

Emoglyphs

Picture-Writing from Hieroglyphs to the Emoji





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Hieroglyphs to the Emoji

Shirly Ben-Dor Evian

With contributions by Orly Goldwasser
and Daphna Ben-Tor, Carlo Rindi-Nuzzolo, and Stefan Jakob Wimmer



The Israel Museum,
Jerusalem

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Emoglyphs: Picture-Writing
from Hieroglyphs to the Emoji
December 2019 – October 2020
Davidson Temporary Exhibition Gallery
Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Archaeology Wing

Curator: Shirly Ben-Dor Evian
Assistant curator: Yael Duvdevani
Exhibition design: Shirly Yahalom

Catalogue design: Studio Ira Ginzburg
Editing and translation: Nancy Benovitz

Printed by Offset AB, Ltd.

Catalogue no. 690
ISBN 978 965 278 507 7

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hippopotami, Egyptian. Predynastic Period, Naqada I,
3850–3650 BCE. Findspot: Tomb 26, Mesaid, Egypt. Pottery (Nile silt ware).
Height x diameter: 6.8 x 19.4 cm (2 11/16 x 7 5/8 in). Harvard University –
Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition. 11.312: fig. 2 (p. 16)
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Art Resource, NY (p. 39)
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Tafelwerke, Part II, Vol. IV, p. 133 (pp. 30–31)

The catalogue was made possible by

Jeannette and Jonathan Rosen, New York

The Montgomery Securities and Friends Endowment
Fund of the Israel Museum

The exhibition was made possible by

The William Davidson Foundation, Detroit

The donors to the Israel Museum's
2019 Exhibition Fund:
Claudia Davidoff, Cambridge, Massachusetts,
in memory of Ruth and Leon Davidoff
Hanno D. Mott, New York
The Nash Family Foundation, New York

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Foreword

The twenty-first century has brought with it new and original means of interpersonal communication. The smileys and ideograms known as emoji that entered our lives during the past decade are now widespread not only in text messages, but also in film, literature, and other art forms, as well as in advertising. The Israel Museum is proud to present the first exhibition of its kind to survey the development of emoji from an unexpected perspective – that of the pictorial script of ancient Egypt: hieroglyphs.

Hieroglyphic script, which served the ancient Egyptians for three millennia, is one of the hallmarks of ancient Egyptian culture. Striking examples of this writing system are on view in major museums around the world. Yet despite countless exhibitions devoted to the treasures of ancient Egypt, few individuals know the meaning of the appealing images that comprise this script and how to read them. As for the general public – hieroglyphic writing remains an utter mystery.

The secrets of hieroglyphic script are now revealed in the exhibition *Emoglyphs: Picture-Writing from Hieroglyphs to the Emoji*, which presents not only the story of ancient Egyptian writing, but also utilizes the ancient script to shed light on the ways emoji are used today. Surprisingly, there are many similarities between the forms and functions of hieroglyphs and emoji, attesting to humanity's timeless desire to write with pictures.

More than sixty ancient Egyptian artifacts are on view in the exhibition, almost all of them from the Israel Museum collection. Many of these are on display to the public for the first time. The objects are complemented by key loans from the collections of David and Cindy Sofer, London, and the Israel Antiquities Authority, to whom we are most grateful.

This catalogue would not have been possible without the support of our friends Jeannette and Jonathan Rosen, New York, whose ongoing generosity helps promote Egyptian archaeology at the Israel Museum; and the support of The Montgomery Securities and Friends Endowment Fund of the Israel Museum. We are also indebted to The William Davidson Foundation, Detroit, and the donors to the Israel Museum's 2019 Exhibition Fund – Claudia Davidoff, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in memory of Ruth and Leon Davidoff; Hanno D. Mott, New York; and The Nash Family Foundation, New York – for their invaluable support of the exhibition.

Finally, we wish to thank the curator of the exhibition, Shirly Ben-Dor Evian, Curator of Egyptian Archaeology, who with great inspiration and talent has succeeded in bridging the gap between ancient Egyptian culture and contemporary life; Haim Gitler, Chief Curator of Archaeology, for his guidance and assistance; and the many other members of the Israel Museum's staff who devoted themselves to the exhibition's success.

Ido Bruno

Anne and Jerome Fisher Director

Preface

One of the first questions I am asked when I introduce myself as an Egyptologist – a scholar of ancient Egyptian culture – is whether I can read hieroglyphic script. When I answer that I can, people often respond with amazement: “But isn’t it very complicated?” I admit that on numerous occasions I have replied that the hieroglyphic writing system is indeed rather complex, and that in my opinion, any attempt to explain its principles to non-Egyptologists is destined to fail. Nevertheless, it seems that recently, the gap between the ancient Egyptians and ourselves has somewhat narrowed. Over the past decade, visual communication, previously restricted, for the most part, to the commercial realm, has become common property, the province of anyone who owns a smartphone. As time goes by, the widespread use of pictures, specifically emoji, in digital communication reminds me more and more of the way hieroglyphs were used in ancient Egypt.

In my attempt to uncover the underlying principles guiding picture-writing in the twenty-first century, I discovered that since such writing is a relatively new phenomenon, its principles have not yet been entirely elucidated. By contrast, hieroglyphic writing has been studied in depth ever since it was deciphered two hundred years ago. For this reason, I wondered whether the ancient Egyptian writing system could shed light on the ways pictures are used, consciously and unconsciously, in writing today.

My comparison of the two writing systems revealed that there is a surprising resemblance between hieroglyphic signs and emoji in terms of their appearance – though it is unlikely that the emoji designers were aware of this. Moreover, these small pictures – such as the winking and smiling faces – are used for communicating non-verbal messages in a manner strongly reminiscent of the ancient Egyptian

“classifier,” without which it would have been virtually impossible to write anything in ancient Egyptian.

The exhibition and its accompanying catalogue present the underlying principles of the hieroglyphic writing system, while shedding light on the fact that, then as now, picture-writing is not only a means of representing language and conveying information; it can also transcend the boundaries of text and enter the realms of artistic and ideological expression.

The catalogue reflects the major topics of the exhibition: hieroglyphs as script, hieroglyphs in magic, and hieroglyphs in art. All the objects presented in the catalogue are from the Israel Museum collection, unless otherwise indicated. Items published here for the first time are described in relative detail, while those that have been previously published are only briefly addressed. The catalogue’s structure consists of thematic introductions followed by catalogue entries; there is a certain amount of repetition, but this is intended to assist the reader, who may not necessarily be reading the catalogue straight through from beginning to end.

The entries are accompanied by delightful illustrations produced by Ira Ginzburg, who intelligently developed the catalogue’s graphic language, integrating hieroglyphic script with emoji. The meaning of each “emoglyph” is indicated next to its image. For this and for the exquisite catalogue design, exhibition graphics, and animated film, I extend to Ira and her team my profound gratitude and appreciation.

Sincere thanks are also due to the many others who have made the exhibition and catalogue possible. First and foremost, I thank Ido Bruno, Israel Museum Director, and Haim Gitler, Chief Curator of Archaeology, for the confidence they have showed in

me and for their ongoing assistance. I am also indebted to Daphna Ben-Tor, for her guidance, unstinting support, and help with matters large and small.

I am grateful to the contributors to the catalogue for sharing their wealth of knowledge: Orly Goldwasser, Carlo Rindi-Nuzzolo, Stefan Wimmer, and Daphna Ben-Tor; and to the experts with whom I consulted, for their generous advice along the way: Deborah Sweeney, Aidan Dodson, Robert Bianchi, Katherine Pickett, Gianluca Miniaci, Simon Thuault, Sefy Hendler, Adi Stern, Hila Shaltiel, and Yonathan Ventura.

I thank Nancy Benovitz, editor of the English edition of the catalogue, and Yosef Kuris, editor of the Hebrew edition, for their meticulous translations and editing, which yielded a clear and comprehensible catalogue in two languages, and for their dedicated work on the exhibition texts. Special thanks are also due to Yael Bamberger, Head of Publications, for her guidance, advice, and support in producing this catalogue. I am grateful to Rachel Laufer, Acting Head of Image Resources and Copyright Management, and to Nili Luria, for their invaluable support with matters related to photos and copyrights; and to Elie Posner, Chief Photographer and Head of Photography, and Laura Lachman, for their exquisite photographs that have brought the objects in the exhibition to life. Credit also goes to Michal Leibovith Weissman, VP Productions at Faza, Heart and Mind Marketing, for suggesting the exhibition's title.

Thanks are due to Carlo Rindi-Nuzzolo, of the British Museum, London, who generously assisted with the procurement of images of the renowned Rosetta Stone; and to Niv Alon of The Metropolitan Museum, New York, who provided updated photos of the decorated coffin. I am particularly indebted to David and Cindy Sofer, London, for the loan of the rare heart scarab;

and to Michael Sebbane, Chief Director of the National Treasures, The Israel Antiquities Authority, along with Yaakov Sharvit and Lior Planer, for the loan of the anchor that was salvaged from the sea just months before the exhibition's opening.

My deep gratitude is extended to the staff of the Israel Museum Conservation Laboratories, who with characteristic dedication and professionalism, conserved and restored a wide variety of artifacts for the exhibition: Sharon Tager, Head of Conservation; Elisheva Yardeni, Head of Stone, Ceramic, and Glass Conservation, along with conservator Connie Green; Irit Lev-Beyth, Head of Metal and Organic Object Conservation; Michal Blankett-Ganor, Head of Decorative Surfaces Conservation; Ronen Dor, Head of Wood Conservation; and Yona Drezner, Head of Textile Conservation.

Special thanks are due to the designer of the exhibition, Shirly Yahalomi, for her depth of thought, original design, and outstanding execution. Among the others who played important roles in the creation of the exhibition, I gratefully acknowledge Amir Ronen, Coordinator of New Media Projects, for producing the excellent exhibition films; Yaron Zinman, for the interactive kiosks; Eran Aronson, for the lighting design; Hebrew editor Tami Michaeli, for her assistance with the exhibition texts; and Ester Stark, for the tasteful illustrations accompanying them.

Among the many other Israel Museum staff members to whom I am grateful, I wish to single out Henk van Doornik, Head of Shipping and Loans, along with Tal Elispur; Liat Benzguida, Project Management Officer, Curatorial Services; Dalia Angel, Executive Budget and Insurance Officer; Yaniv Cohen, Head of Technical Services, and all his staff, especially Inbal Gerzon and Shay Niv; Menachem Amin, Head of the Audiovisual

Department, along with Alexander Uretsky; the staff of the Youth Wing, especially Elinor Malchi and Orna Granot; the staff of the Fine Arts Wing – in particular, Noam Gal, Miriam Malachi, Yvonne Fleitman, Adina Kamien-Kazhdan, and Ronit Sorek; Lea Rotstein, Director of Israeli Friends; Michal Aldor, Head of Exhibition Design; Allison Kupietzky, Collections Database Manager; and Yael Edelist, Spokesperson. Finally, I wish to express my warmest gratitude to *all* my colleagues in the Archaeology Wing for their ongoing and incomparable support, with special thanks to Eran Arie, Alison Ashenberg, Galit Bennett-Dahan, Nurith Goshen, Liza Lurie, Ahiad Ovadia, Yaniv Schauer, and Tali Sharvit.

Last but not least, I am indebted to Yael Duvdevani, Assistant Curator of Egyptian Archaeology, who has been my loyal partner along the way; and to Matan-El Shukrun, Project Management Officer for Archaeology, who worked day and night in order to bring the exhibition to fruition, proving, once again, that where there's a will there's a way.

Shirly Ben-Dor Evian

Jeannette and Jonathan Rosen Curator of
Egyptian Archaeology

Chronological Table

Approximate dates, all BCE

Old Kingdom

3050–2650

1st–2nd Dynasty

Middle Kingdom

2030–1650

11th–14th Dynasty

2650–2130

3rd–8th Dynasty

2130–2030

9th–11th Dynasty

First Intermediate Period

1650–1550

15th–17th Dynasty

Second Intermediate Period

New Kingdom

1550-1300

18th Dynasty

1300-1180

19th Dynasty

1180-1070

20th Dynasty

Late Period

664-525

26th Dynasty

525-332

27th-30th Dynasty

720-664

25th Dynasty

950-720

22nd-24th Dynasty

1070-950

21st Dynasty

332-30

Third Intermediate Period

Ptolemaic Period



Contributors to the Catalogue

SBE *Shirly Ben-Dor Evian*

Jeannette and Jonathan Rosen Curator of Egyptian
Archaeology, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

DBT *Daphna Ben-Tor*

Former Jeannette and Jonathan Rosen Curator of
Egyptian Archaeology, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Orly Goldwasser

Professor of Egyptology,
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

CR *Carlo Rindi-Nuzzolo*

Lead Curator, “Circulating Artefacts” Project,
The British Museum

SJW *Stefan Jakob Wimmer*

Professor, the Institute of Egyptology,
University of Munich

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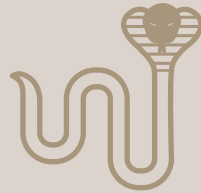
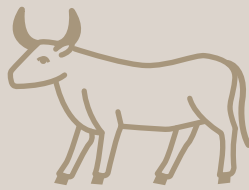
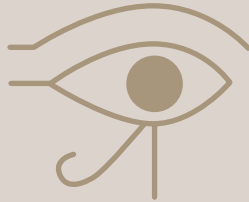
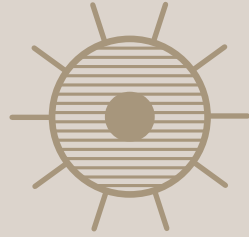
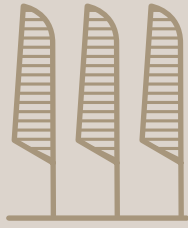
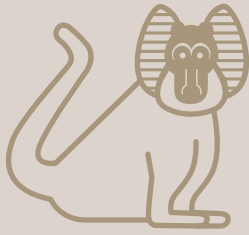
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First Edition November 2019
ISBN 978 965 278 507 7 NIS 109



7 290105 428370