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THE CURIOSITY OF THE CAT IN HIEROGLYPHS

Angela McDONALD

It is a formidable challenge to present Jaromir with a discussion of something with which he is not completely familiar, given his broad and varied interests. Focusing on felines is a particular challenge since Jaromir's *The Cat in Ancient Egypt* covers the territory of ancient Egyptian cats rather comprehensively. This article will therefore endeavour to pad out beyond the book's scope, exploring the hieroglyphic activities of two particular ancient Egyptian cats, one large and one small, which have so far remained camouflaged for various reasons.

The goal of the following discussion is to explore the visual imagery encapsulated in the playful use of feline signs in the script and to note the important role played by form and context. To set the scene, I give a short survey of the varied roles animals in general may play in the hieroglyphic script up until the end of the New Kingdom, concentrating primarily on their role as ideograms and determinatives¹ and discussing the significance of the differing forms they take. I then turn specifically to the felines within this group, touching briefly on the lion before focusing on the panther (a hieroglyphic amalgamation of the cheetah and the leopard) and the humble household cat.





Animals in Hieroglyphs




Animals appear in two principal forms in the hieroglyphic script.² First, they may be used as representations of themselves, either in a full or abridged form, as phonograms, ideograms, and determinatives. Secondly, as ideograms and especially as determinatives, they may be used as metaphors.³ Their metaphorical connotations tend to stem either from their external appearance or from some perceived internal characteristic.





¹ Orly GOLDWASSER (2002, 13-19) has made a case for renaming determinatives 'classifiers', but this is extremely problematic. For a discussion of why 'determinative' is a more appropriate term, see McDONALD 2004, 238-239.

² For a slightly different and more detailed perspective, see VERNUS 2005, 62-75.

³ Orly GOLDWASSER has contributed greatly to this area (most notably 1995, 1999, 2002, 2005; GOLDWASSER and LAOR 1991), although her work tends to downplay the importance of studying determinatives in context. For contextualised studies of the use and evolution of the Seth animal, the panther and the crocodile, see McDONALD 2002a.

External characteristics typically centre on either the animal's shape or its colouring; for example, the smallness of the sparrow makes it a perfect determinative for *nds* 'small', and forms the basis of its extended use as a metaphor for a smallness of other things (e.g. health:  *mn* 'to be ill'; wealth:  *ʔd* 'to be poor'; sense:  *whʔ* 'idiot'). Similarly, the vivid colour of the flamingo's plumage explains its use as an ideogram and determinative for  *dʕr* 'red'.

Internal characteristics range from being fairly transparent in their origins to being much more complex and culturally idiosyncratic. While it is not hard to explain why the crocodile became the hieroglyphic ambassador of concepts like avarice ( *skn* 'to be greedy'), ferocity ( *nhʔ* 'violent') and speed ( *sʕd* 'flash'), the Seth animal's connotations of chaos and disruption have their roots in that god's religio-cultural history.⁴

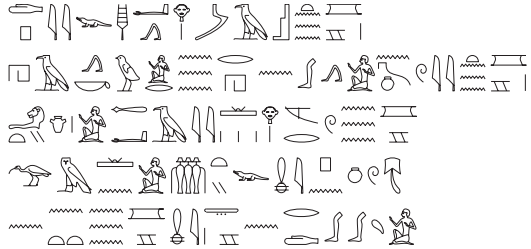
Form is vitally important when it comes to the specificity of the meaning of hieroglyphs as ideograms and determinatives. Those animals that are straightforward embodiments of particular concepts tend to be consistent in their hieroglyphic forms; for example, the trussed goose () shows little variation over thousands of years⁵ and its metaphorical use is more or less restricted to *snd* 'to be afraid' and derivatives. Other animals, however, present a wide range of metaphorical possibilities, which could be teased apart by the use of differentiated forms of the hieroglyphic animal. Thus,  may be used to differentiate certain crocodylian metaphors such as (treacherous) concealment (*kʔp*⁶) and stillness or collectedness (*sʔk*) from those that are represented by  and are more active (e.g. *ʔd* 'to be aggressive', *hn* 'to direct against', *ʕn* 'to be dangerous'). Similarly, the Seth deity sign  is used for a time exclusively to represent disruptions of the body and mind principally in the form of illnesses, which are not compatible with

⁴ See TE VELDE (1977) for a survey of Seth's changing character throughout Egyptian history, and a brief survey of his role in the script as a determinative. For a more complete list of words with Sethian determinatives and a discussion of their meaning, see MCDONALD 2007.

⁵ Small variations are attested; for example, some Old Kingdom texts show the goose with its neck folded back and the rest of its body relatively complete (e.g. Khentika: JAMES 1953, pl. 5 B9), while others render it with all of its limbs truncated, its more traditional form in later times (e.g. Unas: PIANKOFF 1968, pl. 15, §218a).

⁶ For example: KRI II, 21, 2-3 where the Hittites are described as being concealed (*kʔpw*) behind the walls of Qadesh. Similar passages in KRI II, 26, 2-6 and KRI II, 115, 8-9.



O DM 1266 + O CGC 25218 (MATHIEU 1996, 98; pl. 18, ll. 12-13):



<i>dpy ḥ' ḥr m3st</i>	'A crocodile is resting on the sandbank,
<i>h3.kw r mw rhn=i nwy</i>	after I have gone down into the water, as I tread the flood.
<i>ḥ3ty=i '3y ḥr mrw</i>	(But) my spirits are high in the channels,
<i>gm.n=i ḥnty mi pnw</i>	once I have discovered the Crocodile to be like a mouse,
<i>n-ntt mw mi t3 n rdwy=i</i>	because the water is like land to my feet.'

The two crocodilian words in the extract above are cleverly chosen to create a careful sub-text that can play out only in writing. The 'active'⁹ form of the crocodile is used in both instances, which creates an affinity between the two crocodile words and emphasises that the crocodile remains physically the same and potentially mobile throughout the poem, even though the lover's perception of it changes. In fact, *ḥnty* usually has a deity determinative since Khenty is a crocodile god, sometimes described as the manifestation of death. That the word lacks any sign of divinity here suggests that the lover's courage has robbed Khenty of his divine advantage. Spoken aloud, this sub-text vanishes.

Cats in Hieroglyphs

Before the Greco-Roman Period,¹⁰ certain animals are heavily used as metaphors in the determinative system, like the crocodile, the Seth animal, and the bad bird (DAVID 2000). By contrast, some are restricted to one context only: for example, the cow and calf determinative () is exclusively used in the phrase *3ms-ib* which describes filial affection (Wb. II, 7), and the egret () is confined to the root *sd3* 'to shake' (Wb. IV, 365-67).

⁹ Thanks to Phil Gorman for suggesting this useful way of distinguishing the two forms of the crocodile hieroglyph: 'active' and 'at rest'.

¹⁰ The number of animal signs in use multiplies considerably in the Greco-Roman Period: see VERNUS 2005, 62.

Cats form a curious subset among animal signs. Although a wide range of cats appears in Egyptian art,¹¹ the script only includes the lion, the panther, and the domestic cat as signs in regular use. Within this small group, one might expect the hieroglyphic lion to manifest a rich tapestry of metaphoric connotations since it was both a royal and divine animal.¹² In fact, the use of leonine imagery calls attention to an important distinction between what may be called surface metaphors in texts — i.e. those that manifest themselves at word level rather than sign level, which would have been perceptible in spoken Egyptian — and those which are embedded within the language of a text, which remain confined to the script.¹³ The king is often called *mšī* (*ḥsš*) ‘a (fierce) lion’, especially in formal royal inscriptions, but the various ‘animal’ words describing the ferocity of his actions (e.g. *dnd*, *knd*) never have lion determinatives. Indeed, outside writings of its own name, the lion (appearing in either a walking or recumbent form) is barely used as a determinative in its own right. The two other members of the hieroglyphic cat family — the ‘panther’ and the domestic cat — present a rather different picture.

The Panther

The panther had an active life as a metaphor both on and below the surface of Egyptian texts. In surface metaphors, it is the image of ferocity. The king and various gods, especially in the New Kingdom, are often described as ‘raging like a panther’.¹⁴ Below the surface of the text, however, its connotations are not confined to its temper.

The panther’s form in the script requires some explanation. Both leopards (*bššby šm* ‘southern panther’) and cheetahs (*bššby mḥy* ‘northern panther’) were exotic creatures to the Egyptians, imported into the country from Nubia mostly, and both appear in art. The fuller, most typical version of the panther sign most closely resembles a leopard, displaying that animal’s characteristic slouch,¹⁵ although there are variant

¹¹ For examples, see MALEK (1993), *passim* and OSBORN and OSBORNOVA 1998, 106-23.

¹² For a general discussion of the lion in art, see KLEINSGÜTL (1997), 34-46. For the lion’s use in textual metaphors, see GRAPOW 1924 (re-edition 1983), 69-73.

¹³ HIRAGA (2005, 7-13) provides an insightful discussion of extra-verbal metaphor with reference to a haiku. For structuring metaphors in Egyptian language and art, see FRANDSEN (1997).

¹⁴ For examples, see GRAPOW 1924 (re-edition 1983), 73. The one example cited by GRIMAL (1986, 409, n. 1396) is actually to be read ‘Indeed his majesty raged against them like a lion’ (KRI IV, 4, 4).

¹⁵ Unlike the lion, the panther is never shown recumbent. This may be because it was important to show the animal’s distinctive carriage clearly.

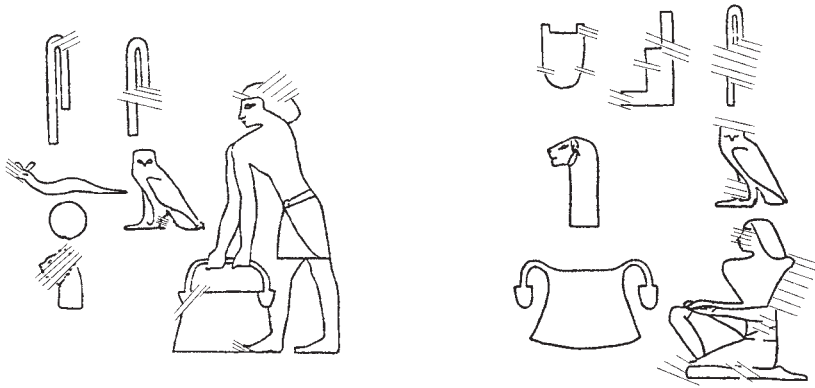






Fig. 1. Reliefs from the Sun Temple of Niuserre
(after SMITH 1933, fig. 5)

forms of the full sign that resemble the cheetah more closely with its longer, upright neck.¹⁶

The second, more commonly attested form of the panther sign shows only the animal's head and elongated neck. In this form, the animal could be considered a leopard-cheetah hybrid, since it usually has the face of a leopard (i.e. it lacks the lacrimal stripe typical characteristic of the cheetah), but the neck of the cheetah. The term 'panther' is useful to indicate the hybrid nature of the sign, which in the New Kingdom also begins to take on leonine characteristics (see below). In the Old Kingdom, the sign often appears as an ideogram for *b3* 'panther pelt' (either leopard or cheetah), and it is probably this item that the sign represents schematically (Fig. 1).

There is further corroboration in a caption in the tomb of Baqet III at Beni Hasan written over a spotted and slouching leopard (Fig. 2a). The animal is called *b3* and the determinative is probably a variant on the Old Kingdom pelt sign shown above in fig. 1: .¹⁷ It is striking that elsewhere in the tomb, a second leopard and a cheetah (Fig. 2b) look more like lions (compare Fig. 2c) than the other leopard.

¹⁶ For example, the leaping panther determinative of Aby 'panther' in an inscription at Medinet Habu inscriptions (MH II, 114, 6). See BOESSNECK 1988, figs. 95a-b for images of the two animals illustrating the differences between them.

¹⁷ This sign is attested as the determinative of *bA* in Unas's copy of PT 263 (§338b). There are several variants in the Pyramid Texts:  in Teti (PT 224: §219b),  in Siese (PT 263: SW l. 26), and  in Pepi I (PT 469: §907d).

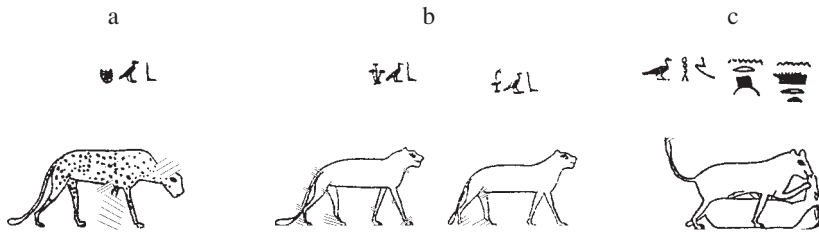


Fig. 2. Captioned cats from the tomb of Baqet III at Beni Hasan
(after NEWBERRY 1893, pl. 4)

The hieroglyphic form of the sign perspectivises¹⁸ the animal's face, which seems to have signalled an air of authority.¹⁹ Although the panther's head is not depicted on the garment shown in the Niuserre reliefs, it is a common feature of the panther hides worn by sem-priests and other dignitaries, especially in the Old Kingdom (compare fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Detail of the panther hide worn by Khufukaef in his tomb, Giza
(author's photograph)

¹⁸ For the use of this term, see TAYLOR 1995, 90.

¹⁹ This significance outlasts the sign's meaningfulness as a determinative. In the New Kingdom Chester Beatty Dreambook, one dream centres on seeing oneself with the face of a panther — according to the papyrus this means 'acting as chief' (P. Chester Beatty III, rto. 4, 2; GARDINER 1935, I, 13; II, pl. 6).

The sign also bears a strong resemblance to the ‘leopard’-headed gaming piece.²⁰ It is probable, however, that the hieroglyphic form influenced the form of the gaming piece rather than vice versa.

Whatever its origins, the panther head sign has a rich metaphoric life in texts of the Old Kingdom (see Table 1 below), and is almost entirely distinct semantically from the fuller form of the animal, perhaps because the animal was more significant and familiar in daily life for its hide rather than as a living creature. The difference between the two forms of the sign is evident in later writings of the word for ‘panther’: the Old Kingdom word *b3* gives way to *Aby* by the New Kingdom, and the latter never takes the panther head determinative.

Table 1. Patterns of use of the panther head sign as a determinative or ideogram²¹

	Old Kingdom	Middle Kingdom	New Kingdom
<i>3ḥwt</i>			
‘fields’?		CT	
<i>3sb</i>			
‘fierce, bright’	PT		
<i>3t</i>			
‘power’	PT	CT NR	BD R
<i>b3</i>			
‘panther-hide’	PT	CT	
<i>bst</i>			
‘dazzling’	NR	CT	
<i>pḥty</i>			
‘strength’	PT NR	CT MM NR	BD MM R NR L
<i>nbyt</i>			
‘Nebyt’ (place)			R
<i>ḥm3tt</i>			
[location]?		CT (?)	

²⁰ See TAIT 1982, 33, n.6 for these pieces being identified specifically as leopards rather than lions.

²¹ A detailed discussion of the significance of genre on the distribution patterns of the panther head sign is beyond the scope of this article, but certain patterns can be observed, most notably the heavy use of the sign in religious texts contrasting with its meagre appearance in literary texts.

	Old Kingdom	Middle Kingdom	New Kingdom
<i>k3</i>			
[substance]	PT NR		
<i>k33</i>			
‘powerful’	PT	CT (?)	

Key: PT – Pyramid Texts; CT – Coffin Texts; BD – Book of the Dead; L – Literary texts; MM – Magico-medical texts NR – Non-royal texts; R – Royal texts.

In the Old Kingdom, the panther’s head seems to represent fiery brilliance or power. This nuance is present in nearly all of the words the panther head is used to determine in the Old Kingdom.²² In the animal’s perceived fieriness there is a rare link between the curtailed and full forms of the panther sign. The context is the sole instance of the full panther sign (looking almost leonine — see fig. 4) being used metaphorically in an Old Kingdom:

Inscription from tomb of Mereruka (DRIOTON 1961, 140):







Fig. 4


mk imy(t)-r hnr̄t iw=s rd n̄dm ir mr=s Look, the overseer of the dancers!
 She has given sweet pleasure to
 whom she likes,
h3h3=s n s3b spt=s nt sš Her agility is that of the jackal,
 the rest of her belongs to stories (?).
iw m3.n=s nb3=sn n.s She has seen that they burn for her.

WARD (1978, 27) believed that the word *nb3* here was related to ‘to tremble’ and this was how he translated: ‘Those who see her tremble for her’. He did not comment on the substitution of the panther determinative. DRIOTON (1961, 140–41) believed that the group was a writing of the verb ‘to burn’ and that the panther was not a semantically meaningful sign here, but simply represented the phonetic quantity *b3*.

²² The exceptions are *phty* and *b3*. The latter simply describes the animal itself or its coat as an object, while *pHty* focuses on the animal’s strength. See n. 26 below.

The translations of Ward and Drioton need not be viewed entirely separately. In a much later period,  occurs among writings of *nb3t* 'flame' (WILSON 1997, 503; compare  'flame' in CANNUYER 1990a, 110), showing that  is not incompatible with words for flame. Hannig and Vomberg's translation (1998, 327) 'sich wie toll gebärden' is even more suggestive of a connection: *nb3* 'flame' would therefore be an epithet based on the flame's 'wild' behaviour, perhaps based on its tendency to flicker which in turn could explain the  determinative of the verb. Thus, *nb3* in the passage might better be understood as meaning 'to be wild', with its panther determinative bringing out this connotation and maintaining the associations of *nb3* with the wildness of fire.²³

As is evident from Table 1 above, the sign's popularity as a metaphor has waned considerably by the New Kingdom. Perhaps it was because leopards and cheetahs were not commonplace that the popularity of their hieroglyphic combination dwindled. By the Middle Kingdom, outwith the domain of religious texts, the panther head sign is more or less restricted to two words — *3t* 'power' and *ph3ty* 'strength' — although even within these domains, its form undergoes significant changes. Looking diachronically at the ways in which these two words are treated in various texts sheds further light on the panther's gradual semantic obsolescence and the ways in which the script reacted to it.

In the case of *3t*, increasingly from the Middle Kingdom, the word is written with a hippo's head () instead of the original panther, with occasional, possibly archaizing exceptions.²⁴ It is likely that two things were happening simultaneously. First, the panther was becoming less meaningful as a sign, and second, the meaning of *3t* was evolving also. It seems as if the panther imparted some of its fiery connotations to *3t* in the Old Kingdom. It is significant that the sign may occasionally be embellished by a uraeus on its brow in the Pyramid Texts.²⁵ Indeed, the uraeus once replaces the panther sign altogether in a passage in Teti's pyramid (PT 255, cited below), no doubt for reasons of superstition to

²³ The panther's association with the root *nb3* seems to be the basis of its use in the place-name *nbyt*, attested from the New Kingdom until the Greco-Roman Period (LEITZ 2002, IV, 74). It is one of the few words in which the fuller form of the animal and the curtailed head may alternate. VERNUS (2005, 77) suggests that *nby* is a variant of *3by* 'panther', however no instances of *nby* 'panther' are cited in any dictionary.

²⁴ For example, in a text at Deir el-Bahri: see NAVILLE 1893, III, 57, l. 3.

²⁵ Twice in Unas (PT 246, §253b; 262, §334a), three times in Pepi I (PT 485, §1032c; PT 502A, §1074; PT 574, §1487b), twice in Neith (PT 474, §940b; PT 478, §973a), once in Ibi (l. 431), and once as an ideogram in Senwosretankh (PT 262, l. 418).

which Teti's text is particularly prone. In context, *3t* is very often connected with the head or specifically the face, for example:

PT 255 (§297c):



iw.k3 N pn hr=f m wr pw nb 3t This N will come, his face being that of
the Great One,
the possessor of power.

If *3t* became increasingly associated with the face (and its metaphorical associations), then the hippo's replacement of the panther was simply replacing one face with another that was more familiar.

Significantly, the hippo's head is never used as an alternative to the panther sign in writings of *phty*.²⁶ However, even though the panther's nuances of strength remained meaningful enough to retain it as the only animal sign used in writings of *phty*, the panther sign itself became increasingly leonine. One detailed, coloured example of the sign shows it not only with a lion's mane, but with vaguer lines on its fur rather than specific spots, and with the lacrimal stripe by its eye that lions and cheetahs share (fig. 5).

However, panthers embellished with their characteristic spots still appear in some texts, especially in papyrus copies of the Book of the Dead (fig. 6).



Fig. 5. Panther hieroglyph from the tomb of Kenamun copied by Nina DAVIES (1958, pl. 2)

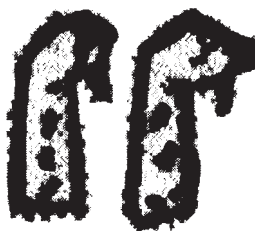


Fig. 6. Panther determinatives in a writing of *phty* in P. Reinisch, BD 108 (after THAUSING and KERSZTKRATSCHMANN 1969, pl. 12, 12)

²⁶ This argues that the panther sign has distinct semantic connotations in *3t* and *phty*. Once, in the Coffin Texts, *phty* has a claw determinative (CT 857, VII. 59i: Sq1Sq), emphasising that the use of the panther determinative in the word had its roots in the animal's physical being.

It comes down to a matter of meaningfulness tied to familiarity. If an animal lost its semantic edge, the script forced it to adapt. Thus, changes in form should always be noted.

The Cat

Despite the privileged position the domestic cat occupied in both daily life, the hieroglyphic cat seems, like the lion, to be confined to an extremely restricted and metaphoric territory, which is almost exclusively religious.²⁷ The cat's form as a hieroglyph before the Greco-Roman Period is similarly restricted — it is nearly always shown in seated position with its tail tucked behind its hind leg, although one exception will be discussed below.

In texts, the cat is mostly attested in religious compositions, primarily as the embodiment of a deity, or medical texts, as a component in the remedies (Wb. II, 42, 1-6; VON DEINES and GRAPOW 1959, 218-20). Few texts involve any extended description of cats. One exception is the Book of Amduat which makes reference to the 'cry' (*sbh*) of a cat demon (*mīwy*), a sound heard during the 8th hour of the night (HORNUNG 1991, 628). The cat's voice would seem to be the basis of the only metaphorical contexts in which it is found. The first occurs in a list of funerary wishes on the New Kingdom stela of Wepwawetmose:

Vienna AEOS 127, main inscription, l. 5:



k3 mdt=s 3st nbt-hwt
s'h -sw inpw ds=f

'May Isis mourn, and Nephthys;
May Anubis himself embalm him.'







Fig. 7²⁸




What I have transliterated as *k3 mdt* is usually understood to be a writing of *kmd* 'to mourn' (HANNIG 2006, 926); this writing is a hapax legomenon. The more familiar, and doubtlessly connected, term for mourning is *km3* (Wb. V, 37, 7), from which the epithet, *km3ty* 'The Two Mourners' (Wb. V, 37; WILSON 1997, 1058), applied to Isis and Nephthys derives. *qm3* and its derivatives have straightforward, logical determinatives like

²⁷ See GRAPOW 1924 (re-edition 1983), 75 for a brief survey. Moreover, it is probably more appropriate to think of the cats that feature in religious spheres as being wild cats rather than domesticated cats. See KLEINSGÜTL 1997, 90-94 for discussion of cats in religion.

²⁸ I would like to thank the KHM Museum, Vienna, for the use of this image.

 and . No animal determinatives are attested. It is possible that the Vienna stela is making a play on this word, re-interpreting it as the phrase *k3-mdt* (literally: ‘to raise the voice’). Reading the text this way makes more sense of the following pronominal =*s*. There is no parallel in the text for an anticipatory pronoun subject if *kmd=s* ‘may she mourn’ is to be read. The cat sign itself may either be taken as determining the whole phrase *k3-mdt* or just *mdt*. Its form does not settle this ambiguity, but it is striking in of itself. The cat raises a paw to its mouth, acting as the feline equivalent of . This writing stands out even more because there are no other comparable uses of ‘innovative’ determinatives elsewhere on the stela.

A second metaphorical context in which the cat may appear is in a more familiar word —  *sr* ‘to prophesy’. The full range of its possible determinatives has never been acknowledged; no dictionary lists *sr* with an animal determinative other than the giraffe (cf. Wb. IV, 189-90; WILSON 1997, 880-81²⁹; HANNIG 2006, 786-7; LESKO 1987, III, 69-70). This is partly attributable to the conventions by which hieratic is transcribed into hieroglyphs, according to which certain sign forms in hieratic are assumed to be variants of hieroglyphic forms, even if they do not resemble them. Again, it is the cat’s voice that prompts its use as a metaphorical determinative, and it can alternate with other animal noise-makers. The discussion below presents only preliminary results and is based mainly on work I have done on the Coffin Texts; further research is needed to shed proper light on the evolution of writings of *sr*.

sr occurs 47 times in the Coffin Texts (VAN DER PLAS and BORGHOUTS 1998, 260), mainly as a verb. In de Buck’s transcribed copies, the giraffe sign alternates with only one other animal determinative — what appears to be a jackal sign () — in one manuscript, B16C. Most of the time, the giraffe is the only determinative, but it may be accompanied by the walking legs (), the man with his hand to his mouth (), or a combination of both. It may also be replaced by one of these two signs.³⁰

²⁹ WILSON 1997, 881 cites an orthography of the phrase *sr-bi3* ‘to proclaim marvels’ with a striding jackal, but presumably she considers this a Greco-Roman cryptogram since no further comment is made on it.

³⁰ Five manuscripts use a papyrus roll determinative, once each (B1P, B1C, B2L, B9C, B1Y) but these are most likely errors. Each manuscript elsewhere uses another sign fairly consistently: B2L (usually walking legs), B1C (usually walking legs), B9C (giraffe mainly, but walking legs once), B1P (giraffe and walking legs alternate), B1Y (only other instance is damaged). Possibly, the papyrus roll is mistakenly written for the walking legs. There is a similarity in the signs in hieratic.

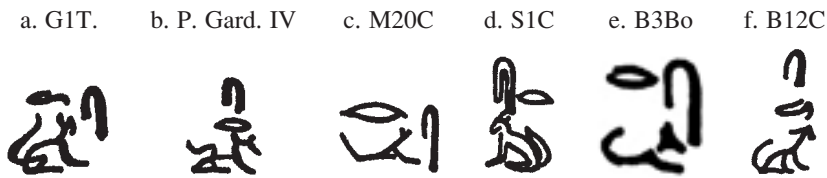


Fig. 8. Signs transcribed as giraffes from various Coffin Texts manuscripts (author's drawings)

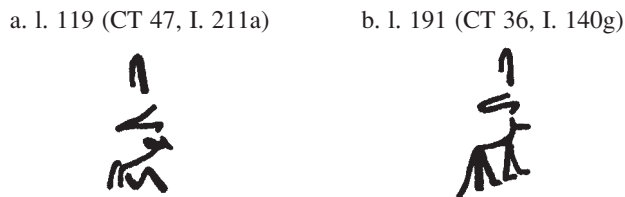


Fig. 9. Two different animal determinatives of *sr* in B16C (author's drawings)


The walking legs sign is the principal alternative to the giraffe.³¹ However, the situation is not as simple as it seems. Looking at the original manuscripts, there are several signs that de Buck transcribed as the giraffe which bear no resemblance to the animal (Fig. 8).

The recumbent or seated position of the animal signs shown above argues against their interpretation as a giraffe, which is never shown in either position. There are examples of signs which do look like giraffes. Ironically, one of the clearest is in B16C, and de Buck transcribes it as a jackal, presumably for consistency. However, when compared, B16C's jackal and giraffe signs are not similar (Fig. 9).

The position of the tail raises another objection to the identification of many signs with the giraffe. The giraffe's tail should be pendent, as it is in Fig. 9a. The long, curved tail of many signs suggests another animal — possibly a feline. The lion is a possibility — perhaps it was used for phonetic reasons to echo the 'r' sound of *sr*, although there are no other attestations of a lion phonogram in writings of *sr* outside the Coffin Texts. Fig. 8d looks distinctly like a cat, not only for its tail, but also for its general shape, and particularly its ear, while fig. 8c looks Sethian instead.

³¹ There is only one instance of the man with hand to his mouth determining *sr* alone (B12C: CT 1060, VII. 314a).

Looking outside the Coffin Texts, several unrecognised animal alternatives to the giraffe appear in a variety of texts in both hieroglyphs and hieratic.

- (1) In the first edition of *Urkunden I* (1903), Sethe transcribes the word *srw* ‘heralds’ in Sabni’s inscription (6th Dynasty) seemingly with a hare sign:  (Urk. I, 137, 9). In his second edition (1933), he renders the sign with shorter ears and a short, upright tail, and includes a note that the hare sign stands for the giraffe. The ears of the sign in DE MORGAN et al’s original copy (1894, 147) do not resemble those of the hare. It is possibly a recumbent Seth animal, or a cat.
- (2) In the inscription of Kanefer-Djaty at Wadi Hammamat (8th Dynasty?), COUYAT and MONTET transcribe the determinative of *sr* ‘to foretell’ as a giraffe, although they note that the sign looks strange (1912, 103, n. 3). Their photograph (1912, pl. 39) of the sign confirms their description of the animal as having a curved, raised tail. It looks like a walking cat.
- (3) One of the stelae of Sarenput in the Heqaib shrine at Elephantine (12th Dynasty) contains a semi-logographic writing of *sr* including an animal sign that HABACHI transcribed as a dog for which he offered no explanation (1985, 36, pl. 24). The body-shape and nature of the animal’s tail confirm his interpretation of the sign.
- (4) Finally, in the Shipwrecked Sailor, the verb *sr* occurs three times (P. Petersburg 1115: 32, 97, 155). The animal determinative in each instance is traditionally transcribed as a giraffe. However, the form of the animal is distinctly un-giraffe-like. BLACKMAN (1932) made no comment about the sign in his transcription, neither did DÉVAUD (1916-17) or CANNUYER (1990b), who both focused on the palaeography of the text. The animal is identical to the Seth animal determinative of *nšn* (P. Petersburg 1115: 32, 98) and *ḳri* (P. Petersburg 1115: 57).

Evidently, alongside the giraffe, the cat, the dog, the jackal (in the Coffin Texts only³²), and the Seth animal may all act as determinatives of *sr*, each perspectivising the meaning of the word in different ways.³³ The

³² The jackal determinative is rather the odd animal out. It was possibly supposed to be the giraffe itself or the dog. There is a connection between jackals and Seth animals (e.g. QUAEGBEUR 1992, 486-87; DUQUESNE 1998), but there is little reason to suppose B16C was using a jackal to stand for Seth

³³ There may be other animals involved in determining *sr*. A very strange creature seems to write the word logographically in the inscription of Djehutyemhab (SEYFRIED 1995,

giraffe perspectivises the spatial aspect of the word very effectively, but like the leopard and the cheetah, perhaps this exotic creature was occasionally replaced by a more familiar substitute. Despite being a hybrid animal rather than a real one, the Seth animal is intrinsically associated with noise, usually of a chaotic or supernatural nature. Art helps make sense of the perspectivising role of the dog and the cat in *sr*. In marsh hunting scenes, both animals may accompany and help their masters — perhaps they were regarded as being able to spot prey in advance. There may also be a connection with noise — it is not difficult to imagine the cat’s meowing and the dog’s barking being interpreted as a fore-warning.

One last example may be offered to corroborate this interpretation of the cat as a herald, and to confirm its connection to the semantic domain of noise. It comes from a New Kingdom mourning song from the tomb of Merymery (19th Dynasty):

Inscription of Merymery (LÜDDECKENS 1943, no. 74, ll. 8-9):



rmy.n=i nhy.n=i ‘I have wept, I have mourned.’

LÜDDECKENS (1943, 149) denied that this animal could be the Seth animal, but did not propose an alternative identification. His transcription makes the animal look like a dog, with its straight snout and curled tail, but it is more likely to be a cat, particularly given the cat’s role in the Vienna stela discussed above. Both the cat and the dog have a connection to making noise, but only the cat has the appropriate connection with mourning.

Conclusion

The Egyptians shared their world with a variety of animals, some of whom remain a familiar part of our modern world. As Jaromir himself has pointed out, an animal like the cat ‘represents one of the few remaining links between the ancient Egyptian civilisation and the completely different world of today’ (MALEK 1993, 14). It is precisely these kinds of links that shed unexpected light on the ancient Egyptian world and, more

pl. 21: 5 columns from left). It is shown standing (unlike the cat), with a pendent tail (ruling out the Seth animal and the dog), and it has a rather rounded head which makes it unlike all three of the usual candidates. Its neck is too short for a conventional giraffe.

importantly, allow us to see that world from an Egyptian perspective. Hieroglyphic cats, when studied in their (con)textual habitat, have much to communicate.

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