LOANWORDS
Egyptian writing is traditionally a system which renders only consonants. As long as it uses words known to the readers and has enough mechanisms to avoid ambiguities, this is not likely to cause serious problems for the reader. Problems tend to arise, however, when new and unknown words appear. One area in which this is particularly likely to happen is foreign words, be they lexical items borrowed or, even more frequently, names of places and persons.

Such items did not have a fixed traditional orthography. Since they appeared normally after the fixation of the Egyptian orthography, we would expect them to make use predominantly of one-consonantal signs in order make them easiest to recognize. Actually, this is the case only to some extent, whereas other factors additionally come into play.

It is useful to separate the evidence chronologically, since during different times, quite different solutions were adopted. For the earlier periods, lexical loanwords are not distinguishable by their orthography from original Egyptian vocabulary – so much so that it is indeed disputed whether to consider some items as early loans or not. This is due to an actual debate raging about the phonetic correspondences between Egyptian and the Afro-Asiatic languages in general. Some crucial sounds are evaluated completely differently in the “traditional” school (e.g., Takács 1999) and the “Rößlerian” school (e.g., Quack 2002a, Schneider 2003b). The last one supposes, among other things, that Egyptian ⟨c⟩ corresponds etymologically to the voiced dentals of the Semitic languages and only developed its quality as a laryngeal shortly before or in the Middle Kingdom. If one accepts this, word pairs showing a correspondence between Egyptian ⟨c⟩ and Semitic ⟨t⟩ and having a high-quality semantic fit could be picked up as Middle Kingdom loans (e.g., Schneider 2003: 194), whereas the traditional school would consider them to be genuinely Egyptian and proof against Rößlers ideas.

Apart from those disputed cases, there is one fairly plausible loanword singled out recently. The word ḫ.t “leek” corresponds to Semitic