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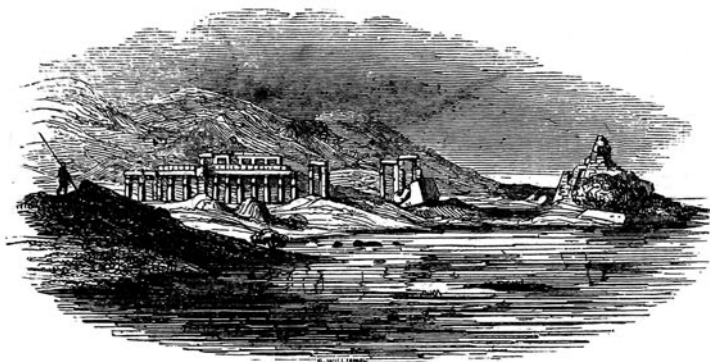
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John Gardner Wilkinson

Excerpt

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MANNERS AND CUSTOMS
OF THE
ANCIENT EGYPTIANS.



VIGNETTE G. The palace-temple of Remeses the Great, generally called the Memnonium, at Thebes, during the inundation.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Chase. — Animals. — Dogs. — Fowlers — Fishermen. — Hippopotamus. — Crocodile. — The Tentyrites.

ALL classes of the Egyptians delighted in the sports of the field, and the peasants deemed it a duty as well as an amusement, to hunt and destroy the hyæna, and those animals which were enemies of the fields or flocks, and they shot them with the bow, caught them in traps, or by whatever means their dexterity and ingenuity could suggest. For though the hyæna is a carnivorous animal, it is not

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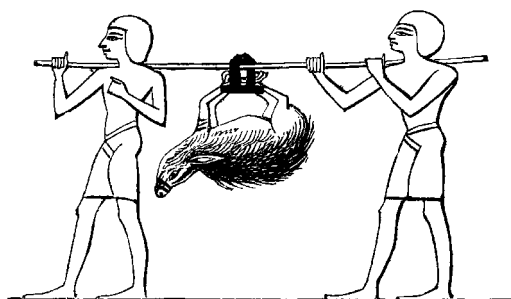
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THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS. CHAP. VIII.



No. 318.

Hyæna caught in a trap.

Thebes.

less hostile to the crops than to the flocks, when pressed with hunger*, and the ravages they are known to commit in the fields among the Indian corn and other produce, make the peasants of modern Egypt as anxious as their predecessors to destroy them, whenever they have an opportunity, or the courage to attack them.

CHASE.

Plato† reckons the huntsmen as one of the castes of the Egyptians; and though, as I have already observed, persons who followed this occupation may have constituted a particular body, or a minor subdivision of one of the castes, we are not to suppose, that the sports of the field were confined to those who gained their livelihood by the chase; or that the wealthy classes of Egyptians were averse to an amusement so generally welcomed in all countries. Indeed, the sculptures of

* I have already noticed this in *Egypt and Thebes*, p. 243, note.

† Plato in *Timæo*, near the beginning.

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CHAP. VIII.

HUNTSMEN.

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Thebes, Beni Hassan, and other places, assure us, that they took particular delight in chasing the wild animals, kept in their preserves for this purpose, and even in the more laborious task of following them in the extensive tracts of the wide desert, which stretch to the east and west of the valley of the Nile. On these occasions they were attended by several huntsmen, whom they kept in their service, to attend upon the hounds, to direct the hunt, to assist in catching the larger animals with a noose, to carry darts and hunting poles*, to arrange the nets†, and, in short, to manage all matters connected with the chase.

When the chasseur was a person of consequence, numerous attendants accompanied him, not merely in the capacity of beaters, to rouse and turn the game, or to carry it when killed, but for various purposes connected with his immediate wants or comforts while in the field; some brought with them a fresh supply of arrows, a spare bow, or other requisites for remedying accidents; and some carried a stock of provisions for his use. These were borne upon the usual yoke, across the shoulders, and consisted of a skin of water, and jars placed

* The Roman *venabula* were of the thickness of a spear, armed with a sharp iron point, of moderate length, and used as a defensive weapon against the attack of a wild beast, being held in a slanting direction to receive it. J. Pollux, v. 4.

† Virg. *Æn.* iv. 131.:

“*Retia rara, plagæ, lato venabula ferro,
Massylique ruunt equites, et odora canum vis.*”

And Hor. 1 Ep. vi. 58. :—

“*Plagas, venabula, servos.*”

This person was called by the Greeks, *δικτυαγωγος*. J. Pollux, v. 4.

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4 THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS. CHAP. VIII.

in wicker baskets, probably containing bread, meats, or other provisions. The skins used for carrying water were precisely the same as those of the present day, being of a goat, or a gazelle, stripped from the body by a longitudinal opening at the throat; the legs serving as handles, to which ropes for slinging them were attached; and a soft pendent tube of leather sewed to the throat, in the place of the head, formed the mouth of the water-skin, which was secured by a thong fastened round it.

Sometimes a space of ground, of considerable extent, was enclosed with nets, into which the animals were driven by beaters; and as this is frequently shown by the sculptures to have been in a hilly country, it is evident that the scenes of those amusements were in the desert, where they probably extended nets across the narrow vallies, or torrent beds, which lie between the rocky hills, difficult of ascent to animals closely pressed by dogs. This is indeed the only way in which a person, mounted on horseback* or in a chariot, could follow, or get within reach of them with the bow; and that some animals, particularly antelopes, when closely pressed, fear to take a steep ascent, is a fact well known to the Arabs; and I have myself,

* As in Virgil, *Æn.* iv. 151.:—

“ Postquam altos ventum in montes, atque invia lustra;
Ecce feræ, saxi dejectæ vertice, capræ
Decurrere jugis: alia de parte patentes
Transmittunt cursu campos, atque agmina cervi
Pulverulenta fuga glomerant, montesque relinquunt.
At puer Ascanius *mediis in vallibus acri*
Gaudet equo: jamque hos cursu, jam præterit illos.”

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CHAP. VIII. MODE OF HUNTING.

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when following them with dromedaries in the same valleys, observed that gazelles preferred doubling, and swiftly passing between their pursuers, to the risk of slowly ascending the eminence to which they had been driven.

The spots thus enclosed were usually in the vicinity of the water brooks*, to which they were in the habit of repairing in the morning and evening: and having awaited the time when they went to drink, and ascertained it by their recent tracks on the accustomed path†, the hunters disposed the nets, occupied proper positions for observing them unseen‡, and gradually closed in upon them. Such are the scenes partially portrayed in the Egyptian paintings, where long nets are represented surrounding the space, wherein the chasseur and his attendants pursue the game, either on foot or mounted in a chariot: and the presence of hyænas, jackals, and various wild beasts unconnected with the sport, is intended to show that they have been accidentally enclosed within the line of nets, which, from embracing an extensive tract, necessarily included within its range the resort of these, as well as of the antelopes and other animals, of which they were in quest.

* "As the hart panteth after the water brooks." Ps. xlii. i. The Hebrew name is אֵיל Ail, evidently the same as the Egyptian $\epsilon\iota\omicron\tau\lambda$ and the Arabic ايل, which I believe to be the Oryx.

† My long sojourn with the Arabs in the desert, and my frequent visits to the springs for the same purpose, have explained to me the methods adopted by the ancient Egyptian chasseurs.

‡ The person whose business it was to watch the nets, was called by the Greeks λινοπηγης, ο τα επιπτοντα επισκουµενος. J. Pollux, v. 4.

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The same custom of surrounding a spot, which they intended to beat, seems to have been adopted by the Romans; and Virgil* represents Æneas and Dido repairing to a wood at break of day, after the attendants had surrounded it with a temporary fence, to enclose the game. This is further confirmed by the description, given by Julius Pollux, of the various contrivances employed in hunting; and he makes an evident distinction between the nets for enclosing a large space, and those for stopping gaps or openings, and other purposes.

The long net, called *δικτυς*, was furnished with several ropes, and was supported on forked poles, varying in length, to correspond with the inequalities of the ground over which it extended, and this was so contrived as to enclose any space, by crossing hills, valleys, or streams, and encircling woods, or whatever might present itself; a description fully applicable to those exhibited in the Egyptian paintings†; smaller nets, called *ενοδια*, for stopping gaps, are also described by the same author; and a circular snare *ποδαγρα*, set round with wooden and iron nails, and attached by a rope to a log of wood, which was used for catching deer, so nearly resembles one still made by the Arabs, and supposed to be an old Egyptian invention, that we

“ Venatum Æneas, unaque miserrima Dido,
In nemus ire parant, ubi primos crastinus ortus
Extulerit Titan, radiisque retexerit orbem.
His ego nigrantem commista grandine nimum,
Dum trepidant alæ, saltusque indagine cingunt,
Desuper infundam.” Virg. Æn. iv. 117.

† Vide J. Poll. Onom. v. 4.

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may conclude it was common to several ancient people.

In many instances, the dresses of the attendants and huntsmen were, as Julius Pollux recommends, “not white, nor of a brilliant hue, lest they should be seen at a distance by the animals,” but of a suppressed colour, and reaching only a short way down the thigh*; being shorter even than those he mentions, which extended to the knee; and the horses of the chariots were divested of the feathers and showy ornaments used on other occasions.

Besides the portions of the open desert and the vallies, above alluded to, which were enclosed by the Egyptians, during their hunting excursions, the parks and preserves on their own domains in the valley of the Nile, though of comparatively limited dimensions, offered ample space and opportunity for indulging in the amusement of the chase; and there, as in the *theriotrophia* of the Romans, a quantity of game was kept, among which may be enumerated the wild goat, oryx, and gazelle. They had also fishponds and spacious *vivaria*, set apart for keeping geese and other wild fowl, which they fattened for the table.

It was the duty of the huntsmen or the gamekeepers they employed, to superintend the preserves; and at proper periods of the year, when the young animals could be obtained, they sought them, and added to the stock, which continued also to increase.

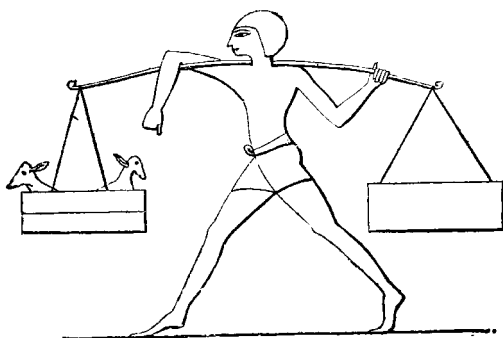
* *Vide* woodcut, No. 319. It was customary with the Egyptians, on ordinary occasions, to wear a kelt reaching to the knee.

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[More information](#)No. 319. Bringing young animals to stock the preserves. *Tomb near the Pyramids.*

independent of those occasional additions, through the care taken in encouraging their propagation, by a judicious regard to their habits. And this is confirmed by the numerous flocks of gazelles and other wild animals, represented in the tombs, among the possessions of the deceased, of which the scribes are seen writing an account, at the command of the steward, who waits to present it, with an annual census of his property, to the owner of the estate.

Being fed within pastures enclosed with fences, they were not marked in any particular way like the cattle, which, being let loose, in open meadows, and frequently allowed to mix with the herds of the neighbours, required some distinguishing sign by which they might be recognised; and were, therefore, branded on the shoulder with a hot iron, probably engraved with the owner's name. This is distinctly shown in the paintings of Thebes, where the cattle are represented lying on the ground with their feet tied, while one person heats an iron on

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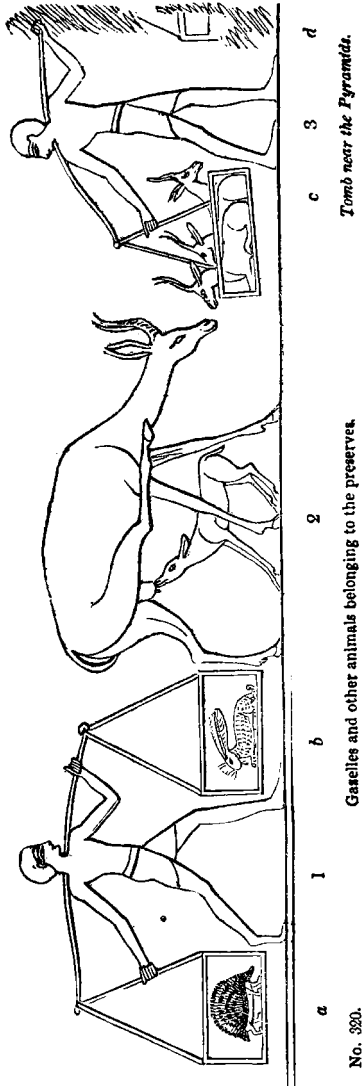
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CHAP. VIII.

PRESERVES FOR GAME.

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the fire, and another applies it to the shoulder of the prostrate animal.

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In primitive ages, the chase was not an amusement, but a necessary occupation among those people, who did not follow agricultural pursuits, or

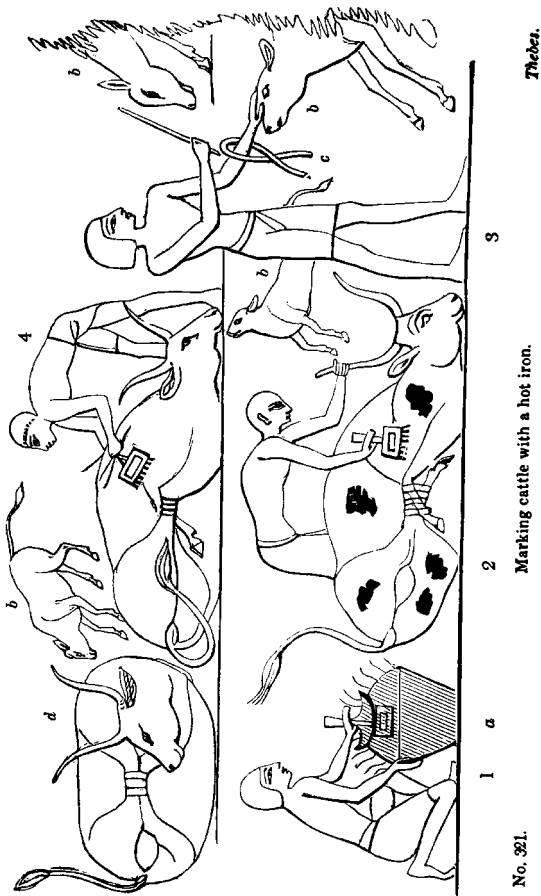


Fig. 1. Heating the iron on the fire, *a*.
2. and 4. Employed in marking the cattle.
3. Holds a tethering cord on his left arm, and keeps away the calves.

lead a pastoral life, and who depended for their subsistence upon the sports of the field: and in some instances the shepherd was obliged to hunt