

SEMITIC WORDS IN EGYPTIAN TEXTS*

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James E. Hoch's *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period* is a work of major importance for scholars both of Semitic and Egyptian. This review essay summarizes the book's presentation of the data, discusses the analyses derived from a detailed study of the data, and suggests ways in which the work can be utilized in future research. Hoch's most important contribution is the conclusion that the phonemic inventory of Canaanite included twenty-seven to twenty-nine phonemes, far more than is usually reconstructed.

I OPEN THIS REVIEW WITH the plain statement that James E. Hoch's work is a masterpiece; it deserves to be on the bookshelf of everyone laboring in the related fields of Egyptian and Semitic. But because many Semitists lack even basic training in Egyptology and in the Egyptian language, I begin with a few paragraphs about the historical picture and the scholarly scene before proceeding to a discussion of the book under review.

During the period of the Egyptian New Kingdom, there was large scale interaction between the Egyptians of the Nile Valley and the Semites of the Levant and beyond. Such contacts existed earlier (note the story of Sinuhe from the Middle Kingdom, the Hyksos rule over large portions of Egypt, and so on), but it was during the New Kingdom that the intensity of this interaction increased dramatically. The contact was in two directions. For the first time in its history Egypt ruled over large areas of Canaan in an imperial manner, with garrisons of troops and administrators stationed throughout the region; and Semites in increasing numbers made their way to Egypt, where their occupations ranged from slaves performing menial tasks to high officials serving the pharaoh. Furthermore, as the Amarna letters attest, Akkadian had become the *lingua franca* of the Near East, so that the language could be read and written by scribes at the court of Akhenaten.

In light of this historical picture, it is no surprise that Semitic words and names appear in unprecedented numbers in Egyptian texts of the New Kingdom (and in the Third Intermediate Period thereafter). These words and names are presented in the traditional Egyptian hiero-

glyphic script, specifically in a variation called "group writing" or "syllabic orthography." This system was developed to transcribe foreign words and names, with an attempt to render the vowels accompanying the consonants.

The three classic studies of group writing and the Semitic words expressed thereby are M. Burchardt, *Die altkanaanäischen Fremdworte und Eigennamen im Aegypten* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1909–10); W. F. Albright, *The Vocalization of the Egyptian Syllabic Orthography* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1934); and W. Helck, *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens zu Vorderasien im 3. und 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1962; 2nd ed., 1971). It is probably not coincidental that each successive work on the subject appeared about thirty years after the previous one, and that Hoch's volume appears now as the latest in the cycle. Each generation dutifully and rightfully needs to rework the problems addressed by earlier scholars, in addition to presenting new data that come to light.

Thus, notwithstanding the aforementioned pioneering studies, many issues still are unclear. Moreover, in the three decades that have passed since Helck's volume, much new material has become available. The need for a new synthesis has been keenly felt, so it was with great excitement and expectation that I opened Hoch's book. I can report that my excitement never lessened, and that my expectations were not only met but were surpassed. This book is so rich in material, both for Egyptologists and for Semitists, that my recommendation to those who cannot labor in the other's field is to disencumber themselves of this deficiency. I direct these words to Semitists in particular, for the rewards of studying the material on the Egyptian side are great. Let me turn now to some of the book's specifics to defend these statements.

Hoch presents 595 different Semitic words appearing in Egyptian transcription. Each entry provides all attes-

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tations of the word, including all variant writings, in both hieroglyphic script and in transliteration; a reconstruction of the Semitic form; identification of the part of speech; translation; Demotic and Coptic forms of the word, if they are attested; discussion of the literary context of the word, with the full Egyptian passage cited; etymology; discussions of phonology, morphology, semantics, and syntax; and a bibliographical note (limited to citations of the three aforementioned works and to A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, 6 vols. [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1926–53]). This is a wealth of material by any yardstick.

Finally, at the end of each entry Hoch assigns a level of certainty within the following range of five numbers: [1] wholly uncertain, [2] dubious, [3] questionable, [4] quite certain, [5] entirely certain. To illustrate three of these categories:

No. 189 *ma-r-ka-ba-ta* ‘chariot’ is attested about a dozen times, both the meaning and the etymology are entirely certain, and thus it is assigned the number [5].

No. 170 *ma-n-da-ta* ‘tax, tribute’ is attested only once, it undoubtedly is to be equated with Akkadian *mandattu* and Hebrew and Aramaic *middāh*, but the exact meaning of the word in the sole Egyptian passage “his things, his *mnt*, his silver, his gold, his utensils” is “elusive” (Hoch’s word, p. 131), and so it is assigned the number [4], corresponding to “quite certain.”

No. 335 *hi-ma-ti* “power” must be a foreign word due to the use of the group writing, but its single attestation appears in a broken context, and there are two possible etyma: *hms* ‘violence’ and *ḥm* ‘mighty’ (cf. Arabic *ḥm*, Hebrew *ḥm*). The latter would involve metathesis, not uncommon in the borrowing of foreign words in general and in the passage of Semitic words into Egyptian in particular. In light of all these problems, Hoch assigns this entry the rank of [3], meaning “questionable.”

Categories [2] and [1] represent even more problematic and dubious words.

After a presentation of all the data, Hoch moves to the second part of the book, devoted to analyses and conclusions. In this portion of his work, a whole series of issues is addressed. The first and most basic is to work out the phonology represented in the Egyptian transcription of the Semitic words. In his analysis, Hoch utilizes only those words with a level of certainty of [5] or [4]. “Although the use of level [4] evidence introduces some element of doubt, it has the advantage of broadening the base of data, which is particularly scarce with the rarer phonemes” (p. 401). In any case, a clear statistical table is included (pp. 431–33), with level [5] and level [4] delineated, so that the interested reader can check Hoch’s work with reference to only the absolutely

certain level-[5] words or with reference to the slightly less certain level-[4] words as well.

By far the most important factor that emerges from the Egyptian evidence is the size of the phonemic inventory, which numbers as high as 27–29 phonemes, even in the more recent material. This is far more than usually believed to be present in the contemporary Canaanite dialects. Although it cannot be demonstrated that any single dialect contained the full inventory, it would seem likely that at least some did (or nearly so) since the Egyptian evidence suggests that dialects with mergers were in the minority as source languages. (pp. 413–14)

For example, the data reveal that the pairs /h/ - /ḥ/ and /ʕ/ - /ǵ/ were distinguished during this period. To be specific: 95% of the cases of Semitic /h/ in level-[5] words are transcribed by Egyptian ḥ, and 93% of the cases of Semitic /ḥ/ in level-[5] words are transcribed by Egyptian ḥ; similarly, 100% of the cases of Semitic /ʕ/ in level-[5] words are transcribed by Egyptian ʕ, and 83% of the cases of Semitic /ǵ/ in level-[5] words are transcribed by Egyptian q or g. This consistency permits us to conclude that most of the Canaanite dialects distinguished /h/ - /ḥ/ and /ʕ/ - /ǵ/ during the period under consideration. To the Hebraist this should come as no surprise, since J. Blau (*On Polyphony in Biblical Hebrew* [Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Science and Humanities, 1982]) demonstrated the same oppositions for the period one thousand years later, at the time of the production of the Septuagint. Hoch’s data confirm this picture for the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages and allow us to extend it, not only to Hebrew, but to virtually all Canaanite dialects.

More striking is the fact that the data allow similar conclusions for the interdentalals. In 77% of the cases, Semitic /t/ is rendered by Egyptian s, and in 88% of the cases, Semitic /š/ is rendered by Egyptian š, suggesting that /t/ had not merged with /š/ in most of the Canaanite dialects. There are only three certain cases involving /d/, but in two of these the Egyptian representation is with t, a sign which is never used for Semitic /z/, thus suggesting that /d/ too was retained in some or most of the Canaanite dialects. Still rarer, of course, are words which include the phonemes /t/ and /d/. Here the data are too limited to permit any definite conclusion, though one level-[4] example of the former allows the possibility that /t/ had not merged with /š/.

The situation concerning /s/ is as follows, though all conclusions are tentative, due to the lack of a sufficient number of examples and an inconsistent picture resulting from these examples. In a minority of dialects, /s/ merged with /š/; in the majority of dialects it either retained its lateral pronunciation [ʃ] or was realized as [s].

Hoch's data are convincing. There can be no doubt that the average Canaanite dialect, even during the Iron Age, contained a larger number of phonemes than the alphabet might suggest. This is implied, not only by Blau's aforementioned study, but by other recent work as well (G. A. Rendsburg, "The Ammonite Phoneme /T/," *BASOR* 269 [1988]: 73–79; E. A. Knauf, "On the Phonemes of Fringe Canaanite," *UF* 19 [1987]: 91–94).

The next logical question to ask, then, is why does the Canaanite alphabet have only twenty-two signs. Hoch responds:

The traditional view is that the 22 letter alphabet was a Phoenician innovation, and perhaps it was, but with Phoenician being a very likely source of many of the words in Egyptian, we are faced with the possibility that the truncation took place elsewhere. Or could there have been in the Phoenician domain a situation similar to that at Ugarit involving two contemporary dialects or socially determined speech patterns? If so, the official script would have reflected the innovating speech of the royal elite and therefore contained only 22 letters, and would also be used for the speech of the common citizens, although it was more conservative with 28 or so phonemes. (p. 415)

While there is no proof for Hoch's assumption of parallel "socially determined speech patterns" with different phonologies, in light of the evidence and in lieu of any other explanation, I am happy to accept his position.

Hoch not only treats the consonantal phonology, he raises issues concerning the vowels as well. The $\hat{a} > \bar{o}$ shift is well attested. Furthermore, a few words witness the shift of short accented a to \bar{o} , characteristic of Phoenician. The diphthongs ay and aw appear usually in their contracted states.

Although Hoch's main goal is to demonstrate what light the evidence sheds on the Semitic side, he also includes a short section, entitled "Implications for Egyptian Phonology and Phonetics" (pp. 425–30). Obviously, the base from which the scholar starts to study Egyptian phonology is notoriously shaky, so while the evidence of the group writing system can be helpful, it does not lead us to definite conclusions about the articulation of particular Egyptian consonants.

Before leaving this section on phonology, let me mention one point noted by Hoch, namely, the sporadic use of Egyptian r for Semitic $/d/$. As Hoch points out (p. 430), this is the inverse of the phenomenon of Greek occasionally rendering Hebrew $/r/$ with δ . It appears that the Semitic and Egyptian $/r/$ was articulated in the vicinity of $/d/$, and thus we may conclude that it was a

rolled dental and not a rolled uvular (though there is evidence for the latter as well; see S. Moscati, *An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages* [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1964], 32). This in turn may help explain certain doublets in the Bible, for example, דַּרְנִים in Gen. 10:4 versus רַרְנִים in 1 Chron. 1:7; דְּעוּאֵל in Num. 1:14 versus רְעוּאֵל in Num. 2:14; and רַבְּלָתָה in Ezek. 6:14 versus רַבְּלָתָה in 2 Kings 25:6. These doublets may not be due to orthographic confusion between *dalet* and *resh* (though various Ketiv/Qere variations presumably are), rather they may reflect a phonological issue involved in the transmission of foreign names (note that the first example is Rhodes in the Aegean, the second is the personal name of a man from Gad in Transjordan, and the third is a city on the Orontes).

Hoch includes a section on morphology in which he analyzes the hundreds of words incorporated in his study. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of them (77.5%) are nouns, 20.7% are verbs, and the remaining 1.8% are other parts of speech.

Hoch also classifies the domains of words in his database. Here too there are few surprises; I list the five largest categories: military terms (51 examples, or 13.4%), topographical terms (31 examples, or 8.2%), food and beverages (28 examples, or 7.4%), household objects (27 examples, or 7.1%), and vessels (24 examples, or 6.3%).

A brief section is devoted to the genres of texts in which these Semitic loanwords appear. The percentages are as follows: school texts (38.7%), accounts and administrative texts (16.9%), historical narratives (12.8%), legal texts (5.8%), magical texts (5.5%), and a whole series of genres—tales, hymns, love poems, wisdom literature, private monuments, etc.—with smaller numbers. Hoch concludes that Semitic words entered the Egyptian language at all levels; they were not limited to certain circles, but were "in common use . . . in virtually every genre of Egyptian writing" (p. 475).

Another topic of interest that Hoch tackles is the source languages of these words appearing in Egyptian texts. Only rarely do we get an inkling where a specific word comes from. One such example is *n-k-fi-ta*, a type of oil said to come specifically from Babylonia and thus easily identifiable as Akkadian *nikiptu*. Otherwise, we must assume that the words are from West Semitic, and more likely they come from Canaanite rather than Aramaic. The Egyptian historical evidence informs us that the most intimate contacts were with Canaan proper, in particular "the Hebrew heartland, the Phoenician coast, and the Southern (Philistine) coast" (p. 485), and most likely the dialects of these regions are the source of

most of the Semitic words appearing in Egyptian texts. While one must be careful of circular reasoning, this brings us again to the conclusion noted above that Canaanite must have possessed a larger phonetic inventory than is generally assumed.

The final section of the book deals with the group writing system itself, and an appendix provides an exhaustive listing of the signs and their values. The volume is extremely well indexed: forty pages (mostly with three columns each) provide indices of words in more than two dozen languages, English glosses, personal names, place names, and divine names.

I have two negative comments to make, both very minor. First, by way of correction, on several occasions Hoch lists Hebrew ל"ה roots as if they were א"ל roots (e.g., חלם 'sick' should be corrected to חלה [p. 248]). Second, by way of comprehensiveness, Hoch attempts to list as many Semitic cognates for each word as possible, but never does he include any Eblaite ones. True, there is no pure dictionary of Eblaite, and thus its lexicon is a bit more inaccessible, but one can use with profit the work of G. Conti, *Il Sillabario della quarta fonte della lista lessicale bilingue eblaite* (Florence: Università di Firenze, 1990).

I note further that, because of the Egyptian transliteration system utilized by Hoch, one must concentrate fully while reading the sections on phonology. I refer to the fact that Hoch chose to use the older Egyptological convention of *t* for the tethering rope (Gardiner sign V13) and *q* for the cobra (Gardiner sign I10). In inter-Egypto-Semitic discussions, this can be confusing, because, of course, the same transliterations stand for totally different phones on the Semitic side. One solution would have been to use the newer Egyptological system which replaces *t* with *č* and *q* with *ğ*. However, I openly admit that I still prefer the older Egyptological system, if only because I and every other student of Egyptian that I know (at least in the English-speaking world) learned the language from A. Gardiner's *Egyptian Grammar* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957)—so I certainly can understand Hoch's preference for *t* and *q*.

Finally, I turn to the question of how this book can be utilized to the maximum. The first and most obvious use is to include the Semitic evidence forthcoming from the group writing system in dictionaries of (mainly) West Semitic. The most comprehensive dictionary of the largest corpus of any West Semitic language of the Iron Age is *HALAT* (= L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, 4 vols. [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967–1990]). This work is replete with cognate evidence and typically cites the evidence of the Egyptian group writing. But

even some Semitic words appearing frequently in Egyptian texts are not cited by *HALAT*, e.g., the entry באר 'well' makes no reference to the Egyptian representations of this word, of which there are six instances according to Hoch (p. 91).

Secondly, scholars of West Semitic investigating a whole series of issues will be able to utilize Hoch's volume as a reference work for years to come. The best way to illustrate the point is to reflect on my own experience in researching the Hebrew word *šibbōlet* meaning both 'ear of grain' and 'torrent, stream' (see G. A. Rendsburg, "More on Hebrew *šibbōlet*," *JSS* 33 [1988]: 255–58). My basic position, stated already by P. Swiggers ("The Word *Šibbōlet* in Jud. xii.6," *JSS* 24 [1979]: 175–77), was that the meaning 'ear of grain' derives from the root *šbl* and the meaning 'torrent, stream' derives from the root *tbl*. At the time I wrote my article, I knew that *šibbōlet* 'stream, torrent' was attested twice in the Shishaq list, but I desisted from raising the issue because I was unsure whether or not I knew of all the attestations with all the possible orthographic variations of this word; and even if I did, I certainly did not know how the Egyptian scribes typically rendered the phonemes in question (I consulted a few basic works then, but could not find sufficiently satisfactory answers). Hoch's volume now provides the evidence *in toto*. The two attestations in the Shishaq list are the only ones attested, and in both cases the initial consonant is represented by Egyptian *š* (p. 276). Also, to my surprise, I now learn that *šibbōlet* 'ear of grain' is attested too, three times to be exact, and the initial consonant is represented by Egyptian *s* (pp. 258–59). Unfortunately, this evidence is of no help in confirming Swiggers' and my hypothesis. On the one hand, the evidence shows that the Egyptian scribes distinguished the two words, but, on the other, these scribes are from different periods and refer to different locales in Canaan. Furthermore, the renderings of both consonants are atypical, for as noted earlier, Semitic /š/ is usually transcribed by Egyptian *š* and only in a few instances by Egyptian *s*, while Semitic /t/ is usually transcribed by Egyptian *s* and only in a few instances by Egyptian *š*. So in the end the Egyptian evidence can neither confirm nor deny the view expressed above, but certainly it would have been beneficial for Swiggers or me at least to present the data. However, I can state that the general notion that /t/ and /š/ had not merged in most Canaanite dialects, one of Hoch's conclusions noted earlier, lends some minimal support to Swiggers' and my approach.

I repeat my opening words: Hoch's book is a masterpiece which deserves to be on the bookshelf of everyone laboring in the related fields of Egyptian and Semitic.