

Fiat Lingua

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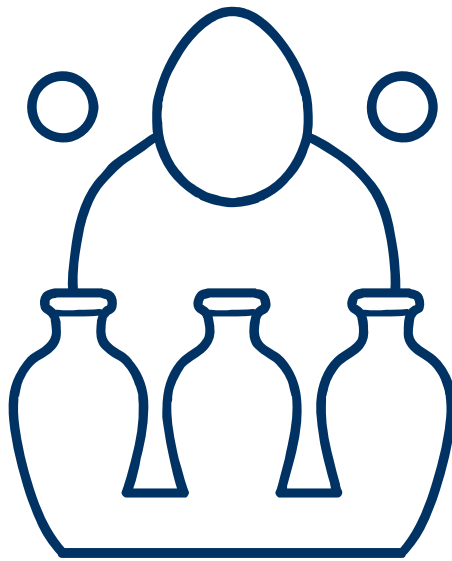
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HIEROGLYPHS OF FNEISE



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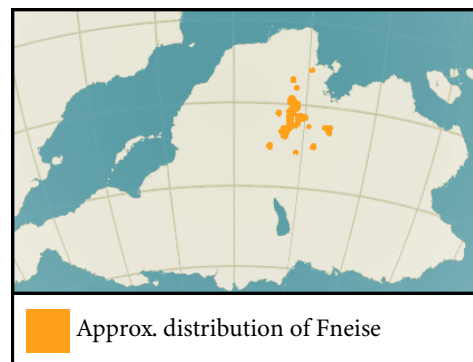
Contents

1	Introduction to Fneise	3
1.1	History and context.....	3
1.2	The language.....	3
2	Introduction to the writing system.....	5
2.1	Medium and method.....	5
2.2	Characterising the script	5
2.3	Conventions & punctuation	5
2.4	Transcriptions	6
3	Using the hieroglyphs.....	7
3.1	Logograms	7
3.2	Syllabograms	8
3.3	Syllabograms for disambiguation.....	9
3.4	Representing reduplication	9
3.5	'Stacked' logograms.....	12
3.6	Enclosed affix logograms.....	12
3.7	Numbers.....	13

1 Introduction to Fneise

1.1 History and context

Fneise is a constructed language of the world known as Seylha. In the ‘present’ of the fictional setting, the Fneise speakers (who call themselves the *Ngũne*) have been pushed to the edges of society, following migrations and invasions from waves of other peoples. The majority now live as peripatetic nomads, and most speakers are bilingual, speaking the language of the dominant polity in addition to their native Fneise.



Approximately 600 years ago, the *Ngũne* were the dominant culture and rulers of their land. They believe that they lived alongside literal giants and had a sophisticated society of cities, clay, bronze, art, writing, and all else that entails.

It was at this time that the Fneise script was widespread, relatively widely understood, and variable, having evolved across both time and place following its emergence hundreds of years prior again. The script calcified following the apocalyptic events of the invasions, and spellings reflect a phonology as-was, absent the emergence of new sounds and containing others spoken by no modern speaker. In the present, literacy is more a specialist skill than ever before: the domain of rare keepers of knowledge and their apprentices known as *qheqhaftéi*.

1.2 The language

Before examining the script, a brief introduction to the Fneise language is useful.

Fneise is a head-initial language with Nominative-Accusative alignment and Verb-Subject-Object (VSO) word order. Verbs include prefixed subject agreement and therefore independent pronoun subjects are optional, and where omitted, the order effectively becomes (S)VO.

Swiki soyu ĩbenis skei.

s- wiki soyu ĩ- bēn -is s- kei
3SG- eat.PST child.NOM ACC- nut -PL 3SG- TEL.PST.DIR

‘The child ate the nuts.’

As demonstrated by the word *skei* above, the modern language includes a clause-final secondary single word predicate indicating both telicity and evidentiality. This is routinely omitted in the orthography, while multiple, seemingly concatenative, affixes may be reflected in the writing which are fusional and inseparable in the modern language.

Regular stress falls on the final syllable if a word ends in a consonant or a nasal vowel, and on the penultimate syllable if a word ends in an oral vowel. Exceptions are indicated with an acute accent.

Phonology

Key features of phonology include a three-way distinction of most stops which may be aspirated, plain, or pre-nasalised and voiced, and additionally a rare labial-velar stop.

Historic developments absent from the orthography include the disappearance of all but the labial and alveolar fricatives, which have also gained a voicing distinction. Vowel developments include the emergence of mid vowels including the schwa, and phonemic vowel nasalisation which can affect all vowels, with nasalisation additionally, and aggressively without blockers, spreading backwards throughout words.

Consonants

		Labial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labial-velar	Uvular
Nasals		m	n				
Stops	Aspirated	p ^h <i><ph></i>	t ^h <i><th></i>		k ^h <i><kh></i>		q ^h <i><qh></i>
	Plain	p	t		k	kp̂ (gb)	q
	Pre-nasalised	^m b (b) <i><mb></i>	ⁿ d (d) <i><nd></i>		^ŋ g (g) <i><ng></i>		
Fricatives	Voiceless	f	s				
	Voiced	v	z				
Approximants			l (r) <i><r></i>	j <i><y></i>		w	

Vowels

Fneise features a fully symmetrical four-way contrast with both long and short oral and nasal vowels.

	Oral			Nasal		
	Front	Central	Back	Front	Central	Back
Close	i i: ĩ ĩ:		u u: ũ ũ:	ĩ ĩ:		ũ ũ:
Mid	e <ei> e: <eei>	ə <e>	o o: õ õ:	ẽ <ēĩ> ē: <ēēĩ>	ã <ē̃>	õ õ:
Low		a a:			ã ã:	

Romanisation

Romanisations are shown in angle brackets <⦿> in the tables above (/p^h/ → *ph*). Long vowels are repeated (/a:/ → *aa*) and an acute accent represents unexpected stress (/a.'pa/ → *apá*). All other phonemes are romanised to match the IPA (/s/ → *s*), including nasal vowels (/ũ/ → *ũ*). Romanisations are in bold, italics, and blue throughout this document.


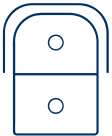


2 Introduction to the writing system

2.1 Medium and method

The script first emerged carved into clay, and following the end of the Fneise golden age, this is again its most common form. Using precise stylus-like tools called *kūdaqei*, the *qheqhaftéi* carve primarily into earthenware—clay pots, jugs, bowls, and similar—though occasionally they carve into stone steles.

2.2 Characterising the script

The Fneise script is a logosyllabary. The hieroglyphs comprise logograms, where single characters represent a whole word or morpheme, mixed seamlessly with syllabograms, where characters represent syllables of the language, or contextually, single sounds. These range from C or V, to CV, to CVC, and are identified by one to three underdots. There are additional characters used as punctuation, from basic word dividers to shorthand expressions of reduplication or similar, plus the disambiguating use of syllabograms preceding logograms which would be otherwise too vague, stacked logograms, and more. Some examples are below:

Logogram	Syllabogram (V)	Syllabogram (CV)	Stacked logogram
			
DANCE	/i/	/tʰi/	ANGRY

2.3 Conventions & punctuation

Like English, Fneise is read from left to right, top to bottom. Older texts however vary considerably. When the hieroglyphs were in more flux, the writing was occasionally mirrored, or adapted to suit a variety of mediums inconsistently. Nonetheless, modern writing is always left to right and is reflected as such in this document.

Sentences begin and end with thick short vertical lines, and individual words are separated by single mid dots.



Thēneiye tityú mukhikhe tikhe. Ī eiyrū qo.

‘We always used to dance in the village. Now I can’t.’

2.4 Transcriptions

This document includes literal transcriptions of hieroglyphs, styled to indicate the type of hieroglyph as follows:

Glyph	Style	Example
Standard logogram	Uppercase bold, in English	PERSON
Syllabogram	IPA, reflecting the proto language	*ᵛgun
Enclosed affix logogram	Gloss abbr., in square brackets	[1SG-]
Reduplicated logogram	RED-Uppercase bold, in English	RED- GOD

Where a single word combines multiple glyphs, the literal transcription shows the separation with a plus (+). In all cases, the literal transcription will be followed by modern Fneise in the romanisation, and then the English translation. The below example demonstrates this with a prefix followed by a central logogram, and then a stacked suffix.



[3PL-]+**TEACH**+[-PASS][-PST]

Swākpāñime

‘They were taught’

Abbreviations

Some examples include glossed transcriptions. The meanings of all abbreviations used in this document are below.

1	1 st person	NOM	Nominative case
2	2 nd person	PASS	Passive voice
3	3 rd person	PL	Plural marker
ACC	Accusative case	PST	Past tense
AN	Animate	RED	Minor reduplication ((C)V-)
DIR	Direct evidential	REDUP	Major reduplication (CVC(V)-)
FUT	Future tense	SG	Singular marker
INAN	Inanimate	TEL	Telic marker

The following chapter will explore the various glyph types and how they are used in more detail.

3 Using the hieroglyphs

3.1 Logograms

Logograms are at the heart of the Fneise writing system. There are an unknown number, they are used for all word types, and are the basis of syllabograms as noted in Chapter 3.2 below. Some logograms are figurative, but others are abstract, or at least the figurative origin is opaque. Below is an example of a noun, dynamic verb, and stative verb.



There are logograms which feature similar imagery but are phonetically unrelated.



In contrast, homophones can have entirely unrelated logograms, as below.



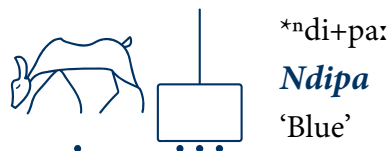
3.2 Syllabograms

There are 379 possible distinct syllabograms in Fneise, covering all permitted V, CV, VC, and CVC syllables from the proto language, excluding vowel length. There are a larger number of allowed syllables in the modern language as over time, while coda stops became disallowed, the vowel inventory expanded, and clusters were introduced. However, the historic spellings are preserved keeping the number at 379. This number may be multiplied by three to account for proto-language vowel length, which is represented by one-to-three mandatory diacritical underdots on the glyph.

All syllabograms are based on logograms, and usually represent the first syllable of the word of the logogram, though varying vowel length.



Syllabograms combine to form words where there is no extant logogram.



Additionally, a writer may choose to write a word using syllabograms if they don't want to use the logogram, or if they do not know it. See below for example of a single logogram for a word versus using syllabograms.



While, as noted above, there are 379 possible syllabograms, most writing uses approximately 63, covering all V and CV glyphs, and excluding the rarer VC and CVC. Coda consonants can instead be represented by a /Ca/ glyph with a single underdot. While proto *i and *u had a contrast of three lengths (*i i: i::), *a only had two (*a a:), resulting in a single underdot representing no vowel, two underdots representing *a, and three representing *a:.

Below is an example of spelling a word contrasting each method—ending first with a single syllabogram reading *fis, and second by combining two syllabograms, *fi+s(a)



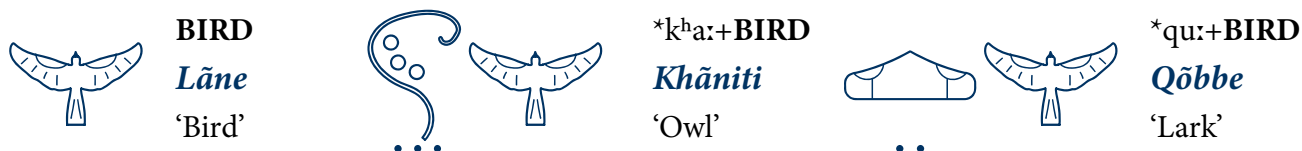
Words primarily using syllabograms may nonetheless include a logogram element, particularly for enclosed affixes (as discussed in Chapter 3.6 below), but also for others not enclosed. The plural markers are common, as below.



3.3 Syllabograms for disambiguation

Logograms may include phonetic complements—syllbograms used primarily for disambiguation almost always preceding the logogram itself. These help the reader understand the specific intended meaning of the logogram where it may otherwise be ambiguous or have multiple possible meanings.

For example, the below shows how the logogram for bird may be preceded by the syllabogram representing the first syllable of the word for the specific species of bird.



3.4 Representing reduplication

Reduplication is a major source of word derivation for Fneise and can be applied in different ways to various word types: animate nouns, inanimate nouns, dynamic verbs, and stative verbs. There are two types of reduplication: **minor reduplication**, usually CV- or VC- reduplication of the first syllable of the proto form of a word, and **major reduplication**, CVC(V)- reduplication of the proto form. These are represented in the orthography in different ways and are maintained even where the historic etymology of the reduplication is unclear.

Longhand reduplication

When writing in full, and where a word is represented by a logogram, minor reduplication is represented by stacking a copy of the logogram on top, reducing the size (and sometimes detail) so combined they take the space of a single glyph. Major reduplication is represented by repeating the logogram in full.

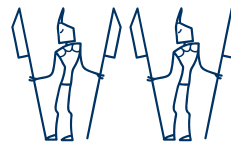
The first example below shows reduplication applied to dynamic verbs. Minor reduplication derives an animate noun: the gerund form of the verb. Major reduplication derives a new verb indicating strong intensity or high frequency of verb.



GUARD
Kōzuu
'To guard'



RED-GUARD
Kākōzuu
'Guarding'



REDUP-GUARD
Kāzgōzuu
'Devote self to'



POT
Fīde
'To make pots'

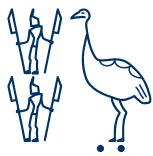


RED-POT
Fēfīde
'Potting'

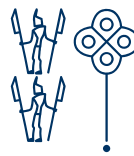


REDUP-POT
Vēvīde
'Create pots non-stop'

Further derivation can be applied. For example, suffixes can be added to the gerund to derive either an animate agentive noun, or inanimate, often abstract, resultative noun. These are represented by a phonetic complement to the logogram.



RED-GUARD+*ti:
Kākōzuuti
'Guardian'



RED-GUARD+*wi
Kākōzuuwe
'Safety, a protected place or thing'



RED-POT+*ti:
Fēvduti
'Potter'



RED-POT+*wi
Fēvduwe
'Pottery, earthenware'

The second example shows reduplication applied to stative verbs. Minor reduplication derives an inanimate noun, usually the quality of being the adjective. Major reduplication derives a dynamic verb.



BRIGHT
Tūkī
'Be bright'



RED-BRIGHT
Tūtūkī
'Brightness'



REDUP-BRIGHT
Tūkētūkī
'Ignite, set fire to'



GENTLE
Īdus
'Be gentle'



RED-GENTLE
Īīdus
'Gentleness'



REDUP-GENTLE
Īdwīdus
'Take care of, pet'

Reduplication applied to nouns derives another noun: this is usually augmentative and can be in a metaphorical way.



HOUSE
Mwisa
'House'



RED-HOUSE
Mūmwisa
'Clan, people, tribe'



AXE
Nure
'Axe'



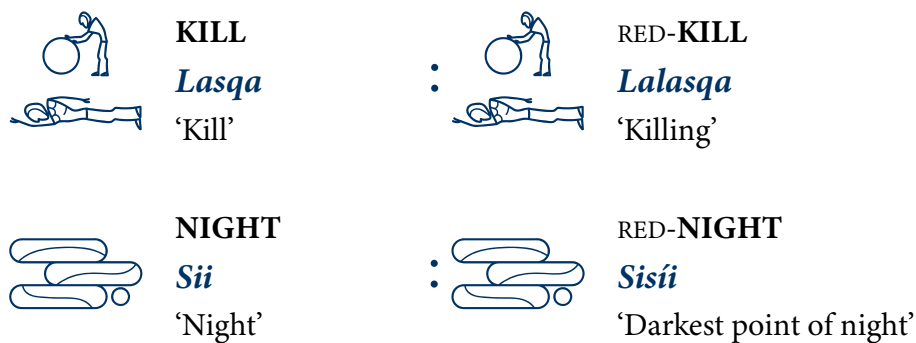
RED-AXE
Nēnure
'Army'

Shorthand & syllabogram reduplication

In contrast to the above method, words made up of syllabograms, or combining logograms with syllabograms, represent minor reduplication with a prefixed double-dot punctuation mark, which appears like a colon. Major reduplication is represented by a phonetic rendering of the reduplication in syllabograms. The below examples show minor reduplication in this method.



This method is sometimes used to show reduplication on logograms, always where the logogram is itself made up of stacked logograms, but also sometimes where the logogram is particularly detailed, or where the writer wants to keep their writing simple.



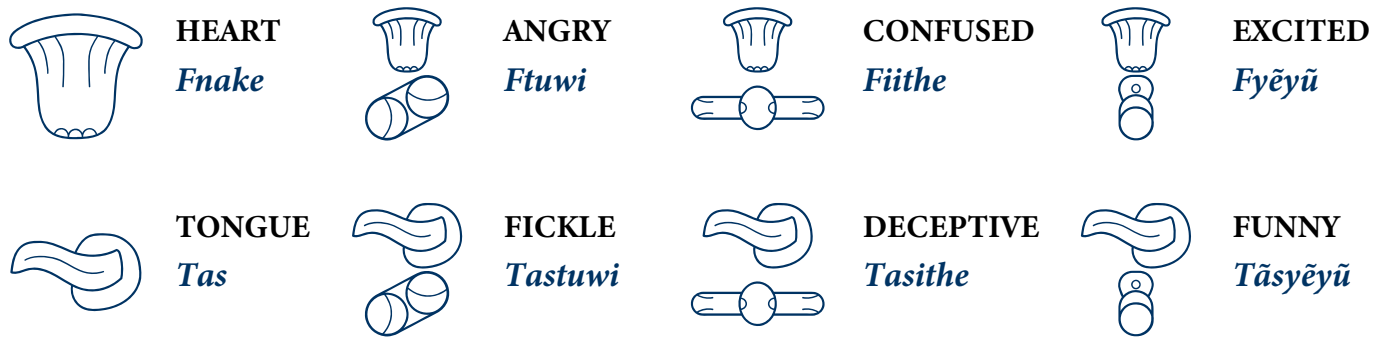
Exceptions

There are rare irregular glyphs, which do not use the methods above to represent reduplication. Take the example below. The word for 'giant' is derived through minor reduplication of 'person' but has an irregular form rather than the expected stacking of the person glyph.



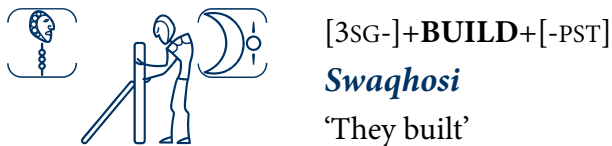
3.5 ‘Stacked’ logograms

Stacking a logogram atop another, but maintaining the height of a single glyph, is common. We have already seen this strategy used to represent minor reduplication, but it is also used to represent words originally formed from compounds. This is historically a particularly common way of deriving stative verbs.

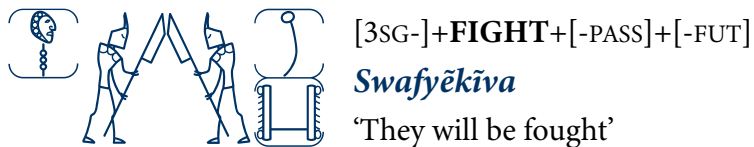


3.6 Enclosed affix logograms

Grammatical affixes are represented by half-size glyphs with bracket-like lines on top and below. These are used for bound pronouns, case marking prefixes, and verb suffixes representing tense and voice.













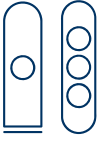

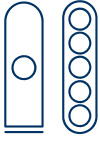




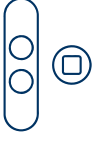




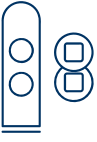

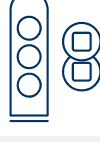


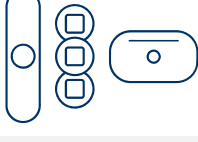


Where the voice is passive or mediopassive, the voice and tense affixes stack.



3.7 Numbers

Numbers in Fneise are primarily base-10, but contain features of a historic base-5, still visible in the writing system. A selection of numbers is below.

				
1 <i>Ta</i>	2 <i>Mbite</i>	3 <i>Ndu</i>	4 <i>Kuf</i>	5 <i>Īre</i>
				
6 <i>Ēlata</i>	7 <i>Ērēbí</i>	8 <i>Ēlōddu</i>	9 <i>Ērekuf</i>	10 <i>Us</i>
				
11 <i>Usta</i>	12 <i>Usmbí</i>	13 <i>Ūsнду</i>	14 <i>Uskuf</i>	15 <i>Ūsĭre</i>
				
20 <i>Mbetus</i>	21 <i>Mbetusta</i>	25 <i>Qhei</i>	26 <i>Ta qhei</i>	27 <i>Mbite qhei</i>
				
30 <i>Nduus</i>	31 <i>Nduusta</i>	50 <i>Qhēĭbí</i>	60 <i>Us qhēĭbí</i>	70 <i>Mbetus qhēĭbí</i>
				
75 <i>Qhēĭddu</i>	80 <i>Nduus qhēĭbí</i>	100 <i>Sqoo</i>	125 <i>Qhei sqoo</i>	176 <i>Ta qhēĭddu sqoo</i>