

# FORTY (OR SO) LESSONS ON ANCIENT EGYPTIAN LITERATURE

## THE SYLLABUS

### BASIC INFO

Course number: EGYT1410 in the Department of Egyptology and Assyriology.  
Semester: Fall 2014.  
Location & time: 206 Rockefeller Library. MWF 10:00–10:50.  
Instructor: Leo Depuydt.  
Assisted on 3 and 5 September, while away at a conference, by  
Emily Drennan, doctoral candidate.  
Office: 205 Wilbour Hall (red-brick building next to the Rock).  
Office hours: To be determined soon (will be posted on the department web  
site); also by appointment.  
E-mail: [Leo\\_Depuydt@brown.edu](mailto:Leo_Depuydt@brown.edu).

### READING AND STUDY MATERIALS

1. The book: *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, edited by W.K. Simpson. Has been ordered by the Brown bookstore. Is also easily available over the Internet.
2. Information transmitted in the lectures. The instructor will make an effort to give you copies of all the lecture notes. These notes contain what one needs to know for the tests.
3. There may be occasional additional readings if any can be found that tie in ideally with the contents of the class. Or maybe not.

### THE FOUR REQUIREMENTS

	Percentage of grade
1. Class attendance: Class participation may include little oral reports on ancient Egyptian texts found in the handbook and what you think of them.	20%
2. Two (2) tests on <b>October 10</b> and <b>November 24</b> . There will be no final.	40%
3. One (1) book report (written version; oral presentation if there is time):	15%
4. One (1) paper (written version; oral presentation if there is time): The rest of the semester after Thanksgiving is entirely kept open for the paper, except for attending the last three lectures.	25%

## **NOTE ON BOOK REPORT AND PAPER SUBMISSION**

Book reports and papers can be submitted in hard copy in class. But sending an electronic version through e-mail is also possible and may in fact be quite convenient. We could look first at a draft together if you so desire.

## **NOTE ON RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS**

There is no need to excuse yourself if you will be absent for religious holidays. Please keep up with the readings and ask me or classmates for a copy of the lecture notes. I generally do not tend to teach on Yom Kippur if it falls on a class day and, if it does not, consider not teaching on Rosh Hashanah instead. This year, it does not. Rosh Hashanah lasts two days from the evening of Wednesday, September 24 to the evening of Friday, September 26. Since the academic year had the earliest possible start, I deemed it suitable to **cancel class on Friday September 26.**

## **THE MILESTONES**

(Each of these milestones will be discussed beforehand in detail in class.)

(Trial tests will be provided before the two tests take place.)

**Milestone 1:** Assignment of the book for the book report. A number of books that ideally complement the course contents will be selected. These books will then be assigned by lottery.

**Milestone 2:** Test 1 on October 10.

**Milestone 3:** Oral presentation of the book report if there is time.

**Milestone 4:** Submission of the written book report.

**Milestone 5:** Two individual meeting(s) with the instructor, first, before Thanksgiving to discuss possible topics for the paper, and second, around the end of classes or in the early reading period to discuss progress on the paper. There will be no class on December 8 and December 10 in the reading period. The fall reading period is in any event short.

**Milestone 6:** Test 2 on November 24, the Monday before Thanksgiving. There will be no class on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving.

**Milestone 7:** Submission of the written paper.

**Milestone 8:** Oral presentation of the paper topic if there is time. Probably not.

September 3, 2014, Brown University

## **WORD OF WELCOME AND REMARKS ON CLASS TYPE**

Greetings from your instructor, Leo Depuydt. I am away this week at the Twelfth International Conference of Demotic Studies in Germany. This conference takes place around this time every three years and I am usually back for classes. But this year, Labor Day falls as early as possible. Hence my absence. Those of you who take the class will learn what Demotic is all about by the end of the semester. Some of the talks at the conference concern the latest, newest on Demotic literature.

In my absence, doctoral student Emily Drennan has kindly agreed to lead the first two class meetings in my stead. This seemed much preferable to just canceling classes.

In terms of class style, three characteristics stand out.

First, this class is very much a classical lecture class. The design is to transmit as many essential information about ancient Egyptian literature as possible. The aim is to transmit a kind of Common Core essential knowledge of Egyptian literature. Ideally, it would be useful to have discussions on the merits of Egyptian literature and apply various theoretical approaches to ancient Egyptian literature in seminar style. But there will be no time to do this as well. Perhaps some day such a class will be organized.

The second characteristic of the class is that there are no weekly readings in the traditional sense. I find it difficult to connect what I say in class with suitable articles. Then again, it is expected that the notes will be studied in considerable detail. So it will be useful to start studying early. The two tests are designed to gauge in-depth knowledge of the notes. Much the focus of your energy will come in four main bursts, as it were, the two tests, the book report, and the final paper.

The third characteristic is that I try to be research-oriented by describing what the original sources are and how the original sources have been studied by modern scholars. This third characteristic takes into consideration that Brown is a research university and it is therefore useful to keep the research dimension in mind. In fact, some of the students may be graduate students or advanced undergraduate students who need to become familiar with some of the tools of the trade.

Two more observations.

The present class differs from a class on the topic *What Did the Egyptians Write*. The Egyptians did write more than literature strictly speaking. And a class on the wider topic would be useful. But literature is probably the most sophisticated and most varied expression of the Egyptian mind. And it will be our principal focus.

Experience teaches me that at least five types of participants attend a class like this. They are 1) graduate students, 2) undergraduate majors who intend to go on to graduate school in the field, 3) undergraduate majors who do not intend to go on, 4) undergraduates taking a few classes in Egyptology, and 5) undergraduates taking just this one class in Egyptology. All five types of participants are welcome. But the diversity does not make it possible to cater to every need of every student.

## **SOMETHING ON LITERATURE**

The term “literary” is meant to denote a certain way in which words are used, not a certain type of text. Words may be said to be used in a literary way if they are used in a way that goes beyond simply communicating information. Decidedly not literary therefore are business texts and mathematical and astronomical texts. The collection of those Egyptian texts that exhibit such a special use of words to the highest degree may be called ancient Egyptian literature. No one would doubt that some texts are more literary than others. But it is not easy to quantify degrees of literariness and therefore difficult in the case of many texts to decide whether they belong to Egyptian literature or not. Then again, some texts may definitely be called literature and others definitely not. The title of the course is hence a little bit of a misnomer. Instead of “literature,” “texts of literary purport” may be more suitable as a title. If texts that are literature do more than just communicate, then what do they do? Apparently, the special use of words draws the attention to itself with different goals in mind, such as to delight or to celebrate or to mourn. The selection of texts for discussion is much determined by what happens to survive. Only very little does. But in what survives, certain groups of texts or types of text easily stand out just because there is more preserved of them than of others. These clusters of texts belonging to certain types just stand out and they therefore present themselves naturally for selection in a course on ancient Egyptian literature. There is reason to believe that these groups or types were also dominant at the time. Then again, there is no denying that there is also much distortion. For example, funerary texts are preserved in much higher numbers than other types of texts because tombs are more often preserved than other structures, being located in the dry and uninhabited desert as they are.

## CONTENTS OF LECTURES

### Introductory Topics

1. THE HISTORICAL SETTING: Egypt in *ca.* 3000 B.C.E.–*ca.* 30 B.C.E.:  
The Place, the Time, the People
2. THE MODERN AIDS: General Studies on and Guides to  
Egyptian Literature
3. THE LINGUISTIC MEDIUM: Language and Writing
4. THE CRACKING OF THE CODE: The Decipherment of Hieroglyphic Writing
5. THE PHYSICAL MEDIUM: The Pen, The Papyrus, The Roll
6. THE INSTITUTION: The School, The Library, The Education
7. THE STATE OF THE ART: The Pioneers, The Discoveries, The Collections,  
What Has Been Done
8. THE THEORY: What is Literature?  
What is Ancient Egyptian Literature?  
What are the Ancient Egyptian Literary Genres?
9. THE MATRIX: Fundamental Properties

### The Old Kingdom, Dynasties 3–6 (*ca.* 2600 BCE–*ca.* 2100 BCE)

10. THE EARLIEST: Pyramid Texts and Their Descendants,  
Coffin Texts and Book of the Dead
11. THE START OF PROSE: Autobiographies of Dynasties 5 and 6

### First Intermediate Period, Middle Kingdom, Second Intermediate Period Dynasties 7–11, 11–12, 13–17 (*ca.* 2100 BCE–*ca.* 1500 BCE)

12. THE TRANSITION: Tomb Inscriptions of Dynasties 7–11
13. THE NARRATIVE I: The Bestselling *Story of Sinuhe*
14. THE NARRATIVE II: Other Middle Egyptian Stories, including  
*The Shipwrecked Sailor* and Papyrus Westcar
15. THE DIDACTIC I: Middle Egyptian Wisdom Texts  
and Related Literature
16. THE RHETORICAL: *The Eloquent Peasant*
17. THE GLOOMY: Literature of Pessimism
18. THE PHILOSOPHICAL: *Dialogue of a Man with His Soul*

**The New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period,  
Dynasties 18–20, 21–25 (*ca.* 1500 BCE–*ca.* 650 BCE)**

19. THE HERETICAL:	Texts from Amarna (Dynasty 18)
20. THE NARRATIVE III:	Late Egyptian Stories I
21. THE NARRATIVE IV:	Late Egyptian Stories II
22. THE DIDACTIC II:	New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period Wisdom Texts and Related Literature
23. THE ROMANTIC:	New Kingdom Love Poetry
24. THE HEDONISTIC:	Songs of the Harpers
25. THE SCHOLASTIC:	Late Egyptian “Miscellanies”
26. THE SATIRICAL:	Response to an Invective in Papyrus Anastasi I
27. THE MONUMENTAL I:	New Kingdom Historical Inscriptions
28. THE DIVINE:	Books of the Afterlife
29. THE ARTISTS’ VILLAGE:	Scribal Activity at Deir el-Medina

**The Late Period (*ca.* 650 BCE–*ca.* 200 CE)**

30. THE NARRATIVE V:	Demotic Stories I
31. THE NARRATIVE VI:	Demotic Stories II
32. THE DIDACTIC III:	Demotic Wisdom Texts
33. THE MYTHICAL:	The Demotic Myth of the Sun’s Eye
34. THE HERMETICAL:	The Demotic Ritual of Entry into the Dark Room
35. THE PROPHETIC:	Demotic Texts of Apocalyptic Purport
36. THE FAMILY CHRONICLE:	The Demotic Semi-literary Papyrus Rylands IX
37. THE MONUMENTAL II:	Texts on Greco-Roman Temples

**Appendix**

38. REMAINING HIGHLIGHTS:	What Else Is Preserved in Hieroglyphic Writing
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**Epilogue: Coptic Literature (*ca.* 300 CE–1000 CE)**

39. THE PATTERNS:	Fundamental Properties
40. THE GENRES:	Fundamental Types of Texts