A Double Abecedary? *Halaḥam* and *ʾAbgad* on the TT99 Ostracon

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This article attempts to advance the debate on the terms inscribed on an ostracon of the Egyptian 18th Dynasty from the excavation of Theban Tomb 99, suggested by Ben Haring to contain the first historical attestation of the Halaḥam *sequence. It presents new etymologies for the words listed on the two sides of the document, all of them in Egyptian syllabic writing. The obverse contains at least the five initial consonants of the* Halaḥam *sequence; the words of the acrostic may form a mnemonic verse. Additionally, the reverse side may provide the first historical attestation of the beginning of the second and historically more consequential ancient alphabet sequence, the* ʾAbgad. *This sheds important new light on the history of the Semitic alphabets and Egyptian knowledge of alphabetic ordering in the 15th century* B.C.E.

Keywords: history of the alphabet; alphabet sequence; abecedaries; Semitic languages; Berber languages; Egyptian syllabic writing; loanwords in Egyptian; mnemonic verse

Background[1]

In an article published in 2015, Ben Haring announced the discovery of the *Halaḥam* sequence, one of the two ancient alphabet sequences on an ostracon found during the excavation of Theban Tomb 99 of Sennefer (Haring 2015; the excavation published in Strudwick 2016).[2] The identification of this sequence on a document dating most likely to the late 15th century B.C.E. is of momentous significance for the complex early history of the Semitic alphabets.[3] In 2016, Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik published a contribution to the ostracon in which they made several suggestions pertaining to individual entries on the list and suggested to see in the listed terms "letter names" that, however, did not become canonical (2016: 175). Still, Haring's and Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik's discussions of the individual entries listed on the two sides of the document have left much room for further debate, as well as the question of the relationship of the reverse to the obverse—the sequence of words on the reverse does not match the *Halaḥam* sequence—and the overall purpose of the ostracon.

This article attempts to provide new etymologies for several of the terms listed, add to the discussion of the sequence on the obverse, and provide an explanation for the entries listed on the reverse. At the same time, the article also gives some context on the historical phonology of ancient Egyptian in the early 18th Dynasty, the time of the ostracon, as the Egyptian phonological inventory did not correlate neatly to the Semitic ones. The continued use by most scholars of an ahistorical Egyptological transcription system (Schenkel 1990: 25–26; Kammerzell 1998: 24; Schneider 2003) that dates back to the late 19th century further obfuscates the interdisciplinary debate. To illustrate this point, I give here one example that is relevant for the sequence of phonemes: In his table 1 (**Fig. 1**), Haring has juxtaposed the sequences from this ostracon (1), Ugarit (2), and Beth-Shemesh (3) but also

[1] The following ideas were first presented at the workshop "The Egyptian Origins of the Hebrew Alphabet," held at the University of California, Los Angeles, on December 1–2, 2016. Some ideas suggested first in my conference paper were independently reached by Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert and Manfred Krebernik in an article that was forthcoming at the time of the conference (Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik 2016).

[2] The ostracon is cataloged on p. 286 as 99.95.0297.

[3] For an overview, see Sanders 2009: 91–96.

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1	*h*	*l*	*ḥ*	*m*	*?*	*[...]*	*r*	*b*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	*g*	-	-	*t*	-	*ḏ*	-
2	*h*	*l*	*ḥ*	*m*	*q*	*w*	*ṯ*	*r*	*b*	*t*	*d*	*š*	*k*	*n*	*ḫ*	*ṣ*	*ś*	*p*	ʾ	ʿ	*ḍ*	*g*	*d*	*ġ*	*ṭ*	*z*	-	*y*
3	*h*	*l*	*ḥ*	*m*	*q*	*w*	*š*	*r*	-	*t*	-	*s*	*k*	*n*	*ḫ*	*ṣ*	*ś*	*f*	ʾ	ʿ	*ḍ*	*g*	*d*	*ġ*	*ṭ*	*z*	*ḏ*	*y*

Fig. 1. The alphabetic sequences of the TT99 Ostracon (1), Ugarit (2), and Beth-Shemesh (3) (after Haring 2015: 195, table 1).

admonished readers that "the transliteration characters employed do not necessarily reflect precisely the same consonants in the different languages. The identification of some consonants on the ostracon with their supposed semitic [*sic*] equivalents is therefore approximate" (Haring 2015: 195). I single out here the Egyptian transcription symbol <ḏ> (the cobra hieroglyph). The choice of this symbol (underlined "ḏ," by contrast to regular "d"; likewise the use of underlined "ṯ" and regular "t") goes back to the Berlin School of Egyptian philology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries[4] and was guided by typographical convenience rather than phonological accuracy. In alternative transcription systems, such as the one introduced by the Tübingen School (e.g., Schenkel 2005), č is used instead. In Egyptian-Semitic transcriptions, <ḏ> is used to render Semitic emphatic affricates (in Haring's table, /ḍ/, /ṣ/) and also the affricate /z/ and the voiced interdental /ḏ/. Depending on what phoneme is represented in Reverse 6, this would correspond to different positions in the alphabet sequence; thus, not only /ḏ/ but also /ḍ/, /ṣ/, and /z/ could be intended here. This means that the linguistic identification of the terms listed on the ostracon may, in some instances, have an influence on the consonants' graphemic representations and thus the assessment of the acrostic.

The following discussion reassesses all entries on the ostracon and tries to demonstrate that we are dealing here with acrostics of foreign words that render not only the beginning of the *Halaḥam* sequence on the obverse but also the *ʾAbgad* sequence on the reverse. Concluding remarks contextualize this new assessment.

A New Assessment of the Entries on the Obverse

Haring regarded the terms listed as Egyptian words, spelled unusually in syllabic writing:

> The words themselves, if interpreted here correctly, have unusual phonetic spellings, such as would be the result of writing down orally-dictated words by a person unfamiliar with their traditional orthography. That same person, however, was well-trained in writing hieratic signs and sign groups, since these look perfectly normal. There is a frequent, though not consistent use of group (or "syllabic") writing, which is otherwise mostly found in the orthographies of non-Egyptian words and names. With the possible exception of obv. 3, however, no words or names of foreign origin come to mind. (Haring 2015: 191–92)

I believe that both on the obverse and the reverse (**Fig. 2**), the words are rendered in Egyptian syllabic writing (group writing), and, in contrast to Haring's view, all words appear to be of foreign linguistic origin (most of them Semitic). All notations of the terms themselves are followed, mostly after a blank space, by an additional hieroglyph. Haring (2015: 195–96) has observed the interesting fact that the signs following the terms in Obverses 1, 2, and 4 seem to appear earlier in the alphabetic inscriptions of Serabit el-Khadim and Wadi el-Hol and denote there the same phonetic values as the initial consonants of the words listed on the ostracon (*h, l, m*); however, this is not the case for any other entries. He also favors the view that "the signs at the left are explained by the phonetically written words at the right" (Haring 2015: 191). They may thus combine semantic and phonetic information and might be called, with a term coined by Wolfgang Schenkel for a different case, "phonetic (or phonographic) determinatives" (2005: 51). For the purpose of the following suggestions, I use the term "classifier" without any implied assumptions about the intended use of these signs on this ostracon.

Obverse 1: This entry has as a classifier a rejoicing man. The notation seems to comprise a *Wortschreibung* (*ḥ3w* "vicinity" > Coptic ϩϩ *hē*) plus the additional signs <h> and <n>. The proposal by Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik (2016: 170) to see both in <3> (archaically) and <n> a rendering of Semitic /l/ and to posit an otherwise unattested root *hlhl* related to Hebrew *hll* "to praise" is unlikely. I suggest to see in this writing a causative (haf'al) of the Aramaic (also Arabic, maybe Hebrew) root *hny* "to be pleasing, enjoyable" (*CAL*), "to make pleasant, alleviate" (Aramaic infinitive *hahāna*).

[4] For the debate about the transcription system, see Gertzen 2013: 248–58.

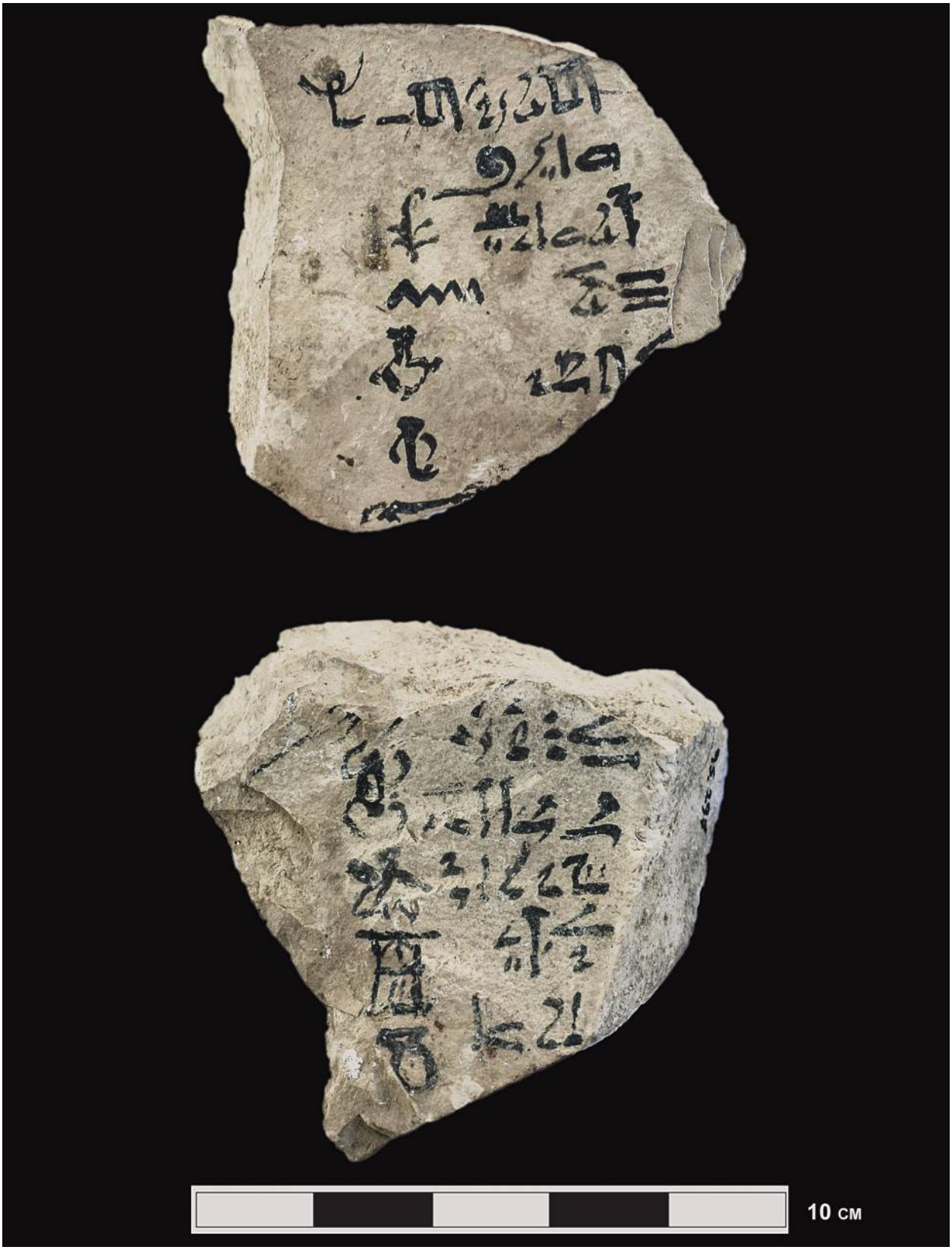


Fig. 2. Obverse (*top*) and reverse (*bottom*) of Ostracon TT99. (Photos by N. Strudwick)

Obverse 2: The classifier placed here immediately after the word itself is a coil of rope (Gardiner 1957: section V, symbol 1 [p. 546]), which in Egyptian is also used as a determinative for verbs denoting "binding," "stringing," "surrounding," or "being circular." The writing could indicate an approximate pronunciation as /rawi/ or /lawi/. I suggest (as Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik have done independently [2016: 170]) the Semitic (e.g., Arabic) root *lwy* "to bend, flex, curve" with Hebrew *liwyā* "garland, wreath" (*HALAT* 498: Prov 1:9, 4:9; 1 Kgs 7:29). A derivation from the same root is also *liwyātān* ("the curved, convoluted, or twisting serpent" [cf. Uehlinger 1999]).

Obverse 3: The term used on Obverse 3 contains the consonants /ḥ/, the Egyptian <r> hieroglyph which can represent either <r> or <l>, as well as /p/ and /t/. The classifier sign added to the left of the word is a reed plant (Gardiner 1957: section M, sign 23 [p. 545]). I suggest equating this term with Aramaic *ḥelpā/ḥulpā* "a type of reed or grass" (*CAL*), Arabic *ḥalfā/ḥalfa* "halfa grass, esparto" (Wehr 1976: 201), and Akkadian *elpetu* "rush, reed" (*CAD* 4: 108–9), an etymology proposed also by Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik (2016: 170–71). In the present 18th Dynasty transcription, the Semitic feminine ending <t> would still have been a consonant (*ḥlpt*). This identification does not present any phonological difficulties and agrees excellently with the Egyptian classifier "reed" in the left column.

Obverse 4: Obverse 4 is more difficult. The *Wortschreibung* with *mw* "water" is often encountered in the Middle Kingdom system for transcribing foreign names (17 times) and only rarely in the New Kingdom.[5] The consonant sequence <m> and <n> with "water" as the classifier sign in the left column would seem to suggest Aramaic *mayyin* "water," but this term has an internal /y/, which would not be rendered here. Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik assumed here the presence of a form consisting of the older *plurale tantum* (e.g., Akkadian) māwū with the younger (Aramaic, Arabic) plural ending –na (*māwū-na or *maw-na [Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik 2016: 171]). Alternatively, it may be conceivable that the scribe associated the Egyptian logogram "water" with the Semitic word for water (*may*) and then added the Aramaic plural morpheme (-n), although such a (logographic) practice is only rarely attested in Egyptian group writing.[6]

Obverse 5: In Obverse 5, Haring (2015: 193) reads  as the writing of the scribal palette, Hieratic  (Möller 1909–1936 2: 48, no. 537: Papyrus Louvre 3226), preceded by a sign that could be either <r>, <t>, or <d> and followed by <pꜣ>. The classifier to the left is a type of vessel. Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik do not believe that the identification of the sign as the scribal palette is certain (2016: 171). Instead of the palette (which does not occur in group writing), I propose to read it as the monoliteral sign  <q>, Hieratic (Möller 1909–1936 2: 29, no. 319: *Papyrus Gurob*), or  (*Lederhandschrift*). This would result in a sequence  <r> (or, possibly, <d> and, less likely, <t> for the initial sign) – <q> – <p>. Egyptian <r> renders Semitic /r/ or /l/ (as in Obverse 2, where it represents the second *Halaḥam* consonant /l/). Egyptian <d> (if this reading is to be preferred) can represent Semitic /d/ and /ṭ/, whereas <t> is the regular equivalent of Semitic /t/ and more rarely renders /d/ and /ṭ/. Egyptian <q> renders Semitic /q/, /g/, and /ġ/. Finally, Egyptian /p/ may also stand in for Semitic /b/ in word-final position (e.g., in /ḥarp/ for Northwest Semitic /ḥarb/, "sword" [Hoch 1994: 233–34; cf. 401–42]). Despite this large number of possible consonant sequences, no suitable Semitic term seems attested, with the exception of a feminine vessel designation *tqbh* once attested in Egyptian Aramaic (*CAL*). I would like to make a very tentative suggestion based on the fact that the fifth letter in the *Halaḥam* sequence is /q/, which would be the second letter of this entry according to the reading proposed above. Additionally, the second and third consonants, read here as <q> and <p>, are a viable transcription of the Semitic liquid and dry measure *qab* (approximately 1.2 liters) (*HALAT* 991–92), a word that could have the vessel sign as classifier. This suggestion requires us to discard the initial <r> as a letter of the *Halaḥam* sequence—it already appeared in Obverse 2 as /l/, and its placement here as /r/ would occur three positions early.

I propose that we might be dealing here not just with coincidental terms rendering the *Halaḥam* sequence,[7] but they actually could constitute the words of a *Merkvers*, a mnemonic verse used to remember the alphabetic sequence. Mnemonic devices of this kind are well known throughout all writing traditions.[8] They are attested for the *Halaḥam* sequence in an Egyptian context itself in the Demotic Papyrus Saqqara 27 from the 4th or 3rd century B.C.E. (Kammerzell 2001: 129–31):

[5] For /mu/ or /mo/, see Hoch 1994: 503, 508.

[6] An example is the use of the Seth animal, which can also be read as Baʕl in renderings of Semitic names (see Schneider 1992: N111, N121, N160, N164, N283). The use of correct Egyptian classifiers after Semitic words (from which the logographic use of the signs could easily ensue) is frequently attested (Schneider 1992: 403–5).

[7] For the suggestion that they are letter names, see Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik 2016: 175.

[8] For an exhaustive treatment, see Ulrich 1997: 27–127.

2	- - -] pȝ Hb ḥr pȝ Hbyn	- - -] Ibis on the Ebony	h
	pȝ Rd ḥr pȝ Rr. [- - -	the Rd-bird on the Rr-plant	l
3	- - -]	- - -]	
	r pȝ Wy ḥr pȝ Wrṯ	the Wy-bird was on the rose	w
	r pȝ Smn ḥr pȝ Sry	the Nile goose was on the Sry-tree	s
	(etc.)		

This proposal would allow us to read the initial sign of Obverse 5 as the <r> hieroglyph and regard it as a rendering of the Semitic preposition "l"; within the *Merkvers*, it could be discounted as irrelevant for the sequence of the acrostic. The acrostic *Merkvers* could then be read as follows: **h**ahāna **l**āwī **ḥ**elpat **m**ayyin l^{e}**q**ab, "to make pleasant the one who bends reed,[9] water (according) to the Qab" (or similar). The ostracon would thus preserve at least the first five letters of the *Halaḥam* sequence, *h-l-ḥ-m-q*.

Obverses 6, 7: The terms are not preserved, only the classifiers. I refer the reader to Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik 2016: 171–72 for possible suggestions; certainty cannot be gained here without the terms themselves.

A New Assessment of the Entries on the Reverse

A first line (counted by Haring as Reverse x + 1) may have been present on the reverse, but hardly any trace is actually left today above Reverse x + 2. Such a line may have continued the *Halaḥam* sequence from the obverse (as suggested by Haring), but in the absence of other fragments belonging to this ostracon, this must remain speculative.

Reverse x + 2: Haring (2015: 193) suggests an unusual orthography of the name Renenutet, the Egyptian harvest goddess, also represented as a snake; in the classifier column, Haring recognizes a snake's tail, although the hieroglyph appears to be a lizard. To interpret  as  does not seem very feasible. Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik refute the reading of "Renenutet"; however, their own suggestion (2016: 172) of  (a group well attested in syllabic writing) seems plausible only for the first two signs (Gardiner 1957: section X, signs 1, 2 [p. 547];[10] cf. Möller 1909–1936 2: 50, nos. 554, 555).

I suggest reading  and, for the entire entry, . On the basis of the classifier, we have to assume a term for "lizard" or "gecko." An extensive search of lizard terms in Semitic and Berber languages produces only one suitable term: Hebrew (and Samaritan Aramaic) לְטָאָה l^{e}ṭāʾā "gecko" (*HALAT* 501). This appears to be a derivation "the adhering, adhesive one" from the Semitic root (Arabic, Tigre) lṭʾ "to adhere," which is related to the ability of geckos to climb up vertical walls or walk across ceilings using their adhesive toe pads (Riede 2002: 181). In accordance with the feminine nouns attested in Obverse 3 and Reverse 5, it is likely that the feminine ending -t was still realized as a consonant (*lṭʾṭ). Since Egyptian <n> (but not <r-n>) is a possible rendering of Semitic /l/ (see below), I propose to see in *n-t-t* a transcription of Semitic lṭʾṭ. The *Wortschreibung* with (the Late Egyptian personal pronoun *twi* > Coptic ⲧ /ti/) can be seen as equivalent to the writing of the Semitic feminine ending in Obverse 3 and Reverse x + 5 as /ti/ ≈ /t/). The third root consonant /ʾ/ would not be written here (*l^{e}ṭāt < l^{e}ṭāʾat), which is also attested in the comparable feminine adjective *ṯmʾt* "thirsty" (Hoch 1994: 386).

This would leave us with a freestanding <r> at the beginning of the line. It has no added ideographic stroke as normally used in group writing and in all other occurrences of <r> on this ostracon (Obverses 2, 3, and Reverse x + 6). This could be an indication that <r> is another example of Egyptian *Wortschreibung* in this document, since the preposition <r> already had a vocalic pronunciation of /e/ in the mid-15th century B.C.E. It could have been used here to render an initial Semitic vowel /e/. In this regard, it is interesting to note that in the later cognates of לְטָאָה in Middle Hebrew (הַלְטָאָה halṭāʾā) and in Jewish Aramaic (לְטָתָּהּ ḥalṭātāʾ), a prothetic syllable was added before the initial /l/. The /r/ could represent a similar vocalic onset /e/, which could be supported by the fact that the following group  is a writing of syllable-closing /-n/ or /-l/ (Hoch 1994: 509; Schneider 1992: 378). Accordingly, I propose to read here (ʔ?)*elṭāʾat* "gecko"; it is debatable whether vocalic onsets were realized in Egyptian with a glottal stop or not.[11]

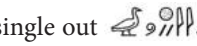
From an Egyptian perspective, the initial <r> could also have been perceived as an allograph for the particle <jw> that introduced adverbial sentences (equally pronounced /e/ [Junge 2005: 38]), as in the much later Demotic mnemonic device quoted above that uses plant and bird terms. One wonders whether Reverse x + 2 could thus also have served as the beginning of another

[9] One anonymous *BASOR* reviewer suggests that this might be a possible reference to a scribe.

[10] Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik's (2016: 172) hieroglyphic rendering erroneously shows the potter's kiln (Gardiner 1957: section U, sign 30 [p. 546]) and not the bread loaf (Gardiner 1957: section X, sign 2 [p. 547]) under the bread (Gardiner 1957: section X, sign 1 [p. 547]).

[11] Against the realization of a glottal stop, see Peust 1999: 97–98.

Merkvers: "And the lizard and the snail, and the dove and the kite (. . .)."[12]

Reverse x + 3: In their discussion of the term, Haring (2015: 193) and Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik (2016: 173) transcribed only the initial part of the term noted here,  *bꜣ-bꜣ-y* (probably indicating a pronunciation as *bibiya*). From the words adduced by Haring and Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik, I single out  *bꜣ-y-bꜣ-y-w* as a term that clearly has two consonants <b> and suggests a comparable pronunciation, *biybiyu*. For this term, the *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache* gives the translation: "Art Insekt, das ein Haus hat" (Erman and Grapow 1926–1961 1: 442:11). It is attested in a pharmaceutical prescription (Papyrus Ebers 88:4), in which an animal's "house" (*pr*), mixed with honey, is used as a kind of plaster to extract a thorn. In contrast to Dimitri Meeks (2010: 282; cf. Takács 1999: 142, s.v. "bjbj.w"), who thinks the "house" is the nest of a wasp (bꜣy.t), I suggest that it might actually denote a snail's shell. The term may be related to a Berber term for snail, *babbūš* and *bāybu* (Behnstedt and Woidich 2011: 384–86 [n. 127]; see also Benabbou and Behnstedt 2003).[13] The classifier "beetle" on the ostracon would be appropriate since a beetle also crawls and has a hard shell. [14] The Papyrus Ebers passage uses instead the "bird" classifier, which is also used for insects and beetles; here, we may be dealing with the problem of classifying a fringe ("fuzzy edge") member of an animal species.[15] If this identification is correct, we would have in the Papyrus Ebers passage the first attestation of the Egyptian word for "shell of a snail" (*pr)*.[16]

For the final hieroglyphic group left untranscribed by Haring and Fischer-Elfert/Krebernik,  , I suggest with some hesitancy  *tʾ* "earth, ground." [17] This word is attested as the second element (nomen rectum) in the beetle (?) term *jkw-tʾ* (and *jkw n tʾ*) "earth-jkw" ("earth-burrower" [Hannig 1995: 108, kind of beetle; 2003: 226; 2006: 421). If correctly identified here, the full term of Reverse x + 3 would be *bꜣ-bꜣ-y=tʾ* "earth snail."

Reverse x + 4: This is, as suggested by Haring (2015: 193) and Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik (2016: 173), quite certainly the Late Egyptian term *gr* "(a type of) bird (maybe pigeon)" with an uncertain Coptic successor, ˢⲥⲣϵ. It is also attested in the New Kingdom compound noun *gr n p.t* "*gr* of the sky," which survived in Coptic as ˢⲥⲣⲟⲙⲡϵ, ᴮⲥⲣⲟⲙⲡⲓ "dove" and appears to be a possible etymology of Greek *κόλυμβος*, Latin *columba*, and Church Slavonic *golǫbĭ* (cf. again Peust 1999: 280, n. 356). The etymology of the term has not been determined, but I wonder whether it might be an onomatopoeic word imitating the sound of doves (cf. English *curr*; German *gurren*; Berber *gurr*, *gerger*, etc. "to curr" [Naït-Zerrad 2002: 852]) or a loanword from Berber where the pertinent verb is attested. The phonetic value of Egyptian <g> is not clear from Egyptian-Semitic transcriptions. Semitic /g/ is rendered more often by Egyptian <q> than by <g>, while in the three certain examples of Semitic renderings of Egyptian /g/, <q> is used (Hoch 1994: 428, 431; Allen 2013: 47). This means that Egyptian <g> was perceived by the Egyptians as a suitable rendering of Semitic /g/, but not vice versa.

Reverse x + 5: Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik (2016: 173) assume that the classifier  in the left column may have been created by the scribe ad hoc. Haring (2015: 193) offered two possible readings for the initial sign—either <t> or <d>—and referred to a suggestion made by Frank Kammerzell to see a loom in the classifier; as a result, the term might be related to the goddess of weaving, Tayt. Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik (2016: 173–74) accepted the interpretation of the classifier but read the large initial sign (more plausibly) as <d>; they connected the entry itself with a Semitic root *ṭwy* "to spin, to twist" (although a suitable noun is not actually attested). My own tentative suggestion is to identify the classifier as the representation of a cage,[18] maybe a bird cage, and to identify the word in question, like the preceding noun, with a bird term, Hebrew *dāʾā (< dāʾat)* "predatory bird, kite" (*HALAT* 199, Ugar. diy) and Aramaic *dyyh, dyytʾ (dayyā, dayyəṯā)* "kite" (*CAL*). The transcription would be accurate, and the rendering of the Semitic feminine ending would be identical to its transcription in the word *ḥalpat* on Obverse 3.

[12] For the other individual terms, see below.

[13] The form *bāybu* is attested in North Morocco and probably as *babu* in Maltese.

[14] Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik (2016: 174) state that a scarab cannot be intended here because of the missing middle legs; however, the Hieratic form of the scarab hieroglyph lacks the middle legs as a rule (Möller 1909–1936 2: 24, no. 258).

[15] I thank Orly Goldwasser for pointing me to the classification problems regarding "fringe members" and the example of the tortoise with either the [hide and tail] or the [fish] classifier (Goldwasser 2002: 68).

[16] Many languages use the term "house" for a snail's shell (e.g., Modern Standard Arabic *baytu ʾal-qawqaʿati*; Levantine Arabic: *bayt al-ḥalazūna*; German *Schneckenhaus*; Danish *sneglehus*; Czech *hlemýždí domeček*; Hungarian *csigaház*).

[17] For the reading of the Egyptian word for "earth" as *tʾ* not *tꜣ*, see Schneider 2015: 447 n. 74.

[18] Cf. also the suspended cage with a person within it, like in the well-known depiction of a prisoner in a cage from a Karnak *talatat* block of Tutankhamun (Theis 2014: 97–99, with the older references).

The precise interpretation of this entry aside, reading the word as starting with a <d> requires again a phonological comment. The adoption of the transcription symbol <d> for the Egyptian sound represented by the hand hieroglyph goes back to the 19th century. It is well established that the Egyptian language of the New Kingdom did not possess a voiced dental /d/ (Peust 1999: 81, 102; Allen 2013: 48). Egyptian <d> was always transcribed as /ṭ/ by Semitic speakers and thus perceived as an emphatic dental. In turn, however, Semitic /d/ was usually rendered by the Egyptians with <d>, but they also used <d> for Semitic /ṭ/. James Hoch has summarized this evidence: "This suggests that the closest Egyptian approximation to Semitic /d/ (almost certainly [d]) was d, and the closest Egyptian approximation of Semitic /ṭ/ was also Egyptian d" (1994: 427—the sound may have been marked as both voiced and emphatic in opposition to /t/, which was voiceless and non-emphatic).[19]

Reverse x + 6: This designation of a vessel does not seem to be attested otherwise. Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik (2016: 174) point to Arabic *zīr* "large water jar, wide in the upper part and nearly pointed at the bottom" but state that it may be a loanword related to Hebrew *sîr* "cooking pot." If so, the equation is not possible, since Egyptian <ḏ> does not render Semitic *samek*. As to *zīr*, there is no certainty that the word existed as early as the 15th century B.C.E. The alternative suggestions offered by Fischer-Elfert and Krebernik are phonologically not feasible. The only—admittedly very hypothetical—explanation I can offer is to assume that the Egyptian volume unit *ḏ3* (Pommerening 2005: 239–61, also with a vessel as a determinative) retained its second consonant, the liquid /r/ or /l/ (rendered historically by <3>) until the 18th Dynasty (cf. Peust 1999: 131–32 for similar cases; Allen 2013: 41). Reverse x + 6 could then be seen as a syllabic (phonetic) writing *ḏ3-r* of that volume unit. As mentioned above, the initial consonant <ḏ> is used for Semitic /ḏ/, /z/, and Semitic emphatic affricates. Hoch (1994: 429) suggests that it may have represented a voiced emphatic affricate /ḍẓ/ or similar.

ʾAbgad on the TT99 Ostracon: A Double Abecedary?

In his article, Haring had remarked that "the sequence on the reverse (presumably containing the last five consonants) is *r-b-g-t-ḏ*, if my transcription is correct, and this does not match the oldest *halaḥam* attestations" (2015: 194). On the basis of the etymologies given here for the first four terms ([ʾ?]*Elṭāʾat–Bibiy-taʾ–Garu–Dāʾat*), I would like to postulate that on the TT99 Ostracon, we encounter not only the *Halaḥam* sequence on the obverse side, but also the first four letters of the *ʾbgd (ʾAbgad)* sequence on its reverse. Even if Reverse x + 2 was pronounced without an initial glottal stop by the Egyptians but rather a vowel, and Reverse x + 5 with <g> was an Egyptian onomatopoeic word, both sounds were still the closest approximations to Semitic /ʾ/ and /g/. The fifth term (the vessel *ḏ3r*, maybe *zīr*) could indicate the phoneme /z/, which follows three positions later in the *ʾAbgad* sequence.

As Haring (2015: 194) remarked regarding the acrostic *h-l-ḥ-m* on the obverse of the ostracon, this must be more than just a coincidence. The TT99 Ostracon would thus constitute the oldest attestation of the *ʾAbgad* sequence, probably in its shorter variant of 22 letters. This attestation predates the ostracon of ʿIzbet Ṣarṭah, so far our oldest witness by three centuries (Sanders 2009: 90–91; Lehmann 2011: 19) and the longer version of the standard Ugaritic alphabet (*ʾAbgḫd*) by two centuries. The ostracon from TT99 would then be a *double abecedary* of both ancient alphabet sequences: After writing down the first seven (or more) letters of the *Halaḥam* sequence on the obverse, the scribe flipped the ostracon over to continue with the initial part of the (short) *ʾAbgad* sequence.[20] **Figure 3** gives the two sides of the ostracon with the identifications of the terms proposed here.

The abecedary would then testify to the knowledge of the two Semitic alphabetic canons in Egypt during the mid-18th Dynasty and, to resume Haring's reference to a judgment by Alan H. Gardiner at the end of his article, an even more advanced "alphabetic consciousness" than previously imagined. Although the find spot of the ostracon in a secondary context (Shaft I) precludes an unambiguous association of the abecedary with the tomb of Sennefer, its deposition does still seem to belong to the contemporary occupation of the area by 18th Dynasty tombs of high dignitaries of the state. Depending on who inscribed the ostracon, it points to the knowledge of the two Semitic alphabets either among the Theban artisans working on the tomb or among the multilingual scribal elite from the administration of the Egyptian state and its provinces around 1400 B.C.E.

[19] James Allen (2013: 48) determines <d> as the unaspirated counterpart of <t>.

[20] Without an inspection of the ostracon itself, it is difficult to establish how much of the original ostracon above Reverse x + 2 may be lost (if any). I thank Ben Haring for the information that the excavation of the shaft did not provide any fragments that could have been part of the ostracon.

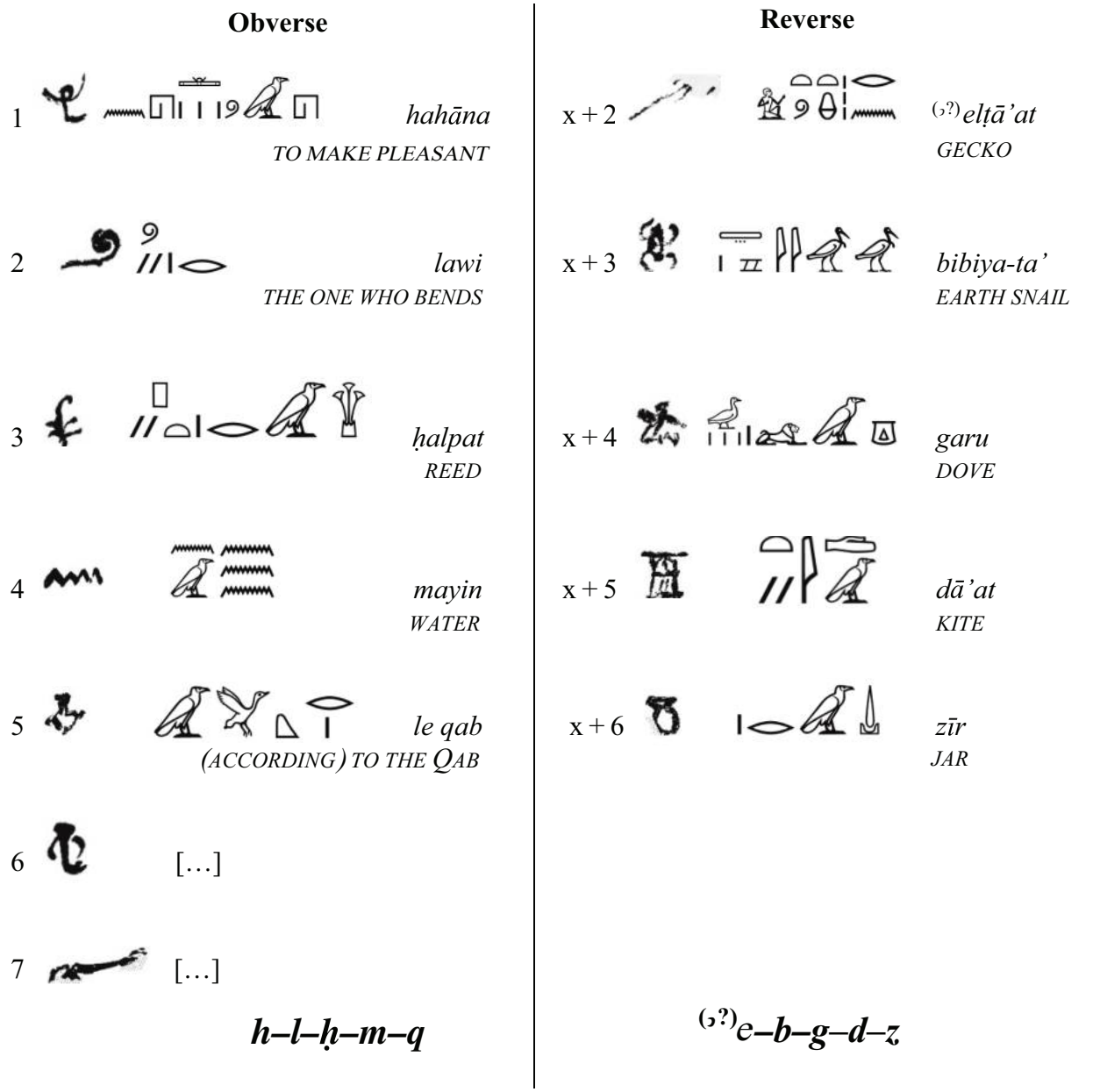


Fig. 3. Proposed identifications of terms on the obverse and reverse of the TT99 Ostracon.

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