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ANIMALS IN EGYPTIAN PROVERBS

Abstract: This study is based on an empirical analysis of all animal proverbs mentioned in the collection of Egyptian proverbs by Taymour. The analysis is both quantitative as well as qualitative. The total number of animal proverbs in the collection has reached a percentage of nearly 14% which indicates their importance. The analysis also categorises the animals according to their frequency. Another aim consists of analysing the portrayal of animals in the proverbs. The analysis lists the features given to the animals. Furthermore, the study tried to answer the question if a possible tie exists between the different kinds of animals and the positive or negative features given to them.

Keywords: animal, animal proverbs, Egyptian proverbs, features, pairs, Taymour.

Introduction

This study aims at analysing the portrayal of animals in the Egyptian proverbs. For this purpose, the collection of Ahmad Taymour is chosen as it is considered to be the most important collection of Egyptian proverbs. The analysis is both quantitative as well as qualitative. As this collection will serve as the corpus of the underlying study all numbers and statistics are based on it. Any proverb outside this collection will be ignored, so as to make the statistics as accurate as possible. The study will try to answer the following questions: How many proverbs contain animals in the collection? How frequent is every animal presented in the proverbs? Which animals are the most frequent in the proverbs?

Following the quantitative analysis, the animal proverbs will be analysed on a qualitative basis. Each group of proverbs containing a certain animal will be analysed with the aim of painting a picture of how this certain animal is portrayed in the proverbs. Purpose of the study is to answer the following question: How is

a certain animal portrayed in the proverbs and what features are given to it?

In order to answer these questions, it will be proceeded as follows. Every proverb will be analysed with the aim of finding out the feature that is given to the animal. These proverbs will be grouped together according to the feature they represent. For example, if the monkey is described as ugly this certain feature will be stated and all the proverbs that show this feature will appear under it. This will show the traits of each animal. The numbers of proverbs showing each feature is of great significance as it will show how a certain trait is tied to a certain animal. Not each meaning of a proverb will be given, as the feature under which it is categorised often shows the meaning of the proverb. In brackets we will give the meaning of the proverb as it appears in the collection of Taymour, if – in spite of naming the main feature – the meaning is not clear. Our aim is not to give an explanation for each proverb – as this is not the purpose of the study – but to point out the features of each animal as portrayed in the proverbs. If further explanation is needed, I will give the necessary explanation without putting it in brackets, in order to distinguish between the explanations of Taymour and my own explanations and comments. If a proverb does not indicate a certain feature or a trait it will be left out of the analysis, but still its number will be mentioned in the appendix in order to show the total sum of the proverbs, in which animals occur, as this is one of the aims of this study.

Of special interest are also the proverbs that contain two different animals. It is also one of the aims of this study to answer the following questions: How many pairs are in the corpus? Which animals come in pairs? Which are the animals that usually appear together in pairs? On what basis are the pairs chosen?

It is important to state that some proverbs do not seem to concentrate on a trait or a feature of the animal itself, but despite of that they are going to be analysed in the study as they are indirectly showing a trait of a certain animal as in the following proverb: “The rich man was hurt by a thorn, so the whole town was in confusion, and the poor man was bitten by a serpent, they told him: ‘Hush! Do not talk!’.” (2067) The proverb is about the rich and the poor, but it conveys indirectly that snakes are harmful.

As already indicated not all proverbs have been analysed, as some do not show a certain trait of the animals. The following proverbs should serve as examples: “Did you see the camel, he said I neither saw (the camel) nor the camel driver” (683) (The proverb means being very secretive.), “When we remembered the cat, it came jumping.” (176) As the aim of these two proverbs are not to portray the animals, they were left out of the analysis, which explains the discrepancy between the total sum of the proverbs containing a certain animal and the proverbs which have been part of the analysis.

It should also be noted that out of the total sum of 3188 proverbs in Taymours collection there are nearly 200 similes. In spite of this fact the ones among them containing animals were taken into consideration because some of them emphasize and clarify some traits of the animals.

Explanatory notes

In order to give an overview over the whole corpus an appendix will list every animal occurring in the proverbs by order of the alphabet. It will also contain the total number of occurrences of each animal. The number of each proverb – as it occurs in the collection of Taymour – will be noted.

The number of each proverb – according to the collection of Taymour – will also be referred to in brackets, every time the proverb is mentioned in the text. The cited proverbs will be put in quotation marks. They will only be written in the English translation. For that purpose, I have translated all the proverbs myself. I tried to preserve the Arabic syntax of the proverbs, as to give a taste of the original wording, knowing that it could be translated in a better way that would be accepted by the English speaker. For example, the proverb “The highest of your horses, ride it.” (159) could be translated as follows: ‘Ride the highest of your horses.’ But the actual meaning of the proverb is: Do the utmost that you can (the highest) but you will not scare or intimidate me. When the proverb is used the emphasis is placed on the “highest of horses”, which is the reason for starting the proverb with these words.

If some animals come in pairs, the proverb is going to be explained only once under the first animal. When mentioning the proverb within the analysis of the second animal only the number of the proverb will occur under the trait that it represents. In brackets it will be referred to the first animal.

The analysis of the proverbs containing a certain animal will appear under the name of the animal. The animals will be arranged on the basis of frequency in a descending order starting with the most frequent. If two or more animals have the same total number of proverbs they will be arranged according to the alphabet.

Analysis

Dog (50 proverbs):

Dogs are inferior: "Doing my errands with my own hands is better than having to tell the dog oh my master." (162), "If you need something from the dog, tell him oh my master." (644), "The funeral is heated and the deceased is a dog." (973 = worthless), "If the dog sees its status it would not shake its ear!" (2432 and 2550) (If the dog looks at its value it would not shake its ears in pride.), Lions are superior to dogs: "The dog is a lion in its house." (2436) (The dog feels itself superior in its house, because it is appreciated by its home mates or so the dog thinks.) In spite of the fact that lions are superior to dogs, sometimes "A living dog is better than a dead lion.", (2434) "A free dog is better than a lion in captivity." (2435) (This is stated in the proverb, because a free or living dog is more useful to itself and others.), "As the horses were scarce they saddled the dogs." (2869)

Dogs are persistent in their (bad) habits: "Cut off the ear of the dog and let it hang, he who has a habit will not change it." (190) (Cutting off the ear of the dog will not change its habits.), "If they dress up the dog with Kashmir and let him walk in a procession, it does not forget the word "keshkesh" (an onomatopoeic sound addressed to dogs) nor its sleeping in the pond of dirt." (664), "The tail of the dog can never be straightened." (1264), "The dog stays a dog, even if its neckband is gold." (2437)

Dogs are fearful: "Like the dog, it only shows courage in its hole." (1522) (It is the place of the dog, where he has someone to protect him.), "Like the dog, it is scared and scares others." (1523), Dogs are only brave in their own homes: "The dog shows bravery only at the door of its own hole (den)." (2438), "A dog

that barks does not bite.” (2442) (This proverb is used for a person used to insulting others, but in the end he is a coward who should not be feared.)

Dogs are mean: “Like the street dogs, they bite with no real reason.” (1517), “If the dog bites me I have no teeth to bite it, and if a mean person insults me, I have no tongue to insult him.” (607) (The meanness of the dog is referred to by the second part of the proverb.), “The fog does not make the dogs blind.” (1749) (It is said of people who want to harm others and nothing can stop them.)

Dogs are impure: “The white one among the dogs is impure.” (47), “That that the lion eats and purifies is better than that that the dog eats and taints.” (426), “Like the dogs, (even) white ones among them are impure.” (1515)

Dogs are useless: “If the wool of the dog becomes long, it is not sheared off.” (2433), “Will the one who shears off the dogs get wool?” (2979 and 2617)

Dogs are dangerous: “A thousand dogs that bark with you, is better than one dog that barks against you.” (237)

Dogs are ungrateful: “I raised a dog and it turned and bit me.” (1303)

Dogs are lazy: “Like the dogs, they love hunger and rest.” (1520)

Some proverbs show the dog as a negative creature without precisely mentioning the exact feature. “A white dog and a black dog. He said they are all sons of dogs.” (2430) (Taymour says that they are not different from each other as they have the same root. God curse them all!)

Dogs are not treacherous: “The dog does not bite its brother’s ear.” (2439 and 2981)

Dogs are hardworking: “Sleep a dog and wake up a lion.” (736) (Work hard like a dog and they will cherish you like a lion.)

Donkey (50 proverbs):

Donkeys are of commercial value: “After hunger and scarcity he has a donkey and a female mule.” (787), “Your lame donkey spares you having to ask the mean.” (1093), “My lame donkey spares me (to ask for) your horse oh my cousin on my father’s

side.” (1094), “Your lame donkey and not the camel of your cousin on my father’s side.” (1103), The camel and the horse are more valuable than the donkey. “A donkey that does not belong to you, its strength is of iron.” (1098) (You don’t preserve it.), “A donkey who belongs only to you is better than a horse of noblest breed.” (1099), “Take from the donkey that left its chain.” (1137) (If you lose the donkey at least keep its chain.), “Trading a small donkey for a small donkey is a skill.” (2768)

Donkeys are hardworking: “He is a donkey of work.” (1096) (He is a person who does all that is asked of him and in the best of ways.), “Like the donkey, it likes to carry the heavy weights.” (1410), “Like the donkeys of the grape they carry the grapes but they do not taste them.” (1413) (Donkeys carry grapes under forced labor.), “Oh donkey, you are invited to the wedding, the donkey said: ‘It is either (to use me) for forced labor or to spill dirt’.” (3053) (Refers to a person that nobody bothers to be good to, only if his services are needed.)

Donkeys are a means of transport: “The donkey died and the visits stopped.” (2592) (The visitors used to come on the donkey.)

Donkeys are inferior: “He who has henna can dye the tail of his donkey.” (311) (If you have something in abundance, squander it the way you want and on things that are not worthy of it.), “I am great and you are great, who will drive the donkeys?” (553) also “If I am a prince and you are a prince, who will drive the donkeys?” (2537) Even dealing with donkeys counts as inferior. “What do the donkeys know about eating ginger.” (714)

Donkeys are lazy: “Like the donkeys of the donkey drivers, they long to hear the sound hess (onomatopoetic expression addressed to donkeys).” (1412) (“Hess” means stop. These donkeys want to stop working.)

Donkeys are regarded as stupid: “The person who is not jealous belongs to the donkeys.” (384) (Said about someone who is not moved by the success of others.), “What would you say about a guy who did not love nor hang on to love, they said: “He will live a donkey and die a donkey’.” (719), “The words are addressed to you, my female neighbor, and you are a female donkey.” (2428) (The criticism is addressed to you and you are stupid and you do not understand it.)

Donkeys are obstinate: “The donkey has a voice in its head, it will not rest until it screams it out.” (1097)

Donkeys are rough: "Like donkeys when they joke, it's all biting and kicking." (1549)

Donkeys are difficult: "Like the donkey it obeys if it is driven by a prod." (1409) (Donkeys only obey if you treat them with strictness.)

Donkeys are untidy: "Cursed is the peasant with his visit and his donkey." (3164) (Even if the peasant brings gifts and is kind, his donkey will eat and make the place dirty.)

Camel (35 proverbs):

Camels are hardworking: "He who makes himself a camel should not complain of work." (484) (He who pretends to be great should not complain from the troubles of his greatness.), "Eat like a camel eats and stand up before the men." (2349) (It is no shame for you to eat a lot as long as you go to work before others.), "Why if you make yourself a camel do you complain?" (2539) (If you make yourself a camel which endures carrying heavy weights, why do you complain?)

Camels are of great commercial value: "If you love, love a moon (pretty woman) and if you steal, steal a camel." (606), 1103 (see donkey), "A cat that only you own is better than a camel shared with others." (2251), "What loading and what carrying, you went on a camel and came back on a cat." (3062) (In spite of the great trouble you endured you did not reach what you wanted, but came smaller in value than before.)

Camels are a means of transport: "Oh how many camels are tied for the pilgrimage." (3098) (People used to go to the pilgrimage on camels.)

Camels are greedy: "Like the camels, its mouth is in a pile of food and its eye on another pile." (1397) (This shows a greedy person who has not finished eating and has his eyes already on other food.)

Camels have flaws: "If the camel looks at its hump, it would cut it off." (967) (The camel cuts it off in order to hide this flaw.), "If the camel sees its hunchback it would fall and break its neck." (2551) (If the camel sees its mistakes, it would die in denial.)

Camels are slow: "He who is in a hurry, should not drive a camel." (2736)

Camels are big (in size): “What the ant gathers in a year, the camel takes in its hoof.” (254), “The door lets a camel through.” (734) and “The lane lets a camel pass through.” (1604) (Told to a person who is being urged to leave.), “Their cat is a camel and their fleas men.” (2261) (This proverb is told of people who exaggerate.)

Cat (28 proverbs):

Cats are treacherous: “He who plays with the cat is not safe from its scratching.” (512), “He who catches the cat, the cat will scratch.” (514), “You hit the cat and it will scratch you.” (889) “Talk to the cat, it will scratch you.” (2424) (The proverb is talking about a mean person who is used to hurting others.)

Cats are superior to mice (weasels): “The injustice of the cat is better than the justice of the mouse.” (984) (The cat is better than the mouse.), “The dream of the cat is all mice.” (1090), “The cat is away, play oh mouse.” (2033), “The impulsive mouse becomes the prey of the cat.” (2083), “The cat does not run from a weasel.” (2257) (The strong does not run from the weak.)

Cats are ungrateful: “Like the cats, they eat and deny (having eaten).” (1504) (People believe that cats forget who fed them and that they don’t cling to them like dogs do.)

Cats are not trustworthy: “They gave the cat the key of the tower (of pigeons).” (2738) (It will eat all the pigeons.), “Like a cat, it praises (in prayer) and steals.” (1502) (The cat pretends to be pious.)

Cats are survivors: “Like the cats, they have seven souls.” (1503) (People believe that cats have seven lives.)

Cats are not valuable: 2251 and 3062 (see camel)

Cats are small: 2261 (see camel)

Monkey (24 proverbs):

Monkeys are ugly: “On the outside it is a flower and on the inside a monkey.” (770) (The outside is good looking and the inside ugly.), “The monkey looked through its notebooks and found nothing but its fat lips and its nails.” (1257) (The monkey looked at himself and found nothing but ugliness.), “The morning of the monkeys is better than the morning of beardless men.” (1726) (The people regarded it as a bad omen if they saw a grown man without beard or moustache in the morning and they preferred seeing a monkey in spite of its ugliness.), “They told the monkey,

they are going to make you uglier, so it said: ‘They will make me a deer!’.” (2203) (The monkey is so ugly that they cannot make it uglier, they can only make it prettier.), “The monkey is a gazelle in the eyes of its mother.” (2234), “A monkey who sells river mussels! Damned be the merchandise because of the face of the merchant.” (2237), “You, who have taken (married) the monkey because it has a lot of money, the money perishes and the monkey will stay as it is.” (3116), “Damned be the honey if it comes from the face of the monkey” (3163)

Monkeys are reckless: “What does the monkey care about its face being black.” (717) (The monkey doesn’t care about the scandal.), “They told the monkey to cover its face with a veil, but it said: ‘This is a face used to scandal’.” (2188)

Monkeys are destructive: “What the grandfathers leave behind, the monkeys destroy.” (260)

Monkeys are mean: “The people left and the monkey stayed.” (1284)

Monkeys are fearful: “Like monkeys, they are afraid of their own shadow.” (1500)

Pairs: “An agreeing monkey and not a straying gazelle” (2235)

Chicken (21 proverbs):

Chicken is precious food: “Don’t feed me a fat chicken, and let me sleep in sorrow.” (820), “(He is) a chicken with keshk (= kind of dough).” (2094) He is like a beloved precious meal which means he is very dear and cherished. “A chicken between four is of no use.” (2095) (No one will have enough to eat.)

Chickens are of commercial value: “Like the poulterer, he has a chicken, he does not die.” (1485) (He has his income secured.) Also: “He has a chicken, he does not die.” (2548)

Chickens are useful: “He who has a chicken, will not lose a grain.” (313)

Chickens are persistent in their habits: “The chicken always digs up, even on a heap of grain.” (2097) (The chicken does not need to dig, but this is its habit.)

Chickens are vulnerable: “He who is afraid of the weasel should not raise small chicken.” (448), “A snail kite does not

throw chicks.” (1035) (A snail kite likes to eat chicks, so how do you expect her to give them away.), “Does the snail kite throw chicks.” (2984)

Horse (18 proverbs):

Horses are valuable: “The highest of your horses, ride it.” (159) (Show your real good value or enjoy the best of the blessings God gave you.) Today they use it as follows: Do whatever you can, you will not scare or intimidate me. “He did not have a family for himself, so he brought a horse.” (2580), “He who has one qirat (a measure = small share) in the mare can ride.” (T 337), “The coward dies, he becomes a horseman.” (3177) (People exaggerate in praising the dead.) To ride a horse is an asset because of the value of the horse unlike the donkey., “The owner of one qirat (a measure = small share) in the mare can ride.” (1719) also 1094 (see donkey), “The cover does not put down the horse of noble origin.” (2099) (The shabby clothes do not effect the value of a man.), 2869 (see dog)

Horses are strong: “The good one of your horses, strain it.” (1005) (It will not be effected by the great effort as it is strong.)

Horses are a working force: “Like the horses of the mill, neither force nor sight.” (1420) (Those weak defective horses are still able to work despite their poor health.)

Snake (18 proverbs):

Snakes are harmful: “He who is bitten by a snake is afraid of its tail.” (279), “He who plays with the snake will have to be bitten by it.” (509) (The habit of the snake is biting, so the one who plays with it must be bitten.), “He who is bitten by a snake is afraid of the rope.” (328 and 2769), “The snake charmer only dies through the snake.” (1014), “The snake charmer does not forget the death of his son and the snake does not forget the cutting off of its tail.” (1015), “The rich man was hurt by a thorn, so the whole town was in confusion, and the poor man was bitten by a snake, they told him: ‘Hush! Do not talk!’.” (2067) (People care for the rich and neglect the poor.), “When there is luck, the ant kills the snake.” (1977), “We were prepared for the snake but did not remember the scorpion.” (1054) (Being prepared for the big evil lets a man forget the smaller evil, which in the end harms him.), “The snake gives birth to a small snake.” (1114) (The small snake is as harmful (evil) as its mother.), “He is afraid of the beetle and plays with

the snake.” (3136) (It is strange that he is afraid of the harmless and plays with the harmful.)

Snakes are mean: “Like the snake it stings and remains motionless.” (1393) (It stays where it is so no one knows who bit. It stands for he who hurts in secret.)

Snakes are superior to worms: “When the worm wanted to imitate the snake it stretched itself so it was torn.” (949)

Bird (general term) (15 proverbs):

Birds are hard to hold on to because they can easily fly away: “Cut the feather of your bird and it will stay with you, let its feathers grow, it will go to someone else.” (2249), “A bird in your hand is better than a flying crane.” (1907), “A bird in your hand is better than ten in the tree.” (1908), “Money is like the birds, they come and go.” (2121)

Birds are selective: “If something is of any good, the birds would not have thrown it away.” (98 and 2555) The birds especially the crow would only throw away what is useless.

Birds go quickly from one place to the other (are mobile): “The human is a bird and not a bird.” (834) (The man moves around quickly as if he were a bird.)

Some birds can serve as food: “Not every bird, its meat can be eaten.” (2635) (There are the good and the bad.) There are some people you cannot mess with.

Birds are harmful to the crop: “He who cultivates (his land) should not be afraid of the birds.” (464) (If he is able to cultivate, he should be able to drive the birds away.)

Mouse (14 proverbs):

Mice are diggers: “The daughter of the female mouse is a digger.” (832)

Mice are inferior to cats: 984, 1090, 2033, 2083 (see cat)

Mice are small: “The mice opened it (a hole) and the bulls fell in it.” (2088 and 3167)

Crow (13 proverbs):

Crows are hard to hold to because they can easily fly away: “A snail kite vouched for a crow, he said both would fly away.”

(1034) The same: “A crow vouched for a snail kite, he said both can fly.” (2045)

Crows are dangerous: “While coming out of the fire he met a crow that swallowed him.” (1115)

Crows are noisy: “Like the assembly of the crows, it begins with a cak and ends with a cak (onomatopoetic expression).” (1398) (Stands for people in a meeting who shout from beginning to end.)

Crows steal: “The joy has not been completed, the crow took it and flew away.” (2092) same “Oh joy that has not been completed, the crow took it and flew away.” (3079)

Crows are persistent in their habits: “They told the crow why do you steal the soap, it said to harm is a habit.” (2185)

Crows are inferior: “A crow does not give birth to a hawk.” (2046) (A hawk is superior.)

Crows are not generous: “Oh how many times has the crow got something for its mother.” (3097) (The proverb is meant ironically as the crow never brings anything to its mother.)

Fish (general term) (13 proverbs):

Fish are edible and of value: “Throw him into the sea and he will come out with a fish in his mouth.” (110) (A person who benefits from every situation.)

Fish are mean: “Like the fish, they eat each other.” (1439)

Fish are cautious: “Like the fish it goes to the fishing rod with its tail.” (1440) (That way it does not get caught.)

Goat (14 proverbs):

Goats have a commercial value: “Your father, what did he leave you, he said: ‘A young billy goat and it died’.” (42) (His inheritance was of very little value and that too did not last.)

Goats are lazy: “Like the goat of the boat, if it floats it eats and if it sinks it eats.” (1395) (Told about a person who eats the food of the people at good times and bad times, but does not share the work with them.)

Goats are vigilant: “The screaming goat, its children are not eaten by the wolf.” (2758) (The goat is harmless but vigilant.)

Cow (11 proverbs):

Cows are useful: “Only the calf of your cow is useful to you.” (2700) (Only that that you actually possess is useful to you.)

Cows are ugly: “There is beauty in the young ones even in the cows.” (965)

Cows are easy to handle: “It is easier to lead the cows to pasture than to pull with the rope.” (1593) (They pull the rope to get water out of the well).

Sheep (10 proverbs):

Sheep are harmless: “The butcher is not afraid of the great number of sheep.” (958), “He neither beats the wolf nor starves the sheep.” (2514) (He keeps both enemies alive, so he can benefit of their enmity.)

Sheep are vigilant: “The screaming sheep, its children are not eaten by the wolf.” (2951) (Sheep are harmless but vigilant.)

Sheep are of commercial value: “They told Goha to count his sheep, he said: ‘One is sleeping and one is standing’.” (2195) (Goha has sheep are very few.) Goha is a known figure in folklore as a wise fool with many stories told about him.

Bull (9 proverbs):

Bulls are hardworking, or are a work force: “A scabby bull, but brings water.” (1808) (The bull is so powerful and hardworking that it gets the water out of the soil.), “The plowing bull is not to be muzzled.” (1809)

Bulls have a commercial value: “He who sells the bull, should not pick his rodents.” (431), “Goha is worthier of the meat of his bull.” (950) Goha (see sheep) is the one who should benefit from his bull, because it is his possession.

Bulls are ignorant: “Like the bull of God in his clover.” (1465) (It knows nothing and is unaware of his surroundings.)

Bulls are big: 2088 and 3167 (see mouse)

Calf (9 proverbs):

Calves are aggressive and difficult: “Milking is better than holding to the calves.” (1083) (Females are much quieter than males.)

Scorpion (8 proverbs):

Scorpions are harmful even deadly: “He who is afraid of the scorpion will encounter the centipede.” (450) (He who fears harm and avoids it will be hurt by greater harm.), “The mother-in-law

is a fever and the sister in law is a quiet (lethal) scorpion.” (1092), “Like a scorpion its sting and (= leads to the) the grave.” (1471), “Like the scorpion it stings and remains motionless.” (1472) (It stays where it is, so no one knows who bit. It stands for he who hurts in secret.), “Hostility among relatives is like the sting of the scorpions.” (1868) (The relatives are worse enemies than strangers.), “The scorpion is the sister of the snake.” (1915) (Both are equally harmful.), “A flower and a scorpion beside it.” (2998) (Good things are surrounded by bad things.)

Beast (general term) (7 proverbs):

Beasts have commercial value: “He who does not tie his beast, (the beast) will be stolen.” (370) Same “The untied beast is lost.” (835), “Release the pressure off of your beast, it will live longer.” (1162), “The protection of your beast is its cord.” (1913) (Tying the beast will preserve it.)

Beasts are a work force: “The water is in the heel of the beast.” (2915) (The more the beast works the more water you get.) The beast sets the water wheel in motion, so that water is pulled out.

Beetle (7 proverbs):

Beetles are ugly: “A beetle saw her daughter on the wall, she said this is a pearl in a thread.” (1183), “The beetle is considered by its mother a bride.” (1184), “Like the beetle they can neither be eaten nor played with.” (1417) (They are useless and ugly.), “Dress up the beetle, it will be the best of women.” (2518)

Beetles are low: “A cockroach loved a beetle, it ran with it through town not knowing how to please it.” (1736) (They are hard to please.)

Beetles are harmless: 3136 (see snake)

Fly (7 proverbs):

Flies are annoying (unwanted): “The closed mouth does not let the flies in.” (810), “Like the flies they gather around the weak.” (1422)

Flies are harmful: “He opens his eyes to the flies and then says this is fate from the Merciful (=God).” (3165) (He did not protect his eyes from the flies and then when they became sore, he said that that was fate.)

Rooster (7 proverbs):

Roosters have little value: "Give your daughter away in marriage for a rooster and if you need her, she will come when you call her." (995) (It is better that the groom does not offer valuable bridal money and is near your home than getting lots of money and your daughter is living far away.)

Roosters are fearful: "Every rooster cries a lot on its own pile of garbage." (2365) (Only in its own domain does it have the courage to cry out.)

Roosters are ugly: "The face is the face of a rooster and the general condition does not please you." (3006) (On the whole the rooster is ugly.)

Snail kite (7 proverbs):

Snail kites are mean: "A snail kite from the mountain drives away the owners of the land." (1036)

Snail kites are ugly: "Like the youngsters of the snail kite, they are neither to be eaten nor can you play with them." (1555) (They are not edible, and they are so ugly that you cannot play with them.)

Snail kites are hard to hold to because they can easily fly away: 1034 and 2045 (see crow)

Snail kites are greedy: 1035 and 2984 (see chicken)

Wolf (7 proverbs):

Wolves are harmful: "The son of the wolf cannot be raised up." (27) (It retains the harmful nature of its species despite its being educated and trained to be different.), 2514 (see sheep), 2758 (see goat), 2951 (see sheep)

Flea (5 proverbs):

Fleas are small 2261 (see camel)

Gazelle (5 proverbs):

Gazelles are good looking: "Love a gazelle or let it be." (158) (If you do something then it should be worth it.) 2203, 2234 and 2235 (see monkey)

Hornet (5 proverbs):

Hornets are harmful: “Stay in your nest until the hornet comes and drives you out.” (191) (The hornet will expel you and it is a force more powerful than you.), “Leave him in his nest until the hornet drives him out.” (1177) (Leave things as they are until they are forced to change.)

Hornets are unwise: “A hornet buzzed, which caused the destruction of its nest.” (1216) (The hornet by its buzzing alerted the people to the existence of its nest.)

Lion (5 proverbs):

Lions are not treacherous: “Sleep in the womb of a lion and do not sleep in the womb of a man.” (735)

Lions are noble: 426 (see dog), 736 (see dog), “A lion is a lion even if it is in a cage.” (1577) (Lions are noble even if they are going through hard times. That does not decrease their value.)

Mule (5 proverbs):

Mules are harmful: “Like the headstrong mule it bites the one who walks in front of it and kicks the one who walks behind it.” (1384)

Mules are mean: “Don’t regard the kicking of the impure mule as too much.” (2598) (It might even do more and kill you.)

Mules are of commercial value: 787 (see donkey)

Ant (4 proverbs):

Ants are hardworking: “Like ants, they carry what is bigger than them.” (1546)

Ants are weak: 1977 (see snake)

Ants are tiny: 254 (see camel), “As small as the ant and it does a big thing (a disaster).” (2231)

Lamb (4 proverbs):

Lambs have commercial value: “Give me wool today and take a lamb tomorrow.” (95) (Better something small today than big tomorrow.)

Lambs are precious food: “The onion of love or of a beloved one is (considered like) a lamb.” (780) (Onion is very cheap food while lamb is expensive.)

Owl (4 proverbs):

Owls are bad omen: “Follow the owls it will lead you to ruin.” (49) (This is said because ruins are the place where the owls live.),

“Like the owl, it does not love but the ruins.” (1372) (The owl is tied in the eyes of the Egyptians with ruins.)

Bear (3 proverbs):

Bears are ugly: “You love your sweetheart even if he is a bear.” (1024)

Bears are dangerous: “He was saved from the bear then fell into the den.” (1612) (The bear is a known beast of prey.)

Bears are clumsy: “They told the bear to embroider, it said this needs manual skill.” (2179) (This proverb is sarcastic, as the bear has fat hands unfit for embroidering.)

Bee (3 proverbs):

Bees are harmful and at the same time of commercial value: “He who eats the honey must endure the stinging of the bees.” (418)

Bees are not obedient: “Like the bees, they only get out through using smoke.” (1543) (When harvesting the honey, they use smoke to bring the bees out.), “The Words are like the bees, they don’t get out unless smoke is used.” (2426)

Goose (3 proverbs):

Geese are good swimmers: “The son of the goose is a swimmer.” (32) (The son is as good as its parents.), “He threatens the geese with drowning” (3175) (Geese cannot fear drowning.)

Hawk (3 proverbs):

Hawks have pride: “The hawk is a hawk and has resolution, it would starve and not go down low.” (1599)

Hawks are superior: T 2046 (see crow)

Pig (3 proverbs):

Pigs are inferior: “A hair from the skin of the pig is gain.” (1677) (A small gain from something low and bad is good.), “He pretends to be a prince in the skin of a pig.” (1847) “A purse of silk cannot be made from the ear of a pig.” (2670)

Animal (general term) (2 proverbs):

Animals are fast and make great effort: “You run like the animals run, you get only what is meant for you to get.” (874 and 879)

Buffalo (2 proverbs):

Buffaloes are big (in size): “He said a mosquito and pretending to be a buffalo.” (2155) (A low small person who appears in front of the people as a great person.)

Egret bird (2 proverbs):

Egret birds are partially ugly: “Like the egret bird it is white and dirty.” (1364) (Egret birds are white with black legs. They are useful for the land as they eat worms, but because of that they are dirty.)

Frog (2 proverbs):

Frogs are ugly: “The wedding is with a storm and the bride is a frog.” (1880) (A great fuss is made of the wedding, although the bride does not deserve it as she is ugly.), “The wedding and the tumult and the bride is a frog.” (1881)

Hedgehog (2 proverbs):

Hedgehogs are ugly: “Like the hedgehog, it can neither be held in the arms nor kissed.” (1507) (The thorns of the hedgehog keep people away.)

Louse (2 proverbs):

Lice are dirty: “After the big and small lice it became red and green and painted on the wall.” (793) (After living in dirt and low conditions they are living in wealth.)

Weasel (2 proverbs):

Weasels are harmful: 448 (see chicken)

Weasels are weaker than cats: 2257 (see cat)

Worm (2 proverbs):

Worms are inferior: 949 (see snake)

Bug (1 proverb):

Bugs are unsatisfied (greedy): “She gives birth to a hundred and says: ‘Oh how scarce are the descendants.’” (811)

Centipede (1 proverb):

Centipedes are harmful: 450 (see scorpion)

Cockroach (1 proverb):

No feature is specified in the proverb regarding the cockroach, the concentration is on the beetle: 1736 (see beetle)

Locust (1 proverb):

Locusts fly away and can't be held on to: "One locust in your palm is better than a thousand in the air." (956)

Mosquito (1 proverb):

Mosquitoes are small and inferior: 2155 (see buffalo)

Peacock (1 proverb):

Peacocks are arrogant: "Like the peacock, it boasts about its feathers." (1457)

Pigeon (1 proverb):

Pigeons are volatile: "Like the pigeon it moves from one tower to the other." (1411) (Their love does not last.)

Scarab (dung beetle) (1 proverb):

Scarabs are inferior: "The scarab is a sultan (= prince) in its home." (39) (It only has dignity in its home.)

Summary and general results

Examining the proverbs from a quantitative perspective indicates the importance of proverbs containing animals. In the collection of Taymour which serves as the corpus for this study and which includes a total of 3118 proverbs there are 429 proverbs which contain animals. This is nearly 14% of the whole corpus. The most frequent animals that occur in the proverbs are the dog and the donkey with 50 occurrences each. Together they constitute nearly 25 % of the corpus. Other animals also appear frequently that means in more than 15 proverbs. These animals are camels, cats, monkeys, horses, and birds. Some animals only come once or twice in the proverbs. The exact numbers are shown in the appendix.

It is important to note that it is not my duty to check if the features or the traits that are given to the animals are true or not, as the purpose in the underlying study is only to show how the animals are actually portrayed in the proverbs of the underlying corpus. The portrayal of the dog can serve as an example. Although dogs are known for their faithfulness – they are not pictured in the proverbs as faithful creatures but – as we see – they are almost entirely tied to negative traits.

As a result of the analysis we find that the negative features that are linked to the animals exceed the positive ones. There are 42 negative features and 20 positive ones which means that the negative features are more than double the positive ones. The proverbs containing negative features are also nearly double the proverbs with positive features, as 163 proverbs contain negative features and 77 positive ones.

The analysis has also shown that there is a certain connection between the species of the animals and the distribution of negative and positive features.

The domestic animals are either purely positive like horses, sheep, calves, beasts and lambs or they show a balance between the positive and negative features like donkeys, chicken, goats, cows, and mules. The purely negative ones are animals with smaller numbers like roosters, pigs, and pigeons.

In my opinion the reason for domestic animals being more on the positive side is that most of them are either a work force, often hardworking, or they are a means of transport or a source of food. In general, they are considered useful for mankind.

As dogs and cats are not considered as a work force by the proverbs, they don't show a balance between negative and positive features. Especially the dog is pictured as mainly negative. The proverbs in which dogs appear bring 10 negative features and only two positive ones. The cats have 8 negative and 4 positive features.

Many wild animals have purely or mainly negative features like snakes, scorpions, wolves, bears, frogs, hedgehogs, weasels, peacocks, monkeys, and mice. Lions and gazelles have purely positive traits.

The proverbs show the birds as having purely or mainly negative features like the birds as a general term, snail kites, owls, and egret birds. The hawk is an exception, as it is given positive features.

The insects which appear mainly in small numbers of proverbs are portrayed in a negative way. The ants are an exception.

It is interesting to know that some features apply to a variety of animals throughout the proverbs and are not bound to a certain kind of animal. The most numerous negative features are the following. It is to be noted that the numbers in brackets indicate the sum of proverbs in which these features appear.

Harmful: dogs (1), snakes (11), birds (1), scorpions (7), wolves (4), hornets (2), mules (1), bees (1), weasels (1), centipedes (1).

Ugly: monkeys (7), cows (1), beetles (4), roosters (1), hedgehogs (1), snail kites (1), bears (1), egret birds (1), frogs (2).

Inferior: dogs (9), donkeys (4), mice (4), crows (1), pigs (3), worms (1), mosquitoes (1), scarabs (1).

Mean: dogs (3), monkeys (1), snakes (1), fish (1), snail kites (1), mules (1).

Fearful: dogs (4), monkeys (1), roosters (1).

The positive features are – as stated before – much less in numbers and they are given to the domestic animals as they are useful for mankind.

Looking at the analysis we find that a number of animals come in pairs. The total number of these proverbs which contain two animals is 47. In order to have an exact total number of the proverbs with animals in the corpus these proverbs have been counted only once. The most common pairs are the ones with dogs and lions with 5 proverbs. As a contrast to the noble lion the dog is regarded as inferior. Another pair is the one with the cat and the mouse. In 4 proverbs the cat is described as superior or stronger opposed to the inferior or weaker mouse. The pair monkey and gazelle with 3 proverbs show the ugly monkey opposed to the pretty gazelle. Other pairs that are fewer in number (only 2 proverbs) are on the basis of size (camels / ants) and (bull / mouse), value (camels / donkeys), size and value (camel / cat). The rest of the pairs appear only in one proverb each.

The underlying study has tried to document the occurrences of animals in the Egyptian proverbs and to show how they are portrayed. Traits that are given to the animals in the Egyptian proverbs are actually reflecting the way the Egyptians see the animals in their culture. These traits might be different from traits given to the animals in other cultures. Not only that but the mere mentioning of certain animals and the frequency of their appearance in the proverbs might show discrepancies between cultures. Some animals are not presented in the corpus of the Egyptian proverbs. These animals might appear in the collection of other peoples and vice versa. Comparing the Egyptian animal proverbs

with other cultures would certainly have very interesting outcomes.

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Appendix

Name of the animal	Total number of occurrences	Number of the proverbs
Animal	2	874, 879
Ant	4	254, 1546, 1977, 2231
Bear	3	1024, 1612, 2179
Beast	7	370, 835, 836, 837, 1162, 1913, 2915
Bee	3	418, 1543, 2426
Beetle	7	1183, 1184, 1417, 1418, 1736, 2518, 3136
Bird	15	98, 464, 585, 834, 1486, 1823, 1906, 1907, 1908, 2121, 2249, 2266, 2555, 2635, 3154
Buffalo	2	2155, 2725
Bug	1	811
Bull	9	202, 431, 808, 950, 1465, 1808, 1809, 2088, 3167
Calf	9	251, 579, 1077, 1083, 1305, 1629, 1961, 1976, 2700
Camel	35	254, 484, 606, 734, 967, 968, 969, 970, 1103, 1397, 1399, 1400, 1401, 1444, 1683, 1758, 1879, 2164, 2165, 2174, 2175, 2206, 2248, 2251, 2261, 2349, 2357, 2493, 2539, 2551, 2736, 2904, 2930, 3062, 3098
Cat	28	176, 512, 514, 889, 946, 984, 1090, 1501, 1502, 1503, 1504, 1505, 2033, 2083, 2084, 2251, 2252,

		2257, 2258, 2260, 2261, 2408, 2424, 2526, 2731, 2738, 2986, 3062
Centipede	1	450
Chicken	21	313, 412, 448, 489, 820, 851, 853, 1483, 1484, 1485, 1487, 1951, 2093, 2094, 2095, 2096, 2097, 2361, 2548, 2984, 3141
Cockroach	1	1736
Cow	11	675, 808, 965, 1069, 1138, 1385, 1593, 2224, 2542, 2692, 2700
Crow	13	687, 1034, 1115, 1398, 1476, 2044, 2045, 2046, 2092, 2185, 3075, 3079, 3097
Dog	50	47, 162, 190, 193, 237, 426, 519, 607, 621, 644, 664, 736, 973, 993, 1110, 1128, 1264, 1303, 1379, 1463, 1515, 1516, 1517, 1518, 1519, 1520, 1521, 1522, 1523, 1749, 2187, 2199, 2430, 2431, 2432, 2433, 2434, 2435, 2436, 2437, 2438, 2439, 2440, 2441, 2442, 2550, 2617, 2869, 2979, 2981
Donkey	50	53, 100, 101, 107, 311, 384, 483, 553, 713, 714, 719, 787, 1093, 1094, 1095, 1096, 1097, 1098, 1099, 1100, 1101, 1102, 1103, 1137, 1409, 1410, 1412, 1413, 1414, 1549, 1600, 1633, 2056, 2147, 2154, 2248, 2286, 2312, 2360, 2428, 2537, 2544, 2592, 2633, 2739, 2748, 2895, 2965, 3053, 3164
Egret bird	2	1364, 1365

Fish	13	110, 1381, 1430, 1438, 1439, 1440, 1490, 1614, 1615, 1826, 2167, 2347, 2944
Flea	5	1376, 1377, 1378, 1380, 2261
Fly	7	605, 810, 1211, 1212, 1261, 1422, 3165
Frog	2	1880, 1881
Gazelle	5	158, 2056, 2203, 2234, 2235
Goat	14	42, 181, 276, 411, 483, 799, 1363, 1395, 1982, 1983, 2758, 2759, 2881, 2988
Goose	3	32, 1552, 3175
Hawk	3	1599, 2046, 3052
Hedgehog	2	1506, 1507
Hornet	5	191, 1177, 1215, 1216, 1423
Horse	18	159, 337, 387, 971, 1005, 1066, 1094, 1420, 1719, 2099, 2479, 2524, 2580, 2637, 2869, 2899, 3106, 3177
Lamb	4	95, 222, 780, 924
Louse	2	793, 2588
Lion	5	426, 735, 736, 1577, 1580
Locust	1	956
Monkey	24	106, 260, 451, 483, 565, 717, 770, 812, 1257, 1284, 1500, 1545, 1637, 1726, 1905, 2188, 2203, 2234, 2235, 2236, 2237, 2239, 3116, 3163
Mosquito	1	2155
Mouse	14	832, 953, 984, 1090, 1481, 1495, 1850, 2033, 2082, 2083, 2084, 2088, 2186, 3167

Mule	5	787, 804, 1032, 1384, 2598
Owl	4	49, 526, 971, 1372
Peacock	1	1457
Pig	3	1677, 1847, 2670
Pigeon	1	1411
Rooster	7	108, 995, 1263, 1427, 2181, 2365, 3006
Scarab	1	39
Scorpion	8	450, 1054, 1092, 1471, 1472, 1868, 1915, 2998
Sheep	10	767, 958, 1479, 2195, 2514, 2673, 2725, 2951, 2952, 3148
Snail kite	7	1034, 1035, 1036, 1555, 2045, 2984, 3052
Snake	18	177, 279, 328, 509, 568, 949, 1014, 1015, 1054, 1114, 1392, 1393, 1442, 1734, 1977, 2067, 2769, 3136
Weasel	2	448, 2257
Wolf	7	27, 490, 766, 952, 2180, 2514, 2758
Worm	2	949, 1251

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