
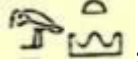
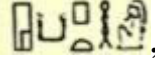


# The Origin of the Word, "Egypt"

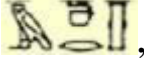
Over the millenniums, Egypt has had many names in many different languages.

Today, its official name is Jumhuriyah Misr al-Arabiyah, which in English means the Arab Republic of Egypt. Egyptians themselves refer to Egypt as Misr, though this can also be a name for Cairo. Interestingly, it is common for Egyptians to refer to Egypt as Misr, if they are resident in Cairo, but if outside of Cairo, then they will refer to Cairo as Misr. In a certain respect, this is a custom that dates to the earliest times of ancient Egypt.

Basically, we can examine three groups of names which have applied to Egypt.

- In the early period of Egypt, during the Old Kingdom, Egypt was referred to as *Kemet* (Kermit), or simply *Kmt* , which means *the Black land*. They called themselves "*remetch en Kemet*", which means the "*People of the Black Land*". The term refers to the rich soil found in the Nile Valley and Delta. But it was also sometimes referred to as *Deshret*, or *dshrt* , which refers to the "*Red Land*", or deserts of which Egypt is mostly comprised.
- Later, Egyptians referred to their country as "*Hwt-ka-Ptah*" (*Ht-ka-Ptah*, or *Hout-ak Ptah*) , which means "*Temple for Ka of Ptah*", or more properly, "*House of the Ka of Ptah*". Ptah was one of Egypt's earliest Gods. As in modern Egypt, this was both a name for the administrative center of Egypt, what we call *Memphis* today, as well as the name of *the country as a whole*.
- Egypt, as many people of the world refer to the country today, is a derivative of this ancient name. Even today, people who speak one language often change the spelling of words in another

language because of the difficulty they may have in pronouncing some of the sounds of that foreign language. Hence, in pronouncing *Hwt-ka-Ptah*, the *Greeks* changed this word to *Aegyptus* (*Aigyptos*), which they used in their literature as the name of an *Egyptian King* (perhaps *Ramesses*, though in a fictional manner), the *Nile River* and for the *country* itself. We find the word used by *Homer* in his famous "Odyssey". We believe the *Greeks* had difficulties with the *Egyptian* pronunciation of the letter "H" at the beginning and end of *Hwt-ka-Ptah*.

Today, the word *Egyptians* often use for their country is *Misr*. This is probably derived from an ancient term, *Mizraim* which may have itself been derived from an ancient *Egyptian* word, *md-r* "مجر" of "مشر" *mdr* , which people in the region called *Egypt*. *Misr* is an *Arabic* name simply meaning "country", and part of the tradition of this term in as a name for *Egypt* comes from the *Islamic Quran*. The term can also mean "fortress", or "castellated" "المحصن" of "المكنون", which refers to the *natural protective borders* of *Egypt* which protected the country from invaders. This name can be extended as *Misr El Mahrosa*.

- As a final note, it is interesting that the origin of "*Coptic*", a word which we today use to refer to the *Christians* of *Egypt* (and actually, the principle *Christian church* of *Ethiopia*, as well others throughout the world related to this form of *Christianity*), actually is derived from the word *Copti*. *The Arabs* who invaded *Egypt* in, like the *Greeks*, had problems pronouncing the term, *Aegypti*, which means "*Egyptian citizen*". Essentially, they changed the word to *Copti*. Of course, at that time, *Egypt* was a *Christian nation*, so the term became limited to actual *Egyptian Christians* as the country became more and more *Muslim*.

Extra information:

The English name *Egypt* was borrowed from Middle French *Egypte*, from Latin *Aegyptus*, from ancient Greek *Aígyptos* (Αἴγυπτος), from earlier Linear B *a-ku-pi-ti-yo*. The adjective *aigýpti-*, *aigýptios* was borrowed into Coptic as *gyptios*, *kyptios*, and from there into Arabic as *قُبْطِيّ* *qubṭī*, back formed into *قُبْط* *qubṭ*, whence English *Copt*. The Greek forms were borrowed from Late Egyptian (*Amarna*) *Hikuptah* "Memphis", a corruption of the earlier Egyptian name *Hwt-ka-Ptah* (ḥwt-ka-ptḥ), meaning "home of the ka (soul) of Ptah", the name of a temple to the god Ptah at Memphis.

Strabo attributed the word to a folk etymology in which *Aígyptos* (Αἴγυπτος) evolved as a compound from *Aigaiou huptiōs* (Αἰγαίου ὑπτίως), meaning "*below the Aegean*". *Miṣr*, the Arabic and modern official name of Egypt (Egyptian Arabic: *Maṣr*), is of *Semitic origin*, directly cognate with other Semitic words for Egypt such as the Hebrew מִצְרַיִם (*Mitzráyim*), literally meaning "the two straits" (a reference to the dynastic separation of upper and lower Egypt). The word originally connoted "metropolis" or "civilization" and means "country", or "frontier-land".

The ancient Egyptian name of the country is *Kemet* (km.t), which means "black *land*", referring to the fertile black soils of the Nile flood plains, distinct from the *deshret* (dšrṯ), or "*red land*" of the desert.

The name is realized as *kīmi* and *kīmə* in the Coptic stage of the Egyptian language, and appeared in early Greek as *Χημία* (*Khēmía*). Another name was *ta-mry* "land of the riverbank". The names of Upper and Lower Egypt were *Ta-Sheme'aw* (ta-šmaw) "sedgeland" and *Ta-Mehew* (ta mḥw) "northland", respectively.