

Egyptian meeting Canaanites

And the genesis of alphabetic
writing around 1900 BCE

Editores / Editors

Josué J. Justel & Antonio J. Morales, Universidad de Alcalá

Secretarios de edición / Editorial assistants

Carlos Gracia Zamacona, Universidad de Alcalá

Jónatan Ortiz García, Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Comité científico asesor / Scientific advisory board

- Ignacio Carbajosa Pérez
Universidad San Dámaso
- Francisco Javier Gómez Espelosín
Universidad de Alcalá
- Rafael Jiménez Zamudio
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid
- Brigitte Lion
Sorbonne Université
- Juan Carlos Moreno García
CNRS & Sorbonne Université
- Ludwig D. Morenz
Bonn Universität
- Jana Mynárová
Charles University in Prague
- Cinzia Pappi
Freie Universität Berlin
- Stephen Quirke
University College London
- Andrea Seri
Universidad Nacional de Córdoba / Universidad Nacional de Rosario
- José Miguel Serrano Delgado
Universidad de Sevilla

Egyptian meeting Canaanites

And the genesis of alphabetic
writing around 1900 BCE

Ludwig D. Morenz



Universidad
de Alcalá

EDITORIAL
UNIVERSIDAD DE ALCALÁ

El contenido de este libro no podrá ser reproducido,
ni total ni parcialmente, sin el previo permiso escrito del editor.
Todos los derechos reservados.

© De los textos: sus autores
© De las imágenes: sus autores
© Editorial Universidad de Alcalá, 2023
Plaza de San Diego, s/n
28801 Alcalá de Henares
www.uah.es

I.S.B.N.(electrónico): 978-84-19745-71-2

Composición: Innovación y Cualificación, S. L.
Impresión y encuadernación: Solana e Hijos, A.G., S.A.U.
Impreso en España

Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitate.

Johannes Clauberg, 1654
(known since the 19th century as ‘Occam’s razor’)

*Von der Ägyptologie verspreche ich mir insbesondere
die Klärung des Übergangs von den Bildern zu den Buchstaben –
darin verbirgt sich der Angelpunkt zwischen alter und neuer Welt.*

Ernst Jünger, 1939
Diary entry – 26.12.1939

*Diese Funde (sc. die von Petrie im Sinai entdeckten Inschriften, LM)
können sich an äußerem Glanz zwar nicht mit den prächtigen Funden
aus dem Grab des Tutanchamun messen, die dank der wirkungsvollen Reklame
in den letzten Jahren die Welt in Aufregung versetzt haben, sie übertreffen diese aber,
so unscheinbar sie sind, an innerer, wissenschaftlicher Bedeutung,
an geschichtlicher Tragweite um ein Beträchtliches.*

Kurt Sethe, 1926
Die wissenschaftliche Bedeutung, 1926, 24

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations.	11
Map 1: Map of Egypt, Nubia, and the region of Sinai.	13
Map 2: Map of the area of Serabit el-Khadim and its periphery.	14
Preface	15
1. The alphabet in the history of writing	19
2. The Egyptian transformation of Southwest Sinai into a ‘sacrotope’ of the goddess Hathor	23
3. Cross cultural contacts: intercultural equations of gods and the development of a new writing system	37
4. Levantine Canaanites versus Sinaitic Canaanites and their presence and representation in Serabit el-Khadim	47
5. A Canaanite ‘path-finder’ (<i>mṯnw</i>) working for the Egyptians: hieroglyphic and alphabetic inscriptions on the stone tablet S 375a	55
6. Appearing like an Egyptian but being Canaanite: Canaanite inscriptions in mine H	59
7. Two inscriptions – one scribe: the case of <i>3d3</i>	63
8. Not just bilingual: the riddles of the sphinx (S 345)	67

9. The Egyptian workshop for the temple of Hathor in the Twelfth dynasty: A significant site for the genesis of alphabetic writing?	83
10. The first wave of alphabetic writing spreading from Serabit into areas outside Sinai	87
11. <i>Anra</i> versus <i>Nefer</i> : MB Levantine imitations of writing	97
12. Between logocentrism and conspicuous communication: looking at the structural and figurative beauty of early alphabetic writing	103
Bibliography	107
Index	117

ABBREVIATIONS

GENERAL

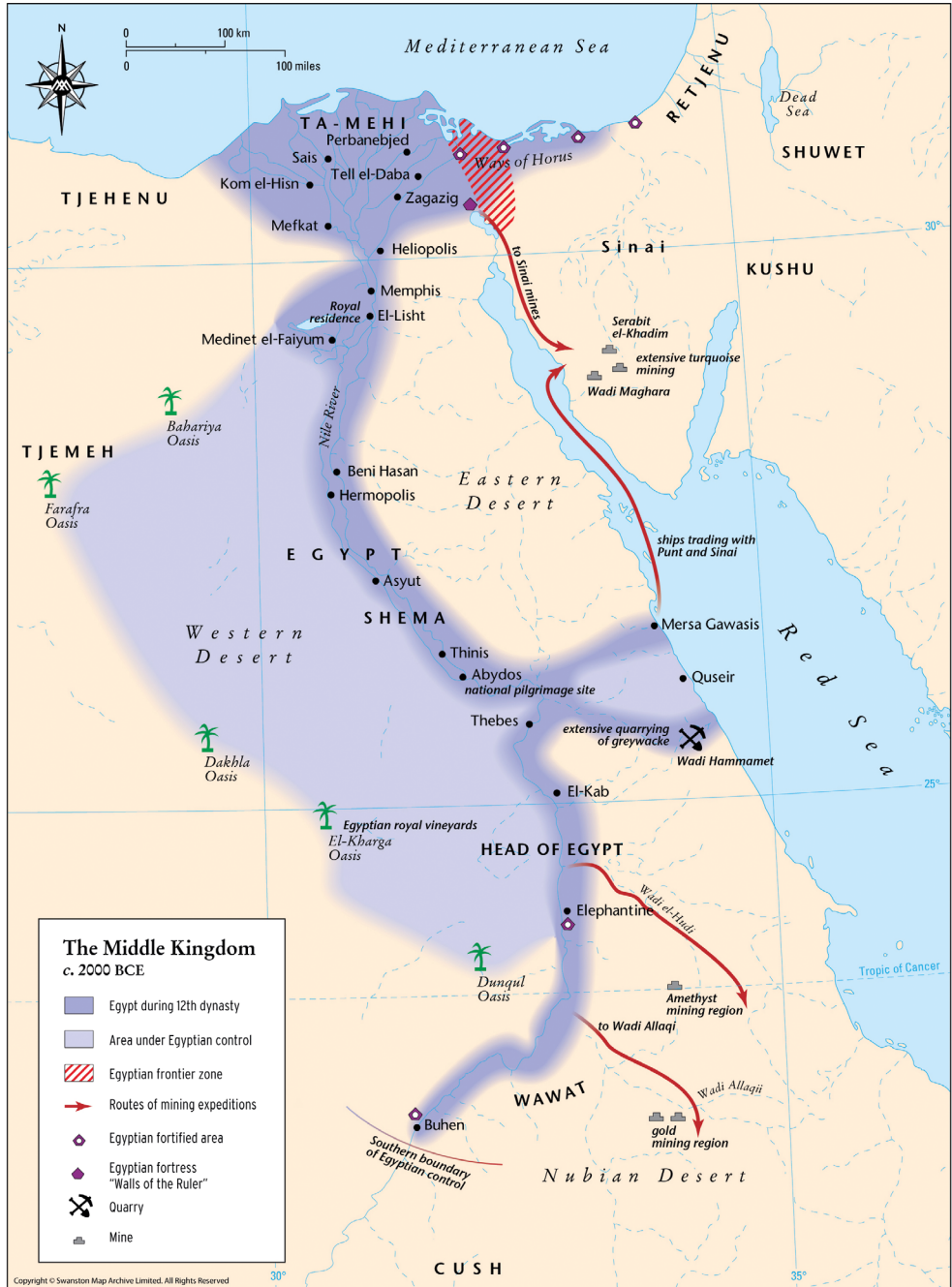
cf.	<i>confer</i> (compare)
ed.	edition
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> (for example)
esp.	especially
<i>et al.</i>	<i>et alia</i> (and others)
fig.	figure
LB	Late Bronze
MB	Middle Bronze
MK	Middle Kingdom
S + number	Serabit number

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL

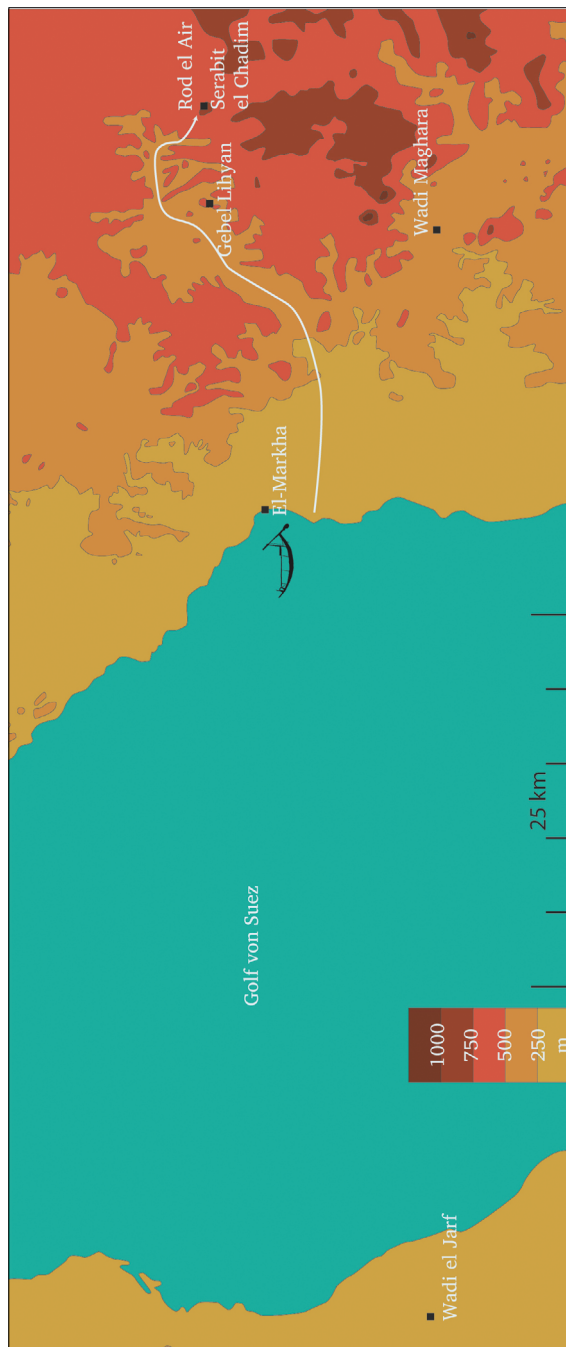
<i>ASAE</i>	<i>Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte</i> , Cairo
<i>ASOR</i>	<i>American Schools of Oriental Research</i> , South Hadley/New Haven
BAeB	Bonner Ägyptologische Beiträge, Bonn
BAR	British Archaeological Reports, Oxford
<i>BIFAO</i>	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale</i> , Cairo
BM	British Museum, London
<i>BMSAES</i>	<i>British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan</i> , London
BoSAe	Bonner Sammlung von Aegyptiaca, Bonn
<i>CRIPeL</i>	<i>Cahier de Recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et d'Égyptologie de Lille</i> , Lille
EA	Egyptian Antiquities, British Museum, London
<i>GM</i>	<i>Göttinger Miszellen</i> , Göttingen
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i> , Tel Aviv

- IS* *The inscriptions of Sinai* (see Černý 1955 and Gardiner 1952 in bibliography)
- JAOS* *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Michigan
- JARCE* *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, San Antonio
- JEA* *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, London
- JNES* *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Chicago
- LingAeg* *Lingua Aegyptia*, Göttingen
- MIFAO* *Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*, Cairo
- MMJ* *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, New York
- OBO* *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis*, Freiburg/Göttingen
- PEQ* *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, London
- SAK* *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur*, Hamburg
- SBA* *Saarbrücker Beiträge zur Altertumskunde*, Bonn
- UCL* *University College London*, London
- UGAÄ* *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ägyptens*, Leipzig/Berlin
- WZKM* *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, Wien
- ZÄS* *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache*, Leipzig/Berlin
- ZDMG* *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Leipzig/Wiesbaden

MAP 1. MAP OF EGYPT, NUBIA AND THE REGION OF SINAI – MIDDLE KINGDOM (CA. 2000 BCE). LOCATION OF SERABIT EL-KHADIM AND WADI MAGHARA IN THE SINAI



MAP 2. MAP OF THE AREA OF SERABIT EL-KHADIM AND ITS PERIPHERY
(MORENZ, *SINAI UND ALPHABETSCHRIFT*, 2019, FIG. 12, ABOVE)



PREFACE

Leaving our modern Post-*Babel*¹ behind, even the Humanities are gradually turning monoglot. This *evolution of simplicity* might seem unstoppable at the moment (but consider Mandarin and Spanish), and on balance it promises more gains than losses. However, a certain *nostalgia* remains. This extended essay is an attempt to present an update of my recent research on the genesis of the alphabet (published mostly in German) combined with some new interpretations (more general ones as well as specific details based on close reading). Analyzing the origin of alphabetic writing, I focus on the fertility of cross-cultural contacts between Egyptians and Canaanites 4000 years ago. Contrary to expectation, this new way of writing was originally not just a logocentric *evolution of simplicity* but was also combined with *conspicuous communication* within the sphere of visual culture. Accordingly, we can detect various cultural elements characteristic for its place of origin: the mining area of Serabit el-Khadim in Southwest Sinai around 1900 BCE (see figs. 1a–d).

¹ While in Biblical tradition, the mythical motive of a Babylonian confusion of languages (esp. Gen. 11, 1–9; Uehlinger 1990, see also Uehlinger 2014) is considered disastrous, others point to the benefits of variety in languages, e.g., Steiner 1975. The motive of separation of languages can be traced back in Egypt to the time of pharaoh Amenhotep III (Černý 1948; Sauneron 1960), probably reflecting the internationalization of this period (see e.g., Cohen – Westbrook 2002). In ancient Mesopotamia, the tradition of this mythical motive is older, more complex, and probably original (Krebernik 2007a; Mittermaier 2009). It corresponds with a very multilingual environment (Sumerian, Akkadian, various other Semitic languages, and Elamite, as well as Hurrian, while during the second millennium the Indo-European Hittite and other languages became relevant too) from the fourth millennium onwards (Attinger – Wäfler 1998).

FIGS. 1A–D. VARIOUS VIEWS OF THE MOUNTAINOUS LANDSCAPE AROUND SERABIT EL-KHADIM (PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR)



Taking a global perspective, this attractive landscape (fig. 2) was the stage for one of the most remarkable innovations in cultural history, from which we still benefit from today – a phenomenon of the *longue durée* (Fernand Braudel) that concerns not only nature but also culture. Thus, Serabit el-Khadim as the birthplace of alphabetic writing can be considered a *lieu de mémoire* (Pierre Nora) for humankind that is certainly worth formal acknowledgement as *World Cultural Heritage*.

FIG. 2. LANDSCAPE OF SERABIT: THE TEMPLE OF HATHOR WITH THE LETTER ALEF PROJECTED ABOVE



Starting in 2011, our Bonn Egyptological team has succeeded in recording anew all the early alphabetic inscriptions in Southwest Sinai and the Nile Valley (see map 1). I am very grateful especially to David Sabel but also to Mohammed Sherif Ali, Beryl Büma, Amr El Hawary, Susanne Kroschel, Leonie Muschiol and Yannick Wiechmann for photographs and drawings, as well as for their intellectual input over the years. I would also like to extend my thanks to external colleagues such as Manfred Krebernik, Stephen Quirke, Udo Rütterswörden, Gebhard Selz, Andréas Stauder, and Stefan Wimmer, to name just a few. Furthermore, I would like to thank all the curators of the various museums for their generous help and support, above all Sabakh Abdelraziq in Cairo Museum and Sheikh Rabia Barakat (figs. 3a–b), our host in Serabit. I am grateful to Roland Enmarch for substantially improving readability and to John Baines for advice as well as taking the burden of editing my text. However, a few idiosyncrasies such as ‘sacrotope (of the Egyptian goddess Hathor)’ (= sacral domain [of Hathor]) remain. Furthermore, I am grateful to Adam Fagbore, Alex Hohnhorst, and Honey Hammer for final proofreading.

In addition, I am grateful to the works of co-researchers, especially Pierre Tallet and his amazing fieldwork in Southwest Sinai, Ayn Soukhna, and Wadi el-Jarf²; and to John Darnell, Orly Goldwasser, Gordon Hamilton, Ben Haring, André Lemaire, Alan Millard, Anson Rainey, Christopher Rollston, Helmut Satzinger, Benjamin Sass, and Pascal Vernus for their input into alphabetic research.³ Karl-Theodor Zauzich, a great scholar in the field of Demotic studies, published substantially on the origin of alphabetic writing.⁴ Following Emmanuel de Rougé and other early scholars, he related the origins of alphabetic writing entirely to Hieratic. However, this speculation fits neither the material evidence nor recent research from the Egyptological or the Semitic side.⁵

As so often in Egyptian archaeology, it was William M. Flinders Petrie⁶ who made the initial discovery of inscriptions in an *unknown* script.⁷ Nevertheless, he was greatly misled by the assumption that Indo-European people had to be the inventors of alphabetic writing, not Semites.⁸ In this sense, looking at our great predecessors,

² For an overview, see Tallet 2012a; Abd el-Raziq – Castel – Tallet – Ghica 2002; Tallet 2012b.

³ Darnell et al. 2005; Goldwasser 2006; Goldwasser 2011; Hamilton 2006; Haring 2015a: 18–32; Haring 2015; Lemaire 2008; Millard 1985; Rainey 1975; Rollston 2020; Sass 1988; Sass 1991; Sass 2005; Satzinger 2002; Vernus 2015.

⁴ Conveniently summarised in Zauzich 2015.

⁵ For a critique, see Morenz 2019a: 43–44, 116–117 and, most recently, Wimmer 2022.

⁶ For William Matthew Flinders Petrie, see his autobiography (Petrie 1932) and the biography written by Margaret S. Drower (1995); for Petrie’s archaeological work in Egypt, see Quirke 2010.

⁷ Petrie 1906: 129–132.

⁸ Petrie 1912; Petrie 1921.

from Franz Praetorius⁹ to Alan Henderson Gardiner¹⁰ and William Foxwell Albright,¹¹ I feel very much like “a dwarf on the shoulders of giants”.¹²

I had the pleasure to talk about the origins of alphabetic writing on various occasions, most recently at the CRE meeting organized from Rhodes in May 2021; I am very grateful for various inspirations, including the challenge to publish my ideas in English. Since I first visited Serabit el-Khadim in spring 1995, this area has been close to my heart: its people, the landscape, and its monuments (figs. 3a–b).

FIGS. 3A–B. SHEIKH RABIA BARAKAT AT GEBEL HAZBAR IN FRONT OF EGYPTIAN MIDDLE KINGDOM INSCRIPTIONS AND NEOLITHIC (?) ROCK ART



Thanks to the epigraphic skills of David Sabel¹³, we presented an updated documentation of all the alphabetic inscriptions from Southwest Sinai and the Nile Valley in the monograph *Sinai und Alphabetschrift. Die frühesten alphabetischen Inschriften und ihr Kanaanäisch-ägyptischer Entstehungshorizont im Zweiten Jahrtausend v.Chr.* (Berlin, 2019), while only a few inscriptions from the Levant were included.¹⁴ The book is used here as the main documentary source. In addition to Gordon J. Hamilton’s *The Origins of the West Semitic Alphabet in Egyptian Scripts* (Washington, 2006), it can also be consulted for a brief overview on the history of research (esp. 31–47).

⁹ Praetorius 1906; Praetorius 1909.

¹⁰ Gardiner 1916; Gardiner 1929; Gardiner 1962.

¹¹ Albright 1966.

¹² For this scholarly *topos*, see Leuker 1997.

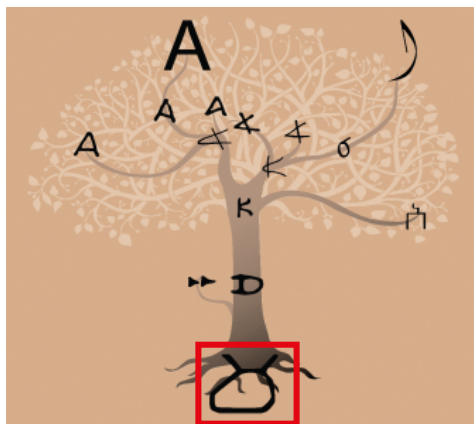
¹³ For the epigraphic approach see Sabel 2020.

¹⁴ Most recently and with a focus on an inscription recently found at Lachish: Höflmayer et al. 2021, for a comprehensive overview see Na’aman 2020; see here chapter 11: The first wave of alphabetic writing spreading from Serabit into areas outside Sinai.

1. THE ALPHABET IN THE HISTORY OF WRITING

The genesis of alphabetic writing in the early second millennium BCE can be considered the most successful, and indeed the most significant, development of media of the Near Eastern Middle Bronze Age.¹⁵ In the long term, it brought socio-cultural benefits that are highly relevant even in today's world: East and West, North and South.¹⁶ All our modern alphabetic writing systems¹⁷ depend on it, more or less directly. This strong historical connection is shown here in a graph concentrated around the Semitic letter *alef* = Greek *alpha* (fig. 4).¹⁸

FIG. 4. LONG HISTORY OF THE LETTER A THROUGH A HIGHLY SIMPLIFIED GRAPH



¹⁵ Herbert Donner called it “ein Jahrhundertproblem der Altorientalistik” in his review of Albright 1966.

¹⁶ For an overview, see e.g., Bright – Daniels 1996. Still worth reading are Gelb 1952 and Friedrich 1966. For overviews of early alphabetic writing, see Naveh 1982; Lehmann 2018. However, character-based scripts are alive and perhaps expanding in East Asia, at least partly because computers make them very manageable.

¹⁷ Most *abugida* writing systems in the world also derive ultimately from it, including South Asian scripts, and the Ethiopian too.

¹⁸ The image is taken from Morenz 2019a: 6.

Alphabetic writing originated in the cultural periphery of Southwest Sinai around 1900 BCE (see map 2).¹⁹ In the next step of cultural evolution,²⁰ it was adopted by Levantine city states such as Lachish (Southern Levant) around 1500 BCE or possibly a little earlier (see Lachish dagger, fig. 76, dated around 1700 BCE).²¹ In the early first millennium BCE, the alphabetic tradition split into a Western branch via Greek²² and an Eastern branch via Aramaic.²³ Although, phono-semantic writing was invented independently in various parts of the world such as Mesopotamia,²⁴ the Nile Valley,²⁵ and Mesoamerica,²⁶ all alphabetic writing seems to have a single origin.²⁷ Probably the most significant development within this writing tradition was the systematic encoding of vowels in the archaic Greek script by transforming ‘weak’ Semitic consonants (such as the *alef*) into Greek vowels (such as the *alpha*).²⁸ Terminologically, we could even distinguish an *alefbet* (in Arabic tradition referred to as *abjad*²⁹) from an *alphabet*.³⁰

Yet, what has turned out to be extraordinarily successful over a period of 4000 years and is used today on all continents of the world might have started as a distinctly provincial simplification of the complex Egyptian phono-semantic hieroglyphic writing system. In the cross-cultural *longue durée* and within a global perspective,

¹⁹ Morenz 2019a.

²⁰ In recent years, the idea of cultural evolution has become rather problematic. Here it is not intended to carry pejorative implications but simply to refer to an important development in the history of writing and more broadly in the archaeology of media.

²¹ Höflmaier et al. 2021; Morenz 2021a.

²² Wachter 2006; Sass 2005.

²³ Röllig 1992; 1998; Sass 2005.

²⁴ Glassner 2000; Selz 2000.

²⁵ Morenz 2021b.

²⁶ Houston – Chinchilla Mazariegos – Stuart 2001.

²⁷ Morenz 2012.

²⁸ Wachter 2006. For questions on an archaeology of media, see discussion in Kittler et al. 2017, and especially for the Greek alphabet: Kittler – Ernst 2006. Furthermore, we should note that in the Ugaritic cuneiform alphabet (an early offspring of the alphabetic writing tradition from Serabit, discussion in Morenz 2011: 194–200), three specific letters were introduced already during the Late Bronze Age to indicate vowels distinctly: $\aleph + a$, $\aleph + i$, and $\aleph + u$ (Loretz 1998). The Greek way of using “weak” Semitic consonants to indicate vowels was also practiced in Egyptian writing, where a *yodh* can represent the vowel ‘i’, especially in writings of foreign words (for Egyptian “syllabic orthography” cf. Schenkel 1986; Hoch 1994; Kilani 2019). Following Peust 2016: 89–100, matters are probably more complicated in that the ‘j’ represents not an ‘i’ but a “real” *alef*. Problems of Egyptian historical phonology are generally difficult, and these difficulties increase when considering phonetics and their graphic representation in inter-language contacts. For an overview, see Allen 2020.

²⁹ Daniels 1990.

³⁰ We might also notice that the term ‘alphabet’ is a Semitic cultural loanword in Greek (Burkert 2003).

this product of an *evolution of simplicity*³¹ (= *Occam's razor*³² in social practice³³) turned out to be highly attractive for users with very different cultural backgrounds. The detachment of alphabetic writing from its original socio-cultural context in Southwest Sinai eventually turned it into more of a technical tool (and medium) for the simple phonetic encoding of languages³⁴, but here I focus on its original socio-cultural context and thus on the combination of an *evolution of simplicity* with *conspicuous communication*.

³¹ For the concept of 'evolution of simplicity' in archaeology, see Wengrow 2001; Yoffee 2001. The idea is very relevant in the archaeology of media.

³² For the term and its history, see Hübener 1983.

³³ This aspect was rather important in Goody 1977.

³⁴ However, there is always a figurative dimension in written communication; among fundamental works are Vachek 1973; Vachek – Luelsdorf 1989.

2. THE EGYPTIAN TRANSFORMATION OF SOUTHWEST SINAI INTO A ‘SACROTOPE’ OF THE GODDESS HATHOR

In contrast to phono-semantic hieroglyphic writing,³⁵ alphabetic writing was structurally new in the sense that its function is purely phonocentric. It is based on the simple graphic-phonetic (or indeed gra-phonetic) equation: one sign represents one sound, nothing more, nothing less.

This new type of writing was developed by Canaanites in Southwestern Sinai after 1900 BCE, probably during the reign of pharaoh Amenemhet III (reign approx.: 1842–1795 BCE) or perhaps a little earlier.³⁶ The individual names of the inventors are lost, but we can pin down the place of origin with a rather surprising precision: the ‘sacrotape’ – a sacred domain – of the Egyptian goddess Hathor in the mountainous area of Serabit el-Khadim in Southwest Sinai (see figs. 5a–b).

FIGS. 5A–B. THE ‘SACROTOPE’ OF ‘HATHOR, MISTRESS OF TURQUOISE’ AT SERABIT IN SOUTHWEST SINAI (LEFT: SIDE VIEW OF THE SANCTUARY; RIGHT: AXIAL VIEW FROM THE ENTRANCE TO THE SANCTUARY)



³⁵ See Schenkel 2003; Vernus 2003. For the various types of signs used in the Egyptian hieroglyphic system, see Polis – Rosmorduc 2015.

³⁶ Most recent discussion in Morenz 2019a: esp. 96–97, 198–199.

Resuming ‘international’ socio-economic activities after a break of some decades (so-called the *Period of the Regions* or First Intermediate Period),³⁷ Egyptian mining expeditions went to Serabit el-Khadim to bring back turquoise and copper from the early Twelfth dynasty onwards.³⁸ That socio-economic process is documented by various lists including titles and names of participants³⁹ monumentalized on stelae erected in front of the sanctuary of the goddess Hathor (figs. 6a–b).⁴⁰

FIGS. 6A–B. LEFT: MIDDLE KINGDOM STELA OF SA-NOFRET (S 112) – RIGHT: ROW OF TWELFTH DYNASTY STELAE IN FRONT OF THE SANCTUARY



These Middle Kingdom stelae express a distinct corporate identity shared by these Egyptian expeditions to the mountains of Sinai, and they imply a degree of sacralization in relation to the goddess Hathor beyond known levels of decorum seen in contemporary examples from the Nile Valley.⁴¹ Even the pillar inside the sanctuary (S 83; see figs. 7a–b) is decorated showing an expedition in front of Hathor with the highest members depicted in relief (fig. 7a) and the others mentioned at least by name (fig. 7b).

³⁷ Recent overview by Strudwick 2020; for a broader perspective, a volume on this period by Andrea Pillon is in preparation.

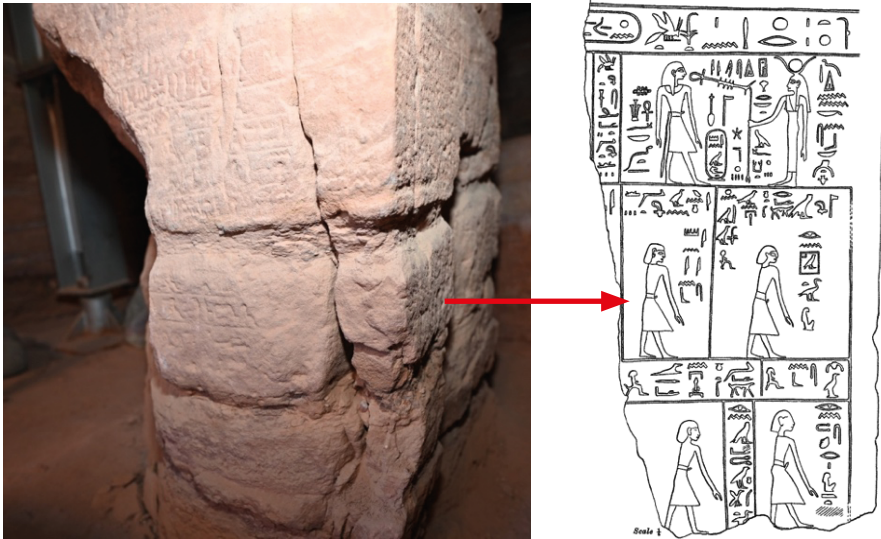
³⁸ Inscriptions in Ayn Soukhna prove that Egyptian expeditions for turquoise restarted already in the Eleventh dynasty under Mentuhotep II (Abd el-Raziq – Castel – Tallet – Ghica 2002).

³⁹ Seyfried 1981; Tallet 2016–2017.

⁴⁰ Valbelle – Bonnet 1996.

⁴¹ The concept of decorum was introduced into Egyptology by John Baines, see e.g., Baines 1985; Baines 1990.

FIGS. 7A–B. LEFT: PILLAR INSIDE THE SANCTUARY WITH OFFICIALS APPROACHING THE GODDESS HATHOR – RIGHT: DRAWING OF THE UPPER PART, HIGH OFFICIALS OF THE EXPEDITION APPROACHING THE GODDESS HATHOR (S 83); IN LOWER PART, THE NAMES OF MEMBERS OF THE EXPEDITIONS (NOT RECORDED IN IS)



The area of Southwest Sinai was a rather foreign area to the Egyptians, who generally left the Nile Valley only temporarily and for very specific economic reasons – and obviously neither as ‘tourists’ nor as ‘pilgrims’.⁴² As it is described in the words of the Twelfth dynasty hieroglyphic rock stela of Ptah-wer (S 54), it reads:

jnj ḏrwt ḥ3swt m rdwj=f
hbhb jnwt št3wt
jnj phwj tmmwt rh

“[...] who reaches the borders of the mountainous/foreign lands with his feet,
 who travels through the secret wadis,
 who reaches the back-end of the unknown”.⁴³

Thus, a rock picture of the Twelfth dynasty in Rod el-Air (figs. 8a–b) shows the Egyptian Gebu in a scene expressing sacralization (offering of turquoise-‘loaf’)⁴⁴ and dominance (grabbing the horns of the gazelle) combined with a hunting scene

⁴² For the questions of pilgrimage in Egypt, cf. Yoyotte 1960; Effland 2018; Morenz 2020. For further reading, see Baines 2004; Baines 2007a; Baines 2013.

⁴³ Morenz 2019a: 58, fig. 16.

⁴⁴ Discussion of this iconographic motif typical of Serabit in Morenz 2019a: 59.

(dogs).⁴⁵ It stands in an intertextual relation with another depiction of Gebu offering turquoise from Rod el-Air too (fig. 8b).

FIGS. 8A–B. ROCK PICTURES OF THE EGYPTIAN GEBU, SON OF SENWOSRET, ROD EL-AIR (NEW RECORDINGS BY DAVID SABEL); ABOVE, GEBU IS HIGHLIGHTED IN RED



Through religious conceptualization and its monumentalization in visual culture, the Middle Kingdom Egyptians transformed what was not home, a place that was completely different from the Nile Valley, into some kind of Egyptianizing autotope.⁴⁶ Thus, the cultural identity of the Egyptian expeditions was reinforced by a new type of *religion of expeditions* focusing on “Hathor, mistress of turquoise” (*ḥwt-ḥr nbt mfk3t*) (see fig. 9).⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Discussion in Morenz 2019a: 58–9, figs. 17–18. According to Roland Enmarch (personal communication), this is vaguely reminiscent of Hatnub graffito 52 (Anthes 1928: 78–80), now probably destroyed, which seems also to juxtapose hunting with sacral (mortuary) activity. The inscription was already badly damaged in the early 20th century.

⁴⁶ This is the opposite of a *heterotope* discussed by Michel Foucault (Foucault 1971) and others.

⁴⁷ Discussion in Morenz 2009.

FIG. 9. THE KING BEFORE HATHOR, 'MISTRESS OF TURQUOISE': ROCK STELA ON MINE D (S 56; FROM THE LEADER OF THE EXPEDITION SA-NOFRET)



This mining area in Southwest Sinai was sacralized particularly by Egyptians building the temple of Hathor (fig. 10) from the time of king Senwosret I (fig. 11)⁴⁸ onwards.⁴⁹

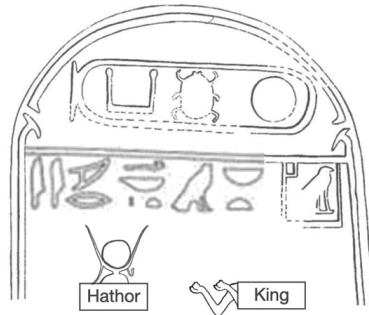
FIG. 10. VIEW OF THE REMAINS AT THE TEMPLE OF HATHOR, 'MISTRESS OF TURQUOISE' IN SERABIT EL-KHADIM



⁴⁸ There are some inscriptions referring to king Amenemhet I, but they are probably not contemporaneous. With the name *hpr-k3-r* in the lunette, stela S 66 provides a good example for the sacralization of Serabit el-Khadim under king Senwosret I (Morenz 2014a: 93–95).

⁴⁹ Morenz 2014a: 92–99.

FIG. 11. STELA S 66 (VERY DAMAGED) WITH PARTIAL RECONSTRUCTION TO THE RIGHT



The Egyptian name of the temple was *hwt sšst* – “house of the sistrum”,⁵⁰ which might allude to the Hathoric cultic activity of playing the sistrum (fig. 12).⁵¹

FIG. 12. HATHOR PLAYING THE SISTRUM, SCENE FROM THE ALTAR OF HER-WER-RE (S 89; SEE ALSO FIG. 18)



This rather intensive building activity, although just a side-product of the Egyptians’ mining activity, was not only an intellectual effort but also an economic one. Egyptian expeditions invested a considerable amount of time in stabilizing Egyptian cultural identity in the distant mountains of Southwest Sinai. Technically speaking, the Egyptians transformed a foreign, exotic territory culturally into an Egyptian autotope, especially by sacralizing the area.⁵²

⁵⁰ Morenz 2014a: 62–65.

⁵¹ Morenz 2009.

⁵² The archaeological literature on landscape is vast; for an overview, see e.g., Bender 1993; Bender

This Hathoric “house of the sistrum” is the largest Egyptian temple outside the Nile Valley, with a building history spanning nearly 1000 years and providing a kind of sacral monumentality, but one that was ‘a work in progress’, and open to numerous additions.⁵³ In architectural semantics, this temple was conceptualised as a mine of turquoise out of which the goddess Hathor, ‘mistress of turquoise’ (*ḥwt-ḥr nbt mfk3t*) appeared as turquoise (*mfk3t*).⁵⁴ From a secondary usage in the Egyptian Coffin Texts, we can reconstruct what I believe to have been originally a cultic hymn at Serabit that was recited during the ritual offering of turquoise to Hathor.⁵⁵ A key section reads:

sd ḏw wb3 jnr
wb3 krrt n ḥwt-ḥr
prj=s m mfk3t
nms(=s) m nms=s

“The mountain is broken open; the stone is split.
 The cave is open for Hathor,
 when she appears as turquoise,
 covered in her *nms* (head cloth)”.⁵⁶

These rather dramatic verses celebrating *Hathor* and *turquoise* are complemented by images, as in a relief from the time of king Amenemhet IV (fig. 13),⁵⁷ which shows the goddess appearing out of the mine, named *ptr nfrw ḥwt-ḥr* – ‘seeing the beauty/presence of Hathor’. On the left side, she is referred to as Hathor, “mistress of turquoise” (*nbt mfk3t*) and to the right as Hathor, ‘mistress of good color’ (*nbt jmnt nfrt*). Both forms stress the relationship of this goddess to turquoise. The mine’s mythopoetic name ‘seeing the beauty/presence of Hathor’ (fig. 14) refers to the mining marvel of turquoise appearing from the mountains corresponding to the verses of the suggested cultic hymn. The Egyptian mining expeditions of the Middle Kingdom conceptualised Serabit as the ‘sacrotape’ of the goddess Hathor, ‘mistress of turquoise’ (*ḥwt-ḥr nbt NN* ‘Hathor, mistress of MATERIAL NN’ was developed in Serabit for turquoise (*mfk3t*) during the early Twelfth dynasty and was later adopted for other mining sites and different materials.⁵⁹

2002; Tilley – Cameron-Daum 2017.

⁵³ An overview is provided by Valbelle – Bonnet 1996.

⁵⁴ Morenz 2014a: 84–140.

⁵⁵ The phrasing recalls wording in rituals, and the pattern of the wordplay *nms m nms=s* has various parallels. It might relate to a ritual of opening a shrine or to a similar activity.

⁵⁶ CT 486: ECT VI, 631-64c. See Morenz 2011; most recent discussion in Morenz 2021a: 18. The textual tradition shows variations. Beyond minor variations B1Bo and S1C are very similar while B2L is expanded in line 2: *wb3 krrt wn 3ḥt j3bt n ḥwt-ḥr*.

⁵⁷ Morenz 2011: 72–74; Morenz 2014a: 48–52.

⁵⁸ Morenz 2009.

⁵⁹ Morenz 2009.

FIG. 13. RELIEF S 124 SHOWING THE SERABITIAN THEOLOGY OF TURQUOISE

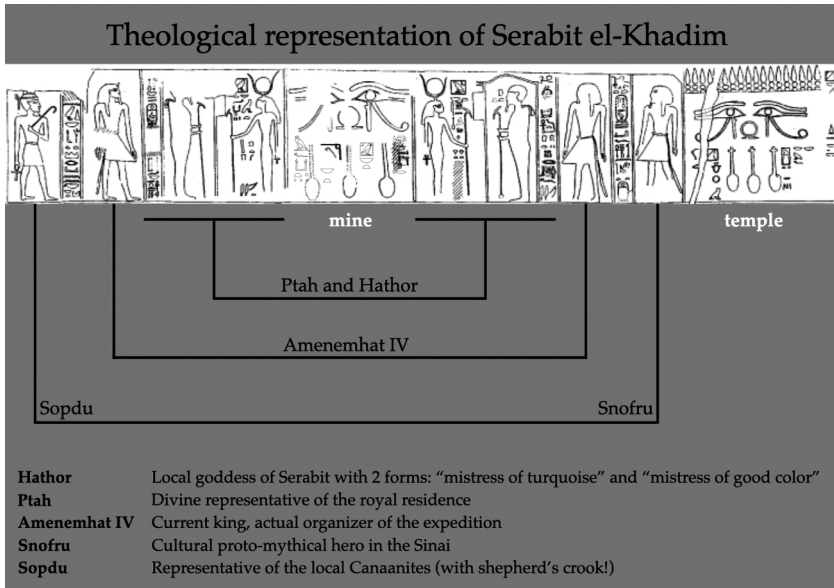
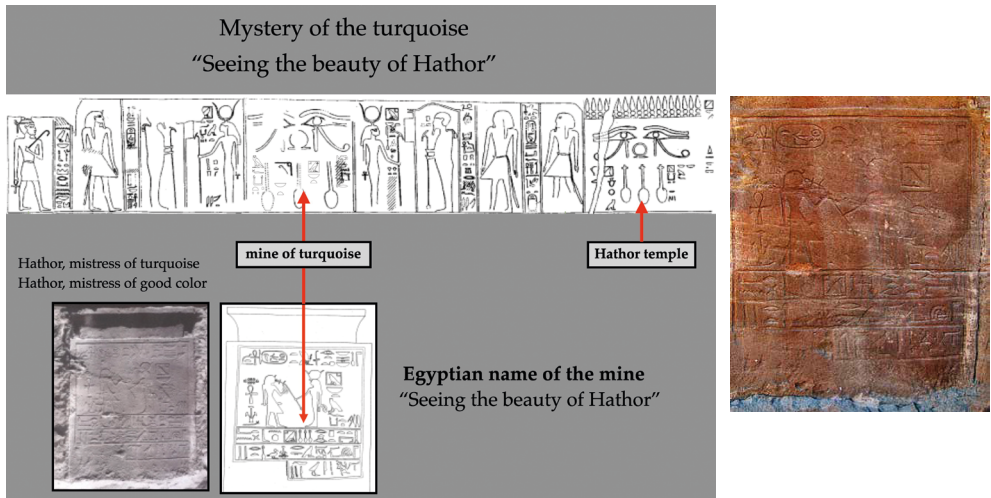


FIG. 14. LEFT: THE MINE 'SEEING THE BEAUTY/PRESENCE OF HATHOR' – RIGHT: IMAGE OF THE RELIEF S 56



The mines in Sinai were given individual names during their ceremonial opening by Egyptian expedition leaders. Thus, the mine was conceptualized as somehow animate. To approach varying degrees of animation of things, landscape, and especially