

Some new remarks on the Egyptian loss of *k*

Stefan Bojowald

In this contribution, the Egyptian loss of *k* is tackled again. The phenomenon can be considered well known. It has been firmly established in research for half a century. The evidence is increased here by three new examples, stemming from the Middle and New Kingdom as well as the Greco-Roman Period.

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The Egyptian loss of *k*¹ was first mentioned in scientific literature by Westendorf (1962: 42; on “*k*“ cf. Peust 1999: 107-110) in 1962. Two reliable examples were used by him for illustration. The amount is not very large at first glance. Nevertheless, Westendorf sees the existence of the phenomenon as certain. Even if the phenomenon is not mentioned by Peust (1999), Bojowald (2018) brought up the relevant material. The discussion was supported by seven new examples. Against this background, the explanation based on mere coincidence is almost certainly ruled out. The dating of the examples ranged between the New Kingdom and Graeco-Roman Period. The present study seamlessly continues the considerations there. The author is pleased to state that three newly discovered examples can be shared. In what follows, the examples are treated in chronological order for better clarity.

The first example can only be understood indirectly, which is why it needs to be elaborated a little further. The focus of the considerations is the formulation:

pr.w śr.ti

‘House of two thorns’

which can be observed in the line

tn-r3 pw n šd.t im3ḥ, m pr.w śr.ti n ḥri.t ḥnd=ś (CT 280, 28j-k)

¹ Thanks go to the anonymous reviewer of *Kervan* for many important hints.

The translation ‘It is a message² of saving the blessed one in the House of the two thorns of the one who is above her leg’ is the most suitable. The example can be found in the Coffin Texts, which form the funerary literature of the Middle Kingdom. The text corpus had the task of securing the postmortem existence of the deceased. The name *hri.t hnd=ś* ‘who is above her leg’ apparently was borne by a lesser prominent goddess (Leitz 2002: 440). In the view of Barguet (1986: 454) she belonged to the female personal of the goddess Neith. The *im3h*-blessed person can probably be identified with the deceased. As far as the crucial but difficult to classify term *pr.w śr.ti* ‘House of the two thorns’ is concerned, Dahms (2020: 287-288) brings it in connection with the expression *hw.t śrq.t* “Skorpion House“ from Pyramid Text Spell 219. Dahm’s point of view has not yet been received in one kind or the other. However, the idea of relating the two text passages to one another could lead in the right direction. This possibility will be returned to later. The Pyramid Text passage is

n nhp=f n nhp NN. pn nhp=f nhp NN pn m rn=k imi hw.t śrk.t k3 htp ‘nh=f ‘nh NN. pn n mt=f n mt NN. Pn (PT 219 § 182c-183b)³

and can be translated as ‘He will not be removed and this NN will not be removed. If he should be removed, this NN will be removed in your name, “the one who is in the Skorpion house,” the satisfied Ka. He will live and this NN will live. He will not die and this NN will not die.’ In the eyes of Dahm’s, the thorn from the Coffin Text can be moved to the stinger of the scorpion goddess. The different architectural names *pr.w* and *hw.t* would certainly not exclude this interpretation. The only problem is that the word *śr.t* ‘thorn’ apparently does not otherwise refer to the scorpion stinger. As a rule, the word ‘*b*⁴’ is used for this. Dahm’s attempt to point out the secondary meaning ‘artificially manufactured needle of metal’ for *śr.t* does not help much either. The connection to the scorpion stinger is not inevitable. A different approach is therefore presented in the following lines.

The close connection between the two expressions *pr.w śr.ti* and *hw.t śrk.t* is in principle maintained. The point of departure remains therefore unchanged against this background. However, the explanation differs from Dahm’s proposal in one important detail. The relationship between the words *śr.t* and *śrq.t* is justified by the loss of *k*, which offer a possible alternative. The different hypothetical vocalization as *śVrḳV.t* versus *śVrtV(i)* does not argue against this explanation, the

² For this term cf. Donnat (2009: 61-93).

³ For this passage cf. Sethe (1960: 103-104).

⁴ For the meaning “‘*b*“ ‘scorpion stinger’ cf. Borghouts (1999: 171q), Gpyon (2012: 54), Theis (2014: 34), Caminos (1954: 435) and Sander-Hansen (1937: 61).

development must be imagined in several steps. In the first phase, the loss of *k* took place, which was replaced by *t* in the second phase. The mobility of the *t* is also evident in the loss of the feminine *t*-ending, which can perhaps be remotely compared. The process was then rounded off with the insertion of a final vowel. If this thesis is correct, the example would provide important evidence for the loss of *k* from the Middle Kingdom. The development started therefore quite early. However, the example is only introduced into the debate as a working hypothesis. The reason for the dual of *śr.ti* ‘two thorns’ must remain open for the time being. Clarifying this matter had already confronted Dahm with an insoluble task. The problem does not need to be pursued further for the purposes of interest here.

The second example consists of the writing *śn* for *śnḳ* ‘to suckle,’ which can be found in the appeal ‘Come to him (*mi n=f*), suckle’ (Fischer-Elfert and Hoffmann 2020: 140) addressed to Isis and Nephthys. The underlying text is a spell against stomach ache, in which the Horus child ate wrong things. Apparently he also committed a cult crime, so that the sun god was damaged. The concret context is built by an historiola with the needy Horus child in the center. The emendation can also be secured in terms of content. The connection of the verb *śnḳ* ‘to suckle’ with Isis and Nephthys appears several times. The examples for the goddess Isis are so numerous that individual references are unnecessary. The connection with the goddess Nephthys is also well attested (Sethe 1922: 151; Backes 2016: 479; Barbash 2011: 207/209). The age of the evidence ranges from the Old Kingdom to the Ptolemaic Period. The age of the example cited above can be assigned to the New Kingdom. The reason for the loss of *k* is difficult to interpret at first. The phonetic or graphic explanation is not possible due to a lack of suitable options. In the outmost, an analogy can be considered.

The third example shows up in the writing *r* for *rḳ* ‘to complete,’ which can be detected in the line *wśḥ.t tn n.t 3ś.t (di.t ḥh) r m k3.t=ś r nfr* (Kockelmann and Winter 2016: 3). The translation ‘this hall of Isis (the live giver) is completed in her work in a beautiful manner’ evokes the best impression. The passage can be found in the Isis temple of Philae as an upper marginal inscription on the architrave above the columns of CO II. The context describes the architectural beauty of the hall. The example can be dated into the Graeco-Roman Period. The combination of *rḳ* ‘to complete’ and *k3.t* ‘work’ is attested elsewhere,⁵ which makes the emendation quite sure. In its case, it seems to be—by the way—a relatively young phenomenon. The overwhelming majority of the examples known to the author can be dated to the Graeco-Roman Period. The loss of *k* appears here after *r*, which coincides with many examples from the older work.

⁵ For this connection cf. Töpfer (2015: 11), Rickert (2019: 288) and Kertmann (2019: 70).

To sum up: The loss of *k* appears in the Egyptian language more often than initially thought. In total, there are now ten (and with the examples from Westendorf even twelve) examples that can be used. The phenomenon can thus be studied on an increasingly broader base. The frequent proximity to *r* stands out as another common factor. For the time being, the situation can only be described without being possible to give a conclusive cause. The aspect cannot be analyzed in a meaningful way either phonetically or graphically. The shape of *k* can be stated as square and that of *r* as lying horizontally. The outlines of the two characters turn out to be completely different. The exact motive for the assimilation (?) of *k* to *r* remains therefore a mystery for now.

Opponents of the model could argue that the loss was only by chance and that *k*, as a small character, could easily be forgotten. However, the objection can be parried with simple means. In the work cited at the beginning, the fact was pointed out, that the same loss occurs with the two other velars *k* and *g*. The pattern of weak velars recurs therefore in the Egyptian language with a certain frequency. The assumption of a simple error in so many cases does not really make sense. The existence of the Egyptian loss of *k* seems to be increasingly confirmed. The fact that the loss occurs especially at the end of the word is noticeable. The same position proves to be susceptible to the loss of other consonants. In all these cases the same cause may be present. The question of stress or non-stress on the last syllable could play a certain role. The mere reference to the possibility as such must suffice here.

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Stefan Bojowald holds a PhD in Egyptology from the University of Bonn. His PhD dissertation was *Die Vita des koptischen Klostergründers Pachom, Synoptische Darstellung, Analyse und Übersetzung*.

Since 2003 he has been a scientific author for international journals. His research focus is Egyptian lexicography, Egyptian phonetics, Egyptian-Near Eastern contacts and Egyptian late antiquity.

Stefan is a lecturer for Coptic Language and Literature at Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn.

Stefan can be contacted at: sbojowal@uni-bonn.de