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James P. Allen
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Introduction

This book was written to serve as a companion volume to the third edition of my Middle Egyptian grammar.[1] It provides editions of both well-known and lesser-known texts for students to apply their knowledge of the language to the exercise of working with real Middle Egyptian compositions.

Besides that pedagogic purpose, the book has two other goals: to make the texts more readily available than is currently the case, and to present them in a fashion as close to the original as possible. All but one of the originals are written in hieratic on papyrus. Unlike other editions, this book presents hieroglyphic transcriptions in the same orientation as the originals: right to left, and in columns as well as lines.[2]

Each text is presented in hieroglyphs, transliteration, translation, and textual notes. The notes deal with matters of both grammar and interpretation; the former are keyed to the relevant sections of my grammar, and the latter sometimes cross-reference the essays in that book. Grammatical notes are extensive for the first text, for which every form and construction is discussed. They diminish in frequency in subsequent texts, as students (ideally) become more proficient in working with the language.

Five of the texts are those that any student of Middle Egyptian should read: the stories of the Shipwrecked Sailor and Sinuhe, the instructions of Kagemni's father and Ptahhotep, the discourses of the Eloquent Peasant, and the Debate between a Man and His Soul. The other three were chosen to complement these: the Loyalist Instruction, to illustrate the attitude toward the king that underlies the story of Sinuhe; the tale of the Herdsman, because it is on the same papyrus as the Debate; and the Hymns to Senwosret III, to exemplify the genre of hymns.

The great anthologies of Egyptian literature in translation contain many more works than these, but the compositions here have been singled out for two more reasons. First is the question of genre. Egyptian literature can be divided into two categories. Many texts that are literary in quality were composed not as literature but for an external purpose: for example, hymns, for use in temple or royal ceremonies; and biographical inscriptions, designed to record the deeds of their subjects as evidence of their worthiness to receive offerings after their deaths. In a narrower sense, "true" Egyptian literature consists of works that were composed for no purpose other than their own existence: primarily instructions, discourses, and stories. While Text 8 exemplifies the first category, the rest belong to the second.

1 James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: an Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, 3rd ed.; Cambridge, 2014.
2 Hieratic signs originally in red are filled in black in the hieroglyphic transcription, and the corresponding transliteration and translation are presented in **bold** type.

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Second is the question of date. Recent research has demonstrated that the corpus of Middle Kingdom literature is both broader and narrower than was previously thought to be the case (Stauder 2014). It is broader because it contains two works that have been traditionally identified as compositions of the Old Kingdom, the instructions of Kagemni's father and Ptahhotep. While the texts themselves place their authors in the Old Kingdom, the language in which they are written is Middle Egyptian, and the document on which they are preserved is of Middle Kingdom date. In fact, there is no evidence whatsoever for the second, "true" genre of Egyptian literature prior to the Middle Kingdom. The corpus is also narrower because a number of works once thought to have been written in the Middle Kingdom have features of the language that do not appear until the Second Intermediate Period or later, and survive only in copies later than the Middle Kingdom. With the exception of a few texts, mostly fragmentary, the works in this book are the only examples of "true" literature that are undoubtedly of Middle Kingdom origin, since they all are preserved on sources of Middle Kingdom date. As such, they represent the golden age of Middle Egyptian.

STYLE

All of the works in this book are written in verse. As far as we can tell, ancient Egyptian verse was similar to the "free verse" form of modern poetry. Its lines did not have a regular pattern of stresses, and they did not (normally) rhyme with one another. Nonetheless, it did obey certain rules of composition.

The basic unit of composition was what has been called the "thought couplet" (Foster 1975). This is two lines of verse that form a coherent thought, in which the second line mirrors, complements, contrasts with, or expands on the first: for example,

nn wn rwj ʿḥꜣw.f	There is none who can escape his arrow,
nn jtḥ pḏt.f (Sin. B 62–63)	none who can draw his bow.
nb jm(ꜣ)t pw ʿꜣ bnjt	He is a master of kindness, great of sweetness:
jṯ.n.f (m) mrwt (Sin. B 65–66)	he has taken possession through love.
jnk pw mdw n.k	The one who speaks to you is I,
(j)m(j)-r pr wr pw sẖꜣy.k (Peas. B1 51–52)	but the one you mention is the chief steward.
sʿnd.k ḏd bjn	You belittle one who speaks badly
m tm ẖsf sw m ꜣt.f (Ptahhotep 65)	by not opposing him in his moment.

As these couplets illustrate, each line is normally a self-contained unit. Things that belong closely together, such as a verb and its subject or a preposition and its object, are not broken between lines. The second line does not have to be a complete sentence, and can therefore consist of an adjunct, as in the last example; in some cases, this can even extend to pseudo-verbal predicates that have a long subject in the first line.

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The identification of a couplet is based primarily on meaning. By that criterion, Middle Kingdom literature also uses single lines, mainly as headings; groups of three lines, known as tercets; and occasionally a group of four, called a quatrain. There are few rules that can help identify when these other groups are used, and the division is partly a matter of interpretation. For example, the following text can be parsed either as a couplet or a tercet:

mj.k jrrt.sn pw r sḫtjw.sn
jww n ktḫt r gs.sn mj.k jrrt.sn pw (Peas. B1 76–77)
Look, that is what they do to their peasants
who come to others besides them; look, that is what they do.

mj.k jrrt.sn pw r sḫtjw.sn
jww n ktḫt r gs.sn
mj.k jrrt.sn pw (Peas. B1 76–77)
Look, that is what they do to their peasants
who come to others besides them;
Look, that is what they do.

One criterion that can help in parsing lines of verse is that of meter. Meter is simply the pattern of stresses in a line of verse: for example, the pattern of 4–3–4–3 in the opening lines of Lewis Carroll's poem, "The Walrus and the Carpenter":

The **sun** was **shi**ning **on** the **sea**,
Shining with **all** his **might**:
He **did** his **ve**ry **best** to **make**
The **bill**ows **smooth** and **bright**—
And **this** was **odd**, be**cause** it **was**
The **mid**dle **of** the **night**.

While Egyptian verse does not seem to use a regular, repeating meter such as this, studies have determined that its lines do conform to a general pattern of stresses. Most lines have two or three stresses. Lines can have as few as one or as many as five, but apparently never more than five.

Hieroglyphic writing, of course, does not reveal how words were stressed, but we can make educated guesses based partly on common sense, partly on syntax, and partly on Coptic, which does reflect stress. Small words such as prepositions, particles, and dependent pronouns were probably not stressed, but independent pronouns can be stressed or not, depending on their meaning (see § 13.6 and p. 94 n. 5). Prepositional phrases and adverbs are stressed, with the exception of the dative with a suffix pronoun (§ 13.6). Indirect genitives have two stresses but direct genitives have only one (which is why nothing can normally come between the two elements): ***hrw*** *n* ***mst*** (Coptic ϩⲟⲟⲩ ⲛⲙⲓⲥⲉ = **how** ʼn**mee**suh) but *hrw-**mst*** "birthday" (Coptic ϩⲟⲩⲙⲓⲥⲉ = hoo**mee**suh). The

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direct genitive rule also applies to an infinitive followed by a noun as its subject or object, which is a genitival construction (§§ 13.4.2, 13.5.1). There is some ambiguity about adjectives that modify nouns, including demonstrative pronouns and the quantifier *nb*, since Coptic shows two patterns: *sṯj* ***nfr*** "good smell" (Coptic **ⲥϯⲛⲟⲩϥⲉ** = stee**noo**fuh "perfume") and ***sṯj nfr*** (Coptic **ⲥⲑⲟⲓ ⲛⲟⲩϥⲓ** = **stoy noo**fee). Verbs and nominal subjects and objects are generally stressed. Using these guidelines, we can reconstruct the stress patterns of the opening lines of the Shipwrecked Sailor as follows (the – dash links words with a single stress):

3	*ḏd jn–šmsw jqr*	Recitation by an able follower.
3	*wḏꜣ jb.k ḥꜣt(j)-ꜥ*	Be informed, high official:
2	*mj.k–pḥ.n.n ẖnw*	look, we have reached home.
4	*šzp ḫrpw ḥw mjnt*	The mallet has been taken, the mooring-post has been hit,
3	*ḥꜣtt rdj.t(j) ḥr–tꜣ*	and the prow-rope is set on land.
4	*rdj ḥknw dwꜣ nṯr*	Praise has been given, and thanks,
2	*z(j)–nb ḥr–ḥpt–snnw.f*	and every man is embracing the other.
3	*jzwt.ṯn jj.t(j) ꜥd.t(j)*	Our crew has returned safe,
2	*nn–nhw n–mšꜥ.n*	with no loss of our expedition.
2	*pḥ.n.n pḥwj–wꜣwꜣt*	We have reached the end of Wawat,
2	*zn.n.n znmwt*	we have passed Bigga.
2	*mj.k–r.f–n–jj.n m–ḥtp*	So, look, we have returned in peace;
2	*tꜣ.n pḥ.n–sw*	our land, we have reached it.

Although parsing the verse structure of a work of Middle Kingdom literature is sometimes a matter of interpretation, there is good evidence that the structure itself was a deliberate creation of the ancient author and not an accidental feature of the text. In the Debate (Text 6), for example, the man's second speech divides thematically into two parts, the first of which records the soul's arguments for death (cols. 5–29) and the second, his argument against life and the man's response to it (cols. 29–55): the fact that the two sections each contain thirty-six lines is undoubtedly not mere coincidence. Moreover, this verse structure is a clue to meaning as well. Among other things, it shows that the line *ḏdt.n n.j bꜣ.j* "what my ba said to me" (cols. 30–31) is not the heading of a new section in which the soul responds to the man but the second line of a couplet and a phrase in apposition to *štꜣw ẖt.j* "the secrets of my belly" in the first line.

The ancient writers used tercets both for variety, to break up what might otherwise be a monotonous string of couplet after couplet, and for thematic effect. A good example of the latter is the first half of the speech discussed in the last paragraph. It contains two tercets (cols. 8–10 and 15–17), each of which marks the end of a sub-section in the text. Tercets are also used in litanies, a verse form in which a common first line is followed by different couplets; examples can be found in the Debate and in the Hymns to Senwosret III (Texts 6 and 8).

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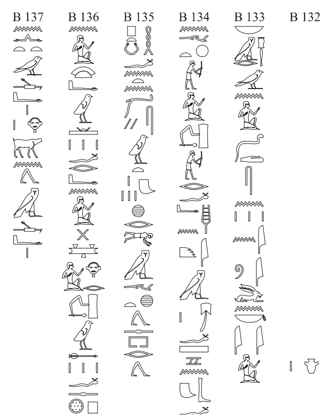
Versification can also be an aid to understanding grammar. The story of Sinuhe's battle against the champion from Retjenu, for example, contains the following lines:



The beginning (B 132–34) is easily analyzed as a couplet:

3 *jb–nb mr.(w)–n.j ḏd.sn*
4 *jn–jw–wn ky–nḫt ꜥḥꜣ r.f*

Every mind was sick for me, saying,
"Is there another strongman who can fight against him?"

The text that follows has been universally understood as a SUBJECT–stative construction introduced by *ꜥḥꜥ.n* (B 134–35), followed by a *sḏm.n.f* clause as object of the compound preposition *m ḫt* (B 135–36), and a second *sḏm.n.f* clause followed by an adverbial phrase and an adverb clause (B 136–37). Since the SUBJECT–stative construction has six units of stress (*ꜥḥꜥ.n jkm.f mjnb.f ḫpt.f nt–nsjwt ḫr.(w)*), it has been divided into two lines; for example,

Then his shield, his axe,
his armful of javelins fell (Parkinson 1997, 33)

And then his shield, his dagger,
his armour, his holder of spears fell (Quirke 2004, 63).[3]

This analysis separates the SUBJECT–stative construction into two lines, which is not a feature elewhere in Middle Kingdom verse. Moreover, it requires the next sentence to begin with a preposition, which is something that Middle Egyptian regularly limits to the preposition *jr*:

3 These two examples are chosen because they translate the story as verse. Other translations are mostly presented as prose.

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> after I had escaped his weapons and made them pass by me (Parkinson 1997, 33)[4]
>
> As I approached his weapons
> I made my face dodge (Quirke 2004, 63).

These difficulties prompt a different analysis. The anomalies of both versification and grammar can be avoided by understanding as a second participle followed by the preposition *n*, despite the spelling without the usual determinative , and *ḫr* as the particle that allows a prepositional phrase to stand at the beginning of the sentence (§ 15.6.13), yielding two tercets with the same pattern of stresses:

3 *jb–nb mr.(w)–n.j ḏd.sn*
4   *jn–jw–wn ky–nḫt ꜥḥꜣ r.f*
5   *ꜥḥꜥ n–jkm.f mjnb.f ḥpt.f nt–nsjwt*
3 *ḫr–m–ḫt spr.n.j ḫꜥw.f*
4   *rdj.n.j swꜣ ḥr.j ꜥḥꜣw.f*
5   *zp n–jwtt wꜥ ḥr–ẖn m–wꜥ*

Every mind was sick for me, saying,
   "Is there another strongman who can fight against him,
   who can stand up to his shield, his axe, his clutch of spears?"
Afterward, I made his weapons come out.
   I made his arrows pass by me
   to no avail, one chasing the other.

Versification is therefore not just an incidental feature of Middle Kingdom literature: it is integral to the compositions and essential for understanding the texts as their authors intended—insofar as that is still possible. This book is also meant to provide material for the study of that aspect of Middle Kingdom literature.

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4 In this translation, this is the first clause of a complex sentence that extends beyond B 137.

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Text 1

The Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor

This text is the oldest surviving ancient Egyptian story. It is preserved in a single manuscript, a papyrus now in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia (pHermitage 1115).[1] The text is written in hieratic, the handwritten form of hieroglyphic (§ 1.9), mostly in vertical columns but at one point in horizontal lines.[2] With some exceptions, red ink is used to mark the beginning of a new section in the narration. The grammar of the text and the paleography of the hieratic date the composition to the early Middle Kingdom (ca. 2000–1900 BC).

The story is unusual in several respects: its rather abrupt beginning, its anonymous characters, its literary device of a story within a story within a story, and its downbeat ending. The moral of the tale is perseverance through travails. At the beginning of the story, an expedition up the Nile to Africa has returned apparently without success. The expedition leader has to report to the king, and to encourage him, one of the crew members tells the leader how he survived a worse situation, being shipwrecked alone on a previous mission. In the course of his story, the sailor meets a god in the form of a giant snake, who encourages the sailor by telling him how he persevered through an even worse disaster, the loss of his entire family.

Like all early Middle Kingdom literature, the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor is composed in narrative verse (Foster 1988). Besides the basic unit of the couplet, this text also makes liberal use of tercets, the occasional single line, and one possible sestet (group of six lines). Like all literary compositions, it also uses devices such as metaphor and alliteration.

The original papyrus has yet to be properly published. The text here is transcribed, and the hieratic signs used in the notes are drawn, after Golenischev 1913; the use of red ink is from Golenischev 1912. For this first text, the columns and lines of the papyrus have been separated into discrete columns or lines corresponding to the verse lines of the composition; the hieroglyphic transcription of Texts 2–8 will be presented consecutively, according to the columns or lines of the original. The numbers to the right of the transliteration indicate the probable units of stress in each line (see pp. 3–4, above).

1 Two probable citations from the story are attested in later texts: Allen 2008, 32–33; Simpson 1958, 50.
2 Cols. 1–123 are vertical; lines 124–76, horizontal in six pages (124–32, 133–42, 143–51, 152–60, 161–69, 170–76); and the rest of the papyrus, vertical (cols. 177–89).

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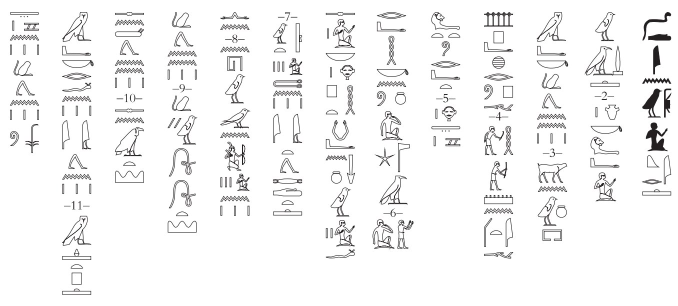
Episode 1 — Setting the Scene (cols. 1–21)



1	***ḏd jn šmsw*** *jqr*	(heading)
1–3	*wḏꜣ jb.k ḥꜣt(j)-ʿ*	3
	mj.k pḥ.n.n ẖnw	2
3–5	*šzp ḫrpw ḥw mjnt*	4
	ḥꜣtt rdj.t(j) ḥr tꜣ	3
5–6	*rdj ḥknw dwꜣ nṯr*	4
	z(j) nb ḥr ḥpt snnw.f	2
7–8	*jzwt.ṯn jj.t(j) ʿd.t(j)*	3
	nn nhw n mšʿ.n	2
8–10	*pḥ.n.n pḥwj wꜣwꜣt*	2
	zn.n.n znmwt	2
10–11	*mj.k r.f n jj.n m ḥtp*	2
	tꜣ.n pḥ.n sw	2

1 **Recitation by an** able **follower**.
1–3 Be informed, high official:
  look, we have reached home.
3–5 The mallet has been taken, the mooring-post has been hit,
  and the prow-rope is set on land.
5–6 Praise has been given, and thanks,
  and every man is embracing the other.
7–8 Our crew has returned safe,
  with no loss of our expedition.
8–10 We have reached Wawat's wake,
  we have gone by Bigga.
10–11 So, look, we have returned in peace;
  our land, we have reached it.

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