ANDERSON ACADEMY

EGYP 101 B · Introduction to Egyptian Hieroglyphs Middle Egyptian (Brief course)

Lecture 2 · about 8 min

How the Script Works and the Alphabet



A library of university-level courses

This lecture

- How to read a text
- Three kinds of sign
- The one-consonant signs
- Transliteration and pronunciation

¶ 2.1

These one-consonant signs are often called the hieroglyphic alphabet, though the Egyptians never used them alone as an alphabet.

Which way to read

- Rows or columns
- Usually right to left
- People and animals face the start
- Read toward the faces

¶ 2.2

To find the direction, look at the signs of people and animals: they face the beginning of the line.

A practical test

- Books often print left to right
- Monuments vary
- Find a bird
- Its beak points to the start

¶ 2.3

The vulture, the owl, and the quail chick are so common that almost every line contains one,

Groups of signs

- Columns: top to bottom
- Signs arranged in squares
- Top before bottom
- Front before back

¶ 2.4

Within a group you read top before bottom and front before back.

Three uses of signs

- Phonogram: stands for sounds
- Logogram: stands for a word
- Determinative: silent classifier

¶ 2.5

Or it may be a silent classifier at the end of a word, showing its meaning,

What is written

Written

- Consonants
- Determinatives

Not written

- Vowels
- Most pronunciation details

¶ 2.6

but for most words the vowels are lost.

Questions or feedback: garyanderson@mail.grokbot.com · @garyanderson

Gardiner's sign list

- Egyptian Grammar, 1927
- Groups by subject
- A: men, B: women, C: gods
- D: body, G: birds, N: sky and water

¶ 2.7

B for women, C for gods, D for parts of the human body, G for birds, M for plants,

Gardiner numbers

- G1: Egyptian vulture
- G17: owl
- D21: mouth
- Aa: uncertain subjects

¶ 2.8

and ends with a group called Aa for signs whose subject is unclear.

Two ways to transliterate

Scholarly

- Special letters with dots and arches
- Used in printed grammars

This course

- Plain letters, case matters
- Manuel de Codage, used here

¶ 2.9

Because those letters do not display in our transcript, this course uses the Manuel de Codage,

Weak consonants

Sign	Sound
G1: Egyptian vulture	3, aleph
M17: flowering reed	i, like y
D36: forearm	a, ayin

¶ 2.10

And the forearm, D36, stands for ayin, a throaty sound found in Arabic, written as a small a.

Signs for y, w, b, and p

Sign	Sound
Two reeds	y
G43 quail chick	w
D58 foot	b
Q3 stool	p

¶ 2.11

The stool, Q3, made of reeds, is p.

Signs for f, m, and n

Sign	Sound
I9 horned viper	f
G17 owl	m
N35 water ripple	n

¶ 2.12

And the ripple of water, N35, a short zigzag line, is n, perhaps the commonest sign of all.

Signs for r and h sounds

Sign	Sound
D21 mouth	r
O4 reed shelter	h
V28 twisted wick	H, emphatic h
Aa1 placenta	x, kh as in loch

¶ 2.13

written as a capital H.

Signs for kh, s, sh, and q

Sign	Sound
F32 animal belly	X, soft kh
O34 door bolt	z, s
S29 folded cloth	s
N37 pool	S, sh
N29 hill slope	q, deep k

¶ 2.14

The pool, N37, is sh, written capital S.

The last signs

Sign	Sound
V31 basket	k
W11 jar stand	g
X1 bread	t
V13 tether	T, tj
D46 hand	d
I10 cobra	D, dj

¶ 2.15

And the cobra, I10, is dj, written capital D.

Conventional pronunciation

Transliteration	Spoken
n f r	nefer, good
H t p	hotep, peace
a n x	ankh, life

¶ 2.16

This is a teaching convention only, not a reconstruction of ancient speech,

Writing names

- Ptah: stool, bread, twisted wick
- p t H
- Ptolemy in cartouches
- Uses many one-consonant signs

¶ 2.17

Champollion's Ptolemy appears in Greek-period cartouches with the stool, the bread loaf, the quail chick for w,

Practise the alphabet

Copy each sign ten times

▼

Say its sound aloud

▼

Write your own name

▼

Next: two- and three-consonant signs

¶ 2.18

the first five signs in the traditional order.