

Not so Black and White

Use of Colour in Eighteenth Dynasty Funerary Manuscripts¹

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Abstract. Studies of hieroglyphic palaeography have often focused on the morphology of each token, less so on the use of colour as a determinant feature in their design. The current paper relates some preliminary observations on the author's latest project, which revolves around the visual impact the use of colour has on defining a certain graphic register (in the sense of Albert & Ragazzoli 2025) in the case of New Kingdom manuscripts. One particular instance is that of the rare presence of polychrome text in Book of the Dead manuscripts, as polychrome hieroglyphs are commonly connected to a monumental, not to a manuscript context. Through a visual analysis of both morphology *and* colour use in writings of the name and an epithet of Osiris, it will become evident that scribes had at their disposal a broad spectrum of options for bringing certain inscriptions closer to their monumental counterparts. The study will thus expand the understanding of graphic registers used in funerary manuscripts, including the diversity of colour use, and challenge the understanding of these writing media as intrinsically connected to “cursive” or “linear” script varieties.

Keywords. hieroglyphic palaeography; colour; funerary manuscripts; graphic registers; monumentality.

1. Graphic registers in New Kingdom manuscripts

This paper presents some preliminary results of a broader study on the use of colour in New Kingdom funerary manuscripts, with a specific focus on the unusual presence of polychrome hieroglyphs in Book of the Dead (BD) manuscripts.²

¹ The author would like to thank Lucia Díaz-Iglesias Llanos and Chloé Ragazzoli for allowing her access to some of their unpublished material and for the stimulating conversation on the topic of graphic registers. She is also indebted to Joel Sams and the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments in the preparation of this article.

² Postdoc Mobility Fellowship funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (grant number P500PH_214164).

A general Egyptological understanding is that “[w]ith few exceptions, the lapidary sphere is associated with the more iconic hieroglyphic variety of the script [...], contrasting with the non-lapidary sphere, which is associated with the more cursive varieties, linear hieroglyphs, hieratic and Demotic on portable writing surfaces.”³ However, studies on graphic registers have shown that a document’s script is connected more intrinsically to its intended sphere of action than to its supporting medium.⁴ For example, the use of hieratic indexicalises texts as belonging to the personal religious sphere⁵ or to the world of scribes.⁶ Nevertheless, even within hieratic texts, certain parts are often written in (linear) hieroglyphs, such as *hṯp-di-nsw* formulae.⁷ Such a custom may suggest not only a wish to monumentalize specific passages, but perhaps also the attachment of the text itself to a specific graphic register: for example, hieratic for visitor’s graffiti, underscoring the writer’s belonging to the *monde des scribes*, and hieroglyphs for religious formulae, even when written in a secondary epigraphic context.⁸

While scholars have focused on the presence of hieratic or linear hieroglyphs in monumental context,⁹ the use of polychrome hieroglyphs in funerary manuscripts is a *transfuge graphique*¹⁰ in the opposite direction: here, monumental culture seems to have influenced an otherwise linear or cursive text. Studies on graphic registers in BD manuscripts mostly distinguish between hieratic and linear/cursive hieroglyphic copies,¹¹ despite noticing that more than one script can be found in a single document and that a more comprehensive investigation on the graphic varieties used would

3 Stauder-Porchet & Stauder 2020: 71. Cf. Dorman 2017: 38 for the BD. As emerged in conversation with Joel Sams, the use of the term “lapidary” to refer only to monumental architecture and other prestige self-presentation objects can seem unintuitive considering that ostraca, typically less formal writing media, may nonetheless be made of stone. This underscores how tricky the distinction between formal and informal materials can be. As the present study aims at demonstrating, it is not necessarily the medium, but how the inscription is written, which gives monumental attributes to a text.

4 The term “graphic registers” has been introduced by Chloé Ragazzoli and Florence Albert in the context of the research program “Écritures”, carried out at the Institut français d’archéologie orientale (Ragazzoli & Albert 2025). It refers to the connection between a certain script and a specific sphere of action. Cf. Goelet 2003: 4 and n. 6.

5 Donnat Beauquier 2014.

6 Ragazzoli 2019.

7 See Ragazzoli 2017: 36; cf. “monumentalized signatures” in Ragazzoli forthcoming. See also below on monumentalisation. Monumentalisation of the *hṯp-di-nsw* formula in full hieroglyphs goes back to at least the Middle Kingdom, e.g. in the coffin of Seni (BM EA 30842, see Taylor 2010: 65; cf. Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2023: 5), where the captions to the object frieze and the spells are instead painted in linear hieroglyphs. This fact confirms that certain texts had to be, or were customarily, written in a specific graphic register independently of the medium.

8 Cf. Ragazzoli 2017: 36, 43; Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2023: 5, Verhoeven 2020: I, 306–308.

9 For an overview, see Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2023: 5–6; for graffiti, cf. Ragazzoli 2018 and forthcoming; for other inscriptions, see Kahl 2022.

10 Ragazzoli & Albert 2025: 11 define as “*transfuges graphiques*” “*les écrits dans lesquels un script est employé là où un autre script est dominant.*”

11 e.g. Cole 2017; Albert 2022; Verhoeven 2023.

be needed.¹² Finally, publications of funerary manuscripts and overviews of BD graphic registers rarely mention colour changes aside from the use of red for certain passages.¹³ A few exceptionally mention the presence of polychrome hieroglyphs¹⁴ and of passages written in white;¹⁵ none, however, seem to have mentioned the existence of sections written in blue (e.g. BD Kha, Turin Museo Egizio Suppl. 8316/03 = Suppl. 8438, fig. 1).¹⁶



Fig. 1. Contrast between the caption to Osiris, written in blue-filled hieroglyphs, and the rest of the text, written in black linear hieroglyphs, in BD Kha (Turin Museo Egizio Suppl. 8316/03 = Suppl. 8438).

CCO 1.0, by Museo Egizio di Torino (adapted by author)

- 12 Verhoeven 2023: 170.
- 13 This is the case for BD Yuya, published in Davis & Naville 1908, and BD Qenna, published in Leemans 1840, two of the manuscripts featuring polychrome text. Modern overviews are Munro 1988: 195; Lucarelli 2010: 270 discusses in a dedicated paragraph colour use in the BD, without mentioning either blue or polychrome inscriptions; cf. also Lucarelli 2020; Albert 2022; Goelet 2003 and 2023; Verhoeven 2023.
- 14 Parkinson & Quirke 1995: 24; Parkinson 2011; Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2023.
- 15 Taylor 2010: 31 mentions again only black and red, except when discussing the use of white pigment in the manuscript REDMG 1998.29.1. Taylor 2010: 47, cat. 15 comments: "The text was first inscribed in red ink and then overwritten using a white pigment made from magnesium silicate. The name of the serpent Apep was left in red." He further proposes a comparison with tombs: "When spells are written on the walls of tombs or on coffins, blue is the preferred colour for the signs." This observation however does not seem to reflect the copies of BD spells found in New Kingdom Theban tombs, where black is preferred. This is the case for all the burial chambers of the Eighteenth Dynasty featuring BD spells (TT 11, TT 61, TT 82, and TT 87, for which see Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2022; and TT 96, Eggebrecht 1988), as well as for TT 1 and other Ramesside tombs in Deir el-Medina (cf. Haring 2006).
- 16 See also BD Tjenena (Paris Louvre N.3074, Cenival 1992: 8, 70, 88), and BD Wenherptah (Bologna Museo Civico KS3167, Curto et al. 1990: 179, under study by the present author).

However, this intermedial shift (or “reference,” Rajewsky 2005: 52, Wolf 2005: 254), that is, the imitation of features conventional for a different medium,¹⁷ notably underscores the scribes’ deliberate choices in adapting colour and script, and highlights how colour bridges these spheres.¹⁸ Such intermediality seems to work in both directions: monumental models may influence portable writing surfaces as well.¹⁹ An in-depth investigation on the use of colour in all its variety in funerary manuscripts is therefore still needed. The current project aims to bring attention to colour as an essential feature of ancient Egyptian writing, and to shed light on its indexicality in the normally monochrome, linear context of funerary manuscripts and initially focussed specifically on text sections written in polychrome hieroglyphs. Currently, only five manuscripts are known to survive featuring polychrome passages.²⁰ Most were published more than a century ago, and even only partially: BD Nakht A (London BM EA 10473),²¹ BD Yuya (Cairo Egyptian Museum CG 51189, see below 3.2),²² BD Qenna (Leiden RMO Leemans T2),²³ BD Meryt (Kha) (Paris BnF Luynes 826),²⁴ and BD Seramun (Paris BnF Luynes 825).²⁵ All date to the (later) Eighteenth Dynasty except BD

- 17 “Intermediality” is an umbrella term to describe several different phenomena connected to the interplay of different media (Wolf 2005); in the case of the transmission of different motifs and thematic variation being present across media, Wolf 2005: 253 also talks of “transmediality.”
- 18 Munro 1988: 13–63. has already extensively compared iconographic details in manuscripts and tomb decoration. The comparability between tombs and BD manuscripts is also well examined in Goelet 2003 (especially p. 17), Dorman 2019, and Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2025.
- 19 Goelet 2003: 18.
- 20 Any information on further manuscripts will be greatly appreciated. These manuscripts will be described in detail in a more extensive publication resulting from the completion of the project.
- 21 BD Nakht A (BM EA 10473) is generally dated to the early post-Amarna period (Quirke 2013: xxi, Glanville 1927). It is one of the rarer manuscripts made of skin membrane, and belonged to the scribe of the army and general Nakht, who owned also a second BD manuscript (BD Nakht B, BM EA 10471). It is not possible at this moment to establish with certainty, but it is likely that the two manuscripts were joined in antiquity to create one artefact. It was acquired by Budge in 1888 in Luxor and it is therefore likely of Theban origin. I thank Barbara Wills and Lucy Skinner from the British Museum for their insights on the materiality, and Patricia Usick for the information on the acquisition.
- 22 BD Yuya is one of the longest surviving BD manuscripts, just short of 20m, and it belonged to the divine father Yuya, famous courtier under (and father-in-law of) Amenhotep III. It was found in Yuya’s and his wife Tuya’s tomb in the Valley of the Kings (KV 46) in 1905 by Quibell (Davies, Maspero, Newberry 1907; the papyrus was published in Davis & Naville 1908).
- 23 BD Qenna was published in Leemans 1840 and is a peculiar manuscript in more than one sense: it has the longest polychrome text section, comprising unusual versions of two sun-hymns (sheet 1–5; Quirke 2013: 32–37), while belonging not to a high courtier or priest, but to a simple “trader.” Acquired by the RMO in 1836, it is dated to the late Eighteenth or early Nineteenth Dynasty and it is likely of Theban origin (I thank Daniel Soliman for the helpful insights on the matter).
- 24 BD Meryt (= BnF 53.2) was almost certainly originally produced for her husband Kha, overseer of the works under Amenhotep II to Amenhotep III, since his name sometimes still features where one would expect the owner’s name. It has now been published by Peis 2021.
- 25 The papyrus (= BnF 53.1b) belonged to a member of the clergy of Amun and was discussed and translated in Ledrain 1880. Joubert 2025: 234–237 also discusses the different “*transfuges graphiques*” in Seramun’s burial equipment: see

Seramun, which dates to the Twenty-First. As the paper will illustrate, the unusual decision to use polychromy allowed scribes to “monumentalize” the manuscript and the text itself, even when the morphology of these polychrome signs closely resembles that of linear hieroglyphs. However, the study soon revealed that this was but one of the strategies adopted by the manuscript designers to emulate monumental visuality, and that use of colour in manuscript is much more varied than previously assumed. Further options include the mentioned use of costly blue paint, filling signs in one paint as to resemble captions in tomb decoration (such as in BD Amenhotep: see below, 3.3), or even adding inner extensive inner details in black within the otherwise blank silhouette of signs (e.g. BD Nebseni, see below 3.4).

Overviews of graphic registers abound, especially on the linear hieroglyphs often found in funerary manuscripts.²⁶ A basic distinction is usually drawn between the hieratic and hieroglyphic registers of script, even though the latter register by itself displays much variation. The choice of one of these registers over the other is consistently associated with several paratextual and graphic features, as Dorman has demonstrated:²⁷ he terms these two clusters of features “scribal format” and “monumental format.”

“Scribal format” BD manuscripts are characterized by text written in hieratic and thus mostly in a horizontal layout²⁸ from right to left,²⁹ and in black ink.³⁰ Such manuscripts also feature a limited number of vignettes, and a limited use of colour for the vignettes themselves.³¹ According to Hassan, the fact that the oldest extant BD manuscripts are written in hieratic³² and laid out in a “scribal format” may explain the presence of hieratograms in later linear hieroglyphic palaeography.³³

in particular fig. 1 on page 245 for a colour photo. Like BD Qenna, BD Seramun’s polychrome inscription features an almost complete colour palette.

26 Goelet 2003: 10–13; Cole 2017; Dorman 2019; Lucarelli 2020; Albert 2022; Hassan 2022a; Munro 2023: 41ff. (specifically on the Eighteenth Dynasty); Verhoeven 2023: 170–175.

27 Dorman 2019.

28 However, most earlier BD manuscripts written in hieratic are (or contain text) laid out in vertical columns: see Dorman 2019; Hassan 2022a: 136. Among these is BD Ahmose (Louvre E. 11085): see Munro 1995.

29 This does not exclude the possibility of retrograde writing, as attested in BD Ahmose for the subtitle to the vignette of spell 136B. Hassan (2022a: 136) suggests that the text might have been copied from hieroglyphic models.

30 Although rubrics may still be present: see the hieratic portion of BD Sobekmose (O’Rourke 2016).

31 Further examples can be found in Hassan 2022a; cf. BD Hatnofer (Cairo TR 25.1.55.6) in Hassan 2022b: 298.

32 This format may derive from Middle Kingdom columnar hieratic copies of Coffin Texts (CT) spells kept on papyrus (e.g. P. Gardiner II; P. Gardiner III [Dorman 2017: 32–33, and fig. 2.3]). However, hieratic for CT spells is rare (see Lucarelli 2020: 579): they are most often written in linear hieroglyphs (cf. Cole 2017, Konrad 2022; see Taylor 2010: 65, cat. 20 for an example). Hieratic BD manuscripts, such as BD Nebimes (Hassan 2022a, Dorman 2019: 34), may have been used as exemplars for linear hieroglyphic BD manuscripts.

33 Hassan 2022a. Other reasons are listed in Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2022: 135–136, with reference to further literature. For hieratograms in linear hieroglyphic texts, see further Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2022: 138–140 (with reference to Lucarelli 2020: 582–584). According to the scholar, hieratograms belong mainly to the categories of birds, trees and plants,

The graphic register considered typical of funerary manuscripts, and particularly of BD manuscripts, is linear hieroglyphs: indeed, BD manuscripts are so intimately correlated with this script that the name “*Totenbuchkursive*” has long been used in Egyptological literature.³⁴ This script variety is graphically strongly linked to monumental hieroglyphic forms and outlines, without being fully painted;³⁵ yet it often displays a high level of detail (see below). Given that it follows the same writing conventions and arrangement as fully painted hieroglyphs, and especially since it lacks ligatures, it should hardly be described as a cursive form of hieroglyphs.³⁶

Linear hieroglyphs, in all their varieties, characterize what Dorman defines as the “monumental format,” which within the *Book of the Dead* tradition became dominant by the reign of Thutmose III. Hieroglyphic BD manuscripts present a much more complex layout than their hieratic counterparts. Their text is organized mostly in vertical columns, a direction connected generally to monumental inscriptions, and to religious texts and temple libraries.³⁷ However, horizontal captions also feature frequently, as do tables, and polychrome vignettes with vertical or horizontal captions.³⁸ In addition, the writing direction can vary: typically, the spells are written in retrograde writing,³⁹ although manuscripts in prograde or mixed direction are attested.⁴⁰

The reasons behind the transition from hieratic to (linear) hieroglyphs have yet to be understood.⁴¹ Goelet proposes as a possible explanation that hieroglyphs were seen as more formal and prestigious, and more connected to *arcana*, i.e. hidden knowledge: Considering that only a small percentage of the population may have been highly literate, and an even smaller one familiar with hieroglyphs, such a choice would give the text a more restricted, mysterious aura.⁴² Hassan, however, refuses the idea that (linear) hieroglyphs were considered inherently more prestigious than

sky earth and water, men and their occupations. Further study may reveal whether these graphic conventions have parallels in the inscription of Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts.

34 The script has also been called “semi-cursive” / *Semi-kursive*, “book-writing” / *Buchhieroglyphen* or *Buchschrift*. An extensive discussion on the topic, with bibliography, is Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2022: 128, n. 7–8.

35 Haring 2006: 8, cf. Lucarelli 2020: 579: “In some cases, the richness in detail of cursive hieroglyphs, for instance, in central compositions in scrolls, such as the final judgment of the dead, would raise the question if, in many cases, the *Totenbuchkursive* should not just be considered a form of monumental hieroglyphs, only painted with a reed pen instead of carved or painted on the wall and with a more or less frequent insertion of hieratic signs.”

36 For a full overview on the topic, see Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2023.

37 Parkinson & Quirke 1995. It is also possible that this direction was more directly influenced by the layout of the CT: see Goelet 2003: 12. In one exceptional case, on a linen shroud (NMR.92, Nicholson Museum, University of Sydney TM 133810), belonging to Tany and dated to Thutmose III, the text is written in long horizontal lines of linear hieroglyphs, possibly inspired by the layout of stelae, see Cole 2017: 42, and 44 fig. 3.4.

38 Dorman 2019; Verhoeven 2023.

39 Cf. Niwinski 1989: 15–17; Goelet 2003: 12.

40 BD Nakht and BD Qenna are prominent examples.

41 Dorman 2019; Hassan 2022a and 2022b.

42 Parkinson & Quirke 1995: 24, 26; Goelet 2003.

hieratic and that this influenced the abandonment of hieratic.⁴³ He instead proposes that the abandonment of hieratic was connected to the aesthetic and magical importance of the vignettes.⁴⁴ This interpretation supports the essential relation of hieroglyphic BD manuscripts to monumental inscriptions, and implies that these were conceptually distinct from hieratic BD manuscripts, even when the latter were accompanied by illustrations.⁴⁵ In addition, some BD owners carried priestly titles, and ones specifically linked to writing, copying, and drawing:⁴⁶ such individuals were thus themselves likely trained in the designs and conventions of monumental hieroglyphic writing.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, a declining familiarity with hieroglyphs might have been at the root of switching again to hieratic in the Twenty-First Dynasty.⁴⁸

Within one document not only can several hands coexist,⁴⁹ but also multiple graphic registers (hieratic/hieroglyphic) and their varieties.⁵⁰ Rarely, manuscripts even exhibit both hieroglyphic and hieratic text sections, such as BD Sobekmose (Brooklyn Museum of Art 37.1777, rto vs. vso)⁵¹ and BD Mesemnetjer (Paris Louvre E. 21324.)⁵² In BD Ani (London BM EA 10470) the beginning and the end of the scroll are written in a variety of linear hieroglyphs displaying more detail than the rest of the text.⁵³ In fact, it is common to find more elegant hieroglyphs at the beginnings of

43 Hassan 2022b: 282. In fact, hieratic is generally also connected to the funerary sphere: see the letters to the dead (Donnat Beauquier 2014).

44 Hassan 2022a: 135; Hassan 2022b: 282 and n. 30.

45 Cf. Stauder-Porchet & Stauder 2020: 71, underscoring the connection of hieroglyphic writing with illustrations in the monumental sphere: "Hieroglyphic writing in the lapidary sphere [...] is often closely associated with pictorial representations of various sorts."

46 Kockelmann 2017: 72, likely referring mostly to the Late Period. BD Nebseni, see below, is the most prominent example from the Eighteenth Dynasty.

47 See also below and Dorman 2017: 39. Cf. Lucarelli 2010: 27: "even when not directly involved in the writing process, the owner of the papyrus, who would often have been literate, may have played a role in the selection of the spells and vignettes."

48 Lenzo 2007: 1118. A similar trend towards less monumental writing is seen in Theban tombs: see Sartori forthcoming, and below.

49 As often seems the case for the name and titles of the owner (Kockelmann 2017: 72), one perfect example being once more BD Nakht: see Glanville 1927.

50 Dorman 2017: 6 and 2019; Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2022 and 2023.

51 The manuscript, more than seven metres long, belonged to the goldworker of Amun Sobekmose and it is one of the few surviving manuscripts likely coming from Saqqara. It dates to the Eighteenth Dynasty and was published in O'Rourke 2016.

52 Mesemnetjer was a member of the clergy of Amun (therefore likely based in Thebes) and a scribe during the Eighteenth Dynasty. His papyrus, like BD Sobekmose, is surprisingly written both on the recto and on the verso (Quirke 2013: xviii). It has yet to be fully published, but photos can be found on <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010003442> (accessed 03.11.2025).

53 Leach & Parkinson 2010: 40 and n. 5. The papyrus is one of the most complete compilations of funerary spells and vignettes. It belonged to the accountant of temple estates of all the gods of Thebes Ani, and it dates to the early

funerary manuscripts and in the presence of vignettes showing the adoration of divinities, not only in the New Kingdom but also later.⁵⁴

Similarly, the use of graphic registers in private tombs changes over time, and an evolution can be seen from the Eighteenth Dynasty to the Ramesside period, with a progressive reduction in the use of monumental hieroglyphs in favour of more linear ones.⁵⁵ Generally, Theban chapels from the early New Kingdom feature mostly highly detailed hieroglyphs, be they polychrome or monochrome.⁵⁶ However, tombs can also be designed in a way that recalls papyri:⁵⁷ such is the case for the use of linear hieroglyphs to write funerary compositions on burial chamber walls, in both royal⁵⁸ and private⁵⁹ contexts. In the latter context, once more, monumental hieroglyphs alternated with linear ones in specific situations, such as in the formulae accompanying large-scale illustrations.⁶⁰ This underscores the connection between pictorial scenes and a higher level of monumentality and confirms the intrinsic connection between certain text genres and certain graphic registers. Scholars have remarked on the connection between tomb decoration and funerary manuscripts (and possibly the influence of the latter on the former) in Deir el-Medina, both in the design of vignettes⁶¹ and in the use of retrograde writing.⁶² Hassan remarks that one of the reasons behind the abandonment of hieratic in favour of linear hieroglyphs may have been the wish to design the manuscript in a way similar to a tomb wall.⁶³ In fact, as Dorman describes:

The major vignettes generally follow the rules of monumental art, where the text is written in the clear rather than in retrograde format, and captions attached to individual figures strictly follow the orientation of those figures. The resultant funerary scroll is often a spectacular product of draftsmen's handiwork and can be described for the purposes of this article as having been produced in accordance

Nineteenth Dynasty. Acquired by Budge together with BD Nakht in 1888, it was published several times, most recently by Goelet et al. 2015. As Leach & Parkinson 2010 have shown, the papyrus was composed of several sections joined together after having been painted.

54 Munro 1988: 195.

55 Sartori forthcoming.

56 The most stunning examples are likely the tombs TT 100, TT 93, etc. For a collection of hieroglyphs, see Davies 1958.

57 Already in the Middle Kingdom tomb of Senet, TT 60, certain texts are written in linear hieroglyphs to give the impression of reproducing a papyrus (Lucarelli 2020: 579–580).

58 Famously KV 34, the tomb of Thutmose III: see Hornung et al. 2005; cf. Goelet 2003: 17–18.

59 Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2022: 133: “The walls of the underground burial chambers in TT 11, 61, 82, and 87 [...] contain monumental or three-dimensional materialisation of texts and images, many of which were more frequently committed to mobile carriers such as shrouds and leather or papyrus rolls.”

60 Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2022: 133.

61 Tawfiq 2023: 369.

62 For the tomb of Sennedjem, TT 1, see Haring 2006: 7–10.

63 Hassan 2022b: 282, n. 30.

with a “monumental” compositional format that embodies textual and decorative standards entirely suitable for the adornment of tomb walls or inscribed objects prepared in anticipation of the interment of royal and private individuals.⁶⁴

This is particularly true for the opening vignettes of such manuscripts, which usually illustrate either the adoration of Osiris or a hymn to Osiris or Ra. Similar “opening vignettes” are found either on focal walls or near the entrance in Theban tombs: indeed, it appears that this textual genre developed originally in this context.⁶⁵ This visual connection to tombs suggests that such openings of BD manuscripts may originally have been intended to act as substitutes for personal rock-cut chapels for BD owners unable to afford their construction and/or decoration.⁶⁶ Illustrations of the Adoration of Osiris, of the Opening of the Mouth ritual, and of the funeral procession in papyri thus mirror some of the most important depictions found in Eighteenth Dynasty tombs⁶⁷—most cases featuring text in monumental hieroglyphs with varying degrees of iconicity.

Interestingly, when scribes copied BD texts from manuscripts onto the walls of burial chambers, not only did they retain the graphic registers that characterized funerary manuscripts,⁶⁸ but they used the same writing conventions, such as painting certain signs in a greater size than the rest.⁶⁹ Lastly, the importance of tailoring one’s writing to fit the context in which it is to appear is also confirmed by graffiti practices.⁷⁰

2. Monumentality and use of colour in manuscripts

As previously remarked, different graphic registers may mingle in a single document (or artefact).⁷¹ On the level of the individual sign, hieratograms feature in linear hieroglyphic palaeography at

64 Dorman 2019: 21; Goelet 2003: 17. Kockelmann 2017: 69 points out also the relation with monumental temple decoration, on the basis of the use of multiple red and yellow upper and lower borderlines, which are, however, also found in private tombs, cf. again Goelet 2003: 17.

65 Assmann 1983.

66 Goelet 2003: 17.



67 Goelet 2003: 17.

68 One major exception being the burial chamber belonging to Sennefer, TT 96B (pictures in Eggebrecht 1988), cf. Díaz-Iglesias Llanos in preparation. In the opposite direction, Kahl 2022 shows that the genre of a contract was so intrinsically linked to the graphic register of hieratic that it was copied on a monument without being transcribed into hieroglyphs.


69 Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2025. She points out two major differences: the larger scale of the signs in burial chambers, to enhance their visibility on such a bigger surface; and the absence of framing devices (except once more in Sennefer, see above).

70 Van Pelt & Staring 2019: 143: in Saqqara, “[a]lthough scribes generally would have been more familiar with hieratic, many of the graffitists in the New Kingdom tombs appear to have adapted their script to ‘fit’ the monumental hieroglyphs used in funerary contexts [...] The use of the hieroglyphic script may reflect an immersion of the graffiti in the ‘divine’ world of the deceased [...]”

71 Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2023: 5.

varying frequencies,⁷² even though linear scripts as a whole seem to be a variety of hieroglyphic writing, and were not derived from hieratic.⁷³ At the same time, a broad spectrum of forms for the same hieroglyph is often attested within individual BD manuscripts, ranging from more to less iconic.⁷⁴ In particular, certain signs are often monumentalized: this is the case for  (scarab, Gard. L1) and  (ibis-on-a-standard, Gard. G26), which even in linear contexts are often written larger and with more detail than other signs.⁷⁵ The name of the owner as well was often graphically enhanced.⁷⁶ The wish to imitate monumental hieroglyphs by adding inner details to linear forms persists in copies from the Third Intermediate and Late Periods.⁷⁷

Captions to vignettes can appear in cursive hieroglyphs even in older hieratic BD manuscripts, employing horizontal linear hieroglyphs for their solitary vignette.⁷⁸ Similarly, within linear hieroglyphic sources, captions to vignettes can feature more detailed hieroglyphs than the rest of the text.⁷⁹ This fact underscores the intrinsic link between illustrations and the monumental hieroglyphic register.⁸⁰ It may even be that the same prototypes in linear hieroglyphs were used for both manuscripts and tombs.⁸¹ Specific passages, especially those accompanying opening or judgement scenes, were often written in a more elegant hand or even polychrome hieroglyphs, bringing the text and the corresponding vignette still closer to monumental prototypes.⁸² Such links between

72 Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2022: 140–147. Furthermore, it seems that hieratic influence on linear hieroglyphic texts “is visible in three aspects: the ductus; the closeness displayed by signs with similar forms that correspond to dissimilar hieroglyphic signs; and the addition of diacritic strokes.” Conversely, more hieroglyphic forms can intrude in hieratic texts, as is the case for the  “human head” hieroglyph, Gard. D1 (Hassan 2022a: 139).

73 Graefe 2015.

74 Graefe 2015: 122–123. Some of these have no correspondence either in hieratic or in hieroglyphs and have thus been dubbed “hybrid graphemes:” see Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2022: 134, cf. Ali 2020’s “cursive hybrid script.”

75 Graefe 2015, confirming, on a different medium, conventions found also on tomb walls, see Haring 2006: 7 for TT 1.

76 Cf. Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2022: 146, quoting Ali 2001: 20.

77 Munro 1988: 195, Lucarelli 2020.

78 For an overview of these manuscripts, see Hassan 2022a. In particular, Hassan 2022a: 138 mentions that “The signs in the hieratic columns were larger than the much-abbreviated signs in the horizontal copies” and that certain signs were written abbreviated in horizontal manuscripts but display a more detailed form when written in columnar manuscripts, again showing that the monumental layout (columns) influences the level of monumentality of the script.


79 Dorman 2019: 21.

80 Hieratic documents do not usually feature illustrations, hence the need of the scribe to refer to monumental models. Hassan 2022a: 134 confirms: “From an aesthetic and formal point of view, the design and layout of the hieratic examples display a poor appearance compared with the hieroglyphs and cursive hieroglyphs versions. The spells were organized without a specific format, especially in the versions written in horizontal lines. In contrast, the examples written in cursive hieroglyphs displayed the interest of the scribes and artists in the manuscript.”

81 Hassan 2022a: 137 and 2022b: 282–283; Munro 2017: 49. Cf. the similarity of script on the ostraca from TT 87, see Lüscher 2013.

82 Munro 1988: 195; Parkinson & Quirke 1995: 24. Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2023: 5 remarks that this practice goes back to hieratic documents of the Old Kingdom, and indeed is confirmed by the aforementioned hieratic BD copies where

certain depictions (e.g. the Adoration of Osiris and the Judgement of the Dead) and monumental hieroglyphs is stable through time and media even after the Eighteenth Dynasty.⁸³ In fact, even manuscripts from the Third Intermediate up until the Roman period, written horizontally in hieratic or demotic, feature captions to the opening vignette written in columns of more or less elegant hieroglyphic forms.⁸⁴ Retaining this graphic convention had its roots in the highly-regarded pictoriality of the hieroglyphic script and likely the prestigious connection of the vignettes to monumental contexts.⁸⁵ Captions to vignettes at the beginnings of scrolls are especially likely to be fully painted in “solid” hieroglyphs, in some cases even in blue, suggesting a wish to raise the prestige of a particularly visible part of the scroll by using expensive paint. At other times, even though the morphology of the signs is not particularly elegant or detailed, the use of a different paint makes the text stand out. Here again, the use of labour-intensive blue raises the visual appeal of selected scenes.

General overviews on the use of script and colour in BD manuscripts often only mention black for the main text and red ink used for spell titles, special instructions, or names of dangerous beings (“rubrics”).⁸⁶ More in-depth analysis reveals that, within a rubric, names or words might be underscored by reverting to black,⁸⁷ or even changing to blue ink: a rather expensive colour and difficult to produce. Similarly, while studies have observed that certain graphemes are always written in hieroglyphs and often appear more detailed than the signs that surround them,⁸⁸ few have noted that some of these same hieroglyphs are often also filled with solid black. It seems that scribes actually played with colour much more than has previously been acknowledged. Within the black text, some signs can exhibit different coloured areas and be partially filled with solid black. This introduces a colour alternation that brings them closer to their monumental counterparts by making their inner details more prominent. Whereas signs such as  (scarab, Gard. L1) are consistently painted fully in black,⁸⁹ others may be fully painted or simply outlined at the discretion of the

the vignette with hieroglyphic captions is positioned at the beginning of the scroll (Hassan 2022a: 137, Lucarelli 2010: 267).

83 Munro 1988: 195. Cf. for example the tomb of Karakhamun, TT 223, dated to the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, where the captions to the Judgement scene were painted in monumental hieroglyphs (Molinero Polo & Rodriguez Valls 2018).


84 Lenzo 2023.

85 Cole 2017: 43; Parkinson & Quirke 1995: 24. These vignettes are often “scaled to full page size” (Kockelmann 2017: 70).

86 The writers of some graffiti similarly used red ink to index danger and apotropaic power, and to give their text “une puissance d’action efficace” from the ritual point of view (Ragazzoli 2018: 401, referring to Donnat Beauquier 2014: 216–217).

87 Verhoeven 2023: 168.

88 Graefe 2015, cf. Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2022: 140, who observes that even among signs of Gardiner’s Sign List’s A group, mostly written as hieratograms, more complex human figures can feature a higher degree of detail.

89 For  (scarab, Gard. L1), see Haring 2006: 8 for tomb palaeography: no extensive study has yet been carried out on manuscript sources. This is one of the axes of the author’s project: see below.



painter (see , crested ibis, Gard. G25 in fig. 2).⁹⁰ In exceptional cases, even the scarab beetle can display a silhouette design with inner linear details (fig. 3a–b).⁹¹




Fig. 2. Diverse writing of the glyph  (crested ibis, Gard. G25) in neighbouring colours, from BD Nebseni (London BM EA 9900, 17).

Eighteenth Dynasty, likely from Saqqara.

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Fig. 3a–b. Exceptional writing of  (scarab beetle, Gard. L1) in the name of the god Khepri as silhouette with inner details, from BD Nebseni London BM EA 9900, 6 (left) and as solid black hieroglyph, from BD Nebseni London BM EA 9900, 22 (right).

Eighteenth Dynasty, likely from Saqqara.

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Scholars generally agree that “[c]ursives were more ornate and time-consuming to draw than hieratic [...], thus making cursives inherently more prestigious and expensive to produce than hieratic texts.”⁹² Looking further at the presence of captions and text sections written in polychrome hieroglyphs, we see that “[a]s a rule, elaborately painted or sculpted hieroglyphs such as those found in the elite tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty were at the top of the hierarchy of scripts. These signs

90 Considering that usually BD scribes have exceptional control over their brushstrokes, I cannot imagine such variation arising by accident. The alternation of outlined/solid versions of the hieroglyph is attested through the whole manuscript, see for other examples on a same sheet BM EA 9900, 14, and the rest of BM EA 9900, 17 in Lapp 2004: pl. 40–41, 49–51.

91 Lapp 2004: pl. 16, 64.

92 Goelet 2023: 191. Cf. Parkinson & Quirke 1995: 24: “cursive hieroglyphs were slower to write than hieratic and were thus more prestigious.”

were obviously quite time-consuming and therefore expensive to produce.”⁹³ If we therefore define “monumentality” by the energetics, meaning the time of labour as well as the cost and amount of resources needed to create a certain product,⁹⁴ as well as by the elaboration in the design,⁹⁵ we can easily imagine that painting the text at the beginning of the scroll in polychrome, just as in an elite tomb, would have elicited a degree of awe and admiration in those who viewed it. This approach to monumentality as a “heightened ability to impress the viewer” is similar to the use of long inscriptions in elegant and detailed polychrome hieroglyphs in elite tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty.⁹⁶ Regarding the layout, the sheer amount of text, and the “tapestry” of the beautifully painted and extremely detailed hieroglyphs, Stauder remarks that “[m]onumentality, here, is not just a matter of size but an embodied, immersive experience.”⁹⁷ Taking all these observations into consideration, we could therefore agree with Dorman that the creators of these manuscripts must have been highly trained draftsmen and artists familiar with monumental iconography and writing.⁹⁸

Scribes had several ways of using colour to monumentalize linear hieroglyphs. The most impressive and rare is, however, polychromy: the use of multiple colours within single signs. Each of the manuscripts in the dataset features a particular colour palette, ranging from an almost full range of colours (including blue, various types of yellow, white, black, and red), to more limited ones (in BD Yuya, blue is often replaced by black; in BD Meryt [Kha], only black and red are used for the main part of the signs, which may exhibit a white filling).⁹⁹

In BD Nakht and BD Qenna, not all polychrome signs display a monumental morphology, but even in these cases, as with BD Meryt (Kha), scribes gave them a more elaborate design by filling the signs’ open spaces with a different paint, either bright yellow or white. Again, this argues for the idea that polychromy evokes a monumental context. As in elite tombs, we can assume that the commissioner as well as the possible viewers of the manuscript would have been “fascinated by the

93 Goelet 2010: 126 and n. 34, referring to Fischer 1976: 39–44. A full colour palette would include blue and green, the oldest artificial pigments developed by humanity: these were rather difficult to produce and thus costly.

94 Levenson 2019.

95 Trigger 1990: 119 regarding “monumental” architecture: “its principal defining feature is that its scale and elaboration exceed the requirements of any practical functions that a building is intended to perform.”

96 Stauder 2024: 270, 274–275, cf. Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2025. For a similar description of monumentality outside Egyptology, see Osborne 2014: 14: “Monumentality lies in the meaning created by the relationship that is negotiated between object and person, and between object and the surrounding constellation of values and symbols in a culture.” According to Smoak & Mandell 2019, other defining parameters for an inscription are scale, space, spectatorship, graphic design and materiality.

97 Stauder 2024: 275.

98 Dorman 2017: 39–40.

99 Picture available on the website of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, <https://medaillesetantiques.bnf.fr/> (accessed 03.11.2025).

individual, colourful and internally detailed signs [...] and drawn into the shimmering tapestry of the overall, bidimensional surfaces of the inscriptions.”¹⁰⁰

A first survey of the material has thus shown that colour plays a major role in the monumentalisation of a manuscript and of specific passages within it. A text’s monumentality does not, therefore, necessarily depend on its physical context, but on the more or less elaborate use of coloured paints.

3. Case study: The writing of Osiris and his epithet *ntr* ʿ “great god”

The most common start to a BD manuscript was the illustration of the adoration of Osiris. This was likely an important element in terms of providing the deceased and his family with the protection of the god, and ensuring a successful passage into and through the Netherworld.¹⁰¹ Analysis revealed that captions to this vignette tend to show the greatest graphic variety, ranging from polychrome hieroglyphs to highly detailed linear hieroglyphs, and they were therefore chosen to illustrate the different options available to scribes and their relation to monumental writing. These legends are also quite varied in text, the only constant element being the name of the god Osiris, accompanied by often-changing combinations of epithets, among which a common one is that of *ntr* ʿ.¹⁰² These two elements were chosen because they permitted a detailed examination of a broad spectrum of graphic renditions of the same signs across manuscripts. Rather surprisingly, it was difficult to find similar ways of writing the name of the god and the corresponding epithet, at least in the extant Eighteenth Dynasty sources,¹⁰³ variation being instead more common. As the rest of the caption as well varied greatly across the analysed sources, only the signs present in all of them were closely examined here.

3.1. Tomb palaeography: TT 69

The tomb-chapel belonging to the overseer of the fields of Amun Menna (TT 69) has been chosen as a point of comparison due to its dating and extremely good state of preservation. It dates within the reigns of Thutmose IV and Amenhotep III and is located in Sheikh Abd el-Qurna. Its decoration is incomplete and shows evidence of reworking in different phases.¹⁰⁴ Its finished sections are, however, extremely detailed. In the tomb, inscriptions are written mostly in polychrome and monochrome monumental hieroglyphs. On various walls, drafts of the text exhibit different stages

100 Stauder 2024: 275.

101 Munro 2017: 55.





102 Cf. LGG IV, 395–398. The hieroglyphs belonging to the phrase *gd-mdw in*, or other common phrases, do not seem to ever appear in polychrome, but only as rubrics, so that there would be little scope for comparison.

103 Munro 1988: 188 and 247–251 has previously observed the great variety in writing the name of the god.

104 Hartwig 2013.

of completion, as is the case for an only-partially coloured inscription in the entrance thickness. In the corridor, red drafts still visible below the black text demonstrate the changes in the design of single hieroglyphs.

The hieroglyphs selected as a case study appear in the scene depicting Menna and his wife adoring Osiris in a kiosk, on the southern wall of the corridor (fig. 4a–b).¹⁰⁵ The full inscription reads *wsir wn-nfr nb t3 dsr.t ntr 3 nb nhh* “Osiris Wenefer, Lord of the Sacred Land, Great God, Lord of Eternity.” The original draft in red is still partially visible below the polychrome signs. All hieroglyphs are fully painted on the yellow background, so that even an open sign such as the eye is filled with white paint. Details and outlines are rendered with red or black paint; fully blue or red (parts of) signs do not seem to need outlines.

The name of the god is written with the hieroglyphs  (human eye, Gard. D4),  (throne, Gard. Q1), and  (seated god, Gard. A40). The first two present a very common colour palette: the human eye has a black outline and pupil, and white filling; the throne is painted completely blue. The glyph  (seated god, Gard. A40), has a white body, blue wig and beard, red face, and a black and white eye perfectly comparable with the Gard. D4 just described. While the colours used to paint such a complex sign can vary, the design of this example from TT 69 fits the most common colour palette of the Eighteenth Dynasty.



The epithet “great god” is written with the glyphs  (divine standard, Gard. R8) and  (wooden column, Gard. O29). Once more, the painter chose the most common of the available colour palettes: red for the wooden column (notice however the absence of a red outline, present in other cases) and yellow and blue for the divine standard, a sign which in other tombs has at least five colour variants.¹⁰⁶



Fig. 4a–b. Vector reproduction of the writing of the name of Osiris and his epithet “great god,” from the southern wall of the corridor of TT 69.

Illustration by O. Bruderer after photo by M. Sartori

105 For a photo, see Hartwig 2013: 69. The same epithet is also found on the southern wall of the transverse hall, but the hieroglyphs are placed differently (Hartwig 2013: 36).

106 Sartori 2021.

3.2. BD Yuya (Cairo Egyptian Museum CG 51189)

Among the rare manuscripts featuring polychrome text is the funerary papyrus belonging to Yuya, found in his tomb in the Valley of the Kings (KV 46).¹⁰⁷ The papyrus is complete and reaches impressive dimensions, just short of twenty meters. The text is written in retrograde, except for the polychrome inscription in the opening scene, the adoration of Osiris, which is prograde. Naville published the papyrus in 1908. In his description, he commented on the quality of the script:

It is written, like all the copies of the *Book of the Dead* of that time, in linear hieroglyphics, which are not perfect, but which are a transition towards hieratic... the text might be more or less neglected, since probably a few only of the people who saw it could read it; besides, the scribes knew that it was to be hidden in a tomb, where only the ka would look at it.¹⁰⁸

In the description of the adoration of Osiris vignette, however, he translated only the caption without commenting on the presence of a polychrome inscription.¹⁰⁹



Fig. 5. Vector reproduction of the writing of the name of Osiris and his epithet “great god,” from BD Yuya (Cairo Egyptian Museum CG 51189).
Illustration by O. Bruderer after photo by M. Sartori

The caption to the god carries his name and epithets: *wsir ḥnty [imntyw] ntr ʿ nb tʿ [...] wn-nfr nb ʿbdw*. As the other epithets do not feature on all the sources analysed in this paper, only the name of the god and again the epithet *ntr ʿ* are discussed here. The hieroglyphs composing these words are

107 The tomb was discovered by James Quibell in 1905 and published in Naville 1908. At the time of writing, the papyrus is exhibited in the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square, Cairo. A photo of the complete manuscript may be found here <https://www.ushabtis.com/papyrus-yuya/> (accessed 03.11.2025).

108 Naville 1908: 1.

109 Naville 1908: 8.

precisely executed and have both outlines and inner details (fig. 5). The outlines and inner details are painted either black or red. The choice of one colour over the other usually reflects the main colour used for the whole sign, such as red for 𓆎 (divine standard, Gard. R8). Complex hieroglyphs, however, are more flexible and detailed, as shown by the hieroglyph 𓆎 (seated god, Gard. A40). The inner filling of the hieroglyphs is yellow (𓆎, Gard. R8) or white (𓆎, Gard. A40, 𓆎, Gard. D4), whereas signs or sign parts without outlines can be painted either all in red or in black, even when in tomb decoration they may have been painted blue (𓆎, Gard. Q1). Similarly, black column lines replace the blue ones more common for polychrome inscriptions in Eighteenth Dynasty tombs (see above). The use of blue paint is generally limited in text,¹¹⁰ and green seems never to be used. Finally, unlike tomb decoration, the inscription in BD Yuya does not seem to depend on underlying drafts, possibly indicating that the scribe felt very comfortable even when dealing with polychrome inscriptions. This would imply their thorough familiarity with monumental hieroglyphic palaeography, unlike the scribe who added the names and titles to the opening scene of BD Nakht.¹¹¹ The presence or absence of preliminary drafts, however, may simply point towards the coexistence of different writing techniques and stages, as they feature extensively in BD Qenna, where the polychrome text is very carefully written, even if not perfectly overlapping the original drafts.¹¹² The general design of the single hieroglyphs on BD Yuya is in fact perfectly comparable to that found on tomb walls, as seen in the examples from TT 69.

3.3. BD Amenhotep (Trieste Museo Civico 12089 a)

In other cases, the monumentalisation of text adoring Osiris is carried out not through the use of multiple paints but simply by using solid hieroglyphs, i.e. signs fully filled with a single paint.¹¹³ These can be either painted fully black or more rarely, blue.¹¹⁴ An example is the papyrus of the scribe Amenhotep, now held in the Museo Civico di Trieste, and dated to the reign of Amenhotep II.¹¹⁵ The full caption reads *wsir ntr* 𓆎 / *wsir hq* 𓆎 *d.t* / *wsir nb ddw ntr* 𓆎 *nb* / 𓆎 *bdw*. Even though the sign for 𓆎 (𓆎, Gard. O29) might here seem slightly reminiscent of 𓆎 (Gard. Aa27), the 𓆎 (arm, Gard. D36)

110 BD Qenna and BD Nakht A feature hieroglyphs written in blue paint; P. Bologna Museo Archeologico KS3167 displays a rare occurrence of long blue text (Curto et al. 1990: 227.)


111 Glanville 1927: 55.

112 The topic is being currently investigated in more detail by the author together with conservator Eliza Jacobi of the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden.

113 Goelet 2010: 128 introduced the term “solid forms” for this type of fully-painted hieroglyphs. However, contrary to Goelet, I would not categorize all solid forms as necessarily “cursive” (or even linear) but would rather assess case by case whether solid hieroglyphic inscriptions are better defined as linear or monumental.

114 e.g. BD Kha (Ferraris 2018: 71–88).

115 Crevatin & Vidulli Torlo 2013: 127–128. Photographs can also be found online: https://beniculturali.comune.trieste.it/reperto-archeologico/?s_id=350685 (accessed 03.11.2025).

and  papyrus roll determinative (Gard. Y1) following them confirm the reading as wooden column (fig. 6). These two additional signs however are rare as part of the Osiris caption and absent from the other instances discussed here, and they were therefore excluded from the analysis since there was no scope in comparing their graphic execution.

All the signs are filled in with paint, and no inner details are visible, the only exception being the pupil in the hieroglyph depicting the human eye (fig. 7). In this case, empty parts of hieroglyphs have not been filled with a neutral paint. The inscription is written once more in vertical columns, as is the case for all the analysed instances, but, as in tombs, monochrome black text is usually framed by red guidelines, instead of blue ones typical for polychrome inscriptions.



Fig. 6. JSeSh transcription of the name of Osiris and his epithet "great god" from BD Amenhotep (Trieste Museo Civico 12089a)



Fig. 7. Vector reproduction of the writing of the name of Osiris and the main signs writing his epithet "great god," from BD Amenhotep (Trieste Museo Civico 12089a). Illustration by O. Bruderer after photo by M. Sartori

3.4. BD Nebseni (London BM EA 9900) 116

Unlike the other sources previously mentioned, the Eighteenth-Dynasty papyrus of Nebseni comes allegedly from Saqqara, and is peculiar from several points of view. Firstly, the manuscript has a general bichrome palette, with only black and red used, even for the vignettes. This fact has contributed to the idea that it may have been produced by Nebseni himself, as he bore the title of *zh'w-qd.wt* (scribe of forms; painter; artist).¹¹⁷ The example shown here comes from within the body of the manuscript, because the opening adoration vignette has suffered damage, and the name of the god is lost. However, the writing of the epithet *ntr* ³ is comparable with the one discussed here.¹¹⁸ The

116 Published in Lapp 2004. Photographs are also available on https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA9900-10 (accessed 03.11.2025).

117 Lapp 2004: 57.

118 Lapp 2004: pl. 2 (BM EA 9900, 1) vs. 28 (BM EA 9900, 10.)

general graphic register of the manuscript is linear hieroglyphs once again in columnar format, yet, as discussed above, the scribe adopted different varieties of signs in different parts of the text.

The papyrus illustrates how scribes could play with the use of colour and paint within a strictly monochrome linear inscription. In a linear hieroglyphic context, in fact, whereas usually most signs are written as outlines (in this case, 𓂏, Gard. Q1, and 𓂏, Gard. A40),¹¹⁹ others may be fully painted (𓂏, Gard. O29), and yet others feature inner details executed through lines or blocks of colour (𓂏, Gard. D4, and 𓂏, Gard. R8). Such an alternation between empty (unpainted) and fully-painted forms may almost count visually as a form of bichromy, as the contrast between the black-filled areas and the unpainted (white or blank) spaces creates a bichrome-like effect, even if technically relying on a single pigment. The level of detail can vary greatly from manuscript to manuscript: the example from BD Nebseni shown here even exhibits a dot within the pupil where there is no paint (fig. 8). This example confirms that linear hieroglyphs are closely related to, and aspire to refer to, the monumental script: even when monochrome, their design and proportions are closely reminiscent of contemporary private monumental inscriptions, such as the discussed example found in TT 69.



Fig. 8. Vector reproduction of the writing of the name of Osiris and his epithet “great god,” from BD Nebseni (London BM EA 9900, 10). Illustration by O. Bruderer.
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4. Concluding remarks

After turning away from hieratic, funerary manuscripts from the Eighteenth Dynasty are written mostly in often detailed linear hieroglyphs, hinting at the importance of giving aesthetic and ritual value to the text itself. Within these documents, however, certain passages, such as the hymns and adoration scenes generally found at their beginnings, and captions to the major vignettes, originally found in monumental tomb decoration, often display a more detailed graphic rendition. Such a practice confirms that the genre of the inscription influenced the choice of certain graphic registers, as is especially the case for the scene of the Osiris kiosk, which seems to automatically carry the need for a more monumental script type. These “*transfuges graphiques*” highlight the intense interplay of different media in the New Kingdom.

119 These nonetheless display a higher level of detail than in other parts of the manuscript, e.g. BM EA 9900, 25, in Lapp 2004: 75.

As most manuscripts were written using black ink, monumentalisation was most commonly achieved through a more elaborate glyph design, in which empty spaces coexist alongside fully painted details. This is the case for BD Nebseni, which features more elegant hieroglyphs not only in its opening scene, but also in the body of the scroll, in a second Osiris adoration scene. However, certain manuscripts show different ways of raising the prestige of particular text sections, such as in BD Amenhotep, where the caption to Osiris is fully painted in solid black. Rarely, solid blue hieroglyphs were used for the god's name, as in BD Kha (Turin Museo Egizio S. 8316/03), while the text referring to Kha himself was written in linear black hieroglyphs, elegantly designed and often alternating empty spaces with fully-painted areas (fig. 1). In other cases, the colour of the glyphs alone (especially costly blue), rather than their opaque design or additional inner details, contributed to monumentalising the scene.¹²⁰ Manuscripts with polychrome inscriptions—which always appear at the beginning of the scroll, usually in scenes of adoration of Osiris, but also in hymns—may exhibit a more or less full colour palette. Blue paint is present in BD Nakht and BD Qenna, whereas in BD Yuya, as presented here, this colour is instead replaced by black. It is furthermore noteworthy that whereas the morphology and colour of certain signs may remain mainly consistent across media (as is the case for the  “seated god” glyph as found in TT 69 and BD Yuya), manuscript palaeography may display a different approach to others, such as the divine standard. Nonetheless, the use of polychrome hieroglyphs shows an intention to raise the prestige and visual efficacy not only of the artefact as a whole, but of the particular text to which polychromy has been applied. That such passages also appear in polychrome hieroglyphs in contemporaneous tomb decoration demonstrates the strong connection between tomb wall and manuscript for these scenes. To maintain this connection, scribes had at their disposal a range of possible options, a “monumentality spectrum,” which could go from extremely detailed linear hieroglyphs to solid hieroglyphs, to various types of polychrome hieroglyphs, and which could exhibit characteristics of both linear and non-linear hieroglyphs. As no absolute boundaries exist between the different graphic varieties, the monumentality of a passage of text can obviously be assessed only in relative terms, both within the artefact itself and in relation to other artefacts, which need not all necessarily belong to the same object category. Further investigation will focus on comparisons between colour use and design of hieroglyphs on different media.

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120 BD Tjenena (Louvre N.3074), Barbotin 2007–2008: 42–51.

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