
Some Errors in Writing Resulting From Similarity Of Some Hieratic Signs

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Among the interesting and curious things a scholar may encounter while dealing with some ancient Egyptian documents, are the writing errors, which are done sometimes by the ancient scribe in some texts. This can occasionally occur when he adds some unnecessary signs to a word, or when he omits other necessary signs in a word, or when he replaces a personal pronoun with another.

The most obvious of such errors are the ones in the cases where the scribe puts one or more signs to a word, where it is not required. The sense can consequently be obscure and the word would be interpreted wrongly.

In such cases the scholar mostly tries to amend the fault suggesting variant writings to adjust the meaning. Mostly, however one pays no attention to explain or to find out the reason for the occurrence of such errors.

Hence the main purpose of the present study is to follow up such errors, to find out the reasons behind them and then to correct the meaning.

It is generally known that when the ancient Egyptian scribe wrote a document, he applied two methods. The first one was through dictating, while the other was through copying. In both cases the writing errors are very probable. The amount and nature of such errors usually depend on the cultural level of the scribe, the standard of his knowledge of the language, and the meanings of the words and their spellings. The condition of the document and the clarity of its writing should also be taken into consideration.





















In the first case, the errors may be due to bad hearing or the failing of concentration.

In the second case, the errors can occur, when the scribe is unable to recognize the right shape or form of some Hieratic signs, especially when a sign seems similar to another sign or they resemble each other in some degree. Consequently, he may write a wrong sign in the place of the right one.

Furthermore, such a misunderstanding can easily occur, if these signs also have the same sound value, as for example in the case of *wḏ* and *w3ḏ* (see below).

In this concern and for the aim of this study, some hieroglyphic signs (mostly in pairs) are selected, depending on the similarity in their Hieratic forms then arranged in-groups. Afterwards, some instances from Hieratic texts, where such errors are traced and picked out, will be presented to prove the above given assumption.

The signs are arranged in the following groups:

1. Between  *spr* and  *spt*
2. Between  *t*,  *d*,  *r*
3. Between  *h* and  the sun disk
4. Between  *w3ḏ* and  *wḏ*
5. Between  *d3* and  *h3*
6. In the writing of  *p* and its ligature with  *n* i.e.  *pn*
7. Between  *s* and  *s*
8. Between  *hm*,  *sn* and  *hm*,  *sn*

1- Between  *spr* and  *spt*

The first sign, which represent a rip, looks in Hieratic very similar to the second one, which represents the upper lip of a human¹ (see Pl. 1, Fig. A).




We notice, that the two signs also have a nearly similar phonetic value.

On account of this resemblance the ancient scribe can easily interchange the two signs with each other.

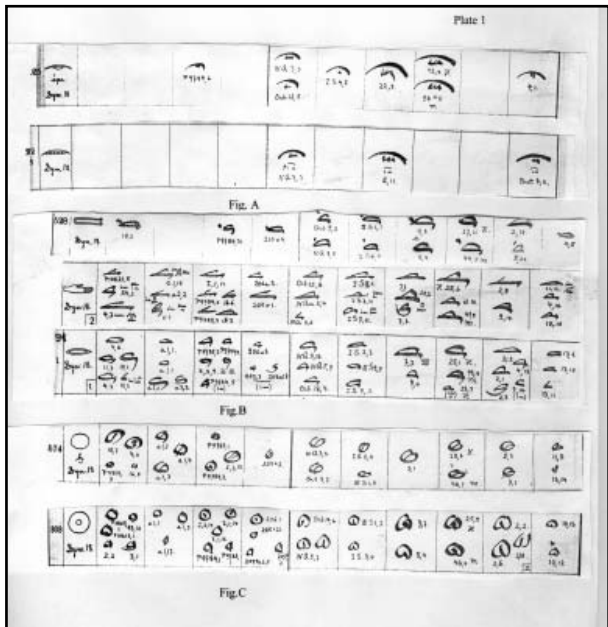
For example the ancient scribe writes wrongly the verb *spr* (reach), where he should write the word *spt* 'Bank'.



(The attendant *Nht-Imm*, son of *T3ri* of the palace *Mri-n-Pth htp hr M3't*, L.P. H.), which on the shore (bank) of *drm* went up...²




2- Between  *t*,  *d*,  and *r*




The three signs look in some instances nearly similar to each other, and can easily be confused, (see Pl.1, Fig. B). Only the first one is distinguished with





(Plate 1)





a diacritic mark, namely with a hack, or a point at its back, which can simply be forgotten or omitted and this leads to an error.

A good example for the confusion between *t* and *r* is seen in some writings of the word  *rmt*. Such as ³ and .⁴

The confusion between *r* and *d* on the other hand can be traced for example in the writing of the word  *d3iw*, a kind of loin-cloth,⁵ which is often abbreviated as .⁶ Beside these writings a very interesting one occurred in some instances namely .⁷ This error is clearly due to the confusion in the writing of both signs in Hieratic.



3- Between  *h* and  the sun disk

These two signs look similar to each other in Hieratic (see Pl. 1 Fig. C).

An example of a writing error, which is due to the confusion between them is seen in the writing of the word  *sfhy* 'guarding', which is once wrongly replaced with. ⁸ (see Pl. 2 Fig. B). In the last writing, the ancient scribe was probably thinking about the word  *sf* 'yesterday', which itself had been once confused with the writing  in papyrus D' orbiney.⁹

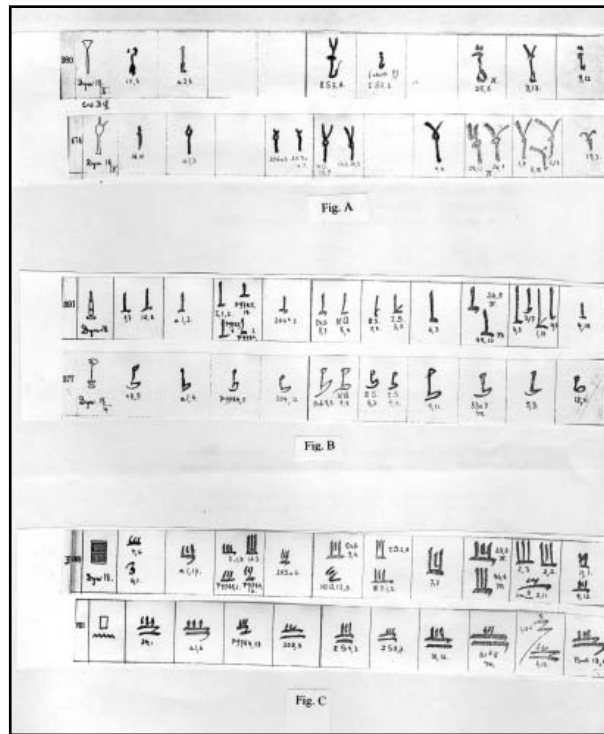
4- Between  *w3d* and  *wd*

It is to be noted here in particular, that the similarity between these two signs lies not only in their hieratic forms (see Pl, 2 fig. A), but also in their phonetic value. This provides a reason for their confusion.

A clear example for such confusion is shown through the writings of the word  *w3d*, 'a kind of fish',¹⁰ which is also written very often as  *wd*.¹¹

5- Between  *d3* and  *h3*.

These two signs look very similar in Hieratic (see Pl. 2, Fig. B).



(Plate 2)

Due to this similarity, the two signs are very often confused. Several examples can be quoted:

The writing of the expression *swd3 ib* in the epistolary greetings formula A ‘*hr swd3 ib n B*’¹². In some instances this word was replaced wrongly with

sh3 ib. In this case the ancient scribe was confused and was probably thinking of the verb *sh3* ‘to remember’.

A clear evidence of this case is seen in the following example from oDeM 429:

... (*sš Hr-Mnw hr nd hr.t n sš Imn-ms m^c. w. s. m ḥs.t Imn- R^c nsw nṯrw p3y.k nb*) ¹³

In this instance the word *sh3* is clearly a misreading for *swd3*, which is usually connected with *ib* especially in the above-mentioned epistolary formula.

A further example can be observed in the writing of the word *md3y* ‘a policeman’,¹⁴ which is written as *mh3y*.

This is shown in the following example from oDeM 120:¹⁵

mh3y (for *md3y*) *P3swr*, ‘The policeman Paswr’.

The ancient scribe could have been confused with a word such as *mh3* ‘measure’.¹⁶



This example and the last one are inscribed by Černý with no comment.

Paswr is a well-known policeman in the community of Deir el Medineh during the XIX Dynasty.¹⁷ The policeman *Paswr* is mentioned in oDeM 558 rt. 7,¹⁸ proceeded with the correct writing *md3y*.

A very interesting and unique evidence occurred unexpectedly in a hieroglyphic text from the Old Kingdom and not in a Hieratic text as expected. It is in the well-known inscription in the tomb of Harkhuf in Elephantine.

In the passage, which mentions the letter of the young King Pepi II to Harkhuf inquiring about the pigmy,¹⁹ the following sentence was inscribed:

In this group, which had been left by Sethe with no interpretation or comment, it seems again that another misreading and confusion exists between the signs for *d3* and *h3*. This group can probably be completed and read as *sh3 swd3*. In the gap after the *s*, the sign for the *w* should be completed, the second *h3*, maybe an error, whereas the first *h3* wrongly replaces *d3*. In light of the context and the occurrence of *ib*, it deals clearly here with the above-mentioned epistolary format *swd3-ib*.

The scribe was clearly inscribing his text from an original hieratic manuscript. Further striking evidence to this can be concluded from the same text namely in the writing of the word *sp*, where a hieratic sign () is written under the hieroglyphic sign for *s* ()²⁰. This

sign, as Sethe noted,²¹ clearly stands for *p*. It is tempting to state that we are dealing here with the original hieratic letter of King Merenre to Harkhuf.

6. In the writing of $\square p$ and its ligature with $\dots n$ i.e. $\square pn$

In some texts, especially in letters, the demonstrative pronoun *pn* is written with double *n* in this way $\square \dots n$.²² The second *n*, which seems superfluous, had occurred very probably as a result of a misreading.

The reason for such a misreading lies, I suppose, in the paleographical development of the letter *p*.

The hieroglyphic sign appeared in its earlier shapes in Hieratic in this simple form \dots . Then the scribes began, in another phase, to join the three diagonal strokes with each other and to separate them from the base \dots , so that the sign looked, with time, as if it were two different sign, linked to one another (Pl. 2, Fig. C).

The three joined strokes could be taken alone for *p* (as in the above-mentioned case of *sp* in Harkhuf), whereas the horizontal base underneath could be read as *n*. Now when the scribe had to write the correct *n* in the case of the demonstrative pronoun *pn*, the group would seem for an ancient scribe, who is copying from a hieratic text, as if it had a double *n*, and so it was transcribed into Hieroglyphs in some texts.

Gardiner tried to interpret this misreading in another way, supposing that the ancient scribe in such cases was possibly thinking of an epistolary expression such as *sš pn n dd hn^c dd*.²³

It means that he sees in the superfluous *n* a genitive adjective followed with the noun *dd*, which is omitted here.

This explanation can not be justified, since we have also the other variants *in.tw n.k sš pn r-dd*, and *m dd*.²⁴ Moreover there is an instance where the demonstrative pronoun is written with one *n*.²⁵

On the other hand, Bakir tried to explain this superfluous *n* in another way.

He supposes that this extra *n* is added here to emphasize the pronunciation.²⁶ This opinion is in fact not convincing, since it cannot explain why the demonstrative pronoun is emphasized only in these cases. Also, it does not explain the case with one *n*, which he himself had quoted.

Nevertheless, his explanation to the following *dd* is acceptable. He considers it merely a variant for *r-dd*, and *m dd*, so he disagrees with Caminos, who considered it an active participle.²⁷

So consequently we have to read that writing as *pn* not *pn n*.

7- Between \dots and \dots

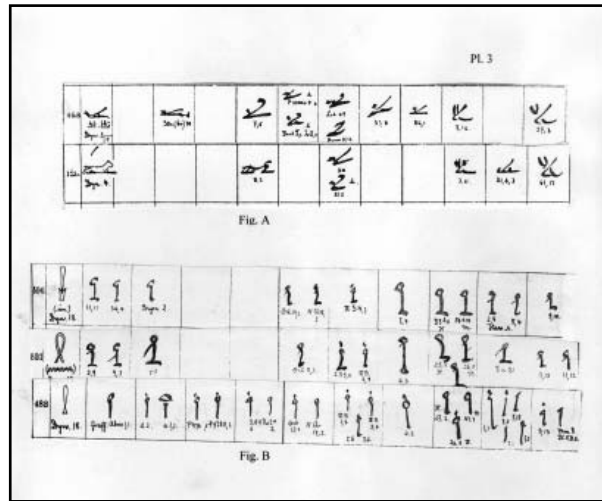
These two signs also look similar to each other in Hieratic (Pl. 3, Fig. A), so they can be easily confused with each other. This confusion was already referred to by Gardiner.²⁸

A good example for this confusion is shown clearly in the writing of the word $\dots \square \dots$ *šn^c* 'Magazine'.²⁹ Besides this writing, there is also the variant writing $\dots \square$.

Another example is found in the writing of the name of a kind of fish, namely the *šn^c* -fish.³⁰ This word is mostly written as \dots or \dots .³¹ This word is often written with the *rw*-sign and not with the plough-sign.³² The lion sign, which usually has the phonetic value *rw*,³³ has in fact, either in this case or in the previous one, nothing to do with the phonetic value *šn^c*. So it was used in such words only because of its confusion in hieratic with the sign of the plough.

8- Between \dots *hm*, \dots *sn* and \dots , \dots *šn*

In fact there is a great similarity between these three signs in hieratic.³⁴ (Pl. 3, Fig. B).



(Plate 3)

Such a similarity led consequently to a clear confusion in the writing of some words.

A good example on the misreading appeared constantly in some passages of the Horus stele.

For example we find in the so-called spell A, the following sentence:

*hmt pw nw r3.k wd n.k it.k Gb rdi n.k mwt. k Isis sb3 n.k sn.k Hnti-Shm irt s3.k*³⁵

‘It is the art of your mouth, which your father Geb had entrusted you, which your mother Isis has given you and which your brother *Hnti-Shm* had taught you in order to provide your protection.’

In this sentence of the Horus stele, which is directed to the young Horus (Harpocrates) it is referred *Hnti-Shm*. This is a further name of Haroeris, the lord of Letopolis (Kom-Osim),³⁶ who is known moreover as the elder Brother of Harpocrates.³⁷

Hence *Hnti-Shm* is referred to here with the epithet *sn.k*, which had occurred also in many other Variants (see Stèle von Benetehor, 1538, Horusstele Aksum, 4; Stele Edinburg 4).³⁹

In some other variants of the Horus stele we find the word $\Downarrow \curvearrowright$ *sn.k* sometimes substituted with the

word $\Downarrow \curvearrowright$ *hm.k*, as in Metterniche 111⁴⁰ and sometimes with $\Downarrow \curvearrowright$ *sn.k*, compare Stele. Turin A,⁴¹ and Stele Cairo 9404 A, 6.⁴² The two variants *hm.k* and *sn.k* have in fact nothing to do with the context. They are clearly just a misreading of the correct one *sn.k*. As I suppose, this misreading and confusion is due to the similarity of the three signs in their hieratic forms.

In conclusion, the above presented and discussed cases are just selected examples to show and prove how the similarity between some signs in hieratic could lead to a confusion and misunderstanding of some words such as in the case of *md3y* (policeman). Many unclear or doubtful readings may, in this way be emended and better understood. The cases in the text of Harkhuf and the Horus stele stand as strong evidence.

Notes

- 1 G. Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie*, II, (Leipzig, 1910), pl. 5.
- 2 A. H. Gardiner, *Late Egyptian Miscellnies*, *Bib. Aeg.* VII, (Bruxelles, 1973), 31, 16-17. Here Gardiner referred already to the confusion of *spr* and *spt*, but without giving an explanation cf. *LES* 31a, note 17a; For further examples see Weamun, 3, 11 (= A. H. Gardiner, *Late Egyptian stories*, 64 a) and compare for the correct writing *LES* 66.3; *LEM* 41, 12.
- 3 CG 25644 rt. 6, vs. 4 (=J. Černý, *Catalogue des Ostraca hieratiques de Musée du Caire.*)
- 4 *LEM* 47, 8; *LRL* 32, 16.
- 5 See J. Janssen, *Commodity prices from the Ramesside Period*, (Leiden, 1975).
- 6 L. Lesko, *Dictionary of Late Egyptian*, Vol. IV, 1989, 121
- 7 Janssen, *Commodity prices from the Ramesside Period*, see also *KRI*, VI, 640, 11, 13 (for P.Turin 167); oDeM 131.
- 8 *LEM* 6, 6, and compare the right one in *LEM* 67, 7.
- 9 Möller, *Hieratische Lesetücke II*, pl. 5. Again this is due to the similarity between *f* and *d*.

- 10 D.Valbelle, *Catalogue des Poids à Inscription Hieratiques de Deir el Medineh*, DFIFAO XVI, (Cairo, 1977), Nos 5199, 5202, pl. 27; 5204 pl. 28 for *w̄d̄*.
- 11 Valbelle, *Catalogue des Poids*, Nos: 5193 pl 26 5197, 5198, 5201 pl. 27 for *w̄d̄*, cf. also oDeM 268, 2; HO 67, 2.
- 12 A. Bakir, 'Ancient Egyptian Epistolography from the Eighteenth to the Twenty-first Dynasty', *BdE* 48, (Cairo, 1970), 42 ff.
- 13 Černý, *Catalogue des ostraca hieratiques non litteraires de Deir el-Medineh*, V, pl. 23, (oDeM 429, 2).
- 14 Wb, II 186, 10.
- 15 Černý, *Catalogue des ostraca hieratiques non litteraires*, II, pl. 4 (oDeM 120, 3); Kitchen *Ramesside Inscriptions* III, 543/ 532
- 16 Wb, II 130, 14.
- 17 Černý, 'Community of Workmen at Thebes in the Ramesside Period', *BdE* 50, 272, 12.
- 18 S. Sauneron, *OHNL* VI, DFIFAO XIII (Cario,1959), pl. 6.
- 19 K. Sethe, *Urkunden des Alten Reiches* I, (Leipzig, 1903) ff, 130, 5.
- 20 *Urk*, 130, 13.
- 21 *Urk*, 130 note a.
- 22 Gardiner, *Late Egyptian Miscellanies*, VII, 46, 4; 79, 10; 82, 6; 83, 4; 84, 5; 126, 9; oMichaelides 66, 3.
- 23 Gardiner, *LEM* 46 a, note 4 a for Anastasi IV, 10, 8 f.
- 24 Bakir, *Epistolography*, 86, note 4.
- 25 Gardiner, *LEM* 136, 5. Gardiner, (*LEM*, 136 a, note 5b) supposes it stands for the usual *pn* with double *n*.
- 26 Bakir, *BdE* 48, 86.
- 27 Bakir, *BdE* 48, note 4.
- 28 Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, (Oxford, 1969), 460, 517 (sign list E 23, U 13).
- 29 Wb, IV 507 f.
- 30 Wb, IV, 507, 10.
- 31 Valbelle, *Catalogue des Poids*, 25
- 32 Compare for example *Catalogue des Poids*, pl. 27 (weights no. 5200, 5202); pl. 30 weights nos. 5222, 5223; pl. 31 (weight no. 5228).
- 33 Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 460.
- 34 Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie* II, 483, 596, 521.
- 35 G. Daresy, *Textes et dessins magiques*, (Caire, 1903) (= Cat. général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée de Caire), (Cario, 1908), Stele no. 9403.
- 36 Gardiner, *AEO*, II, 161, 165.
- 37 Sander-Hansen, 'Metterniche stele', 54; *LÄ* III, 41 ff.
- 38 Altenmüller, 'Der Sockel einer Horus stele des Vorstehers der Waaab-Priester der Sachmet Benitehor', *SÄK* 22, (1995), s. 2, 3.
- 39 H. Sternberg El Hotabi, *Die verschollene Horus stele im Aksum*, (Göttingen, 1994), 189 ff.
- 40 Sander-Hansen, 'Metterniche stele', 54; For further parallels s. Daresy, *Textes et dessins magiques*, Stèle Cairo CG 9401, 4; 9402 Text A 4; 9405, Text A, 16. Sander-Hansen, 'Metterniche stele', 54; had already referred to this confusion.
- 41 Nach Sander-Hansen, 'Metterniche stele', 54, 41.
- 42 Daresy, *Textes et dessins magiques*.