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ORIENTALIA LOVANIENSIA
ANALECTA
————— 241 —————

PROCEEDINGS OF THE
TENTH INTERNATIONAL
CONGRESS OF EGYPTOLOGISTS

University of the Aegean, Rhodes
22-29 May 2008

Volume II

edited by

P. KOUSOULIS and N. LAZARIDIS



PEETERS
LEUVEN – PARIS – BRISTOL, CT
2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I: ARCHAEOLOGY

J.R. ANDERSON and SALAH ELDIN MOHAMED AHMED Five Years of Excavations at Dangeil, Sudan: A New Amun Temple of the Late Kushite Period.	3
M.-P. AUBRY, W.A. BERGGREN, C. DUPUIS, E. POORVIN, H. GHALY, D. WARD, C. KING, R. O'BRIAN KNOX, Kh. OUDA and W. FATHY HASSAN TIGA: A Geoarchaeologic Project in the Theban Necropolis, West Bank, Egypt	21
B. BADER A Late Middle Kingdom Settlement at Tell el-Dab'a and its Potential . . .	45
G. BAKOWSKA Meroitic Pottery from Napata. The Hellenistic Influence	65
H. BARNARD The Study of Eastern Desert Ware	77
N. BILLING and J.M. ROWLAND Recently Discovered Blocks in the Central Delta Village of Kom el-Ahmar, Minuf	101
J. BUDKA The Asasif Revisited: New Results from the Austrian Concession	111
J. BUDKA Festival Pottery of the New Kingdom: The Case of Elephantine	131
N. CASTELLANO Les nécropoles d'Oxyrhynchos.	147
R. CZERNER Architecture of the Temple of Tuthmosis III at Deir el-Bahari. Some Remarks on the Hypostyle Hall: Study on Architectural Elements of the Roof Structure	159
Z. DE KOONING Preliminary Report on the Ceramological Corpus of the Survey in al-Shaykh Sa'id South	175

C. FANTAOUTSAKI	
New Evidence on the Sanctuary of Isis in the Ancient City of Rhodes . . .	189
J.M. GALÁN	
Excavations at the Courtyard of the Tomb of Djehuty (TT 11)	207
Z. HAWASS	
The Egyptian Expedition in the Valley of the Kings Excavation Season 2, 2008-2009: Part 1	221
I. INCORDINO	
Royal Monuments of the Third Dynasty: A Re-examination of the Archae- ological Documents	267
M. JONES	
The Temple Palace of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu: An Archaeological Approach to its Preservation	277
A.A. KROL	
“White Walls” of Memphis at Kom Tuman	295
M.J. LÓPEZ-GRANDE and E. DE GREGORIO	
Pottery Vases from a Deposit with Flower Bouquets Found at Dra Abu el-Naga	305
M.H. TRINDADE LOPES and T.R. PEREIRA	
The Palace of Apries (Memphis/Kôm Tumân): Brief Report of the Fifth Campaign (April 2008)	319
S.T. BASILICO and S.A. LUPO	
Function of Area II in Tell el-Ghaba, North Sinai, through its Pottery Evi- dence	327
M. MÜLLER	
Kalksteinpuzzle in Per-Ramses	341
M. MASCORT	
L’Osireion d’Oxyrhynchos	365
A. NIWIŃSKI	
A Mysterious Tomb at Deir el-Bahari. Revelations of the Excavations of the Polish-Egyptian Cliff Mission above the Temples of Hatshepsut and Thutmosis III	377
M.C. PÉREZ DIE	
Ehnasya el Medina (Herakleopolis Magna). Excavations 2004-2007 at the Necropolis of the First Intermediate Period / Early Middle Kingdom	393

E. PONS MELLADO	
Saite Tomb n° 14 at the Archaeological Site of Oxyrhynchus (el Bahnasa)	411
C. PRICE	
East of Djoser: Preliminary Report of the Saqqara Geophysical Survey Project, 2007 Season	421
R. SCHIESTL	
Locating the Cemeteries of the Residential Elite of the Thirteenth Dynasty at Dahshur	429
F. SCHMITT	
La semence des pierres: le dépôt de fondation dans l'Égypte ancienne . . .	443
N. SHIRAI, W. WENDRICH and R. CAPPERS	
An Archaeological Survey in the Northeastern Part of the Fayum	459
Z.E. SZAFRAŃSKI	
King Hatshepsut from the Deir el-Bahari Temple	475
P. VERLINDEN	
“Tombs for the Tombless”: A Study of Children and Burial Space in the Dakhla Oasis	487
G. VÖRÖS	
Egyptian Temple Architecture in the Light of the Hungarian Excavations in Egypt (1907-2007)	501
A. WODZIŃSKA	
Tell er-Retaba: Ceramic Survey 2007	521
S. YOSHIMURA and M. BABA	
Recent Discoveries of Intact Tombs at Dahshur North: Burial Customs of the Middle and New Kingdoms	545
C.S. ZEREFOS, S.N. AMBRAZEYS, H. BADAWY and E. XIROTYRI-ZEREFOS	
Past and Present Geophysical Threats at the Great City of Alexandria . . .	557
C. ZIEGLER	
Nouvelles découvertes à Saqqara	569

PART II: ROYAL IDEOLOGY AND SOCIETY

S. AGAPOV	
Soziale Strukturen und wirtschaftliche Aktivitäten in Gebelein zur Zeit der 4.-5. Dynastie (nach Angaben der Gebelein-Papyri)	583

S. ALLAM	
A Field for Interdisciplinary Research	595
S. CARMELLO	
Aramaic-Speaking People in Egypt: Religion and Ethnicity.	605
J. CASHMAN	
The Scribal Palette as an Elite Gift in New Kingdom Egypt	615
G. CAVILLIER	
From the Mediterranean Sea to the Nile: New Perspectives and Researches on the Sherden in Egypt	631
G. CRISCENZO-LAYCOCK	
The Nome: Naturally Occuring Local Unit, or Artificial Device of the State? A Case Study of the Fourteenth Upper Egyptian Nome	639
A.J. DE WIT	
Enemies of the State: Perceptions of “Otherness” and State Formation in Egypt	649
H. DIAZ RIVAS	
Widowhood in Ancient Egypt.	669
Sh. EL-MENSHAWY	
Aspects of the Office of Temple Gardener in Ancient Egypt (Reconsid- eration of the Recently Published Stela TN. 20.3.25.3).	679
A. EL SHAHAWAY	
Les «individus» qui établissent l’ordre cosmique: un aspect de la dévolution de prérogatives royales dans les tombes thébaines du Nouvel Empire	693
C.J. EYRE	
Economy and Society in Pharaonic Egypt	707
M. FAROUK	
A Timeline of the Old Kingdom Officials	727
M. GATHY	
La peinture thébaine sous le règne d’Amenhotep II: étude d’une création artistique comme reflet du contexte historique et socioculturel de l’époque	741
B. HAYDEN	
Demotic “Marriage Documents” as Evidence for the Perception and Use of Coinage among Egyptians in the Ptolemaic Period.	751
K.A. KÓTHAY	
Duties and Composition of the Personnel of the Cults at Lahun.	763

M. LIANOU	
The Foundations of Royal Military Power in Early Ptolemaic Egypt.	777
G. MENÉNDEZ	
Foreigners in Deir el-Medina during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties	791
J. MOJE	
The Demotic Tomb Stelae from Dandara.	805
M. MINAS-NERPEL	
Ptolemaic Queens in Egyptian Temple Reliefs: Intercultural Reflections of Political Authority, or Religious Imperatives?	809
M. NUZZOLO	
Sun Temples and Pyramid Texts: The King's Progress in the Evolution of his Cult	823
M. ORRIOLS-LLONCH	
Semen Ingestion and Oral Sex in Ancient Egyptian Texts	839
F. PAYRAUDEAU	
La situation politique de Tanis sous la XXV ^{ème} dynastie	849
D. STEFANOVIĆ	
The <i>ḥkrt-nswt</i> on the Monuments of the <i>ʒtḳ n tt ḥkʒ</i>	861
D. SWEENEY	
Masculinity, Femininity and the Spirituality of Work at Deir el-Medīna . .	873
K. SZPAKOWSKA	
Infancy in a Rural Community: A Case Study of Early Childhood at Lahun	885
A. VON LIEVEN	
Who was “King” (S)asychis?	899
A.P. ZINGARELLI	
Comments on the Egyptian Term <i>wḥyt</i> : Family or Quasi-Village?	909

PART III: BELIEF SYSTEM AND RITUAL

B. ARQUIER	
Décans nocturnes et décans diurnes	923
J. ASSMANN	
The “Structure” of Ancient Egyptian Religion	935

J.A. BELMONTE, M. SHALTOUT and M. FEKRI Astronomy and Landscape in Ancient Egypt. Temple Alignments and Implications for Chronology	951
R. BUSSMANN Changing Cultural Paradigms: From Tomb to Temple in the Eleventh Dynasty	971
E. CONSTAS Une lecture de la façade du tombeau de Petosiris. Les piliers d'ante: approche sémiologique	987
D. CZERWIK The Afterlife Beliefs in the Sixth-Dynasty Private Inscriptions	1003
M. DOLINSKA The Bird at the Back of the Atef Crown	1017
K. LAHN DUMKE Some Reflections on the Function of a Particular Triad Constellation in New Kingdom Religious Iconography	1041
Kh. ELGAWADY Die Schranken in den ägyptischen Tempeln der griechisch-römischen Zeit	1053
A. EL-TAYEB SAYED Coffin Texts Spell 823 and the Rites of Passage: The Archaeological Context of the Coffin of Mentuhotep	1073
F. FEDER Egyptian Mortuary Liturgies in the Papyri of the Ptolemaic Period	1083
A. GABER Some Snake Deities from the Temple of Edfu	1093
K. GRIFFIN Links between the <i>rekhyt</i> and Doorways in Ancient Egypt	1115
N. GUILHOU La constellation de la tortue: proposition d'identification	1131
S. TOWER HOLLIS Hathor, Mistress of Byblos	1143
L.J. KINNEY The (<i>w</i>) <i>nwn</i> Funerary Dance in the Old Kingdom and its Relationship to the Dance of the <i>mww</i>	1153

Y. KOENIG	
The Papyrus of the Seven Utterances of the Goddess Mehet Weret.	1167
L. DÍAZ-IGLESIAS LLANOS	
The Role of Osiris in the Mythological Cycle Devised around Heracleopolis Magna and its Territory.	1173
R. LUCARELLI	
Ancient Egyptian Demons: The Evidence of the Magical and Funerary Papyri of the New Kingdom and the Third Intermediate Period.	1187
L. MARTZOLFF	
L'adaptation d'un rituel sur les murs d'un temple à la période tardive: l'exemple du rituel divin journalier	1195
A. PRIES	
Standard Rituals in Change – Patterns of Tradition from the Pyramid Texts to Roman Times	1211
G. SCHREIBER	
Crocodile Gods on a Late Group of Hypocephali	1225
J.M. SERRANO	
Nouvelles données concernant le rituel de l'Ouverture de la Bouche: la tombe de Djehouty (TT 11)	1237
R. SOUSA and T. CANHÃO	
Some Notes on Sinuhe's Flight: The Heart as a God's Voice	1247
C. WADE	
Sarcophagus Circle: The Goddesses in the Tomb	1259
D.A. WARBURTON	
The New Kingdom Solar Theology in Scandinavia?	1271
A. WÜTHRICH	
Un exemple de l'évolution des concepts funéraires à la Troisième Période Intermédiaire: le chapitre 166 ^{PLEYTE} du Livre des Morts.	1281

PART IV: LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND EPIGRAPHY

E.M. CIAMPINI, F. CONTARDI and G. ROSATI	
Hathor Temple Project: The Epigraphic Survey at Philae (2006).	1293
D. CILLI	
Funny Signs, a New Perspective.	1307

M. DESSOLES et V. EUVERTE	
Projet Rosette: une assistance informatique pour l'étudiant, l'épigraphiste et le philologue	1317
C. DI BIASE-DYSON	
Two Characters in Search of an Ending: The Case of Apophis and Seqenenre	1323
B. EGEDI	
Greek Loanwords and Two Grammatical Features of Pre-Coptic Egyptian	1333
J. GEE	
Textual Criticism and Textual Corruption in Coffin Texts 131-142.	1345
T. GILLEN	
Thematic Analysis and the Third Person Plural Suffix Pronoun in the Medinet Habu Historical Inscriptions.	1351
R. JASNOW	
"From Alexandria to Rakotis". Progress, Prospects and Problems in the Study of Greco-Egyptian Literary Interaction	1363
F. KAMMERZELL	
Egyptian Verb Classifiers	1395
R. LANDGRÁFOVÁ and H. NAVRÁTILOVÁ	
Texts from the Period of Crisis. A Database of the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom Biographical Texts.	1417
E.-S. LINCKE	
The "Determinative" is Prescribed and Yet Chosen. A Systematic View on Egyptian Classifiers	1425
M.Á. MOLINERO POLO	
L'identification des <i>Textes des Pyramides</i> des tombes de Haroua (TT 37) et de Pabasa (TT 279).	1435
L.D. MORENZ	
Kultursemiotik der Alphabetschrift. Ein mentalitätsgeschichtlicher Rekon- struktionsversuch.	1447
K. MUHLESTEIN	
Those Who Speak Rebellion: Refining our Understanding of the Words Used to Describe "Rebellion"	1473
F. NAETHER	
Magic in the Internet: Investigation by Genre in Trismegistos.	1485

J.R. PÉREZ-ACCINO	
Who is the Sage Talking about? Neferty and the Egyptian Sense of History	1495
S. POLIS and J. WINAND	
Structuring the Lexicon.	1503
J. WINAND, S. POLIS and S. ROSMORDUC	
<i>Ramses</i> : An Annotated Corpus of Late Egyptian	1513
V. RITTER	
La littérature sapientiale du Nouvel Empire. Un état de la question.	1523
A. ROCCATI	
Alien Speech: Some Remarks on the Language of the Kehek	1531
H. SATZINGER	
What Happened to the Voiced Consonants of Egyptian?	1537
I. CORDÓN SOLÀ-SAGALÉS	
Four <i>Daughters of the King</i> from the Second Dynasty: Epigraphic and Iconographic Analysis of the Stelae of Hepetkhenmet, Satba, Shepsetipet (?) and Sehefner	1547
J. STAUDER-PORCHET	
Relations between Verbs and Simple Prepositions in Earlier Egyptian . . .	1559
U. VERHOEVEN	
Literarische Graffiti in Grab N13.1 in Assiut/Mittelägypten	1569
K. VÉRTES	
Ten Years' Epigraphy in Theban Tomb 65. Documentation of the Late Twentieth Dynasty Wall Paintings in the Tomb of Imiseba	1577

PART V: ART AND VITREOUS MATERIAL

K.E. BANDY	
Scenes of Fish and Fishing in Middle Egypt: An Examination of Artistic Continuity and Change	1589
E. BERNHAUER	
Zyperns Hathorkapitelle aus altägyptischer Sicht	1603
M. CASANOVA, G. PIERRAT-BONNEFOIS, P. QUENET, V. DANREY and D. LACAMBRE	
Lapis Lazuli in the Tôd Treasure: A New Investigation	1619

S. EINAUDI	
Le Livre des Morts dans la cour de la tombe d'Haroua (TT 37): nouvelles découvertes	1641
L. EVANS	
Animal Behaviour in Egyptian Art: A Brief Overview	1653
S. GRALLERT	
Integrated Sets of Model Vessels in Late Period Burials from Lower Egypt. A Preliminary Report	1667
M.C. GUIDOTTI	
Essai de classification de la céramique d'Antinoopolis	1681
A. MILWARD JONES	
Faience Bowls of the Late New Kingdom	1693
T. KIKUCHI	
The Decoration Program in the Burial Chamber of the Royal Tomb of Amenophis III	1709
É. LIPTAY	
Panther-Head on the Cloak	1719
N.C. MCCREESH, A.P. GIZE and A.R. DAVID	
Pitch Black: The Black Coated Mummies, Coffins and Cartonnages from Ancient Egypt	1731
S. MEDEKSZA, R. CZERNER and G. BĄKOWSKA	
Forms and Decoration of Graeco-Roman Houses from Marina el-Alamein	1739
P.T. NICHOLSON	
Glass and Vitreous Materials at Tell el-Amarna	1759
M. PANAGIOTAKI, M. TITE and Y. MANIATIS	
Egyptian Blue in Egypt and Beyond: The Aegean and the Near East	1769
G. PIEKE	
Principles of Decoration: Concept and Style in the Mastaba of Mereruka at Saqqara	1791
C. RAEDLER	
Potsherd Scrapers and their Function at the Workshops of the Residence at Piramesse	1807
J. REVEZ	
Déconstruction intellectuelle et restitution monumentale: le temple d'Amon-Rê de Karnak comme laboratoire d'idées	1819

G. ROBINS	
The Flying Pintail Duck	1833
N. STARING	
Contextualizing Old Kingdom Elite Tomb Decoration: Fixed Rules versus Personal Choice	1839
I. STÜNKEL	
Analysing CT-Scans of a Mummy: The Amulets of Nesmin	1849
G.J. TASSIE	
“‘I’m Osiris, No I’m Osiris, No I’m Osiris”’: Hairstyles and the Afterlife .	1873
A. WOODS	
Five Significant Features in Old Kingdom Spear-Fishing and Fowling Scenes	1897
G. XEKALAKI	
The Royal Children as Signs: Reading New Kingdom Princely Iconography	1911

PART VI: EGYPT AND THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

A. ALTMAN	
Was Ugarit ever Subordinated to the Eighteenth Dynasty Pharaohs?.	1925
N.D. AYERS	
Egyptian Imitation of Mycenaean Pottery	1935
K. BLOUIN	
Mendès et les reines: reconsidération historique des mosaïques navales de Thmouis (Alexandrie 21739 et 21736).	1951
P.A. BUTZ	
Egyptian Stylistic Influence on Stoichedon and the Hekatompedon Inscrip- tion at Athens	1961
L. HAGUET	
Ceci n’est pas l’Égypte: toponymes, monuments et mythes grecs en Égypte dans la cartographie occidentale entre les XVI ^e et XVIII ^e siècles.	1975
A. HASSLER	
Mycenaean Pottery in Egypt Reconsidered: Old Contexts and New Results	1989
I. HEIN	
Cypriot and Aegean Features in New Kingdom Egypt: Cultural Elements Interpreted from Archaeological Finds	1999

F. HÖFLMAYER and A. ZDIARSKY	
Synchronising Egypt and the Aegean: A Radiocarbon-Based Approach . .	2015
S. ISKANDER	
Merenptah and the Sea Peoples: A New Perspective	2035
N. LAZARIDIS	
A Description of the Project “Wisdom Sayings in Ancient Egyptian and Greek Literature” and its Significance as a Comparative Study	2047
R. MÜLLER-WOLLERMANN	
Ägypten in Iran	2051
J. PHILLIPS	
Egyptian Amethyst in Mycenaean Greece	2057
J.-L. PODVIN	
Lampes à décor isiaque du littoral égéen d’Asie mineure	2071
T. POMMERENING	
Milch einer Frau, die einen Knaben geboren hat	2083
O.A. VASILYEVA	
“Lost Child” of Isis: Towards the Problem of the <i>Interpretatio Graeca</i> of the Osirian Myth in Texts of Later Antique and Christian Authors	2097

PART VII: CULTURAL HERITAGE AND MUSEOLOGY

A. AMENTA	
The Vatican Mummy Project. A Preliminary Report on the Restoration of the Mummy of Ny-Maat-Re (MV 25011.6.1)	2107
G. ANDREU	
News from the Louvre Museum	2119
M. HANNA and M. BETRÒ	
Exploring 3D Mapping Applications for the Risk Assessment and Monitoring of Mural Paintings in Theban Tomb 14	2127
J.-L. BOVOT	
Le catalogue des chaouabtis du Louvre: réflexions sur une publication. . .	2137
V.I. CHRYSIKOPOULOS	
À l’aube de l’égyptologie hellénique et de la constitution des collections égyptiennes: des nouvelles découvertes sur Giovanni d’Anastasi et Tassos Néroutsos	2147

E. DAVID	
A Louvre Museum Project: The Prosopographical Index of Monuments of the Egyptian Department and its Publication	2163
C. DE SIMONE	
A Memorandum of Understanding between Egypt and Sudan in the Field of Cultural Heritage.	2167
A. DODSON	
The Egyptian Coffins in the Collection of Bristol's City Museum and Art Gallery	2171
K. EXELL	
Innovation and Reaction: A Discussion of the Proposed Re-display of the Egyptian Galleries at the Manchester Museum (UK) in the Context of Consultative Curatorial Practice	2187
M. HELMY	
Hidden Histories Project at the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology .	2199
M. TRAPANI	
Kha's Funerary Equipment at the Egyptian Museum in Turin: Resumption of the Archaeological Study	2217
W. WENDRICH, J. DIELEMAN and E. WARAKSA	
Ideas Concerning a New Egyptological Knowledge Base: The UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology (UEE)	2233

RAMSES: AN ANNOTATED CORPUS OF LATE EGYPTIAN

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The *Ramses* project aims at building an annotated corpus¹ of all Late Egyptian texts². It must be considered as an interdisciplinary project of fundamental research both in Egyptology and in information technology³. In Egyptology, *Ramses* should trigger a complete change of paradigm in one's way of studying texts and language, for the encoding will integrate all possible aspects needed for philological and linguistic studies: hieroglyphic script, transcription, translation, morpho-syntactic analysis, semantic and pragmatic tagging. Those data will constitute the core of the database, but a complete description of the corpus and bibliographical links will systematically be added. As regards information technology, significant progress will be made to help Egyptologists encode texts by using new morpho-syntactic parser automata.

The aim of this paper is to answer four general questions raised by the brief presentation given above: (1) **why** did we consider it necessary to launch such a project? (2) **what** are our goals when speaking of an annotated corpus? (3) **who** will encode the great amount of data needed to make a tool like *Ramses* efficient and who is going to develop the software? and (4) **how** will we manage to achieve our aim?

¹ From a technical point of view, *Ramses* is a relational database in SQL, where the texts themselves are represented and stored in XML. The editing and search software is written in JAVA, and usable both on Mac and PCs. By means of export procedures (XML), the adopted format for the database is fully compatible with what is recommended by the Text Encoding Initiative (<http://www.tei-c.org/index.xml>).

² For the encoding, our goal is to integrate all the material written in Late Egyptian, from the 18th to the 25th dynasty, including the texts written in “softer” Late Egyptian (‘néo-égyptien mixte’ and ‘néo-égyptien partiel’), cf. J. WINAND, *Études de néo-égyptien, I. La morphologie verbale*, *Ægyptiaca Leodiensia* 2 (Liège, 1992), 10-3.

³ The information technology viewpoint will not be addressed in detail here. Although this project is essentially committed to solving Egyptological problems, it should be stressed that it will also provide a substantial ground for genuine scientific research in information technology: in cooperation with the Department of computer science of the University of Liège, several innovative algorithms will be developed in order to assist both the encoding of Late Egyptian texts and their syntactic analysis.

1. Why did we launch the *Ramses Project*?

Despite the high quality of the scientific research done in the study of Egyptian language, significant progress in Egyptian linguistics is hampered by technical problems. To be innovative today, scholars urgently need extensive corpora of texts provided with a complete linguistic analysis. It is our strong belief that research in Egyptian linguistics cannot make significant progress for lack of systematized corpora⁴.

Our project is of course not the first one to link Egyptology with information technology; in fact, computers have been part of the Egyptologists' lives for roughly four decades⁵. The foundation of the "Égyptologie et Informatique" Round Table in 1986 was instrumental in this respect⁶. In order to view *Ramses* against the background of previous achievements, we shall begin with a short retrospective, a quick look in the rear view mirror.

First, it is worth mentioning some tools which we are still using today, and which quickly followed the first Round Table: the "Manuel de codage"⁷ (1988) and the very popular software "Glyph for Windows" (1993). Regarding the processing of Egyptian texts, a series of conferences organized in Berlin in connection with the *Wörterbuch* project deserves special attention⁸. Year 2000 saw the publication of the *Coffin Texts*

⁴ In this respect, Egyptology lags behind what is being done in Greek and Latin (cf. e.g. the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* [TLG], <http://www.tlg.uci.edu/>) although databases of classical texts are still far less developed than what could be achieved (see below). Furthermore, one should also keep in mind that Egyptian texts are not available outside the small circle of Egyptologists; this situation should be of concern to all of us from the general perspective of world heritage.

⁵ See R. GUNDLACH and W. SCHENKEL, 'M.A.A.T. Ein System zur lexikalischen und grammatischen Erschließung altägyptischer Texte mit Hilfe einer elektronischen Datenverarbeitungsanlage (Projektbeschreibung)', *Chronique d'Égypte* 83 (1967), 41-64, and the discussions (especially by W. Schenkel, R. Gundlach and J. Leclant) in: A. SCHWAB-SCHLOTT (ed.), *Dokumentation ägyptischer Altertümer. Tagung vom 16. bis 17. Juli 1969 in Darmstadt* (Darmstadt, 1970).

⁶ Since then, Egyptology in Liège has taken a continuing interest in the applications of information technology to the study of Egyptian, see J. WINAND, 'Analysis of Late Egyptian by Computer', in: G. ENGLUND and P.J. FRANSEN (eds.), *Crossroad. Chaos or the Beginning of a New Paradigm. Papers from the Conference on Egyptian Grammar, Helsingør 28-30 May 1986* (Copenhagen, 1986), 388-400; ID., 'Constitution de fichiers-textes en néo-égyptien: lemmatisation et analyse automatiques', *Revue Informatique et statistiques dans les sciences humaines* 22 (1986), 179-90; ID., 'Quelques aspects de l'analyse du néo-égyptien par ordinateur', *Informatique et Égyptologie* 4 (1988), 67-80; ID., 'Lemmatisation et levée d'ambiguïté automatiques (II)', *Informatique et Égyptologie* 5 (1988), 76-92; ID., 'Les bases de données de textes en égyptien', *Informatique et Égyptologie* 7 (1990), 161-9.

⁷ J. BUURMAN, N. GRIMAL, M. HAINSWORTH and D. VAN DER PLAS, *Manuel de codage des textes hiéroglyphiques en vue de leur saisie sur ordinateur. Manual for the Encoding of Hieroglyphic Texts for Computer-Input. Leitfaden zur Verschlüsselung hieroglyphischer Texte für die Computer-Eingabe*, Informatique et Égyptologie 2 (Paris, 1985).

⁸ See especially St. GRUNERT & I. HAFEMANN (eds.), *Textcorpus und Wörterbuch. Aspekte zur ägyptischen Lexikographie*, Probleme der Ägyptologie 14 (Leiden, 1999); I. HAFEMANN (ed.), *Wege zu einem digitalen Corpus ägyptischer Texte. Akten der Tagung «Datenbanken im Verbund» (Berlin, 30. September – 2. Oktober 1999)* (Berlin, 2003).

*Word Index*⁹, while 2004 must be considered as another turning point for it is at that time that the *Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae*¹⁰ appeared online. More recently, 2007 can be seen as the *Ramses* project's official birthdate. Of course, like every child, it was conceived some months earlier¹¹.

The ongoing projects illustrate the two major trends for the use of computers in the field of linguistics for the study of texts¹²:

- lexical databases, as illustrated by D. van der Plas and J. Borghouts's *Coffin Texts Word Index*;
- annotated corpora, the aims and purpose of which are more ambitious. This is the path followed by the *Ägyptisches Wörterbuch*'s team in the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences. This project combines a lexical database with a corpus of texts and has been a valuable source of inspiration for our own project.

Indeed, the *TLA* is the first attempt to design an annotated corpus on a large scale. Its website basically provides two types of information: firstly, it gives access to the original *Zettel* that were used for the printed version of the *Wörterbuch* and still remain a treasure trove; in addition, it links the user to a new *Textcorpus* whose encoding is still in progress. Such a tool is useful and handy enough for every Egyptologist on a daily basis, but it is fair to say that, at the same time, it falls a bit short of what is needed in linguistics and philology:

- nowadays, the technology at our disposal allows a full integration of the hieroglyphic script: the continuing progress made in computer science in the last decades invites us to use without restraint what information technology now has to offer;
- although the texts are lemmatized, the morphological and syntactic data are not accessible to users. Hence, it turns out to be less helpful for a linguist or a grammarian than for a lexicographer;
- as regards the search option, it is impossible (at least online) to make complex searches by combining more than two lemmas in a query, and there is basically no possibility to sort out the results.

⁹ D. VAN DER PLAS and J.F. BORGHOUTS, *Coffin Texts Word Index*, Publications Interuniversitaires de Recherches Égyptologiques Informatisées 6 (Utrecht-Paris, 1998).

¹⁰ Cf. <http://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/>

¹¹ A preliminary presentation of the project is given in St. POLIS, 'Le projet Ramsès', in: J. WINAND, 'Un siècle d'Égyptologie à l'Université de Liège', in: Eug. WARMENBOL (ed.), *La caravane du Caire. L'Égypte sur d'autres rives* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 2006), 180.

¹² The use of multimedia for the needs of publication and/or diffusion of structured data has not been taken into account here. *Inter alia*, one can mention the online Demotic dictionary made under the auspices of the University of Chicago (<http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/pubs/catalog/cdd/>), the Deir el-Medina database (<http://www.leidenuniv.nl/nino/dmd/dmd.html>), or Deir el-Medine online (<http://dem-online.gwi.uni-muenchen.de>).

The facilities offered by textual databases developed outside Egyptology also appear somewhat limited. For instance, the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG) integrates almost every non-documentary text written in Greek between 8th century BC and 14th century AD. However, as the words are neither lemmatized nor analyzed, the possibilities for research are considerably restricted.

2. What are our goals?

It was not too difficult to design an ideal structure: we only had to dream eyes wide open. In this sense, we chose to be very ambitious from the beginning. So we devised a large set of specifications to fulfil scholars' expectations in Egyptian linguistics:

- a hieroglyphic encoding;
- a complete morpho-syntactic analysis;
- a semantic and pragmatic analysis;
- multi-level searches that should:
 - be multicriteria, that is, allow not only lexical queries, but also queries on inflexions, syntax and semantics;
 - be context-sensitive, which means that they should operate at the level of the syntagm, within a proposition, within a sentence, and beyond the sentence (from the paragraph up to the text);
 - integrate the graphic level, i.e. hieroglyphic script: signs must be searchable by means of a specific coding;
 - adapt the corpus of research to specific needs.

And we should be able to do it in some easy way. This means that we never neglected the ergonomics of the software, being always keen on developing user-friendly interfaces. The ambition of the *Ramses* project is to make encoding as easy as possible and at the same time to ensure coherence by using semi-automatic procedures of analysis.

3. Who?

Ramses was launched in 2006 after the “Informatique et Égyptologie” Round Table held in Oxford; it has its roots in a long tradition of interest in Egyptian linguistics and information technology in Liège¹³. We started the project with the human resources of the chair in Egyptology (Stéphane Polis, Jean Winand), but quickly brought into the team Serge Rosmorduc, who took part in the database conception, and did the

¹³ See n. 6.

programming. In October of the same year, Laurence Neven was hired as research assistant to the project with funding from the University.

In 2007, the programming of several modules had already been achieved and it quickly became evident that the development of the software and the encoding of the data could be done in parallel. Our team grew again in 2008 as we were lucky to get funding from the F.R.S.-FNRS: Stéphanie Gohy and Anne-Claude Honnay (M.A. in Egyptology) then joined the team¹⁴. And last but not least, the project has been awarded special funding from the University, called an “Action de recherche concertée¹⁵” (ARC), starting in October 2008; it will allow us to hire over the next five years:

- two young Egyptologists to work on the project and write PhDs on related topics (cf. n. 14);
- two post-docs in charge of the validation of the encoding and working on the *Prolegomena* for two collective volumes on lexical semantics and on syntactic analysis in Late Egyptian;
- one engineer in computer science to help writing the software and developing the database.

4. How?

In order to meet all the requirements detailed in our second point, we have designed a database¹⁶ that relies, from the point of view of both encoder and user, on three pillars: (1) a Text-Editor working in close connection with (2) a Lexicon-Editor, and (3) a Search-Engine that makes every bit of information encoded in *Ramses* searchable.

4.1. The Text-Editor

The lemma, the morphology and the exact spelling of each word are encoded in this module (cf. fig. 1)¹⁷. The morpho-syntactic analysis is done in minute detail; for the first time, multiple analyses for a single unit have been made possible. This provides an elegant solution for treating cases of ambiguity without losing information, which

¹⁴ Each young scholar working on *Ramses* has a PhD subject in close connection with the project: St. Gohy, *Pour une définition du corpus néo-égyptien. Approche linguistique d'une synchronie dynamique*; A.-Cl. Honnay, *Syntaxe générale de la proposition en néo-égyptien*; L. Neven, *Étude du syntagme nominal en néo-égyptien*.

¹⁵ Two main partnerships are to be considered inside the ARC: ÉPHÉ (S. Rosmorduc, P. Vernus) and LASLA (= Laboratoire d'analyse statistique des langues anciennes, cf. <http://www.cipl.ulg.ac.be/lsl.htm>).

¹⁶ The encoding of the database is done online; this means that each module has been designed to be multi-user.

¹⁷ For a detailed explanation of the encoding procedure, see A.-Cl. HONNAY and St. POLIS, *Manuel d'encodage du projet Ramsès* (http://www.egypto.ulg.ac.be/Manuel_Ramses.pdf).

means that it is now possible to handle ambiguities in morphology (e.g. perfective *sdm.f* vs. subjunctive *sdm.f*) and in syntax (e.g. sequential *iw* vs. circumstantial *iw*). This is obviously better than arbitrarily choosing an analysis at the expense of others. Along the same lines, it is also possible to encode a spelling without linking it to a lemma or an inflexion in case of doubt about its analysis.

There is also functionality for noting critical annotations and ecdotic information (lacunae, emendations, palimpsest, dittography, haplography, etc.).

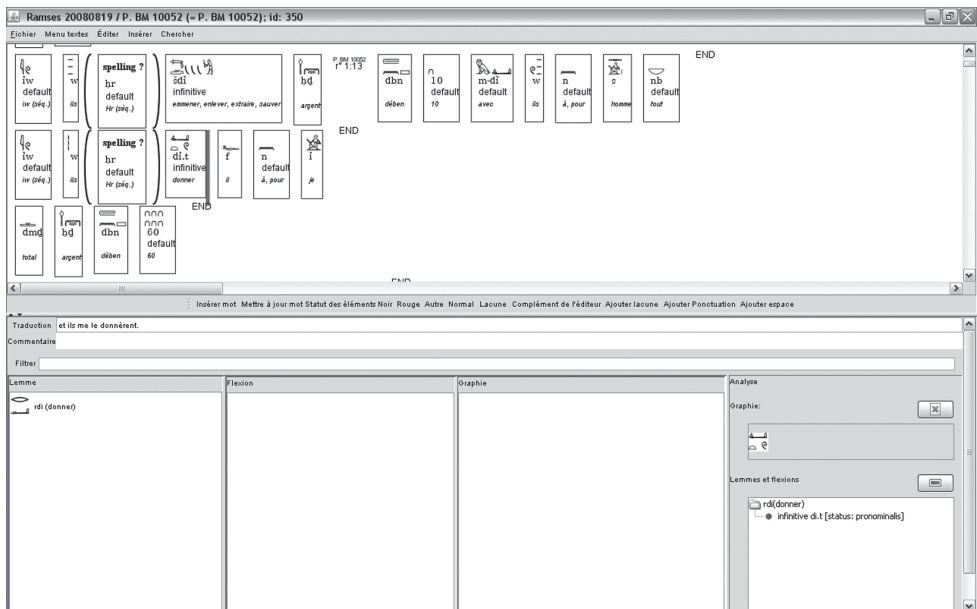


Fig. 1. P. BM 10052, r^o 1,12-13 in the Text-Editor.

It must be stressed that the Text-Editor includes a module for describing the corpus of texts: in this module, the type of document, its origin, its date, its support, its script (hieroglyphic vs. hieratic), its level of language and the relevant bibliographical information are recorded. A sharp distinction is made between documents (the actual physical source) and texts; this offers a solution for the encoding of texts recorded in more than one document, like the *Battle of Qadesh*.

4.2. *Lexicon-Editor*

Each word encoded in the Text-Editor is linked to a lexical entry (lemma) whose morphological features (depending on the part of speech concerned) are accessible

through the Lexicon-Editor. Moreover, this tool enables the easy addition of a new lemma, inflexion and/or spelling every time a text offers an example of a new form not yet attested in the existing corpus.

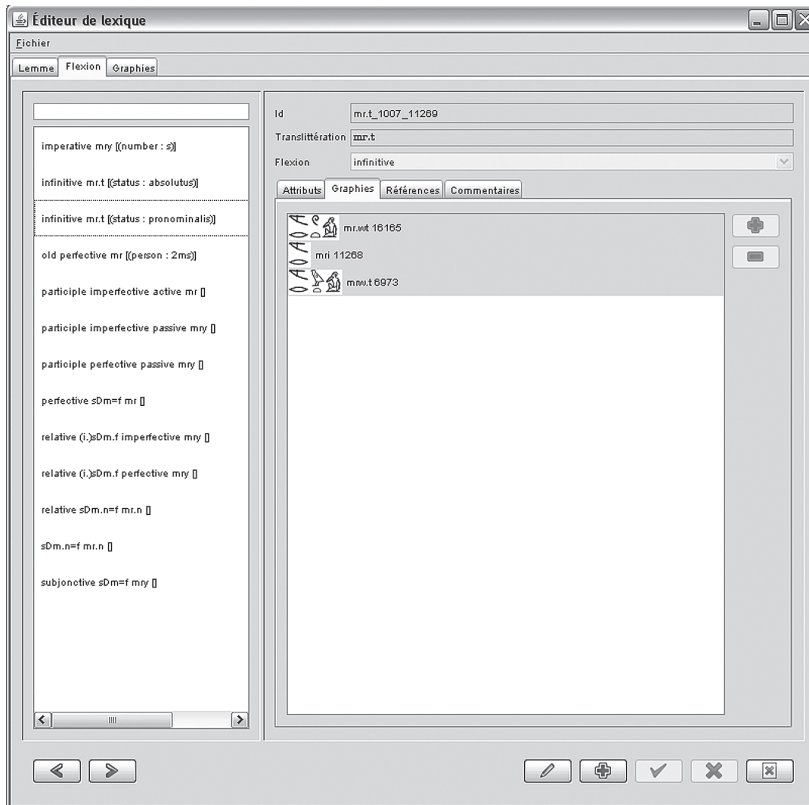


Fig. 2. The Lexicon-Editor: spellings attested for *mr*ⁱ (inf. st. pronominalis).

4.3. The Search-Engine

We strongly believe that it is by its search-power that the value of a database can be properly assessed. In this respect, the search facilities offered by *Ramses* go far beyond what exists nowadays in linguistic corpora; it does not seem pretentious to state that *Ramses* allows any kind of research without limitation¹⁸. It is possible: (1) to build a

¹⁸ A more detailed presentation of the Search-Engine is given in: S. ROSMORDUC, St. POLIS and J. WINAND, 'Ramses. A new Research Tool in Philology and Linguistics', in: N. STRUDWICK (ed.), *Information*

research corpus (using parameters encoded for the texts and/or documents, cf. 4.1); (2) to look for any combination of data (be it lexical, morphological or syntactical, cf. fig. 3); (3) to sort out the results according to the type of data within the scope of the research.

For instance, the figure below illustrates how one can find the collocation of any verb with the walking legs (D54) as determinative followed by a prepositional phrase (*r* + a geographic name).

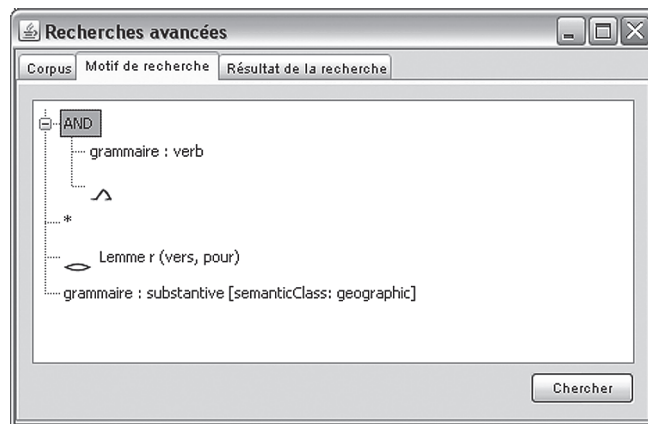


Fig. 3. The Search-Engine.

Conclusions

The modules are at different stages of development, but at the time of writing they are fully operational. In 2008, there were up to 440 texts already encoded, the number of lemmas in the dictionary roughly amounted to 6,000 and the number of occurrences was about 100,000.

In the near future, the database will be greatly enhanced in at least three ways. First, the number of texts encoded will be dramatically expanded¹⁹. Second, we will continue to develop the software. Many functions still have to be implemented in the Search-Engine (sorting facilities; a better interface for users; graphs and statistics) and the writing of the syntactic and semantic editor will obviously keep us busy for some time

Technology and Egyptology in 2008. Proceedings of the Meeting of the Computer Working Group of the International Association of Egyptologists (Informatique et Égyptologie), Vienna 8-11 July 2008, Bible and Technology 2 (Piscataway, 2009), 133-42.

¹⁹ For now, the following sub-corpora are completely encoded in the database: *LES*, *LRL*, *LEM*, *RAD* and the Tomb-Robberies texts.

to come: this specific tool will be unparalleled in Egyptology and, to the best of our knowledge, there is nothing coming close to it in Classical studies either, as it will enable a multi-layered analysis of syntactic features from the word up to the text. Third, a bibliographical module will be interconnected with the documents/texts database, the Lexicon-Editor, and the Text-Editor. So it will be quite easy to add relevant bibliographical notes on general matters (like texts) and on particular points (like words in the lexicon, special spellings, or difficult passages in the texts).

A web interface will enable online searches within the next five years. Once validated at every level, a text will become a fully-fledged member of the *Ramses*-corpus and, hence, available through this user interface.