



P. BM EA 10419 Recto

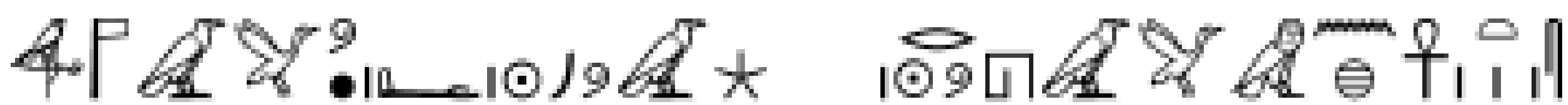
DANIEL POTTER

THE RAMESSIDE

LANGUAGE OF

DIVINE INTERACTION

How did the Ancient Egyptians view their interactions with the divine? And what can a close analysis of their language tell us about this?



"They are alive today; tomorrow is (upon) the arms of the god" P. BM EA 10417 rt.11

Abstract

During the Ramesside Period in Ancient Egypt (c.1295-1069 BC) there is a visible increase in texts which describe the interaction between humanity and the divine. Early discussion of the texts showing such interaction was focussed upon a group of stelae discussing the punishment of the individual by the divine. However, the themes of divine interaction are not limited to this group of stelae. This study aims to facilitate a better understanding of the world view of the Ancient Egyptians at this time, specifically how they encoded their perception of such divine interaction. In order to do this, a number of linguistic topoi found within a large textual corpora will be assessed through translation and detailed modern linguistic analysis.

Analysis

If we take the example shown above (P.BM EA 10417 rt.11), what exactly does "tomorrow is (upon) the arms of the god" mean to the sender of this letter, and similarly to the recipient? Does it function to show divine care, or perhaps some element of submission to divine control on the part of humanity? Also, is this phrase ubiquitous in its usage within texts of this period?

In order to evaluate this phrase and others like it, this study applies various elements of cognitive-linguistics and pragmatics (see right) as a qualitative means of analysis. By exploring the way which meaning is constructed within a wide range of sources, including letters, private stelae (see below) royal inscriptions, as well as tomb inscriptions and Late Egyptian literary pieces, it may be possible to comprehend more clearly how these individuals viewed the role of divine impact/interaction in their lives.



The Stela of Neferabu
BM EA 589 reverse

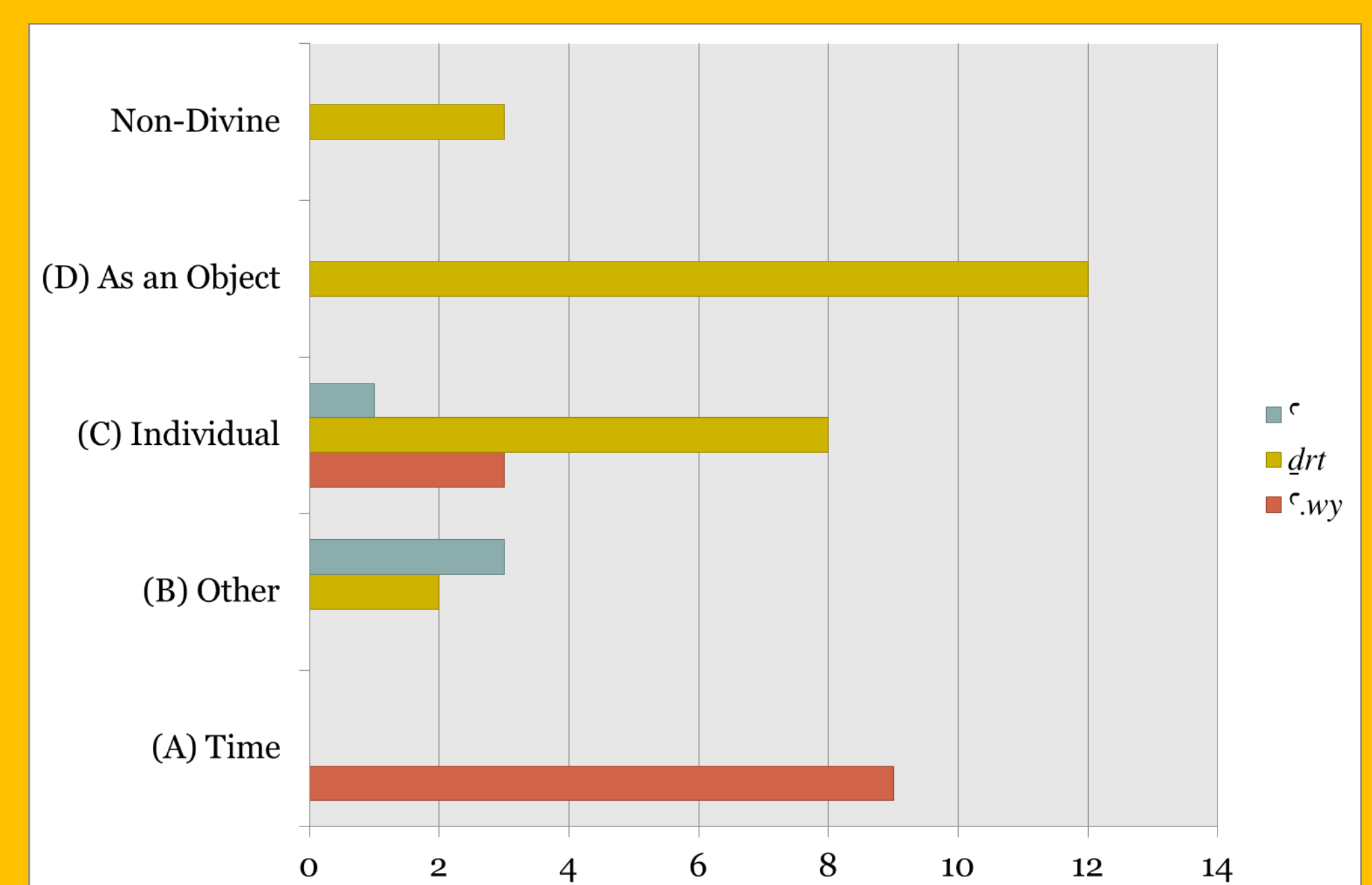
CASE STUDY: THE HAND OR THE ARM OF THE GOD?



The metaphor of "the hand of god" is present within a great many cultures, as it is often the easiest way of describing an interactive deity (Humans have hands so if a god is to interact, then through a hand is an obvious idea) For example, this is seen within the Bible (Job 19:21), the Qur'an (Al Hadid, 57:29), and in other ancient near-eastern cultures– and remember Maradona?

This phrase is also seen within the translations of Ancient Egyptian sources. However, when we look at the original texts, it becomes apparent that two words are used *ꜥ.wy* (arms) and *drt* (hand). Whilst many academics may have translated both words as "hand" are these lexemes synonyms? If not, are they being used to express different ideas?

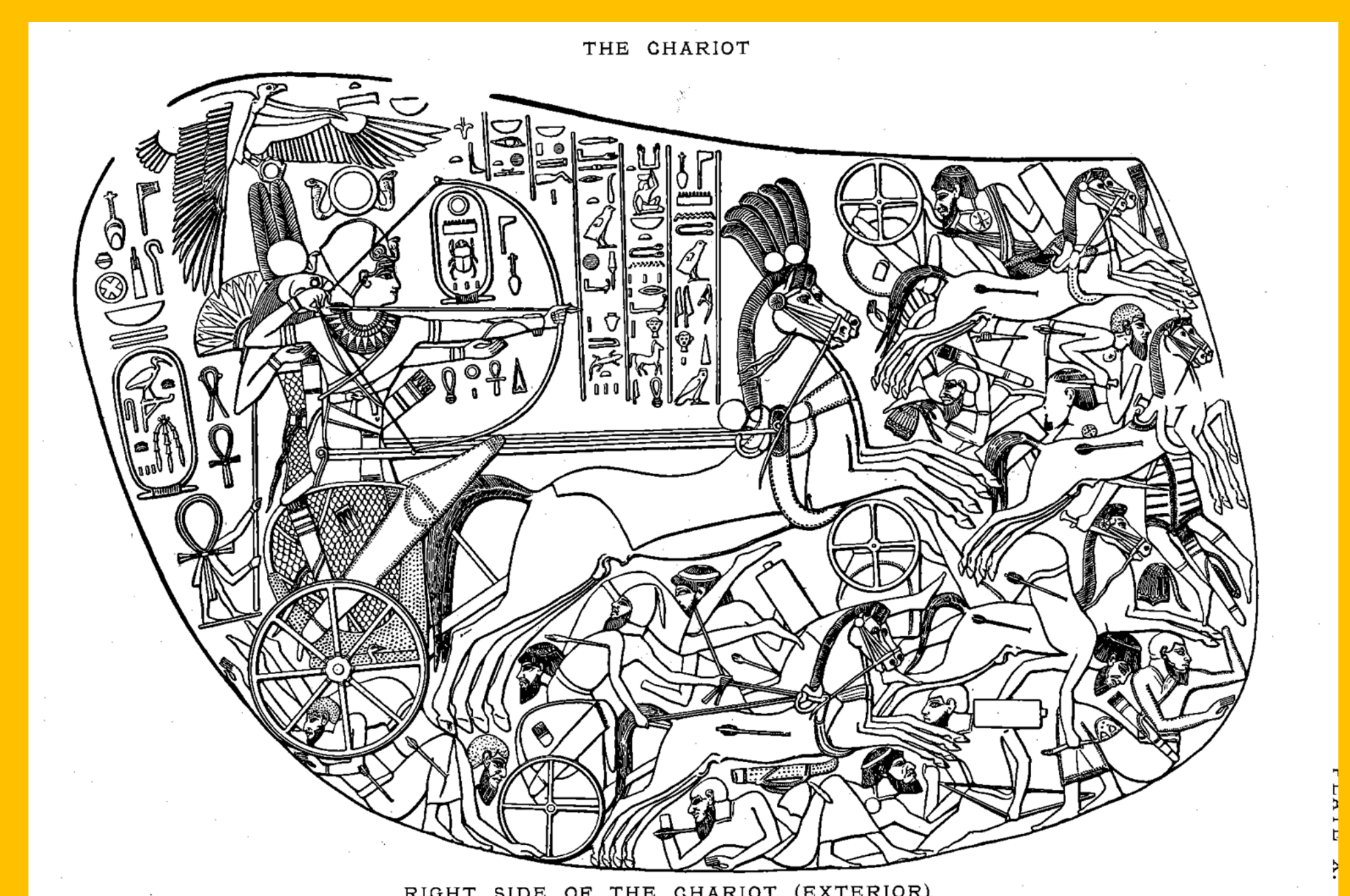
From the detailed analysis of 35 instances found within a wide variety of Ramesside texts, it is clear that the two lexemes are used to express different ideas. One showing the proximity of the divine and their interaction with humanity, and the second showing an element of distant control. Of more abstract concepts (see Graph below).



Arm(s)– ꜥ(.wy) is ABSTRACT

Hand – drt is PALPABLE

For example; the depiction on the side of Tuthmosis IV's chariot (below), where the war god Montu is seen holding the King's arm up may be showing the interactive and palpable nature of *drt*.



PRAGMATICS AND LINGUISTICS

This study utilises a number of elements of Pragmatics and cognitive linguistics in order to explain the thought processes behind the phrases examined. Implicature (meaning which is intended though not stated) explains clearly how the same phrase can take a number of meanings.

1) "Happy is he who reaches the west, when he is safe in the hand of the god"

Implies that being in the hand of the god is positive, that the god cares for the individual and that the god is close.

2) "I was in her hand night and day. I sat upon the birthing brick like the pregnant woman"

Implies that the god is close, however, being her hand was a negative situation.