Literary Late Egyptian as a Polysystem

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Introduction

In the history of mankind, Ancient Egypt is considered one of the more canonized societies. For over two thousand years (overlooking intermediate periods of disorder and consequent breaks in the central rule), this society behaved according to the same semiotic code, creating extremely centralized and strongly canonized products of art, architecture, and literature. A highly sophisticated writing system—the hieroglyphic system—was maintained for over three thousand years, virtually untroubled by the new drifts of alphabetic script that began to blow into the Ancient Near East.[1] There is evidence that changes and developments were taking place, continually but gradually, maintaining the culture's ability to preserve itself and to answer the needs of the society. Nevertheless, the overall impression created by the Ancient Egyptian culture is of a very well-balanced and steady civilization, which the modern observer will most likely find to be at least partially afflicted with some of the disadvantages of too highly canonized societies that "manifest themselves in a high degree

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1. It was only with the advent of Coptic that the hieroglyphic script was abandoned for the Greek alphabet, supplemented by seven characters derived from the hieroglyphs (Gardiner 1957: 5–6). On the emergence of the alphabet from the hieroglyphic system, see A. H. Gardiner (1916). On the early alphabet, see J. Naveh (1982). For the Egyptian decorum, see J. Baines (1989).

of boundness and growing stereotypization of the various repertoires"
(Even-Zohar 1990: 17).[2]

However, this statement is somewhat oversimplified. The Egyptian
civilization could not have retained its strength and viability without
the processes of dynamic canonization. In this study we shall try to
shed some light on two different cases of dynamic canonization in
Ancient Egypt: the first was a process of *linguistic* innovation and can-
onization, the second a *literary* one (repertoire), and both processes
occurred in the New Kingdom.

To exemplify these processes, we have chosen to discuss two texts
placed at the intersection of the two above-mentioned procedures of
dynamic canonicity: the literary letter, written on the papyrus known
today as "Papyrus Anastasi I,"[3] and a prayer by the king, which was
inscribed on a gold (or silver) tablet in the temple of Karnak (Seele
1935; Kitchen 1977: 221–23).

1. Dynamic Canonicity within the Linguistic System

"Late Egyptian" is the term by which modern Egyptologists describe
the type of language used in the literary and nonliterary texts written
after the Amarna period (Erman 1979 [1933]). Before the Amarna
period, literary and nonliterary texts were written in the "classical"
language[4] (also called "Middle Egyptian"), the jargon used since the
beginning of the Middle Kingdom and which had evolved from Old
Egyptian, the language used during the Old Kingdom.

In 1450 B.C., just before the "Amarna revolution" took place, it is
obvious that the texts written in a jargon very close to the "classical"
language were already far removed from the spoken language of the
time. Indeed, careful study of the New Kingdom language used be-
fore 1450 reveals intrusions of linguistic changes, probably emerging
in response to the pressures of the spoken language; but these changes
are found on the fringes of the Egyptian literary repertoire in genres
and registers that are naturally closer to the colloquial, such as letters,
citations of spoken phrases, and, to a rather limited extent, some ad-
ministrative texts originating in the royal circles.[5] Nevertheless, most

2. For a comprehensive collection of Egyptian literature, see M. Lichtheim (1973–
80).
3. The papyrus (now in the British Museum) is named after its previous owner, the
Swedish consul in Egypt in 1837. For transcription and translation, see Gardiner
(1966 [1911]) and H. W. Fischer-Elfert (1983–86). For a partial translation, see
J. A. Wilson (1969).
4. Differences between literary and nonliterary texts already existed in this period,
but were still hard to detect (see, e.g., Vernus 1987). For a somewhat different
opinion, see F. Junge (1985).
5. For the "intrusions," see A. Erman (1979 [1933]: 2) and B. Kroeber (1970).

of the repertoire controlled by the conservative ruling circles (and a very conservative educational system) remained crystallized.

More drastic changes appeared during the Amarna period. This era witnessed a powerful shift in the semiotics of the Egyptian society that produced manifest changes in religion, art, and language simultaneously.[6] In a decision rarely enacted, the dominating circles officially admitted forms belonging to the vernacular into the official texts of the culture. In contrast to the gradual and rather limited infiltration of the colloquial into texts written prior to this period, this appearance of the "spoken language" in the texts was clearly dictated by the ruling class: the king and his followers (Tobin 1986). For the first time in the history of the New Kingdom, the "vernacular" was officially allowed into the aggregate of texts that formed the official repertoire—thereby canonizing a new set of syntactical forms. These forms are most noticeable in those items of the repertoire that had been previously inaccessible to the Late Egyptian undercurrents (official religious texts, royal eulogies, etc.). Reasons for these changes may be sought in the naturalistic/"positivistic" view in which Akhenaten perceived the world. Reality (as opposed to things magical, mythical, and cryptic), or more precisely, "everything that is embraced by the rays of the sun," is the structural condition for the real truth. Therefore, language variations (being the articulation of people acting under the above-mentioned condition) should be treated as a legitimate form of revealed truth.[7]

The "Amarna revolution" lasted for a very short time. The kings who followed Akhenaten tried very piously to reinstate the old repertoire in religion, art, and language. But the dam had been breached; as in art and religion, the new linguistic options were never forgotten. The process could not be reversed. From the time of Akhenaten on, products of the Egyptian culture became a mixture of old traditional ways and new knowledge.

Since then, it has been possible to view the history of the texts as the history of the fusion between the new and the old. Nearly all texts written in the subsequent Nineteenth Dynasty (i.e., those which were not mere copies of old texts) were, to some degree, a mélange of old and new forms. Moreover, this combination introduced a new vitality

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The Kamose stele can be viewed as a text lingering from the Second Intermediate Period, a period of emphatic weakness of the *Egyptian* ruling circles, resulting in the weakening of canonization and decorum.

6. For general discussion and sources on this period, see D. B. Redford (1984); for the religious aspect, see J. Assmann (1972); for Egyptian religion in general, see E. Hornung (1982a, 1982b).

7. After S. I. Groll, in a lecture in the Department of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University, November 1985.

into the language, and an altogether *new* set of syntactical forms appeared: the *Late Egyptian literary forms*, observed only in new literary texts of the period.

To sum up, in the post–Amarna period (from the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty through the Nineteenth), Egyptian texts comprised three different, interlacing layers of grammatical formations (Groll 1975–76):

1. the conservative Middle Egyptian forms;
2. the newly introduced colloquial forms;[8]
3. the new literary forms.

Nonliterary texts of the period ("written as if spoken" [Gregory 1967]) mostly used the new colloquial forms, while literary texts from that era were varied combinations of all three forms. This mélange and its analysis will be the subject of our test cases: the literary letter of Papyrus Anastasi I and the "golden tablet" prayer of Rameses III.

2. Dynamic Canonicity in the Repertoire:
The Literary Letter and the Private Prayer

In the sphere of the literary repertoire of Late Egyptian, two genres were distinguished additions to the previous aggregate: the literary letter and the private prayer, or, in Egyptological terminology, "private piety." The two new genres emerged from different semiotic stimuli. The first one, the letter, mirrors a change of emphasis in the administrative network, whereas the private prayer testifies to a certain shift in the man/god relationship in Egypt during the time of the New Kingdom.

3. The Literary Letter

One of the clearest examples of dynamic canonicity in the literary repertoire of the Ancient Egyptians is the "literary letter." Letter writing started as early as the Old Kingdom, stemming from the substantial need for information exchange in daily life, thus most probably representing a register close to the spoken language of the time. As early as this period, the letter also functioned as a communicative act directed at a dead addressee (for the letters of Ancient Egypt, see Caminos 1975; Gardiner and Sethe 1928). These two types of communication by letter continued to exist side by side until the end of the Pharaonic days.

Due to the expansion of the Egyptian Empire and the growing importance of the administrative network, the letter began to acquire a

8. For an extensive grammar of the Late Egyptian vernacular, see J. Černý and S. I. Groll (1984 [1975]).

new status within the corpus of texts. While maintaining its position as the main channel of information exchange, good canonical letter writing provided one of the most important means of demonstrating proficiency for the Egyptian scribe. The reason for the growing importance of this genre was probably the shift of the letter to the center of the repertoire, that is, its upward movement from the status of an administrative tool to that of a member of the literary repertoire par excellence. During the Nineteenth Dynasty, the letter established itself as a vigorous "productive principle," creating a new *literary model* to be followed (Even-Zohar 1990: 19) and thus inspiring the formulation of various kinds of artificial letters, some imitating real administrative letters, others using the letter as a new frame for literary subjects not normally found in the realm of daily-letter exchange: eulogies to certain towns and to the king, sermons about the good fortune of the scribe versus the miserable life of the soldier (obviously propaganda emerging from school circles), and so forth.[9] The culmination of this process took the shape of an imaginary letter, which included subject matter usually confined to other genres, such as wisdom and religious literature, eulogies to the king, geographical lists, "scientific" literature (i.e., mathematical and architectural calculations), all of which were *embedded* in the new genre.[10]

The alleged writer of the text discussed below identifies himself as "Hori." The most exquisite version of this text is found on Papyrus Anastasi I, while other, very fragmented and much less carefully executed versions are found on school-exercise ostraca.

3.1. *The Case of Papyrus Anastasi I (the Letter of Hori)*

The letter of Hori, written in the Nineteenth Dynasty, is a good ex-

9. These letters are often called "model letters" by Egyptologists, as some of them were used as school texts; for a collection of such texts, see R. Caminos (1954).

10. The genre of "letter" usually dictates second-person voice and a formulaic opening that includes the titles of the writer and the addressee and good wishes bestowed on the addressee (Bakir 1970). The first signs of the genre's stagnation can be detected when letter formulae are mechanically added to other literary genres, without accordance to the requirements of the genre, thus playing against the reader's expectations. A good example is the prayer to Thot (the god of wisdom and a special guardian of scribes) on Papyrus Sallier I, 8, 2–8, 7. The text (a school text) begins with traditional letter-opening formulae and moves on without warning to the prayer, which belongs to a different genre: "The overseer of the guardians, the scribe *Imn-m-int* of the treasury of Pharaoh, says to *Pn-t3-wrt*: To the matter: This letter is brought to you, saying: another matter: "Thot, bring me to Eshmone your city. Life is sweet when you make provisions with cakes and beer. . . . Come, save the silent man; Thot, the sweet well to the thirsty in the desert. It is sealed for the 'one who finds his mouth' [loose-tongued], it is open to the silent man. When the silent man comes, he will find the well in the heat. You are the savior. End" (Caminos 1954: 321–23).

ample of the way in which the two procedures of dynamic canonicity, that of the linguistic reality and that of the repertoire, intertwine. A literary letter written on the papyrus roll now named after its first owner, Papyrus Anastasi I is a well-known canonized text, accepted as legitimate by the dominant circles (as testified to by its numerous copies on school ostraca), and it has thus become part of the historical knowledge of the Egyptians. It is the "literary letter" par excellence of the Egyptian repertoire, well known among modern scholars for its length (28 papyrus pages!), "misunderstandings,"[11] and boundness. It can definitely be identified as an original product of the Ramesside *Weltanschauung*. Under the pretext of a correspondence between two elite scribes, a whole set of subjects is laid down, subjects which the "excellent scribe" has to master and, obviously, the addressee does not, at least from the writer's point of view. The interest in this case for the non-Egyptologist reader lies in the fact that the papyrus demonstrates most accurately the "struggle" between "high" and "low" formations within the literary repertoire; and, being a school text, it probably mirrors the correct subdivision of a multi-registerial canonized text (on multi-registerial texts today, see Fairclough 1988). The text comprises three main registers, and the third, long register is divided into clusters of subregisters.

We shall very briefly explain, for the non-Egyptologist reader (without being too tedious, we hope), the choice of registers in the version of the text inscribed on this papyrus. As suggested by the use of the very expensive papyrus roll and by the exquisite handwriting, this version of the text was written by an elite scribe. This is probably not the Ur-text, but, being a product of the period, it was probably well understood by the scribe, and this version allows us a glimpse into a part of his idiolect, as reflected in his text.

3.2. The Three Main Registers in the Letter of Hori

3.2.1. The register of adulation (1, 1–2, 7).[12] This register comprises nearly three of the papyrus's twenty-eight pages. It is an exaggeration of the typical introductory formulae of a real letter of the period (see Bakir 1970). Besides the official titles of the two scribes, it includes a long list of their capabilities, as in the following excerpt.

> The scribe of noble heart, patient in discussion, at whose utterances men rejoice when they are heard, skilled in hieroglyphs; there is nothing he does

11. These "misunderstandings" have been treated as mistakes by many scholars. It is more plausible that the "code" of the text is not yet sufficiently understood by modern scholars, as we are far removed from the intended "narratee."
12. If not stated otherwise, the numbers refer to line numbers in Papyrus Anastasi I (see Gardiner 1966 [1911] and Fischer-Elfert 1983–86).

not know. . . . He greets his friend, his excellent brother, the royal scribe in command of the victorious army, noble of heart, goodly of qualities, adept in knowledge; who has not his equal in any scribe.   (1, 1–1, 2; 2, 3–2, 4 [translation after Gardiner 1966 |1911|: 6–7])

It should be noted, however, that the list of Hori's capabilities is much longer than that of his addressee, Amenemope (Hori 1, 1–2, 3; Amenemope 2, 3–2, 7).

The formulation of the register can be outlined as follows (see Hasan 1971).

a. Subject matter of discourse: titles, education, and competence of the writer and the addressee (plus minor changes in field, scribe/ soldier).
b. Situation type of discourse: polite letter exchange.
c. Participants' roles: two scribes of similar official rank (established in this register).
d. Mode of discourse: adulatory.
e. Medium of discourse: written text, in the hieratic script (the cursive version of hieroglyphs usually used for writing on papyri and ostraca), inscribed on a very fine papyrus roll.

This register of the text is written in third-person voice, using mostly nominal forms. This combination of "nameness" and third-person voice enhances the effect of disengagement and officialese.

3.2.2. The register of salutation (2, 8–4, 5). This register is also a development of the typical discourse for expressing good wishes which appears in every letter exchange between people of more or less similar rank. Whereas these letters usually concern themselves primarily with requests to the gods for such worldly benefactions as life, good health, etc., Papyrus Anastasi I exhibits a shift in the semantics of the discourse. After only a few sentences, it moves into the realm of the hereafter, as in the following excerpt.

May you live and prosper and be hale, my excellent brother; well equipped, strongly established, without a wish; your needs of life and of sustenance satisfied, joy and delight united in thy path. . . . May you enter in your tomb in the holy ground and mix with the noble spirits; may you be judged among them and be acquitted in Busiris before Onnofre, being established in Abydos in the presence of Shu-Onuris. . . . May you receive the offerings, may you inhale the breeze. . . . May you make your transformations as you like, like the Phoenix.   (2, 7–4, 5 [translation after Gardiner 1966 |1911|: 7–8])

The formulation of this register can be outlined as follows.

a. Subject matter of discourse: salutations for the present and future, including the future in the next world.

b. Situation type of discourse: again, polite letter exchange.
c. Participants' roles in the discourse: as above.
d. Mode of discourse: salutatory.
e. Medium of discourse: as above.

The use of second-person optative creates only partial engagement.

3.2.3. *The register of the subject matter: The multilayered register (4, 5–28, 7).*
This is the longest register of the letter. It is formulated out of many
subregisters that vary in both subject and grammar. Immediately,
from the very first sentences of the register, a sudden change can
be felt.

> Another topic: Your letter reached me in an hour of resting a while. It was
> while I was sitting beside the horse which is in my charge that your messen-
> ger found me. I rejoiced and I was glad, I was ready to reply. I entered into
> my stable to examine your letter. I found it consisted neither of praises nor
> insults. Your utterances confuse this with that, all your words are perverted,
> they are not coherent.   (4, 5–5 [translation mine])

Thus begins a lengthy debate, moving from prose to verse and back to
prose, as Hori tries to prove his colleague's incompetence, feebleness,
and ignorance. This register exhibits a wide range of subjects and a
wide selection of grammatical and syntactic variations.

The formulation of the subject-matter register can be outlined as
follows.

a. Subject matter of discourse: various subjects interlaced, including
   moral issues ("the true scribe," "wicked, yet well-off"), adminis-
   trative problems ("moving a colossus," "providing provisions for
   the army on a campaign," "calculations needed for the building
   of a ramp"), and geographical issues (the scribe, as a "Mahir"
   [warrior], has to find his way in Canaan and Syria).
b. Situation type of discourse: bitterly contentious letter exchange.
c. Participants' roles: as above.
d. Mode of discourse: polemical, ironic, sarcastic, preaching.
e. Medium of discourse: as above.

3.3. *Registers and Grammar in Papyrus Anastasi I*
The assumption that registers differ in grammar and lexis[13] is clearly
supported in our text. Subregisters also differ in grammar and lexis,
although they adhere to slightly different rules.

As we have already stated above, literary Late Egyptian constitutes
a mélange (of varying degrees) of new and old grammatical forma-

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13. "The crucial criteria of any given register are found in its grammar and lexis"
(Halliday, McIntosh, and Strevens 1964: 87–88).

tions. Late Egyptian also shows a radical change at the deictic level: a whole set of new definite, indefinite, and possessive articles surfaces in writing. Reviewing the text from this point of view, we soon note some prominent differences.

A. The register of adulation: Grammatically, it is mostly structured by Middle Egyptian forms. Only one Late Egyptian form can be detected with certainty. Lexically, the register has many affinities with Middle Egyptian, although nouns which are typical of the Late Egyptian lexicon are also present. From the deictic point of view, the register belongs to the old language (Middle Egyptian), as none of the new definite or indefinite articles appear (for Late Egyptian articles, see Erman 1979 [1933]: 50–56; Černý and Groll 1984: 40–50). The typical Middle Egyptian negation *nn* is very prominent in this part of the text (on the differences between Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasty vernacular and the problems created thereby, see Goldwasser [1990: 215–16]). In Late Egyptian new sets of negations are advanced, but none of them is present in the register of adulation.

B. The register of salutation: This register is even more archaic than the previous one. No Late Egyptian grammatical form can be defined unequivocally. The new articles are missing, and again, the Middle Egyptian negation *nn* is very conspicuous.

C. The register of the "subject matter": This main part, which we have termed the "subject matter," opens with an explicit "declaration of transition" to a different sort of literary register. The opening words of the register, "Another topic, to the matter" (*ky-dd r-nty* [4, 5]), are salient initiality markers of the nonliterary language and abruptly thrust us into a register which is much less literary in nature than those of the preceding sections. At this point in the text, the new Late Egyptian articles are dramatically introduced, appearing in almost every sentence. From this description, the nonspecialist reader might assume that this register in the text will be using the nonliterary language of the period (i.e., "written as if spoken" [Gregory 1967]), as manifested in the nonliterary texts of the period. But this assumption would, in fact, be made a little too hastily. As early as the third line, four archaic forms make their appearance: *ḥ᷄.k(wi)* (I rejoiced), *rš.k(wi)* (I was glad), *ḥr.k(wi)* (I was ready), and *ᶜk.k(wi)* (I entered [4, 7]), none of which forms part of the vernacular of the period (Goldwasser 1990: 231–32). Thus, from here on, this part of the text projects the colorful mélange of the Late Egyptian literary language. For the first time in this papyrus, other prominent vernacular forms are also represented (like the new negations *bn, bwpw*), appearing side by side with the older Middle Egyptian forms (e.g., *nn* negation). To sum up, this register exemplifies most precisely the expected mixture of forms, as presented in section 1, above: Middle Egyptian (and even older)

forms, new forms of the vernacular (nonliterary Late Egyptian), and the newly created literary Late Egyptian forms.

3.4. *Systematicity in Literary Late Egyptian*

Now we will turn to the crucial question: Are there any reasons for the creation of different textual combinations by the Ancient-Egyptian writer? Examining the factors which create the three registers reveals most obviously that the first two registers are close in subject (a) and in mode (d)—the formal discourse subjects of adulation and salutation and the polite, detached mode usher the writer into the more remote areas of language available to him within the aggregate of grammar and lexic and, probably, also within the bounds of decorum.

The sharp change occurs in the third register. Here the subject changes abruptly to various matters of everyday life, and this is accompanied by a radical change in mode. Politeness is eschewed altogether, and the text becomes polemical, challenging, and, at times, even insulting. The changes in factors (a), (b), and (d) of this register allow, or perhaps even compel, the writer to turn to more modern forms (forms that have not yet become dead metaphors) in order to be meaningful and effective. Nevertheless, within the register of the subject matter of the text, the discourse dealing with more literary subjects (e.g., "the true scribe," "wicked, yet well-off") shows a higher percentage of combinations with the old forms. Also, typical "markers" of the old language, such as the *nn* negation, exist side by side with the new forms. The more nonliterary discourse, dealing with more worldly subjects (e.g., the long geographical section), contains a higher percentage of new forms, and the "marker" *nn* of the old language is absent. Yet, it should be stressed that here, in contrast to the "real" nonliterary, "written as if spoken" texts, the old and the new forms clearly exist side by side.

We may thus conclude that it is the numerical correlation of the "high" and "low" forms within a register and the presence or absence of the prominent Middle Egyptian "marker"—the *nn* negation—that express the syntactic differences between the literary and nonliterary subregisters in the long, "subject matter" part of the text. Nevertheless, one must always bear in mind that the entire text belongs to the master register of literature.

3.5. *Concluding Remarks on the Letter of Hori*

It is the inclusion of the letter of Hori in the master register of literature that enriches the vertical-axis choices available to the writer. By 1400 B.C., Egyptian literature had already been in existence for over one thousand years, and after the Armarna period the "repertoire of forms" was dramatically enlarged. Thus, the new "Late Egyptian" language, as exhibited in Papyrus Anastasi I, provides the reader with a wealth of information, both in the horizontal plane—about the newly

introduced and lively forms of the vernacular—and in the vertical plane—about the choices of the individual writer, albeit within the requirements of decorum, choices that still left enough room for the quest of poetics.

4. The Personal Prayer

During the Eighteenth Dynasty, just before the Amarna revolution, there emerged at the periphery of the Egyptian sociocultural system a new subculture, making its appearance on the fringes of the written literature. Short texts, mostly written on ostraca or as graffiti, disclose the existence of a new genre in the Egyptian literary tradition.[14] These texts bear witness to the development of a new ideology that had been only implicitly and very partially manifested in the texts of the Egyptian literary system up to then. A direct path was now laid from a man to a god, without circumvention by the old intermediaries, such as the king or *Maat*.[15] It was the will of god that now acted directly on man (Assmann 1989a: 75–78). About two hundred years later, during the reign of Rameses III and probably due to the growing ideological crisis, the royal canonized repertoire was not only ready to accept the new genre, but to move it to the center of the repertoire (see "Dynamics," in Even-Zohar 1990: 89 et passim). A prominent sign of the legitimization given to these new ideas was their incorporation into a king's prayer. In a rare act of humility, the king placed himself in the position of "the weak," a humble human being.

Nevertheless, the canonized system does not accept such texts as a final product, but as a new productive model open to variations, changes, and fragmentation, thus demonstrating the process of dynamic (non-static) canonicity (ibid.: 19–20). The incorporation of a new genre into the older texts of the repertoire causes it to be identified as a register within a text. This process will be exemplified by one of the prayers of the king.

4.1. *The "Golden Tablet" Prayer of Rameses III*

This literary text,[16] emerging from the royal circle, is a canonized product of the Twentieth Dynasty. The fact that this specific text was chosen to be immortalized by inscription on a gold (or silver) tablet

14. See G. Posener (1975) and B. Gunn (1916). Even Assmann, who advocates early "fore-runners and foreshadowing" for these ideas, admits that they appear for the first time as a definable, separate genre only in the nonroyal texts of "private piety," during the New Kingdom (Assmann 1989a).

15. *Maat* is one of the most sophisticated and complex notions of Egyptian religion and thought. It appears as a concrete manifestation of a female goddess, the daughter of the sun god Re, and in such abstract manifestations as "world order created by the demiurge" and even "justice" (Posener, Sauneron, and Yoyotte 1962). For a recent contribution on the subject, see Assmann (1989b).

16. See K. A. Kitchen (1977) and K. C. Seele (1935).

in the temple points unequivocally to its position at the center of the repertoire. Moreover, to safeguard against looting, the inscription was copied twice on the temple wall, and, indeed, it is these less glamorous copies that saved the hymn from oblivion. The hymn is by genre a prayer to the god Amon that fulfills the modern definition of a genre as an implicit code or set of conventions obtaining between the writer and the reader. Each genre contains obligatory elements that create the genre's "vraisemblance" (see Culler 1975: 145–48). Here the genre will require a worshiper and a god, a certain degree of humility, and a certain range of subjects.

Upon careful examination of the "golden tablet" prayer, we soon note two prominent registers. The first contains subjects of a mostly mythological/theological order, well known from earlier texts.[17]

> —Great art thou as Lord of the Gods,
> As the Ram mysterious of faces and great of renown;
> Whose name has been hidden and his image concealed. . . .[18]
> Thou givest light to every eye that was in darkness;
> Thy complexion is that of the sunlight. . . .
> All kinds of precious stones are mingled in thy frame;
> Thy body is breath to every nose.
> One breatheth from thee to live.
> The taste of thee is the Nile.
> Thou are anointed with radiance. . . .
> One goeth and cometh upon thee in thy form of Geb.[19]
>
> . . . .
> The God came forth from thy mouth, and mankind from
>   thy eye.[20]
> . . . Thou madest time, and thou establishedst birth;
> Fate and fortune rest on thy decree.
> There is no god that is like unto thee,
> The one, who made everything that existeth.
>   (Kitchen 1977: 221–22)

The language of the text here is characteristic of this kind of religious register, that is, basically dependent on the systems of Middle Egyptian *langue* but with subtle intrusions from later phases.[21] In the

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17. For the earlier texts, see Assmann (1983: 170ff.). In translating the "golden tablet" hymn, we mainly followed Seele's (1935) translation, with slight changes. A radical departure from the published translation would necessitate a detailed linguistic discussion that should be reserved for an Egyptological publication.

18. These are puns on the name of Amon.

19. The original male divinity and thus the father of all (see Hornung 1982a: 66 et passim).

20. A probable homophony of the words "men" and "tears" gave way to etiological legends (see Seele 1935: 237 n. 28; Hornung 1982b; Wilson 1969: 11 n. 6).

21. For example, *pr.sn*, which is obviously a descendent of either an emphatic *pr.n.f*

first part of the "golden tablet" prayer, indexical features of the vernacular, such as the Ramesside articles, are almost entirely absent. The negation is the old Middle Egyptian negation *n*. Suddenly, with the following lines, a rather conspicuous change can be perceived:

> . . . I know thy form,
> I am persuaded that you art divine beyond any god.
> I have found the benefits of him that walks on thy way.
> He that seeth thy court hath health and life. . . .
> Everyone that cometh to thy city, he [shineth],
> Thou makest him to say: "How pleasant indeed is the lot of whom
>   thou hast touched!" . . .
> When he sleepeth, thou art his keeper.
> He that says "My Father" to thee, he is Lord of the Nine Bows;[22]
> . . . Everyone that seeketh refuge in thy presence, he shall not
>   perish, but his throne abideth in peace.
> Everyone that exalteth thy name, thou art his shepherd;
> Thou makest him to be obedient and his heart is joyful.
>   (Ibid.: 222–23)

In this last part, the text includes many Ramesside articles, and we also encounter typical "colloquial" grammatical forms.[23] The reason for this change most probably lies in the transition from one register to another, that is, from the mythological/theological register to the sphere of personal religion. This part of the text focuses on the god/man relationship, without mentioning any other gods or cosmological affinities. Thus, not only is the grammar changed, but the lexis as well. Many of the lexical items enumerated by H. Brunner (1982: 955) as typical of the sphere of personal religion are found in this part of the text, such as *mtn.k* (your way [of life]), *p3-m33* (the one who sees), *p3-dmi.k* (the one you have touched), *p3-hn* (the one who relies), *p3-dm rn.k* (the one who pronounces your [the god's] name), *di.k sw hr mw* (you put him on water), and so on.

We thus find that the change in register fully conforms to M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan's recent definition of a register as

> a configuration of meanings that are typically associated with a particular situational configuration of field, mode and tenor. But since it is a configuration of meanings, a register must also include the expressions, the lexico-grammatical and phonetical features that accompany or REALIZE these meanings.   (Halliday and Hasan 1989 [1985]: 38–39)

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or *prr.f*; the similar formula in pBoulaq 17 shows a *prr.n.f* [*sic*] (Möller 1961 [1927]: 34; VI, 4).
22. An Egyptian term for "the nations of the world," or the like.
23. The first present, *tw.k [hr] rs.f tw.k [m] mniw.f tw.k [hr] swd3.f*, exhibits the "omission of preposition" which is typical of the nonliterary language of the period (see Groll 1982: 13).

Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that even if it did contain some prominent forms of the vernacular, the personal prayer was still part of literary discourse. This would allow the use of the Middle Egyptian *nn* negation and words like *ḥnr-* ("would that"), which were usually confined, during the Twentieth Dynasty, to the literary vocabulary.

In contrast to nonroyal private-piety texts, this text incorporates subjects that could only have concerned the king: that is, the submission of Egypt's enemies and the consolidation of the throne.

5. Some Final Remarks

In literary Late Egyptian, a variety of choices was available to the writer within any single syntactic and pragmatic order. The writer's choice was governed, on the one hand, by the rules of the canonized aggregates and, on the other hand, by his own poetic preferences. Nevertheless, during the Twentieth Dynasty, the canonized aggregate was still attentive to the changing socio-ideological equilibrium in Egyptian society, and the repertoire of the period can be securely defined as an "innovatory" repertoire.

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