



THE WISE WOMAN AND THE HEALING PRACTICE (O. OIM 16974)

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ABSTRACT

This paper publishes the hieratic ostrakon O. OIM 16974 and studies the relation between the wise woman mentioned in the text and healing practices. It is a letter to an unknown woman concerning the wise woman and the death of two infants. The palaeography and the subject, which appears to be the same event recorded on O. Letellier, suggest that this ostrakon may be dated to the late Nineteenth Dynasty.

Limestone ostrakon (O.) OIM 16974 (FIGS. 1–2), of unknown provenance, is presently at the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago. It measures about 14 cm in width and 9.5 cm in height. It is inscribed on two sides in black ink, with five lines on the recto, and four lines on the verso. There are palimpsest traces of an older text on the verso. The end of the text is damaged. The ostrakon bears several inventory numbers (O. Nelson 08; O. OIC 16974).¹ Jaroslav Černý made a transcription of the text in one of his notebooks without providing a translation or commentary.² This ostrakon may be related to O. Letellier. Both texts deal with a consultation of a wise woman about two children.³

HIEROGLYPHIC TRANSCRIPTION

RECTO



VERSO



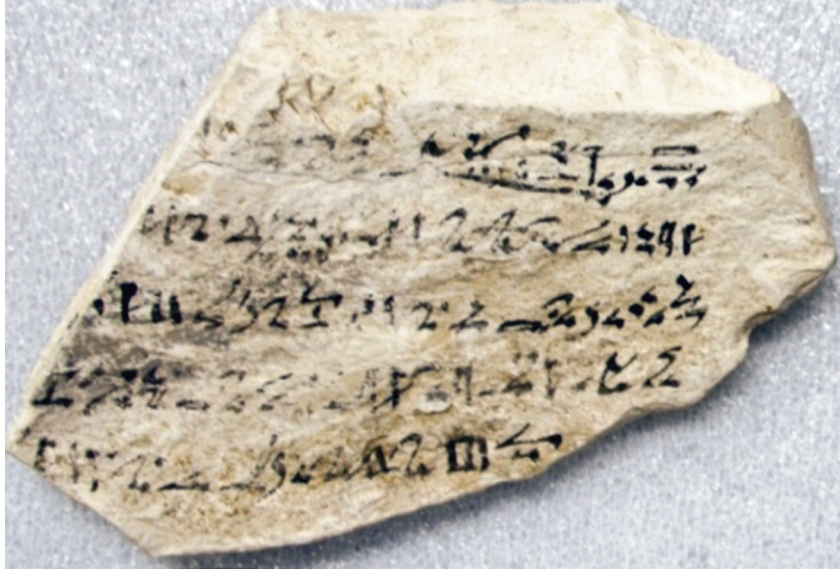


FIGURE 1: O. OIM 16974 recto. © The Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago.)

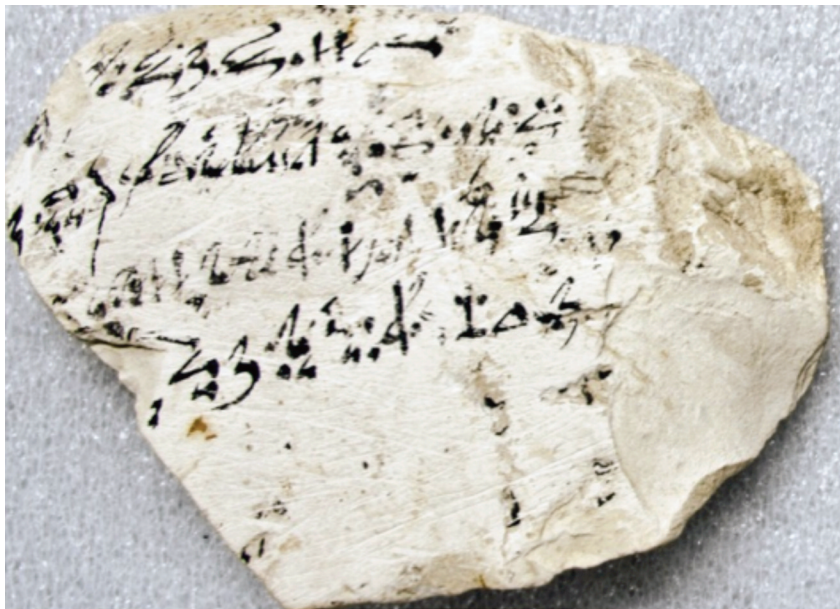


FIGURE 2: O. OIM 16974 verso. © The Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago.)

TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

RECTO

- (1) *r-nty tw.i hnw.kn t3 rh<.t> n^(a)^(b)*
- (2) *i<w> s hr dd n.i t3y.i rdit.i p3y*
- (3) *mw.t tw.i spr r p3y.i dd.w 2.....*
- (4) *nh i n sn i<w>s hr dd n.i r t3 (kt<.t> dd<.t>*
- (5) *dy hk n p3 ntr^(c).....*

- (1) As follows: I went to the wise woman because
- (2) she said to me, I take, I give the.....
- (3) mother, I visit my two dd.w children...
- (4) nh?, they said. She said to me about the little dd<.t> child ...
- (5) There, the ailment from the god

VERSO



- (1) *ky dd m dd mr....*
- (2) *p3y rmt nht t3 wr.t...*
- (3) *s3 iw.i it3y....*
- (4) *m ir snt^(d) h3ty.t m dy....*

- (1) Another matter: do not say mr.....
- (2) This man, the strength of the goddess t3 wr.t
- (3) and I will take
- (4) Don't question your heart with



PALEOGRAPHICAL REMARKS

RECTO







L.1a

: On the basis of the faint traces that remain, this word could be  t3 rh.t. Its form would be similar to the forms on O. Cairo CG 25674,⁴ and wooden board CG 25366.⁵



L.2a

: Perhaps it represents .

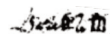



L.3a

: Černý⁶ transcribed  , but perhaps it could be  . The sign  appeared with similar form during the Nineteenth Dynasty to represent  . A more recognizable form for the latter sign is .

L.4a



: this phrase very faint. It may be  as in the second line of the recto.

L.5a




: Černý⁸ transcribed this as  , but the author thinks that this group of signs represents  ,⁹ where the normal form of the man with arms tied behind his back is  .¹⁰ The form with a horizontal base line occurs from the Eighteenth Dynasty onwards.

VERSO



L.2a

: Černý ignored this word, but it could be  .

L.3a

: Černý¹¹ transcribed this as  , but the author thinks that this group of signs could be  .

L.4a

: Černý ignored this word, but it may represent  .

COMMENTARY

(a)



 t3 rh<.t>: the ancient Egyptians practiced medicine in different forms. They understood that disease could be treated by pharmaceuticals. Healers had little understanding of some of the diseases and blamed them on supernatural forces, so they depended on other techniques like those of the Seer (“knowledgeable woman,” “the <woman> who knows”) t3 rh.t. The term “wise woman” embodies many ambiguities, and scholars have different opinions concerning its context. John Baines,¹² Doris Karl,¹³ Jaana Toivari-Viitala,¹⁴ and Anne Austin¹⁵ considered t3 rh.t to be a title that means a person who possesses the techniques of insight and predictions of events and the reasons for their occurrence, in addition to performing the role of healer. Therefore, the expression has been translated

TABLE 1: Reasons for visiting wise women according to the New Kingdom fragments.

SOURCE	REASON FOR THE VISIT
O. Letellier ^a	the name of <i>t3 rh.t</i> followed by <i>hr p3 3d(w) 2 ir mwt</i>
O. DeM 1690 ^b	followed by <i>mwt.k ndnd p3 b3w</i>
O. DeM 1688 ^c	followed by <i>mwt iw p3- šd</i>
O. Gardiner 149 ^d	contains <i>iw.s hr dd n.i b3w n pth</i>
O. Cairo CG 25674 ^e	contains <i>iw.s hr dd n.i b3w n t3-wrt</i>
NOTES: ^a Letellier 1980, 127–133. ^b Gasse 1990, no. 1690. ^c Gasse 1990, no. 1688. ^d Borghouts 1982, 24–25; Karl 2000, 136. ^e Černy 1933, pl. LXXXIII.	

woman regarding the *b3.w*. The first case is a consultation with the wise woman about the *b3.w* that are presumably causing a specific disease: for instance, in O. DeM 1690 a man is asked to consult with the wise woman about the *b3.w* that are supposed to be causing his wife's blindness.³² In this example she clearly explains the reason of illness as *hk n p3 ntr* "the illness of the god." In the second case, the *b3.w* is known and the consultation was to inquire with the wise woman about what to do; for instance, in O. CG 25674³³, the text is broken but mentions the *b3.w* of Nemti and Taweret.

(d)

 *šnt*: the verb *šnt* appeared with different reading as to "conjure,"³⁴ "to surround," "to question," and "to wonder."³⁵


DATING

As the text recounts the same event recorded on O. Letellier, this ostrakon should most probably be dated to the late Nineteenth Dynasty. This date also is suggested by the style of handwriting (TABLE 2), in addition to grammatical structures used in the text and the formula.

THE FORMULA OF THE LETTER

According to the New Kingdom sources that represent a letter regarding a wise woman, these

letters were characterized by a fixed formula with three main elements (TABLE 3):

- Visiting the wise woman , the first formula is the opening formula, which represents the visiting of the wise woman. The scribe used the verb *Smt* or *Hn.* and followed with the title *t3 rh.t*.
- The reason for the visit.
- The reason for the death or the illness. In most cases it is given as *iw.s hr dd n.j*, followed by the reason.

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TABLE 2: Sign list for O. OIM 16974.



























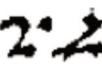







G/M		O. OIM 16974	O. CAIRO CG 25674	WIMMER 1995
	A1/33	 1r		
	A2/35	 4v		
	A24/15	 4r		
	G1/192	 5r	 5r	
	M2/268	 1r	 2r	
	M17/282	 2r	 3r	
	X1/575	 3r	 2r	
	Z7/200B	 3r		
	G47+G1/ 224+192	 2r	 5r	
	X1+G1/ 575+192	 2v		
	G41+G1/ 221+192	 3r	 2r 3r	
	N35+X1+Z4/ 331+575+560	 1r	 2r	
	G36+D21/ 198+91	 2v	 4r	

TABLE 3: The formula of letters to the wise women.

VISITING THE WISE WOMAN	
O. Letellier	<i>šm.t n t3 rh.t / hn.t. ndnd m-di.t t3 rh.t</i>
O. Cairo CG 25674	<i>tw.išm.t n t3 rh.t</i>
O. DeM 1690	<i>iw.k hr šm.t n t3 rh.t</i>
O. DeM 1688	<i>tw.j hn n t3 rh.t</i>
O. Gardiner 149	<i>tw.j hn n t3 rh.t</i>
O. OIM 16974	<i>tw.i hmw.k n t3 rh.<.t></i>
THE REASON FOR THE VISIT	
O. Letellier	<i>hr p3 ˆq.w 2 ir mwt</i>
O. Cairo CG 25674
O. DeM 1690	<i>hr p3 b3w nti m ir.ti n hˆ.s</i>
O. DeM 1688	<i>n mwt</i>
O. Gardiner 149
O. OIM 16974	<i>n</i>
THE CAUSE OF THE DEATH OR ILLNESS	
O. Letellier
O. Cairo CG 25674	<i>iw.s hr dd n.j b3w t3-wrt</i>
O. DeM 1690
O. DeM 1688	<i>iw.f hr dd n.j b3.w n pth ˆnh mw[t]</i>
O. Gardiner 149	<i>iw.s hr dd n.i b3w n pth m di.t n p3-šw hr ˆnh hr t3i.f hm.t b3w n sth</i>
O. OIM 16974	<i>hk n p3 ntr</i>

- ‘weisen Frau’ im alten Ägypten.” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 28, 131–160.
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NOTES

- ¹ See Deir el-Medina Database.
- ² Černý Notebook 107.30 (in the collection of the Griffith Institute, Oxford).
- ³ Letellier 1980; Kitchen 1989, 257–258; Karl 2000; Toivari-Viitala 2001, 229.
- ⁴ Černý 1933, pl. LXXIII.
- ⁵ Daressy 1901, pl. LXII; Hassan 2016, 126, pl. 1.
- ⁶ Černý Notebook 107.30.
- ⁷ Möller 1909, 28, 309.
- ⁸ Černý Notebook 107.30.
- ⁹ Lesko 2004, 292.
- ¹⁰ Möller 1909, 4, 49.
- ¹¹ Černý Notebook 107.30.
- ¹² Baines 1987, 93–94.
- ¹³ Karl 2000, 131–60.
- ¹⁴ Toivari-Viitala 2001, 228–231.
- ¹⁵ Austin 2014, 97–101.
- ¹⁶ Borghouts 1982, 24–27.
- ¹⁷ Letellier 1980, 257–258.
- ¹⁸ Ranke 1935, 365.51; Ranke 1952, 396.1, 430.25.
- ¹⁹ Sethe 1924, 7, 10; Borghouts 1982, note 124, 59.
- ²⁰ Karl 2000, 131–160; Toivari-Viitala. 2001, 228–231.
- ²¹ Borghouts 1982, 26–27.
- ²² Borghouts 1982, 26–27.
- ²³ Karl 2000, 138.
- ²⁴ Borghouts 1982, 24–27.
- ²⁵ Karl 2000, 131–160; Austin 2014, 97.
- ²⁶ Austin and Gobeil 2016, 34.
- ²⁷ Lang 2012, 215; Borghouts 1982, 26, note 123; Austin 2014, 101.
- ²⁸ Scott 1951.
- ²⁹ Austin and Gobeil 2016, 24.
- ³⁰ Borghouts 1982, 26; Lang 2012, 215.
- ³¹ Lesko 1999, 143.
- ³² Karl 2000, 134–135; Mathieu 1994, 335–336; Toivari-Viitala. 2001. 229. The same case appeared in O. DeM 1688, with a consultation with the wise woman to determine the *b³.w* affecting the eyes of a woman.
- ³³ Černý 1933, pl. LXXIII.
- ³⁴ Lesko 2004, 128.
- ³⁵ Motte 2017, 60.