NORTHWEST SEMITIC INCANTATIONS IN AN EGYPTIAN MEDICAL PAPYRUS OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY B.C.E.*

RICHARD C. STEINER, *Yeshiva University, New York*

I. INTRODUCTION

THE London Medical Papyrus, published seventy years ago by W. Wreszinski,[1] contains a number of short Northwest Semitic magical texts transcribed into hieratic syllabic script ("group writing").[2] The only attempts I know of to decipher any of these texts have been by Egyptologists;[3] Semitists seem to have ignored them entirely.[4] This neglect is quite undeserved, since the papyrus in question is early by Northwest Semitic standards (fourteenth century B.C.E.)[5] and since the Egyptian syllabic script is, in many ways, more informative than the native scripts of the Northwest Semitic languages.

So far as I know, these incantations have the distinction of being the earliest Semitic texts written in an Egyptian script.[6] The "Amorite" material in the Execration Texts, etc.,[7] is much earlier, but it consists solely of names. The Northwest Semitic texts in the

Harris Magical Papyrus,[8] Papyrus Anastasi I,[9] and Ostracon Cairo 25759[10] are some-what later. The Aramaic text in Demotic script[11] and the Arabic text in Coptic script[12] are, of course, much later.

My initial work on these spells was based on Helck's transliterations of Wreszinski's hand copy (in which hieroglyphs are substituted for the original hieratic signs), but I soon discovered that these were only a first approximation—that they were frequently misleading as to the vowels and occasionally mistaken as to the consonants. The mistakes in the transliteration of the consonants, apparently just careless ones, have been corrected in accordance with Wreszinski's hand copy.[13] The misleading transliterations of the vowels stem from the fact that Helck's orthographic theory forces him to decide in advance whether to interpret signs or groups of the form consonant$+ \jmath$ as consonant$+a$, consonant$+\partial$, or consonant$+\emptyset$. I have attempted to remedy this defect here by transliterating only the initial consonant of such signs.[14]

Another difference between my transliteration and Helck's is that his indicates only selected determinatives, while mine gives (in parentheses) all those which do not func-

---

[8] See T. Schneider, "Mag.pHarris XII,1–5: Eine kanaanäische Beschwörung für die Löwenjagd?," *Göttinger Miszellen* 112 (1989): 53–63. I am indebted to R. Ritner for this reference. Schneider (p. 53) dates the text to the Ramessid period. If Ramesses II is the Pharaoh of the Exodus, he is also the Pharaoh of the following passage from A. Shinan, ed., *Midrash Shemot Rabbah* (Jerusalem, 1984), p. 211: "At that point (upon seeing the miracle of the rod), Pharaoh began to laugh at them and crow at them like a cock, saying to them: 'This is the level of your God's (magical) skill? The normal practice is for people to bring their wares to a place where they are needed. Does anyone bring brine to Aspamia, fish to Acco? Don't you know that I have mastery over all the magical arts?' He had children brought from their school and they did the same thing. He even sent for his wife and she did it (too)!" What a field day the Rabbis would have had with the information that Ramessid magicians, presumably after being bested by Moses, no longer considered it beneath their dignity to borrow a spell or two from the Asiatics!

[9] W. F. Albright, *The Vocalization of the Egyptian Syllabic Orthography* (New Haven, 1934), pp. 33 (III.A.2), 37 (IV.18), 42 (VII.A.14); Helck, p. 530; H.-W. Fischer-Elfert, *Die satirische Streitschrift des Papyrus Anastasi I,* Ägyptologische Abhandlungen, vol. 44 (Wiesbaden, 1986), p. 152. I am indebted to Quirke for the last reference.

[10] See A. Shisha-Halevy, "An Early North-West Semitic Text in the Egyptian Hieratic Script," *Orientalia* n.s. 47 (1978): 145–62.

[11] For the literature, see my article, "The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script: The Liturgy of a New Year's Festival Imported from Bethel to Syene by Exiles from Rash," *JAOS* 111 (1991): 362–63; S. P. Vleeming and J. W. Wesselius, *Studies in Papyrus Amherst 63,* vol. 2 (Amsterdam, 1990).

[12] See J. Blau, "Some Observations on a Middle Arabic Egyptian Text in Coptic Characters," *Jerusa-*

lem Studies in Arabic and Islam 1 (1979): 215–62.

[13] Quirke and Ritner were kind enough to check the accuracy of Wreszinski's readings, the latter from Wreszinski's photographs, the former from the original in the British Museum.

[14] The value of these signs has been debated since the nineteenth century. In the first systematic exposition of the Egyptian syllabic orthography, that of W. M. Müller, all groups containing $\jmath$ were interpreted as consonant $+a$ (just as all groups containing y or w were interpreted as consonant $+ i$ or u, respectively), but already in 1898 Spiegelberg pointed out that this aspect of Müller's theory could not be sustained; see Albright, *The Vocalization of the Egyptian Syllabic Orthography,* pp. 2 and 4. Helck has patched up Müller's system by assigning additional values to $\jmath$, but the result has an ad hoc appearance. Helck's use of the value ∂ is supposedly limited to unstressed syllables affected by reduction, but since he provides no explicit rule for reduction (or even for stress assignment) and since the distribution of his ∂ seems quite irregular, one is left with the impression that ∂ can be invoked whenever it is needed. I could easily have adopted this practice for the purposes of this article, but I did not wish to mislead Semitists through the inclusion of such malleable "data." It is interesting to note that the same problem is encountered in the Aramaic text in Demotic script, which, as noted by Zauzich, is written in a late form of the syllabic orthography; see K.-Th. Zauzich, "Abrakadabra oder Ägyptisch?: Versuch über einen Zauberspruch," *Enchoria* 13 (1985): 127. The earliest published work on that text was based on an assumption very similar to that made by Müller, viz., that $\jmath$ represents no vowel other than a; see R. A. Bowman, "An Aramaic Religious Text in Demotic Script," *JNES* 3 (1944): 224. It is now recognized by all students of the text that $\jmath$ can stand for any vowel, and my forthcoming book on the text contains a long list of examples of $\jmath$ corresponding to $\emptyset$.

tion as part of the syllabic orthography.[15] The determinatives in the London medical papyrus are very helpful to the decipherer—far more helpful than in, say, the Aramaic text in Demotic script[16]—because in this text they often correspond to the real *Semitic* meanings of the words rather than only to the meanings of *Egyptian* words which they happen to resemble. In other words, the scribe who wrote these spells shows by his use of determinatives that he understood them.[17]

In other respects, my transliteration follows Helck's. Thus, the reed-leaf sign, transliterated *i* in Egyptian words, is transliterated $^{\circ}$ in Semitic words.[18] The double reed-leaf, transliterated *y* in Egyptian words, is transliterated as the vowel *i* in Semitic words, except at the beginning of a syllable, where *y* is used. These practices are standard in works on the syllabic orthography.

II. THE TEXTS

The first three incantations are quite fragmentary, but they yield a few interesting words. No. 27 is "[another] incantation against *ḥ-m-k-tu* (disease) in the language of those who dwell beyond the desert edge," i.e., the language of foreigners:[19]

...]-*p* (deity), Hidden One, i.e., Amun (deity), honor your spirit *k*-[...
...] *r-ḳ r-bu-n* (deity) *r-ḳ*( ) [...] (deity)
... *r*]-*ḳ bu-n* (deity) $^{\circ}$-*s-t-*$^{\circ}$*u-m* (deity) $^{\circ}$[...

Helck's interpretation of *r-bu-n* as "our lord" is quite convincing. Like *r-bi-y* in no. 31 (see below), it has the proper Egyptian determinative for a word with that meaning, viz., the deity determinative. The form may be normalized as *rabbunā*. Helck suggests further that $^{\circ}$-*s-t-*$^{\circ}$*u-m* is "möglicherweise als Ištar-ummi 'Meine Mutter Ištar' anzusehen, da das schliessende -*r* von Ištar in Ägypten gern verschwindet"; this is also reasonable.[20] Helck's interpretation of the repeated word *r-ḳ* as *rḳ*, "spittle," is less convincing, but I

---

[15] The following determinatives are omitted from the transliteration in the given environments, where they function as part of the syllabic orthography: man-with-hand-to-mouth (after *i*), man-with-upraised-arms (after *ḳ3*), book-roll (after *ḳ3*), walking-legs (after *š3s*), and bread-loaf (after *t*). (I am indebted to Ritner for this list.) Some of these are included in the transliteration when they occur in other environments.

[16] Cf. my unpublished paper, "Was the Scribe of Papyrus Amherst 63 a Bilingual?," Oriental Institute Symposium ("Life in a Multicultural Society: Egypt from Cambyses to Constantine"), 5 September 1990.

[17] An unusually clear case of Egyptian determinatives used in accordance with the Semitic meaning of a transcribed word is found in Papyrus Anastasi I (col. 17, l. 7), where the scribe used the determinatives for "scribe/writing," "foreign (throwstick)," and "man" following *tu-p-r* = *sōper*, "scribe." (I am indebted to Quirke for identifying these determinatives.) The entire phrase, *tu-p-r y-di-*^{c} = *sōper yōdea*^{c}, "knowledgeable scribe," is believed to be a translation of Egyptian *zẖ3w spd-ḥr*, "sharp-faced scribe,"

which appears in the same papyrus only a few lines before (col. 17, l. 2); see Fischer-Elfert, p. 152 and the works cited there.

[18] Griffith and Spiegelberg used $^{\circ}$ rather than *i* to transliterate the Demotic reflex of reed-leaf, and even today Tait prefers $^{\circ}$ to plain *i;* see *Enchoria* 10 (1980): 2–3 and 11 (1981): 72.

[19] I owe this translation to Ritner, who informs me that Wreszinski's rendering "eines Beduinen" and Helck's rendering "Wüstenbewohner" are inaccurate. The Egyptian term can refer to the inhabitants of any country outside of Egypt, as recognized by Bossert, *Asia,* p. 114 ("Bewohner des Fremdlandes"). Quirke agrees that the term "denotes the inhabitants of the world outside the Egyptian Nile Valley" and that it "includes desert-dwellers as well as settled peoples beyond the desert" (personal communication).

[20] Cf. the Akkadian personal names on the pattern DN-*ummī* (all periods) cited by W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Wiesbaden, 1981), pp. 1416b–1417a. Cf. also the feminine personal name $^{\circ}$*u-m* = $^{\circ}$*umm*, "mother" (written, like $^{\circ}$-*s-t-*$^{\circ}$*u-m,*

am unable to offer anything better.[21] Based on the occurrence of *r-p-y* (deity) = *rp(^{ɔ})y*, "my Healer," in no. 33, R. Ritner suggests restoring [*r*] at the beginning of this spell, yielding [*r*]-*p* (deity) = [*r*]*p*(^{ɔ}), "[Hea]ler."[22]

No. 28 reads:

s-ḳ (twice) ^{ɔ}-[. . .
  . . .] ⌜^{ɔ}⌝-*š-m-n* ^{ɔ}-*bu*-[. . .
^{ɔ}-*s-t-t-r* (deity) *w*-^{ɔ}-[. . .

Bossert[23] interprets the second line as ⌜^{ɔ}⌝*šmn* ^{ɔ}*bu*[*n*], "⌜E⌝shmun, [our] father," noting that Eshmun is equated with Asklepios, the Greek god of healing, in a trilingual inscription from Sardinia commemorating the healing of a certain Kleon.[24] If this is correct, we must be dealing with a Phoenician incantation, for Eshmun is strictly a Phoenician god.[25]

   At Sidon, Eshmun was connected with Astarte,[26] the goddess called Ishtar in Mesopotamia, and ^{ɔ}-*s-t-t-r*[27] in our text. It is difficult to understand what motivated Helck to write: "In ^{ɔ}-*š-t-tá-r* Ištar zu erkennen, ist mir wenig wahrscheinlich." In my view, this occurrence of *Ištar* is, if anything, *more* probable than the one which Helck finds in no. 27. The only difficulty I can find with this interpretation is that is makes the second *t* redundant, but that difficulty is only apparent. Ritner informs me that the first three signs[28] of the name form the Egyptian word *ist*, "look, behold," in which the final *t* had quiesced by the New Kingdom, as shown by the variant spelling *is*[29] and its Demotic and Coptic reflexes.[30] The second *t* is, thus, no obstacle to this interpretation.

No. 29 reads as follows:

---

with the newborn calf sign), discussed by W. M. Müller, *Asien und Europa nach altägyptischen Denkmälern* (Leipzig, 1893), p. 80.

   [21] In view of the second person pronoun in *kȝ.k*, "your spirit," it is very tempting to interpret *r-ḳ* as *lk*, "to you," each occurrence being followed by a divine name or epithet in the vocative: "to honor your soul . . . to you, our lord, etc." (The phrase "you, O DN" is, of course, extremely common in prayers, for example, Dan. 2:23, *lk* ^{ɔ}*lh* ^{ɔ}*bhty*, "to you, O God of my fathers.") It would even be possible to take *lk* to mean "of you," in apposition to the Egyptian suffix -*k*, "of you," in *kȝ.k* (cf. no. 31, below, where Canaanite *bt*, "daughter," could be taken as an appositive of Egyptian *šrit*, "daughter"). The problem is that the rendering of Semitic *k* by Egyptian *ḳ* would be quite anomalous—more anomalous, in my judgment, than the renderings of Semitic *ḳ* by Egyptian *k* discussed below.

   [22] Personal communication.

   [23] Bossert, *Asia*, p. 114.

   [24] H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden, 1971), p. 14, no. 66; vol. 2 (Wiesbaden, 1973), p. 21.

   [25] See J. C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic*

Inscriptions, vol. 3 (Oxford, 1982), p. 104.

   [26] See again Donner and Röllig, vol. 2, p. 21 and Gibson, p. 116.

   [27] Note that the name is spelled, here and in no. 27, with an initial ^{ɔ} as in Akkadian, rather than ^{c} as in West Semitic. Note also that it is written in both places with the "deity" determinative, which, according to Quirke (personal communication), is "generic for gods and goddesses."

   [28] Quirke calls my attention to the fact that the same three signs occur at the beginning of ^{ɔ}-*s-t-^{ɔ}u-m* in no. 27, where, if Helck's interpretation is correct, the *t* must have been pronounced. In his opinion, "there may be no problem in the two different renderings of Ishtar (for example the two texts may come from different sourcebooks or traditions . . .)." Is it possible that the scribe did not notice that the first three signs of his transcription of Ishtar could be mistakenly read as an Egyptian word with a silent *t* until he got to the second occurrence of the name?

   [29] A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, vol. 1, p. 130.

   [30] W. Erichsen, *Demotisches Glossar* (Copenhagen, 1954), p. 70.

...]-*t-m* *ʾ-s-y-m* ...

...]-˹*š*˺-*r*- ...

k-š-s-t-t-m (book-roll) *ʾ-s-t*-(book-roll)-*m*

In a medical papyrus, the word *ʾ-s-y-m* can hardly be anything other than *ʾsy-*, the Aramaic and Amorite[31] word for "physician" borrowed from Akkadian (and ultimately from Sumerian or pre-Sumerian). Similarly, *ʾ-s-t-m*[32] looks like Aramaic *ʾāsūt-*, the abstract noun (note the -*ūt* ending) meaning "healing"; it is written, appropriately enough, with the book-roll determinative, as if it were an Egyptian abstract noun. The -*m* at the end of both of these nouns is, of course, the old Semitic mimation.[33] It is interesting that in this form, unlike the immediately preceding one, the scribe wrote the determinative before the mimation, as if he knew that it was a suffix.

No. 30 is "an incantation against the *fnṯ* (snake)," which is generally taken to be a kind of worm:

˹*s*˺-*b-k-n* *ʾ-m-r* *s-k-n* (twice) *ʾ-m-r-nu* *ḫ-r-s-n*

Helck interprets: *sābaknū ʾemer śaknū ʾamrēnū ḫālašnū,* "Wir haben einen Spruch geflochten, wir haben unseren(?) Spruch verflochten und haben gesiegt."[34] Unfortunately, it must be said that very little in this reconstruction conforms with normal Semitic usage. The normal use of the root *s/š-b-k* in Northwest Semitic is in the passive, with the meaning "intertwined, entangled." It certainly cannot be used of a "saying," nor can *s/š-k-k.* Nor is there any reason to expect the word for "saying" here instead of the normal Northwest Semitic word for "incantation" (*lḥš/lḥšt*). The root *ḥ-l-š,* "vanquish," takes an object (direct or oblique) in both of its Northwest Semitic attestations. Finally, this interpretation gives us not the incantation promised by the Egyptian introduction but merely a past-tense reference to an incantation used previously.

I suggest the following interpretation:

"˹L˺eave us," I say, "l⟨ea⟩ve us." We have said our incantation.

This interpretation takes the form ˹*s*˺-*b-k-n* as an imperative of a root known primarily from Aramaic: *š-b-k,* "leave, leave alone." (For the unexpected Egyptian renderings of Semitic *š* and *k,* see below.) It takes the final -*n* to be the 1pl object pronoun "us." A very similar usage is attested in the Syriac version of Mark 1:31 *šbaktāh ʾeššātā* "(and he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up and immediately) the fever left her" (cf. also John 4:52). Imperatives meaning "Begone!" are common in ancient incantations.[35]

[31] See I. J. Gelb, *Computer-Aided Analysis of Amorite,* Assyriological Studies 21 (Chicago, 1980), pp. 13 and 52.

[32] Helck's transliteration of this word is misprinted as *ʾá-ṣa-tá-m* instead of *ʾa-śa-tá-m.*

[33] Mimation is common in the Execration Texts and the Taanach letters, but in the Amarna letters it occurs only sporadically and in the Canaanite transcriptions of the New Kingdom it is virtually non-existent; see Helck, pp. 46–60, 507–30, and C. Brovender, "Hebrew Language: Pre-Biblical," *En-cyclopaedia Judaica,* vol. 16, cols. 1565–66. Moreover, the noun *ḥ-m-k-tu* appears here twice without mimation. The simplest explanation would appear to be that *ḥ-m-k-tu* is Phoenician, while *ʾ-s-y-m* and *ʾ-s-t-m* are Aramaic (see conclusion below).

[34] Helck, *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens,* p. 528.

[35] See T. H. Gaster, "The Magical Inscription from Arslan Tash," *JNES* 6 (1947): 187; R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Pyramid Texts* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 85–89, nos. 277, 287–89, 291, 297, and 298. I am indebted to Ritner for the latter reference.

ʾ-m-r is from the root *ʾ-m-r;* it is here taken as a 1s imperfect.

s-k-n seems to be an error for *s-⟨b-⟩k-n.*

ʾ-m-r-nu is apparently a 1pl perfect from the root *ʾ-m-r.* Its *-nu* suffix meaning "we" is paralleled in Canaanite and Akkadian.

ḥ-r-s-n seems to be a metathesized form of *lḥš,*[36] "whisper, incantation," attested in the Bible and (with a fem. ending) in the seventh century B.C.E. inscriptions from Arslan Tash (cf. also Akk. *liḥšu,* "whispered prayer"). No Hebraist will be surprised to find the word used of an incantation against a creature whose name (*fnṯ*) is written with the snake determinative, since several of the biblical attestations have to do with snakes.[37] It has a 1pl possessive pronoun.

No. 31 begins with a difficult Egyptian declaration which has frequently been misunderstood. H. von Deines, H. Grapow, and W. Westendorf translate: "Es ist nicht der Sohn (die Tochter?) von dem und dem, ⟨sondern⟩ ich bin die Tochter einer (Frau) an die man sich bittend wendet."[38] Helck's translation is similar: "Es ist nicht der Sohn irgendeines, sondern ich bin die Tochter einer, die man bittet."[39]

S. G. J. Quirke informs me that the reference to a son in these renderings is based on a misreading.[40] The correct reading is *nn mn ink šrit n spr.tw-n.s.* Moreover, as Ritner points out, these renderings fail to indicate that *Spr.tw-n.s,* written with the deity determinative, is the name of a little-known scorpion goddess, the wife of Horus and the daughter of Ra.[41] A daughter of this goddess would be a scorpion, for which the Egyptian words (*wḥ ͨ .t, ḏ ʾr.t*) are feminine. The patient proclaims: "It is not so-and-so but I, the daughter of *Spr.tw-n.s,*" by which he/she means that he/she is no longer so-and-so but rather a scorpion. The declaration is designed to establish kinship with the scorpion whose venom is attacking him/her.[42]

Immediately following this Egyptian declaration come the following Semitic words:

b-ṭ-r-bi-y (deity) *r-bi-s-t* (goddess) (twice).

I suggest that the meaning of these words may be:

the daughter of my lord, the governess.

---

[36] For the velar *ḥ* in this word, cf. Ugaritic *lḫšt,* "whisper." The Semitic word for "magic" (*ḫarašu*), on the other hand, has a pharyngeal *ḥ,* which does not match the Egyptian transcription. Moreover, the collocation of *ḥaraš-* with *ʾ-m-r,* "say," is strange.

[37] Cf. the rendering "Beschwörung (v. Schlangen)," for Hebrew *laḥaš,* and the rendering "Schlangenbeschwörer," for Ugaritic *mlḥš,* in L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner et al., *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament,* vol. 2 (Leiden, 1974), p. 501. One is tempted to take the *fnṯ* to be a poisonous snake (cf. the next incantation, directed against the venom of scorpions) rather than a worm, but Quirke adduces counter-evidence from a Late Period treatise on snakes; see S. Sauneron, *Un Traité d'ophiologie: Papyrus du Brooklyn Museum nos. 47.218.48 et 85,* Publications de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Bibliothèque Générale, vol. 11 (Cairo, 1989). The text in question "seems to give a comprehensive listing of snakes found in Egypt," and yet it does not include *fnṯ;* on the other hand, "the text is not complete at the beginning."

[38] H. von Deines, H. Grapow, and W. Westendorf, *Übersetzung der Medizinischen Texte,* Grundriss der Medizin der alten Ägypter, vol. 4, pt. 1 (Berlin, 1958), p. 254. I am indebted to Ritner for this reference.

[39] Helck, *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens,* p. 529.

[40] "The sign ⧽ is the negative determinative, not usually found after ⟂ *nn,* 'there/it is not'; Helck misread Wreszinski and gave ⧽, *s3,* 'son', but this is clearly ⧽ in the original" (personal communication).

[41] Personal communication; see Borghouts, *The Magical Texts of Papyrus Leiden I 348* (Leiden, 1971), pp. 149–51. Ritner also notes that this is another example of the deity determinative used with the name of a goddess; cf. n. 27, above; von Deines, Grapow, and Westendorf, p. 254, assume that this spell, like the preceding one, is directed against the *fnṯ* worm.

[42] I am indebted to Ritner for this entire interpretation.

The whole bilingual spell would then mean:

It is not so-and-so but I, the daughter of *Spr.tw-n.s,*
the daughter of my lord, the governess.

b-ṯ appears to be a transcription of *bt,* "daughter," the Canaanite and Amorite[43] equivalent of Egyptian *šrỉt,* "daughter," in the introductory sentence. It should be noted, however, that the *ṯ*-sign used here is the one normally used for Sem. *s*—not the one which is used to render Sem. *t* as well as *s.*[44] Thus, our interpretation assumes some confusion between the two signs for *ṯ;* if this papyrus is a copy, a later copyist may have substituted one for the other.

r-bi-y is clearly *rby,* "my lord"; as noted above, it has the proper Egyptian determinative for a word with that meaning, viz., the deity determinative. Ritner suggests that the phrase "daughter of my lord" may stand in apposition to the name *Spr.tw-n.s,* and hence that "my lord" refers to Ra, the father of *Spr.tw-n.s.*

r-bi-s-t has the Egyptian goddess determinative, corroborated by what appears to be a Semitic feminine *-t* ending and the feminine references in the Egyptian portion of the spell. This determinative would seem to point to a divine epithet. This feminine divine epithet could not very well stand in apposition to the masculine divine epithet *r-bi-y,* but it could stand in apposition to the entire phrase *b-ṯ-r-bi-y,* "daughter of my lord," referring to *Spr.tw-n.s.* In view of this, I suggest that *r-bi-s-t* may be the feminine of *rābiṣu,* an Akkadian word which is common in the Amarna letters.[45] It is used of "officials on earth as well as in the world of the demons."[46] The unattested Akkadian feminine would be either **rābiṣtu* or, more probably, **rābištu.* The latter form would be a product of the Old Babylonian sound change which merged *ṣ* with *š* before apical stops;[47] most of the attested examples resemble our form in that they involve *ṣ* derived from Proto-Semitic *ḍ.*[48]

r-bi-s-t is not the only form in these passages which would be at home in the Amarna period. The divine name *Ištar,* discussed above, calls to mind Amarna letter 23, according to which Tushratta, king of Mitanni, sent an image of "Ishtar of Nineveh" to Amenhotep III. Amarna Akkadian is, as is well known, heavily influenced by West Semitic; our papyrus may show that such influence was a two-way street in the Amarna period.

No. 32 is the well-known spell in the language of Keftiu studied by H. T. Bossert,[49] G. A. Wainwright,[50] F. Gordon,[51] J. Vercoutter,[52] H. Goedicke,[53] and others. Since the language is non-Semitic, this spell is beyond the scope of this article.

[43] Gelb, *Computer-Aided Analysis,* p. 288.

[44] Helck, *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens,* pp. 561, 563, and 569.

[45] Ibid., pp. 248–51.

[46] A. L. Oppenheim, "The Eyes of the Lord," *JAOS* 88 (1968): 178–79.

[47] See M. Held, "*mḫṣ/mḫš* in Ugaritic and Other Semitic Languages (A Study in Comparative Lexicography)," *JAOS* 79 (1959): 173.

[48] See my *The Case for Fricative-Laterals in Proto-Semitic* (New Haven, 1977), pp. 158–59.

[49] H. T. Bossert, "Die Beschwörung einer Krankheit in der Sprache von Kreta," *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 34 (1931): 303–29. I am indebted to Quirke for this reference.

[50] G. A. Wainwright, "Keftiu," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 17 (1931): 27–30.

[51] F. Gordon, "The Keftiu Spell," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 18 (1932): 67–68.

[52] J. Vercoutter, *L'Egypte et le monde égéen préhellénique* (Cairo, 1956), pp. 82 ff.

[53] H. Goedicke, "'The Canaanite Illness'," *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 11 (1984): 91–105. I am indebted to Ritner for this reference.

No. 33 is "an incantation of against *s-mu-n* (disease)":[54]

w-⌐*b*⌐*-ki* (disease) *s-t s-bu-*ʾ
y-ḏ (walking legs) *ḥ-m-k-tu* (seated person)
r-p-y[55] (deity) the Great One ʾ*-m-*ʾ (deity)

Three words of this text are intelligible to me: *y-ḏ ḥ-m-k-tu r-p-y* (deity). They appear to mean:

Let the strangulation-demon(s) go out, my Healer.

That the word *ḥ-m-k-tu* in this incantation refers to an illness is clear from the introduction to no. 27, cited above, where it is written with the disease determinative; the seated-person determinative used here suggests that the disease is personified as a demon. It has the feminine ending *-t* and the nominative ending *-u*. It is no doubt to be identified with one of the two strangling goddesses (ʾ*iltm ḥnktm*) of Ugaritic and the strangulation-demon (*ḥnkt*) of the first Arslan Tash incantation.[56] The *samānu*-disease, identified with *s-mu-n* in the introduction to this incantation, is somewhat similar: it is a demon which attacks the head of its victim.[57]

The differences between *ḥ-m-k-tu* and Proto-Semitic *ḥankatu, "strangulation," in all three positions of the root are more apparent than real. If *ḥ-m-k-tu* renders a Phoenician form, then its pharyngeal *ḥ* is the expected reflex of velar *ḫ.[58] It is generally accepted that *ḫ was merged with *ḥ in Phoenician.[59] The merger is attested already in the so-called mirror written Ugaritic texts, probably written by Phoenicians.[60] The difference between *m* and *n* is of no consequence; the phone in question was probably neither [m] nor [n] but rather the velar nasal [ŋ].[61] The rendering of Semitic *k* with Egyptian *k* is unexpected, but it is paralleled in no. 30 (see conclusion below).

The form *y-ḏ*, written with the walking-legs determinative used in Egyptian for verbs of motion, is surely to be connected with the Canaanite root *y-ṣ-*ʾ, "go out, leave." Eg. *ḏ* is used regularly to transcribe Canaanite *ṣ* in this period.[62] The absence of ʾ in the

[54] For this Akkadian disease name, see J. Nougayrol, "Conjuration ancienne contre samana," *Archív Orientální* 17 (1949): 213–29 cited by von Deines, Grapow, and Westendorf.

[55] So Wreszinski; Helck misread the second sign as *šʾ.*

[56] See, for example, Z. Zevit, "A Phoenician Inscription and Biblical Covenant Theology," *IEJ* 27 (1977): 114. Cf. also du Mesnil du Buisson's modern Arabic parallel cited there and the Aramaic and Greek parallels adduced by Gaster, "Magical Inscription," p. 186.

[57] Nougayrol, "Conjuration ancienne," pp. 215–16.

[58] At first glance, this interpretation would appear to imply that no. 33 is written in a different dialect than incantation no. 30, where the reflex of *ḫ is *ḫ;* but see conclusion below.

[59] See Z. S. Harris, *A Grammar of the Phoenician Language* (New Haven, 1936), pp. 16–17; and C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome, 1956), p. 12.

[60] See again Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook,* p. 16 and

H. L. Ginsberg, "The Northwest Semitic Languages," in B. Mazar, ed., *The World History of the Jewish People,* vol. 2, *The Patriarchs* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1970), p. 106.

[61] In Akkadian, too, one occasionally finds an underlying /n/ written as *m* immediately before a velar stop, e.g., /kunkā/ "sealed" written *ku-um-ka;* see von Soden, *Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik,* AnOr 33 and 47 (Rome, 1952 and 1969), pp. 32–33, esp. §33a. This is generally taken as evidence that the nasal is partially assimilated to the velar stop, yielding a velar nasal. Such spellings are not common in cases where a scribe knows the underlying form from other occurrences of the root. In the case of *ḥ-m-k-tu,* however, we seem to be dealing with a proper noun borrowed from Phoenician by Aramaic (see conclusion below); it is quite possible that, because of its pharyngeal *ḥ,* its connection with *ḥ-n-k* was not recognized by speakers of Aramaic.

[62] See my *Affricated Ṣade in the Semitic Languages* (New York, 1982), p. 68.

Egyptian form is no obstacle to this interpretation, since glottal stop deletion is attested later in this sentence (cf. *r-p-y* = *rp(ʾ)y* "my Healer") and in normal Phoenician texts.[63] Indeed, if our form is a singular jussive, the ʾ of the root would have stood in word-final position where Hebrew ʾ always quiesces, for example, *yēṣē* < **yiṣiʾ*.

Now the subject of this verb, *ḥ-m-k-tu*, is clearly feminine, and although neither the 3fs imperfect nor the 3fpl imperfect of Phoenician is attested, they are normally assumed to have had a *t-* prefix, like those of Hebrew.[64] If our interpretation is correct we must (1) reject this assumption, or (2) posit a lack of agreement, or (3) assume that, as in Hebrew, the mpl form of the imperfect could stand in for the fpl form. If all else failed, we could always take *y-ḍ* as a fem. perfect with deleted final *-t* as in Hebrew, Phoenician and later Byblian,[65] viz., *yaṣaʾā*.

The form *r-p-y* (deity) is no doubt a rendering of *rp(ʾ)y*, "my Healer," *rpʾ* being the Canaanite equivalent of Aramaic *ʾsy*.

III. CONCLUSION

What can we say about the language of these spells? We have already seen a number of seemingly Canaanite features (the verb *ysʾ* and the noun *rpʾ*; the suffix of *ʾmrnu*), and we have noted that the pharyngeal *ḥ* of *ḥ-m-k-tu* and the god Eshmun point specifically to Phoenicia. On the other hand, there are a number of non-Canaanite features. The verb *šbk* and the noun *ʾsy* are known from Aramaic, not Canaanite. The preservation of velar *ḫ* in *ḫ-r-s-n* points away from Phoenicia. Moreover, the phonetic values of two consonants appear to be different from those of their Canaanite counterparts. In these texts, Semitic *ḳ* and *š* are rendered with Egyptian *k* and *s*, respectively, whereas Canaanite *ḳ* and *š*[66] are normally rendered with Egyptian *k/g* and *š* during this period.[67]

This mixture of features may be explained on the assumption that our texts are Phoenician spells which were borrowed and adapted by Arameans[68] before being borrowed by the Egyptians for their own use.[69] The Egyptian transcription would represent the Aramaic pronunciation of the words; *ḥ-m-k-tu*, with its pharyngeal *ḥ* and its lack of mimation (contrast *ʾ-s-y-m* and *ʾ-s-t-m*), would be a Phoenician loanword in Aramaic.

[63] See J. Friedrich and W. Röllig, *Phönizisch-punische Grammatik* (Rome, 1970), pp. 10–11.

[64] Ibid., pp. 57–58.

[65] See W. R. Garr, *Dialect Geography of Syria-Palestine, 1000–586 B.C.E.* (Philadelphia, 1985), pp. 125–26.

[66] In contradistinction to *ś* and *t̠*.

[67] See, for example, Helck, pp. 536–38. In *ʾ-s-y-m* = *ʾāsiyam*, we seem to have Eg. *s* rendering Semitic *s*, conforming to the pattern found with Canaanite loanwords of a somewhat later period. However, it would be unwise to base any conclusions on a single example, especially this one. First of all, this word is a borrowing within Semitic, and it may not have had the same sibilant in all of the Semitic languages. Moreover, it is possible that the *s* which this word has in Aramaic derives from **ś*. In this connection, it may be noted that in the Old Babylonian syllabary used to write Amorite, the word in question is written A-SI-IA, with the same SI-sign used to write the reflexes of Proto-Sem. *ś* and *š*; see Gelb, *Computer-Aided Analysis* p. 52.

[68] The alternative possibility—that these texts reflect a genuine spoken dialect which contained elements of both languages—is rendered less likely by their use of both the Aramaic word for "doctor" and its Canaanite counterpart.

[69] Quirke comments: "I am intrigued by one possible explanation of the mixture of Aramaic and Phoenician . . . ; could the texts have evolved to their actual form in a mixed Semitic environment within Egypt, e.g., in Memphis in an Asiatic quarter? Pure speculation, of course." This suggestion would also provide the context needed for an Egyptian scribe who understood Semitic (see above), or an Aramean able to write Egyptian.

Interestingly enough, a very similar mixture of features is known from the only other early Northwest Semitic magical texts known to date, the Arslan Tash incantations (mentioned twice above as a source of lexical parallels). It has long been noted that these texts, especially the first of them, exhibit a mixture of Phoenician and Aramaic features.[70] It is not at all surprising that such texts should be written in a *Mischsprache,* given the international flavor of magical texts in later periods.

[70] See, for example, F. M. Cross and R. J. Saley, "Phoenician Incantations on a Plaque of the Seventh Century B.C. from Arslan Tash in Upper Syria," *BASOR* 197 (1970): 42 and 48.