MULTILINGUALISM IN ANCIENT CONTEXTS

Perspectives from
Ancient Near Eastern
and Early Christian
Contexts

EDITORS

Louis C. Jonker
Angelika Berlejung
Izak Cornelius

5

ISIS GIVES LIFE! Hieroglyphic Inscriptions on Egyptian Amulets Found in Iron Age Southern Levant

Laura Gonnermann
Leipzig

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Recently an exhibition was opened in Jerusalem in which the hieroglyphs of the ancient Egyptians were compared with emoticons.¹ The similarities of some emoticons with hieroglyphic signs are striking. The hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt, like postmodern emoticons, also have this pictorial character, but their value is not limited to this. They can be phonograms, ideograms, or logograms (determinative). In the hieroglyphs of the Egyptians, these linguistic characteristics are combined in a particularly intensive way due to the pictorial materiality of the signs.² The arbitrariness between sign and signified, as it forms the basis of semiotic theories, is suspended in hieroglyphics.³ The prominent materiality of the signs makes the hieroglyphs appear especially effective in foreign-language contexts. This hypothesis will be pursued in the following by questioning the premises of postmodern linguistic multilingualism research on a special group of objects, namely amulets. The Egyptian amulets found in the southern Levant, that is, Israel/Palestine, between the Late Bronze Age until the Hellenistic-Roman period (1550 BCE–132 CE),⁴ are inscribed with hieroglyphics. The special nature of this study is the observation of a small group of objects such as the amulets in contrast to the investigations of bi- or multilingual papyri or monumental artefacts.

5.2 POSTMODERN LINGUISTICS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

“Multilingualism is a powerful fact of life around the world, a circumstance arising, at the simplest level, from need to communicate across speech communities.”⁵ Bilingualism and, as a special case, multilingualism is defined as the use of two or more languages by an individual (or a group of individuals) in daily contexts.⁶ As it is difficult to differentiate between bi- and multilingualism, Langslow suggests: “On this account, bilingualism and diglossia are two points on a single scale running

- 1 Exhibition Israel Museum, Jerusalem: Emoglyphs. Picture-Writing from Hieroglyphs to the Emoji.
- 2 Cf. Jan Assmann, “Ancient Egypt and the Materiality of the Sign”, in *Materialities of Communication*, eds. Hans U. Gumbrecht & K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 15-31.
- 3 Aleida Assmann shows how the distinction between thing and sign has shaped Western philosophy and how there has always been a desire to soften this difference. See Aleida Assmann, “Voraussetzungen der Hieroglyphen-Faszination”, in *Hieroglyphen. Stationen einer anderen abendländischen Grammatologie. Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation VIII*, eds. Aleida Assmann & Jan Assmann (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2003), 261-80.
- 4 Based on the New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land.
- 5 John Edwards, *Multilingualism* (London: Taylor & Francis 1994), 1.
- 6 Jost Gippert, “Bilingualismus”, in *Metzler Lexikon Sprache*, eds. Helmut Glück & Michael Rödel (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2016), 104-105, here 104.

from stylistic variation through diglossia to multilingualism.”⁷ Langslow starts with stylistic variations at one end of the scale, as they also serve illustration in monolingual contexts, and continues the scale via diglossia to multilingualism. The advantage of such an arrangement is that the supposedly sharp differences between the concepts disappear and the phenomenon of language change can emerge. This takes into account that there are different degrees of adoption in the contact of languages, starting with the transfer of individual linguistic elements up to complex linguistic patterns.⁸ As a special case, code-switching ranges from replacing single words to whole parts of sentences, and is mainly observed in multilingual societies.⁹ This observation will be of importance in the course of this chapter.

Furthermore, linguists distinguish between sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic code switching. Sociolinguistic code switching is either situational, with the reasons for switching being different people or locations; or conversational, when dealing with metalinguistic comments, quoting or expressing differences with a language.¹⁰ Although code-switching is the result of complex linguistic methodologies, the observed distinction between the different types of code switching can be helpful in the following discussion.

In addition to the microstructural mechanisms of language change, the macrostructural conditions for language contact are also noteworthy, as they provide the basis and explanatory models for language contact. The field of Linguistics distinguishes between monolingual and bi- or multilingual language modes in groups or societies.¹¹ In a monolingual language mode, a single language is used for communication. In contrast, in a bilingual language mode there are two languages for communication and switching between them does not cause irritation. In principle, a distinction can be made between individual, territorial, and institutional multilingualism.¹² Individual multilingualism is limited to individuals within a group or society, territorial multilingualism refers to certain multilingual areas, such as modern Switzerland, and in the case of institutional multilingualism, all languages also permeate institutions and administration.

7 David R. Langslow, “Approaching Bilingualism in Corpus Languages”, in *Bilingualism in Ancient Society. Language Contact and the Written Text*, eds. James N. Adams, Mark Janse & Simon Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 23-51, here 26.

8 This process is known as transference: “Transference is employed for the process of bringing over any item, feature or rules from one language to another, and for the results of this process. Any instance of transference is a transfer”. See Michael Clyne, *Community Languages. The Australian Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 160.

9 Claudia M. Riehl, *Sprachkontaktforschung. Eine Einführung* (Tübingen: Narr Verlag, 2014), 24.

10 Ibid., 25-28.

11 Ibid., 32.

12 Ibid., 63.

A multilingual situation emerges in different settings and may be caused by “migratory movements, migration, but also conquests”, although economic and cultural exchanges are also conceivable.¹³ In bi- or multilingual contexts languages can die. The conditions are difficult to predict but can be related to the power and prestige of one language. The preservation of a language is favoured when it is anchored in a wider social context such as religion. Thus, the choice of a particular language is always in relation to a desired identity: “Language choice, for example, is often bound up with the identity which a person is seeking to project on a particular occasion, and ‘identity’ will come up from time to time [...]”¹⁴

Language contact, language change, and language choice are thus not merely linguistic phenomena, but at the same time sociological ones that reflect social and cultural structures. All these observations have been derived from the survey of language participants and relate to the situation of actively spoken languages. The situation in the historical sciences is fundamentally different. Here, language is understood as an umbrella term for spoken as well as written language. Therefore, multilingualism in historic contexts also means multiliteracy.

Active language participants no longer exist so that only texts from an extremely limited corpus can be accessed. The challenge of corpus texts is on the one hand, the coincidence of their transmission, and on the other hand, a lack of knowledge about ancient writing culture, and a strong preference for some genres – especially religious texts.

The coincidence of transmission appears due to the writing material and the climatic conditions in the Levant. Very few written papyri from the ancient southern Levant are known today, such as the scrolls found in the Qumran caves, whereas the total number was probably much higher. Another challenge is the limited knowledge of the ancient writing culture. Some texts from Egypt and Mesopotamia on the scribal education, such as exercises and curricula,¹⁵ are preserved. Scribal exercises indicate the locations of education in private houses, temples and palaces.¹⁶ Certainly, only a

13 Riehl, *Sprachkontaktforschung*, 185.

14 James N. Adams & Simon Swain, “Introduction”, in *Bilingualism in Ancient Society. Language Contact and the Written Text*, eds. James N. Adams, Mark Janse & Simon Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1-22, here 2.

15 The Egyptian exercise book during the New Kingdom was *Kemit*. The Mesopotamian Curriculum is not as explicit, but there were numerous different texts and genres available for practising (Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum & Jochem Kahl, *Erste Philologie. Archäologie einer Disziplin vom Tigris bis zum Nil* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018], 59-66).

16 Many of these places connected to scribal education were found in Mesopotamia (e.g., “House F” in Nippur, Inanna-temple in Nippur, Nabu-scha-hare-temple in Babylon, Sin-kaschid-palace in Uruk).

small elite of society was trained as scribes; therefore, the texts do not reflect everyday communication.¹⁷

A kind of first education served to train scribes for economic contexts, whereas a second course enabled students to learn and write wisdom texts, myths, or religious texts.¹⁸ During the educational process, memorisation played an essential role. This led to a very one-sided transmission of textual genres, which is further intensified by the coincidence of transmission.¹⁹

Ancient oriental philology is lacking metalinguistic discourses, comparable to those of classical Greek philosophers from Aristotle onwards.²⁰ Nevertheless, Cancik-Kirschbaum proves that, in Egypt and Mesopotamia, writing activities were accompanied by philology since the complex writing systems presuppose a certain degree of metalinguistic consideration.²¹ In addition to these philological considerations, linguistics in Egypt and Mesopotamia were also negotiated mythologically.²²

Interestingly, bi- or multilingualism is under discussion in classical philology, for Latin and Greek contexts, but theoretical works on this topic in Ancient Orient research have only come into focus in recent years.²³ Most of the research focuses on bi- or multilingual texts as the result of bi- or multilingual societies – with all the difficulties described above. However, in the following, this chapter will discuss epigraphic texts in Old Egyptian language and script found in the southern Levant, where Semitic languages were spoken. Due to this setting, the existence of foreign language and script – as religious/magic objects – in a country other than the country of origin, needs to be explained.

17 There are only a few instances where one can investigate whether basically trained scribes wrote their thoughts unfiltered: the drawings and writings in Kuntillet 'Ağrūd, the graffiti at Deir el-Medine (Egypt), and scribal exercises.

18 Cancik-Kirschbaum & Kahl, *Erste Philologie*, 61.

19 While papyrus is preserved in Egypt due to the dry climatic conditions, this writing material decomposes in the southern Levant due to the high humidity.

20 Aristotle developed terms for grammar concepts (*Ars Poetica* and *De interpretatione*), but also Homer and Heraklit; Democritus and the Sophists had debates about the connection between object and word. Platon disconnected object and word in his *Kratylos*.

21 Cancik-Kirschbaum & Kahl, *Erste Philologie*, 46.

22 In Egypt and Mesopotamia, scribal goddesses guaranteed the ongoing scribal activities (Egypt: Thot and Seschat; Mesopotamia: sum: Nisaba; akk: Nabu). Also, some myths existed about the invention of script (Enmerkara and the lord of Aratta, vv. 500-506).

23 Ulrich Hübner & Herbert Niehr, eds., *Sprachen in Palästina im 2. und 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017); David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart. Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Cancik-Kirschbaum & Kahl, *Erste Philologie*.

To what extent can knowledge of multilingualism in the Iron Age southern Levant be demonstrated in epigraphic texts, that is, outside the large religious text corpus of the Old Testament? Can statements about the intention and use of the different languages be made on the basis of the archaeological details? Did the people of the ancient southern Levant have a feeling for the multilingual cluster they lived in?

5.3 EGYPTIAN AMULETS IN THE SOUTHERN LEVANT

When dealing with multilingualism, longer (literary) texts are mostly considered. However, the many focus of this contribution lies on the investigation of small artefacts with inscriptions.

The object amulets discussed in this chapter originate from Egypt, dating mostly from the Iron Age (1200–586 BCE),²⁴ and were found in Israel/Palestine.

These amulets can be distinguished from scarabs, scaraboids, conoids or palleys by a pendant device for carrying on chains or robes, and a standing base. The objects are small (approximately 5–40 mm); they are sculptural and raise up from the base.²⁵

Besides these external features, Othmar Keel and Claudia Müller-Winkler already pointed out the necessity of a definition of amulets in terms of their effectiveness:

*Das ägyptische Amulett ist ein Objekt, das den Träger durch seine magische Kraft schützen und ihn so gesund und unversehrt erhalten soll.*²⁶

The Egyptian amulet is an object which is supposed to protect the wearer by its magic strength and to keep him healthy and unharmed.

(transl. author)

The object amulets treated here are designed anthropomorphically, theomorphically, or object-like. In their iconography they depict deities from Egypt, hieroglyphics, or objects of religious life. The amulets represent Egyptian religiosity in a foreign land, in Israel/Palestine, where people served their own goddesses.

Besides those crafted from precious stones or soapstone (steatite, enstatite), amulets predominantly consist of composite material from sand or quartz which is called

24 Chronology is based on the ongoing discussion in New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land (1993).

25 Othmar Keel, *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel. Von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit* (Fribourg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 66.

26 Claudia Müller-Winkler, *Die ägyptischen Objekt-Amulette. Mit Publikation der Sammlung des Biblischen Instituts der Universität Freiburg Schweiz ehemals Sammlung Fouad S. Matouk* (Fribourg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 20.

anachronistically ‘faience’, ‘Egyptian faience’ or ‘Egyptian blue’.²⁷ The raw material together with water can be molded out by hand or in ceramic molds. The molded object could be dried and fired by a high temperature (~800°C). It is assumed that inscriptions are applied before complete firing, as the mass is already well preformed in this state and yet soft enough for the inscription to be carved. The last step of the fabrication is the glazing in a calcite powder during or before firing.²⁸

This observation of the materiality culminates in the question where the amulets were produced. Usually, it is assumed that the Egyptian amulets found in the southern Levant were produced in Egypt, even more concretely in Qantir in the Nile delta. In two volumes, Christian Herrmann presents 1383 (1985) and another 377 (2007) molds for amulets, scarabs, and scaraboids.²⁹

The described production process suggests the thesis of production, including firing, glazing, and inscribing at one location. Since numerous molds have been found in Qantir and only four pieces found in Israel/Palestine (Gezer, *Tell el-ʿAḡul*, Bet-Shean, Tel Rehov) are considered to be molds,³⁰ it is very likely that Qantir in the Nile Delta has been a significant production site of faience objects. Additionally, the strong iconographic similarities between amulets from Egypt and those from the southern Levant hint at a production of all these amulets at Qantir.³¹ This is further supported by the good economic relations between the delta and the southern Levant, both by land and by sea,³² making this scenario more plausible.

Out of approximately 3 000 Egyptian amulets found in Israel/Palestine, about 70 amulets are inscribed with hieroglyphic signs on the back or on the base. The majority of the amulets were unearthed during regular excavations in Israel/Palestine.³³ Although

27 Keel, *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette*, 149.

28 Ibid.

29 Cf. Christian Herrmann, *Formen für ägyptische Fayencen: Katalog der Sammlung des Biblischen Instituts der Universität Freiburg Schweiz und einer Privatsammlung* (Fribourg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985); Christian Herrmann, *Formen für ägyptische Fayencen aus Qantir Band II: Katalog der Sammlung des Franciscan Biblical Museum, Jerusalem und zweier Privatsammlungen* (Fribourg/Göttingen: Academic Press Fribourg/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

30 These four pieces were mostly found during early 20th-century excavations and they are highly under debate. Even if they were molds for amulets, four molds are not enough evidence for extensive amulet production in Israel/Palestine.

31 Christian Herrmann, *Ägyptische Amulette aus Palästina/Israel. Mit einem Ausblick auf ihre Rezeption durch das Alte Testament* (Fribourg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 36.

32 Bernd U. Schipper, *Israel und Ägypten in der Königszeit. Die kulturellen Kontakte von Salomo bis zum Fall Jerusalems* (Fribourg / Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 82.

33 Only five inscribed amulets have an unknown provenance.

amulets were found in the whole area, most of the inscribed Egyptian amulets came from the coast or the southern regions and are mostly dated during Iron Age II.³⁴

Altogether it can be observed that the inscribed Egyptian amulets have their highest distribution in the Iron Age II. Besides some very few inscribed Late Bronze Age Egyptian object amulets from the southern Levant, the number then increases significantly in the Iron Age II.

In the first place this seems to be unusual since the direct Egyptian presence in the southern Levant collapsed after the Late Bronze Age, at the latest during the reign of Ramses IV.³⁵ However, a big internal conflict following the New Kingdom in Egypt itself introduced the Third Intermediate period. The internal conflicts resulted in almost the complete loss of foreign policy activities, including in the southern Levant, during the reigns of the last Ramesside kings of the 20th dynasty (high: 1200–1085; low: 1186–1070 BCE) and the first Libyan kings of the 21st dynasty (1085–935 BCE).³⁶ Only after the stabilisation of Libyan reign in Egypt in the 21st dynasty did they become active again with reference to foreign policy in the 22nd dynasty (935–730 BCE) under pharaoh Shishaq I.³⁷ The military campaign of pharaoh Shishaq I to the southern Levant³⁸ marks the starting point of a short recovery of the Egyptian kingdom lasting at least 100 years from Shishaq I until Takelot I.³⁹ The second phase of the 22nd/23rd dynasties is again marked by raising internal conflicts until the beginning of the 25th Cushite dynasty.⁴⁰

34 Christian Herrmann, *Ägyptische Amulette aus Palästina/Israel Band IV: Von der Spätbronzezeit IIB bis in römische Zeit* (Fribourg/Göttingen: Academic Press Fribourg/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 486.

35 The discussion raises questions about the consequences of the “Seevölkerschlacht” of Ramses III. Was there an ongoing Egyptian dominance after this battle whereby Ramses IV came to reign? Or, did the battle cause massive problems leading to a collapse of Egyptian dominance over the southern Levant? (see, Manfred Bietak, “The Sea Peoples and the End of the Egyptian Administration in Canaan”, in *Biblical Archaeology today – Proceedings of the Second International Congress on Biblical Archaeology*, eds. Avraham Biran, Joseph Aviram & Alan Paris-Shadur [Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993]: 292-306)

36 Schipper, *Israel und Ägypten in der Königszeit*, 15.

37 The classic position attributes the Palestine campaign described in the OT (1 Kgs 9:16), on one fragmentary relief from Tanis and by several destruction layers in Israel/Palestine, to pharaoh Siamun of the 21st dynasty (first, Jacob Goldwasser, “The Campaign of Siamun in Palestine”, *BIPES* 14 [1948-49]: 82-84 [Hebrew]). In contrast, Schipper suggested pharaoh Shishaq I to be the pharaoh of the campaign in the southern Levant, supported by a list of conquered cities in Israel/Palestine during this campaign (Schipper, *Israel und Ägypten in der Königszeit*, 23).

38 A fragment of a stele of Shishaq I was found during the excavations of the Chicago Oriental Institute in 1926 at Megiddo.

39 Schipper, *Israel und Ägypten in der Königszeit*, 118.

40 Ibid., 139.

These highly conflictive political conditions in Egypt allowed powerful foreign policy activities only for the first half of the 22nd dynasty. The blossoming of the amulet production at the time in the Delta thus seems plausible. The fact that amulets from after the 8th century BCE were found in large numbers at the coast can be explained by the continuous sea trade of the Phoenicians who probably were largely unaffected by the internal political circumstances in Egypt.

All these observations show that Egyptian amulets in Israel/Palestine are in most cases not a relict of Late Bronze Age hegemonial dominance, but a special economic import of Egypt religiosity to the local people in the southern Levant. Despite the weak Egyptian power, the amulets were thought to be artificial, magical, and powerful and were enormously popular.

5.4 EGYPTIAN AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE SOUTHERN LEVANT

The Egyptian objects have already been described as religious objects of another religious system. Their ways of transmission have been discussed above. In the following, their linguistic character will be paramount in order to present the foreignness of the Egyptian language to Levantine people. This will lead to a better understanding of the southern Levant as a multilingual region in the ancient Near East.

Linguistically, Old-Egyptian is an Afro-Asian language (formerly known as hamito-semitic) whose area of distribution stretches from north Africa to western Asia and includes about 200 modern and numerous extinct languages.⁴¹ In addition to Egyptian as a separate language branch, the Afro-Asian languages also include the Semitic languages, the Berber languages, Cushitic, Chadian and Omotic. The classification of Egyptian and Semitic languages into two language branches of Afro-Asian underlines the similarities and differences of both language branches. These differences are larger than those between the single languages of the Semitic branch.

The Egyptian specimens, which has been found in sources since the end of the 4th millennium BCE, are preserved in several language and script levels. The older Egyptian language levels include Old Egyptian, Middle Egyptian (sometimes called Classical Egyptian) and Late Middle Egyptian. The younger language levels are represented in Late Egyptian (13th–7th centuries BCE), Demotic and Coptic. Parallel to the complexity of the language levels, different scripts developed: the hieroglyphics and, also at an early stage, hieratic, an italic script mostly written with ink. Demotic script is also italic and even more abstract than hieratic. Coptic uses the Greek alphabet script with additions from the Demotic language.

41 Hanna Jenni, *Lehrbuch der klassisch-ägyptischen Sprache* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2010), 43.

The languages of the southern Levant belong to the language family of Semitic languages, more precisely to the west Semitic languages.⁴² In the southern region of the Levant it can be assumed that Hebrew was the dominant language in the Bronze Age at least until Iron Age I and II. Hebrew was displaced from its heartland in the southern Levant by Aramaic at the beginning at the 8th century BCE,⁴³ at least until Aramaic became the official language of the Persian Empire.⁴⁴ However, Hebrew remained, like Latin in the Middle Ages, the language of religious texts, as the texts of the Old Testament show.⁴⁵

Thus, Hebrew, and later Aramaic, were the dominant languages in the southern Levant in the 1st millennium BCE. The language and writing system of Egyptian, which is clearly different from these Semitic languages, would most likely have caused audible and visible strangeness and incomprehension. “Because of the lack of direct evidence, the feelings of the peoples of ancient Syria toward the linguistic mosaic in which they moved are not easily established.”⁴⁶

Whereas the choice of script for Hebrew is no matter of discussion, the choice of script in Egypt depended mainly on the writing material and the intention. Hieroglyphs were preferred for writing on stone as monumental inscriptions, whereas hieratic was written with ink on papyrus or ostraca, for example for economic purposes. From the New Kingdom onwards, only religious and magical texts, as well as royal texts and inscriptions, were written in hieroglyphics besides older texts which were transmitted.⁴⁷ In addition, the hieroglyphic writing develops an independence through its pictorial quality, which can be observed in the use of pseudo-hieroglyphs in the southern Levant.

The Egyptian amulets found in the southern Levant were inscribed by hieroglyphs long after the New Kingdom.⁴⁸ On the one hand, this is a result of the writing

42 The main characteristic of Semitic languages is a verbal system based on words with three radicals (so called ‘root’) determining the morphology and lexicon significant.

43 Holger Gzella, *A Cultural History of Aramaic. From the Beginnings to the Advent of Islam*, Handbook of Oriental Studies 111 (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

44 Rüdiger Bartelmus, *Einführung in das Biblische Hebräisch. Mit einem Anhang Biblisches Aramäisch* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1994), 212.

45 Most scholars agree that the formation of large parts of the Old Testament originated in the second half of the 1st millennium BCE when Hebrew was already partly displaced by Aramaic.

46 Daniel I. Block, “The role of language in ancient Israelite perceptions of national identity”, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 103 (1984): 321-40, here 322.

47 Erhart Graefe, *Mittelägyptische Grammatik für Anfänger* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1988), 2.

48 Von Lieven presents all evidence of Egyptian writing in the southern Levant in the 1st millennium (Alexandra von Lieven, “Ägyptische Sprache und Schrift im Palästina des 1. Jahrtausends v. Chr.”, in *Sprachen in Palästina im 2. und 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, eds. Ulrich Hübner & Herbert Niehr [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017], 11-26).

material (composite material or “Egyptian faience”) which could be inscribed before firing the soft clay. On the other hand, the Egyptian amulets belonged to a religious/magic/medicinal context which required hieroglyphs. This means that the Egyptian amulets are clearly marked as precious and special objects with religious/magic/medicinal purpose.

Considering the long training required to write hieroglyphics, it is very unlikely that large parts of the population have understood what the signs on the back of their amulets meant.

A look at the archaeological context should clarify who wore the amulets. What were typical situations of wearing them? Which finds were made together with the amulets?

5.5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS

If one aims to determine the archaeological context of the inscribed amulets to gain social-economic information about the wearer, one should take note that nearly one-third of all inscribed amulets were found in graves. Since multiple burials were made in one grave in the Iron Age southern Levant, large (family) graves were occupied by numerous burials. As a result, the assignment of grave goods to a single individual burial is only possible in exceptional cases. In this respect, the situation differs considerably from that in Egypt where entire find compositions can be made for individual burials.⁴⁹ However, the practice of burial in pits and caves,⁵⁰ common in the southern Levant, has the advantage of an enclosed archaeological context which can be dated if the grave goods or the architecture of the grave itself allows it.

The archaeological burial context at *Tell ed-Duwer*, the biblical Lachish, should be discussed here. During the British excavations in the 1930s numerous graves hewn into the sandstone around the Tel were uncovered. Several Egyptian amulets, some of them with inscriptions, were found in these graves. All these tombs date to the Iron Age II and have been used several times. Only the presence of numerous multiple burials indicates that large parts of the normal population were buried here.

Over the decades of the burials many finds, amongst them metal finds, have accumulated in the different graves, which shows at least little prosperity. Objects from metal were precious and they could be reused by melting. Placing them in a grave means the objects could not be used again. Besides the semi-prosperous graves, Egyptian amulets

49 Ulrike Dubiel, “Anthropomorphe Amulette in den Gräbern der Region Qau el-Kebir (Mittelägypten)”, *Altorientalistische Forschungen*, 31 (2004): 156-88.

50 Jens Kamlah, “Grab und Begräbnis in Israel/Juda. Materiale Befunde, Jenseitsvorstellungen und die Frage des Totenkultes”, in *Tod und Jenseits im Alten Israel und in seiner Umwelt*, eds. Angelika Berlejung & Bernd Janowski (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 257-98.

were also found in grave 1002 which contains a lot of burials, possibly also secondary burials.⁵¹ The few accompanying finds stand in sharp contrast to the great number of burials. The grave goods are of lower quality than those in contemporary graves.⁵² All this leads to the assumption that in grave 1002, normal people, maybe working-class people with a low budget for grave goods, were buried. However, even in grave 1002, Egyptian amulets were discovered, including one with an inscription.⁵³ This find proves that Egyptian amulets were not worn as luxury objects by the upper class, but were accessible to all social groups. It also means that, economically, it must have been possible for the broad population to acquire the amulets.

Since the amulets were dedicated to the grave, their use ended after the burial. It is therefore likely that they were given to a person for their life and the person was buried with it.⁵⁴ This observation makes it highly likely that the amulets were products of the Iron Age and not relics of the Late Bronze Age when the Egyptians had political control over the southern region. In this case, the amulets would have been provenanced in graves of the Iron Age I already. However, the number of finds of Egyptian amulet of the Iron Age II shows a steep increase. According to these observations, the Egyptian amulets are objects which were given to normal people in their graves and thus were withdrawn from the cycle of passing them on within the family. The amulets must therefore have been rather inexpensive and easy to obtain. What is known about the production of faience in the Iron Age, is that it was a raw material that was easy to produce and could be cast quickly and in mass production.⁵⁵ The amulets are small and were thus easily transportable, which makes the possibility of a flourishing trade with faience objects conceivable.

Besides the burial context, there is a prominent case where amulets were found in direct connection with their wearers. At Tel Azekah, a complex of buildings was excavated, which collapsed during a massive natural event or conquest, burying the people inside alive.

51 Olga Tufnell, *Lachish III (Tell ed-Duwer). The Iron Age* (London/New York/Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1953), 229.

52 Tufnell, *Lachish III (Tell ed-Duwer)*, 229.

53 Cf. Alan Rowe, *A Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs, Scaraboids, Seals and Amulets in the Palestine Archaeological Museum* (Le Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1936), 272, Pl. XXX:A24; Tufnell, *Lachish III (Tell ed-Duwer)*, Pl. 36:51; Herrmann, *Ägyptische Amulette aus Palästina/Israel*, No 24.

54 Angelika Berlejung, "Ein Programm fürs Leben. Theologisches Wort und anthropologischer Ort der Silberamulette von Ketef Hinnom", *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 120 (2008): 204-30, here 226.

55 Ulrike Dubiel, *Amulette, Siegel und Perlen: Studien zur Typologie und Tragesitte im Alten und Mittleren Reich* (Fribourg/Göttingen: Academic Press Fribourg/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 212.

Under the thick destruction debris, melted mudbrick and various smashed and intact ceramics and precious items were found.⁵⁶ In the immediate vicinity of two of the persons, a collection of beads and amulets was found. This tragic find proves that the persons wore amulets together with beads in their everyday life.⁵⁷ Both individuals were young (between 13-20 years) and show signs of having overcome illness and heavy labour. One individual was found next to a grinding installation, the muscles of the second, potentially female, individual show intensive use of her arms as necessary for grinding or weaving.⁵⁸ Thus, the individuals were found in a domestic context, carrying out domestic activities. Meaning they are belonging to the working society in the Late Bronze period. Even if this archaeological case dates to the Late Bronze Age where the Egyptians were directly dominant in the southern Levant and even if they didn't find any inscribed Egyptian amulets it strengthens the thesis: Egyptian amulets were worn by all parts of the society in daily life as well as in death. Additionally, the tragic case in Tel Azekah shows another socio-economic characteristic one can't observe in Iron Age burials: The individuals were very young, one was potentially female, and both were strong and working physically. These were the most vulnerable members of a society in antiquity.⁵⁹ It seems very plausible that these most vulnerable members of society received objects of protection for their daily life.⁶⁰

5.6 MAGICAL AMULETS AND HIEROGLYPHS

Amulets from Egypt were protective objects *par excellence*. In Egypt, from the Old Kingdom until the Late Period, there was a widespread knowledge of magic and medicine. Professionally trained specialists helped vulnerable and sick people using tinctures and incantations. A distinction is made between the therapeutic and prophylactic effects of certain objects, tinctures, and incantations.⁶¹ Therapeutically, drugs and incantations were used to treat illnesses already affecting the patient, whereas they served prophylactically in dangerous situations such as birth, snake bite,

56 Ido Koch, Sabine Kleiman, Manfred Oeming, Yuval Gadot & Oded Lipschits, "Amulets in Context: A view from Late Bronze Age Tel Azekah", *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 16 (2017): 9-24, here 10.

57 The excavators found three scarabs, three figurative amulets and 65 beads alongside a very young person (Locus 13/L220) and one scarab and 16 beads alongside a potentially female individual (Locus 14/L407).

58 Koch et al. "Amulets in Context", 11.

59 Ulrike Dubiel can show that the vast majority of amulets in Egypt (*Qau el-Kebir*) were found in burials of women and children (Ulrike Dubiel, "Anthropomorphe Amulette in den Gräbern der Region Qau el-Kebir (Mittelägypten)", *Altorientalische Forschungen*, 31.1 (2004): 164.

60 Berlejung, "Ein Programm fürs Leben", 226.

61 Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert, "Magie (Ägypten)", in *WiBiLex* (2006).

or diffuse dangers, operating generally apotropaically. In incantation texts from Egypt, amulets were mentioned together with drugs and incantations in healing procedures.

In a prominent 19th dynasty incantation text from Egypt, Horus invokes the female body by the help of a dwarf (most probably the Egyptian Bes) to give a fast and painless birth. The short text ends with a request of recitation:

*Rezitation viermal über einem Zwerg aus Ton; werde gelegt auf den Scheitel der Frau, die schmerzhaft gebiert.*⁶²

Recitation four times over a dwarf of clay; placed on the head of the woman giving birth painfully. (transl. author)

In the last part of an incantation, it was most customary to mention the use of figurative amulets together with other drugs and tinctures.

The many Egyptian amulets in the southern Levant give the impression that amulets were also used here in a similar medical-magical way. Due to the good conservational conditions in Egypt, the medical-magical papyri, like the well-known papyrus Ebers, have been preserved. Unfortunately, there are almost none of these medical-magical texts from the southern Levant. Thus, to explain the use of the numerous Egyptian amulets in the southern Levant, only the Egyptian texts which mostly come from the New Kingdom can be consulted. The Egyptian amulets in the southern Levant therefore functioned, like their iconographically identical relatives, in a medical-magical context. They also fulfilled an apotropaic function for their wearers or were used therapeutically in cases of illness.

It remains unclear how the hieroglyphic inscription which was incised into a few Egyptian amulets in the southern Levant, functioned.

The contents of the inscriptions on the Egyptian amulets from the southern Levant should be viewed together with the depicted figure of the amulet. The inscriptions are mostly short concise formulae. For instance, amulets of the goddess Isis, who breastfeeds her son Horus, are tripartite: an introductory formula is complemented by the naming of the goddess with her Epithet and concluded by a request or a wish. The inscriptions can be understood as a short form of an incantation, invocation, or generally as a request with the same purpose as the amulet itself. The inscriptions strengthened the apotropaic effect which the amulet anyway had.

62 Translation of the Egyptian incantation by Fischer-Elfert: Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert, *Altägyptische Zaubersprüche* (Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, 2005), 73.

An amulet with an inscription would therefore not only have been somewhat more expensive, but possibly also have been praised as more effective.

Dealing with multilingualism, the question arises to what extent the inscriptions on the amulets were ordered or requested specifically, and if at all, were read and understood. The hieroglyphs in their pictorial appearance are attributed a magical competence in Egypt, and this would certainly have been similar in the Levant. In order to make hieroglyphs ineffective, the legs, wings, or arms of the animals were not drawn because the depicted animal hieroglyphs were unable to fly or walk without them and could not become magically active on their own.⁶³ The magical connotation and the pictorial nature of the hieroglyphs make them particularly suitable for use on magical objects and for writing magical texts. The pictoriality and magical connotation are aspects that are immediately apparent and accessible to people who are unable to read, regardless of their understanding of the respective content.

If it is to be assumed that, in the southern Levant, there was no awareness and no added value of being able to read and write hieroglyphics – in contrast to cuneiform writing or the regional alphabet scripts, and that no broad literacy about hieroglyphics can thus be assumed – then the inscriptions on the amulets were the first and perhaps only contact of the wearers with another language and script. The craftsman definitely knew the meaning of the inscription. The merchant and the customer might have known it. In this regard, Egyptian amulets are different to other textual amulets⁶⁴ from the southern Levant which mostly consist of an inscribed piece of papyrus included in a kind of capsule. In this case, no one except the craftsman had known the exact spelling or wording written down. The wearer of an Egyptian amulet could look at the hieroglyphics in their pictorial quality and could feel the object and the inscription carved into it.

However, the inscribed amulets nevertheless show that the hieroglyphs were the writing system of choice,⁶⁵ since they possessed the magical ambiguity of sign and image and were therefore particularly suitable. The choice of the writing system is therefore not only determined by the writing system of the country of production,

63 This can be observed on a ‘human-headed heart scarab of Hatshepsut’ (13th dynasty) from the Collection of David and Cindy Sofer, London.

64 Angelika Berlejung, “Kleine Schriften mit großer Wirkung. Zum Gebrauch von Textamuletten in der Antike”, in *Schriftträger – Textträger. Zur materialen Präsenz des Geschriebenen in frühen Gesellschaften*, eds. Annette Kehnel & Diamantis Panagiotopoulos (Berlin/München/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 103-26, here 118.

65 It is remarkable that, so far, no amulets with Hebrew inscriptions from the time and only very few with Phoenician inscriptions were found.

but it also served the content well; the ambiguous, magic hieroglyphics were therefore especially suitable for medical-magical texts.⁶⁶

The society of the ancient southern Levant can be described as multilingual, and following this observation, the conscious use of hieroglyphs as writing system of Egypt on magical-medicinal amulets can be called sociolinguistic situational code-switching. The two codes are the common west Semitic language of the southern Levant and the foreign Egyptian language, represented in this case by the writing in hieroglyphs. The reason for the switching is due to the higher efficacy attributed to hieroglyphs in magical matters. Additionally, this fits the observation of other magical Semitic incantation texts using a mixture of languages, as can be seen in the Aslan Taş incantations and the London Medical Papyrus (BM 10059). The mixture of languages serves the “international flavor of magical texts in later periods”.⁶⁷ It points out that “the genre ‘amulet’ has an enormous integrative potential regarding internationality, intercultural and interreligious aspects”.⁶⁸

“Language choice, for example, is often bound up with the identity which a person is seeking to project on a particular occasion [...]”.⁶⁹ In light of this statement, one could say that in the wearing of an amulet, the individual trusted in the protective power of the Egyptian goddesses and the power of signs.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The Egyptian amulets found in the southern Levant depict small deities from the Egyptian pantheon. As the analysis proves, they were worn by people from all social classes and do not represent a luxury product during the Iron Age II period. The archaeological context shows that the amulets were worn in everyday life and were added to the tomb, thus accompanying the respective person in his or her life cycle.⁷⁰ On account of the case of Tel Azekah and the similarities to Egypt, it can also be

66 Selz describes this openness in the interpretation of single signs by the foreign-language sign user for the Akkadian literature (Gebhard J. Selz, “Scriptura Franca? Zur Rolle einer ideographisch basierten Schrift in einer mehrsprachigen Gesellschaft”, in *Mehrsprachigkeit. Vom Alten Orient bis zum Esperanto*, eds. Sebastian Fink, Martin Lang & Manfred Schretter [Münster: Zaphon, 2018], 113-30).

67 Richard Steiner, “Northwest Semitic Incantations in an Egyptian Medical Papyrus of the Fourteenth Century B.C.E.”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 51 (1992): 191-200, here 200.

68 Angelika Berlejung, “There is nothing better than more! Texts and Images on Amulet 1 from Arslan Tash”, *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*, 36/1 (2010): 1-42, here 7.

69 Adams & Swain, “Introduction”, 2.

70 Besides the variety of archaeological contexts proving the existence of amulets in graves of the southern Levant in Iron Age II, domestic contexts are even more rare. Therefore, the author presents a case here from Late Bronze Tel Azekah.

assumed that mainly women and children wore them in the southern Levant. These were the most vulnerable members of ancient society.

Amulets exerted magical and medicinal power. They were given prophylactically and therapeutically together with incantations and drugs. It is most probable that amulets in the southern Levant also served this function. Their popularity suggests that they were filling in a gap in the magical-medicinal, and therefore religious, repertoire of the southern Levant.

The popularity of Egyptian amulets after the period of imperial domination over the southern Levant seems at first glance highly unlikely. Against this backdrop Egyptian amulets have to be understood more as cultural mediators and less as an enforced cultural obligation. Inscribed amulets are quite common during the Iron Age II A–B periods (10th–7th centuries BCE). This is a period where the interconnections between Egypt and the southern Levant were characterised mainly by trade with the Libyan 21st/22nd dynasty, and not by imperial domination like during the Late Bronze period. In any case, it is more likely to consider the inscribed amulets to be products of cultural exchange in the Iron Age II than relics of the Late Bronze imperial encounter. This is strengthened by the life circle of a single amulet and its appearance in burial contexts.

In addition to the magical-medicinal power of the amulets, the inscriptions double this effect due to their incantational performance. Hieroglyphs were easily accessible due to their pictorial character, but their magical usage made them mysterious. The numerous occurrences of the most common hieroglyphs *nh* or *nfr ntr* show that even illiterate people had a basic understanding of these signs.

In ancient times, multilingualism manifests itself through multiliteracy based on a multicultural sphere. Even if the wearer of the amulet could not read the inscriptions and therefore did not know their exact meanings, he or she got in contact with them. He or she developed an understanding of the foreignness and therefore a basic understanding of a multiliterate world.

“Everyone is bilingual.”⁷¹ This quote from John Edwards certainly also fits the ancient world. It suggests that everyone knows at least one pair of words of a foreign language – even if these are only the most common hieroglyphics.

One will never know whether the content of the inscription was explained to the wearer. If so, the wearer would know the content and would feel the incisions of the inscription, the hieroglyphs. Every wearer of the amulet would interpret the meaning

71 Edwards, *Multilingualism*, 55.

of the inscription in his or her own language, based on the pictorial appearance of the hieroglyphs, the haptic event and the potential meaning. Hence, the wearer would translate the language in its graphical appearance as hieroglyphs into his or her own language and cultural context. This would at least be an act in a multicultural context – maybe even a multilingual context. Or, to put it like J.R. Edwards: “Multiculturalism is an icon for some, an illusion for others. Also, language – particularly in its symbolic roles, as well as in those communicative ones that link past to present, that bear culture across generations – is in many instances the centerpiece of the multicultural thrust.”⁷²

72 John R. Edwards, “Multiculturalism and Language”, in *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics*, ed. Keith Brown (Oxford: Elsevier, 2006), 369–71, here 369.