

2 The Kemyt script

The intrinsic *raison-d'être* of this paleography lies in the peculiarity of the Kemyt script, the interpretation of which depends on the definition of hieratic and cursive (linear) hieroglyphs.¹ Previous literature acknowledges its archaizing aspect evoking earlier forms of hieratic.² It has been connected to the cursive hieroglyph forms as in the Book of the Dead manuscripts and has sometimes even been understood as a script allowing transition from the contemporaneous hieratic to the cursive hieroglyphs in the funerary/religious texts to be learned by apprentice scribes.³ Goelet even stated that “in many instances, there was actually little difference between the Kemyt ‘hieratic’ and the cursive hieroglyphic form of a character.”⁴ Yet, a close examination of the Kemyt manuscripts through the lens of materiality highlights several dissimilarities between scripts. Some graphemes, like Gardiner D21  or Gardiner P8  for instance, do have a similar *ductus* and form, regardless of the cursive script. However, the Book of the Kemyt also displays allographs (or “diagnostic sign”),⁵ making it *a priori* a cursive script of its own.⁶

¹ See for instance Verhoeven (2015), Fischer-Elfert (2021), Grandet (2022), Konrad (2022), Díaz-Iglesias Llanos (2023), and Verhoeven (2023a) for up-to-date synthesis on the hieratic and linear hieroglyphic scripts with previous bibliography.

² For instance, Quirke (2004, 52) speaks of “‘Old Hieratic’, the standard cursive script of the late Old Kingdom to early Middle Kingdom,” while Goelet (2010, 125) describes the Kemyt script style as “reminiscent of the 11th Dynasty or even the First Intermediate Period,” Gasse (2005, 2) “la difficile (pour un étudiant de l’époque Ramesside) cursive du Moyen Empire” and Parkinson (2002, 323) as “a Middle Kingdom style hieratic, through linear hieroglyphs suitable for religious texts, to fully drawn hieroglyphs.” More recently, Fischer-Elfert (2020, 658) refers to the Kemyt script style as “semi-hieratic” and “offshoot of the Egyptian script,” while Quack (2023, 80) characterizes it as “sub-mittelhieratisch.”

³ See e.g. McDowell (2000, 231–232), Parkinson (2002, 322–323), Goelet (2003, 20–21), Goelet (2008, 103, fn. 2), Goelet (2010, 125–126), and Goelet (2013, 119).

⁴ Goelet (2010, 125). In fn. 26 he also specified that Parkinson (2002, 323) has reached a similar conclusion.

⁵ Cf. chapter 1, fn 3.

⁶ O. BM EA 21186, O. BM EA 21216, and O. BM EA 21284 are three parallel copies of a model letter used for a school exercise, which display a similar script to that of the Book of Kemyt. That said, they have not been included in this discussion. They do not preserve enough graphemes to make useful comparisons in table 2.1. Out of the ten selected graphemes, only four are present in the three British Museum ostraca: A1 , D58 , G17 , and G43 . See Hagen (2007) and Quack (2023) for a discussion of this model letter and Demarée (2002, 23–24, pl. 61–62 and 65) or https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA21284 (accessed on 19.11.2024) for pictures.

For an accurate definition of the Kemyt script, further elements should be considered, such as the ligaturing of characters and the sign iconicity, and deserve further research.⁷ This book is not the place to answer this complex question, as it primarily aims at displaying the data without the interpretative part (cf. chapter 1). At this moment, let it suffice to point out that ligatures are indeed very few in the Book of Kemyt,⁸ just as in the Book of the Dead as Goelet observed it,⁹ but the Kemyt graphemes do not have a strong iconicity unlike cursive hieroglyphs. The following list provides a selection of a few graphemes from different periods and text genres to illustrate this point (table 2.1¹⁰). I first chose two emblematic Kemyt excerpts¹¹: one from the late 17th–early 18th Dynasty (O. MMA Field No. 36112), and another dating from Ramesses III (O. Brussels E 3208). Both are used as key witnesses to make comparisons with earlier and contemporaneous material displaying cursive scripts on similar writing media, i.e. the 12th Dynasty Heqanakht letter I (P. MMA 22.3.516), the 17th Dynasty hymnic P. Moscow I, 16 314, a Ramesside excerpt of the Teaching of Amenemhat (O. LACMA M 80-203-204), the layout of which follows that of the Book of Kemyt, but the writing of which is a patent form of cursive hieroglyphs, in which many signs have preserved their iconicity, and finally the 18th Dynasty Book of Dead of Kha (P. Turin S. 8438) as one telling example of cursive hieroglyphs in funerary/religious texts.¹²

⁷ This is all the more complex as hieratic signs are sometimes used instead of their linear hieroglyph equivalents within cursive hieroglyphic inscriptions, such as the 18th-Dynasty Book of the Dead. See, for instance, the hare sign in the Book of Dead of Kha (cf. table 2.1 below) and Munro (1988, 254–257) and Díaz-Iglesias Llanos (2022) for further examples.

⁸ See the paleographic tables in section 5.25.

⁹ This reluctance to ligature signs makes Goelet (2013, 116) consider the Kemyt script cursive hieroglyphs, rather than a form of hieratic. Fischer-Elfert in Dreyer et al. (2002, 214–215), Burkard (2006, 411), Hagen (2007, 43), and Petersmarck (2012, 14–15) also speak of cursive hieroglyphs.

¹⁰ P. MMA 22.3.516 was drawn by James P. Allen (cf. Allen (2002)) and P. Moscow I, 16 314 by Georg Möller (cf. Möller (1927)). All remaining sources were drawn by myself.

¹¹ The selected sources had to be long excerpts to guarantee the presence of at least one hieratogram of each grapheme. Ramesside sources are many but few display the 11 selected graphemes in table 2.1.

¹² See also Ali (2001, 15–19) for further comparisons with several Books of the Dead of the 18th, 19th, and 21st dynasties – P. Cairo JE 51189, P. BM EA 9900, P. BM EA 9901, P. BM EA 10470, and P. Cairo CG 40007 respectively – for graphemes of Gardiner A1 , D1 , D2 , G17 , and W11 . For a diachronic overview of the recorded scripts in the Book of the Dead manuscripts, cf. Verhoeven (2023b, 170–175).

Table 2.1: Samples of characteristic graphemes in hieratic and cursive hieroglyphs

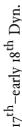
Grapheme	P. MMA 22.3.516	P. Moscow I, 16 314	O. MMA 36112	O. Brussels E 3208	O. L.ACMA M.80.203.204	P. Turin S. 8438
 A1						
 D1						
 D2						
						

Table 2.1: Samples of characteristic graphemes in hieratic and cursive hieroglyphs

Grapheme	P. MMA 22.3.516	P. Moscow I, 16 314	O. MMA 36112	O. Brussels E 3208	O. L.ACMA M180.203.204	P. Turin S. 8438
 D58						
 E34						
 G17						
	12 th Dyn.	17 th Dyn.	17 th –early 18 th Dyn.	Rameses III	Rameside	18 th Dyn.

Table 2.1: Samples of characteristic graphemes in hieratic and cursive hieroglyphs

Grapheme	P. MMA 22.3.516	P. Moscow I, 16 314	O. MMA 36112	O. Brussels E 3208	O. L.ACMA M.80.203.204	P. Turin S. 8438
 G43						
□ Q3						
 W19						
	12 th Dyn.	17 th Dyn.	17 th –early 18 th Dyn.	Rameses III	Rameside	18 th Dyn.

Table 2.1: Samples of characteristic graphemes in hieratic and cursive hieroglyphs

Grapheme	P. MMA 22.3.516	P. Moscow I, 16 314	O. MMA 36112	O. Brussels E 3208	O. L.ACMA M.80.203.204	P. Turin S. 8438
 Y ₁						
	12 th Dyn.	17 th Dyn.	17 th –early 18 th Dyn.	Ramesses III	Ramesseid	18 th Dyn.