
UNWRAPPING IDENTITY AN INSCRIPTION FROM THE SAITE TOMB N^o.54



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Abstract

This article is a small token of tribute to Professor Hassan Amer, with whom I have had the pleasure of working during the last years since my recent incorporation into the team of the Egyptian-Spanish archaeological mission at Oxyrhynchus.

Keywords: Oxyrhynchus - An inscription - Saite period – tomb- Identity

مُلخَص البَحْث

كشَفَ الهَوِيَّة: نَقْشٌ مِنْ مَقْبَرَةٍ «أَرْبَعَةٌ وَخَمْسُونَ» مِنَ العَصْرِ الصَّاوِي

يَعُدُّ هَذَا البَحْثُ مِثَابَةً إِشَادَةً وَإِهْدَاءً صَغِيرًا لِلْبَرْوفيسُورِ حَسَنِ عَامِرٍ، الَّذِي كَانَ لِي الشَّرْفُ بِالعَمَلِ مَعَهُ خِلَالَ السَّنَوَاتِ الأَخِيرَةِ مُنْذُ انْضِمَامِي الأَخِيرِ لِفَرِيقِ البَعْثَةِ الأَثَرِيَّةِ المِصْرِيَّةِ - الإِسْبَانِيَّةِ فِي أُوكْسِيرِينْخُوسِ.

الكلمات الدالة: أُوكْسِيرِينْيُوسِ - نَقْشٌ - العَصْرِ الصَّاوِي - مَقْبَرَةٌ.

Introduction

In season 2021, archaeological work on Sector 36¹ led to the discovery of two tombs from the Saite Period: Tomb no. 53, which was damaged and spoiled, but also Tomb no.54, which was found sealed and intact. This article deals with the inscription written over the mummified remains of the owner of the Tomb no. 54.

The preliminary study of the mummified body was carried out in situ by the anthropologist Ms. Francesca Pullia. The body was placed inside a stone sarcophagus wrapped in a thin, black-coated casing instead of a more consistent cartonnage² (Figure 1). The

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² Cartonnages fell out of use after the 23rd Dynasty, substituted by an anthropoid inner coffin. While this type of coffin was not used in T.54, the beads coincide with the documented ornament of the enshrouded mummies in this period in the fashion of nets (Ikram & Dodson (1998), 186.



Figure 1 (left.): The mummy of T.54 in the sarcophagus. © Archaeological mission of Oxyrhynchus.

Figure 2 (above): Detail of the broken casing at the upper part of the body. © Archaeological mission of Oxyrhynchus.

black color of the wrappings and casing was produced by the resin used during the mummification process.³ This casing was damaged and broken in the upper part (Figure 2), and only the part beginning approximately by the waist and covering the legs was preserved. Scattered on top of it, the remains of a protecting net composed of tubular beads were recovered.

Once the beads were retrieved and the surface cleaned, a faint inscription in a yellowish color became visible. There were traces of this light color down to the feet of the mummy, but only part of the inscription was legible.

2. The inscription

The support of the inscription was very fragile and was lost during the examination of the mummy. Nonetheless, it was documented extensively through photographs under the supervision of the directors of the mission, Dr. Maite Mascort and Dr. Esther Pons, and examined and copied in situ by Dr. Leah Mascia and the author, Susana Soler. The

³ About the types of resin found in the necropolis of Oxyrhynchus and its abundant employment during the Late Period, see Pons (2020), 2, 453-454. For an analysis of the composition of the different types of embalming fluids employed during the mummification process and the burial rites in the preceding Third Intermediate Period, see Fulcher, K., Serpico, M., Taylor, J. H., and Stacey, R. (2021).

[...] [*Wsir*] *nb Ddw im3h(w) P-nn?/wnw? hm-ntr p(3)-(n?)-nn m3^c -hrw ir [n] nb [.t-pr]* [...]
 [...] [Osiris] Lord of Busiris, the revered one, *hm ntr p-nn?/wnw?* Priest, Pa(en?)nen(i),
 justified, made by (born from) [the Lady of the house] [...]

3. Direction of writing

Hieroglyphic signs could be written, as it is well known, from left to right and from right to left, but the ancient Egyptian cursive scripts (i.e., hieratic and demotic) are written from left to right. Cursive hieroglyphs, which is the case of the inscription, can be written in both directions, and the text can be displayed both in lines or columns.⁵

The layout of the inscription in T. 54 presented the signs in groups of one or two signs arranged in columns, with the peculiarity of different changes in orientation, as indicated in Figure 4. The motivation for this layout is obscure since the inscription is not combined with images that may concord with the direction of the writing. None of the factors presented by Fischer (1977) in his study of the orientation of hieroglyphic signs (i.e., symmetry, concordance, and confrontation) can be argued for this inscription. The most intriguing fact is that the direction of reading could be interpreted as some sort of boustrophedon composition, with at least five direction changes for different “semantic units,” as explained next. The boustrophedon is very rare in hieroglyphic inscriptions, so this device could have been employed to embed a cryptic or extra-religious significance to this short funerary formula. Exceptional resources like retrograde and or boustrophedon compositions applied an extra layer of meaning by defying the rules of the orientation of hieroglyphs.⁶

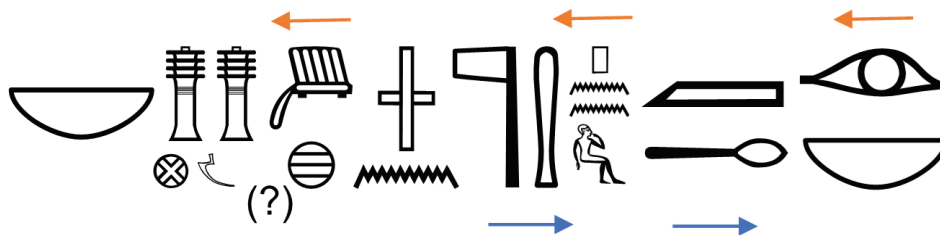


Figure 4. Changes of direction in the inscription



The direction of reading for the first part of the inscription (*nb Ddw*) cannot be defined. The sign beside (O49) should be \cup *t*⁷ or could be 𓏏 *w* if it is part of the spelling of the Northern cultic city of Osiris, Busiris.⁸ This is the expected reading led by the position

⁵ Konrad, (2022).



⁶ Polis (2018) 339-340 and no. 115.

⁷ See Amer et. al. (2014), 64, fig.4.2, for 𓏏 𓏏 in the North Wall of the Burial Chamber of Heret in Tomb N.1.

⁸ See Gauthier, (1929), 135-136 for the different spellings of the city Busiris. A spelling 𓏏 𓏏 is known from the Tomb of Horemheb KV57 (<https://thebanmappingproject.com/images/12608jpg?site=5975>). 𓏏 𓏏



of the sign in the group 'quadrat,' and it would suggest that the group is to be read from right to left, with the classifier  as the last sign of the word 'Busiris.' Nonetheless, the shape of the sign resembles more of an inverted sickle  (U1),⁹ in agreement with the direction of the two remaining signs for the word *im3h(w)* 'revered one.' Even if it is not possible to determine the shape of this sign, the changes in the direction of the reading are evident for the remaining inscription: this direction will switch in every group or separate unit of meaning (Figure 4):

Right to left	<i>im3h(w)</i> 'revered one'
Left to right	<i>hm P-nn? hm-ntr</i> "hm P-nn (?) + priest"
Right to left	<i>p(3)-(n?)-nn PN cP</i> "(n)neni" (?)
Left to right	<i>m3c -hrw</i> "justifie"
Right to left	<i>ir [n] nb [.t-pr]</i> 'made by (born to) the [Lady of the house]

It is important to remark that an anomaly in the writing/reading direction of some signs was documented before in one of the sarcophagi in tomb N.1,¹⁰ with a cursive hieroglyphic inscription oriented leftwards. However, it apparently affected only specific signs, i.e.,  and , a basket and a sickle, that were oriented rightwards. Notice that certain signs may tend to retain a rightward orientation in the writing by convention, like clothes and tools.¹¹

4. Once again, the title



Rodriguez & Corcoll listed the priestly titles documented in the High Necropolis of Oxyrhynchus, devoted to the cult of several deities: Taweret, Osiris, Bastet, Amun, and Khonsu, the child-god.¹² The title associated with all these cults is that of *hm-ntr*. This research included seven priests from the Saite Period. The most important of them was Heret, whose burial belonged to the main chamber of Tomb N.1.¹³



[9] The spelling of  *im3h(w)* without the more frequent initial  is also documented in T.1 of Oxyrhynchus. See Goyon (2014), 107 and 119 fig. 8.2.













[10] Goyon, (2014), 114.




[11] Fischer, (1986), 69.





[12] Rodriguez & Corcoll (2008), 341–347.

[13] To his extensive list of religious titles (*hm-ntr T3-wr.t* 'Priest of Taweret', *hm-ntr* 'Priest of Bastet of Iteh', Priest of Bastet of Per-Khef, Nurse-Priest of Khonsu, Priest of the temples of the gods, Priest-Herald of the Gods in Per-Medjed, Intendent of the Great Gods and the Priests, and the obscure  discussed in the text), Het added the titles of  *pr* 'noble' and *h3ty-c* 'prince' (Rodriguez Corcoll, (2008), 348.

One of the titles owned by Heret was  with the variant  for the second sign. Rodriguez & Corcoll (2008) presented the first proposal of reading the title as *imy-N(t)* ‘the one who belongs to Neith’ following the interpretation suggested by Goyon.¹⁴ This interpretation was based on the relation of the Red Crown with the name of the goddess Neith¹⁵ and the identification of the name Heret and that of his father Somtustefnakht to a Lybian origin and a possible provenance from the Delta city of Sais, the cultic center of the goddess.¹⁶

The inscriptions containing the title  from Tomb N.1 in the High Necropolis were found in the sarcophagus of Heret and the walls of his burial chamber (room 3),¹⁷ and also in several cursive inscriptions from different rooms of the tomb belonging to other occupants of the tomb, which offer a better paleographic match to our inscription. These cursive inscriptions were studied by Goyon,¹⁸ who proposed to read this title  var.  not as *imy-N(t)*, but instead as *wnw* ‘child.’ This reading was based on one inscription (Ia, p. 111) where the title  (considered now equivalent to ) was followed by the classifier of the child  (A17), and Goyon proposed the possibility of a sportive reading of   = *wnw*. Hence, the complete sequence is here:     *wnw hm-ntr B-wr.t*. Following this argument, the specific priestly title exclusive of Oxyrhynchus will be that of *wnw* ‘child’ of Taweret.¹⁹

Still, a third possible reading of the signs was offered by El-Aguizy²⁰ (2014) as *imy(.t)-nnw*, ‘she who is in the primeval Ocean,’ an epithet known for Taweret in the New Kingdom. His interpretation preserved the initial reading  = *imy* and advocated for a phonetic reading of  = *n* and a cryptographic reading of  = *wn*.

The title surfaced again during the study of Saite Tomb N.14, belonging to Padineith and Halti, located also in the High Necropolis of Oxyrhynchus. This time, the most common spelling of the title was , but the previous attested variants  and  were also documented. This new graphic variant  seemed to shed some light

¹⁴ Presented in 2004 by the members of the Oxyrhynchus mission at the IX International Congress of Egyptologists Padro et al., (2007).; Rodriguez & Corcoll (2008), 348.

¹⁵ For evidence of the writing of the name of the Goddess with the Red Crown only during the Saite Period, see El-Sayed (1982), 15 and 429, doc. 495a.











¹⁶ Rodriguez Corcoll, (2008), 348.







¹⁷ The epigraphy of the burial of Heret was studied and published by Amer, the epigraphist of the mission M. Erroux-Morfin, & Padry. See Amer, Erroux-Morfin, & Padry (2014), 43-56 and 57-68.

¹⁸ Goyon (2014), 118.

¹⁹ Goyon argued for an identification of this infant-god with Dedun, child of Taweret-Medjat and Lady of Per-Khef. See Mascort & Pons (2019), 244 after Leitz (2002, v. VII), 331. However, the complex mythology of Taweret in Oxyrhynchus also considered the goddess mother of Seth. See Padry (2014b) and Mascort & Pons (2019).

²⁰ The inscription I, located in the lintel to the entrance to the burial chamber of Heret, had a first part written in cursive hieroglyphs (containing the titles and filiation of Heret) and a second part rendered in demotic script, a cursing for the safekeeping of the burial, studied by El-Aguizy (2014) and dated paleographically to a later period (30th dynasty or early Ptolemaic period). El-Aguizy (2014), 129.

on the title's meaning. The interpretation of González (2015) offered a justification to all attested variants: , , , and  to be read as *imy-nw(w)* 'celui au flot nww.'²¹ González's article offered parallels and evidence for the interpretation of ,  and  as biliterals with the phonetical value *nw*, while the equivalence  = *n* was explained by the equivalence  = . According to his conclusion, the title could refer to an administrative function related to the management of the (flood) waters instead of being a priestly title specific to Per-Medjed.²²

In the sequence of titles registered for the priests of the High Necropolis of Oxyrhynchus,  and var. , have been found in connection with the name of the deceased and followed by other priestly titles. Especially interesting are the inscriptions presenting  + *hm-ntr* (*n*) *t3-wr:t* 'priest of Taweret' or only *t3-wr:t* 'Taweret'.²³ The variant  was never connected to this sequence.²⁴ In the inscription of T.54,  is followed by the title *hm-ntr*, priest, without the reference to the goddess. This adds a new layer to the complexity of the title. The absence of the divine name Taweret could be justified if the title, again, is interpreted to be explicitly linked with the cult of the goddess in Oxyrhynchus. Also, if the sequence of changes or reading direction in the sequence of the inscription is accepted, one is inclined to consider that  is arranged together as a unit of reading, reasserting the priestly nature of the title.

5. The name of the owner of T.54

The deceased's name is to be found in the lower part of the preserved inscription. This name could be read *p3-n-nn* 'the one who belongs to the child' or 'the one of the child.' However, an exact parallel has not been documented.

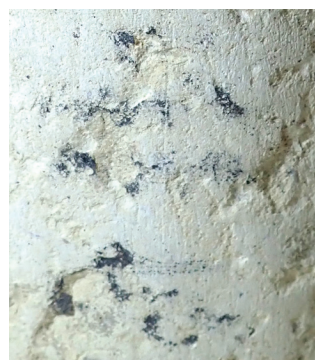


Figure 5. The name *p3-(n)-nn* in the inscription on the mummy (left) and in one of the canopic jars (Hapy) from the funerary equipment of Tomb n. 54 © Archaeological mission of Oxyrhynchus.

²¹ González (2015), 5.


²² Still, a priestly function does not seem to be incompatible with the title. See, Mascort & Pons (2019) about the link of Taweret with the flood waters in her representation as a sacred fish in Oxyrhynchus.


²³ As noticed by Goyon (2014), 118.

²⁴ González (2015), 3.


According to this tentative reading, the structure of the name would be a compound formed by $p(\beta)$ - (article) – n (genitive) – n (phonetic complement) – nn (logogram).

Another possible interpretation is a single word-name $p(\beta)$ - nn ‘the child’.²⁵

The reading of  register based on Gardiner (1957) as nn ‘child’.²⁶ Also, Gardiner (1957) notes the variant of sign A17 vs A17A²⁷ representing the child.²⁸ In A17, which is the sign that we find on the inscription, the child takes one of the hands to the mouth. In variant A17A, both arms are extended alongside the body: this the variant of the sign found in the canopic jar of Tomb n.54 (see Figure 5).


The combination p - n or $p\beta$ - n with a theonym or a toponym is documented for the Saite Period. For this, an interesting parallel is found in the name of the city Herakleopolis:  nn - $nswt$.²⁹ Ranke³⁰ collects a possible (but doubtful) reference to a New Kingdom personal name very similar to the toponym Herakleopolis.

The name of the deceased buried in Tomb n.54 may have some relation with the neighboring city of Herakleopolis, but it could also be read simply as ‘the one of the child.’ One name attested for the Late Period has a parallel structure $p\beta$ - n - nw , ‘the one of the dog.’³¹ Another possibility would be that the ‘child’ refers to ‘Horus the Child’ (i.e., Harpocrates), like in another attested name, $p\beta$ - n - hrd .³²

However, an interesting possible reading for the name in the inscription $p(\beta)$ - n - nn or $p(\beta)$ - nn could be a connection with the priestly title presented above, which could reinforce the interpretation proposed by Goyon for this title as ‘child-priest’.³³ Then again, two aspects remain inconclusive. In the first place, the exact phonetic reading: wnw after Goyon, nn as suggested by the phonetic complements, or finally nwn , also with the meaning of (divine) ‘child’,³⁴ that perhaps could explain the attested variant  as a cryptographic spelling.

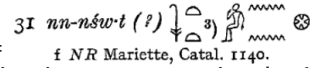
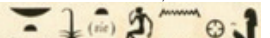
[25] This type of names included the definite article from Dynasty XVIII onwards Vittmann, (2013),1.

[26] Gardiner (1957), 530.


[27] Sign TSL_1_245 <<http://thotsignlist.org/mysign?id=245>>, in: *That Sign List* <<http://thotsignlist.org>>, edited by Universität de Linge and Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften. The token for the phonetic reading of the logogram  as nn in the TSL is an inscription of Ramesses II with the name of the city Herakleopolis.

[28] Gardiner (1957), 443.

[29] LÄ 1126-1127 ; Leitz (2002), 245 vol. IV.

[30] RPN II 299.31 =  Looking into the source provided by Ranke (Mariette, *Catalogue général des monuments d'Abydos découverts pendant les fouilles de cette ville*), we found that this nn - $nswt$ is a feminine PN, and Ranke's rendering of the PN is missing the [WOMAN] classifier supplied (or reconstructed) by Mariette .

[31] RPN I. 106.2.

[32] RPN I. 110.18. Notice that the name is written with the logogram  interpreted as hrd , without phonetic complements. Also, the reference to a child-god in Oxyrhynchus is not likely to be identified with Horus. See note 13 and also the cult attested for the child-god Khonsu in Rodriguez & Corcoll (2008), 348.

[33] Names based on titles, including priestly offices, were not uncommon. For a summary, see Vittmann (2013), 2.

[34] See Leitz (2002), 551.

6. Conclusion

The inscription found on Tomb N.54 offers new evidence highlighting the significance of the title in Per-Medyed/Oxyrhynchus. Consequently, the occupant of this small Saite tomb, *p(3)-(n)-nn*, held the title of priest, a designation shared by several other individuals documented in Tombs N.1 and 14 of the High necropolis. This flowing inscription, crudely painted over the resin enveloping the body, exhibits a particularly intriguing and unique arrangement resembling a boustrophedon composition. Anticipated future discoveries are expected to provide further insights into the fascinating role of these priests.

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