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ORIENTALIA LOVANIENSIA

ANALECTA

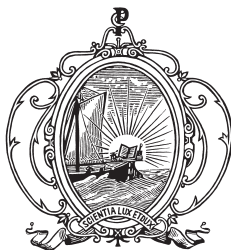
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# A TRUE SCRIBE OF ABYDOS

Essays on First Millennium Egypt  
in Honour of Anthony Leahy

edited by

CLAUS JURMAN, BETTINA BADER  
and DAVID A. ASTON



PEETERS

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AN ABNORMAL HIERATIC LETTER FROM DAKHLEH OASIS  
(OSTRACON AMHEIDA 16003)\*

Günter VITTMANN

In January 2013, during the excavations of New York University under the direction of Roger Bagnall in Amheida (Dakhleh), a fine ostrakon with a letter in abnormal hieratic came to light. It is one of several hieratic and demotic documents that continued to be discovered on that site over several years.<sup>1</sup> Although unfortunately much of the text is still incomprehensible, which is not uncommon with a document of this kind, and although it certainly does not lead to spectacular insights, I think the piece deserves publication, the more so since the number of published letters in abnormal hieratic is very limited.<sup>2</sup> Thus it is a pleasure for me to offer this modest contribution to the distinguished scholar and excellent specialist of the Late Period to whom this volume is dedicated.<sup>3</sup>

The reddish brown ostrakon (from area 4.1; height ca. 14 cm, width ca. 17 cm, Pls. 1–2 and Figs. 1–4) is complete. The scribe started on the convex side, only short and faint parts of the first four lines of which are still visible, and continued on the concave side in turning it 90° to the left. Here the writing as a whole is rather well preserved, but considerable parts of the first three lines have wholly disappeared. In line 7 there are some undefinable traces of writing that seem to belong to an earlier deleted text.

The handwriting represents “classical” abnormal hieratic of the 25th and early 26th Dynasties, which makes a date between 700 and 650 BC most probable.

Although especially with a text in a difficult and imperfectly understood script (and not only here, of course) one has to be cautious in blaming the scribe for blunders and mistakes, in the present case an assumption to that effect is hard to avoid, see notes on a 3; b 3. 5. 7. 8, and I have the strong impression that the scribe committed even more errors than those highlighted below.

\* I am obliged to Koen Donker van Heel for some useful comments and to Andrew Monson for kindly revising my English.

<sup>1</sup> For another fragmentary ostrakon letter in abnormal hieratic from Amheida see VITTMANN 2012a: 184–185, No. 306; some more objects of this kind were discovered in early 2014. Similar finds have been made in the area of the temple of Seth at Mut el-Kharab, cf. the text quoted below, note on a 3.

<sup>2</sup> See VITTMANN 2015: 419 (B).

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Roger Bagnall for allowing me to study and publish this material.

*Transcription*

## a) Convex side

- 1 p3 hrw n hm-ntr n Stḥ ..[---]
- 2 「...」 Hr-wd3 hn<sup>c</sup> ..[---]
- 3 im <n>zn(?) nḥ wd3 snb r<sup>c</sup> nb ..[---]
- 4 [...] shm.t(?) H3m(?)[---]

The rest is completely lost.

## b) Concave side

- 1 t3j w<sup>c</sup> w<sup>c</sup> n [... ...](?)
- 2 m-ir gw w<sup>c</sup> n w<sup>c</sup> [... ...](?)
- 3 iwz{i}s i ph p3jzn hrj i s(?)「..」[...]
- 4 m-djzf gw w<sup>c</sup> n w<sup>c</sup> iwzi gt nzn(?) 「i」
- 5 p3 pr-hd p3jzn hrj sn i-ibdzw i t3 md.t s3
- 6 i p3 ntj iwzk i irzf hr m-ir r d3 t3 md.t n
- 7 p3jzw b3k rh r-<sup>c</sup> hrj-hs ... š<sup>c</sup>-dj p3jzw
- 8 nw p3 ntj (n) t3jzf {t3} i3(w.t) hrj-hs
- 9 m-sh Hr-wd3 (s3) P3-dj m-hn n
- 10 h.t-ntr

*Translation*

## a) Convex side


- 1 The voice of the prophet of Seth [---]
- 2 「...」 Horudja and [---]
- 3 may you (pl.?) be given life, prosperity and health every day [---]
- 4 [...] woman(?) Kham(?)[---]


## b) Concave side

- 1 Take one by one [... ...]!
- 2 Do not oppress one by one [... ...]!
- 3 She/it will reach our lord .. [...]
- 4 and he will oppress one by one, I being crippled .. 「...」
- 5 the treasury. Our lord inquires among them concerning the truth
- 6 (and?) concerning what you will do. Furthermore, do not ... ... the matter of
- 7 their servant. Learn(?) the condition(?) of a chief of singers ... until their
- 8 supervision(?) of him who is in his office of (the) chief of singers.
- 9 In writing of (i. e. written by) Horudja <son of> Padi in the interior of
- 10 the temple.


## Commentary

## a) Convex side

- (1) For *hrw* () “voice” in the introduction of letters see DEPAUW 2006: 131. Other examples from the Amheida ostraca are nos. 16325, 1; 16454, 1; 16463, 1. For further examples from Dakhleh see VITTMANN 2012b: 21. The “prophet of Seth”, whose name is lost, might have been affiliated with the village of Mut (Mothis), a main cult centre of Seth, whereas in Amheida Thoth was more prominent. The Ankhef mentioned in no. 16097, 1 from the same site ([...] *n Sth 'nhz*) was presumably likewise a priest of Seth. From parallels of the Third Intermediate Period it may be concluded that the introductory formula *p3 hrw n A* was continued by the words *ntj-*iwz*f m-b3h B*; cf. DEPAUW 2006: 131. For Amheida this is attested in the three ostraca mentioned above.
- (2) Horudja (note the use of the child determinative) is probably not identical with the like-named writer of this letter (b 9) but rather the addressee. If





the following  reads *hn*, as is probable from the palaeographical perspective, we are faced with the problem that the personal pronouns (*iwz* b 4; *iwz* k b 6) presuppose the existence of one sender and one addressee only.

- (3) For similar formulae see BAKIR 1970: 62–63, 100–101. In accordance with examples there given, one would expect *im nzk 'nh wd3 snb*, cf. ostracon Mut 13/6 (likewise followed by *r' nb*), see VITTMANN 2012b: 20, fig. 4.





In the present instance, the group between *im* and *'nh wd3 snb*, , could consequently perhaps be understood as *<n>=tn*.

## b) Concave side

- (1) *w' w' >* Coptic  $\text{oua oua}$  “one by one, one after another” (CRUM 1939: 469).



- (2) The verb    *gw* reappears in line 4 ().


Although the unspecific determinative does not help in clarifying the meaning, these are apparently two more examples for the transitive-causative use of *gw(3)* “to be narrow” in the sense of “to make narrow” > “to oppress” or the like (compare German “in die Enge treiben”), see also

ERMAN and GRAPOW 1957, V: 160.5 *gw3* (   ) “vom Schädigen eines Schwachen zugunsten eines Starken” and Coptic  $\text{6woy}$  CRUM 1939: 835a. A demotic example is found in papyrus Rylands 9, XXV 3.<sup>4</sup>


<sup>4</sup> ERICHSEN 1954: 574 s.v. *gw3* does not mention this use, but the very last example on the page is evidently taken from the passage in papyrus Rylands 9 quoted above.


Compare the common proper name *Sṯṯ-ṯmn-gw/gṣw* “May Amun expel distress”,<sup>5</sup> which is also attested in abnormal hieratic, where it is always provided with the determinative of the “bad bird” (Louvre E 3228 D *passim*<sup>6</sup>; Louvre E 3228 F, 3. 97).

- (3) I take   as an — admittedly very awkward — mistake for *ṯwṣs*, but no other explanation seems possible.

Here and in line 5, *ḥrj* “lord” is preceded by , which must be *pṣjz* with a personal pronoun. In the unpublished ostrakon


Amheida 16580, 1, *ḥrj* is preceded by .


In several early demotic letters, *ḥrj* is preceded by a group written , and the

like (more rarely ) , and for which the readings *pṣjz* or *pṣjz* have been proposed; cf. discussion and references in VITTMANN 1998, I: 431–434; MARTIN, SMITH and DAVIES 2011: 275 (a) and 284 notes 5–6. There can hardly be any doubt that in both the abnormal hieratic and the demotic sources we deal with the same expression. In my opinion, in both cursive scripts the sign following *pṣj* is simply an abbreviation of the suffix first person plural that developed in epistolographic style due to the current and formulaic use of the expression *pṣjz ḥrj* in this genre. In other contexts,

*pṣjz ḥrj* is written in the regular way, compare



ostrakon Mut 38/80+108, concave, I 10;  Mut 38/73. To a certain degree, one may compare the abbreviated demotic spellings of certain elements in frequent proper names such as *ṯj-m-ḥtp* or *Dd-ḥr* which would be fully written in other contexts.

- (4) If  were the preposition (“with him”), the following *gw w' n w'* would be the reversal of the prohibition *m-ṯr gw w' n w'* in line 2, which hardly makes good sense. More probable, therefore, is an analysis as conjunctive “and he (i.e. the person referred to as “our lord”) will oppress” etc. or the like. *mdj* is the usual abnormal hieratic spelling of the Late

<sup>5</sup> THIRION 1986: 132; LÜDDECKENS et al. 1980–2000: 942 (determinative of dying warrior). Note also coffins Amiens 94.3.3.1–4 (with determinative of striking arm, PERDU and RICKAL 1994: 34).

<sup>6</sup> MALININE 1984: 17–20 *passim* and pl. VI.

<sup>7</sup> MALININE 1982–1983: 94 and pl. 4.








Egyptian conjunctive *mtw*, and is also attested in Early Demotic; cf. DONKER VAN HEEL 1995: 317.<sup>8</sup>





 is , which hitherto was only known from the

Teaching of Amenemope (BM 10474, XIII 5, cf. ERMAN and GRAPOW 1957, V: 209.2 without translation, “in unklarem Zusammenhang”), where it means “cripple(d)” or the like, cf. Coptic βαχε “lame, crippled”; βαωχε “to cut (off)” WESTENDORF 1977: 444 (s.v. χαθε); 473; LAISNEY 2007: 120 (13,5) “estropié”; 129–130.


- (5) Theoretically, *pʒjzn hrj* (for which see note on line 3) could also be an address to the recipient (“our lord, inquire among them” etc.), but in that case we should rather expect an optative \**mj šn pʒjzn hrj* etc.

Except for the last sign, which theoretically can be either  or , looks exactly like the postnegation *īwnʒ*. As this reading, for obvious reasons of context and syntax, is excluded, the only reasonable interpretation that lends itself is to integrate the preceding *i* and to read the whole group as *i-īwdzw* “between them, among them” with a strongly abbreviated and contracted spelling of . Usually, the “walking legs” are discernible in

the abnormal hieratic evidence for this word as e.g. in  Turin 2118, 8<sup>9</sup>), but  in Louvre E 3228 C, II 16 is a very good parallel, see MALININE 1951 and especially pls. III, V and VI.<sup>10</sup>

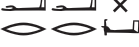
- (6)  is apparently different from the verb of motion ,  “to go away” (or similar) discussed by VITTMANN 2001: 161 (bb). I am now less confident than before that in all these cases *ʾr* and not *ʾr ~ ʾl* is to be understood. On the contrary, late spellings such as  for the *ʾrw*-tree in papyrus Salt 825, V 3. 7<sup>11</sup> (cf. ERMAN and GRAPOW 1957, I: 210) suggest a reading *ʾr* for the abnormal hieratic examples as well. However, whereas in the two examples discussed in my article in *Enchoria*, *ʾr* can be derived from (*i*)*ʾr* “to mount, to go up” (λλε) because of the determinatives, the Amheida ostrakon adds the “striking arm”. Although *ʾr*, *ʾl* is otherwise always provided with the determinative of the “walking legs”, the use of the “striking arm” would not seem inappro-




<sup>8</sup> An uncertain further abnormal hieratic example for *mdjzk* as a conjunctive in Brooklyn 37.1799E, 16, see JASNOW and VITTMANN 1992–1993: 38 (JJJ).

<sup>9</sup> From museum’s photograph; MALININE 1984: 23 ().



<sup>10</sup> A new publication is being prepared by K. Donker van Heel, who kindly drew my attention to this particular spelling.


<sup>11</sup> DERCHAIN 1965, II: 5\* and 6\*; pl. V; see also CHARPENTIER 1981: 170–171 (258).



appropriate for the meaning “hold, take, lift up” (cf. ČERNÝ 1976: 228 s.v. ωλ). Assuming an error for  ERMAN and GRAPOW 1957, I: 209.15–18 (“etw. ausführen”, “herstellen”, “(Leute) anstellen” etc.);





LESKO 1982: 83 is unconvincing.  can only be , but a word with such a spelling is unknown. It does not fit for *tʒj* “to take”, which should have been written either by means of the *tʒ*-bird (and not the *dʒ*-sign), or ideographically as  like in demotic. However, since the idea of “taking” was possibly already conveyed by the preceding verb *r*, I wonder whether *dʒ*, which cannot denote an object, might still be an idiosyncratic spelling of a derivate of *tʒj*, i.e. of (*m*) *tʒ(w.t)* “stealthily, secretly” (ἄκτιογϵ, CRUM 1939: 794a).



- (7) At the beginning, at the top of *p*, and farther to the left, above *r*ˀ, there are some traces of writing that seem to be part of an earlier deleted text.


It is not immediately clear whether  is to be understood as it is written, i.e. as *rḥ r*ˀ “Know (or learn) the condition (or the like) of ...” or whether we deal with an error for Late Egyptian *hr r*ˀ compare SPIEGELBERG 1927: 42–43; ERMAN and GRAPOW 1957, II: 395.9 (“noch o.ä.”); CAMINOS 1954: 178 with further examples; LESKO 1986: 46 (“seeing that, meanwhile”). In line 6, the particle *hr* was written correctly, and although *rḥ* in abnormal hieratic is regularly provided with two determinatives () there is at least one example where it has only the “man with hand to mouth” determinative: Cairo CG 30884+30864 (...), 9, see VITTMANN 2000: 149 and pls. 14–15. For these reasons, I prefer to take the spelling *rḥ* seriously. *r*ˀ is rather “condition, place” as the first element of a compound and not the particle, otherwise the lack of an article with the following *hrj-ḥs* would be puzzling.



The difference in rank and function between *hrj-ḥs* 


 ; similarly  line 8) “chief of the singers” and the far more common *mr-ḥs* is unknown; see EMERIT 2013: 87–124, and 91 with special regard to *hrj-ḥs*. For demotic examples of *hrj-ḥs* see SMITH 2005: 138 (f).


I have not succeeded in deciphering the group . Could it be a personal name starting with *P(ʒ)-n*, as proposed to me by Koen Donker van Heel? However, the beginning of the group resembles the article *tʒ* preceding *md.t* in lines 5 and 6. The cross-formed sign could well be  or , and the end of the passage might even be , but this will hardly lead to a satisfactory reading.

The exact analysis of  (followed by *p3jzw nw*) is difficult: in spite of its appearance it cannot be the conjunction *š'-dj*<sup>12</sup> since there is no verb. Taking the whole group as a spelling  for simple *š'* is equally problematic as *š'* is always written without any determinative,<sup>13</sup> so it is probably necessary to assume an error and to transcribe *š'{-dj}* *p3jzw nw*. Perhaps the scribe first wanted to write \**š'-djzw nw* “until they look” but then decided to change the construction without correcting his error, see remark on line 8.

- (8) *nw* () “to look” is here used as a nominalized infinitive. I hesitantly suggest an analysis as *š'{-dj}* *p3jzw nw* (*n*) *p3 ntj* ... “until their supervision of him who” etc.; cf. for *nw n* WENTE 1967: 30 (p). The *t3* between *ntj t3jzf* and *t3* is a gross blunder.

- (9) For *P3-dj* () see RANKE 1935: 121.17; 

Kairo CG 986 (JANSEN-WINKELN 2014, II: 1064, no. 60.572). In abnormal hieratic, this name is also attested in Louvre E 2432, 2 (<sup>14</sup>); ostracon


Mut 6/116, 1 (, unpublished). See the discussion by MALININE 1973: 205 (b).


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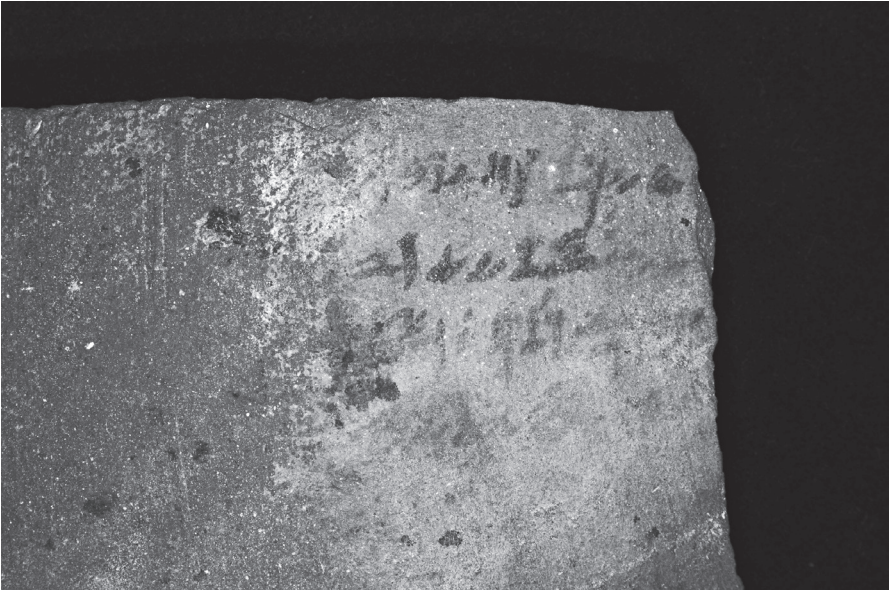
<sup>12</sup> In the different constructions *š'-djzf sdm* (terminative) and *š'-dj sdmzf*; cf. COLLOMBERT 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Needless to say, the book-roll which appears in the hieroglyphic transcription is merely a part of the complex ayin-sign and not a determinative of the whole word.

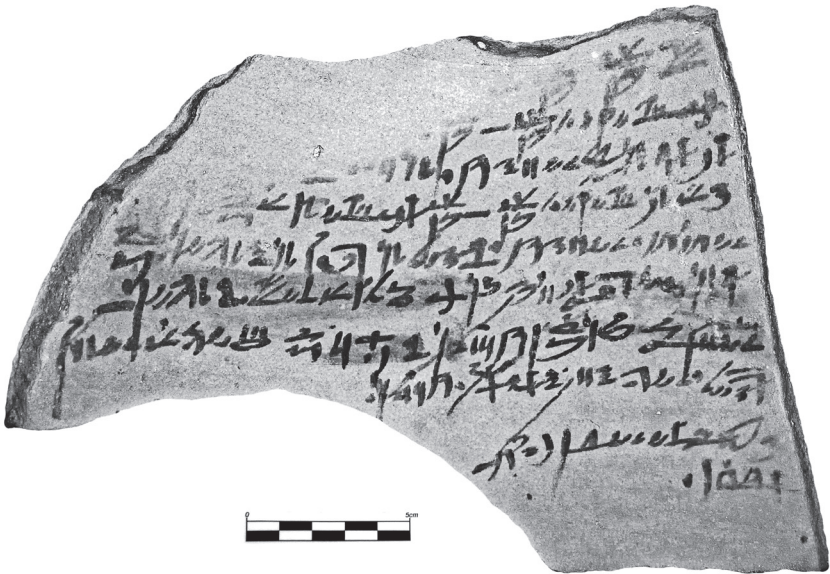
<sup>14</sup> MALININE 1984: 48 (with hieroglyphic transcription ) and pl. XIV. Previously MALININE (1953: 102–103) had read *P3-iwn(?)* “Peiôn?” but corrected this later, see above.

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Pl. 1. Ostrakon Amheida 16003, convex side  
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Pl. 2. Ostrakon Amheida 16003, convex side  
(© G. Vittmann and The Dakhleh Oasis Project).

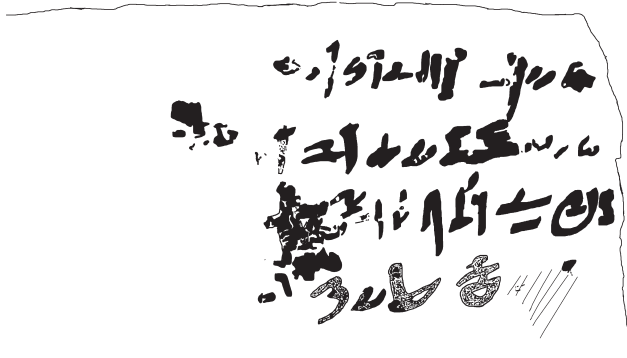


Fig. 1. Facsimile of ostracon Amheida 16003, convex side (© G. Vittmann).

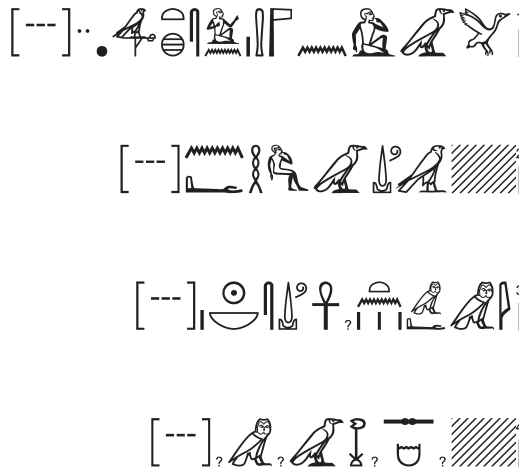


Fig. 2. Ostracon Amheida 16003, convex side, hieroglyphic transcription.

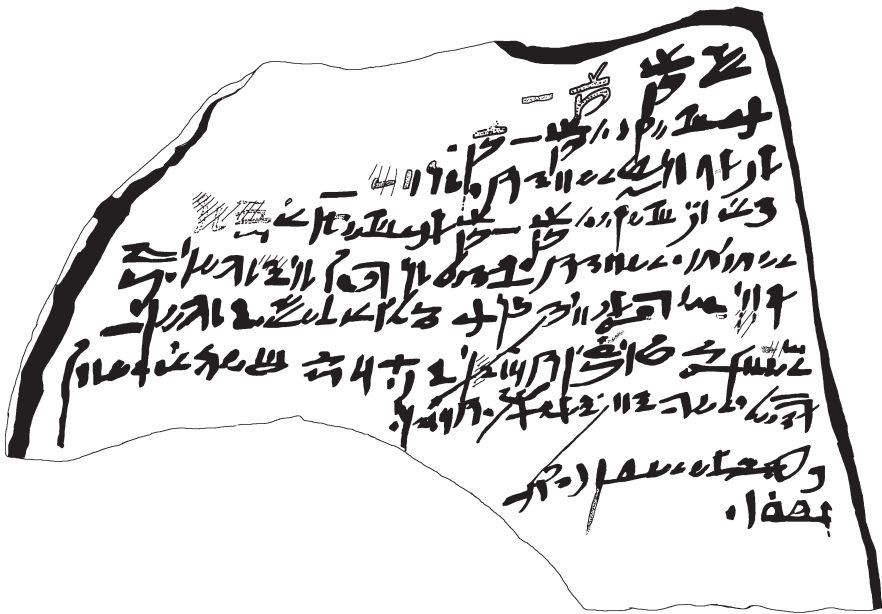


Fig. 3. Facsimile of ostracon Amheida 16003, concave side  
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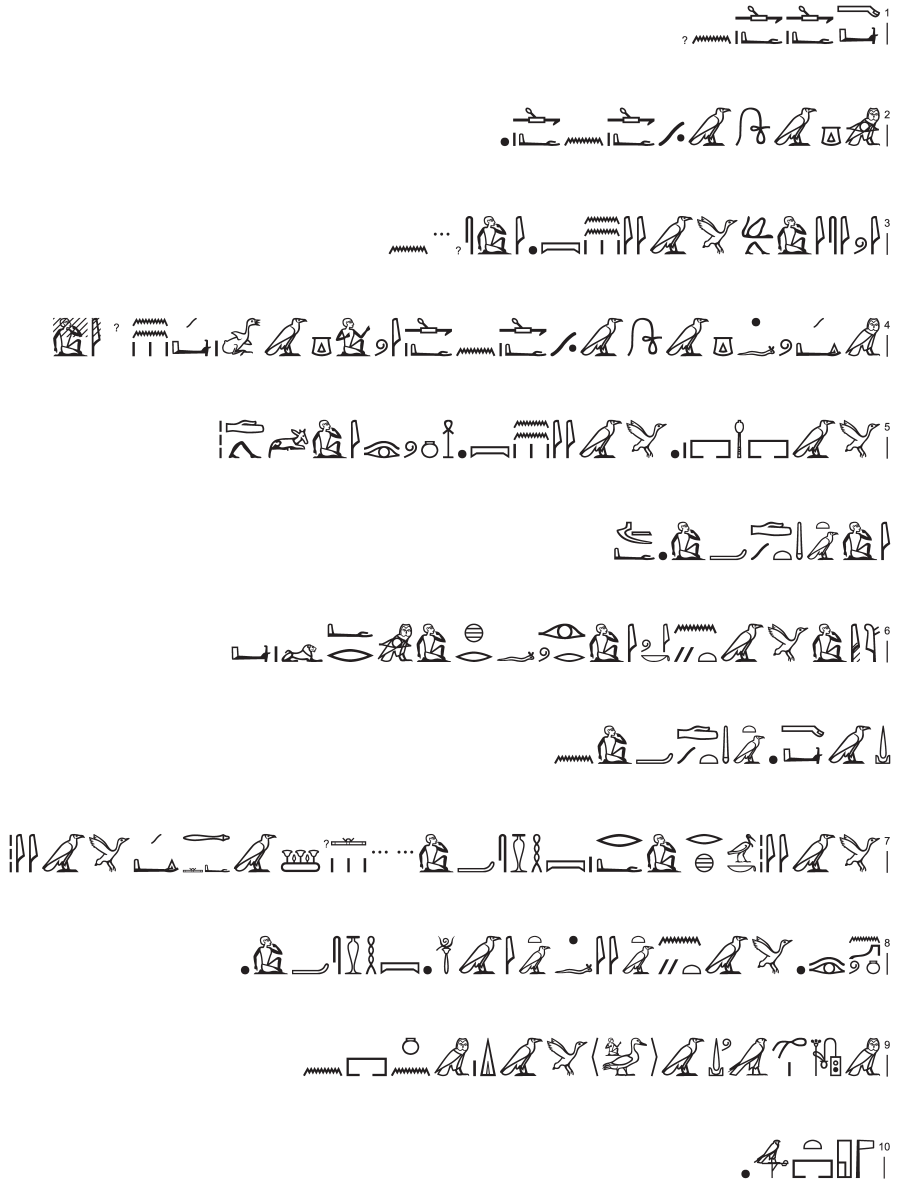


Fig. 4. Ostrakon Amheida 16003, convex side, hieroglyphic transcription.