



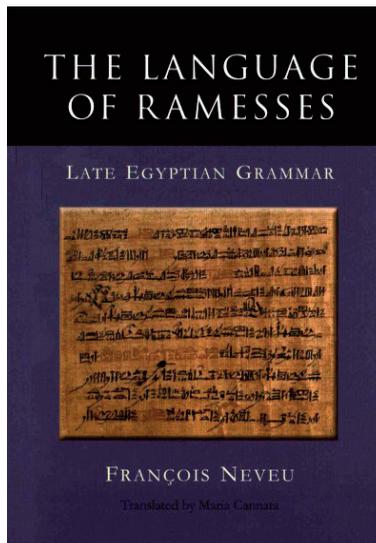
REVIEW

THE LANGUAGE OF RAMESSES: LATE EGYPTIAN GRAMMAR

by François Neveu
Translated by Maria Cannata
Oxbow Books, Oxford, 2015

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It is always a difficult task to review a translation of a well-used and well-respected publication, in this case the new English translation of François Neveu's *La langue des Ramsès, grammaire du néo-égyptien* (1996; Paris: Khéops) by Maria Cannata for Oxbow Books. This new publication is visually appealing and easy to read, and follows the same layout as the original publication by Neveu. The translation itself remains true to the 1996 French publication, and is predominately a word-for-word translation, with no new updates added to the text, footnotes, or references. Following Neveu's layout, the book is separated into 44 chapters, which are divided between three key parts: morphology, syntax, and the appendices, which focuses on interrogative constructions and syllabic writing. The texts utilized in the grammar book comprise those dating from the 17th to 24th Dynasty and include a range of genres: private letters, administrative, legal and literary texts, as well as some official inscriptions. The publisher claims that the "book incorporates the most recent work on the subject," yet this is based upon Neveu's original publication twenty years ago and so many new and innovative developments in the understanding of Late Egyptian are not included. However, as Sweeney comments in her prominent and thorough review of Neveu's original publication, one of the "outstanding merit[s] of this book is that Neveu distinguishes so clearly between the vital, the useful, and the peripheral. The details are at hand whenever one wants them, but they are never allowed to clutter up the main design."¹



As such, this publication remains a staple teaching grammar and Cannata should be commended for producing such a translation, as the need for teaching resources in English for Late Egyptian is pressing. Currently, in addition to this newly translated Late Egyptian grammar, which is already taking center stage in Late Egyptian modules at various universities, students are also encouraged to utilize Junge's *Late Egyptian Grammar*, translated into English by David Warburton (2005; Oxford: Griffith Institute). It is unfortunate that neither publication quite meets the complete needs of the student independent of each other. In her review, Sweeney comments that "one of the few drawbacks [...] in this book is that

Neveu has over-estimated students' grasp of grammatical terms."² This is particularly relevant for students taught in English who are equipped with a different grammatical vocabulary from those studying in the French tradition and who also use Junge's *Late Egyptian Grammar*, which again uses different terminology (e.g. old perfective vs. stative). More poignantly, although Neveu designed his grammar to be a follow on for students who had already studied Middle Egyptian, as he highlights in his introduction (p. xv), he could not have envisioned the future teaching grammar by Allen and its success. Students who have learned Middle Egyptian using Allen's grammar, are taught, not only, once again, a different set of grammatical terminology, but are also taught in a different method, utilizing non-verbal sentences in the

initial stages of training, rather than the verbal forms. Hence students are confronted with a wider range of terminology and pedagogical approaches throughout their learning journey in ancient Egyptian. Additionally, the lack of teaching exercises included in Neveu's grammar means that it is still necessary to use Junge's *Late Egyptian Grammar*, as the teaching exercises in the latter are much better. Yet, it is not possible to rely solely on Junge, as the discussion of grammar is heavy and at times unreadable,³ and, as such, not very student friendly.

It is also worth noting that comments made by Sweeney in her review of Neveu's grammar, many of which could have been used to add further value to this new translated edition, are not addressed.⁴ Besides the need to improve some of the wider student-facing issues, other linguistic aspects, such as temporal changes, textual registers and scribal idiosyncrasies, could have been more extensively explained. This is particularly in reference to examples taken from literary texts, which do not take into account that the "literary Late Egyptian" of the texts, as explained by Jay, "is a conventionalised hybrid displaying many features retained from Middle Egyptian;"⁵ hence, not a Late Egyptian phenomenon. Additionally, Sweeney highlights several errors within the original publication by Neveu and it is somewhat disappointing that these have not been corrected in the translated version. These are (page numbers correspond to Cannata's English translation, not Neveu's original publication as referred to by Sweeney in her review; all credit needs to be awarded to Sweeney for observing these errors, and my aim here is to update the page numbers):

- p. 130 (ex. 7) read *jh hr.t <hr> t³ md.t*
- p. 135 (ex. 11) a dittograph in the hieroglyphic text. *bn jw=j* is written twice.
- p. 146 (ex.19) read [*<hr> n³]* *qnqn* — there is only room for one group in the gap in *v.1*.
- p. 156 (ex. 4) *jrj.j sw n=f* should read *jrj.j sw n=k*.
- p. 227 (ex. 52) *p³jj.tn mš^c* should read *n³jj.tn mš^c*.
- p. 228. (ex. 53) the rope sign is missing from the name Nebmehy.

¹ Deborah Sweeney, "Review: Neveu, François 1996. *La langue des Ramsès, grammaire du néo-égyptien*, Paris: Khéops," *Lingua Aegyptia: Journal of Egyptian Language Studies* 5 (1997), 290.

² Sweeney 1997, 291.

³ J. Brett McClain, "Book review: Friedrich Junge, *Late Egyptian Grammar*. Translated by David Warburton, Oxford: Griffith Institute 2001," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 64 (2) (2005): 120.

⁴ Sweeney 1997, 292–294.

⁵ Jacqueline Jay, "Book review: Friedrich Junge, *Neuägyptisch: Einführung in die Grammatik* (3rd edn.), Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag 2008," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 132 (3) (2012): 478.