LATE EGYPTIAN

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HOW THE STUDY OF LATE EGYPTIAN SHOULD BE MADE

Under most unfortunate conditions during the last war, I was compelled to return to Egypt, and to complete my work on *Egyptian Epistolography* from the XVIIIth to the XXIst Dynasties with Dr. Černý, now Professor of Egyptology at Oxford University. At that time, we had only Erman's *Neuägyptische Grammatik* to refer whenever any grammatical difficulty arose, and Erman's book was not always helpful in this direction, some points in Grammar needed rearrangement and discussion in the light of new discoveries. As such was the case, Dr. Černý suggested that it might be a good idea if he started a series of lectures for me, and that Mr. Fairman, now Professor of Egyptology at Liverpool University, and Mr. Gredsloff should join in. Dr. Černý intended to publish his new study of Late Egyptian which I sincerely hope will appear in the near future. In addition to these lectures we

studied 'The Egyptian Vocalisation from Native Sources, i.e. Coptic with the idea that it may serve as a background for a better understanding of Late Egyptian'.

That is, in brief, the story of my study of Late Egyptian. It shows how this study should be made. Parallels with Coptic will be given. Published and unpublished texts will be read, and from these you will be asked to draw your own conclusions, and indicate the peculiarities of the style of Late Egyptian. I must point out that the grammar of Middle Egyptian should be thoroughly digested.

STAGES OF THE EGYPTIAN LANGUAGE

Philologists concern themselves, among other things, with the study of the forms and constructions of any given language in relation to certain periods. This procedure has been successfully followed in the analysis of modern languages, as when we read that scholars distinguish, between *l'ancien français*, of the XVth and XVIth centuries, and *le français moderne*, of the XIXth and XXth centuries. The French language, philologists tell us, shows clearly in these two distinct periods the characteristics of the political and social structures of France.

This same fact is true of the Ancient Egyptian Language, which may also be classified into distinct periods, each reflecting with the same intensity the ups and downs of Egyptian history. But this is a subject in which we have to proceed with caution, because our only evidence of the Egyptian Language comes from written documents and is subject to the results of Excavations. With this idea in mind, we may say that Grammarians have been able to classify the Ancient Egyptian Language into distinct periods which are now known as follows : ([1])

(A) The « Old Egyptian » as shown in the Pyramid Texts and a few other formal inscriptions dated to the first eight Dynasties, from 3180 to 2240 B. C..

(B) The « Middle Egyptian » of Dynasties IX to XI, from 2240 to 1990 B.C., is known as the classical language, and has been regarded as the literary language down to the Græco-Roman periods.

1) Compare Gard., *Grammar*, § 1.

(C) « Late Egyptian » which is the language of Dynasties XVII. to XXIV (1573 to 715 B.C.). Various foreign words make their appearance I

(D) « Demotic », properly a kind of writting, but also loosely applied to the language in which such documents were written. It was used from Dyn. XXV to late Roman period (715 B.C. to 470 A.D.). Classical and later elements are intermingled.

(E) « Coptic », which represents a far later stage of the Egyptian Language that of the IIIrd century A.D. and afterwards, was written in Greek characters with the addition of seven modified characters from Egyptian. It contains Greek words and sometimes follows the word order used in Greek sentences. It gradually fell into disuse after the Arab Conquest of Egypt in 460 A.D..

WRITTEN AND SPOKEN LANGUAGES ARE DIVERGENT

It is now desirable to investigate the main linguistic forms and characteristics underlying such classification. For the time being, I shall omit the discussion on Demotic or Coptic, as these are out of the subject under consideration.

Written language and spoken language are usually divergent, though they emanate from one source. By virtue of some kind of standing tradition, the first would retain fixed grammatical rules and special modes of expression throughout the ages which would look back for the crystallised ancient mode as displaying genuine Egyptian forms. This is the reason for the revival of the Old Classical language as late as the Demotic Period, as well as its retainment in religious texts. The spoken language, on the other hand, is that of the people and soon absorbs new words. It develops its own simple and fluent forms which become at last quite distinct from the written language.

A characteristic of the vernacular language is a tendency to slur over grammatical niceties, such as gender and number. Apparently, there are some sporadic examples of this vernacular language in the Pyramid texts, such as the use of $\square$ (sometimes *pi*), originally masculine singular, for referring to both masculine or feminine words, singular or plural:
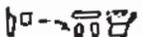
e. g. (*Pyr.* § 133)   It is his offerings.

This could also be traced in the Middle Kingdom texts:

e.g. (*Pap. West.* ix, 9) ⸺ She is the wife of the priest of Re^c.

Similarly, the words ⸺ , originally demonstratives for « this » (m.), « this » (f.) and « these » (pl.), have come to be used as the definite article « the », usually prefixed to a noun·
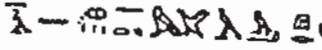
e. g. (*Peasant*, R. 4) ⸺ The corn which is in the storehouse.

(*Paheri*, pl. 3) 'land still, be not disobedient ⸺ excellent horse.

In Late Egyptian may also precede the classical feminine infinitive, such as: (*Turin 73*, 11, 9) ⸺ *p; ìr (t)* the doing. It is possible that, in Late Egyptian, this is due to the fact that weak consonant *t* had dropped out in the vernacular pronunciation, which is clear in the Coptic equivalent.

With regard to the construction of nominal sentences, in particular those introduced by such particles as *mk*, *sk*, *'ist* and having a pronominal subject ( ) and predicate (' composed of either:

preposition + { noun or infinitive } or, an old perfective

e.g. ⸺ When he was still on his feet.

⸺ Behold, thou art come.

However, Late Egyptian seems not only to omit the particles in such constructions, and sometimes even the preposition before the infinitive, but also we get what is known as the «personal compounds» : *tw.ì (hr) sdm* for the older *'ist wi hr sdm*.

We also notice the substitution of many new words and forms for old ones:

e.g.

Old	New	Old	New

From the foregoing remarks, I think it is clear that there existed two forms of the Egyptian Language; traces of one of which appear as far back as the Old Kingdom, but finally superseded in later documents. This new form of the language apparently made its appearance in written documents following social upheavals and revolutions. The revolution known to us are those following the break up of the Old Kingdom (¹), and the religious and political revolution of Akhenaten near the end of the XVIIIth Dynasty.

DEFINITION OF LATE EGYPTIAN

The first to recognise the existence of these two forms of the language and who separated the spoken tongue from the other groups was Professor Adolf Erman in 1880 in his first edition of *Neuagyptische Grammatik* where, on p. 1, he defines it as the colloquial language « Vulgärsprache » of the New Empire which we read since the beginning of that period, but of which we have not abundant written material until the XIXth and XXth Dynasties. In his second edition of the same book, published in 1933, Erman states on p. 2 that the Egyptian is used as a literary language from the time of Amenophis IV. Sethe, in 1933, calls it « the spoken language » Umgangsprache of the New Empire of Thebes (²) and describes it as a simple spoken language raised to the status of a literary language. More recently, Gardiner, in 1950, states that « Late Egyptian, the vernacular of Dynasties XVIII-XXIV, is 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 ». (³)

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(1) It is referred to in Gardiner, *Admonitions of an Egyptian sage*.
(2) Cf. *ZDMG* 79, p. 304.
(3) See *Egyptian Grammar* § 1.

From the afore-mentioned definitions we may conclude that Late Egyptian was the spoken language of the New Empire from the time of the XVIIIth to the XXIVth Dynasties. Its first regular appearance as a written language occurred towards the end of the XVIIIth Dynasty. During the reign of Amenophis IV, it became the literary language, and was even introduced in hymns. Our most abundant source comes from the XIXth and XXth Dynasties in non-literary and literary documents, and the latter gradually diminished after the XXIst Dynasty until the XXIVth Dynasty when we see them written in Demotic (another field outside our present study). However, I wish to stress this point from the beginning that Late Egyptian is *not* a development of the older stages of the language, but is a distinct form, or as Sethe says « it is, a sister and not a daughter language ». [1]

CHARACTERISTICS IN WRITING

As a written language, Late Egyptian shows peculiarities o *Orthography* (i.e. spelling) which is thoroughly discussed in *Neua-gyptisch Grammatik* (2nd ed.) §§ 8 — 58. Nevertheless, I whish to mention some points, as for details I refer you to the book.

(a) *Group - writing* (§§ 29 — 31): From *Dyn.* XVIII onwards biliteral signs ending with ⟨hieroglyphs⟩ are frequently substituted for alphabetic signs; [2]

e. g. ⟨hieroglyphs⟩ (*ỉꜣ*); for ⟨hieroglyphs⟩ (*w*, *wꜣ*); for ⟨hieroglyphs⟩, ⟨hieroglyphs⟩ (*ꜣ*, *ꜣꜣ*), for ⟨hieroglyphs⟩ (*kꜣ*).

On the other hand, we find two alphabetic signs (the second being also ⟨hieroglyphs⟩ representing a single sign — the first in the group;

e. g. for ⟨hieroglyphs⟩ (*ḏꜣ*); for ⟨hieroglyphs⟩ (*kꜣ*); for ⟨hieroglyphs⟩ (*gꜣ*).

Thus:

⟨hieroglyphs⟩ is to be read *bnr*, not *bwnwr* (Coptic ⲃⲟⲗ outwards

⟨hieroglyphs⟩ is to be read *gbgbt* to fell.

⟨hieroglyphs⟩ is to be read *ḥrr* flower.

[1] CF. ZDMG 79, p. 501.
[2] These endings may stand for a sound, and that when we transliterate 'bnr' (see examples below) we merely bring it into line with Middle Egyptian.

(b) *Writting of Vowels* (§§ 32 — 38): In Late Egyptian they may stand for i —

e.g. [hieroglyphs] who (Coptic NIM); [hieroglyphs] Sidon (Hebrew צידון);

[hieroglyphs] father (Coptic ει τ); [hieroglyphs] his (Coptic nωq).

[hieroglyph] , which has become the unaccented $\breve{e}$, could stand for $\breve{o}$ which we come across in such group-writings as:

(*An. iv*, 12, 2) [hieroglyphs] type (Hebrew: כבור)

[hieroglyphs] a place-name (i.e.: *Nebate*)

(c) *Space-fillers* (§§ 28 & 43): The spaces over little (or small) determinatives [hieroglyphs], [hieroglyph] etc. are frequently filled with meaningless [hieroglyphs]

e.g. (. . . . .) [hieroglyphs] , (. . . . . II, 7) [hieroglyphs] ;

(. . . . .) [hieroglyphs] ; (. . . . III, 18) [hieroglyphs] .

(d) *Determinatives* (§§ 25 — 27): Late Egyptian uses freely the determinatives especially those which have general indications, as: [hieroglyphs]

Old	New	Old	New
[hier]	[hier]	[hier]	[hier]

only [hieroglyphs] that remain without determinatives. Sometimes more than one determinative is appendee especially [hieroglyphs]

e.g. (*Pap. d'Orb.*) [hieroglyphs] plunder, rob.

(*Max. d'Anii* 4, 17) [hieroglyphs] take care of; manage

Plural strokes may again be added to these general determinatives, irrespective of number—e.g. (*Max. d'Anii* 4, 2) [hieroglyphs] and *ibid* 2, 5 [hieroglyphs]

(e) *Pronunciation* (§ 44 ff): Here I am limiting my reference to the pronunciation of r as an *initial* letter of a word, a *medial* or a *terminal;* for other letters I refer you to Erman's book.

As *initial* it has become short $\breve{e}$, as we see in the preposition with

its corresponding pronunciation ⟨hiero⟩ — two r's may begin a word, as in ⟨hiero⟩ weap; this means that the r must be accented (Coptic ⲣⲓⲙⲉ)

As *medial*, it disappears as Coptic shows: e.g. ⟨hiero⟩ (Coptic ⲍⲟⲟⲧ)– compare later variants (*Wenamun* 1 x + 15) ⟨hiero⟩ or (*passim* + 16) ⟨hiero⟩. However, this r may return when the word is in the plural: (*Wenamun* 1 x + 21) ⟨hiero⟩ to be compared with Coptic ⲍⲣⲉⲧ.

As final, the r has become $\overset{?}{i}$, e.g. ⟨hiero⟩ « bitter » appears in Late Egyptian ⟨hiero⟩. Coptic points to this phenomenon, as in the well known examples.

⟨hiero⟩ (Coptic ⲛⲟⲩⲉ) and ⟨hiero⟩ (Coptic ϣⲱⲡⲉ).

Another characteristic in pronunciation which I must draw your attention to is in, for example, (*Pap. d'orb.*) where we see ⟨hiero⟩ and ⟨hiero⟩ for simple Form ⟨hiero⟩. The reason is that the final *d* and *t* are almost identical in pronunciation thus we get such pronunciation as * *dodtf* which sounds like * *dotf* or *dodf* ⟨hiero⟩.

GRAMMATICAL CHARACTERISTICS

In addition to the afore-mentioned characteristics of Late Egyptian, there are other differences between it and the earlier language. These are :

(1) The use of adverbial nominal sentences (Coptic, first present) without introductory particle, as in :

They are (on) hearing = They hear

(*Urk. iv.* 649, 15) ⟨hiero⟩ It is like what? What is it like?

To this belong the so-called « Pronominal Compounds » prefixed with *tw.* (¹)

(¹) Cf. p. 4 for this construction.

(2) The new suffix 3rd person plural *.w* for the old *.sn.*

(3) The change of the form of the demonstrative *pn*, *tn* and *nn* *n* into *p꒐y*, and *n꒐y* respectively which precede their nouns.

(4) The derivation of the indefinite article from the word for one $\underset{\frown}{}$, (___) .

(5) The construction of the numerals from 10 onwards with a following genitive, also the singular treatment of all numeral expressions.— e.g. *p꒐ 20 n rmt* the 20 of man = 20 men.

(6) The neuter conception, or more properly the personification of an abstract once treated as a feminine word is now treated as masculine e.g. (*Wenamun I X + 10*) 〔hieroglyphs〕 he said *it* where the suffix *.f* is used to express the neuter.

(7) The disappearance of the tense *sdm.n.f.*

(8) The conjunctive form *mtw.f (hr) sdm* and he hears (Coptic: S. Ⲛ̄ϥⲥⲱⲧⲙ̄ - B. Ⲛ̄ⲧⲉϥⲥⲱⲧⲉⲙ) has come into use.

(9) The paraphrase of the old optative *sdm.k* by *imi* (Coptic Ⲙⲁ—) which is negatived by *m rdi* followed by *sdm.f* form.

(10) The elimination of *hr* before the infinitive especially in the pseudo-verbal construction : *twi. sdm* instead of *twi. hr sdm* — also the frequent omission of *r* in the following expressions *r-dr.f* (Coptic ⲦⲎⲣ=) e.g. (*Pap. d'Orb.* 15, 4 〔hieroglyphs〕 or *r h꒐t* = before (Coptic Ⲏ̄ⲧⲉ).

(11) The negative words 〔hieroglyphs〕 (Coptic Ⲛ.. .ⲁⲛ), etc.

This leads us to the subject of the VERB which I should like to analyse more fully. Indeed, it was the main subject of our study under Professor Černý.

The classical language contains a number of simple forms: *sdm* (imperfective and perfective), *sdm.n.f*, *sdm.in.f*, *sdm.hr.f*, *sdm.k꒐.f*, *sdmin.f* all with their passive forms, and the special passive form *sdmw.f*, the forms *sdmt.f* and *sdmty.fy*, the old perfective, the infinitive, the four participles and finally the relative forms. Out of all [1]

this number, Late Egyptian retains only a few. However, it is not sa poor as Coptic, which contains only two forms: the infinitive and the qualitative. In Late Egyptian, the verbal form is reduced to the form s $dm.f$, the old perfective. the imperative, the two participles (active and passive). the relative and the infinitive, vestiges here and there of the passive $sdmw.f$. What is lacking in the simple forms. Late Egyptian replaces by a paraphrase with auxiliary verbs.

For the purpose of our study, it is advisable to take one or two special texts and analyse them thoroughly. We are not lacking in material, Late Egyptian documents are plentiful and have been classed into the following groups:

(A) Judicial Texts notably those dealing with conspiracy against Ramesses III and Tomb Robberies.

(B) Correspondence and Schülerhandschriften (writings of school-boys). many of which are published by Černy. Erman and Gardiner.

(C) Literary Works. fiction. etc.

Finally, I want to draw your attention to four points:

1. It is highly desirable for the student at this stage to become well acquainted with Coptic which often confirms and explains some phenomena in Late Egyptian.

2. As I pointed out in the beginning, the student must be thoroughly familiar with Middle Kingdom grammar in order to appreciate the changes he comes across.

3. In the course of these studies any earlier construction will be referred to as « Archaism ».

4. One further word, it must be remarked that Late Egyptian was by no means confined to the lower classes. It was used by the educated people and is found written side by side with the classical tongue as in the Annals of Thutmoses III. But it is not until the Amarna Period that we begin to find the rich stream of profane literature beginning to appear.

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