

2. Language and Music

2.1. Preface

2.2. Language

2.2.1. A 3-day course “Hieroglyphs for beginners” with Dr. Peter De Smet

2.2.1.1. Concerning language and the name Egypt

Our quest into the ancient Egyptian language begins with the question where the name Egypt derives from, and what it means.

To answer that question it is important to know that there are several names for the land along the Nile. The ancient Egyptians called it Ta-Mery, meaning “The Beloved Land”, and “Khemet”, “The Black Land”. This last already makes a very important distinction for the Egyptians : the distinction between “The Black Land” and “The Red Land”, the former being the fertile land along the river, the latter being the surrounding steppes and deserts.

The Egyptian Khemet evolved into the Arabian Khemy. With the Arabian article “Al” in front of it, this becomes “Al Khemy”, the origin of the English “alchemy”. So it is a well-founded hypothesis to say that the medieval “alchemy” actually meant “Egypt”. This is not that strange, as the ancient Egyptian high-priests were well versed in the sciences.

The Canaanites, and afterwards the Hebrews, called (and call) Egypt, Mishraim.

The modern name Egypt derives from the Greek Aigyptos, which, in its turn, derives from the ancient Egyptian “Hut-Ka-Ptah”, meaning literally : “The Castle of the Soul of Ptah”. At the time, this was a quarter of the ancient city of Memphis, and Memphis’ Egyptian name was Men-Nefer, “The Beautiful Walls”.

Now, as the Arabian written language uses very few vowels, the Arabians in Egypt used to write Aigyptos as “gpt”. This soon degraded to be read like “Copt” or “Cypt”, and for centuries it became the name for the Christian Egyptians. Initially it used to mean only those Byzantine Christians who had accepted the Council of Chalcedon (451AD), but later evolved to encompass all Christians in Egypt

Many of the names we use today to describe ancient places, Gods and people, came to us through the Greek and have been “Greekified”. We therefore are better acquainted with Osiris, Isis, Horus, Sesostris and Nectanebo, than with their original Egyptian counterparts Osir, Aset, Hor(u) or Hor-A’a, Senusret and Nakhthoreb.

Initially, ancient Egyptian was catalogued as belonging to the Afro-Asian languages, together with languages like Turkish, Sumeric and Japanese. More recently, however, there is a strong tendency to incorporate ancient Egyptian into the Indo-European language group, together with languages like Arabian, Semitic, and the various Romano-Germanic languages. Turkish and Sumeric, for one thing, are agglutinous languages (meaning they have a convoluted system of pre- and

suffixes), a property not found in ancient Egyptian, which, just like Indo-European languages, uses adjectives. Furthermore the Indo-European languages possess both strong and weak verbs, another property also found in ancient Egyptian.

It was Jacob Grimm, of the Grimm brothers, the famous fairytale writers, who developed the system of different language groups. To date there are more than 7,000 of these groups, often limited to just one language that doesn't seem to fit in any other group. So the status of ancient Egyptian in the Afro-Asian or Indo-European group is far from settled yet.

2.2.1.2. Concerning Herodotos

The first scholar to write about Egypt was the Greek Herodotos from the fifth century BC. The political situation in his native Halicarnassos had become slightly too murky for the former politician, so he decided to travel for a while and write about the history of the lands he visited. His first idea was to write a history of Persia, but as his native Anatolia and Egypt had had very good commercial relations for centuries, he soon found himself in Alexandria. The Greek were no strangers in Egypt. Already during Akhenatens reign, Greek merchants had frequented the country, and even built their own town in Lower Egypt. The town still existed in Herodotos' days and it was, until the time of the Ptolemies, the only place in Egypt that knew a monetary system

From the priests of Ptah in Alexandria Herodotos learned that there are three different sorts of writing in Egypt :

- “Holy Signs”, that are only to be found on temple walls. Herodotos translated this to his native Greek as “glyphos” (sign) and “Hieros” (holy or sacred). Hence our term “hieroglyphs
- “Holy Script” : a system of writing based on these hieroglyphs, but strongly simplified. This “Holy Script” also always contained religious texts, and was only written on papyrus rolls as found in the local library, the Per-Ankh, the House of Life. As most of these texts were indeed religious in nature, he called this “Hieratic Script”.
- Finally, there was the writing the common people used for all possible kinds of things. As the Greek for “people” is “Deimos”, he called this script “Demotic Script”.

From the second century BC Greek letters were added to this Demotic script, in order to be able to write “un-Egyptian” sounds. This alphabet evolved into the Coptic script, that is largely Greek in origin with added letters to accommodate for “un-Greek” sounds.

From these four writing systems, only the Coptic still exists as a more or less written language. More or less, as its statute is also more or less the same as our “Church Latin”. Latin is, just like Egyptian, a dead language, but a remnant has stayed alive in the so-called Church Latin, or Pidgin-Latin. A bastardized version of the Roman Latin that, in writing, is still used in various Christian ceremonies, but is, aside from between a few scholars, never used as a day-to-day language. In much the same way, the Coptic language has evolved along the same path. Its roots are in the Demotic language – although there are many differences – and is severely

influenced by the Arabic language. The colloquial language in Egypt in the 21st century is a mix of this Arabian with a large dose of Coptic.

Demotic and Hieratic have disappeared as written and spoken languages since ca. the 6th or 7th century AD, largely caused by the Arabian practice of using Arabian as unifying language throughout their empire.

2.2.1.3. Concerning the history of writing and the re-discovery of hieroglyphs

The origin of the spoken and written languages is not clearly marked. “Some time” man started to talk, and “some time” someone thought of a way to write down what was being said. Now, as the first notation of language was done by making drawings, it is a very vague border between where “drawing” ends and “writing” begins. Maybe the credo of the Egyptian scribe Ten-Is in “Asterix and Cleopatra” is closer to the truth than we think : “He who can draw, can write.” Incidentally, the hieroglyph for painting, drawing and writing is the same.

This is precisely why, in Egyptological and Sumerological circles, there is still a bitter war being waged on whether the hieroglyphs are older than the Cuneiform (and its predecessors), or the other way around. Sumerologists are gaining ground, though. The fact is, that there are more Sumeric loanwords concerning agriculture in Egyptian than vice versa. This probably means agriculture and writing were imported into Egypt, from Sumer, making the Sumerian culture the first to implement writing.

Whereas the Sumeric evolved into a simplified alphabet of some 35 characters, that would become the basis of our alphabet, the Egyptian writing evolved in the opposite direction. In the Middle Kingdom we now distinguish some 500 different hieroglyphs; during the Ptolemaic reign there were over 7,000.

Fortunately there is a simplified way for using hieroglyphs. Some characters can be used as phonetic characters, the way even the Egyptians used them to write foreign names and words. The system by which these characters were developed, is called acrophony. A glyph gets the phonetic value of the first letter of the thing it represents. For instance : a glyph representing a basket would become the glyph for the sound “B”. The glyph might still be used as a pictogram meaning “basket”, but it can now also be used to mean “B”. This acrophonic system was already well developed by 3050BC.

The arrival of the Greek and Romans heralded the end of the hieroglyphs. Aside from the fact that the conquerors imposed their own languages and alphabets, it is a fact that the Greek and Latin alphabet are more practical in use than hieroglyphs. The last hieroglyphic inscription dates to app. 380AD, the last hieratic text to app. the end of the 5th century AD. It is safe to say that by the end of the sixth or seventh century AD the last of those who could read either, had died out.

And so, as the interest in ancient Egypt fluctuated between the seventh and nineteenth century AD, from virtually non-existent in the dark middle ages, to the Egyptomania of the middle and late nineteenth century, entire tomes have been filled with interpretations of hieroglyphs, that are both as fascinating as they are wrong.

It wasn't until after Napoleon Bonapartes campaign in the Middle East that a young language scholar from Figeac in the south of France, finally forced a breakthrough in the decoding of the ancient markings. He was able to do so thanks to the discovery of a trilingual piece of text from the Ptolemaic Era.

The trilingual text was found in Rosetta, near Alexandria.

The young scholar was Jean-François Champollion.

2.2.1.4. Concerning the Stone of Rosetta

On this app. 1m² large slab of basalt stone (which is now at the British Museum in London) is a text by Ptolemy V. What makes this artefact so special, is that the text on it is written in three languages : in hieroglyphs, Demotic and Greek. For the first time in history they had found a translation of hieroglyphs in a language that was well known, and on the same artefact.

A number of scientists started work on transcripts of the Stone, but it was Champollion who first came up with the idea of counting a) the hieroglyphs; b) the Greek letters; and c) the number of Greek words. From the facts that there are fewer hieroglyphs than Greek letters, and fewer Greek words than hieroglyphs, Champollion concluded – correctly – that hieroglyphs are not exclusively alphabetical signs. His subsequent theory that ancient Egyptian uses a combination of pictograms and phonograms proved to be right. After 14 centuries in obscurity, the ancient glyphs once again spoke to us.

2.2.1.5. Concerning the decoding

In the end five different glyphs (or purposes for glyphs) were discovered :

1. Unisons
2. Diphthongs
3. Triads
4. Pictograms
5. Determinatives

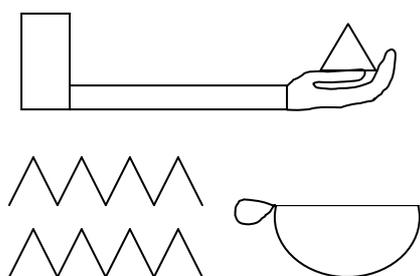
These distinctions made the deciphering at the same time easier and harder. The same glyph can be used as a pictogram (meaning the thing it depicts), a phonogram (a unison, diphthong or triad) or as a determinative (determining and explaining the glyphs before it).

In addition to that, the order of the glyphs is subject to changes dictated by religious, political or even aesthetic motives ! For instance, in a name that holds a glyph that refers to a deity, the glyph of the deity will be placed in front. The name Akhen-en-Ra will therefore literally be written : Ra-Akhen-en. Then, on the other hand, the God Seth had a rather bad reputation in some parts of Egypt. People with a name that referred to Seth went out of their way to avoid the use of the glyph for "Seth". At the mortuary temple of Seti I, whose name means "He who belongs to Seth", at Abydos, Seth is depicted as the slayer of the serpent Apepi (Apophis), who tries to devour the sun each evening. So Seths name is written with different glyphs to emphasize the difference with Seth the "Committee of Fratricide", who murdered his brother Osiris.

Seth, by the way, was later, in Arabic, called El Shaitan, which in turn leads us to our Satan.

And finally, sometimes glyphs were re-ordered or added for aesthetic reasons. An example thereof are the phonetic complements. After triads, often two unisons were added, repeating the last two sounds of the triad, in order to clarify the use of the triad, and to complete the quadrant in which they were written. The advantage is, that it is very hard to make mistakes in writing. Unfortunately, the same “creativity” that is used in writing, is to be applied in reading, and that is far from easy.

Determinatives are used to provide distinctness in cases of possible doubt or confusion. Such can be for instance when dealing with homonyms. A “bore” can be hole, but can also be an annoying person. To clarify the intention of the writer meaning a hole, he may use the pictogram of a drill after the glyph for “bore”. There are a number of virtually exclusive determinative glyphs, but in the end any given hieroglyph can be used as a determinative. To top it all off : there are no rules for the use of determinatives (or none have been formulated as yet), so every writer could more or less do whatever he wanted.



Now let's try to decipher the glyphs to the left, based on what we've just learned.

The first glyph shows an arm, giving a small bun. As a phonogram, this sign stands for “A”. The wavy line is actually a pictogram for water, but also the phonogram for “N”. The little basket is the sign for “K”. So together we read “A-N-K” or “Ankh”. (The second wavy line is just there to fill out the quadrant, so we can safely ignore that one.)



Presented together like this, the combination of glyphs also means “to give/offer in exchange for”. What it is that is offered and exchanged becomes clearer when we see the rest of the inscription, as shown in the photograph. Three signs explain what it is that is exchanged : on the left is the Was-Sceptre, based on a shepherd's crook with a fork for catching snakes at the bottom. This symbol equals continuity-power-rule.

The origin of the middle glyph is uncertain. It could be a sheaf of corn, but it might just as well be a spine. It is, and that is quite clear, the sign of the Djed-pillar, and it refers to stability-steadfastness-longevity.

There is some discussion as to the origin of the Ankh-sign. Many tourist guides in Egypt will tell you that it symbolizes the Nile and the Delta. This interpretation is, however, wrong. Most Egyptologists are of the opinion that the Ankh-glyph finds its

origin in a stylized sandal strap. Some argue that it depicts a penis sheath. Whatever the origin, it definitely means “life”.

So, basically, what is told here, is that in exchange for offerings, power, stability and a long life are being given. By whom ? In this case, by one or more Gods. To whom ? To the only one who was permitted to give offerings to the Gods : Pharaoh.

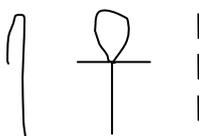
Concerning the interpretation that the Ankh-glyph depicts a penis sheath

A penis sheath is an ancient symbol that has always been used to fend off “the evil eye”. Possibly there is a content related connection between this symbol and the concept of “life”. (probably the Egyptians had also noticed the connection between the use of the “content” of the sheath and “life”). Alternatively, the Egyptian word for “penis sheath” and “Ankh” may have been homonyms.

2.2.1.6. Concerning readily recognizable formulae

A causative is a tense of a verb in it’s “causing” state, for instance : “to make live”, which in Ancient Egyptian is “s-Ankh-w”. We mention this tense, because it is a standard formula that is easy to recognize.

Furthermore, causatives are also always in a plural tense, but a specific plural tense that indicates “perpetuity”. It expresses the fact that “to make live” is an ongoing process, as opposed to “giving birth”, which only happens once.



On the left we see the phonogram for “S”, the “Ankh” glyph, and the determinative for “perpetual plural”, which, in itself, is also a phonogram for “W” and/or “U”. So we read : “S-Ankh-W” or “S-Ankh-U” (which has nothing to do with the “Sank you” some vocally challenged pop-stars blurt out after every song...)



Another formula that is easy to spot, is the pictogram mark. This is one of the few things we can be absolutely sure about : whenever there’s a short vertical line underneath a glyph, the glyph is to be read as a pictogram instead of a phonogram. To the left is the Egyptian word for “Houses”. It depicts the glyph for “House”, with a determinative mark underneath, telling us to read the glyph above as a pictogram. The three plural-tense-lines tell us that we are dealing with several houses (and as a house is something lasting, these plural-tense-lines are the same as the perpetual plural determinative from above.). As the Egyptian word for “House” is “Per”, we read “Per-W” or “Per-U”. Without the pictogram determinative it would be “P-U”.

The way something is written, or the epigraphy, depends on the period and location of when and where something is written. That is why the same text from the 17th dynasty from Memphis (Mennefer) will look different from its 18th dynasty counterpart from Thebes (Waset).

A third formula that is easy to find, are the phonetic complements (see page V). These are used for two reasons. Firstly, they serve to clarify the triad written before them, repeating the two last sounds. Secondly, they are used for purely aesthetic reasons to fill out the quadrant. It is common in hieroglyphic writing to use a variety of glyphs, just to fill up empty space.

To the right we once again find the “Ankh”, but this time with two phonetic complements : the “N” and the “Kh”. Actually completely unnecessary, but added because of aesthetic reasons.



2.2.1.7. Concerning a historic order in the Egyptian language

Just like we already know that there are differences between Old, Renaissance, Victorian and Modern English, there are also distinctions in Ancient Egyptian depending on the age of the hieroglyphs.

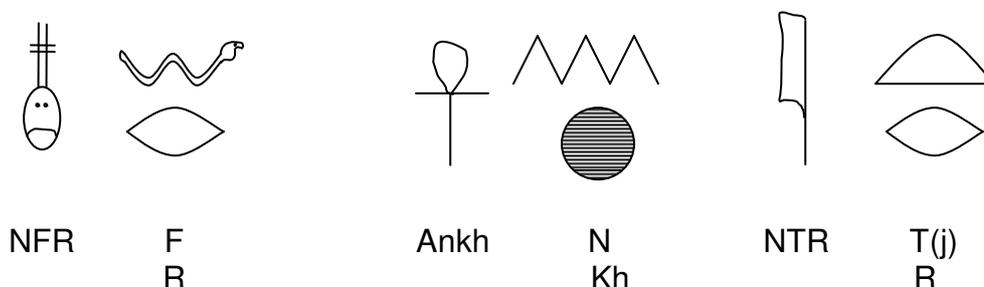
We distinguish a first period from the appearance of hieroglyphic writing in the third millennium BC, until app. 2050BC. This is the period of the actual Ancient-Egyptian. The period between 2050BC and app. 1350BC is the period of the Middle- or Classical Egyptian. From this period we have names like Senusret and Djehutymes. By 1350BC the spoken language and the written language had both evolved down different paths. They evolved so far, that they were hardly the same anymore.. So by 1350BC, Akhenaten introduced a new standard : the New Egyptian or Neo-Egyptian. For some 350 years the spoken and written Egyptian would remain the same. Neo-Egyptian names that have come to us, are, for instance, Ramesses and Tutankhamun. By 1000BC, however, political instability and growing conservatism, prompted a return to the Classical Egyptian of some 4 centuries earlier. The Neo-Classical Egyptian would remain in use for approximately a thousand years, after which Greek, Latin and Arabic supplanted the ancient language. Neo-classical names are, for instance, Nakhthoreb and Nakhtnebef.

Certain names occur only in specific periods, so a specific name can be an indication for the age of the text in which it is mentioned. An example is the simultaneous occurrence of the names Montuhotep and Amunhotep. Before the 17th dynasty in Thebes the primary God of Thebes was the war God Montu. During the 17th and 18th dynasty he was supplanted by the God Amun. So the period in which the frequency of the names Montuhotep and Amunhotep was equal, must be around the beginning of the 17th dynasty. Our imaginary text mentioning two brothers Montu- and Amunhotep, therefore can only be written at the end of the Second Intermediate Period.

It was probably quite a shock for the first Pharaohs, but royal names were not the first words to be written. That honour goes to very simple labels that were tied to the necks of jars, to describe the contents.

2.2.1.7.1. ARGUMENTS FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF EGYPTIAN IN THE INDO-EUROPEAN GROUP

Similar to Semitic and Arabic languages, Egyptian has a system of words with three radicals (consonants) that frequently occur. Examples are all the triads in Egyptian, amongst which N-F-R (Nefer), A-N-Kh (Ankh), and N-T-R (Netjer).



“Nefer” is the Ancient-Egyptian for “good-beautiful-efficient”. Apparently, the Ancients never made the distinction between “good” and “beautiful”. What was beautiful, was good, and vice versa. To us, this is a strange idea.

“Netjer” refers to “deity”, but not the way we refer to any deities. The Egyptian concept is more in line with what we would call the whole of Gods, angels, spirits, devils, ghosts and forefathers. Amun, for instance is a Netjer, but my late great-grandfather is a Netjer too (albeit of a lower rank than Amun). So, aside from the forefathers, we have already discovered over 10,000 other Netjers !

By the way : as we have already learned that by adding the glyph for “sw” or “u”, we put the glyphs before it in the plural, we now also know that the plural of Netjer is Netjeru. Concerning Nefer, we know already that an added “t” glyph makes the previous glyphs female, so the female “beauty” is “Nefer(e)t”. And that syllable we also find in the name of the famous queen Nefertiti. We usually spell that name Nefer-Titi, but a more accurate way to spell it, is actually Neferet-Iti, meaning “The Beautiful female after she has come hither”. This might indicate that Nefertiti was not indigenous to Thebes (Waset) or even to Egypt. She may have come from another province, or even from outside Egypt, from the kingdom of Mitanni. In that case she would only have received an Egyptian name after her arrival in Egypt.

2.2.1.8. A mythological-historical Interlude

Let us now, for a moment, digress from our linguistic essay, in order to clarify the Egyptian religious concept. This differs greatly from ours.

First of all, Egyptian religion is polytheistic, instead of our Christian, Islamic or Judean monotheistic religion. This, in itself, is already a major, and fundamental difference. A religion, where several Gods co-exist, is, by its very nature, more tolerant. Gods that share the power, are, by definition, neither omnipotent, nor omniscient. This concept of a omniscient, omnipotent and jealous God, like we know our God, is therefore unknown to the Ancient Egyptian. The absence of the “jealousy” of the monotheistic God in the make-up of the polytheistic Gods, infers a much profounder tolerance towards other religions. The credo “My God is better than your God, therefore I must be better than you.”, is completely absent in a polytheistic religion.

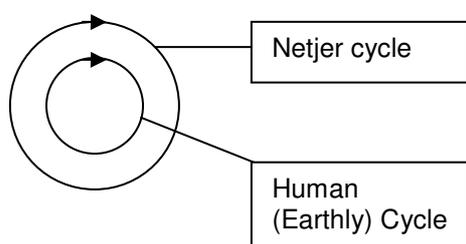
Out of necessity, because if this credo were applied, the whole civilisation would break down, and disciples of every temple would fight each other for supremacy, leading to a monotheistic cult. We know for a fact that, in Egyptian times, foreign Gods were indeed worshipped in Egypt. Gods like Baal and Ishtar were no strangers to the Egyptians.

In addition to the above, the Ancients acknowledged that Gods are people- and location-bound. This, inevitably, leads to the acceptance that people in other places worship other Gods. The fact that these Gods have the same totem and attributes as their Egyptian counterparts, is perfectly acceptable : after all, it's another people and it's another place. Even inside Egypt this idea came to play, although in more subtle ways : the Seth from the delta was not exactly the Seth from Upper Egypt.

Secondly, the Ancient Egyptian made no distinction between different types of Gods. Practical as he was, he even developed a globalizing term for them : Netjeru. Anyone "from the other realm". The Netjeru are comprised of about every creature from "the other side" one can imagine : higher and lesser Gods, demigods, sprites and spirits, djinns, demons, ancestors... Unfortunately the western world has the unpleasant heritage of the concept of vampirism, which gives the term "undead" a quite negative connotation, otherwise this term would be the closest word we have to describe all the Netjeru. The Ancient Egyptian does not share that heritage with us, so to him anything that comes from "the other realm", the spiritual world, is "Netjeru". The word Netjeru still exists, albeit as an archaism, in several modern Semitic languages. There it usually means "being different", but in a metaphysical capacity.

Thirdly, the Egyptian Gods are mortal. Osiris, for instance, died twice. But once again, "mortality" is a different concept to the Egyptian than it is to us. Osiris died, but the dead Osiris rules the underworld (and there's another concept that is anything but our Hell). There are even a number of dead Gods, recognizable by a hieroglyph behind their names that means "he who has completed his cycle".

The Egyptian Gods also have their faults, a character trait they have in common with their Greek, Roman and Celtic counterparts. Osiris is, to say the least, gullible; Seth is violent and jealous; Horus is proud and Hathor lascivious.



All these differences are rooted in the completely different way the Ancient Egyptians view Time (with a capital T). To us, Time is linear : cause => effect; or action => reaction. The Ancients, however, saw Time not as linear, but as circular. Time, on Earth runs like the hands of a clock. When one cycle is completed, the next cycle begins.

The end is the beginning. The new cycle can be on Earth as well, or can be in the realm of the Netjeru. This is the case, when the Ka (one of three forms of the soul) ascends to another (higher) plane of existence. It is at that plane that the Netjeru exist. Their cycle is a million times as long as the Earth cycle. Both planes of existence exist in the primordial chaos that surrounds us, and which the Ancients called the Duat.

The ever practically inclined Egyptians at once noticed the major problem with existence on an ethereal plane. On such an immaterial plane, where does the food come from ? How would the Netjeru feed themselves ? Because as they were alive, they would need sustenance. To fulfil their needs, they get the food where it is : on Earth. But in order to do so, they do need corporeality. That is the reason why statues in Ancient Egypt have such a special status. Statues called Ka-statues were made of Gods and other Netjeru (such as deceased Pharaohs), for the soul (Ka) of the Netjer to have a place to settle. From the presented offerings, the Ka would then extract the ethereal energy with which it would feed itself, leaving the material remains of the offerings for the priests of the temple. An elegant solution, if ever there was one...

It was, however, quite impractical, if not virtually impossible, to cater to all Netjeru in this way. Remember that there are over 10,000 Netjeru, not including the ancestors. So, in order not to forget any Netjer, there were places, usually just outside the temples, where offerings were made to all Netjeru, without distinction. That way, no one was ever forgotten.

In theory it was only Pharaoh who was allowed to offer to the Netjeru, for only Pharaoh was "Netjer-Nefer" and "Remet" : "The Beautiful/good God" and "Human". This is the concept of divine birth that has stood from the fourth millennium BC until the age of the Ptolemies. Its remnants survived until well in the 19th century for all monarchs who were King or Queen "by the Grace of God". It still survives, in a way, in the Roman Catholic Church, where the Pope is Pope "by the Grace of God". The following myth may be the origin of, or the excuse for this concept of Divine Birth.

Once upon a time there was a Netjer who felt the need to mingle with us humans. So he sent an emissary. Now, the nature of the Netjeru is such, that they cannot stay on our plane of existence for very long, and have to "possess" a humans body in order to interact with us. So, the Netjer (and depending on the geographical location of the myth this is Amun, Ra, Horus or Atum) searched for a way to gain a permanent presence on Earth. His emissary was to find him the perfect vessel for his "essence". The emissary found this vessel in the person of the first Great Wife of the first Pharaoh. So, then Ra took possession of Pharaohs body, made love to the Great Wife, and impregnated her with the first Netjer-Nefer, the "God who is both Man and God". Which will sound pretty familiar to any Christian... but this story is some 4,000 years older than the one in the New Testament...

2.2.1.9. Concerning Nefertiti and Nefertari

Both names are relatively rare and only appear from the 18th dynasty forward. Nefertiti, Great Wife of Akhenaten, and Nefertari, Great Wife of Ramesses II, share the first part of their name, the "Nefer". Now, traditionally, we see these names as Nefer-Titi and Nefer-Tari, but that is actually incorrect. By now, we have learned that the "T" is the sign for the feminine gender, so it is clear that we actually should speak of Nefer(e)t-Ity and Nefer(e)t-Ary. As we know that Nefer means, good/beautiful, this translates as the "The female beauty/goodness" or, more popularly translated : "The beautiful woman".

The suffix –ity means : “after she has come hither”. This might be a sign that Nefertiti was not indigenous to either Waset (Thebes) or even Egypt (see page VI & VII). Her full name signified : “The female beauty after she has come hither.” Or “the beautiful woman that came from elsewhere.”.

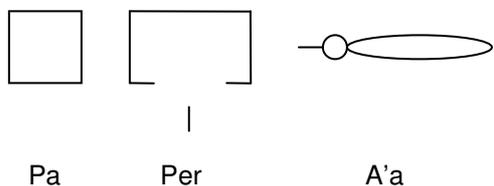
The suffix –ary means : “from him/belonging to him”, which would make Nefertary into “The female beauty of him” or “the beautiful woman that belongs to him”. “Him”, of course, would have been Ramesses II.

Concerning the hypothesis that Nefertiti and Nefertari were sisters

The relative rarity of both names, both geographically and historically, gave rise to the speculation that both ladies were actually sisters. Supporters of this theory are of the opinion that this must be possible, even though there were at least 7 other Pharaohs between Akhenaten and Ramesses II. A second theory, more moderate, does not exclude a family tie between them, but would sooner have Nefertari the niece or grand-niece of Nefertiti (the daughter of granddaughter of a sister of Nefertiti).

It is one of the advantages of the autodidact that he doesn't have to accept either, but can allow all possible theories to exist simultaneously, taking note of all of them, but not converting to either.

2.2.1.10. Concerning the origin of the words “Papyrus” and “Nile”



“Papyrus” is clearly a Greek word, so we know by now that we can drop the end –s. “Papyru” is the Greek form of the Ancient Egyptian “Pa-per-a’a”. A short burst of research teaches us that “Pa” means “that belonging to”. “Per” as we have already seen, means “House”, and “a’a” is a sign for “great/big”. So, literally, “Pa-per-a’a” means “That which belongs to the great house”.

“The Great House” is, of course, something entirely different than “the great house”. In “Pa-per-a’a”, the Egyptians refer to “The Great House” the same way we would refer to “The White House”, “Downing Street 10” or “The Elysée” : in a figurative sense. What is meant, is Pharaoh. Incidentally, there is also a firm linguistic connection between the words “Pharaoh” and “Per-a’a”. Some linguists argue that the word “Pharaoh” derives from “Per-a’a”, others are in favour of “Per-Wer”, but as they take “a’a” and “wer” to both mean “great”, we can be fairly sure of the translation.

This could be taken to mean that the making of papyrus was only allowed to the royal manufactories. This hypothesis is supported by the observation that, until the Ptolemaic era, very few “civilian” texts have been found on papyrus. Apparently, your average Egyptian preferred writing on clay tablets or ostraka (shards).

Whatever the truth may be, the Egyptians themselves seldom referred to the material as “Pa-per-A’a”. They simply called it “Mehdet” (scroll).

Concerning the age of the word and concept of “Pharaoh”

Dr. Peter De Smet is of the opinion that the word (and consequently the concept) of “Pharaoh” is first used during the 15th or Hyksos Dynasty.

Others are of a different opinion, believing that the term is older and goes all the way back to the father of the First Dynasty, Narmer.

Once again, let me point out that it is the distinct advantage of the autodidact to take note of both theories without having to commit to either.

How far the study of names can take us, is illustrated by the name of the river that dominates Egyptian life from start to finish : the Nile. The fact that “Nile” derives from “Nao-Iteru-A’a” may not be clear at the onset, but after some analyses the logic becomes clear.

“Nao” is a demonstrative pronoun that eventually degraded into the equivalent of “the”. In “Iteru” the “T” is a weak consonant, and weak consonants all share the same characteristic : over time they tend to disappear in spoken and written language. What remains, is “Ieru”, meaning “Stream”. The “U” signifies that we are dealing with a plural, so “Streams”. The “R” is incorrectly translated into Greek as an “L” (the Egyptians, strangely enough, did not know the sound, or the letter “L”, and the Greek consistently mistranslated the “R” for “L”). “A’a”, as we already know, means “great”. So in translation, “Nao-Iteru-A’a” becomes “The Streams great” or “The great River(s)”. It is, hieroglyphically, written with the glyph for “N-Tr” (remember that we have none to few vowels in Ancient Egyptian). As we have just seen that the “T” tends to disappear and the “R” is incorrectly translated as “L”, we now know that the Greeks read the whole thing as “N-L”. Hence the Greek name “Nilos”. Nile. So, actually, we ought to say “Niter”, in stead of “Nile”.

2.2.1.11. Concerning names and name giving

Someone asked : “How do we keep tabs on all those names of Pharaohs from 30 dynasties ? There have been several Pharaohs with the same names (Ramesses I to XI, Djehutymes I to IV, etc). How do we tell them apart ?” This is a justified question, as the Ancient Egyptians did not know the use of surnames. And this concerns only the Pharaohs, what if we include all other people that were called Ramesses ? The use of a surname is a relatively recent development for which we, mainly, have to thank Napoleon Bonaparte. Even with the added advantage of surnames, it is often still difficult to follow a genealogical line : in Holland, for instance, there was a family called Van Goedstetten. During the Bonapartist regime of General Bernadotte they changed their name to “de Bonneville”. These days, certain branches carry the surname “Bovie”. Van Goedstetten, de Bonneville, Bovie : all one family, but three names.

Not that long ago it sufficed for anyone to be called “John with the Hump of Mary of the Mill beyond the Miller’s Field”. Everyone in the region knew exactly who that person was, and you would seldom be mistaken for any number of other “Johns”.

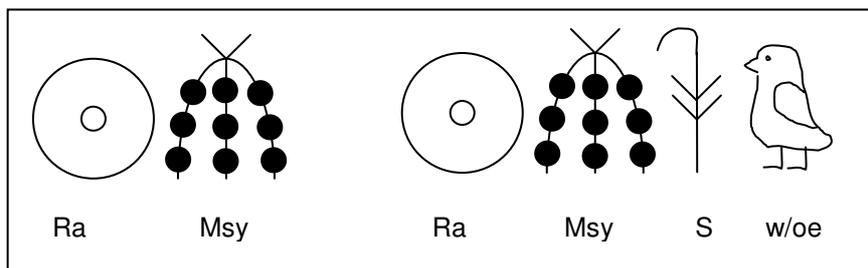
We'll see that name giving in Ancient Egypt was somewhat more convoluted, especially when it came to naming Pharaohs. More about that later on.

In Ancient Egyptian we discern three types of names : Theophoric names, Basilophoric names and Optative names.

2.2.1.11.1. CONCERNING THEOPHORIC NAMES

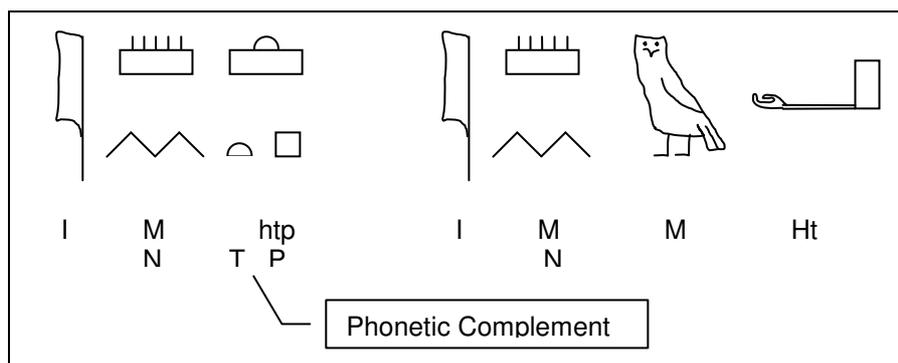
Theophoric names are names that refer to a deity. The deity's name is preceded or followed by an epitheton. There are few examples in our western culture, especially since the Judeo-Christian God's name is either deliberately unknown or His name is "not spoken". The Latin name Deodonatus (Godgiven) is probably the closest thing we have to a theophoric name in our culture.

The Egyptian culture on the other hand, has a large number of theophoric names. Let's take a closer look at the name Ramesses. We're already familiar with the Greek -s at the end, so we know that it is actually "Ra-Messe". A first way to distinguish royalty from other people called Ramesses, is a purely Egyptological distinction. The royal name Ra-Messe is written with two hieroglyphs : "Ra" and "Msy". Non-royal people wrote their name Ra-Messe in four hieroglyphs : the two used by the Pharaoh, plus two phonetic complements "s" and "w/u". So, the Egyptological consensus is to read Pharaonic names as Ra-Messe(s), and the others as Ra-Mosis or Rahmose. Basically, however, it's the same name.



The hieroglyphs are a pictogram for the sun, "Ra", and three skins of foxes, tied together at the top, meaning "giving birth/being born by". The phonetic complements "s" and "w/u" both clarify the triad "Msy" and have their own meaning : "him". So the name translates as "Being born by Ra", "Him who is born of Ra", "Ra has born him", but also "Ra continuously provides him with life".

Now let's take a closer look at a few names with the God Amun in them : Amunhotep and Amenemhat.



The first three glyphs construct the name of Amun. It is an Egyptological convention that we call him Amun, Amen or Amon. In fact, the first letter of his name is an “I”, so basically it should be Imun.). The three final glyphs are a triad (at the top) and two phonetic complements at the bottom. We add vowels as best as we can determine (remember that there are virtually no vowels in hieroglyphic script), and so we read : “I-M-N-Htp”, or “Imenhotep”, which means “Amun has been brought to rest” or, in the more popular form : “Amun is content”.

Our second Amun-related name has the sign of an owl behind the name of Amun. This, too, is a phonogram for the sound “M”. The glyph looking like a hand stretched out as if giving a gift, is the phonogram for the diphthong “ht”. Literally : “I-M-N-M-Ht” or Amenemhat (Amun-Em-Het), sometimes also written as Amenemet. And this means as much as “Amun is at the head/front”.

2.2.1.11.2. CONCERNING BASILOPHORIC NAMES

Basilophoric names are based on, or refer to illustrious and venerated people. Our system of naming our children after saints and historic personalities is a basilophoric system.

An Egyptian example of a basilophoric name is the name Amenemhet-Ankh, which means “Amenemhet lives long” or “Long live Amenemhet”.

2.2.1.11.3. CONCERNING OPTATIVE NAMES

These names express a wish or state of being. The name of Egypt's most prominent Ruling Queen, Pharaoh Hatshepsut, is such an optative name. Her name, “Ht-Shps-u-t” is construed of two parts : “Ht” (first) and “Shps” (noble). The “U” signifies the plural tense, and the “T” the female genus. So we read : “First of all noble women”, usually taken to mean “May she be the first of all noble women”.

Concerning the name of Hatshepsut

In the context of this seminar we have assumed that Hatshepsut was given this name as a child. Christian Jacq, on the other hand, is of the opinion that Hatshepsut herself only took that name when she proclaimed herself Pharaoh. In that case the translation would rather be “She is...” than “May she be...”

2.2.1.12. Concerning the fivefold titles of Pharaoh

Fortunately for us, every reigning Pharaoh sported no less than five titles, or names. Most of the time, it is on the basis of these different titles that we distinguish between Pharaohs of the same name. They may have one name in common, but they never have five in common. Like everyone, Pharaoh had his birth name, or the name he carried in his youth (we're not entirely certain when an Egyptian received his name : by birth or later). This is called the Sa-Ra (son of Ra) name. Upon his ascension to the throne, he would adopt his throne name, the Horus Name. The three additional names, more or less chosen according to the same system a pope uses when he

chooses a name for his pontificate, referred to emphasises Pharaoh wanted to put on certain policies, or to character traits he wished for himself. Why don't we start with the most important one, the Horus Name ?

2.2.1.12.1. CONCERNING THE HORUS-NAME

The Horus Name is the oldest Pharaonic name we know. In fact, from a number of the 1st dynasty and pre-dynastic Pharaohs, it is the only name we know. So, it doesn't mean it is the oldest form of name giving, but it is the oldest form that was important enough to be written down. It is only on occasion, like in reports of coronations, that we find all five titles.

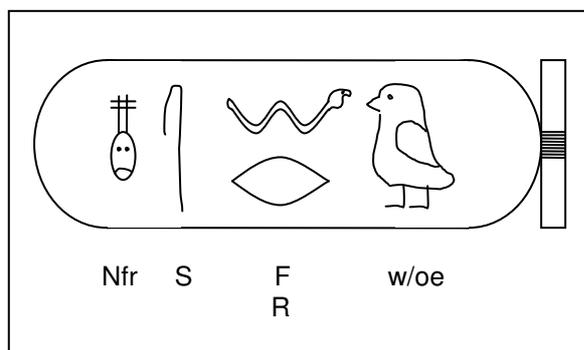


The illustration above shows us the typical way of writing the Horus Name in the Old Kingdom. A standing or lying palace wall (here lying) with above, or in front of it, the Horus falcon. This form is called a Serekh, and it is the oldest determinative of a royal name. It precedes the cartouche (see further) by several centuries. In this case we read : "Hor(us)-Nb-Ma'a-T" (Hornebmaat), which is the Horus Name of "S-Nfr-U" (Snefru) from the 5th Dynasty, signifying "Horus is the Lord of Cosmic Balance".

2.2.1.12.2. CONCERNING THE SA-RA NAME

The Sa-Ra name (Son of Ra Name) is, in a manner of speaking the birth name of Pharaoh. For instance, to quote a Sa-Ra Name of a Pharaoh before he became Pharaoh, the Sa-Ra Name Ramesses is written next to the relief of prince Ramesses on the King List of Abydos at the mortuary temple of his father Seti I.

To stick to the same Pharaoh as above, let's take a look at the somewhat jumbled Sa-Ra Name of Snefru.



According to the order of the glyphs, this name should actually be read Nefersu. The "F" and "R" being phonetic complements for the "Nfr", are omitted and the "S" actually comes after the "Nfr". But remember : the order of the glyphs can be changed for any number of reasons ! Furthermore note that the snake is facing the wrong way. My fault.

The Sa-Ra Name is one of two names that is written in a cartouche. This cartouche is a so-called determinative signifying royalty. Only royalty and certain Gods get their names written in a cartouche. Above or in front of the cartouche are two glyphs : the sun, as a symbol of Ra, and a duck, meaning "son".

2.2.1.12.3. CONCERNING THE NESU BITY NAME

This is the only other royal name that is written inside a cartouche. It differs from the Sa-Ra cartouche in that over the cartouche, or in front of it if it is written horizontally, there are two different glyphs. The reed and the bee symbolize the Two Lands, Lower and Upper Egypt. The reed is an ancient symbol for the Delta, and the bee is one of many symbols for the south. Both are often depicted on top of a little bread, . As this is a phonogram for the letter “T”, this is in this case a phonetic complement for both glyphs, making it actually into “Nesut-Bity” as it indeed reads “Ns-t-B-t”. Alternatively this is also read as “Nesbit”. It means “He of the Reed and the Bee”, of course referring to Pharaoh as the protector of both Upper and Lower Egypt.

2.2.1.12.4. CONCERNING THE NEBTI NAME

The Nebti Name is not written in a cartouche and is actually seldom used. It is

preceded by two specific glyphs :  The vulture “Nkh-Bt” and the cobra “Ws-ch-t” or “Wdj-t” (depending on the translating Egyptologist) stand for the Goddesses Nekhbet and Wesechet (or Wadjet). Nekhbet is literally “She of the city of Nekhbe”, a town in the south of Egypt, now called El Kab, and therefore a patron goddess of Upper Egypt. Wesechet is a snake goddess revered especially in the Delta, which makes her a patron goddess of Lower Egypt. Once again the glyphs refer to Pharaohs status as the unifier of both lands.

2.2.1.12.5. CONCERNING THE GOLDEN HORUS NAME

The last and final name of the fivefold titles isn’t written in a cartouche either, nor in a Serekh, but is, just like the Nebti name, preceded by a specific sign, a determinative.



The Horus-falcon, seated on the glyph for “gold”. Coincidentally (or maybe not that coincidentally) the glyph for “gold” is the same as the glyph for the city of Ombos (the current Kom Ombo). Ombos was the city where all the caravans bearing Nubian gold gathered upon entering Egypt proper. Even in Arabian Kom Ombo means “Hill of Gold”. This city was always associated with the god Seth, so if we see the glyph for Ombos also as a glyph for Seth, it might just mean the victory of Horus over Seth, a common theme in Egyptian mythology.

2.2.1.12.6. CONCERNING A FEW EXAMPLES OF COMPLETE FIVEFOLD TITLES

So, even though several Pharaohs shared the same Sa-Ra name, and/or Horus Name, we are usually able to pinpoint the exact Pharaoh by looking at the other Names in the Fivefold Titles. Comparing the age of the writings is not really an option, as specific names are quite limited to specific time periods.

Now, as an encore, let’s have a look at two complete Fivefold Titles, one “real” and one “imaginary”...

Sa Ra	Ptolemaios V Epiphanes	
Horus	Iwaennetjerwymeryitu	The Heir of the Two Father-loving Gods
Nesu Bity	Setepptah	Chosen of Ptah
Nebti	Userkara	Powerful is the Soul of Ra
Golden Horus	Sekhemankhamun	Living Image of Amun

This next one is entirely fictitious, but I beg you to allow me this small indulgence...

Sa Ra	Panebtawy Meryamun	Lord of the Two Lands, Beloved of Amun
Horus	Kheperkama'at	The Soul of Ma'at comes into Being
Nesu Bity	Userma'atra Setepenma'at	Powerful is the Justice of Ra, Chosen of Ma'at
Nebti	Ptahhirkhopshef	Ptah is his Strength
Golden Horus	Wehemmessutawy	He who gives continuous Rebirth to the Two Lands

2.2.1.13. Concerning the future

The syllabus of Dr. Peter De Smet contains some 60 additional pages concerning the grammar of ancient Egyptian. Unfortunately all of this is in Dutch. We'll get around to translating it someday.

Although it is the goal to, one day, finish a comprehensive work, entitled "The Autodidacts Guide to Ancient Egypt", that will offer an understandable, yet complete review of all aspects of Ancient Egypt, it is not the goal of this transcript to present a complete section. Work on "The Autodidacts Guide..." is a lifelong enterprise for which I also count on the intellectual support of each and every one of you, the readers. Together with all enthusiasts and Egyptomaniacs, amateur and professional alike, we can create this work that will be accessible for everyone.

This way, we will help preserve a wonderful and intriguing culture to which we still owe a tremendous lot in our daily life. Sadly our heritage is in danger of disappearing forever. If the radicalisation of the Arabian world continues at the pace it moves at today, then nothing will prevent them from treating the pyramids and the Valley of the Kings the same way the Taliban treated irreplaceable statues of Buddha : by blowing them up because they don't fit within their extremely narrow-minded world view. Fortunately, since the start of this project, over 1800 people, most of them young people from Egypt, have joined us, and by doing so they have proven to be able to stand above all differences of race, culture and religion. Together we apply "The Rule of Ma'at" to our own lives and project our behaviour towards others, so that eventually, in a utopian future, everyone will apply Ma'at's Rule. And who knows ? Maybe finally, the prophecy an Old Egyptian spoke to me in the Valley of the Kings will come true :

"PHARAOH SHOULD COME BACK, SIR..."