ¹²² E.g., Goff et al. 2008.
- ¹²³ Freedman 1999, 134–138; Faral 1922, 243–264.
- ¹²⁴ Freedman 1999, 134.
- ¹²⁵ Douglas 1975; see also Campkin and Cox 2007, esp. 4.
- ¹²⁶ Campkin and Cox 2007, 5; Kristeva quoted in Buchli and Lucas 2001, 10.
- ¹²⁷ Campkin and Cox 2007, 6–7.
- ¹²⁸ Barbosa 2007.
- ¹²⁹ Vogelsang-Eastwood 2000, 284; see also Hall 1986, 48–56.
- ¹³⁰ *BH* I, pls. 11 [5th reg.], 29 [2nd reg. left]; *BH* II, pls. 4 [2nd reg. left]; 13 [2nd reg. left-center].
- ¹³¹ E.g., Cairo JE 46765 of Inpuemhat and Usermut, Saqqara: Quibell 1927, 41–42, pl. 15.2; Tooley 1995, fig. 46; Cairo JE 47929 of Gemniemhat, Saqqara: Firth and Gunn 1926, 53, pl. 28; Jørgensen 2002, 86–87. These models are sometimes described as depicting flax/rope production (e.g., Tooley 1989, 62, 76), but their depictions of stacked linen and their similarity to the Beni Hassan scenes indicate they represent laundry.
- ¹³² Vogelsang-Eastwood 2000, 284; Janssen and Janssen 2002.
- ¹³³ *BH* I, pls. 29 [2nd reg. right], 30, 32, 34, 35 [3rd reg. left].
- ¹³⁴ Barbosa 2007.
- ¹³⁵ Jäger 2004, 98–99, 179–180.
- ¹³⁶ Frandsen 2007, 82–104, 100.
- ¹³⁷ Jäger 2004, 100, 146–147, 179; Parkinson 1997, 279.
- ¹³⁸ On petitioning, see Hagen 2012, 161–164, 192–196; Parkinson 2012, 6–7. The actual process was documented in official records such as the late Middle Kingdom Papyrus Brooklyn Insertions B and C: Hayes 1955, 71–85, pls. 5–6; Quirke 1990, 140–146; and Seventeenth Dynasty Karnak legal stela: Helck 1983 [1975], 67, l. 16–18; Parkinson 2002, 177.
- ¹³⁹ Parkinson 2012, 248–251.
- ¹⁴⁰ Parkinson 1997, 92.
- ¹⁴¹ Doxey 1998, 66–68. On ritual purity, Quack 2013.
- ¹⁴² E.g., *Meir* I, pl. 10 [1st reg. right]; *Meir* III, pl. 23 [1st reg. right].
- ¹⁴³ *Bersheh* I, 15–16, pls. 10–11.
- ¹⁴⁴ Frandsen 1998, 980, 988.
- ¹⁴⁵ Enmarch 2008, 174.
- ¹⁴⁶ See the list of prohibited people in the “Book of the Temple”: Quack 2005, 64.
- ¹⁴⁷ Baines 1990; Richards 2005, 122 suggests that access to cemetery space at Haraga and Riqqa was restricted.
- ¹⁴⁸ Seidlmayer 2007; Willems et al. 2005.
- ¹⁴⁹ Petrie 1891, 5–8; Quirke 2005; Frey and Knudstad 2007.
- ¹⁵⁰ Wegner 2001, 282–285.
- ¹⁵¹ E.g., “interior overseer of the inner palace (*imy-r ḥnwty n kꜣp*)”, or “(chief) interior overseer of the treasury (*imy-r ḥnwty (wr) n pr-ḥd*)”: Quirke 1986, 117–120.
- ¹⁵² Arnold 2007, 49.
- ¹⁵³ Lichtheim 1988, 50.
- ¹⁵⁴ Jäger 2004, 142–143, 175.
- ¹⁵⁵ A doorkeeper is depicted in the granary of Sarenput I, Qubbet el-Hawa: Müller 1940, pl. 27. Doorkeepers in tomb models: e.g., Meketre

- slaughterhouse (MMA 20.3.10: Winlock 1955, 86–87, pls. 7, 18–19; Roehrig 2002, figs. 13–14; Arnold 2005) and bakery/brewery (MMA 20.3.12: Winlock 1955, 27–29, 88, pls. 22–23).
- ¹⁵⁶ Arnold 2007, 49–50.
- ¹⁵⁷ Conard and Lehner 2001; Arnold 2005, 50, n. 197; Lehner and Wetterstrom (eds.) 2007, 185–192.
- ¹⁵⁸ Ikram 1995, on the drying of meat, see 147–154.
- ¹⁵⁹ Arnold 2005.
- ¹⁶⁰ Verner 1986; Verner 1988.
- ¹⁶¹ Arnold 2005, 9.
- ¹⁶² Enmarch 2008, 173.
- ¹⁶³ AEIN 1633: Jørgensen 2002, 91; Arnold 2005, 48–49.
- ¹⁶⁴ Jäger 2004, 134–135, 169.
- ¹⁶⁵ Douglas 1966, 4.
- ¹⁶⁶ E.g., *BH I*, pls. 30 [4th–5th regs. right]; *Bersheh I*, pl. 20.
- ¹⁶⁷ *BH I*, pls. 17–20, 35–37.
- ¹⁶⁸ Gardiner 1947.
- ¹⁶⁹ Baines 1988; Baines 2008.
- ¹⁷⁰ Parkinson 2002, 277; see also Kemp 2006 [1989], 71–72.
- ¹⁷¹ Douglas 1966, 40–41.
- ¹⁷² Moore 2007, 95.
- ¹⁷³ Enmarch 2008, 19–20.
- ¹⁷⁴ Jenkins 2004, 6, 11.
- ¹⁷⁵ Quirke 2004; Martin 1971; Grajetzki 2013, 220–224.
- ¹⁷⁶ Wegner 2010, 125, 137–139, fig. 7.7.
- ¹⁷⁷ Eyre 1999, 37.