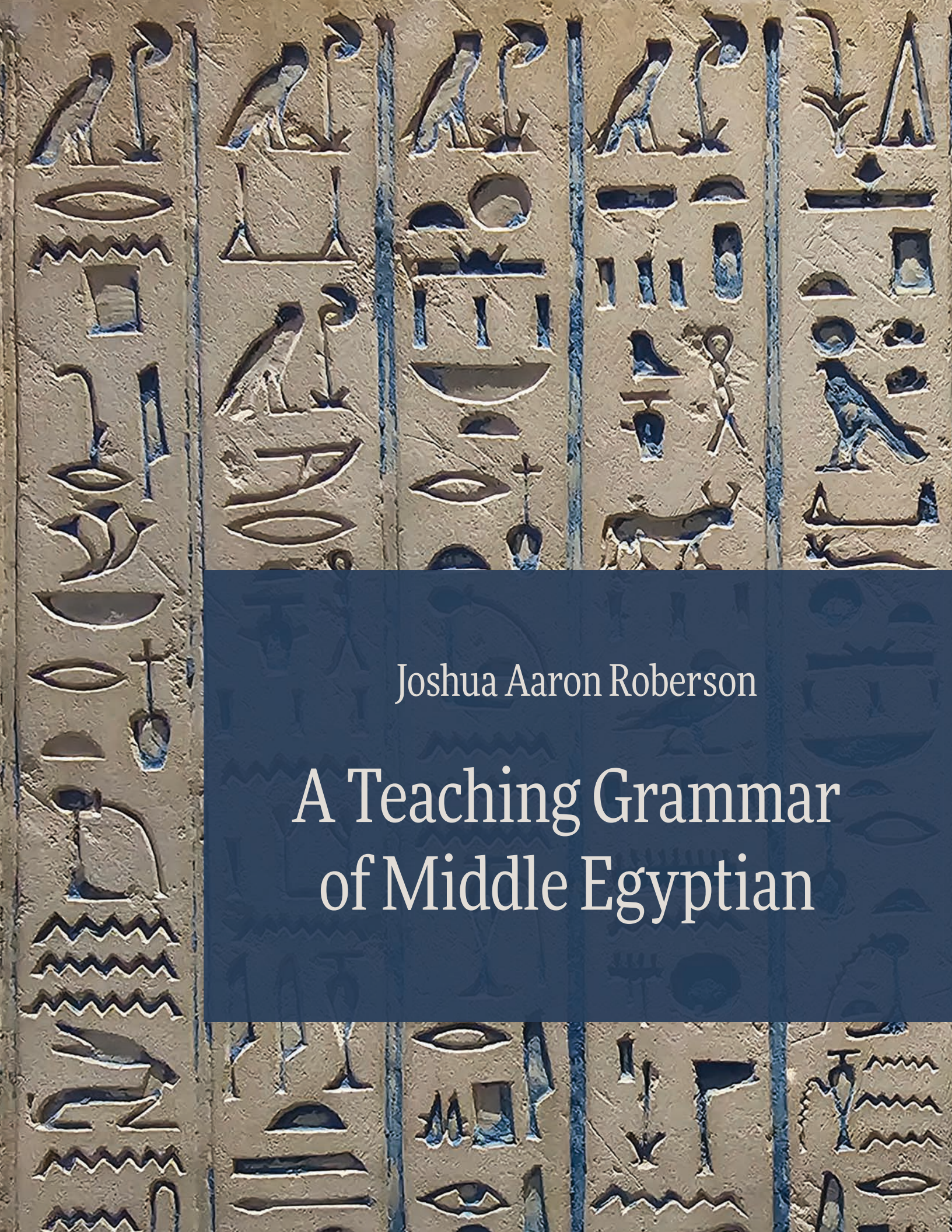


Joshua Aaron Roberson

A Teaching Grammar of Middle Egyptian

A TEACHING GRAMMAR OF MIDDLE EGYPTIAN

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Joshua Aaron Roberson



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Dedicated to the memory of my father, David Aaron Roberson, true of voice,
and to my mother, Terri Lynn Hammack, may she live, prosper, and be well.

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Any work of scholarship stands on the shoulders of giants. More specifically, anyone familiar with the trajectory of scholarship in Egyptian language and its pedagogy will easily spot the profound debt that the present work owes to the many monographs and shorter studies upon which my own understanding of the language rests, above all, the seminal reference *Egyptian Grammar: Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs*, by Sir Alan H. Gardiner, particularly with regard to the structure and organization of the sign list; and the second edition of *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, by James P. Allen, whose terminology I employ for most grammatical forms and constructions. In addition, I must cite a few works that have made the task of tracking down examples and sample texts far, far less time-consuming than they would otherwise have been. First and foremost, I acknowledge the superlative, single-volume anthology by James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom*, from which I have taken the vast majority the literary examples throughout the present volume; and Rami van der Molen, *A Hieroglyphic Dictionary of Egyptian Coffin Texts*, an essential reference for tracking down specific words and constructions from that vast corpus. I would like to mention also the online editions of numerous literary and historical texts supplied by Mark-Jan Nederhof,[1] which permitted quick, web-based searches of that material from the comfort of my home office, saving untold hours that I would otherwise have spent browsing hard copies in my university library. Finally, I extend my heartfelt thanks to Silvia Zago (University of Liverpool) for numerous insightful suggestions, additions, and corrections; and to Mark Janzen (Lipscomb University, Center for Biblical Archaeology), who graciously agreed to use an early draft of this work in his own introductory Egyptian language sequence (2023–2024). Mark's insightful feedback, and that of his students, helped identify strengths and weaknesses in the presentation, which were not initially apparent to me—for example, the need for an Egyptian vocabulary review at the end of each chapter. Finally, I acknowledge with gratitude a number of helpful references suggested by one of my anonymous peer reviewers, which have increased the utility of the present volume, especially with regard to more advanced students, as they begin to engage more deeply with other scholarly works on the Egyptian language.

To my students

The present volume was composed and utilized for classroom instruction during the academic years 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 at the University of Memphis. The feedback that my MA and PhD students provided during that period was

1. https://mjn.host.cs.st-andrews.ac.uk/egyptian/texts/corpus/pdf/.

essential for producing a workable teaching grammar, and I extend my thanks to them collectively, with apologies for not naming each of them individually. In addition, I extend my thanks to all of the graduate and undergraduate students whom I instructed in various phases of the Egyptian language prior to the composition of this work, first at the University of Pennsylvania (2006–2009, 2010–2011) and later at the University of Memphis (2015–2022). The time that we shared in the classroom, working through (and sometimes struggling with) the full range of earlier, English-language teaching grammars of Middle Egyptian was the proximal catalyst for my decision to undertake this challenge. Finally, I offer my most profound gratitude to the graduate assistants at the University of Memphis who helped shoulder the burden of copy editing and proofreading various drafts of this document: Paige Nehls (MA, art history, 2024) provided initial feedback on the clarity of the prose; Terra Sloan Elliot (PhD candidate in history) brought numerous typographical errors to my attention; Paula Celeste Curran (MA, art history, 2025) supplied detailed editorial corrections, saving me from countless typographical errors and other inconsistencies throughout; and Brooke Hughes (PhD candidate in history) assisted with proofreading all hieroglyphic sample texts and exercises, checking signs and their citations against the primary sources, and compiling a running tally of citations for incorporation into the index at the end of the volume. Any remaining errors, omissions, or inconsistencies are solely my own.

Fonts and typesetting

Bold headings of chapters, major section breaks, etc., appear in Gill Sans MT. All other Roman script and all Egyptian transliteration utilize the freeware New Athena Unicode font, distributed by the American Philological Association.[2] All transliterated characters were typed initially in the Lexilogos multilingual keyboard for Egyptian transliteration,[3] with my thanks to Franziska Naether for the excellent suggestion. All hieroglyphs have been typeset using the JSesh Hieroglyphic editor by Serge Rosmorduc.[4]

2. https://ucbclassics.dreamhosters.com/djm/greekkeys/pdfs/NAU5_OpenFontLicense.pdf.
3. https://www.lexilogos.com/keyboard/egyptian_latin.htm.
4. https://jsesh.qenherkhopeshef.org/.

About This Book

The present volume is a teaching grammar of the so-called classical phase of the ancient Egyptian language and its script, known by convention as Middle Egyptian. It assumes prior knowledge of the English language, but precious little else. It is intended for use in a university classroom setting, under the supervision of a qualified and knowledgeable instructor. In terms of its theoretical underpinnings and terminology, the present work belongs to what may be termed a Post-Standard Theory worldview. However, my presentation of the grammar is largely atheoretical and translation-forward—that is, primarily philological in its scope and intent. The advantage to this strategy is that it leaves the door open for an instructor to supply as much or as little theoretical background from comparative linguistics, philosophy, or whatever else they feel might be appropriate for the students in their particular program. For my part, the framework that I use to describe the grammar rests above all on syntax, which we may define here as the order and function of the parts of speech, the identification of initial main clauses and noninitial main sentences, the identification of subordinate clauses and their equivalence to nouns, adjectives, or adverbs, and any exceptions to the rules that govern each of these features. In terms of grammatical theory "under the hood" of the present work, it is worth noting that my treatment of the verbal system—notably, six formally distinct, bi-partite suffix conjugations (§12.1, Obs., and n. 1)—follows the widely known and widely understood terminology employed in the first and second editions of J. P. Allen's *Middle Egyptian*, while rejecting his more recent simplification of the *sḏm=f* paradigm to an active/passive dichotomy, as advocated since the third edition of that grammar.[1] In cases where terminology for a given construction varies significantly in English-language works (e.g., prospective vs. subjunctive), I have endeavored to cross-reference the alternate terminology, whenever the construction is first introduced. I have kept the introduction of new/idiosyncratic terminology to a minimum. Nevertheless, in the handful of cases that idiosyncratic terms are used—primarily when a functional descriptor appeared to me as more useful than a more traditional, formal designation—I have again supplied the older terminology, in order to facilitate cross-referencing with other English-language works (e.g., "secondary adjective phrase" = "*nfr ḥr* construction").

Most of the content in the present volume is dedicated to establishing a basic foundation in the ancient language and its hieroglyphic script, which is more-or-less comprehensive and therefore comparable to other English-language teaching grammars of Middle Egyptian (e.g., Gardiner, Hoch, Borghouts, Ockinga, Allen). My organization of this material is analytic, being divided into chapters and sections by parts of speech and predicate constructions.[2] This foundational material comprises chapters 1–14, after which the student will have been exposed to the tools necessary for translating most literary and nonliterary texts of the Middle Kingdom (Dynasty 11–13). The following chapter 15 introduces select constructions that I have grouped under the rubric of "archaisms and innovations," which hearken back to Old Egyptian on the one hand, or anticipate Late Egyptian on the other.[3] This material will prove most helpful for tackling higher-register religious texts (e.g., Coffin Texts), post-Middle Kingdom literary works (e.g., Papyrus Westcar), and historical texts of the Eighteenth Dynasty (e.g., Urk. IV), as well as New Kingdom religious and cosmological texts (e.g., Book of the Dead, Amduat). The final chapter 16 adapts my "Very Brief Introduction to Hieratic," distributed previously as an online teaching resource,[4] to serve here as a coda to the first year of classroom instruction and a

1. The history of scholarship concerning the analysis of the suffix conjugation, emphatic forms, etc., is vast, and its detailed enumeration is beyond the scope of this volume. For a cogent summary of earlier theoretical approaches (Gardiner's as well as the so-called Standard Theory), see L. Depuydt, "The Standard Theory of the 'Emphatic' Forms in Classical (Middle) Egyptian: A Historical Survey," *OLP* 14 (1983): 13–54; for caveats and corollaries, building toward an eventual sea change away from the ST, see, e.g., various papers in G. Englund and P. J. Frandsen, eds., *Crossroad: Chaos of the Beginning of a New Paradigm*, CNI Publications 1 (Copenhagen: CNI, 1986); J. P. Allen, "Tense in Classical Egyptian," in J. P. Allen et al., *Essays on Egyptian Grammar*, YES 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 1–21; and M. Collier, "The Circumstantial SḎM(.F)/SḎM.N(.F) as Verbal Verb-forms in Middle Egyptian," *JEA* 76 (1990): 73–85; plus many other contributions that shaped the post-ST perspective of AME[2], which is largely followed here. For the radical simplification of the "*sḏm=f*" paradigm to an active/passive dichotomy, as advocated eventually in AME[3], see J. P. Allen, "Rethinking the *sḏm.f*," *LingAeg* 19 (2011): 1–16, among others. Ongoing research in these areas continues, for which see, e.g., various articles in J. P. Allen, M. A. Collier, and A. Stauder, eds., *Coping with Obscurity: The Brown Workshop on Earlier Egyptian Grammar*, Wilbour Studies 3 (Atlanta: Lockwood, 2016); five special "Crossroads" editions of the *LingAeg* journal, plus many, many other article- and book-length studies too numerous to cite here.

2. In this regard, the present work is more similar to those of Gardiner or Allen, as opposed to the genre-based approach of Hoch.

3. Approach inspired by D. P. Silverman, W. K. Simpson, and J. Wegner, eds., *Archaism and Innovation: Studies in the Culture of Middle Kingdom Egypt* (New Haven: Yale University Press; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2009).

4. https://www.academia.edu/35681835/A_Very_Brief_Introduction_to_Hieratic.

logical point of departure for more advanced studies. After these sixteen chapters, a series of appendices supply additional reference material, which is critical to learning the language and developing translation skills, but which is ill-suited to presentation in chapters, as conventional prose. Appendix 1 is a glossary of particles and other markers of syntax and mood. Appendix 2 supplies extensive paradigm tables and charts, which group the various grammatical constructions in transliteration by their most basic, formal features, concluding with a concise, diachronic overview of the verbal system of Middle Egyptian and its relationships to the verbal systems of Old and Late Egyptian. Appendix 3 supplies a robust sign list, including many sample words and phrases taken from the lexical entries of the Berlin *Wörterbuch*, with additional examples drawn from the corpus of texts employed elsewhere throughout the present volume. Appendix 4 includes an answer key to the even-numbered translation exercises from chapters 2–14, supplying transliteration and English translation, without additional grammatical analysis.[5] An index of texts cited and an index of grammatical terms, which will primarily benefit instructors and advanced students, round out the volume. Speaking with regard to citations, footnotes, and similar scholarly apparatus, the overwhelming majority of references concern the primary sources from which example texts have been drawn. In addition, I have included sparing references to the secondary literature in the footnotes—mostly in cases that struck me or one of my readers as interesting or noteworthy for whatever reason—but these are in no way comprehensive. Ultimately, no level of citation can please everyone, but it is important to bear in mind that a teaching grammar is a pedagogical tool, not a dissertation. My view is that it is the instructor's responsibility to cultivate engagement with the secondary literature to whatever extent is helpful for a particular student cohort.

As a final word about this book, many readers will doubtless note that I have not included a general glossary or dictionary of Egyptian words. This choice was based on my observation that students who learn with the crutch of a curated glossary often struggle in their second year, after work on the grammar is done, when longer texts necessitate consultation of stand-alone lexical publications. To address this perennial difficulty, I recommend that students obtain an Egyptian-English dictionary of their instructor's choice and begin using it from chapter 1.[6] After the first year, students will inevitably need to expand their dictionary knowledge with more advanced works, such as the seven-volume Berlin *Wörterbuch*, as well as more specialized dictionaries aimed at specific genres or time periods.

5. This concession was intended mainly to facilitate the work of those brave souls who, for whatever reason, decide to embark on the study of Egyptian outside of a formal classroom setting. In addition, however, I have found that students in the classroom also benefit from retaining easy access to some, but not all, of the answers, such that the instructor might choose to assign even or odd-numbered exercises, as appropriate for their particular cohort, or to reserve odd-numbered exercises for exams. Note that all exercises and other example texts include references to the original source material, which may be checked as needed.

6. Typically for English-language instruction, students begin with R. O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute and Ashmolean Museum, 1962), which has been reprinted numerus times, is relatively inexpensive, and is widely available.

Abbreviations

General

2ae-/3ae-inf.	secundae/tertiae infirmae
2ae-/3ae-gem.	secundae/tertiae geminatae
2-lit./3-lit.	bi-/tri-literal
↓ / ↑	below / above
adj.	adjective
adv.	adverb
anom.	anomalous
app.	appendix
c	common gender
ca.	circa
ch. / chs.	chapter(s)
Dyn.	Dynasty
et al.	et alia, and others
ex. / exs.	example(s)
f / fem.	feminine
fig./figs.	figure(s)
L	liter
lit.	literally
m / masc.	masculine
MK	Middle Kingdom
n	neuter
NB	note bene
NK	New Kingdom
nr.	number
Obs.	Observation
OK	Old Kingdom
p / pl.	plural
pl.	plate / plural
PVC	pseudo-verbal construction
rto.	recto
s / sing.	singular
s.v.	sub voce
TT	Theban Tomb (+ number)

Bibliographic
(works not listed here are cited in full wherever they occur)

AäG	E. Edel, *Altägyptische Grammatik*, 2 vols. (continuous pagination), Analecta Orientalia 34/39. Rome: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1955/1964.
ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
ACT	J. P. Allen, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts. Vol. 8: Middle Kingdom Copies of Pyramid Texts*. Oriental Institute Publications 132. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2006.
Admonitions	The literary composition known as the "Admonitions of Ipuwer," Leiden papyrus 344, as published in

	A. H. Gardiner, *The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage from a Hieratic Papyrus in Leiden (Pap. Leiden 344 Rector)*. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1909.
Akhenaten	M. Sandman, *Texts from the Time of Akhenaten*. Brussels: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1938.
Amd.	The cosmological composition known as the "Amduat," as published in E. Hornung, ed., *Texte zum Amduat*, 3 vols. (continuous pagination), Aegyptiaca Helvetica 13–15. Geneva: Éditions de Belles-Lettres, 1987–1994.
AME^2	J. P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
AME^3	J. P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*. 3rd ed. Cambridge University Press, 2014.
BD	The corpus of mortuary spells known as the "Book of the Dead," as published in E. A. W. Budge, *The Book of the Dead: The Chapters of Coming Forth by Day*. London: Kegan Paul, 1898. Citations by spell number and internal line number.
BE	The cosmological compositions known as the "Books of the Earth," as published in J. A. Roberson, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Earth*. Wilbour Studies 1. Atlanta: Lockwood, 2012.
Berlin	Objects from the Egyptian collection of the Berlin Museum, Germany.
BHK	J. von Beckerath, *Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen*. Münchner Ägyptologische Studien 49. Mainz: von Zabern, 1999.
BIFAO	*Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale*
BM	Objects from the Egyptian collection (EA) of the British Museum, London, UK. Searchable collections database available online: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection.
BSOU	The cosmological compositions known as the "Books of the Solar-Osirian Unity," as published in J. C. Darnell, *The Enigmatic Netherworld Books of the Solar-Osirian Unity: Cryptographic Compositions in the Tombs of Tutankhamun, Ramesses VI and Ramesses IX*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 198. Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004.
Cairo	Objects from the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. Published by various authors in the *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire*.
Caverns	The cosmological composition known as the "Book of Caverns," as published in A. Piankoff, "Le Livre des Quererts," *BIFAO* 41 (1942): 1–11; 42 (1944): 1–62; 43 (1945): 1–50; and 45 (1947): 1–11, with continuous numbering of plates.
CDD	J. Johnson, ed., *The Demotic Dictionary of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago* (Chicago, 2001). Available online: https://isac.uchicago.edu/research/publications/chicago-demotic-dictionary
CDME	R. O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*. Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1962. Repr. 1991.
Cenotaph	H. Frankfort, A. De Buck, and B. Gunn, *The Cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos*. Memoir of the Egypt Exploration Society 39/2. London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1933.
Complaint	British Museum writing board 5645, also known as the "Complaint of Khakeperreseneb," as published in A. H. Gardiner, *The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage from a Hieratic Papyrus in Leiden (Pap. Leiden 344 Recto)*, 95–112. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1909.
Courtiers	Various Middle Kingdom stelae, published in F. Petrie, A. Gardiner, H. Petrie, and M. A. Murray, *Tombs of the Courtiers and Oxyrhynkhos*, pls. 12 and ff. London: British School of Archaeology in Egypt and Quaritch, 1925.
CT	A. De Buck and A. H. Gardiner, eds., *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*. 7 vols. Oriental Institute Publications 34, 49, 64, 67, 73, 81, and 87. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935–1961.
DPS	D. P. Silverman, *Interrogative Constructions with JN and JN-JW in Old and Middle Egyptian*. Malibu: Undena, 1980.
Dramatic	The so-called Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus, as published in K. Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altägyptischen Mysterienspielen II: Der Dramatische Ramesseumpapyrus; Ein Spiel zur Thronbesteigung des Königs*. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Altertumskunde Ägyptens 10. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1928. Citations by internal line number.
Ebers	The medical text of the Ebers papyrus, as published in W. Wreszinski, *Der Papyrus Ebers I. Teil: Umschrift*. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1913.

GEG[3]	A. H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar: Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs*. 3rd rev. ed. Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2007.
Hamm.	J. Couyat and P. Montet, *Les inscriptions hiéroglyphiques et hiératiques du Ouadi Hammâmât*. MIFAO 34. Cairo: IFAO, 1912.
Hatnub	Graffiti from the Hatnub alabaster quarry, as published in R. Anthes, *Die Felseninschriften von Hatnub nach den Aufnahmen Georg Möllers*. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1928. Citations by graffito number and line.
Herdsman	The literary "Herdsman's tale," as published in J. P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom*, 161–67. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
Heqanakht	J. P. Allen, *The Heqanakht Papyri*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002.
Himmelskuh	The mythological tale known as the "Destruction of Mankind," and its parent composition, the "Book of the Heavenly Cow," as published in E. Hornung, *Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh: Eine Ätiologie des Unvollkommenen*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 46. Fribourg: University of Freiburg; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982. Citations by page number, source abbreviation, and internal line number.
HMANE	Objects from the Egyptian collection at the Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East. Searchable database of 3D museum models available online: http://sketchfab.com/hmane.
HMEG	J. E. Hoch, *Middle Egyptian Grammar*. SSEA Publications 15. Mississauga: Benben, 1997.
Hymnen	A. Erman, *Hymnen an das Diadem der Pharaonen: Aus einem Papyrus der Sammlung Golenischeff*. Berlin: Reimer, 1911.
JARCE	*Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*
JEA	*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
JLEG	F. Junge. *Late Egyptian Grammar: An Introduction*. Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2001.
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
Kagemni	The literary composition known as the "Instruction of Kagemni," as published in J. P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom*, 161–67. Cambridge: University press, 2015.
KRI	K. A. Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions: Historical and Biographical*. 8 vols. Oxford: Blackwell, 1975–1990.
LdR	H. Gauthier, *Livre des Rois d'Égypte*. 5 vols. Cairo: IFAO, 1907–1917.
Lebs.	The literary tale known in German as the "Lebensmüde," and variously in English as the "Man who was tired of life" or "Dispute of a man and his *ba*," as published in J. P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom*, 327–59. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
LEG	J. Černý and S. I. Groll, *A Late Egyptian Grammar*. Studia Pohl: Series Maior 4. Rome: Biblical Institute, 1975.
LingAeg	*Lingua Aegyptia*
Litany	The etiological composition known as the "Litany of Re," as published in E. Hornung, *Das Buch der Anbetung des Re im Westen (Sonnenlitanei): Nach den Versionen des Neuen Reiches, Teil I: Text*, transcribed by Andreas Brodbeck. Ægyptiaca Helvetica 2. Basel and Geneva: Ägyptologisches Seminar der Universität Basel and Centre d'études orientales de l'Université de Genève, 1975–1976.
Loyalist	The literary composition known as the "Loyalist Instruction," as published in J. P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom*, 155–60. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
MGKI	C. Manassa, *The Great Karnak Inscription of Merneptah: Grand Strategy in the 13th Century BC*. YES 5. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
MIFAO	Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut Français d'Archéology Orientale
MLP	P. Der Manuelian, *Living in the Past: Studies in Archaism of the Egyptian Twenty-sixth Dynasty*. Studies in Egyptology. London: Kegan Paul, 1994.
MMA	Objects from the Egyptian collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Searchable collection database available online: https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/collection-areas/egyptian-art.
MWGR	M. Malaise and J. Winand, *Grammaire raisaonnée de l'égyptien classique*. Aegyptiaca Leodiensia 6. Liège: CIPL.
Neferti	The literary "Prophecy of Neferti," as published in W. Helck, *Die Prophezeiung des Nfrt.tj*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992. Line numbers follow the version of pPetersburg 1116B, except where noted, with cross reference to page and section numbers in Helck.
OLP	*Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*
OPEA	E. Oréal, *Les particules en Égyptien ancient*. Bibliothèque d'étude 152. Cairo: IFAO, 2011.

Peas.	The literary tale of the "Eloquent Peasant," as published in J. P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom*, 229–325. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
PT	K. Sethe, *Die altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte: Nach den Papierabdrücken und Photographien des Berliner Museums*. 4 vols. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1908–1922; and J. P. Allen, *A New Concordance of the Pyramid Texts*. 6 vols. Providence: Brown University, 2013. Available online via ISAC collections: https://isac-idb.uchicago.edu/index.php.
Ptah.	The literary composition known as the "Instructions of Ptahhotep," as published in J. P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom*, 167–228. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
Readingbook	A. De Buck, *Egyptian Readingbook*. Vol. 1: *Exercises and Middle Egyptian Texts*. Leiden: Nederlands Instituut vor het Nabije Oosten, 1948.
Rhind	The Rhind mathematical papyrus (pBM 10057–10058), as published in T. E. Peet, *The Rhind Mathematical Papyrus: British Museum 10057 and 10058*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970. Repr. of 1923 edition.
RPN I	H. Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen*, vol. 1. Glückstadt: Augustin. 1935.
SAC	Studies in Ancient Cultures
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilisation
Semnah	P. C. Smither, "The Semnah Despatches," *JEA* 31 (1945): 3–10.
Senwosret	Hymns to the Twelfth Dynasty king Senwosret III, recorded on a papyrus in the University College London (pUC 32157), as published in J. P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom*, 369–82. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
Sethos I	A. M. Calverley, M. F. Broome, and A. H. Gardiner, *The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos*. 4 vols. London: Egypt Exploration Society; Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1958.
Shabaqo	Religious texts from the royal monument known as the "Shabaqo Stone" (BM 135*/498), as published originally in J. H. Breasted, "The Philosophy of a Memphite Priest," *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 39 (1901): 39–54. All signs and readings reflect a thorough collation of the monument by the present author in 2019.
ShS.	The literary tale of the "Shipwrecked Sailor," as published in J. P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 9–54.
Sin.	The literary tale of "Sinuhe," as published in J. P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom*, 55–154. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
STGG	W. K. Simpson, *The Terrace of the Great God at Abydos: The Offering Chapels of Dynasties 12 and 13*. Publications of the Pennsylvania-Yale Expedition to Egypt 5. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1974.
Turin	Objects from the collection of the Egyptian Museum, Turin, Italy. Searchable collections database available online: https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/en-GB/.
UPenn	Objects from the Egyptian collection of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Searchable database available online: https://www.penn.museum/collections/.
Urk. IV	K. Sethe, *Urkunden der 18. Dynastie*. 4 vols. (continuous pagination). Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1906–1909.
UC	Objects from the Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese Archaeology, University College, London. Searchable collection database available online: https://collections.ucl.ac.uk/search/simple.
Westcar	Three literary tales preserved on the Westcar papyrus (pBerlin 3033), as published in *The Story of King Kheops and the Magicians*, ed. A. M. Blackman and W. V. Davies. Reading: J.V. Books, 1988.
Wb	A. Erman and H. Grapow, eds., *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*. 7 vols. Berlin: Akademie; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1971.
Zaubersprüche	Magical spells for mother and child (pBerlin 3037), as published in A. Erman, *Zaubersprüche für Mutter und Kind: Aus dem Papyrus 3027 des Berliner Museums*. Berlin: Prussian Academy, 1901.
ZäS	*Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*

Introduction

What Is Egyptian?

"Egyptian" is a modern designation for the ancient language spoken and written along the Nile River, north of the first cataract,[1] in the northeast corner of Africa, from about 3300 BCE until about 1200 CE.[2] Since at least the Middle Kingdom (ca. 1980–1760 BCE), the ancient Egyptians referred to their spoken language as , *r n Km.t*, pronounced by modern convention as "*ar en Kemet*" and meaning "speech of the Black Land."[3] The written language, on the other hand, which we describe as the hieroglyphic script, was referred to since at least the early Old Kingdom (ca. 2543–2120 BCE) as , *mdw.w-nṯr*, pronounced conventionally as "*medu'u netjer*" and meaning "words of the god."[4] It is this hieroglyphic script (§1.1) and the grammar of ancient Egyptian, which it conveys, that are the subjects of this volume.

Linguists—scholars who study the underlying structure and rules governing the use of human speech—group languages together into "families," based on shared elements of grammar, phonology, vocabulary, and syntax. The more similarities two languages share, the more closely they are "related" on a "branch" of a particular language family's tree. The language of ancient Egypt is said usually to belong to the "Afroasiatic" family, which includes hundreds of related languages from north Africa and southwest Asia. Thus, ancient Egyptian shares some features with north African languages, such as Berber and Chadic/Hausa. At the same time, Egyptian also shares certain features with the Semitic branch of the Afroasiatic family, including modern Hebrew and Arabic, as well as the ancient languages of Aramaic and Akkadian, among others. However, most of these similarities appear to be even more ancient than the hieroglyphic writing system, suggesting that Egyptian diverged from its Afroasiatic parents already in prehistory. Because of this early split and the many differences that it produced, Egyptian is classified usually as its own branch within the Afroasiatic language's family tree.

As a spoken language, Egyptian is "dead," meaning that there are no living, native speakers[5] who might verify precisely how the language worked, how it was pronounced, or why one construction was preferred over another in a particular context. Fortunately, this does not mean that modern people are incapable of understanding these features! However, it does mean that we should exercise extreme caution in the composition of "new" Egyptian texts, because we can never be certain if we are employing the language in a way that would have made sense to the Egyptians themselves. Therefore, composition in Egyptian is not a feature of the exercises in the present volume, and only genuinely ancient, hieroglyphic texts will be transcribed as examples.[6]

1. Heading south from the modern city of Aswan, to just beyond Meroë in the Sudan, the Nile was punctuated by a series of six cataracts, or shallow rapids, which created natural barriers to river travel. The second cataract is no longer extant, having been submerged beneath the waters of modern Lake Nasser.

2. This book employs the scientific abbreviations BCE ("Before Common Era") and CE ("Common Era") rather than BC ("Before Christ") and AD (*Anno Domini*, "In the Year of Our Lord").

3. The "Black Land" refers to the fertile black soil of the Nile River Valley, which was synonymous in ancient times with Egypt itself and occurs in contrast to the unfertile "Red Land" of the desert.

4. The English adjective "hieroglyphic" and the noun "hieroglyph" both come from an ancient translation of "god's words" into Greek: *hieroglyphika grammata* (ἱερογλυφικά γράμματα), or "sacred carved letters." Note that modern, academic English prefers the noun "hieroglyphs" to the less formal "hieroglyphics."

5. Modern Egyptians speak a dialect of Arabic, which began to replace ancient Egyptian as the spoken language of Egypt after the Islamic conquest in 639 CE.

6. Note that grammatical paradigms and other artificially composed examples of Egyptian constructions appear only in transliteration but not in hieroglyphic transcription (§1.2).

Language Change over Time

Although Egyptian is today a dead language, it was a vibrant and living tradition in Egypt for more than 4500 years of recorded history. This makes Egyptian the longest lived, and therefore most successful, language attested in writing.[7] Given its incredibly long history as a living language, it is not surprising that Egyptian went through many changes in both its writing system and grammar. Egyptologists usually divide this history broadly into Earlier Egyptian, characterized by its so-called synthetic verbal system, and Later Egyptian, characterized by a more analytic verbal system. The synthetic verbs of Earlier Egyptian signaled changes in meaning by altering the form of the verb itself, similar to English "I run" (present tense) vs. "I ran" (past tense). Unfortunately for us, many of these changes, which would have been evident in pronunciation, were not indicated in writing, so tense and other features of the verb are often ambiguous and must be deduced through context. By contrast, the analytic verbs of Later Egyptian signaled changes in meaning through the addition of short words, which make features like tense much more explicit in the writing system, similar to English "I run" (present tense) vs. "I will run" (future tense).

Within the broad categories of Earlier and Later Egyptian, scholars recognize six major subdivisions: The earlier phase is divided into Archaic, Old, and Middle Egyptian, while the later phase is divided into Late Egyptian, Demotic, and Coptic. Each of these subdivisions has its own peculiarities of script, grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. The subject of this book is Middle Egyptian, which was spoken for about three hundred years, during the Middle Kingdom (Dynasties 11–13, ca. 2000–1700 BCE) but continued in use on monuments, as a written language, for the next two thousand years.[8] In fact, what we call Middle Egyptian was regarded by ancient Egyptians of the New Kingdom and later as something like a "classical" language. As such, its use in writing, long after the spoken dialect died,[9] may be compared to the use of Latin as a language of learning and religious observance by Catholics, or Coptic for similar purposes in the Coptic church, from the late Middle Ages up to the present. For modern students, Middle Egyptian serves almost always as the starting point for study of the ancient language. A solid foundation in Middle Egyptian will permit you to approach other phases of the language much more easily than beginning, for example, with Old Egyptian, Late Egyptian, or Demotic.[10]

7. Compare Chinese, which has an attested, written history of approximately 3250 years (ca. 1250 BCE–present) and Greek, with an attested history of about 3450 years (ca. 1450 BCE–present).

8. The last known hieroglyphic text, written in a version of Middle Egyptian, was inscribed on the island of Philae in southern Egypt, during the reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian, in the year 394 of the Common Era.

9. The dialect of Middle Egyptian appears to derive from Upper/southern Egypt, as opposed to the dialect of Old and Late Egyptian, which appears to derive from Lower/northern Egypt and the Delta (see W. F. Edgerton, "Early Egyptian Dialectical Relationships," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 122 (1951): 9–12; for a cogent summary of more recent scholarship and opinions, see also J. Winand, "Dialects in Pre-Coptic Egyptian," in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, ed. A. Stauder and W. Wendrich, available online at https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8tr5w9nc.

10. One could make a case for beginning study with Coptic, which uses a modified version of the Greek alphabet, rather than a native Egyptian script. This, in fact, is how Jean Francois Champollion (d. 1832) completed the initial decipherment of Egyptian in modern times. However, it is the iconic status of hieroglyphs as the Egyptian writing system par excellence that leads most people to the study of ancient Egyptian. From the perspective of the hieroglyphic system, Middle Egyptian is unquestionably the most widely used—and therefore most useful—stage for beginners.

Chapter 1
The Hieroglyphic Writing System

§1.1. The Hieroglyphic and Hieratic Scripts

1.1.1. For most of their history, the ancient Egyptians employed two main writing systems, or "scripts": hieroglyphic and hieratic. The hieroglyphic script was inscribed primarily on monuments made of stone but appears also on artifacts of wood and metal and, rarely, on papyrus (a precursor to paper, made of dried papyrus stalks). The hieroglyphic script is what most people think of when they picture Egyptian writing: Groups of individual hieroglyphs—images of people, gods, animals, plants, and inanimate objects—arranged in compact rows or columns. However, the Egyptians also employed hieratic, a cursive script, which was written mainly on papyrus, as well as on flakes of limestone or pottery, known as ostraca. Unlike the hieroglyphs, which were usually carved with a hammer and chisel, the hieratic script was usually drawn with a brush and ink.[1]

A great many (but certainly not all!) of the preserved examples of the ancient Egyptian language are carved in stone, in the hieroglyphic script. In fact, durability was precisely the reason why Egyptians used stone in the first place. However, this accident of preservation creates a false impression that Egyptians wrote mainly in hieroglyphs, when in fact the cursive, hieratic script was far more common in daily use. This makes a great deal of sense when you think about it: If someone wanted to dash off a letter, or keep a daily journal, it would hardly be practical to drag out a huge block of stone and start chipping away, when you could simply pick up a pen and paper! In fact, most ancient Egyptian scribes (the literate minority of Egypt's population) knew *only* how to write in hieratic; relatively few went on to learn the hieroglyphic script. However, rather than force modern students to learn both the monumental and cursive scripts at the same time, it is common practice to transcribe texts written originally in hieratic into their corresponding hieroglyphic forms, as in figure 1.1.

Notice that some of the hieratic signs look very similar to their hieroglyphic counterparts, while others appear much more cursive and are more difficult to recognize. We will return to the topic of hieroglyphic transcription in §1.2, below. We will examine hieratic in more detail in ch. 16.



Figure 1.1. Hieratic text, above, with hieroglyphic transcription, below (Sin. R, 13). Hieratic text after G. Möller, *Hieratische Lesestücke für den akademischen Gebrauch,* vol. 1 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1909), 6, 13.

1.1.2. The texts in the preceding figure were written in rows, reading from right to left. In terms of direction, hieratic texts were almost always written from right to left. The hieroglyphic script, on the other hand, was written regularly in both directions, right-to-left as well as left-to right. Both scripts could be arranged either in horizontal rows or vertical columns, although hieratic texts tend to prefer the former (i.e., horizontal) layout. Frequently, left- and right-facing texts would be placed opposite one another to create a symmetrically balanced composition. However, the two directions

1. Note that hieroglyphic inscriptions were usually sketched first, in ink, prior to carving.

were almost never combined in a single passage.[2] Consequently, there is always only one correct direction to read a given section of text. Fortunately, the direction of writing, whether in rows or columns, is usually easy to determine: you read against the direction that the signs face. Therefore, in the example from figure 1.1, simply pick out any human, animal, or other signs with obvious directionality and read the signs in that line from front to back. Most of the hieroglyphic examples in this volume have been transcribed in rows, left-to-right, in order to flow more naturally with the direction of the English text. However, many of the exercises found at the end of each chapter have been transcribed in their original directions, left-to-right or right-to-left, or might preserve their original format as rows or columns. Students should be able to read either direction, rows or columns, with equal facility.

§1.2. Transcription and Transliteration

1.2.1. In this book, we will read Middle Egyptian texts in a standardized hieroglyphic font. Of course, ancient Egyptians did not use a font and original Egyptian texts exhibit tremendous variation in the forms and details of individual signs, details that no font can (or should) convey. However, the use of a font greatly simplifies the work of the beginning student, who must learn several hundred common signs relatively quickly. Figure 1.2 shows an epigraphic copy—that is, a scientifically accurate drawing[3]—of a late Middle Egyptian text from the Eighteenth Dynasty tomb of Montuherkhepeshef at Thebes, with the same signs written in the hieroglyphic font below. Notice the similarities and differences between the standardized signs in the font and the shapes of the actual hieroglyphs from the epigraphic copy. Also note the hashed areas, indicating the position of lacunae (gaps or missing areas) in the transcribed text, and note how they correspond approximately to the position and size, but not the shape, of the damaged areas on in the epigraphic copy.

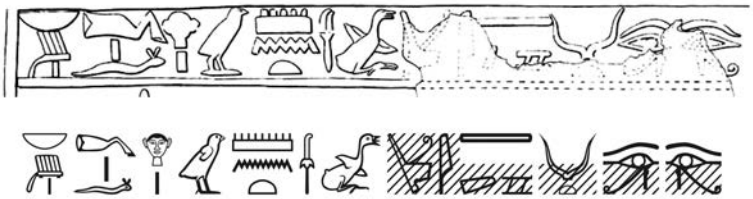


Figure 1.2. Epigraphic copy of a hieroglyphic text, above, vs. hieroglyphic transcription in typeset font, below. From the Eighteenth Dynasty tomb of Montuherkhepeshef (TT20). Epigraphic copy after N. de Garis Davies, *Five Theban Tombs* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1913), pl. 7.

1.2.2. The process of converting a hieroglyphic inscription into a standardized form, whether on a computer or by hand, is called transcription. Students must learn to transcribe the signs into their own handwriting from the very beginning. Learning to draw the signs yourself will help with the memorization process (for example, in the creation of flash cards) and will also be necessary for the preparation of assignments at home, as well as exams in class. You don't need to reproduce every detail of the sign to make a useful transcription.[4] In fact, too much detail quickly becomes counter-productive. Rather, seek only to draw enough detail to make the sign recognizable to anyone else who might read your transcription. Figure 1.3 shows two examples of different styles of hand-written hieroglyphs. Notice that most of the signs are drawn in outline only, with few internal details.

2. Texts written in alternating directions are described as *boustrophedon* (lit., "ox-turning," like a farmer tilling a field with an ox-drawn cart, first one direction, then the other). Such practice is found, for example, in archaic Greek texts but is virtually unattested in texts from ancient Egypt (for a rare example, see J. A. Roberson, "The 'Jackal Hymn of the West' in the Book of the Night," in *Enigmatic Writing in the Egyptian New Kingdom I*, ed. D. Klotz and A. Stauder (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 151 n. 13.

3. I.e., an accurately scaled drawing that reproduces all of the details of the original signs, as well as the flaws and damage of the original wall surface, in a state of "arrested preservation."

4. A very useful book, which discusses handwriting strategies for many common signs is H. G. Fischer, *Ancient Egyptian Calligraphy: A Beginner's Guide to Writing Hieroglyphs*, 4th ed. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999). This volume is available as a free, legal download at http://www.gizapyramids.org/pdf_library/fischer_eg_calligraphy.pdf.

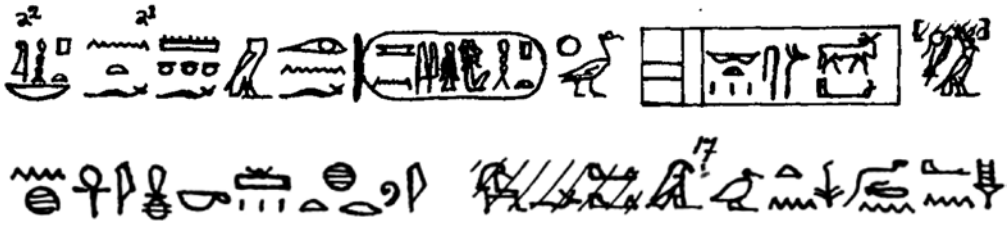


Figure 1.3. Examples of different handwritten hieroglyphic transcriptions.
Text after KRI I, 131, 1 (above) and *Readingbook*, 80, 5 (below).

1.2.3. Ideally, we would simply read the hieroglyphs, know how to pronounce them out loud, and translate them straightaway. This is presumably how the ancient Egyptians read their own language. In actual practice, this level of comprehension is virtually impossible for modern translators to achieve. In order to quickly approximate the phonemes, or sounds that the hieroglyphic script encodes, Egyptologists use a standardized system of transliteration to express the sounds of Egyptian in a modified version of the Latin script,[5] which most westerners use already to write their own languages. The following list shows the letters of the transliteration alphabet (in italics),[6] with some of their conventional pronunciations in English, below.[7]

ꜣ	*i*	*y*	*ỉ*	*ꜥ*	*w*	*b*	*p*	*f*	*m*	*n*	*r*	*h*	*ḥ*	*ḫ*	*ḫ*	*z*	*s*	*š*	*q*	*k*	*g*	*t*	*ṯ*	*d*	*ḏ*
a	i/y/a	y	i/y	a	w/u	b	p	f	m	n	r	h	h	kh	kh	z	s	sh	k	k	g	t	ch	d	j

Note that although some characters are *pronounced* conventionally like vowels (*ꜣ*, *i*, *ỉ*, *ỉ*, *ꜥ*, and *w*) the transliteration alphabet itself includes only consonants. This is because Hieroglyphic Egyptian did not write the vowels of the spoken language but only the "consonantal skeleton" of its words. If English worked the same way, the previous sentence would look like this:

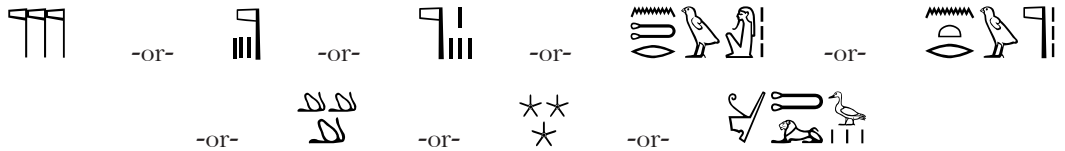
"Ths s bcs hrglyphc gyptn dd nt wrt th vwls f th spkn lngg bt nly th cnsnntl skltn f ts wrds."

Since words cannot be spoken aloud without vowels, Egyptologists usually insert an /e/ sound between clusters of consonants in an Egyptian word and place stress on the next-to-last syllable. Thus, the transliterated Egyptian word for "woman," *ḥm.t*,[8] would be pronounced conventionally as /**hem-**et/.[9] If the transliterated character is already pronounced like a vowel, it should usually be treated as its own syllable, without an additional /e/ sound. For example, *ꜣbd*, "month," would be pronounced conventionally as /**a-**bed/.[10] We will examine the transliteration alphabet, the names and sounds of the letters, and their pronunciations in more detail below (§1.4). For now, note that the transliteration alphabet appears in a specific order, such that similar sounds are grouped together. This is the phonetic order, which is employed in all modern dictionaries of ancient Egyptian, as opposed to the alphabetic order, with which most English speakers are already familiar. In order to locate words in the standard reference volumes, it is the first task of every student to memorize this phonetic order by heart.

1.2.4. It might seem strange—and highly artificial—to learn Egyptian words in transliteration as well as hieroglyphic transcription, rather than just reading the hieroglyphs themselves. However, there are very good reasons for doing so. First, transliteration forces the student to work out (and therefore remember!) all of the underlying sounds that the hieroglyphs encode, which in turn aids in the correct division of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences into appropriate

5. So-called because it was developed by the Romans to write the Latin language.
6. For additional discussion, see below, §1.4 and Obs.
7. The phonology (study of spoken sounds) of ancient Egyptian is a complex and problematic field. Some of the conventional pronunciations are probably quite close to the original Egyptian sounds, while others—particularly those sounds pronounced as English vowels—are probably quite far removed. For the beginner, it is enough to remember that our "pronunciation" of ancient Egyptian is simply a convention that allows us to talk more easily about the language we are studying.
8. The "dot" before the *t* in this word separates the feminine gender ending from the root word; we will discuss the dot and its many uses in the next lesson.
9. Right-leaning /slashes/ enclose phonetic pronunciations.
10. The conventional /a/ pronunciation is usually short, i.e., "ah," as opposed to "ay."

sections for analysis. The second, and perhaps most important, reason for transliteration is that the hieroglyphic script is much more flexible in its spelling than most modern languages. As a result, there might be many different ways to spell a given word. Transliteration cuts effectively through all of those variations, revealing the underlying consonantal skeleton. For example, depending on context, an Egyptian scribe might have written the word for "gods" in any of the following ways:



If one wanted to discuss the orthography of these words—the forms of the signs as written and the reasons for their use—then it would be important to include the hieroglyphs and all of their variations, as above. However, if one wished only to discuss the meaning of the word, its syntax (relative word order of the parts of speech), or grammatical function in a sentence—in other words, if your task was to translate the text—then a single transliteration would suffice for all of the various spellings. In this case, every word written above is transliterated in exactly the same way: *nṯr.w*.[11] To put it another way, for every Egyptian word, which might have numerous hieroglyphic forms, there is generally only one correct transliteration.

§1.3. Ideograms, Phonograms, and Classifiers

1.3.1. The Latin script, which we use to write English, employs an alphabet: individual letters that convey all of the sounds of the spoken language, including consonants as well as vowels. Such letters lack iconicity, meaning that there is no obvious connection between the image of the letter itself and the original picture from which the letter derives, or to the sound that it conveys.[12] The hieroglyphic script never employed letters and did not possess a true alphabet. Instead, Hieroglyphic Egyptian employed three different kinds of highly iconic signs, known conventionally as logograms/ideograms, phonograms, and classifiers.

1.3.2. The oldest kind of signs are referred to alternately as logograms (lit., "word writing") or ideograms (lit., "idea writing"),[13] which is to say, pictures of things that write the word for the thing itself, or else some concept closely related to it. For example, a seated man, , might be used to write the Egyptian word *z*, meaning "man." All of the original, so-called pristine writing systems (Egyptian, Sumerian, Chinese, Meso-American) seem to have begun as ideographic systems, which are essentially picture-writing. Some modern languages, such as Chinese and Japanese, still frequently use ideograms; others, such as English, use them less frequently.[14] Hieroglyphic Egyptian started as an ideographic system and continued to use ideograms throughout its long history.

1.3.3. There are, of course, serious limitations to a purely ideographic system, which can only write words for concrete things that can actually be drawn as a picture. Thus, it is relatively easy to draw a man, a house, or a scepter but the task becomes more difficult if you try to draw a picture of "order," "love," or "knowledge." To compensate for this difficulty,

11. The dot that appears before *w* in this word separates a plural number marker, which we will discuss in the next chapter.

12. For the early origins of Western alphabetic scripts from the late Middle Kingdom in Egypt, see J. C. Darnell et al., "Two Early Alphabetic Inscriptions from Wadi el-Ḥôl: New Evidence for the Origin of the Alphabet from the Western Desert of Egypt," *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 59 (2005): 73–124; O. Goldwasser, "The Miners Who Invented the Alphabet: A Response to Christopher Rollston," *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 4.3 (2012): 9–22.

13. For discussion, see S. Polis and S. Rosmorduc, "The Hieroglyphic Sign Functions: Suggestions for a Revised Taxonomy," in *Fuzzy Boundaries: Fesctschrift für Antonio Loprieno*, ed. H. Amstutz et al. (Hamburg: Widmaier, 2015), 149–74, with arguments in favor of the former designation (i.e., "logogram") at 161–63.

14. For the four "pristine" writing systems, see Ilona Zsolnay, ed., *Seen Not Heard: Composition, Iconicity, and the Classifier Systems of Logosyllabic Scripts*, Oriental Institute Studies 14 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2023). Good examples of ideograms in English may be observed on traffic signs, as in the common image of a stick figure striding across a horizontal line, as an ideogram for "pedestrians." From the digital realm, emoji function often as ideograms.

Egyptians exploited the rebus principle, which allows a picture of one thing to write similar *sounds* in unrelated *words*. For example, a small loaf of bread, , wrote the Egyptian word *t*, "bread," as an ideogram. Through the rebus principle, the same sign could be used in any word with the /t/ sound, such as , *tr*, "time, season"; , *ḥtm*, "to annihilate"; or , *ḫt*, "wood." The bread loaf appears at the beginning of the first word, in the middle of the second, and at the end of the third but, in each case, it writes only the sound /t/, not the word for "bread." We call signs that are used in this fashion phonograms ("sound writing") because they convey only the sound of the picture (by rebus), not the idea behind the picture itself. Phonograms are, far and away, the most common type of sign in Hieroglyphic Egyptian.

1.3.4. With the introduction of phonograms, the Egyptians were able to spell any word in their language, including abstract concepts like "love" and "knowledge," which could not be drawn easily as ideograms. However, this introduced a whole new difficulty—namely, how to tell the difference between words with the same spelling but very different meanings? For example,  writes the consonantal skeleton *wn*, which might mean "to exist," "to open," "to hurry," or "to go bald." To distinguish between such homographs ("same writing"),[15] the Egyptians introduced a third kind of sign, which modern grammars describe alternately as determinatives or classifiers.[16] Classifiers are signs that give the reader a clue about the word's meaning but were not pronounced as a sound in the word itself. In the example given above, the word meaning "to exist" usually has no classifier, while the homographs usually include a door-leaf (, *wn*, "open"), walking legs (, *wn*, "hurry"), or hair (, *wn*, "go bald"). In each case, notice that the classifier appears at the end of the word and does not alter the transliteration of the word in which it appears. Furthermore, many words might have two or more classifiers, none of which are reflected in the transliteration. For example, the very common word , *rmṯ*,[17] "people," includes three classifiers: A SEATED MAN, a seated WOMAN, and PLURAL STROKES. Finally, as the preceding examples illustrate, note that this book employs small capitals when describing the image that a hieroglyphic sign depicts. When discussing the sense of a classifier in a given word, the small capitals appear in brackets—for example, the WALKING LEGS convey [MOTION].

Once you recognize what the classifiers actually depict, their functions in a given word are usually fairly obvious. Some of the most common such signs include the WALKING LEGS, , mentioned above and used with words indicating [MOTION]; the STRIKING ARM,  (also abbreviated) and STRIKING MAN, , with words that concern [STRENGTH] or physical [CONTACT, VIOLENCE]; the SEATED MAN, , SEATED WOMAN, , SEATED MUMMY, , or SEATED GOD, , for words concerning [MEN], [WOMEN], [DEAD PEOPLE], or [GODS], respectively; waves of water, , for words relating to [LIQUID]; the plan of a simple house, , for [BUILDINGS] and other man-made [STRUCTURES]; a field with IRRIGATION CANALS, , indicating [CULTIVATED LAND] (esp. in Egypt itself); and three HILLS, , for [FOREIGN LAND] or [DESERT, HIGHLANDS, HILL-COUNTRY] (as opposed to Egypt itself). However, the meaning of many other classifiers is culturally specific to the ancient Egyptian people and not necessarily self-evident to modern readers. Thus, for example, the SPARROW, , classifies words with a [BAD] connotation or indicating [LACK], from an original sense of the sparrow itself as [SMALL].[18] Along similar lines, the papyrus BOOK ROLL, , incidentally the most common classifier of all, occurs with [ABSTRACT] words (i.e., words that could be written about but not represented easily in figural art)—for example, , *sḫr*, "plan," or , *mꜣꜥ*, "correct."

1.3.5. One of the most important skills students must develop is the ability to recognize classifier signs. Fortunately, classifiers appear always at or near the end of a word and usually follow any ideograms or phonograms. Because Egyptian does not separate words with spaces like English does, the placement of classifiers often helps the reader to tell where one word ends and another begins. Unfortunately for the student, not every word will have a classifier, so

15. Because hieroglyphic Egyptian only writes consonants (§1.2.3), homographs are not necessarily homophones ("same sound"). Thus, two words might look the same in writing but sound very different when spoken. Compare the English future tense "I will **read**" (/reed/) and past tense "I have **read**" (/red/), which are homographs but not homophones; versus "blue" and "blew," which are homophones but not homographs.

16. The present work employs the latter term, but the specific nomenclature is less important than recognizing the sign's function. For "determinative," see GEG[3], §23; for "classifier," see O. Goldwasser, *Prophets, Lovers, and Giraffes: Wor(l)d Classification in Ancient Egypt, with an appendix by M. Müller,* Göttinger Orientforschungen IV: Ägypten, Bd. 38, Classification and Categorisation in Ancient Egypt 3 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), 1–2, and §1.4.

17. For the spelling of this word, see §1.8.1, below.

18. Contrast the sparrow, or [BAD] classifier, with the *wr*-swallow, , which was used as a phonogram in words with exactly the opposite meaning (i.e., "great, plentiful"). The two birds, while similar in size and appearance can be distinguished by the shapes of their tails: round for the [BAD] sparrow vs. forked for the *wr*-swallow.

you can't rely upon them exclusively. In addition, many signs that occur as classifiers occur also as phonograms and/or ideograms. For example, the BRANCH, , can be used in all three ways: As an ideogram, it writes the word *ḫt*, "wood." By rebus (§1.3.3), the BRANCH becomes a phonogram, writing the consonant sequence *ḫ-t* (e.g., , *nḫt*, "strong"). As a classifier, the BRANCH occurs with nouns made from or relating to [WOOD] and [TIMBER] (e.g., , *ꜥfd.t*, "chest, box"). Your best clue to the use of an unfamiliar sign is where it appears in a word. Remember: classifiers usually occur at the end, after phonograms and ideograms. In addition, to help differentiate ideographic spellings, the Egyptians often used a small, vertical dash, , the classifier stroke, indicating that the preceding sign should be read as an [IDEOGRAM]: , *ḫt*, "wood." Hieroglyphic Egyptian employed literally hundreds of signs as classifiers. Fortunately, once you get used to reading phonograms and ideograms, it is usually not at all difficult to recognize classifiers as such. Thus, the student should simply learn those signs as part of the spelling of individual words, rather than memorizing them separately.

§1.4. Alphabetic Signs ("Mono-literals")

We shall now examine the phonograms ("sound signs") of the hieroglyphic script. As mentioned above, hieroglyphs were used to express consonants but not vowels. Unlike most modern alphabets, which mostly use one sign or letter for one sound, Egyptian phonograms might express either one, two, or three consonants with a single sign. Using different combinations of sound signs, the ancient scribe could construct words of any length in their language. Signs that write only a single consonant are usually called mono-literals (lit., "one letter"), but we can think of them just as easily as alphabetic signs, since they function similarly to the letters of our own alphabet. Table 1.1 lists all of the mono-literal signs employed in standard Middle Egyptian, in phonetic order (§1.2.3). The second column from the left includes an explanation of what the hieroglyphs depict,[19] as well as the conventional name given to the signs.[20] The third column lists the mono-literal value in standardized transliteration (Obs., below), with older transliteration values, encountered frequently in earlier scholarship (e.g., Faulkner's *Dictionary*; the Berlin *Wörterbuch*), supplied in parentheses for reference. The fourth column lists the conventional pronunciations for each Egyptian consonant. Note that the consonants *ꜣ* and *ꜥ* do not have English counterparts, hence their conventional pronunciation as a short /a/ (like English "ah"). The consonants *i̯*, *ï*, *y*, and *w* were probably semivowels, like /y/ in the English word "happy" or /w/ in "threw." Finally, note that the values of many signs changed over time, as phonemes weakened and, in some cases, coalesced with similar sounds (§1.8.5). This phenomenon may be observed among many of the Egyptian consonants, but it was especially common from the Middle Kingdom and later in the sequences *z-s*, *t-ṯ*, and *d-ḏ*. As a general rule, words spelled with weakened phonograms should be transliterated according to their originally attested sound values. For example, the pronoun , *sn*, "them," appears frequently as , which we transliterate always as *sn*, never as **zn* (§2.5.2).[21]

Obs. Egyptology has employed a number of different transliteration systems over the years. In the modern era, a British system, codified by A. Gardiner in his *Egyptian Grammar*, was standard in the English-speaking world until the end of the twentieth century, in parallel to an earlier system, developed originally by the Berlin school for the *Wörterbuch der Ägyptischen Sprache*, which was more common in German-speaking countries. From the 1990s and early 2000s, alternative transliteration strategies had begun to appear in a new generation of teaching grammars, e.g., W. Schenkel, *Tübinger Einführung in die klassisch-ägyptische Sprach und Schrift*, and J. P. Allen *Middle Egyptian*. Unfortunately, the proliferation of idiosyncratic systems of notation has only increased the potential for confusion among students, scholars, and laypersons alike. The current, standardized system of transliteration, which is employed throughout the present volume, was introduced at the 13th International Congress of Egyptologists in Leiden in 2023.[22] However, it is important that students also understand how the characters of the Leiden Unified Transliteration system relate to older systems of transliteration, since virtually all of the standard reference works on the Egyptian language were published before the current system was created.

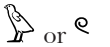
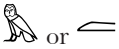
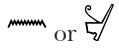
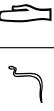
19. Remember: Whenever the signs are used as phonograms, they write only the sound, not the idea of the sign itself (§1.3.3).

20. Note that the names of the signs are not the same as their pronunciations. Compare English, where we can talk about the letter called "double-u" or we can use the letter in a word, where it is pronounced /w/.

21. The asterisk that precedes **zn* signifies an artificial, incorrect, or otherwise unattested example, which has been invented for pedagogical purposes.

22. https://www.iae-egyptology.org/the-leiden-unified-transliteration.

Table 1.1. Mono-literal Phonograms

Hieroglyph	Object Depicted; Sign Name	Transliteration	Pronunciation(s)
	vulture; "aleph"	*ꜣ*	/a/ (≈f**a**ther)
	reed leaf; "yōd" or "i"	*ỉ* (older: *j*)	/i/ (≈b**ee**t), /a/, or /y/
	double reed leaf; "y"	*y*	/y/
	dual strokes; "second i"	*ï* (older: *i, j, y*)	as *ỉ* and *y*, above
	human arm; "ayin"	*ꜥ*	/a/ (≈f**a**ther)
	quail chick or cursive quail chick; "w"	*w*	/w/ or /u/ (≈t**oo**)
	human leg; "b"	*b*	/b/
	foot stool; "p"	*p*	/p/
	horned viper; "f"	*f*	/f/
	owl or [unknown object]; "m"	*m*	/m/
	waves of water or the red crown; "n"	*n*	/n/
	human mouth; "r"	*r*	/r/
	reed shelter; "h"	*h*	/h/
	twisted flax fiber; "second h"	*ḥ*	as previous
	placenta; "third h"	*ḫ*	/kh/ (≈German i**ch**)
	cow belly & udder; "fourth h"	*ẖ*	as previous
	door bolt; "z" or "s"	*z* (older: *s*)	/z/ or /s/
	folded cloth; "s"	*s* (older: *ś*)	/s/
	pool of water; "shin"	*š*	/sh/ (≈**sh**ape)
	a hill; "q"	*q* (older: *ḳ*)	/k/
	a reed basket; "k"	*k*	as previous
	a jar stand; "g"	*g*	/g/
	a bread loaf; "t"	*t*	/t/
	a rope hobble; "second t"	*ṯ* (older: *č*)	/ch/ (≈**ch**annel)
	human hand; "d"	*d* (older: *ḏ*)	/d/
	cobra; "second d"	*ḏ* (older: *ǧ*)	/dj/ (≈ju**dg**e)

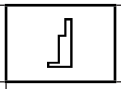
All of the mono-literal signs outlined in table 1.1 are extremely common and could be used at the scribes' discretion to spell all or part of any word in the Egyptian language. As the cornerstone of the hieroglyphic script, all of these signs and their transliteration values must be learned by heart, as soon as possible. Note that, in addition to the standardized transliteration characters of the Leiden Unified system, discussed above, table 1.1 also includes select correspondences with older transliteration systems. These correspondences are included for reference to earlier grammars and dictionaries, but students should not utilize these older systems of notation in their own work.

§1.5. Two-consonant Signs ("Bi-literals")

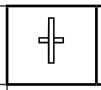
In addition to the mono-literals, Egyptian employed more than a hundred bi-literal signs, which write two consonants each. Note that not every possible combination of sounds has a corresponding bi-literal sign. For example, there are many words that begin with the consonants *d-ḏ* but there is no bi-literal sign **dḏ*. Likewise, no bi-literal signs incorporate *f* or *y*. In addition, note that some combinations have more than one bi-literal (e.g., *ꜥḏ*); some bi-literal signs write more than one pair of consonants (e.g., , *ꜣb* or *mr*); some bi-literals occasionally possess mono-literal values (e.g., , *ỉm* or *m*); while some others also possess tri-literal values (§1.7, below). Like the mono-literals, the bi-literals are exceedingly common and could be used more or less freely to spell all or part of most words in the language.

The following tables include all of the most common bi-literal phonograms, arranged in phonetic order by first consonant. Signs with multiple sound values in standard usage appear in bold cells; these should be cross-referenced with alternate mono-literal (§1.4), bi-literal, and/or tri-literal (§1.7.2) values for those same signs, until the student is comfortable with selecting the correct reading in a given word. You should begin familiarizing yourself with all of the bi-literal signs now, although you will not need all of them immediately. Instead, they can be learned as you encounter them in the vocabulary and exercises at the end of each chapter.

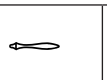
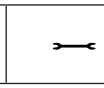
ꜣ-

					
ꜣw	*ꜣb*	*ꜣḫ*	*ꜣs*		*ꜣḫ*

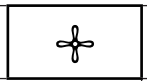
ỉ-

											
ỉw		*ỉb*		*ỉm*		*ỉn*			*ỉr*	*ỉz*	*ỉṯ*

ꜥ-

						
ꜥꜣ	*ꜥb*	*ꜥḥ*	*ꜥq*	*ꜥḏ*		

w-

							
wꜣ	*wꜥ*	*wp*	*wn*		*wr*	*wḏ*	

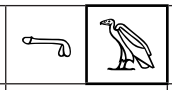
b-

			
bꜣ			*bḥ*

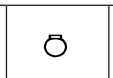
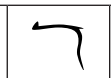
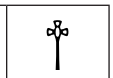
p-

				
pꜣ		*pr*	*pḥ*	*pḏ*

m-

													
mꜣ	*mỉ*		*mw*	*mn*		*mr*				*mḥ*	*ms*	*mt*	*md*

n-

										
nỉ		*nw*	*nb*		*nm*		*nn*	*nḥ*	*ns*	*nḏ*

r-

	
rw	*rs*

h-


hb

ḥ-

												
ḥꜣ	*ḥw*	*ḥp*	*ḥm*		*ḥn*			*ḥr*		*ḥz*	*ḥḏ*	

ḫ-

ḫꜣ		*ḫᶜ*	*ḫw*	*ḫm*	*ḫt*

ẖ-

ẖꜣ	*ẖn*		*ẖr*

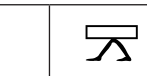
z-

zꜣ			*zp*

s-

sꜣ		*sw*	*sn*	*sk*	*st*		*sṯ*	*sḏ*

š-

					
š3	*šw*	*šm*	*šn*	*šs*	*šd*

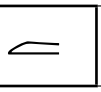
q-

		
qn	*qs*	*qd*

k-

		
k3	*kp*	*km*

g-

				
gb	*gm*	*gs*		

t-

					
t3		*ti or tï*	*tp*		*tm*

ṯ-

	
ṯ3	*ṯz*

d-

		also note:		
di			*dd* (originally *didi*)	

ḏ-

				
ḏ3	*ḏw*	*ḏb*	*ḏr*	*ḏd*

§1.6. Phonetic Complements

1.6.1. Frequently, bi-literal signs were accompanied by additional, mono-literal signs that echo one or both of the bi-literal's consonants. These additional signs are known as phonetic complements. Phonetic complements should not be transliterated as additional consonants. For example, in the group , the first sign is the bi-literal *ḥn* (), while the following mono-literal *n* () is a phonetic complement. Thus, we transliterate the group as *ḥn*, not *ḥnn*. If the scribe had wanted to write *ḥnn*, he would have written an additional *n*: . Usually, if the phonetic complement

echoes the second consonant, it follows the bi-literal, as in the previous examples. However, if the complement echoes the first consonant, it might follow or precede its bi-literal. For example,  and  both write *mr*, with bi-literal *mr* (), plus phonetic complements *m* () and *r* (). Failure to recognize the phonetic complements as such might lead one to transliterate the incorrectly as **mmrr* or as **mrmr*. Compare the following words, paying attention to the placement of the phonetic complements relative to the bi-literal sign(s):

, *sꜣ*, "knife" , *nwḫ*, "rope" , *ḏꜣ*, "extend"

1.6.2. In some cases, phonetic complements seem to function as clues to assist the reader in selecting the correct value for an ambiguous bi-literal sign. Thus, in the example of , the phonetic complements confirm the correct reading of as *mr*, rather than *ꜣb*. Conversely, the phonetic complement *b* in the group confirms the reading of as *ꜣb*, rather than *mr*. For the beginning student, occurrence of phonetic complements can be a tremendous aid in identifying an unfamiliar sign. However, it is interesting to note that, for a literate ancient Egyptian (or a skilled modern translator!), most phonetic complements don't clarify anything and appear basically superfluous as aids to reading. For example, the sign only writes bi-literal *ḏd*. Consequently, examples with one or more phonetic complements, for example, , clarify nothing and the complements could just as easily have been omitted. In such cases, the inclusion or omission of phonetic complements seems to be a matter of scribal preference, or a feature of a given text genre. In either case, the phonetic complements seem to have been employed mostly for aesthetic reasons—that is, to create a more varied and presumably more visually appealing inscription.

§1.7. Three-consonant Signs ("Tri-literals")

1.7.1. In addition to mono- and bi-literals, Egyptian also possessed a number of tri-literal signs, which wrote three consonants. Like the bi-literals, some tri-literal signs have more than one possible value (e.g., , *ỉdn / sḏm*), including some with bi-literal values (e.g., , *sk / wꜣḥ*). In addition, the tri-literal signs were also frequently written with phonetic complements. These often echo the second and/or third consonants and usually follow the tri-literal itself:

, *ḏbꜣ*. Tri-literal , *ḏbꜣ*, followed by phonetic complement , *b*, echoing the second consonant.

, *sḏm*. Tri-literal , *sḏm*, followed by phonetic complement , *m*, echoing the third consonant.

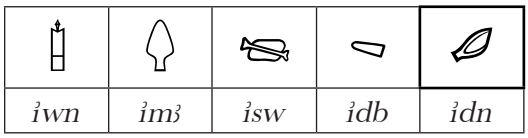
, *ꜥnḫ*. Tri-literal , *ꜥnḫ*, followed by phonetic complements , *n*, and , *ḫ*, echoing the second and third consonants, respectively.

However, exceptions to this general guideline are not uncommon, as in the following example:

, *sbꜣ*. Tri-literal , *sbꜣ*, preceded by phonetic complements, , *s*, and , *b*; followed by phonetic complement , *ꜣ*.

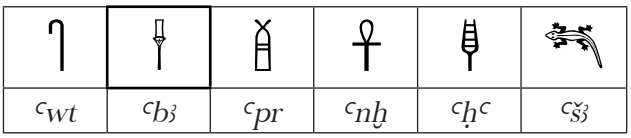
1.7.2. Although they occur nearly as often as other types of phonograms, tri-literal signs were not used as freely. Most of the time, tri-literals were used only to write a single word or group of related concepts. For example, the scarab , writing tri-literal *ḫpr*, was employed in a number of words relating to "changing," "becoming," and "transformation." The more restricted use of triliteral signs is probably due to the simple fact that, statistically speaking, longer sequences of consonants are less likely to occur in random or unrelated words than shorter sequences. The following list includes the most common tri-literal signs, arranged by first consonant. Cells containing signs with multiple values appear in bold. The student should pay special attention to these multivalent signs, checking each of the possible values from the bi- and/or tri-literal sign lists, while they cultivate familiarity with the script. You do not need to memorize all of the tri-literal signs at once. They can be learned as you encounter them, in the vocabulary and exercises at the end of each chapter.

ỉ-



ỉwn *ỉmȝ* *ỉsw* *ỉdb* *ỉdn*

ꜥ-



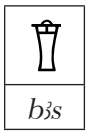
ꜥwt *ꜥbȝ* *ꜥpr* *ꜥnḫ* *ꜥḥꜥ* *ꜥšȝ*

w-



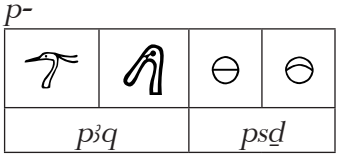
wȝḥ *wȝs* *wȝḏ* *wbn* *wnm* *whḥ* *whꜥ* *whm* *wsr* *wsḫ* *wḏꜥ* *wḏb*

b-



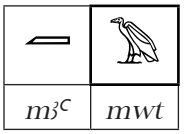
bȝs

p-



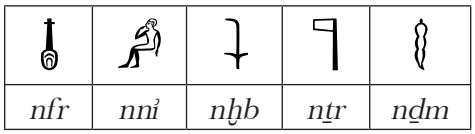
pȝq *psḏ*

m-



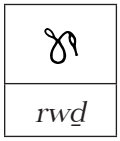
mȝꜥ *mwt*

n-



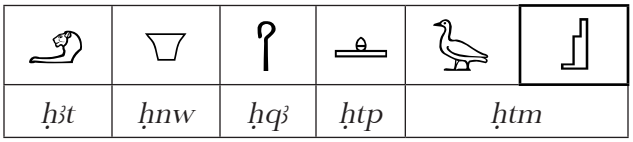
nfr *nnỉ* *nḫb* *nṯr* *nḏm*

r-



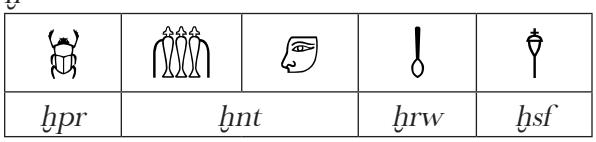
rwḏ

ḥ-



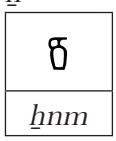
ḥȝt *ḥnw* *ḥqȝ* *ḥtp* *ḥtm*

ḫ-



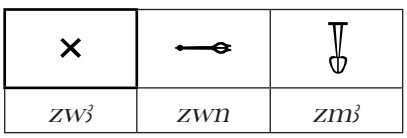
ḫpr *ḫnt* *ḫrw* *ḫsf*

ẖ-



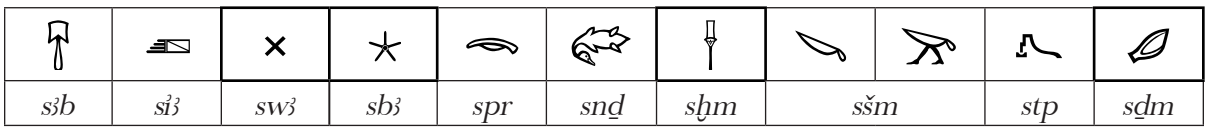
ẖnm

z-



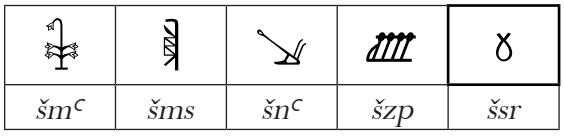
zwȝ *zwn* *zmȝ*

s-



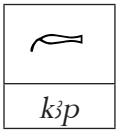
sȝb *siȝ* *swȝ* *sbȝ* *spr* *snḏ* *sḫm* *sšm* *stp* *sḏm*

š-



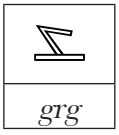
šmꜥ *šms* *šnꜥ* *šzp* *šsr*

k-



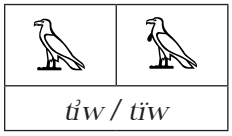
kȝp

g-



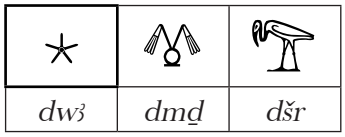
gṛg

t-



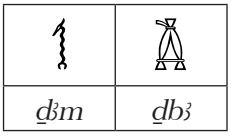
tỉw / tiw

d-



dwȝ *dmḏ* *dšr*

ḏ-

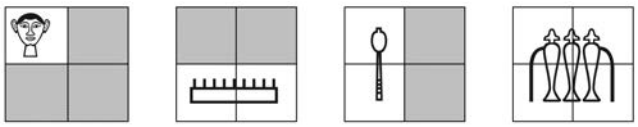


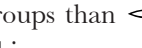
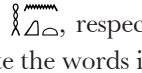
ḏȝm *ḏbȝ*

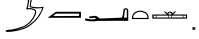
§1.8. Further Observations on the Hieroglyphic Writing System

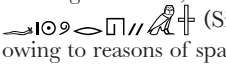
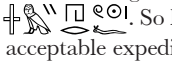
1.8.1. We have noted already that hieroglyphic texts could be written in rows or columns, which might be read either left-to-right or right-to-left (§1.1.2). In addition, the orientation and placement of individual signs could also be manipulated

for aesthetic reasons, to suit the tastes of the scribe or to harmonize an inscription with its accompanying scene. The most basic aesthetic consideration was the concept of the ideal square. Just as Egyptian art was drawn according to a fixed canon of proportions on an (actual) grid,[23] Egyptian writing was arranged according to an (imaginary) grid, which governed the placement of signs. In classical Middle Egyptian, this ideal square consisted of four equal quadrants. All of the hieroglyphs can be described in terms of their general shape within this quadrant system: short-narrow signs (1 quadrant), short-wide signs (two horizontal quadrants), tall-narrow signs (two vertical quadrants), and tall-wide signs (all four quadrants).[24] The following chart illustrates the relationship between the imaginary quadrants of the ideal square and the four general hieroglyphic shapes:



In some cases, signs might be rearranged for aesthetic reasons, to produce a more pleasingly compact group within the ideal square: for example, the word , *ḫft*, "opposite," was usually written , which we must always transliterate in the correct order as *ḫft*, never as **ḫtf*. With other words, aesthetic consideration within the ideal square resulted in spellings that regularly omit strong consonants. This phenomenon may be observed, for example, in the common words , *rmṯ*, "people," and , *ḥnq.t*, "beer." In each of these words, the second consonant (*m* and *n*, respectively) was usually omitted in writing. We know from diachronic evidence that both of these sounds survived in pronunciation all the way through to Coptic: ⲢⲰⲘ�necessary, /rō-mĕ/, "man"; ϩⲛⲕⲉ, /hən-kĕ/, "beer." Therefore, the omission should be regarded as a graphic phenomenon, probably due to aesthetic considerations—namely, that  and  were perceived as more pleasingly compact groups than  and , respectively.[25] In all cases, whenever consonants were omitted or rearranged for graphic reasons, we transliterate the words in question with all of the expected consonants in the correct order (cf. phonological omissions, discussed in §1.8.4, below).

1.8.2. One of the peculiarities of Egyptian aesthetics, in art as well as writing, is a feature that art historians call *horror vacui*, the "fear of empty space." Because Egyptians did not like to leave excessive blank space in an inscription, they always attempted to arrange individual words into compact sign groups within the ideal square, as opposed to creating long strings of individual signs, as in most modern languages. For example, the word *mꜣᶜ.t*, referring to the created order of the Egyptian cosmos, was spelled frequently in the compact group , but almost never in single file, as .

> **Obs.** The influence of the ideal square is more prevalent in hieroglyphic inscriptions than in handwritten (hieratic) texts. When scribes wrote by hand, with brush and ink, they often created longer, single-file arrangements of signs, similar to the second *mꜣᶜ.t* example, shown above. Whenever you encounter hieroglyphic transcriptions in modern works that organize signs in this way, it is usually an attempt to replicate the approximate layout of the original hieratic signs. Such transcriptions may place the signs on the ground line, rather than centered, and will often respect the right-to-left orientation of the hieratic original, for example,  (Sin. R, 45). However, modern authors do not always need to replicate the original hieratic layout, whether owing to reasons of space or to better illustrate some other aspect of the text. In such cases, the author might reorganize the hieroglyphic transcription into more compact groups; signs will typically appear centered rather than on the ground line; and the text might be reoriented left-to-right, to read in the same direction as the text that surrounds it: . So long as all of the original signs are present in the same reading order (§1.8.3, below), such modifications are an acceptable expedient, which does not usually impact our analysis of the ancient text and its grammar.

In order to make best use of the available space, scribes might rotate certain short-wide signs 90°, making them tall and narrow, for example, the book-roll classifier appears frequently as . Likewise, certain tall-narrow signs might be

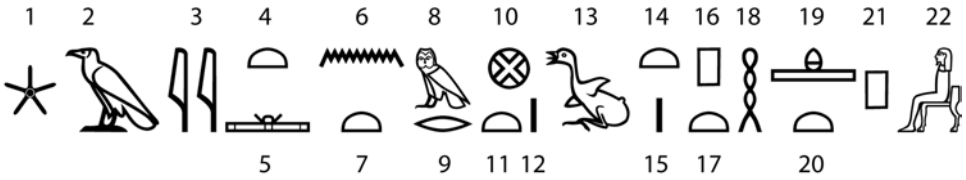
23. See G. Robins, *Proportion and Style in Ancient Egyptian Art* (Austin: University of Texas, 1994).

24. Note that most sign-lists include an index of signs organized by quadrant-shape; this is the single most useful tool for identifying the value(s) of a sign, with which you are not familiar.

25. Examples of these last two orthographies are attested but occur primarily in other phases of the language (*rmṯ*: *Wb* II, 421; *ḥnq.t*: *Wb* III, 169), although such spellings do appear occasionally in good Middle Egyptian, e.g., , *rmṯ* (CT VII, 465a, B3C; see ch. 5, ex. 30). For discussion of this phenomenon, including both phonological and aesthetic factors, see J. Kahl, "Die Defektivschreibungen in den Pyramidentexten," *LingAeg* 2 (1992): 99–116.

rotated to become short and wide, for example tri-literal , *ḫrw*, appears often as . In general, such rotations do not change the meaning of the sign.[26]

1.8.3. Even though Egyptian scribes had some freedom to manipulate signs within the ideal square, the order of consonants within a given word had to be respected. Fortunately for us, this means that there will usually be only one correct order in which to read the signs. The basic rule is simple: moving in the general direction of the text, signs should be read from front to back and top to bottom. Consider the order of signs in the following example, from the introduction to the literary text known as the "Maxims of Ptahhotep":



As you are learning the hieroglyphic writing system, bear in mind the following strategies for transliterating:

(1) When you read, transliterate the signs (or whole words) that you recognize and flag the signs (or words) you don't yet recognize.
(2) If a bi-literal or tri-literal sign has more than one possible value, isolate possible phonetic complements to help select the appropriate reading.
(3) If the phonetic complements are of no help (or absent), then note all possibilities for the multi-literal sign; use context from the surrounding words and sentences to select the most plausible value.
(4) Use classifiers to identify word-boundaries wherever you can, bearing in mind that not all words will have classifiers.

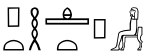
After your first pass through the text, go back, look up any unknown signs/words, and reanalyze the word divisions, if necessary. Finally, for ambiguous signs, try to find words in the sign-list or dictionary that best fit the context. Always remember that, very often, the first entry in the dictionary is not the best translation for a given passage.

Using only the four rules outlined above and the signs we have encountered already in §§1.4–7, we should be able to divide the preceding sample text from the "Maxims of Ptahhotep" into four smaller sections—which might include multiple words—based on the placement of classifiers, notated below with brackets. In addition, we can identify most of the consonants in their correct order, and we can identify possible phonetic complements, notated below with parentheses. Finally, we can isolate one new sign, which we don't recognize as a phonogram, and which might represent either another classifier or an unfamiliar ideogram:

 *sbꜣ / dwꜣ* (+ *ꜣ*?) + *y* + *t* + [classifier: ABSTRACT]

 *n* + *t* + *m* + *r* + |new sign: classifier or ideogram?| + *t* + [classifier stroke]

 *ṯꜣ* + *t* + [classifier stroke]

 *p* + *t* + (*ḥ* +?) *ḥtp* (+ *t* + *p*) + [classifier: DECEASED PERSON]

Of course, we would need some additional knowledge of the vocabulary, grammar, and context to remove the question marks, separate all of the individual words, and finalize our transliteration, which would not include ambiguous readings, phonetic complements, classifiers, or "plus signs" inserted between the consonants.[27] Once you become more

26. But note the use of reversals, which are often semantically significant, e.g., , *pr*, "go forth," vs. , *ꜥn*, "go back." For a detailed discussion, see H. G. Fischer, *The Orientation of Hieroglyphs. Part I: Reversals* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1977).

27. Thus, the present example would be transliterated and translated: *sbꜣy.t n.t (i)m(i)-r ṯꜣ.t(i) Ptḥ-ḥtp*, "Instruction of the Overseer and Vizier, Ptahhotep."

comfortable reading the hieroglyphic script, most of these thought processes will happen more or less automatically, without having to write them down. Until then, this example illustrates how we can deduce quite a lot of information just from the identification of phonograms, classifiers, sign order, and direction of writing, without knowing the meaning of any individual words.

1.8.4. Like all languages, ancient Egyptian experienced significant changes in pronunciation over time. As the pronunciation changed, the written forms of words changed as well, albeit more slowly. Over the course of its long history, we observe two major trends in the way Egyptians expressed the sounds of their language in writing. The first of these is a tendency to omit certain consonants, which had either weakened or dropped altogether from the spoken language. This trend is evident in the very frequent omission of the semivowels *ỉ* and *ỉ̈*, less commonly also *ꜣ*, *y*, and *w*. In addition, word-final *t* and *r* also dropped from pronunciation in many cases and were sometimes omitted in writing. We describe these omissible consonants as "weak," in contrast to the "strong" consonants, which were rarely, if ever, omitted in writing. When a weak consonant has been omitted, Egyptologists often supply the omitted consonant in parentheses. For example, the word for "overseer," *ỉmỉ̈-r*, does not usually write the two weak consonants *ỉ* and *ỉ̈*. More often, only the strong consonants *m* and *r* appear: , which we might then transliterate as *(ỉ)m(ỉ̈)-r*, supplying the omitted signs in parentheses. In fact, we have encountered this spelling already, in our sample text from §1.8.3, above.

1.8.5. In addition to the omission of weak consonants, Egyptian also experienced a coalescence of similar sounds over time, which resulted in a reduction of the total number of consonants and the interchange of certain hieroglyphic signs.[28] These reductions occur mostly within the groups of similar sounds outlined in §1.2.3, above. The most common such change involves the collapse of the sibilants, *s* and *z*. By the Middle Kingdom, these two sounds were no longer distinct, and we frequently find *z* () written in place of *s* (), and vice versa. In fact, many older Egyptological works simply transliterate both signs as *s*—for example, Faulkner's *Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*. However, such practice is no longer considered standard for texts of the Middle Kingdom, which should be transliterated instead according to the words' originally attested sound values.[29] In addition to the sibilants, the dentals, *t*, *ṯ*, *d*, and *ḏ* were also undergoing a similar process of collapse. In the Middle Kingdom, *t* () often substitutes for *ṯ* (), and *d* () occasionally replaces *ḏ* (). Similar changes were taking place among other consonants but most of these are not common in the Middle Kingdom, occurring mostly in specific, restricted environments. For example, the consonants *t* () and *r* (), when they occur in word-final position, might weaken to semivowels, expressed either as *ỉ* () or *ỉ̈* ().[30] We will revisit the topic of historical sound change in a later chapter (§15.10).

1.8.6. Sometimes, Egyptian scribes would substitute one sign from a general class, like "birds" or "body parts," for another sign from the same class. For example, in hieratic texts, the *zꜣ*-goose, , frequently interchanges with other bird signs. One of the most common such "class substitutions," found in a wide variety of texts, is the use of the *ꜥ*-arm phonogram, , in place of the STRIKING ARM classifier, . Along similar lines, also substitutes for the arm holding a bread loaf, , with the bi-literal value *dỉ*.[31] This latter substitution, although quite common, is found almost exclusively in the word *(r)dỉ*, "give."

1.8.7. As a final caveat on the hieroglyphic writing system, the student should always bear in mind: There are very few hard-and-fast rules governing the spelling of Egyptian words. There were guidelines, and some of these were more rigid than others, but there are always exceptions. As a student of Egyptian, you must learn to be flexible in your approach. If

28. These trends are not unique to Egyptian. For example, in English we find that word-final /r/ tends to disappear in certain dialects: "car" becomes /cah/ in Boston, while "sir" becomes /suh/ in Georgia; likewise, in French, various consonants in word-final position (for example, -er) have long since dropped from pronunciation, while the consonant /h/ has disappeared almost entirely from the spoken language (thus, old Fr. hostel → modern Fr. hôtel, pronounced /ō-tel/).

29. Note that, in Faulkner's *Dictionary*, words that include an original *z* consonant are usually indicated in parentheses, after the main entry, e.g., , *ḥsỉ* (*ḥzỉ*), a verb meaning "favor" or "praise" (CDME, 176).

30. For example, the very common spelling , *btỉ*, which appears from the Eleventh Dynasty and later in place of older , *bd.t*, "emmer wheat," shows the weakening of word-final *t* to *ỉ* as well as the rare collapse of medial *d* to *t* (GEG[3], 483, M34; for detailed discussion, see J. A. Roberson, "Tête-à-tête: Some Observations and Counter-arguments Regarding a Contentious Phonological Value, *dp* or *tp*," *LingAeg* 26 [2018]: 185–202).

31. This type of substitution can also be described as *pars pro toto*, or "part for the whole," insofar as the *dỉ*-arm, , is a composite sign, consisting of two parts: the *ꜥ*-arm, , plus the *dỉ*-bread loaf, .

you only expect a word to appear in the form given in a dictionary, you will soon find your progress stymied and grow frustrated.

On the other hand, the Egyptian writing system was not a free-for-all. Even though general principles seem to be violated with alarming frequency and virtually every word could be spelled in multiple ways, the spellings that are actually attested are quite few in number, relative to the number that are theoretically possible but unattested. Consider the mono-literal signs: In theory, the Egyptians could have spelled any and every word using only mono-literals, like an alphabet. However, in practice, very few words were spelled this way. Instead, we find various combinations of mono-literals, bi-literals, tri-literals, and ideograms. Ultimately, it is better to get a "feel" for the ways that Egyptian was spelled, by working through actual texts to see how they behave. The alternative—memorization of hundreds of rules and hundreds of exceptions—is a grim and soulless task best left to machines and savants.

Chapter 1 Vocabulary

Basic Classifiers. Memorize the conventional names of each of the following, common classifiers and memorize their semantic values, indicated below each entry in brackets.

 SEATED MAN (§1.3.4)
[MEN; HUMAN BEINGS]

 SPEAKING MAN
[SPEAKING; EATING]

 STRIKING MAN
[FORCE; AGGRESSION]

 PRAISING MAN
[PRAISE; WORSHIP]

 EMBRACING ARMS
[EMBRACING; GRASPING]

 NEGATIVE ARMS
[NEGATION; NEGATIVITY]

 ARM / STRIKING ARM (§1.8.6)
[ACTION; FORCE]

 WALKING LEGS
[MOTION]

 LEG
[LEGS; ACTIONS OF THE LEG]

 BRANCH
[WOODEN THINGS]

 SKY
[PERTAINING TO THE SKY]

 CANALS
[LAND AND WATER]

 MOUND
[EARTHWORKS; BURIALS]

 HOUSE
[BUILT STRUCTURES]

 DOOR
[DOORS; PORTALS]

 THROW STICK
[FOREIGN; WARFARE]

 ROPE
[ROPE; FIBER THINGS]

 BOOK ROLL
[ABSTRACTS; CONCEPTS]

 CLASSIFIER STROKE
[SINGLE THINGS; IDEOGRAMS]

 DUAL STROKES
[PAIRED THINGS]

 PLURAL STROKES
[THREE OR MORE THINGS]

Vocabulary Building, Sign Inventory. Make flash cards for the common Egyptian words given below, paying special attention to the arrangement and function of the different kinds of signs in each word (mono-, bi-, and tri-literal phonograms, phonetic complements, and classifiers). Find each word's entry in Faulkner's *Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (CDME) and note its transliteration, basic meaning(s), and page number(s) on the back of each flash card.[32] Begin memorizing these words. Use this process of vocabulary building to assist in memorizing bi-literal and tri-literal signs in context and continue this practice for any new Egyptian words you encounter.

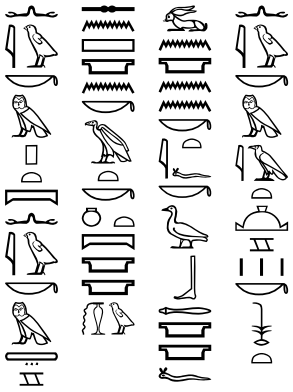


32. Note that the transliteration system in CDME neutralizes the original distinction between *z* and *s* . When an original *z* consonant was present in the root, CDME will usually indicate that value in parentheses, e.g., *ḥsi* (*ḥzi*). For the purpose of the exercises in this volume, *z* and *s* should be differentiated wherever possible.

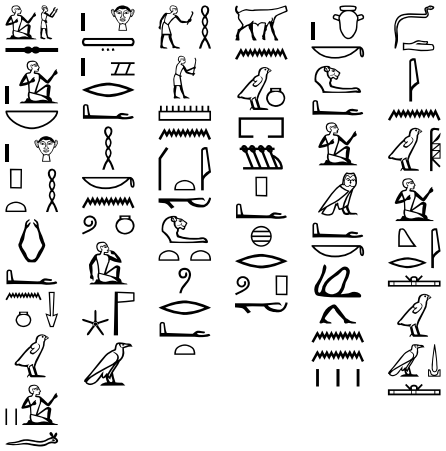
Chapter 1 Exercises

Reading Practice: The Hieroglyphic Writing System. (1) Using the list of basic classifiers provided above, in conjunction with the sign lists from §§1.4–7, attempt to transliterate the following texts. Pay attention to the direction of writing and be aware of phonetic complements. (2) Wherever possible, use classifiers to note where words begin and/or end. Recall that some signs occur as phonograms in certain cases, but as classifiers in others. Recall that words can have more than one classifier. (3) Look up any words you believe you have isolated in CDME and make a note of the first definition. Pay special attention to correct use of the Leiden Universal Transliteration system (§1.4, Obs.), as opposed to the older system of transliteration, which Faulkner employs. (4) Don't panic: This exercise is not designed to produce a translation. Rather, it is meant to get students thinking in terms of different sorts of signs and the boundaries of words that they form. The inevitable "errors" that will result should serve as a point of departure for class discussion, to further refine the thought processes of looking at an unfamiliar text.

CT VII, 35h–k, T1C:



ShS., 1–6:



Sin. B, 205:



Chapter 2. Nouns and Pronouns

§2.1. Parts of Speech

2.1.1. The "parts of speech" of any given language refer to the different categories of words that share similar grammatical functions and that occupy similar syntactic positions. The grammatical function of a word is the role that it plays in a sentence, for instance, subject, predicate, or object. The syntactic position or syntax of a word refers to its order of placement relative to other parts of speech. For example, in the English sentence "Darleen finished her homework," the word *Darleen* is the grammatical subject, who performs or experiences the predicate; *finished* is the predicate, which the subject performs or experiences; and *her homework* is the object, which is performed or experienced. In terms of those words' syntax, we could also describe *Darleen* as a noun, *finished* as a verb, and *her homework* as a noun phrase (multiple words that function as a single syntactic unit). In this example, the noun subject, *Darleen*, must occupy the initial (i.e., first) syntactic position. Therefore, it would be incorrect to say "Has finished her homework Darleen," because this would violate the rules of English syntax.

2.1.2. Parts of speech are the basic building blocks of sentences in any language. Thus, in order to translate Egyptian, we must learn its parts of speech, as well as their potential grammatical functions and syntactic positions, in order to translate the ancient texts. Ancient Egyptian had seven basic parts of speech:

- Particles. Small "flavoring" words that provide nuance or shifts in meaning. In Egyptian, these words always appear at or near the beginning of a sentence. Proclitic particles *can* occur as the first word in their sentence. Enclitic particles *cannot* occur as the first word. Particles can serve as markers for specific grammatical features or syntactic roles (see Appendix 1: The Particles of Middle Egyptian).
- Nouns. Words that refer to things (people, places, objects, ideas, etc.). Nouns, together with pronouns, are the topic of the present chapter.
- Pronouns. Words that stand for, or otherwise replace, nouns (her, him, those, etc.).
- Adjectives. Words that describe a quality (good, blue, huge, etc.). Adjectives frequently modify nouns.
- Prepositions. Words that describe the position of things relative to each other (under, in, beside, etc.).
- Adverbs. Modifying words that convey when, why, how, or where something occurs. Adverbs often modify the predicate of a sentence.
- Verbs. Words that describe actions or states of being (strike, read, sleep, climb, etc.).

Each of these parts of speech will be the subject of their own discussion in due course. However, it is important to be aware of all of them now, for the sake of discussion along the way.

§2.2. Nouns and Their Properties

2.2.1. Gender and root consonants. All nouns in Egyptian have gender, which is always either masculine or feminine. It is important to understand that "gender" refers here to a feature of the grammar, which is not necessarily related to biological sex (i.e., male or female) or to culturally assigned gender roles and identity. Nevertheless, when a noun refers to an animate being—an animal, person, or god—grammatical gender is usually the same as biological sex. For example, the Egyptian word , *z*, "man" refers to a biologically male animate being and has masculine grammatical gender. Conversely, the word , *z.t*, "woman," refers to a biologically female animate being and has feminine gender. These two words are differentiated in terms of their classifiers (a SEATED MAN and SEATED WOMAN, respectively). In addition, the second word also exhibits a final *t*, which is separated in the transliteration by a dot. This *t* is the feminine gender marker. All grammatically feminine words in Egyptian originally had this marker. Therefore, we would say that

feminine nouns are marked for feminine gender by the final *t*, as opposed to masculine nouns, which are unmarked in the script for grammatical gender.[1]

You will notice that both of the Egyptian words cited above share the consonant *z*. This shared consonant is the root of both words. In Egyptian, the "root" refers to the consonants that all forms of a word share in common.[2] In the example pair given above, we could say that the root *z* refers simply to a PERSON, which could be either a male / grammatically masculine "man" (no special ending), or a female / grammatically feminine "woman" (marked with a *t*). We refer to elements like the gender marker *t*, which are suffixed to the end of a root and change its meaning, as endings. Because root endings are distinct grammatical units that were not part of the root itself, we separate them in transliteration with a dot: , *ꜥ.t*, "room; chamber"; , *mḏ.t*, "papyrus-roll; book." The combination of roots and endings creates the characteristic shape, or morphology, of individual nouns in the language. The smallest indivisible units that convey meaning in any word, including roots and suffixed endings, as well as prefixes (added to the front of the root) and infixes (added between the root and a following suffix), are known as morphemes.

Over time, the otherwise strong consonant /t/ started to behave like a weak sound in word-final position, where it would drop from pronunciation.[3] If a scribe wanted their writing to reflect this change, then they might choose to omit the *t*-sign at the end of a given word. As a result of this process, texts from the Middle Kingdom and later occasionally left the feminine gender marker *t* unexpressed. However, in such cases, the word was still grammatically feminine. We account for this phenomenon in our transliteration by supplying omitted gender marker in parentheses, for example: , *z(.t)*, "woman."

Many masculine nouns that refer to animate beings have feminine counterparts, which share the same root but could be differentiated by the presence or absence of the gender marker, in addition to any MALE or FEMALE classifiers. For example, the words , *nṯr*, "god" and , *nṯr.t*, "goddess," share the root *nṯr*, which means essentially a DIVINE BEING, which might be either a masculine "god" (no gender marker) or feminine "goddess" (marked with *t*). In some cases, roots show changes in pronunciation between the masculine and feminine forms. This is usually when one or more of the root consonants is a semivowel—for example, , *mꜣw*, "tom-cat" versus , *my.t*, "female cat." Other masculine and feminine counterparts do not share the same root because they derive from different words altogether. For example, , *ḥm.t*, was often used to mean a "woman" as opposed to a "man." However, the primary sense of *ḥm.t* was "wife," which is etymologically unrelated to the word *z*, "man."

All of the nouns discussed above refer to animate beings. Therefore, in each case, the grammatical gender also corresponds to the beings' biological sex. At the same time, Egyptian also possessed countless nouns that referred to inanimate (nonliving; literally "soulless") things, as well as intangible (nonphysical, untouchable) ideas and concepts. These sorts of nouns also possessed grammatical gender, which must be either masculine (unmarked) or feminine (marked with *t*). However, unlike animate nouns, the gender of inanimate things and intangible ideas is purely a feature of the grammar and has nothing to do with biological sex. For this reason, inanimate and intangible nouns do not usually have a counterpart of the opposite gender. Thus, for example, , *mrḥ.t*, "oil," is an inanimate, feminine thing with no biological sex and no masculine counterpart, while , *srf*, "relief," is an intangible, masculine thing with no biological sex and no feminine counterpart. As a general guideline, Egyptian often seems to prefer the feminine gender for inanimate objects and especially intangible ideas and concepts, although many exceptions, like *srf*, "relief," may be cited.

As a final observation regarding grammatical gender, it is also important to note that some inanimate, masculine nouns possess a root in which the final consonant also happens to be the /t/ sound. Because this sound was part of the root, it is not separated by a dot in transliteration, as in the very common masculine noun , *ḫt*, "wood; branch." In some cases, it seems that root-final /t/ resulted from a weak consonant dropping at the end of an originally longer root, leaving /t/ as the last preserved sound. Thus, for example, the four-consonant root , *ḫnrt*, translated variously as "prison,"

1. Alternatively, unmarked words can also be described as having an implicit Ø-marker, or "zero marker." However, there is no real benefit to complicating the transliteration system any further through the addition of Ø to our notations.

2. Egyptian words could have as few as one root consonant (e.g., *z*, "man") or as many as six (e.g., *ḥntꜣsw*, "lizard"), but the large majority of words in the language possessed between two and five root consonants.

3. For weak vs. strong consonants, see §1.8.4. Note that English can also omit consonants at the end of a word, to reflect the pronunciation of the spoken language. Such omissions are typically used in less formal writing styles, for example, "living at home," versus "livin' at home."

"harim," or "enclosure," derives probably from an older root with five consonants: *ḥnrtw*.[4] Of course, it is very important to recognize masculine nouns ending in *t* when they occur, so that your transliteration remains accurate and for reasons of gender agreement, which we will consider in the next chapter. Fortunately, there are very few such nouns. In addition to the words for "wood" and "prison," mentioned above, some other relatively common masculine nouns with root-final *t* include , *ỉt*, "barley"; , *ỉt*, "father"; , *wt*, "bandage"; , *mt*, "dead person"; and , *t*, "bread."

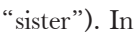
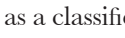
Obs. Egyptian dictionaries, like CDME, list masculine roots before any feminine nouns derived from them—for example, *z*, "man," appears before *z.t*, "woman." In addition, the gender marker does not count toward the order of unrelated words in the dictionary, since it is not part of the root. For example, *m* comes before *t* in the phonetic order, so *ḫm*, "shrine," is listed before the masculine noun *ḫt*, "branch," but after the feminine noun *ḫ.t*, "thing."

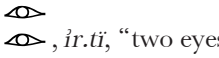
2.2.2. Number. In addition to gender, all nouns in Egyptian also possessed the quality of number. Number could be singular, referring to *exactly one* instance of the noun; dual, referring to *exactly two* instances of the noun; or plural, referring to *three or more* instances of the noun. The singular construction is the basic, unmarked form of any given noun. Therefore, singular nouns have no special ending, other than gender, where appropriate. For example:

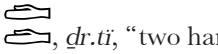
, *pr*, "house" (<u>one</u> house, masculine)[5]

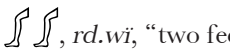
, *dp.t*, "boat." (<u>one</u> boat, feminine)

, *zḫȝ* (also: *zš* or *sš*),[6] "scribe" (<u>one</u> scribe, masculine)

Dual nouns add the ending *-wï* (vars. *-wỉ*, *-wy*) to masculine roots. This ending was usually written as , , or similar,[7] for example, , *sn.wï*, "two brothers" (from , *sn*, "brother"). Feminine nouns add the ending *-ï* (var. *-ỉ*), which follows the feminine gender marker, written usually as ,[8] for example, , *sn.tï*, "two sisters" (from , *sn.t*, "sister"). In the preceding examples, note that the dual nouns' classifiers were written twice. This scribal practice, while common, was not obligatory, and examples with one classifier or none also occur, for example, , *ʿ.wy*, "two arms," or , *pḥ.wï*, "end," lit., "paired hindquarters."[9] In some cases, a grammatically singular noun includes a sense of duality in its meaning. Such nouns may be written as a false dual, in which case the dual strokes serve merely as a classifier: , *snw*,[10] "brother; (male) companion"; , *snw.t*, "sister; (female) companion." The earliest form of expressing the dual involved a simple repetition of ideograms. In such cases, remember that the transliteration must still include the dual ending, for example:

, *ỉr.tï*, "two eyes" (from the feminine noun , *ỉr.t*, "eye")

, *ḏr.tï*, "two hands" (from the feminine noun , *ḏr.t*, "hand")[11]

, *rd.wï*, "two feet," (from the masculine noun , *rd*, "foot")

4. For discussion of this word, see S. Quirke, *Titles and Bureaux of Egypt 1850–1700 BC* (London: Golden House, 2004), 94–95.

5. Note that the stroke following the *pr*-sign is a classifier stroke (§1.3.5), not an indication of the numeral "one." Numerals (as opposed to grammatical number) will be dealt with in a later chapter.

6. The full, original root appears to have been *zḫȝ*. Through the processes of historical sound change (§1.8.5), final *ȝ* dropped from pronunciation, *z* weakened to *s*, and *ḫ* weakened to *š*. The older root is mainly attested in the Old Kingdom; both of the reduced, later spellings occur in texts of the Middle Kingdom. The ideogram, when lacking any phonetic complements, as in the example given above, can therefore be transliterated according to the preference of the translator.

7. The *ï* semivowel might be expressed occasionally , *ỉ*, or , *y*. Such spellings of the dual are more typical of Old Egyptian (see *AäG*, §162).

8. Much less often, the feminine gender marker might be expressed together with the dual ending using the biliteral sign , *t*.

9. Sin. B, 63; Sin. B, 64.

10. Note that the *w* in this word is part of the root, not an ending, which would be separated with a dot. Compare the following example of *snw.t*, which includes the same root consonants, plus the feminine gender marker, as an ending.

11. Note that the hand sign, , functions in this word as an ideogram, not a phonogram.

Because the dual refers to exactly two of a given noun, Middle Egyptian tends to use it mostly for natural pairs, such as the body parts listed above. However, the dual also occurs with nouns that were viewed in Egyptian culture as intrinsically paired, for example , *tȝ.wï*, "the Two Lands; Egypt"; , *ȝḫ.tï*, "two horizons"; , *nb.tï*, "the Two Ladies" (the goddesses Nekhbet and Wadjet). Productive, that is, unrestricted use of the dual with nouns of a more general sort was already dying out by the Middle Kingdom, to be replaced increasingly by the plural.

Plural nouns added the ending *w* directly after the root, for example, *z.w*, "men." In the case of feminine nouns, the plural marker precedes the gender marker: *z.wt*, "women." The plural ending was occasionally spelled out, as  or . However, plural number was indicated most often by the addition of a special classifier consisting of three plural strokes or plural dots, which the scribe might arrange in various ways—for example, , , , , , or similar. Plural strokes (or dots) were almost always written as the last sign in a given word, after any phonetic signs or other classifiers.

Masculine: , *mȝ.w*,[12] "lions"

, *ḫftï.w*, "enemies"

, *ḥbȝ.w*, "monuments"

, *nṯr.w*, "gods"

Feminine: , *nq.wt*, "figs"

, *wȝ.wt*, "paths; ways"

, *ḫ.wt*, "things; possessions"

, *nṯr.wt*, "goddesses"

In some cases, scribes might indicate the plural with groups of three ideograms, for example, , *nṯr.w*, "gods," or else by tripling the word's classifier, for example, , *sr.w*, "officials." In texts that show greater influence from Old Egyptian (e.g., Coffin Texts), the plural might also be indicated through a repetition of the entire word three times, for example, , *rn.w*, "names."

In some cases, Egyptian words that included a final *w* consonant in the root might be written as false plurals, for example, , *mȝw*, "appearance," or , *nfrw*, "deficiency." Along similar lines, singular nouns that include multiple parts frequently include plural strokes to indicate the collective, for example, , *rmṯ*, "people"; , *ỉz.t*, "crew (of a boat)." Occasionally, both strategies might be employed in a single word, as in the very common orthography , *mw*, "water," which includes root-final *w*, suggesting a false plural, but which also consists of multiple smaller amounts of water, suggesting a collective. Finally, note that nouns referring to unique individuals or things could not normally be made plural, for example, , *Rʿ*, the sun god "Re," or the god's physical manifestation as , *rʿ*, "the sun." Nevertheless, occasional exceptions do occur, which remind us to remain flexible in our approach to grammatical categories like number.

Ex. 1 (Lebs., 59–60)

mȝ=k rʿ.w, "You shall see suns," i.e., multiple instances of sunrise.

2.2.3. Specificity: defined vs. undefined nouns. Alongside gender and number, all nouns also possess the quality of specificity, which might be either defined or undefined. Defined nouns refer to exactly one, specific member from the noun's general class ("the man"; "my friend"; "that woman") or one specific group, in the case of plurals ("the cats"; "those books"). Undefined nouns, on the other hand, could refer to any given member or group from a general class ("a dog"; "some people"; "anything").

In English, specificity is often indicated through use of the definite article "the" or the indefinite article "a(n)." However, "classical" Middle Egyptian does not regularly utilize a part of speech corresponding to the definite and indefinite articles of English.[13] As a result, the specificity of most nouns must be deduced from context. Without additional context,

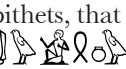
12. The eye sign, , has no real function in this word; rather, the scribe has construed the group as a bi-graph, i.e., two signs functioning together, to express the sequence *m-ȝ*, on analogy with the common verb , *mȝȝ*, "to see," where the eye serves as an ideogram.

13. For the sporadic introduction of definite articles in texts from the second half of Dynasty 12 and later, see below at ex. 36, and ch. 15, §15.12.

an Egyptian noun might therefore be either defined or undefined,[14] for example, , *šmsw*, "a/the follower"; , *stp.wt*, "the/some choice cuts."

Fortunately, there are many clues that can help us to determine if the noun is defined or undefined. Thus, for example, any proper noun—the name or a specific individual or thing—will always be defined: for example, "Amenhotep"; "Isis"; "the Great House."[15] We will learn other such clues as we progress further into the grammar.

§2.3. Noun Phrases

2.3.1. Apposition. Two or more Egyptian nouns in sequence (NOUN + NOUN) can exhibit different relationships, forming various sorts of noun phrase. The simplest sort of relationship between nouns is known as apposition. Apposition occurs when multiple nouns refer to the same thing, as in the English phrases "the one, the only," or "Vincent, our man in Amsterdam." There is no special marker to indicate apposition in Egyptian, and any two or more nouns in sequence might possess this relationship. Although nouns in apposition can occur in any context, they are particularly common in titularies: names, titles and laudatory epithets, that can be strung together to identify an individual—for example, , *mnᶜ.t Py(.t)*, "the wet-nurse, Pey(et)"; , *wḥmw Šnw*, "the reporter, Shenu."[16]

2.3.2. Coordination and disjunction. Nouns in sequence can also refer to different things, which exist together in a group. Nouns in a group might express coordination, meaning that all members are included ("cats and dogs"), or they might express disjunction, meaning only one member can be included ("cats or dogs"). In the vast majority of cases, Egyptian employed no special marker or other word to express these sorts of relationships.

Ex. 2  (ShS., 47–49)
dbȝ.w ỉȝrr.wt, "figs and grapes"

Ex. 3  (*Courtiers*, pl. 28)
t ḥnq.t kȝ.w ȝpd.w šs mnḫ.t, "bread, beer, oxen, fowl, alabaster, and clothing"[17]

In some cases, coordination could be expressed by the prepositions , *ḥnᶜ*, "together with," or , *ḥr*, "upon." In such cases the preposition, which appears *between* the coordinated nouns, is translated best as "and."

Ex. 4  (Westcar 7, 2–3)
*wnm … **ḥnᶜ** swr*, "eating … **and** drinking,"[18] lit., "eating with drinking."

Ex. 5  (Westcar 11, 14)
*ḏᶜ **ḥr** ḥwy.t*, "wind **and** rain," lit., "wind upon rain."

Similarly, disjunction could be marked explicitly, albeit rarely, by the prepositional phrase  (also spelled), *r-pw*, "with respect to that,"[19] which usually appears as the *last* word in its phrase, where it is translated best as "or." This use occurs with nouns and noun phrases as well as with prepositional phrases, consisting of a preposition plus object.

14. Note that this ambiguity is purely a result of missing context; all nouns were always either defined or undefined, even if poor preservation or some other factor obscures this quality to us.

15. The usual name of the royal palace.

16. *Courtiers*, pls. 12 and 27.

17. Note that each of the words in this example is written as an ideogram. Also note that the plural strokes here serve double duty as a classifier for both *kȝ.w* and *ȝpd.w*.

18. The ellipsis (…) indicates that some intervening words have been omitted, in this case, for the sake of clarity.

19. For additional discussion, see §2.6.2, below.