



Figure 4. Wooden tenon RMO Leiden F 2003/6.1.



Figure 5. Facsimile drawing of the hieratic text on F 2003/6.1.

THREE NEW KINGDOM OSTRACA

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This paper deals with the texts on three hieratic ostraca written in black ink on one side only, now stored in the basement of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. According to the palaeography and the contents, the first ostrakon probably dates to the 18th dynasty, while the other two date to the 20th dynasty.

The vast majority of the 18th dynasty hieratic ostraca were found during the excavations of E. Naville and H. Winlock on the site of Deir el-Bahri around the temples of Mentuhotep, Hatshepsut and Thutmose III,¹ while most of the Ramesside ostraca came from the sites where the inhabitants of Deir el-Medina lived and worked. The writing mediums such as limestone flakes and potsherds were easily obtainable - in and around the village itself, along the route from the village to the work sites, and in both the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens.² These thousands of hieratic ostraca were acquired by museums and collections throughout the world. The Egyptian Museum in Cairo was no exception. Several collections of ostraca are kept in various sections of the museum. These collections are stored in many cupboards, drawers and boxes.

The ostraca of the present paper were found together with other ostraca written in different scripts i.e. Demotic, Greek, and Coptic. Unfortunately there is no written documentation concerning the provenance or the excavation of these documents in the registers of the museum. The ostrakon no. 459³ most probably refers to a delay in the provision of the workmen's rations. The text of the ostrakon no. 422 deals with a lease or a purchase of a donkey from an unknown workman to the water-carrier *Knr*. This kind of transactions was well known among the inhabitants of Deir el-Medina. Interestingly the text of this ostrakon was almost certainly written by two different scribes. The third ostrakon (no. 420) contains the record of an inspection and inventory of the tools that were used in building the royal tomb in the time of Ramses VI.

* I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Soad Abd el-Aal (Cairo University) and Prof. Ursula Verhoeven (Mainz University), for reading the manuscript and giving me valuable comments. The ostraca of the present paper belong to a group studied in my PhD-thesis under their supervision and finished in 2014. I am also indebted to Dr. Robert Demarée (Leiden University) who discussed with me these texts, and drew my attention to many important points and also for correcting my English. Responsibility for any possible errors is, nevertheless, entirely mine.

¹ A small group was published by W.C. Hayes, 'A selection of Thutmoseid ostraca from Der el-Bahri', *JEA* 46 (1960), 29-52, Pls. IX-XIII. Publication in preparation by Dr. M. Römer (FU, Berlin).

² F. Hagen, *New Kingdom Ostraca from the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge* (Leiden-Boston, 2011), 1.

³ This number represents the serial number that has been assigned by a team of the Cairo University - the author was one of this team - which was authorized to make an inventory of all ostraca stored in the basement of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, and does not relate to the entry or the temporary numbers of the museums' registers.

I. HO. Cairo 459

Description

Flint ostracon, 9.5 x 8.5 cm. The text of two complete lines is written in black ink on one side only. Presumably found at Deir el-Bahri.



Fig. 1. Ostracon HO.Cairo 459 (Photo M. Sameh Abd El-Mohsen, copyright the Egyptian Museum, Cairo).



Fig. 2. Facsimile.

Transcription



Transliteration

- (1) ḥn^c-dd mī dī.n dīw (n) n3 n rmt
- (2) mk s.t ḥr rmi n ḥkr

Translation

- (1) Then, come let us give rations (to) the workmen.
- (2) Behold, they are weeping from hunger.

Notes

The handwriting is practiced, coherent, and displays the regular style of the 18th dynasty script, which is thick, bold, and compact. These characteristics can be also observed in most of the 18th dynasty hieratic texts, especially in those dating to the first half of this period. Lacking any specific date or name, the only criteria for dating this ostracon are the handwriting and the grammatical elements.

𐀀 This form was common in the 18th dynasty texts, especially its first half of this period 𐀀⁴ 𐀀⁴

𐀁: The ligature is closest to the form of papyrus Louvre E.3226 dating to Tuthmosis III 𐀁⁵ 𐀁⁶

𐀂: The forms of papyrus Louvre E.3226 𐀂⁷, 𐀂⁷, 𐀂⁷ and Papyrus Gurob 𐀂⁸, ⁸ are very similar. 𐀃: This is also a usual 18th dynasty form 𐀃⁹

𐀄: This represents a slightly compact writing of the group 𐀄 𐀄¹⁰. The sign of the woman is probably written here without the diacritical dot, and possibly the writing of this group was due to insufficient space at the end of this line.

⁴ G. Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie* II, Anhang XLI.
⁵ M. Megally, *Considérations sur les Variations et la Transformation des Formes Hiératiques du Papyrus E. 3226 du Louvre* (Le Caire, 1971), Pl. XXXVI, k.
⁶ Kh. Hassan, *Publish and Study a group of hieratic ostraca from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo*, PhD thesis, (Cairo, 2014), Pl. 35, 455 rt.
⁷ M. Megally, *Considérations sur les Variations*, Pl. XVI, e.
⁸ G. Möller, II, 470 B.
⁹ M. Megally, *Considérations sur les Variations*, Pl.II, f.
¹⁰ Usually written 𐀄 𐀄



This expression was commonly used in letters and brief notes as a transition formula, introducing a new subject,¹¹ also implying a continuation of the communication between two persons.¹² Consequently, its normal position was not at the beginning of the letter, unlike the present text that starts with this expression. This phenomenon is also found in a few examples of 18th dynasty letters dating to the time Hatshepsut and Thutmose III.¹³



This writing of the definite article was normal in texts of the 18th dynasty, but gradually became obsolete in the 19th dynasty. Its use in the present text points to an early date.

Commentary

Interestingly, this 18th dynasty text provides two early attestations of concepts so well-known from Ramesside documents from Deir el-Medina.

The *dīw* mentioned in line 1 are comparable to the rations, the supplies of emmer and barley as part of the monthly wages for the royal necropolis workmen.¹⁴ Since our ostrakon was most likely found at Deir el-Bahri, the workmen employed there in the building projects of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III seem to have been provided with such rations.

“Weeping from hunger” in line 2 strongly reminds us of the frequent complaint of the workmen of Deir el-Medina when their rations failed to arrive.¹⁵

II. HO. Cairo 422

Description

Brown potsherd, 8 x 10.5 cm, thickness 0.6–0.8 cm. The text of three complete lines is inscribed in black ink on one side only. Most probably this ostrakon was found at Deir el-Medina.

Transcription



¹¹ J. Černý and S. Groll, *A Late Egyptian Grammar* (Rome, 1984), 165.

¹² A. Bakir, *Egyptian Epistolography from the XVIIIth to the XXIst dynasty*, (Cairo, 1970), 83.

¹³ Kh. Hassan, *Publish and Study a group of hieratic ostraca*, Pls. 35 and 38.

¹⁴ J.J. Janssen, *Village Varia, Ten Studies on the History and Administration of Deir el-Medina* (EU 11; Leiden, 1997), 13ff.; R. Mandeville, *Wage accounting in Deir el-Medina* (Wallasey, 2014), 3.

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. W. Edgerton, ‘The strikes in Ramesses’III twenty-ninth year’, *JNES* 10 (1951), 137, 139; S. Häggman, *Directing Deir el-Medina. The external administration of the Necropolis* (Uppsala, 2002), 325.

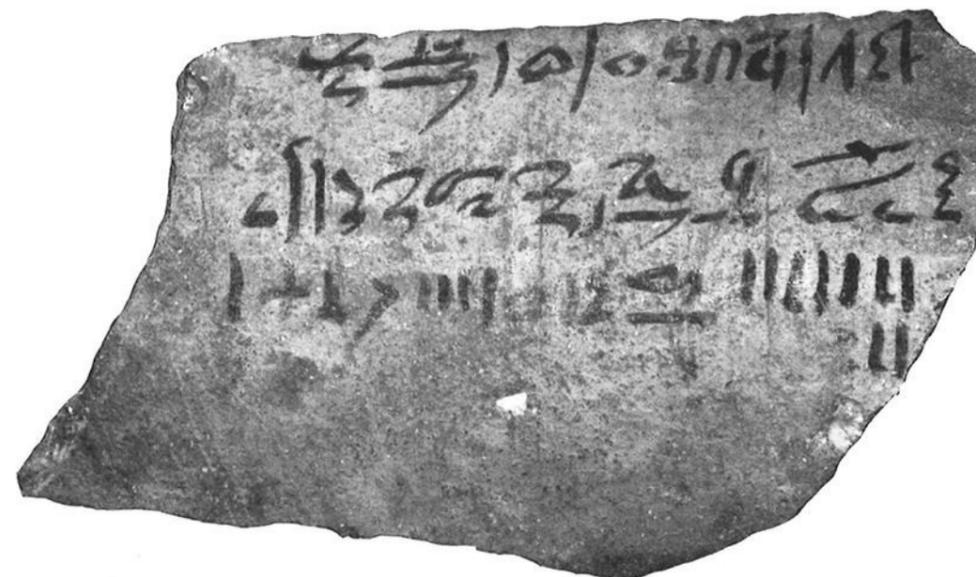


Fig. 3. Ostrakon HO.Cairo 422 (Photo Sameh Abd El-Mohsen, copyright the Egyptian Museum, Cairo)

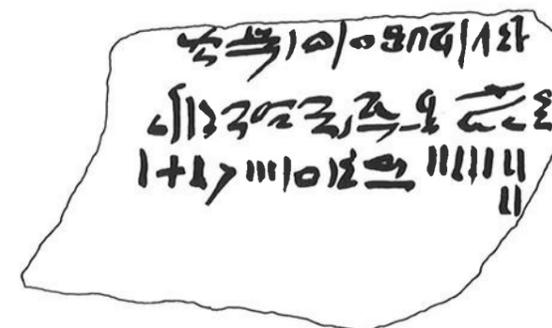


Fig. 4. Facsimile.

Transliteration

(1) *rnp.t-sp 11 3bd 2 pr.t sw 1 hrw pn dī.t*

(2) *t3 '3.t n ĩnw-mw Knr*

(3) *9 ĩr.n snĩw 4,5 d3.t ĥ3r 1.*

Translation

(1) Year 11, second month of *pr.t*, day one. This day, giving

(2) the she-ass to the water-carrier *Knr/Kl*.

(3) Nine. This makes 4.5 *snĩw*, remainder 1 *khar*.

Palaeographical remarks

The first two lines are clearly written with heavy and bold brush strokes. The signs are formed in large and long shapes. Most of the signs have very thin endings especially the strokes e.g. . None of these features can be observed in the third line, where the writing is smaller and the ink is lighter. Further, the shape of the sign  in the first two lines is different from the same sign in the third line . These observations suggest that the text was written by two different hands, and thus maybe not even have been noted down as a whole at the same time.

(line 3)  represents a non-hieratic writing of the number nine.

Commentary

The text of this ostracron deals with hiring or purchasing a donkey by the water-carrier *Knr*. Its provenance is most probably Deir el-Medina, where a great number of similar texts were found.¹⁶ The reading of the last line poses a problem. One would be inclined to interpret the 9 strokes at the beginning of this line as the number of days of the hire period. Yet, this can hardly be the case in view of what follows. Donkey hire prices in the 20th dynasty do not exceed $\frac{1}{2}$ *oipe* per day¹⁷ and nine days rent therefore would cost maximum $4\frac{1}{2}$ *oipe*, i.e. $2\frac{1}{4}$ *deben*. However, the second part of the third line mentions a value of $4\frac{1}{2}$ *snìw* = ca. 18 *deben*, plus a remainder of 1 *khar* = 2 *deben*: total ca. 20 *deben*. This amount could well be a (low) price for a donkey¹⁸, but then the number nine at the beginning of this line remains a puzzle.

 *Knr/ Kl*

Several individuals at Deir el-Medina bore this name¹⁹, but the water-carrier appearing in the present text is known as a member of the service personnel at Deir el-Medina who is mentioned a number of times in documents dated to the reign of Ramses III.²⁰ His active lifespan so far was recorded between the years fifteen²¹ and twenty-nine of Ramses III.²² The present text therefore provides the earliest known date for the water-carrier *Knr*.

¹⁶ Jac.J. Janssen, *Donkeys at Deir el-Medina* (EU 19, 2005); K. Van der Moezel, "Donkey-Transactions: Some Notes on Decontextualisation and Accountability", in: B. Haring... *et al* (eds.), *The Workman's progress, Studies in the Village of Deir el-Medina and other Documents from Western Thebes in Honour of Rob Demarée* (EU 28, 2014), 157-174.

¹⁷ R.J. Demarée, in: Chr. Gallois, P. Grandet et L. Pantalacci, *Mélanges offerts à François Neveu*, BdÉ 145 (Le Caire, 2008), 90-92.

¹⁸ The value of a donkey varies between 20 and 40 *deben*, while the most frequently mentioned price is 30 *deben*, cf. Jac.J. Janssen, *Donkeys*, 88.

¹⁹ W.A. Ward, 'Foreigners living in the Village', in L. Lesko (ed.), *Pharaoh's Workers, the Villagers of Deir el-Medina* (London, 1994), 74.

²⁰ E.g. O. DeM 364, O. DeM 432, O. DeM 582, O. Michaelides 1; for these and other ostracamentioned see the online Deir el-Medina Database at <http://leidenuniv.nl/nino/dmd/dmd.html>.

²¹ O. Turin 57141; cf. Jac.J. Janssen, *Donkeys*, 122.

²² Turin Strike Papyrus, vs. 3,7; Sir Alan Gardiner, *Ramesside Administrative Documents* (Oxford, 1948) 46,7.

III. HO. Cairo 420*Description*

Limestone ostracron, 11 x 18.5 cm. The text of six almost complete lines is inscribed in black ink on one side only. There are two small brown smudges on the surface of the ostracron. The first extends vertically from the middle of the first line to the middle of the fourth, and

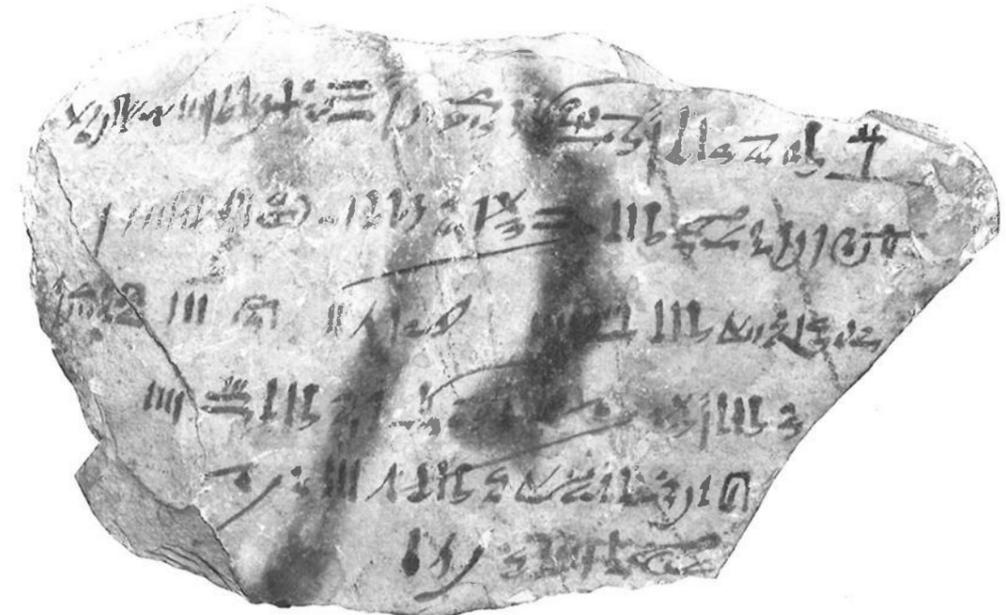


Fig. 5. Ostracron HO.Cairo 420 (Photo M. Sameh Abd El-Mohsen, copyright the Egyptian Museum, Cairo).

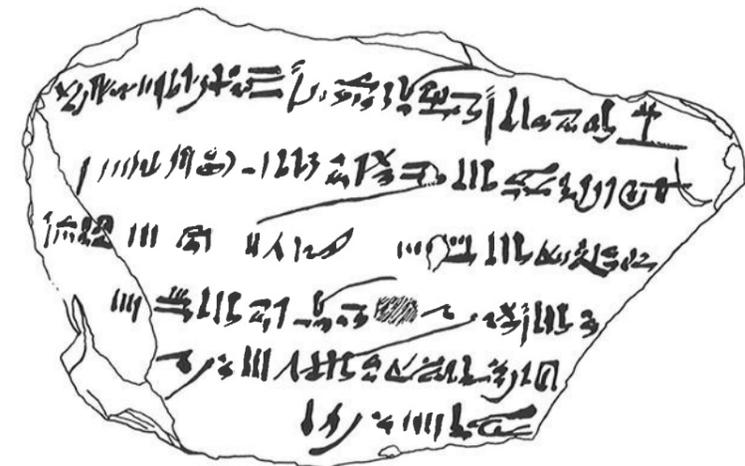
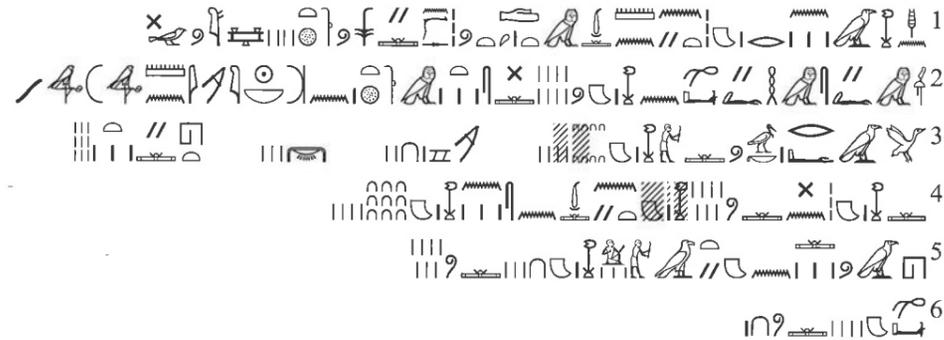


Fig. 6. Facsimile.

the second stretches down to the left of this from the top till the bottom of the ostrakon; only the first one slightly affects the text of the third and the fourth line. The ostrakon was probably found in the Valley of Kings.²³

Transcription



Transliteration

- (1) 'h'.n hnr.w nty mn m-dr.t.w n(y)-sw-rnp.t-sp 4 w3si
- (2) wnmy smhy, sfh n h3: 108, wp.st m rnp.t-sp 1 n (Nb-m3'.t-R' mry Imn)
- (3) p3-r(3)-b3k.w, h3: 84, minb: 12, hd: 3, ht.t: 9
- (4) dmd h3.w šbn: 107, h3 nty mn n.sn: h3 94
- (5) h3.w n hnty.w: h3 13, dmd: 107
- (6) sfh: 4, dmd: 111

Translation

- (1) Account of tools remaining with them (lit. "in their hands"), (and) which belong to the old year 4
- (2) (of) the right and left side, blunt tools: 108; their specification in year one of (Neb-mâtrâ, beloved of Amon);
- (3) (for) the work in progress, h3-chisel: 84, minb-axe: 12, hd-mace: 3, ht.t-drill: 9.
- (4) Total of different types of tools: 107. Tools remaining for them: tools: 94;
- (5) used by the coppersmiths, tools: 13, total: 107;
- (6) blunt: 4, total: 111.

Notes

The text shows the characteristic features of 20th dynasty scripts, in which some signs are written in cursive and abbreviated form. The handwriting is that of a professional scribe who had sufficient experience to write signs in various forms.

²³ For this site as the provenance of many work-related texts, see Ch. Eyre, *The Use of Documents* (Oxford 2011), 235.

(line 1) 'h' n, 'account' or 'amount of' is a well-known document heading in administrative texts.²⁴ The last word in this line clearly represents a writing of w3si, 'ruined, old'.²⁵

(line 4) Because of the dark brown smudge on this part of the surface some signs are illegible. In view of the context, one could restore the word h3.

Commentary

Ramses V reigned for 4 years (1147-1143 BC). He began the construction of his tomb in the Valley of Kings (KV 9) and a huge funerary temple, but he died young.²⁶ Ramses VI (1143-1136 BC) was a younger son of Ramses III. He usurped the royal tomb and the mortuary temple begun by his nephew and this delayed the final burial of Ramses V into year two of Ramses VI.²⁷ Our present text records an inspection and inventory procedure of the tools used for the construction of the royal tomb of Ramses V now taken over by Ramses VI. Clearly this inventory was carried out after the death of Ramses V (i.e. "old year 4") by the administration of the tomb so as to be sure that there was no loss or theft of any of these tools. Next these tools were specified again for the workmen in the first year of Ramses VI in order to continue their work in the royal tomb (now of the new king).

The tools

The bronze tools that were used for hacking out the royal tomb were valuable. They were owned by the state and were handed out to the workmen at the beginning of the work.²⁸ The scribe of the Tomb was responsible for keeping record of these instruments, and their return when they were no longer needed or at least when they had become blunt and had to be repaired or sharpened. They would be put back in the government storehouse for the future use. The tools mentioned in the present text are:



The word h3, which is the common abbreviation for hnr,²⁹ has two meanings: the generic one refers to the collective of the 'copper tools' used by the workmen in the royal tombs³⁰ and the second is more specifically referring to the 'chisel' or the 'spike'.³¹ In our present text the word is used with both meanings. The 'chisel' or 'spike' was a part of the standard equipment of the workmen. It was chiefly employed to hack out the tombs from the rock, a process referred to as s3.w inr 'breaking stone' or sd inr 'splitting stone'.³² In several texts the h3 is

²⁴ Cf. K. Donker van Heel and B.J.J. Haring, *Writing in a Workmen's village* (Leiden 2003), 140-141.

²⁵ *Wb* I. 260,9-261,5; cf. A.H. Gardiner, *ZAS* 41 (1904), 75-6, and L. Zonhoven, *JEA* 65 (1979), 92, note 8.

²⁶ K.A. Kitchen, 'Ramses V', *LÄ* V, col. 124.

²⁷ J. Van Dijk, 'The Amarna Period and the Later New Kingdom', in: I. Shaw (ed.) *The Oxford history of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 2000), 307.

²⁸ D. Valbelle, *Catalogue des poids à inscriptions hiéroglyphiques de Deir el-Médineh* (Le Caire, 1977), 14.

²⁹ D. Valbelle, *Catalogue des poids*, 12.

³⁰ J. Černý, *The Valley of the Kings* (Cairo, 1973), 15-22.

³¹ J.J. Janssen, *Commodity Prices*, 312ff.

³² J. Černý, *The Valley of Kings*, 17; D. Valbelle, *Catalogue des poids*, 12.

mentioned together with the *md3.t*³³ and the *krdn*³⁴; the three together comprised the basic equipment of the stone-masons.³⁵

𓂏𓂏𓂏 *minb*

Based on the first sign, one would be inclined to read this word as *mr*, 'wooden hoe',³⁶ a tool used in agricultural activities. However, the present text is dealing with metal tools. Therefore 𓂏𓂏𓂏 is more likely to be read as *minb*,³⁷ or *mibt*,³⁸ 'hand-axe'.³⁹ This axe is mentioned on an ostrakon among other tools such as: *krdn/ h3y '3/ iddk/ 'nt/ md3t*.⁴⁰ The word *minb* was written in several ways, e.g. 𓂏𓂏𓂏/𓂏𓂏𓂏/𓂏𓂏𓂏⁴¹/𓂏𓂏𓂏⁴², and sometimes in a more abbreviated orthography as 𓂏𓂏⁴³. The spelling of the word with the sign 𓂏 was not known so far. Probably we are dealing with a writing mistake resulting from the homophony of the phonetics in the signs 𓂏 and 𓂏. Such a mistake could indicate that the word here may well have been written from memory or at least dictated.

𓂏𓂏 *hd*

Although the upper part of the hieratic sign looks more like Möller 300, it obviously stands for Möller 419. Just like in the case of the previous word, due to the homophony of the phonetics the scribe clearly wrote the sign for *hd*, 'silver', instead of that for the *hd*-mace.⁴⁴

𓂏𓂏𓂏 *htit*

The word is derived from the verb *htit* 'to pierce',⁴⁵ 'to drill'. This is the first attestation of this tool in texts from Deir el-Medina. Drills were known since the Old Kingdom and were used by both stone and wood workers for drilling holes. Stone workers used the drill with a crank since heavy stones could be used to apply the required pressure to the wooden shaft.⁴⁶

Accounting mistakes

In all its brevity, the present text is clearly a record of an inventory and inspection procedure based on counting numbers. Noteworthy therefore are the differences in totals of objects counted. The scribe recorded the total number of the used tools in the second line to be 108,

³³ The *md3t* is the 'mortising chisel' that was used by carpenters, but it was also the typical tool of the sculptors who carved the reliefs, cf. J.J. Janssen, *Commodity prices*, 317-318.

³⁴ O. Cairo CG 25509 vs., O. Cairo CG 25618 vs. The *krdn* is the 'axe', a heavy instrument used to break up the rock, cf. J.J. Janssen, *Commodity Prices*, 318-319.

³⁵ J.J. Janssen, *Commodity prices*, 312; see also O. DeM 347, O. DeM 10057 and O. DeM 10173.

³⁶ *Wb.* II, 98, 11.

³⁷ *Wb.* II, 44, 7-8.

³⁸ *Wb.* II, 42, 14.

³⁹ *Wb.* II, 44, 7-8; J.J. Janssen, *Commodity prices*, 322.

⁴⁰ O. DeM 347.

⁴¹ *Wb.* II, 44, 7-8.

⁴² E. Edel, 'minbyt, Die ausführlichste Schreibung für 'Beil,' SAK 13 (1986), 32.

⁴³ O. DeM 347, 2.

⁴⁴ *Wb.* III, 206, 9-13.

⁴⁵ *Wb.* II, 50.

⁴⁶ B. Scheel, *Egyptian Metalworking and Tools* (London, 1989), 53.

and he wrote the details of this total in the third line. However, in the fourth line he recorded the number 107 instead of 108 as a total number for the tools that were used, a total he repeated in the next line. Similar mistakes are found in other texts from Deir el-Medina. In his article about accountancy at Deir el Medina, Janssen listed several types of errors, e.g. misreading, metathesis, and misspelling.⁴⁷ Although this kind of errors have no adverse effect on understanding the contents of the text, some mistakes cause the text to lose its credibility and reliability, e.g. mistakes in dates and numbers.⁴⁸ Such errors make the whole document useless for accountancy, as is also the case with our present text. At the end of his article Janssen proposes that such errors and mistakes resulted from the fact that the whole administration still rested on predominantly oral practice, although the format of the various types of ostraca may have been somewhat systemized.⁴⁹ This notion can be seen in the present text, where the scribe became confused between two signs that have the same phonetics in the words *minb* and *hd*. This means he may have written his text from memory or by dictation, which is considered to be a kind of oral practice. However, I am not sure that this is the only reason for the inaccuracy of these texts. Actually, I am inclined to accept the idea that ostraca of this kind served as drafts or a temporary storage of information. These drafts would be then copied onto papyrus to be sent to the central administration.⁵⁰ Furthermore, J. Černý observed that there are always corrections to be found on ostraca and only seldom on papyrus, which proves that the ostraca were used as drafts until recopied with more attention by a skilful scribe who could avoid the errors that occurred on the ostraca.⁵¹ This permanent 'papyrus diary' was kept in the scribe's office for future reference,⁵² but a copy or extract from it was sent at intervals to the office of the vizier along with more detailed reports on individual events.

⁴⁷ J.J. Janssen, 'Accountancy at Deir el-Medina: How Accurate are the Administrative Ostraca?', SAK 33 (2005), 148; see now also R. Mandeville, *Wage accounting in Deir el-Medina* (Wallasey, 2014), 133-144.

⁴⁸ J.J. Janssen, SAK 33 (2005), 150.

⁴⁹ J.J. Janssen, SAK 33 (2005), 157.

⁵⁰ M. Megally, 'Un intéressant ostrakon de la XVIIIe dynastie de Thèbes', BIFAO 81 (1981), 297; K. Donker Van Heel and B. Haring, *Writing in a workmen's village*, 1.

⁵¹ K. Donker Van Heel and B. Haring, *Writing in a workmen's village*, 3.

⁵² J.J. Janssen, *Commodity prices*, 226.