

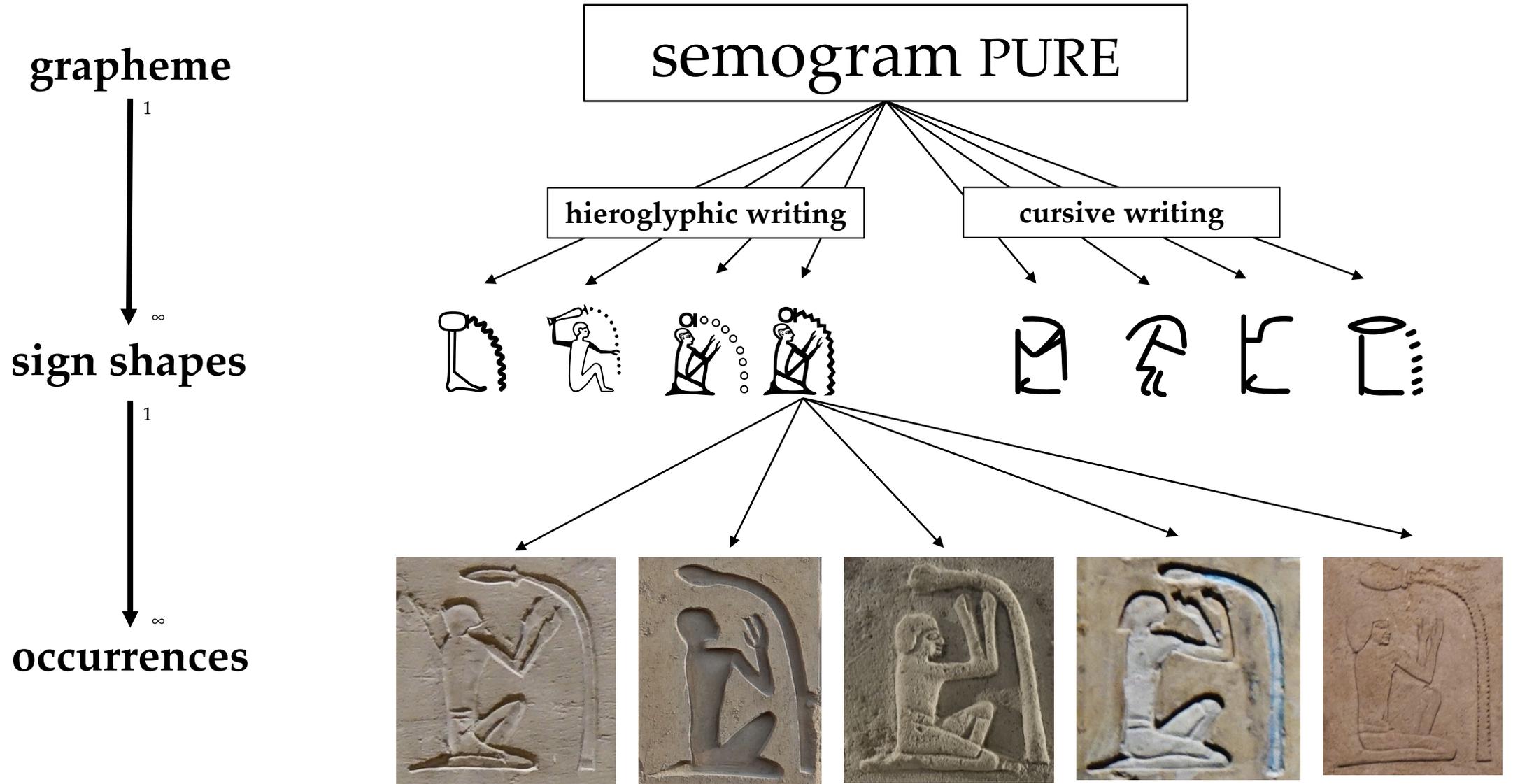


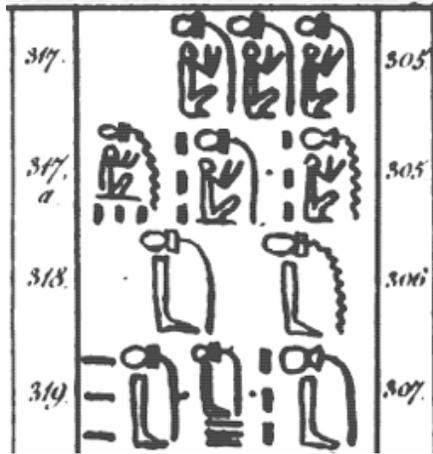
Kishan Kumar "Elderly Man Washing his Face in the Sea"  
(www.pexels.com)

# What is purity?

A systemic perspective on the evolution of the semogram  during the 3rd millennium BCE

# **I Introduction Of Pure Men and Pure Legs**

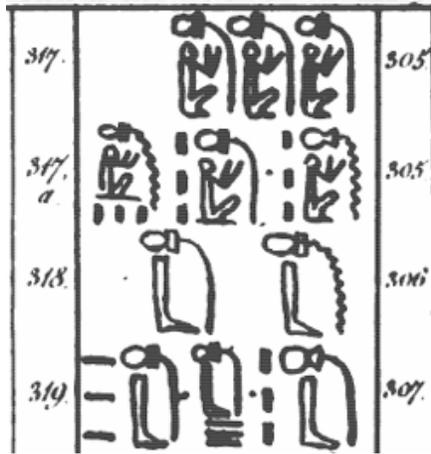




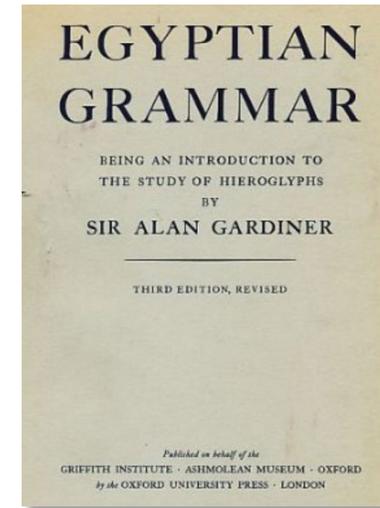
“306. ʕḫw, ʕḫw, prêtre ; variante du n.º 364”  
 (Champollion 1824, 34; sic but meant is no. 304)



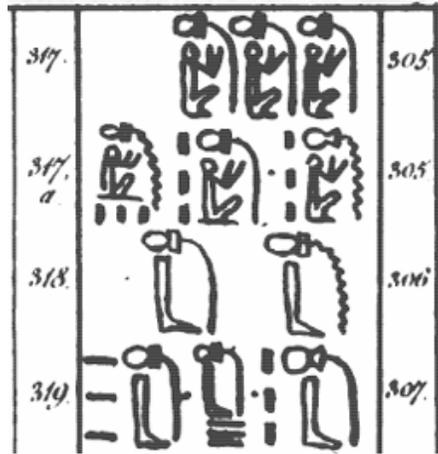
Tomb of ḥḫ-ḥr.w, Asasif



“306. ⲟϥⲏⲃ, ⲟϥⲁⲃ, prêtre ; variante du n.° 364”  
 (Champollion 1824, 34; *sic* but meant is no. 304)



“ combination of  D58 with a vase from which water flows (replaces earlier  A6)”  
 (Gardiner 1957, 485)



“306. οϣηβ, οϣαβ, prêtre ; variante du n.º 364”  
 (Champollion 1824, 34; sic but meant is no. 304)

wclb 

Priester. Seit A.R.  
 Kopt. <sup>a</sup>ϣηηβ : <sup>z</sup>ϣηβ.

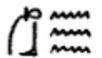
<sup>a</sup>  , <sup>m</sup>  ,  <sup>mm</sup>  (  )

<sup>D.18</sup> auch  ,  u.ä.

vereinzelt seit m:  
 ,  u.ä.

Allgemeines Wort für Priester (der  
 alt auch beim Bagutachten  
 des Opferfleisches <sup>13</sup> und als  
 Arzt <sup>14</sup> tätig ist).

Wb. II, 282

wclb 

reinigen ; rein sein  
 vgl. auch clw.

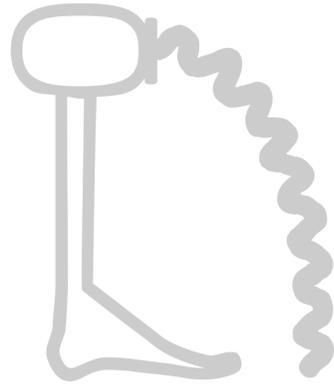
Kopt. <sup>a</sup>ϣϣπ.  
 Qual. <sup>a</sup>ϣααβ : <sup>z</sup>ϣαβ :  
 f. ϣϣεβ.

seit Pyn: 

Pyn  —  ,  —  u.ä.

a.R. ; seit  seit D.18 

Wb. II, 280



“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;

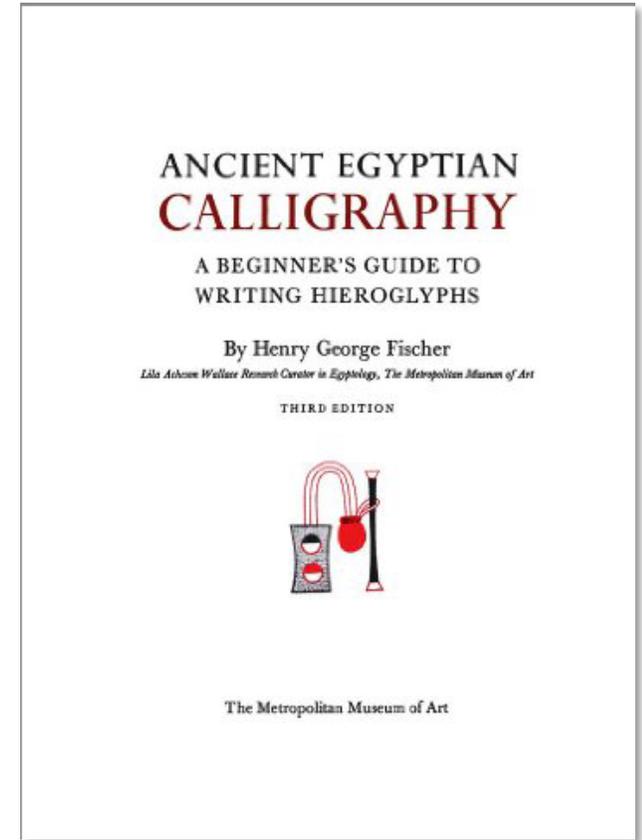
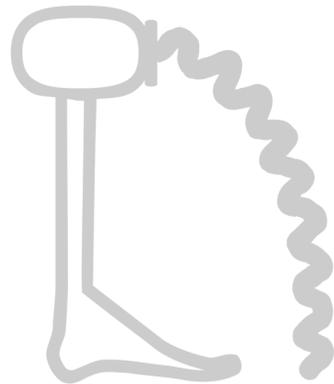
(2) they appear together in the writing of *wb* as  ; and

(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.”

(Fischer 1988, 54, sign D60; structured in paragraphs by Ph. Seyr)

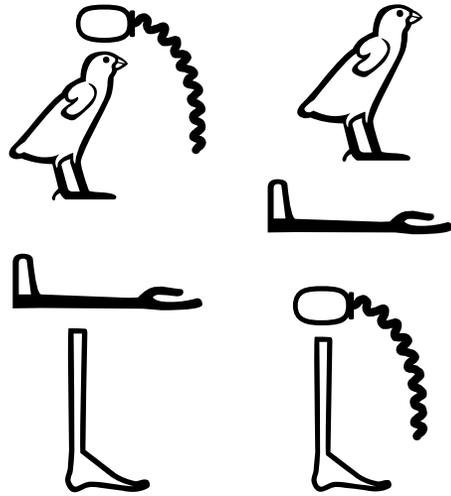




suppression of  
human figure



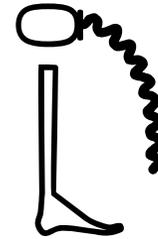
Pyramid Texts



autonomous use  
as logogram



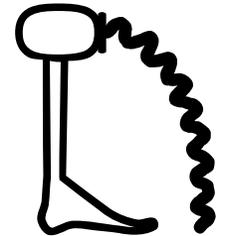
11th Dynasty

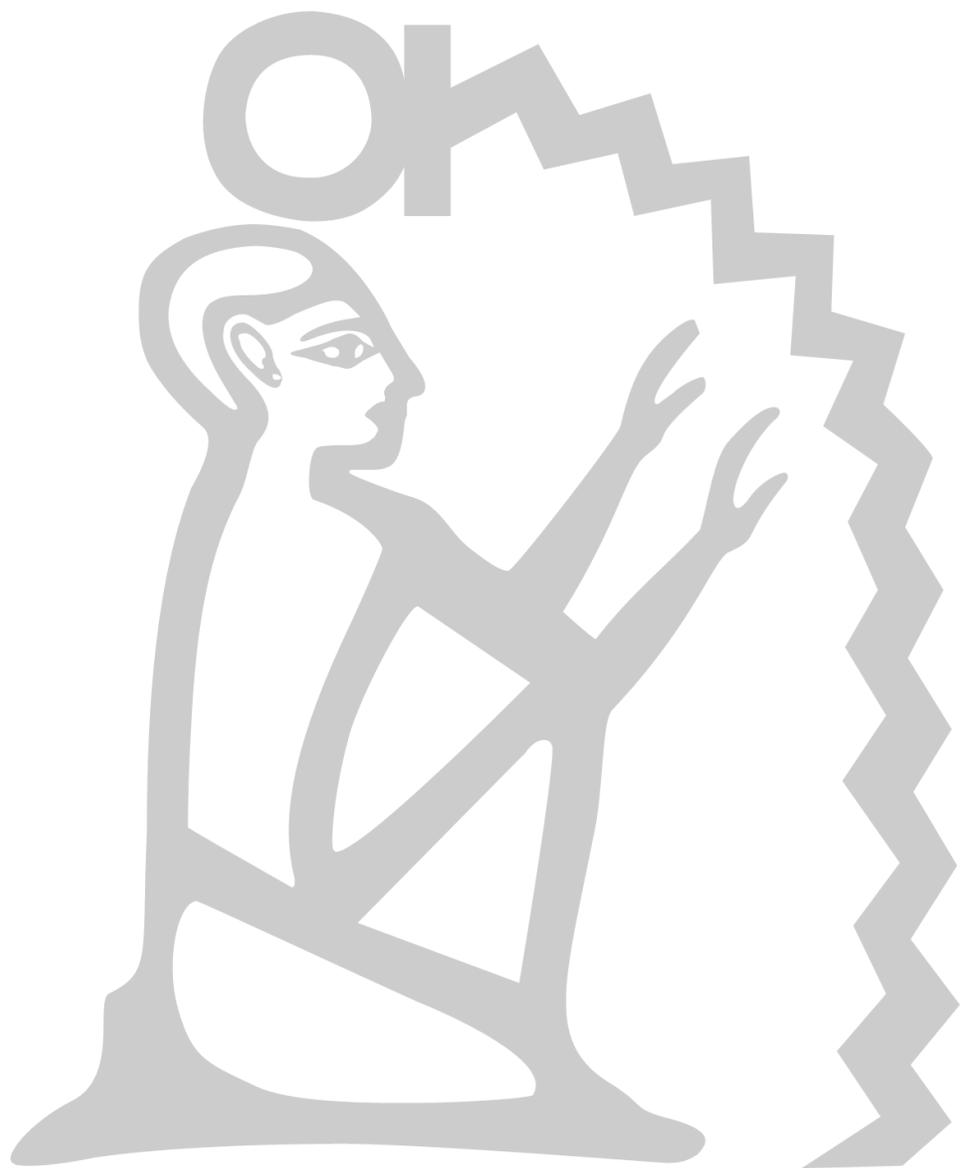


merge of  
compounds



11th Dynasty





## **II The semogram PURE: an origin story**



Ashmolean Museum E. 3918 (Garstang 1904, pl. 28)



UC "614" (Kaplony 1963, fig. 567)



0 1 cm

KO-KF 3460



EM99-34 (Köhler & Jones 2009, pl. 34)



EM99-19 (Köhler & Jones 2009, pl. 21)



Domain 1R4/49, GEM



CG 57136 (Saqqara, mastaba B1)



False door of *šr.j*, EM Cairo (Saqqara, mastaba B3)



TPC, s'nh-wj-ptḥ



CG 1756



CG 1389



UPC, ḥr.j-mr.w



UPC, ḥr.j-mr.w



Turin S. 1864



CG 1398



CG 56994



TPC, k'pr



BM EA 682



CG 1484



CG 1447

12



CG 1414



Zürich RAG 4



CG 1740



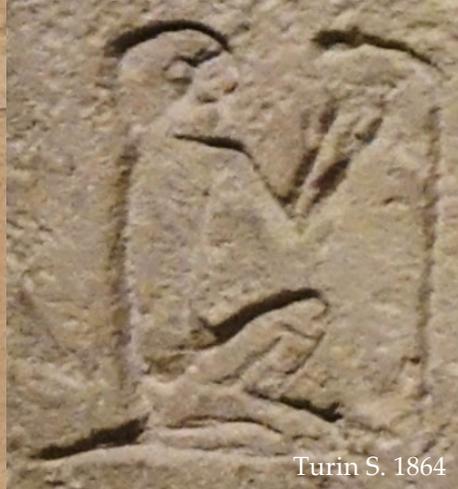
MRAH, nfr-jr.t-n=f



CG 1564



Tehna 13



13





TPC, s'nh-wj-ptḥ



CG 1756



CG 1389



UPC, ḥr.j-mr.w



UPC, ḥr.j-mr.w



Turin S. 1864



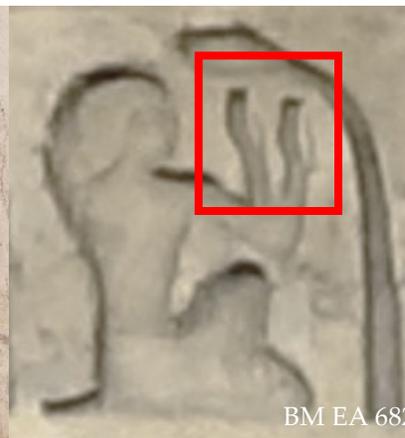
CG 1398



CG 56994



TPC, k3-pr



BM EA 682



CG 1484



CG 1447

14



CG 1414



Zürich RAG 4



CG 1740



MRAH, nfr-jr.t-n=f



CG 1564



Tehna 13



ÄMUL 2560



WH G 23



ÄM 17500



ÄMUL 1607



JE 67571

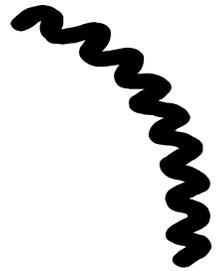


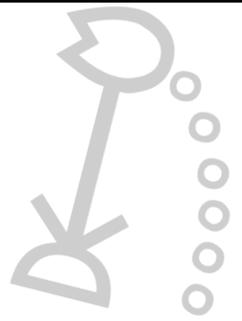
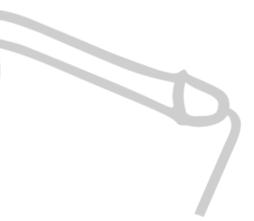
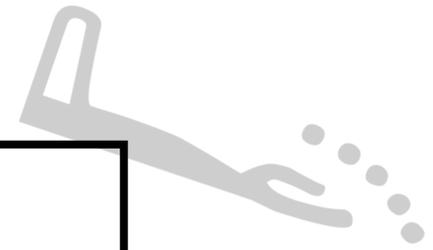
CG 1888



Clay tablet from Balat  
Kharga Museum



 + sign/group





Domain 1R4/49, GEM



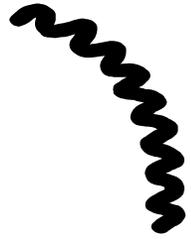
BM EA 32668 ([www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org))



PAHMA 6-19825 ([hearstmuseum.berkeley.edu](http://hearstmuseum.berkeley.edu))



G7140 ([giza.fas.harvard.edu](http://giza.fas.harvard.edu))



+



semo. *jdy* PERFUME



BM EA 32668 ([www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org))



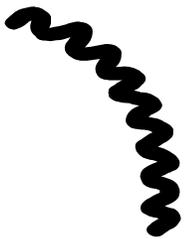
+



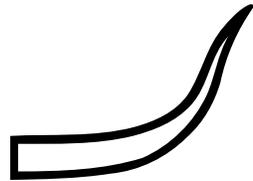
semo. *j'i* WASHING



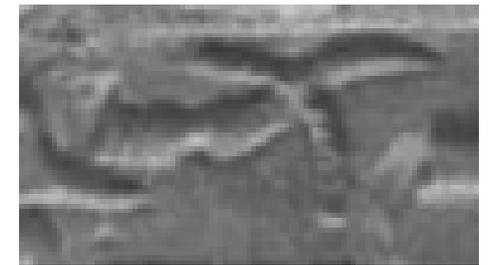
PAHMA 6-19825 ([hearstmuseum.berkeley.edu](http://hearstmuseum.berkeley.edu))



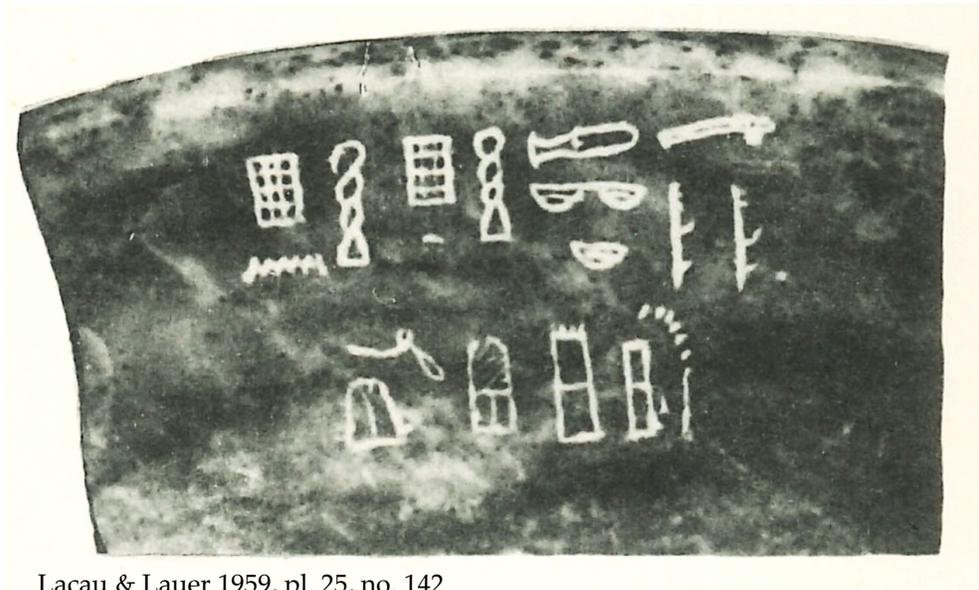
+



semo. *bw* PURITY



G7140 ([giza.fas.harvard.edu](http://giza.fas.harvard.edu))



Lacau & Lauer 1959, pl. 25, no. 142



BM EA 35556 (Kahl 2009, pl. 1)



MRAH



BM EA 35612 (Martin 2011, pl. 17, stela 55)



Ashmolean Museum E. 3918 (Garstang 1904, pl. 28)

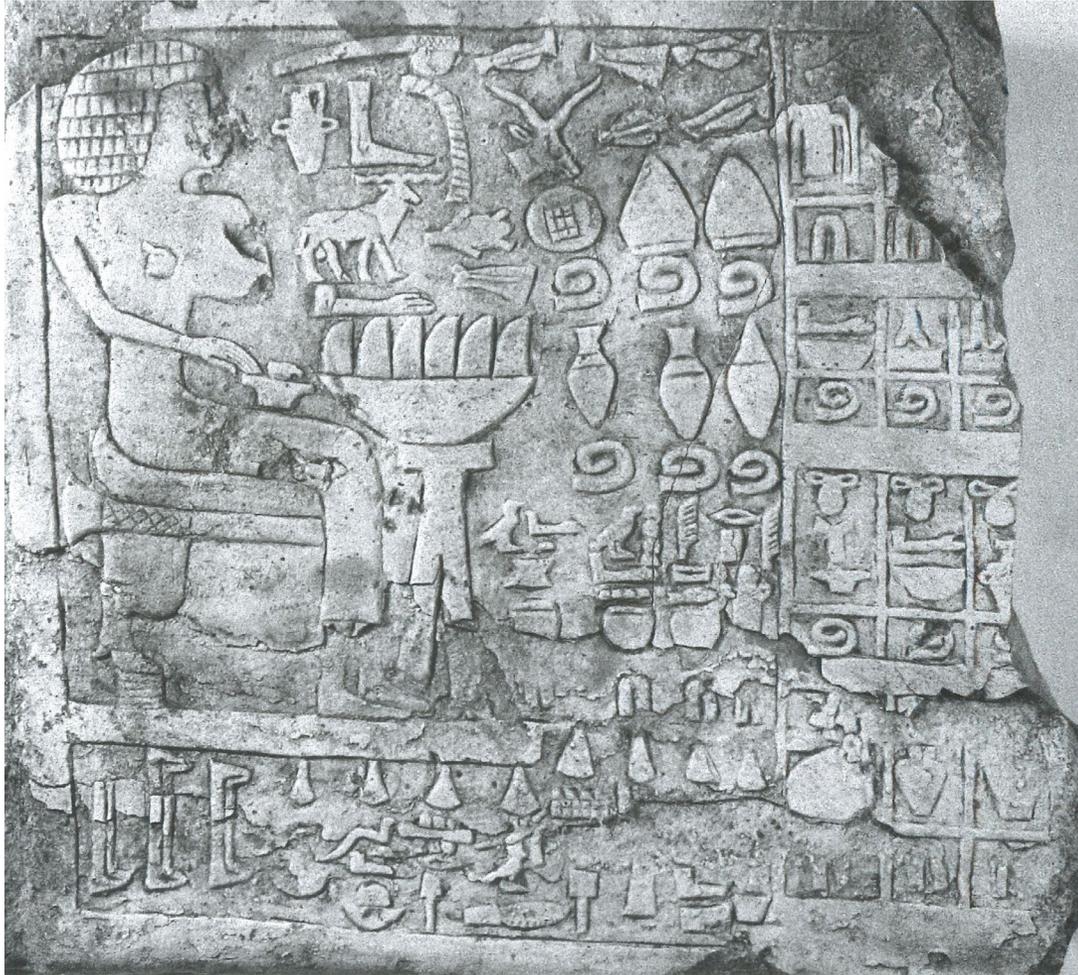


UC "614" (Kaplony 1963, fig. 567)

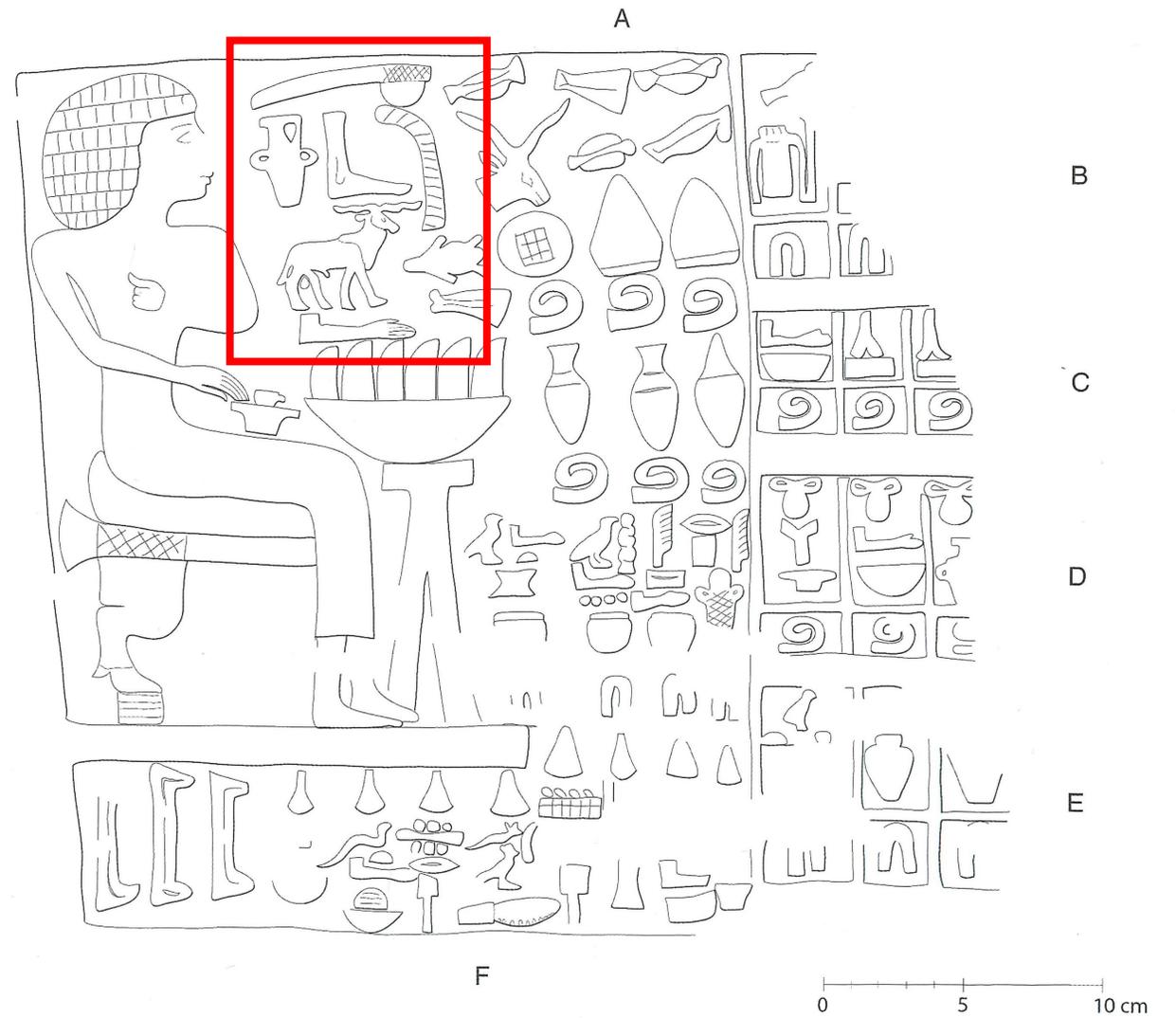


0 1 cm

KO-KF 3460



EM99-13 (Köhler & Jones 2009, 149 & pl. 15)



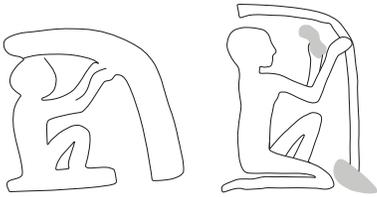


Tomb of *nfr-m<sup>3</sup>.t*, Meidum; estate 1M4-27, after Jacquet-Gordon 1962, 445

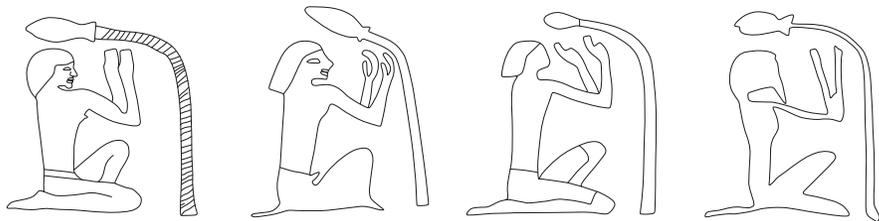
estate *Trw-b(?) -grg(?)*

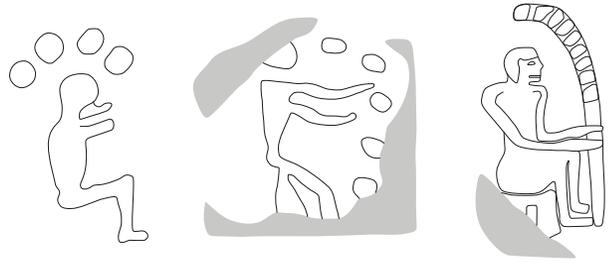


uniformisation  
of feet posture

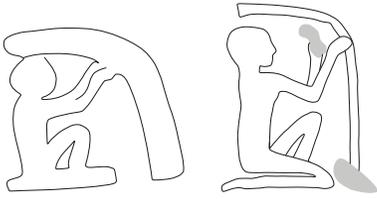


addition  
of vessel

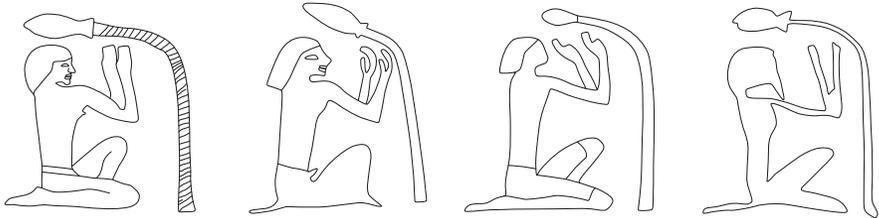




uniformisation  
of feet posture

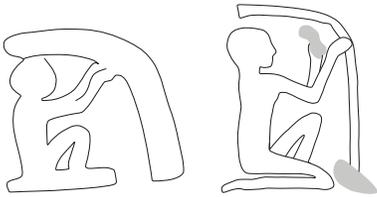


addition  
of vessel

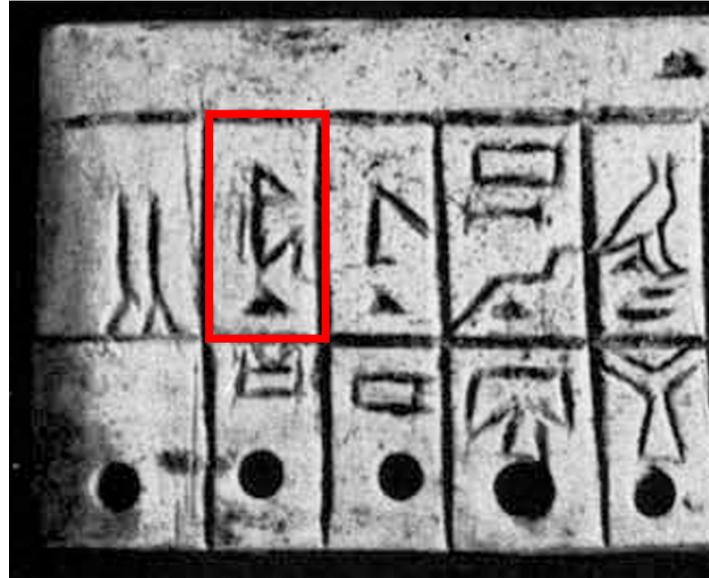




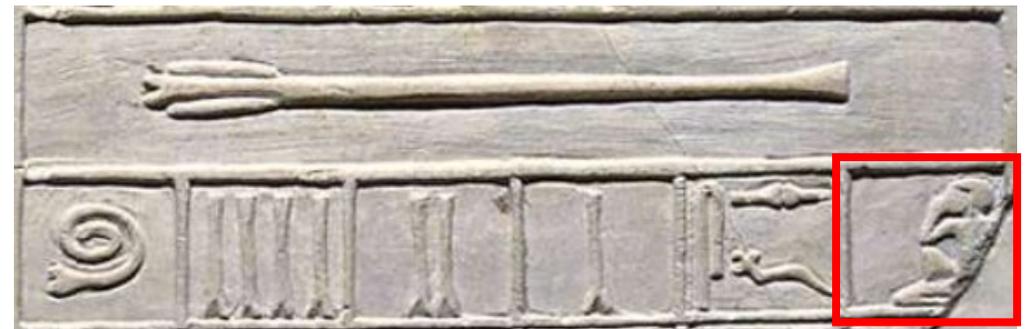
uniformisation  
of feet posture



addition  
of vessel



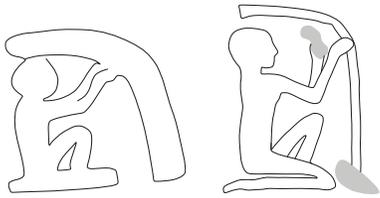
Goneim 1957, pl. 65B & 66



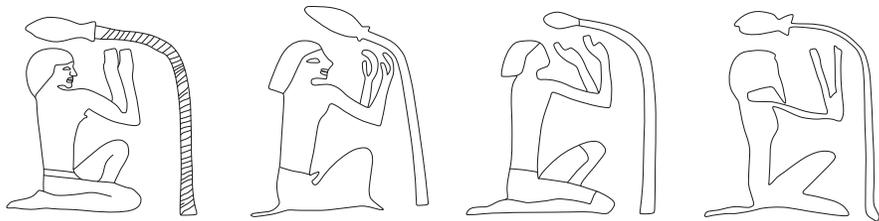
BM EA 1242 ([www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org))

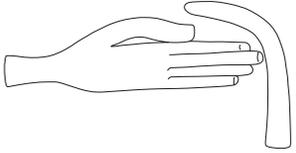
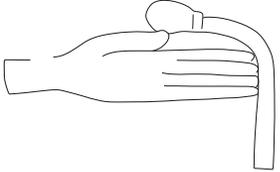
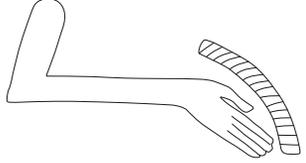
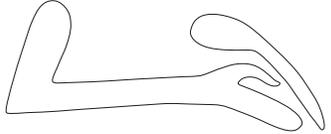
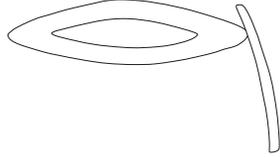
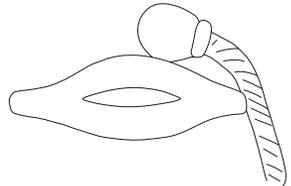
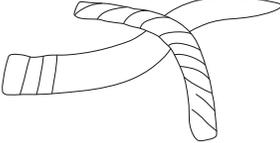
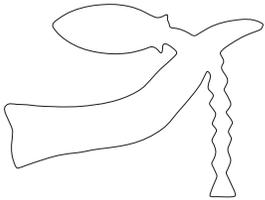


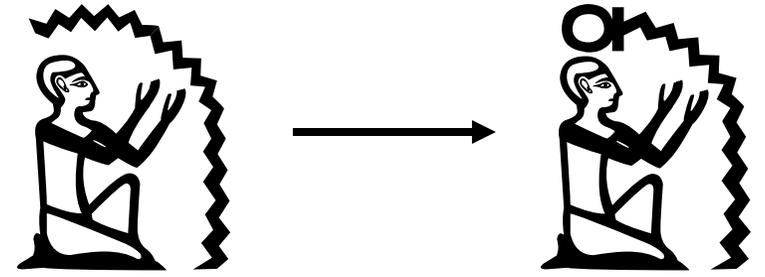
uniformisation  
of feet posture



addition  
of vessel



semo. <i>jdy</i> PERFUME		
semo. <i>ji</i> WASHING		
logo. <i>bw-r'</i> BREAKFAST		
semo. <i>bw</i> PURITY		



for the signs see Beaux 297, fig. 8 & 299, fig. 9; Manuelian 2003, 192; *Pyr.* 789 (P); *Pyr.* 951 (M); Simpson 1978, fig. 32



semo. HIDING

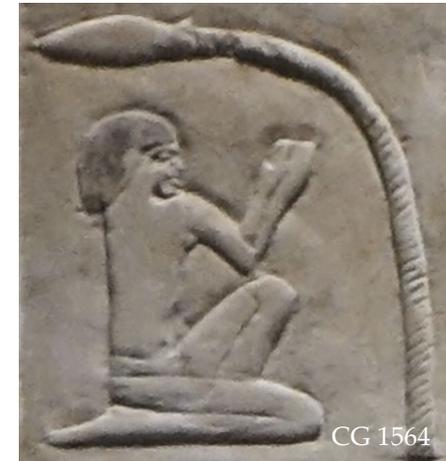


MMA 08.201.1

[www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org)



semo. *wb* PURE



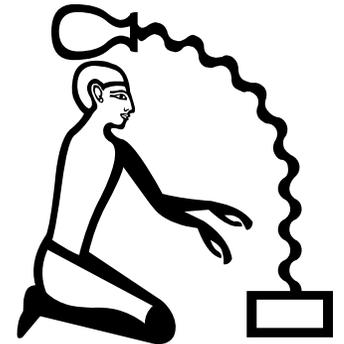
CG 1564



False door JE 30185 from Saqqara, NSP



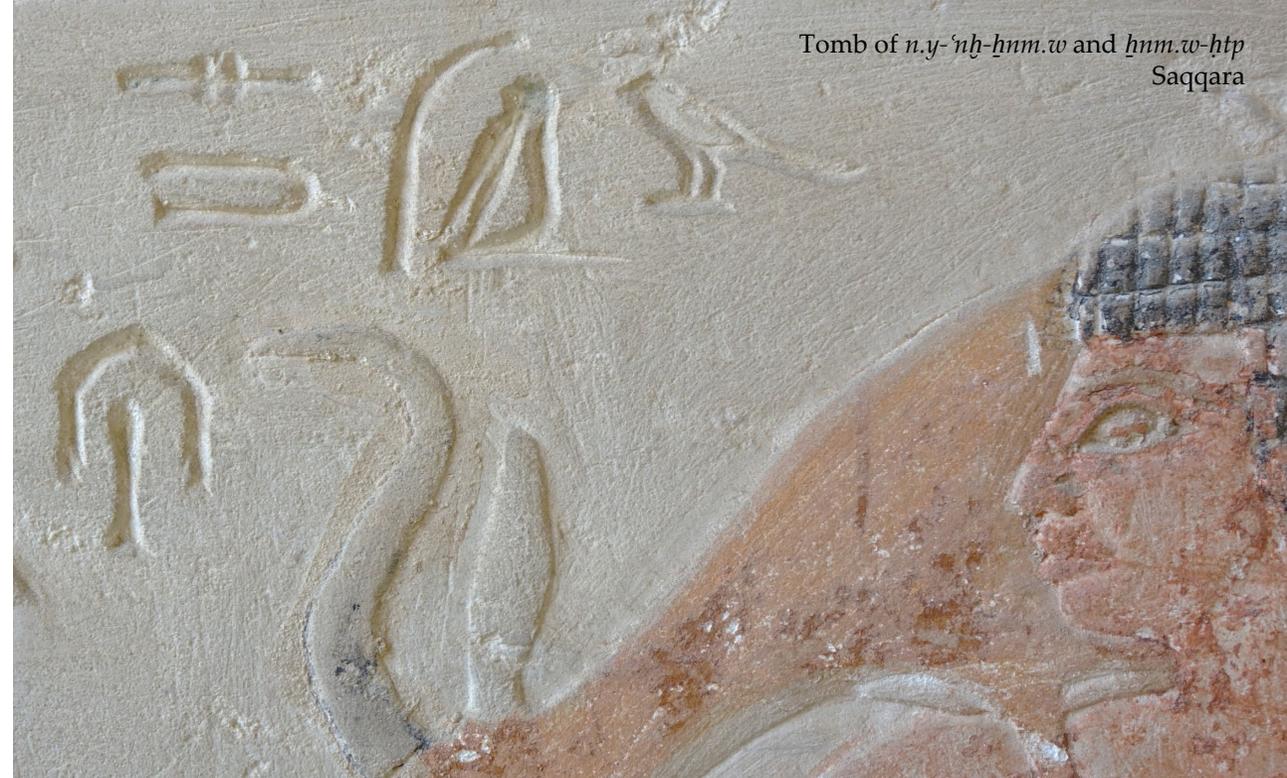
semo. *wḥ* PURE



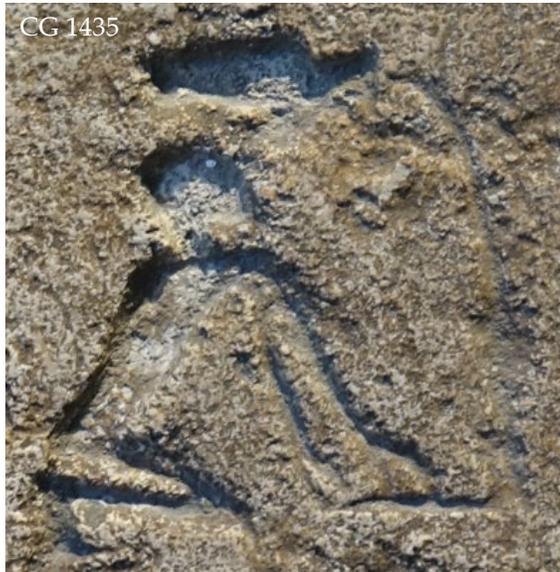
semo. *zḥ* LIBATING



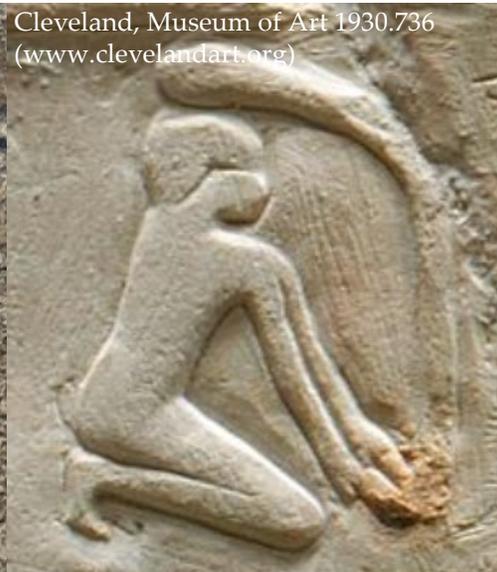
semo. z<sub>3</sub>t LIBATING



CG 1435



Cleveland, Museum of Art 1930.736  
([www.clevelandart.org](http://www.clevelandart.org))

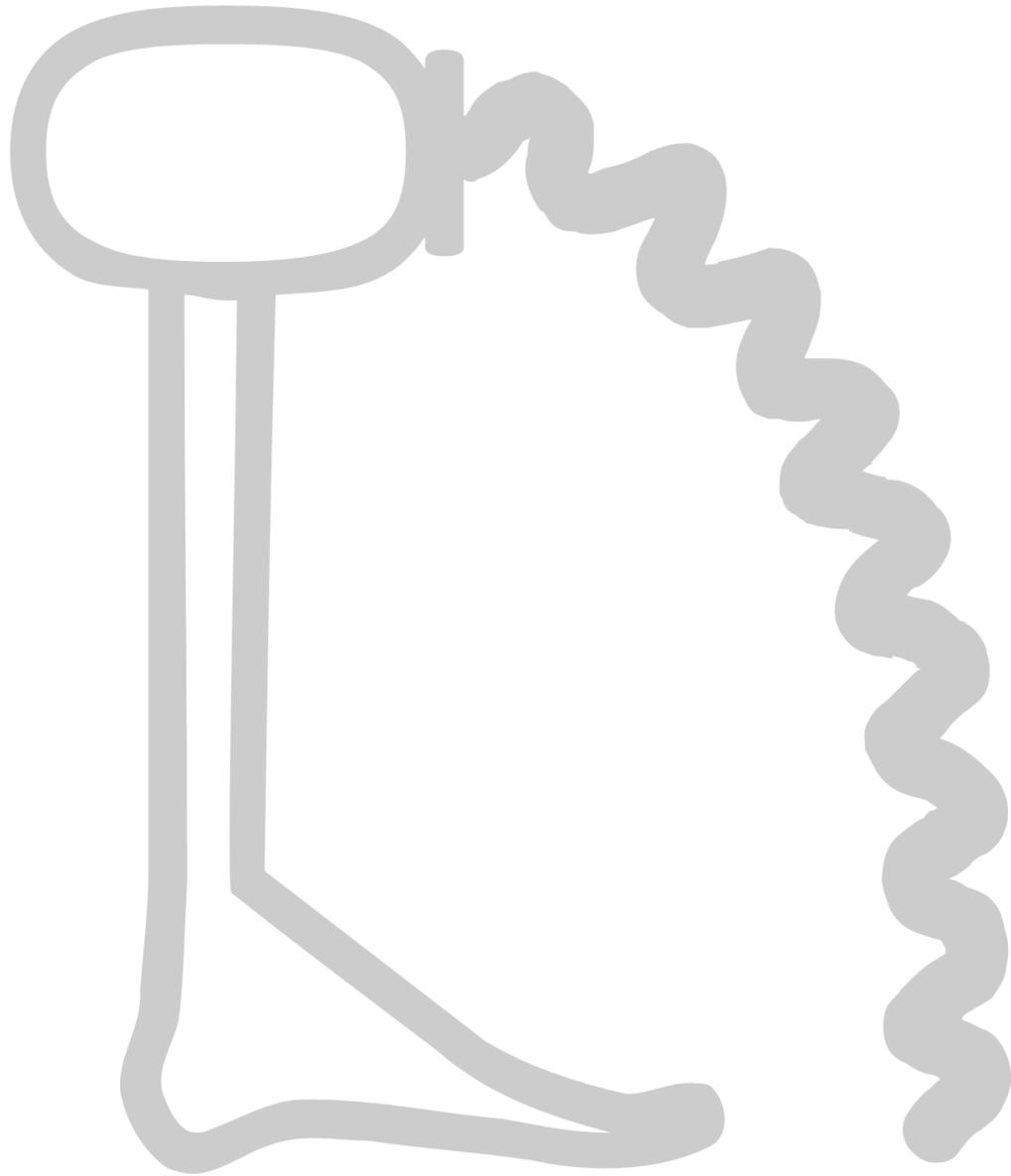


AEIN 6-7



Legros 2013, 159, fig. 2





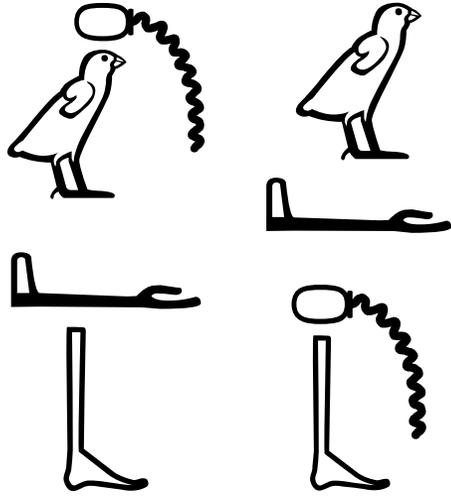
## **III Sign alterations in the PT**



suppression of  
human figure



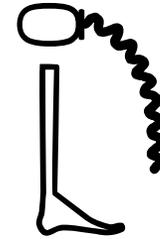
Pyramid Texts



autonomous use  
as logogram



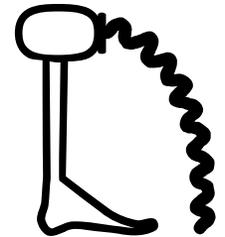
11th Dynasty

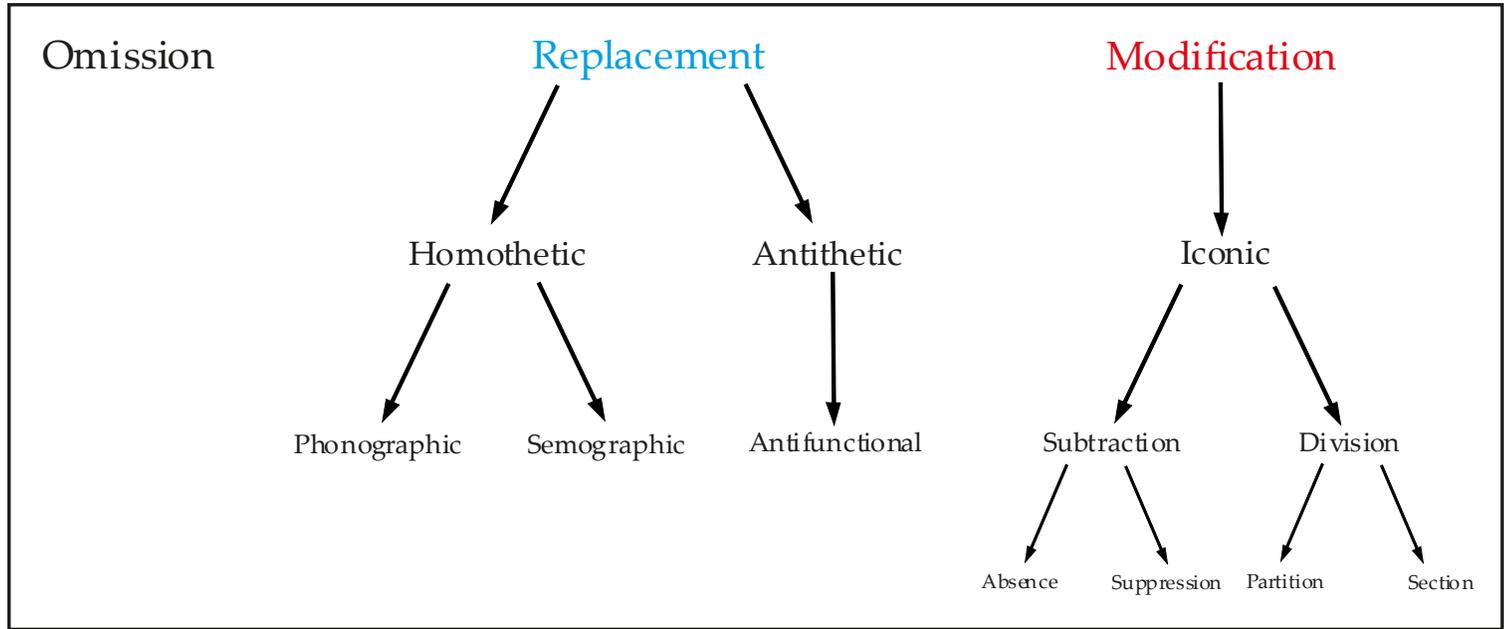
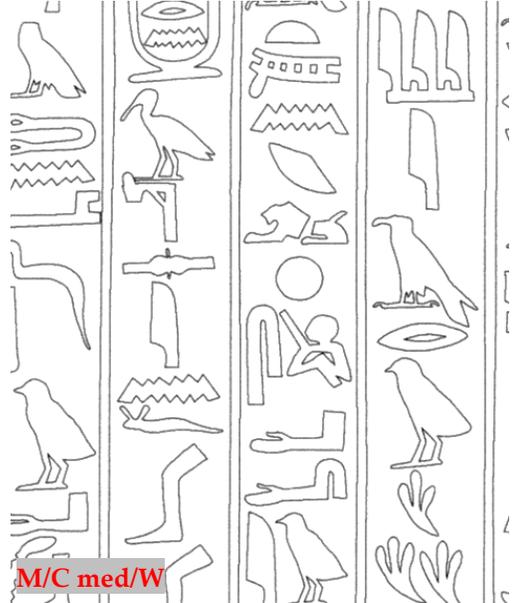


merge of  
compounds



11th Dynasty



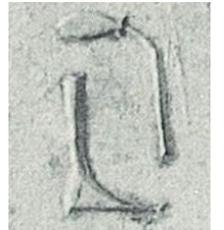


typological model after Pietri & Polis 2021 adjusted to the evidence of the PT by Ph. Seyr

**function**

**classifier/radicogram**

**logogram**



**attestations**

4

2

1

1

1

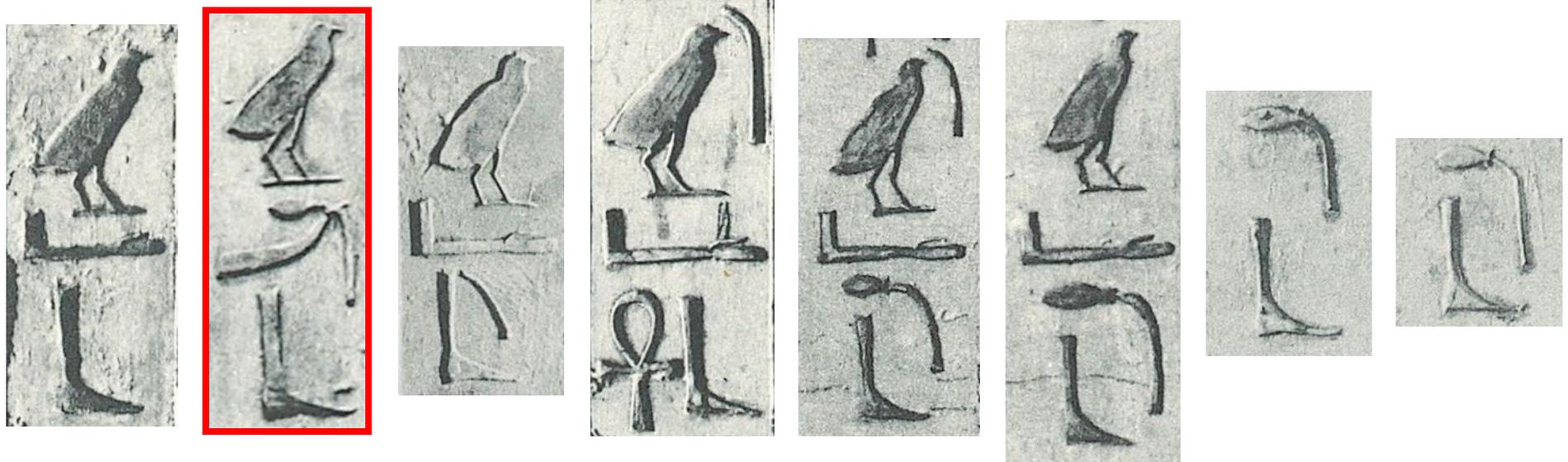
8

12

**function**

**classifier/radicogram**

**logogram**



**attestations**

4

2

1

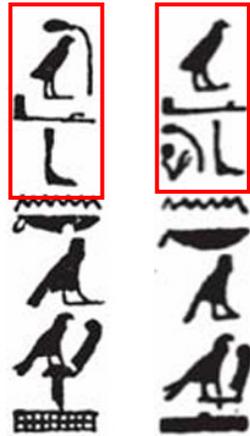
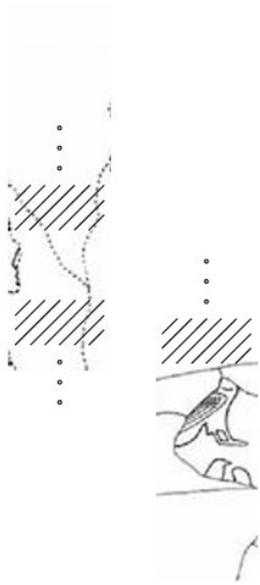
1

1

8

12

*Pyr. 211c*



w<sup>b</sup>.n=k m jmn.tt

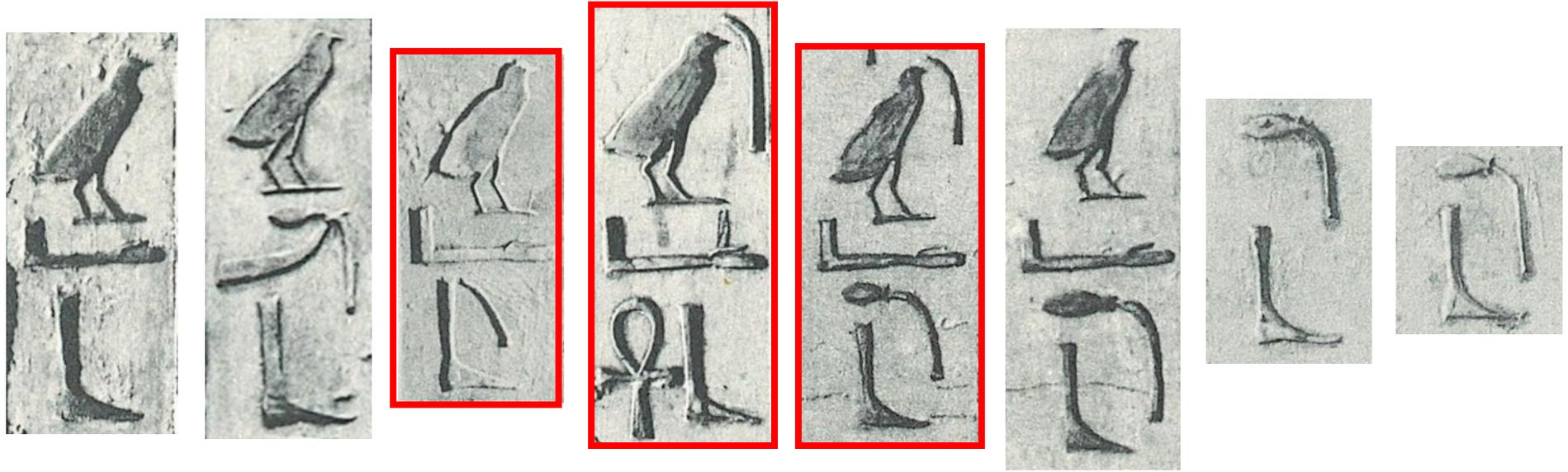
šzp.n=k <sup>b</sup>.w=k m ḥkꜣ-nd hr jt=k

“You **have cleaned yourself** in the Western Nome;  
 You have received **purity** in the Heqa-anedj Nome by your father.”

**function**

**classifier/radicogram**

**logogram**



**attestations**

4

2

1

1

1

8

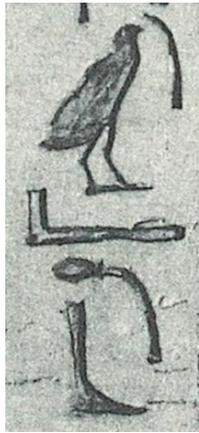
12



*Pyr. 138b (W)*



*Pyr. 151b (W)*



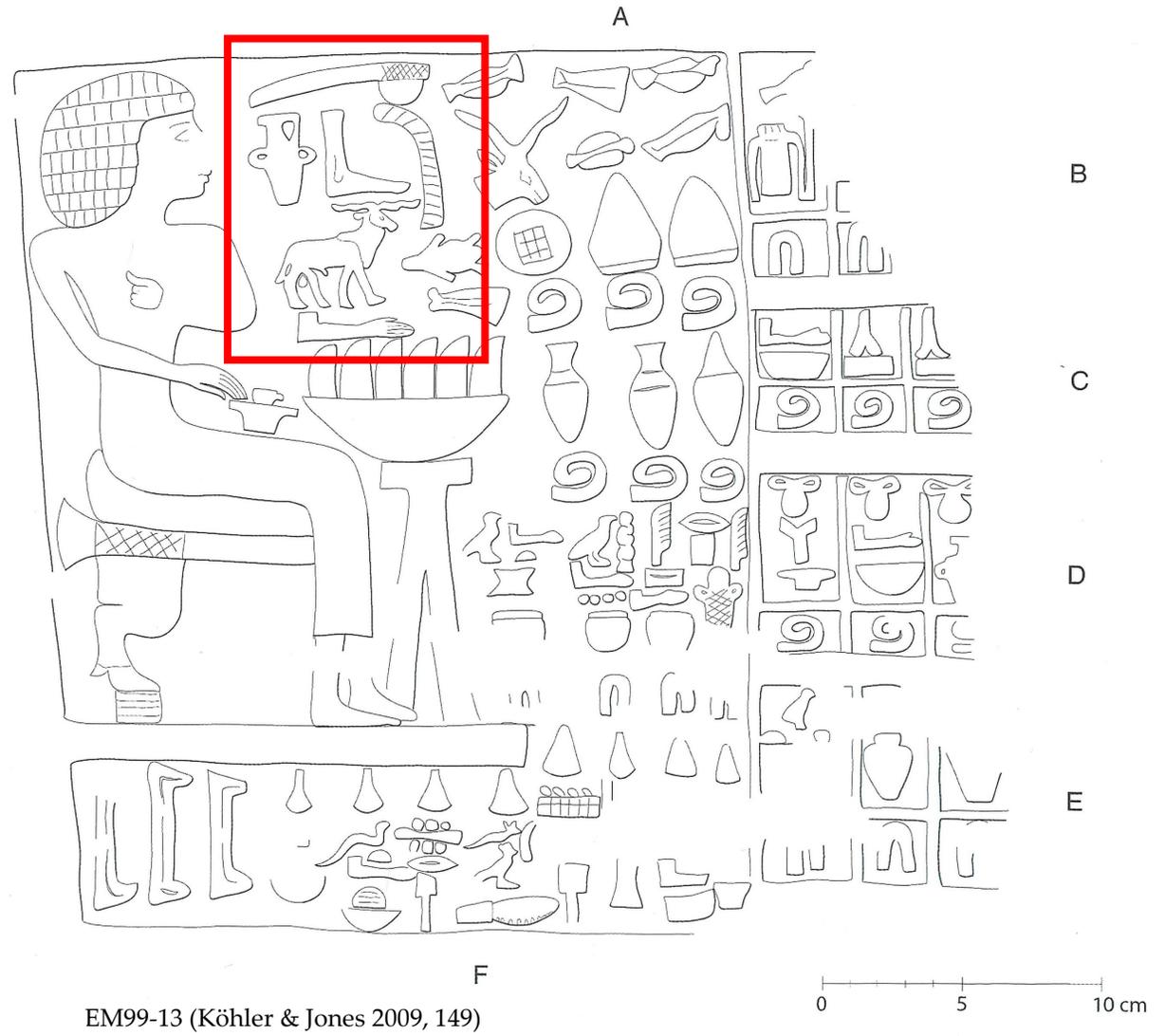
*Pyr. 473a (W)*



*Pyr. 22b (W)*



*Pyr. 308f (W)*

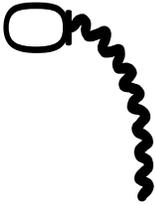


hypothesis 1  
(Lacau 1913)



w'b PURE

suppression of  
human figure



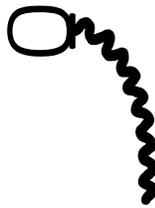
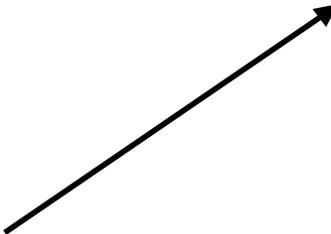
w'b PURE

hypothesis 2

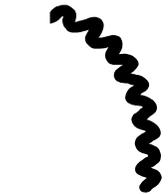


w'b PURE

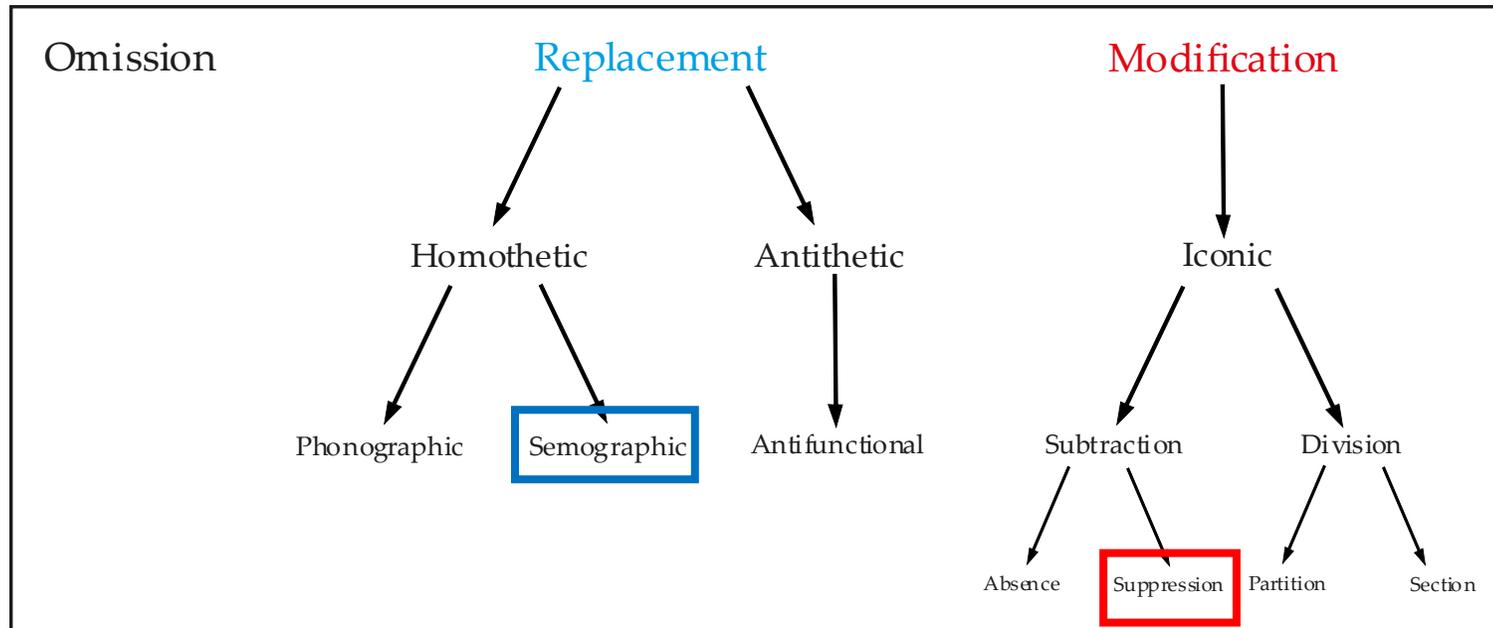
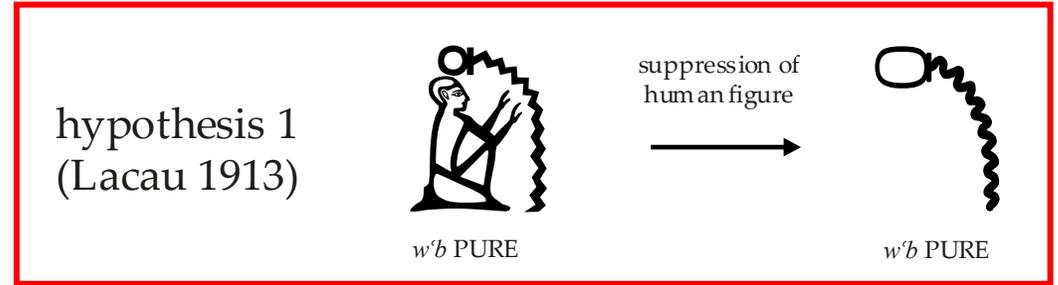
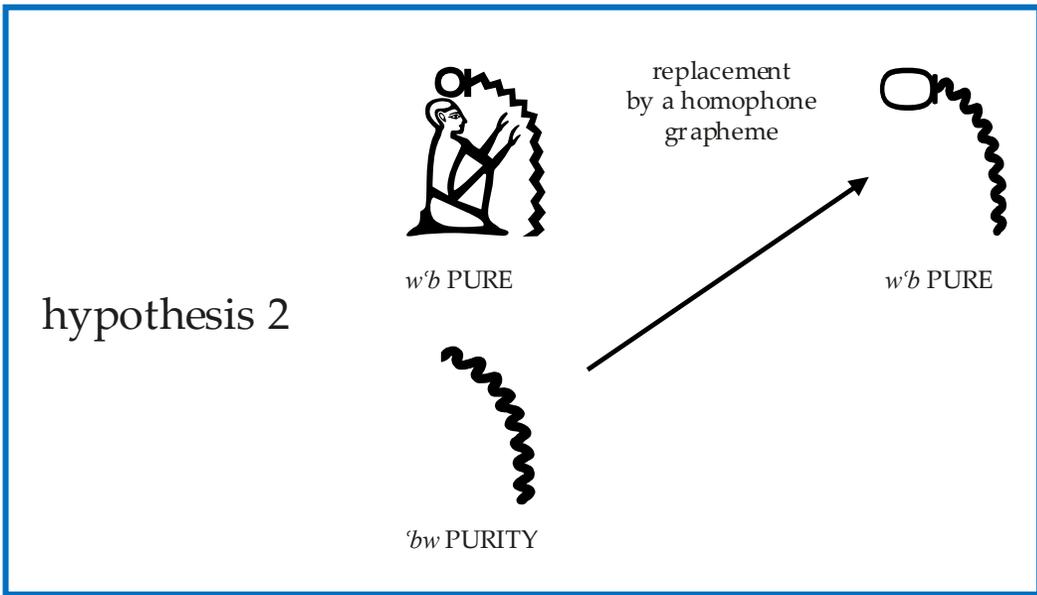
replacement  
by a homophone  
grapheme

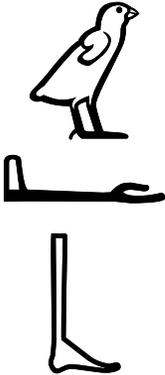
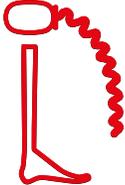
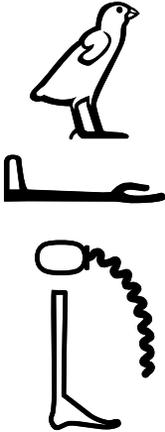
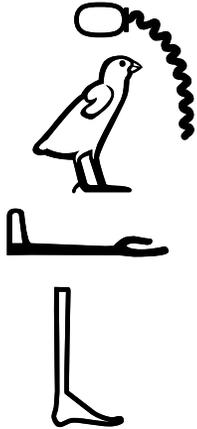


w'b PURE

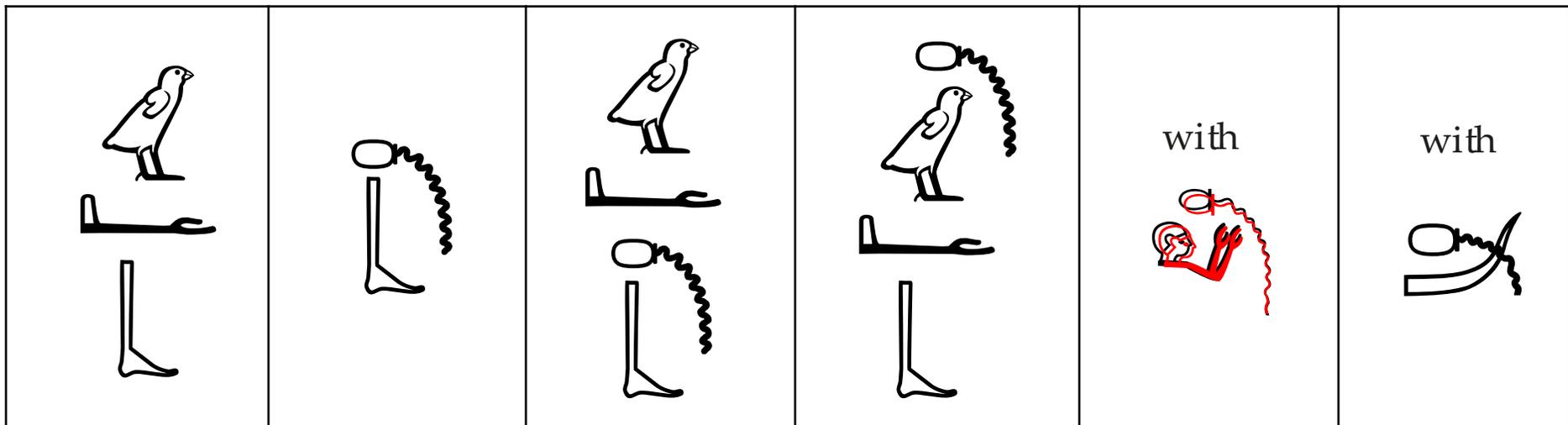


'bw PURITY

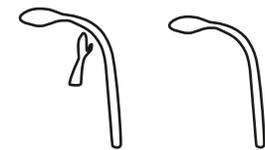


					
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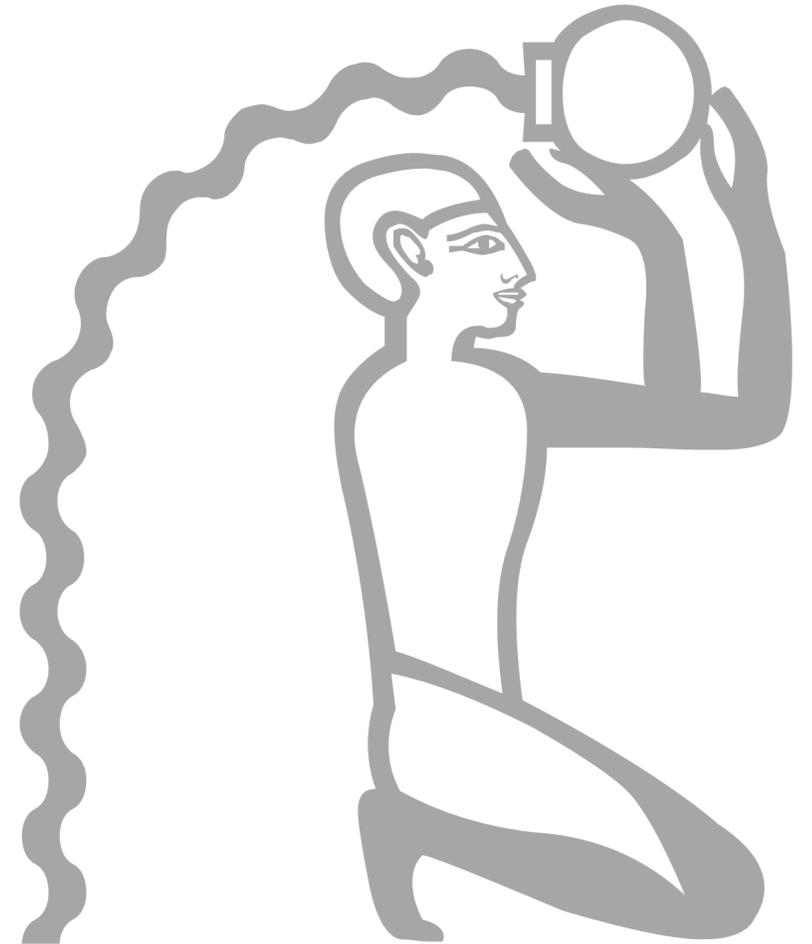
W	4	12	8	1	-	2
T	-	-	-	31	-	-
P	-	-	120	7	3	-
M	-	-	62	16	-	-
N	1	-	45	81	-	-
Nt	-	-	18	3	14	5

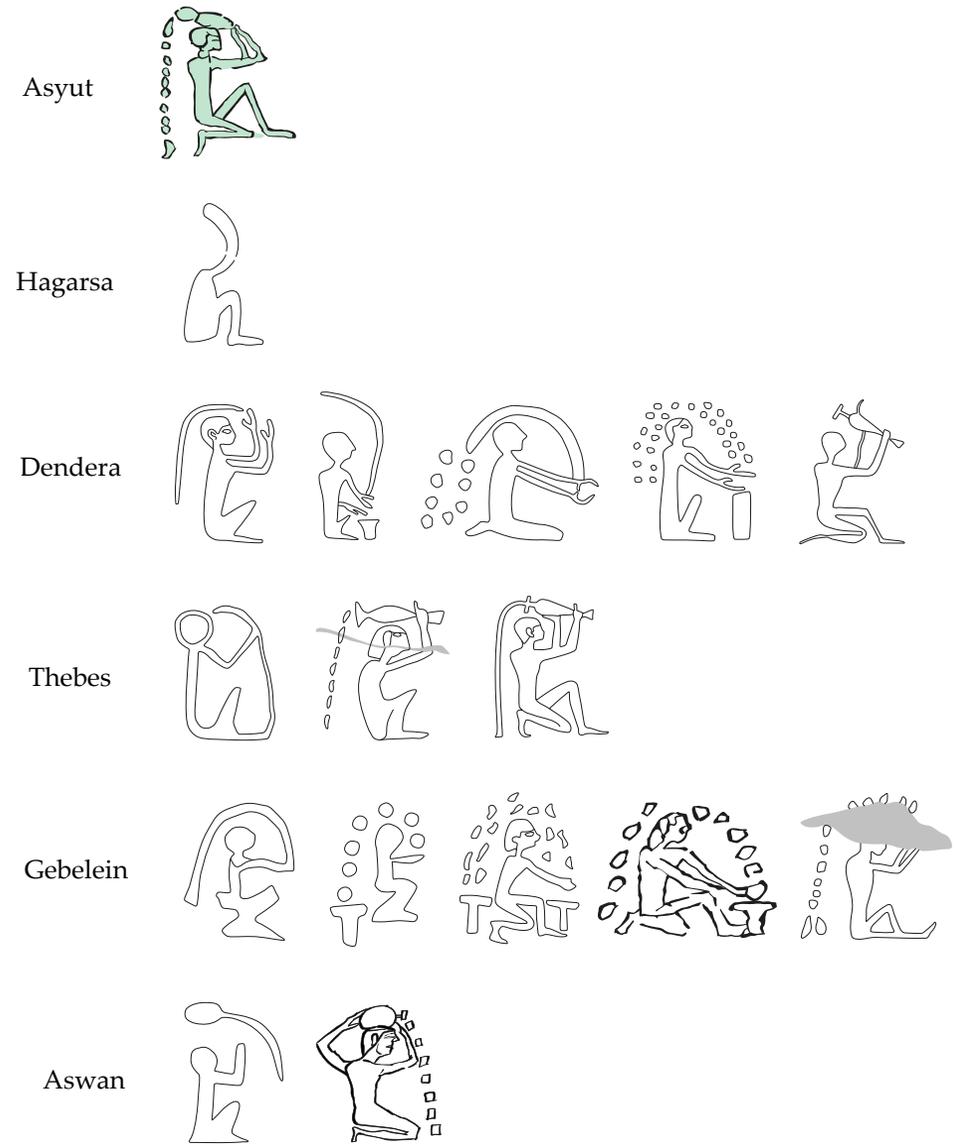
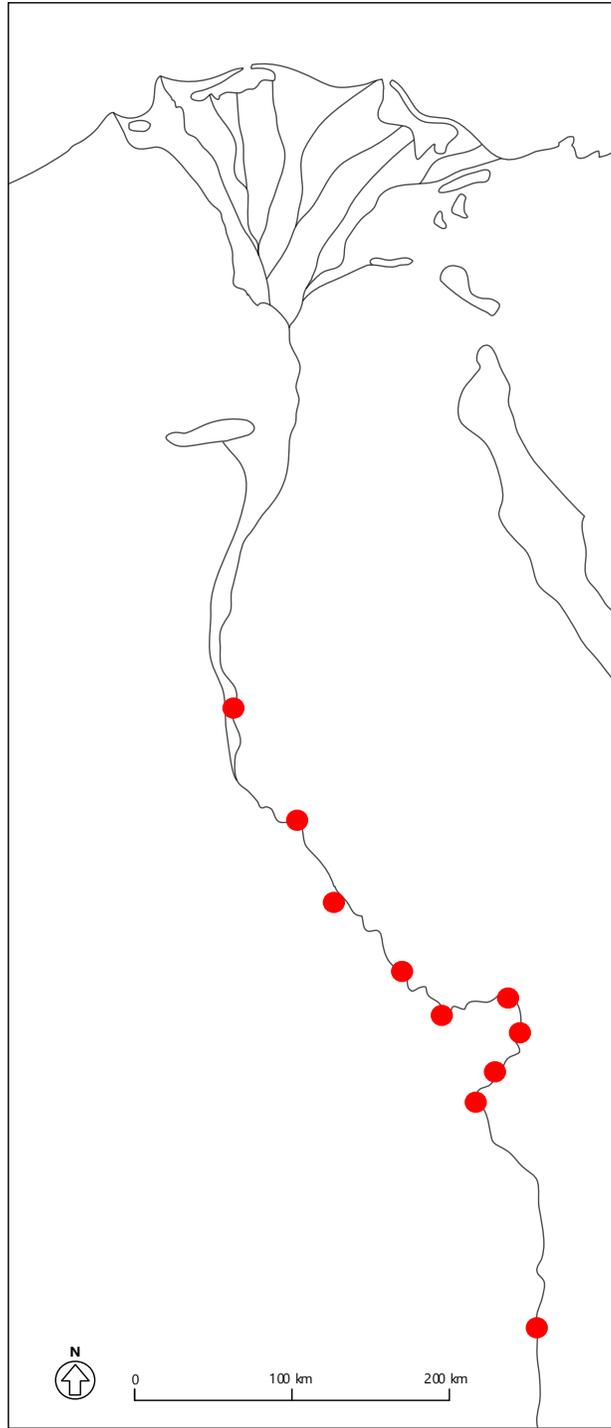
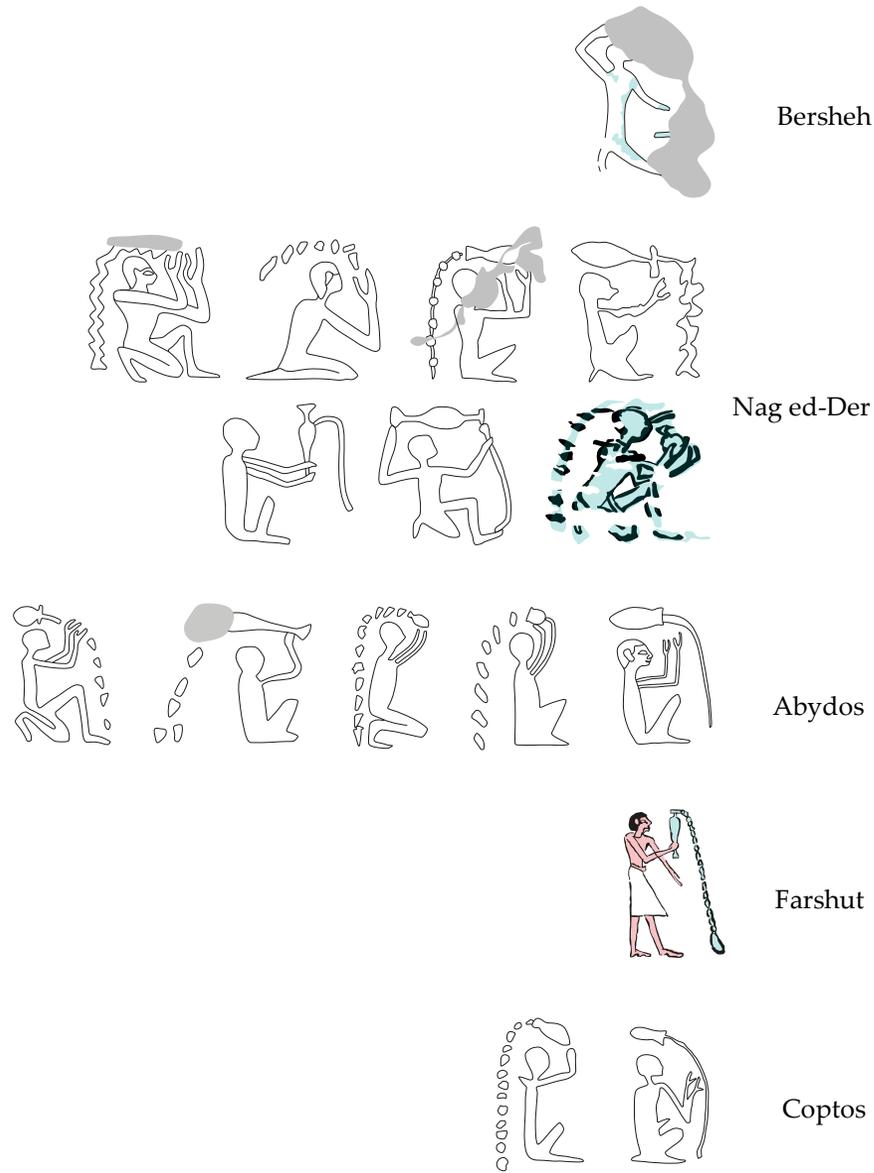


W	4	12	8	1	-	2
T	-	-	-	31	-	-
P	-	-	120	7	3	-
M	-	-	62	16	-	-
N	1	-	45	81	-	-
Nt	-	-	18	3	14	5



**IV What the heck means ?  
Sign shapes during the FIP**



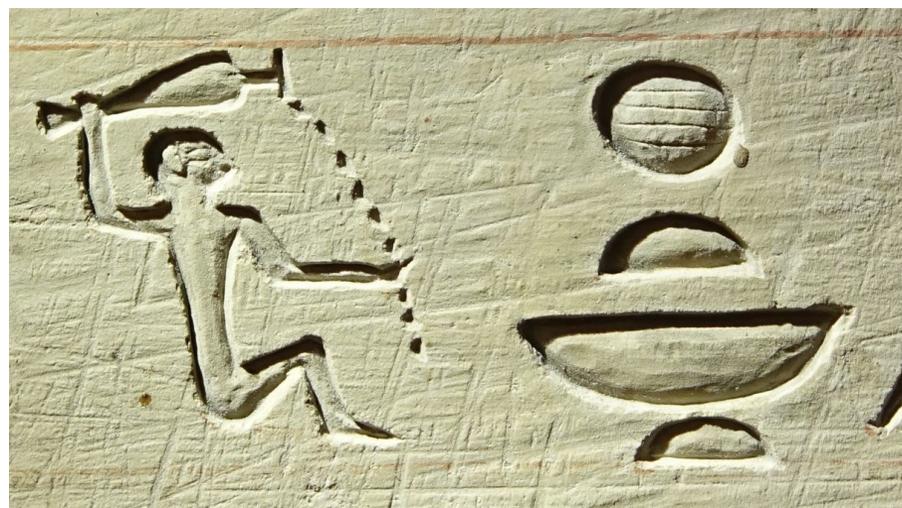




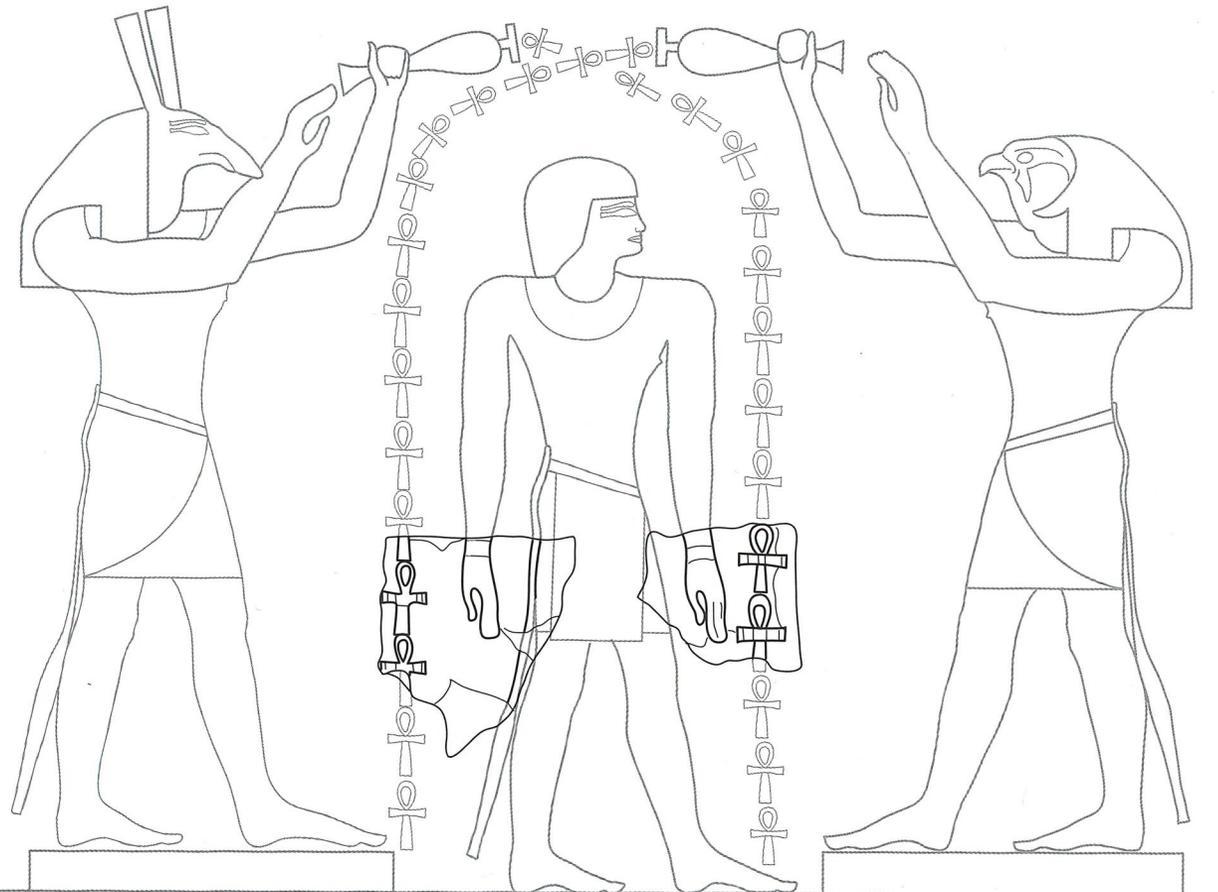
Berlin ÄM 1197, l. 2, from Abydos



Turin S. 13115, from Gebelein ([www.museoegizio.it](http://www.museoegizio.it))



CG 20003, l. 5, probably Middle Egypt



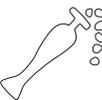
Funerary temple of King Raneferef (Landgráfová 2006, 22; see also Landgráfová 2011)



Turin S. 13115, from Gebelein (www.museoegizio.it)

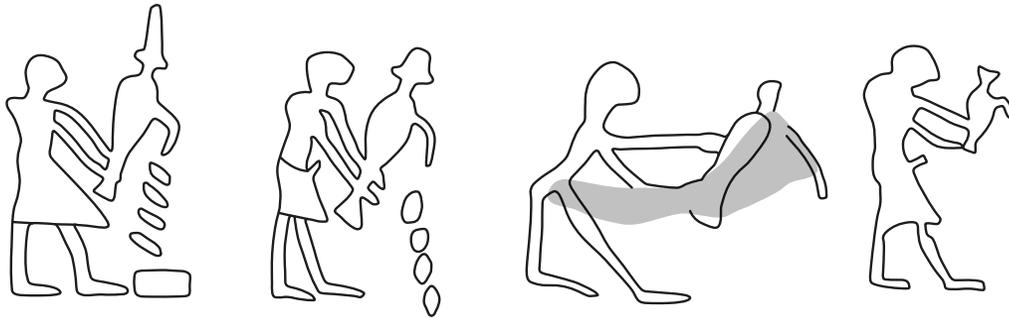


CG 20003, l. 5, probably Middle Egypt

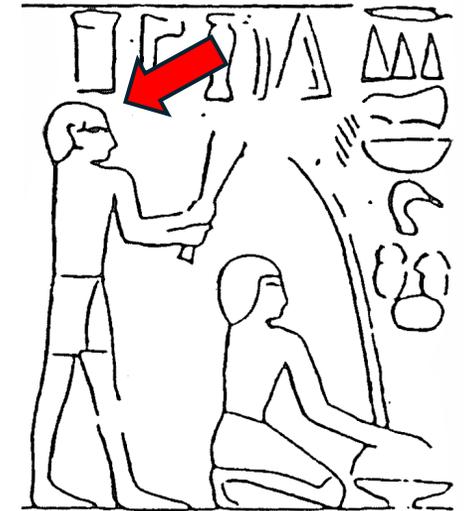
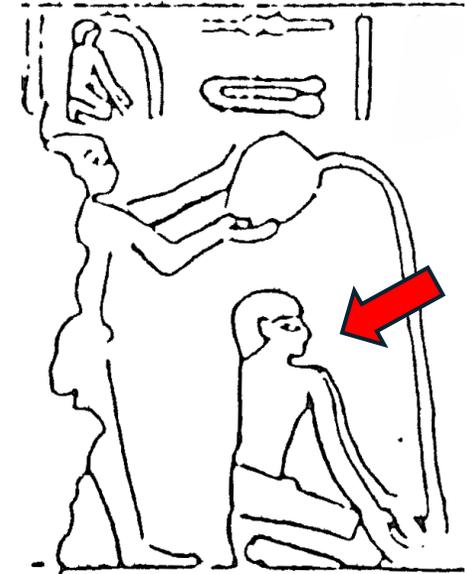
	OK	QH OK-FIP	Thebes FIP	Dendera FIP	Akhmim XI	Bersheh XI
PURE			   	     		
LIBATING		    	   	          	 	



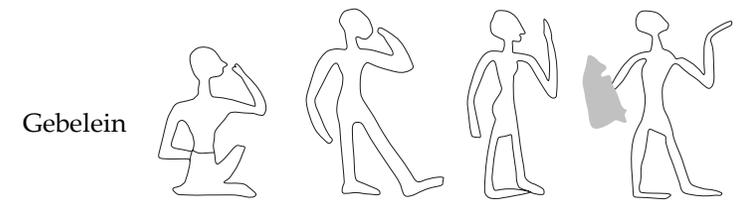
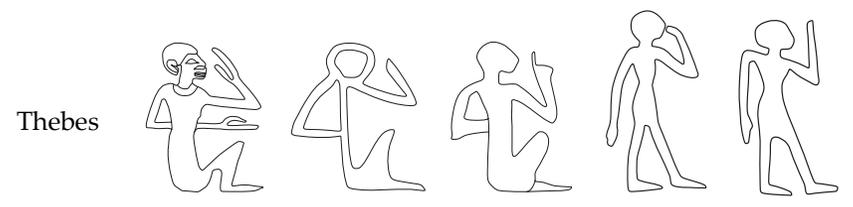
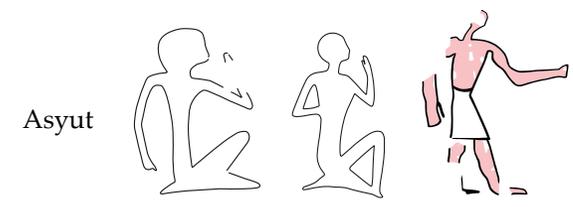
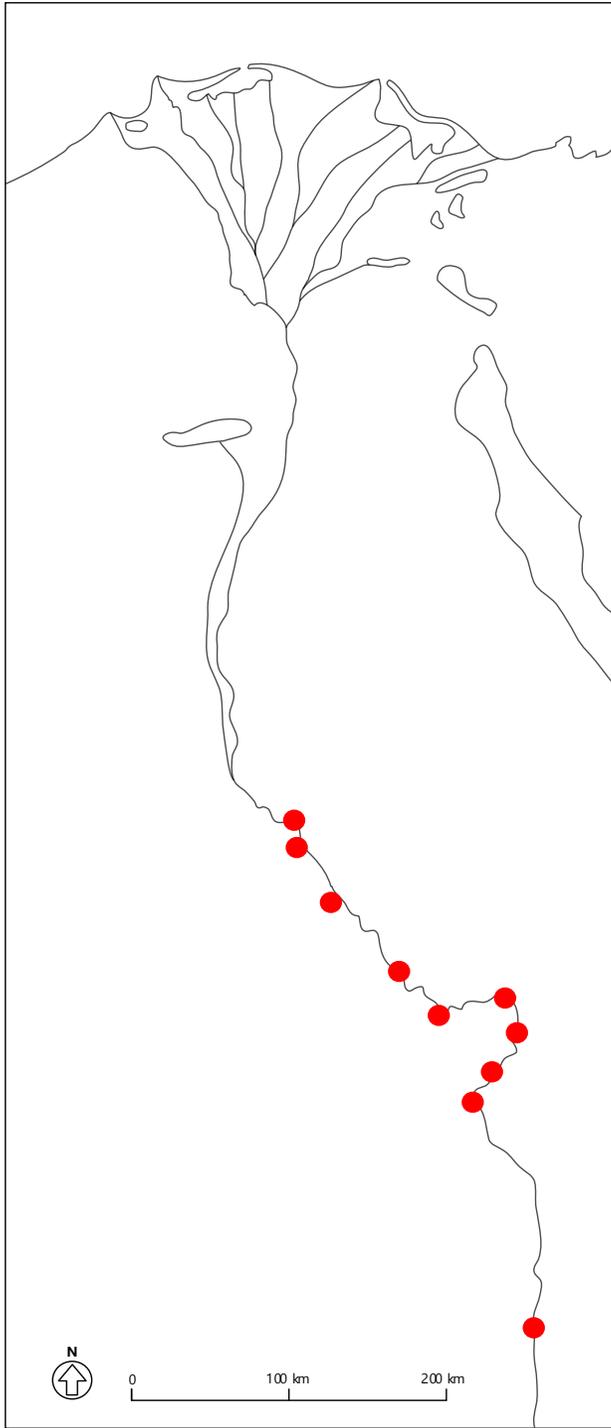
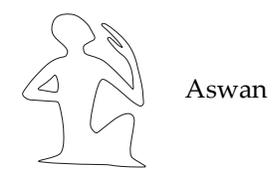
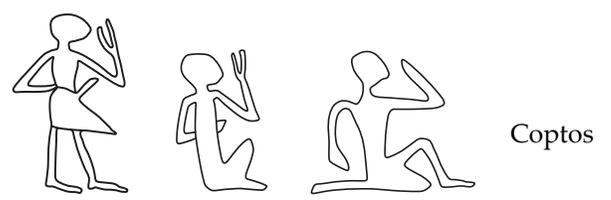
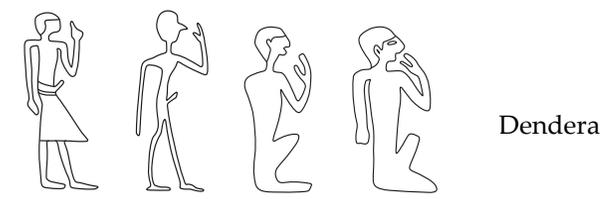
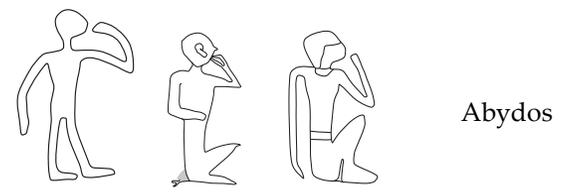
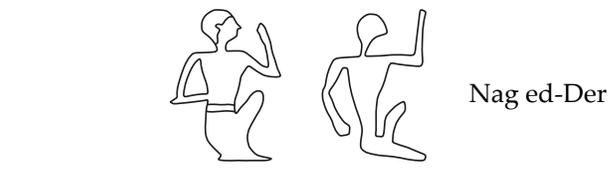
CG 1435, l. 39



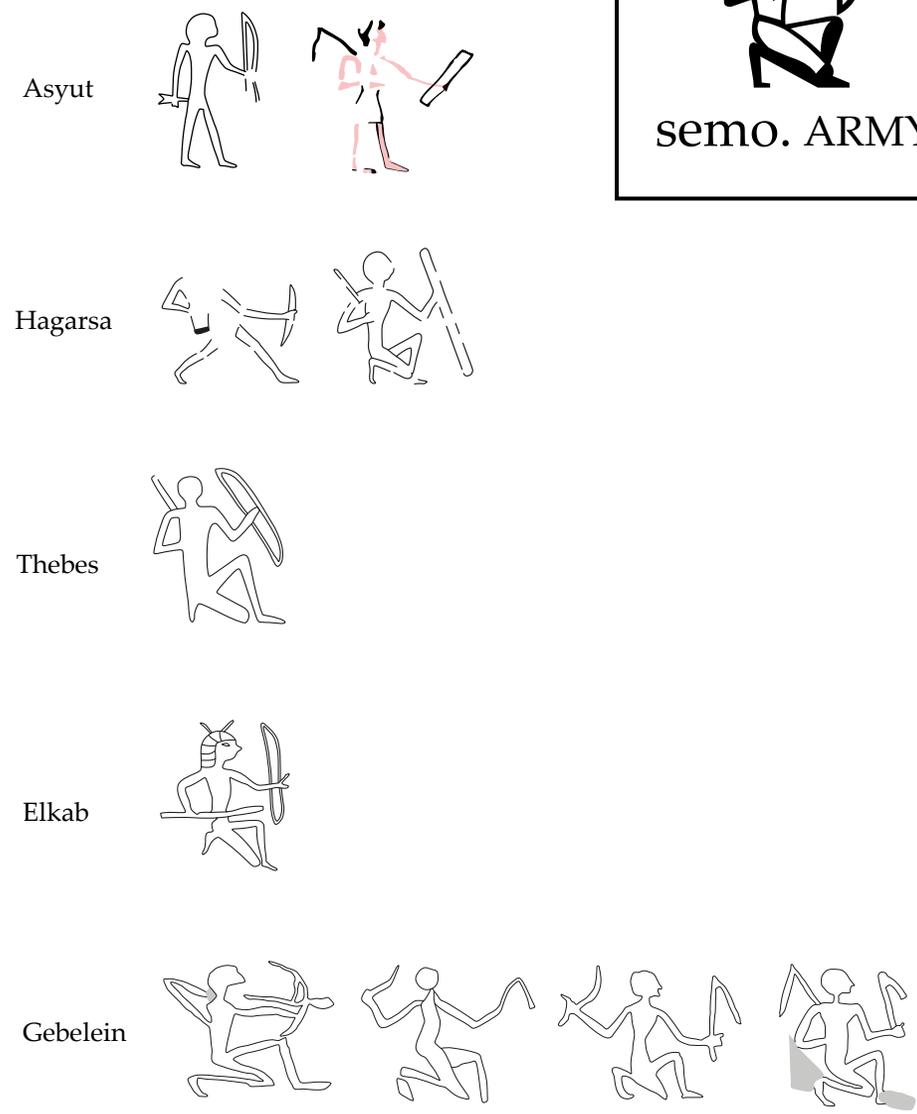
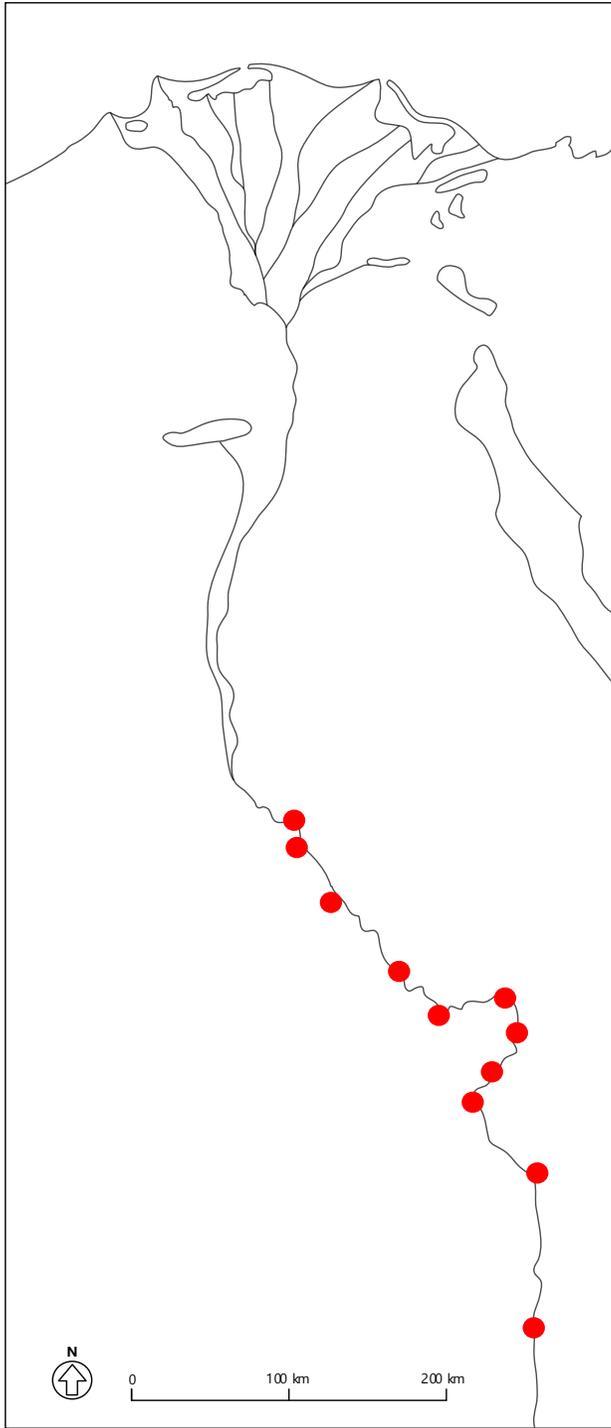
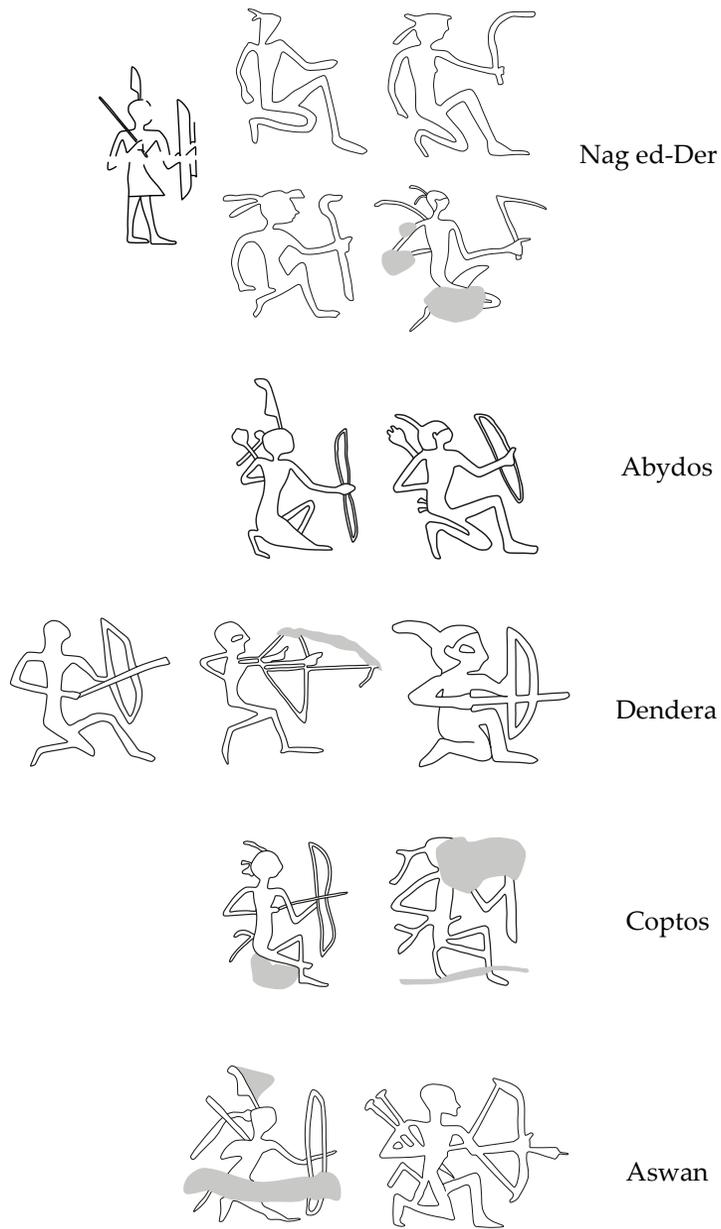
Bolton 1898.56.35; CG 1664; UPMAA 29.66.699; architrave of *ḥtp.j*



Säve-Söderbergh 1994, pl. 20 & 22



semo. EATING  
SPEAKING

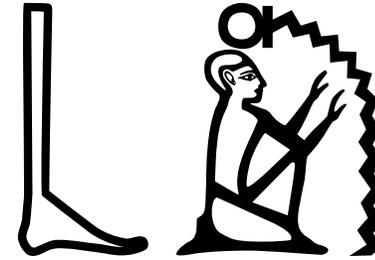




autonomous



Architrave of *hr.j-mr.w*, UPC



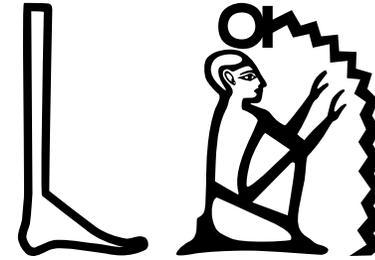
non autonomous



Decree Coptos C

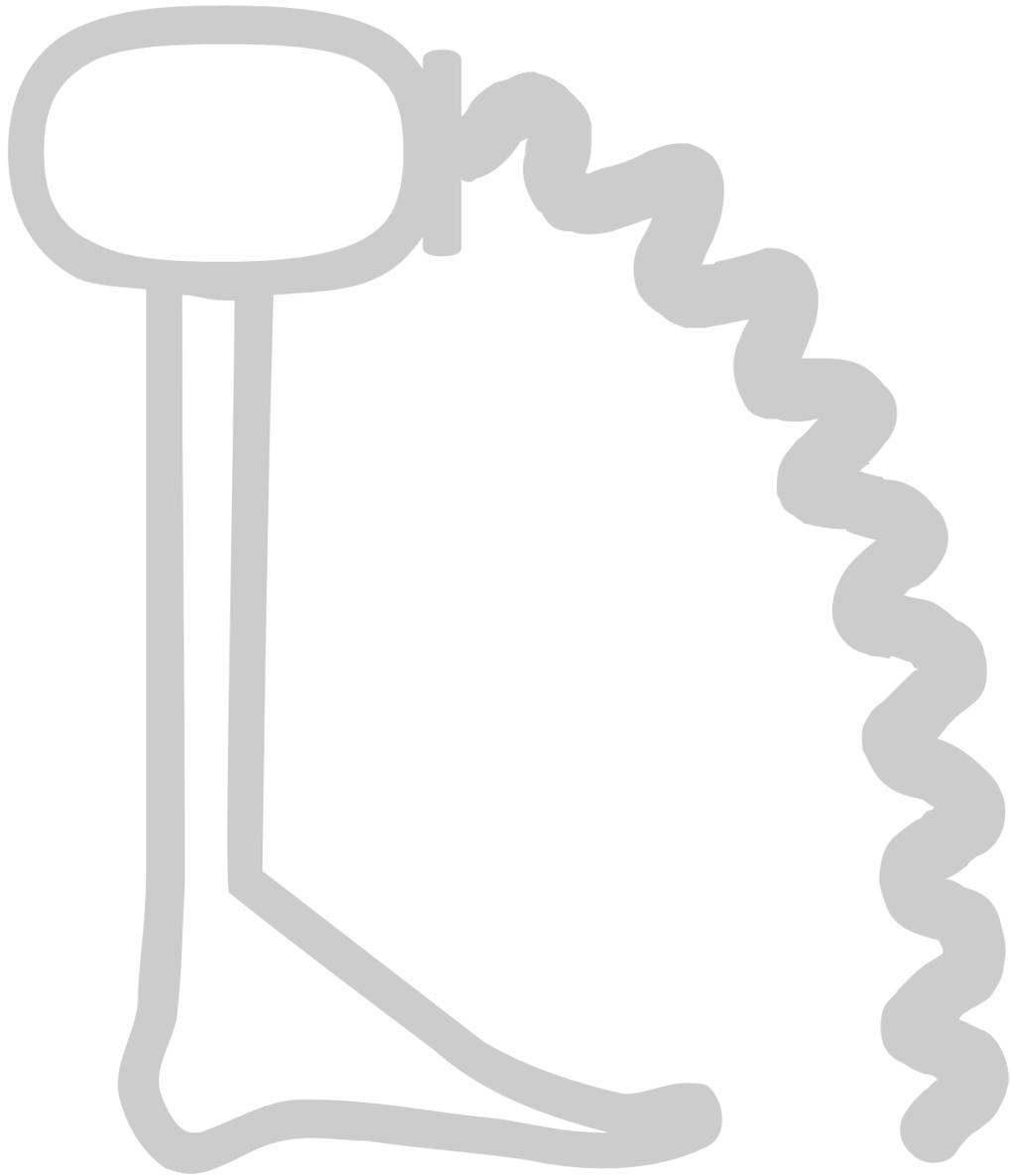


autonomous



non autonomous

	IV-V	VI-VII	FIP
noun <i>wb</i> "priest"			
adjective <i>wb</i> "pure"		rare	rare
adjective <i>wb</i> "pure" in proper names	rare	rare    rare	∅



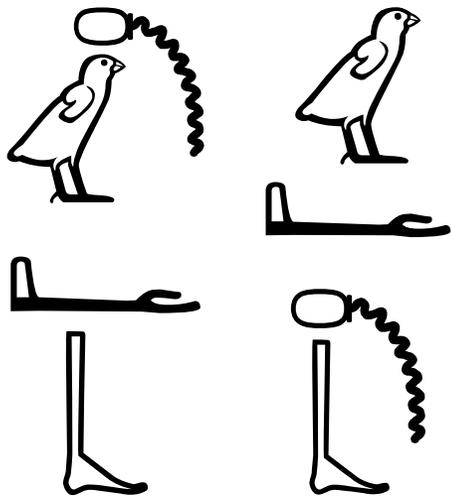
**V The emergence of  during the mid-11th Dynasty**



suppression of human figure



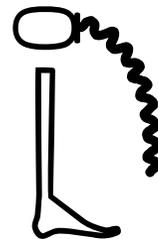
Pyramid Texts



autonomous use as logogram



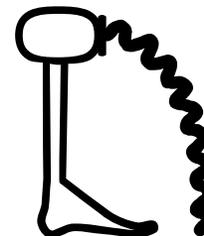
11th Dynasty

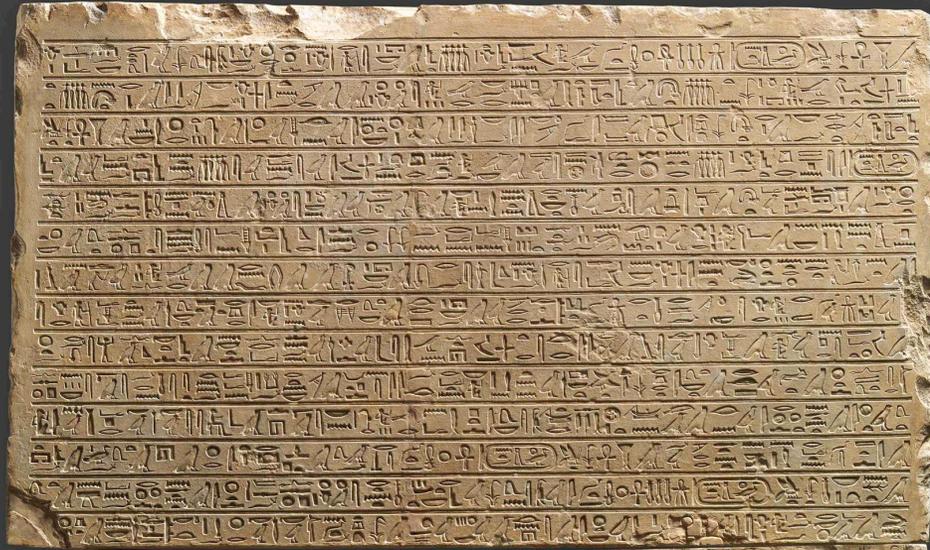


merge of compounds

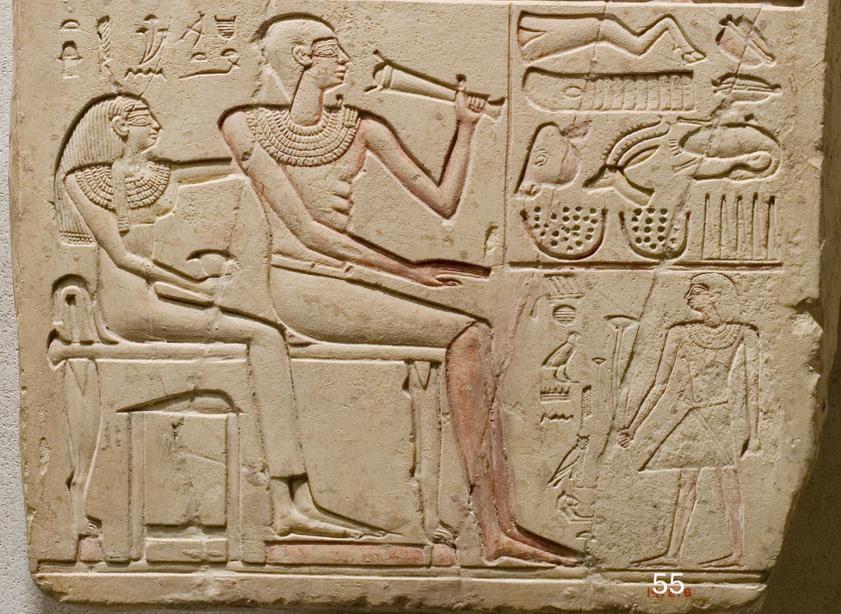
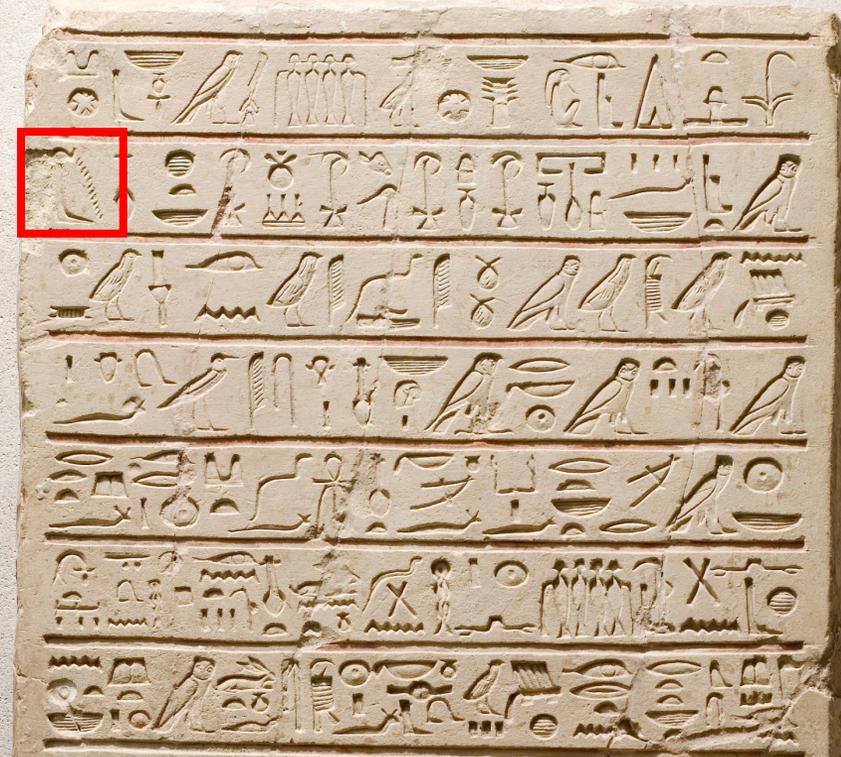


11th Dynasty

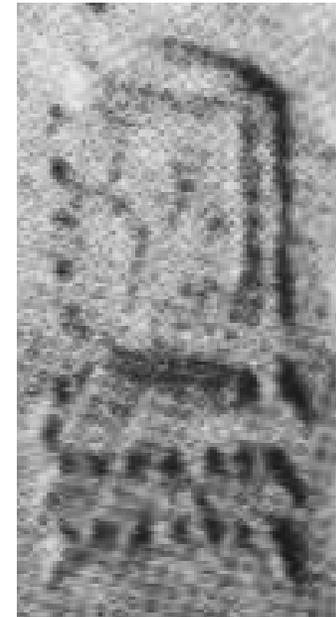




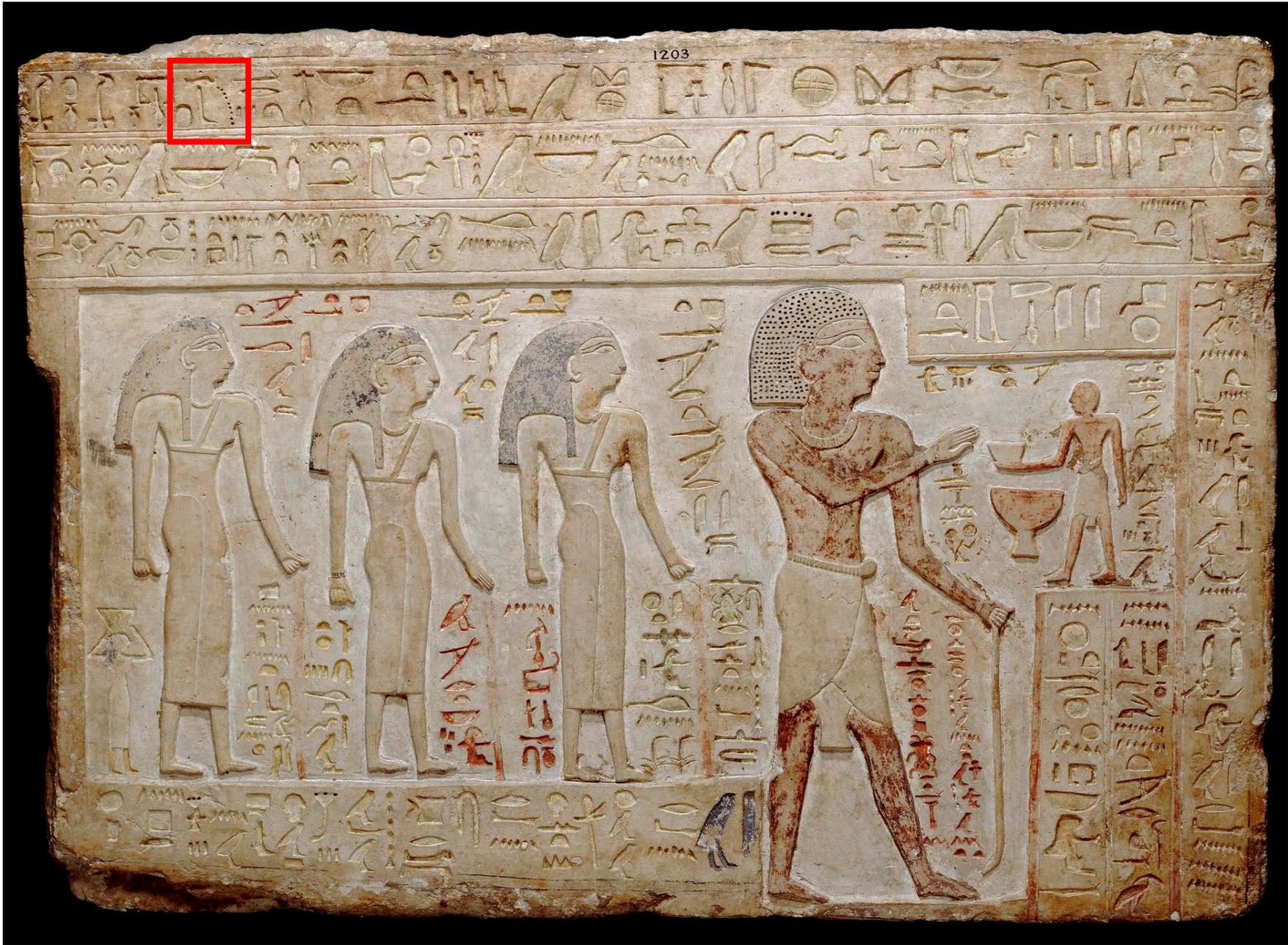
BM EA 614 ([www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org))

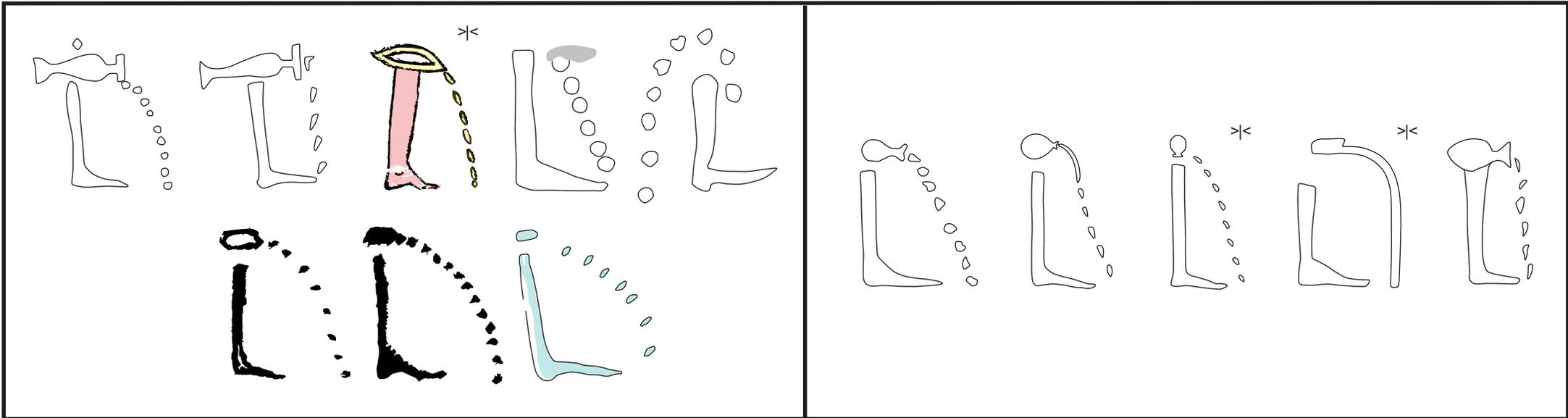


MMA 14.2.6 ([www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org))

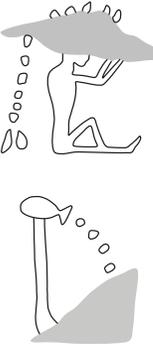
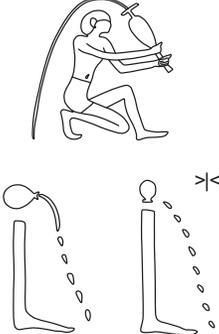
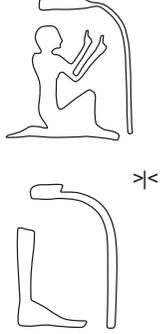


Stela ex Clandeboye Hall (Edwards 1965, pl. XI)





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

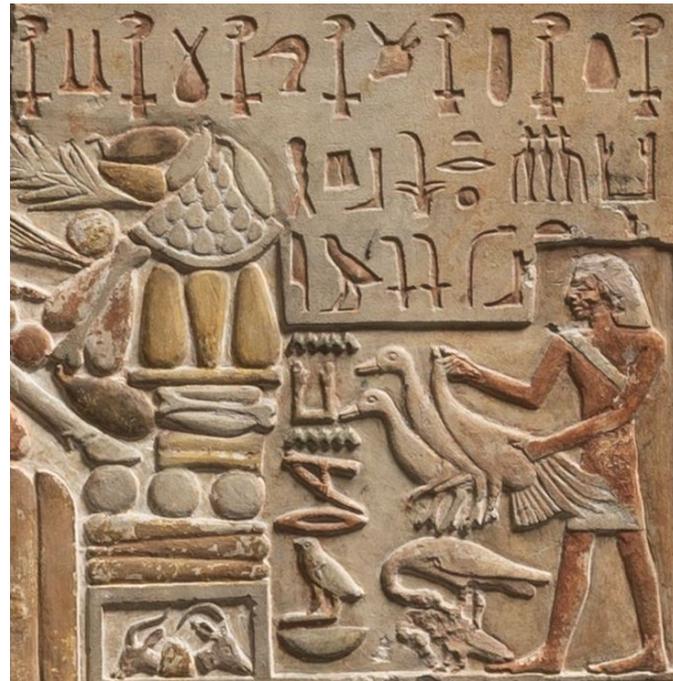
Aswan	Ar mant(?)	Thebes	Farshut	Abydos		Bersheh
A1C	ÆIN 1241	JE 47267	MFA 03.1631	CG 20514	Turin Cat. 1447	tomb 17K74/1
						

	<b>anthropomorphic (👤)</b>	<b>podomorphic (👣)</b>
Aswan	divine epithets, offerings	offerings
Ar mant	divine epithet	offerings
Thebes	divine epithets, offerings	divine epithets, offerings
Farshut	divine epithet	offerings, tomb
Abydos	priests, bulls	offerings
Bersheh	deceased	offerings



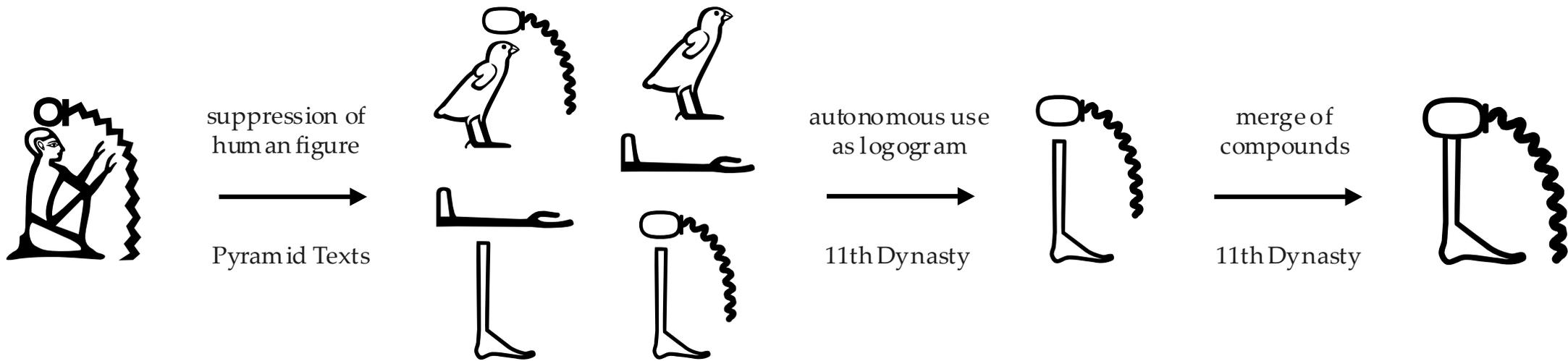
*w<sup>b</sup>.w n.w ntr ḥm.w-ntr nb n ḥd.w*

“the **pure ones** of the Great God and the priests of the Lord of Abydos”



*jw nn w<sup>b</sup>.t*

“These are **pure!**”



## Counterarguments

- different sign functions: classifier *versus* logogram
- large geographic and chronological distance between the two phenomena
- both phenomena can be tracked in their formative phases

*“The influence of hieratic upon hieroglyphic  
was far greater than is usually believed”*

Gardiner 1930, 182

## **VI A new hypothesis**

SPC (II)	
pAbusir (V)	
pElephantine (VI-VIII)	
LtD (IX-X)	
early CT (XI)	
Hatnub (XI)	

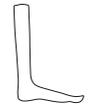
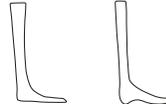
Facsimiles of the hieratograms: Ph. Seyr & AKU

	PURE	HIDING
SPC (II)		
pAbusir (V)		
pElephantine (VI-VIII)		
LtD (IX-X)		
early CT (XI)		
Hatnub (XI)		

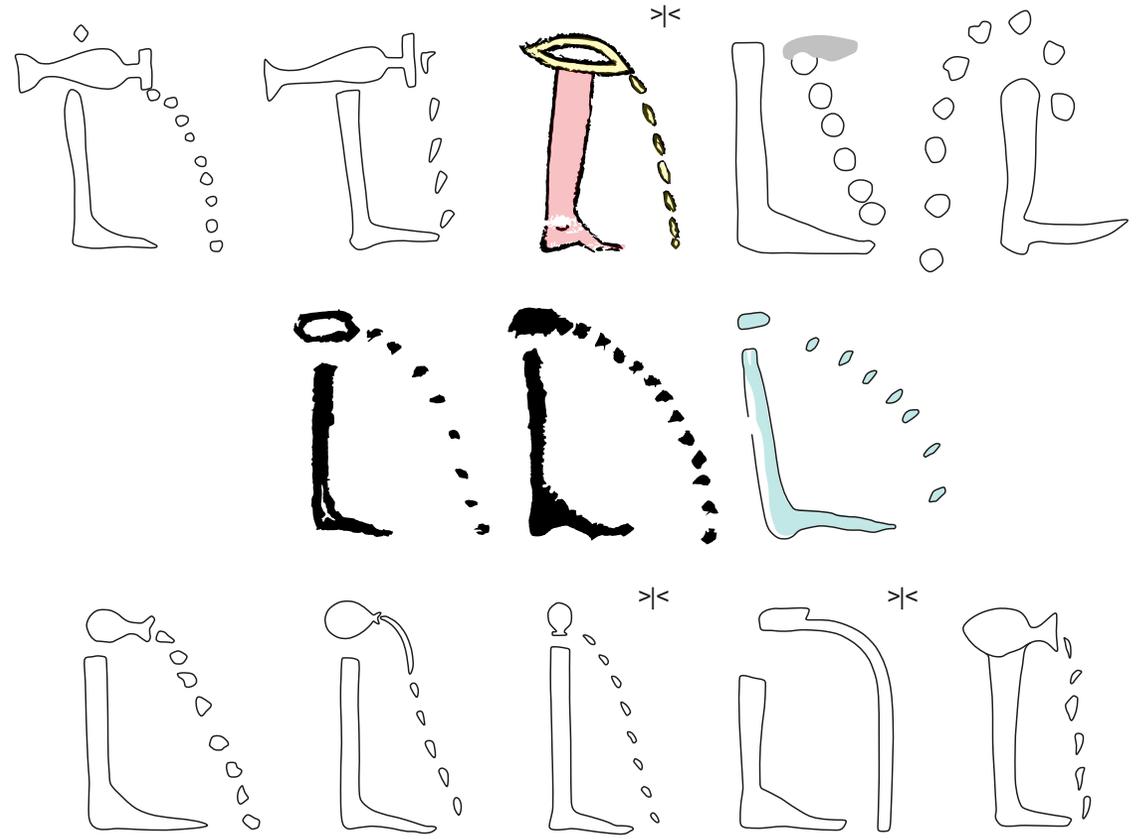
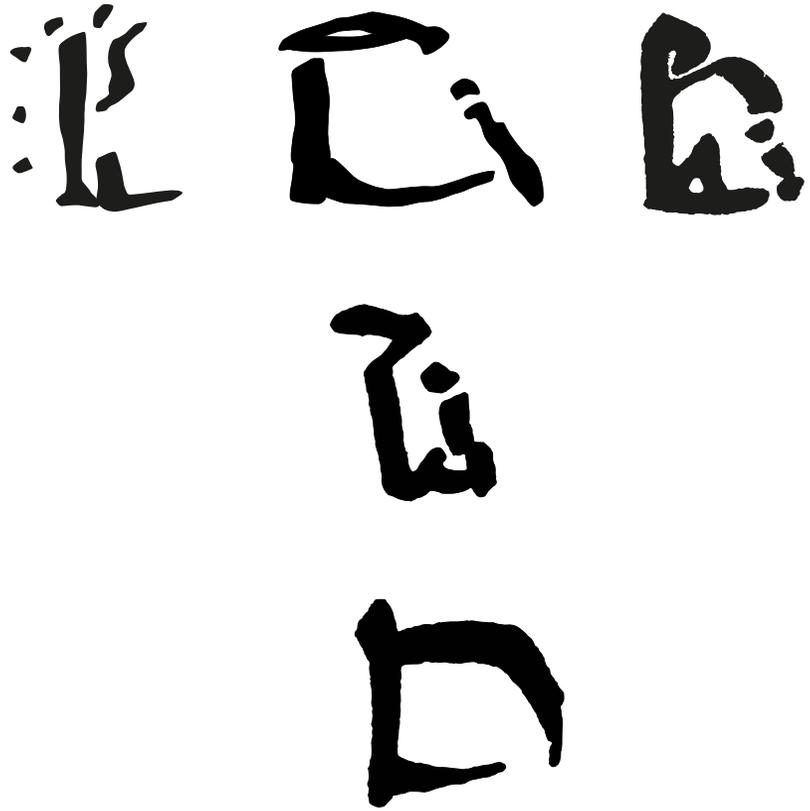
Facsimiles of the hieratograms: Ph. Seyr & AKU

	PURE	HIDING
SPC (II)		
pAbusir (V)		
pElephantine (VI-VIII)		
LtD (IX-X)		
early CT (XI)		
Hatnub (XI)		

Facsimiles of the hieratograms: Ph. Seyr & AKU

	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>	 	 	 	 	  	 

Facsimiles of the hieratograms: Ph. Seyr & AKU

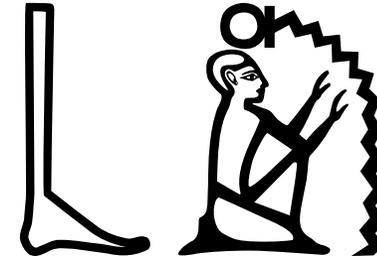




Coffin of *jqr* from Dra Abu el-Naga  
Luxor Museum  
(see Galán 1009)

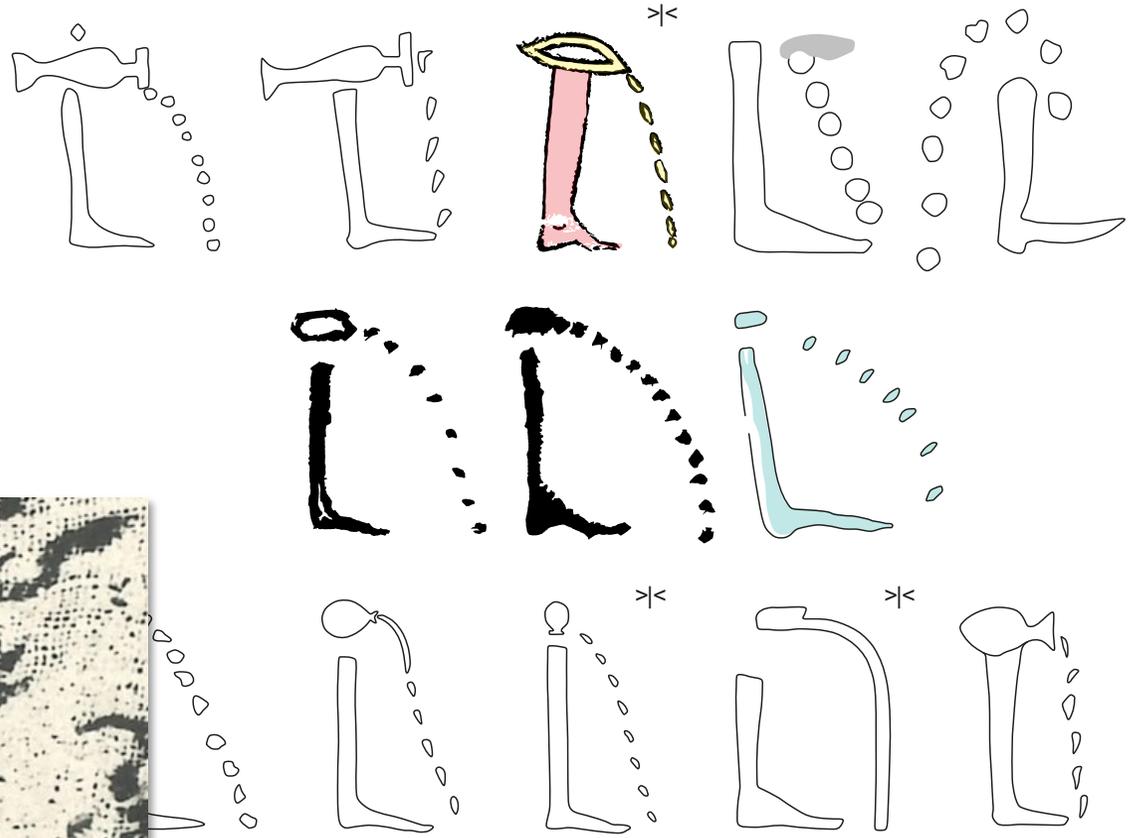
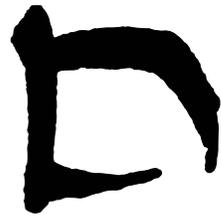
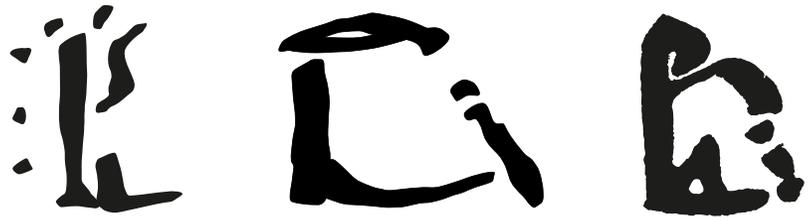


autonomous



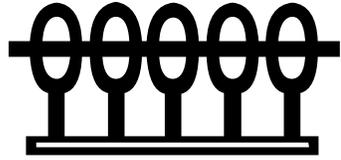
non autonomous

	IV-V	VI-VII	FIP
noun <i>w</i> "priest"			
adjective <i>w</i> "pure"		rare	rare
adjective <i>w</i> "pure" in proper names	rare	rare    rare	∅

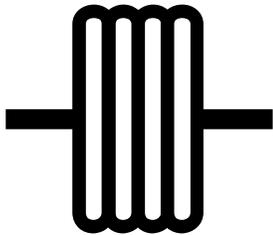


logo. šzp RECEIVING

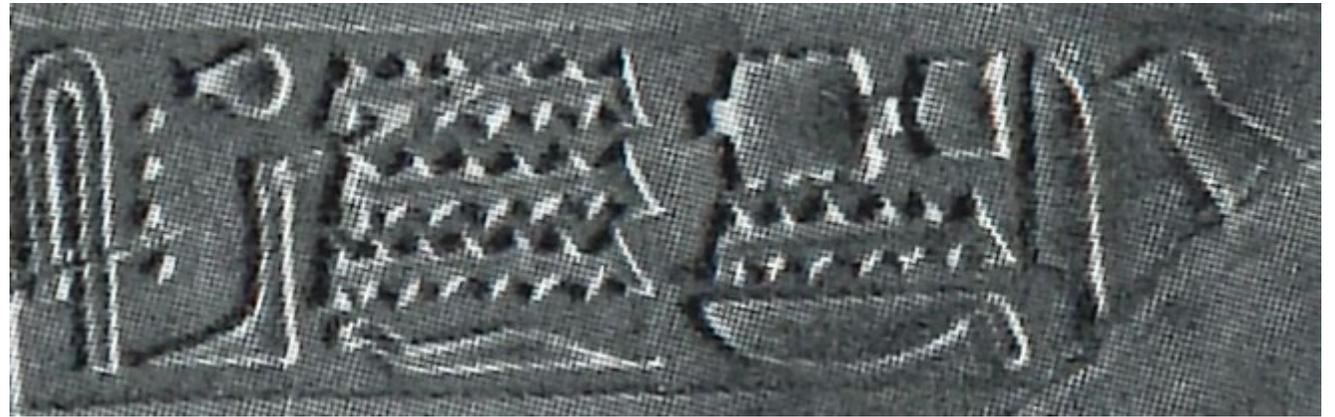
OK



FIP  
Thebes  
Abydos



Louvre C15, l. x+6



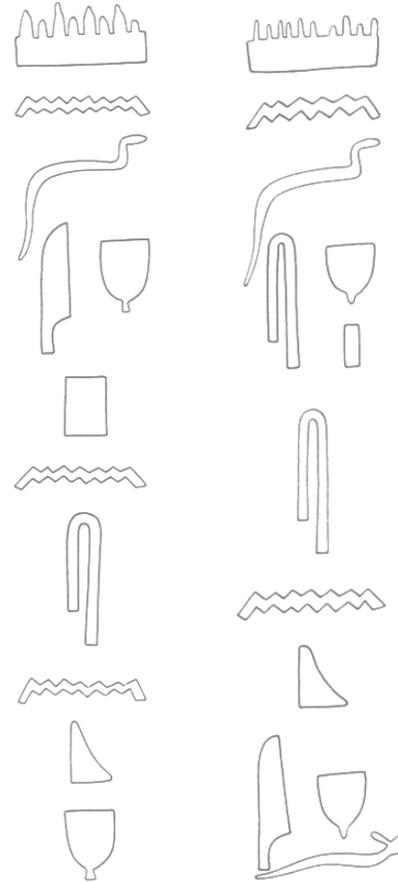
Moscow I.1.a.5603 (Hodjash & Berlev 1982, 69)

semo. BREAST

OK



FIP  
Thebes



Pyr. 1109a-b (P/C med/E 54)

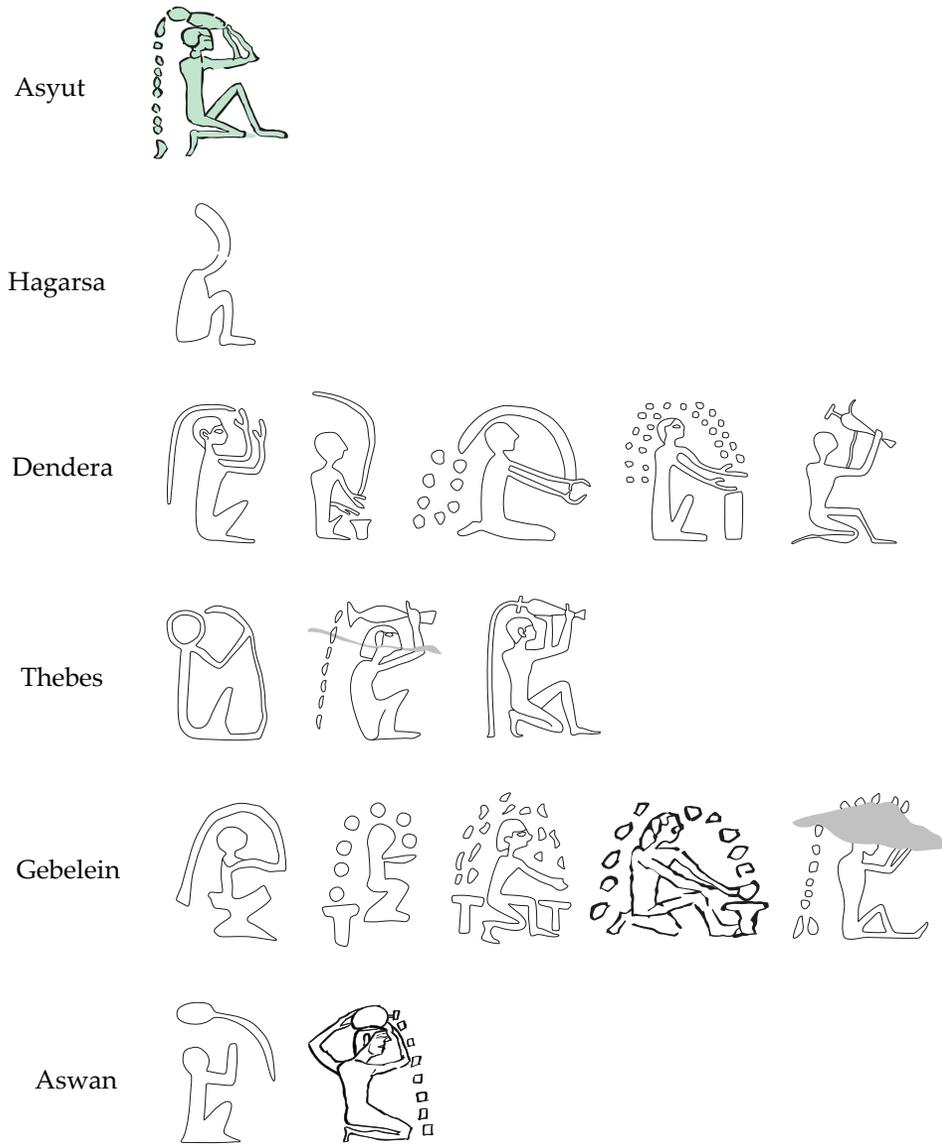
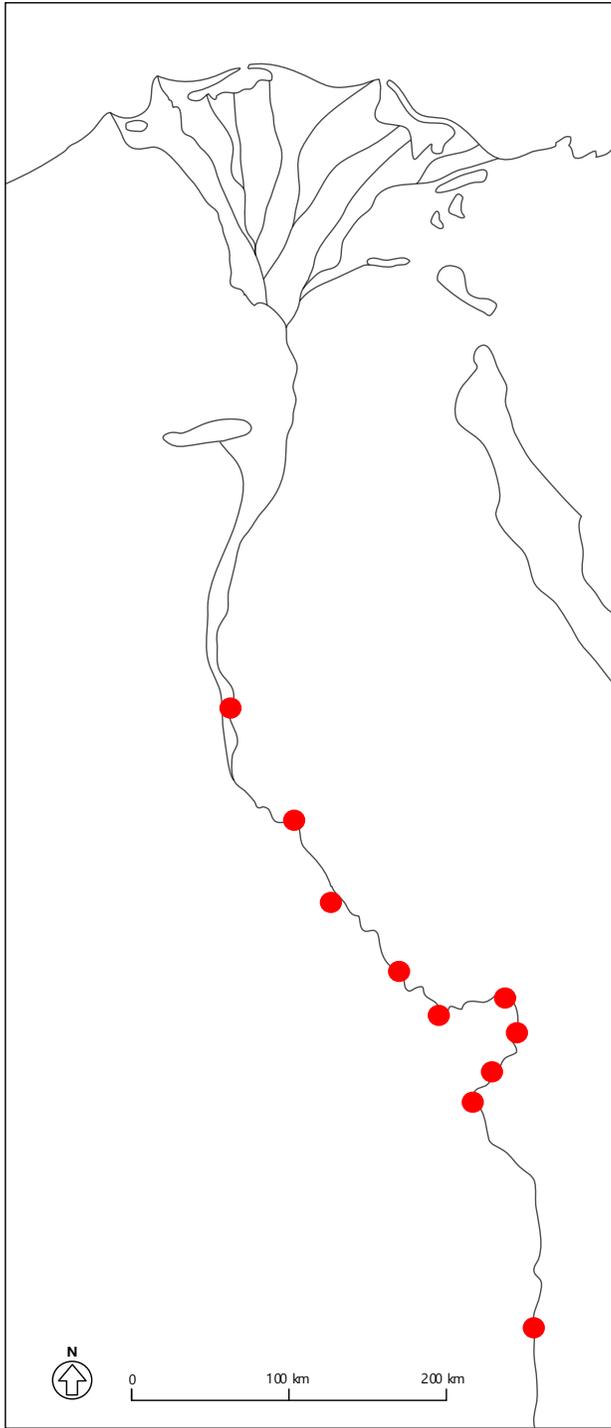
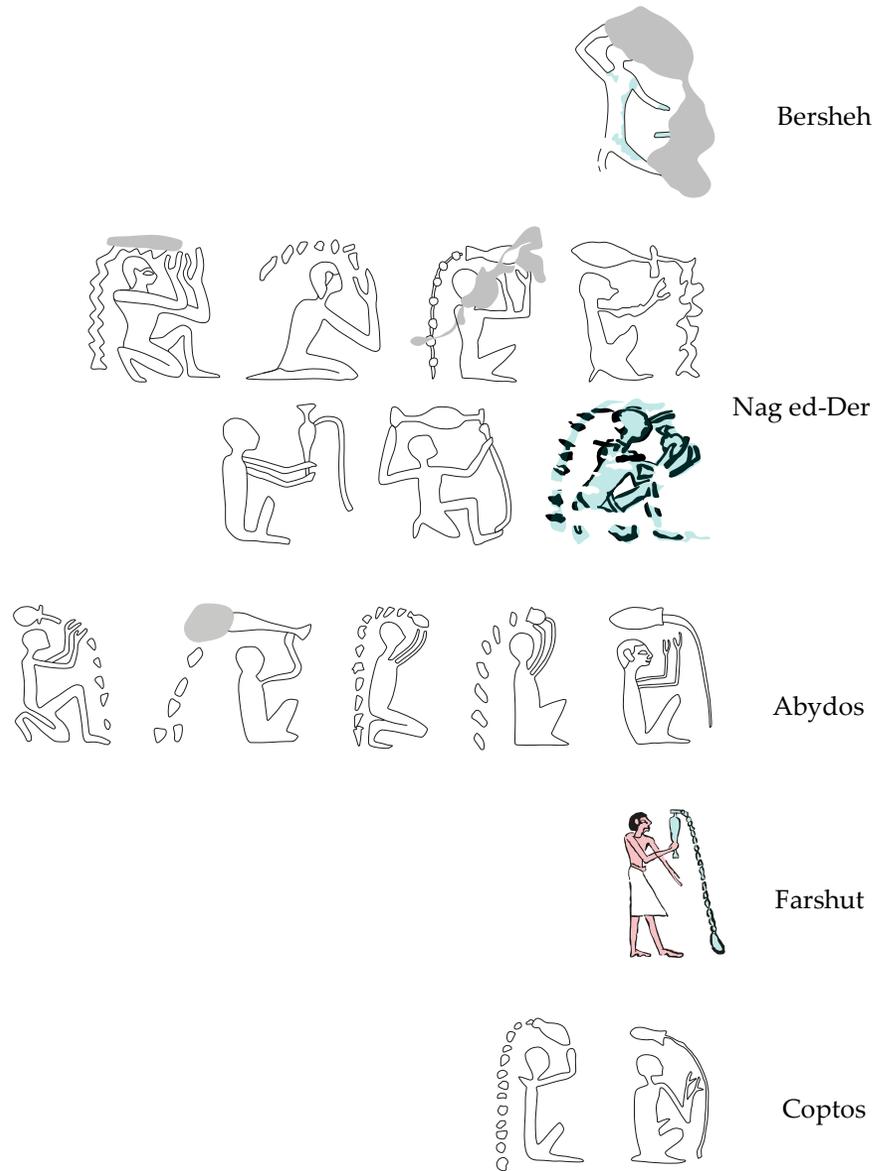


MMA 26.3.29, l. 4-6 (www.metmuseum.org)

	OK	pElephantine	FIP Nag ed-Der (stela groups)					Dyn. XI	
			red	blue	green	<i>mr-jr.ty=f</i>	<i>mny.t=f</i>	Hatnub	Aaschyf
ARMY	 								
CHILD									
SITTING									

The posture changes of many any anthropomorphic signs during the FIP are reinterpretations based on cursive interdependencies!

**VII Final thoughts:  
the iconicity of **

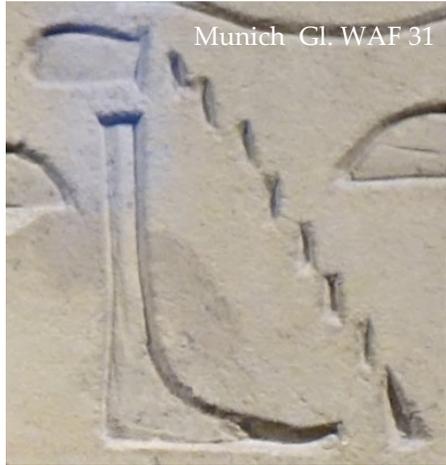
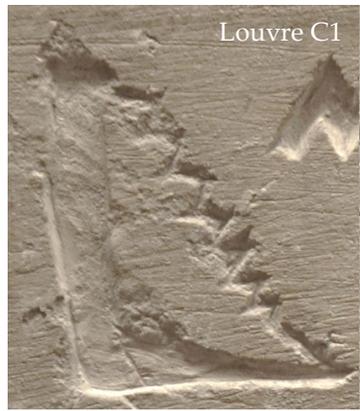


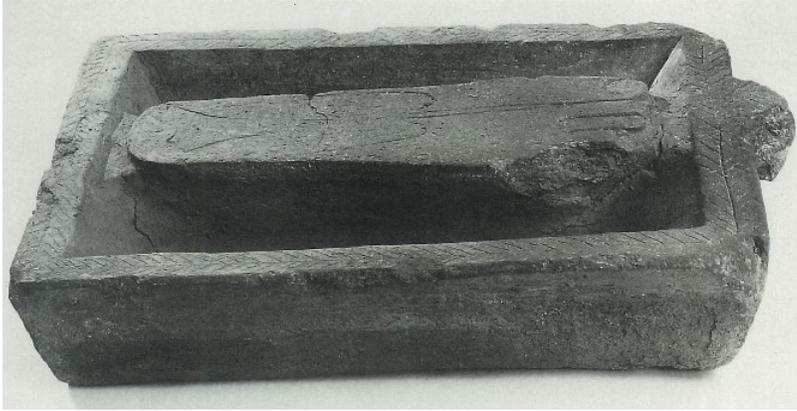


Decree Coptos D ([www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org))



JE 47267, FOut 1

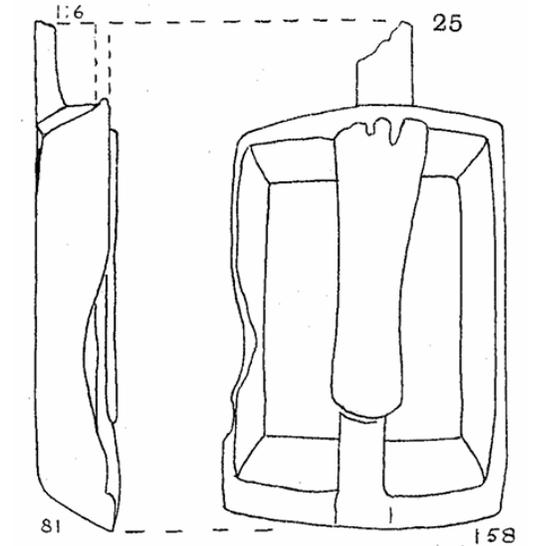
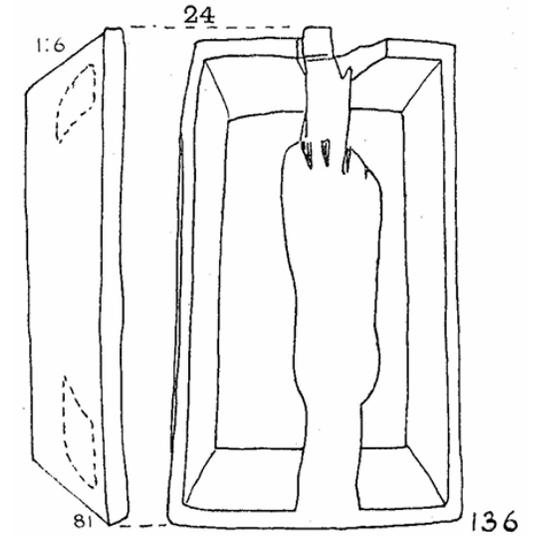




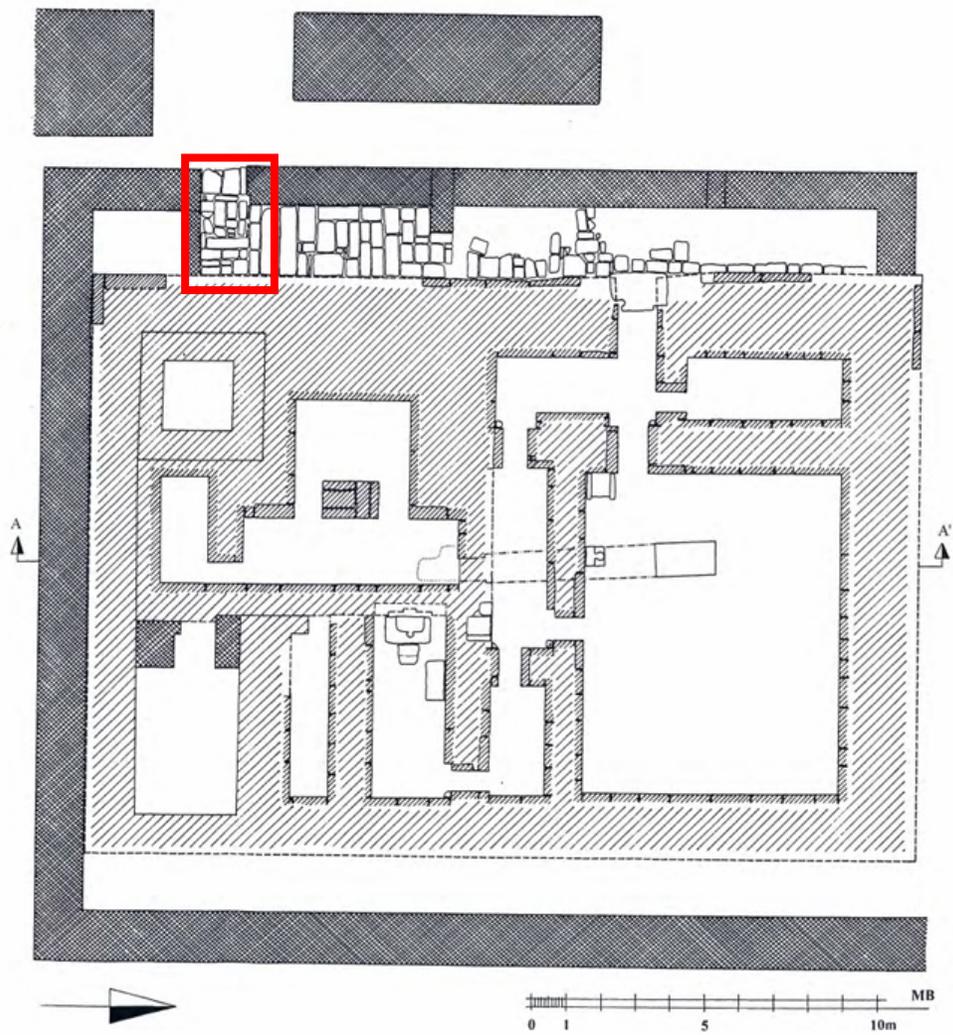
ÄMUL 2339, Abusir  
(Krauspe 1998, pl. 60, no. 158)



Tomb of *r'-hṯp*, Meidum; BM EA 1277  
([www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org))



Wooden footbaths from Tarkhan  
(Petrie, Wainwright & Gardiner 1913, pl. XI.24-25)



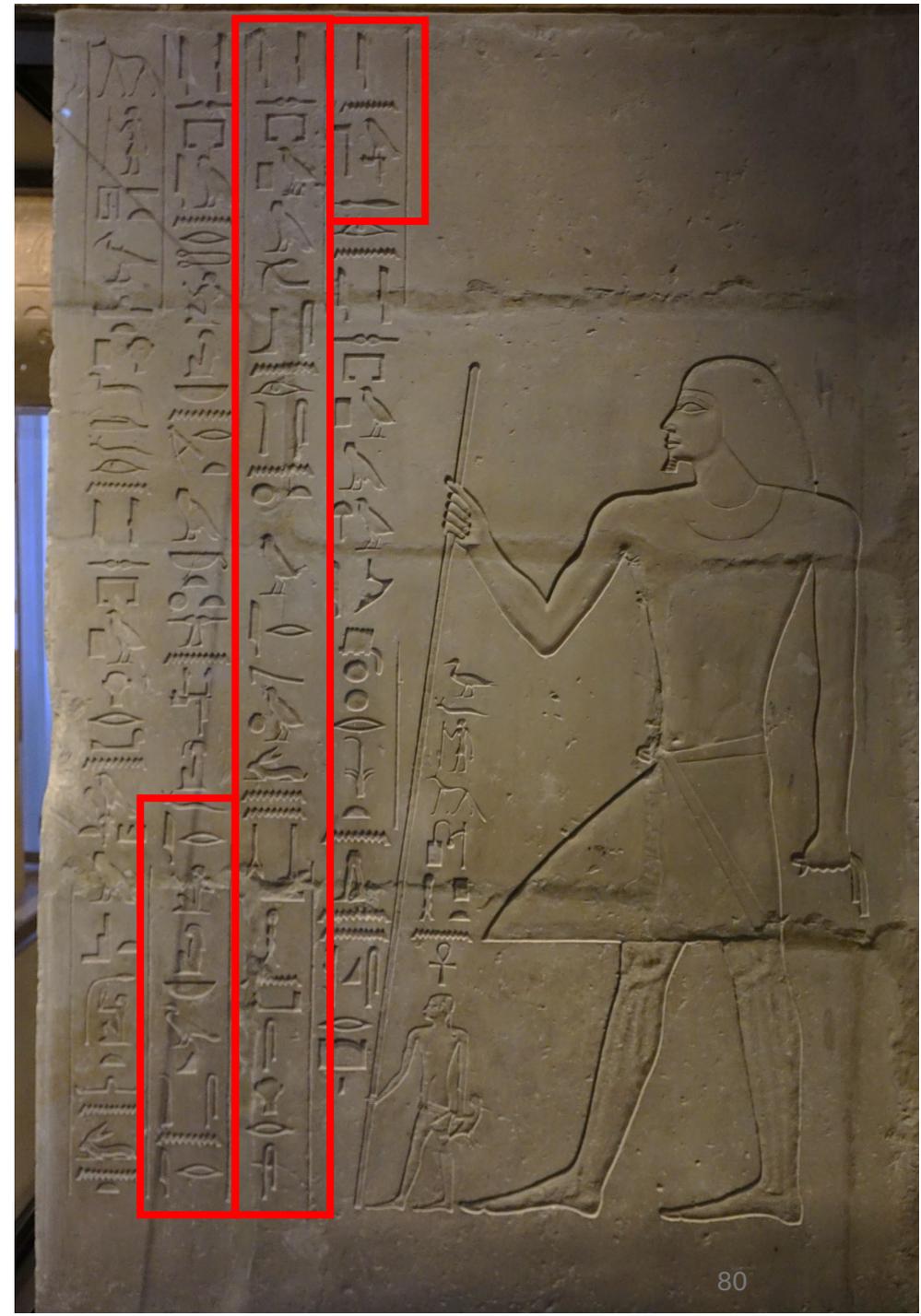
Mastaba of Ptahshepses Junior II (Bárta 2000, 47, fig. 2 & 48, pl. 2)  
kindly pointed out to me by A. delli Castelli

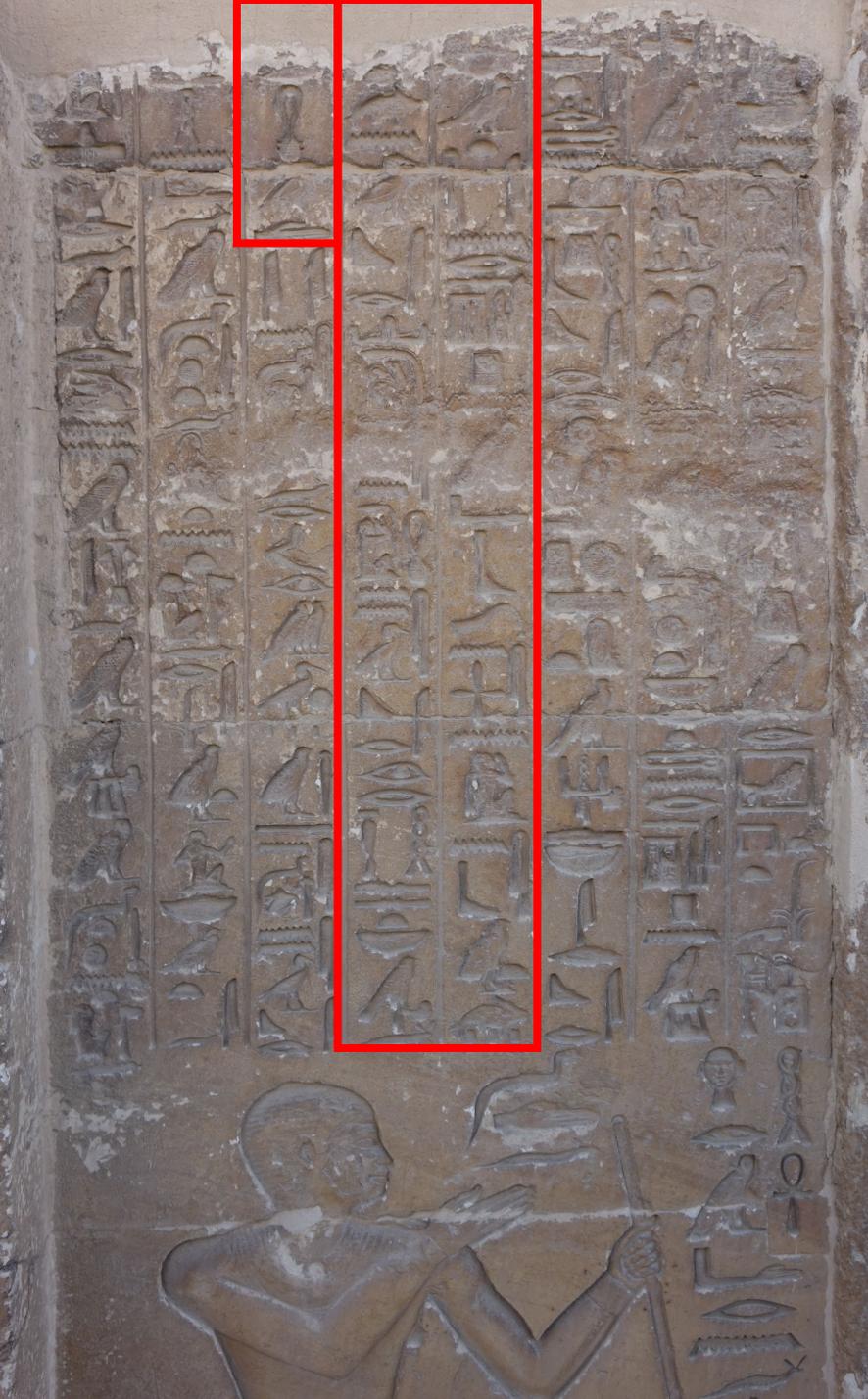


*jr rmt nb k.tj=sn jr jz pw m bw=sn  
jr.tj=sn (j)h.t dw[.t] jr nzw  
wnn wd'-mdw hn's{n} hr=s jn ntr 3*

“As to every person who will enter this tomb in **purity** and/or  
who will do anything bad against this  
judgement will be held with them because of it by the great God.”

Tomb of *htp-hr-h.ty*, Leiden Museum (*Urk. I*, 50.16-51.1)





[jr rmt] nb 'k.tj=sn jr jz pn m bw=sn  
wnm=sn bw.wt [bw.y]t n 'h jkr  
nj w b=sn n-mj w b=sn n 'h jkr jrr hzz.t nb=f  
[jw=j r jt t'z].t=f mj 'pd

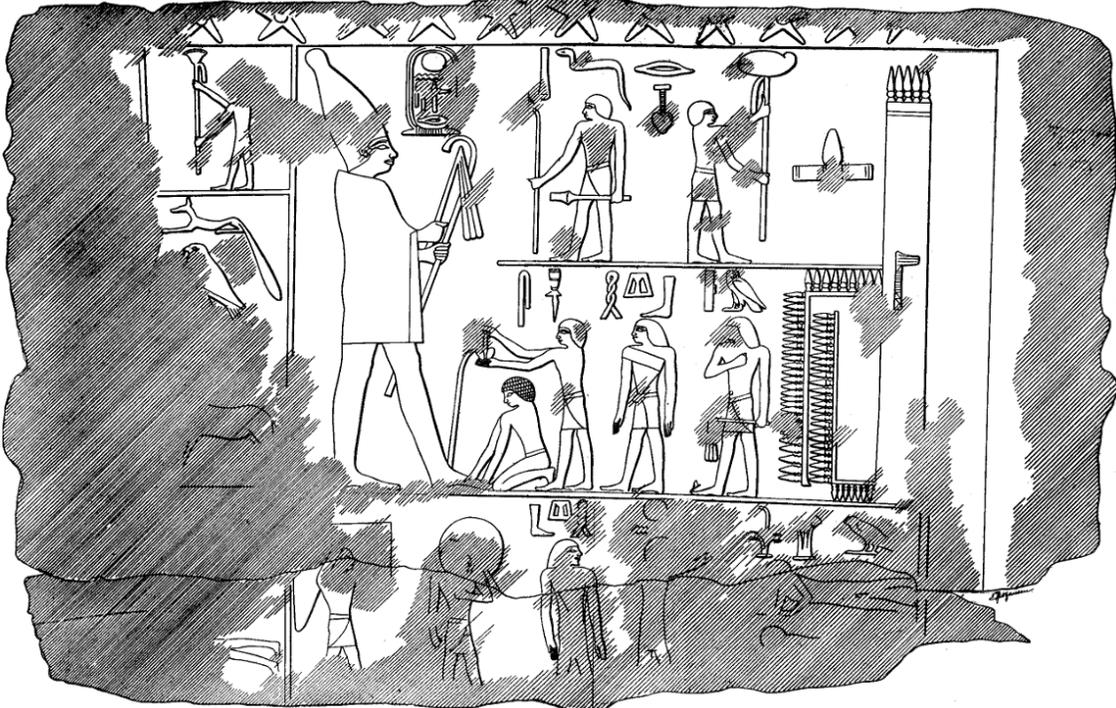
“As to every person who will enter this tomb in **purity**,  
having eaten despiseful thing which are a despise for an  
excellent spirit and/or  
**without being pure like they should be pure for a an  
excellent spirit who does what his lord praises.**

I will take his neck like (that of) a duck .“

Tomb of 'nh-m-'hr.w, TPC, Saqqara (Urk. I, 202.3-6)

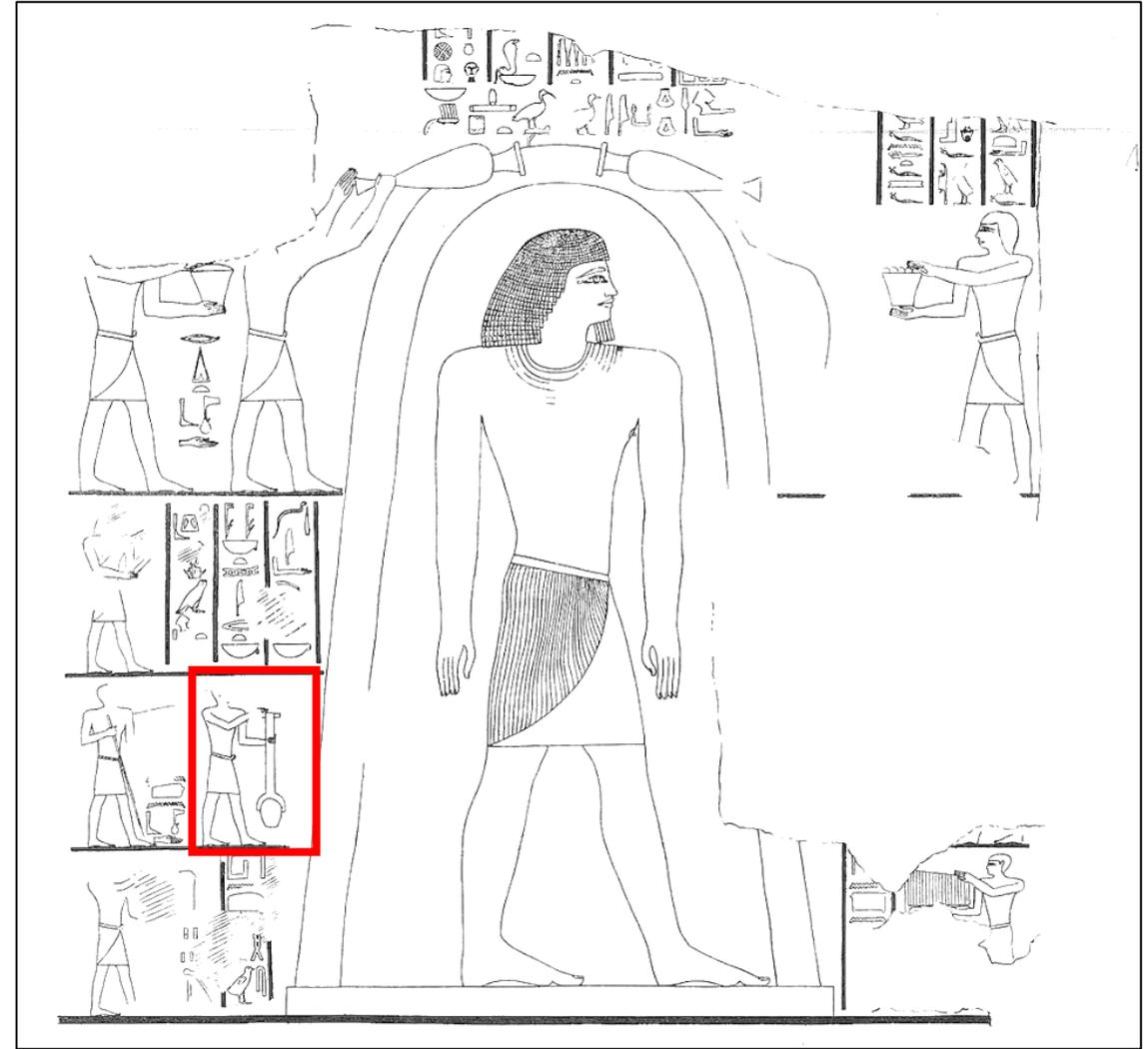
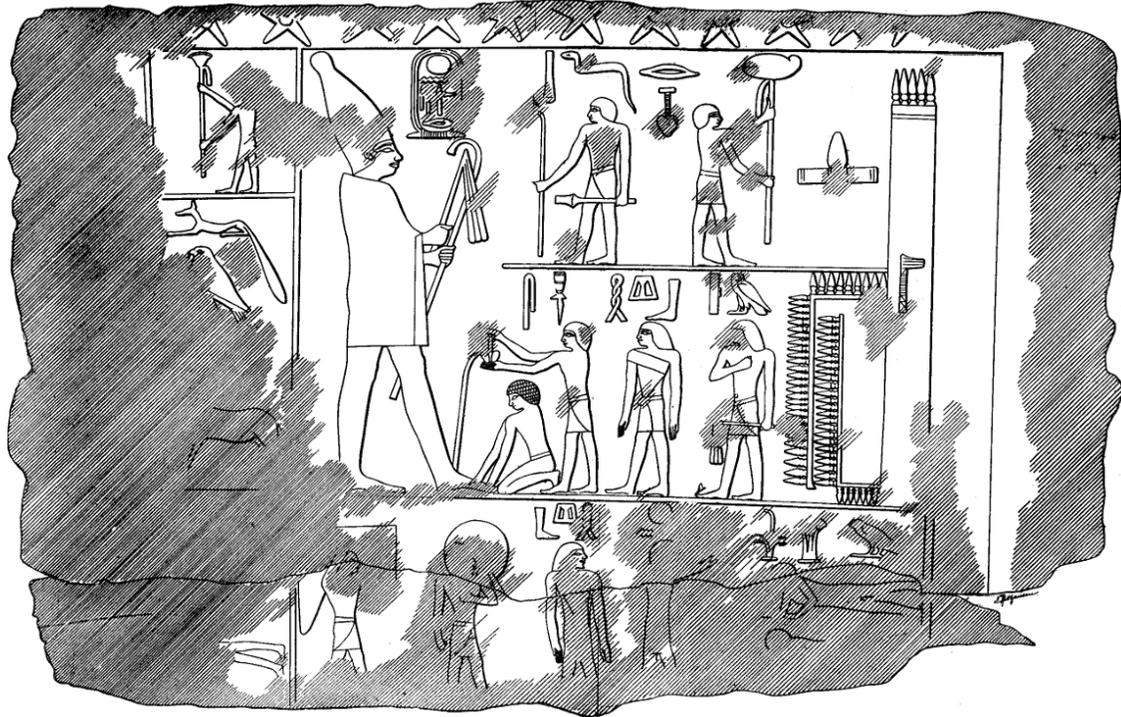


MMA 26.9.12 ([www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org))

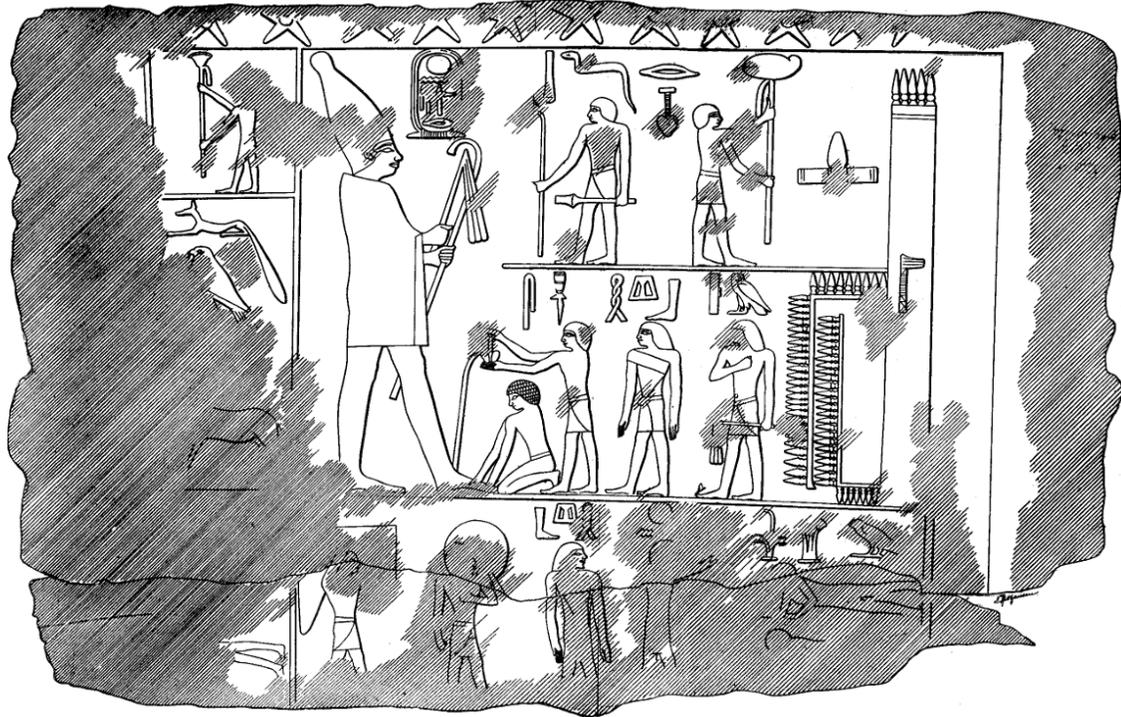
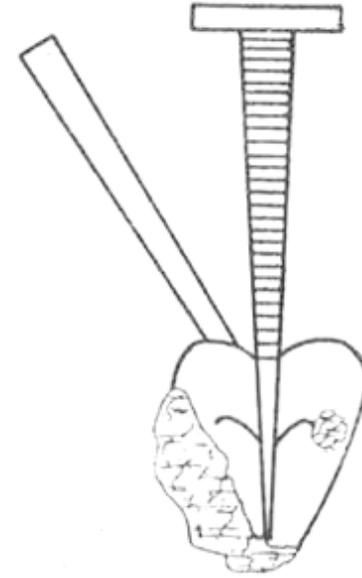


Sun temple of King Niuserra (von Bissing & Kees 1928, nos. 20 & 45a; kindly pointed out to me by A. delli Castelli)





Tomb Bersheh 2 (Newberry 1895, pl. X)

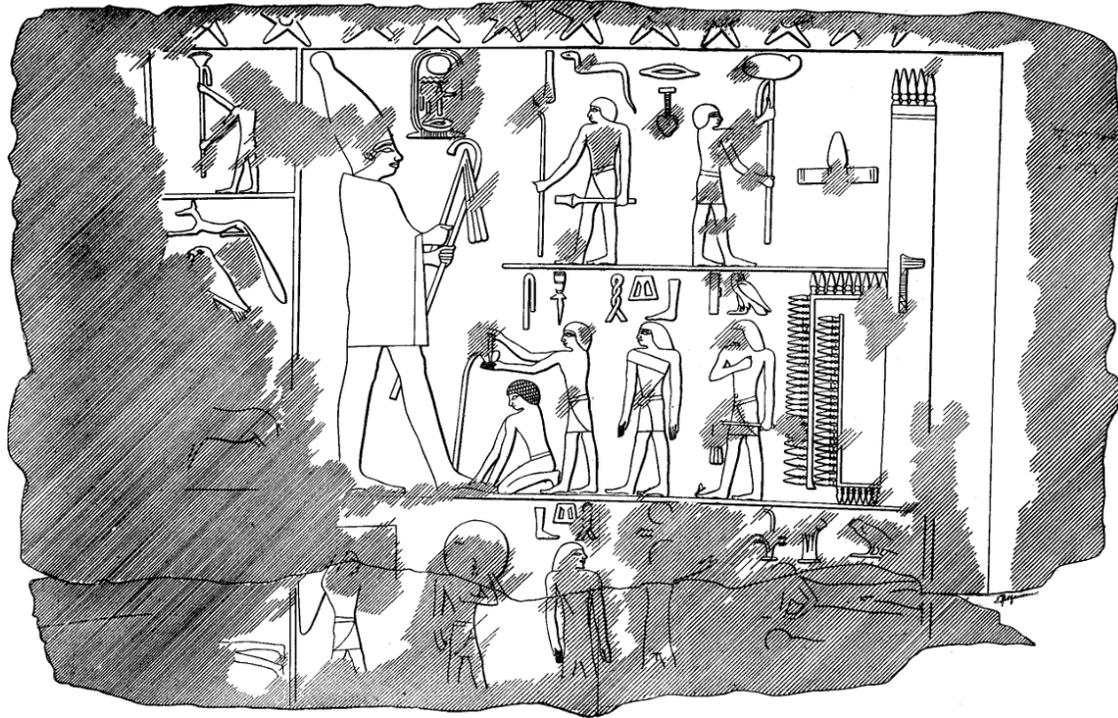
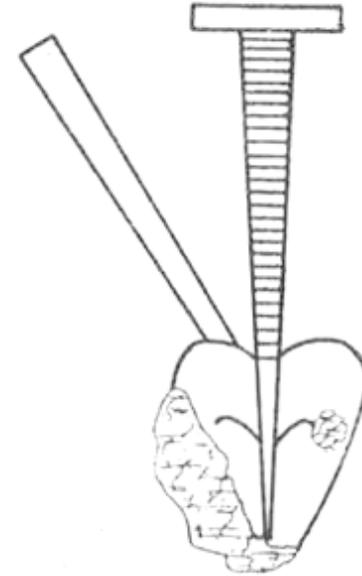




37-38. Deux objets, cf. 28035 (25-26) et fig. 88 : en jaune rayé rouge. Insc. : 



(Lacau 1904, 112 & pl. XXIV, no. 88; CG 28037 = M7C)



Sun temple of King Niuserra (von Bissing & Kees 1928, nos. 20 & 45a; kindly pointed out to me by A. delli Castelli)

**Thank you for  
your attention!**

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Uppsala University, 04.12.2025