

Walk Like a *Wsr*

Tracing a Hieroglyph through Times and Scripts

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Abstract. This essay offers a short discussion of the sign  (F78), a variant of  (F12). The known attestations are collected and are presented in an appendix.

Keywords. Gardiner F78; Walking *wsr*; Hyksos; jackal-headed figure.

1. Introduction

Our knowledge of the corpus of hieroglyphic signs and their variants is constantly growing. Variations of hieroglyphs¹ may be overlooked or not considered in typeset texts because they are functionally interchangeable. Nevertheless, despite their semantic synonymy, these variations provide valuable insight into the possibilities and limitations of variation in the hieroglyphic script.²

An interesting example of overlooked signs is  (F78), which is often associated with the Hyksos, rulers of the 15th Dynasty.³ The following essay presents a collection of attestations of this variant, examines its origin and transformation, and investigates any restrictions on its usage.

¹ On this topic, see *inter alia* Polis 2020: 554.

² e.g. the usage of a human ear  (D18) instead of the cow's ear  (F21) in the title *sdm-š* (Ragab 2024). On the use of composite hieroglyphs, see most lately Seyr 2023.

³ *Inter alia* Gauthier 1912: 136 [n. 2]; Ben-Tor 2007: 106; Quirke 2016: 345.

2. The Sign (F78)

The sign  (F78)⁴ was early on understood as a graphical variation of  (F12). Recently, it has been described as a synecdoche (most likely of ; C25)⁵ and classified as an anthropomorphic variant of  (F12).⁶

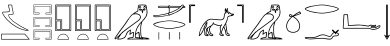
Before the Second Intermediate Period,  (F78) is only attested written with ink. The earliest attestation is found in the hieratic text on P. Berlin P. 9010⁷ purchased by L. Borchardt in 1896 at Elephantine.⁸ Written in a clearly legible Old Hieratic script, this text was dated palaeographically to the 6th Dynasty.⁹ The text itself deals with a dispute over property and an estate. Among the individuals mentioned is *Wsr*, written thrice as   .¹⁰ The complementary writing confirms the phonetic value of  (F78) as *wsr* in the earliest known attestation. One wonders whether the addition of a supplementary stroke to  (F12) in the hieratic script paved the way for the later creation of the walking *wsr*  (F78).¹¹ However, while a later case from the Middle Kingdom (ex. 4 in the appendix) clearly shows the sign  (F78), the examples from the Old Kingdom (ex. 1–3) may also depict a seated hieratic version of a canine headed deity such as  (C6).¹² Nevertheless, the reading *wsr* is also verified in these cases due to the complementary writing in the attested name *Wsr*. Other signs that might fit the traces in the Old Kingdom attestations are not known with the reading *wsr* and it fits the usage of this sign in the attestation from the Middle Kingdom ( , cf. fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Detail of CG 20364 (© J. Posch)

- 4 Following the *Thot Sign List*,  (F78) can be identified as a composite hieroglyph between  (F69) and  (D54); Sign TSL_1_3159 <<http://thotsignlist.org/mysign?id=3159>>, in *Thot Sign List*, edited by Université de Liège and Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften [last accessed: 24.09.2025].
- 5 Roberson 2020: 40.
- 6 Roberson 2020: 82 [F78].
- 7 Gardiner & Möller 1911: pl. I-la. See also Pillon 2021: 222–223.
- 8 <<https://elephantine.smb.museum/objects/object.php?o=400008>> [last accessed: 15.09.2025].
- 9 Cf. Sethe 1926: 67–68.
- 10 The sign itself is written as  (col. 3),  (col. 5), and  (col. 8); cf. Gardiner & Möller 1911: pl. I. The short stroke of the second leg distinguishes it from other examples of seated deities (with a canine head), e.g.  (Qau-bowl outside col. 3; Gardiner & Sethe 1928: pl. III). On the interpretation of the last as a seated Seth, see McDonald 2002: 284–285. However, the legs of other hieratic signs such as  (A1) and  (A2) are similar if not identical in their appearance, offering a valuable reading option.
- 11 On the addition of legs to hieroglyphs, see furthermore Meeks 2023: 370–373. Based on the example *iʿb* and *iʿb*, he highlights the possible influences of hieratic signs on hieroglyphic writing and vice versa, as well as later (re)interpretations of signs. See also fn. 23 below.
- 12 Cf. the shape of the hieratic rendering of this sign on a letter to the dead from the First Intermediate Period (pHearst 1282; Szpakowska 1999: 163).

As other signs that might fit the traces in the Old Kingdom attestations are not known with the reading *wsr*, this leaves  (F 78) as the best reading also in these first instances.

According to R. Anthes, a dipinto at Hatnub (Gr. 1; tab. 1 [a]),¹³ dated to the reign of Teti, contains the sign  (F78).¹⁴ The preserved traces resemble the only other known example of this sign from the Old Kingdom (cf. tab. 1). However, the available space to its left is damaged, but would only allow for the reading of the sign  (S29) or similar.  (F78) is otherwise only found in anthroponyms (see the attestations in tab. 1 below) and the dipinto in Hatnub would be the only instance in which it is written outside of an anthroponym. One may therefore question this reading and hypothesize that the visible traces are part of the sign  (E17), which not only fits the remaining traces but also the available space. This allows to read the passage as  'rf m mr.w(t) Inpw m ḥw.wt m³(w.t) "wrapping up in the sanctuaries¹⁵ of Anubis within the new temples."¹⁶

Early on,  (F78) was primarily associated with both the Second Intermediate Period and the reign of Ramesses (II).¹⁷ However,  (F78) is known from both the Old Kingdom as well as the early Middle Kingdom, contradicting the idea that this sign was unique to a specific region and/or time period during the Second Intermediate Period¹⁸ and a short revival during the reign of Seti (I) and Ramesses (II).¹⁹

13 Anthes 1928: pl. 9–9a [Gr. 1].

14 Anthes 1928: 19. He was followed in this reading by Möller 1935: 2 [149].

15 Erman 1928: 108.9–10; TIA WCN 800018.

16 I would like to thank Roman Gundacker, Johannes Jüngling, and Philipp Seyr for their helpful suggestions and discussions concerning this passage.

17 Gauthier 1912: 136 [n. 2]. Contrary to H. Gauthier's statement that the sign  (F78) may only be found among the names of S.wsr-n-R'w (II) Ḥ-jj-ḥ-ḥ, '3-wsr-R'w ḥppj (III), and Ramesses (II), he depicts this very sign in the name of at least one other king of the Second Intermediate Period; cf. Gauthier 1912: 146.

18 See fn. 1 above. This even led to a chronological hypothesis: As some inscriptions from Gebelein with the names of S.wsr-n-R'w (II) Ḥ-jj-ḥ-ḥ or '3-wsr-R'w ḥppj (III) spell their prenomen with  (F78), Vandersleyen 1995: 173–175 proposed that the appearance of this sign in the prenominal '3-wsr-R'w may have coincided with this ruler's territorial dominance over parts of Upper Egypt. This was early on questioned by Schneider 1998: 73, who stressed the possibility that the prenominal '3-wsr-R'w was used during the majority of '3-wsr-R'w ḥppj's (III) reign. On the find context of the inscriptions of S.wsr-n-R'w (II) Ḥ-jj-ḥ-ḥ or '3-wsr-R'w ḥppj (III), see also the discussion in Polz 2006. However, as this ruler most likely never changed his prenominal (as highlighted by Ilin-Tomich 2023: 104, there is no reason to assume that '3-wsr-R'w ḥppj (III) changed his prenominal twice during his reign; the only prenominal that can be linked with this ruler with any certainty is '3-wsr-R'w, which he most likely wore from the beginning), any chronological implication linked with such a change cannot be upheld. Cf. also Siesse 2019: 114.

19 See also Hagen 2025: 7–9, 19–20, and passim.

3. Discussion

The sign  (F78) belongs to a rare type of composite hieroglyphs that are first attested in the hieratic script and later became part of the hieroglyphic corpus.²⁰ All verified usages of the sign  (F78) are observed within anthroponyms. The earliest two examples are known from private individuals both named *Wsr*; however, after the Middle Kingdom, it was exclusively used for rulers. Its reappearance in royal names during the reigns of Seti (I) and the early part of Ramesses (II) are best explained as a revival drawing on the late Second Intermediate Period,²¹ perhaps due to the close proximity of Piramesse to the former power centre of the 15th Dynasty, Avaris.

Besides a royal commission, there is no clear connection between the use of this sign and its context (cf. tab. 1). During the Second Intermediate Period, the sign appears on scarabs, jar lids, statues, columns, and a door lintel. Later, during the New Kingdom, the sign is known from a door lintel, a column, and wall decorations in the outer and innermost temple areas, as well as on a statue, and from a graffito in the Wadi Hammamat. As there are currently no attestations known from tombs or more profane contexts such as administrative texts during the New Kingdom, it can be tentatively concluded that this sign is mainly found in temple contexts (cf. tab. 1 [Ramesside Period]). However, any specific significance of this sign compared to  (F12) must, at least at the moment, remain unknown.

3.1. Excursus: Depictions of a jackal-headed guardian or god

Jackal-headed figures with walking legs appear in the rows of deities on amulets²² and *apotropaia*. They are very similar to the hieroglyphic sign  (F78), but may be supplemented by a knife in their paw and snakes coming out of their mouths (fig. 2).²³ Later on, this knife disappears and they are more similar to instances of  (F78) (fig. 3). Whereas the examples of birth tusks depict this figure with paws, the much later case of amulet Louvre N 3233b depicts this similar figure with human legs.

20 On this phenomenon, see Fischer 1977: 17–18 [fn. 156]. Similarly also Seyr 2023: 156 with fn. 33 and 169–170, who suggests that many composite hieroglyphs originated as cursive ligatures and continued into hieroglyphic writing.

21 Cf. for example also the case of Seth from Avaris; Bietak 1990.

22 e.g. Louvre N 3233b from the Late Period; cf. Goyon 1977: 48–49 with n. 1 and pl. XV. Next to four lines of hieratic text is an oversized depiction of a jackal-headed figure with two legs.

23 Other examples only with two legs are MMA 08.200.19, Philadelphia UPM E 2914, and Cairo CG 9438 = JE 31046; cf. also Quirke 2016: 347.

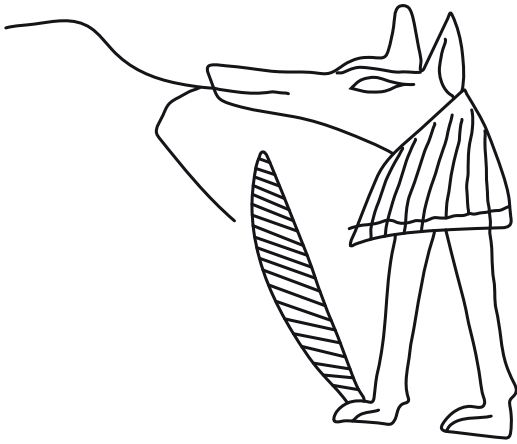


Fig. 2. Drawing of Walters Art Museum 71.510 after <https://art.thewalters.org/object/71.510/> (© J. Posch)



Fig. 3. Drawing of Louvre N 3233b after <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010003253> (© J. Posch)

It is unclear whether these depictions in apotropaic contexts were influenced by the sign  (F78), or whether they developed independently.²⁴ The earliest hieroglyphic example of this sign (i.e. ex. [4], tab. 1)²⁵ is known from the early Middle Kingdom, predating the major phase of magic wands, i.e. birth tusks. However, as this is a singular attestation, it is hard to draw any major conclusions from it. Various combinations of legs with heads of animals,²⁶ or other symbols such as the sun²⁷ can be observed, especially on birth tusks, allowing for a potential independent development of the figure. These depictions of apotropaic figures with walking legs most likely serve to illustrate speed and agility, making them effective protectors and guardians. While these jackal-headed walking figures may represent Anubis or Upuaut,²⁸ they should not be read as the hieroglyphic

24 One might wonder whether several mud seals from Tundaba in the Western Desert also depict this guardian/god instead of the hieroglyphic sign. The published example (Darnell 2013: 252 [fig. 32]) shows two lines of figures apparently following each other. In the first line, legs and part of a head are visible, which have been interpreted as belonging to the sign  (F78) that is standing in front of a tree. Below, two heads of the sign  (F12) are visible, seemingly walking one after the other. However, the shapes of the heads in both lines do not align with each other—while the upper illustration shows a broad nose, those of the lower figures are pointed—and as the lower line has only their heads preserved, they could very well be standing standards rather than walking figures. Based on the dating of other materials found at Tundaba (Darnell 2013: 250–257), these seals most likely date to the late Second Intermediate Period or the early New Kingdom.

25 The signs on this stela are in between different stages from clear hieroglyphs to cursive hieroglyphs, conforming to the examples 1, 2, and 3a in Te Velde 1988: 172. The scribe painted less common signs (e.g.  [F63]) with greater detail, while frequent signs (e.g.  [A1]) tend towards their hieratic appearance.

26 Quirke 2016: 349 [4.1.3.4].

27 Quirke 2016: 387 [4.1.12].

28 Altenmüller 1965: 165; Altenmüller 2023: 37. *Contra* Budge 1934: 88–89, who associates these figures with the Seth-animal.

sign  (F78), *wsr*.²⁹ It is also possible that the appearance of jackal-headed walking figures on apotropaia during the 13th Dynasty influenced their reappearance in the royal names of the 14th and 15th Dynasties. Such an association necessitates some kind of link between the sign  (F78) and these apotropaic figures, which might be simply visually. Anyhow, without clearer attestations this must remain speculative for the time being.

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29 *Contra* Morenz 2008: 246–247, who proposes to interpret it as a hieroglyph combining the two signs *ini* “to bring; to bring away; to buy” (Erman & Grapow 1926: 90.2–91.10; TLA WCN 26870) and *wsr* “powerful one” (Erman & Grapow 1926: 363.5–7; TLA WCN 49610). He thus reads: *ini wsr* “(Herbei)Bringen von *wsr*.” For a similar interpretation of the pictorial combination in the sign  (W25), see Xú & Goldwasser 2024: 189. However, while the latter is presented as a combination of  (W24) and  (D54), the sign  (F78) is better described as a compound of  (F69) and  (D45) (see also fn. 2), rather than  (W25) and  (F12) as proposed by L. Morenz.

Appendix: Collection of attestations of (F78)

6th Dynasty		Early Middle Kingdom	
(1)  (2)  (3) 		(4) ³⁰  *	
Second Intermediate Period			
<i>H'ḫ-wsr-R'w</i> ; 14th Dynasty		<i>Mri'-Wsr-R'w Jj~ḳ~b-hr</i> ; 14th Dynasty	
(5)  *		(6)  * (7)  (8)  (9)  (10)  (11)  (12)  (13)  (14)  (15)  (16)  * (17)  * (18)  (19)  (20)  (21)  *	
<i>S.wsr-n-R'w</i> (II) <i>H~jj~³~n</i> ; 15th Dynasty		<i>ḳ-wsr-R'w Ippj</i> (III); 15th Dynasty	
(22)  (23)  * (24)  * (25)  * (26)  (27)  *		(28)  (29)  (30)  (31)  (32)  * (33)  * (34)  (35)  (36)  * (37)  * (38)  * (39)  *	
Ramesside Period			
Seti (I); 19th Dynasty	Ramesses (II); 19th Dynasty	Ramesses (IV); 20th Dynasty	
(40)  (41) 	(42)  * (43)  (44)  (45)  (46)  (47)  * (48)  (49)  (50)  (51)  (52) 	(53) 	
Uncertain attestations			
(a) 			

Tab. 1. Overview of attestations with the sign F78.

Drawing of signs were made based on photographs (*) or redrawn based on published fac-simile.

The drawings are not in scale

30 Such a date is indicated by the use of n *im³hjj* NN, which is not common after the early Middle Kingdom (Bennett 1941: 79; Rosati 1980: 270; Ilin-Tomich 2017: 31), and *pr.t-hrw* directly follows *hṭp-di-njswt* without a preceding *di=f*, which is only rarely known after the mid of the 12th Dynasty (Bennett 1941: 77–78 [1]).

- (1) Papyrus Berlin P. 9010: <<https://aku-pal.uni-mainz.de/signs/18304>> [last accessed: 15.09.2025]
- (2) Papyrus Berlin P. 9010: <<https://aku-pal.uni-mainz.de/signs/18305>> [last accessed: 15.09.2025]
- (3) Papyrus Berlin P. 9010: <<https://aku-pal.uni-mainz.de/signs/18305>> [last accessed: 15.09.2025]
- (4) Stela Cairo CG 20364: Mariette 1880: 214 [No 735]; Lange & Schäfer 1902–1925: I, 369 [CG 20364]; IV, pl. XXVII
- (5) Scarab London UC 11797: Tufnell 1984: pl. LIX [3345]
- (6) Scarab BM EA 30500: Tufnell 1984: pl. LVII [3228]
- (7) Scarab Aberdeen ABDUA: 81204: Petrie 1917: pl. XXI [15.4]
- (8) Seal impression TD 8970: Zeger 2009: 68
- (9) Seal impression TD 8971: Zeger 2009: 69
- (10) Seal impression TD 8972: Zeger 2009: 70
- (11) Seal impression TD 8973: Zeger 2009: 71
- (12) Seal impression TD 8974: Zeger 2009: 72
- (13) Seal impression TD 8974: Zeger 2009: 72
- (14) Seal impression TD 9019: Zeger 2009: 109
- (15) Scarab Basel cat. 143: Hornung & Staehelin 1976: 219 [cat. 143]
- (16) Scarab Bet-Shemesh IAA 1995.5571: Keel 2013: 108–109 [31]
- (17) Scarab Jerusalem IM 76.31.3977: <<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/598518-0>> [last accessed: 18.09.2025]
- (18) Scarab Chicago OIM 18464: Tufnell 1984: pl. LVII [3224]
- (19) Scarab Cairo JE 72863: Tufnell 1984: pl. LVII [3225]
- (20) Scarab Berlin ÄM 8891: Tufnell 1984: pl. LVII [3226]
- (21) Scarab BM EA 64759: Tufnell 1984: pl. LVII [3227]
- (22) Scarab Chicago OIM 18461: Tufnell 1984: pl. LVI [3213]
- (23) Scarab Berlin ÄM 18653: Tufnell 1984: pl. LXII [3459]; Ilin-Tomich 2023: 145 [fig. 94]
- (24) Statue Cairo CG 389 = JE 28574 = GEM 1720: Borchardt 1925: 7–8 [CG 389]
- (25) Column Cairo JE 30392: Polz 2006: 240 [fig. 1]
- (26) Sphinx BM EA 987: Hall 1914: pl. 18
- (27) Jar lid Heraklion, Archaeological Museum 263: Lilyquist 1995: 83 [fig. 12]
- (28) Scarab Ashmolean AN1893.9: Tufnell 1984: pl. LXII [3439]
- (29) Scarab London UC 11661: Tufnell 1984: pl. LXII [3462]
- (30) Scarab BM EA 32331: Tufnell 1984: pl. LXII [3443]
- (31) Scarab London UC 11663: Tufnell 1984: pl. LXII [3446]
- (32) Scarab BM EA 24113: Tufnell 1984: pl. LXII [3458]
- (33) Scarab London UC 11662: Tufnell 1984: pl. LXII [3442]
- (34) Scarab London UC 11677: Tufnell 1984: pl. LXII [3446]
- (35) Scarab Cairo JE 72859: Tufnell 1984: pl. LXII [3451]
- (36) Scarab Berlin ÄM 32722: Ilin-Tomich 2023: 106 [fig. 67]
- (37) Scarab BM EA 37663: Ilin-Tomich 2023: 106 [fig. 69]
- (38) Scarab BM EA 66167: Ilin-Tomich 2023: 115 [fig. 74]
- (39) Door lintel Cairo JE 29238: Polz 2006: 240 [fig. 1]
- (40) Western wall of room 17 in the temple of Seti (I) in Abydos: Černý Notebook MSS 17.156: 30–31; Naville 1930: pl. II; Kitchen 1975: 193.14; Beckerath 1999: 150–151 [G1b]. The sign is used in the Golden Falcon name of this king (*Wḥm-h'ṯ.w-Wsr-pḏ.wt-m-t'ḫ.w-nb.w*) on both, the northern and southern part of the western wall
- (41) Western wall of room 17 in the temple of Seti (I) in Abydos: Naville 1930: pl. IV
- (42) Statue D in Luxor temple: Kitchen 1979: 186.9. Drawing after a photograph of C. Jurman, whom I would like to thank here
- (43) Ramses Abydos, chapel H.2: Iskander & Goelt 2015: 274–277 [pl. 4.1.3–6]

- (44) Ramses Abydos, chapel L.3: Iskander & Goelet 2015: 356–357 [pl. 4.6.3–4]
- (45) Ramses Abydos Pillar 53: Iskander and Goelet 2020: 428–429 [pl. 1.203]
- (46) Ramses Abydos Chapel S Niche 18: Iskander & Goelet 2020: 530–531 [pl. 2.2.16]
- (47) Relief, door lintel in room XXVIII (Porter & Moss 1972: plan XL [h–g]) in the temple of Seti (I) in Qurnah: Gauthier 1914: 55; Lepsius [1849–1859]: Blatt 132 [f]; the second appearance of this sign on the door jambs is too damage nowadays to be verified; Lepsius & Sethe 1900: 96; verified personally in the temple
- (48) Relief, Hypostyle Hall in Karnak: Nelson 1981: pl. 63
- (49) Relief, Hypostyle Hall in Karnak: Nelson 1981: pl. 71
- (50) Relief, Hypostyle Hall in Karnak: Nelson 1981: pl. 81
- (51) Relief, Hypostyle Hall in Karnak: Nelson 1981: pl. 83
- (52) Relief, Hypostyle Hall in Amarah West: Kitchen 1979: 214.15; Spencer 2016: pl. 67 [b]
- (53) Stela 238 in the Wadi Hammamat: Couyat & Montet 1912: 111 [No 238] and pl. XLV; Kitchen 1983: 16.1; Montet 1950: 26 fig. 4 [l. 6]. As part of a cryptographic writing of the name *Wsr-M³.t-R⁴w*
- (a) Dipinto Hatnub Gr. 1: Anthes 1928: pl. 9a [Gr. 1]. The majority of the inscription was written in hieroglyphs with few exceptions such as the hieratic  (G17)

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