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COMMUNITY TRANSLATION AND MODERN PHILOLOGY: THE ROSETTA STELE AND AFRICAN ORTHOGRAPHIES

ABSTRACT

The Rosetta Stele, an inscribed stone slab, was discovered in July 1799 near the town of Rashid, ancient Rosetta, which is situated in the western part of the Nile delta of Egypt, by soldiers of Napoleon Bonaparte's invading army. After the French surrender of Egypt in 1801, the stele passed into British hands and is now in the British Museum in London. The commemorative stele contains three versions of the same text (in Egyptian hieroglyphic, Egyptian Demotic and ancient Greek script, representing two varieties of the ancient Egyptian language and the ancient Greek language). It recounts a decree issued on 27 March 196 BCE by Egyptian priests during the Ptolemaic dynasty on behalf of Ptolemy V Epiphanes to commemorate his crowning. It took more than 20 years and various attempts by scholars to decipher the Demotic and hieroglyphic Egyptian texts. This was done by utilising the mechanisms of modern philology, which had been established as a field early in the 1800s. Standing on the shoulders of his predecessors, Jean-François Champollion was the first Egyptologist to crack the code of hieroglyphic writing by realising that some of the signs were alphabetic, some syllabic, and some determinative. The discovery and decipherment of the Rosetta Stele put multilingualism and the practice of translation and interpreting during the Ptolemaic reign over Egypt into focus. In this essay we describe the rediscovery, as well as the emergence and growth of new knowledge, that was unlocked by the decipherment of the Rosetta Stele, including its implications for African orthographies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Rosetta Stele (also known as the Rosetta Stone), is an inscribed stone slab that was discovered in August 1799 in the vicinity of Fort Saint-Julien, just north of the town of Rashīd (the modern Arabic name of ancient Rosetta), situated in the north-western part of the Nile delta (13 kilometres from its debouchment into the Mediterranean and 48 kilometres northeast of Alexandria in Egypt), by soldiers of the engineering corps of Napoleon Bonaparte's invading army of Egypt (Schoville 2001, p. 2). French scholars accompanying Napoleon's army realised its importance. After the French surrender of Egypt in 1801, it passed into British hands under the terms of the Treaty

of Alexandria (1801) and is now in the British Museum in London (Shaw & Nicholson 2008, p. 276). The stele is made of black basalt, 28 centimetres (11 inches) thick, 114 centimetres (3 feet 9 inches) high and 72 centimetres (2 feet 4½ inches) across (Schoville 2001, p. 1). Part of the (rounded) top and a section of the right side of the Rosetta Stele is missing.

The commemorative stele contains three versions of the same message in three scripts – Egyptian hieroglyphic (14 lines, the sacred characters of the priesthood used primarily for monumental inscriptions), Egyptian Demotic (32 lines, the contemporary documentary cursive script) and ancient Greek script (54 lines). The versions represent two varieties of the Egyptian language and a variety of the ancient Greek language. Demotic was the form of the Egyptian language in the Ptolemaic period and was quite different, in terms of grammar and vocabulary, from the Egyptian language embodied in hieroglyphs. The Rosetta Stele provided scholars for the first time with a Greek translation of an Egyptian language, which had been extinct for 14 centuries. The message is a decree issued at Memphis on 27 March 196 BCE, during the Ptolemaic dynasty, on behalf of Ptolemy V Epiphanes, king of Egypt from 203 to 181 BCE (Schoville 2001, p. 3). It is, thus, an important historical inscription containing quotations from proclamations by which the king attempted to correct the evidently sad state of Egypt at that time. In recognition of his accomplishments in the kingdom, divine honour must be paid to him and statues of him must be erected throughout the kingdom and in temples.

The English translation of the Greek text was available from April 1802 (see Budge 1929, pp. 51–66 for the translation). In the same year, the French orientalist Silvestre de Sacy published a partial solution of the Demotic, while the Swedish scholar Johan David Åkerblad was able to identify about half the letters of the Demotic alphabet (Gardiner 1961, p. 12). However, it took a further 20 years and various attempts by scholars to decipher the Demotic and hieroglyphic Egyptian texts. This was done by utilising the mechanisms of modern philology, which was established as a field early in the 1800s (Turner 2014, Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2020, pp. 10–28). Thomas Young, who worked on the project from 1814, succeeded in dividing the Demotic text into 86 word-groups, most of them correct (Gardiner 1961, p. 12). The repetition of Ptolemy's name (which is enclosed in hieroglyphic writing in an oval ring, called a cartouche) in the different scripts was the most important clue to deciphering. The other names used were Cleopatra, Beloved of Amun Ramesses and Tuthmosis (Gardiner 1961, p. 14). Standing on the shoulders of his predecessors, for example, Thomas Young, Jean-François Champollion (1790–1832) was the first Egyptologist to realise that some of the hieroglyphic signs were alphabetic, some syllabic, and some determinative – standing for the whole idea or object expressed. He also established that the Egyptian language varieties were interlingual translations from the Greek, and not vice versa. Champollion had a thorough knowledge of Coptic, the last stage of the Egyptian language. This knowledge enabled him to recognise the meanings of many Egyptian words in the upper part of the inscription. Over two hundred years ago, on 14 September 1822, the work on the decipherment of the Rosetta Stele was completed and Champollion could read the entire text (Gardiner 1961, p. 14; Schoville 2011, p. 16). On 27 September 1822, this breakthrough, which led to the unlocking of the rich heritage of Egyptian hieroglyphic texts, was announced in a lecture to the *Académie royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*. His pamphlet, *Lettre à M. Dacier relative à l'alphabet des hieroglyphs phonétiques* (1822), outlined the principles of his decoding method (Gardiner 1961, p. 14; Schoville 2011, p. 16). These principles were confirmed and expanded in the *Précis du système hiéroglyphique* (1824).

This knowledge established the basis for the translation of all hieroglyphic and Demotic texts, which enabled scholars to read the literature of ancient Egypt. Knowledge of ancient Egyptian history would be nearly impossible to obtain without the ability to read hieroglyphics. The Rosetta Stele's translation became the backbone of Egyptology, and the iconic stele has been credited as one of the most important objects in history, because it is the key for the decipherment itself. With the cracking of the hieroglyphic and Demotic scripts, other Egyptian hieroglyphic and Demotic discoveries could be deciphered. By this, other civilizations (mentioned in Egyptian inscriptions and writings) also got their own voice and, suddenly, whole areas of knowledge were revealed.

The Rosetta Stele focuses attention on the multilingualism of the specific society/community in which it was situated. Although abundant studies are available on the relevant epigraphy and languages, there is very little research on the sociolinguistic aspects as well as on the language practices of the society in which the Rosetta Stele functioned. An example of this negligence is the publication edited by Jonker, Berlejung and Cornelius (2021) on multilingualism in Ancient Near Eastern and early Christian contexts, which excludes Egypt and Africa and does not even treat language practices of those times. The discovery and decipherment of the Rosetta Stele put multilingualism and the practice of translation and interpreting during the Ptolemaic reign of Egypt in focus. In this essay, we describe the rediscovery and the emergence and growth of new knowledge unlocked by the decipherment of the Rosetta Stele, including its implications for African orthographies.

The essay is organised as follows: Section 2 deals with the complex nature of knowledge and translation as a complex and emergent phenomenon, as well as the processes for establishing translational knowledge. Section 3 describes the knowledge that is unlocked through the decipherment of the Rosetta Stele. Section 4 provides the conclusion.

2. COMPLEX NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

In searching for a sophisticated solution for the integration of disciplinary knowledge into a broader body of knowledge according to a specific overarching principle, two seminal publications in the field of translation studies provide examples that may be of assistance.

Marais (2019a) deals with the issue of fragmentation within translation studies caused by the translation "turns" (that is, the paradigm shifts [in Kuhn's terms] of translation studies) and argues for considering translation as a complex and emergent phenomenon. For example, interlingual translation is both process and phenomenon, and it is semiotic in nature; these characteristics make it a complex, emergent phenomenon.

D'hulst and Gambier (2018) also break with the tradition of viewing the history of translation through the reductive lenses of schools, theories, "turns" or interdisciplinary exchanges. In a first attempt to map modern thinking about modern translation knowledge, they identify seven processes for establishing translation knowledge, namely generating, mapping, internationalising, historicising, analysing, disseminating and applying knowledge. Instead of the fragmentation of knowledge, they argue that the focus must be on the progress of knowledge by its growth or accumulation.

It seems that similar processes can be established for the emergence and growth of the knowledge unlocked by the decipherment of the Rosetta Stele. It is impossible to work out a full analysis of the processes; examples are provided below in section 3 for each process as

proposed by D'hulst and Gambier (2018, pp. 1–14), but they should be considered preliminary. In this section, we introduce and define each of the processes.

Generating knowledge refers to the creation of new linguistic and grammatical knowledge by the decipherment of the Rosetta Stele. It led to the compilation not only of grammars of the specific languages, but also the unlocking of the writings in these languages.

Mapping (or organising) knowledge refers to the ways in which knowledge unlocked by the decipherment of the Rosetta Stele has been organised and channelled. For example, the network of relations between agents (linguists, researchers, publishers) and organisations (associations, academic departments, meetings and conferences) that are in charge of producing and transferring knowledge embodied in verbal constructs (papers, articles, books, grammars, lexica/dictionaries, concordances, databases, handbooks, etc.) on local, national or international levels.

Internationalising knowledge refers, inter alia, to the way that the knowledge is applied to, and utilised in, new contexts when crossing language and cultural borders to account for the typological needs of new users of the knowledge.

Historicising knowledge (the genealogy of knowledge) refers to the fact that knowledge is inscribed in time, and therefore shows changes and adaptations (D'hulst & Gambier 2018, pp. 233–234). Knowledge further enters oblivion but is sometimes rediscovered, as happened with the decipherment of the Rosetta Stele.

Analysing knowledge implies transforming data or information into knowledge (D'hulst & Gambier 2018, pp. 285–286). It includes the ways or techniques of handling information, such as description, classification, comparison, interpretation, criticism and synthesis of the connections among cognition, verbal performance, and culture.

Disseminating knowledge refers to exchanges (distribution and circulation of ideas) between disciplines, that is, with other fields of knowledge (D'hulst & Gambier 2018, p. 355). This happens in a variety of ways, namely, theories, concepts, and methods elaborated on within a discipline can enrich, disturb, and revitalise other disciplines. The dissemination of knowledge also refers to the distribution and circulation of ideas within a discipline.

Applying new knowledge concerns, for example, the teaching of linguistics or one of its subdisciplines, such as the semiotics of writing or orthography.

Given this wide spectrum of processes, no single, overriding or organising principle can account for the nature of the knowledge. However, the search for knowledge must be a purposeful, meaning-making activity that is functionalist in orientation (Nord 2018). In other words, the search for knowledge within a discipline must be nuanced and it must be typified by the use (or purpose) for which it is intended.

As explained in Miller-Naudé and Naudé (2020), in our approach we steer away from two opposing tendencies – the modernist tendency to reduce explanation to a single dimension of reality, and the postmodernistic fragmentation of reality. Instead, we embrace four general principles of complexity theory — complexity, interconnectedness, dynamism and emergence. Complexity (see Marais 2014, 2019b) involves the observation that the object of study is too multifaceted to be adequately conceptualised in terms of only one elementary concept or idea. A complex system includes one or more populations of agents, elements or components,

which are numerous and diverse, and which connect and interact in different and changing ways. Interconnectedness describes a situation in which any element or subsystem in the system is affected by and affects several other elements or subsystems. Dynamism refers to the fact that everything changes all the time. The process in which a system adjusts itself in response to changes in its environment is adaptation. For this reason, complex systems are called complex adaptive systems. Emergence describes the appearance in a complex system of a new state at a level of organisation higher than the previous one.

Complexity theory provides a means to integrate multiple disciplinary approaches, such as philology and linguistics, with translation studies to understand and describe the complex of knowledge surrounding the Rosetta Stele. At the time of its discovery in 1799, the European tradition of classical philology, which originated in ancient Greece from the third to the first century BCE in the Hellenistic period, was drawing to a close (Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2020, pp. 7–10). From this very early period, Egypt played an important role as a centre of philology through the establishment of the first public library in Alexandria and the work of its first librarian, Zenodotus of Ephesus, in introducing the innovations of "alphabetical ordering, standard editions, the use of marginal signs to show emendations, line-by-line commentary on a text, the glossary, and historical chronology to solve textual problems" (Turner 2014, pp. 10–12; Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2020, pp. 7–8). Modern philology arose around 1800 in Europe, from the impetus of the discovery of "new" ancient texts and languages as a result of imperial and colonial expansion, especially Sanskrit, which gave rise to comparative philological endeavours (Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2020, pp. 10–12). The discovery and later decipherment of the Rosetta stele must, therefore, be seen as having occurred at a time of rapid and vast expansion of textual, linguistic, and cultural knowledge through imperial exploration, invasion and conquest. Napoleon's invading army included

> one hundred and seventy-five 'learned civilians'... The soldiers and sailors called them 'the donkeys'. The intellectual contingent brought along a large library, containing practically every book on the land of the Nile available in France, and also dozens of crates of scientific apparatus and measuring instruments (Ceram 1952, p. 73).

Among the volumes would have been Rollin's 12-volume *Histoire Ancienne* (1730–1738), containing about 30 pages of the history of ancient Egypt (Rollin 1730–1738). Among the fruits of Napoleon's scientific contingent was the cataloguing of Egyptian antiquities by Dominique-Vivant Denon (Ceram 1952, pp. 74–77) through his meticulous drawings, which formed the basis for the famous *Description de l'Égypte* (1809). Champollion and Rosellini also laboured to catalogue and document Egyptian paintings and texts, an effort that continued after the French lost control of Egypt to the British in 1801 (Rosellini 2006[1832–1834]). Napoleon was, thus, well aware of the importance of Egyptian cultural knowledge, and he even spurred on his soldiers in battle by pointing to the pyramids of Giza and addressing them: "Remember that from the height of these monuments forty centuries are looking down upon you [Songer que du haut de ces monuments quarantes siècles vous contemplent]" (Archer 1887, p. 14). The possibility of unlocking massive amounts of forgotten knowledge lay ahead.

In Miller-Naudé and Naudé (2020, p. 19) we argue that, prior to linguistic analysis, editorial theory (new philology) provides a crucial preliminary role in the assemblage of language data within texts through palaeography, epigraphy, decipherment of scripts, analysis of sources, textual criticism, and so on. In this regard, editorial theory (new philology) plays a role in the assembling of the language data as found in texts for historical linguistic analysis, whether

of “text languages” or of previous stages of living languages (Adamson & Ayres-Bennett 2011, p. 204). Complexity theory provides a framework for an integrated, emergent, and multifaceted approach to the study of ancient languages in which linguistics, editorial theory (new philology), and other academic disciplines can be applied in disciplinarily appropriate ways for the generation of new knowledge.

3. GENERATING OF KNOWLEDGE THROUGH THE DECIPHERMENT OF THE ROSETTA STELE

3.1 Knowledge of scripts, orthographies and languages of the Egyptian linguistic landscape

The scripts (that is, written characters), the orthographies (that is, sets of conventions for writing a language, and spelling norms) and languages of Egypt had been a riddle to scholars for many hundreds of years. The belief was that hieroglyphs on monuments were mere decorations (art) or represented a secret and magical sacred code of the Egyptian priests. Ten years after the decipherment of the Rosetta Stele, and by the time of his death in 1832, Champollion had already compiled in manuscript form a word list and a complete Egyptian grammar. As a result of his work and of continuing research, trained scholars can now read hieroglyphic texts with ease. Gardiner (1957, pp. 1–24; 19–26) provides an account of the writing systems, the stages of the language and the literature preserved. The following knowledge of scripts, orthographies as well as languages and their structures emerged.

The ancient Egyptians used hieroglyphic (from the Greek words meaning *sacred carving*) writing for more than 3 000 years. The ancient Egyptians borrowed the idea of hieroglyphic writing from Mesopotamia about 3000 BCE (Hallo & Simpson 1971, p. 189). Egyptian hieroglyphics eventually included about 700 symbols. The symbols have the elegant, stiff quality typical of ancient Egyptian art. The earliest hieroglyphs consisted of pictorial characters known as pictographs or ideograms. These characters were direct representations of ideas. For example, Egyptians who wished to express the idea of a vulture drew a picture of a vulture (Andrews, 1981, p. 9). Some hieroglyphic texts are read from right to left and others from left to right, depending on the direction that the hieroglyphs face. Columns are read from top to bottom. They used hieroglyphic writing mainly for religious inscriptions on temples and stone monuments and to record the words and deeds of royalty. In fact, the Egyptians called their hieroglyphic writing *god’s words*.

Egyptian hieroglyphs included determinatives. Determinatives indicate the semantic class of object to which the preceding hieroglyph belonged. An example of a determinative might be the symbol for water placed after the name of a specific lake.

The Egyptians also developed phonetic hieroglyphs (also called phonograms), which, like the characters of modern alphabets, represented the sounds of the language. Some represented only one sound. Others represented combinations of two or three sounds that formed syllables. However, the phonetic symbols represented only the sounds of consonants. There were no signs for vowels.

As writing became more common, papyrus was invented, which was easier than stone to write on. A consequence was that Egyptians developed a simplified cursive (flowing) script called hieratic writing, which was more suitable for writing on papyrus. It was used for both religious and nonreligious purposes. About 700 BCE, the Egyptians developed a script called *Demotic*

(from *demos*, people) that was simpler and could be written faster than hieratic writing. It was used for correspondence and recordkeeping. For a number of centuries, the Greek and Demotic scripts were used side by side.

After 300 CE, the Egyptians replaced hieroglyphic and Demotic writing with a simpler (Coptic) alphabet consisting of Greek letters supplemented by seven signs borrowed from Demotic. Knowledge of hieroglyphic and Demotic symbols was soon lost. According to Andrews (1981, p. 7), hieroglyphs were used on 24 August 394 CE for the last time to inscribe the Egyptian language, while the final inscription in Demotic script is dated 452 CE. The meaning of hieroglyphics and Demotic inscriptions and writings remained a mystery until their decipherment in the early 1800s. The belief was that hieroglyphs represented a secret and magical sacred code of the Egyptian priests. However, the language written in the Coptic alphabet survived longer. Coptic primers were sometimes written in Arabic with the result that those who could read Arabic also had access to the last form of the Egyptian language (Andrews 1981, p. 8).

The Egyptian language remained in active use from the fourth millennium BCE until the eleventh century CE. It forms one of the six branches of a family of languages spoken in North Africa and the Ancient Near East, known as Afro-Asiatic (or Hamito-Semitic), which includes Egyptian, Semitic (for example, Akkadian, Hebrew and Arabic), Berber (North Africa west of Egypt), Chadic (around Lake Chad), Cushitic (Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and north-west Kenya) and Omotic (southern Ethiopia). The Egyptian language emerged through six stages, namely Archaic Egyptian (c. 3100–2650 BCE), Old Egyptian (c. 2650–2135 BCE), Middle Egyptian (c. 2135–1550 BCE), Late Egyptian (c. 1550–700 BCE), Demotic (c. 700 BCE–450 CE) and Coptic with two major dialects, Sahidic and Bohairic (c. 200 CE–1000 CE). One distinct break occurred when the synthetic morphology of Old and Middle Egyptian was replaced by the more complex analytical morphology of Late Egyptian. The Egyptian language itself survived in a fossilised form in the liturgy of the Coptic church, even after the emergence of Arabic as the spoken language of Egypt (Shaw & Nicholson 2008, p. 176).

3.2 Knowledge of language practice in Ptolemaic Egypt and Alexandria

As mentioned in Section 1, the discovery and decipherment of the Rosetta Stele put multilingualism and the practice of translation and interpreting during the Ptolemaic reign of Egypt in focus. As prelude to the issues involving language practice and to give a sense of the power and accomplishments of the Ptolemaic rulers, we provide a brief historical background.

The name Ptolemy was held by a succession of 15 Hellenistic rulers of Egypt from 305 to 30 BCE. The Ptolemaic Period includes the preceding Macedonian Dynasty (332–305 BCE), encompassing the reigns of Alexander the Great (332–323 BCE), his half-brother Philip Arrhidaeus (323–317 BCE) and his son Alexander IV (317–310 BCE) (Shaw & Nicholson 2008, pp. 257–258). The following historical facts are relevant.

After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, Ptolemy I was made satrap in Egypt. In 305 BCE, the Ptolemaic Dynasty (see Bevan 1927) began when he assumed the title of king of Egypt. He tried to maintain control of southern Syria, but rejected the offer of regency over the rest of Alexander's empire. For sending grain to the island states in a famine year, he received the title of *Soter* "Saviour". His son, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, followed his father in power in 283 BCE. He reigned with his sister-wife Arsinoë until 246 BCE. Under these rulers and their successor, Ptolemy III Euergetes I, who ruled until 221 BCE, Egypt gained its

greatest power since the days of Thutmose III (Menkheperra) (1479–1425) of the eighteenth dynasty during the New Kingdom. With Ptolemy IV Philopater, who ruled from 221 to 203 BCE, these rulers also controlled Syria and the coast of Asia Minor. In 200 BCE, during the reign of Ptolemy V Epiphanes (203–181 BCE), the Ptolemy to whom the Rosetta Stele is dedicated, the rule over Syria was lost and Egypt began to decline. However, the Ptolemaic Dynasty with many successors ruled until the Roman conquest of Egypt in 30 BCE (Bruce 1973, p. 232; Shaw & Nicholson 2008, p. 352).

The Ptolemies grafted their administration onto the existing political and religious structure of ancient Egypt, but aligned it towards the Mediterranean region, rather than towards Africa or western Asia. The Pharaonic administrative and religious centres at Thebes, Memphis and Tanis were, therefore, replaced by Alexandria, a new capital city on the Mediterranean, which had a population of about half a million people by the mid-first century BCE, including substantial numbers of Greeks and Jews (Shaw & Nicholson 2008, pp. 25–26), in addition to Egyptians and countless others who came for trade. As a planned city, Alexandria has a gridded street plan, like a Hellenistic rather than an Egyptian city, and was known as *Alexandra ad Aegyptum*: "Alexandria beside Egypt" rather than within it, that is, a separate country in its own right (Shaw & Nicholson 2008, p. 25).

As Hellenistic culture spread through the Ancient Near East, Greek became a lingua franca. Accordingly, Greek was adopted as the official language in Egypt, although Egyptian continued in use. Under the royal direction of the Ptolemies, the production of papyrus was plentiful, as made evident by the discoveries at Oxyrynchus and elsewhere (Shaw & Nicholson 2008, pp. 132–133). Slave copyists were numerous, so that scrolls could be produced and sold at low prices to the reading public (Caldwell & Gyles 1966, pp. 363–366). The Greeks were seldom prepared to make the effort to learn a foreign language and there is no evidence that any Greek ever mastered Hebrew or any other eastern language (Momigliano 1981, p. 331). Ptolemy IV Philopater depended upon interpreters and translators, even when he addressed his armies (Papaconstantinou 2010). Writing and translation were fundamental to the running of the Ptolemaic Egyptian economy and evidence of these activities were, therefore, found in every town and village in Egypt (Aitken 2015, p. 3). The Egyptian scribe was responsible for the considerable amount of written material, of which only a fraction survived (Hallo & Simpson 1970, p. 197). Greek-speaking users formed the upper levels of the Ptolemaic bureaucracy, and Egyptian speakers formed the vast majority of the population throughout the Ptolemaic period. Royal decrees were therefore routinely issued in both Greek and Egyptian. Based on bilingual papyrological archives, Papaconstantinou (2010) provides an extensive description of the language practice activities in the multilingual society of Ptolemaic Egypt.

Ptolemy II Philadelphus established a library in Alexandria, which amassed a total of 700 000 scrolls. The library was a centre of scholarship covering, inter alia, knowledge of religion and philosophy as well as Egyptian fauna, flora, mathematics and science, geography, astronomy and medicine (Caldwell & Giles 1966, pp. 366–373). The Greeks and, through them, the Romans, held Egypt in high regard as a font of ancient wisdom. In this way Egyptian civilisation exerted a strong influence on the Classical world, and the roots of Western civilisation owe considerably more to Egypt than is commonly realised (Shaw & Nicholson 2008, pp. 132–133). In addition, Egypt's contacts with the rest of the world involved Africa, Syria, Anatolia, Mesopotamia and Persia (Hallo & Simpson 1970, p. 190).

3.3 Knowledge of the translation of Hebrew sacred writings in Ptolemaic Egypt and Alexandria

For the benefit of the Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria, the first translation of the Hebrew sacred writings into Greek was made. To justify the Greek translation and to signal Jerusalem's approval thereof, a paratext or metatext, the *Writing of Aristeas*, was produced, which relates that Ptolemy II Philadelphus wanted to complete his great library by the inclusion of the sacred writings of the Jews. He sent a message to the high priest at Jerusalem and procured from him 72 selected scholars who were given quarters on the island of Pharos, where they translated the Pentateuch from Hebrew into Greek in 72 days (Naudé 2009; p. 2012). Much later, the Mishnah (*Megillah* 1, p. 8), the first major written collection of Jewish oral traditions dating to the third century CE, confirmed Greek as the only language into which the Hebrew Bible could be translated.

The Greek translations of the prophets and other sacred writings in the Hebrew Bible, as well as those writings not canonised in the Jewish tradition, some of which were written originally in Greek and are not translations, are collectively known as the Septuagint. The translations were carried out over a period of approximately 150 years. An example is the translation of 1 Maccabees, a pious account of the Maccabaean revolt written in biblical style about the end of the second century BCE (Momigliano 1981, pp. 341–342). A document that shows solidarity between the Egyptian and Palestinian Jews is a possible intratranslation, namely, 3 Maccabees. It imitates 2 Maccabees (originally composed in Greek) to show that the Egyptian Jews suffered persecution similar to that of the Palestinian Jews under Ptolemy IV Philopater (Momigliano 1981, pp. 341–342).

A translation that utilised paratexts or metatexts is the translation of the Ben Sira writing, reckoned among wisdom literature, into Greek (Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2019, p. 188). According to Sira 50:27, this Hebrew composition was written in Jerusalem by a Jerusalemite named Yeshua, son of Eleazar, son of Sira between 195 BCE and 180 BCE (Wright 2015a, p. 412). According to the Prologue of Ben Sira, the grandson's Greek translation was made in Egypt, probably in Alexandria, around approximately 117 BCE (Wright 2015b, p. 513) in order to make the conservative thought of Jerusalem available to Jews in the Diaspora (Momigliano 1981, p. 341).

With reference to Rajak (2009), Aitken (2015, p. 2) claims that the Septuagint "is the largest extant piece of Ptolemaic Greek, and one of the first works of Hellenistic Judaism … it is (possibly) the largest work of translation literature from antiquity, offering valuable insight for translation studies on both bilingual interference and translation technique".

3.4 Knowledge of multilingual inscriptions in Ptolemaic Egypt and Alexandria

During the Ptolemaic Period in Egypt (305–30 BCE), councils of Egyptian priests were held mostly in Alexandria. Although the issues they addressed varied, their main purpose was to increase the honours of the king and the royal family, and to ensure financial and economic gratification for the priests. The outcome of these councils took the form of multilingual inscriptions on stelae posted in the temples all over the country, provided in Hieroglyphic, in Demotic and in Greek versions. Rounded tops with sculptured reliefs have been found on the tops of stelae dedicated to Ptolemy II, Ptolemy III, and Ptolemy IV (Schoville 2001, p. 2). The oldest of these is the *Decree of Alexandria*, which was issued in 243 BCE and

can be almost completely reconstructed from copies found near Athribis, in Assuan and in Elephantine. One noteworthy result of the study of these decrees collectively is that they have been found to have been modelled after older and contemporary Greek honorary inscriptions and, therefore, represent a new textual genre transferred into Egypt in Ptolemaic times. Although he focusses on Greek inscriptions in a broader geographical region than Egypt, Aitken (2014) stresses the importance of Greek inscriptions for the illumination and understanding of Septuagint vocabulary.

3.5 Knowledge of Hellenistic papyri in Ptolemaic Egypt and Alexandria

Hallo and Simpson (1970, p. 190) typify Ptolemaic Egypt as a "vast source of materials in the Greek papyri … the scholarly world of the classical papyrologist". Archaeologists have found, in mummy wrappings and in trash heaps of the ancient villages of Ptolemaic Egypt, thousands of papyri – some written in Demotic and others in Greek. Some are translations into Greek, for example, the Demotic Legal Code of Hermopolis (Oxyrhynchus Papyrus xlvii. 3285 (Momigliano 1981, p 329). Papaconstantinou (2010) claims that, in the course of the last century, more than 50 000 papyri and 10 000 ostraca of the Graeco-Roman period have been published, most of them Greek, but also texts in Latin, Demotic and Coptic.

Besides the discovery of lost writings, numerous official documents that deal with public and private life, such as laws, royal decrees, appointments, letters, business and household accounts, were discovered, through which social life in Egypt during the relevant time unfolded (Caldwell & Giles 1966, p. 341). Caldwell and Giles (1966, p. 341) conclude that the "discovery of papyri and inscriptions has furnished such a wealth of new material that even the lives of individuals, the management of private estates, and the business life, national and international, can be accurately described".

3.6 Knowledge of Egyptian history and culture

History is dependent on written records and Egyptian history is no exception. It is through writing that Egyptian history becomes a subject of study (Hallo & Simpson 1970, p. 190).

Manetho, an Egyptian priestly writer who lived in the Ptolemaic Kingdom in the third century BCE, authored his annals in Greek, known as *Aegyptica*, in which he divided Egyptian history into 30 dynasties. He began with the union of Egypt during the reign of Menes (now identified with Narmer), the founder of the first dynasty (in 3100 BCE), while the thirtieth dynasty ended (in 343 BCE) with the death of the last native pharaoh, Nectanebo II (Waddell 1940, pp. 1–187). The original annals of Manetho did not survive, but quotations preserved in the writings of later authors (for example, Josephus, Africanus and Eusebius) give the gist of his account (Schwantes 1965, p. 53). Before the decipherment of the Rosetta Stele, Manetho's account formed the principal source for the history of Egypt – a serviceable framework that is, in broad terms, in accord with contemporary knowledge of Egyptian history. The scheme is still followed by most historians (Schwantes 1965, p. 54).

After the decipherment, it became possible to read and utilise other lists, which are older and by which it is possible to confirm, to strengthen, to modify and to correct Manetho's account in places where the sequence of succession did not conform to the sequence of succession as can be observed from older succession lists in Egyptian, and where the text of Manetho had became corrupted/damaged. Examples of these lists are the following:

a. The Palermo stone (c. 2392–2283 BCE), in seven surviving fragments of a stele (in Palermo, Cairo and London), mentions kings of the Old Kingdom, as well as the level of the Nile in different years.

b. The Karnak king list – a great list on the walls of a chamber of the Karnak temple (c. 1479–1425 BCE) (now in the Louvre, Paris) – shows Thutmose III worshipping his ancestors, of which 61 are named.

c. The Abydos king list (c. 1295–1186 BCE), carved on the walls of a temple in Abydos, presents Seti I worshipping his ancestors, of which 77 are named.

d. The Sakkara king list (c. 1295–1186 BCE), carved on a tomb in Saqqara, mentions 47 kings shown to Ramesses II.

e. The Turin Royal Canon or Turin King List (c. 1186–1069 BCE), preserved on a papyrus, now in the Egyptian Museum in Turin, contains a list of kings from Menes to Rameses II (Gardiner 1961, pp. 46–71; Schwantes 1965, p. 53; Hallo & Simpson 1970, pp. 193–195; Hallo, 1997, pp. 69–73).

On the basis of new information obtained through studying texts, modern scholars group Manetho's dynasties of Egyptian history into periods corresponding to the centralisation of power (that is, periods of stability and achievement) and periods of lack of political power (that is, periods of instability and stagnation) as follows: Early Dynastic Period (3100–2686 BCE; Dynasties 1 and 2); Old Kingdom or Pyramid Age (2686–2181 BCE; Dynasties 3 to 6); First Intermediate Period (2181–2055 BCE; Dynasties 7 to 11); Middle Kingdom (2055–1650 BCE; Dynasties 11 to 14); Second Intermediate Period (1650–1550 BCE; Dynasties 15 (Hyksos) to 17); New Kingdom or Empire Period (1550–1069; Dynasties 18 to 20 – Dynasties 19 and 20 are called the Ramesside Period); Third Intermediate Period (1069–747 BCE; Dynasties 21 to 24); and Late Dynastic Period (747–332 BCE; Dynasties 25 to 31) (Gardiner 1961, pp. 429–453; Hallo & Simpson 1970, pp. 192, 299–302; Murname 1995, pp. 712–714; Shaw & Nicholson 2008, pp. 350–351). Dynasty 31 was added after Manetho. The documentation shows the intervening periods as eras of relatively weak political stance, and division, interference from foreigners, and restructuring of society, but they were productive in terms of literature and formed the basis for change (Hallo & Simpson 1970, p. 192).

Hallo and Simpson (1970, p. 195) conclude: "Egyptian chronology is thus a piecing together of data within a framework based on the king lists and associated documents and supplemented by various contemporaneous inscriptions". This process is the result of the decipherment of the Rosetta Stele.

3.7 Disseminating knowledge of orthography to create new orthographies

3.7.1 Sesotho orthography

As an expert in the decipherment of ancient scripts, Champollion was also an important scholar in the context of modern philology through his involvement in the development of orthographies for previously unwritten languages. He was a teacher of the French missionaries, including Eugène Casalis, who, in partnership with Sesotho colleagues, later developed the first orthography for Sesotho (and also had influence on Xitsonga orthography) in the late 1800s (Mosimann-Barbier 2014, pp. 20–26). Casalis (1861, pp. 313–327) gave a description of the

structure of the language. Both ancient Egyptian and modern Sesotho are African languages whose writing systems were, respectively, deciphered and developed through the joint efforts of a community of scholars.

Mosimann-Barbier (2014, p. ix) discusses the problems of the Sesotho orthography by indicating that the spoken languages were transcribed by missionaries of different nationalities, in this case, mostly by the French and the British. The result is that the sounds heard when they were transcribed were not written in the same way, and were affected by the respective orthographies of their own languages (see also Lepsius 1863). For example, the residence of King Moshoeshoe (transcribed as Moshesh by Casalis) is spelt "Thaba-Bossiou" by French missionaries, as opposed to "Thaba Bosiu" in English. The French "Bassoutos" is spelled as "Basutos" in English. Casalis spelled the name of Moshoeshoe's enemy, as "Sékonyéla," when he wrote in French, but "Sikonyela" in English. This offers a possible explanation for the different orthographies of Sesotho in Lesotho and South Africa, which have implications for Bible translation, as investigated by Makutoane (2022).

3.7.2 Meroitic inscriptions

Meroitic was the language during the Meroitic period (c. 300 BCE–400 CE) of the Kingdom of Kush (southern part of Upper Egypt, that is, Lower Nubia to Khartoum, Sudan [Upper Nubia]), the capital of which was at Meroë (modern Begrawiya in Sudan) during the Meroitic period (Adams, 1995, pp. 775–789; Davidson, 1991, pp. 34–49). Ricard (2004, pp. 6–7) typifies Meroitic as a truly African written language, related to languages that are still spoken in the area. Early evidence of Meroitic is from the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (c. 50 BCE), who described the scripts of Meroitic in his *Bibliotheca historical*, Book III (Africa), Chapter 4 (Oldfather 1933). It became extinct about 400 CE and is still an unclassified language in terms of its language family. By 1990, approximately 1 000 individual inscriptions had been documented (Davies 1990, p. 133).

The British Egyptologist Francis Llewellyn Griffith (1862–1934) started deciphering Meroitic in 1910 (Griffith 1911, p. 1912). By comparing parallel funerary formulae, he was able to determine the size of the Meroitic syllabary, the correlation between the hieroglyphic and cursive scripts, the direction in which signs are read and the phonetic values of the signs. The key to this achievement was a stand from a temple in Ben Naga in Sudan with inscriptions in Egyptian and Meroitic hieroglyphs, now in the Berlin Museum (Davies 1990, pp. 133–134). Since the phonetic values of the Egyptian signs were known, it was possible for Griffith to establish the values of the remaining signs. The decipherment, which is accepted as correct, was refined by the German scholar Fritz Hintze (1959). The writing is essentially alphabetic, each script having 23 signs: 15 consonantal signs, 4 signs (1 of them occurring only in the initial position), and 4 syllable signs (for *ne*, *se*, *te*, and *to*). Further refinements followed by Millet (1973) and Rowan (2006).

Despite the success in transliterating the scripts, the understanding of the language is still obscure. Some words, phrases and grammatical constructions have been identified, but the meaning of most inscriptions remains opaque. If a link between Meroitic and a known language, such as Egyptian or Greek, can be established, for example, by the discovery of another Rosetta Stele, the decipherment can be fully established, so that not only the names of rulers, but their activities can be interpreted.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this essay, we demonstrate the rich information and new knowledge that were generated by way of (community) translation practice in Ptolemaic Egypt concerning the scripts, orthographies and languages of the Egyptian linguistic landscape; language practice, translation of Hebrew sacred writings, multilingual inscriptions, and Hellenistic papyri; Egyptian history and culture, as well as dissemination of this knowledge for the creation of new orthographies for languages with no written record, and for the decipherment of languages with written records.

The discovery of a single inscription in a known language, ancient Greek, with translations into two varieties of Egyptian led to the decipherment of the Egyptian orthographic systems. The knowledge that was acquired at that time also influenced the development of orthographic systems for languages without written systems, for example Sesotho.

The knowledge of the history, administration, and social life of Egypt is rich, because the translated texts of the multilingual Rosetta Stele made decipherment of the abundant hieroglyphic and Demotic inscriptions and papyri possible, so that they could be read and interpreted. This is very important for the unlocking of African knowledge if the viewpoint of Ricard (2004, p. 12), based on the suggestion of the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop, is accepted: "Egypt was the centre of civilization because it had assimilated all African cultures and restored what it had taken from the rest of the continent". Concerning the unity of African languages, Ricard (2004, pp. 12–13) quotes Théophile Obenga (1980, p. 69):

> Pharaonic Egyptian, Coptic, and as yet undeciphered Meroitic are the African languages with the longest written history. This is Black Africa's linguistic and cultural foundation ... From its Egyptian cradle, culture and civilization were diffused to the whole of Africa, thanks to Bantu peoples.

This is contra the popular view of Ali A. Mazrui (1986), who argues that Africa is a product of three major influences, namely indigenous traditions, Western culture, and Islamic culture – the conflict or synthesis of this triplet heritage has determined the situation in African states today. The first-mentioned viewpoint deserves to be developed and researched further by unlocking the heritage of Africa, as stressed by Ricard (2004, p. 13) quoting Obenga's preface to Diop (1988, p. 8):

> This thesis postulates the teaching of Egyptian humanities everywhere in Africa, to strengthen African historical consciousness as well as to revive Pharaonic civilization thanks to the support of a living community … Pharaonic heritage belongs in totality, from its origin to the end of foreign dynasties, to the Black African cultural universe, by its dwellings, its race, and the tongue of Ancient Egyptian creators of Pharaonic civilization.

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