TOWARDS ANOTHER SCRIPT
EGYPTIAN WRITING FOR NON-EGYPTIAN LANGUAGES
AND VICE VERSA: A SHORT OVERVIEW

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Since my contribution about the writing of foreign words has already induced me to give some remarks about the use of Egyptian writing systems for writing foreign languages, I will provide a separate discussion for them here. The fact that the Egyptian writing could be, and was used for writing other languages is of some theoretical interest. The following documentation (see Peust 1999: 74f and 78), will only consider cases where not only single words were rendered but also connected texts of at least one sentence in length.

The literary letter of the New Kingdom, attested mainly in papyrus Anastasi I, contains, besides many deliberately chosen individual foreign words, in 23, 5 one single phrase entirely in a Semitic language (Fischer-Elfert 1983: 138, 1986: 152, Hoch 1994: 20f). The language is obviously chosen because the sentence is supposedly spoken by Asians, thus it adds a local dimension. We can suppose that at least part of the intention was to convey the semantic meaning as well as the fact of its foreignness to the educated reader.

The ostracon Cairo CG 25759 rt. comes from the Valley of the Kings at Thebes and dates to the twentieth dynasty (Černý 1935: 79 and pl. XCVI, 92*, 93*). On the recto, it is written in hieratic script, but does not seem to be Egyptian in language. It has been analyzed as a North-West Semitic text concerning an everyday affair (handing over of a goat) (Shisha-Halevy 1978). The imperfect preservation of the piece as well as the small extent of the text renders all interpretations problematic. It might be not a connected text at all, but a list of words or even personal names, e.g., the first entry could be analyzed as a mixed Egyptian and Semitic name t3-n.t-čm “she of the goats”. The scanty remains on the verso are definitely in Egyptian. If this really is a business text in Northwest-Semitic, it would be due to the fact that many Asiatics were settled in Egypt during the New Kingdom, and they might have occasionally used their own language even if sticking to the local script system. Thus, this would be a conveyer of semantic meaning, even more so than in pAnastasi I.