

From: Michael Tilgner <mtilgner@baan.nl>
To: 'Ancient Egyptian Language List' <AEgyptian-L@rosta.demon.co.uk>
Subject: AEL AW: AEL Chronology Confusion
Date: Sun, 17 May 1998 23:37:43 +0200

Dear Michael,

> Can you help clarify something for me? I'm a little confused about
> the officially-accepted death date of the hieroglyphic system. I've
> heard/read everything from the 1st century A.D. to as late as the 7th century.

for some time I searched for an answer of your questions myself.
Here are the results with the relevant literature:

last hieroglyphic inscription: AD 394
last demotic inscription: AD 452

The last hieroglyphic inscription is to be found in the temple of
Isis in Philae, near Hadrian's gate.

A color photograph is in: A. Giammarusti/A. Roccati: File - storia
e vita di un santuario egizio, Novara, 1980, pp. 86/87 with Italian
translation.

F. Ll. Griffith, Catalogue of the demotic graffiti of the
Dodecaschoenus,
Vol. I (Text), Oxford, 1937, pp. 126/127 ("Ph. 436") and
Vol. II (Plates), Oxford, 1935, pl. 69

Griffith, p. 126: "... later a figure of Mandulis was engraved in a
different style four feet eastward accompanied by hieroglyphic and demotic
inscription."

The text is in three columns, the hieroglyphs are badly written, hardly
recognizable, the grouping of the signs chaotic. If you look at them,
it is clear for you that hieroglyphic writing was nearing its end; in fact,
it was the end.

Griffith did a great job in deciphering the text. I reproduce it in
WinGlyph format:

```
U31\r3 D52 E22 Z7:r H8:Z1 G5 Aa13:D40 ..:f Q1 t:p V20:Z1 A1 i-G11=20  
H8 S1 V20 R8 U36 t:Z1 Z1:Z1 t:H8 n:Q1*(t:H8) D:t:N17 H-N5-H !  
D&md N N36:Z1 E22 Z7:r G5&Z1 G7 N102 A6:N33 t:O49:N33*N33 G5:aA
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Explanations:

U31\r3 D52 is Aa58
Q1 t:p should be Q1 t:H8?
G7 =3D G7d (G6 instead of G5)
N102 was present in my demo version
t:O49:N33*N33 should be t:O49:[& N33*N33 +1 ? +s &] - did not function
with my demo version

My transcription:

(1) m-bAH (?) mrw sA Hr m-a-f (=3D m-a n?) Ast-mD i-axm sA Ast(?)
HDt-mD Hm nTr 2 n Ast Dt nHH
(2) Dd mdw in mrw nb n(?)
(3) wabt nTr aA

Translation (Griffith):

"(1) Before Merul son of Horus, by the hand(?) of (?) Esmet-Akhom(?) son of Esmet, second prophet of Isis, for ever and ever.

(2) Words spoken by Merul, lord of

(3) Abaton, great god."

Mrw = Mandulis

m-a n caused by ? (Hannig, p. 312; see also demotic text)

Abaton = Phylae?

Griffith: "The name and titles of the sculptor would be unintelligible without the key given by the demotic."

Therefore here is the demotic part of the inscription (only translation), p. 127:

"I Esmet-akhom, the scribe of the house of record(?) of Isis, son of Esmet-Panekhate the second prophet of Isis and his mother Eswe-re; I performed work on this figure of Mandulis for everlasting, because he is kindly of face(?) unto me. To-day, the day of the Birth of Osiris, his (?) dedication-festival, year 110."

Griffith:

"The 'birth of Osiris' ... was on the first epigomenal day, corresponding to 24 Aug., and the year is AD 394 ... This is by far the latest date known for hieroglyphic writing..."

The hieroglyphic inscription is quite interesting. One sees the old priest writing it into the wall of the temple. He only knows some standard phrases and his name. It becomes too complicated and therefore he changes to the script he knows more fluently, demotic.

Think about the last known sentence in hieroglyphs!

"Words spoken (better: to speak) by Merul, lord of Abaton, great god."

Normally it is an introduction, and the words spoken followed. But here: "Words spoken by Merul: ---" The rest is silence.

The last demotic inscription:

"Lexikon der Aegyptologie", Vol. I, cols. 1052-1056, entry "Demotisch", footnote 4:

The youngest known demotic texts are Philae 365 and 377 of the year AD 452.

Best wishes,
Michael Tilgner

[Photo and hieroglyphs below]

Addendum 1:

Photo from the University of Memphis page

<http://www.memphis.edu/egypt/philae2.php>

Now no longer available (retrieved via WayBack machine)

"Relief of a Ptolemaic or Roman period pharaoh from the temple of Isis at Philae.

The last known hieroglyphic inscription in Egypt dates from 394 C.E. (late Roman period) and is seen here in this image from Philae Temple. Vertical lines border and divide the two columns of hieroglyphs which relate a royal decree. The hieroglyphs are crude in execution but are clear enough to read. On the left is a badly damaged figure of a king wearing an elaborate crown."



Addendum 2:

Hieroglyphic text in: F. Ll. Griffith, Catalogue of the Demotic Graffiti of the Dodecaschoenus, vol. I: Text, Oxford, 1935, pp. 126-127
The 3 cols. are on p. 126.

col. 1:



col. 2:



col. 3:

