

Group Writing as Text-Making Technique

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SSEA Symposium
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Semitic Texts in Egyptian Script

- Old Kingdom: 1
- New Kingdom: 5
- Late Period/Graeco-Roman: 2

Semitic Texts in Egyptian Script

- All are Northwest Semitic

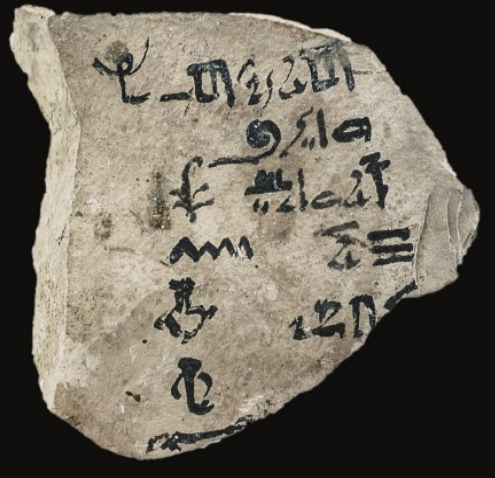
Semitic Texts in Egyptian Script

- All are Northwest Semitic
- Found in a diverse range of text types

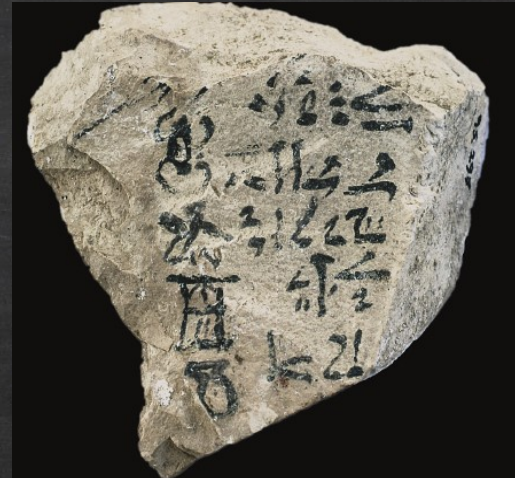
Semitic Texts in Egyptian Script

- All are Northwest Semitic
- Found in a diverse range of text types
- Two eras predominate:
 - 1. New Kingdom (*no Akkadian!*)

1. O. TT 99



Recto



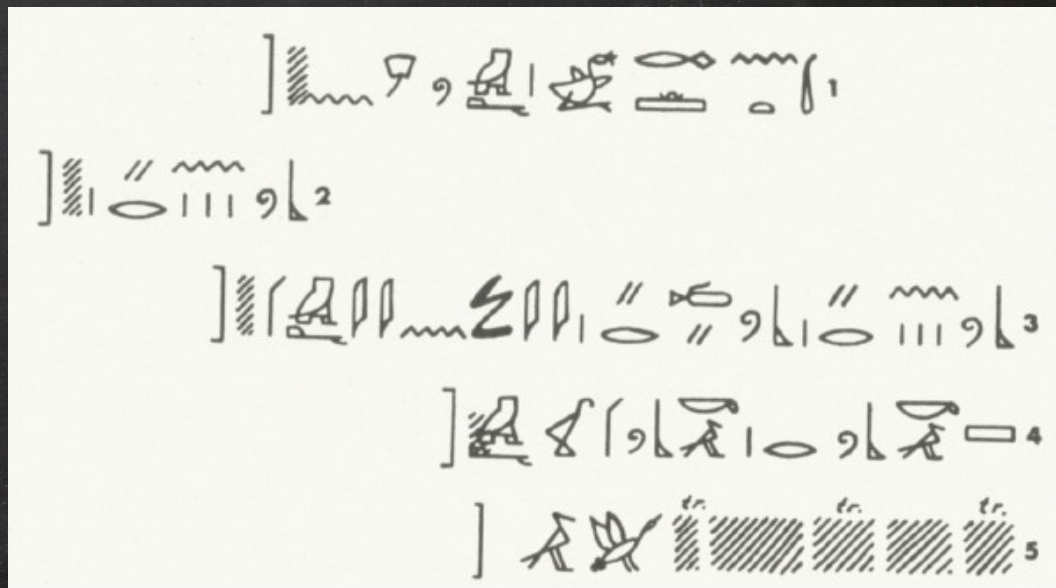
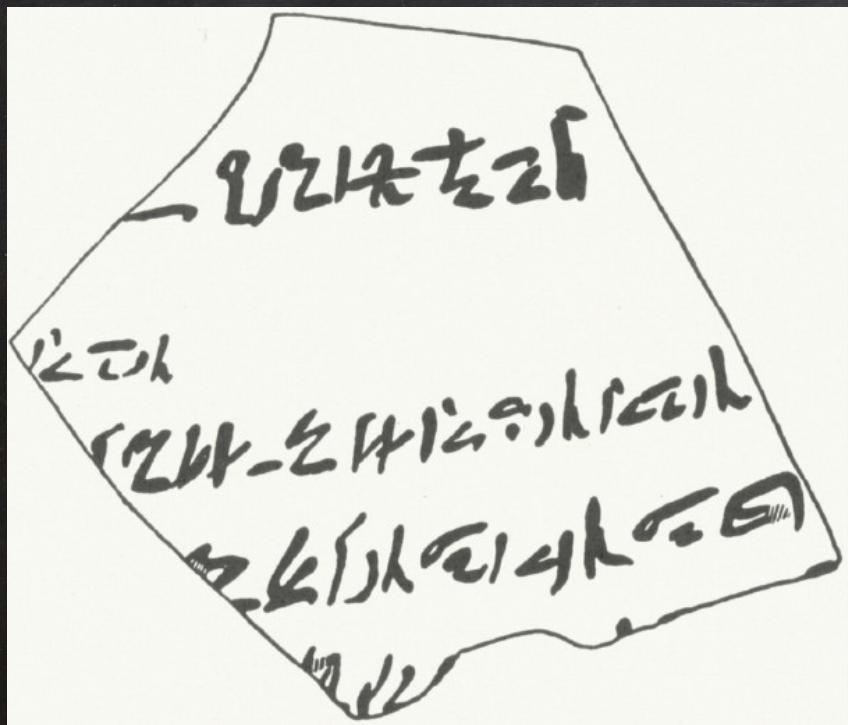
Verso



Photos: T. Schneider, BASOR 379 (2018)

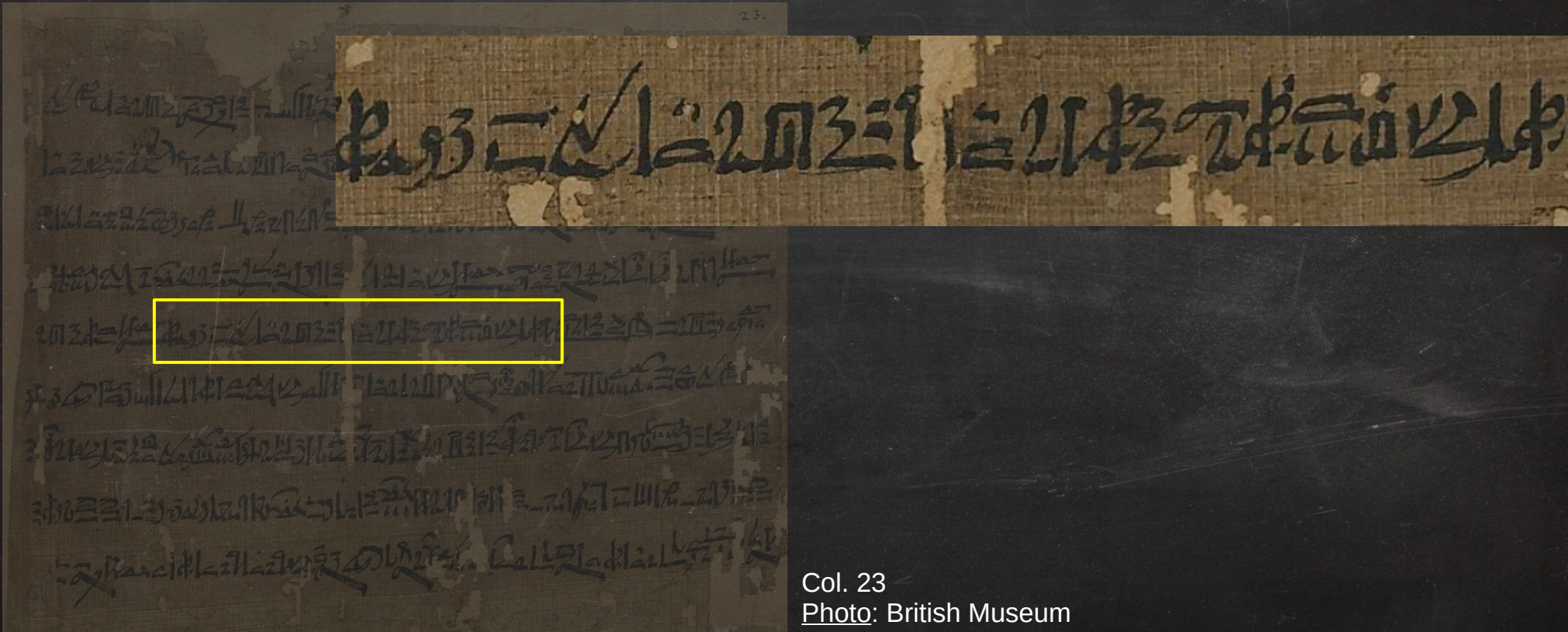
Transcriptions: B. Haring, JNES 72 no. 2 (2015)

2. O. CGC 25729



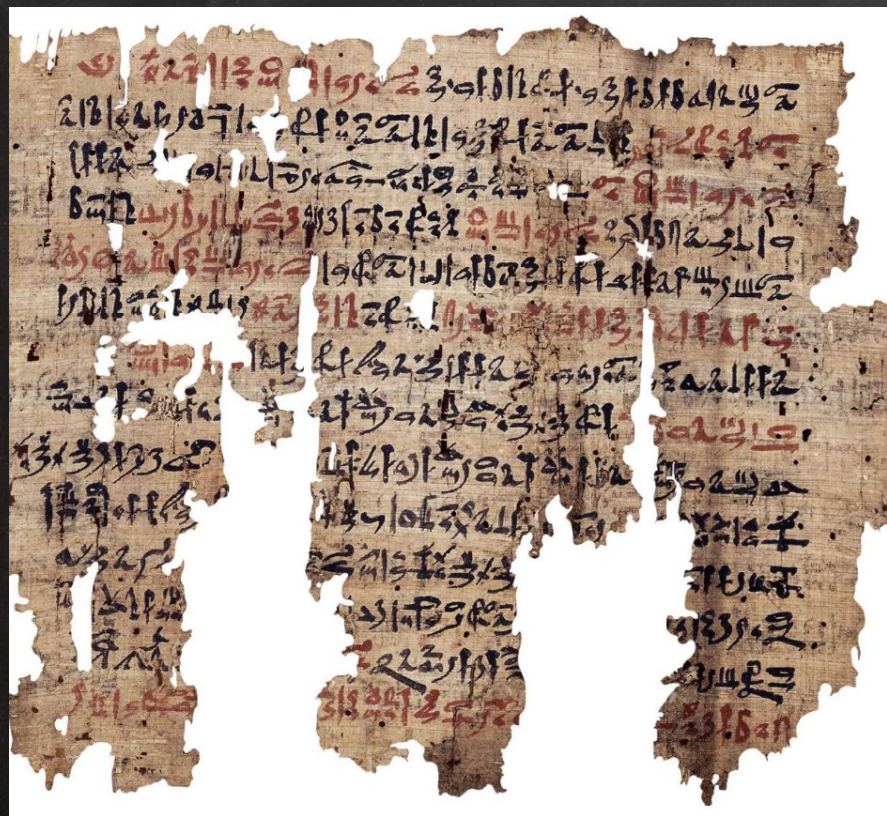
Černý, *Ostraca hiératiques*, CG 25501-25832 (1935), pl. XCVI
[Image from Shisa-Halevy, *Orientalia* (n.s.) 47.2 (1978)]

3. Satirical Letter (P. Anastasi I)



Col. 23
Photo: British Museum

4. London Medical Papyrus



Col. 7
Photo: British Museum

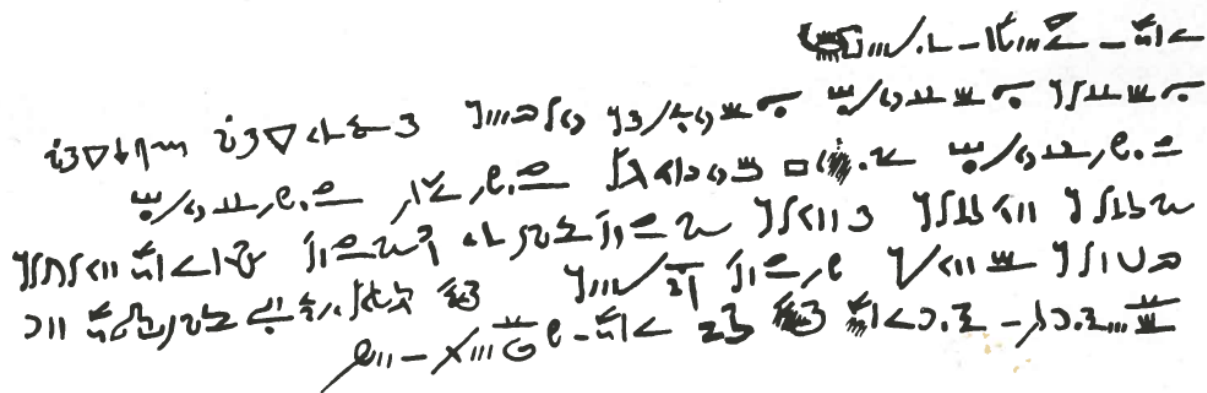
5. Harris Magical Papyrus

Semitic Texts in Egyptian Script

- All are Northwest Semitic
- Found in a diverse range of text types
- Two eras predominate:
 - 1. New Kingdom (*no Akkadian!*)
 - 2. Post-New Kingdom: Aramaic

The Late/G.-R. Period Semitic texts in Eg. script

- Wadi Hammamat graffito scorpion spell (?)

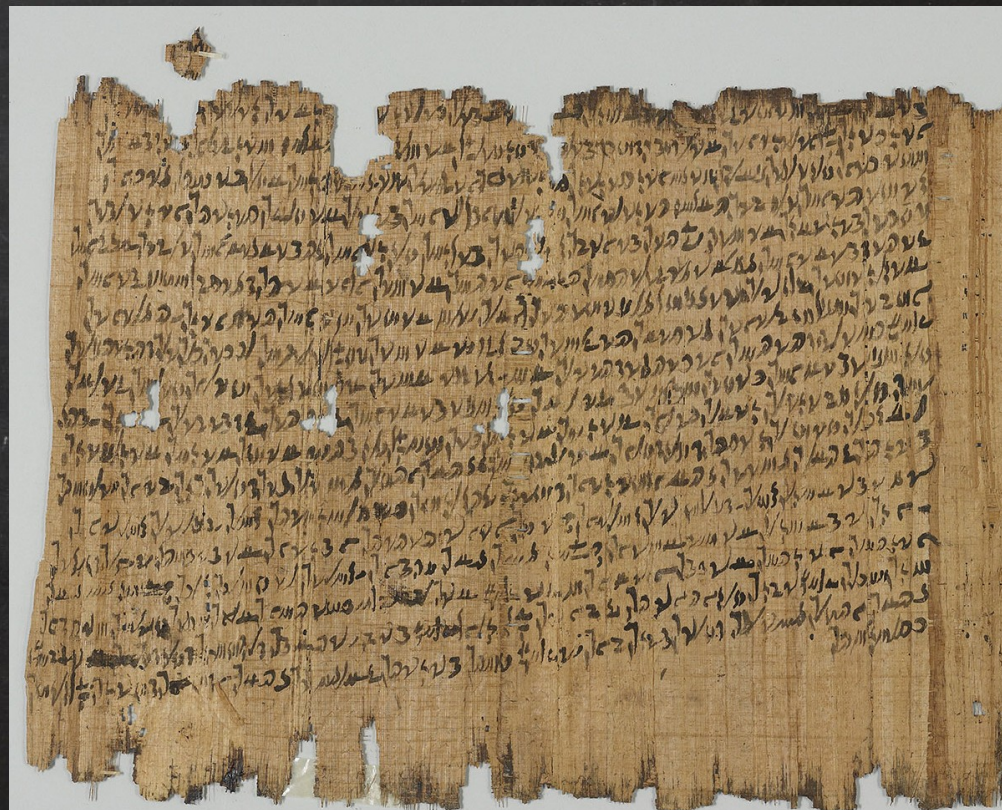


אֵת - מִן - לְ - מִן - לְ - מִן
הַ - שֶׁ - הָיָה - בְּ - הַ - מִן - לְ - מִן - לְ - מִן
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G. Vittmann, "Eine Zauberspruch gegen Skorpione im Wadi Hammamat," in Festchrift Lüddeckens (1984), Taf. 35

The Late/G.-R. Period Semitic texts in Eg. script

- P. Amherst 63



First col. of verso
(Photo: Morgan Library)

Semitic Texts in Egyptian Script

- Outlier: serpent spells in the Pyramid Texts of Unas (5th Dynasty) (?)



R. Steiner, *Early Northwest Semitic Serpent Spells in the Pyramid Texts* (2011), 107

Group Writing

- Used with all the New Kingdom texts
- A subset of the standard orthography used for loanwords and foreign proper names as well as certain native Egyptian words
- Developed in the New Kingdom

Group Writing

- Prior research on group writing
 - Since 19th century: interest in vowels

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- Prior research on group writing
 - Since 19th century: interest in vowels
 - **Assumption**: since the standard orthography does not indicate vowels, a modified orthography must, and that is the reason the orthography was modified
 - Encouraged by the prominence of the “weak consonants” *ʒ*, *y*, and *w*

Group Writing

- Prior research on group writing
 - **Bias**: Cf. Ignace Gelb’s “principle of unidirectional development”: all scripts proceeded from the most archaic forms to ones where both consonants and vowels, i.e. in the true alphabet, could be rendered lucidly

Group Writing

- But: impossible to derive a coherent and, more importantly, **predictive** system of vocalization from the evidence, since there are far too many exceptions

Group Writing

- But: impossible to derive a coherent and, more importantly, **predictive** system of vocalization from the evidence, since there are far too many exceptions
- Complication: contemporary evidence for vocalization

Group Writing

- Today's paper:
 - Show the general value of a **grammatological** (Peter T. Daniels) understanding of group writing, bracketing the issue of vowels
 - Grammatology treats writing systems as more than a vehicle for phonological information

Group Writing

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Group Writing

- Grammatological definition: signs which stand unambiguously for a consonant are used as a base and then supplemented with extra signs that are not present for phonetic value, but are simply visual markers.

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- Grammatological definition: signs which stand unambiguously for a consonant are used as a base and then supplemented with extra signs that are not present for phonetic value, but are simply visual markers.
- Follow well-worn patterns and are most commonly based around the consonants *ʒ*, *y*, and *w*.

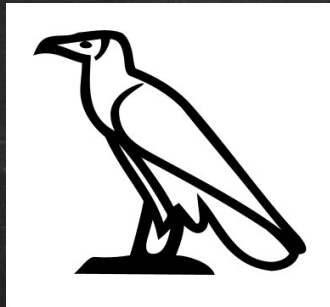
Group Writing

- The consonants *y* and *w*: good space fillers



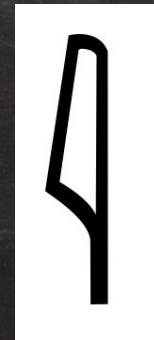
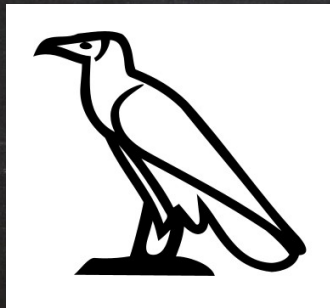
Group Writing

- The consonant ʒ: dropped in pronunciation (NK)



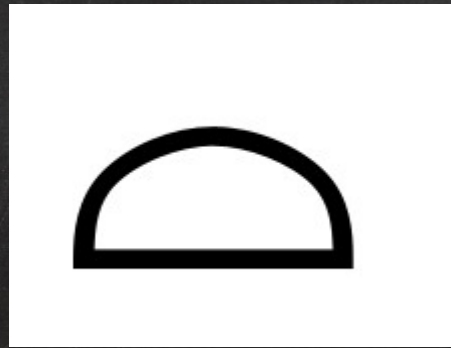
Group Writing

- The consonant ʕ: dropped in pronunciation (NK)
- To represent glottal stop (ʔ), reed leaf was used



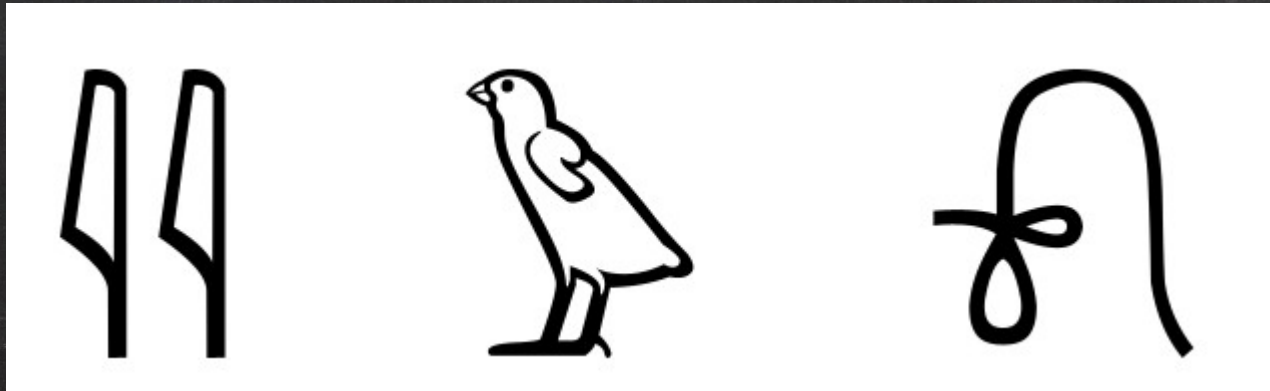
Group Writing

- *t* is rarely used as space filler: frequent phonetic complement for historical d and *d*



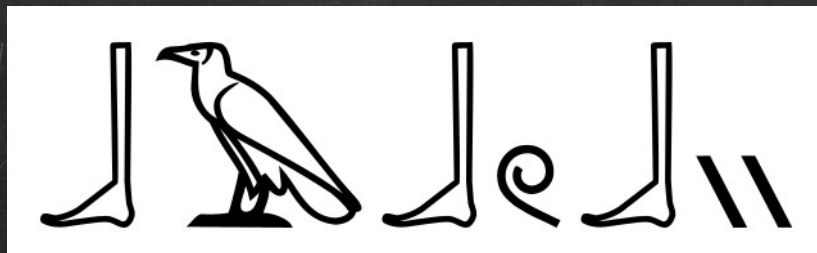
Group Writing

- Writing of base sign of y, w:



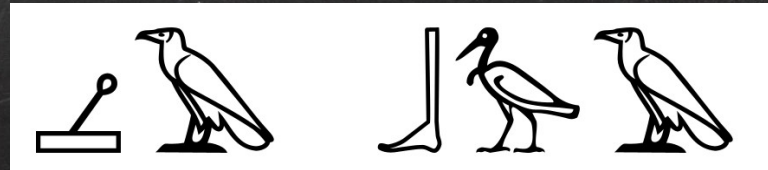
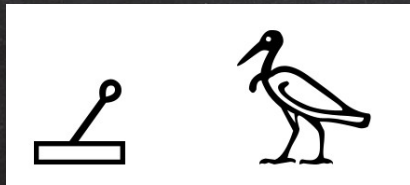
Group Writing

- Weak consonants ʒ , j , w can be added to monoconsonantal signs



Group Writing

- Biliteral signs: often written with phonetic complement, and almost always ʔ-series

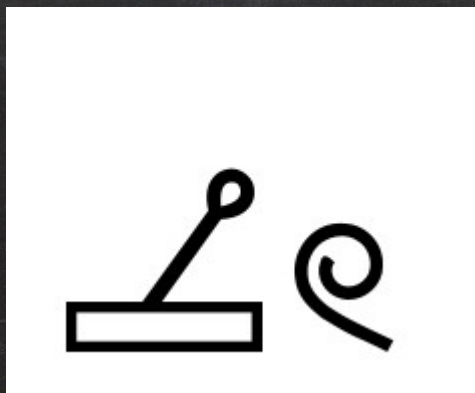


- Exception:



Group Writing

- Rare: ʒ-biliteral not followed by ʒ



= s, not sʒw!

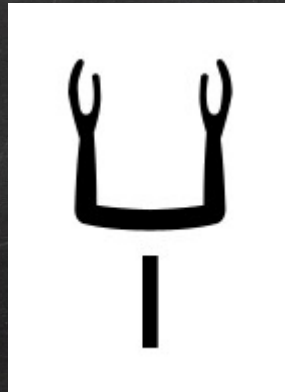
Group Writing

- Other extra signs: determinatives
- Not random, but closely associated



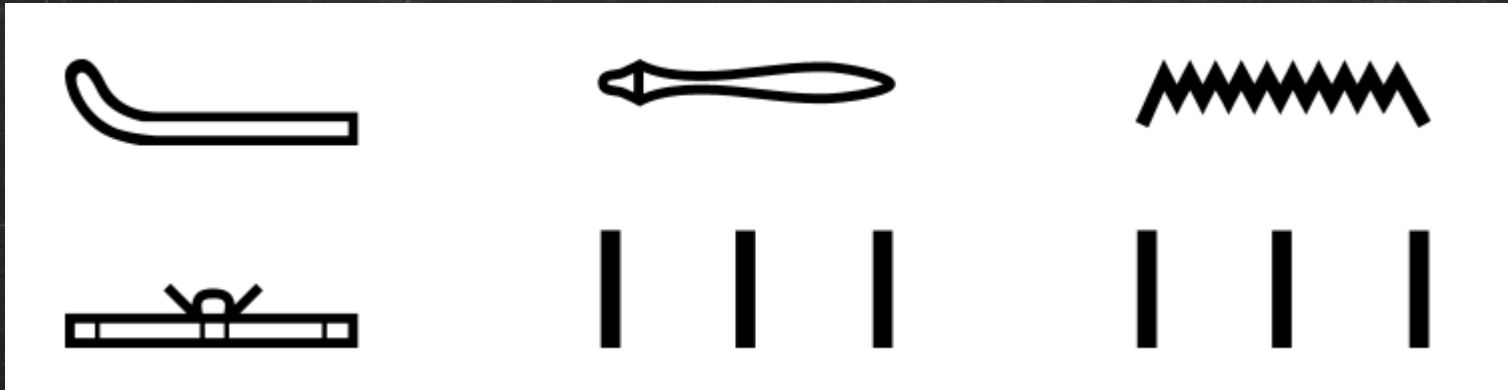
Group Writing

- Other extra signs: single stroke (Z1) after bilaterals



Group Writing

- Other extra signs: flat horizontal determinatives after other flat horizontal signs



Group Writing

- Popular sign combinations: whole words, other spellings



Group Writing

- Special case: “acrophonic principle”-like dropping of weak consonant



Group Writing

- Rare: trilaterals, weak consonant is dropped

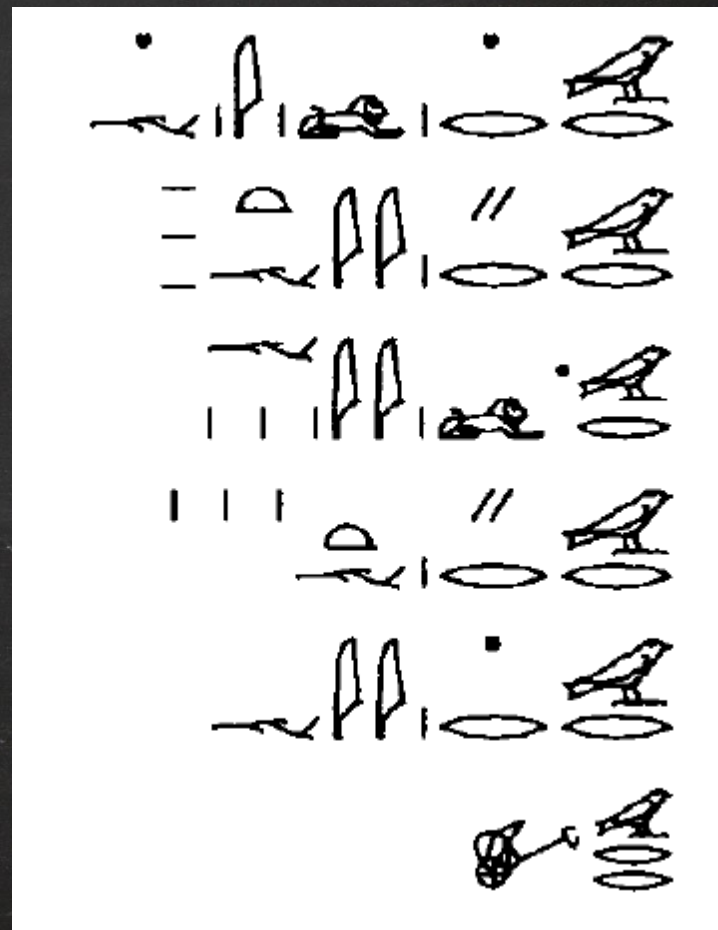


Group Writing

- Summary: theoretically, group writing is no different from the standard orthography in the way that they **both write consonantal skeletons of words.**


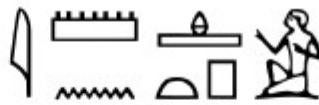
Group Writing


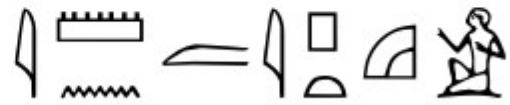
- Used for native words



Group Writing

- Used for nicknames

 *hwy*, diminutive of  *imn-htp*

 *ipy*, diminutive of  *imn-m-ipt*

Group Writing

- Common denominator: a need to avoid the confusion that would come when using writings that are closely associated with other words and, by extension, traditional etymologies
- *A visual technique*

Group Writing

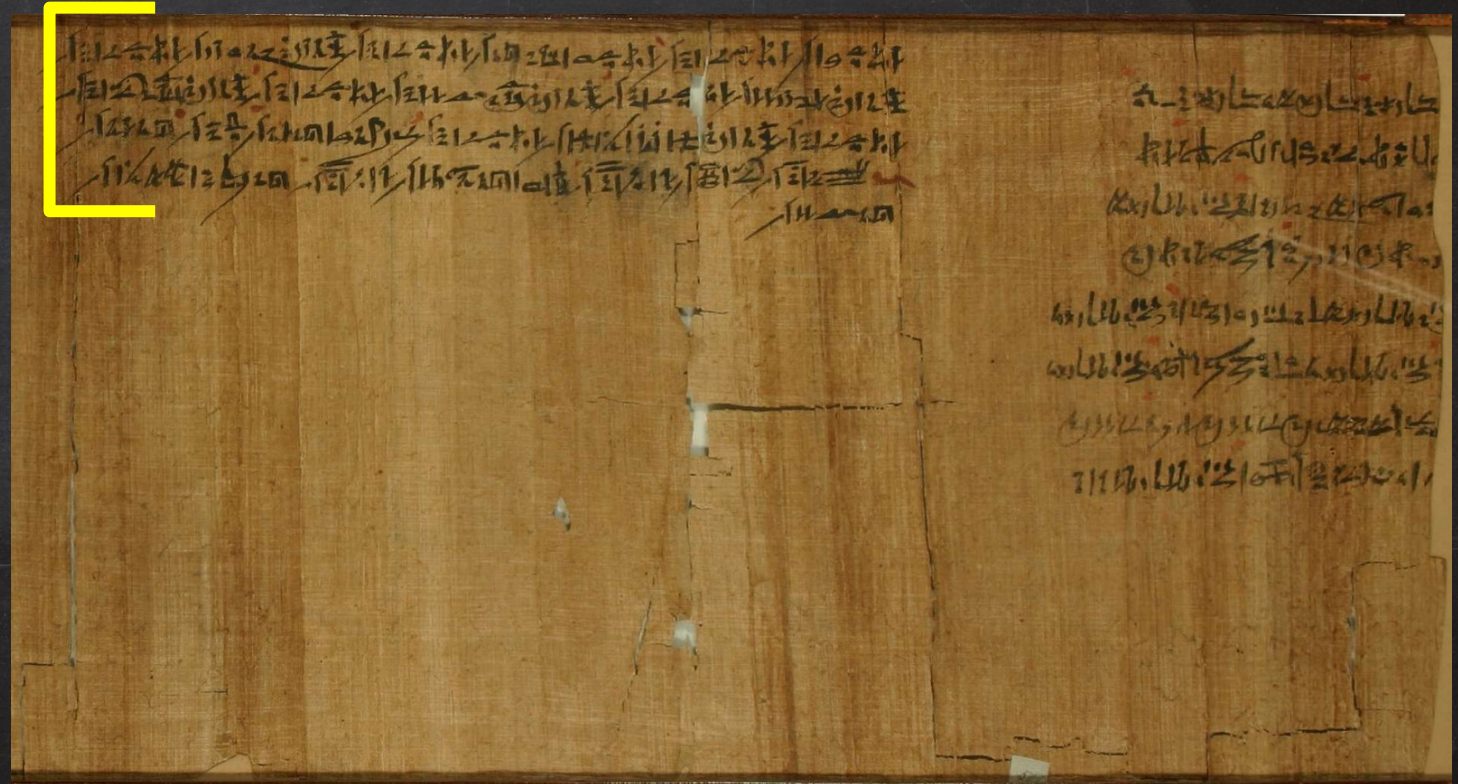
- Challenge: historical writings, traditional sign groupings
- To not be misleading representing a word that can be etymologically connected to a traditional Egyptian word

Group Writing

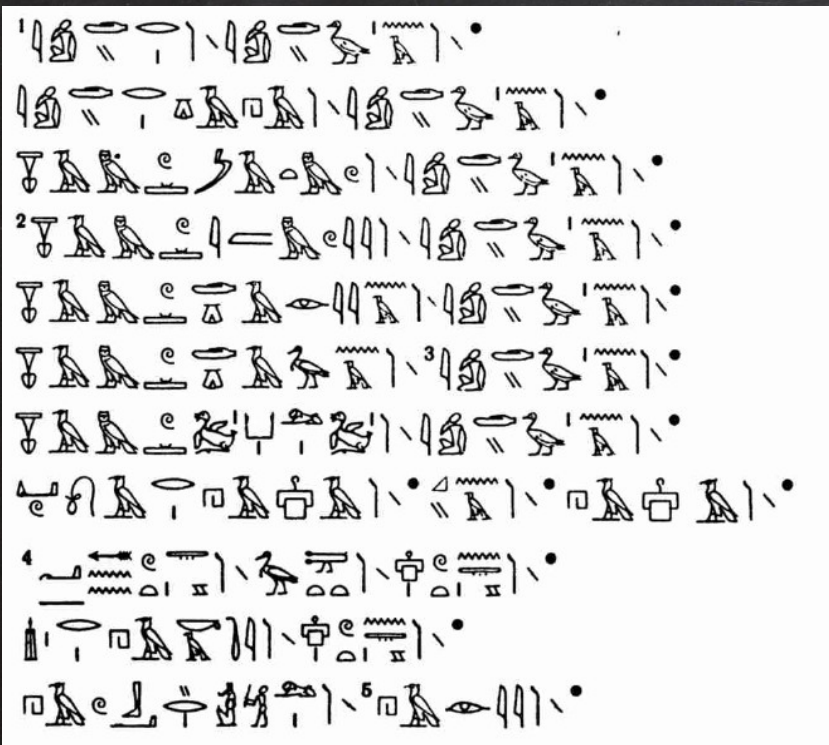
- Each consonant in the orthography can be supplemented with other signs that a reader will know do not need to be pronounced
- Or that mark it as different from the standard orthography without forcing a different pronunciation

Harris Magical Papyrus

Complete Northwest
Semitic text

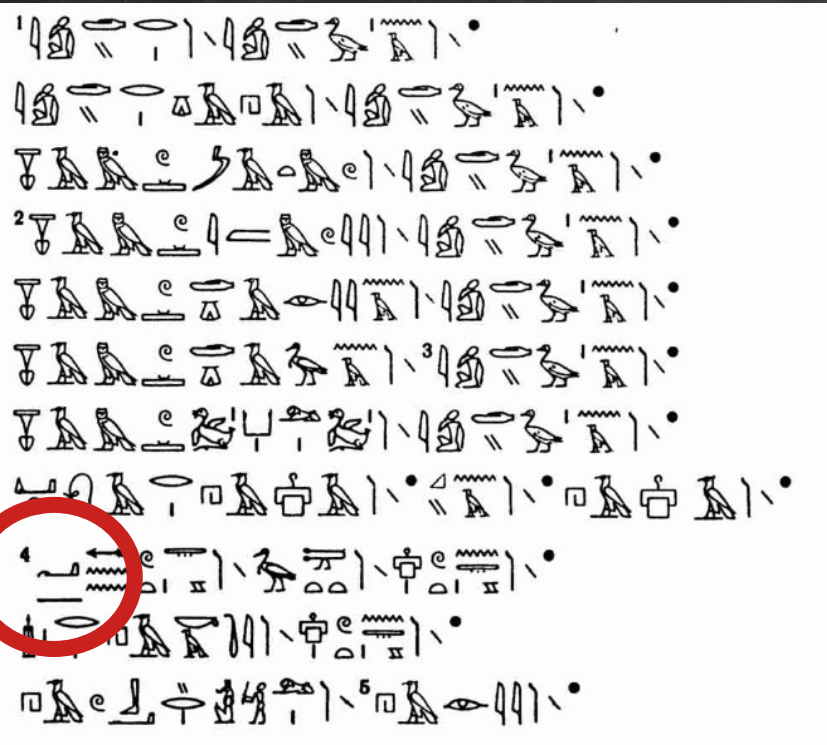


P. Harris lion hunt boasting poem



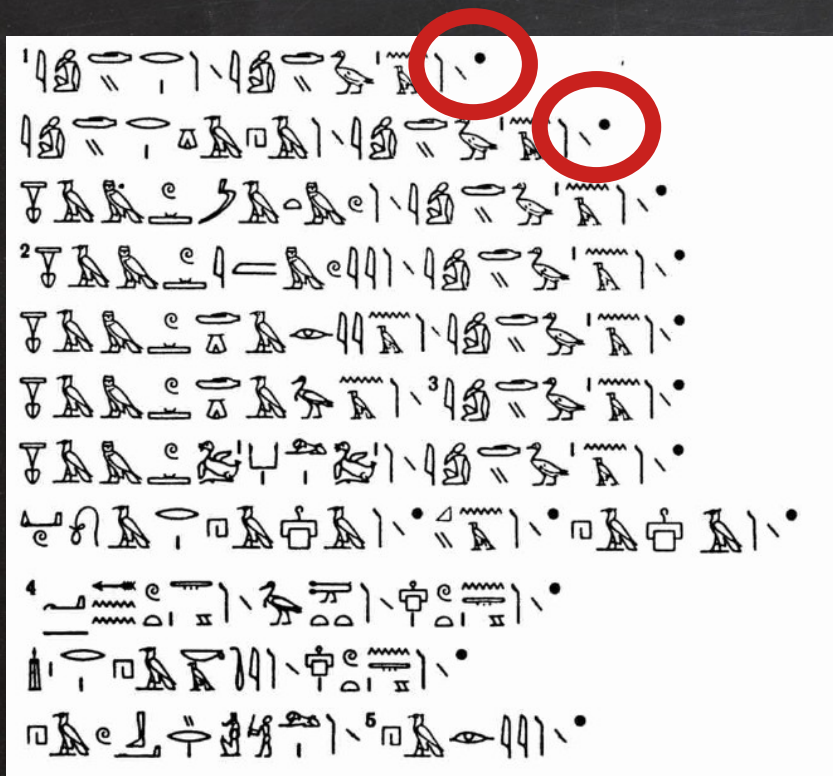
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 sm mt 'dtn (Enabler of death: I will crush (him))
 sm 'my 'dtn
 sm dg 'ryn 'dtn 'ryn = lion (cf. ארי)
 sm dg bn 'dtn
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 mwr h'⁽¹⁾ qyn h'⁽¹⁾ (Missile, ha! Spear, ha!)
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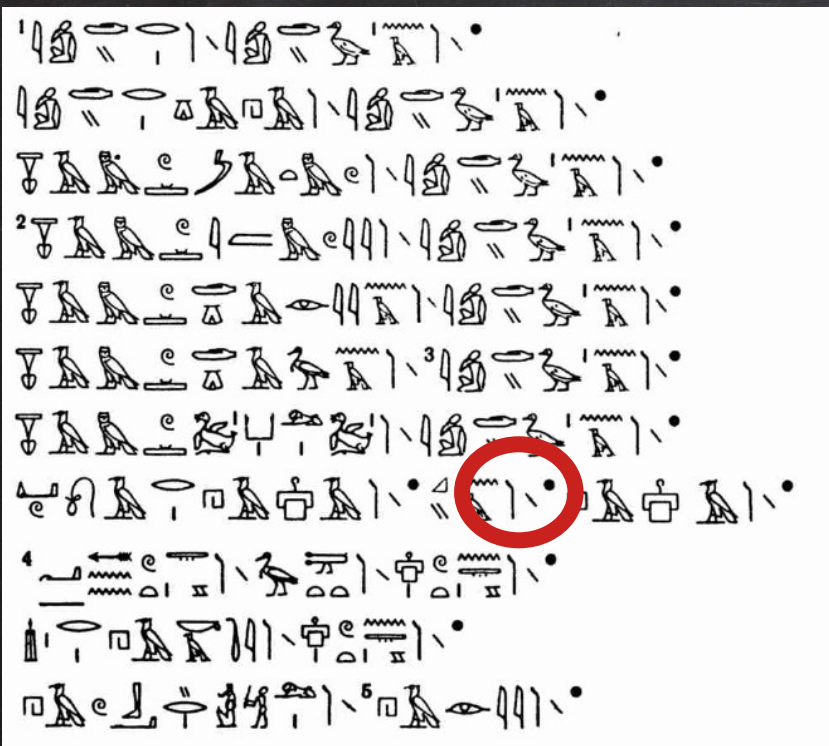
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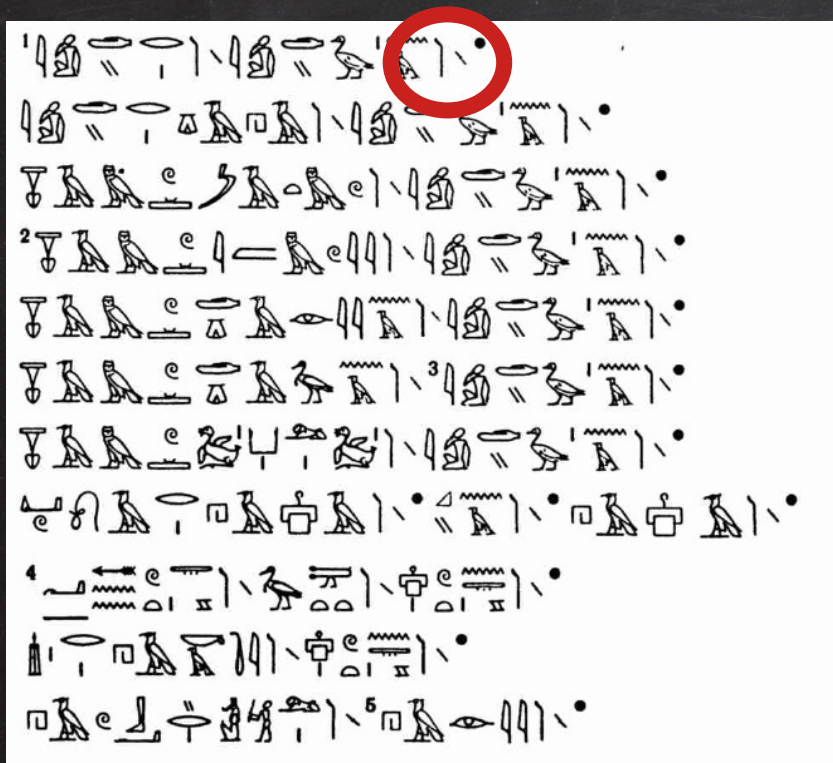
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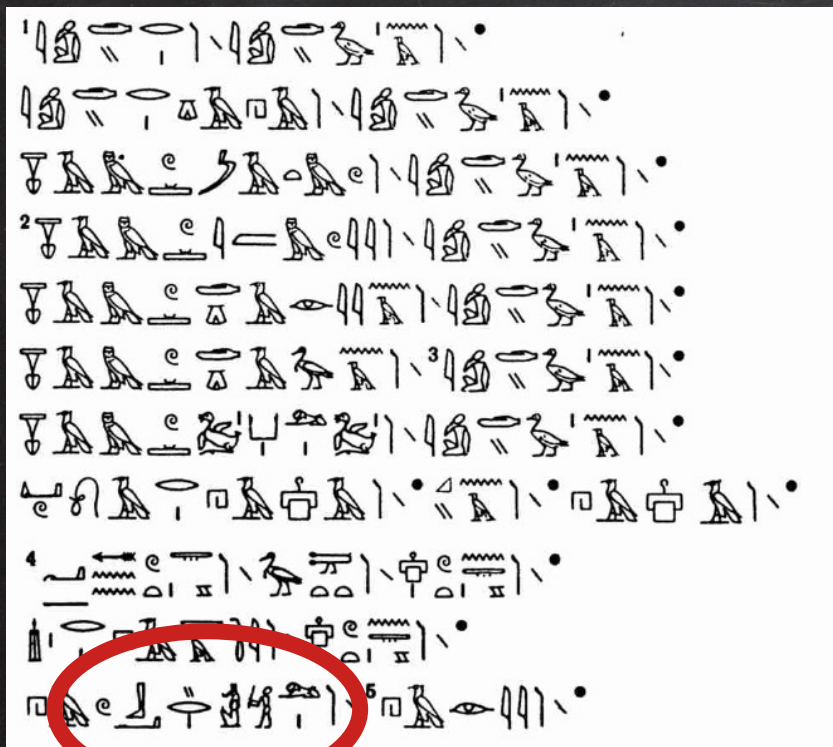
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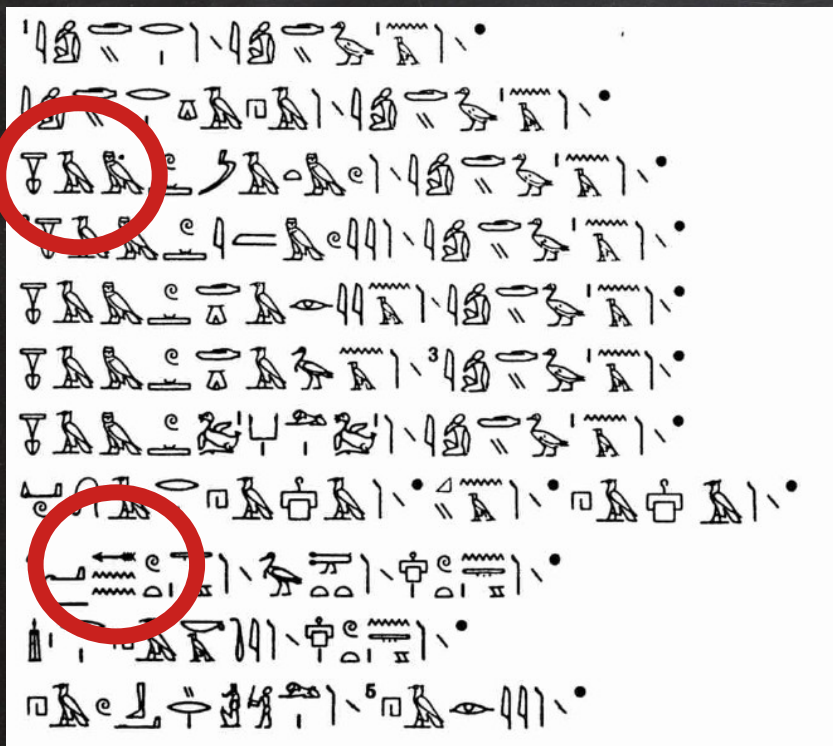
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P. Harris lion hunt boasting poem



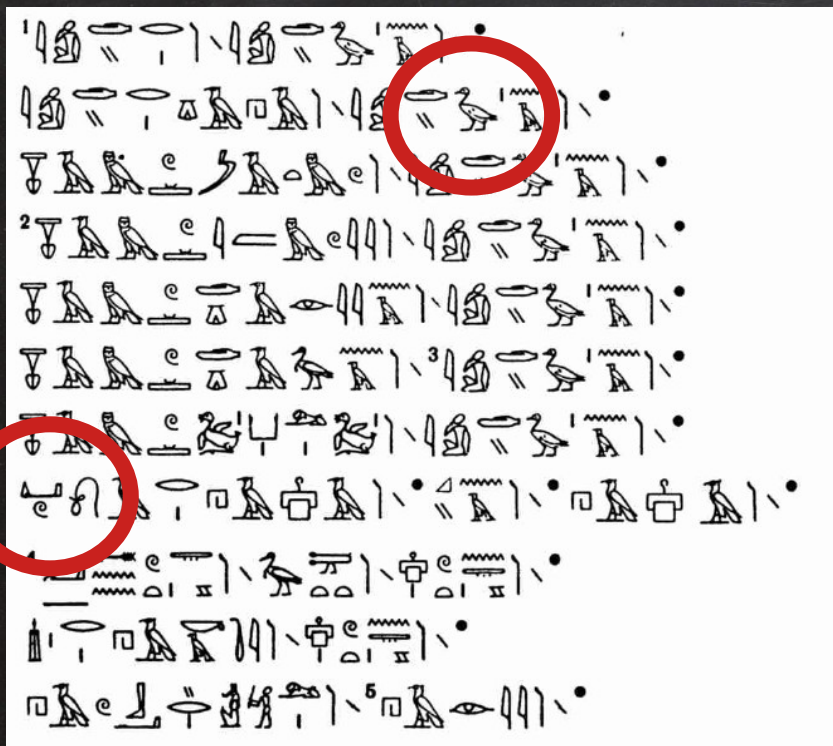
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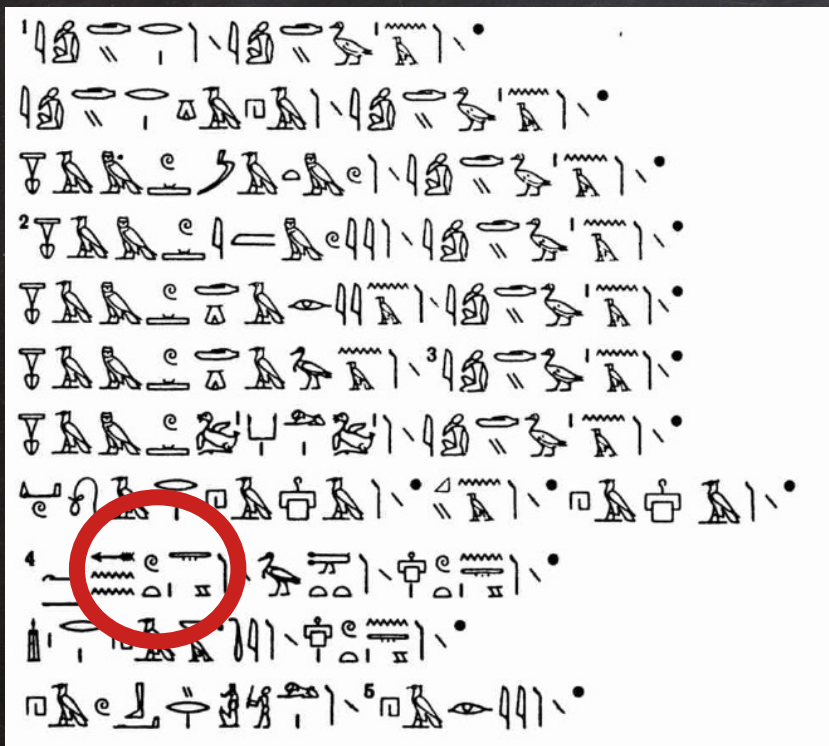
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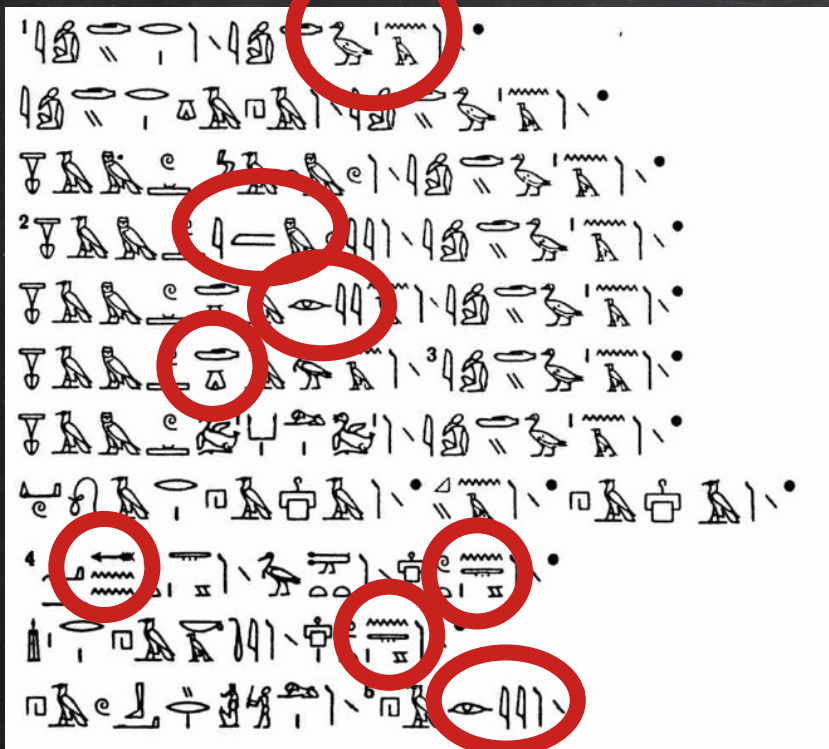
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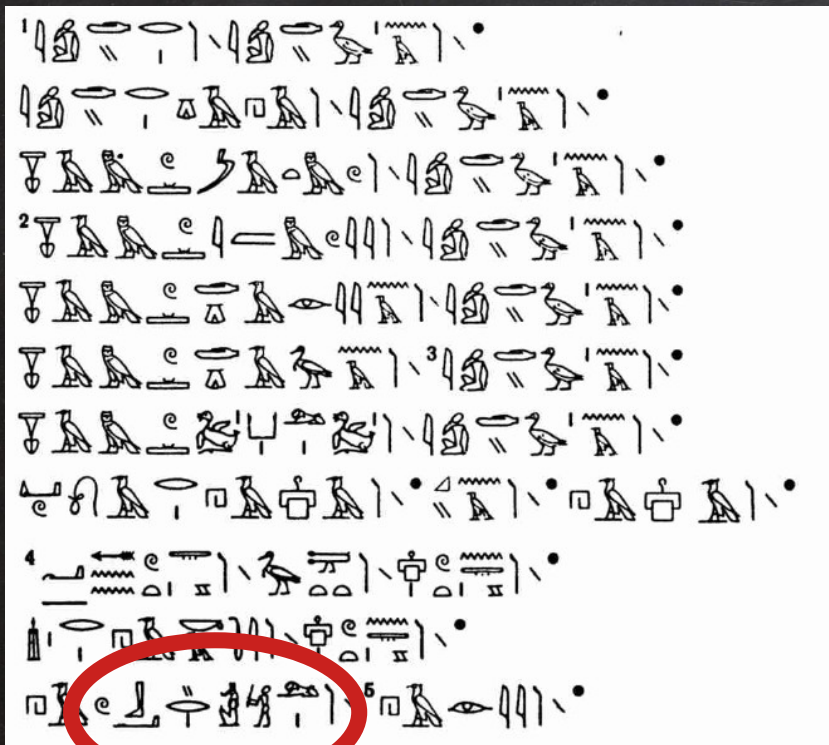
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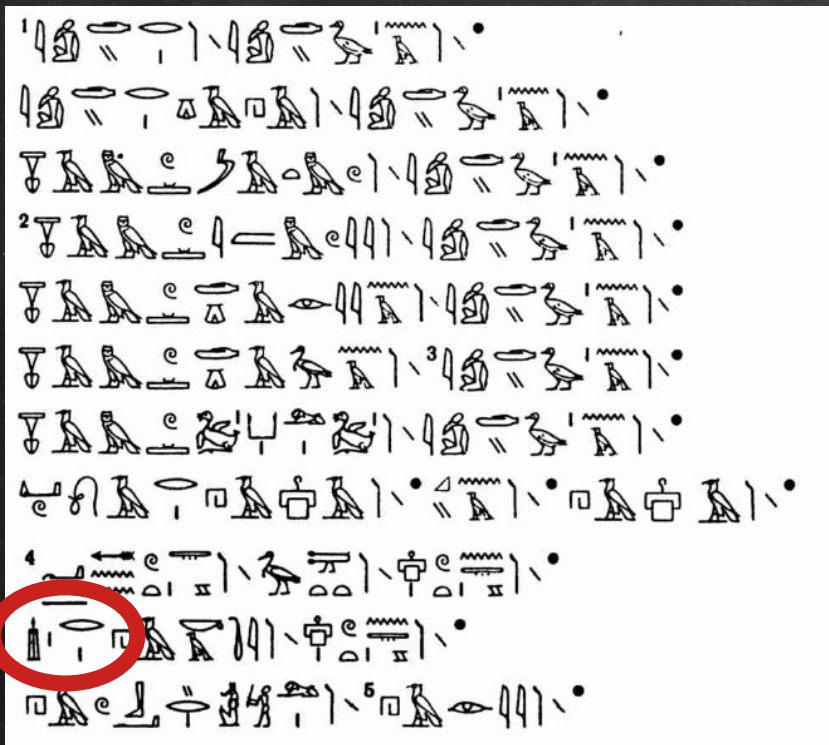
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P. Harris lion hunt boasting poem



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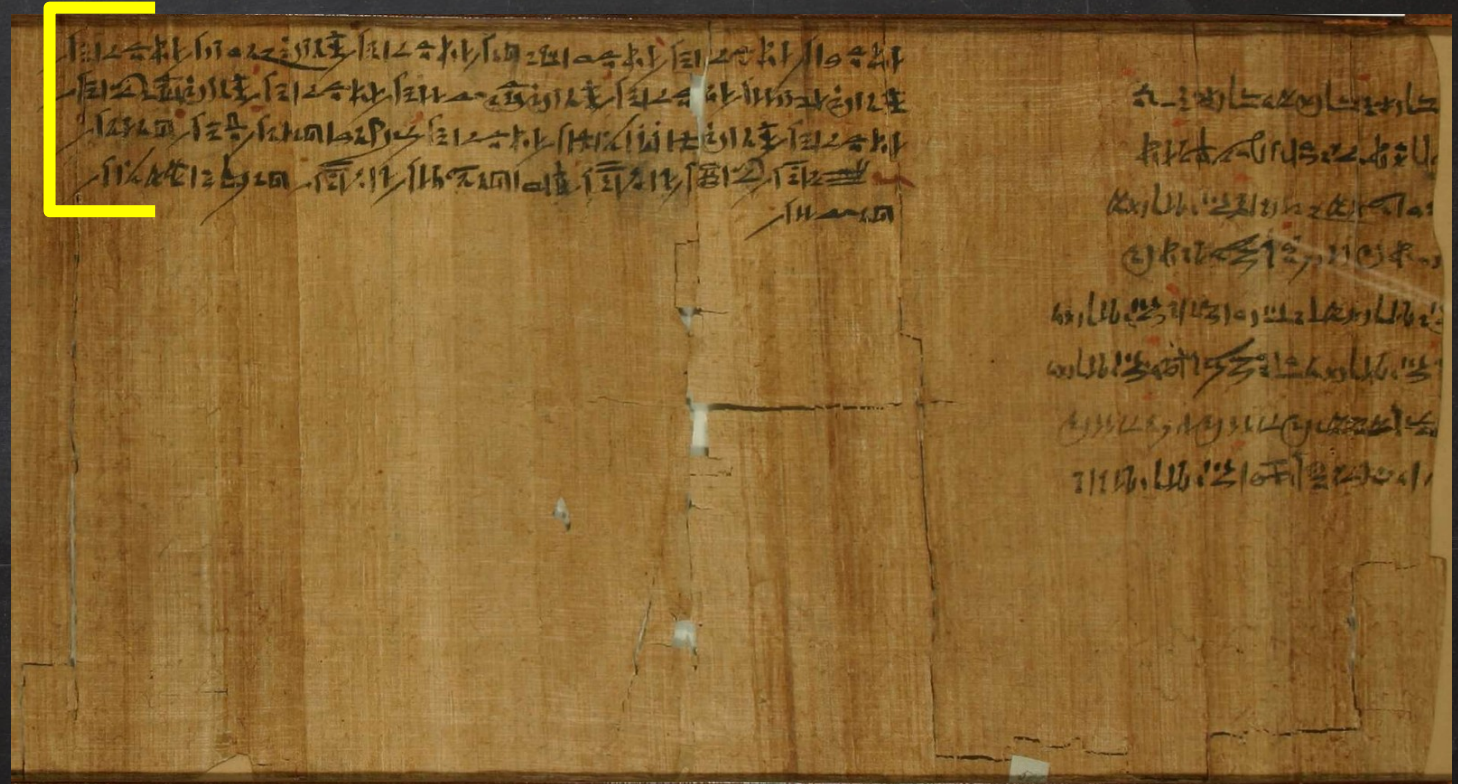
P. Harris lion hunt boasting poem

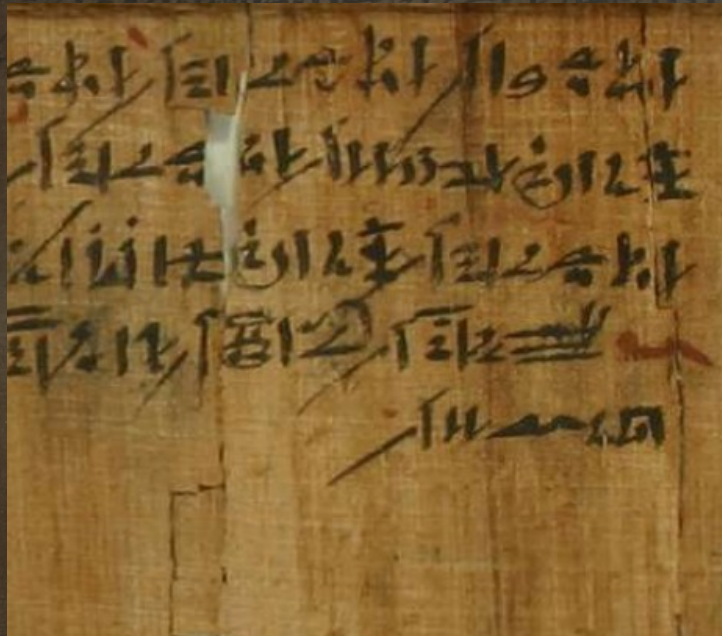


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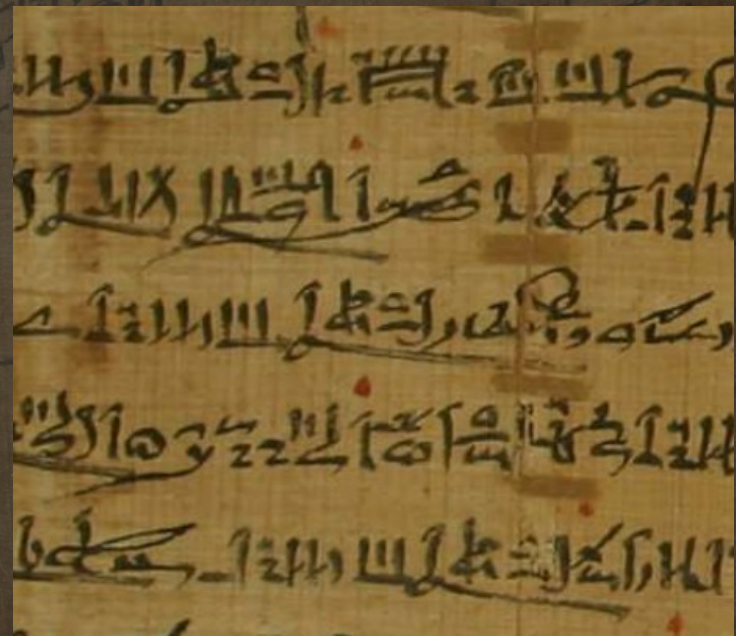
Harris Magical Papyrus

Complete Northwest
Semitic text





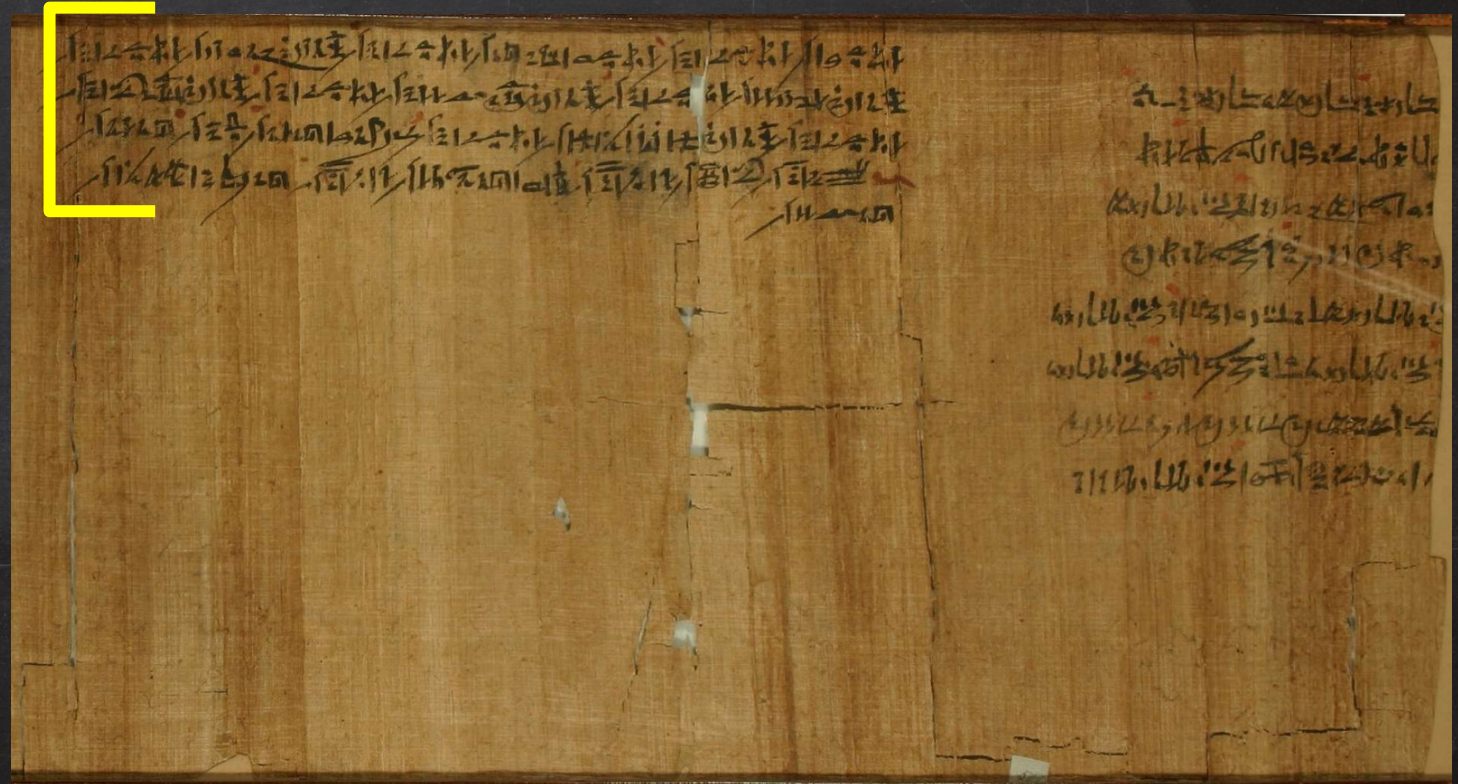
Northwest Semitic text, vso. col. 3



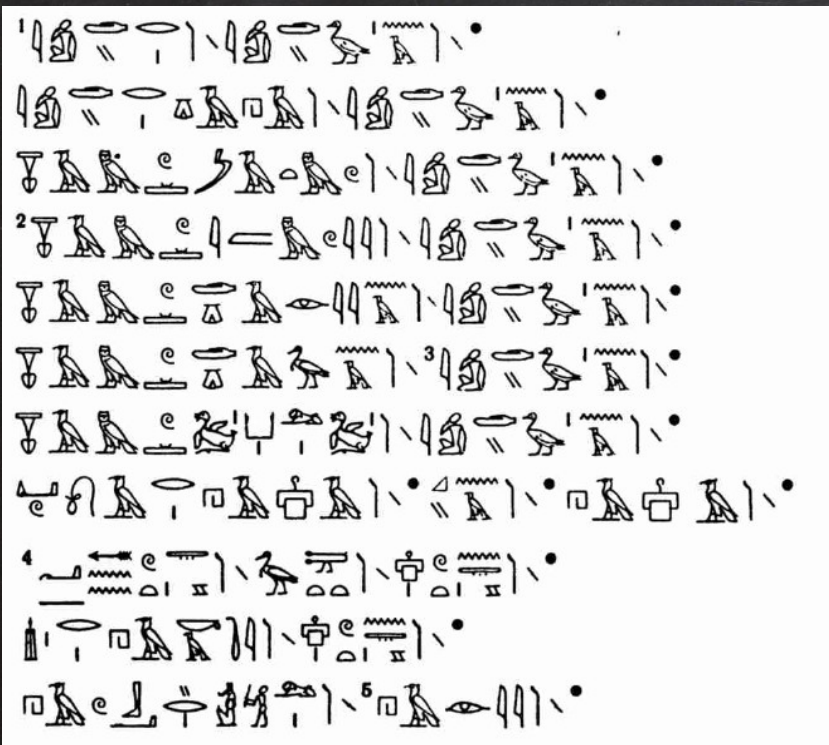
Selection from rest of scroll

Harris Magical Papyrus

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P. Harris lion hunt boasting poem



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BM 134872

Unidentified literary text from
Amarna

With verse points in red ink

Harris Magical Papyrus

First incantation of all conjurations on water...

O egg of the water, spittle of the earth, fluid of the Ogdoad!
... I penetrate with you from your nest. I am Min, lord of
the land of Coptos...

This incantation is to be spoken (over) an egg of clay,
placed in the hand of a man at the fore of a boat. If there
appears the one who is on th water, it is to be thrown into
the water.

Harris Magical Papyrus

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P. Harris Poem and Group Writing

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- It did not need to conform to a system or to be legible in the same way to someone else
 - cf. idiosyncratic orthography

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 - Isolated words: no guarantee that group writing helped someone read them with accuracy

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- Group writing **not enough to be proclaimed as a complete text**