

Eitan Grossman, Peter Dils,
Tonio Sebastian Richter & Wolfgang Schenkel (eds.)

Greek Influence on Egyptian-Coptic:
Contact-Induced Change in an Ancient African Language

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Eitan Grossman, Peter Dils,

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Identifying Semitic Loanwords in Late Egyptian

Jean Winand¹

We cannot identify “non-loanwords” in an absolute sense. A “non-loanword” is simply a word for which we have no knowledge that it was borrowed (Haspelmath 2010: 38)

0 Introduction

A common assumption among Egyptologists is that loanwords from the Semitic world entered the Egyptian lexicon *en masse* during the New Kingdom.² If so, it would *a priori* contradict a general typological assumption according to which recipient languages tend to have lower cultural status than donor languages.³ In the New Kingdom, Egypt of course enjoyed higher political prestige than its close neighbors, but it remains unclear if this can be equated with prestige in cultural matters. Egyptologists have taken a serious interest in lexical borrowing for a very long time.⁴ The study of Semitic loanwords in Egyptian has now been made easier by two major publications: Helck (1971) and Hoch (1994).⁵

The borrowing of Semitic words in the New Kingdom – and actually of words in any language – can be approached from two different angles: a purely linguistic one, which deals with the morpho-phonological adaptations, the semantic integration and the problems raised at the graphic level, and a socio-linguistic one.⁶

In my opinion, a basic question still awaits a satisfactory answer: *How can one recognize a loanword?* According to the Egyptologists’ *communis opinio*, a word in the Egyptian lexicon is reputed to be a Semitic loanword if:

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I’d like to thank Gaëlle Chantrain for her help and Todd Gillen for improving my English. Many thanks too to Stéphane Polis for his comments and suggestions, and to the anonymous reviewer for his/her comments and advice.

2 Cf. Erman (1923: 241).

3 Haspelmath (2010: 48): “(...) it seems to me undeniable that prestige is a factor with paramount importance for language change, going far beyond our current topic of loanwords”.

4 See already Albright (1917–1918).

5 I will not consider proper names here. For this, see Schneider (1992). Hoch’s study has not been received without criticism: Görg (1996: 80–87), Meeks (1997: 32–61), Ward (1996: 17–47).

6 In the second part of his study, Hoch devoted some space to the following questions, that have a general interest in the problematics of borrowing: phonology, morphology, semantic classes, the category of texts, the precise identification of the Semitic languages, syllabic writing.

- it is written in syllabic writing,
- it does not appear before the New Kingdom,
- it does not have an etymology within Egyptian,
- it has Semitic cognate(s) that can be validated at the (morpho-)phonological level *and* at the semantic level.

An alternative answer to this question will be presented here by focussing on seven case studies. Before proceeding to the core of this paper, some background information on lexical borrowing in the New Kingdom might be in order.

1 Background information

In this section, some general considerations, mainly statistical in nature, on the distribution of the corpus are given. I first consider the distribution of the corpus according to word classes (1.1). I then give some comments on the use of the loanwords in terms of frequency (1.2), on the Demotic and Coptic successors of the Semitic loanwords (1.3) and on the problems raised by the distribution of the loanwords in text genres (1.4) and in semantic classes (1.5). After much hesitation, I have taken Hoch's study as the corpus of reference, but with some adaptations. Hoch's corpus consists of nearly 595 words; this number has been first reduced to 389 for the following reasons:

- proper nouns (anthroponyms, theonyms and toponyms) have not been considered,
- nouns that are part of a complete Semitic sentence (as is the case for instance in the P. Anastasi I⁷) have been dropped,
- double (or triple) entries have been reduced to one single entry.⁸

I finally decided to work with 326 words after eliminating 63 more words whose Semitic origin seems fairly dubious.⁹

1.1 Distribution of the corpus according to word classes

The corpus can first be considered in terms of its distribution in word classes. As shown in Tab. 1, the distribution of the Semitic loanwords in Egyptian according to word classes is largely uneven: certain classes are largely or completely absent (pronouns, prepositions, adverbs and grammatical words); nouns and verbs make 98 % of the total.

7 E.g. P. Anastasi I, 23,5 (see Hoch 1994: 20, # 6).

8 Hoch (1994: 349, # 512).

9 See the reviews of Ward (1996) and Meeks (1997). To this, add Ward (1989). Among these are words that are genuinely Egyptian, Egyptian words that have been borrowed in Semitic, and loanwords that do not come from Semitic.

	Tokens	Percentage
Nouns	270	82.8
Verbs	52	15.9
Adjectives	2	0.6
Pronouns	1	0.3
Prepositions	1	0.3
Total	326	100

Tab. 1. Distribution of loanwords according to word classes

Such a distribution calls for some comments. Typologically, it is a well-known fact that the category of nouns always stands at the top of the hierarchy.¹⁰ Pronouns, prepositions and conjunctions are consistently low on this scale. The position of verbs and adjectives is more problematic. According to case studies on the borrowing of words into related and unrelated languages, the relative position of verbs and adjectives can vary, sometimes considerably.¹¹ There cannot be of course a general explanation for this. The variation must obviously lie in the specificities of the linguistic systems of the donor and the recipient languages.¹² Now, as noted by Matras (2009: 134), cross-linguistic comparison does not always stand on ground as firm as may be expected, since word categories are not defined along the same lines everywhere. As regards Late Egyptian, it is difficult not to relate the very low proportion of adjectives with the strong tendency in Later Egyptian (Late Egyptian, Demotic and Coptic) to avoid (and finally suppress) adjectives as a word category.¹³

1.2 Frequency

The frequency of use might suggest how deeply a loanword is integrated in the recipient language. The statistics that can be drawn are largely dependent on the extent of the corpus. The corpus of Semitic words in Late Egyptian is rather small: 326 words, which amount to 1217 tokens. The distribution presented in Fig. 1 will undoubtedly be modified as new documents come to light. The status of the hapax legomena is of course very fragile. The hapax legomena alone amount to 41% of the total; words that are attested up to 3 times account for 71%; words attested up to 8 times constitute 90%. From this point onwards, the curve is almost flat. This shows how quickly loanwords saturate the lexicon.

10 See Matras (2009: 166), Tadmor (2010: 61).

11 Cf. the data given for codeswitching and borrowing in Matras (2009: 133; 157).

12 These neutral terms (Haspelmath 2010: 37) are used in this study rather than Matrix and Embedded Languages that are theoretically more marked (see Myers-Scotton 2002: 54sq).

13 As Eitan Grossman pointed out to me, Coptic “borrows plenty of adjectives, even though it barely has a category of inherited adjectives”. Thus, in a way, one could expect lexical borrowing to fill a kind of systemic gap. One conclusion that could be drawn from this is that the situation of Late Egyptian and Coptic as linguistic systems is different in this respect. On the borrowability of adjectives, see also Almond (this volume).

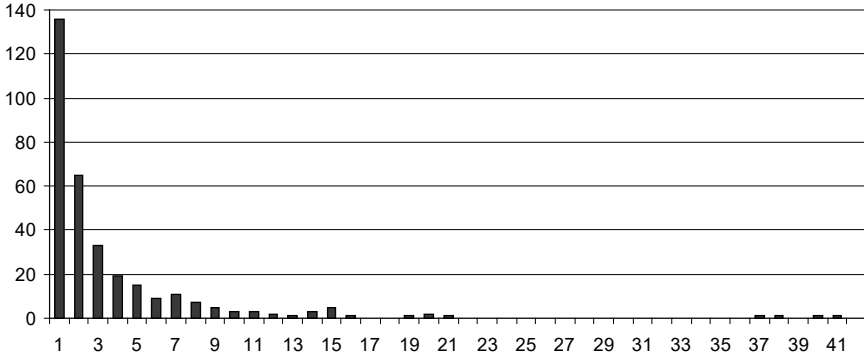


Fig. 1. Frequency of Semitic loanwords in Late Egyptian

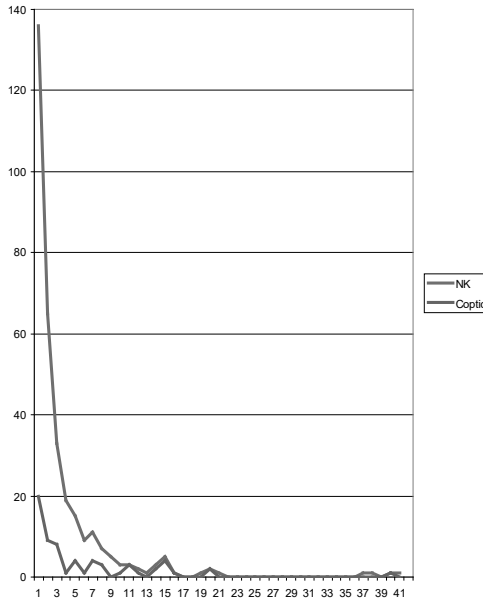


Fig. 2. Semitic loanwords in the New Kingdom and their successors in Coptic

1.3 Semitic loanwords and their Coptic successors

Another way to appreciate the impact of Semitic loanwords on Late Egyptian is to trace them down to the last two stages of Egyptian, i.e., Demotic and Coptic. Only 65 words in our corpus are still attested in Coptic (20%). Fig. 2 shows the number of Semitic loanwords that survived down to Coptic with respect to their frequency in Late Egyptian. Only 15% of the hapax legomena made their way into Coptic. As the frequency rate rises, so does the probability of having a Coptic successor. There is indeed almost a perfect match between the two lines (Late Egyptian and Coptic) for words that are attested at least 11

times.¹⁴ From a methodological viewpoint, one cannot completely eliminate the possibility for a word to be borrowed in the New Kingdom and then later on – probably in a slightly different form – be borrowed again in Coptic (or in Demotic).

1.4 Text genres

Since the first studies of loanwords in the New Kingdom, it was suspected that the borrowings were not evenly distributed. Some attention has been directed towards text genres to see if some correlations could be made. Hoch (1994: 474–477) was probably the first to design a taxonomy of the text genres for that purpose. But it is unfortunately not very helpful: first, his classification is too fragmented, and second it is a bit too idiosyncratic by completely ignoring the linguistic discussions that have been going on in this field for more than 25 years.

The classification proposed here arranges the texts according to a cultural-linguistic continuum, whose poles are the texts close to the vernacular, on the one hand, and texts that reflect the high culture, on the other hand. Medical texts of the beginning of the New Kingdom have been treated separately, as they are written in an idiom very close to the Middle/Classical Egyptian. Fig. 3 clearly shows that 1/3 of the loanwords are used in texts related to everyday life (letters, judicial, business, fiction and lyric texts), whereas 2/3 occur in the texts of the elite culture (wisdom texts, onomastica, religious texts, autobiographies, royal texts). The very low proportion of loanwords in the letters is particularly noteworthy considering the numerical importance of this sub-corpus: there are only 20 Semitic loanwords in the 350 Late Egyptian letters that have come down to us!¹⁵

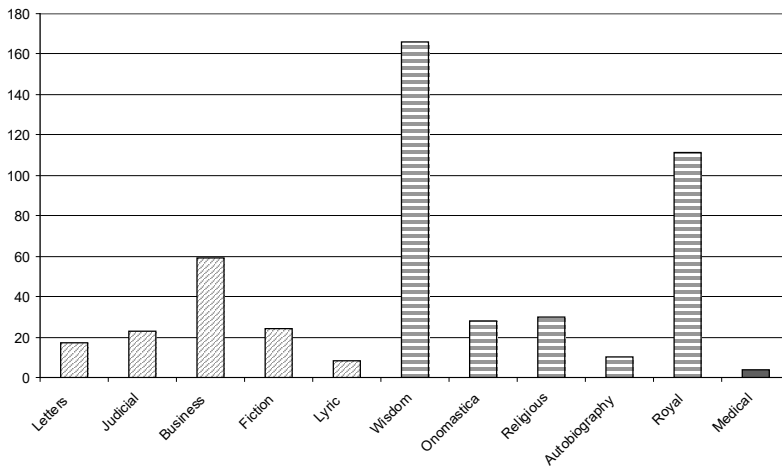


Fig. 3. Distribution of Semitic loanwords in Late Egyptian according to text genre

14 There are of course exceptions: some very common Semitic nouns in the New Kingdom have no successors in Coptic, like *isb.t* “chair, throne” or *kdn* “charioteer”, that are the two most frequently attested Semitic loanwords.

15 This corroborates Ward’s study (1989) of the Semitic loanwords found in the non-literary ostraca of Deir el-Medineh. In this strictly delimited sub-corpus, the number of items (24) is rather low; from a semantic viewpoint, they are limited to cultural borrowings (in the sense of Haspelmath 2010: 46).

1.5 Semantic classes

One can also appreciate the distribution of loanwords according to the semantic classes they belong to. To build a taxonomy of semantic classes is a notoriously difficult task (Haspelmath & Tadmor 2010a).¹⁶ In his study, Hoch (1994: 462–469) proposed a taxonomy that is exceedingly fragmented (33 categories). The table below gives an overview of his classes based on a selection of 374 words listed in decreasing order according to their frequency. Hoch does not explain how the selection has been made out of the original list of 595 items.

Semantic classes	Tokens	Percentage
Military terms	51	13.4
Topography	31	8.2
Food & beverages	28	7.4
Household objects	27	7.1
Vessels	24	6.3
Body & medicine	16	4.2
Motion	12–13	3.2–3.4
Emotions	12	3.2
Agriculture & animal Husbandry	11–12	2.9–3.2
Architecture	10	2.6
Tools & equipment	9	2.4
Raw materials	9	2.4
Civilian occupations	9	2.4
Force	8–9	2.1–2.4
Political terms	8	2.1
Flora	7	1.8
Fauna	7	1.8
Crafts	7	1.8
Minerals	6	1.6
Religion & cults	6	1.6
Settlements & Habitation	6	1.6
Ointments & Fragrance	5	1.3
Disparagement & Abuse	5	1.3
Music	4	1.1
Abstract	4	1.1
Justice & Oppression	4	1.1

¹⁶ In Egyptology, a classification of words in semantic classes can also be found in standard dictionaries: see Grapow (1950: 195–221), Hannig & Vomberg (1999).

Semantic classes	Tokens	Percentage
Weights & Measures	4	1.1
Legal Terms	3	0.8
Administration	3	0.8
Meteorological terms	3	0.8
Social terms	2	0.5
Miscellaneous Nouns & Adjectives	14	3.7
Miscellaneous Verbs	19	5.0
Total	374	100

Tab. 2. Distribution of Semitic loanwords in Late Egyptian according to Hoch's semantic classes

Hoch then gives what he calls the Broader Picture (1994: 470–473) where the words have been regrouped in 14 categories according to “various aspects of human endeavour and world view”. The number of items is slightly higher than the corpus that was selected for the previous classification (391 against 374). The broader taxonomy is given in the next table:

Semantic classes	Tokens	Percentage
Ecology	63	16.1
Warfare	59	15.1
Household	50	12.8
Economic	43	11.0
Leisure & Luxury	43	11.0
Activities	42	10.7
Abstract	38	9.7
Health	17	4.3
Architecture	12	3.1
Legal	7	1.8
Political	7	1.8
Religious	5	1.3
Society	4	1.0
Royal	1	0.3
Total	391	100

Tab. 3. Distribution of Semitic loanwords in Late Egyptian according to Hoch's semantic classes (the Broader Picture)

Hoch's taxonomy (and those of others as well) leaves unresolved at least two major questions. First, there are words that can be equally classified in two (sometimes more) dif-

ferent classes according to the viewpoint one chooses to privilege. Second – and in my opinion – the most crucial point, the context of use (textual genres and registers) is regularly ignored. Words like “run away”, “chariot”, “armor”, “cry”, “fear”, “tent” are commonly distributed across different classes according to the standard taxonomies. In the Late Egyptian corpus however, all these words have a common denominator: they appear exclusively in texts showing the king at war against his enemies. This particular context seems to be the very *raison d’être* for the presence of these words belonging to the Semitic world.¹⁷

In the next figure, I give my own classification based on the context of use.¹⁸ For instance, the military category comprises words that designate different classes of people involved in military activities like *mryn* “knight”, *mhr* “officer”, *itʔr* “prisoner”, *nhr* “fugitive”, weaponry like *mrh* “spear”, *rbš* “cuirass”, buildings and housing like *tpg* “barracks”.

For each category, the number of the tokens is given in the first column, while the second one stands for the percentage.

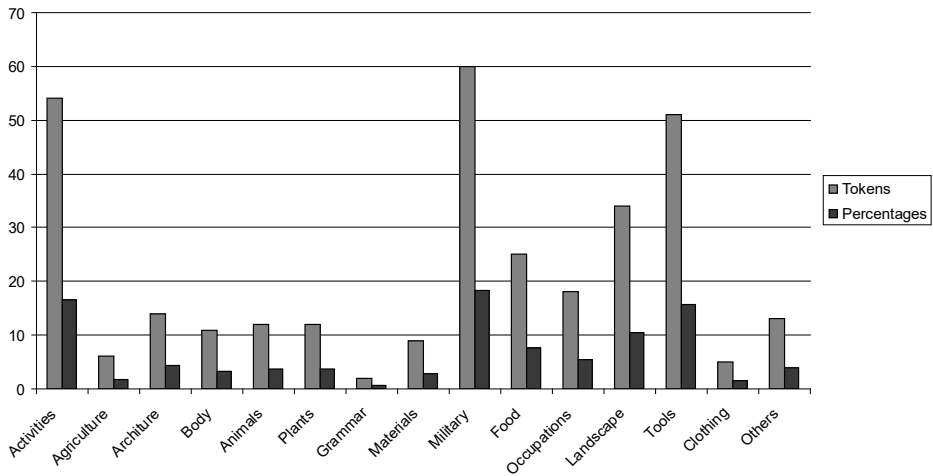


Fig. 4. Distribution of Semitic loanwords in Late Egyptian according to semantic classes

Another type of classification should also be considered. Words can be roughly divided in two main classes, in what is sometimes called cultural and core words.¹⁹ Cultural words express entities that are new to the culture of the recipient language. In Late Egyptian, *mrkb.t* “chariot” illustrates this class of words that come in Egyptian with the material

17 On the presence of Semitic loanwords in the “Militärsprache”, see Schneider (2008).

18 The list of Haspelmath & Tadmor (2010a) has not been followed here. Being basically designed as a questionnaire for a large typological inquiry, its scope is too large to analyse the data we have to deal with in this study.

19 This terminology is adapted from Myers-Scotton (2002: 41–42), who uses these terms in her broader MLF (then 4-M) model. In this sense, Haspelmath (2010) uses the concepts of cultural and core borrowings, which have been retained here.

object. Core words are words that more or less copy already existing words in the recipient language. Loanwords expressing psychological states like “fear” or “cry”, or verbs expressing movement like “run away” or “escape”, or words expressing sexual behaviour are fairly common. In addition to these, one can also find loanwords that parallel words that belong to the system of the recipient languages (prepositions, pronouns, auxiliaries). But this is much more rare.²⁰ For all of these, there are more or less close correspondences in Late Egyptian. The circumstances that facilitated their introduction in Egyptian are of course different from the ones that motivated the adoption of the cultural words (see conclusion).


2 Case studies

The core of this paper is made of seven case studies. The words that will be considered are: *it* “which?”, *ym* “sea”, *bnr* “outside”, *nmi* “to sleep”, *hr* “street”, *k3mn* “to be blind, blind”, *gwsš* “to squint, divert, lead astray”. These words have not been chosen randomly:

- they are well attested (between 10 and 15 times, with the exception of *bnr*, which occurs dozens of times as part of a compound preposition or as a post-verb, and *hr*, which is attested a little less than 10 times),
- they belong to different word classes (nouns, verbs, interrogative),
- they match the usual criteria for identifying a Semitic loanword: they are written in syllabic writing, they appear in the New Kingdom and they seem to have possible cognate(s) in some Semitic languages,
- they are not cultural words; they rather belong to the core words in the sense defined above (1.5). Moreover, at the onomasiological level, they compete with Egyptian words that share the same semantic field.

Thus one can say that the words that have been chosen have a relatively low level of borrowability. They are in some way borderline cases, which makes their study very interesting.

2.1 *it* (Hoch 38)

The interrogative word *it* rightly deserves close attention, for it clearly belongs to the core, basic vocabulary. Its spellings are distinctively syllabic: . Special attention should be paid to the classifier [SEATED MAN WITH HAND TO MOUTH], which seems to be the hallmark of loanwords that do not belong to a specific semantic class.²¹ *it* is mostly used as a nominal modifier (ex. 1), and very exceptionally as a pronoun (ex. 2):

- (1) *it šmsw n A p3 iy n.k*
 “which servant of A is the one that came to you ?” (P. BM 10052,7)

20 These are sometimes called grammatical functional words: see Matras (2009: 193–208).

21 On this, see Niv Allon (2010).

- (3) *i.irk iy hr ih n shn ?*
 “For which mission did you come?” (*LES* 67,9–10)
- (4) *ih m 3tp.t t3 wn <hr> nhb.t.w ?*
 “Which load was on their neck?” (P. BM 10052, v° 14,18)

Now, it should be noted that *ih n/m* NP is much more common in the texts close to the vernacular. Furthermore, interrogative *it* does not seem to have outlived Late Egyptian: the latest attestation is found in the *Wisdom of Amenemope*. In Demotic, *ih n* is the normal way to mark the interrogation of a noun; *it* is never to be found in Demotic or Coptic:

- (5) *ih n wp.t t3y nty-iw.k ir.s*
 “Which mission are you on?” (*Sonnenaug*, XVIII,3)
- (6) *ih n md.t nfr.t t3y ir.k n wsir nsw pr-^{c3}*
 “What is this good thing that you did for the Osiris-King, Pharaoh?”
 (P. Berlin 13588, II,15)

The situation is summarized in Tab. 5:

	Royal	Wisdom	Miscel.	Narratives	Judicial	Letters
18 th dyn.						
19 th dyn.	<i>it</i>		<i>it</i>	<i>ih m</i>		
20 th dyn.	<i>it</i>	<i>it</i>			<i>it</i> [1 occ.] <i>ih m</i>	<i>ih m</i>
21 st dyn.		<i>it</i>		<i>ih m</i>		
Demotic	<i>ih m/n</i>					
Coptic	ⲁⲱ (< <i>ih</i>)					

Tab. 5. Distribution of *it* and *ih* in Late Egyptian, Demotic and Coptic

The Semitic cognates of *it* seem very sound in this case. To the best of my knowledge they have never been seriously challenged. The unavoidable conclusion is that *it* is a Semitic loanword. It was first used in texts that have clear Semitic contexts, like P. Anastasi I; it also spread out later in non-vernacular texts, but very sporadically.

Now, one also has to realize that *it*, like many other loanwords (see *infra*), was stylistically marked. In other words, it was consciously used by the scribes of the elite to bring to their production a distinct flavour of exoticism, as part of a literary game. In the Kouban Stela and in P. Anastasi V, the scribes obviously embedded *it* in a sophisticated rhetorical scheme, using three different interrogative words:

- (7) *ih t3 iw bw rh.k sw*
m nim rḳ.f mi-ḳd.k
it s.t iw bw m3.k sy
 “What is a land that you do not know?, who will have understanding like you?,
 what is a place that you did not see?” (St. Kouban, 15–16 = *KRI* II, 355,16)

The new word *ym* seems to replace *w3d-wr*, an ancient Egyptian creation (meaning the Great Green), already attested in the Old Kingdom. From the New Kingdom onwards, *w3d-wr* was retained in the *Égyptien de tradition*.²⁸

In Late Egyptian (and later in Demotic), *ym* takes over. The great Ashmolean ostrakon of *Simuhe* (v° 25) bears witness to this, incidentally replacing *w3d-wr* that was in its master copy with *p3-ym*. The same kind of relation is found in the Late Egyptian adaptation of the *Ritual for repelling the Aggressor* attested in P. BM 10252.²⁹ In the New Kingdom, *ym* and *w3d-wr* are exceptionally used in the same texts.³⁰ In such cases, *w3d-wr* refers to places of water inside Egypt, like lakes or rivers, including the Nile, or enters into some fixed phraseology. The sole exception seems to be the expression *iw.w hrj-ib w3d-wr* “the islands in the midst of *w3d-wr*”, which refers to some islands in the Eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea.³¹ In Demotic, *p3-ym* can refer to the sea or to watery areas in Egypt while *w3d-wr* has by then become obsolete, except for some expressions, especially when it is part of some divine epitheta. In Coptic, *ym* survived as $\epsilon\iota\omega\eta$, but it was itself challenged by another loanword, this time of Greek origin, $\theta\acute{\alpha}\lambda\alpha\sigma\sigma\alpha$. With the definite article, *p3-ym* became a topographical name referring to the Fayum Lake ($\phi\iota\omega\eta$), from which the name in Arabic and in our occidental modern languages is ultimately derived.³² A summary of the words used in Egyptian to designate the sea is given in Tab. 7.

	Vernacular	Elite	Eg. de tradition
Old Kingdom		<i>w3d-wr</i>	
Middle Kingdom	<i>w3d-wr</i>	<i>w3d-wr</i>	
Late Egyptian	<i>p3-ym</i>	<i>p3-ym</i> “sea” <i>w3d-wr</i> “lake, river”	<i>w3d-wr</i>
Demotic	<i>p3-ym</i>	<i>p3-ym</i>	<i>w3d-wr</i>
Coptic	$\epsilon\iota\omega\eta$ $\theta\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\alpha\sigma\sigma\alpha$		

Tab. 7. Distribution of *w3d-wr*, *ym* and $\theta\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\alpha\sigma\sigma\alpha$ in Late Egyptian, Demotic and Coptic

There is no doubt here that *ym* has a Semitic origin. Its integration in the Egyptian lexicon can be easily traced along a Semitic path. To start with, the first occurrences of the word are clearly set in a Semitic context, which is important (see conclusion). It cannot be excluded that the borrowing was motivated by some exotic appeal, but also by some intention of discriminating between two realities (cf. German *der/die See*). The ancient

28 The meaning of *w3d-wr* has been hotly debated in the last thirty years: see Nibbi (1998), Vandersleyen (1988, 2002), Quack (2002).

29 P. Louvre 3129, 48 (*imy bnr w3d-wr*) = P. BM 10252, 11 (*bw ir p3-ym hnn*).

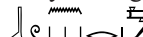


30 E.g. Stela Boston MFA 23733; Qadesh, Poem, § 42, 107.

31 Stela Boston MFA 23733, 14.

32 Cf. Vycichl (1983: 63).

word *w3d-wr*, which was sometimes used to designate the sea, first referred to the Nile or the Delta, which could be felt in the New Kingdom as ambiguous.

2.3 *bnr* (Hoch 119)


The next case is *bnr*, which means “outside”. It is used as a noun, but it is much more used with a preposition in some compound prepositional patterns: *r-bnr*, *hr-bnr*, *m-bnr*, *n-bnr*. In Coptic, εβολ, the ultimate avatar of *r-bnr*, is probably among the words that are first learnt by beginners. The standard spelling of *bnr* is  from the 19th dynasty onwards, but it should immediately be noted that the first written attestations of the word, in the mid-18th Dynasty, are  (Tb of Paheri, pl. IIIa) and  (*Urk.* IV, 661,12). It appears that these are not syllabic writings.

The word is commonly written with the [ROAD] and the [LEGS] classifiers, but in the 18th Dynasty and at the beginning of the 19th Dynasty, it is instead attested with the [HOUSE] classifier.³³ The basic meaning seems to be “exterior” as opposed to “interior”, which is expressed in Egyptian by *hnw*, also written with the [HOUSE] classifier.³⁴ The [LEGS] classifier is attested a bit later, probably as the result of the frequent association of *bnr* with roads and journeys; one of the first examples thereof can be found in the Battle of Qadesh:

- (11) *gm.n.f inḥ sw 2500 n ʿ-n-ḥtr m t3y.f w3.t bnr*
 “He found that 2500 pieces of chariotry surrounded him on his way out”
 (Battle of Qadesh, § 84 Poem)

In combination with the preposition *r*, *bnr* is exceedingly common in Late Egyptian functioning like a post-verb in English.³⁵ In the Late Egyptian corpus, there is no particular association of *bnr* with the Semitic world: *r-bnr* is attested in every text genre. As the word obviously belongs to the core vocabulary, it would score very poorly on the scale of borrowability.³⁶ Actually, *bnr* is in a diachronic relation with *rwt* “outside”, already attested in Earlier Egyptian, with which it shares a common antonym, *hnw*. Interestingly enough, *rwt(y)* is attested only sparsely in the Late Egyptian corpus, each time in a literary text.³⁷

As a preliminary conclusion, one has every reason to doubt that *bnr* could qualify as a loanword. As noted by Hoch (1994: 97), the Semitic cognates that have been proposed are not without problems of their own, mainly phonological ones. But the Egyptian

33 In some administrative documents, the word can be abbreviated as , a spelling that is found again much later, for instance, in P. Salt 825, a religious text.

34 Cf P. Léopold II-Amherst 2,15: *ḥw n3y.f wt.w ḥt m nbw ḥd m hnw m bnr* “Their coffins being inlaid with gold and silver inside and outside”; see also P. Berlin 10494, 6–7.

35 Although it is not the place here to discuss this issue, *r-bnr* (viz. εβολ) seems also to function as an operator of telicity, modifying the Aktionsart of the verb. See Winand (2006: 48).

36 As noted by Hoch himself (1994: 97, n. 28), but not without much embarrassment.

37 In P. Harris I, 75,2–3 (*wn p3 B n km.t ḥ3ʿ m-rwtj* “the land of Egypt was completely abandoned”), the use of *m-rwtj* as a post-verb with a telic force is very close to that of *r-bnr*, which is fairly frequent in Late Egyptian and in Demotic with the same verb (cf. also κω εβολ in Coptic).

etymologies that have been suggested so far do not seem more convincing.³⁸ According to Takács (2001: 247), following a suggestion already made by Hoch, the origin of *bnr* could be an Afroasiatic cognate that surfaced in the written culture relatively late. The distribution of the compound prepositions *m/r-rwty* vs. *r-bnr* (viz. ⲉⲃⲟⲗ) is summarized in Tab. 8.

	Vernacular	Elite	Ég. de tradition
Anc. Eg.	?	<i>r-rwt(y)?</i>	
Middle Eg.	?	<i>m/r-rwt(y)</i>	
Late Eg.	<i>r-bnr</i>	<i>m/r-rwt(y)</i>	<i>m/r-rwt(y)</i>
Demotic	<i>r-bnr</i>	<i>m/r-rwt(y)</i>	<i>m/r-rwt(y)</i>
Coptic	ⲉⲃⲟⲗ		

Tab. 8. Distribution of *r-bnr* and *m/r-rwty* in Egyptian

2.4 *nm(ⲥ)* “sleep” (Hoch 249)

According to Hoch, *nm(ⲥ)* should be considered a Semitic loanword. The Semitic cognates that are cited are numerous and diverse. There is undoubtedly a relation between the Egyptian word and its Semitic counterparts. The nature of this relation however is debatable. To start with, this borrowing has not been registered by Helck (1971²); neither Osing (1976: 50), nor Vycichl (1983: 139) seem to consider *nm(ⲥ)* to be a Semitic loanword.³⁹

Obviously enough, a verb meaning “to sleep” belongs to the core vocabulary of any language. *nm(ⲥ)* “sleep” does not seem to be attested outside Late Egyptian, where it is not very frequent. It seems to be used only in literary texts (narratives, poetry, miscellanies and royal inscriptions). Except for a passage of the Second Libyan war of Ramses III, there is no special connection with a Semitic context.

In Late Egyptian, there are two other verbs associated with sleeping: *sdr* and *nḳdd*. The first one is an old word, already present in the Old Kingdom. Having as its classifier the [MUMMY LYING ON THE FUNERARY BED], it etymologically means “to lie down on one’s side (*ḏr*)”, hence “to sleep” (𓂏𓂛𓂏𓂛). The second one, which has the [EYE] classifier, is a derived form of a simplex *ḳd(d)*, which is already attested in the *Pyramid Texts*. It is probably more directly connected with the act of sleeping, as suggested by the occasional association of *sdr* and (*n*)*ḳd*.⁴⁰ In Late Egyptian, however, *sdr* is much more frequently attested than (*n*)*ḳd*, in any kind of text; it can undoubtedly take the meaning of “sleeping” alongside that of “lying in bed”, as shown in the next examples:

38 A review is given in Takacs (2001: 245–246).

39 Hoch’s entry (# 249) is not discussed in Meeks (1997) or in Ward (1996).

40 See e.g. *Amenemhat*, 1,12–2,1; *Doomed Prince*, 7,14; Israel stela, C 23–24 (= *KRI* IV, 18,9); P. Leyde 349, v^o 5,3 (but with lacunae).

- (12) ... *iw:f hr wrš sdr m t3 in.t*
 “He spent the day sleeping in the valley” (O. IFAO 1357, 8–9)
- (13) *i.dd n.i mi sdr.k r-tnw rwh3*
 “Tell me how you sleep every night” (P. Anastasi I, 25,6)
- (14) *mr.k wnm m sdr*
 “You like to eat while lying” (P. Berlin 10463, v° 3)
- (15) (May one hour reveal itself as an eternity) *dr sdr<.i> hn^c.k*
 “when I am lying in bed with you” (P. Harris 500, r° 6, 7)

In Demotic, *sdr* and *nkḏj* are well attested; in Coptic, both survive as $\chi\tau\omicron$ and $\mu\kappa\omicron\tau\kappa$ respectively, although only the latter is attested with any frequency as a verb meaning ‘sleep’.⁴¹

To come back to *nm*(^c), it seems at first sight that we are dealing with something similar to *it* “what?”, that is, a Semitic loanword that belongs to the core vocabulary, that entered the Egyptian lexicon in the New Kingdom, but did not survive later. Actually, the picture is more complicated. First, in contrast to *it*, *nm*(^c) is not particularly associated with a Semitic context. Second – and this is far more important –, there are some facts that suggest that words deriving from the root $\sqrt{\text{NM}}$ were known in the Egyptian lexicon before the New Kingdom as shown in the next examples:

- (16) *ʕ3 rd.k, rd.k wri š3s.f mnm.t wr.t*
 “Your foot is big, your foot is now great, he can travel through the great bed”
 (Pyr. 658c)⁴²
- (17) *nm^c.n n.t nb.t hr 3.t.t*
 “Because of you, all men have been in the sleep of death (because of you) and through your power” (CT IV 99c)⁴³

To this, one must add that *nm*^c can be inflected, a feature that appears only very rarely with borrowed verbs:

- (18) *iw.k nm^c.tw m skr*
 “You are lying in bed as Sokar” (O CGC 25209,2)⁴⁴

In conclusion, given the chronology of the attestations (from the Old Kingdom onwards), given the fact that there are in Egyptian several words deriving from the root $\sqrt{\text{NM}}$, and given the fact that *nm*^c can be inflected, there is a strong likelihood that *nm*^c “sleep” is a genuine Egyptian word. Since it clearly belongs to the core vocabulary and since words obviously derived from the same root are attested in the Semitic languages, one can suggest that $\sqrt{\text{NM}}$ has its roots in the Afroasiatic phylum.



41 As was rightly pointed out to me by Eitan Grossman.

42 The word is also attested in lists (Junker 1940: pl. 9). It is still attested later in *Égyptien de tradition*.

43 Another possible case is CT VI, 377m, but the understanding of this passage remains problematic (see Barguet 1986: 585, Faulkner 1977: 285, Carrier 2004: 1684–5).

44 See Erman (1900: 30).

2.5 *hr* “street” (Hoch 343)

The next case is the word *hr*, which is translated by Hoch as “street, road”, and by the *TLA* as “Straße, Gasse”. In the New Kingdom, it is always written  with very minor variants, that is, in a distinctly syllabic writing. In the wisdom text of the P. Brooklyn 47.28.135, whose composition can be dated around the 25th–26th dynasty, the classifier of the [HOUSE] has been replaced by the [IRRIGATION CANAL]:  (plural). In Demotic, *hr* is still used as *hṛ* (*CDD*, s.v.; Erichsen, *DG*, 388) with the classifier of the [HOUSE]. Finally, the word is widely attested in Coptic as ϩⲓⲣ (S).⁴⁵

The Semitic origin of the word has never been challenged. The word is not attested before the 19th dynasty, always in literary texts, more precisely in the genre of *Miscellanies*⁴⁶ and in a wisdom text (P. Brooklyn 47.28.135). The meaning of “street” in the *Miscellanies* is debatable. The word could just as well designate some kind of cellar or recess where one used to serve beer and wine. It would thus be closer to the meaning of the Semitic cognates that have been advanced, which seem to have as a common denominator the idea of “hole” and “cave”.⁴⁷ It would also do some justice to the [HOUSE] classifier, which is invariably used in the New Kingdom.⁴⁸ The first indisputable attestation of the meaning “street” is found in P. Brooklyn 47.28.135, three or four centuries later.



- (19) *twk hr šm.t m hr n hr*
 “You are going from cellar/street/cave to cellar/street/cave”
 (P. Anastasi 4, 11,9)⁴⁹
- (20) *iw.i r di.t hty rd.wy.k hr šm.t m n3 hr.w*
 “I will prevent your feet from going in the cellars/streets/caves”
 (P. Anastasi 5, 17,5)
- (21) *iw n3 nty (hr) b3k p3 t3 (hr) mwt n hkr m n3 hr.w*
 “But those who work the earth are dying from hunger in the streets”
 (P. Brooklyn 47.28.135, 6,7)⁵⁰

In Middle Egyptian and in the literary texts written in Classical Egyptian that are attested in the 18th Dynasty (*Amenemhat*, *Khéty*, *Ipuwer*), there is a word *mrr.t*, which very likely means “street” in an urban context. This word is not attested in Later Egyptian.

45 Cf. Osing (1976: 14), Vycichl (1983: 307).

46 In the sub-genre called “Rebuke to a dissipated scribe”.

47 Akkadian *harranu* is closer to the intended meaning, but according to the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (s.v.), it rather means “road, way”, in a non-urban context.

48 The words meaning “road” or “way”, like *w3.t*, *mtn*, *mi.t* have the [PATH] classifier (); the word *mrr.t* “street” is written with the [CORNER] classifier, to which the [HOUSE] classifier is sometimes added: .

49 The passage of P. Berlin 3035, 16,2 (*m33 hw.t-k3-ptḥ ʿb.t rkḥ, iw h3rw.s m t hnḳ.t* “See Memphis at the *rkḥ*-festival, its streets/cellars/recesses (?) full of bread and beer”) does not help very much.

50 It is also possible to understand *mwt* as an Old Perfective; one then has to translate accordingly “but those who work the earth are dead from hunger in the streets”.

There are many words in Egyptian for expressing the meaning of road. In Earlier Egyptian, *mṯn* and *w3.t* are probably the commonest ones. Both are still attested in Late Egyptian, but only in literary texts.⁵¹ Both are still used in *Égyptien de tradition* down to the Graeco-Roman times. There is another word in Late Egyptian, with a close meaning, namely *mi.t*, which is attested in literary and non-literary texts as well. From the available evidence, *mi.t* seems to be used in the non-literary documents somewhat later.

It seems that *ḥr* came to express the concept of street only in the last stage of Late Egyptian, a meaning that it retains in Demotic and Coptic. It entered the Egyptian lexicon probably by being first used in the literary texts. The old word *mrr.t*, which was still in use in the 18th Dynasty in the literary texts written in Classical Egyptian, did not survive in Later Egyptian. In Coptic, besides ϩⲡ, which means “street” and is the late descendant of Late Egyptian *ḥr*, there is another word that designates “road” in a non-urban context. This word, ⲠⲟⲈⲓⲦ, has been connected to *mṯn*.⁵² As ⲠⲟⲈⲓⲦ is masculine, it is difficult to link it to Late Egyptian (and Demotic) *mi.t*, which is always treated as feminine. Now, alongside feminine *mi.t*, there is another *mit* in Demotic, which is treated as masculine. Both words do not seem to deeply diverge in meaning as shown in the following pairs of examples:

- (22a) *p3 nty mšc ḥr t3 mi.t n rn.s*
 “The one who walks on this street” (Archive of Hor, 17,14)
- (22b) *bw irf mšc ḥr p3 mit*
 “He does not go on the road” (Saqqara Demotic Papyri I, text V,1,10)
- (23a) *p3 ntr p3 nty di.t p3 mit ḥn t3 mi.t n p3 gi-n-ḥ*
 “The god is the one who gives the way in the journey of life”
 (P. Insinger XXIX,9)⁵³
- (23b) *mj n.s p3 mit n ḥ*
 “Give her the way of life” (Saqqara Demotic Papyri I, text II,6,24)
- (24a) *ink p3 nty wn t3 mi.t ḥr-t3-ḥ3.t-n p3 nty iy nb r t3 wsh.t n t3 dw3.t*
 “I am the one who opens the way before everyone who comes into the Hall of the Netherworld” (P. Rhind 1, IV d,1)
- (24b) *ḥr p3y.f mit wn*
 “Then his way is open” (P. Insinger XI,24)
- (25a) *bnp.w ḥ3c t3 mi.t r šm r p3 m3c nty-ḥw pr-ḥ3 nim.f*
 “They did not give access to the place where Pharaoh was”
 (Saqqara Demotic Papyri I, text II, x+I,37)
- (25b) *p3 s3b3 i.ir ḥ3c p3 mit n p3y.f dmi*
 “The one without god who has abandoned the way of his city”
 (P. Insinger XXVIII,10)

51 In Demotic, *w3.t* is only used in frozen phraseology.

52 Takács (2008: 756).

53 In this example, the two words appear side by side.

Thus there is a probable link between Earlier Egyptian *mtn* > Demotic *mit* > Coptic ΜΟΕΙΤ. However it remains unclear if *mi.t* (fem.) and *mit* (masc.) are one single word whose gender could fluctuate (maybe along some dialect lines) or if they rather should be considered as two distinct words. The table below summarizes the uses of *w3.t*, *mi.t*, *mrr.t*, *mtn*, and *hr* from Middle Egyptian down to Coptic.


	Vernacular	Literary	Eg. de tradition
Middle Kingdom	<i>mrr.t, mtn, w3.t</i>	<i>mrr.t, mtn, w3.t</i>	
Late Egyptian	<i>hr</i> ‘recess’ > ‘street’	<i>mi.t, mtn, w3.t</i>	<i>mrr.t, mtn, w3.t</i>
Demotic	<i>hr, mi.t, mit</i>	<i>w3.t</i> (fixed phraseology)	<i>mrr.t, mtn, w3.t</i>
Coptic	ⲚⲓⲠ, ΜΟΕΙΤ		

Tab. 9. Distribution of *w3.t*, *mrr.t*, *mi.t*, *mit* and *mtn* from Earlier Egyptian to Coptic

To sum up, *hr* probably cannot be denied a Semitic origin. It entered the Egyptian lexicon in the New Kingdom with the meaning of “cellar”, “cave” or “recess”. It eventually became to mean “street” in place of *mrr.t*, which is not attested after the 18th Dynasty except in *Égyptien de tradition*.

2.6 *k3mn* (Hoch 459–461)

There are in Egyptian two, possibly three different words derived from the same root: a verb “to blind somebody, to be blind”⁵⁴, a substantive “blind”⁵⁵, and maybe a substantive “blindness”.⁵⁶

I will here be exclusively concerned with the verb, for the other two words are poorly documented. The verb *k3mn*, always written  with very minor, unimportant variations, is not recorded before the 19th Dynasty. As shown in Tab. 10, *k3mn* is attested in all kinds of texts. More importantly, it does not appear in contexts closely or loosely related to the Semitic world.


	Religious texts	Narratives	Judicial texts	Letters
18 th dyn.				
19 th dyn.	2/2	1/5		
20 th dyn.	2/2	1/1	1/3	2/3
21 st –22 nd dyn.	2/2			

Tab. 10. Diachronic distribution of *k3mn* according to text genres

54 *Wb.* V, 107,1–4.

55 *Wb.* V, 107,5.

56 Not recorded in the *Wb.* The word appears in the Oracular Amuletic Decrees: *iw.n šd.s r sbḥ, r kmn, r ir.t wd3 m h3w nb n ʿnh* “we shall protect her from leprosy, from blindness, from the Wadjet-eye in her whole lifetime” (P. BM 10083,10).

The verb *k3mn* appears in different morphological forms and conjugational patterns: Perfective *sdm.f*, *k3-sdm.f*, Infinitive in the Future III, the Sequential *iw.f hr sdm* and the Conjunctive, Old Perfective in the Present I, and Perfective Participle. In the latter case, the participle is written with a *yod prostheticum* () which is unparalleled in the corpus.⁵⁷ It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the morphological integration of *k3mn* in the Late Egyptian conjugation system is very deep, far deeper indeed than what can be observed for the other verbs that have been borrowed. As a rule, the Semitic verbs that entered the Egyptian lexicon do not usually take the inflexions that are the marks of the Egyptian conjugation (cf. the case of *nm^c*, discussed in 2.4).

The meaning of *k3mn* is “to be blind”; it can also be used transitively with a direct object “to blind someone”:



- (26) *y3 ir.t.i k3mn, iw bw ir.f ptr.k*
 “Actually, my eye has become blind, it cannot see you anymore”
 (P. Phillipps, v^o 8–9 = *LRL* 30,11–12)
- (27) *iw.f k3mn b3k-stit t3y.s šri.t m-mitt; iw.sn hms [k3]mn m p3 hrw*
 “And he blinded Baksetet, his daughter as well; they remain blinded today”
 (P. Turin 1887, r^o 2,11)

Blindness – be it genuine or the result of illness, war or bad treatment – was obviously already a part of Egyptian reality before they came into contact with speakers of Semitic languages. It belongs to the core vocabulary of any human society. What seems to be new however is the word *k3mn* itself, which is not attested before the New Kingdom. Its syllabic writing suggests a Semitic origin, but the Semitic cognates that have been proposed are not without problems as acknowledged by Hoch in his commentary.⁵⁸

Before the New Kingdom, Egyptian had in its lexicon another verb, *šp*, to express the same meaning. This word is common enough in the texts from the Old Kingdom onwards, where it can be used transitively and intransitively:

- (28) *m šp hr.k r dgi n.k*
 “Do not be with a blind face against him who looks to you” (*Peasant* B2, 105)
- (29) *n dd.n.f iw msh^c h^c šp.n sw snd.f*
 “He cannot say: ‘the crocodile is here’, while the fear of it has blinded him”
 (*Teaching of Khety*, § 21,4)

Very interestingly, while *šp* fell out of use in Late Egyptian, it continued to be used – and very widely – in texts written in *Égyptien de tradition* down to Graeco-Roman times:

57 *Truth and Falsehood* 6,6–6,7; the same form is written  in the previous line (6,5–6,6), which could be interpreted as a corruption of *i.ir k3mn*, that is a periphrastic pattern using the auxiliary *iri* “to do”. The fact that the scribe had to split the word because of the end of the line () does not help to understand exactly what he had in mind.

58 The word has not been discussed by Meeks (1997) nor Ward (1996) in their critical recensions of Hoch (1994).

- (30) *wn.n.i n.k ir.ty.k šp*
 “I opened for you your eyes that were blind”
 (Tb of Petosiris, 144b, l. 5 ed. Lefébure)

k3mn is still to be found in Demotic (under the spelling *gnm*)⁵⁹, but it seems to be restricted to religious and magical texts. In the texts closer to the vernacular language, *gnm* was replaced by a new word, *bl*, which becomes the standard word for blind in Coptic (ⲃⲗⲗⲎ). In Coptic, *k3mn* rather mysteriously survives as Ⲕⲱⲛⲛⲓ, and seems to be a hapax.

One can thus observe a kind of cyclical renewal of the lexicon, which is unmistakably reminiscent of what happened to its antonym, namely “see”, even if the processes of change are not exactly parallel.⁶⁰ The table below gives a contrastive summary of the evolution of the generic verbs expressing vision and the absence thereof.

	Vernacular	Elite	Eg. de trad.	see/look
Anc. Eg.	<i>šp</i>	<i>šp</i>		<i>m33/ptr</i>
Middle Eg.	<i>šp</i>	<i>šp</i>		<i>m33/ptr</i>
Late Eg.	<i>k3mn</i>	<i>k3mn</i>	<i>šp</i>	<i>ptr/nw</i>
Demotic	[<i>bl</i>]	<i>gnm</i>	<i>šp</i>	<i>nw</i>
Coptic	ⲃⲗⲗⲎ			ⲛⲁⲮ

Tab. 11. Diachronic distribution of the generic verbs meaning “to see” and “to be blind”

In conclusion, even if *k3mn* made its first appearance in our documentary evidence in the New Kingdom, and even if it is consistently written in syllabic writing, there remain serious doubts as regards its Semitic origin. As already stated, *k3mn* is attested in every kind of texts, even in letters where the level of borrowability is the lowest in our corpus (see 1.4). It shows a deep morphological integration, appearing in various inflectional patterns. Its putative Semitic cognates have problems of their own both formally and semantically; moreover, they are attested in sources that are clearly posterior to the New Kingdom. Finally, *k3mn* belongs to the core vocabulary of Late Egyptian. It is also part of a lexical cycle that periodically replaces old lexemes expressing generic activities by new words. Interestingly enough, a similar – although not identical – cycle can be observed for its antonym “to see”. The conclusion is that *k3mn* is probably best explained as a native Egyptian word.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Chicago Demotic Dictionary*, s.v. (oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/PUB/SRC/CDD/CDD/html).

⁶⁰ For the verbs of seeing, the generic verb was each time replaced by a specialized verb that originally expressed a particular modality of seeing. This does not seem to be case for being blind; but there is admittedly not many ways of being blind. See Winand (1986).

2.7 *gwš* (Hoch 509–510)⁶¹

gwš “deviate, be deviant” is said to appear in the 19th Dynasty. The spelling is consistently syllabic (𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏). It does not seem to be used much outside religious and wisdom texts. In Demotic, the word is attested very scarcely. In Coptic it has been connected to ϩωϩϩ.

Actually the word is already attested in an 18th Dynasty medical text with a non-syllabic writing (𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏).

- (31) *iw ir.t.f gwš.t(i) hr.s m gs.f*
 “His eye squints because of this on his side” (P. Smith 4,6)

The uses of *gwš* according to text genres are tabulated in Tab. 12.

	Religious	Wisdom	Royal	Judicial	Medical
18 th dyn.					1/1
19 th dyn.		4/4			
20 th dyn.		1/2	1/1	1/1	
21 st dyn.	2/8				

Tab. 12. Diachronic distribution of *gwš* according to text genres

The word has been understood by Hoch as meaning “crooked, turn away”. In fact, *gwš* is said of something that departs from the straight line, something that is going astray, that is deviating. Cognitively, to be crooked or bent is different from to deviate (cf. Fig. 5).

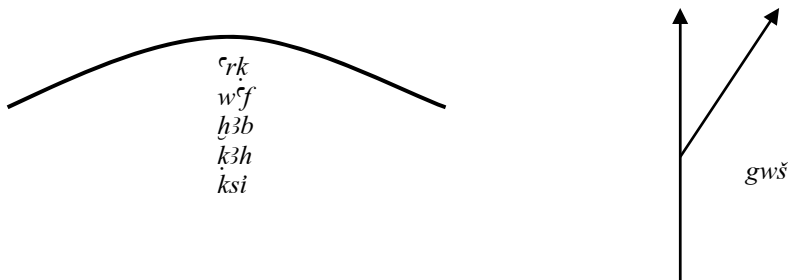



Fig. 5. Schematic representation of [CROOK] and [DEVIATE] with the respective Egyptian lexemes

gwš is used in a medical context for describing someone who squints, that is, who does not have straight vision (cf. ex. 32). It can also take on a moral value being used transitively for people trying to divert somebody from doing what is right, by enticing her to do something damaging for others. The antonyms of *gwš* are (s)ʕk3 and *smtr*:

61 With the supplements of Meeks (1997: 53).

- (32) *im.k s^cḳ3 gwš*
 “Do not straighten what is deviant” (O Petrie 11, r^o 3–4)
- (33) *i.ir.k m zp n m³.t*
^cḳ3
m ir gwš
 “You should do only right acts! Be upright! Do not deviate!”
 (P. Ch. B. IV, v^o 1,8)
- (34) ... *iw bn ir ḥ3ty.s (r) gwš im.f*
 “And her heart will not deviate from him” (T. Nesikhonsu CGC 46891, 58–59)

In the Middle Kingdom, there is one anthroponym *gwš.t*, in reference to a woman who squints ().⁶² In the onomastics, it is not exceptional to find names that are related to physical illness or deformities (the blind one, the little one, the dwarf, etc.).⁶³ Of course, one can also consider that the woman was given such a name because of an improper social behaviour. In which case, *gwš.t* would be the Egyptian equivalent of the Italian *traviata*, the one who quits the main road.

The Egyptian lexicon has a word that seems to be closely related to *gwš*, namely *gs3*, which is well attested in Middle Egyptian, but disappears in the New Kingdom, except in *Égyptien de tradition*, where it is still present – and infrequently in some literary texts of the New Kingdom that have some Late Egyptian flavour⁶⁴ –, down to Graeco-Roman times. In the next example, the phraseological parallel with some examples involving *gwš* is very clear:

- (35) *ir gs3.f ḥr.k gs3.k*
 “If it (i.e. the scales) tilts, then you shall tilt” (*Peasant*, B1 193–4)⁶⁵

The issue that can now be raised is whether one can make a connection (more or less direct) between Middle Kingdom *gs3* and Late Egyptian *gwš*. On a semantic level, the answer seems to be positive, but I remain agnostic about possible problems at the phonological level. From a comparative viewpoint, *gwš* seems to have sound connections with some Semitic languages, but the attestations are very late, like Mishnaic Hebrew and Arabic, and they do not exactly match the meaning of Egyptian *gwš* at a semantic level. So my provisory conclusion would be here that *gwš* may belong to the common Semitic-Egyptian lexicon, or that it was borrowed from Egyptian by some Semitic languages.

62 St. Louvre C 39; cf. Clère (1938: 112). See Vernus (1986).

63 See Vernus (1986: 126).

64 In P. Chester Beatty IV, a wisdom text, *gwš* and *gs3* are both used (v^o 1,8 and 2,3); the first one is an antonym of ^cḳ3 (^cḳ3, *m ir gwš* “Be upright, do not deviate!”), the second one is used transitively (*ir spr n.k nmḥ gb, iw ky m-s3.f, gs3.f sw* “If a poor man who is hapless comes to you, while someone is after him in order to perturb him”). Nothing very conclusive can be said on the co-occurrence of the two words, for this text is a miscellany that regroups texts of different genres and from different dates.

65 One will note that *gs3* is written differently:  in the first case, and  in the second one, which is very close to a syllabic writing.

Another remote possibility could be that *gsʒ* and *gwš* were borrowed from Semitic at different times. The formal differences could thus be explained by the chronological gap; one must also take into account the possibility that *gsʒ* and *gwš* have not been borrowed from the same Semitic idiom, which would easily account for minor differences.

3 Conclusions

In Tab. 13 is a summary of the cases discussed in the preceding section. Indications are given for the origin of the word (Egyptian, Semitic or common, i.e. Afroasiatic), for its existence or absence in Demotic or Coptic, for the written genres where it appears in Late Egyptian, for the general context (Semitic or not) in which the word is used, for the existence of other words belonging to the same root in Egyptian, and finally for the existence of (quasi-)synonyms in Egyptian.

	Origin	Attested in Demotic/Coptic	Register in LEg	Semitic context	Other words related to the same root	Related earlier Eg. words
<i>it</i>	Semitic	no	literary	yes	no	<i>iḥ</i>
<i>ym</i>	Semitic	yes	all	yes	no	<i>wʒd-wr</i>
<i>bnr</i>	Afro-asiatic?	yes	all	no	no	<i>rwty</i>
<i>nm(ʕ)</i>	Afro-asiatic	yes	literary	no	yes	<i>(n)-ḳd, sdr</i>
<i>hr</i>	Semitic	yes	literary	no	no	<i>wʒ.t, mi.t, mrr.t, mṯn</i>
<i>kʒmn</i>	Egyptian	(yes)	all	no	yes	<i>šp</i>
<i>gwš</i>	?	yes	all	no	?	<i>gs(ʒ)</i>

Tab. 13. Summary of the seven case studies

All the words that have been studied are included in Hoch's list of Semitic loanwords. On closer scrutiny, it appears that one or two of them are better explained as native Egyptian words. Two of them, *bnr* and *nm(ʕ)* might belong to the common Egyptian and Semitic stock.⁶⁶ As for *gwš*, the situation remains undecided. Its relation with older *gsʒ* remains an open issue. One generally considers that *gwš* is a loanword, but that *gsʒ* is a genuine

⁶⁶ It is of course difficult to decide whether *nmʕ* exclusively belongs to Egyptian and Semitic, or if it is part of a shared heritage from the Afroasiatic phylum. This question is of course directly related to how one reconstructs the proto-history of this phylum, which includes the question of the very existence of such a phylum in the sense given to the Indo-European phylum.

Egyptian word. But one cannot exclude that both *gsʒ* and *gws* are loanwords, borrowed at different times from different Semitic languages.

The fact that there are in the Egyptian vocabulary many words derived from the same root does not seem to be an argument in favour of a borrowing, at least of a recent one. Along the same line, the two verbs (*nmʿ* and *kʒmn*) studied in our sample behave like any Egyptian verb by taking the morphological inflexions of Late Egyptian. This sharply contrasts with the verbs that are clearly borrowed from Semitic as these latter ones usually appear in a bare form or in a form unrelated to their function in the Egyptian sentence they are used in.

These seven case studies have made it clear how difficult it is to recognize a borrowing, leaving aside the complex socio-linguistic questions that unavoidably surface when one tries to understand the conditions of their use in Egyptian. In the following sections, I will discuss some questions related to the difference between borrowing and code-switching (3.1), the question of the syllabic writing (3.2), the schemata of borrowing between Egyptian and Semitic (3.3), and lastly the relevance of the study of the lexicon for the general understanding of the history of Ancient Egyptian (3.4).

3.1 Borrowing vs. code switching

As has been already noted (1.1), many words borrowed from the Semitic world are hapax or quasi-hapax (attested up to 3 times). It is of course difficult to estimate the frequency of use for corpora that are partial and unequal. But the fact that so few words survived in Demotic and Coptic (around a fifth, see 1.3) does not obviously contradict this first impression. Most of the borrowings appear in texts belonging to the high culture (literary pieces, royal inscriptions, etc.), often strongly connected to Semitic culture. They are often used in highly stylized contexts, sometimes being part of rhetorical games (2.1). Finally, some semantic classes are overrepresented, such as vocabulary dealing with (or in the context of) military action.⁶⁷

This is sufficient, in my opinion, to revise our judgment on the magnitude of the Semitic loanwords in Egyptian as a socio-cultural phenomenon. In many cases, the presence of these words in Egyptian texts does not bear testimony to a borrowing process; they are rather manifestations of some kind of code switching.⁶⁸ As has been already rightly observed, bilingualism among scribes was probably a reality in elite circles,⁶⁹ which undoubtedly favoured the emergence of a mixed culture. On the other hand, Semitic loanwords also appeared in the speech of the lower class, but it seems to be limited to cultural borrowing.⁷⁰

67 In this respect, it is noteworthy that borrowings with the meaning of crying or fleeing are frequently used in the description of battles to vilify the behaviour of the enemies of Egypt. The scribes thus threw Semitic words back at foreigners as rhetorical weapons.

68 Cf. the comment of H. von Deines cited by Helck (1971: 506, n. 6).

69 Ward (1989: 288).

70 Cf. *supra*, n. 13 à propos the village of Deir el-Medineh.

3.2 Syllabic writing

In Egyptology, one of the distinctive trademarks of Semitic loanwords has always been the so-called syllabic (or group) writing.⁷¹ This judgment needs to be slightly revised.⁷² Of course, there are numerous Semitic loanwords that perfectly fit this pattern, but exceptions do occur. To start with, there are some Semitic words that do not make use of this particular type of writing. But the reverse is also true. The vocabulary of Late Egyptian is full of inherited Egyptian words that are sometimes or always written in syllabic writing. In Tab. 14, there is a sample of some Egyptian words as they appear in writing in Earlier Egyptian and in Late Egyptian.

	Old Kingdom	Middle Kingdom	New Kingdom
<i>trp</i> “goose”		[religious texts]	
<i>bk3.t</i> “mother cow”		[Coffin texts]	
<i>sk3</i> “ass’s foal”			
<i>wsi</i> “to saw”			
<i>twt</i> “you”		[Coffin texts + rel. texts]	
<i>swt</i> “he”			
<i>in</i> “focalising partic.”			
<i>dgs</i> “walk”			
<i>hbs</i> “lamp”			
<i>irm</i> “with”			

Tab. 14. Some Egyptian words in Syllabic writing

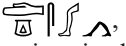
In the first section are words that are attested in Old Egyptian and again in Late Egyptian, with a gap in Middle Egyptian.⁷³ Particularly interesting are the last three words because they are grammatical in nature. The independent personal pronouns *twt* (2nd m. sing.) and

71 The syllabic writing is generally understood as a kind of signal for foreign words, more or less like *katakana* in Japanese as opposed to *hiragana*.

72 Cf. the remarks of Ward (1989: 289).

73 The attestations during the Middle Kingdom are apparent exceptions: the first two words are attested only in religious texts; the third one *wsi* “to saw” is attested once in a representation from a tomb of Beni Hasan (Newberry 1893: pl. XIII) that is directly inherited from similar compositions of the Old Kingdom.

swt (3rd m. sing.) are part of an old set of pronouns that were used in Old Egyptian in parallel to a new set (*ink*, *ntk*, etc.) that would remain the only one in use in the subsequent stages of Egyptian.⁷⁴ The ancient forms *hwt* and *swt* are used again in Late Egyptian, but only in some fixed patterns (like the expression of possession).⁷⁵ The Late Egyptian negative particle *iwn*³⁷⁶ is very likely the new form of an old particle, *in*, which is basically a focus particle.⁷⁷

The verb *dgs* “walk” does not seem to appear in texts before the New Kingdom. It can be written “alphabetically” as , but also in syllabic writing. The word *hbs* “lamp”, also appearing for the first time in the New Kingdom is constantly written in syllabic writing. Finally, the preposition *irm* “with” is another newcomer in Late Egyptian, where it gradually replaced *hn*.⁷⁸ It is always written in syllabic writing.

It seems that the reason for writing these words in syllabic writing is very similar to what was done for the foreign words at the same time, that is a lack of historical and cultural motivation. The syllabic writing is a script that is semantically or iconically unmotivated in the sense that it has no traditional or etymological link with the spellings that have been sanctified by the dignity of the past; it is a script whose primary function remains at the phonological level, whatever its precise functioning.⁷⁹

To conclude this section, even if syllabic writing is most often found with Semitic loanwords, it cannot be seen anymore as a necessary or a sufficient condition.

3.3 Borrowing Semitic words in Egyptian

As is well known, cultural words have the highest degree of borrowability. If a new item enters one’s cultural sphere, be it a plant, an animal or a tool, one very easily takes the word that comes with it.⁸⁰ Things are of course different when it comes to core vocabulary. If the recipient language already possesses word(s) that can compete with the new one at the onomasiological level, one should be able to show a reasonable and comprehensible path that leads from Semitic to Egyptian. In this respect, one should probably treat function words separately, like the interrogative pronoun *it*.

From the available evidence, words belonging to core vocabulary first show connections with the Semitic world, which means that they appear in texts where Egyptians interact with speakers of Semitic languages, as in the narration of battle scenes, or where the Semitic-speaking world is present in the background, as in the description of the woes of the Egyptian soldier abroad or in tales where the plot is partly set in Palestine. They

74 Edel (1955–1964: 79–80), Loprieno (1995: 65).

75 Černý & Groll (1984: 17–19).

76 Winand (1996).

77 Loprieno (1989; 1995: 108–109).

78 Winand (2014a).

79 The syllabic writing has been approached in different ways by Egyptologists; how far and how adequately this system can render the vocalic system remains an open issue: see Schenkel (1986), Zeidler (1993).

80 Haspelmath (2010: 46–48).

were also first used in texts that belong to the elite culture, that is, among people who could master more or less freely some Semitic languages. As is well known, Akkadian was the diplomatic language of the time. It was also used as the *lingua franca* among peoples who did not speak Akkadian. The best-known example remains of course the treaty of peace between the Egyptians and the Hittites. It is possible that the scribes sometimes sprinkled their compositions with borrowings only to show off. This is probably the case in the P. Anastasi I, where the scribe of the court definitely wants to assert his cultural superiority over his junior colleague, who is serving abroad in the army. But, as pointed out by Ward, it would be simplistic to explain everything in this way. Using loanwords is only what is expected in any bilingual society.⁸¹ Some of these loanwords eventually entered the Egyptian lexicon, like *ym* “sea”, while others always stayed within the elite culture (*it*) and were dropped after the New Kingdom. In the later case, it is probably better to consider these words as manifestations of code-switching (3.1).

3.4 The history of the lexicon and the diachrony of Ancient Egyptian

The history of the lexicon can also shed some light on the diachrony of Egyptian. According to what is probably for many Egyptologists the academically well-received theory of the evolution of Ancient Egyptian, the five traditional stages of Egyptian succeeded to one another in a straight line (Old Egyptian – Middle Egyptian – Late Egyptian – Demotic – Coptic). Now, in the 1950s, Edgerton drew the attention to some grammatical features shared by Old Egyptian and Late Egyptian but not by Middle Egyptian.⁸² More recently, it has been pointed out that Bohairic has some traits in common with Late Egyptian that are not found in the other Coptic dialects.⁸³

The dialectal variety of Coptic is a well-established fact.⁸⁴ For the earlier times, the evidence is very scanty, mainly because of the writing system, which is not the best suited for rendering a phonological system and whose visceral conservatism prevents the adaptation of spellings to the linguistic changes. This notwithstanding, it is possible to pinpoint some features that can be related to diatopic variations: within Late Egyptian, there were probably two main dialects (north and south) that sometimes reveal themselves in some inflectional paradigms, like the pattern of the Future III.⁸⁵

A close study of the lexicon might help us to have a more fine-grained understanding of this reality. The fact that some words seem to be used in Old and Late Egyptian, but not in Middle Egyptian, is in complete agreement with the remarks already made by Edgerton. It strongly supports the theory that Old and Late Egyptian, on the one hand, and Middle Egyptian, on the other hand, had different birthplaces.

81 Ward (1989: 288).

82 Edgerton (1951).

83 Shisha-Halevy (1981).

84 The doubts raised by Loprieno (1982) on the existence of Coptic dialects, largely based on the phono-graphemic level, are less binding when other viewpoints (morphology, syntax, lexicon) are considered.

85 Winand (1992: § 771–784). See now Winand (2015).

As regards the second period of Ancient Egyptian, there is every reason to doubt that the succession from Late Egyptian to Demotic, and from Demotic to Coptic was straightforward. The study of the Semitic loanwords can again be very helpful. As noted in the first section (1.3), 65 Semitic loanwords attested in Late Egyptian survived in Coptic. But what is very interesting is that only 28 seem to be attested in Demotic. Again, one can suspect that the reality is far more complicated than it is presented in the manuals.⁸⁶ If one admits that Demotic emerged in a different place than Late Egyptian, such differences can be explained quite easily.

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⁸⁶ Case studies could be very rewarding in this respect. For instance, the preposition *hn^c* “with” is virtually dying in the last phase of Late Egyptian, being replaced by *irm*. But *hn^c* seems to be alive and well in Demotic. On this, see Winand (2014a).

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