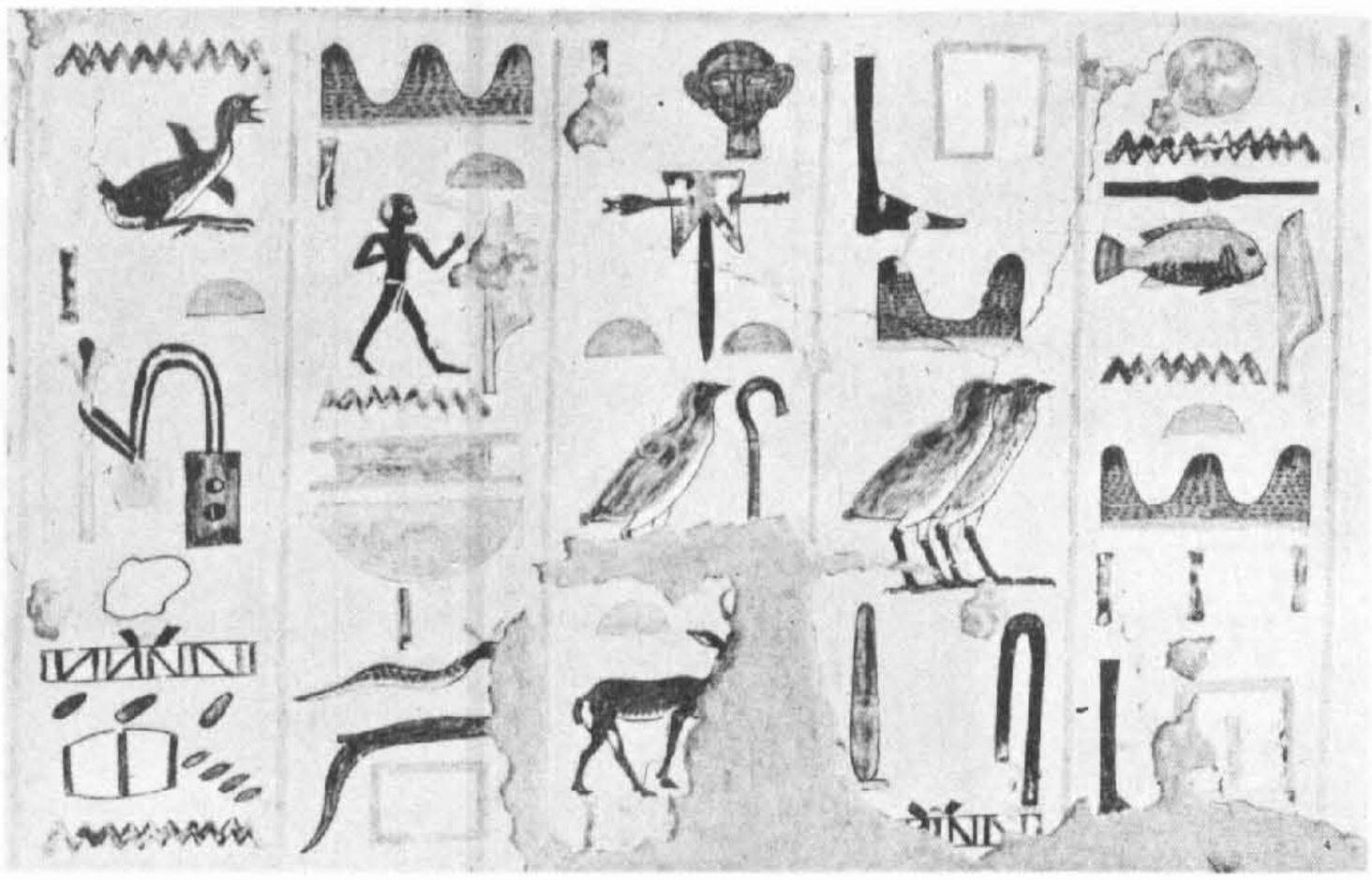
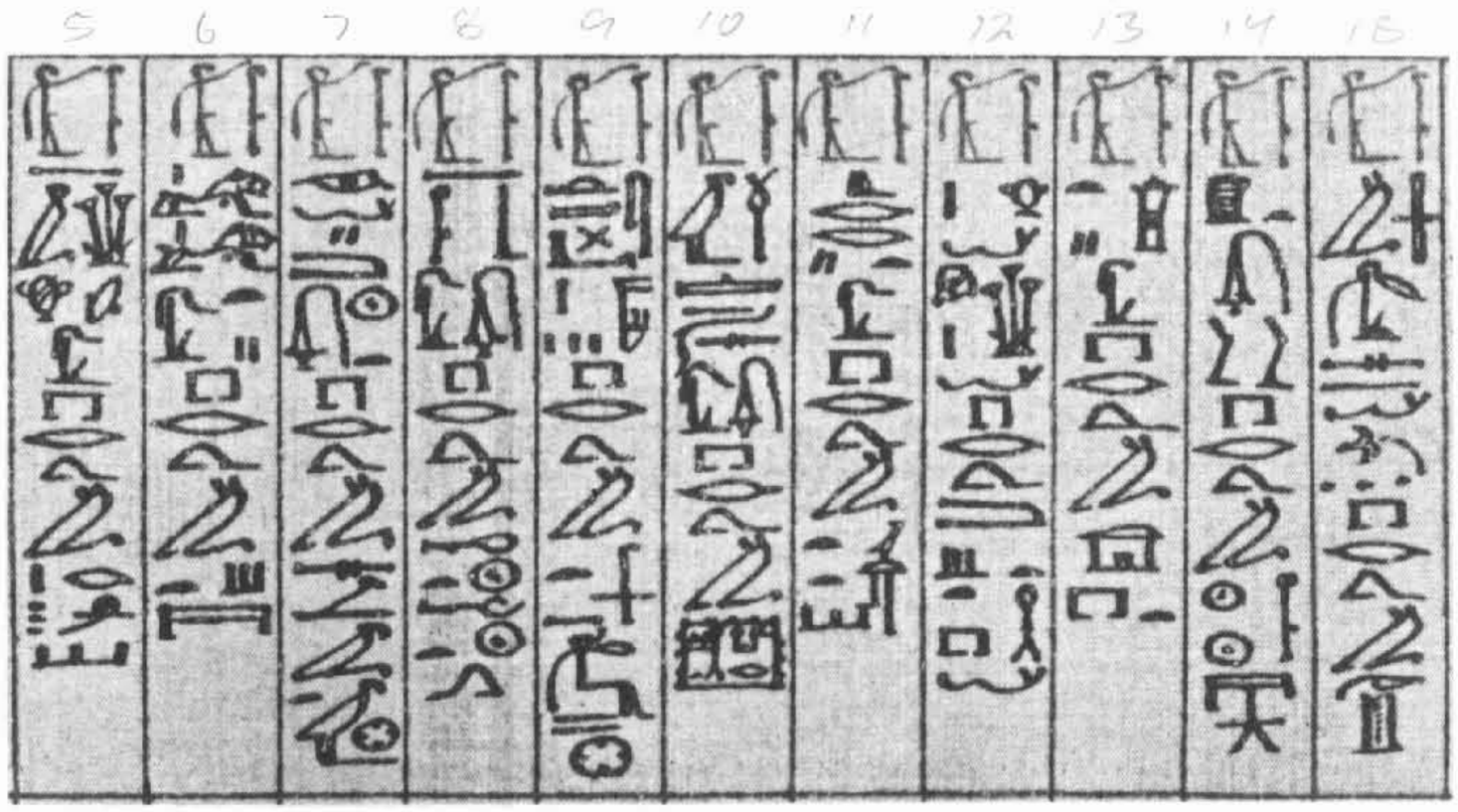
PLATE I



ELABORATE PAINTED HIEROGLYPHS FROM A THEBAN TOMB

HIEROGLYPHS INCISED UPON A LIMESTONE STELA



CURSIVE HIEROGLYPHS WRITTEN WITH A REED ON PAPYRUS

DIFFERENT STYLES OF HIEROGLYPHIC WRITING (DYN. XVIII)

EGYPTIAN GRAMMAR

BEING AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF HIEROGLYPHS

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§ 4. **Different stages of the language.**[1] Bearing in mind the fact that the written language reflects the spoken language of the different periods only to a limited extent, and that monumental records on stone are always more conservative than business documents and letters on potsherds and papyrus, we may roughly distinguish the following linguistic stages:

Old Egyptian: the language of Dynasties I–VIII, about 3180 to 2240 B.C.[2] This may be taken to include the language of the Pyramid Texts (below, § 13), which, however, displays certain peculiarities of its own and is written in a special orthography. Otherwise the surviving documents of this stage are mainly official or otherwise formal—funerary formulae and tomb-inscriptions, including some biographical texts. Old Egyptian passes with but little modification into

Middle Egyptian, possibly the vernacular of Dynasties IX–XI, about 2240–1990 B.C., later contaminated with new popular elements. In the later form it survived for some monumental and literary purposes right down to Graeco-Roman times, while the earlier form was retained as the religious language.

Late Egyptian: the vernacular of Dynasties XVIII–XXIV, about 1573 to 715 B.C., exhibited chiefly in business documents and letters, but also in stories and other literary compositions, and to some extent also in the official monuments from Dyn. XIX onwards. There are but few texts, however, wherein the vernacular shows itself unmixed with the 'classical' idiom of Middle Egyptian. Various foreign words make their appearance. For some other characteristics, see above, pp. 3–4.

Demotic: this term is loosely applied to the language used in the books and documents written in the script known as Demotic (see below, § 8), from Dyn. XXV to late Roman times (715 B.C. to A.D. 470). Here again the old 'classical' idiom is blended with later, vernacular elements, often inextricably.

Coptic: the old Egyptian language in its latest developments, as written in the Coptic script, from about the third century A.D. onwards; so called because it was spoken by the Copts,[3] the Christian descendants of the ancient Egyptians, in whose churches it is read, though not understood, even at the present day. After the Arab conquest (A.D. 640) Coptic was gradually superseded by Arabic, and became extinct as a spoken tongue in the sixteenth century. Coptic is written in the Greek alphabet supplemented by seven special characters derived ultimately from the hieroglyphs,

[1] B. H. STRICKER, 'De Indeeling der Egyptische Taalgeschiedenis', in *Oudheidkundige Mededeelingen*, XXV, Leyden, 1944.

[2] The dates adopted are approximately those given by SEWELL in *The Legacy of Egypt*, Oxford, 1942; those prior to Dyn. XII are much disputed.

[3] The name Copt is doubtless a corruption of the Greek 'Aiguptos', i.e. Egypt.

namely: ⲱ = *sh* = hieroglyphic 𓈙 *š(ꜣ)*
ϥ = *f* = „ 𓆑 *f*
ϧ = *kh* = „ 𓎛 *ḫ(ꜣ)*, only in the Boḥairic dialect;
the Akhmimic ⳉ, a differentiation from ϩ, answers the same purpose.
ϩ = *h* = hieroglyphic 𓉔 *ḥ*
ϫ = *dj* = „ 𓈎 *ḏ(ꜣ)*
ϭ = *g* = „ 𓎡 *k*
ϯ = *ti* = „ 𓏏 *ḏi*

The importance of Coptic philologically is due to its being the only form of Egyptian in which the vowels are regularly written.[1] It must not be forgotten, however, that Coptic represents a far later stage of the language than even the most vulgar examples of late Egyptian. The vocabulary is very different from that of the older periods and includes many Greek loan-words, even such grammatical particles as μέν and δέ. The word-order is more Greek than Egyptian. To a certain extent, at least, Coptic is a semi-artificial literary language elaborated by the native Christian monks; at all events it is extensively influenced by Greek biblical literature. The first tentative efforts to transcribe the old Egyptian language into Greek letters belong to the second century A.D., and are of a pagan character (horoscopes, magical texts, and the like). Several dialects of Coptic are distinguished, of which the following are the most important:

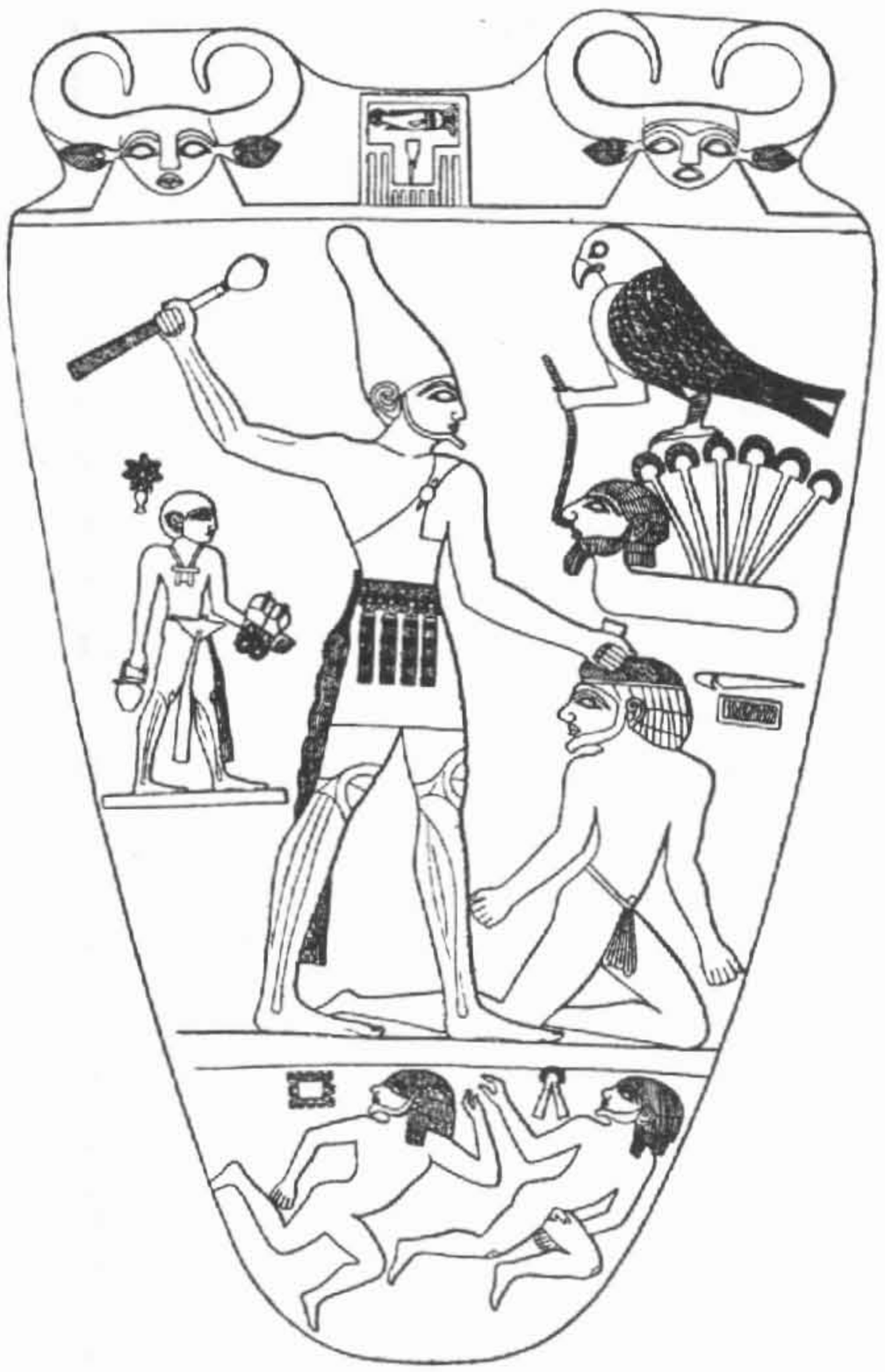
1. **Akhmîmic**: the old dialect of Upper Egypt, which early gave place to Ṣaʿīdic.
2. **Ṣaʿîdic** (less correctly written Sahidic): the dialect of Thebes, later used for literary purposes throughout the whole of Upper Egypt.
3. **Boḥairic**: doubtless originally the dialect of the Western Delta only,[2] but later, after the removal of the Patriarchate to Cairo in the eleventh century, the literary idiom of the whole of Egypt.

B. THE EGYPTIAN WRITING

§ 5. The **hieroglyphic writing**[3] is an offshoot of **pictorial art,** a very early and important function of which was to provide a visible record of facts and occurrences, accessible to those who for one reason or another were beyond the range of the spoken word. The limitations of pictorial art as a medium for conveying or storing information are, of course, obvious; and recorded history may be considered to have been non-existent until, shortly before the end of the Pre-dynastic period, the Egyptians discovered the principle of the **rebus** or **charade.** The new departure consisted in using the pictures of things, not to denote those things themselves or any

[1] See Appendix A at the end of the book.
[2] See CRUM's remarks, *JEA.* 27, 180.
[3] For the general theory see SETHE, *Das hieroglyphische Schriftsystem*, Leipzig, 1935; also in wider perspective, ID., *Vom Bilde zum Buchstaben*, Leipzig, 1939. A popular account by the present writer, *JEA.* 2, 61.

cognate notions, but to indicate certain other entirely different things not easily susceptible of pictorial representation, *the names of which chanced to have a similar sound.* Obviously proper names could only be communicated in this way, and it is perhaps



Verso OF THE SLATE PALETTE OF NARMER (DYN. I).

This is one of the oldest specimens of Egyptian writing known. The name of the king, written with the *nʿr*-fish and the *mr*-chisel, occupies the rectangle (below, p. 72) between the Hathor-heads. The other small hieroglyphs give the names or titles of the persons over whose heads they are written; the captured chieftain may have been named Washi (harpoon *wʿ*, pool *š*). The group at top on right was probably intended as explanation of the picture in the centre; at this early date the gist of complete sentences could apparently be conveyed only by symbolical groups of which the elements suggested separate words. The conjectural meaning is: The falcon-god Horus (i.e. the king) leads captive the inhabitants of the papyrus-land (*Tȝ-mḥw* 'the Delta').[1]

with them that hieroglyphic writing began (see the annexed cut). The method was that by which Prior Burton, in the Middle Ages, playfully symbolized his name by a thistle or *burr* placed upon a barrel or *tun*. In similar manner, the notion of high

[1] See RANKE in *Studia Orientalia* (Helsingfors, 1925), 167 ff.; KEIMER in *Aegyptus*, 7, 169 ff.

numbers such as 'thousand' or 'ten thousand' could only have been conveyed pictorially by the thousandfold or ten-thousandfold repetition of a stroke or of the object to which the number referred; and even if the draughtsman had accomplished this laborious task, the spectator desirous of grasping the meaning would have been condemned to the hardly less laborious task of counting the strokes or objects so depicted. The Egyptians adopted a simple way of avoiding this difficulty. The word for 'thousand' in Egyptian was *kha*, and that for 'ten thousand' was *djēbaʿ*; but *kha* in Egyptian also meant 'lotus' and *djēbaʿ* meant 'finger'. In order, therefore, to write '32,000 cattle' in hieroglyphs all that was necessary was to depict three fingers and two lotus-plants in close proximity to the image of an ox, thus :—  . As is hinted by the example just quoted, Egyptian hieroglyphic writing did not attempt completely to replace pictorial elements by sound-elements; throughout the entire course of its history that script remained *a picture-writing eked out by phonetic elements*. Hieroglyphic writing may be said to have come into existence as a properly differentiated entity at the moment when, in a given pictorial representation, one portion of the objects figured was shown in miniature and was clearly intended to be interpreted in terms of language, while the other portion, of larger size, was no less clearly intended to be construed purely visually without reference to language. The development of Egyptian writing is well epitomized in those sculptured scenes on the walls of tombs or temples where what cannot easily be represented pictorially is conveyed by sequences of hieroglyphic signs graven above the figures to which they refer. By this means we may not merely watch the ancient craftsmen at their work, but even overhear their banter and listen to the songs they sang.

§ **6**. Even in the fully developed form of hieroglyphic writing only two classes of signs need be clearly distinguished. These are : (1) **sense-signs** or **ideograms** (Greek *idea* 'form' and *gramma* 'writing'); (2) **sound-signs** or **phonograms** (Greek *phonē* 'sound' and *gramma* 'writing').

1. **Ideograms** or **sense-signs** signify either the actual object depicted, as  'sun', 'hill-country', or else some closely connected notion, as the sun in the sense of 'day', a scribe's palette, water-bowl, and reed-holder in the sense of 'scribe', 'write', or 'paint'.[1]

2. **Phonograms** or **sound-signs** are signs used for spelling, which, although originally ideograms and in many cases still also employed elsewhere as such, have secondarily acquired sound-values on the principle explained in § 5. Examples are *r*, from original 'mouth', in Egyptian *ra*; *p* + *r*, from original 'house', Egyptian *pāru*.[2]

[1] In strictness ideograms represent words rather than objects or notions connected therewith. Nevertheless, substitution of the term 'word-sign' could only obscure the clear distinction above made.

[2] The pronunciations here given are reconstructions from Coptic ⲣⲟ 'mouth' and -ⲛⲱⲣ in ϫⲉⲛⲉⲛⲱⲣ 'roof'.

§ 7. **Vowels not written.**[1] In reading the last section, the student has doubtless noted that the sound-values derived from 𓂝, the ideogram of the 'mouth' (*ra*), and from 𓉔, the ideogram of the 'house' (*pāru*), were said to be, not *ra* and *pāru*, but simply the consonantal elements entering into those two words, namely *r* and *p* + *r*. To put it differently, the Egyptian scribes ignored the vowels in writing. It thus came about that both these signs could be used in a far greater number of different words than would otherwise have been the case: 𓂝 might virtually represent *ră*, *rā*, *rĕ*, *rē*, *ăr*, *ār*, *ĕr*, *ēr*, or any other combination of vowel and *r* that the Egyptian language might contain; similarly 𓉔 might stand, not only for *pāru*, but also for *pĕr*, *āpr*, *epr*, *epra*, and so forth. A like neglect of the vowels is seen in Phoenician, Hebrew, and Arabic, though in certain other Semitic scripts (Babylonian, Ethiopic) the vocalization is always indicated. The reason for the Egyptian omission of the vowels is not far to seek. It is characteristic of the family of languages to which Egyptian belongs that one and the same word presents different vocalizations according to the forms that it assumes and the contexts in which it appears; thus the ideogram for 'house' 𓉔, pronounced *pār* (from *pāru*) in isolation, may well have represented **pĕr*[2] when followed by a genitive and **pră*(*yyu*) in the plural. Such a variability of the vowels could not fail to engender the feeling that the consonants were all that mattered, whereby it became easier to utilize the sign 𓉔 for writing other words pronounced with *p*+*r* in that order, whatever vowels they may have possessed. In actual fact 𓉔 is found in the writing of words which we have reason to believe may have been spoken as **prāref* or **perrāref*, 'he habitually goes up', and **prāyet* 'spring'.

§ 8. **Hieroglyphic writing** is only one of three kinds of script which in course of time were evolved in Ancient Egypt. Out of hieroglyphic sprang a more cursive writing known to us as **hieratic,** and out of hieratic again there emerged, towards 700 B.C., a very rapid script formerly sometimes called **enchorial** but now always known as **demotic.** None of these styles of writing utterly banished the others, but each as it arose restricted the domain of its progenitor. In the Graeco-Roman period all three were in use contemporaneously.

Hieroglyphic owes its name to the fact that in the latest times it was employed almost exclusively for 'sacred' (Greek *hīeros*) inscriptions 'sculptured' (Greek *glūpho*) on temple-walls or on public monuments. At the outset hieroglyphic was used for all purposes; on stelae of stone and the like the signs are incised, or more rarely in raised relief, without interior markings; in temples and tombs where their decorative effect was of account the hieroglyphs were often executed with the most elaborate detail and beautifully coloured; upon papyrus the outlines were, on the other hand, abbreviated to a very considerable extent. For specimens of these different types of

[1] Sethe's convincing views on this topic are vindicated by De Buck in *Bibl. Or.* 1, 11 against Scharff in *Sitz. Bay. Ak.* 1942, 72, n. 311.

[2] The asterisk * indicates that the reconstruction so marked is purely hypothetical.

hieroglyphic writing see the Frontispiece, Plate I. As time went on, hieroglyphic became restricted more and more to monumental purposes, though for religious texts it was in general employment even on papyrus down to the end of Dyn. XX; as an occasional medium for writing texts on potsherds or papyrus it survives right down to Christian times.

Hieratic,[1] so called because in the Graeco-Roman age it was the usual script employed by the priests (Greek *hieratikos* 'priestly'), is the name now given to all the earlier styles of writing cursive enough for the original pictorial forms of the signs to be no longer clearly recognizable. Hieratic was nothing more, in the beginning, than hieroglyphic in the summary and rounded forms resulting from the rapid manipulation of a reed-pen as contrasted with the angular and precise shapes arising from the use of the chisel. Under the Old Kingdom, hieratic is hardly differentiated from hieroglyphic. Under the Middle Kingdom and in the Eighteenth Dynasty hieratic is invariably used on papyrus, except for religious texts; it is developing a relatively consistent orthography of its own and distinguishes both more and less cursive varieties. Religious texts on papyrus begin to be written regularly in hieratic about Dyn. XXI, and from that time onward sporadic inscriptions on stone in the same script are found. In the latest period, as already said, hieratic was generally employed by the priests when writing religious texts on papyrus.

Demotic[2] (Greek *dēmōtikos* 'popular'), or **enchorial** (Greek *enkhōrios* 'native') as some of the earliest decipherers called it, is a very rapid form of hieratic that made its first appearance about the time of the Ethiopian Dynasty. Throughout the Ptolemaic and Roman ages it was the ordinary writing of daily life, and is occasionally found even upon stelae of stone.

For specimens of hieratic and demotic see Plate II. With demotic we are not concerned at all in this work, and with hieratic we deal only in so far as it has been converted or, to employ the usual term, 'transcribed', into hieroglyphic. Individual hieratic hands differ as all handwriting is apt to differ; for this reason Egyptologists, before translating a hieratic text, habitually transcribe it into hieroglyphs, just as the modern printer sets up a modern author's manuscript in type.

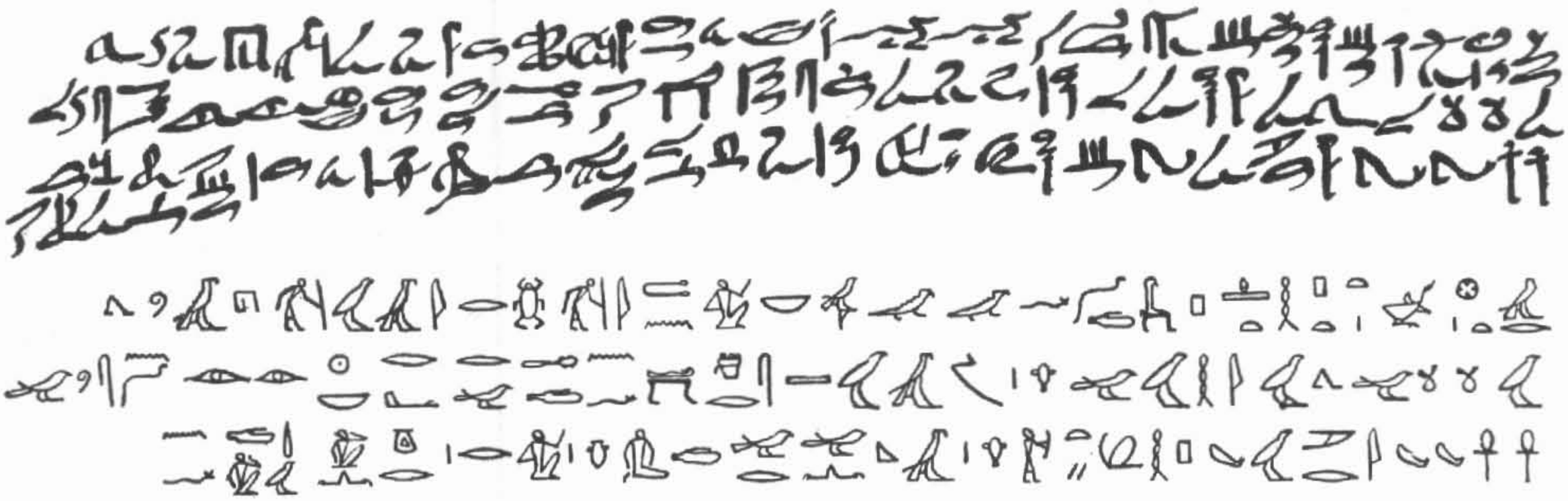
C. BRIEF HISTORY OF EGYPTIAN PHILOLOGY

§ 9. The tradition and its interpreters.[3] As Christianity spread throughout Egypt, the knowledge of the old native scripts and lore, long since the jealously

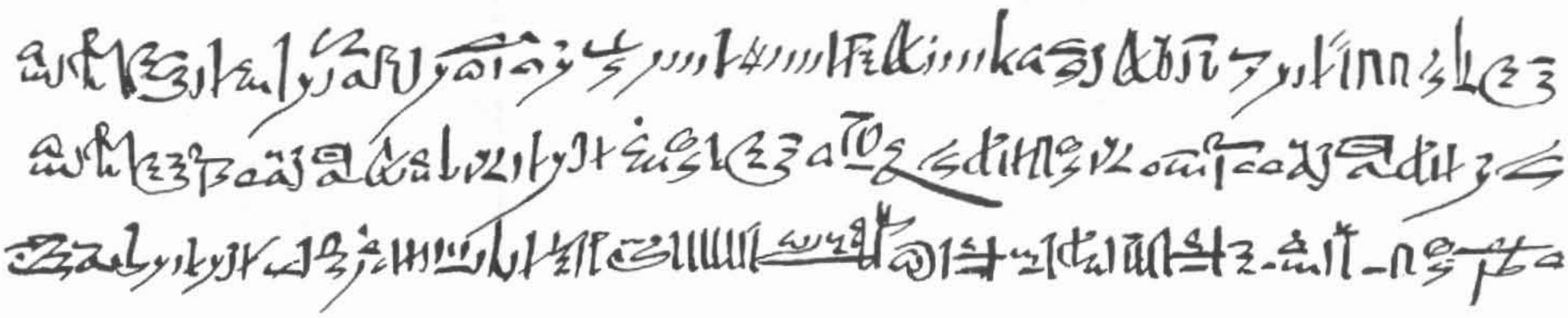
[1] See MÖLLER, *Hieratische Paläographie*, 3 vols., Leipzig, 1909–12; *Ergänzungsheft*, 1936; also ID., *Hieratische Lesestücke*, 3 vols., Leipzig, 1909–10. On the transcription of hieratic see Add. § 63 A.

[2] See W. SPIEGELBERG, *Demotische Grammatik*, Heidelberg, 1925; W. ERICHSEN, *Demotische Lesestücke*, 2 vols., Leipzig, 1937–9; FR. LEXA, *Grammaire démotique égyptienne*, I, II, Prague, 1939–40.

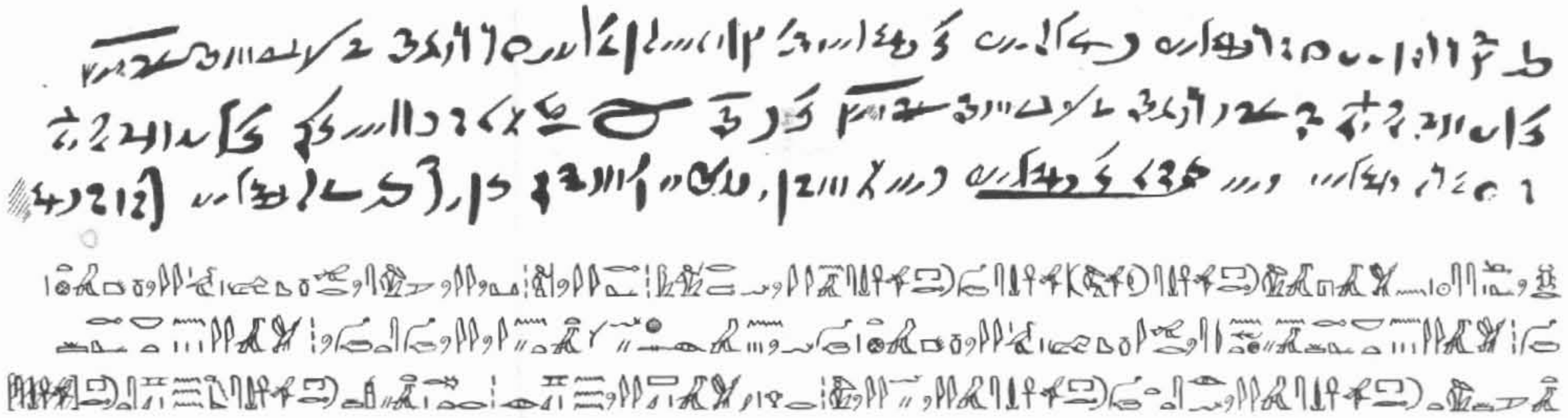
[3] See P. MARESTAING, *Les écritures égyptiennes et l'antiquité classique*, Paris, 1913; H. SOTTAS and E. DRIOTON, *Introduction à l'étude des hiéroglyphes*, Paris, 1922.



LITERARY HIERATIC OF THE TWELFTH DYNASTY (*Pr.* 4, 2–4),
WITH TRANSCRIPTION



OFFICIAL HIERATIC OF THE TWENTIETH DYNASTY (*Abbott* 5, 1–3),
WITH TRANSCRIPTION



LITERARY DEMOTIC OF THE THIRD CENTURY B.C. (*Dem. Chron.* 6, 1–3),
WITH TRANSCRIPTION

SPECIMENS OF HIERATIC AND DEMOTIC

with hieroglyphic transcriptions in a modern Egyptological hand.