The Autobiography of Admiral Ahmose

Part I

Introduction

Youth

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1 The grammar of the 'Introduction' and 'Youth' is discussed in (VI.A) of my Introduction to Middle Egyptian through Ancient Writings.
Expulsion of the Hyksos

hr m ḫt grg.n.i pr

wn.hr.i hr šms ity ẖn(.w)-(w)d(w)-(w)-s(nb.w) hr rdwi.i

m ḫt stwt.f ḫr wr(r)t.f

iw hms.tw ḫr dmi n ḫwt-wrt

wn.hr.i hr knt ḫr rdwi.i m b3ḥ hm.f

ẖc.n.i dhn.kw r ḫc-m-mn-nfr
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Vocabulary

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{hri} (up)on
\item \textit{dni} row, transport (by boat)
\item \textit{hnyt} crew
\item \textit{iš} moon, Thoth
\item \textit{mrw} justified
\item \textit{rm} men, mankind
\item \textit{hzt} favor
\item \textit{iw} reward, endow
\item \textit{nbw} gold
\item \textit{hm} (male) servant
\item \textit{hmt} (female) servant
\item \textit{s3h} endow (m with)
\item \textit{ht} field
\item \textit{33} many
\item \textit{wrt} very
\item \textit{rn} name, identity
\item \textit{kni} (adjective-verb) brave, diligent, persevering
\item \textit{htm} perish
\item \textit{t3} land
\item \textit{dt} forever, eternity
\item \textit{hprw} form, shape, stages of growth
\item \textit{dmi} town, quarter, abode, quay
\item \textit{nhb} Nekheb (El Kab)
\item \textit{iti} father
\item \textit{wfr} soldier
\item \textit{z3} son
\item \textit{phti} strength
\item \textit{db3, db3} replace (r in exchange for)
\item \textit{dpt} ship, boat
\item \textit{sm3} wild bull
\item \textit{sdr} lie down, spend the night, sleep
\item \textit{ht} wake, aftermath; \textit{m ht} after, future
\item \textit{grg} set up, establish
\item \textit{i3ti/iti} take (possession of)
\item \textit{mhti} northern
\item \textit{šmsi} follow
\item \textit{ity, itii} sovereign
\item \textit{lph} \textit{nh(w)-(w)d3(w)-s(nb.w)}-lph
\item \textit{rd} foot
\item \textit{swtwt} walk about, travel, journey
\end{itemize}
wrrt  chariot
hmsi  sit, sit down, besiege
hwt-wrrt  Avaris (Hyksos capital in the Delta)
b\(^3\)h  presence
hm  incarnation, majesty
dhn  bow, appoint
h\(^\circ\)i  appear, rise
mn-nfr  Memphis
\(\phi\)h3  fight
psjdkw  Pjedku (canal at Avaris)
hfr  grasp, make capture, seize
drt  hand
smi  report
whm  repeat
nbw n knt  gold of valor
st  place, throne
rsi  south, southern
skr\(^5\)nh  prisoner of war
z(i)  man
h\(^3\)i  go down, head (r for)
mw  water
mh  hold
hrw\(^r\)  apart from, besides
\(\delta\)i  cross (water), ferry
hr  under
snnw  second
snnw  second
hr  under
h3k  plunder
h3kt  plunder
zt hmt  woman
dmd/lmd  unite, total, sum
dmd/lmd (r)  total
tp  head, top
\(\delta\)3h3\(\text{n}\)  Sharuhen (town in the Negev Desert)
rnpt  year
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Grammar Points

Introduction

The prepositional nisbe hri “upper, lying on” is an adjective used here as a noun “chief, commander, master,” lit. “one who is above.” The double-stroke sign \( \) is not shown but the sky/above determinative clearly points to the meaning.

There is a graphic transposition in hnyt “crew”, a collective noun derived from the verb hni “row.” The title “crew commander” can be upgraded to “naval commander.”

or i\( ^{h} \) originally meant the moon god but eventually became Thoth, the god of writing and knowledge. In the following speech the creator makes Thoth to embrace the two skies (the world and the Duat below) and with this act makes the “moon of Thoth” evolve:

\[ iw.i \ gr \ r \ rdit \ inh.k \ pti \ m \ nfrw.k \ m \ hwrt.k \ hpr \ i\(^{h}\) \ pw \ n \ dwrti^{1}. \]

(Here in the last A \( pw \) noun clause the non-attributive perfective relative form of hpr “evolve” is used as the predicate; note that \( pw \) moved forward in side the indirect genitive i\( ^{h} \) \( n \) \( dwrti \) “the moon of Thoth.”) The name i\( ^{h} \)-ms “moon/Thoth is born” contains the passive form of msj “give birth.”

ib\( ^{3}n\) has been translated as Ibana, Eben, Abana, Abena, and Abina. The adjective phrase m\( ^{3} \) hrw usually translates as “justified,” lit. “true of voice.” It

signifies that the person in question lived a just life, passed the weighing the heart ceremony, made a successful transition to afterlife, and joined the society of the dead.

The long topicalized subject is followed by the imperfective $sdm.f$ of $dd$.²

$dd.i\ n.tn\ rmt(t)\ nbt\ \ di.i\ rh.tn\ hzwlt\ hpr\ t.n.i$

The two clauses here have verbal predicates of the verbs $dd$ and $rdi$ both in intentional prospective/subjunctive $sdm.f$ forms: “I will tell” and “I will let.” The feminine form of $nb$ reveals that, instead of $rmt$ “people”, its collective form $rm$ “men, mankind” is used here. In the second clause the $rdi\ sdm.f$ construction “let him hear,” lit. “cause/give that he hear” is used with $rdi$ and, by construction, $rh$ in prospective/subjunctive $sdm.f$. Note the archaizing writing of the plural of the (feminine) noun $Hzt$. Matching this, the perfective active participle of the verb $hpr$ is in feminine plural form “which came” lit. “which happened.”

$iw^c.\ kw\ m\ nbw\ zp\ 7\ hft\ hr\ t;\ r\ dr.f$

$hmw\ hmwt\ r\ mitt\ irw$

In stative the transitive verb $iw^c$ “reward” has passive meaning. The compound preposition $hft\ hr$ can be translated as “in the presence/sight of,” lit. “before the face of.” The prepositional phrase $r\ dr$ lit. “to the limit” is best translated as an (apparent) adjective “whole, entire.” The next two nouns (in apposition) “the male and female servants” are still governed by the preposition $m$. The plural of the closing phrase $r\ mitt\ iri$ “as well” lit. “the like/similar pertaining to it” is composed of two nisbes from the prepositions $mi$ and $r$. We met this in the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor:

$s3h.\ kw\ m\ 3hwt\ \ §3\ wrt$

The sentence here matches with the previous with identical grammar.

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² Allen (20.14).
³ [Sh. S. 21].
Note that the plural strokes in "many" is always a determinative.

The first main clause is an adverbial sentence of identity introduced by the particle *iw*. The subject is the noun phrase *rn n kn* "the name of the brave," with *kn* "brave (one)" also a military title. The "m of predication" is given by the perfect relative form of *iri* "that which (he) has done." According to Goedicke, the alternate reading *irt n.f* is also possible with *irt* being the perfective passive participle of *iri*: "what is done."

Note that in Middle Egyptian, *m* of predication is used for temporary or acquired identity or profession. In contrast, for unchangeable or natural identity nominal sentences are used.

The second sentence is a typical *nn* + prospective/subjunctive *sdm.f* construction and as such it has future meaning. The subject *rn n kn* is omitted since it is the same as in the previous sentence. This sentence is a proverb used also in the Thutmose III Inscriptions.

**Youth**

After the introduction Ahmose now begins to talk about his youth and upbringing. The passage starts with the narrative infinitive of *dd*. It is followed by the prepositional phrase *r ntt*, introducing a noun clause. It can be translated using "as follows" or "inasmuch as," lit. "with respect to (the fact) that." As we saw in the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor already twice: *ir.n.i hrw 3 wa.kw* and *m.k tw r irt 3bd hr 3bd*, the verb *iri* (circumstantial

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4 [Urk. IV, 34, 2].  
5 [Urk. IV, 684, 17; 780, 14-15].  
6 [Sh. S. 41].  
7 [Sh. S. 117].
sdm.n.f (perfect here) not only means “make, do” but also “pass/spend time.”

\[ \text{hprw} \] means “form, shape, stages of growth.” With these, the Egyptian phrase \( \text{ir.f hprw.f m} \) can be rendered as “he spends his youth in” or “he has his upbringing in,” lit. “he passes his stages of growth in.”

\[ \text{nḥb} \] is the ancient Nekheb, near the present day El Kab, south of Luxor.

\[ \text{iw it(i).i m w}^{⑤} \text{w n nswt-biti SKN.N-R}^{⑤} \text{ m}^{③} \text{ hrw} \]

This is another adverbial sentence of identity, an \( m \) of predication. \( \text{SKN.N-R}^{⑤} \) “Whom Re has made brave” is Sekenenre Taa II, a local Theban ruler and the next-to-last king of the 17\(^{th}\) Dynasty, Second Intermediate Period, c.1560 BC. The verb form in the name is a perfect relative form (of the causative) of the verb \( \text{kni} \) “brave.”

\[ \text{b3b3} \ z3 \text{ rint } \text{rn.f} \]

This is a typical AB nominal sentence used by Ahmose to tell his father’s and his (paternal) grandmother’s names: Baba, son of Ra-inet, was his name. Note the use of the Egyptian ditto sign \( zp \) 2 in the name \( b3b3 \).

\[ \text{śḥ.n.i hr irt w}^{⑤} \text{w r db3.f m p3 dpt n p3-sm3} \]

\[ m \text{ h3w nb t3wi NB-PHTI-R}^{⑤} \text{ m}^{③} \text{ hrw} \]

The pseudo-verbal construction \( \text{hr irt} \), lit. “upon doing” describes the action in progress: Ahmose being a soldier or serving as an officer.

At this stage of the language \( p3 \) is no longer a demonstrative pronoun but the definite article “the.” \( p3\text{-sm3} \) “The Wild Bull” is the name of the ship.

The typical epithet \( \text{nb t3wi} \) “Lord of the Two Lands” refers here to the pharaoh \( \text{NB-PHTI-R}^{⑤} \) “The lord of strength is Re.” This is the prenomen of Ahmose I (1550-1525 BC), the founder of the 18\(^{th}\) Dynasty, after he assumed the throne. Note that in the king’s
name the double $t$ is not $tt$ but a peculiar way of writing $ti$, the so-called “sportive dual.”

Alternative spellings of $phti$ “strength” are $\begin{align*} &\text{ and } \end{align*}$.

Another adverbial sentence of identity here is followed by an unmarked relative clause employing the $ni\text{sdmt}.f$ construction. We have already met this in the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. This construction carries the meaning that the action has not happened yet which, in this case, means that at this point Ahmose has not been married, lit. “has not made a wife.”

The particle $iw$ introduces the imperfective of the verb $sd$ referring to habitual action in the past. In English this can be rendered inserting “used to” in front of the verb. The meaning of the phrase $smt\text{ snw}$ is unknown. There is some support to the argument that it should mean some typical garment of youth$^8$ or a net of hammock (Gardiner and Gunn).

**Expulsion of the Hyksos**

This is a good example for one of the basic functions of the particle $hr$ as a converter to let the prepositional phrase $m\text{ lt}$ “after,” lit. “in the wake” stand in front of the sentence. Together they can be translated as “then later.” The usual meaning of the noun $pr$ “house,” the object of the circumstantial $sd\text{m}.n.f$ /perfect form of the verb $grg$, should be “household” here.

In the subject-stative construction the transitive verb $iti/iTi$ has passive meaning, “was

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$^8$ [Breasted, II, p.6].
transferred.”

The nisbe mhti “northern” is derived from mhyt “northwind,” and it is the name of the ship. Alternatively, though the plural strokes are missing, it may be the ideogram for ḫw “ship(s)” and together with the demonstrative pronoun p3 ḫw may mean “the fleet” (with mhti being an adjective). The preposition hr “because” governs a clause of causality in which knn is a non-attributive relative form of the adjective-verb kni “be brave” used nominally.

\[ \text{wn.hr.i hr šms ity 'nḥ(w)-(w)dḥ(w)-s( nb.w) hr rdwi.i} \]

\[ m ḫt swtwt.f hr wr(r)t.f \]

wn.hr “then” introduces a pseudo-verbal hr + infinitive construction indicating action in progress: “then I followed,” lit. “then I existed upon following.” Note that wn.hr is used only after the 18th Dynasty onwards.

\[ \text{is another spelling of ity, itii “sovereign” that we met before.} \]

In the adverbial phrase introduced by the compound preposition m ḫt the verbal noun swtwt “journey, travel” is derived from the rare 5-lit. verb swtwt “walk (about), promenade.” Having plural ending, it cannot be infinitive. Nevertheless, a possible translation could use a verbal predicate: “when he was riding about,” lit. “in the wake of his journeys.”

Note that wrrt “chariot” is used in Egyptian history the first time during the Hyksos period.

\[ \text{iw ḥms.tw hr dmi n ḥwt-wrt} \]

ḥmsi “sit down, reside” also means “besiege” and the iw sdm.f /imperfective construction with the impersonal suffix pronoun tw indicates that the action happened in the past; the English past imperfect “was besieged” is a good way to translate this construction.

Note that dmi not only means “harbor, quay” but also “town.”
"wart" is the name of the Delta town Avaris, the Hyksos capital at the time. It has been identified with the site Tell el-Dab‘a.

The grammar of this sentence is similar to the one above. This time it is applied to the adjective-verb knt. It means that at the time of the siege of Avaris Ahmose fought bravely, lit. “existed upon being brave.”

Note also the spelling of the adverbial adjunct m bḥḥ “in the presence of.”

Once again a subject-stative construction involving the transitive verb dhn “appoint” has passive meaning.

ḥfr is a perfective active participle of ḥfr “rise.” mn-nfr is Memphis, lit. “beautiful of monument,” or with a verbal interpretation “established and beautiful.” The ship determinative shows that ḥfr-m-nfr “Rising in Memphis” is the name of the ship. The first (pyramid) determinative is for the town of Memphis (because of its necropolis), usually written as . Goedicke argued that ḥfm mn-nfr means a secondary coronation ceremony of Ahmose in Memphis, thereby the name of the ship may commemorate this event.

For a change, here it is the impersonal suffix pronoun that makes the sentence having passive meaning. The pseudo-verbal hr + infinitive construction means action in progress, and the literal meaning “one was fighting” can be improved to “there was fighting.”

The determinative reveals that pî-ddkw is a canal, less likely a harbor town or a quay. Excavations at Tell el-Dab‘a point to the fact that the Pelusiac branch of the Nile,
along with smaller tributaries were close to the city, and thus p3-ddkw may be the name of one of these waterways.

\[\text{aHa.n xfa.n.i in.i Drt 1}\]

is a variant of \[\text{xfa}\] “grasp, make capture, seize.”

Depending on whether the phonetic complement (of the stem) of \[\text{aHa.n}\] is present or absent, \[\text{aHa.n}\] can be considered as the indicative/perfective \[\text{sdm.f: in.i}\], or the (transitive) circumstantial \[\text{sdm.n.f: perfect: in.n.i}\]. The indicative/perfective is supported by the fact that elsewhere in the text (in similar clauses) the scribe did use phonetic complements. The circumstantial \[\text{sdm.n.f: perfect}\] is supported since it matches the previous. The issue is a bit academic, since in either case, the meaning is past tense.

Finally, to show the number of enemies a warrior slew he had to cut off and bring back the right hands of the slain. The flesh determinative attests this gruesome practice.

\[\text{smit n whmw nswt wn.in.tw hr rdit n.i nbw n knt}\]

The verb form of the caus. 2-lit. verb \[\text{smit}\] “report” (with base stem \[\text{smi}\]) is problematic.

(A few lines below the same sentence appears with the predicate \[\text{smiw}\] which is clearly passive.) The ending can be considered an archaizing \[\text{t}\], therefore \[\text{smit}\] could either be an infinitive or, equally likely, a perfective passive participle attached to the previous passage: “that which was reported.”

\[\text{whmw nswt}\] (in honorific transposition) is the royal herald, where \[\text{whmw}\] itself is a participle/noun of agent derived from \[\text{whm}\] “repeat.” \[\text{nbw n knt}\] is the “gold of valor”, a military reward for courage and prowess. It is a golden necklace with fly-shaped pendants.
The transitive verb *whm* appears first in passive and then in a pseudo-verbal *hr* + infinitive construction. The objects are the infinitives of *ḥḥ* and *ḥf* used as nouns. Both clauses can be translated using the word “again,” lit. “fighting has been repeated” and “(upon) repeating capturing.”

The last sentence with the indicative/perfective (or circumstantial *sdm.n.f*/perfect; see the discussion above) of *ini* concludes the events.

*wn.in.tw ḥr rdit n.i nbw n knt m whm ṣ*

This sentence has already appeared and has been discussed previously with the added remark that the adverb *m whm ṣ* is an Egyptian phrase for “a second time, again.”

*wn.in.tw ḥr ḥḥ m ṭḥ kmt ḥswt n dmi pn*

At least from the point of view of grammar, the biography here is repetitive. The tongue of land determinative *ḥḥ* indicates that *ḥswt* is a noun, therefore the location *kmt ḥswt n dmi pn* is “Egypt, (which is to) the south of this town”, where ‘town’ is a reference to Avaris.

*ḥḥ.n in.n.i skr-ḥnh z(i) l*

This time Ahmose ended the fight by carrying off (in circumstantial *sdm.n.f*/perfect) a prisoner of war. The passive participle of the verb *skr* “smite, strike down” is used in the noun *skr-ḥnh* “prisoner of war,” lit. “(one) who is smitten alive.”

*hḥ.n i ṭ pḥ mw*

*m.k in.tw.f m ḥḥ ṭḥ ḥrt pḥ dmi*

*dḥ.n.i ḥt.f ḥt mw*
Examining the three sentences we can reconstruct the sequence of events as follows.
Ahmose went down to the water \((h\ddot{a}i \text{ } r \thinspace \text{p}\ddot{a} \text{ } mw, \text{lit.} \text{“head for the water”})\) with the circumstantial \(sdm.n.f/\text{perfect of}\ h\ddot{a}i\), captured/carried off a prisoner \((ini \text{ } m \text{ } mh, \text{lit.} \text{“bring/carry as holding”})\) with the circumstantial/imperfective \(sdm.f/\text{of}\ ini\ expressing concomitant action and the infinitive of \(mh \text{”hold”}\) on the side of the town \((\beta \text{ } hrt \text{ } p\ddot{a} \text{ } dmi)\), where the compound preposition \(hrw-r\) (with omitted \(r\)) stands for “besides,” lit. “apart from.” Therefore the Egyptian army was on the other side of the town.

The exact situation in this feat of bravery is further emphasized in the last clause by stating that he crossed the water \((d\ddot{a}i \text{ } hr \text{ } mw\text{ with the circumstantial}\ sdm.n.f/\text{perfect of}\ d\ddot{a}i\) carrying the prisoner on his back \(hr.f, \text{lit. “under him.”}\)

The passive of the verb \(smi\) without an expressed subject starts the sentence “(it) was reported.” We now meet a strange peculiarity of this inscription, namely that before the infinitive of the verb \(iw^e\) we would expect the preposition \(hr\) but find the particle \(m.k,\) a scribal error (possibly a hieratic confusion) which needs to be emended to \(here.\)

In the expression \(hr \text{ } iw^e.i\) the suffix pronoun is the object of the infinitive, lit. “upon rewarding me.” The phrase \(hr \text{ } snnw.si\text{ “second time” involves the cardinal number snnw “second” used as a noun, lit. “upon its second.”}\) Note the extra \(\text{\text{n}}\) in the suffix pronoun copied from the dual.

The fate of Avaris is described here (with a simple grammar) by the use of the verb \(h\ddot{k}\text{ “plunder” and the derived collective noun \(h\ddot{k}t \text{ “plunder.”}\)
Ahmose recounts here his gains: dmd/dmD (r) stands for “total”, a word derived from the verb dmdi/dmDi “unite, total, sum.”

Note also that the captives were counted by tp “head” (and the slain, as we saw above, by drt “hand”).

The earlier iw sdm.f/imperfective iw hms.tw is changed here to wn.in.tw hr hmt, a pseudo-verbal construction after wn.in, with the only difference in meaning is that wn.in (and h3.n) emphasize subsequent action. According to the Book of Joshua, Sharuhen is in southern Canaan, Simeon’s tribal territory. Although many arguments have been put forward, there is not enough archaeological evidence to pinpoint its exact location. There is also a debate about the exact number of years of the siege of Sharuhen; the readings vary between 3, 5 or 6. In any case, the stubborn resistance of the retreating Hyksos is apparent.

A sentence similar to this appeared above; the subject of the infinitive h3k is expressed (hm.f) therefore its pronominal object has the dependent form s(i).

Most of the grammar here has been discussed above. In the last clause, the verb form of rdi (with the impersonal suffix pronoun tw) is indicative/perfective sdm.f, an infrequent
way to express the passive. The seated man can be read as a determinative, and can then be rendered as “captives.” Alternatively, it can be read as a suffix pronoun emphasizing that they are Ahmose’s own captives.