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The Phonetic Value of Gardiner's Sign U 23 (𓌙) in Earlier Egyptian

The article examines the reading of the sign 𓌙 in the Old and Middle Kingdom and concludes that the phonetic value must be mr and not mḥr. Four pieces of evidence are used to support this conclusion. The first three come from onomastics and show the interchangeability of 𓌙 with 𓄡𓅱, 𓈖, and 𓄿. The fourth piece of evidence is a prefixed form of the verb 𓌙𓄡𓅱𓂝 from the Pyramid Texts, which proves that the verb consists of two radicals, meaning that it must be mr and not mḥr.

Hieroglyph U 23 (𓌙) | Phonetic Value mr | Onomastics | Pyramid Texts | Old Kingdom | Middle Kingdom

Cet article examine la lecture du signe 𓌙 pendant l'Ancien et le Moyen Empire et conclut que sa valeur phonétique doit être mr et non mḥr. Quatre éléments de preuve sont utilisés pour étayer cette conclusion. Les trois premiers proviennent de l'onomastique et montrent l'interchangeabilité de 𓌙 avec 𓄡𓅱, 𓈖 et 𓄿. Le quatrième élément de preuve est une forme préfixée du verbe 𓌙𓄡𓅱𓂝 tirée des Textes des Pyramides, qui prouve que le verbe se compose de deux radicaux, ce qui signifie qu'il doit s'agir de mr et non de mḥr.

Hiéroglyphe U 23 (𓌙) | Valeur phonétique mr | Onomastique | Textes des Pyramides | Ancien Empire | Moyen Empire

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The sign possesses two distinct phonetic values. While the reading ꜣb is not subject to debate, the second phonetic value has been the subject of scientific discourse for some time. The prevailing perspective, as articulated by Gardiner (1957: 518), is that the phonetic value is mr. Quack (2003) posited that an alternative reading, mḥr, should be employed. He cites late spellings with ḥ and a pun from the Pyramid Texts. This assertion is countered by the works of Regulski (2010: 196) and Schweitzer (2011). Evidence from the Early Dynastic Period is cited, and it is asserted that this evidence can only be explained by the phonetic value mr. This question has been addressed in another article by Quack (2022). In addition, he presents a series of arguments that are intended to support his hypothesis. He also endeavors to invalidate the evidence cited by Regulski and Schweitzer. A thorough review of this article was conducted by Fante (2023). She has demonstrated with a high degree of conviction that the evidence from the Early Dynastic Period unequivocally validates the phonetic value mr. Moreover, she has substantiated that Quack's interpretations of the Early Dynastic Period evidence are not valid, and that all the evidence from the Old and Middle Kingdom that Quack lists for mḥr, including the attempt of Collombert (2010) equating the different terms for "pyramid"  and ,[1] is untenable. Additionally, she proposes an explanatory model for the late spellings with ḥ. The sign has undergone a process of reinterpretation, a phenomenon that has also been observed in or .[2] This finding serves to substantiate the phonetic value of mr as valid for the duration of the Early Dynastic Period. However, it is noteworthy that the sign could be interpreted as mḥr during the first millennium. This contribution poses the following question: what was the phonetic value in the Old and Middle Kingdom? It offers four indications that lend support to mr.

1. As Brovarski (2009) asserts, two discrete lexemes are present.

2.  was interpreted as , so that the original ḫm, "sanctuary," became sḫm, "sanctuary."  resembles a  in hieratic. This is why there are spellings such as for the city of Ḫmn.w, even though the phoneme s does not exist in the word. For these cases and others, see Fante (2023).

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1. In 1943 Hermann Junker published the mastaba of K3-ḥ(w)j=f. On the west wall there are figures with offerings.[3] The fourth person has the following inscription: . As Junker already suspected, the name  is present. Ranke (1935: 162.9) lists this name as mrw jdw, thus interpreting a name consisting of two elements. The second element contains the word jd.w, which can be used as epiclesis[4] in Old Kingdom names. Scheele-Schweitzer (2014) knows the following examples: Jnị̈-jtj=f-jd.w #328, Mr.w-jd.w #1282, Ḥtp-Ptḥ-jd.w #2567, Ḥtp-Sbk-jd.w #2609.

There is additional evidence of this name in the Old Kingdom. On the eastern wall of the mastaba of Uhemka[5] it is written: . Ranke (1935: 421.20) still understood the first bird hieroglyph as . However, Kayser's (1964: 68) reading of in his publication of the Mastaba was concurred with by Scheele-Schweitzer (2014: #1273). The photographic evidence presented herein serves to reinforce the accuracy of Kayser's interpretation.[6]

The two occurrences of the name are written differently, once with and once without . This results in the correspondence  = , which can only be meaningfully understood with the phonetic value mr for .

2. The Abydos stela CG 20554 was published by Lange and Schäfer (1902: pl. 44) in their monumental edition of the stelae of the Middle Kingdom. The name of the owner of the stela is visible in the first line of the object and has been transcribed by Lange and Schäfer (1908: 184–185) as . Ranke (1935: 113.13) lists this name with a question mark as pns-wr and refers to Wb I, 510. The term "pns," which stands for "earth," is also spelled with a  as a determinative. It is frequently utilized in a medical context.[7] The question mark employed by Ranke is indeed warranted. The appellation "great earth" is highly atypical in the context of Egyptian names. Ilin-

3. Junker (1943: 117, fig. 36).
4. Scheele-Schweitzer (2014: 59).
5. Kayser (1964: 36-37).
6. Cf. http://www.giza-projekt.org/Photos/Leipzig/pdf/BFM-1363354.pdf (Retrieved February 26, 2026).
7. Cf. https://oraec.github.io/corpus/60110.html (Retrieved February 26, 2026).

Tomich (2025) offers an alternative interpretation of the name, reading it as .[8] The interpretation of the penultimate sign is within the realm of possibility. A is frequently not significantly wider than tall, as evidenced by the tokens in the Thot Sign List.[9] With the reading , Ilin-Tomich also proposes an alternative transliteration: Therefore, the is not pn, but rather the possessive prefix p³-n. For the name type consisting of a possessive prefix and noun, there are 24 attestations in the Middle Kingdom[10]. The is then no longer a logogram for wr, but rather a determinative for an official, a usage that is well attested. The phonographic rendering of the official's title is , although it is more commonly written as . Therefore, the equation = is evident in this context. The name of the stela's owner serves as additional evidence for the phonetic value mr.

3. In the mastaba of Nesunefer from the Old Kingdom, a person depicted has the name inscription .[11] This name is known in two variants from the Middle Kingdom. An individual belonging to the naos of Ḥrj[12] is designated as .[13] A stela currently housed in Marseille[14] bears the name .[15] A connection between these names has already been considered by Satzinger and Stefanovic (2011: 243). Moreover, they present two spellings of the name from Papyrus Boulaq 18. However, according to Scharff (1922: 22**) these spellings should be understood as  instead of . Consequently, the following conclusions can be drawn: The following equation is true: = ~ . An examination of the name inscribed on the stela from Marseille reveals that the name components are in reverse

8. https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/6/name/4907 (Retrieved February 26, 2026).

9. Cf. https://thotsignlist.org/mysign?id=4259 (Retrieved February 26, 2026).

10. https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/4/type/381 (Retrieved February 26, 2026).

11. Kanawati (2002: pl. 52).

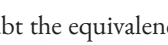
12. Vienna ÄS 186: Hein/Satzinger (1993: 112-127).

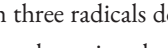
13. Hein/Satzinger (1993: 122).

14. Marseille 227: Satzinger/Stefanovic (2011: 242-244).

15. Satzinger/Stefanovic (2011: 243); https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/6/name/1343 (Retrieved February 26, 2026) interprets this name as . The last character also appears in this form in the first line, as a phonogram in ³bḏ.w. In this respect, identification as  seems unlikely, especially since a Kj-sḫm is not otherwise attested.

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order. Such transpositions are commonplace in Egyptian names,[16] thereby establishing a potential connection between  and . The Egyptian word ky, meaning "other," manifests in a variety of spellings within Egyptian names. Spellings with  are most common, but spellings with  are also attested.[17] Therefore, there is no reason to doubt the equivalence of  and , providing further evidence for the interchangeability of and .

4. In addition to onomastics, another area that can contribute to the question of phonetic value, albeit one that has not yet been considered by either Quack or Schweitzer, is the inflection of verbs. Inflection is known to depend on the verbal class. Verbs comprising two radicals can be prefixed under certain conditions; however, verbs with three radicals do not possess this ability. The verb  contains two radicals if the phonetic value of is mr. However, if Quack's approach is accurate, it contains three radicals. The presence of a prefixed verbal form of this verb clearly indicates the phonetic value of mr. In Allen (1984), the inflection of the verb  can be elicited with a high degree of success. Allen has noted a prefixed Old Perfective of in Pyr § 1202d, albeit with a question mark. The relevant passage is oraec164-21[18]: ... jr wt ḏbᶜ pw jm n.j Wsjr  Allen (2005: 160) translates: "[...] to wrap with it the finger of Osiris that has gone painful". What does the belong to here? Sethe assigns it to the preceding word. Sethe (1962: 101) writes: " Part. perf. wegen des pw und nicht Pseudop., das Verbum wohl als Hilfsverbum zu verstehen (wie  od. ), dem das eigentl. Verbum in der Form des Pseudopartizips folgt". But the case is not that clear! The singular attributive participle of this verb is mostly written without ending in the Pyramid texts: Pyr §§ 17a, 62a, 693d, 826a, 832a, 1431a, 1595b, 1605b. In Pyr § 1431a, only the text witness P has the ending . In Pyr § 1193b, all text witnesses have an ending: P and M have , while N

16. For the transposition of nfr see https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/6/type/269 (Retrieved February 26, 2026) and https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/6/type/299 (Retrieved February 26, 2026); for the transposition of wsr see https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/6/type/264 (Retrieved February 26, 2026) and https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/6/type/270 (Retrieved February 26, 2026).

17. Cf. https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/6/name/798 (Retrieved February 26, 2026).

18. For a detailed analysis of the word forms see https://oraec.github.io/corpus/oraec164-2.html (Retrieved February 26, 2026).

has . Pyr § 316b writes . Allen (1984: § 614) discusses the inflection of the participle forms of the verbs secundae infirmae. He takes the forms without endings as perfective. For the forms with endings he discusses the possibility that they are imperfective. Allen (1984: § 38) points out that the participles with endings in § 316b and 1193b parallel the participle of jyi̯, which also writes an ending here. According to semantics, we have to assume with Sethe that there is a perfective in § 1202d, as Allen translates it. In this respect a form without endings makes sense. However, this would have the consequence that the would have to be drawn to the following . A prefixed form can only be explained if the phonetic value is mr.

The four pieces of evidence listed suggest that, as in the Early Dynastic Period, mr is the phonetic value of for the Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom. There is no evidence for a reinterpretation as mḥr, as is evident in the Greco-Roman period. In Earlier Egyptian texts, should be transliterated as mr.

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