Two Demotic Ostraca of Unknown Provenances

ملاحظ

تتضمن هذه المقالة دراسة لكسرتان من الفخار من مجموعة المتحف المصري بالقاهرة؛ إلا أن مصدرهما غير معروف. وتورث الأولى بالفترة المبكرة من العصر البطلمي، والنص الخاص بها يتضمن وثيقة تنتمي لأحد المعابد، وتمثل هذه الوثيقة إعلانًا باستلام مواد مختلفة ومبالغ مالية لتلبية احتياجات المعبد الخاصة بالشهر الثالث والرابع من فصل الصيف، أما من قام بإعداد النص فهو غالبًا المسؤول الإداري بالمعبد.

النص الآخر مؤرخ بالعام السادس والعشرين من حكم الإمبراطور أغسطس (السابع من يونيه – العام الرابع ق. م.)، ويتضمن كميات من القمح التي تم توزيعها خاصة محصول القمح التي تُسلَّم في أيام محددة، ويُسلَّمها الفلاح المسؤول عن زراعة الأرض الموجبة.

Maha Akeel*

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This article deals with two Demotic ostraca belonging to the collections of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, and of unknown provenances. The first one could be dated to the early Ptolemaic period and represents a temple document. The latter dates to Year 26 of the reign of Augustus, and is a loan document concerning wheat crop. Unfortunately, neither of these documents includes any clues pertaining to their provenances.

1. A temple account list (Fig. 1)

Description: Potsherd of dark reddish-brown color; text appears on one side of the potsherd; some surviving traces suggest being palimpsest; broken off at the upper edge.

Transliteration

1. 1/3 r. t [   ]
2. 1/3 r. tj=j n=f n hj [   ]
3. n i rmt.w n hj h r n i mn£w. w Ès.t (rtb n) sw 4
4. k'k'o.t 5 r (rtb n) sw 1/12
5. r. tj=j n n hj htp-ntr r pï ntr ... hlr ni wn.w tbn 4
6. n i sw.w r tj=j [   ] htp (rtb n) sw 1/4
7. c.wj (n) pì ntr.... pì hm-ntr Hr-sï-Ès.t (rtb n) sw 1/3
8. n i k'k'o.w.t [   ] pì hm-ntr Hr-sï-Ès.t irm w'b
9. n i hj.w [   ] sw 20 [   ] (rtb n) sw 1/6
10. ùr mn£ ibt-3 r c.wj
11. pì hm-ntr Hr-sï-Ès.t [   ] tij [   ]
12. [.... ] 'tr[ [   ]
13. (rtb n) bt 49.t ibt-4 ùmw sw 10 r.tj ni... [   ]
14. k'k'o.t 2.t [   ] tij .. [   ]
15. Pì ùr ....
16. (rtb n) sw 3.t

Translation

1. 1/3 which [   ]
2. 1/3 which I gave to him for the cost [   ]
3. The tenants besides the stylists of Isis 4 (artabas of) wheat
4. Five cakes make 1/12 (artabas of) wheat
5. What I gave for the divine offerings concerning the god ... besides the shrine openers 4 debens
6. The wheat which I gave [   ] priestly allowance 1/4 (artabas of) wheat
7. The temple.... the first priest Harsiesis 1/3 (artabas of) of wheat
8. The cakes [   ] the first priest] Harsiesis with the priest.

Inv.: Cairo JdÈ 51491.
Measurements: 18.7 x 9.5 cm.
Provenance: Unknown.
Date: Early Ptolemaic'?
9. The costs [ ] day 20 [ ] 1/6 (artabas of) wheat.

10. (The) son of the stylist the third month concerning the temple.

11. The first priest Harsiesis [ ] that one [ ]

12. [......... ] entire [.. ]

13. Forty-nine (artabas of) emmer-wheat Mesore day 10 what the ... [ ] gave

14. Two cakes [ ] gave... [ ]

15. The son....

16. Three (artabas of) wheat.

**Line Commentary**

L.1: It can be predicted easily that this line starts with the same formula as that of the following line (1/3 r.tj=j “1/3 which I gave”).

L.3: Among the various meanings of preposition hr² “besides” seems to be the most appropriate one for the context, so it is adopted also in L.5.

mnḥ is interpreted as “stylist” i.e. “the one who dresses divine images”, which appeared in many titles, such as mnḥ Wsr-Hp ḫ ntr ḫj “stylist of Osiris-Apis, the great god” (P S Vienna Kunst 5850, 10 &13), mnḥ is.t ḫ n mw.t n Hp ḫ stylist of Isis, the mother of Apis” (E I Saq 9, 16).³

The dot, representing the letter s, of the word sw “wheat” is probably covered under the elongated sign for four. The sign occurring between sw and four could be unobiterated sign of a previous text. L.5: The faint curved sign appearing below the sign ntr “god” (in r ḫ ntr), probably belongs to an earlier text.

tś “province” is legible after ntr, where it makes a perfect sense (ḫ ntr tś “the god of the province”), but the absence of the geographical determinative of this word assumes that this reading might be uncertain.

The reading wn “shrine opener = Gr.παστοφόρος” is agreed by many scholars, such as Erichsen depending on Wb 1, 312/13; Meeks, Année 3 (1982) 69, 79.0675. This reading was also taken by Clarysse & Thompson, Counting the People 1 (2006) 653 or it might be also read wn-pr, as suggested uncertainly by Sp., RdT 23 (1901) 99, n. 2 & Griffith, Rylands, 3 (1909), 214, n. 5; & supported by Pestman, RdE 25 (1973) 22, n. 1; Tait, Fs. Lüdeckens (1984) 218; Pestman, Choachyte (1993) 428, d, who gave a number of hand copies of exx.⁴ Quack suggested ʾiri-Š2 as a different reading.⁵

The silver sign is read as tbn due to being followed by a number (4), while the reading kt becomes certain in case of being followed by a fraction.⁶

The tbn sign is written above the plural sign for wn.w.

L.6: nā sw.w “wheat” could be written in the plural form probably to refer to considerable quantities.⁷

L.7: Both ḫ wy “house” and ḫ n ḫ ntr “house of the god” were used frequently to convey the meaning “temple”.⁸

ḥ-hṭp “advance or deposit” could be a suggested reading for the ambiguous word appearing after ḫ ḫ n ḫ ntr, albeit its meaning does not go well with the context.

The religious title pī ḫ m-ntr “the first priest” was also used as a proper name,¹⁰ but the non-existence of any other proper names, rather than Harsiesis, in this text and the recurrence of many titles make the scale tip in favor of being the title.

L.13: bt “emmer-wheat” is legible at the beginning of this line.¹¹
General Commentary

This text starts with a declaration made by a person whose name is not mentioned (L.2: 1/3 r. tj=j n=f n h[...] “1/3 which I gave to him for the cost”), by which he declared that he gave sums of money and seeds and numbers of cakes for certain persons who were indicated by their titles without mentioning their personal names, except that of the first priest (hm-ntr):

L.3: n’ rmt.w n hj ḫr n’ mnḥ.w ḫs.t (rtb n) sw 4 “The tenants besides the stylists of Isis 4 (artabas of) wheat”

L.4: k’k’c.(t).t 5 r (rtb n) sw 1/12 “5 cakes make 1/12 (artabas of) wheat”

L.5: r. tj=j n n’ ḫtp-ntr r p’ ntr ... ḫr n’ wn.w tbn 4 “What I gave for the divine offerings concerning the god ... besides the shrine openers 4 debens”

L.6: n’ sw.w r tj=j [ ] ḫtp (rtb n) sw 1/4 “The wheat which I gave [ ] priestly allowance 1/4 (artabas of) wheat”

L.7: ḫ.wj (n) p’ ntr ..... p’ ḫm-ntr ḫr-si-Ḥs.t (rtb n) sw 1/3 “The temple ..... the first priest Harsiesis 1/3 (artabas of) of wheat”

L.8: n’ k’k’c.w.t [ p’ ḫm-ntr] ḫr-si-Ḥs.t irm w’b “The cakes [the first priest] Harsiesis with the priest”

L.9: n’ hj.w [ ] sw 20 [ ] (rtb n) sw 1/6 “The costs [ ] day 20 [ ] 1/6 (artabas of) wheat”

L.10: šr mnḥ ḥbt-3 r ḫ.wj “(The) son of the stylist third month concerning the temple”

L.11: p’ ḫm-ntr ḫr-si-Ḥs.t [ ] tj [ ] “The first priest Harsiesis [ ] that one [ ]”

L.12: (rtb n) bt 49.t ḥbt-4 ṣmw sw 10 r.tj n’i’ ... [ ] “49 (artabas of) emmer-wheat Mesore day10 what the ..[..] gave”

L.13: k’k’c.t 2.t [ ] tj .. [ ] “2 cakes [ ] gave ..[ ]”

L.14: (rtb n) sw 3.t “3 (artabas of) wheat”.

The recurring religious titles unveil clearly the identity of its holders, who are members of the clergy of a temple, which is mentioned twice (L.7: ḫ.wj (n) p’ ntr, L.10: ḫ.wj) with no further details about it. The tenants (L.3) are probably also of the same clerical members, as priests were always engaged in the temple’s land. Those priests are of different ranks, whose chief is the first priest Harsiesis, designated three times in the text (L.7, 8, 11), the only one mentioned with his name probably because of his high rank. The sums mentioned were described as being given for costs (L.2, 9), divine offerings (L.5) and priestly stipend (L.6). The declared sums ranged between being money (L.4: 4 debens = 40 kite = 80 drachma), wheat (L.3: 4 artabas, L.6: 1/4 artaba, L.7: 1/3 artaba, L.9: 1/6 artaba, L.10: 3 artabas), olyra14 (L.13: 49 artabas) and numbers of cakes (L.4: 5 cakes, L.8: .. cakes, L.14: 2 cakes), where it was clarified that the quantity of wheat used to make 5 cakes is 1/12 artabas of wheat.15

Eventually, this text can be classified as a temple document registering a declaration of the delivery of diversified substances and money in order to be used to meet many of the temple’s needs related to the third and fourth months of the summer season. The one who made this declaration is most likely the mr-ṣn (lesonis) of the temple.16 The lack of the provenance of this document leaves no room for any speculations concerning the location nor the deity of the temple.

2) A loan document of wheat crop (Fig. 2)

Inv.: Cairo CG 67043.

Measurements: 20.1 x 15 cm.
Two Demotic Ostraca of Unknown Provenances

Provenance: Unknown.

Date: Year 26 of Augustus (7 June 4 BC)

Description: Dark reddish-brown potsherd; written on one side of the pot, with a possibility of being palimpsest due to not fully obliterated signs that can still be observed.

Transliteration
1. ḫi.t-sp 26 n Gijsrs ibt-2 šm sw 13
2. wjo Lw s# Smbjtjn n p# kũr
3. sm mḥ-3.t (rtb n) sw 70 1/3
4. pr.t-slḥ.t mḥ-3.t (rtb n) sw 13
5. sw 19 mḥ-3.t (rtb n) sw 14 2/3
6. sw 26 ḫ[   ] (rtb n) sw 85
7. pr.t-slḥ.t (rtb n) sw 13

Translation
1. year 26 of Caesar Payni day 13
2. The peasant of Loe son of Smpathian of the kũr (?)
3. herb, the third 70 1/3 (artabas of) wheat
4. the seeds of field, the third 13 (artabas of) wheat
5. day 19, the third 14 2/3 (artabas of) wheat
6. day 26 ḫ[   ] 85 (artabas of) wheat
7. the seeds of field 13 (artabas of) wheat.

Line commentary
L.2: The personal name Lw has the foreign determinative (a combination of sandy-hill country over edge of green cultivation and a throw stick). The patronymic Smbjtjn is most probably one of the variants of Snphjm.19

P# kũr is clearly written with the house determinative, but its meaning is problematic. In the Chicago Demotic Dictionary two words were discussed shortly, i.e. kũr and kl: kũr appeared in the plural form with a clear determinative of the house which was read by de Cenival as dr, who interpreted it as “to scatter” (RdE 20, 1968, 38-40). While kũr, with the plant determinative, was translated as a type of plant “coriander” (Reymond, Medical 1976, who read kũr(i)). kl recurred also in the plural form with two determinatives, each appeared separately, the house and the stone determinatives, where it was interpreted as unit of liquid measure (Thissen, Enchoria 6, 1976, 69, n. to l. 2), part of personal name (Bresciani, SCO 22, 1973), or docks (Pestman, Amenothes, 1981, 150-51, n. d). Two other variants are also known kl, with unclear determinative, and kr with the house determinative, rendered as farmhouse.20 Therefore, it is preferred to leave p# kũr without being translated, albeit the occurrence of
the house determinative raise a question concerning being a type of buildings related to the agricultural society to which Loes and his farmer belonged.

Lines 3, 4 and 5 are written in the form of 3 columns, but the context proposes that they are nothing but three successive lines.

**General commentary**

This document starts with a clear date of Year 26 of the reign of Augustus. Then wj' conveys the meaning of a farmer undertaking the tiling works,21 followed by Loes son of Smpathian, to whom the farmer presented his services. Next n pi kri “of the kri” showed up, which is likely an agricultural institution located at the province where both the farmer and Loes lived. The main subject of this text showed up starting from line 3, where some amounts of wheat were connected with herb and the seeds of field for the third time in certain days:

_L.3:_ sm mh-3.t (rtb n) sw 70 1/3 “herb, the third 70 1/3 (artabas of) wheat”

_L.4:_ pr.t-sh.t mh-3.t (rtb n) sw 13 “the seeds of field, the third 13 (artabas of) wheat”

_L.5:_ sw 19 mh-3.t (rtb n) sw 14 2/3 “day 19, the third 14 2/3 (artabas of) wheat”

The last two amounts of wheat mentioned are in relevance to the seeds of field and one certain day:

_L.6:_ sw 26 h[ ] (rtb n) sw 85 “day 26 h[ ] 85 (artabas of) wheat”

_L.7:_ pr.t-sh.t (rtb n) 13 “the seeds of field 13 (artabas of) wheat.”

The word sm22 can be interpreted as herb, probably a general term used to refer to the produce of the rented land, whereas pr.t-sh.t appeared in many ostraca from Thebes dated to the Roman period. Some of these ostraca acknowledged money payments made instead of amounts of wheat for pr.t-sh.t “the seeds of field”, where it was elucidated as amounts of seeds, specified according to the piece of land rented, delivered in advance by the cultivator of the State’s land upon paying the rent, by which it was guaranteed that the land will remain cultivated in the next year.23 Others included amounts of wheat paid also for pr.t-sh.t “seed grain”, either separately or with the land rent (pi hw- ẖwtj), which was explained as loans of seed grain.24 Both of the two elucidations are reasonable, however the latter is more acceptable.

Accordingly, the amounts of wheat could represent loans of wheat crop delivered in certain days by the farmer cultivating the rented land, whose lessee could be Loes. Unfortunately the fluctuation in the amounts paid will be left unaccounted for.

**Notes**

* Department of Antiquities & Civilization, Faculty of Arts, Helwan University; demotic_ostraca@yahoo.com.

1 The paleographical features of the text, the thick script formed with separated signs or with ligatures, suggest the early Ptolemaic period as a possible date for this ostracon. M. Depauw, *A Companion to Demotic Studies*, Papyrologica Bruxellensia 28 (Brussels, 1997), 23–24.


3 *Chicago Demotic Dictionary* 117, letter m, consulted on 5 July 2019.

4 *Chicago Demotic Dictionary* 89, letter w, consulted on 5 July 2019.


8 *Chicago Demotic Dictionary* 8, letter ṝ, consulted on 5 July 2019.

9 *Chicago Demotic Dictionary* 301, letter ḫ, consulted on 5 July 2019.


14 During the Ptolemaic period, the Egyptian priests received their allowances in the form of baked bread made of emmer wheat “bt”. D.J. Thompson, *Memphis under the Ptolemies* (Princeton, 1988), 183.

15 From the Sarapieion papyri, it is known that thirty loaves were reckoned as the equivalent of one artaba of olyra (emmer wheat), where the allowance of four loaves per day was given as the daily ration for the twins engaged in mourning ceremonies for the Apis bull, which died in 164 BCE. Thompson, *Memphis under the Ptolemies*, 183–84.

16 During the Ptolemaic period, each temple had one *lesonis* who was in charge of the temple’s finances and of meeting its obligations to the State. A. Monson, ‘Priests of Soknebtunis and Sokonopis: P. BM EA 10647’, *JEA* 92 (2006), 208.


22 Erichsen, *Demotisches Glossar*, 430.


24 Years 42, 32 and 27 of Augustus. M. Lichtheim, *Demotic Ostraca from Medinet Habu* (Chicago, 1957), nos. 89.3, 91.3, 92.3.