Title
Proposal for encoding the Meroitic Hieroglyphic and the Meroitic Cursive scripts in the SMP of the UCS

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Peer reviewed
1. Introduction. The Meroitic script appeared with the rise of the Meroitic Kingdom in the third century BCE, though Egyptian writing (both hieroglyphic and demotic) would certainly have been known and was used previously in the Nubian city of Meroë, a city which is about 6 km north-east of the modern Kabuskhya station near Shendi, Sudan, about 200 km north-east of modern Khartoum. Meroitic was used until some time after the fall of the Meroitic Empire in the first half of the fourth century CE. The values of the script’s characters are known, but the language itself remains unknown, apart from names and a few other words.

2. Structure. The script has a monumental form, derived from Egyptian Hieroglyphs, and a cursive form, derived from Egyptian Demotic, which was used considerably more frequently than the monumental form. Although there is a relationship between Meroitic Hieroglyphic (l’écriture hiéroglyphique méroïtique) and Meroitic Cursive (l’écriture cursive méroïtique), the argument that the two should be treated as font variants is not compelling. Publications which cite Meroitic in the original script rather than in transliteration regularly preserve the distinction between Hieroglyphic and Cursive script forms. Essentially, there is no usage requirement where any text written in Meroitic Hieroglyphic would be converted into Cursive, or vice versa. Meroitic Hieroglyphic is only used to write texts which were written in Meroitic Hieroglyphic, and Meroitic Cursive is only used to write texts which were written in Meroitic Cursive. The Meroitic script is essentially two script forms used concurrently, but not interchangeably, for the same language. Scholars distinguish, and need to be able to distinguish, in plain text, Meroitic Hieroglyphic from Meroitic Cursive.

Moreover, in origin the two script forms differ historically. Meroitic Cursive developed over a period of time. Most of its characters are very close to the old Ptolemaic demotic of Upper Egypt (332-186 BCE), in particular / O, // YA, § PA, ω RA, 3 KHA ḫa, 3 SA, § QA, and the numbers 6, 8, 9, 20, 50, 70, 80, 100, 200, 300, and 800. Rilly 2007:247-262 gives a complete discussion of the origin of each individual Cursive character.

Like Meroitic Cursive, Meroitic Hieroglyphic is first known in various forms dating to the reign of Taneyidamani, at the end of the 2nd century BCE. But whilst the goal of Cursive writing was practical, it
appears that the development of the Hieroglyphic form was based in the desire to possess a monumental and decorative version of the Cursive form, and also to participate in the magic power attributed to Egyptian Hieroglyphs. The set of letters devised for Hieroglyphic all have direct parallels with Egyptian Hieroglyphs, and is larger than the set of letters used in Meroitic Cursive, which relates not to Egyptian Hieroglyphs, but to the demotic script which is not unified with the Hieroglyphs. One of the reasons Meroitic Hieroglyphic is larger is an evident uncertainty in which Egyptian characters were to be used for various sounds; both \(\text{←} \) and \(\text{→} \) are used for \(b \)— the former (the foot) having the value \(b' \) in Egyptian, the latter (the foot) simply \(b \). These are also distinguished in current fonts. There is no purely one-to-one relationship between Cursive and Meroitic Hieroglyphic. Meroitic Hieroglyphic is used only for formal inscriptions. There are no private documents written in it.

The two script forms of Meroitic are treated in this encoding as two separate scripts and are encoded in two separate blocks, Meroitic Hieroglyphs and Meroitic Cursive.

3. Directionality. The direction of writing is right-to-left, evidently with no exceptions. Unlike Egyptian, where one reads into the faces of the people and animals, in Meroitic, the reading direction follows the way the people and animals are looking. Thus, using arrows to indicate the reading direction, the name Amun (Inn, god of Thebes) would be written as amana in Meroitic \(\text{←} \) \(\text{na-ma-a} \) \(\text{←} \); in Egyptian Hieroglyphs this would be written \(\text{←} \) \(\text{na-ma-a} \) \(\text{←} \) with right-to-left directionality, \(\text{→} \) \(\text{na-ma-a} \) \(\text{→} \) with left-to-right directionality. Another way of visualizing this would be that if the cognate Egyptian characters were written with right-to-left directionality, they would appear reversed from the Meroitic point of view, thus: Meroitic \(\text{←} \) \(\text{na} \), Egyptian \(\text{→} \) \(\text{na} \).

4. Punctuation and symbols. Word dividers are employed more or less regularly, to isolate not separate words, but basic elements of sentences—nominal phrases (noun and article, noun and adjective and article, etc) verbal forms, and so on. Three vertical dots are used in Hieroglyphs and early Cursive, though when the Hieroglyphs are set in vertical columns, three horizontal dots are used. It would seem that U+205D TRICOLON \(\vdash \) and U+2026 HORIZONTAL ELLIPSIS \(\ldots \) can serve this function. In later Cursive texts this became reduced to a U+003A COLON \(:\) , used with some irregularity. Two logograms derived from Egyptian Demotic are used with Meroitic Cursive, and two ankh-like symbols are used with Meroitic Hieroglyphic.

5. Numbers. Meroitic numbers are fairly well known, and are only found in Meroitic Cursive. Ones, tens, hundreds, and thousands are known; characters for 60, 90, and 900 are not yet known; neither are the numbers for 4,000, 6,000, 7,000, 8,000, and 9,000, though the number for 10,000 is cited in secondary literature (a number chart, see Figure 4). There is a system to the number shapes, as there are in Egyptian Hieratic, so gaps have been left in the code table for the numbers as yet unattested.

6. Ordering. Meroitic ordering interfiles the Cursive and Hieroglyphic script forms as well as the encoded variants.

7. Names. Meroitic has four vowels, namely \(a \), \(e \), \(i \) and \(o \) and a semivowel \(y \). The vowel \(a \) is only written when it is an initial; \(e \), \(i \), and \(o \) are also written within words. Meroitic has two types of consonants. A
few consonants are combined with a vowel, namely ne, se, te, and to; the other consonants are single consonants, each of which is followed by a vowel (e, i, o) in the inscriptional records. If there is no vowel inserted between two consonants, the consonant is read with an inherent a. For example, the Meroitic royal title is qore, written $\omega \beta \gamma \delta$ or $\beta \gamma \delta \gamma (q + o + r + e)$; the title of the supreme commander of the army is paqara, written $\omega \beta \gamma \delta$ or $\beta \gamma \delta \gamma (p + q + r)$. In the character names, the inherent -a is used for the consonants and the rest of the names follow the usual UCS conventions.

8. Future standardization. At least twenty-four symbols are known, many used in conjunction with numbers and are perhaps determinatives of different types of goods. A number of these with very similar glyphs may not be unique characters at all. Further study of these is required. They are left for future standardization.


11. Acknowledgements. This project was made possible in part by a grant from the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities, which funded the which funded the Universal Scripts Project (part of the Script Encoding Initiative at UC Berkeley) in respect of the Meroitic encoding. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment of the Humanities.
# Vowel letters

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<thead>
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<th>Egyptian Hieroglyph</th>
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<td>𓁆</td>
<td>a001</td>
</tr>
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<td>𓁇</td>
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<td>10983</td>
<td>𓁉</td>
<td>a004</td>
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# Consonant letters

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<th>Egyptian Hieroglyph</th>
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<td>m017a</td>
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<tr>
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<td>𓁋</td>
<td>v004</td>
</tr>
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<td>10986</td>
<td>𓁌</td>
<td>c011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10987</td>
<td>𓁍</td>
<td>d058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>𓁎</td>
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<td>10997</td>
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# Symbols

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<th>Egyptian Hieroglyph</th>
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<tr>
<td>10991</td>
<td>𓁒</td>
<td>s034</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Date: 2009-07-29

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(www.unicode.org/unibook/)
### Vowel letters

- 109A0 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER A
- 109A1 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER E
- 109A2 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER I
- 109A3 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER O

### Consonant letters

- 109A4 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER YA
- 109A5 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER WA
- 109A6 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER BA
- 109A7 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER PA
- 109A8 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER MA
- 109A9 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER NA
- 109AA ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER NE
- 109AB ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER RA
- 109AC ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER LA
- 109AD ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER KHA
- 109AE ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER HHA
- 109AF ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER SA
- 109B0 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER ARCHAIC SA
- 109B1 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER SE
- 109B2 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER KA
- 109B3 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER QA
- 109B4 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER TA
- 109B5 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER TE
- 109B6 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER TO
- 109B7 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE LETTER DA

### Logograms

- 109BE ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE LOGOGRAM RMT
- 109BF ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE LOGOGRAM IMN

### Fractions

- 109C0 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE FRACTION ONE HALF
- 109C1 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE FRACTION ONE TWELFTH
- 109C2 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE FRACTION TWO TWELFTHS
- 109C3 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE FRACTION THREE TWELFTHS
- 109C4 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE FRACTION FOUR TWELFTHS
- 109C5 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE FRACTION FIVE TWELFTHS
- 109C6 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE FRACTION SIX TWELFTHS
- 109C7 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE FRACTION SEVEN TWELFTHS
- 109C8 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE FRACTION EIGHT TWELFTHS
- 109C9 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE FRACTION NINE TWELFTHS
- 109CA ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE FRACTION TEN TWELFTHS

### Numbers

#### Ones

- 109CC Ӏ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER ONE
- 109CD Ӏ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER TWO
- 109CE Ӏ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER THREE
- 109CF Ӏ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER FOUR

- 109D0 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER FIVE
- 109D1 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER SIX
- 109D2 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER SEVEN
- 109D3 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER EIGHT
- 109D4 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER NINE

#### Tens

- 109D5 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER TEN
- 109D6 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER TWENTY
- 109D7 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER THIRTY
- 109D8 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER FORTY
- 109D9 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER FIFTY
- 109DA ̀ <reserved>
- 109DB ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER SEVENTY
- 109DC ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER EIGHTY

#### Hundreds

- 109DE ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER ONE HUNDRED
- 109DF ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER TWO HUNDRED
- 109E0 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER THREE HUNDRED
- 109E1 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER FOUR HUNDRED
- 109E2 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER FIVE HUNDRED
- 109E3 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER SIX HUNDRED
- 109E4 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER SEVEN HUNDRED
- 109E5 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER EIGHTY HUNDRED

#### Thousands

- 109E7 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER ONE THOUSAND
- 109E8 ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER TWO THOUSAND
- 109E9 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER THREE THOUSAND
- 109EA ̀ <reserved>
- 109EB ́ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER FIVE THOUSAND
- 109EC ̀ <reserved>
- 109ED ́ <reserved>
- 109EE ̀ <reserved>
- 109EF ́ <reserved>
- 109F0 ̀ MEROITIC CURSIVE NUMBER TEN THOUSAND
The following is a list of the Meroitic alphabet in order according to the values of the signs. The evidence for the values given will be found in the detailed discussion of the signs below:

1. 𝑅 initial a or alif.
2. 𝑆 vowel e (earlier sometimes ye).
3. 𝑇 vowel i.
4. 𝑈 vowel i (earlier sometimes yi).
5. 𝑉 ||| y.
6. 𝐺 w.
7. 𝑪 ( ) b.
8. 𝑪 w.
9. 𝑪 ( ) m.
10. 𝑪 ( ) a.
11. 𝑢(𝑖) older 𝑋.
12. 𝑋, w r.
13. 𝑌 l, older 𝑊.
14. 𝑍 r, older 𝑇.
15. 𝑍 b.
16. 𝑃 – s(i).
17. 𝑃 s.
18. 𝑃 – k.
19. 𝑃 g, older 𝑊, 𝑊.
20. 𝑃 – l(i).
21. 𝑃 h, older 𝑊, 𝑊.
22. 𝑃 h.
23. 𝑃 s, 𝑊.

The hieroglyphic letters in brackets are forms occurring in the inscription *Meroitic* i and sometimes elsewhere.

The above scheme of the alphabet shows a close connexion with Egyptian values for the signs. / like * appears to be a reduplication of the corresponding Egyptian sign. for / and for / seem to be the only signs devoid of any probable explanation from the Egyptian side: and the value of is as yet only guessed.

The demotic letters, 5, 9, 16, 17, resemble the Egyptian demotic signs. The rest show no such resemblance, but may have been derived by a long process from some form of hieratic, or more directly from the hieroglyphic.

**Figure 1.** Table from Griffith 1911 showing the alphabet in both Meroitic Hieroglyphic and Meroitic Cursive.
INDEX C

MEROITIC WORDS AND GROUPS

Abbreviations:—n. personal name, n. A. name of deceased, n. AA. of second deceased, n. B. of mother (n. III. &c.), n. C. of father (n. CC. &c.); pl. n., place name; form. A B C D &c., terminal formulae A B C D &c., see Ch. V, p. 42; inv., invocation, see Ch. III, p. 33; desc. occurring in descriptive phrases, see p. 38. Eg., Egyptian. Titles are roughly divided as civil and sac(erotal).

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<td>1w51152</td>
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<td>n. A. Kar. 68</td>
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<td>n. B. Kar. 74</td>
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<td>4811354152</td>
<td>n. A. Kar. 26, 39</td>
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<td>'envoy', Eg., apt., desc. Sh. 4, 5, 6, 19</td>
<td>see p. 10</td>
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<td>n. (?) desc. Kar. 21</td>
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<td>'chief envoy', desc. Kar. 56, Sh. 5 (twice), 8</td>
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<td>5451152</td>
<td>n. C. Kar. 119</td>
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<td>'of Amanap', deity, desc. Kar. 102, v. Man and see p. 71</td>
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<td>'prophet' (Eg.), desc. Kar. 15 (twice), 19 (thrice), 21 (five times), 47, 59, 60 (twice), 69, 87, 89 (thrice), 117, 119, 125, 126, cf. ii and see p. 57</td>
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Figure 2. First page of the glossary from Griffith 1911.
Figure 3. Text in Meroitic Cursive from Hofmann 1991.

Figure 4. Text in Meroitic Cursive from 'Abd Allah 1986.
Figure 5. Text in Meroitic Hieroglyphic from 'Abd Allah 1986.
Figure 6. Table of Meroitic numbers.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>équation</th>
<th>mot mériotique</th>
<th>graphie mériotique</th>
<th>équivalents égyptiens et démotiques</th>
<th>équivalents copistes et grecs</th>
<th>donne valeur de</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a)</td>
<td>Natakamani</td>
<td>𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ᵃ, ᵃ, ᵃ, ᵃ, ᵃ, ᵃ</td>
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<td>Amantière</td>
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<td>ᶾ⁄ippet. *hr</td>
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<td>(e)</td>
<td>Atéri Osiris</td>
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<td>ᶾ⁄ippet, *gypri</td>
<td></td>
<td>3, w</td>
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<td>(f)</td>
<td>Ar Horus</td>
<td>𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾</td>
<td>ᶾ⁄ippet, *gypri</td>
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<td>(g)</td>
<td>Pileque, Pilage, Pilage Philae</td>
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<td>dem. P.3ylaq</td>
<td>µ, µ, µ</td>
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<td>(h)</td>
<td>Aïye Sedeinga</td>
<td>𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾</td>
<td>H. i Tiy = /ha-teye/ (?)</td>
<td></td>
<td>11, 11</td>
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<td>(i)</td>
<td>tévisiti adoration</td>
<td>𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾</td>
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<td>µ, µ, µ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>µ, µ, µ</td>
<td></td>
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<td>dem. p-re</td>
<td>µ, µ, µ</td>
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<td>𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾</td>
<td>transcr. dem. qrunj</td>
<td>µ, µ, µ</td>
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<td>𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾</td>
<td>Pâhpañras, Pâhpañras</td>
<td>µ, µ, µ</td>
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<tr>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>Šaye Saf</td>
<td>𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾𓊾</td>
<td>Zâm</td>
<td>µ, µ, µ</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 7.** Table from Rilly 2007 showing texts in both Meroitic Hieroglyphic and Meroitic Cursive.
A. Administrative
1. Title
Proposal for encoding the Meroitic Hieroglyphic and Meroitic Cursive scripts in the SMP of the UCS
2. Requester’s name
UC Berkeley Script Encoding Initiative (Universal Scripts Project)
3. Requester type (Member body/Liaison/Individual contribution)
Liaison contribution.
4. Submission date
2009-07-29
5. Requester’s reference (if applicable)
6. Choose one of the following:
6a. This is a complete proposal
No.
6b. More information will be provided later
Yes.

B. Technical – General
1. Choose one of the following:
1a. This proposal is for a new script (set of characters)
Yes.
1b. Proposed name of script
Meroitic Hieroglyphics and Meroitic Cursive.
1c. The proposal is for addition of character(s) to an existing block
No.
1d. Name of the existing block
2. Number of characters in proposal
98 (32, 66).
3. Proposed category (A-Contemporary; B.1-Specialized (small collection); B.2-Specialized (large collection); C-Major extinct; D-Attested extinct; E-Minor extinct; F-Archaic Hieroglyphic or Ideographic; G-Obscure or questionable usage symbols)
Category E.
4a. Is a repertoire including character names provided?
Yes.
4b. If YES, are the names in accordance with the “character naming guidelines” in Annex L of P&P document?
Yes.
4c. Are the character shapes attached in a legible form suitable for review?
Yes.
5a. Who will provide the appropriate computerized font (ordered preference: True Type, or PostScript format) for publishing the standard?
Michael Everson.
5b. If available now, identify source(s) for the font (include address, e-mail, ftp-site, etc.) and indicate the tools used:
Michael Everson, Fontographer.
6a. Are references (to other character sets, dictionaries, descriptive texts etc.) provided?
Yes.
6b. Are published examples of use (such as samples from newspapers, magazines, or other sources) of proposed characters attached?
Yes.
7. Does the proposal address other aspects of character data processing (if applicable) such as input, presentation, sorting, searching, indexing, transliteration etc. (if yes please enclose information)?
Yes.
8. Submitters are invited to provide any additional information about Properties of the proposed Character(s) or Script that will assist in correct understanding of and correct linguistic processing of the proposed character(s) or script. Examples of such properties are: Casing information, Numeric information, Currency information, Display behaviour information such as line breaks, widths etc., Combining behaviour, Spacing behaviour, Directional behaviour, Default Collation behaviour, relevance in Mark Up contexts, Compatibility equivalence and other Unicode normalization related information. See the Unicode standard at http://www.unicode.org for such information on other scripts. Also see Unicode Character Database http://www.unicode.org/Public/UNIDATA/UnicodeCharacterDatabase.html and associated Unicode Technical Reports for information needed for consideration by the Unicode Technical Committee for inclusion in the Unicode Standard.
See above.

C. Technical – Justification
1. Has this proposal for addition of character(s) been submitted before? If YES, explain.
No.
2a. Has contact been made to members of the user community (for example: National Body, user groups of the script or characters, other experts, etc.)?
Yes.
2b. If YES, with whom?
Richard Lobban, Reginald Smith, Claude Rilly, Michael Zach
2c. If YES, available relevant documents
3. Information on the user community for the proposed characters (for example: size, demographics, information technology use, or publishing use) is included?

**Small community, scholars and historians.**

4a. The context of use for the proposed characters (type of use; common or rare)

**Scholarly use.**

4b. Reference

5a. Are the proposed characters in current use by the user community?

**Yes.**

5b. If YES, where?

**Worldwide.**

6a. After giving due considerations to the principles in the P&P document must the proposed characters be entirely in the BMP?

**No.**

6b. If YES, is a rationale provided?

6c. If YES, reference

7. Should the proposed characters be kept together in a contiguous range (rather than being scattered)?

**Yes.**

8a. Can any of the proposed characters be considered a presentation form of an existing character or character sequence?

**No.**

8b. If YES, is a rationale for its inclusion provided?

8c. If YES, reference

9a. Can any of the proposed characters be encoded using a composed character sequence of either existing characters or other proposed characters?

**No.**

9b. If YES, is a rationale for its inclusion provided?

9c. If YES, reference

10a. Can any of the proposed character(s) be considered to be similar (in appearance or function) to an existing character?

**Yes.**

10b. If YES, is a rationale for its inclusion provided?

**Yes.**

10c. If YES, reference

**Similarity to Egyptian hieroglyphs is genetic but superficial.**

11a. Does the proposal include use of combining characters and/or use of composite sequences (see clauses 4.12 and 4.14 in ISO/IEC 10646-1: 2000)?

**No.**

11b. If YES, is a rationale for such use provided?

11c. If YES, reference

11d. Is a list of composite sequences and their corresponding glyph images (graphic symbols) provided?

**No.**

11e. If YES, reference

12a. Does the proposal contain characters with any special properties such as control function or similar semantics?

**No.**

12b. If YES, describe in detail (include attachment if necessary)

13a. Does the proposal contain any Ideographic compatibility character(s)?

**No.**

13b. If YES, is the equivalent corresponding unified ideographic character(s) identified?