The Universal Hieroglyphic Writing System: a compromise first stage

Bob Richmond, version 2016-08-04

Mark-Jan, Stéphane and I will be participating remotely in a UTC meeting today.

Following the I&E Cambridge meeting on July 11th there appears to be only one consensus solution for the first stage of a hieroglyphic writing system. Serge (Ramses Project) and Simon (TLA) and I are in agreement about this. Mark-Jan and Stéphane have not been available this week so they may have additional points to raise at the meeting.

We will also try to agree a 'where we are now' document as the basis of future developments and aim to update this in October to report progress to the next UTC meeting.

Initial encoding of hieroglyphic as a complex script

Actions

Add the EGYPTIAN HIEROGLYPH HORIZONAL JOINER and EGYPTIAN HIEROGLYPH VERTICAL JOINER characters to Unicode 10 on the basis of L2/16-018 but exclude LIGATURE at this first stage. Scope to horizontal text only.

Update section 11.4 *Egyptian Hieroglyphs* of the Unicode Standard to use the two control system rather than MdC (as stands at Unicode 9.0). Reference to be made to the earlier method in some way. Changes to Unicode data tables and technical notes?

Clarify the situation relating to enclosures such as cartouche. No 'official' HLP guidance in technical notes at this stage. To be left to the user community to decide on what methods may be useful.

Benefits

Egyptologists will have the opportunity to understand how hieroglyphic as a Unicode writing system works.

General purpose software (web browsers, word processors, search engines, low level shaping software) can be updated to support Egyptian Hieroglyphic as a complex script. Once Egyptian is treated as a complex script in software, additional controls should be technically straightforward to add.

Fonts can implement Egyptian Hieroglyphic as a complex script with basic functionality.

Specialist software can use a simple HLP to enable progression from MdC-level designs and data formats.

Specialist databases (such as Ramses and TLA) can use a simple HLP to enable progression from MdC type formats.

Disadvantages

For the majority of scholars and virtually all casual users, using a system that almost but not quite meets their needs will be a little frustrating until more functionality is added.

Web sites such as Wikipedia may decide to continue to use non-text methods for rendering hieroglyphs (e.g. WikiHiero) until a more complete solution is available. If a reliable HLP becomes available to address the issue this may be less of a problem.