

## **Revising Meroitic Sound Values: A Phonological Approach**

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Meroitic is the ancient undeciphered written language of the Kingdom of Kush (Sudan). A breakthrough towards the complete decipherment of this language was the deduction of correlative sound values of the Meroitic signs by the Egyptologist F. Ll Griffith. Since this breakthrough nearly one hundred years ago, there has been only a handful of studies conducted on the supposed sound values of the signs.

The analysis proposed here revises the sound values of certain Meroitic signs as established by Griffith (1911, 1917, 1929). In particular, the sound value of the Meroitic sign d (previously z) was the only one for which Griffith could find no equation with transcripts from Greek and Egyptian of Meroitic words or vice versa. Meroiticists would later investigate the value of this sign (Zyhlarz 1930, Macadam 1949, Hintze 1973, Zawadowski 1972, Rilly 2007) and conclude, bar Zawadowski, that it is representative of a coronal retroflex.

A new analysis is presented here that approaches the investigation of the sound value of this Meroitic sign from a phonological perspective. This linguistic analysis advances typological and empirical support against the traditional view of this sign representing a coronal retroflex. It is proposed that the context occurrence of this sign is imperative in deducing its true sound value.

It is also shown that phonology is crucial in determining the pattern and behaviour of Meroitic sounds and is an approach that has been considerably lacking in previous analyses of the Meroitic sound values of the signs.