

An Introduction to Ancient Egyptian
OFFERING FORMULAE

Sem Essessi

Foreward by <someone>

January 25, 2025

A royal offering by Osiris the lord of Busiris...
...the great god, the lord of Abydos...

... a voice offering of bread, beer, oxen, fowl, alabaster and linen...
... and all the things, beautiful and pure, on which a god lives...

... for the ka of the revered one, my great ancestor, Hannibal Barca...
...true of voice.

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Foreword

Someone else needs to write this explaining...

- their relationship with the authors
- how it is useful to people
- how they contributed to the work
- signing their name at the end

Preface

Learning the standard form of the offering formula, then learning to translate its many variations has been a wonderful exercise to help me learn the language of Ancient Egypt.

Ancestor worship is a near universal religious practice and one of the oldest we know of. The offering formula was important for the particular flavour practised in Ancient Egypt and many hieroglyphic inscriptions are of this kind.

I hope that this book will be useful to those interested in learning hieroglyphs by providing a practical use case and effective reference. I also hope that it will be useful for those seeking to practice the same kind of religion as the ancients.

Notation

The transliteration notation used in this book is a variant of the *Manuel de Codage* (MdC), referring to an extended version of *Gardiner's sign list*.

MdC is an Egyptological standard for computer encoding of hieroglyphic text based on the phonetic values. It was first published in 1988 and continues to be revised.

It uses a subset of the Latin alphabet, with capitalisation and Gardiner sign codes used for greater accuracy. It also includes markup characters to encode positioning and arrangement of hieroglyphs, although these will not be used in this book.

In this book a variation is used which prefers phonetic values to sign codes and adds some additional encodings. For convenience this variant is referred to as MdC+.

The Gardiner sign list categorises hieroglyphs into types, and assigns each one a unique code. Although a given hieroglyph may fit into multiple categories, they occur only once, and usually in the first applicable category. It was first published in 1927, although the discovery of new glyphs and variants has required its extension since then.

For example, the hieroglyph G10 portrays a falcon, representing the god Sokar, standing on a barque on top of a sled.

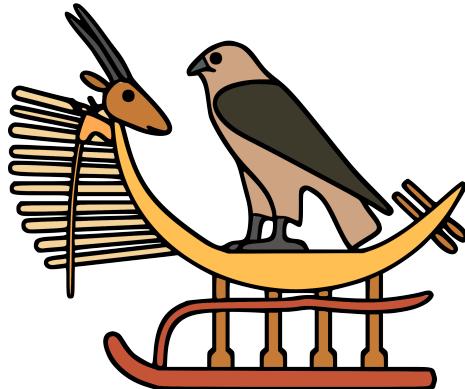


Figure 1: Hieroglyph G10

It could reasonably fit into the categories G (Birds), P (Ships and parts of ships), R (Temple furniture or sacred emblems) or U (Agriculture, crafts, and professions). It appears only once in the G category.

Transliterations used in this book will place in bold the parts to be vocalised. Any implied or otherwise absent hieroglyphs will be in curved brackets, and determinatives in square brackets.

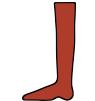
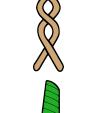
Manuel de Codage variant (MdC+)

These tables define the encoding used throughout this book for transliteration, and to render hieroglyphs in a way that can be vocalised.

Uniliteral signs

Uniliteral signs represent individual sounds. They give us something like an alphabet, but are not used alone. In many cases they are used as phonetic compliments to assist in reading multiliteral signs.

They are presented separately to give the reader a clear impression of the set of sounds used in the ancient Egyptian language.

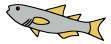
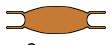
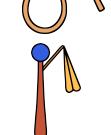
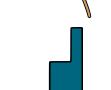
Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	A	;	G1
	a	‘	D36
	b	b	D58
	d	d	D46
	D	ɖ	I10
	f	f	I9
	g	g	W11
	Ğ	ğ	V33
	h	h	O4
	H	ħ	V28
	i	ɿ	M17
	k	k	V31

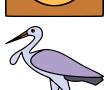
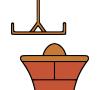
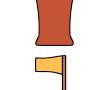
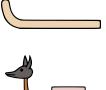
Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	I	I	E23
	m	m	G17
	M	m	Aa15
	n	n	N35
	N	n	S3
	p	p	Q3
	q	q	N29
	r	r	D21
	s	s	S29
	S	š	N37
	t	†	X1
	T	‡	V13
	w	w	G43
	W	w	V1
	x	ḥ	Aa1
	X	ḥ	F32
	y	y	M17a
	Y	y	Z4
	z	z	O34

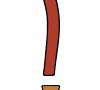
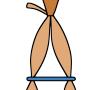
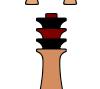
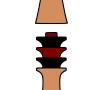
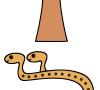
Multiliteral and other signs

These signs are used for compounds of multiple sounds or as determinatives, numbers or grammatical hints. For example, the Z2 and Z3 hieroglyphs occurring early in the table are plural markers. The Z1 hieroglyph is used to denote the end of a word or to fill space between words for a more beautiful composition.

Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	---	---	Z3
	I	I	Z1
	III	III	Z2
	10	10	V20
	100	100	V1
	1000	1000	M12
	aA	ꜥ	O29
	AA	ꜣ	G2
	ab	ꜥb	D59
	Ab	ꜣb	U23
	abA	ꜥbꜣ	S42
	Abd	ꜥbd	N11
	Aby	ꜥby	E24

Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	ad	‿d	K3
	aD	‿d̩	V26
	aH	‿h	T24
	aHa	‿h̩	P6
	aHA	‿h̩ɔ	D34
	Ai	‿i	T12
	Ams	‿ms	S44
	anx	‿n̩h	S34
	Anx	‿n̩h	S34
	aq	‿q	G35
	Ar	‿r	T12
	arq	‿rq	V12
	As	‿s	Q1

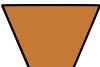
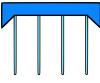
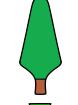
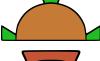
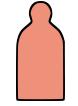
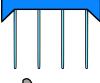
Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	aSA	‘š;	I1
	Af	ʒtʃ	S8
	Aw	ʒw	F40
	awt	ʒwt	S39
	Ax	ʒh	G25
	Axt	ʒht	N27
	bA	b;	G29
	baHi	bəhì	G32
	bAs	bəs	W2
	bd	bd	R9
	bdt	bdt	M34
	bH	bh	F18
	biA	bì;	U16

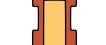
Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	bit	b <small>ɪ</small> t	L2
	bnr	bnr	M30
	bz	bz	K5
	DA	d <small>ʒ</small>	U28
	Dam	d <small>ʒ</small> m	S41
	db	db	F16
	Db	d <small>ʒ</small> b	G22
	Dba	d <small>ʒ</small> b <small>ɛ</small>	D50
	DbA	d <small>ʒ</small> b <small>ɔ</small>	T25
	dd	dd	R11
	Dd	d <small>ʒ</small> d	R11
	DD	d <small>ʒ</small> d	I11
	DHwty	d <small>ʒ</small> hwty	C3

Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	di	dī	X8
	dmD	d <u>m</u> d	S23
	Dr	d <u>ṛ</u>	M36
	DrD	d <u>r</u> d	F21
	dSr	dšr	G27
	Dsr	d <u>š</u> r	D45
	dSrt	dšrt	S3
	Dw	d <u>w</u>	N26
	dwA	d <u>w</u> ȝ	N14
	dwAt	d <u>w</u> t	N15
	fnD	fnd	D19
	gb	gb	G38
	gH	gh	D56

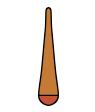
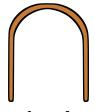
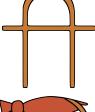
Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	gHs	ghs	D56
	gm	gm	G28
	grg	grp	U17
	HA	ḥ ³	F4
	HAt	ḥ ³ t	F4
	hb	hb	U13
	Hb	ḥb	W3
	HD	ḥd	T3
	HDD	ḥdd	T6
	HDt	ḥdt	S1
	Hfn	ḥfn	I8
	HH	ḥḥ	C11
	Hm	ḥm	N42

Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	Hmt	ḥmt	U24
	Hmwt	ḥmw̄t	U24
	Hn	ḥn	M2
	Hnmmt	ḥnmmt	N8
	Hnqt	ḥnqt	W22
	HqA	ḥqɔ̄	S38
	HqAt	ḥqɔ̄t	U11
	Hr	ḥr	D2
	hrw	hrw	N5
	Htp	ḥtp	R4
	Hw	ḥw	F18
	Hwt	ḥwt	O6
	Hz	ḥz	W14

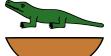
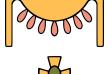
Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	iab	ì·b	W10
	iAb	ì;b	R15
	iAdt	ì;dt	N4
	iaH	ì;h	N11
	iAm	ì;m	M1
	iAt	ì;t	N30
	ib	ì;b	F34
	ibA	ì;bɔ	Y6
	id	ì;d	N41
	idn	ì;dn	F21
	idr	ì;dr	V37
	idt	ì;dt	N4
	iH	ì;h	T24

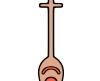
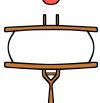
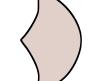
Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	im	ìm	Aa13
	lm	ìm	Z11
	imAx	ìm;h̄	F39
	imi	ìmì	Z11
	imnt	ìmnt	R14
	in	ìn	K1
	inb	ìnb	O36
	ini	ìnì	W25
	inpw	ìnpw	C6
	ipt	ìpt	O45
	ir	ìr	D4
	iri	ìrì	D4
	iry	ìry	A47

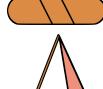
Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	isw	ìsw	F44
	it	ìt	U10
	iTi	ìTì	V15
	iw	ìw	N18
	iwa	ìw̥	F44
	iwn	ìwn	O28
	iz	ìz	M40
	kA	kɔ	D28
	kAp	kɔ:p	R5
	kAr	kɔ:r	O18
	kfA	kfɔ	F22
	km	km	I6
	kp	kp	R5

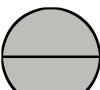
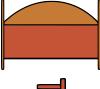
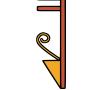
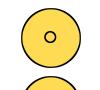
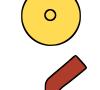
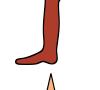
Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	mA	m; ³	U2
	MA	m; ³	U1
	mAat	m; ³ t	C10
	mAi	m; ³ i	E22
	mAw	m; ³ w	G46
	md	md	S43
	mD	m <u>d</u>	V20
	mDAt	m <u>d</u> ³ t	Y1
	mDH	m <u>d</u> h	S10
	mDt	m <u>d</u> t	V19
	mH	m <u>h</u>	V22
	mi	mì	N36
	Mi	mì	W19

Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	mm	mm	G18
	mn	mn	Y5
	mnD	mn <u>d</u>	D27
	mnhd	mnhd	Y3
	mnit	mn <small>it</small>	S18
	mniw	mn <small>iw</small>	A33
	mnw	mn <small>w</small>	C8
	mnx	mn <u>h</u>	U22
	mnxt	mn <u>ht</u>	S27
	mr	mr	U7
	Mr	mr	U6
	mri	mr <u>i</u>	N36
	ms	ms	F31

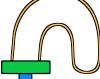
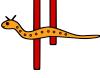
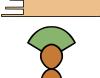
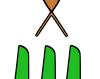
Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	mSa	mš ^c	A12
	msDr	ms <u>d</u> r	F21
	msi	msì	B3
	msn	msn	V32
	mt	mt	D52
	mw	mw	N35a
			
	mwt	mwt	G14
	mxAt	mḥ ^t	U38
	mzH	mzḥ	I3
	nb	nb	V30
	nbty	nbty	G16
	nbw	nbw	S12
	nD	nd	Aa27

Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	nDm	n <u>dm</u>	M29
	nDs	n <u>ds</u>	G37
	nfr	nfr	F35
	nfw	nfw	P5
	nH	n <u>h</u>	G21
	ni	n <u>i</u>	D35
	niwt	n <u>iwt</u>	O49
	nm	n <u>m</u>	T34
	nmt	n <u>mt</u>	T29
	nn	n <u>n</u>	M22a
	nr	n <u>r</u>	H4
	ns	n <u>s</u>	F20
	nSmt	n <u>šmt</u>	K6

Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	nTr	n <u>tr</u>	R8
	nTrw	n <u>trw</u>	R8a
	nw	nw	W24
	nxn	n <u>hn</u>	O47
	nxxw	n <u>hhw</u>	S45
	nzt	nzt	W11
	pA	p:	G47
	pAq	p:q	H3
	pd pD	p <u>d</u> p <u>D</u>	T9 T10
	pH	p <u>h</u>	F22
	pq	pq	H2
	pr	pr	O1

Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	pt pXr	pt ph̪r	N1 F46
	pzD	pzd	N9
	qAb	q:b	F46
	qiz	qìz	A38
	qmA	qm̄	T14
	qnbt	qnbt	O38
	qrsw	qrsw	Q6
	qs	qs	T19
	ra	r̄	N5
	rA	r̄z	N5
	rd	rd	D56
	rdi	rd̄i	X8

Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	rmi	rmī	D9
	rnp	rnp	M4
	rs	rs	T13
	rsw	rsw	M24
	rtH	rth	U31
	rw	rw	E23
	rwd	rwd	T12
	rwD	rwd	T12
	rxyt	rhyt	G23
	sA	s;	Aa17
	SA	s;	M8
	sAH	sḥ	D61
	sAq	s; q	I5

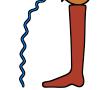
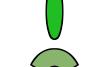
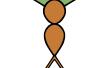
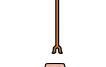
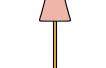
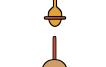
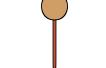
Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	sbA	sbɔ̄	N14
	sbk	sbk	I4
	sbq	sbq	D56
	sd	sd	F33
	Sd	šd	F30
	sDAw	sdɔ̄w	S19
	sDm	sd̪m	F21
	sf	sf	S30
	siA	siɔ̄	S32
	sk	sk	V29
	sm	sm	M21
	Sm	šm	N40
	Sma	šm̄	M26

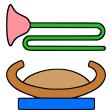
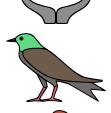
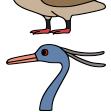
Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	Sms	šms	T18
	sn	sn	T22
	Sn	šn	V7
	Sna	šn ^c	U13
	snD	sn <u>d</u>	G54
	Sndyt	šndyt	S26
	snT	sn <u>t</u>	V5
	snTr	sn <u>t</u> r	R7
	Snwt	šnw <small>t</small>	O51
	Sny	šny	D3
	spAt	sp; <small>t</small>	N24
	spr	spr	F42
	Sps	šps	A50

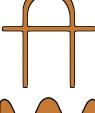
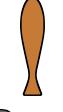
Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	Spsi	špsi	A51
	spt	spt	D24
	spty	spty	D25
	sr	sr	A21
	srqt	srqt	L7
	sS	sš	V6
	SsA	šsɔ:	F5
	sSm	sšm	T31
	sSr	sšr	V33
	st	st	Q1
	sT	s <u>t</u>	S22
	sTA	s <u>t</u> ɔ:	V2
	sTAw	s <u>t</u> ɔ:w	V3

Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	sti	st̄i	F29
	stp	stp	U21
	stX	st̄h	C7
	Styw	štyw	I2
	sw	sw	M23
	Sw	šw	H6
	Swt	šwt	S35
	Swty	šwty	S9
	sxm	sh̄m	S42
	sxmt	sh̄mty	S6
	sXr	sh̄r	T11
	sxt	sh̄t	M20
	Szp	šzp	O42

Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	tA	t̪	N16
	TA	t̪	G47
	TAw	t̪w	P5
	Tb	t̪b	S33
	tHn	t̪n	S15
	THn	t̪n	S15
	ti	t̪i	U33
	tm	t̪m	U15
	TmA	t̪m̄	V19
	tp	t̪p	D1
	tr	t̪r	M6
	txn	t̪n	O25
	tyw	t̪w	G4

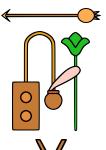
Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	Tz	<u>t</u> z	S24
	wa	w ^c	T21
	wA	w ³	V4
	wab	w ^b	D60
	wAD	w ³ d	M13
	wAH	w ³ h	V29
	wAs	w ³ s	S40
	wbA	wb ³	U26
	wD	w <u>d</u>	V24
	WD	w <u>d</u>	M13
	wDA	w <u>d</u> ³	U28
	wDAT	w <u>d</u> ³ t	D10
	wDb	w <u>d</u> b	N20

Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	wdn	wdn	M11
	wHa	wħ̄	P4
	wHm	wħm	F25
	wn	wn	E34
	wp	wp	F13
	wr	wr	G36
	wrrt	wrrt	T17
	wSA	wš;	G42
	wSm	wšm	H2
	wsr	wsr	F12
	wsx	wsh	S11
	wsxt	wshṭ	O15
	ww	ww	G44

Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	wx	wh	R16
	wz	wz	Q2
	xa	ḥ ^c	N28
	xA	ḥ ^b	M12
	XA	ḥ ^b	K4
	XAr	ḥ ^b r	V19
	xAst	ḥ ^b st	N25
	xAt	ḥ ^b t	R1
	xAw ^t	ḥ ^b wt	R1
	xD ^t	ḥdt	S1
	xm	ḥm	U36
	xn	ḥn	G41
	Xn	ḥn	F26

Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	Xnm	ḥnm	W9
	Xnmw	ḥnmw	C4
	xnt	ḥnt	W17
	xpr	ḥpr	L1
	xprš	ḥprš	S7
	xps	ḥps	F23
	xr	ḥr	A15
	Xr	ḥr	T28
	Xrd	ḥrd	A17
	xrp	ḥrp	S42
	xrw	ḥrw	P8
	xsf	ḥsf	U34
	xt	ḥt	M3

Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	xtm	ḥtm	S20
	xw	ḥw	S37
	zA	zʒ	G39
	zAb	zʒb	E17
	zb	zb	O35
	zH	zħ	O22
	zin	zὶn	T11
	zmA	zmɔ	F36
	zmn	zmn	U32
	zp	zp	O50
	zS	zš	Y3
	zSn	zšn	M9
	zSſt	zšſt	Y8

Hieroglyph	MdC+	Transliteration	Gardiner code
	zw	zw	N5
	zwn	zwn	T11
	zx	zh	Y3
	zxnt	zh_nt	O30
	zzmt	zzmt	E6

Extended Gardiner sign list

Outline

The shape of the offering formula is always the same. It opens with the same standard phrase, invokes a god to pass along the offering, lists the offerings then names the recipient.

Htp-di-nsw

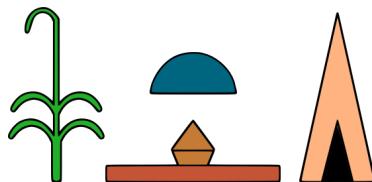


Figure 2: Htp-di-nsw as commonly rendered in hieroglyphs

Many renditions of the offering formula begin with this compound expression. The exact interpretation is debated, but this is often rendered as "a royal offering" or "an offering given by the king".

This expression is sometimes used to describe an offering formula.

By convention the t from nswt is dropped, although it often appears in writing and inscriptions.

The order of the words when written is a case of *honorific transposition*, with the nswt part written first. This is to show the importance of the king, and also applies to names of gods and the word nTr which loosely translates to "god".

Htp

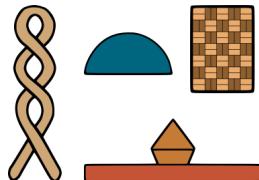


Figure 3: A more complete spelling of Htp - H t p [Htp]

The word Htp has no precise translation into English, and is variously rendered as "contentment", "peace" or "offering". This is sufficient to grasp its true meaning, since offerings are intended to bring comfort and bliss.

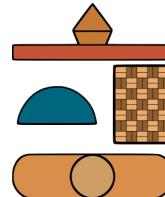


Figure 4: Another spelling of Htp - **Htp t p [X4]**

di

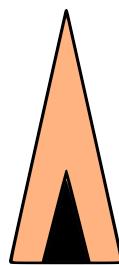


Figure 5: the (r)di hieroglyph

This word is a verb, (r)di - to give, which in older writings is sometimes rendered as rdi rather than di. It also appears later in the formula, but with a suffix pronoun, either .f, .s or .sn depending on the god(s) invoked.

nswt

The term nswt means the king or ruler. It was treated with great reverence as the embodiment of the institution of statehood, which was unique in its earliest form.

prt-xrw

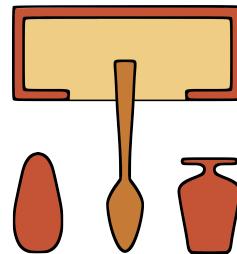


Figure 6: the prt-xrw hieroglyph

The expression prt-xrw is usually translated as "voice offering", although it more directly means "emerging from voice".

The hieroglyph contains the bread and beer signs, but this is by convention, and doesn't necessarily mean that the voice offering includes bread and beer.

Offering(s)

There is something of a standard list of offerings, which is usually terminated with the expression xt nbt nfrt wabt Anxt nTr im - all the beautiful and pure things on which a god lives.

Bread - t

Bread.

Beer - Hnqt

Beer.

Oxen - kAw

Oxen.

Fowl - Apdw

Fowl.

Alabaster - Ss

Alabaster.

Linen - mnxt

Linen.

God(s)

Anubis, he sits on his mountain

Osiris, lord of Abydos

Hathor, lady of the west

n kA n

The offering formula is directed at the ka of the recipient.

Putting it all together

Offerings

Gods

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