













## Not Dead Yet!

### *Legitimizing Imperial-Period Hieroglyphic Symbolisms*

Lucius's transformation into an ass in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* integrates the Egyptian god Seth into metamorphosis literature. By linking Lucius and Seth, Apuleius aligns the *Metamorphoses*' Platonic themes with systems of significance that surrounded the Seth/ass pairing in Egyptian religion. This puts Apuleius in close company with Plutarch. Both authors broached Seth's associations with disorder, chaos, and all that hinders philosophical contemplation through the animals—like the ass, hippopotamus, and crocodile—with which he was identified. This is a web of meaning that surrounded Seth's animals as they were translated from Egyptian-language sources, through Aegyptiaca, to Plutarch and Apuleius.

The nexus of Seth, his animals, and the cosmological concepts that he signified is not just a Platonic projection. In a very basic way, the Seth animal means “chaos”; the connection is direct and semantic. Looking at the Egyptian-language words tagged with the Seth animal as a classifier bears this out. A range of disorder verbs were lumped together into one coherent semantic field by means of a Seth-animal written at their end as a so-called determinative sign.<sup>1</sup> Key vocabulary like    *sh<sup>3</sup>* (to be in confusion),    *khb* (to be violent, to roar),   *h<sup>3</sup>h<sup>3</sup>tj* (storm),   *nshj* (rage/disaster/storm), and   *hnn* (to disturb/tumult) all use the Seth animal as a determinative.<sup>2</sup> The Seth animal was semantically tied to chaos vocabulary like *hnnw* and *nshj*, both antonyms to important words of universal order (*m<sup>3</sup>t* and *htp* respectively). Animals are

1. Te Velde (1977, 25). For the world-organizational role of determinatives, see Goldwasser (2002); for the lexical semantics of determinatives, Grossman and Polis (2012). Goldwasser (2006) prefers “classifier,” which I also use.

2. *sh<sup>3</sup>*: Wb. 3.206; *khb*: Wb. 5.137; *h<sup>3</sup>h<sup>3</sup>tj*: Wb. 3.363, where this spelling is a New Kingdom variant; *nshj*: 2.340; *hnn*: Wb. 3.383.

embedded in the language of disorder, in the same way that a scarab is embedded in the semantics of autogenesis. To talk about animals and the divine is to discuss the animal-shaped characters through which the Egyptian language bound together gods and cosmological concepts.

### *The Animal/Hieroglyph Nexus*

This interconnection of animal, iconography, and script is not limited to Egyptian-language evidence. Apuleius leverages the contiguity of animals and the hieroglyphic script to coordinate Lucius's asinine metamorphosis with his initiation into Isiac religion. When Lucius finally transforms back into a human and then undergoes his promised initiation into the cult of Isis, he glimpses the sacred texts on which Isiac lore is written:

From a hidden and inner part of the temple the priest produces some rolls written in unknown letters. Some of those rolls suggest, through all kinds of animal characters, concise versions of solemn formulae; others have their meaning protected from the curiosity of the uninitiated by letters that are intricate, twisted into themselves like a wheel, and thickly knotted like vine-tendrils.<sup>3</sup>

The Isis cult's liturgical texts reinject animal symbolism into a narrative of initiations.<sup>4</sup> After Lucius's metamorphosis back into human form, Apuleius exploits hieroglyphs' evocation of symbolically laden, gated-off knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Through these hieroglyphic animal characters, the ability to "read" animal figures becomes a precondition for initiation and salvation. Apuleius deliberately shifts from "letters" (*litteris*) to "characters" (*figuris*) to underline the figurative quality of hieroglyphs. Greeks and Romans generally thought that hieroglyphic was an ideogrammatic script comprised of animal "figures."<sup>6</sup> Apuleius builds on this association of animal and script to bind together linguistically encoded wisdom and recognition of animal characters. Animal characters present the cult of Isis's exclusivity in the same terms as the long-postponed recognition of Lucius's inner humanity, which was also hidden behind an otherwise inscrutable and illegible asinine exterior. Apuleius's final book relies on this bivalence of the "figure" to stitch together Lucius's metamorphosis and initiation.

Animal-shaped gods and animal-shaped characters circularly reinforced each other's significance. The hieroglyphic script adds a semiotic underpinning to the

3. Apul. *Met.* 11.22.8: de opertis adyti profert quosdam libros litteris ignorabilibus praenotatos, partim figuris cuiusce modi animalium concepti sermonis compendiosa verba suggerentes, partim nodosis et in modum rotae tortuosis capreolatimque condensis apicibus a curiositate profanorum lectione munita.

4. For more on this continuity of hieroglyphic and animal metamorphosis, see Kelting (2021), from which this paragraph and part of the next are taken.

5. Burkert 1972 (176) and Struck (2004, 80–88) trace the symbol back to its roots as a passcode. Benson (2019, 212–13) frames *Met.* 11.23.6–7 through the passwords used in mystery cults.

6. Exemplary is Tac. *Ann.* 11.14.

discussions of the philosophical and literary receptions of Egypt's animal-shaped gods highlighted in the previous part of this book. The basic mechanics of the Egyptian language and its tripartite structure of phonograms that communicate sound values, ideograms that communicate images, and determinatives that classify lexemes into semantic fields go a long way in explaining the overlap between zoomorphism and hieroglyphic.<sup>7</sup> The two were mutually dependent cultural forms. That is clear no matter where in the chain of cultural translation you look. On the close and semantic level of the hieroglyphic script, the Seth animal literally determined cosmological concepts of chaos and disorder. When discussed by Apuleius, Egypt's animal hieroglyphs and Lucius's asinine exterior both hide an inner truth that is knotty, opaque, and difficult to access.

Authors of *Aegyptiaca* were the mediators who presented the Egyptian language to a Greek and Roman audience. The interconnection between iconography and script allowed authors of *Aegyptiaca* to triangulate language, animal, and cosmological principle. That holds particularly true for the ideograms and determinatives on which these authors focused. For both types of signs, the linguistic identification of the divine through animal characters is inextricable from the iconographic identification of gods with either fully or partially zoomorphic figures. This inextricability of language and divine zoomorphism is poorly served in a "cultural representation" model. Different scholars write different books on different *topoi* surrounding Egypt in Greco-Roman literature. As a result, isolated scholarship on hieroglyphs and on animals in the Roman imagination fail to account for the explanatory systems that arise when these two categories are juxtaposed.<sup>8</sup> This has been exacerbated by a general ambiguity in reception scholarship about whether the object of focus is purely the hieroglyphic script—and thus grammatically conservative "Traditional Egyptian"—or the Egyptian language as it was actually spoken in the Ptolemaic and imperial periods.<sup>9</sup> Greek and Roman interest in the Egyptian language is not wholly circumscribed by hieroglyphic characters, just like animal worship does not encapsulate fully the connection between animals and the divine.

How did authors of *Aegyptiaca* present the Egyptian language? The question reasserts the basic task of the translator, which has skirted around the margins of the model of cultural translation I have been promoting. Drilling down on

7. For a basic introduction to the principles of the Egyptian language, see Allen (2000, 1–14). For more information on Egyptian linguistics, see Loprieno (1995).

8. The standard work on hieroglyphic's reception is Iversen (1961; see also 1971). As an example of this silo effect, hieroglyphic animal signs are unmentioned by Rosati (2009) and Kindt (2021b) (cf. the passing analogization offered by Smelik and Hemelrijk 1984, 1861).

9. Roman-Egyptian interest in and adaptation of the hieroglyphic script is well discussed by Iversen (1961, 1971) and Love (2021, see 339–44 for overview). "Traditional Egyptian" (only really studied by corpus, rather than synoptically—as the bibliography of Engsheden 2016 makes clear) is a term for the grammar of Persian-, Ptolemaic-, and Roman-Egyptian hieroglyphic inscriptions, a term complementary to "Ptolemaic Egyptian" (Kurth 2008), which is primarily used to distinguish Ptolemaic (versus pharaonic) hieroglyphic orthography.

discreet acts of translation dramatizes the precarious authority that defines latter-day authors of *Aegyptiaca*. They were writing at a time when the hieroglyphic script was falling out of use. That is an essential framework that hangs over their presentation of the Egyptian language. So far, I have avoided a restrictive dichotomy of correct/incorrect to evaluate the cultural translation in *Aegyptiaca*. But how can that latitude withstand moments when an author like Chaeremon seems to fake his way through the Egyptian language?<sup>10</sup> Just how much leeway should we give to authors of *Aegyptiaca* who promote symbolic and philosophical readings of the hieroglyphic script that run roughshod over the actual semantics of the Egyptian language?

All of which is to say, the Egyptian language itself can provide an acid test of the agency and flexibility I am trying to assign to authors of *Aegyptiaca*. Language puts in stark relief the gap between equally valuable frames for *Aegyptiaca*: Glissant's creolizing web of relation, which promotes ongoing, dynamic, and non-teleological mixture, and the fact of the hieroglyphic script's "death." I will be pushing back against the utility of the "death of hieroglyphic" narrative in this chapter, but the hieroglyphic script did in fact fall out of use—if well after the end point of this book.<sup>11</sup> This fact can enrich, rather than erode, the way we approach *Aegyptiaca*. Glissant's effusive defense of the translator is a helpful point of departure:

What does this mean if not that, just as the poet invents a *langage* in his own language, the translator has to invent a *langage* going between one language and the other? A necessary *langage* going from one language to the other, a *langage* common to both of them, but in some sense unforeseeable with regard to each of them. The translator's *langage* works like creolization and Relation in the world, that is, it produces the unforeseeable. An art of the imaginary, in this sense translation is a true operation of creolization.<sup>12</sup>

Authors of *Aegyptiaca* are translators in this vein. They provide a view onto a unique cultural formation that derives from, but is independent of, the Greek and Egyptian languages between which it is suspended. Glissant is so dogged in individuating the translator's *langage* because he wants to emphasize its particularity, dynamism, and informality. Assaying the authenticity of language in a culturally mixed environment, whether in antiquity or in the twentieth century, is to misconstrue that language's creativity and undervalue its imaginativeness. Both are essential qualities of the translations of the Egyptian language one sees in *Aegyptiaca*. They lack the formality and unambiguity of bilingual stelae and papyri, but they are no less important as artifacts of the intellectual horizons of creolization

10. For the status of hieroglyphic as an object of scribal education, the widely copied Book of the Temple (e.g., P. Jumilhac) is a key source, summarized by Love (2021, 28–33) and analyzed by Iversen (1958) and Quack (among others, 2000, 2005, and 2021).

11. Conventionally dated to 394 CE, with an inscription at Philae. For the end of hieroglyphic, see Stadler (2008).

12. Glissant (2020, 27). For a fuller analysis of Glissant's use of *langage*, see Britton (1999, 30–31).

in the ancient Mediterranean.<sup>13</sup> Chaeremon has often been taken as proof that the hieroglyphic script was in the process of dying.<sup>14</sup> But as I move through the different stakeholders—authors of *Aegyptiaca*, philosophers, and emperors—who made hay of Egyptian’s rich symbolism, I will argue that we must appreciate on its own terms the messy and imperfect but still legitimate expertise one sees in imperial-era discussions of the Egyptian language. The fact of the matter is that authors of *Aegyptiaca* were translators. What remains to be seen, in this chapter and the next, is just what kinds of translations they provided.

#### MANETHO THE TRANSLATOR AND ETYMOLOGIZER

Manetho, as the representative of *Aegyptiaca* in its tidiest and most authoritative guise, is a good starting point. First, it requires little argument that Manetho was fluent in spoken Egyptian (*viz.* Demotic) and drew on inscribed Egyptian written in the grammatically conservative hieroglyphic script. Second, that authority over the Egyptian language is a primary point of reference for the Greek and Roman authors who discussed him. Third, attention to Manetho as translator furthers an argument I have been making across this book: that his expertise ranged much more widely than the annalistic history for which he is best known today.

#### *Translating “Translation”*

Ancient authors who discuss Manetho regularly highlight his access to Egyptian-language evidence. Josephus is no fan of Manetho, as any reader of the *Against Apion* will soon learn. But Josephus establishes a set pattern that repeatedly flags Manetho’s access to hieroglyphic inscriptions to divide up Manetho’s narrative into proper history based on written records and spurious mythological interpolation.<sup>15</sup>

The first mention of Manetho in the *Against Apion* is representative: “Manetho was an Egyptian by birth and had a Greek education, as is obvious; for he wrote a history of his home country in Greek, having made a translation from the hieroglyphic, as he himself says.”<sup>16</sup> Ironically, it is not easy to translate the phrase

13. Discussed by Fewster (2002), Dieleman (2005), Kidd (2011), and Vierros (2012) (bilingualism and translation in specific dream, magical, and documentary papyrological archives); Papaconstantinou (2010) and Evans and Obbink (2010) (wide-ranging volumes on Greek/Traditional Egyptian/Demotic interaction); Dumas (1952) (bilingualism in the Canopus and Memphis decrees); and Hoffmann, Minas-Nerpel, and Pfeiffer (2009) (the trilingual Gallus stele).

14. Fowden (1986, 65) and Burstein (1996, 602–3).

15. Dillery (2015, 204–6) quotes this passage at greater length. He emphasizes Josephus’s insistence that the “textual” component of Manetho’s history (the material I quote) exculpates Jews where Manetho’s much weaker oral and mythological source material (not included in my excerpt) casts Jews as leprous Egyptians.

16. Joseph. *Ap.* 1.73 = *BNJ* 609 T 7a: Μανεθὼν δ’ ἦν τὸ γένος Αἰγύπτιος, ἀνὴρ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς μετεσχηκῶς παιδείας, ὡς δηλὸς ἐστίν· γέγραφε γὰρ Ἑλλάδι φωνῇ τὴν πάτριον ἱστορίαν ἐκ τε τῶν ἱερῶν <γραμμάτων>, ὡς φησιν αὐτὸς μεταφράσας.

"having made a translation from the hieroglyphic (ἱερῶν γραμμάτων)." First, my translation of "hieroglyphic" is anodyne, but surprisingly heterodox. Most published translations suggest that here *hierôn grammatôn* denotes Egyptian inscribed chronologies. Lang's translation of "sacred records" in her *Jacoby* entry points in that direction.<sup>17</sup> But a simpler translation is the better one. To jump directly from hieroglyphic to evidentiary records like kings lists is an overreach. The more generic term "hieroglyphic" fits with the standard use of *hieroi grammatoi* since Herodotus: to indicate the Egyptian language in its hieroglyphic script.<sup>18</sup> It also better renders a boilerplate formula that Josephus uses to describe translations from a native language.<sup>19</sup> This is more than just nit-picking. Stripping *hieroi grammatoi* to its basic meaning relocates the discussion away from Manetho's bonafides as an annalistic history-writer toward Manetho's importance as a translator of the Egyptian language and the range of generic traditions that it contained.<sup>20</sup>

The translation of the very word "translate" is also worth pausing over. Josephus twice uses variations of the phrase "translated from the Egyptian language" to situate Manetho's authority. But both variations of the verb "translate" emphasize the deliberation and circumspection that come with moving Egyptian-language generic traditions into Greek. The first example: "For this same Manetho, who endeavored to translate (μεθερμηνεύειν) Egyptian historiography from hieroglyphs. . . ."<sup>21</sup> The root verb, *hermèneuô*, foregrounds ideas of explanation. In the process, it becomes clear that this translation is a rearticulation of a tradition that must undergo reframing in its new cultural context. Of course, this is true of all translations, so there is nothing exceptional in that. But the "hermeneutic" core of *hermèneuô* does highlight the creativity of interpretation that characterizes Glissant's translator. The verb's attested usages cluster around cross-cultural translations of gods' names and etymologies.<sup>22</sup> These divine etymologies emphasize a bi-cultural equivalence-seeking that sets this particular form of translation apart.

17. Lang (2014). Waddell (1940, 77) chooses "sacred tablets" (cf. Dillery 2015, 204, "sacred writings," and Verbrugghe and Wickersham (1996, 129), "priestly writings"). Waddell's justification—"Manetho would naturally base his History upon temple-archives on stone as well as on papyrus"—speaks to a circularity against which I am pushing back.

18. As suggested by its first attested use, Hdt. 2.106. See also Pl. *Ti.* 23e and 27b.

19. Compare Joseph. *AJ* 8.144.

20. Some supporting evidence for this focus on pure access to inscribed Egyptian, on script rather than on genre, comes from Eusebius. He cites (*BNJ* 609 T 9) an apparent Manethonian text called the "Sacred Book," a title (see Verbrugghe and Wickersham 1996, 101) that seems to reemphasize the religious, rather than annalistic, connotations of Egypt's "sacred letters."

21. Joseph. *Ap.* 1.228 = *BNJ* 609 F 10a: ὁ γὰρ Μανεθῶς οὗτος ὁ τὴν Αἰγυπτιακὴν ἱστορίαν ἐκ τῶν ἱερῶν γραμμάτων μεθερμηνεύειν ὑπεσχόμενος. . . .

22. It is used repeatedly in that sense of cultural translators, in Eudoxus (F 374 ed. Lasserre), Hecataeus of Abdera (Diod. Sic. 1.11.2–4, 12.2–3, 12.5 = *BNJ* 264 F 25), and Alexander Polyhistor (*BNJ* 273 F 131). In the string of Diodorus/Hecataeus examples, it describes Egyptian-language etymologies of gods' names translated into Greek.

In other words, *methermêneuein* is a felicitous anchor for my wider use of the phrase “cultural translation” across this book. Josephus chooses this interpretatively laden term for translation because it suits his purpose, which is to push back against Manetho’s representation of Jews. Through the specific choice of reinterpretation-qua-translation, Josephus suggests that even as Manetho draws from hieroglyphic evidence, his reinterpretation (*methermêneuein*) of said evidence is far from automatic or assured.

Even Josephus’s above-quoted “by the numbers” denotation of “translation” (“Manetho was an Egyptian by birth. . . .”) points toward the mediation of cultural traditions. The operative term (μεταφράσας) is relatively rare. At its core, it denotes concepts of consideration and elaboration that are at the heart of the root verb (φράζω). Early uses in Homer and Dionysius (the earliest extant authors to use the verb) point toward “consider” and “elaborate on,” respectively.<sup>23</sup> Even when used in a sense of “translation,” the valences of interpretation and reconsideration are still prominent. Already in antiquity, there remains an emphasis on the creative qualities of the translator that, at least according to Josephus, indicates Manetho’s dynamic, unforeseeable, and ultimately controvertible cultural production.

#### *Etymologizing: Fake It Til You Make It*

The specific acts of translation assigned to Manetho—especially the verb *methermêneuein*—prioritize “reinterpretation.” As a result, Manetho’s access to hieroglyphic texts broadens into a larger task of repositioning Egyptian historiographic traditions in a new Greek-language context. Josephus’s set phrase “ancestral history” positions literary genre as a literal object of translation.<sup>24</sup> This translation of genre required Manetho to move Egyptian annalistic memorialization into a Greek historiographic framework over which Herodotus loomed particularly large. Ian Moyer and John Dillery have debated how and in what ways Manetho translates history-writing between Egyptian and Greek conventions.<sup>25</sup> That is an essential conversation, one that locates Manetho’s intellectual production in a culturally mixed environment while emphasizing the endurance of inherited historiographic traditions. I would emphasize that Manetho is a valuable point of departure not just for generic translation of historiography, but also for the acts of reinterpretation that cluster around the “sacred” half of Egypt’s “sacred letters.” Manetho’s translations of Egyptian religious names bear out the interpretative creativity toward which *methermêneuein* points.

23. Representative are Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 3.32 and Phil. *De vit. Mos.* 2.38, which emphasize the different intentions that yield different translations of the same term.

24. In Greek, τὴν πάτριον ἱστορίαν, which is the direct object of the participle μεταφράσας.

25. Dillery (1999, 97–98) positions Manetho primarily against Herodotus; Moyer (2011, 84–141) responds by reemphasizing Manetho’s debt to Egyptian annalistic conventions; and Dillery (2015, 32, 341–42) attempts to balance both perspectives.



Through these creative etymologies, one can do two things, both of which are salutary. First, and most importantly, it is possible to demonstrate concretely a path of translation that begins with Egyptian-language etymologies of gods' names, travels through Manetho, and then reaches Plutarch. In a tradition as lacunose as *Aegyptiaca*, the verifiability of one of Manetho's etymological translations is striking:

*Also, though most people think that Amoun is the name for Zeus among the Egyptians (which we pronounce 'Ammon'), Manetho of Sebennytyus believes that 'being hidden' or 'concealment' is signified by this phrase. . . . That's why, when invoking the first god, whom they consider an embodiment of the universe, as invisible and hidden, and asking him to be visible and clear to them, they call him 'Amun.' That, in sum, is why Egyptians' reverence for wisdom in divine matters was so great.<sup>26</sup>*

It would be overly positivist to say that Manetho provides for Plutarch a correct Egyptian-language etymology. But, it is in fact correct—at least in the social context of elite scribes and priests who practiced this kind of etymologizing. Manetho really does give Plutarch an etymology of Amun that offers essential background on Amun's semantics of removal and primacy. As Manetho clearly knew, in Egyptian Amun's name was the past participle of the verb *jmn*, "to conceal."<sup>27</sup> Beyond the slippery slope of accuracy, the passage reconfigures the site where a mixed etymological and symbolic presentation of the divine is taking place. It is worth appreciating that Plutarch, for one, assigns philosophically inclined etymologies to Manetho and, through Manetho, to Egyptians writ large. By referencing Manetho's etymologies, Plutarch can persuasively align his own Platonic metaphysics with similar discussions taking place in Egyptian-language sources. Amun and concealment help Manetho (and, by extension, Plutarch) define what it means to be divine. That assignation of philosophically rich interpretation to *Aegyptiaca* is something I will return to in chapter 6, but it is worth proleptically gesturing to here.

Egyptian-language texts reveal the body of evidence from which Manetho draws this Amun-as-hiddenness gloss. No specific text can be singled out as *the* source—wordplay around Amun's name is widespread. But the famous New Kingdom hymns to Amun, contained in P. Leiden I 350, provide a good example.<sup>28</sup> The hymns, which assert the centrality of Amun in the Egyptian cosmogony, are rife with *figurae etymologicae* that help establish his primacy and unknowability. To provide one example among many:

26. DIO 9, 354c–d = BNJ 609 F 19: ἔτι δὲ τῶν πολλῶν νομιζόντων ἴδιον παρ' Αἰγυπτίοις ὄνομα τοῦ Διὸς εἶναι τὸν Ἀμοῦν (ὃ παράγοντες ἡμεῖς Ἀμμωνα λέγομεν) Μανεθῶς μὲν ὁ Σεβεννύτης τὸ κεκρυμμένον οἶεται καὶ τὴν κρύψιν ὑπὸ ταύτης δηλοῦσθαι τῆς φωνῆς. . . .

27. Wb. 1.83. For the larger function of Manetho's etymologies within his historical narrative, see Dillery (2015, 324–28).

28. Published by Zandee (1948).





provided.<sup>33</sup> But no matter the author, the etymology is idiosyncratic. There is no clear way to corroborate the etymology with either Greek or Egyptian semantics of "hindrance." To complicate matters, Manetho is not the only author to discuss the Seth/Bebon pairing. Another fragmentary Greek historian, Hellanicus of Lesbos, refers to Seth/Typhon as *Babys*.<sup>34</sup>

Even the claim directly attributed to Manetho, that Bebon was an alternate name for Seth, brings one into a gray area. There is some clear support from Egyptian evidence. The baboon-shaped god Baba or Babawy had a broad set of connections to darkness, evil, and chaos. In those guises, he came to be closely aligned with, and sometimes identified as, Seth. Any survey of Egyptian-language mentions of Babawy leads immediately to the slipperiness of this distinction between Babawy as "Sethian" and Babawy as "Seth." Babawy's role in the *Contendings of Horus and Seth* and his Sethian epithet Nebed in the Papyrus Jumilhac underline a close relationship between Seth and Baba that often verges into syncretistic identification of the two.<sup>35</sup> This is nothing new. Minor divinities in Egypt often followed a process in which they first were identified with major deities who shared a quality or cult site with them, and then were entirely subsumed into them.<sup>36</sup> Manetho is, then, trying to capture an on-the-ground reality in Egypt, where local and national gods were aligned with each other. That is important to stress, even if the dichotomy (comrade versus syncretistic pair) that Plutarch is structuring this Manetho citation around is ultimately wrongheaded. But no matter what, there is still a clear and identifiable path of translation that moves from Egyptian language sources connecting a baboon god to Seth, through Manetho, to Plutarch. Even if some specifics are lost, the Baba material is still making its way into Plutarch.

Casting a wider net for Manetho's etymologies makes things even less tidy. There is plenty of evidence that even an exegete of Egyptian culture as exalted as Manetho provides etymologies whose Egyptian-language credentials are sketchy. That ambivalence of accuracy is also a salutary lesson to take away from Manetho's etymologizing. The main non-Plutarch source for Manetho's etymologies comes from Josephus and the debate about the Exodus. Frustratingly, it occurs in a much-disputed passage.<sup>37</sup> In Josephus's larger recapitulation of Manetho's

33. This is a problem that comes inevitably with fragmentary authors. For my use of "co-authorship," see chapter 1.

34. Ath. *Deipn.* 15, 679f–680a = *BNJ* 4 F 54.

35. As explained by Griffiths (1970, 487–89). For texts, *Contendings* 3, 9–10 (Broze 1996), P. Jumilhac 16, 22 (Vandier 1962).

36. Well discussed by Hornung (1982, 91–99).

37. As Barclay (2000 56–57n316) makes clear, Joseph. *Ap.* 1.83 is a textually suspect passage. He summarizes well the various proposed solutions and tentatively concludes that this is an interpolation. I find the more commonly endorsed alternative "2" the most attractive, in which the passage reflects an edited version of Manetho. The presence of the "shepherds" gloss in Manetho's annalistic history offers enough support that the etymology is Manetho's, even if Barclay is right and this passage is an interpolation. Moyer (2011, 122–25) and (especially) Dillery (2015, 206–10) defend the passage's utility for reconstructing Manetho's narrative.

version of the Exodus, Manetho turns to the common tradition associating the Jews of the Exodus with the Hyksos migration. The Hyksos were a set of Delta-based dynasties of the Second Intermediate Period. They ruled an area that had undergone demographic changes during the Middle Kingdom, when mass resettlement of West Asians in the Delta led to a mixed Levantine-Egyptian cultural milieu. But after the Thebans of the Seventeenth Dynasty defeated the Hyksos kings, a far-reaching *damnatio memoriae* consigned the Hyksos to the ranks of chaotic, foreign-born, non-Egyptian foes whose expulsion helped restore Maat and universal harmony. It was in that spirit that subsequent annalists, like Manetho, began to connect the Hyksos period and its roots in West Asian immigration with the debate about the historicity of the Exodus.

On to the etymology itself. Josephus mentions that Manetho gave two etymologies for the Hyksos: “shepherds” and “captives.”<sup>38</sup> Fortunately, there is corroborating evidence that the etymology is well and truly Manetho’s. In his annalistic history, Manetho labels the Fifteenth Dynasty the “shepherd-kings.”<sup>39</sup> “Shepherds” is not an ideal gloss for the Hyksos, a Greek transliteration of *ḥꜥꜥꜣw ḥꜣswt*, “rulers of the foreign lands.”<sup>40</sup> It seems clear that this gloss is both a misrepresentation of Egyptian etymologies of the Hyksos and safely attributable to Manetho. The combination of those two facts is of course troubling, as it seems to erode the foundations of Manetho’s inimitable authority over the Egyptian language.

When taken as a group, the Amun, Bebon, and Hyksos glosses demand an approach to Manetho’s use of language that avoids the pitfalls of a correct/incorrect rubric. In some cases, this is recuperative. Manetho’s representation of the Hyksos kings is, *de facto*, an Egyptian explanation because Manetho was himself an Egyptian. To call it incorrect is a misguided approach to how and in what ways language and etymologies depend on the particular person giving it voice. I am far from the first to suggest that folk etymologies are correct in the eyes of the people who relied on them.<sup>41</sup> Manetho’s “shepherd-kings” has its own kind of authority that can be appreciated on its own terms.

That also enriches the Amun etymology, which is underserved if it is only cited as correct. Amun-qua-hidden is a clear example of how systems of significance could travel between cultural and linguistic communities. Its value lies not in rubberstamping Manetho as a correct etymologizer; it lies instead in the way that Plutarch assigns to Manetho an exegetical role that places philosophically rich modes of interpretation unproblematically in an Egyptian’s mouth. That assignation is the essential lesson to be taken away from Manetho as etymologizer and exegete

38. The alternative depends, per Joseph. *Ap.* 1.82, on the first syllable, *hyk*.

39. For shepherd-kings in the Fifteenth Dynasty, see Syncellos 113.7 (ed. Dindorf) = *BNJ* 609 F 2 (cf. Moyer 2011, 121). For Josephus’s citation of the two etymologies, see F 8 (with Lang 2014 *ad loc.* for discussion).

40. Discussed most authoritatively by Ryholt (1997).

41. Filos (2019, 162, and see 160n2 for the origin of *Volksetymologie*) defines folk etymologies and emphasizes their independence from a correct/incorrect dichotomy.

of Egypt's gods. Manetho's flexible cultural translation maintains its emphasis on the structures that make Egyptian etymological data coherent and meaningful, no matter how precisely the etymologies in question succeed or fail when weighed against Egyptian-language sources from the distant Egyptian past. A collective impulse to celebrate Manetho's accuracy and bemoan his failure misses the picture that should be drawn with Manetho's use of language. Etymologies were a dynamic and malleable tool through which Manetho developed his exegetical authority.

#### HIEROGLYPHIC SYMBOLISM AND OTHER PRECARIOUS TRANSLATIONS

##### *Chaeremon the Close-But-Not-Quite-Right Translator*

Chaeremon amplifies the issues that Manetho has introduced. The mixed bag that we see in Manetho, where etymological explanations sometimes track and sometimes fail to track with Egyptian-language evidence, becomes decidedly more mixed in Chaeremon. This is not a rebuke of Chaeremon and later authors of *Aegyptiaca*, who have long been compared unfavorably with Manetho. It is instead a sign of how an authoritative explanation of the Egyptian language changes when the Ptolemaic gives way to the imperial period. As with sacred animals, imperial-era Egyptians' discussions of the hieroglyphic script frustrate any neat division between explanations vouchsafed by pharaonic evidence and tendentious, Greek "philosophications" of the Egyptian language. This builds on the general ambivalence in the other facet of Chaeremon's intellectual profile, which aligned philosophical and priestly practice into a composite form over which he could claim joint mastery.<sup>42</sup>

That ambiguity of authority extends to the main text that Chaeremon wrote, the *Hieroglyphica*. His explanation of hieroglyphic for a Roman audience was, as the title spells out, a defining feature of his intellectual profile. His is one of the two *Hieroglyphica* known from the ancient world. These two *Hieroglyphica*, of Chaeremon and the much later, difficult-to-date Egyptian priest Horapollon, offer symbolically and religio-philosophically laden explanations of hieroglyphic signs.<sup>43</sup> Chaeremon's specific presentation of Egyptian heightens the questions of authority over hieroglyphic introduced by Manetho. It is clear, by the very fact of his annalistic history, that Manetho had some demonstrable expertise with inscribed Egyptian texts. When one moves onward in *Aegyptiaca* to Chaeremon, that sort of authentication is harder to come by.

42. For the biography of Chaeremon, see Frede (1989), Frankfurter (1998, 224–25), and chapter 2 in this book. I analyze the mixed semantics of Chaeremon's philosopher-priest role in chapter 6.

43. While outside the chronological frame of this book, Horapollon's presentation of hieroglyphs (see Boas 1993, 15–18 for difficulties of dating) complements Chaeremon's, where heavy-handed philosophical glosses of hieroglyphs (discussed by Wildish 2017, 107–27 for symbolic explanations, 34–71 for natural-philosophical context) still show clear connections to the mechanics of Ptolemaic- and Roman-Egyptian hieroglyphic.

The very indirect preservation of Chaeremon's *Hieroglyphica* exacerbates the general questions of authority that arise alongside the shift from Manetho to Chaeremon. Put simply, the two main sources for Chaeremon's presentation of the Egyptian language are late and leave something to be desired.<sup>44</sup> The main citing authority, who offers the meatiest extant fragment of the *Hieroglyphica*, is Ioannes Tzetzes.<sup>45</sup> He lived in the twelfth century CE. The gap that separates him from the first century CE and Chaeremon is more than wide. Tzetzes's entry in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* just about sums it up: "A copious, careless, quarrelsome Byzantine polymath."<sup>46</sup> An absolutely prolific author whose *History* canonized the Greek cultural tradition, Tzetzes's early exegetical work on the *Iliad* veered into the very type of allegorical interpretation for which hieroglyphic was such a frequent point of reference. His freewheeling style of quotation is not very encouraging—per the OCD, "he is extremely inaccurate." Besides Tzetzes, it remains possible that Chaeremon formed the source of Ammianus Marcellinus's discussion of the hieroglyphic script, though Chaeremon is never explicitly cited by Ammianus.<sup>47</sup>

So, the evidence is not exactly watertight. But even with this sorry state of affairs, it is worthwhile to see how a line of interpretation that emphasizes "symbolism" coexists with glosses of hieroglyphic signs that felicitously match the semantics of those signs in Egyptian. Even granting Tzetzes's shortcomings and distortions, there is some core value to the information that is assigned to Chaeremon. One certainly cannot take it as a verbatim quote, but I find it more probable than not that some of the discrete hieroglyph-plus-translation pairs were present in Chaeremon's original text.<sup>48</sup> The fragment is worth quoting in full:

For Ethiopians do not have phonological letters, but instead all kinds of animals, their limbs, and other pieces.<sup>49</sup> *For the more ancient sacred-scribes, wanting to hide the natural philosophy of the gods, handed these things down to their children through allegories and symbols of this kind, as the sacred-scribe Chaeremon says.* And in place

44. Ioannes Tzetzes, who provides the longest fragments (T 6 and F 12, cf. T 12, F 13, 26D, 27D), though Ammianus Marcellinus is another potential source (F 28D), as Foster (2020, 889) argues, picking up the discussion of Schwyzer (1932, 98). Clement too (F 19D) might be a valuable (if never explicit) source for Chaeremon fragments, as van der Horst (1984, 68) argues.

45. F 12, discussed by Wendel (1940) and van der Horst (1984, 62–63).

46. Forbes, Browning, and Wilson (2016).

47. On which, Foster (2020, 889).

48. The general style of interpretation one sees in the Tzetzes fragment fits squarely with the alignment of Egyptian/religious and Greek/philosophical thinking on display in Chaeremon's other fragments from more chronologically proximate sources, e.g. Origen and Porphyry in F 3 and 4. For a fact-checking approach to the fragment's glosses and for a defense of Chaeremon's knowledge of hieroglyphic, see van der Horst (1984, 62–63).

49. Tzetzes presents the hieroglyphic script as Ethiopian in no small part due to the rise of the Kingdom of Axum, through which the distinction between Meroitic (on which Rilly and de Voogt 2012, 3) and Egyptian was lost on later Byzantine authors.

of 'joy' they wrote a woman beating a drum; in place of 'grief' a man holding up his chin with his hand and bowing to the earth; in place of 'misfortune' an eye crying; of 'not having' two empty, outstretched hands; of 'sunrise' a serpent coming out of a hole, of 'sunset' one entering it; in place of 'rebirth' a frog; of 'soul' hawk, as well as of 'sun' and 'god,' in place of 'daughter-bearing woman,' 'mother,' 'time,' and 'heaven' a vulture; of 'king' a bee; instead of 'birth' and 'autogenesis' and 'men' a beetle; instead of 'earth' a bull. The front of a lion indicates 'total sovereignty' and 'protection,' the back of a lion 'necessity'; a deer the 'year'; ditto the palm tree. A child indicates 'growing'; an old man 'decaying'; a bow 'keen power'; and thousands of others, from which Homer says these things.

If you choose, elsewhere I will also give the Ethiopic pronunciations of these characters, drawing on Chaeremon.<sup>50</sup>

Chaeremon no longer includes spoken Egyptian as a meaningful etymological source. As the end of the fragment makes clear, a discussion of Egyptian phonetics is a promise postponed. The straightforward pairs of signifier and signified suggest that Chaeremon is engaging exclusively with determinatives and ideograms. This fits generally with the changes that occurred to the hieroglyphic script during the Ptolemaic period, when hieroglyphic orthography increasingly relied on iconographic characters at the expense of the traditional grouping of phonograms plus a determinative.<sup>51</sup>


Even with this oversimplification, there remains in the quotation a stubborn grip on information that aligns with Egyptian-language sources. That is what makes the Tzetzes material worth the trouble. I certainly cannot say that everything Tzetzes includes here belongs to Chaeremon, nor that Tzetzes is accessing Chaeremon directly, rather than through an intermediary author or epitome. But caveats notwithstanding, the fragment makes clear that Chaeremon had some knowledge of the hieroglyphic script, all the more so because the hieroglyphic script had fallen out of use in 394 CE, some seven hundred years before Tzetzes was born.


The most impressive gloss, the one that comes closest to a real syntactic knowledge of Egyptian, is his explanation of "not having" as two empty, outstretched hands. Chaeremon clearly has in mind the ideogram and determinative for negation, *n/n* 𓂏. Second, Chaeremon makes the grade with bee as kingship; the bee was an identifier of kingship through the pharaonic *nswt-bjty* title, by which the king came to be associated with Upper and Lower Egypt.<sup>52</sup> Finally, the association of frog with resurrection has a clear Egyptian precedent. Heket, the goddess

50. F 12: βουλόμενοι γὰρ οἱ ἀρχαιότεροι τῶν ἱερογραμματέων τὸν περὶ θεῶν φυσικὸν λόγον κρύπτειν, δι' ἀλληγορικῶν [καὶ] συμβόλων τοιούτων καὶ γραμμάτων τοῖς ἰδίοις τέκνοις αὐτὰ παρεδίδουν, ὥς ὁ ἱερογραμματεὺς Χαϊρήμων φησί.

51. Kurth (2007–2008) (cf. Wilson 1997) discusses the specific orthography of Ptolemaic hieroglyphic.

52. Von Beckerath (1984, 13–21). This specific gloss is also included in Ammianus, as discussed by Foster (2020, 884–85, 888–89).

of childbirth, was zoomorphically represented as a frog. The frog determinative sometimes used in the phrase  “repeating life” (*whm nḥ*), which occurs after names of the deceased, speaks directly to a nexus of frogs, Heket, childbirth, and life after death. The widespread presence of frog lamps in Roman-Egyptian tombs, as a means of hinting at “repeating life” and resurrection of life after death, proves the ubiquity of the association that underlies Chaeremon’s connection of frog hieroglyph with a return to life.<sup>53</sup>

Chaeremon has the verb  *hpr* in mind when he glosses the beetle hieroglyph as “birth,” “natural-grown,” and “men.” *hpr*, which variously denoted “to be born” and “to become,” underlay Egyptian conceptions of autogenesis and emergence, whether of the individual person, of the world writ large, or of the sun each day. The last of these bears directly on the zoomorphic god Khepri, who tied together the semantics of the verb *hpr* with the tripartite solar ideology of Khepri the rising sun, Re the noonday sun, and Atum the evening sun. It is no surprise that authors of *Aegyptiaca* were quick to explain the semantics of birth that helped contextualize the otherwise odd ubiquity of scarab iconography. In this regard, it is worth recalling Apion’s explanation of the scarab beetle (via Pliny).<sup>54</sup> Apion too spent some time underlining the solar connections of the scarab beetle. The mirroring between Apion and Chaeremon is striking. The two authors’ scarab passages prove that discussions of zoomorphic gods and of hieroglyphic only gain coherence when connected to each other. Especially in the imperial period, that join is part of what makes it worthwhile to see *Aegyptiaca* as a coherent tradition, rather than a set of disparate authors discussed briefly and in isolation.

Chaeremon’s glosses continue to doggedly resist a binary of emic authority and etic hucksterism. His philosophical bent continues with the hawk sign, which he associates jointly with “soul,” “sun,” and “god.” This is all a bit hodgepodge, but there is still some meaningful connection to Egyptian zoomorphic iconography. Through the “soul” gloss, Chaeremon seems to refer to the *ba* bird. I could spend a good deal of time clarifying just how “soul” mistranslates the core concept of the *ba*, which instead indicated one’s individuality and the impression one made on other people.<sup>55</sup> But since Herodotus, Greeks had identified *ba* and its iconography of a human-headed bird with the Greek soul.<sup>56</sup> So, Chaeremon’s soul reading is not exactly original or authoritative, but it is still a well-established site of cross-cultural translation between Greek philosophies of the soul and Egyptian concepts of the *ba*.

53. For the use of Gardiner I7 in the phrase *whm nḥ*, see Iacoby and Spiegelberg (1903). For frogs and rebirth, *LdÄ* 2.334–6.

54. Plin. *HN* 30.99 = *BNJ* 616 F 19, discussed in chapter 1. For Khepri’s solar associations, see Hornung (1982, 97–98).

55. For an introduction to the role of the *ba* in the afterlife, see most systematically Zabkar (1968), but also Dunand and Zivie-Coche (2004, 168–69) and Allen (2011, 3–11).

56. *Hdt.* 2.123 connects the *ba* bird to animal metempsychosis, a trend continued by *Diod. Sic.* 1.98.



The hodgepodge quality comes mainly from the shift from the *ba* bird—a type of stork—to the glosses (“sun,” “god”) that seem to refer to the Horus falcon. The Horus falcon could meaningfully be tied into solar religion via Re-Horakhty, whose iconography included Horus’s falcon zoomorphism. It is in that domain that Chaeremon’s general “god” gloss could gain some sense, even if that is a bit of a stretch. While the Horus falcon was an ideogram for various divine words—all connected in some way to Horus—the blanket term “god” was reliably denoted by the flag-pole sign *netjer*. Put simply, there is something to this threefold explanation of the hawk; it creatively sews together the avian imagery of the *ba* with the related avian imagery of the winged sun. This synthesis is certainly novel and easily labeled incorrect. But to rush to that conclusion misses out on an associative impulse that synthesizes otherwise separate domains of Egyptian culture—language, animals, metaphysics—into a coherent whole. Chaeremon’s hawk gloss requires as joint framing Glissant’s defense of the translator’s creativity and the obsolescence of hieroglyphic tied to changes in priestly training.<sup>57</sup>

Chaeremon paints a philosophical portrait of hieroglyphic, focusing exclusively on religious and cosmogonic vocabulary. His discussion of language thus fits into his larger project, which bound together Egyptian religious and Greek philosophical expertise.<sup>58</sup> If the selection is not purely the whim of Tzetzes, the hieroglyphs’ collective emphasis on metaphysics and the emotions would fit in well with Chaeremon’s Stoicism. Chaeremon’s apparent connection to Cornutus, the Stoic allegorizer, is relevant context for Chaeremon’s specific mode of glossing. Porphyry mentions Chaeremon in the same breath as Cornutus, as they were the two authorities for Stoic allegoresis of Greek gods: “Origen also made use of the books of Chaeremon the Stoic and of Cornutus, from which he came to know the substitutive (*metaleptic*) approach to the Greek mysteries. . . .”<sup>59</sup> Hieroglyphic, and particularly its use of ideograms and determinatives, fits in perfectly in this push and pull between the Stoic physics of which Chaeremon had some mastery and his presentation of Egyptian cosmogonic thinking.<sup>60</sup>

### *An Enigmatical Sort of Wisdom: From Aegyptiaca to Plutarch*

It was Manetho and Chaeremon who developed the creative explanations of Egyptian one sees in Plutarch. Authors of *Aegyptiaca* etymologized divine names, coordinated animal, god, and nature, and generally prioritized the

57. Quack (2021) gives a fine overview of this latter-day priestly training.

58. On display in FF 5–9.

59. Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.8 = T 9: ἐχρήτο δὲ καὶ Χαϊρήμονος τοῦ Στωϊκοῦ Κορνούτου τε ταῖς βίβλοις παρ’ ὧν τὸν μεταληπτικὸν τῶν παρ’ Ἑλλήσιν μυστηρίων γνούς. . . .

60. Particularly if one keeps in mind the explicit role of allegory in the division of the Egyptian language offered by Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 5.4.20 = Chaeremon F 20D), which van der Horst (1984, 69) (following Vergote 1941) suggests is indebted to Chaeremon’s presentation of hieroglyphic.

significance of language. In some moments, like the glosses of Amun (from Manetho) and linguistic negation (from Chaeremon), these symbolic explanations align with Egyptian-language evidence. But at other times, they decidedly do not. I have been suggesting that this does not so much threaten the accuracy of authors of *Aegyptiaca* as it does demand a theoretical approach to translation that prioritizes creativity and inventiveness between languages. *Aegyptiaca*'s "Greegyptian" argot of religio-philosophical vocabulary contains its own imaginative logic, responsive to the times and sociocultural contexts that defined it. It was a sociocultural context that aligned Chaeremon with Plutarch, since both turned to etymology as a mixed Greek and Egyptian tradition essential to philosophical and religious expertise.<sup>61</sup>

Plutarch uses an etymology to bolster the very premise of the *On Isis and Osiris* (*DIO*): he moves from a paean of truth-searching to the Osiris myth through an etymology of Isis from "to know" (οἶδα), which coordinates Isis-worship with philosophy through the love of knowledge shared by both. As a part of this etymology, Plutarch clarifies: "Isis is a Greek word."<sup>62</sup> This has been a contentious etymology, one whose coordination of an Egyptian god with a Greek verb invites readings that emphasize cultural priority.<sup>63</sup> As I will discuss more fully in the next chapter, racing to cultural priority misses the forest for the trees. The etymology is a point of departure for Plutarch's attempts to align priests and philosophers as kindred truth-seekers. For now, I want to emphasize the foundational role of the etymology in the narrative. It is the crux of the *DIO*'s goals.


Pragmatically, the Isis etymology is given pride of place, but the *DIO* repeatedly turns to Egyptian- rather than Greek-language etymologies.<sup>64</sup> The etymologies that Plutarch assigns to Manetho are just two instances. There are also several examples that cannot be directly tethered to a named Egyptian author. While the path of translation from Egypt to Plutarch cannot be directly charted for these cases, they still speak to a literary milieu in which Egyptian-language material was brought over into Greek. By prioritizing the tradition of *Aegyptiaca* rather than an individual author, these "orphaned" passages can be brought into the fold of *Aegyptiaca*'s reception among Greek and Roman authors.

61. Griffiths (1970, 100–1) traces Plutarch's Stoic etymologizing back to Cornutus. Given the testimonium (T 8) presenting Chaeremon and Cornutus as the two canonical Stoic etymologizers, it is tempting to insinuate Chaeremon into this intellectual lineage.

62. *DIO* 2, 351f: Ἑλληνικὸν γὰρ ἡ Ἰσίς ἐστι.

63. It is critical to the eristic reading of Richter (2001; 2011, 192–98) and to the argument for Plutarch's universalizing view of Greek philosophy offered by Görgemanns (2017, 11–12). See too Brenk (1999).

64. By this I mean etymologies which, though delivered in Greek, are oriented toward an originally Egyptian word or phrase. Griffiths (1970, 106–10) helpfully lists these etymologies and "linguistic elements," notably avoiding the Isis-as-"to know" etymology.

Plutarch's linguistic connection of the fish hieroglyph to hatred is a good place to start.<sup>65</sup> Fish are a recurrent presence in the *DIO*: first, as a bridge between the old Homeric chestnut about fish (Homeric heroes never eat fish) and Egyptians' hatred for the fish that ate Osiris's dismembered penis.<sup>66</sup> The fish returns when Plutarch underlines the associations between the sea and Seth/Typhon, which spirals out into a discussion of Egyptians' suspicion of salt and maritime traders: "And not least on these grounds [the sea's Typhonic associations] they find fish guilty, and write out 'hatred' with a fish."<sup>67</sup> In a strict and positivist sense, the gloss holds water. Since the Old-Kingdom Pyramid Texts, Egyptians had written *bwt* ("hatred") as .<sup>68</sup> By the New Kingdom, the fish determinative in the previous spelling was used by itself as an abbreviation for the same idea of hatred. This is not so much a celebration of a victory in a correct/incorrect template I have been avoiding. The gloss's cultural fidelity to Ptolemaic hieroglyphic spelling is, instead, valuable as a shadow that delineates the outline of an author of *Aegyptiaca* who remains out of view.

Besides the *DIO*, the fish/hatred concept is reflected indirectly elsewhere in Plutarch and in Apuleius. In Book 1 (1.25) of Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, Lucius's magistrate friend takes vengeance on a huckster fishmonger by stomping on all his fish. The scene is odd enough, and Apuleius generally invested enough in esoterica, that Nicolas Lévi has suggested a play on the coordination of feet and fish in the above hieroglyphic spelling.<sup>69</sup> But one cannot be certain. No matter Apuleius's potential continuation of this tradition, Plutarch's interest in hieroglyphs is clear enough. In addition to the fish, he coordinates a falcon with "god," a pair similar to that offered by Chaeremon. The specific source for Plutarch is hard to pin down. Plutarch claims that the inscription that included these fish and falcon hieroglyphs was from Sais. Any reconstruction of a source purely on that basis is necessarily tentative.<sup>70</sup> Regardless, one sees in Plutarch a discussion of hieroglyphic signs that matches animal and concept in much the same way that Chaeremon had done. That is certainly a reconfiguration of the hieroglyphic script, but the fact remains that "hatred" is spelled with a fish glyph in inscribed Egyptian texts.

65. *DIO* 32, 363f.


66. Fish abstention and Homer: *DIO* 7, 353c–e (cf. the discussion of Pythagoras's abstention from fish and its Egyptian origins in Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* 8.8.3, 729d–e, with Meeusen 2017, 222–23); for fish's consumption of Osiris's penis, see *DIO* 18, 358a–b.

67. Plut. *DIO* 32, 363f: οὐχ ἥκιστα δὲ καὶ τὸν ἰχθὺν ἀπὸ ταύτης προβάλλονται τῆς αἰτίας καὶ τὸ μισεῖν ἰχθύι γράφουσιν. The association of fish with hatred occurs also in Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 5.7.41.3–42.3, included as a dubious fragment of Chaeremon in van der Horst (1984, F 19D).

68. *Wb.* 1.453, s.v. *bwt*.

69. Lévi (2014, 433–34).

70. Griffiths (1970, 105–6, 422–23) hazards a reconstruction based on the signs mentioned and concludes: "Enough is right to show that he [Plutarch] was in contact with a source to which the hieroglyphs were not unfamiliar" (423).

As in Chaeremon, hieroglyphic spelling offers Plutarch fodder for symbolic etymologies of gods' names. The best example is Osiris, whose name Plutarch unpacks both hieroglyphically and phonetically. In the former case, Plutarch cites the spelling of Osiris with scepter and eye to suggest that Egyptian iconography is symbolically rich in the same ways as Pythagoreanism, which correlates a numerical concept (cube) with a god (Poseidon).<sup>71</sup> Plutarch extrapolates from this spelling a wider symbolic significance, in which the eye-sign's connotations of vision and "many-eyed" suitably underline the omnipresence and omniscience of the king of the gods. Strictly as a reflection of contemporary hieroglyphic spelling, Plutarch finds corroboration in Ptolemaic monuments, which also spell Osiris (*Wsr*) with an eye and scepter .<sup>72</sup> Once again, there is enough of a toehold in contemporary orthographic practices to gesture hazily toward an Egyptian source whose authority depends on contemporary practices rather than much earlier pharaonic norms.

Plutarch does not just emphasize hieroglyphic signs and their symbolic significance. He takes a phonetic tack too. Plutarch, keen to identify Osiris with the principle of moisture, cites the Greek mythographer Hellanicus for the pronunciation "Hysiris."<sup>73</sup> While totally unconnected to the Greek hydrological vocabulary to which Plutarch tries to yoke Hysiris, this spelling does represent a better transliteration of the Egyptian pronunciation.<sup>74</sup> Even more importantly, this interest in pronunciation clarifies that hieroglyphs and determinatives do not circumscribe the Egyptian language and its reception among Greek and Roman authors.

This push beyond hieroglyphs introduces new types of cultural translation rooted in language. So, for example, Plutarch identifies *Arouêris* as either Apollo or the elder Horus. One can see quite clearly the move from elder Horus, *Hr-Wr* in Egyptian, to the phonetically similar *Arouêris*. There is also a broader form of cultural translation at play. In the overarching passage in which the transliteration occurs, Plutarch depends on an author of *Aegyptiaca* to translate into Greek a common narrative of the birth of Nut's children (Isis, Osiris, the elder Horus, Seth/Typhon, and Nephthys) on the succession of five epagomenal days that ended the Egyptian year.<sup>75</sup>

71. *DIO* 9, 354f. For the wider use of this Pythagoreanism-Egypt symbolism, see chapter 6 in this book.

72. *DIO* 10, 354f–355a. For spelling of *wsr*, see *Wb.* 1.359.

73. *DIO* 34, 364d–e: Ὑσιρις.

74. This association with moisture is, in and of itself, an *interpretatio Graeca*, though it does have some basis in later Egyptian belief, given Osiris's role in fertility and the consequent identification of Osiris with Nun. This Hellanicus is the same as the famous chronographer.

75. *DIO* 12, 355e and 356a. Plutarch here (cf. Eudoxus F 290 ed. Lasserre) reflects the standard Ptolemaic translation of *Hr-Wr*, the "great/elder" Horus (discussed by Junker 1917, 42) specific to a prominent Heliopolitan cosmogony (reflected in inscriptions at the Hathor temple at Dendera, per Cauville 1991, 93–94).

There are other religious translations similar to this *Arouêris* example. One can add, for good measure, Plutarch's translation of the text in an amulet purportedly worn by Isis. Plutarch renders it "true of voice."<sup>76</sup> While its relevance to the amulet in particular is unclear, the phrase must represent a translation of the Egyptian *mꜣꜥ hrw* ("true of voice/justified"), a ubiquitous expression for the dead who have "spoken truly" by making the negative confession, a key stage in Egyptian eschatology.<sup>77</sup> The hodgepodge quality of these orphaned fragments hints at a heterogeneous corpus of religious and eschatological topics that authors of *Aegyptiaca* sought to translate. Plutarch certainly projects a good deal onto the Egyptian language, as a cipher for the divine truth that is the *DIO*'s idealized object of philosophical investigation. But that does not mean that authors like Manetho or Chaeremon were not presenting the Egyptian language in the same way, in ways more (Amun, fish, hawk/Horus) or less (deer for year) proximate to pharaonic evidence, but consistently creative and imaginative.

#### DOMITIAN'S OBELISK, OR, "NOT DEAD YET!"

The hieroglyphic script was a material reality across the Mediterranean. That is an absolutely critical frame for the discussions of the Egyptian language one sees in Plutarch and imperial *Aegyptiaca*. The presence of Egyptian inscriptions in Italy anchors Chaeremon's *Hieroglyphica* in the pragmatic questions of how hieroglyphic was composed in Rome in the imperial period. Disciplinarily, hieroglyphic monuments help bring Chaeremon into conversation with the work of Stephanie Pearson, Molly Swetnam-Burland, Miguel John Versluys, and all those who have surveyed Italy's material, rather than literary, *Aegyptiaca*.<sup>78</sup> Both Chaeremon and hieroglyphic-inscribed obelisks traveled from Egypt to Rome on roads paved by the exigencies of empire.

While there are many recycled hieroglyphic inscriptions in Rome, the list of Rome's new hieroglyphic compositions is, unsurprisingly, pretty short. But one example suffices.<sup>79</sup> The obelisk now found in the Piazza Navona was originally commissioned with a new inscription by the emperor Domitian. It was placed in

76. *DIO* 68, 378b: φωνή ἀληθής.

77. *BD Spell* 125, translated in Allen 1974 97–101 and discussed by Assmann (1990, 130, 136–40, as a component of Maat, and 2001b, 137, as a part of Egyptian approaches to death).

78. The list of work on Egyptian material culture in Italy is too long to list. Apposite is Versluys (2002, 23, 421); Swetnam-Burland (2015), who discusses hieroglyphic inscriptions, Chaeremon, and Domitian's obelisk (41–53); Barrett (2019); Pearson (2021); and the series of conference volumes on Isis cult (Bricault 2004; Bricault, Versluys, and Meyboom 2007; Bricault and Versluys 2010, 2014).

79. Note also the so-called Antinous obelisk (on which Meyer 1994 for edition, Grimm 1994, 27–88, for text and translation, and Sorek 2010, 89–100, for discussion), another case in which a new hieroglyphic inscription was added to an obelisk, in its case to consolidate the cult to Antinous. See too the small obelisk erected in the *horti sallustiani*, discussed by Pearson (2021, 170).

Rome's Isis temple when the latter was rebuilt by Domitian as a part of his building program in the Campus Martius.<sup>80</sup> The obelisk's inscription, and particularly its celebration of the Roman emperor, tethers the symbolic expositions of the Egyptian language I have traced across this chapter to the social and political contours that surrounded Egyptian-looking stuff in Rome. Through the obelisk, Domitian celebrates the successes of his, his brother Titus's, and his father Vespasian's military and civic achievements. In doing so, Domitian both consolidates the Flavians into an identifiable dynasty and casts Roman power in the language and imagery of pharaonic rule.<sup>81</sup>

Domitian's obelisk has been productively studied. Several have highlighted the exoticizing function of hieroglyphic writ large, the obelisk form as a projection of power, and imperial obelisks as index of the principate's evolving self-definition against Egyptian religion.<sup>82</sup> These are all extrinsically significant. The obelisk's original location, in the so-called *Iseum Campense*, integrates a monument trumpeting the Flavians' power into the practice of Isis religion in Rome. That emperor/Isis pairing shows just how much things had changed since the Augustan and then Tiberian rejection of Isis cult. Under Domitian, Egypt was back in favor. Egyptians like Crispinus prospered, much to the ire of Romans like Juvenal who explained all that was wrong with Rome via the prominence, wealth, and prestige that Crispinus, the "Nile's trash," gained under Domitian's patronage.<sup>83</sup> But part of the value of Domitian's obelisk requires one to push past the bare signification of an Egyptian-looking monument that is often the stopping point in discussions of Egyptian material culture in Rome. Domitian's obelisk is not purely a tabula rasa of broad and cultural, rather than narrow and linguistic, import.

It is not just that obelisks are a frame for Aegyptiaca. It is also that Aegyptiaca is a frame for the presence of hieroglyphic inscriptions in Rome, one that can move beyond exoticism as the inevitable meaning attached to such objects.<sup>84</sup> Reducing hieroglyphs' significance solely to their exotic appeal leaves the contents of these inscriptions out of reach. Certainly, the readership of the obelisk was slim. But the significance that Egyptians attached to inscribed hieroglyphic, as a powerful speech act, holds true regardless of potential readership. What's more,

80. The text of the obelisk is published by Erman (1917) and Grenier (1987) (cf. Lembke 1994, 210–12, for translation; D'Onofrio 1965, 222–29, for its relocation to the Piazza Navona). For discussion, see too Parker (2003).

81. Vittozzi (2014, 243–46) discusses the dynasticism motif with reference to the obelisk; that dynasticism is also broadcast through the *Templum gentis Flaviae* (cf. Jones 1992, 87–88).

82. Iversen (1968, 76–92) and Sorek (2010, 79–84) catalogue the Roman obelisks. For Domitian and Isis see Lembke (1994, 69–70), and for obelisks as objects in motion see Parker (2003; 2007, 212–13).

83. To quote Juvenal's programmatic first satire (1.26). For Juvenal's treatment of Crispinus, see the historicizing approach of Baldwin (1979); Vassileiou (1984); and for Crispinus as a programmatic satiric target, Keane (2015, 49).

84. To build on a point made by Swetnam-Burland (2015, 43).

a differentiation between viewership and readership depends on an image/text binary that is a poor fit for Egyptians' understanding of hieroglyphic.<sup>85</sup> No matter who read (or viewed) it, the text still communicated a culturally mixed message of imperial power. It was a message that sought to fuse together Egypt's monumental royal ideology and the new needs of a Roman emperor wishing to consolidate his family's achievements. On the level of syntax and genre alike, the obelisk is a document in creolization. It is another text that emphasizes the intersecting layers of discreet, linguistic translation and broader generic translation, in this case of dynastic power between Egypt and Rome.

On a more basic level, the obelisk offers a point of reference for the presentation of hieroglyphic in Aegyptiaca. It provides an ideal *comparandum*, one that shows how Chaeremon's discussion of the hieroglyphic script squares with the syntax of hieroglyphic written at the beginning of the end of its history.<sup>86</sup> It can offer a corrective for a collective impulse to unfairly evaluate the Egyptian authority of post-Manetho authors of Aegyptiaca against a pharaonic yardstick. Like the messy Egyptian identity of authors of Aegyptiaca, imperial-era hieroglyphic suffers from a black mark of posteriority that singles it out as lesser than its Ptolemaic predecessor, to say nothing of pharaonic hieroglyphic monuments. That has long been the reason why the intra-textual, rather than extra-textual, significance of the obelisk's inscription has withered. From the perspective of Egyptologists equipped to read the text, Domitian's obelisk is boring and derivative. Most write off Domitian's text as a rehash of the basic formulae of obelisk inscriptions. Adolf Erman, a pioneer in the study of Rome's Egyptian obelisks, is far from enthusiastic. He concludes that the obelisk's inscription is "virtually devoid of content."<sup>87</sup>

The basic mechanics of the inscription shed light on the status of hieroglyphic. For Chaeremon, the evidence available suggests he focused exclusively on determinatives and ideograms and did not have complete mastery of the phonetic value of hieroglyphs. Domitian's obelisk and its transliteration of the Flavian emperors serve as proof that Egyptians still knew how to transliterate Latin names into Egyptian via alphabetic transcription.<sup>88</sup> So Domitian is rendered *dmtȳʿns*, Titus *dyds*, and Vespasian *wsʿpʿns*.<sup>89</sup> This was but the continuation of transliteration that had been occurring in Egypt since the Ptolemies came to town and that was critical

85. The idea of writing as a speech act is essential to the efficacy and power of hieroglyphic spelling, as discussed by Dunand and Zivie-Coche (2004, 176) and Hornung (1992, 17–36, esp. 30–34).

86. Chronologically, the obelisk was erected during the reign of Domitian (81–96 CE), not long after Chaeremon's *floruit* in the 30s–60s CE.

87. Erman (1917, 9): eigentlich ohne jeden Inhalt.

88. The transliteration of Greek and Latin names into Egyptian was instrumental to the modern decipherment of Egyptian, proving as it does the phonetic value of hieroglyphs, on which see Pope (1999, 11–84).

89. There is some ambiguity in the reading of Vespasian, in particular, the reading of the egg sign (Gardiner H8).



to the decipherment of hieroglyphic in the nineteenth century. Transliteration is a demonstration of competence that is certainly ho-hum; but the literal incorporation of Roman dynasts into an Egyptian and hieroglyphic narrative is still significant. This alphabetic transliteration tweaks the hieroglyphic script, one among many ways that contact between Egypt and Rome produced new cultural forms. But purely as an evaluation of the state of hieroglyphic, the ability to transliterate Roman names into Egyptian points to the continued phonetic importance of the hieroglyphic script. That should caution one from authoritatively writing off Chaeremon's ability to engage with Egyptian as a language, or with hieroglyphic as a phonological script with which to write that language.<sup>90</sup> All the more so because Tzetzes is such a tenuous source. Hieroglyphic was certainly changing, but it was not dead yet.

The inscription's recycling of pharaonic formulae, far from dispiriting proof of imperial-era Egyptians' inability to produce anything new, emphasizes Romans' adoption of tropes of pharaonic kingship, the translation of dynasticism from Egypt to Rome, and the continuation of the divinely-nursed-king motif in a new Roman context of Isiac religion. As an example of the former, the *topos* of Domitian as unapproachable and fear-inducing continues a motif repeated throughout famous pharaonic inscriptions like Ramesses II's Qadesh Inscription and Thutmose III's Poetical Stele from Karnak.<sup>91</sup> In the case of the king's divine support, the text adds a specific path of cultural translation around Isis that is missed when the obelisk is discussed only contextually and extrinsically, as an imperial monument located in Rome's Isis temple. The inscription reiterates the typical claim that the king was suckled at the breast of Isis and Nephthys.<sup>92</sup> To Erman, this is rote and boring—all kings were nursed by Isis. But the trope provides a model of translation of divine support that both completely contradicts Virgil's Actian rhetoric—where Octavian battles with Isis—and reveals the often-underappreciated points of connection between pharaonic religion and Rome's Isis cult.

One particular *topos* best exemplifies the changes that define imperial-era hieroglyphic and its presentation by authors of Aegyptiaca. Domitian, in the obelisk, "is strong of arm, who acts with his arm."<sup>93</sup> The phrase recurs throughout royal monuments and literature, to underline kings' effectiveness. In a typical pharaonic example from the Tale of Sinuhe, Sinuhe praises Senusret I in similar terms: "He is also a forceful one who acts with his forearm."<sup>94</sup> The spelling that each text uses is telling. To write "forearm," Domitian's obelisk uses the ideogram 𓂏 (𓂏) where

90. Dumas (1988–1995) remains the authority on the phonetics of imperial-era hieroglyphic.

91. For translation, see Lichtheim (1976, 57–72 for the Qadesh Inscription and 35–39 for the Thutmose III stele).

92. Erman (1917, 9, 27) (= Obelisk IVc).

93. Erman (1917, 21) (= Obelisk IIa): *nḥt 'jr m 'f*.

94. Sinuhe R 77: *nḥt pw grt jr m ḥpš.f*. For the text of Sinuhe, see Koch (1990) for *editio princeps*, or Allen (2015, 55–154). For translation, see Lichtheim (1975, 222–35) or Simpson (2003, 54–66).

Sinuhe uses the full phonetic group *hps̥*. This tracks a larger trend in imperial-era hieroglyphic spelling, which was increasingly pictorial and cryptographic.<sup>95</sup> Domitian's spelling of forceful (*nht*) is also slightly garbled. The verb *jr* lacks a determinative in the Domitianic version.<sup>96</sup> This is one among many examples of the cryptic, determinative- and ideogram-laden form of hieroglyphic complementary to the alphabetization one sees in the Flavians' hieroglyphic names.

This close-but-not-quite-right quality of the obelisk inscription encapsulates in a nutshell the type of engagement with the Egyptian language I have been prioritizing. To catalogue Plutarch's hazy Egyptian sources, or Manetho, or Chaeremon according to whether they got hieroglyphic right or wrong is doomed to failure. For one, it assumes that hieroglyphic, as a script, was a static thing. Chaeremon's explanation of hieroglyphic is more or less concordant with contemporary sources, both in Rome and in Egypt. For another thing, it unduly sunders a script (hieroglyphic) from a language (Egyptian). If it is divorced from the actual language that it spelled out, hieroglyphs will inevitably be an empty signifier of exotic wisdom, rather than one part of a wider conversation around language and the pursuit of religious and philosophical meaning. And for a third thing, it leaves no space for creativity and agency in the ways that Egyptians attached symbolic weight to a script that had always been marked out for its sacrality. The shift from Manetho to Chaeremon need not be a sign of hieroglyphic's slow death. The two authors can instead help trace the rise of a new and increasingly enigmatic approach to hieroglyphs' "visual poetics."<sup>97</sup>

#### CONCLUSION: HIEROGLYPHS AND RELIGIO- PHILOSOPHICAL WISDOM

Domitian's obelisk, its use of the hieroglyphic script, and its location in Rome's Isis temple show, concretely, that the translation of hieroglyphic texts was bound up in larger systems of cultural translation between Egypt and Rome. The connection between animal and the divine on display in Isis temples enriched, and was itself enriched by, the discussions of animals, gods, and the hieroglyphic script one sees in Aegyptiaca. Apuleius's "Isis Book" makes that much clear. The semantic overlap of hieroglyphic and metamorphic "characters" allowed Apuleius to underline the dynamics of form versus essence shared by Lucius, animal-shaped gods, and hieroglyphic inscriptions alike. Romans—and not just Apuleius—were quick to connect animal-shaped signs and their semiotic significance with animal-shaped

95. On the rise of cryptographic hieroglyphic spelling in the imperial period, see Darnell (2020, 7) (cf. Stadler 2008, 163–66). This is on clear display in the purely cryptographic Hymns at Esna, discussed by Morenz (2002).

96. Erman (1917, 7–8) for orthography and spelling peculiarities.

97. This is the term Morenz (2008) uses to describe scribes' playful manipulation of hieroglyphs' intersecting phonetic and visual meanings.

gods and their own webs of meaning. I opened with the god Seth and the Seth animal, which both connoted and denoted disorder. If nothing else, it is important to recognize that isolating the Roman reception of these various threads—Isis cult, zoomorphism, and hieroglyphic—robs them of the web of significance on which authors of *Aegyptiaca* relied. That web of significance is on display throughout Egyptians' presentation of the Egyptian language, whether etymologies of gods' names, glosses of hieroglyphic signs, or translations of Egyptian-language texts.

That current of *Aegyptiaca* should not be lost in a rush to grade Egyptians' knowledge of the hieroglyphic script. To be sure, the move from Manetho to Chaeremon, like the move from pharaonic, to Ptolemaic, to Roman-Egyptian inscriptions, shows how the hieroglyphic script was increasingly distant from vernacular Egyptian. There is a process of fossilization at work here, and I do not want to pretend that that is not the case. Be that as it may, it is still wrongheaded to claim that a comparison of Manetho and Chaeremon serves only to prove that the former knew hieroglyphic and the latter did not. Both authors sought to foreground the systems of meaning that lay underneath language. As his Hyksos and Bebon glosses reveal, Manetho's etymologizing is also fuzzy and sometimes hard to pin down, just like Chaeremon's. *Aegyptiaca* is such a rich tradition because it troubles the water of authoritative cultural exposition. It is all too easy to fixate on an elusive rubric of accuracy so doggedly that one loses sight of the larger goals that lead these authors to orient their texts around language exposition.

Those goals were, in a nutshell, to prioritize the symbolic significance of the hieroglyphic script. Plutarch, Apuleius, Manetho, and Chaeremon alike set out to present the Egyptian language as a symbolically rich object of investigation. The mechanics of symbolism—of the move from script and signifier to underlying signified—was an essential component of how authors of *Aegyptiaca* brought their own presentation of Egyptian traditions into alignment with a philosophical *lingua franca* of enigma, allegory, and symbol. All three were tools with which to unpack language, in Egyptian, Greek, and Roman traditions alike.

It remains to be seen how authors of *Aegyptiaca* positioned their own expertise through this philosophical *lingua franca*. These authors' expertise in symbol and allegory lay in between areas denoted by religion and philosophy. The philosophy-religion nexus has been hovering around the margins of this book, but now needs to move center stage. The different occupations assigned to authors of *Aegyptiaca* can facilitate a final reevaluation of how to best frame the expertise that authors of *Aegyptiaca* claimed. Within and without the confines of language, authors of *Aegyptiaca* advertised their authority in a tradition of symbolic exegesis that hovers between priestly and philosophical traditions. I have been using periphrases like "web of meaning" and "systems of significance," but I cannot fully avoid the disciplinary quicksand of drawing geographic and cultural boundaries around symbol, allegory, and enigma. "Symbolism" as a term has been a battleground for competing visions of how Greek and Roman intellectual traditions fit in with, or

stood apart from, other cultures of the Mediterranean world. I have postponed the questions of cultural rivalry and priority that define the different work that different scholars want Plutarch's *On Isis and Osiris* to do. Symbolism has long been a dirty word, one that smacks of Greco-Roman exceptionalism and cultural projection. Its recuperation will help center a process of dialogue in which authors of *Aegyptiaca* had a central role.