ReMembering Osiris

Number, Gender, and the Word in Ancient Egyptian Representational Systems

TOM HARE

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In Memory of My Mother
Phyllis Miriam Hare

PREFACE

I have been trained as a Japanologist, with a specialization in literary studies. Much of my graduate career was spent in learning to read old Japanese texts (poetry, drama, and *Genji*). I teach Japanese literature and cultural history (as well as comparative literature) at a large research university. So (obviously), "Why have I written a book about Egypt?"

Those who study Japan often ask themselves (or are asked), "hontō ni wakaru no ka ne?" ("I wonder if I/you *really* understand?"). Do you really understand the language? Do you really understand the epistemology, the assumptions concerning the cultural position of the subject, the ontology, that underlies what you are reading? And no matter the culture being studied, there is a line of argument that would evaluate the authenticity of any response to such a question by reference to a putative national, racial, and/or ethnic identity. My very engagement in Japanese studies is proof that I reject out of hand such a framing of the criteria for understanding. All the same, it has seemed to me that any response I make to this question within the context of "Japanology" would be unsettlingly vague and impressionistic. Or that, more reductively still, it might digress to a rehearsal of "facts" or even an apologia, which is not, in the end, what the question of cross-cultural understanding is about.

We are all confronted with the problem of cultural identity and the access and limitation it affords. Claims to special ownership of a cultural legacy are common, but they are often based on the haphazard vagaries of experience, and not on knowledge. Individual experience is, of course, indispensable to culture, but it must not be confounded with knowledge of the broader currents of history; for to do so is to straitjacket understanding inside sociopolitical categories and putative genealogies of the state. Even the heritage of language/s must be understood as contingent and coincidental. The native speaker's very intimacy with his language may occlude his understanding; his very fluency in his culture may fool him into thinking it is his nature, or even universal Nature. Thus it is with a sense of coincidence and contingency that we must examine issues of who "we" are and what we "know" and "understand." Hence Egypt, and hence this book, for Egypt—to be more precise, *ancient* Egypt—is so distant that no one can claim a culturally privileged understanding of it.

At the center of my argument is a chapter on the myth of Osiris. It follows the discussion in the Exergue, which stands apart from the enterprise proper, following instead the line of this Preface. After the Exergue and the chapter on Osiris, there are three technical chapters, the first on language and representation, the second concerning gender, and the third devoted to number. The final chapter would look in some ways like a conclusion, but it is more adequately an opening to considerations of Egypt in and as "the West," considerations I tried to rein in while writing the previous four chapters.

This writing was doubly conceived. It is presented, on the one hand, as a book, with a beginning and an end, with chapter heads and footnotes and a bibliography. The practicalities of publishing at the end of the twentieth century make this material form the most readily processed from my institutional context, and I have, moreover, an attachment to the solidity and clarity of the book (illusory though they may indeed be).

On the other hand, the academic apparatus I have used to write this essay has been, at least in part, an electronically linked "stack of cards" (a "hypercard," to give it its proper commercial due). Since the texts I have been engaged upon belong to no one, or, rather, to everyone, I would wish to disseminate them, as much as I can, "in the original language," in order to lay bare the archaeology of the enterprise as much as possible.

The enterprise as a whole, moreover, should be open to reconstruction and deconstruction by the reader; and so it is already, fundamentally, of course, but the technological capabilities available to us should open it more readily to readings along lines different from those enforced by the format of a conventional book. I have, therefore, created a supplementary collection of material on the World Wide Web, at http://www.stanford.edu/~thare/regypt. There I offer the Egyptian texts around which this book is written, with a panoply of linguistic glosses and notes, bibliographical references, visual aids, asides, definitions, and so on.

My inspiration for such a structure comes from several classics of philology, especially Sir Alan Henderson Gardiner's *Egyptian Grammar*, with its blandishments to scatter the reading around and beyond the page, to the tiny side note listing a reference from the wall of a Theban tomb, back to the sign list for a Thirteenth Dynasty variant of a particular glyph, then to the dictionary or one of the indexes, or to an excursus twenty pages back (which was beyond adequate comprehension the first time you encountered it).

If Sir Alan hoped to contain his subject whole within a single volume and make that single volume a comprehensive initiation to the hieroglyphs, then the meticulously annotated structure he produced defeated his ambition. The result is a splendid monument, arduous and fascinating, but not comprehensive (cock a skeptical eyebrow as you read).

And I myself, I said before, have no ambition to the definitive or comprehensive. I think these words can have only very limited or ironic application today, but I fully embrace the expansive reading that Gardiner envisioned.

I owe thanks to many people for the opportunity to work on this book and for the insights they have provided me along the way. I cannot hope to name all of them here, but I could not proceed without acknowledging at least a few. Sepp (a.k.a. Hans Ulrich) Gumbrecht has been a model colleague in this context, not only for his constructive reading of the manuscript, but also for his encouragement that I was engaged in "what Complit is really about." It was he, as well, who introduced me to Jan Assmann, whose achievements in Egyptology are an inspiration and an (unattainable) example. Assmann and Antonio Loprieno were both generous readers of the manuscript, and I thank them for their comments. Haun Saussy has been a superb interlocutor on the linguistic and literary-critical issues at the heart of this enterprise, and his detailed criticism of the chapter on language and representation saved me from many mistakes even as it pushed me on to a more rigorous consideration of several of the problems at hand. Seth Lerer showed me the forest after I'd been climbing trees for a very long time. John Baines gave warm encouragement and numerous insights, as well as making it possible for me to use the wonderful library of the Griffith Institute, Oxford. Richard Parkinson shared his own excellent work on gender and sexuality in ancient Egypt with me and helped me obtain important materials for publication. David Keightley lectured at Stanford on the earliest Chinese, bringing to my attention a range of cross-cultural problems that proved instructive at a crucial point in my work, and he made many helpful comments about a chunk of the work I

unceremoniously dumped in his lap. My student Tomiko Yoda proved herself my teacher as well, and directed my attention to important comparative materials that would otherwise have escaped my notice. A Marta Sutton Weeks research fellowship extended to me through the good offices of the deans of Humanities and Sciences at Stanford made it possible for me to visit important museum collections and acquire materials that would otherwise have remained out of reach, and I thank both Reverend Weeks and my deans, especially John Etchemendy. I am grateful for the expert editorial assistance I have received at Stanford University Press. Helen Tartar and Nathan MacBrien have maintained a creative and cooperative frame of mind in face of the many material complications this book has caused, and Andrew Lewis has suggested countless improvements in the text. Finally, and most deeply, I owe thanks to my wife, Anne, and my children, John, Emma, and William Krishna, for their patience these several years.

CONVENTIONS

The importance of language to the enterprise as a whole demands in certain cases a high degree of technical precision. Thus it has been necessary to use the specialized tools of the Egyptologist even though, at first, they may alienate some readers' eyes and try their patience. My apologies. Whenever I have found it possible, I have aimed to simplify. All the same, it will be helpful to have some familiarity with the complicated and sometimes inconsistent transliteration practices of Egyptologists.

There are two major problems inherent in the English transcription of Egyptian words: Egyptian writing systems did not notate vowels (or notated them only sporadically and obscurely), and Egyptian languages use some consonants that either do not signify or do not occur in English. Thus, the precise reconstruction of Egyptian words in English letters is impossible. Yet it is necessary to refer to Egyptian words in talking about Egyptian matters. In many cases this can be done unobtrusively using accepted compromises, such as "Nefertiti" or "ankh sign." When more precision is required, however, I have adopted the following conventions of transliteration.

The letters below require no special explanations except the practical caveat that *g* is to be pronounced hard, as in "gate," never soft, as in "genial."

w, b, p, f, m, n, r, s, h, k, g, t, d, z

The following letters are marked with diacritics that need to be explained:

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ṯ, ḏ, ẖ, ḫ, ḥ, š, q (ḳ)

The letters *ṯ* and *ḏ* produces the sounds "tch" and "dj," as in the words "etch" and "Djibouti" (the latter being more familiar as that soft *g* in "gesture" or as *dg* in "edge"). An *ẖ* signifies a sound similar to "ch" in the German *ich*, whereas *ḫ* indicates the harder "ch" of Scottish "loch" or German *Buch*. An underdot shows emphasis, thus *ḥ* is expressed with more force than *h*, as in the Arabic name Aḥmad. Some Egyptologists similarly use *ḳ* to represent an emphatic *k*, reminiscent of the Arabic *ḳur'ān*, but I use, rather, *q* for this purpose (as in Qur'ān). The letter *š* stands for "sh" as in "shine."

The following letters present some special complexities:

ꜣ, j (ꞽ), ꜥ, y

These all have relatives in the Semitic languages and are called by their Hebrew (or Arabic) names, *aleph* (*alif*) for ꜣ, *yod* (*ya*) for *j* (some Egyptologists prefer *ꞽ*), *'ayin* (*'ain*) for ꜥ. Whether these consonants represent the same consonants in ancient Egyptian as they do in modern Arabic or Hebrew is the subject of a lively debate among linguistically oriented Egyptologists. (Some theorize that *aleph* and *'ayin* represented liquids, like *r* and *l*, in Old Egyptian.) By Egyptological convention, however, *aleph* is considered to represent a glottal stop, as in the sound that takes the place of "tt" in the Cockney for "bottle." *'Ayin* does not occur in English, but represents a deeper guttural consonant, perhaps a voiced glottal stop. *Yod* may represent a semiconsonantal glide, like the *y* in "yellow." The Egyptian consonant we transliterate *y* is related to this, and thought to correlate relatively well with English *y*.

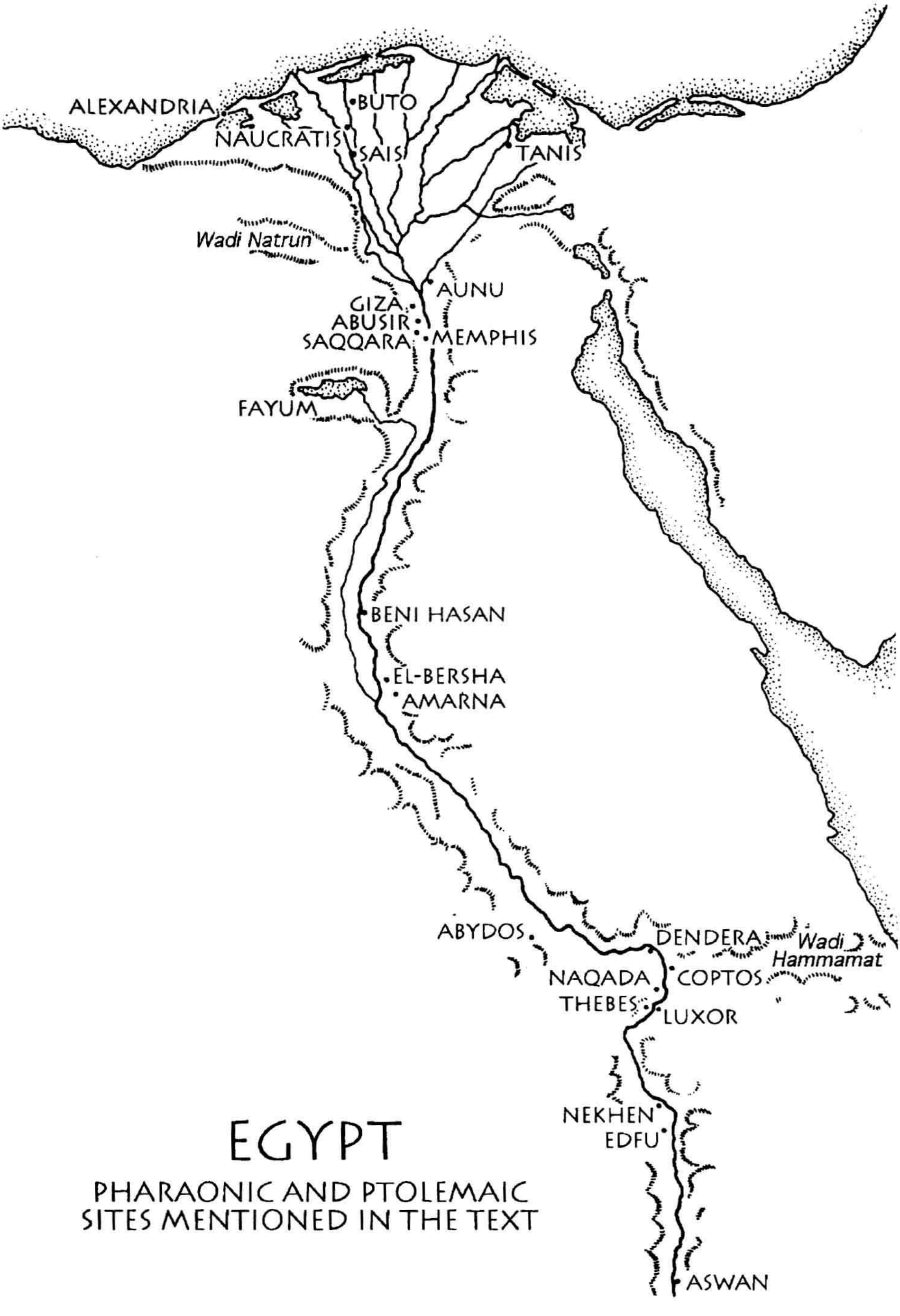
The above will be relevant to the discussion in this book only occasionally. The fact is, the scholarly romanization of ancient Egyptian words gives us little hope of pronouncing them. Although it is not actually possible to pronounce Egyptian words as the Egyptians themselves did in any case, it is nonetheless necessary in many contexts to vocalize them, and it is indeed desirable that they should be capable of vocalization even in a silent reading. I will therefore adopt the conventional expedient of inserting vowels (usually "e" or "o") into the consonant clusters of Egyptian words to create more practical if technically less correct romanizations for most Egyptian words cited here, only using the scholarly romanizations explained above when it is important that technical details be conveyed in the text. (When important terms are introduced for the first time, I will give both the scholarly romanization and the more practicable conventional one.)

We will, therefore, speak of "Senusert" rather than "Snwsrt" and "Menkaure'" rather than "Mnkꜣwrꜥ." It is worth noting, however, that this further conventionalization we adopt for most purposes introduces a problem of multiplicity. The selfsame pharaoh, for example, can be variously written "Thutmosis," "Tuthmosis," "Tḥutmose," "Tethmosis," or even, for purists, "Djehut(y)mose." The problem is compounded by the fact that this is a common personal name, as well as the name of four notable pharaohs in the highly notable Eighteenth Dynasty. I have accepted the convention of distinguishing those four (and other pharaohs sharing the same nomen) with Roman numerals, as "Tḥutmose I," "Tḥutmose II," and so on, but on first mention I will give the pharaoh's prenomen as well, which, in this case, produces the following: "'Aakheperkare' Tḥutmose I," "'Aakheperenre' Tḥutmose II," "Menkheperre' Tḥutmose III," and "Menkheperure' Tḥutmose IV."

Sometimes I prefer to note the presence of my *'ayin* with an apostrophe. In such cases the *'ayin* is converted either to the English e', as in "Re'" (for *Rꜥ*), the principal name of the sun god, or to the English 'a, as in "truth": "ma'at" (for *Mꜣꜥt*). I mark *aleph* in the usual manner, with an English *a*, and *yod*, usually, with an English *i* except with such important words as *jmn*, and *jtn*, the names of the gods commonly rendered as "Amun" (or "Amon") and "Aten" (or "Aton"). I prefer to keep the consonants *t* and *ḥ* (which occur in succession in many Egyptian words) distinct, to avoid confusion with "th" as in "thing" or "theology," and have done this by using an underdot with the *h*. Thus you will find my (picayune?) "Hatḥor" rather than the common "Hathor." These examples all illustrate the inconsistencies we live with in imagining Egyptian vowels.

I include hieroglyphic texts in many cases, insisting on the visual iconicity of the medium, and encourage even those who have no intention of learning to read hieroglyphics to let their eyes play over them for the occasional pleasure of recognizing an ideograph. Such citations are read, as hieroglyphs usually were, from right to left, reading toward the faces of anthropomorphic and theriomorphic signs. (When, however, words in hieroglyphics have been run directly into lines of English text, I have written the hieroglyphic words in English order, from left to right.) I have made all practical effort to present the hieroglyphic texts with due attention to the specific material context from which they come. Thus, nonstandard glyphs are reproduced as they appear in the inscription in question, and defacements or damage to the texts are indicated in my transcriptions as well. I have, however, taken the liberty of transcribing the texts horizontally, except in the case of a brief passage from the Shabaka Stone where the disposition of the glyphs in the inscription is of particular significance for the meaning of the inscription (see p. 178). The texts are identified in the notes as precisely as my epigraphic sources allow. Lowercase "p" affixed to the front of a capitalized word means "papyrus." In referring, when necessary, to dates, I follow the example of Baines and Málek in the *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*. Translations and all drawings are mine unless otherwise noted.

ReMembering
Osiris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EGYPT

PHARAONIC AND PTOLEMAIC
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