

On the Phonetic Change between “g” and “h” in the Egyptian Language

In this contribution, a new investigation of the Egyptian phonetic change between “g” and “h” is offered. The question was tackled in previous research only sporadically. The material amassed in this article consists of four new examples. The phenomenon has parallels in many oriental languages.

Keywords: *Egyptian philology – Egyptian phonology – phonetic change between “g” and “h”*

In this contribution, the Egyptian phonetic change between “g” und “h” is highlighted once again. The search for further tangible evidence of its historical evidence is the top priority. The initially perhaps somewhat strange impression of the phonetic change can hopefully be reduced in this way. Previous research has already dealt with this phenomenon several times without being there a broader investigation. The following overview explains the more precise details:

The earliest comments on this phenomenon apparently come from Edel (1955, 53), who concentrated on the writing “ng3g3” for “nh3h3” “breast flow over“. The phonetic change occurs here in the middle of the word. The example can be dated into the Old Kingdom.

The discussion was then taken up by Westendorf (1989, 76/1962, 350), who referred to the relationship of “wbg” – “wbh” “to light“, “ph3” – “pg3” “to split, to open“ and “fnh” – “png” “to split, to open“. The phonetic change appears here in the middle and at the end of the word. The phenomenon is apparently understood by Westendorf between the lines as an explanation for root doublets.

In later scientific literature, things became relatively quiet regarding this phonetic change. The current moment is therefore just right for a renewed analysis. In what follows, four fresh Egyptian examples are presented, which are beyond any suspicion of coincidence or scribe’s error¹. On superficial inspection, the amount may not be very high for far-reaching conclusions. At this point, however, Schenkel’s (1993, 147) beautiful statement that one secure piece of evidence is worth more than a thousand uncertain pieces of evidence definitely deserves attention. Although the words appear originally in a

¹The emendation of “g” in “h” at Grunert 2008, 139, is probably based on other prerequisites and is therefore not taken into account here. The relationship of “g” and “h” at Quack 2019, 102, is also on a different level and does not need to be considered here.

1 different context, they can easily be transferred to the current case. For better
2 orientation, the examples are presented in chronological order.

3 The point of departure for the following considerations is the Egyptian
4 rendering “iniwg3ś3” (Urk. IV, 704, 6; for this passage cf. Edel, 1979, 84) for
5 the country name “Nuḥašše“, whose geographical location on the map of the
6 Middle East extends over the north of today’s Syria east of the Orontes². The
7 phonetic change occurs here in the middle of the word. The other sound
8 phenomena in this word are not so important here and can therefore be ignored.
9 The example can be dated to the New Kingdom. .

10 The word “ḥbš” (Černý 1965, § 59) follows next, which is apparently a
11 vessel or container name. Breyer (2011, 86/2010, 449) believes to have found
12 the etymology of the word in the Hittite “^{DUG}tagapisa“³ “a vessel“, so that it
13 would meet the phonetic criteria for inclusion in this article. The phonetic
14 change can be detected here in the middle of the word. The Hittite model is,
15 however, not the only possibility for the solution of this question. The same
16 word is deduced by Hoch (1994, 362) from the Semitic root “ḥbš” “to bind“
17 and by Ward (1989, 73-82; for Hurrian loan words in Egyptian cf. Schneider
18 2004, 137-138) from the Hurrian root “taḥapšu” “leather strap“. If the last two
19 options apply, the example would be omitted for the considerations here. The
20 first alternative is considered more likely here. The example can be dated to the
21 New Kingdom as well.

22 The Egyptian writing “krgp3” for the queen’s name Gilu-ḥepa known
23 from EA 17, 5 should be mentioned last, in which the representation through
24 “g” could be a sign of voicing the “ḥ” (Edel 1963, 34). The explanation of the
25 phenomenon eluded Edel according to his own words. The phonetic change
26 investigated here would create a good base for interpretation. The name is
27 borrowed from Hurrian onomastics, but should not have any serious conse-
28 quences. In this case it is rendered in hieroglyphic transcription. The phonetic
29 change takes place here in the middle of the word again. The example can be
30 dated to the New Kingdom.

31 The writing “śg3” (Lefebvre 1923, 50) for “śḥ3” “to remember“ fits well
32 as a third new discovery, which probably also reveals the influence of this
33 phonetic change. In this case it was executed in the middle of the word. The
34 example can be dated to the Graeco-Roman period.

35 The indirect proof of the phonetic change could also be achieved by the
36 fact that Semitic “ḥ” could be shifted either to “g” or “ḥ” in Egyptian
37 (Westendorf 1977, 507). The parallelism therefore indicates a certain sound
38 similarity between the two phonemes. The argument should be taken seriously.

39 The whole thesis can be supported by the following factor: the Egyptian
40 language apparently knows the phonetic change between “ḥ” and “k”

²For the “Nuḥašše“-lands cf. Klengel 1999, passim; Klengel 1998-2001, 610-611; Bryce 2009, 515.

³For this word cf. Tischler 2001, 160.

1 (Westendorf 1962, 37; Lüddeckens 1943, 122; Satzinger 1999, 147; Vycichl
2 1958, 387; compare also the writing “šk3” “to plough” for “šḥ3” “to
3 remember” bei Töpfer/Müller-Roth 2011, 51). The close relationship is
4 noticeable at first glance. The missing link is the phonetic change between “g”
5 and “k”, who enjoys general notoriety (Jasnow/ Zauzich 2005, 89; Jasnow
6 1992, 106).

7 The final conclusion is as follows: The probability of the Egyptian
8 phonetic change between “g” and “ḥ” has become more concrete through the
9 above observations. The phenomenon can be detected according to the material
10 known so far in the middle and at the end of the word. The beginning of the
11 word remained unaffected by this phonetic change in the current state of
12 things. The duration of the phonetic change can be traced throughout almost
13 the entire history of the language. The existence of the phonetic change is, by
14 the way, secured, by external factors. Interestingly, the Egyptian language is
15 not isolated with this phenomenon. On the contrary, the phonetic change
16 between “g” and “ḥ” is also attested in other oriental languages. The law can
17 thus be placed in a broader context. We would be happy to take advantage of
18 the opportunity below. The double and triple protection also helps to refute
19 possible objections. The loose list below is intended to serve as an initial
20 overview.

21 The Akkadian language is placed at the beginning. The phonetic change
22 between “ḥ” and “g” can be observed there in Late-Babylonian words, who
23 could be under Aramaic influence (von Soden 1995, 31).

24 The reproduction of the name ^mTudḥaliya in Ugaritic alphabetic script by
25 “tdḡl” (Hoffner, Jr./ Melchert 2008, 39) obviously shows the same cause.

26 The realisation of Protosemitic “*/ḡ/” through “ḥ” in Amorritic (Streck
27 2000, 231; for the Amorritic onomastikon cf. Golinets 2018, passim; Bojowald
28 2021, 137-141; Bojowald 2022, 287-290) aims in the same direction.

29 The allophon „[ḡ]“ (Wegner 2007, 46; for Hurrian cf. Neu 1988, passim)
30 for /ḡ/ and /ḡḡ/, respectively, in Hurrian could also belong in this series.

31 The phonetic change between “g” and “ḥ” seems to appear in Luwian as
32 well (Hawkins/ Morpurgo Davies 1993, 50-60; for the Greek-Anatolian
33 relationship in the case of “Perge” and “Pegasos” cf. Hutter 1995, 79-97).

34 To summarize: The base for the phonetic change between “g” and “ḥ” has
35 been further enlarged. The Egyptian type is definitely worth keeping an eye on.
36 However, the phonetic change is one of the rarer phenomena of this kind. In
37 future, the number of examples could rise.

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