

**ON THE ALLEGED PHONETIC VALUE /P/ OF THE FROG HIEROGLYPH
IN PTOLEMAIC**

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ABSTRACT

The present article deals with two passages (Esna n° 379, 9 and Edfu III, 190, 2) which feature the frog hieroglyph with a supposed phonetic value /p/. While an alternative reading /H/ is suggested for the first text, the other requires returning to Nefertari's tomb for disclosure of the frog's meaning.

In a note published in the *Mélanges Mariette*, Sauneron² was first to bring up a possible phonetic value /p/ for the frog hieroglyph in the passage Esna n° 379, 9:



twt nb &A-snj Hrj nHp nHp(.w) nTr.w nb(.w)

“You are the lord of Esna, master of the potter’s wheel, who creates (on the potter’s wheel) all gods”.


Regarding the source of this phonetic value /p/, SAUNERON pointed out the rare word , pgg(.t), which has to mean a kind of toad or frog.³ Hence, the


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² Sauneron (1961: 233f. – §4. *L'hieroglyphe de la grenouille* = p).

³ Fischer-Elfert (1986: 37 n. e): it is hardly possible to identify the precise species with any certainty at the moment; a guess might be the common Mascarene frog (*Rana mascareniensis mascareniensis*). For further occurrences of the word pgg(.t) cf. Cairo JE 43809, a door jamb of the Old Kingdom mastaba of Nefermaat: a daughter of the tomb owner bears the personal name P{A}gg.t, (Harpur, 2001: 59. Fig. 72 & pl. 3). Papyrus Hearst 13, 6: amm n pgg.t, “brain of a frog” as ingredient for a drug (Iversen, 1947: 47f.). P. BM EA 9997: the pgg.t-frog in an allusion to the usual prey of the snake, cf. Leitz, 1999: 17 and Fischer-Elfert, 2005: 54ff. & 140. P. PSI inv. I 72: the appellation pgg.t, ‘frog’, appears in a pun to the location @r-wr, capital of the frog-goddess Heqet, (Osing, 1998: 180 & 182 n. r-s). Edfu VI, 299, 14: a silver amulet in the shape of a

value /p/ was derived from this word by the acrophonic principle (*pgg(.t) > p*). Subsequently, Sauneron's finding made its way into most of the relevant sign lists and dictionaries of Ptolemaic.⁴

However, there is a lack of attestations for the frog hieroglyph with the /p/ value, and the word nHp, which is seemingly providing the above example, poses a problem of its own as it belongs to the basic theological vocabulary of the Esna temple. Because of this, the word nHp occurs in many instances, displaying a great variety of spellings.⁵ Particular attention should be paid in this regard to examples that show no initial /n/,⁶ as well as to those spellings that omit the word ending in /p/.⁷ There is even an example of the word featuring the frog hieroglyph (cf. Esna n° 394, 27: ). Here, the frog is beyond doubt used for /H/, a phonetic value which is quite commonly found for the frog in Esna.⁸


In all of these examples it is ultimately the potter's wheel determinative () which guaranteed the correct reading and allowed fancy spellings. This seems also true for the above mentioned passage Esna n° 379, 9, where in the present author's opinion the frog should just simply be read as /H/.⁹


This said, another occurrence exists of the frog hieroglyph with seemingly a /p/-value. The text is from Edfu temple and the context is a scene where the scribal palette is presented to Thot:

pgg.t-frog in connection with the ritual mk.t-Haw, "protection of the limbs" (Ghattas, 1968: 54).







⁴ Daumas & al. (1988: 349 n° 3); Kurth (2007: 276 n° 2, 278 n. 4); Leitz (2004: 165); Wilson (1997: 370 s.v. <ps>).

⁵ Derchain-Urtel, 1999: 199: "Es ist nicht verwunderlich, dass auch gerade dieses Wort nHp eine grosse epigraphische Breite erhalten hat, zählt es doch zu den Schlüsselkonzepten im Rahmen der Kosmogonie von Esna mit Chnum, dem Schöpfergott, als Mittelpunkt, der diese Schöpfung auf seiner Töpferscheibe Hr nHp.f, hundertfach wiederholt, in Gang setzt."

⁶ Cf. Esna n° 377, 1: .

⁷ Cf. Esna n° 311, 1: .

⁸ See for instance: Esna n° 242, 23 & 25; Esna n° 349, 13; Esna n° 394, 24; Esna n° 395, 8.

⁹ The spelling shows an accumulation of the /H/-sound while the /p/-ending is either not written at all or can be found contained in , Hb. The word's spelling can be resolved like this: , nH{H};  H{H};  Hp (<Hb);  H. Metathesis of the final two consonants for aesthetical reasons can be found in another spelling of nHp:  (Firchow/Sethe, Urk. VIII, § 213, line 4).



sjar gsj ar p(A)s Dd-mdw jrj-sDm=k jab.tj m bAH=k wr-nD.tj 7 jmj=f
p(A)s=k pn (j)sk r gs=f Hr jrj wnw.t=k m Ab=k,

“Presenting the scribal palette, stylus and water-pot. Words to be spoken: ‘Your scribal palette (jrj-sDm) is standing before you, the seven wr-nD.tj-pens are in it and this your water-pot is at its side while performing your duty according to your desire’” (Edfu III, 190, 2-4).

The odd writing of a *frog-atop-a-water-pot* did not slip Sauneron’s attention who interpreted it as meaning in this case pAs/ps “for unknown reasons”.¹⁰ Later commentators again favoured the reading /p/ for the frog, thus taking the frog as *mater lectionis* for the phonetically ambiguous sign Gardiner W10,¹¹ or they even deduced the alleged phonetic value /p/ from exactly this writing.¹²

Two objections can be raised, firstly, there is evidence for trouble-free usage of the sign ∇ for ps,¹³ and secondly, the frog sign for /p/ seems a problematic *mater lectionis* since that phonetic value is in our current documentation at best only once more attested (in the Esna text discussed above).

What ptolemaists seem to have overlooked is the fact that the arrangement of a frog perching on top of a water-pot is encountered already in the tomb of queen Nefertari:

¹⁰ Sauneron, 1961: 234 n. 1: “En d’autres textes, il semble que la grenouille doive se lire p(A)s, ps, pour des raisons qui nous échappent...”

¹¹ Derchain-Urtel, 1981: 147a n. 2: “... le signe de la grenouille pgg.t donne la lecture p qui ici, n’est qu’une mater lectionis pour déterminer la lecture du godet p(A)s indiqué.” Kurth, 2007: 278 n. 10: “Herleitung [...] über das Wasser im Näpfchen, das als wHm anx galt? Für wahrscheinlicher halte ich aber, dass der Frosch Mater Lectionis p zum Ideogramm des Näpfchens ist.” From what follows here, Kurth’s first interpretation would have been perfectly right.

¹² Gabolde, 1988: 19 n. 15: “De cette graphie pAs/ps provient sans doute la valeur p de la grenouille en ptolémaïque”.

¹³ Daumas & al. (1995: 777f. n° 143) lists some 18 possible phonetic values for the sign ∇ , ps, however, is absent. This reading is clearly proven by the Tanite statues Cairo JE 67094 of Panemerit and JE 67093 of Pichas, dating from the time of Ptolemy XII.: There, repeatedly the writings ∇ und ∇ occur for Sps (Zivie-Coche, 2000a: 378 fig. 15, l. 8, l. 9, l. 10; 2000b: 452 fig. 7, l. 5, l. 8 2x, l. 9). See furthermore the commentary by Zivie-Coche (1987: 181 n. 1). The second writing ∇ strongly suggests that the value p(A)s/b(A)s for Gardiner W10 has been deduced from the ointment vessel Gardiner W1/W2 (∇) and not from ps(j), “to cook, boil” as had stated Herbin (1984: 271 n. r). This argument is enforced by the writings ∇ (tomb of Petubast) and ∇ (Esna n° 163, 23) for Bastet – see Osing & al. (1982: 80 n. a).



Fig. 1. Tomb of Nefertari, chamber F, north wall¹⁴: the queen before Thot (Stafford-Deitsch, 2001: 121).

It is noteworthy that the scene serves as a vignette to chapter 94 of the Book of the Dead, entitled *rA n dbH pAs gstj (m-a ©Hwtj) m Xr.t-nTr*, “chapter for requesting a water-pot and a scribal palette (from Thot) in the necropolis.” A close semantic connection is evident to the much later ritual of presenting the scribal equipment to Thot in the Ptolemaic temple scenes. It is therefore safe to assume that the pictorial combination *frog-on-water-pot* had its origin in the Book of the Dead’s tradition as an iconographic ensemble. Such sign combinations were elsewhere ascertained to have the quality of “super signs” (Superzeichen), that convey an entire message or even a whole discourse.¹⁵ What this means in

¹⁴ There is an unfortunate hotchpotch in the designations of rooms and the direction of walls in the tomb of Nefertari; cf. Kaper (2002: 121 n. 1).

¹⁵ Reiche, 2006: 182.

At this point arises an interesting follow-up question: How may the immense period of time between the scene in Nefertari's tomb and the Edfu text be bridged? One could imagine an ongoing tradition of the vignette to BD 94, featuring the frog perching on a water pot, but this seems not at all to be manifest in the preserved manuscripts after the 19th dynasty.²²

Another possible explanation vessels with frog applications. Such vessels can be seen in 18th dynasty tomb scenes where they constitute a tributary offering connected primarily with Syrians.²³ This type of vessel seems to have been an «admired design»²⁴, thereafter copied by Egyptian goldsmiths so as to eventually become a «stereotyped motive»²⁵. Later vessels or objects with frog representations can be cited to further close the gap between the Ramessid and Ptolemaic period.²⁶

To cut the discussion short at this point, it may be said that neither in the Esna nor in the Edfu examples the frog hieroglyph stands for the phonetic value /p/. In fact, we are instead confronted in the latter case with an iconographical

procreative force of the Nun itself, or even allude to the Hermopolitan model for the creation with its frog-headed primordial deities that emerged from the Nun.

²² Only in the Book of the Dead of Neferrenpet, a contemporary of Nefertari, do we find a similar vignette to spell 94; (Milde, 1991: 79-81). A further depiction occurs in TT 335, the tomb of Nakhtamun, Neferrenpet's brother, cf. Kaper (2002: 110 fig. 2) and Milde, 1991: 238: "*The obvious relationship of the queen's wall-paintings to those in the private tombs and especially in Neferrenpet's Book of the Dead (cf. BD 17 and 94) gives rise to the supposition that Neferrenpet's vignettes originate among the workers in the Valley of the Queens in the time of Ramesses II*". Before the time of Nefertari, a scene in the 18th dyn. tomb of Neferhotep (TT 50) already shows a lotus chalice with a perching frog on top of it next to a scribal's palette. This vessel recalls the form of the chalice in the later Neferrenpet vignette (see Hari, 1985: pl. 29). In summary, the specific vignette to spell 94, as it occurs in Nefertari's tomb, seems to have been created by the workmen who were responsible for the queen's tomb – and it may well be that it remained a purely local matter, confined to the Deir el-Medina area during the New Kingdom. For the local Book of the Dead tradition of Deir el-Medina that features other iconographic peculiarities as well, see Hofmann (2004: 90ff.) or Lüscher (2007: 23-44).

²³ Wachsmann, 1987: 63 with n. 145. The vases themselves were made of metal (gold, electrum), the frog application might have been of lapis lazuli. For a different approach on the frog vases see Leibovitch (1943: 72).

²⁴ Davies & Davies, 1941: 97.

²⁵ Müller, 1910: 16: "*This leads to the theory that this frog-decoration was a stereotyped motive of the Syrian or Egyptian goldsmiths. Its returning among the vessels from the Asiatic booty of Ramses III, at Medinet Habu, otherwise would be very difficult to explain. Could the artist have gone back to the wall paintings of Dynasty 18 or did the idea survive in Syria? [...] We see how the goldsmiths, copying a limited number of models for centuries, slavishly followed them in the smallest details. The modern bazaar of the goldsmiths at Cairo furnishes the best analogies of such conservatism.*"



²⁶ To name just a few: a 22nd dyn. faience bowl from Tell el-Ratabah with a multitude of frogs applied to it; see Petrie (1906: 31f. & pl. 32). A green faience casket with perching frog on its lid, dated roughly to the 26th dyn.; see Brovarski (1987: 72f.). This piece might have an eastern Greek origin though (Dunn Friedman, 1998: 214 n° 86). A fragmentary faience bowl with two frogs applied to its rim (Late Period – Early Ptolemaic period); see Busz / Gercke (1999: 365 n° 204). A close parallel is Cairo CG 18024 (von Bissing, 1902: 102).

ensemble from the Book of the Dead tradition which has been ingeniously adapted²⁷ into a writing that is highly charged with supplementary meaning.²⁸

²⁷ See the other examples of such ptolemaic adaptations provided by von Lieven (2001: 111f.) and particularly Quack, 2007: 225f.: *“In jedem Fall sollte dieser Befund dazu führen, dass man die gelegentlich etwas allzu hoch eingeschätzte Kreativität der spätzeitlichen Priester auf ein angemessenes Mass zurückführt. Sicher haben sich diese Leute ihre Gedanken gemacht, aber sie konnten dabei auf erhebliches Archivmaterial zurückgreifen und sich davon inspirieren lassen. Ihre Kunst lag oft mehr in der Adaption des Vorgegebenen als in der Schaffung ganz neuer Elemente. [...] Wer weiss, wie oft in griechisch-römischen Bauinschriften betont wird, die Dekoration sei «nach alten Schriften» erfolgt, wird dies nicht verwunderlich finden.”*

²⁸ For this and the characterization of such writings as “visual poetry” see Morenz (2008).

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