



BULLETIN DE L'INSTITUT FRANÇAIS D'ARCHÉOLOGIE ORIENTALE

en ligne en ligne

BIFAO 113 (2014), p. 183-192

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A Visitor's Hieratic Ostracon Concerning the Temple of Deir el-Bahri

KHALED HASSAN

THE PRESENT ostracon belongs to a corpus of hieratic ostraca (now stored in the Egyptian Museum of Cairo) currently under study by the author as part of a Ph.D. thesis at the University of Cairo, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Soad Abd el-Aal and Prof. Dr. Ursula Verhoeven.

Unfortunately, there are very few data available regarding the exact find spot of the object. According to a brief note found inside the box, this ostracon was perhaps uncovered during the excavations of H. Winlock at Deir el-Bahri between 1911 and 1931, either from the North-East side of the court of the Hatshepsut temple or from one of the É. Naville dumps. These dumps were formed during the excavations of É. Naville at Deir el-Bahri between 1893 and 1899. Two of these dumps are already known; the first one was located on the North-East side of the Temple of Hatshepsut, very close to the tomb of Senmut.¹ The other one was situated to the south of the temple of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II.²

The ostracon treated in the following pages bears a hieratic text, which normally was written on the walls of the tombs and funerary temples as graffiti. This paper will attempt to shed more light on the formula of this text, as well as the reasons for the writing of such a text on an ostracon. In addition, it questions whether there is any connection between the handwriting of this text and the corpus of the hieratic ostraca from Senmut's tomb.

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors Prof. Dr. Soad Abd el-Aal (Cairo University), and to Prof. Dr. Ursula Verhoeven (Mainz University) for reading the manuscript and giving me valuable comments. This paper was written during my scholarship

at the Institute of Egyptology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Mainz University. I am also very grateful to Prof. Dr. Robert J. Demarée (Leiden University) who gave me important information about the excavation of H. Winlock at Deir el-Bahri. My thanks

also go to Dr. Dirk Wicke (Mainz University) for correcting my English.

¹ H. WINLOCK, *Excavations at Deir el Bahri, 1911–1931*, New York, 1942, p. 68.

² *Ibid.*, pl. I.

Description

[FIG. 1, 2]

Provenance. Deir el-Bahri

Dimensions. W: 12cm; H: 13cm

Material. Limestone

Current location. Egyptian Museum of Cairo, no. 432.

The ostracon is inscribed in black ink on one side only. The hieratic text consists of six parallel lines. The handwriting is clear and neat. The beginnings and ends of the lines (except for the beginning of the 6th line) and the lower part of the text are incomplete. Some signs are faded at the end of the first three lines.

Hieroglyphic Transcription

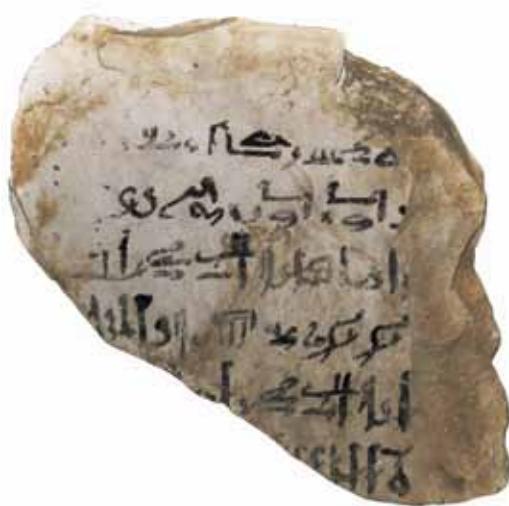
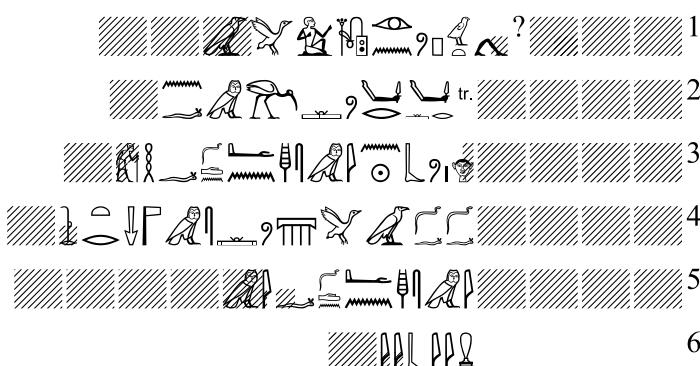


FIG. 1. Photograph of the Visitor's ostracon
(photo M. Sameh Abd El-Mohsen
© Egyptian Museum of Cairo).

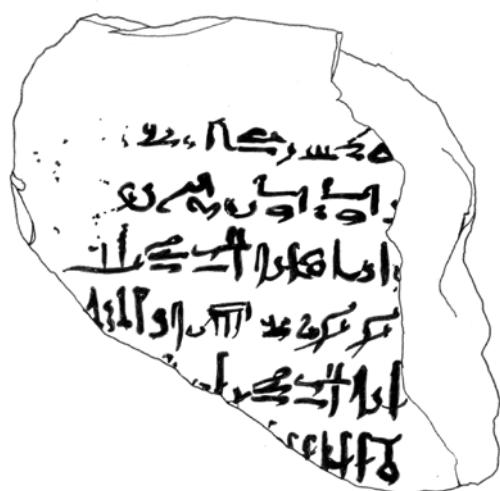


FIG. 2. Facsimile drawing (Kh. Hassan).

Transliteration

- [1] [...] *iw.t pw ir.n sš Pj* [...]
- [2] *[r m33 t3 hw.t-ntr] Dsr-dsru gm.n.f* [s.t]
- [3] *[m3 p.t m hnw.s R'] hr wbn im.s 'h'.n dd.n.f hwi*
- [4] *[p.t m 'n.tyw w3d] dfdf.s m sntr*
- [5] *[m/hr tp-hr.t n s.t wr.t nty NN] im.s 'h'.n dd.n.f im* [...]
- [6] *m3 bi[3it ...]*

Translation

- [1] ...] then the scribe Pa[...] came (lit. coming made by the scribe Pa...)
- [2] [to visit the temple] Djeser-Djeseru, he found [it]
- [3] [as if there were heaven in it, Ra] rising from it. Then he said: Let
- [4] [heaven drip fresh myrrh], and pour incense
- [5] [on the top of the great place in which the god NN] is staying, then he said [...]
- [6] like a wonder [...]

Paleographical Remarks

- 1. 1. A few traces of the sign  as a complement of   can be seen at the end of this line.
- 1. 2.  this ligature in the word *dsru* is very close to being .³ However, the determinative of the temple *dsru* was usually  or . Possibly the scribe became confused between *dsru* as a word meaning “holy” or “sacred”⁶ that used the papyrus roll as a determinative and as a part of the name of the temple.
- 1. 3.  this represents the typical form of the first half of the XVIIIth Dynasty as can be seen in the following table:

 8	 9	 10	 11	 12
---	---	--	--	--

- 1. 3.  may represent the sign , enhanced by the presence of the lower part of the stick. Sometimes, the writing of this sign shows the man holding the stick at the top or in the middle,⁷ as in the present text.
- 1. 6. There are no traces of writing at the beginning of this line.

³ G. MÖLLER, *Hieratische Paläographie* II, Leipzig, 1927, p. 67, no. XLIV.

⁴ *Wb* V, 612, 18; W. HAYES, “A Selection of Tuthmoside Ostraca from Dér El-Bahri,” *JEA* 46, 1960, pl. IX, no. 4 r.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pl. IX, no. 2.

⁶ L. LESKO, *A Dictionary of Late Egyptian* II, Providence, 2002, p. 274.

⁷ G. MÖLLER, *op. cit.*, p. 2, no. 14.

⁸ M. MEGALLY, *Considérations sur les variations et la transformation des formes hiératiques du papyrus E. 3226 du Louvre, BdE* 49, 1971, pl. XV g.

⁹ Unpublished ostracon belonging to Men-kheper-re-seneb, the high priest of Amon in the time of Tuthmosis III.

Currently under study by the author, as part of his Ph.D. thesis.

¹⁰ W. HAYES, *Ostraka and Name Stones from the Tomb of Sen-Müt (No. 71) at Thebes*, New York, 1942, pl. XVI, no. 81, 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pl. XIII, no. 63, v.

¹² *Ibid.*, pl. XIII, no. 64, v.

Commentary

The current ostracon is related to a significant group of texts called “visitors’ inscriptions” (*Besucherinschriften*). This group of texts mainly dates to the New Kingdom,¹³ and can be found on many ancient monuments as graffiti. The geographical distribution covers many important sites, e.g. Thebes,¹⁴ Assiut,¹⁵ and the necropolis of Memphis,¹⁶ in addition to the funerary temples. Most of the authors of such texts did not hold a higher position in society than that of ordinary scribes.¹⁷ Information about the social status of the scribes of the visitors’ inscriptions is scant since they almost never signed their texts with their actual and functional titles, but merely with the word “scribe”. These inscriptions reflect the great admiration the visitors had for their history and for the respective monument itself,¹⁸ and refer to the Egyptians’ realization that they had a real past and monuments worth exploring.¹⁹ H. Navrátilová in her study of the visitors’ graffiti of the XVIIIth and XIXth Dynasties in Abusir and northern Saqqara divided these texts according to its formulae into four types:²⁰

1. Antiquarian (or) Descriptive: the formula of this type shows an interest in the monuments visited, their names, owners and architectural elements.
2. Signature: this sort of inscription consists of a brief text with the name of the visitor and the date of the visit accompanied by a signature.
3. Piety-oriented: these formulae don’t show any interest in the monuments themselves, the visitors have just written prayers and invocations to the deities of the site.²¹
4. The Stroll: these texts, as appeared from their formulae, are nearer to amusement, curiosity and excursion visits, than to piety visits.²²

Visitors’ Formulae

The ostracon under discussion belongs to the antiquarian (or) descriptive formula. It is worth noting that this formula as can be seen on this ostracon was not only confined to old

¹³ D. WILDUNG, *LÄ* I, 1980, col. 766. s. v. “Besucherinschriften”.

¹⁴ N.G. DAVIES, A. GARDINER, *The Tomb of Antefokher, Vizier of Sesostris I, and of his Wife, Senet (no. 60)*, London, 1920, pl. XXXV-XXXVII.

¹⁵ U. VERHOEVEN, “The New Kingdom Graffiti in Tomb N 13.1: an Overview,” in J. Kahl et al. (ed.), *The Ayut Project: Seven Seasons at Asyut*, TAP 2, 2012, p. 52.

¹⁶ H. NAVRÁTILOVÁ, *The Visitors’ Graffiti of Dynasties XVIII and XIX in Abusir and Northern Saqqara*, Praha, 2007, p. 16. The vast majority of these visitors’ inscriptions were found in the Memphite area.

¹⁷ A.J. PEDEN, *The Graffiti of Pharaonic Egypt, Scope and Roles of Informal Writings*, Leiden, 2001, p. 61.

A.I. Sadek noted that the graffiti found at Deir el-Bahri, date back to the XIXth and XXth Dynasties, and that most of their authors were scribes, often attached to the Theban temples. But there are a few people holding higher ranks (e.g. a vizier, a general of the military and members of police forces and a deputy), who visited the temple, however, they remain a small minority (A.I. SADEK, “An Attempt to Translate the Corpus of the Deir el-Bahri Hieratic Inscriptions,” *GM* 71, 1984, p. 68; *id.*, *GM* 72, 1984, p. 65-87. Cf. hieratic graffiti published by M. Marcinaik, *Les inscriptions*

hiératiques du temple du Thoutmosis III. Deir el-Bahri I, Varsovie, 1974.

¹⁸ M. NEGEM, “Tourist Graffiti from the Ramesside Period”, *DE* 40, 1998, p. 115.

¹⁹ A.J. PEDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 290. A.J. Peden explains that these tourist graffiti are to be found throughout New Kingdom Egypt, but not often in Nubia where textual graffiti are again confined to various royal names and titles.

²⁰ H. NAVRÁTILOVÁ, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

²¹ H. NAVRÁTILOVÁ, *loc. cit.*, most of the graffiti found at Deir el-Bahri related to this type. Published by M. Marcinaik and translated by A.I. Sadek (*GM* 71, 1983, p. 67-91; *GM* 72, 1984, p. 65-86).

²² H. NAVRÁTILOVÁ, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

and monumental buildings, but was also used for contemporary buildings, such as the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri. The formulae were written when inspecting the great monuments “out of a sense of both curiosity and piety”.²³ The antiquarian inscriptions have a typical formula running as follows:

*iw.t pw ir.n s̄ NN*²⁴
r m̄s̄ t̄ hw.t-ntr n.t NN
*gm.n.f s̄i nfr hr ib.f r̄ 3t wr s̄i m hr.f m̄i t̄ p.t*²⁵

or

*gm.f s̄i nfr.t̄i hr ib.f r̄ hw.t-ntr nb.t nfr.t*²⁶
*gm.n.f s̄i m̄i p.t m-hnw.s R̄ hr wbn im.s*²⁷

or

*'b'.n dd.n.f hwi p.t n̄ 'n.tyw w3d dfdf.s m sntr hr-tp n.t hw.t-ntr NN*²⁸
*'b'.n dd.n.f w̄i p.t m̄ 'n.tyw w3d dfdf.s m sntr m/hr tp-hr.t s.t wr nty NN im.s*²⁹
*'b'.n dd.w n.f imm h3i t.w ... k3.w 3pd.w ht.w nb.t nfr.wt w̄b.t n k3 n NN hwi p.t ...*³⁰

The opening formula was common in the visitors' inscriptions during the New Kingdom. *iw.t pw* here is a reference to the visitor himself.³¹ The construction *iw.t pw ir.n (sdm pw ir.n)* is describing the fact and outlining the purpose of the visit.³² St. Quirke states that H.W. Helck considered this phrase to be evidence for the writer's purely antiquarian interest in the monuments of the past.³³ However, D. Wildung opposed this view and explained that the use of a stock formula demonstrates the religious character of the texts.³⁴ The opening formula remains similar from the beginning of the XVIIIth Dynasty onwards, but sometimes a few differences can appear in some features of writing or spelling e.g. *iw.t pw ir.n / iw.t pw ir.t.n / iw.s pw ir.n / iw sw pw ir.t.n*³⁵ / *ii pw ir.n*³⁶ / *iw.t in.*³⁷

Sometimes, the scribe used in instead of *ir.n*.³⁸ It is worth noting that *ir.n* not only refers to the person who made the visit, but perhaps also indicates the actual writer who recorded the text on the walls with his hand; moreover it is considered, according to U. Verhoeven, as a

²³ A.J. PEDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 61; H. NAVRÁTILOVÁ, *op. cit.*, p. 132; U. VERHOEVEN, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

²⁴ N. DAVIES, *op. cit.*, pl. XXXVI, no. 7, pl. XXXVII, nos. 31, 33, 36.

²⁵ H. NAVRÁTILOVÁ, *op. cit.*, p. 52, M. MEGALLY, “Two Visitors' Graffiti from Abúsir,” *CdE* 56, 1981, p. 229.

²⁶ U. VERHOEVEN, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

²⁷ H. NAVRÁTILOVÁ, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁹ U. VERHOEVEN, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

³⁰ H. NAVRÁTILOVÁ, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

³¹ G. BURKARD, “Die Besucherinschriften,” in M. Abdel-Raziq (ed.), *Das Grab des Sobekhotep in Theban NR. 63*, Cairo, 1990, p. 90.

³² K. PHILIPS, “Observations on the Alleged New Kingdom Sanatorium at Deir el Bahri,” *GM* 89, 1986, p. 78; A.J. PEDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

³³ St. QUIRKE, “The Hieratic Texts in the Tomb of Nakht, the Gardener at

Thebes (No. 161) as copied by Robert Hay,” *JEA* 72, 1986, p. 88.

³⁴ St. QUIRKE, *loc. cit.*

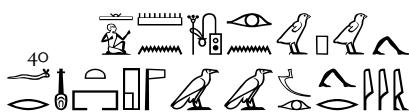
³⁵ U. VERHOEVEN, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

³⁶ N. DAVIES, *op. cit.*, pl. XXXVII, no. 1, 4; pl. XXXVII, no. 34.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pl. XXXVII, 29, 31, 36. It is worth noting that most of these formulae dated back to the time of Tuthmosis I.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pl. XXXVII, no. 9, 31.

“signature”, meaning “made by”.³⁹ The main verb in this opening phrase is *iw*, however, some scribes used the verb *ii* instead. In a rare formula the scribe used both verbs:



iw.t pw ỉr.n ss Mn *then the scribe Men came*
ii r m33 hw.t-ntr nfr *having come to visit the beautiful temple*⁴¹

The Date in the Opening Formula

Sometimes, the opening formula was preceded by the date,⁴² which may include two essential elements:

- The year, month, season, and day.
- The name of the pharaoh whose year is mentioned.⁴³ However, with the ostracon under discussion, it is uncertain whether the broken part before *iw.t pw* contains the date or whether it could merely be a physical space.

[r m33 hw.t-nr] Dsr-Dsrw

The verb *m33* can be used here in a specific meaning “to visit” instead of its original meaning “to see”.⁴⁴ Most of the visitors’ inscriptions of the temples mention the name of the king or god (owner of the temple) and his title. In the current ostracon the scribe directly mentioned the name of the temple: this can be seen among ostraca related to the Hatshepsut temple at Deir el-Bahri, where usually the name of the temple is mentioned without any indication of the queen’s name.⁴⁵

Dsr-dsrw, Hatshepsut’s Temple

Hatshepsut’s temple at Deir el-Bahri is one of the most impressive monuments of western Thebes,⁴⁶ and took about 15 years to be built.⁴⁷ It was built of limestone and designed in a series of terraces set against the cliff wall in a bay naturally formed by river and wind action.

³⁹ U. VERHOEVEN, *op. cit.*, p. 55, sometimes we find many visitors in the same text, so it may be that the actual writer is the first person mentioned after *ır.n.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 53. This graffito was found on the northern wall of tomb N 13.1

of the nomarch Iti-ibi(-iqa) of the XIth Dynasty in Asyut, with another graffito of the same scribe with the same formula.

⁴² H. NAVRÁTILOVÁ, *op. cit.*, p. 51, 60, 77, 81, 88, 93, 98; U. VERHOEVEN, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁴³ M. MEGALLY, *CdE* 56, p. 222.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁴⁵ W. HAYES, *JEA* 46, pl. IX.A, no. 2.

⁴⁶ R.H. WILKINSON, *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt*, London, 2000, p. 176.

⁴⁷ R.H. WILKINSON, *loc. cit.*

The design of the temple followed a form known since the First Intermediate Period and was particularly inspired by the XIth Dynasty temple of Mentuhotep II, which is situated just to the south.⁴⁸ This temple of Hatshepsut is called *Dsr-dsrw*, “Sacred of sacreds” or “Holy of holies”, however, the full name is *Hw.t-ntr 3.t n.t bhw m rnp.wt hw.t Dsr-dsrw Imn*.⁴⁹ The name *Dsr-dsrw* is referred to on many ostraca found at Deir el-Bahri.⁵⁰ In other ostraca from the same site it is simply referred to as *Dsrw*, with a variant determinative like □⁵¹ or 𢃥.⁵² Djeser-djeseru ceased to function as the queen’s mortuary temple after her death, and undoubtedly it subsequently suffered a decline in importance and prestige.⁵³

Biȝit-wonder

This word was not in common use in the formulae of the visitors’ inscriptions, where it occurred once in the formula of a graffito dated to Amenhotep II, found in the south chapel of the pyramid complex of King Djoser at Saqqara:⁵⁴

iw.t pw ir.n sš Hw-m-Mn-nfr r m33 biȝit
There came the scribe Khaemmenfer to see the wonder

Maybe the scribe in the current ostracon also describes the temple of Hatshepsut as a wonder.⁵⁵

Why was the text written on an ostracon?

The usual places for visitors’ inscriptions were the walls of the tombs and temples as graffiti. There is only one short text written on a potsherd that was found in the tomb of Senmut (XVIIth Dynasty) recording the visit of the scribe Djeser-ka to the tomb:⁵⁶

⁴⁸ B.M. BRYAN, “The 18th dynasty before the Amarna period (c.1550-1352 BC),” in I. Shaw (ed.), *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford, 2000, p. 241.

⁴⁹ B.J.J. HARING, *Divine Households, Administrative and Economic Aspects of the New Kingdom Royal Memorial Temples in Western Thebes*, EgUit 12, 1997, p. 420.

⁵⁰ W. HAYES, *JEA* 46, pl. IX, no. 2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pl. IX, no. 4, r.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pl. IX, no. 2; pl. XI, no. 9 r.; for more information about this temple,

cf. *PM* II, p. 340; É. NAVILLE, *The Temple of Deir el-Bahari I-VI*, EEF 13, 14, 16, 19, 27, 29, 1895-1906; M. WERBROUK, *Le temple d’Hatshepsut à Deir el-Bahri*, Brussels, 1949; S. BROZOSTOWSKI, L. KRZYZANOWSKI (ed.), *The Temple of Queen Hatshepsut 1-4*, Warsaw, 1979-1991.

⁵³ E. BROWARSKI, “Senenu, High Priest of Amün at Deir el-Bahri,” *JEA* 62, 1976, p. 68.

⁵⁴ H. NAVRÁTILOVÁ, *op. cit.*, p. 24. To my knowledge, there are no parallels for this term from Thebes.

⁵⁵ For more information about “biȝit” as a wonder, cf. E. GRAEFE, *Untersuchungen zur Wortfamilie biȝ*, Köln, 1971, p. 113.

⁵⁶ W. HAYES, *op. cit.*, pl. XX, no. 97. Another visitor’s formula is partially mentioned on ostracon O. Campbell 22 in a hymn dedicated to Amon: cf. A. G. McDOWELL, *Hieratic Ostraca in the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow*, Oxford, 1993, p. 29-30, Pl. XXXI.



*īw.t pw īr.n
sš Dsr-k3 r
m33 [...]*

*There came
the scribe Djeser-ka to
visit [...]*

The tomb of Senmut is situated near the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri. A huge number of hieroglyphic, hieratic, and figure ostraca was found in this tomb. The great majority was discovered in the fill of the terrace.⁵⁷ The scribes in charge of the work in this tomb used these ostraca for making preliminary sketches for the decorations of the tomb; they made arrangements for religious and funerary texts to be used in the decoration together with lists of names, brief notes on the progress of the work, etc.⁵⁸ A hieratic ostracon, contemporary with the building of the tomb (fig. 3) was found in it, recording a hymn to the Uræus.⁵⁹ It seems that this ostracon, which was used in the decoration of the tomb, was written by a scribe who was working on the construction of Senmut's tomb.⁶⁰ The handwriting of the latter ostracon is very similar to the handwriting of the ostracon under discussion.

	𓂋	𓂋	𓂋	𓂋	𓂋	𓂋	𓂋
Visitor ostracon							
Hymn ostracon							

The paleographical comparison indicates that the visitor ostracon was written by the same scribe who wrote on the ostracon of Senmut and was employed in the construction of the tomb. This ostracon must be contemporary with the building of Senmut's tomb, which at the same time is contemporary with the epoch of Hatshepsut. Thus, the antiquarian formula was not only confined to old and monumental buildings; but also was used for contemporary buildings.

57 W. HAYES., *op. cit.*, p. 3.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 24, pl. XXV, no. 140 r.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

The writing of this formula on an ostracon instead of on a wall of the temple is perhaps due to the fact that the temple was still at the height of its glory, prosperity, and fame and it was difficult to gain access to it. At the same time, it was considered an inappropriate act to write on the walls of a new temple.

Dating

The present formula, *iw.t pw ir.n ...* was confined to the XVIIth Dynasty, while, in later times, different formulae were used.⁶¹ According to the paleographical comparison with the Senmut ostracon, the present ostracon is strongly suggested to be dated to the time of Hatshepsut.

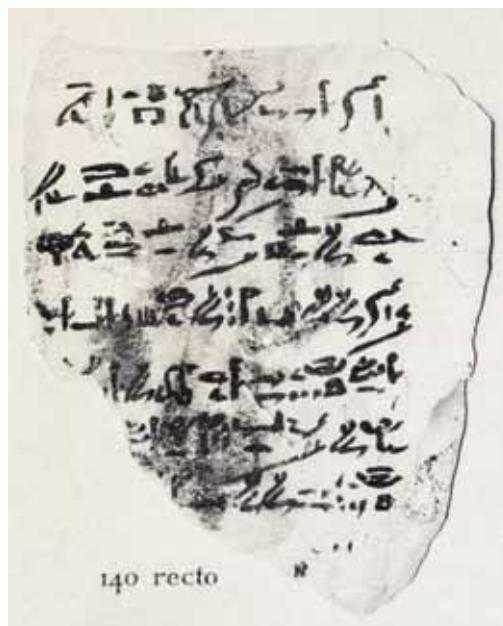


FIG. 3. Senmut ostracon (after W. Hayes, *Ostraca and Name stones*, pl. XXV, no. 140 r.).

⁶¹ C.M. FIRTH, J.E. QUIBELL, *Excavations at Saqqara. The Step Pyramid I*, Cairo, 1953, p. 78 (B), p. 81 (K);

R. ANTHES, "Hieratic Graffiti on statue fragments," in U. HÖLSCHER, *The Excavation of Medinet Habu, The Temples of*

the Eighteenth Dynasty, Chicago, 1939, p. 107.

