

## Examples of Hieratic Documents

A wide variety of documents written in Hieratic remain from the Middle Kingdom. Many of these are from excavation of the town of Kahun in central Egypt. They give us a broader look at everyday life in ancient Egypt than the political and religious propaganda written in hieroglyphs, so much of which has survived.

I shall be posting documents here from time to time, as time and inspiration permit. The hieratic in which they are written is not as careful as the literary hieratic of The Shipwrecked Sailor or the Teachings of Ptah-Hotep, as well as being mostly from the end of the Middle Kingdom, when writing style had changed noticeably from the beginning.

I hope you be able to use these to help you in learning to read hieratic documents, and will try to provide transcriptions into hieroglyphs to assist you when you have difficulty. As for translating them, they are written in Middle Egyptian, and any good textbook should give you the grounding necessary.

Good fortune!

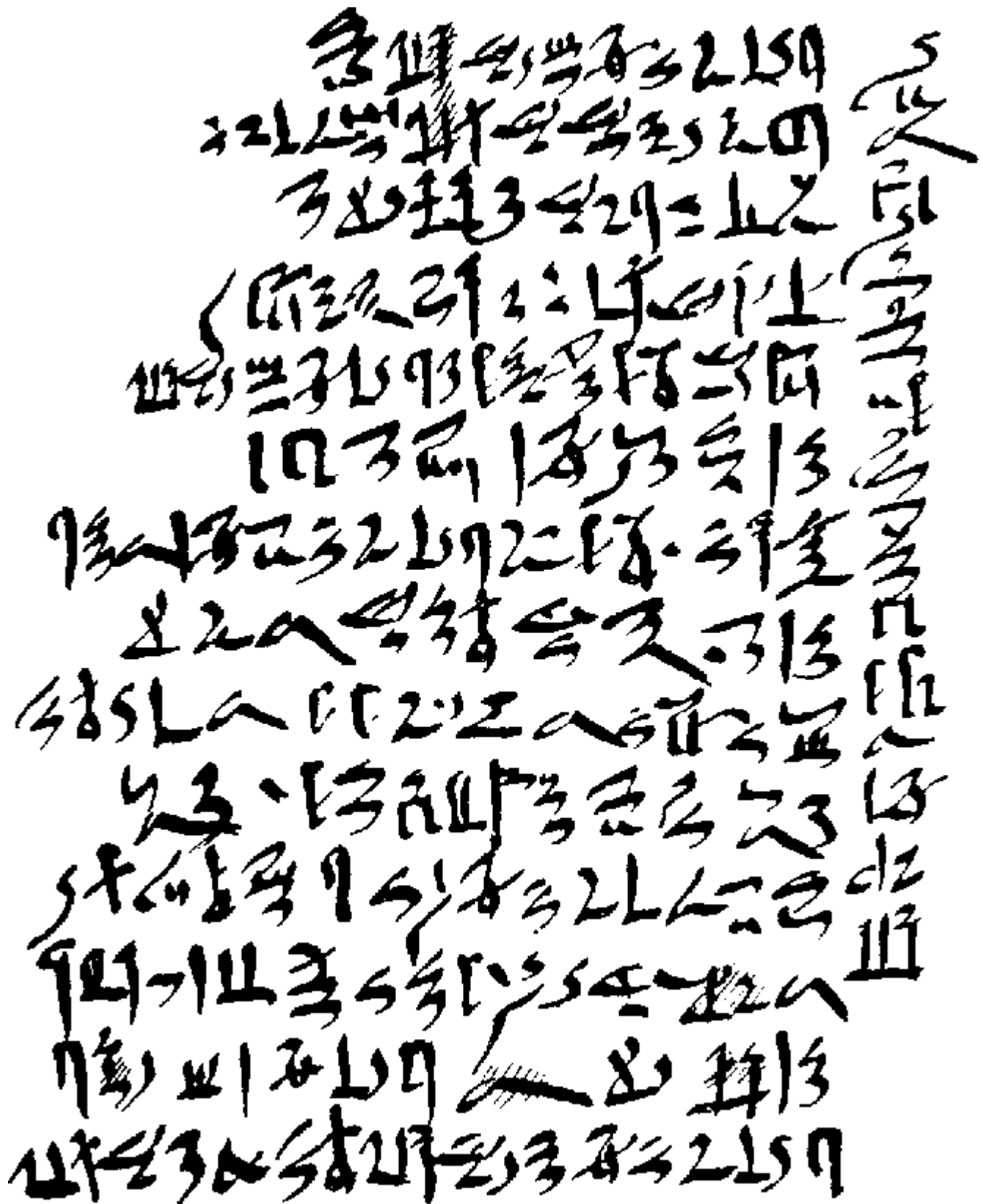
- [A Letter of Reminder](#)
- [A Letter from the Boss](#)
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- [Return to Basic Lessons in Hieratic](#)

*If you have any comments or suggestions  
please send me [email](#)*

## A Letter of Reminder

The underling Neni writes to his superior, the steward Iyib, decorously reminding him to deal with some property. Two previous letters have not produced any response. A man called Waah is known from a will and may be the same man as the property owner mentioned here; if so, this letter may date to the reign of Amenamhet IV (c. 1790 BC). [Adapted from R.B.Parkinson, *Voices from Ancient Egypt*.]

The image shown here should display at approximately the original size (on a PC monitor).



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The letter was originally published in

F. Ll. Griffith *The Petrie Papyri: Hieratic Papyri from Kahun and Gurob*, p.72 and Plate XXIX.

This version is from the facsimile in

G. Möller, *Hieratische Lesestücke für den akademischen Gebrauch I*, 19B

Translations of this letter can be found in

E. Wente, *Letters From Ancient Egypt*, pp.70-80, and in

R. B. Parkinson, *Voices from Ancient Egypt*, pp.90-92.

I have added a few notes on some "peculiarities" of the writing in this letter [here](#).

I have presented a modified version of this letter in "[Neni Writes A Letter](#)," where you may find some assistance with the background, structure and special vocabulary of formal letters of the Middle Kingdom.

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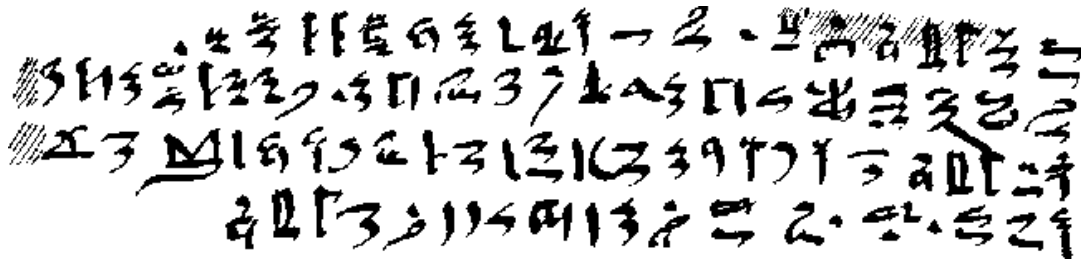
## A Letter from the Boss

This is a letter which was copied into the temple daybook at el-Lahun, and refers specifically to this practice; presumably other, less important, messages were simply discarded.

This letter is important for the chronology of the period, since it appears to refer to the heliacal rising of Sirius in 'Year 7, month 3 of Peret, day 25.' The king's name is not given but was presumably Senwosret III. [Adapted from R.B.Parkinson, *Voices from Ancient Egypt*.]

You will notice that, unlike the "Letter of Reminder," where the writer is addressing a superior, this letter does not include the same formal phrases of greeting and respect. Letters written to inferiors tend to be very brusque and to the point, as this one is.

The image shown here should display at approximately the original size (on a PC monitor).



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The letter was originally published in

Ludwig Borchardt *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 37:89-103,  
"Der Zweite Papyrusfund von Kahun und die zeitliche Festlegung des mittleren Reiches  
der ägyptischen Geschichte."

This version is based on the facsimile in

G. Möller, *Hieratische Lesestücke für den akademischen Gebrauch I*, 19.

Translations of this letter can be found in

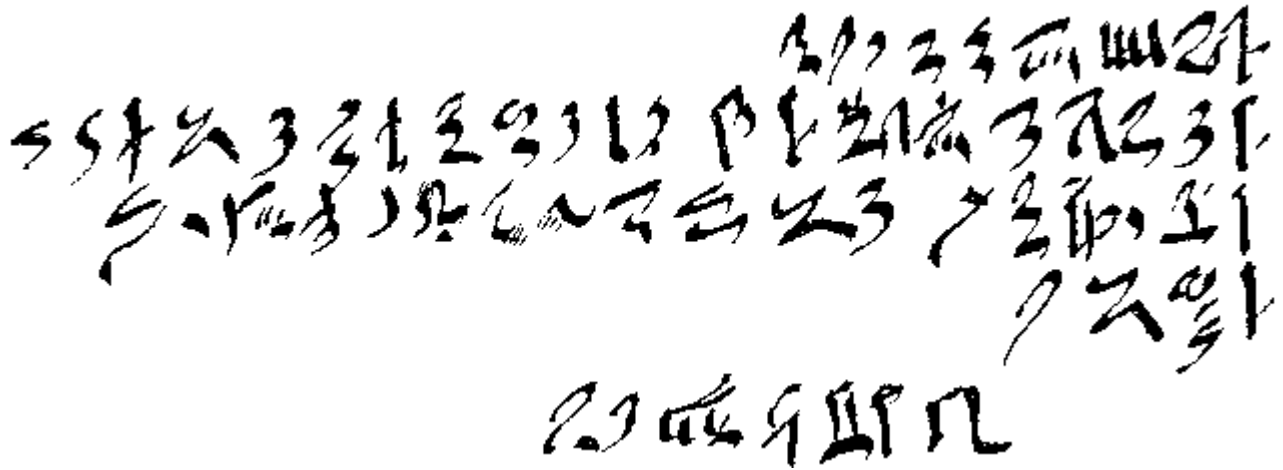
E. Wente, *Letters From Ancient Egypt*, p.73, and in  
R. B. Parkinson, *Voices from Ancient Egypt*, p.89.

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## A Note of Request

This is a terse practical note without any formulae, similar to "Letter from the Boss." Traces of additional signs along the left edge (*see [original papyrus](#)*) suggest that this sheet was cut out of an already used roll, or that it is a copy of the message kept by the recipient. This would explain the placing of the sender's name at the end: it generally comes first in actual letters. This note dates to the reign of Amenemhat III. (*Adapted from Parkinson, [Voices from Ancient Egypt](#)*)

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der ägyptischen Geschichte."

This version is based on the facsimile in

G. Möller, *Hieratische Lesestücke für den akademischen Gebrauch I*, p.18.

Translations of this letter can be found in

E. Wente, *Letters From Ancient Egypt*, p.79, and in  
R. B. Parkinson, *Voices from Ancient Egypt*, p.90.

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