To: Unicode Technical Committee
From: Deborah Anderson
Date: 13 October 2005
Subject: Request for Egyptian transliteration characters as provided in N2241: Proposal to add 6 Egyptological characters to the UCS by Michael Everson

I have received a number of requests for six Egyptian transliteration characters recently. I attach three letters from ongoing projects that need these characters and request that the UTC discuss this proposal.

Proposal N2241 by Michael Everson, dated 2000-08-27, apparently was never discussed in the UTC. It was, however, discussed at WG 2 meeting 39 (Vouliagmeni, Athens, Greece, 2000-09-19 – 22). This document is based on discussion in a document N2043 submitted by Michael Everson on 1999-07-24.

Authors of the letters and their affiliations:

> 1. Donald Mastronarde, Melpomene Professor of Classics
> Director, Center for the Tebtunis Papyri
> UC Berkeley
>
> 2. Michael A. Berger
> Manager/Faculty Liaison/Grants Administrator
> Language Faculty Resource Center
> Language Laboratories and Archives
> University of Chicago
>
> 3. Bob Richmond MA (Cantab.)
> Director
> Saqqara Technology Ltd.
> www.gameset.com

Dear Debbie,

I am writing on behalf of the Center for the Tebtunis Papyri to endorse discussion and adoption of three characters needed for the transliteration of Demotic Egyptian. The Center promotes study of a large collection of papyri at the University of Californnia, Berkeley, and up to one-third of this collection has writing in Demotic Egyptian from the period extending from the third century BCE to the fourth century CE. The actual script used for Demotic Egyptian is quite difficult, and it has long been the practice of scholars to represent such texts in publications in a transliterated form using mostly ordinary roman characters or roman characters with usual and unusual diacritics. Thus, most of the characters needed to encode transliterated Demotic texts as Unicode are already in the standard.

In n2241.pdf, Michael Everson identified three characters that are not currently in the standard (Egyptological alef, yod, and ayin). These items are essential to the representation of both Demotic and earlier Egyptian texts in the usual form of transliteration. We are already using a Unicode font at the Center to prepare camera-ready copy for Volume VI of the series The Tebtunis Papyri, to be published soon by the Oriental Institute in Chicago, and several future volumes already in progress will also need to present Demotic texts. In the interim, these three items are encoded in the font in PUA, but to avoid conflicts and confusion they certainly deserve official codepoints.

The font and an associated input for Demotic transliteration for Mac OS X have been made available to papyrologists around the world, and we know that they are being used by Prof. Todd Hickey and his researchers at the Center here, by some contributors to Volume VI, and by Demotic expert Dr. Brian Muhs in Leiden, and it may be assumed that they are in use elsewhere as well.

Effective and easy international communication among Demotists in the future depends on inclusion of their needed symbols in the Unicode standard. I very much hope the UTC will soon discuss the proposal contained in n2241.pdf.

Donald J. Mastronarde, Melpomene Professor of Classics
Director, Center for the Tebtunis Papyri
http://tebtunis.berkeley.edu
University of California   djmastronarde@berkeley.edu
Department of Classics   http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~pinax
7233 Dwinelle Hall # 2520   phone 510-642-4099 (Dept. Office -4218)
Berkeley CA 94720-2520   FAX 510-643-2959

Dear Debbie,

I am the manager of the Language Faculty Resource Center at the University of Chicago, and I am one of the developers of the Middle Egyptian Text Editions For Online Research (METEOR) project.

The METEOR project, funded by a Mellon Foundation grant for Less Commonly Taught Languages, is producing an electronic readingbook for students studying Middle Egyptian, the classic stage of the ancient Egyptian language. The readingbook includes a corpus of Middle Egyptian texts representing the numerous genres of texts preserved in Middle Egyptian and appropriate for study by students beginning the study of Middle Egyptian. For each text, students are able to access any section of the text, in hieroglyphs, attempt to transliterate and translate the passage, and check their work with linked glossary and grammar. In addition, there are numerous linked digital maps and other images and text intended to place the individual texts in their cultural, geographical, and physical contexts. Cultural information about ancient Egypt can be obtained from the vast array of art and archaeological materials that have survived: paintings, sculptures, architecture, artifacts (e.g., tools, pottery, weapons), maps, and other texts. The inclusion of this information helps to contextualize each inscription for the student. There is also a sign list giving not only identification of each sign and common phonetic uses of each sign but also a schematic to help students learn how to draw the sign.

For our project we need the transliteration characters (proposed in document N2241 by Michael Everson), as these would be very useful for any ancient Egyptian text document. Currently the METEOR project uses the PUA for these characters, so we would welcome their inclusion in
Unicode.

Sincerely,
Michael Berger
Manager/Faculty Liaison/Grants Administrator
Language Faculty Resource Center, Language Laboratories and Archives
University of Chicago
5811 S. Ellis - Cobb 211
Chicago, IL 60637
Ph. 773-702-9772; FAX: 773-702-9861; email: m-berger1@uchicago.edu

Hi Debbie

The transliteration scheme used by most modern egyptologists and students (modern meaning a century or so!) for hieroglyphs and hieratic from Old Egyptian on uses basic latin characters, some with diacritics, and three special characters for Alef, Ayin and Yod. Upper and lower case versions of these are used in the literature. The http://std.dkuug.dk/jtc1/sc2/wg2/docs/n2241.pdf proposal describes this notation and works just fine for Egyptian Transliteration.

As Michael notes, whereas Alef and Ayin are treated consistently, Yod is sometimes represented by a 'j' eg. Loprieno 1995 and Allen 2000 instead of the 'i with special diacritic'. In my opinion however, a distinct character is desirable for machine purposes - the character has a distinct meaning.

Many C19 transliteration schemes were influenced by Coptic scholarship - Champillion notation and variations are found in books from Sharpe, Birch, Renouf etc. Budge continued this tradition in his (prolific) publications until his death in 1934. Books by Budge remain very popular to this day as they deal with material not adequately published in a more modern approach so the modern reader will encounter the older tradition.

The modern system originated in Germany 1880s (cf Erman in particular) and had been adopted by most Egyptologists by early C20. Griffith (1898) documents the situation at the turn of the century well. Grammars (eg Gardiner 1927) and dictionaries (eg Wörterbuch, Faulkner) established the standard 80+ years ago.

Computer software from the 90s to date (eg InScribe, Winglyph, MacScribe, GlyphScribe) use the notation, also using a shorthand for ease of keying viz A=ALEF a=AIN, i=YOD. 8 bit fonts have had to be hacked to represent the correct glyphs while waiting for a Unicode standard. This still tends to be the case rather than PUA. Web pages have resorted to various hacks including 3 (numeral three) for Alef and ' (quote) for Ayin - a practice that precludes sensible data processing.

Data processing of ancient egyptian is often done in transliteration and in my opinion work in this area has been slowed down in recent years by lack of an adequate standard. Applications include dictionaries and databases.

Word processing and publishing are other popular applications by students, egyptologists and hobbyists. Using hack solutions means one can usually ends up fighting WP and other software (eg spelling and grammar correction, data sorting etc.). Obviously. Even with an addition to Unicode it will take years before the characters are widely supported but at least we can make a
start.

Personally speaking, I would be looking to include associated font and software support in InScribe, GlyphScribe and other software in development as soon as the characters are available in a published standard. This would then give several hundred users a better solution than they have now.

Saqqara is also creating digitally remodelled editions of a number of older publications in addition to new works. I'm currently stuck in PUA for this work. All would benefit from availability of standard characters. Me as editor and, more significantly, for users. Medium term leads to the possibility of compatible searching and other functionality in products from
key vendors such as Adobe (eg PDF, Acrobat) and Microsoft (Windows etc.). It should be emphasised that I expect searching will often be done by transliteration, not hieroglyphs, for many applications. Much as pinyin is used with Simplified Chinese.

If a basic set of Egyptian Hieroglyphs forms part of Unicode 5.1 (a goal I very much support), it would be odd not to have (simple and surely uncontroversial) support for Egyptian Transliteration along the lines given in the 5 year old proposal. A table with two legs has its uses but we can do better.

Regards

Bob Richmond MA (Cantab.)
Director
Saqqara Technology Ltd.
www.gameset.com