

# Reading the Rosetta Stone: Introduction to Ptolemaic Hieroglyphs

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1      1/26/2026

- most signs in “Ptolemaic” hieroglyphs reflect standard, conventional use, as reflected in e.g. Gardiner’s sign list
  - example from temple text: the one unusual sign is a dog [jackal?] signifying the phonetic value *ii*
  - Ptolemaic has “7000” signs, but in practice, most texts rely predominantly on the “700” or so standard signs that most students will know
  - Leitz on a ritual scene from the temple of Dendara: 362 signs, 342 of which are conventional, 10 are common Late Egyptian substitute uniliterals
- Ptolemaic inscriptions often juxtapose playful or unusual writings against more standard writings



*hwi.n=f h3=sn m inb pn r ifd nn iry m ifd*

He made protection around them with this wall on the four sides of these [gods].

- standing baboon with arms raised: an unusual but common Ptolemaic writing of *nfr*
- TempleTexte: <https://www.tempelexte.uni-tuebingen.de/portal/>
- [ *The Temple of Esna: An Evolving Translation*, by David Klotz: <https://bookdown.org/shemanefer/Esna3/> ]
- “Ptolemaic” can be a misleading term. Ptolemaic hieroglyphs do not only appear in Ptolemaic or Roman inscriptions. Conversely, not all such inscriptions stick to “Ptolemaic” readings/values of given hieroglyphs, but may use older readings/values.
- P3-di-Inn-nb-ns.t-t3.wy*: In his copy of the Book of the Dead, his name uses the Ptolemaic obelisk sign for the name Amun
- m-hnw* evolves phonetically to sound like *mw hr nw*, which is then spelled: *m(w) hr nw*
- pri* spelled with an *f* viper leaving a box(!); *'k* spelled with the viper entering the box
- the principles by which Ptolemaic glyphs derive their values were not new to the Ptolemaic Period, but (expansions of) older, existing principles

- Traditional Egyptian: “From 404 BCE [to] 394 CE hieroglyphic texts were in general composed in the high-status language variety termed Traditional Egyptian.” <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8g73w3gp>
  - inconsistent *n* vs *m* distinction
  - inconsistent *sdm=f* vs *sdm.n=f*
  - reduction of statives, infinitives, affixes
  - phonetic changes reflected in script
  - imitation of earlier phases
  - text-specific idiosyncrasies
  - attested from the New Kingdom through Roman Periods
  - “linguistic interference” from all stages of the language
- Joachim Quack doesn’t believe that Ptolemaic hieroglyphs exist as a true separate category: There is no phase of the language that can be definitively called Ptolemaic.
- the following glyphs all signified phonetic k in what Champollion read:



- Leitz: “[Ptolemaic] is not some arcane branch”!
- hieroglyph theory:
  - a literal description of the *ba* bird as depicted in the *b3* sign
  - Dendera VI, 157, 2: “As for Sobek who is in this place, it is Seth. As for the feather which is upon his head, it is Osiris.” Then a glyph of a literal crocodile wearing a *maat* feather
- BD 17: “I know the name of this Medjed, who is among those inside of the temple of Osiris, who shoots with his eye, but one cannot see him; who circles heaven with flames of his mouth, who announces the flood, but one cannot see him.”
- our main sign list:

Kurth, *A Ptolemaic A Ptolemaic Sign-List. Hieroglyphs used in the Temples of the Graeco-Roman Period of Egypt and their Meanings*

- our main dictionary/lexicon:

Wilson, *A Ptolemaic Lexikon: a Lexicographical Study of the Texts in the Temple of Edfu* (*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*)

- derivation principles:
  - acrophony [think: “acronyms”]: we will mainly avoid this
  - the consonantal principle: drop weak sounds in multiliterals
  - phonetic shifts: *p* vs *b*, *m* to *b*, *m* vs *n*, *d* vs *t*, *k* vs *k̥*
  - class (*f* vs *d* snakes) and shape (*h* vs *r̥* signs) substitutions, synonymy
  - direct representation (viper leaving/entering box; feather-wearing crocodile; “colorful of feathers, who comes forth from the horizon”)
  - antonomasia (*ntr* ‘*B* < epithet of Ihy < sistrum player, *ikr* < epithet of Thoth < ibis), metonymy (*ny-sw.t* < King of Upper Egypt < white crown; *ntr* < god < star [compare: Sumerian *dingir* sign])
  - synecdoche
  - logograms, the rebus principle

- puns
- ??? (*t3.wy* < two lands < scarab?)

## 2. 2/2/26

- example derivations of “new” readings:
  - *m3c.(t)-hrw* < “wreath of justification” < Gardiner M2
  - *Imn* < *n m iw* (Gaudard 2010), *i m n* (Sethe 1993), *im + n* (Fairman 1943)
  - *dd*, e.g., in the name *Dd-hr* < *dd mdw.(t)* < *Dhwty*?
- quasi-phonetic spellings of royal names:
  - *Ptwlmys* < Ptolemy
  - *Kliwp3dr3* < Cleopatra
  - *K3ysrs* < Caesar
- use of the dual was fairly limited: e.g., to pairs of gods, pairs of body parts
- like in Late Egyptian (LE):
  - the feminine *-t* was no longer pronounced in the spoken language, so it was often dropped in the script
  - no gender/number agreement needed in the indirect genitive
  - definite articles *p3*, *t3*, *n3*
  - adverbial predicates are tenseless by default, with tense marked by converters
- *iw<sup>c</sup> n ntr.wy pri.wy* < “heir of the manifest gods” < heir of Πτολεμαῖος Ἐπιφανῆς Εὐχάριστος < heir of *Ptolemaios Epiphanes Eukháristos* < heir of Ptolemy V the Manifest, the Beneficent < Ptolemy VIII
- “Ptolemy VIII was a super-not-great dude... It was very Game-of-Thrones in this time period”
- *B3k.t*, “The Shining One”, is an epithet (not replacement) for *Km.t*, much like “a shining city on a hill” for Puritan Massachusetts
- If you memorize the cult epithets of the various Ptolemies, it can help with identifying these kings in Egyptian texts where they are named only by epithet.
- *shm ‘nh Imn*, “living image of Amun”, is a Ptolemaic evocation of the New Kingdom *Tw.t-‘nh-Imn* (!)
- the *nty* in *‘h3y nty ‘3.t rwd.(t)*: maybe a precursor of the Coptic indefinite *nt-* prefix
- updates to the suffix pronouns:
  - -*tw* established as the impersonal 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular pronoun
  - -*w* now used as 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural pronoun
- Zoom chat: “what does imps mean?” “impersonal”
- in the spelling of *hy*, “male, husband”: a penis
- *is*, derived from *ist/ist*, marks the start of an independent clause, usually an adverbial predicate
- Some people claim that there are no Egyptian creation myths with creator goddesses. “I’m here to tell you, that’s bunk!”
- the particle *iw* can take different, contradictory roles:
  - when used as in the Middle Egyptian (ME) *iw* for (circumstantial) adverbial predicates, it is a circumstantial converter marking an independent clause
  - when used as in LE, it marks a dependent clause
- *wnn.in*: imperfect converter used in narrative contexts

- *wn*: imperfect converter used in non-narrative contexts
- Esna 206: a Neith creation myth documented on a single column of the temple of Esna

### 3. 2/9/26

- How to identify when *iw* is marking the circumstantial first present? Sometimes, can tell from whether the surrounding text has more ME or more LE characteristics.
- adverbial predicates can often occur with no introductory particle
- cartouches:
  - the Greek cult epithet usually appears outside, not inside, cartouches
  - within the birth-name cartouche of a Ptolemy, the name is often followed by the epithets *'nh d.t mry Pth*
  - within the throne-name cartouche, the name is often followed by *shm 'nh Imn*
  - nearby the name of the ruler, one often finds epithets for the parent(s) of the ruler
- example use of epithets from the Rosetta Stone:



*hnty n ny-sw.t bity Ptlmys 'nh d.t mry Pth ntr pri nb nfr.w*

statue of the king of upper and lower Egypt, Ptolemy, living forever, beloved of Ptah, the manifest god, lord of perfection

- [Kom Ombo: site of a Ptolemaic temple dedicated “dually” to Sobek and Haroeris (*Hr-wr*)]
- an oddity: they switch between *Sbk* and *Sbk-R* even in the same (columnar) text
- Aurelio: Would *kairos* (καῖρος) be an appropriate translation of *3.t*?
- In the Getty and other places, they refer to Trajan as “Augustus Caesar”: but if you look at the actual cartouches, it’s Trajan with the *title* Autocrator Caesar
- last line of the Rosetta Stone:

[*hti=tw*] *sh3wy pn hr 'h3y nty 3.t rwd.(t) m sš n mdw.w-ntr*

This decree should be engraved upon a stela of hard stone in hieroglyphs [“the writing of the gods’ words”].

- apart from the Rosetta Stone, most of the texts we’re reading in class are from temple walls, and occur as description of a (theological) scene
- common structure of a temple scene: the king gives an offering to a god; the god then promises some benefit to the king
- The Ptolemaic spellings of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person masculine and feminine dependent pronouns often overlap: Why? Because by that point in time, *sw* and *sy* were being pronounced the same.

- infrequently, they use the LE dependent pronouns in place of the ME ones: *tw=i, tw=k, tw=t, tw=n, tw=tn* in place of *wi, tw, tn, n, tn*
- Why is *hpr* spelled without the complementary r? Because by that point in time, they were not pronouncing the r: They pronounced it *shape* [as in Coptic].

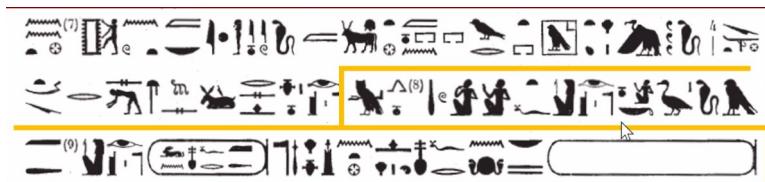
#### 4. 2/16/26

- “When you see those winged [sun] disks everywhere in temples in Egypt, those are depictions of Horus of Edfu.”
- Monumental inscription sight-reading practice:



*snd n šbk-R<sup>c</sup> nb Nby.t ntr<sup>c</sup>3 nb hw.t hnt*

Have fear of Sobek-Re, lord of Ombos, great god, lord of the temple of the south.



*mi n hrw=i it=i Wsir  
ink s3=k hr m3<sup>c</sup> hrw  
Wsir Wn-nfr m3<sup>c</sup> hrw ntr<sup>c</sup>3 hry ib Iwn.t  
htp hr=k nfr n ny-sw.t bity nb t3.wy ( )|*

Come to my voice, my father, Osiris.  
I am your son, Horus, true of voice.  
Osiris Wennefer [“Perfect Being”], true of voice, great god who is in Dendera.  
May your beautiful face be content with the dual king, the lord of the two lands, ( ).

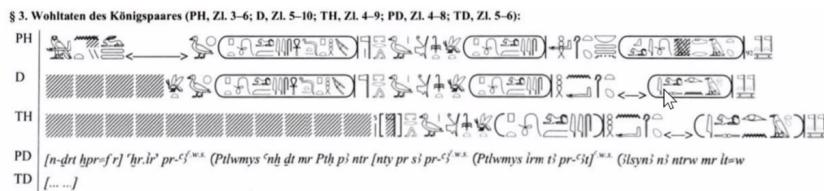
- LE *sdm=f* forms:
  - perfective *sdm=f*: a.k.a, preterite, perfect
  - prospective *sdm=f*: a.k.a., subjunctive

- ambiguity in the phrase *iw<sup>c</sup> n ntr.wy pri.wy*: could be either Ptolemy VI or Ptolemy VIII, since they were brothers
- exercise: find *iw<sup>c</sup> n ntr.wy pri.wy* in Urk. VIII, no. 76
- “The left eye will be joining the right eye”
- real example where the feminine 3<sup>rd</sup>-person dependent pronoun is spelled with -w, because the (semi)vowel is just not pronounced anymore:

*sw m hm.t n Imn-R<sup>c</sup>*

She [not “he”] is the wife of Amun-Re.

- “They were supposed to write his mother’s name, but accidentally wrote his first wife’s name: Cleopatra [the First].” “They should all have been named Arsinoe.” “Right. Or Berenike... We have, what, seven Cleopatras...”



- very common in monumental captions:

*dd mdw.(w) in* [name of god]

speaking [infinitive] of word[s] by [name of god]

- in reference books: “Tableau” = an illustrated scene; “Titre et Formule” = the title caption
- tw<sup>3</sup> p.t* = “raising the sky [said of the king-as-Shu]”
- mi n=k / n=t* = “take for yourself”
- the *hr / r + infinitive* construction:
  - in Ptolemaic writing [or LE], *hr + \_\_\_* need not have progressive aspect
  - may be modified by preceding converters
  - may omit the *hr* or *r*, as they were no longer included in the spoken version
- in Ptolemaic, *iw=i*, *iw=k*, *iw=t*, etc. will just refer to the LE third future
- Coptic ψλα ςωτμ comes from Egyptian *hr sdm*, not *hr sd़m*
- “Remember, if you’re Egyptian, you’re facing south. So ‘the West’ is to the right.”
- “[In the West], you could get attacked by Apophis; you have the damned who get their heads cut off every night...Of course, in the Christian era, the West is recast as the bad pagan place.”

## 5. 2/23/26

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## 6. 3/2/26

7.      **3/9/26**

8.      **3/16/26**