

BILL MANLEY

EGYPTIAN
HIEROGLYPHS
FOR
COMPLETE
BEGINNERS

47 illustrations



Thames & Hudson

INSCRIPTIONS

Stela of Mereri from his Tomb at Dendereh
(6th Dynasty, c. 2200 BC)



1 Stela of Mereri,
from Dendereh

- ① An offering which the king gives Osiris /
- ② lord of Djedu: a voice offering for /
- ③ the governor, overseer of priests, guardian of the temple cattle /
- ④ Mereri







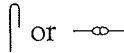








#1 What You Need to Know: Sound Signs

Let us begin a journey into ancient times by making sense of this stela from the tomb of Mereri, one of a pair in this book (we will come to the other on page 34). An Ancient Egyptian stela is a stone block, usually from a tomb, inscribed with hieroglyphs and images, while this particular one is now in the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.




The first thing you need to know is that hieroglyphs are not a kind of picture writing. Knowing what a particular hieroglyph *shows* gives you no clue about how to read it. For example, look carefully at the stela of Mereri. On the left you can see the slender, muscular figure of the man himself, in his fine kilt and collar and official's wig. He carries a staff and sceptre as symbols of his

authority. In front of him, four columns of hieroglyphs promise to tell us something about the man and his monument; but what are the hieroglyphs? An eye and a hand, a brace of birds, a couple of seated men, half a lion and a cow – and so on. What sense would you make from these pictures? Certainly not the correct reading, which you can also see in the caption opposite.

So how do we come by the correct reading? The key is to understand that most hieroglyphs write sounds in the Egyptian language. For example, an owl does not mean 'owl': it writes the sound 'm'. You do not need to know why it writes 'm', any more than you need to know why (in the English alphabet) we use the shape M. It is what we are taught to do. Likewise, just learn that the owl hieroglyph writes the sound 'm' (and the best way to learn it is to copy it out a few times). Here are 16 hieroglyphs that write sounds you know from English:









 or 	pair of leaves/strokes	y		mouth	r
	quail chick	w		fence (seen from above)	h
	lower leg	b		folded cloth/door bolt	s
	mat	p		dish	k
	viper	f		pot stand	g
	owl	m		small loaf	t
	water ripple	n		hand	d

In addition, these three hieroglyphs write sounds you know well, but we do not have special letters for them in the English alphabet:

	lake	<i>š</i>	'sh' in <i>ship</i> .
	animal tether	<i>t̄</i>	soft 't' in <i>adventure</i> , similar to 'ch' in <i>church</i> .
	snake	<i>d̄</i>	soft 'd', similar to 'j' of <i>jail</i> .


It is important to recognize that *s* and *š* are different sounds, just as *t* and *t̄* are different and *d* and *d̄* are different. We use the special marks (called diacritics) above and below the letters to indicate the differences.

Now, in just a few moments you have already learned 19 different hieroglyphs and the sounds that they write. Finally, here are seven hieroglyphs that write sounds we do not usually recognize in English:

	vulture	ʒ	(Called <i>alif</i> .) The stop in the middle of <i>uh oh</i> or Cockney pronunciation of <i>bottle</i> as <i>bo-ul</i> .
	reed leaf	i	(Called <i>yodh</i> .) The weak 'y' sound at the end of <i>tea</i> (think, half of  y above). Not to be confused with English <i>i</i> .
	forearm	ʿ	(Called <i>ayin</i> .) Throaty gurgle, like saying <i>a</i> while swallowing.
	wick of flax	ħ	(Called 'second h'.) Breathy <i>h</i> pronounced in the throat.
	ball of twine	ḥ	(Called 'third h'.) Scots 'ch' in <i>loch</i> .
	animal belly	ḥ	(Called 'fourth h'.) Softer than <i>ḥ</i> , like German 'ch' in <i>ich</i> .
	hill slope	q	(Called <i>qaf</i> .) Arabic 'q' in <i>Qurān</i> . Like 'k', but pronounced further back in the mouth.





The last seven sounds may seem offputting, but, remember, you do not have to learn how to *speak* Egyptian (Arabic became the principal language of Egypt about a thousand years ago, and Egyptian is no longer *spoken* or read by anyone there). All you need to do is recognize these sounds wherever they are written.




Some folk find a particular problem recognizing that *h*, *ħ*, *ḥ* and *ḥ* are different sounds in Egyptian. Maybe this illustration will help:

hr = above
hr = before 
hr = beneath

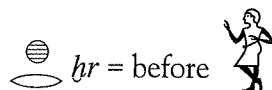
You can see here three different words in Egyptian, with three different meanings and three different sounds. So you must be able to distinguish *hr* from *hr* or *hr*, when the time comes to read them in hieroglyphs (you will do this soon). Because *h*, *ħ*, *ḥ* and *ḥ* are different sounds, there are different hieroglyphs to write them.

#2 What You Need to Know: Direction of Writing

Now you know the 24 sounds normally written in the Egyptian language, and 26 hieroglyphs that can write them (remember  and  both write *y*, while  and  both write *s*). These are 1-sound hieroglyphs, because they each write one sound. Look back at Mereri's stela and see how many of these hieroglyphs you can find. You will not be able to read any words yet, but you can find nine of these hieroglyphs, including a couple used more than once. What the other hieroglyphs are doing, we will come back to soon.

Something else you will notice: the hieroglyphs face the opposite way to those we have learned. We know that  writes *m*, but in column 3 of the stela we find  instead. What difference does this make? The answer is, none at all. Egyptian hieroglyphs can be written from the left (as we write) or from the right (as in Mereri's stela) without this affecting their meaning. How do we know which way to read? Any hieroglyph with a front or a face will look towards the beginning of the text. (In fact, if you were asked to draw a face you would probably draw it something like this , facing left because you are used to writing from the left.) In the stela, you can see that the birds and animals – and, indeed, the figure of Mereri himself – all *look to the right*, so we start reading *at the right*. On the other hand, when we are explaining things in this book we will normally write the hieroglyphs from the left because then they follow the direction of the English text.

Back to the stela: the words have been divided into four columns using vertical lines. Again, hieroglyphic texts can be written horizontally (along a line) or vertically (in a column), and it is usually obvious which way to read. The only thing you need to remember here is that hieroglyphs written in columns always read *from top to bottom* (never upwards), so when you see a hieroglyph above another one, read the top one first. For example, let us go back to the illustration above and add some hieroglyphs:



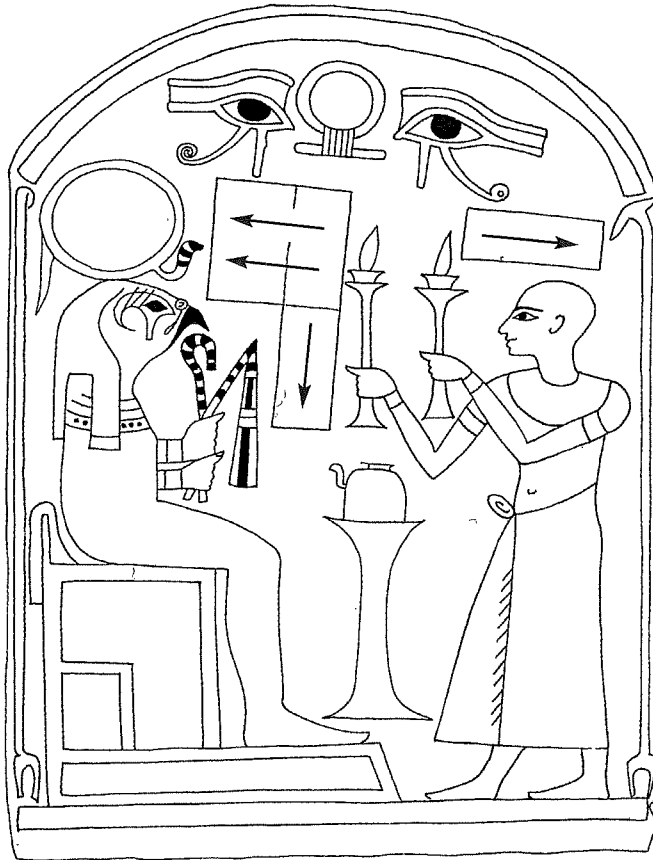
Here the word *hr* 'before' is written with one hieroglyph above another, and we read the top hieroglyph first.

To illustrate how this works, let us look at a stela of the 1st millennium BC

in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. It is beautifully painted, with boxes marked out for hieroglyphic texts. However, the hieroglyphs were never actually painted in, perhaps because the intended recipient died before the work could be finished.


DID YOU KNOW?

Although we cannot be sure why, this stela is obviously not finished. Many monuments have come down to us incomplete, not least because archaeologists occasionally find artists' workshops. More often, inscriptions on stelae and tomb walls, including tombs in the Valley of the Kings near Thebes, have been found where, in some sections, the hieroglyphs have only been sketched out or where craftsmen have just done the initial rough work.



2 Unfinished stela in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



You can see from the blank boxes how the hieroglyphic texts would have been laid out. One box sits above the head of the man holding a pair of incense burners and doubtless this text would have told us who he was. Probably the hieroglyphs in the box would have read from left to right (as indicated by the arrow), so that they face the same way as the man. The other block of hieroglyphs would have told us about the strange-looking god seated on the throne. (He is actually the funerary god, Sokar, who has a mummified body and the head of a falcon.) Notice how the block has been arranged to

read in front of his face, then 'wrap' down in front of the enthroned god. This creates a right-angled block  because that shape fills the available space, and other stelae show us that the block would have been filled with writing in lines and columns (as shown by the arrows), or perhaps just with two or three columns of writing.

**I
n
t
e
r
n
e
t
C
a
f
e** This last point explains why hieroglyphs can be written horizontally and vertically: sculptors liked to fill the available space as fully and effectively as required. They arranged texts in ways that suited the monuments they decorated. Hieroglyphs are beautiful to look at because they are meant to dignify the sacred sites of the Ancient Egyptians – their temples and tombs. To do so included organizing hieroglyphs into pleasing and attractive arrangements, which followed the lines of the artwork. In Mereri's stela, you can see how the columns follow the upright figure, and how the columns read naturally from the right so that they finish at the image of Mereri himself. The notion of writing in different directions may seem odd at first, but think how easily you can read a sign like the one on the left. You will soon get used to reading hieroglyphs in different directions without giving the matter a second thought.

Now, here are two words that appear on Mereri's stela:





 n for   temple cattle

Study them, then find where they are written on the stela (at the ends of columns 2 and 3). Remember, the hieroglyphs are arranged vertically in the stela. Ignore any hieroglyphs that did not appear among the 26 above ( and ) because these will be explained on page 18.


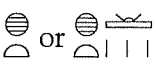







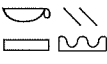
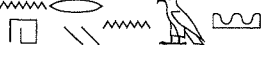



#3 Vowels and Pronunciation

You have just met the word 'for' in Egyptian, which is written with the sound 'n', while the word for 'temple cattle' is written with the sounds *tnnt*. They have both been written without vowels; that means without the sounds we write in English using the letters A, E, I, O and U. Vowels are sounds we make by keeping our mouths and throats open when speaking and they are crucial for pronouncing words. Therefore, Egyptian when spoken had vowels, but

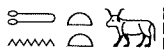



they are rarely written down in hieroglyphs. So rarely, in fact, that we do not have to worry about them in this book. As a result, words written in hieroglyphs may seem like word skeletons (or text messages), as though we were to write *ppl cn rd ths* ('people can read this'). Likewise, the stela gives us only the skeleton of *tnnt* and we do not know how it was pronounced. This is a frustrating aspect of hieroglyphic texts, but one we cannot wish away.

You do not need to speak Egyptian, so pronunciation is not relevant to making sense of what you are reading. In classrooms or study groups, many folk like to insert a brief 'e' where necessary into words so they can be spoken aloud, in which case *tnnt* is pronounced something like 'chentet'. Likewise,  ³ and  may be pronounced as 'a' because they are foreign sounds for us, while  *i* may be pronounced as 'i', and  *w* may be pronounced as 'u'. In this way, *inpw* may be spoken aloud as 'inpu'. However, this is purely a convenience for use among ourselves and does not bear much relation to how words were actually spoken in ancient times.

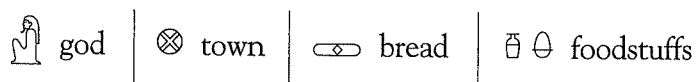
Here are more words written in hieroglyphs, which appear in inscriptions you are going to read later in the book. Work out which sounds appear in each word, and compare your own readings with the answers (or cover up the answers, if you prefer). Remember, ignore for now any hieroglyphs that did not appear above – they will be explained below (see #4):




	<i>inpw</i>	Anubis (god)		<i>ht</i>	thing
	<i>ywi³</i>	Yuia (name)		<i>hr</i>	before
	<i>pt</i>	sky		<i>skr</i>	Sokar (god)
	<i>pth</i>	Ptah (god)		<i>sgrh</i>	pacify
	<i>f</i>	he/his		<i>kšy</i>	Kush (place)
	<i>nhryn³</i>	Naharin (place)		<i>ty</i>	Ty (name)
	<i>rn</i>	name		<i>twi³</i>	Tjuia (name)

#4 What You Need to Know: Determinatives

The hieroglyphs you have learned so far write sounds in the Egyptian language, and you have seen how they can be put together to write words such as *tntt*. We have also seen *tntt* written as  on Mereri's stela. If the first four hieroglyphs write the sounds *tntt*, what are the last two hieroglyphs doing? Well, this is the second use of hieroglyphs: instead of writing sounds, some hieroglyphs tell us about the meaning of the word. The sign  tells us this is a word for 'cattle' and the sign  (which can also appear as ) tells us that this is a word for a group or herd (three strokes indicate the plural or anything that involves 'more than just one and more than a pair', see also #24). Hieroglyphs used in this way are called *determinatives* because they help us 'determine' what the word means.

Determinatives are generally written at the end of words, so they help us break a text up into individual words, which is useful because there are no commas or spaces between words in Egyptian inscriptions. Here are the other determinatives in Mereri's stela:






















Determinatives are not usually specific to one word, so  may appear in any word to do with a god or the name of any god, while  may appear in the name of any town. A word may have two or three determinatives. On the other hand, no word *has* to be written with a determinative. For example, you have already seen the word  *n* 'for' written with a sound sign and nothing else. Nevertheless, when determinatives are written they are very helpful.

DID YOU KNOW ?





The thoughtful interplay between sacred art and hieroglyphs is quite obvious on the stela of Mereri. Notice how the four columns of the inscription are organized by using vertical lines, the last of which is formed by the staff in Mereri's hand. This staff then isolates a small group of hieroglyphs next to Mereri himself, and these are the very ones that write his name. It is not easy to say where the picture ends and the writing begins. In fact, the word 'hieroglyph', taken from Greek, means 'sacred image' (not writing), while hieroglyphic inscriptions in Ancient Egypt were sometimes described as 'divine words'.





So now look for where determinatives appear in Mereri's stela because you know they probably mark the ends of various words.

Here are some other common determinatives, which also appear in this book:

	name / occupation of men		name / occupation of women
	dignitary / the dead		raised / high
	strike / force		strike / force
	gesture / calm	 or 	bread / foodstuff
	sky / above		land, especially desert
	minerals / pigments		land / earth
	tree		water
	building		granite
	cup / fluid		foreign (the throw-stick is a non-Egyptian weapon)

Pay special attention to the following three determinatives:

 used in the word  or  *it* 'father' and nowhere else, this sign looks the same as the 1-sound sign  *f*, but presumably was originally a different sign (see page 126)



 or  (papyrus scroll) used to write words for ideas we cannot picture but we can write down, such as  *ht* 'thing' or  *rn* 'name'

 or  used with a group / herd / plural (see #24)

You may be surprised to learn that you are already only two steps away from knowing all about how hieroglyphs are used to write the text on Mereri's stela. At this point, you may like to go back to the stela and make sure you are clear about what you recognize. In #6, we will move onto the hieroglyphs you do not recognize yet: what are they doing? In the meantime, here is a question for you to think about.

#5 How Do We Know How to Read Hieroglyphs?

You may well wonder, how do we know that hieroglyphs usually write sounds in Egyptian? The first indication is the one we noted above: if we treat hieroglyphs as picture writing (remember the owl sign writing 'm' on page 13. above), it is very difficult to make sense of what any text means. This is even more the case when we compare one text with another, where some of the same hieroglyphs appear, but in different combinations and consistent translations become impossible. For many centuries after the ancient knowledge of how to read Egyptian hieroglyphs was lost, hieroglyphs were treated by Egyptian and European scholars alike as picture writing, and the result was a proliferation of unlikely and contradictory theories.

However, during the first half of the 19th century a consensus emerged among those studying hieroglyphic inscriptions that they wrote a language; and, more to the point, a language very close to one already known well. The well-known language is Coptic, which was the indigenous language of Egypt during Byzantine and Arab rule, until it was displaced by Arabic during the period AD 900 to 1200. Crucially, Coptic was written using a version of the Greek alphabet, so knowledge of how to read Coptic was never lost. Now, the word 'for' in Coptic is **N** or **NΔ** (na), which compares to  n above. Likewise, the word for 'he' is **Ϣ** (f), which is the same as  f above. In fact, there are innumerable examples of words in Coptic that we also find written in hieroglyphs. Once we recognize that Egyptian and Coptic are closely related, we arrive at a way of reading hieroglyphs that applies consistently from text to text. As a result, during the past two centuries we have learned a tremendous amount in detail about how to read hieroglyphic inscriptions going back 5,000 years to the very dawn of history.

Of course, there are differences between Egyptian and Coptic, but we should think of the relationship between them in terms of the relationship between Latin and Italian: two languages spoken in the same country, where the later language obviously developed out of the earlier one. Moreover, this is a continuous written history, so there are hieroglyphic texts from Egypt as late as the 4th century AD, the era when Coptic texts begin to appear in significant numbers. Here are some other comparisons between Egyptian and Coptic using words you will come across elsewhere in this book, remembering that



words in Egyptian were not written down with vowels (a, e, i, o, u):

Egyptian	Coptic		Egyptian	Coptic		
<i>it</i>	ⲈⲓⲬⲧ	(yōt)	father	<i>hmt</i>	ⲤⲓⲘⲈ	(hime) wife
<i>pt</i>	ⲠⲈ	(pe)	sky	<i>hnkt</i>	ⲤⲘⲕⲈ	(hnke) beer
<i>ms</i>	ⲘⲓⲘⲈ	(mise)	give birth	<i>h³</i>	ⲬⲐ	(sho) thousand
<i>nfr</i>	ⲘⲐⲮⲈ	(noufe)	perfect	<i>hr</i>	ⲬⲁⲠⲐ	(kharo) under

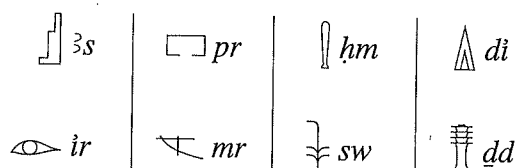
#6 What You Need to Know: Signs Writing 2 or 3 Sounds

By now you have found signs that write the sounds on pages 11–12, and you have also found the determinatives on the stela. So why do you still not recognize most of the signs? Why can you not find any words other than *n* ‘of’ and *ntt* ‘temple cattle’? Well, because most signs on Mereri’s stela – indeed most hieroglyphs in general – do not write a single sound. Instead, they write combinations of two or three sounds. For example, look at the start of column 2, where you will find the word \cup *nb* ‘lord’. All that has happened here is that the hieroglyph \cup spells the two sounds *n* + *b* together and in that order (it never spells *b* + *n*). How do you know that *nb* means ‘lord’? Well, you simply have to learn this word in Egyptian.

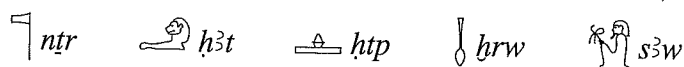
It may seem peculiar to use a sign for *nb* when there are perfectly good hieroglyphs for *n* and *b* already. Why did the ancients not use an alphabet, when they had the chance? There are various reasons for this, but three of the most important are as follows. First, if we only had the 26 hieroglyphs on pages 11–12, then hieroglyphic monuments would look increasingly dull and repetitive. Second, it would be difficult to divide the inscription into separate words because there are no spaces between words and no punctuation marks, such as commas and stops. Imaginetryingtoreadwritinglikethisalltheti
meitcanbedonebutitisveryhardevenwhenyougetusedtoit. Of course, we could suggest using spaces between words, but the Ancient Egyptians liked hieroglyphs to fill the available space without leaving blank, uninscribed stone. Two-sound hieroglyphs, especially combinations of 2-sound hieroglyphs, are distinctive, so they help you to find where words appear. The hieroglyph \cup adds visual interest to the inscription, and makes it easier for you to locate words based on the sounds *n* + *b* together (at least, once you

have learned what  is used for). Third, a hieroglyph writing two sounds is very economical:  on its own can write the word *nb* 'lord'. To take another analogy from text writing, do you not find 'gr8' quicker to write and perhaps more distinctive than 'great'?

Here are the other hieroglyphs on the stela of Mereri that spell two sounds together:



However, that is not the end of the matter. These hieroglyphs on his stela spell *three* sounds together:



No doubt, this last group of hieroglyphs seems like an unwelcome complication, but straight away there is good news. No hieroglyphs spell more than three sounds together. To put it another way, you now know all four different types of hieroglyphs that there are: those which write one sound, those which write two sounds, those which write three sounds, plus determinatives. Now you only have to practise and develop what you have learned so far. To that end, we now need to learn some more about how 2-sound and 3-sound hieroglyphs are used to write words.

DID YOU KNOW?

At least 700 different hieroglyphs were used to write Egyptian during the 2nd millennium BC and many new signs were devised throughout the centuries. Most people had no access to formal education, so literacy was a very limited skill identified more with power than education. In fact, the number of people who could read and write hieroglyphs was probably a fraction of 1%, most of them men. On the other hand, all of the kings of Egypt seem to have been literate unlike, for example, their contemporaries in Mesopotamia. As a result, all of the monuments you will read here belonged to high officials or the kings themselves. In general, these men, their families and priests were the intended audience.

#7 What You Need to Know: Sound Complements

What follows here is the most difficult idea you have to grasp when it comes to reading Egyptian. However, it is something that crops up a lot, so you are going to get a lot of practice. You will soon get the hang of it. In column 2, *nb* 'lord' appears as part of the common phrase *nb-ddw* (see below). Here you can also see the sound signs 𓆎 *dd* and 𓆏 *d* and 𓆑 *w*, plus the determinative ⊗ for towns. So we seem to have a word with the sounds *dd + d + w*, while the determinative tells you that they spell the name of a town. However, here is a rule for you to learn:

- When a 2-sound sign like 𓆎 is accompanied by a 1-sound sign like 𓆏 and the latter *matches* one of the sounds of the former, then the 1-sound sign *reinforces* the reading of the 2-sound sign. *It does not give new information, so we do not read it as a separate sound.* When hieroglyphs are used to reinforce the reading of another hieroglyph, we call them *sound complements*.



So what does this mean? In the inscription above we have 𓆎 *dd* followed by 𓆏 *d*. Does 𓆏 match any of the sounds of 𓆎 ? Yes, it does. So we read 𓆎 𓆏 together as *dd*. Then we have 𓆑 *w*. Does this match any of the sounds of 𓆎 ? No, it does not. So 𓆑 gives us new information, and we can read *ddw*. This is the name of the town, which we know in English as Djedu. Therefore, the whole phrase written above is *nb-ddw*, which means 'lord of Djedu'. In Egyptian, titles often put words together without using 'of', just as we say goalkeeper ('keeper of the goal') or bank manager ('manager of a bank').

Over the page you will find some common 2-sound signs, which you need to get to know as you make your way through this book. Make a note of the page and keep coming back to it, until you have learned these hieroglyphs. You may also like to copy them out onto bits of paper, and put their readings on the back. Copying hieroglyphs is a good method of fixing them in your mind, and afterwards you can use the bits of paper as flashcards to practise your learning.

Common 2-sound Signs









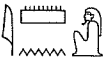





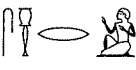

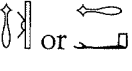


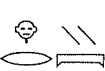

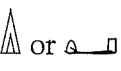
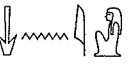
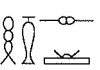






	ʒw		mr		h ^c		tʒ
	ʒb or mr		mr		ht		or tʒ
	ʒs		mh		hr		tw
	ib		ms		sʒ		ti
	in		nw		sw		tp
	in		nb		sp		tp
	ir		rs		sn		tm
	or		hm		sh		or di
	w ^c		hm		st or st		dʒ
	bh		hr		šn		dw
	pr		hs		šs		dr
	mʒ		hd		kʒ		dd
	mn		hʒ		gb		


Opposite you will find a list of words written with these 2-sound signs. The words appear in inscriptions in this book. Work out which sounds appear in each word, and compare your own readings with the answers.

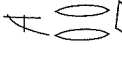








There are a few words in the list that you need to study closely, while you are getting used to reading words written with sound complements:



- Both sʒ 'son' and gb 'Geb' are written with birds, and perhaps your knowledge of ornithology is not sufficient to tell them apart (as it happens, the former is a duck, the latter a goose). However, in the case of at least, the appearance of tells you that the bird is more likely to be gb (which reads with *b*) than sʒ (which does not have *b*).
- In ʒbdw 'Abydos', the sign can read ʒb or mr, but the appearance of indicates that you should read the group as ʒb.





List of Words Written with 2-sound Signs






	<i>ꜥbdw</i> Abydos (place)		<i>sštꜥ</i> secrets
	<i>ḥꜥ</i> thousand		<i>ms</i> born
	<i>ꜥsir</i> Osiris (god)		<i>šs</i> alabaster
	<i>ḥr</i> beneath		<i>nb</i> lord
	<i>imn</i> Amun (god)		<i>kꜥ</i> soul
	<i>sꜥ</i> son		<i>nbtw</i> Nebtu (name)
	<i>intf</i> Intef (name)		<i>gb</i> Geb (god)
	<i>smr</i> courtier		<i>ḥr</i> above
	<i>ꜥ</i> great		<i>tp</i> upon
	<i>sn</i> brother		<i>ḥry</i> keeper (title)
	<i>pr</i> estate		<i>di</i> give
	<i>sni</i> Seni (name)		<i>ḥs</i> praised
	<i>mntw</i> Montju (god)		<i>dw</i> hill
	<i>shd</i> controller		<i>ḥdrt</i> Hedjret (name)
	<i>mrri</i> Mereri (name)		<i>ddw</i> Djedu (place)

On the other hand, in the word  *smr* 'courtier' you know the same sign is to be read *mr* because of the sound complement *r*. You see, sound complements actually help you to read words, once you get used to the way in which they are used.

- Read the name  carefully. The sign  gives you *mr*. Then you have  *r*. Is this new information? No,  and  together read *mr*. However, you then find a second  *r*. Is this new information? Yes,  does not tell you that the name has two *r*'s, so a second  does tell you something new. Finally, there is , and the whole name reads *mri* in Egyptian.



















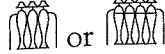















Two words written with a 2-sound sign are  *hr* 'above/on' and  *hr* 'beneath', so now we can complete the illustration from page 12:



		<i>hr</i> = above	
	<i>hr</i> = before		
		<i>hr</i> = beneath	

We can end this section by looking at most of the 3-sound signs used in this book and words written with them. Signs that write three sounds are helpful because they tend to write just one word or a single group of related words. For example, the sign  writes the sounds *nfr*. These are found in *nfr* 'perfect', *nfrw* 'perfection' and other related words. However, few other words in Egyptian have the same three sounds in the same order. (How many English words can you think of with the three consonants *n + f + r* together and in that order? *Nefarious*, perhaps, or versions of *infer* and *confer*. In truth, there are not many.) So, although there is no visual link between  and 'perfect', you can usually assume that  writes the word *nfr* 'perfect'. Likewise,  tends to write the word 'nh' 'life', while  tends to write the word *ntr* 'god', and so on. Again, keep coming back to this table until you know these signs, and you may like to copy out these hieroglyphs and write their readings on the back.


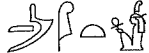














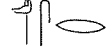

Opposite you will also find some words that crop up in the book, written with 3-sound signs. In the usual way, work out which sounds appear in each word, then compare your own readings with the answers given here.

Common 3-sound Signs

	<i>iwn</i>		<i>m³c</i>		<i>hk³</i>		<i>s³w</i>
	<i>idn</i>		<i>m³h</i>		<i>htp</i>		<i>stp</i>
	<i>nh</i>		<i>mnw</i>		<i>hpr</i>		<i>stt</i>
	<i>w³s</i>		<i>nbw</i>		<i>hpš</i>		<i>šm^c</i>
	<i>w³d</i>		<i>nfr</i>	 or 	<i>hnt</i>		<i>šn^c</i>
	<i>w^cb</i>		<i>nhb</i>		<i>hrw</i>	 or 	<i>kbh</i>
	<i>whm</i>		<i>ntr</i>		<i>htm</i>		<i>dw³</i>
	<i>wsr</i>		<i>h³t</i>		<i>hnm</i>		<i>dsr</i>

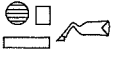











Take care not to confuse  *³w* with  *m³h* (the latter is really only used to write the word *im³hw* 'revered one', see page 45).

List of Words Written with 3-sound Signs

	<i>iwnw</i>	Heliopolis (place)		<i>m³t</i>	order (see page 57)
	<i>im³hw</i>	revered one		<i>mnw</i>	Min (god)
	<i>idn</i>	Iden (name)		<i>nbw</i>	gold
	<i>nh</i>	life, live		<i>nfr</i>	perfect
	<i>w³s</i>	authority		<i>nhbt</i>	Nekhbet (god)
	<i>w³dyt</i>	Wadjyt (god)		<i>ntr</i>	god
	<i>w^cb</i>	pure		<i>hk³</i>	ruler
	<i>whmw</i>	messenger		<i>htp</i>	offering
	<i>wsr</i>	powerful		<i>hpr</i>	form

continued on page 28

List of Words Written with 3-sound Signs *continued*

	<i>hps̄</i>	strength		<i>sttw</i>	Asiatics
	<i>hnt</i>	in front (of)		<i>šm̄</i>	south, Upper Egypt
	<i>hrw</i>	voice		<i>šn̄</i>	storehouse
	<i>hnmw</i>	Khnum (god)		<i>kbhw</i>	spring-water
	<i>s̄3w</i>	guardian		<i>dw̄3t</i>	adoration (see page 62)
	<i>stp</i>	choose		<i>dsr</i>	sacred

Notice that in the word $\frac{\triangle}{\square} htp$ 'offering' there are sound complements with the sign $\frac{\triangle}{\square} htp$. Therefore, we can extend the rule on page 23:

- When a 3-sound sign like $\frac{\triangle}{\square}$ is accompanied by a 1-sound sign or a 2-sound sign and the latter *match* any of the sounds of the former, then the 1-sound sign or the 2-sound sign *reinforce* the reading of the 3-sound sign.

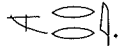
So what does this mean in practice? In the inscription above you have $\frac{\triangle}{\square} htp$ followed by $\triangle t$ and $\square p$. Does \triangle match any of the sounds of $\frac{\triangle}{\square}$? Yes, it does. Then you have $\square p$. Does this match any of the sounds of $\frac{\triangle}{\square}$? Yes, it does also. So you read $\frac{\triangle}{\square}$ together as *htp*.

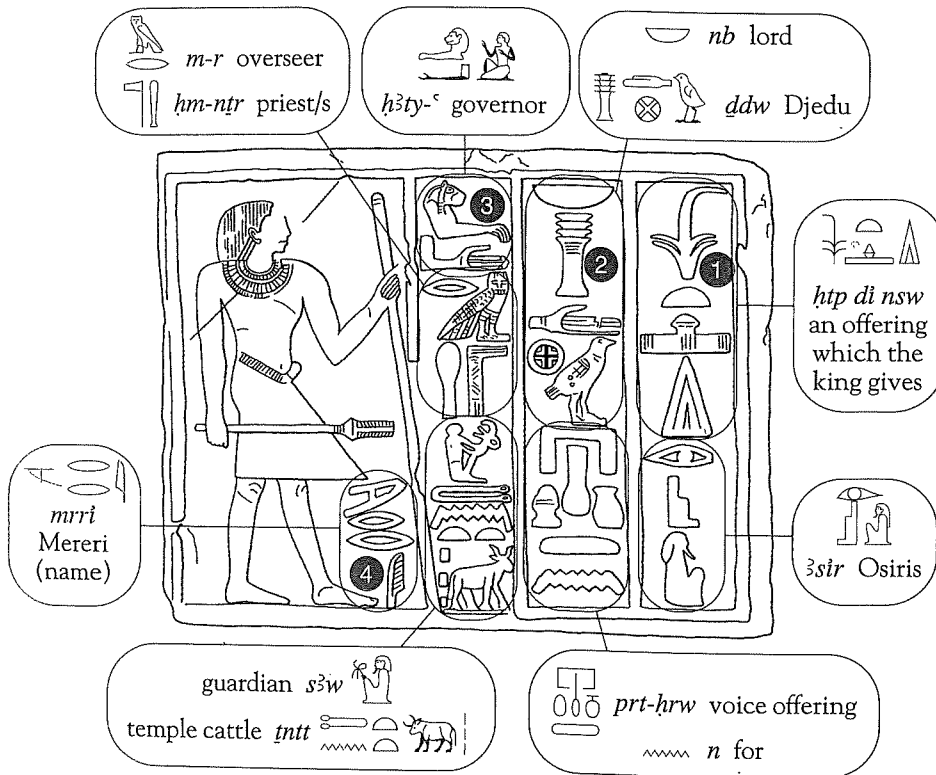
#8 What You Need to Know: Unexpected Writings

Now take a look at how Mereri's stela breaks down into words, so you can work out what the different hieroglyphs are doing. Remember, from page 10, the correct reading of the inscription is as follows:

- ① An offering which the king gives Osiris /
- ② lord of Djedu: a voice offering for /
- ③ the governor, overseer of priests, guardian of the temple cattle /
- ④ Mereri.

Hopefully you can see how most of these phrases have been written on the stela. For example, there are four columns of hieroglyphs, of which the fourth is a brief text isolated beside the figure of Mereri himself. This simply gives us

his name . In column 3 we read that Mereri is *h3ty-^c* 'governor'. He is also *m-r* 'overseer'. However, an overseer must oversee *somebody*, so, reading the next word, we also recognize that he is 'overseer of priests' (see right, remember titles in Egyptian do










3 Stela of Mereri with the inscription explained.






not need to use a word for 'of'). He is also *s3w* 'guardian'. Again, a guardian must guard *something*, so we look at the next word and read *s3w tnnt* 'guardian of temple cattle' (see left). Stop and think about this for a moment: even at this early stage, you can already read columns 3 and 4, and recognize most of the words in the first two columns.


On the other hand, there are words here that do not read as you may expect.









- In column 1, the name of the god of the dead, Osiris, is *3sir* in Egyptian. Therefore we may expect the writing to give us  *3s* followed by  *ir*, and, in fact, that is what usually happens. However, on the stela of

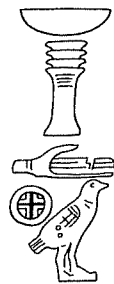
Mereri the signs are written the other way round (see right).
 None the less, it is the combination of the two signs that matters:
 both  and  are commonly used hieroglyphs, but the
 combination of  and  together tells us we have the name
 Osiris. Of course, the determinative  clinches the matter.















- The title  'overseer' seems to read *mr*, but you have been asked to read it as *m-r*. Why the hyphen? Well, this is because scholars have learned that this title is actually made up of two smaller words in Egyptian.
- Likewise, the title  seems to write *h3t*, but you have been asked to read it as *h3ty*. In this case the writing is an *abbreviation* of *h3ty*. For the time being, you will have to take readings like this on trust, just as somebody learning English has to be taught that 'Dr' is an abbreviation of 'Doctor' and 'St' is another writing of 'Street'. We can be sure that  is an abbreviation because occasionally on monuments the title is written out in full.







How could you know that  is made up of two words? You could not – certainly not on the basis of what you have learned so far. Only many decades of scholarship have worked out the reading *m-r* (and, even then, some Egyptologists read the title slightly differently). Again, you will just have to take unexpected readings and abbreviations on trust. After all, how would you explain to somebody learning English that a 'TV' is the same thing as a 'telly'? The good news is that titles such as *m-r* are so common in inscriptions that you soon get to know them.





- In column 2 above we have a vertical writing of *ddw* (see right). The suggestion in #4 was that determinatives will normally come at the end of words – and usually they do. However, as here, they do not have to. Why not? Well, if we look at *ddw* we have the signs  *dd* and  *w*, which are tall; between them we have  *d*, which is flat; while the determinative  is small. In the expected sequence     the signs do not fit together very well, creating an awkward arrangement, which leaves





spaces in the inscription. So here the sculptor has moved  over the back of  to fill up the space. Along a horizontal line we are likely to encounter a writing such as   , where the determinative has moved into the middle to fill the space in  .

The unexpected writings of *ʒsir* and *ddw* introduce us to an important principle of writing, whether in hieroglyphs or in English. It is not individual signs that matter, it is combinations of signs we need to recognize. You can teach anybody which sounds are written with the letters G and H in English, but how would you then explain to them the pronunciation of 'eight' or 'enough'? In fact, even with our alphabet we learn words as distinctive groups of signs, not through their constituent letters. (How else could you learn to read and write 'eight'?) Likewise, in hieroglyphic inscriptions the combination of   together alerts us to the name *ʒsir*, while  and  with  point us to the place name *ddw*.




- In column 3 we have the title   *hm-ntr* 'priest', which is made up of two words  *hm* 'body' and  *ntr* 'god' (hence 'god's body', a title whose meaning we can explain later, see page 105). However, the phrase seems to read with  before .

The unexpected reading of   leads us to another simple rule: titles that include the word  *ntr* write  first, irrespective of where it is actually read in the title.

Scholars call this arrangement *honorific transposition*, which simply means that  has been moved (or *transposed*) because it has special significance (it is *honoured*). This may seem odd, but you will quickly learn the correct reading of  *hm-ntr* in the same way that somebody learning English learns that £10 reads 'ten pounds' not 'pounds ten'. Later we will see the same rule applied to words other than *ntr*.




No doubt your head is spinning because of these unexpected writings. However, writing is not logical nor consistent in any language: how do you explain the way we use C so differently in 'cake', 'circus', 'success' and 'cello'? Unexpected writings occur on the stela of Mereri because it is a real monument, and matters like *abbreviation* are matters you need to know about

DID YOU KNOW?

A writing such as  *ddw* illustrates a crucial aspect of Egyptian hieroglyphic writing – that there was a certain amount of flexibility, which enabled artists to make the most effective use of space. The writing above may be more concise and elegant than . On the other hand, if the space available for an inscription was very restricted, an even briefer writing of the same word would be . Artists could vary the make-up of words, abbreviating them or spelling them out more fully, in order to make the most pleasing and varied arrangements within an inscription, whether horizontally or vertically.

in order to read ancient inscriptions. More to the point, reading hieroglyphs does not get any harder than this. Mereri's stela is real, so it has not been 'spin-doctored' to hide the difficulties from you. All you need to do now is practise what you have learned. Then practise some more. So, before you complete your reading of the stela, let us turn to our next monument: a second stela of the same man, Mereri. We can better understand what his inscriptions are about by comparing the two monuments, which we will do in #10. In the meantime, here is another question for you.

#9 What is Transliteration?

You have already begun thinking about the sounds of Egyptian words written both in hieroglyphs and also in a version of our own alphabet. We can write the word  'for' as *n* because *n* is the sound written by . Likewise, we can write  'temple cattle' as *tnnt* because those are its sounds. To put this another way, you can take words in hieroglyphs and write them out in a version of our own alphabet. We call this process *transliteration*, and it is good practice to get used to transliterating hieroglyphic inscriptions. Transliteration helps you to learn and remember words. Moreover, if you wish to go beyond the most basic level of reading you will eventually have to learn how to use sign lists, dictionaries, notes, etc., and Egyptologists write and organize these using transliteration. If you do transliterate inscriptions from the beginning, it will soon become second nature to you.

Because transliteration uses a form of our own alphabet, we transliterate according to our ordinary writing practice. So we transliterate in lines from left to right, whichever direction the hieroglyphic inscription is written in.

For example, we would transliterate the stela of Mereri above as follows:

ḥtp di nsw ʒsir nb-ddw prt-ḥrw n ḥʒty-ꜥ m-r ḥm-ntr sʒw tntt mrrī

Here the sounds of the words are written out as we normally write, including word breaks, and we do not try to copy the columns and the right-to-left layout of the original. Also, because our own way of writing is concerned only with the sounds of words, we do not try to show the determinatives in transliteration. At first, transliteration looks peculiar because there are no vowels, and because we use special signs (ʒ, i, ꜥ, ḥ, ḥ, ḥ, š, k, t, d) for sounds that do not have their own letters in our alphabet. However, simply practise transliterating inscriptions and you will soon get familiar with it.

Now practise what you have learned:

- 1-sound, 2-sound, 3-sound signs and determinatives
- sound complements
- honorific transposition

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....