

Epistolary Exercise from Deir el-Medina: Cairo Ostrakon J.E. 96564¹

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Abstract: The focus of this study is on one of the many limestone ostraca that originated from the community of Deir el-Medina and are currently housed in the Cairo Egyptian Museum. Specifically, the ostrakon under examination is preserved under the number J.E. 96564 (S.R. 1849). It measures 18 x 13.5 cm. The database of the Cairo Egyptian Museum does not provide detailed information about its provenance; however, a note on the right side of the ostrakon indicates that it was discovered during the Th. Davis excavation season of 1905-1906 in the Valley of the Kings. A preliminary examination suggests that the content of the ostrakon is a letter from Scribe Khonsu to the Chief Workman Nekhemmut. However, it should be noted that this ostrakon is likely an epistolary exercise, as evidenced by the repetition of several lines and the presence of numerical trials on the reverse side, which in a stereotypical formula without spelling difficulties, reinforces the impression that we are dealing with the work of a student. Additionally, there is an unparalleled superimposed text written in bold, such as "Scribe Khonsu the Child". The purpose of this superimposed text is unclear, as it could have been written either by Nekhemmut to clarify which Khonsu was intended or by Khonsu the Child himself as a demonstration of his writing abilities. Without further information, it is impossible to determine the true purpose of this text. Based on the content, names, and paleography of the text, it is most likely that the ostrakon is from the mid-20th dynasty.

Keywords: Ostraca - Ramesside period – Letter - Scribe Khons - Chief workman Nekhemmut – Pawenesh - epistolary exercise - Deir el-Medina - Valley of the Kings.

¹ The photos of this object are published here for the first time. The author expresses his gratitude to the General Director of the Egyptian Museum and the Photographer of the Museum, their invaluable assistance and for permission to publish it, also extend our appreciation to Prof. Fredrik Hagen and Dr. Robert J. Demarée for their guidance, insightful discussions, and thorough review of this manuscript.

خطاب تدريبي من دير المدينة: أوستراكا القاهرة JE. 96564

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الملخص: موضوع هذه المقالة هو دراسة ونشر إحدى قطع الأوستراكات العديدة التي تعود إلى مجتمع دير المدينة والمحفوظة حاليًا بالمتحف المصري بالقاهرة. حفظت الأوستراكا محل الدراسة تحت رقم: J.E 96564 (S.R.1849)، وهي عبارة عن شقافة من الحجر الجيري تبلغ مقاساتها 18*13.5سم. لم تذكر سجلات المتحف المصري مكان الكشف عنها، ولكن من خلال التاريخ المكتوب على الجانب الأيمن لها اتضح أنه عُثِر عليها أثناء حفائر ديفيز عام 1905-1906 في وادي الملوك. يبدو موضوع هذه الأوستراكا من النظرة الأولى على أنه خطاب موجّه من الكاتب خنسو إلى رئيس العمال نخموت، ومع ذلك اتضح فيما بعد إنه نص تدريبي وليس خطاب رسمي، ليس لأنه لا يحتوي على الصيغ المتعارف عليها للخطابات فقط، ولكن لأنه أيضًا يحتوي على بعض الأسطر المكررة، وبعض الأرقام التدريبية على الظهر. كما تظهر أيضًا سمة غير متعارف عليها في الأوستراكات الموازية من حيث كتابة "الكاتب خنسو الطفل" فوق النص الأصلي، فربما كتب هذا النص بواسطة نخموت وهذه الكتابة إشارة إلى خنسو الطفل وليس غيره، أو ربما كُتِب بواسطة خنسو نفسه كإشارة إلى أن خنسو الطفل أصبح قادرًا تمامًا على الكتابة، ولكن لا توجد أدلة كافية لتأكيد أحد الاحتمالين. طبقًا للمحتوي، الأسماء الشخصية، والدراسة الخطية للنص، من المرجح أنها تُورَخ إلى منتصف الأسرة العشرين.

الكلمات الدالة: أوستراكا - الرعامسة - خطاب الكاتب خنسو - رئيس العمال نخموت - باونش - خطاب تدريبي - دير المدينة - وادي الملوك.

Introduction:

The Cairo Egyptian Museum is home to a vast collection of ostraca. Many of these artifacts were discovered during excavations in Thebes carried out by Theodore Davis between 1903 and 1912, as well as by Lord Carnarvon and Howard Carter between 1915 and 1922,¹ in the Valley of the Kings.²

These excavations yielded a large number of ostraca, inscribed with different scripts and covering a variety of topics. These ostraca have greatly advanced our understanding of the community of workers who lived in Deir el-Medina village and were responsible for constructing the tombs of kings and queens during the New Kingdom period (approximately 1550–1070 BCE). Through the study of these ostraca, we have gained insight into the nature of the work performed by this community and the organization of their labor.

At the turn of the last century, G. Daressy published a significant group of hieratic ostraca from the Valley of the Kings,³ followed by Jaroslav Černý, who published another group, the majority of which also originated from the Valley of the Kings.⁴ Since 1935, many of these ostraca have been published individually or in groups in scholarly literature.⁵ In 1998, the Deir el-Medina Database project, compiled by K. Donker van Heel, B. Haring, R. Demaree, and J. Toivari-Viitala, was created as an intermediate presentation of the ongoing research project, "A Survey of the New Kingdom Non-literary Texts from Deir el-Medina" at Leiden University.⁶ Today, the list of publications related to ostraca from the Deir el-Medina community has grown exponentially as scholars of Egyptology continue to contribute to the field.⁷

¹ Nicholas Reeves, "Excavations in the Valley of the Kings, 1905/6: a Photographic Record", *MDAIK*, 40 (1984): 227- 235.

² Nicholas Reeves, *Valley of the Kings: the Decline of a Royal Necropolis*, (London: Kegan Paul International, 1990), 321.

³ Georges Daressy, *Catalogue général des Antiquités Égyptiennes du Musée du Caire, Nos 25001- 25383*, (Le Caire: IFAO, 1901). Also see Georges, Daressy, "Un ostracon de Biban el Molouk", *ASAE*, 22 (1922): 75-76; Georges, Daressy, "Quelques ostraca de Biban el-Molouk", *ASAE*, 27(1927):161-182

⁴ Jaroslav Černý, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el Médineh*, I:IV, (Le Caire: IFAO, 1939); Jaroslav Černý, *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire, Nr. 25501- 25832*, (Le Caire: IFAO, 1935-1939).

⁵ Georges Posener, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques littéraires de Deir el-Médineh, Nos 1001 à 1675*, (Le Caire: DFIFAO 18/1-3 IFAO, 1934-1980); Georges Posener, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques, Nos 1214 à 1266*, (Le Caire: DFIFAO 18/3 IFAO, 1972).

⁶ <https://dmd.wepwawet.nl/>

⁷ For instance; Grandet Pierre, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el-Médineh/8, Nos 706-830*, (Le Caire: DFIFAO 39, IFAO, 2000); Rob Demarée, *Ramesside Ostraca*, (London: The British Museum Press, 2002); Grandet Pierre, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el-Médineh/9, Nos 831 – 1000*, (Le Caire: DFIFAO 41, IFAO, 2003); Annie Gasse, *Catalogue des ostraca littéraires de Deir el-Médina, Nos 175-1873 to 1156*, (Le Caire: DFIFAO 44, IFAO: 2005); Grandet Pierre, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el-Médineh/10, Nos 10001 – 10123*, (Le Caire: DFIFAO 46, IFAO, 2006); Abdel Rahman Abdel Samie, *Hieratic ostraca of the ramesside period in the egyptian museum of Cairo*, (London: Golden House Publications, 2010); Fredrik Hagen, *New Kingdom ostraca from the Fitzwilliam Museum*, (Cambridge: Brill, 2011); Khaled Hassan, "Publish and Study a Group of Hieratic Ostraca from the Egyptian Museum of Cairo (Deir el-Bahri and Deir el-Medina)" (Unpublished Ph.D Diss., Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo University, 2014).

Cairo Ostrakon J.E. 96564 (S.R. 1849) is a fragment of limestone measuring 18 x 13.5 cm and was discovered during the excavation season of Theodore Davis in the Valley of the Kings between 1905 and 1906. The specific provenance of the ostrakon is not recorded in the Cairo Egyptian Museum's database. However, it is noted that it was found during this excavation season. During this year, five areas were dedicated to Davis' excavation work:¹ 1) in front of KV 2 of Ramses IV; 2) to the south of the tomb of Amenophis II, on the northern face of the promontory that extends from the perpendicular cliffs; 3) the clearance work of KV 47; 4) the discovery of KV 49; and 5) in the entrance of KV 19.

Based on the finds in each area, it is likely that Cairo Ostrakon J.E. 96564 was discovered during the excavation work of KV 49, where an ostrakon was found bearing the name of the chief workman "H3y"² who appears in the company of the chief workman Nekhemmut on Cairo Ostraca 25553,2-3 of the year 12 of Ramesses III,³ also, they are mentioned together in years 13/14/15 and 16.⁴ Additionally, several ostraca were found to the north of the tomb KV 29, and the remains of rough workmen's huts, along with further ostraca, were discovered over the entrance of the same tomb.⁵ These huts were likely used as temporary shelters for the workers. Also The titles and names on the ostrakon-the scribe Khons and Chief of workmen *Nhn-m-mwt*- aligns with the workmen's activity at this site.

Currently, the ostrakon is housed in the fourth department of the Cairo Egyptian Museum on the second floor. Although a preliminary transcription was made by Jaroslav Černý (N. 153, currently housed at the Griffith Institute in Oxford), the ostrakon remains unpublished and is not listed in the Deir el-Medina Database.⁶ However, it is important to note that the ostrakon is a valuable addition to the corpus of texts from the Deir el-Medina community, and further research on the content, script, and dating of the ostrakon could provide new insights into the daily life and work of this community.

Description:

Cairo Ostrakon J.E. 96564, despite some chippings on the upper left side of the recto and the lower edge of the verso, is generally in good condition. The ostrakon is written in hieratic script on both sides, with the ink still vivid and legible throughout. However, some parts of the writing, particularly on the third line of the recto and the end of the last line, are slightly faded. This may be attributed to improper storage conditions in the Cairo Museum, as many ostraca in the collection are exposed to dust and humidity.

¹ Reeves, "Excavations in the Valley of the Kings": 227- 235

² Benedict Davies, *The Tomb of Siptah: The Monkey Tomb and the Gold Tomb: The Discovery of the Tombs*; illustrations in color by E. Harold Jones. King Siptah and Queen Taousirt/ by Gaston Maspero. The excavations of 1905-1907/ by Edward Ayrton. Catalogue of the objects discovered/ by Daressy, (London: Constable, 1908), 1-7.

³ Jaroslav Černý, *A community of workmen at Thebes in the Ramesside period*, (Le Caire: Bibliothèque d'étude 50, IFAO, 1973), 305

⁴ Černý, *A community*, 306

⁵ Reeves, *Valley of the Kings*, 75-76.

⁶ Thanks to Dr Robert J. Demarée for providing me with information on Černý's page that contained notes on the current ostraca.

The recto of the ostrakon features four lines of text with large-scale writing superimposed over the main text, with the ends of lines 1, 2, and 3 lost due to chipping. On the verso, there are three lines of text and a group of numbers on the right side of the third line, written in a larger font compared to the recto. The verso also features slightly better preservation, despite the loss of the end of the first line and damage to the very left side of the lower edge, resulting in partial cutting off of some signs. Overall, the text is legible and can be transcribed with minimal effort.



Fig.1: Cairo Ostrakon J.E. 96564 (Recto) © Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

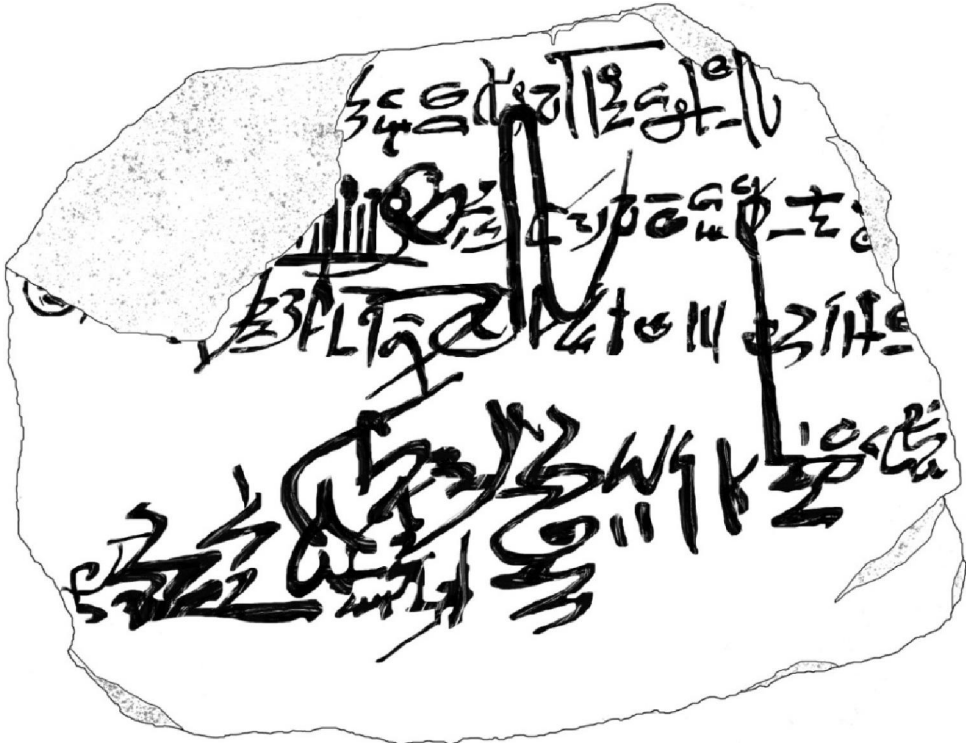


Fig.2: Facsimile of Cairo Ostrakon J.E. 96564 (Recto).

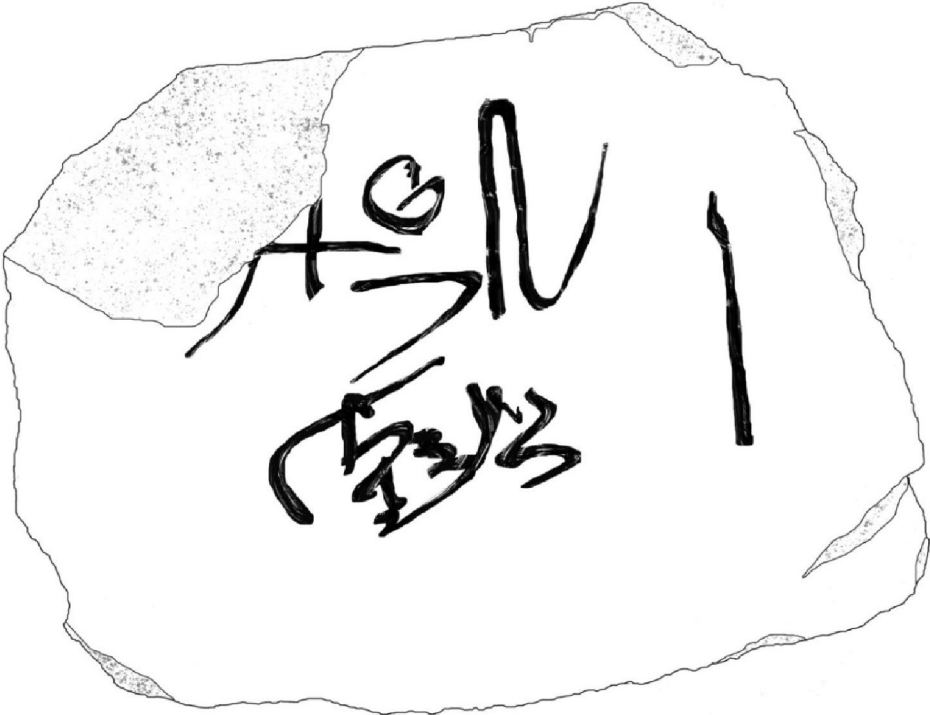


Fig.3: Facsimile of Cairo Ostrakon J.E. 96564: Superimposed over the previous text of the recto

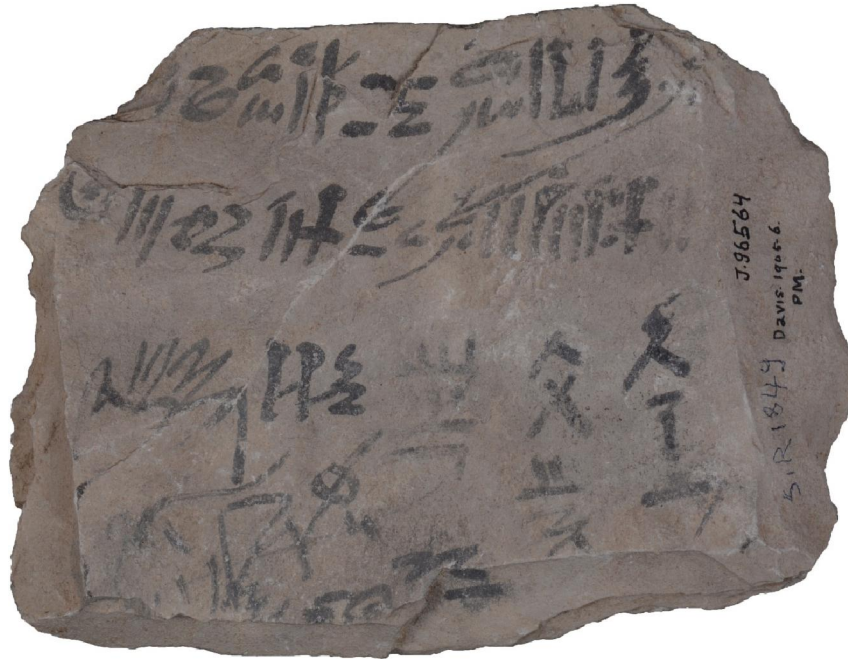


Fig.4: Cairo Ostrakon J.E. 96564 (Verso) © Egyptian Museum in Cairo

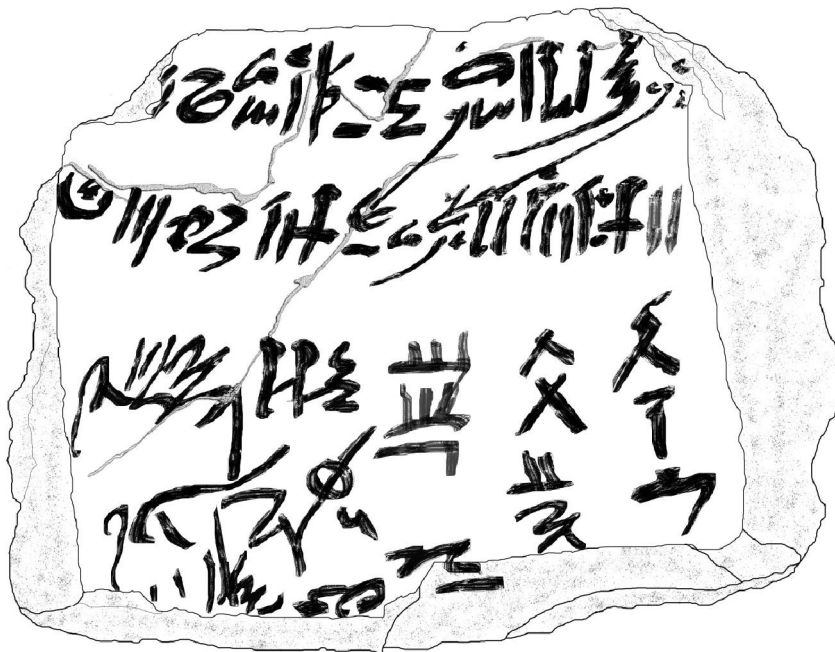
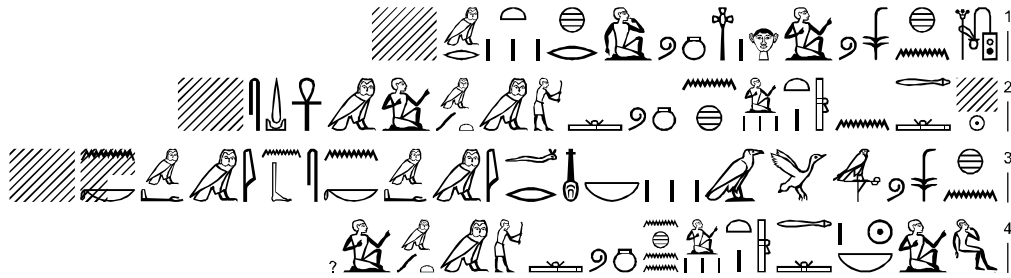


Fig.5: Facsimile of Cairo Ostrakon J.E. 96564 (Verso)

Recto:



Superimposed over the previous text:



Transliteration:

- 1-sš *Hnsw hr nd-hrt imy-r...*
- 2-... 3 *n ist Nhn-m-mwt m ʿ.w.s...*
- 3-*Hnsw p3 hmt 3 nb nfr imi n.k snb imi [n].k ...*
- 4-*[rnp]r ʿ nb 3 ist Nhn-m-mwt*

Superimposed over the previous text:

sšHnsw p3-hrd

Translation:



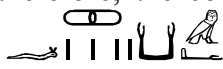
- 1-The scribe *Hnsw* greets the overseer...
- 2- ... Chief workman *Nhn-m-mwt* (I): In L.P.H ...
- 3- Khonsu, and the three good lords to keep you healthy, to keep you ...
- 4- [young] every day.Chief workman *Nhn-m-mwt*(I)?...


Superimposed over the previous text:




Scribe *Hnsw*, the child

Remarks on the Translation:

R.1: a. On the basis of the faint traces that remain on the damaged edge, this ligature

 signs ¹, therefore, the complement of this damaged title could probably be reconstructed as  *mrk.f* in comparison with V. l.1., It apparently means "gifts"², there is only a single example, from the New Kingdom, in the Story of Wenamun.

R.2: a. On the right side of the second line, there is a faint trace , maybe it is a ligature sign, but it is difficult to guess what does it mean. **b.m** in the name *nh-m-mwt* is written below the superimposed text, but its reading is certain. **c.** The last faint traces on

the damaged edge , are most probably the lower part of the signs ³ and ⁴ to present the initial signs of the term *hsi* which usually occurred in the construction *m hsi Imn R^c nsw ntrw* "in the favor of Amun Re, King of the gods", although the preposition *m* before *hsi* has disappeared below the superimposed text and the name and the title of the god are lost with the chipped off part of the edge.⁵

R.3:a. The occurrence of the name of the god Khons here and *r^c nb* "everyday" in the beginning of the fourth line makes the probable reconstruction of the missing last words of the second line possible to *betwi hr dd n* "I am calling upon...", occasionally, this construction is followed by the Theban triad; Amun, Mut and Khons like in V. l. 2, and then followed by a formula beginning with *imi snb n.k.*⁶ **b.** Currently, the traces of *nb nfr* is very faded but still somewhat legible. **c.** *imi n.k* occurrence three times in this line, but *n.k* is damaged on the second time and the rest of its traces is still visible on the

¹ Georg Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie: die ägyptische Buchschrift in ihrer Entwicklung von der 5. Dynastie bis zur römischen Kaiserzeit*, V. II, (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1927), 64, no. XIII.


² See Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der aegyptischen Sprache*, vol. II, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag Berlin, 1935-1971), 113 (3); James Hoch, *Semitic words in Egyptian texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), no. 188.

³ Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie II*, 47, no. 525



⁴ Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie II*, 45, no. 502

⁵ See for instance Cairo Ostraca CG 418, CG 429: Jaroslav Černý, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el Médineh, Nos 340 à 456*, (Le Caire: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1951), pl. 20, 23; CG 560 (Recto), CG 581: Sarg Sauneron, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el Medineh, Nos 550 à 623*, (Le Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1959), pl. 7a-7, 16a-16; Cairo p. N III, Cairo p. N VIII: Jaroslav Černý, *Papyrus hiératiques de Deir-el-Médineh, Nos I-XVII*, (Le Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1978), pl. 18-18a, 24-24a; P. BM EA 75015: Rob Demarée, *The Bankes Late Ramesside Papyri*, (London: British Museum Research Publication 155, 2005), pl. 1, 2.



⁶ BM EA 75015 (rto): Demarée, *The Bankes Late Ramesside Papyri*, pl. 1, 2; Cairo Ostraca CG 418, CG 429: Černý, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el Médineh*, pl. 20, 23; Ostraca Cairo CG 560 (Recto): Sauneron, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el Medineh*, pl. 7.



damaged edge,  while *forn.k* of the third one, it is not clear that it is damaged on the right edge at the beginning of the fourth line or omitted by the scribe. **d.** The missing words on the chipped off part of the edge are a complement of the blessings and petitions between the sender and the addressee,¹ so maybe reconstructed with the beginning of the fourth line as the following: *imi n.k snb imi n.k ḥnh imi n.k rnpi rḥ nb* "to keep you healthy, to keep your life, to keep you young every day", the chipped off part is fit for this reconstruction, and the remains of the third *imi* on the very left edge


 confirm this reading.


R.4:a. There are traces  after *rnpi*, maybe it is . Usually verb *rnpi* ended with the determinative child with hand to mouth², that clarifies why the occurrence of the seated man sign here is difficult. Maybe it is written mistakenly by the scribe, especially since writing *rḥ nb* after it as the end of the usually blessings formula denies considering this


sign as the end of a person's name or a title. **b.**  Černý transcribed the initial


signs of this group is  however, these signs may represent  a part of the title *ḥ* (*n*) *ist* "chief of workman" as in I. 2 and V. 1.1. The third plural vertical stroke now disappeared from the ostraca. **c.** The faint traces and the superimposed signs over other signs present a problem to read. The last words of this line which were transcribed


  by Černý. In trying to disjoint the signs by following ink density on the ostraca, we note that the scribe sloped down in his writing of this line. Maybe the signs


below *p3* are the initial part of the name *Nḥw*  with unusual double *n* then the

following sign is unclear but the traces of the man with stroke  are clear below the

large traces of , the following signs are also unclear but by the conjecture reading, these signs may present the rest of the personal name *Nḥ-m-mwt*.

V.1: a. The initial signs of this line are very faint and difficult to read, but maybe transcribed as  *wr* "great". **B.** the second part of the name of *Nḥw-m-mwt* is lost on the left edge and reconstructed from R. 1.3.

V.2: a. Also, on the beginning of this line there are faint traces of two signs that may be transcribed as , since the occurrence of the title *nsw.t ntrw* "king of the gods" is usually preceded by the name of the god Amun Re, and may be both determinatives of

the two gods are put together at the end of the name. **b.** Unusual is the writing  as a determinative of the goddess Mut, so maybe it is a mistake by the scribe, or he only



¹ Abd el-Mohsen Bakir, *Egyptian epistolography from the Eighteenth to the Twenty-first Dynasty*, (Le Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1970), 36.

² Erman and Hermann, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, II, 434 (9-14).

forgot the dot for the sign of the woman c. In the end of this line *nfr* is lost and reconstructed from R.1.2.



V. 3: a. writing this word is difficult to read, regardless of the definite reading of the possessive adjectivethat is present at the beginning. Perhaps it is possible to read it in one of the following ways:

1. It is transcribed  in Černý's note, we might here have a writing of *tBy.s m^cb3*, which means "her thirty"?¹
2. but also *m^cb3* means "spear"?²
3. If we assume that the sign before the aleph is the sign "š3" (M8),³ this term may read as  *tBy.s mš3.t* "her anus"⁴.

So, what does this tell us about the exact reading? They cannot be classified as #1 or #2, as both words are spelled with a "b" rather than a "p" as in the Černý transcription, and both terms are not followed by the sign (F51) as a determinative. Additionally, both words are masculine, yet the possessive adjective used is feminine. This leaves us with the probable reading of #3, which is consistent with the preceding feminine possessive adjective. *mš3.t* is standing for anus or an unknown part of the body⁵ However, the intended meaning of the scribe remains unclear in this context.

V. 3: b. *nk* and *wnš*: The term *nk* with the phallus determinative is clearly visible in the Cairo ostrakon; it refers to the act of sexual intercourse and does not inherently carry any positive or negative connotations.⁶ *wnš* literally means « jackal », ⁷ but from another perspective, it could be considered a personal name since it was common in Deir el-Medina.⁸ However, considering it as a personal name without a specific determinative is a weak possibility that we may not accept. To better understand why these two terms appeared in the Cairo ostrakon, we can look at a similar reference in tomb N13.1at Assiut, the (hieratic dipinto TW5, formerly W39a (fig.6) dated to the reign of

¹ Adolf, and Hermann, *Wörterbuch der aegyptischen Sprache*, II, 46 (15).

² Adolf, and Hermann, *Wörterbuch der aegyptischen Sprache*, II, 47 (1-3).

³ Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie II*, 25, no. 274

⁴ "mSA.t" (Lemma ID 861168) <<https://thesaurus-linguae-aegyptiae.de/lemma/861168>>, edited by Altägyptisches Wörterbuch, with contributions by Andrea Sinclair, in: Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae, Corpus issue 17, Web app version 2.01, 12/15/2022, ed. by Tonio Sebastian Richter & Daniel A. Werning by order of the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften and Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert & Peter Dils by order of the Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig (accessed: 4/13/2023)

⁵ Rainer, Hannig, *Groszes Handwörterbuch*, (überarbeitete Auflage: Marburger Edition, 4, 2006), 367

⁶ Toivari, Viitala, *Women at Deir el-Medina. A Study of the Status and Roles of the Female Inhabitants in the Workmen's Community During the Ramesside Period*, (Leiden: EU 15, 2001), 153-157

⁷ Adolf, and Hermann, *Wörterbuch der aegyptischen Sprache*, I, 325 (3); (Lemma ID 47050) <https://thesaurus-linguae-aegyptiae.de/lemma/47050> (accessed: 4/13/2023).

⁸ Hermann, Ranke, *Personennamen*, I, (Glückstadt: J. J. Augustin, 1935), 104.3 ; O. Ashmolean Museum 0020, O. BTdK 601, O. BTdK 613, O. Cairo CG 25642, O. DeM 00236, O. DeM 10087, O. OIM 19262, O. OIM 19262, O. Turin N. 57006, P. Turin Cat. 1891 verso.

Amenhotep III.¹ There, the scribe's name has been followed by *hr nk dydy*. In the negative confession of the Book of the Dead Spell 125, *n nk=j n di=j* the non-reduplicated form is determined with a phallus and appears as an activity of a man that needs to be negated. Additionally, "*didi*" is also associated with animals and a "potent jackal" (*wnš dydy*), which is used as a metaphor for the lover or for Amun-Ra-king-of-the gods, as well as a 'courting bird' (*3pd dydy*), with which a scribe is compared.² This statement appears to be suggesting that the scribe who wrote the Cairo ostrakon may have intended the same sense when using the terms "*nk*" and "*wnš*" to compare with the scribe. However, without further context or analysis, it is difficult to say for certain what the scribe's intentions were.

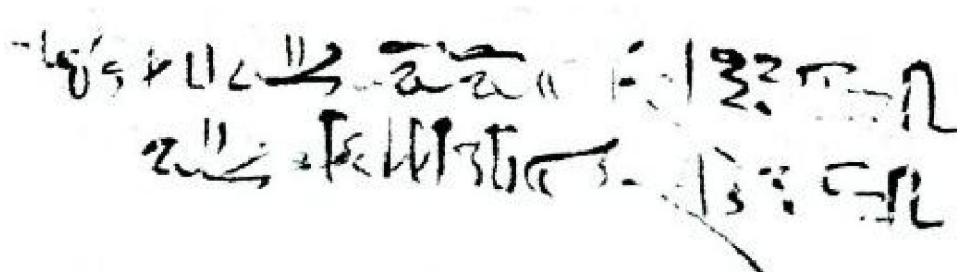


Fig.6: Hieratic dipinto TW5, formerly W39a (Ursula Verhoeven, *Die wie Kraniche balzen. Männerphantasien zur Zeit Amenhoteps III*, 2009, 435)

General discussion:

To begin with, the names listed in the Cairo ostraca J.E. 96564 (Table.1), as they provide us with a relatively reliable timeline, especially Nekhemmut, who is also the earliest chronologically, as we will explore further below.

Person	Gender	Title	Notes
<i>Nh-m-mwt</i>	M	ꜥ n ist	Nekhemmut (I) (The Father)
<i>Hnsw</i>	M	sš	Khons (V) (The son)

Table (1): The persons mentioned in the ostrakon (col.1), the gender of the person (col.2), the title (col.3).

Nekhemmut's name³ is commonly found in the community of Deir el-Medina during the New Kingdom period; it is likely that the name found on the Cairo ostrakon refers to

¹ Ursula, Verhoeven, "Die wie Kraniche balzen. Männerphantasien zur Zeit Amenhoteps III in Assiut", in: D. Kessler et al., Hgg., *Texte - Theben - Tonfragmente. Festschrift für Günter Burkard*, ÄAT 76, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), 434-441; Ursula, Verhoeven, "Besuchertexte, Lehren und Lieder des Neues Reiches", in: Ursula Verhoeven, ed., *Dipinti von Besuchern des Grabes N13.1 in Assiut, The Assiut Project 15*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2020), 94-96, 232-233.

² For all the textual evidences see Verhoeven, "Die wie Kraniche balzen": 435-438 and Verhoeven, "Besuchertexte": 94-95 with further references.

³ Ranke, *Personennamen*, 209.11

Nekhemmut (I),¹ who had a prominent role during the reign of Ramesses III, based on the title he holds and the location where the ostrakon was found as mentioned above. Therefore, Nekhemmut(i), the Chief Workman, is a well-documented figure in the historical record of the community of Deir el-Medina and known in the study literature as Nekhemmut (I). According to the available literature, he is believed to have been a member of the family of Sennedjem (I),² specifically the son of Khons (II) and Tameket (I).³ Bierbrier has attempted to determine that Nekhemmut was born in the 25th year of the reign of Ramesses II.⁴ The earliest known attestation of his existence is found on the ostrakon O. Cairo CG 25779, vso.3,6, which is dated to the reign of Amenmesse.⁵

Nekhemmut (i) is known to have held a position of authority at Deir el-Medina during the Ramesside period, specifically during the reign of Ramesses II (1279-1213 BCE). Through records of his work with the right side of the gang,⁶ it is possible to trace the path of his career throughout the closing years of the 19th Dynasty. By the 11th or 12th year of the reign of Ramesses III, he had attained the position of foreman and held this role for several subsequent years.

Concerning his personal life, on Bankes Collection stela N.9,⁷ Nekhemmut (I) is depicted alongside his wife Webkhet (VI) and their grown children Khons (V) whom I mentioned above, Tameket (II), and Tasaket (I). Additionally, his fourth son Amenkhu (I) is known from Gardiner Ostrakon 272.3, which provides the earliest datable evidence of his career as a workman.⁸

Similarly, the name Khons⁹ is a common occurrence within the community of Deir el-Medina during the New Kingdom period, making it challenging to identify the specific individual referred to in Cairo ostrakon. This is because there were a number of individuals with this name, including Khons in the early reign of Ramses II, Khons in the late reign of Ramses II or the early reign of Amenmesse, Khons in the time of Ramses III, and Khons in the reigns of Ramses X and XI. However, through the examination of Cairo ostraca, it can be inferred that the Khons referred to as a "scribe" was active in the community of Deir el-Medina during the reign of Ramesses III or slightly thereafter, based on the proposed date of the Cairo ostrakon. Furthermore, the Cairo ostrakon also mentions a "Scribe Khonsu the Child", suggesting that he was a

¹ Benedict, Davies, *Who's who at Deir el-Medina. A Prosopographic Study of the Royal Workmen's Community*, (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1999), 47.

² Davies, *Who's who at Deir El-Medina*, chart 7.

³ Davies, *Who's who at Deir El-Medina*, chart 7.

⁴ Davies, *Who's who at Deir El-Medina*, 47.

⁵ Davies, *Who's who at Deir El-Medina*, 47.

⁶ Davies, *Who's who at Deir El-Medina*, 47.

⁷ The Bankes Stela N.9 is in the collection of William John Bankes, a British politician and collector of antiquities. The stela was discovered in Thebes, Egypt and it dates back to the reign of Pharaoh Ramesses II in the 19th dynasty. It is made of limestone and depicts the king in a religious scene, making offerings to various gods and goddesses, for the publication of this stela see Cerny, *Egyptian stelae in the Bankes collection*, (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1958), No.9.

⁸ Davies, *Who's who at Deir El-Medina*, 49.

⁹ Ranke, *Personennamen*, 270.16.

young scribe who may have been an apprentice and possessed a level of education and writing proficiency.

By identifying the personality of Khons who lived during this period, it can be inferred that he may have been a member of the family of Sennedjem,¹ specifically the son of Nekhemmut (i) who was discussed above. They were depicted together with his father and mother Webkhet (VI) on Bankes Collection stela N.9.² Khons is known in literature studies as Khons (v)³ and was still young when his father became old. It is likely that he followed in his father's footsteps and held a position of authority in the village. He probably began his career as a workman and first appears in year 1 of Siptah.⁴ Bierbrier's suggestion is that Khons (v) had probably served as "deputy" from the first half of the reign of Ramesses III. And makes his first appearance as foreman in year 16 of Ramesses III,⁵ following in his father's footsteps.

Upon examination of various Deir el-Medina documents, I did not find (at least for me) any evidence of Khons holding the position of scribe as a profession⁶, it is possible that Khons wrote this ostrakon as a practice to show his writing skills to his father.

As previously mentioned, the discovery of Cairo Ostrakon J.E. 96564 is thought to have taken place during the excavation of KV 49 where an ostrakon was found bearing the name of the Chief Workman "H3y," and identified in conjunction with the chief workman Nekhemmut in Cairo Ostraca 25553,2-3, dated to year 12 of Ramesses III. Both workmen are referenced together in records from years 13 to 16. The reference to "Scribe Khonsu the Child" in the Cairo ostraca suggests that he was a young scribe who may have followed in his father's footsteps after year 12 of Ramesses III. Also based on the paleography, the Cairo Ostrakon can likely be dated to a period between the year 12 of Ramesses III and the mid-20th dynasty.

¹ Davies, *Who's who at Deir El-Medina*, 47

² Davies, *Who's who at Deir El-Medina*, 46

³ Davies, *Who's who at Deir El-Medina*, 47

⁴ Davies, *Who's who at Deir El-Medina*, 47

⁵ Davies, *Who's who at Deir El-Medina*, 47

⁶ In Sojic Nathalie, "Editing Letters from Deir el-Medina: A Preliminary Report", in: S. Töpfer, P. Del Vesco, F. Poole (eds.), *Deir El-Medina Through the Kaleidoscope*. Proceedings of the International Workshop Turin 8th-10th October 2018, (Modena: 2022), I noticed that she mentioned an ostrakon with the title Scribe that includes the name Khons and has the number OL 4101 in IFAO Collection. Unfortunately, The IFAO policy on the dissemination of data refused my request to investigate this object until it is published.

Conclusion:

This study examines a limestone ostrakon from the community of Deir el-Medina, housed in the Cairo Egyptian Museum. The ostrakon, numbered J.E. 96564 (S.R. 1849), is believed to be an epistolary exercise, possibly a letter from Scribe Khonsu to Chief Workman Nekhemmut. However, the presence of numerical trials on the reverse side and repetition of several lines suggest that it may not be a genuine letter.

Furthermore, the ostrakon features an unparallel superimposed text in bold, reading "Scribe Khonsu the Child," the purpose of which is unclear. The content, names, and paleography of the text indicate that the ostrakon is from the mid-20th dynasty. Among its content is two obscene/offensive words, further highlighting the complexity and diversity of the daily life. In the instance of the Cairo Ostrakon, without more context or information about the child and the circumstances surrounding the writing of the ostrakon, it is difficult to say for certain why he wrote it. Perhaps he wrote it as a comparison to the scribe. However, some possible reasons could include: Children may sometimes repeat phrases or words they hear without fully understanding their meaning. The child may have heard this phrase from someone else and thought it sounded interesting or funny, without realizing the significance or implications of what they were saying. Overall, the ostrakon offers valuable insight into the educational practices and daily life of the people of Deir el-Medina during this period.

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