

Sections of Hell in Ancient Egypt

Yosuef Ibrahim Abbas, Dr. Bushra Enad Mohammed

Department of History, College of Arts, University of Baghdad

Email: yoseflbrahim33300@gmail.com

Abstract

The ancient Egyptian mentality was characterized by endless philosophical ideas. The foundations of the sources of these philosophical ideas were born from the natural phenomena in ancient Egypt. The ancient Egyptian found the phenomenon of the Nile flooding and then its recession and the drought that affected the country and its positive and negative impact on crops. He also found the phenomenon of sunset at night and its interpretation was its death. The explanation for the sunrise in the morning was its revival after death. Also, in ancient Egyptian mythology, the god (Osiris) was resurrected after his death. All of this naturally had an impact on the ancient Egyptian mentality and its reality on ancient Egyptian society in particular. The concept of death and resurrection that emerged in the ancient Egyptian mentality explained that there is another life after death and this life settles in a world that separates his material world. The life after death that the ancient Egyptian believed in was settled in the underworld. What concerns us here is the section in which the guilty were punished after their trial in the court of the god (Osiris) in the underworld. It is known that criminals and outlaws in the material world were punished and held accountable according to the decisions of the court that were conducted inside or outside the temples. Among these decisions were execution, flogging, imprisonment, and others. The ancient Egyptians worked to apply them to the underworld by recording the texts of (Coffins), the Book of the Dead, the Book of (Amudat), and the Book of (Caves). He included in these books a topographical division of the underworld, the most important of which is the section of Hell, which in turn divided it into many sections, including lakes of fire, islands of flame, and hills, as well as the presence of fiery pits and fiery furnaces. These sections related to Hell played an actual role in punishing the guilty for what they committed in their earthly lives. Because of the breadth of the subject, the areas of hell in the underworld, we have chosen for this research the section (Fire Pits, Fire Furnaces), and other places that were used for torture, as this subject carries the utmost importance to know what is going on in the ancient Egyptian mentality and the extent of the religious and philosophical intellectual level that he reached to uncover the mystery of life after death, and his awareness of the topography of this hidden world and his attempt to match it with his material world, and to put forward different ideas for punishing sinners in the material world and seeking to apply it in the underworld.

Keywords: Underworld, Hell, Punishment, Fire Pits, Fire Furnaces..

1. Introduction

One of the important topics that the ancient Egyptians addressed when writing these ancient Egyptian funerary texts is recording the entire geography of the underworld, including the areas of hell and addressing all of its sections. We find that the ancient Egyptians excelled in giving an accurate description of all of their pursuits of those areas, due to their proximity to the concept of punishment after death, which was attached to a group of texts. He worked on recording the difference in the forms and functions that explain the function of those terrifying areas, as this topographical nature contained many sections for the purpose of punishing the dead (the guilty) in the underworld, which is composed of lakes and hills filled with fiery pits, in addition to the presence of a group of gods charged with the functional tasks of punishing (the guilty).

The ancient Egyptians were fully aware of the utmost importance of recording these sections or regions of hell in the ancient Egyptian texts, especially the texts of (Coffins), the Book of the Dead, the Book of (Amudat), the Book of (Gates), and the Book of (Caves). We can divide the regions of hell in light of the ancient Egyptian texts with their various sections as follows:

First: The Fiery Pits:

A- 3dw H:

It is one of the fiery pits and was considered one of the sections of hell. The origin of this word 3dw H is likely from the verb and is translated as (hunting) (Abd-elHady, 2002, p. 408). This fiery pit was mentioned in the eleventh hour of the Book of (Amudat), the third (lower) register recording a group of punishers (guilty), in addition to a group of gods who were assigned the functional tasks of punishment, and their assignment was also assigned Supervising a number of fire pits, numbering six (Hornung, 1992, p. 179-180), as stated in the following text:



Translation: "They live on the voice of enemies, the crying of spirits and shadows in their fiery pits h3dw." (Hijazi, 2016, p. 292)

B- fth:



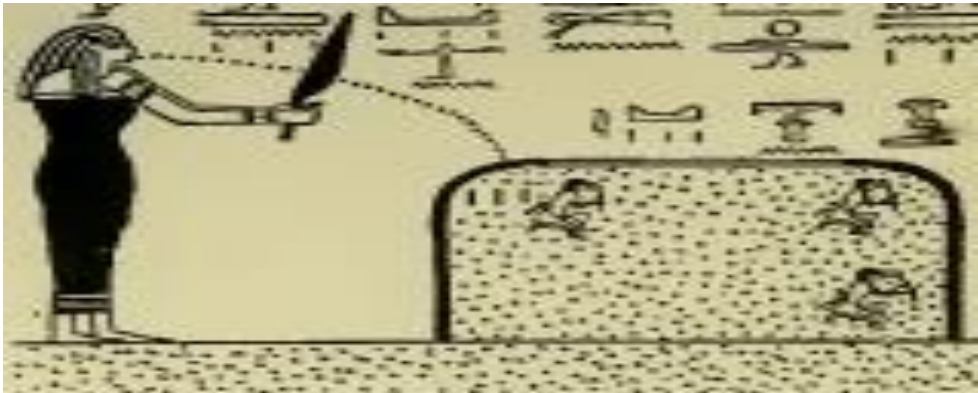
(Badge, 1905, vol. 1, p. 249)

It was called the expressive formula *ftḥ* meaning (enemy), in the above scene the structural construction of this pit appears, it came in the scenes of the eleventh hour of the book (Amudat), it is about it containing inside it a group of sinners numbering four beheaded, and the guardian deity of this fiery pit is the goddess *hryt-kywt-s*, which translates to (responsible for its hearth) she came in the scene with the head of a lioness (female lion) and her weapon is the knife, her function is to torture the sinners by shooting them from her mouth, in addition to punishing them by cutting them with (the knife) (Mahmoud, 2014, p. 74) (Mahmoud, 2014, p. 74) (Badge, 1905, vol. 1, p. 250), as stated in the following text:



Translation: “In the fiery flames she is on top of her kettles against you” (Hornung, 2007, p. 346).

C- h3wt:



Badge, 1905, vol. 1, p. 250)) (Badge, 1905, vol. 1, p. 250)

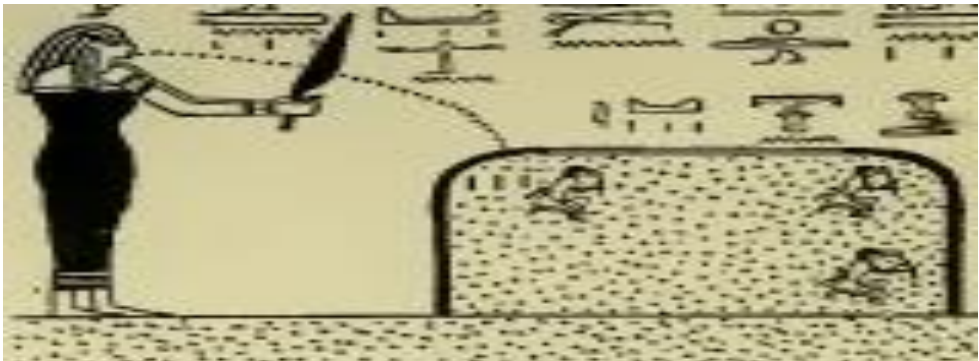
The above view explains what came in this pit with the name ḥ3wt meaning (bodies), the geometric shape of this pit is that it contains three human bodies and they are thrown into this fiery pit (Atallah, 2011, p. 114) (Atallah, 2011, p. 114), and here we notice the deities responsible for this pit are known as ḥryt-ḥ3w-s meaning (responsible for the pit), and they were also assigned the punishment of the guilty, so their weapon was the knife and the blowing of fire towards the punished (Mahmoud, 2014, p. 75), and the text below explains that:



Nswt ḥryt ḥ3dw. s r.t n'''

Translated as: "The fire above its pits against you" (Hornung, 2007, p. 346).

D- b3w:



(Badge, 1905, vol. I, p. 250)

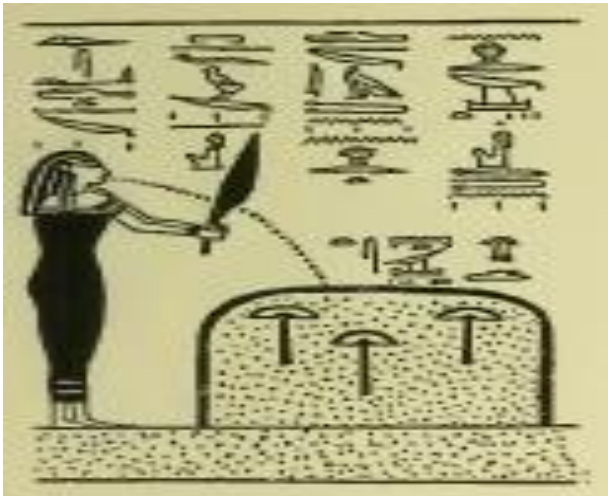
It is known as *b3w* meaning (spirits), in the above scene consisting of three birds that express the spirits of the dead (the guilty), these punished ones settle inside this pit filled with fire (Atallah, 2011, p. 114), and the gods responsible and based on the functional tasks of this pit are known as *ryt-nknith* and their weapon is the knife and shooting the guilty punished ones (Mahmoud, 2014, p. 75), and the text explains this:



"Nik n h3wt tn m njkyt"

Translation: "Punishment of Bodies with the Knife of the Punishing God (Hornung, 2007, p. 345)

E- wwtŠ:



(Badge, 1905, vol. I, p. 251)

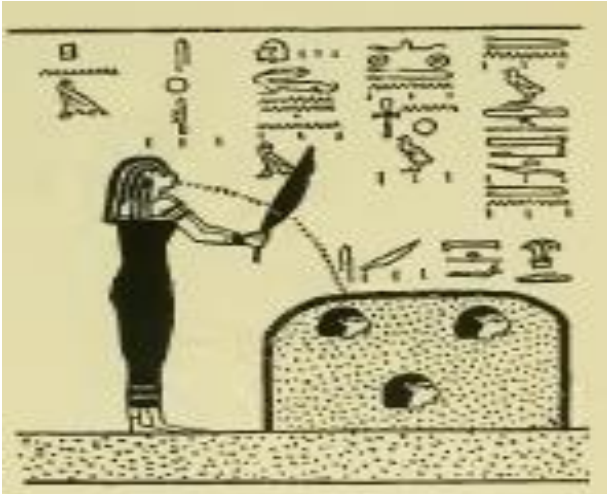
In the above scene, it was called (wwtš sho) meaning (shadows), and what is meant here is the shadows of the sinners present in this pit, and the deities supervising this pit are known as ḥrit-nmwt-s and translate to (responsible for its altars), and she is in human form and her weapon is usually a knife and fire inside this pit⁰ (Mahmoud, 2014, p. 76), as in the following text:



"bḥḥw jmy r3 nj ḥryt nmwt-s r-tn"

Translation: "The fire shoots it and is above its ovens against you" (Hornung, 2007, p. 347)

F- tpw:



(Badge, 1905, vol. I, p. 251)

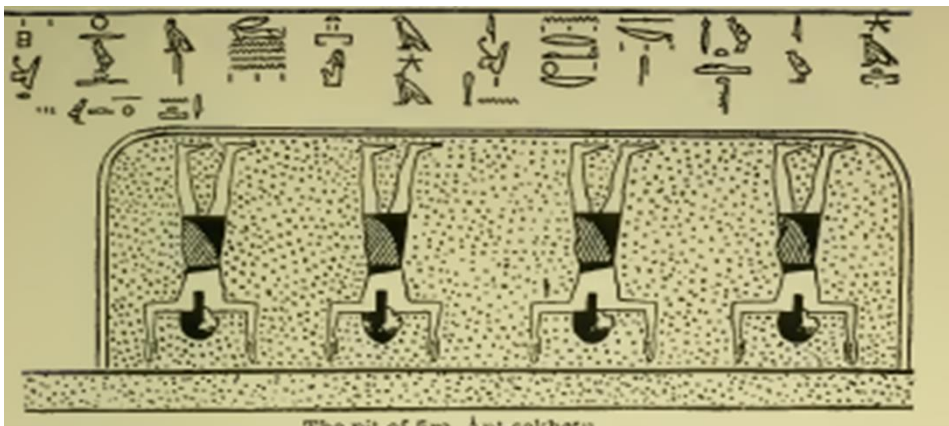
Above, this pit was mentioned in ancient Egyptian texts, including the (coffin) texts and the (pyramid) texts, as well as the book (Amudat) under the name *tpw* meaning (the damned), and the cadre of this pit consisted of three beheaded sinners as in the scene, and the deity responsible for this pit is known as *hryt-nmwt.s* and translates to (responsible for the knives) (Mahmoud, 2014, p. 76) (Mahmoud, 2014, 76), as stated in the following text:



Ds *jm-tn nj hryt zfw-s*""

Translated as: "The knife is above her knives in you" (Hornung, (2007, p.347)

G- int-shdw:



(Badge, 1905, vol. I, p. 253)

This pit is known as int-šḥdw meaning (the valley of the upside-down heads), as in the above scene there is a group of sinners inside this pit, four in number, with their heads upside down, and they are known as šḥdw (upside-down heads) (Mahmoud, 2014, p. 77), and the text indicates this:



Translated as: "Those who are upside-down on their heads, are the ones who are exposed to extermination" (Hornung, 2007, p. 345) (Hornung, 2007, p. 345) Obviously, we found that it referred to a group of fiery pits in The third hour of the Book of the Gates, the third (lower) register in the scene above shows a record of a group of four oval-shaped fire pits, and near them there is a group of four gods who are charged with supervising these pits and they are known as dw –sn ḥrjw ḥ3 meaning (supervisors of their fire pits), and the god (Horus) appears in the scene in human form and carries the royal scepter (W3s-), and the scene below:



It is accompanied by text, as follows:



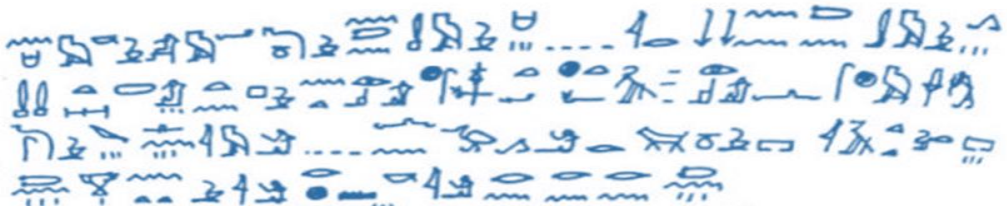
"in hr n nn ntrw ndr. n tn hftjw it.i hnp.n.tn r h3dw.tn hr nn d'm r dw ir .n.sn n 3 gm mtw hrt.tn md." w3t st3 h3dw bh3w m "wd .n (Bedouie, 2023, p. 106-107) (Bedouiy, (2023, p. 106-107)

Translation: "The god Horus says to the gods, bind my father's enemies and drag them to your fiery pits, because of the evil they have done to this great god, who was found, who My son, your mission in the underworld is to guard your fires according to the orders of the god Ra. I call upon you to work (Alhadiq, 2020, p. 67) according to your missions, for this god stands over these pits" (Badawi, 2023, p. 106- 107).

Second: Fiery Furnaces:

A- I3tw:

The translation of I3tw (Iathu) is explained as meaning (fiery cauldron) (Theol, 1960, p. 161), and it was mentioned in the incantation numbered (335) of the (coffin) texts as follows:

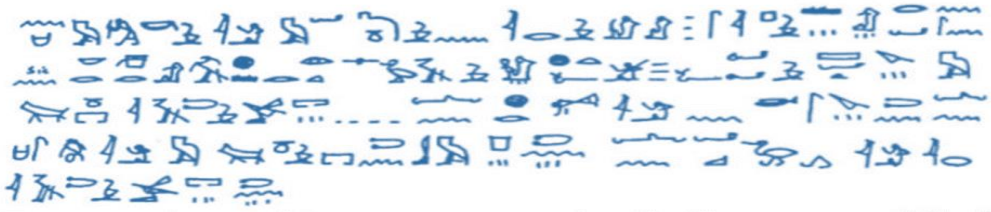


(Abdel - Hady, 2002, p. 397

"nhm (w) = k wj m nw n(y) jr (y) .w sip.w rd n=sn (n) nb dr 3h jrrw szw .w t r hft (y).w= f ddw šc.wt m- hnw j3tw.w nn hr(w) =j n ds.w= tn nn hms (w) j m- hnw tnmw .w =tn nn q(w)=j ir I3tw.w =tn" (Carrier, 2004, Tome I, p. 830).

Translation: "Save me from those who inflict harm and punishment on me, and these tormentors belong to the god Osiris, for they are the gods who carry out punishment against the enemies of the god Osiris. Their knives will have no power over them, I will not enter their cauldrons because I know their names" (Faulkner, 1973, vol. I, p. 265).

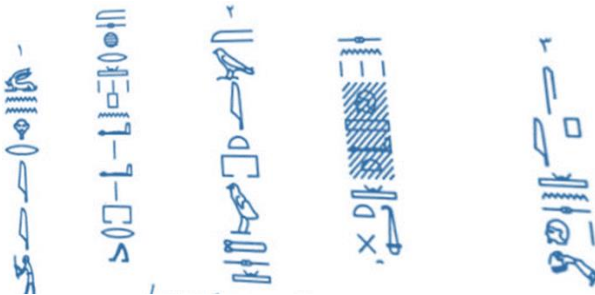
It is clear from the text that the deceased seeks help from the gods in order to be saved from the punishment gods who are ordered by the god (Osiris) and punish his enemies through this fiery cauldron (furnace), as stated in Chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead I3tw (Iathu), as follows:



Translation: "O Khepri, save so-and-so from those whom the Lord of the World has given magical power to guard the enemies who are punishing" (Barge, 2003, p. 56), (Badge, 1898, p. 57) In the place of torture Iztw, from which there is no escape, let not your knives torment me, nor enter their place of torture, nor their kettles, nor sit in their traps" (Allen, 1974, p. 31). The above text is where the deceased asks the god (Khepri) for help in order to save him from the perpetrators of punishment, and asks not to enter the place of torture, where a group of punishing gods were present.

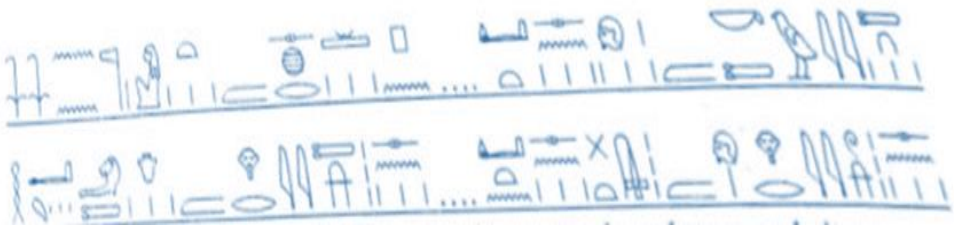
B- Hrit: (Hurrit)

It was considered one of the sections of hell and came in the ancient Egyptian texts and its translation (the oven) (Hornung, 1968, p. 25), especially the fifth chapter of the third section of the Book of Caves, and the text accompanies it with a scene of two arms coming out of the ground and holding a cauldron, and inside it are four human heads, and in the scene appears the punishing gods in the form of a cobra head and they were assigned the task of releasing fire from their mouths inside this fiery oven, as the following text states:



Translation: "Thus is the oven in this position where two arms emerge from the place of destruction, raising the high fire, where the heads of the guilty are" (Abdel – Hady, 2002, p. 434).

Also in the Book of the Earth in the fourth section where there is a cauldron and in front of it one of the punishing gods,



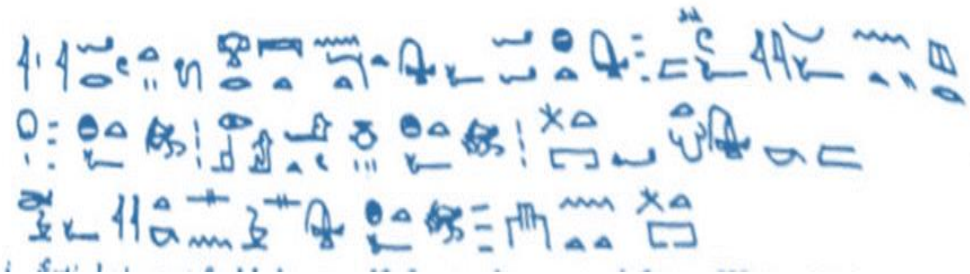
Translation: “This is how these gods are made, they put the heads in their pots and the bodies and hearts in their ovens, their bodies hidden when they throw fire into their ovens” (Hornung, 1992, p478)

It is clear from the above that the text refers to the functional tasks of the punishing gods who were entrusted with inflicting punishment on the dead (the guilty), as the ovens in which the fire was lit were used as one of the instruments of torture.

C- dfi is one of the formulas recorded in the ancient Egyptian texts expressing the sections of Hell. It is (dfi) considered one of the types of fiery cauldrons, in the form of a vessel containing two handles on both sides (Atallah, 2011, p. 153). The book (The Caves) Chapter Six, Section Three, states the following:



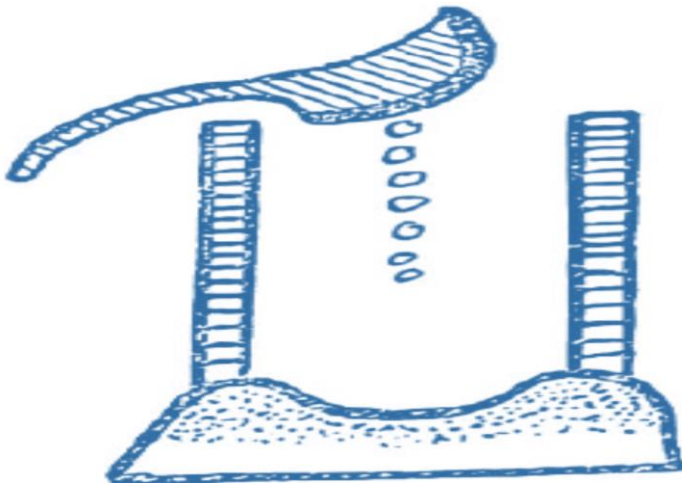
The above scene refers to one of the types of cauldrons (Hornung, 1992, p. 372), and is accompanied by a text:



Its translation: "O God, who sends flames into the hearth you guard, where the heads and hearts of enemies are contained, send your flames and ignite your fires on the enemies (Piankoff, 1944, p. 58)) (Piankoff, 1944, p. 58) in your cauldron dfi, so burn the enemies in the underworld" (Piankoff, 1954, vol. I, p. 107).

Third: Other places used for torture:

A- Nmt



(Quoted from: Abdul Hadi, 2002, p. 62).

(Nmt) means (slaughter), so it was returned from the regions of hell (Theol, 1960, p. 166), where this region was used to slaughter sinners in the underworld, so the word nmt referred to the existence of a region of hell where a group of slaughtering operations were prepared for the punished (Abdel - Hady, 2002, p. 401), and (nmt) is derived from (nm) which means knife (Eisaa, 2009, p. 511-512), and this word also referred to the place where animals were slaughtered similar to what came in the Old Kingdom era within the texts of (the pyramids) in the numbered spell (223), as follows:



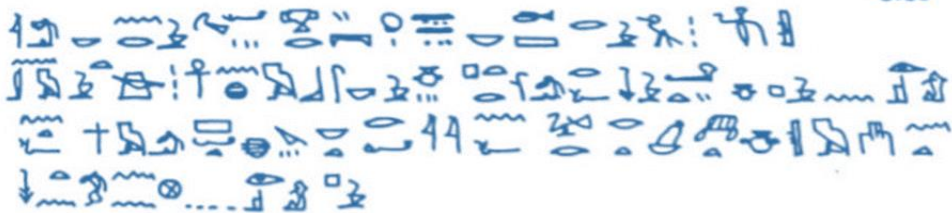
Translation: "O King so-and-so, get ready and sit down for a thousand loaves of bread and a thousand beers and a roasted piece of ribs designated for him from the altar and itꜥ bread from the hall wsꜥt" (Mercer, 1952, p. 68-69) (Saber, 2002, p. 144).

As for the texts dating back to the Middle Kingdom, we found the text numbered 335 of the (coffin) texts, as follows:

"j (nb) nrw ꜥ ꜥr (y)- tp tꜥ.wy nb dšrw wꜥd(w) m.wt rdyꜥ=f wrr. t wꜥw .t-jb ꜥnt Nn(j)-n(y)sw.t dd mdw wsir pw wꜥd n=fꜥqꜥ.t m nꜥr.w" (Carrier, 2004, Tome I, p. 828).

Translation: "O lord of terror over the heads of the lands, O god of blood who makes the altars good, who gave the written crown and joy in Ahnasya, O god Osiris to whom the gods gave rule" (Faulkner, 1973, vol. VI, p. 265)

Of course, we found texts in the New Kingdom era explaining the place of Nmt, chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead, as follows:



Translation: "O lord of terror who rules the lands, Lord of blood, multi-halls of slaughter, who lives by devouring the entrails, is the heart of Osiris, who devours the slaughtered, to whom gave the white crown and the joy of victory in Herakleopolis, he is Osiris" (Barge, 2004, p. 56) (Ibrahim, 2015, p. 36-37).

As for the book (Amudat), the word Nmt appears in the lower register of the eleventh hour. We see in the scene of this hour the god (Horus) appears as he eliminates the enemies of the god (Ra) and accompanied by a group of punishing gods who carry knives and shoot with their tongues in the place of Nmt. The texts of the book (Amudat) came with the names of those punishing gods, which are:

1- Stj ꜥꜥw (Who burns millions)



2- Hryt h3dw.s (Hurrit is above her graves)



3- Hryt nmwt.s (Harith is above her sacrifices) (Hornung, 2007, p. 344).

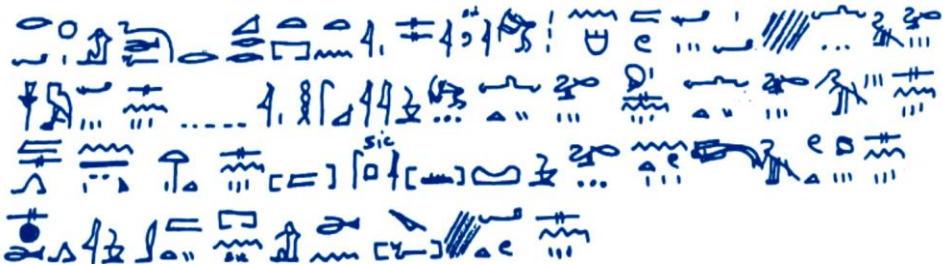


In addition to another text explaining the place of Nmt, which is: There is what is known of the guardian gods associated with the god (Osiris), and the text is:



Translation: "I wish you would save me from the hunters of Osiris who cut off heads, and slit necks, who take souls and take them to the altar, the one who eats green" (Abdul Hadi, 2002, p. 401)

Among the texts that revealed to us the torture of the punished in the underworld, we found it in the third section of the Book of Caves, a view of a group of four guilty dead with their arms tied, in addition to a group of four other dead who were beheaded, as stated in the text:



Translation: "Ra addresses this cave, O you who are punished, O you who are beheaded, whose souls do not travel to the earth, their error will be condemned with punishment and their bodies will be upside down and those who go to the altar will be slaughtered" (Hornung, 1992, p. 354) (Hornung, 1992, p. 356)

The word *nmt* was also recorded in the Book of Gates of the New Kingdom, at the tenth hour, the punishment of (Aab) the archenemy of the god (Ra) appears in the record of this hour during his journey in the underworld, so we find there a view of a group of three gods carrying the inhabitants in their hands to kill (Aab) (Hornung, 1992, p. 277), as stated in the text:



Abdul Hadi, 2002, p. 399).

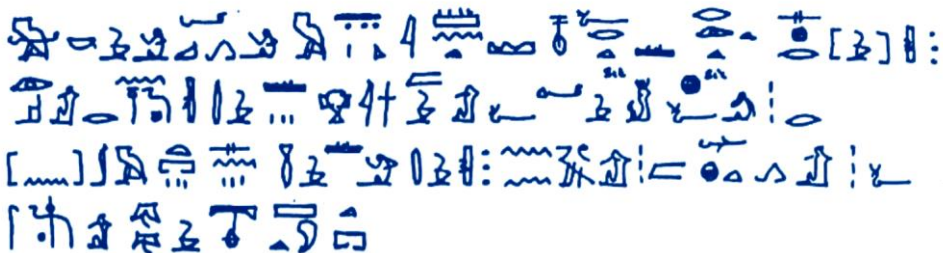
Its translation: "Your face has been destroyed and you will make your way to the slaughterhouse, the knives are against you until the day of your cutting" (Hornung, 1992, p. 278).

As for the book (The Caves), it mentions the word *nmt* (Hornung, 1992, p. 312) as follows:



Its translation: "Your place of slaughter is punished" (Alnaaqa, 2019, p. 91) (Hornung, 2007, p. 152-153)

In addition to writing a text:



Its translation: "I enter the land of the beautiful west to care for Osiris for life in it I will deliver the enemies of Osiris to their altars, and I give orders to those who follow Osiris, I who illuminated the path of darkness" (Hornung, 1992, p. 312).

As for the punishing gods, they were mentioned in the following text:



Translation: "O butchers belonging to the altar."

It is clear from the above that the word *nmt* refers to the places where the dead who were sentenced to punishment were punished. A stone tablet dating back to the late period was found showing the shape of the altar and accompanied by a text, as follows:



Translation: "Sekhmet dominates the altar and her fire is against all the great (Abdel - Hady, 2002, p. 398).

2. Conclusion

In our research entitled (Divisions of Hell in Ancient Egypt), we can raise several conclusions, which are as follows:

- 1- We find that the religious intellectual aura dominating ancient Egyptian thought is the first motive that pushed him to raise many deductions, so he worked on developing his religious ideas by imposing his reality on worldly life and natural phenomena, so he implanted his religious ideas in writing and archiving.
- 2- The ancient Egyptian reflected the reality of his worldly life after his death, so he realized that there are types of punishment after death, similar to the punishment of criminals in worldly life, so he worked on comparing the reality of worldly life to life after death, he was certain that there would be an account in a court in the underworld in which the guilty would receive their punishment.
- 3- Of course, after the ancient Egyptians realized the punishment after death, they worked on developing their ideas and creating a somewhat complex mythology, trying to match it with the reality of worldly life, except that there was a difference in the types of punishments for the

guilty, in addition to the presence of many punishing gods who were assigned specific tasks in the areas of hell.

4- The sequential recording of the topographical sections of hell came with great skill on the walls of the royal and non-royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings, that great effect was recorded in the funerary books that carried the sections or areas of hell, including the pits and fiery furnaces, so the ancient Egyptian writer worked on giving a complete picture of the topographical infrastructure of hell, especially there are the areas of hell that he described with great accuracy accompanied by many scenes and texts that explain the functional tasks of each area of the sections of hell.

5- These brilliant scenes and texts from the ancient Egyptian mentality came with two axes, the first axis: explaining the Egyptian mentality and its belief in life after death and its worship of the gods, and this naturally stems from the sacred ownership of the kings of Egypt, considering them to be descendants of the gods, so the ancient Egyptian was forced to worship their kings and the gods, the second axis: is the exploitation of the ancient Egyptian writer and his attempt to control the minds of the people in order for them to possess these funerary books, especially after the modern state, it became possible for the rich to own the right to these books and write them on the walls of their tombs after they were exclusively for kings.

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