

8. A Case of Domestic Violence

The following appears to be a record of a court hearing at which a man was accused of beating his wife and was made to swear an oath, presumably that he would not repeat the offence. Since the ends of the crucial lines are lost, we cannot be sure that this impression is correct; it is not impossible that the woman's husband was the victim of a beating by a third party rather than the other way around. The first person pronoun is male throughout, but since the speaker mentions 'my husband' and is thus presumably female, this is not informative. At any rate, in view of the interesting possibilities raised by this case, we have included it here.

Year 20, third month of summer, day 1. Day that the workman Amen-em-ope approached the lawcourt (of)

the chief workman Khonsu
the scribe Wen-nefer
the scribe Amen-nakhte
the deputy Amen-kha
the deputy In-her-khau
the officer Nefer-horep
the officer Kha [...]

saying, 'As for me, my husband [...] Then he beat, he beat [...] saying, 'And I caused his mother to be brought, the [...]' and I said He was found to be in the wrong, and one made [...] and I said to him, 'if you were [...] before the magistrates'.
And he took [an oath of the Lord], saying, 'As Amen lives, as [...] lives, [...] in [...]'

9. A Domestic Quarrel

This passage, taken from a record of various payments, favours, and services done by the workman Khnum-mose for his colleague Ruty, incidentally gives us a picture of a woman repeatedly thrown out of the house by her husband and taken in by her friends.

My son spent two years carrying his water.
A wall fell down in his storeroom and I built it up; and I used five donkey-loads of water for it, too.
I plastered three places on top of his house, and also the stairs of his tomb.

His wife spent forty days dwelling with me in my house, and I provided for her, giving her one sack of emmer and ten loaves. And he threw her out again, and she spent twenty days in the house of Menna, while I supplied

3 *oipe* of emmer
1 *inet*-garment (?)
1 *khet*-measure of *sety*-fruit.

10. Paternity Leave

The following extract, part of a journal recording who was absent from work each day and for what reason, has an interesting entry: the workman Ka-sa was given three days off when his wife gave birth. This may have been to help care for his wife or to take part in purification ceremonies.

Second month of inundation, day 23. Those who were (with) the scribe Pa-shed working for the vizier: Ipu, Nakhte-em-Mut.

Those who were (with) the chief workman Khay: Khannu, Sa-Wadyt; and Qa-ha was ill.

Those who were (with) the chief workman Pa-neb: Ka-sa, his wife being in childbirth and he had three days off. And Ka-sa son of Re-[mose] was ill; and Re-weben was ill.

11. Women Withdraw for Menstruation

In many cultures, women withdraw to a special place at the time of their menstruation. This practice is not well-attested for ancient Egypt until Ptolemaic and later times, when the space under the stairs of multi-storey houses was often reserved for this purpose. The only reference to the custom of withdrawal from earlier times occurs on the following ostrakon from Deir el-Medina. Eight menstruating women are said to have been leaving the village on their way to the 'place of women' when some incident occurred, the description of which is lost through a gap in the text.

Year 9, fourth month of inundation, day 13. Day that the eight women came outside [to the] place of women, when they were menstruating. They got as far as the back of the house which [... long gap] the three walls.

CHILDREN AND PARENTS

12. A Widower Cares for his Children

The following account, which concerns purely personal matters, was entered on the Turin Strike Papyrus ('Work in the Royal Tomb' No. 187 below) before the main text was written down. It records payments to a doctor and to a wet-nurse by a man called Weser-hat, and also an oath by the latter that he will not be separated from his three daughters. While no background to these events is given, it is perhaps not too fanciful to conjecture that Weser-hat's wife had died in childbirth, leaving the widower to care for their three children. Note that the wet-nurse, whose duties admittedly extended over some time, is paid as much as the doctor.

Year 29, month 4 of inundation, last day (Ramesses III).

Total given to the doctor by Weser-hat:

bronze ewer	makes 4 <i>deben</i>
fine <i>denyt</i> -basket	makes 5 <i>deben</i>
sandals, two pairs	makes 4 <i>deben</i>
one staff	makes $\frac{1}{2}$ <i>deben</i> (?)
basket with lid	makes $\frac{1}{4}$ sack
fine <i>denyt</i> -basket	makes 5 <i>deben</i>
castor oil, 2 <i>hin</i>	makes $\frac{1}{2}$ sack
wooden <i>sheger</i> -box	makes 2 <i>deben</i>
fine mat	makes $\frac{1}{4}$ sack.
Total [...] 22 <i>deben</i>	

(Things) that are for the wetnurse, which are in the possession of Weser-hat (but) which will be apportioned.

three necklaces of red jasper	makes 15 <i>deben</i>
one piece of log	makes 10 <i>deben</i>
<i>sheger</i> -basket	makes 2 <i>deben</i>
ivory comb	makes 2 <i>deben</i>
one pair of sandal thongs and 1 <i>hin</i> of fat	makes $1\frac{1}{2}$ <i>deben</i>
TOTAL	30 $\frac{1}{2}$ copper <i>deben</i>

WHAT is for him: 20 copper *deben*. WHAT is for her, [10] copper *deben*. TOTAL 30 copper *deben*.

Statement of Weser-hat before the lawcourt (of) the chief workman Kha, the scribe of the Necropolis Amen-nakhte, and the entire gang: 'As Amen endures, as the Ruler, I.p.h., endures, my three daughters will not be taken from me, and I will not be taken from them.'

13. A Son Supports his Father

We have little indication of what happened to older workmen—whether they received a salary until they died or whether they were dismissed and depended on their savings and their children for support. A third possibility is suggested by the following text, namely, that a father might retire in favour of his son, who would then support his parent. The text opens with a list of items given by Weskhet-nemtet to his father including such relative luxuries as meat, oil, honey, and garments, all of which were supplied to the workmen on festival days and as special rewards. The text goes on to record that Weskhet-nemtet gave his father emmer from his rations for ten months beginning in year 1, second month of inundation, which is known from other sources to have been the time of the younger man's appointment to the gang. The amount of grain handed over monthly, $2\frac{1}{2}$ sacks, is over half the younger man's salary. Finally, Weskhet-nemtet shared with his father the services of a maidservant, as provided to the workmen by the state. In addition to the items listed here, a workman would have received fish, vegetables, firewood, and pottery; but for some reason Weskhet-nemtet fails to mention this portion of his salary.

List of everything that Weskhet-nemtet gave to his father up to year 2:

New Year	10 large loaves
Festival of Amenophis [...]	5 large loaves
New Year again:	10 loaves, 2 mats
Given to him from the rewards which Pharaoh gave us:	5 large loaves, $\frac{1}{2}$ sack of emmer
	20 loaves, <i>shay</i> -cakes, 2 loaves

Again: 15 loaves, 10 pieces of cut meat

Again: 10 loaves, 5 pieces of cut meat, 2 *hin* sesame oil, 2 *hin* fat, 1 *hin* honey, 1 fine ketchief, 1 smooth-cloth tunic.

And I gave to him emmer amounting to $2\frac{1}{2}$ sacks as rations every month from year 1 until year 2, second month of inundation to third month of summer, making 10 months, each $2\frac{3}{4}$ sacks. Total, 27 sacks.

Given to him again: $1\frac{1}{2}$ sacks as rations from [...] Total, 25 sacks.

Given to him again: 2 sacks [given to] us by Pharaoh.

And during one year I gave [to him [...] day of service which Pharaoh gave to us. [...]

16. A Man Makes Demands on his In-Laws

In this letter, a woman asks her sister to send bread and reports that her husband has threatened to divorce her unless the couple gets more material support from her family. The husband sounds unpleasant and violent, and it is difficult to know how much weight to give his assertion that families always supplied foodstuffs to their relatives; one would not have expected a Deir el-Medina workman to depend on contributions from his wife's sister. The abrupt ending of the letter is characteristic of Egyptian correspondence.

Said by Ta-kheny-shepe to her sister Iyt. In life, prosperity and health!

Furthermore, to the effect that: I will send this grain to you and you should have it ground for me and add emmer to it and make it into bread for me, because I am quarrelling with Mery-Ma'at. '(I'll) throw you out' so he says, and he quarrels with my mother enquiring after grain for bread. 'Now, your mother does not do anything for you,' so he says to me, saying, 'now, you have siblings, but they do not look after you!' So he says, arguing with me daily. 'Now look, this is what you have done to me since I have lived here, although everyone supplies beer and fish daily (to) their people. In short, if you say something, you will go down to the Black Land (the cultivation).'

It is good if you attend.

17. A Woman Goes Back to her Parents

Since the family home went with the breadwinner's job, the first problem faced by a woman who found herself without a close male relative was where to live. In the following text a father promises his daughter that she can always find a home in his storehouse if the workman Baki throws her out. It is not clear what her relationship with this Baki is; he may be her husband, so that these measures are taken in case of a possible divorce. Note the stress put on the fact that the father built this structure himself, so that it is his own private property to do with as he likes.

The workman Hor-em-wia says to the lady Tenet-djeseret, his daughter: You are my good daughter. If the workman Baki throws you out of the house, I will act. As for the house [it belongs to (?)] Pharaoh, l.p.h.; but you will dwell in the portico in my storehouse, because I am the one who built it, and no one in the land will throw you out of there.

18. Charity after a Divorce

The workman Hesy-su-neb-ef divorced his wife Hel in year 2 of Seth-nakhte (c.1190-1187), and for three years after that, the author of the following text supported her with a small monthly grain ration. This quantity, roughly equivalent to 19 litres, would not be quite enough to live on, but he did also buy a sash of hers for six times its value. Why these good deeds were recorded is not said; he may have wished to put in a claim to her inheritance, though that is unlikely to have been worth much.

Besides the picture it gives of how a divorced woman might survive on the charity of others, this text raises two points of interest. First, it illustrates vividly how one might set about selling a piece of property. The owner estimated the value of her sash at a quarter sack of grain, and since this is a tenth of the usual price for such an item, this one must have been of very inferior quality. Her benefactor brought it down to the riverbank, the general market-place of West Thebes, and offered it for sale. Did he place it on the ground and stand behind it, hoping some passer-by would take a fancy to it? Or did he offer it to individuals known to him as likely buyers of clothing? In any case, no one would have it, and in the end he bought it himself for much more than it was worth.

This text also adds yet one more fact to the already well-documented lives of Hesy-su-neb-ef and Hel. Hesy-su-neb-ef evidently began life as a slave, but was adopted by his master and became a member of the gang, eventually attaining the rank of deputy. He expressed his devotion to his adoptive parents by naming a son and a daughter after them and by dedicating a stela to his father. Hel, his wife, is known from P Salt 124 (No. 21 below) to have lived with Pen-dua before she married Hesy-su-neb-ef; she deceived both husbands with the notorious Pa-neb. It is not impossible that this last incident led to her divorce from Hesy-su-neb-ef, especially since Pa-neb had threatened to kill her husband's beloved father.

Year 2, third month of summer, day 24, of King Weser-Khay-Re Setep-en-Re (Sethnakhte), l.p.h.: (day) Hesy-su-neb-ef divorced the lady Hel.

I spent three years giving to her an *oipe* of emmer every single month, making 9 sacks.

And she gave me a sash, saying, 'Offer it at the riverbank (the market-place); it will be bought from me for an *oipe* of emmer.' I offered it, but people rejected it, saying, 'It is bad!' And I told her exactly that, saying, 'It has been rejected.' Then she gave it to me, and I had one sack of emmer delivered to her via Khay son of Sa-Wadyt.

What was given to her via Nebu-em-wesket (*fem.*): 1 *oipe*.

- loaves, total 165 (?)
 30 loaves of the reward
 30 *bery*-fish
 2 sieves
 2 bowls
 10 jars of beer
 $\frac{1}{4}$ *oipe* lubyra-beans
 $\frac{1}{4}$ *oipe* sety-fruit
 $\frac{1}{4}$ *oipe* salt
 5 bricks of natron
 2 red jasper rings
 1 red jasper eye amulet, shaped from one piece.
 And they threw me out, although she had not made for me (even?)
 a garment for my behind.
 I went again with all my property in order to live with them.
 Look, she acted exactly the same way again.

ADULTERY

Surprisingly, adultery does not seem to have been a punishable offence in Egypt as it was in many other ancient cultures; but there was strong disapproval of the deed on moral grounds and literary texts suggest that the deceived husband might go so far as to murder the adulterer. Charges of adultery occur in denunciations of individuals to the authorities, probably as evidence of the accused's general wickedness, or, where he was himself an official, as examples of abuse of power. The accusation is generally one of sleeping with a married woman, suggesting that the wrong was against her husband rather than the adulterer's own wife; a man's infidelity with an unmarried woman would evidently not provoke the same public censure or risk of revenge. Of course, a married man who actually wished to set up house with a new woman would be expected to divorce his wife and give back the property she had brought into the marriage as well as her share of that which they had acquired together. There are very few references to women who committed adultery, although there should have been as many of these as adulterous men. Presumably it would again be the deceived husband who would be considered the injured party, and the couple would

settle the matter between them without bringing charges; the man could divorce his wife without surrendering her share of the common property.

21. Accusations against Officials

This passage forms part of a long series of charges against the chief workman Pa-neb by the workman Amen-nakhe. Amen-nakhe felt that he should have been chief workman himself and that Pa-neb had taken the job from under him by bribing the vizier. His aim was to have Pa-neb dismissed on the grounds that he was unworthy and incompetent. (See 'Law' No. 146.) The charges he brings here vary from criminal offences to evidence of bad character, and it is not clear where in this range the following accusations of adultery fall. Note that Pa-neb is said to have slept with the lady Hel when she 'was with' Pen-dua, and again when she 'was with' Hesy-su-neb-ef; the terminology strengthens our impression that marriage was a relatively informal arrangement. For Hel and Hesy-su-neb-ef, see above No. 18.

Charge concerning this: his son ran before him to the place of the doorkeepers and he took an oath of the Lord, l.p.h., saying, 'I will not shield him (?)'. And he said, 'Pa-neb slept with the lady Tuy when she was the wife of the workman Qenna; he slept with the lady Hel when she was with Pen-dua; he slept with the lady Hel when she was with Hesy-su-neb-ef,' so said his son. 'And when he had slept with Hel, he slept with Webkhet, her daughter. And A'o-pekhy, his son, slept with Webkhet himself.'

22. The Wealthy Seducer

This text offers a fascinating glimpse of village personalities which resembles an episode in a novel. The poor, rather trusting servant who is the narrator of the piece has married the daughter of a workman, but the young couple had not yet set up house together. One day, on visiting his beloved, the bridegroom found that she had been seduced by Mery-Sekhmet, the son of the wealthy draughtsman Menna, known from other sources to have been a wild and irresponsible young man given to brazen lies. After initial miscarriage of justice, the officials made Mery-Sekhmet swear to stay away from the girl in future; but in defiance of authority and of his own oath he visited her again and made her pregnant. This time his own father brought him before the officials, but Mery-Sekhmet got off lightly with another oath. The text is unique in several respects and it is not impossible that it