

---

# DEMOTIC OSTRACON OF ACCOUNT OF MONEY

---



ESRAA MOHAMED ABD EL-HALIM AHMED<sup>\*</sup>

## Abstract

This article aims to publish a demotic ostracon of account of money from Dendera. This ostracon is kept in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo on the third floor (23 East) under the special register number 18953. The current account seems to be related to a certain institution, possibly a temple or a religious institution. That can be determined from interior evidence, such as the people mentioned in the text whose positions indicate that they are priests and workmen. As for the date, the style of handwriting and the known names indicate that it is dated to the Ptolemaic period (30-310 BC).

**Keywords:** Demotic, Ostracon, Dendera, Money, Account, Ptolemaic.

## ملخص البحث

تهدف الدراسة إلى نشر وتقديم تحليل تفصيلي لقطعة أوستراكا ديموطيقية لحساب مالي تم العثور عليها في دندرة. محفوظة حاليًا في المتحف المصري بالقاهرة في الطابق الثالث (٢٣ شرق) تحت رقم السجل الخاص ١٨٩٥٣. يشير محتوى الأوستراكا إلى أنها كانت جزءًا من سجلات مالية لمؤسسة دينية. وذلك استنادًا إلى الأسماء والوظائف المذكورة والتي تشير إلى وجود كهنة وعمال. أما عن التاريخ، فإن أسلوب الكتابة والأسماء المعروفة تشير إلى أنها ترجع إلى العصر البطلمي (٣١٠ - ٣٠ ق.م).

الكلمات الدالة: ديموطيقية، أوستراكون، دندرة، حساب مالي، بطلمي.

<sup>\*</sup> Master's researcher in the Ancient Egyptian Language. Demonstrator at Department of Egyptology, Faculty of Arts, Mansoura University, Egypt.

**Cairo Museum: Inv. No./TR. 18953****Dimensions:** (9.6 x 10.2 x 5 cm.).**Color:** Reddish-brown.**Provenance:** Dendera.**Date:** Ptolemaic Period.**Description:** The text is almost completely preserved. The handwriting is thick, neat, and regular.**Transliteration**

1. *P3-šr-Is.t r-hrw (n) hm-ntr ht 45.t*
2. *P<sup>c</sup>-n3 stm/sm ht 20*
3. *P3-šr-P3-hj nkt-nb ht 6.t*
4. *P<sup>c</sup>-n3 (s3) Ns-hr ht 12 kt 5*
5. *P3-bik (s3) P3-tj-hr-sm3-t3.wj ht 7 kt 5*
6. *P3-bik ht 5*
7. *Mw.t-hrrj ht 15*

**Translation**

1. *P3-šr-Is.t*, in place (of) god's servant (oracle) 45.t silver (pieces)
2. *P<sup>c</sup>-n3*, setem/sem-priest 20 silver (pieces)
3. *P3-šr-P3-hj*, thing of gold 6.t silver (pieces)
4. *P<sup>c</sup>-n3* (son of) *Ns-hr* 12 silver (pieces), 5 kite
5. *P3-bik* (son of) *P3-tj-hr-sm3-t3.wj* 7 silver (pieces), 5 kite
6. *P3-bik* 5 silver (pieces)
7. *Mw.t-hrrj* 15 silver (pieces)


**Commentary**

L.1- The reading of the word following the proper name *P3-šr-Is.t* as *r-hrw* 'at the command of, at the behest of' seems possible.<sup>1</sup> The translation of the (n) after *r-hrw* depends on the context.

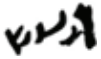
<sup>1</sup> Erichsen, W. (1954), 365-366.

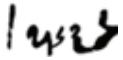


In texts, *r-hrw* comes to convey the meaning 'in place of, for, or at the command of,' which indicates that the person acts as a representative of or as mandated by another person or official.<sup>2</sup>

-  *hm-ntr*: Which means (lit., god's servant).<sup>3</sup> It was translated as 'prophet,' but that word is now avoided due to its Judeo-Christian undertones. It is now preferred to translate 'priest' as something more generic.<sup>4</sup> *hm-ntr* is a high rank of priests; it seems that this person *P3-šr-Is.t* is the temple's oracle in Dendera (the priest who receives the prophecy in the temple). The Oracles were typically located in temples and shrines, and they were staffed by priests and priestesses who were trained to interpret the messages of the gods.

It is noteworthy that the Oracles played an essential role in ancient Egyptian society. They were a way for people to communicate with the gods and receive guidance on important decisions. Also, oracles were highly respected in ancient Egypt, and their advice was often sought by people from all walks of life.<sup>5</sup> since the daily offering service was such a fundamental part of Egyptian religion, *hm-ntr* was the king's deputy in the daily service of the god's statue in the temple. Texts record, 'There was performed for him all ceremonies that are performed for the king,' transforming him from a priest into a proper surrogate for the king, the ritual consisted of the physical maintenance of the god, followed by the presentation of food and drink. Thus, all ritual actions were made in the name of the king, and it is he who is shown in the temple reliefs, although in reality, a priest acted in his stead.<sup>6</sup>

L.2-  The reading of the first proper name *P<sup>c</sup>-n3* seems certain, it is one of the familiar proper names in Dendera.<sup>7</sup>

-  *stm/sm*: is a suitable reading,<sup>8</sup> it is a priestly title, (sem-priest). This priest's duties were only funerary, and he performed the opening of the mouth ceremony for the mummy, where it regains its physical senses and can receive offerings and benefit

<sup>2</sup> Vleeming, S. (1994), No. 60.4, 143.

<sup>3</sup> Erichsen, W. (1954), 305.

<sup>4</sup> Teeter, E. (2011), 25.


<sup>5</sup> Teeter, E. (2011), 105-112.

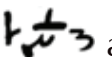
<sup>6</sup> Teeter, E. (2011), 46-50.

<sup>7</sup> Devauchelle, D. (2006), No. 109 B, 194-195.


<sup>8</sup> Erichsen, W. (1954), 479.

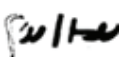
from them, this ceremony is what allowed the deceased to be able to speak, see, hear, eat and drink in the afterlife. The Sem Priests were also responsible for mummification; so, they embalmed the corpse and recited all of the spells while wrapping the mummy. The sem priest is recognizable by his leopard-skin robe.<sup>9</sup>


L.3-  The reading of the personal name *P3-šr-P3-hj* seems sure, it is mentioned in *DemGloss*.<sup>10</sup>

- The reading of the group  as *nkt-nb* meaning 'thing of gold' seems certain, it is mentioned in *Glossar*.<sup>11</sup> It seems that this person *P3-šr-P3-hj* was responsible for the materials used in the daily offering rituals of the temple, especially those made of gold. It is important to note that the position of the goldsmith has been mentioned before, but under a different word *s n nb* (lit., the man of gold).<sup>12</sup> It is known that there were gold workshops attached to temples, and they were staffed by skilled artisans who were trained in the latest techniques of gold working. They were often employed by the Pharaoh to craft jewelry and gild furniture or funerary equipment such as armchairs, coffins, and death masks.

There is a similar instance of this personal name *P3-šr-P3-hj* from Edfu.<sup>13</sup> But I am not sure if he is the same person or not.

L.5-  The first three elements of the patronymic *P3-tj-hr* are faint, but the reading *P3-tj-hr-sm3-t3.wj* is certain.<sup>14</sup>

L.6-  The reading *P3-bik* seems likely when compared with the written in the previous line, but the letter 'k' and the determinative are faint.

L.7-  The proper name *Mw.t-hrrj* is known from another published text that includes an account of wheat.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Teeter, E. (2011), 24-25.

<sup>10</sup> Lüddeckens, E. (2000), 238.


<sup>11</sup> Erichsen, W. (1954), 230.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, J. (2001), 10.

<sup>13</sup> Akeel, M. (2019): No.1.9, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Lüddeckens, E. (2000), 334.

<sup>15</sup> Wahid El-Din, S. (2012), No. 1.2, 47.

-  The numeral 5 within the number 15 is somewhat indistinct due to its faintness; however, the reading is confirmed with certainty.

## Notes

The ostracon's origin from Dendera is confirmed by excavation notes on its verso, establishing a clear archaeological context for the artifact.

The content of the ostracon suggests a strong link to an institutional setting, likely a temple or religious institution, given the titles and roles of the individuals mentioned. The presence of both priests and workmen implies a hierarchical structure typical of such establishments based on the three people mentioned in lines (1,2 &3), whose positions indicate that they are priests and the others in three lines (4,5 &6) are workmen, as previously explained. It is unclear as to what these expenses or costs refer to, I think it records the cash revenues or expenses of the specific institution. While the exact nature of the expenses or costs is not explicitly stated, the inference is that the ostracon records cash revenues or expenses pertinent to the operations of the aforementioned institution. This is consistent with the types of transactions that would be expected in a temple or religious context during the Ptolemaic period.

**Dating the Ostracon:** The ostracon is tentatively dated to the Late Ptolemaic Period, a conclusion supported by the style of handwriting and the presence of a personal name, Muteherri (L.7), which has been previously documented in texts from the same era. This dating places the artifact within a specific historical and cultural milieu, contributing to our understanding of economic and administrative practices during that time.

The ostracon's identification as a financial record from a temple or religious institution during the Ptolemaic period provides valuable insights into the economic activities, administrative roles, and social hierarchies of ancient Egyptian society. It also sheds light on the continued importance of traditional Egyptian religious practices under Ptolemaic rule.

In summary, the ostracon from Dendera serves as a significant historical document that not only confirms the provenance of the artifact but also offers a glimpse into the economic and institutional life of ancient Egypt during the Ptolemaic era. Its analysis contributes to the broader study of Egyptian history, religion, and culture, as well as the economic transactions that sustained these institutions.

## Bibliographies

- Akeel, M. (2019). "Two Demotic Ostraca from the Roman Period." *En dātail–Philologie und ArchΔologie im Diskurs: Festschrift fūr Hans-W. Fischer-Elfert* 7: 1-10.
- Devauchelle, D. (Paris, 2006). 'Vases offerts a Isis.' in: Barbotin, C. (ed.), *La voix des hīyroglyphes. Promenade au Dīpartement des Antiquitīs Ÿgyptiennes du Musēe du Louvre*.
- Erichsen, W. (1954). *Demotisches Glossar*. Kopenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard.
- Johnson, J. H. (2001). *Thus wrote 'Onchsheshonqy': An Introductory Grammar of Demotic*. SAOC 45. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago.
- Lδddeckens, E. (2000). *Demotisches Namenbuch*. Band I.1. Wiesbaden.
- Teeter, E. (Cambridge University Press, 2011). *Religion and ritual in ancient Egypt*.
- Vleeming, S. (Leiden, 1994). *Ostraka Varia: Tax Receipts and Legal Documents on Demotic, Greek, and Greek-Demotic Ostraka, Chiefly of the Early Ptolemaic Period, from Various Collections*, P.L. Bat. 26.
- Wahid El-Din, S. M. (2012). *Four Demotic Ostraca of Accounts*, *Abgadiyat* 7: 46-52.

