

Hieratic Fragments from Tell el-Far^cah (South)

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The inscriptions on two sherds found during Petrie's excavations at Tell el-Far^cah (South) in 1928–1929 belong to a well-known category of hieratic inscribed sherds from southern Israel/Palestine. They are probably from the period of Ramesses III, and support the contention that the site was one of a group of centers at which taxes, in the form of grain, were collected.

INTRODUCTION

During W. M. F. Petrie's excavations at Tell el-Far^cah (South) in 1928–1929, two sherds of reddish brown ware were found, bearing black ink inscriptions on cream slip in Egyptian hieratic. The fragments, found at the top of a grain pit, measure 6.7 × 5.4 cm and 8.0 × 5.5 cm. They are kept at the Rockefeller Archaeological Museum, Jerusalem and are identified as Museum no. I.9833/1,2. The three preserved lines on the smaller sherd (fragment A) have very much faded but they are still, at least tentatively, legible (fig. 1). From the four lines on the larger piece (fragment B), only a few signs are still discernible (fig. 2).¹ Obviously the scribe's hand is the same on both fragments, suggesting that they may have been part of the same bowl.

DISCUSSION

(For this discussion, the letters in parentheses refer to the superscript letters in the translation.)

(a) Isolated as it stands, this line is open to a wide range of possible translations. We chose a very literal version. The verb *jnj* may also stand for “to buy” (Gardiner 1962: 65); and as the noun *jnw*,

assume meanings like “tribute, revenues, product, deliveries” (Gordon 1983; Bleiberg 1984; 1996; Janssen 1993). The small sign following the *dd*-group could possibly be rendered as  [A1]; such a reading *dd.j* “I said” would raise the question of whether this fragment might be part of a note. (Compare other possible notes: Goldwasser 1984: 82, sherd no. 7; 1991a: 248, sherd no. 1).

(b) *wḏ³* “Storehouse” should require the house-determinative.

(c) \Rightarrow 7[N1] seems the most likely reading for the partly preserved sign. Cf. *WHP* N.1 Type b with inserted diacritical dot. Due to the ambiguity of the preposition *n-*, the bearer of the title may be either the official receiving the barley delivery or one handing it in or over to another official. A large number of titles of the pattern *hrjj- (n-) X* “overseer of X” are known. No definite conclusion as to its exact nature can therefore be drawn in this case.

An alternative reading of the sign as \Rightarrow [N37] might perhaps be considered, rendering *m-jt n-š[mw]* “as barley of harvest-tax” (cf. *RAD* 33: 5,6). The term *šmw* “harvest-tax” (Gardiner 1941: 20; Goldwasser 1984: 86) is well attested in inscriptions from Lachish (Černý 1958: 133), Deir el-Balah (Wimmer, in press), probably also Tel Sera^c (Goldwasser 1984: 79).

(d) Or *m-dj*.

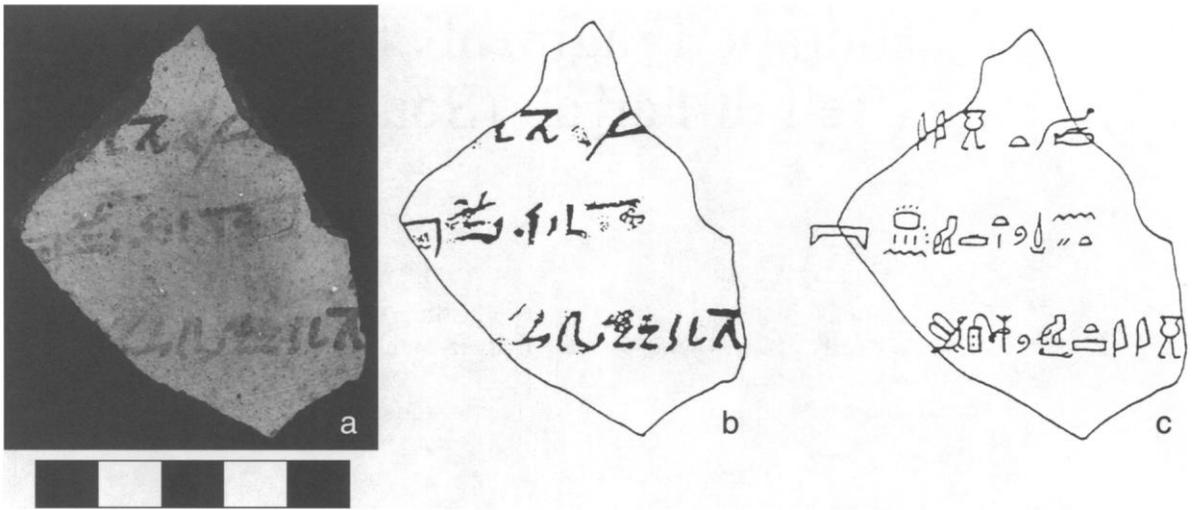


Fig. 1. Sherd found by Petrie's excavations at Tell el-Far^cah(S) in 1928–1929: Fragment A (I.9833/1). (a) Photograph; (b) facsimile; (c) transliteration.

TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION

... *ḏd.t jnj[j.t]* ...
 ... *ntjj (m-)wḏ³.t m-jt n-hrjj-* ...
 ... *jnjj.t m-^c sš P³-* ...

... what was said is(?) what was brought^(a) ...
 ... which is the rest^(b), as barley of/for the overseer of^(c) ...
 ... brought by the hand of^(d) the scribe Pa-^(e) ...

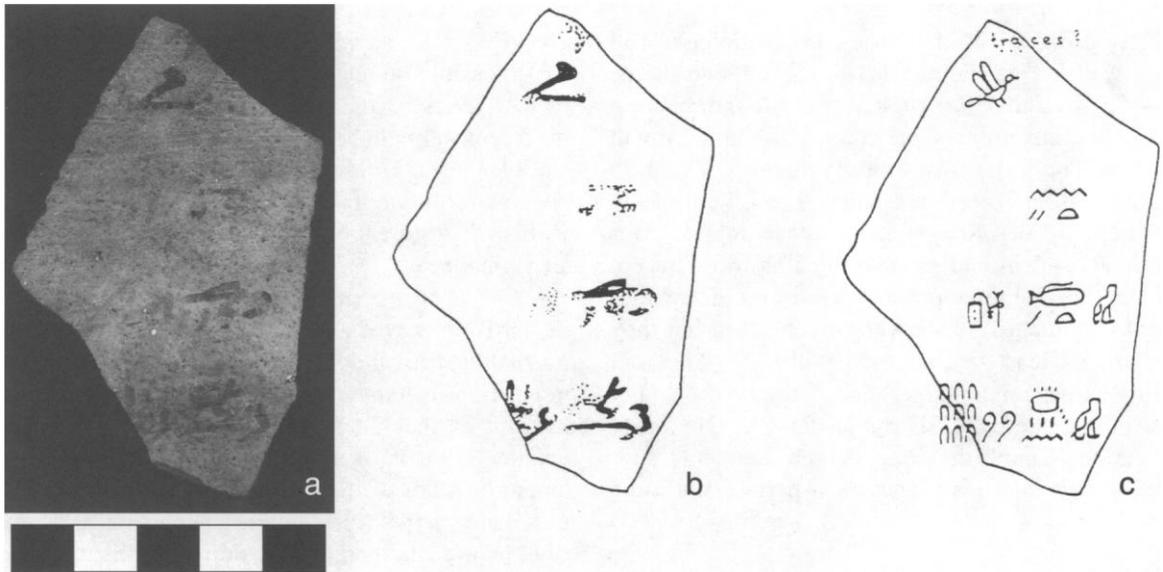


Fig. 2. Sherd found by Petrie's excavations at Tell el-Far^cah(S) in 1928–1929: Fragment B (I.9833/2). (a) Photograph; (b) facsimile; (c) transliteration.

TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION

... *p³* ... *ntjj* ... *m-ḏr.t sš(Hr?)[jt] m-jt n 290[+ x]* ...

... the ... which ... with/by the scribe Hr^(?)^(f) barley^(g) of(?) 290 [+ x]^(h) ...

(e) Only the beginning of the scribe's name is preserved. Personal names with *P³-* or *P³jj-* (definite article, resp. demonstrative adjective or possessive article) as their first element are very common. A scribe *sš J- [. .]* is recorded on a sherd from Lachish (Goldwasser 1991a: 248–53).

(f) There might have been a bird (*Hr?*)  [G5] sign after the *sš*; however, it may be a mere figment of our imagination.

(g) Possibly so, lit. “barley as barley!”, a very common expression, referring to payment in real barley (*DLE* I, 58; Gardiner 1941: 24 n. 3).

(h) Large amounts of grain deliveries are recorded on bowl fragments from Lachish (Černý 1958) and Tel Sera^c (Goldwasser 1984).

PALAEOGRAPHY

Neither fragment, unfortunately, includes any of the signs established as definite criteria for dating in *WHP*. Quite a number of signs and sign groups do, however, show statistical affinities to the 20th Dynasty, rather than the 19th (numbers referring to *WHP* plates):

 U.10/ Bb.7 b;   G.41/ G.1 a;  G.17 f (fragment A) and c (fragment B);  X.1/Bb.5 b;  N.35/X.1/Bb.6 b;  Y.3 a. The affinity tends more

to the 19th Dynasty in just one case  X.1/Y.1 b, leaving the overall evidence with quite a clear stress on the 20th Dynasty.

CONCLUSION

The inscription(s) clearly belong to the well-known category of similar hieratic inscribed vessels from southern Israel/Palestine. The context is that of a Ramesside Egyptian administration over the local population, which was subjected to taxation in the form of grain deliveries. These deliveries were collected at local centers and documented on votive bowls.² Four such places are already known: Lachish, Tel Sera^c, Tel Haror, and Deir el-Balah.³ From Tell el-Far^cah (South) two scarabs have been published as administrative seals of a temple estate of Ramesses III (Uehlinger 1988: 13–15), indicating that the site belongs to the same group of towns. This is now confirmed by our fragments. Another scarab of the same type comes from Bet Shemesh, where no hieratic inscriptions have yet been found.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We are obliged to Eli Yannai from the Israel Antiquities Authority for permission to publish the objects.

NOTES

¹Possible ink marks partly preserved on the very top of this fragment might hint at a palimpsest, since they do not appear to fit into the more-or-less regularly spaced pattern of lines.

²Whether the receiving temples are to be looked for at these Canaanite towns, or in the provincial capital Gaza, or in Egypt, has been discussed elsewhere (Goldwasser 1984: 86; Uehlinger 1988: 13–15; Wimmer 1990; Wimmer, in press.

³Lachish (Černý 1958; Goldwasser 1982; Gilula 1976). Tel Sera^c (Goldwasser 1984; Groll 1973). Tel Haror (Goldwasser 1991a: 248–49; Oren 1993: 582). Deir el-Balah (Wimmer, in press; Dothan 1982: 745³). The hieratic fragments from Bet Shean in the north belong to a different, namely literary-religious context, Wimmer 1993 and Wimmer 1994.

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