

SINCE he was in fourth grade, Tom Hare has been fascinated with Egypt. Although his career as a professor of comparative literature has focused mainly on Japanese works, he never forgot his love for the images and symbols of ancient Egyptian culture.

Now, Hare has written and illustrated a new book that brings the picture-based writing of ancient Egypt to audiences in an experimental way, as a “graphic translation” of a 4,000-year-old Egyptian fable. In the slim volume called *Sinuhe: Flight and Homecoming*, Hare weaves hieroglyphs and prose to create a narrative that retains the rich and colorful beauty of the symbols.

“It bothered me that translations of Egyptian works took these beautiful hieroglyphs and converted them into text,” said Hare, the William Sauter LaPorte '28 Professor in Regional Studies. “The result is that you’ve lost the visual character of the original language.”

The book tells the story of Sinuhe, a nobleman who flees Egypt during a period of unrest that follows a pharaoh’s death. He finds a new and prosperous life in a land to the east, and returns home in his later years, uncertain of his reception from the new king.

The story was written during the age of the Middle Kingdom, which spanned from 2030 B.C.E. to 1700 B.C.E. It was preserved across the ages on two papyrus scrolls and on pieces of broken pots, and today is a well-known fable in the region.

One of the challenges of creating the graphic translation was choosing which hieroglyphs to include, Hare said. Many hieroglyphs have a literal translation. For example, the cow represents livestock, so when the story says that Sinuhe amassed a fortune in livestock, Hare included several columns of cows. Other hieroglyphs are less literal but still evocative, like the dead goose that represents fear. Some hieroglyphs represent sounds, like the horned viper that represents the sound “f” but can also mean “he,” “his” or “him.”

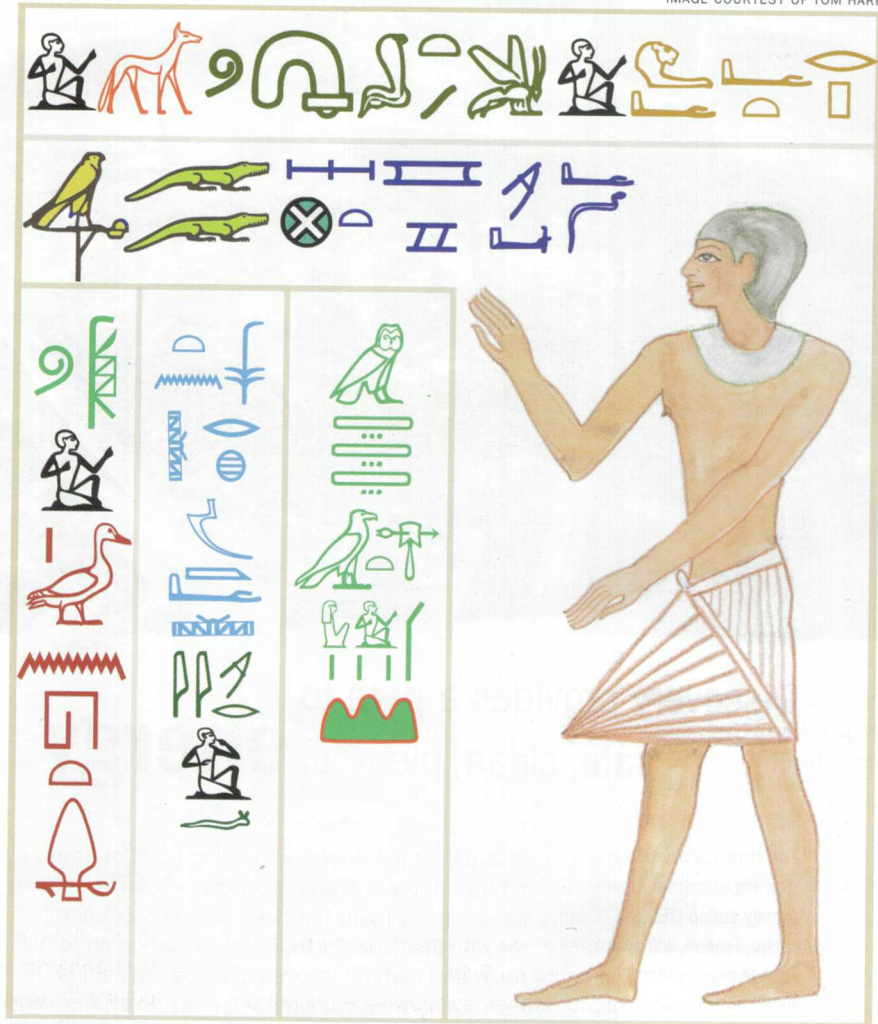
Still other symbols were part of a Middle Egyptian form of cursive called hieratic. The latter half of the book contains notes on the translation, including discussions of where experts have disagreed on the exact meaning of a passage.

While preparing the book, Hare found that the visual nature of the volume demanded a great deal of experimentation on where to put the hieroglyphs and text, leading him to self-publish a limited number of copies. He is now editing it and eventually plans to seek a publisher.

Hare hopes the story of Sinuhe presented in this graphic format will help people channel their inner 10-year-old and learn to read hieroglyphs. “The visual elements make it possible for people today to get insight into what Egyptian culture was like,” he said. “This is important given the foundational role of Egyptian culture in Western civilization.” —By Catherine Zandonella

Egyptian translation highlights the beauty of hieroglyphs

IMAGE COURTESY OF TOM HARE



**PEER, ROYAL SEALBEARER,
DIGNITARY
SENIOR MAGISTRATE
FOR THE SOVEREIGN
IN THE LAND OF THE SYRIANS
TRUE INTIMATE OF THE KING,
WHO LOVES HIM
A FOLLOWER, SINUHE, IT IS**

A classic Egyptian tale of a nobleman’s adventures in foreign lands is the subject of an experimental translation that blends the art of hieroglyphs with English text.