

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

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ABSTRACT

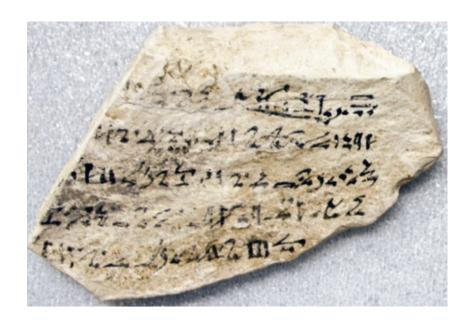
This paper publishes the hieratic ostracon O. OIM 16974 and studies the relation between the wise woman mentioned in the text and healing practices. It is a letter to an unknown woman concerning the wise woman and the death of two infants. The palaeography and the subject, which appears to be the same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

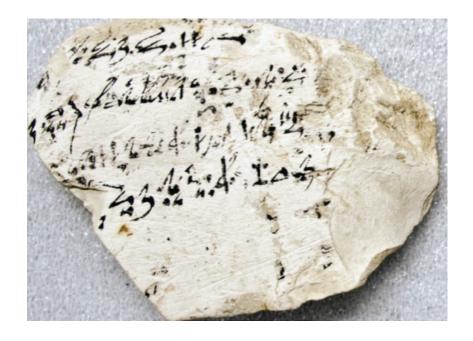
Limestone ostracon (O.) OIM 16974 (Figs. 1–2), of unknown provenance, is presently at the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago. It measures about 14 cm in width and 9.5 cm in height. It is inscribed on two sides in black ink, with five lines on the recto, and four lines on the verso.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

HIEROGLYPHIC TRANSCRIPTION

VERSO

1-METATE OF A SEL TO MINISTER OF A SEL TO MI





 $\begin{tabular}{ll} Figure 2: O. OIM 16974 verso. @ The Oriental Institute \\ Museum of the University of Chicago.) \\ \end{tabular}$

TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

RECTO

- (1) r- $nty tw.i hnw.k n t rh < .t > <math>n^{(a)}^{(b)}$
- (2) i < w > s hr dd n.i t > y.i r dit.i p > y
- (3) $mw.t tw.i spr r p \stackrel{?}{} y.i \stackrel{\checkmark}{} dd.w 2....$
- (4) nh i n sn i < w > s hr dd n.i r t < (kt < .t > `dd < .t >
- (5) $dy h k n p^{3} n t r^{(c)} \dots$
- (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 <u>dd</u> m <u>dd</u> mr....
- (2) $p \ge y rmt nht t \ge wr.t...$
- (3) \check{s} $\check{i}w.\check{i}\ i\underline{t}$ $\check{s}y....$
- (4) m ir $\check{s}nt^{(d)}$ h?ty.t m dy...
- (1) Another matter: do not say *mr*.....
- (2) This man, the strength of the goddess t^3 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 $\frac{1}{2}$ $\frac{1}{2}$

L.2a

Perhaps it represents 🙀 .

L.3a

be come it could be com

L.4a

s in the second line of the recto.

L.5a

the author thinks that this group of signs represents below the horizontal base line occurs from the Eighteenth Dynasty onwards.

Verso

L.2a

: Černy ignored this word, but it could be

L.3a

Cerny¹¹ transcribed this as \bigcirc e, but the author thinks that this group of signs could be \bigcirc e.

L.4a

 \mathbf{L} : Černy ignored this word, but it may represent \mathbf{L} \mathbf{L} .

COMMENTARY

(a)

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") t^3 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 t^3 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

as "wise woman", "one who practices divination," "seers," and "knowledgeable one." While others including Joris F. Borghouts, 16 Bernadette Letellier, 17 and Herman Ranke¹⁸ assumed that $t^{\frac{1}{2}}$ rh.t is a feminine name. The earliest attestation of the title of wise woman in Egypt comes from stela of Khentyemsemyt (BM EA 574),19 which dates to the Twelfth Dynasty and comes from Abydos. In line 8 the owner is qualified as "... $dm\underline{d}.w$ n=f ' $r\underline{h}.t$," meaning someone "to whom the arm of the knowledgeable one (?) is extended"; the "knowledgeable one" in this context may be a goddess. During the New Kingdom, in the Workers Village of Deir el-Medina, six texts mentioning the wise woman have been identified.20 All of these documents call for an individual to consult with the wise woman in order to determine the divine cause of an illness or death.21 For the Ptolemaic Period onwards, Borghouts underlines the fact that the epithet *rhy.t* is often given to both Hathor and Isis.²² Although several administrative documents mention healers, wise women are not mentioned. This might mean that the wise women were not paid by the state and were not recognized administratively or professionally. They were probably practicing their profession informally. Thus we can ask whether the woman mentioned in the ostracon received a fee in exchange for her services in healing and forecasting, and whether she actually received a ration—and if so, was it a fixed or variable percentage according to what the patient gave her, or did the wise woman perform this service without pay? Until we find sources revealing something about the economic position of the wise women, these are questions that remain unanswered.

Drawing from the various sources, we can summarize the characteristics of the wise women as follows:

- 1) The anonymity of the wise woman: Among all documents that have been discovered so far and that refer to the title of wise woman, none includes a personal name written in conjunction with the title. Karl thinks that the local inhabitants already knew the name of the wise woman. ²³ This in itself may indicate that there was just one such wise woman in the village.
- Knowledge, wisdom, and a divine intermediary were characteristics found among the wise women of the villages. Borghouts has mentioned

- that the wise woman was a specialist in mythology,²⁴ and Karl explains that the wise woman appeared as a divine intermediary in order to determine the negative divine intervention of an individual's problems.²⁵
- 3) Austin and Gobeil²⁶ suggest that a wise woman had a tattooed body. One of the roles of wise women—especially during the Late Period—was the treatment of bites of venomous snakes and stings of scorpion. Therefore she had snakes tattooed on her body to express her magical powers in healing.
- 4) None of the documents mention the age of the wise woman. Apparently age did not contradict her skill and powers.
- 5) The main role of this woman was to assist in the diagnosis of the etiology of illness.
- There were many goddesses who possessed the epithet and qualities of wise women in terms of predicting future events, as well as identifying the disease symptoms and how to cure them. These goddesses are: A) Isis, who describes herself as "a knowing one (rh.t, rhy.t, rs.t in her town) "27 according to The Metternich Stele, which dates to the Thirtieth Dynasty;²⁸ B) Hathor; if we assume that the tattooed woman from Deir el-Medina was one of the wise women, we have an example of the first of these women, the most well-known of whom is the priestess of Hathor Amunet;29 Hathor held the epithet (rh.t, rhy.t, rs.t) during the Ptolemaic period and later;³⁰ and C) Mut who is described as a wise, mature, and public-spirited woman of middle age.³¹ Through these female deities we observe the close association between this title and the women.
- (b) From other sources (TABLE 1), the author can suggest that the missing part of the text contained the reason for visiting the wise women and consulting her about the death of two infants.
- was engaged in the healing process, but her services are more focused on knowing the reasons for illness rather than treatment. All of the sources use the term "the b^3 .w of" a god that were affecting an individual; there are two cases of consultation with the wise

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

Source	Reason for the Visit
O. Letellier ^a	the name of $t^3 rh.t$ followed by $hr p^3$ ${}^5d(w) \ 2 \ ir \ mwt$
O. DeM 1690 ^b	followed by mwt.k ndnd p3 b3w
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 ptḥ</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. LXXIII.

woman regarding the $b^3.w$. The first case is a consultation with the wise woman about the $b^3.w$ 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 $b^3.w$ that are supposed to be causing his wife's blindness.³² In this example she clearly explains the reason of illness as h/k n/p^3 n/t" the illness of the god." In the second case, the $b^3.w$ 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 $b^3.w$ of Nemti and Taweret.

(d)

2 snt: the verb šni appeared with different reading as to "conjure," "to surround," "to question," and "to wonder." "35

DATING

As the text recounts the same event recorded on O. Letellier, this ostracon 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):

- (a) Visiting the wise woman of the control of 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.
- (b) The reason for the visit.
- (c) 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
鳌	A1/33	4 1r		4401
<u> </u>	A2/35	4v		& # *
A.	A24/15	£ 4r		K & K
Ā	G1/192	2 - 5r	2 5r	2 7 2
JD .	M2/268	 1r	- 7 2r	# y-
β	M17/282	F 2r	3r	r + }
٥	X1/575	♣ 3r	2r	4 4 4
9	Z7/200B	5 3r		, , ,
AS	G47+G1/ 224+192	2r	22 5r	22 13
Ã	X1+G1/ 575+192	2v		有爱名
A XX	G41+G1/ 221+192	2:2 3r	2 12, 2r 3r	12,
**	N35+X1+Z4/ 331+575+560	1r	5 , 2r	73 77
A	G36+D21/ 198+91	2v	4r	

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

VISITING THE WISE WOMAN			
O. Letellier	šm.t n t³ rḥ.t / ḥn.t. nḏnḍ m-dì.t t³ rḥ.t		
O. Cairo CG 25674	tw.i.šm.t n t3 rh.t		
O. DeM 1690	ìw.k ḥr šm.t n t³ rḥ.t		
O. DeM 1688	tw.j ḥn n t³ rḥ.t		
O. Gardiner 149	tw.j lin n t3 rli.t		
O. OIM 16974	tw.i ḥnw.k n t³ rḥ<.t>		
THE REASON FOR THE VISIT			
O. Letellier	$hr p^{\circ \circ} \underline{d}.w \ 2 \ ir \ mwt$		
O. Cairo CG 25674			
O. DeM 1690	$hr p^{\varsigma} b^{\varsigma} w$ nti m ir.ti n $h^{\varsigma} . s$		
O. DeM 1688	n mwt		
O. Gardiner 149			
O. OIM 16974	n		
THE CAUSE OF THE DEATH OR ILLNESS			
O. Letellier			
O. Cairo CG 25674	iw.s ḥr ḏd n.j b³w t³-wrt		
O. DeM 1690			
O. DeM 1688	$iw.f.hr.\underline{d}d.n.j.b^3.w.n.pth.^{c}nh.mw[t]$		
O. Gardiner 149	iw.s hr dd n.i b³w n pth m di.t n p³-šw hr ʿnḥ hr t³i.f hm.t b³w n sth		
O. OIM 16974	ḥk n p³ nt̞r		

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Notes

- See Deir el-Medina Database.
- ² Černý Notebook 107.30 (in the collection of the Griffith Institute, Oxford).
- Letellier 1980; Kitchen 1989, 257–258; Karl 2000; Toivari-Viitala 2001, 229.
- ⁴ Černy 1933, pl. LXXIII.
- ⁵ Daressy1901, 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.
- ²¹ Austin and Gobeil 2016, 34; Austin 2014, 97.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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; Mathieu1994, 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 Černy 1933, pl. LXXIII.
- ³⁴ Lesko 2004, 128.
- ³⁵ Motte 2017, 60.