

A list of references of interest for the study of the ancient Egyptian script

Carlos Gracia Zamacona, 15/03/2019

This is a non-exhaustive list of references on the ancient Egyptian script, with a very brief section of general studies on writing systems. Those readers familiar with Egyptological literature will notice the absence of studies of individual monuments and documents which include important discussions on specific aspects of the script, or which publish new material of relevance for the study of the script—the wealth of information contained in the publications of Old Kingdom mastabas is perhaps the most telling example of it. Essential as these publications are, they have no place in an introductory list of references such as this one, although they should be included in any future, comprehensive bibliography on the topic.

The present list starts with a short commentary on basic references, which is followed by a list of references by topic. As this list may be progressively completed in the future, any additions or comments would be most welcome.

Basic references commented

Bibliography by topic

0. General on writing systems

0.1. Periodicals specialized

1. Introductions to the ancient Egyptian writing system

2. Diachronic studies

3. Studies on the writing system

3.1. General

3.2. Subsystems

3.2.1. Epigraphy and palaeography

3.2.2. Cursive hieroglyphs

3.2.3. Hieratic

3.2.4. Demotic

3.2.5. Ptolemaic

3.2.6. Coptic

3.2.7. Syllabic writing

3.2.8. Cryptography

3.2.9. Monograms

3.2.10. Emblems

3.2.11. Potmarks

3.3. Related writing systems

4. Studies on the signs

4.1. General

4.2. Signs and *realia*

4.3. Signs and sounds

4.4. Determinatives

4.5. Engrammations

Basic references commented

The foundational work by Jean François Champollion (1822 & 1836) has countless times been praised as a paramount achievement of Western genius, even as a paradigm of how method and perseverance are key to the deciphering of ancient scripts, which are themselves pictured as the intellectual maximum of a conundrum. The decipherment was a remarkable attainment: the fact that Champollion could not only read the script but also understand the texts written therewith and the grammar of the language they employed—because these three skills were involved in the same and only process of deciphering—will never be sufficiently highlighted.

Despite the fact that Champollion's brilliant path has been travelled by many scholars since, the study of the ancient Egyptian writing system suffers from the lack of empirical data on the actual encoding of the words (typology, frequencies, orthographic variations in space and time, etc.), and attention tends to be paid to the signs instead (mainly their types and functions). Among these studies are the influential works by Kurt Sethe (1908 & 1935) and the operational list of signs that was provided by Alan H. Gardiner in his grammar (first published in 1927). Even if this list represents a reduction of the formal repository of signs and possibly their functions, it constitutes a milestone in the research on the ancient Egyptian script and its consultation is necessary for any further study. To this, the compilation of studies by Pierre Lacau (1970) must be added, as well as an overall insight of this approach by Gérard Roquet (1989), in which an inspiring approach to different types of spellings was proposed.

More specific studies appeared early in the twentieth century. Studies on the materiality of the writing signs are represented already in 1914 with Lacau's work on the mutilation of signs, and later contributions have since followed. As much can be said about historical studies on the writing system, with the inspiring work by Siegfried Schott (1926 & 1950).

An idiosyncratic feature of the research on the ancient Egyptian writing system is that the relationship between signs and their referents, with the important contribution by Lacau (1954), has encountered more attention than the relationship between signs and sounds. Notwithstanding this, two contributions by William Edgerton (1947 & 1952) are essential to the study of the sign-sound relationship. In addition to this, the second of Edgerton's works is, in the first place, a sharp critique of Ignace Gelb's theory of writing (1952). As is known, Gelb named his approach 'Grammatology', a term later recycled by the influential Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie* (1967), whose work has only reached studies in the ancient Egyptian script late in the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Galvano 1999 & 2003).

The opposition between sound and referent/meaning within the study of the ancient Egyptian script was naturally housed by those works of a broad structuralist inspiration, among which Wolfgang Schenkel's (1971) is a reference. Delving into the breach this approach opened between sound and referent/meaning, a populated research line incorporating cognitivist approaches from the seventies has followed since after the influential work by Orly Goldwasser (1995) in Egyptology. It is not without surprise, because these two approaches (structuralism and cognitivism) are frequently pictured as opposed, that the work that sparks Goldwasser's study is a brilliant, influential article by

one of the fathers of linguistic structuralism and the theory of communication, Roman Jakobson (1956). Another astonishing consequence of the isolation between sound- and referent/meaning studies is that, with very few exceptions, the studies on phonology and phonetics do not discuss the sound-sign relationship, as if it should be taken for granted.

In a broader horizon walking through material culture and anthropology, literary and communication studies, are the fundamental contributions by Erik Hornung (1989), Jan Assmann (1991), Antonio Loprieno (2001), and John Baines (2007), which have enlarged our knowledge and perspective over the ancient Egyptian script's agency, use and materiality covering such diverse aspects as the emblematic use of signs, the role of puns, visual culture, or the reading-writing process.

Last but not least, and thanks to their variety, quantity and impact in the field, the works by Henry George Fischer and Pascal Vernus have greatly improved our understanding of the ancient Egyptian script. Fischer's main achievements must be counted in the interconnections between writing and representations (1986), the intricacies of specific subsystems such as monograms (1977b), the relevance of the directionality of the script (1977a), and the origin of the script (1989). Vernus' studies range over almost all aspects of ancient Egyptian writing, from its material aspects (1990) to its historical developments (1993) through its relationship with representations (1985) and the interference between sound and image (2003). The contribution of these two authors helped shape what can be termed as the *writing space* of the ancient Egyptian script: a space where writing was possible in all its complexity and interaction with the reality and the supports, the sonic nature of language and the iconic nature of the script and representations (painting and reliefs).

Bibliography by topic

0. General on writing systems

N.B. 1. For a recent bibliographical compilation by Terry Joyce, covering mainly English and German publications, see faculty-sgs.tama.ac.jp/terry/awll/orbwill/20160810-all.pdf

N.B. 2. A few studies on specific writing systems, although of general relevance, have been included here as well.

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

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4.5. Engrammations¹

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1 'Spelling' (the term is Prof. Gérard Roquet's).

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