

# A HISTORY OF THE ANIMAL WORLD IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

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liest known representation of the Red Junglefowl or common chicken from ancient Egypt (Peck and Ross 1978: no. 118; Houlihan 1996a: fig. 141). This immediately recognizable bird, now ubiquitous the world over, was first introduced into Egypt, not for the table, but probably as an extraordinary rare prize, an object of marvel. There are only a few extant instances of this species occurring in Egyptian art, and all but two are attributable to the closing years of pharaonic history (Leclant 1980: figs. 76, 190; Houlihan 1986: 79–81). It was not to become a common resident along the banks of the Nile until Greco-Roman times.

Exotic birds and beasts all but vanish from Egyptian artistic sources following the crest of the nation's power during the New Kingdom. The Greek-speaking rulers of the Ptolemaic Dynasty were extraordinarily fascinated by, and concerned with, amassing fine zoological collections of their own, but very little of their efforts have been preserved for us in the iconographic record (Jennison 1937: 28–41; Rice 1983; Meyboom 1995).

#### APPENDIX: THE RANGE OF ANIMAL LIFE IN EGYPTIAN ART AND HIEROGLYPHS

What follows is a systematic list of all the various animal life that can confidently be identified in Egyptian art and hieroglyphs. It builds upon a somewhat similar one complied by Lothar Störk in the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* (Störk 1977). The present list draws on imagery ranging in date from the earliest Predynastic times to the close of the Ptolemaic period, and includes creatures represented in a wide array of media. Some animals, occasionally professed to be readily distinguishable in the iconographic repertoire, such as the aardvark (*Orycteropus afer*), otter (*Lutra* sp.), warthog (*Phacochoerus aethiopicus*), and dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*), to name but four mammals, have been excluded from this survey because it is thought that these proposed identifications do not stand up to the rigors of close scrutiny.<sup>4</sup> Only those animals that can be identified with reasonable certainty are given here; speculations have been kept to an absolute minimum. The list includes a number of birds and beasts that are only known from single or rare occurrences, as well as those that are illustrated

<sup>4</sup> These highly questionable identifications persist in the recent work of Osborn and Osbornová (1998).

ubiquitously over the course of three thousand years of pharaonic civilization, such as those employed as standard hieroglyphs. In addition, the list is not restricted to indigenous fauna, but also contains a variety of foreign specimens occurring in Egyptian art, as in the case of the Syrian bear, and some of the exotic fishes and other marine animals, dwellers of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, portrayed in the splendid reliefs depicting the voyage to the fabled land of Punt in Queen Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahari. The creatures are arranged in taxonomic order. After each form, I have generally cited a pair of references that will point the reader to either a typical or an especially noteworthy example of it. Those wishing specific information on individual animals listed below are encouraged to consult the comprehensive *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* (Helck, Otto and Westendorf 1975–92), which includes extensive lemmas covering a great many of them, and now also Redford (2001).

#### A. Class: Mammalia

1. Long-eared or Desert Hedgehog *Hemiechinus auritus* and *Paraechinus aethiopicus* (Boessneck 1988: figs. 21 and 44b; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 34 and 49–50)
2. Shrew *Crocidura* sp. (Boessneck 1988: fig. 97; Arnold 1995: no. 43)
3. Bat (order Chiroptera) (N. M. Davies 1949: pl. III; Houlihan 1986: figs. 195–199; 1996a: fig. 113)
4. Green Monkey *Cercopithecus aethiops* (Boessneck 1988: figs. 87 and 94; Houlihan 1996a: pl. VI and fig. 73)
5. Hamadryas Baboon *Papio hamadryas* (Boessneck 1988: figs. 230a–b; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 69–70, and pls. XXVI, XXX)
6. Olive or Anubis Baboon *Papio cynocephalus* (Houlihan 1996a: figs. 72 and 145; Houlihan 1997: figs. 2, 4, 6, 7)
7. Desert Hare *Lepus capensis* (Boessneck 1988: figs. 42 and 48; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 51–52)
8. North African Porcupine *Hystrix cristata* (Wreszinski 1936: pl. 103; Houlihan 1996a: fig. 33)
9. House or Spiny Mouse *Mus musculus* and *Acomys cahirinus* (Arnold 1995: nos. 77–78; Houlihan 1996a: fig. 149)
10. Field Rat *Arvicanthis niloticus* (W. S. Smith 1965: fig. 179; Drummond, Janssen and Janssen 1990: fig. 3)
11. Jerboa *Jaculus* sp. (Boessneck 1988: figs. 43–44; Arnold 1995: no. 18)

## CHAPTER THREE

# ANIMALS IN EGYPTIAN ART AND HIEROGLYPHS

PATRICK F. HOULIHAN

### ANIMAL IMAGERY DURING PREDYNASTIC AND EARLY DYNASTIC EGYPT<sup>1</sup>

Humans and animals have an extremely long history of relations in Egypt. A record of some of their earliest interactions are captured in thousands of drawings (petroglyphs) executed on rock faces in the western and eastern Deserts, and along the cliffs bordering the entire length of the Nile Valley in Upper Egypt and Lower Nubia (W. M. Davis 1979; 1984; Hoffman 1991: 233–39; Otto and Buschendorf-Otto 1993). The oldest series of representational carvings probably originates from the Badarian or Amratian (Naqada I) periods, although rock drawings are notoriously difficult to date. The subject matter of these compositions frequently consists of an assortment of indigenous big game animals, which are sometimes being trapped or pursued by hunters and their dogs. The beasts encountered most routinely include ostriches, giraffes, aurochs, Nubian ibexes, antelopes, and other horned quadrupeds; less common figures are Nile crocodiles, hippopotamuses, African elephants, and rhinoceroses. With the advent of animal domestication, herding long-horned cattle also becomes a recurring theme. Although schematically fashioned, some of the more accomplished chase episodes have tremendous vitality and possess a certain artistry (Houlihan 1986: fig. 2; 1996a: fig. 30). Such works are often described in the literature as being connected with magical practices, for example, hunters attempting to conjure up desired quarry. Whatever the intention may have been, these portrayals are a brilliant introduction to the art of

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<sup>1</sup> Susan M. Houlihan and Mary Beth Wheeler kindly read early drafts of this essay and offered numerous suggestions for its improvement. The references cited here tend to be selective. The following works have extensive bibliographies dealing with the various birds, beasts, and bugs represented in ancient Egyptian iconography (Houlihan 1986: xiv–xxix; 1996a: 221–36; Boessneck 1988: 182–97).

animal representation that will continue to flourish and claim many masterpieces in Egypt over the millennia (Brunner-Traut 1986).

Animal imagery dominates early Egyptian art. Especially just before and during the time of the emergence of phonetic writing in the Nile Valley, the animal world, both real and imagined, served as a kind of symbolic language, visually communicating theoretical concepts (Baines 1989: 473–74; Kemp 1989: 46–53; 1991: 207–8). Through the illustration of animals in this shared system, particularly as part of the decoration on costly luxury and votive objects, the ancient Egyptians were able to express important ideas about kingship, the unification of their country under one ruler, and the powers of the cosmos in a manner that was later supplanted by the use of hieroglyphic inscriptions. There have been some inspired attempts at interpreting the complex underlying symbolism of these faunal motifs, and some headway in this area has been achieved (Williams and Logan 1987; Williams 1988; Ciałowicz 1991: 58–81; W. M. Davis 1992; Baines 1993; H. S. Smith 1994: 364–67). Nevertheless, much about their significance remains imperfectly understood, and conclusions are often speculative and a matter of continued controversy. In the present state of our knowledge about this aspect of early Egypt, then, it is certainly easier to appreciate many of these animal images as fine artistic creations, rather than explaining the thought processes that prompted their portrayal. Also appearing during late Predynastic times are several figural elements, most notably fabulous creatures, which are unmistakable Mesopotamian borrowings (Fischer 1987: 15–16; H. S. Smith 1992; Pittman 1996: 14–22). The principal categories in which birds and beasts are met with in art during the Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods in Egypt can be summarized (Capart 1905; Vandier 1952; Kantor 1974; Leclant 1978, 41–57; Adams and Ciałowicz 1997).

Predynastic craftsmen of the Amratian and Gerzean (Naqada II) periods produced numerous schist (or graywacke) palettes in very simplified shapes of various species (African elephants, hippopotamuses, antelopes, rams, turtles, fishes, and birds), which were intended for grinding malachite into green eye-paint for medicinal and cosmetic purposes (Ciałowicz 1991: 19–40). On these, the salient morphical aspects of the animals have been captured successfully. Many of the palettes have a hole for suspension when not in use, or, possibly, the smaller ones could also have been worn as pectorals. These zoomorphic objects are among the commonest grave

herbal (Beaux 1990; Baum 1992; Schoske, Kreißl and Germer 1992: fig. 73; Germer 1993, 77–78; Wilkinson 1998: 137–39). These proposed new identifications, though, seem rather speculative. In any event, even in the absence of preserved paint, some of the avifauna that are also portrayed here can be confidently determined, and a few of them are unique in Egyptian iconography: the darter, diver, and great spotted cuckoo (Houlihan 1986). A small gazelle illustrated here was tentatively labeled by the late Joachim Boessneck as a Persian Gazelle, which, if correct, would certainly make it a true import (Boessneck 1988: fig. 79). Also prominently exhibited in the “Botanical Garden” as beasts of wonderment are several head of cattle of the two-tailed and three-horned variety! These peculiarities may be simply flights of creativity or, perhaps, could even depict farmyard freaks, the kind well-known to working large-animal veterinarians.

During the Nineteenth Dynasty, Ramesses II likewise evinced an inquisitiveness into exotic wildlife. His modest rock-cut temple at Beit el-Wali includes a scene of the importation into Egypt of various domestic and wild animals, the spoils of Nubian war and tribute, which are shown paraded before the victorious king. These comprise cattle, lion, giraffe, monkey, gerenuk, beisa oryx, ostrich, cheetah, leopard, and an entire range of valuable animal products (Ricke, Hughes and Wente 1967: pls. 7–9). Although usually said to date from the Eighteenth Dynasty, it was, in all likelihood, this same monarch who, during the course of his reign, had represented in sunken relief on a pylon of the temple of the war god Montu at Armant, amid a frieze of Nubian booty, the delivery of an adult live rhinoceros to Egypt (Säve-Söderbergh 1956: 121; Fischer 1987: 26). The mighty rhinoceros is depicted being restrained by a gang of men using strong ropes. It appears to have been the subject of vigorous examination, because carved all around it are short hieroglyphic captions, briefly detailing its massive dimensions, including the length of the horn (Mond and Myers 1940, 2: pl. XCIII; Fischer 1987: pl. VI, fig. 20; Houlihan 1996a: fig. 143). The inclusion of these measurements makes this figure unique in Egyptian iconography. The arrival of this beast from the south must have been hailed as a truly heroic feat, and, by all means, worthy of public exhibition.

The painted wall decoration of Theban tomb chapels provides the most vivid evocation of the vast array of exotic fauna that flowed into Egypt during the New Kingdom. The private tombs of some of the highest ranking officials in the land, such as those of Rekh-

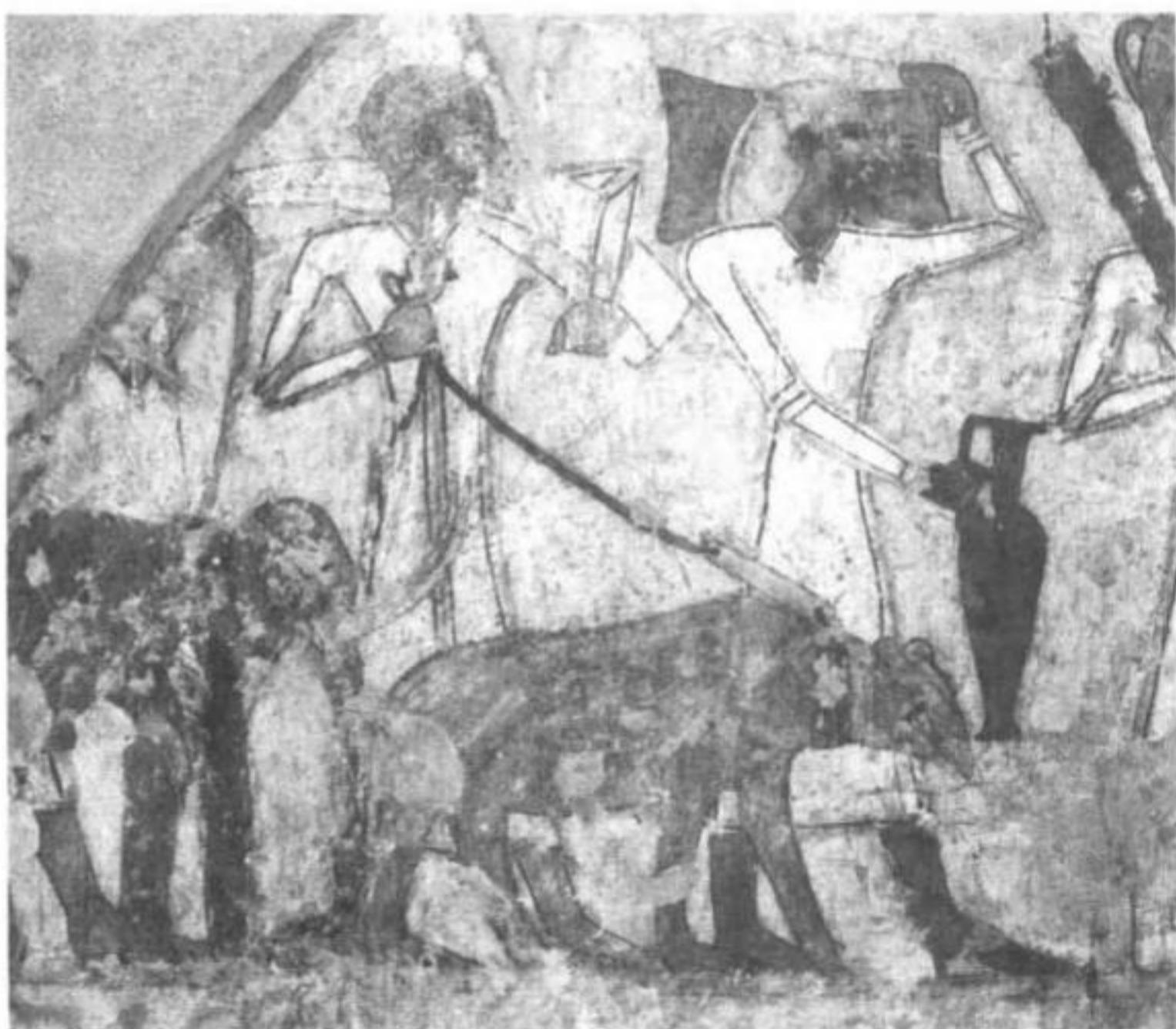


Fig. 3.11. Wall painting from the tomb chapel of Rekhmire at Thebes showing the arrival of foreign tribute, including live animals. In the lower register, Syrians deliver some prize products and fauna from their distant country. Here they are shown bringing a Syrian bear, wearing a collar and held on a leash. The man with the bear also carries a great elephant's tusk. Behind is a rather small Syrian elephant, also collared and leashed. 18th dynasty. Photo courtesy Patrick F. Houlihan.

mire (TT 100; fig. 3.11), Huy (TT 40), Kenamun (TT 162), Ineni (TT 81), and Amunehzeh (TT 84), among others, feature delegations from foreign lands, Nubia, Libya, Crete, or Syria, bringing some of the live animals and merchandise characteristic of their respective locations for trade or as tribute (N. de G. Davies 1935; 1943; Müller-Wollermann 1986). Here, we meet such oddities as domestic humped cattle, newly imported from Asia, and the lion, leopard, cheetah, giraffe, Syrian elephant, Syrian bear, and the list goes on. In many instances, the species' diagnostic features are superbly indicated in these arresting paintings, the result of firsthand knowledge of them.

Drawings on ostraca are yet another source for catching glimpses of some of the nonnative animals imported into New Kingdom Egypt. For example, one well-known figured ostracon, discovered by Howard Carter in the Valley of the Kings, and presumably the work of an artisan of the Nineteenth Dynasty, displays on it the ear-

12. Lion *Panthera leo* (Boessneck 1988: fig. 85; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 65–68)
13. Leopard *Panthera pardus* (Boessneck 1988: fig. 94; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 3, 66, pl. XVI)
14. Cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* (N. de G. Davies 1943, 2: pl. XVII; Aldred 1972: pl. 18)
15. Jungle or Wild Cat *Felis chaus* and *Felis sylvestris* (Malek 1993: fig. 20; Houlihan 1996a: fig. 33)
16. Domestic cat *Felis catus* (Malek 1993: figs. 32–44; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 60–64 and pl. XXIII)
17. Serval *Felis serval* (Malek 1993: fig. 13; Pinch 1993: pls. 43–45)
18. Caracal *Caracal caracal* (Boessneck 1988: fig. 35; Osborn and Osbornová 1998: figs. 7-191, 7-193.)
19. Golden Jackal *Canis aureus* (Wreszinski 1936: pls. 16 and 103; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 2, 33, 58–59)
20. Domestic dog *Canis familiaris* (Boessneck 1988: figs. 3, 20–21, 90–94; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 34–35, 48, 56–57 and pls. II, XV, XXXII)
21. Cape Hunting Dog *Lycaon pictus* (Boessneck 1988: figs. 11a–b; Houlihan 1996a: fig. 54 and pl. I.)
22. Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* (Saleh and Sourouzian 1987: no. 25a; Houlihan 1996a: pl. XXI)
23. Striped Hyena *Hyaena hyaena* (Boessneck 1988: figs. 54–55; Houlihan 1996a: pl. XI)
24. Honey Badger or Ratel *Mellivora capensis* (Keimer 1942: 11–14 with figs. 7–9; Churcher 1984: figs. 34–35)
25. Striped Weasel *Poecilictis libyca* (Wreszinski 1936: pl. 84; Houlihan 1996a: fig. 32)
26. Common Genet *Genetta genetta* (Boessneck 1988: figs. 33–34; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 84 and 95)
27. Egyptian Mongoose or Ichneumon *Herpestes ichneumon* (Houlihan 1996a: figs. 83, 86, 95 and pl. X; Houlihan 1996b: pls. I–II)
28. African Elephant *Loxodonta africana* (Boessneck 1988: fig. 9; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 30–31)
29. Syrian Elephant *Elephas maximus* (Boessneck 1988: figs. 75–76; Houlihan 1996a: pl. XV)
30. African Wild Ass *Equus africanus* (Davies and Gardiner 1962: pl. III; Decker and Herb 1994: pl. CLXXXIV)
31. Domestic donkey *Equus asinus* (Boessneck 1988: figs. 12, 105,

129–131; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 23–26 and pl. XIII)

32. Horse *Equus caballus* (Arnold 1995: nos. 69–71; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 27–29 and pl. XVII)

33. Hinny or mule (Boessneck 1988: figs. 132 and 137; Houlihan 1996a: fig. 29)

34. Black or White Rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis* and *Ceratotherium simum* (Boessneck 1988: fig. 74; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 30 and 143)

35. Domestic pig *Sus domesticus* (Boessneck 1988: fig. 128; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 20–22)

36. Hippopotamus *Hippopotamus amphibius* (Boessneck 1988: figs. 57 and 59; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 78–79 and pls. IX–X, XIV, XXXIV)

37. Deer (family Cervidae) (Houlihan 1987: figs. 1–3; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 35, 46–47)

38. Giraffe *Giraffa camelopardalis* (Boessneck 1988: fig. 11a; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 35, 54 and pls. I, XV)

39. Roan Antelope *Hippotragus equinus* (Keimer 1943: figs. 1–2; Boessneck 1981: pl. 18)

40. Scimitar-horned Oryx *Oryx gazella* (Boessneck 1988: figs. 22, 46, 51, 52; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 34–38 and pl. I)

41. Addax *Addax nasomaculatus* (Spencer 1993: fig. 84; Houlihan 1996a: fig. 40)

42. Bubal Hartebeest *Alcelaphus buselaphus* (Boessneck 1988: figs. 10, 21, 38; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 34, 39–41)

43. Dorcas Gazelle *Gazella dorcas* (Boessneck 1988: figs. 20, 39, 49, 50, 52, 89; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 74–75 and pls. I–II)

44. Soemmering's Gazelle *Gazella soemmeringii* (Wreszinski 1936: pl. 18; Boessneck 1988: fig. 38)

45. Slender-horned Gazelle *Gazella leptoceros* (Boessneck 1953: fig. 4; 1981: pl. 2)

46. Persian Gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa* (Boessneck 1988: fig. 79; Beaux 1990: pls. X–XII)

47. Gerenuk *Litocranius walleri* (Asselberghs 1961: pl. LXXXIX; Spencer 1993: fig. 35)

48. Nubian Ibex *Capra ibex* (Boessneck 1988: figs. 7, 47, 51–52; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 34, 42–44 and pl. I)

49. Barbary Sheep *Ammotragus lervia* (Boessneck 1988: fig. 29; Houlihan 1996a: figs. 31 and 45)

50. Aurochs or wild cattle *Bos primigenius* (Wreszinski 1936: pls. 16,