







The Emergence of During the Mid-11th Dynasty



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Abstract. Following a remark of H.G. Fischer (1988: 54), the formal change  \rightarrow  of the semogram *w'b* PURE is generally connected to the grouping , which is the result of practices of intentional sign modification in the Pyramid Texts. This assumption is contestable since a significant temporal and geographic gap separates the last documented occurrences of the grouping  in the pyramids of the 6th Dynasty from the first attestations of the logogram  in Theban epigraphy during the reign of Intef III. In the present paper, I provide solid arguments against Fischer's hypothesis, based on a thorough examination of the two relevant steps in the evolution of the semogram PURE. I suggest that the emergence of  may have been triggered by the influence of cursive writing, which is a driving force behind the emergence of new sign shapes in the regional epigraphies of Upper Egyptian during the FIP.

Keywords: A6; D60; sign mutilation; cursive influence; purification; feet washing



1. Introduction

The inventory of the ancient Egyptian writing system contains two types of sign shapes¹ for the semogram *w'b* PURE: anthropomorphic shapes (e.g., ) and podomorphic ones (e.g., ). Anthropomorphic shapes of the grapheme appear since the early stages of writing in Egypt, whereas podomorphic shapes were not commonly used before the mid-11th Dynasty. From the Middle Kingdom onwards, both types are employed as allographs, with different patterns of distribution across texts from a particular period.

¹ In this paper, *formal types* of graphemes will be designated as *shapes*. The equivalent term in the data model of the Thot Sign List is *class*.

Although this allography is known since the early days of Egyptology,² it was not explicitly explained until the seminal works of H.G. Fischer on hieroglyphic palaeography.³ He associated the substitution of the human figure with a leg ( → ) to the practice of avoiding or “mutilating” anthropomorphic hieroglyphs that emerged in funerary texts during the late 5th Dynasty. This is because  (the common sign shape of the OK) is most often reduced to its upper part  in the Pyramid Texts, which led to groupings with the phonograms *w* () or *b* () within one quadrate.⁴ Fischer suggests that the latter combination  ultimately triggered the fusion of both elements and the creation of the logogram  (PURE). According to my knowledge, this hypothesis became the *communis opinio* on the subject, though its validity was never demonstrated by means of a more thorough study.⁵






2. Discussion

In the following, I will examine the two main steps in the development of  / , namely, its first occurrences from the Old Kingdom (and the early Dynastic period) (step 1) and its establishment as logogram *wʿb* “to be pure” during the mid-11th Dynasty (step 2).

2.1. Step 1: The sign modification during the Old Kingdom



The earliest spellings of the lexeme *wʿb* “to be pure” with modified shapes of PURE are found in the PT of King Unis. They display a large variation: we find phonographic spellings of *wʿb* that place the jet of water at different positions within the word (fig. 1.b–d); the ovoidal vessel as

² E.g., Champollion 1824: tableau général, 34, nos. 304–307. Note that already Gardiner 1957: 442, sign A6 & 458, sign D60 commented on the different chronological distribution of the two formal types.

³ Fischer 1988: 54, sign D60: “It is generally assumed and rightly so, that this composite sign goes back to the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom, but note that (1) there the two signs are not united; (2) they appear together in the writing of *wʿb* as ; and (3) other writings of the same word show variations such as  and . [...] The use of  in inscriptions aboveground is first attested on Eleventh Dynasty stelae [...] in these cases the two elements are still slightly separated, but soon they were more often fused.” Earlier, Lacau 1913: 12–13, 15 had suggested that it was the sign  that resulted from this phenomenon in the PT.

⁴ See Lacau 1913: 12–13; Sethe 1922, 107; Edel 1955: 33, §73.

⁵ E.g., Brovarski 1998: 56; Derchain-Urtel 1999: 41; Regulski 2010: 102, n. 1066; de Spens 2022: 135, 354.

source of the water is only optional (fig. 1.b–e); and the compound sign  is occasionally used (fig. 1.h). In addition, *wʿb* “to be pure” is sometimes spelled seemingly logographically as  (fig. 1.f–g).⁶

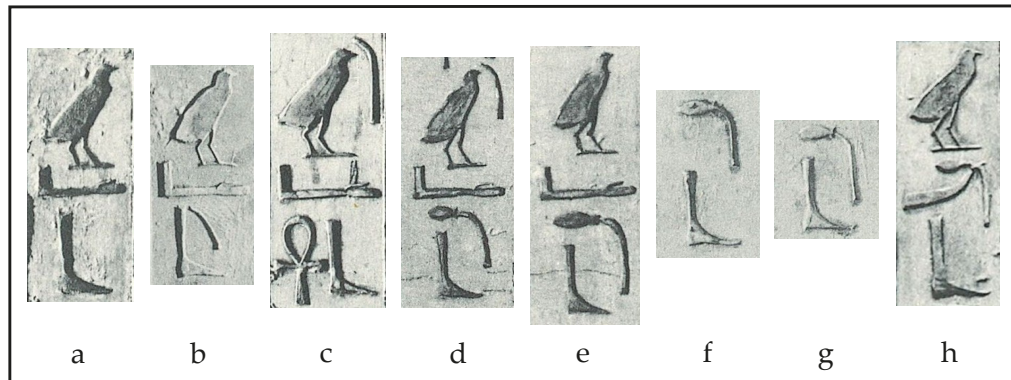












Fig. 1: The lexeme *wʿb* “to be pure” in the Pyramid Texts of King Unis: (a) Pyr. 151c (Piankoff 1968: pl. 41), (b) Pyr. 138b (Piankoff 1968: pl. 40), (c) Pyr. 151b (Piankoff 1968: pl. 41), (d) Pyr. 473a (Piankoff 1968: pl. 5), (e) Pyr. 471d (Piankoff 1968: pl. 5), (f) Pyr. 275b (Piankoff 1968: pl. 13), (g) Pyr. 275c (Piankoff 1968: pl. 13), (h) Pyr. 127b (Piankoff 1968: pl. 56).

After the formative phase of sign modification in the Pyramid Texts of King Unis, the number of possible spellings is reduced in the PT of the 6th Dynasty: *wʿb* is generally written phonographically with the three monoconsonantal signs  (*w*),  (*ʿ*), and  (*b*);⁷ the vessel as source of the water jet is displayed in most cases; and  is no longer used in this lexeme.

⁶ Cf. *Wb I*, 280.21. Examples are found in Pyr. 264c, 266b (Piankoff 1968: pl. 12: ) , Pyr. 273c, 275a–d (Piankoff 1968: pl. 13:  in all cases; spelled  in T and absent from other pyramids), and 457a (Piankoff 1968: pl. 35: ).

⁷ In the Pyramid Texts of the 6th Dynasty, the grouping  without other phonograms is confined to spellings of the causative verb *s(w)ʿb* “to purify,” e.g.,  in Pyr. 29a in P (Berger el-Naggar et al. 2001: pl. IV.B, P/F/Ne 37) and Nt (Jéquier 1933: pl. X, l. 92).

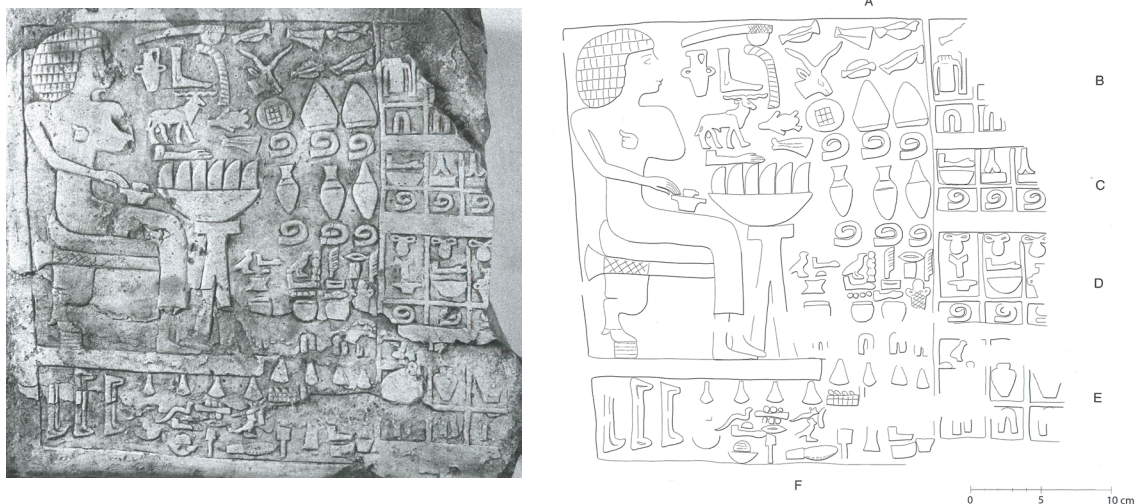







Fig. 2: The stela EM99-13 from Helwan (Köhler & Jones 2009: 149, pl. 15).

Interestingly, the grouping  does not make its first appearance in the Pyramid Texts of King Unis but in the early Dynastic stela EM99-13 from Helwan where it is part of the personal name *'bw-ḥnm.w* (fig. 2).⁸ In this stela, the shape  stands for the ancient semogram *'bw* PURIFICATION () which is used as logogram in the terms *'bw r' nb* “purification every day” ()⁹ and *'bw-r'* “breakfast” ()¹⁰. Although the grapheme continues later as classifier with the meaning FLUID in the Pyramid Texts (fig. 3d-e),¹¹ it progressively lost its autonomy during the Old Kingdom, ultimately becoming a formative element only.¹²

⁸ Köhler & Jones 2009: 64–65, 148–149, pl. 15. My reading of the name deviates from all current interpretations, e.g., in Kaplony 1966: 41, 267, pl. 7, no. 1097; Kahl 1994: 469, sign d6; 2002: 109–110; Köhler & Jones 2009: 148; Regulski 2010: 102 & 377, sign d5; Fitzenreiter 2022: 15–16. Compare the names *'bw-nj.t* in the early Dynastic stela BM EA 35612 and UC 14268 (Martin 2011: 50–53 & pl. 17, stelae 55 & 57) and *'bw-k'* in the stela Chicago, ISAC 5871 (Martin 2011: 90–91, pl. 31, no. 110).

⁹ This group is found on three early dynastic incision on vessels (cf. Kahl 1994: 622–623, sign n3; 2002: 78; Regulski 2010: 153, 535, sign n3).

¹⁰ For examples, see Kaplony 1963: 1123, fig. 229; Manuelian 2003: 190–191; cf. for the reading de Meulenaere 1981.

¹¹ E.g., in the term *rdw* “efflux” (Schmidt 2022: 492).

¹² For signs with this element, see Kaplony 1966: 88–89.

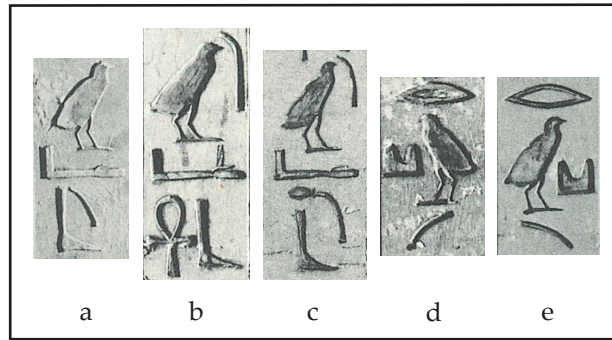


















Fig. 3: The lexeme *w'b* “to be pure” in the Pyramid Texts of King Unis: (a) Pyr. 138b (Piankoff 1968: pl. 40), (b) Pyr. 151b (Piankoff 1968: pl. 41), (c) Pyr. 473a (Piankoff 1968: pl. 5), (d) Pyr. 22b (Piankoff 1968: pl. 38), and (e) Pyr. 308f (Piankoff 1968: pl. 19).

In view of the foregoing observations, “la suppression totale de la figure humaine dans des signes complexes” (Lacau 1913: 12), i.e.  → , is not the only possible explanation for the modifications of *PURE* in the Pyramid Texts.¹³ The use of the shapes  and  in the pyramid of Unis indicates that what was later standardized as  may indeed go back to the semogram  *'bw* (PURIFICATION), by “remplacement par un signe homophone” (Lacau 1913: 24);¹⁴ cf. also the similarity between  in *w'b* and  FLUID in this pyramid (fig. 3).

Be this as it may, it is important for the present study that the logographic use of the grouping  is not only absent from the PT of the 6th Dynasty (fig. 4.a) but also from non-royal texts of the late OK. Interestingly, the grouping  is generally not found in the latter but they contain the modified shapes  (fig. 4.b),¹⁵  (fig. 4.c),¹⁶ and .¹⁷ As such, the current


¹³ According to Lacau 1913, 12–16, this type of “mutilation” is only found in two other graphemes in the pyramid of King Unis, namely, the semogram *z't* LIBATING (; cf. Lacau 1913: 13–14; Lincke 2011: 141–142, nos. 0660–0670) and the classifier of *pnk* “spooning out (water)” (; cf. Lacau 1913: 16; Lincke 2011: 109, 140–141, nos. 0540–0560). Subsequently, they adopted other modified forms (including parts of the human body) in the pyramids of the 6th Dynasty, whereas the semogram *PURE* mostly continued the shape .

¹⁴ If this is correct, the apparent etymological link between *'bw* “purity” and *w'b* “to be pure” (*Wb*. I, 175: “Substantiv zu *w'b*”; Grunert 2002: 146–150) could have catalysed the process.

¹⁵ E.g., in the funerary chamber of *bjw* from the necropolis of Pepy II (Jéquier 1940: pl. 52, M. XIV, middle line, col. 22 from left), and in the Pyramid Texts of King Pepy I shown in fig. 4.

¹⁶ E.g., on the sarcophagus of *hnt.y-k'i/jh.j* from the TPC (Firth & Gunn 1926, pl. 58.4, l. 1; James 1953, 32, pl. XXXIX, insc. 217.1).

¹⁷ E.g., on the sarcophagus of *k'pr* from the TPC (Hassan & Kanawati 1996, pl. 55.a, l. 1).

evidence shows the progressive disappearance of the logographic use of  during the late OK, an observation which contradicts Fischer's evolutive hypothesis.

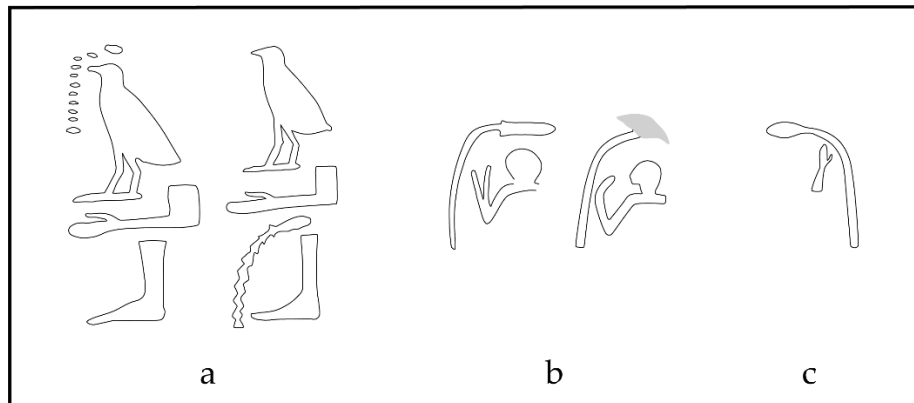





Fig. 4: Modified spellings of the semogram w'b PURE in the PT and private inscriptions of the 6th Dynasty and the late OK: (a) PT 1116 (after Pierre-Croisiau 2019: pl. VIII; M/F/Sw C 1;) and Pyr. 710a (after Pierre-Croisiau 2019: pl. III, M/F/E 36); (b) Pyr. 530a (after Berger el-Naggar et al. 2001: pl. XXIII, P/D post/W 23) and Pyr. 527c (after Berger el-Naggar et al. 2001: pl. XXIII, P/D post/W 20); (c) Sarcophagus of *hnt.y-k'/jhb.j* from the TPC (after Firth & Gunn 1926: pl. 58.4, l. 1).


2.2. Step 2: the emergence of during the mid-11th Dynasty

The development of the semogram PURE is characterised by important formal variation in the different epigraphic traditions of Upper Egypt during the late Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period (fig. 9 below), but the combination  is not found in texts of this period. It appeared during the first half of the 11th Dynasty, its earliest clearly datable occurrences being found on stelae from Thebes with the name of Intef III.¹⁸

When the leg-type of the semo. PURE emerge, its shapes show a large range of formal variation: Inscriptions of a higher artistic quality use the two main shapes that persist in later periods, namely  (with the globular vessel hovering above the leg)¹⁹ and  (with the vessel

¹⁸ The earliest examples known to me are found on the stelae BM EA 1203, l. 1 (Intef II & III); ex Clandeboye hall, caption to libating person, l. x+2. (Intef III; Edwards 196: 22–24, pl. XI); MMA 14.2.6, l. 2 (Intef III); see Fischer 1988: 54, sign D60; Brovarski 1998: 56.

¹⁹ E.g., on the stelae BM EA 614, l. 15 & 16; CG 20007, l. 2; CG 20514, l. 2; CG 20543, l. 22; CG 20804, l. 1; Louvre C14, l. 15; MMA 14.2.7, l. 1; Moscow I.I.a.5603, l. 2; Turin Cat. 1447, 2nd register from bottom, r. side, l. 3; in relief decoration of the royal temple complex in Deir el-Bahari (Arnold 1974: 47, sign D60), or in the coffin of Aaschyt (Backes 2020: 613, sign D60).

resting directly on top of the leg).²⁰ But at the same time, inscriptions of small size or minor sculptural quality, texts on coffins, and rock inscriptions depict the upper part of the hieroglyph in various forms (fig. 5), e. g., with an elongated libation vessel²¹ a human mouth,²² an oval,²³ or no vessel at all on top of the leg,²⁴ and once the water jet floating is even shown flowing backwards.²⁵ In addition, the group  is rarely also used non-autonomously in this period, e.g., in the coffin of *jqr* from Dra Abu el-Naga (fig. 6)²⁶ and the tomb of *ḥ³-nḥt* at Bersheh.²⁷

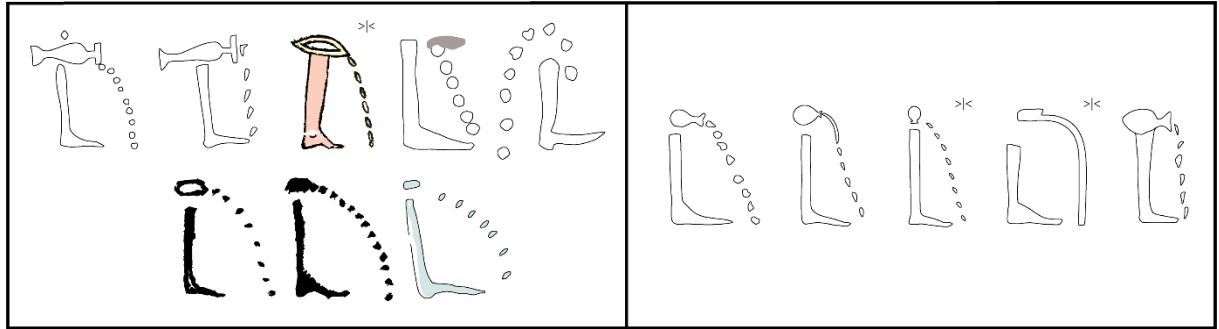


Fig. 5: “Experimental” shapes (left): stela BM EA 1203, l. 1; stela Louvre C14, caption to offering table scene; coffin of *jqr*, F; stela of *zj-n-sbk*, Dra Abu el-Naga; stela Firenze 7594, l. 3; WH CM 192, l. 5, 14; Bersheh tomb 17K74/3 (Willems 2007: pl. LIII); standard shapes (right): stela BM EA 614, col. 2; sarcophagus of Aaschyt SFrOut 1 & SHOut 1; Stele Turin Cat. 1447; stela Louvre C14, l. 3 (drawings: P. Seyr).














- ²⁰ E.g., on the stelae BM EA 1164, l. 4; Copenhagen ÆIN 1241, l. 14; Louvre C14, l. 3 & 4; TN 3.6.25.2, l. 3 & E x+5; and the coffins JE 36418 (Willems 1996, pl. 29); MFA 03.1631, FR & lid; as well as MMA 07.230.1.
- ²¹ Stela BM EA 1203, l. 1; stela Louvre C14, caption to offering table scene. Note that the larger sized main text of the latter (l. 15) uses the shape .
- ²² Coffin of *jqr*, F & B, from Dra Abu el-Naga (Galán 2009: 32), currently housed in the Luxor Museum.
- ²³ WH CM 191, l. 4; WH CM 192, l. 5, 14.
- ²⁴ Stela el-Tod H106.1-2, l. 2 (Postel 2007, 1546 fig. 4); stela of *zj-n-sbk*, Dra Abu el-Naga; late 11th or early 12th Dynasty (Polz 2014–2015); BM EA 1628, l. 4.
- ²⁵ Stela Firenze 7594, l. 3.
- ²⁶ The sign is found on both long sides of coffin, in identically spellings of the adjective *w^b.t* in the phrase *m s.wt=f nb.t nfr.t w^b.t* “in all his good and pure places.” The spelling is especially intriguing because  seems to be a compound sign consisting of the class. PURE and the uniliteral phono. *b* and the use of  evokes the lexeme ‘*bw*’ “purity.”
- ²⁷ Newberry 1895: 35 & pl. XVII: [-] *b³k n ḥw.t-nṯr m w^b.w* (  ; without vessel!) *jn ḥ³.ty-‘ ḥrp-ns.ty jm.y-r³ ḥm.w-nṯr w^b.t* () *ḥ n ḏḥw.ty z³t* () *n jr-m³.t ḥ³-nḥt* “[Receiving?] a branch of the temple from the priests by NN.”



Fig. 6: The adjective *w'b.t* "pure (places)" on the front side of the coffin of *jqr* (photo: P. Seyr).

It is noteworthy that the appearance of  also influenced the graphosyntactic value of the grapheme: if inscriptions of the late Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period use the anthropomorphic sign shapes as trilateral phonogram *w'b* (PURE + )²⁸ or (more rarely) as classifier in the spelling  + PURE,²⁹ the sign form  is nearly exclusively used autonomously, i.e., as logogram *w'b* PURE.³⁰

Since the mid-11th Dynasty, podomorphic and anthropomorphic shapes were used simultaneously, and some inscriptions from the period of Mentuhotep II or slightly later contain even examples of both types of the sign side by side (fig. 7). Interestingly, they show a slight tendency to use the human figure in phrases referring to humans or gods and the sign  in relation to objects.³¹

²⁸ This combination is attested in the regions of Gebelein/Moalla (e.g., Ankhtyfy, Insc. 16.3 = Vandier 1950: 257; and the stelae CG 1622, col. 2; CG 1654, l. 1), Coptos (e.g., decree C = *Urk.* I, 287, 17), Thebes (e.g., stelae CG 20004, l. 2; MMA 13.182.3, col. 4), Dendera (e.g., frieze of *mnj* = Petrie 1900: pl. II.A, f5l2; libation basin UPMAA 17753), Abydos (e.g., stela Chatsworth 720.12, col. 1 in front of the large, standing male figure at the bottom right), Nag ed-Der (e.g., stelae PAHMA 6-1951; PAHMA 6-11468; and MFA 25.677, l. 7).

²⁹ E.g., in some instances, in the PT with a "mutilated" anthropomorphic form of PURE (e.g., Pyr. 530a in P and Pyr. 194d, 195a in N) and in the tomb D4 at Hagarsa (Kanawati 1995: pl. 5.a, 26). During the later part of the FIP, this spelling is also found at Dendera (architrave BM EA 1261, l. 2; lintels UPMAA 29.66.686 and 29.66.700) and Nag ed-Der (stela OIM 16952, l. 2).

³⁰ One of the rare exceptions to the logographic use is found in fig. 6.

³¹ This distribution reminds of the tendencies that Derchain-Urtel 1999: 41–53 found in stela inscriptions of the Graeco-Roman period.


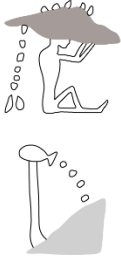
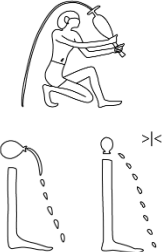

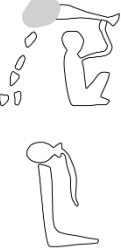
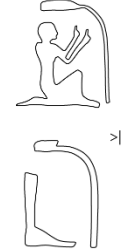












| Aswan | Armant(?) | Thebes | Farshut | Abydos | | Bersheh |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|
| A1C | ÆIN 1241 | JE 47267 | MFA 03.1631 | CG 20514 | Turin Cat. 1447 | tomb 17K74/1 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |


Fig. 7: The anthropomorphic and the podomorphic shapes of PURE in inscriptions of the mid- and late 11th Dynasty that contain both (drawings: P. Seyr).

3. An alternative hypothesis







In my view, the foregoing observations on the distribution and the function of the grouping  in spellings of the lexeme *wʿb* “to be pure” in the PT as well as of the shapes / during the 11th Dynasty provide solid evidence against the hypothesis that both phenomena are somehow connected. In fact, there is not only a large temporal hiatus between the last appearances of  during the late OK and the appearance of / in the reign of Intef III but they also have different functions, the former being used non-autonomously in the PT and the latter autonomously in texts of the 11th Dynasty. In addition, the geographic distance between the Memphite necropolis with its pyramids, from where the spelling  could theoretically be copied, and the Theban territory under the reign of Intef III seems significant, even the more because the shape / is apparently introduced in Middle Egypt only after the Theban reunification.³²

3.1 The cursive influence on the development of

The formal and functional variation discussed above is indicative of the fact that the mid-11th Dynasty was indeed the formative phase of / (logogram PURE). Strikingly, the large variation of the sign’s upper part is not only found in hieroglyphic inscriptions of this period,

³² At Bersheh, podomorphic shapes are found in the tombs 17K74/1, E wall, offering list, 1st item (Willems 2007: 38, pl. XI, XLVI) and 17K74/3, N wall, l. 2 (Willems 2007: 67, pl. XLI, LIV) & E wall, offering list, 1st item (Willems 2007: 74, pl. XXX, LII). At Asyut, the most ancient example of  appears in the tomb of Djefayhapi I (Kahl & Shafik 2021: 68, sign D60).

but it is also characteristic for the cursive shapes of the grapheme in contemporaneous CT manuscripts. This correlation indicates that the introduction of the podomorphic hieroglyphic shapes could be connected to the influence of cursive writing, which is in fact a driving force behind the emergence of new sign shapes in the regional epigraphies of Upper Egyptian during the FIP.

As shown in fig. 8, the semogram PURE had been the subject of a simplification process in cursive writing:³³ in course of the late Old Kingdom, its lower part was simplified into the form . The stroke sequence of  certainly evoked the formally identical cursive phonogram *b* () which corresponds to the hieroglyphic leg-sign . As such, it could have been for a visual reanalysis of cursive shapes like , and their transposition into hieroglyphic writing, that  emerged.







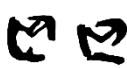


















| | OK | FIP (until Intef II) | Gebelein (MII-late XI) | Thebes (Intef III-Mentuhotep II) | Abydos (Intef III-late XI) | Bersheh (late XI) |
|-----------------|---|---|---|--|---|---|
| PURE |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| |  |  |  |  | |  |
| phono. <i>b</i> |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| |  |  |  |  | |  |

Fig. 8: Comparison between the development of the semogram PURE and the phonogram *b* in hieroglyphic and cursive writing from the Old Kingdom to the late 11th Dynasty (drawings: P. Seyr).

This reinterpretation may have been catalysed by the proximity of the semogram PURE and the phonogram *b* () in the spelling , which had become common in hieroglyphic and cursive

³³ For the cursive shapes of the semogram PURE in the 3rd millennium BCE, see the examples in Goedicke 1988: 1, sign A6 & 8, sign D60; Posener-Kriéger et al. 2006: 442, sign A6; Regulski 2010: 87, 332, sign A6; Backes 2020: 613, sign D60; Regulski 2020: 462, sign D60.

writing³⁴ during the FIP. Initially, the human figure probably assimilated to the leg-sign—cf. the group  in various CT manuscripts—³⁵ and then, the first leg sign (phono. *b*) was considered superfluous and thus omitted.

3.2 The iconicity of

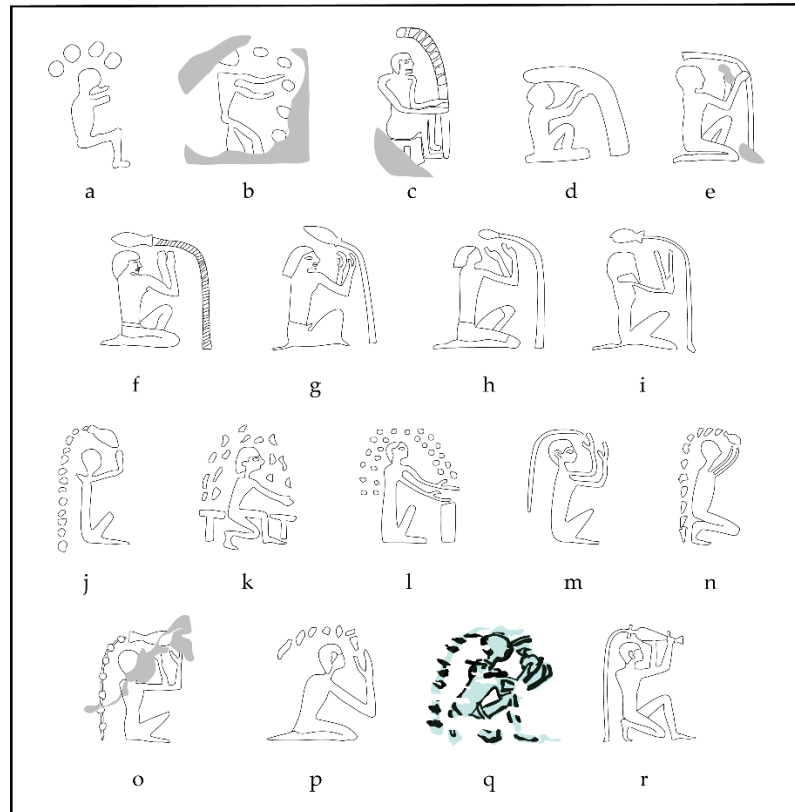












Fig. 9: The formal development of the semogram *w' b* PURE from the early Dynastic Period (a–c) until the First Intermediate Period (k–r): (a) sealing "UC 614" from Abydos (after Regulski 2010: 335, sign a1); (b) sealing KO-KF 3460; (c) stela Ashmolean Museum E.3918 from tomb R 88A at Reqaqna (drawing after Garstang 1904: pl. 28); (d) stela Heluan EM99–34 (after Köhler & Jones 2009: 102); (e) domain procession from the funerary complex of King Sneferu, GEM; (f) mastaba of Ptahhetep, NSP (after Davies 1900: pl. 4.23); (g) lintel of Herymeru/Mery, UPC; (h) false door, CG 1484; (i) statue CG 99; (j) decree Coptos D; (k) stela Turin S.1270, l. 2, from Gebelein; (l) false door Bolton Museum 1898.56.35 from Dendera (after Fischer 1968: 133, fig. 23); (m) architrave JE 32147 from Dendera; (n) stela Turin Cat. 1513, l. 3, from

³⁴ E.g., in pBerlin P.10523 (Möller 1909: 5, no. 56) and the bowl Cairo JE 91740 (Hsieh 2022: 276, fig. 5.36, l. 9) from Aswan during the late OK and in the linen Cairo JE 25975 (Gardiner & Sethe 1928: pl. I, l. 4 & 13).

³⁵ In fact, the sign  occasionally takes the phonetic complement , e.g., in CT I, 129b (B12C^b); V, 165a (A1C^a); VI, 121a (T1C); VII, 393b (B2L); and the lexemes *w' b* "to be pure" and *bw* "purity" are often assimilated through their spellings in CT manuscripts from Bersheh (e.g., CT V, 353.V, 378f; VII, 387a; cf. van der Molen 2000: 69, 88).

Abydos; (o) stela BM EA 1658, l. 2, from Nag ed-Der (p) stela Chicago, ISAC Museum, E. 16952, l. 2, from Nag ed-Der (q) chest PAHMA 6–2068 from Nag ed-Der; (r) coffin of Aaschyt from Thebes (drawings: P. Seyr).

From a diachronic perspective, the semogram PURE manifests originally as a compound anthropomorphic hieroglyph of the type [ + sign],³⁶ like the semograms  *jd.t* (PERFUME)³⁷ and  *j'i* (WASHING).³⁸ Its forms in early Dynastic inscriptions show most probably a man washing himself (fig. 9.a–c). The “classic” Old Kingdom shape of pure,  (fig. 9.f–i), developed only progressively during the 3rd and the 4th Dynasties by analogy to other hieroglyphic shapes. The sign assimilated the prototypical sitting posture of  during its early development (fig. 9.d–e)³⁹ and an ovoidal vessel was added at the top end of the water jet, hovering above the man’s head, at latest by the 4th Dynasty.⁴⁰ As such,  is a conventionalized shape that does no longer convey the notions of pureness and cleanliness by its iconic type (i.e. the action that it represents) only. It might be for this reason that, since the late Old Kingdom, the different regional epigraphies of the Upper Egypt developed iconically more transparent sign forms that show a man washing himself (fig. 9).⁴¹






I suggest that the “creation” of  during the mid-11th Dynasty may have been another attempt at creating a meaningful shape for the semogram *w'b* (PURE). In this view,  is a

³⁶ For this type of compounds, see Kaplony 1966: 88–89.

³⁷ For early examples, see Kahl 1994, 428, sign D46*; Regulski 2010: 101, 370–371, sign D46*.

³⁸ For early examples, see Köhler & Jones 2009: 103, sign D 207 (?); Manuelian 2003: 192–193; cf. Fischer 1996: 182–183.

³⁹ E.g., in the slab stelae from Heluan (Köhler & Jones 2009: 102, sign A6). The semo. EATING shows a similar formal development in the textile term *g.t*: compare, for instance, the sign forms in the linen lists in Kahl et al. 1995: 134–135; Köhler & Jones 2009: 160–161 & pl. 21; James 1961: pl. I, no. 2. For the correct reading of the term, see its complemented spellings in the Abusir papyri (Posener-Kriéger et al. 2006: 434; cf. Scheele 2005: 46–47, 71).


⁴⁰ A similar addition is occasionally found in most compound hieroglyphs of this formation type, e.g., in  (Beaux 2009: 298–299, fig. 9),  (Sethe 1922: 106),  (Beaux 2009: 296–297, fig. 8). It was probably introduced in analogy to another group of signs that show a recipient pouring out his content (cf. Lacau 1954: 56–60). The vessel became an established feature only in  and  (early form: Simpson 1978: pl. XXI & fig. 32), most probably because a jet of water without a clear source of origin like in these two signs may have been perceived as incoherent.

⁴¹ For the development of the sign in this period, cf. Fischer 1961: 79–80, no. (a'); Fischer 1968: 133, fig. 23.2.


compound hieroglyph referring to the washing of feet,⁴² an act which is fundamental in ancient Egyptian ritual of all periods. The continuous use of podomorphic shapes of pure until the Graeco-Roman Period may be indicative of this hypothesis.

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⁴² Cf. the logogram  (Visual Glyph+ D611) which is used in the term "feet-washer of the king" in some object friezes of the MK, e.g., in the coffin CG 28037 from Meir; see Blackman 1918: 119; Jéquier 1921: 315–317.

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